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Tales, Sketches, Anecdotes, &c.

A TERRIBLE THREAT.

"I'll Set the Pacific Ocean in Flames!" Mysterious Murder.

Having recently taken possession of the newly fitted up and commodious building on High Street...

Referring to Gregory Summerfield, the murdered man, Mr. Parker speaks of him as having been one of the deepest chemical students of the age...

"One day towards the close of last September, an old man wrapped at my office door, and on invitation came in, and advancing, called me by name.

"It was not many minutes before he requested a private interview. He followed me into my back office, carefully closed the door after him and locked it.

"I replied that I had observed nothing new upon that subject since the experiment of Agassiz and Professor Henry, and added that in my opinion the expensive mode of reduction would always prevent its use.

"In a few words he then informed me that he had made the discovery that the art was extremely simple, and the expense attending decomposition so slight as to be insignificant.

"Presuming that the object of his visit to me was to procure the necessary forms to get out a patent for the right, I congratulated him upon his good fortune, and was about to branch forth with a description of some of the great benefits that

must ensue to the community, when he suddenly and somewhat uncivilly requested me to be silent and listen to what he had to say.

"He began with some general remarks about the inequality of fortune amongst mankind, and instanced himself as a striking example of the fate of those men who, according to all the rules of right, ought to be near the top, instead of at the foot of the ladder of fortune.

"Looking at him more closely, I thought I could detect in his eye the gleam of madness; but I remained silent and awaited further developments. But my scrutiny, stolen as it was, had been detected, and he replied at once to the expression of my face: 'No, sir, I am neither drunk nor a maniac; I am in deep earnest in all that I say; and I am fully prepared, by actual experiment, to demonstrate beyond all doubt the truth of all I claim.'

"For the first time I noticed he carried a small portmanteau in his hand; this he placed on the table, and unlocked it, and took out two or three small volumes, a pamphlet or two, a small square, wide-mouthed phial, hermetically sealed.

"I watched him with profound curiosity and took note of his slightest movements. Having arranged his books to suit him, and placed the phial in a conspicuous position, he drew up his chair closely to my own, and uttered, in a halting tone:

"I demand one million dollars for the contents of that bottle; and you must raise it for me in the city of San Francisco within one month, or scenes too terrible for even the imagination to conceive, will surely be witnessed by every living human being on the face of the globe."

"The tone, the manner, and the extravagance of the demand excited a faint smile upon my lips, which he observed, but disdained to notice.

"My mind was fully made up that I had a maniac to deal with, and I prepared to act accordingly. But I ascertained that my inmost thoughts were read by the remarkable man before me, and seemed to be anticipated by him in advance of their expression.

"Perhaps, said I, 'Mr. Summerfield, you would oblige me by informing me fully of the grounds of your claim, and the nature of your discovery?'

"That is the object of my visit," he replied. "I claim to have discovered the key which unlocks the constituent gases of water, and frees each from the embrace of the other, at a single touch."

"You mean to assert," I rejoined, "that you can make water burn itself up?" "Nothing more nor less," he responded, "except this—to insist upon the consequences of the secret, if my demand be not at once complied with."

"Now, suppose I fling the contents of this small phial into the Pacific Ocean, what would be the result? Dare you contemplate it for an instant? I do not assert that the entire surface of the sea would instantaneously bubble up into insufferable flames; no, but from the nucleus of a circle, of which this phial would be the centre, lurid radii of flames would gradually shoot outward, until the blazing circumference would roll in vast billows of fire, upon the uttermost shores. Not all the dripping clouds of the deluge could extinguish it. Not all the tears of saints and angels could for an instant check its progress. Onward and onward it would sweep with the steady gait of destiny, until the continents would melt with fervent heat, the atmosphere glare with the ominous conflagration, and all living creatures in the land, and sea, and air perish in one universal catastrophe."

when once fairly under way, must necessarily sweep onward, until all the seas are exhausted.

"Rising from my seat I went to the wash-stand in the corner of the apartment, and drawing a bowl full of Spring valley water, I turned to Summerfield and remarked, 'Words are empty; theories are ideal—but facts are things.'

"I take you at your word," So saying he approached the bowl, emptied it of nine-tenths of its contents, and silently dropped the potassium coated pill into the liquid. The potassium danced around the edge of the vessel, fuming, hissing and blazing, as it always does, and seemed on the point of expiring, when to my astonishment and alarm a sharp explosion took place, and in a second of time the water was blazing in a red, lurid column half way to the ceiling.

"For God's sake," I cried, 'extinguish the flames or we shall set the building on fire!'

"Had I dropped the potassium into the bowl as you prepared it," he quietly remarked, 'the building would indeed have been consumed.' Lower and lower fell the flickering flames, paler and paler grew the blaze, until finally the fire went out, and I rushed up to see the effect of the combustion.

"Not a drop of water remained in the vessel! Astonished beyond measure at what I had witnessed, and terrified almost to the verge of insanity, I approached Summerfield and tremblingly inquired: 'To whom, sir, is this tremendous secret known?'

"To myself alone," he responded; "and now answer me a question—is it worth the money?'

"It is entirely unnecessary to relate in detail the subsequent events connected with the transaction. I will only add a general statement, showing the results of my negotiation. Having fully satisfied myself that Summerfield actually held in his hands the fate of the whole world, with his millions of human beings, and by experiment having tested the combustion of sea water, with equal facility as fresh, I next deemed it my duty to call the attention of a few of the principal men in San Francisco to the extreme importance of Summerfield's discovery.

A leading banker, a bishop, a chemist, State University professors, a physician, a judge, and two Protestant divines were selected by me to witness the experiment on a large scale. This was done at a small sandhill lake near the seashore, but separated from it by a ridge of lofty mountains, distant not more than ten miles from San Francisco. Every single drop of water in the pool was burnt up in less than fifteen minutes. We next did all we could to pacify Summerfield, and endeavored to induce him to lower his price and bring it within the bounds of possibility. But without avail. He began to grow urgent in his demands.

"The sub-committee soon commenced work amongst the wealthiest citizens of San Francisco, and by appealing to the terrors of a fever, and the sympathies of all, succeeded in raising one-half the amount within the prescribed period. I shall never forget the woe-begone faces of California street during the month of October. The outside world and the newspapers spoke most learnedly of a money panic—a pressure in business, and the disturbances in the New York gold-room. But to the initiated there was an easier solution of the enigma. The pale spectre of death looked down upon them all, and pointed with his bony finger to the fiery tomb of the whole race, already looming up in the distance before them. Day after day I could see the dreadful ravages of this secret horror, doubly terrible, since they dare not divulge it. Still, do all that they could, the money could not be obtained. The day preceding the last one given, Summerfield was summoned before the committee, and full information given him of the state of affairs. Obdurate, hard and cruel he still continued. Finally, a proposition was started that an attempt should be made to raise the other half of the money in the City of New York. To this proposition Summerfield ultimately yielded, but with extreme reluctance. It was agreed in committee, that I should accompany him hither, and take with me, in my own possession, evidences of the sums subscribed here; that a proper appeal should be made to the leading capitalists, scholars and clergymen of that metropolis, and that, when the whole amount was raised, it should be paid over to Summerfield and a bond taken from him never to divulge his awful secret to any human being.

"With this he seemed to be satisfied, and left us to prepare for his going the next morning.

"As soon as he left the apartment, the bishop arose, and deprecated the action that had been taken, and characterized it as childish and absurd. He declared that no man was safe one moment whilst 'that diabolical wretch' still lived; that the only security for us all was in his immediate extermination from the face of the earth, and that no amount of money could seal his lips or close his hands. It would be no crime, he said, to deprive him of the means of assassinating the whole human family, and as for himself he was for dooming him to immediate death.

the extermination of Summerfield. In them all there was the want of that proper caution which would lull the apprehension of an enemy; for should he for an instant suspect treachery we knew his nature well enough to be satisfied that he would waive all ceremonies and carry his threats into immediate execution.

"It was finally resolved that the trip to New York should not be abandoned, apparently. But that we were to start out in accordance with the original programme; that, during the journey, some proper means should be resorted to by me to carry out the final intentions of the committee, and that whatever I did would be sanctioned by them all and full protection, both in law and conscience, afforded me in any stage of the proceeding.

"Nothing was wanting but my own consent. I asked the privilege of meditation for one hour at the hands of the committee before I would render a decision either way. During that recess the above argument occupied my mind. The time expired and I again presented myself before them. I did not deem it requisite to state the grounds of my decision; I briefly signified my assent and made instant preparations to carry the plan into execution.

"Having passed on the line of the Pacific railway more than once, I was perfectly familiar with all its windings, gorges and precipices.

"I selected Cape Horn as the best adapted to the purpose, and as the public knows the rest.

"Having been fully acquitted by two tribunals of the law, I make this final appeal to my fellow-men throughout the State, and ask them confidently not to reverse the judgment already pronounced.

A MEAN AND AMUSING TRANSACTION COMBINED.—At a recent sale of real estate in Vernon, Vt., a house was sold that was occupied by a widow and a sick daughter. After the sale the mother asked the purchaser to allow her to remain in one of the rooms until her daughter was better able to be removed, but was met with a decided refusal. Kind hands were at once enlisted in her behalf and the sick girl removed to the south part of the town, which of course retarded her recovery. This was the mean part, and now for the amusing one. The next day the purchaser was surprised by the reception of a box neatly addressed to himself. He at once opened his prize, and, to his astonishment, was met by the compliments of a living skunk—a fitting companion for such a mean specimen of humanity. The last heard of the man he was in search of a new suit of clothes.

LITTLE WOMEN.—Three little girls were playing among the poppies and sagebrush of the back yard. Two of them were 'making believe' keep house, a little way apart as near neighbors might. At last one was overheard saying to the youngest of the lot, 'There, now, Nelly, you go over to Sarah's house and stop there a little while, and talk as fast as ever you can, and then come back and tell me what she says about me, and then I'll talk about her; and then you will go and tell her all I say, and then we'll get as mad as hornets and won't speak when we meet, just as our mother do, you know; and that'll be such fun—won't it?'

"Hadn't these little mischiefers lived to some purpose? and were they not close observers and apt scholars, charmingly trained for the chief business of life in a small neighborhood?

A GOOD STORY is told of an eccentric old gentleman, who, although occasionally addicted to the habit of swearing, was still punctilious in regard to saying grace at the table, and this duty he never omitted on any occasion. The story runs that on a certain occasion the old gentleman invited a sea captain, a jolly old weather-beaten tar of his acquaintance, to dine with him. They sat down to dinner, and the old gentleman, according to custom, commenced saying grace; but the captain, whose attention had been diverted for the moment, hearing the old gentleman speak, thought he was addressing him, and turned to him with:

"What did you say, 'Squire?'

"Why, d—n it, man, I am saying grace."

WHAT IT WAS ABOUT.—"Well now that puts me in mind of two old fellows down in Kentucky that had been the best friends in the world for over thirty years—never had a cross word, and would do anything for each other. They got into a top buggy wagon and started down to Lexington on business. You see they lived about twelve miles out of Lexington. One was named Burr—the other Clark. About six miles from Lexington they passed a track of land belonging to a man named Baker. It had a brook running through a gully on it.

"Tom," says Burr, coming to the gully, 'if Baker wanted to build a pond all he would have to do would be to throw a wall across that gully.'

"Yes," says Clark, 'but Tom don't want a pond.'

"Well," replied Burr, raising himself up, 'I didn't say he wanted a pond, did I? I said if he wanted a pond all he would have to do would be to throw a wall across that gully.'

"Well," exclaimed Clark, firing up in his turn: 'I didn't say that you did say he wanted a pond, did I? All that I said was that Baker didn't want any pond.'

"Well," shouted Burr in an angry tone, 'I didn't say that you did say that I said he wanted a pond, did I? I said I—' he wanted a pond, all he would have to do would be to throw a wall across that gully.'

"Well," said Clark, now thoroughly enraged, 'you are a d—d old fool, and I won't ride with you any farther! Stop the wagon.'

"So Burr stopped the wagon," said the Blue Grass man, "and Clark walked all the way to Lexington, six miles, before he would ride with him. That was seven years ago, and the cussed old fools have never spoken to one another since."—N. T. Sun.

JOHN BILLINGS ON HASH.—Hash is made out of cast off vittles. Hash has done more for the human race or man than almost any other breed of food.

For breakfast, a small tender-lion steak, some few ham & eggs, 3 baked potatoes, a plate of buttered toast, sum slap jacks, 2 cups of coffee, and sum hash is good.

I like to eat hash this way better than any other. Sum phukes always raise their nose up at hash.

If you search history with I eye, you will find these folks, 20 or 30 years ago, more or less, were born on hash. I have seen hash myself, that I had my doubts about, but I eat it, and still live. I love hash as a principle, and this is my rule; I watch the landlady, and if she eats it, I take the second plate. This makes me very popular at all the boarding houses which I attend. If folks would be a little more penurious with their hash, and not get stubs or tallow candles, baby's morocco shoes, and walk noddies, and then a fine tooth comb, that want more than half worn out, into their hash, hash would stand to-day at the head of all mixed food.

GEN. LOGAN'S STAFF.—Just before the capture of Savannah, Gen. Logan, with two or three of his staff, entered the depot at Chicago one morning, to take the cars east, on his way to rejoin his command. The general, being a short distance in advance of the others, stepped upon the platform of a car, and was about to enter it, but was stopped by an Irishman with:

"You'll not be goin' in there."

"Why not, sir?" asked the general.

"Because them's the leddies' cars, and no gentleman'll be goin' in there without a leddy. There's was sate in that car over there, ef yees want it," at the same time pointing to it.

"Yes," replied the general, "I see there is one seat, but what shall I do with 'my staff?'

"O, bother your staff!" was the petulant reply. "Go and take the sate, and stick yer staff out of the windy."

HOW IT WOULDN'T WORK.—Good Mr. Snake had been talking to little Calvin, in Sunday school, about the evils which result from using tobacco, and told him how, when he was a little boy, he had met a gentleman in the street with a segar in his mouth, and he asked him to throw it away, and how the gentleman said:

"My boy, you have taught me a leetle son," and never smoked again.

So little Calvin tried it. He asked the first man he met to "Please throw away that filthy segar," but the man was not on the throw, and all he said was, "I'll learn you manners, you little fool you," and he cuffed little Calvin's ears till his nose bled.

Little Calvin thinks things are changed since Mr. Snake was a boy.

BUTLER PRETTY.—A girl that quits a house because they don't have family prayers, ought to be considered a real good girl, but it is not always the case. One in Boston did it, saying she didn't believe any family that neglected to pray was good, and after she was gone the family found that all the silverware and jewelry had gone with her. They pray now regularly before their hired girls.