

**The Life Secret of Charley Parkhurst,
a Famous California Stage-Driver.
Death of a Western Character, and
Discovery that He Was a Woman.**

San Francisco Chronicle.

The stage-drivers of California have by their intrepidity, sang froid, and dare-devil recklessness, mingled with cool calculation, become historical characters. Hank Monk, with his memorable "Keep your seat, Horace, I'll bring you thar on time," and Ben Foss in his wild drive along the Geyser road, are familiar personages to all who ever heard of or lived in the Golden state. A third worthy is to be added in the person of Charley Parkhurst, who at his death achieved a celebrity which, by its attendant strangeness and romance, places him first in the trio. To the miners of the pioneering days Parkhurst was known as a stage-driver of renown, while to us of later date he will henceforward be remembered as a personage who kept a secret all his life long unsuspected and intact, and only gave it up to a power which either buries it forever from sight or strips away all mystery and makes all plain. Everything is common before the great leveler, death. There are many who, upon reading this sketch of a living and dead mystery, will remember Charley Parkhurst on the box-seat to the stage-coach running from Oakland to San Jose; others who will remember him driving from Stockton to Mariposa, and again others who recollect him as sending the dust flying along the road from San Juan to Santa Cruz. The stout, compact figure of about five feet six, broader across the hips than across the shoulders; the sunbrowned face beardless save for 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 likely to be overlooked. Moreover, so far nothing has been discovered as to where he came from or who are his friends in the Atlantic states. 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. Unfortunately Birch was drowned in the good ship Constitution, so that the verification of this volunteered sketch is not possible, while the facts which have recently come to light lead one to imagine that it was a plausible story which Parkhurst found useful as a foil for too strict interrogations. Whatever question there may be about this story, there is none to his efficiency in the driver's perch, nor 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 be wise not 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 in a firm grip, sent the long whip-lash 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 minute and then go tumbling into the water. 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 grasping 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 the legs of drawers pulled down over the face, with two holes cut in them for 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 rear leader's off ear afforded him convincing proof that for the once discretion would be the better part of valor. The box was dropped, but with it Parkhurst gave the robbers a warning that he would not let matters stop there, and that some time or other the same gentlemen, 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 the 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 leader's 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 clap 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 this 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 palmy 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 stage 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-hills 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 always 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 jovial, companion. He had no particular friends either on the road 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, however, 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 prompted 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 sum of some thousand 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 on lands belonging to F. A. Hihn of Santa Cruz. After raising quite a herd of cattle, he sold out of that business, and being a sufferer of 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 his 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 sixty 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 his 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 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 last, Dec. 29, when Charles Durky Parkhurst, reputed native of New Hampshire, voter of the state of California, aged 67, departed this life. With his last breath the fearless 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 astonishing 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 Charles Parkhurst longed for a little sympathy which is accorded every woman. The story of the discovery was at first refused credence, but medical science furnished irrefragable proof of the real state of the case when an examination attested the fact of the dead woman having once been a mother. The keen business sagacity which had been a distinguishing feature throughout the whole of Parkhurst's life in California was unwavering up to the end. The money matters of the deceased were found clearly arranged. Certificates of deposit on the Watsonville bank to a considerable amount were left behind in the charge of Otto Stoessen, and the will which was only a concise statement of the way in which the money was to be disposed of—chiefly in gifts to those in attendance at the latter days—was shrewdly signed "C. D. Parkhurst."

And as C. D. Parkhurst the enigma of stage-driving history lies in the Odd-Fellows' cemetery at Watsonville, where the body was deposited on the afternoon of Dec. 30, 1879.