

An Incident of the War.

DURING the siege of Fort Wagner in 1863 the following deed of daring was performed by John Stray, a private in the New York Volunteers.

General Gilmore had taken steps to reduce the fort by regular siege and had established a parallel of guns which was doing good work. Unfortunately, during a night attack on the Union works the rebels succeeded in driving them from their position and spiking the guns in the battery. This was a serious check, as the rebel sharpshooters, ensconcing themselves in rifle pits, effectually stopped further progress on the part of the engineer corps. One of the spiked guns, a 200 pounder Parrott, completely raked the rifle-pits, and it was of the utmost importance that it should be brought into action; but every attempt made by the Union men to effect this met with a murderous volley from the vigilant rebel marksmen. In this difficulty the chief of ordnance called for volunteers to restore the piece to service.

To do this it was necessary to mount the cannon and drill out the spike obstructing the vent while the foe were diligently occupied, on their part, in picking off the venturesome workman from his perch. As no one seemed ambitious to undertake the venture, the chief of ordnance, Colonel Mordicael, applied to Stray, who, besides being a skillful machinist, had given proof on several occasions of unusual coolness and daring. At the request of the colonel he inspected the gun, but the shower of bullets which greeted his appearance was not calculated to encourage him, and he reported that he did not think any one could live long enough on the cannon to unspike it; and having a wife and young children, he was not desirous of making the effort. Without trying to influence him against his inclinations, the colonel replied that if he were willing to make the attempt and should be killed, he (the colonel) would see that his family were provided for.

This promise decided Stray, and he concluded to try and achieve the feat. At nightfall he went forth on his perilous errand, armed simply with a brace and bits. Straiding the breech of the monstrous piece, and couching as low as possible, he plied the drill vigorously. No sooner had he begun to work than the enemy perceived him, and flash after flash succeeded from their rifle-pits. It is one thing to exhibit prowess amid the clash and rush of battle, fired by the contagion of enthusiastic comrades, another to brave death singly and deliberately. Stray could see, as he worked, the long rifle pits of the rebels, not a hundred yards distant, ablaze with the light of fifty rifles, and feel the wind of their bullets as they whistled past him. Occasionally one struck the cannon, as he noticed by the peculiar chirp of the impact. Favored partly by the obscurity and more by good luck, he remained unscathed, save by one skin-scraping shot. In fifteen minutes—it seemed to him an hour—the vent was clear. As the gun was loaded, a lanyard and primer were passed up to him, and these affixed, he slipped quickly off. The rebels seeing him drop imagined they had shot him, and set up a yell of exultation, which was suddenly checked as a discharge of grape scattered death among them. The rifle-pits were at once abandoned, and our sappers and miners enabled to proceed without any further interruption. The captain of the battery reported twenty-two lead marks from bullets that had struck the piece.

In reward for this exploit, Stray was offered a second lieutenancy, but being a modest man, and not fitted by education for the position, he declined it and was satisfied to accept the appointment of master mechanic in the ordnance department.

This was by no means the only adventure of peril that Stray was engaged in during the war, and his history would make a readable volume. He was presented by Major General Gilmore with the bronze medal for valorous conduct, of which I believe but thirty-nine in all were ever distributed. Stray is now an engineer employed in a factory in Jersey City. He is a short, thick set man of fifty or so, with a gray beard fringing a quiet but determined countenance. Many a less deserving name will be handed down to posterity, to become illustrious with time, than that of this obscure hero, John Stray.

Freaks of a Lunatic.

A story is told of a French gentleman, who, having lost the bulk of his property through the rascalities of friends to whom he trusted, crowned it all by the loss of his mental balance, and for the remainder of his days found his only delight in riding in omnibuses and passing fares from passengers to the driver, taking care when change was returned to add to it a sou or two from his own pocket and watch the effect on the receiver. In nine cases out of ten as the story goes, the passenger, counting over his change and finding the driver had cheated himself, would look bewildered for a moment and then pocket the money with a quiet chuckle. The special delight of the lunatic was in satisfying himself in this way that nine-tenths of his fellow-men were dishonest if they only had the opportunity.

Tricking a Smuggler.

WHILE two detectives were examining the passengers on a newly arrived steamer, they come across a Jew who was a passenger in the steamer, but he was very sick. The passage had been very stormy and he was not much of a sailor; but, notwithstanding his illness, he seemed very anxious to land as soon as he could. Both officers remarked this, and asked him if he were ill.

"I feel terribly," answered Moses, "I am dying! Indeed, I'm very bad."

"Sea-sick?" asked the detective.

"Shocking," replied the Jew. And he seemed indeed to be suffering much from a severe pain in the stomach.

"Come with me," said the detective. "You are an old practitioner. We must search you before you go ashore. Well or ill, no matter."

So the Jew had to go into the captain's cabin *volens volens*. His clothes were searched, but nothing found. He complained of the rough treatment and said: "You did not think to be able to catch me twice, did you?" (for he had once before fallen into the hands of the police for smuggling) and then he made a ludicrous effort to laugh at his own joke. Then he rubbed his stomach, writhed with pain, and seemed every moment to be getting worse.

But he dressed himself again, and was even going on deck to leave the ship, when the detective ordered him to wait, at the same time calling the steward. The latter came and the officer immediately told him to fetch the doctor, for, said he, "we have here a very sick man."

The officer spoke to the doctor about it outside of the cabin. "Doctor," said the former in a confidential tone, "I have within here a Jew diamond smuggler who is very ill; he is one of our passengers, just arrived from Europe." And then he whispered into the doctor's ear something of his suspicions. "I wish that you would prescribe for him a good strong purging mixture; which will act well without hurting him. But give him such a dose as will clear out his stomach in fifteen minutes. Can you do that?"

"I understand," laughingly replied the doctor, who was an honest man, and in his heart opposed to smuggling. "I will make him up something suitable; and it shall not hurt him either."

Five minutes afterwards, in came the detective with a dose of calomel and croton oil for the sick man. He was indeed very unwell, he was pale as death and turning about with pain. But he refused to take the medicine offered to him. He was "not going to let himself be doctored on board the ship," only at home, and there he would be willing to have medical assistance.

"Take it," said the detective, "it will do you good."

"But I will not."

"Then we will pour it down your throat by force—every drop of it," answered the officer with determination. "I have something more to do than to stand here by the hour trying to cure you. Will you take it willingly, or shall we pour it down your throat?"

"It is a great deal too much, indeed it is," groaned the Jew, as he looked with hesitation into the glass held towards him. "Down with it," shouted the officer, and the fellow seeing that no kind of refusal would help him, gulped and gulped, and gulped it down till the greater portion was taken; but all the time making exceedingly wry faces.

"Now, you ungrateful curmudgeon, stay here till the medicine has acted and cured you of your sudden illness. But take a lesson. I know you, and your game is played out. Mark that. With these words the detective moved away.

"Go to the devil," was the answer that overtook him from his patient as he was going.

Romance of Captivity.

A letter from Iowa gives the following bit of romance in real life: "George Henderson left Ottumwa in 1867 to cross the plains to California, and was captured by the Shoshone Indians. He was taken to New Mexico, and has been there since. He married an Indian woman, and she assisted him to escape, and persisted in coming with him. He has a wife, to whom he was married but a short time before he went away, residing near Ottumwa. His father was killed in the war. The family had given him up for dead, and the meeting on his arrival at home was affecting. The mother recognized him as he stepped in at the gate, though he was dressed in the Indian costume and bronzed to nearly the color of a savage. He is now forty-two years old, six feet one inch in height, and as straight as an arrow. The Indian wife seems devoted to him, but freely and fully recognizes the just rights of his first wife, who has so long mourned her husband as dead, and surrenders all her claims upon him in behalf of the white woman."

A Perplexed Legislator.

A gentleman who occupied a seat in the upper branch of the New York Legislature, but at the time was a member of the Assembly, relates the following:

Perkins was as honest a man as ever set a foot in Albany. Money wouldn't buy him and I knew it, but I thought I would have a little fun with him, so I went down to his room one evening and said, "Perkins, what do you think of that underground railroad bill? Are you going to vote for it?"

"Well," said Perkins, "I haven't made up my mind yet, exactly. I am inclined to think it is a good bill, but why do you ask?"

"I thought you were in favor of it," said I, "and as long as you have concluded to vote for it, I just wanted to say to you that the men interested in it are paying five hundred dollars for votes, and as it is coming up on its final passage to-morrow, you can just as well have the money as not; you'll vote for the bill anyway."

"Vote for the bill!" I'll be hanged first," cried the irate Perkins. "No, sir. If improper means are being taken to pass this thing as you say, I for one, will vote against it every time. You can put me down 'no.'"

"O, I don't care anything about the bill," said I. "I was only trying to do you a favor, and I think I can yet, for to tell the truth, the rival companies are all here in full force and are moving heaven and earth to defeat it. They are paying the same amount for 'noes,' and as long as you are bound to vote that way, I'll get you the five hundred dollars all the same."

"Can such things be?" exclaimed Perkins, raising from his seat and tearing up and down the room in a whirlwind of righteous wrath and virtuous indignation. What a state of things this is! A plague on both of your houses, I won't vote at all."

Suicide Incidents.

Some of the scientific men of our day are trying to ascertain if a thoroughly sane person ever commits suicide. These gentlemen meet with difficulties, some of the chief of which arise from the impossibility of placing the suicides themselves on the witness stand. They find it impossible to get any but inferential evidence of a self destroyed man, as to his mental status at the time he killed himself.

Some queer facts have been brought to light however. One man had been told by a fortune teller that he would die in three weeks, and having a great horror of death, he took a dose of strychnine to escape it. That man was clearly of unsound mind. His visit to the fortune-teller showed that.

Another case almost the reverse of the above, occurred in Paris. A man bent on suicide climbed up the parapet of a bridge over the Seine, was about to jump into the river, when a sentry pointed his musket at him and threatened to shoot him dead unless he immediately came down. Singularly enough, this man at once came down, instead of staying on the parapet and achieving death at the hands of the sentry without committing suicide. Was that man in his right mind?

A still more singular case was that of an old bachelor, who in a moment of weakness entered into marriage engagement. On coming to what he called his right mind, this unfortunate man resolved to escape the consequence of his folly by committing self-destruction. Thus resolved, he had his razor aimed at his jugular vein, when word came that his fiancée had eloped with younger and handsomer man. Here was unexpected deliverance; but now mark the vagaries of a perturbed mind? Jealousy of his rival succeeded to horror of his betrothal, and after writing a plain statement of his grievances, the bachelor resumed his razor and cut his throat.

Good for Him.

Ladies traveling through Canada by rail are often greatly annoyed by having their luggage unnecessarily searched, but one of the officials recently got his deserts. It happened that a Yankee school teacher on her way from Kansas to Vermont passed through the Dominion, with a trunk packed to bursting with nothing contraband. When the officer demanded her key she begged him not to open it, assuring him it had come through from Kansas, contained simply clothes and books, and was so full that it would be very troublesome to repack it. But he sternly demanded the key, and maliciously pulled everything out to the very bottom; then—finding her assertions true—he returned the key, and advised her "to hurry up and get the traps back," as the train would soon move. "What is that to me," said the quick-witted woman. "I have a check for that trunk, and hold the Grand Trunk Railway responsible for its safe delivery. I will not take the key, and you may do as you please with the trunk. Report says that official was very weary and red in the face, and rather profane ere he finished packing that trunk."

What we want to Know.

A Scientific paper says: "If a man had an arm long enough to reach to the sun, and were to touch that body with his finger, he could never find out whether it was hot or cold, for he would be dead before the sensation arrived at headquarters, which would require a hundred years." This is very interesting and highly important. But now we want to know what it would cost that man annually for coat sleeves; how long it would take him to put on a clean shirt, the number of centuries he would have to expend to feel in his pocket for his handkerchief, and whether he could ever hope to part his hair properly while his arm had only one elbow. When light is thrown on these branches of the subject, we shall be better prepared to decide whether to advise our readers to let their arms grow to that length or not.

Origin of Penny Postage.

An English lecturer recently told his audience that Mr. Rowland Hill saw a poor woman whose husband was away, look earnestly at the outside of a letter from him and then declined to take it, as the postage was too great. He expressed his sympathy, but when the postman was gone she explained that the letter was all outside; her husband and she had agreed on signs and tokens to be conveyed by lines and dots and variations of the address, so that she could thus learn without fee that he was well or ill, was coming home soon, or wished her to come to him, or would send her money next week, and so on. The future reformer thought it a pity the poor should be driven to such shifts, and accordingly preached penny postage. This, the lecturer asserted, was the origin of cheap postage.

Compromising the Cloth.

A very wicked anecdote, but one passable as piece of ludicrous news, is told by the Green Bay (Wis.) Advocate, of an exemplary clergyman and respectable elderly lawyer of a neighboring city: While on their way, about two miles from that city, to attend a dying man, their buggy broke down, and they started on foot. A lady, coming along with a two-seated, open buggy, invited them to ride, which they accepted, the minister taking the front seat with the fair driver. She drove them into town, and dashed up and down the principal street, making a great sensation, setting the people on the walks into loud guffaws. They didn't discover until afterward that she was a woman noted for much wickedness and little virtue.

Which Should Bear the Loss?

One friend, a merchant, proposes to another, and underwriter, to insure his ship, lost or not lost, which ought soon arrive. The underwriter hesitates, takes the policy home, and says, "I will return it to-morrow, signed or unsigned." Early in the morning the merchant receives intelligence of the loss of his vessel. He knows his religious brother, and sends a clerk (who is ignorant of the loss) to say, Neighbor A. informs thee that if thou hast not underwritten, thou needest not do it."—The underwriter draws the inference that the vessel is safe. He has not actually signed, but, pretending to look for the policy, contrives to sign it by stealth, and says to the clerk, "Tell thy master I had signed."

The Tautology of Legal Jargon.

Some idea of the tautology of legal formula may be gathered from the following specimen, wherein, if a man wishes to give another an orange, instead of saying, "I give you that orange," he must set forth his "act and head" thus:—"I give you all and singular, my estate and interest, right, title, and claim, and advantage of, in and to that orange, with all its rind, skin, juice, pulp, and pips, and all right and advantages therein, with full power to bite, cut, suck, or otherwise eat the same orange, or give the same away, with or without its rind, skin, juice, pulp, and pips, anything heretofore or hereinafter, or in any other deed of deeds, instrument or instruments, of what kind or nature soever, to the contrary in anywise notwithstanding."

Four Good Habits.

There were four good habits a wise man earnestly recommended in his counsels, and which he considered to be essentially necessary for the management of temporal concerns; and these are, punctuality, accuracy, steadiness, and despatch.—Without the first of these, time is wasted; without the second, mistakes the most hurtful to our own credit and interest; and that of others may be committed; without the third, nothing can be well done; and without the fourth, opportunities of great advantage are lost, which it is impossible to recall.

A Vermont boy is in luck. The school-teacher was just going to "baste" him when the lightning struck the house, and in his excitement the teacher forgot all about the intended thrashing.

An old lady in a town of Worcester county lately refused the gift of a load of wood from a tree struck by lightning, through fear that some of the "fluid" might remain in the wood, and cause disaster to her kitchen stove.

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