

ACROSS COUNTRY TO HIS JOB

*Became City Editor of the Hustling Village Paper;
Amusing Early Experiences.*

BY CHARLES F. LUMMIS,
First City Editor of "The Times."

There is a certain autumnal satisfaction in being the last leaf on the old twig. No merit about it—simply it has lasted longer. To be dean, one has only to wait until the betters have died off.

As now dean of the men who worked on the paper in its formative days, it is probable that I have known The Times from the inside longer than any other person now living. This would naturally imply affection and understanding; while my training for thirty years as historian and critic has largely, I hope, enabled me to deal justice to my friends and tolerance to my enemies. Probably no one, better knows the ideals, the ethics, the achievements—and the faults—of the paper. I very frequently disagree with it on minor things; in the essentials, it is always there.

But far more than the personal relation, The Times has interested me as a student of history and economics. It has had a place in the building of a community which no other paper ever had. Like all the greatest American newspapers, it was essentially the dominant personality of one man. As Watterson to his Courier-Journal, Dana to his Sun, Greeley to his Tribune, Sam Bowles to his Springfield Republican—so was Harrison Gray Otis to his Times. And something more—thanks to the unique opportunity of his environment. None other of those giants of the old days, when newspapers were editorial rather than commercial, had chance to serve in the development of a town from little village up to tenth city in the Union. None of them had such

fateful crusades to make. Few of the 500,000 people now here can half realize what Los Angeles owes to The Times—nine-tenths of them have come to a redeemed town since the great fights were really won.

Early in 1884, an Ohioan in Los Angeles began sending me The Times. I was then in Chillicothe, O., editing the venerable Scioto Gazette, oldest newspaper west of the Alleghanies, and founded by the grandfather of N. P. Willis. I was struck by the personality, the upstanding courage and breeziness of this far western sheet—but had no dream of going to California. But I wrote Col. Otis my appreciation of some of his editorials, and sent him some of my own. He was much interested to learn from mutual friends that I had volunteered to go with the militia and put down the riots in Cincinnati. This appealed to his soldier sense.

WALKING ACROSS CONTINENT.
In August, I had my first touch of "fever'n'ague," and that ended the usefulness of Ohio to my mind—and Los Angeles and The Times popped up for the first time as a plan. I wrote Col. Otis fully, inclosing more of my "stuff," told him I thought I would move to California and would walk across the continent to get there—if he could use a newspaper letter a week en route, and give me a berth on the paper when I arrived. His answer came back promptly and characteristically; and Sept. 12, 1884, I started on the long tramp for pure pleasure, and no limitation of time, going zigzag, after Kansas, to see everything of interest within fifty miles each side my route; so the walk stretched out to 3705 miles and consumed 143 days. On the first day of Feb-

ruary, 1885, having come the last 700 miles across the desert with a broken arm, I reached San Gabriel at dusk. Col. Otis was awaiting me, and I had my first interview with that extraordinary personality. We lunched under the big oaks, and walked in to Los Angeles together—he striding soldierly at my side, and at 11 p.m. were seated in Bob Eckert's, on Court street, for a more substantial supper and further "slang-up" one of the other.

At 10 next morning, as City Editor of The Times, duly ordained, I was interviewing Emma Abbott. Col. Boyce "smoothly" presented me in flowery language, and wound up: "He has the hardest legs in the world, Miss Abbott—just feel them." That fine prima donna, against whom no breath of scandal ever stirred, was "a good scout." She pinched and marveled. Four years later, I was at Mojave waiting for the San Francisco train; and then stood rapt beside the new Mogul engine, the first I had seen. Suddenly a musical voice behind me called: "Here John, here is Mr. Lummis—he has the hardest legs of any man in the world." I whirled and there was Emma Abbott, bringing her husband for introduction. Which naturally also required explanation.

LOS ANGELES THEN.

Los Angeles claimed 15,000 inhabitants the day I walked into it—it really had about 12,000. There was not a paved street—and in winter the mud on Main and Spring streets was incredible and bottomless. The Times office was in the old Downey Block—where the Federal Building now is. The Public Library was in two or three dingy little rooms in that dingy block; it was presided over by the remarkable woman who has made so sound a place for herself since then, Mary Fov, a graduate of the first class of the Los Angeles High School. The police station and jail was conveniently near—in the long low adobe where the Phillips Block later stood and where the Hamburgers opened up their first big "People's Store." I had the pleasure of seeing half a dozen or more hangings in the old jail yard.

Then, as always, the Police Department was a bone of contention. I think the thing that really first welded me closest to Col. Otis was when I brought him proof, after long investigation, that the Police Chief we had been supporting was crooked. He sat at his plain table in the little office when I handed him my report and article; looked up and said gruffly: "But this is contrary to the policy of the paper!" Bates was editing telegraph and Eddy, foreman, stood on the steps to the composing room. "To hell with the policy of the paper!" said I. "I take it the policy of 'The Times' is to be right—and we have been wrong." They expected to see things fly; but the Old Chief simply looked up at me quizzically and said: "Do you think that is the way to speak to your superior?" Of course I apologized for the rough speech;

and he was glad to find some one not afraid of him. Too many were and he despised them.

When I went on the paper I had 2700 circulation, and was making a hard uphill fight against two old and successful rivals, the Herald and Express. For a long time I was not only city editor, but the whole local staff; also chief editorial writer—and when our kindly old Harvard man had a "periodic," I had the telegraph also on my hands. There was the good old days! There was something really personal in newspapering in this small, wide open, saloon-ridden town. Nobody "licks" editors any more, and seldom tries to shoot them; but in those days it was different. We had a ferocious fight of our campaign for high license—the first restriction ever put on the saloons here. The Times conducted this campaign single-handed—every other newspaper opposed. Nobody expected it to win—but high license carried by two to one.

THE FREE HARBOR.

The long, savage fight for a free harbor at San Pedro, against the then all-powerful Southern Pacific, was another victory for The Times—all the other papers either opposing or silent. Today, we can even better understand what would have happened to this city if its only railroad outlet to the ocean had been at Santa Monica, monopolized by the Southern Pacific.

There have been a hundred other important creative campaigns in which The Times has done for its community what a great newspaper is expected to do. But one is monumental and unique.

Col. Otis was himself a union printer, and a loyal one in the early days before the unions became a great agency to support mediocrity and penalize individual effort. But the dose we got—especially after we moved over to the new Times Building on Fort street, with its fine pepper trees (now, alas, Broadway) was enough to convert anyone. I remember one night at 2 a.m. the foreman came to us with a new demand. The two-column patent medicine ads which came by express in long electro-types; these must be paid for, the simple lifting the single slab and putting it in the "form," the same money as if a compositor had set up each of the 50,000 individual letters! Surrender, or no paper in the morning! This was about the last straw. The Old Chief got a conference with all the other newspaper managers in town, and they entered a solemn compact to resist this and further aggression. All of them "fell down" within a week—and have been paying for it ever since. Col. Otis had laid his plans; and when the Typographical Union walked out of The Times office forever—in walked a full force of Typothetae. And the thing stood. It was hard on many of our good men, driven out unwillingly by the walking delegates. The Times was the only newspaper in Los Angeles that never missed a pay roll.

Every inch a soldier, Gen. Otis (as he became in the Spanish War) brought discipline and order into everything he touched. The Times was the best classified and the best arranged daily in the United States long before it became the largest. And it had a corps spirit, rare among newspapers. The people who worked for it were loyal. They needed to be! No other newspaper in the world has ever

been so long, so viciously, and so powerfully campaigned against by organized labor—the whole force of all the unions of the United States was focused for years to boycott or destroy The Times. And eleven years ago, this campaign culminated in the martyrdom of twenty loyal men and the destruction of The Times Building. I don't know of a more stirring chapter in all newspaper history than the dynamiting of The Times—and the going of those crippled survivors, binding rags and sacks around bleeding arms and feet, trudging to the auxiliary plant the old chief had quietly provided in case of accidents—and turning out a blurred, but living and dauntless four-page paper, which was delivered almost on time in the morning!

A DOMINANT PERSONALITY.

The incomparable growth of Los Angeles of recent years is largely due to its industrial freedom, and that we owe to Harrison Gray Otis! San Francisco and other cities still in the clutch of the murder-class of unionism, marvel to find themselves outgrown by a community that but a few years ago was a village beside them, but none of their papers have yet dared lead the fight for every man's right to work for himself. It is almost needless to say that it has been The Times, and The Times alone, unaided or opposed by all other papers, to rally and hearten and lead the good citizens who have made and kept us free.

Besides the dominant personality of Gen. Otis—big, rugged, sometimes rough, fearless, of an integrity severe and absolute, staunch, independent, indomitable—I have always been struck by the curious unity in The Times personnel. It

is not one of the great machines for making money, set up by millionaires or the ambitious. No rich man was ever an owner in it—till it made its owners rich! It has always had a sort of family quality. Gen. Otis and his noble wife, who, during her life, was an indefatigable worker on the paper, and Harry Chandler, the bright-faced round-headed newboy of my time, who became a son-in-law of the Otises. And now at the helm, solemnly pledged to the sailing directions laid down by the old pilot. And others, who have been there so long that they seem almost of the family themselves—and have the family feeling. They are not hirelings. This is not a negligible factor in the character of a newspaper. It is the best hope, also, of the survival into the future of that single-hearted, fearless, progressive policy, which Gen. Otis made the backbone, the complexion, and the guiding thought of The Times.