

Life of W. T. Sapp, the world famous ossified man / written by himself ; a brief account of his life, condition and experience ; a book from which every man, woman and child in the land may learn a lesson of patience, cheerfulness and self reliance.

Contributors

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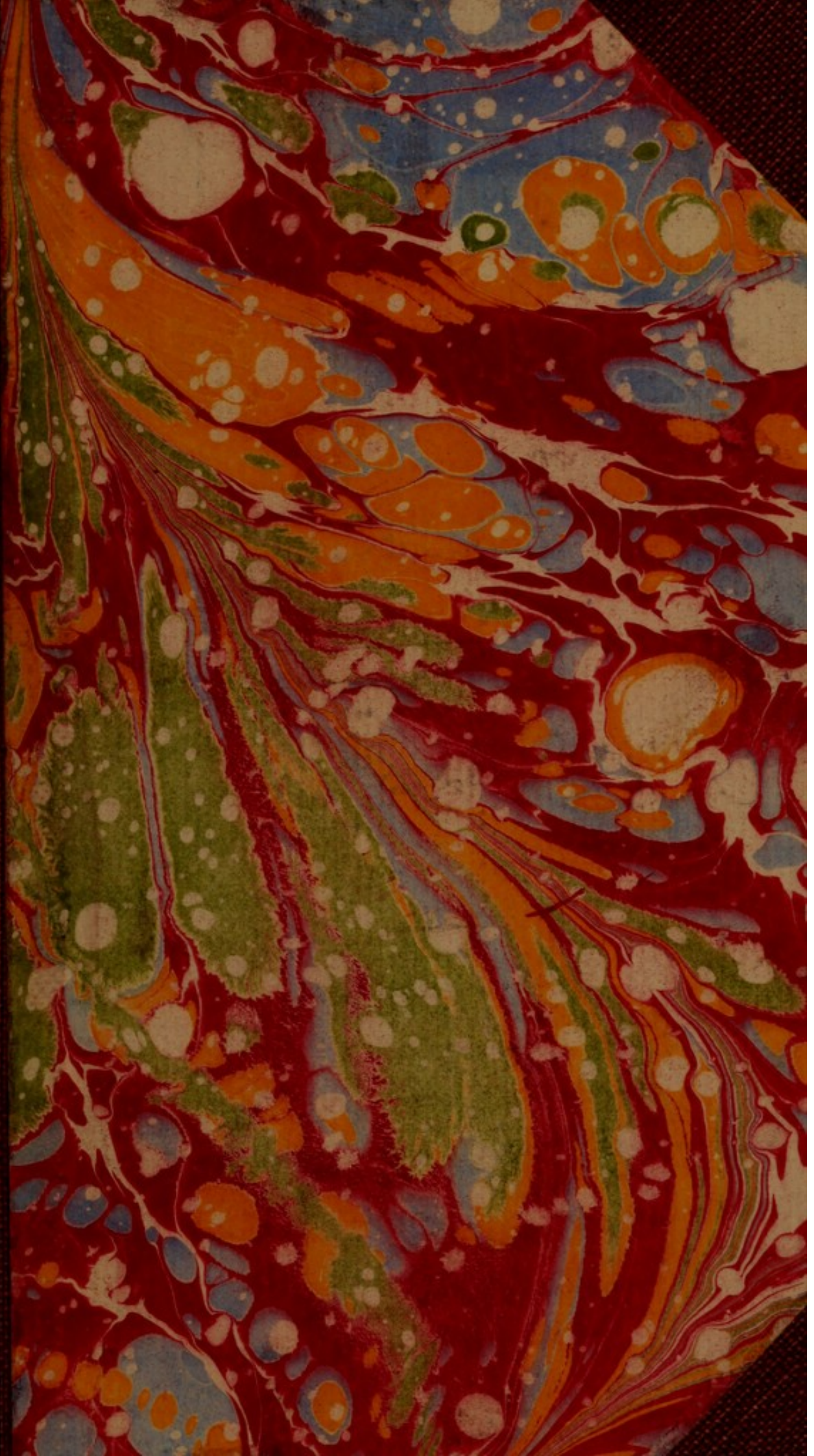
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LIFE OF W. T. SAPP,

THE WORLD FAMOUS



OSSIFIED MAN.

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

A brief account of his Life, Condition and Experience; a Book from which every Man, Woman and Child in the Land may learn a Lesson of Patience, Cheerfulness and Self Reliance.

PRICE FIVE CENTS.

DANCE BROS. & CO. PRINTERS, DANVILLE, VA.

Known as the "Ossified Man"

Mr. W. T. Snapp, the famous ossified man of Lebanon, Ky., is dead in Alberquerque, N. M. While still a child Sapp's muscular tissues entirely wasted away and every joint in the body except those of the left shoulder and of the hands became solidified. For thirty-six years the hapless statue of the man has been on exhibition.

— 1897

LIFE OF W. T. SAPP.

(THE OSSIFIED MAN).

I was born Nov. the 10th, 1854, near the little town of Lebanon, Ky. My father, Cornelius Sapp, is the third son of Benjamin Sapp, who emigrated from Maryland and was one among the first settlers of Marion county, Ky. My mother is the eldest daughter of Reed Hayes, whose father was also one of the first settlers of the State, after whom the little town of Hayosville was named. My mother who is 65 years of age, and my father who is 66 years of age, are healthy, ordinary-sized persons, and are the decendents of very hardy and long-lived ancestors. They have a family of five children; one girl and four boys. I am the third one of these children, my sister and one brother being older than myself, and two brothers younger. My sister and brothers are averaged-sized persons and are all married and still reside in Kentucky.

At my birth, and until about the seventh year of my age I was a remarkably hardy, robust and active boy, engaging with my brothers and playmates in all the sports and pastimes of childhood with as much vigor and sprightliness as any one of my age, giving every promise of reaching manhood's estate a perfect specimen of physical strength and vigorous form. But alas! like many other bright prospects

and fond hopes we cherish, these promises were never to be realized. My young life beginning as bright and promising as a beautiful May morning, full of joy and hope, was soon to be overcast by the dark clouds of a sad misfortune, casting a shadow over my future existence that blighted all these bright hopes and flattering prospects.

As children, with that eagerness and bright anticipations, we look forward to the great future when we fancy we shall see all the dreams of our young minds realized. How we yearn to be men and women like papa and mama. With what innocent joy do we talk of the great achievements we shall accomplish and the noble things we shall do. How slowly the years seem to pass before this fancy picture of our future lives can be realized. But when the years have slowly rolled by and we have reached the long desired goal, how often, instead of the bright visions of our childish imaginations, are we met by sad disappointment. The memories of my own childhood days are the dearest memories of my life. They now seem like a happy dream. As I listen to the cheerful voices of little children so free from care, so full of joy, or as I see them skipping and bounding like the nimble squirrel on their way to school, or in their childish sports, I ask myself if it is possible my prospects were once as bright as theirs? As I look into their bright eyes and happy faces, where I see pictured only joy and hope, a feeling of sadness steals over me that carries me back from my unfortunate present to my happy past. Then I lived on in blissful ignorance of the great misfortune that was so soon to overtake me—well that it was so; had the veil of the future been lifted, and I had seen, instead of the castles I was building the terrible fate that awaited me, my young heart, light as it was, could not have but grown sad, and those happy days of sunshine turned to gloom.

At about this time I was attacked by a peculiar malady, the nature of which was so mysterious, but the result so marked, that at the end of three years from its commencement, a complete transformation had taken place.

This transformation I will now try to describe: At about the age of 7, without any pain or apparent cause, the muscles began wasting away from the limbs and body. The waste was very slow, but so continual that it soon began to tell. My parents becoming alarmed, called in our family physician, who treated me for quite a while, but being unable to arrest the strange decay of muscle that was taking place, they called in others noted for their medical skill and success in the art of healing, but as I was gradually wasting away without any apparent cause, the general system remaining unaffected, and being seemingly in good health, they too, were at a loss to account for the mysterious cause that seemed slowly, but surely, leading to a fatal termination. My peculiar condition attracted a great deal of attention at the time, and was published in quite a number of the leading newspapers throughout the country, and created quite a stir among the medical fraternity.

During the three years that I was being reduced to my present strange and unaccountable condition, I was visited and treated by a number of the best physicians, surgeons and medical experts of the country, but my case seemed an enigma to them all, being without a parallel in medical annals.

After the muscles had wasted away from the limbs and body until I was reduced to almost a shadow, another strange condition set in. Every joint in the entire body from head to foot, with the exception of those of the left shoulder and the fingers of each hand, began growing stiff or becoming solidified. This my physicians tried to check by frequently

moving and working them, but despite every effort that could be made to prevent it, the joints gradually became so rigid that force could not move them without breaking the bones, and the limbs and body were left as solid and immovable as a stone. Thus in three years from the beginning of this terrible and unknown malady, instead of the muscular, vigorous and finely formed boy I was at seven, I had been reduced to a mere shadow of my former self, the muscles wasted until I was a complete skeleton, with the body and limbs as solid and immovable as if they had been carved from a block of marble. Strange as it may seem, during the time this great change was taking place in the body and limbs, the head and face were not affected, nor was the general health impaired in the slightest degree. It left all of the vital organs in a healthy and normal condition, the organ of digestion, respiration and circulation being unimpaired. Although the muscles were completely wasted away and the joints were solidly united, making the body as solid and immovable as a statue carved from a block of granite, it left the general health apparently as good as it had been before this change, and so it has remained to the present time.

Though my early childhood days gave promise of such a bright future for me, three short years had blighted those happy prospects and cast a gloom over my future life that was anything but cheerful, the contemplation of which required the stoutest heart and the highest degree of moral courage, but which no power but the hand of Death could cast aside. Instead of a future life of physical strength and manly form, which has ever been the glory of man, gifted with self-locomotion and muscular power, able to take part as others do, in all the athletic exercises and feats of strength which are so conducive to both health and hap-

piness, I was imprisoned as it were, in my own body, now as solid as marble, there to remain as long as life should endure. Though feeling as well as any one living, every organ of the body performing its natural functions with as much regularity as in the strongest and most robust person, with all the vital parts of the system unaffected, I was utterly unable to move of my own will and volition, with the exception of the left shoulder and fingers, as though I was a statue chiseled from marble. Though living, breathing, speaking, and thinking, these functions were performed in a body that to all intents and purposes was absolutely dead.

The right side being the only position I could occupy with comfort, I was compelled to assume that position, there to remain confined in my bodily prison until liberated by the cold hand of death, as helpless and dependent on others as the babe that sleeps on a fond and loving mother's breast is dependent on her for every want and care. For thirty long and weary years I have thus lain on the one side, never changing position, never moving; not so much as lifting the head from my pillow. For thirty long and tedious years, helpless as an infant I have been compelled to look out of my bodily prison on a grand and beautiful world, where so many beauties are spread for the enjoyment of mankind, where others are permitted to roam at will, realizing in its highest degree the blessings of an earthly existence. But the hand of Fate withholds many of these blessings from me. What so many others possess and so lightly appreciate, to me seems a blessing for which we can never be too thankful. What would the deaf give to hear? The dumb to speak? or the blind to see? What would the helpless give for strength and activity? Yet how little gratitude many possessing all these blessings show for their possession. Though deprived of strength and activity, confined in a

body that is as useless to me, so for as motion is concerned, as if moulded from clay, I must patiently and perseveringly make my way through life as best I can, expecting to be released only when I pass from this body into the great beyond. Yet I do not complain. My lot has been cast by the Almighty, and I am glad that I have courage enough to accept it and make the best of it. Fate has indeed smitten me with a heavy hand—a hand that would perhaps have crushed the spirit in many, but I should be ashamed to think courage would allow me to shrink from its blows. The body has been vanquished, but the spirit stands defiant; physical strength has been conquered, but hope and courage have not deserted me, and with these as my companions, I will cheerfully follow the rough pathway through life that has been marked out for me by the Ruler of our destinies.

I have been left in possession of all the senses and mental powers through which our pleasures are received, so that I am by no means entirely cut off from the enjoyments of life. My unfortunate condition prohibits me from engaging in many pleasures indulged in by others, but fortunately has left me capable of taking in and enjoying those that are the most lasting and give us the keenest delight. My enjoyments are more limited in number, but just as intense in degree. I cannot enter so many paths of pleasure, but those that are left open to me are filled with just as many delights. I cannot exhaust myself in the whirl of the dizzy waltz, but the strains of the music fills my ears with its melody. I cannot wander into the gardens and fields and gather the beautiful flowers, but they are no less charming nor their fragrance less sweet. I cannot climb to the dizzy heights of the mountain's peak, nor stand erect on the brink of Niagara, but the eyes take in their grandeur and beauties, filling the soul with just as much delight. Though the body has

been reduced to a physical wreck the mind has remained bright and clear. While the limbs are not any larger than those of a child, the head is that of a fully developed man, having grown to normal size and being well formed. Being only seven years old when the decay began, I had gone to school only a short time and was not very much advanced in an education, but was considered an apt scholar and had a great desire to learn, and notwithstanding I was being daily reduced by the strange affliction, I did not lose interest in my studies, and with the assistance of private instructors and my own perseverance, I received quite a good English education. In my studies I had a preference for Language, Geography and History.

This fondness for learning in childhood has grown stronger with each year of my age, and nothing now gives me so much pleasure as access to a well-filled library. My favorite reading is works on history, biography, travel, and poetry. My desire for information is so great that there is no bodily sacrifice that I would not cheerfully make in order to gratify it. Notwithstanding my helpless condition, I, perhaps, enjoy life as well as many others more fortunate than myself. I take as much interest in the ordinary affairs of life as most men, having the same ambitions, aspirations and desires as others, with an aim in life for which I work as hard to attain and which I look forward to with as much interest and earnestness as ordinary persons. I am as deeply interested in social, political, religious and financial affairs as those who are differently situated. On all these subjects, as well as others pertaining to the welfare and happiness of the human family, I have always endeavored to gain correct ideas and form unbiased opinions for which my strange condition gives me peculiar advantages.

Having been raised by a good mother, I was at an early

age taught the principles of Christianity, and the duties we owe our Creator, our fellow-man, and ourselves, and although I have never been a member of any religious denomination, I have the highest respect for religion and the greatest admiration for moral principles. I have a deep sense of the obligations we are under to our Creator and our fellow-man. To our Creator we are never thankful enough for the blessings granted us.

Though He has denied me so much that He has bestowed on others, He has granted me blessings of priceless value, which I highly appreciate. He has left me in possession of all five senses through which so much of our pleasure is derived. Through the sense of sight I am enabled to gratify my thirst for knowledge, by reading, enlightening the mind with the thoughts, sentiments and songs of the best authors, historians and poets of the present as well as past ages. Through this sense I can enjoy the beauties of a grand and lovely world, the grandeur of which fills the mind with its indescribable charms. As I gaze on the beautiful landscape, the star-lit heavens, the towering mountain, or the mighty cataract, the soul is filled with emotions of keenest delight. As I look on the beautiful painting, study the beauties of the sculptor's art, or admire the grand structure of architecture, the mind is filled with pleasures that are surpassed only by the kind and genial expression that beams from the eyes of dear friends, or by the smile that plays on the faces of those I love. The sparkle of the dew drops, as they glitter like so many diamonds in the rays of the morning sun, the lovely flowers that fill the air with their fragrance and charm the eye with their beauties, the twinkling stars that light up the clear blue sky with so much glory, and the soft rays of the beautiful moon, throwing a quiet beauty over hill and valley, all excite in my mind a feeling

of delight that words cannot describe and only a true lover of nature appreciates.

Through the sense of hearing I can enjoy the soothing strains of music, both of nature and art. The clear, sweet strains of the harp or guitar fill my soul with rapture, equalled only by the lovely songs of the birds, the soft cooing of the dove, or the sweet tones of the human voice, speaking words of kindness. The deep tones of the organ, the clear notes of the flute, and the soul-stirring melody of the violin fill me with a joy no less intense than the sweet music of nature that strikes the ear when I listen to the soft whisperings of the wind among the trees, the gentle ripple of the brook over its rocky bed, or the sweet voices and merry songs of dear little children.

Though the limbs and body are as unbending and rigid as iron, the sense of touch is very acute on any portion of the body or limbs, and through this sense the flower-scented breeze of May, the balmy winds of summer, or the inviting shade of the grove, are as refreshing to me as to others more fortunate. The body has been reduced from a large, vigorous and promising boy, weighing about sixty-five pounds when seven years old, to a mere pigmy in form, solid as a rock, weighing at present only forty pounds.

But despite all this decay, one favor has been granted me, the fingers of both hands, and the left shoulder have remained movable, and with the aid of the shoulder and the fingers of the hand, I am enable to do my own writing, feed myself, hold a book or a paper—a boon to me that is beyond price. My parents, brothers and sisters were exceedingly mortified over my great misfortune, and made every effort to make me comfortable in my sad condition and to lighten the affliction they knew I must endure through life. They treated me with the utmost kindness, being ever ready to

gratify my slightest wishes. My dear mother was never too tired, nor too sleepy to minister to my wants, nor was there any sacrifice she would not cheerfully make for my comfort. Though they were kind to me and made it as pleasant for me as they could, I could not subdue the spirit of independence that has always been a marked trait of my character, and the thought of perhaps a long life of dependence on others for my bread and butter was one that gave me no little anxiety. But what was I to do? Though proud in spirit I was helpless as a babe in a cold and selfish world. For their kindness and care I felt the deepest gratitude, but the sting of dependence became only the sharper as days wore themselves into weeks, weeks into months, and months into weary years. My keenest desire was to relieve them of the care with which I felt I was taxing them. As increasing years of age developed the aspirations and ambitions that were so deeply implanted in my nature, words cannot express my feeling of helplessness, when I reached the verge of manhood's estate where so many grand opportunities are offered which when embraced, lead to honor, independence and happiness. The opportunities that were so invitingly held out to others were withheld from me. The opportunities that could be so easily embraced by others, to me were impossibilities. The pursuits of life which offered such bright prospects to others I could never expect to enter. It was like perishing of hunger, surrounded by the richest and most nourishing food, or dying of thirst, with the cool and sparkling water flowing at the feet. The soul was filled with ambition, but was held captive by the body in which it had made its abode. The mind was imprisoned within the walls of its own home, but courage fought away despair, and it looked out on the grand possibilities of human life with a zeal that adversity was unable to conquer. I was help-

less, but possessed of a strong will power. I did not yield to despondency, but determined to make my way through life as best I could. There was no pursuit of life that was open to me. For manual labor I lacked physical strength, for business I needed capital, and for authorship I must have a classical education. My condition was like that of a ship without a pilot on the mighty ocean. My peculiar physical condition had made me one of the greatest living wonders of which there was any record, and of course excited the interest and curiosity of all who saw or heard of me, and I was solicited by many to place myself on public exhibition. I was by nature somewhat modest and retiring in disposition and being very sensitive in regard to my misfortune, I at first shrank from the thought of going before the public gaze. But ambition finally overcame my scruples, and in order to break the monotony that was slowly wearing away the years, and to free myself from a life of dependence on others, which was stinging my pride to the very quick, I determined to follow the only path that was left open to me through which I might make my own support. But when my friends and relatives learned that I had intentions of this kind, it called forth their loudest protests and their bitter opposition. The idea to them seemed preposterous. For one so utterly helpless and dependent as myself to leave home, friends and relatives and go forth into a cold and unfriendly world to fight the battle of life; alone in strange cities and among strange people, seemed to them an idea verging on lunacy. They pointed out to me the dangers I would meet, the hardships I must undergo, and the risk I would incur by pursuing such a course; all of which I realized and was prepared to face. But when the beseeching words, the earnest prayers, and the gentle warning of a kind and loving mother, whose eyes filled with

tears and whose heart seemed wrung with pain at the thought, was brought to bear, I shrank back overcome by a power which nothing else could wield—a mother's influence. By this power I was firmly held while the hand of time slowly marked off the days, the weeks and the months of many long years, during which there was a struggle going on in my soul that the flight of time seemed unable to decide—a struggle between a mother's love and ambition. A mother's love bade me remain where it could watch over me in my helpless lot and be a guardian angel to guide me through the rough pathways of life, ministering to my wants with a tenderness prompted only by a gentle woman's love. Ambition, though unable to lead me into the great highway through which others were passing to success, urged me with a force that seemed irresistible, to follow the one path left open to me—a path in which there was a gleam of hope. For years the struggle thus went on. The wishes of a mother were indeed hard to overcome, but the spirit of ambition lashed the soul with unrest and I was compelled to seek the counsel of reason in regard to the course I should pursue.

Reason taught me that a mother's wishes should not be lightly considered, but it also pointed out to me the stern realities of life. It told me that the mother and father that now watched over my welfare might be called away by the merciless hand of Death. It pointed out to me the duty we are under to our friends and to ourselves to grasp the opportunities that are offered us to make our own way and to bear our own burdens through life, instead of neglecting the opportunities and casting ourselves a burden on the hands of others. It taught me that to remain a charge on willing friends when there was a way left open to free them from it, showed a spirit of meanness as well as ingratitude.

and despite my own sensitiveness, the opposition of friends and the influence of a dear mother, ambition, guided by reason, gained the mastery, and I resolved to overcome the many difficulties that lay in my way and follow the only course that was left to free me from dependence—go on public exhibition.

In the summer of 1884 I applied to the manager of Keiler's Dime Museum, in Kansas City, Mo., for an engagement and secured it. After filling my engagement there I went to Chicago, and since that time I have been almost continuously on exhibition, having within the past ten years visited most of the principal cities of the United States and Canada, and satisfactorily filled engagements in all the leading museums of the country. I have made several tours of the country with circuses and been visited during the ten years by perhaps two million people, who were filled with wonder and amazement at my strange and almost incredible condition. Exposed to the constant dangers and hardships of travel, fortune has so far kept me unharmed, and to her favor I trust for my future safety. Although I wander through the world alone, among strange people and surrounded by strange scenes, the love of home and recollection of its friends have not faded from my memory. Time will fail to blot from my memory the careworn face of a kind old mother, as she touched my cheek with a last holy kiss of motherly love, and whose parting words were a prayer for my welfare. Well do I remember her as she looked after me until I had passed from her view, going helpless as I was, into a strange world from which she might never see me return. The tottering gait, the trembling hand and the silvery locks of my aged father, whose eyes filled with tears as he shook my hand, are treasured deep in my mind. In my childhood they had hoped to see me enter life's battle

gifted with vigorous form and manly strength, but they must see me enter the great struggles helpless as a babe. This parting filled me with emotions that cannot be described, but armed with a strong will power and courage, I determined to do the best I could, and though, with the aid of only the fingers and one shoulder, I have thus far succeeded in making my own way through a world, where so many blessed with health and strength sink down discouraged or waste their strength in cowardly complaint. In order to make my own way I have left parents and home, wandering alone through a selfish world, and may die among strangers in a strange land, without the tender hand of a loving woman to smooth my dying pillow or plant one sweet flower on my grave to cheer the lonely spot while I sleep the calm sweet sleep of death. But, if I can, as I pass through the world in my unfortunate condition, be the means of teaching others, more fortunate than myself, the lesson of patience and gratefulness, I shall feel that the design of an allwise Creator has been accomplished and that my mission in life will not have been in vain, and I shall die content.

W. T. SAPP.

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