

"THE
CLAIM-JUMPERS;
Or,
Durango Dick's
Doom,"
By CHAS. HAMILTON,
begins
On Next Page.

Larks!

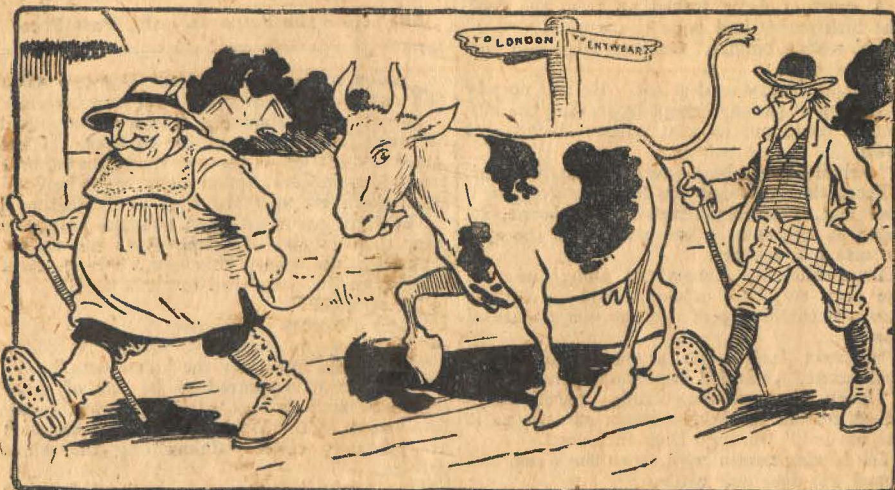
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LARGE PAGES,
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Vol. 8.—No. 397.]

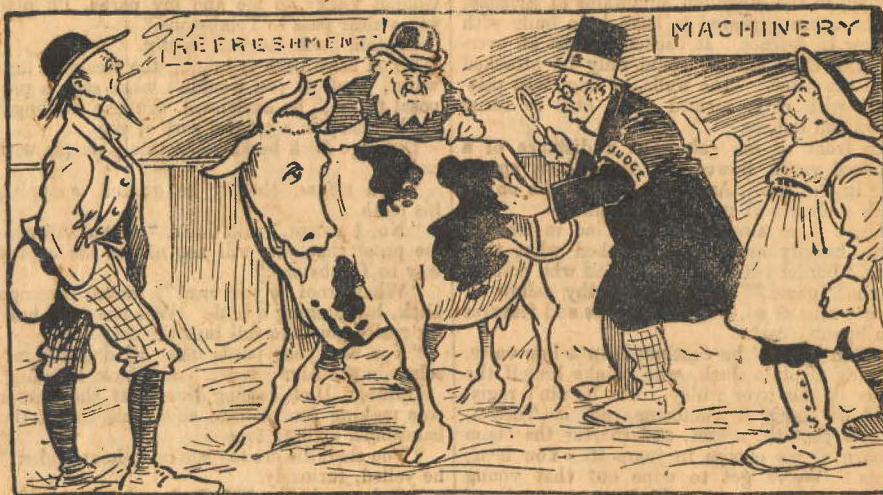
MONDAY, DECEMBER 3, 1900.

[HALFPENNY.]

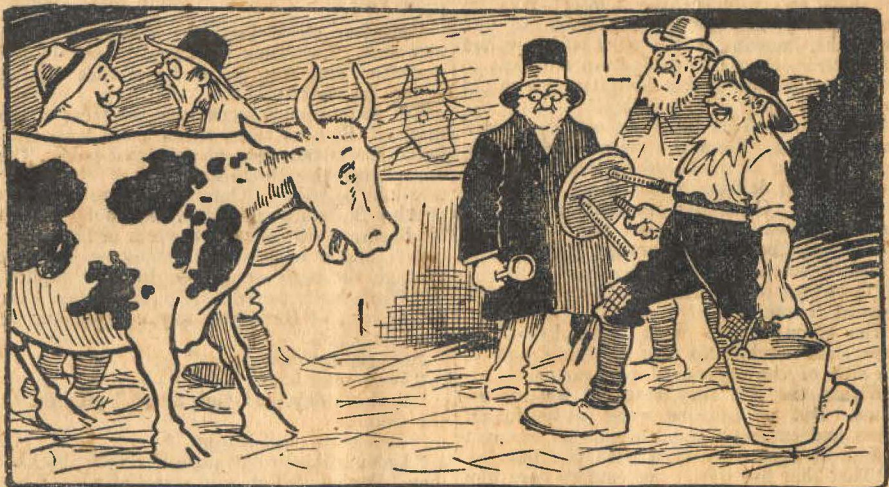
OUR COLONIAL CONTINGENT VISIT THE CATTLE SHOW.



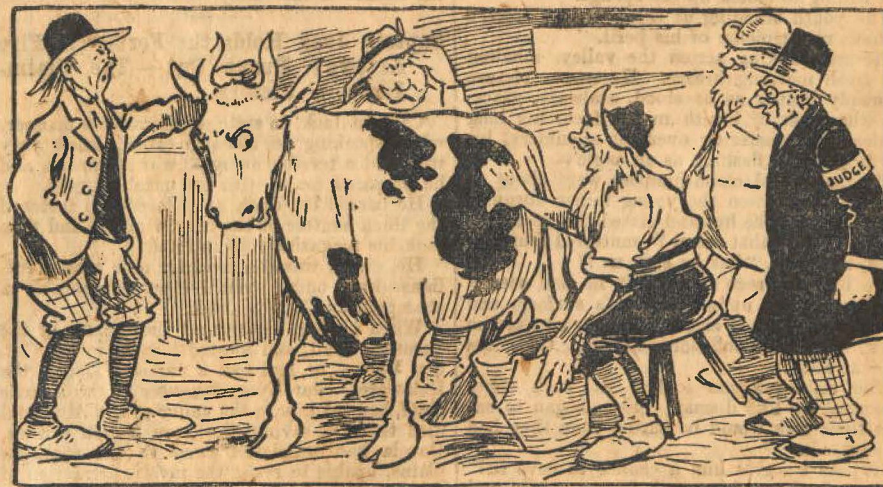
1.—WHAT'S this! the Contingent turned farmers? Oh! it's all right, peoples, we're just footin' it up to the Islington Cattle Show with our prime thoroughly-bred-dairy-fed cow. You see, we heard that a big prize was to be had for the fattest cow, so, as we were rather short of the needful, we thought we may as well win it. "Gee-whoa!" chuckled Farmer Thomas (of Toronto), "danged if they Lunnon fellers 'll be able to show sich a hanimile as our Molly." "Quite roight, zur," said the farmer's man, who you might recognise as yer 'umble, "if all 'er natural points ain't quite what they should be, she zertingly can't be matched fer intelligence!"



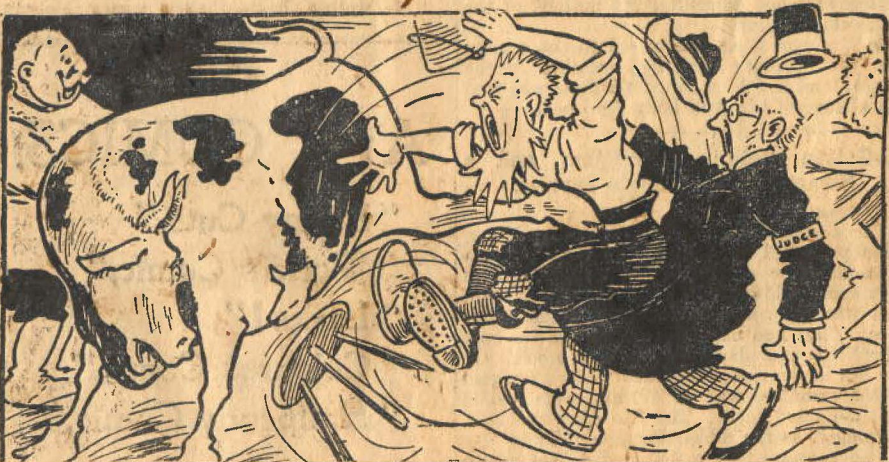
2.—"Right there, Billy!" said the cow. What! you don't believe she said it? Well, you will when you know the wonderful kind she is. Anyway, we arrove at the Show in good time, and put Molly in the stall ready to be judged. "Yes," said one of the judges, after looking at her beyewiful coat, and examining all her fine points with a magnifying glass, "she's a foine specimen, Mr. Turmits. The only question is, is she a good milker?" "Aye, she's all that, an' more," said Tommy, "only, if I were you, I wouldn't test 'er to-day—the walk up from Mudford has been a bit of a strain for her."



3.—"Oh, but we must, my good man," said the judge. "Then if she is a good milker, you get the prize." "Besides," said Turmits, "there is sumthink abaart thic coo as doan't zeem 'xactly roight!" Well, this was a pretty awkward predicament, for—we'll let you into the secret at once if you won't tell—the fact was, Molly was made up with Montreal Mike and Ballarat Bob, with a pneumatic skin over 'em—so's we could pump it up nice and fat! "Strikes me," said I, "the only way to save the sitiuation is for Molly to kick the whole lot over, then they won't want'er milk 'er again!" Presently, up came the milkman with his pail to test our cow.



4.—So I whispered to Molly to kick out a good 'un when she saw the bloke sit down with his pail. "She's a horfibly nasty temper, gents," said I, "when she's bein' milked, so look out, me man." "Dazzey! I'll look out," said the milkman; "if she kims any ov'er tricks wiv Oi, Oi'll teacher a lesson!" "Well, in coorse, gents," said Tommy, "I'll do me best ter keep 'er quiet. But, if you ain't got no objection, we'll take the prize now and go home, as the pigs 'll want feedin', then if she don't come up to the milkin' test, we'll send the prize back per parcels post!"



5.—But them silly judges were very obstinate and wouldn't agree to our proposal—they insisted on going on with the milking business. "Very well, then," said Tommy, "if that's the case, THINGS MUST TAKE THEIR COURSE!" And, by geewillykimps, THEY DID! for at that precise and exact moment, Molly let fly with her south-east tootsie, and things got muchly disturbed. "Ow-wow-ooo-ow!" screeched the milkman, "save me from the viciousness of this yer female bovril, somebody!" But every somebody seemed more anxious to save themselves!



6.—Then a little army of the Show employés came on the scene and tried to capture Molly. And the circus scene that followed may be seep in the circular scene above (we've seen enough of that—Ed.). After that, cruel and unsympathetic cops came and insisted on our taking tea with them at the—police-station! and next day we were introduced to a friend of ours, who keeps a little office in Bow-Street. However, when we explained that we'd got to appear again in next week's "LARKS!" he said he wouldn't trouble us to call again, which was very kind of him.

THE CLAIM-JUMPERS;

OR,

DURANGO DICK'S DOOM.

A STORY OF "CAPTAIN JACK."

By CHARLES HAMILTON.

In the Golden Valley of the Mogollon Mountains—Captain Jack and the Claim-Jumpers—The Defiance.

"That's our game."

The words were uttered in low tense tones, and the speaker jerked his forefinger towards the "game" he spoke of.

The "game" was a young man who stood at the door of a log-built cabin in Golden Valley, in the Mogollon Mountains of Arizona.

The cabin appeared to have been built with a view to defence. It backed against an overhanging cliff, and so could only be attacked from the front. The walls, of huge logs plastered with clay, seemed quite able to resist blows and bullets.

In front of the cabin, at a distance of a hundred yards, flowed the Alva River, sparkling in the sun. Amid the high rocks on its bank a cluster of men lay in ambush.

There were nine of them. Clad in frontier garb, heavily armed, they looked what they were, "border ruffians." The man who pointed to the "game" was a swarthy fellow of twenty-nine or so, with black eyes and features of a Spanish cast.

"That he is," he continued, in a low voice. "That's Captain Jack, who thinks himself the owner of this hyer valley. But he ain't registered no claim at Tombstone nor at Tucson, I know that fur a fact, and tharfur the claim is oorn of we choose to jump it. You hear, pard? We've got to wipe out that young English rooster, and we'll have a couple of million dollars to divvy."

"That's so, Durango Dick," said one, a red-bearded Texan of giant frame, "but Captain Jack is a mighty tough cuss to wipe out."

"It's got to be did. Now, when I say 'Swipes!' just hump yourselves up and give him a volley. If he breathes arter that, why I'm willing to chuck up the sponge."

The youth standing at the hut door seemed to have no suspicion of his peril.

He was looking across the valley, inhaling the fresh morning breeze. He was a picture of manly beauty as he stood, stalwart, graceful, the flush of health in his face, his long golden hair clustering over his shoulders, his eye bright and flashing as an eagle's.

The ambushed claim-jumpers were about to rise and fire, when the young miner abruptly withdrew into the hut and closed the door.

"What does that mean?" muttered Durango Dick, savagely, "has he seen us?"

He had not seen them, but he had seen a moving shadow upon the river's surface, and to one so skilled in signs of danger as Captain Jack, that was sufficient warning that foes were at hand.

The claim-jumpers looked at each other in something like dismay. They began to see that their task would be harder than they had anticipated.

"S'pose we give him a chance to cave in?" suggested the red-bearded Texan. "Go an' talk to him like a Dutch uncle, Dick."

The voice of the swarthy sport rang out crisply upon the air.

"Captain Jack!"

"What do you want?" came back a reply in clear, fearless tones.

"Will you promise not to fire if I come forward to speak?"

"Yes, unless you try treachery."

Durango Dick advanced from the rocks towards the hut. Captain Jack opened the little window, and they stood face to face.

An expression of profound astonishment appeared upon Captain Jack's face as he saw the sharp.

"Durango Dick!" he exclaimed.

The leader of the claim-jumpers nodded carelessly.

"You thought me dead, eh?"

"Yes. When I exposed your little game at Slide in Camp, and proved you to be Black John the outlaw, you took poison to escape Judge Lynch, and I'll swear the boys planted you safe enough," Captain Jack declared.

"I was playin' roots on you," the sharp explained. "The drug I took wasn't pizen, but a narcotic, which gave me the appearance of death. I knew the boys wouldn't trouble to bury me very deep. In the night I came to, squirmed out of the grave, and levanted. And then, Captain Jack, I took your trail, as you had taken mine, to run you down to your death for revenge."

And the eyes of the cardsharp glittered venomously.

"Well, now you have a first-class chance," said Jack, in the most cheerful tone, "I am alone here, and you have a gang of cherubs hidden among those rocks. Wade in; I'm your mutton, with the wool on."

"I offer you a chance to surrender," said Durango Dick, annoyed by the English hunter's coolness. "If you vamoose, and leave the Golden Valley to me and my pards, I'll give you a clear pass to Tombstone."

Captain Jack laughed lightly.

"You have been indulging too freely in fire-water, pard, or you wouldn't make such a proposal to me," he exclaimed, shaking his finger at the sharp in a playful sort of way.

Durango Dick became absolutely purple with rage.

"You refuse, then?" he gritted, snapping his teeth.

"No, I accept," said Jack, "if you will give me proof that you will not molest me on my way to Tombstone."

"What proof do you want?" asked Durango Dick, brightening a little. Was the wary hunter really going to fall into the trap?

"You and your pards must all drown yourselves in the Alva yonder," said Jack, laughing.

Durango Dick, seeing then that the hunter was making fun of him, shook his fist at the handsome, smiling face.

"You shall die ere the sun is an hour higher," he yelled, furiously.

"Quiet, sabe?" said Jack, philosophically, "I shall do my best to send you over the range if you attack me. And you shan't get out of your next grave so easily, I promise you. You'll have to wait till the Day of Judgment for your next resurrection, once I draw a bead on you."

Durango Dick, cursing volubly, strode back to his men, and at once sharp rifle shots broke the silence of the valley.

Captain Jack Holds the Fort—The Fire Arrows—Burnt Out—The Claim-Jumpers' Victory.

Captain Jack, in spite of his careless manner, when speaking to Durango Dick, knew very well that a terrible struggle was imminent, and he prepared for it with his usual courage.

He barred the door, and closed and fastened the thick shutter of the only window, and then took his magazine rifle in hand.

He, alone, was to encounter nine border ruffians—long odds, even for so redoubtable a champion as Captain Jack.

When he first discovered the secrets of the Treasure Trail, and located himself in the Golden Valley, he had had a partner, Dacola the Delaware. Star Eyes, daughter of the Apache chief, had led him to the valley of the Alva, and died there in saving him from Indian arrows. Dacola had wandered away to the southern plains, unable to resist the mystic attraction of the lone llanos, and Captain Jack remained alone. And then came Durango Dick and his band.

"I need a little excitement," Captain Jack murmured; "when bullets are flying I can forget poor little Star Eyes."

He placed himself at a loophole out in the door. Bullets were pattering against the logs outside; some penetrating, others glancing off. The claim-jumpers had spread out in a half-circle, enclosing the cabin.

As no bullet came from the hunter, the jumpers grew bolder, and a little swarthy Mexican began to steal up to the window, a tomahawk in his hand. A slashing blow upon the shutter would open a passage for bullets, and make the interior a hot hole for the defender.

Captain Jack waited until he was within six paces. Then, taking aim through a loophole, he fired.

The Mexican gave a heavy groan and fell limply to the earth. The bullet had found his heart, and in less than a minute life had fled.

A howl came from the claim-jumpers, and instinctively they shrank into securer cover. Well they knew how unerring was the rifle of the long-haired hunter.

Captain Jack, within the cabin, smiled quietly.

"That's a lesson for them, to begin with. I wish it had been Durango Dick; but he's too cunning to expose himself. The fools! even if they take the cabin, I have a way of escape that will baffle them."

He wondered what the enemy's next move would be. They would never dare a rush in the face of his Lee-Metford. Nor was it likely that such men would have patience enough for a regular siege. He was not long left in doubt.

From the river rocks where the swarthy sport lay, a point of fire rose and hissed towards the cabin.

It was an arrow, to which was tied a piece of rag, dry as tinder, and burning readily.

The arrow dropped upon the roof of the hut, and Captain Jack, hearing the tap of it, knew at once what had happened.

"They are going to burn me out."

There had been no rain for a week; the logs of the cabin were baked by the sun and cracking with dryness. It would not be long before the flames caught.

Durango Dick and his pards chuckled over their devil's work.

"Lucky we came prepared for everything," the swarthy sharp said. "If Captain Jack isn't burnt to a cinder, I'm a Digger Injin."

The arrows flew swiftly, one after another.

"The roof's ketchin', b'gum," said Panhandle Pete, the red-bearded Texan.

A spurt of flame jerked up from the roof. The fifth arrow had done the work.

"Now for a bonfire," Durango Dick said, in a satisfied tone.

Captain Jack was at a loss. He had no way of getting at the fire except by leaving the hut, and he could not do that without being shot down.

"I shall have to beat a retreat," he muttered.

From the centre of the floor he dragged a rush mat, and then, drawing his bowie, he began to scarp away the earth from the spot the mat had covered.

Meanwhile, the flames ran along the roof like fiery serpents, catching hold in various places, until the top of the hut was a mass of blaze.

"Captain Jack'll find it purty warm-thar, I calkerlate," chuckled Panhandle Pete.

"Keep your shooters ready, pards. He's almost certain to make a break as soon as it gets too hot," Durango Dick exclaimed.

The hissing flames crept down the walls, and lapped the door and window.

Crash! and a scattering cloud of sparks. The roof had fallen in!

"Now look out fur him," cried the sharp.

But Captain Jack did not appear. The anxiety of the claim-jumpers grew tense and strained as they watched the blaze of the burning cabin leaping against the grey cliff behind it. Had a bullet found its way through the logs and disabled the hunter? Was he overcome by the smoke and unable to fly?

Or did he, knowing that levelled rifles awaited him outside, choose, with Spartan stoicism, to perish in the flames, that his bitter foe might not have the joy of slaying him?

The cabin, alight in every corner, burned gradually out. From the mass of black embers a column of smoke arose, winding round the cliffs and drifting darkly down the valley of the Alva. Crumbling remnants of the four walls remained standing, but that was all.

"He must be dead," Durango Dick said in a hushed voice.

"Good-bye to Captain Jack," said the red-bearded Texan.

The claim-jumpers went forward to look upon their work. No fear had they now of the rifle of the eagle-eyed plainsman.

Within the hut they searched for his remains. But no remains were to be found. Ashes and embers abounded, but no remnant of flesh or bone. Durango Dick was puzzled.

"That thar fire wasn't hot enuf to burn him up so clean as not to leave a rib or two," he said.

"Thar ain't hide nor h'ar of him hyer, that's sartin," replied Taos Tom, "and he didn't leave the cabin, sartin, too."

"There may be a secret exit," said Dick, greatly worried by the idea; "s'arch for it, pards."

They searched diligently, but nothing of the kind came to light.

So Durango Dick was forced to the conclusion that Captain Jack had perished in the flames, and had been so utterly destroyed that not a trace of his dead body remained.

Ill-Gotten Gold—A Pilgrim and a Stranger—Sing-Sing's Service.

A week had passed.

The Golden Valley of the Mogollon Mountains presented an aspect somewhat different from that the claim-jumpers had seen when they came gold-hunting on the Treasure Trail.

It was their presence that made the difference. They had built three cabins on the spot where Captain Jack's home had stood. On the bar in the river bend they washed for gold in the primitive way of '49, and with results that delighted them. The Rio Alva was rich, seemingly, as the fabled Pactolus. Every day the adventurers took a thousand dollars' worth of dust from the river, and the claim showed no signs of "petering out" for a long while to come.

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"We're made men, pards," Durango Dick said one evening when they had struck work; "seven or eight thousand dollars already, and as much more as we choose to take. If the Apaches don't git on the war trail agin us, or a gang of stampedeers happen along, we'll be Cressuses afore we take the trail to Tombstone."

The eight pards sat upon boulders to smoke after their labour. Looking down the valley, crimson in the sunset, they saw a strange form coming up the river trail towards them.

"A stranger!"

"And a Chinese, by hooky!"

"We'll we do with him, pards?"

"He's some fun outter the yaller cuss."

The stranger appeared to be one of those sleek and smiling sons of the Flowery Land, who swarm in the Wild West of America, and are generally called "Johns" by the white citizens.

This "John" appeared to be youthful, but his pigtail was of large size, and his body extremely—even comically—stout.

Falstaff was "not in it" with this yellow-tinted "John." His loose and flowing garments added to his "corporeity."

As he came near the miners, he saluted them with the "child-like and bland" smile supposed to be characteristic of the "heathen Chinese."

"Muchee nicee day," he remarked in an oily tone, "Sing-Sing verry glad to see Melican gemmen. Sing-Sing lookkee for wolkee. Dollar a day, he wolkee haldee."

The suggestion jumped with the ideas of the miners. Rich as their stolen claim was, they hated the labour even of gathering gold. The more hands there were to the work, the sooner it would be ended. Once the golden treasures of Alva Bar were exhausted, the "John" could be dismissed with a small reward, or no reward at all, and if he proved troublesome, a bullet through the head would give him his quietus.

"Work hard, can you?" Durango Dick said, reflectively. "Have you any companions, or are you alone?"

"Sing-Sing quite lonee."

"We'll take it on."

"Dollar a day, and glub found," conditioned the Chinese.

"That suits—call it a go."

"I shud like to hev some fun with the heathen," Panhandle Pete said regretfully. "What a target his fat tummy would make."

"Wait till the bar peters out, and then you can have all the fun you've got room for," answered the sharp, unheard by the Celestial.

The next morning the Chinese started work along with the pards, and he laboured so diligently that the lazy claim-jumpers thought him a most valuable acquisition.

"Me wolkee haldee, allee samee Melican

THE

A1 1^d 2 COMICS.

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"World's Comic,"

"Larks!"

"Coloured Comic,"

"Halfpenny Comic,"

SHOULD BE READ BY EVERYONE.

DON'T FORGET! THE CHRISTMAS NUMBER of THE HALFPENNY COMIC appears on December 4th.

man," the heathen said; and he more than kept his word, for he worked a great deal harder than the "American men."

And so the precious grains multiplied in the gold box of the claim-jumpers, and they were content, caring nothing that their wealth had been bought by black crime.

But there were troublous times ahead for Durango Dick and his band.

A Startling Apparition—The Ghost of Captain Jack.

Sing-Sing had been more than a week in the service of the claim-jumpers before anything occurred to break the monotony of life in the Golden Valley.

The miners treated the Chinese pretty well; for, brutes as they were, they did not wish to scare away so useful a helper. Sing-Sing was always placid and calm. Only in one thing he was obstinate. The miners were very careful to keep their weapons cleaned and ready for use; but as this was tiresome work they tried to turn it over to Sing-Sing. But the Celestial would have none of it. He professed a mortal terror of fire-arms. Even when they were unloaded he would not touch them. His cowardice became a joke, and the roughs frequently amused themselves by playing upon his fears.

The Golden Valley being in the Apache country, the miners usually kept watch at night. The establishment of a military post on the old Treasure Trail had driven the red braves further afield, but there was danger of raiding bands entering the valley of the Alva. Therefore, one of the band watched every night, ensconced in a cleft of the cliff that rose behind the cabins.

Taos Tom was on watch one brilliant moonlight night. He sat upon a boulder, with his rifle across his knees, chewing tobacco, and at intervals squirting the juice over the mossy rocks. The cabins were quiet, save for the snoring of the miners sleeping within. Sing-Sing slept in a lean-to against the wall of one of the cabins.

All at once, from a clump of juniper bushes, Taos Tom saw a strange figure arise. A young man, with deathly pale face, came into full view in the moonlight. Taos Tom gave a gasp of terror as he recognised the form and features of Captain Jack, the man who had been burned in the cabin a fortnight before.

"Jerusalem crickets! et's er ghost," muttered the scared rough.

The form moved towards him, the long golden hair floating round the deathly face.

With a desperate oath Taos Tom threw up his rifle and fired, full at the breast of the apparition.

Seemingly unhurt, it advanced steadily, the gleaming eyes fixed upon the rough with a stony stare. Nearer and nearer, until Taos Tom, paralysed with fear, reeled off the boulder and sank to the earth in a swoon.

Alarmed by the shot, the claim-jumpers came out of the huts in a few minutes, and great was their astonishment when they found Taos Tom lying senseless, and no sign of a foe to be seen.

"What's the matter with the cuss?" ejaculated Durango Dick, "he ain't been getting outside tanglefoot, or thar'd be a smell of it around."

"He's fainted," Panhandle Pete answered; "douse him in the crick; that'll bring him to."

Taos Tom, taken by the ankles, was slapped head-first into the Alva, and hauled out again, gasping and spluttering.

"Wot in thunder—" he began; then, remembering, "did you see et, pards?"

"See what?"

"The ghost."

"The dickens!"

"The ghost, pards, sure ez shootin'," said Taos Tom, impressively.

"Ye derried slabsided Digger Injin, whose ghost?" cried Durango Dick.

"Captain Jack's."

The claim-jumpers looked at each other in wonder. Taos Tom related what he had seen. In daylight laughter would have greeted the tale, but under the moon it was a different matter.

"I never miss w'en I dror a bead," Taos Tom said, "I gi'n him a chunk of lead ticketed for his pulsometer, but he never squirmed. Pards, it was a fast-chop genocine ghost, or I'm a liar."

"You dozed and dreamed it," answered Durango Dick.

And in the warm sunlight when day returned, this became the general belief. But Taos Tom remained unshaken in his belief that he had seen the ghost of Captain Jack.

A Warning of Doom—The Man Hunt—A Mysterious Disappearance—Missing Men.

The incident was almost forgotten by the claim-jumpers, and even Taos Tom thought less

about it, as the days passed on, and the ghost appeared no more.

The gold yield from the bar grew richer, and often Durango Dick congratulated himself upon his good fortune in having jumped so valuable a claim.

"I wouldn't lose my grip on it for Captain Jack, or Captain Jack's ghost, or for Old Scratch himself," he said. "Taint no use the lone spirit perambulating around hyer; he can't skeer me worth a cent."

But on the morning after this boastful speech he came out of his cabin strangely white through his swarthy skin. In a hand that trembled he held a sheet of thick white paper.

"Pards," he said, "which of you keers so little fur his life as to play this little joke on me?"

"What's the racket, cap.?"

The claim-jumpers gathered round to look at the pale gambler held out the sheet of paper. Upon it was a neat drawing of a gallows, with a man suspended therefrom, the man's features being those of the swarthy sharp. Underneath was written "Durango Dick's doom."

"I found it by my side when I awoke," said Durango Dick. "Now, which of you cusses put it thar?"

One and all denied the soft impeachment. Dick was puzzled; their faces expressed their truth.

"Could it have been the John?" suggested one of them, a half-breed named Miguelez.

The others shook their heads; nothing seemed more unlikely than that the guileless Celestial should play such a trick. However, Sing-Sing was called and questioned, and showed the paper. He studied it for a time with an air of amazement.

"Facee likee youls, massa Delango Dickee," he said, presently, as if he had just discovered the likeness, "whatee words say? Mee talkee Melican velly well, me cute John, but me not leadee (read) velly well."

Clearly the Chinaman was not to be suspected.

Durango Dick became very uneasy as he reflected upon the matter.

He remembered how Captain Jack had vanished amid the flames, leaving not a trace behind. Could it be possible that he had in some mysterious way escaped from the burning cabin, and was still lurking in the Golden Valley on the trail for vengeance?

That would account for this warning of doom, as well as for the so-called ghost that Taos Tom had seen and fired at.

This idea grew upon the sharp's mind, and after breakfast, instead of commencing work upon the bar, he told his suspicions to his pards, and suggested a hunt through the valley for the conjectured foe.

No one took stock in this theory, but all were glad to leave work for a day, and the expedition was willingly agreed to.

The claim-jumpers, armed to the teeth, set out in various directions to search the valley in every quarter.

It was arranged that at sunset they should return to the cabin, with or without success. The Chinese was left in charge of the cabins, with instructions to have a big meal prepared by sundown.

Behind Mount Alva the golden sun sank as evening drew on. The eastern sky was searped with ragged clouds. Darkness began to close in upon the valley of gold.

Seven men gathered by the cabins.

"Where is Taos Tom?" was the general question.

He had not returned. Night advanced, but he came not.

"Lost in the foot-hills," commented Durango Dick. "He'll come back with the sun."

And he rolled himself in his blanket and slept.

The sun came back, but Taos Tom did not put in an appearance. The pards were anxious now. What had become of him? Had he fallen into some deep barranca, or died beneath the spear of a Navajo or Apache scalp-hunter?

"We must s'arch," said Durango Dick, and they did search. The whole day was spent in ferreting among the rocks of the valley, and at sunset the pards met again.

But only six of them met.

Another of their number—this time the half-breed Miguelez—had failed to return.

There was terror now in the faces of the claim-jumpers as they looked at each other.

"There's a new hand in the game," Durango Dick said. "A sharp is playing a cold deal on us. But who kin it be, and whar is he?"

"Captain Jack!"

The name leaped to the lips of two or three at once.

"But Captain Jack is dead," cried Panhandle Pete.

"His ghost walks the valley," answered Mohave Dave, the least courageous of the claim-jumpers. "Didn't Taos Tom see it?"

"Rot!" exclaimed Durango Dick; "whoever is on our track is a live man, and no darned spirit. But look you, by separating we put it in his power to tackle us one at a time. We'll keep together now."

"Shall we s'arch fur Tom and Miguelez, cap.?"

"What's the use? They're gone, an' we can't find 'em. We'll stay yar and get on with our biz."

None of the claim-jumpers cared to encounter the unknown foe, and the tie of comradeship between them was very feeble. Willingly they left the two lost ones to their fate. After all, the shares in the gold would be larger among a few.

The roughs resumed their labour the next morning, but not in their usual thoughtless mood. They were uneasy, as their frequent upward glances at the circling hills testified. The most nervous of all seemed to be the Chinaman, Sing-Sing. Whenever a tree stirred in the breeze, or a squirrel moved among the bushes, he exclaimed that the Indians were coming to scalp them.

And the Two Lost Men—Where Were They?

Far up the pine-clad slopes of Mount Alva a narrow and dark cavern opened in the hill-side.

It penetrated to an unknown depth into the rock-ribbed mountain. No one had ever followed its utmost windings, save perhaps some lost grizzly or cascabel. But to a distance of a quarter of a mile several men had ventured. There, in rocky chambers, the unknown foe of the claim-jumpers had bestowed his captives.

In gloomy darkness, at some distance from each other, Taos Tom and Miguelez occupied the cavern. Round the ankles of each were locked iron rings, attached to chains, secured to iron staples in the rock. Their hands were free; food and water were within their reach.

They lived! but how was this to end? The doubt tortured them. Often they had shouted for help; the vast cavern echoed their cries, which never reached the open air. They were, in fact, buried alive, and at the mercy of their captor.

Baffled Flight—Mohave Dave Tries Again—A Ghostly Chase.

Durango Dick and his men worked at the bar for several days without interruption.

If they had an enemy in the valley he did not show himself. And the confidence of the claim-jumpers gradually returned. Only one had expressed a wish to "vamoose." It was Mohave Dave, who was lacking in the animal courage of his comrades. Dick had sternly forbidden him to go. If he went, the story of the rich strike would spread, and a crowd of gold-hunters would pour into the valley. Wealth which the claim-jumpers looked upon as their own would be ravished away under their noses.

But Mohave Dave was determined to go. He waited until his turn came to keep watch. Then, in the silence of the night, he abstracted the gold-box from its hiding-place, mounted his horse, and rode away. As by his flight he gave up his share of the claim to his comrades, he "reckoned" he had better compensate himself by "walking off" the whole of the proceeds of the working up to date.

It was midnight when he left Alva Bar. He breathed more freely when he had placed a mile between his comrades and himself. If they pursued he had a good start now.

A rustle in the thicket beside the trail he followed made him lay his hand upon his revolver. Indians, or wolves, or—

He gave a gasp of dread as a ghostly figure emerged from the cover. Captain Jack's ghost, as Taos Tom had seen it! The finger of the phantom pointed warningly at the claim-jumper.

READY NEXT THURSDAY.

"Christmas Larks!"

SIXTEEN PAGES—ONE PENNY.

Leading Features:—

"A CHRISTMAS CRUISE; Or, The Further Adventures of Mid-shipman Fred,"

A Story of Nelson's Days,
By CHARLES HAMILTON.

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How the Boys of Stormcliffe College "Broke up" for Christmas,
By S. CLARKE HOOK.

"THE CHRISTMAS OF KLONDIKE KIT,"

By A. M. CUMBERLAND.

OUR COLONIAL CONTINGENT'S CHRISTMAS FESTIVITIES.

XMAS PICTURES, XMAS JOKES—
IN FACT

"XMAS LARKS" OF ALL KINDS.

PLEASE NOTE.—"Christmas Larks!" will take the place of the ordinary weekly issue of "Larks!" for December 6th.

"Back!" said a sepulchral voice. Mohave Dave did not wait to be bidden twice. Back he galloped at mad speed to escape that terrible figure.

He reached the cabins, and had sufficient presence of mind to restore the gold box to its place before he awoke his companions.

To them he related the story of his baffled flight; in his horror he could not keep it to himself.

Durango Dick's eyes had a dangerous gleam as he listened.

"So you tried to get away, Mohave Dave?"

"Why shouldn't I, if I want to?" retorted Dave.

"Don't try it again, unless you want a bullet through your think box. We're in this game together, sink or swim."

Mohave Dave did not answer, but his resolve remained unshaken. For all the gold in Arizona he would not have remained longer than he could help in that accursed valley.

The others shared his disquietude. They began to wish that they had left Captain Jack and his claim alone. The way of the transgressor is hard, and they were beginning to find it out.

All but Durango Dick believed in the ghost

(Continued on page 390.)

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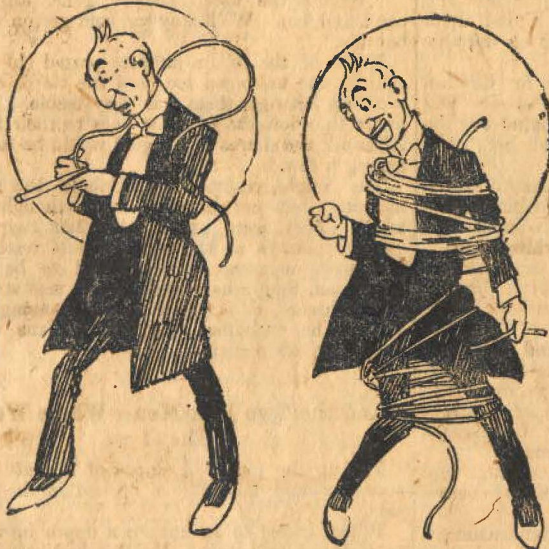
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"At the Mercy of his Foe." A Stirring Christmas Cavalier Story, appears in the HALFPENNY COMIC Christmas Number.

THE
TABLES TURNED.

"I SAY, your daughter's awfully mashed on me, doncherknow, and I thought I'd ask you if she is likely to be able to support me in the style to which I have been accustomed, doncherknow."

THOSE PENCILS.

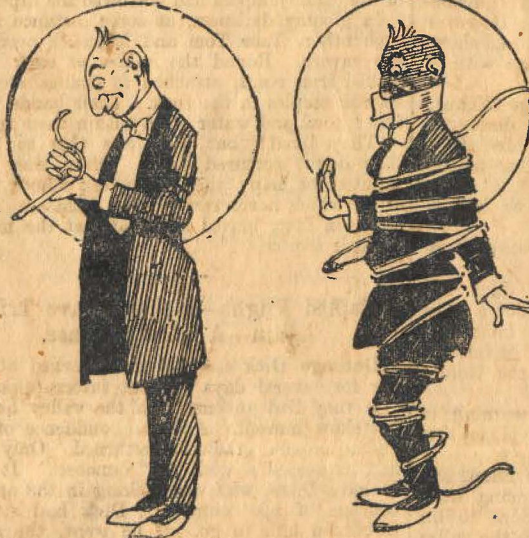


1.—"THIS seems to be one of these new-fangled paper pencils; got to unwind it, I suppose."

3.—"Thunder, ain't this awful? Help!"



HIS SISTER: "Do you suppose she rejected you because you were not rich enough?"
Her Brother: "Well, she gave me to understand that I was a man of no interest and not much principle."



2.—"Great Scott! this thing is coming off like a tape machine."

4.—And the flow of language that herewith followed was simply appalling.



1.—"Now," said Billy, "we'll just watch them two toffs fall over the string." But he didn't know that those "two toffs" were the brothers Turnover from the Hippodrome.



2.—And tripping over that string just started them off, and while one jumped up and turned his foot round Billy's neck, the other turned double somersaults round the lamp-post.

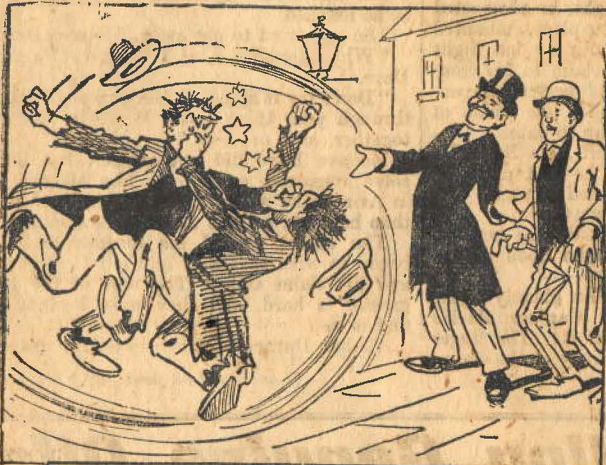


3.—Then one of them laid down to it, and started bouncing Billy about on his feet, while the other tickled the seat of Billy's trousers with a stick.

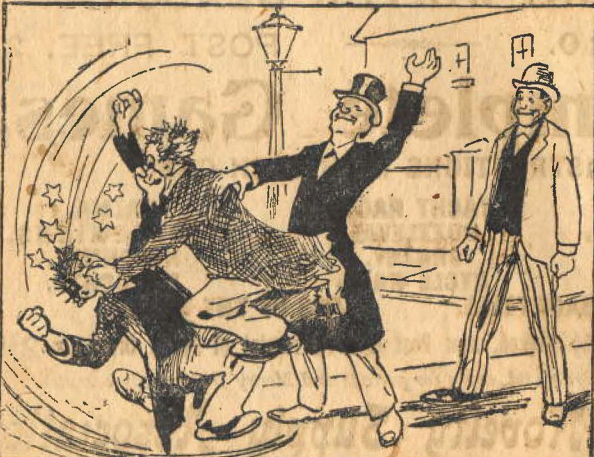


4.—Having thus put Billy through about five minutes' worth of the most violent exercise he had ever had in his life, they left him sitting on the pavement, trying to think how it all happened.

THE PRICE OF PEACE.



1.—"Now, just look at these quarrelsome tramps!" said Winks. "In half a mo' I'll make 'em stop fighting. I'm a grand peacemaker."



2.—"Now, my men! why can't you agree together and be 'appy 'stead of all this—"



3.—So they did agree next minit, and went fer old Winks bald-headed, who got more than he wanted, but—



4.—He wasn't beaten, oh, no! "Look at 'em!" says he, "there they go; what did I tell you? chummy as you like!"

THOSE DRAWING LESSONS.



1.—"My!" say the proud parents, when their daughter shows them this as a specimen of her talent, "and did you do it all yourself?"

"Oh, the drawing master just altered it and touched it up a little bit," replies the clever girl.



2.—This shows the rough pencil sketch by May Tomtit before being "slightly altered and touched up" by the drawing master. (Of course this is between ourselves.)



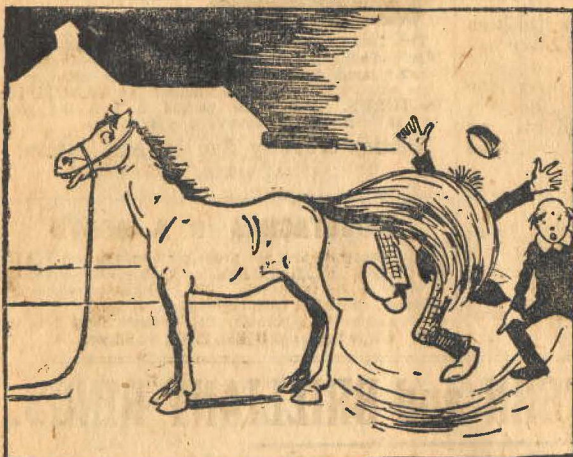
SHOULD HE TAKE IT AS A COMPLIMENT?

At the Fancy Dress Ball.—Miss Pert: "Well, you do look a fool!"

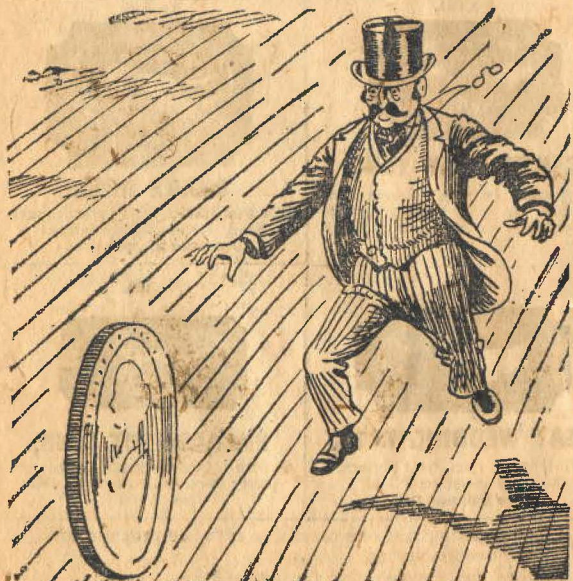
MORE 'AIR.



1.—SMALL BOY: "I say, Jimmy, let's pinch some hair out o' this old hat stand's tail; he'll never miss it."



2.—The Horse: "What's that? call me a bat stand, does he? Well he can take that—(swish)—and that" (swish). And Jimmy got a sight more hair than he wanted.



THE PURSUIT OF WEALTH.

SONG OF THE SOVEREIGN: "They're after me, they're after me. To capture me is all they desire."

MIGHT WAS RIGHT.



1.—SARAH ELLEN: "Please, sir, 'ere's a man wot wants to see yer. 'E's waitin'!"



2.—Old Moneygrub: "Another begging letter! Show the gentleman up, Sarah Ellen."



3.—"Now, I'm determined to show this business up once and for all. I must make an awful example of him. It's hard on him, I know, but it is for the good of the community."



4.—But when he saw the size of the awful example, he suddenly changed his mind, and asked him whether he preferred four 'arf or champagne.



NOT SO RUM TO US.

"YES, I seem to do nothing but answer the door to gentlemen."

"La! ain't that rum! There weren't any gentlemen callers at all when I was here. That's why I left."

IT WAS "LARKS!"



1.—"Now then, white man, I want something to fatten me up, so say yer prayers."



2.—But Little Simkins was wise in his generation, and handed over the greatest fat producer ever known, and the dusky native got so fat on the first page that he couldn't walk. (Simkins did, though.)



TAKING A RISE OUT OF HIM.

ELDEST SISTER (shouting downstairs): "Mother! mother!! quick!!! Bring up all the buckets, dishes, soup-tureens, tea-cups, and basins you can find."

Mother: "Mercy me, child! what's the matter?"
Eldest Sister: "Oh, Charley's going to have his first shave."



A DEADLY JOKE.

PUNMAN: "That poor little baby of Jones's hasn't lived long, dear."
Mrs. Punman (shocked): "What! you don't mean to say it's dead already?"

Punman: "Not yet, dear, but you know it hasn't lived very long, because it was only born three days ago." (Then he escaped.)

A NEW GAMP.



1.—"I vos forgot my ombrella unt here is der rain. I vos bound to get ter der concert soaging vet."



2.—"But I put the bass-horn upon meinself unt I pe as dry as a bone."



A MATTER OF COMPARISON.

"SOME beer is better than other beer, no doubt; but there's no sich thing as BAD beer."

"FLASHES

FROM THE FOOTLIGHTS,"

A SERIES OF EXCITING STORIES
OF THEATRICAL LIFE,

By JOHN C. COLLIER,

ARE NOW RUNNING IN

THE HALFPENNY COMIC.

(Continued from page 387.)

theory. Captain Jack wasn't a phoenix that he could rise in new life from the flames that destroyed him! He was as dead as Christopher Columbus, and his unquiet spirit haunted the scene of his murder!

"Let's git as much dust as we kin git quick, and absquatulate," the red-bearded Texan, Panhandle Pete, advised.

"So you are turning coward too, Pete," said Durango Dick, bitterly. "Are you as white-livered as Sing-Sing?"

"Durn it, wot's the use of buckin' agin spirits!" replied the Texan.

The work on the bar went on. The ruffians were eagerly anxious to make a scoop and be off. Taos Tom and Miguelez they had almost forgotten. Their concern was wholly for themselves. Sing-Sing worked like a slave; he appeared most anxious to get away.

Dick did not trust Mohave Dave to keep watch again. But on the third night, when Bison Bill was on sentry-go, the faint-hearted claim-jumper stole out of his cabin, and, under cover of the river rocks, crept away down the valley. He went empty handed, but he cared not for that; anything was better than loitering in the haunted valley.

Bison Bill did not observe his flight. Away he sped, on foot, for he could not get his horse unobserved. As soon as he was round the base of Mount Alva he broke into a run.

What made the blood rush suddenly to his heart, and leave his bronzed cheeks of a deathly pallor?

Footsteps, faint, but just audible, rang behind him upon the rocky trail round Mount Alva.

Who was his pursuer? Durango Dick, pistol in hand? or the terrible phantom that before had baffled his flight?

In desperation he turned at bay. But nothing could be seen; the footsteps stopped when he stopped. Had he been deceived by an echo?

On he went again, and the footfalls recommenced. Terror mastered him now; he fled like a hunted wild beast. Swiftly he bounded from rock to rock on the rugged mountain side. But such ground was ill-adapted for reckless running. Ere long his foot slipped upon a smooth spur of selenite, and he crashed down on his face.

As he lay half stunned, the ghostly footsteps reached his side.

Another Desertion—The Chinese Warning—The Pursuit—Mexican Jim Disappears.

At dawn the absence of Mohave Dave was discovered by his comrades.

Alarm was written upon every countenance. "He went to sleep in the cabin with me," declared Mexican Jim, a swarthy Greaser, "what is he now?"

"He was skinned, and stole away," Durango Dick answered, indifferently.

But Bison Bill, the sentinel, was positive that he hadn't.

"I should hev seen him if he had," he declared.

"He's skipped, anyway, and that ends it; I wish I had put a bullet through him the other night."

"The facks is," said Panhandle Pete, "that the ghost hev got him, jist as he got Taos Tom and Miguelez."

Durango Dick looked at the credulous and fear-stricken faces of his four remaining pals with bitter contempt.

"I suppose you want to vamoose?" he asked.

"I reckon," Bison Bill replied, abruptly, and his words were echoed by one other, Shasta Kit.

"I hangs on to the gold," Panhandle Pete asserted, and Mexican Jim said the same.

"You two hev got some grit. As fur Bill and Kit, they kin go if they choose, but they won't take an ounce o' gold out of this canyon."

This ultimatum decided the two waverers to stay. But their terror was extreme. They worked on the bar, but they continually looked up from the spading and washing to watch the valley for foes, earthly or unearthly. Their nerve was gone. Durango Dick, iron-nerved sport as he was, shared their dread to a great extent.

The Golden Valley, which had been a Land of Promise to them, was now an Egypt from which they were anxious to escape. Once they had made a good haul, they would fly gladly from the Mogollon Mountains.

The second night after Mohave Dave's disappearance, Durango Dick was awakened from a troubled slumber by a light touch.

Starting up, he saw Sing-Sing, the Chinese, bending over him.

"What do you want here, heathen?" he growled, pistol in hand at once.

"Sing-Sing friende to Melican man. Melican man not likee losee goldee," replied the Chinese.

"Lose the gold. Who's after it?" and up jumped the gambler.

"Bison Bill and Shasta Kittee takee boxee—"

Ere the Chinaman could finish, the enraged sharp rushed out of the cabin. Sing-Sing looked after him with a strange slow smile. Often, when he was unobserved, that smile would come over the face of the stout placid Chinese. There was more in Sing-Sing than met the eye.

Only a dim crescent of moon could be seen, but a myriad stars spangled the deep blue of the heavens.

A ring of horses' hoofs died away faintly down the river bank as the swarthy sport emerged from the cabin.

Bison Bill and Shasta Kit—the latter had been on guard—were gone. Durango Dick's yell of rage brought his two still faithful pals to him in a twinkling.

"Wot's the racket?" the man from Panhandle asked, sleepily.

"Bill and Kit hev skipped with the box o' gold."

Three men rushed frantically for horses. Useless! Anticipating pursuit, Bison Bill and his pard had killed, with bowie blades, the horses they did not require for themselves.

"Curses on them," yelled Durango Dick. "All is lost!"

"No," exclaimed Mexican Jim, "they can't git out of the valley without roundin' Mount Alva, and if we cut across the hill—"

Ere he finished, the trio were flying over Mount Alva. From the high ground they could, if they reached a certain point in time, overlook the trail followed by the fugitives, within rifle range.

A quarter of an hour of running, and they halted, panting, upon a pinnacle of rock.

"We're in time," gasped Durango Dick, as he cocked his rifle.

Two mounted men were spurring up the trail, less than half a mile away on the lower ground, and clearly seen in the starlight. They rode on without suspicion that three muzzles threatened them from the height. But for Sing-Sing's wakefulness they would not have been pursued until morning.

"The dogs!" hissed Durango Dick, "there's the gold we've all worked for slung up beside Shasta Kit. I'll take him; you two settle Bill."

There was no mercy in the hearts of the robbed robbers.

Swift death to the traitors, and the recovery of the stolen gold; that was what they thought only of.

The three rifles rang together. The effect was instant and horrible.

Shasta Kit slid from his horse, and lay in the dust a huddled heap. Bison Bill tumbled to the ground, jumped up and ran on; then fell again, groaned, and lay still.

"They've cashed their chips," said Durango Dick, with a ferocious smile, "and now to git back the yaller."

The claim-jumpers, eager to regain the precious box, hurried down the rugged hill to wards the place where the bodies lay.

Naturally, upon such a route they became separated.

Durango Dick reached the goal first, and secured the box. Panhandle Pete joined him. They opened it and examined the contents. All was safe. Nothing had been lost.

"But what's Jim?" exclaimed Pete. "Why don't he kin?"

A paleness came over Dick's swarthy face, a chilly fear into his heart.

"Jim! Jim!" he shouted.

The rocks of the canyon echoed the sound of his voice, but Mexican Jim did not appear.

Taking the horses their victims had ridden, Dick and Pete rode back to the cabins. Mexican Jim was not there; nor, to their surprise, was the Chinaman, Sing-Sing.

"What can the John be?"

But the Chinaman did not come back, and the two desperadoes, last of the desperate band, returned to their blankets. But not to sleep. Each was too disquieted to be able to close his eyes again.

The Rogues Fall Out—The Chinese Reappears—A Metamorphosis—Captain Jack on Hand.

"I'm going, Dick," said Panhandle Pete, in the morning.

"You are skeered enough to throw up your hand, Pete?"

"I keer nothin' wot you say," replied the Texan, sullenly. "All of us aire gone but us two, and how do we know when the ghost 'll come for us?"

"You are a coward."

Pete scowled and gripped his revolver.

"I don't want to lay out a pard," he said, "but don't you go too far, Durango Dick, or you'll hear suthin' drop."

But the sharp was bent upon a quarrel. The truth was, that he himself was afraid to remain in the Golden Valley. He meditated immediate flight. But in that flight he did not wish for a companion. No, he alone should carry away the treasure of the Golden Valley, and then in Tombstone he would lay claim to the part of the valley he chose.

He could register his mine, and send workmen to develop it, without the necessity of coming back personally to the hated spot. He would be a millionaire before the year was out, but he would not share his millions with this rough Texan, who in drunken moments might blurt out unpleasant details as to how the money was come by.

"I said you were a coward, Pete, and you are," retorted Durango Dick, staring insolently in the face of the Texan.

Panhandle Pete was brick-red in his coarse bronzed face with rage.

"Do you want a racket?" he cried, fiercely.

"Yes, I do. Only one of us is going to spend Captain Jack's gold," the sport answered, coolly.

"You pesky skunk, you're a darned sight vuss'n Kit or Bill," the red-bearded man from Panhandle exclaimed.

Two revolvers flashed out into the sunlight.

But clumsy, burly Pete had no chance against the slim-fingered sport. Only a single shot cracked out. The Texan went tumbling backwards into the Alva, whose waters choked his last cry as they bore him away.

Durango Dick laughed with fierce exultation. "I—I alone—am master of the Golden Valley," he cried.

"Except for Captain Jack!" said a stern voice, the tones of which he knew too well.

Whirling round wildly, he faced Sing-Sing, the Chinaman.

The heathen Chinese!

"You, you!" he howled.

He did not lift the revolver, which had been so fatal to Panhandle Pete, for the Chinese had him covered.

A striking change had come over the "John." His face was resolutely set, his eyes scintillating. The revolver he held covering the gambler never for an instant wavered from the true line.

"The game's up, Durango Dick," he said, firmly, "put up your hands."

Up they went mechanically. Then Sing-Sing disarmed the gambler, and, forcing him back against one of the uprights of the cabin, bound him to it with a strong cord.

"You guess my identity, of course," continued the Celestial, laughing.

"Captain Jack!"

"Exactly!"

The Chinese stripped off the close-fitting skin-coloured skull-cap, with the false pig-tail attached. He had already washed the yellow paint from his face, and from his eye-brows the streaks of black which gave his eyes their elongated Chinese look. He stripped off the Chinese garb, with the enormous padding which had made him appear a stout man. Underneath he wore his ordinary clothes. The long Mongolian moustaches came off with a jerk. Captain Jack looked his ordinary self, with his long yellow hair clustering around his shoulders, not quite so long as heretofore, for he had been compelled to crop it a little to make it squeeze inside the false skin of his head. The disguise had been so skilful, so perfect, that it was no wonder that the claim-jumpers had been utterly deceived by it. Durango Dick ground his teeth as he watched the metamorphosis.

"Curse you!" he hissed, "I feared that you had escaped the fire, but I never looked for this."

"Did you think that I should tamely yield up the Golden Valley?"

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Look out for "THE GHOST OF SILAS SECUNDUS" in the CHRISTMAS NUMBER of the HALFPENNY COMIC.

"How did you escape, you fiend?"

"By a simple means. When I built my cabin, the Apaches were on the war-path; I was daily and nightly in expectation of an attack. Naturally I made a way of retreat from the cabin, to be ready if the redskins made it too warm for me. I ran a tunnel from the centre of the cabin to a hollow oak down the valley. When you fired my shebang, I descended into the tunnel. The top was closed by a trap-door, plastered over with earth, so that its existence should not be suspected. I reached the hollow oak, and scooted. You thought me dead, and took possession of my claim. I was undecided how to act at first. I could have raised a gang and come back and wiped you out. But I always preferred playing a lone hand, and I did not wish for bloodshed, if I could regain my rights without it. I resolved to come here in disguise, and to make your possession of my claim a misery and a curse to you. I got this Chinese rig in Tombstone, and also a set of manacles for the use of your gang, whom I meant to lay by the heels one by one."

"Blind fool that I have been!" the gambler hissed, white with rage.

"I played ghost to scare you, and I think I succeeded. Your men got little pleasure out of their plunder, I reckon. You understand now how it was that Taos Tom's bullet did not hurt the ghost. Sing-Sing had got at his rifle before he went on guard, and abstracted the bullet from the cartridge."

"And it was you who placed the warning of doom by my bedside. I see it all now. And my pards, who disappeared one by one—what have you done with them?"

"They are alive; my prisoners; chained up in a cavern on Mount Alva. Taos Tom and Migulez, Mohave Dave and Mexican Jim—they are all expiating their crime. This imprisonment, which will not, however, last much longer, is their punishment for the wrong they did me. Shasta Kit and Bison Bill I should have captured also, but they went in company, so I could not have done it without killing one or both. But I was determined that they should not escape with my gold. Therefore I set you upon their track."

Durango Dick cursed volubly. He saw how he had been duped. In everything he had played into the hands of his patient and relentless foe.

"Now," resumed Captain Jack, "you have murdered your last pard, and alone remain for me to deal with."

"I fought him fairly," muttered the gambler. "He had no chance against you, and you know it. It was sheer murder. You are a human wolf, Durango Dick, and it is not only for your wrong to me that you are doomed."

The gambler burst into a reckless laugh. "Don't preach," he cried, "you've got me foul, and you mean to take advantage of it. I don't complain. I am too old a sport to curse fortune. The game has gone against me, and I throw up the cards. Fire!"

Captain Jack shook his head.

"I never harmed a helpless man yet," he said. "I am going to fight you fairly, Durango Dick."

"Ah, a duel!" The sharp's face brightened. Then he remembered the prowess of the English hunter with every kind of weapon. No amateur himself, still he knew that he had little chance against Captain Jack.

"On what terms?" he said.

"As you like."

"Hand to hand, then." Captain Jack was wiry, strong; but the sport looked down upon his own muscular limbs, and smiled confidently. "Hand to hand, till one is dead! Once I saw a duel fought in Mexico, each man on a cliff with a rope round his neck. Thus will we fight, if you dare."

"I dare."

"But your prisoners in the cavern, if you are killed?"

"I have a pard at Tombstone who will come and release them in a week's time, whatever happens to me. That imprisonment is their punishment; not hard enough, but they were after all only tools in your hands, Durango Dick. I think they will know better than to trouble me again."

The sport drew a deep breath.

"Either you or I die to-day," he exclaimed.

"So be it."

The Combat on the Cliff—A Felon's Doom.

When the arrowy waters of the Alva River rushed and foamed past the southern end of Mount Alva, a huge granite cliff rose abruptly from the riverside.

From the summit to the base, over a thousand feet, this cliff was as sheer as the wall of a house. Its summit was level, the flat top being nearly an acre in extent, backed by another cliff.

Near the edge of the precipice two iron staples were driven firmly into the rock. To these staples long and stout ropes were attached. Each rope had a noose at the loose end. These nooses were now placed around

the throats of two men who stood upon the summit of the cliff.

Captain Jack and Durango Dick faced each other, both pale, but calm and resolute.

That the coming conflict must be fatal to one was certain. The ropes were secured round their necks. Whichever man was pitched over the cliff would be effectually hanged.

It was a duel to the death.

"Are you ready?" asked Durango Dick.

"I am ready."

They gripped and closed.

The combat commenced. No sound came from either save their deep breathing.

Durango Dick's face was ferocious; Captain Jack's sternly set. Life and death hung upon the struggle. Each realised it. Each was pitilessly bent upon victory.

Over them, as they swayed in the conflict, hung a huge black vulture upon extended pinions, serenely anticipative. Whichever way the conflict went, he was sure of prey.

Fiercer grew the fight, harder the grip, more hurried the breathing; deadlier the

glitter of eye, the clench of teeth. Particles of earth and stone, torn up by the grinding boots, formed a dusty cloud round the swaying figures.

Slowly but surely victory inclined to the avenger.

Madly fought the claim-jumper. Tramp, tramp, tramp, grind and clatter, on the very verge of the cliff!

On the very verge! There is a quick panting breath, a tremendous wrench, and the locked forms fly apart. One reels back, breathless, exhausted, but safe. The other is hurled into yawning space.

Down flies the whirling body. It is stopped by an abrupt jerk as the rope tautens, and the body crashes back against the rugged face of the cliff.

At the end of the rope hangs a dead man. From the cliff staggers the victor, panting for breath. And slowly into the gulf sinks, with hungry beak, the obscene bird that had watched the conflict, and seen Durango Dick's Doom.

THE END.

THE DOCTOR'S BATH.

By S. CLARKE HOOK.

To look at William Smart you would have taken him for a quiet, inoffensive boy, but Dr. Dobson, the proprietor of Fernleigh College, did not find him quiet by any manner of means. Hal Bailey, who was Bill's particular chum, was bad enough; but for what our American relations designate "downright cussedness" Bill could have carried top weight and won easily.

It was the last day but one of the Christmas term, and thoughts of roast beef and plum pudding put the sadder thoughts of lessons out of the boys' heads. Indeed, there was to be no more work that term, the boys being supposed to make their preparations for the journey home.

"What are you up to, Bill?" inquired Hal, entering the dormitory, where that worthy was dancing on the various clothes which he had rammed into his box.

"Packing! The—ugh—hanged things won't go in."

"Don't you think you will spoil them with those muddy boots?"

"Well, they must go in."

"Oh, let them go to Bath. Come out and have a lark."

"All right! The box will have to go open like that. I'll jam a label on, this side up with care. Let's come and help 'em with those building extensions."

"I've already offered my services," answered Hal, "and the foreman says he'll bash my brains in if I come messing around."

"I'm going to lay the foundation stone, whether he likes it or not," declared Bill, making his way to the seat of operations.

"Ere, you'd best be off," said a man, who was stirring a huge pond of slaked lime. "The boss is in a awful temper this morning, and 'ere he comes."

"Clear out of it, you scum," roared a fat red-faced man, approaching.

"I'm going to lay a foundation stone," said Bill, picking up a brick, "where's some mortar?"

"I'll mortar you," roared the angry man, making a rush at Bill, who dodged round that pond.

"Put that brick down, you cuss, or I'll murder you," yelled the fat man.

"Well, there you are," said Bill, hurling it into the centre of the white stuff, and fairly deluging the foreman, who was the opposite side of the pond; then Bill and Hal bolted across the doctor's garden and sought refuge in the paddock, while the whitewashed party went to lay his complaint.

"I say, Hal," exclaimed Bill, "why shouldn't I have a ride on that old horse?"

"Think Dobson would like it?"

"Oh! there's no pleasing him. It doesn't matter what I do, he's never pleased. Look there! The horse is just beneath that apple tree. Watch me mount him."

Bill succeeded in climbing the tree without frightening the steed, then working his way along the branch he suddenly dropped on its back.

Fireworks—thus the boys had named the horse, because of his temper—seemed vexed. He lashed out with his heels, but Bill clung lovingly round his neck, and finding he could not unseat him, Fireworks went across the paddock like a rocket, then he leapt the garden hedge, and dashed across the doctor's flower beds, leaving his trail behind him.

"Hie, steady, you blessed idiot!" roared Bill. "You'll get me into a row directly. Here, stop! You can't jump that fence."

Fireworks evidently thought he could, at any rate he meant having a try. It was not high, but it was considerably higher than he jumped. The result was disastrous, so far as

the fence was concerned. Something had to go before Fireworks' mad rush, so the fence went—about three yards of it.

Now Dr. Dobson had come out and was receiving a bit of the foreman's mind. The two were standing at the spot where Bill had laid his foundation stone. The foreman was gesticulating wildly. Suddenly he and the doctor uttered simultaneous yells of terror, for Fireworks was bearing down on them like an avalanche. The doctor sprang backwards, then he plunged into that pond. Fireworks shouldered caught the foreman, and hurled him on the top of the doctor. Bill fell off sideways, and springing to his feet stood gazing in wonder at the effect of his ride. The foreman rose. The only portion of him that was not white was his waistcoat. As for Dr. Dobson he was white all over. He looked like a ghost, or a plaster cast of a stout Apollo, as he emerged from that pond.

Bill looked serious. Hal, who now came on the scene, danced about and shrieked: "Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha, harrah!"

"If you please, sir," observed Bill, "I am sorry if—I've inconvenienced you in any way, but it was Fireworks' fault. He's so impulsive."

"Boy!" howled the doctor, "look at me!"

"Yes, sir. I am! If I was you, I'd let it dry before I brushed it off. Oh, murder! Here comes that other ghost! Yarah! Stop him, doctor. Save me! He's dangerous."

And Bill bolted across the playground, and was out of the gate like a shot, while the foreman was close behind him.

Bill made for the village, and the shrieks of laughter which greeted his extraordinary looking pursuer did not tend to appease his wrath.

"What's up, young gent?" inquired a constable, who recognised Bill.

"Stop him! He's mad. Seize him."

The policeman grabbed the furious pursuer, and they both rolled over.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped the constable, struggling to his feet and gazing at his uniform, which was blue and white now. "Look what a dratted mess you've made me in!"

"The cuss has been and doused me in the blooming stuff. Let me get at him."

"You can't, mate. He's cut his lucky. Best go home and get a clean up. Sam. And I'll have to do the same. This 'ere uniform has got to last me, but it won't at this rate."

"I shouldn't wonder if you find holes in it to-morrow," growled Sam. "It's a thumping lucky thing as there was plenty of water in the stuff, else it would have burnt my flesh. He's been and doused old Dobson in it, too. That 'ere's a comfort, and chance it. Just wait till I get hold of him!"

And that's what Bill wanted to do. Hal found him, and they spent the day in the village.

"So you think old Dobson is vexed?" inquired Bill.

"Ha, ha! I fancy so. I couldn't see the expression on his face for whitewash, but his incoherent ravings certainly gave me the impression that he was vexed. And when you come to think of it, Bill, you could scarcely—ha, ha, ha!—swoop a chap into limewash like that without vexing him."

"How would it be if you were to go to him and explain that it was his fault for getting in the way of Fireworks?"

"Eh?"

"Put it to him nicely, you know. Ask him to flog Fireworks. I don't care who he flogs, so long as he doesn't flog me."

"I think I'd rather you put it to him nicely. You see, he might flog me first and you afterwards, and that would be a ridiculous waste of energy."

READY TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4TH.

GRAND CHRISTMAS NUMBER

OF THE

"HALFPENNY COMIC"

AT THE USUAL PRICE

"THE GHOST OF SILAS SECUNDUS,"

By S. CLARKE HOOK.

"Peace on Earth, Goodwill towards Men,"

A PANTOMIME STORY, by J. C. COLLIER.

AND A

STIRRING XMAS TALE OF THE CAVALIERS AND ROUNDHEADS,

By J. G. ROWE.

Are Some of the Good Things in Store for You

"I know what, Hal. I'll order a cab for four o'clock to-morrow morning. We'll sneak in late to-night and leave early to-morrow. It will give him time to get his whitewash off before he sees us again."

And this is exactly what they did. Effecting an entry by smashing one of the lower windows, they crept to their dormitory.

Bill did some more jumping on his box, but as he could not get it shut he tied it up with string, leaving the top gaping open a couple of inches or so.

"Are you going to take that box like that?" inquired one of the fellows.

"Yes, of course. Why not?"

"Oh, nothing. Only it doesn't look so plaguy secure. I'd repack it, if I were you."

"I'll see you hung first, Scroggins," said Bill. "I had enough trouble to get the beastly things in like they are. It's as safe as houses. Come on, Hal, give us a hand downstairs."

"Shall I help you?" inquired Scroggins.

"No! You won't. You'd drop the blessed thing, then say you were sorry. This box is too congested to stand being dropped. Come on, Hal, and don't make a blessed sound. For goodness sake don't laugh. Think of something sad."

"Ha, ha! I'll think of Dobson and the whitewash. By George! it's heavy. I really think you had better get Scroggins to help you."

Bill knew that worthy, though, and flatly declined.

It is not an easy matter to get a heavy box down a flight of stairs. Hal found it downright difficult. He had got the lower end, and, as far as he could make out, all the weight. However, they succeeded in getting it down the first flight of stairs, then turning the corner, worked their way down the bottom flight. Scroggins seized a water jug, and waited for them on the landing, which was immediately over the second lot of stairs.

"Ah!" gasped Hal, as water trickled on his head, "it's raining!"

Scroggins was only trying to find if he were in the right position, and as Hal's exclamation told him he was, he turned the jug upside down.

Hal couldn't stand that. He dropped his end of the box and belted into the hall, where he stood with icy cold water streaming out of the ends of his trousers.

"Moses!" exclaimed Bill. "Hold it. The hanged thing is pulling me down."

Scroggins crept down the stairs, and placing his foot against the bent portion of Bill's body, gave him a vigorous shove.

That finished it. Bill and his box went down those stairs with bangs and crashes. The box smashed a baluster, then took a dive into the hall, and Bill's wearing apparel was scattered all over the place.

He sat up, and gazed around in wonder. Dr. Dobson rushed from his study.

"Who would have thought that now?" murmured Bill.

"Boy! it's you! What are you doing now?"

"If you please, doctor," said Bill, remaining seated, because his master had a cane, "I have been packing up my box, and the bloomin' thing has come unpacked. Never mind! I'll soon collect 'em."

And seizing a miscellaneous armful, he flung them into the box, and jumped on them.

"The boy must be mad," soliloquised the doctor. "He is a dangerous lunatic. You stupid creature! You are spoiling those clothes."

"Think so, doctor?"

"Get off at once. Both of you come into my study."

"Won't to-morrow morning do, doctor?" inquired Bill. "We are rather sleepy now."

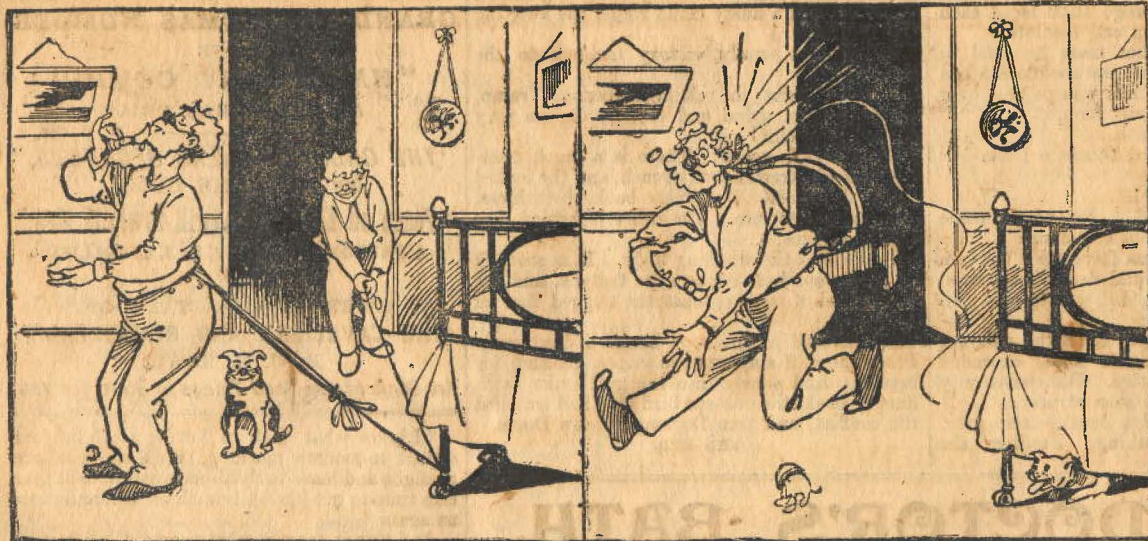
Dr. Dobson, however, soon woke them up, and when he released them he said he should have to consider whether he would not have to expel Bill.

"But, doctor, it was entirely Fireworks' fault. You oughtn't to keep such a frisky horse."

"Go to bed, both of you. I shall write to your parents. You are the worst boys I have ever had in this college."

THE END.

A LITTLE SURPRISE.



1.—GENTLEMAN (lathering): "Ou—ah, naughty Ponto; 2.—"Gr—reat Jehosaphat!! Who's that chucking fire-irons leggo my braces, you bad doggie-woggie."

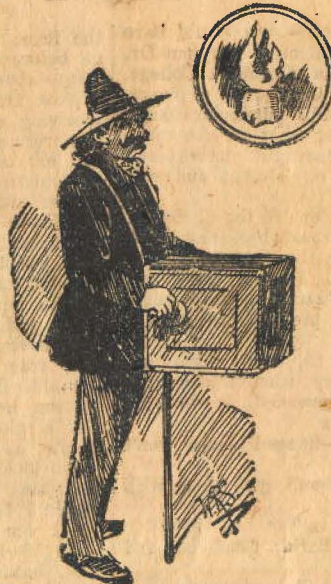


OUT FOR THE DAY.

"Poor Mr. Blondin, I *do* sympathise with him when he walks the line!"



BILL LARGECHECK: "Yus, sir, yer knows I married a widder. Well, she says I compelled her to throw up her weeds when we got spliced, and now she wants to compel me to throw up mine."



PUZZLE.—Which sort of "grinder" does the British householder dislike the most?

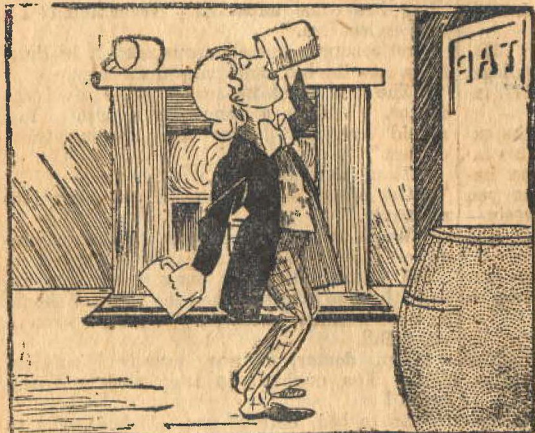
THE THIRSTY POET.



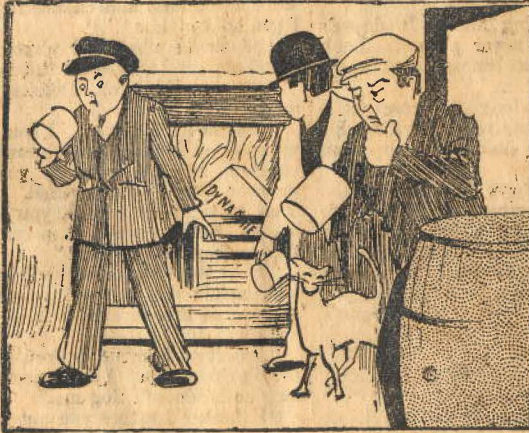
1.—"Not only have they refused my poems," said Aubrey Fitzmorice Rymaker, "but they have sent me a box of dynamite, with a message to blow myself to pieces, for neither I nor my poems are wanted here."



2.—And as he flung the box upon the blazing fire, the occupants of the tap-room of the Pig and Whistle hastened out with all possible speed.



3.—When left thus, Aubrey Fitzmorice Rymaker proceeded to drink their beer.



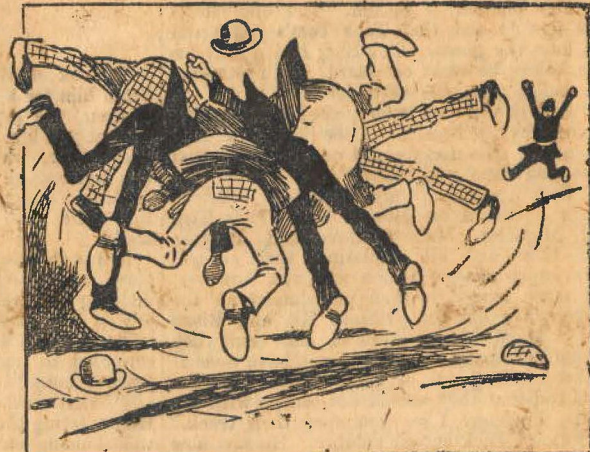
4.—When they returned, Aubrey Fitzmorice Rymaker had gone—So had all the beer. The cat was the only one that seemed to see the joke.



HOW COULD HE?

"TAKE a seat, uncle, and make yourself comfortable."

A QUIET GAME.



1.—Don't be alarmed, gentle reader, the above picture doesn't represent a dynamite explosion or a massacre, or even an escaped convict. No.



2.—It was only some of the Swigton Rugby Scrunchers having a little practice game, in view of their great match on Saturday. Nothing serious, was it?



A LEG-TRICK-AL SUCCESS.

SHE: "The début of Signorina Hi Kiker at the Lingerie Music Hall was simply electric."
He: "In fact, a leg-trick success!"