Letter Six

TAKES ME THROUGH BRET HARTE’S COUNTRY,

AND TO PORTLAND WITH “OLD MAN CALIFORNIA.”

EXPLAINS HOW TWO VAGABONDS BECAME

HOMESICK THROUGH LOOKING AT OTHER

PEOPLE’S HOUSES

“I walked in the lonesome even,
   And who so sad as I,
As I saw the young men and maidens
   Merrily passing by?”

25 December 1889   Pioneer

SAN FRANCISCO has only one drawback. 'Tis hard to leave. When like the pious Hans Breitmann I “cut that city by the sea” it was with regrets for the pleasant places left behind, for the men who were so clever and the women who were so witty, for the “dives,” the beer halls, the bucket shops, and the poker hells where humanity was going to the Devil with shouting and laughter and song and the rattle of dice-boxes. I would fain have stayed, but I feared that an evil end would come to me when my money was all spent and I descended to the street corner. No man need lack warnings to keep him in the path of sobriety and moderation in San Francisco. I saw a face in the night—the face of an officer in our army, a man who had once served in India. He had been “broke” by court-martial, but that was a little breaking to what came afterwards. This summer he is loafing about the streets of the city and living Heaven knows how. He has gone
down and he says that he will never come up again. Then he laughs and asks for the price of a drink. A voice inside me said: “Get out of this. Go north. Strike for Victoria and Vancouver. Bask for a day under the shadow of the old Flag.” So I set forth from San Francisco to Portland in Oregon, and that was a railroad run of thirty-six hours. Let no man attempt to make his own traveling arrangements out here. Catch the agent of the estimable Cook and confide yourself to his hands. The city is studded with ticket offices, all most anxious to convey you across the Continent by the only safe and picturesque line in existence. Each railway publishes a fraudulent map wherein its own system is drawn straight as a rule from point to point, while all the others do manifestly wriggle and squirm. This is not cheating: it is competition. Occasionally men establish bogus ticket offices and sell forged tickets. This also is competition. A ticket for a variegated trip is called a “kewpon” ticket and may be a yard and a half long. It does not include accommodation in a Pullman. That you must buy from the Pullman Car Company, reserving your berth exactly as you would one in a steamer. These things accomplished you begin to enter into the spirit of American travel. It is “Look after yourself, for I’m d—d if I’ll help you.” The Oakland railway terminus, whence all the main lines start, does not own anything approaching to a platform. A running yard with a dozen or more tracks is roughly asphalted, and the traveler laden with hand-bags skips merrily across the metals in search of his own particular train. The bells of half a dozen shunting engines are tolling suggestively in his ears. If he is run down, so much the worse for him. “When the bell rings, look out for the locomotive.” Long use has made the nation familiar and even contemptuous towards trains to an extent which God never intended. Women who in England would gather up their skirts and scud timorously over a level crossing in the country here talk dress and babies under the very nose of the cow-catcher, and little children dally with the moving car in a manner horrible to behold. When I had seen Oakland yard—it wasn’t a station—I understood how insurance companies blossomed like pansies in the spring. We pulled out at the wholly insignificant speed of twenty-five miles an hour through the streets of a suburb of fifty thousand, and in our progress among the carts and the children and the shop fronts slew nobody: at which I was not a little disappointed.
“You’ve no railways like this in England,” said a fellow passenger who recognized in me a lone lorn Britisher.

“We have not,” I said stiffly as the train whistled through somebody’s back yard. “We are by way of being civilised.”

“I hear you protect your tracks more than we do. I suppose you have to,” continued the American. “We don’t care about these little things. We are too busy.”

“My friend,” I said, “I am sick of this. Your countrymen have told me that they are too busy when their rubbish is shot into the main street, when their side-walks are blocked with packing cases and when their children are maimed by tram-cars. They say this as though they were proud of the fact. Believe me you have nothing to be proud of. Your business is the manufacture of dollars for yourselves. Yours may be a fine indifference, but it is a dashed poor civilization. What you call your liberty is just the desolate freedom of the wild ass. Because you are not yet crowded together in blocks you can throw over your heels and whinny and bray. Wait till your country fills up and you have to unlearn all your pleasant little theories of doing as you darn please if you are strong enough.”

The American laughed and refused to believe. He was a lawyer from San Francisco and held a fund of quaint experiences, some of which may hereafter find their way into print. What he could not understand was my deep interest in the arrangements of the Pullmans, from the stuffy green plush dog kennel set apart for smokers to the “fuggy” tapestry curtains that veiled the stuffy bunk and the elaborate window catches that rendered hasty egress impossible. When the Negro portér bedded me up for the night and I had solved the problem of undressing while lying down—a man who has tried to change his kit in a Dalhousie dooli will know what that means—I was much cheered by the thought that if anything happened in the night I should have to stay where I was and wait till the kerosine lamps set the overturned car alight and fired me to death. It is easier to get out of a full theatre than to quit a Pullman in haste. We crossed a river by a gigantic ferry-boat in the night, and ‘twas not a cheerful sensation.

By the time I had discovered that a profusion of nickel-plating, plush and damask does not compensate for closeness and dust, the train ran into the daylight on the banks of the Sacramento river. A
few windows were gingerly opened after the bunks had been reconverted into seats, but that long coffin-car was by no means ventilated, and we were a gummy, grimy crew who sat there. At six in the morning the heat was distinctly unpleasant, but seeing with the eye of the flesh that I was in Bret Harte’s own country I rejoiced. There were the pines and madrone-clad hills his miners lived and fought among; there was the heated red earth that showed whence the gold had been washed; the dry gulch, the red dusty road where Hamblin was used to stop the stage in the intervals of his elegant leisure and superior card play; there was the timber felled and sweating resin in the sunshine; and above all there was the quivering pungent heat that Bret Harte drives into your dull brain with the magic of his pen. Californian pine woods have a scent of their own, a sharp biting reek drawn out by the sun that sets the blood in motion and fills the idle mind with thoughts of going away into the woods and never coming back this side of eternity. When we stopped at a collection of packing cases dignified by the name of a town, my felicity was complete. The name of the place was something offensive,—Amberville or Jacksonburgh or Pink Toes—but it owned for its heart a cast-iron fountain worthy of a town of thirty thousand. Next to the fountain was a “hotel,” at least seventeen feet high including the chimney, and next to the hotel was the forest—the pine, the oak and the untrammeled undergrowth of the hill side. A cinnamon-bear cub—Baby Sylvester in the very fur—was tied to the stump of a tree opposite the fountain: a pack mule dozed in the dust haze, a red-shirted miner in a slouch hat supported the hotel, a blue-shirted miner swung round the corner, and the two went indoors for a drink. A girl came out of the only other house but one, and shading her eyes with a brown hand stared at the panting train. She didn’t recognise me, but I knew her—had known her for years. She was M’liss. She never married the schoolmaster after all, but stayed always young and always fair among the pines. I knew Red Shirt too. He was one of the bearded men who stood back when Tennessee claimed his partner from the hands of the Law. The Sacramento river, a few yards away, shouted joyously that all these things were true. The train went on while Baby Sylvester stood on his downy head, and M’liss swung her sun bonnet by the strings.
“What do you think?” said the lawyer. “It’s a new world to you; isn’t it?”

“No. It’s quite familiar. I was never out of England; it’s as if I saw it all.”

Quick as light came the answer: “Yes, they lived once thus at Venice when the miners were the kings.”

I loved that Lawyer on the spot. We drank to Bret Harte who, you remember, “claimed California, but California never claimed him. He’s turned English.”

Sitting back in state I waited for the flying miles to turn over the pages of the book I knew. They brought me all I desired—from the Man of no Account sitting on a stump and playing with a dog, to “that most sarcastic man, the quiet Mister Brown.”

He boarded the train from out of the woods, and there was venom and sulphur on his tongue. He had just lost a lawsuit. Only Yuba Bill failed to appear. The train had taken his employment from him. A nameless ruffian backed me into a corner and began telling me about the resources of the country, and what it would eventually become. All I remember of his lecture was that you could catch trout in the Sacramento river—the stream that we followed so faithfully.

Then rose a tough and wiry old man with grizzled hair and made inquiries about the trout. To him was added the secretary of a life-insurance company. I fancy he was traveling to rake in the dead that the train killed. But he, too, was a fisherman, and the two turned to me-ward. The frankness of a Westerner is delightful. They tell me that in the Eastern States I shall meet another type of man and a more reserved. The Californian always speaks of the man from the New England States as a different breed. It is the Punjab and Madras over again, but more so. The old man was on a holiday in search of fish. When he discovered a brother-loafer he proposed a confederation of rods. Quoth the insurance-agent, “I’m not staying any time in Portland, but I will introduce you to a man there who’ll tell you about fishing.” The two told marvellous tales as we slid through the forests and saw afar off the snowy head of a great mountain. There were vineyards, fruit orchards and wheat fields where the land opened out, and every ten miles or so twenty or thirty wooden houses and at least three churches. A large town would have a population of two thou-
sand and an infinite belief in its own capacities. Sometimes a flaring advertisement bordered the line, calling for men to settle down, take up the ground and make their home there. At a big town we could pick up the local newspaper, narrow as the cutting edge of a chisel and twice as keen—a journal filled with the prices of stock, notices of improved reaping and binding machines, movements of eminent citizens “Whose fame beyond their own abode extends for miles along the Harlem road.”

There was not much grace about these papers, but all breathed the same want—good men, steady men who would plough and till and build schools for their children and make a township of the ready hills. Once only I found a sharp change in the note and a very pathetic one. I think it was a young soul in trouble and consequently writing poetry. The editor had jammed the verses between the flamboyant advertisements of a real-estate agent—a man who sells you land and lies about it—and that of a Jew tailor who disposed of “knobby” suits at “cut-throat prices.” Here are two verses: I think they tell their own story—

“God made the pine with its root in the earth,  
Its top in the sky;  
They have burned the pine to increase the worth  
Of the wheat and the silver rye.

Go weigh the cost of the soul of the pine  
Cut off from the sky,  
And the price of the wheat that grows so fine  
And the worth of the silver rye!”

It seems very probable that circumstances are bringing a young sapling down with a crash from the blue to the decent level of grain, and the process hurts. I wish I could have met the young man that launched these heretical sentiments about the souls of trees in a country where a pine is lumber and should be cleared away. The thin-lipped, keen-eyed men who boarded the train would not read that poetry, or, if they did, would not understand. Heaven guard that poor pine in the desert and keep “its top in the sky.”

When the train took to itself an extra engine and began to breathe heavily some one said that we were ascending the Siskiyou Mountains. They call a four thousand-foot hill a mountain in these parts. We had been climbing steadily from San Francisco and at last won to
over four thousand feet above sea-level, always running through forest. Then, naturally enough, we came down, but we dropped two thousand two hundred feet in about thirteen miles. It was not so much the grinding of the brakes along the train, the sheer drop down the khud, or the sight of three curves of track apparently miles below us, or even the vision of a goods-train apparently just under our wheels, or even the tunnels that made me reflect: it was the trestles over which we crawled—trestles something over a hundred feet high and looking like a collection of match-sticks.

“I guess our timber is as much a curse as a blessing,” said the old man from Southern California. “These trestles last very well for five or six years: then they get out of repair and a train goes through ‘em, or else a forest fire burns ‘em up.”

This was said in the middle of a groaning, shivering trestle and made me happy when I thoroughly understood that the line was spiked to the sleepers and not chaired, the joints only being strengthened by fish-dash plates. An occasional plate-layer took a look at us as we went down, but that railway didn’t waste men on inspection duty. Very often there were cattle on the track against which the engine used a diabolical form of whistling. The old man had been a driver in his youth and beguiled the way with cheery anecdotes of what might be expected if we fouled a young calf.

“You see they get their legs under the cow-catcher and that’ll put an engine off the line. I remember when a hog wrecked an excursion train and killed sixty people. ‘Guess the engineer will look out.’

There is considerably too much guessing about this large nation. As one of them put it rather forcibly: “We guess a trestle will stand for ever and we guess that we can patch up a washout on the track, and we guess the road’s clear and sometimes we guess ourselves into the deepot. And sometimes we guess ourselves into Hell,”—which being translated means that the work is kutch and track isn’t ballasted. They haven’t time and it wouldn’t pay; and anyhow the survivors can take their charge out of the company at law.
The descent brought us far into Oregon and a timber and wheat country. We drove through wheat and pine in alternate slices, but pine chiefly, till we reached Portland, which is a city of fifty thousand, possessing electric light of course, equally of course devoid of pavements, and a port of entry about a hundred miles from the sea at which big steamers can load. It is a poor city that cannot say it has no equal on the Pacific coast. Portland shouts this to the pines which run down from a thousand-foot ridge clear up to the city. You may sit in a bedizened bar-room furnished with telephone and clicker and in half an hour be in the woods. The insurance man and the old fisherman bade me, if I wanted good accommodations, to follow the wake of the Jew and the Drummer—the commercial traveller. “The Sheeny always knows where to feed himself,” said the insurance man, and piloted me to a place full of men who talked of money. The Westerner is worse than the native in his paisa and khana talk. He is much worse. On the streets, in the bars, in the tramcars, in the trains and in the hotels he speaks of the dollar and nothing else but the dollar, and in the evening coming out of a theatre he stops to talk dollar with a friend. Portland produces lumber and jig-saw fittings for houses, and beer and buggies, and bricks and biscuit; and, in case you should miss the fact, there are glorified views of the town hung up in public places with the value of all the products down in dollars. All this is excellent and exactly suitable to the opening up of a new country; but when a man cocks his hat on the back of his head and tells you it is civilisation, you object. The first thing that the civilised man learns to do is to keep the dollars in the background because they are only the works of the machine that makes life go smoothly.

When I was ordered to admire by a complete stranger, and to take delight in the lumber and the planing mills and the fruit, I suggested that all the mechanism that merely enabled a man to keep alive, so aggressively put forward, was no more lovely than the cave man’s output of stone hatchets or dead deer. He called me a crank, and he couldn’t see that nickel-plated bar furniture and pictures of lewd, nude females floating from the ceiling had nothing to do with civilisation. Portland is so busy that it can’t attend to its own sewage or paving, and the four story brick blocks front cobble stones and plank side-walks and other things much worse. A man who had served on
the Municipal Committee aforetime told me some of his experiences with the people. They would run up houses and sell plots and trade like Americans, but they didn’t see any particular use for sanitation or road works. They wanted to go on and make money. I saw a foundation being dug out. The sewage of the old-time town, perhaps of twenty years ago, had thoroughly soaked into the soil, and there was a familiar and Oriental look about the compost that flew up with each shovel-load. Yet the local papers, as was just and proper, swore there was no place like Portland, Oregon, U.S.A., chronicled the performances of Oregonians, “claimed” prominent citizens elsewhere as Oregonians, and fought tooth and nail for dock, rail, and wharfare projects. And you could find men who had thrown in their lives with the city, who were bound up in it, and worked their life out for what they conceived to be its material prosperity. It is strange to find an echo of the clanishness of a public school in a large city. They would get in cable cars to surmount the slopes of the hills, they would repave the street some day; and so forth, and so forth. Pity it is to record that in this strenuous, labouring town there had been, a week before, a shooting-case. One well-known man had shot another on the street, and was now pleading self-defence because the other man had, or the murderer thought he had, a pistol about him. Not content with shooting him dead he squibbed off his revolver into him as he lay. I read the pleadings and they made me ill. So far as I could see, if the dead man’s body had been found with a pistol on it, the shooter would have gone free. Apart from the mere murder, cowardly enough in itself, there was a refinement of cowardice in the plea. Here in this civilized city the surviving brute was afraid he would be shot—fancied he saw the other man make a motion to his hip pocket, and so on. Eventually the jury disagreed. I don’t know whether they will try the man again, but no one I talked to seemed to anticipate a fatal result from the performance. And the degrading thing was that the trial was reported by men who evidently understood all about the pistol, was tried before a jury who were versed in the etiquette of the hip pocket, and was discussed on the streets by men equally initiate. Here as in San Francisco I gathered that about fifty percent of the men, the younger ones, carried a revolver not because they moved in an unsettled country—Portland prides itself on its civilisation—but to protect them
against the chance of being slain by men who wore top-hats and frock-coats and flowers in their button-holes. The old man my companion spoke rather brutally on the subject, and the mildest word he used was cowardice.

But let us return to more cheerful things. The insurance-man introduced us as friends to a real-estate man, who promptly bade us go up the Columbia River for a day while he made inquiries about fishing. There was no overwhelming formality. The old man was addressed as “California,” I answered indifferently to “England” or “Johnny Bull,” and the real-estate man was “Portland.” This was a lofty and spacious form of address and gave us the feeling of severally representing the countries whence we were christened. A big fat man who crossed our sun-illumined horizon was called “Chicago.” This may or may not be the custom of the West.

So California and I got a steamboat and upon a sumptuous blue and gold morning steered up the Willamette River, on which Portland stands, into the great Columbia—the river that brings the salmon that goes into the tin that is emptied into the dish when the extra guest arrives [in India]. California introduced me to the boat and the scenery, told me the locality of the “texas,” the difference between a “tow-head” and a sawyer and the precise nature of a “slue.” All I remember is a hazy and delightful feeling that Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn and Mississippi Pilot were quite true, and that I could almost recognise the very reaches down which Huck and the negro had drifted. We were on the border line between Oregon State and Washington territory, but that didn’t matter. The Columbia was the Mississippi as far as I was concerned. We ran along the sides of wooded islands whose banks were caving in with perpetual smashés, and we skipped from one side to another of the mile-wide stream in search of a channel, exactly like a Mississippi steamer, and when we wanted to pick up or set down a passenger we chose a soft and safe place on the shore and ran our very snub nose against it. California spoke to each new passenger as he came aboard and told me the man’s birthplace. A soft-featured, long-haired tender of kine crashed out of the underwood, waved his hat and was taken aboard forthwith. “South Carolina,” said California almost without looking at him: “When he talks you will hear a softer dialect than mine.” And it befell
as he said: whereat I marveled and California chuckled. Every island in the river carried fields of rich wheat, orchards and a white, wooden settler’s house, or else, if the pines grew very thickly a sawmill, the tremulous whine of whose saws flickered across the water like the drone of a tired bee. From remarks that he let fall I gathered that California owned timber ships and dealt in lumber, had ranches too, a partner and everything handsome about him in addition to a chequered career of some thirty-five years. But in appearance he looked almost as disreputable a loafer as I, and in his childish and innocent delight in his holiday I greatly envied him.

At Vancouver, the American town of that name, I saw things that made me faint. They were respectively a private and a sergeant of artillery loafing at the wharf. Their uniform was filthily dirty; they wore civilian waistcoats and any sort of collar; they stuffed their hands in their pockets and their tunics were unbuttoned. The sergeant wore civilian trousers. California couldn’t see that ten days’ extra kit-drill and about a week’s confinement to barracks was what these persons wanted.

“They will turn out quite clean at parade tomorrow,” said he.

“But a soldier should always be tidy,” I remonstrated. “They are two disgraces to their regiment.”

“Young feller,” quoth California, “we don’t run our regular army in that hard and fast way. We regard them only as a nucleus: our citizen soldiers are the ones we trust in.”

California may be right: but I’ll go to the stake for it that in any country under Heaven a dirty soldier—a composite, loafing, unclean soldier—is bad. Vancouver’s garrison may be of excellent quality, but that isn’t the way it impresses a stranger. The town, which by the way was half burned down the next day, looked fat and green and sleepy.

“Say, young feller, we’re going to see scenery now. You shout and sing,” said California when the bland wooded islands gave place to bolder outlines, and the steamer ran herself into a hornet’s nest of black-fanged rocks not a foot below the boiling broken water. We were trying to get up a slue, or back channel, by a short cut, and the stern-wheel never spun twice in the same direction. Then we hit a floating log with a jar that ran through our system, and then, white-bellied, open-gilled and yellow-moulded spun by a dead salmon—a lordly...
twenty-pound Chenook salmon who had perished in his pride. “You’ll see the salmon wheels ‘fore long,” said a man who lived “way back on the Washoogle,” and whose hat was spangled with trout-flies. “Those Chenook salmon never rise to the fly. The canneries take them by the wheel.” At the next bend we sighted a wheel—an infernal arrangement of wire gauze compartments worked by the current and moved out from a barge in shore to scoop up the salmon as she races up the river. California swore long and fluently at the sight, and the more fluently when he was told of the weight of a good night’s catch—some thousands of pounds. Think of the black and bloody murder of it: but you out yonder insist in buying tinned salmon out yonder, and the canneries cannot live by letting down lines.

About this time California was smitten with madness. I found him dancing on the fore-deck shouting—“Isn’t she a daisy? Isn’t she a darling!” He had found a waterfall—a blown thread of white vapour that broke from the crest of a hill—a waterfall eight hundred and fifty feet high whose voice was even louder than the voice of the river. “Bridal Veil,” jerked out the Purser. “D__n that Purser and the people who christened her: why didn’t they call her Mechlin lace falls at fifty dollars a yard while they were at it?” said California. And I agreed with him. There are many “bridal veil” falls in this country, but few, men say, livelier than those that come down to the Columbia River. The railway ran by the foot of the falling water, and it was only when I saw the insignificance of a long passenger train as it hooted at the splendour above that I understood the height I was watching. Then the scenery began—poured forth with the reckless profusion of Nature, who when she wants to be amiable only succeeds in being oppressively magnificent. The river was penned between gigantic stone walls crowned with the ruined bastions of Oriental palaces. The stretch of green water widened and was guarded by pine-clad hills three thousand feet high. A wicked devil’s thumbnail of rock shot up a hundred feet in midstream. A sand-bar of blinding white sand gave promise of flat country that the next bend denied: for, lo! we were running under a triple tier of fortifications, lava-topped, pine clothed and terrible. Behind them the white dome of Mount Hood ran fourteen thousand feet into the blue, and at their feet the river threshed among a belt of cotton-wood trees. There I sat down and looked at
California half out of the boat in his anxiety to see both sides of the river at once. He had seen a note-book, and it offended him. “Young feller, let her go—and you shut your head. It’s not you nor anybody like you can put this down. Black the novelist he could. He can describe salmon-fishing, he can.” And he glared at me as though he expected me to go and do likewise. “I can’t. I know it,” I said humbly. “Then thank God that you came along this way.”

I cannot say what I saw till we reached a little railway, on an island, which was to convey us to a second steamer, because, as the Purser explained, the river was “a little broken-up above.” We had a six-mile run, sitting in the sunshine on a dummy wagon, and we were whirled just along the edge of the river-bluff throughout. Sometimes we dived into the fragrant pine woods, ablaze with flowers; but we generally watched the river, now narrowed into a turbulent millrace. Just where the whole body of water broke in riot over a series of cascades, the United States Government had chosen to build a lock for steamers, and between the original lock works the stream was one boiling, spouting mob of water. A log shot down the race, struck on a rock, split from end to end and rolled over in white foam. I shuddered because my toes were not more than sixty feet above the log, and I feared that a stray splinter might have found me. But the train ran into the river on a sort of floating trestle, and I was upon a screw steamer ere I fully understood why. The cascades were not two hundred yards below us, and when we cast off to go upstream, the rush of the river, ere the wheel struck the water, dragged us as though we had been towed. Then the country opened out and California mourned for his lost bluffs and crags, till we struck a rock wall four hundred feet high, crowned by the gigantic figure of a man watching us. On a rocky island we saw the white tomb of an old-time settler who had made his money in San Francisco, but had chosen to be buried on an Indian burying ground. A decayed wooden “wickyup,” where the bones of the Indian dead are laid almost touched the tomb. The river ran into a canal of basaltic rock, painted in yellow, vermilion and green by Indians and, by inferior brutes, adorned with advertisements of “bile beans.” And we had reached the Dalles—the center of a great sheep and wool district, and the head of navigation.
When an American arrives at a new town it is his bounden duty to “take it in.” California swung his coat over this shoulder with the gesture of a man used to long tramps, and together, at eight in the evening, we explored the Dalles. The sun had not yet set, and it would be light for at least another hour. All the inhabitants seemed to own a little villa and at least one church apiece. The young men were out walking with the young maidens, the old folks were sitting on the front steps—not the ones that led to the religiously shuttered best drawing-room, but the side front steps—and the husbands and wives were tying back pear trees or gathering raw cherries. A scent of hay reached me, and in the stillness we could hear the cattle bells as the cows came home across the lava-sprinkled fields. California swung down the wooden pavements audibly criticizing the housewives’ hollyhocks and the more perfect ways of pear grafting, and, as the young men and maidens passed, giving quaint stories of his youth. I felt that I knew all the people aforetime, I was so interested in them and their life. A woman hung over a gate talking to another woman, and as I passed I heard her say, “skirts,” and again, “skirts,” and “I'll send you over the pattern;” and I knew they were talking dress. We stumbled upon a young couple saying good-by in the twilight, and “When shall I see you again?” quoth he: and I understood that to the doubting heart the tiny little town we paraded in twenty minutes might be as large as all London and as impassable as an armed camp. I gave them both my blessing because “When shall I see you again?” is a question that lies very near to hearts of all the world. The last garden gate shut with a crisp click that traveled far down the street, and the lights of the comfortable families began to shine in the confidingly uncurtained windows.

“Say, Johnny Bull, doesn't all this make you feel lonesome?” said California. “Have you got any folks at home? So've I—a wife and five children—and I’m only on a holiday.”

“And I’m only on a holiday,” I said, and we went back to the Spittoon-wood Hotel. Alas! For the peace and purity of the little town that I had babbled about. It supported a grocery where you buy corn-cob pipes—sweetest of all pipes. At the back of a shop and discreetly-curtained was a room where the young men who had been talking to the young maidens could play poker and drink and swear, and in the
shop were dime novels of bloodshed to corrupt the mind of the little boy, and prurient servant-girl-slush yarns to poison the mind of the girl. California only laughed grimly. He said that all these little one-house towns were much the same all over the States.

That night I dreamed I was back in India with no place to sleep in, tramping up and down the station mall and asking everybody: “When shall I see you again?”