

The Man from Maine.

BY J. D. ELLSWORTH.



As a Westerner, I was amused by the discreet sinfulness of Boston ; but when business called me to Maine, our down-east sister, whose temperate example is always held before our eyes, I felt that I was about to set foot on the stepping-stone of heaven. To provide against the serpent that must inevitably haunt such an Eden, I filled my pocket flask with the standard Western remedy for snake bites.

The train left the Union Station at nine in the morning, and anticipating a stupid ride I went into the smoking-car to enjoy a cigar and read my newspaper. The car was fitted up with mahogany card tables and stationary cribbage boards. In the seats in front of me were three traveling men.

“Play euchre?” said one of them, looking toward a lean, lanky stranger.

“Does it cost anything?”

“Not a cent.”

“Well, then, I guess I’ll come in,” and he opened himself like a jack-knife and strolled to his place. His thin, freckled face looked as if it had been carved with a chisel, and his clothes were economically cut to save cloth. Altogether, he had an air of Yankee thrift that might suggest to a cynical observer that he had taken the rear seat to save the interest on his fare while the conductor was making his way through the car. There was a chill about him that suggested a diet of ice-water, and when he cut the cards I half expected that they would be frost-bitten by his touch.

As the train rushed over bridges and through suburban cities the novelty of my surroundings so engrossed my attention that I did not notice the card-players again until I heard the lean stranger say :

“ I guess I’m going to be real sick. I never had such a fearful pain before in all my life.”

He put his hand on the pit of his stomach, and there were sharp lines in his face that indicated intense agony. The dealer looked up sympathetically, and his partner said :

“ I’ve got a little something with me from Kentucky. Perhaps it might do you good.”

“ I come from Maine,” said the stranger, “ and we don’t drink rum down there. But, as a medicine, I might take a few drops, if you don’t think it would go to my head.”

The drummers assured him that something warming was just what he needed, and a bottle was brought forth. The man from Maine took a drink, cleared his throat, and seemed better at once. Then the game went on.

Lounging back in my seat and watching the dissolving panorama of snow-bound villages, I ruminated on the incident. It was impossible not to pity the people of Maine, whose strict prohibition principles deprived them of the gracious influence of a little stimulant in cases of sudden illness.

At Lynn I was reminded of the euchre players as one of the drummers got out and another passenger took his place. The last comer carried a gun case and was dressed for a hunting trip. When we reached Salem at 9.35 the two remaining drummers left. The lean stranger and the sportsman found two new partners and continued playing.

As I had finished my cigar and exhausted my newspaper, I tried to amuse myself by watching the game. When the cards were passed to the lean stranger he shook his head and pushed them over to his partner.

“ Deal for me,” he groaned ; “ I’ve got an awful pain in my side. It seems like pneumonia, but it may pass in a minute.”

The group looked solicitous, and the sportsman, taking a black bottle from the pocket of his hunting-bag, said :

“ Take some of this, man ; you musn’t fool with a pain like that.”

“ I come from the State of Maine,” said the sufferer, “ and I’m opposed to strong drink. But, rather than delay the game, gentlemen, I’ll take a little as medicine.”

“Of course ; it’s the only thing to do,” interrupted the other players.

The man from Maine put the bottle to his lips, and then coughed and said that he didn’t know whether the liquor did it, but that he certainly felt better.

At the town of Newburyport the lanky representative of the Pine Tree State was left alone at the card table. I was becoming interested in him. As we crossed the bridge over the Merrimac I lost sight of him for a moment, but when the train had passed the State line I walked forward in the car. My invalid friend was playing seven-up with a swarthy stranger.

Dropping into a seat, I patiently waited for developments. We were due to reach Portsmouth at 10.40. I looked at my watch from time to time and then at the man from Maine. I saw that he began to get uneasy. His face showed signs of suffering and he coughed violently. He went from one spasm into another until it seemed that he could not recover his breath.

The brakeman brought some water in a tin cup. The suffering man motioned him away, gasping, “I wouldn’t dare (cough) to take water (cough) ; it makes it worse.”

The swarthy stranger drew from his grip a pocket flask and handed it to the sufferer. The spasmodic cough ceased for a moment, and a familiar voice said :

“My friend, I hail from the State of Maine and believe in total abstinence. I can’t take a drink, but I’ll just swallow a few drops as medicine.”

We rolled into Portsmouth as he handed back the half-emptied bottle. There were tears in his eyes, but his cough was stopped.

When we reached North Berwick it seemed as if the very air was different. It was Maine air and evidently agreed with the man who claimed that State as his home. He settled himself in the corner of a lonely seat and figured industriously on both sides of an envelope.

The car was almost deserted after we left Biddeford, and another change came over the unfortunate representative of prohibition. In a very low tone he asked a question of the conductor, who replied by shaking his head decidedly. Then the man from Maine went forward into the baggage car and returned with a

pale, haggard face. I wondered how his complaint would develop. Perhaps it was smallpox or measles by this time.

A glance at my watch assured me that the sun had passed the meridian. Bringing out the flask I had filled at Boston, and unscrewing the top, I said, "Stranger, will you join me?"

"Thanks, very much," he replied; "I am a Maine man —"

As the train slowed up at Portland, the remainder of his sentence was drowned in the gurgling sound of liquor that flowed gently and smoothly as in a familiar channel.

