

*Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*  
August 25, 1863

*Letter from Mark Twain*

*Steamboat Springs Hotel*

*August 23, 1863.*

*The Springs*

EDS. ENTERPRISE: I have overstepped my furlough a full week—but then this is a pleasant place to pass one's time. These springs are ten miles from Virginia, six or seven from Washoe City and twenty from Carson. They are natural—the devil boils the water, and the white steam puffs up out of crevices in the earth, along the summits of a series of low mounds extending in an irregular semi-circle for more than a mile. The water is impregnated with a dozen different minerals, each one of which smells viler than its fellow, and the sides of the springs are embellished with very pretty parti-colored incrustations deposited by the water. From one spring the boiling water is ejected a foot or more by the infernal force at work below, and in the vicinity of all of them one can hear a constant rumbling and surging, somewhat resembling the noises peculiar to a steamboat in motion—hence the name.

THE HOTEL

The Steamboat Springs Hotel is very pleasantly situated on a grassy flat, a stone's throw from the hospital and the bath houses. It is capable of accommodating a great many guests. The rooms are large, "hard-finished" and handsomely furnished; there is an abundant supply of pure water, which can be carried to every part of the house, in case of fire, by means of hose; the table is furnished with fresh vegetables and meats from the numerous fine ranches in the valley, and lastly, Mr. Stowe is a pleasant and accommodating landlord, and is ably seconded by Messrs. Haines, Ellsworth and Bingham.

These gentlemen will never allow you to get ill-humored for want of polite attention—as I gratefully remember, now, when I recall the stormy hours of Friday, when that accursed "Wake-up Jake" was in me. But I haven't got to that, yet. God bless us! it is a world of trouble, and we are born to sorrow and tribulation—yet, am I chiefest among sinners, that I should be prematurely damned with "Wake-up Jake," while others not of the elect go free? I am trying to go on with my letter, but this thing bothers me; verily, from having "Wake-up Jake" on the stomach for three days, I have finally got it on the brain. I am grateful for the change. But I digress.

THE HOSPITAL

Dr. Ellis, the proprietor of the Springs, has erected a large, tastefully designed, and comfortable and well ventilated hospital, close to the bath-houses, and it is constantly filled with patients afflicted with all manner of diseases. It would be a very profitable institution, but a great many who come to it half dead, and leave it again restored to robust health, forget to pay for the benefits they have received. Others, when they arrive, confess at once that they are penniless, yet few men could look upon the sunken cheeks of these, and upon their attenuated forms and their pleading, faded eyes, and refuse them the shelter and assistance we all may need some day. Without expectation of reward, Dr. Ellis gives back life, hope and health to many a despairing, poverty stricken devil; and when I think of this, it seems so strange that he could have had the meanness to give me that "Wake up-Jake."

However, I am wandering away from the subject again. All diseases (except confirmed consumption) are treated successfully here. A multitude of invalids have attended these baths during the past three years, yet only an insignificant number of deaths have occurred among them.

I want to impress one thing upon you: it is a mistaken notion that these Springs were created solely for the salvation of persons suffering venereal diseases. True, the fame of the baths rests chiefly upon the miracles performed upon such patients, and upon others afflicted with rheumatism, erysipelas, etc., but then all ordinary ailments can be quickly and pleasantly cured here without a resort to deadly physic.

More than two-thirds of the people who come here are afflicted with venereal diseases—fellows who know that if "Steamboat" fails with them they may as well go to trading feet with the undertaker for a box—yet all here agree that these baths are none the less potent where other diseases are concerned. I know lots of poor, feeble wretches in Virginia who could get a new lease of life by soaking their shadows in Steamboat Springs for a week or two. However, I must pass on to

## THE BATHS

My friend Jim Miller has charge of these. Within a few days the new bath-house will be finished, and then twelve persons may bathe at once, or if they be sociable and choose to go on the double-bed principle, four times as many can enjoy the luxury at the same time. Persons afflicted with loathsome diseases use bath-rooms which are never entered by the other patients.

You get up here about six o'clock in the morning and walk over to the bath-house; you undress in an anteroom and take a cold shower-bath—or let it alone, if you choose; then you step into a sort of little dark closet floored with a wooden grating, up through which come puffs and volumes of the hottest steam you ever performed to (because the awkwardest of us feel a hankering to waltz a little under such circumstances, you know), and then if you are alone, you resolve to have company thenceforward, since to swap comments upon your sensations with a friend, must render the dire heatless binding upon the human constitution.

I had company always, and it was the pleasantest thing in the world to see a thin-skinned invalid cavorting around in the vapory obscurity, marveling at the rivers of sweat that coursed down his body, cursing the villainous smell of the steam and its bitter, salty taste—groping around meanwhile, for a cold corner, and backing finally, into the hottest one, and darting out again in a second, only remarking "Outch!"—and repeating it when he sits down, and springs up the same moment off the hot bench.

This was fun of the most comfortable character; but nothing could be more agreeable than to put your eye to the little square hole in the door, and see your boiled and smoking

comrade writhing under the cold shower-bath, to see him shrink till his shoulders are level with the top of his head, and then shut his eyes and gasp and catch his breath, while the cruel rain pattered down on his back and sent a ghastly shiver through every fibre of his body. It will always be a comfort to me to recall these little incidents.

After the shower-bath, you return to the anteroom and scrub yourself all over with coarse towels until your hide glows like a parlor carpet—after which, you feel as elastic and vigorous as an acrobat. Then if you are sensible, you take no exercise, but just eat your breakfast and go to bed—you will find that an hour's nap will not hurt you any.

### THE WAKE-UP-JAKE

A few days ago I fell a victim to my natural curiosity and my solicitude for the public weal. Everybody had something to say about "wake-up-Jake." If a man was low-spirited; if his appetite failed him; if he did not sleep well at night; if he were costive; if he were bilious; or in love; or in any other kind of trouble; or if he doubted the fidelity of his friends or the efficacy of his religion, there was always some one at his elbow to whisper, "Take a 'wake-up,' my boy."

I sought to fathom the mystery, but all I could make out of it was that the "Wake-up Jake" was a medicine as powerful as "the servants of the lamp," the secret of whose decoction was hidden away in Dr. Ellis' breast. I was not aware that I had any use for the wonderful "wake-up," but then I felt it to be my duty to try it, in order that a suffering public might profit by my experience—and I would cheerfully see that public suffer perdition before I would try it again.

I called upon Dr. Ellis with the air of a man who would create the impression that he is not so much of an ass as he looks, and demanded a "Wake up-Jake" as unostentatiously as if that species of refreshment were not at all new to me. The Doctor hesitated a moment, and then fixed up as repulsive a mixture as ever was stirred together in a tablespoon. I swallowed the nauseous mess, and that one meal sufficed me for the space of forty-eight hours. And during all that time, I could not have enjoyed a viler taste in my mouth if I had swallowed a slaughter-house.

I lay down with all my clothes on, and with an utter indifference to my fate here or hereafter, and slept like a statue from six o'clock until noon. I got up, then, the sickest man that ever yearned to vomit and couldn't. All the dead and decaying matter in nature seemed buried in my stomach, and I "heaved, and retched, and heaved again," but I could not compass a resurrection—my dead would not come forth. Finally, after rumbling, and growling, and producing agony and chaos within me for many hours, the dreadful dose began its work, and for the space of twelve hours it vomited me, and purged me, and likewise caused me to bleed at the nose.

I came out of that siege as weak as an infant, and went to the bath with Palmer, of Wells, Fargo & Co., and it was well I had company, for it was about all he could do to keep me from boiling the remnant of my life out in the hot steam. I had reached that stage wherein a man experiences a solemn indifference as to whether school keeps or not.

Since then, I have gradually regained my strength and my appetite, and am now animated by a higher degree of vigor than I have felt for many a day. 'Tis well. This result seduces many a man into taking a second, and even a third "wake-up-Jake," but I think I can worry along without any more of them. I am about as thoroughly waked up now as I care to be. My stomach never had such a scouring out since I was born. I feel like a jug. If I could get young Wilson or the Unreliable to take a "wake-up Jake," I would do it, of course, but I shall never swallow another myself—I would sooner have a locomotive travel through me. And besides, I never intend to experiment in physic any more, just out of idle curiosity.

A "wake-up-Jake" will furbish a man's machinery up and give him a fresh start in the world—but I feel I shall never need anything of that sort any more. It would put robust health, and life and vim into young Wilson and the Unreliable—but then they always look with suspicion upon any suggestion that I make.

GOOD-BYE.

Well, I am going home to Virginia to-day, though I dislike to part from the jolly boys (not to mention iced milk for breakfast, with eggs laid to order, and spiced oysters after midnight with the Reverend Jack Holmes and Bingham) at the Steamboat Springs Hotel. In conclusion, let me recommend to such of my fellow citizens as are in feeble health, or are wearied out with the cares of business, to come down and try the hotel, and the steam baths, and the facetious "wake up-Jake." These will give them rest, and moving recreation—as it were.