STORIES FROM THE COMEDY OF LIFE.

On the Street and in the Office, in the Car and by the Fireside at Home.

They were speaking of the Impossible Man at the Commercial club the other evening. The Impossible Man of fifty years ago was an entirely different creature from what he is today. Then he was a kind of an Admiral Crichton, who knew everything and could do everything, who was brave and learned, tender and courageous as a lion, one of Ouida's heroes stalking out from between the covers of a book and posing for all humanity to gaze at. He was romantic and sentimental. Of course he had a large fortune and spent it lavishly, sometimes in self indulgence, but often in deeds of charity.

Today the Impossible Man must be the antithisis of the one described above. He must necessarily be poor in purse else he would not fill the bill of impossibility. Were he wealthy he would be a common, every-day fellow with no earmarks of impossibility about him. Here is a story of an Impossible Man that must be told.

"Jim" Dixby was a lawyer. He was not a corporation lawyer, nor did he have many civil cases involving large amounts of money. There was a reason for this, and that reason will be shown later on. But in the criminal branch of litigation Dixby was supreme. Here no great financial interests clashed. The case was tried solely on its merits and the fate of the prisoner was left to his attorney and the jury. In this field Dixby had attained eminence and an enviable reputation for fidelity to his client.

One day at a city convention "Jim" Dixby was nominated for alderman. His party was in the minority and the ticket was not expected to win out at the polls. And it didn't, with the single exception of Dixby. He was popular with all parties, and it so chanced that he swung into the office by a slight plurality over his leading competitor. To vary the monotony of being an Impossible Man Dixby set up cigars numerously. There was nothing "near" about Dixby. Several weeks before taking his seat in the council he was buzzed around by a number of representatives of a water supply syndicate which desired to secure a franchise to create a monopoly from the council. The plain people were all against the project and over half the council at the inception of the deal. Dixby was emphatic in his opposition. At last, when the new council held its first meeting, it was discovered that Dixby's vote would turn the scale. So would one of the others, but somehow the idea obtained that Dixby's vote and influence were badly needed in the council favoring the franchise.

On the evening of the meeting of the council it was the expressed intention of the opposition to press for a vote on the proposition and kill it. Noses had been counted, including Dixby's, and the opponents of the scheme were in high glee. Suddenly the rumor began spreading that Dixby had been fixed. Councilmen flocked around him for confirmation of the report.

"Yes," he said, "I've sold out my vote to the water works company. I'm not a Croesus and I'm in debt. I had to have money, and they gave me a big lump sum, $20,000, in short."

Then everybody against the water works company cried "Shame!" and said that was the last thing they would have expected of Dixby, but of course every man had his price, and some of the opponents began kicking themselves because they had resisted all advances made by the corruptionists of the new water works system. However, they purposed to vote against it, and let Dixby bear all the odium of selling out the people. Then he could take his $20,000 and go to the devil. He would probably be prosecuted for bribery, anyway, and go to prison. Representatives of the water works company said that Dixby was a liar. No money had been paid him, and that if he voted for the franchise he would do it pro bono publico, because it was a good thing and ought to be pushed along.

When the roll was called Dixby passed his vote, and the result showed 9 for the franchise and 9 against it. Dixby's vote could settle the tie for or against it. A few minutes before the time came for Dixby to vote a messenger boy came in with a large square box and placed it on the councilman's desk. Dixby opened it. It was a phonograph.

"Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Council: Certain parties now in this hall have seen fit to denounce me as a liar this evening. Now, as a lawyer, I am well aware that my unsupported word against representatives of the water company would not go far. It is true that I might have quietly voted against this franchise and killed it. Cui bono? It would have been jumped up again and lived to become a plague on all our houses. So I thought, and I consider wisely, that I would not only scotch the snake, but kill it as well.

"Mr. President, I have the pleasure of laying before you $20,000."

Here Dixby advanced to the president's desk and deposited an exceedingly corpulent roll of bills. Then he resumed:

"Now, you all know I never was worth that amount of money in my life. I leave it here for the future disposition of the city council. But here is one more link in my chain of evidence. This is a photograph of two individuals taken yesterday afternoon in my room. One of them is myself, the one on the right, in the act of receiving this wad of money. You will all recognize the other gentleman, who is presenting me with it."

Two men in the rear of the room at this hastily left the council chamber and went down stairs.

"Now, gentlemen, with no desire to turn this meeting into a vaudeville entertainment, let me ask your indulgence while you listen to a bit of conversation as faithfully recorded in this phonograph. You will observe the position of the instrument in the picture."

Mr. Dixby touched a spring and the dialogue was emitted.

"You will easily recognize the other voice," said Dixby. This is what the phonograph revealed to the astonished aldermen who had clustered around it:

"I believe I can rely on you."

"Well, you know my general reputation. Honestly, I was, and am now, opposed to the franchise. It is not in the people's interest. They know it, I know it and you know it. Still, I am in debt. My family expenses are large, and I must have money. When I say must I mean all the term implies. I will accept the $20,000."

"All right. Here is the money. Of course this transaction can go no further. You are considered a discreet man and one, I am happy to say, cannot overlook his own self-interest. That is every man's duty. We shall depend on your vote, and, I may add, shall not attempt to negotiate with any one else. We already have nine others with us."

"Mr. President, and gentlemen of the council, this is all that can be revealed by the phonograph. I bowed my head at this juncture, but the phonograph cannot show you the bow. Now, then, of course a phonograph can be 'doctored.' Nothing is easier. But it could hardly be made to reproduce the tones of the gentleman who has just gone out and whom you all know so well. Here I have the report of the conversation made by my stenographer, who was concealed behind the curtain shown in the picture. It is reduced to long hand and is sworn to, the affidavit being attached. The stenographer is also present as a witness. So is the photographer who did the snap-shotting from another recess on the right and not shown in the picture.

"Mr. President and gentlemen of the council, to expose villainy and denounce fraud is not exactly the province of a criminal lawyer like myself. I admit this to be true. But, gentlemen, no man can own so much as one of my thumb nails. If the man or corporation own a piece of me, they own all of me, body and soul. No man ever has done that yet; no man ever will. The corrupt lobbyists of this and all other similar franchise-grabbing corporations should be driven out of town. They should be routed foot, horse and artillery. They should have no foothold in any well-governed moral community. I trust that the authorities will take steps to prosecute these scoundrels, and I will aid them in every way possible. Mr. President, I vote 'No' on this infamous ordinance."

Then Mr. Dixby sat down. For a minute there was breathless silence. Then cheers and hand-clapping came in great shape, and a large number of people flocked in the vicinity of Mr. Dixby's desk, eager to grasp the hand of the Impossible Man.

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"There is nothing that would have given me more pleasure," said the man with the Vandyke whiskers and opal stud, "than to have attended the recent yacht races off Sandy Hook."

"You are fond of the sea?" inquired the elderly gentleman who wore a plaid muffler and carried a small silk umbrella with an elaborately carved handle.

"I love old Neptune with all his salty dash and spray. Like Byron, I long to lay my hand upon Old Ocean's mane. There is no sport like yacht racing—the king of pastimes. True, it requires a princely purse to pursue it, but it is worth all it costs and more, too."

"Are you familiar with the technicalities of practical yacht racing?" asked the elderly gentleman.

"Am I? Well, I should say yes. I have owned a number of yachts myself. Not ninety-footers exactly, but smaller single stickers, some in the twenty-foot class. Take it some glorious October morning, when old Sol is just climbing over the horizon and spreading his carmine tints across the silver tips of the white caps, what can be more glorious than to break out the mainsail, topsail, jib, jib topsail, baby jib and spinnaker, clew up the forecastle, douse the binnacle, clew up the cook's galley, put stoppers on the cook's mouth, up with the mudhook, belay the lee scuppers, burst the balloon jib out of the bolt ropes, slush down the bulkheads, haul the keel in on deck, lower away the garboard strake and pipe all hands to the capstan for cocktails? What sport so rare as this?"

"You are sure you have not got your wires crossed on some of your description?" inquired the elderly gentleman with no small degree of curiosity.

"Not in a thousand years," replied the man with the Vandyke beard. "I have sailed in all waters and in all weathers. Commanded a steamer once, one of the compartment or bulkhead steamers which are built so that it is impossible for them to sink. The first officer and myself didn't hit it off very well together from the start. He seemed to have the idea that I didn't know enough about a ship to put in tea. But I showed him something. He really wanted to do all the commanding, and carry on steam and sail when there was really no necessity for it. We had time enough to get home in, but he had imbibed the idea that expense could be saved by quick trips without taking into account the extra coal used.

"Well, I'll tell you how I got even with him. One day we were caught in a gale off Gibralter. The first officer was forward cussing the men in the vicinity of the anchor chains, and I was aft swearing at the helmsman for letting the steamer fall off six points from her course. Suddenly a big Cunnarder crashed right into us, cutting us square in two amidships, and going her way just as if nothing had happened. And there we were. As I said before the steamer was one of those compartment affairs and couldn't sink. Neither end of her. My first officer was on the front end and I on the quarter deck. We began to drift rapidly apart. I grabbed a speaking trumpet and yelled to the first officer to take in sail, slew his end of the craft around and we would contrive to lash them together."

"Oh, you go to the devil,'" he shouted back. "I've got you now just where I want you. I have long wanted to sail this ship and now I'm dinged if I don't sail a piece of her home."

"You mean that, do you?" I cried.

"That's what I said," he shouted back. "I'll save this much of her for her owners an you may drop down to Davy Jones' for all I care. Good evening."

"Well, he had one engine aboard of his end of the ship and an extra propeller in the forward hold, which he managed to rig up, and with what sail the foremast and jib gave him he could creep along. I don't think he had any compass, however, but he had a sextant, while I had the chronometer and all the charts in my cabin. In one respect he had the advantage of sharp bows while I was obliged to bump into the head seas with the square end of the bulkhead. We were bound for New York. Well, I carried on all sail possible, and burned up the furniture and a lot of oil barrels when we ran out of coal, but let me tell you I got into New York three days ahead of my first officer, and when he landed, I had him put into irons and tried for mutiny.'

"You did have quite a thrilling experience," replied the elderly gentleman. "Could I have read anything about this singular affair?"

"Guess not; you see I went around to all the papers and had it suppressed. What might your occupation be, if the question is not intrusive?"

"Me, oh, I'm sailing master and navigator of the Olympia. She is out of commission now in the dry dock, and I'm on shore leave."

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It seems to me that I am prepared to offer superior inducements for an exchange of personal property. Those who have the capital to carry over such stock as I have on hand will find profit in opening up correspondence with me. In invoicing my property I learn that I can dispose of one set of golf sticks, as good as new, one red coat and a wide-striped sweater, one red coat—short, one Tam O'Shanter cap, with a fuzzy bob on the surface, one pair of white canvas shoes, one pair of short pants to be tied over the knee pans with red ribbons, pair of plaid hose, and one especial putting stick with ash and rosewood handle. It is warranted to put a refractory caddie out the first jolt. This has been demonstrated.

The above property I will exchange for three tons of bright, black coal that has never been used, f. o. b.

I also have inventoried the following among my stock of summer goods: One split bamboo pole. It was split over the head of a large, lemon-colored dog that persisted in going in swimming in the vicinity of the place where I was angling for bass. I have also three other split bamboo rods, split in the ordinary way by quite delicate machinery. Along with these will go a pair of rubber boots with cork soles, reaching up under the armpits and, at present, beyond the reach of the rubber trust; one skein of fishing line weighing about five pounds, which became entangled early last June, and which I have not yet found time to extricate from its difficulty. To unravel the tackle will be fine sport for your children during these long winter evenings. I have also an interesting book of fly hooks, red hackles and other deceptive, yet very attractive, baits for trout, bass, pike, pickerel and an occasional bull-head. Also three bait bottles of varying sizes, one with a leather cover, and German silver drinking cup attached, together with a two-gallon jug of live bait—spirited and spirituous—which has never been broached. These, together with a brown duck coat with 250 pockets, a hat to match and a small creel for trout, I will exchange for a heavy ulster overcoat with high collar and deadened walls, one set of weather strips and a boy's sled.

Parties wishing to negotiate an exchange will please drop a postal in some adjacent letter box, and I will have it conveyed to my office by some friendly carrier. —Richard F. Steele.

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BEWARE OF IMITATIONS.

GLEANED BY A GIRL.

I think that sometimes we meet in real life people who seem to have stepped out of our favorite books.

Agnes in "David Copperfield" has long been dear to me, represented in a personal friend who was faithfully drawn years ago in old England by Dickens. Nearly every day I meet Amelia Sedley on the street here in St. Paul, and occasionally am amused at Becky Sharp's observations upon end of the century affairs. And the other evening I met a girl who might have come out of Louisa Alcott's "Little Women," she is so much like Jo.

She had been telling stories of childish pranks, for as a child she was hoydenish and high-tempered, and, I take it, generous hearted. She had three "chums"—all boys, and one of them was her brother.

But as the two grew older, the brother would leave his little chum to amuse herself at home in the evening while he went out with "the gang," boys of whom the erstwhile chum did not wholly approve.

For all her tomboyish ways, she was a little woman in her intuitions, and she tried to coax her brother to stay at home. One night when he was ready as usual to join the "gang" down town, she, as was her custom, pleaded with him to stay at home. He was impatient at her persistence. "Why," he said, wishing to silence her, "I will stay with you instead of going out with the fellows, if you'll have a cigarette with me." "Yes," she said, "I will." He was a little brute, and she—well, she thought the game, desperate as it was, was worth the candle.

He rolled for her one of the odious things, and she took it fearfully. She had hoped that he would relent, but there were no signs of his doing so, and he thought it jolly sport to see her light the cigarette and watch the delicate wreaths of smoke curl above her aureole of fluffy hair. The smoke choked her and made her sick and she wanted to cry, but she kept puffing away until the horrible thing was burned up.

The sequel to the story is that the "gang" lost one of its "good fellows," but the "good fellow" had the grace, after that evening, to smoke his cigarettes at home alone. And the little sister who had stooped to conquer was exceedingly glad.

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This is a simple little story gleaned just the other day from life's big book.

It was one of those brief, radiant autumn days, carrying in the very atmosphere such a lilting joyousness that then, although "it is not all of life to live," yet it is the best part of it.

A carriage drove down from one of Summit avenue's fashionable homes and stopped in front of a hospital. From it a girl attired in a faultlessly tailored costume walked up the broad steps, and through the corridor.

Her hands were filled with sweet flowers, and there was something of anxiety in her hurried manner. A nurse, sweet-faced and white-capped, came out of a ward. When she saw the girl, she went eagerly forward. "The child has been asking for you," she said. "She wants to see you before—to see you once more," the nurse corrected, leading the way.

A child, with a face scarcely less colorless than the pillows upon which lay the head, clustered about with bronze curls, looked up with a glad smile as the young woman entered. "I am glad you came,'" she said, "for I could not go without telling you good-bye. And I am so happy that it will soon be all over—the awful pain. I shall pray for you ever so often."

The dainty daughter of fashion, upon whose face had settled an expression of sacred reverence, knelt upon the floor near the small white cot and joined her prayers with the little sufferer's—the waif whom she had rescued a few months before from a miserable home.

And now death came like a great bond that united the two extremes of human conditions represented there.

As the poor protege's eyes closed forever in eternal sleep from the girl's eyes fell blinding tears; and as she walked away there was in her face that rapt expression of one whose thoughts dwell beyond the things of earth.

—Beth.

MANNERS IN MIDDLE AGES.

An old French book warns women "not to look too often at a man lest he think that she is in love with him, for it is generally only vain women who allow their eyes to wander restlessly, like a hawk on the watch for a victim."

It was considered more than rude for any one, man or woman, to look aimlessly into space or gaze at the sky for any length of time, and staring about in the street or in church was considered especially impolite; people who desired to be considered well brought up were enjoined not to wave their hands about in the air and not to place them upon the head or shoulders of any distinguished personage.

When standing both men and women were exhorted to place one hand over the other near the waist. A well bred woman, also, when walking out of doors, had to place the thumb of the left hand in the buckle or string by which her cloak was fastened under her neck, while with the two fingers of the right hand she kept the cloak closed.

When on horseback men were enjoined not to look at their legs, but straight over the horse's head. In a book of the twelfth century we read of a model young woman who "walked nicely and did not look around; she did not speak to her mother nor greet her father, neither would she look at man or woman!"

Great weight was attached to greeting people. "Give a friendly greeting to every one," says a French author; "it costs nothing and raises you higher in the estimation of others." In France it was the custom for ladies to raise their caps, and the men bowed almost to the ground. One of the oldest forms of greeting among Saxon people was "Hails!" which was the equivalent to "May you be healthy!"

Moderation in eating and drinking was especially recommended for ladies, because, said one book, "a drunken woman is not a pleasant spectacle." It was the duty of the gentlemen to see that the ladies had enough, and it was not at all unusual for the lady of the house or her daughter to cut up the food for a guest whom they particularly wished to honor.

LOVE'S LADDER.

"Sweetest spite,
Cruel delight,
Leave Me, and don't love me!
Dear despair,
Fatal fair,
You're too far above me."

"Eager eyes,
Sudden sighs,
Dare to look and love me.
Learn to win,
Come, begin!
Climb till you're above me."

Up he leapt,
Swiftly stept,
With a will for climbing;
Won her so—
A kiss to show;
And all the bells a-chiming.

—Ada Bartrick Baker in Pall Mall Magazine.

THE LADY OR THE TIGER.

When Darwin searched in ev'ry field
For evolution the'ries,
Each sprig of grass, each worm would yield
A link in endless series.

By this and that he traced the cat
From Ganges to the Niger,
And proved the same—nor wild nor tame—
Was first of all a tiger.

When Kitty, fairest Kitty, smiles
On me, in sweetest favor,
My heart in mast'ry she beguiles
With true Elysian flavor.

These faces scan, and guess who can,
From Ganges to the Niger—
Which Kitty, pray, I love—now, say:
"The Lady or the Tiger?"

—Chicago Times-Herald.