

Grosh, Ethan Allen

DEATH OF E. ALLEN GROSH [slightly abridged]

DEAR BR. AUSTIN:- Again do I ask the use of your columns to convey afflictive tidings to a large and widely separated circle of friends. My eldest son, whose letter announcing the decease of his brother (at Gold Canon, U.T. in Sept. last) excited so much interest and sympathy, has now gone to rejoin his brother. But oh, by what terrible sufferings was he perfected for the last great change! But I will not anticipate—but as calmly as horror and grief will permit, I will condense the details in a brief biographical sketch.

ETHAN ALLEN GROSH was born in Marietta, PA., November 7th, 1824. Of feeble constitution, confinement to study or in-door labors, for a few weeks, was certain to induce a severe bilious attack, nervous headache, or deep depression of spirits. Regular school education was impossible, but by occasional reading and especially by conversation, he managed to amass a large fund of general knowledge. Unfortunately he chose printing for a life-pursuit. After acquiring the art, under his uncle C. C. P. Grosh, in the Magazine and Advocate office [in Utica, NY], and a further knowledge of fancy work in Philadelphia, his health compelled him to abandon it forever. He was then engaged in the post office at Lewistown, Pa., by his uncle, Moses Montgomery, Esq. His enthusiasm in the cause of mental and moral improvement, and his success in engaging others in the work, will long be remembered in that place. Resolved to have a trade to rely on, he entered the Reading, (Pa.) Depot Machine Shop in early 1848, desiring to become a good machinist. When the "gold fever" reached here, the hope of uniting the several branches of his father's and uncle's families in some good location, and improving their pecuniary condition, induced exertions to organize a company for gold mining in California. That company left Reading in Feb. 1849—not 1850, as erroneously stated in a former article. After the varied fortunes and reverses stated in my notice of Hosea's decease, and after that sad event, Allen believed it was his duty to remain in Utah and prosecute to valuable results the fortunate prospects which had just then begun to open up before them. His friends regretted this, and wrote offers of aid to induce his return, but alas! they never reached him.

Knowing his distance from any post office, we hoped that "no news is good news." Imagine our bitter anguish on receiving the following tidings from various sources. Mr. W. J. Harrison says in his excellent and sympathizing letter, dated "Last Chance, Placer co., Dec. 20th, 1857"—a miner's camp far up the mountains, 20 miles from Michigan Bluffs, the nearest post office: —

"I learned from him the following account. About the 20th of November he, in company with another young man, left [Bigler Lake, on] the east side of the Nevada mountains, for the more congenial climate on the west side. After they had traveled some 30 or 40 miles their pack animal was stolen by some Indians and white men, supposed to be Mormons. They pursued the trail, and on the fifth day succeeded in recovering their animal. The snow was falling very fast, and they hastened to cross the first summit of the mountain. By the time they were across, the snow was so deep that their jack could not travel. They halted for a few days in a small valley, in the

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hope of a change of weather; but there was no modification. They then killed their animal, and started with as much of the meat as they were able to pack on their backs. As they ascended the mountain, the snow got very deep, and impeded their progress very much. They at last crossed the second summit; but they had nothing to eat, their matches were wet, and they found it impossible to get a fire during the night. They traveled four days without food, and slept in the snow four nights without fire. On the fifth day they found a camp of Spaniards [Mexicans] who live about ten miles higher up in the mountain. The Spaniards took them in and treated them as well as they could."

We omit the remainder, as Allen's letter belongs here. We give it verbatim, supplying in brackets its omissions and abbreviations. It is written on a half sheet of paper, in trembling and confused characters, unlike his usual clear and decided penmanship. It is undoubtedly his *last lines*, and was addressed to Francis J. Hoover, Esq., El Dorado (formerly of Lancaster Co., Pa.), a very kind and firm friend, whose genial and generous character led them to call him their "Governor."

Blind Ravine , Mid[dle Fork,] Am[erican] River, Dec. 12th, 1857

"Dr. Gov[ernor] and Friends: — We were snowed in crossing the Sierra Nevada, and escaped only with our lives. We were forced to take to the water courses as guides to our way, on account of the thickness of the snow storm. Our matches got wet, and both barrels of our shot gun clogged, and we were obliged to seek shelter from the wind and storm, on lower ground, where we succeeded in saving our lives by burying ourselves in the snow. The next day, the storm still continuing as violent as ever, we were compelled to follow the river as the only means of knowing our direction. For four nights we were without fire, and too cold to weave snowshoes. We buried our feet and legs in snow, and will probably save them. We are now in the kindest of hands, and are treated as though we were relatives rather than strangers. We have been taken into the house of an Italian and a Chillano, and the only trouble is to prevent them from doing too much for us. We are indebted to them so much already, and in fact to the whole settlement, that we feel we can never repay them. God bless them all, until we can make a better return than our prayers.

"My companion is a young Englishman, and though not yet twenty-one years of age, has shown the high Norman blood, in encountering our difficulties and trials... His name is Morris Buck, of Sinai, C.W. [Canada West].

"Morris' feet are worse than mine, as he thawed them out by the fire, while I wrapped mine up in blankets. I had not the energy to rub in the snow; for besides being without fire for four nights, we were without food for three days. The next day we washed in beef brine, and also the next, when a kind Mexican came to our relief with a bottle of mustard, and a linament of the composition of which I know nothing, except that I can detect the smell of turp[entine] and cam[phor]. After washing our feet in warm water and

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mustard, he bound up our feet in a white lye poultice. This morning we washed off the poultice and anointed with sweet oil, and our feet look very well. I think that in three or four days I will start for the Sugar Loaf. If Morris is able to go along, he will go with me,- if not, I shall leave him behind at the best place I can find, and push on in hopes of getting something to do that I can work at until my feet get well so as to sustain us both, if necessary. My Mexican doctor gives me great hope of a speedy recovery to the full use of my feet, but I fear he is altogether too sanguine. My plan is to beg my way towards Sugar Loaf, and stop wherever I can get board for my work. If I cannot get work, I may have to push on as far as Mud Springs [El Dorado] where I must rely on you or some of the S[ugar] L[oaf] boys either for something to do, or the means of subsistence...

"The ends of my fingers are very slightly touched with frost, and my wits-end with fever, so that I feel very much ashamed at the confused note I have written you. But it must go, as I cannot write another. Neither of us can walk. Our friends will try and have us packed out as far as Mich[igan] Bluffs through the snow. We are 6 or 7 miles above Last Chance, and 18 or 20 above the Bluff. We have had a *very narrow* escape of it. — And God's providence alone saved us. With this confused account I must put you off until we meet, until when, good bye all."

E. A. Grosh

This was mailed at Michigan Bluffs on the 17th. — Mr. Hoover, in his very thoughtful and feeling letter to me, says:

"Allen's letter to me was received by me on the 19th. On the 20th I wrote to Michigan Bluffs, enclosing money enough to pay his fare to this place, but little did I think that on the same day I sent him aid, he would be consigned to his last resting place on earth."

As soon as the messenger from the Mexican camp reached Last Chance, the miners to the number of twenty went over with sleds on the 13th, and with great exertions carried the sufferer over the mountains to the last named place. We continue quotations from Mr. Harrison's letter:-

"So soon as they came in we procured every comfort that could be had for their benefit. From the time your son arrived here to his death he sunk gradually. Nothing kept him alive from the time of his crossing the last summit and his getting in, but his great resolution and mental energy. His constitution appeared to be impaired by his life in this country, but from nothing but its hardships and privations." [And doubtless grief and loneliness since the death of Hosea, did its share of the work.] "He had exhausted all physical ability, and nothing could have saved him. He was frozen up to his knees, and so soon as his legs thawed out, the unhealthy flow of blood was too great for his physical strength. His companion is yet alive—he is a strong man, and may yet recover to some extent."

He breathed his last at 20 minutes past 4 o'clock, A.M., December 19th, being then 34 years, 1 month, and 12 days old — and was buried decently on December

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20th, at a quarter past 4 o'clock. Mr. Harrison superintended the funeral, and sent us a lock of his hair. He says further: —

"Could money have purchased the life of your son, it would have been freely paid.... The miners wish me to express to you and your family, their warmest sympathy in your present bereavement. They *feel* sympathy, for your son died in their midst, where all around looks desolate and gloomy, among these inhospitable mountains on the frontier. And in conclusion, sir, please accept the warmest sympathy of a brother 'of the mystic tie.'" I remain,

Yours sincerely,
W. J. Harrison

A few extracts, and a few words more, and my painful task will be completed. Br. (late Rev.) Alpheus Bull, of the firm of Bull, Baker, and Co., San Francisco, sent us the "Bulletin" of that city, with a kind letter of condolence. He says:-

"I met your sons on the way to this country, in July, 1849, on board the brig "Olga." Their oneness of purpose was noticed on the ship.- When we consider how very closely they were attached to each other while on earth, as mentioned in the *Ambassador*, how very remarkable it is that they were separated so short a time from their union in the spirit-world. Again there is cause for thankfulness to know their end. So many die throughout this country, and not a word do their friends learn concerning them to relieve their hearts of torturing suspense."

[W]ords are weak to express what we owe to the good Samaritans of those mountain camps, who received and ministered unto the famished and frozen sufferers—who traveled 20 miles over rugged roads and through deep snows to bring them to their own camp, and there tended them as brothers until death, and then reverently and affectionately buried my son, and sent us words and tokens of sympathy and consolation. Would that I could see their faces and grasp their hands! May God forever bless them, one and all!

The brothers who were so "lovely and united in their lives" were not long sundered by death—for though their mortal remains slumber peacefully on *opposite* sides of the Sierra Nevada, over which they roamed for many years, and where they died, yet their spirits, we trust, are united forever in greater heights, and sit together in heavenly places, where wintry storms and earthly sufferings can never intrude, and farewells are never spoken.

[Rev.] A.[Aaron] B. Grosh

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, Sat. 20 Feb 1858
[a Universalist newspaper]

Transcribed on 28 Jan 2008 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY