

## AN OLD MAN'S SOLILOQUY.

This road leads sure to death;  
I near the end;  
The mile-stones are all past—  
Three score and ten.  
I started with a crowd.  
Where are they now?  
I lost them on the road;  
I know not how.

I lost them one by one;  
I know no more.  
They were not left behind;  
They went before.  
The way was full of hope,  
Of joy and bliss,  
Of pain, and woe and death—  
And happiness.

Life's journey has been short;  
That is to say,  
'Twas morning, noon, and night—  
But one day short.  
I'll look the record o'er;  
Yes, I am right;  
The journey of a day—  
Morn, noon, and night.

My morn was spent in dreams;  
My noon was bright;  
Clouds quickly gathered 'round,  
And now 'tis night.  
My glass is almost run;  
Why need I care?  
The hand that led me here  
Will lead me there.

Now let the time be short,  
When I may rest  
My weary, aching head  
Upon my breast.  
I go from whence I came.  
Life's journey o'er,  
And be what I have been,  
And nothing more.

My dust returns to dust,  
All for the best;  
My soul will go to God,  
And be at rest.  
I've outlived all my friends,  
My hopes, my fears;  
I have no place for mirth,  
And less for tears.

## THE STOLEN WATCH.

## I.

The stage stopped. Every man and woman in it knew at once what it meant. They had joked at the terrors of the journey before them in the morning. They had talked seriously enough, but bravely enough, too, of the possibility of danger ahead as they ate their dinners. They had laughed as much at supper as in the morning, but the laughter had been nervous enough to have been cries of terror instead of laughter. And now, with the moon just silvering the hills to the east of them, the stage stopped.

"Hold up your hands, gentlemen, and be lively; we have no time to waste."

One after another the passengers were robbed. The man who had talked loudest of his bravery, and of his utter contempt for those who would allow their money to be taken without a fierce fight, gave up his money and his excellent pair of self-cocking revolvers without a struggle. The man who had talked of the investments he was about to make in the West, and who had boasted of his wealth all the way that day, was fervently cursed by the robbers, who found barely five dollars on his person. The lady who had spoken at least once every half-hour all day long of that wonderful person, "My husband, the colonel," and who had manifested an air of conscious superiority ever after she had informed the company, as she did very early on the journey, that her entire life had been passed on the frontier, fainted dead away. A young lady from Vassar, who shrieked a full five minutes when a spider ran across her hand in the morning, sauced the fellow who took her money, and actually asked him why he didn't take her, too. A black-coated, white-cravated gentleman, who had insisted on asking grace at each meal that day, stood and swore by turns in not less than five languages while the robbers did their work.

After all this, it wasn't to be wondered at that every one looked at the quiet, awkward little man, who had been laughed at more or less all day, to see how he acted under pressure. He was going to the gold fields, he had said, to seek his fortune. When, therefore, the robbers took from him a larger roll of bank-bills than any of the passengers had ever seen before, they half-forgot their own losses and the dangers of the situation in their interest in what was going on. The little man's shabby coat, which had prompted more than one unkind remark during the day, was opened, and a diamond stud of great value torn from his very plain shirt-front. At last they took his watch—a large old-fashioned thing, in a very brassy-looking case.

"See here, sir," he said in an even tone, and with more dignity than any of his friends of a day had ever heard in his tones, "see here; you have taken my diamonds and forty-five hundred dollars in money, and I have not complained, but I want to keep my watch. It was my grandfather's, my father's and mine. I meant it to be my son's after me. Spare me that."

"It don't look worth much," said the man who had taken it, and he moved as though half-inclined to give it back.

The other robbers were "assisting" the passengers to their places in the stage; the little man and the robber were holding their parley a little apart.

"It's a good watch for all its looks," said the little man, sturdily, in the sincere tones of a person who will assert the worth of that he

loves whatever may come of it; "but I want it for its associations, not for its value."

"A good timekeeper? Solid gold case?"

Both questions were asked contemptuously. "A silver case, and plated at that, but as good a timekeeper as there is in America. It doesn't vary a second in weeks."

The robber opened the watch, and glanced at the works and the maker's name.

"I am considered a fair judge of watches. I've handled a good many in my time," and he laughed quietly, "and the evidence of the watch is all in your favor. I believe you—and I will keep it."

"You will keep my watch?"

"I said so."

"May its possession be an everlasting curse to you."

"Thank you. Come, boys," and the robber took the stolen watch from his pocket and pretended to look at the time, "we cannot entertain our generous friends any longer."

The indignity offered his watch in the pretence of using it may have stung the little man to sudden madness; he may have intended all along to fight for his precious watch if he had to. Be this as it may, as the robber slipped the watch into his pocket the little man drew a revolver from some concealed place which the robbers had overlooked and fired at the one who had so wronged him—fired at scarcely half a dozen paces, and missed. It was all over in a minute. The little man lay in the road with his life running out from a half-dozen pistol ball wounds, and his face growing whiter and whiter under the cold light of the moon.

"Into the stage and off with you," was a command that did not need to be uttered a second time.

"On to your horses, and we are off, too," was the second command, and its tones brought prompt obedience.

And the last words of the dying man floated after the stage, and drifted down the wind to the ears of the fleeing freebooters.

"May its possession be an everlasting curse to you!"

## II.

If the neighbors and acquaintances of Miguel Gordon had been asked why he was so popular with them, the answers would have been varied. To the miners, pure and simple, his wonderful good luck in all his enterprises would have been sufficient reason. To those who loved manly sports and wild life, his horsemanship and marksmanship would have appealed first. Those who had rode by his side in the many fruitless quests for robbers and fugitives respected the simple and terrible earnestness of the man. Men who had families, and the women who lived with husband and children on the frontier, loved him for the love he manifested for his two children, Manuel and Manuela. Any man for miles around would have given time, and money, would have even risked life itself, for Miguel Gordon. Gordon worked in the little camp of miners among the hills. He never loafed, he never drank, he never quarreled. Once in two or three weeks he would ride to the settlement which had grown up around the railway station thirty miles to the south, where he had made a home for his children. The miners bought their supplies at this little place, and most of them knew Manuela and Manuel—knew them and shared their father's admiration of them.

Manuel was a slight and rather sickly youth of eighteen; Manuela was sixteen, and strong and handsome. The mining camp would have been proud to have them there. Every man in the camp would have constituted himself a protector of the children. But the father said the settlement at the station was better for them, and that settled it.

## III.

The twilight had not brightened into day one morning when a man rode up to Gordon's door and roused him with a perfect hurricane of knocks. "Danger at the settlement, and no time to be lost," was the summons. The note the swift rider had brought was short, but only too definite. Some friends of Gordon's had heard by accident certain rumors, and seen certain signs which led to an investigation. Examination showed that Manuela Gordon was about to elope with a certain good-looking stranger who had won the most of the spare money at the settlement by his skill at cards. They were going on the train at nine o'clock that morning. Some were for killing the handsome stranger; others for keeping quiet and having nothing whatever to do with the affair. A middle class, although small in number, had won the day, and the best rider of them all had carried the startling news thirty miles through the night to Miguel Gordon.

In five minutes Gordon and his friend were on their way back to the settlement. Little was said, but Gordon's face was pale, and his hand closed and unclosed nervously around the rifle he carried.

In the long race before them time was important, and it early became evident that Gordon's friend could not keep up with him.

"Go on," said the friend, "and God grant you are in season!"

Oh, the long miles of the road, the dreary, weary way he had to ride with his strong father-love at his heart urging him on. But at last he thundered up to the platform at the station, and it lacked fifteen minutes of nine!

The men he knew looked curiously at him; women looked with pitying eyes into his as he fastened his horse, and strode into the waiting-room, rifle in hand.

"Who is the man? Have you found out yet?" he asked of the man who had sent him the note.

"Jim Bragg, gambler, murderer and suspected stage-robber. I had half a mind to shoot him myself as he stood making love to your daughter this morning, and save the law a job in the future."

"The law won't need to exercise its power on him, and his future is short enough. When will the train come?"

"Didn't you know? The train has been gone fifteen minutes!"

The watch which Miguel Gordon had carried for a whole year—a year to a day—and which had not varied ten seconds in all the time before, was half an hour slow that morning, and had cost him his daughter.

## IV.

Another year has slowly gone by. Miguel Gordon is more popular and more prosperous than ever. His daughter has never been heard from, and his terrible loss has aged him greatly. Still he is not entirely unhappy. His life is bound up in his son. He has brought Manuel with him to the camp now. Manuel uses his weapons, his tools, his horse. Father and son seem to be one. Whatever the son wishes the father gets for him. "He is a model father," is said of one, and "He is a model son," of the other. This morning they are working together among the ledges.

"We must put in a blast here, and loosen up the rock," said Miguel; "we can fire it from the house. I will light the fuse at exactly twelve."

At ten o'clock all is ready, and the two men separate to go to other parts of the camp.

"At twelve o'clock we will fire it," were the last words of the old man as they parted.

"At twelve—yes," responded his son.

When the shock of the great blast at Gordon's was felt, every one in the camp or in the claims along the ridge looked up; and a half-minute later the whole camp was flocking towards the place of the explosion, for the old man, grown grayer and older in the last few minutes, was bringing down from the rocks a shapeless mass that had once been human. His watch was a half-hour fast that noon, and had cost him his son.

## V.

A slight young man stood in the largest saloon of which the mining camp could boast, and slowly finished his story.

"Three years ago, and more, since he left home, and we have never traced him to a certainty. The man who was killed three years ago to night, when resisting the robbers a half-dozen miles east of your camp, may have been my father. The description is fairly accurate. But I never expect to know certainly whether it were he or not."

Every newcomer was expected to tell something of his story, and young Johnson had told his with simple directness, ending as stated above.

An old man, with sad look and snow-white hair, but straight and strong yet, entered the room, walked to the bar, drank, took a large old-fashioned watch from his pocket, looked at the time, and walked over to the stove.

"Any errands over to the station this afternoon?" he asked. "I am going over on horse-back for some light supplies."

The saloon man answered in the negative, and the old man walked out.

Johnson turned towards the barkeeper with a face like marble and eyes like fire, but asked a couple of very simple questions nevertheless.

"Was that Miguel Gordon I've heard so much about?"

"Yes."

"Is there any stage in or out to-night?"

"Yes; the stage from the East should be in at nine o'clock."

A half-hour later Miguel Gordon rode away towards the south. A half-hour after that young Johnson stood in the centre of the saloon with an excited crowd around him.

One man said: "We've tried to catch these robbers often enough, and have failed. If the youngster is wrong, it is only one failure more. The stages have been stopped about once a month for the last three years. There is one chance in thirty by the theory of probabilities."

It had been suspected that this man had once been a scholar and a teacher. He was called "the Professor" yet.

Another man objected: "We don't know this boy. It would be lucky if it all ended in only failure. How do we know it isn't all a trap for us?"

"Likely to be that, isn't it, with the boy along? He'd scarcely try that," said a third.

"We've never gone without Gordon before," said another: "whatever will he think of us if we go now without him?"

"It can't be helped this time," said the barkeeper, "and I vote we go."

And it was so decided.

Johnson's proposition had been a strange one. It was that, starting at three o'clock, they should ride hard and meet the stage from the East as far to the east as possible; that the women and children should be left behind, together with any male passengers who might show a lack of

pluck; and that as many of them as the stage would hold, fully armed and ready for the attack, should ride into the little mining town that night. He offered no reason, but simply said that there would be an attempted robbery.

The moon had been up an hour. The night was silent and calm, and would have seemed lovely enough to the driver of the stage but for the strange load he carried that night. The stage was crowded with men armed with heavy navy revolvers—and men who knew how to use them.

The "Professor" was half-dozing in his corner, and muttering something about infinity and zero; the man who had distrusted the boy, Johnson, was so far asleep that he might have been trapped or betrayed. The stage turned a curve in the road and stopped just where it had three years before.

"Hold up your hands, gentlemen, and be lively; we have no time to lose," came the quick, nervous command.

The driver's heart might almost have been heard to beat in the silence for one long moment, and the next there was a volley from the well aimed arms of those within the stage, and with a cheer that might have been heard for miles, the miners sprang down to meet the robbers who had puzzled and defied them for years.

The wild shots of the astonished outlaws did no harm, but they went down under the fierce onslaught of the miners like grain before the reaper.

In five minutes the avengers were in a position to solve the mystery fully. Of the half-dozen dead men only one was known to the miners; the rest were strangers. The puzzle was unsolved still. But, no, a dozen rods away young Johnson stood, revolver in hand, over the robber chief who had fallen only when the last ball had been fired. In his hand was a watch which he had taken from the dying bandit.

"It was my father's," said Johnson, with a sob.

"It has been an everlasting curse to me," groaned the prostrate man, with his last breath.

The watch would never run again, for the ball that carried death to the one who stole it had destroyed the watch as well.

A miner snatched the mask from the robber's face, and the reason why the attempts to capture the villains had always failed was no longer a mystery. For, framed in with the well known white hair was a well known face, and the dead eyes which stared up at him glared from beneath the ashen brow of Miguel Gordon.

## PROGRESS IN CHINA.

Despite occasional set-backs, China continues to make progress in the line of modern civilization. The great generals who, as viceroys, exercise an almost absolute direction over affairs, are in favor of the introduction of Western improvements as rapidly as China can assimilate them. The first step was taken in the establishment of arsenals and the adoption of European drill and weapons. The new telegraph line, the opening of coal mines, the Merchants' Navigation Company, the woollen mill under German supervision, the adoption of our medical system, and the founding of two hospitals (one of them in charge of our countrywoman, Miss Howard), and the Government postal service, are important moves in the same direction, and are all due to the influence of the viceroys. The college at Peking, under the charge of Dr. Martin, and the lighting and marking of the Chinese coast, are due to foreigners. Much remains to be done, for China is still without common roads, steam or horse railroads, without a coinage, without prisons or process of law worthy of the name, without a press and with a system of education in which letters are everything and science nothing. Still there seems no reason for anxiety lest China, having advanced so far, should now turn back.

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