

BARTER.

"Give me the gold from off thy hair,
The rose upon thy cheeks that lies,
Thy singing voice that every where
Makes laughter in the trembling air,
The young joy in thine eyes."

"What will you give to me, oh, say,
Thou gray old man with restless wings,
For love's entrancing morn of May,
For dawn and freshness of the day,
And life that leaps and sings?"

"Lo! I will make thy footsteps slow
Across the flowers that bend and wave;
And for thy gold will give thee snow,
And silence for thy laughter low,
Darkness, a grass-grown grave."

—Boston Transcript.

THE SERGEANT'S VOW.

I had been waiting a week at Jefferson for instructions from Washington. I had written for permission to go to New Orleans, as I had relatives there with whom I wished to pass the winter; but at the end of the week my hopes were all nipped in the bud by the following missive:

MAJOR: You will proceed at once to Fort Stetson; thence, with all possible dispatch, to Fort Carson; and thence to Fort Kearney, at which posts you may pay off the enrolled men and officers, and also settle all duly authenticated bills against the office on account of provisions, forage, camp and garrison stores, etc.

It is particularly requested that you will be careful and exact in your return of estimates for the coming winter months.

Captain Goodwin will detail for you such escort as you may require. I have the honor to be, etc., G. P. BOWMAN, D. P. M. G., Major and Paymaster, U. S. A. To G. S. Cochrane.

This did not reach me by the hands of Captain Goodwin, however, whom I should have been happy to meet; but by the hands of Sergeant James Conover, who came with six men under his command, to escort me on my way, if I deemed such escort sufficient. Goodwin, who was sick with fever and ague, wrote by the hand of his clerk:

"I would send you more men; but, really I think more would be in your way. There are no Indians on the trail between Jefferson and Stetson; and certainly this escort is sufficient against any ordinary highway interpolation. Sergeant Conover is not a very brilliant man; nor is he over and above sociable; but I have found him true as steel; and the privates—members of my own company—whom I send with him you can rely upon in any emergencies. Only, they have the common weakness. Don't give them too free a run at the whisky bottle. They won't break faith with you to get it; but if allowed full sway, they might get a drop too much for your own comfort."

And he wrote about other matters, but nothing more of his men.

After reading the letter I raised my eyes and met the gaze of the Sergeant, who stood with his cap in his hand on the opposite side of the small table. He started when I looked up, and I thought he was ashamed of having been caught staring at me so fixedly. But the flush quickly left his face, and he inclined his head another way.

He was a man of medium size, very heavily built, and evidently very muscular. In short, he was made for a fighter, and for one of those valuable fighters who possess stubborn will and dogged resolution rather than hot and impetuous pugnacity. He was not a man to be ever in a ferment; but a man who, when fairly aroused, is to be feared. He was not far from forty-five years of age, and the stripes upon his forearm showed that he had served four full terms of enlistment previous to the present.

I went out with the Sergeant and found the six men on the piazza, standing at ease under arms. They were really fine looking fellows, and answered, respectively, to the names: Smith, Adams, Mealy, Oesau, Van Wirt, and Connolly. Smith was a Yankee; Adams was an Englishman, and had been in the Queen's service as a dragoon; Mealy and Connolly were Irishmen; Oesau was a Dutchman, and Van Wirt was a German. A wide range of nationality for so small a squad; but a fair sample of our army, nevertheless; and, furthermore, six men of one nation could not have been more free and pleasant than were those six. Unlike their Sergeant, they were free and pleasant, and seemed to be thankful for the privilege of taking the forest tramp with me; while I, in turn, gave them to understand that I would do all I could to make them comfortable. The squad had come with good horses, so the only preparations I had to make for

the start were to get my own horses ready and draw my money.

My estimates had been to the amount of \$35,000, and this I must take in gold. I went to the bank with the sergeant and three of the men and got the money, which I took away in four small canvas bags, weighing about forty pounds each, but at the hotel I packed the gold in a sort of pannier-saddle, a contrivance which I had invented myself, and in which I could so pack anywhere from one to four hundred pounds of gold that it would neither sway or jingle. In short, a horse could bear in this saddle-pack a burden of dead weight almost as easily as he could bear a human rider. And I had a horse on purpose for the work—one that I used for several years, and that understood his duty as though it had all been reasoned out in his mind.

Bright and early on a clear, cool October morning we set forth from Jefferson with three days' rations in our haversacks, for Stetson was 120 miles away and we would be doing well to make the trip within the time indicated. I rode in advance—not because I desired it, but because the others were inclined to fall to the rear.

We were passing over a narrow bridge just on the outskirts of Jefferson when we met two men and two boys driving before them a drove of cattle. I had met and gone clear of the herd without difficulty, and was thinking how I would like to take one of the fatter bullocks along with me, when an exclamation of anger arrested my attention, and turning in my saddle I discovered one of the oxen—a wild, frolicsome thing—had attacked the sergeant's horse. It had been quickly done—a frisk—a leap—a lunge of the great curving horns at the horse's side—the rearing of the latter, and the consequent unseating of the sergeant.

When Conover had regained his feet the frolicsome bullock was away from his reach, but not so the innocent drovers. The two men were near together and directly by his side as he grasped his sword-hilt and turned upon them. I did not think Conover would harm them; but they were terribly frightened, nevertheless, and the younger of the two, who was a stout, fair-looking fellow, was the first to speak an intelligent word—the sergeant had uttered one or two oaths.

"Excuse us, my good friend, I am sorry—truly sorry—for this mishap, but I assure you it was no fault of ours."

As Sergeant Conover then stood his face was turned very nearly toward me, so that I caught nearly every line and shade of expression upon his features. He had been terribly shaken and was exceedingly wrathful, but his wrath was in a greater part made of chagrin at being unhorsed in so ridiculous a manner than from a mere attack of the bullock. A few seconds he gazed into the face of the man who had spoken to him, and then, prefacing his remark with an oath of condemnation, he exclaimed:

"If ye've got a God ye'd better thank Him that Jem Conover don't owe ye much of a grudge!"

The man muttered something and passed on to attend to his cattle, while the Sergeant placed his foot in the stirrups, and as he did so he looked toward me.

Our eyes met, and again I saw him change color and start, as though he had done some guilty thing in thus looking into the face of his superior officer.

"If ye've got a God, ye'd better thank Him that Jem Conover don't owe ye much of a grudge."

Why did those words ring in my ears, and echo through my whole being?

Twenty times during that day I looked upon my Sergeant when he did not know it, and studied his face, and each effort seemed to bring the last connection nearer, without quite giving it into my hands. He seemed to know that I had begun to feel an interest in his antecedents, and toward the latter part of the day behaved himself more as the officer of my escort ought. He asked me how I would like to have the guard disposed, and very modestly gave me to understand that my wishes would be held as law by them. I took this for what it was worth, and I knew very well what it meant: There was an old association that he would not have raked up.

That night found us at the foot of Brock's Mountain, and at the extreme verge of civilization in that direction. Beyond here we were to take the old government-supply road—a mere bridle-path—with which Conover and his two men were perfectly familiar, and we would not strike another settlement until near Stetson.

I went to sleep in my tent thinking of Sergt. James Conover, and it must have been immediately after my waking senses

that my dream senses took up the thread, and they took it up to some purpose. Hampered with no ordinary routine or system of circumlocution, bothered with no searching for connecting links or correlative circumstances, they went back over the years with a leap, and drew a picture for me as vivid and distinct as the original event had been just eighteen years before.

I was at Fort Snelling a Second Lieutenant of Engineers, engaged in surveying government lands, laying out roads, and so on, and among those detailed to assist me was a private of the name of James Conover. He got drunk while at work, and when I reprimanded him he used language so offensive and foul that I could not pass it by. In fact, if I had been armed at the time I should have shot him, for his course was such as to entirely place himself beyond the reach of forbearance. I reported him and he was flogged severely—flogged so severely that I bore him no more grudge. But he bore a grudge toward me, though. Aye—while his back was bleeding and smarting he hissed into my ears: "If ye've got a God, be sure to him. Jem Conover swears that he don't give over this grudge till one of us dies!"

I started out from my sleep and sat up. It had been a dream, and yet not all a dream. All the while the scene was being repeated before me. I had been conscious that I lay there in my tent under the old boulder of the Brock. I had sunk into a state where my mind was free to follow its own course, taking the single fact of James Conover for a point of departure, and thence running backward until he was met again.

I remembered all now. Yes. This was the man who, eighteen years before, had cursed and swore and reviled me, and threatened all manner of violence; and his only provocation had been that I had threatened to have him punished if he ever got drunk again while on duty with me. To be sure he was under the influence of liquor at the time; but not so far gone but that he knew very well what he was doing; because, after reaching the fort, on our return, he made his boast that he had given the "shoulder-pop" (so he called me) a stomachful to carry off, but he didn't believe I would dare to report him. But I did report him, and I gave his speech in full, and the result was that the old Major ordered a court-martial, out from the sentence of which the man came with a hundred lashes.

And here I was, with my old enemy for an escort! From that far gone time to the present I had never seen nor heard of the man, and he had long ago passed entirely from my mind. Conover is a common name in the army; or, at least, I had happened to hit quite a number of enlisted men of that name; so I had not connected the stout, dark-browed, stocky Sergeant with the fair-faced, lithe and youthful soldier who had crossed my path at Snelling.

A hasty review of the whole thing brought me to rather an unpleasant understanding of the present situation. That Conover still bore a grudge was very evident; and it was equally evident that he meant to settle the account between us on this trip. I could not think there in the tent. It was too narrow a space. I had arisen, and was upon the point of passing out, with my pistol in my hand, when I heard a stealthy footstep at the entrance. Without noise I sprang into a front corner, and then crouched down upon my saddle.

I had scarcely gained the position when the flap was thrown aside and a man looked in. Ah! just beyond the face of the interloper was an opening at the end of the mountain, and I caught his profile against a patch of clear sky. It was the hard, bronzed face of John Conover!

I held my pistol ready for instant use expecting every moment to see him leap to the spread blankets. But he was very moderate. He put his head further in, and seemed puzzled. It was, of course, very dark in there, but yet he could probably see that the bed did not look as though there was a man in it. Once I raised my pistol, full sure that the man was after my life, and fearful that if I threw a chance away he might get the better of me; but I did not fire. Something seemed to whisper in my ear "Hold on! you've hit him once. Be sure you're in danger before you hit him again!" and I lowered my pistol and watched. Presently:

"Major!" came from his lips, careful but earnestly. "Major!—Major Cochrane?"

There was something in the tone of that voice that gave me heart. It was sort of imploring, prayerful tone, as of one who has a great favor to ask. I de-

termined to answer him; but to be sure I kept my pistol ready at hand.

With a yawn, as though just startled from my sleep, I returned:

"A-a-h! Hello! Who's here?"

"Eh! Down here! It's me, Major—Sergeant Conover. I was passing round back of your tent and thought I heard ye talking with yerself. So, thinkin' ye'd be awake, and havin' something I wanted particularly to say, I made bold to come around and look in. The fact is Major, I couldn't sleep till I'd set matters right."

By this time the fellow had turned so that I could see that he had no weapon with him, and I began to think that I had been a little too fearful. However, I got up and stepped out into the centre of the tented area, and then said:

"Go ahead, sergeant. I'm all attention."

Without further preliminaries he went on:

"Of course you know me?"

"I think I have good reason to remember you, sergeant."

"And you remember the last words I ever spoke to you in the old years?"

"I have not forgotten them."

"Well," he said, with a palpable burst of feeling, "them words have been haunting me ever since I met you at the hotel in Jefferson. When I was ordered to report to Major Cochrane I never thought of you. The old affair had almost gone from my mind; but when I saw your face I knew you, and when you looked up at me I was troubled. I hoped you might not remember me. If you did not I meant to hold my tongue. But I couldn't act hide myself. Howsumever, I held up till to-night. But after we'd done supper I kept watch of your movements, and made up my mind that you were going to look out for me. But, Major, don't let it go no further. I'm too old a soldier now not to know that the harm I suffered at Snelling was of my own making. I don't bear the old grudge any longer, and I tell you the truth when I tell you that you did me a good turn that time. I know how I was going on, and I know that another officer in your place would have shot me. So, you will take my hand and cry quits of all old memories?"

I never gave my hand to a man more readily, nor more cheerfully; and I doubt if in all this Western wilds there was a more sociable and jolly party than we made on the following day. As an individual, I was particularly happy; for I am free to confess that there were a few moments of that first night in the wilderness freighted with about as much dread and uneasiness as a man would care to experience. But, as I remarked to the Sergeant on a former occasion: "All's well that end's well." And our tramp of four weeks continued so pleasantly that the end might have been longer deferred without complaint from us.—

Chicago Times.

A Dog-Catching Canine.

The intelligence and sagacity of that trustful friend of man—the dog—have often been extolled, but Deputy Poundmaster Wilmer has a dog who, while exhibiting great sagacity, at the same time gives evidence of such heartless depravity that he seems a living walking evidence of the truthfulness of the old proverb, "Evil communications corrupt good manners." This dog, which looks like a red Irish setter, but is claimed to be a shepherd dog, accompanies Wilmer on his dog-catching excursions, and so thoroughly understands the wishes and intentions of his master that whenever Wilmer points at a dog this wicked beast flies at it, and if able throws it down and holds it till Wilmer's assistant throws his net over it. If the dog "wanted" is too large to be thrown down this renegade engages him in conversation, and if necessary picks a quarrel with him, distracting his attention till the fatal net is thrown.—Portland Oregonian.

Letter Mail Long Ago.

The interesting Post Museum at Berlin has lately received a noteworthy addition in the shape of a letter cover dating from last century. The letter was sent from Philadelphia to the great grand-father of the late possessor of the cover. The cover bears the postmarks of Philadelphia, London, Calais, Brussels, the Hague, Amsterdam and Hamburg, so that the route adopted in those days was evidently a very circuitous one. The date of the missive is between 1760 and 1789, but the actual year cannot be determined, as the cover gives no date. The cost of trans-shipment was no less than five thalers—twelve schilling of Mecklenburg money, or eighteen mark ninety pfennig of modern German money.