

MY WILD MAN.

BY TOM P. MORGAN.

I thought I was smart, very smart, when I invented that Wild Man, and through the columns of the Daily Razooper turned him loose in Onion township and vicinity to terrify the inhabitants thereof till the very hair in their veins was almost curdled with fright. A sensation was wanted by the Razooper, of which I was a special correspondent, and I determined to furnish one that would cause the very breath of the community to stand erect, so to speak. The result of much thinking was a two-column article with "scare" head-lines seven stories high, telling in shivery sentences, each with ice down its back, of the appearance in Onion township of a Wild Man.

Oh, he was a terrible fellow—bony and black, with great, splay feet, huge, claw-tipped hands, and a face calculated to frighten the very elect out of a year's growth. His hair was worn a la snarl and trimmed with splinters, and his mouth looked like the unpardonable sin. His wardrobe was rather limited, consisting usually of a fierce frown worn diagonally upon his brow, a quarter section of scurvy robe worn about his middle, a club with warts on its major end worn in his right hand, and a stone bruise of generous size on his left heel.

In short, the Wild Man of Onion township was, according to the Razooper, of somewhat striking appearance, and calculated to cause a buzz of comment in any drawing-room.

His behavior at times bordered on the eccentric. He seemed passionately fond of laying for belated wayfarers, said the account. He would jump up suddenly before a benighted pedestrian, make a few original gestures, accompanied by gnashing of teeth, and then take to the woods, uttering roars louder than those of a prominent citizen whose dog-tax had been raised. The accounts of his appearance were vouched for over the names of several citizens who I felt sure would not go back on me, inasmuch as one of them had gone away and died, another had engaged in a foot-race with the authorities that took him rapidly in the direction of Nova Scotia, and the third entered into rest in the practice of medicine in a town where there were already twenty-eight doctors.

It was really surprising to see how many people, after the publication of the Wild Man article, were ready to testify that they had seen him. If a farmer, returning late at night toward Onion township in a state of advanced hilarity superinduced by an overdose of balloon-juice, fell out of his wagon

and had his team run away and over him, he forthwith swore that he had been assaulted by the Wild Man. Little boys with vivid imaginations frequently saw him in the twilight scooting into the timber. And the oldest inhabitant and biggest liar vowed he had seen his tracks in the mud, and that they were small compared with those of the wild man that he had seen 'way back in '38.

It got so that the Wild Man, even if imaginary, was one of the most useful citizens of Onion township. No longer fond mothers terrified their offspring by threats of the "booger." At the revival in that neighborhood Rev. Whooptext, in describing Satan, whom he pictured as ever ready to seize the sinner by the surplus skin of his neck and jerk him from happiness to a place where the chief industry of the inhabitants consists of weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth, made use, almost verbatim, of the Razooper's description of the Wild Man.

It was a little later that the Thespian Amateur Dramatic Club, of which I was a member, decided to give an entertainment at the schoolhouse in Onion township. The literary society which met there every Friday evening had requested us to appear. They did not want a play, as, on account of the length of an ordinary drama, its production after the regular business of the society was disposed of would keep them too late. So we resolved to give them a short specialty entertainment. Mr. Hiwhoop was cast to sing a sentimental ballad, B'jones and B'jinks to do a little Irish comedy sketch, Miss Giggleslick for a select reading, and myself for a character song and dance. The Thespians who were not on the program were to attend as a committee on applause.

I resolved to make my part the feature of the evening, and not only surprise the natives but the Thespians as well. To this end, after choosing the character, the one known in theatrical circles as "The Jolly Hottentot," I kept all in the dark in regard to my choice.

My "make-up" for the character, which was the best I could procure, was pretty costly, but I felt that the furor it would create would amply repay me for the outlay.

Just before dark on the eventful night I repaired to the house of a friend at the edge of town and donned my costume and made myself up. My entourage consisted of black tights with a huge breech-clout of fur. My hands were blackened on the backs and given palms of bright red, and my pedal extremities were in huge artificial feet of leather, each nearly a yard long. My wig was a terrible affair of black, woolly hair with skewers stuck through it. My face looked

simply scandalous when blackened except around the eyes and mouth, where it was painted red. Hanging to my ears were large rings, and around my neck was a string of imitation claws. Altogether I felt competent to surprise the audience.

Then, when it got dark, I mounted my horse, and wrapped in a long overcoat, started for Onion township. The greater portion of the ride was uneventful, and I devoted most of my attention to holding up my artificial feet.

Just before reaching the schoolhouse I stopped in the woods to tighten my saddle-girth. A moment later I heard voices, and fearing discovery in the starlight, I pulled my horse back behind a clump of bushes and waited for the owners of the voices to pass. As they rounded a bend in the road I saw that they were a great, hulking young farmer and his sweetheart. They were talking in shivery tones of the Wild Man, and now and then glancing behind them as if they half expected his approach.

I am very, very smart at times, and it popped into my head that it would be a capital joke to play Wild Man for a minute and see the big booby and his girl run. I dropped off my long coat, and leaving my horse behind the bushes, sneaked out into the road and close behind the couple without their having heard my approach. Uttering my best howl, I prepared to roll on the ground with laughter as they fled. That is where I reckoned without having consulted the landlord's figures, so to speak.

The couple jumped almost out of their skins and gave a great cry of fright, and then, before I could begin to roll, the young farmer struck me a tremendous lick with a club which I had not till then noticed, and which he had evidently carried for the entertainment of the Wild Man. As a consequence I rolled on the ground with my jaw knocked out of place, and in my agony howled lustily, but unable to utter an intelligible word.

I heard my horse give a snort of affright and charge off down the road. The young farmer hurled himself upon me and proceeded, to the best of his ability, to tear me up, and his girl stood near with the club and gave me a lick every time she could get a chance to hit me. In vain I struggled and fought; the young farmer was too many for me and smote me hip and thigh, nearly drove my head out of sight in the bosom of Mother Earth, and seemed desirous of dismembering me completely. In vain I tried to explain; my dislocated jaw, which caused me excruciating pain, prevented me from uttering a coherent word, and all I could do was to yell in an untranslatable but energetic way.

After he had given me the most thorough flailing I ever heard of, the farmer and his girl dragged me off to the school-house, in spite of my mumbling and incoherent appeals.

My appearance there was the cause of more excitement than I had anticipated. The literary society broke up in confusion. Everybody who had at any time lied and said that they had seen the Wild Man, now shouted a triumphant "I told ye so!" One citizen, who had a hog mysteriously assassinated some time previously, was uproariously anxious that I should hang then and there. Somebody suggested that I should be burned at the stake, or something of that kind. It was loudly surmised that I had eaten Hank Lunkhead's baby, which had been missing for two days a week before. Said baby had been discovered to have drowned himself in the well, but that made no difference. I looked bad enough to have eaten him, and probably would have done so had he not drowned himself in self-defense. That was about the way the excitable ones in the crowd seemed to reason.

Calmer counsel prevailed, and with two ropes around my neck and two strong men holding each, I was led, a mumbling, growling, agonized captive, to town. The pain in my jaw was so great at times that I could not refrain from yelling, and on such occasions the holders of the ropes would nearly choke me to death to keep me from biting them, and the young farmer with the club would draw near, all ready to lay me out if I overpowered the holders of the ropes.

When we reached town I was ready to give up the ghost, and my captors had decided that I was poisonous. Then the rumpus aroused my friend, at whose house I had donned my costume, and he speedily identified all that was left of me. I was released and my jaw was set, and I crawled off home more dead than alive.

My overcoat was lost, and when, next day, I learned that my runaway horse had fallen off from a bluff and broken his neck, I felt that smartness had brought its own reward.

All Christendom professes to receive the bible as the word of God, and what does it avail? Out of this "Inspired volume" comes Romanism, for Rome believes in the bible. Out of it comes Mormonism, for the Mormon believes in the bible. Out of it comes Episcopalianism, Methodism, Swedenborgianism, and all other sects whose name is legion. All these claim a divine sanction from the bible, and yet they are strongly arrayed against one another, rejecting each other's interpretations of the book, and each aiming to exterminate all the rest.—[William L. Garrison.]