

MYSTERY MAN ONCE STUDENT IN UNIVERSITY

George Morris Hoskinson a Scholar, Train Dispatcher, Peanut Vendor and Wanderer.

FRIEND OF 'GENE' FIELD Painted President's Carriage Horse Like a Zebra and Was Forced to Quit School.

George Morris Hoskinson is dead. That simple statement might be sufficient, and no doubt would harmonize best with the life of the man.

Possibly when he was a student at the University of Missouri more than half a century ago, a classmate of Eugene Field, he did not realize or anticipate all that the world held for him—or possibly he did, for "mystery men" are peculiar personalities.

From scholar, friend of great men, train dispatcher, wanderer and peanut vendor to scissor grinder—these touch the high spots, but it was not until after his death a few days ago that the world of romance in his life became known to his friends.

And it was not until after his humble death that the great mystery of his life became known—how for almost half a century while roving over a considerable part of this hemisphere he kept in touch with a daughter, who never came to know him, and how he died, unknown by her, almost within sound of voices within her home, taking his life secret with him to his grave.

"For the old man who sat for eight years at his little grindstone on the streets of this city was a classmate—it is said he was a roommate—of the inimitable Eugene Field half a century ago at the University of Missouri at Columbia.

"Later the kaleidoscope of his romantic life displayed itself in flashes of color here and there between long periods that are blank on the pages of record. But about his daughter.

"It was at sundown on the day of his burial that Walford, proprietor of the Marion hotel here, rushed out to the veranda in answer to a cry from his wife.

"She held in her hand the evening's issue of a Drumright paper telling of the death of the old man who for so many years ground scissors and knives in the streets of the town. Her hand trembled as she read the name, George Morris Hoskinson.

"It is my own father," she cried. "I know now that he was my father."

"But it was not the scanty details in the paper that had caused her instant conviction. Mrs. Walford's thoughts were of a day almost two years ago when she took a kitchen knife to the old man to have it sharpened.

"She had never forgotten that experience. She had never forgotten the weird look the old workman had given her as he looked for the first time in forty years into the eyes of his own daughter—the first time since she was a baby in her mother's arms. He gently asked her what was her name. But now she knew that he then knew her for what she was to him.

"Not a word did he say to indicate that he knew I was his own flesh and blood. Is it any wonder that I am a bit shaken now?" she said.

"That evening Mrs. Walford visited the home which the old man had departed. She found there something of the love that had entered his life in its twilight. There her heart was made glad in meeting her own sister, Mrs. J. M. Hickman, of whom she had never even heard, although they had lived for years in the same town. Both she and Mrs. Hickman are daughters of the old scissor grinder, but have different mothers.

In each case marriage had proved unhappy and in each the mothers had separated from Hoskinson after less than a year of wedded life.

"And as the two daughters talked there in the darkening night of the day of the old man's burial, they tried to piece together the long and broken life thread of the veteran who through its eventful cycle was master of life's secrets.

"Hoskinson was the son of Capt. Gamel Hoskinson of the Grand Army of the Republic. He was born in Zenia, Ill., and at the time of the civil war his people were living at Mount Carmel, Ill. When he was 15 years old his family moved to Rolla, Mo., and here he suffered an illness which resulted in the loss of his right leg. When he was 17 years old he entered the University at Columbia, Mo., to fulfill the wish of his father that he become an assayer. It was here that he met Eugene Field.

"Little is known of the days Hoskinson spent in the old university in company with the Missouri writer, other than that, as a result of an escapade in which he and Field were ring leaders, the carriage horse belonging to the president of the university was changed during the darkness of night with the aid of a pot of paint into the semblance of a zebra.

"This prank cost Hoskinson his attachment to the house of learning, and at 20 years of age he took up telegraphy. It was this prank therefore that was the making of one of the keenest train dispatchers that ever ordered a train out of a station in the middle west.

"In the meantime he married Miss Albina Leady of Rolla, Mo., mother of Mrs. Walford. It was six years later, after obtaining a divorce from the mother of his little girl that he married Miss Nellie Majors, Mrs. Hickman's mother. A year later he passed completely out of the lives of both of these women.

"Mysteriously he kept in touch with at least one of his two daughters. When attending a girls' school in St. Louis Mrs. Walford, then a romantic girl 17 years old, was thrilled in receiving a letter from her almost unknown father. However, the thread was soon broken. That was the first and the last direct word she ever had from him.

"Many years later in a little jewelry store in Monette, Mo., the next scene in his life was laid. The man who had in the course of time married the boarding school miss, was running the shop. He came to know "Silent Huck" Hoskinson, the crippled chief dispatcher of the division, who came to the little jewelry store to have railroad watches synchronized. He came to know the cripple as an expert railroad man who stood high in the esteem of his fellows, as a student and a lover of life as he chose to live it, playing a lone hand.

"But it was not until one night this week in Drumright as the two families sat upon the Hickman porch in the twilight, that Walford learned of the strange relationship and a probable reason for their friendship back in Monette.

"For today, Walford is confident that "Silent Huck," as he was called by railroad men, had kept track of his brood without breaking the silence for almost half a century.

"It was shortly after this that he drifted down to Old Mexico, there to become the husband of a Spanish woman of reputed beauty. Little is known of these years. His salary there was comparatively magnificent. He lived in luxury.

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Oxford Graduate Spends Fifteen Years as Hobo on the Open Road

A student in the School of Journalism was driving from St. Joseph to Kansas City over the Jefferson Highway. His car was running smoothly; the road was excellent; it was a perfect day, and he was on his way to see his girl.

About fifteen miles from Kansas City, the student spied a bent and apparently worn figure trudging through the dust. He slowed his car and offered the fellow a ride. Here was the opportunity of a lifetime to pick up a few choice bits of

slang of the open road, for the trudge was undoubtedly a true type of the fast-disappearing hobo.

The student stopped his car, and the bent figure, with a few courteous words climbed into the seat beside the driver. All was silence for a few hundred yards and then the hobo began to talk. There was no opportunity for the student to say anything. The hobo used words which were "way over the student's head."

His talk touched on philosophy, religion, science, history, current topics; his views, or as many of them as the befuddled student could understand, were clear-cut and decisive—and, most wonderful of all, original. The student felt like a school boy discussing the theory of relativity with Einstein—and he talked about as much as the school boy would have talked under those conditions.

Another benumbed silence followed, then the hobo began to hum a tune. After a bit of this, he asked his host if he cared for music. His host assured him that he did, whereupon the passenger began, in a voice that would compare favorably with that of John McCormack, some operatic air—something that the student, even in his dazed condition, recognized as similar to those pieces which his sister, who had been in college in the east, invariably selected for the family victrola, in other

words, grand opera. And—here the student narrowly escaped a collision with a large and apparently solid tree—he was singing in Italian. It was too much. The humble student began to inquire, fearfully, about his strange guest. And here was the story, delivered in a modulated, and beautifully accented voice:

"Persons sometimes think that it is queer, I am, as you have doubtless suspected, a Britisher. I was educated for the bar, and progressed as far as a degree from old Oxford. But the whole affair sickened me. Why should I sit in a stuffy office, talking to stuffy people about stuffy legal cases? I left England, and came to Canada. That was fifteen years ago—and I've wandered over the breadth of the North American continent since that time. Why not? I am happy. There are no worries. I go where I wish and when I wish. There is nothing to hold me. People are kind; they feed me when I am hungry. And I can, by singing and playing, pick up enough money to keep me clothed. Who can ask more? What more is there in life?"

"Is that the city ahead of us? No, thank you sir, it's peaceful out here. There is too much hurry and haste and hate over there. If you will be so kind as to drop me? I appreciate, sir, your kindness, and your forbearance. Thanks, but I have enough for today. Perhaps there will be no tomorrow."

The "hobo," made his host adieu with some Latin phrase. What it was, the student does not know.

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