

THE GREAT WHITE LORD

By
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ON THAT great highway of the foolish and miserable, condemned and defamed for years, we have hunger and thirst, hope and despair, love and hatred, as you have elsewhere. And there, too, on the Bowery, we have honest men and women, strong on the side of righteousness, as well as those who have leagued with the devil from earliest to most recent days.

Do remember that the Bowery is in the heart of our greatest city and not in the wilds of Tibet, and believe me that human nature and emotions prevail there as anywhere. If you doubt me, come and see, transfers are given at all crossings.

If there is anything that will distinguish in one particular human nature on the Bowery from that of other parts it is its primitive directness. People will love, hate, trust and despise more strongly, more directly, where the shell of civilization has not yet entirely veneered the whole surface. And to you, of the higher civilization, the humanity of the Bowery, because of its absolute directness, seems grotesque, absurd.

It is claimed that in certain stages of intoxication men will show their true selves. That's how it is on the Bowery. There, the potent inebriety of misery makes men throw all pretense to the winds. If one

On the day on which the curtain of this little comedy of errors rolled up, Bender was returning from his daily search for work. He had not met with any encouragement and made his homeward journey entertaining himself by noting the many incidents which make the streets of the metropolis an unending panorama.

He made his leisurely way to the Bowery and, before turning into East Third Street, investigated the progress of the "Hygienic Restaurant," which, for weeks, had displayed this sign: "Will Open Tomorrow."

It was in his immediate neighborhood and Bender took a personal pride in this improvement of it via this dazzlingly shining establishment for feeding purposes.

Charmed by the bold inscriptions on the still whitened windows, reading, "Surpassing Coffee" and "Try Our Home-Made Cooking," Bender dwelled in dreams of feasting and was not aware that he, in turn, was being scrutinized.

The proprietor of the Hygienic, a man of swarthy mien and decked out in much conspicuous jewelry, who had been directing the hangers of the great sign bearing the name of the restaurant, had for some time watched the circular distributor.

"Working?" he broke, at last, the mutual spell of inspection.

"Me? No, not just now," answered Bender, feeling, instinctively, that he confronted a crisis.

"Want a job?"

permitted to intrude, Bender still stood in the hall, fairly boring holes with his eyes through the door, behind which the second-floor man was taking his sullen airing. And again, later, when Bender at last had started on his climb, he stopped at the "second floor, rear," door and came as near to eavesdropping as his conscience would permit him. Whatever he heard or discovered, after a vigil of, perhaps, two minutes, Bender dreamily shook his head and continued on to the top floor.

During his three months in the Army Bender had carefully absorbed and practised the dogmas of that remarkable body. Scarcely any of the small daily tasks were performed by him without "holding communion." And so, as soon as his cubby-hole was reached, he again resorted to communion in this "travail of his soul."

These "communions" were not perfunctory matters, but events accompanied by much detail. First he went to the "sink" in the hall to cleanse his hands; then he brushed his hair and spread a newspaper on the floor before his cot. After this mise en scene had been arranged, he again went to the "sink" and once more washed his hands. Back in the room, he locked the door and sank to his knees on the newspaper beside the bed. With folded hands and uplifted eyes he remained so for a moment before communing with Him, his God, the God of Bender.

"Please excuse me, God, for coming to You again with my troubles, but, honest, I can't help it. And it ain't only my troubles I want to talk to You about, but I want to thank You, too, for what You done for me about getting that job at the restaurant. It's no use o' talking, I needed it, and, You can bet, it came in awful handy. But I don't know what to do about them two funny people on the second floor. They're my neighbors and I got to do something for them because it is my duty, but I don't know how or what, and I got to put it up to You and I hope You'll help me. If You would only give me a little more nerve so I could speak to that fellow about coming over to the Army some night with me, I think it would be all right. He's been a sinner all right, for Captain Aggie Haskins says you can read a whole lot in faces and his face don't look right to me at all. I guess that's about all I can tell You just now and I hope You'll send me some inspiration so I can rescue that fellow from his wickedness. And now I thank You for Your goodness to me and ask Your blessing and strength so I won't fall by the wayside. And—oh, so long, Father. Amen."

And, truly, that prayer was heard. He was celebrating a "Hot Time Evening" at the Salvation Army that night and Bender, of course, was present. The trend of his simple life was sadly disturbed by the strange couple on the second floor, rear. The only thing he knew about them from observation and through Mrs. Spillane was that they were poorly situated.

Had he known all about them he might have deemed their fate commonplace, but the mystery surrounding them and the odd appearance of the man had a strange fascination for Bender. He had thought about them and how to help them all day and at the "Hot Time" he found application to them in every song, every speech, every testimony uttered.

It was after the song, "We're All Going Home to Heaven," sung to the air of "We Won't Go Home Till Morning," that Bender's psychological moment came to him.

Throughout the evening a pale, ascetic man, in officer's uniform, had sat brooding on the platform. After the last chorus of "We're All Going Home to Heaven," the commanding officer of the post stepped to the edge of the platform to make the following announcement:

"Comrades and friends! As you all know, we have with us to-night Colonel Harvey Timberall, the silver-tongued orator of the Golden West. Colonel Timberall has been fighting glorious battles out in the wicked digger-towns of Nevada and Colorado and Montana, and he is going to tell you how to fight the battle on to victory. And now let us give three cheers for Colonel Harvey Timberall!"

The cheers were given and much noise was made while the Colonel made his way to the center of the platform.

How his speech ranked according to Salvation Army criterions cannot be stated, but to the average listener it was a weird compound of twisted theological doctrines and bombastic rhetoric. But—and that was the point—the audience liked it. Greedily they swallowed the sentences and often interrupted the orator by tumultuous applause after some particularly appealing sentiment.

Bender's attention was so rapt that almost the entire speech was memorized by him. And when the speaker came to the practical hints, telling his congregation how they, too, every one of them, could go out into the world and do as much for their fellow men as he had done, then Bender knew and felt that the sermon had been preached solely for his benefit.

"... And there, behold, there He stood upon the mountain, facing the multitude, proving beyond peradventure that He was the saviour of the lowly. What did He say? The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head. And what did he do? Did he remain facing the multitude? No! He went right down among them and gave them the message of the Master. And these are the commands of the Great White Lord: 'Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.' And He also said: 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.'"

That was the whole thing in a nutshell, those were the commands of the Great White Lord, and Bender beamed them.

Devotional hysteria ran high that evening, and it was midnight before Bender crept up the stoop, on which the man from the second floor rear, was taking his siesta. Ordinarily Bender's nerve would have failed him, but the influence of the "Hot Time" was still potent and he determined to begin his mission at once.

"We had a poorly good time over at the Army to-night."

The man looked up without speaking.

"Yes, I—You see, I belong to the Salvation Army," Bender bravely kept on, and, not getting an answer, asked: "You don't belong to the Army?"

"No, scarcely," was the harsh reply.

"I think you ought to," declared Bender fervently. "It made a man o' me all right and you ought to join them too, for—"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed the man angrily.

"Oh, nothing, only it makes a man much happier and—well, it does a lot o' things."

"It can't make me or mine happy and I'm more interested in getting food than happiness," growled the stranger.

"The Army'll give you food."

"To be sure they will and then will take a mortgage on my manhood. There's such a thing as self-esteem: It's the only possession I have and I will not let it go. I have reached the limit of misery, forsaken by every living soul, even she—but I won't beg."

"But when a man is in your fix," Bender spoke didactically, "only the Great White Lord can help him."

"The Great White Lord?"

"Yes," replied Bender. "I ain't never been to school, but I know that the Great White Lord can

help if you only will pray to him."

"And you are crazy enough to believe that?" sneered the man.

"I know it's so and all you got to do is to try it."

"You fool! If there were any truth in that He would have helped me long ago."

"But did you pray to Him?"

"I prayed to Him and I cursed Him—and all without avail. And they called me crazy because of my belief in Him. Now—ah, but why waste time in idle talk."

"Gee, but you must have been an awful sinner!" It slipped involuntarily from Bender's lips.

"I must have been," mocked the other. "I was one of those fools who tried to satisfy a champagne appetite on a beer income. I played the grand bluff and when it didn't work any longer they called me irresponsible, put me away and dubbed me 'crazy.' But I got away and they shan't get me again. And if she"—he pointed upward in the direction of his room—"if she gives me away, then I'll give them a chance to put me away—and for good."

What to reply to this Bender did know.

"You ought to tell it all to the Great White Lord," he said, hesitatingly. "He'll help you—and I'll pray for you anyway."

"You, and your Great White Lord, pshaw!" and the tenant of the second floor, rear, went up to his chamber.

Alone, Bender realized that he was facing a crisis. But what was he to do? Only one thing was obvious, he must procure some food for them. But that is no easy matter when one is without a penny. What was he to do?

They were working all night at the Hygienic Restaurant to get it ready for the morning's opening. Several men were bossed about by the swarthy proprietor and the place was a bedlam of noise when Bender entered.

What plea Bender made he never knew, but after pledging his next day's pay, he left the restaurant loaded with bundles. Careful not to lose any of the packages, he gingerly ascended the stoop of his house and opened the door.

Somebody was in the hall.

There was no possibility of burglars—there was nothing to steal—still it was strange to find somebody there at this hour of the night. Bender went straight to the figure, shrinking into the shadows—and found the wife of the second floor tenant dressed for the street.

"Why—how—you ain't going out?" he stammered.

"Yes, I'm going. Please don't detain me," she answered, eager to get away.

"I think I know what you're going out for, but it ain't necessary. I got it right here," Bender smiled slyly, displaying his bundles.

The woman's glowing eyes had been fastened on Bender, but now they saw the packages and the smiling face above them—and, as people in some rare moment will, she understood a great deal.

"And you—you got this for us?"

"Sure," he said. "It ain't much, but in the morning I'll get you some more. Anyway, I wouldn't have him doubt my Great White Lord."

"Your Great White Lord?" the woman asked wonderingly.

"Yes, He who says you might entertain an angel unawares."

"And you think that he, upstairs, might be an angel unawares?"

and not turning when he heard them. She wavered for an instant, but then went to him and placed her hand on his shoulder.

"Edward," she whispered, "I have come back; I couldn't go."

The husband stood up, and, without a glance at Bender, who hovered in the background, he folded his wife in his arms. The humble intermediary thought this a good opportunity to absent himself and stepped to the table to leave his bundles. But before he had reached the door, the wife had him by the arm.

"Oh, don't go yet," she pleaded, looking also at the husband. "We must thank you first and—"

"Yes, I suppose we have to thank you, but I shall re—well, I shall make it all right in a day or two."

mumbled the husband, greedily eyeing the packages.

The wife, not at all satisfied with the husband's manner, insisted on Bender's remaining.

The packages were quickly opened and the two fairly gorged themselves. The food disappeared rapidly. This unexpected feast seemed to intoxicate the husband.

"The Great White Lord isn't such a bad fellow, after all," he mumbled between mouthfuls. "But say, you're a mighty queer looking cuss to be so intimate with such a great personage."

The last few hours had taught Bender a great many things and he did not propose to stand any more flogs.

"You can sneer all you like at my Great White Lord, but I think it would become you much better to thank Him. You can kid all you like, but it's only the Great White Lord that can save fellows like you."

"And I suppose as the next part of the service our brother here will lead in prayer?" the stranger still mocked.

It was what Bender wanted. He did not know how to expound or argue, but he had implicit faith in the power of prayer. So, for once dispensing with his preparations, he knelt in the center of the floor and spoke to his God, the God of Bender.

"Please, God, excuse me for coming to You with my troubles so late at night, but this fellow here that I have been telling you about, he's in a bad way and his heart is getting more and more stubborn. Now, what am I going to do? I done everything I could and prayed for him, but it don't seem to do much good. How can he refuse to believe in You? He ought to know that only for You he wouldn't maybe be alive and wouldn't have gotten his little lady back again. It was You that made me meet her and steer her back again. And, honest, You know how square and loyal she is and that she's all to the good."

Whether it was a laugh or a sob behind him Bender never knew or cared. He just kept on.



"HEY, NOW, YOU AIN'T GOING OUT?"



"YES, I'M GOING. PLEASE DON'T DETAIN ME."

is about to kill, or steal, love, grow good, or go crazy, there is no mistaking his purpose.

We have no kleptomaniacs, geniuses or eccentrics down our way; we have the direct sort, crooks, "daffies" and "bugs."

And of these I will tell you a story, as I have seen it played before me. Should you come to the conclusion that the narrator belongs to either of the two last named categories of the species, stick to it by all means; it will not change conditions even a trifle.

Nick Bender was of so little account that no one knew anything about his private history and no one tried to find out. Not even his landlady, Mrs. Spillane, of East Third Street, knew any more about him than that he was about as poor as the rest of her lodgers and made less of a bluff at prosperity.

Old Mary Spillane was not a sociologist and that Bender never got above the stage of distributing circulars for spectacular dentists and flamboyant chiropractors, in spite of his youth and physical well-being, was no concern of hers as long as her weekly stipend of seventy-five cents was paid on Saturday.

There had been Saturdays when even this small amount had not been forthcoming, but Old Mother Spillane did not have the heart to dispossess the poor, inoffensive devil from his room, which, in verity, was the merest cubby-hole on the top floor, where trunks unused furniture and other trash shared the space with him—in fact, Mother Spillane, who never took any interest in her lodgers, came about as near to liking Bender as it was possible for her to like anybody.

Whether Bender knew or appreciated this fact was not apparent. He plodded along his simple way, sometimes eating, sometimes starving, and nothing of importance occurred to him until he fell into the gaping meshes of the Salvation Army.

Who shall dare to read men's souls aright? Therefore, do not let us judge Bender's motives in joining this horde of jubilant fanatics. Whether seeking salvation or forgiveness for his sins, or whether seeking self-aggrandizement, it was his personal matter, not ours.

On the other hand, Bender was not so far removed from his kind of the day to overlook any possible accruing benefit. It seemed to him quite likely that some "painless dentist" would willingly increase the usual daily wage of fifty cents to, at least, seventy-five cents for the privilege of having his circulars distributed by a soldier of the Army in full regiments.

But that was still in store, as Bender had not yet reached the uniformed stage and in the meantime fate was to have its frolic with him.



"AND THAT'S ALL, GOD, AND I HOPE YOU'LL DO IT—"

"This is the first time I ever tried to do what the Great White Lord tells us for to do and now, please, God, don't disappoint me. Let me make good this once, anyway. This fellow here, he ain't so bad after all, and he's educated, but he got a little daffy from being on the bum and can't see that he's the cause of the whole trouble. So, please, God, open his eyes and make him go out and hustle for a job—and let him find one—so's the little woman won't have to be ashamed o' him no more. And You, who knows everything, knows that then the little woman's cheeks will be rosy again and that a fellow has been saved from going completely to—down and out. And that's all, God, and I hope You'll do it for me. Amen."

A sudden quiet had come into the room and Bender, not wishing to disturb it, went through the door with a whispered "Good-night."

Inasmuch as Bender never troubled his slumbers were always sound, in spite of hard pillow and thanks to a clear conscience. It was toward morning, just as the dawn was strenuously fighting the stubborn night for supremacy, when Bender was awakened from his dreams.

"Bender," whispered the figure beside the bed, "I want to thank you—"

"Oh, gee, that would have kept until morning," growled Bender sleepily. "I'm good and drowsy."

"But I must tell you this, that the little woman has forgiven me and that I'm going to look for a job in the morning. And I also want to tell you that you did this or—"

"Ah, stop your kidding," retorted Bender, now a little more awake. "Don't you know yet who done it? 'Twas the Great White Lord. Go and thank Him—and let me go to sleep. Good-night."

Moral? Is there one?

NEXTWEEK "Gold and the Guinea's Stamp,"
By Leo Crane.