

POSSUM SKETCHES.

Zeb White Tells of His Closest Shave While Making Moonshine Whisky.

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Evening, when the old 'possum of Tennessee was in a story-mood, I asked him how close a shave he had ever had from the revenue while making moonshine whisky. After a little thought he replied: "Well, they cum powerful close to me or fo' times, but on one occasion I saved in a mighty curus way. I knowed I had a still up yere in the mountains, and they was jest bound to bust. They knowed, too, everybody up yere was agin 'em, so they had to be mighty keeful. I didn't cum huntin' around in an away, but sent spies to trap 'em. I fust feller that cum along purposed to be a preacher, and he asked us on fo' different Sunday mornin' at the schoolhouse. I can't say I mistrusted him the least bit, but I fust sermon the ole woman told me: "Zeb White, if that preacher ain't no them revenoo spies then I'll be fust to see him. I foller him the next mornin' and he ain't no other Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian or any other pertickler. He ain't fur hell-fire nor agin it. He ain't fur heaven nor agin it. He fust smellin' of everybody's breath the time, and do yo' look out or I'll fust five y'ars in state prison!" And did he turn out to be a spy?" "I asked. "Of co'se he did—of co'se. Yes, sah, he was right among 'em b'ars befo' he knowed it, and they was mighty glad to see him. They looked at him fur a spell, as if wonderin' whether he was drunk, too, and then they went in to hev sum fun. The big b'ar reached out and got a hang on him and begun to dance around, and fur awhile the artist was too skeered to holler. When



"THEY WENT IN TO HEV SUM FUN."

ward fur a week, and on two or three moonshins I tramped around with him. I fust found what he was arter, and he talked about buyin' all the land around here, but one maw'nin' my ole woman sez to me: "Zeb White, kin a man find iron or coal in the darkness of night?" "He skassy can't," sez I. "But fur these last two nights the stranger has slipped outer bed and bin gone fo' or five hours. If he ain't huntin' fur coal and iron then he's huntin' fur yo' still, and yo'd better look out." "That set me to thinkin', and when night cum agin I was on the watch. The feller went to bed about nine o'clock, but climbed out of the window an hour later and started up the hill. Yo' kin allus git the smell of a still befo' by night, yo' see, and from the way that feller was headed he would hev run plump on it. I played that I was a drunk, however, and I skeert him so that he made back fur the cabin. Next maw'nin' I axed him to move on, and he thought o' the nayburhood in a hurry. I thought I'd ketch on to the next man they sent up, but they was too tricky fur me. One day a feller appeared who said he was an artist and wanted to paint some mounting scenery fur one of the biggest men in New York. He drew a pictur' of the ole woman on paper, and was so handy about it that I reckoned he was all right. He went to stop with Dan Shaw and he had paints and brushes and things and used to work away by the hour. Nobody was mindin' him in the least when my ole woman speaks up one day and sez: "Zeb White, hev yo' taken a good look at that artist's nose yit?" "Not so very particular—why?" "Cause it was made fur smellin' out stills, and he's allus sniffin' about. He's soon arter daylight to sniff the wind, and he's gwine to find yo' still befo' another week. I could smell it myself this maw'nin' when I opened the doah." "That set me to thinkin'," said Zeb. "And I jest made up my mind to lay low. I took four kegs o' whisky from

A FOREMAN OF THE JURY.

By Charles B. Lewis.

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As the Lake Shore train from the east rolled into Toledo one morning a dozen years ago, a detective was waiting to see the conductor and make an arrest ordered over the wire an hour before. A detective who has been in the business for a dozen years seldom meets anything that surprises him, but as this officer was asked to arrest a handsome, well-dressed woman on the charge of robbery, he opened his eyes in amazement. There were two handsome, well-dressed women, and one said to him: "Officer, this person has robbed me of jewelry to the value of \$6,000 and I want her arrested at once!" The other looked at him in a cold, haughty way and made a gesture of contempt as she replied: "Officer, this woman's charge is false, and if you detain me it will be at your peril!" "My name," continued the first, "is Mrs. John Wickham, of New York city. I am on my way to Chicago to visit relatives. This person boarded the train at Buffalo, and we became quite friendly. I had the jewelry in a small satchel. Late last night or early this morning she obtained possession of it. I wish to have her arrested and searched." "If you dare to do it I will have you sent to prison!" exclaimed the other. Here was a straight charge and a firm denial, and the detective was nonplused. If the woman had stolen the jewelry, she must have the plunder about her person or in her baggage. He asked her if she was willing to be searched, and she promptly replied: "Not only willing, but I demand it, in order to clear myself. Afterwards I will deal with this woman!" The two ladies left the train and were escorted to a hotel. Mrs. Wickham identified herself as the wife of a New York millionaire, and sent a telegram to her husband to come at once, and a search of the other proved her innocence. None of the missing jewelry was found upon her. She gave her name as Mrs. James Taylor, of Buffalo, and she hinted that her husband would demand the fullest satisfaction for the insult forced upon her. By the advice of the chief of police, Mrs. Wickham attempted to get out of the affair as best she could, but Mrs. Taylor stood on her dignity and wanted \$10,000 for her injured feelings. She must either have \$10,000 in cash or she would sue for \$50,000 damages. Perhaps the two women might have reached some sort of a compromise but for the advent of Mr. Wickham. He heard his wife's story about the loss of the jewelry, and realizing that he was in a box he tried a bluff game on Mrs. Taylor. He struck the weak spot at once by demanding her husband's address in Buffalo. She refused to give it, and her refusal aroused suspicion that something was wrong. When pressed to give her identity she positively refused, and the result was a formal charge and her arrest in due form. When the alleged thief was arraigned circumstances were so much against her that she was held for trial in the higher court. She continued to give the same name and address as at first, and added that she would see the case through without any assistance from her husband. Her policy was one of haughty independence. She had a fine wardrobe, considerable jewelry, and was also bound for Chicago. Her cash in hand amounted to less than \$100, but no sooner had she secured a lawyer than money was sent him to make a desperate fight for her acquittal. Wickham was not only an aggressive man, but he had to convict the woman or pay damages. He therefore aided the police in every possible way. Buffalo was turned upside down without finding a James Taylor to fit the case. Every effort was made to locate the woman, but beyond the fact that she had taken the train at Buffalo nothing could be learned. There were plenty of who said she was an adventuress and was guilty of the theft, but there were many also who contended that she belonged to some honorable family and was seeking to shield the name from scandal by giving a false one and withholding information. She didn't seem to worry at all during her commitment, and when the case finally came to trial she was in the best of spirits. I am a quiet, steady man of family, not in the habit of reading the newspapers much. If I had not been drawn on the jury for that term of court I doubt if I should have ever heard of the case. As a juror I had to listen to and weigh all the evidence, and for three days the accused woman sat within ten feet of me. The evidence was purely circumstantial, but not particularly strong as circumstantial evidence. Mrs. Wickham had section No. 7, and Mrs. Taylor had section No. 5. Both had hand-bags. Mrs. Wickham had said nothing about her jewelry, but the bag in which it was stored had disappeared. There were only four passengers in the sleeper. The third was an old lady—the fourth the president of an eastern college, and therefore to be considered above suspicion. If the car porter had taken the bag he had passed it to some one during the night, but the Jefferson did not even hint that he might have stolen it. It was a singular and yet a strong defense. If the prisoner preferred to fight the case out without revealing her identity that was to her credit and could not be used against her. As she did not know the contents of the missing bag why should she be tempted? If she had taken it what had she done with it? She was perfectly willing to be searched, and nothing had been found. The old lady might have taken

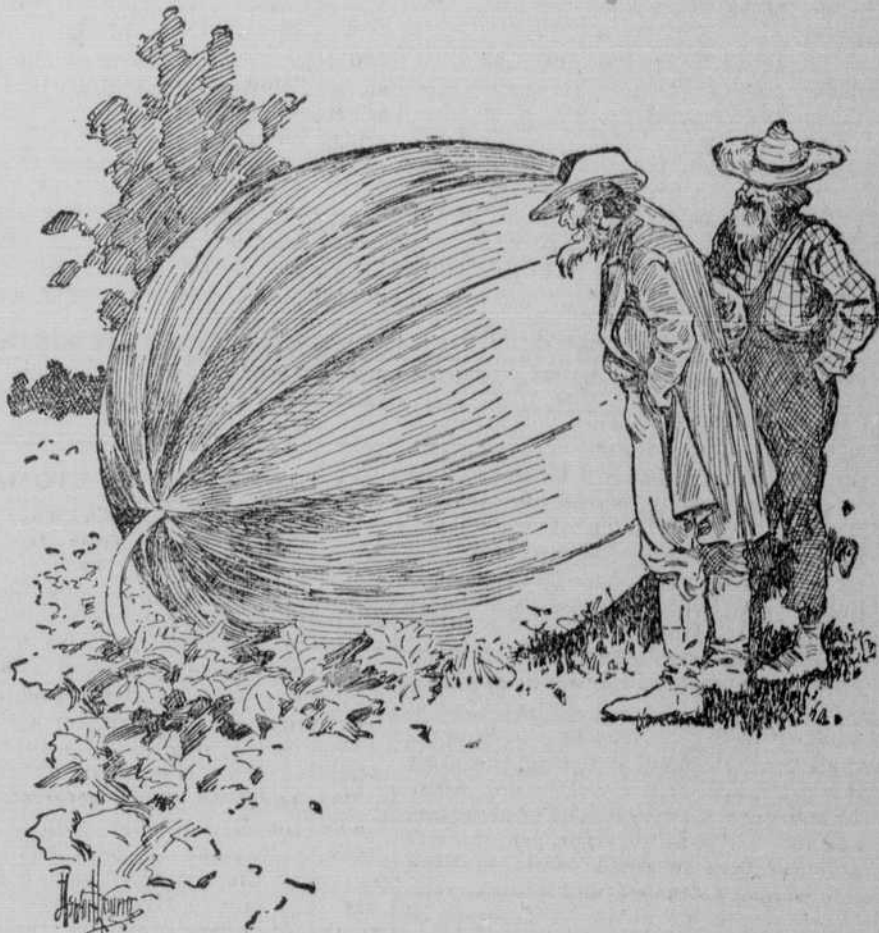
it by mistake—even the college president might have been tempted. There was the train conductor, the car conductor and the porter. As the bag had not been opened by its owner between New York and Toledo, how could she swear that the jewelry was in it at Buffalo and beyond? Mrs. Wickham could only say that no one else but Mrs. Taylor could have taken the bag, and in all but one thing the prosecution made out a very poor case. I had been made foreman of the jury, and when we retired I found myself halting between two opinions. No legal proof had been advanced that Mrs. Taylor stole the bag, but if there was nothing wrong about her why should she conceal her identity? I was almost of the belief that she was an adventuress, but yet I had sworn to be guided by the evidence. On our first ballot we stood seven for conviction and five for acquittal. On that ballot I voted for conviction, but five minutes later I was using arguments against such a verdict. Deep down in my heart I believed Mrs. Taylor to be the thief, but if we were to be guided by law and evidence she must be acquitted. The second ballot showed eight for acquittal and four for conviction. The four men were pig-headed and obstinate, and we had been out seven hours before one of them decided to come over to the majority. The other three vowed they would hang out 'till doomsday, and we put in a long night in the jury room. After breakfast the next morning I went to work at them in earnest. I am neither an orator nor a magnetic man, but I went over all the evidence and presented it, pro and con, in such a manner that after we had been out about 30 hours a ballot showed that we were all for acquittal. This was the verdict announced in court, and Mrs. Taylor was at once discharged from custody. Within two hours Mr. Wickham had compromised with her for \$3,000 in cash. As the days went by that verdict bothered me. Mrs. Taylor had gone to a hotel as soon as discharged, and Mr. Wickham had hired a detective to watch her. It was determined to discover her identity, if nothing more. The woman probably suspected that she would be watched. After a few days she went to Chicago, visited a lawyer's office, a bank and two or three other places, and then bought her ticket for Buffalo. The detective had dogged her every movement, and she had made no sign that she was aware of his espionage. He saw her leave the hotel in a carriage for the depot, and as there was plenty of time he took a street car instead. When he went through the train she was not to be found. The man worked on the case for a week without striking her trail and was then hauled off. When this instance came to my ears I was conscience-stricken over our verdict. The woman must surely be a sharper, and we ought to have strained a point and given her over to justice. Two months had gone by, and one evening I was waiting in the Union depot at Cleveland for a train. I sat reading a newspaper when a woman dropped into the seat beside me and smilingly asked if she was mistaken in thinking I was Mr. So and So of Toledo. I replied that there was no mistake, and then recognized her as Mrs. Taylor. "I am so much indebted to you!" she said as she held out her hand and let her smile broaden. "About your case at Toledo?" "Of course. The prosecution had a poor case against me, but my lawyer was fearful of a verdict of guilty, because I refused to reveal my identity. It of course looked as if I had something to conceal." "But you didn't have?" "Didn't I?" she exclaimed as she laughed heartily. "Did you live in Buffalo, as you claimed?" I asked. "Of course not." "And isn't your name Taylor?" "Not at all." "Then may I ask who you are?" "You may because you proved yourself a good friend in my hour of need. I heard how you brought those four obstinate fellows over to your way of thinking, and I am glad of this opportunity to show my appreciation in a substantial manner. As to my name, I have half a dozen. As to who I am, I make my living by my wits. If I were a man I'd be called a sharper." "Then you—you are an adventuress!" I gasped. "That is probably a correct term," she laughed. "And you?" "I took the bag of jewelry, of course. You had no doubt of it in your own mind, and yet you stood my friend. Yes, I stole the bag while her berth was being made up at night and passed it on to a good friend of mine in the next car. The haul divided \$3,000 between us, and for what you did for me I am going to present you with \$500." I sat and stared at her with mouth wide open, wondering if I was awake or dreaming, and she took a pencil and card from her reticule and said: "Give me your home address and I will send the money by express tomorrow." "My heavens, woman, but did you really steal that jewelry?" I whispered. "Why, of course I did!" she replied. "And you made Mr. Wickham pay you \$3,000 damages!" I went on. "Of course. You didn't suppose I'd let him off after all that trouble, did you? What is the address, please? I am one who fights her enemies and rewards her friends. If you do not think \$500 is sufficient please say so and I will increase the amount." I arose and walked out of the depot without saying a word in reply—without a look back at her—so overcome that I could hardly have given my name if asked for it. After wandering around for an hour I went back. To my great relief she had gone.

SQUATTER TALES.

Abe Hope Tells of the Biggest Watermelon Ever Grown in Arkansas.

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In the truck patch, on the north side of the old squatter's cabin, was a watermelon so near the size of a flour-barrel that I gasped at the sight of it, and after I had walked around it three or four times I asked Abe Hope if that was the biggest melon he ever raised. "That no account tattle out thar?" he exclaimed in tones of contempt as he glanced towards the patch. "Why, sah, that's one that wasn't wuth totin' away to sell to the steamboat men! Any of the cull'd folks around yere would hev to be mighty hard up to steal that melyn. Shoo! Hu!" "Then you have raised larger ones?" I persisted. "Stranger," said Abe as he picked at a sliver in the sole of his shoe. "I'm gwine to tell yo' 'bout the whoppinest melyn ever raised, and the ole woman and all the folks around yere will back me up in it. I might lie 'bout wild cats or cat-fish, but a man would hev to be low-down to lie 'bout melyons. 'Bout fo' y'ars ago Kurnel Bunker cum along yere one day and sez to me: "Abe Hope, folks dun tell me that yo' ar' the laziest man in all Arkinsaw, and I'm feelin' bad over it." "What's the use in workin' when yo' don't hev to?" sez I. "But every critter orter hev an am-bishun," sez he as he takes off his hat to the old woman standin' in the doah. "Hev yo' got an am-bishun, Kurnel Bunker?" "I hev. I want to be gov'nor of Arkinsaw next y'ar. Everybody in the state except yo' has got an am-bishun, and I've dun cum down to see if I can't stir yo' up. Yo' needn't hev no am-bishun as big as a house, and one to make yo' sweat yo' shirt, but jest sumthin' to keep the chills and fever off. Ar' yo' willin' to tackle an am-bishun?" "It was too ripe, eh?" "No, sah, that wasn't it. Fust thing we knew thar' was about 20 cull'd folks—men, wimen and chill'en—aboard us. They wasn't thar' when we started, and they hadn't swum aboard. They had dun crawled out of that melyn." "You don't mean it!" "Every last word, sah. Yes, sah—they three families had dun squatted inside that melyn fur a cabin befo' it left my land, and they had eaten away 'till the roof got weak and fell in on 'em. They had dun dug out three big rooms inside, and hang me if they didn't



"THEM PYRAMIDS OF EGYPT AIN'T NOWHAR."

"If I don't hev to wear butes nor git my har' cut," sez I. "Then I'll tell yo' what to do," sez he. "We ar' gwine to hold a county fa'r this fall, and do you go at it and raise up the biggest watermelon ever seen on the face of this airth. That shall be yo' am-bishun, and it will be one to glorify the hull state. When that melyn gits the prize at our show the name of Abe Hope will be writ in letters of gold on the records of time, and with my own hand will I present yo' ole woman with a hull pound o' snuff and a new pa'r o' shoes." "That's the way he talked to me," said Abe as he still dug at the sliver, "and I promised him that I'd hev am-bishun. I had growed sum whoppin' big melyons in my time, but I had never spread myself to see what could be dun with 'em. It was 'bout plantin' time then, and I fixed up the sile and picked out sum seeds and went to work. I lowed fur plenty of room, and put a bresh fence around the spot to keep the mawl off. Bimeby the seed cum up and the vine begun to run, and I never did see anythin' like it. Thar was six melyons on no vine, but the one in the middle was the best." "And it grew to be a whopper?" I queried. "Stranger, a whopper of a melyn is one thing, but a whoppinest whopper is another. When she got to be as big as a beer-keg she was a whopper. When she got to be as big as a flour-bar' she was a whoppinest whopper. Arter that I couldn't find no words to call her by. She jest riz up and spread out and got big, and finally she was the size of a hoghead." "You don't mean it?" "Ask Kurnel Bunker, sah! He rid down yere one day and took a look at that melyn, and arter he had walked all around it he sez to me: "Abe Hope, them pyramids of Egypt an't nowhar' alongside this melyn, and the archives of time will be holdin' yo' name when that of Napoleon has dun bin forgotten. Don't git drunk