

How He Got a Start by Judge Clark

Stephe Blake had graduated, with high honor, at a tip-top medical college. He was, withal, a sensible fellow, and full of pluck; yet here he was, at the end of three months, without having killed or cured a single patient, with a quarter's rent due tomorrow, and several weeks' board on top of it. To crown all, he was desperately in love with the sweetest creature in the world, and at daggers' points with all her relations.

His old chum, Nat. Webb, whom he had not seen since they were school-boys together, had dropped in on him that day, and the two were having a confidential chat together, in the dusk of evening, in Stephe's back office.

"Why don't you try Bob Sawyers, late Nockemorf's plan?" suggested Nat., in reply to some rather despondent reply of Stephe. "Bribe the watchman to ring you up half a dozen times in the night. Have a boy, on Sundays, rush headlong into church in the middle of the service, and whisper in your ear; after which start up excitedly, make a grab at your hat and bolt hurriedly out. Send the mythical Mr. Smith's pills to the real Mr. Snooks; and send back to correct the mistake, taking care to excuse it on the grounds that, in an extensive practice such errors *will* occur. There's no end of ways and means in such cases. Why, I knew a young doctor once that fell into a thriving business thuswise. Two or three times a day he would mount his horse, and gallop out of town, by the main street, as if a case of life and death was before, and something a good deal worse behind him. One day, to his consternation, he found himself followed. His secret, he feared, would be out. He turned down one by-way, and up another—doubled, tacked, wheeled of at right, and then again, as the backwood's surveyor had it, at *left* angles. But all to no purpose; his relentless persecutor, as if bent on 'plucking out the heart of his mystery,' still kept him in sight. At last, as he dashed along an unfrequented path, he came upon a man lying on the ground helpless, and groaning bitterly. In a trice he was at the sufferer's side. The stranger had been thrown from his horse, and had his leg broken. The spy, who had no doubt but this was the very case the doctor had been hurrying to attend, came forward and assisted in carrying the patient to the nearest house. The fracture was successfully treated, the doctor got a good fee, and was thenceforward a made man."

"A good enough story," sighed Stephe; "but the moral, if it has one, doesn't apply here. Bless you! You can't imagine how inquisitive *these* people are, and how thoroughly everybody understands everybody else's business."

"How many doctors have you in the place?" inquired Nat., after a pause.

"Only two—old Bloomas and myself."

"There *ought* to be enough business for both of you."

“Yes; but old Bloo—plague take him!—gets it *all*, True, he’s an arrant old donkey; but he’s been physicking this community for two generations, and they all believe in him. If his patients survive, *he* cures them; if they die, *Providence* kills them.”

“And Providence is a good many ahead, I imagine. But, hark! What’s that?”

“Nothing but Deacon Smith’s shanghai, that roosts in the next back yard, crowing for tomorrow morning by Chinese time.”

“I don’t mean that,” said Nat., “but the noise in the front office.”

The noise in the front office was of someone blundering over chairs in the dark, to the imminent peril of his shins, if not his neck, in a reckless rush for the inner sanctum, where the two friends sat confabbing. The door flew open, and in a burst a tow-headed urchin, badly blown, with gaping mouth, and eyes distended like a couple of freshly opened oysters.

“Come—right away—down to the—tavern, Doc.!” He puffed out in broken doses.

“Why, what’s the matter?” inquired Stephe.

“There’s a—man down there’s—got a—fit!”

Each catching up the other’s hat, Stephe and Nat. set out on the double-quick, and reached the scene of the action a good two lengths ahead of old Bloomas, for whom a separate messenger had been dispatched.

The patient, a genteelly dressed young man, lay on his bed insensible, and Stephe already had him by the wrist when old Bloomas entered.

The latter clapped his fingers on the unoccupied pulse, and, with an air of unutterable wisdom, “bent his eyes”—and probably his thoughts too—“on vacancy.”

“Pulse feeble,” he began—“*stentorous* breathing—dilated iris—plain case of apoplexy.”

“I think it’s ep—” But before Stephe could finish, Nat. had beckoned him aside, and whispered in his ear.

“I think it’s *apparent* the patient is suffering from the effects of laudanum,” said Stephe, returning hurriedly to the bedside.

“Laudanum!” sneered old Bloomas, with a look of ineffable contempt. “Do you think *I* don’t know a case of apoplexy when I *see* it?”

“Possibly you *do*,” Stephe dryly answered; “only you don’t happen to see one just at present.”

“Much *you* know about it!” returned the other.

“I’ll bet you the cigars Blake’s right!” interrupted Nat.

“I’ll stake my professional reputation he’s *wrong!*” roared old Bloomas, purple with rage.

“The wager’s too trifling,” retorted Nat.; “I prefer the cigars.”

“We’ll have a *post-mortem* examination as soon as the breath’s out of him,” sputtered Bloomas, “and that’ll settle the question.”

“Why not pop a stomach-pump into him, and settle it while he’s alive?” suggested Stephe.

This proposal met with general approbation. The experiment was tried, and resulted in a complete vindication of Stephe’s theory. Enough laudanum was pumped from the patient’s stomach to kill a dozen men. The usual antidotes were speedily administered, and in a couple of hours, to old Bloomas’ intense disgust, the patient had sufficiently recovered to give an account of himself.

He was a prodigal son, whose scapegraceful behavior had reduced him to the last extremity; and not having grace enough to “arise and go to his father,” he had sought to end his troubles by an “everlasting sleep,” without stopping to reflect, with the philosophic prince, “what dreams might come.”

“What put laudanum into your head?” asked Stephe, as he and Nat. walked back together. “As soon as you mentioned it, the case was plain enough.”

“This phial, and the label on it,” Nat. replied, “which I saw on the mantel, and slipped into my pocket, while you and old Bloo. were busy over the patient. I tipped you the wink just in time to save you from committing as big a blunder as your rival did. I would have told you all about it, but as soon as I mentioned laudanum, you caught at the word, and needed no further prompting.”

Stephe’s reputation was fixed, and the bubble of old Bloomas’ punctured. The young prodigal recovered, and repented. His father paid Stephe handsomely; and the latter is now married, and on the best of terms with his wife’s family.

Such is life, and such are the accidents on which its successes oftentimes depend.

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