

HOW IT FEELS TO BE STARVING TO DEATH

(New York Sun.)

Men who have actually been on the point of starvation, whether in the streets of a big city, in the jungles of South America, in an open boat at sea, or on the sandy deserts of Australia, give divergent accounts of their feelings.

Their stories go to prove that different men feel starvation in different ways. Some suffer intensely; others hardly at all. Some feel acute physical pain, while the sufferings of others appear to be purely mental.

A sailor whose schooner was wrecked on a voyage from the Cayman Islands to Jamaica a few years ago, and spent nearly two weeks in an open boat without food, was asked how he felt during that time.

"I hardly felt at all after the first two days," he said. "I seemed to outgrow the longing for food, and I do not remember suffering any particular pain."

"I drifted along in a dreamy sort of way, not caring what happened. Even when I saw the ship which picked me up, I did not feel excited. I was too faint to worry."

"The only craving I remember distinctly was for a glass of rum and a smoke of tobacco, and that was very strange, because I am ordinarily a teetotaler and do not greatly care for smoking."

A man who is now receiving a big salary in New York had a hard time when he first came to this city, and nearly starved. For days and weeks together he did not have a decent meal, and, by his own account, he suffered tortures.

"I could not keep still," he said. "Often, when I was frightfully hungry and hadn't a cent to buy anything, I would go to one of the free libraries and try to force myself to sit down and read."

"But it was no use. Some irresistible impulse would drive me out into the streets again, and I would pace them restlessly, and, strangely, watching the restaurants and wondering when I would get another square meal."

"The faces of the people in the crowded streets got on my nerves. Faces, faces, nothing but faces! They stared by me continually, day and night—not one of them familiar; not one of them kind."

"It seemed as if it was my fate to stand still and see that awful procession of faces flit by forever. They did not strike me as belonging to real people; they seemed like the faces of ghosts. I could not even sleep at night. I used to see those faces in my dreams, and for months after I became prosperous they haunted me day and night like a nightmare."

"My hunger caused me the keenest physical torture. Every bone in my body ached; my head throbbed violently; I had terrible pains in my stomach, and, at the time, I felt as if I was just going to faint."

"As soon as hunger fairly got hold of me I lost every ounce of energy. I could not look for work, as I had been doing; I could not even get up."

"Two or three times I asked men for money in a timid, feeble way, but when they turned aside I did not persist. A poor, ill-dressed woman gave me a dime one night, although I did not ask her. I got a good meal with it, but afterward I felt hungrier than ever."

An orchid hunter who nearly perished in a Venezuelan jungle two years ago and lost five of his men by starvation would night after night when he went to sleep famished and exhausted dream of the markets that he had seen in various parts of the world. He would behold Leadenhall market in London piled high with thousands of carcasses and tons of meat; and just as he put out his hand to grasp a leg of beef or a sirloin steak, the vision would fade, and in its place would be the gayly colored market of Panama, with bananas, pineapples and oranges, glistening brightly in the tropical sunlight. Those, too, would vanish when he tried to snatch them; and he would awake hungrier and more miserable than ever."

"I could have borne the real horrors of the days a thousand times better," he said, "if it had not been for the tantalizing miseries of the night."

gave up all his prospects in life some years ago to become a social worker among the poor of the east end of London. In order to get an idea of what it felt like to be really poor he lived for six days on 12 cents, eating nothing more than one tiny two-cent loaf each day. As a result, he nearly starved, and was ill for a week afterward.

"It would not have been very trying," he said, "if I had not seen food all round me—in the baker's shops, in the restaurants, in the butchers' and in the green-grocers'. I would walk about the streets for hours, watching the people go into the restaurants for lunch and wondering what they were going to eat."

"By the end of the third day I was in a half comatose state. Practically, I had lost my identity and my memory."

"I was always thinking about food, but in quite a detached sort of way, as if it were nothing to do with me. I thought of it as an untravelling man might think of India."

"My reason told me that in three days I could eat as much as I liked, but my mind could not take hold of that fact. It seemed as if I should always be eating tiny loaves a day and watching other people go into restaurants."

"On the fifth day I was utterly cowed. If a man spoke to me I trembled and could not answer, but slunk away. Every bit of moral fibre and every ounce of physical pluck was gone."

After this experience, the graduate in the school of starvation took keen interest in discovering the sensations of other men who had gone hungry. He met many of them in the course of his philanthropic work and discovered that in no two cases were their emotions alike.

"Starvation," he was fond of saying, "is a mental rather than a physical pain. Its principal terrors are connected with the mind and the imagination."

"The educated and refined man, he who has seen better days, is the man who suffers most when he goes short of food. The sufferings of a starving man are really a matter of temperament. If he has not a highly strung temperament, he does not suffer much."

"The more animal a man is, the more comfortably he can starve. Some laborers who nearly died of exposure and lack of food have told me that they hardly suffered at all. If food had been plentiful, they would not have starved."

"A direct negative to this theory is given by a professor of an Australian university, who narrowly escaped dying of starvation during an expedition into the desert country of Central Australia."

"I am sure," he said, "that I felt the pangs of hunger much less keenly than my black trackers and servants. I had heard they could go for long periods without food, but the second day we put ourselves on short commons they complained bitterly and appeared to be in extreme pain."

"At the time I suffered nothing, nor did I suffer until some days afterward. Indeed, although two or three of my men were almost dead from lack of food, by the time we reached the nearest settlement I really suffered very little."

"The only unpleasant sensations I can recall were occasional bad headaches, slight pains in the stomach, and now and then a feeling of faintness. At other times I felt exceptionally strong, although I had eaten hardly a scrap of food for days."

"If I were to judge of my own feelings, I should say that the agonies of starvation are much exaggerated. But the sufferings of my men were terrible enough. I asked one of them how he felt when he was lying on the ground one evening, too weak to move."

"Boss," he replied, "me full of devil's clawin' at me inside."

"I gave the poor wretch a little brandy, but he declared it made him feel worse."

"I did not find that hunger in any way affected my mental powers. On the contrary, it seemed to improve them. I was able to take the keenest interest in my scientific work."

"Possibly the fact that I had something to occupy my mind saved me from suffering as the others did. They, poor wretches, had nothing to do but to think of food. I believe that was why they suffered so keenly."

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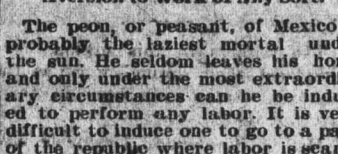
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