

Virginia City Territorial Enterprise
December 1863

Letter From Mark Twain

Carson City, December 12, 1863

The Logan Hotel

Such is my destination. Thither I go to recuperate. I take with me a broken spirit, blighted hopes and a busted constitution. Also some gin. I shall return again, after many days, restored to vigorous health; restored to original purity; free from sin, and prepared to accept any lucrative office the people can be induced to force upon me. If elected, I shall donate my salary to charitable institutions. I will finish building this chronic brick church here, and lease a high-priced parson to run it. Also, an exorbitant choir. Everything connected with the church shall be conducted in the bulliest manner.

The Logan Hotel is situated on the banks of Lake Bigler—or Lake Tahoe, which signifieth "grasshopper" in the Digger tongue. I am not going with any of the numerous pleasure parties which go daily to the lake and infest the Logan Hotel. I shall travel like Baxter's hog—in a gang by myself. I am weary of the gay world, and I pine for an hour of solitude.

The hotel is new, handsomely furnished, and commodious; it stands within fifty feet of the water's edge, and commands a view of all the grand scenery thereabout; its table is furnished with the best the market affords, and behold they eat trout there every day; fifteen miles over the new King's Canyon road is all the journey it is necessary to take—after which the worn pilgrim may rest in peace in the bosom of Logan & Stewart. That is as good a thing as I want, as long as I am not married.

NO MORE MINES

A year from now, there will not be a mine left in this Territory. This is an appalling statement, but it is a true one. I guessed it from remarks made by that disreputable old cottonhead, Bill Stewart, who as good as promised me ten feet in the "Justis," and then backed down again when the stock went up to \$80 a foot. That was a villainous way to treat me, who have gone on juries for him, and held my grip through all the monstrous fabrications he chose to present in his eloquent sophistry, and then brought in a verdict for him, when it seemed morally certain that Providence would interfere and stop the nefarious business. I said, the last time, that I would never serve on one of Bill Stewart's juries again, until they put a lightning rod on the Court House. I said it, and my word is good. I am not going to take any more chances like that.

But what I commenced to tell about was, that last night, after the Convention adjourned, and the political meeting was called together, Bill Stewart went to work with his characteristic indecent haste (just a parallel case with that Justis affair), to construe the Constitution!—construe and determine the species of the new-laid egg from which is to be hatched our future power and greatness, while the tender thing was warm yet!

Bill Stewart is always construing something—eternally distorting facts and principles. He would climb out of his coffin and construe the burial service. He is a long-legged, bull-headed, whopper-jawed, constructionary monomaniac. Give him a chance to construe the sacred law, and there wouldn't be a damned soul in perdition in a month. I have my own opinion of Bill Stewart, and if it would not appear as if I were a little put out about that Justis (that was an almighty mean thing), I would as soon express it as not.

He construed the Constitution, last night, as I remarked before. He gave the public to understand that the clause providing for the taxation of the mines meant nothing in particular; that he wanted the privilege of construing that section to suit himself; that a mere hole in the ground was not a mine, and it wasn't property (he slung that in because he has a costly well on his premises in Virginia); and that it would be a difficult matter to determine in our courts what does really constitute a mine.

Do you see his drift? Well, I do. He will prove to the satisfaction of the courts that there are only two definite kinds of mine; that one of these is an excavation from which metallic ores or other mineral substances are "DUG" (which is the dictionary phrase). Then of course, the miners will know enough to stop "digging" and go to blasting. Bill Stewart will then show, easily enough, that these fellows' claims are not "mines" according to the dictionary, and consequently they cannot be taxed. He will show that the only other species of "mine" is a "pronominal adjective," and proceed to prove that there is nothing in the Constitution that will permit the State to tax English grammar. He will demonstrate that a mere hole in the ground is not a mine, and is not liable to taxation.

The end will be that a year from now we shall all own in these holes in the ground, but no man will acknowledge that he owns in a "mine"; and about that time custom, and policy, and construction, combined, will have taught us to speak of the staunch old bulwark of the State as "The Great Gould & Curry Hole-in-the Ground." Bill Stewart will put them up to it. In one short year, sir, from this date, I feel within me that Bill Stewart will have succeeded in construing the last vestige of a mine out of this country.

STATE PRINTER

This subject worried the Convention some. In the first place, the Standing Committee reported an article providing for the election of a State Printer, whose compensation was to be fixed by law, etc. The members, without even showing the Committee the courtesy of discussing the matter, snubbed them very pointedly, by pitching the bill overboard without offering the semblance of an apology for their conduct. They substituted an article providing for printing State work by contract. That was debated to death, and duly buried with its still-born predecessor. Then they tried a Superintendent of Public Printing. That plan appeared to suit them. They adopted it, and looked upon the work of their hands and pronounced it good.

There the matter rested until last night, when Governor Johnson got up and asked unanimous consent to substitute the original State Printer article for the Superintendent. He pointed out to the Convention that the office of Superintendent would be turned into a mere sinecure, and its incumbent would accomplish no good to the State and behold, without a word of objection, the change was made! Verily, it is vastly better to yield to wisdom at last, than not at all.

SCHOOL FUND

Speaking of State Printer, reminds me that we made a mistake in the report published this morning. We said the school moneys were to be invested only in United States bonds—whereas, the truth is, it was decided that they might be invested in either United States or State bonds.

HANK MONK

A superb gold watch, worth five or six hundred dollars, was presented to Hank Monk, here, night before last. The donors were John S. Henning, Joe Clark, H. H. Raymond, Alex. O'Neil, William Thompson, Jr., John O. Earl, W. M. Lent and three others. The ceremonies were conducted at Frank Ludlow's daguerrean rooms. Judge Turner made the presentation speech, and Judge Hardy replied on behalf of the defendant. Champagne flowed freely. The watch is gorgeously embellished with coaches and horses, and with charms and seals in keeping with the same, and bears for a motto Hank's famous remark to Horace Greeley: "KEEP YOUR SEAT, HORACE—I'LL GET YOU THERE ON TIME!"

"THE OLD PAH-UTAH"

Lovejoy has issued the first number of his paper at Washoe City, and the above is its name. It is as pretty as a sweetheart, and as readable as a love-letter—and in my experience, these similes express a good deal. But why should Lovejoy spell it Pah-Utah? That isn't right—it should be Pi-Uty, or Pi-Ute. I speak by authority. Because I have carefully noted the little speeches of self-gratulation of our noble red brother, and he always delivers himself in this wise: "Pi-Uty boy heepy work—Washoe heep lazy." But if you question his nationality, he remarks, with oppressive dignity: "Me no dam Washoe—me Pi-Ute!" Wherefore, my researches have satisfied me that one of these, or both, is right. Lovejoy ought to know this, even better than me; he came here before May, 1860, and is, consequently, a blooded Pi-Ute, while I am only an ignorant half-breed.

CARSON CITY

Call your Constitutioners home. They do nothing but sing the praises of Carson City, and Carson society, and Carson climate. Hite, and Brosnan, and Youngs, and Sterns, and half the balance of them, are more than half inclined to stay here. It is absurd. Pipe to quarters!

FINAL REPORT

The Third House of the Constitutional Convention met in solemn grandeur, at 11 o'clock last night. To-morrow or next day I shall compile a verbatim report of its proceedings for the forthcoming volume of official reports of the Convention, and if you think you can afford to pay enough for it I will allow you to publish it in advance of that volume.

MARK TWAIN

President Constitutional Convention (Third House)