

A Long Cold Walk

It was in February, 1873, and we were snowed in at Grand Junction, Iowa. The hotel was a block south of the depot and it was filled to the limit with passengers from both the C. & N. W. and the "Des Moines Valley," now the C. R. I. & P., railroad. Nearly a dozen commercial men, of which I was one, were in the number. It was cold and stormy and the wind blew the snow in all the directions of the compass.

The highways were as thoroughly blocked as the railroads and the only thing to do for over forty-eight hours was to wait and try to be as comfortable as possible. Several in the party were anxious to reach Des Moines as soon as possible and I was one of that number. The C. & N. W. would undoubtedly be open first but it had no branch to Des Moines.

At last a train left Fort Dodge for Des Moines carrying mail and express and one passenger car well-filled with men, women, and children. It got along slowly, shoveling its way occasionally until well south of Gowrie, where it ran into an open prairie of some fifteen miles to Grand Junction. The little towns of Paton and Dana were not yet laid out.

About three o'clock, a man, well-bundled up in a fur coat and other means of protection, came down the railroad track on foot. He reported the southbound train was stuck fast in a cut half a mile long, six or seven miles up the track. There was no hope of freeing the train and there was no food for half a dozen ladies and three babies. He asked for volunteers to go up the line and carry some food and coffee.

Here was an opportunity to do some heroic work, a chance to get one's name in the paper! George W. Smith, representing Wellington Bros. & Co., wholesale dry goods, Boston, was the man who volunteered to attempt the "forlorn hope." It was expected that two or three men would undertake the task but no one came to the front and George went alone. We all turned in and got him ready. The landlord put up a large basket of food and coffee, as much as a man would wish to carry so far. I borrowed a fur coat and cap for George and he started off about 3:30 p.m.

His home was in Marshalltown. I got the address of his people there so that I could communicate with them in case of necessity. Several of the boys walked up the track half a mile, carrying the basket, to give him a good start and cheerful beginning. While the track was clear and smooth for long distances, the snowbanks in the cuts were deep and impenetrable.

Ed Steel, a clothing man out of Boston, a born

humorist, and Frank Smith, a furniture man from Grand Rapids, Michigan, went with George over a mile.

George Smith walked seven miles up the track, found the stalled train and delivered the lunch and coffee to the ladies and babies. At once he began the long walk of seven miles on the return trip. At six o'clock we got anxious and, as I had promised when he left, we sent two men, who volunteered for the undertaking, with two lanterns up the track to meet and look after his welfare.

They went about two miles before meeting George and got into the hotel, on their return, at eight o'clock. I want to tell you George had a royal welcome and a pleasant evening of greetings in the dining room and parlor of the hotel as a reward for his disinterested, unselfish, heroic, but wearisome journey of fourteen miles in one of the worst storms of that or any other winter season.

Mr. Smith continued with Wellington Bros. & Co. for years. He finally quit the road and went into the retail dry goods trade at Broken Bow, Nebraska, Marshalltown and Nevada, Iowa, and did a successful business in each place. He died a few years ago in his old home in Marshalltown. The personal friendship existing between us continued for over a third of a century.

K. W. BROWN