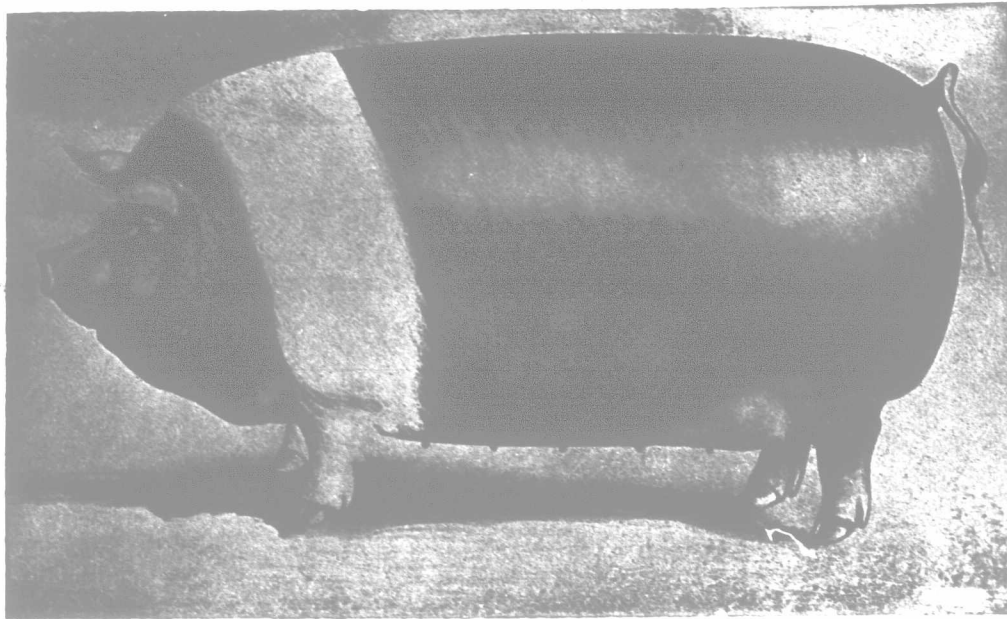


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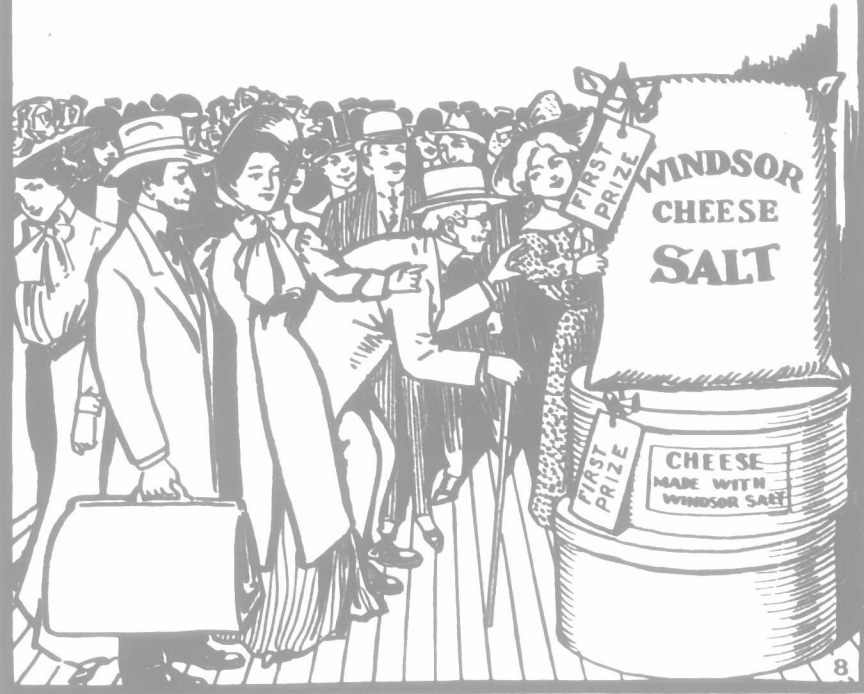
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return? Hoarse, guttural, mocking laughter and cries of "O Lord!"

It was some days after the catastrophe considered so lightly by Caroline of the doubting heart and by the world of the slums, that we sat at my window, looking out on the panorama of the court. My window was even with the roofs of the opposite buildings, and from the small, two-story houses that cover the stairways leading to the roof, ever and anon emerged people, who crossed over into other small roof-houses, walking the length of a block up there in the air.

On the roof directly opposite us, some

little girls commenced to play at "Come to see." A tea-party was also in progress. A small child decked out in a bright pink dress—they sometimes dress very well on the roofs of the slums—was laying the table.

It was a little round table and low. She daintily spread out a fringed cloth and set the cups and saucers about. Then she went in at the door of her roof-house for something, and a small boy came out from behind a chimney and upset the table.

The grief of the child was great when she came back, so great that the parrot, seeming somehow to scent it, cried out from below, "O Lord!" and laughed with ghoulish glee.

"Didn't I tell you?" reminded Caroline.

The little girl once more spread the cloth and set out the cups and saucers that remained unbroken. Her guests

commenced to arrive, coming up through a certain roof-house door and saluting her. She was an exceedingly gracious hostess for her years. In a charming way she bowed and seated them, and from the tiny table handed them their tea.

One of them, rising, came to the edge of the roof and looked over at the bird. "Have a cracker, Polly?" asked she.

"Well, what was that he answered?" asked I in amazement.

"I think," said Caroline, "that he answered 'Rats!'"

Lower down, tea-parties were being conducted on a smaller scale. Two children set a table on a fire-escape. Their dolls sat by, looking glass-eyedly on. They were not well-behaved dolls at all, judging from the numerous spankings their mothers interrupted the tea to give them.

A man emerged from the depths of a basement, a sallow-faced creature who had evidently inhabited the depths of basements since his birth. He walked slowly across the court. Two dogs sprang out from somewhere and bit fiercely at his trousers' legs.

The man cried out. The dogs had bitten into his legs.

And the parrot from his high-up fire-escape, turning his bright green head sidewise and observing this, yelled hoarsely, "O Lord!" and laughed. He shook his green sides with laughter before he finally quieted down and pecked at his wings.

"It is to be hoped," reflected Caroline, "that these people of the slums are hydrophobia proof. And, indeed, I have more fear for the dogs."

In front of the third-floor window opposite was a longish balcony. On this balcony a man lay outstretched upon a comfortable, his face on his arm, the open window gaping behind him. Now and again cries of children apparently in mortal combat emanated from this window. Once the man raised his head, called out something to them, lowered his head again, and lay motionless.

"A man who works all night," decided Caroline, "and so must sleep through the day. It's a pity his children won't let him sleep. Where is the mother, do you suppose? Gadding about somewhere?"

In another window sat an old woman, knitting a long woollen sock.

"She comes from Switzerland," announced Caroline, "or somewhere in the Old Country. We Americans have never found the time to knit."

Beside her sat her husband, old, gray-haired, reading a time-worn paper filled with strange characters.

By and by, since it was Thursday, there arrived by a circuitous route the German band. A long way off we could hear them coming nearer, court by court, until now, standing in a bunch on ours, they commenced to play on instruments that, putting it in mild form, were hardly attuned.

From the height of his perch the parrot looked down on them.

"O Lord!" he cried.

Caroline stopped her ears.

"He's right this time," she groaned. The German band played loud and long. The parrot screeched. In a frantic endeavor to get the band to stop the noise, the children flung pennies, pennies wrapped in paper to prevent scattering.

The pennies had an opposite and disastrous effect. The band played on.

Finally, however, they came to the end of their repertoire and left the court. We could hear their discord in a near-by court, in one farther off, then, happily, the sounds ceased altogether to distract us.

Caroline unstopped her ears.

"I thought that the parrot breathed a sigh of relief," said she.

The parrot seemed to have heard her mention him. All of a sudden he shrieked aloud.

"What did he say?" I demanded, for Caroline was better acquainted than I with the patois of the neighborhood, having lived there longer.

"I thought he said, 'Oh, look who's here!'" Caroline replied.

True enough. The parrot was looking into the court at something and laughing. We craned our necks to see what it was, and at length beheld it. It was an accordion player sprawled lamely out on the pavement below.

"Do you suppose he is really lame?" asked Caroline of the doubting heart.

To judge from his subsequent maneuvers, he was. For when at the end of the scream of the accordion a child threw a penny down, he was forced by his exaggerated lameness to sprawl his ungainly length along the flags in order to reach it.

"If someone yelled 'fire!'" suggested Caroline, "I'll wager he'd get up and hustle all right enough." Caroline has little belief in the truthfulness of this world of the East Side.

When the lame man had crawled away, and the parrot had duly yelled and laughed, and the tea-table on the roof had been replaced by small rocking-chairs in which the guests reclined and enjoyed the view of our opposite roofs, our attention was turned again to the man on the balcony.

All this time, through German band and accordion, he had lain motionless.

Now the cries of the children within aroused him.

"It's a pity they won't let him sleep," repeated Caroline. "Where in the world is their mother?"

One of the children—a boy—rushed to the window and scrambled out, stepping ruthlessly on the man in his excitement. He poured forth a tale of woe, his tears falling. Frantically he exhibited a long red scratch on his brown arm.

The man sprang up and vaulted heavily in at the window. We could hear his voice, now beseeching, now scolding. Sometimes it was angry, then again it had the sound of a sob. He begged the children pitiously to be still and let him rest awhile. He was so tired, he told them. He fell wholly to sobbing after a time, so that the children, awed by this sight—a strong man he was, and it is a pitiful thing to young and old alike to see a strong man sob—sank into submission.

We heard them promise to behave better. We heard them say in their piping treble that they would be still. We saw him come once more to the balcony and throw himself down. We saw him throw his arm over his head and continue to sob. His broad shoulders shook. We could hear the long-drawn echo of his pitiful sobbing.

Caroline leaned out over the sill and looked down at him.

"Do you know who he is?" she asked me presently.

"Why, no," said I.

"It comes to me now," she said, and for once she sighed. "He is the husband of the woman who was killed the other night, and they are her children. The woman, I mean, who fell from the roof."

The court was all of a sudden still.

Perhaps it was the sobs of the father of the motherless children that had stilled it. Perhaps, on the other hand, it was only the traditional hush of the twenty minutes to, or the twenty minutes after. But the Vampire of the Slums is unsubdued by sobs or time.

Out of the stillness his voice came sobbing.

"O Lord!" he cried.

And then he laughed—[By Zoe Norris, 10-11-1906.]