

HE WAS ALWAYS LOOKING FOR A BETTER PLACE

BY H. C. WATERS

IT'S a long, long trail that sometimes leads to the Harris-co home, out on the Crosby-rd.

There is J. J. Banham, who sits among the quiet men there who seem to be ever waiting for—something.

He seemed the patriarch of them all, with massive white beard and white hair.

He sat over next to a fireplace in a big rocker, leaning gently on a great cane, just as I imagine they sat in the days of "the fathers."

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I said to myself: "I'll find out what brought this patriarch here.

I asked him and he said:

"I have always been looking for a better place and I have never found it to this day."

I said to myself: "If I were a preacher I could preach a great sermon on that."

But not being a preacher we will have to let this man, with 86 hard run years of a LIFE, preach the sermon.

The aged man said:

"I guess with me it is literally 'over the hills to the poorhouse,' over many hills of life,

"From the day I was a little boy, I was neevr satisfied with anything I had. I wanted always to go just over the hill yonder to see if I couldn't find a better place.

"I started out in Kentucky, and now, looking back, it seems those hills of my boyhood were the greenest I have ever known, the streams the clearest, the people the best.

"But I didn't know it then. I wandered over the country. I was married—married to only one woman, who died 17 years ago. She stayed by my side all the years. And there were 10 children, nine of whom are still living.

"They are scattered, too, like the chaff, from one end of the United States to the other." Banham tried to think of some of their names. There was Ida, the eldest. He could remember her.

"You see," he explained, "the things that happened away back yonder seem as if they happened but yesterday and the things of just a few years ago are lost in mists. I guess the mind doesn't hold things as we grow old."

And then with the petulant ramblings of an old man he lived over little events of bygone years—how a rain came up one night and put out a camp fire, etc.

"But I spent my substance in wandering," he went on. "No sooner had we made a little home and cleared the land

than I decided just over yonder there was a better place for me and missus.

"I didn't see the end, but I reckon I have reached it now."

The old man stopped to ponder.

"Now, just what is your great mistake in life?" I asked him.

"Well, if I had it to live all over again I would try to stick to one place. You know the old saying is 'that a rolling stone gathers no moss.' I am a living example of that.

"I would try to be satisfied with my lot if I were doing well. You don't know until you get near the end that satisfaction is the end of all. I have come to the house of contentment. I have searched far and wide and haven't found that better place I've always dreamed of. But I have found contentment here, just because the sands of life are nearly run, I guess.

"But I might have found contentment in my youth and now had my family and friends around me. But God only knows which course is the best."

Bonham, tired and weary and penniless, wandered into the home only a few months ago, seeking "a better place..."

"I'll always stay here," he said.

But he hasn't long to stay. . . .

THEY CALL HIM "FOXY GRANDPA" HE HAS SAVED JUST \$ 30

BY GEORGE B. WATERS

TWENTYTWO years more and Jack Bear will have lived in this workaday world 100 years.

He never married, he never accumulated a fortune, he hasn't a living relative, he never worried over his failures, and even now, in the bone dry poorhouse, he is still cheerful.

He never drank to excess, he doesn't blame liquor for his downfall, but boasts, "I have not been exactly a prohibitionist."

He says he is glad he never had a wife to support. When

asked if he isn't sorry that he has no children to "fall back on," he laughingly points to numerous of his fellows who have children and grand children who have let them go to the poor farm.

They call Jack Bear "Foxy Grandpa." I asked T. W. Harral, the superintendent, why. Harral said it was because Bear was "foxy" and so typical a picture of an old fashioned grandpa.

He has iron gray whiskers that flow long from the sides of his face and chin and hang over

his bosom. He wears his hair long and he is 78.

Yet he is a "devil with the women" and holds hands with women inmates. There has been some fear that he might elope.

"Foxy Grandpa" was born in Switzerland and was a drummer for a clothing house. At 45 he sailed from Le Havre to America, ran a saloon in Cleveland, Ohio, 12 years, ran a saloon in Beaumont for a number of years, ran another saloon in Port Arthur for a year and then came to Houston. For years, until the poorhouse got him, he

worked at the Age Bar, owned by Louis Grasmuck, Preston-av and Milam-st.

Jake Bear took many a drink on the house and the house took many a drink on him. He said for years he drew no salary from the Age Bar. He used the bar, and the eating place with it, as his bank. He left his money back of the bar. He got his drinks, his board, a place to sleep and part of the time his "bank" account was overdrawn.

He knew that Louis Grasmuck wouldn't let him starve—Louis was his godfather. And

even now Jake Bear tells with pride that Louis is holding \$30, Jake's savings of a lifetime, to bury him when the end comes.

"Suppose Louis should die before you do?"

"Oh, Louis won't die; he's still going strong," replied Jack Bear. "I'm just waiting; Louis will take me to Houston to be buried. I trust Louis, he's been my friend."

Jake says Louis gives him a dollar a year interest on the money. That's Jake's entire income. He doesn't let it accumulate; he says there's no pocket in a shroud.