

THE MAIL
A PAPER FOR THE PEOPLE.

TERRE HAUTE, - - AUGUST 26, 1877.

LIVE AND WORK.

Why live, when life is sad,
Death only sweet?
Why fight, when closest fight
Ends in defeat?
Why pray, when purest prayer
Does thoughts assail?
Why strive, and strive again
Only to fail?
Why hope, when life has proved
Our best hours vain?
Why live, when love is fraught
With so much pain?
Why not cool heart and brain
In the deep wave?
Why not lie down and rest
In the still grave?
Live—There are many rewards
Need thy care.
Pray—There is one at hand
Helping thy prayer.
Fight—In thy God,
Strive—but in His great strength
Not in thy own.
Hope—there is heaven's joy
Laid up for thee.
Love—there are love outlives
In any way.
Fight, pray, and wrestle on,
Loving God best;
Then, when thy work is done,
Lie down and rest.

Elam's Adventure.

'Can't you tell us some of your adventures? I asked of my friend Elam, who had returned from his many years' travels in the bush and other outlandish places, and was sitting with me and my wife. And, though absent so long, he was, so to say, a young man yet.

'Adventures? Well, I had plenty. Rough ones, some of them.'

'Please tell us one,' chimed in Mary.

Elam laughed. 'I can tell you of a curious one that I met with in the mountains.'

'Oh yes, do. Which mountains?'

'In California, up in one of its wild districts.'

'That will be the very thing.'

'Well,' said Elam, running his tapering fingers through his hair and smiling at my wife. 'I'll soften down things in the telling, as well as my blank speech and uncivilized modes of thought will allow, of you must excuse the rest.'

'Oh, I'll excuse anything. Please begin.'

'When I started from home to settle in unfeasted districts,' began Elam, 'I set up a theory that no young man should ask a girl to marry him until he had prepared a home for her. It is surprising how much you begin to think of a wife over yonder, arising, I suppose from the extreme loneliness of existence. I was no exception. The land I took up was in the Rogue River Valley, and after I got it a bit ship-shape I worked away with that object in view—to bring home a wife.'

'But, Elam, had you selected a wife? I asked.'

'No. I intended to do that as soon as I could, though you may say I was full young to be thinking of it. I worked on, and was pretty successful. I built me a house, got a considerable quantity of stock, made a flower garden for my wife; even put up the pegs and nails she would want to hang her dresses on. I intended that some autumn to get on my horse, ride through the Wallamet Valley, and find me my wife, marry her, and bring her home.'

At the notion of courting in that off-hand style, we laughed a little. Elam laughed too, as if the recollection pleased him.

'You think it strange, I see. It was not so strange over there in those days, where girls were as scarce as angels. There was not a girl within forty miles of me; and I assure you that the very thought of one, as I drove in those nags for her garments to hang on, went through me like a thrill. You don't believe? Go out, yourself, and try it.'

'But I do believe.'

'I had about two hundred and fifty head cattle, a good house, with a garden, a young orchard, vegetables growing, sweet-scented flowers—all in readiness for the wife I hoped to bring home to bless me and take care of this, my possession. And what do you think happened to it?'

'We could not tell.'

'There came such a plague of grasshoppers upon the valley that everything perished. Crops, orchard, flowers, grass, evergreen and delightful and promising thing; the grasshoppers destroyed all. You remember the second chapter of Joel.'

I nodded.

'The land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness. I was ruined. My stock died; at least, the greater portion; they had nothing to feed upon. Yet, it was complete and absolute ruin.'

Elam paused a moment, mentally looking at the past.

I considered myself disappointed in love, too; I resumed in the quaintest of tones. 'Though I had not yet been out to find my girl, I knew she was somewhere in that other valley waiting for me; and when the greedy grasshoppers ate up everything, I felt that I had been jilted. It actually gives me a pang now to think of those useless pegs on which my imagination had so often seen a girl's pink cotton dress or a white sun bonnet.'

Elam gave a great sigh. He was an eccentric fellow.

I began misanthropic; said to myself that between fate and the grasshoppers I had been used hardly. Packing my books and a few other traps, I made adieu to the Rogue River Valley forever. It was a longish journey, as I had to drive before me the stock I had left. There, in the mountains, I settled down again, built myself a fort and played hermit. No jilted girls should come near me now.'

'A fort? A regular fort. A stockade eighteen feet high, with an embankment four feet high around it, and a strong gate in the middle. My tent was in the midst of the inclosure, with my books and household goods, firearms, and all the rest of my property stored away in it.'

'Were you afraid of the Indians?'

'Indians and white men. Yes, I saw a good many Indians at first within the range of my rifle. They learned to keep away from my fort, finding it did not pay to attempt to invade it. Down in the valley below there were mining camps; and you perhaps know what some of the hang-on's of such camps are. I sold beef—live in heads of cattle—to the miners and as I had sometimes a tidy sum of money by me, it was necessary to be careful.'

'What a strange life for a young man.'

'I herded my cattle, drove them to market, cooked, studied, wrote, and indulged in misanthropy, combined with some rifle practice. By the time that I had entered upon the second summer in the mountains I felt quite at home and was getting rich. After all, the life had its charms. A man cannot quite tire of when he is but a few years out of his teens.'

'And the girl-wife?'
I am coming to that. Having had time to forget my ill-usage, a reaction set in, you see, and I thought, after my girl. But I was not in the hurry over it that I had been before. This is all very dull, you will say, but there'll be some stir presently.'

'It is not at all dull.'

'One Sunday afternoon—how did I know it was Sunday, you ask? Because I had kept a count of the days all along; kept my diary regularly. One Sunday afternoon I was sitting outside writing, when a shadow fell across the paper; and, looking up, there stood a skeleton. Accustomed as I was to lonely encounters with strange men of all kinds, my hair stood on end as I stared at the spectre before me. He was the merest boy in years, pretty and delicate by nature and evidently reduced to his shadowy state by starvation. His story was soon told. He had left Boston on board a vessel bound for the northwest coast, had been wrecked at the mouth of the Umpqua, and been wandering about in the mountains ever since, subsisting on roots and berries.'

'He was—'

'No, I assure you,' interrupted Elam, with an amused look at my wife, 'the boy was not a young woman in disguise, if that's what you are thinking. He was just a poor, weak, half starved lad, named Edwards. I fed and nursed him until he was able to work for himself, and then I got Sam Chong Sung to let him take up a claim alongside a Chinese camp, promising to favor the Chinamen in a beef contract if he would be good to the boy. I still continued to see a great deal of him.'

'And did he succeed?'

'Yes, he got on. One day two Chinamen stole some of Sam Chong Sung's horses; and he offered four hundred dollars to Edwards if he would go after the thieves and track them. Edwards asked my advice, and I encouraged him to go, telling him where I fancied he would find the men. So he started in pursuit; and I confess I missed him.'

Again Elam paused. We did not interrupt him.

'A man came to my fort one day who was naked and starving. He was a bad looking fellow, yet but you will say a man naturally does look bad when his clothes are nowhere and his bones protrude through his skin. I clothed him, fed him, cared for him kindly until he was able to travel, and then he went away. The next Sunday I was sitting outside my fort as customary on that leisure day, reading some translations from the Greek poets—for I dare say you remember I could never make much of Greek itself—when, chancing to look off my book, I beheld a vision.'

'A what?'

'A vision. A vision of a lovely woman. And I can tell you I should as soon have expected to see a vision there as a woman. I had seen neither for a year or two. She was riding up the approach to my fort, a fine horse; riding gracefully and very slowly, as if to give me time to get over my surprise; and I believe I needed it. The picture she made is in my mind now. I see the very flicker of the shadow and the sunlight across the road and the glimmer of some steel that fastened on my pegs, and hang up her pink garments on my pegs, had rushed into my mind, you see—but I never like to confess to this part of the story, because I get laughed at. But don't you think I did right?—having my reputation to keep up?'

While we had our laugh on Elam was pushing his soft, fine light hair off his brow with those slender fingers, that looked as if no rough work had ever come near them—and what must they have been before it did come?

He went on thoughtfully.

'She finally rode away, not having been invited to get off her horse, leaving me in anything but a pleasant frame of mind. From telling myself I was a bear, I turned to the other subject—my promised robbery and murder. Had she simply invented that little fable, or was it a true bill? I felt inclined to believe it the latter. Any way, I determined it well to be prepared for all contingencies, barring and bolting my fort against intruders, and sitting up late over the fire. This was Sunday night. On the Tuesday morning three or four mounted men rode up, one of whom was the traitor, my former naked and hungry protege. He no longer attempted to conceal his true character from me, but said he and his comrades were intending to 'clean out' the Chinese camp, and he asked me to join them in the raid. I was on my guard in answering him, simply saying that I would have nothing to do with robbing the Chinese, that they were my friends and customers, and I thought they had best be let alone. With that he went off. That same afternoon Edwards came in, having recaptured some of the horses. He was very tired and asked leave to stay with the horses at my place till next day. I said nothing to Edwards of the gang just gone away, or that (what I suspected) they had talked of making a raid on the Chinese only to throw me off my guard, that it was my fort on which the attack was to be, and I hoped the fellows did not know of the arrival of the horses, as they would be an additional temptation for them.'

'I'd not live in those wild, lawless regions for the whole world,' cried out Mary.

'Dusk came on. I sent Edwards, dead tired to bed; made a great fire in the tent, and sat by it facing the window. My expected visitor came, the villain. He made believe to have been drinking and put that forward as a plea for shelter until the morning. The instant he was inside, I made the gate fast, driving the big wooden pin home with an axe. I caught a gleam from his eyes as I was doing this, which made me start.'

'Why did it?'

'Because I had heard of Boone Helm before—and knew he was the greatest terror of the time. I suppose I should have done something to help him, but I had his trials. I asked him what his true name was. Hiram Credin, he answered; but the one he was known by was Boone Helm. That made me start.'

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'And what of that pretty Amazon, Elam? I suppose she was almost as good to you as a guardian angel! Coming on horseback to give you warning?'

'Was she not? And I returned it by behaving as unhandsomely to her! But now, I just ask you—Would it have been proper to have let her come on that week's visit?—and I a young man with a reputation!'

Again we burst out laughing. Elam's appeal to us was put with the most un-sophisticated air possible.

'At any rate, you did not.'

'No, said he. I did not. And, taking all things into consideration, I think I did right.'

'Did you ever see her again?'

'Once. It was at San Francisco. She was married and staying at the same hotel that I was. Her husband was a fine, tall, dashing man, what with you would call a gentleman and very wealthy. She had been lucky, you see. I knew her as soon as she came into the drawing room, and in a few minutes I saw that she recognized me; but she did not take any notice, neither did I. She told me with her eyes that she remembered; but there was an appealing glance in them, which I interpreted rightly. After dinner she went to the piano and sang 'Kate Kearney.' We had got into conversation before that, the three of us just as strangers will do in a hotel, and I found the husband a very intelligent, educated, well informed man. In parting I just a word aside with her, 'I'm glad to meet you again, and thus, I hope, to you for your reticence. In the past of life that has been composed of ups and downs, lying on the memory that we don't care to recall or proclaim to the world.'

'And about that young girl in Wallamet Valley?'

'I never found her,' replied Elam, shaking his head thoughtfully. 'Truth to say, I never started fairly to look for her. Life is composed of ups and downs, you know, as the other lady observed, of blighted hopes, and all that. Perhaps it's as well.'

Elam paused. I wondered what was coming.

'You guess, I dare say, that I have a quick ear, for you know what my temperament is—all sensitive consciousness. My good hearing had been cultivated too, by listening for the Indians. By and by I detected a very stealthy movement outside the fort, and then a faint chirrup, such as a young squirrel might make. Up sprang the man, but I covered him with my rifle, cocked. He saw the movement, showed his teeth, and drew out a pistol; but not before I ordered him to throw down his arms or die. He hesitated; he saw that in my eye and that aspect that made him quail. With the rifle leveled, and my finger on the trigger, he threw down his arms—pistol and knife—with a dreadful oath. I had the best of him, and he knew it; for before he could put his pistol into form, or rush on me with his knife, the ball from my rifle would have been in him. His language was awful—and we are not nice in that respect, you know, in California. The foam lay on his lips. He demanded to be let out of the house, demanding me as a robber and a murderer.'

'To all his ravings I had but one answer to be quiet, to obey me, and he should live; dare to disobey me, and he should die. He sat there cowed, on the opposite side of the fire, not daring to make even a doubtful motion. Then I told him what I knew—that I had heard what he was, and what he meant to do. With that he broke down utterly—or pretended at it, howled like a child, declaring that now he knew my pluck.'

'Elam, you have been a good boy.'

'I am coming to that. Having had time to forget my ill-usage, a reaction set in, you see, and I thought, after my girl. But I was not in the hurry over it that I had been before. This is all very dull, you will say, but there'll be some stir presently.'

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