

makes you live, want to or not. Why, my great-uncle Jake from Montana'll be 94 next fall, but you'd never think it to see him jump on and off his bicycle when he's going down South to see his old people. My Aunt Mima—she's 76, and Junior golf champion of Butte. Great snakes! she's a peach of a player for a junior; get another year or two over her head and she'll be frightenin' some of the older players. I can tell you. Yes, there's been a lot of us brought up in Montana, but I can't call to mind any one of 'em hand'ing in their checks before they'd passed the century."

"I fancy," said the quiet man, who was smoking a cherrywood pipe, "that I've read somewhere of one of your relatives dying comparatively young and somewhat suddenly."

"My uncle 'Zekiel' got damages from the Montana Eagle for publishin' a false account of his death; perhaps that's what you're running your head up against," said the Yankee.

"No," replied the quiet man, "It wasn't your uncle 'Zekiel,' and it wasn't in the Montana Eagle. The account I read was a true one. It was in the Acts of the Apostles, and had reference to your Uncle Ananias."

"No, Mr. Popper; my note was—"

"Maybe you're the fellow that sent this bill for \$98.75 for lace?"

"No, sir. As I was about to say, my—"

"Then you're the man that wants to collect this \$86.44 for—"

"No, sir. My note was asking if I might have your daughters' hand."

Mr. Popper's face lost its scowl, but took on an expression of deep sympathy.

"You want to marry her?" he gasped. Then, turning the stack of bills over and over in his hands, he urged: "Take her, young man! I don't know your name, but take her quick! Better elope with her. She's talking about doing some more shopping."

An Unwilling Sacrifice.

"Did you attend the Progg-Budlong wedding last night, Ike?" inquired the able editor of the Hawville Clarion, note-book in hand.

"Shore thing!" replied Alkali Ike.

"I suppose the Rev. Jack Jonks officiated, and that the ceremony was very impressive?"

"That was about the size of it. Don't reckon I ever had the pleasure of minglin' in one that was more impressive."

"H'm, yes. Who was the best man?"

"I was one of 'em. The other three was Tarantula Jim, Whoop Rawson and Threefingered Babcock."

"Pshaw! There is never more than one best man at a wedding all the world over."

"Mebby they don't have but one in the East, but out yere we have as many as we need. One best man couldn't have pulled that thar ceremony through last night no more than a rabbit. It took all me an' them three other gents could do to lead the groom to the altar, so to speak."

"Tell you how it was; The obsequies started off all accordin' to Hoyle, an' everything was goin' along as slick as you please—except that the lickin' was shameful, and the stove smoked like a Dutchman, till finally we pulled the confounded thing down and flung it out into the yard—till the groom took to his legs, jest before it was everlastingly too blamed late, an' skinned out across the scenery in the general direction of Lower California as the crow flies, hittin' only the high places on the face of nature as he went."

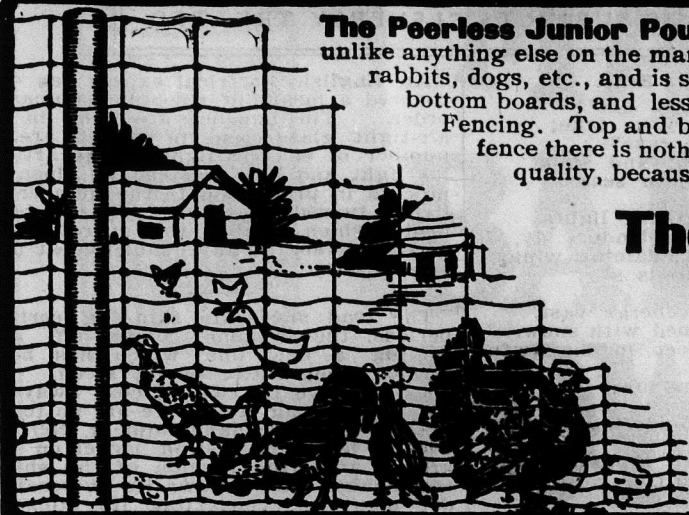
"Me an' them three other gents put chase to the pootroom, as they say in stories, an' Tarantula overtook him early in the second mile, and got whipped by the groom in three licks before the rest of us could ketch up. Whoop Rawson got some of the same a couple of minutes later; but then me an' Threefingered got thar an' swarmed over the happy man in great plenty, an' he agreed to listen to reason after I had showed him the error of his ways by bendin' my six-shooter over his head."

"He went back with us like a little lamb—the four of us packin' him along by the four corners. We sorter supported him in this manner, suthin' like a capital letter X, as it were, while the officiatin' clergyman cleared his throat an' pronounced 'em man an' wife the first dash out of the box, to be safe, an' then got off the rest of the impressive ceremony afterwards."

"After we had all whirled in an' congratulated the happy couple thar was a dance, durin' which one of the fiddlers had a fit an' fell off from the table an' broke his bow-arm, an' the floor got swagged down in the middle shameful. After which we all dispersed, feelin' that it had indeed been good to be thar."

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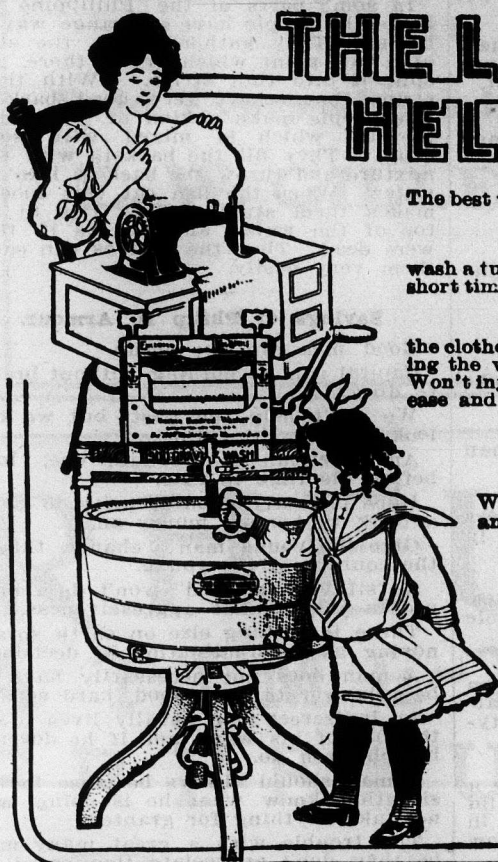


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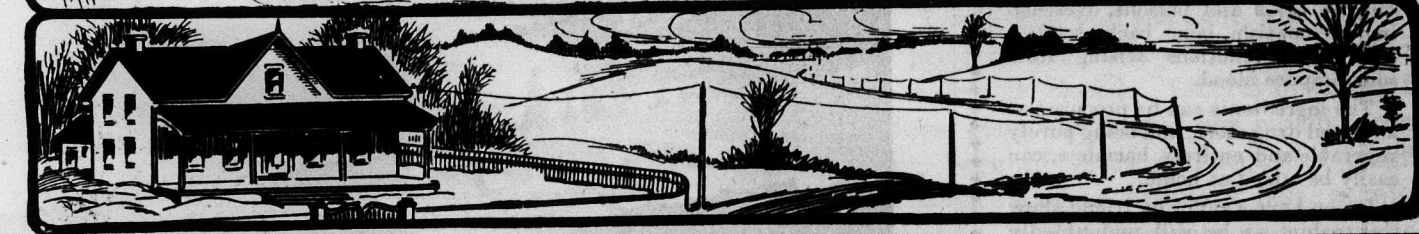
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