

Butler Ellis Parker

Perkins of Portland: Perkins The Great



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I. MR. PERKINS OF PORTLAND

THERE was very little about Perkins that was not peculiar. To mention his peculiarities would be a long task; he was peculiar from the ground up. His shoes had rubber soles, his hat had peculiar mansard ventilators on each side, his garments were vile as to fit, and altogether he had the appearance of being a composite picture.

We first met in the Golden Hotel office in Cleveland, Ohio. I was reading a late copy of a morning paper and smoking a very fairish sort of cigar, when a hand was laid on my arm. I turned and saw in the chair beside me a beaming face.

“Just read that!” he said, poking an envelope under my nose. “No, no!” he cried; “on the back of it.”

What I read was:

“Perkins’s Patent Porous Plaster Makes all pains and aches fly faster.”

“Great, isn’t it?” he asked, before I could express myself. “That first line, ‘Perkins’s Patent Porous Plaster,’ just takes the cake. And the last line! That is a gem, if I do say it myself. Has the whole story in seven words. ‘All pains and aches!’ Everything from sore feet to backache; all the way from A to Z in the dictionary of diseases. Comprehensive as a presidential message. Full of meat as a refrigerator- car. ‘Fly faster!’ Faster than any other patent med. or dope would make them fly. ‘Makes!’ They’ve got to fly! See? ‘Perkins’s Patent Porous Plaster MAKES all pains and aches fly faster,’ ‘makes ALL pains and aches fly faster,’ ‘makes all pains and aches fly FASTER.’ Isn’t she a beaut.? Say, you can’t forget that in a thousand years. You’ll find yourself saying it on your death-bed:

“Perkins’s Patent Porous Plaster
Makes all pains and aches fly faster.”

I held the envelope toward him, but he only tapped it with his finger.

“There is a fortune in those two lines,” he said. “I know it I’m Perkins, known from Maine to California as Perkins of Portland, Perkins the Originator. I have originated more ads. than any man living. See that shoe? It’s the ‘Go-lightly’ kind. I originated the term. See this hat? It’s Pratt’s. ‘Pratt’s Hats Air the Hair.’ I originated that ad. Result, six million pair of the Go-lightly kind of shoes sold the first year. Eight million Pratt’s Hats sold on the strength of ‘Air-the-Hair.’ See this suit? I originated the term ‘Ready-tailored.’ Result, a boom for the concern. Everybody crazy for Ready-tailored clothes. It’s all in the ad. The ad.’s the thing. Say, who originated ‘up-to-date in style, down-to-date in price?’ I did. Made half a million for a collar concern on that. See that fringe on those pants? And to think that the man who’s wearing them has made millions! Yes, millions – for other guys. But he’s done. It’s all off with Willie. Now Willie is going to make money for himself. Mr. Perkins of Portland is going to get rich. Are you with him?”

“How is the plaster?” I asked, for there was something taking about Perkins. “Is it good for anything?”

“Plaster!” he said. “Bother the plaster! The ad.’s all right, and that’s the main thing. Give me a good ad., and I’ll sell lead bullets for liver pills. Display ‘Perkins’s Bullets Kill the Disease’ in all the magazines, and in a year every person with or without a liver would be as full of lead as a printer’s case. Paint it on ten thousand barns, and the inhabitants of these glorious States would be plugged up like Mark Twain’s frog. Now I have here an ad. that is a winner. Give me fifty thousand dollars, and we will have every man, woman, and child in America dreaming, thinking, and wearing Perkins’s

Patent Porous Plaster. We will have it in every magazine, on every barn, fence, and rock, in the street-cars, on highways and byways, until the refrain will ring in sixty million American heads —

“Perkins’s Patent Porous Plaster
Makes all pains and aches fly faster.”

“But, my dear sir,” I said, “is the plaster good?”

Mr. Perkins of Portland leaned over and whispered in my ear, “There is no plaster.”

“What?” I cried.

“Not yet,” he said, “that will come later. We will get that later. Law of supply and demand, you know. When there is a demand, there always turns up a supply to fill it. See the point? You look bright. See this. We advertise. Get, say, fifty thousand orders at ten dollars each; total, five hundred thousand dollars. What next? We sell out. We go to some big concern. ‘Here,’ we say — ‘Here is an article advertised up to the handle. Here are orders for five hundred thousand dollars’ worth. Thing on the boom. Give us two hundred thousand cash, and get up your old plaster, and fill the orders. Thanks. Good day.’ See? They get a well-established business. We get a clear profit of one hundred and fifty thousand. What next? We get up another ad. Invest our whole capital. Sell out for a million. Invest again, sell out again. In ten years we can buy Manhattan Island for our town-seat and Chicago for our country-seat. The richest firm in the world — Perkins and — ”

“Brown,” I said, supplying the blank; “but I haven’t fifty thousand dollars, nor yet ten thousand.”

“What have you got?” he asked, eagerly. “Just five thousand.”

“Done!” Perkins cried.

And the next day we had the trade-mark registered, and had made contracts with all the Cleveland papers.

“You see,” said Perkins, “we are shy of money. We can’t bill the universe with a measly little five thou. We’ve got to begin small. Our territory is Ohio. Perkins’s Patent Porous Plaster shall be known to every Buckeye, and we will sell out for twenty thousand.”

So we soon had the words, on the fences and walls throughout Ohio. Every paper proclaimed the same catchy couplet. One or two magazines informed the world of it. The bill-boards heralded it. In fact, Perkins’s Patent Porous Plaster was in everybody’s mouth, and bade fair to be on everybody’s back as soon as there was a Perkins’s Patent Porous Plaster to put on those same backs.

“Perkins’s Patent Porous Plaster
Makes all pains and aches fly faster,”

For Perkins was right. The backs seemed fairly to ache for plasters of our making. From all over the State druggists wrote for terms; and we soon kept two typewriters busy informing the anxious pharmacists that, owing to the unprecedented demand, our factory was two months behind on orders, and that “your esteemed favor will have our earliest attention, and all orders will be filled in rotation at the earliest possible moment.” Each day brought a deluge of letters, and we received several quite unsolicited testimonials to the merits of Perkins’s Patent Porous Plaster. Perkins was radiant.

Then he faded.

He set out to sell the trade-mark, and failed! No one wanted it. Money was tight, and patent medicines were a drug.

Porous Plasters were dead. Perkins was worried. Day followed day; and the orders began to decrease, while countermands began to arrive. We had just two hundred dollars left, and bills for four thousand dollars’ worth of advertisements on our file. At last Perkins gave up. He came in, and leaned despondently against my desk. Sorrow marked every feature.

“No use,” he said, dolefully, “they won’t bite. We have to do it.”

“What?” I asked; “make an assignment?”

“Nonsense!” cried Perkins. “Fill those orders ourselves!”

“But where can we get — ”

“The plasters?” Perkins scratched his head. He repeated softly, “Makes all pains and aches fly faster,” and swung one foot sadly. “That’s it,” he said; “where?”

The situation was becoming acute. We must have plasters quickly or fail. A look of sadness settled on his face, and he dropped limply into a chair. Instantly he sprang to his feet with a yell. He grasped the tail of his coat and tugged and struggled. He had sat on a sheet of sticky fly-paper, and he was mad, but even while he struggled with it, his eyes brightened, and he suddenly darted out of the office door, with the fly-paper rattling behind him.

In two hours he returned. He had a punch such as harness-makers use to punch holes in straps, a pair of scissors, and a smile as broad as his face was long.

“They will be here in ten minutes!” he cried. “Sit right down and write to all of our ad. mediums to hold that ad. for a change. In one year we will buy the soldiers’ monument for a paper-weight, and purchase Euclid Avenue for a bowling-alley! Get off your coat. I’ve ordered fifty thousand paper boxes, one hundred thousand labels, and two hundred thousand plasters. The first lot of boxes will be here to-morrow, and the first batch of labels to-night. The plasters will be here in five minutes. It’s a wonder I didn’t think of it when I wrote the ad. The new ad. will sell two plasters to every one the old one sold.”

“Where in thunder – ” I began.

“At the grocery, of course,” he cried, as if it were the most natural place to find porous plasters. “I bought every wholesale grocer in town out of ‘em. Cleaned them plump up. I’ve got enough to fill all orders, and some over. The finest in the land. Stick closer than a brother, ‘feel good, are good,’ as I wrote for a stocking concern. Stay on until they wear off.”

He was right. The trucks soon began to arrive with the cases. They were piled on the walk twenty high, they were piled in the street, we piled our office full, and put some in the vacant room across the hall. There were over a thousand cases of sticky fly-paper.

We cut the sheets into thirds, and sprinkled a little cayenne pepper on the sticky side with a pepper-shaker, and then punched holes in them. Later we got a rubber stamp, and printed the directions for use on each; but we had no time for that then. When the boxes began to arrive, Perkins ran down and gathered in three newsboys, and constituted them our packing force. By the end of the week we had our orders all filled.

And our plasters stuck! None ever stuck better. They stuck forever. They wouldn’t peel off, they wouldn’t wash off, they wouldn’t scrape off. When one wore off, it left the stickiness there; and the victim had to buy another to paste on top of the old one before he could put on a shirt. It was a huge success.

We changed our ad. to read:

“Perkins’s Paper Porous Plaster

Makes all pains and aches fly faster,”

and branched out into the magazines. We sent a to Europe, and now some of the crowned heads are wearing our plasters. You all remember Stoneley’s account of meeting a tribe of natives in the wilds of Africa wearing nothing but Perkins’s Paper Porous Plasters, and recall the celebrated words of Rodriguez Velos, second understudy to the Premier of Spain, “America is like Perkins’s Paper Porous Plasters – a thing not to be sat on.”

Five months ago we completed our ten-story factory, and increased our capital stock to two millions; and those to whom we offered the trade-mark in our early days are green with regret. Perkins is abroad now in his private yacht. Queer old fellow, too, for he still insists on wearing the Go-lightly shoes and the Air-the-Hair hat, in spite of the fact that he hasn’t enough hair left to make a miniature paint-brush.

I asked him before he left for his cruise when he was from, – Portland, Me., or Portland, Oreg., – and he laughed.

“My dear boy,” he said, “it’s all in the ad. ‘Mr. Perkins of Portland’ is a phrase to draw dollars. I’m from Chicago. Get a phrase built like a watch, press the button, and the babies cry for it.”

That’s all. But in closing I might remark that if you ever have any trouble with a weak back, pain in the side, varicose veins, heavy sensation in the chest, or, in fact, any ailment whatever, just remember that

Perkins’s Paper Porous Plaster
Make all pains and aches fly faster.

II. THE ADVENTURE OF MR. SILAS BOGGS

BEFORE my friend Perkins became famous throughout the advertising world, – and what part of the world does not advertise, – he was at one time a soliciting agent for a company that controlled the “patent insides” of a thousand or more small Western newspapers. Later, my friend Perkins startled America by his renowned advertising campaign for Pratt’s hats; and, instead of being plain Mr. Perkins of Chicago, he blossomed into Perkins of Portland. Still later, when he put Perkins’s Patent Porous Plaster on the market, he became great; became Perkins the Great, in fact; and now advertisers, agents, publishers, and the world in general, bow down and worship him. But I love to turn at times from the blaze of his present glory to those far-off days when he was still a struggling amateur, just as we like to read of Napoleon’s early history, tracing in the small beginnings of their lives the little rivulets of genius that later overwhelmed the world, and caused the universe to pause in stupefaction.

Who would have thought that the gentle Perkins, who induced Silas Boggs to place a five-line ad. in a bunch of back-county weeklies, would ever thrill the nation with the news that

Perkins’s Patent Porous Plaster Make all pains and aches fly faster, and keep up the thrill until the Perkins Plaster was so to speak, in every mouth!

And yet these two men were the same. Plain Perkins, who urged and begged and prayed Silas Boggs to let go of a few dollars, and Perkins the Great, the Originator, – Perkins of Portland, who originated the Soap Dust Triplets, the Smile that Lasts for Aye, Ought-to-hawa Biscuit, – who, in short, is the father, mother, and grandparent of modern advertising, are the selfsame Perkinses. From such small beginnings can the world’s great men spring.

In the days before the kodak had a button to press while they do the rest; even before Royal Baking Powder was quite so pure as “absolutely,” – it was then about 99 99/100 % pure, like Ivory Soap, – in those days, I say, long before Soapine “did it” to the whale, Mr. Silas Boggs awoke one morning, and walked out to his wood-shed in a pair of carpet slippers. His face bore an expression of mingled hope and doubt; for he was expecting what the novelists call an interesting event, – in fact, a birth, – and, quite as much in fact, a number of births – anywhere from five to a dozen. Nor was Silas Boggs a Mormon. He was merely the owner of a few ravenous guinea-pigs. It is well known that in the matter of progeny the guinea-pig surpasses the famous Soap Dust, although that has, as we all know, triplets on every bill-board.

Mr. Silas Boggs was not disappointed. Several of his spotted pets had done their best to discountenance race suicide; and Silas, having put clean water and straw and crisp lettuce leaves in the pens, began to examine the markings of the newcomers, for he was an enthusiast on the subject of guinea-pigs. He loved guinea-pigs as some connoisseurs love oil paintings. He was fonder of a nicely marked guinea-pig than a dilettante is of a fine Corot. And his fad had this advantage. You can place a pair of oil paintings in a room, and leave them there for ages, and you will never have another oil painting unless you buy one; but if you place a pair of guinea-pigs in a room – then, as Rudyard says so often, that is another story.

Suddenly Mr. Silas Boggs stood upright and shouted aloud in joy. He hopped around the wood-shed on one leg, clapping his hands and singing. Then he knelt down again, and examined more closely the little spotted creature that caused his joy. It was true, beyond doubt! One of his pigs had presented him with something the world had never known before – a lop-eared guinea-pig! His fame was sure from that moment. He would be known to all the breeders of guinea-pigs the world over as the owner of the famous lop-eared spotted beauty. He christened her Duchess on the spot, not especially because duchesses have lop-ears, but because he liked the name. That was in the days before people began calling things Nearwool and Ka-bosh-ko and Ogeta Jaggon, and similar made-to-order names.

To Mr. Boggs, in the midst of his joy, came a thought; and he feverishly raked out with his hands the remaining newly born guinea-piglets, examining one after another. Oh, joy! He almost fainted! There was another lop-eared pig in the litter; and, what filled his cup to overflowing, he was able to christen the second one Duke!

At that moment Perkins walked into the wood-shed. Perkins at that time had a room in the Silas Boggs mansion, and he entered the wood-shed merely to get an armful of wood with which to replenish his fire.

“Well, Boggs,” he remarked in his cheerful way – and I may remark that, since Perkins has become famous, every advertising agent has copied his cheerful manner of speech, so that the ad. man who does not greet you with a smile no longer exists —

“Well, Boggs,” he remarked, “more family ties, I see. Great thing, family ties. What is home without sixty-eight guinea-pigs?”

Silas Boggs grinned. “Perkins!” he gasped. “Perkins! Oh, Perkins! My dear Perkins!” But he could get no farther, so overcome was he by his emotions. It was fully ten minutes before he could fully and clearly explain that the stork had brought him a pair – the only pair – of lop-eared guinea-pigs; and in the meantime Perkins had loaded his left arm with stove wood, and stood clasping it, overhand, with his right arm. When Silas Boggs managed to tell his wonderful news, Perkins dropped the armful of wood on the floor with a crash.

“Boggs!” he cried, “Boggs! Now is your chance! Now is your golden opportunity! Advertise, my boy, advertise!”

“What?” asked Silas Boggs, in amazement.

“I say – advertise!” exclaimed Perkins again.

“And I say – advertise what?” said Silas Boggs.

“Advertise what?” Perkins ejaculated. “What should you advertise, but Silas Boggs’s Celebrated Lop-eared Guinea-pigs? What has the world been waiting and longing and pining for but the lop-eared guinea-pig? Why has the world been full of woe and pain, but because it lacked lop-eared guinea-pigs? Why are you happy this morning? Because you have lop-eared guinea-pigs! Don’t be selfish, Silas – give the world a chance. Let them into the joy-house on the ground floor. Sell them lop-eared guinea-pigs and joy. Advertise, and get rich!”

Silas Boggs shook his head.

“No!” he said. “No! I can’t. I have only two. I’ll keep them.”

Perkins seated himself on the wood-pile.

“Silas,” he said, “if I understand you, one of these lop-eared guinea-pigs is a lady, and the other is a gentleman. Am I right?”

“You are,” remarked Silas Boggs.

“And I believe the guinea-pigs usually marry young, do they not?” asked Perkins.

“They do,” admitted Silas Boggs.

“I think, if I am not mistaken,” said Perkins, “that you have told me they have large and frequent families. Is it so?”

“Undoubtedly,” agreed Silas Boggs.

“And you have stated,” said Perkins, “that those families many young and have large and frequent families that also marry young and have large and frequent families, have you not?”

“I have! I have!” exclaimed Silas Boggs, beginning to warm up.

“Then,” said Perkins, “in a year you ought to have many, many lop-eared guinea-pigs. Is that correct?”

“I ought to have thousands!” cried Silas Boggs, in ecstasy.

“What is a pair of common guinea-pigs worth?” asked Perkins.

“One dollar,” said Silas Boggs. “A lop-eared pair ought to be worth two dollars, easily.”

“Two dollars!” cried Perkins. “Two fiddlesticks! Five dollars, you mean! Why, man, you have a corner in lop-ears. You have all there are. Shake hands!”

The two men shook hands solemnly. Mr. Perkins was hopefully solemn. Mr. Boggs was amazedly solemn.

“I shake your hand,” said Perkins, “because I congratulate you on your fortune. You will soon be a wealthy man.” He paused, and then added, “If you advertise judiciously.”

There were real tears in the eyes of Silas Boggs, as he laid his arm affectionately across Perkins’s shoulders.

“Perkins,” he said, “I can never repay you. I can never even thank you. I will advertise. I’ll go right into the house and write out an order for space in every paper you represent. How many papers do you represent, Perkins?”

Perkins coughed.

“Perhaps,” he said, gently, “we had better begin small. Perhaps we had better begin with a hundred or so. There is no use overdoing it. I have over a thousand papers on my list; and if the lop-eared brand of guinea-pig shouldn’t be as fond of large families as the common guinea-pig is – if it should turn out to be a sort of fashionable American family kind of guinea-pig, you know – you might have trouble filling orders.”

But Silas Boggs was too enthusiastic to listen to calm advice. He waved his arms wildly above his head.

“No! no!” he shouted. “All, or none, Perkins! No half-measures with Silas Boggs! No skimping! Give me the whole thousand! I know what advertising is – I’ve had experience. Didn’t I advertise for a position as vice-president of a bank last year – and how many replies did I get? Not one! Not one! Not one, Perkins! I know, you agents are always too sanguine. But I don’t ask the impossible. I’m easily satisfied. If I sell one pair for each of the thousand papers I’ll be satisfied, and I’ll consider myself lucky. And as for the lop-eared guinea-pigs – you furnish the papers, and the guinea-pigs will do the rest!”

Thus, in the face of Perkins’s good advice, Silas Boggs inserted a small advertisement in the entire list of one thousand country weeklies, and paid cash in advance. To those who know Perkins the Great to-day, such folly as going contrary to his advice in advertising matters would be unthought of. His word is law. To follow his advice means success; to neglect it means failure.

He is infallible. But in those days, when his star was but rising above the horizon, he was not, as he is now, considered the master and leader of us all – the king of the advertising world – mighty giant of advertising genius among the dwarfs of imitation. So Silas Boggs refused his advice.

The next month the advertisement of the Silas Boggs Lop-eared Guinea-pigs began to appear in the weekly newspapers of the West. The advertisement, although small, was well worded, for Perkins wrote it himself. It was a gem of advertising writing. It began with a small cut of a guinea-pig, which, unfortunately, appeared as a black blot in many of the papers; but this, perhaps, lent an air of mystery to the cut that it would not otherwise have had. The text was as follows:

“The Celebrated Lop-eared Andalusian Guinea-pigs! Hardy and prolific! One of nature’s wonders! Makes a gentle and affectionate pet. For young or old. **YOU CAN MAKE MONEY** by raising and selling Lop-eared Andalusian Guinea-pigs. One pair starts you in business. Send money-order for \$10 to Silas Boggs, 5986 Cottage Grove Avenue, Chicago, HI., and receive a healthy pair, neatly boxed, by express.”

To Silas Boggs the West had theretofore been a vague, colorless expanse somewhere beyond the West Side of Chicago. Three days after his advertisements began to appear, he awoke to the fact that the West is a vast and mighty empire, teeming with millions of souls. And to Silas Boggs it seemed that those souls had been sleeping for ages, only to be called to life by the lop-eared Andalusian guinea-pig. The lop-eared Andalusian guinea-pig was the one touch that made the whole West kin. Mail came to him by tubfuls and basketfuls. People who despised and reviled the common guinea-pig

were impatient and restless because they had lived so long without the sweet companionship of the lop-eared Andalusian. From Tipton, Ia., and Vida, Kan., and Chenawee, Dak., and Orangebloom, Cal., came eager demands for the hardy and prolific lop-ear. Ministers of the gospel and babes in arms insisted on having the gentle and affectionate Andalusian lop-eared guinea-pigs.

The whole West arose in its might, and sent money-orders to Silas Boggs. And Silas Boggs opened the letters as fast as he could, and smiled. He piled the blue money-orders up in stacks beside him, and smiled. Silas Boggs was one large, happy smile for one large, happy week. Then he frowned a little.

For all was not well with the lop-eared Andalusian guinea-pigs. They were not as hardy as he had guaranteed them to be. They seemed to have the pip, or glanders, or boll-weevil, or something unpleasant. The Duke was not only lop-eared, but seemed to feel lippy all over. The Duchess, in keeping with her name, evinced a desire to avoid common society, and sulked in one corner of her cage. They were a pair of very effete aristocrats. Silas Boggs gave them catnip tea and bran mash, or other sterling remedies; but the far-famed lop-eared Andalusians pined away. And, as Silas Boggs sat disconsolately by their side, he could hear the mail-men relentlessly dumping more and more letters on the parlor floor.

The West was just beginning to realize the desirability of having lop-eared guinea-pigs at the moment when lop-eared guinea-pigs were on the point of becoming as extinct as the dodo and mastodon. In a day or two they became totally extinct, and the lop-eared Andalusian guinea-pig existed no more. Silas Boggs wept.

But his tears did not wash away the constantly increasing heaps of orders. He ordered Perkins to withdraw his advertisement, but still the orders continued to come, and Silas Boggs, assisted by a corps of young, but industrious, ladies, began returning to the eager West the beautiful blue money-orders; and, if anything sends a pang through a man's breast, it is to be obliged to return a money-order uncashed.

By the end of the month the incoming orders had dwindled to a few thousand daily – about as many as Silas Boggs and his assistants could return. By the end of the next month they had begun to make noticeable inroads in the accumulated piles of orders; and in two months more the floor was clear, and the arriving orders had fallen to a mere dribble of ten or twelve a day, but the hair of Silas Boggs had turned gray, and his face was old and wan.

Silas Boggs gave away all his guinea-pigs – the sight of them brought on something like a fit. He could not even bear to see a lettuce leaf or cabbage-head. He will walk three blocks to avoid passing an animal store, for fear he might see a guinea-pig in the window. Only a few days ago I was praising a certain man to him, and happened to quote the line from Burns, —

“Rank is but the guinea's stamp,”

but when I came to the word “guinea,” I saw Silas Boggs turn pale, and put his hand to his forehead.

But he cannot escape the results of his injudicious advertising, even at this day, so many years after. From time to time some one in the West will unpack a trunk that has stood for years in some garret, and espying a faded newspaper laid in the bottom of the trunk, will glance at it curiously, see the advertisement of the lop-eared Andalusian guinea-pigs, and send Silas Boggs ten dollars.

For an advertisement, like sin, does not end with the day, but goes on and on, down the mighty corridors of time, and, like the hall-boy in a hotel, awakes the sleeping, and calls them to catch a train that, sometimes, has long since gone, just as the lop-eared Andalusians have gone.

III. THE ADVENTURE OF THE LAME AND THE HALT

I HAD not seen Perkins for over two years, when one day he opened my office door, and stuck his head in. I did not see his face at first, but I recognized the hat. It was the same hat he had worn two years before, when he put the celebrated Perkins's Patent Porous Plaster on the market.

"Pratt's Hats Air the Hair." You will remember the advertisement. It was on all the bill-boards. It was Perkins, Perkins of Portland, Perkins the Great, who conceived the rhyme that sold millions of the hats; and Perkins was a believer in advertising and things advertised. So he wore a Pratt hat. That was one of Perkins's foibles. He believed in the things he advertised.

"Get next to a thing," he would say. "Study it, learn to love it, use it – then you will know how to boom it. Take Murdock's Soap. Perkins of Portland boomed it. He bought a cake. Used it. Used it on his hands, on his face, on his feet. Bought another cake – washed his cotton socks, washed his silk tie, washed his woollen underwear. Bought another cake – shaved with it, shampooed with it, ate it. Yes, sir, ate it! Pure soap – no adulteration. No taste of rosin, cottonseed – no taste of anything but soap, and lots of that. Spit out lather for a month! Every time I sneezed I blew a big soap-bubble – perspired little soap-bubbles. Tasted soap for a year! Result? Greatest ad. of the nineteenth century. 'Murdock's Soap is pure soap. If you don't believe it, bite it.' Picture of a nigger biting a cake of soap on every billboard in U. S. A. Live niggers in all the grocery windows biting cakes of Murdock's Soap. Result? Five hundred thousand tons of Murdock's sold the first year. I use no other." And so, from his "Go-lightly" shoes to his Pratt's hat, Perkins was a relic of bygone favorites in dress. The result was comical, but it was Perkins; and I sprang from my chair and grasped his hand.

"Perkins!" I cried.

He raised his free hand with a restraining motion, and I noticed his fingers protruded from the tips of the glove.

"Say," he said, still standing on my threshold, "have you a little time?"

I glanced at my watch. I had twenty minutes before I must catch my train.

"I'll give you ten minutes," I said.

"Not enough," said Perkins. "I want a year. But I'll take ten minutes on account. Owe me the rest!"

He turned and beckoned into the hall, and a small boy appeared carrying a very large glass demijohn. Perkins placed the demijohn on a chair, and stood back gazing at it admiringly.

"Great, isn't it?" he asked. "Biggest demijohn made. Heavy as lead! Fine shape, fine size! But, say – read that!"

I bent down and read. The label said: "Onotowatishika Water. Bottled at the spring. Perkins & Co., Glaubus, Ia."

I began spelling out the name by syllables, "O – no – to – wat – " when Perkins clapped me on the back.

"Great, hey? Can't pronounce it? Nobody can. Great idea. Got old Hunyadi Janos water knocked into a cocked hat. Hardest mineral water name on earth. Who invented it? I did. Perkins of Portland. There's money in that name. Dead loads of money. Everybody that can't pronounce it will want it, and nobody can pronounce it – everybody'll want it. Must have it. Will weep for it. But that isn't the best!"

"No?" I inquired.

"No!" shouted Perkins. "I should say 'no!' Look at that bottle. Look at the size of it. Look at the weight of it Awful, isn't it? Staggers the brain of man to think of carrying that across the continent! Nature recoils, the muscles ache. It is vast, it is immovable, it is mighty. Say!"

Perkins grasped me by the coat-sleeve, and drew me toward him. He whispered excitedly.

“Great idea! O-no-to-what-you-may-call-it water. Big jug full. Jug too blamed big. Yes? Freight too much. Yes? Listen – ‘Perkins Pays the Freight!’”

He sat down suddenly, and beamed upon me joyfully.

The advertising possibilities of the thing impressed me immediately. Who could resist the temptation of getting such a monstrous package of glassware by freight free of charge? I saw the effect of a life-size reproduction of the bottle on the bill-boards with “Perkins Pays the Freight” beneath it in red, and the long name in a semicircle of yellow letters above it. I saw it reduced in the magazine pages, in street-cars – everywhere.

“Great?” queried Perkins.

“Yes,” I admitted thoughtfully, “it is great.”

He was at my side in an instant.

“Wonderful effect of difficulty overcome on the human mind!” he bubbled. “Take a precipice. People look over, shudder, turn away. Put in a shoot-the-chutes. People fight to get the next turn to slide down. Same idea. People don’t want O-no-to-thing-um-bob water. Hold on, ‘Perkins pays the freight!’ All right, send us a demijohn!”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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