



MY INVESTMENT IN THE FAR WEST.

(From *Blackwood's Magazine*.)

I had the pleasure of making acquaintance with old Mr. Tips, Judge Tips, of Salem, Mass.—his Christian name was Magogentius,—in rather a curious manner. He sat next to me at the general dinner in the best cabin or saloon. The table was crowded, but there were three below me, on the same side of the long board.—The dinner was a capital one; the Cunard directors are famous for good feeding; and Judge Tips, father to my young companion, played an excellent knife and fork. A dish of peas came round, the last of the marrowfats, the latest peas of summer; and indeed I cannot conceive from what remote market the steamboat purveyors had imported them, seeing that the Covent Garden had been barren in respect to this vegetable for some weeks. I am very fond of peas, and was rejoiced to see my favorites once again; and I anxiously awaited their arrival. Miss Tips, Miss Julia Tips, and Tips were, as the French would say, had each taken a decorous spoonful from the flying dish, and now the black water was offering the delicacy to Tips himself, enough being left for five persons at least.—What was my horror to behold the Judge deliberately monopolise the whole—sweep, as I live, every pea into his own plate—and then turning to me, with a greasy smile, remark, 'I guess, stranger, I'm a whale at peas?' Yes, Mr. Bright tells sterling truth. There are some matters in which the most acquisitive of us all are distanced by an American. Judge Tips was obliging enough to favor me with a good deal of his inimitable conversation, and by meekness and affability I won his heart. He not only invited me to visit him at Salem, but when I hinted that I was on my way to the West, and should be glad to make the acquaintance of any notable citizens of Illinois or Iowa, he gave me the coveted letters of introduction to more than one magistrate, sheriff, and popular preacher. Nor did any accident mar the even tenor of our agreeable passage to New York.—We had almost uniform good weather, and before the evening of the eleventh day, we were standing on the wooden landing-places of the Empire City, surrounded by German porters, Irish car-drivers, and Yankee brats. The latter race, wise in their generation, prefer head-work to the toil of actual muscle, and perambulate Europe to furnish them with soldiers and foremast-men, stavedores, navvies, and dock-laborers while they supply officers, foremen, mates, and overlookers to regulate and profit by the exertions of their hirelings.

The Astor House is not what it was. It has been distanced by more gigantic competitors; and as for the Tremont, it is left high and dry, like a stranded whale, by the tide of fashion.—Nevertheless I bestowed my patronage on the latter, perhaps for Sam Slick's sake, and spent a couple of days under its hospitable roof while recovering from the sensation of 'cramp, bedim, and nausea quite insupportable from a sea voyage. Then I set out for the West. The journey, as far as Fort Madison, on the western boundary of the State of Illinois, I performed by railway, expeditiously perhaps, and not very uncomfortably, in spite of the amount of racking and swinging due to a carelessly-metalled permanent way, if I may employ the phraseology of engineering. But I could not, with a clear conscience, agree with the enthusiastic comments of my fellow travellers, as to the immense superiority, in speed and accommodation, of American railroads over those of Britain. After being jolted and swung till one's bones ached, all the time, perhaps, being at a net speed of thirty miles an hour, it was rather provoking to listen to such remarks as the following:—

'Well, mister, I expect that our flying locomotives do rather astonish you. They kinder take the conceit out of Old England, I s'ome think.' Or, more gravely, 'I believe, sir, it's pretty universally admitted that America whips the world for speed. We have beaten your yachts, we have licked your racers, and our trains must make you think small beer of your expresses. We go ahead, we do!'

I take great praise to myself that I was always able to keep my temper, and to abstain from polemics. But argument would have been useless. I had to do with a people who saw the outer world through the spectacles of their journalists, and who would no more admit the imperfections of America than a lover will see a blemish in his mistress. To them America was all in all; and the mightiest countries in Europe were esteemed by them as rotten and worthless, only existing by the sufferance of the Great Republic. As for my praise of the British Constitution, they simply laughed at it, assuring me that I knew nothing about the matter, and that there could be no liberty where a plain man was not allowed to go to court in his working dress if he chose. But I had not crossed the ocean

to argue; I had come to pluck out the heart of the mystery concerning the Nauvoo and Nebraska Railway. And I was very careful at dinner-tables, bars, cafes, and railway cars, to elicit all available information with respect to the resources of the West. What I heard was, of course, vague; but on the whole it contained some comfort. It appeared certain that a great trade was carried on by land and water; that towns started up with incredible quickness in the midst of desolate prairies, or, like Chicago, on piles in a swamp; and that hardy men were taming the wilderness. So far so good. But it did not appear to me that security to life and property went in exactly the same ratio as the increase of wealth. I heard odd stories about regulators, vigilance committees, and Judge Lynch. Mob-law seemed paramount to written statutes; and the fiat of a legal court required to be backed by the good pleasure of a majority before its execution could be guaranteed. Besides the moral standard of the community did not rank as high as perhaps a very delicate sense of honor required. Commercial tricks were spoken of as 'clever,' or 'ingenious,' which in other lands would have engaged the serious attention of the law-officers of the Crown; and the most unprincipled ruse was mentioned with laughter and indulgence, if not with approbation. All this augured badly, methought, for the prospects of the Nauvoo and Nebraska Railway.—And yet I did not despair, and still less did I drop a hint of my suspicions to any casual acquaintance. It was not for me, a managing director, to denounce the project with which my name was, alas! mextricably linked, until it should be proved a bubble on the very clearest evidence. I reached Fort Madison, the most remote point to which the steam horse could convey me, and had, at any rate, the satisfaction of knowing that I was within a few miles of Nauvoo. I hired a mule-waggon for the journey, and sitting down to dinner at the public table of the hotel, I inquired what sort of a place Nauvoo might be.

'Nauvoo, mister,' said a tall gaunt man, whom his friends addressed as Major, 'Nauvoo is a pretty considerable sprig of a city. It is a tall place, sir. There air good points and great developments about Nauvoo. Do you settle down there, stranger? I could sell you a lot of land awful cheap.'

'Thank you,' said I; 'I have no intention of becoming a resident at Nauvoo; I merely wish to visit it.'

'I see,' observed another guest; 'you want to have a peep at the great temple the Mormons built before Joe Smith was shot at Springfield. That'n't much you'll see, though, stranger, for the place is all to ruin. The blays were not soft enough to let so much cedar-pine and dressed limestone stand, when houses were costing batties of dollars. But Nauvoo has some fine bluffs, considered equal to any scenery the old Rhine can show.'

'Air you in the hardware line? If so, we might trade, I guess,' said a little man at my elbow.

'No, no,' I returned; 'my journey is not of a commercial character, exactly.'

'Political, eh?' asked the Major; 'picking up news, perhaps, for your Downing Street wiseness, and feeling Uncle Sam's pulse to know when the old gentleman is at fever heat, eh, mister?'

'Not at all,' said I; 'I have no mission of the sort; nor, indeed, do I believe the British Government to entertain any peculiar anxiety on the subject you mention.'

A cough and shrug of disapprobation pervaded the assembly.

'It is well known, sir,' said the tall Major, 'that the Government of your benighted land is ever on the watch for the expression of American opinion. American opinion, sir, has great weight in your House of Commons.'

'I was not aware of it, I give you my word; I answered with a smile.

'Perhaps not, sir, perhaps not,' replied the Major, pitying. 'Do you never read the *Evening Planet*, sir, when you are at home?'

I inquired. The truth was, that I did take in the *Evening Planet*, and heedfully perused therein the valuable dicta of its eloquent proprietor, a celebrated parliamentary and platform orator. And I had been accustomed to give credence to the confident assurance of this gentleman, that we were miles behind the Northern States of the American Union in all that was useful and good, and that we could not do better than copy so shining a model in all things. I had read and heard the bold statement, made in defiance of statistics, that America was floating peacefully on the tide of prosperity into the haven of universal empire—an empire won by bloodless means, of course; for what nation, unsaddled with an aristocracy, would dream of war, while Britain was sinking into decrepitude and decay. All this, and much more, had I heard and read, and I had believed that Britania

ought to sit at the feet of her flighty offspring for instruction, and to remodel her old institutions after a republican pattern. But, as not seldom happens, a nearer view of the United States did not precisely confirm the loud assertions of the Americanising party in the British press and senate, and I was gradually losing my ideal admiration for transatlantic liberty and customs. After the rapid dinner, and the more leisurely supplement of juleps and brandy-cobblers imbibed in the bar-room of the hotel, I asked a colored waiter if my waggon and mules were forthcoming, as I was desirous of reaching Nauvoo before dark.

'Iss, missa?' answered the negro, and whisked off with his napkin to inquire after the lingering equipage.

The Major said he was going to Nauvoo too, and begged the favor of a lift, which I willingly conceded.

The mules and waggon, with their whicker-teamer, soon rattled up to the door; my bill was promptly paid, my baggage transferred to the vehicle; and the Major and I climbed into our places, and we started.

'How comes it, Major,' said I, 'that there is no line open to Nauvoo?'

The Major knocked the ashes off his cigar as he replied, 'Wall, I suppose it wouldn't pay.—Rail to Fort Madison is all right and spry, because Uncle Sam has property there; but I guess not a dime could be drawn from Washington treasury to make a line on to Nauvoo.'

'And from Nauvoo, westward through Iowa, say to Nebraska, observed I, with affected carelessness; 'what would you say to the prospects of a railroad in that direction?'

My heart throbbled audibly as I spoke, for all my feigned indifference, and I listened with anxiety for the Major's reply. I had not long to wait.

'That depends,' said my fellow traveller, with sagacious deliberation, 'on the sort of rail you talk about. Is it a line to go no farther than Wall Street, and perhaps your London Capel Court, that you are speaking of, mister?'

'Wall Street and Capel Court! Upon my life, I hardly comprehend you,' returned I.

'Moonshine, flummery, make-believe, sleepers, rails, stations, all of paper, that's what I mean, stranger,' rejoined the Major, somewhat impatiently.

'But I spoke of a bona fide concern—of a real railway, honestly made and fairly worked,' answered I; 'wha would you say to that?'

'Say? replied the Major, with infinite contempt, 'say! Let me see the games. Trot 'em up to me, sir. Just let me have a look at the simple coss that are at the head of the business, and I'll tell them what I think, fast enough. No, Nauvoo is a rising place, a neat location, but it can wait for a rail one while, unless every sage plant on the prairie turns soon to silver dollars.'

After this I asked the Major no more questions. We reached Nauvoo, and through the dark I spied the shingled roofs of its houses, the bold bluffs of limestone, the rushing colored river, and the unfinished building lots with their heaps of wreck and rubbish. We put up at the General Jackson Hotel. I had a letter of introduction to Squire Park of Nauvoo, a gentleman in the flatboat interest, who owed his title of Squire to his being in the commission of the peace. But on repairing to his house I was doomed to disappointment—the more vexatious because Mr. Park had been entangled by Judge Tips as a man who knew the West thoroughly. Squire Park was gone to Cairo on business, and was not expected back before the end of the month. On consulting the map I carried, I found that a place called Keosauque was the nearest of the few towns in Iowa to the line of railway, real or imaginary, in connection with which my name, and those of other men of respectability and substance, were flaming in advertisements and on the broadsheets of a prospectus, throughout the British metropolis. I set off to Keosauque, mounted on an Indian pony, and accompanied by a guide in the shape of a wiry blackwoodsman, in an enduring costume of leather, and who gave accommodation to my portmanteau behind his saddle. For some miles we rode in silence over the apparently boundless sea of grass, mottled with weeds and flowers, and occasionally studded with lone farmhouses and maize fields, or by herds of grazing cattle. These half-reclaimed mustangs are not the most pleasant mount for a timid rider, nor am I, George Bulkeley of Stamford Hill, a very adventurous horseman; and before we had got far I began to wish the brute I rode would desist from what secured an alternation of starts and stumbles. My guide, a good-humored wild man, observed my embarrassment, and undertook its removal.

'See here, Colonel,' said he—strangers in the West are usually decorated with visionary epaulettes—'you musn't keep the rein so slack as that, nor yet hold your hand up level with your

cravat, or, scalp me, but you'll be spilt. Mustangs want a tight grip on the bit. So—steady now. Stick in your knees, Colonel, and scorn to ketch hold of the pommel—so. Do as you see me do; give him a touch of the spur, but mind his kicking—for mustangs can kick, they can. You'll do nicely, now.'

Ichabod was a skilful riding-master, by instinct, I suppose; and, thanks to his forcible instructions, I was soon on better terms with my refractory quadruped. On we rode, over the waving grass, through the rank weeds, through the belts of cottonwood timber and maples that skirted every streamlet, and past the swampy bottoms where sluggish waters wound like wounded beet, parched corn, and hominy, at a farm which did duty for an inn, and slept at another house of the same character. Next day we resumed our route; and as we rode towards Keosauque, I ventured to ask Ichabod if he had ever heard of the Great Nauvoo and Nebraska Railway. I had been hitherto averse to propounding this query; for how could I tell whether the interests of my informant might conflict with mine?—but with this rough frontierism I felt I was safe. He, at least, was no rival speculator—no shareholder in a completing line—no steamboat proprietor, or lord of many stage-waggons. But his first answer was not satisfactory. It was comprised in the one word, 'Awan?'

'The Railway?'—asked I again—'from Nauvoo to Nebraska; not a finished thing, of course; but you surely must have seen or heard of the works—the bridges, the embankments, and the rest of the preparations?'

Ichabod shook his head. 'You're talking Greek to me, Colonel, and that air a fact.'

'How is it possible?' cried I, in an agony; 'that there can have been a railway begun in this country, and the settlers unaware of it?—Surely you must be a stranger to this part of the State yourself?'

'You're wrong there, Colonel,' answered Ichabod; 'I'm Illinois born, but I'm Iowa bred. In this State I was raised; and I don't believe there's a thing happened over the border sin' I could mount a horse, be it buller or deer, loping Indian, runaway nigger, or Yankee pedlar, without my hearing on't. Stop! and he snatched his knee with a palm as hard as any.—I've got it, You're talking of Harvey's Folly?'

And I thought the young blackwoodsman would have tumbled off his horse in the extravagant burst of mirth which this discovery produced.

'Who-whoop? cried he; 'I've seen queer sights, but never did I think to see a stranger come out on a bar line from the old country—no offence, Colonel—to ax about Harvey's Folly. I'd aigh forgot that the thing existed at all. Wall! but it beats coon-catching.'

With some trouble I got an explanation. It appeared from the borderer's statement that, years ago, a speculative individual of the name of Harvey had undertaken to construct a railway from Nebraska to Nauvoo, with a branch linking it to the Central Illinois Line. He had obtained the usual charter and grant of land from the State, and had actually commenced operations between Keosauque and New Buda, two little towns not far from the Missouri boundary. But he had soon desisted from the Sisyphean task, rained, disheartened, or disappointed of the aid on which he had somewhat sanguinely reckoned; and thenceforth no more had been said of the scheme or the schemer. 'But the property,' groaned I, 'the works, surely they air a remain?'

'Why,' said Ichabod, meditatively, 'I kinder think there's rails laid down a bit—yes, for some miles I guess, and they'll be there still. The cuss'd Indians can't have stampeded them, like they do the cattle. There's a tidy bridge over a creek or two Harvey built, and s'me sheds and scannings; and that's about all.'

'All?' said I; 'I think again, Ichabod. Surely there must be more plumb than that, and then the rolling stock?'

The frontiersman laughed. 'We know more about gunstocks than rolling stocks, out here on the pararas,' said he; 'and I neter heard of plants, unless 'twas hickory or sunach. But I've kinder catalogued the hull fixings for you, Colonel, without 'tis a pile of rusty iron, or a few waggon-loads of logs—beat bits of oak lumber they were, trimmed and dressed, and shaped mighty like a saddle tree, that I harrey left on the ground.'

'The sleepers, I suppose,' returned I; 'are they there still?'

'Well, Colonel, mebbe some of 'em air taking a nap there still,' replied Ichabod; 'but parara men often camp thereabouts, hunting, cattle-leading, or prospecting, and firewood being mortal scarce on the plains, 'twasn't to be expected the boys wouldn't make free with some chips to cook with. I may have had a chop at those logs with my tomahawk, when I wanted a broil, 'nast or twice, myself.'

I groaned again. The Great Nauvoo and

Nebraska Railway was evidently as brittle a speculation as Alnashar's basket of glass. I finished the ride to Keosauque in moody reverie.—There was no other guest to share such rugged plenty as the wooden tavern, called by courtesy the Eagle Hotel, could afford; and as the land-lord was absent, and the landlady busy in the management of her children and Irish helps, no one talked to me, and I sat sullen and dejected the whole evening. Next day, tired as I was, I set out again, under Ichabod's guidance, to visit what he persisted in naming Harvey's Folly.—We reached the spot at last. A swampy level, intersected by runlets of water, and with a good deal of thorny brake, and here and there a clump of cottonwood poplars diversifying the scene, had been selected by Mr. Harvey for the site of his preliminary operations. Why he had chosen that wet ground at all, when so much prairie lay beyond, of very tolerable smoothness, it is difficult to conjecture; but perhaps the more accurate level had tempted him. There were rails, certainly there were rails, half-buried by the growth of hemlocks and rank grass; but on dismounting I discovered that for lack of proper metal rails, the rails had been constructed of wood, covered with a thin slip of iron—not an unusual device in out-of-the-way parts of America, as I was afterwards told. The fastenings were very defective, the sleepers loose, and the whole concern had a crazy haphazard look.—Such as they were, these precious rails were continued for about five miles—five miles out of 350—and then they terminated in a mass of run and confusion. There were rootless snags, scantlings and serpens blown down by hurricane gasts, heaps of rusty iron, broken tools, damaged wheelbarrows, and a shattered truck with only one wheel left. Also there were a quantity of sleepers of dressed oak, and the fragments of many more, split by the axe and charred to coal, as they lay around the blackened spots of burned turf, where many a camp fire had been lit by the frontiersmen. That was all the valuable property left at the disposal of the directors.—The sight sickened me. 'Harvey's Folly,' muttered I between my teeth, 'say rather 'Bulkeley's Folly—Bulkeley's credulity, phony, weakness! And not only mine, but Tom Harris's and that of all of us. What a long eared pack were we to be lured by the empty piping of such a dissembling knave as that old Colonel!' I rode away, sad and careworn. Ichabod's quiet talk was unnoticed. I had another companion that claimed my undivided attention, and that was Care, Black Care, which air crawling behind my saddle. I was haunted by a ghastly phantasm of impending bankruptcy. The London *Gazette* speaks of ill owned stock before me, and in its fatal columns I read, in flaming characters, 'George Bulkeley, of Cannon Street, in the City of London, and Stamford Hill, Middlesex, to surrender at Portugal Street on Monday, the 14th instant. Official Assignee, Mr. Wilks.' That it should have come to this!—Ruin, ruin, ruin. Ruin and disgrace to us all, the duped directors of this wretched swindle.—Were we not responsible for the debts of the undertaking? Was not the paid-up capital in the treacherous hands of our Yankee cashier, Dr. Titus A. C. Bett, and could there be a doubt that it was lost for ever? Mainly the first business was a fraudulent trick from the first—a net to catch gold-fish. Ah, already with my mind's eye I saw the broker's men in possession of Magnolia Villa; I saw my costly furniture, the cellar of wines I had been so proud of, engravings, pictures, everything submitted to public competition by a snaking auctioneer. I heard the hammer fall, knocking down my Lanes and Penates to the highest bidder. Going, going, gone! the accursed formula rang in my ears with baleful clearness. Magnolia Cottage to let! My family abiding in poor lodgings in Boulevard. George Bulkeley, a moody bankrupt, shaking about the pier of that refuge for insolventy, and afraid to face the Stock Exchange. Even though the Court might declare me blameless, even the commissioner might whitewash me into commercial parity, my conscience was less compassionate, and sternly refused me even a third-class certificate.

I might have had the right to run myself and family, but what right had I to make desolate the hearts of many helpless and confiding people? How about those shareholders ignorant of business, those pined viars, needy widows, poor old half-pay officers, and the rest, who had been dazzled by our prospectus, and had invested their savings in the pocket of Dr. Titus A. C. Bett? It was my respectable name, in common with those of my fellows in the Direction, which had baited the hook for such poor prey as these. My heart—even City men have hearts sometimes—was heavy and mournful with a grief not wholly selfish. Plump! fluff! down went the mustang on his knees, his feet having plunged into the holes that led to the dwellings of some 'prairie-dogs'—interesting little brutes that burrow all over the plains—and over the ani-