

# VANQUISHED A SPOOK

### BILL SCROGGINS DID IT AND THEN DISAPPEARED.

The Singular History of a Peculiar Character Who Located Wells for Missouri Farmers and Juggled With Trained Snakes.

Rev. Bill Scroggins was a character in a border county of Missouri in 1844. How he acquired the ecclesiastical prefix and what he did under the title were stories which used to be told in the farmhouse of what is now known as Cass county.

They said he had been a snake charmer when he was a young man, that he traveled about the country as a sort of magician and that he showed farmers with his divining rod where to dig wells.

The people of what was then a frontier county assembled once a year in their respective communities and held camp meetings. On one of these religious occasions Bill followed the crowd with his bag of reptiles. The minister, an old man whose face was like that of a patriarch, told the story in a sermon of Moses lifting up the brazen serpent in the camp of Israel under the command of Jehovah. The Missouri farmer who used to entertain travelers with the recital said that the congregation was not particularly moved by the appeal, but after its delivery Bill Scroggins got up and announced that he had a bag of real, crawling, hissing reptiles which he would exhibit after dinner just outside the camp ground, and he claimed that he would show the people some snake tricks which would beat the Moses story they had just heard.

In spite of the protest of the minister the people turned out to the live snake show, and Bill gave them an exhibition which was a great success. It is said, or it used to be said, that there wasn't a snake trick which Bill Scroggins' serpents didn't do. When the exhibition was over, Bill told the people that he was a sort of missionary himself in connection with his business of locating wells and that he would call on each member in the evening and advise with them as to their spiritual and worldly wants.

When he called, his first question was, "Have you got a well?" If the reply was in the negative, and wells were scarce, Bill informed the member that he must have one located, and then he opened his bag of snakes and as they began crawling Bill lifted up his voice and called the people to repentance. He told them the snakes would do no harm if they (the people) would give him the job of locating wells.

It was a tax on human belief, but the Missourian who told the story vouched for the truth of his assertion that the people gave Bill more orders than he could fill in one season and that he broke up the camp meeting. He was the first heretic in the west, although the word was unknown in that country then. He became famous and was in demand. Wherever he traveled he had his bag of trained snakes, and he waxed fat and became independent.

Whenever there was any doubt about the success of any movement the word was passed that Rev. Bill Scroggins should be summoned.

People in that section believed in ghosts, as many more enlightened people believe in them in this day. There was one ghost which had done a lively business along the highway between the county seat and a river known to this day as Bear creek. It was the custom of this ghost to chase belated horsemen over the highway until the ford at Bear creek was reached. There the chase stopped. The ghost never crossed the stream.

When the fame of Rev. Bill Scroggins had spread abroad, it was suggested that he travel over the Bear creek road and try his hand on the spirit. Bill accepted the call. He made a number of journeys before the ghost materialized, and there were people who began doubting the existence of the ghost, while others cited Rev. Bill as one who could overcome anything, and by that token he had made the ghost take to the woods. The community was equally divided.

However, the ghost showed up one night in the midst of a storm and challenged Rev. Bill to ride for his life. The snake ecclesiastic refused, and there was a contest in which Bill's horse was killed, and he was left afoot. The ghost got the bag of snakes and escaped to the ford, where Bill overtook him on the following day, and the contest was renewed. The ghost undertook to turn the snakes on Bill, but they refused to act. Bill got possession of them and turned them on the spirit. They drove the spirit into Bear creek and across it, and the spirit fled, and that was the end of the ghost in that country.

Bill returned in triumph to the county seat and told the story. It was received with some doubt, but as years slipped by and nobody was chased people began to believe Bill, and apologies came in rather late. But Bill was vindicated. Then he mysteriously disappeared.

Some years later a den of snakes was discovered in what is now Bates county, Mo., the adjoining county on the south to Cass, and in this den was discovered the skeleton of a man. In the opinion of many the skeleton was none other than that of Rev. Bill Scroggins. So well was his memory revered that the bones were collected from the snake den, and when the first courthouse was built in Cass county, it is said, they were placed in a box under the cornerstone and were found there years after when the old courthouse was demolished.—Brooklyn Eagle.

An egg will settle coffee, but it takes money to settle a bill.—New York Weekly.

# THE REGENT DIAMOND.

### It is Acknowledged the Most Perfect Brilliant in Existence.

The "Pitt" (or "Regent," as it was afterward called) is the most perfect brilliant in existence, and its history is also very remarkable. It is said to have been found by a slave in the Paris mines in 1701, who to retain his treasure cut a hole in the calf of his leg, in which he concealed it, although it is more probable he secreted it among the bandages. The slave escaped to the coast with his find, where he encountered an English skipper, whom he made his confidant, offering, indeed, to bestow upon him the stone in return for his liberty. The mariner, apparently consenting to the slave's proposal, took him out to sea and when there drowned him, after obtaining possession of the diamond. Disposing of the gem to a diamond merchant for £1,000, it is said the man afterward hanged himself in a fit of remorse.

Mr. Pitt, governor of Fort St. George and great-grandfather of the illustrious William Pitt, became the next possessor of this valuable stone, weighing 410 carats, for £20,000. He sent it to London, where he had it very skillfully cut at a cost of £5,000, the process occupying two years. Pitt appears to have found his diamond no very enviable possession, for, after refuting the calumnies of his enemies, who had charged him with having obtained it by unfair means, he was so haunted by the fear of being robbed that he never slept two nights consecutively under the same roof, never gave notice of his arrival in or departure from town and went about mysteriously disguised. He must necessarily have felt greatly relieved when he parted with the diamond to the Duc d'Orleans, regent during the minority of Louis XV, king of France, in 1717 for the sum of £135,000.—Chambers' Journal.

# MINERS AND MORPHINE.

### A Necessary Custom Which is Not Pleasant to Contemplate.

"When I was in the northwest," said a gentleman with some money invested in mines, "I employed a prospector to go out into the mountains looking for properties which had been recommended to me. One day he was to have gone from our camp over into a very rough and rocky district, but when evening came he reported that he hadn't made the trip.

"Why not?" I inquired.

"Because I didn't have my morphine with me," he responded in a very matter of fact manner.

"Morphine!" said I in astonishment. "What has that got to do with it? You are not a morphine fiend, are you?" "Not as much of a one as you are a tenderfoot," he laughed and proceeded to inform me that every prospector who knew his business always carried with him enough morphine to kill a man easily and that he did so in order to end himself quickly in case of an accident which would disable him far away from assistance. There were many instances of prospectors falling over cliffs and crippling themselves or breaking a leg in a hole among the rocks or rendering themselves helpless in some other way, and death was sure to follow by starvation or freezing or in some sections by being devoured by wolves or other wild animals. In order to prevent such a horrible death as any of these the prospector simplified matters by always carrying a little packet of morphine, which not only quieted the pain of the hurt he had sustained, but put him to sleep pleasantly to wake no more on earth. It struck me at first as uncanny, not to say wicked, but I got over that feeling after a narrow escape or two, and I carried my little tin box just like a veteran would."

—Washington Star.

### He Knew Human Nature.

Three young men were walking up Riverside drive the other morning, when a gamy looking race horse jogged by, drawing a natty trotting rig.

"Isn't that a splendid animal?" exclaimed one of the young men in cheery, admiring tones, pausing to gaze at the trotter.

The driver's eye sparkled, and his chest expanded. He had heard the compliment. Wheeling his horse around, he brought it alongside the pavement.

"Wouldn't you like to try a brush behind him?" he said courteously.

In a jiffy the young man was seated in the buggy, and the two were disappearing down the drive at a pace that justified the compliment of the pedestrian. His companions watched him enviously. Then one of them said:

"Bill is a judge of horseflesh."

"And an artist on human nature," added the other. "I've seen him do that before."—New York Mail and Express.

### He Missed His Slippers.

When a young man, the late John Lewis, R. A., went to India and Egypt and was away about 18 years. When he returned to his mother's house in Portland place, he almost immediately pulled off his boots and commenced to hunt about at one end of the parlor fender and seemed terribly put about. His mother of course asked him anxiously what he wanted.

"My slippers," said he. "When I went away, I left them just down there. Now, where are they?"—Tit-Bits.

### Well Regulated Parents.

"Our little Dick makes very clever conundrums—really very clever."

"Can you guess them?"

"Oh, we never dare do that. Little Dick wants to tell the answers himself."—Indianapolis Journal.

# Passed the Porter.

The pet fad of a certain actress is shoes, and she never travels without a pair of shoe trees in her satchel. One season she was touring the west. When she went to bed in the Pullman the first night eastward from Butte, she took off her trim walking boots and, as her custom is, slipped the trees into them and set them under the edge of the berth. It was broad daylight when she was awakened by the respectful and somewhat awestricken voice of the porter. She drew the curtains aside and looked out into the aisle. The porter was standing there, holding the shoes in his hand.

"Here they are, lady," he said. "Well, just put them down under the berth, please," said she. The man hesitated a moment.

"Can you—can you put them on by yourself?" he asked.

"What the shoes?" asked the lady. "No, miss," answered the porter. "I means your feet. Ain't these yere things feet?"

Since then she has carried the ghastly looking boot trees in her trunk.—Washington Post.

### The Wrong Bird.

A certain conjurer once had an experience which was highly comical, though quite disastrous from a professional point of view.

Having produced an egg from a previously empty bag, he announced that he would follow up this trick by bringing from the bag the hen by which the egg had been laid. This little arrangement he had left to his confederate to carry out.

He proceeded to draw the bird from the bag in which it had previously been placed, but what was his consternation on finding that the alleged hen was an old rooster, which strutted about the stage with ruffled feathers and offended dignity and set up as vigorous a crowing as if he had just awakened from his nocturnal slumbers.

The whole audience shrieked with laughter, and the unfortunate conjurer made a "bolt" for his dressing room.

### Variable.

"What is this title 'professor' that I hear so often?" asked the distinguished foreigner.

"Well," answered Miss Cayenne, "it's getting rather hard to tell. Usually it means a man who knows more than any one else, and sometimes it means a man who simply won't work."—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

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