

was I'd knowed pretty well that he'd make a kick. But, my Lord, the size of the holler he sent up was something nobody could 'a' looked for!

"He wouldn't take them, no, sir, he wouldn't, and there was no law in this God-forsaken country that could make him!"—And, dad fetch him, he ended up by as much as callin' me a swindler!—I shouldered the bag and came next thing to leavin' him where he stood.

"But he stopped me and offered to take five dollars' worth—then a third of them—then half the bag-full—But, 'no, sir,' I said—'You'll take all, or you'll take none, and mighty lucky you are to get another chance at them at all!' He decided that there was nothin' for it, and take them bass he'd have to—And we lugged them up the bush-road to the house.

"Well, just as such things happen, there in the lane stood the wife with a letter for me which Alf Johnston had just left in on his way back from town. It had been lyin' in the Post Office for three days, and had been sent to let me know that that New York crowd was comin' on a week earlier that year; and they expected to hit the Junction the afternoon of Thursday the Twentieth. Well, that was the afternoon of Thursday the Twentieth! And, as I calculated it out while I was flingin' the harness on the team—they must 'a' been sittin' on their traps on the station platform lookin' for my democrat, for a good hour then!—

"And when I come peltin' in, sure enough, there they sat. And what with apologizin' for keepin' them waitin' and the solid satisfaction of renewin' old friendship, on the drive back to The Forks I'd pretty well forgot all about Hotchkiss and Sparks and that mighty fishin' wager of theirs.

"But when we got in it was the first thing that we were made to think of. It seemed that Hotchkiss, figgerin' that he had a few bass too many to be convincin', had put about half that bag-full away in the ice-house. But when Sparks had come home with seventeen and had got sight of only that other half of Hotchkiss's showin', he'd stopped in his tracks and sent up his howl right there. And all through supper their yappin' came in to us like from two yellow dogs with a fence between them. For a while I kept silent and pretended not to hear it. And then at last for the life of me I couldn't hold in any longer, and I let that crowd into the whole story.

"And it did seem to fill them about as full of natural delight as anything they'd ever heard. That old jelly-bag, Judge Morris, had just to be laid out on the sofa at last. But when he got the use of himself again, the grey-headed old sinner sat up, began to pull his solemnity around him like puttin' on his gown—(I tell you it's made me mighty dubious of the judgin' business ever since!)—and says to young Morris: 'William, my son, let us have no more of this unseemly levity. This is plainly a case where the bench must do its duty. Gentlemen,' he says, 'we will adjourn for an outside session.'

"Yes, sir, he led the whole party out there and introduced himself with as much side and gravity as if he'd come all the way to The Forks just to hold assizes on that one particular case in disputation. And, as it happened, it was the easier for him to introduce himself because he recognized Sparks as the gentleman who for years had been sellin' him collars when he was on circuit duty in his town; and Hotchkiss, he was on hats in the same store. Indeed, too, though they both seemed fairly willin' to leave their case with him, this meetin' with the judge up there for awhile made them pretty awed and subdued.

"But the Judge, he didn't stand on any ceremony. He just let himself down onto one of them old hives, settled his glasses, cleared his throat with a noise that would have straightened out a French horn, and called for the case for the plaintiff. And when Sparks was jogged into understandin' that that meant him, he started in with a sort of whimper to tell what a natural skin his brother-in-law was, anyway; how he'd once done him out of a watch, and another time give' him away in a private matter which should have been kept quiet between friends, and had lied to him any amount of times before—'And he's lyin' now,' he says, 'when he tries to make out he caught them forty-seven

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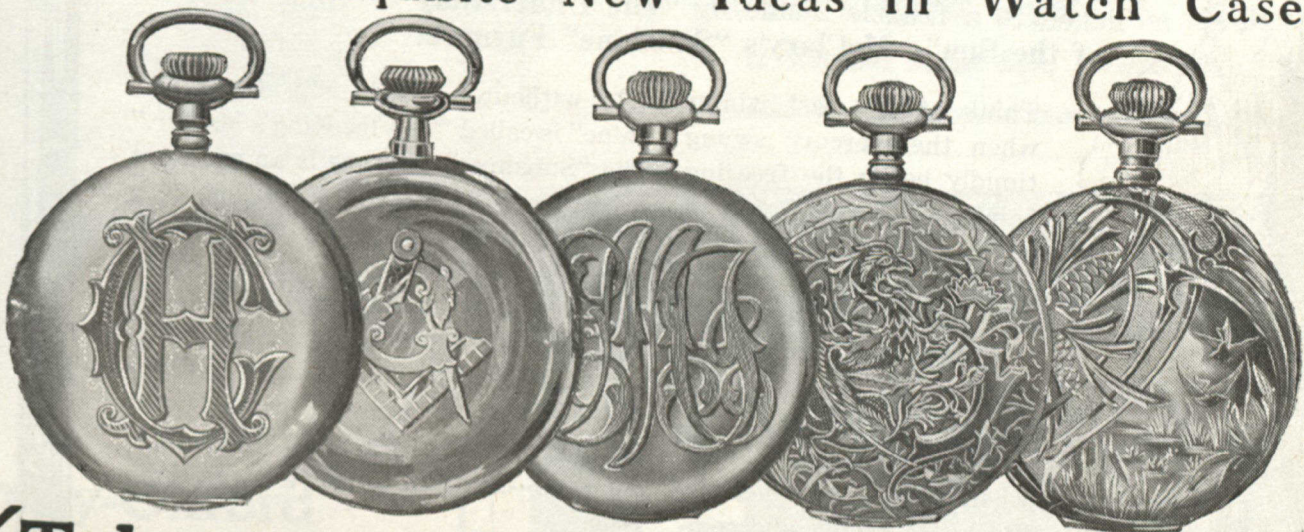
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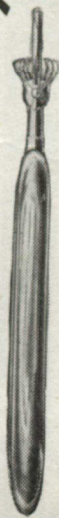
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