

Potash, Perlmutter and Others

By MONTAGUE GLASS

VIII.—THE CENTER OF POPULATION

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THREE generations are commonly said to complete the cycle from shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves. Even though it is not encompassed in six or seven, collateral branches of the same family, at all times during the transition, may disclose not only shirtsleeves, but patched overalls and Horace Greeley whiskers to boot. Thus, while Frederic Goodel pursued the lucrative occupation of a dealer in "investment securities," his cousin, Lafayette Goodel, filled the ancestral farm in Sullivan county and each year came within perhaps a hundred dollars of clearing expenses.

The deficit was supplied by Frederic, who took in exchange an occasional basket of small sour peaches. Once he had paid his cousin a visit projected to last for ten days. He rowed on the lake, climbed the mountain, grew bilious from drinking too much milk and at the end of the third afternoon waved an adieu from the rear platform of the observation car, into which he immediately disappeared, not to emerge again until the porter's whiskbroom heralded his imminent arrival in town. "What a place!" he ejaculated to his brother-in-law, Rushmore Luddington. "Hard beds, soft water, unripe fruit and everything tried to a crisp!"

"That's the way our ancestors were raised, though," Luddington replied, "and what a sturdy lot of fellows they were!" "Of course they were. They simply had to be if they survived at all." "But then, you know, there's the lake and the mountain, the whole," Luddington concluded, "providing an ideal place for a boy's holiday."

Goodel struck the desk. "By Jove, an admirable suggestion!" he exclaimed. "Jimmie shall go there next week. Sour peaches at a hundred dollars a basket are too expensive for me. I once had Jimmie out to lunch, and if he doesn't eat Cousin Luff out of house and home I'm no judge of a good appetite!"

At this juncture Mr. Goodel's only clerical assistant, the sixteen-year-old Jimmie Brennan, entered and deposited a bundle of canceled vouchers on his employer's desk. "Now, Mr. Goodel," he said, "dat guy at de bank want me to sign a receipt for dem cut checks."

"And did you?" Mr. Goodel asked. "I did not," Jimmie replied, and produced the unsigned receipt from his breast pocket. "Quite right," Mr. Goodel commented as he adjusted a pair of gold glasses on his shapely nose. "Never sign anything for me unless I tell you to do so, and never sign anything for yourself unless you read it over first."

Then, adding example to precept, Mr. Goodel carefully perused the printed slip. He crossed out one or two words and appended his signature with characteristic neatness. "My boy, beware of printed forms," he continued to Jimmie, who received the admonition with a scared gravity. "Everybody signs them and nobody reads them. Hence the supposed order for the encyclopedia, with an appendix, proves to be a promissory note for \$500." He emphasized the remark with a vigorous wink to Luddington. "And now, Jimmie," he went on, "how would you like to have a vacation?"

"A vacation?" Jimmie cried. "Why, I ain't sick, Mr. Goodel." Goodel gazed critically at Jimmie's shining red cheeks and neatly combed hair. "I admit," he said, appealing to Luddington, "that he doesn't look it." Jimmie's face expanded into a broad grin, and Luddington nodded slowly. "True," he agreed in solemn accents; "but there may be some internal disorder, and therefore—"

"And therefore," Goodel interrupted, "Jimmie leaves for Cousin Luff's next week!" Many years of plowing had reduced the action of Luff Goodel's mare to a deliberate amble, which as much resembled the gait of a normal horse as the progress of a baby's bassinet compares to the onrushing touring car. She had been dubbed Olympia by Luff's sister, who deemed the name not only euphonious, but an apt allusion to a slight lameness with which the mare was afflicted. For the rest Olympia was blind of one eye and very timid about automobiles, at which she invariably shied. This was evidenced by a certain switching of her attenuated tail, and at periods of great emotion, such as a locomotive might engender, she wagged her right ear. When Jimmie Brennan stepped from the New York express to the platform

of the little flag station at Goodel's Corners, Olympia's ear and tail twitched a frenzied equivalent to the running away of the normal horse, and Luff was alarmed in proportion. "Whoa, dem yer!" he bellowed. "What ails yer?" He seized the lines with a tense grip and sat bolt upright, prepared for any emergency, as Jimmie approached. "I never see nothin' like it," he declared. "This blame boss can't never get used to no engines. I bet I druv her down here four times, countin' this year an' last, an' she ails kinks up the same folderol!"

Jimmie flung his valise on the back of the wagon and climbed up beside Luff. "That's right," Luff said. "Jes' make yerself ter hum. I'd let yer drive, but I darsen't trust her to yer." "After a sharp 'Gidap!' from Luff, the old mare moved slowly away from the tracks. Jimmie and his host maintained an embarrassed silence. The boy furtively glanced at his employer's cousin and made mental note of the ragged fringe of whiskers that adorned the farmer's neck. As Luff shifted a huge mouthful of tobacco from cheek to cheek his Adam's apple jerked convulsively. Apparently, it roamed about at will, and disappeared beneath his shirt collar only to lob up among the thicket of whiskers with an agility that completely fascinated Jimmie.

"Say," he said at length and by way of conversation, "was you ever to Luff's?" "Luff bestowed the cud in one corner of his mouth, voided a pint or so of the attendant moisture and wiped his lips on the back of his hand. "Which way?" he asked. "On Fourteen street."

"No," he answered. "I never was to the city, 'Gidap!' He fell again to the rumination of his fine cut. "Why d'ye ask?" "I tought I seen yer dere waant," Jimmie replied, "wid a lady wot played on de trombone. You wuz tellin' her about de circus comin' ter town, an' den yer did a sand dance together."

Luff gasped in astonishment and almost swallowed his tobacco. "Look a-here, young feller," he said. "I dunno what kind o' domines you've got to New York, but up here ministers of the gospel don't allow no such carryin's on in their houses. 'Gidap!' Jimmie felt vaguely that he had offended and offered prompt reparation. "Excuse me," he said humbly. "I didn't mean to make no break."

"Freely granted!" cried Luff. "City ways ain't country ways, I guess, but you seem a right nice young feller. 'Gidap!' Jimmie blushed, and for the rest of the ride neither ventured on any further conversation. Luff's sister met them at the head of the farm lane and greeted Jimmie with a motherly smile. "Well, Luff," she cried, "Lympha ain't so spry as some. You'd better come right in an' set down. Biscuits is burnin' this half hour past."

For almost an hour Jimmie tucked in honey and hot biscuit, with steaming coffee and ham, until his ruddy cheeks glistened and the waistband of his trousers grew taut. By this time the conversation assumed a more intimate tone, and even Luff thawed out. "Well, sister," he said, "f'orter seen 'Lympha when the train came in. I swan she was scart out of her wits!" "She'll get over it fast enough," Miss Goodel commented, "when they cut the railroad through the pasture lot."

Luff slapped his knee. "By Gregory," he cried; "she'll never get over it, if that's what she's waitin' for! That darned railroad company won't own my pasture lot for less than \$500 an acre unless they steal it from me."

"Mebbe they will," said Miss Goodel, "if you stay up till all hours of the night. You need to have a clear brain if you want to get ahead of the railroad company." Luff rose and stretched lazily. "All right, sister," he grunted, and, taking the lamp from the table, he piloted Jimmie to the spare room on the second floor.

Under Luff's tutelage Jimmie rapidly acquired all the accomplishments of a hired man, and when his vacation drew toward its close it had proved to be as profitable for Luff as it had been enjoyable for Jimmie. A profusion of freckles obscured the healthy glow in the boy's cheeks, and a cast-off suit of Luff's overalls completed his transformation into as rustic a youth as never saw Fulton market or the Brooklyn bridge.

It was, therefore, not at all surprising that he should be hailed as "bud" by the thickest gentleman with the jet black mustache who drove a smart looking horse and buggy up the farm lane.

"Who lives here, bud?" he asked out of one corner of his mouth. Jimmie took in at one comprehensive glance the panama hat, the diamond breastpin and the general air of Tonderlin insouciance that pervaded the stranger's personality. "Come again," Jimmie said. "Where's yer pap?" "Pap?" Jimmie repeated. "Oh, rats!" the stranger broke in impatiently and drove rapidly up the lane. Jimmie gazed after him in unaffected surprise. That essentially urban presence in its strange setting of pasture and meadow affected the boy like a whiff of East river breeze, and he turned to his task of mowing the border of the lane, almost glad that his vacation approached its close.

A moment later the buggy drew up near the barn, where Luff was busily engaged currying Olympia's rough coat with a handful of straw. "Mr. Lafayette Goodel?" the stranger asked.

Luff nodded, and his visitor's beady eyes rested on Olympia. "That's a nice looking mare you've got there, friend." "I lay great store by her," Luff replied dryly. "About how much do you ask for her?"

Luff surveyed the stranger's three-year-old trotter for one admiring second. "I'll make an even swap," he answered, "and give yer \$100 to boot."

The stranger laughed, "as if he were being paid for it," Luff said afterward. "She ain't mine," the stranger volunteered. "She belongs to the United States government."

"She?" said Luff, resuming the chewing of a straw. "And so do I," the stranger continued, flashing a gilt badge. "Do tell," was Luff's comment. "Topographical department."

"Ain't nothin' ter do with sellin' in trees?" Luff suggested. "Nope." "Nor books?" "Nope." "Nor lightnin' rods?" "Nope."

"Then put up yer horse an' step round to the house." "Fanning is my name—William K. Fanning."

Luff was not impressed. "Well, I s'pose canvassers must have names, same as other people," he said. Mr. Fanning grew slightly purple. "I ain't a canvasser, and I don't want to sell you anything. You understand? I'm here to talk business."

He hurried along before Luff could get in a word. "The United States topographical department is making a map of this country, and you may or may not know it, but right on the creek that runs through your pasture lot, next to the white oak tree,—here Mr. Fanning consulted a paper,—and these twenty-four degrees forty minutes east ten chains and thirteen links—"

"Excuse me, Mr. Fanning," Luff interrupted. "I ain't no land surveyor!" Mr. Fanning waved an airy gesture with his large white hand. "That's all right," he went on; "there ain't no necessity for me to continue. The point is this—right next to that white oak tree is the center of population of New York, Vermont, Pennsylvania and Connecticut."

"Pretty lonesome there in winter, all the same," Luff suggested. He shuffled his feet uneasily. "I'd be glad to visit with you some more, but I got a heap o' chores an' no help to speak of." "That's all right," Mr. Fanning assured him again, "my time's worth money and so is yours. I won't mince words about it, but the United States government has decided to put up a monument in your pasture lot similar to the one I show you here."

Mr. Fanning produced some photographs of small cairns, or monuments, erected by the United States geodetic survey in the course of its work and made a running comment on each picture.

"Now, here's one of the monuments built on Mount Pisgah, the highest point in the northern tier counties," he said. "Handsome piece of work, don't you think?" "Some might say so," Luff replied, "but I don't know as I want any such contraption in my pasture lot."

Immediately Mr. Fanning dug down into his trousers pocket and produced a roll of bills, from which he peeled ten crisp five dollar notes. "Uncle Sam ain't no niggard when it comes to paying for what he wants," he declared, "and here's \$50 for the privilege of building a small stone monument in your pasture lot. Take 'em!" He thrust the bills into Luff's hand and seized his hat. "Now, that's settled," he said and strode out of the house.

"See here," Luff commenced, "I don't know as I ought to—"

"You mean," Mr. Fanning broke in without pausing in his progress toward the barn, "you don't feel like taking the money without giving a receipt. Well, that's all right; your word's good enough for me."

"Tain't that," Luff corrected, "but—"

"Well, all right, if you insist," said Mr. Fanning, pausing. "Have it your own way." He searched in his breast pocket and pulled out a sheet of paper. Then he handed a fountain pen to Luff. "Sign here," he said.

Folding the paper so that only the spot he indicated was visible, he held it against his horse's flank while Luff appended a very shaky signature. Without waiting to blot it, Mr. Fanning took the document and started to leave.

The buggy had proceeded a couple of hundred yards when Luff woke up. He immediately commenced running and shouting at his lungs' capacity, whereat Mr. Fanning gave his trotter a vicious cut with the whip and started off at a 2:40 gait.

In the meantime Jimmie mowed peacefully at the bend of the farm lane near the pasture lot. He had straightened up for a moment to take the kinks out of his back, when the clatter of the trotter's hoofs and Luff's discordant roaring broke on his ear. "A runaway!" he cried, and sprang into the middle of the lane.

There he yelled and brandished his scythe full in the path of the oncoming horse until it was almost on top of him. It was nlp and tuck, but Jimmie stood it out, and at the last moment the trotter swerved and started up the bank. Then it was that Jimmie dropped his scythe and seized the plunging animal by the bridle just as Luff arrived on the scene, flourishing the bills in his right hand.

"Here, you!" he gasped to Fanning. "Take 'em!" He threw the bills into the wagon. "I don't want 'em!" Jimmie held on to the horse, gaping at the sight of the money.

"Did he give it to yer?" he asked, nodding toward Fanning, who stood up in the wagon and dropped the lines. "What's biting you?" the topographer bellowed, purple with rage. "You leave go that horse's head or I'll whale the life out of you!"

He grabbed the whip, but Luff jumped in beside him, pinning both his arms to his sides. "Now, you behave!" Luff growled. "This may be the center of population of all the universe, I dunno and I don't care. Pick up that money o' yours, an' be quick about it!"

Fanning stooped to recover the bills from the bottom of the wagon. "Did he give yer dat money?" Jimmie repeated. "He did," Luff replied, "but I don't want it. Ain't got no use for it, an' I ain't got no use for no monuments, neither."

Jimmie only heard the first part of Luff's answer. "An' did yer sign any receipt for it?" he continued. Luff slapped his knee. "By Gregory, I did sign one, an' I come near forgettin' all about it!" he cried.

"An' did yer read it before yer signed it?" Jimmie went on coolly. "Now, you let go that horse!" Fanning shrieked, fairly frothing at the mouth. Seizing the lines, he slapped them violently on the trotter's back. The horse reared and bucked, but Jimmie clung tight to the bridle. There ensued a wild struggle in the wagon. Luff Goodel had the advantage of muscle if not of weight, and in another minute Fanning's 200 pounds landed in a heap on the dusty surface of the farm lane.

As the descent was made head first, the contents of his pockets fell in a shower about him, and prominent among the scattered papers was the document bearing Luff Goodel's sprawling signature. Luff pounced on it with an exclamation. "Leggo the mare, Jimmie!" he cried. "We're all through!"

Jimmie released the bridle, and no sooner had he sprung to one side than horse and buggy disappeared down the farm lane in a cloud of yellow dust. Fanning rose to his feet, and, hastily gathering up his belongings, shouting curses as he went.

"An' now, Jimmie," said Luff, "we'll take a look at the pesky thing. You'd better read it. Your eyes are better than mine." Jimmie took the document from Luff and unfolded it. "Know all men by these presents," he began, "that I, Lafayette Goodel,



The Contents of His Pockets Fell in a Shower About Him.

for and in consideration of the sum of \$50—

"That's all right, so far," Luff said. "Go ahead!" "The sum of \$50, lawful money of the United States"—

"It looked like good money," Luff admitted. "To me in hand paid by the Midland Railroad of New York"—

"Stop!" Luff shouted. "Read that over!" "By the Midland railroad of New York," Jimmie repeated. "Do hereby grant, bargain, sell, assign and convey all that land"—

"That'll do," Luff gasped. "That's enough! I see it all now!" He stood up unsteadily. "The dirty rascal!" he cried. "So that was his trick, was it?" He turned to Jimmie. "Jimmie, boy," he said earnestly, "Gimme your hand. That pesky railroad can't buy my pasture lot for less than \$500 an acre, and when they do you'll get your share, and a big one too!"

And six months later Luff was as good as his word.

The Elevator Boy By M. QUAD Copyright, 1915, by the McClure Newspaper Syndicate

Many a young doctor or lawyer just starting his career has watched an elevator boy at work and said to himself: "Ah, what a profession! No disappointments—no carking care—no burdens on the young back. Why didn't I adopt it?"

And yet the young gentleman who elevates the elevator has hidden sorrows that the public wots not of. These sorrows begin with the engine room.

In a certain building not long ago I sized up the engineer the very first day as a man who would make me trouble if he could. I learned that two of the window cleaners thought him a single man and both were a little gone on him. Also that his wife brought his lunch in regularly every noon.

The next day at the proper time I scooped up to the eighth floor and found the Widow McCarthy wiping up the hall, and I said to her: "Have you got your lunch with you, Mrs. McCarthy?"

"Indade I have," she replied. "And why don't you go down to the basement and eat it in company with Engineer Flynn? I know he would appreciate your company."

"That's true, me boy, and I'll get me basket and go down, especially as that cold faced grass widdy who calls herself Mrs. O'Shane, though she's no right to it in the law, seems to have finished her door and gone home."

I took her down and then scooted for the fifth floor and found Mrs. O'Shane and said to her: "Why don't you take your lunch basket and go down and keep Mr. Flynn company?"

"Is it company he sighs for, me laddy? If so I'll go down and cheer him up with my presence," she replied. "And you'll find a place to warm up some cold tea if you want to."

"Thank ye, but that is a beautiful idea, and mebbe the good hearted man will have a cup wid me. How long ago did Mrs. McCarthy disappear, Sammis?"

"Oh, I took her down some time ago." "She calls herself the Widdy McCarthy, Sammis, leavin' the 'h' out to put in her 'shugar,' I suppose, but is she a widdy, me boy? It's easy enough to say this and that, but where are the proofs? Has she ever shown anybody her husband's death notice as 'twas printed?"

"I never saw it, ma'am." "I dropped Mrs. O'Shane at the basement just as Mr. Flynn's wife came in with his lunch. There wasn't much said. The three women pitched into each other almost on sight, and they were pulling hair and banging into partitions and making the dust fly when I took a walk. Next day as I stopped at the sixth Mrs. McCarthy got sight of me and said:

"Sammis, I'm told that ye are an orphan boy all by yourself." "Not strictly an orphan, only fatherless."

"So you've got a mother, have ye? Well, a poor fatherless boy can't be havin' too many mothers, and I'll also be a mother to ye."

"I hadn't better call you 'ma' when any one's around, had I, ma?" "I was a-thinkin' about that, Sammis," she thoughtfully replied.

"No, I guess you hadn't. You see, it might lead to jealousy and more. Sammis, d'ye mind I went down to the basement to eat me lunch wid that spalpeen of an engineer the other day?"

"Seems as if I did. You thought Mr. Flynn would be a bit lonely, I believe. He didn't like to eat his lunch alone."

"Bad cess to his loneliness and his whole body! Sammis, me son, the man is a deceiver and ought to be dropped from the roof. He let on to me that he was a single man and dyin' for some one to love him. What d'ye think, Sammis? On the day I'm thinkin' of I had scarcely got out of the elevator and says 'good day' to him when she that calls herself Mrs. O'Shane cums after me, and right on her heels cums a woman wid a lunch basket—the engineer's own true and legal wife! Wasn't that a pretty mess, me son?"

"Did anything happen?" "I'm not clear about it, Sammis, but I think somethin' did. I have a dim recollection of bein' banged on the chin, receivin' this blackness under me eye and of me heels flyin' away wid me and me bein' banged against the partitions, but I shall never be able to make it out to me satisfaction. All I'm sure of is that me head has been achin' ever since that hour, and every time I draw a breath I feel like hittin' that engineer over the head with me bucket."

"And we'll put up a job on him and get him bounced?" "By and by, perhaps, but not now. We'll move slowly in this matter, Sammis, and meanwhile I'm lookin' for you to defend yer adopted mother's reputation should any gossip arise. Ye might feny that ye took me down that day. By the way, how's the mortgage on the home, Sammis?"

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