

ON THE BRINK.

To me, at least, Roger Elbe was a very interesting character. He was the most systematic and accurate person I ever met, but there was an element of poetry in his nature which enabled him to tell a story so vividly as to make his audience feel that they were witnessing the events he related.

He might easily, I am sure, have secured a place a much higher and more lucrative position than that of a division engineer, employed by the Canadian Pacific Railroad Company to superintend the construction of its line through some of the most difficult passes of the Rocky and Selkirk Mountains, but he chose this out-door life because his physical condition required it.

His health was not vigorous. He had an excellent physique, but his nerves were unstrung. Usually he kept them under control, but any sudden surprise or prolonged worry caused him to lose command of himself. I have known him to drop a valuable instrument when a long silence was broken by the sudden caw of a crow over his head. Once, as he was quietly writing, he sprang suddenly to his feet and overturned the table before him when some snow dropped from a pine-tree down upon our tent.

One day it was necessary to make measurements and observations on the face of a high cliff, from a point about midway between its base and its top. Several of our men volunteered to go down, but Elbe said he wished to examine the character of the rock, and would go himself.

Fastening a rope about his waist, whistling loudly meanwhile, he bade the men lower him down the cliff, while I stood at its edge to watch for signals that he might make.

He stooped on a projecting ledge, secured a footing, and then set deliberately to work. After making a few measurements, he took out his field-book, apparently to record the figures. A second later he roared as though he had received a blow, and dropping his book, grasped the rope, and shouted hoarsely to be drawn up.

In less than a minute he was brought to the top of the cliff, but as we carried him back from its brink he appeared to be completely unnerved. His teeth were clenched, he glared wildly about him, and great drops of sweat stood upon his pallid face.

However, he soon regained self-control, the color returned to his face, and nervously untying the rope from his waist, he said, in a weak, hesitating way:

"Boys, I was not afraid of your letting me drop, but I can't keep my wits in a place like that. I'll tell you the reason when you get back to camp. Finish the work without me, but don't any of you go down there if you have the least objection to going. No, no, there is no need that any of you should go back to the camp with me, I am all right now."

After the work was finished, the other men took the instruments back to camp, and I made a detour down through the gorge to get the book that Elbe had dropped.

Some of the leaves had become loosened by the fall, and in collecting them I noticed that it was evidently quite an old book. The first few pages were filled with ordinary engineering computations, observations about weather, vegetation, geological formations and the like. Then there was a leaf on which the distance passed over by a falling body in five seconds was carefully calculated.

On one of the leaves I picked up was a computation which at first I thought had something to do with the velocity of a slow current of water that we had encountered, but soon concluded that the moving body, whatever it was, travelled even too slowly for that.

Ever long I found other puzzling computations, all of which appeared to have been made for the purpose of establishing the fact that something would occur at "ten minutes past four o'clock P. M."

Next I found a leaf on which was a rough drawing of a little child, with curly hair and feld s hands, lying in its coffin.

Just here it dawned upon me that I must have been examining private papers, instead of an ordinary field-book, and so, restraining my curiosity, I gathered what other leaves I could find, and hastened back to camp.

That night, as we were seated outside the tents around a blazing fire, Elbe told his story. So vivid was the impression made upon my mind that I think I can repeat it very nearly in his own words.

"Boys," he said, "I was in this region several years ago, long before it was definitely known that Kicking Horse would be the pass chosen to run the line through. We came up the Columbia in the summer, and spent the winter over in the Big Bend, making our usual observations, and preparing for a regular survey of the region."

"One morning early in April I started from our camp to spend part of the day hunting goats. I soon came upon the tracks of a small herd, and followed them. At first the way led up a small side canon; then it turned toward some peaks and high cliffs that form a part of the south wall of the Illecillewaet Pass. About three hours of zigzag climbing brought me to the summit of the ridge, when the falling of a rock, that I carelessly displaced alarmed the goats, and they bounded away. As they disappeared among the ice-drifts I fired two shots after them. The next moment I regretted this, for as the echoes rattled among the crags I was sure that every goat and mountain sheep within five miles would be on the alert the rest of the day. However, it was now nearly twelve o'clock, and I decided to find a comfortable nook for my lunch, and then return to camp."

"The lay of the land had much to do with my subsequent adventure, so that I recall it now with distinctness. I was on the top of a low ridge extending east and west along the bases of two peaks which rose up on each side of the ridge."

"At the end of this central ridge, some distance in advance of it, fell a precipice into the valley below. The hollows between the two higher peaks and the ridge were filled with snow and ice, under one of which, and at its side, flowed a shallow stream of water. In looking for a sheltered place in which to eat my luncheon, I had noticed the space between the end of the central ridge, and the bright sun shining full upon it."

"The stream of water, or some other agency, had made an opening, or crevice, between the ice in the hollow on the western side of the ridge and the peak which rose near it wide enough for me to pass through to the open space beyond, that looked so inviting."

"Following this crevice back a short distance, I found a jagged ledge, with projections of ice opposite, that would enable

me with comparative ease to get to the bottom of the narrow passage. Using these projections, I succeeded in reaching the shallow water that flowed in the bed of the crevice, and thus easily passed on to the sheltered space beyond.

"There was no opening in the mass of ice and snow that filled the hollow on the eastern side of the central ridge, and the end of this ridge, enmassed in ice, rose abruptly forty or fifty feet above the open space in which I stood. The ice in both hollows also ended abruptly nearly on a line with that which enclosed the point of the ridge."

"The current of water that ran through the crevice covered only a part of the west side of the open space, leaving elsewhere the rock on which I stood comparatively dry. Here, with a fine view before me, I sat down to eat my luncheon."

"After eating I still sat for some time admiring the grand landscape before me. I remember wondering how long the water that was running near me had been cutting its way along the side of the mass of snow and ice that had accumulated in the western hollow. Then I speculated in a listless sort of way that the rains and snows of many centuries had passed through this ravine."

"The view in front and below was especially fascinating, while the small stream poured over the edge, and fell, looking like a mass of falling pearls, down to a shelving rock, until it became only mist and spray long before it reached the base of the precipice."

"I had a curiosity to know the height of this precipice, so, taking a cartridge from my belt and wrapping a piece of white paper about it, I dropped it into the abyss, and noted that it reached the bottom in five seconds. So I computed in my field-book that it was about four hundred feet from where I stood to the base of the precipice. Then I sat down, and wearied by my long tramp, stretched myself upon my side, and voluntarily dropped asleep."

"On looking at my watch when I awoke I saw that it was two o'clock, so I reluctantly concluded to leave my cool retreat. I took my gun and walked back toward the point in the cliff where I had entered. 'Imagine my surprise when I found it was so narrow that I could not pass through it. I looked, rubbed my eyes, and looked again. Yes, there was an opening, but it was not a foot wide. With a quickening pulse I began to investigate."

"The ice-wall was certainly nearer to the brink of the precipice than it had been when I passed through the crevice. A thin line of the alluvial-like dust which accumulates on the rocks of fresh-water streams was scraped up at the base of the ice-wall, and one of my footprints on this thin, soft substance was partly hidden by the ice."

"The truth was now perfectly plain! Had there ever been another man so inconceivably thoughtless as to walk into a trap like that?"

"The mass of ice and snow behind me had begun to move downward. Already it had cut off my retreat. I was hemmed in before a slowly moving ice-fall, and should be resistlessly crowded down over the brink into the fearful abyss beyond."

"At first I was dazed by this awful discovery. Then I began nervously to look about for some way of escape but neither the smooth walls at the sides of my prison nor the perpendicular face of that moving ice-cliff offered any footing up which it would be possible for me to climb more than a few feet."

"Trembling in every nerve, and with a sinking heart, I went to the precipice. A few moments before I had looked with pleasure down into the abyss. How different it appeared now! A single glance made my heart chill with horror."

"Time and again I paced up and down my slowly shortening prison, seeking some hitherto overlooked means of escape. I thrust my rifle in between the ice and the side of the channel, madly hoping that in some way it would check the movement of that awful mass. I might as well have tried in the same way to check the waters of the Columbia."

"I struck my hunting knife into the ice to see if I could not cut steps for my hands and feet and thus draw myself up the face of the ice-wall. At almost the first blow the blade snapped from the handle, which fell into the water and glided over the brink."

"Then I gave up hope. 'Still, with a sort of fascination, I wished I could know how much longer I had to live. I had a small tape line in my pocket. With it I measured the distance from the edge of the precipice to the base of the ice-cliff. It was just sixty-two feet."

"Then I took my watch and observed the mass while it passed over three feet. It seemed to move steadily at the rate of about six inches a minutes."

"I did not need to put down the figures in order to know that—even if the movement did not increase with the heat—I had a little less than two hours to live; nevertheless, in a dazed way, I put the figures down in my field-book. I must have been purely the force of habit that led me to do so. I even reflected that I should be crowded from my position before the ice reached the brink, and so, as it was just fourteen minutes past two, I concluded that I could not hope to remain on the ledge longer than until ten minutes past four o'clock."

"Strange details, you think, for a man in such peril to busy himself with. But I believe that the horrible fear and suspense must at times have unsettled my mind, which seems to have gone from one extreme to the other, so that my imagination conjured up all kinds of strange and unexpected fancies."

"Sometimes I hoped, sometimes I feared, that the mass would become suddenly loosened, and hurl me at once into the abyss. Sometimes I became frantic at the thought of my horrible position, then I would accept what was to come as inevitable, and settle into the dull acquiescence of despair."

"A great fleecy cloud came floating below me, and for a few minutes hid the yawning chasm. I remember longing to jump down into its feathery folds, and wishing that upon it I might sail away into space forever."

"I thought an hour must have passed, but my watch showed that only fifteen minutes had elapsed since I had completed that last computation. I would not believe it until I looked back and saw by the aid of marks that I had placed in the side of the chasm, that the creeping, horrible mass had advanced seven and one-half feet."

"A breath of wind bore a delicate bit of moss to my feet. Then I remembered that I had seen moss of the same kind many years before at the grave of one of the playmates of my boyhood. Loving

hands had twined a mossy wreath and placed it upon the coffin. Every feature of the fair, peaceful countenance lying upon his snowy pillow came distinctly to my mental vision. Mechanically I began to sketch the dead face on a leaf of my book. But the consciousness of my awful peril did not leave me, and the rough sketch seemed to transform itself into a vivid picture of a mangled body lying among grisly bolster at the foot of a precipice, and buried beneath masses of snow and ice."

"It seems to me that I did not shrink from death or even-ling to life; but the thought of the horrible sensation of falling filled me with dread. It seemed as if my sensations would not end with death. I even felt that if I were to send a bullet crashing through my brain I should still feel that horrible sensation of falling; and that if my body were ground to powder I should still be conscious of the crash of that great mass that would fall upon me."

"With these and many other fantastic and terrifying imaginings my mind was occupied till three o'clock. The mass of ice still moved with almost the precision of a machine. As I sat looking up at the sky, flecked here and there with gauzy clouds, a dark speck appeared circling above me. Then another came in sight, following the downward flight of the first."

"As they came nearer I saw that they were vultures. When they were within thirty feet of my head, delicately poisoning and balancing themselves, they seemed, in my insane imaginings, to be exulting in their superiority and my helplessness. The thought exasperated me. I drew up my rifle and fired at the nearest bird. It dropped downward, with a wing broken close to its body. But as it caught with its claws on one of the long icicles that depended from the side of the precipice, and clung there, wildly flapping its one wing, I pitied the poor thing and reviled myself for my cruelty."

"I saw that I had but a slight hold upon the ice, and resolved to try to reach it and put an end to its suffering. I made a flying fastened the other end to my gun, I lay down and reached as far as I dared. I should have caught it, but the poor thing loosened its hold and fell, turning over and over until it struck the bottom, quivered, and became still. Here I beheld the rehearsal of my own approaching fate."

"My head began to swim and my eyes to blur. Just then a small bird, almost white, darted up past my face, and drew my attention. I sprang to my feet and looked for it, but it was out of sight. I half-fancied that it was the soul of the dead bird flying away to heaven."

"Again I looked at my watch. The hands pointed to half past three. I could not believe it. Still I dreaded to look behind me as one might dead to look at a crouching tiger ready to spring upon him as he looked. Nevertheless I forced myself to do it. My watch was confirmed, and I sank back, knowing that I had but forty minutes more to live."

"A newspaper that had been wrapped about my luncheon lay near me. I picked it up and began to read. It was an ordinary newspaper, though nearly a year old of course. Some of the paragraphs held my attention, because in one way or another the expressions used suggested my situation."

"A young ladies' man of bright prospects had begun to speculate. Successful at first, he continued in a larger way. Finally, when he had become deeply involved his losses began. 'On the Brink of Bankruptcy,' the paper said, 'he made a desperate struggle to bear up under his misfortunes, but his reputation was gone. He was overpowered by a mass of adverse circumstances and crowded down to ruin.'"

"Another article told of a handsome intelligent boy, always successful in his studies, who had been so intent on developing his mental powers that he had neglected to care for his health, and was now lying on the verge of insanity, pressed down by a host of bodily ailments."

"Under the heading 'Death of a Drunkard,' was told the familiar story of an intelligent, capable young man who prided himself upon his ability to throw off his habit of drinking a glass now and then, whenever he should find that the habit was becoming injurious to him. In time he became a confirmed drunkard. He then struggled to escape from his overpowering vice, but it was too late, and, as the paper put it, 'He was forest from the brink of respectability into a pit of degradation, and buried beneath an avalanche of shame.'"

"So rapidly did my imagination work that I seemed to live over the temptations, struggles, fears, hopes, and disappointments of each of those unfortunate lives as it neared its respective brink."

"The sun was shining in my face, and I started to change my position. My hand struck something cold! The mass was almost upon me. Fifteen minutes more—and all would be over!"

"I got up and placed my back against the eastern side of the advancing mass, with my hands raised above my head and gripping the slight icy projection."

"As I looked at the landscape before me I saw the low sunbeams sparkling upon the distant snow-drifts, and tangling themselves like a network of fire among the forests. The deep blue sky, the downy clouds, the earth—everything was beautiful."

"A thrill went through me as my gun—pushed by the moving ice—slipped, and slid over the edge of the precipice. I heard it as it struck and bounded from the side of the cliff, until it reached the bottom. I tried to close my eyes, but I could not."

"Suddenly then, the rock beneath my feet seemed to tremble. The icicles that hung from the ice on the east side of the open space snapped and fell. There was a rumbling sound that grew louder. Then the entire mass of ice in the hollow on the western side of the ridge, where the current of water flowed, shot up by me and pouring over the edge of the precipice, fell with a crash that seemed to make the whole earth quiver. This was followed by a rush of water."

"Almost blinded as I was, even in my insane fear, I knew what had happened. The ice accumulations in the other ravine had been pushed forward by an avalanche of snow from the heights behind. Undermined by the flow of water beneath, it had moved readily and thus had taken the whole force of the avalanche."

"Every moment I expected that the mass behind me would in like manner be pushed forward."

"But no! The echoes died away among the crags, the torrent of water that had shot down in the wake of the ice ceased, a miniature rainbow had appeared in the

chasm for a moment,—I noticed it even in that awful moment,—and I found myself standing as before with the brink of the precipice—the horrible precipice—yawning just before me."

"Then came a wild hope of escape. 'Starting from where I stood, I darted swiftly round the edge of the central ridge, pushed my way through the accumulations of snow that still blocked the channel, and then leaped and pushed ahead like a madman, until I had reached a place where I could climb from the ravine to the level above.'

"Here I remember trying to laugh, pray, sing, shout and weep, all at the same time. Then, as another thunderous roar sounded among the crags, I swooned."

"It was nearly sundown when I came to myself. The moon rose so that I could see my way, and it was midnight before I reached camp. I have been trying to forget that experience, but it is impossible. My nerves that day received a strain from which they will never recover."

"To-day I thought I would discipline myself by going down over the cliff. I got along well enough at first, but when I opened my field-book to write in it, I found that by some mistake I had put in my pocket the same book that I had used while imprisoned on that bank."

"Instantly that old scene came back to me, and I lost my self-possession. I think I dropped that book into the gorge, and I hope I may never see it again."

He never did.

HOW THEY SETTLE STRIKES IN RUSSIA.

Fifty Labor Revolvers So Cruelly Used That They Kill Themselves.

A correspondent of the London Times says that a strike in Russia is in truth a revolt, and is so treated by the authorities. The reason is that Russian workmen are such ignorant, unreasonable beings that they would become utterly unmanageable without the vigorous action of the judiciary.

About a month ago a case occurred that illustrates the childish absurdity of the men and the efficacious action of the authorities. A falling off in trade caused the proprietors of certain large mills to reduce the production and discharge a number of the hands, whose services were no longer useful. As soon as this decision was known a crowd of semi-savage workmen surrounded the managers and insisted that work should be found for the usual number of hands, threatening personal violence if their demand was unheeded, while at the same time a quantity of machinery was destroyed by the rioters.

The police were called in and settled the matter very quickly. During the night fifty of the ringleaders were quietly spirited away, no one knew whither or how. The rest, left leaderless, whimpered like beaten children and prayed to their favorite saints. Not receiving any satisfactory answer from St. Vladimir, St. George of Cappadocia, and the army of martyrs, the strikers quietly gave in and went to work completely demoralized.

By and by it leaked out among the diplomats that the fifty poor fellows had been hurried off to the salt mines of Cracow, where they were scourged and ill used till they imitated the example of Mrs. Sibiada, and sought death as a refuge from tyranny. All this horror was kept as quiet as possible, that the element of mystery might be added to the other atrocities. So that, while the Government got rid of fifty dangerous men, their former fellow laborers were awed by the incomprehensible disappearance of their leaders.

The Dairying Interest of Canada.

The convention of Canadian dairymen that met at Ottawa last week was the first attempt to unite in a single representative society all those who are prominently engaged in the dairy industry throughout the Dominion. All the provinces and territories were represented by delegates, and the papers read sketched the progress that had been attained from Nova Scotia to British Columbia. The fitness of Canada for this branch of agriculture has been recognized by the best qualified experts in the old world—men like Professors Sheldon, Fream and Tanner, who are connected with agricultural education and practical farmers, like the gentlemen of the Scottish deputation that came to Canada in 1882. In one of the admirable series of pamphlets on Canada and its resources, written by Prof. Fream and published by the Department of Agriculture, that gentleman recommends dairying as the most productive and paying of our agricultural industries. He speaks highly of the cheese of Ontario and Quebec, and points out that the former provinces carried off three first prizes for cheese in competition against the whole world at international exhibitions. That is no small triumph. Quebec has produced some cheese which, in Prof. Fream's opinion, is equal to the best that Ontario dairies have yielded, but the farmers are slower in adopting improvements. Both in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick a great drawback was the reluctance of the farmers to supply themselves with the best class of modern dairy apparatus. Of the advantages for dairying of the Northwest, especially Manitoba and Alberta, Mr. Fream writes with enthusiasm. At the same time, however, the make of butter is hardly sufficient to meet the local demand. In fact the people have only recently begun to recognize the benefits of mixed farming as opposed to exclusive wheat growing. British Columbia is so vast an area that if its fertile valleys formed one continuous region it would be one of the finest farming countries in the world. What is now required all over Canada is an improvement in our butter, an attempt, indeed, to bring it up to the standard of our cheese, which is rapidly acquiring a world wide fame. Much is being done in this direction, but much yet remains to be accomplished and it behoves every individual farmer to bestir himself.

A Dog's Seal Saccue.

About a month ago the Princess of Wales had a sealskin sack made for her lapdog in Paris, and the important fact was scabbed over half the civilized world. It was not of any profound degree of importance, but the result is amusing. One of the most prominent furriers in New York made twelve jackets for dogs immediately on seeing the news in the paper, and they were all sold within two weeks. The claim of the Princess of Wales to be a leader of fashion is beyond dispute.

THREW HIMSELF FROM THE STEEPLE.

The Sexton Rang the Chimes and then Took a Fatal Leap.

A remarkable suicide is reported from Wicksville, Neb., Wicksville has a church with a set of chimes in the steeple. A young Englishman named John Hicks Dawson was sexton, and played the chimes. About six weeks ago he had a severe attack of influenza. He recovered sufficiently to go to work again, but has acted rather strangely and has seemed very despondent. The other morning during the service the congregation was started upon hearing the lively strains of the "Devil's Dream" rattled off in the steeple, followed by a heavy fall, and Dawson was found lying on the ground groaning. He was carried into the church, and died in a few moments.

A Warning to Farmers.

To make two blades of grass grow where one grew before is a creditable achievement for any farmer who desires a good crop of hay. To raise 100 bushels of wheat on an acre of ground capable before of producing not more than 30 would be another desirable accomplishment for any tiller of the soil. To find a kind of oats which, being sowed, would spring forth and yield 150 bushels of 40 pound oats to an acre would be an equally profitable discovery. But none of these things are likely to come to pass in Canada, in this or in any other day and generation. The miracle of planting and reaping has its limits. Nevertheless a seed company has been started in the States which represented to farmers of this country that it had a kind of oats which would make the purchasers rich in a few years, and make mortgages a thing of the past. The ground in which this seed was buried would yield a harvest of three times the usual quantity, and the quantity would be in keeping with the extraordinary yield. Many farmers gave credence to the story and bought of the wonderful oats. In order to get them in large quantities, notes payable after harvest time were given. The farmers all ready perceive the mistake they have made as the notes are being pressed for collection, and the oats which were to produce such wonderful things are not yet in the ground, and, if they were, most likely would prove about as good as any other variety. Agriculture has made great strides within the past fifty years. It has advanced in this country as decidedly as either settlement or mechanical pursuits. Indeed in no other industry have there been more marked changes. Fifty years ago the scythe, the sickle, the flail, the hand-hoe and hand-rake were the universal farming implements. Now it is the machine for cutting down and binding wheat and oats, the threshing machine, the horse rake and horse hoe that do the work. Machinery has taken the place of manual exertion in the planting and sowing, tilling and curing, gathering and preparing for use. Butter and cheese, too, are machine and factory made, and thus the housewife is relieved from these most laborious duties. Furthermore, during the past decade or two, silos and ensilage have entered the field and gained a permanent lodgment, obviating a vast amount of former hard, grating labor. But, with all the progress made, ground and grain vary but little from their old capacities, the great transformation being in the utensils for doing the work. When strangers with plausible speech attempt to sell farmers cereals at big prices, which are to accomplish the impossible, the farmers will serve themselves best by showing their callers the road, and placing their reliance on the oats capable of yielding a crop of 50 bushels of 32 pounds weight to the acre, and in other grains sticking to what has been proved valuable.

War Prospects.

The approach of Spring is apt to bring more or less uneasiness in regard to war prospects in Europe, and occasionally this takes the form of direct alarms. So many campaigning seasons, however, have come and gone without disturbance of the peace of the Continent that perhaps only on the theory that "it is the unexpected that happens" need any anxiety on this score be felt for 1890. There are some signs of petty disturbance in the Balkans, where plotting against Prince Ferdinand seems to go on without much intermission; and in the latest affair it is alleged that sundry Russian officials have been implicated. Russia is said to have made, also, a demand for the payment of 3,000,000 rubles, due her for expenses incurred in maintaining an armed force in Eastern Roumelia, after the treaty of Berlin and in accordance with that treaty. Still, to demand this payment of the Government at Sofia seems to imply assent to the political union of Eastern Roumelia and Bulgaria. The best sign of peace, perhaps, is the fact that the German Government has taken up the labor problem for the immediate future, which it would hardly do unless it expected 1890 to be a year of peace.

The acceptance by England of Germany's invitation to take part in the labor conference devised by Emperor William makes it look as if the movement might amount to something. The Emperor probably evolved the scheme as a sop to be thrown to the working-men just before the election, and it is very likely that he is angry enough now to withdraw it if he could. But he cannot, the invitations having gone out to other nations. What the conference can do does not appear, but there is a growing feeling among European governments that something must be done to allay the discontent among the laboring classes. There are scores of things which might be done if the governments were in a different position, but they are so hampered that they can do but little.

The Alaska Commercial Company loses its valuable exclusive privilege of taking fur seals upon the islands of St. Paul and St. George because of the competition excited by its large profits. The North American Commercial Company, of New York and San Francisco, which is to have the lease, is to pay more than three times as much per annum as was paid by the Alaska Company. On the basis of 100,000 seals per annum the Government will receive about \$1,000,000 per annum, as against \$300,000 required under the old lease. The exclusive privilege is to run for twenty years. The purchase of Alaska was a pretty good business speculation, as these figures show. The United States paid only \$7,200,000 for the country, and it has immense undeveloped resources besides these seal fisheries. No wonder that the Washington Government contends that Behring Sea is a *mare clausum* or closed sea, and wishes to control the seal fisheries of the whole district.