

SAVED BY MASONRY.

BY WILLIAM HOUNSEVILLE.

In the second year of the great gold fever on the Pacific coast, the emigration to California was at its height. Some adventurous spirits, who had braved the dangers of the mountain passage, had been heard from by their waiting friends on this side of the globe, and that they had amassed gold in fabulous quantities was circulated all over the land. The consequence was that thousands, believed until that time to be sane, became crazed and determined to forsake all and follow the migrating crowd to the fairy land where fortunes could be made in a day, and none but the indolent could miss becoming as rich as Croesus, or as the more modern Astor. Every mode of conveyance that the ingenuity of the Anglo-Saxon race could invent was put in requisition to bear the pilgrims to the land of promise. Oxen, horses, mules, cows, and even wheelbarrows, bore the baggage of the adventurers—for it is related that one persevering fellow put his provender in a wheelbarrow and actually made the passage of plain and mountain pass successfully.

Cows were yoked to the wagons under the conviction that their lacteal furnishings might be turned to advantage, and in several cases it was found that the wise forethought saved the lives of the persons forming the "cow brigade." Oxen stood the journey well as long as forage and water could be procured. Horses managed generally to keep up with these slow-paced animals, but often left their carcasses by the way side; while mules very frequently succumbed to the lack of feed and drink.

A company was formed in St. Louis which contracted to deliver persons on the other side of the mountains for a specified sum, finding teams, carriages and baggage wagons, so that the pilgrims were to be transported and boarded until their arrival in California. Among those who availed themselves of this method of crossing the plains, was a gentleman who resided in one of the northern counties of Illinois, named Enoch Seeley, a member of the masonic lodge of the village in which he resided, and a mason in deed, as well as by profession. He was in easy circumstances, with means sufficient to allow him to choose the "express hire," as the means of reaching the Golden State.

It should be remembered that the passage across the plains at the period of which we write, consumed as many months as it now requires days. The railway has bridged over the distance, annihilated space and compressed the journey of half a year into a single week. But it was expected that the "express," organized and conducted by men who had traveled the route and who were able to lead by the most practicable path, would make the trip in much less than the time usually consumed by the private caravans. As soon as the grass had sprung up sufficiently to give sustenance to the animals of the train, they started across the wilderness of plains and mountains. Sometimes forward, and sometimes in the rear of the private teams that left at the same time with it, the "express" blundered on, and soon the passengers by that train were rejoiced if they were not left behind a day's journey.

It became manifest, at an early stage of the passage, that their guides were ignorant of the best roads to travel. In fact they disagreed among themselves and finally quarreled and separated. The animals began to fail as they approached the "salicatus region" and several died. Provisions fell short, and it became necessary to reduce the size and number