

THE OREGON SENTINEL

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2. If any subscriber desires the discontinuance of their subscription, the publisher may continue to send them until all arrearages are paid.

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THIRTEEN AT TABLE.

When I was a sub-lieutenant on board the —, stationed at Marcellus, an event happened which made a remarkable impression upon me. The doctor of our ship was a great friend of mine. He was clever and a thoroughly estimable man, but he had one failing. He was extremely superstitious. No old woman ever gave more credence to signs and omens than he did, and he was an almost abject fatalist.

One evening we had all sat down to dinner in the ward-room, the doctor presiding at the head of the table. We were as usual a very merry party, and jokes were circulating freely. The soup and fish had just been removed, when we observed the doctor's face suddenly change, while he looked around with an expression of great anxiety.

"Hullo, doctor!" one or two of us exclaimed "what's the matter?"

His face grew whiter and whiter, and, rising up, he said, in a voice trembling with emotion:

"Stop the dinner! For God's sake stop the dinner!"

"Why?" was the simultaneous query.

"We are thirteen at dinner."

A loud laugh greeted this reply.

"Is that all?" we asked; for we thought the doctor must at least have discovered that the soup and fish were poisoned.

"We must not go on! It is certain death to one of us!" gasped the doctor; "we must send for some one else directly to make up fourteen."

In vain we laughed and protested. In vain we endeavored to point out that the harm, if any, was already done. Nothing would satisfy the doctor but that a fourteenth should be procured at all hazards. We grew weary of opposition, and our dinner was growing cold, so at last we yielded, and the mess steward was dispatched on deck to find the first man who could be pitched upon.

In spite of this fellow's assurance that he had already dined, and consternation at the idea of joining the select party below, he was immediately conducted to the ward room. The doctor ordered an extra plate to be laid, and bade him sit down and ask no questions, which, after giving vent to the ejaculation, "Lord, sir!" he consented to do.

The dinner proceeded as merrily as ever; our rough and somewhat bashful guest appearing to enjoy our good fare. At desert the hilarity reached its height, and we proposed song after song, and toast after toast. When it came to John May's turn to sing, he curiously enough selected the old rhyme:

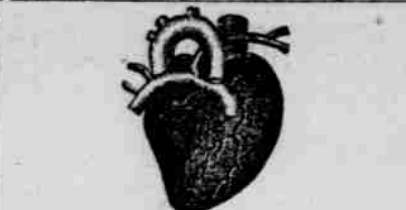
"For who can tell where we may be,
To be happy another year?"

We all seized the idea as appropriate after the doctor's croaking, and we shouted out the chorus with loud laughter and many sidelong hits at his superstition. He still seemed very uneasy, and when dinner was over he said to me: "Ah, you young fellows may laugh, but, mark my words, something will come of this! If I had only discovered it in time!"

"Before the soup came round?" I answered, laughing. "No, don't wish that, sir, or it would have grown cold while we were waiting for number fourteen."

The doctor groaned and turned away.

It may scarcely be believed, but it is an actual fact that, before two months had passed, I and several others who had been present at the dinner assisted in dragging the corpse of poor John May out of the harbor. He had fallen into the water while stepping over some barges to reach the ship's boat which was lying beyond them, and was almost instantly drowned. The event shocked us all greatly, and we were reminded of the chorus of the poor fellow's song, which seemed to have been a premonition of his unfortunate fate. It gave rise to much discussion among us, and we blamed the doctor considerably, saying that the catastrophe was partly caused by yielding to his superstition, and that if he had been content to let the number alone, and had never summoned John May to the table, we should not have attributed his death to the accident of our having begun dinner with thirteen. He, however, insisted on our regarding the event as the practical illustration of his theory. It was certainly very strange that the poor fellow who was called upon to take the fourteenth place should be the victim—"Golden Era."



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