

Josh, of the "Territorial Enterprise"

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IN 1848 a hardy group of pioneers laboriously climbed over the high Sierras from California into the unknown Territory of Nevada. Once at the feet of those lofty peaks, they founded the town of Genoa. Some ten years later, in 1858, a now unknown printer founded a weekly newspaper and called it the *Territorial Enterprise*. Meanwhile Carson City had been settled, and, sensing a more fertile field, the printer moved the paper to that town in 1859.

In this same year a great cry welled up in thousands of throats. "Gold in Washoe!" It was heard from San Francisco to New York — from the Yukon to Cape Horn. The rush was on to Sun Mountain. The Comstock Lode was worth millions — nay — billions! Virginia City, on Sun Mountain, sprang up over night, gained population phenomenally. True to its itinerant career, the *Enterprise* moved to Virginia City in 1860. It located at the corner of A Street and Sutton Avenue.

On March 2, 1861 Joe Goodman, in partnership with Dennis McCarthy, bought the paper and took over the editorship. Goodman was young, handsome and reckless. Prior to his acquisition of the paper, Goodman had been a contributor to the *Golden Era*, a literary magazine published in San Francisco. He wrote with a pen dipped in acid. Both bullets and pi were part of a journalistic career in Nevada, and editors needed courage. Goodman had more than his share.

Along with the pioneers, bad men, lawyers, saloon keepers and prospectors, Rollin M. Daggett drifted into town and helped with the editing. He hurled vitriol

right and left and was disdainful of the havoc he wrought. Dan DeQuille took over the local news, which perhaps explains why he always carried a bowie-knife. An office boy and a Chinese cook who spent his spare time chasing a pastry-loving devil, completed the ménage.

The office itself was a disreputable place — a shanty with a lean-to extension on the rear. It was cold in winter, hot in summer, and leaked badly when it rained. It was fitted with bunks, and the staff lived there.

A telegraph line had been strung, tree to tree, from San Francisco. It was unreliable to an astounding degree. All of the stage drivers, when they had any mechanical trouble with their coaches, would cut off as much wire as was needed to repair wheel or brake. Consequently most of the news came into the *Enterprise* office via the Pony Express, which was the only reliable source of news. It brought in dispatches on new settlements, discoveries, Indian raids, and the slave question.

The *Enterprise*, under Goodman's guiding hand and fearless policy, gained in readers and in influence. It became a daily on April 24, 1861. Goodman's trick was to exaggerate everything. Rival editors came in periodically for a literary trouncing. One Goodman called a "walking whiskey bottle," and another a "Fenian imp." All of the staff had an indifference to news as news. Dispatches were colored to please the lusty, bawdy, hell-roaring miners. Often a dispatch would be pushed aside to make room for a tall story. Stories of a fictitious nature were reported as fact in the news columns, and local color and names were used. Often, this would arouse the wrath of the possessor of the misused name. One day Colonel Calhoun Thompson was enraged over the use of his name. He armed himself and stomped into the *Enterprise* office. Everyone but the office boy was out.

"Are you the editor of this sheet?" the Colonel roared. The boy reached into a drawer and leveled a pistol at the Colonel. "Sure," he replied easily, "Anything to say about it?" Thompson fled.

The *Enterprise* maintained a bulletin board and dispatches were posted as soon as received. Crowds collected in front of the office for the latest developments. The news of the disaster at Bull Run was one of the many stories on which the *Enterprise* scored a scoop. By 1862 the paper had the largest circulation on the Coast, and was the most quoted paper in the West. It was running nip and tuck with the fine *Sacramento Union* in prestige. As befitted its conquest, it moved to a new brick and iron building on C Street.

One day Joe Goodman received a contribution signed Josh. Josh was apparently a miner at Aurora (a number of miles away) and he asked no pay for his sketch. Goodman published it, and the miners roared their approval. It was ironic stuff — about George Turner, then chief justice of the territory, and a very vain man. The sketch purported to be a lecture delivered at Aurora by Turner. Its title was *Professor Personal Pronoun*. The correspondent finished by saying that he couldn't report the lecture in full as the type cases had run out of capital I's.

On July 4, 1862, another piece came from Josh. It burlesqued a Fourth of July oration, using all of the stock patriotic phrases in absurd order. "I was sired by the Great American Eagle and foaled by a Continental Dam" it began. Goodman thought it was great. He wrote Josh a letter offering him twenty-five dollars a week to work for the paper. A short time later Josh (Samuel L. Clemens) reported for work. He told Goodman and DeQuille that he had been a lieutenant in the Confederate army. However, he had received so many

contradictory orders that he had resigned. "I am perfectly willing to fight for either the United States or the Confederacy," he said he had written to his commanding officer, "but the damned uncertainty as to which side I am fighting on is killing me with anxiety!" Here was salty humor — the kind that the Comstock could appreciate! Goodman complimented himself on his choice. He proceeded to instruct Sam as to how to write his articles.

"On the *Enterprise*," Goodman said, "we never say 'it is reported' or 'it is alleged.' Always say 'it is.' You may have to back it up with a gun, but it preserves public confidence." Goodman meant it. He differed with Tom Fitch of the rival paper and fought a Nevada duel with him. In a duel of this quaint type both parties kept shooting until their guns were empty. He wounded Fitch in the leg, crippling him and making of him a fast friend. Goodman was a dead shot.

By this time Virginia City had a population of forty thousand — twice that of present day Reno. Profanity was the popular language, and the journalistic element had it developed to a fine art. Even the mule drivers stood aghast at their fluent flow. Clemens topped them all, for in addition to the phrases he picked up on the Lode, he had brought an inexhaustible, different and spectacular vocabulary with him from the Mississippi. Of roughnecks there were plenty, and of bad-men, too many. Sam Brown, Langford Peel, and many lesser lights swaggered around town at all times. Once Peel, haled into court for trial, was fined. He said he had no money, and grasping the judge's whiskers firmly in his hand, beat that worthy gentleman's head against the wall. History records that the judge considered the fine paid. But even the bad-men avoided trouble with the newspaper men. They considered the journalists "bad

medicine,” as the Piute Indians of that section would say, for Goodman, Daggett and DeQuille were fearless physically, and were all dangerous with firearms.

One day DeQuille wrote his *Solar Armor* story. It was a highly technical yarn about a hood that had a circulation of fluid chemicals which kept the wearer cool. He built it up and concluded by saying that its inventor started over thirty miles of desert on a test in a temperature of one hundred and seventeen degrees. When he failed to arrive at his destination a searching party was organized. They found him frozen to death in the desert and the rescue party had to chop the icicles away before they could bring him in. Believe it or not, the *London Times* picked up this item and spoke editorially of equipping British Tommies in tropical service with the Yankee Heat Armor when it was perfected. The Comstock enjoyed this quirk even more than the original story.

Then DeQuille wrote another, even taller than the last. It was a weird tale of a magnetic center in the valley that pulled stones together and shot them apart again. He dwelt on electrical propulsion and repulsion. This yarn created a furor in scientific Germany, and DeQuille began to receive letters requesting more information addressed to *Herr Doctor*! He disclaimed all knowledge, whereupon he was accused of professional jealousy regarding his secret discovery.

Clemens watched this, and then in order to avenge himself on a coroner against whom he had a grudge, wrote his *Petrified Man* story. He claimed that the coroner pronounced the man as dead three hundred years, and described the position in which he was found as “a reflective pose” with the right elbow resting on one knee, the fingers extended, and the thumb touching the nose! After this story his fame was assured. Many others fol-

lowed. Some seemed so plausible that they were picked up by California papers with whom the *Enterprise* exchanged. So cleverly were the facts arranged that only by a reshuffling did the joker appear. So well were the stories liked that Clemens went to Goodman and told him that he wanted to sign his articles. Mark Twain was the name he preferred — to the Mississippi pilot it meant two fathoms, safe water. Goodman consented and on February 2, 1863, Mark Twain was born.

The circulation of the *Enterprise* doubled, and doubled again. It could make or break any man on the Coast. When the question of statehood for Nevada arose, Bill Stewart, the best lawyer in the Territory, drew the state constitution. To his chagrin, he found that he was not alone in his desire to become the first Senator from Nevada. All thirty-six members of the Legislature were of a single mind. Stewart set about the superhuman task of defeating the adoption of his own constitution. He toured the entire Territory appealing to the honest miner on the grounds of a technicality he had discovered, to defeat the bill. The *Enterprise* assigned Mark Twain to cover his stumping tour. Twain dubbed Stewart "The Honest Miner" and reported Stewart's speech as always the same, and that it was driving him crazy. He pled with Stewart, in the *Enterprise* columns, to change a comma here and there, to rephrase a sentence now and then in order to preserve Twain's sanity. This by no means pleased Stewart, nor did the fact that his speech would be reported flanked by one column in which fossilized snails were blasted out of rock and indignantly bored their way back again, and by another column in which a fish caught in Steamboat Hot Springs died of exposure when removed! At long last the bill was defeated. Stewart had won. Although Stewart later re-

organized his political lines and clinched the Senatorial post, and hired Twain as his secretary in Washington, he never forgave him for the "Honest Miner" drubbing and their association in Washington was short lived.

All theatricals played the Comstock at Maguire's Opera House. Due to the scarcity of women in Virginia City, they were well attended. Critics DeQuille, Goodman and Twain were the supreme arbiters.

Mazeppa, played by Adah Isaacs Menken, came to Virginia City. The critics attended the performance. They expected to laugh at the Menken, to call her a circus performer due to the finale in which she was tied, almost nude, to the back of a stallion and carried up a runaway. But when the performance was over they silently returned to the office, to vie with one another in extravagant praise. She became the fast friend of the little group during her stay. When the Menken left, Maguire withdrew all of his advertising and printing from the office due to a prior argument with Goodman. The staff claimed that Maguire had insulted the Menken and demanded that he send her an apology. Maguire withdrew the customary press passes. A fight was what the paper wanted. The critics paid their dollars for tickets. If the show was good, not a line about it appeared in the *Enterprise*. If it happened to be bad, it was unmercifully drubbed. After a while Maguire wanted to call a truce. The *Enterprise* insisted that he send the apology to Miss Menken, which he did. The paper kept its perfect record of never having lost a fight.

One of the citizens, in order to atone for a night of disorder, contributed a sum of money to what the *Enterprise* was pleased to call the Conscience Fund. Due to other nights of revelry by other citizens, the fund grew. The question of disposal of the money arose, and the sugges-

tion of a school caught the fancy of the population. Going to school was about the only thing that most of the miners had never done. But finding a teacher was the real problem. A young graduate of Harvard, not at all strong, decided that he would like the post better than mining. Doubt was expressed as to whether he could handle the "boys."

Opening night came, and found him standing in the yard, where most of the pupils had congregated. Two of them were tossing a ball, and all were waiting for the fun to start. "Boy," said the schoolmaster to a burly miner, "ring the bell." The miner stared at him insolently. The teacher drew a revolver from his belt and quickly shot the hand ball. The miner rang the bell and thus education came to the Comstock!

Goodman went to San Francisco on a business trip, leaving the editorship to Mark Twain. Anxious to uphold the honor of his office he traded insults with a rival editor. A duel was arranged. George Turner (Professor Personal Pronoun) leaped at the chance to get back at Twain. A new law had made dueling a two year prison offense. Turner issued a warrant for Twain's arrest. The Governor, friendly to Mark Twain, gave him a twenty-four hour start before having it served. Twain fled to San Francisco, where he wrote a series of sizzling articles on civic corruption for the *Enterprise*. Goodman published them, remarking that if Twain could stand them, he could. The San Francisco chief of police filed suit against the *Enterprise* and tried to seize all copies entering the city. The latter move zoomed the paper's circulation. It was the first time that suit had been entered against the *Enterprise* and the Comstock considered it the act of a great booby. In Virginia City one fought, one didn't sue. Later, however, the action was dropped.

In 1864 the paper took up the crusade for statehood and forced the adoption of the constitution. The fact that a mountain (for all life was concentrated around Sun Mountain) had been made a state pleased the boys. They thought it the most colossal of all practical jokes. Washoe's three votes ratified the Thirteenth Amendment and Nevada definitely became a Union state.

On April 11, 1865 the *Enterprise* was the first paper in the far west to print the news of Lee's surrender, and later, of Lincoln's death.

In 1865 the mines began to fill with water and speculation in mining shares became feverish. It was out of this alarming gambling, rather than out of the mining itself, that the immense Hearst, Fair, and Mackay fortunes were made. Mining became hazardous. Sometimes it was impossible. Sutro's scheme for draining the mines by means of a tunnel to the river was still in an embryonic state. Then another great cry welled up in thousands of throats. "Gold on the Reese. Sell out your claims and come to the Reese. Better than the Comstock ever was." Fantastic stories! But the crowd went. Virginia City declined. By 1866 it was practically deserted. The *Enterprise* suspended publication, an act sincerely regretted by every newspaper on the west coast.

And so the story of the *Territorial Enterprise* ends. With its suspension America lost one of its most human and colorful newspapers, staffed with a great abundance of talent, understanding its readers thoroughly, fitting its community to perfection.

Today all that remains of the *Enterprise* is its legend, a dozen or so copies scattered in libraries in California and Nevada, and the credit for having given free rein — the only thing that could have developed his talent — to Mark Twain, America's greatest author.

Acetylene Torch

ISRAEL NEWMAN

Here fire, a few-inch jet of it,
Is a sharp edged saw
Cutting metal like birch wood:

Fire with wind in it,
Blue, cobalt and a ghost
Of violet
Sawing steel,
Cutting through girders
That can bear the strain of eighteen thousand pounds
Per square inch.

What is fire that it cuts steel
And in an instant is nothing?

I-beam and T-section,
Channel-iron and plate,
Their sawdust is the same:
Their sawdust is grains of light.