

Old Bill's Gift

By Octavia Roberts

(Copyright by Western Newspaper Union.) Bill, more familiarly "Old Bill"—he had never been known to mention a family name—looked around his "haven of holiday comfort," as he termed it, with a chuckle of supreme satisfaction.

"It's great!" he gloated, "with only one thing missing—a Christmas tree." Bill was a character. The townspeople designated him a tramp. Somehow, however, the appellation did not seem to fit. He did not drink nor swear. He did not beg. His willing ways had made him popular, and when Bill was "down on his luck" and passed a doorway hungry-looking, his wants were generally provided for unsolicited.

It was the day before Christmas. Behind the patient gleam in "Old Bill's" eyes lurked some sentiment of memory that impelled him to celebrate. This especial year he had been preparing for the event with the eager ardor of a school boy. Bill had made no confidants. Quietly and enjoyably he had laid his plans.

These were now perfected. A week back Bill had "gone to house-keeping." He had discovered an old abandoned barn just beyond the town limits. The lower part had lost doors and windows and was bleak and cheerless indeed. A rickety stairs, however, led to a room in one corner of the loft. It was cozy and warm and at one time had been a harness room. Here Bill had "camped." He had fished out an old oil stove, a cot, a table and chair from the town dumping heap.

A particular housewife had presented him with a roasted chicken because one side was slightly charred. On the rude table beside it were half a dozen homemade doughnuts and a real mince pie.

Bill took a last look at the goodly array of comfort then went out to seek a branch of arbor vitae which would serve as a Christmas tree.

As he neared the barn on his return he came to a speedy halt.

A light glowed over at one corner of the place. It proceeded from a lantern set in the feed box of a manger. In the manger itself across the stale hay it contained a blanket was spread, and, swathed in coverings upon this, as revealed by the lantern rays, lay a little sleeping babe.

Near by a serious-faced man was shaking the snow from his shoulders. Beside him, seated on an old suitcase, was a comely but care-worn woman.

The man began to speak. Bill, apace, drew into the shadow and listened. It was to hear enough to learn that bad luck was driving these homeless ones from their former home, penniless, on foot, to the father of the wife, ten miles further on. The storm had driven them to temporary shelter.

The husband and father had taken a well-thumbed volume from his pocket. He began reading aloud. It was of "an upper room," of a master and his beloved disciples, of a supper never to be forgotten in the memory of mankind.

Bill stood like one transfixed. What tender chord had been struck that he closed his eyes! He was back forty years in memory, at his mother's knee. How vivid, how appealing—a picture she had shown him of the Christ-child in a manger, of the devoted father and mother, as here before him, a prototype of that holy eve so real, so touching—the First Christmas!

A mighty thought moved him as he quietly spoke:

"Friend, upstairs you will find comfort till the storm is over. Call it a Christmas greeting—see?" and was gone.

"I'll strike out for Farmer Dale's haymow," shivered Bill, after half an hour's desultory wandering, and he turned about—to start, to shout out, and then to run.

For there in the distance the familiar farmhouse showed no illumination within, but beyond it a glare shot up—a haystack on fire!

Bill reached the farmyard. The wind had blown the flames against one gable of the house and it was burning. He ran to the stable for a pitchfork. Then began a fierce battle. Bucket after bucket of water he carried. The last spark was dashed out, and Bill sank exhausted to the ground as the farmer and his family, visiting at a neighbor's and attracted by the blaze, came rushing upon the scene.

"Yes," declared Farmer Dale, two hours later, as he showed Bill up the stairs and into a comfortable chamber, "this is your room, and you will sleep here, and you're a free boarder long as you like, understand? Why, there'd be no house to sleep in if it wasn't for you!"

Old Bill was a long time getting into bed. Like to a child he sank into a peaceful slumber, his softened spirit in radiant dreams wandering through that "upper room" filled with the souls of those, however humble, who had helped to make true "Peace on earth good will to men."



MONTENEGRIN ARTILLERY IN ACTION



Montenegro has been little heard of in the conflict of the big powers, but the kingdom of Nicholas I, has put up so heroic and determined a resistance that it has surprised the Austrians and aroused the admiration of the world. The brave little army, aided by the mountainous nature of the country, has so far been successful in opposing invasion. The photograph shows a Montenegrin gun in action.

Boy First to Kill Bear.

Dorset Ringler, seventeen, of Trout Run is the first Lycoming (Pa.) county hunter this season with a bear to his credit. Ringler and Floyd Bowen, another Trout Run lad, were returning from an unsuccessful coon hunt at one o'clock the other morning when they heard something crashing through the brush, and a moment later a large black bear passed 20 feet in front of them and started to climb an oak tree.

Bowen was the first to fire and missed. At the report of the gun the bear started down the tree, and as it touched the ground Ringler sent a bullet into its heart, killing it instantly. Returning to the village of Trout Run, five miles distant, the boys awakened their fathers, who accompanied them to the scene and helped get the carcass home. The bear weighed 225 pounds.

Germans Lead in Wireless.

There are about ten wireless stations in France, the most powerful being that of the Eiffel tower. The Germans have many more, and especially the great station of Nauen, with a constant transmitting power of 6,000 miles, occasionally raised to 7,200 miles. They have a similar post in Spain, and another at Sayville, L. I., opposite New York. The three pylons of the latter, each nearly 500 feet high, with the antennae and all the apparatus, were manufactured in Germany, and sent from Rotterdam to Hoboken by a Holland-America steamer. When the cables connecting America with Germany were cut she had already prepared a perfect substitute, or nearly so.

Testing Quality of Ale.

At one time Shakespeare's father is said to have served as an ale conner or tester. In the olden days the ale conner tested only for sugar, and a musty (and doubtless ale-soaked) chronicler tells us that it was the custom of these testers to enter a tavern, call for a pot "by accident (sic) spill a puddle" on a bench and sit in the puddle for "half an hour by the clock." If the conner could rise with due dignity from his seat, all was well; but woe to the tapster whose ale glued the leather breeches of the tester to the bench—there was sugar in his ale; which brings us, by the well-worn route of anecdote, nearer home.

Aid to Sleep.

There are two very simple but effective remedies for that kind of sleeplessness that comes from overwork or nervous exhaustion. One is to have the feet very warm. Put them against a rubber bag filled with hot water. A rubber bag is better than an earthen bottle, as it will retain the heat for hours. The second method is much more simple. Discard the pillow, turn over and lie on the stomach with hands clasped under the forehead to lift the head a trifle. This will often send one to sleep.

Nothing Too Hot.

Chabert, the fire king, who was a popular favorite in London many years ago, claimed to be able to swallow arsenic and other poisons with impunity. Visitors to his entertainment were requested to come provided with phosphorus, prussic acid, arsenic and oxalic acid, which he proceeded to consume before their eyes, taking an antidote afterward which was supposed to neutralize their effects.

Elaborate Preparations for another winter of warfare have been made by all the armies in Europe.

This British trooper carries his full winter equipment, including a fur overcoat, in a bundle on his back.

LAND AND WATER CYCLE



Mr. Rebin of Battersea demonstrated at Southend, England, recently this new land and water bicycle, riding on the water for a mile and a half.

HARD TO DEFINE VULGARITY

What One Generation Condemns Another May Have Considered Distinctly Proper.

There is nothing more difficult to define than vulgarity. It is often merely something one dislikes in somebody's manner of speech or behavior. Webster's dictionary defines "vulgar" in the modern sense as "lacking cultivation or refinement; rustic, boorish; also, offensive to good taste or refined feelings; low, coarse, mean, base."

And "vulgarity" it defines as "grossness or clownishness of manners or language; absence of refinement; coarseness."

The half of these definitions might safely be cast aside. It is absurd to define "vulgar" in the present sense as "rustic; low, . . . mean, base."

When we say that anyone is vulgar we mean chiefly that he is, in Webster's words, "offensive to good taste," and that is about as near an explanation as we can go.

As to what good taste is, who can inform us? To say that it is the taste of the best people does not get us much farther, for we have then to discover who are the best people. And is it the best people who have ever lived that we must follow, or the best people who are living now? The best people nowadays would consider it vulgar to get drunk at table; but the best people of bygone times were of a different opinion.

Chance to Think.

"Miss Gadders talks so much and so fast that it is impossible to get in a word."

"Yes, but I find her conversation a great help to me at times," said Professor Diggers, who is compelled to leave his study occasionally to fulfill his social obligations.

Tourists in France.

One of the curious aspects of the war in France is the effort of the railways to encourage the customary tourist travel. The tourists, of course, are confining themselves to travel in the large part of France that is outside of the war zone, where the fear of the dangers of war may be "ungrounded."

Not the African Variety.

Snooks was one of those conceited, make-believe, bold hunters, and was always spinning his yarns about his experiences in Africa, and he generally wound up by saying he never yet saw a lion he feared. One night, after he had finished yarning, he was a little taken aback by one of his audience, who said:

Peculiar "Fairy Stone."

Perhaps the most curious mineral found in the United States is staurolite, otherwise known as the "fairy stone," reports the United States geological survey. This is an iron aluminum silicate found only in Virginia and North Carolina, the reddish brown and brownish black crystals occurring in well defined single and double crosses. There is some commercial demand for the crosses as curios which are worn as watch charms or on chains in the manner of a locket or lavaliers, a demand perhaps stimulated by the quaint legend which is told of their origin; the fairies living in the caves of the mountains, on hearing the sad tidings of the death of Christ, fashioned these crosses as mementos of him.

Royalty Fond of Strong Drink.

"Cobblers and tinkers are your true ale drinkers," yet "Merry go downe," so called "for its slides downe merrily," has not lacked for royal patronage. Queen Elizabeth pronounced ale "an excellent wash" and "likes it so strong." Lord Burleigh writes: "There is no man able to drink it." And Catherine—the worst and the wisest—had no small partiality for the brew of Burton, which even in her day was imported in great quantities into Russia.

SPERM WHALE BATTLES SHIP

Monster Hits and Nearly Founders Whaling Vessel in Alaskan Waters.

Seattle.—Showing the effects of a desperate battle with a huge sperm whale while ten miles south of Mount Edgecombe, Kruof island, near the entrance of Sitka sound, on June 15, the whaling steamer Star III, Capt. L. P. Halls, Gunner G. Earling, reached Eagle Harbor after a successful season.

While taking one of the big mammals, which members of the crew describe as "just like an ocean liner," the big fellow charged the steamer, damaging the gunwale, second towing check on the starboard side and bending and crumpling a plate in the bulwarks for a distance of ten feet. The weight of the whale nearly swamped the little steamer.

TANK IN LITTLE HISSING JAUNT

Does Serpentine Tango in Chicago Street, Causing No Little Excitement.

"GOOD BUY" FOR SAM

Soda Fountain Attachment Picked Up by Junk Dealer Does Some Startling Things When Attacked by Purchaser.

Chicago.—Sam Shamburg, dealer in rags, old iron, and related products, made a good buy recently. He picked up across a second-hand liquid carbonic acid tank such as is used in soda fountains.

He took it to his emporium at Chicago and Franklin streets and, being a prudent person, he saw a varied party to be had in dissecting the tank.

The nozzles of such tanks are made of brass and brass is a readily malleable metal. Hence Sam would remove the nozzle first. He stood the tank upright and hit it a crack with a sledge.

A Little Hissing Jaunt.

A truly alarming thing occurred. As if resenting the violence of Sam's attack, the tank hissed with remarkable humanness and, without further ado, set off up the street in most shocking haste.

It so happens that the factories in this vicinity are discharging their hundreds of workers at this time of day and the majority of these are girls. When these young women saw a hideous gray object, foaming at the mouth, hissing like a sea serpent, and swizzling up the street like an intoxicated muskellunge, they thought the city had been attacked by German submarines and a torpedo had gone astray.

A Hissing of Skirts.

Well, sir, they say up along West Chestnut street there never was such



Set Off Up the Street.

a hissing of skirts and such a screeching of terror nor such a scramble for something to get behind since the Chicago avenue water main burst.

Daniel Matthews, a driver for P. D. Carroll, an expressman, tried to guide his horses out of the way of the rampaging tank, but it's hard enough to dodge on foot, let alone trying to dodge with two horses and a truck. The hissing monster hit one of the horses and fractured a leg.

Meanwhile Sam was doing a serpent gallop after his runaway junk, and was losing by a mile, when the angry tank gave a last hissing gasp and fell dead.

Professional Pot Boiling.

When a historian or biologist spends part of his time in coaching or extension lecturing in order that the rest of it may be devoted to his researches, these subsidiary functions must obviously be classified under the heading of potboiling.

He teaches in order that he may have time and money for study.

The educational enthusiast, on the other hand, studies that he may teach; he regards teaching as the one thing in the world which it is a privilege to be allowed to do, and therefore rejoices if he is permitted to give his didactic impulses full play without having to divert any of his energies into some less fascinating pursuit.

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