

Written for THE CANADIAN PHILATELIST.

THE ORATOR.

BY FREDERICK S. FOX.

MY BUSINESS as a commercial traveler for a leading notion house of New York City, necessitates my making several extended trips every year throughout my assigned district, which includes the States of Colorado and Kansas, and often sections of other of the Western States. However, the fact that I am constantly on the wing does not debar me from sharing the joys so peculiarly the philatelist's own, for stamp collecting, indeed, is my sole recreation when I am at leisure in the city, and as my kinsmen are none, and acquaintances few, my album and myself have become boon companions. Nor do I forget my hobby when on the road with album and stamps hundreds of miles away, for, like all good philatelists, my years of experience and careful study, will, I think, justify me in laying claim to this much sought-for appellation. I often visit brother collectors in distant cities, provided I have the spare time at my disposal.

At the time my story opens, I was about to start on my usual fall tour throughout my territory, when I received a letter from a friend in Caldwell, Kansas, Browne by name, whom I had previously visited, and in which he requested me to bring with me my collection when I again called on him in Caldwell. Now, I am not in the habit of lugging my treasured album and its more treasured contents from place to place while on my travels, but since I had often boasted of my stamps to this Kansas friend, a tinge of pride prompted me in an unguarded moment to satisfy my friend's desire by revealing to him the well-filled pages of my "international." Accordingly, when I packed my grips preparatory to starting, my album was not forgotten, but reposed snugly among the contents of my luggage.

After making stops in several towns in Eastern Kansas, I arrived in Caldwell and Browne after meeting me at the structure of pine boards which the inhabitants graciously styled a station, explained to me that he would be unable to be with me for more than an hour, on account of having been suddenly called to a neighboring town, but that on the morrow, and thereafter, he would have plenty of leisure time to devote to myself and my album. With this bit of information, he piloted me to the "Eagle Hotel"—I will never forget the name of this particular stopping place—and after I had registered we were assigned to my room. Browne, having still a half hour to spare, helped me to unpack my traveling bag, and, removing the album therefrom, we examined the contents for a time. When his time had expired, I placed the album in the telescope, which I carefully locked, and we went down stairs. Before leaving, Browne exclaimed to the proprietor, a great, raw-boned specimen of humanity, with a voice that almost shook the building: "Remember, Orator, give my friend the very best accommodations you have at your disposal. He is a tenderfoot, and it behooves you to bestow upon him a tender care. Be kind to him."

"All right, Fritters, responded the orator," as Browne had most aptly called him." "We'll try to make things easy for him." Then, turning to

me, he said: "You had better keep your album here in the office. It might be stolen from you, like as not, if you leave it in your room, as thieves are plenty, and times are hard. Go up and fetch it, stranger; I'm worried about it."

My album! How had this raw and woolly westerner learned that I had brought my album with me, and that I was a real, dyed-in-the-wool stamp collector? Is he a collector himself, and did he recognize my name on the register, and conclude that my album had accompanied me? Or had he surreptitiously approached my room while Browne and myself were regaling ourselves with its contents? Or is he an ex-dime museum mind-reader? These questions I quickly asked myself, as I stood before the towering giant, while the deep tones of his voice reverberated through the little dingy office, card room and bar-room combined, plainly heard by the score or more of cowboys and thugs there assembled, much to my utter perplexity and distress.

"Well, what is the answer?" insisted the orator.

"I rather think that I prefer to guard my album myself. Yes I am decidedly of that opinion," I answered, with feelings of mingled surprise and anger.

I thought I could detect a vein of sarcasm in his tone, as he wheeled about to join a boisterous party of players, and declared out: "Well, Easterner, just as you have it, you know."

That afternoon passed wearily on my hands. My very first conversation with the landlord of the hotel had made me uneasy, and I began to long for Browne's return. To add to the general dreary aspect a heavy rain had begun to fall, and the town, forlorn as it appeared under an autumn sun, now seemed to me, as I gazed through the dirty window, to be as God forsaken a place as one could wish for. The cowboys had made a rendezvous of the hotel, and so I had concluded to remain downstairs, and pass the time between gazing from the window and watching the doings of the card-players. During the course of the time I noticed that one group of players, in particular, had become unduly interested in me, and at one time I observed the "orator" whisper a few words in their ears, and then point to me with a smile. I felt that something was wrong, and my uneasiness increased. Instinctively, I wished that I had disregarded the solicitations of my friend, and left my album at my New York boarding-house, safely secured from harm's way, under lock and key.

Supper-time came at last, and the proprietor and his favorite quartette seated themselves at a table adjoining mine (thank heaven, no milk-dewed cowboy with buckskin boots broke bread with me at my table), and I could not help feel but that their subdued, yet animated conversation, in some manner or means, was directed upon me and my album. And no wonder! For the *sub rosa* glances which they cast at me did not escape my notice, nor did their chuckles of glee when they observed me ill at ease and anxious to finish the meal as quickly as possible. After supper was over I loitered for a time in the office, and listened to the strains of a solitary banjo, picked by one of the natives and when the shades of evening descended, I resolved to withdraw from the noisy crowd and seek the solitude of my room. I did so, and when I unlocked the door I walked straightway to my "telescope," and removed