

The Dollar of Pride

How Dennis O'Calahan Let a Feeling of Pride Interfere in a "Money Proposition."

By PAUL SHEARD

"GEE, I wish't I had a dollar!" Such were the sentiments of one Dennis O'Calahan as he sat on a park bench, absorbing the scanty warmth of the March sun. The spirit of discontent forever besieges the frail human atom. Those strong among us attack this spirit with vigour, name it ambition, and accomplish shining deeds thereof. The less strong turn a deaf ear to the call and steer an uninterrupted course. The least strong of all—and of such was O'Calahan—calmly sit down and wish for the unattainable to come along.

Nor was the dollar that O'Calahan desired a mere passing fancy. It sure wasn't; there were reasons why he wanted that dollar—had to have it, in fact. If the blushing truth must be told, O'Calahan had been given his freedom from jail too early—no, that wasn't it either, he hadn't been "sent down" for long enough in the first place. Being discovered begging on the streets on, or about, New Year's eve, he had been summarily arrested; a case of "Ring out the old, run in the new," for O'Calahan was new to the town and hence unprepared for its unfriendliness. He was given two months for vagrancy—or was it fragrancy? However, once inside, his unrestrainable optimism asserted itself and he made the best of it.

It is said there is only one side to prison life—the inside; but to O'Calahan, gentleman of misfortune, it had a bright side as well. There were worse things in life, he thought, than lying snugly in bed, listening to the winter wind whistling past one's window, even though the window may have bars in it. And so he sat on his bench in the bleak March sunshine, thrust forth from shelter and warmth.

JUST then a little grey sparrow, swinging on a twig overhead, gave vent to the opinion "Cheep!" O'Calahan cocked his eye at the bird.

"What's eatin' you, little bobtail?" he said, foolishly. "Who's cheap? Not me anyhow—one dollar was the amount I asked fer."

"Cheep," said the bird again.

"Oh," said O'Calahan, "you mean somebody else is cheap? Sure 'tis meself knows that. They're a cheap lot hereabouts."

The little bird agreed that they were cheap, and then, ruffling its feathers, lapsed into silence. O'Calahan's mind reverted to his immediate needs and again he wished for that dollar. He wanted the money as travelling expenses for a trip south, where the air was fragrant and the sun hot and where there was no snow to leak through one's battered boots. The amount hardly seems adequate for a journey of, say, three hundred miles, but O'Calahan had an Irish smile that helped some, and with reasonable luck, he figured he would get along very nicely. But first he wanted that dollar, whether in copper, silver, or green-back it mattered not, just so it totalled up one hundred per cent.

O'Calahan had never heard of Mahomet and the mountain, and yet he was familiar with the basic principle involved. Gazing at the sky, he concluded that no dollars seemed to be raining down where he was; observing the mud at his feet, he became equally assured that no treasure lay buried near at hand; and so with a groan he arose and shuffled off.

O'Calahan had no definite port in view—any turn of events that would thrust one dollar of currency, no more, no less, into his passive hand, would be his goal. The chance seemed better if he kept moving, so O'Calahan moved.

Dennis O'Calahan's only method of prying a living from an unfriendly world—which, of course, the world owed him—could be summed up in that pat little *bon mot*, "Beg, borrow, or steal it"; there is also, I believe, an exception to this rule—namely, earn it, but O'Calahan played strictly according to rule and recognized no exceptions. Consequently when his slow footsteps brought him among a group of labourers at work, the possible thought of procuring a job never occurred to him. That is, not until he found his way blocked, and heard a loud

voice insult him by asking if he wanted a job.

O'Calahan looked up, and into the smiling face of Patrick McShawn—of course he didn't know the face's name, but he recognized the Irish grin and gave the correct return signal. Now that the mountain had come to Mahomet—not a bad simile, either, considering McShawn's proportions—Mahomet intended to scuttle out of the way and let the mountain pass, as it were.

"G'wan," smiled O'Calahan, "I'm too strong to woik, can't ye tell whin a gentleman's in a hurry t'get to his singin' lesson?"

But McShawn would not be put off. Hadn't he been told to engage every man he could find, to help with the work? The old plank sidewalk had to be ripped up by six o'clock that evening, so that the concrete gang could start in the morning. No skill was required beyond swinging a pick and at present there were only eight pick-swingers at work; O'Calahan looked like a possible ninth, if he could be persuaded to join.

"See here, sport," said the boss, "you take this pick, and dig in till six o'clock an' you'll git a big day's pay fer it."

"Nix fer you," said Dennis, trying to pass. "I git all the exercise I need, roll-

handling the pick.

"Bully for ye, my bye," he said, "just leave me see your pick a minute an' watch the way I swing it. You're holdin' your two hands too close together fer to git the most out of your swing."

So O'Calahan stood aside while McShawn demonstrated a stroke or two.

Be it known that the plank which McShawn now attacked was one that O'Calahan had already been working loose. A new plank it was, one that had been put down within the year; and it came up, under McShawn's skillful strokes, all in one piece, leaving the ground flat and hard beneath it. In the middle of the flat space, gleaming pleasantly in the sun, lay a gold coin; by the size of it, anyone could tell, at a glance, its value was exactly ten dollars.

O'Calahan grabbed for it and so did the boss, with O'Calahan losing out.

"Aisy me bye, aisy does it," said McShawn, softly. "I beat ye to it."

O'Calahan straightened his back and addressed McShawn.

"As one gent to another," he said, "if it's a gent I'm speakin' to, I approximate that ye won't have no compunction in handin' that sparkler over to its rightful owner, on account of me seein' it first."

"Take a think to yersilf," said McShawn, "an' rectify your intelligence against the idea that it's my job you're workin' on at present. Accordin' to the lights an' customs of me consciousness, any article of relative value, discovered adjacent beneath the planks, belongs, as it were, to the boss of the works, bein' me."

"And" continued O'Calahan, "adherin' to the fact that it was meself what started to investigate that there plank, before you come and butted in with your notions of pick swingin', I ast ye, as a gentleman, are ye goin' to gimme that shiner or shall I shove the face off ye?"

McShawn smiled and dropped the coin daintily into his vest pocket.

"Hold your wisht, me bye," he said. "Your language is an abuse on common illegance."

O'Calahan became speechless with rage, but as the smiling McShawn made as though to move off, the fighting spirit of a long line of Donnybrook Fair ancestors rose in him and speech returned.

"Language, is it?" he shrieked, "ye lop-eared son of a lemon-faced pirate! 'Tis as plain as the ugly face of ye that no argument will ever penetrate your thick skull! Hand over the shiner, you hear me, or by the powers—"

Here speech ceased and action commenced; O'Calahan was energetic and

unscientific and his rush landed. McShawn was equally energetic and unscientific and, what's more, larger—therefore he returned the rush. Battle raged for some fifteen minutes. Those fortunate enough to be eye-witnesses all agreed, on departing, that the little guy put up a great scrap, for a bantam, but that he shouldn't have signed up in the heavy-weight class.

And so McShawn removed his weight from the small of O'Calahan's back and O'Calahan in turn removed his nose from the red earth.

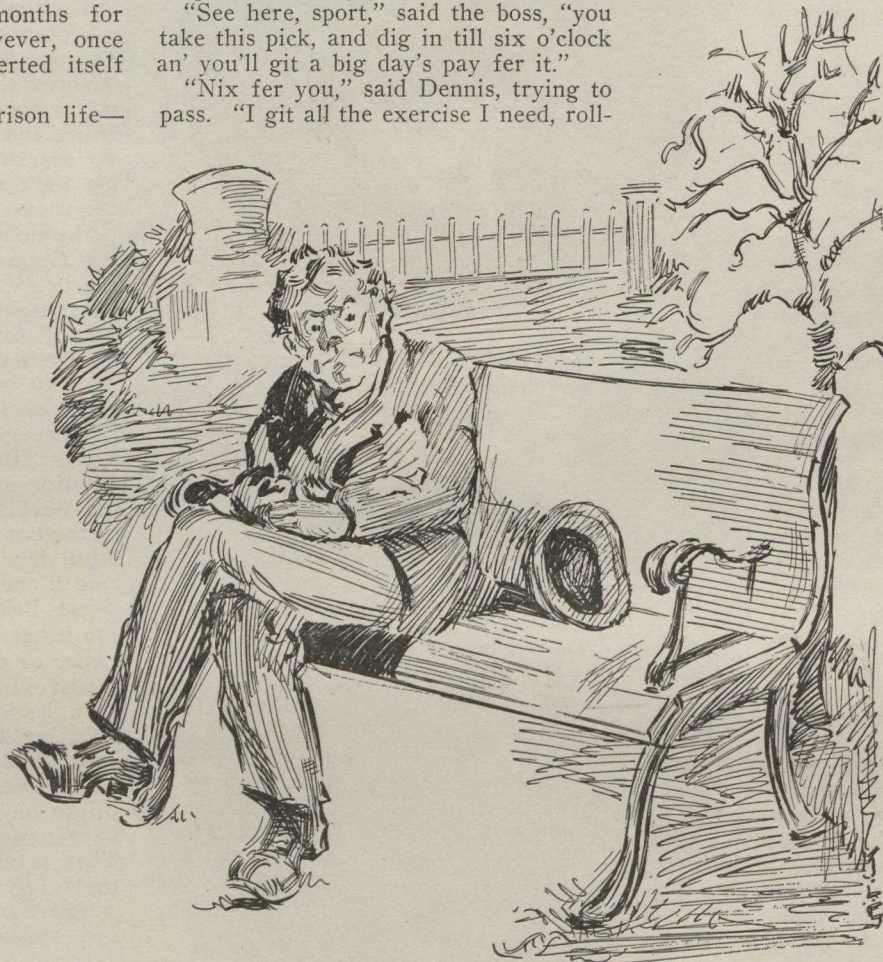
Slowly the defeated one put on his coat, made a pretence at arranging his attire, glared about him with one eye and trudged down the street as befits a man who has been outwardly subdued. As he reached the turn he felt someone running behind him and turned—on guard.

There stood McShawn, smiling cheerfully out of a swollen mouth.

"Say, sport," said that gentleman. "I was all wrong about that ten samolion piece. I only seen half of it first. Here's the other half, fer your share. That's fair ain't it? Come on back to your job. You're the first hundred-pound guy I ever see with a two-hundred-pound punch in each hand."

O'Calahan regarded the five dollar bill, held out to him, with a look horrible to see. Was this great bull trying to pay him for being licked! O'Calahan

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"Gee, I wish't I had a dollar!"

Drawn by J. L. Sheard.

ing my cigarettes, an' yer money proposition don't interest me none."

A minute longer he was detained by the strong hand of Mr. McShawn.

"See here, yer honour," said McShawn, "just take holt this pick an' massage them there planks till twelve o'clock noon—jist to 'blige a feller; and when the noon whistle blows I'll give you a whole dollar bill; are ye game?"

With the words "one dollar" O'Calahan's mind harked back to his heart's desire. Work till noon. Mortify the flesh for three whol' hours—well he'd try it this once, because he wanted that dollar.

IF O'Calahan could have reasoned introspectively he would have become aware that it was not the actual work he disliked so much as the mere thought of working. For now as his pick swung clear and landed soggly in each rotten plank, and as he heard the pleasant crackle of the soft wood applauding, as it were, each stroke, he found himself whistling a tune. And as the warm sun rose higher and struck into the back of him, O'Calahan threw off his coat and turned to his task like one to whom a new lease of life is given.

For an hour he enjoyed the exercise, doing easily twice as much work as any other man on the job.

McShawn, the boss, stopped as he passed O'Calahan with a word of praise and a friendly hint on