

then he reflected that he was one of a Vigilance Committee sworn to hang that admirable man, the late Commodore William H. Vanderbilt, for certain practices and cruelties done upon the bodies of certain steerage passengers by his line, and for divers irregularities in their transportation. I mention this fact merely to show how so practical and stout a voyager as Thatcher might have contounded the perplexities attending the administration of a great steamship company with selfish greed and brutality, and that he, with other Californians, may not have known the fact, since recorded by the Commodore's family clergyman, that the great millionaire was always true to the hymns of his childhood.

Nevertheless, Thatcher found time to be cheerful and helpful to his fellow-passengers, and even to be so far interesting to "Yuba Bill," driver, as to have the box seat placed at his disposal. "But," said Thatcher, in some concern, "the box seat was purchased by that other gentleman in Sacramento. He paid extra for it, and his name's on your way-bill!" "That," said Yuba Bill, scornfully, "don't fetch me, even ef he'd chartered the whole shebang. Look yar, do you reckon I'm goin' to spile my temper by setting next to a man with a game eye. And such an eye! Gewhillikins! Why, darn my skin, the other day, when we were watering at Webster's, he got down and passed in front of the off-leader—that yer pinto colt that's been accustomed to injins, grizzlies and buffalo—and I'm blest ef, when her eye tackled his, ef she d'n't jist git up and rar' round, that I reckoned I'd hev to go down and take them blinders off from her eyes and clap 'em on his." "But he paid his money and is entitled to his seat," persisted Thatcher. "Mebbe he is—in the office of the kempeny," growled Yuba Bill, "but it's time some folks knewed that out in the plains I run this yer team myself." A fact which was self-evident to most of the passengers. "I suppose his a thoity is as absolute on this dreary waste as the captain of a ship's in mid-ocean," explained Thatcher to the baleful-eyed stranger. Mr. Wiles—whom the reader has recognized—assented with the public side of his face, but looked vengeance at Yuba Bill with the other, while Thatcher, innocent of the presence of one of his worst enemies, placated Bill so far as to restore Wiles to his rights. Wiles thanked him. "Shall I have the pleasure of your company far?" Wiles asked, insinuatingly. "To Washington," replied Thatcher, frankly. "Washington is a gay city during the session," again suggested the stranger. "I'm going on business," said Thatcher, bluntly.

A trifling incident occurred at Pine Tree Crossing which did not heighten Yuba Bill's admiration of the stranger. As Bill opened the double-locked box in the "boot" of the coach—sacred to Wells, Fargo & Co.'s Express and the Overland Company's treasures—Mr. Wiles perceived a small black morocco portmanteau among the parcels. "Ah, you carry baggage there too?" he said, sweetly. "Not often," responded Yuba Bill, shortly. "Ah, this, then, contains valuables?" "It belongs to that man whose seat you've got," said Yuba Bill, who, for insulting purposes of his own, preferred to establish the fiction that Wiles was an interloper, "and ef he reckons, in a sorter mixed kempeny like this, to lock up his portmanteau, I don't know whose business it is. Who," continued Bill, lashing himself into a simulated rage, "who in blank is running this yer team? Hey? Mebbe you think, sittin' up 'thar on the box-seat, you are. Mebbe you think you can see 'round corners with that thar eye, and kin pull up for teams 'round corners, on down grades, a mile ahead!" But here Thatcher who, with something of Launcelot's

concern for Modred, had a noble pity for all infirmities, interfered so sternly that Yuba Bill stopped.

On the fourth day they struck a blinding snow storm while ascending the dreary plateau that henceforward for six hundred miles was to be their road bed. The horses, after floundering through the drift, gave out completely on reaching the next station, and the prospects ahead, to all but the experienced eye, looked doubtful. A few passengers advised taking to sledges, others a postponement of the journey until the weather changed. Yuba Bill alone was for pressing forward as they were. "Two miles more and we're on the high grade, where the wind is strong enough to blow you through the windy, and jist peart enough to pack away over them cliffs every inch of snow that falls. I'll jist skirmish round in and out o' them drifts on these four wheels, whar ye can't drag one o' them flat-bottomed dry goods boxes through a drift." Bill had a California whip's contempt for a sledge. But he was warmly seconded by Thatcher, who had the next best thing to experience, the instinct that taught him to read character, and take advantage of another man's experience. "Them that wants to stop kin do so," said Bill, authoritatively, cutting the Gordian knot; "them as wants to take a sledge can do so—thar's one in the barn. Them as wants to go on with me and the reay will come on." Mr. Wiles selected the sledge and a driver, a few remained for the next stage, and Thatcher, with two others, decided to accompany Yuba Bill. These changes took up some valuable time, and the storm continuing, the stage was run under the shed, the passengers gathering around the station fire, and not until after midnight did Yuba Bill put in the relays. "I wish you a good journey," said Wiles, as he drove from the shed as Bill entered. Bill vouchsafed no reply, but addressing himself to the driver, said curtly, as if giving an order for the delivery of goods, "Shove him out at Rawlings," passed contemptuously round to the tail-board of the sled, and returned to the harnessing of his relay.

The moon came out and shone high as Yuba Bill once more took the reins in his hands. The wind, which instantly attacked them as they reached the level, seemed to make the driver's theory plausible, and for half a mile the road bed was swept clean and frozen hard. Further on a tongue of snow, extending from a boulder to the right, reached across their path to the height of two or three feet. But Yuba Bill dashed through a part of it, and by skillful manoeuvring circumvented the rest. But even as the obstacle was passed the coach dropped with an ominous lurch on one side, and the off fore wheel flew off in the darkness. Bill threw the horses back on their haunches, but before their momentum could be checked the near hind wheel slipped away, the vehicle rocked violently, plunged backwards and forwards, and stopped.

Yuba Bill was on the road in an instant with his lantern. Then followed an outbreak of profanity which I regret, for artistic purposes, exceeds that generous limit which a sympathizing public has already extended to me in the explanation of character. Let me state, therefore, that in a very few moments he succeeded in disparaging the characters of his employers, their male and female relatives, the coach builder, the station keeper, the road on which he travelled, and the travelers themselves, with occasional broad expletives addressed to himself and his own relatives. For the spirit of this, and a more cultivated poetry of expression, I beg to refer the temperate reader to the 3rd chapter of Job.