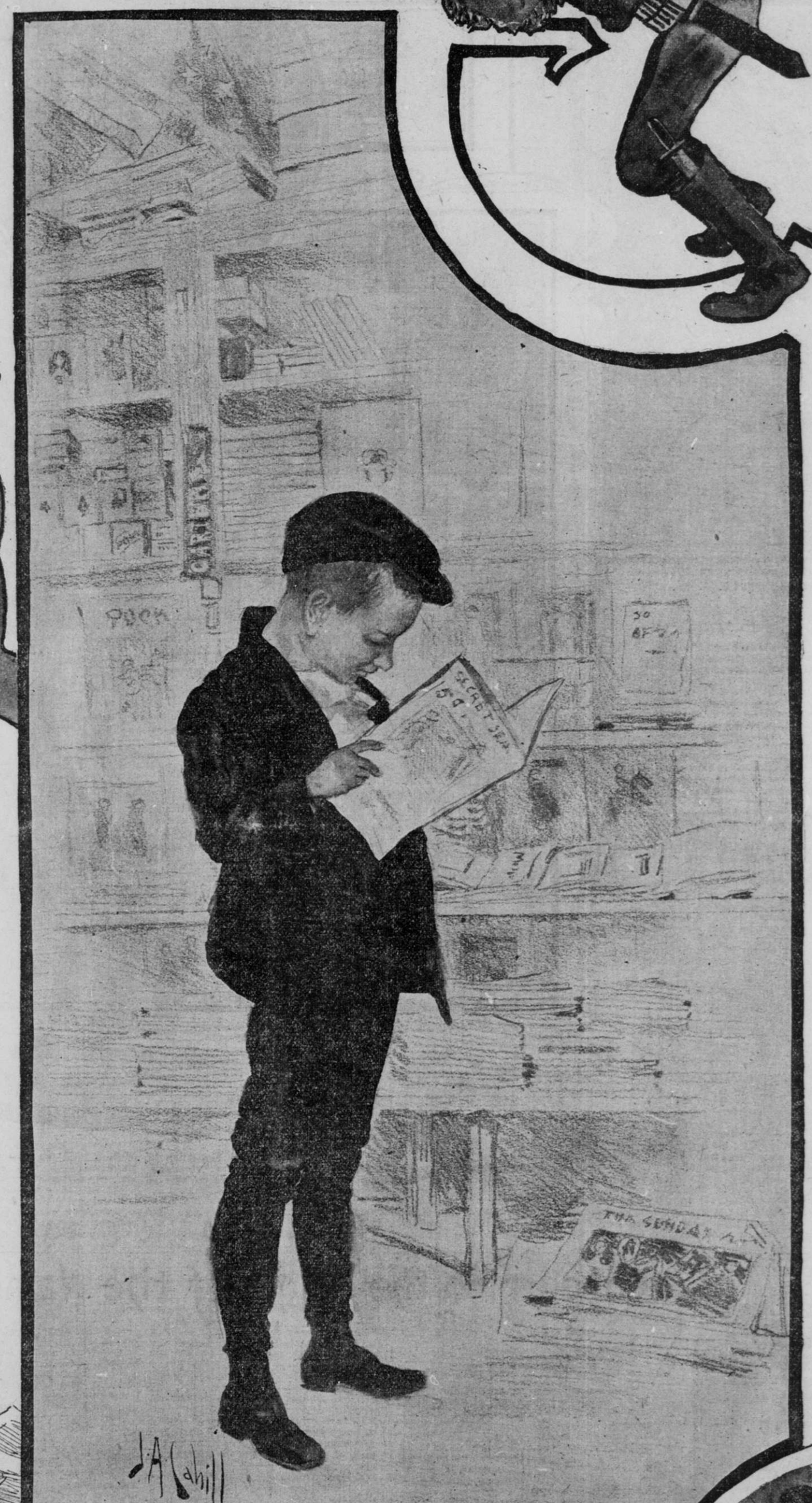
From Pittsburg To San Francisco

Remarkable Trip of a Small Boy Who Came West to Pick Up Gold and Fight Indians.

Frank M. Adams



THE CAUSE OF IT ALL

HE SEES GOAT ISLAND AT LAST

DIAMOND DICK and Fred Fearnot, together with a hundred or more accomplices, are accused. Let them defend themselves. It is only one 14-year-old boy who accuses, but the charge is as big as he is little. He says that this band of yellow-coated conspirators coaxed him all the way from Pittsburg to San Francisco on a will-o'-the-wisp promise of "barrels of money." He has reached here, but he is not throwing gold nuggets to be scrambled for. Instead, he has taken lodgings in one of the great heavy-doored, silent-halled buildings of our city where little boys may find lodgings when nobody cares.

"I was forever reading novels," he said. "If it hadn't been for the novels I'd be home now."

He sat opposite me in the reception room of the Youths' Directory and calmly talked the matter over. He talked with a poise and world-knowledge that the average 25-year-old falls short of, but he talked in a voice that has not yet decided how old it is.

Father Crowley had sent upstairs for him, and I had awaited him in a solemn chair and mental discomfort. The discomfort was such as a mightier interview could never call forth. "A runaway boy, 14 years old, who travels on cabooses," I said to myself by way of preparation. It struck me as sounding unpropitious. I saw in picture an embryo jailbird with manners more of the street than of the parlor. Then of a sudden I heard the brave good ring of the cheery father's voice as he said: "This is the boy, Miss Comstock; this is Frank Adams." And my mental boy vanished into thin air, for the real boy was as gravely courteous as a gentleman of the old school, and he was saying, "Miss Comstock, I'm pleased to meet you."

Then we looked squarely at one another and shook hands, and to-day we hardly remember when we began to be friends.

"The novels made all the trouble," he proceeded. "I've read all the novels I ever want to—that is, dime novels, you know. Some novels are all right. Dumas is pretty good, don't you think so? 'The Three Musketeers' is the best.

"Wish I'd always read Dumas and books like that. But I didn't. Somehow I got hold of one of these paper-covered stories that tell about California, and that started me. I took all the money my folks gave me and bought more of those books, and I bought weekly papers that have that kind of stories. They were nearly all about California."

"And in the week that you've been here you don't find it just as Joe Dauntless did?"

"This doesn't look so," he replied, with a deprecatory gesture that covered his costume from collar to boots. The trousers have traveled more than 2000 miles; the rest of the clothes have been given to him, and they are estimable but no more.

"Some of the stories made out that California was all a big gold field—nothin' to do but walk out and take the trouble to pick up nuggets in the road. I didn't quite believe that, but I did think the mining must be lots easier than it seems to be. I knew there was a big city here all right, but I thought there was gold all around it and that the mining was just about play. And I thought it wouldn't be any trouble to get to the Klondike from here.

"'Young Klondike' was the book that put that idea into my head. You see I had lots of different ideas when I came here. I didn't know just what I would do; mine, or go into the navy, or ship fruit. But I was going to make a fortune, anyway. I decided that."

He is a bit humorous when he speaks now of his fancies, and there is a minor chord somewhere in his humor; it is the sad laugh that people learn after they have watched life for long years and have found her out.

"I went to school right along, so I had to read nights. I was in the seventh grade. Yes, I like school all right, but I thought I'd like a fortune better. I—well, I was a pretty good boy, I don't care if I do say it," he blurted. "I was kind of a leader of boys' pranks, but I studied and behaved all right in school. I had to," he added, and the pale little freckled face took on a whimsicality. "My father was president of the school board."

"What were the names of some of your novels?"

"'Young Glory' was one, and 'Secret Service' and 'Nick Collier' and 'Fred Fearnot.' They're all silly. Some of the stories tell about the barrels of money to be made packing fruit out here, and all the fellows in those books start out without a penny and come back home in a little while and feel big, and they let their mother kiss 'em and cry, and then they say, 'The house is a little shabby, is it not?' and so they step out and buy a few town lots and put up a house with marble steps and present it to their father and mother, and when the folks say 'Thank you,' they say 'Don't mention it.' I thought I'd do something like that, but it don't look that way now. All I want is any kind of a job as bellboy, elevator-boy or anything that I can live on and get some decent clothes and have a chance to go to night school."

It is a long step down from the gold nugget path to the bell boy ambition. The pity of it lies in that he has learned to take the step gracefully.

"For a long time I kept thinkin' about startin' out, but I couldn't see how to do it until one day last October my mother gave me ten dollars to buy some clothes. I saw here was my chance. I bought a ticket with it. I never thought I was stealin'.

"The ten dollars bought me a half-fare ticket to Chicago, and there was some left. I took a good look at Chicago, and then I went on to Joliet. That's as far as my money lasted.

"From there on I had to work my way. I got the trip to Rock Island for breakin' coal for the engine, but that's pretty hard work for a boy."

I looked at the nervous, intelligent hands that had never been made for breaking coal, and there flashed into my mind a thought of the mother that misses him. I know no more of her than that she is his mother, but I know just how the sob sounded in her voice when she read out the letter that told about breaking coal. The father, it seems, is stern and a politician, and he has had neither time nor will to write to the youngster during the five months' absence; hence I know that he only grunted when he heard the coal story, and he probably said, "Let him find out for himself," and he said it within basso range. But when Frank enters the Pittsburg home again, somehow politics will be laid aside for the evening and Frank's mother will not be the only interested and proud listener when Frank gives an account of himself.

"I didn't walk any of the way, and I never bummed my way, either. I never asked at houses for anything to eat. I rode on cabooses, and I worked for the men to pay my way. The cabooses are like little houses, you know, and the men eat on them—have regular meals at a table, and that's how I boarded.

"At the big towns I stopped off, and I never missed having my clothes washed every week. I sent them to a laundry and didn't go on to the next town until they were done.

"I wanted to get to Omaha, and I got a chance to ride on the limited. So I did. I rode on the mail car. Omaha was where I expected to see the first signs of what I was lookin' for. I thought it was all a big mining camp, with gold as easy as ripe peaches. It was at Omaha that Dick the Dangerous went for a walk and came home with dusty shoes, and when he went to brush them he found it was all pure gold dust he was brushin' off. He had to kill nineteen Indians there to keep them from killin' him, but that was easy. I wouldn't be afraid of Indians, but there aren't any to be afraid of. I never saw but three. They came out to meet the train, and they looked too lazy to care about fightin'. They didn't have a sign of war paint nor a feather, and they left my scalp, you see."

It is an unlovely straw heap that they left, but it is brushed fit for Jack-a-Dandy. Frank Adams is the most civilized wild boy I ever saw.

"Omaha didn't come up to what I expected, and when I got there I felt kind of homesick. That was the first time. It's a queer feeling. Ever have it? You feel awful far off from everything, and you kind of think you wouldn't duck your head under the bed clothes if your mother tried to kiss you good night. It's a queer feelin'.

"It came over me so queer that I thought I'd better do somethin' to get over it, so I moved on to Grand Island. I got a place there as bellboy in a good hotel—it was a four-dollar hotel—and I stayed four months. I wanted money, so I worked steady, but I spent all I earned. Nearly all of it went in buyin' novels. I know now it was foolish. But I was gettin' a little discouraged by that time, and I needed somethin' to brace me up. The novels did it. I found one that told about a boy who dropped a plum stone on the ground in San Francisco and a tree started, and that gave him an idea; so he planted fruit and made $80,000. I thought I could raise fruit as well as anybody else, so I braced up, and I made up my mind to keep on.

"After four months workin' I started out again and without a cent. I'd spent it all. But I came pretty straight to San Francisco.

"In all novels the boys go west to find their fortunes, and so I came West, and I kept comin', hopin' all the way for somethin' to turn up. But when I got here there wasn't any further west to go—unless I joined the navy, and it took me two days hangin' around the water front to find out there wasn't any chance to do that. When I was comin' over on the ferryboat I said to a man, 'Is that Goat Island?' and he said 'Yes,' and I said, 'I'm going there,' and he laughed at me, and I guess he laughed right. I've come as far west as I can get, and it isn't a big gold field, and there aren't any barrels of money for a boy to make in a few weeks. It's a big city where I don't know anybody, and where there are more boys than there are jobs."

"What can you do?" I asked him. He makes a bold stretch at a fourteen-year-old height, but he is far too slight, and his plain, strong little face is pinched and white. He is wearily tense in body and mind, for the nerves have been strung tight, and they are only a child's nerves.

"What can you do?" I asked, and looking I saw only a pale, worn little specimen of humanity that looked absurdly incapable set in contrast to the big hulking, jostling world. But when I asked him what he could do he replied without a hint of boast, "Anything." It was as unconscious and simple as if I had asked, "What do 2 and 2 make?" and the answer had been "4."

Then in the light of what he had done, I believed the word of this strangely old youngster.

He stepped forward and opened the door for me perfectly. I left a good luck wish behind me and departed, to reflect all the way to the car, which means a whole block of reflection. The moral is as crudely obvious as that of any Sunday-school book; the moral of the runaway boy and his come-up-ance; this is the wild goose chase of the year.

But I marveled that it was the splendid folly of one whom you would pass in a hurry for only an ungainly, freckle-faced boy.

SARAH COMSTOCK.

Some Wonderful Wounds Seen in South African War.

From Mooi River Sir William MacCormac, England's distinguished surgeon, who took the field with the soldiers in South Africa, sends to the London Lancet an interesting set of notes on the remarkable bullet wounds he has seen recently. "The greater number of these wounds," he says, "were caused by the Mauser bullet, and nearly all presented the characteristic features—a small circular, slightly depressed area covered by a black scab. The exit wounds often were similar, but a little larger, sometimes presenting a scar like an incised wound and difficult to discover.

"When I saw them a week or ten days after the injury they were for the most part healed. How these bullets fail to damage vital structures lying immediately in their path is nothing short of marvelous. The proportion of fatal chest wounds to those that are recovered from is believed to be small, but what the proportion precisely is cannot yet be learned. It is abundantly clear that one lung and often both lungs may be traversed, and in many directions, without causing grave symptoms, and often without producing any symptoms of lung trouble at all."

A halt was called on operations for perforating abdominal wounds because so many recoveries from such wounds were noted. So, too, the previous indications for operations in such cases had to be revised completely. Recovery from wounds of the knee joint were so many as to make a chapter entirely new in the experience of the surgeons. The same is true of wounds to other joints. In pelvic injuries it was hard to understand the limited amount of damage done. Bullets perforate arteries and nerves without severing them or, in the case of arteries, without causing the expected amount of bleeding.

A private who looked extremely well and said he had nothing to complain of had a hole seven inches long and three inches wide in his chest, which involved the lungs. Part of three of his ribs were carried away and the lung was exposed. The soldier lay in a trench on the field from 2:30 to 5 o'clock before he could be attended to. He was carried to the hospital at 12:30 o'clock that night.

Another private was hit in the middle of the nose, and the bullet passed out the back of his neck. He had a little headache and some trouble in swallowing, but in ten days the wound healed and the man apparently was perfectly well.