The Last SHORT STORY.

BY D'ERF MAILLIW.

The Senator and his fellow judges had read stories in the great Collier's short story contest of last year until their eyes were almost blind, their brains almost too weary for consecutive thought and their ideas almost too chaotic from the long continued strain to allow an unbiased decision, when the distinguished statesman-scholar took from the table the last of the many thousands of manuscripts sent in, lighted a fresh Havana, and settled himself wearily in the depths of his big arm chair.

The sigh of satisfaction was still more pronounced, when, as he tore open the envelope, he found but a few pages of typewritten matter, scarcely a thousand words in all, and his "Thank Heaven!" was re-eoched by his companions as they also realized that a short half hour would complete their weeks of self-imposed labor.

There had been silence in the room for several minutes, while the others were thinking of the jumble of ideas that would for months occupy their minds where love and war, humor and pathos had created a heterogeneous mass.

Many of the stories submitted had been of a very high order of merit—some of the very highest—and final decision would, they realized, tax to the utmost their ability to select. Some had been witty and brilliant, some able but verbose, but many, very many, had proven tedious and trashy, and they each and all agreed they would never again care to read even the headlines of any "Short Story."

"God!" exclaimed the Senator, half reverently, half profanely, "and so this was the tragic end of our dear chum of old '71, one of the best and bravest fellows who ever lived."

"For the honor of old Harvard, gentlemen," bowing gravely to his associates, "let me read aloud this last of our short stories."

* * *

He sauntered into Station 17 of the Fire Department, late one stormy afternoon in December, a small, gray-haired, rather weazened specimen of humanity, looking as though he had not made the acquaintance of a square meal for many days. A close observer, however, would have noticed that his eyes were very brigh and keen, his muscles well knit, his gait springy, and would, perhaps, have decided that his physique did not require a very large amount of sustenance and that he was ignorant of the pangs of dyspepsia.

Speaking to no one in particular, he remarked with a peculiar drawl:

"I sometimes think I would enjoy a job of this sort myself. It looks comfortable here."

"Seventeen" was known as the crack company of the force. Its members were all athletes and it had to its credit an unparalleled record of brilliant and impossible rescues.

At these words of the old man, grim smiles broke over the faces of the half dozen men present. A young fireman, one of the most powerful and athletic of the entire department, replied:

"Why, grandpap, we have to do things here when the bell rings. Children aren't allowed on the force."

"I know they are not, sonny, but after all, I judge that age isn't the only thing that counts in this game."

"I'll tell you, grandpap," the young fellow added with a wink to his companions, "if you can follow me in a few little exercises we have here morning and night, I'll resign and recommend you for my place."

"Go ahead, sonny, your friends can act as judge and umpire."

The fireman walked over to the other side of the room, took up the oak handle of a stone breaker, grasped it firmly in both hands, and with a sudden wrench, broke it squarely through the middle. Throwing the two pieces on the floor, he remarked laconically, but in a rather conceited tone, "There's another handle in the corner where I got this one, but I reckon you won't care for it."

"No, perhaps this one will answer," said the old man, taking up the two short pieces and looking them over rather curiously. With a quick jerk he broke one of the halves and then the other, and throwing all the pieces on the floor drawled out:

"Should call that more of a trick than a trial of muscle."

A murmur of astonishment ran round the room, and his young contestant showed no little chagrin, for this had been his favorite exhibition, which none of his associates had been able to accomplish.

The old fellow continued unconcernedly: "Now if it were a trial of strength, perhaps some of you younger fellows could tire the old man out." Then springing like a cat, he caught with his right hand one of the rounds of a ladder by which the men climbed to the second story, and pulled himself up with a single arm. Lowering himself, he repeated this "chinning" operation several times with great rapidity, first with one arm and then the other. Dropping to the floor he strolled over to a pair of 100 pound iron dumb-bells and began handling the heavy weights as if they were hollow or made of wood, passing the bells from hand to hand, poising them on high without a tremor, and finally laying them down without even the noticeable quickening of his breath.

The men looked sharply at one another. Not the best of them could give such an exhibition of strength. The sergeant was just growling, "Old man, who might you be, anyway?" when the alarm gong sounded, the firemen sprang to their places and the little old athlete was temporarily forgotten. A close observer, however, might have noted him dart out of the door and vanish around the corner with the speed of a trained runner.

The fire was in a lately finished apartment house and was well under way when the engines arrived. Ladders were quickly placed against the building, and the brave firemen made many trips, up and down, rescuing the frightened occupants. Finally all the inmates appeared to be saved and efforts were directed toward extinguishing the fire or preventing its spread.

Suddenly, everyone was startled by the wild screams of a child, and a little girl, of not more than ten years, whose scanty apparel gave evidence that she had but just awakened, appeared at a window of the top floor, wringing her little hands and crying in extreme terror, as well she might, for the fierce flames were bursting from all the lower floors of the building. Ladders were set beneath her window, and several of the more daring firemen attempted to ascend only to be driven back with scorched hair and blistered hands.

A cry from the crowd to the right attracted the attention of firemen and spectators, and all held their breath, as a little old man was seen, climbing, with the agility of a cat, the galvanized waterspout on the corner of the building. Reaching the top and grasping the cornice, he rapidly worked himself along until he was directly over the open window. He must have had a wonderfully correct eye, for as he seemed to expect, his left foot reached just to the top of the scaling ladder below him. Placing his foot firmly upon the slight support, he released first one hand and then the other, sliding them along the rough brick side of the building, as if grasping an imaginary rope. Cautiously lowering himself to a stooping position, he suddenly threw himself inside the open window, as the ladder, burned near the middle, fell to the ground with a crash. With scarce a moment's loss of time he reappeared and piled several thick books upon the window sill. Then with the child strapped tightly upon his back, he balanced carefully upon these, reached up and again grasped the cornice. The firemen at once realized what a desperate plan he was about to attempt and quickly placed another ladder just around the corner of the building, not yet reached by the flames. Slowly and carefully the old man, with his precious burden clinging to his shoulders, worked his way along the insecure gutter, his progress at times painfully retarded and the distance seemed great. Would he beat the flames in the race? Would he be able to hold out, encumbered as he was? The great crowd below held its breath. Finally he clutched the projection at the corner and swung his feet upon the rounds of the ladder. Long tongues of fire leaped from the room he had so lately occupied and seemed to be striking at the rescuer and the rescued, in vicious though impotent fury, but strong and willing hands met and relieved the old man of his burden and aided his evidently failing strength down the steep incline.

But the pitcher had been to the well once too often and even while the cheers and words of encouragement were sounding in his ears, the life-blood gushed from his mouth, and sinking heavily to the ground murmured, "Hold tight, little one," and the brave old heart suddenly ceased its busy work.

"He's dead, the dear old fellow, saving a young life of which he had never heard," whispered one to the other, and a young minister, who, from the first, had watched the scene with an intense interest, bent over the body, and detaching a Greek letter badge from the vest, read to the sympathizing crowd, "J. R. H., Harvard, '71," adding revently as he removed his tall hat:

"Greater love hath no man than this."

* * *

To their credit, there were real tears in the eyes of these big, strong men of the world, as in silence they touched glasses with the Senator to the memory of that classmate, whose soul was still marching on, and whose heroic death had added another star to old Harvard's glory.

THEY TOUCHED GLASSES TO THE MEMORY OF THAT CLASSMATE."

CRUSADE AGAINST VICE.

The Great Work of Anthony Comstock has Brought Splendid Results.

Few of those who have read of the accomplishments of Anthony Comstock in his crusades against vice, which have made his name known in every section of the United States, have any idea of the history of the man whose single-handed exertions have been largely responsible for the suppression of obscene literature and photographs. He has been painted as a crank of the weirdest sort, a notoriety seeker, a grafter using a cloak of morality to enrich himself, and everything else wild and dishonest, but he is none of these and to-day his position is stronger and his influence more potent than ever before.

His life has been threatened scores of times by desperate criminals whom he has deprived of their unlawful gains and sent to the penitentiary. Many attempts have been made to stab, shoot and poison him; ground glass has been scattered in his food; infernal machines have been sent him through the mails and by express; he has been accused of unprintable depravity; his honesty has been sneered at and his every motive impugned, but he has gone unscathed amid physical perils and his reputation has escaped the cleverly planned pitfalls designed to ruin him in the eyes of the people and dissipate the enormous power for good which he has built up by almost a lifetime of devotion to a high duty.

Guardian of Youthful Morals.

Mr. Comstock is best known for his work in the prosecution of those who make it a business to sell indecent books, pamphlets and pictures to the young, but as a matter of fact he is equally active in crushing out other forms of vice, not only in New York, but in the country at large. He travels a great deal from city to city and has been a prominent figure in reform crusades in various sections of the country, and has frequently produced important results while others supposed to be helping him were engaged in talking it over.

In a recent interview Mr. Comstock tells for the first time the history of his life and how he abandoned a promising business career, in which he might have made a comfortable fortune, to pursue a vocation which has never netted him more than a living and has left him, in declining years, still with a mortgage of $10,000 on his house at Summit, N. J.

He is sixty-one years of age and was born in Connecticut. His brother Samuel was killed at the battle of Gettysburg and young Anthony took his place until the end of the war. Returning to his native State he entered a grocery store in New Haven, but later went to Tennessee, where he purchased supplies for the Lookout Mountain Institute. His health failed and he went to New York, landing there with $3.45 in his pocket. He got a job at $12 per week, but resigned it to take one at $5 because he thought the new one offered better opportunities for advancement. While eking out an existence on this salary he found that the young men in the store were readers of stories of the vilest sort, and he made his first raid. He learned that a bookseller in a shop a few doors away was selling the books. Young Comstock took a policeman to the place and had the proprietor arrested and in the case involved resurrected what was a dead letter law. He won out.

Progressing rapidly in the commercial world, the young man was soon making $1,500 a year commissions as a salesman, but his abhorrence of vice was in nowise abated. He found a man named Simpson trading in obscene literature and told a policeman his troubles. Instead of arresting the man the policeman warned him to skip out, and that was the pivot on which the life of the young reformer turned. He had the policeman dismissed for the bit of treachery and the papers began to take notice. They asked why he did not go into Nassau street and proceed against the open violators of the law there. Mr. Comstock answered the question by going. On all sides illegal publications were openly for sale, and on March 2, 1872, when he was but twenty-eight years old, he caused the arrest of seven men. The fruits of this were the suppression of 169 different books, the raiding of three publishing houses, the confiscation of $50,000 worth of plates and engravings from one man in Brooklyn, the seizing of $16,000 worth of plates and books from a man in Manhattan, together with six tons of stereotyped plates from his printer, and the destruction of $10,000 worth of bound books belonging to still another man. All of this was accomplished by Mr. Comstock without any assistance whatever from organization or committee.

He Found a Good Angel.

He had started to buy a home and had paid $500 down on it, but giving a mortgage for the rest, he used all he could save from his salary to carry on his crusade. He was a firm believer in prayer and he believed that it was in answer to his supplications that Morris K. Jesup, the philantropist, took him up at that time. Mr. Jesup gave him $500 to help him in the fight and $150 to reimburse him for his expenditures already made.

Since that time Mr. Jesup has taken a deep interest in the Comstock crusades and has given his money freely. A meeting was held at Mr. Jesup's house in 1873 by prominent citizens, the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice was formed and Mr. Comstock was engaged as its agent at a regular salary.

A determined attack on the publishers and vendors of obscene literature and pictures was at once begun, and at a fitting time, for never had there been so many and such brazen violations of the laws of the land and decency as at that time. Advertisements were boldly printed in the papers and thousands of circulars were distributed by the dealers, many of the circulars being placed in the hands of children as they left school. An ineffective law was passed in 1872 against the use of the mails for immoral purposes, but it accomplished nothing, and Mr. Comstock endeavored

ANTHONY COMSTOCK.

to have a more stringent bill put through. Mr. Jesup defrayed his expenses to Washington and Senator Buckingham, of Connecticut, introduced the measure in the Senate and Clinton L. Merriam in the House. Intense opposition was met from a powerful lobby of publishers, but the bill got through by a small margin, and with the aid of Speaker James G. Blaine, was among the last taken up and passed on the night of the final day of the session of 1873.

He Refused the Salary.

After the law went into effect Senator Buckingham asked Mr. Comstock to take a position as postoffice inspector to see that it was enforced. He accepted the position, but declined the salary, on the ground that he might be placed under obligations to politicians, and on March 5th, 1873, was made a special agent of the department, which commission has been renewed each year since then.

So severe was the blow dealt the publishers of the profitable "sub rosa" literature that desperate efforts were made to have the law repealed, and in 1887 a petition containing 70,000 names and headed by Robert G. Ingersoll, backed by unlimited money and the most adroit lobbyists, was presented to Congress asking that the restrictions be removed. Mr. Comstock appeared alone before the House committee which had the repealing measure and in the face of severe and brutal condemnation was successful in preventing favorable action. As part of the campaign against him a book entitled "The Life and Crimes of Anthony Comstock" was published, and seventeen thousand copies distributed. It was stated that he himself was a dealer in the very things against which he waged war, and that he had been arrested by five district attorneys, but he kept on his way, and never once let up in the struggle with evil.

Mr. Comstock is still a postoffice agent without pay. He is allowed five cents per mile mileage and $1.50 per day witness fees while attending courts as a witness, but these payments he turns into the treasury of the society for which he is agent. In this way he has turned over more than $21,000 which he might have kept.

The work which Anthony Comstock has accomplished and is doing to-day is of incalculable benefit to the moral fibre of the maturing citizenship of the Republic. The man is one of God's appointed.

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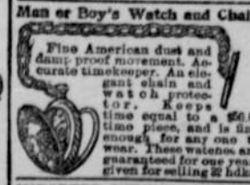

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