

How to Manage a Recalcitrant Burro

Sage and Tumbleweed

March 26, 1939

by *Inyokel

I confess and will not deny that there was malice aforethought in my flattening out the old copy of the *Death Valley Chuck-Walla* and leaving it where the Padre would see it as he picked up his breviary. "The Burro Discusses Profanity" debate that has gone on, oh these pastor as to the efficacy of a few sprinkled cuss words for the American desert. I have held out there is no other way for helpless dumb creation. The Padre has been nothing justifies the blistering invective used by old-time muleskinners. "And I've heard some pretty fair samples," he hastens to add, as if fearing that I would ask what was the matter with "You " for instance.



was written to order for my side of a many years, between myself and the well-chosen and Judiciously speeding up of life on the great for strong language, believing that humans to retain their mastery over obdurate in his insistence that

I watched him peruse the essay swiftly at first, then deliberately with the corners of his mouth creeping up. "Ha, ha, Inyokel. Good stuff! More grist for you mill, eh? Well, I think you are wasting your time. And so is your friend the burro." He referred to the animal in the article, which purports to be a conversation between a prospector and his toothful four-footed partner. The desert rat is telling the burro that he has read in *The Daily Cacti* that a man was struck by lightning near Welcome Springs while swearing at his mules. The burro refuses to credit this, since he has known cuss words in seven languages before he ever carried a pack. He heard them all applied to his mother. "Surely no Divine Providence, with an appreciation of the desert such as one must have had to make it, could fail to see the necessity of cuss words in order to continue life here as it should be continued. No good and just God would make desert and mules, and skimmers to drive 'em, and then put a crimp in the whole game by killin' the skinner for talkin' to the mules in the only language they can understand. Do you suppose a mule would know what to do when a skinner addressed him with: 'Dorothy, my dear, would you be kind enough to remove your hoof from that nearest trace chain, and having finished your survey of the valley, proceed with your onward march!' Well, hardly. Dorothy would think she had a new driver and would at once take the opportunity to kick her mate over the bank, tangle the harness, and knock hell out of the wagon with her two hind feet. You couldn't blame Dorothy. You wouldn't know what to do yourself if someone told you in Chinese there was a big gold strike in Kalamazoo. Now if the driver says: 'Gid up, Doll! Damn your old rat-tailed carcass. Untangle that hoof, you slab-sided, good-for-nothin', sage-eatin', raw-boned, ring-tailed, long-eared bunch of meanness,' then you can see the team start. Of course it starts. It knows what's wanted, and it moves on... Cogent, I calls it, but the shepherd of the desert just chuckled, thumbed through his prayer book, blessed himself, and was soon out of my ken.

I recalled the time I had brought home the tale of the poor tenderfoot stuck in the sand with his mules and wagon. Nary a step would the beasts take, and he had used up all the coaxin' he had with him. Along came old Alkali Ike, whose voice is well nigh gone, eaten out by soda dust and what it takes to wash soda dust out of your tonsils. He took in the stranger's plight, sidled up to the animals, and just whispered in their off ears. Away they tugged, and in no time the outfit was on its way out of there. 'Are you sure Ike didn't say an aspiration, or 'Remember the Maine?'" was all the Padre would answer.

I found an unexpected ally in Senator Key Pittman of Nevada, who told us a tale down at Furnace Creek about his experiences in Alaska. He had stumbled through a blizzard to discover another musher on the trail at a steep spot, a poor meek gentleman who was having no luck at all in getting his dogs to struggle out of the hole into which they had fallen. The future senator took the reins in hand and cut



loose with a volley of epithets that thawed the ice for yards around, galvanizing the malamutes into feverish activity. "That's the way to handle 'em," he confided, turning to the waiting driver. "Oh, but sit," came the answer, "You should not do that. As a minister of the Lord I could not use such language, and I do not think the Master intended that any of us should thus abuse His creatures." Pittman was taken aback, but made the best of it and soon passed on with his string of dogs into the storm. Just a year or so later he was overtaken on the trail by a swift-moving outfit, the driver's voice cutting through the night like a knife in splendidly polished descriptions of the

infamous blood that flowed in his dog's veins. Pittman gasped, for he recognized the preacher of yesteryear. "Well, you see, I have found out that this is the only language these brutes understand. These words convey a definite meaning to them, and surely the good Lord will not call it swearing when you use words which have two meanings, one for the world, the other for the dog?"

But do you think even the chairman of the foreign relations committee convinced the Padre? Rather did he come back with "Exactly. The dogs and the burros have learned from their teachers that certain words or certain garnishings of language mean definite demands, and they respond accordingly. But if the poor dumb brutes had been taught by masters who themselves did not know, or," and he cast an eye at me, "or did not care to use profanity, the animals would react just as quickly to decent language. Remember that all Daniel O'Connell did to silence the vile-mouthed Dublin fish-wife was to denominate her as a parallelepipedon, or something like that. Try that on your donkey, Inyokel!"

*Inyokel – Fr. Crowley's pen name.