TIBERIUS SMITH—He Leads to Victory

by Hugh Pendexter

"It Was the Dons Got Mazie."

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I NEVER had the good fortune to meet Tiberius Smith, the veteran showman, but I have known that other remarkable man, Billy Campbell, and from his lips heard many chronicles of his patron's hardy and unusual doings. As he told me these yarns his eyes often grew moist and he would murmur in parenthesis: "Ah, but he was a man. Heaven knows why his folks dubbed him Tiberius; maybe to get away from the Smith. But when it came to writing down the real answer he was the only Roman on the asphalt."

I first met Campbell at the "Away From Home club," and as I came to know him I learned to love him, and through him his old master. And thus as the winter nights drove us to our pipes and the cozy companionship of the blazing hearth he detailed that which has until now escaped the public ken, except as garbled press reports have at times hinted at inexplicable situations without furnishing the solution. I can see now that Smith in his world wide wanderings in search of circus and menagerie furnishings or in piloting some theatrical venture was the blind factor in many a half published equation.

If I remember correctly, I had been commenting on the frequency of revolutions in quarrelsome Central America when Campbell first opened his heart, filled his pipe and began the narrative which was to charm me for many an evening.

"It is true," he began, "that Central America has been a bargain counter in petty warfares for years and has peddled out more genuine lemons to would be Caesars than any other spot of its size on the map. Some of the disturbances have been exceedingly eccentric, others just plain, vulgar killings; but I doubt if there was a more picturesque insurrection than that in which Tiberius Smith of Vermont filled the president's cozy corner for one week, and with his reserve battery of comic opera singers and his ever reassuring 'Ha! ha!' defied all comers. The passing of Tiberius and his administration is not mentioned in history, nor did the consular agent hear of it in time to stir up the Washington newspapermen with sanguinary wires. And probably the slob element down there, known as the common people, have long since forgotten it.

"But the story of that glorious week should make brave reading, nevertheless, and the battle put up by the Green mountain man and his corps of gaily clad sopranos and a light brigade of giggling danseuses, reinforced by sad voiced contraltos, an Alpine shepherd, a regulation pirate, and much green room truck, incidentally demonstrates that art and science need not always stagger to the ropes because of ranting brute force.

"Tib—you know we called him Tib for short—had a way of making every one and everything loyal to him. When his round, brown eyes concentrated in two beady twinkles, you had to believe in him and do his bidding. He believed in himself, and simply bubbled over with assurance when making the hardest shots imaginable. And he had the blamedest schemes. Yet, most of them pulled through in one way or another. If he didn't land what he was gunning for, he'd net something else almost as good. So when he decided to take a comic opera troupe to Guatemala City, Mazie Adams sidestepped thirty per week in order to lead the ballet, and I was hypnotized to go as first tenor. There were 28 of us all told, four men and two dozen women. Tiberius said he could surround enough Aztec gold in Guatemala to make bond holders of us all for life. He believed it, and hang me if we all didn't after he'd given us a con about 'the luxurious life of the tropics,' 'the Croesus dons of the blue Pacific,' and the like. It was the dons that caught Mazie Adams and the other girls.

"Well, we sailed in November from Frisco, bound for San Jose de Guatemala. From there we were to take diligences to the capital. Our troupe was about all the little coastwise steamer had aboard, and when we were bobbing about off Champerico it began to blow up a regular hummer. The captain wanted to land us there, but Tib said San Jose or zero, and on we rolled. I was sorry and so were the others; for the storm now became a hurricane and the captain decided he couldn't make San Jose, as that port had no harbor, but is simply an open roadstead. I believe we were to luff, or to loaf, in the offing, or thereabouts, and then beat in when the wind went down. But we didn't. Instead, we boomed right by in the night, and after a miserable 10 hours found ourselves in Arcate, a small town that would make a sewing machine feel homesick.

"Arcate is made up of a dozen wooden houses, built down close to the beach, and one street running back about five blocks from the shore. Along this artery of travel are a handful of native huts of bamboo sticks, covered with leaves of the cocoanut palm, while in the environs of the burg poisonous pools of stagnant water fill the air with miasma, steaming thickly in the 90-degree heat. Mazie Adams crept down to the baggage deck and wept bitterly.

"'Cheer up, little one,' encouraged Tiberius, soothingly. 'For every tear now shed you shall have a piece of ice to wear on those fairy fingers.'

"But as if the heavy atmosphere and sickening odors were not enough, the tin boiler in our little craft blew up near daybreak, and we were forced to go ashore in our nightclothes, where we shivered in rugs and old sails until the broiling sun relieved the situation. To our joy we found all of our stage trunks had been saved, but our everyday finery was naught.

"'Get busy,' cried Tiberius, in his merry bass. 'Unpack the trunks and slip into the calico of act 1. When we reach Guaty we'll have some nice, new linen suits. Remember, children, I'm all that ever was, multiplied by two.'

"And that's what we had to do, and a nice looking lot we were. Mazie and the other fairies in pink tights and long, bespangled cloaks, didn't go so bad with the furnishings, but the pirate, George Hanscom, and I, the Alpine shepherd, kind of jarred on the rest of the furniture. Tib's rotund, energetic form was incased in a tin suit of medieval armor, and he swore it felt good. By the time the town was fairly awake we were all arrayed in our picnic clothes, and I guess they thought we were a sure enough bunch of fairies.

"While the dusky rabble was enjoying us with wonder lit eyes, a tall, thin, mahoganized skinned man approached and greeted us in good, old Anglo-Sax. He said he was Alfred Jones, more commonly known on the coast as 'Banana' Jones. He had lived in the country for 15 years and was too lazy to leave it. He informed us he could talk any lingo between Purgatory and Guatemala City, and Tib at once hired him as ticket seller. Tib himself threw a fine cluster of Spanish, having toured a circus through South America once on a time. But he was shy on dialects.

"So Banana Jones was delegated to scout for some diligences, and he said he would, once he was able to tear his eyes from Mazie, and was just explaining that he hadn't seen a white woman for 10 years, when 50 tatterdemalions, armed with ancient guns and a large accumulation of realty on their hands and bare feet, came howling down the lane.

"'I forgot,' said Banana Jones simply, 'there's a bit of revolution on, and the insurrectionists hold the town. They are expecting a president from San Francisco. The junta was to send them down a regular fire eater this week.'

"'That's me,' cried Tim. 'I'm on! I'm the president! I go a mile in less than nothing. I never did start a game but what something good turned up unexpectedly. Tell 'em I'm their feudal lord.'

"'Well, I'll be blasted,' gasped Banana Jones. Then he added, 'Do I get all the banana privileges between here and Sonsonate?'

"'You certainly do,' answered Tiberius, drawing his tin rapier and jolting his helmet into a jaunty position.

"Jones ran toward the mob and began a harangue, in which 'Don Senor Tiberio' and 'viva la libertad' figured extensively, and when he was done the ragamuffins danced about us in glee and one squint eyed ruffian sought to encompass Mazie Adams' fair waist with his dirty paw. But Tib lunged ferociously at him with his Toledo (Ohio) blade, and the gang evidently set us down for born fighters.

"'They dope you out as High Muckamuck and accept you,' said Jones, 'but they want to know if you've brought any arms and powder.'

"'Tell 'em I've brought art, music, beauty and science, and that against that quartet prosaic explosives aren't deuce high in a well thumbed euchre deck,' retorted Tib, grandly. Then he tipped us the cue and we all burst into a few sweet strains of song as sung in the ensemble of 'The Dear Gazelle.' It fetched 'em, sir. It fetched 'em to their knees. They groveled. I guess they'd have chucked the whole blooming revolution for reserved seats in our show. But Tiberius had made up his mind to act the conqueror, and he told Jones to take us to the most pretentious habitation in town that he might confiscate it for government purposes. A miserable little hotel, built to accommodate about 15, was the best thing in this line, and into it we went, while all the regular boarders departed via the back door.

"'But what about weapons?' persisted Jones, dubiously.

"Tiberius pondered thoughtfully, and Hanscom, the pirate, tapped the hardware in his belt and said, 'We've got them all here.'

"'We have the kinetograph,' reminded Tiberius.

"'What's that. A machine gun?' cried Jones, eagerly.

"Tiberius looked at him sadly and then explained it was merely a device to throw moving pictures on a screen.

"'But pictures won't hurt 'em,' bemoaned Jones.

"'No,' cried Tiberius, exultantly, 'but it'll scare 'em like the deuce. Why, man, in that one big box I've columns of infantry, heavy artillery, troops of cavalry, a little drummer boy, a red cross society and the "Private's Farewell to His Aged Mother." It's the most economical method of transporting field forces in the world.'

"Then, after he had spoken several more pieces, Jones saw the illumination, and his hard baked face cracked into various smiles. 'If they'll only come by night,' he murmured.

"'You see, we carted the picture machine around to amuse the audience between the acts of 'The Dear Gazelle,' and almost all of the pictures were war scenes. Fortunately it was escaped injury in the explosion, and only needed to be dried out to be in fighting trim.

"But the rest of us hadn't come down to Central America to build up republics, and we were in a fair way to mutiny. Hanscom had just killed a tarantula, and was now writing a weepy letter to his old mother in Utica, N. Y. Mazie was sobbing that she did not see any chance of freezing her digits with Guatemala ice, and the rest of the bunch were swearing or sniveling, as the sex demanded, when Tiberius visited us.

"'Children,' said he, kindly, 'list. Why weep? We've arrived here. The boat is busted. We can't leave till another comes. It seems two factions are sparring for the strangle hold on this forsaken land. If we remain neutral one side or the other, or both, will pick us up and sell us as slaves to owners of the dank mangrove swamps.' Tib didn't know a mangrove from a yard of felt, but it sounded good and he used it. 'Think, Mazie, of being compelled to pluck rubber gum with those fragile lily stalks,' he said. 'Think, Gertrude, of making bean bread for some chocolate frosted brute that remembers when he walked on all fours. Now, if I can obtain the backing of one party we are that much stronger, and will come out all right. Remember, Tiberius Smith always wins. Why, children, once I fell so low that I was forced to join an "Uncle Tom's Cabin" company and play I was ice in the Ohio river. Did I stay ice? Ask me. Today you behold in me the sole owner of "The Dear Gazelle" opera troupe, and president pro tem of Iscanlati, or whatever name under high heavens they call it.'

"Of course there was a lot of horse sense in Tib's talk, but I knew he was playing president just through his lust of empire. He told me afterward that if he could have held down the job, he had intended to map out a canal route and sneak a stake from Uncle Sam.

"But to return to the well filled inn and the homesick allies of the insurrectionists. That afternoon Tib and Jones reconnoitered the only approach from the interior; the only road over which the enemy could come. This ran dead against a big white cliff, and then swung sharp to the left and made a bee line to the beach. Tib deployed the native troops far out beyond the cliff, with instructions to hike back to the hotel if they scented the foe. In a casual way he led them to believe that they wouldn't have to do much fighting. Just take prisoners after the new president had shaken a little parlor magic out of his cuff. This pleased them immensely, and they said we were their saviors, Jupiter Stators and all that kind of stuff. But we were in a very disagreeable situation. The warm climate didn't make the 'Gazelle' rags so bad for the girls, and we men knew we could get used to our makeup after a while. But only a narrow strip of beach separated us from the sharks, and Tib and his picture game from the dusky triflers in front. However, it was grin and bear it, and we were there to tote the machine and fixings up to a point near the white cliff.

"No one troubled us that night, but on the next a horrible screeching aroused us from uneasy slumbers, and when the pirate and I got down into the open we could just catch a glimpse of Tib's armor twinkling in the moonlight far ahead.

"'Bring your shepherd's horn, Rupert,' cried Tib—he sometimes called me by my stage name—and I obeyed him.

"A long, lean valentine guided me up the road to the firing line, to where Tib and Jones were stationed. To my horror I found them facing the cliff, backs turned to the enemy.

"'For heaven's sake!' I cried, 'let us receive our wounds in the breast and die facing the tyrant.'

"'When I begin to let loose Uncle Sam, just sound some merry lay on the horn,' ignored Tib. 'Give 'em boots-and-saddles and a bit of that Tyrolese warble.'

"I was so choked up I didn't believe I could wind the horn, but Tib and Jones were cool enough. Tib had the machine all ready, and as a fearful howl went up behind us he turned on the illuminations. There on the cliff pranced the Fighting Seventh cavalry, while Banana Jones split the shadows with hoarse shouts and military orders, accompanying his vocal stunts by hurling rocks among the bushes—in short, making enough noise for a whole regiment.

"'An' would ye save me, blow!' cried Tib.

"Forgetting my peril, really believing that the brave phantoms on the white rock stood ready to succor me, I fixed my eyes on Old Glory and gave them Dixie. Any one ought to fight by that tune! Between the notes I could hear the great gasp of astonishment from the foe, as they halted. Then the crackling in the bushes began to recede, and Banana Jones chuckled, 'They've vamoosed! Best pictures I ever saw.'

"You can safely gamble that the insurrectionists down on the beach looked upon us as real warriors when the sun rose and brought no invaders. Tiberius was so chesty that he wanted to pursue the enemy and incidentally annex San Salvador. But as white cliffs aren't always handy, we held him back.

"Well, three days passed and our stage costumes began to look tarnished. Then came the second attack. Our scouts said it was a different party, and when they approached the pass it was hardly dark enough to operate the machine. Tib commanded us all to follow him, and arranged us in a semicircle position for the curtain raise in act II.

"'Now, warble!' he commanded, and we did, with a fringe of limelight playing over our rich vestments and scared faces. What the enemy thought on seeing 28 fays, all covered with gold and cutglass, giving the serenade, will never be known. But it staggered 'em. Mazie Adams and the other Venuses sang and looked like angels and the brownies didn't care to buck up against a celestial choir without any investigation.

"'If you can hold 'em a few minutes we'll win in a canter,' cried Tib.

"At that we all stalked forward a few paces with the best bit of the whole piece pealing from our ruby lips. Then came the welcome order to stand aside, and the faithful old picture gallery began to squirt photos on the cliff. What with the howling of the ballet, the hoarse cries of Jones, the bugle calls and prancing pictures, the brownies were held up for fair. And the funny part of it was, our allies were as scared as the enemy.

"'See 'em run!' cried Banana Jones.

"Then, just as the old One Hundred and Fortieth infantry began tramping by, we all with one common impulse, insane with elation, charged the paralyzed ranks in the brush. With one long drawn out screech they fled, but not before one beggar gave me a cut in the leg with a big cheese knife. Tiberius would run amuck, and soon distanced us, the twinkling and clanging of his tin suit only revealing his whereabouts. When the company caught up with him he was trying to lift a good sized chest in his arms.

"'It's probably full of tortillas,' remarked the pirate after we had returned to the hotel.

"'I think, children, it's their war chest,' gasped Tiberius, who had been unable to carry it alone.

"We tore off the cover and there were rows upon rows of yellow wafers. We divided 'em up equally and Jones said each one's share amounted to about $1,500.

"Whether it was the loss of their funds or the moving pictures that turned the trick we were not destined to learn. For on the seventh day a little vermin infested tub poked her nose into the harbor and we all shipped for San Jose, where we picked up some civilized rags and caught a steamer for San Francisco."

Lunged at Him!

Yellow Wafers.

Grandmother Aged 131, Mother Aged 97, Daughter Aged 62,

By W. D. Hornaday

Quitman, Texas.

MRS. L. KILLCREASE, who lives at Pine Mills, a small village 3 miles east of here, is 131 years old. She was born June 10, 1776. She lives with her daughter, who is 97 years old, and with her granddaughter, who is 62 years old. It is believed that Mrs. Killcrease is the oldest person in the United States and probably the oldest in the world. There seems to be no question as to her age. She has what appears to be authentic documentary proof which shows that she was born in Halifax county, North Carolina, 131 years ago. Her birthplace was near the site of the present village of Scotland Neck in that county. Dr. R. O. Connell; W. E. Burkett and J. H. Saxon, all well known and worthy residents of Hainesville, Tex., near Mrs. Killcrease's home, as well as other people of the community have investigated the matter of her age and have found her statement to be true. Her daughter's age is also well authenticated. The latter maintains that her mother was 34 years old when she was born, and there can be no question about the correctness of the statement of both their ages, as well as that of her granddaughter.

Mrs. Killcrease lived for 100 years in the mountains of western North Carolina, where she was born. She came to Texas with her daughter's family in 1886 and has lived at Pine Mills ever since she arrived in the state. She is in good health and is able to get around the house and premises quite briskly. Her mind is bright and active. She says she was never much of a reader, as she was brought up in a time and place where books and newspapers were practically unknown. But she likes to be told the gossip of the world. She can still relate many incidents of a local character dating back a century and a quarter ago, but few of the events of national importance impressed themselves upon her memory. She says that news of such events were slow in reaching her mountain home. She makes no claim of ever having seen George Washington, General Lafayette or other great men of the early days. She has a distinct recollection of the war of 1812. She was 36 years old then and had been married several years. A number of men in her neighborhood joined General Jackson's forces and fought in the battle of New Orleans.

Mrs. Killcrease does not attribute her long life to any particular cause. She says that she belongs to that kind of stock and that there is nothing remarkable about her living to be 131 years old. Her forefathers were long lived, most of them not dying until they had passed far beyond the century mark. The resinous mountain air, pure water and equable temperature of the locality where she was born and resided for a century were all conducive to longevity. She believes that hard work and frugal living tend to prolong life. She is the champion of no particular diet. She never tasted any kind of "breakfast food" in her life. Eat what you want and as much as you want—if you can get it—is her motto. She knows very little about modern inventions which are now in practical, every day use all over the country. She lives several miles from a railroad and has seen a railroad train but a few times in her life.

Her daughter is remarkably well preserved, notwithstanding the fact that she will soon have reached the century mark. These three old women live alone and are wholly dependent upon their own efforts in making a living.

The people of this section take a kindly interest in them, and upon the occasion of the recent anniversary of Mrs. Killcrease's birth many of their old friends called upon them and helped to make the event a pleasant and memorable one for the old folks. Mrs. Killcrease looks upon her granddaughter as a mere child. She thinks her daughter is not so very old. She delights in telling how much work she could do when she was only 100 years old.

MRS. L. KILLCREASE SEATED IN CENTER HER DAUGHTER ON RIGHT AND GRANDDAUGHTER ON LEFT

Tale of a Bag of Stolen Gold

By L. L. Andrews

AT 40 the money lust came upon me. Indifferent to wealth in any form up to that time, every penny of which I became possessed and slipped through my fingers without any benefit to me. Lack of definite aim in life had caused me to yield to frequent temptations to "loaf and invite my soul." I was capable of earning a very respectable competence, and with anything like application to work and a disposition to live within my means, I might easily have laid aside a snug sum every year.

Some one has said that the lost years are made up to us, and I trust that such is the case, for I have most shamefully abused my opportunities. I was philosophical enough, however, to refrain from worrying over what might have been, and when I woke up I dwelt constantly on money and schemes for acquiring it. "Get money, son; honestly if you can, but get it," was the old man's advice, and the race is guided by his precept.

I wanted money with all my heart, strength, soul and mind, and swore a mighty oath that "I can, I must, I WILL HAVE MONEY FIRST OF ALL!" I wanted it so badly that I was willing to work for it, which is saying much for one who formerly valued it so lightly. By reason of a self-imposed period of idleness I found myself bordering on financial collapse. Being cornered, I was obliged to fight. After a heart to heart interview with his majesty, myself, I finally concluded to work hard, cut my expenses to a minimum and save all I could.

I secured a position as agent at a small station on an insignificant narrow gauge railroad in the redwoods of California. The hours were long, the work arduous, the pay small and the cost of living exorbitant. By reason of a recent fire which had consumed the depot building in the town where I was located an antiquated coach and a boxcar were pressed into service temporarily as ticket and freight office, waiting room, express, baggage and freight warehouse.

On a certain Sunday the train arriving at my station about noon brought $10,200 in gold for parties in town. It is an unusual thing for express companies to handle money on Sundays, particularly such large sums, and I have never ascertained to this day why this shipment was made on the Sabbath. There were two consignments—one $200 in $5 gold pieces for a store keeper in town, the other $10,000 consisting of a package of currency addressed to Bruce & Kennedy, whilom partners in various more or less shady timber transactions, and proprietors of several large hop yards. The men were inveterate drinkers, and I knew they were then boozed up to the limit.

When the express manager handed me the money he whispered, "Too bad it's Sunday, old man; you'll have to keep your eye peeled," knowing that I was responsible for the treasure with no safe place in which to keep it.

I set the pouch containing the treasure on the platform between my feet as I unloaded the balance of the express matter, but made no comment in reply to the remark. I then carried the sack into my car and placed it in the strongbox, a small, portable safe, such as express messengers use on their runs.

My mind was made up. I had demanded money and here it was. I had not said whose money I wanted, and really it made little difference, for there were no longer any scruples of mine and thine. My plan was simple. There was no train due at my station until midnight, when a special from the city passed through to Willow Grove, the terminus of the road, some 10 miles north. Returning, it was due about 4:30 in the morning.

My duties did not require me to meet either of these trains, and as I was a comparative stranger on the road, I knew the conductor would not recognize me as an employe of the road. I would ride to San Francisco on the train, where it was due about 8:30 a. m. and take the Oceanic for Australia at 9 o'clock from a pier a short distance from the ferry house. I argued that it would be after that hour before my absence would be noticed and reported to the officials in the city; therefore, they would never suspect my move.

The store keeper applied for his $200 that evening, urging immediate delivery, as he wished to leave town with it before daybreak the next morning to make a payment on land in an adjoining county. Although it was against the rules to deliver the money on Sunday I finally did so, as he pleaded hard, but I mentally cursed him for robbing me of the amount.

After dark I opened the small safe, took out the $10,000 package, put it in my telescope grip, which I placed on a bench near the door, and crawled into my bunk. I knew the noise of the approaching train would arouse me in time to board the rear car unobserved.

I soon fell asleep and do not know at what hour I was aroused by a grating sound as of some one stealthily trying a key in the lock of the car door. "Who's there?" I demanded. For answer a terrific blow crashed the lock of the door, which swung inward, admitting a burly form, barely recognizable in the darkness.

I had no weapon, but I sprang off my mattress, which I spread on the telegraph desk every night, and grappled with the intruder. It was a singular thing that in that instant I realized my duty to other people's money, which I was paid to and had sworn to protect, and yet had not scrupled to appropriate myself.

I soon found that I was no match for my burly assailant, who cursed me with the vilest oaths imaginable under his breath as he strove to break my hold around his body, which pinioned his arms to his sides. He carried a heavy revolver in his hand, as I soon discovered and knew that if he freed his arm or could twist his wrist ever so slightly there was no chance for me. His heavy boots trod on my bare feet, crushing them painfully. He redoubled his efforts to free himself and with a sudden wrench tore his pistol hand free and fired point blank at me.

The blinding flash and the stinging pain of the heavy ball in my left shoulder roused me to a frenzy. With a power of which I never deemed myself possessed I grasped his huge fist inclosing the butt of the revolver, which he was endeavoring to point at me, and by a mighty effort forced his hand toward his chest as the heavy weapon discharged its second deadly missile.

With a baffled roar of rage, pain and defeat the huge bulk of the robber toppled over, stone dead. In the darkness I quickly opened my telescope, transferred the cursed package of bills to the company's strong box, locked it, and, lighting a lamp, began dressing, just as a crowd of men, aroused by the shots, were rushing into the car.

Turning the body over, one of the men held a lantern to the face of the recumbent form.

"Dick Benson!" he exclaimed. It was the store keeper to whom I had paid the $200, and whose envious eyes had noted the bundle of bills in the strongbox.

"You got a nerve, pard," remarked one of the men, as he clumsily bound up the wound in my shoulder, while I related the details of the night attack.

"Other people's money makes me a lot of trouble," I rejoined, with a sigh.