

CHARLEY PARKHURST.

The story of Charley Parkhurst, the noted California stage-driver, reads more like a romance than it does like a verified tale of real life. San Francisco papers give us very interesting sketches of Charley. He first appeared on the box seat of the stage-coach running from Oakland to San Jose; after that, driving from Stockton to Mariposa, and again from San Juan to Santa Cruz. The stout, compact figure of about five feet six inches, broader across the hips than across the shoulders, the sunbrowned face, beardless save a few straggling, downy hairs, the bluish-gray eyes and sharp, high-pitched voice, the set but not unpleasant features, moved now and then with a rare smile, the deliberate movement which seems to be a fashion of the fraternity, were as familiar to the passengers on these routes as the chuck-holes in summer. How he drifted to California in the first days of the gold-mining fever is not exactly known, for in that time of hurry, bustle and struggle the ordinary unassuming man was very likely to be overlooked. His true name, even, in the light of present circumstances, has become a matter of conjecture. The generally-accepted story of the late Charles Parkhurst is, however, as follows:

He was born, it is stated, in New Hampshire, and worked on a farm with his uncle until a quarrel arose between the two, when Charley moved to Providence, R. I. There he remained for some time as coachman in the employ of a Mr. Childs. From Providence he went to Georgia, and became a stage-driver, continuing in that State and occupation for two years. He used further to state that one Jim Birch, noticing his capabilities as a driver, brought him to California and placed him upon an opposition line to drive from Oakland to San Jose.

Whatever question there may be about this story, there is none as to his efficiency on the driver's perch, nor as to the unfailing nerve that lay beneath his ordinary exterior. An incident in his early career as a stage-driver will illustrate this. Once in winter, when the rain was coming down in sheets, as it had been for three days past, and the coach was laboring along through mud almost to the hubs, Parkhurst was hailed by a stray wayfarer and told that the bridge across the Tuolumne river was in a shaky condition, and that it would not be wise to risk driving over it. Parkhurst answered never a word, but, gathering up the lines with one hand, he cut the swings and wheelers across the haunches with the other, and pushed on.

Soon the swollen stream came in sight. It was swashing and roaring like a mill-race. The bridge was next seen, and Parkhurst, clearing the rain from his eyes, perceived that, in a very short time, there would no longer be any bridge, for it was already shaking on its foundation. The solitary passenger begged of Parkhurst not to venture on the creaking structure, but Charley, setting his teeth together and gathering the reins with a firm grip, sent the long whiplash curling about the leaders' ears and eyes with so vicious a swing that, giving a wild leap, they plunged forward on to the bridge. The planks trembled under the horses' hoofs and rocked beneath the wheels, but, with a final effort, a cheering cry from Parkhurst and a flying lash, the opposite shore was gained in safety; gained only just in time, though, for, looking back at the turn of the road, the further end of the bridge was seen to sway over the stream for a moment and then go tumbling into the waters.

There were other dangers on this Stockton and Mariposa road than those of flood, for highwaymen abounded, and one could never tell where progress might be stopped by a leveled shot-gun, a masked man grabbing the leader's headstall, and the hoarse command to throw out the treasure-box. Parkhurst had not long been running when such an interruption occurred. The choice was offered him, in the gloaming of a certain evening, between receiving the contents of two double-barreled shot-guns and delivering up the contents of a strong chest. Parkhurst looked at the figures disguised with hideous-looking caps, and masks made out of legs of drawers, pulled down over the face, with two holes cut in them for the eyes, and was disposed to parley. The ominous fingering of two triggers, and the knowledge that his little gun was inaccessible, very nearly decided him, while a pistol-barrel inserted in the near leader's off ear afforded him convincing proof that, for the nonce, discretion would be the better part of valor. The box was dropped, but with it Parkhurst gave the warning that he would not let matters stop there, and that some time or other the same gentleman, or any of the kind, should hear from him in a less pleasant way.

After that Parkhurst was not only forever on his guard, but was always on the lookout for a chance to get even with the road-agents. The chance was not long in coming. There was at that time a noted desperado known as Sugar Foot. Going here and there, terrorizing the passengers on a dozen routes, Sugar Foot at last decided to change his base of operations to the Calaveras road. It is probable that he had heard of Parkhurst's threat, for he associated with himself for the enterprise quite a posse of highwaymen.

The moment of attack was chosen, the

choice being influenced by the report of a heavy booty to be obtained, and while Parkhurst was one day driving back home from Mariposa to Stockton, Sugar Foot and his band leaped into the road. There was the usual demand, the usual tactics of wicked muzzles pointing at the driver, and a rough hand at the leaders' heads. But there was a change from the usual programme when Parkhurst, drawing a pistol, let fly right and left, and, with a pull on the reins and a call to the horses, sent them flying through the discomfited robbers. Charley had aimed at the man who appeared to head the gang, and had the pleasure of seeing him clasp his hand to his breast and tumble backward. The shot was fatal to Sugar Foot's predatory excursions, for, while his companions fled, he crawled into a miner's cabin and gave up his sinful ghost.

There are other stories told of Parkhurst to show the daring conduct of the man in the face of difficulties and dangers. It is told that once, while driving a fractious four-in-hand from Oakland to San Jose, the team ran away so suddenly as to throw Parkhurst from the box. Still retaining his grasp on the lines, he was dragged along until he succeeded in turning the runaways into the chaparral, where they caught among the bushes and stopped. To show their admiration of the driver's pluck, the passengers made up and presented him with a purse of \$20.

Again, when drivers were scarce he did double duty by driving both ways over the road, keeping on the box night and day, and earning double pay for months. During his career as stage-driver he was kicked by a frisky horse in the left eye so violently as to destroy the sight. It was from the loss of this organ that he received the nickname "One-Eyed Charley," by which he was commonly called.

Leaving the Calaveras road, he took the position of boss driver on the Oakland and San Jose stage road, where, as on the Calaveras line, he made himself a favorite with all who traveled with him by his pleasant, quiet behavior and cool resolution. He added to his reputation on the San Juan and Santa Cruz road, where he was known as one of the crack drivers and best whips in California.

Altogether he sat on the stage-coach seat for fifteen years, and only abandoned his petty throne when the steam-horse invaded his province and he saw that Ichabod was written over the balmy days of staging. Even while driving, Parkhurst had occasionally in winter time varied his employment by following the trade of lumberman. In the woods, as behind his six-in-hand, he gained the name of being expert and thoroughly reliable. The heaviest work was never shunned. He wielded the ax with such vigor and skill that he was reckoned an A No. 1 woodman. Farming, too, was a calling which he seemed at home in, so when he stepped down from the stage-coach for the last time it was not to be shiftless and idle for want of any other employment.

About the year 1858 he dropped the whip and reins, and opened a station and saloon on the road between Watsonville and Santa Cruz, at a point about half way between the Aptos Laguna and the first heavy sand hill as you go toward Watsonville. At this place he furnished the hay and grain for the stage horses on contract, got also fair wages per month for taking care of the teams, etc., and kept his bar and stopping-place beside. He smoked, chewed tobacco, drank moderately, played a social game of cards or dice for the drinks, and was "one of the boys." Parkhurst, however, was never addicted to loose life.

Though usually cheery and agreeable with those into whose society he was thrown, he was always inclined to be reticent about his affairs. That is, he was social, but never communicative; a pleasant but never a joyful companion. He had no particular friends either on the roads or in the fields, and was not disposed to be what is known as chummy. Especially was he not a love-maker; and petticoats, even when surmounted by a trim bodice and a pretty face, were without special attractions. There was, at one time, an owner of both petticoat and face who seemed to have made a little deeper impression than the rest of her sex. Near the ranch on which Parkhurst first settled lived a widow with an only daughter. Somehow or other they did not prosper, and misfortune at last overtook them in the shape of a Sheriff's sale. Parkhurst bought the place and gave it back to the widow; and, though it was said at the time that the good deed was promoted by the daughter's good looks, the report is nullified by the fact that soon after he left the neighborhood and settled near Watsonville.

Parkhurst's celibacy was not enforced by poverty, as the neighbors very well knew, for, being of a saving disposition, he had amassed a comfortable fortune of some thousands of dollars; that is, a comfortable fortune inasmuch as it was sufficient to insure him a competency. In course of time he rented out his station, and went into the cattle-raising business. After raising quite a herd of cattle, he sold out of that business, and, being a sufferer from sciatic rheumatism, he sought a less laborious avocation, and went to raising chickens in the hills back of Aptos. In this last occupation he continued for some years, but finally yielded to his rheumatic troubles, sold his ranch to a Portuguese, deposited the proceeds, or a part of them, in the Bank of Watsonville, and retired from active life to live on the interest of the money. Near the Seven-Mile House, out of Watsonville, is a little cabin, and there, during the latter years of his life, Parkhurst has resided. He was well known to the townspeople and those on the surrounding farms as a quiet little elderly gentleman of about 60 years of age, badly afflicted with rheumatism; not given to talking much, but apparently contented to live unnoticed and alone. This rheumatism was the natural result of the extreme exposure and hard work to which he had been subjected all his lifetime.

The winters' snows in the woods, the years passed with his face turned unflinchingly to the wind and rain, and his general carelessness as to results, played havoc with what must originally have been a constitution of iron. His rheumatism grew from bad to worse, until it resulted in the withering of the members, and he grew almost helpless. Then, as if his ills were not crushing enough, he became afflicted with a cancerous tongue and mouth. This was his death-wound, so to speak; and, feeling

that this world was slipping from his grasp, he very quietly hired a man to attend to his needs; and, telling a friend that he was going to die, directed him what to do with his belongings, and waited patiently for a relief to his sufferings, which had now become most acute. That relief came on Sunday, Dec. 29, when Charles Durey Parkhurst, reputed native of New Hampshire, voter of the State of California, aged 67, departed this life.

With his last breath Charles Parkhurst, the daring driver, the fearless fighter of highwaymen, the strong lumberman, passed out of existence, and in his place was found something gentler and more tender. With the death of one who was always more or less a mystery, was born one that shadows the other into utter insignificance. The dead man was being prepared for his last resting-place, when the astounding discovery was made by those fulfilling the sad office that the clay beneath their hands was that of a woman! With astonishment at a deception so marvelously carried out comes the sad thought of all she must have suffered. It is useless to waste time in conjectures as to what led the dead to take up the cross of a man's laboring life, but whether from necessity or phantasy, the certainty remains that in the latter years there must have been many dark hours when poor Charley Parkhurst longed for a little of the sympathy which is accorded to every woman.
