The only merit I claim for the following narrative is that it is a true story. It has a moral at the end of it, but I claim nothing on that, as it is merely thrown in to curry favor with the religious element.

After I had reported a couple of years on the Virginia City (Nevada) Daily Enterprise, they promoted me to be editor-in-chief—and I lasted just a week, by the watch. But I made an uncommonly lively newspaper while I did last, and when I retired I had a duel on my hands, and three horse-whippings promised me. The latter I made no attempt to collect; however, this history concerns only the former. It was the old “flush times” of the silver excitement, when the population was wonderfully wild and mixed: everybody went armed to the teeth, and all slights and insults had to be atoned for with the best article of blood your system could furnish. In the course of my editing I made trouble with a Mr. Lord, editor of the rival paper. He flew up about some little trifle or other that I said about him—I do not remember now what it was. I suppose I called him a thief, or a body-snatcher, or an idiot, or something like that. I was obliged to make the paper readable, and I could not fail in my duty to a whole community of subscribers merely to save the exaggerated sensitiveness of an individual. Mr. Lord was offended, and replied vigorously in his paper. Vigorously means a great deal when it refers to a personal editorial in a frontier newspaper. Duelling was all the fashion among the upper classes in that country, and very few gentlemen would throw away an opportunity of fighting one. To kill a person in a duel caused a man to be even more looked up to than to kill two men in the ordinary way. Well, out there, if you abused a man, and that man did not like it, you had to call him out and kill him; otherwise you would be disgraced. So I challenged Mr. Lord, and I did hope he would not accept; but I knew perfectly well that he did not want to fight, and so I challenged him in the most violent and implacable manner. And then I sat down and suffered and suffered till the answer came. All our boys—the editors—were in our office, “helping” me in the dismal business, and
telling about duels, and discussing the code with a lot of aged ruffians who had had experience in such things, and altogether there was a loving interest taken in the matter, which made me unspeakably uncomfortable. The answer came—Mr. Lord declined. Our boys were furious, and so was I—on the surface.

I sent him another challenge, and another and another; and the more he did not want to fight, the bloodthirstier I became. But at last the man's tone changed. He appeared to be waking up. It was becoming apparent that he was going to fight me, after all. I ought to have known how it would be—he was a man who never could be depended upon. Our boys were exultant. I was not, though I tried to be.

It was now time to go out and practice. It was the custom there to fight duels with navy six-shooters at fifteen paces—load and empty till the game for the funeral was secured. We went to a little ravine just outside of town, and borrowed a barn-door for a target—borrowed it of a gentleman who was absent—and we stood this barn-door up, and stood a rail on end against the middle of it, to represent Lord, and put a squash on top of the rail to represent his head. He was a very tall, lean creature, the poorest sort of material for a duel—nothing but a line shot could "fetch" him, and even then he might split your bullet. Exaggeration aside, the rail was, of course, a little too thin to represent his body accurately, but the squash was all right. If there was any intellectual difference between the squash and his head, it was in favor of the squash.

Well, I practised and practised at the barn-door, and could not hit it; and I practised at the rail, and could not hit that; and I tried hard for the squash, and could not hit the squash. I would have been entirely disheartened, but that occasionally I crippled one of the boys, and that encouraged me to hope.

At last we began to hear pistol-shots near by, in the next ravine. We knew what that meant! The other party were out practising, too. Then I was in the last degree distressed; for of course those people would hear our shots, and they would send spies over the ridge, and the spies would find my barn-door without a wound or a scratch, and that would simply be the end of me—for of course that other man would immedi-
ately become as bloodthirsty as I was. Just at this moment a little bird, no larger than a sparrow, flew by, and lit on a sage-bush about thirty paces away; and my little second, Steve Gillis, who was a matchless marksman with a pistol—much better than I was—snatched out his revolver, and shot the bird’s head off! We all ran to pick up the game, and sure enough, just at this moment, some of the other duellists came reconnoitring over the little ridge. They ran to our group to see what the matter was; and when they saw the bird, Lord’s second said:

“That was a splendid shot. How far off was it?”

Steve said, with some indifference:

“Oh, no great distance. About thirty paces.”

“Thirty paces! Heavens alive, who did it?”

“My man—Twain.”

“The mischief he did! Can he do that often?”

“Well—yes. He can do it about—well—about four times out of five.”

I knew the little rascal was lying, but I never said anything. I never told him so. He was not of a disposition to invite confidences of that kind, so I let the matter rest. But it was a comfort to see those people look sick, and see their under­jaws drop, when Steve made these statements. They went off and got Lord, and took him home; and when we got home, half an hour later, there was a note saying that Mr. Lord peremptorily declined to fight!

It was a narrow escape. We found out afterwards that Lord hit his mark thirteen times in eighteen shots. If he had put those thirteen bullets through me, it would have narrowed my sphere of usefulness a good deal—would have well nigh closed it, in fact. True, they could have put pegs in the holes, and used me for a hat-rack; but what is a hat-rack to a man who feels he has intellectual powers? I would scorn such a position.

I have written this true incident of my personal history for one purpose, and one purpose only—to warn the youth of the day against the pernicious practice of duelling, and to plead with them to war against it. If the remarks and suggestions I am making can be of any service to Sunday-school teachers, and newspapers interested in the moral progress of
society, they are at liberty to use them, and I shall even be
grateful to have them widely disseminated, so that they may
do as much good as possible. I was young and foolish when
I challenged that gentleman, and I thought it was very fine
and very grand to be a duellist, and stand upon the “field of
honor.” But I am older and more experienced now, and am
inflexibly opposed to the dreadful custom. I am glad, indeed,
to be enabled to lift up my voice against it. I think it is a bad,
immoral thing. I think it is every man’s duty to do everything
he can to discourage duelling. I always do now; I discourage it
upon every occasion.

If a man were to challenge me now—now that I can fully
appreciate the iniquity of that practice—I would go to that
man, and take him by the hand, and lead him to a quiet,
retired room—and kill him.

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