

EARLY HISTORY OF CLOUD COUNTY BY H.E. SMITH

MY NIGHT IN A STAGE COACH

I think it is now, a very black and sooty place, with a canal in front of it, a hill behind it, and the huge mine I have spoken of under it. It was not only black and sooty itself, but its people were similarly black and sooty; and so were its horses, or rather its mules, for it seemed to have few of the former and a great many of the latter. Even its dogs and cats partook of the general sootiness, and were evidently greatly depressed by it. I was very cold when I went down into the mine-which had its shaft just behind the hotel-and I was colder still when I came out of it.

I went to bed cold, and got up cold, so cold indeed that I thought I would never be warm anymore. When I went down into the frozen breakfast-room, I looked out of the window, and saw that the ground was covered deep with snow, and that it was still snowing as if it meant to exhaust the whole winter's supply in five minutes or so, being very greatly pressed to do it immediately. I drank my cold, black coffee and ate my cold, tough beefsteak in total silence, thinking more than I had done for a long time before of home, of its pleasant cheer and warmth, and of the loving boys and girls in it who were even then, no doubt, expecting my speedy coming, for this already the morning of Tuesday, and Thursday would be Christmas Day.

In that home I was St. Nicholas himself, for it was I that brought home in the night the brave tree with its spreading green branches; it was I that planted it firmly in the middle of the wide parlor; it was I that found the infinite variety of toys, cakes, bon-bons, and glittering bubbles which covered it; it was I that placed the ever-beautiful image of the Christ-Child on the topmost bough; I that lighted the many-colored tapers; and I that, at the auspicious moment, suddenly threw open the folding-doors and let the children to behold the glory of that wondrous Christmas miracle.

**Register of Deeds
Judy Lambert
(Continued)**