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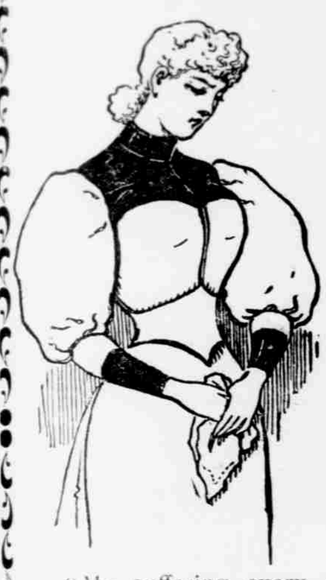

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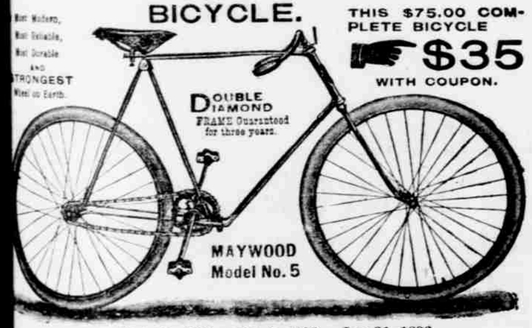

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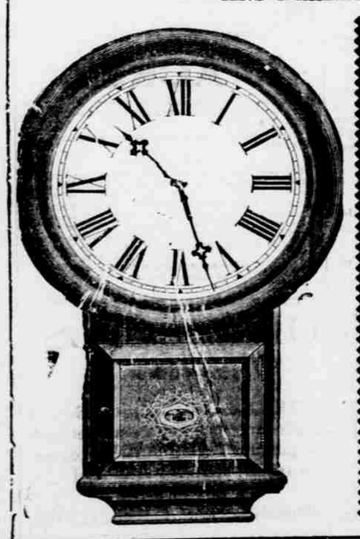

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MRS. PHELPS' REVELATION.

BY CHARLES E. REED.

"Madam, I need help; won't you give me something?" The question was addressed to Mrs. Phelps, who had just entered her carriage.

"No, I've no money to waste on lazy vagabonds!" was her sharp reply as the carriage door slammed shut.

Mrs. Phelps, a wealthy young widow, prominent in fashionable society, was in an unpleasant frame of mind. She had just visited three of the largest stores in the city in a vain search for a certain costly fabric, and now felt that she was an exceedingly unfortunate and most ill-used individual. Presently the carriage drew up before another store, which Mrs. Phelps entered after instructing her four-year-old son to remain seated in the carriage until her return. Master Phelps was very obedient for about three minutes. Then his attention was attracted by something which appealed to him quite as strongly as to a less aristocratic juvenile—the antics of a monkey under charge of a peripatetic musician. Standing on tiptoe, he laid his hands against the door, which, having been accidentally left unfastened, yielded to the pressure and partly opened; and in a very short time the young gentleman was out of the carriage and half-way across the street. Then, in an instant, there was a hoarse cry of warning, a woman's shriek—and something grasped the boy, swung him from right in front of a runaway team, and laid him, frightened and screaming, in his mother's arms.

After she had soothed the child and put him into the carriage, Mrs. Phelps turned to the rather shabbily-dressed man to whose agility her son's rescue was due.

"You have saved my Arthur's life!" she exclaimed. "Come to-morrow to my residence and name your reward. Meanwhile, take this;" and she handed him a $20 gold piece.

But the man refused the proffered gold.

"Why should you reward a lazy vagabond? That is what you called me a bit ago when I asked you for something," he remarked.

Mrs. Phelps looked at him closely and recognized him.

"I was out of humor," she explained. "Pardon what I said, and tell me how I can assist you."

"Madam, you've invited me to come to your home. If you'd do me a kindness, come to mine instead."

Mrs. Phelps looked at him in amazement.

"I can hardly do that," she said. "I would much rather—"

"As you please, madam. I'm glad I was able to rescue your child. If you're glad, I wish you'd visit my home. It isn't much to ask."

"What is your name, and where do you live?"

He said his name was James Thompson, and named an obscure street as his address.

"After I've taken my child home, I'll call and see you," said Mrs. Phelps.

"I'll be there by the time you are," he responded.

An hour later Mrs. Phelps, accompanied by a trusty servant, having driven into a narrow street, entered a most uninviting tenement, and ascended three flights of rickety, filthy stairs, was admitted to a small attic room, lighted by a single window. The floor was carpetless. A cracked stove, an old table, a large box which served as a cupboard, a bed, and two or three broken-backed chairs, were the only furniture. But though so bare and comfortless, the room was clean. Upon the scantily covered bed lay two persons—a woman of perhaps 35 and a little girl of about six—both evidently ill and both sleeping uneasily.

"I asked you to come here because I wanted you to see this," said Thompson in a low voice. "This"—with a comprehensive wave of the hand—"is my home. You see all my furniture—except what's at the pawnshop. I have no fire, and no fuel to make it with; no food, and no money to buy it with. I have a little medicine left by the doctor, but none of the comforts needed by my sick wife and child. This, madam, is why I asked you for help this morning."

Mrs. Phelps covered her face.

"How long have you been in this deplorable condition?" asked Mrs. Phelps.

"To-day is the first I've had to beg," was the reply; "something I'd have thrown myself into the river rather than do if it hadn't been for them. But I couldn't see them starve. I came to the city five years and more ago," he added after a moment's pause. "I had bad luck, for work was dull. From having a little house by ourselves, we were obliged to move here, and then my wife, who was a good seamstress, succeeded in getting men's trousers to make at 18 cents a pair."

"Eighteen cents a pair!" exclaimed Mrs. Phelps.

"Yes; but the price soon fell to 15 cents, and as I was out of employment, I helped with the sewing. By working from early morning till late at night we managed to earn enough to pay our rent and buy sufficient food to keep us from starving. But the rates went down, down, down, to 13, to 12, even to ten cents a pair."

"What! Ten cents for making a pair of trousers? Who is mean enough to pay such wages as that?"

"The great clothing firm of Phelps & Co., madam!"

"Phelps & Co.! Impossible!"

"The firm, madam, of which your husband was the head. I wonder if, when he gave largely to some library, church or hospital, he ever thought of the poor wretches who toiled day and night, summer and winter, with aching eyes, weary fingers and hungry stomachs, that the mill which ground out his money might turn him out a good-sized grist! I can take you to half a dozen families in this very house who make trousers for Phelps & Co., at the same prices, and who, like us, have finished coats at from five to ten cents each, and make knee pants at 16 to 18 cents a dozen pairs."

"Eighteen cents a dozen pairs! You don't mean that?"

"Yes, madam, I do. When Phelps & Co. pay ten cents for making a pair of trousers which sells for five dollars, is it any wonder that the firm prospers exceedingly, and that your husband was able to give away his thousands?"

"This is a revelation to me," said Mrs. Phelps. "I cannot see how you managed to exist at all."

"It's been a hard, hard struggle," replied Thompson. "With the aid of our little girl—for she has been sewing ever since she was four years old—we were occasionally able to earn a dollar in a day; but that was seldom. We had to pay a dollar and a quarter per week for this room, and hardly ever had more than four dollars a week to feed, clothe and warm the three of us. But for the last six months the child has been ill. Ten days ago my wife took sick, and because of having to wait on her and the child I was able to do so little sewing that the foreman got angry the other day and refused to give me any more work. Besides, we have been falling behind with the rent, and only yesterday I received notice that if I don't pay up by the end of the week I and my sick family must leave."

"Outrageous! Who is your landlord?"

Thompson took a paper from his pocket, and, remarking that it was his last receipt, handed it to Mrs. Phelps, who, after a single glance, started, and then stood staring at it in open-mouthed astonishment. For her own name was affixed to the receipt!

"What!" she ejaculated, as soon as she could find her voice. "This house—mine?"

"So it seems."

"This is my agent's work," said Mrs. Phelps, half to herself. "And he would have turned you into the street! Horrible!"

She opened her pocket and took out some bills.

"Mr. Thompson," she said, "I thank you for insisting that I should come here. You have opened my eyes to some things I was blind to before. Take this—it is only a very small part of the heavy debt I owe you. Buy fuel, food, clothing, furniture, medicines—whatever you and your sick family most require. Spend it freely, but pay no rent; this room shall never cost you another cent."

"God bless you, madame!" Thompson exclaimed, his eyes filling with tears. "I take your gifts now with a glad and thankful heart. I felt sure that all you needed was to see and understand. But, oh, remember that there are others in this house almost as badly off as you found me."

Upon reaching home Mrs. Phelps went to her room and shut herself in. Her visit to James Thompson had indeed been a revelation to her. How had she discharged the responsibility which the possession of great wealth carries with it? By lavishing money on flowers, music, rich viands and the like, when so many were lacking the necessaries of life. And, most humiliating thought of all, much of the very wealth which she enjoyed had been earned for her by those same starving poor. Theirs it was—not hers—if justice were done. In her humiliation she knelt and offered what was, perhaps, the first real prayer that had risen from her lips for a long time; a prayer in which she craved pardon for the thoughtlessness, selfishness and frivolity of the past, and consecrated her wealth to the service of Christ and of those concerning whom He said: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these * * * ye have done it unto Me."

A year has passed. James Thompson with his wife and daughter, both of whom have been restored to health, are living in a neat, pleasant house, the gift of Mrs. Phelps, through whose instrumentality Thompson has procured lucrative employment. The year has witnessed some other changes, too—especially in the real estate owned by Mrs. Phelps. Very promptly she called upon her agent and gave that individual some instructions which fairly took his breath away. She obtained from him a list of all tenements owned by her, and then set to work to systematically visit each house and the families occupying it. Such poverty, squalor and degradation as she encountered! As a result of this inspection, she ordered a general reduction of the rents, a thorough cleaning of all the houses and numerous repairs, while some crazy habitations she ordered to be demolished.

Phelps & Co. no longer pay starvation wages to their employes. Mrs. Phelps' husband had bequeathed her a controlling interest in the firm, and one day she startled the other partners by proposing a heavy increase in the rates paid for making up clothing. They demurred, and said that such an increase would bankrupt the firm. But Mrs. Phelps persisted in her demand, and finally induced the senior partner to accompany her to the abodes of some of the people employed by the firm. They had not visited many places when he said he had seen quite enough.

"How do you suppose the patronage of Phelps & Co. would be affected," asked Mrs. Phelps, "if our customers were aware that their new garments had been lying a few hours before on the dirty floor of a tenement or on the bed of a child sick with a contagious disease?"

Being unable to answer this question satisfactorily, both partners quietly submitted to the inevitable. The wages were raised, and, far from becoming bankrupt, the firm of Phelps & Co. is more prosperous than ever. And Mrs. Phelps to-day is a very cheerful, happy woman—far happier than when she was a devotee at the altar of fashion. For she knows that she has the smile of Him to whom she has consecrated not only her wealth and her time, but herself.—N. Y. Observer.

The Near-Sighted Woman.

What a curious manifestation of vanity it is which prevents a near-sighted woman from wearing glasses. One such woman was a member of a party that took a trip over the Rockies. She heard the others exclaiming over the beauties of the landscape through which they were passing. Not wishing to be behindhand: "Look! look there!" she presently exclaimed, "isn't that exquisite? What a picturesque ruin!" The "picturesque ruin" turned out to be a stable or a barn painted with: "Use Pain's Painless Plaster, etc." Undeterred by one such error she raved in ecstasy over the loveliness of some "stunning woman," until a kind-hearted companion checked her by pointing out that the fair one was an antique guy with a wig.—N. Y. Herald.

IN THE QUICKSANDS.

BY H. IRVINE LYNDS.

We were all sitting around the cozy fireplace in my friend's study, telling hunting experiences. The wind was blowing outside with just enough force to give the windows a ghostly rattle, and make the blaze roar up the chimney in a way that lent an added charm to stories into which the element of danger largely entered.

We had all dutifully told some old-time adventure—with certain additions that seemed absolutely necessary under the circumstances—all except our host, who had been given the last place on the list, so that the series might close robed in the richest coloring.

He was a hunter of wide and varied experience and a man who had given a great deal of intelligent thought to the mysteries of woodcraft. Consequently, whatever he said upon the subject was always listened to with deference.

We therefore settled down a little more comfortably in our chairs as he began:

"In my younger days I spent more time in the woods than I do now. Not that I like hunting less. It has as great attraction for me as ever, the odor of the woods is as sweet to me as the scent of powder is to the old war horse; but many things claim my time now and keep me from wandering.

"The little adventure I am about to tell happened in Nova Scotia, 20 years ago, when I was quite a young man.

"It is not generally known that certain parts of the province contain some of the finest hunting grounds imaginable. Miles and miles of virgin forest, acres of spruce and pine averaging fully 60 feet in height, crowded together on moss-green groundwork, almost close enough to shut out daylight. Then there are parts overrun with high maples, birch and beech.

"Many a day have I crept through the deep, shady glades and over the long, sloping hills. But I am rather wandering from my story.

"I'll just show you where my adventure happened."

Raising, he took down an atlas from a shelf.

"Just here at the north," he continued. "See that headland? That's the place. Twice a day all the water in the basin seems to rush around that point, and away up into the mainland.

"It is marsh land along there, and the point is called Minudie marsh. It is a very large tract of land, said to contain 5,000 acres, shut in from the sea by nine miles of dyke. It is perfectly level, dotted all over with barns and haystacks; and in the autumn also with men and horses, busily at work cutting 'broad leaf' or marsh hay.

"One not acquainted with the place could easily become lost, for the barns and haystacks, extending in every direction, are all alike in size, shape and color. It was near this marsh that I had located myself for the hunting season, on account of the excellent sport which it afforded in the shape of almost every kind of water fowl, and also because not many miles away were woods in which moose and caribou were plentiful.

"The autumn that year had been very dry, so that there were, comparatively speaking, no birds on the marsh. Without knowing this, however, I one day set out for a few hours' shooting.

"I tramped the best part of the afternoon, without success, and, as I did not care to go home without bagging something, I determined to shoot 'peep' on the mud flats.

"I rolled up my trousers to the knee and started, sinking fully six inches in the soft mud at every step. I walked about for some time, getting a shot now and then and wandering far out upon the flats, until a rushing noise behind made me turn quickly around.

"The 'bore' was coming—a bank of tumbling, seething water, quite three feet high, tearing about as fast as a man could run. 'Time to be getting back,' thought I. 'It will not take long for the tide to cover the flats.' I stood and watched the tidal wave for a moment, then started quite leisurely for the dyke, shaping my course directly for it.

"After having gone 50 yards or so, I came to a gully, between eight and ten feet wide, at the bottom of which flowed a little stream. It ran nearly parallel with the dyke, and in order to reach the marsh I had either to cross it or go away up and around. Not caring to lengthen my disagreeable tramp—for it was no fun dragging one's feet out of the mud at every step—I decided to hold my original course. The sides of the gully looked soft and treacherous, but by taking a running jump I thought I could clear the dangerous part.

"I stepped back a few paces, and, firmly grasping the gun, started. I had miscalculated the effect the bad footing would have, and saw my mistake the moment I sprang; but too late!

"I landed on the other side of the stream, in what seemed to me the softest part of the mud. My weight and the impetus of my jump drove me into the mud knee-deep.

"At first I was inclined to laugh at my plight, but that feeling speedily gave way to one of anxiety, when I realized that I was swiftly sinking.

"I endeavored to draw my feet out, but when I tried to lift one the other went further down. A cold sweat broke out on my forehead. I was in a bed of quicksand!

"I struggled with all my strength, but it was useless. There seemed to be an undercurrent of sand that was continually slipping away from my feet. Against that terrible power it was useless to fight.

"I had heard and read of people dying in this horrible manner, but never before had the chilling awfulness of it struck me with any degree of force. Now, as I thought of being drawn slowly down, down inch by inch, in imagination I could feel the cold, wet mud creeping, like some gruesome reptile about my neck, higher, higher—over my chin; over my tightly-closed lips, until my breath—. I tell you a man's mind rushes when he gets so near the border!

"I shouted for help, in the hope of attracting some one, but it only exhausted me, and my struggles caused me to sink faster.

"In extreme agony of mind, I threw myself on my face—I had sunk below my waist—and clawed the bank in a frantic endeavor to draw myself out. My fingers slipped through the soft mud and touched some hard, smooth substance, buried about three inches below the surface.

"I struggled to grasp it, but it was too large for my fingers to grip. It was a tree that had probably grounded on the flat long ago, and the tides had gradually drifted the sand over it.

"When one is in a position of great bodily danger, events succeed one another much more rapidly than they can be afterward told. The telling of this has taken a great deal longer time than its actual occurrence. A few minutes only had passed since I started toward the dyke.

"The sound of the tide now rushing over the lower part of the flats called me to a sense of new danger.

"Even if I was able to keep from sinking for a little while, the red water would soon rise over the place of my imprisonment and complete what the quicksands had so surely begun.

"'Drowning is said to be the easiest of deaths,' thought I, though any kind was preferable to being smothered in soxy quicksand.

"In the water, too, I could at least struggle—fight for life. But in that narrow, clinging grasp, every limb bound as with elastic cords, allowing freedom only to the extent of simply maddening one, caught like a miserable fly in a spider's web, I would not even have the satisfaction of struggling.

"The feeling of fear that first possessed me gradually left, or maybe numbed my senses, and in its place came strange fancies, such as one dreams when lying half awake.

"The sun seemed beating its piercing rays into my brain. The hoarse cry of a raven far up in the sky came faintly to me. I pictured him and his mate, dark specks showing against a background of white clouds, floating—floating and watching.

"I wondered if the peck of a raven's beak on one's head would hurt much—if they were up there waiting for me to die. Then I remembered that before I was dead I would be buried!

"I smiled grimly at the thought of cheating them. But if they came before? Instinctively I felt for my knife. I could keep them off with it. My knife! Like a flash came the thought that it would be a means of rescue.

"The cloud of fancies seemed to lift from my brain. With trembling fingers, I hurriedly drew it out and opened it. It was the kind known among schoolboys as 'toadstabber,' stout and strong.

"Hopefully, with one hand, I felt for the tree; but I had sunk so far in the mud that it was now beyond my reach. A groan burst through my clenched teeth, as my last hope fled.

"It seemed as if I must give up. But life is sweet—so sweet to one about to lose it. One more effort, then—a requiem chanted by the waves and flung landward by the winds.

"Making a violent struggle, I thrust my hand that held the knife as far forward as I could and struck down with all my strength.

"The tree must have been lying obliquely along the sides of the gully, so that my left hand had not been able to reach it; but my right, in which was the knife, had found it. The blade sank into the soft, half-decayed wood. Slipping my hand down as closely to the tree as possible, so as not to pull the knife out, and placing my left hand over my right, to give myself greater purchase, I pulled. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the dreadful sucking power was lessened—was stopped! Slowly my arms bent—I was gaining! Wrenching the knife out, I drove it in farther up the trunk, repeating this again and again, for I was able to draw myself only a few inches at a time, until I finally lay my length over the tree—saved!

"I had thrown the gun high up on the flat when I first found that I was fast. Recovering it now, I gained the dyke, to fall weak and trembling on the grass. I lay there until the tide had risen to the dyke. Then washing the mud out of my clothes I spread them in the sun to dry. When I had finished it was flood tide, the water was still and smooth as a mirror, except where here and there mounds of amber-colored foam or a piece of driftwood broke the surface.

"I shuddered as my eyes, drawn by a strange fascination, sought out the spot, now covered by many feet of water, where a short time before I had so narrowly escaped a terrible death.

"When I reached my boarding house, tired and hungry, the harvest moon was shining brightly. I thought with a shudder of the cold white glitter of the wet sands, and how nearly that night her beams had rested on my grave."—Golden Days.

ON THE EUROPEAN STAGE.

Toole's theater in London is to be torn down to make room for an addition to Charing Cross hospital.

Italy is more celebrated for its theaters than any other country in Europe. The theaters at Naples, Parma and Milan are the largest in Europe.

On Mardi Gras, with a matinee programme made up of Moliere's "Les Femmes Savantes" and "M. de Pourceaugnac," the Comedie Francaise took in 8,825 francs, the largest sum for one performance in its history.

Salvini recently made a reappearance on the stage of the Teatro Valle at Rome at a benefit for dramatic artists. The play was "Othello," the great tragedian, who seemed to have lost none of his power, acting the part of the Moor to the Iago of Ermete Novelli.

"Grosse Fortune," Henri Meilhac's new comedy at the Theater Francais, has had only a succes d'estime. It turns on the efforts of a young wife to win back her husband, who loves her, but has gone astray on account of suddenly coming into a great deal of money.

—Aaron Burr resigned from the provincial army by reason of ill health in 1789. In 1800 he and Jefferson each had seventy-three electoral votes for the office of president of the United States. The choice was thus left to congress, which, on the thirty-sixth ballot, chose Jefferson for president and Burr for vice president.