

Baggage-Smashers

WRONGS THAT TRAVELERS SUFFER AT THEIR HANDS

Inscriptions on Trunks Which Indicate the Character of the Owner – The President’s Mishaps in the Twin Cities – Touching State of the Reformed Lecturer

EVERY thinking student has doubtless noticed that when he enters the office or autograph department of an American inn a live and alert male person seizes his valise or traveling-bag with much earnestness, writes Bill Nye from Minneapolis. He then conveys it to some sequestered spot and does not again return. He is the porter of the hotel or inn. He may be a humble porter just starting out or he may be a swollen and purse-proud porter with silver in his hair and also in his sock.

I speak of the porter and his humble lot in order to show the average American boy who may read these lines that humor is not the only thing in America which yields large dividends on a small capital. To be a porter does not require great genius or education or intellectual versatility, and yet, well attended to, the business is remunerative in the extreme and often yields excellent returns. It shows that any American boy who does faithfully and well the work assigned to him may become well-to-do and prosperous.

It was here in Minneapolis that Mr. Cleveland was injudicious. He and his wife were pained to read the following conversation in the paper the day after their visit to the Flour City:

“Yes, I like the town pretty well, but the people, some of ’em, are just too blamed fresh.”

“Do you think so, Grover? I thought they were nice, indeed, and still I think I like St. Paul the best. It is so old and respectable.”

“O, yes, respectability is good enough in its place, but it can be overdone. I like Washington, where respectability is not made a hobby.”

“But are you not enjoying yourself here, honey?”

“No, I am not. To tell you the truth, I am unhappy. I’m so scared for fear that I’ll say something about the place that will be used against me by the St. Paul folks that I almost wish I was dead, and everybody wants to show me the new bridge and the water-works and speak of ‘our great and phenomenal growth,’ and show me the population statistics, and the schoolhouse, and the Washburn residence, and Doc Ames, and Old Forgerson, and the saw-mill, and the boom, and then walk me up into the thirteenth story of a flour mill, and pour corn-meal down my back, and show me the wonderful growth of the city debt, and the sewerage, and the West Hotel, and the glorious ozone, and things here, that it makes me tired. And I have to look happy and shake hands, and say it knocks St. Paul silly, while I don’t think so at all, and I wish I could do something besides be President for a couple of weeks, and quit lying almost entirely, except when I went afishing.”

“But do you think the people here are cordial, dawling?”

“Yes, they’re too cordial for me altogether. Instead of talking about the wonderful hit I have made as President, and calling attention to my remarkable administration, they talk about the flour output, and the electric plant, and other crops here, and allude feelingly to ‘No. 1 hard,’ and chintz bugs, and other flora and fauna of this country which, to be honest with you, I do not and never did give a damn for.”

“Grover!”

“Well, I beg your pardon, dear, and I oughtn’t to speak that way before you, but if you knew how much better I feel now you would not speak so harshly to me. It is, indeed, hard to be ever gay and joyous before the great masses, who, as a general thing, do not know enough to pound sand, but who are still vested with the divine right of suffrage, and so must be treated gently, and loved and smiled at till it makes me ache.”

Mr. Cleveland was greatly annoyed by the publication of this conversation, and could not understand it until this fall, when a Minneapolis man told him that the pale, haughty coachman who drove the Presidential carriage was a reporter. He could handle a team with one hand and remember things with the other.

And so I say that as a President we cannot be too careful what we say; I hope that the little boys and girls who read this and who may hereafter become Presidents or wives of Presidents will bear this in mind, and always have a kind word for one and all, whether they feel that way or not.

ABOUT PORTERS.

But I started out to speak of porters and not reporters. I carry with me this year a small, sorrel bag, weighing a little over twenty ounces. It contains a slight bottle of horse medicine and a powder rag. Sometimes it also contains a costly robe de nuit, when I do not forget and leave said robe in the sleeping-car or hotel. I am not overdrawing this matter, however, when I say honestly that the shrill cry of fire at night in most any hotel in the United States now would bring to the fire escape from one to six [employees] of said hotel wearing these costly vestments with my brief by imperishable name engraved on the bosom.

This little traveling-bag, which is not larger than a man’s hand, is rudely pulled out of my grasp as I enter the inn, and it has cost me twenty dollars to get it back from the porter. Besides, I have paid \$8.35 for the new handles to replace those that have been torn off in a frantic scuffle between the porter and myself to see which would get away with it.

Yesterday I was talking with a reformed lecturer about this peculiarity of the porters. He said he used to lecture a great deal at moderate prices throughout the country, and after ten years of earnest toil he was enabled to retire with a rich experience and nine dollars in money. He lectured on phrenology and took his meals with the Chairman of the lecture committee. In Ouray, Col., the baggageman allowed his trunk to fall from a great height and so the lid was

knocked off and the bust which the professor used in his lecture was busted. He therefore had to borrow a baldheaded man to act as bust for him in the evening. After the close of the lecture the professor found that the bust had stolen the gross receipts from his coat-tail pocket while he was lecturing. The only improbable feature about this story is the implication that a bald-headed man would commit a crime.

But still he did not become soured. He pressed on and lectured to the gentle janitors of the land in piercing tones. He was always kind to every one, even when people criticised his lecture and went away before he got through. He forgave them and paid his bills just the same as he did when people liked him.

Once a newspaper man had done him a great wrong and said that "the lecture was decayed and that the professor would endear himself to every one if he would some night at his hotel, instead of blowing out the gas and turning off his brains as he usually did just turn off the gas and blow out his "brains." But the professor did not go to his office and blow holes in his viscera. He spoke kindly to him always, and once when the two met in a barber shop, and it was doubtful which was "next" as they came in from opposite ends of the room, the professor gently yielded the chair to the man who had done him a great wrong, and while the barber was shaving him eleven tons of ceiling peeled off and fell on the editor who had been so cruel and so rude, and when they gathered up the debris a day or two afterward it was almost impossible to tell which was ceiling and which was remains.

So it is always best to deal gently with the erring, especially if you think it will be fatal to them.

The reformed lecturer also spoke of a discovery he made, which I had never heard of before. He began, during the closing years of his tour, to notice mysterious marks on his trunk, made with chalk generally, and so during his leisure hours he investigated them and their cause and effect. He found that they were the symbols of the Independent Order of Porters and Baggage-Bursters. He discovered that it was a species of language by which one porter informed the next, without the expense of telegraphing, what style of man owned the trunk and the prospects for touching him, as one might say.

MYSTERIOUS SIGNS.

The Professor gave me a few of these signs from an old note-book, together with his own interpretation after years of close study. I reproduce them here because I know they will interest the reader as they did me.

This trunk, if handled gently and then carefully unstrapped in the owner's room, so as to open comfortably without bursting the wall or giving the owner vertigo when he opens it, is good for a quarter.

This man is a good, kind-hearted man generally, but will sometimes escape. Better not let him have his hand baggage till he puts up.

This trunk belongs to a woman who may possibly thank you if you handle the baggage gently and will weep if you knock the lid off. Kind words can never die. (N. B. Nyether can they procure groceries.)

This trunk belongs to a traveling man who weighs 211 pounds. If you have no respect for the burned old fire-proof safe itself please respect it for its gentle owner's sake. He cannot bear to have his trunk harshly treated and he might so far forget himself as to kill you. It is better to be alive and poor than it is to be wealthy but dead. It is better to do a kind act for a fellow-being than it is to leave a desirable widow for someone else to marry.

If you will knock the top off that trunk you will discover the clothing of a mean man. In case you cannot knock the lid entirely off burst it open a little so that the great, restless, seething traveling public can see how many hotel napkins and towels and cakes of soap he has stolen. The bald-headed man and his hair are soon parted.

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This story was accompanied by seven in-text illustrations.