

JOSEPH WARD

Desert Poet. Prospector. And a Manxman.
His Life and Adventures.

1879-1928.

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ROUGH EXPERIENCES

A fellow Bum, who had been roughly handled by a priest in Kansas City, played a joke on me. He told me that this priest had been very kind to him and had given him 50 cents. So I went to the house, while my pal hid and watched the results. In answer to my knock at the door, a lady appeared, and afterwards brought the priest.

I didn't like the looks of him; he had a bad face. I said, "I am telling you the truth, mister, can you help me?" He said: "No, you're not telling the truth. It's a shame to see a young man like you going around begging. I'll call an officer." After further argument, he asked the lady had she anything to give me, and she wrapped up something in a piece of old newspaper, which, on opening I found to be a piece of hard, dry bread. I nearly killed my pal for laughing at me and putting me on to the priest. Had I stayed with this fellow he'd have had me in the penitentiary.

In Kansas City, while very drunk, he said: "What do I care for a damn Cop?" and immediately bowled me over, and for this we both went to the Rock pile.

He got me into further trouble by leaving me on guard while he robbed a miner. Then we planned to rob a Santa Fe freight car of 25 pound boxes of tobacco, and to peddle it to the darkies in Neosho Valley.

At Emporia, a detective called, in an imperious voice, "Where are you going?" I said "Kansas City." "Right," he answered, "I'll see you get there safely and keep you in jail a while." He sealed us up in a car full of lead pigs shipped from Leadville to Argentina. When we arrived at Osage, Kansas, the conductor of the train exhibited us to the populace, and laughingly said what he'd do to us, and how he'd put us in the penitentiary for breaking the seal.

Later on we managed to force a way out of the car by using one of the pigs of lead as a battering ram.

This was in February, '82. My companion claimed he was an engineer, so we went to work at Amazonia Station, seven miles north of St. Joe, Mo. There we were set to work to fix up a stationary engine with such limited success that not even an expert mechanic, specially sent to help us, could make it work after we had finished with it. Of course, we were fired.

It was very cold. On the street, my friend, who worshipped Jesse James, pointed out a big man with red whiskers, and said, "That's Jesse James." We often followed this man

and worshipped him, although I always had a sneaking contempt for Jessie, and was always on the side of law and order. Actually, we were mistaken, and the man was not Jesse James. Really, James was a small man, and so was his brother Frank, of whom I enquired at a restaurant one Sunday. The hotel-man replied: "There's the man right there, pointing to a small crowd in a corner of the courthouse square..

I walked over and saw near the little brick jail, a man in black, tilted on a chair, sneering and smiling. I could not tell whether he was 25 or 50; he had a very deceiving face small and ornamented by a little mouse-coloured moustache. He had several ladies and 20 or 30 men around him listening to his stories. I compared him to Gladstone's wisdom, life, and morality. James was lost but he had nerves of iron, and I wished I had them. I was very nervous and excited and trembled in his presence. He fired my imagination and had he come towards me, friendly or hostile. I should have wilted and dropped. He said he was 22 days going across the Isthmus to California, and gained 22 pounds on pork and beans. He told his experiences of the Civil War days, and I thought that the division of opinion and Southern War sentiment, and the baffling woods of Missouri is what saved the boys so often and so long. When they went to Minnesota and this sentiment was wanting, with being on foreign soil and not their stamping ground, to which they were so familiar.

Going North in the dead of winter, I rolled into Minneapolis yards at midnight in February, 1882, and earned my keep by doing odd jobs, cutting wood, digging allews, etc., and stopped with Johnny Lepla on Washington Avenue North until May, 1882. He used to wake me up at night with him and his friends singing Dutch and German love songs, playing with the zither and guitar. They affected me so much that I would sit up and almost cry. I will never forget them.

Johnny begged me to stay and settle down in Minneapolis and take up lands in the Red River. I was entitled to 480 acres at that time and could have raised wheat, and become a very rich man. I had the same chance in Winnipeg in 1880, but didn't take the opportunity.

I got a frontier pass to the end of the railway—Northern Pacific R.R.—one thousand miles from where I started on my 1,950 mile walk to Montana, Idaho, and Washington. In the Cold Fall, I left Portland, Ore., by boat, and landed in Southern California, where I stayed. I shall probably finish on the desert on the Great Mojave. Who knows?

JOHN McCLANAHAN—KING OF SANDY, NEVADA.

"You can't prospect without money," said John to me one night in his saloon at Sandy, Nevada. "That's all there is about it." However, he gave me a bit of bacon and other things, for which I paid in the full when I struck Gold Crater, Nevada. He was a good man and often led us bums at his hotel at Sandy. I had two Burros and a wagon at that particular time, and had just lost two white colts west of Ivanpah, Mountain. They failed to follow their mother, and I never saw them again.