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#### A Boy Who Used His Brains.

#### THE ROMANCE OF A GREAT BUSINESS.

The first of the great London Exhibitions, held in Hyde Park in 1861, was so great a success financially that to-day, nearly seventy years after, the surplus are still endowing science scholarships and bursaries.

One of the factors in the success of that wonderful exhibition was the enterprise of a boy of seventeen named John Cook, who personally helped to convey 165,000 visitors from the Midlands to London.

This lad conceived a brilliant idea for securing support. Hiring an empty excursion train at Derby, he would take it to one of the big Midland manufacturing towns, parade the place with a brass band and banners, meet the hands leaving the works on pay day, and carry them off to the train. Having thus filled his train, he would take it to London, escort his crowd to the exhibition, collect them again, bring them back to their homes, and then start all over again.

At that time he was sometimes up all night for five nights in the week, just snatching a nap when and where he could.

But John Cook, at seventeen, was already a practised traveller. The son of a Leicestershire temperance lecturer, he had been brought up in very poor circumstances and had learned early to look after himself.

As a mere child he had been noted for his amazing muscular strength and independence. When only six years of age, he left home on his own account, and made a three days' journey by road, omnibus, rail, and canal, returning quite safe and cheerful. He had been, he said, to see his mother's home. His next excursion was when, at the age of ten, he helped to handle 500 children on the occasion of an afternoon excursion from Leicester.

Mad on Travelling!  
Before he left school at the age of fourteen, he was already earning

wages by setting type in a printing office.

From the beginning he was mad on travelling. There never has been a plainer illustration of the old saying about the boy being father of the man than was afforded by John Cook. His father, Thomas Cook, had at this time taken up the tourist business, but on a very small scale. John Cook's chance came when, at the age of sixteen, he was entrusted by his father with the care of 100 tourists in the Highlands of Scotland. All sorts of difficulties cropped up, but young Cook was always equal to the occasion.

In 1855, when John Cook was twenty one years of age, his father moved his office from Leicester to London. Some idea of the way in which it grew can be gathered from the fact that, within thirty years, the staff had increased from three to more than four thousand!

All was fish that came to John Cook's net. He was ready personally to conduct a tourist to Pampeluna or Patagonia, to fit him out with letters of credit, supplies of foreign money, couriers or guides, provisions or passports. He originated the hotel-coupon system by the aid of which a tourist always finds a room ready in whatever town or village he wishes to stop at.

It was John Cook to whom the British Government turned when they were anxious to send a relief expedition to General Gordon, besieged in Khartoum.

On this occasion, 15,000 troops, 130,000 tons of stores, and 70,000 tons of coal had to be conveyed up the Nile. The vessels provided for the purpose were twenty-seven steamers, 650 sailing craft, and 800 whaleboats. No fewer than 5,000 Egyptians were hired to assist in the matter of transport.

It was this firm, again, who, in 1888, acquired the cable railway which has since carried tens of thousands of visitors to the summit of Vesuvius. The Vesuvius railway was at that time in a bankrupt condition, and John Cook had to fight all sorts of claimants in the Italian law courts. Then, when at last the ownership was settled, the

people of the village of Resina went on strike.

For years these truculent mountaineers had extorted a poll-tax on all travellers who came up the mountain, besides forcing the previous owners of the line to pay blackmail to the tune of £800 a year. When these robbers offered similar terms to John Cook he quietly but absolutely declined to pay them one penny. Thereupon the ruffians attacked and burned the railway station, seized the rolling stock, and hung the carriages down the crater of the volcano.

The line was repaired, and then wrecked again. Then the iron hand of John Cook descended. He closed the line absolutely, and would not open it again until the Resina people came to his agent in Naples and almost on their knees begged for peace at any price.

On another occasion—this was a good many years ago—a certain railway company, which shall be nameless, jerried at Cook and Son and haughtily refused to make any concessions whatever.

John Cook boycotted the line. He put it clean outside his arrangements. Five years later the directors awoke to the fact that they were losing a lot of money. They decided to make peace. It was several years before the ban was lifted. It must have been one of John Cook's greatest triumphs when, the moment his ban was withdrawn, the stock of that railway jumped upwards.

Of John Cook's personal prowess there are many stories. On one occasion he had invited a distinguished party to a trial trip of a new steamer built for work on the Nile. This steamer had a novel steering apparatus, to which the "rais," or captain of the vessel, a native Egyptian, had an old-fashioned prejudice.

The "rais," who was a giant of a man, took the wheel, and the steamer began to proceed up-stream in zig-zag fashion. John Cook saw at once how the land lay. Excusing himself to his visitors, he stepped up alongside the "rais."

"Can't you keep her on a straight course?" he asked quietly.

"Impossible," growled the giant. "It is this new steering apparatus."

"Impossible," repeated Cook. "Well, if you can't steer I don't want you here any longer."

With that he seized the tall Egyptian round the body, carried him to the side, and, lifting him as if he had been a child, flung him into the muddy Nile. Without one glance at the swimming man he went back and took the wheel and steered a straight course with his own hands.

#### The Uncanny Copper.

A London motorist, stopped by a Scottish constable for speeding, hinted broadly that he might pay to be let off.

"What, sir?" cried the constable. "Day ye suggest that I wud take a bribe? Dae ye dare to insult me, sir?"

"Oh, excuse me," said the Londoner. "I really—"

"But, now," put in the constable, "jist supposin' I was that kin' o' man, how much wud ye be inclined to gie?"

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#### The Lantern Wasn't Lit.

One night a man in a trap was run down at a level crossing. Consequently the old signalman in charge had to appear in Court. A grueling cross-examination failed to shake his evidence. He said he had waved his lantern frantically, but to no avail.

The following day the superintendent

ent of the line called him into his office.

"You did do well yesterday, Tom," he said. "I was afraid at first you might break down."

"No, sir," replied Tom. "But I was in a dreadful funk that that old lawyer chap was going to ask me whether my lantern was lit or not."

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By Gene Byrnes

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