

Our Complete Short Story

What Are You Laughing At?

McGennis' Promotion From Collier's Weekly

WITHIN a minute or two of six o'clock that morning the sun rose, and it was broad, glaring day. One instant the world was smothered in a damp, impenetrable, almost tangible, grayness; the next, its nakedness lay discovered in a glare of light.

There was a sea of lily-pad, lake-warm water, heaving slowly, a ribbon of beach, metallic-white, a tangle of untended, unproductive vegetation, a village equally unscathed and unproductive—except of unnecessary babies—wherever less brown people moved without much purpose, or, lacking the ambience even to make a show of activity, lolled where they were.

The tropical sun had no magic of halflights to tinge it all with romance or stir it into fugitive beauty. Such as Sicaba was at heart, it stood unexcited.

When the sun rose, John McGennis stood for a moment, unshivering in the lukewarm air, to look down on the poverty of his town, before he turned to pour water over himself out of an old tomato-can.

Like the morning and the sea and the air, the water had no tang in it, and McGennis, drying himself slowly and methodically, felt no proud and well-tempered body fail to respond to the caress of slushing water there is generally something wrong with the mind which inhabits it. There was with the mind of McGennis.

The trouble lay outside his window. That compound of staring sea and sky and stared-at village which the day revealed had overruled him. As mere geological and botanical facts, Sicaba, Pagros, the Tropics, had proved too big for him. They made of him a spot of life, meaningless as an ant crawling unendingly in the forest of the grass-stems. Tiny dot of intelligence that he had found himself in the midst of those triumphant physical forces, McGennis had come to wonder whether anything he could do among them mattered much.

Slowly and methodically, he bathed, he dressed, he put on, left puttee, put the strap twice round, hauled it through the buckle and tucked the end back neatly—and when he was trim in his khaki and yellow leather he stood for a moment with the irresolution of inertia on his face. Then he pulled his knife from his pocket, strode across to the thick corner of his room, scooped and with elaborate care cut a notch in the tough, dense wood.

The post, from the upward limit of his knee, was jagged with such notches, lying in groups of seven, six sides by side, and another cut diagonally across them. They were a calendar of more than ordinary significance. In the mind of its maker, each of them represented a day of "Grip, sabbie, gobble," each checked off twenty-four hours in which he had stood in the divisions, greeting every comer with that contortion of the lips which, conventionally at least, expresses pleasure, eating sufficient food to keep his body in repair—Ma had revered his body intently as an ancient Greek—and in which he had, both in his office and in the primitive society of Sicaba, "strangled his jaw," and thereby come to a growing disposition to speechlessness.

With the fierce enthusiasm of an ascetic he cut these records, in an effaceably deep on the mornings of the days for which they stood. There could be no going back. Standing at him from the undecaying wood, they warned him that for one more stretch at least he must grin, sabbie, and gobble, or be a quitter.

They served a more immediately practical purpose also. McGennis had found that it was the first grime, the first nibble at the food his Occidental stomach loathed, the first burst of insane chatter, which came hard. Once fairly started, the grin became a veritable smile—how boyish and appealing he had never guessed—the chatter became amused question and answer, and his stomach, more fundamentally human than Occidental, found even the food Sicaba afforded preferable to emptiness. But somehow the quiet of the evenings and the stillness of the long nights and the flatness of the dawns brought back continually the question: "What's the use?" and he would have his fight to make all over, with his neck.

On this particular morning he stood for a while staring at the jagged post, which was at once a cenotaph to his departed days and an altar prepared for the sacrifice of days to come. Without counting, McGennis knew that his latest notch rounded out a tale of three hundred and sixty-two. The possibilities of that one post were not exhausted yet, and his house held a dozen other posts, virgin still, and

rupted him with the most suppressed of coughs. "Well, Secretario," said McGennis, rousing, "let's drink our chocolate. I must have been dreaming. I hope I haven't kept you waiting long."

"Only a moment," the visitor assured him, though the Deputy Supervisor's day-dream had lasted long for any dream, "only a moment, I hope," he added, curious struggling with courtesy, "that I did not bring bad news."

"Bad news?" McGennis beamed on him. "You brought the best little old news you ever brought. The Secretario, if you never promulgate worse news than that, you'll boost your circulation a thousand a day. It was red news with green edges."

The Secretario had understood the tone if the words were beyond him; and his smile matched McGennis' own. "I could almost believe," said he, with elephantine earnestness, "that the Government had increased your salary."

"Secretary," said McGennis approvingly, "you hit the truth in the eye of that time. But that isn't the best of it."

"Ah, promoted?" said the Secretario, catching at the flying tails of a word he knew.

"Not on your life," McGennis shouted scornfully. "Not on your life, Secretario. 'They've raised me.'"

"Wherefore, when he saw a bold notice in the paper, which read, 'How to Save Gas Bills,' he studied the matter carefully."

"Are your gas bills heavy?" asked the advertisement. "Do you wish to save them? If so, write us at once, enclosing a P. O. for one shilling, and we will send you full particulars of our simple plan. Don't delay—Send at once!"

The Secretario, who some little while before had been engaged in a debate about the P. O. for one shilling, the economical one decided to invest. It might be the means of saving him pounds! The letter was duly sent, and a money enclosed, to the phantasmagoric firm who wanted to help others.

He waited expectantly for the promised particulars. Two days passed, but on the morning of the fourth the fatal letter came.

Eagerly the old man tore open the envelope and read the printed slip. It contained: "To save gas bills: Buy a scrub-brush, and paste them in it—right away!"

The village of Wollleston had an entertainment in the public hall and the Wolllestonians were assembled in great numbers to witness the performance of a trained orchestra.

Strange to relate, however, the galloway piped in question was not up to concert pitch. Everything that was wanted of him he failed to do, and he endeavored to climb the footlights and give an exhibition of his own creation.

The widely-advertised act came to a sudden and untimely end, and the trainer emerged from behind the curtain and apologized meekly. "Ladies and gentlemen," said he, "I am sorry to disappoint you this evening. The performance did not continue till we got a new orchestra leader."

A murmur of discontent passed round the massive building.

"Ah dunno!" drawled out the youth. "Mobley 's is, 'mebby 'e is't. Anyway, you can ask am yourself. 'E's sittin' there on the jury."

The man who manipulated the drugs was in high glee. Literally he danced for joy, and his face was contorted with mirth.

"What—what's the matter?" gasped the assistant-dispenser. He gazed at the bottles dancing on the noise of the bottles dancing on the shelves had called him hastily. "Have you taken something, or—"

"No," gurgled the chemist. "Oh, dear, no!"

"You remember last winter," explained the chemist, calming down somewhat, "when our water-pipes were frozen?"

"Yes, but how?"

"Well," and the chemist jumped for joy once more—"the plumber who came into put things right has just been in again—to have a prescription made up! My turn now!"

The collector of antiquies was on the watch, and Fortaine had guided his footsteps to Little Longham.

After buying two ha-penny stamps at the post office, he questioned the postmaster on the possibility of pursuing his hobby in the district.

Children Cry for Fletcher's



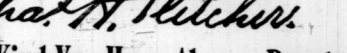
The Kind You Have Always Bought, and which has been in use for over 30 years, has borne the signature of Dr. J. C. Fletcher and has been made under his personal supervision since its infancy.

What is CASTORIA

Castoria is a harmless substitute for Castor Oil, Paregoric, Drops and Soothing Syrup. It is Pleasant. It contains neither Opium, Morphine nor other Narcotic substance. Its age is its guarantee. It destroys Worms and allays Feverishness. It cures Diarrhoea and Wind Colic. It relieves Teething Troubles, cures Constipation and Flatulency. It assimilates the Food, regulates the Stomach and Bowels, giving healthy and natural sleep. The Children's Panacea—The Mother's Friend.

GENUINE CASTORIA ALWAYS

Bears the Signature of



The Kind You Have Always Bought
In Use For Over 30 Years
THE CENTRAE COMPANY, 77 MURRAY STREET, NEW YORK CITY.

RYLAND McG. ARCHIBALD
Is now Agent for
NOVA SCOTIA FIRE
Insurance Company.
If you would be sure of Prompt, Liberal payment of your FIRE LOSS
invest in a "Nova Scotia Fire" Policy.
**STRONG
LIBERAL
PROMPT**

Butter -- Parchment

PRINTED OR PLAIN

Don't Buy Imitation Parchment It Will Injure Your Butter

Visiting Cards

PRINTED
on good stock.

50 for 50c : : : 100 for 75c

Truro Publishing Co. Ltd.

Saw Mill Machinery

Saw Carriages Trimmers
Lath Machines. Shingle Machines
ARE MADE BY US

Truro Foundry & Machine Co., Ltd.
Agents for the Hoe Saw Nova Scotia

High-Class Groceries for Xmas

Our Christmas stock is nearly all in and opened up. You will find the quality and prices here.

CROSS AND BLACKWELLS.	SPECIALS.
Orange Marmalade 1 and 2 lb glass jars.	3 lbs mixed candy 25c
Smoked Sardines 2 for 25c	3 lbs new dates 25c
Rennet Tablets 15 cents.	3 lbs finest grapes 25c
Browning for Gravy.	Chocolate 25c to 50c
Strawberry Jam 25c, 25c.	Fancy boxes 25c to 50c
Raspberry Jam 25c, 25c.	Sweet oranges 25c
Black Currant Jelly 25c, 25c.	Cranberries 15c quart
Chicken and Tongue in glass 60c.	Swartberries 25c
Lee and Perrin's Sauce, 35 cents.	Candied Ginger 25c lb
Pickles in crock 85c.	Preserved Ginger 25c lb

ALMOND PASTE, RICE POP CORN, OXO CUBES, WAGSTAFF'S PRESERVES & MARMALADE, Wagstaff's Mince-meat 2 lbs 25c

Phone 26
Phone 129 J

W. H. SNOOK & CO.

CASTORIA
For Infants and Children.
The Kind You Have Always Bought
Bears the Signature of Dr. J. C. Fletcher

McGennis thought as he looked down at the clean green mortar of his culvert.

"It is good!" the foreman of the masons asked anxiously.

The Deputy Supervisor surveyed the work with puckered brows. "Fine, Miguel," he said genially. "Continued on page three."