

The Puzzling Punch

BY ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

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THE train from Port Washington, L. I., pulled into the Woodside station, where all passengers transfer from the steam cars to the electric trains that carry them under the river. Close behind us came the electric train to which we were to transfer, and I was one of the first to step to the platform, but not quite the first.

Ahead of me was a well dressed man of perhaps fifty years. I noted him particularly, for when the train began to slow down he crowded to the door hastily, pushing the rest of us to one side rather rudely, and stood on the lower step ready to jump off as soon as the train came to a stop. Even before the train had stopped he began looking up and down the platform in an anxious manner, as if seeking some one he had expected to meet there. There were already a number of passengers on the platform, dumped there by the Whitestone train that had preceded us, and the gentleman of fifty looked from face to face. He was so intent in his search that he did not alight from the car step, and he was so stout that I was obliged to push gently against him, as a hint that others wished to descend from the train. He looked up at me for an instant, and I saw he had a most benevolent expression, although he looked worried. His was just the expression of a nice, fatherly man, intent on taking his daughter to a matinee, and worried because she was not meeting him as agreed.

He uttered an apology and stepped to the platform, and the rest of us crowded out of the car, the steam train pulled away and the electric train pulled in. There was immediately the usual pushing and rushing as the passengers sought to get aboard, but the benevolent looking gentleman did not join in this. He continued to look up and down the platform, glanced nervously at his watch and seemed more worried than ever. Then, as the last passenger was getting aboard, his face brightened.

From the street, half a block away, a young man was hurrying, and as he came he waved his hand. As he saw how little time was left before the train would move the young man broke into a run, and as he ran he drew back his right fist. With all the strength of his arm and all the impetus given him by his run he struck the gentleman of fifty full in the face with his fist. The elder man went down like a tenpin. His hat went in one direction and his small handbag in another and his head struck the station platform with a thump.

The next instant the younger man was bending over him solicitously, gathering up his hat and satchel. With the utmost gentleness and affection he raised the victim from the platform, brushed the dust from his clothes, and as the train began to move I saw the elder man's look of painful surprise give way to a smile of pleasure. Not a word had been said, although the younger man seemed dismayed and apologetic, but now the elder man put out his hand and shook hands warmly, saying, "Thank you! Thank you! I am very much obliged!" as if, in knocking him down, his assailant had done him the greatest possible favor. So great was his gratitude the young man had to push him aboard the moving train by main force, and while he stood on the platform, smiling as the train departed, his remarkable victim waved and smiled at him and dropped into a seat.

Naturally I took a seat near the elderly man as I could, but being a woman I could not engage him in conversation. When the conductor passed through the car he said a few words to him in a low tone, but the gentleman shook his head and actually chuckled with glee as he caressed his face, which had already begun to swell and discolor. At the Pennsylvania station I lost sight of this remarkable man, who seemed to enjoy being struck a sledgehammer blow in the face.

During the next few months I told this story a hundred times, for it was the most puzzling thing I had ever seen, but none of my friends could give me the slightest solution. "Funny things happen," they would say, and I began to fear I was doomed to let the incident slip from my memory unsolved, as such things do slip, when one of my friends called my attention to a "personal" advertisement in one of the Sunday newspapers:

WILL any witness of a vicious assault upon an elderly man by a younger man on the Woodside station platform, Wednesday, June 16, kindly communicate with ELLMER & WARBURTON, Attorneys at Law, 19 Pine St., New York.

"There!" I said to my husband when I had read this. "You have laughed at me when I have said I was fooled by a moving picture imitation assault. Read that!"

"I told you," he said, "was that a moving picture affair or an advertising fake. You had better get out of the whole thing. The first thing you know your curiosity will get you into trouble."

"Now, Edward," I said, "I may be curious, but you do not see that affair. If you had seen a kindly, benevolent looking old gentleman struck a terrific blow in the face, and had seen him get up and thank the man that hit him, you would want to know what it was all about. You would have been in conversation with that man inside of three minutes."

are ample in any court. This is some advertising scheme. You keep out of it!" I am a native of Iowa, and as such I have been a member of the Iowa New Yorkers, which I can describe as the female offshoot of the Iowa Society of New York, and at the annual banquet, attended by both societies, I was promenading with my husband in the reception room during the half hour before the banquet was served, when, on turning at the end of the room, I found myself facing the young man of the mighty fist. I managed, by pressing my husband's arm, to call his attention to the young man, and as soon as we had passed him I explained that the young man was the assailant of whom I had told so often. My husband promised to discover if he could who the young man might be, and left me with some friends while he set about it.

Meeting the Assailant.
"It is certainly odd," he said, when he rejoined me to lead me into the banquet room, "but nobody seems to have any idea who that young man is. I asked the officers of the Iowa Society, and none of them knows, and none of the Reception Committee knows, and no one else seems to know, but they tell me he could not have got in here without an official invitation. Some of them are going to look it up for me."

I had to be satisfied with that. The banquet was served on a number of small tables, each seating perhaps six or eight, and I craned my neck in a rather unladylike manner seeking to catch another glimpse of the young man, but I could not see him, and I turned my attention to the long table on the platform, at which sat the president of the society, the toastmaster and those who were to make the speeches after dinner. The fourth man on the left of the toastmaster was the middle aged gentleman that had received the blow in the face. On the menu card the name of the fourth man to the left of the toastmaster was the Rev. Orpheus Williams.

The banquet proceeded as such affairs do, and after the final ices we settled down to listen to the speeches. The president introduced the toastmaster, and the toastmaster introduced one celebrity after another. Finally it came to the turn of the Rev. Orpheus Williams.

"The best laid schemes o' mice and men," said the toastmaster, "gang aft a-gley," as Burns says, but it is not often that they can be fought so satisfactorily as we are able to fight them this evening. The Rev. Orpheus Williams is not able, for adequate reasons, to be with us this evening, but we have in his place one you will all be glad to hear. Iowa has produced many notable philanthropists, but she has given the world one of whom we are all especially proud. I introduce to you the Honorable Cephus Maxwell!"

"Edward," I whispered, "that's the man that was hit by the young man."

"Nonsense, Eleanor!" said my husband. "You are mistaken. No one would strike dear old Cephus Maxwell!"

"But he liked it," I protested. "He smiled joyfully."

"He may have grinned with pain," said my husband.

"But he shook hands with the young man," I expostulated.

"Mr. Maxwell," I asked, "when the young man struck you on the Woodside station platform, was that the first cheek or the second?"

I do not know what I expected, but the smile immediately left his face.

"You saw that?" he asked eagerly. "I must have your name and address, and he scribbled them hastily in a memorandum book he drew from his pocket."

"Now," said my husband, when we drew away, "now you have done it. You'll be called as a witness, probably when you can least well afford the time."

"But he was the man!" I crowed triumphantly. "And I'll know why he was struck and why he liked it so well."

"Inquisitive woman!" said my husband laughingly.

We moved toward the cloak rooms, and in the hall we separated. Hardly had my husband left me to get his coat and hat when the young man I had noticed touched me lightly on the arm.

Recalls the Blow.
"Pardon me," he said politely, "but Mr. Maxwell has just asked me to speak to you. I believe, since you recognized Mr. Maxwell, you will remember that I am the young man that walked up to him at Woodside station and knocked him down?"

"Yes," I admitted. "I was sure of that when I saw you earlier in the evening."

"Thank you," said the young man. "That is all I have to ask you, and I beg your pardon once more."

With that he was gone. There was nothing mysterious about his going. He turned and walked into the men's hat room—to get his hat and coat, I suppose. I got my wraps and was waiting for my husband to appear, when Mrs. Wilton, whom I had known in Iowa, came into the cloak room with her daughter and another young woman. She smiled when she saw

me and we chatted for a moment, and then she introduced the young woman.

"You ought to know each other," she said. "Miss Frankton has just taken up her residence with her aunt in your town on Long Island. You know her aunt, Mrs. Garth?"

"No," I said, "but I know who she is."

"You must meet auntie," said Miss Frankton. "She is lovely. Won't you call on us? I'm destined to be your neighbor for a while, at least."

"She expects to be married in the spring," explained Mrs. Wilton. "A very worthy young man, too. A Mr. Geering. He came with us to-night. Think of me as a chaperon, my dear! What would we have thought so few years ago in Iowa if any one had suggested we needed a chaperon?"

What I might have thought does not matter, for just then my husband appeared at the door and beside him was the young man of the virile fist. Mrs. Wilton took my arm.

"This is Mr. Geering," she said, going through the formal introduction and including my husband.

years his greatest works had been produced—works so joyous and bright and full of sunshine that it seemed as if they must be the work of some other than the suffering invalid from whose brush they came.

Within a reasonable time I called on Mrs. Garth and Miss Frankton. Miss Frankton did not happen to be at home, but Mrs. Garth received me most graciously. From her I learned that Miss Frankton's father had been the great artist.

"He was my brother," said Mrs. Garth, "but I saw very little of him during his later years. I think his illness changed him. Grace—my niece—thinks many of the peculiar things he did were done while he was in great pain. He was so peculiar! Grace doesn't know to this day whether she is an heiress or a pauper. The will is not to be opened until eleven months after my brother's death, and Grace is forbidden to marry until the will is opened."

"She seems very much in love," I suggested.

"And Mr. Geering is a charming young man," said Mrs. Garth. "For some reason, however, my brother objected to him most strenuously. I really believe he thought Mr. Geering was too kind hearted, too considerate of the feelings of others."

nothing of the sort, and he was averse to such things—but this time he was over-coaxed, and what was the result? The president of a virtue-on-ice society of some sort stepped in and made the police have the picture removed on the ground that it was indecent. Imagine my brother painting an indecent picture! But this virtue-on-ice man was a New Englander or—

"Or an Iowan?" I asked, smiling.

"He was an Iowan," said Mrs. Garth. "He was—he was—Maxwell! Maxwell! That was his name. Of course, he thought he was doing his duty, but imagine the crudeness of the virtue that would think the 'Europa' indecent! At all events, brother was furious—bitterly furious. He tried to go out of the house as he was, bent and crippled, to chastise the 'vandal,' but he fell in a faint at the door of the room. Then he tried to get Mr. Geering to chastise Cephus Maxwell. It is hard to imagine Mr. Geering chastising any one, isn't it?"

"I think I could imagine it if I tried very hard," I said.

"It would tax the imagination," said Mrs. Garth.

So that was the secret, was it? Evidently Mr. Maxwell had received his chastisement. But why had Mr. Geering plucked up courage enough to administer it? And why had Mr. Maxwell received it so gratefully? Philosophy is all very well, but somehow, when I think of "turning the other cheek," I think of a slap, not of one of those cruel, stinging blows such as Mr. Geering gave Mr. Maxwell. At least the philosophy of non-resistance is not often carried that far in the present day and age.

It was not until a few months later that my curiosity seemed likely to be fully satisfied, and in the meantime I became better acquainted with Miss Frankton. She seemed to take as great a liking to me as I felt for her, and as the eleven months drew toward an end she became more and more dejected and confided in me more and more. She said she feared she could never marry Mr. Geering. Against her father she never said one word, but she told me she feared he had taken a violent dislike to Mr. Geering and that the will probably forbade their marriage.

"But, my dear," I said, "your father was ill, he was suffering, and sufferers have hallucinations. It would not be right to spoil your life for a sick man's whim. I should not consider an order of that sort binding in the least. Of course he might legally leave his money elsewhere provided you did not marry to suit his wishes."

"Oh, money!" she said scornfully. "Let the money go! If I thought of the money or if Mr. Geering thought of it we would be unworthy."

I did not know about that. Money is not such a bad thing. But what the will said I was to know as soon as Miss Frankton, for I received from the lawyer of the family a request that I be present at the opening of the will at the office, No. 2 Recor street. Had I known then how unusual it is for outsiders to be present at such times I would have been more surprised than I was.

I went in with Miss Frankton on the 11:04 train, and we had luncheon together. Our appointment was for one o'clock, and we were there in ample time. We had to wait until Mr. Ullmer, the lawyer, returned from his luncheon, and before he arrived Mr. Cephus Maxwell came. I nodded to him, but Miss Frankton ignored him. Mr. Geering arrived soon after Mr. Ullmer. There were one or two others, minor legatees.

Mr. Ullmer, as soon as we were all assembled, broke the seal of the envelope that held the will. "On the exterior of this envelope," he said, "Mr. Frankton has written with his own hand the following words:—'This contains my last will and testament; not to be opened until eleven months after my death. I have, however, instructed my attorney, Henry C. Ullmer, to deliver a copy of this will to Cephus Maxwell as soon after my death as possible.'"

Miss Frankton looked at Mr. Ullmer blankly. "What did he do that for?" she asked.



"The Elder Man Went Down Like a Tenpin."

We went down in the same elevator to the street floor, and Mr. Geering took the opportunity when we were crowded away from the rest of the party to beg me to say nothing to Miss Frankton or Mrs. Wilton of the affair of the Woodside platform. Of course I promised.

Mr. Geering went with us as far as the Pennsylvania station, and when we entered the car I managed to get a seat beside Miss Frankton. She was a most charmingly sweet young woman and my heart was taken instantly by her face and manner, and her tinge of sadness was explained when she told me her father had been dead less than a year. I judged from her appearance and a few remarks she let fall that he must have been a man of wealth, but I did not at that time suspect he was the great Frankton, the artist, whose works were only more celebrated than his bodily infirmities. He had been a cripple for many years, and during those

They had a long interview just before my brother's death. What it was about I cannot guess, but Mr. Geering evidently refused to accede to my brother's wishes. He refused to speak to him after that. He even refused to allow him to enter the house."

"It was the suffering," I said.

"Yes," said Mrs. Garth, "and it was aggravated by the 'Europa' affair."

"I don't remember that," I said.

"No wonder," said Mrs. Garth. "It is nothing at all. 'Europa' was one of Mr. Frankton's greatest nudes. It was a wonderful painting—the whole world admitted that—but, my dear, it is not true that 'to the pure all things are pure.' Things that are pure to the pure of Paris and New York may seem very impure to the pure of New England. Brother had given one of the New York dealers permission to exhibit the 'Europa' in his window."

"He seldom did this—his market needed

The "Muddy" Flavor of Fresh Water Fish.

[From the European Edition of the Herald] It is a fact well known by those who eat fresh water fish that certain of these animals possess a particularly disagreeable flavor which is often described as a "muddy" taste, for it is similar indeed to the odor given off by muddy deposits in some marshes and ponds.

It is generally in muddy ponds where the water is not often renewed that fish acquire this peculiar flavor. Hence it is suggested that the taste is due to the impregnation of the fish, directly or indirectly, by the more or less putrid odor emanating from the decomposition of organic matter, of which the debris on being deposited at the bottom of the pond with fine particles of mineral matter constitute the mud.

This, however, is not the case, as has been shown by Dr. L. Léger in a communication recently made on this subject to the Paris Academy of Sciences. Some fish placed in reservoirs with a muddy bottom where they could find their food did not contract any marked muddy flavor even after several months. Further, it is very easy to prove that the putrid odor of the mud is really very different from that of the fish, characterized by the flavor known as "muddy." The mud produced by the decomposition of organic matter does not therefore give the bad taste to the fish and the current expression "muddy" flavor is erroneous.

And in fact the oscillaria evolve in abundance an odor absolutely identical with that which characterizes the "muddy" flavor of fish. It is enough to smell a growth of oscillaria, or, better, to crush it between the fingers, in order to recognize the odor.

In all stagnant or running water where the oscillaria are numerous, forming colonies on the bottom or clinging to the surface of aquatic plants, fish are found to have a "muddy" taste even when no chara are present in the water.

When no oscillaria exist in the water the fish have no "muddy" flavor even if chara are present. In the latter case in stagnant waters much enumerated by chara the fish may have a peculiar flavor, due to this vegetation, but it is weak and different from the typical "muddy" flavor, which is in reality the taste, or, rather, the odor, of the oscillaria.

If fish originating from very pure water, and which consequently are devoid of any strange taste, are placed in a pond containing oscillaria it is found after a certain period that they become strongly impregnated with a "muddy" odor.

From these observations Dr. Léger considers it may be concluded that the "muddy" taste is the result of the impregnation of the fish living directly or indirectly at the expense of these algae.

It is known that the "muddy" flavor may be appreciably attenuated by keeping the fish for several days in pure running water. During this time the greater part of the odorous substance is doubtless eliminated by a process of secretion.

NOT ALL BAREFOOT.
ONE of the bright young men attached to our Embassy at London tells of the experience of an American who was taking a walking trip through Scotland.

One day on a quiet road he met a young woman, tall and comely, who walked barefoot. The traveller was surprised, and in an honest quest for information he stopped her to ask:

"Do all the people go barefoot?"

"Some of them do," said the young woman quietly. "The rest mind their own business."

nothing of the sort, and he was averse to such things—but this time he was over-coaxed, and what was the result? The president of a virtue-on-ice society of some sort stepped in and made the police have the picture removed on the ground that it was indecent. Imagine my brother painting an indecent picture! But this virtue-on-ice man was a New Englander or—

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memory, but the effect on Grace was instant. She threw herself upon Mr. Geering and clasped her arms around him.

"You shan't! You shan't!" she cried. "It would be ignoble to strike him! We do not want the money, John!"

"But, Miss Grace," said one of the minor legatees, who saw her little legacy fade away unless Cephus Maxwell was soundly assaulted, "you are forbidden to marry unless John knocks the old rascal down. Let him do it!"

Grace turned on her angrily. "Be still!" she cried, and then, covering her face with her hands, she put her head on my shoulder and sobbed.

"I can't give him up! I can't give him up!" she wept.

"Listen, Grace," I begged. "But before I could say the word John Geering was at her side. 'Grace,' he said, 'there is no need for us to give each other up.'"

"What?" she cried, with blazing eyes; "Are you a man older than yourself? Are you a coward, John Geering?"

He blushed. "Miss Frankton," said Mr. Ullmer, "the deed has been done. Mr. Geering has already struck Mr. Maxwell with the full strength of his arm and has knocked him down in a public place in the city of New York, before witnesses."

If Mr. Ullmer imagined this would calm her he was mistaken. "Have you done that, John Geering?" she asked. "Oh! What have I done to be tossed about among such men? Money, anger, revenge!"

She clasped her hands until her fingers were white. She bit her lip. She pressed her hands against her cheeks.

"Money! Money!" she moaned. "That is why you hit an old man, John Geering!"

"Pardon me," said Mr. Maxwell softly, and with his usual good natured smile, "but I'm not quite an old man. I believe I could, if so minded, stand up with John Geering, and he would drop nine times to my one—fair rules and no favors."

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