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The Whig's New Serial Story



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PROLOGUE

THE gold fever of '49 is now a chapter—and a very thrilling one, too-in our national history. Mr. White has made that feverish time live wonderful piece of work. He go with bated breath through the scenes he pictures with so much vividness. "Gold" has special interest at this time because part of the story is laid in Panama, the route taken by the gold seek-If your heart has ever beaten a little faster at the thought of those adventurous days, you will follow the fortunes of this little party of four with real delight.

CHAPTER I.

Oh, Susannah! OMEWHERE in this story I must write a paragraph exclusively about myself. The fact that in the outcome of all these stirring events I have ended as a mere bookkeeper is perhaps a good reason why one paragraph will be enough. In my youth I had dreams a-plenty, but the event and the peculiar twist of my own temperament prevented their fulfillment. Perhaps in a more squeamish age-and yet that is not fair either to the men whose destinies I am trying to record. Suffice it, then, that of these men I have been the friend and companion, of these occasions I have been a part, and that the very lacks and reservations of my own character that have kept me to a subordinate position and a little garden have probably made me the better spectator. Which is a longer paragraph about myself than I had purposed writing.

Therefore I will pass over briefly the various reasons, romantic and practical, why I decided to join the gold rush to California in the year 1849. It was in the air, and I was then of a romantic and adventurous disposition.

columns of some Baltimore paper. Evinfinitely remote, and then, as now, ro- he seemed fairly to spring with vigor. mance increases as the square of the His body was very erect and tall and distance. There might well be gold pliant, bending easily to every change there, but more authentic were the re- of balance. If I were never to have ports of fleas, rawhides and a dried seen his face at all I should have up coast. Minstrel shows made a good placed him as one of the laughing spirdeal of fun of it all, I remember. its of the world. His head was rather Then, when we were of a broad grin, came the publication of the letter written by Governor Mason to the war department. That was a sober official document and had to be believed, but some features, with a clear, biscuit t read like a fairy tale.

"I have no hesitation in saying." wrote the governor, "that there is more gold in the country drained by the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers than would pay the costs of the late war with Mexico a hundred times over." And he then went on to report in detail big nuggets and big washings, mentioning men, places, dates, in

a circumstantial manner that carried Our broad grins faded. The minstrels' jokes changed color. As I look rather negatived the impression made back it seems to me that I can almost see with the physical eye the broad restless upheaval beneath the surface of all society. The Mexican war was just over, and the veterans-young veterans all-filled with the spirit of adventure turned eagerly toward this plainly through the steady brooding glittering new emprise. Out in the small villages, on the small farms, the er, for it was mysterious. Whether it news was talked over seriously, almost without excitement, as offering a lowing delicately the moods or reflecpossible means of lifting the burden tions of the spirit within, or whether war had laid. Families strained their it was a purely fortuitous effect of resources, mortgaged their possessions,

Then came the song that caught the popular ear, and the rush was on. | clear brain. His name, I soon discov-Most great movements are done to song, generally commonplace. It was so in this instance. "Oh, Susannah!" or rather a modification of the original porting firm. They were enterprising made to fit the occasion, first sung in | people, and already they were laying some minstrel show, ran like fire in plans to capture some of the California

From every stage, on every street corner, in every restaurant and hotel it was sung, played and whistled. At the sound of its first notes the audience always sprang to its feet and cheered like mad.

The desire to go to Eldorado was universal and almost irresistible. The | the object of his interest. ability to go was much more circumscribed. For one thing, it cost a good deal of money, and that was where I bogged down at the first pull. Then, I suppose a majority did have ties of family, business or other responsibilities impossible to shake off. But we all joined one or more of the various clubs formed for the purpose of getting at least some of their members to California, and discussed heatedly the merits of the different routes, and went into minute and fascinating details as to processes of which we knew less than nothing, and sang "Oh. Susannah!" and talked ourselves into a glorified fever of excitement, and went home with our heads in the clouds. Once in a great while some of these clubs came to something-as a body. 1 mean-for individual members were constantly working themselves up the summit of resolution to rush headlong and regardless down the other side and out of our sight. When a man had reached a certain pitch of excitement he ran awuck. He sold anything, deserted anything, broke through anything in the way of family, responsibility or financial lacks in order to go. But, as I say, occasionally one of these clubs pooled its individual resources and bought some old tub of a whaler or outfitted a wagon train and started off. But generally we got only as far as "Oh, Susannah." I remember once in coming out from one of our meetings finding myself next a solemn and earnest youth originally from my own village. He walked by my side for several squares lost in a brown study.

Then suddenly he looked up. "Frank," said he, with conviction, "i believe I'll go. I know most of this talk is wildly exaggerated, but I'm sensible enough to discount all that sort of thing and to disbelieve absurd stories. I shan't go with the slightest notion of finding the thing true, but will be satisfied if I do reasonably well. In fact, if I don't pick up more than a hatful of gold a day I shall be perfectly satisfied."

Which remark sufficiently indicates about where we all were.

We had many sorts of men in our club, but nearly all young. One in especial early attracted my attention and held it through all the changing vicissitudes of our many meetings. I say attracted me, though fascinated would be perhaps the better word, for after the first evening of his attendance used deliberately so to place myself

that I could watch him. He came always in a rather worn military cape, which on entering the The first news of the gold discovery | door he promptly threw back in such filtered to us in a roundabout way a manner as to display the red lining. through vessels to the Sandwich is. This seemed an appropriate enveloplands, and then appeared again in the ment of his flaming, buoyant personality. He walked with his chin up and erybody laughed at the rumor, but ev. his back straight and trod directly on erybody remembered it. The land was and over the ends of his toes so that small, round, well poised, with soft close set ringlets all over it like a cap, in the fashion of some marble gods I have seen. He had very regular, handbrown complexion, and a close clipped, stubby, light mustache. All these things were interesting and attractive, though no more so than are the vigor and beauty of any perfect animal. But the quality of his eyes placed him, at least to me, in a class apart. They were sober, clear eyes that looked out gray and contemplative on the world about them, so that one got the instant impression of a soul behind them that weighed and judged. Indeed, they were not laughing eyes at all and by the man's general bearing. But somewhere down in them something flickered like a strong burning candle in a brisk wind. Occasionally it was almost out; then again it blazed up clear, so that one thought to see look. It always fascinated the beholdcame and went, grew and shrank, follight and refraction no man was ever to equip and send their single strong. able to say. And some men later est members to make the common for made some very bad guesses. I myself think it was the devil of geniusa devil behind the steady control of a

ered. was Talbot Ward. At this period I was starting in a an assistant bookkeeper to a large exthe tinder of men's excited hopes. trade. The office talk I heard concernI mg the purebase or sings, the consignment of arms, the engagement of captains and of crews further inflamed my imagination. I received the vast sum of \$9 per week. As I was quite alone in the world and possessed no other resources, the saving of the \$500 agreed upon as the least sum with which it was possible to get to California was fairly out of all question.

One evening after the meeting, to my great surprise. Ward fell into step with me. We had up to that moment never exchanged a word.

"In New York long?" he demanded. "About six months," I told him. "Farm bred, of course?" he remark-

ed. "Where?" "Ashbury, in Vermont," I replied, without the slightest feeling that he was intrusive.

He stopped short in the street and

looked me up and down reflectively, but without comment. "I've been watching you at these fool meetings," said he, falling into

step again. In spite of myself I experienced a glow of gratification at having been t

"Fool meetings?" I echoed inquir-

"Suppose by a miracle all that lot could agree and could start for Callfornia tomorrow in a body-that's what they are organized for, I believe," he countered-"would you go with

"Martin is why not, and Fowler is why not, and that little Smith runt weak sisters. If you are going into a thing go into it with the strong men. wouldn't go with that crowd to a snake fight if it was twelve miles away. Where do you live?" "West Ninth street."

"That's not far. Have you a good

"I have a very small hall bedroom," I replied wonderingly. "A number of us have the whole of the top floor." Somehow, I must repeat, this unexplained intrusion of a total stranger into my private affairs did not offend.

"Then you must have a big sitting room. How many of you?"

"Can you lick all the others?" I stopped to laugh. By some shrewd guess he had hit on our chief difficulty as a community. We were all four country boys with a good deal of residnary energy and high spirits, and we were not popular with the tenants" underneath.

"You see, I'm pretty big"- I remind-"Yes, I see you are. That's why I'm with you. Do you think you can lick

I stopped short again in surprise, "What in blazes" - I began. He laughed, and the devils in his

"I asked you a plain question," he said, "and I'd like the favor of a plain answer. Do you think you can lick me as well as your rural friends?"

"I can," said I shortly. He ran his arm through mine eagerly. "Come on," he cried, "on to West Ninth!"

We found two of my roommates smoking and talking before the tiny open fire. Talbot Ward, full of the business in hand, rushed directly at the matter once the introductions were | thought."

Our arrangements were very simple. The chairs were few and pushed back easily, and we had an old set of gloves. "Which is it to be?" I asked my guest, "boxing or wrestling?"

"I said you couldn't lick me." he replied. "Boxing is a game with rules. It isn't fighting at all." "You want to bite and gouge and

scratch, then?" said I, greatly amused. "I do not. They would not be fair. A fight's a fight, but a man can be de-



with it all. We'll put on the gloves, and we'll hit and wrestle both in fact, we'll fight," He began rapidly to strip. "Would you expect to get off your

lothes in a real fight?" I asked him a little sardonically. "If I expected to fight, yes!" said he. "Why not? Didn't the Greek and Roman and Hebrew and Hun and every other good old fighter strip for the fray when he got a chance? Of

course: Take off your shirt, man!" I began also to strip for this strange contest whose rules seemed to be made up from a judicions selection of general principles by Talbot Ward. .. My opponent's body was as beautiful as his head. The smooth white skin covered long muscles that rippled

Leneath it with every slightest motion. The chest was deep, the waist and hips narrow, the shoulders well rounded. In contrast my own big promi-

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gent muscles, trained by heavy fare work of my early youth, seemed to move slowly, to knot sluggishly though powerfully. Nevertheless I judged at a glance that my strength could not but prove greater than his. In a boxing match his lithe quickness might win, provided he had the skill to direct it. But in a genuine fight within eyes danced right out to the surface the circumscribed and hampering dimensions of our little room I thought my own rather unusual power must crush him. The only unknown quantity was the spirit of gameness of us two. I had no great doubt of my own determination in that respect. I had been on too many log drives to fear personal encounter. And certainly Talbot Ward seemed to show nothing

MONTREAL, CANADA

but eager interest. "You don't show up for what you are in your clothes," said he. "This is going to be more fun than I had

and the mantelpiece out of the way. I asked the length of the rounds "Rounds!" echoed Talbot Ward, with

a flash of teeth beneath his little mustache. "Did you ever hear of rounds in a real fight?"

(Continued Next Saturday.)

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