

THE MAIL

A PAPER FOR THE PEOPLE.

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TWO EDITIONS

Of this Paper are published.
The FIRST EDITION, on Friday Evening, has a large circulation in the surrounding towns, where it is sold by newsboys and agents.

The SECOND EDITION, on Saturday Evening, goes into the hands of nearly every reading person in the city, and the farmers of this immediate vicinity.

Every Week's Issue is, in fact,

TWO NEWSPAPERS, in which all Advertisements appear for THE PRICE OF ONE ISSUE.

Argonaut.

OLD BIBLE-BACK.

A MAN WITH TWO VERY DISTINCT INDIVIDUALITIES.

BY E. H. CLOUGH.

Standing in the centre of a motley group of miners, teamsters, gamblers, stockkeepers, and mountaineers, Old Bible-back delivered himself of the following extravagant oration:

"I'm the best man in forty counties an' don't ye fergit it. I'm just out of the Nevady Legislature an' I'm up to all the tricks o' the game, from a lobby combination to three-card monte—name yer game an' count me in. I'll bet any man in this yer town that I ken jump higher, hit harder, dive deeper, an' come up drier than the best sport you can produce inside o' twenty minutes. What'll ye hev? Name yer game, gentlemen—two to one that I'm the best collar's elbow man in the crowd. Who wants the bet? Don't all speak at once."

He paused for a reply, and eyed his audience with an expression of such sincere confidence in his ability to win the bet that a broad shouldered Cornishman who had moved forward with the evident intent of obtaining further particulars, edged back to his former position, remarking as he did so:

"Thee's a stiff patterer, but ee don't b'lieve thee's talk a bloody fool o' me afore ee finds out w'at's thes drivin' at."

And yet, as far as physical appearances were a criterion, the Cornishman need not have feared the result, for the man who had bantered for a collar and elbow fall was far from being a giant, either in height or muscle. In the first place he was old—his long, gray beard and the deep furrows that marked his mahogany colored face attested that fact. Then again, he was stoop shouldered, and this was the most remarkable feature in his anatomical make up. His chest had once been broad in proportion to his rather short stature, but constant application to some occupation requiring a half leaning posture has contracted it while allowing the shoulders to retain their position. He wore a coarse flannel ulster, and his stooping attitude compelled it to drape the upper portion of his frame in such a manner that a deep crevice was revealed along his back from the base of his neck downward.

"Looks like a section o' flame topped with warped boards," criticised one of the miners in an undertone to a comrade. The latter laughed at the comparison—a laugh that seemed to irritate Old Bible-back, for he swung his hands about and shouted:

"Ye'd laugh out o' the other side o' that clam o' yours o' ye'd git me half a show to give ye fall or two. Come on, some o' ye, git me a chance to make expenses. I'm just dyin' to git somebody a tussle. But neb-be collar's elbow don't suit yer refined tastes. Mebbe ye go yer pile on for jumps, mebbe ye in on hard bittin'—w'at's yer game? I'm game for any thing that's got muscle an' grit in it. I'm blood, I am—blood from the word go an' I don't back water for no man. W'at's the matter o' you roosters?—don't ye bet on nothin'?—ain't ther no thoroughbred in this yer cap? Bet! I'm o' I ain't dead ashamed o' myself for comin' yer. What d'ye suppose I came to Idaho for? For fun? Not much. They told me in White Pine that all the bloods had come up yer—workin' to the Black Hills minin' games, an' such. I'll be fifty dollars to a Pinto cayuse that White Pinelied. I'll take an even bet that ther ain't a man in the crowd that knows a see high off from a full hand bet. I'll go a hundred to twenty that ther ain't a man in Silver City that ken prove up a thoroughbred record."

This last challenge produced a sensation in the assemblage and caused a tall man, clad in buckskin, to elbow his way to the front, with the remark:

"Hold on, stranger. I reckon yer hoistin' in yer neck a little to fast on the thoroughbred racket."

The old man eyed his adversary keenly for an instant, and then, with an aggravating sneer, replied:

"That's so; I'm bluffin'. It's more fun to bluff 'em to strike pay gravel in new diggin's, but it don't hydraulics within ninety percent o' havin' anything in it. There's a clar gain o' clatter in the sluice-boxes though, an' mebbe that's a pint or two in the game."

"Look yer, stranger," answered the tall man. "That's all chit, an' we don't know but you're givin' us a little game fur yer own amusement. I'll praps yer jest w'at ya say ye are. Praps yer on the jumps, an' wind'y on the run. We don't call 'em ye'st, but when it comes to denyin' that we ain't blooded ye strike wher we live. When ye blow about seech games o' skill ez runnin', divin', bittin', an' them larks, praps we're liable to back a little, praps we don't come to the center last enough to suit lightnin' talk-laters and forty mile express trains; we ain't payin' much attention to jumblastics in these parts this season, much; but when you talk science to us we're in ev'ry time. Ther may be no billiard sharps in Idaho, an' I'll admit that we don't know much about croquet or ten pins, but we're all h—i on keeds, stranger."

"Cassino, I spose—twenty-one mebbe; pretty good at encue likely, 'spec'ly when the little joker's lewed in the game," sneered the old man.

"Not much, stranger; we don't play no ol' we-man's games in this yer camp. We're scienced, we are."

"Name yer game, young feller; I'll bet it's—"

"Poker," interrupted the man in buckskin.

"Now yer talkin'," retorted Old Bible-back. "Whar'll we settle the bizzness?"

"Come 't me; I'll show ye," and the tall man led the way to a neighboring saloon, followed by old Bible-back and the entire crowd. It was "four handed" when the game began, but during the fifty-eight hours that it lasted the number had varied, sometimes being reduced to two, and occasionally occupying the closest attention of six. The tall man left the table and returned five

times, each time leaving lighter than he returned. Over a hundred men sat down at that table during the progress of the game, but not one of them left with enough to pay for the drinks. And through it all Old Bible-back sat, stolid and apparently unconcerned, shuffling, cutting, dealing, and "raking down" all the "fat pots."

On the morning following the conclusion of the game there was a vague suspicion afloat in Silver City that sundry and divers speculators, resident in that thriving metropolis, had been most completely "salted," to use the somewhat vigorous expression of certain heartless satirists, who had not been possessed of sufficient capital to take a hand in the disastrous diversion. And when it was ascertained that the stranger had disappeared as suddenly as he had appeared, the community unanimously agreed with the tall man clad in buckskin when he announced that they "might hev busted him on the runnin' an' jumpin' rackets, but when it came to a rattle in square science the ol' man was that ev'ry time, you bet ye boots."

Six months after this little episode, on a crisp, bracing morning in December, in the snow-shrouded Main street of Pioche, Nevada, a mining expert who had witnessed the Silver City affair, and whose nomadic occupation had rendered it necessary for him to report on certain bonded mines in this vicinity, observed the self-same old man haranguing a similar congregation on "precisely the same subject that had formed the basis of his remarks in the Idaho village, namely, his ability to achieve greater results in any line of sport than could be accomplished by any other man in Nevada, and his entire willingness to back his propositions with coin laid on the most preposterous odds. And he was, by his method of argument, his apparent confidence in his ability to perform what he proposed, creating such a profound impression upon his hearers that for a considerable length of time no one responded to his innumerable challenges.

"I'm turtle-necked and bow backed," he was saying, "but of any man in this country, I'm just out of the Nevady Legislature an' I'm up to all the tricks o' the game, from a lobby combination to three-card monte—name yer game an' count me in. I'll bet any man in this yer town that I ken jump higher, hit harder, dive deeper, an' come up drier than the best sport you can produce inside o' twenty minutes. What'll ye hev? Name yer game, gentlemen—two to one that I'm the best collar's elbow man in the crowd. Who wants the bet? Don't all speak at once."

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