



C H A P T E R 2 2

MY EXPERIENCES AS AN AUTHOR BEGAN EARLY IN 1867. I CAME TO New York from San Francisco in the first month of that year and presently Charles H. Webb, whom I had known in San Francisco as a reporter on *The Bulletin* and afterwards editor of *The Californian*, suggested that I publish a volume of sketches. I was charmed and excited by the suggestion and quite willing to try it if some industrious person would save me the trouble of gathering the sketches together. I didn't want to do it myself, for from the beginning there has been an empty spot in me where the industry ought to be.

Webb undertook to assemble the sketches. He performed this office, then handed the result to me and I went to his publisher's, Carleton's, establishment with it. I approached a clerk and he bent eagerly over the counter to inquire into my needs; but when he found that I had come to sell a book and not to buy one, his temperature fell sixty degrees. I asked the privilege of a word with Mr. Carleton and was coldly informed that he was in his private office. But after a while I got by the clerk and entered the holy of holies. Ah, now I remember how I managed it! Webb had made an appointment for me with Carleton. Carleton rose and said in a not very inviting manner, "Well, what can I do for you?"

I reminded him that I was there by appointment to offer him my book for publication. He began to swell and went on swelling and swelling and swelling until he had reached the size of a god of about the second or third degree. Then the fountains of his great deep were broken up and for two or three minutes I couldn't see him for the rain. It was words, only words, but they fell so thickly that they darkened the atmosphere. Finally he made an important sweep with his right hand which took in the whole room, and said:

“Books—look around you! Every place are books that are waiting for publication. Do I want any more? Excuse me, I don't. Good morning.”

Twenty-one years went by before I saw Carleton again. I was then staying with my family in Lucerne. He called on me, shook hands in a friendly way and said:

“I am really an unimportant person but I have a couple of such major distinctions to my credit that I am entitled to immortality. I refused a book of yours and for this I stand without competition as the prize fool of the nineteenth century.”

It was a most handsome thing for him to apologize and I told him so and said it was sweet to me because during the past twenty-one years I had in fancy taken his life several times every year and always in new and increasingly cruel inhuman ways, but that now I should hold him my true and valued friend and never kill him again.

I reported my adventure to Webb and he bravely said that not all the Carletons in the world should defeat that book, he would publish it himself on a ten percent **royalty**. And so he did. He brought it out in blue and gold and made a very pretty little book of it. I think he named it *The **Celebrated** Jumping Frog of Calaveras County, and Other Sketches*, price \$1.25.

In June I sailed in the *Quaker City* **excursion**. I returned in November and found a letter from the American Publishing Company of Hartford offering me five percent royalty on a book which would tell the adventures of the excursion. Instead of the royalty I was offered the choice of ten thousand dollars cash upon delivery of my story. I

consulted A. D. Richardson and he said, "Take the royalty." I followed his advice and closed the deal.

I was out of money and I went down to Washington to see if I could earn enough there to keep me in bread and butter while I wrote the book. I came across William Swinton, brother of the historian, and together we invented a scheme: we became the fathers and originators of what is a common feature in the newspaper world now, the **syndicate**. We became the old original first newspaper syndicate in the world; it was on a small scale but that is usual with untried new enterprises. We had twelve journals on our list; they were all weeklies, unknown and poor and scattered far away in the settlements. It was a proud thing for those little newspapers to have a Washington correspondent and a fortunate thing for us that they felt in that way about it. Each of the twelve took two letters a week from us, at a dollar per letter; each of us wrote one letter per week and sent off twelve copies of it to the journals, thus getting twenty-four dollars a week to live on, which was all we needed in our cheap and humble quarters.

Swinton was one of the dearest and loveliest human beings I have ever known, and we led a charmed existence together, in unlimited contentment. Swinton was a gentleman by nature and upbringing; he was highly educated; he was of a beautiful spirit; he was pure in heart and speech. He was a Scotchman and a Presbyterian; a Presbyterian of the old and real school, being honest and true to his religion and loving it and finding peace in it. He hadn't a vice, unless a large and grateful sympathy with Scotch whisky may be called by that name. I didn't regard it as a vice, because he was a Scotchman, and Scotch whisky to a Scotchman is as innocent as milk is to the rest of the human race. In Swinton's case it was a virtue but an expensive one. Twenty-four dollars a week would really have been riches to us if we hadn't had to support that bottle; because of the bottle any lateness in the arrival of any part of our income was sure to cause some inconvenience.

I remember a time when a shortage occurred; we had to have three dollars and we had to have it before the close of the day. I don't know now how we happened to want all that money at one time; I

only know we had to have it. Swinton told me to go out and find it and he said he would also go out and see what he could do. He didn't seem to have any doubt that we would succeed but I knew that that was his religion working in him; I hadn't the same confidence; I hadn't any idea where to turn to raise all that money, and I said so. I think he was ashamed of me, privately, because of my weak faith. He told me to give myself no uneasiness, no concern; and said in a simple, confident and unquestioning way, "The Lord will provide." I saw that he fully believed the Lord would provide but it seemed to me that if he had had my experience—but never mind that; before he was done with me his strong faith had had its influence and I went forth from the place almost convinced that the Lord really would provide.

I wandered around the streets for an hour, trying to think up some way to get that money, but nothing suggested itself. At last I walked into the Ebbitt Hotel, and sat down. Presently a dog came over to me. He paused, glanced up at me and said with his eyes, "Are you friendly?" I answered with my eyes that I was. He waved his tail happily and came forward and rested his head on my knee and lifted his brown eyes to my face in a loving way. He was a charming creature, as beautiful as a girl, and he was all made of silk and velvet. I stroked his smooth brown head and we were a pair of lovers right away. Pretty soon Brig. Gen. Miles, the hero of the land, came walking by in his blue and gold uniform, with everybody's admiring gaze upon him. He saw the dog and stopped, and there was a light in his eye which showed that he had a warm place in his heart for dogs like this gracious creature; then he came forward and patted the dog and said:

"He is very fine—he is a wonder; would you sell him?"

I was greatly moved; it seemed a marvelous thing to me, the way Swinton's faith had worked out.

I said, "Yes."

The General said, "What do you ask for him?"

"Three dollars."

The General was obviously surprised. He said, "Three dollars? Only three dollars? Why that dog is a most uncommon dog; he can't

possibly be worth less than fifty. If he were mine, I wouldn't take a hundred for him. I am afraid you are not aware of his value. Reconsider your price if you like. I don't wish to wrong you. "

But if he had known me he would have known that I was no more capable of wronging him than he was of wronging me. I replied:

"No, three dollars. That is his price."

"Very well, since you insist upon it," said the General, and he gave me three dollars and led the dog away and disappeared upstairs.

In about ten minutes a gentle-faced, middle-aged gentleman came along and began to look around here and there and under tables and everywhere and I said to him, "Is it a dog you are looking for?"

His face had been sad before and troubled; but it lit up gladly now and he answered, "Yes—have you seen him?"

"Yes," I said, "he was here a minute ago and I saw him follow a gentleman away. I think I could find him for you if you would like me to try."

I have seldom seen a person look so grateful. He said that he would like me to try. I said I would do it with great pleasure but that as it might take a little time I hoped he would not mind paying me something for my trouble. He said he would do it most gladly—repeating that phrase "most gladly"—and asked me how much.

I said, "Three dollars."

He looked surprised, and said, "Dear me, it is nothing! I will pay you ten, quite willingly."

But I said, " No, three is the price," and I started for the stairs without waiting for any further argument, for Swinton had said that that was the amount the Lord would provide and it seemed to me that it would be wrong to take a penny more than was promised.

I got the number of the General's room from the office clerk and when I reached the room I found the General there petting his dog and quite happy. I said, "I am sorry, but I have to take the dog again."

He seemed very much surprised and said, "Take him again? Why, he is my dog; you sold him to me and at your own price."

"Yes," I said, "it is true—but I have to have him, because the man wants him again."

“What man?”

“The man that owns him; he wasn’t my dog.”

The General looked even more surprised than before, and for a moment he couldn’t seem to find his voice; then he said, “Do you mean to tell me that you were selling another man’s dog—and knew it?”

“Yes, I knew it wasn’t my dog.”

“Then why did you sell him?”

I said, “Well, that is a curious question to ask. I sold him because you wanted him. You offered to buy the dog; you can’t deny that. I was not anxious to sell him—I had not even thought of selling him, but it seemed to me that—”

He broke me off in the middle and said, “It is the most extraordinary thing I have ever heard of—the idea of your selling a dog that didn’t belong to you—”

I broke him off there and said, “You said yourself that the dog was probably worth a hundred dollars. I only asked you three; was there anything unfair about that? You offered to pay more, you know you did. I only asked you three; you can’t deny it.”

“Oh, what in the world has that to do with it! The truth of the matter is that you didn’t own the dog—can’t you see that? You seem to think that there is nothing wrong in selling property that isn’t yours provided you sell it cheap. Now then—”

I said, “Please don’t argue any more about it. You can’t get around the fact that the price was perfectly fair, perfectly reasonable—considering that I didn’t own the dog—and so arguing about it is only a waste of words. I have to have him back again because the man wants him; don’t you see that I haven’t any choice in the matter? Put yourself in my place. Suppose you had sold a dog that didn’t belong to you; suppose you—”

“Oh,” he said, “don’t mix me up any more with your crazy reasonings! Take him along and give me a rest.”

So I paid back the three dollars and led the dog downstairs and passed him over to his owner and collected three for my trouble.

I went away then with a good conscience, because I had acted honorably; I never could have used the three that I sold the dog for,

because it was not rightly my own, but the three I got for returning him to his rightful owner was rightly and properly mine, because I had earned it. That man might never have gotten that dog back at all, if it hadn't been for me. My principles have remained to this day what they were then. I was always honest; I know I can never be otherwise. It is as I said in the beginning—I was never able to persuade myself to use money which I had acquired in questionable ways.

Now then, that is the tale. Some of it is true.