(Concluded from third page.)

of the bills. "Say yes, or shut up!"

The lank man slunk back, grinning sheepishly. It was no longer the pretense of a joke in any person's mind. Hunt made the offer general, and the room became silent.

"Tell everybody," he went on, "that a thousand dollars waits at my office for the man who'll come there and voluntary earn it by testing the vial."

He swept his eyes triumphantly over the gaping audience, gave the bank notes another enticing shake and strode out of the room.

Loneton, as we have said, was in the mountains, and in those days railroads were scarcely known of there, while telegraphy by electricity had not been invented. News was a local and scarce commodity in an isolated place like that.

But if rumor did not fly far or make itself conspicuous under attractive headlines, it somehow filled the area of natural limitation with amazing suddenness. From town to mountain-side, and up and down the foot-hills, and in and out of the pockets and dells flashed this fresh incident of the murder mystery. Everybody heard of the offer made by Lawyer Hunt, and everybody had an opinion to express regarding it.

"I'm purty darn sarting 'at hit air an out'n out bluff," remarked 'Squire Spivy to the State's attorney. "A Noo Yo'k bluff, ye mought say."

"Of course it is," was the reply, "and it beats the devil why somebody doesn't call him. He'd wilt like a sweet-potato slip in a drouth."

"Then why don't ye call 'im?" demanded the 'squire. "Ye'd git the pot."

"Humph!" sneered the prosecuting lawyer, "I'll never have the chance to. Hunt knows whom to tackle."

The 'squire, a droll-looking countryman from the foot-hills, mused for a few moments with a reminiscent, ecloguic vacancy in his eyes; then, suddenly assuming a shrewd countenance, said:

"Ef ye're a jes' nat'rally er dyin' ter try the projec' w'y, I'll go see Hunt an' 'range the matter."

"Do it, 'squire, do it," urged the attorney, jocosely grimacing while he bit off a chew of tobacco. "I'll see you well paid for your trouble."

People took sides in this matter; they even grew intemperate and pugilistic over it, and hot arguments ended in punches and nose-bleeding upon two or three occasions. Strange to say, however, no person seemed quite ready to earn the thousand dollars which Hunt, in the tireless search for a victim, made exhibt of in every crowd he could come upon.

Bloat Jack took the temptation to heart. It was noticed that he appeared thoughtful, down-spirited, and was inclined to silence. He was, indeed, so absent-minded that, so Paddy Dineen reported, he refused a drink of apple-brandy offered him by an acquaintance, which was regarded as a grave symptom.

"W't ails Bloat, anyhow?" the inquiry went from group to group. "He do sorto' seem unhappy."

In time it leaked out that Bloat Jack had been heard to say:

"Im no count for nothin' an' never wuz, an' it look as if I mout jes's well try it. Hit cayn't more'n kill me, nohow.

"I tole 'im bedad niver to do sich a thing," said Paddy Dineen, "but I reckon the pore craytur don't moind di'th one bit at all, he's got so low down. An' besides, Maysther Hunt is a spoikin' 'im kind o' private loike wid the bayst o' Frinch liquor an' stuff to git 'im stiff 'nough to do it."

More than one person chanced to see Hunt furtively and with a wheedling look accost Bloat Jack in by-way or alley.

"Ef he do pu'suade 'im inter doin' it," remarked 'Squire Spivy in a deprecatory tone to the State's attorney, "he'd orter be lynched. Bloat air a pore, harmless critter."

"Look here, 'squire, I hope you're not goose enough to put any faith in such a preposterous story as this!" said the attorney, and he interpolated some very vigorous expletives while speaking. "You're surely not a born fool."

"I sort o' su'mise 'at I air 'bout on the same footin' wi' you. You don't git up an' hurry ter try thet 'speriment, I take spaycial notice," was the dry rejoiner.

"Oh, get along," laughed the attorney as the 'squire rose to go out of the office. "But say, 'squire" he called out through the open door. The 'squire was on the side walk, but turned and peeped in.

"I say 'squire, you keep a close eye on that little game and report everything to me. I'll pay you handsomely. Watch every move. They're not smarter than you are, do you think?"

The 'squire meditated and his jaundiced countenance appeared to give forth a twinkle of billious cunning, as if he were weighing the chances of some scheme or other, Lawyer Hunt was his friend, but then—

"Wayl," he presently drawled, "ef they air up to my trick, ye kin bet I'll fetch it ter ye."

Late at night before the morning of the day set for Mowbry's trial a fresh rumor took the breeze, a rumor very grateful to all ears and with much in it to give color of authenticity to the main fact.

But Jack had finally agreed, in consideration of one thousand dollars, so some one reported, to have the experiment made upon him, or rather to make it himself, which should test the power of the celebrated vial's contents.

It was told in surreptitious whispers that cats and dogs and pigs experimented upon in the room over Hunt's office had actually flashed away into tenuous vapor under the touch of but a single drop. Men leaned close at the bar of Paddy Dineen's saloon and looked at one another askance, while the night waned and the cocks crowed up the day.

It was to be a great day; folk poured in from everywhere around and filled the town with a motley swarm breathlessly eager for a sensation and bent upon having it.

Early in the morning 'Squire Spivy went to the State's attorney and, after some hepatic coughing and hesitation, told him that at last lawyer Hunt had succeeded in getting Bloat Jack up into a room over his office where something uncanny would betimes happen.

"Hit air a go," he added almost hoarsely, "the 'speriment air to be tried. Hit's done been tried on er cat. Yes'r. last night; I seed it; I crope up an' peeped through the key-hole."

"And what did you oberve?"

"Observe?" The 'Squire shuddered retrospectively: "thet cat 'jes 'sploded an' glimmered inter nothin', 'jes petered into pale smoke an' dis'peared, leavin' nothin' but er smell er' singed cat-h'ar!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the State's attorney. "Dad burn nonesense! Go 'long!"

The 'squire set his bilious jaw, and made a dangerously suggestive movement toward his his hip pocket. The 'squire had been known to fight at a word.

"Mebbe ye consider 'at I've lied?" he growled.

"No; but this thing—" the attorney began.

"Air 'jes's I tell ye," snapped the 'squire.

The two men looked straight at each other in silence.

Presently, speaking in an absent minded, reflective strain, the squire said:

"I wouldn't be in ole Bloat's boots f'r forty million dollars!" He lifted his shoulders and could not entirely hide a shuder.

Just then a trumyet-toned voice was heard from the opposite side of the street crying out:

"Oh yes! Oh yes! The circuit court of Lonesome county's now in session!"

It was the high sheriff opening the court for Mowbry's trial.

The State's attorney put on his hat, gathered up an armful of law-books and hurried away to the court-house.

"Fetch me all the news you get," he called back over his shoulder to the 'squire.

Loneton, like ancient Rome, covered seven hills, very small ones, over which the ochre-colored clay streets clambered from knob to knob, their ruts and gulleys scantily fringed with dog-fennel. Its houses were mostly old wooden shells set upon stilt-like foundations. The court-house, which stood on the center of a square lot, surrounded with rustic hitching racks for horses, was a squat, weather-beaten edifice, having dismal windows in front, on each side of a double porch decorated with rudely fluted columns.

"If your honor please," said the great advocate from New York city, "in behalf of the prisoner, my client, I now withdraw the plea of insanity, and will let the cause stand on the simple plea of not guilty; for we shall prove him as guitless an any jurror in that box."

This did not surprise the State's attorney, but it did seem to confirm in a way what had been rumored. Plainly the defense had some hidden support. Meantime the great lawyer spoke on.

Such a voice had never before been heard in Loneton; it thrilled every soul of that audience with a strange musical power. In those days oratory was almost unlimited in its influence. The man's presence, moreover, was captivating, his face wore a solemn, almost awful expression, such as Booth could put on at his inspired moments, and his dark, gray-green eyes emitted magnetic light. He was still on his feet when Hunt, showing a precipitate mood and expanded eyes, came elbowing his way from the front door, and, entering the bar, hurried to his side and whispered something in his ear.

The great advocate started and stepped a pace backward, while a look of supreme tragic horror distorted his grand face. Hunt also showed uncontrollable agitation.

The State's attorney and his co-counsel moved uneasily in their chairs. Something had hapened; the audience gaped breathlessly.

At the same time 'Squire Spivy, wrought upon and sweating with excitement, entered the court-room. He was evidently in an ecstasy of haste; his face, wrinkled and shrunken, was of a saffron hue, and when he reached the State's attorney he could scarcely speak, he panted so violently.

"B-B-Bloat's gone!" he exclaimed in a rasping, far-reaching whisper. "He-w-went ter thin smoke at one puff! Ugh! Lordy mussy!"

The jury heard, the court heard, the audeience heard. A hush of almost suffocating attention filled the house. Every soul present knew the purport of those words; for all had been indirectly expecting something of the sort.

"Hit was tur'ble," the 'squire continued to sibilate. "Pore ole Bloat! He went suddent, ermazin' suddent!"

Lawyer Hunt handed a small glittering object to the great advocate, who held it for a moment in plain view. It was a gold-necked vial two-thirds full of sparkling pale green liquid which when shaken played up and down with a treacherous, flame-like ripple.

So thoroughly and evenly had gossip spread every particular of the news that there was probably not a person in the court-room who did not know that vial at a glance and feel the awful significance attaching to its contents.

The judge was a short, bald headed man with a heavy underhung chin and protruding eyes. He looked uneasily this way and that and mopped the bare area of his crown with a red bandana. It had been long known that the judge would not fight.

'Squire Spivy continued speaking in his enormous whisper and gesticulating at random while the State's attorney backed by his now wax-pale co-counsel was trying to address the court.

"Your Honor," he said, and with difficulty rolled his stiffening tongue in his cheek to moisten it; "your honor, 'Squire Spivy informs me that—that a hideous, dastardly, awful crime has just been committed in the room over Mr. Hunt's law office." By this time the speaker's face was very pale and his lips were crisp as he proceeded. "I demand, your honor, that this court order the sheriff to arrest Mark Hunt for the murder of Jackson Beck, or Bloat Jack, as we call him, and arrest also that man there as his accomplice, aider and abettor!" He shook his quivering finger at the great advocate.

Meantime 'Squire Spivy was plucking fussily at the State's attorney's coat and fairly screaming in a whisper insistant and deprecatory:

"No, no! Ye'll ruin yer case; Hunt didn't never tech Bloat at all. Bloat done it hisself o' his own accord—just tuck thet air little bottle an' went ter drink some o' thet air truck, jes one drap, an Lordy Mussy!" He made a motion with his hands to indicate the catastrophe.

The great advocate now began to speak in a loud, clear and incomparably bellicose strain of eloquence. His face flamed with anger, his eyes shot burning rays as he took two strides toward the State's attorney and gesticulated with superb vigor, a meanace in every motion, the vial corusceting like an enormous emerald in his hand.

"Be careful! Be careful!" cried Hunt, shrinking and dodging, "the stopper's out of that bottle!"

There was a large pine table between the opposing lawyers, and upon this lay a small whitish fragment like a bit of chalk or limestome. Nobody had observed it.

"Be careful, I tell you!" almost screamed the frightened and writhing Hunt. "You'll spill it! I tell you you'll spill it?"

"Call me murderer, have me arressted, I care not," roared the great advocate, oblivious of anything save his own eloquence. "I have a sacred duty to perform in this court-room, and no power under the blue vault of heaven can prevent my doing it!" He shook the vial, unconsciously it was evident, but with supreme defiance, over the table at the State's attorney.

'Squire Spivy leaped backward spasmodically, and almost upset one of the State's co-counsel.

"No, sir, you can not do it," the great advocate bellowed; "I will not submit to it! Before I will give up my liberty and let my client fall a helpless victim to your desire for slaughter by the gallows, I will," his imposing figure swelled and his countenance irradiated desperation, "yes, sir, I will demonstrate the power of this," he shook the vial savagely, "of this deadly fluid!" His chest tones made the building vibrate, while the stillness was like something palpable.

There is a law by which the deepest current of human feeling, held for a period at eddy, rises suddenly and breaks all bounds. A thousand men will, on the moment's impulse, take fright as one. It is a stampede of feeling toward a common act.

Somewhere near the center of the court-room an individual disturbed the stagnant audience by a struggle, at the same time uttering a cry of abject fright. The voice sounded like Paddy Dineen's, gurgling desperately: "Le' me out, bedad, quick!"

Simultaneously with this the great advocate shouted at the State's attorney:

"Away with your malicious threats! I defy them and you!"

He brought down his hand from on high with a swinging gesture, and a tiny spurt of the green liquid leaped from the vial and fell upon the whitish substance in the center of the table.

Hunt yelled forth a phrase of vehement warning. There was a broad, pale flash, a subtly energetic detonation, and a thin, expansive whirl of purple smoke which enveloped the State's attorney and swiftly widened through the air, smiting everybody with a smell of imminent danger.

Instantly the crowd moved with a surge that rocked the old temple of justice to its mud-sills. There was a multitudinous, choking rage of voices. The little judge flung himself from the bench and tore his way to a window; the sheriff ran almost over the State's attorney, who in turn bore down and trampled upon 'Squire Spivy.

It so chanced that no one was seriously hurt in the mad crush. The court-room emptied itself by way of windows and doors, heaping men upon men criss-cross, kicking, growling and furiously clawing the air, like desperate beasts. Last of all, stately, imposing, his face wearing a sublimely injured and regretful look, stalked forth the great advocate. The crowd picked itself up and looked at itself in amazement. What had happened? and how had it come to pass? Men rearrranged their clothes and wiped the dust out of their eyes, then glared at one another as if to say: who is scared?

Then came a husky, maudlin voice from across the street:

"H'lo there! w't's er masser? Who's been er fightin'?" it hiccoughed crapulously.

Eyes turned in that direction saw Bloat Jack leaning out of a window over Hunt's law office. His face was purple and his lips writhing with a frothy smile.

"Say!" he shouted when he saw 'Squire Spivy limping along; "say 'squire, tell Mark Hunt ter come'n I'me out'n yer. I want er drink! Er—say, who shot ye, 'squire? Bleedin' much?

Nobody thought of Mowbry. He had been lost in the scuffle, and, indeed, he was never seen again, never heard of.

"I reckon that Abbot must have let a drop of that stuff fall on our client," Hunt was fond of saying in after years. "But," he would add with a wink, we tried it on Bloat Jack, and it never made him flinch. He smacked his lips and begged for more! Got my thousand dollars too easy, the old scamp?"

'Squire Spivy always insisted that he peeped through the key-hole of the room over the law office and saw "w'at looked 'dxac'ly like wa't I said I saw." But it was frequently more than hinted, by certain persons, that financial ointment poured by counsel for the defense sharpened Spivy's vision. The State's attorney was never heard to discuss the outcome.

Russell Woolworth Abbott went back to New York City bearing fresh honors and presumably a fat fee.

"An' she-divil's own liyur wuz he," said Paddy Dineen; "Oi broke me nick twoice a-gitten' out of that court-house, bedad!"—*Mid-Continent Magazine.*

## AUDITOR'S NOTICE.

Clayland Mullikin, Assignee,
vs.
James B. Merritt, M. D., and wife.

Notice is hereby given to all persons concerned that the Auditor will proceed to make an audit in the above entitled cause on

TUESDAY, AUGUST 10TH, 1897,

at his office in Easton. Persons having claims against the fund are warned to file same with the Clerk of the Circuit Court for Talbot County on or before that day, otherwise they may be excluded from all benefits of said fund. OSWALD TILGHMAN,
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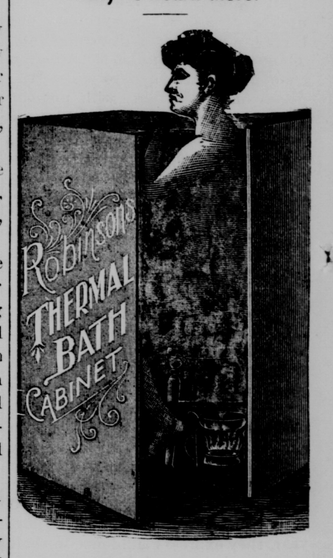
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