

VARIOUS

STORIES BY AMERICAN
AUTHORS, VOLUME 6

**Various
Stories by American
Authors, Volume 6**

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=35500859

Stories by American Authors, Volume 6:

Содержание

THE VILLAGE CONVICT.	4
THE DENVER EXPRESS.	28
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	41

Various Stories by American Authors, Volume 6

THE VILLAGE CONVICT. BY C.H. WHITE

"Wonder 'f Eph's got back; they say his sentence run out yisterday."

The speaker, John Doane, was a sunburnt fisherman, one of a circle of well-salted individuals who sat, some on chairs, some on boxes and barrels, around the stove in a country store.

"Yes," said Captain Seth, a middle-aged little man with earrings; "he come on the stage to-noon. Wouldn't hardly speak a word, Jim says. Looked kind o' sot and sober."

"Wall," said the first speaker, "I only hope he won't go to burnin' us out of house and home, same as he burnt up Eliphalet's barn. I was ruther in hopes he'd 'a' made off West. Seems to me I should, in his place, hevin' ben in State's-prison."

"Now, I allers bed quite a parcel o' sympathy for Eph," said a short, thickset coasting captain, who sat tilted back in a three-legged chair, smoking lazily. "You see, he wa'n't but

about twenty-one or two then, and he was allus a mighty high-strung boy; and then Eliphalet did act putty ha'sh, foreclosin' on Eph's mother, and turnin' her out o' the farm, in winter, when everybody knew she could ha' pulled through by waitin'. Eph sot great store by the old lady, and I expect he was putty mad with Eliphalet that night."

"I allers," said Doane, "approved o' his plan o' leadin' out all the critters, 'fore he touched off the barn. 'Taint everybody 't would hev taken pains to do that. But all the same, I tell Sarai't I feel kind o' skittish, nights, to hev to turn in, feelin' 't there's a convict in the place."

"I hain't got no barn to burn," said Captain Seth; "but if he allots my henhouse to the flames, I hope he'll lead out the hens, and hitch 'em to the apple trees, same's he did Eliphalet's critters. Think he ought to deal ekally by all."

A mild general chuckle greeted this sally, cheered by which the speaker added:

"Thought some o' takin' out a policy o' insurance on my cockerel."

"Trade's lookin' up, William," said Captain Seth to the storekeeper, as some one was heard to kick the snow off his boots on the door-step. "Somebody's found he's got to hev a shoestring 'fore mornin'."

The door opened, and closed behind a strongly made fellow of twenty-six or seven, of homely features, with black hair, in clothes which he had outgrown. It was a bitter night, but he had

no coat over his flannel jacket. He walked straight down the store, between the dry-goods counters, to the snug corner at the rear, where the knot of talkers sat; nodded, without a smile, to each of them, and then asked the storekeeper for some simple articles of food, which he wished to buy. It was Eph.

While the purchases were being put up, an awkward silence prevailed, which the oil-suits hanging on the walls, broadly displaying their arms and legs, seemed to mock, in dumb show.

Nothing was changed, to Eph's eyes, as he looked about. Even the handbill of familiar pattern:

"STANDING WOOD FOR SALE.
APPLY TO J. CARTER, ADMIN'R,"

seemed to have always been there.

The village parliament remained spellbound. Mr. Adams tied up the purchases and mildly inquired:

"Shall I charge this?"

Not that he was anxious to open an account, but that he would probably have gone to the length of selling Eph a barrel of molasses "on tick" rather than run any risk of offending so formidable a character.

"No," said Eph; "I will pay for the things."

And having put the packages into a canvas bag, and selected some fish-hooks and lines from the show-case, where they lay environed by jackknives, jewsharps, and gum-drops—dear to

the eyes of his childhood—he paid what was due, said "Good-night, William," to the storekeeper, and walked steadily out into the night.

"Wall," said the skipper, "I am surprised! I strove to think o' suthin' to say, all the time he was here, but I swow I couldn't think o' nothin'. I couldn't ask him if it seemed good to git home, nor how the thermometer had varied in different parts o' the town where he'd been. Everything seemed to fetch right up standin' to the State's-prison."

"I was just goin' to say, 'How'd ye leave everybody?'" said Doane; "but that kind o' seemed to bring up them he'd left. I felt real bad, though, to hev the feller go off 'thout none on us speakin' to him. He's got a hard furrer to plough; and yet I don't s'pose there's much harm in him, 'f Eliphalet only keeps quiet."

"Eliphalet!" said a young sailor, contemptuously. "No fear o' him! They say he's so sca't of Eph he hain't hardly swallowed nothin' for a week."

"But where will he live?" asked a short, curly-haired young man, whom Eph had seemed not to recognize. It was the new doctor, who, after having made his way through college and "the great medical school in Boston," had, two years before, settled in this village.

"I believe," said Mr. Adams, rubbing his hands, "that he wrote to Joshua Carr last winter, when his mother died, not to let the little place she left, on the Salt Hay Road, and I understand that he is going to make his home there. It is an old house, you know,

and not worth much, but it is weather-tight, I should say."

"Speakin' of his writin' to Joshua," said Doane, "I have heard such a sound as that he used to shine up to Joshua's Susan, years back. But that's all ended now. You won't catch Susan marryin' no jailbirds."

"But how will he live?" said the doctor. "Will anybody give him work?"

"Let him alone for livin'," said Doane. "He can ketch more fish than any other two men in the place—allers seemed to kind o' hev a knack o' whistlin' 'em right into the boat. And then Nelson Briggs, that settled up his mother's estate, allows he's got over a hundred and ten dollars for him, after payin' debts and all probate expenses, and that and the place is all he needs to start on."

"I will go to see him," said the doctor to himself, as he went out upon the requisition of a grave man in a red tippet, who had just come for him. "He doesn't look so very dangerous, and I think he can be tamed. I remember that his mother told me about him."

Late that night, returning from his seven miles' drive, as he left the causeway, built across a wide stretch of salt-marsh, crossed the rattling plank bridge and ascended the hill, he saw a light in the cottage window, where he had often been to attend Aunt Lois. "I will stop now," said he. And, tying his horse to the front fence, he went toward the kitchen door. As he passed the window, he glanced in. A lamp was burning on the table. On a settle, lying upon his face, was stretched the convict, his arms beneath his

head. The canvas bag lay on the floor beside him. "I will not disturb him now," said the doctor.

A few days later Dr. Burt was driving in his sleigh with his wife along the Salt Hay Road. It was a clear, crisp winter forenoon. As they neared Eph's house, he said:

"Mary, suppose I lay siege to the fort this morning. I see a curl of smoke rising from the little shop in the barn. He must be making himself a jimmy or a dark-lantern to break into our vegetable cellar with."

"Well," said she, "I think it would be a good plan; only, you know, you must be very, very careful not to hint, even in the faintest way, at his imprisonment. You mustn't so much as *suspect* that he has ever been away from the place. People hardly dare to speak to him, for fear he will see some reference to his having been in prison, and get angry."

"You shall see my sly tact," said her husband, laughing. "I will be as innocent as a lamb. I will ask him why I have not seen him at the Sabbath-school this winter."

"You may make fun," said she, "but you will end by taking my advice, all the same. Now, do be careful what you say."

"I will," he replied. "I will compose my remarks carefully upon the back of an envelope and read them to him, so as to be absolutely sure. I will leave on his mind an impression that I have been in prison, and that he was the judge that tried me."

He drove in at the open gate, hitched his horse in a warm corner by the kitchen door, and then stopped for a moment to

enjoy the view. The situation of the little house, half a mile from any other, was beautiful in summer, but it was bleak enough in winter. In the small front dooryard stood three lofty, wind-blown poplars, all heading away from the sea, and between them you could look down the bay or across the salt-marshes, while in the opposite direction were to be seen the roofs and the glittering spires of the village.

"It is social for him here, to say the least," said the doctor, as he turned and walked alone to the shop. He opened the door and went in. It was a long, low lean-to, such as farmers often furnish for domestic work, with a carpenter's bench, a grind-stone, and a few simple tools. It was lighted by three square windows above the bench. An air-tight stove, projecting its funnel through a hole in one of the panes, gave out a cheerful crackling.

Eph, in his shirt-sleeves, his hands in his pockets, was standing, his back against the bench, surveying, with something of a mechanic's eye, the frame of a boat which was set up on the floor.

He looked up and colored slightly. The doctor took out a cigarette, lit it, sat down on the bench, and smoked, clasping one knee in his hands and eying the boat.

"Centre-board?" he asked, at length.

"Yes," said Eph.

"Cat-rig?"

"Yes."

"Going fishing?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"I was brought up to sail a boat," said the doctor, "and I often go fishing in summer, when I get a chance. I shall want to try your boat some time."

No reply.

"The timbers are not seasoned, are they? They look like pitch-pine, just out of the woods. Won't they warp?"

"No. Pitch-pine goes right in, green. I s'pose the pitch keeps it, if it's out of the sun."

"Where did you cut it?"

Eph colored a little.

"In my back lot."

The doctor smoked on calmly, and studied the boat.

"I don't know you," said Eph, relaxing a little.

"Good reason," said the doctor. "I've only been here two years;" and after a moment's pause, he added: "I am the doctor here, now. You've heard of my father, Dr. Burt, of Broad River?"

Eph nodded assent; everybody knew him, all through the country;—a fatherly old man, who rode on long journeys at everybody's call, and never sent in his bills.

The visitor had a standing with Eph at once.

"Doctors never pick at folks," he said to himself—"at any rate, not old Dr. Burt's son."

"I used to come here to see your mother," said the doctor,

"when she was sick. She used to talk a great deal about you, and said she wanted me to get acquainted with you, when your time was out."

Eph started, but said nothing.

"She was a good woman, Aunt Lois," added the doctor; "one of the best women I ever saw."

"I don't want anybody to bother himself on my account," said Eph. "I ask no favors."

"You will have to take favors, though," said the doctor, "before the winter is over. You will be careless and get sick; you have been living for a long time entirely in-doors, with regular hours and work and food. Now you are going to live out-of-doors, and get your own meals, irregularly. You didn't have on a thick coat the other night, when I saw you at the store."

"I haven't got any that's large enough for me," said Eph, a little less harshly, "and I've got to keep my money for other things."

"Then look out and wear flannel shirts enough," said the doctor, "if you want to be independent. But before I go, I want to go into the house. I want my wife to see Aunt Lois's room, and the view from the west window;" and he led the way to the sleigh.

Eph hesitated a moment, and then followed him.

"Mary, this is Ephraim Morse. We are going in to see the Dutch tiles I have told you of."

She smiled as she held out her mittened hand to Eph, who took it awkwardly.

The square front room, which had been originally intended for

a keeping-room, but had been Aunt Lois's bedroom, looked out from two windows upon the road, and from two upon the rolling, tumbling bay, and the shining sea beyond. A tall clock, with a rocking ship above the face, ticked in the corner. The painted floor with bright rag-mats, the little table with a lacquer work-box, the stiff chairs, and the old-fashioned bedstead, the china ornaments upon the mantel-piece, the picture of "The Emeline G. in the Harbor of Canton," were just as they had been when the patient invalid had lain there, looking from her pillow out to sea. In twelve rude tiles set around the open fireplace, the Hebrews were seen in twelve stages of their escape from Egypt. It would appear from this representation that they had not restricted their borrowings to the jewels of their oppressors, but had taken for the journey certain Dutch clothing of the fashion of the seventeenth century. The scenery, too, was much like that about Leyden.

"I think," said the doctor's wife, "that the painter was just a little absent-minded when he put in that beer-barrel. And a wharf, by the Red Sea!"

"I wish you would conclude to rig your boat with a new sail," said the doctor, as he took up the reins, at parting. "There isn't a boat here that's kept clean, and I should like to hire yours once or twice a week in summer, if you keep her as neat as you do your house. Come in and see me some evening, and we'll talk it over."

Eph built his boat, and, in spite of his evident dislike of visitors, the inside finish and the arrangements of the little cabin were so ingenious and so novel that everybody had to pay him

a visit.

True to his plan of being independent, he built in the side of the hill, near his barn, by a little gravelly pond, an ice-house, and, with the hardest labor, filled it, all by himself. With this supply, he would not have to go to the general wharf at Sandy Point to sell his fish, with the other men, but could pack and ship them himself. And he could do better, in this way, he thought, even after paying for teaming them to the cars.

The knowing ones laughed to see that, from asking no advice, he had miscalculated and laid in three times as much as he could use.

"Guess Eph cal'lates ter fish with two lines in each hand and 'nother in his teeth," said Mr. Wing. "He's plannin' out for a great lay o' fish."

The spring came slowly on, and the first boat that went out that season was Eph's. That day was one of unmixed delight to him. What a sense of absolute freedom, when he was fairly out beyond the lightship, with the fresh swiftness of the wind in his face! What an exquisite consciousness of power and control, as his boat went beating through the long waves! Two or three men from another village sailed across his wake. His boat lay over, almost showing her keel, now high out of water, now settling between the waves, while Eph stood easily in the stern in his shirt-sleeves, steering with his knee, smoking a pipe, heaving and hauling his line astern for bluefish.

"Takes it nat'ral ag'in, don't he? Stands as easy as ef he was

loafin' on a wharf," said one of the observers. "Expect it's quite a treat to be out. But they do say he's gittin' everybody's good opinion. They looked for a regular ruffian when he come home—cuttin' nets, killin' cats, chasin' hens, gittin' drunk. They say Eliphalet Wood didn't hardly dare to go ou' doors for a month, 'thout havin' his hired man along. But he's turned out as peaceful as a little gal."

One June day, as Eph was slitting bluefish at the little pier which he had built on the bay-shore, near his rude ice-house, two men came up.

"Hallo, Eph!"

"Hallo."

"We've got about sick, tradin' down to the wharf; we can't git no fair show. About one time in three, they tell us they don't want our fish, and won't take 'em unless we'll heave 'em in for next to nothin', and we know there ain't no sense in it. So we just thought we'd slip down and see ef you wouldn't take 'em, seein's you've got ice, and send 'em up with yourn."

Eph was taken all aback with this mark of confidence. He would decline the offer, sure that it sprang from some mere passing vexation.

"I can't buy fish," said he. "I have no scales to weigh 'em."

"Then send ourn in separate barrels," said one of them.

"But I haven't any money to pay you," he said. "I only get my pay once a month."

"We'll git tick at William's, and you can settle 'th us when you

git your pay."

"Well," said he, unable to refuse, "I'll take 'em, if you say so."

Before the season was over, he had still another customer, and could have had three or four more, if he had had ice enough. He was strongly inclined that fall to build a larger ice-house, and although he was a little afraid of bringing ridicule upon himself in case no fish should be brought to him the next summer, he decided to do so, on the assurance of three or four men that they would deal with him. Nobody else had such a chance, he thought—a pond right by the shore.

One evening there was a knock at the door of Eliphalet Wood, the owner of the burned barn. Eliphalet went to the door, but turned pale at seeing Eph there.

"Oh, come in, come in!" he panted. "Glad to see you. Walk in. Have a chair. Take a seat. Sit down."

But he thought his hour had come: he was alone in the house, and there was no neighbor within call.

Eph took out a roll of bills, counted out eighty dollars, laid the money on the table, and said, quietly:

"Give me a receipt on account."

When it was written he walked out, leaving Eliphalet stupefied.

Joshua Carr was at work, one June afternoon, by the road-side, in front of his low cottage, by an enormous pile of poles, which he was shaving down for barrel-hoops, when Eph appeared.

"Hard at it, Joshua!" he said.

"Yes, yes!" said Joshua, looking up through his steel-bowed spectacles. "Hev to work hard to make a livin'—though I don't know's I ought to call it hard, neither; and yet it is rather hard, too; but then, on t'other hand, 'taint so hard as a good many other things—though there is a good many jobs that's easier. That's so! That's so!

"Must we be kerried to the skies
On feathery beds of ease?"

Though I don't know's I oughter quote a hymn on such a matter; but then—I don't know's there's any partic'lar harm in't, neither."

Eph sat down on a pile of shavings and chewed a sliver; and the old man kept on at his work.

"Hoop-poles goin' up and hoops goin' down," he continued. "Cur'us, ain't it? But then, I don't know as 'tis; woods all bein' cut off—poles gittin' scurcer; hoops bein' shoved in from Down East. That don't seem just right, now, does it—but then, other folks must make a livin', too. Still, I should think they might take up suthin' else; and yet, they might say that about me. Understand, I don't mean to say that they actually do say so; I don't want to run down any man unless I know—"

"I can't stand this," said Eph to himself; "I don't wonder that they always used to put Joshua off at the first port, when he tried to go coasting. They said he talked them crazy with nothing.

"I'll go into the house and see Aunt Lyddy," he said, aloud.

"I'm loafing this afternoon."

"All right! all right!" said Joshua. "Lyddy'll be glad to see ye—that is, as glad as she would be to see anybody," he added, reaching out for a pole. "Now, I don' s'pose that sounds very well; but still, you know how she is—she allus likes to hev folks to talk, and then she's allus sayin' talkin' wears on her; but I ought not to say that to you, because she allus likes to see you—that is, as much as she likes to see anybody—in fact, I think, on the whole—"

"Well, I'll take my chances," said Eph, laughing, and he opened the gate and went in.

Joshua's wife, whom everybody called Aunt Lyddy, was oscillating in a rocking-chair in the kitchen, and knitting. It was currently reported that Joshua's habit of endlessly retracting and qualifying every idea and modification of an idea which he advanced, so as to commit himself to nothing, was the effect of Aunt Lyddy's careful revision.

"I s'pose she thought 'twas fun to be talked deaf when they was courtin'," Captain Seth had once sagely remarked. "Prob'ly it sounded then like a putty piece on a seraphine; but I allers callated she'd git her fill of it, sooner or later. You most gin'lly git your fill o' one tune."

"How are you this afternoon, Aunt Lyddy?" asked Eph, walking in without knocking, and sitting down near her.

"So as to be able to keep about," she replied. "It is a great mercy I ain't afflicted with falling out of my chair, like Hepsy

Jones, ain't it?"

"I've brought you some oysters," he said. "I set the basket down on the door-step. I just took them out of the water myself from the bed I planted to the west of the water-fence."

"I always heard you was a great fisherman," said Aunt Lyddy, "but I had no idea you would ever come here and boast of being able to catch oysters. Poor things! How could they have got away? But why don't you bring them in? They won't be afraid of me, will they?"

He stepped to the door and brought in a peck basket full of large, black, twisted shells, and with a heavy clasp-knife proceeded to open one, and took out a great oyster, which he held up on the point of the blade.

"Try it," he said; and then Aunt Lyddy, after she had swallowed it, laughed to think what a tableau they had made—a man who had been in the State-prison standing over her with a great knife! And then she laughed again.

"What are you laughing at?" he said.

"It popped into my head, supposing Susan should have looked in at the south window and Joshua into the door, when you was feeding out that oyster to me, what they would have thought!"

Eph laughed, too, and, surely enough, just then a stout, light-haired, rather plain-looking young woman came up to the south window and leaned in. She had on a sun-bonnet, which had not prevented her from securing a few choice freckles. She had been working with a trowel in her flower-garden.

"What's the matter?" she said, nodding easily to Eph. "What do you two always find to laugh about?"

"Ephraim was feeding me with spoon-meat," said Aunt Lyddy, pointing to the basket, which looked like a basket of anthracite coal.

"It looks like spoon-meat," said Susan, and then she laughed too. "I'll roast some of them for supper," she added, "a new way that I know."

Eph was not invited to stay to supper, but he stayed, none the less: that was always understood.

"Well! Well! Well!" said Joshua, coming to the door-step, and washing his hands and arms just outside, in a tin basin. "I thought I see you set down a parcel of oysters—but there was seaweed over 'em, and I don' know's I could hev said they was oysters; but then, if the square question hed been put to me, 'Mr. Carr, be them oysters or not?' I s'pose I should hev said they was; still, if they'd asked me how I knew—"

"Come, come, father!" said Aunt Lyddy, "do give poor Ephraim a little peace. Why don't you just say you thought they were oysters, and done with it?"

"Say I *thought* they was?" he replied, innocently. "I knew well enough they was—that is—knew? No, I didn't know, but—"

Aunt Lyddy, with an air of mock resignation, gave up, while Joshua endeavored to fix, to a hair, the exact extent of his knowledge.

Eph smiled; but he remembered what would have made him

pardon, a thousand times over, the old man's garrulousness. He remembered who alone had never failed, once a year, to visit a certain prisoner, at the cost of a long and tiresome journey, and who had written to that homesick prisoner kind and cheering letters, and had sent him baskets of simple dainties for holidays.

Susan bustled about, and made a fire of crackling sticks, and began to roast the oysters in a way that made a most savory smell. She set the table, and then sat down at the melodeon, while she was waiting, and sang a hymn—for she was of a musical turn, and was one of the choir. Then she jumped up, and took out the steaming oysters, and they all sat down.

"Well, well, well!" said her father; "these be good! I didn't s'pose you had any very good oysters in your bed, Ephraim. But there, now—I don' s'pose I ought to have said that; that wasn't very polite; but what I meant was—I didn't s'pose you had any that was *real* good—though I don' know but that I've said about the same thing, now. Well, anyway, these be splendid; they're full as good as those cohogs we had t'other night."

"Quahaugs!" said Susan. "The idea of comparing these oysters with quahaugs!"

"Well, well! that's so!" said the father. "I didn't say right, did I, when I said that? Of course, they ain't no comparison—that is—*no* comparison—why, of course, they *is* a comparison between everything, but then, cohogs don' really compare with oysters! That's true!"

And then he paused to eat a few.

He was silent so long at this occupation that they all laughed.

"Well, well!" said he, laying down his fork, and smiling innocently; "what be you all laughin' at? Not but what I allers like to hev folks laugh—but then—I didn't see nothin' to laugh at. Still perhaps, they was suthin' to laugh at that I didn't see; sometimes one man'll be lookin' down into his plate, all taken up with his vittles, and others that's lookin' around the room, may see the kittens frolickin', or some such thing. 'Tain't the fust time I've known all hands to laugh all to onct, when I didn't see nothin'."

Susan helped him again, and secured another brief respite.

"Ephraim," said he, after awhile, "you ain't skilled to cook oysters like this, I don' believe. You ought to get married! I was sayin' to Susan t'other day—well, now, mother, have I said an'thing out o' the way?—well, I don' s'pose 'twas just my place to hev said an'thing about gittin' married, to Ephraim, seein's—"

"Come, come, father," said Aunt Lyddy, "that'll do, now. You must let Ephraim alone, and not joke him about such things."

Meanwhile Susan had hastily gone into the pantry to look for a pie, which she seemed unable at once to find.

"Pie got adrift?" called out Joshua. "Seems to me you don' hook on to it very quick. Now that looks good," he added, when she came out. "That looks like cookin'! All I meant was, 't Ephraim ought not to be doin' his own cookin'—that is—if you can call it cookin'—but then, of course, 'tis cookin'—there's all kinds o' cookin'. I went cook myself, when I was a boy."

After supper, Aunt Lyddy sat down to knit, and Joshua drew

his chair up to an open window, to smoke his pipe. In this vice Aunt Lyddy encouraged him. The odor of Virginia tobacco was a sweet savor in her nostrils. No breezes from Araby ever awoke more grateful feelings than did the fragrance of Uncle Joshua's pipe. To Aunt Lyddy it meant quiet and peace.

Susan and Eph sat down on the broad flag door-stone, and talked quietly of the simple news of the neighborhood, and of the days when they used to go to school, and come home, always together.

"I didn't much think, then," said Eph, "that I should ever bring up where I have, and get ashore before I was fairly out to sea!"

"Jehiel's schooner got ashore on the bar, years ago," said Susan, "and yet they towed her off, and I saw her this morning, from my chamber window, before sunrise, all sail set, going by to the eastward."

"I know what you mean," said Eph. "But here—I got mad once, and I almost had a right to, and I can't get started again; I never shall. I can get a livin', of course; but I shall always be pointed out as a jail-bird, and could no more get any footin' in the world than Portuguese Jim."

Portuguese Jim was the sole professional criminal of the town, a weak, good-natured, knock-kneed vagabond, who stole hens, and spent every winter in the House of Correction as an "idle and disorderly person."

Susan laughed outright at the picture. Eph smiled, too, but a little bitterly.

"I suppose it was more ugliness than anything else," he said, "that made me come back here to live, where everybody knows I've been in jail and is down on me."

"They are not down on you," said Susan. "Nobody is down on you. It's all your own imagination. And if you had gone anywhere that you was a stranger, you know that the first thing that you would have done would have been to call a meetin' and tell all the people that you had burned down a man's barn, and been in the State's-prison, and that you wanted them all to know it at the start; and you wouldn't have told them why you did it, and how young you was then, and how Eliphalet treated your mother, and how you was going to pay him for all he lost. Here, everybody knows that side of it. In fact," she added, with a little twinkle in her eye, "I have sometimes had an idea that the main thing they don't like is to see you savin' every cent to pay to Eliphalet."

"And yet it was on your say that I took up that plan," said Eph. "I never thought of it till you asked me when I was goin' to begin to pay him up."

"And you ought to," said Susan. "He has a right to the money—and then you don't want to be under obligations to that man all your life. Now, what you want to do is to cheer up and go around among folks. Why, now, you're the only fish-buyer there is that the men don't watch when he's weighin' their fish. You'll own up to that, for one thing, won't you?"

"Well, they are good fellows that bring fish to me," he said.

"They weren't good fellows when they traded at the great

wharf," said Susan. "They had a quarrel down there once a week, reg'larly."

"Well, suppose they do trust me in that," said Eph. "I can never rub out that I've been in State's-prison."

"You don't want to rub it out. You can't rub anything out that's ever been; but you can do better than rub it out."

"What do you mean?"

"Take things just the way they are," said Susan, "and show what can be done. Perhaps you'll stake a new channel out, for others to follow in that haven't half so much chance as you have. And that's what you will do, too," she added.

"Susan!" he said, "if there's anything I can ever do, in this world or the next, for you or your folks, that's all I ask for, the chance to do it. Your folks and you shall never want for anything while I'm alive.

"There's one thing sure," he added, rising. "I'll live by myself and be independent of everybody, and make my way all alone in the world; and if I can make 'em all finally own up and admit that I'm honest with 'em, I'm satisfied. That's all I'll ever ask of anybody. But there's one thing that worries me sometimes—that is, whether I ought to come here so often. I'm afraid, sometimes, that it'll hinder your father from gettin' work, or—something—for you folks to be friends with me."

"I think such things take care of themselves," said Susan, quietly. "If a chip won't float, let it sink."

"Good-night," said Eph, and he walked off, and went home

to his echoing house.

After that, his visits to Joshua's became less frequent.

It was a bright day in March—one of those which almost redeem the reputation of that desperado of a month. Eph was leaning on his fence, looking now down the bay and now to where the sun was sinking in the marshes. He knew that all the other men had gone to the town-meeting, where he had had no heart to intrude himself—that free democratic parliament where he had often gone with his father in childhood; where the boys, rejoicing in a general assembly of their own, had played ball outside, while the men debated gravely within. He recalled the time when he himself had so proudly given his first vote for President, and how his father had introduced him then to friends from distant parts of the town. He remembered how he had heard his father speak there, and how respectfully everybody had listened to him. That was in the long ago, when they had lived at the great farm. And then came the thought of the mortgage, and of Eliphalet's foreclosure, and—

"Hallo, Eph!"

It was one of the men from whom he took fish—a plain-spoken, sincere little man.

"Why wa'n't you down to town-meet'n'?"

"I was busy," said Eph.

"How'd ye like the news?"

"What news?"

There was never any good news for him now.

"Hain't heard who's selected town-clerk?"

"No."

Had they elected Eliphalet, and so expressed their settled distrust of him, and sympathy for the man whom he had injured?

"Who's elected?" he asked, harshly.

"You be!" said the man; "went in flyin', all hands clappin' and stompin' their feet!"

An hour later the doctor drove up, stopped, and walked toward the kitchen door. As he passed the window, he looked in.

Eph was lying on his face, upon the settle, as he had first seen him there, his arms beneath his head.

"I will not disturb him now," said the doctor.

One breezy afternoon, in the following summer, Captain Seth laid aside his easy every-day clothes, and transformed himself into a stiff broadcloth image, with a small silk hat and creaking boots. So attired, he set out in a high open buggy, with his wife, also in black, but with gold spectacles, to the funeral of an aunt. As they pursued their jog-trot journey along the Salt Hay Road, and came to Ephraim Morse's cottage, they saw Susan sitting in a shady little porch, at the front door, shelling peas, and looking down the bay.

"How is everything, Susan?" called out Captain Seth; "'bout time for Eph to be gitt'n' in?"

"Yes," she answered, nodding and smiling, and pointing with a pea-pod; "that's our boat, just coming up to the wharf, with her peak down."

THE DENVER EXPRESS.

BY A.A. HAYES

I

Any one who has seen an outward-bound clipper ship getting under way and heard the "shanty-songs" sung by the sailors as they toiled at capstan and halliards, will probably remember that rhymeless but melodious refrain—

"I'm bound to see its muddy waters
Yeo ho! that rolling river;
Bound to see its muddy waters
Yeo ho! the wild Missouri."

Only a happy inspiration could have impelled Jack to apply the adjective "wild" to that ill-behaved and disreputable river, which, tipsily bearing its enormous burden of mud from the far Northwest, totters, reels, runs its tortuous course for hundreds on hundreds of miles; and which, encountering the lordly and thus far well-behaved Mississippi at Alton, and forcing its company upon this splendid river (as if some drunken fellow should lock arms with a dignified pedestrian), contaminates it all the way to

the Gulf of Mexico.

At a certain point on the banks of this river, or rather—as it has the habit of abandoning and destroying said banks—at a safe distance therefrom, there is a town from which a railroad takes its departure for its long climb up the natural incline of the Great Plains, to the base of the mountains; hence the importance to this town of the large but somewhat shabby building serving as terminal station. In its smoky interior, late in the evening and not very long ago, a train was nearly ready to start. It was a train possessing a certain consideration. For the benefit of a public easily gulled and enamored of grandiloquent terms, it was advertised as the "Denver Fast Express;" sometimes, with strange unfitness, as the "Lightning Express"; "elegant" and "palatial" cars were declared to be included therein; and its departure was one of the great events of the twenty-four hours, in the country round about. A local poet described it in the "live" paper of the town, cribbing from an old Eastern magazine and passing off as original, the lines—

"Again we stepped into the street,
A train came thundering by,
Drawn by the snorting iron steed
Swifter than eagles fly.

Rumbled the wheels, the whistle shrieked,
Far rolled the smoky cloud,
Echoed the hills, the valleys shook,

The flying forests bowed."

The trainmen, on the other hand, used no fine phrases. They called it simply "Number Seventeen"; and, when it started, said it had "pulled out."

On the evening in question, there it stood, nearly ready. Just behind the great hissing locomotive, with its parabolic headlight and its coal-laden tender, came the baggage, mail, and express cars; then the passenger coaches, in which the social condition of the occupants seemed to be in inverse ratio to their distance from the engine. First came emigrants, "honest miners," "cow-boys," and laborers; Irishmen, Germans, Welshmen, Mennonites from Russia, quaint of garb and speech, and Chinamen. Then came long cars full of people of better station, and last the great Pullman "sleepers," in which the busy black porters were making up the berths for well-to-do travellers of diverse nationalities and occupations.

It was a curious study for a thoughtful observer, this motley crowd of human beings sinking all differences of race, creed, and habits in the common purpose to move Westward—to the mountain fastnesses, the sage-brush deserts, the Golden Gate.

The warning bell had sounded, and the fireman leaned far out for the signal. The gong struck sharply, the conductor shouted, "All aboard," and raised his hand; the tired ticket-seller shut his window, and the train moved out of the station, gathered way as it cleared the outskirts of the town, rounded a curve, entered

on an absolutely straight line, and, with one long whistle from the engine, settled down to its work. Through the night hours it sped on, past lonely ranches and infrequent stations, by and across shallow streams fringed with cottonwood trees, over the greenish-yellow buffalo grass; near the old trail where many a poor emigrant, many a bold frontiersman, many a brave soldier, had laid his bones but a short time before.

Familiar as they may be, there is something strangely impressive about all night journeys by rail; and those forming part of an American transcontinental trip are almost weird. From the windows of a night-express in Europe, or the older portions of the United States, one looks on houses and lights, cultivated fields, fences, and hedges; and, hurled as he may be through the darkness, he has a sense of companionship and semi-security. Far different is it when the long train is running over those two rails which, seen before night set in, seemed to meet on the horizon. Within, all is as if between two great seaboard cities; the neatly dressed people, the uniformed officials, the handsome fittings, the various appliances for comfort. Without are now long, dreary levels, now deep and wild cañons, now an environment of strange and grotesque rock-formations, castles, battlements, churches, statues. The antelope fleetly runs, and the coyote skulks away from the track, and the gray wolf howls afar off. It is for all the world, to one's fancy, as if a bit of civilization, a family or community, its belongings and surroundings complete, were flying through regions barbarous

and inhospitable.

From the cab of Engine No. 32, the driver of the Denver Express saw, showing faintly in the early morning, the buildings grouped about the little station ten miles ahead, where breakfast awaited his passengers. He looked at his watch; he had just twenty minutes in which to run the distance, as he had run it often before. Something, however, travelled faster than he. From the smoky station out of which the train passed the night before, along the slender wire stretched on rough poles at the side of the track, a spark of that mysterious something which we call electricity flashed at the moment he returned the watch to his pocket; and in five minutes' time, the station-master came out on the platform, a little more thoughtful than his wont, and looked eastward for the smoke of the train. With but three of the passengers in that train has this tale specially to do, and they were all in the new and comfortable Pullman "City of Cheyenne." One was a tall, well-made man of about thirty—blond, blue-eyed, bearded, straight, sinewy, alert. Of all in the train he seemed the most thoroughly at home, and the respectful greeting of the conductor, as he passed through the car, marked him as an officer of the road. Such was he—Henry Sinclair, assistant engineer, quite famed on the line, high in favor with the directors, and a rising man in all ways. It was known on the road that he was expected in Denver, and there were rumors that he was to organize the parties for the survey of an important "extension." Beside him sat his pretty young wife. She was a

New Yorker—one could tell at first glance—from the feather of her little bonnet, matching the gray travelling dress, to the tips of her dainty boots; and one, too, at whom old Fifth Avenue promenaders would have turned to look. She had a charming figure, brown hair, hazel eyes, and an expression at once kind, intelligent, and spirited. She had cheerfully left a luxurious home to follow the young engineer's fortunes; and it was well known that those fortunes had been materially advanced by her tact and cleverness.

The third passenger in question had just been in conversation with Sinclair, and the latter was telling his wife of their curious meeting. Entering the toilet-room at the rear of the car, he said, he had begun his ablutions by the side of another man, and it was as they were sluicing their faces with water that he heard the cry:

"Why, Major, is that you? Just to think of meeting you here!"

A man of about twenty-eight years of age, slight, muscular, wiry, had seized his wet hand and was wringing it. He had black eyes, keen and bright, swarthy complexion, black hair and mustache. A keen observer might have seen about him some signs of a *jeunesse orageuse*, but his manner was frank and pleasing. Sinclair looked him in the face, puzzled for a moment.

"Don't you remember Foster?" asked the man.

"Of course I do," replied Sinclair. "For a moment I could not place you. Where have you been and what have you been doing?"

"Oh," replied Foster, laughing, "I've braced up and turned over a new leaf. I'm a respectable member of society, have a place

in the express company, and am going to Denver to take charge."

"I am very glad to hear it, and you must tell me your story when we have had our breakfast."

The pretty young woman was just about to ask who Foster was, when the speed of the train slackened, and the brakeman opened the door of the car and cried out in stentorian tones:

"Pawnee Junction; twenty minutes for refreshments!"

II

When the celebrated Rocky Mountain gold excitement broke out, more than twenty years ago, and people painted "PIKE'S PEAK OR BUST" on the canvas covers of their wagons and started for the diggings, they established a "trail" or "trace" leading in a south-westerly direction from the old one to California.

At a certain point on this trail a frontiersman named Barker built a forlorn ranch-house and *corral*, and offered what is conventionally called "entertainment for man and beast."

For years he lived there, dividing his time between fighting the Indians and feeding the passing emigrants and their stock. Then the first railroad to Denver was built, taking another route from the Missouri, and Barker's occupation was gone. He retired with his gains to St. Louis and lived in comfort.

Years passed on, and the "extension" over which our train is to pass was planned. The old pioneers were excellent natural

engineers, and their successors could find no better route than they had chosen. Thus it was that "Barker's" became, during the construction period, an important point, and the frontiersman's name came to figure on time-tables. Meanwhile the place passed through a process of evolution which would have delighted Darwin. In the party of engineers which first camped there was Sinclair, and it was by his advice that the contractors selected it for division headquarters. Then came drinking "saloons," and gambling-houses—alike the inevitable concomitant and the bane of Western settlements; then scattered houses and shops, and a shabby so-called hotel, in which the letting of miserable rooms (divided from each other by canvas partitions) was wholly subordinated to the business of the bar. Before long, Barker's had acquired a worse reputation than even other towns of its type, the abnormal and uncanny aggregations of squalor and vice which dotted the plains in those days; and it was at its worst when Sinclair returned thither and took up his quarters in the engineers' building. The passion for gambling was raging, and to pander thereto were collected as choice a lot of desperadoes as ever "stocked" cards or loaded dice. It came to be noticed that they were on excellent terms with a man called "Jeff" Johnson, who was lessee of the hotel; and to be suspected that said Johnson, in local parlance, "stood in with" them. With this man had come to Barker's his daughter Sarah, commonly known as "Sally," a handsome girl with a straight, lithe figure, fine features, reddish auburn hair, and dark blue eyes. It is but fair to say that

even the "toughs" of a place like Barker's show some respect for the other sex, and Miss Sally's case was no exception to the rule. The male population admired her; they said she "put on heaps of style"; but none of them had seemed to make any progress in her good graces.

On a pleasant afternoon, just after the track had been laid some miles west of Barker's, and construction trains were running with some regularity to and from the end thereof, Sinclair sat on the rude veranda of the engineers' quarters, smoking his well-colored meerschaum and looking at the sunset. The atmosphere had been so clear during the day that glimpses were had of Long's and Pike's peaks, and as the young engineer gazed at the gorgeous cloud-display he was thinking of the miners' quaint and pathetic idea that the dead "go over the Range."

"Nice-looking, ain't it, Major?" asked a voice at his elbow, and he turned to see one of the contractors' officials taking a seat near him.

"More than nice-looking, to my mind, Sam," he replied. "What is the news to-day?"

"Nothin' much. There's a sight of talk about the doin's of them faro an' keno sharps. The boys is gittin' kind o' riled, fur they allow the game ain't on the square wuth a cent. Some of 'em down to the tie-camp wuz a-talkin' about a vigilance committee, an' I wouldn't be surprised ef they meant business. Hev yer heard about the young feller that come in a week ago from Laramie an'

set up a new faro-bank?"

"No. What about him?"

"Wa'al, yer see he's a feller thet's got a lot of sand an' ain't afeared of nobody, an' he's allowed to hev the deal to his place on the square every time. Accordin' to my idee, gamblin's about the wust racket a feller kin work, but it takes all sorts of men to make a world, an' ef the boys is bound to hev a game, I calkilate they'd like to patronize his bank. Thet's made the old crowd mighty mad, an' they're a-talkin' about puttin' up a job of cheatin' on him an' then stringin' him up. Be sides, I kind o' think there's some cussed jealousy on another lay as comes in. Yer see the young feller—Cyrus Foster's his name—is sweet on thet gal of Jeff Johnson's. Jeff wuz to Laramie before he come here, an' Foster knowed Sally up thar. I allow he moved here to see her. Hello! Ef thar they ain't a-comin' now."

Down a path leading from the town, past the railroad buildings, and well on the prairie, Sinclair saw the girl walking with the "young feller." He was talking earnestly to her, and her eyes were cast down. She looked pretty and, in a way, graceful; and there was in her attire a noticeable attempt at neatness, and a faint reminiscence of by-gone fashions. A smile came to Sinclair's lips as he thought of a couple walking up Fifth Avenue during his leave of absence not many months before, and of a letter, many times read, lying at that moment in his breast-pocket.

"Papa's bark is worse than his bite," ran one of its sentences. "Of course he does not like the idea of my leaving him and going

away to such dreadful and remote places as Denver and Omaha, and I don't know what else; but he will not oppose me in the end, and when you come on again—"

"By thunder!" exclaimed Sam; "ef thar ain't one of them cussed sharps a watchin' 'em."

Sure enough, a rough-looking fellow, his hat pulled over his eyes, half concealed behind a pile of lumber, was casting a sinister glance toward the pair.

"The gal's well enough," continued Sam; "but I don't take a cent's wuth of stock in thet thar father of her'n. He's in with them sharps, sure pop, an' it don't suit his book to hev Foster hangin' round. It's ten to one he sent that cuss to watch 'em. Wa'al, they're a queer lot, an' I'm afeared thar's plenty of trouble ahead among 'em. Good luck to you, Major," and he pushed back his chair and walked away.

After breakfast next morning, when Sinclair was sitting at the table in his office, busy with maps and plans, the door was thrown open, and Foster, panting for breath, ran in.

"Major Sinclair," he said, speaking with difficulty, "I've no claim on you, but I ask you to protect me. The other gamblers are going to hang me. They are more than ten to one. They will track me here, and unless you harbor me, I'm a dead man."

Sinclair rose from his chair in a second and walked to the window. A party of men were approaching the building. He turned to Foster:

"I do not like your trade," said he; "but I will not see you

murdered if I can help it. You are welcome here." Foster said "Thank you," stood still a moment, and then began to pace the room, rapidly clinching his hands, his whole frame quivering, his eyes flashing fire—"for all the world," Sinclair said, in telling the story afterward, "like a fierce caged tiger."

"My God!" he muttered, with concentrated intensity, "to be *trapped*, TRAPPED like this!"

Sinclair stepped quickly to the door of his bedroom, and motioned Foster to enter. Then there came a knock at the outer door, and he opened it and stood on the threshold, erect and firm. Half a dozen "toughs" faced him.

"Major," said their spokesman, "we want that man."

"You cannot have him, boys."

"Major, we're a-goin' to take him."

"You had better not try," said Sinclair, with perfect ease and self-possession, and in a pleasant voice. "I have given him shelter, and you can only get him over my dead body. Of course you can kill me, but you won't do even that without one or two of you going down; and then you know perfectly well, boys, what will happen. You *know* that if you lay your finger on a railroad man it's all up with you. There are five hundred men in the tie-camp, not five miles away, and you don't need to be told that in less than one hour after they get word there won't be a piece of one of you big enough to bury."

The men made no reply. They looked him straight in the eyes for a moment. Had they seen a sign of flinching they might have

risked the issue, but there was none. With muttered curses, they slunk away. Sinclair shut and bolted the door, then opened the one leading to the bedroom.

"Foster," he said, "the train will pass here in half an hour. Have you money enough?"

"Plenty, Major."

"Very well; keep perfectly quiet, and I will try to get you safely off." He went to an adjoining room and called Sam, the contractor's man. He took in the situation at a glance.

"Wa'al, Foster," said he, "kind o' 'close call' for yer, warn't it? Guess yer'd better be gittin' up an' gittin' pretty lively. The train boys will take yer through, an' yer kin come back when this racket's worked out."

Sinclair glanced at his watch, then he walked to the window and looked out. On a small *mesa*, or elevated-plateau, commanding the path to the railroad, he saw a number of men with rifles.

"Just as I expected," said he. "Sam, ask one of the boys to go down to the track and, when the train arrives, tell the conductor to come here."

In a few minutes the whistle was heard, and the conductor entered the building. Receiving his instructions, he returned, and immediately on engine, tender, and platform appeared the trainmen, with *their*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.