

Rolling Stones

by

O. Henry

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Front Page

O. Henry, Afrite-Chef of all delight—
Of all delectables conglomerate
That stay the starved brain and rejuvenate
The Mental Man! The æsthetic appetite—
So long enhungered that the "inards" fight
And growl gutwise—its pangs thou dost abate
And all so amiably alleviate,
Joy pats his belly as a hobo might
Who haply hath obtained a cherry pie
With no burnt crust at all, ner any seeds;
Nothin' but crisp crust, and the thickness fit.
And squashin'-juicy, an' jes' mighty nigh
Too dratted, drippin'-sweet for human needs,
But fer the sosh of milk that goes with it.

*Written in the character of "Sherrard
Plummer" by James Whitcomb Riley*

THE ROLLING STONE

is a weekly paper published in Austin, Texas every Saturday and will endeavor to fill a long-felt want that does not appear, by the way, to be altogether insatiable at present.

THE IDEA IS

to fill its pages with matter that will make a heart-rending appeal to every lover of good literature, and every person who has a taste for reading print; and a dollar and a half for a year's subscription.

OUR SPECIAL PREMIUM

For the next thirty days and from that time on indefinitely, whoever will bring two dollars in cash to *The Rolling Stone* office will be entered on the list of subscribers for one year and will have returned to him on the spot

FIFTY CENTS IN CASH

The editor's own statement of his aims

Introduction

This the twelfth and final volume of O. Henry's work gets its title from an early newspaper venture of which he was the head and front. On April 28, 1894, there appeared in Austin, Texas, volume 1, number 3, of *The Rolling Stone*, with a circulation greatly in excess of that of the only two numbers that had gone before. Apparently the business office was encouraged. The first two issues of one thousand copies each had been bought up. Of the third an edition of six thousand was published and distributed *free*, so that the business men of Austin, Texas, might know what a good medium was at hand for their advertising. The editor and proprietor and illustrator of *The Rolling Stone* was Will Porter, incidentally Paying and Receiving Teller in Major Brackenridge's bank.

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of the paper was "The Plunkville Patriot," a page each week—or at least with the regularity of the somewhat uncertain paper itself—purporting to be reprinted from a contemporary journal. The editor of the *Plunkville Patriot* was Colonel Aristotle Jordan, unrelenting enemy of his enemies. When the Colonel's application for the postmastership in Plunkville is ignored, his columns carry a bitter attack on the administration at Washington. With the public weal at heart, the *Patriot* announces that "there is a dangerous hole in the front steps of the Elite saloon." Here, too, appears the delightful literary item that Mark Twain and Charles Egbert Craddock are spending the summer together in their Adirondacks camp. "Free," runs its advertising column, "a clergyman who cured himself of fits will send one book containing 100 popular songs, one repeating rifle, two decks easywinner cards and 1 liver pad free of charge for \$8. Address Sucker & Chump, Augusta, Me." The office moves nearly every week, probably in accordance with the time-honored principle involving the comparative ease of moving and paying rent. When the Colonel publishes his own candidacy for mayor, he further declares that the *Patriot* will accept no announcements for municipal offices until after "our" (the editor's) canvass. Adams & Co., grocers, order their \$2.25 ad. discontinued and find later in the *Patriot* this estimate of their product: "No less than three children have been poisoned by eating their canned vegetables, and J. O. Adams, the senior member of the firm, was run out of Kansas City for adulterating codfish balls. It pays to advertise." Here is the editorial in which the editor first announces his campaign: "Our worthy mayor, Colonel Henry Stutty, died this morning after an illness of about five minutes, brought on by carrying a bouquet to Mrs. Eli Watts just as Eli got in from a fishing trip. Ten minutes later we had dodgers out announcing our candidacy for the office. We have lived in Plunkville going on five years and have never been elected anything yet. We understand the mayor business thoroughly and if elected some people will wish wolves had stolen them from their cradles..."

The page from the *Patriot* is presented with an array of perfectly confused type, of artistic errors in setting up, and when an occasional line gets shifted (intentionally, of course) the effect is alarming. Anybody who knows the advertising of a small country weekly can, as he reads, pick out, in the following, the advertisement from the "personal."

Miss Hattie Green of Paris, Ill., is
Steel-riveted seam or water power
automatic oiling thoroughly tested
visiting her sister Mrs. G. W. Grubes
Little Giant Engines at Adams & Co.
Also Sachet powders Mc. Cormick Reapers and
oysters.

All of this was a part of *The Rolling Stone*, which flourished, or at least wavered, in Austin during the years 1894 and 1895. Years before, Porter's strong instinct to write had been gratified in letters. He wrote, in his twenties, long imaginative letters, occasionally stuffed with execrable puns, but more than often buoyant, truly humorous, keenly incisive into the unreal, especially in fiction. I have included a number of these letters to Doctor Beall of Greensboro, N. C., and to his early friend in Texas, Mr. David Harrell.

In 1895-1896 Porter went to Houston, Texas, to work on the *Houston Post*. There he "conducted" a column which he called "Postscripts." Some of the contents of the pages that follow have been taken from these old files in the fair hope that admirers of the matured O. Henry will find in them pleasurable marks of the later genius.

Before the days of *The Rolling Stone* there are eleven years in Texas over which, with the exception of the letters mentioned, there are few "traces" of literary performance; but there are some very interesting drawings, some of which are reproduced in this volume. A story is back of them. They were the illustrations to a book. "Joe" Dixon, prospector and inveterate fortune-seeker, came to Austin from the Rockies in 1883, at the constant urging of his old pal, Mr. John Maddox, "Joe," kept writing Mr. Maddox, "your fortune's in your pen, not your pick. Come to Austin and write an account of your adventures." It was hard to woo Dixon from the gold that wasn't there, but finally Maddox wrote him he must come and try the scheme. "There's a boy here from North Carolina," wrote Maddox. "His name is Will Porter and he can make the pictures. He's all right." Dixon came. The plan was that, after Author and Artist had done their work, Patron would step in, carry the manuscript to New York, bestow it on a deserving publisher and then return to await, with the other two, the avalanche of royalties. This version of the story comes from Mr. Maddox. There were forty pictures in all and they were very true to the life of the Rockies in the seventies. Of course, the young artist had no "technique"—no anything except what was native. But wait! As the months went by Dixon worked hard, but he began to have doubts. Perhaps the book was no good. Perhaps John would only lose his money. He was a miner, not a writer, and he ought not to let John go to any expense. The result of this line of thought was the Colorado River for the manuscript and the high road for the author. The pictures, fortunately, were saved. Most of them Porter gave later to Mrs. Hagelstein of San Angelo, Texas. Mr. Maddox, by the way, finding a note from Joe that "explained all," hastened to the river and recovered a few scraps of the great book that had lodged against a sandbar. But there was no putting them together again.

So much for the title. It is a real O. Henry title. Contents of this last volume are drawn not only from letters, old newspaper files, and *The Rolling Stone*, but from magazines and unpublished manuscripts. Of the short stories, several were written at the very height of his powers and popularity and were lost, inexplicably, but lost. Of the poems, there are a few whose authorship might have been in doubt if the compiler of this collection had not secured external evidence that made them certainly the work of O. Henry. Without this very strong evidence, they might have been rejected because they were not entirely the kind of poems the readers of O. Henry would expect from him. Most of them however, were found in his own indubitable manuscript or over his own signature.

There is extant a mass of O. Henry correspondence that has not been included in this collection. During the better part of a decade in New York City he wrote constantly to editors, and in many instances intimately. This is very important material, and permission has been secured to use nearly all of it in a biographical volume that will be issued within the next two or three years. The letters in this volume have been chosen as an "exhibit," as early specimens of his writing and for their particularly characteristic turns of thought and phrase. The collection is not "complete" in any historical sense.

1912.H.P.S.

*This record of births and deaths is copied from the
Porter Family Bible, just lately discovered.*

BIRTHS

ALGERNON SIDNEY PORTER
Son of
SIDNEY AND RUTH C. PORTER
Was born
August 22, 1825

MONDAY EVENING, May 29, 1858
Still-born Son of
A. S. AND M. V. PORTER

MONDAY, August 6, 1860, 9 o'clock P.M.
SHIRLEY WORTH
Son of
A. S. AND M. V. PORTER

THURSDAY, September 11, 1862, 9 o'clock P.M.

WILLIAM SIDNEY [\[1\]](#)
Son of
A. S. AND M. V. PORTER

SUNDAY, March 26, 1865, at 8 o'clock A. M.
DAVID WEIR
Son of
A. S. AND M. V. PORTER

MARY JANE VIRGINIA SWAIM [\[2\]](#)
Daughter of
WILLIAM AND ABIAH SWAIM
Was born
February 12, 1833

DEATHS

MARY VIRGINIA PORTER
TUESDAY EVENING, September 26, 1865
At 7:30 o'clock

ATHOL ESTES PORTER
SUNDAY EVENING, July 25, 1897
At 6 o'clock

ALGERNON SIDNEY PORTER
SUNDAY MORNING, September 30, 1888
At 20 minutes of 2 o'clock

The Dream

[This was the last work of O. Henry. The *Cosmopolitan Magazine* had ordered it from him and, after his death, the unfinished manuscript was found in his room, on his dusty desk. The story as it here appears was published in the *Cosmopolitan* for September, 1910.]

Murray dreamed a dream.

Both psychology and science grope when they would explain to us the strange adventures of our immaterial selves when wandering in the realm of "Death's twin brother, Sleep." This story will not attempt to be illuminative; it is no more than a record of Murray's dream. One of the most puzzling phases of that strange waking sleep is that dreams which seem to cover months or even years may take place within a few seconds or minutes.

Murray was waiting in his cell in the ward of the condemned. An electric arc light in the ceiling of the corridor shone brightly upon his table. On a sheet of white paper an ant crawled wildly here and there as Murray blocked its way with an envelope. The electrocution was set for eight o'clock in the evening. Murray smiled at the antics of the wisest of insects.

There were seven other condemned men in the chamber. Since he had been there Murray had seen three taken out to their fate; one gone mad and fighting like a wolf caught in a trap; one, no less mad, offering up a sanctimonious lip-service to Heaven; the third, a weakling, collapsed and strapped to a board. He wondered with what credit to himself his own heart, foot, and face would meet his punishment; for this was his evening. He thought it must be nearly eight o'clock.

Opposite his own in the two rows of cells was the cage of Bonifacio, the Sicilian slayer of his betrothed and of two officers who came to arrest him. With him Murray had played checkers many a long hour, each calling his move to his unseen opponent across the corridor.

Bonifacio's great booming voice with its indestructible singing quality called out:

"Eh, Meestro Murray; how you feel—all-a right—yes?"

"All right, Bonifacio," said Murray steadily, as he allowed the ant to crawl upon the envelope and then dumped it gently on the stone floor.

"Dat's good-a, Meestro Murray. Men like us, we must-a die like-a men. My time come nex'-a week. All-a right. Remember, Meestro Murray, I beat-a you dat las' game of de

check. Maybe we play again some-a time. I don'-a know. Maybe we have to call-a de move damn-a loud to play de check where dey goin' send us."

Bonifacio's hardened philosophy, followed closely by his deafening, musical peal of laughter, warmed rather than chilled Murray's numbed heart. Yet, Bonifacio had until next week to live.

The cell-dwellers heard the familiar, loud click of the steel bolts as the door at the end of the corridor was opened. Three men came to Murray's cell and unlocked it. Two were prison guards; the other was "Len"—no; that was in the old days; now the Reverend Leonard Winston, a friend and neighbor from their barefoot days.

"I got them to let me take the prison chaplain's place," he said, as he gave Murray's hand one short, strong grip. In his left hand he held a small Bible, with his forefinger marking a page.

Murray smiled slightly and arranged two or three books and some penholders orderly on his small table. He would have spoken, but no appropriate words seemed to present themselves to his mind.

The prisoners had christened this cellhouse, eighty feet long, twenty-eight feet wide, Limbo Lane. The regular guard of Limbo Lane, an immense, rough, kindly man, drew a pint bottle of whiskey from his pocket and offered it to Murray, saying:

"It's the regular thing, you know. All has it who feel like they need a bracer. No danger of it becoming a habit with 'em, you see."

Murray drank deep into the bottle.

"That's the boy!" said the guard. "Just a little nerve tonic, and everything goes smooth as silk."

They stepped into the corridor, and each one of the doomed seven knew. Limbo Lane is a world on the outside of the world; but it had learned, when deprived of one or more of the five senses, to make another sense supply the deficiency. Each one knew that it was nearly eight, and that Murray was to go to the chair at eight. There is also in the many Limbo Lanes an aristocracy of crime. The man who kills in the open, who beats his enemy or pursuer down, flushed by the primitive emotions and the ardor of combat, holds in contempt the human rat, the spider, and the snake.

So, of the seven condemned only three called their farewells to Murray as he marched down the corridor between the two guards—Bonifacio, Marvin, who had killed a guard while trying to escape from the prison, and Bassett, the train-robber, who was driven to it because the express-messenger wouldn't raise his hands when ordered to do so. The remaining four smoldered, silent, in their cells, no doubt feeling their social ostracism in

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