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EXPLODING EXPLOITING OF "OLDEST MAN"

Supposed to Be 131 Years
Old — Doctor Says He Is
Not a Hundred.

(Toronto Mail and Empire.)

Some time ago an account was given in this column of John Shell of Kentucky, who was said to be 131 years old. He was put forward as the oldest man in the world, and on this assumption thousands of people paid their dime for the privilege of looking at him in side shows and shaking his pulsing hand. Now arises Dr. L. J. Nascher, after an investigation into the facts, to declare that Shell is only 97, and that the contention that he is a centenarian was put forward by a little group of three or four men, who have exploited him and made a small fortune as a result. Dr. Nascher invaded Kentucky for the sole purpose of examining Shell, for it is not often a doctor has an opportunity of inspecting a centenarian. Whether he expected to find fraud is not said, but Dr. Nascher's article in the Sun and New York Herald gives the impression that he was not astonished at what he found. In the first place he notes that Shell lives in one of the most inaccessible places in the habitable United States. A journey of twenty miles, partly on a razor-backed mule, occupied a day. There was another stage of twenty miles of which sixteen only were covered in a day. It is impossible to reach the shell homestead, he says, without a guide, and as a rule the Kentuckians do not welcome visitors. He believes that advantage has been taken by those who exploited Shell of the fact that it requires much time and no little determination to reach the old man.

Says He Is 131.

He carefully examined Shell, who is undoubtedly the oldest man he ever met, but saw nothing that might not be found in a man of more than ninety and less than a hundred. He says he is not only old but he is illiterate and mentally defective, and his own statement about his age or about anything else is not to be relied upon. He declared he is suffering from a garrulous form of senile dementia, with hallucinations and delusions, but the magic figure "131" has been so thoroughly drilled into him that he never makes a mistake on this vital point. No doubt if he lives another couple of years he will continue to insist that he is one hundred and thirty-one. Dr. Nascher tested him on many other points and found his statements contradictory. He didn't remember how long he was married and could not make feeble guesses at the ages of his children, but he had no doubt whatever that he was 131 years old. And if you didn't believe him the first time he would tell you again.

The Mysterious Receipt.

The chief support of the claim that John Shell is as old as he says is an alleged receipt dated 1809 in payment of a tax, and nobody would be liable for this tax who was not of voting age. Where is this receipt? Dr. Nascher could not find it. None of those whom he interviewed had ever seen it, although one of the three or four men who exploited the aged man claimed to have seen a receipt dated 1809. That would make him 111, or twenty years younger than the advertisements claimed for him. His statements about his age somewhat recall the story of the old negro who had been carefully coached as a witness by a rather unscrupulous lawyer. Upon his testimony depended the issue. His statements were most punctilious, and all efforts to discredit him on the grounds of uncertain memory failed until just as he was preparing

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to step from the box his own lawyer asked: "And what year were you born in, Uncle Moses?"

"Well, boss," he replied, "scratching his head, 'it was either in 1840 or 1848, I ain't just sure which."

Are They All Frauds.

Dr. Woods Hutchinson, an interesting writer upon medical subjects in the American press, remarked some time ago that there were no centenarians, and pointed out that practically all the persons for whom extreme old age was claimed were illiterate, and came from classes in the community where the vital statistics were not carefully kept. He said that he never saw official records to prove anybody one hundred years old, and called attention to the natural human vanity which prompts an aged man to claim a greater age than he is entitled to, just as it prompts a middle-aged woman to somewhat minimize the years to which she might lay claim. The point is also handled by Hardy in "Far From the Madding Crowd," where the dissertation of the old maulster upon his extreme antiquity is one of the most humorous passages in English literature. In the case of Shell there are some records which Dr. Nascher unearthed in the census bureau. These show that John Shell is 97 or 98 years old.

The Baby Case.

His case appears to be somewhat similar to that of Noah Raby, who died in a New Jersey almshouse a few years ago. He was supposed to be 137 years old, and the most aged man on the face of the earth. In his lifetime no attempt was ever made to verify the claim, but after he was dead and the matter had ceased to interest him, an investigation of the records showed that he was less than one hundred years old. John Shell must be absolved of any attempt to deceive the public. He doesn't know how old he is. Apparently his senility has been taken advantage of by those who saw in the old man an opportunity to make some easy money. Shell admits that he was dragged from his comfortable obscurity by a few persons who promised him \$200 if he would exhibit himself under their auspices. He was to get \$20, but complains that he received only \$199. His sons declare that what has been told about him is a "beak of lies," excepting the statement that he has two hundred descendants.

SPANKING MACHINE DOES DUTY NOBLY

Treatment Effective With
Boys and Girls Alike —
Police Are Operators.

Spanking, administered by a "spanking machine" has made Bridgeton a town of well-behaved boys and won fame for the mayor, Arthur C. Whitaker, who originated the "machine" and who directs its operation.

"Spare the rod and spoil the child" is no mere proverb at the local city hall, says the Bridgeton correspondent of the Philadelphia Inquirer. More than 100 boys and a few girls have gone through the "spanking machine" in the seven years that Mr. Whitaker has been mayor, so that it is beyond experimental stage, he says. Only one boy out of that number ever came back for "more."

"Sore" Subject to Mention.

Until recently the nature of the "spanking machine" has been very much of a mystery. Mayor Whitaker and his police would not tell what it was and those who went through it considered it too "sore" a subject to mention afterwards. The spankings are all administered privately in a back room at the city hall and Mayor Whitaker makes a policy never to make public the names of the boys who are spanked.

The "spanking machine" avows in no wise of the old whipping post. It is not an implement of torture but for benevolent punishment. In the city hall of Bridgeton, who has a red-blooded boy of his own.

"When a boy commits some offense that gets him into the hands of the police, he is brought before me and if the offense warrants it, I sentence him to the 'spanking machine.' I have nothing to do with the administering of the spanking. The police do that. After going through the machine, the boy is brought back to my office. He usually has tears in his eyes and is in a humble spirit. I talk to him and show him where he has done wrong and the effect of it. I invite the boys to come back and tell me how they are getting along and to seek my advice in any of their troubles. At times I find as high as a dozen boys waiting here at my office in the evening to talk to me about their problems—everyone of them a boy that I had previously sentenced to be spanked."

Police Do Spanking.

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"The oldest fellow we ever put through the machine was twenty-three years old. He had committed an offense that would have sent him to jail and he chose the whipping himself rather than be put behind the bars. He had it laid on pretty hard. He was so ashamed of what he had done and of the spanking he got that he left town the next day and we have never heard about him since."

Mayor Whitaker has used the "spanking machine" exclusively for juvenile offenders, with this single exception, but he believes that if properly geared up it would be quite effective for wife beaters.

Girls Spanked, Too.

"Yes, we spank girls, too, sometimes," admitted the mayor, "but I don't spank as many of them as we do boys." Some of the Bridgeton fathers have hung up the old willow or hick switch in the woodshed since they heard of the "spanking machine" and when Johnny gets too obstreperous around home, they send him around to the city hall with a note to the mayor or the police commissioner to perform that duty that "hurts me more than it does you, my son."

"Parents who have seen how effective the 'spanking machine' is, occasionally ask me to spank their boys for them," said Mayor Whitaker. "If the boy has been really bad and has gotten beyond the control of his parents, we usually try to accommodate them."

The fact that it is known that there is a "spanking machine" at the city hall has quite a moral effect upon the younger generation of the city.

"I've had fathers come and ask me what kind of a machine it is," said



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the mayor. "They thought it was some contraption operated by a crank or something like that. If the moral effect should be lost now that the public know just what the 'machine' is, why we will rig up a really, truly, mechanical spanker to take the place of the barrel of the gun, on the spot where it fetches up."

Bridgeton is a manufacturing city of 16,000 population and has boys of about the average type. The number of boys committed from here to the reformatory is surprisingly low. The cases of truancy are also few, as the "spanking machine" makes it unhealthy to play hooky, even in the spring when the fish first begin to bite, although Mayor Whitaker takes such things into consideration in having a boy punished. Citizens give Mayor Whitaker's "spanking machine" the credit for the exceedingly low average of commitments to the reformatory and also for the checking of truancy.

The brethren of a colored church at McHugh, Ga., were surprised at the smallness of the contributions, but their wonder ceased when they discovered that one of the collectors had tar in the top of his hat.

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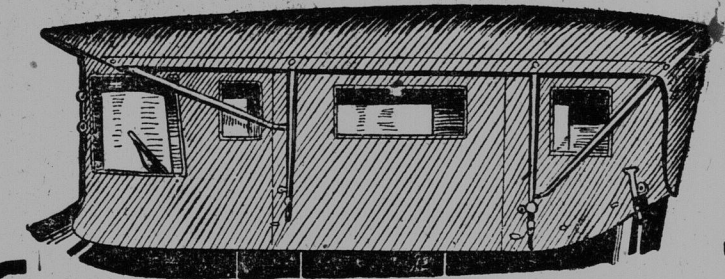
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CIVIC GRANTS IN TORONTO

At a meeting of Toronto city council this week a vote of \$10,000 to the Canadian Institute for the Blind, as was compared with \$5,000 last year, was added to the following special grants which were passed:

Veterans' Association, \$150; Army and Navy Veterans, \$25; Ontario Soft League, \$1,000; Dominion Day Regatta, \$500; Ontario Rifle Association, \$400. The following fixed grants were passed: Toronto University, \$6,000; Art Museum of Toronto, \$5,000; Toronto Teachers' Institute, \$600. The remaining estimate as passed were: Special grants: Hospitals for Sick Children, \$55,000; Toronto General Hospital, \$14,152; National Sanatorium, \$22,800; Grace Hospital, \$15,000.