

# THE MILAN EXCHANGE.

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MILAN, TENNESSEE

## MY MIRROR.

Between the orchard and the mill  
The brooklet of its laughing fires;  
Its waters there grow deep and still  
About the piers, old and moss-grown,  
Beneath the little bridge of stone  
Clasped, here and there, with wild rose  
briers.

I was a vain young country maid,  
Each day at noon sent to the mill,  
And used to loiter in the shade,  
And lean above the jangled pier  
Beyond the wild rose creeping near,  
And peer into the placid rill.

'Twas not the water lilies there,  
Nor pale green crosses that I sought;  
But back to me bright eyes and hair,  
Sun-tangled, framed in shadowy green,  
Reflected, threw their glamorous sheen  
And kept me longer than they ought.

One day I lingered, looking down,  
Long past the sunshine of mid-day,  
When close beside me, big and brown,  
Two eyes, so full of laughter, met  
My own within the rignulet,  
My eyes drooped low and turned away.

You see, 'twas father's harvest—  
'Our John,' we always called the lad;  
Like to his own my parents were,  
And I—I can not rightly tell  
By what strange chance it e'er befel—  
His coming made me always glad.

How shallow seemed the brooklet then  
After the glance of eyes like his!  
I slowly raised my own again,  
And found him gazing shyly down—  
I never knew that eyes of brown  
Were full of such sweet mysteries!

For, looking up, how could I guess  
To find my imaged features there?  
A mirror full of tenderness  
His dark eyes made; the rivulet,  
In all my letterings, never yet  
Had made me seem one-half so fair.

The wild rose blossoms all are dead;  
And, where the water lilies were,  
The brook sleeps in its frozen bed,  
Unheeded, let the winter pass;  
I have a truer looking-glass—  
The brown eyes of my harvest!

—Eva Best, in Detroit Free Press.

## SLACKER'S WILD MAN.

The Sensation of Radical City—  
How It Ended.

[Written for this Paper.]

THE Indian Summer sun hung two hours high above the jack-oak fringed top of Hickson's Bluff. Its slanting rays fell upon the score of roofs and general inactivity of Radical City. The major portion of the male inhabitants of the "city" were congregated at Perdue's combined grocery, dry goods, hardware, drug and furniture store, post-office, public hall and real estate office. The residue of the males, with but two exceptions, were lounging in front of the Metropolitan Hotel, which consisted of a one-story "main part" and an unreliable looking "lean-to."

These two buildings, which, with the exception of a blacksmith shop, formed the entire business portion of Radical City, stared at each other with their expressionless window eyes from opposite sides of the narrow little street.

The two exceptions, the males of Radical who were not present at the regular rallying-place, were old man Bitley and young Ab. Slacker. The former was at home, the victim of a grievous attack of the "yaller janders," as the neighbors denominated his ailment. The latter was supposed to be some where in the Big Timber examining his coon traps.

In the center of the street an athletic game of quoits was going on. The quoits in use upon this occasion were horseshoes ("quats" the players called them.) No one had thrown a "ringer" for some time and the interest in the game was waning.

Phin Dozak turned his eyes up the road to where it bent into the lane that ran into the Big Timber. As he looked, a figure rounded the bend and came down the road at the top of his speed. His feet twinkled up an down with amazing rapidity, and, at each stroke, they sent up a puff of dust that looked almost golden as the rays of the declining sun shone through it. As he approached, Phin saw that the runner was Ab. Slacker.

"Yere comes Ab!" Phin cried.

"Wander what's broke loose now?"

"Runs ri hit peart!" some one remarked. Then, the attention of all was turned to the game. A well-directed "quate" had made a "ringer" on the western peg and the players at that end waited breathlessly to see if the fortunate player could score a second "ringer."

Ab. Slacker, panting and breathless, was almost upon the watchers at the western end when the released horseshoe left the hand of the player at the eastern end. A puff of wind whirled dust into his eyes. Half blinded he stubbed his toe on the peg and fell headlong. The "quate," thrown "short," descended squarely upon Ab's hay-colored pate, scoring a "ringer" and drawing a lusty yell from Ab. Gasping and almost unable to utter another sound, he rolled over and lay panting in the dust.

The bystanders aided him to rise while the players engaged in an argument as to the legitimacy of a "ringer" made on a boy's head. Ab. caught his breath and made an attempt to talk.



"RUNS RIGHT PEART," SOME ONE REMARKED.

"I see—seen him!" he gasped.

"Who?"

"A wi—wi—wild man!"

"Whur?"

That "whur" expressed volumes of interrogation and was so emphatic that the ringer discussion was dropped.

"In the Big Timber," Ab. answered, recovering his breath somewhat.

"Tell us all about it!" cried several. Ab. seemed to swell with his own importance as he began oratorically:

"I was sorter creepin' long w'en I yearned a mighty funny noise. I crep' up, an' peekin' through the haw bushes, I saw—"

"The wild man?" interrupted an eager voice.

"Naw!" snorted Ab. "'Twas the biggest coon ever I seen. Must a weighed—"

"Blame the coon! Tell us about the wild man!" broke in several voices.

Thus admonished, Ab. proceeded: "Jest as I was loosenin' up the trap spring, I yearned sumpin' behind me. I looked round, an' good gov'ner!"

"What?"

"The wild man stood there within four feet of me! I jest stood there with my mouth open. Couldn't a said a word if I'd a-be'n killed for it. My foot was on the trap spring an' the coon wiggled out an' started to limp away. The wild man flew at him like a wolf, an' killed him with two licks of his big club. As soon as he went for the coon, I sorter came to myself, an' broke out through the timber like the dickens before daylight! I looked back onct, an' the wild man was goin' the other way, draggin' the coon. Biggest coon I ever seen. Bet he—"

But eager questions interrupted Ab. again, and the description of the coon remained unfinished. From Ab.'s excited description, it was learned that, although no taller than an average boy, the wild man was hideously deformed, being the possessor of a body distorted nearly out of all likeness to a human form. If Ab.'s testimony was to be believed, the wild man's appearance was enough to frighten a timid person into fits. He had claws, Ab. affirmed, and teeth as sharp as those of a wolf. The crowning horror made the listeners hold their breath in astonishment, only to burst out a moment later with a great "wal!" of amazement.

"He hadn't but one eye," Ab. said, proudly, "an' that was square in the middle of his forehead, an' was red an' glowin' like a coal of fire!" So elated was Ab. at his sudden popularity that he hardly realized where fact ended and fancy began. He paused and a chorus of excited voices arose.

"Thar!" said Phin Dozak, "that thars jest w'at's be'n stealin' our shoats an' chickens. No longer ago th' a yistiddy, I told old man Bower that I bet that—"

"Shucks!" sneered Perdue, the merchant.

"Wal!" retorted Phin, "you kin shucks all you want to, but hit's a fact. Didn't I tell you, Bower—"

But old man Bower was already a rod down the road and the little crowd was melting rapidly away, all intent upon being the first to retail the news at home. Phin joined the rush and no one knows what he really had said to old man Bower.

Every trace of apathy had disappeared from Radical City e'er the sun went down.

A meeting was held at Perdue's store that night. After several more or less eloquent speeches it was decided that the wild man must be gotten rid of.

"Who knows," cried one self-appointed orator, "but w'at the monster has stold away our leetle child'en an' esten 'em alive?"

This was received with groans of horror. No children, large or small, were missing, but that fact was not taken into consideration.

"No doubt that thar was the fate that overtook Jake Elder!" the orator continued.

The truth was that Jake had disap-

appeared from Radical City, leaving behind him a small mountain of debt. The stage driver reported having seen him at Baconville next day, but in spite of this the theory that the wild man had eaten him was generally accepted. All the women and children of the "city" were present for the reason that they were afraid to remain at home.

As before, the only two persons who were absent were old man Bitley and Ab. Slacker. These two were engaged in earnest conversation in the "front room" of the little house where the farmer "batched" alone.

"Ab," old man Bitley was saying, with a nod of his white-wrapped head, by way of emphasis, "thar's right smart uv money in hit for us if we work hit right."

Bitley presented a rather peculiar appearance just then. That part of his face that was not concealed by the huge bandage that enveloped the major portion of his head was of a decided saffron hue.

"How air we goin' to make it?" asked Ab.

"Jest this way. Them fools"—with a jerk of his thumb toward the crowd at Perdue's—"them fools want to kill the wild man. 'Stead uv that, it's our game to ketch him alive."

"What for?" queried Ab.

Old man Bitley began to unfold his plan to the open mouthed Ab. The wild man was to be captured, taken to some large city, to be exhibited at museums or sold to some showman for a goodly sum.

"Why!" broke out the elder schemer, "thar's a bar'l uv money in hit for us! Jest think what a cur'osty he'd be! The woolly hoss or two-headed girl hain't no whur! A eye in the middle uv his forehead! Hit'll set the country plumb wild!"

"Wal," hesitated Ab. "I won't be so sure 'bout that eye; I was excited right smart, you know."

Next morning, the expedition, consisting of nearly the entire population of Radical City, did not start on the wild-man hunt as early as had been planned, owing to the heavy storm that had occurred during the night. After the breeze had shaken the drops from the branches, the expedition was delayed for some time waiting for Ab. Slacker, whose services as a guide were in demand. No Ab. was to be found, and finally they started off without him.

Shortly after they disappeared in the woods, a smaller expedition, consisting of old man Bitley and young Ab. Slacker, might have been seen making a short cut to the timber. The old man's head was still wrapped in a great bandage, from which his saffron-hued face peered anxiously forward. The "yaller janders," which had before kept him confined to the house was of only secondary importance when there was a wild man in the prospective.

Each bore a gun and also a rope with which to bind the wild man. "We'll slip up," explained old man Bitley, "an' watch our chances to fling these yere ropes over his arms an' legs. Then we've got him! One uv us stays to watch him an' the other double quicks to town to fetch a wagon an'—"

"I'll go!" broke in Ab. "I kin run the fastest."

"Yes, I reckon that's the best way," the old man replied.

And, thus, before they had even discovered a trace of the wild man, he was disposed of to the entire satisfaction of both.

"An'," added Ab., "we won't give none of the money to nobody."

"Certain," replied the other, "Hit's ourn an' we're a-goin to keep hit."

"Yere's the trap!" announced Ab., at last.



CAUTIOUSLY THE TWO ADVANCED.

They found the spot where the wild man had slaughtered the coon. The storm of the previous night had entirely obliterated the trail, so the best the two could do was to proceed in the direction in which Ab. had seen the wild man going. As they proceeded, the ravages of the storm became more marked. Here it had been a tornado. Limbs had been torn from trees, and here and there a sapling was uprooted or a decayed trunk blown down. Farther on, the damage was greater.

Presently, they came upon a little

clearing, at one side of which stood a little "shack," or cabin. Just before the hut, and, with one of its branches thrust through the roof of the frail structure lay a great hackberry tree, uprooted by the power of the tempest.

Cautiously, the two advanced to the half-open door of the cabin. From within came low moans, as if of a person in pain.

They examined the ropes, and then old man Bitley pushed the door softly open.

"Halt, thar!" a weak voice said, as Bitley stood on the threshold.

Ab. shook with fear and Bitley's yellow face grew yellow, as they found themselves facing a cocked and leveled gun. The weapon, with its breech resting on the poor bed, was upheld by a sick woman, so thin and feeble in appearance that it seemed as if life was held in her wasted body only by the slightest bond.

Her eyes gleamed unnaturally bright with excitement and fear, and there was a burning, hectic flush on her sunken cheeks.

On a thin, worn quilt, on the floor, lay the distorted form of Ab. Slacker's wild man. His eyes were closed, and he was breathing fitfully and moaning as if in pain, although unconscious. His long hair was clotted with the blood that had oozed from a great wound in his forehead. The ray of light that strayed in through the hole in the roof lit up his face, in repose not vicious, only weak and vacant.

His body was distorted almost out of likeness to a human form. The rain of the previous night's storm had fallen upon him, and his bed quilt was still wet, while, in a depression of the floor, was a little pool of water. A rude table, overturned and broken, lay near, and on the floor were the remnants of a few pieces of crockery. The limb of the hackberry tree, that had broken its way through the roof, reached almost to the floor.

It was evident that when the fall of the great tree had driven the limb through the roof, it had struck down the deformed young man who now lay moaning on the old quilt.

"You shan't take him!" quavered the woman's thin voice. "You shan't take him till I've fired one shot for my poor, afflicted boy's freedom! We've be'n hunted from place to place an' now it's come to an end. Hev mercy! Hev—"

Old man Bitley grasped the situation. He interrupted the pitiful pleadings of the woman.

"Yer barkin' up the wrong tree," he said, and his voice was as soothing as if the denial had been uttered in the most polished paraphrase instead of in the homely slang of the border.

"We hain't a-huntin' nobody's boy!"

"What air them ropes fer?" quavered the woman.

"To tie the shoats with," old man Bitley answered, promptly. "Storm last night blowed down the fence uv my hog lot an' let twenty head uv Berkshires scatter all over seven States. Half the town's be'n a-helplin' me, an' we've ketched all but a couple uv shoats. Them two kin no more be driv than they kin fly, so we bring these ropes 'lowin' to tie 'em an' haul 'em home."

The hectic flush faded from the woman's face. The gun began to rattle, and old man Bitley sprang forward and laid it on the floor. The woman's strength imparted by the gun had fled, the woman was weak.

Old man Bitley stepped forward and said, "Git!" he said.

"conville an' fer!"

let no grass grow under my feet."

But Ab. was already gone.

speeding away.

"Oh!"

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have to go right smart before they find him."

It was almost night and the last mellow rays of the declining sun rested on the face of the deformed boy as the released soul left the distorted body and death captured Ab. Slacker's wild man. Never more would he be hunted.

The sick woman lay half unconscious for several days. By the time she returned to her right mind and began to gain strength, the simple burial service at which Preacher Hobbs, from Baconville, presided, had been solemnized, and the poor, mishapen form had been laid in a grave in the shadow of the red-buds. The story the sick woman told was one of pain and suffering.

Shortly after leaving Indiana, her husband had died, leaving little but a mortgaged "claim" and the deformed and idiotic son. Misfortunes did not come singly. As the boy grew older, he developed an uncontrollable desire to steal any thing that was stealable.

In vain the widow did all in her power to prevent his depredations. In spite of her efforts, he continued to appropriate whatever struck his fancy.

There were murmurings of disapproval among the neighbors and hints of necessary restraint for the unfortunate boy, toward whom they were only lenient out of pity for his afflictions. Then the mortgage on the claim was foreclosed, and the widow and orphan were homeless.

The poor woman removed her scanty belongings to another town, from whence she was speedily forced to journey by the thievish ways of the idiot. From place to place she wandered, upheld by the mother-love and desire to protect the innocent sinner.

At last he committed what, in the West, is the equal in depravity to any crime on the calendar—horse-stealing. The entire neighborhood was determined that the idiot should be summarily punished, either by the penitentiary or man-house. Then the widow fled in the night, taking with her the unfortunate son, now a man in years but a child in intellect. Pursuit was organized, but she eluded it. At last, after prolonged wandering, they sought refuge in the depths of the Big Timber.

Here she found the deserted cabin, left by some turkey hunters of two years before. Several times they were almost discovered, but each time they escaped detection. They subsisted as best they could upon the products of a little "truck patch" that the two had cleared, and upon the game captured by the idiot, who, in spite of his fortune, was an expert trapper.

Then the widow had been set down by the enervating fever for many days growing weaker, referring to risk death rather than their hiding place.

When she had fallen there were tears in her eyes.

Dr. Hawk's, old man Bitley.

A month mightily sum-

man Bitley

from the

hunt-