

New Stories O. HENRY

RED CONLIN'S ELOQUENCE.

They were speaking of the power of great orators, and each one had something to say of his special favorite.

The drummer was for backing Bourke Cochran for oratory against the snare. Ingeroll the most persuasive pleader, and the insurance agent advanced the claims of the magnetic W. C. F. Breckenridge.

"They all talk some," said the old cattle man, who was puffing his pipe and listening, "but they couldn't hold a candle to Red Conlin, that run cattle below Stanton in '90. Ever know Red?"

Nobody had had the honor.

"Red Conlin was a natural orator," he wasn't overworked with book learning, but his words came free and easy, like whiskey out of a new faucet from a full barrel. He was always in a good humor and smiling across his face, and if he asked for a hot blizzard he'd like to be a blizzard for his life. He was one man who had the gift of gab, and it never failed him.

"I remember once, in Adams County, the horse thieves worried us right smart. There was a gang of 'em, and they got runnin' off a cashmere every week or so. Some of us got together and raised a pint of order and concluded to sustain it. The head of the gang was a fellow named Mullens, and a tough cuss he was. Right, too, and warm, particular when twenty of us saddled up and went into camp, loaded down with six chubsters and Winchester. That Mullens had the nerve to try to cut off our saddle horses the first night, but we heard him, got mounted, and went hot on his trail. There was five or six others with Mullens.

"It was dark as thunder, and pretty soon we run one of them down. His horse was lame, and we knew it was Mullens by his big white hat and black beard. We didn't hardly give him time to speak, we was so mad, but in two minutes there was a rope round his neck and Mullens was awing up at last. We waited about ten minutes till he was still, and then

some fellow strikes a match out of curiosity and screams out: "Gosh a mighty, boys, we've strung up the wrong man!"

"And we had."

"We reopened the fellow's case and gave him a new trial, and acquitted him, but it was too late to do him any good. He was as dead as Davy Crockett."

"It was Sandy McNeagh, one of the quietest, straightest and best respected men in the county, and what was worse, had'n't been married but about three months."

"Whatever are we to do?" says I, and it sure was a case to think about.

"We ought to be aigh Sandy's house now," said one of the men, who was tryin' to peer around and kind of locate the scene of our brilliant court deliver, as they say.

"Just then we seen a light from a door that opened in the dark, and the house wasn't two hundred yards away and we saw what we knew must be Sandy's wife in the door lookin' for him."

"Somebody's got to go and tell her," said I. "I was kind o' leamin' the boys. Who'll do it?" Nobody jumped at the proposition.

"Red Conlin," says I, "you're the man to tell her, and the only man here who could open his mouth to the poor girl. Go, like a man, and may the Lord teach you what to say, for d-d if I can."

"That boy never hesitated. I saw him kind o' wet his hand, and smooth back his red curls in the dark, and I seen his teeth chinin' as he said: 'I'll go, boys; wait for me.'"

"He went and we saw the door open and let him in."

"May the Lord help that poor widow," we all said, "and d-d us for bunglin', murderin' butchers what ain't no right to call ourselves men."

"It was fifteen minutes, maybe, when Red came back."

"How is it?" we whispered, almost afraid to hear him speak.

"It's fixed," says Red, "and the widow and I asks ye to the wedding nixt Chuesday night."

"That fellow Red Conlin could talk," Published by arrangement with the Wheeler Syndicate, Inc.

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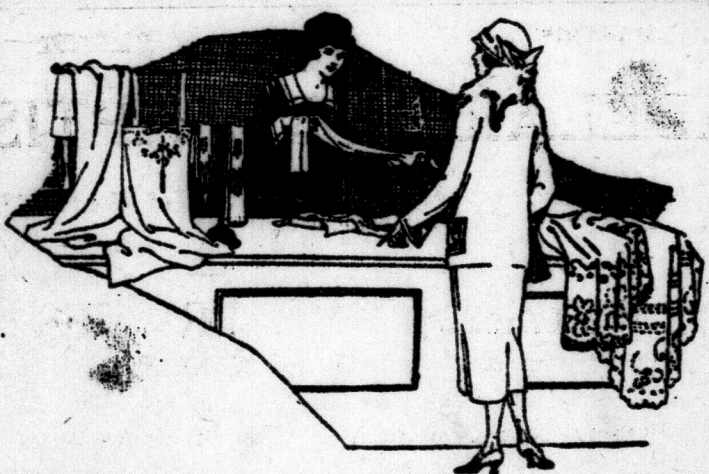
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