

ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 1899.

COFFIN DRUMMER'S TALE

PROFESSOR A TALE THAT HIS CALLING IS NOT ALL GLOOMY.

A Wonderful Earthquake in an Ohio Cemetery Which Put a Flaming Touch to a Marriage Romance—A Seismic Disturbance With Happy Results.

When the experienced drummer with the two heavy grips stepped up to the desk the clerk recognized him and bowed and smiled gravely.

'Ghost-walk, No. 3, Gibson,' he said to the bellboy who answered his call.

The drummer nodded an acquiescence to the assignment and followed the boy to the elevator. When he returned to the lobby half an hour later the cherry phosphate salesman who had stood within earshot of the desk when the drummer registered, came forward and said, curiously:

'I beg your pardon, but will you give me a clue to the mystery of the clerk's instructions in regard to your room? What and where is the ghost-walk?'

The experienced drummer looked up in surprise.

'Good heavens,' he said, 'where have you been all your life? I thought everybody knew about that. Why, the ghost-walk is what they always call the rooms where the men of my line are stowed away.'

The cherry phosphate man flushed slightly at the allusion to his possible backwoods origin, but boldly persisted in his laudable endeavor to add to his meagre fund of information. 'What is your line?'

'Coffins,' said the experienced drummer, succinctly.

The cherry phosphate representative quailed. 'Great Scott!' he exclaimed. 'You don't travel around with a—' with those things do you?'

'Why not?' demanded the experienced drummer, irritably. 'What's the matter with coffins? They're something we've all got to come to, sooner or later, unless we happen to be incinerated in a hotel fire or die in the course of a trip abroad and get shoved off into the measureless depths of the murmuring sea. For my part, I must say that I prefer a coffin to either of those alternatives.'

'Oh, I don't know that there is anything the matter with your coffins,' returned the phosphate man, calmly ignoring the reference to possible casualties. 'If there was, I suppose you couldn't tell them. But it must be a grewsome sort of business.'

The coffin man sniffed angrily. 'Now, see here,' he said 'don't you know that that's all tummyrot? But I suppose I ought not to blame you for your ignorance. You're no worse than nine out of ten of the other people I meet. Honestly, it makes me boil sometimes to see how people look upon a coffin man. It seems to be the popular impression that our traveling paraphernalia consists of a hearse and a pair of funeral horses, not to mention a car-load of coffins and a saratoga trunk full of shrouds, while some folks even go so far as to imagine that we carry a corpse around to make the display more attractive.'

'I'll venture to say though,' and here the experienced drummer showed signs of lapsing into reminiscence, 'that if it came down to an actual story-telling contest I could discount every single one of my conferees and not pass outside the realm of facts, either. To start with, I'll make the assertion that I'm the only man in the business who has completely fitted out a cemetery that is all the way from one foot to six thousand feet beneath the surface of the earth.'

The drummer stopped to light another cigar, then continued musingly: 'That was a peculiar thing. It was by all odds the strangest thing I have ever seen or even heard of and that means a good deal coming from a man who has been on the road constantly for the past thirty years and has as a matter of course, seen more than one thing of interest. It was such a very strange thing that if there were not two or three thousand people living in southern Ohio now who can vouch for the truth of what I'm going to say I should be afraid to tell it for fear you'd go away and say: 'Well if that coffin man ain't the darndest liar I ever did see.' The cemetery I had reference to a moment ago is on the outskirts of a little town on the Ohio River about sixty miles above Cincinnati. There was only one undertaker in the town then—there is only one there now, for that matter—and up to the time I began to

solicit his trade all the people thereabouts, who were of the hide-bound, old-fashioned sort, had been content to be laid simply away in family burial lots upon death. Shortly after I made my first call, however, a wave of progress struck the place, and one of the first things the village guardians did, after becoming imbued with the spirit of advancement, was to lay out a cemetery.

'That was—let's see—that was about twenty three years ago. I had just sold a large order of goods to the undertaker when the first death occurred after the consecration of the new ground, and as I continued to stand high in his favor, there never was a coffin or a scrap of funeral tappings put away in that unique cemetery that did not come direct from me and that is saying a good deal when you take into consideration that Cincinnati is one of the greatest coffin towns on the face of the earth, and Ohio people as a rule, the greatest of sticklers for patronizing home industries. Nev'theless, I held my ground. In the prosecuting of my business I visited the town about every six months. When there I did not stop at the local hotel, which afforded but poor accommodations, but put up with an eccentric but generous old character named Judson Calhoun, who lived on the outskirts of the village. One evening when I happened to be stranded there over night I found when I got around to Judson's house, that his wife was very ill. She had been sick for a week or so, he told me, and their dearest friends a Mr. and Mrs. Lindsay, had literally shut up their own house and come over to take care of her and look after things in general.

'I felt a little squeamish about staying there under the circumstances, but Judson insisted, so finally I retired to my old room as usual. Along toward morning Mrs. Calhoun died. I had been awakened by the confusion, and was at the bedside along with Judson and Mr. and Mrs. Lindsay when she breathed her last. Just before the end came the poor woman seemed to realize that she was going fast, so she called us all close to her side and said:

'Judson, I want to be put away in the family lot in the cemetery, and when your time comes I want you to be laid beside me. It may sound like superstition, but I couldn't rest in my grave if you were not there close at hand.'

'And with his wife lying there staring death in the face, what could Judson do but promise that he would make his final resting place by hers? But still she didn't seem to be satisfied with that—knowing, as I suppose she did, that the best man on earth is apt to break his word, if the slightest inducement is offered to do otherwise so she looked up to Mrs. Lindsay and said:

'Sarah, if you're still here when Judson goes, you'll see to it, won't you, that his grave is made alongside mine?'

'And Mrs. Lindsay promised, too, thus making the agreement doubly binding.

'After Mrs. Calhoun's death I switched around and made Donald Lindsay's house my stopping place. When making my semi-annual visit two years later, I saw, to my regret that Donald was going at a pretty lively gallop right up to death's door. Now, whether he took his cue from Mrs. Calhoun or not, I cannot say, but certain it is that when his last hour had come he made his wife promise the very identical thing Mrs. Calhoun had asked of Judson. I guess neither Judson nor Mrs. Lindsay thought much about their solemn words at the time, but it wasn't long till they began to make themselves felt pretty strongly. When I visited the town six months later I found that Judson had already commenced to call on the comely widow. I expected to see them married when I came again, but to my surprise the courtship seemed no nearer a termination than the last time.

'I asked Judson the difficulty, and he told me the whole story. The trouble all hinged on the burial of their former partners. There was Donald Lindsay, he explained dolefully, in the Lindsay lot in the west end of the cemetery, and Mrs. Calhoun in the Calhoun section in the east end, and so far as human knowledge could go there was no power short of downright sacrilege that could take them away from their respective places. And worst of all, the two relics were bound by those solemn promises. Judson frankly admitted that he wouldn't have cared a rap for his word, but Mrs. Lindsay was as hard as adamant. She was willing for him to call whenever he felt like it, she said, and she would even

go so far as to wash and iron and mend and bake for him, but she wouldn't marry him, because when she died she wanted to be laid by Donald.

'Once, Judson told me, he became so bold as to suggest that that was all right; that she could be put away with the Lindseys when her time came and he with the Calhouns, according to agreement, but she let out on him so fiercely then that he was completely unbalanced. 'Judson Calhoun,' she said, 'I want you to understand once for all that I will never marry any man who doesn't think as much of me as he did of his first wife. I'll not play second fiddle to any woman, living or dead. You needn't think for one minute that I'll marry you and do for you for ten, maybe fifteen years, and then at the last, when my work and yours is all over and done with, have you go back to your first love and make your home with her and let me be put away any old place. No, indeed. I ought to be just as dear to you as anybody and if I can't be buried alongside you, too, I won't have you: that's all.'

'This of course, was a dampener on Judson, and he allowed the courtship to drift quietly along after that, without mentioning marriage. Matters were still in that unsatisfactory state when the earthquake, or landslide, or whatever it was, occurred. I was in the town at the time and was stopping with Judson, as I soon came to do again after he became accustomed to bachelor ways and set down to good housekeeping. It isn't worth while trying to describe that terrestrial commotion to you. If you have ever been in an earthquake region and experienced a shock, you know better than I can tell what it is like. If you have never been through it no words of mine, however well chosen, could give you any conception of the horror of it.'

'It came on about midnight. Judson and I had sat up late talking and I had been asleep but a little while when the first quake came. It was a pretty severe shake-up for a starter, and I jumped out of bed in alarm and lighted the lamp. I hadn't the faintest idea what was the cause of the disturbance, but for the moment I became as weak as a cat and felt, instinctively, that I should be safer if I only had a light. This introductory quiver was followed by a stillness of several minutes' duration, and I began to think that my nerves had played me a trick after all. Just as I began to wonder if it wouldn't be advisable to go back to bed I felt the earth tremble once more. There was a series of shocks in rapid succession that time. The house rocked violently, chairs and tables slipped around over the floor as though they were greased, looking glasses and pictures fell from the wall, and the light was extinguished.

'It came over me like a flash then that we were passing through an earthquake. Just as I realized what was happening there came a dull, hollow roar, followed by the most terrific clap of thunder. I remember that even in my fright it gave me the impression of the whole earth being flattened out and then doubled over in the middle and flapped together like a pancake. At that final shock I fell to the floor insensible. When I came to myself Judson was standing over me, talking wildly about Mrs. Lindsay. We both leapt as if we ought to go to her, yet I doubt if we dared venture out, for while Judson's house was still intact, there was no knowing what we should strike ten feet beyond the door. But Judson would listen to no argument. Anxiety for her safety finally overcame my personal uneasiness, and we started out.

'It was pitch dark. Our lantern had been thrown from a shelf and broken, and we were obliged to pick our way step by step without a light. Mrs. Lindsay's house was about half a mile west of Judson's. The intervening space was utilized as truck patches, and I found, as we groped along, that all the fences were down and that the ground was cut up by innumerable gullies and ridges. It seemed to take us an eternity to get to Mrs. Lindsay's, but when we reached the house at last and found that she was safe, we felt amply repaid for our rough trip, and when she went so far as to own up that she was crying, not from fear, but anxiety as to Judson's welfare, the old chap was so tickled that he declared he would be glad to go through an earthquake every night in the week if he could only receive such an assurance as that as a recompense.

'We stayed at Mrs. Lindsay's till morning dawned, then left her and set out to see what damage had really been done. The first person we met on our way to the village was the undertaker. He was pale as a ghost.

'What's the matter?' I asked. 'Everybody killed?'

'No,' said he, 'there is but one life lost that I know of, and that was Eli Garrison's, who was sleeping off a drunk in a fence corner, but the dead have been shaken up at a terrible rate. Lord of Love, you just ought to see the cemetery!'

'The horror in his voice made me sick with dread. My legs wobbled so I could hardly stand, and my lips trembled.

'What's the matter?' I repeated.

'What do you mean?'

'Just go down and see,' he said, and hurried on.

'As for me, I fairly ran to the cemetery

with Judson close at my heels. What I saw there made me reel and doubt my own senses. In the western part of the little graveyard where, the night before, anybody looking that way could have seen a smooth plane dotted with grassy mounds, was now a conical hill of yellow, clayey mud. To the east a narrow strip of the cemetery remained, about one-tenth of the width of the original ground. I hurried over to the Calhoun lot the first thing. It was in a state of good preservation. Not a grave seemed to be disturbed. Then I looked carefully around. About six feet to the west of the Calhoun section I saw a monument that seemed strangely familiar. I stepped over and examined it, and there on one side was the well-known inscription: 'Donald Lindsay. Born, Oct. 6, 1833. Died, Nov. 10, 1875.' On the other side I read, 'Sarah, wife of Donald Lindsay. Born, May 30, 1840. Died—'

Several scientific men from Cincinnati were there in an hour or so, and not until I had listened several times to their explanation could I make head or tail to the interesting phenomenon. At last they made me understand that when the western half of the cemetery had been heaved up, a great chasm had been opened in the earth at its base. The upper crust of ground on this hill to the depth of nine or ten feet had formed a landslide and slipped down into the abyss, graves, tombstones, and all. That section at the top of the newly-made hill—the one containing the Lindsay lot—had been loosened last, and when it finally came sliding down the slope the depression was already so nearly filled that it needed only this additional stratum to bring it to a level with the uninjured part of the cemetery, so this layer just glided along and spread itself out over the piled-up earth as smoothly as you'd slip a pie from a greased pan. Notwithstanding all this disturbance every grave in this section was in comparatively good condition, and every headstone was standing firm on its foundation. This was particularly true of Donald Lindsay's lot, where even the green sod was unbroken and not a blade of grass seemed cut of place.

'Honestly, it was the greatest sight you ever saw. Several people whose folks were buried hundreds of yards deep in the debris suggested that we dig down and make a new cemetery, but when it was pointed out to them that in all probability we might have to dig down a mile and that the footing of Gabriel's horn could reach them just as well under six thousand feet as six, they decided to let things remain as the Lord had put them. I, myself, was completely flabbergasted when I first thought of all my coffins and things being jumbled up down that hole, but when I finally comprehended the situation, I felt easier. The first thing I did then was to go and get Mrs. Lindsay and bring her over to Judson, who still sat in a dazed condition beside his wife's grave.

'There's just room between for both of you,' I said, pointing to Lucinda's grave on one side and Donald's on the other. 'You here and Judson there. Providence has planned this to show you you were wrong.'

'Yes,' said she, consistent to the last, 'and we can have another monument put up at the head of our own graves with both our names on to show that I belonged to you, too, Judson, as well as Lucinda.'

'This seemed absurd to me and to Judson, but her wish to go share and share alike was so evident that all he said was: 'Why, yes, of course we can, if you like.' And I suppose they will do that when the time comes, but I guess Judson isn't worrying about that now, so long as he's got his wife.

'As I said in the beginning, and here the reasoned drummer looked hard at the adolescent cherry phosphate agent, 'there are few men on the road who have more interesting experiences than the coffin drummer.'

And the phosphate man smiled weakly in reply, and said: 'No; I guess there are not.'

EXTREME RACE PREJUDICE.

It Interferes With the Sales of Automobiles in one City.

'People who live north of Mason and Dixon's line,' said a man whose business constantly takes him to the South, 'can't realize the intensity of race prejudice that prevails below the line. It has its humorous features, as might be supposed. I have heard men say in the South that they won't ride a bicycle, 'because niggers have them now.' I was sitting in one of the hotels in Memphis the other day when an automobile came down the street. An old man was sitting next to me whom I supposed to be one of the oldest inhabitants and who either retired from business or was idle from the lack of having something to do. This kind of man is communicative. He sat in his chair momentarily hitting the soles of his shoes on the tiled floor and looked as if he was waiting for a chance to begin a conversation, so I turned to him and said:

'I see you have automobiles in Memphis.'

'Yes,' he replied, 'we have one, and we're going to have another, but two's all I can positively stand for.'

'Of course I wondered why there should never be more than two automobiles in

Memphis and quickly asked, 'How's that?'

'Niggers,' was the sententious reply. 'You see, one of our leading citizens went to New York not long ago and brought an automobile back with him. He's going to sell 'em here. He rides his friends around in his new machine, and a lot of people began figuring on buying one. Before the machine had been in Memphis for eight hours in walks a colored gentleman to the man's store and says he wants an automobile as quick as it can be delivered. A little thing like paying \$2,000 for one of these machines didn't bother him. He could draw his check for many that much. Now what'd you think of that? And the old fellow turned around on me with so much feeling in his voice that I was afraid to say exactly what I thought, but it was evident that he thought automobile sales in Memphis would be quite limited.

'Have you wealthy negroes in Memphis?'

I asked.

'Have we?' said the old man, 'there's one negro here that's worth close on to half a million dollars and that's a big pile in the South when cotton ain't bringing 5 cents a pound. Why, he goes to Europe now and then and doesn't think any more of going to New York than I would of going ten miles down the river. Didn't you ever hear about the time the white women called on his wife?'

'Of course I hadn't and the old gentleman immediately began to tell me.

'Well,' he said, 'the rich negro built a fine house out in the best part of town and some of the white ladies were just dying of curiosity to know what the inside of that house was like. I guess some of them half thought there would be little niggers sitting around the floor eating out of pans, and soap box pictures and calendars hung on the walls and receipts from the furniture installment man and the colored Mason's treasurer sticking in the clock. They didn't talk about anything else and they heard such wonderful tales about what was in that house that they decided they would go and see. So one day a lot of 'em goes over and rings the front door bell, and a servant lets 'em in. They all sank down onto sofas in the big parlor to wait for Mrs. Blank. 'What are we going to call her?' asked one of them while they were waiting. 'We can't 'Mrs.' a negro. I know; we won't call her anything. Just let her show us through the house.' Just then they heard Mrs. Blank coming down the stairs, and they all straightened up and held their heads as high as Daughters of the Revolution. In comes Mrs. Blank and one of the white ladies gets up and says:

'Good morning. We would like so much to be shown through your new house.'

'Then what do you reckon happened?' said the old man, hitting his fist on the arm of the chair. 'Why, that negro woman just turned around and mashed a button in the wall and smiled sweetly and said: 'Very well. I will call my maid,' and then she sweeps out of the room and the white women all try to catch their breath.'

'My, my,' continued the old man, without any urging, times have changed. You can't tell when you are going to run on niggers now. A white lady out my way had a young yellow girl working for her and the other day went into the kitchen and had a little row with her because the girl's fellow kept calling her up over the telephone. After the white lady had given the girl a lecture she went upstairs and dressed to go to town. She got on one of these street cars that have seats for two like a railroad coach, and at the very next block the colored girl got on the car. She pranced down the aisle and flopped herself down in the same seat with the white woman, and her mistress at that. They were both bound for the same place, too, and for all I know they might have been headed for the same bargain counter.'

'I had to stop the old man at this point, for my train was to leave in an hour. I got up, explaining that I had to get shaved.

'Well,' said the man, 'go across the street into the basement. That's a white shop.'

A Natural Inference.

Clara—Uncle John, what do they mean when they talk about old mine diamonds? Uncle John—I suppose they mean diamonds that were theirs before they visited the pawnbrokers.—Jewelry Weekly.

Solid Comfort.

'Truth,' said the aphorist, 'is at the bottom of a well.'

'Probably,' replied the man with a wilted collar. 'And I don't know that I blame her for staying there this kind of weather.'

Not a Success.

'The electric lights went out on our car.' 'That made it pleasant.' 'Yes; but our acquaintances couldn't see that we were having a trolley party.'—Chicago Record.