

Niblo George

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Sit down! Sit down! Stop right where you are! The game isn't over by a long way.

I've got a few aces up my sleeve yet, and don't you forget it!

No wonder I'm feeling tiptop! Fact is, I fancy I am feeling to-night a little like the colored brother who got religion, and filled with enthusiasm, or something more of a liquid character, expressed to the doubting parson his desire to imitate Elijah, and go to glory in a chariot of fire.

"Yes," said the parson, "I reckon, my friend, you'se just want to get acclimated-like before reachin' de end ob your journey."

Now how did that reverend gentleman know?

Why, only through circumstantial evidence, for you see he had unfortunately once been the proud owner of a flock of fowls that did not have sense enough to roost high.

However, I'm not sighing just yet to go to glory.

This gay metropolis pleases me some.

But, talking of circumstantial evidence, I know one man who would never consent to hang a suspected murderer on the strength of it.

You won't blame him, either, when you hear what his

experience in that line has I been.

He's a doctor by profession.

His learning has always been in the direction of mind troubles, and consequently I wasn't surprised when I met him the other day to learn that he is now in full charge of one of the biggest institutions in the State, for the care of the insane.

Now, it happened that recently in making a tour of inspection the doctor had occasion to enter an unoccupied cell in the ward reserved for incurables.

As he did so the iron door clicked shut, making him a prisoner in his own asylum.

While he was standing there, rattling the grating and calling for an attendant, a party of visitors came strolling his way.

"I beg your pardon," said the doctor suavely to the first man, "but I'm locked in."

"Poor fellow," replied the visitor, "so I perceive."

"I wish you would be good enough to have some one let me out," the doctor continued.

By this time a second visitor appeared.

"See," said the first, "this fellow looks quite intelligent, and asks to be released, as though he really expected it."

"Gentlemen, I see your error. I am not crazy, I assure you. I locked myself in here by accident. Really – I – why – " and the doctor felt himself smiling in the most blankly imbecile manner.

"Look at him now!" cried the second visitor. "Did you ever see a more hopelessly idiotic expression on the face of man?"

This was really too much for human nature to endure.

"See here, you scoundrels," cried the doctor, excitedly, "call an attendant or I'll have you both in here for life. I'm the superintendent."

"Come away," said one of the strangers, quickly, "we musn't get the poor devil worked up. He may do himself harm," and they passed on down the corridor.

The doctor spent a morning in that cell, and now he says he has more sympathy for his patients.

He assured me that if I ever took a notion to drop in and see him, he would do all he could to make my stay comfortable.

I wonder what he meant, and if that was a mere formula used to calm each new guest at his hotel.

Long experience has made the doctor quite an artist in that line.

Speaking of artists, there's Craigie, who has a studio on Fifth Avenue. Craigie is a friend of mine.

He paints atrocious pictures, but somehow seems to make a living out of the business.

Sometimes I go to see him, when business is bad, and I'm wondering where the money's coming from to pay the month's bill.

Between you and myself, the sight of all those daubs on the walls of his studio, which he considers masterpieces, always makes me feel better.

Misery likes company, and they certainly do look tough.

Recently, while I was lounging there in his Oriental corner, old Dr. Gregg dropped in.

I expected some fun, because the doctor has quite a caustic tongue, you know, and don't mind giving a fellow a rap.

Craigie understood why I winked at him, and I saw blood in his eye while he continued to paint.

The doctor walked around, grunting and making an occasional slurring remark that in another man might have been looked on as an insult.

But we all knew Gregg.

Finally he turned to the artist.

"I say, Craigie, these things which you exhibit on your walls, seeking a purchaser in vain, I suppose may be called failures?"

"Well," remarked the artist, "perhaps you hit the nail on the head in a commercial sense, doctor. You see, men in your profession have the advantage over us poor devils of painters, for while we are compelled to exhibit our failures on the wall, yours are safely planted underground out of sight."

When I met Craigie, after he had spent a summer abroad, he delighted me with his sketches of the many interesting things he had seen.

Among other subjects he had a picture of Monte Carlo.

It is certainly a lovely heaven on earth and I said as much. Craigie grinned at me.

"All the same," said he, "it has appeared to be a regular hades for many a poor devil."

"That's so – when a fellow has lost all his money," I admitted.

"Why," said he, "I myself experienced the tortures of the Inquisition in that room you see yonder."

"What are those affairs in sight?" I asked.

"I played roulette there, and was broken at the wheel."

Although I never went through a similar experience I could sympathize with Craigie.

Leaving out the wheel part of it, his condition has usually been a constitutional failing of mine, and was that morning when I called at the office of the Sunday paper.

Now, if there is anything I dislike it's to see an editor show his temper.

Some of them are really too provoking.

So when I happened in and found the man who runs the comic supplement frothing at the mouth I tried to soothe him.

"Christopher Columbus!" I remarked, pleasantly, after my usual way, "you seem to be out of humor this morning."

"That's all right," he snarled; "you can't sell me any."

What a husband that bear must be; not domestic, after my own fashion, for I dearly love to do errands for my wife.

Of course I sometimes make blunders in shopping, but then experience teaches one, and in time I hope to be able to hold my own with the tricky tradesmen who look upon me as a soft mark.

When the mistake is really atrocious I get a good calling down, and sometimes have to resort to strategy in order to save the day.

The lady of the house was indignant this evening when I came

home from my weary round of the newspaper offices.

"The joke is on you, George," she said.

I wondered which one, for the day had not been productive of much long green.

"What's it all about?" I asked.

"Why, that mattress I told you to buy."

"Well, I bought it all right," I protested, feebly.

"Yes, and instead of sending home a mattress of live goose feathers, you purchased one of excelsior."

"How can you blame me, my dear," I said, "when I assure you it had a placard fastened to it which read 'Marked Down'? That furniture man is a prevaricator, that's all."

Those sharks who sell furniture must have some connection with fishermen, to judge from the thundering big lies they tell.

Now, I am fond of going fishing myself.

Perhaps I take a deeper interest in the whooping big yarns spun around the blazing camp fire by a set of jolly sportsmen than in the taking of mighty strings of fish.

Still, I delight to lure the festive trout out of the wet.

I've met some fellows who like old-fashioned methods, and succeed where the rest with their expensive tackle fail.

One day I had a remarkable run of luck, and that night as we sat around the camp fire, I took occasion to say that my success was due to the superior kind of flies I had used.

"You may flatter yourself on the string you've brought in to-day," said an old fisherman who had joined our party, "but let

me tell you, mister, that I saw a Digger Indian catch more fish in one hour in this stream than you've landed all day with your fine flies."

"What bait did he use?" I asked.

"Live grasshoppers," replied the old man; "but he didn't impale them. From his head he would stoically pluck a hair, and with it bind the struggling insect to the hook. Almost upon the instant that this bait struck the water a fish would leap for it. After landing him the Indian would calmly repeat the performance of snatching a hair from his head and affixing a fresh grasshopper to the hook.

"After the Indian had landed in quick succession a mighty string of salmon trout he suddenly stopped. I called to him to go on with the exciting sport, but he merely smiled grimly and pointed significantly to his head."

"What was the matter with his head?" I asked.

"He had plucked it bald," replied the old man.

There have been some occasions when I've felt myself as though I would like to pluck my hair out, though it is generally on account of some stupidity on my part.

And if you don't mind I will tell you right here, how.

I put my foot in it the other night.

I was so provoked at my stupidity that I came near retiring to a nunnery, or taking a solemn vow not to speak a single word for a week.

Now, I haven't an unusually large mouth, and yet when I

related my unfortunate break to Charlie Parsons, the cashier of our bank, he was cruel enough to hint that perhaps some people never could open their mouth without putting their foot in it.

I call that decidedly uncharitable, don't you?

But about this stupid remark of mine.

It was a big reception you know, a mixed company, where one was apt to meet any sort of an old star.

Some famous chaps were there, too.

I honored it with my presence.

At the table I chanced to sit next to a learned professor, head of a famous college. And during the meal some fiendish spirit induced me to turn toward him and say:

"Professor, can you tell me who that uncommonly ugly lady is, opposite to you?"

He looked at me with a wicked smile.

"Sir," he said, "she chances to be my wife."

Of course I was overwhelmed with confusion, and to crawl out of the hole I did what any other person would have done under the same circumstances.

"Pardon me, professor, but I mean the lady on the right."

"And that, sir, is my daughter," he said, solemnly.

Then I flew the coop.

When I was strolling along the Bowery this evening I saw a man come jumping out of a museum that boasts of more freaks than Barnum's show.

"Where's the nearest doctor?" he cried, and from his

frightened appearance I felt positive the human snake had gulped down the bearded lady, or the living skeleton with the ossified bones wanted a tough joint pulled, or had got stuck in the wastepipe of the sink.

"What's the matter – anything wrong?" I asked.

"Wrong," he yelled, "I should say there was. Why, the sword swallower has got a pin down his gullet! Show me a doctor, quick!"

A little further along I saw an Irishman being run out of a clothing store by an irate Jew, who certainly looked as though he couldn't take a joke.

The Celt was laughing when I caught up with him.

"What's up?" I asked.

He pointed to the sign that read:

"Great Slaughter in Clothing."

"Sure," said he, "the gossoon was mad clane through because I wint in and asked to see one av thim kilt suits," and he laughed so hard that he choked half to death over a set of false teeth.

Speaking of teeth, that was pretty tough on Snyder when his little son and heir took to giving away family secrets so recklessly.

It seems that Snyder had been treating himself to a new set of teeth.

The youngster thought the event of sufficient importance to be related to the minister when he called.

And quite naturally the good dominie, much amused, asked what would become of the old ones.

"Oh, I suppose," replied little James, with a look of resignation; "they'll cut 'em down and make me wear 'em."

Snyder's wife is a good general.

She was riding in the car with her little daughter Edith, when the conductor, thinking perhaps of a half fare, asked:

"How old are you, little girl?"

"You must ask ma," she immediately replied, "'cause she always takes care of my age in a street car."

Now that was pretty cute, don't you think so?

And my youngest came up smiling recently.

Really, I am worried about that little chap, because I never know whether he is going to be a fool or a humorist.

Perhaps it doesn't matter much.

On this occasion he had had his first ride in an automobile.

A fellow around the corner bought one recently, and as he wants to get in my good graces for some reason or other, he asked Harold to go through the park with him.

That evening I heard my wife, who is very circumspect in all such matters of etiquette, say:

"Harold, did you thank Mr. Gaycrank for that lovely ride he gave you?"

Harold was reading but did not answer.

So she asked him again.

I knew he heard from the way he looked up, but was surprised that he made no reply.

"Harold!" she spoke sharply, now.

"Yes, ma," he replied.

"Did you thank Mr. Gaycrank for taking you riding? Why don't you answer me?"

"I did thank him, ma," whispered Harold, "but he told me not to mention it."

Harold was studying geography.

I saw something puzzled him.

"What's the knotty problem?" I asked him.

"They call the Mississippi the 'Father of waters,'" he said, "and I think it ought to be the 'Mother of waters.'"

"Correct, my son," I said, admiringly.

"Is Missouri the daughter of Mississippi then?" he asked.

I'm afraid I have much to answer for.

And think of it, that boy only nine years old.

What will become of us when he breaks loose at man's estate?

Just this morning he astonished me by declaring the dictionary was only an old joke book after all.

I frowned upon such levity.

The dictionary I look upon as an old and valued friend, and one deserving of the utmost respect.

It has pulled me out of many a difficulty.

"Nonsense, I'll give you a dime for every bona fide joke you show me in the dictionary," I said.

"All right, here's one already."

He pointed out the word "question."

Reading further I found this:

"To pop the question – see pop."

Well, I never begrudged that dime a bit. And my respect for that solemn old conglomeration of knowledge is now mingled with hilarity.

Since I'm in on the subject of young ones, let me tell you that I've always endeavored to impress my children with the fact that I take an interest in all they do.

That is, I want them to come to me with all their troubles, and gain by my checkered experience.

Sort of older brother confidence game, you know.

Once in a while I'm rather afraid they take advantage of my easy-going character.

There's Aleck, about sixteen, and almost ready to go to college – what d'ye think he said to me yesterday.

Catching me in a particularly good frame of mind, when a big check had just come in, he said in a serious tone:

"Will you advise me, pop?"

"Certainly – only too delighted, my son. Now, what is it you want my opinion upon?" I said, feeling particularly pleased because of this confidence.

"Well, you see, I wanted to know whether I had better strike you for five dollars or for ten?"

There's no use in telling you how much he got, for who could resist such a clever hold up?

Oh, by the way, did I ever tell you about Jackman?

Among my friends I suppose he is by long odds the most

consequential – why, he has the strut of a Lord High Admiral in a comic opera.

That is, when before the public.

Secretly, I believe he leads a sort of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde life, and that the power behind the throne is in reality his wife, a little woman with a will of her own.

This was proven to my mind the day I was out with him at his country seat.

His coachman came up, looking red in the face, as though out of humor.

"I think I must leave you, Mr. Jackman," said he.

"Why, what's wrong, Thomas?"

"I don't like to complain, sir, but really I can't stand the missus."

"Oh, is that it – she's too strict, eh?" laughed Jackman.

"Yes, sir, she keeps forgetting that I can throw up my job at any time, and bosses me around just as if I was you, sir."

I thought it good manners to get behind the stable before I allowed myself to laugh.

But Thomas went all the same.

Jackman told me Thomas had recently got religion and was about the longest-winded petitioner at prayer he ever knew. But I had been South among the darkies, and remembered one old fellow, at least, who could give him points and still win out.

This was old Uncle Mose, who looked solemn enough for a funeral when I asked him how things were going.

"I declar'," he said, "I got ter be mo' keerful in future – I sho' has!"

"What's the trouble now?" I asked.

"Well, suh, I whirled in en prayed fer rain dese two hours en a half, en bless de Lawd, dey come along a regular deluge, dat mighty nigh drown de bes' mule I had. Prov'dence am so partial ter me, dat I'se got ter be mo' keerful about overdoin' things, you see."

Uncle Mose had a son who, being a barber, puts on considerable style at times.

I'd seen him look like a howling swell.

One day, down at the post office, while waiting for the mail to be distributed, I saw this Adolphus saunter in.

Another young gamecock rubbed elbows with him.

"Hullo, 'Dolphus, you'se ain't been a wearin' dem fine patent-leather shoes ob yours no mo'. What am de matter?" I heard him ask.

"Kain't – de patent done run out," said Adolphus.

That fellow was quite good looking, and in fact I can remember quite enjoying him after a fashion.

I don't believe I've ever been called a handsome man myself.

That is, in a beauty show, the prizes wouldn't be rushing in my direction.

And yet for years I did cherish the fond belief that my face had the stamp of honesty and rectitude upon it.

Alas! I'm not so positive now.

To tell the plain, unvarnished truth, I begin to fear this business of talking on humorous subjects is beginning to leave its effect upon my frank countenance.

This is how I know.

I had engaged to do a stunt in a certain town down among the North Carolina pines.

Come to find out, there was no way of getting there except by means of a stagecoach, just as in olden days.

I was the only passenger, you see.

There had been considerable talk about a rascal who had robbed right and left, so that I was not feeling very good.

Besides, I didn't like the looks of that driver, for if ever an evil-browed mountaineer had taken to coaching, he was the man.

He kept looking back at me every little while, and somehow I got the notion into my head that he was figuring whether it would pay to make way with me.

There was an awful lonely stretch of woods between Athens and Saulsboro, and when we struck it I tell you a cold chill pranced up and down my spinal column, for it was just an ideal spot for murder.

Suddenly the driver drew in his horses.

My knees began to knock together, and my teeth rattled just like those Turkish castanets you've seen dancers use.

The worst had come, and this black-browed villain was about to finish me then and there.

I tried to get to my feet.

"Hold on there!" growled the driver.

His voice trembled, I thought, with rage.

It was the most terrible moment of my life.

"Who are ye?" he next demanded.

I told him my name.

"What ye going to Athens fur?" he asked.

I hastened to inform him that I was the funny man who had been engaged to appear, my object being to let him know I might be worth more coming away from Athens than when bound there.

He put out his big hand, quickly.

I expected to see a big pistol in it, but no, it was empty.

"How glad I am, mister, to hear that," he said. "I've been shaking in my boots all this yer time thinkin' ye was that land pirate an' meant to murder me, 'cause they say he's even an uglier cuss than me. Shake hands, mister. I declar ye've taken a mighty big load off'n my mind."

I shook hands with the delighted fellow, but lacked the nerve to tell him how badly scared I had been.

But I'm not so proud of my honest looks nowadays.

Whenever I hear a good story in connection with some person of note, I always enjoy it more if I happen to know the party.

They told me about Richard Harding Davis the other night at the club, which amused me not a little.

Ever hear of his adventures with the bull?

Well, it runs something like this, and those who happen to be honored with a personal acquaintance with the famous young

American author will appreciate its point best.

He was taking a stroll one day, and lost in meditation, so the story runs, rather incautiously started to cross a meadow where a ferocious bull was pastured.

The gentleman did not see the bull until he charged, and then like a true soldier of fortune he dropped his dignity and made headlong for the nearest fence.

This he reached in good time, but the bull had the satisfaction of assisting him over.

Though no great damage was done, Mr. Davis' feelings were deeply injured.

Just then, as luck would have it, the owner of the bellowing bovine came running up.

He was angry because Mr. Davis had been trespassing on his property, and Mr. Davis was mad clean through because he was not in the habit of being assisted over fences in that style.

"I'll have you arrested for trespass, sir," exclaimed the farmer, in a rage.

"And I'll have you summoned for keeping dangerous animals at large," cried Mr. Davis.

"You had no business on my land, sir."

"Ah! perhaps you don't know me; I'm Richard Harding Davis, sir!" striking his well-known attitude, and tapping his manly breast significantly.

"Oh," said the farmer, duly impressed, "but Mr. Davis, why didn't you tell that to the bull?"

I was out in a country cemetery lately.

Ever walked through one?

Sometimes you find some queer epitaphs on the old stones.

I read one that told about the virtues of three husbands a certain woman had.

And the monument had evidently been touched up several times, as occasion required.

This gave me a suggestion which I later carried out in the shape of a little song, and if you will permit me, I'll sing it to you now. Keep your seats, there's no extra charge.

The orchestra will please play, softly, the "Dead March of Saul." My song is entitled "The Overworked Monument."

She followed him unto his grave
And reared a marble rare,
And chiseled on this sentence sweet,
"My grief I cannot bear."

She mourned a year and then she wed,
And they chiseled on that stone
A single word, and now it reads,
"My grief I cannot bear – alone."

But soon she wore her weeds again,
And they turned that stone about;
And on it traced this touching line,
"My life's light has gone out."

Not long she walked in darkness lone
Around that marble patch,
The bells rang out, the sculptor wrote,
"I've struck another match."

She's happy now with number four,
But all the neighbors say
That she will be a busy girl
On Resurrection Day.

Some people are very partial to the bang-tails.

There's Cribber, for example, has become quite infatuated over the races, and loses no opportunity of going when the season is on.

He stoutly maintains that it is just his Kentucky love for the magnificent thoroughbreds that lures him there.

And being a confiding sort of a fellow myself I actually believed this song and dance for a time.

I know better now.

Here's where the bars were lowered.

Cribber has a lovely home, and a devoted wife, who has long been one of my wife's best friends.

The other day when she was at the house she took advantage of my wife running upstairs to get her hat on, to put me on the rack.

I was surprised.

What do you think she asked me?

She wanted to know whether the air down on Long Island had malaria in it, and especially around Sheepshead Bay, where the horses ran.

I assured her that so far as I knew it was considered fully as healthy as any other part of the shore.

Then she let the cat out of the bag.

Several times of late after Cribber had been to the races he looked careworn and cross, and complained that there was something radically wrong with his system.

I saw a great light.

But I made no attempt to explain matters to the little woman, who doubtless continues to be worried about the health of that gay old deceiver, Cribber, and when I told him about it he bribed me to secrecy with a prize fifty-cent cigar.

To tell you the truth, if there's anything I enjoy it's a prime cigar.

And like many another man I've had to make myself a martyr each Christmas, for my better-half invariably insists on buying me a box of the weeds.

Her intentions are all right, but the cigars – well, they generally bring back vivid recollections of boyhood days, when corn-silk and grape leaves all went.

I have come to dread the holiday time.

And yet I never have the heart to dissuade her, she seems to take such delight in seeing me smoke one of the vile weeds some villain of a tobacconist sold her as prime stuff.

Now this year I determined to be wise.

Accordingly I managed to slip out of the house and presented the box with a "Merry Christmas" to Mike McGinnity who lives around the corner.

Then I bought a box of my favorites and smuggled it into the house, feeling guilty, yet triumphant.

That night Clara, bless her heart, insisted on opening the package and bringing me the first cigar, which she lighted with her own dear hands.

Then she watched me puff my satisfaction.

It was genuine, I tell you, and mentally I was patting myself on the back.

"How do you like them, my dear?" she asked, anxiously.

"Prime – as good as any I've ever smoked," I replied, honestly.

"I'm so glad, for you see I had Mr. Harvesthome pick them out for me. They cost fifteen dollars for the box of fifty. But I do love to see you enjoy a good cigar after dinner."

Well, what do you think of that?

Harvesthome is the best judge of cigars I know.

Every time I pass McGinnity he calls out blessings on my head for the "illegant" box of cigars I gave him.

And I think Harvesthome suspects something.

That will cost me another box to keep him hushed up.

I guess those were about the most expensive common, everyday smokes I've ever indulged in.

Next year I will bribe Clara to let me help her select the

present.

But talking of smoking, I wonder whether it really has any effect on the nerves, as the doctors claim.

Because, it's been my experience that some of the nerviest chaps among the rising generation were boys who indulged in cigarettes.

Why, just last week I had occasion to go to a neighboring town down the coast.

It was confusing to a total stranger, the streets ran at such queer angles.

So I determined to seek a little assistance.

There came along a sallow youth, puffing away at a cigarette and looking mighty important.

I held him up.

"Say, young fellow, can you direct me to the bank?" I asked.

"Guess I kin, for a quarter," he replied, coolly.

I liked his nerve.

At the same time I expressed my surprise over the steep demand he made for such a trifling service.

"Huh," he said with a grin, "guess you can't expect a fellow to be a bank director for nothing."

He got that quarter for his smartness.

If only one keeps his ears open on the streets he is very apt to hear many queer things, and sometimes fragments of humor go floating on the breeze.

Try it once.

You'll soon realize that after all, this is something of a gay old world.

Down on Park Row, just as I was passing, an irate customer was hauling a clothing dealer over the coals.

"Say, Isaacson, you said this suit would wear like iron," I heard the customer say.

The Jew shrugged his shoulders.

"Vell, do you mean to dell me it did not?" he asked.

"Hang it, too much like iron. I've only had it a week, and see here how rusty it's become."

The same day I stopped to gaze at an astonishing picture in front of a Fourteenth Street museum, where the freaks are on exhibition day and night.

A wild-looking man came out and hurried away.

He was met by the manager, but broke loose and walked down the street, evidently out of temper.

"See here," called out the proprietor to the man in the ticket office, "what's gone wrong with the glass-eater?"

"Oh! he's struck."

"Wants more money, eh?"

"Nope, getting too toney, that's all."

"What's he up to, now?"

"Refuses what we give him – lamp chimneys ain't fastidious enough for his highness – wants cut glass," said the man in the ticket office.

While I was still smiling about the stuck-up devourer of

broken glass, I ran slap into Godkin, who used to be a neighbor of ours.

Some months back he yielded to the alluring blandishments of the Jere Johnson tribe of suburban real estate men, and went over in Jersey to reside.

He certainly looked bad.

His face was pale and his eyes had a far-away expression.

"Old man," I said, anxiously, "what's ailing you? I never knew you to be sick before. Really, you ought to ask some doctor what's the matter."

"It's no use, I know it only too well. It's quick consumption," he replied, with a sigh.

I was really distressed.

Godkin, bluff and hearty, was the last man I should ever have expected to go into a decline.

"Quick consumption!" I repeated, after him, and laying a hand on his arm, sympathetically.

"Yes, having to bolt my breakfast in two gulps and hurry to catch the train for town."

While I was talking with Godkin a nervous-looking man passed us.

He had a lad along with him, and as it was a cold day the boy kept knocking his hands together to induce circulation.

This appeared to annoy grandpa.

"Tommy, stop rubbing your hands like that. The weather's not cold."

And Young America made reply:

"Well, I ain't tryin' to warm the weather – I'm a warmin' my hands, see!"

I have good cause to remember that day.

It was a red-letter occasion.

I pride myself as being as smart as the next one, and in a long experience seldom come out at the small end of the horn.

But that day – it was a terrible blow to my pride.

An auction attracted me.

I must confess that I've a sneaking liking for any stray old bargain that may be floating around.

I've got an attic full of 'em at home in the country – send 'em down there so my wife won't laugh at me.

However, up to this day, I don't think I've ever been as foolish about bidding things in as Mrs. Gerrold, who got a doorplate with the name Thompson on it, and when I asked what use it could be to her, calmly replied:

"Life is very uncertain. Who knows, Gerrold might be taken away and I might marry some man named Thompson, and this would come in very handy."

But I have purchased a white elephant.

You shall hear.

While prowling around in the auction room I ran across a little antique chest.

It struck my eye as the very thing to keep my papers in, and I thought I might squander a dollar or so for it when the time

came to bid.

When I turned back the lid I found the box half-filled with packages of papers, some of which looked like deeds.

Of course I was foolish to think of treasure-trove, for who could say what valuable document a fellow might not unearth among these bundles!

A seedy-looking chap touched me on the arm.

"I beg pardon," said he, "but I hope you won't bid against me on this here chest."

"And why?" I asked, getting my back up at once.

"Because, you see, I used to be a coachman for the family, and when they busted up they owed me a part of my wages."

"Oh, yes, and now you think there may be a bonanza for you here. Well, I guess the track's free to all, and I've taken a fancy to that chest myself," I said, firmly.

He shook his head and looked angry.

The box was put up the next thing.

I've often thought that queer.

That fellow hung on like a bulldog, to the extent of his little pile, but my fighting blood was up, and if I'd been a Vanderbilt I guess I'd have gone a thousand.

I got it, though.

Locking the chest up I left it while I went to the bank and borrowed the money, some fifty-two dollars.

Yes, that was an expensive box.

It seemed so precious that I squandered another dollar and a

half hiring a cab to carry it home.

My wife thought I had been to a funeral.

A little later I was of the same opinion myself.

Those stocks and bonds just brought me twenty-two cents for old paper.

Of course it was a set-up game, and they say a sucker is born every minute.

That was my minute, probably.

But I am not always such an easy mark.

I dropped into a wholesale shoe house the other day to see a friend.

Several of the salesmen were perched on boxes, taking it easy, for business had slackened.

"Hello," I remarked, "all pulled for the jury, I see."

"How's that?" asked one.

"Why, sitting on cases," I said.

Out in front I ran across two excited Hebrews.

"You called me a dead beat," said one, angrily. "You must take dot pack, sir, or suffer dose consequences."

"I never dakes anydings pack," declared the other, firmly.

"You don't dake noddings pack?"

"Never. So help me shiminy gracious."

"All right. You vas der man I've been looking for. Lend me a haluf a tollar."

I hope he got it.

I had no time just then to wait and see, for I had an errand to

do downtown, a very particular one, too, for Gwendoline.

That's my niece, who runs our flat just now.

You see, my brother left his little girl with us while he ran across to London.

She's a dear little thing, but utterly spoiled.

Once in a while it is up to me to punish her, for I promised Henry to be a father to his little pet while he was gone.

The other night she was pouting and headstrong, so I set about depriving her of something she particularly desired.

Result, of course, a deluge of tears.

"It hurts me to see you cry, Gwendoline," I said, in a mournful voice, "but you understand you can't always have your own way, and do as you like."

"Oh, uncle," she sobbed, "how can you be so obstinate?"

They're all alike, these women, and bound to gain their ends by hook or by crook.

And yet sometimes they do have the most remarkable ideas about things.

I was at a reception, and having wandered in the conservatory thought myself alone, until I heard low voices behind some shrubbery.

Of course a pair of turtledoves had secreted themselves there to bill and coo – the cooing would end at the altar, but every married man knows the billing keeps right along.

Pretty soon I heard the happy youth say:

"Dearest, how do you know that you truly love me?"

And then she answered innocently:

"Why, George, don't you see, ever since I met you I've grown to admire ears that stand out."

When that girl gets married I don't think she'll need any assistance in her household work.

We changed help the other day.

I hardly know what to make of the new girl.

Sometimes I labor under the impression that she can be as dense as they make them across the water.

Then again she makes some remarks that stagger me, and on my life I'm unable to decide whether she's a fool, or takes me for one.

Her breaks are numerous.

Of course being newly landed she had never tasted ice cream, and as the first spoonful went into her mouth it came out again with violence, and tears coming into her eyes, she gasped:

"Howly mither, it do burn!"

Why, it was only this morning I wanted to consult my wife about something or other.

Of course she could not be found.

It's always thus.

But I am not the man to complain.

With the determination that has always distinguished my noble line of ancestry, I started in to search from one end of the flat to the other.

This brought me to the kitchen, where lovely Nora was

diligently bending her back over the washtubs.

"Can you tell me of my wife's whereabouts?" I asked.

She looked puzzled, but only for a moment, and then smiling broadly, said:

"Faith, to till yees the truth, I do belave they're in the wash, sur."

However, I've run across some things that won't wash.

We had a regular seance one night last week at the house of a great friend of mine called Harper. It was very interesting.

The professor who conducted the exercises was a genius, and he came mighty near converting some of the ladies to his extraordinary way of thinking.

I think Harper's wife was anxious to be a convert.

At any rate I heard her eagerly saying to the gentleman with the long hair and the occult eye:

"I have always believed in dreams, professor."

"Ah!" said he, delighted, "then perhaps you too have had some psychological experience?"

"Indeed, I did – a most remarkable one in particular," she gushed.

"Prophetic?"

"Yes."

"I should greatly like to hear it."

"One night I dreamed that the sky suddenly blazed with light; the heavens were filled with a thronging host, a trumpet sounded, the dead arose from their graves, and then a voice shouted:

'Something terrible is going to happen!'"

"Well?" he asked, "and it came to pass?"

"Why, the very next day our cook left."

I felt very sorry for the professor – he laughed, of course, but during the rest of the evening I noticed he fought shy of Mrs. Harper's company.

And the best of it was that lady actually believed in the realization of her prophecy.

I know Harper thought it a dire calamity when he had to subsist for a whole week on provender fashioned after the methods in vogue among cooking-school graduates.

When he was a little younger Harper used to be quite a clubman.

Habits of his bachelor days were hard to shake off.

I had often wondered how he came to suddenly reform, and when my wife told me recently, as a great secret, I have come to feel a new respect for the fertility of resource as shown in the gentler sex.

Mrs. Harper used strategy, where another little woman, less wise, might have tried expostulation and entreaty without effect, for most men dislike the tyranny of tears.

I'll tell you what she did.

Before going to bed she drew two easy chairs close together by the parlor fire.

Then she took one of Dick's cigars and held a match to it, until the room got a faint odor of smoke.

Harper casually asked the next morning who had dropped in and looked at her in a funny way when she said no one.

But he never went out another evening without Mrs. Harper.

Now, I call that as smart a bit of diplomacy as Napoleon ever exhibited in his campaigns, don't you?

Harper lives in Brooklyn.

This gives him the privileges of a landed proprietor.

Why, think of it, the nabob even owns a reel of garden hose, and when he comes home weary, in the evening of a hot, dusty day, he can find relaxation to body and mind by sprinkling the streets in front of his house.

The first time I was over there, I found him taking a turn at this thing.

There is a fascination about it, you know.

At first I joked him unmercifully about it, but wound up by offering to show him a few stunts in that line which proved how I had graduated as a past master in the art.

While we were chatting his little boy came along.

He seemed to be in tears about something.

"What's wrong, my son? I thought you had gone with your mother on an errand," said Harper.

"She sent me home to change my stockings," he blubbered.

"Why, what's the matter with them?"

"They's put on wrong side out."

"Hold on," I exclaimed, "that's easily remedied, if you will permit me," and I turned the hose on him.

That little event brought to my mind the narrow escape I had recently.

Through the carelessness on the part of a gentleman who was demonstrating the wonderful abilities of his patent liquid fire extinguisher, my clothes caught fire.

Well, that, you know, is no joke.

Many a poor chap has burned up before he could collect his wits and roll himself up in a rug.

But I must confess, the fellow who was to blame kept his head, and knew just what to do.

He slapped a little stream of his magic mixture on me, and before you could say Jack Robinson, I was saved.

Of course he apologized.

I felt like thrashing him, but, as he was a brother of my best friend, the pawnbroker, I forbore.

"I'm awful sorry, old boy," he said, "but no great damage is done, and I hope you're not angry with me."

"No, but to tell you the truth, I feel awfully put out," I replied.

Harper has another boy, about the age of my youngest, and like all Brooklyn lads he is precocious.

He came in while I was there, crying for keeps.

"Hello, what's happened?" asked his father.

"Been fightin' again."

"With that Irish boy, I suppose."

"Yep, I'm bound to lick him yet."

"Well, you seem to have come out second best this time. But

what's the use crying – tears do no good," said Harper, thinking to make him more manly.

"All right," spluttered the boy as well as his cut lip would allow him, "but I guess if you'd gone and got whaled you'd blubber, too."

Harper was telling me about Jerry's experience at school. Jerry is the little chap who put his stockings wrong side out that afternoon.

I thought it was rather a joke on Harper, though he refuses to look at it that way.

Well, the teacher gave each of the little kids a good, big healthy word to write down.

Then they were expected to look up the definition in the dictionary, and write out a complete sentence containing it.

Jerry, he was given the word "anonymous," without a name, and when the teacher read what he had written on his strip of paper, she thought it was worth the while to send it to Mr. Harper for denial.

This was Jerry's sentence:

"The new baby at our house is anonymous."

Still that was unintentional humor.

Nothing delights me more than to accompany a friend on some afternoon excursion to the country.

This is especially true if he chances to be thinking of finding a house in the suburbs.

Recently I performed this sad rite with Hollingsworth, a legal

friend of mine.

Among other places where he took me was a town in Jersey which I dare not name for fear of being lynched.

At any rate it was a dead herring.

Once a boom had set in, and streets were laid off in the most extravagant fashion, but for years the place had been going to the bad.

The real estate man had exhausted his resources, and as a last card he said, desperately:

"But you certainly must admit that the town is well laid out."

"Oh! we agree you've done the proper thing," I remarked.

"When a town is dead it's only right to have it well laid out."

That real estate man was offended.

But then levity at a funeral is, I suppose, out of place.

There was a dentist in the town who seemed to have a little ambition, for he planted a sign in front of his office bearing the legend:

"Teeth inserted for five dollars."

"I call that dear," I remarked.

"How so?" asked Hollingsworth.

"Why, I've got a brindle dog out in the country that I'll guarantee to do the job every time for nothing."

While that real estate man was showing us the beauties of the broad fields we made an unfortunate acquaintance with a gentleman cow.

Run – well, we did that everlastingly.

But the bull caught up with poor Hollingsworth.

I expected to see him gored to death.

That was when I forgot he was a lawyer, and used to holding every charge.

He clutched Mr. Bull by the horns, and I hardly knew whether to laugh or be frightened when I actually saw him riding the beast.

Finally he was assisted over the fence.

We hurried to him, anxious to learn whether he had been injured seriously.

Beyond a few scratches, and a tear or so in his garments, he seemed to be all right.

Of course I warmly congratulated him on his abilities as a prize bull-baiter.

He was a little dazed – I guess you would have been, too, after such a warm experience.

"Say, am I awake – was this thing the genuine article or did it only exist in my imagination?" he asked.

I thought of how he rode that all bovine like a Centaur, and hastened to reply:

"Well, if it wasn't real, it's certainly a striking example of a man being carried away by his imagination, that's all."

On the way home after that trip, Hollingsworth was quite gay.

I've often wondered whether it came from his being so well shaken up by the bull, or because he had successfully evaded the snares of that smart real estate agent.

"Did you notice it was a colored man who gave our friend

Joblots his letters at the post office?" he asked.

I replied that I had been surprised to see that the residents of a town in Jersey had a negro postmaster.

"Oh! he's only an assistant. But you'd be surprised still more if you realized his real character."

"Would I?"

"Because everyone knows he's a blackmailer."

"That's serious, isn't it?"

"And it isn't the worst, either."

"Why, he must be a hard citizen – what else does he do?"

"Joblots says his wife takes hush money."

"Bribery, eh?"

"You see, she's one of the nurses at the orphan asylum."

By the way, before I forget, I want to tell you about a man I met this morning. He followed the funniest profession you ever heard of.

He appealed to me for help, saying times were hard and he could find no employment at his profession.

"What are you?" I asked him.

"An oculist," he replied.

He looked so seedy that I was surprised.

"An oculist, eh? How do you make that out?" I asked.

"I take the eyes out of potatoes," he said.

Well, I got him a job as scullion in a beanery.

He had the whitest hair and mustache you ever saw, and told me it had come in a night through a scare, that he nearly died

from fright – now do you believe that?

Of course you do.

Why, more than once you've seen an old widower's hair suddenly turn from gray to black about five months after he buried the partner of his joys and woes, and he didn't dye from fright, either.

Say, did any of you people ever strike a prohibition town?

Any of you that have done so will sympathize with me, for I had a terrible experience of that sort when on a tour last winter.

To save my life I couldn't get anything stronger than Sparrowvinatis; that's a drink they have in those freak towns.

Well, sir, I spied a braw Scotchman selling tickets at a theatre door.

I gloated.

I made a bee line for him.

I plagued him with questions until he was the maddest man in the United States.

Then I went away feeling better.

Yes, friends, if you ever get stranded in a temperance town, do as I did, stir up a little hot Scotch.

It'll do you good.

I went to a dinner in that same town.

One fellow proposed a toast:

"May the trade of this town always be trodden under foot!"

Drunk? Oh, no, he wasn't drunk. You see they had a dozen big carpet manufactories there, and —

Dear, dear, dear! Why, here's a hole in my coat. That puts me in mind of Sunday school – you know we learned long ago when we were good little boys and went to Sunday school, that the prophet rent his clothes. I guess he must have been a poor man and couldn't afford to buy 'em. That's nothing against old Elijah, is it?

Say, did you ever get up against the first-class lunatic who is forever telling us about the city man's smartness and the country man's dullness?

Let me tell you an experience of mine that gives the lie direct to such an idea.

It happened one night as I was standing near the ticket box of a swell Eastern theatre.

The play was "The Forty Thieves."

A big, raw-boned Jerseyman strode into the place, as though he had made up his mind to squander some of his hard-earned cash in order to see the really gorgeous performance.

Sliding up to the box office I heard him demand one of the best seats and laid down a five-dollar bill. A coupon and three dollars was handed to him. When he asked what the ticket cost and was told that it was two dollars, it was evident that he expected to pay half a dollar at most.

"Two dollars to see the forty thieves, eh?" he repeated.

"Yes, sir," said the box-office man.

"Well, keep your durned seat," exclaimed the man from Jersey. "I don't think I care to see the other thirty-nine."

Then there's the elevator boy in our apartment house, who was born and brought up in the city.

He had a little flag pinned on his coat, and I was joking him on his patriotism.

"What have you ever done for your country, Bill?" I asked.

Would you believe it, that urchin had the nerve to look me wickedly in the eye and say:

"Well, I guess I've raised a good many families, sir."

On the train I met a man I used to know.

After we had been chatting about generations a while, I asked:

"How about that wedding out in your town that I saw mentioned in the papers – did it come off without a hitch?"

"Well, I guess so."

"Everybody pleased, of course, as usual?"

"Everybody nothing, everybody as mad as hornets, you mean. The groom didn't show up, the bride got screeching hysterics, and the father's been prowling round with a shotgun ever since," said my friend.

"But see here – you said it went off well?" I broke in.

"No, I didn't. You asked if it went without a hitch and I assented, for how could there be a hitch without the bridegroom."

But, say, I must tell you about being in court the other day.

The smart lawyer had the witness in hand, and it appeared to be his plan of campaign to impeach the man's testimony, by showing what a bad citizen he was.

"Now," said he, very deliberately, "will you have the goodness

in conclusion, Mr. Gallagher, to answer me a few questions; and be pleased to remember, sir, that you are on your oath, and have sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

"Certainly, sor," replied the witness, whom I thought an honest-looking fellow, though hardly smart enough to hold his own against a lawyer's search-light methods.

"Now, Mr. Gallagher, we have reason to believe that at the present time there is a female living with you who is known in the neighborhood as Mrs. Gallagher. Kindly tell the jury if what I say is true?"

"It is, sor."

"Ah! yes, and Mr. Gallagher, is she under your protection?"

"Sure."

"Now, on your oath, do you maintain her?"

"I do."

"And have you ever been married to her?"

"I have not."

The lawyer smiled just here, with the proud consciousness of having rendered that man's testimony not worthy of being taken into consideration.

"That is all, Mr. Gallagher, you may step down," he said.

"One moment, please," remarked the opposing counsel; "with the permission of the court I would like to ask a question."

"Granted," said the judge.

"Mr. Gallagher, remembering that you are on oath to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, be pleased to

state the relation which this objectionable female bears to you."

"She's me grandmother, sure," said Gallagher.

In Central Park I saw a policeman wheeling a baby carriage, with the little cherub sound asleep inside.

Possibly the nurse had eloped with another copper, and this chap was taking the abandoned infant to the station that it might be claimed.

"Why are you arresting a little child like that?" I asked the officer.

"Kidnaping," he said, with a grin, pointing to the slumbering baby.

Don't look round but let me whisper. There's an ancient couple at the back of the hall enjoying a basket-lunch. That's what I call combining pleasure with lunch. Now at the place where I dine we do things differently. There we combine business with lunch. The legend over the portals of the restaurant reads:

"Business Luncheons."

I suppose they make that candid announcement because it's anything but a pleasure to make way with what they serve there.

The other day when I dined there the waiter came round and asked:

"What are you going to have?"

"I guess a beefsteak – but see here, waiter, not a small one. I'm that nervous to-day every little thing upsets me."

"Pardon me for asking, sir," said the waiter, between the courses, "but what's made your eye black and blue? Perhaps

you've been having a little affair with the gloves."

"Yes," I replied, carelessly; "I've been going through an operation at the hands of a knockulist, that's all."

Then I turned my attention to the roast chicken, which reminded me of another affair.

You shall hear it.

Teddy O'Toole, who gave me so much amusement last summer while I was sojourning in a mountain town, has been at it again, I hear.

He is a sad case.

What do you think, his last trick was but to play good old Father Ryan for a dinner.

Let me tell you the ingenious way the graceless scamp went about it.

First of all, being hard set by hunger, what does he do but steal a fat young fowl from the priest's henyard.

Having wrung its neck he presented himself before the reverend father, looking sadly repentant.

"What now, Teddy?" asked the old man, who was growing weary of wrestling with the devil as personified in the vagrant.

O'Toole, with his head hanging low, confessed that in an evil moment he had stolen a fowl, and then, stung by the lashing of his conscience, had come to confess his wrong.

The father, of course, began to lecture him.

Then Teddy, as if desirous of doing penance, offered the fowl to his reverence, which shocked Father Ryan more, and he added

to his words of reproach.

"But faith, phat shall I do with the burrd at all?" asked Teddy.

"First, return it to the owner."

"Indade and I've done the same, and be me sowl he's actually refused to resave the purty creature."

"That is strange, and complicates matters. Stay, there is one other chance left. Find some poor widow who is in need, and present her with the wretched bird."

"And thin will ye confess me?" demanded Teddy.

"Of a surety, since the good deed will have balanced the evil one," returned the priest.

So away posted that miserable sinner to the house of the Widow McCree, and she only too gladly cooked the bird, since she had the fire handy.

Thus pooling their resources they fared merrily.

And I am told on good authority that Teddy, determined to do the thing up as it should be, presented himself before the priest on the same evening, related how he had given the fowl to a poor widow in need, and received absolution as meekly as though he might be but an erring saint instead of a scheming sinner.

His pranks always amuse me.

Though on more than one occasion I've found the laugh didn't seem to come quite so spontaneously, when the joke was on me.

This happened on a recent occasion.

I thought I had enough common sense about me not to be caught by such a picayune piece of tom-foolery, but no doubt

at the time my mind was wrestling with some of the weighty questions that daily beset a professional man.

At any rate I fell an easy victim.

And I feel foolish every time I think of the affair.

There were seven gay boys in Snyders when I entered, and having seen me coming, through the glass door, they seemed to be engaged in serious discussion.

"Here he is now – he can settle the argument himself," said Tom Radcliffe.

"What's it all about?" I asked, innocently.

"Why, Craigie here said you understand German, and I told him he was badly mistaken, and that I didn't believe you could translate five words of it."

"Oh! well, I don't pretend to be a scholar, but I've rubbed against some Teutons in my day, and may say without egotism that I've conversed in German," I replied, for it rather galled me to have Radcliffe say that.

"Bosh!" exclaimed my detractor, "I've an idea the simplest sentence would stump you. Say, what does 'Was wollen Sie haben' mean, anyhow?"

"Why, what will you have?"

"Scotch for me," said Radcliffe, and the others said that would suit them to a fine point.

But I don't believe they would have caught me so easily if cares of state had not occupied my mind – you see I was sitting on a new scientific joke, and waiting for it to hatch.

Talking of science, I've found that it pays a man to keep right up with the times.

By observing small things he is able to increase his reputation among those who read less.

Let me prove this to you.

When that eclipse of the sun came I was down among the mountains of North Carolina.

The district was a wild one, and they made considerable moonshine whiskey round there, too; but as I received no salary from the government for looking after these mountain-dew men, I shut my eyes to their little game.

You see I hadn't forgotten all the trouble they gave my friend Bill Nye when he retired to these North Carolina wilds to make up his funny books.

It occurred to me that I might have some fun with the ignorant darkies over the eclipse.

So, meeting old Uncle Lisha the day before, I told him how his chickens would all go to roost before noon on the following day.

Of course the old fellow was incredulous, and just as I supposed, circulated my prophecy round.

Well, now, I'm telling you there were some pretty badly scared darkies in that section when it began to get dark about eleven o'clock.

And the fowls perched high all right.

I never passed a cabin after that, but every inmate ran to the door and gaped after me in dumb admiration.

It was a great temptation to pose as a wizard, but I was wise enough to forbear.

Something sudden sometimes happens to wizards and other objectionable people down in that country.

Why, I remember one day seeing a poor woman sitting outside her door, and crying while she dipped snuff.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"They's took my old man an' rided him on a rail," she said.

"That's bad."

"An' then they done tarred and feathered him."

She wept copiously at the memory.

My tender heart beat in sympathy with her.

"My good woman, I'm really sorry for you. It must have been terrible hard," I said.

"It were," she cried. "They done took my best feather bed."

But to return to the eclipse.

A few days later I ran across Uncle Lisha again, and he took his hat off very humbly.

"Well, did it all happen as I said, uncle?"

"'Deed an' it did, sah, jest to de letter. 'Scuse me, but did I understan' you to say, sah, dat you knowed all about dat ting for a long time back dat it would happen?"

"Why, yes, quite a while, uncle," I replied.

"Mout it a ben as much as a yeah, sah?"

"Oh, two of them I'm certain," I replied, carelessly.

"Dat am shore a powerful queer ting," said the old man,

scratching his head in perplexity as I rode on, "case, you see, sah, dem chickens waunt eben hatched den, and yet you knowed it all. Powerful strange."

I might have talked all week and that old fellow would never have understood.

I like to go househunting with my wife.

Of course we keep on living in the same place, but then she has a periodical desire to better our condition.

The last time we were out a relative of hers who has always lived in Jersey, mistress of her own lawn and with plenty of room to swing a cat in her house, accompanied us.

It was very funny.

That dear little woman gave the heartache to many a lordly janitor before we wound up the day.

Her remarks were so refreshing.

Now, at the very first place we examined I heard her give utterance to a genuinely feminine squeal of delight.

"Why, isn't this just too cute for anything – the dearest little linen closet I ever saw. Now, this is what I call sensible," she said, enthusiastically.

"Excuse me," said the agent, coldly, "but that is not a linen closet, lady; that's the dining-room."

After that I watched Mrs. Suburb eagerly, for somehow I conceived the idea that she was in for a good time.

At another place there were limited accommodations, and when my wife talked of putting Aleck to sleep in the parlor on a

wire couch, I entered my solemn protest.

"The boycott is a relic of barbarism," I declared; and that settled our chances of taking that flat.

Talking about flats and moving, puts me in mind of the long ago, when I was a merry, light-hearted bachelor, not caring a rap what the day brought forth.

Little I bothered myself about the price of spring bonnets or how the crops promised.

Each day was sufficient unto itself, and brought its joys and difficulties, but the tatter never weighed heavily.

I've raised a family since, and my credit is still good.

Thank you, I appreciate your encouragement, but one experience will probably be quite sufficient for me.

Now, during these halcyon days of yore, I remember there was one dear old lady who seemed to take the greatest interest in my welfare.

I often met her in the street, and she would even stop to chat with me at times.

One day I was looking in at a shop window.

I had a cigar box under my arm.

Just then, as luck would have it, the old lady came up and greeted me.

She gave me a reproachful look.

"I'm afraid you are smoking too much for your health. I never see you now, without a cigar box under your arm," she said, in her motherly way.

"Oh, it isn't that, I assure you," I hastened to declare, "but the fact is, I'm moving again."

And speaking of those days, puts me in mind of a little thing that happened to me about that time.

I was working as a reporter then, and the managing editor complained that my material was quite too far stretched.

That is, he said I cost them too much money in telegraphic tools, and desired me to condense the details.

They could do all the romancing at the office, for we had men especially employed for that purpose, who, given a few facts for a foundation, could build up the most astonishing account imaginable.

Indeed, I've known them to describe things better than the fellow who was on the spot could have done.

That's genius, you understand.

Well, I laid low and awaited my opportunity to boil the next account down in a manner certain to please this grand mogul.

The opportunity came.

There was some sort of explosion on a big vessel over at Philadelphia, and as our regular correspondent there chanced to be ill, I was packed off to get special news.

"Be as quick as you can. Wire us hard, boiled-down facts as soon as you get hold of 'em. Leave details to the office. Perhaps you'll be in time for the noon edition."

That's what the managing editor said.

I spared no expense in hurrying to the spot, and before eleven-

twenty sent this brief telegram:

"Terrific explosion. Man-o'-war. Boiler empty. Engineer full. Funeral to-morrow.

Niblo."

It would be hard to beat that for brevity. I believe in brevity, even when a man is proposing to his best girl.

Now there has always been considerable curiosity manifested by my friends, who know my humorous instincts, to know just how I ever popped the question.

They declare, the chances are, I must have done it in a joke.

Of course this doesn't refer to any lack of estimable qualities in my wife, but simply that a fellow of my character could not possibly do anything seriously.

I have determined to relate the facts in the case, and they can judge for themselves.

You see, we had been down to the seashore together, and, for the life of me, I couldn't muster up courage enough to ask her the all-important question.

She gave me an opening at last, though perhaps no one but a born humorist could have seen it.

Out on the rocks stood a gay old lighthouse, which seemed to possess unusual interest in the eyes of the young woman.

"It must be a lovely thing to live in such a weird place. Sometime, before I die, I hope I may keep a light house. I believe it would be lovely, don't you?" she said.

Now, to tell the truth, the idea never occurred to me before,

but when she spoke of it I saw my chance.

"My dear girl," I said, "if I had only known that you cared for light house-keeping, I would have spoken before this. Let us discuss the matter; what's the use waiting until long in the future, when the opportunity presents itself now."

And the result was, we pooled our issues, hired a couple of rooms, bribed a minister to say a few words, and kept house in a light way.

Since that time we've had our ups and downs.

But I've never felt toward my better half as that old bear Podgers must, with regard to the partner of his joys and woes.

He rode down with me in the elevator yesterday.

We had been having a little domestic trouble, and the lady in the kitchen had wafted herself away.

This sometimes makes a man sad, especially if his wife is seized with some of her old-time enthusiasm and joyously declares she will look up those recipe books, arranged at the time she went to cooking school.

I knew I was in for another dose of dyspepsia and had on my part been trying to remember the dozens of patent medicines to which I had given a trial on the last occasion, and which of them had been least injurious.

Of course, man-like, I poured my woes into the ear of Podgers, hoping for sympathy.

"Do you have any trouble keeping a cook?" I asked.

He laughed in a cold-blooded way.

"Not in the least – not such good luck, my boy. You see our cook has a lien on the place. She's my wife," he said.

Well, I wouldn't have said that, no matter what I thought.

But then Podgers always has been considerably henpecked at home, even if an arrogant chap downtown.

Sometimes he makes me think of the meek little fellow I saw recently in court.

He was a witness.

"Well," remarked the judge, "have you anything to say?"

Then the witness looked fearfully about him, like one long accustomed to knowing his place.

"That depends," said he, "upon circumstance. Is – er – my wife in the room, judge?"

While I am speaking of marrying let me tell you about a fellow I once knew.

His name was Steiner, and he set himself up in business as an international marriage broker.

You see, these matches between broken-down foreign noblemen and wealthy young American girls gave him an idea that he might make a nice dot.

In due time he was employed by a German count to secure an heiress for him.

The arrangement was that Steiner was to receive ten per cent. of the young lady's estate for arranging the match.

This looked like a snap, always providing Steiner should succeed in finding the heiress, and bring about an understanding.

Well, he found the girl with the ducats all right, but his price went up like bounds, until, not content with ten per cent. of the estate when a marriage was brought about, he asked for the whole shooting match.

Yes, and he got it, too.

How was that – why, just as easy as two and two make four. Steiner married the heiress himself.

Funny how one thing arouses a train of thought.

My wife brought home a curious Dutch stein after one of her shopping excursions, and I never looked at that affair without thinking of a certain graveyard out in Western New York.

Let me tell you how that happens.

While visiting a friend, he took me to see the sights of the place, and quite naturally we strolled through the churchyard.

There were lots of old-timers buried there, and some of the inscriptions quite interested me.

Presently we came to a new tombstone.

I noticed that above the inscription there had been cut a single hand, with the index finger pointing upward.

It seemed appropriate enough to me, and I was astonished when my friend, after bending down to read, actually laughed.

"Well, I declare," he said, presently, "if that isn't just like old Stein. He never did order more than one beer at a time!"

To the very last he was attached to his bier.

I remember it was in this same cemetery I ran across a funny old ducky who seemed to be examining several traps which he

had set.

Of course, my curiosity being aroused, I began to fire a few questions at him.

If you ever want to find anything out, the best way is to ask the why and wherefore.

What do you think he was after?

Rabbits, of course.

Then I remembered that down South it was all the fashion for darkies to get the foot of a graveyard rabbit, and carry it around with them; they look on it as a sure thing to keep bad luck away.

I thought I might convince the old fellow of the absurdity of such mummary.

"See here, uncle, I'm afraid you're a bit superstitious," I remarked.

"'Deed I isn'," said he, shaking his white head. "Some folks is a skyah't of ghosses an' all kin's of critters; but as long as I have a rabbit's paw in mah pocket I feels puffickly safe."

After that I couldn't say a word.

In fact, I felt as though speech were denied me, as it is some unfortunate fellows.

If you ever ran across a man with a genuine impediment in his speech, well, you know how painful it seems to watch him nearly strangle in the endeavor to make himself understood.

Advice is wasted on such a man.

I remember trying it once, only to get the cold laugh.

Here's the story in verse.

Listen!

"Oh, be not hasty, friend?" I cried,

"Think twice o'er all you utter."

"I'm bound to do so," he replied,

"I stut-tut-tut-tut-tutter."

And I never hear any one carrying on in that way, but what I think of an old Irishman, a farmer who dropped into the office of a country weekly, run by a friend of mine.

"Sit down, Mr. Dooley," said my friend, the editor.

Mr. Dooley took a chair.

"By the way, Mr. Dooley," said my friend, "you have sent me a load of hay in payment for the five years' subscription you owed me for my paper."

"Oi d-d-d-did," declared Mr. Dooley, nodding pleasantly.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Mr. Dooley, my horse can't eat that hay."

Mr. Dooley screwed up his face, and puffed out his cheeks until I thought he would have a fit.

"T-t-t-to tell ye the t-t-truth, mister, no more c-c-can m-m-me g-g-go-go-goat e-e-eat your p-p-p-p-p-paper."

I don't know which was hotter, Mr. Dooley or the editor, when they finished their argument.

You realize there are various methods of warming a man up – for instance, at my hotel one evening a bell-boy came to the desk, after answering a call, and said:

"That fellow up in 999 says he's freezing."

"All right," said the clerk, cheerfully, "we'll soon have him hot enough. Here, take him up his bill."

I've got a great friend, Henry Badger by name, that I must tell you about.

I hardly know whether to admire the monumental nerve of Henry Badger, or class him as a near relative of the jackass tribe.

You may not know it, but his neighbors have long been aware of the fact that his good spouse ruled the roost with an iron rod, and Henry's former buoyant spirit has all but withered in his breast.

Why, he used to strut the streets with all the pompous airs of an alderman, while now he shuffles along as though he owed ten tailors on the block.

It is awful, the change made in that man.

Once in a while I understand there is a faint glow among the embers, and a trace of his old-time spirit flashes up, though it is gone almost as quickly.

That must have been the case the evening I was there.

Henry had been reading the evening paper, where many black headlines announced the exciting events of the day.

"One wife too many," I heard her say, sarcastically; "that must of course refer to the doings of another rascally bigamist."

"Not necessarily, my dear," returned Henry, without daring to take his eyes off the paper.

I held my very breath with awe.

But Mrs. Badger, after shooting him one quick look, probably decided that it was a blank cartridge.

Badger, when her back was turned, actually gave me a wicked wink behind his paper.

On the whole, I guess there's a little of the old spunk left, but it will never set the river afire.

Badger told me once, he and his wife ran away and got married by a justice of the peace.

If you never witnessed a civil marriage by an alderman, a mayor, or some such officer authorized to deal out bliss in double harness, well, you don't know what you've missed, that's all.

The first time a magistrate has to officiate upon such a happy occasion, one can hardly blame him for being kind of nervous.

A good fairy sent me to the office of a friend, who is a justice, and it happened he was tying his first double knot.

Having been duly coached, he opened the proceedings all right, and fancied he had plain sailing.

The woman had been duly asked whether she would take the aforesaid man to be her husband, and as that was the identical reason why she was there, she hastened to say that she had no objections, and at the same time took a firmer hold on his arm, as though determined not to let him get away from her.

Then the magistrate turned to the groom and pierced him with his eagle eye.

Perhaps he was so accustomed to having appeals made to him in his official capacity, that it came very natural for him to

remark:

"Prisoner at the bar, what have you to say in your defense."

At the same time I thought it rather hard on the young man, but he came up to the scratch smiling and proved an alibi.

A magistrate's office is a good place for picking up humor, but it doesn't compare with the den of an installment book agent.

The manager of the office was hauling a candidate for a position over the coals while I waited for an interview, and quite a few amusing tidbits floated over the top of the partition.

"Ever done any canvassing before, Mr. Jones?"

"Well, I worked a year in a Chicago house where they packed hams for the market."

"You are a little hoarse this morning – I hope your voice is reliable, for you'll need it in this business."

"That's all right, the neighbors think I got a good voice – they all advised me to go abroad and study."

"You complained of having the toothache – will that prevent you from carrying on business?"

"Not at all, sir. You see it's a holler tooth."

By the way, this same manager of the Book Agents' Supply Company has a most decided aversion to all department stores.

He declares they are ruining the country.

That there is no longer a chance for a young man to set himself up in business, and so forth.

You've heard the changes rung up on that story.

Possibly there's more or less truth about it; but we've got to

face a condition, not a theory.

Well, Babcock carries his hatred so far that he detests the very sight and name of the department stores. His wife has the strictest instructions not to purchase anything whatever at these pernicious paradises, and, therefore, when he returned to his home early one day last week and discovered a parcel of groceries on the hall table which bore the hated imprint of Swindell & Getrich, great and tremendous was his virtuous wrath.

His knife was out in an instant, and in another the various packages were ripped up, and condensed milk, eggs, tea, sugar, and the sultanas were mixed together in a fearsome heap on the linoleum.

"Why, what are you doing, Henry?" said his wife, entering at that moment.

Rip, went another packet of Scraped Nutshells for Scraggy Nonentities, and whizz went its contents.

"I'm teaching you a lesson, madam!" he roared. "Teaching you to obey my instructions not to deal at this store?"

"Why, Henry," said the lady, "they don't belong to us at all. Mrs Jenkins, next door, has gone away for the day, and I promised to take them in for her."

And Babcock had to subdue his spleen, allow his wife to hie away to the hated department store and duplicate the whole Jenkins' order.

He is also a singular man, in that he will not allow himself the

pleasure of a good cigar.

Some men would make good Mohammedans, for they always seem trying to deny themselves the good things of life – a sort of crawling to Mecca on their knees.

Why, what do you think, while Babcock and myself were sauntering through Central Park recently, up runs a smart little urchin, and sings out:

"Box o' matches, sir?"

"No," said Babcock, loftily, "don't smoke."

"Well," remarked the boy, sympathetically, "if you'll buy a box, guv'nor, I don't mind teachin' yer."

As we sauntered along we came upon a diminutive girl who was wheeling a perambulator, in which was a very young child.

As the vehicle was being pushed dangerously near the edge of a somewhat steep curb, I was alarmed, and ventured to faintly remind her that the little one was in danger of being thrown out.

The girl looked up in my face, and, in a tone of utter and complete indifference, replied:

"It don't matter, mister; it ain't our kid."

And it was on the same afternoon that I saw an amusing mix-up, as well as had my recollection of a life upon the ocean wave revived.

An old salt, who had apparently learned to navigate a bicycle fairly well, was working his wobbly way along one of the paths in the park, when, before our eyes, he collided with a lady wheeler.

It was awfully funny, I'm telling you, now.

Fortunately, there was no personal damage, and he hastened to murmur his excuses.

"I'm sure as I ought to be scuttled for it, mum," he said, apologetically, "but I couldn't get your signals no more as if we were feeling through a fog bank. I was blowin' for you to pass to port an' steerin' my course accordin'. Just as I was going to dip my pennant an' salute proper, your craft refused to obey her rudder, an' you struck me for'ard. Afore I could reverse, your jib-boom fouled my starboard mizzen riggin', your mainsail (skirt) snarled up with my bobstay, parted your toppin' lift, and carried away my spanker down haul. As I listed to try to jib, I capsized, keel up, an' put you flounderin' in the wreckage. I hope you'll forgive me, mum, and let's start off fresh, on a new tack."

Now, I liked that old tar.

He was a square-rigged man, and ready to accept what the gods sent him.

That's my style.

I've got my faults, but kicking isn't one of 'em, you bet.

You'll always find me at the same old stand, ready to take things as they come – but please be a little careful about the antiquity of the eggs, because, you see, I've got my best clothes on.

Now, if the orchestra will kindly wake up and give us a little music, I'll try and sing a song which I have called "No Kicker Need Apply."

Hold on, professor, you want to be sharp. I expected you'd be

flat, so I guess you'd better compromise and only be natural.

Well, then, here goes:

Guess I've been about as lazy as the civil laws allow;
Know blame well I've been as lazy as I could be anyhow;
Never liked t' do th' milkin', never liked t' heft a hoe,
Never liked to plow or harvest, never liked t' reap ner sow.
Never was much good at nothin' that my daddy put me at,
But I've never been a kicker, an' I'm bloomin' glad o' that.

There isn't any chorus to this song, so glide right along to the second verse, professor. Here you are.

I've been called a triflin' beggar, I've been called a shif'less
slouch;
I've been called some things that hurt me, but I never hollered
"Ouch!"
I've left undone a heap o' things I started out to do,
An' I've had my share of headache – yes, I've had my share,
f'r true;
But my upper lip's kep' stiffer'n any board ye ever see,
Fer I've never been a kicker, an' I'm never goin' t' be.

I've seen days when clouds was hangin' over ev'rything in
sight;
I've seen times I wished t' goodness, morning wouldn't foller
night;
I've felt kicked an' snubbed an' slighted – though folks didn't
mean it so,

An' I've had to blink an' swaller for t' make my smiler go;
But I made it work, by ginger, and I'm thankful for it still —
Fer I've never been a beefer, an' you bet I never will.

I've been watchin' folks that hollered till they's purple in th'
face,
Claimin' that their nat'ral enemies was all th' human race.
Kep' on noticin', and purty soon their guess was blame near
right,
For they al'ays was commingled in some sort o' gen'ral fight.
Thankful I don't see things that way, though I'm not no haloed
saint;
But I've never been a kicker, an' I'm mighty glad I ain't.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen.

I knew the noble sentiments expressed in those verses would
take your hearts by storm.

And please forbear showing your appreciation by the
customary liberal supply of ancient hen fruit, tomatoes, and
cabbage flowers.

I want you to understand that this is no donation party.

You doubtless saw that I was a little horse – in other words,
that I have something of a colt this evening.

Now, I'm pretty good at making excuses myself, but I give the
cake to Reddy Moriarty.

You see, he's a fellow working on the subway, under an old
friend of mine, a Maj. Dickerson.

Just while I was interviewing the contractor the other morning, who should come along but Moriarty.

The foreman was mad clean through, and I thought only Reddy's ready Irish could save him from a hauling over the coals.

It did the same, by the powers.

"Nine o'clock!" snarled the foreman, "what d'yer mean by coming at this time of day? It's a wonder a man of your independence troubles himself about coming at all. Now, then, what's your excuse?"

Moriarty considered a moment, and at last the excuse came.

"Sure, sor," he said, "I dramed last night I was at a baseball match, betwane the giants and the Champions, that ended in a tie. So the umpire ordered extra innings to be played, and, begorra, sor, I only stopped to see the finish!"

Moriarty was once a pilot.

"Faith," says he to me, "time was when I piloted all kinds of ships into harbor, but I've redooed it all down to a system, and the only sort I take over the bar now is schooners sor."

But I musn't forget to tell you about my friend, old Dr. Raggles.

I always refer to him as "that old war horse." You'd know why, if you cast your eye over that last bill he sent me. As a charger he'd be hard to beat.

The doctor took a day off recently and ran up to a country town to see a family horse that was for sale.

He tried the beast, fancied him, paid a stiff price for the outfit,

and rode off happy.

Three hours later he came back mad.

"Look here, sir!" he yelled, "this darned old horse won't do for me. He shies. I can't get him to cross the bridge."

"That's why I sold him," said the dealer. "Didn't I advertise my reasons for selling him?"

"Yes; 'to be sold,' you stated, 'for no other reason than that the owner wanted to get out of town.'"

"Well," says the dealer, "if you can get out of town with him, it will be more than I can do!"

Say, I went on the road with a post office inspector last year.

First post office we struck, a big, strong Irish woman was behind the counter.

"Ahem!" said the inspector. "I thought a man was in charge here!"

"Begorra, ye're roight, he was," said the lady; "but Oi married him, an' Oi'm in charge now. Pfwat is it yez want?"

She was a Tartar, I tell you.

I wonder what Mr. Man was doing. Maybe he had the cradle to rock.

I was in jail last month. Oh, only as a visitor, of course. I needn't explain that. Went the rounds of the cells with the governor of the State.

Well, we struck one man who was the homeliest specimen of humanity I've ever seen.

"What are you here for?" says the governor.

"For runnin' away with a woman, yer honor!" says the man.

"Bless my soul!" says the governor, "is that so? I must send you a pardon. I don't see how a man so homely as you could ever get a wife unless he ran away with one."

A cage or two farther on was occupied by a big, husky chap.

"What are you here for?" says the governor.

"I'm here for my health, governor," says the man.

"How's that?" asks the governor.

"Well, you see, I had six wives, governor."

Well, no pardon dropped in on that chap.

He had seized just six times his share.

A few more like him and the women wouldn't go around.

Jiminy Christmas! There's the gong of my auto. My chaffeur's getting impatient. Yes, my time is up. I got ten dollars advanced on it yesterday.

Good-night!