

# TALES OF AN INLAND TOWN.

## BILLY'S NARRATIVE.

"I say Johnny, what are you going to do to-night? Lets go up to Williams' place and have a game of pool."

The speaker was a dapper, well dressed little fellow, whom every body liked because of his affability, yet there had been several ochre shades in his past that the little world in which he moved knew of and they acted as a nicely constructed-brake whenever he would let that uncontrollable vein of banter, that constituted a large portion of his character, lead him too far in poking the rattling ribs of other people's skeletons.

"I tell you Johnny, its a corker, why I just got a telegram from Pittsburg, but this business is getting too big, d' you understand? I'm going up to Williams' to-night and enjoy myself with the boys, whether school keeps or not."

Taking his somewhat indifferent friend by the arm he tried to drag him away from the friendly post which had been supporting him for the past half hour in front of one of the leading hotels in the town. If the fair curling hair, the full moon face and almost girlish mouth of the man whom he addressed as "Johnny," were indications of his nativity and his nature the physiognomist would say that he was a Swede with a disposition as gentle as a June zephyr, yet looks are deceptive and, alack, beauty is only skin deep.

As a matter of fact Johnny was one of the most obstinate of men. His habit of quizzing everyone until he found out what side of a question they were on, then taking the opposite, simply to get into an argument, was so well known to his little friend that it was indeed a wonder that he even suggested Williams' if he had any hopes of getting him there.

At this particular moment it was an ill timed suggestion for Johnny was day dreaming. Mentally he was tossing about a *chic*, round pebble and wondering if there were any rounder ones in existence than the one he had picked up on the beach at Pleasure Bay the summer before.

The little fellow realized that he would have to take a different course with his companion, so sauntering into the hotel he looked over the register of the day's arrivals, indulged in *repartee* with the loungers whom he knew, and went out to find his friend awakened wide enough from his reverie to walk up street with him.

They left the place together and wandered along, on that crisp fall evening, talking all the small talk that men who are really actively in business delight to regale themselves with occasionally and did not realize it until they were in the cosy pool room, where half a dozen or more gentlemen were already hilarious over a game. They were invited to take "sticks" immediately upon entering and as the balls were just being placed for a new game both of them went into it. There was the usual jolly and being jollied that had made Williams' place so popular as a resort for men, but the Pleasure Bay incident had not entirely vanished from Johnny's mind and the contempt with which all the players seemed to treat the green ball was more than his not altogether undisturbed frame of mind could stand. He tossed up for the tie he had been in with the gentleman who could get "cripples" "any time" and left the place.

Half an hour later he could have been seen bounding up the stairs of his favorite resort and brusquely entering a room where a party of friends were playing cards—an innocent game of hearts, but over which there was always as much excitement as if the chips that were used had been worth a thousand dollars the stake instead of having the merely fictitious value that was assigned them. There was a double pot up, two eights and a thirteen, when Johnny pulled his chair up beside one of the old Chesterfields of the town who had always manifested a paternal interest in him. The friendship that existed between this pair was a beautiful illustration of what bachelorhood has lost in not having found anything to love. The admiration of the younger man for the elder found vent in the truest blue expressions, as the old player led a "thirteener" from a perfectly invincible hand and, of course, "got in." His love was requited in a way that proves our theory that sentiment is not extinct, even in the flintiest heart. The cards were dealt for the fifth hand and everything had gone smoothly as a scientific game could go, when a discovery was made that at once set the party by the ears. A card was missing. It had been in the hand before and no one could imagine how it had slipped from the deck. There was nothing wagered on the game, except the valueless chips, the players were all gentlemen and there was no apparent reason why it should be missing other than that it was one of the "twos," but when, looking on the floor for it, Johnny saw the corner of the lost card sticking above the side of his old friend's gum shoe, he shivered from head to foot. He could have swallowed gallons of boiling water and spat out blocks of ice, so chilled was he at the thought that the man whom the whole party had just heard him address, as he wouldn't even have done to his father, should be guilty of such a thing. Leaving in disgust he joined a party of fellows who were on their way to a friend's house, where they had planned to spend an hour in telling tales of the town.

"Come in Johnny, you're just in time to help me out in a little argument I seem to have the short string on here!" said the host, as the arrival of the last one of the guests interrupted a heated discussion long enough for all to look up. The party was seated in what, for want of some better name, was called *Duo et Viginti*. It was plainly a man's room. Two plain tables, a few chairs, and a stove made up its furnishing, while a single electric lamp struggled to send its yellowish glare through the clouds of tobacco smoke that curled toward the ceiling. There was not a sign of woman's refining touch about it, yet the men loved the haunt simply because they knew its good natured owner threw proprieties to the dogs, in that part of his home, at least.

A discussion was on as to whether Mrs. Sherwood would countenance such a breach as accepting a man's invitation to dinner and then departing without thanking or even saying good night to him. "That depends entirely on whether the host can be found when the guests are ready to depart," said Johnny, and as there was a likelihood of unpleasant details coming to light one of the gentlemen, thinking to turn the conversation, remarked that it reminded him of a little story about a livery-man, in the town, who had a very good stable boy whose only failing was his inordinate craving for rum.

One morning, after the boy had been on a three day's debauch his employer undertook to give him some advice and it ran as follows: "Now lookie here Louie, I don't want you to be gettin drunk for a whole week on. Now I don't mind it if you git drunk just once a day."

Everyone laughed but the host, who became restless and tried to look as if the relation between the story and the discussion that had been on was rather far fetched.

Just then a rather military looking young fellow began exploiting some of his hair raising experiences while campaigning with the N. G. P., when some one remarked: "Oh, that ain't in it with the man who carried such heavy bags of shot on the old Gettysburg turnpike, during the war, that he sank into the hard road up to his knees." "Yes and he's living and well right here in town and he did something more remarkable than that. It occurred down in the Shenandoah valley the time McDowell's raiders came very near being corralled by old Stonewall Jackson. Bill had fallen behind in the retreat so that if the command: 'To the rear, March,' should be given he would be in his loved position in front of the van. Feeling that they were safely out of the rebel's clutches he sat down under an apple tree to take the spikes out of his running shoes, when, all of a sudden, there was a clatter of horses' hoofs, a sound of scabbards clanking against spurred boots and he looked up to find himself surrounded by a whole troop of rebel horsemen. They halted, when about forty paces from the tree, and their leader advanced. He was none other than the daring Jackson. He rode straight at Bill and when he had gotten so close that the hot air from the pink nostrils of the horse swept his face he pulled it on its haunches and thus addressed our hero: 'William Unconquerable, will you surrender?' 'No Sir!' was the firm reply, and without further ado the General wheeled about, ordered a retreat and the whole rebel out-fit was soon lost in a cloud of dust down the valley."

Such intrepidity took all the wind out of the sails of the modern blanket-

tossing, trick-paddle soldier and he ordered a bottle of appolinaris when another fellow exploited Bill still further in the following:

"Bill was color bearer for the 47th in the battle of the Wilderness and do you know that old fellow didn't know what fear was. Why one time he carried his stand so far in advance of the line that the General in command shouted to him: 'Here, you fellow, bring those colors back to the line!' 'Bring your d—d old soldiers up to the colors!' shouted Bill, as he crept further into the woods and dodged three grape shot through fear of losing his vermi-form appendix."

At this juncture the dapper little fellow, who had been seen in front of the hotel in the early part of the evening, dropped in smiling and rubbing his hands like a French dancing master. The fit of his trousers appeared execrable. They were puffed out about the pockets until he looked like a female Kangaroo transporting her young. Not disconcerted, in the least, by the questioning stare of the gentlemen he took advantage of the momentary lull in the conversation and launched out into politics. Now that subject had been tabooed by the party, but as the new arrival was known to be a staunch friend of a certain ex-Assemblyman who is said to have gotten so used to voting "No!" on measures before the House that one night, when he was traveling in Berks county and had fallen asleep in his seat, the train pulled into a small town that bore his name. The brakeman opened the door with a slam that shook the car and called the station. Dreaming that he was in Harrisburg the Legislator was half aroused by the sound of his name, and, with a sleepy drawl, the force of habit dictated the word "No!" that he answered back.

"I tell you fellows its a corker, this Legislative fight, but we'll show the boys a thing or two." With a gentle caress for the puffs that gave his trousers such an ill fitting look he began talking in favor of the candidate whose friends were supposed to be knifing the man "from over the mountain." If a bomb had belched forth from a spring lamb it could not have been more of a surprise to the party, for only the day before he had been lauding "the boy" to the skies and insisting that it was "dirty work that the fellows are doing around here." Few of the gentlemen knew how the little fellow enjoyed carriage riding and few of them knew what caused those puffs in his trousers, so they all accepted his explanation that he had been deceived by his quondam friend from "over the mountain" and was now ready to join forces with those who were pure and straight in politics.

By this time most of the cigars had gone out, so intensely interesting was the story told by the little fellow, but above the crackling of the matches that was at once set up a new voice was heard. It wasn't a strange or distinguished fellow who clamored for the floor, only a person who belongs to that great class of absolute essentials, yet no one is able to give a satisfactory reason why. He had an idea. No doubt he had had several up to that time, but at least one had come worthy of being sounded abroad. He said:

"I was standing in an up town clothing house, the other evening, when a man came in to look around. After sizing up most everything in the cases he stopped in front of a few cheap purses that looked decidedly shop worn. Upon inquiry he found that the price was exceedingly low and was about to purchase one, when he discovered that they were so cheaply made that they couldn't possibly last long. Remarking this to the clerk, that young man knew his business, and, with all the *sang froid* in the world, assured the doubting purchaser that the purses were all right. 'Why we have had them for five years ourselves, he said.'"

"That's a joke," said Johnny, who had forgotten everything unpleasant that had occurred in the early part of the evening, "but do you know that this town has some of the meanest mortals who ever drew the breath of life. Why, I know a man who gives his children a penny a piece for going to bed without their supper; then when they are sound asleep he slips up to their room and steals the pennies back for use the next night. Yes, and he's no relation to the lawyer of whom this story is told."

"One morning an old friend of the attorney's passed his office on the way to a train, that was to carry him to a little village in the county, and as the weather looked threatening the gentleman was undecided as to whether he would go, as to get to his destination would require a drive of several miles over a muddy country road. Stopping in front of his friend's office he remarked: 'Good morning, Mr. Blackstone, do you think it will rain to-day?' The lawyer looked at the sky and vouchsafed the information that he thought it would. Then turning on his heel he entered his office, turned to his client's account and when they settled, the following December, this entry was found: 189—Aug. 25th—To advice on condition of weather—\$5.00."

The appolinaris was gone and the military looking individual had made up his mind not to be mad because someone had done greater things than he, so he told a good one that occurred away back in the seventies, but had lost none of its spice by having been stowed away in its winding sheet until a few days before:

"There is a gentleman, of German antecedents, living in town who had a thrilling experience with high-waymen one night, while driving over the mountain. It is very funny to hear him tell it, and a story loses half its interest if not told properly, but I'll try to tell it as nearly as possible, like he told it to me:"

"I tell you how it was, Yonson, I was just takin tree to usand tollars ober de mountain one night, already. Judas priest, but it was dark. So dark dot I couldn't see my hands my face before. When I got up dere dot water in trof by two strappin big fellows schumped out and grabbed de horse by de head. One had two of dem boy knives as long as my arm and de odder one had a great big pistol. Dey said: 'Gib up dot money!' Den what 'you tink I did, so help me Judas? Vy I jüst crawled out and grabbed a big dornick and yelled: Git, you sons-o-guns! and you ought to jüst have seen dem takin up de mountain. I watched dem til dey got about a mile ahead and den I jüst drove on."

Everyone recognized the hero in this tale and it called forth another about the time he had dickered with a rich banker of the town on a horse deal.

The trade had been made and a few days after the banker came into possession of his new horse he discovered that it was a dummy. He sent for the man who had dealt it to him and the following dialogue ensued:

"Say, Dealer, you'll have to take that horse back. I can't use it, you cheated me. Why that horse is a dummy."

"Yes, Mr. Richman, but you got more money as I has, you jüst edicate him."

"Say, boys," said a sallow faced young man who was sitting over by the stove, "talk about your folk-lore, stories of the town, etc., they don't speak half as loud as some of the foot prints on the streets of the town. What do you suppose will become of that path down there on H— street. that used to be made by the street sprinkler between a certain business place and the hotel, before they covered it up with stones?" "Oh," said Johnny, "that'll be all right, that fire sale of shoes will furnish the crushers cheap and it won't be long until the path is worn down again."

"Say, Militaire, do you remember that little story about a local minister going his round of pastoral calls?" "Oh, yes," came the reply, "but it has grown whiskers now." "Tell it anyway," shouted the party in chorus.

"Well, one Monday a minister of the town was on his round of pastoral calls and dropped in on a Logan street family, the mother of whom had lately connected herself with his church. It being wash day, she was up to her elbows in the tubs and sent one of her sons into the room to entertain the pastor until she could make herself presentable. The boy shuffled into the minister's presence and slouched into a chair near the caller who got up and, laying his hand on his shoulder, interrogated him as follows:

'Good morning, son, are you working for the Lord?'

In utter incomprehension the youth replied:

'No sir, I am driving bus for Mr. Brandon, down at the Brokerhoff house.'

Some one started to telling Flick tales just then and half the party left. The ones who stayed heard this remarkable story:

"You all know Flick. He is the fellow who saw a pine tree, one time, that was so st night that it leaned a little. Well one day he was out hunting and had tramped all over the Alleghenies without getting a shot at anything and was on his way home when he came to the Black M. Shannon. As there was no

bidge at that point the only thing left for him to do was wade the stream. Just about the time he was ready to step into the water he spied a deer in some laurel on the other side. In his haste, in loading his gun, he forgot to withdraw the ram-rod and blazed away with it in. Would you believe it: The bullet killed the deer and the ram-rod skimmed along the water in such a way that when it reached the opposite bank there were nine ducks strung on it, then when Flick started to wade across his pants got so full of fish that all the buttons were busted off and every bloomin button flew with such deadly force that he found eleven dead rabbits when he went to pick up his deer and ducks."

Fearing that this last story was going to lead to a general drawing on imaginations the gentlemen all said good night to their host and departed. About the time they were leaving the house an elderly gentleman was met, whose curiosity led him to ask what such a crowd meant. When told what they had been doing he said: "Let me tell you one." As he was known to have a rich store of the tales of long ago they gathered eagerly about him to hear the following little story of how one of Bellefonte's most illustrious citizens once got even with a York county farmer who was a little too out-spoken.

"During the rebellion Governor Curtin was returning from Washington to Harrisburg and an old York county farmer got on the cars, and finding a vacant seat alongside of the Governor, whom he did not recognize, he soon got into conversation with him. The first thing he did was to commence abusing Curtin and every person connected with his administration. He told the Governor that he was on his road to Harrisburg to buy substitutes for Codorus township and he had four thousand dollars in his pocket to pay for them. The Governor told him that there were a great many sharpeners and thieves about Harrisburg, and that he had better be careful or he would lose his money. When they reached that place Adjutant General Russel met the Governor at the cars, and the old farmer was put in his care. He took him to a good hotel. Next day the rustic called at the Executive mansion to see about his substitutes. Imagine his surprise to find the man he had met in the cars the day before was the Governor himself. The Governor saw that he was embarrassed, and told him to take a seat, that he was busy—and would give him an audience in a short time. A good many people were going in and out, but Curtin kept his eye on the old farmer who was busy wiping the perspiration off his brow. Finally Curtin turned around and asked him what he could do for him. The old fellow looked at the Governor in a sheepish way and said: 'I came here to see you, but I'll be d—d if I know what to say' I met you on the cars and did not know you were the Governor and I know I made a d—d fool of myself' and the more he tried to apologize the more involved he got. The Governor finally helped him out of his trouble by making light of the whole transaction."

Although it had gotten very late the elderly gentlemen could not let the party go without the following little story about the rivalry that existed between old Judge Burnside, who was on the common pleas bench here, and his brother-in-law, Judge Huston, who had a seat on the supreme bench.

"Though they were brothers-in-law Judge Burnside was over-weeningly envious of Judge Huston, and continually coveted the latter's seat on the supreme bench. So one time when Judge Huston was taken suddenly ill in Philadelphia and he was supposed to be in a precarious condition Judge Burnside sent a personal messenger clear down there to inquire as to the condition of his health. That was the ostensible reason but Burnside really wanted to know whether there was any probability of Huston's dying, so he could arrange his pins accordingly. Judge Huston was sharp enough to see his crafty brother-in-law's motive and answered the inquiry of the messenger regarding his health as follows:"

"You just tell Judge Burnside that I'll neither die nor resign."

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