

## *An Unwelcome Passenger*

A cold winter's night several years since found a stage load of us gathered about a warm fire of a tavern barroom in a New England village. Shortly after we arrived, a pedlar drove up and ordered that his horse should be stabled for the night. After we had eaten supper we repaired to the barroom and as soon as the ice was broken the conversation flowed freely. Several anecdotes had been related, and finally the pedler was asked to give us a story, as men of his profession were generally full of adventures and anecdotes. He was a short, thick set man, somewhere about forty years of age, and gave evidence of great physical strength. He gave his name as Lemuel Viney, and his home was in Dover, New Hampshire.

“Well, gentlemen,” he commenced, knocking the ashes from his pipe and putting it in his pocket, “suppose I tell you about the last thing of any consequence that happened to me? You see I am now right from the far West and on my way home for winter quarters. It was about two months ago, one pleasant evening, I pulled up at the door of a small village tavern in Hancock, Indiana. I said it was pleasant—I meant it was warm, but it was cloudy and likely to be very dark. I went in and had my horse taken care of, and after I had eaten I sat down in the barroom. It began to rain about eight o'clock and for a while it poured down good, and it was awful dark out doors.

“Now, I wanted to be in Jackson early the next morning, for I expected a load of goods there for me, which I intended to dispose of on my way home. The moon would rise about midnight, and I knew if it would not rain, I could get along very comfortable after that. So I asked the landlord if he could not see that my horse was fed about midnight, as I wished to be off before two. He expressed some surprise at this, asked me why I did not stop for breakfast. I told him I had sold my last load about all out, and that a new lot of goods was waiting for me at Jackson, and I wanted to be there before the express agent left in the morning. There was a number of people sitting around while I told this but I took little notice of them, one only arresting my attention. I had in my possession a small package of placards which I was to deliver to the Sheriff at Jackson, and they were notices for the detection of a notorious robber named Dick Hardhead. The bills gave a description of his person, and the man before me answered very well to it. He was a tall, well formed man, rather slight in frame, and had the appearance of a gentleman, save that his face bore those hard, cruel marks which an observing man cannot mistake for anything but the index of a villainous disposition.

“When I went to my chamber I asked the landlord who that man was, describing the suspicious individual. He said he did not know him. He had come there that afternoon and intended to leave the next day. The host asked why I wished to know, and I simply told him that the man's countenance was familiar, and I merely wished to know if I was ever acquainted with him. I resolved not to let the landlord into the secret, but hurry on to Jackson, and there give information to the sheriff, and perhaps he might reach the inn before the villain left; for I had no doubts with regard to his identity.

“I had an alarm watch, and having set it to give the alarm at one o'clock, I went to sleep. I was aroused at the proper time, and immediately got up and dressed myself. When I reached the yard, I found the clouds all passed away and the moon was shining brightly. The hostler was easily aroused, and by two o'clock I was on the road. The mud was deep and my horse could not travel

very fast—yet it struck me that the beast made more work than there was any need of, for the cart was nearly empty.

“However on we went, and in the course of half an hour I was clear of the village. At a short distance ahead lay a large tract of forest mostly of great pines. The road lay directly through the wood, and as near as I could remember, the distance was twelve miles. Yet the moon was in the east, and as the road ran nearly west, I should have light enough. I had entered the woods, and had gone about half a mile when my wagon wheels settled with a bump and a jerk, into a deep hole. I uttered an exclamation of astonishment, but this was not all. I heard another exclamation from another source!

“What could it be? I looked quickly around, but could see nothing. Yet I knew that the sound that I heard was very close to me. As the hind wheels came up I felt something beside the jerk of the hole. I heard something tumble from one side to the other of my wagon, I and could also feel the jar occasioned by the movement. It was simply a man in my cart! I knew this on the instant. Of course I felt puzzled. At first I imagined some poor fellow had taken the method to obtain a ride; but I soon gave this up, for I knew that any decent man would have asked me for a ride. My next idea was that somebody had got in to sleep; but this passed away as quickly as it came, for no man would have broken into my cart for that purpose. And that thought gentlemen opened my eyes. Whoever was in there had broken in.

“My next thoughts were of Mr. Dick Hardhead I saw at the tavern. He had heard me say that my load was all sold out, and of course he supposed I had some money with me. In this he was right for I had over two thousand dollars. I thought he meant to leave the cart when he supposed I had reached a safe place, and then either creep over and shoot me, or knock me down. All this passed through my mind by the time I had got a rod from the hole.

“Now I never make it a point to brag of myself, but I have seen a great deal of the world, and I am pretty cool and clear headed under difficulty. In a very few moments my resolution was formed. My horse was now knee deep in the mud and I knew I could slip off without noise. So I drew my revolver, I never travel in that country without one—I drew this, and having twined the reins about the whipstock, I carefully slipped down into the mud, and as the cart passed on I went behind it and examined the hasp.

“The door of the cart lets down, and is fastened by a hasp, which slips over a staple and is then secured by a padlock. The padlock was gone, and the hasp was secured in its place by a bit of pine—so that a slight force from within could break it. My wheel wrench hung in a leather bucket on the side of the cart, and I quickly took it out and slipped it into the staple, the iron handle just sliding down.

“Now I had him. My cart was almost new, made in a stout frame of white oak, and made on purpose for hard usage. I did not believe any ordinary man could break out. I got on to my cart as noiselessly as I got off, and then urged my horse on, still keeping my pistol handy.—I knew that at the distance of half a mile further I should come to good hard road; and so allowed my horse to pick his own way through the mud. About ten minutes after this I heard a motion in the cart, followed by a grinding noise as though some heavy force were being applied to the door. I said

nothing, but the idea struck me that the villain might judge where I sat and shoot up through the top of the cart at me, so I sat down on the footboard.

“Of course I knew now that my unexpected passenger was a villain, for he must have been awake ever since I started, and nothing in the world but absolute villainy would have caused him to remain quiet so long, and then start up in this particular place. The thumping and pushing grew louder, and pretty soon I heard a human voice.

“Let me out,” he cried, and he yelled pretty loud.

“I lifted up my head so as to make him think I was sitting in my usual place and then asked him what he was doing there.

“Let me out and I will tell you,” he replied.

“Tell me what you are in there for?” said I.

“I got in here to sleep on your rags,” he answered.

“How did you get in,” I asked.

“Let me out, or I’ll shoot you through the head,” he yelled.

“Just at that moment my horse’s feet struck the hard road, and I knew that the rest of the route to Jackson would be good going. The distance was twelve miles. I slipped back on the footboard and took the whip. I had the same horse then I’ve got now—a tall, stout, powerful bay mare and you may believe there’s some go in her. At any rate she struck a gate that even astonished me. She had received a good mess of oats, the air was cool, and she felt like going. In fifteen minutes we cleared the woods, and away we went at a keen jump. The chap inside kept yelling to be let out.

“Finally he stopped, and in a few minutes came the report of a pistol—one—two—three—four, one right after the other, and I heard the balls whiz over my head. If I had been on my seat, one of those balls if not two of them would have gone through me. I popped up my head and gave a yell and then a deep groan, and then I said—“O God save me, I’m a dead man!” Then I made a shuffling noise as though I were falling off, and finally settled down on the footboard again. I now urged the old mare by giving her an occasional poke with the butt of my whipstock and she peeled it faster than ever.

“The man called out to me twice more, pretty soon after this, and as he got no reply he made some tremendous endeavors to break the door open, and as this failed him he made several attempts upon the top. But I had no fear of his doing anything there, for the top of the cart is framed with dovetails, and each sleeper bolted to the posts with iron bolts. I had made it so I could carry heavy loads there. By and by, after all else had failed, the scamp commenced to holler whoa to the horse, and kept it up, until he became quite hoarse. All this time I kept perfectly quiet, holding the reins firmly, and kept poking the beast with the stock.

“We were not an hour in going that dozen miles—not a bit of it. I hadn’t much fear perhaps, I might tell the truth and say I had none, for I had a good pistol, and more than that, my passenger was safe, yet I was glad when I came to the old flour barrel factory that stands at the edge of Jackson village, and in ten minutes more hauled up in front of the tavern, and found a couple of men in the barn cleaning down some stage horses.

“Well, old feller,” says I, as I got down and went round the back of the wagon, “you have had a good ride, haven’t ye?”

“Who are you?” he cried, and he kind of swore a little too, as he asked the question.

“I’m the man you tried to shoot,” was my reply.

“Where am I? Let me out!” he yelled.

“Look here, we’ve come to a safe stopping place, and mind ye, my revolver is ready for ye the moment you show yourself. Now lay quiet.”

“By this time the two ostlers had come up to see what was the matter, and I explained it all to them. After this I got one of them to run and route out the sheriff and tell what I believed I’d got for him. The first streaks of daylight were just coming up, and in half an hour it would be broad daylight. In less than that time the sheriff came, and two men with him. I told him the whole in a few words, exhibited the handbills I had for him and then he made for the cart. He told the chap inside who he was, and if he made the least resistance he’d be a dead man. Then I slipped the iron wrench out, and as I let the door down the fellow made a spring. I caught him by the ankle, and he came down on his face, and in a moment more the officers had him. It was now daylight, and the moment I saw the chap I recognized him. He was marched off to the lock up, and I told the sheriff I should remain in town all day.

“After breakfast the sheriff came down to the tavern and told me that I had caught the very bird, and that if I would remain until the next morning, I should have the reward of two hundred dollars which had been offered.

[“I found my goods all safe, paid the express agent for bringing them from Indianapolis, and then went to work to stow them away in my cart. The bullet holes were found in the top of my vehicle just as I expected. They were in a line about five inches apart, and had I been where I usually sit, two of them would have hit me somewhere about the small of the back and passed upward, for they were sent with a heavy charge of powder and his pistol was a heavy one.

[“]On the next morning the sheriff called upon me and paid me two hundred dollars in gold, for he had made himself sure that he’d got the villain. I afterwards found a letter in the Post Office at Portsmouth for me, for me, from the sheriff of Hancock County, and he informed me that Dr. Dick Hardhead, is in prison for life.”

So ended the pedlar's story. In the morning I had the curiosity to look at his cart, and I found the four bullet holes just as he had told us, though they were now plugged up with phial corks.

*Greenfield [MA] Democrat*, July 28, 1856

*The Ottawa [II] Free Trader*, November 15, 1856 — with the subtitle “The Pedlar's Story”

*Lancaster [PA] Examiner and Herald*, January 21, 1857

*Lancaster [PA] Intelligencer*, March 10, 1857 — with the subtitle “The Pedlar's Story”

*Carlisle [PA] Weekly Herald*, November 9, 1859

*Folsom [CA] Telegraph*, September 29, 1866 — with the subtitle “The Peddler's Story”

*The Spirit of Democracy [Woodsfield, OH]*, November 16, 1886

This story was reprinted as

“The Unwelcome Passenger” in

*The Star of the North [Bloomsburg, PA]*, September 12, 1860

“The Peddler's Story” in

*Mansfield [PA] Advertiser*, March 13, 1878

“The Pedler's Story” in

*Daily State Journal [Madison, WI]*, January 10, 1857

*The Contra Costa Gazette [Pacheco, CA]*, November 2, 1861

*The Wellsborough [PA] Agitator*, November 20, 1856 — with the subtitle “An Unwelcome Passenger”