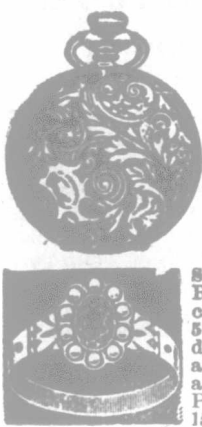


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his collecting-dish from among the other resources and paraphernalia of his inscrutable art, and proceeded to pass it among the newcomers.

"No, thank ye," politely observed the first pirate into whose face the dish was

suggestively thrust. "I won't take anything. I had my supper jest before I left home."

"This," explained the magician, "is my dish for collecting entrance fees."

The courteous pirate put his hand to his ear and leaned forward smilingly. "Thank ye, jest the same," he repeated. "I won't take anything. I had my supper."

The faint artist continued to wander, holding out his dish in the hope of finding truth and some more substantial spoils, until interrupted by Belcher, under whose manipulation Sambo's mouth was now opening to the utmost limit and shutting regularly with the loud precision of a corn-sheller.

"Oh, let 'em alone, and come up here and play out some more o' yer bill," said the good-natured Belcher, resuming his unofficial seat among the audience. "All on us that paid could git our money back ef we wanted to, 'cause you advertised them dolls ter talk without aid o' human instruments. A screw-driver's a human instrument, ain't it?"

An' it's me an' my screw-driver has geared up Sambo, thar', into yawpin' trim agin. But we don't want our money back. Ye're a-doin' well. Ye're a-doin' first-rate. The show ain't what it advertised ter be, but it's a darn sight better. 'Xceptin' when some special number—like Sambo thar'—needs regulatin', it's the restfullest thing I ever went to. Let the boys alone, Beelzebub; git up onto the platform; turn on yer fireworks agin; make yer dynamite rattle now."

Inspired by this pyrotechnic utterance, the disheartened craftsman reseated himself and worked Sambo and Paddy to such facetious measures, including several songs, that a round of applause followed. Misled by this generous encouragement, the dialogue stretched on and on into such overbearing proportions of time that the pirates rose wearily at last and stalked boldly forth into the outer elements, where they languidly resumed their old post of observation at the windows. They were joined by a number, who, though legitimately entitled to the luxury of the interior, were willing to forego their privilege for the sake of the clearer atmosphere outside; among these Cuby and I stood near a window which had been opened several inches by an unscrupulous pirate resolved to hear as well as see.

Our cheeks were wet with tears of laughter; and we were to sail next day, the Lord knew where; and there was a suspicion of tragedy in the air. And what there had been to laugh at, I could not have told if brought to any analysis of it, but we had laughed the very richness of spontaneous mirth. Maybe it was Belcher's face, magisterially grave and observant of proceedings on the stage, or it may have been the many unrelated incidents among the audience, which made that body a far livelier theater of action than the recognized platform.

I sobered, as the free wind struck my face again, and looked off toward the hill. The lights were still burning brightly there.

"When the lights go out I must see you home and then go up yonder to my watch, Cuby," I said.

"All right, Jeem," replied my fearless little maiden. The unknown future held only the joy of release and of all possible adventure to her.

We heard Belcher's voice, so dominant that it pealed out roundly through the open window.

"It's wonderful, Beelzebub. The way you make them dolls talk without no human agency is a mystery to me, anyhow. But now the hour is waxin' kind o' late, suppose you pass on to the next figger in the programme. Put in some sulphur this time, Beelzebub; we're gittin' a mite sleepy."

The showman rose obediently, laid aside his dolls, and advanced to the front of the platform with a bow, as a preface to the next act.

"I will now," he said, "to your astonishment, take from the neck of anyone in the audience whom you may name and choose to point out to me for the act, a live goose. Positively, a live goose. You will be at liberty to inspect and handle the same after I have brought it to light, in order to assure yourselves that it is indeed an ordinary bird of the species known to man, such as we are all accustomed to, though its mysterious and unaccountable appearance from the neck of anyone you may mention in the audience has never yet been explained by any known laws of science."

With another bow he retreated to the dim corner near a loose-geared end window where his few stage trappings lay piled. He was evidently rummaging, and as the search continued, it was felt that some blight had already fallen upon the proposed miracle. The magician suddenly rushed to the front of the stage in a panic.

"My goose is gone," he cried accusingly. "Who has stolen my goose?"

"Where'd you keep him?" inquired Belcher.

"In a cratebox under me table. A blanket lay on top of the box, and my accordion was on top of the blanket."

"Is yer accordion gone?"

"No, it's here."

(Continued on page 391)

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