

The Phonograph and the Graft

By O. HENRY

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I LOOKED in at the engine room of the Bloomfield-Carter Manufacturing company, limited, for the engineer was Kirksy, and there was a golden half hour between the time he shut down steam and washed up that I coveted.

I found Kirksy resting, with his pipe lit, smut faced and blue overalled.

"Tis a fair afternoon," I said, "but bids to be colder."

"Did I ever tell you," began Kirksy honorably, "about the time Henry Horsecollar and me took a phonograph to South America?" And I felt ashamed of my subterfuge and dropped into the wooden chair he kicked toward me.

"Henry was a quarter breed, quarterback Cherokee, educated east in the idioms of football and west in contraband whisky, and a gentleman, same as you or me. He was easy and romping in his ways; a man about six foot, with a kind of rubber tire movement."

"Henry and me met at Texarkana and figured out this phonograph scheme. He had \$300 which came to him out of a land allotment in the reservation. I had run down from Little Rock on account of a distressful scene I had witnessed on the street there. A man stood on a box and passed around some gold watches, screw case, stem winders, Elgin movement, very elegant. Twenty bucks they cost you over the counter. At \$3 the crowd fought for the tickers. The man happened to find a valise full of them handy, and he passed them out like putting hot biscuits on a plate. The backs were hard to unscrew, but the crowd put its ear to the case, and they ticked mollifying and agreeable. Three of those watches were genuine tickers, but the rest, they were only kickers."

"Hey? Why, empty cases, with one of them horny black bugs that fly around electric lights in 'em. Them bugs kick off minutes and seconds industriously and beautiful. The man I was speaking of cleaned up \$288 and went away, because he knew that when it came to wind watches in Little Rock an entomologist would be needed, and he wasn't one."

"So, as I say, Henry had \$300 and I had \$288. The phonograph idea was Henry's, but I took to it freely, being fond of machinery of all kinds."

"We bought a fine phonograph in Texarkana—one of the best make—and half a trunkful of records. We packed up and took the T. and P. for New Orleans. From that celebrated center of molasses and disfranchised coon songs we took a steamer for—yes, I think it was South America or Mexico—I am full of inability to divulge the location of it—'tis on the rural delivery map, 'tis colored yellow on the map and branded with the literature of cigar boxes."

"We landed on a smiling coast at a town they denominated by the name, as near as I can recollect, of Sore-toe-kangaroo. 'Twas a palatable enough place to look at. The houses were clean and white, sticking about among the scenery like hard boiled eggs served with lettuce. There was a block of skyscraper mountains in the suburbs, and they kept pretty quiet, like they were laying one finger on their lips and watching the town. And the sea was remarking 'Sh-sh-sh' on the beach, and now and then a ripe coconut would fall kerflop in the sand, and that was all there was doing."

"The captain went ashore with us and offered to conduct what he seemed to like to call the obsequies. He introduced Henry and me to the United States consul and a roan man, the head of the department of mercenary and licentious disposition, the way it read upon his sign."

"I touch here again a week from today," says the captain.

"By that time," we told him, "we'll be amassing wealth in the interior towns with our galvanized prima donna and correct imitations of Sousa's band excavating a march from a tin mine."

"'Ye'll not," says the captain. 'Ye'll be hypnotized. Any gentleman in the audience who kindly steps upon the stage and looks this country in the eye will be converted to the hypothesis that he's but a fly in the Elgin creamery. Ye'll be standing knee deep in the surf waiting for me, and your machine for making hamburger steak out of the hitherto respected art of music will be playing 'There's no place like home.'"

"Henry skinned a twenty off his roll and received from the bureau of mercenary dispositions a paper bearing a red seal and a dialect story, and no change."

"Then we got the consul full of red wine and struck him for a horoscope. He was a thin, youngish kind of man. I should say past fifty, sort of French-Irish in his affections and puffed up with disconsolation. Yes, he was a flattened kind of a man in whom drink lay stagnant, inclined to complacency and misery. Yes, I think he was a kind of Dutchman, being very sad and genial in his ways."

"The marvelous invention," he says, "entitled the phonograph has never before invaded these shores. The people have never heard it. They would not believe it if they should. Simple bearded children of nature, progress has never condemned them to accept the work of a can opener, as an over-

ture, and ragtime might incite them to a bloody revolution. But you can try the experiment. The best chance you have is that the populace may not wake up when you play. There's two ways," says the consul, "they may take it—they may become inebriated with attention, like an Atlanta colonel listening to 'Marching Through Georgia,' or they will get excited and transpose the key of the music with an ax and your selves into a dungeon. In the latter case," says the consul, "I'll do my duty by cabling to the state department, and I'll wrap the stars and stripes around you when you come to be shot, and threaten them with the vengeance of the greatest gold export and financial reserve nation on earth. The flag is full of bullet holes now," says the consul, "made in that way. Twice before," says the consul, "I have cabled our government for a couple of gunboats to protect American citizens. The first time the department sent me a pair of gun boots. The other time was when a man named Pease was going to be executed here. They referred that appeal to the secretary of agriculture. Let us now disturb the senator behind the bar for a subsequence of the red wine."

"Thus soliloquized the consul of Sore-toe-kangaroo to me and Henry Horsecollar."

"But, notwithstanding, we hired a room that afternoon in the Calle de los Angeles, the main street that runs along the shore, and put our trunks there. 'Twas a good sized room, dark and cheerful, but small. 'Twas on a



"A big, fine looking white man looked in," various street, diversified by houses and conservatory plants. The peasantry of the city passed to and fro on the fine pasturage between the sidewalks. 'Twas, for the world, like an opera chorus when the Royal Kafoozlum is about to enter."

"We were rubbing the dust off the machine and getting fixed to start business the next day when a big, fine looking white man in white clothes stopped at the door and looked in. We extended the invitations, and he walked inside and sized us up. He was chewing a long cigar and wrinkling his eyes, meditative, like a girl trying to decide which dress to wear to the party."

"'New York?' he says to me finally. 'Originally, and from time to time,' I says. 'Hasn't it rubbed off yet?'"

"'It's simple,' says he, 'when you know how. It's the fit of the vest. They don't cut vests right anywhere else. Costs, maybe, but not vests.'"

"The white man looks at Henry Horsecollar and hesitates."

"'Injun,' says Henry; 'tame Injun.'"

"'Mellinger,' says the man—'Homer P. Mellinger. Boys, you're confiscated. You're babes in the wood without a chaperon or referee, and it's my duty to start you going. I'll knock out the props and launch you proper in the pellucid waters of Sore-toe-kangaroo. You'll have to be christened, and if you'll come with me I'll break a bottle of wine across your bows, according to Hoyle.'"

"Well, for two days Homer P. Mellinger did the honors. That man cut ice in Sore-toe-kangaroo. He was it. He was the Royal Kafoozlum. If me and Henry was babes in the wood, he was a Robin Redbreast from the topmost bough. Him and me and Henry Horsecollar locked arms and toted that phonograph around and had vassal and diversion. There was vino tinto and vino blanco to drink with every tune. The aborigines had acquirements of a pleasant thing in the way of drinks that gums itself to the recollection. They chop off the end of a green coconut and pour in on the liquor of it French brandy and gin. We had them and other things."

"Mine and Henry's money was counterfeited. Everything was on Homer P. Mellinger. That man could find rolls of bills in his clothes where Herrmann the Wizard couldn't have conjured out an omelet. He could have founded universities and had enough left to buy the colored vote of his country. Henry and me wondered what his graft was. One evening he told us."

"'Boys,' says he, 'I've deceived you. Instead of a painted butterfly, I'm the hardest worked man in this country. Ten years ago I landed on its shores and two years ago on the point of its jaw. Yes; I reckon I can get the decision over this ginger cake commo-

(Continued on page 6)

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MAKE ANNUAL EVENT.

LOS ANGELES, June 14.—Initial steps have been taken to make the ocean yacht race to Honolulu an annual event. If the plans suggested by those interested are followed the contest will be over a course from San Francisco to the Hawaiian Islands instead of from San Pedro for a trophy which it is said will be offered by the Hawaiian yacht club. It is expected that should the plan carry, at least ten vessels will be entered for next year's race.

WOMEN ADMITTED.

CHICAGO, June 14.—The international association of auctioneers at its convention here yesterday adopted a resolution allowing women to become members of the association.

Complaint was made that many places exact an exorbitant fee. In some places this fee reaches \$50 a day.

Several speakers declared that portion of the law wherein masters in chancery are made auctioneers of estates works injustice to the heirs as an experienced auctioneer would secure better results.

The session will close today with the election of officers and selection of place for the convention of 1907.

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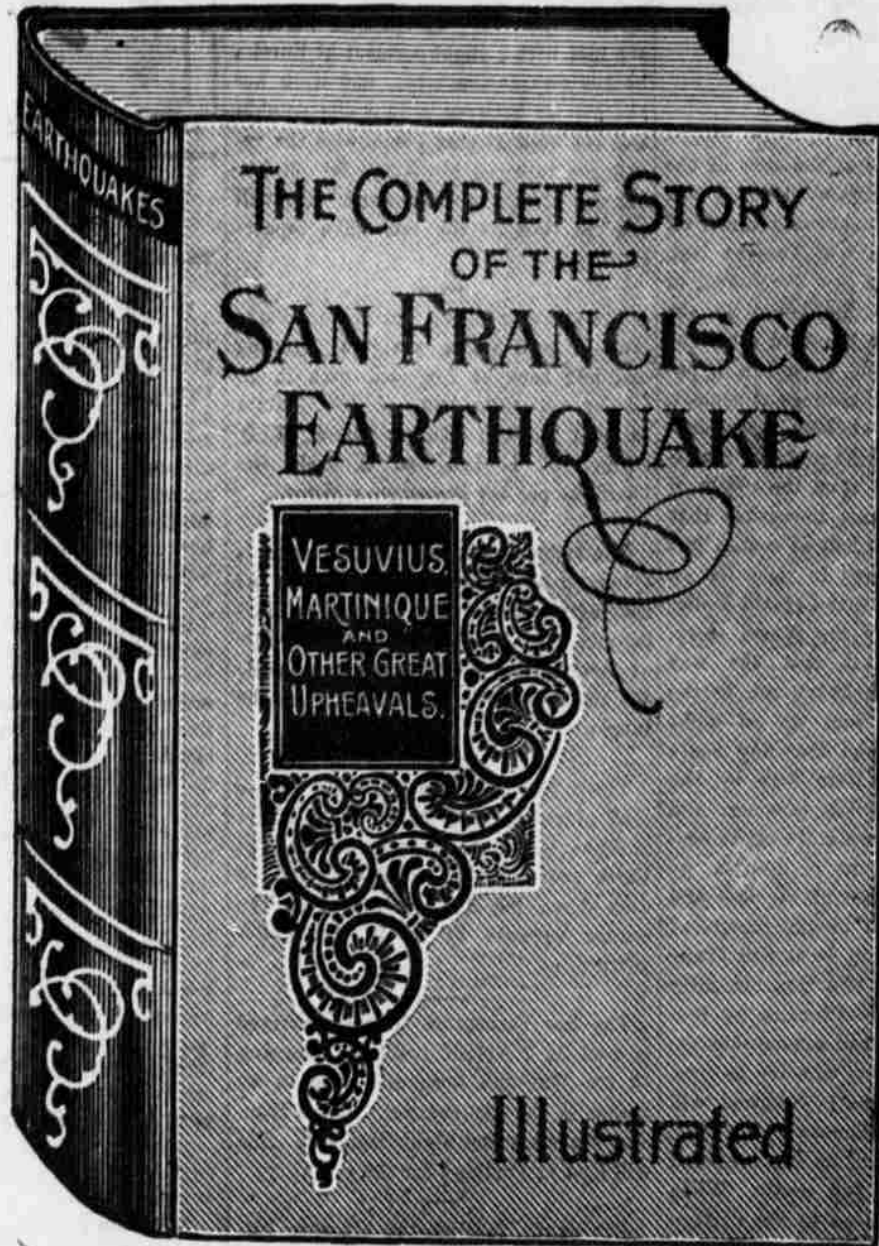
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