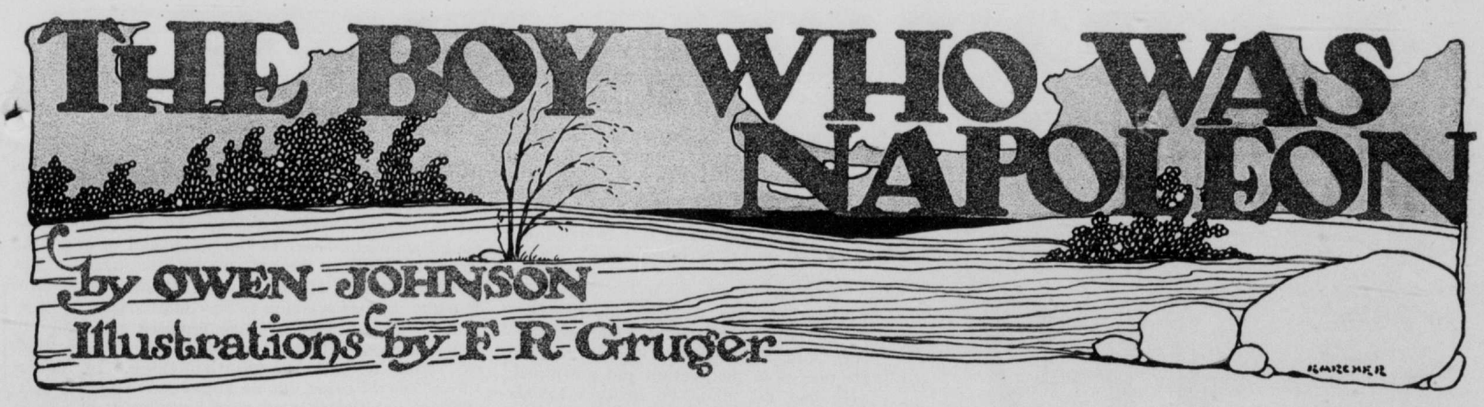


FROM the sublime to the ridiculous is but a step; and it is equally true that moments of greatness arrive in the midst of trivial and absurd situations. It all started from a haphazard remark of the Triumphant Egghead's as the Monday afternoon section of the Dickinson House was returning from Compulsory Bath.

Jigs Wilson, romping in the fair of the afternoon on the noisy playground, had heard the humiliating summons with a fresh rebellion of spirit. Like twenty others he had approached the low brick penal abode of Compulsory Bath with murder in his heart and defiance in his eye. They could drive him to water, but they could not make him wash!

Firm in this heroic resolve, he had received from Doc Cubberly — veteran of the War and the Wash — his towel, his sponge, and his cake of soap — abhorrent insignia of subjection! — and, marching spunkily into his wooden compartment, had noisily locked the door and turned on the faucets in the tub.

After which public advertisement he had mounted his chair, sponge in hand and engaged in a dripping three-sided combat with the equally fully-clothed Walladoo Bird and the White Mountain Canary — a contest in which a few honorable drops might be received.

This agreeable pastime having brought Doc Cubberly stumping down the aisle, he had slid to the floor and angrily exclaimed:

"I say Doc, what's a fellow to do? They're soaking me with water."

The tub having reached the churning point, he had then seized the wooden chair, and splashed it vigorously back and forth, exclaiming for the supervisory ear on the dry side of the door:

"Ow! Murder! Holy Cats! Gee, that's cold! Keeroogalum!"

Then pulling the plug, he had next simulated the shivering of the body, and the rough passage of the punitive towel and (as he was under gravest suspicion) accenting the imitation with the following monologue:

"Holy Mike, why don't they heat this place?

"Gee, I've got a towel like a curry comb.

"Ow-wow-wow-wow!

"Oh, my poor back!

"What do they think I am — a horse?

"Help! Help!

"Where the dickens is my shirt?

"Beat you dressing, Walladoo!"

A certain dramatically plausible time having elapsed, he had moistened his hands to the wrists, likewise his hair, which had been carefully mussed. Then, bursting from the door at the same moment as his fellow comedians, the Walladoo Bird and the White Mountain Canary, he exclaimed:

"Dressed first!"

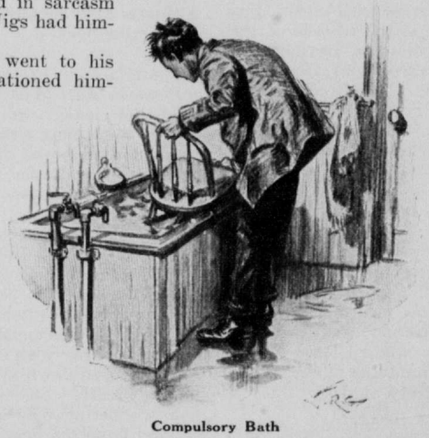
The Dickinson contingent having thus, with the valor of a King of France, marched up to the tubs and back again, had formed gleefully and returned toward the House, Jigs Wilson rollicking at the head.

He was in this ridiculous mood, hat off and one disheveled lock curled over his forehead, when the Triumphant Egghead, reclining lazily on the soft bank, looking up, said, in tones of languid sarcasm:

"Gracious, Jigs, you do look like Na-po-le-on!"

That was all. It was said in sarcasm and in direct suspicion that Jigs had himself nursed the effect.

Jigs Wilson grunted and went to his room, shut the door and stationed himself before his mirror. His hair had been further disheveled coming up the stairs, due to a friendly squabble with the Coffee Colored Angel. He brushed it smooth with free, easy strokes, and drew one lock down with a fat forefinger, arranging it so that it lay in an inverted question mark on his pudgy forehead. Then he stood solemnly scrutinizing the result. The forelock was satisfactory; but the rest was disappointing. He did not look like Napoleon. What the deuce had made the Triumphant Egghead say so? Perhaps it was the profile. He took up a hand-mirror and, standing off, thrust one hand between the second and third buttons of his coat, as Kings and Emperors always do. Immediately he cast the hand-glass on the bed with an exclamation of impatience.


Compulsory Bath

"Aw — Napoleon didn't have a pug nose," he said, disappointment and chagrin in his voice and on his face. "Egghead was just shooting off his face."

Nevertheless he returned to the mirror, folded his arms, and lowering his head, scowled gloomily from under his contracted eyebrows. Despite the flopping calf-like ears, there certainly was a look of destiny about him now, a flash of the lightning that plays among the thunder-clouds, something imperial, something awesome, yes, something Napoleonic.

"What in the name of peanuts are you doing?" said Hungry Smeed, appearing at the door.

"I am rehearsing a piece," said Jigs instantly, running his fingers through his hair to conceal the imperial lock. "Trying to stick in gestures and all that sort of thing, you know."

"Well, what do you say to a few bunches of gestures with a knife and fork? Conover's pancakes, nice, hot, juicy pancakes? Eh, what?"

Jigs, for reply, went through the pantomime of searching his pockets.

"It's all right," said Hungry Smeed loftily; "my little flyer in Wall Street has put me on the velvet. I'll set 'em up."

Ensconced at one of Conover's appetizing tables, confronted by columns of browned and steaming pancakes, Jigs quite forgot about Napoleon and the destinies of nations, and became a boy again.

That night though, as he guided his first razor over the perilous course, he remembered again that the Triumphant Egghead had thought he looked like Napoleon. He laid the razor gingerly down and glanced eagerly into the mirror; but the frothy image was inconclusive. He finished shaving, staunched the wounds, placed a strip of court plaster on the chin to commemorate that bloody passage, and again resumed the study of the vexing problem. With the aid of the lamp, which cast frowning shadows about the eyepits, he achieved a glare of concentrated solemnity that certainly was in the best style, and terrific if not Napoleonic. From this highly satisfactory result one thing alone had to be excepted. The shadows of the lamp that touched the eyes with dignity and gave sternness to the mouth, unfortunately intensified the great flanking ears. They were grotesque, elephantine, neither dignified nor imperial.

"Gee, the ears gum the whole game!" he said mournfully. "They're regular fins!"

It really was discouraging, when all the rest was so in character. Then an inspiration arrived. He went to his bureau and returned in triumph with a piece of electric tape. A quick motion secured the tape to the ears and flattened them against the skull. He folded his arms, lowered his head, and scowled once more at the mirror. The illusion was complete!

The illusion was complete!

II.

When Jigs awoke the next morning, it was to the Sun of Austerlitz. The sound of trumpets was in the stirring air, and the tread of battalions just over the horizon. He sprang up and painfully removed the adhesive tape from his ears, which at once sprang forward in the most discouraging way.

Now, Jigs Wilson had not what might be called an imaginative nature. He had had, it is true, periods of greatness, in which he had felt within him the reincarnated spirits of Deerslayer, d'Artagnan and the great John Ridd. But these fictitious personages had succeeded one another with the rapidity of the flitting modern servant. Lord Byron had for awhile invoked his waiting imagination; but a brief essay at a gigantic historical poem in the style of "Childe Harold" had chilled his enthusiasm and reconciled him to a life of mediocrity, when mediocrity could be fed on jiggers and pancakes, and made pleasant by midnight plunges in the canal. This matter of Napoleon, however, was quite a dif-