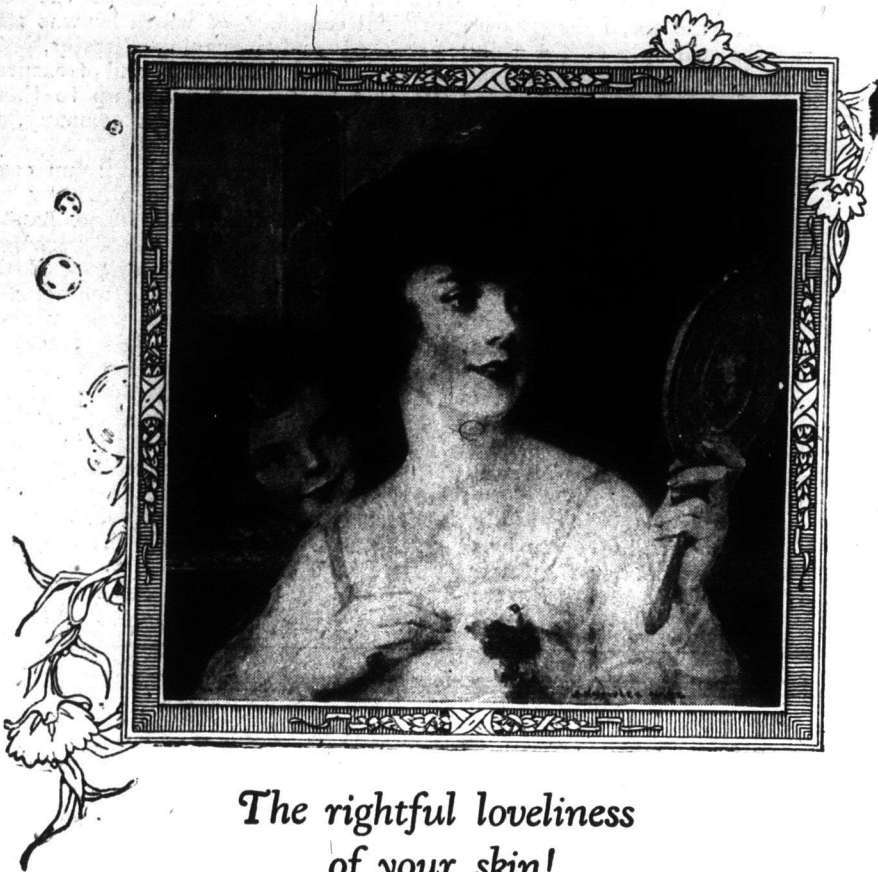




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POWDERS

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a torchlight procession in Dutton, with Mr. Potter occupying the position of honor at its head. The torches were brooms dipped in coal oil. The Duttonians felt they could afford to splash it around, now that they had so much of it, right under their feet. There wasn't a drop of coal oil left in Dutton that night.

The procession wended its way to The King's Hotel, and ordered up an impromptu banquet; the guest of the evening—and, later on, of the morning—being Silas Benjamin Potter, discoverer of refined coal oil in Dutton.

The lights failed, from lack of oil, about two o'clock; but nobody minded that. They kept up the eating and drinking and speechmaking in the dark, and not until the sun was peeping above the Eastern horizon did they think of going home.

Celebration? That was a celebration. For the first time in his life, Mr. Potter went home smelling of intoxicants. The boys had persuaded him that such a peculiarly special and altogether unique occasion demanding moistening of some kind, and had loaded him up with cock-tails.

He did not go to bed with his boots on, the way a drunk man should, if he cares anything about the traditions of the thing; rather he displayed an exaggerated carefulness in the removing and subsequent bestowal of his garments, inasmuch that there was not an article of furniture in the room but received some part of Mr. Potter's wearing apparel.

When he awoke, late in the afternoon, his trousers hung gracefully over the mirror, while two of the bedposts carried a sock apiece. He awoke with a raging headache, and his first thought was one of anger against whomever had taken the liberty of tossing his garments around in that incoherent way. Then he remembered, and lifted his head for shame. He expected Mrs. Potter would be scandalized.

If she was, she never let on. She knew he didn't do it on purpose, so what was the use of making a fuss? A wife like that is a great comfort to a man.

It takes a while to sink a three-foot hole to any depth. By the time old Bill had wormed that auger ten feet into the bowels of the earth—as Mr. Potter spoke of the operation—the company decided that an auger of a smaller caliber would answer the purpose just as well and it should get down faster to where the oil was. That was the main thing. So a two-foot auger was substituted, and the boring went on apace.

Still the company was not satisfied; they changed to a twelve-inch bore, abandoned that for an eight-inch, and gave up the eight for a six.

Then they encountered a difficulty; old Bill's limit, in the way of depth, was a hundred and four feet, although his contract called for a thousand.

A hurried meeting of the company was held, and after long and earnest consultation, it was decided to let Bill go ahead, as he offered to do, and make hundred feet each. The "operations" were resumed on that basis.

One morning it was noticed that the scum had disappeared from the surface of the slough, and Mr. Potter ordered that drilling operations be suspended at once. The disappearance of the oil was proof, he said, that they had tapped the parent vein.

They were drilling at the time in Well No. 3. Mr. Potter tied a small can to a string, weighted it with stones, and dropped it down the well.

It came up brimming with water, clear cold water—not the slightest trace of oil in it.

For a moment Mr. Potter looked puzzled. Then a great light burst forth upon his countenance. He said:

"Boys, this is the most stupendous discovery of this or any century, a discovery that makes the Law of Gravitation look pale and weak, and lays the Conservation of Energy away in the shade. It has remained for us to wrest from Nature her last and greatest secret—soluble oil!"

"You have been taught, and perhaps you have believed, that oil and water will not mix. I have always doubted

it. And here we have the proof that it is not so.

"Look at this can of ostensible water. Can you detect any trace of oil there? Not the slightest. Yet it is there in abundance; but so subtly concealed, so perfectly blended, by the alchemy of Nature, that not even the most experienced eye can detect it."

Mr. Potter, overcome by emotion, retired to write a pamphlet on "The Soluble, Dissoluble, and Indissoluble Distillates of Petrolatum"—a title suggested by Mr. Todd, the schoolmaster—leaving the crowd to gape in open-mouthed wonder at the can of ostensible water. Privately Mr. Potter hoped that the pamphlet would gain him a membership in the Royal Zoological Society of London.

This discovery gave a fresh impetus to frenzied speculation in oil wells. The boom was at its height, and booming serenely along, when that veterinary came back to town.

Of course he had to listen to the story of the great oil strike—every newcomer was accorded that privilege—and as a clincher they showed him the Government report.

That veterinary left town hurriedly during the night, but a few days later a letter came for Mr. Potter from a remote part of British Columbia. It had been posted on the train, in order to conceal, as far as possible, the whereabouts of the sender; but it was from that miserable veterinary, and it put forth the absurd theory that the Dutton oil wells had been "salted" by a cow, or some such nonsense. Why, the man must be mentally deficient to write such a ridiculous letter as that. Mr. Potter took no stock in it whatever.

He tried distilling the oil out of that ostensible water, but it wouldn't distill; he tried using the water as an illuminant, with no better success; then he gave it up. Said he had done his part in discovering the oil; if the rest of the world couldn't find a way of utilizing it it was their loss.

Deserted by their leader, the citizens of Dutton were helpless. Not knowing what to do, they did nothing, and let the boom go by default.

I have said they did nothing. That is not strictly true; they did one thing. They protested the valuation of every parcel of land on the village assessment roll the following year.

Starting a Crowd off on a Song

Nobody feels more like thirty cents than the person who is out in a crowd and when "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" or "God Save the King" is called for, not one ventures to act as starter. Sometimes a faltering voice pipes out the first couple of notes starting the tune off about half an octave too high. Then the singers must watch sharp or the whole thing will fall flat.

Why should not everybody be equipped to start such familiar and standard pieces as those above mentioned? It is easy enough to do. And often it helps proceedings very much. Take for example this incident related by one of the nurses returned from overseas. One of the Red Cross nurses in France was passing down a ward in her charge on Christmas Eve. The soldiers were unusually quiet and there were traces of tears on several of the faces. "I guess we're homesick," one of the men volunteered, "don't you think it would be a good plan to sing something, nurse?" The nurse thought it would. "Well, you start us," returned the first speaker, "we can all sing if someone will only just start the songs." The nurse never felt her inability to do anything so much in her life. She sadly confessed she could not lead them in the singing.

This is hardly a typical case, for so often it is only among a few in some small meeting. But one's inability applies just the same in measure. Would it not be a good thing for everyone to resolve that he or she will prepare so as to be able to start a group off on any of these familiar songs?

Recognized as the leading specific for the destruction of worms, Mother Graves' Worm Exterminator has proved a boon to suffering children everywhere. It seldom fails.