

At the Sign of the Wooden Leg

By "Silas Wegg."

A Backyard Episode.

"There is a boxful of empty bottles on the back-steps, Silas," said Mrs. Wegg to me last Saturday afternoon. "What shall we do with them?"

"Sell them to the junk man," I replied. "We can use the money we get to buy a pianola."

This remark of mine was intended for sarcasm, as it would recall to Mrs. Wegg the occasion on which she disposed of a barrel of bottles, my second-best trousers, the 1909 file of *Civilians* and a gas stove, in hopes of getting a start towards buying a pianola. The sarcasm might have been apparent to Mrs. Wegg had she remembered that she made eight cents out of the deal with the junk-man, but she had forgotten that part of the transaction, and was about to telephone to Whiskerowski when Silas Junior broke in with a suggestion that we put candles in the mouths of the bottles, and set the bottles on the back fence after dark in honour of his birthday.

"Then we might shy rocks at them," said the lad, oblivious of the definition of the word rock, and what the neighbour on the other side of the fence might have to say when the bottles came crashing on his lot.

The idea of the illumination appealed to me, however, as a cheap way of celebrating the boy's birthday, and that evening the back fence was converted into a fairyland causeway, to the delight of young Silas and the hundred other youngsters who were drawn to the scene by the reports of

the proposed celebration which Silas had spread throughout the city.

The candles had all flickered out, and Silas and his hundred friends had gone to bed. I sat in a chair a few feet from the fence, smoking my last pipe in the moonlight, when a strange thing happened. Voices issued from the mouths of the bottles. It was a strange thing, was it not, yet did not Omar Khayyam hear words, which he has reported, from the pots in the potter's house, and have we not a tale of the Bottle Imp told to us by Stevenson? There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, and in bottles also, than are dreamed of in your philosophy. The bottles were talking.

"Who is the wooden-legged guy in the chair?" asked one. It was a square-faced fellow, who had come from the grocer's to us with coal oil inside him, that asked the question. He could not boast of intimate acquaintance with the family, I suppose, having been introduced, as it were, under false colours, for the name on his forehead was Geneva.

"Oh, that fellow," replied a long-necked chap with a shiny label marked Castor Oil, "is in the civil service. I helped him to get a day's sick leave once when the Tigers were playing here."

"You don't say," said Squareface. "He must think a lot of you."

"He has never shown any great fondness for me," replied Castor, "but that doesn't fizz on me, as I said to the Sedlitz Powder one morning. Ha! Ha! I'm hard to down." He thereupon burst into a loud laugh at