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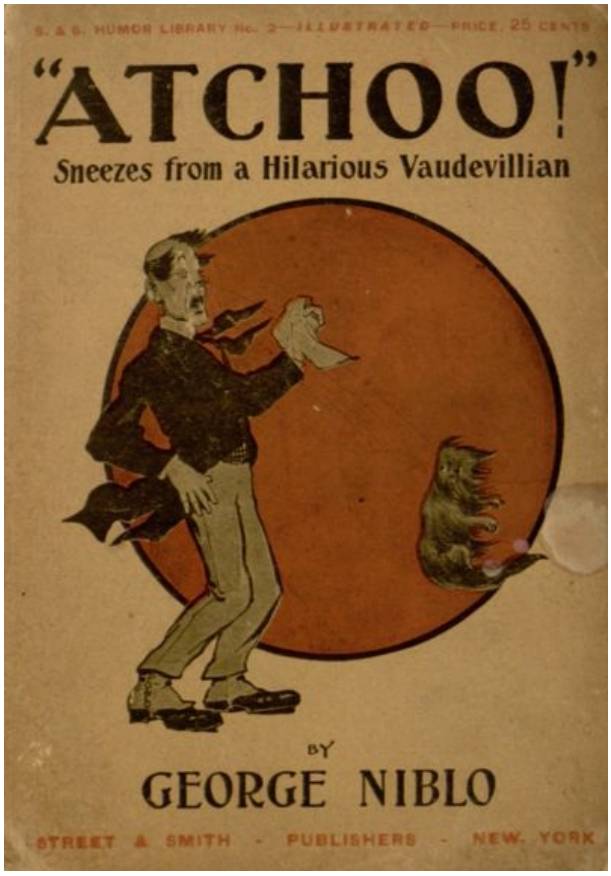

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"ATCHOO!"

Sneezes from a Hilarious Vaudevillian

BY

GEORGE NIBLO

STREET & SMITH - PUBLISHERS - NEW YORK

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NEW YORK
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ATCHOO!

[Pg 3]

Fellow citizens!—I beg pardon, I mean ladies and gentlemen! You see I've just come from a political meeting, and that sort of thing gets on your nerves. I went to hear my friend Isaacstein talk. His subject was "Why should the Jew have to work?"

They did a lot of whitewashing at that meeting. I suppose it's all right. Of course you can't make a new fence with a pail of whitewash, but you can cover up the mothholes.

But we mustn't be too hard on the politicians. If it wasn't for politics a good many fellows that are too lazy to earn a living with their hands would be paupers. But some of 'em are all right. There's Isaacstein for instance. As good a man as ever sauntered down Hester Street. He joined the noble army [Pg 4] of grafters two years ago and worked so hard at his profession that he got appendicitis.

A friend of Isaacstein's met another acquaintance of his in Hester Street and asked:

"Haf you heard aboudt Isaacstein?"

"No. Vat iss it?"

"He vas sick. They take him by der hospital, and vat you tink they do to him?"

"Vell. Vell. Vat iss it?"

"They put him in a room all by himself und take his appendix away from him."

"Na! Na! Na! Vat a pity, ain't it, he didn't have it in his wife's name?"

Why, I was taken sick myself lately—such thing will happen even in the best regulated families, you know.

The doctor came and said that he
Would make another man of me.
"All right," said I, "and if you will,
Just send that other man your bill."

While I was on my way here there was a fire down in one of those thickly populated streets where twenty families and more live, like sardines, in a tenement. The fire [Pg 5] engine came booming along, and as usual created tremendous excitement.

I noticed a small chap on a bicycle riding zigzag in front of the machine, evidently anxious to keep up with it and get to the fire in time to watch it begin work.

Half a dozen times the driver had to pull up suddenly to avoid running over the nervy little Hebrew, and this of course made the firemen riding with the machine furious.

Just in front of where I was standing one of the gallant life savers jumped down from the engine, caught hold of the boy and pulled him off to one side, at the same time saying:

"You miserable little Sheeney, you ought to be arrested for getting in the way! I've a good mind to spank you."

The boy looked at the fireman in surprise and whimpered:

"If it wasn't for the Jews you wouldn't have anything to do." [Pg 6]

I often squander an hour or two down in Hester Street, where I have some rare acquaintances among the second-hand dealers.

Of course you understand that I only go there to study human nature, and I remember some months ago being delightfully entertained at a Jewish wedding, where my esteemed friend Moses Schaumburg gave his cherished Rebecca into the keeping of young Silverstein, a progressive Broadway salesman.

This fact was brought to my mind when, only the other day I saw the bridegroom rush into his father-in-law's establishment bearing a look of excitement, and also a few very positive scratches upon his olive face, and exclaiming dramatically:

"Mister Schaumburg, I vants you to dake back your daughter Rebecca."

The old man threw up his hands.

"I dakes not dot Repecca back. Ven a man comes to my house, picks out himself a piece of goots, and dot goots vas received by him in goot order, I vould be a fool to dake pack dot goods. No, sir, you schoost keep dot Repecca." [Pg 7]

My brother Tom was hit on the head some time ago, and at the hospital they said they would have to amputate half his brain. I didn't want them to, because he is absent-minded anyway.

"We'll have to give him something to make him sleep," said one of the surgeons.

"That won't be necessary," said another; "he's a policeman."

That made Tom sore, and he snapped: "I've got half a mind to cave in your ribs for you."

"You won't feel that way in a minute," said the surgeon, "because that's the half of your mind we're going to cut out."

It was a great operation. When I told my wife of the surgeon's little joke and how Tom came back at him she said she never knew a time when Tom wasn't ready to give anybody a piece of his mind.

Tom was a confirmed dyspeptic, too, and when the operator was taking an X-ray photograph of the seat of his troubles, this waggish brother of mine, with a ghastly attempt to be facetious, said: [Pg 8]

"This, I suppose, is what might be called taking light exercise on an empty stomach."

Perhaps it may surprise you to hear me say that some years ago I was connected with the newspaper business.

I don't tell this to everybody, you know, but there are some little things connected with my experience that drive away the blues in these times when the ghost refuses to walk regularly on pay day.

It was out in old Kaintuck, the Blue Grass country famous for its fast horses, fair women and old Bourbon.

Say, have you ever been in the land of Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett, the original Tennessee Congressmen?

You don't know what you've missed then—grand scenery, splendid cooking, and the most original people in the mountains, where they make that moonshine whiskey you've heard about. [Pg 9]

I used to hustle right lively looking for news, and during the course of my journeyings I ran across a grizzled old farmer from the back settlements, who looked like he might be a good judge of double distilled mountain dew that had paid no revenue to Uncle Sam.

Of course I tackled him right away, and first lining him up in the tap-room of the tavern, asked what news there might be up in his section, for it was a warm corner of the State, and could usually be depended on for some lively incidents during the week.

His answer rather disappointed me at first.

"They ain't nothin' doin' up our way," he said, "'cause we're all too busy with our crops to bother about anything else. All quiet in our neighborhood for sartin."

"Pretty good crops this year?" I inquired.

"Bully," says he. "I ought to be in my field this minute, an' I would be if I hadn't come to town to see the coroner." [Pg 10]

"The coroner?" I began to feel interested, because you know there's only one kind of harvest that needs a coroner.

"Yep. Want him to hold an inquest on a couple of fellers down in our neighborhood."

"Inquest? Was it an accident?"

"Nope. Zeke Burke did it a-puppus. Plugged George Rambo and his boy Bill with a pistol. Got to have an inquest."

"What caused the fight?"

"There wasn't no fight. Zeke never give the other fellers a show. Guess he was right, too, 'cause the Rambos didn't give Zeke's father an' brother any chance. Just hid behind a tree and fired at 'em as they came along the road. That was yistiday mornin', an' in an hour Zeke had squared accounts."

"Has Zeke been arrested?"

"Nope. What's the use? Some of old man Rambo's relatives came along last night, burned down Zeke's house, shot him an' his wife, an' set fire to his barn. Nope, Zeke hasn't been arrested. But I ain't got time to talk to you. Have to git back to my harvestin'. But there ain't no news down our way. If anythin' happens I'll let ye know." [Pg 11]

One of my best friends down there was an old judge who knew more about whiskey than he did about law. One day a young lawyer came to town and hung up his shingle.

Up to that day the judge had been the only member of the legal fraternity there.

Old Si Corntassle, a close-fisted farmer, sizing up the situation, thought it a good chance to corner some legal advice without cost, so he hastened to call upon the young man, told him he was very glad he had come into the town, as the old judge was getting superannuated, and then contrived in a sort of neighborly talk to get some legal questions answered.

Then thanking the young sprig of the bar, he put on his hat and was about to leave, when the lawyer asked him if he should charge the advice, for which the fee was five dollars.

The old fellow went into a violent passion and swore he never would pay, but the young lawyer told him he would sue him if he didn't. [Pg 12]

So old Si trotted down to see the judge, found him hoeing in his garden, and said:

"That young scamp that's just come into town! I dropped in to make a neighborly call on him and he charged me five dollars for legal advice."

"Served you right," said the judge, who sized up the situation, and saw a chance to pay off an old score; "you had no business to have gone to him."

"But have I got to pay it, judge?"

"Of course you have."

"Well, then," said the man, "I suppose I must," and he started off.

"Hold on!" said the judge; "aren't you going to pay me?"

"Pay you? What for?" said old Si.

"For legal advice."

"What do you charge?"

"Ten dollars."

And consequently as old Si had to settle with both he rather overreached himself in the transaction.

Some of you people doubtless find benefit in visiting the country, but I imagine Snellbaker, who has a gents' furnishing-goods emporium on the corner of a Brooklyn Street, rather carries off the prize in a profitable trip. [Pg 13]

I met him the other day, well sunburned, and with a twinkle in his eye.

"I say, Mr. Niblo, did you hear about my luck?" he asked, slapping me on the shoulder.

"Why, no, what's happened now?" I replied, wondering if he had drawn the grand prize in a lottery, or if his children had the measles.

"Well, you know when I went away to the country, I only took my five children and I brought ten home with me."

"How was that?" I asked, in surprise.

"Well, they ate green apples and got doubled up."

Singular what queer things do happen on the electric cars of a great metropolis. The other day I was riding down to the City Hall in a pretty crowded car when something happened. [Pg 14]

All the other passengers in the car were men except one; and she was a girl, a nice, pretty, young thing of that peculiar pinkish clarity of complexion more commonly designated "peaches and cream."

The conductor had just collected her fare and was proceeding on his way to the rear platform when the girl grabbed at the left arm of her jacket and emitted a gaspy little scream.

"What is it, miss?" asked the conductor.

"Oh, what shall I do?" moaned the girl. "I've lost it! I've lost my Yale

pin!"

And she looked as if she would topple over on the man next to her. The conductor stooped and looked about the floor of the car. All of us passengers did the same. The pretty young thing shook out her skirts [Pg 15] vigorously. All hands lent their aid to lift up the gratings and to search the space beneath them. There was, however, no signs of the cherished emblem. About the time everybody was beginning to feel exhausted the girl suddenly exclaimed:

"Oh, I remember now! It's all right. Don't bother any more. I gave it back last night."

"City Hall!" yelled the conductor, and I was glad to get off.

Last time I rode in a trolley car I got a scare for sure. Honestly now, it gave me a queer feeling up and down my spine when I noticed that the car number was 1313, and what made it worse we were just passing Thirteenth Street at the time.

I thought I would mention the fact to the conductor, especially when upon counting the passengers I found there were just that fatal number aboard.

It was the thirteenth of the month too, and bless you if that conductor's number wasn't just 3913.

So I grimly paraded these significant facts before the attention of the knight of the fare register.

"I should think it would make you nervous!" I remarked.

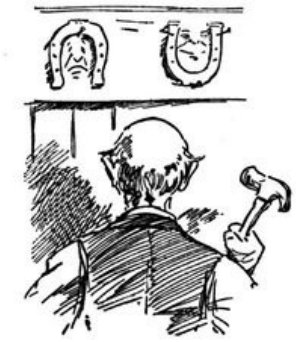
"Only once't that I remember," said the conductor, with a grin. [Pg 16]

"When and how?"

"There was thirteen babies in this here car yellin' in thirteen different keys all at the same time," replied the conductor.

Some people are so superstitious, you know, always carrying home old horseshoes and nailing them up over the door—why, a pagan nation like the Japanese have the same custom with other embellishments.

The fun of it is, while some stoutly maintain the horseshoe must be nailed with the forks pointing upward, there are others just as set in their belief that if a chap wants real good luck to swoop down upon his domicile it is absolutely imperative that the opening must be left below.



Why Ketcham actually grew hot under the collar the other day because I sneered when he chanced to mention what horrible bad fortune had come to him since his propitiation to the gods was stolen from his barn door by a wandering dago junk-man. [Pg 17]

"Don't you believe then that there's good luck in finding a horseshoe?" he demanded, fiercely.

"Why, yes, under certain conditions," I replied; "for instance when you find it on the winning horse."

Ketcham is quite a gay fellow, and a member of many clubs, so that he can seldom be found home of an evening.

I once remonstrated with him, as a true friend should.

"See here," I said, seriously, "you are out every night until the 'wee sma' hours.' Isn't midnight late enough for you?"

"Well," he replied, "I find when I show up at midnight my wife can talk to me, but when I get home at three, words fail her."

Say, my wife came home from shopping the other day filled with righteous indignation, and, of course, while men are not supposed to have any curiosity, you know, my peace of mind was somewhat disturbed. [Pg 18]

I began to have vague fears that perhaps some miserable detective in one of the department stores might have insulted her—perhaps accused her of having too warm an affection for the lace counter.

At length, however, seeing that I would not ask the question she was burning to hear, she burst out with:

"I wish the shopkeepers would be more careful how they put mirrors in conspicuous places."

"What's the matter? Been trying to dodge your own reflection?" I asked, for do you know it was the first time I had ever heard a woman complain of too much looking-glass.

"No; but you know there is one of those triple mirrors in one of the department stores, and poor dear Fido spent fifteen minutes chasing around it trying to find the other dog. I thought I'd never get him out of that store."

Ever been through the Chinese quarter down around Mott Street, where

you can smell the incense of the joss-sticks burning before the ugly little idols? [Pg 19]

I saw in the paper the other day about a fellow who had come from Korea with samples of idols that he wanted an American firm to manufacture, and it begins to look as though presently our enterprising Yankees might corral this trade along with everything else.

That gave me an inspiration which I set down in verse—if you'd like to hear the result I don't mind one bit, so prepare to weep, for here it goes:

The heathen in his blindness
  Bows down to wood and stone—
Some idol inexpensive
  He puts upon a throne;
But now we'll teach the heathen
  The error of his way,
And sell him modern idols
  Made in the U. S. A.

We'll lift the foolish heathen
  From groping in the dust.
And change and civilize him— [Pg 20]
  We'll form an Idol Trust.
For ages he has groveled
  In superstition dim
But now we'll help his progress
  By making gods for him.

No seven-handed figures;
  No gods with coiling tails:
No birds, no bugs, no serpents,
  No animals, nor whales—
No, sir! He'll have our idols:
  A shovelful of coal,
A meter, and an oil can
  To terrify his soul.

A bonnet and a ribbon:
  A bargain ad.—the strife
They'll cause will make the heathen
  Yearn for a better life.
The poor benighted pagan
  Will come out of the dark
And bow before our idol—
  The mighty dollar mark!

Mr. Carboline, our druggist at the corner, has troubles of his own, though I never realized the fact until I saw a perspiring individual rush in upon him with a thermometer in his hand the other day, and in an excited tone exclaim: [Pg 21]

"Here, take back this darned machine before I freeze to death."

He looked so heated just then that we began to imagine he must be a little out of his mind, but Carboline ventured to ask humbly enough what was the matter with the mercury register.

"It's out of whack somehow, and won't register correctly. Darn it, I've been shivering in my room for a week, and just couldn't keep warm. I had the thermometer over my writing desk, and the other morning when the steam went down a little I looked at the mercury. It showed forty degrees.

"I knew nothing less than a polar bear could work in that temperature, and went hustling after the janitor.

"He shook up his furnace, and the steam began to sizzle, but the room wouldn't get warm enough to raise that mercury above 50. [Pg 22]

"We ran short of coal for a day, and she went down to 40 again, and I went over to stop with a friend till we got more coal.

"Then the steam sizzled once more, but the north wind seemed to come in through the window cracks and the shivers had me all over.

"I struck for window strips, and had a row with the landlord.

"The mercury showed 50 degrees right along, and though I made it hot for the janitor I couldn't get any of it into the blamed thermometer.

"Yesterday I gave notice that I would get out if they didn't keep me warm. I'm a bachelor tenant paying a good price and generally no kicker, and they didn't want me to leave.

"About an hour ago the janitor came in to see how I was getting along.

"He found me at my desk with a blanket around me. He asked if I were sick. I told him I was frozen. [Pg 23]

"He said he thought the room was very warm. Before licking him I showed him the thermometer and told him that was the real test.

"The mercury stood at 50.

"The janitor swore and went out.

"He came back in a minute with another thermometer and hung it alongside of mine. It was a fine one, guaranteed to keep perfect records.

"It marked 65 degrees when he brought it in, and in a minute or two it showed 71. Mine stood still at 50.

"The janitor looked at the two machines and began to grin. I began to unwind the blanket that was around me. The janitor looked scared, but I told him not to run; that I wasn't going to lick him. The only man that I felt like licking was the one who sold me a thermometer that wouldn't go.

"You're the one.

"Now, it's up to you to apologize, give me a machine that is true, or be licked. I've paid my money and you can take your choice."

Mr. Carboline preferred to make the change.

By the way, before I forget it, let me tell you about young Charlie Suitz, a friend of mine, who is really as modest a chap as you would care to meet. [Pg 24]

Charlie has a girl upon whom he calls very frequently, and, they tell me, at the most unexpected times.

That was probably how it happened he dropped in one afternoon and was informed by her mother that she was upstairs taking a bath, so he told the old lady he only wanted to speak to her for a minute; and she called out:

"Mamie, come right down, Mr. Suitz wants to see you down here."

So Mamie called back, "Oh, mother, I can't; I have nothing on."

"Well, slip on something right away, and come down."

And what do you think? Mamie slipped on the stairs, and came down.

Talking of your level-headed young Lochinvars of to-day, who use automobiles in their elopements instead of horses as in the old times, there was Charlie's brother who fell in love with the only daughter of old Squeezer, the richest skinflint in Stringtown, and was bound to have her, even if he had to resort to strategy.

"Oh, Bob," she whispered, sliding down into the outstretched arms of the lover who stood at the bottom of the ladder, "are you sure the coast is clear?" [Pg 25]

"To a dead certainty," he replied, bitterly. "I succeeded in boring a hole in the water pipe. Your father has discovered it, and will keep his finger over the hole until the plumber arrives. Come!"

I dined at the Waldorf the other night, and somehow in the long list of courses found my mind wrestling with an item that had caught my eye in one of the yellow sheets, where a certain well-known doctor declared that the simple cooking of savage tribes was far superior to that of the present civilized races.

When I reached home the thought, and perhaps the menu I had so gallantly assailed, so impressed me, that I sat down and rattled off a few verses covering the ground. This is how the song goes:

[Pg 26]

"You cook," I observed to the African chief,
"With a truly remarkable skill;
With your soups and your entrees you ne'er come to grief,
You seldom go wrong when you grill.
Your roast leg of pork or of mutton is—well,
It's a privilege simply to view it;

And I feel I could fatten for weeks on the smell!
How on earth do you manage to do it?"

With a gratified simper the chieftain explained,
"Ah, well, for that matter, the fact is,
Whatever ability I may have gained
Is simply the outcome of practice.
In the days of my youth, e'er I quitted my land,
Not content with the usual rations,
I made it a habit to practice my hand
On my numerous friends and relations.

"I strove with a will toward my ultimate end,
Surmounting each obstacle gayly.
I speedily ran through my circle of friends,
Diminished my relatives daily.
My brothers gave out, and my uncles as well;
My cousins went faster and faster;
Until—in a word a long story to tell—
I found I could cook like a master."

In silence I stood till he came to the end,
For his tale had delighted and thrilled me;
Then thoughtfully thanking my cannibal friend,
I owned that with envy he filled me.
For many's the man whom I'd thankfully boil,
And countless relations beset me,
Whom I'd eagerly stew (without grudging the toil),
If only the law would abet me.

[Pg 27]

Some people have such remarkable ideas connected with the bringing up of children. There's Rossiter's young wife for example.

I was invited to an evening dinner party recently where she was the guest of honor.

This charming young matron is the proud mother of two fine boys, both under four years of age.

In their education she endeavors to follow a system, like many other young mothers, and she is very careful to live up to any rules she may have formulated for them.

[Pg 28]

During an early course in the dinner, and in the middle of an animated conversation with her host, she suddenly ceased talking.

Her face took on a most startling expression. Then finding her voice, she exclaimed:

"Mercy, I have forgotten those boys again! May I use your telephone?"

She was taken to the 'phone by the host, and the murmur of her voice in most earnest conversation was wafted back to the dining room.

After a short time she returned.

"I beg a thousand pardons," she said, "but you must know I have always insisted that Sam and Dick say their prayers for me before they go to sleep.

"In the hurry of getting off to-night I entirely forgot my usual duty.

"So I called up the nurse. She brought them to the 'phone and they said their prayers over the wire. I feel quite relieved."

Speaking of boys reminds me of my friend Toddlekins' young hopeful, who marched into the library the other day when I was engaging his pa in a scientific discussion.

[Pg 29]

I may remark just here that Tommy had a new gun under his arm, which I understood his fond parent had recently presented to him—you know Toddlekins is a great admirer of the strenuous life and likes to encourage it all he can in his offspring, who appears to be a chip of the old block.

"Say, pa," was what he exploded, "is it true that cats have nine lives?"

Always ready to impart information to the inquiring mind of youth, his fond parent replied such was the common saying, which might be accepted as truth.

"Well, I am glad of that," said the boy, heaving a genuine sigh of relief, "because then our old tortoise-shell's got eight coming to her."

I'm afraid my smallest chap is going to take after his proud father—it's about time, since I've taken after him on many an occasion.

For instance now, at school, in the course of his astronomy lesson, the

teacher happened to ask:

"What supports the sun in the heavens?"

"Why, its beams, of course," was the prompt answer given by the flower of the family. [Pg 30]

He was not encouraged to exercise the propensity further.

But it is not always the boys who can be depended on to furnish material for a good story.

I knew a little tot of a girl once, Helen they called her, the pride and joy of a young couple with whom I used to dine occasionally in my happy bachelor days.

I discovered, however, one night, that the little lady was very much afraid of the dark, just as some of her older sisters are prone to be, and all her mother's persuasive eloquence was required to induce the child to leave the brilliantly lighted dining room for her own dark bedroom.

A whispered colloquy between mother and child finally resulted in the little one's departure to her room without further protest.

When the mother returned to the dining room she explained:

"It's so easy to handle children if you just know how. I told her there was no reason to be afraid; that the dark was filled with angels, all watching over her. Now she is quite content to be left alone and——" [Pg 31]

"Mamma! Mamma!" piped a small, far-away voice at this point, "please come quick. The angels is a-biting me."

While I was talking with Mike who should drop in but the archbishop?

Now, because a man's a priest is no reason he shouldn't have a big streak of humor in him, and the archbishop can appreciate a joke as well as the next one.

They say that when he was up in the Harlem district last winter, for the purpose of administering confirmation, he asked one nervous little girl what matrimony was, and she answered:

"A state of terrible torment, which those who enter it are compelled to undergo for a time to prepare them for a brighter and better world."

"No, no," remonstrated the pastor; "that isn't matrimony; that's the definition of purgatory."

"Leave her alone," said the archbishop; "maybe she's right. What do you or I know about it?"

Thinking to test his knowledge of history, some one once remarked in his hearing:

"I wonder who made the first after-dinner speech?" [Pg 32]

"Adam did," replied the archbishop, promptly, "for you know we read that after he had eaten that apple down to the core, he arose and said, 'the woman tempted me'."

And you will agree with me he was pretty nearly correct that time.

I always take considerable interest in the yacht races for the America's Cup, and when my friend Donovan informed me recently that the next boat would have a wonderful rudder filled with air, to add to the buoyancy and save weight, I began to consider whether the advantages might not be offset by the new dangers accompanying a pneumatic rudder.

If a yacht should happen to get a puncture in her rudder during the race she would be compelled to drop out, owing to the difficulty of cementing or plugging it while sailing.

And in a race a yacht is liable to be on a tack at any moment.

A week ago I took a spin on my wheel, along country roads where the festive bull loiters in the shade of the tree, waiting for a victim. [Pg 33]

If you have ever taken the trouble to notice, there are funny things sometimes happening on these dusty highways of the hobos, and more than a few times the shrewd city man finds himself the sport of Rube's wit.

Having become somewhat confused as to my bearings on this particular occasion, I thought to make inquiries of a slab-sided youth, who leaned on a fence and sucked at a straw meditatively.

"I say, my good fellow, am I on the right road to Jericho?" I asked, with my most patronizing smile.

He surveyed me a minute and then said slowly:

"Ya-as, stranger, but I kinder reckon you're goin' in the wrong direcshun."

Say, as I was walking along Sixth Avenue a man thumped me on the back and yelled out:

"Sure, Michael, ye're the broth av a bhoy. Len' me ten."

And I did; I couldn't refuse it. That's like the Irish; they're so hearty and will share your last cent. [Pg 34]

There's one bright Irishman that I'm greatly interested in. Terence Sullivan came over here with the idea that he could pick up money in the streets; and sure enough the first day he landed he found a nice new ten-dollar bill on one of the seats in Battery Park. Since then he's gone on doing well.

Sullivan was never much of a reader, and I had often wondered at this until on a certain occasion he gave his prejudice an airing.

"And faith," said he, "Oi don't see the since in noospapers. They kin only print what's already happened."

As affairs prospered with the honest fellow, like all true-hearted Irishmen, he must needs send for the mother, and install her in a comfortable home.

I remember meeting the old lady once, and under conditions that often make me smile.

I had a friend, a lawyer, who had an office away up in one of the skyscrapers downtown, and here Mrs. Sullivan, after much persuasion, had been induced to come and pay her rent. [Pg 35]

The lawyer's office was on one of the upper floors of a large office building.

After the rent had been paid and the receipt given, the old woman was shown out into the hallway by the office boy.

I found her in the hallway a few minutes later, when I chanced along. She was wandering about opening doors and otherwise acting in a strange manner.

"What are you looking for?" I asked.

"Shure," she said, in her simplicity, "I'm lookin' for the little closet I came up in."

I suppose you will believe me when I tell you that my theatrical ventures have frequently brought me in contact with ripe episodes that impressed themselves strongly upon my memory.

Sometimes they were too ripe, and gave occasion for much toil ere they could be wholly eradicated from my unfortunate coat.

I long ago lost my taste for eggs in any shape. [Pg 36]

On a barn-storming crusade with a small show, I remember, at an afternoon rehearsal, the flute player in the orchestra made me nervous by playing off key. After vainly endeavoring to correct the man, I lost my temper and exclaimed:

"Cut out the flute for goodness' sake!"

Thereupon the musician arose with fire in his eye.

"Oh! you want to get rid of the flute, do you?" he asked.

"Yes," I drawled carelessly, "I guess we'll get along all right without your assistance."

"Oh! you will, will you! Well, see here, young fellow, if I don't play the flute, you don't sing that song—and there'll be no show to-night. You understand?"

"Who'll prevent?" I demanded.

"Only the flute," was the answer. "I'm the mayor of this place, I am, and I issue the permits. See?"

And I saw.

On my last whirl around the circuit I went by way of the New York Central. [Pg 37]

There was a newly-married couple in our car, and of course lots of us were more or less interested in their carrying-on.

Once the train plunged through a tunnel, and I suppose the newly-made Benedict took advantage of the golden opportunity to kiss his spouse.

"Morris-sinia!" yelled the brakeman as we came to daylight again.

"I don't care if he did," snapped the woman, "we're married."

At our first stop in a bustling town up in York State I was in the box office, when I was addressed by a young man who in hollow tones declared he had heard that to see so great an actor as myself was good for any form of ailment.

"You might help me," the young man declared with labored breathing;

"anyway, I'd like to enjoy myself once more before I die. I have consumption, you know. Could you let me have a pass?" [Pg 38]

I couldn't help but feel sorry for such a woebegone-looking, hard-luck chap, so I at once wrote him out a pass.

The man took the card, looked at it, coughed even more distressfully than before, and asked:

"Couldn't you make it two? I would like to take a friend."

"Has your friend consumption, too?" I asked, solicitously.

"N—no—not yet," faltered the man.

"Ah! then, I'm afraid I can't accommodate your friend. You see, I never give passes except to persons with the consumption."

Some people think there is little in a name, but I'm a great believer in an attractive title. I could mention scores of reasons for thinking as I do, and you can better believe I'm not alone in this thing.

Passing the Academy of Music a short time ago, one matinee day, I met my friend Shackleford coming out, and the play only half over. [Pg 39]

"What is the matter?" I asked; "play bad?"

"No," he replied, "but it is too hot in there; the house is literally packed with women. You see it's the name—'Ninety and Nine'—that catches them. Why, it's better than an actual horse-race or a locomotive, to draw. They fancy that the admission has been marked down from a dollar and can't resist the bargain."

Whenever I meet Chauncey Billings on Broadway the sparks are sure to fly in the fireworks display of dry wit that passes between us, just as though you struck flint and steel smartly.

The other day he approached, looking very happy, as though anticipating overwhelming me, so being forwarned I prepared to resist boarders.

"My dear Niblo," said he, "you will be surprised to learn I've taken up a new business."

"Indeed, What are you now?" I asked.

"I'm a detective in a pool room."

"What do you do?"

"Oh, I spot balls."

"That's nothing," I remarked, casually, "I used to work in a cheese factory." [Pg 40]

"And what did you do?"

"Oh, play baseball."

"What, baseball in a cheese factory, Mr. Niblo!"

"Sure, I used to chase flies. That got tiresome and I went to work in a barber shop."

"What were your duties there?"

"I used to mix lather."

"And what did you mix lather for?"

"Oh, to lather Irishmen and Dutchmen, etc."

"I have a brother who works in an eye hospital," said Chauncey, soberly.

"What does he do?"

"Oh, he makes goo-goo eyes."

"That's nothing, I have a sister who works in a watch factory making faces."

And so we pass the retort discourteous, and exchange pleasantries as only old friends may.

In the Catskill village, where we delight to spend a portion of the heated term and all our hard-earned capital, there is a boarding-house run by an eccentric genius, who knows how to set a good table and never has an empty room through the season, though over the gate leading up to his hotel he has painted a sign that might well cause consternation in the breast of many a would-be sojourner, for it reads: [Pg 41]

"Boarders taken by the day, week or month. Those who do not pay promptly will be taken by the neck."

There were some rumors floating around that this remarkable Boniface, as a Christian Science advocate, had been

benefited to an astonishing extent in the recovery of his health.

Being of an investigating turn of mind, and anxious to learn all that was possible concerning the latest fad, I cornered old Bijinks out near the hog-pen and engaged him in conversation, during which he made a positive assertion that rather staggered me.

"Do you mean to tell me that you actually believe Christian Science cured you?" I demanded, eagerly.

"Sure," he said, nodding.

"Of appendicitis?"

"B'gosh, no—of Christian Science."

There was a crusty old bachelor at the house who got disgusted with the spoony couples and came up to my room to talk it over with me. [Pg 42]

"What is love, anyway?" he demanded.

"Intoxication," I answered, unguardedly.

"Right," he quickly said, "then possibly marriage must be delirium tremens."

Before I could recover my breath he fired another hot shot at me.

"There's three things I never could stand if I ever married."

"And what are they?" I asked.

"Triplets."

I tried to give him the old gag about a woman's heart being a gold mine.

"That's right," he said; "you've got to prospect it before you find out what it's worth; and I know a whole lot of fellows who've gone broke prospecting."

That landlord of ours up in the glorious Catskills was a hard subject to catch napping, and many a time I've watched him crawl out of a hole with hardly an effort.

Probably it requires considerable nerve to run a summer resort hotel, and meet all the requirements which the traveling public seem to expect.

On one occasion I heard a tourist who had just arrived ask him the old chestnut:

"Is this a good place, landlord, do you think, for a person affected with a weak chest?" [Pg 43]

"None better, sir, none better."

"I've been recommended, you know, by the doctor, to spend the summer in some mountain region where the south wind blows. Does it blow much here?"

"Why sure, it's always the south wind that blows here," replied the landlord, stoutly.

"Ah, indeed, then how do you account for it blowing from the north just now?"

"That's easy enough, sir—you see it's the same old south wind on its road back again."

That landlord was a jewel, and afforded me considerable entertainment during my sojourn; but he had a neighbor, a stout German farmer, who took the cake when it came to doing business.

Le'me tell you about his experience with the insurance agent, for it was certainly laughable, though old Platzenburger didn't see it that way.

It seems that the house of the farmer, insured for a thousand dollars, had burned down. The privilege of replacing a burned house is reserved by insurance companies and the agent, having this in mind, said to the farmer: [Pg 44]

"We'll put you up a better house than the one you had for six hundred dollars."

"Nein!" said Platzenburger, emphatically. "I vill have my one tousand dollar or notings! Dot house could not be built again for even a tousand."

"Oh, yes, it could," said the insurance man. "It was an old house. It doesn't cost so much to build houses nowadays. A six-hundred-dollar new house would be a lot bigger and better than the old one."

Some months later, when the insurance man was out for a day's shooting, he rode up again to the farmer's place.

"Just thought I'd stop while I was up here," he said, "to see if you wanted to take out a little insurance."

"I got notings to insure," said Platz, "notings but my vife."

"Well, then," said the insurance man cheerfully, "insure her."

"Nein!" said the farmer, with determination. "If she die, you come out here and say, 'I not give you one tousand dollar. I get you a bigger und a better vife for six hunded.' No, sir, I dakes no more insurance oud!" [Pg 45]

You must excuse me if I have to call a temporary halt upon these proceedings and indulge in a little vociferous sneeze, for a cold in the head is no respecter of persons. This is the sneeze, sung in a sad, sobbing minor:

I've got a cold with snuffles in;
What kind of a cold have you?
I've got the kind that makes me sin
By craving fizzes made of gin
And other stuff with bad booze in—
What kind of a cold have you?

I've got the kind that makes one hoarse;
What kind of a cold have you?
To speak requires my utmost force;
My voice is rough, and harsh, and coarse,
And strains its laryngital source—
What kind of a cold have you?

[Pg 46]

I've got a cold that makes me mad—
What kind of a cold have you?
That makes me reticent and sad,
That puts me plainly to the bad,
The worstest cold I ever had—
What kind of a cold have you?

I suppose you know I was on a tour in Florida and other parts of the Sunny South last winter?

There is a tradition down there that if a mule kicks a darky on the head the wretched mule is sure to go lame.

When I was down there I happened to notice a little colored girl limping along the street, her feet done up in immense bandages of sacking.

"What's the matter with your feet?" was my natural inquiry.

"My fadder done hit me on de haid while I was standin' on an iron cellar door," was the response.

When I got to Charleston there was a circus in town, and after doing my matinee stunt at the local theatre, I got around to the circus.

There was a pretty fair menagerie along with the show, and it was a treat to me to stand around and hear the original and quaint remarks of the negroes, many of whom had never before in their lives seen lions and elephants.

[Pg 47]

One big ugly gorilla seemed to attract them above all other living curiosities, and he was a fierce sight, I assure you.

I saw an old wizened-up aunty stand in front of his cage a long time, speechless with awe, and finally heard her vent her feelings in the words:

"Foah massa sakes alibe, if he ain't jest like de ole-time culled folks."

Another queer old chap tried to make the acquaintance of the uncouth and hairy monster.

"How is you?" said the old black man, bowing before the monstrous ape.

No answer.

"How is you?" Eph repeated, with another profound bow, and still no answer. Then, after a long pause, Eph exclaimed:

"You's right, ole man; keep yo' mouf shet or dey'll put a hoe in yo' hand and make yo' raise cotton."

The menagerie always fascinates me. Why, I'm just like a boy again when I get among the animals, and catch that well-remembered odor always connected with a show.

I've even dreamed about 'em, and strange as it may appear, they always seem to be passing before me in a great hurry, just as though on a wager.

[Pg 48]

As I say, I was kind of fascinated and thinking of boyhood's days and all that sort of thing, you know, when some one spotted me.

"By de great horn spoon, if dar ain't George Niblo!"

I tried to look shy and turned on my best blush.

Then the manager turned to me politely, gave me the glad hand and asked if I wouldn't sing a little song.

I said "sure"; and I did. Here's the song I sung:

The animals thought they would have a race;
The Monkey was referee;
The Bull was stakeholder, for, as he said,
It was his nature to be.

The Camel got a hump on himself;
  The Lion ran with might and mane;
The Tiger stood off, for a beast of his stripe
  Was not let to enter again.
The Elephant took his trunk along,
  In case he won the prize;
The Peacock was starter, and missed no one,
  For, you see, he was all eyes. [Pg 49]
Some spotted the Leopard for winner sure;
  The old ones chose the Gnu;
While those who leap to conclusions quick
  Bet on the Kangaroo.
The Ostrich plumed himself on his speed;
  All tried the record to wreck;
The Hippopotamus blew his own horn,
  But the Giraffe, he won by a neck.

I was in court the other day.

There is no use of any vulgar curiosity concerning the reason of my being present; but I will say right here that I won my case, and when a fellow does that he's all right. Yes, sir; I had the dough with me.

While I was waiting my turn a disreputable-looking chap was brought before the judge, I believe charged with vagrancy or something of the sort.

"What is your name?" inquired the justice.

"Pete Smith," responded the vagrant.

"What occupation?" continued the court.

"Oh, nothing much at present; just circulatin' round."

"Retired from circulation for thirty days," pronounced the court, dryly.

In another case where one of the witnesses had been severely baited by a counsel, the question arose as to the authenticity of a letter of which the witness was reputed to be the author. [Pg 50]

"Sir," said the lawyer, fiercely, "do you, on your oath, swear that this is not your handwriting?"

"I think not," was the reply.

"Does it resemble your handwriting?"

"I can't say it does."

"Will you swear that it does not resemble your handwriting?"

"I will."

"You will positively take your oath that this writing does not resemble yours?" persisted the lawyer, working himself into a state bordering on frenzy.

"Ye-s-s, sir."

"You seem less positive," remarked his interrogator; "perhaps we had better have a specimen of your handwriting for purposes of comparison."

The witness caused it to be understood that this was impossible, whereupon the lawyer, scenting his approaching triumph, smiled serenely at the court. [Pg 51]

"Oh, sir, it is impossible, is it? And may I ask why?"

"'Cause I can't write," returned the man.

"Step down; I'm done with you," said the smart lawyer.

Which reminds me of an occasion when an Irish judge was on the bench, and took occasion, in my hearing, to address the jury.

"Gentlemen," he said, seriously, "you have heard the evidence. The indictment says the prisoner was arrested for stealing a pig.

"The offense seems to be becoming a common one. The time has come when it must be put a stop to; otherwise, gentlemen, none of you will be safe."

As I came out of court that day it was only natural that I should run across an old friend, Dr. Case, and hear of more courting. Ah, I thought you'd see it!

"Great news about McGregor—he's to be married again."

I expressed my surprise, for let me tell you I had already enjoyed the pleasure of an acquaintance with three wives of this same gentleman.

"Fourth time—that's going it pretty steep, doctor," I remarked.

"It would appear so. Beats all how the rage for collecting will take hold of a man. Sometimes it's old books or playbills, and sometimes it's postage stamps. In McGregor's case it appears to be wives." [Pg 52]

When I looked in on Bob Lightwate the other day, at his office, expecting him to accompany me to the hospital, where a mutual friend had been taken, I found him clipping an item from a newspaper, which he was very careful to place in his note book.

"It tells how a house was robbed, and I want to show it to my wife," he explained.

"What good will that do?" I inquired.

"A whole lot," was the reply. "You see, this house was robbed while a man was at church with his wife."

"B'Gosh!" I exclaimed, excitedly, "you haven't got a duplicate copy of that paper, have you?"

Before we could get away Bob had a caller.

You see he owns a lot of real estate in the suburbs and his tenants pester the life half out of him on account of trivial troubles.

This party was plainly embarrassed, for he kept twirling his hat in his hands. [Pg 53]

"What can I do for you, Mr. Sorter?" asked Bob.

"I came to tell you, sir, that our cellar—"

"Well, what about the cellar?"

"It's full of water, sir."

"Is that all? Humph, I don't see that you've any kick coming, Mr. Sorter. You surely didn't expect a cellar full of champagne for ten dollars a month."

The matter was of course satisfactorily adjusted, after Bob had enjoyed his little joke, and we went on our way to the hospital.

Now, a hospital isn't the most cheerful place in the world, and yet now and then there is some gleam of humor breaks out there.

Human nature is a queer combination, and I've known men who would joke even under the surgeon's knife.

When we entered the room where poor Huggins lay, we found that two physicians were beside his cot holding a consultation over him, and that it was suspected he had a severe case of appendicitis concealed about his person.

"I believe," said one of the surgeons, "that we should wait and let him get stronger before cutting into him." [Pg 54]

Before the other prospective operator could reply the patient turned his head, and remarked feebly:

"What do you take me for—a cheese?"

I rejoice to tell you that this hero survived the operation, and is about again.

Lightwate has always been a great lover of the weed, and it is a rare thing to find him without a cigar or a pipe in his mouth.

When taken to task he never fails to joke about the matter, and turn the tables on a fellow.

I remember of asking him plainly once why he smoked so much, and he immediately replied:

"I suppose because I'm too green to burn."

While Bob and myself were on the way back to his office we saw a commotion ahead, and pretty soon a wild-looking citizen rushed up to a policeman who stood on the curb, and shouted:

"Officer, officer, I've been robbed, and yonder goes the wretch who snatched my watch!"

The vigilant guardian of the peace waved him majestically aside, as he answered: [Pg 55]

"Don't bother me with such very trifling affairs when I'm timing an automobile."

Bob said things had come to a pretty pass when a man's time-piece might be stolen with impunity because of the necessity for securing the time-pace of a machine.

Our walk took us along the Bowery, and as I was passing, a man seemed to be busily engaged in shoving some bank-bills, together with a straw-colored ticket into his pocket. I was surprised to hear him give way to sentiment and exclaim:

"Alone at last!"

Just then Bob, with a grin, called my attention to the three golden balls over the door of the shop from which he had evidently just emerged, and I tumbled to the game.

On the corner of Grand Street I was halted for a minute by an Irishman whom I knew as a steady fellow, a machinist by trade, and with a buxom better-half who ruled his

home like a queen.

"Sure it's a bit av advice I'd be after beggin' sorr. I'm puzzled to know phwat to do wid a case loike that," he said, mysteriously. [Pg 56]

"Tell me the circumstances, Mike."

"Will, it's jist this way, yer honor, the walkin' diligate has ordhered me to sthroike, and me ould woman tills me to ka-ape on wur-rkin', an' for me loife I don't know phwat to do."

It was a hard case, and I felt sorry for Mike, but under the circumstances any advice I might give would have been wasted, for to tell you the truth, knowing Mrs. Casey as I did, I realized that he was between the devil and the deep sea.

I've often wondered how he made out.

My having been a theatrical man off and on for years, it is nothing out of the way for me to spend some of my spare time lounging about agencies where they give out the prizes.

There is one such on Broadway, and it chanced that in taking up quarters near the Criterion they were given the telephone number of a fish market that had moved away.

This little but significant fact gives rise to occasional mistakes on the part of housewives who have been in the habit of ordering their sea-food by wire. [Pg 57]

For instance, when I was in there the other day the bell rang violently, and a message, loud enough to be heard all over the office, and in a decidedly feminine voice, came over the wire.

"Send up two quarts of oysters at once."

"Sorry to say we haven't any just now," said the polite gentleman in the theatrical office; "but if they would do as well, we have a few fine lobsters we could let you have, madam."

Another order came for "crawfish" which were especially desired for dinner.

"Sorry," called the agent, "impossible to supply you with crawfish, but we can send you up a fine lot of assorted coryphees."

"Coryphees," said a dazed feminine voice, "I don't know what they are—I said crawfish."

"Sorry, but crawfish are no good in our business; but we can send up nice selected coryphees, all dressed—make any dinner go off well." [Pg 58]

"You must be a fool," we heard over the wire, and no doubt the receiver was slammed into the holder while the lady hurried to get a dictionary to discover what manner of sea-food coryphees might be.

Perhaps she found that they might be called nymphs.

Speaking of nymphs, reminds me of my next-door neighbor, Miss Snappe, whose tongue is surcharged with cayenne pepper when she is ruffled.

I remember she once had a squabble with another neighbor, Miss Antique, and as they had once been good friends, my wife, in her warm-hearted way, tried to soothe the ruffled plumage of Miss Snappe, and pour oil on troubled waters.

"Come now," said the dear little peacemaker, "why don't you and Miss Antique become friends again?"

"Oh, I don't see the sense of going to all that trouble for her!"

"But it isn't any more trouble for you to make up, than it is for her."

"Don't you believe it. She's used to making up, for she's been doing it for years." [Pg 59]

Nevertheless I've found that same Miss Antique something worth cultivating, for she possesses more genuine wit than any other woman of my acquaintance.

It was only recently the doctor said to her:

"My dear Miss Antique, you must really take exercise for your health."

"All right, doctor," she replied, "I will certainly jump at the first offer."

To win the matrimonial race—
Oh, all ye maids who try—
You're lucky if you get a place
Resulting in a tie.

I remember asking this frisky old maid whether, in her opinion, women were really as brave as men.

She gave me a look of scorn.

"Far braver, sir; if you notice carefully all accounts upon the subject, you will learn that the scientists who keep on talking with alarm and even terror concerning the dreadful bacilli in a kiss, are every one of them males." [Pg 60]

She has also very decided views as to the future of this glorious country, and while we were discussing the chances of America ever being dominated by a combined Europe, she said, emphatically:

"That will never happen, sir, so long as eminent Europeans continue to marry American girls."

I agreed with her, knowing from experience what an influence in the household the average American wife must ever be.

Speaking of marrying brings to my mind a very eccentric old minister out in Oklahoma at the time the boom was in full progress.

He was the only parson for miles around, and it kept him busy splicing couples, for a regular fever seemed to have broken out, and everybody thought of taking a mate.

I asked a resident if the stories I had heard about the domine were true, and that in his wholesale business he had actually married thirty couples within an hour, that being high-water mark. [Pg 61]

"Yes, stranger," responded the boomer, "and we call him the 'torpedo-boat minister.'"

"Why so?"

"Because he made thirty knots an hour."

By the way, I forgot to tell you several amusing things that happened while I was down in Dixie.

When in Alabama, I spent some time with an old friend who owned a big plantation.

Among his negro hands was his coachman, who up to that time had invariably persisted in getting in his vote, despite the plain hints of the white election officers that he would do better to stay at home. On that particular Election Day he returned home in the afternoon with a countenance that looked like it had been taking some familiarities with a buzz saw.

"What's the matter, Zack?" I asked, with some solicitude.

"It's this way, boss; I went up dar to the votin' place, and there wuz the county undertakah, sah, a-sittin' with a big book open 'foah him, and he sez to me right sharp like:

"'What's your name?'

"'Zack Taylor', I sez, humble.

"'Let's see?' says the undertakah, and he turned over the leaves of the book. All of a sudden he stopped turnin' and begin to run his fingers down the page, mutterin' to himself. [Pg 62]

"'Taylor, Taylor, Taylor, Taylor—Zack.' And pretty soon he hollered out:

"'Heah it iz. You black scoundrel. I dun buried you ten year ago. What you mean by tryin' to vote?'

"Just then a passel of white men tuk and threw me out, and den I dun come home 'fore they could bury me again."

They were having a genuine old-time revival in the darky church near by, and of course I went to see the enthusiasm.

You remember it was at such a place a devout and practical old mammy was heard to shout:

"Good Lawd, come down fru de roof, an' I'll pay for de shingles."

I wanted to see if the affair was all it had been cracked up to be.

It happened that in order that the revival spirit should be quickened, it was arranged that the preacher should give a signal when he thought the excitement was highest, and from the attic through a hole cut in the ceiling directly over the pulpit, the sexton was to shove a pure white dove, whose flight around the church and over the heads of the audience was expected to have an inspiring effect, and, as far as emotional excitement was concerned, to cap the climax. [Pg 63]

All went well at the start; the church was packed; the preacher's text was, "In the form of a dove," and as he piled up his eloquent periods the excitement was strong.

Then the opportune moment arrived—the signal was given—and the packed audience was scared out of its wits on looking up to the ceiling and beholding a cat, with a clothesline around its middle, yowling and spitting, being lowered over the preacher's head.

The preacher called to the sexton in the attic:

"Whar's de dove?"

And the sexton's voice came down through the opening so you could hear it a block: [Pg 64]

"Inside de cat!"

But, say, I want to tell you about a genuine farmer that I struck down South.

He lived from hand to mouth, was about as ugly a specimen as the sun ever shone upon, and yet would you believe it this fellow actually thought himself to be the Robby Burns of Alabama?

One of his shadow hogs chanced to be wandering on the railway, and, as sometimes happens, was transformed into bacon ready for the pan.

Naturally he started to collect damages, even while he smoked the remains, and here is the result:

"My razorback strolled down your track
A week ago to-day;
Your 29 came down the line
And snuffed his light away.

"You can't blame me—the hog, you see,
Slipped through a cattle gate;
So kindly pen a check for ten,
The debt to liquidate."

[Pg 65]

However, the game didn't pan out as he expected, for there chanced to be a match for his genius in the office of the railroad, and shortly after Skeezer received the following poetic reply:

"Old 29 came down the line
And killed your hog, we know;
But razorbacks on railroad tracks
Quite often meet with woe.

"Therefore, my friend, we cannot send
The check for which you pine,
Just plant the dead; place o'er his head:
'Here lies a foolish swine.'"

As I have said, old Skeezer was always so dilapidated, and his person so soiled, that he had become a by-word of reproach in the neighborhood.

Even respectable darkies scorned to be seen in his society, and he found his only solace among his swine.

Why, his boy, just turned six, barelegged and far from clean himself, had some knowledge of his pa's shortcomings.

I proved this to my satisfaction.

[Pg 66]

Having some business over at the farm, I went to the house and knocked.

This little chap came to the door.

"Is this where Skeezer, Nathan Skeezer, lives?" I asked.

"It be," he replied.

"Is he at home?"

"Reckon he is, sah—you'll find him over yonder cleanin' out the pigpen."

I thanked the youngster, and was moving away when he called out:

"Say, mister, you'll know dad, 'cause he's got his hat on."

While I'm at it, let me relate an experience I had with homely men, and I remember it the better because it cost me five dollars.

I chanced to be on one of the Old Dominion steamers at the time, in company with Tom Plunger, whose game it was to play the races.

Tom was a mighty good fellow, and his only fault lay in the fact that he stuttered dreadfully.

That's an awful infliction, but it sometimes adds piquancy to a joke, just as Worcestershire sauce does to your chops.

[Pg 67]

We hadn't been long on the water, when I observed a most remarkable-looking individual pacing the deck.

I've seen some ill-looking men in my day, but this specimen was surely the very worst that had ever crossed the scope of my vision, and beat that old Alabama farmer out of sight.

I said as much to my friend, whereupon Tom offered to wager a five-dollar bill that he had seen a worse one in the steerage.

I at once accepted, and Tom started for his man for comparison.

He found the fellow a bit of a wag, as an intolerably homely man is apt to be, and, after the promise of a nip, nothing loath to exhibit himself.

As they appeared on deck, my friend, with an air of conscious triumph, turned to direct my attention to his companion, who was making sure of his success by concocting faces.

"St-st-st-stop!" ordered Tom. "No-no-none of that! You st-st-stay just as you were made. You ca-ca-ca-ca-can't be beat!" [Pg 68]

And he wasn't.

It takes an Irishman to be a Job's comforter.

Patrick Brannagan, whose face was so plain that his friends used to tell him it was an offense to the landscape, happened to be as poor as he was homely.

One day a neighbor met him, and asked:

"How are you, Pat?"

"Mighty bad! Sure, 'tis starvation that's starin' me in the face."

"Begorra!" exclaimed his neighbor, sympathetically, "it can't be very pleasant for either of yez!"

Say, have you ever tried the Christian Science cure? It's simply great.

And the cost is so little, too.

Apparently there are some people though who can't see things in the right way.

They simply lack faith.

I remember when out in the country, I dropped in to see friend Wilkins, the editor of the local sheet.

He was endeavoring to give some medicine to his little chap, who writhed and twisted in contortions.

Of course it was a case of too many green apples, and I could sympathize with Teddy. [Pg 69]

We've all been there.

Now, it happened that a good woman next door had been called in.

She was a devout Christian Scientist, and the way she assured the boy he must be deceiving himself, and there could not be anything the matter with him, would have convinced you or me right away.

But Teddy stubbornly refused to take comfort.

"I think I ought to know," he groaned. "I guess I've got inside information."

Speaking of these fads puts me in mind of the widow McCree, whose husband when alive was noted as a tough case, but he left her well provided for, and she tries to make people believe she mourns for him.

Once she even went to a medium, hoping to hear some message of consolation from the dear departed.

But I rather guess that same medium had been acquainted with Billy during his lifetime.

"Is there any message from my dear husband?" asked the widow, anxiously. [Pg 70]

"Yes, there is," snapped the medium, "and it's hot stuff, too."

By the way, on that Old Dominion steamer there was a newly-married couple—there always is.

I soon discovered that the lady had been something of a yachtswoman, and seemed perfectly at home on the heaving ocean.

Not so the newly-made Benedict.

As soon as the swell off the capes set us to dancing he rushed to the side and started lightening the ship.

This he repeated many times, but was too game to seek his berth.

So, as night came on, they sat there, she chipper as a lark, and he about as dejected a bridegroom as could be found in seven counties.

Perhaps she thought a touch of the romantic might get him out of his mood, so she tried this:

"The moon is up, isn't it, darling?" [Pg 71]

"Yes," I heard him reply, languidly; "that is, if I swallowed it."

It isn't often that a shrewd lawyer gets two set-backs on the same day.

Yet I once witnessed such a thing.

It was in a Western city—never mind the name.

This lawyer was cross-examining a woman who it seemed was the

spouse of a burglar of considerable notoriety.

It was his intention to shatter her testimony, and he went about it in the usual browbeating way.

"Madam, you are the wife of this man?"

"Yes."

"You knew he was a burglar when you married him?"

"Yes."

"How did you come to contract a matrimonial alliance with such a man?" [Pg 72]

"Well," the witness said, sarcastically, "I was getting old, and I had to choose between a lawyer and a burglar."

The cross-examination ended there.

In the other case, the gentleman of the green bag received even a worse dose, and he was such a bulldozing character that no one felt sorry.

"Now, sir," began the attorney, knitting his brows and preparing to annihilate the witness whom he was about to cross-examine, "you say your name is Williams? Can you prove that to be your real name? Is there anybody in the courtroom who can swear that you haven't assumed it for purposes of fraud and deceit?"

"I think you can identify me yourself," answered the witness, quietly.

"I? Where did I ever see you before, sir?" demanded the astonished lawyer.

"I put that scar over your right eye twenty-five years ago, when you were stealing peaches out of father's orchard. Yes, I'm the same Williams." [Pg 73]

Which must have shattered some of the nerve of that same legal gentleman.

But that's nothing to the nerve of a Western landlord! One of them roped me in for fair. You see the blamed hotel burned down while I was there, and—would you believe it?—the next day I got a bill from the proprietor for a fire in my room.

I've been abroad more than once during my checkered career, the last time with a company that played the "Children of the Ghetto." When it was staged in New York, in order to get the best effect of the mob scene the manager went into the New York Ghetto and engaged the real article, employing at the same time an interpreter to explain to them in Yiddish the stage directions. The plan was successful.

But when the production was taken to London we abandoned this scheme.

The English manager had employed the usual group of cockney supers, and spent a good deal of English gold in buying make-ups for them. When our manager saw the lot he was furious.

"Why," he screamed, "that band of mutts looks like a gang of sneak thieves trying to dodge the police! They'll ruin the play!—ruin it!—do you hear me? They'll ruin it! Look at those whiskers!" [Pg 74]

And he yanked off the beard of one of the supers, threw it on the floor and stamped on it.

"And look at that wig!" and a bit of false head-dressing followed the whiskers to the floor, and was shredded under the American's angry heel. "And that one, too!" Another wig went to destruction. "And that nose!—that nose!"

Here he made a grab at the very prominent and highly Roman nasal organ of a very short super, and tweaked it as through he would throw it, too, to the floor and stamp on it.

The super's eyes filled with tears, he uttered a cry of pain, indignantly grabbed and pulled away the manager's wrenchlike fingers, and then backing away, bowed and explained very humbly:

"Hi begs your pardon, sir, but that's me hown."

But, after all, it takes a young woman of the present day, to rub it in with a free hand.

There's Miss Gutting, for instance, whose father roped me in on many a deal on Wall Street. He made his little pile, and of course the daughter is considered a great catch, and among those who hover about the bright flame are several young society swells whose brains have never come out of their swaddling clothes. [Pg 75]

She gave Softleigh an awful jolt the other day when he thought to get off a poem, which somehow seemed to lose all its point in his hands.

"I think, Mr. Softleigh, you will become quite a distinguished man if you live long enough," she said.

"Ah, thanks, awfully, doncher know. It's very good of you to say that. By the way, what do you—aw—think I will be distinguished for?"

"Longevity," said the minx.

It was cruel, perhaps, but I've no doubt she enjoyed it.

But Miss Gutting sometimes finds her match in the grim old Wall Street operator whom she calls papa.

She has a passion for hats, and of course her Easter creation was a dandy. [Pg 76]

"Isn't it a duck of a hat?" she asked the old gentleman, parading it before him.

"Certainly; only I'd call it a pelican," he said, grimly glancing at the account on his desk, "judging from the size of the bill."

I suppose you've noticed that I've done a good deal of chin-scratching to-night. Some people do that when they're thinking hard, but not so with me. Oh, no, the simple fact is I got shaved by a new barber and I guess I'll grow a beard in future. Some people say there's lots of comedy in a barber shop. They mean tragedy. Again some people think there's poetry in the prattlings of the knight of the brush. I know one man who thinks different. Little Archie Rickets has a horror of the tribe and has a scheme to head 'em off.

Whenever he has to patronize a strange barber during the course of his travels, it is his invariable custom to immediately hand out a piece of money before sitting down in the chair, and whisper:

"Here, put this in your pocket for yourself."

The barber, delighted of course, always declares that he has never before received a tip before commencing operations. [Pg 77]

Whereupon Rickets will frown and cut him short with:

"That is not a tip—it's hush money."

And in every case the barber tumbles to the racket, and puts a lock on his lips.

Rickets was telling me the other day about a wonderful bookkeeper his father used to have in his office.

"An all-around athlete," he declared, with a grin.

"Indeed," I replied, knowing he had a card up his sleeve, for Rickets is quite prone to have his little joke.

"Yes, indeed," he continued, "you ought to have seen him balancing the books. Why, he could keep the day-book in the air while he juggled the ledger on his nose and totaled up the journal with either right or left hand. Oh, he was fine, but pop had to let him go."

"How was that?" I asked. [Pg 78]

"He was too much of an adept at the horizontal bar."

"Yes," I remarked, "that same bar has doubtless been the cause of many a fine fellow's downfall. But it is becoming the fashion now among men who lead a strenuous life to give up their tippling. I was just reading that Santos Dumont, the celebrated Brazilian air-ship navigator, does not indulge at all."

"Quite right," remarked Rickets, soberly; "probably he is afraid of taking a drop too much."

There's poor old Juggins, who used to be a great friend of mine till he took to drink.

I knew he would get his desserts if he continued his habit of a periodical spree, and the other day sure enough he turned up in the pen when the cases of drunk and disorderly were called.

"Officer," said the police-court judge, "what made you think the prisoner was drunk?"

"Well, your honor, as he was going along the sidewalk he ran plump into a street lamppost. He backed away, replaced his hat on his head, and firmly started forward again, but once more ran into the post. [Pg 79]

"Four times he tried to get by the post, but each time his uncertain steps took him right into the iron pole.

"After the fourth attempt and failure to pass the post he backed off, fell to the pavement, and clutching his head in his hands, murmured, as one lost to all hope:

"'Lost! Lost in an impenetrable forest.'"

"Ten days;" said the court.

Juggins has been given to this sort of thing ever since he lost his chance of marrying a belle in Washington, and the daughter of a rich senator.

As a newspaper man Juggins was rather free with his criticism of public men and measures, and one of his letters, written before he became infatuated with the young lady in question, had rubbed it in so hard that the senator had gone to the trouble of finding out just who the writer was.

His hour of revenge arrived when Juggins summoned up courage to ask for his daughter's hand.

Then he arose in all his awful majesty.

"Only a year ago, Mr. Juggins, you referred to me emphatically as an old pirate," he said.

Juggins was naturally overwhelmed. [Pg 80]

His sins had found him out.

Of course he tried to stammer out excuses, and how he had regretted his indiscreet act ever since.

"No, I'm not a pirate, Mr. Juggins, I wish you to distinctly understand that—I'm only a sort of freebooter. This (biff-bing) won't cost you a cent."

And Juggins went out of that senatorial mansion a sadder and a wiser man.

That was why he took to drink.

I've known the poor fellow to have the delirium tremens, and see all manner of goblins.

Did you ever run across a ghost, any of you?

Not the nicest experience in the world.

Perhaps you'd like to hear of an exciting adventure in that line that once befell me.

I was out West at the time, traveling on horseback, and pulled up at a tavern when night came on.

There I learned to my chagrin that as a crowd was attending the races—it was in Kentucky, of course—the landlord did not have a single place to stow me. [Pg 81]

When I pressed the old chap, he admitted that there was one unoccupied room.

"But," he said, "no one can sleep in that room, for it's haunted. You must go on to the next village."

"I'll sleep in the room, ghost or no ghost," I declared, determined to go no further, as it promised to be a stormy night.

The landlord tried to persuade me; but I had established myself over the fire and called for supper.

Reluctantly the landlord gave orders to prepare the haunted chamber.

Meantime I was enlightened by the other guests as to the nature of the ghostly visitant.

Every night at a certain hour a sepulchral voice was heard outside the casement, saying:

"Do you want to be shaved?"

"And then, what happens?" I demanded.

No one could certainly say.

The last gentleman who slept in the room had fled, shrieking, on hearing the voice, and had spent the rest of his days in an asylum.

Some said that if you allowed the ghostly barber to approach and commence operations on your chin, your throat would infallibly be cut. [Pg 82]

Fortified by this information, I retired early to rest, leaving the company engaged in an exciting game at cards, each with his pile of cash on the table before him.

Waking up from my first sleep, a hoarse, croaking sound seemed to come from the casement.

To my half-awakened senses the sound seemed to take form in the words:

"Do you want to be shaved?"

I jumped up and went to the window. The creaking branch of an old pear tree was swaying in the wind and scraping against the sash. This was the origin of the ghostly voice.

"What about those fellows downstairs?" I immediately asked myself, not thinking it fair that I should enjoy all of the fun.

I went to the door and listened. They were still at their cards.

So I dressed myself up in a sheet, took my razor in one hand, and a well-lathered brush in the other, and went downstairs. [Pg 83]

Opening the door of the room where the card-players were still eagerly engaged in their game, I looked around. Every eye was fixed on me in terror. Advancing a step into the room, I waved my razor, and said, in a hoarse voice:

"Do you want to be shaved?"

There was a general stampede for the opposite door, and the ghost was left in possession. I walked around the table, and swept the various piles of money into my pocket. Retiring to bed, I slept soundly till the next morning. When I came down to breakfast, eager inquiries were made by the others as to what had happened.

"Well," I answered, "there was some one came, and asked, 'Do you want to be shaved?' So I said, 'No, I don't; but there are some chaps downstairs who do.'"

That's as near as I ever got to meeting a spectre.

But I have seen a dead man galvanized into life. [Pg 84]

This is the way it happened.

It was on the stage.

We were playing Juliet at the time. I used to affect Shakespeare when I was young and foolish.

Paris had been duly slain, and Juliet lay stretched upon her bier.

Just then a portion of the scenery caught fire somehow, but some of us behind managed to extinguish it before much damage was done.

Juliet, with commendable presence of mind, did not move an eyelid, but the corpse of Paris was plainly nervous.

He raised himself to a sitting posture, gazing up at the fire in alarm, then scrambled to his feet and scuttled off the stage, the liveliest dead man you ever saw.

The danger being removed, his courage returned, and the audience [Pg 85] shrieked with laughter at the spectacle of a corpse crawling along from the wings bent upon taking up his proper position for the final curtain.

I was around with the editor of the New York "Flapdoodle" yesterday, working up a sensational item about myself, when I heard a crash in the composing room. The editor and I dashed upstairs and found that a nervous printer had dropped the form of the first page and pied the whole business. The editor looked grimly at the wretch, and then remarked, mournfully:

"I wish you had broken the news more gently."

Now, we've got our quick-change artists on the stage, but to tell you the honest truth, I believe they can't hold a candle to some in private life.

There's Mrs. Stubb, for instance. You know her husband likes an occasional quiet game with the boys—the trouble is he is too confiding.

That sort of people always run up against a buzz saw for their pains.

"Maria," he said, penitently, one morning at breakfast, "last night I played poker and"—— [Pg 86]

"Played poker!" interrupted Mrs. Stubb. "How dare you spend your money gambling, sir!"

"As I was saying, I played poker and won enough to buy you a set of furs"——

"You did? Oh, John, you are so good! I knew those sharps could not get the best of you."

"And just as I was about to quit I dropped it all and fifty more."

"You brute! To think I should have married a gambler!"

I'm really sorry for Stubb.

He's a good fellow in the main, too, though somewhat henpecked at home.

You see he's at the head of a big syndicate, and lately the rumor went around that they might sell out if the right customer turned up.

I chanced to know this, and believed I could bring in a man who would pay their price.

It turned out that he also represented a company.

"Well," said Stubb, finally, "our price is just $150,000, not one cent less." [Pg 87]

"Make it just that much less," suggested the promotor, "and I think we

can cinch the deal."

"How do you mean?"

"Make it $149,999.99. The head of our syndicate is a woman."

Stubb always prided himself on what he was pleased to call his wonderful gift of reading character.

I've often wondered how such a genius ever came to make such a mistake before he married.

But then love, they say, is blind.

And like Rip Van Winkle's drink, that one didn't count.

To tell you the truth he was a pretty good hand at guessing character, and I've known him to tell five out of six men's occupation or trade just by keen analysis of their appearances and actions.

Of course Stubb went in for reading all such books as Sherlock Holmes.

"After all," he said to me one day as we rode in a Broadway car, "it is really a very simple thing; requires nothing but close observation. [Pg 88]

"For instance, it is easy to tell a man's occupation.

"His facial expression, his actions, even his dress, are stamped by his daily work.

"You see that man sitting opposite us? Well, I am just as sure as though he had told me that he is a barber."

"You are mistaken," I replied, quickly. "That man is a butcher."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Stubb. "You never saw a butcher with slim, white hands, like his?"

"Perhaps not," I admitted, shaking my head, "but he is a butcher just the same."

"How do you know he is?"

"How do I know? Faith, I have very good reasons for persisting in my assertions, since the scoundrel shaved me once."

Our last servant girl is a daisy.

Only yesterday morning I heard my wife ask her why she left the alarm-clock on the kitchen table all night alongside the buckwheat batter. [Pg 89]

"Sure, mum, so it would know what time to rise."

Her brother Mike has a saloon down on the Bowery.

The other day I went in to give him a message from Nora, and found him examining some sort of patent contraption guaranteed, if fastened in the furnace smokepipe, to effect a wonderful saving in the consumption of coal.

And just then such a thing was an object in New York, with hard coal soaring out of reach.

"And you say that wid wan av these patent dampers in me sthovepipe I'd save half me coal?" Mike was saying as I went in.

"That's it. It will do the work every time and save half your coal bill," declared the agent, eagerly.

"All right," says Mike, "thin, be jabers, phwat's the matter wid me takin' two and savin' the whole av it?" [Pg 90]

Riding uptown on the elevated the other night, I noticed a parson sitting on one of the cross-seats, and he was evidently trying to extend sympathy to the cadaverous-looking young man who sat opposite him.

"Pardon me, sir," said the churchman; "but you look worn out. You know he who dissipates——"

"No, parson, it ain't dissipation. The truth is I'm most dead. I had about forty letters to write this afternoon."

"Why didn't you dictate them?" asked the parson.

"No typewriter."

"What's become of her?"

"I married her."

"Get another."

"Can't."

"Why not?"

"Costs too much to live now."

I can sympathize with that poor fellow. [Pg 91]

Ah, me! What life was like in those old, old bachelor days, when a million hearts were at my feet. My wife came to me only this morning with an angelic smile on her face and, pointing to a book she held open, she said:

"George, dear, I have a little surprise for you. I have been going around among the girls who knew you before we were married and I have put down here the names of all those women you have kissed, and I'm going to ask you to give me a dollar for every kiss."

I had to pawn my watch to settle that terrible bill.

Talking about old days, when I was in budding manhood I thought I was in budding poethood as well. I wrote a little ballad for a grocery clerk, and he was so effusive [Pg 92] he made me blush. But the glad hand he gave me started me on the road to ruin. By some strange freak of fortune, I butted up against a real live versifier who had actually had his lines printed.

"Keep at it, my young friend," he said to me. "That's the only way to win. The railroad magnates are the first persons to recognize real genius. Why, before I was seventy years old, I was travelling on a pass!"

I steered away, for I reckoned if I'd have to wait till I was three-score-and-ten before passes came my way I wouldn't need 'em then.

I walked to a neighboring village and bribed the editor of the local paper to print a five-line poem which I had written. The poem was entitled "To Hell," and was pretty hot stuff for a youngster. Next day I trotted off to the paper office to preserve the [Pg 93] original manuscript. As I was leaving some one shouted:

"That's the villiain, Jake, that makes love to your wife by writin' poetry to her."

"Aha!" roared Jake, "that 'ar shunk! the fellow what wrote the poem about Nell! Whoop!"

I caught a flash of a big farmer getting his gun in position. I waited for no more, but did a flying scoot.

Great Scot! There's the stage bell. I'll have to shut down, or the manager will be here with a club. Ting-ting!

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AN extremely rare occurrence for the publishers of a magazine is to find themselves embarrassed by the obligation imposed by the degree and quality of prosperity that has attended AINSLEE'S during the past year. Such prosperity brings with it an obligation in a very real sense, for it means that in what has actually been accomplished in the past, there is implied a promise to the public and to the literary world, of a continued development toward what is best and most wholesome in fiction, poetry and essays. Here are some of the more familiar names:

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It will thus be seen that in 1904 there will be plenty of quality to go along with the greatest quantity of reading matter to be found in any other magazine published at any price.

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The Ainslee Magazine Co., *New York*

Transcriber's Note:

Some image alignments have been changed from the original to better accommodate free-flowing text.

Apparent spelling errors within dialogue have been left unchanged on the assumption that they are intentional dialect.

Page 3, changed "its" to "it's" in "I suppose it's all right."

Page 4, changed "aint" to "ain't."

Page 13, added missing close quote after "home with me."

Page 43, changed "its" to "it's" in two places.

Page 56, changed "its" to "it's" in "it's jist this way."

Page 65, changed "Hear" to "Here" in "Here lies a foolish swine." Illustration was correct; error was in typeset text.

Page 70, added missing "I" to the beginning of the sentence "I soon discovered that the lady..."

Page 80, changed "Of couse" to "Of course."

Page 87, removed duplicate "a" from "was a a pretty good hand."

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