

# Poem Which Captured Prize at National Eisteddfod

ONE of the literary features of the recent national Eisteddfod held in this city was the offering of a prize for the best poem in English stanzas, not over 200 lines; subject, "The Overland Pony Express." There were seven poems entered, the winner being Dr. E. F. Eldridge of Grand Junction, Colo. The "News" presents herewith both the adjudication as given by the Rev. T. C. Edwards, D. D., (Cynonfardd) of Kingston, Pa., and the prize poem itself.

## THE ADJUDICATION.

Seven poems have been entered in this interesting competition, bearing the fictitious names of Pendry; Fremont; Competitor; Mildred North; "D"; Teamster; and a nameless poem. (This author sent the name to the secretary only.) These poems have been written by persons who know the story of the old system of conveyance over the wild west before the advent of the rapid transit of our modern civilization. It is not always helpful to the author too familiar with the subject to be described, because he may be tempted to be more prosaic than poetical in his delineation.

1. **PENDRY**—This poem is in the form of four sketches and an invocation. Sketch 1—The rider and his equipment. Sketch 2—A bison herd in repose. Sketch 3—A night at a station. Sketch 4—Besieged.

The author seems to have had a wide experience in traveling, and to have been an eye-witness of the scenes he depicts. The form of his composition is rather stiff and unyielding. The work would have been much more acceptable if he had adopted a simpler stanza form. It reads more like an essay with rhyming lines than a poem.

2. **FREMONT**—This is well written and in full sympathy with the subject from the beginning to the end. Some of the details of the contents of letters could have been omitted and some events of another character could have been substituted with advantage to the poem as a composition. On the whole this is very creditable and promises well for a young poet.

3. **COMPETITOR**—This is a pretty little poem; but too short to afford the writer space for displaying any of striking events connected with the subject. The author seems to be in a hurry. If he had taken more time to develop his theme he would have excelled many of his competitors.

4. **MILDRED NORTH**—This introduction is too long for such a short poem. Rhyming the first and third, and the fifth and seventh line in the stanza would add much to the melody and beauty of this meter. With more care in the phraseology the scenes could be made more vivid and dramatic. The poem is a pretty picture and nicely written.

5. **"D"**—This poem by "D" has more humor in it than any of the others. It is the only humorous poem in the competition. "Summer and winter their task was the same, Fifty a month and the balance in fame."

Please remember that it is unlawful to use the same word to end

## EXPLANATORY NOTE.

The overland mail, generally represented by the Concord coach, was the usual means of conveying the mail and express pouches from the terminal of the railroad, in some middle western city, to an outpost, which was either a permanent fort or a stockade at the end of the wagonroad. From some of these outposts, which were the rendezvous of scouts, prospectors and frontiersmen, there extended across the plains and through the mountain passes, single paths, or trails, over which the overland pony express riders, once a week, dashed across the country, each relay making about 100 miles, depending somewhat upon the location of water for the stations, the keepers of which, isolated as they were, and continually exposed to hostile attacks, were about as reckless as the riders themselves, but as there were several of them at a station, it was not quite so lonesome or dangerous.

The hardships and dangers which beset the riders were enough to discourage all but the most vigorous and daring, as many times they were compelled to leave the regular trails, on account of rockslides, torrents or forest fires, as well as by the Indians who seemed well nigh omnipresent, and the farther risk of broken limbs from falls, and sudden attacks of disease.

These intrepid riders generally reached their destination with wonderful promptness, and always served their company and the public with the utmost fidelity.

If one of them failed to report at his station at or near the regular time, it was known that he had either become lost, helplessly disabled, or had died in the discharge of his duty.

## OVERLAND PONY EXPRESS.

The overland stage is fast nearing the post  
Enveloped in dust, like an uncanny ghost,  
It sways on its journey through shadow and light,  
For the fort must be reached, e'er the fall of the night.  
On the edge of the desert which stretches away  
Toward the sun, now descending, like wolves held at bay.  
The treacherous redskins are lying in wait  
For the unguarded victim who leaves its barred gate.

Beside the wild broncho he scarce can restrain,  
The lone rider waits with his hand on the rein  
Till the pouch from the boot of the Concord is passed  
To his cantel behind, where the thongs make it fast.  
Then springing astride with a hearty "So long,"  
His spurs find the "fur"—and the onlooking throng  
Are gazing in wonder along the dim trail,  
While clouds of red dust their nostrils assail.

The gates of the fortress are closed and made fast  
As the flag flutters down from the top of the mast,  
And shades of the evening exclude from the sight  
The dauntless young rider, who fades in the night.  
As on toward the summit he hastens along  
He hums to himself, a favorite song,  
And dreams of his sweetheart with laughing blue eyes,  
Who waits for his coming, beneath southern skies.

Aware of the danger from merciless foes  
Swift on through the night, he unceasingly goes,  
His cayuse ne'er slackening its renegade pace  
While a smile, like a baby's creeps over his face  
As he thinks of the blessings he carries along  
To some lad, from his mother, or childish love song  
That will gladden the heart of her miner at rest  
In the bunk of his cabin, somewhere in the west.

His reveries cease, for far in the night  
From the station he covets, there flashes a light  
And then as he listens there falls on his ear  
The call of a whippoorwill, hovering near.  
To answer their challenge he utters the cry  
Of a "cayute" that scents from the sod covered sty,  
Some newly born pigs, or a fresh rutting hound,  
As he howls to the night, from the sage hidden mound.

His speed is now slackened and up to the shed  
His dripping wet mustangs are carefully led,  
Where he is assisted by rough, willing hands,  
For it is with effort he painfully stands,  
He drains a deep "schooner" while horses are changed,  
By those who from safety are gladly estranged,  
But who, seeming heartless, are tender as girls  
To the dare-devil rider with long streaming curls.

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The final game in the big gold and Uncle Sam's mail,  
men was played on Tuesday that none could endure,

two successive lines for the sake of rhyme, such as

"And that is as near as words can express."

Part of the work of the pony express.

This poem will be acceptable as a humorous reading at a social gathering.

6. **TEAMSTER**—This is a fairly good description of the express; it begins well and ends well; but the main body of the composition is very prosaic with passages of this kind: "Miss Lightning with rider in one hour and five Ran twenty-two miles and came out alive. Bucking Baully possessed the most enduring powers. Made seventy-five miles in six and a half hours."

The ending describes the substitution of better methods:

"So the line was built from river to coast—  
The achievement of which Ed. Crelighton could boast:  
Then the news of the day from the East came quick  
Like the lightning's flash with a merry click;  
It told of battles and the nation's distress,  
And ended the days of the pony express."

7. **NO NAME**—This author having sent his proper name to the secretary, forgot to attach a fictitious name to his composition. This poem is well arranged and carefully written. It tells the story of the overland pony express with the varied experiences connected with its dangerous routes, in an attractive style with smooth rhythmic cadences, and a pretty diction. The poem opens with a picture of the stagecoach nearing the post, "enveloped in dust like an uncanny ghost."

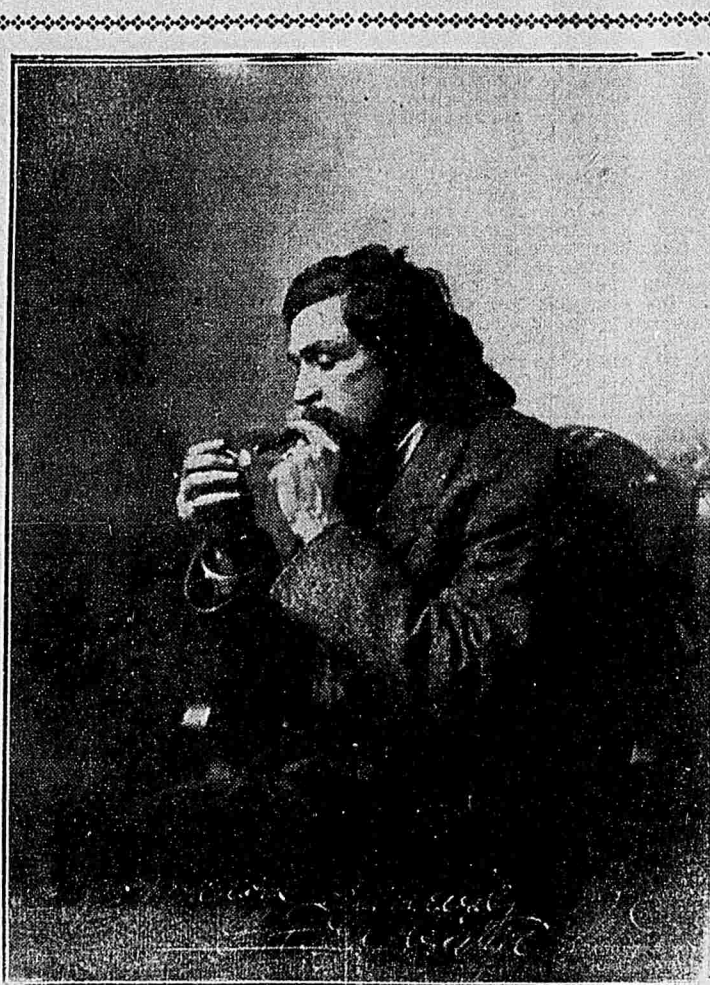
"It sways on its journey through shadow and light  
For the fort must be reached e'er the fall of the night."

Then follows an attack and a miraculous deliverance. It closes thus, "In worshipping heroes the world often falls  
To remember the deeds on the overland trails  
And the men who, resigning their sweethearts and wives,  
Were ever the foremost to hazard their lives  
In efforts to hasten, between east and west,  
A message of love from some yearning breast:  
N'er thinking of honor or worldly estate,  
They died for mankind, and must live with the great."

In summing up the comparative merits of these poems I find much in each of them that I consider worthy of praise and am sorry that I have only one prize to award. I hope that the exercise has proven a reward in itself to each contestant and that my mild criticism on the poems will stimulate the competitors to a renewed effort for more excellent work next time. In the present contest I find that for vividness of description, and a fairly complete picture in a good literary style this poem without a name takes the lead, therefore to him (or her) shall the prize be awarded.

Yours, &c.,  
CYNONFARDD.

Kingston, Pa., Sept. 23, 1908.



DR. E. F. ELDRIDGE OF GRAND JUNCTION, COLO.

Winner of Prize Poem in English Stanzas at Recent National Eisteddfod in Salt Lake.

Except the wild mustang, whose footing is sure,  
And who, with his rider, though oft in distress  
Is seldom behind with the Pony Express.

One-half of his journey at least fifty miles,  
Is now left behind amid the dark wilds  
And hope is beginning to sing in his ear—  
When out of the darkness fierce warriors appear.  
His spurs are thrust deep in the cayuse's sides,  
For the race is to him who most fearlessly rides—  
Regardless of trail, or, in fact, lack of one,  
And who can the quickest unlimber his gun.

On through their midst like a fierce hurricane,  
He rushes along toward the alkali plain—  
To pitch from his saddle, his horse falling dead  
From wounds which have sprinkled his leggings with red.  
Unharmful by their arrows, though still they pursue,  
He shelters himself and with aim swift and true,  
Assisted by morn, as it breaks o'er the hills,  
"Pumps lead" from his Spencer, which generally kills.

Repulsed by the slaughter, they hardly can hide,  
The marauders withdraw and reluctantly ride  
Away o'er the foothills, and leave him alone,  
The loss of his "partner" to sadly bemoan.  
The curse of the desert—the demon of thirst,  
Is parching his throat, but what he heeds first  
Is the fact that the landscape is new to his sight—  
That the trail has been lost in the hot running fight.

'Mid the alkali dust of the desert's drear waste,  
Where the sun heats the sand to a glow,  
And the trail is o'er strewn with the bones of the dead  
Which are bleaching as white as the snow;

Where the atmosphere gleams with a sulphurous hue  
And the sand reaches far out of sight;  
Where the low barren hills, like demons asleep  
Reflect back the dazzling light,—

Not a blade of green grass, or a creature in sight;  
Of air it seems hardly a breath,  
Where the silence is broken alone by himself  
And Nature speaks only of death.

His eyes search the landscape for cottonwood trees,  
For water must seep from the ground under these,  
But not a leaf trembles to gladden his sight,  
Or lessen the terror of his awful plight.  
Half dead from exhaustion, and dazed by the fall,  
He at first tries to walk, but finds he must crawl.  
To leave the mail pouches ne'er enters his head,  
For he vows they must move until he is dead.

To stay where he is means horrible death;  
So dragging his load, with a prayer on his breath,  
He starts for the foothills, determined to find  
At least a moist spot, or if nature be kind,  
A hole in the rocks, which was filled by the rains  
When winter swept over these now burning plains;  
Though often polluted by savage and beast,  
To him it seems nectar and fit for a priest.

Scarce thinking of aught but the terrible thirst,  
He staggers along 'til on his sight burst  
Two warriors, well mounted, but still unaware  
That the cause of their search is awaiting them there,  
Who drink from a "skin" as they pass it around,  
Which they filled at a spring bubbling up from the ground  
Far back in the hills, where the giant pines grow,  
And hide from the south winds their treasures of snow.

Not heeding the hazard of two against one  
He draws from his holster his trusty old gun,  
But his movements attract his now startled foes  
Who reach for their rifles instead of their bows  
And bullets are whizzing, like bees through the air.  
In a contest that leans toward the bloodthirsty pair,  
But when it is finished two "Injuns" lie prone  
And the rider's left arm shows a half splintered bone.

Disregarding the fracture he climbs up the hill,  
And from the skin bottle he drinks at his will,  
Then loosens the horses and soon has his pack  
Again moving west, on the cayuse's back.  
The trail he had lost is now under his feet,  
But the air seems aflame with the glimmering heat,  
While the pain from the wound, streaming up to his head,  
Fills his soul with despair and a sickening dread.

It is not for himself that he trembles with fear,  
But the pouch may be lost if no one is near  
To urge on the ponies, or at least hold them back  
From the Indian camp, as they'll double their track.  
To prevent such a sequel, he ties them in haste  
To the belt for his gun, which encircles his waist,  
And summoning all of his fast ebbing strength,  
Determines to ride to his uttermost length.

With incessant efforts and unbending will,  
He lashes his mounts o'er arroyo and hill,  
Until from exhaustion he falls to the ground,  
To catch from the earth a most welcome sound—  
The rhythmic cadence of iron-shod feet  
Which tells, by its measure, a tale that is sweet—  
That scouts from the station, because he is late,  
Are coming to rescue, or learn of his fate.

Scarce able to answer the questions they ask  
Until he has drunk from a dusty old flask,  
Which revives him enough to partly explain  
The uneven conflict he had on the plain—

The loss of his cayuse, the wound of his arm,  
Which he quickly explains had caused no alarm,  
Until the fierce fever excited his brain  
And he feared going mad, from the terrible strain.

Then his mind wanders off in a feverish dream  
And he kneels in the dust, as if by a stream,  
Attempting to drink, from a fancied clear pool,  
And talks of the water, so sparkling and cool—  
Of losing the pouches, they gave to his care—  
Of the blessings and songs and the mother's last prayer,  
Then begging the troopers to "send on the mail,"  
He sinks in a swoon, by the side of the trail.

## ENVOI.

In worshipping heroes the world often falls  
To remember the deeds on the overland trails—  
And the men who, resigning their sweethearts and wives,  
Were ever the foremost to hazard their lives  
In efforts to hasten, between east and west  
A message of love from some yearning breast;  
N'er thinking of honor or worldly estate  
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## PRAISE FOR EISTEDDFOD.

D. E. F. Eldridge Writes Regarding His Impressions of Big Event.

In connection with the prize poem, Corresponding Secy. John James yesterday received the following from Dr. Eldridge, which is self explanatory: "Having had the privilege of attending the fourth grand national Eisteddfod in the great Mormon tabernacle in the city of Salt Lake, Utah, I take the liberty of expressing my opinion of it. In the first place I was much surprised as to its scope and international importance and also as to the many advantages gained by such an enterprise; this added to the perfect environments produced a profound impression upon me. Having attended the Boston peace jubilee, the Milwaukee Sangerfest, besides listening to the most noted choirs of Europe and many of its military bands, I was inclined to depreciate anything of the kind occurring so far west and seemingly out of musical and literary centers; there-

fore I was naturally biased; but after listening to the many contests both in vocal and instrumental music, by the many organizations, and observing the character of the literary productions and their most accurate adjudications, I have no hesitancy in asserting that it was in the aggregate, the greatest 'feast of reason and flow of soul' to which it has been my privilege to listen. Indeed, so excellent was the entire program that it is impossible for me to specialize; it was all grand, and the singing of the combined choirs, supported by the great organ of the tabernacle, carried me nearer heaven than I had ever been before. It was marvelous and equal to the world's best.

Under no circumstances shall I allow another Eisteddfod to pass without a most strenuous effort to enjoy its unparalleled pleasures.

Hoping that it may spread over the entire universe, and that its great nation will fully awake to its usefulness, I beg to remain, most respectfully,  
E. F. ELDRIDGE, M. D.  
Grand Junction, Colo.



MARY TWAIN AT SEVENTY-THREE.

On the 13th day of this month Samuel L. Clemens, America's foremost humorist, will celebrate his seventy-third birthday. Mr. Clemens looks as hale and hearty today as he did 10 years ago, and his wit is just as keen as it was half a century ago. He has recently removed from New York to his new estate in Connecticut.

## No. 4—HEROES OF HISTORY.

(Written for the Deseret News by Albert Payson Terhune.)

### Leonidas, the Hero Who Fought the Bravest Fight in History

A HANDFUL of men lay entrenched in a little cleft in Mount Oeta, in Greece, one day in 480 B. C. The cleft was barely 25 feet wide, yet it was the only pass across the mountains to Athens and the heart of Greece. It was known as Thermopylae (Hot Gates). The men who now defended it were Spartans and allies of theirs, perhaps 4,000 in number. They were under the command of the Spartan king, Leonidas.

Encamped beyond the Pass of Thermopylae and preparing to rush down upon Greece through that tiny gap in the hills was the largest army ever seen. Its numbers have been estimated at 2,100,000. Its commander was Xerxes, emperor of Persia and Media. Persia had been made by Cyrus the greatest, richest, most powerful nation on earth. Some years before the events now to be told a Persian army had attacked Greece and had been utterly routed at Marathon. The Persian monarch, Xerxes, had burned to wipe out the memory of this defeat. So he had invaded Greece with an enormous land army and a fleet almost equally large. Some of the Greek states had weakly surrendered as soon as he drew near and had let him pass unmolested through their territory. Greece was a small, numerically weak country, divided up into separate states. Such of these as did not yield to the invader combined to plan some means of defense. They could not hold out for long, and of these 4,000 were sent under Leonidas to check the enemy at Thermopylae.

Xerxes, marching on unopposed, was astounded to hear that a little band of Greeks were awaiting him at the narrowest of passes. He sent a messenger to Leonidas explaining that sooner or later the pass would be taken and all Greece subdued, and adding that if Leonidas would surrender Xerxes would make him viceroy of the whole conquered country. Leonidas sent back a curt refusal. Xerxes next wrote out a long and flowery document commanding Leonidas to yield up his men and weapons. Leonidas sent back the parchment with two Greek words scrawled across the bottom. The words were "Molon labei!" ("Come and take them!")

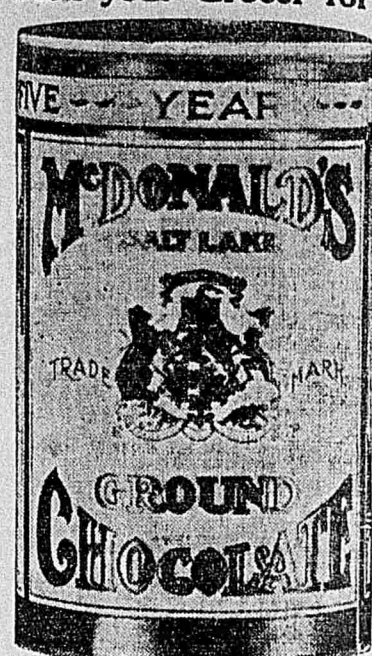
Xerxes, in fury, hurled the Median vanguard of his army against the pass. Leonidas drove them back with terrible slaughter. Next Xerxes sent forward his "Ten Thousand Immortals," the picked corps of the Persian army. These, too, Leonidas forced to retreat. The plucky Greeks held the pass for days against all comers. In vain the Persian millions were dashed against the living wall of heroes. Xerxes, richest king on earth and leader of the greatest army, found himself hopelessly balked by a petty Spartan and by a force less than one-five-hundredth the size of his own.

How long this deadlock might have endured can never be known. For a Greek, Ephialtes by name, went privately to Xerxes and told him of a secret path leading up the mountain to a plateau that commanded the pass and the Greek entrenchments. One morning Leonidas awoke to find the enemy had the pass in the hands of the enemy. Further resistance was hopeless. So he dismissed his allies and sent them safely home. Then he consulted the oracle and was told that "Either Sparta or its king must perish." To save his country (for the messages) he resolved to stay and defend the pass until he should be killed. With 300 Spartans Leonidas awaited the charge of the Persians. Xerxes skirmished Leonidas fell. In the first comrade fought on until they dropped dead about their slain king. Only one man escaped alive. He returned to Sparta, where he was cursed as a coward and a traitor, and was henceforth shunned as though he had been a leper. His family went into mourning, while the relatives of those who had been killed dressed as for a festival.

Twenty thousand Persians had been slain in the effort to capture Thermopylae. In rage at memory of such slaughter, Xerxes had Leonidas' body flung into a gallows. By this abominable treatment of a gallant foe he won for himself the contempt of all the world.

Leonidas' act in sacrificing himself and his followers for a hopeless cause was not one of bravado. It was an object lesson and an example to men and weapons. Leonidas sent back the parchment with two Greek words scrawled across the bottom. The words were "Molon labei!" ("Come and take them!")

Ask your Grocer for



effect that changed the world's history. For later, Alexander the Great, remembering how 300 Greeks had held at bay all the power of Persia, calculated that a small Greek army might overcome Persia itself. So with only 30,000 men he attacked and conquered Persia, and later the whole known earth.

Thus was Leonidas, the fearless Spartan, avenged; and the brave fight he and his comrades waged between the narrow walls of Thermopylae led indirectly to making Greece ruler of the world.



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