

# BANGS JOHN KENDRICK

The Booming of Acre Hill, and  
Other Reminiscences of Urban and  
Suburban Life

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Life:*

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# **John Kendrick Bangs**

## **The Booming of Acre Hill, and Other Reminiscences of Urban and Suburban Life**

### **THE BOOMING OF ACRE HILL**

Acre Hill ten years ago was as void of houses as the primeval forest. Indeed, in many ways it suggested the primeval forest. Then the Acre Hill Land Improvement Company sprang up in a night, and before the bewildered owners of its lovely solitudes and restful glades, who had been paying taxes on their property for many years, quite grasped the situation they found that they had sold out, and that their old-time paradise was as surely lost to them as was Eden to Adam and Eve.

To-day Acre Hill is gridironed with macadamized streets that are lined with houses of an architecture of various degrees of badness. Where birds once sang, and squirrels gambolled, and stray foxes lurked, the morning hours are made musical by the voices of milkmen, and the squirrels have given place to children and nurse-maids. Where sturdy oaks stood like sentinels guarding the forest folk from intrusion from the outside world

now stand tall wooden poles with glaring white electric lights streaming from their tops. And the sighing of the winds in the trees has given place to the clang of the bounding trolley. All this is the work of the Acre Hill Land Improvement Company.

Yet if, as I have said, the Acre Hill Land Improvement Company sprang up in a night, it passed many sleepless nights before it received the rewards which come to him who destroys Nature. And when I speak of a corporation passing sleepless nights I do so advisedly, for at the beginning of its career the Acre Hill Land Improvement Company consisted of one man—a mild-mannered man who had previously labored in similar enterprises, and whose name was called blessed in a thousand uncomfortable houses in uncomfortable suburbs elsewhere, that, like Acre Hill, had once been garden spots, but had been "improved." Even a professional improver of land finds sleep difficult to woo at the beginning of such an enterprise. In the first instance, when one buys land, giving a mortgage in full payment therefor, with the land as security, one appears to have assumed a moderately heavy burden. Then, when to this one adds the enormous expense of cutting streets through the most beautiful of the sylvan glades, the building of sewers, and the erection of sample houses, to say nothing of the strain upon the intellect in the selection of names for the streets and lanes and circles that spring into being, one cannot but wonder how the master mind behind it all manages to survive.

But the Acre Hill Land Improvement Company did survive,

and Dumfries Corners watched its progress with much interest. Regrets were expressed when some historic knoll was levelled in order to provide a nice flat space for a public square. Youngsters who had bagged many a partridge on Acre Hill felt like weeping when one stretch of bush after another was cut ruthlessly away in order that a pretentious-looking structure, the new home of the Acre Hill Country Club, might be erected. Lovers sighed when certain noble old oaks fraught with sentimental associations fell before the unsentimental axes of the Improvement Company; and numberless young Waltons muttered imprecations upon the corporation that filled in with stone and ashes the dear old pond that once gave forth fish in great abundance, and through earthen pipes diverted the running brook, that hitherto had kept it full, into a brand-new sewer.

These lovers of nature could not understand the great need of our constantly growing population for uncomfortable houses in inconvenient suburbs, and in their failure to comprehend they became cavilers. But others—those who admire the genius which enables a man to make unproductive land productive, who hail as benefactor one who supplants a profitless oak of a thousand years' standing with a thriving butcher-shop—these people understood what was being done for Dumfries Corners, but wondered how the venture was to be made profitable. There were already more vacant houses in Dumfries Corners than could be rented, more butcher-shops than could be supported, more clubs than could be run without a deficit. But the Acre Hill Land

Improvement Company went on, and within three years paradise had become earth, and the mild-mannered and exceedingly amiable gentleman who had replaced the homes of the birds with some fifteen or twenty houses for small families could look about him and see greater results than ever greeted the eyes of Romulus in the days of the great Rome Land Improvement Company.

Most wonderful of all, he was still solvent! But a city is not a city, nor, in its own degree, a suburb a suburb, without inhabitants; and while to a mind like that back of the Acre Hill Land Improvement Company it is seemingly a moderately easy task to lay out a suburb in so far as its exterior appointments are concerned, the rub comes in the getting of citizens. A Standard Oil magnate can build a city if he is willing to spend the money, but all the powers of heaven and earth combined cannot manufacture offhand a citizenship. In an emergency of this nature most land improvement companies would have issued pretty little pamphlets, gotten up in exquisite taste, full of beautiful pictures and bubbling over with enthusiastic text, all based upon possibilities rather than upon realities.

But the Acre Hill Land Improvement Company was sincere and honest. It believed in advertising what it had; it believed in dilating somewhat on the possibilities, but it was too honest to claim for itself virtues it did not possess.

So it tried different methods. The Acre Hill Country Club was the first of these, and a good idea it was. It was successful from the start, socially. Great numbers attended the entertainments

and dances, although these were rather poorly conducted. Still, the Country Club was a grand success. It gave much and received nothing. Dumfries Corners, reluctant to approve of anything, approved of it.

But no lots were sold! The Acre Hill Land Improvement Company was willing to make itself popular—very willing. Didn't mind giving Dumfries Corners people free entertainment, but—lots didn't sell. What is the use of paying the expenses of a club if lots don't sell? This was a new problem for the company to consider. There were sixteen houses ready for occupancy, and consuming interest at a terrible rate, but no one came to look at them. Acre Hill was a charming spot, no doubt, but for some unknown reason or other it failed to take hold of the popular fancy, despite the attractions of the club.

Suddenly the head of the institution had an idea. In the great metropolis there was an impecunious and popular member of Uppertendom whose name had been appearing in the society journals with great frequency for years. He formerly had been prosperous, but now he was down financially; yet society still received and liked him, for he had many good points and was fundamentally what the world calls a good fellow.

"Why not send for Jocular Jimson Jones?" suggested the head and leading spirit of the Improvement Company. "We can offer him one of our cottages, and pay his debts if he has any, if he will live here and give us the benefit of his social prestige."

The suggestion was received with enthusiasm. Mr. Jones was



summoned, came and inspected the cottage, and declined. He really couldn't, you know. Of course he was down, but not quite down to the level of a cottage of that particular kind. He still had plenty of friends whom he could visit and who would be charmed to entertain him in the style to which he was accustomed. Why, therefore, should he do this thing, and bring himself down to the level of the ordinary commuter? No, indeed. Not he! The Directors saw the point, and next offered him—and this time he accepted—the free use of the residence of one of the officers of the company, a really handsome, pretentious structure, with a commanding view, stable, green-houses, graceful lawns, and all other appurtenances of a well-appointed country seat. In addition to the furnishing of the house in proper taste, they put coal in the cellar and fly-screens in the windows. They filled the residence with servants, and indorsed the young person at the grocer's and butcher's. They bought him a surrey and a depot wagon. They bought him horses and they stocked him well with fine cigars. They paid his tailor's bills, and sundry other pressing monetary affairs were funded. In fact, the Acre Hill Land Improvement Company set Jocular Jimson Jones up and then gave him *carte blanche* to entertain; and inasmuch as Jocular had a genius for entertaining, it is hardly necessary to say that he availed himself of his opportunity.

During that first summer at Acre Hill Mr. Jones had the best time of his life. His days were what the vulgar term "all velvet." His new residence was so superb that it restored his credit in

the metropolis, and city "swells," to whom he was under social obligation, went home, after having been paid in kind, wondering if Jocular Jimson Jones had unearthed somewhere a recently deceased rich uncle. He gave suppers of most lavish sort. He had vaudeville shows at the club-house, with talent made up of the most exclusive young men and women of the city. The Amateur Thespians of the Borough of Manhattan gave a whole series of performances at the club during the autumn, and by slow degrees the society papers began to take notice. Acre Hill began to be known as "a favorite resort of the 400." Nay, even the sacred 150 had penetrated to its very core, wonderingly, however, for none knew how Jocular Jimson Jones could do it. Still, they never declined an invitation. As a natural result the market for Acre Hill lots grew active. The sixteen cottages were sold, and the purchasers found themselves right in the swim. It was the easiest thing in the world to get into society if you only knew how. Jocular Jimson Jones was a fine, approachable, neighborly person, and at the Country Club dances was quite as attentive to the hitherto unknown Mrs. Scraggs as he was to Mrs. John Jacob Wintergreen, the acknowledged leader of the 400. Mrs. Wintergreen, too, was not unapproachable. She talked pleasantly during a musicale at the club-house with Mr. Scraggs, and said she hoped some day to have the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Scraggs; and when Scraggs, in response, said he would go and get her she most amiably begged him not to leave her alone. Months went by, and where sixteen empty houses had been,

there were now sixty all occupied, and lots were going like hot cakes. Tuxedo was in the shade. Lenox was dying. Newport was dead. Society flocked to Acre Hill and hobnobbed with Acre Hillians. Acre Hillians became somewhat proud of themselves, and rather took to looking down upon Dumfries Corners people. Dumfries Corners people were nice, and all that, but not particularly interesting in the sense that "our set," with Jocular Jimson Jones at the head of it, was interesting.

Then came the County Ball. This Jocular engineered himself, and the names of the lady patrons were selected from the oldest and the newest on the list. Mrs. Wintergreen's name led, of course, but Mrs. Scraggs' name was there too, sandwiched in between those of Mrs. Van Cortlandtuyvel and Mrs. Gardenior, of Gardenior's Island, representing two families which would carry social weight either in Boston or the "other side of Market Street." There were four exalted names from the city, one from Dumfries Corners, and seven from Acre Hill.

Then more lots sold, and still more, and then, alas, came the end! Jocular Jimson Jones was too successful.

After two years of glory the social light of Acre Hill went out. The Acre Hill Land Improvement Company retired from the business. All its lots were sold, and, of course, there was no further need for the services of Jocular Jimson Jones. His efforts were crowned with success. His mission was accomplished, but he moved away—I think regretfully, for, after all, he had found the Acre Hill people a most likable lot—but it was inevitable that,

there being no more fish to catch, the anglers needed no bait, and Jocular Jimson had to go. Where he has gone to there is no one who knows. He has disappeared wholly, even in the metropolis, and, most unfortunately for Acre Hill, with Jocular Jimson Jones have departed also all its social glories. None of the elect come to its dances any more. The amateur thespians of the exclusive set no longer play on the stage of its club-house, and it was only last week that Mrs. John Jacob Wintergreen passed Mr. Scraggs on the street with a cold glare of unrecognition.

Possibly when Acre Hill reads this it will understand, possibly not.

Dumfries Corners people understood it right along, but then they always were a most suspicious lot, and fond of an amusing spectacle that cost them nothing.

# THE STRANGE MISADVENTURES OF AN ORGAN

Carson was a philosopher, and on the whole it was a great blessing that he was so. No man needed to be possessor of a philosophical temperament more than he, for, in addition to being a resident of Dumfries Corners, Carson had other troubles which, to an excitable nature, would have made life a prolonged period of misery. He was the sort of a man to whom irritating misfortunes of the mosquito order have a way of coming. To some of us it seemed as if a spiteful Nature took pleasure in pelting Carson with petty annoyances, none of them large enough to excite compassion, many of them of a sort to provoke a quiet smile. Of all the dogs in the neighborhood it was always his dog that got run into the pound, although it was equally true that Carson's dog was one of the few that were properly licensed. If he bought a new horse something would happen to it before a week had elapsed; and how his coachman once ripped off the top of his depot wagon by driving it under a loose telephone wire is still one of the stories of the vicinity in which he lives. Anything out of the way in the shape of trouble seemed to choose the Carson household for experimental purposes. He was the medium by which new varieties of irritations were introduced to an ungrateful world, but such was his nature that, given the

companionship of Herbert Spencer and a cigar, he could be absolutely counted on not to murmur.

This disposition to accept the trials and tribulations which came upon him without a passionate outburst was not by any means due to amiability. Carson was of too strong a character to be continually amiable. He merely exercised his philosophy in meeting trouble. He boiled within, but presented a calm, unruffled front to the world, simply because to do otherwise would involve an expenditure of nervous force which he did not consider to be worth while.

I can never forget the sense of admiring regard which I experienced when in Genoa, while he and I were about to enter our banker's together, he slipped upon a bit of banana peeling, bruising his knee and destroying his trouser leg. I should have indulged in profane allusions to the person who had thoughtlessly thrown the peeling upon the ground if by some mischance the accident had happened to me. Carson, however, did nothing of the sort, but treated me to a forcible abstract consideration of the unthinking habits of the masses.

The unknown individual who was responsible for the accident did not enter into the question; no one was consigned to everlasting torture in the deepest depths of purgatory; a calm, dispassionate presentation of an abstraction was all that greeted my ears. The practice of thoughtlessness was condemned as a thing entirely apart from the practitioner, and as a tendency needing correction. Inwardly, I know he swore; outwardly, he

was as serene as though nothing untoward had happened to him. It was then that I came to admire Carson. Before that he had my affectionate regard in fullest measure, but now admiration for his deeper qualities set in, and it has in no sense diminished as time has passed. Once, and once only, have I known him to depart from his philosophical demeanor, and that one departure was, I think, justified by the situation, since it was the culminating point of a series of aggravations, to fail to yield to which would have required a more than human strength.

The incident to which I refer was in connection with a fine organ, which at large expense Carson had had built in his house, for, like all philosophers, Carson has a great fondness for music, and is himself a musician of no mean capacity. I have known him to sit down under a parlor-lamp and read over the score of the "Meistersinger" just as easily as you or I would peruse one of the lighter novels of the day. This was one of his refuges. When his spirit was subjected to an extreme tension he relieved his soul by flying to the composers; to use his own very bad joke, when he was in need of composure he sought out the "composures." As time progressed, however, and the petty annoyances grew more numerous, the merely intellectual pleasure of the writings of Wagner and Handel and Mozart possibly failed to suffice, and an organ was contracted for.

"I enjoy reading the music," said he as we sat and talked over his plan, "but sometimes—very often, in fact—I feel as if something ought to shriek, and I'm going to have an organ of my

own to do it for me."

So, as I have said, the organ was contracted for, was built, and an additional series of trials began. Upon a very important occasion the organ declined to shriek, although every effort to persuade it to perform the functions for which it was designed was made. Forty or fifty very charming people were gathered together to be introduced to the virtues of the new instrument—for Carson was not the kind of man to keep to himself the good things which came into his life; he shared all his blessings, while keeping his woes to himself; a well-known virtuoso was retained to set forth the possibilities of the acquisition, and all was going as "merry as a marriage bell" when suddenly there came a wheeze, and the fingers of the well-known virtuoso were powerless to elicit the harmonious shrieks which all had come to hear.

It was a sad moment, but Carson was equal to the occasion.

"Something's out of gear," he said, with a laugh due rather to his philosophical nature than to mirth. "I'm afraid we'll have to finish on the piano."

And so we did, and a delightful evening we had of it, although many of us went home wondering what on earth was the matter with the organ.

A few days later I met Carson on the train and the mystery was solved.

"The trouble was with the water-pipes," he explained. "They were put in wrong, and the location of the house is such that every time Colonel Hawkins, on the other side of the street, takes



a bath, all the water that flows down the hill is diverted into his tub."

I tried not to laugh.

"You'll have to enter into an agreement with the Colonel," I said. "Make him promise not to bathe between certain hours."

"That's a good idea," said Carson, smiling, "but after all I guess I'd better change the pipes. Heaven forbid that in days like these I should seek to let any personal gratification stand between another man and the rare virtue of cleanliness."

Several weeks went by, and men were busily employed in seeing that the water supply needed for a proper running of the organ came direct from the mains, instead of coming from a pipe of limited capacity used in common by a half dozen or more residents of a neighboring side street.

Somewhere about the end of the fourth week Carson invited me to dinner. The organ was all right again, he said. The water supply was sufficient, and if I cared to I might dine with him, and afterward spend an evening sitting upon the organ bench while Carson himself manipulated the keys. I naturally accepted the invitation, since, in addition to his other delightful qualities, Carson is a past grand-master in the art of giving dinners. He is a man with a taste, and a dinner good enough for him is a thing to arouse the envy of the gods. Furthermore, as I have already said, he is a musician of no mean order, and I know of no greater pleasure than that of sitting by his side while he "potters through a score," as he puts it. But there was a disappointment in store

for us. I called at the appointed hour and found the household more or less in consternation. The cook had left, and a dinner of "cold things" confronted us.

"She couldn't stand the organ," explained Carson. "She said it got on to her nerves—'rumblin' like.'"

I gazed upon him in silent sympathy as we dined on cold roast beef, stuffed olives, and ice cream.

"This is serious," my host observed as we sat over our coffee and cigars after the repast. "That woman was the only decent cook we've managed to secure in seven years, and, by Jingo, the minute she gets on to my taste the organ gets on to her nerves and she departs!"

"One must eat," I observed.

"That's just it," said Carson. "If it comes to a question of cook or organ the organ will have to go. She was right about it, though. The organ does rumble like the dickens. Some of the bass notes make the house buzz like an ocean-steamer blowing off steam."

It was a picturesque description, for I had noticed at times that when the organ was being made to shriek fortissimo every bit of panelling in the house seemed to rattle, and if a huge boiler of some sort suffering from internal disturbance had been growling down in the cellar, the result would have been quite similar.

"It may work out all right in time," Carson said. "The thing is new yet, and you can't expect it to be mellow all at once. What I'm afraid of, apart from the inability of our cook to stand the racket, is that this quivering will structurally weaken the house.

What do you think?"

"Oh, I don't know," I said. "Some of the wainscot panels rattle a bit, but I imagine the house will stand it unless you go in too much for Wagner. 'Tannhäuser' or 'Siegfried' might shake a few beams loose, but lighter music, I think, can be indulged in with impunity."

Time did not serve, as Carson had hoped, to mellow things. Indeed, the succeeding weeks brought more trouble, and most of it came through the organ. Some of the rattling panels, in spite of every effort to make them fast, rattled the more. One night when the servants were alone in the house, of its own volition the organ sent forth, to break the still hours, a blood-curdling basso-profundo groan that suggested ghosts to their superstitious minds. The housemaid came to regard the instrument as something uncanny, and, even as the cook had done before her, shook the dust of the house of Carson from her feet.

Then a rat crawled into one of the pipes—Carson was unable to ascertain which—and died there, with results that baffle description. I doubt if Wagner himself could have expressed the situation in his most inspired moments. Still Carson was philosophical.

"I'll play a requiem to the rodent," he said, "that will make him turn over in his grave, wherever that interesting spot may be."

This he did, and the effect was superb, and no doubt the deceased did turn over in his grave, for the improvisation called into play every pipe on the whole instrument. However, I could

see that this constant pelting at the hands of an unkind fate through the medium of his most cherished possession was having its effect upon Carson's hitherto impregnable philosophy. When he spoke of the organ it was with a tone of suppressed irritation which boded ill, and finally I was not surprised to hear that he had offered to give the organ away.

"After all," he said, "I made a mistake—flying so high. A man doesn't want a church-organ in his house any more than he wants an elephant for a lap-dog. I've offered it to the Unitarian Church."

I felt a little hurt about this, for my own church was badly in need of an instrument of that nature, but I said nothing, and considering the amount of trouble the organ had given I got over my regret when I realized that the Unitarian Church, and not mine, was shortly to have it. In this, however, I was mistaken, for, after due deliberation, the Unitarians decided that the organ was so very large that they'd have to build a new church to go with it, and so declined it with thanks.

Carson bit his lip and then offered it to us. "Don't seem to be able to give it away," he said. "But I'll try again. You tell your vestry that if they want it they can have it. I'll take it out and put it in the barn up in the hay-loft. They can take it or leave it. It will cost them cartage and the expense of putting it up."

I thanked him, and joyously referred the matter to the vestry. At first the members of that body were as pleased as I was, but after a few minutes of jubilation the Chairman of the Finance Committee asked; "How much will it cost to get this thing into

shape?"

Nobody knew, and finally the acceptance of the gift was referred to a committee consisting of the Chairman of the Finance Committee, the Chairman of the Music Committee, and myself, with full power to act.

Inquiry showed that the cost of every item in connection with the acceptance of the gift would amount to about a thousand dollars, and we called upon Carson to complete the arrangement. He received us cordially. We thanked him for his generosity, and were about to accept the gift finally, when the Chairman of the Finance Committee said:

"It is very good of you, Mr. Carson, to give us this organ. Heaven knows we need it, but it will cost us about a thousand dollars to put it in."

"So I judged," said Carson. "But when it is in you'll have a thirty-five-hundred-dollar organ."

"Splendid!" ejaculated the Chairman of the Music Committee.

"The great difficulty that now confronts us," said the financier, "is as to how we shall raise that money. The church is very poor."

"I presume it is a good deal of a problem in these times," acquiesced Carson. "Ah—"

"It's a most baffling one," continued the financier. "I suppose, Mr. Carson," he added, "that if we do put it in and pass around a subscription paper, we can count on you for—say two hundred and fifty dollars?"

I stood aghast, for I saw the thread of Carson's philosophy snap.

"What?" he said, with an effort to control himself.

"I say I suppose we can count on you for a subscription of two hundred and fifty dollars," repeated the financier.

There was a pause that seemed an eternity in passing. Carson's face worked convulsively, and the seeming complacency of the Chairman of the Finance Committee gave place to nervous apprehension as he watched the color surge through the cheeks and temples of our host.

He thought Carson was about to have a stroke of apoplexy.

I tried to think of something to say that might relieve the strain, but it wouldn't come, and on the whole I rather enjoyed the spectacle of the strong philosopher struggling with inclination, and I think the philosopher might have conquered had not the Chairman of the Music Committee broken in jocularly with:

"Unless he chooses to make it five hundred dollars, eh?" And he grinned maddeningly as he added: "If you'll give five hundred dollars we'll put a brass plate on it and call it 'The Carson Memorial,' eh? Ha—ha—ha."

Carson rose from his seat, walked into the hall and put on his hat.

"Mr.—ah—Blank," said he to the financier, "would you and Mr. Hicks mind walking down to the church with me?"

"Say, he's going to put it in for us!" whispered Hicks, the Chairman of the Music Committee, rubbing his hands gleefully.

"Don't you want me, Carson?" I asked, rising.

"No—you stay here!" he replied, shortly.

And then the three went out, while I lit a cigar and pottered about Carson's library. In half an hour he returned alone. His face was red and his hand trembled slightly, but otherwise he had regained his composure.

"Well?" said I.

"Well, I'm going to put it up," said he.

"Now—see here, Carson," I remonstrated. It seemed so like a rank imposition on his generosity. To give the organ was enough, without putting him to the expense of erecting it.

"Don't interrupt," said he. "I'm not going to put it up in the organ-loft, as you suppose, but in a place where it is likely to be quite as much appreciated."

"And that?" I asked.

"In the hay-loft," he replied.

"I don't blame you," said I, after a pause.

"Neither do I," said he.

"But why did you go down to the church?" I asked.

"Well," he explained, chuckling in spite of himself. "It was this way. My grandfather, I have been told, used to be able to express himself profanely without using a profane word, but I can't, and there were one or two things I wanted to say to those men that wouldn't go well with the decorations of my house, and which couldn't very well be said to a guest in my house."

"But, man alive, you didn't go to the church to do your

swearing?"

"No," he answered. "I did it on the way down; and," he added, enthusiastically, "I did it exceeding well."

"But why the church?" I persisted.

"I thought after what I had to say to them," said he, "that they might need a little religious consolation."

And with that the subject was dropped.

The organ, as Carson threatened, was transferred to the hay-loft and not to the church, and as for the two Chairmen, they have several times expressed themselves to the effect that Carson is a very irritable, not to say profane, person.

But I am still inclined to think him a philosopher. Under the provocation any man of a less philosophical temperament might have forgotten the laws of hospitality and cursed his offending guests in his own house.



# THE PLOT THAT FAILED

Among the most promising residents of Dumfries Corners some ten years ago was a certain Mr. Richard Partington Smithers, whose brilliant début and equally sudden extinguishment in the field of literary endeavor have given rise from time to time to no little discussion. He was young, very young, indeed, at the time of his great literary success, and his friends and neighbors prophesied great things for him. Yet nothing has since come from his pen, and many have wondered why.

Thanks to Mr. Smithers himself I am enabled to make public the story of his sudden withdrawal from the ranks of the immortals when on the very threshold of the temple of fame.

Ten years have changed his point of view materially, and an experience that once seemed tragedy to him is now in his eyes sufficiently tinged with comedy, and his own position among us is so secure that he is willing that the story of his failure should go forth.

After trying many professions Smithers had become a man of schemes. He devised plans that should enrich other people. Unfortunately, he sold these to other people on a royalty basis, and so failed to grow rich himself. If he had only sold his plans outright and collected on the spot he might sometime have made something; but this he did not do, and as a consequence he rarely

made anything that was at all considerable, and finally, to keep the wolf out of his dining-room, he was forced to take up poetry, that being in his estimation the last as well as the easiest resource of a well-ordered citizen.

"I always threatened to take up poetry when all else had failed me," he said to himself; "therefore I will now proceed to take up poetry. Writing is purely manual labor, anyhow. Given a pad, a pencil, and perseverance—three very important p's—and I can produce a fourth, a poem, in short order. Sorry I didn't get to the end of my other ropes before, now that I think of it."

And so he sat down and took up poetry.

He put it down again, however, very quickly.

"Dear me!" he ejaculated. "Now, who'd have thought that? Here I have the pencil and the pad and the perseverance, but I'm hanged if the poem is quite as easy as I had supposed. These little conceits aren't so easy to write, after all, even when they contain no ideas. Of course, it isn't hard to say:

"Sweet month of May, time of the violet wild,  
The dandelion golden, and the mild  
Ethereal sweetness of the blossoming trees,  
The soft suggested calor of the breeze,  
The ruby-breasted robin on the lawn,  
The thrushes piping sweetly at the dawn,  
The gently splashing waters by the weir,  
The rose- and lilac-laden atmosphere'—

"because, after all, it's nothing but a catalogue of the specialties of May; but how the dickens to wind the thing up is what puzzles me. It's too beautiful and truly poetic to be spoiled by a completing couplet like:

"'And in the distant dam the croaking frog  
Completes, O May, thy wondrous catalogue.'

"Nobody would take a thing like that—and pay for it; but what else can be said? What do the violets wild, the dandelion, the ruby-breasted robin, and the lilac-laden atmosphere and other features all do, I'd like to know? What one of many verbs—oh, tut! Poetry very evidently is not in my line, after all. I'll turn the vials of my vocabulary upon essay-writing."

Which Partington, as his friends called him, proceeded at once to do. He applied himself closely to his desk for one whole morning, and wrote a very long paper on "The Tendency of the Middle Ages Towards Artificialism." Hardly one of the fifteen thousand words employed by him in the construction of this paper held fewer than five syllables, and one or two of them got up as high as ten, a fact which led Partington to think that the editor of the *South American Quarterly Review* ought at least to have the refusal of it. Apparently the editor of the *South American Quarterly Review* was only too eager to have the refusal of it, because he refused it, or so Partington observed in confidence to an acquaintance, in less time than it could possibly

have taken him to read it. After that the essay became emulous of men like Stanley and Joe Cook. It became a great traveller, but never failed to get back in safety to its fond parent, Richard Partington Smithers, as our hero now called himself. Finally, Partington did manage to realize something on his essay—that is to say, indirectly—for after "The Tendency of the Middle Ages Towards Artificialism" had gone the rounds of all the reviews, monthlies, dailies, and weeklies in the country, its author pigeon-holed it, and, stringing together the printed slips it had brought back to him upon the various occasions of its return, he sent these under the head of "How Editors Reject" to an evening journal in Boston, whose readers could know nothing of the subject, for reasons that are familiar to those who are acquainted with American letters. For this he not only received the editor's thanks, but a six months' subscription to the journal in question—the latter of which was useful, since every night, excluding Sundays, its columns contained much valuable information on such subjects as "How to Live on Fifty Dollars a Year," "How to Knit an Afghan with One Needle," and "How Not to Become a Novelist."

Discouraged by the fate of his essay, Partington endeavored to get a position on a railway somewhere as a conductor or brakeman; but failing in this, he returned once more to his writing-table and wrote a novel. This was the hardest work he had ever attempted. It took him quite a week to think his story out and put it together; but when he had it done he was glad

he had stuck conscientiously to it, for the results really seemed good to him. The book was charmingly written, he thought; so charming, in fact, that he did not think it necessary to have a type-written copy made of it before sending it out to the publishers. Possibly this was a mistake. For a time Partington really believed it was a mistake, because the publisher who saw it first returned it without comment, prejudiced against it, no doubt, by the fact that it came to him in the author's autograph. The second publisher was not so rude. He said he would print it if Partington would advance one thousand dollars to protect him against loss. The third publisher evidently thought better of the book, for he only demanded protection to the amount of seven hundred and fifty dollars, which, of course, Partington could not pay; and in consequence *False but Fair* never saw the light of day as a published book.

"Is it rejected because of its length, its breadth, or what?" he had asked the last publisher who had turned his back on the book.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Mr. Smithers," the publisher had answered, "all that our readers had to say about it—and the three who read it agreed unanimously—was that the book is immature. You do not write like an adult."

"Thanks," said Partington, as he bowed himself out. "If that's the truth, I'll try writing for juveniles. I'll sit right down to-night and knock off a short story about 'Tommy and the Huckleberry-tree.' I don't know whether huckleberries grow on trees or on huckles, but that will make the tale all the more interesting. If

they don't grow on trees people will regard the story as romance. If they do grow on trees it will be realism."

True to his promise, that night Partington did write a story, and it was, as he had said it should be, about "Tommy and the Huckleberry-tree"; and so amusing did it appear to the editor of that eminent juvenile periodical, *Nursery Days*, because of what he supposed was the author's studied ignorance on the subject of huckleberries, that it was accepted instantler, and the name of Richard Partington Smithers shortly appeared in all the glory of type.

Partington walked on air for at least a week after his effusion appeared in print. He had visions night and day in which he seemed to see himself the centre of the literary circle, and as he promenaded the avenue in the afternoons he felt almost inclined to stop people who passed him by to tell them who he was, and thus enable them to feast their eyes on one whose name would shortly become a household word. All reasonable young authors feel this way after their first draught at the soul-satisfying spring of publicity. It is only that preposterous young person who was born tired who fails to experience the sensations that were Partington's that week; and at the end of the week, again like the reasonable young author, he began to realize that immortality could not be gained by one story treating of a fictitious Tommy and an imaginary huckleberry-tree, and so he sat himself down at his desk once more, resolved this time to clinch himself, as it were, in the public mind, with a tale of "Jimmie and the

Strawberry-mine." This story did not come as easily as the other. In fact, Partington found it impossible to write more than a third of the second tale that night. He couldn't bring his mind down to it exactly, probably because his mind had been soaring so high since the publication of his first effusion. For diversion as much as for anything else during a lull in his flow of language he penned a short letter to the editor of *Nursery Days*, and announced his intention to send the story of "Jimmie and the Strawberry-mine" to him shortly—which was unfortunate. If he had finished the story first and then sent it, it might have been good enough to convince the editor against his judgment that he ought to have it. A concrete story can often accomplish more than an abstract idea. In this event it could not have accomplished less, anyhow, for the editor promptly replied that he did not care for a second story of that nature. There was no particular evidence in hand, he said, that the children liked stories of that kind particularly, adding that the first was only an experiment that it was not necessary to repeat, and so on; polite, but unmistakably valedictory.

"No evidence in hand that they are liked, eh? Well, how on earth, I wonder," Partington said, angrily, to himself, "do they ever find evidence that things are liked? Do they go about asking subscribers, or what?"

And then he picked up the issue of *Nursery Days* that had started him along on his way to immortality, to console himself, at all events, with the sight of his published story. In turning over

the leaves of the periodical his eye fell upon a page across the top of which ran a highly ornate cut which indicated that there was printed the "Post-office Department of *Nursery Days*," on perusing which Partington found a number of communications and editorial responses like these:



# I

"DEAR POSTMASTER,—I have been taking *Nursery Days* since Christmas, so I thought I would write you a letter. My birthday came a week ago Thursday. I received a watch and chain, a glove-buttoner, a penknife, and a set of ivory jackstraws. We have a cat at home whose name is Rumpelstilzken. He is very sleepy, and sleeps all day. He always picks out the most comfortable chair, and then feels very much injured if we turn him out. I like Bolivar Wiggins's story in your last paper very much. Are you going to have any more stories by Bolivar Wiggins?

"Your little friend, "HELEN CHECKERBY, aged seven.

"[We hope soon to have a new story from Mr. Wiggins, Helen. We wish we could see your cat. He seems a very sensible cat.—EDITOR *Nursery Days*.]"

## II

"CANADA.

I am a little girl nearly ten years old, and as I like your paper very much I thought you would like a letter from me. Here is a cow's head I drew. It is not very good, but I wanted to see if I would get a prize or not. I have two little sisters; their names are Jennie and Fanny. I hope I will see my letter in print. The stories I like best are Bolivar Wiggins's story about 'Solemn Sophy' and his other one about 'Bertie's Balloon.' Have you any more stories by him? I must close now, so good-bye.

"LILLIAN JAMES.

"[Several, Lillian. Your cow is beautiful, and perhaps some day it will appear in this column. Watch carefully, and maybe you will see it.—EDITOR *Nursery Days*.]"

"Ah!" said Partington, softly, as he read these effusions. "That is why Bolivar Wiggins is permitted to cover so much space, eh? The children like his stories well enough to write letters about him—or perhaps Bolivar himself—ah!"

The second "ah" uttered by Partington indicated that a thought had flashed across his mind—a thought not particularly complimentary to Bolivar Wiggins.

"Perhaps," he said, slowly, "Bolivar writes these letters to the editor himself—and if Bolivar, why not I?"

It was a tempting—alas, too tempting—opportunity to supply the editor of *Nursery Days* with the needed evidence that stories of the "Tommy and the Huckleberry-tree" order were the most popular literary novelty of the day, and to it, in a moment of weakness, Partington succumbed. I regret to have to record the fact that he passed the balance of the night writing letters from fictitious "Sallies, aged six," "Warry and Georgie, twins, aged twelve," and others dwelling in widely separated sections of the country, to the number of at least two dozen, all of which, being an expert penman, Partington wrote in a diversity of juvenile hands that was worthy of a better cause. Here are two samples of the letters he wrote that night:

# I

*"NORWICH, CONNECTICUT.*

"I have taken the *Nursery Days* for one year, and think it is a very nice paper. For pets I have two cats, named Lady Tompkins and Jimpsey. I have tried to solve the 'Caramel Puzzle,' but think one answer is wrong. I go to school, and there are forty-four scholars in my room. My little kitty Jimpsey sleeps all day long, and at night she is playful. She wakes me up in the morning, and then waits till I get up. Who is Mr. Smithers who wrote that beautiful story about 'Tommy and the Huckleberry-tree'? Everybody of all ages, from baby to my grandmother, likes it and hopes you will print more by that author.

"SARAH WINKLETOP."

## II

"YONKERS, N. Y.

"Our Uncle Willie in New York sends us *Nursery Days* every week. We like it immensely, and every one tries to get the first reading of it. "Tommy and the Huckleberry-tree" is a splendid story. Papa bought six copies of *Nursery Days* with that in it to send to my little cousins in England.

"JIMMIE CONWAY RHODES."

Others were more laudatory of Partington's story, some less so, but each demanded more of his work.

These written, Partington made arrangements to have them posted from the various towns wherein they were ostensibly written, and then, when they had been posted, he chuckled slightly and sat down to await developments.

It took a trifle over one week for developments to develop, and then they developed rapidly. Just eight days after his conception of this magnificent scheme the postman whistled at Partington's door and left this note:

*OFFICE OF NURSERY DAYS,  
NEW YORK, March 16, 1889.*

"*Richard Partington Smithers, Esq.:*

"DEAR SIR,—Can you call upon me some afternoon

this week? Yours truly,  
THOMAS JACKSON TORPYHUE,  
*"Editor Nursery Days."*

"The bait is good, and I'll land the fish at once," said Partington, his face wreathing with smiles. "I'll call upon Mr. Thomas Jackson Torpyhue."

And call he did. Two hours later he entered the sanctum of the editor of *Nursery Days*.

"Good-afternoon," he said, as he sat down at the editor's side.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Smithers," said Mr. Torpyhue. "I'm very glad to see you."

"I thought you'd be," began Partington, forgetting himself for a moment in his triumph. "If that wasn't evidence enough that I—ah—oh—er—ah! Ahem! Why, certainly," he continued, suddenly recalling the fact that as yet he could properly have no knowledge of the evidence in question.

The editor threw his head back and laughed, and Partington forced himself to join him, nervously withal.

"You have heard of the evidence have you?" asked Mr. Torpyhue.

Partington gasped faintly, and said he thought not.

"Well, it's very strange, Mr. Smithers," said Mr. Torpyhue, "but do you know that you have developed into one of our most popular authors?"

"Indeed?" queried Partington, pulling himself together and trying to appear gratified.

"Yes, sir. Here is a bundle of twenty-four letters all received within three days. One of the letters calls you the best writer of short stories of the day. Another, from Canada, written by a parent, says that you have written one of the most delightful bits of juvenile humor that he has seen in forty years."

"How extremely flattering!" said Partington, faintly.

"Yes, extremely," assented the editor, dryly. "And now, Mr. Smithers, I'm going to do for you what this paper has never done even to its most popular author in the past."

"Now, my dear Mr. Torpyhue," began Partington, gaining courage, "I beg you not to feel called upon to discriminate against your old favorites in my favor. Your present rates of payment are entirely satisfac—"

"You misunderstand me, Mr. Smithers," interrupted Mr. Torpyhue. "What I'm going to do to you that I never before have done even to our most popular author is to return to you at once every one of those highly entertaining manuscripts you have favored us with—we receive so many real letters from real children that, of course, we cannot afford to buy from you purely fictitious ones. These of yours are excellently well done, but you see my point. One does not pay for things that can be had gratis. Perhaps later you will try us with something else," he added, with a grin.

Here Mr. Torpyhue paused, and Partington tried to think of something to say. It was all so sudden, however, and, in spite of his misgivings, so extremely unexpected, that his breath was

taken away. He had neither breath nor presence of mind enough left even to deny the allegation, and when he did recover his breath he found himself walking dejectedly down the stairs of the *Nursery Days* building with his bundle of encomia in his hands.

"I wonder how he caught on!" he groaned, as half an hour later he entered his room and threw himself face downward on his couch.

Investigation after dinner gave him a clue.

Not one of the letters had been mailed from the town in which it had been dated. The envelope containing the Washington letter bore the Boston postmark. The Brooklyn missive had been sent from Chicago, that from Norwich had been posted at Yonkers, and vice versa, and so on through the whole list. Each and every one had, through some evil chance, started wrong. In addition to this, Partington found that in a forgetful moment he had appended to two of the communications an editorial response promising more work from Mr. Smithers.

"I must have been muddled by my success with 'Tommy and the Huckleberry-tree,'" he sighed, as he cast the documents into the fire. "If that's the effect literary honors have on me I'd better quit the profession, which leaves only two things to be done. I shall have to commit one of two crimes—suicide or matrimony. The question now is, which?"

He thought deeply for a moment, and then, putting on his hat and overcoat, he turned off the gas and left the room.

"I'll call on Harris, borrow a cent from him, and let the toss



decide," he said, as he passed out into the night.

Is it really any wonder that Mr. Smithers has given up literature?

# THE BASE INGRATITUDE OF BARKIS, M.D

The time has arrived when it is possibly proper that I should make a note of the base ingratitude of Barkis, M.D. I have hesitated to do this hitherto for several reasons, any one of which would prove a valid excuse for my not doing so. To begin with, I have known Barkis ever since he was a baby. I have tossed him in the air, to his own delight and to the consternation of his mother, who feared lest I should fail to catch him on his way down, or that I should underestimate the distance between the top of his head and the ceiling on his way up. Later I have held him on my knee and told him stories of an elevating nature—mostly of my own composition—and have afterwards put these down upon paper and sold them to syndicates at great profit. So that, in a sense, I am beholden to Barkis for some measure of my prosperity. Then, when Barkis grew older, I taught him the most approved methods of burning his fingers on the Fourth of July, and when he went to college I am convinced that he gained material aid from me in that I loaned him my college scrap-books, which contained, among other things, a large number of examination papers which I marvel greatly to-day that I was ever able successfully to pass, and which gave to him some hint as to the ordeal he was about to go through. In his younger professional days, also, I have been

Barkis's friend, and have called him up, to minister to a pain I never had, at four o'clock in the morning, simply because I had reason to believe that he needed four or five dollars to carry him through the ensuing hours of the day.

Quotation books have told us that in love, as well as in war, all is fair, and if this be true Barkis's ingratitude, the narration of which cannot now give pain to any one, becomes, after all, nothing more than a venial offence. I do not place much reliance upon the ethics of quotation books generally, but when I remember my own young days, and the things I did to discredit the other fellow in that little affair which has brought so much happiness into my own life, I am inclined to nail my flag to the masthead in defence of the principle that lovers can do no wrong. It is no ordinary stake that a lover plays for, and if he stacks the cards, and in other ways turns his back upon the guiding principles of his life, blameworthy as he may be, I shall not blame him, but shall incline rather towards applause.

On the other hand, something is due to the young ladies in the case, and as much for their sake as for any other reason have I set upon paper this narrative of the man's ingratitude, simply telling the story and drawing no conclusions whatever.

Barkis was not endowed with much in the way of worldly possessions. His father had died when the lad was very young, and had left the boy and his mother to struggle on alone. But there was that in both of them which enabled the mother to feel that the boy was worth struggling for, and the boy at a very early age to

realize the difficulties of the struggle, and to like the difficulties because they afforded him an opportunity to help his mother either by not giving her unnecessary trouble or in bringing to her efforts in their mutual behalf aid of a very positive kind.

Boys of this kind—and in saying this I cast no reflections whatsoever upon that edifying race of living creatures whom I admire and respect more than any other—are so rare that it did not take the neighbors of the Barkis family many days to discover that the little chap was worth watching, and if need be caring for in a way which should prove substantial. There are so many ways, too, in which one may help a boy without impairing his self-reliance that on the whole it was not very difficult to assist Barkis. So when one of his neighbors employed him in his office at a salary of eight dollars a week, when other boys received only four for similar service, the lad, instead of feeling himself favored, assumed an obligation and made himself worth five times as much as the other boys, so that really his employer, and not he, belonged to the debtor class.

Some said it was a pity that little Barkis wasted his talents in a real estate office, but they were the people who didn't know him. He expended his nervous energy in the real estate office, but his mind he managed to keep free for the night school, and when it came to the ultimate it was found that little Barkis had wasted nothing. He entered college when several other boys—who had not served in a real estate office, who had received diplomas from the high-school, and who had played while he had studied

—failed.

That his college days were a trial to his mother every one knew. She wished him to keep his end up, and he did—and without spending all that his mother sent him, either. The great trouble was that at the end of his college course it was understood that Barkis intended studying medicine. When that crept out the neighbors sighed. They deprecated the resolve among themselves, but applauded the boy's intention to his face.

"Good for you, Jack!" said one. "You are just the man for a doctor, and I'll give you all my business."

This man, of course, was a humorist.

Another said: "Jack, you are perfectly right. Real estate and coal are not for you. Go in for medicine; when my leg is cut off you shall do the cutting."

To avoid details, however, some of which would make a story in themselves, Jack Barkis went through college, studied medicine, received his diploma as a full-fledged M.D., and settled down at Dumfries Corners for practice. And practice did not come! And income was not.

It was plainly visible to the community that Barkis was hard up, as the saying is, and daily growing more so. To make matters worse, it was now impossible to help him as the boy had been helped. He was no longer a child, but a man; and the pleasing little subterfuges, which we had employed to induce the boy to think he was making his way on his own sturdy little legs, with the man were out of the question. His clothing grew threadbare,

and there were stories of insufficient nourishment. As time went on the outward and visible signs of his poverty increased, yet no one could devise any plan to help him.

And then came a solution, and inasmuch as it was brought about by the S.F.M.E., an association of a dozen charming young women in the city forming the Society for Mutual Encouragement, or Enjoyment, or Endorsement, or something else beginning with E—I never could ascertain definitely what the E stood for—it would seem as if the young ladies should have received greater consideration than they did when prosperity knocked at the Doctor's door.

It seems that the Doctor attended a dance one evening in a dress coat, the quality and lack of quantity of which were a flagrant indication of a sparse, not to say extremely needy, wardrobe. All his charm of manner, his grace in the dance, his popularity, could not blind others to the fact that he was ill-dressed, and the girls decided that something must be done, and at once.

"We might give a lawn fete for his benefit," one of them suggested.

"He isn't a church or a Sunday-school," Miss Daisy Peters retorted. "Besides, I know Jack Barkis well enough to know that he would never accept charity from any one. We've got to help him professionally."

"We might boycott all the fellows at dances," suggested Miss Wilbur, "unless they will patronize the Doctor. Decline to dance

with them unless they present a certificate from Jack proving that they are his patients."

"Humph!" said Miss Peters. "That wouldn't do any good. They are all healthy, and even if they did go to Jack for a prescription the chances are they wouldn't pay him. They haven't much more money than he has."

"I am afraid that is true," assented Miss Wilbur. "Indeed, if they have any at all, I can't say that they have given much sign of it this winter. The Bachelors' Cotillon fell through for lack of interest, they said, but I have my doubts on that score. It's my private opinion they weren't willing or able to pay for it."

"Well, I'm sure I don't know what we can do to help Jack. If he had our combined pocket-money he'd still be poor," sighed Miss Peters.

"He couldn't be induced to take it unless he earned it," said little Betsy Barbett. "You all know that."

"Hurrah!" cried Miss Peters, clapping her hands ecstatically; "I have it! I have it! I have it! We'll put him in the way of earning it."

And they all put their heads together, and the following was the result:

The next day Jack Barkis's telephone rang more often in an hour than it had ever done before in a month, and every ring meant a call.

The first call was from Miss Daisy Peters, and he responded.

"I'm so sorry to send for you—er—Doctor," she said—

she had always called him Jack before, but now he had come professionally—"for—for—Rover, but the poor dog is awfully sick to-day, and Doctor Pruyn was out of town. Do you mind?"

"Certainly not, Daisy," he replied, a shade of disappointment on his face. I am inclined to believe he had hoped to find old Mr. Peters at death's door. "If the dog is sick I can help him. What are his symptoms?"

And Miss Peters went on to say that her cherished Rover, she thought, had malaria. He was tired and lazy, when usually he rivalled the cow that jumped over the moon in activity. She neglected to say that she had with her own fair hands given the poor beast a dose of sulphonal the night before—not enough to hurt him, but sufficient to make him appear tired and sleepy.

"I must see my patient," said the Doctor, cheerfully. "Will he come if I whistle?"

Miss Peters was disinclined to accede to this demand. She was beginning to grow fearful that Jack would see through her little subterfuge, and that the efforts of the S.F.M.E. would prove fruitless.

"Oh," she demurred, "is that—er—necessary? Rover isn't a child, you know. He won't stick out his tongue if you tell him to—and, er—I don't think you could tell much from his pulse—and—"

"I'd better see him, though," observed Jack, quietly. "I certainly can't prescribe unless I do."

So Rover was brought out, and it was indeed true that his old-



time activity had been superseded by a lethargy which made the wagging of his tail a positive effort. Still, Doctor Barkis was equal to the occasion, prescribed for the dog, and on his books that night wrote down a modest item as against Mr. Billington Peters and to his own financial credit. Furthermore, he had promised to call again the next day, which meant more practice.

On his return home he found a hurry call awaiting him. Miss Betsy Barbett had dislocated her wrist. So to the Barbett mansion sped Doctor Barkis, and there, sure enough, was Miss Barbett apparently suffering greatly.

"Oh, I am so glad you have come," she moaned. "It hurts dreadfully, Jack—I mean Doctor."

"I'll fix that in a second," said he, and he did, although he thought it odd that there were no signs of any inflammation. He was not aware that one of the most cherished and fascinating accomplishments of Miss Barbett during her childhood had been her ability to throw her wrist out of joint. She could throw any of her joints out of place, but she properly chose her wrist upon this occasion as being the better joint to intrust to a young physician. If Jack had known that until his coming her wrist had been all right, and that it had not become disjointed until he rang the front door bell of the Barbett house, he might not have been so pleased as he entered the item against Judge Barbett in his book, nor would he have wondered at the lack of inflammation.

So it went. The Hicks's cook was suddenly taken ill—Mollie Hicks gave her a dollar to do it—and Jack was summoned. The

Tarletons' coachman was kept out on a wet night for two hours by Janette Tarleton, and very properly contracted a cold, for which the young woman made herself responsible, and Doctor Barkis was called in. Then the society itself discovered many a case among the worthy poor needing immediate medical treatment from Barkis, M.D., and, although Jack wished to make no charge, insisted that he should, and threatened to employ some one else if he didn't.

By degrees a practice resulted from this conspiracy of the S.F.M.E., and then a municipal election came along, and each candidate for the Mayoralty was given quietly to understand by parties representing the S.F.M.E., that unless Jack Barkis was made health officer of the city he'd better look out for himself, and while both candidates vowed they had made no pledges, each had sworn ten days before election-day by all that was holy that Barkis should have this eighteen-hundred-dollar office—and he got it! Young women may not vote, but they have influence in small cities.

At the end of the second year of the S.F.M.E.'s resolve that Barkis must be cared for he was in receipt of nearly twenty-eight hundred dollars a year, could afford a gig, and so command a practice; and having obtained his start, his own abilities took care of the rest.

And then what did Jack Barkis, M.D., do? When luxuries began to manifest themselves in his home—indeed, when he found himself able to rent a better one—whom did he ask to

share its joys with him?

Miss Daisy Peters, who had dosed her dog that he might profit? No, indeed!

Miss Betsy Barbett, who disfigured her fair wrist in his behalf? Alas, no!

Miss Hicks, who had spent a dollar to bribe a cook that he might earn two? No, the ungrateful wretch!

Any member of the S.F.M.E.? I regret to say not.

He went and married a girl from Los Angeles, whom he met on one of the summer vacations the S.F.M.E. had put within his reach—a girl from whom no portion of his measure of prosperity had come.

Such was the ingratitude of Barkis. They have never told me so, but I think the S.F.M.E. feel it keenly. Barkis I believe to be unconscious of it—but then he is in love with Mrs. Barkis, which is proper; and as I have already indicated, when a man is in love there are a great many things he does not see—in fact, there is only one thing he does see, and that is Her Majesty, the Queen. I can't blame Barkis, and even though I was aware of the conspiracy to make him prosperous, I did not think of the ungrateful phase of it all until I spoke to Miss Peters about his *fiancée*, who had visited Dumfries Corners.

"She's charming," said I. "Don't you think so?"

"Oh yes," said Miss Peters, dubiously.

"But I don't see why Jack went to Los Angeles for a wife."

"Ah?" said I. "Maybe it was the only place where he could

find one."

"Thank you!" snapped Miss Peters. "For my part, I think the Dumfries Corners girls are quite as attractive—ah—Betsy Barbett for instance—or any other girl in Jack's circle."

"Like yourself?" I smiled.

"My!" she cried. "How can you say such a thing?"

And really I was sorry I had said it. It seemed so like twitting a person on facts, when I came to think about it.

# THE UTILITARIAN

## MR. CARRAWAY

The Christmas season was approaching, and Mr. Carraway, who had lately become something of a philosopher, began to think about gifts for his wife and children. The more he thought of them, the more firmly was he convinced that there was something radically wrong with the system of giving that had prevailed in past years. He conjured up visions of the useless things he had given and received on previous occasions, and an inventory of his personal receipts at the four celebrations leading up to the present disclosed the fact that he was long on match-boxes, cigar-cases, and smoking-jackets, the last every one of them too small, with an appalling supply of knitted and crocheted objects, the gifts of his children, in reserve. His boot-closet was a perfect revelation of the misdirected Christmas energies of the young, disclosing, as it always did upon occasions when he was in a great hurry, a half-dozen pairs of worsted slippers, which he had received at Yuletide, some of them adorned with stags of beads leaping over zephyr walls, and others made in the image of cats of extraordinary color, with yellow glass eyes set in directly over the toe whereon he kept his favorite corn. I am not sure that it was not the stepping of an awkward visitor upon one of these same glass eyes, while these slippers for the first time covered

his feet, that set Mr. Carraway to cogitating upon the hollowness of "Christmas as She is Celebrated." Indeed, it is my impression that at the very moment when that bit of adornment was pressed down upon Mr. Carraway's corn he announced rather forcibly his disbelief in the utility of any such infernal Christmas present as that. And as time went on, and that offending, staring slipper slipped into his hand every time he searched the closet in the dark for a left patent-leather pump, or some other missing bit of foot-gear, the conviction grew upon him that of the great reforms of which the world stood in crying need, the reformation of the Christmas gift was possibly the most important.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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