

MC2465 POOR DOCUMENT

THE GRANITE TOWN GREETINGS

'Smith, Debtor.'

A Bucket-Shop Idyll.

BY JAMES H. GANNON, JR.
(Continued from last issue.)

Whatever this may have been to others, to Wallace B. Jones it was an opportune call to a wider field—the beckoning finger of the Goddess of Fortune—and he followed on, thrusting Skaneateles behind him without hesitation.

Therefore, once again footsteps echoed down the corridor leading to the offices of Smith & Wise, and this time the artists within, become careless through frequent disappointment, continued absorbed in their more natural roles until disturbed by the rattle of the door-knob under the feverish hand of Mr. Jones.

As a result, the clamor that reached that gentleman's ears as he finally thrust open the hesitating door was far less artificial than its hundred futile predecessors. He stood bewildered, his first groping thought being one of amazement that same men should dream of giving up a business such as this.

Gradually there came to him more definite impressions, of men fighting for a place at the ticker, scorning the slower quotation board. From this crowd each moment there broke away at a broad gallop some screaming individual, who lost himself in another crowd surging about the order window, scribbling madly on little slips, which Jones knew were order slips to buy or sell, or seemingly impatient at the delay involved in this, shouting orders, initially, at the window, orders for 100, 200, and even 500 shares of stock.

Mercilessly, Mr. Jones' thoughts traveled back to Skaneateles, to the modest little bucket-shop in the town hall basement, with special entrance on an alley for the use of such Skaneateles as paid homage to public opinion. He saw the morose group of individuals, heavily bewiskered, figuring, figuring, and finally sighing like a furnace as they reluctantly plunged into a ten-share purchase.

Only the figure of the late cashier of the Skaneateles had believed the picture—a regular plunger compared to his cautious fellow townsmen—but alas now a late cashier.

It was the voice of Mr. Smith, inquiring politely what service Smith & Wise could render him, that finally brought Mr. Jones back to realities. Like one banishing a dread vision, Mr. Jones shook himself, awoke more to the delicious present, and resolved that this present should be his future, cost what it might—a future of fame and power in the great "Street."

"Can we do anything for you?" asked Mr. Smith mellifluously, deferentially. He had sized up Mr. Jones and, having given him time to drink in the scene, judged the psychological moment to have arrived for disturbing his sweet reveries.

Mr. Jones fumbled at his waistcoat pocket, averted, in spite of his carefree front, by the imposing picture made by Mr. Smith, and drew a copy of the Syracuse World.

"My name is Jones, of Skaneateles, N. Y., where I've been running a brokerage office. I saw this ad., and as I was coming down anyway, I thought I'd drop in to look the place over."

Mr. Jones rather congratulated himself on the skill with which he made his visit to Smith & Wise seem secondary, especially in view of his fixed intention of getting the business now that he'd seen it. Mr. Smith's round countenance betrayed no least sign of his full appreciation of this feeble maneuver.

"Glad to see you and have you look us over. If you'll excuse me half a jiffy, I'll see if my partner, Mr. Wise, is in. I think he is." And he left Mr. Jones to feed his passion on the scene about him.

"A guy from Skaneateles, Arty, to buy the shop," Mr. Smith used a stage whisper to convey the intelligence to his partner as he closed the door of the private office. "His name is Jones."

"Mud, you mean, Smithy," said Mr. Wise sententiously, "plain Mud.

Well, bring Mr. Mud in, and we'll do him quick."

"Please, Arty, Jones, not Mud. You'll kill off the guy if you call him that in your funny business. Is the phony 'phone bell working O. K., Arty?"

"Yes, the thimbles are entirely rigged—on with the dance—or dance, Smithy."

Mr. Smith vanished, only to reappear instantly with the amateur from Skaneateles, who was struggling hard to look like a broker born on the ticker.

"Mr. Jones," said Mr. Smith, elaborately, "my partner, Mr. Wise," "Exceedingly glad to meet you, Mr. Wise heartily. "You're one of our number, I know; can't mistake the signs."

"Yes," admitted Mr. Jones modestly. "I've been running a shop up State."

Mr. Jones saw our advertisement, Art—Mr. Wise—Mr. Smith corrected himself hastily—and as he was coming down anyway, he stopped in to look us over."

"Everything at your disposal, Mr. Jones," said Mr. Wise, smiling pleasantly at the double entendre. "We're a going concern."

Here Mr. Smith, who was in an agony of fear lest his partner's sarcastic points should penetrate Mr. Jones' intelligence, coughed heavily.

"A going concern, as you see from the customers' room, finished the imperturbable Mr. Wise. "But we are compelled to retire, in a way, by the condition of my partner, Mr. Smith. You notice his cough. He thinks its consumption. He doesn't look it now—does he, Mr. Jones?—but his doctors have told him to travel; and as for me, I'm just tired of work."

Mr. Smith, who had thus drawn down upon himself the unwelcome role of invalid, perforce coughed lustily again, to the evident enjoyment of Mr. Wise, who was beaming upon the enraptured Skaneatelesan.

"Tired of work," in the way Mr. Wise said it, meant simply to Mr. Jones, the anxiety for opportunity to spend the money which the little gold mine had turned out for an unappreciative young spendthrift.

"Now, me," said Mr. Smith, after he had coughed again sullenly, "at a silent command from his partner, "I don't ask nothing better than to stay, for I know a good thing when I see it, but there are the family physician and the family to consult. Mr. Wise, Mr. Jones, is the nephew of the celebrated financier, Russell Wise, and he naturally don't have to stop and think of little money details the same as you and me do. He can get tired of work at any time, especially so now that we've made such a hit here."

Mr. Smith broke off to answer the telephone on the desk at which he had seated himself in his role of invalid.

"Russell Wise's nephew?" The worrisome Mr. Jones into a moments forgetfulness—to reveal thus in the Eden of high finance! He was brought forth again by the soft voice of Mr. Wise.

"I don't think a lot of bragging about ones relatives, Mr. Jones, but this time it is rather important, since my uncle does a great deal of his buying and selling of stocks through our house."

"Excuse me, Mr. Jones, broke in Mr. Smith, "its an important order I must give, and, coughing violently, he rolled over to the cashiers wicker, and to the pale-faced cashier, who opened it in response to a tattoo, shouted an order to buy 500 Erie at the market for President Cary of the Amalgamated."

The pale-faced cashier grinned diabolically as he slowly closed the window.

"I was saying, continued Mr. Wise, "that my uncle deals through us, and if you satisfy him, will continue his trade with you. He's eccentric, as you may have heard, but—"

Again the monologue was interrupted by Mr. Smith at his desk 'phone. "Who is it?" shouted Mr. Smith through the phone. "Oh, Cashier Cole, of the City Bank! Yes, Mr. Cole, this is Smith. What—the market? Pretty strong; looks like a bull move all around. Three hundred Steel?

O. K. at the market? Yes, thanks.

And again Mr. Jones, whose usual caution evaporated, as the course of the negotiations was repeatedly broken into now by a call at the phone for Mr. Smith and now for Mr. Wise. Each call resulted in an order that made Mr. Jones blush for shame at the memory of his Skaneateles retail trade, and fixed him more firmly in his determination to have the business of Smith & Wise.

There were others after this business; a splendid chance naturally, as the partners explained while they exhibited the books and other business details of the firm. But they wanted the proper man to get it, on account of Uncle Russell Wise among other reasons, and, as Mr. Wise said with commendable frankness, Mr. Jones really seemed best able to fill the bill.

An earnest skirmish over the price was finally on, and Mr. Smith concluded that it was time to play the trump card. The bell of his telephone rang, and he picked up the instrument.

"Yes?" he said questioningly. "Oh—!" "It's your uncle, Mr. Wise," he said softly, putting the 'phone down and getting out of his chair to make way for his partner.

Mr. Jones rose to leave the room, which had now become hallowed ground, while the heart-to-heart talk between uncle and nephew should be on. But with a finger at his lips Mr. Smith led him back, and Mr. Wise smiled graciously on him as he seated himself and picked up the apparatus.

"Yes, uncle." There was a world of deference in Mr. Wise's voice as he greeted his famous relative. "I know it—I ought to have come up to Fifth Avenue to dinner last night, but we were so busy at the office—"

Here Mr. Smith winked knowingly at Mr. Jones, and whispered behind a pudgy hand, "A little supper at Del's with his lady friends, the young scamp." And Mr. Jones, not to be thought untutored in the ways of the great metropolis and its gilded youth, winked back with interest.

"To-night?" asked the apologetic young man at the 'phone. "Yes, indeed, tell Aunt Mary I'll be there promptly, if she won't ask me to put on dinner togs. I'll be kept here till six, probably."

"Yes—I know—you don't say? Got the deal all fixed up already? Rockefeller told you he was putting two million into it and Morgan, too—'Whew! million and a half? Gould's got a big interest, and the City Bank people take a three million participation? Union Pacific will have the control of all the Western roads cinched—c i-n-c-h-e-d—Oh, I mean absolutely safe uncle!"

"Old man don't unders and slang; cinched too much for him," whispered Mr. Smith jovially to Mr. Jones, whose eyes were topping out of his head as he listened to this familiar mention of financial giants.

Mr. Wise went on with the one-sided conversation:

"Where do you come in, uncle?" he asked solicitously. "Oh, you take a million in bonds and a half million in stocks! You like bonds better than that, right, safer always. They asked you to be a director? Morgan insists on it, and won't go into the deal unless you accept? Rockefeller'll throw it over, too? Certainly, take it, by all means."

"Good idea, that; ought to be a good thing. How much do you want us to buy for you?"

"Three thousand shares? All right. Buy a thousand for myself? You guarantee it? Good. You've got ten thousand already—'Whew—!"

Mr. Jones had been unconsciously drawing nearer and nearer the telephone. At last, crowded up against the side of the big desk at which Mr. Wise sat, he stood like one entranced, seeing visions through a golden haze, for was not all this splendid traffic to be his?—the nephew had promised that the light of the uncle's countenance should be shed in turn on him if he bought, and he would buy all right—trust him to buy. So deep in his dreams was he that he just heard the "good by" of the careless nephew as he hung up the receiver on the hook. The jangling of the telephone bell brought him back, and he stood there, waiting hungrily for some more of this food of ambition.

He failed to notice the look of anxiety on Mr. Wise's face as he removed the receiver again. The momentous babbings in the bell, which persisted, although

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they should have ceased when the receiver came down, escaped him, as did the covert, uneasy signals which passed between Mr. Wise and his partner—signals which seemed to have direct reference to the position of Mr. Jones's feet, almost, oddly enough, as if Mr. Jones were unconsciously standing on a lost dime ardently coveted by two street gamins, at their wits' end to move him and get it. He paid no attention when Mr. Smith, with exaggerated politeness, invited him to come over to the turf above the graves; he was as far away from suspicion as those who slept so peacefully there. Mr. Smith bumped into him, at first easily, with a quick apology, and then, as this only prompted Mr. Jones to grip the side of the desk and stand fast in his tracks, almost savagely, like an enraged full-back at a stubborn line.

The bell still babbled and Mr. Wise still shouted meaningless nothings into the transmitter, waving the while more and more frantic signals at his maneuvering partner, who tried in vain to move Mr. Jones. Perspiration burst out on Mr. Smith's round, red face, as he nudged and shoved at the un-understanding man from Skaneateles, who calmly held his place by the desk. At last a sort of madness seemed to grip Mr. Smith. He trotted off on small circles around the room, completing each circle at the unmoved Skaneatelesan with a vicious bump. Gradually the circle enlarged, like those that spread from a stone cast in a pool, and finally Mr. Smith was galloping about, not unlike a fat white circus horse in his destined ring, while his partner did strange things with the clamorous telephone, which bubbled tirelessly.

Suddenly the cashier's window opened. The pale-faced, bespectacled cashier looked in on the scene, at first with amazement and mystification; as Mr. Smith dashed by on his orbit, and finally as he heard the gurgling telephone bell, with understanding. A look of acute pleasure swept over the cashier's features. As Mr. Smith dashed by once more on his mad round, the sour face of the cashier was thrust clear through the wicket into the room, and making a trumpet of his hands, bellowed through them at Mr. Jones, of Skaneateles: "Get your foot off that button, you jay!"

Then he fled, the long over-due sentimental account of "Smith, Debtor," being now liquidated.

As the flying footsteps of the cashier and of the pursuing Mr. Smith echoed ever more faintly down the corridor, Mr. Jones, with his eye fixed on the floor, speculatively moved first his left foot then his right. As he thought from the slight protuberance felt beneath the heel it was his right. He lifted it. The bell ceased its jangle, and he knew the bump in the carpet for what it was, the push button of a dummy telephone, built for pleasant but deceptive monologues.

Dully, or the passion of his dream still gripped him, he looked at Mr. Wise, who tilted back in his chair, raised his arms above his head, and yawned with ennui; for to Mr. Wise it was a play played out, and the audience still lingering, he arose and sauntered over to the window, with the view of Trinity and of its graveyard of other hopes.

It was, by contrast a pleasant outlook, perhaps, for he did not even turn his head as Mr. Jones silently passed out.

If from society we learn how to live, it is solitude should teach us how to die.—Byron.

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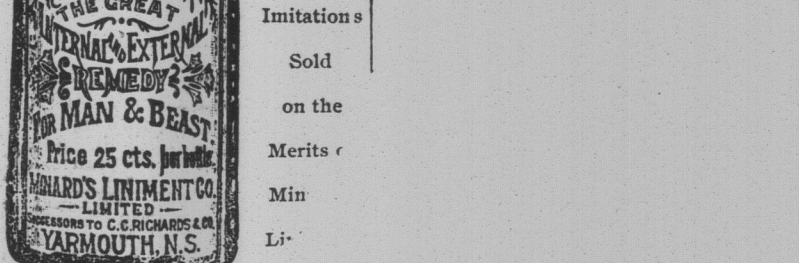
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