

MC2465 POOR DOCUMENT

THE GRANITE TOWN GREETINGS

'Smith, Debtor'

A Bucket-Shop Idyll
BY JAMES H. GANNON, JR.

It ain't no use tryin' to keep this game goin' no longer," Mr. Smith, whose chest development resembled a poster pigeon's, and whose bull-neck made ridiculous the pretended domination of a turn-down white collar and a red neckerchief weighed with a generous diamond, waved a disgusted fist at the mise en scene of the bucket-shop.

The fat paused a moment, as in its enclosing sweep it pointed toward the door of the customers' room, from which could be heard the dropping of a voice asking out the questions of a ticket and the "click," "click" of the little wooded blocks which a boy was slipping into place on the big question board to keep pace with the ever-changing fractions.

Undisturbed by the silence of the young man who stood at the window looking out over Broadway to the little patch of green in Old Tinty churchyard, Mr. Smith resumed his argument.

"We're up against it good and hard, th'ys all, and we got to get busy. Six months we've been a-dopin' on the rest on these 'patial offices'—them's your own words in the ads.—and what's happened? Once we had fifteen marks in a bunch, all reg'lar customers, and things began to look like a run for the money. Then along comes a ball market, and the fifteen begins to get the goods. We got 'em to pyramid, got 'em to pull up on a margin, that's what, kept gettin' thinner and thinner, till we thought we could see the finish, sure.

"I've been thinkin' what life wise financial editors call a 'healthy reaction' is. It's a good thing, and you and me would've been saunterin' down Easy Street in the sunshine.

"And what happened?" Mr. Smith repeated, his favorite phrase with evident relish, and then, banging his fist on the big roll-top desk at which he sat in a "less swivel-chair," kept a-climb-in' 'at's what happened.

"The higher the fever, as the guy in 'Factor's says, the higher the stocks went the fewer the customers we had left. 'One by one the leaves is fallin' that's what, and there's only three leaves left. Wise gamblers, those twelve, put next by all his 'campaign of education,' by a dub from Boston with a new game to work.

"And you and me set there day after day watchin' them come up all smiles and grins, as polite as new barkeepers, cashin' in, cashin' in, while we was washin' out. When I think of it, it makes me blush, it certainly does, me—with the fosterin' care old 'Pat' had, didn't he, 'pat' on my education in the old bucket-snoo in 'Chi.' Me lettin' real money get away from me like that!"

This picture of his own shortcomings was too much for Mr. Smith. He rose from his chair, and looking at the wall until he went whirling violently, he watched it with a malevolent eye.

"Why," he queried peevishly, "why didn't we bust 'em when we had the goods, instead of waitin' till now when we ain't got a red cent left?"

"Why," he repeated, as if his opinion had been sought, "because we're a pair of—"

Mr. Smith came to a full stop to watch the striking manœuvres of a head which for several minutes, in a wholly detached way, had been first thrust through and then withdrawn from a small wicket window opening into the cashier's office from the partner's private room. With the cutting off of Mr. Smith's voice, the head again came, tentatively, through the window until a pale face, largely obscured by huge, iron-rimmed glasses, turned expectantly, guilty, toward Mr. Smith.

However strange its movements, this apparition was apparently familiar to Mr. Smith. Without ceremony and after a preliminary dash of profanity at its expense, he inquired what it all meant. A hand came up from obscurity to the thin lips of the face, warningly, and Mr. Smith, impressed by this plain request for discretion, swore only softly as he tiptoed over to the window.

The impressive man on the other side of the room, who had turned to find the reason of the unusual stillness, saw Mr. Smith's head in the wicket to a wicket window, and with a flame over his head, Mr. Smith's features, and, practically coincidentally, saw Mr. Smith's first step up and in toward the pale face, but to his surprise, he had vanished with a swiftness born of long practise.

"Well?" queried the man at the street window.

Mr. Smith, whose anger seemed dissipated by his futile thrust at the pale-faced cashier, turned, without a trace of humor.

"One more leaf has fallen, Arty," he said. "And one from three leaves two. Our loyal cashier gleefully informs me that Mr. Joseph Silverman has just asked for a statement of his account and a check for his balance. He'll get the statement at once, but the balance, well, the balance—"

"Has just stepped out for a moment, will you wait?" eh, Smithy?" said his partner sarcastically. "What a joker you are, just a joker, but that's no good in a poker deck. Whoa, Smithy, he added soothingly, as Mr. Smith's face began to redden. "Who's just a joker, now, don't get hot. Well, what'll we do? That's what we want to talk about. Hang out a red flag and auction things off, or have a try at a dignified, gentlemanly private sale first, with lots of bait on the hook?"

"Private sale," said the still offended Mr. Smith, shortly.

"Good, Smithy. We'll try the private sale first, and advertise our judicial offices in out-of-town papers exclusively. In that way we get fresh fish and avoid the affecting good-by calls of the installment, the precinct detective, the head-quarters detective, and other old and dear friends. Ten to one, we'll land it on some poor guy, and then 'fresh woods and pastures new,' eh, Smithy?"

For seven days, that seemed as many years to Mr. Smith, whose sunny disposition grew more threatening each day, even as that of his morose and sarcastic partner blossomed into something approaching sunshine, the brokerage business of Smith & Wise awaited a purchaser. In the mean time, the market, slumped just enough to score the two remaining customers into closing out their accounts and their balances, like Mr. Silverman's were paid. The partners welcomed their departure. With the disappearance of "the fringe," as Mr. Smith naturally designated the two faithful customers, the place was repopulated with sporting friends of the firm who loitered without in the game on foot.

At least on the days of the offices looked like a gambling house, with poker and fan-tan games in full blast among the firm's friends, who lounged at ease in the luxurious armchairs and upon the couches, resting their feet upon mahogany tables—where this attitude entailed no inconvenience to themselves.

A step in the corridor, betokening the approach of a possible purchaser of the business, brought a change, comparable only to a change in stage scenes under the hands of a most skillful director. Every one came to attention. The neglected ticker was surrounded by a bevy of anxious men, who left it only long enough to dash to the cashier's window and in search for stocks. The partners passed in and out among the crowd, penciling orders on "buy" or "sell" pads, or gave market opinions in no uncertain tones; and either approached, at a certain angle, his desk in the private office, clamor broke forth on the telephone.

If the steps passed the door, as most of them did, the hubbub ceased; the scene shifted easily and naturally back again to that of a gambling room.

Only the pale-faced, bespectacled cashier jarred, jarred hopelessly, in either scene. He didn't belong in the dist, and he knew it, and was already meditating his exit, tarrying only to close out a certain long account, a purely sentimental one, the least of which was carried in his embittered but bookkeepingly legible mind as "Smith, Debtor."

For six months, which seemed as many years to Mr. Smith, he had been playing the part of the "nigger" in a "hit-the-nigger-and-get-a-goodie" game indulged in daily by the choleric Mr. Smith at the window of the cashier's office. Nursing bruises until he learned to dodge, he now nursed, painstakingly, his wrath, and gladly would have served thrice Jacob's term to vent it. And his chance came quickly.

Meaning, however, a good angel was on the wing, hastening due south. For up in Sixty-third Street, County, N. Y., where he had operated a bucket shop along the city lines, but with reason-

able success until the hurried departure of the cashier of a book bank had been wretchedly attempted to be located in his place, Wallace B. Jones had seen the fetching advertisement of "Smith & Wise, Bookkeepers and Bookers," and had appreciated it.

Resentful of the evident injustice of his fellow townspeople in the matter of the late cashier, chafing under the restrictions imposed by his contract with a big metropolitan "wire house," bucket-shopping outfit that furnished to him his stock "mis-quotations," and consumed two-thirds of his legitimate profits, Wallace B. Jones was in that frame of mind which leads men to putting things to the touch. And so, in looking for an opening, it came in the form of an advertisement in the Syracuse World.

"To others it was just an advertisement reading something like this:

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Concluded in next issue.

THE COMEDY TWO.

(Continued from Page 3)

it was with the consciousness that he had made for himself a lasting name. No man had ever pulled a truck carrying anywhere near the number of "bibles." But his partner had figured the problem out and his more accurate brain had devised a plan by which the Teuton could be silenced forever.

He had counted the remaining bibles and at a time when the pile came on board numbered exactly his partner's record, and once more he backed in his truck and refused to budge until the entire lot had been loaded on.

Then shall the excitement of a close finish in a horse race, the long Canuck picked up the handles, and with little apparent distress, pulled the load on board. "Dutchie" looked on good-naturedly.

"Yes," he said, "great one. Now you watch my next load. Keep your eyes on your partner, 'Schimmy'."

Then the big fellow started out only to find that the cargo had been completed and his last chance for the record had passed.

It was an early trip we were on. Some floating ice had been encountered which partly wrecked the old boat's side-wheels and we staggered into the Soo canal in a rather helpless condition. While repairs were being made, the deckhands had nothing to do, and the twins, as they were sometimes called, found their way into town. I walked up that way myself a little later to see that the hands did not scatter too far and found several members. "Sim" walked out and looked at the rapids with an expression of contempt on his thin lips. "Dutchie" was sitting in a back-seat chair, his chin lost in his ample chest, with little interest in the world.

"Pretty fine rapid," remarked a passenger to "Sim."

With a toss of his head and a wave of his hand, the Canuck replied in scorn: "Bet five dollar I run 'em on 'de two-inch plank."

"Take it" was the quick response, the passenger believing the offer to be merely a bluff.

The Canuck's hand dived into his pocket, produced a small roll of bills, more than are usually found on the person of a deckhand, selected one of the proper denomination and waved it calling.

"Who holds de stake?"

A stakeholder was quickly found. "I run de Ottawa an' de St. Lawrence," shouted, he, with waving hands. "Am I afraid of 'at bubble?"

Somebody show me de two-inch plank," he called, paddle.

I show you how to shoot de rapid."

Dangerous place, cross it."

The plot pointed to a line of spray which seemed to extend from the Canadian side more than half way across, not far from the foot of the

rapid, but "Sim" waved him aside and with a small party, started for the head of the rapid.

About this time "Dutchie" rolled his eyes and muttered:

"Vere my partner?"

Up along the rocky bank between the rapid and the canal went the small party, "Sim" rattling away about the St. Lawrence and gesticulating with his long arms.

A half-breed pilot in the group pointed out the danger. He said no man had ever emerged from that line of spray alive.

"Afraid you'll lose your bet?" queried the bystander, noting the white, agitated face of the passenger.

"Afraid I'll win it," he answered. "Never felt so sorry for a bet in my life."

"There he comes."

In an instant all was suppressed excitement. Around the end of a small rocky island, and well out in the stream, dashed the tall thin figure. His feet were only a short distance apart, his body as straight as a railroad and his chin high in the air. We could imagine the glance of contempt from the fearless eyes as he swept along, heading straight for the dangerous reef. His craft was so low that he appeared to stand knee-deep in the spray. The only sound was a pitiful sob from Dutchie, and he murmured:

"Mein barden! Mein boor barden!"

"Is he lost?" gasped the passenger who had made the bet.

"Not sure yet," answered the pilot. "He may save himself yet, if—"

"He sees it!"

This shout came from all the pilots at once.

"He'll do it yet," shouted the half-breed.

"Can he do it?" shrieked the passengers, grasping the arm of the pilot.

"Can he do it?"

"If he is strong enough to keep up that stroke he's all right. But no man on earth can do that."

"Yes he can," he shouted, becoming as much excited as the others. "That fellow is as strong as an engine."

"He's done it! He's done it!" shouted the half-breed, throwing his cap in the air and executing a war dance on the rocks. The cry taken up by all. The passengers shouted with the passengers and waved their hats, and amid the general uproar the form of "Sim" emerged from a cloud of spray, erect and defiant once more. With scarcely a movement of the paddle he guided his plank to where he stood, and "Dutchie" reached into the shallow water and carried the triumphant voyager to the rocks. The stakeholder handed over the two five-dollar bills, and as "Sim" folded them he said to the passenger:

"I was afraid you claim the foul."

"Why?"

"It was de tree-inch plank. We can fan no two-inch plank up dare, pointin' half way up the rapid."

"We reached Buffalo late in the evening and the hands were all in a hurry to quit us. I tried to induce the "Comedy Two" to remain, but they both laughed at me. They started up from the creek together, and as I watched them go, I saw a girl of about fourteen, well dressed and having a rich braid of blonde hair, tied up in the style that indicated school, suddenly launch herself at the big Dutchman with a cry of:

"Oh, papa! papa! How could you leave us?"

"Dutchie" dropped on one knee and placing his great, strong arm gently upon the slim waist of the weeping girl, gave her a long and loving embrace. "Sim" gave one glance at the couple and quickly disappeared around the next corner.—Hartford Times.

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