

A DEFECTIVE WARRANT

By M. QUAD

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In every village in the land almost every house owner has a lot big enough to make a garden and raise the most of his vegetables. It is a custom that may have descended from the pilgrim fathers that when the crop is bountiful and there are cucumbers and tomatoes to waste to invite the neighbors less fortunate to open the gate and help themselves. This custom had prevailed in the village of Kernstown for many long years. There was one exception to it, however, and that was the case of Elder Wickshaw and his wife. He had been elder of a church since a church had been established in the place, and he had long been known for his stinginess.

The elder's wife would have been open handed with the neighbors, but her husband had said to her:

"If we have got any neighbors who haven't cowcumpers, onions and tomatoes in plenty it is due to their shiftlessness and they shan't have any of ours."

"But they are going to waste," would reply the wife.

"No, they ain't. They will enrich the soil for another season. Even if they won't I am not going to encourage shiftlessness in anybody."

Among those whom he denominated as shiftless was Solomon Graves. He wasn't exactly lazy, but yet he might have had more energy. He had a small garden, but it was hostile soil. He passed and repassed the elder's house many, many times, and always stopped and looked over the fence, but the elder never came out and invited him to help himself. At length, when Solomon saw that things were going to waste, he determined to help himself without the invitation.

In walking in the garden at sunset one evening the elder particularly noticed six large cucumbers on a certain vine. He walked out again soon after sunrise and there were no cucumbers there. In place of them, in the soft soil, were the tracks of the villain who had visited the spot during the night and despoiled the vine. He hastened into the house to say to his wife:

"Marlar, there is an unhung villain in Kernstown."

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed, with a start of surprise.

"And that unhung villain entered our garden during the night and picked and carried away six of our choicest cowcumpers."

And after a hasty breakfast the elder took the trail so plain in the soil and followed it over the fence into the alley and from there to the house of Solomon Graves, a quarter of a mile away.

In ten minutes more he was at the house of the justice of the peace for the village, one Hiram Brown, before whom two lawsuits had been tried in about eight years. He felt all the dignity, however, of his official position and was not to be gainsaid as to legal points.

"Judge," said the elder as he entered in haste, "Solomon Graves has stolen six cowcumpers from my garden. I want a warrant for his arrest, and I want him sent to jail before sundown."

When the warrant had been filled out his honor handed it over to the elder to read, and it was but a moment before the latter exclaimed:

"Here, judge; this won't do. I told you Solomon Graves had stolen six cowcumpers out of my garden."

"But the warrant says so."

"But you haven't spelled it right. You haven't got the cowcumpers in at all. What you have got is 'kucumpers,' when it should be cowcumpers. You can't hold Sol on a warrant like that."

"Look here, elder," said the judge as he rose up and puffed out his bosom, "have you come here to teach me how to spell or to get a warrant for Solomon Graves?"

"But you probably made a slip of the pen," lamely explained the man who wanted justice.

"There are no slips in my law, sir."

"But they are cowcumpers."

"I never heard of such things. As for kucumpers, I have a hundred in my own garden. That warrant will send Sol to the county jail as fast as a horse can gallop. I want no man to come here thinking he can teach me my business."

The schoolma'am was finally called in to settle the question of spelling.

The wondering teacher came, and when the case had been stated to her she hesitated a moment and then said:

"I can decide the question at issue, and I hope neither of you will bear me any hard feelings for so doing. You are both of you wrong. The name of the vegetable you are disputing about is 'cucumber,' and you pronounce the 'c' softly."

"I'll be durned if I do!" shouted his honor.

"And I'll be durned in the same way!" shouted the elder, making use of a swear word for the first time in thirty years.

In a few hours the whole village heard of the dispute and was split into factions. There were the "cows" and the "kus" and the "coos," and there was a row that didn't quiet down for a year or more. More than fifty pocket dictionaries were sent for and consulted, and although they settled the pronunciation for some, others continued to hang out and are hanging out still. But perhaps the main point of the whole affair was that Solomon Graves was never arrested for the heinous crime he committed in Elder Wickshaw's garden that summer night.

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