



A WASTED LIFE.

BY WILLIAM M. HINSDALE.

I first met the deacon under rather odd circumstances. A persistent touch of rheumatism under my left shoulder, which defied liniments and plasters, sent me to the Hot Springs, seven miles north of Boonopolis, Southern California.

To reach the Hot Springs, the traveller crosses five miles of desert country, where the cactus flourishes like the green bay tree, and the coyote shrills at night his peculiar lay. Then he climbs "the grade," a rise of 1,000 feet in two miles. This part of the way is over a mountain road which skirts precipices and winds in and out among canyons in a way that makes timid people dizzy.

One beautiful winter afternoon Deacon Hardwicke started for the hotel. That morning he had procured at Boonopolis a livery team and a driver, and had been taken to different points about the valley, looking at lands which were offered for sale. Having completed his inspection, he was driven to the foot of the grade, and there he dismissed the team.

He had in his hands a little black leather wallet containing deeds, and, as he walked along in his slow and dignified fashion, his eyes bent on the ground, he looked like a gentleman of leisure, perhaps a wealthy Eastern tourist out for an airing.

At the foot of the grade is a little ranch house, and just beyond the road makes a turn almost at right angles and skirts the edge of a canyon where the traveller is hidden from view in either direction.

In this angle of the way a man was waiting for the afternoon stage, which was about due. It carried the mail for the hotel, and sometimes considerable express matter, to say nothing of the passengers.

But the deacon happened to come first, and, as he turned the corner, plodding slowly along, he heard a smooth, clear, firm, but not impatient, voice say:

"Wait a moment, sir. And kindly hand over that grip-sack and your money."

Glancing up, the deacon beheld a big revolver pointed at his head.

Deacon Hardwicke was surprised and grieved. He was not a coward. He had lived in many a lawless community had seen men lynched, had himself been a target for bullets more than once. If he had been armed, he would have fought—as he afterwards assured me.

But the appalling fact flashed over him that he had no "gun," and that the gentlemanly stranger "had the drop" on him.

"Come," said the highwayman in a more threatening tone. "I mean business. Drop your wallet. Give me your money, or I'll let daylight through you."

The deacon halted and shook his fist at the man. What he said is not material to this recital. Then he turned and ran down the grade.

The highwayman fired twice, and the deacon afterwards stated that the balls whistled by in close proximity to his head. The shots flustered him. He stumbled, tripped and fell. He bruised his shins and tore the skin from his wrists. The wallet flew from his hand, and he lay in the road, howling with rage and pain.

The marauder advanced leisurely and picked up the wallet. Just then the stage, which was a trifle late, as usual, rolled slowly around the turn in the road.

The deacon's assailant leaped down the steep bank of the canyon and rolled headlong among the chaparral.

The remarks of the passengers on the stage, which picked him up and brought him to the hotel, did not tend to make him better natured.

"Guess it was all a fake," "I didn't hear any shots," "More scared than hurt." These were some of the whispered comments that came to the deacon's ears.

"If I had only had a gun," he said to me, "that fellow would never have got out of there alive. It's the disgrace that hurts. I don't see how I was careless enough to leave my gun at home these times," he said, with tears in his eyes.

"Do you think you would know the fellow should you ever see him again?" I asked.

"I should know him anywhere. He is short and wiry, dark hair, mustache, no beard, black eyes. And there is a great, red, flaming scar across his cheek—knife wound, I reckon."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," I said. "Let us go to Boonopolis and find him. He will soon see that there is no pursuit, and will certainly go there. Perhaps we can arrest him yet."

Boonopolis at that time was only an infant among the cities of Southern California. There were huge gaps among its business houses, now filled with stately edifices. There were no pavements, and where 100 globes of electric fire now glare at night upon the passer-by there was then only the dim and fitful gleam of lamps from the windows of the scattered stores.

After an elaborate supper at the Transcontinental, served by retired cowboys from Arizona, we sallied forth to visit the saloons and gambling places in search of our robber. We made three or four circuits of the town without success, and finally found ourselves in the Magnolia Club rooms.

I was enjoying the character of amateur detective hugely. So far there was a pleasant tinge of excitement—or rather an expectation of excitement—and very little danger. But as we scanned the faces of the company without seeing our man the deacon's brow grew black with disappointment.

It was now after midnight. The cigar store was closed, but the bar was kept open all night. Disappointed in our search, we became absorbed in watching the game.

There is something of the gambler in every man, and as I looked upon the tense, excited faces of the players, the contagion of their example seized me, and I felt in my pocket for a coin. Finding nothing but silver, which I did not like to stake, as there was none on the table, I was on the point of borrowing a double eagle from the deacon when I heard a quiet but distinct voice at the end of the room say:

"Hands up, gentlemen, if you please."

Glancing around, I saw a man standing at the door leading to the bar, a revolver in each hand pointed at us. He was a short, slight man, with dark hair and a flaming scar across his face.

There was no confusion. One of the loungers quietly placed his back against the door leading to the cigar store and drew two revolvers, which he pointed along the table. Two others, evidently confederates, also stood at ease awaiting the next order. The rest of us lifted our hands simultaneously.

"The gents that are seated will kindly rise," said the voice near the door.

The gamblers rose as one man.

"Now, then. Everybody right about and face the wall," was the next command.

We advanced in two rows to the opposite sides of the room and stood, as directed, ranged against the walls. Then the two confederates stepped leisurely to the table and scooped the gold into a couple of little sacks which they produced from their pockets.

Having secured the money on the table, the brigands proceeded to rob our persons. With a great show of politeness they requested us to give up our watches, money, and weapons.

The fellow tossed my revolver and my few silver dollars into his sack and grabbed at my watch.

Just then there was a crashing, explosive sound, deafening in the narrow confines of the room—then another—another—and another. Then came darkness, a quick rush of feet, a tumult of shouts and groans.

It was the deacon, of course. I knew it before the welcomed hurried arrival of men from outside with lanterns. He had "turned loose" at the leader. They had exchanged three or four shots before the light went out, quickly and mysteriously. The men with the sacks and the money were gone, but the deacon was bending over a form that was stretched upon the floor.

The fellow tried to lift himself upon his elbow.

"I know you, pard," he said. "You're the man I stood up this afternoon. You've held over me this time. I'm gone."

The deacon's eyes softened. He dropped his revolver, put his long arm under the other's head, and tried to turn him into a more comfortable position.

"I am sorry for you," he said slowly and simply.

"Oh—it's—all—right," gasped the wounded man, evidently speaking with difficulty. "I came—into—the—game—on—a—bluff—but—you've—called—me—sure."

"Is there anything that I can do for you?" asked the deacon.

"Bend down here," said the man.

The deacon lowered his head, and the other whispered something to him.

"I'll do it," said the deacon.

The next day, in the afternoon, the deacon and I sat on the veranda of the hotel at Hot Springs, enjoying a sun bath and admiring the diversified landscape before us.

"Now, there was that young fellow yesterday," said he. "Had he told me who he was, I would have lent him \$100 to go east, and there he might have amounted to something. He simply threw his life away."

"What did that young fellow say to you?" I asked.

"Told me his name. You would know the family if I should mention it. Wanted me to see that he was decently buried, and to write to his father and mother."—*San Francisco Argonaut.*

The Mysteries of a Pack of Cards.

A private soldier by the name of Richard Lee was taken before a magistrate recently for playing cards during divine service. It appears a sergeant commanded the soldier at church, and when the parson had read the prayer, he took the text.

Those who had a Bible took it out, but this soldier had neither Bible nor common prayer book, but pulling out a pack of cards, he spread them before him. He just looked at one card and then at another.

The sergeant of the company saw him and said:—"Richard, put up the cards; this is no place for them."

"Never mind that," said Richard.

When the service was over, the constable took Richard before the mayor.

"Well," says the mayor, "what have you brought the soldier here for?"

"For playing cards in church."

"Well, soldier, what have you got to say for yourself?"

"Much, sir, I hope."

"Very good. If not, I will punish you more than man was ever punished."

"I have been," said the soldier, "about six weeks on the march. I have neither Bible nor common prayer book. I have nothing but a pack of cards, and I'll satisfy your worship of the purity of my intentions."

And, spreading the cards before the mayor, he began with the ace:—

"When I see the ace, it reminds me there is but one God. When I see the deuce, it reminds me of Father and Son. When I see the tray, it reminds me of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. When I see the four spot, it reminds me of the four evangelists that preached—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. When I meet the five, it reminds me of the five wise virgins that trimmed their lamps—there were ten, but five were foolish, and were cast out. When I see the six, it reminds me that in six days God made heaven and earth. When I see the seven, it reminds me that on the seventh day He rested from the great work He had created, and hallowed it. When I see the eight, it reminds me of the eight righteous persons that were saved when God destroyed the world, viz., Noah and his wife, with three sons and their wives. When I see the nine, it reminds me of the nine lepers that were cleansed by our Saviour—there were nine out of ten who never returned thanks. When I see the ten, it reminds me of the ten commandments which God handed down to Moses on tablets of stone. When I see the king, I am reminded of the King of Heaven, which is God Almighty. When I see the queen, I am reminded of the Queen of Sheba, for she was as wise a woman as Solomon was a man. She brought with her fifty boys and fifty girls, all dressed in boys' apparel, for King Solomon to tell which were boys and which were girls. King Solomon sent for water for them to wash; the girls washed to their elbows and the boys to their wrists, so King Solomon told by that."

"Well," said the mayor, "you have given a good description of all the cards except one."

"What is that?"

"The knave," said the mayor.

"I will give your honor a description of that, too, if you will not be angry."

"I will not," said the mayor, "if you do not term me to be the knave."

"Well," said the soldier, "the greatest knave I know is the constable that brought me here."

"I do not know," said the mayor, "if he is the greatest knave, but I know he is the greatest fool."

"When I count how many spots there are in a pack of cards, I find three hundred and sixty-five—as many days as there are in a year. On counting the number of cards in a pack, I find there are fifty-two—the number of weeks in a year. I find there are twelve picture cards—representing the number of months in a year; and on counting the tricks, I find thirteen—the number of weeks in a quarter. So you see, sir, a pack of cards serve for a Bible, an almanac, and a common prayer book.—*Etc.*

THE QUIET HOUR.

Conversation.

Keep a watch on your words, my sisters,
For words are wonderful things;
They are sweet, like the bees' fresh honey—
Like the bees they have terrible stings!
They can bless like the warm, glad sunshine,
And brighten a lonely life;
They can cut, in the strife of anger,
Like an open two-edged knife.

Let them pass through your lips unchallenged,
If their errand is true and kind—
If they come to support the weary,
To comfort and help the blind.
If a bitter, revengeful spirit
Prompt the words, let them be unsaid;
They may flash through the brain like lightning,
Or fall on the heart like lead.

Keep them back, if they're cold and cruel,
Under bar and lock and seal;
The wounds they make, my sisters,
Are always slow to heal.
God guard your lips, and ever,
From the time of your early youth,
May the words that you daily utter
Be the words of beautiful truth.

The Door of the Lips.

Possibly there are two distinct species of busy-bodies; some may be heedlessly liable to pass on a piece of spicy news, letting the tongue wag simply from unrestrained habit, but others with a more deliberate purpose to injure. The latter, as a matter of course, fall under the condemnation of all decent people, and would probably be slow to admit themselves to be consciously guilty of such an offence. Yet, even so, they are also not free from censure, just as the consequences of their gossiping may manifest the workings of a poisonous sting. How easily an innocent reputation may be all unknowingly blasted, and without opportunity of defence or reparation, by ugly gossip based on unfounded rumor. And, if "the costliest treasure mortal times afford is a spotless reputation," how irrevocably—or, at least, for a considerable season—a man may be robbed of the most precious thing he owns!

Pondering upon these things, as well as upon the expectation of having to account in the judgment for every idle word, a Christian will surely be "slow to speak."

Nor does this necessitate a cowardly concealment of actual wrongs, the promulgation of which would be the first step to their abatement or correction. There is such a thing as criminal silence, which may make the silent one accessory to the wrong, if not hold him amenable, in a degree only slightly inferior to that attaching to the principals themselves. There is a time to speak, and to speak unequivocally, with a view to effect some betterment. But there is also a time to be silent; and ever and always it is in order to meditate upon and make use of the prayer, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and keep the door of my lips." St. James understood both human nature and ethics when he wrote: "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain."

Words.

Words have a fearful power. Swift-winged messengers are they for good or evil. Could each human soul possess a tablet upon which, by some mysterious agency, words might be engraven in appropriate characters, how varied and full of meaning would those characters be, and how potent their spell! Light words, the interchange of friendly civilities, the little occurrences of everyday life, would be but faintly impressed and recognized only by the charm investing them. Gay words, the pointed and brilliant scintillations of wit and fancy, sparkling as just dropped from a diamond point. Bitter words, stinging, withering words of reproach and scorn, engraven as with a pen of iron, and darkly enveloped with gloomy shadows. Noble words, the embodiment of the glowing thoughts and conceptions of genius, set with gems, and enriched with a halo of glory. And words of mercy, loving words of sympathy, burning with a radiance mild and lovely as the breathings of an angel-presence. This is not all fancy. Words are indeed engraven upon more enduring tablets than those of ivory or brass; that of immortal minds. Take the continual interchange in the particles of matter; particles thrown off from one substance filling the places in the formation of another. So words are the particles which minds are throwing off, to become incorporated with other words, to be unperishable as the mind itself.

It becomes us, then, to consider well the power of this influence for good or evil in our keeping. That careless, thoughtless word of thine may carry with it a thrill of agony—almost too bitter for the sensitive spirit to endure. A kindly word may awaken in some soul energies which shall burn on forever; or its opposite crush to earth some timid soul, and destroy within it the power to rise. A word of encouragement, fitly spoken, may cause the sweet flowers of hope and joy to spring up in the heart, and sweetly lure the bright buds of promise to unfold in beauty. One little word may touch some chord which shall vibrate tones of joy or sorrow through the endless ages of eternity.

Five words cost Zacharias forty weeks' silence.—*Fuller.*