

ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, JULY 29, 1899.

DEATH A STEP AWAY.

AN UNLUCKY GAMBLER'S ENGAGEMENT WITH DAVY JONES.

He got on a Ferryboat and Then Something Happened That Drove all Thoughts of Suicide out of his Mind—Attitude of People in Face of Death.

Once in a while it comes to every man's reckoning, said the cross-eyed gambler, 'to figure up how he would face death if it came right down to cases. Taking it all in all, there ain't many of us ever called on to do any figuring of that sort. Either a man gets passed out by some sort of accident so quiet that no time is given for calculating his own feelings, or else he dies of an illness that saps his vitality gradually, so that when the end comes he simply drops away without a struggle. It's a mighty few chance of a man going up against the final with a pair of fieldglasses to his eyes, so to speak, and a first chop view of the whole field. I've always thought that if I was in a crowd, that was on the edge, I'd want to keep tabs on their actions, only I'd probably be too rattled myself to think of anything but keeping a steady jaw. Well, I've had the chance of my life at that, under conditions when I didn't have to get rattled for myself, and I can hereby notify you that once is enough. Interesting? Well, it just sweated interest, that performance did, and I didn't miss much that was going on either. But, as I said, once is all I want to chip in for. Besides, I've got my own life to look after nowadays. Then I didn't have.

'No, I wasn't a dead one. Just getting ready to be. That's all. What the preachers call a Benign Providence had handed me a couple of uppercuts that just about got me ready for a permanent nap. Never mind what. It was just all kinds of trouble and when I boarded the ferryboat in Brooklyn I had calculated to leave my last quarter on the deck for some luckier bettor and just modestly slip over the rail into oblivion. On the whole, I couldn't discover that I made a great hit by living. Once over the rail it would be a clinch, for I couldn't swim a stroke and I figured that my luck wasn't of the kind that would make me jump off a boat into the arms of a life preserver. No matter how far down you are, though, there's always a little natural hesitation when it comes to dropping the flag. I stood out on the rear deck, because I didn't want to be chewed up by the paddle wheels, which is a rough deal even for a suicide. Well, I stood there trying to pick out a patch of river that looked a little less cold and wet than the average, and wishing I'd blown in the quarter for drink to brace me up a little, when I found out that something was happening out in front. There was a great old racket and a tooting and shouting, then we hit something like running into an express train head on, and it was only by a champion clutch that I saved myself from going over the rail before my time. That jarred all the suicide right out of me. I started forward and found a first-class riot going on in the cabin, so I went through the carriage way, and a pretty gay time I had of it, for all the horses in the place were doing quicksteps.

'Getting trampled to death by horses wasn't any part of my programme, and I performed some grand dodging before I reached open air on the other side. Then there was another big bump, and I dived into a post with my head and just about put myself out. When I got to my feet again and things stopped whirling around like a roller coaster I thought I was in an asylum sure. There is a streak of insanity in all of us, and it takes a sudden danger to bring it out. That whole ferryboat load of people were acting like a sideshow to Bloomingdale, yelling and howling and dancing and making faces at each other.

'In the course of a long and unsuccessful life I've had occasion to see my imminent finish a number of times and I hope I can put up as good a front as the next man, but when I felt that solid deck sort of giving its solidity under my feet—or thought I did—I had a powerful hunch to make a running jump of it and trust to landing somewhere. One thing is sure; the little jolt I had got just knocked the suicide game clean out of my memory and I forgot what I was there for. That with the yelling and hooting and general dopeness of the bunch around me, I soon got my wits back and began to size up the situation. But a little beyond us in the fog I could make out one of these big river tugs looking pretty sick, with her bow stove up

into several kinds of lumber. She didn't look as if she was in a position to do us much good if it came down to cases, and as everybody was yelling that we were sinking or words to that effect it looked like a hard deal for the life insurance companies. As near as I could figure out there were about three women to every man aboard the ferryboat, and when it came to a question of figures it seemed to be up to me to get at least one female out of the scraps if I could do it, so I made a bolt into the cabin, cut loose a couple of life preservers and looked around for a lady that looked as if she could float easy. First thing I struck was a 300 pounder; don't believe you could have sunk her with a wagon load of lead, but as she was leaning against the wall trying to faint I tucked her up in the preserver, and then found it wouldn't go around. By sacrificing my last necktie I got it fastened onto her, and all the while she had me by the neck and was praying me not to forsake her. There was more business to be done in other places, and I broke out of that clinch, though it almost cost me my shirt to get loose, and looked for another lady that needed to be saved. Something hit into me pretty hard, and the next I knew a young chap had me by the arm.

'My name's Corder,' he says in a sort of whistly squeak. 'Oh, my God! I'm going to drown. I can't swim. Tell 'em my name's Corder when they find the body. Good-by.'

'He made a break for the rail. He moved quick, but I moved quicker, and I got him by the leg.

'Hold on, Corder,' I says. 'Take a life preserver. It'd come in handy.'

'Lemme go, I mme go,' he yelled. 'She's sinking.'

'He beat at me with his open hands like an old woman when she gets mad and I had to down him. It didn't seem to be a time for polite measures, so when I got him down I gave him a punch to quiet him and he quit his little song. Then I yanked him to his feet and told him there were women aboard to be saved, and if he didn't lay himself out to take care of some of them I'd lay him out myself. He was white and he shook like a fit of ague, but he steadied himself like a good one and says:

'Thanks. I'm all right now. Got rattled, I guess. Where are the preservers?'

'Under the seats,' I says. 'You'll do all right.'

'We fished in and got all the preservers we could carry, and went out to fix up the women again. I must say that the women took it better than the men on the average. Some of 'em lay around and groaned, but all the howling and rampaging was done by the stronger sex. Not but what some of the men were all right. I saw one large prosperous looking banker—from his looks that I'd like to change wads with, moggling around giving good advice to everybody in reach.

'There's lots of time,' was his tune. 'We may not go down at all, and if we do it won't be till we've all had a chance to get off. Don't jump till you get the word.'

'He had plenty of opposition, though, for there were idiots all over the place that didn't have anything else to do but warble about the boat sinking and everybody getting drowned. My young friend Corder, who had got to work and forgotten all about his own troubles tackled one of them and put in a few words of expostulation, and when those didn't go he landed a neat swing on the squaller's jaw that stopped the concert in no time. But the worse case of that was a fat little brute who was down on his knees near the iron gate using his voice for all that was in it. I've heard some pretty tough talk in my time in more than one language, but for concentrated blasphemy that guy laid over anything I had ever heard before. As soon as I had time I got him by the neck, but I had to choke him silent and then he kept trying to go on:

'Quit that Johan act,' I say as soon as I could get a word in. 'Your enough to sink a whole fleet of ships, let alone one ferryboat.'

'Let me alone,' he whispered. 'I'm going to die. Let me make my peace with heaven. It's my last prayer.'

'You're making yourself solid with the other place all right,' I told him, and if that's what you call praying I'd hate to be brought up in your Sunday school.'

'One last prayer,' he cried, and went on gabbling that awful stuff.

'And he was in earnest. He actually

was praying, but in his panic he got fatally twisted. I hauled him to his feet and then I saw he had a life preserver fastened tight around his knees. I cut it off in one sweep and at that he grabbed me around the waist and began to cry and beg me not to sacrifice his last chance of life and to tell me that he was wicked and not fit to go to his account, with specifications. From what he said I couldn't make out but what he'd led a pretty respectable sort of life, but that wasn't the question. I tried to explain to him that unless he wanted to go floating around the bay wrong end up, making a sort of breeches buoy of himself, he'd better not wear his life preserver around his knees. It didn't take long after that to get him fixed up and planted in a place where he'd be out of the way. There were a couple of young ladies who had been hustling around among the others trying to keep them quiet and get them ready to jump, if the worst came, and neither of them had thought anything about herself. It was a job to round them up and get them into cork, but I got it done, and then I ran into the queerest specimen of the lot. I've heard of men who were drunk coming sober when confronted by danger, and I've seen one case of it; but this was the first time I'd ever seen the opposite.

'This chap had a beautiful jag on, and I'll swear he was all right when the boat started, for he came up to me and asked me for a light, and it he'd been unsteady it would have been easy enough to spot the booze on him then. Maybe he had a still on. Anyway he was reeling around the deck with his eyes half closed singing some razzle dazzle ditty in a voice like a dead man's and occasionally remarking that he wasn't afraid of anything and could lick any three men aboard. Last I saw of him he was trying to chuck the 300 pound lady under the chib and explaining to her that there wasn't any real danger so long as he stood by her, which he would do until death did them part. As she was about half conscious, it didn't disturb her and the jag was left to watch over her, which at least kept him out of mischief.

'By this time I was having a pretty gay sort of a time for a man just on the edge of the grave. My little pet watery-grave scheme hadn't returned to my memory yet; but, on the other hand, I didn't seem to care much what happened. Guess I had a touch of the time-of-peril joy that for solid 24 karat exhilaration makes champagne look like calico tea. There was still that uncomfortable sag to the deck, and out in the fog things were making a million kinds of fancy racket, but it didn't disturb me any more. I managed to keep busy, though, as a cheerer of the down-hearted. I wasn't in the same class with the young ladies who were dispensing good advice just as cool as if there wasn't any danger within a hundred miles. Comparatively speaking, things were getting calmed down—that is, the yelling wasn't such a continuous performance but what you could hear yourself think now and again—when a wagon grocer's boy came flitting out of a wagon where I suppose he'd been sleeping through all the mess, with his eyes just popping out of his head. He began to shin up one of the cabin supports, and paint my nose green if he didn't cling there and begin to or ow like a rooster. It was the wierdest performance I saw in the who's show. There was nothing about it in the rules of the game, and the way he did make little shivers go down my back. Corder came up, and he says to me:

'He's going mad,' he says. 'First thing you he'll drop down and bite somebody, or throw himself overboard. We ought to get him down.'

'Not for me,' I says. 'That isn't the variety of Willies I like to meddle with. That ought to be in the padded cell,' I says, 'and I dodge.'

'That's where Corder had more nerve than I had, for he hauled the kid down and, sure enough the kid bit at him like a dog. It gave me such a bunch that I swear I'd had a gun I'd have come pretty near putting a bullet in his head, like shooting a wild animal. But Corder got down, and with the help of broker party straightened him out. They said afterward it was a sort of epileptic fit. Whatever it was it started the whole crowd of loonies raving again, and right in the middle of it a little thin, wizened guy came up to me with a hop, skip and a jump and gave a sort of a howl.'

'It's you,' he says.

'Of course it's me,' I told him. 'Who did you think it was, the ice man?'

'Oh, it's you; it's you,' he says, doing a double shuffle. 'I knew it the minute I saw those eyes.'

'Now be nice,' say I, for a cross-eyed man has some feeling of his own. 'Be nice and don't make cracks about my eyes or something might happen to yours.'

'Those eyes, those eyes,' he yawned, dancing the highland fling. 'You looked at me when I came aboard, and now the boat is sinking.'

'Well, that chap was honestly of the opinion that my off-side eye had wizarded the craft and brought about the accident, and he looked like an intelligent citizen too. Pretty soon he danced away still bemoaning my peeps, and I went through to the rear of the cabin to see if there was anything doing there. Nobody had got busy, around that region and there was a little family group that had been forgotten a young German mother and three youngsters. When I came up she was talking to the oldest a boy of six or so, in German, and from tones of her voice I guess she was trying to keep the little fellow from being scared, but she was as white as a sheet herself and the other two kids were whimpering. I grabbed out some life preservers and told her to put them on, but she shook her head. Didn't understand life preservers or English either. Hoch, der Kaiser, is about the limit of my German, but I dove in, and made signs to her to put on the preservers. 'They'll float you,' I says. 'Fitz-n like corken,' I says, making a stab at the Dutch.

'Well I got preservers on the kids all right, and got another for her, and then I managed to make her understand that I'd stick by the family. At that she got me around the knees and began to cry and do the gratitude game until I felt like thirty cents change out of a hundred dollar bill. It got too good and I broke away and sent Corder back there, telling him it was a case of necessity. Then I peeked through the cabin when he got there. I laughed myself blue in the face to see the catch-at-catch-can wrestling match he'd let himself in with the grateful lady.

'Then the engines got going and pretty soon we were on the slip, and the whole push came back to their senses and began to look ashamed of themselves. Naturally, I drifted along with the crowd, and it wasn't till I was half way up the bridge that I remembered that little engagement with Davy Jones.

'Say, I say out loud, not thinking, 'I've forgotten something.'

'What's that?' asked Corder, who was right next me.

'This isn't my landing,' I says. 'I ought to have got off outside.'

'Corder looked at me hard and said we'd better talk it over. Well, the upshot of it was that I told him to whole game, and he rolled up his shirt sleeves, so to speak, and square me with the world, and it cost him a bit, too. Afterward I hit it heavy on a run of red on the wheel and paid him back. I've struck tough luck now and again since then, but I've never had any appetite for suicide, mainly because I found out that a man who's within one step of dead can do some good in the world if things happen right and have a pretty lively sort of a good time doing it.'

HIS SEASHORE SCHEME.

It seemed a Veritable Klondike, but the Landlord Knew Better.

He was a new arrival at the seashore, and everything he saw seemed to interest him. Of course he went to the beach during the bathing hour and after a brief survey of it became abstracted and thoughtful. He walked the entire length of it and then made a circuit up by the bathhouses studying every detail of the surroundings.

'Do you know,' he said later when he had hunted up the proprietor of the hotel at which he was staying, 'that you're overlooking a golden opportunity?'

'Wait until you see your bill,' suggested the proprietor, with the calm assurance of a man who knows he has done the best he can.

'Oh, that has nothing to do with it! I returned the guest rather irritably. There is a chance to make a fortune here entirely outside of the hotel business.'

'Possibly, possibly,' replied the proprietor, 'but you have to be pretty sharp to run a shell game here without getting into trouble with the authorities.'

'Who wants to run a shell game?' demanded the guest. 'My scheme is as legitimate as—as—any theatrical attraction there is in existence. Will you go into it with me if I prove it to you?'

'My capital is pretty well tied up in this hotel,' said the proprietor cautiously.

'Practically no capital is required,' urged the guest. 'Just say the word, and I'll let you go in on the ground floor.'

'Let's hear about it,' returned the proprietor, 'and if it is at all plausible you can count me in.'

'Well, the first thing to do,' explained the guest, 'would be to rent the bathing beach and put a high board fence

around it. The living picture exhibition there during the bathing hour is simply superb, but it ought not to be free. I'd make all men and old maids pay an admission fee.'

The proprietor shook his head.

'It wouldn't do,' he said. 'We tried it once.'

'What was the trouble?' asked the guest. 'Two of the prettiest girls there were here got mad about some trifle one day and just out of spite they cut an additional six inches off the skirts of their bathing suits and insisted on going in outside of the inclosure. They kept that up for a week, and we didn't make enough money to pay the gatekeeper.'—Chicago Post.

THE BOY ON THE CAR.

He was Talkative Because Pop Hadn't Bought That Wheel.

If you are married and have a boy who is old enough to ride a wheel and there are any family secrets which you prefer keeping in the background, do not take the boy with you when out for a street car ride.

This advice is founded on an incident in one of the Boulevard horse cars—beautiful things for a city like New York—labeled 'Grant Tomb.'

'Pop you know what you promised me—about that wheel. Do I get it tomorrow, pop?'

'I'll see about it. Look; there is the horseless carriage.'

The boy looked.

'Sa, pop, that won't be in it with my wheel, will it?'

'I should say not. I am afraid it is going to rain. I guess we had better go back.'

'If I had my new wheel, I'd say, 'Let 'er rain!' wouldn't you pop?'

'It looks very much like a shower. Guess we will take the next car back.'

'Say, pop, I don't want no boy's wheel. I want a man's wheel, and I want adjustable handle bars, and I don't want the wheel too low geared, do I? What wheel are you going to get, pop?'

This inquiry caused several who heard it to look at the father of the boy, as if each would like to name the wheel, but nobody did. The father ventured to say:

'You don't want a man's wheel.'

'Yes, I do, pop. You know you promised me it should be a man's wheel. She wouldn't let you in till you promised, you know, pop.'

'Look at that wheel. It is a new make. I think I know that man.'

'You know, pop, you promised me to get me a bike suit like hers, pop, and the suit goes with the wheel, pop.'

'Yes, my boy. Now we will get off at the next corner.'

'What for? Ma said she hoped to the Lord she wouldn't see you again today. Why not go and get the wheel now?'

'I am not ready today.'

'You ain't? Are you going to buy it for cash or on the instalment plan?'

'Cash, of course. Always pay cash, my boy, and then you won't owe anybody.'

'Then what made you tell me to get her bathing suit on monthly payments?'

The man tried to laugh. He did not succeed so well as those who sat opposite.

'Oh, I know, pop. You told me to stand off the gas man and the ice man, so you could get ahead. That's how you're going to pay cash for my wheel. Eh, pop?'

'Seventy-ninth street!' by the conductor.

'Thanks!' by the man who got off, followed by a boy.—New York Truth.

Didn't Even Hesitate.

An Englishman travelling in America once had occasion to investigate the running time of the trains that passed through the small place where he was stopping. Carefully searching a time-table he found apparently that there would be an express train due at four o'clock that afternoon.

The Englishman was at the station to time with his bag, etc., and so was the express train. The intending passenger watched it approach and thunder by the station at top speed.

He was not a little annoyed, and turning to a coloured man who stood near, remarked, 'That train didn't stop!'

'No, sir,' replied that individual cheerfully. 'Not that train. Didn't ev'n hes'tate!'

Scare-Head.

Rarely does a 'green hand' give the long-suffering editor such an opportunity as that below, noted in the Catholic Standard and Times:

'Here's a story of a thief,' said the enthusiastic young and new reporter, 'who secured a room at a local hotel and robbed other guests of their money. What sort of head shall I put on it?'

'Oh,' said the editor, 'suppose you make it 'Scoundrelly Roomer Gains Currency.'