

Through The Fiery Furnace.

By EDGAR WELTON COOLEY.

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On one end of the bench in front of Dillingham's general store sat Abner Moon, widower, peaked face protruding in front of his thin gray locks, one leg across the other lank knee, jackknife in his right hand, shingle in his left. On the other end of the bench squatted Bige Ellet, bachelor, fat legs spraddled out, pudgy feet just touching the ground, black pipe in mouth.

"Some folks can do a thunderin' lot of thinkin' not to amount to much in this world, seems to me," said Abner.

"Meanin'?" said Bige.

"Meanin'," replied Abner, peeling a long shaving off the shingle, "some folks can sit around for an hour sunnin' themselves and never say a word to show their sociability."

"Waal," drawled Bige, puffing vigorously, "I was thinkin' what an all-fired good thing it is that Salem Center has so many baldheaded old widowers struttin' around like peacocks in a peach orchard."

"Why?" asked Abner, squinting at Bige.

"Cause town would be fuller of old maids and widders than the Sahary desert is of sand burs."

Abner fell to whittling the shingle spitefully. "I reckon," he mused, "that it just ain't right to fly in the face of Providence, and if the good Lord had ever intended Bige Ellet for a Romeo he'd 'a' made him a little more handsome and a trifle less hippopotamus."

"Maybe I'm a hippopotamus," said Bige calmly, "or a alligator or a 'nosoross, but I ain't losin' no sleep yearnin' for a postgraduate course in matrimony."

"By Jingo!" cried Abner, leaping to his feet and shaking his fist. "Don't taunt me, Bige Ellet; don't ye do it!"

"Ain't goin' to taunt ye, but if you don't keep out of my way I'll step on ye, and I've seen a moon fore now that didn't have nothin' left to it but a rim."

"You're a consarned old blow pont!" stormed Abner. "You're a jealous old Jessecat! You know I courted Sereny Simkins fore you did, and you think you can cut me out, but ye can't do it."

For a moment he gazed up and down in front of the sneering Bige, then darted up the street. Bige sat on the bench and watched him until he disappeared in the distance. Then he arose slowly and brushed his clothes with his bandanna handkerchief.

"Can't, eh?" he soliloquized, glancing in the direction whence Abner had fled. "Can't, eh? Reckon I'll just wander down that way and see."

Miss Simkins was out by the willow hedge gathering green brush in a clothes basket when Abner came shuffling along the road. He was trembling with indignation and fatigue and sat down on the well curb to rest. But he hadn't been there ten minutes when he saw Bige Ellet, puffing like a freight train on a steep grade, steering for Miss Simkins' modest abode.

"Jumpin' Jericho!" he cried, gazing frantically about for some avenue of escape.

Already the front gate was blocked by the bachelor's pompous form. In the rear Miss Simkins was coming up the path. So with the agility of a squirrel he darted into the smokehouse, climbed a ladder and squatted silently amid the gloomy rafters, from which dangled numerous uncured hams and pieces of side meat.

Straight to the open door came Bige, then paused and removed his hat as Miss Simkins approached. "Why, how d'ye do?" he began, bowing effusively.

"Oh, Mr. Ellet," replied Miss Simkins, "I'm so glad you came. I need somebody to help me smoke that meat."

"Why, certainly, mum," said Bige, his rosy face turning scarlet with pleasure.

He took the basket from her and dumped its contents upon a pile of leaves on the middle of the smokehouse floor, then struck a match and touched it to the leaves.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Abner from his elevated perch as a thin cloud of smoke began rising. "I wish a cyclone would come along. I wish the town would catch fire. I wish something would happen to make 'em go away. I don't know what I am goin' to do."

"It is certainly very kind of you, Abilah," said Miss Simkins, blushing. "A lone woman has a hard time trying to get along." She sighed effectively.

"Must have a thunderin' hard time to want to marry a widderer with six children," said Bige dryly.

A great cloud of smoke was rising from the fire. Abner was nearly choked and was rolling his eyes desperately to keep from sneezing. The tears were running down his cheeks in streams.

"Why, Mr. Ellet," began Miss Simkins amazedly, "what do you mean?"

"Heard that you were goin' to marry that old idjit of an Abner Moon," came Bige's complaining voice. Then the door closed with a bang, and a bolt flew into place.

Miss Simkins sat down on the door-

step and looked up at Bige. "I don't care," she said. "Mr. Moon has been a very kind friend of mine, and, besides, some men don't seem to have had sand enough to declare their feelings."

Bige blushed scarlet and stammered. "Really, Miss—Miss Simkins," he said, "I—I—that is, I long have—have nourished a—a deep regard—"

But just then from somewhere within the dark recesses of the smokehouse came an unearthly noise.

"Kertychoo—oo—oo! Good Lord—ker-cho—o—o!"

"Mercy sakes!" cried Miss Simkins, glancing at the closed door affrightedly. "What in the world was that?"

"I—I dunno, mum," gasped Bige. "Sounded like a cat."

"No, 'tain't no cat. There ain't no cat around the place."

"Kertychoo! Ky—choo—oo! O—O Lord!"

"It's a man, and he's in the smokehouse," cried Miss Simkins, trembling. "He's choking to death. Let him out—oh, please let him out, Mr. Ellet!"

"Hain't ought to let him out," replied Bige. "Ought to keep him in there till he's cooked to a crisp. He's a thief, and he's after your meat, mum."

"Open this door!" coughed Abner. "I'm smoked up worse than a brier pipe. I'm blacker than the ace of spades. I've got to get out. You can laugh at me if you want to; you can laugh till you can't see straight, but I can't stay here no longer." He was wheezing like a blacksmith's bellows with a rest in it.

"Who be ye?" demanded Bige cautiously. "And what be ye doin' in there?"

"I'm Abner Moon, if ye must know," roared a weak voice, "and I'm under-



"I FEEL LIKE A HALF-CURED HAM,"

goin' the paups of slow torture. My lungs are fuller of smoke than a consarned old chimney, and I feel like a half-cured ham."

"Oh, mercy!" cried Miss Simkins. "Poor Mr. Moon! Poor Abner! Let him out this instant, Mr. Ellet."

Bige threw open the door, and Abner staggered into the light of day. He was covered from head to foot with soot and ashes.

"Well, well!" began Bige. "It is Abner Moon, but what a lookin' Moon! He's gone into total eclipse. He's never goin' to shine any more!"

"I'm burnt all over," moaned Abner. "I'm toasted on the outside and fried on the inside. I'm charred—"

"But what was you doin' in there?" demanded Bige. "However came you to be in there anyhow?"

Abner put his hands suddenly to his head. "I dunno," he said. "I was taken sick suddenly. I didn't know what I was doin' or where I was goin'. I was dizzy. I was dizzier than a yellow cat with a conipation fit, and I'm gittin' dizzy ag'in." He rolled his eyes dolefully, then looked at Miss Simkins. "I don't like to bother you, mum, but if I could lie down—I'm afraid I'm goin' to faint."

"Oh, dear, dear!" said Miss Simkins sympathetically, taking him gently by the arm and leading him toward the house. "Poor, poor Abner!"

Bige watched them a moment in silence. Then he winked one eye cunningly and chuckled to himself.

"Mebbe I'd better go and get the doctor, mum," he said. "Pease to me he's a pretty sick man."

"Yes, do," replied Miss Simkins. "And hurry—oh, please hurry!"

Bige hurried. Fifteen minutes later he was coming down the street with Dr. Lavender. He was talking low and grinning. The doctor was nodding his head and grinning.

Abner was lying on the horsehair sofa. Miss Simkins was bathing his forehead with cold water and holding one of his hands in hers.

Dr. Lavender felt of his pulse and looked at his tongue. Then he shook his head solemnly.

"Goodness, mum," he said, "it's the worst attack of nervous excitement I ever saw. I do believe he's been getting mad at something or somebody. He ought to control his temper. He's threatened with a rush of blood to the spine, and that would kill him. If you will get me a piece of ice, mum."

Miss Simkins hurried to the kitchen and in a moment returned with some ice in a pan. Dr. Lavender took a piece the size of a hickory nut and looked at Abner.

"Do you think you could sit up a minute, Mr. Moon?" he asked.

"I—I dunno," Abner replied weakly, "but I'll try."

He put one arm around Miss Simkins' neck and raised himself. The

doctor dropped the ice down his back. "Jumpin' Jericho!" he screamed, falling back upon the sofa. "What d'ye do that for? Tryin' to give me spinal meningitis?"

"It's just as I feared," said Dr. Lavender. "He's gettin' violent."

"You're a consprin' old Nero!" yelled Abner. "You've plotted with Bige Ellet to make a fool of me. But I ain't goin' to let ye do it. I'm goin' home this very minute."

"There, there, Abner!" said Miss Simkins solicitously. "Do try and calm yourself."

"I'll try, Sereny," he replied meekly. "You see, mum," explained the doctor, "they always act that way when they have hysteria. They always think you are trying to torture 'em. If you'll kindly get some cloth, mum, and some mustard, we'll make some plasters. Let's see." Bige was hunting for something under his chair. His handkerchief was stuffed in his mouth, and he was blue in the face. "We'll need one plaster for his chest, another for his back and one for the sole of each foot."

"You're not goin' to put them fool things on me!" howled Abner, sitting up and glaring as if he was going stark mad. "I tell you, I ain't goin' to let ye make any bigger idjit of me than ye have already."

"Mebby we'd better chloroform him," suggested Bige. "Mebby we'd better strap him to a board."

"It's too bad to have to put these things on anybody," soliloquized Dr. Lavender dryly while he and Bige Ellet were affixing the plasters. "Would not wonder but they'd disgrace him for life."

"And he ain't any too good lookin' as it is, goodness knows," added Bige sympathetically.

"Go ahead and taunt me," growled Abner in a muffled voice from the environment of his disarranged clothing.

"There," said the doctor finally, fastening the last band and rising to his feet. "Now we must keep him warm. He ought to have a couple of blankets and three or four bedquilts on top of him."

"Sereny," observed Abner a few moments later, peering out from beneath a mountain of bedclothes like a rabbit peeking from under a straw stack. "I don't feel like I was very long for this world. I'm a half-cured ham covered with mustard. I feel like a moldy old sandwich." He turned his face toward the wall and groaned.

"Oh, Abner," said Miss Simkins cheerfully, "do try and bear up, Abner!"

"And, Sereny," he resumed weakly, "when they take them poultices offen me I'll be the reddest Moon anybody ever saw. I'll be so lurid that I won't dare to go home for fear of givin' my children the scarlet fever."

"There, there," crooned Miss Simkins cheerily; "don't you go to worryin' about them children, Abner."

He turned and looked at her tenderly. "Sereny," he said, "would you really like to look after 'em—always? Would you care to marry?"

He paused suddenly and rolled his eyes like one in mortal agony. His breath came in gasps. His mouth was wide open.

"Fire! Fire!" he roared suddenly, trying desperately to push the covers off. "I'm ablaze from one end of me to the other. I'm a ragin' conflagration. In just three minutes there won't be nothin' left of me but a bed of coals. I'm sufferin' spontaneous combustion. I tell ye! Won't somebody please put me out?"

Miss Simkins wrung her hands in fright. "Oh, Dr. Lavender!" she cried. "Oh, Mr. Ellet! Do something for him, can't you?"

"Mebby I'd better throw a bucket of water on him," said Bige. "Mebby I'd better turn in a fire alarm."

"Consarn ye!" growled Abner. "I want ye to take them things offen me. They've drawn my wishbone and my spinal column together already, and the soles of my feet are clinging to my kneecaps like a stone bruise to a boy's heel."

"Be there any blisters on ye?" asked Dr. Lavender.

"There's just one," snorted Abner, "but it's bigger than a barn door, and I'm right in the middle of it."

"Too bad," said the doctor solemnly. "When plasters take effect as quick as that it shows his nervous system is a total wreck." He opened his medicine case, took out a bottle, shook it and held it between him and the light.

"I'm afraid, mum," he resumed sadly, "I'll have to give him a dose of this, after all. I hate to do it, but it's the only chance left us." He poured a little into a spoon. Abner was watching him with a florid but anxious face.

"It may cure him, mum," he resumed gravely. "If it does, he will be a well man in ten minutes, but if it doesn't, mum, it will kill him deadlier than a nit."

Abner clutched the bedclothes convulsively. He tried to speak, but he could only gurgle like elder pouring out of a jug, and a cold sweat broke out all over him.

"N-n-no," he gasped, throwing off the covers and sitting up on the edge of the sofa. "I won't take it! There's nothin' ailla' me but just plain foolishness. I came here to court Sereny, and when I saw Bige Ellet courtin' her in the smokehouse, I ain't goin' to marry her. I wouldn't marry no woman to marry a consarned idjit that'll let a couple of heartless heretics make a dogged dunce of him."

"But I want to marry you!" cried Miss Simkins, laughing and weeping by turns. "I don't care if you have

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been offered up as a burnt sacrifice. You've passed through the fiery furnace triumphant, and I'll marry you if you say the word, Abner."

She put one arm around his neck and rested her head affectionately upon his shoulder.

"Ugh!" groaned Abner, twisting his face into a horrible grimace. "I love ye, Sereny, and I'll marry ye, but please don't pillar your head on that poultice, Sereny."

THE ANDEAN WALL.

Crossing the Chilean Cordillera in Winter and in Summer.

The wall of the Andes begins at the Caribbean and runs all the way down the western edge of South America until it trails off into the Antarctic like a jagged dragon's tail. It is a very high wall and a very wide one—sometimes scores and sometimes hundreds of miles across—and except in a few places all but impassable. There is the Oroya railroad in central Peru, the highest in the world, which will take you from the drowsy tropical coast at breakfast time and by early afternoon set you on the roof of the divide, shivering and breathing fast, 15,500 feet above the sea. There is a railroad up to Lake Titicaca from Mollendo, in southern Peru, which crosses the shoulder of the Andes at an altitude about a thousand feet lower, and there is a railroad running down into Chile and the coast from the Bolivian plateau. The only railroad highway which crosses the continent, however, is that which climbs the Chilean mountains to the pass of Uspallata and runs thence across the pampa to Buenos Aires. Some day this will be a through line from sea to sea, and in a dozen or more places tunnel gangs are nibbling

under the upper cordillera. But now it is open only during the summer, and even then the fourteen kilometers over the Cumbre, or summit of the pass, must be made by stage. In winter no attempt is made to cross, and from Mendoza, in the Argentine foothills, over to Los Andes, on the Chilean side, about 150 miles, the road is closed.

The Andes in the loftiest of which is Aconcagua's 24,000 feet, and the pass itself is at not far from 13,000—3,500 meters, to be exact. During the winter—the months of our northern summer—it is buried in snow; the deadly temporal is likely at any time to whirl down on the traveler, and crossing the cordillera is as different a thing from crossing it in summer as crossing a prairie carpeted with spring violets is different from venturing into it during a blizzard, when a man may lose his way and freeze to death a furlong from the ranch house door. Whoever tries to cross after the 1st of June is supposed to take his life in his hands. —Scribner's.

Antiquity of the Oath.

The oath is practically as old as history. As far back as we can go we find some form of appeal to the forces that are stronger than man. The oath calling God to witness is of course much later than that made in the name of the powers of nature, fire, flood and tempest or the ferocity of wild beasts or the terror of the pestilence. The gesture of the raised hand and the formula, "So help me God," are of Jewish-Christian origin, although the ancient nations swore in the name of their gods.

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