

At this juncture Joe broke into the proceedings with a loud guffaw. McShay eyed him severely.

"I said a Christmas-tree, and any feller caught laffin' at it will be showed the door." And he walked away after the manner of platform lecturers who move about to show their perfect command of the situation. As he did so Orson stepped into his place and Silent handed him a small article wrapped in paper which he took from the tree. Orson, trying to imitate the Sunday-school manner of the big man, said:

"Will Mickey McShay please step forward? Mickey, here is the last see-gar you unloaded on us, and if you kin smoke it, we'll some day give you the proudest banquet in any of the local joints this side the Missouri, at which banquet you kin eat your own words and damned if they don't choke you," and he handed Mike a cigar with the added insult:

"It's a onion with a alfalfa wrapper. It ain't fit fer perlite society." Mike joined in the laugh at his expense, but at once took charge of the occasion, determined not again to lose control. He turned with a kindly smile to Big Bill.

"Will Little Willie push his presence as near to us as circumstances and his *waist line* will permit?"

Bill ambled forward, glancing down over his ample figure with an awkward smile, looking a bit teased and very close to blushing. Mike took a "sinker" from the tree and handed it to the big man.

"Here is a cookie for Little Willie," he said. The disproportion between the size of the present and the recipient was so great every one laughed, including