

THE FAKE AUCTION

By H. E. TWINELLS
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THE PROPRIETOR

AMERICANS have the reputation of being quick witted and shrewd. As a matter of fact we are. Barnumized bluffers, far more glib and credulous than any class of any nation.

Right now, in nearly every moderate city of the United States we are falling in line and dropping gold into the tills of organized fake auction stores and taking in exchange a misrepresented article. These bogus auction stores are more harmful to us as a nation than all the old-time lotteries, policy games, mail-order fakes and circus grafts, including gold bricks and shell games, combined.

They are not honest. They play "heads we win, tails you lose." Uncle Sam doesn't want to bring up his boys in the business; yet he countenances it, and over 530 of his cities issue licenses regularly to the auctioneers of these fake companies, giving them the privilege of swindling the public at a nominal fee.

Any town with over 10,000 blind, Barnumized Yankees waiting to be buncoed is considered a fertile field.

From coast to coast,

from line to line, we find in nearly every state from one to forty cities supporting temporary auction swindles. Few are permanent; it is a mushroom business which springs up over night in a cheap store, leased from month to month, and stays until trouble occurs or the field is worked dry.

New York city alone demands to be duped by no less than eight practically permanent companies of this sort, only shifting their positions to greener fields as the crowds change.

There are three ways to tell a legitimate auction. If the place is permanent and advertises sales on certain days, if the goods to be sold are catalogued piece for piece, and if there are no outside men hired to control the bidding, then it is certain that the sale is genuine.

The fake auction game is played under the pseudo patronage of reliability. The auctioneer's license, issued by the city, is hung conspicuously near the door and the goods are claimed to have been consigned from private sources or pawnbrokers in nearby cities. It is misrepresentation from the start. As a matter of fact the goods were picked up in job lots from novelty houses, jobbers, Japanese stores and regular auction supply firms who handle job lots of trashy stuff and are to be found in all the larger cities. The iveries they handle are made of cheap clay by shrewd Japs who have scraped through the shell of American bluff and found the flabbiness of the flesh beneath. These antiques crumble to pieces after six months in a heated apartment. Practically all the goods handled in these stores are made on the same principle and bought at from one-fifth to one-fiftieth of what they will bring at auction.

There is nothing criminal in selling at an exorbitant profit if the purchaser gets the square deal. But a fake auction company is primarily a ring of cheats never intentionally giving anyone a square deal.

The proprietor is the arch rogue. His profit depends on selling the article at anywhere from fifty to two, three and sometimes five hundred dollars. The auction does not pay it run for the average buyer; it is merely a trap, a "plant," for the occasional "good thing" who happens in and is quickly relieved of a large amount of money through an elaborate system he never suspects.

It is a joyless game, played on cut-and-dried rules which admit of no freshness or originality. The average cast—for they are all actors and play the same cheap show every day—is made up of one backer, or proprietor, two auctioneers, one pretty girl cashier, and from two to ten "shills" (the pale-faced people with mushy morals), their number depending on the size and situation of the store.

The backer usually is a shrewd and unscrupulous man who rents a vacant store, fills it with a scattering of cheap, showy articles to attract attention and a number of large so-called "works of art," and "antiques" which, on inspection, prove to be minors. The range runs from fountain pens at ten cents to deceptive "iveries," which bring from fifty to two hundred and fifty dollars, and sometimes more, from the uninitiated.

The proprietor hires a pretty girl cashier and counts her as an additional attraction. He gets one or two auctioneers—they usually travel in pairs, to relieve one another and the public—and guarantees them ten per cent. of the sales, which commission runs from forty to two hundred dollars a week.

Then the dealer incorporates the backbone of the whole crooked business—the body of "shills."

I don't believe you gentlemen would give \$2.50 to see statue of liberty do a Salome dance. Two dollars bid, oh, shill! Two dollars!"

Jones, your out-of-town friend, is undecided whether to go in or not; but at that moment a fellow near the door shakes his head to a seeming stranger beside him and says in a low voice: "It's a shame. Things are going for nothing. Wish I had the price to buy some of that cut glass. It'll sell for a song."

Jones overhears and is interested. He thinks the mind of everybody in that store is centered on the opera glasses, going so cheap. He smiles at their rapt attention and the auctioneer's hard luck complaints. The smile would disappear instantly if he knew that he himself was the sole concern of the eight minds in that audience, and the auctioneer. He would be furious if he knew the auctioneer saw Jones looking in a shanty; that when this fact to the shill nearest the door by saying, "Oh, shill!" casually in his speech. Jones had never heard the word, so naturally he didn't select it with suspicion from the auctioneer's jargon, and suspected nothing when the man near the door remarked about cut glass bargains.

As a matter of fact Jones was interested in cut glass. His wife liked it and occasionally he invested in some. It being the nearest he could get to diamonds.

So he sauntered in casually and watched with an amused smile the frantic auctioneer trying to sell a watch. Jones wasn't interested in watches. He had one in his pocket; so his eyes continually roved toward the cut glass in a little Japanese cabinet.

He didn't know it, but before he was in the place two minutes, while the auctioneer was trying to "feel him out" with the watch, one of the shills had noticed Jones's interest in cut glass, and had called the auctioneer's attention to the fact by touching the cabinet significantly.

The auctioneer, on his perch above them all, had control of the situation. He noted the signal from the shill, jotted down mentally that Jones wanted cut glass, and knocked down the watch he had been experimenting with to one of the shills for a ruinous price, which was all helpful in showing Jones that a shrewd man could pick up a bargain if he laid low, attracted no attention and bided his time.

"Sold for six ninety. Put it with the other goods for Mr. A. Deposit sufficient," the auctioneer cried to the pretty cashier.

Jones did not bid on the first piece of cut glass. The auctioneer did not look toward him once to give him a chance. The piece was knocked down for \$3.80. It was a frightful bargain. Jones would have given \$5 for it himself. But the auctioneer passed abruptly to the next article.

Jones pressed forward this time as a gorgeous punch bowl was put up. He heard various exclamations around him, all tending to give him confidence in the fact that things were going dirt cheap. Two ladies beside him commiserated because they wouldn't have enough. "Gentlemen and ladies," the auctioneer went on solemnly, "if I had this article in Chicago or New York it would bring one hundred dollars, one hundred dollars. You couldn't duplicate it at retail for less than two hundred. It is the finest piece of art glass ever shown in your city."

"Can I get one hundred dollars? Ninety? Eighty? Seventy-five dollars? Can I get sixty? Fifty? Give me forty; thirty-five; thirty!"

"Fifteen dollars!" came a halting voice from beside Jones.

Jones was interested. He sensed a bargain. Had he known that when the auctioneer said "thirty-five" it was a signal to the shill beside Jones to bid \$30 with a line through it, or fifteen actual dollars, he would not have been so enthusiastic.

"Sixteen!" "Seventeen!" "Half!" "Eighteen!" staccato offers punctuated the atmosphere after the auctioneer's encouragement.

The little man beside Jones shook his head sadly.

"Gee, it's gone beyond me," he sighed, turning to Jones; "it'll go dirt cheap, too. If you could buy that for \$50 it'd be a bargain, sure enough."

"Twenty-eight is the last bid," wailed the auctioneer. "Why, you could take it out and pawn it for more than that."

Jones thrilled as the auctioneer turned to look squarely at him.

"You'd give thirty, wouldn't you?" he cried.

Jones gulped and nodded.

The auctioneer skillfully led up to the grand landing by taking offers of "thirty-six" and "thirty-seven" from members of his troupe. He had felt out his man carefully and knew that \$40 would be Jones's limit.

"Will you give me forty?" he said simply, in a level tone, leaning far over the showcase.

Jones hesitated, gulped, and then nodded his head abruptly.

Jones was pleased with his bargain until he got home and his wife told him he could get the same punch bowl for \$10 anywhere and that the other stuff was worthless.

well being during the whole time he is one's guest."

"Animals feed; man eats; the man of sense alone knows how to eat."

"The destiny of nations depends upon how they are fed."

"Monsieur le canceller," a hostess asked him one day, "which do you prefer, Burgundy or Bordeaux?"

"Madame," replied the judicial authority, "that is a lawsuit in which I have so much pleasure in taking the evidence that I always postpone judgment."

THE PROPRIETOR

THE CASHIER

THE AUCTIONEER

THE SHILL



THE PROPRIETOR

THE CASHIER

THE AUCTIONEER

THE SHILL

SALE TODAY.

Pick out any acquaintance who lives in a small town, is fairly prosperous, and has come to the nearby city of 10,000 to 30,000 population to look around for the day, purchase a present for his wife and some implements for the farm.

He has read in the papers and magazines accounts of book, art and antique auctions and noted the high prices brought by rarities. When he stumbles on to the flagrant flag of the fake auction house and looks in at the window, heaped with a miscellany of antiques, he is suddenly stirred by that perennial longing for a bargain.

He glances through the door. There is a worried auctioneer struggling with eight dull-faced people. He is trying frantically to sell a pair of opera glasses.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen; conceive and convex lenses, put up in this heavy morocco case," the auctioneer cries, "and \$2 is bid for them. Think of that! Not a tenth of their value. Why,

office as civil judge. He fled to Switzerland and then to the United States, where he played a fiddle in a New York theater to gain a living.

His property was afterward returned to him and he was made a counsellor of the Supreme court, an office he clung to successfully through changes of empire and kingdom. His "Physiology of Taste" shared the fate of many celebrated books. It was refused by several publishers and eventually published at the author's expense, but without his name attached to it, as he considered the nature of the work incompatible with his judicial functions.

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Some of the axioms from his book are:

"The man who can cook is made, the man who can roast is born."

"To invite anybody to one's house is to undertake the responsibility of his

New News of Yesterday

by E. J. Edwards

How Thackeray Left America

Homelessness Caused Him to Sail Suddenly Without Word to Friends Who Were Planning Big Dinner for Him.

When William Makepeace Thackeray visited the United States for the second and last time, in 1855, to deliver his lecture entitled "The Four Georges," the two Americans who were closest to him during his stay were Parke Godwin, publicist and son-in-law of William Cullen Bryant, and George William Curtis.

"The intimacy which we enjoyed with Thackeray was due to the fact that he made his headquarters while in this country at the old Putnam's Magazine office, with which both Mr. Curtis and myself were connected," explained Mr. Godwin a few years before his death. "Sometimes Curtis and myself were enthusiastically agreed that Thackeray was the most delightful, lovable and companionable man we had ever met. But, probably, just when we had arrived at this decision, Thackeray would be brusque and apparently cold toward us, and there would be decided traces of cynicism or contempt in his nature. Frankly, though we tried hard, and had rare opportunities to do so, we never fully understood him. I think, myself, that he was a man of moods, or else he sometimes suffered from ill-health, which he bore uncomplainingly, although his relations with his fellow men were affected by his physical suffering."

"Thackeray, to the personal knowledge of Curtis and myself, did many strange things while he was in the country, but the most astonishing of all his acts was the manner in which he left America and his best friends here. It was particularly embarrassing to me; and it was an act that had every outward aspect of cold and purposeful discourtesy."

"After making a successful lecture trip through the south, if I remember correctly, Thackeray returned to New York flushed with his success, and, in that happy spirit, sent us word that he would be with us for two or three days before departing to fulfill some lecture engagements in another section of the country. We were so rejoiced over his success and his presence in the city that we arranged for a dinner in his honor, and Thackeray, when he learned of our plan, was particularly delighted. Nothing pleased

him more than a good dinner with good company. He would sit the longest at the table of any man present; he was at his best around the festive board.

"I was particularly active in planning the dinner and extending invitations to it. The afternoon of the great day I sent a message to Thackeray's hotel to tell him that I would meet him there at a certain hour that evening and escort him to the feast. Pretty soon the messenger was back with the startling information that Mr. Thackeray was no longer stopping at the hotel.

"Much perturbed, I hastily made my way thither, and upon inquiry at the desk, I learned to my great astonishment that Thackeray that very morning had suddenly vanished. I found his luggage packed, paid his bill and departed in a carriage. "Gone where?" I asked. And the proprietor gave it as his opinion that the distinguished novelist had sailed for Europe but a few hours since.

"As quickly as I could I went to the office of the steamship line that

had a sailing that day. Yes, Mr. Thackeray had arranged for accommodations just an hour or so before sailing time, and had barely caught the steamer. No, he had not left any message. Nor had he left at the hotel or anywhere else any message for me or any one else interested in honoring him at the dinner. He had departed for Europe unceremoniously, and, apparently, in a most discourteous manner.

"Of course the dinner, minus the guest of honor, was a flat failure. At it, and for some time after, Curtis and I were asked to explain Thackeray's curious conduct. We didn't even try to offer an explanation—to us his conduct was inexplicable. But weeks later I made some inquiries and was told that Thackeray, the morning of the festive day, was overwhelmed all of a sudden with a feeling of homesickness, and learning that a steamship was to sail that day, decided on the instant to take passage by it to England. Perhaps that was the true cause of his departure. But if it was it showed him to be a man of whims and moods, and that may explain much that so many persons regarded as mysterious or eccentric about him."

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Human Postoffice Rewarded

How Boy Who Acted as Cupid's Messenger for Thurlow Weed Became Treasurer of the United States.

Thurlow Weed must have been about eighty years of age when I said to him one day:

"An old friend of yours, Mr. Weed, told me yesterday to ask you about the delightful surprise you gave Mrs. Weed when you took her with you to Washington during Lincoln's first administration."

"Ah," he said, "it was a surprise and a delight for Mrs. Weed, and it is one of the sweetest memories of my married life. I will tell you about it."

"When I was a journeyman printer—for, you know, that was my trade—I came to be employed by a man in a little village near Herkimer, N. Y. Of course I was only a hired man—in reality not much more than a printer's devil, because all the odd jobs of the shop fell to me, the only employee—and so I was not of much consequence so-

cially in the village. Nevertheless I had not been there long before I was greatly attracted by a young woman upon whom I cast about my eyes at every opportunity. I soon had reason to suspect that she was not displeased by my attentions, but after a while, when we had become so well acquainted that it was plain I purposed keeping company with her, there were parental objections, and I was practically forbidden the house.

"But, the saying is, you know, 'Love will find a way.' In that village there lived a barefooted, freckle-faced, tow-headed boy of Dutch descent. But he was as bright as a new dollar. One day I met him in the street.

"'Frank,' I said to him, 'do you suppose you could carry a note for me to a certain young lady so secretly that nobody but she would know it?'

"'I guess I could,' he replied.

"'Well, do you suppose you could bring a note from her just as secretly?'

"'You try me and see,' the boy said.

"So I wrote a little note, discreetly worded, and delivered it to this Cupid's postmaster. A day later he came to me with a note which had been entrusted to him by the young lady. Later in the day—maybe it was the next day—I answered the note and gave my reply to the boy for delivery. In due time he brought me another note from the young lady; and thus we kept up a secret correspondence that lasted until I proposed, when all objection was removed to my paying attention to the young lady. Not long after that we were married.

"Well, one time when it became imperative for me to go to Washington during Lincoln's administration I took Mrs. Weed with me. 'My dear,' I said, after we had reached there, 'I should like to take you to the treasury department. I can't bring you another gentleman I know there.' And a little later we walked into the office of the treasurer of the United States.

"I took Mrs. Weed over to a desk at which a gentleman was sitting.

"'My dear, do you know who this is?'

"'No,' she had to confess.

"'What, you don't know our Cupid's postman? I exclaimed in feigned surprise.

"'Yes, there he was—no longer the barefooted, freckle-faced, tow-headed little village boy, but a full grown, handsome man—Francis D. Spinner. And you can imagine the surprise and delight of Mrs. Weed when she discovered in the treasurer of the United States the boy who had been the dumb and faithful little messenger of our courting days.'

Mr. Weed might truthfully have added that, in return for the services Frank Spinner gave him in his courting days, he took every possible opportunity to befriend the lad as he grew up. And it was upon Mr. Weed's recommendation that President Lincoln named Mr. Spinner treasurer of the United States in 1861, a position that he filled with great credit until 1875, when failing health caused him to retire voluntarily. It was during his incumbency that women were first employed as clerks in the treasury department to take the place of the men who enlisted in the Union army.

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Douglas and the Clambake

Little Giant Mightily Pleased the People of Norwich, Conn., by His Tribute to the Native Institution.

Stephen A. Douglas, known from one end of the land to the other in the days of his popularity as the "Little Giant," was the first candidate for the presidency to take the stump in his own behalf. His determination to make a personal campaign for the presidency was not entirely to the liking of the conservative politicians of 1860, but I have been told that he excused his action by saying that Lincoln made his campaign for the same office, especially in the east, before he was nominated, and that it was vital that some one in authority should reply to Lincoln in that section of the country, there having been no opportunity for this to be done until after the presidential nominations had been made.

However that may be, I know personally that the "Little Giant" gladly accepted an invitation to speak to his countrymen at Norwich, Conn., the home town of William A. Buckingham, who a little later became one of the great war governors of the north—a town where Lincoln, in February of the same year, made an address which many persons said later saved Connecticut to the Republican party in the ensuing state election by the narrow majority of 541.

Great preparations were made for the Little Giant's appearance in the old town. In deference to his wishes a meeting in the open—the usual type of political gathering in the west—a large common was selected for the scene of the rally, booths were set up to purvey lunch, consisting principally of oyster soup, and it was arranged that there should be a characteristic New England clambake at the end of the speechmaking.

It turned out to be a gala occasion. The farmers flocked in from miles around to see and hear Lincoln's great

rival, and as they gazed on the little dumpty man with the great head, the great shock of hair and the large, cavernous eyes thundering forth at them from the speakers' stand, many were the comparisons they drew between him and the tall, gaunt, loose-jointed rail-splitter most of them had seen and heard speak in the same town a few months earlier.

Yet for all the diminutiveness of stature, Douglas held the close attention of the great gathering throughout his entire speech. My boyhood recollection of that speech is that it was a superb political and oratorical effort, but the impression that it made on me was slight compared with the effect caused by the impromptu postscript to the speech itself. His peroration delivered with all that power of oratory which he possessed to a superlative degree, Douglas paused for a moment and smiled expectantly into the sea of upturned faces before him.

"And now that I have had the privilege of addressing my fellow-citizens of this historic town," he continued, "I shall take advantage of the invitation given to me to participate for the first time in my life in a genuine New England clambake. Its aroma first reached me while I was in the midst of my speech. It has lingered in my nostrils ever since. It has tantalized me greatly. It is very inviting. And, with your permission, I will now step down from this platform and proceed to revel to my heart's content in your famous feast."

A mighty shout greeted this unexpected tribute to a much-loved native institution. Then they took the Little Giant to a place which had been prepared for him and feasted him. And when he had had a surfeit he signed contentedly, beamed upon the gentlemen gathered about him in the tent (my father was of the number) and said: "Now, gentlemen, I shall go on my way rejoicing."

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Lord Clanricarde's Plaque

This Example of Goldsmith's Art is One of the Greatest in the World.

One of the greatest Claquecento jewels in the world is the Clanricarde plaque, owned by Lord Clanricarde, who is known as the Hermit Peer, and who claims direct descent from the kings of Connaught. He guards the jewel with a jealous care this precious example of the goldsmith's art, keeping it safe from possible thieves and the common gaze in a bank vault, to which he goes occasionally with great secrecy to feast his eyes upon its magnificence. Some years ago, by royal request, he lent it to an art exhibition in London, where it was admired and coveted by some of the greatest connoisseurs of Europe.

The huge disk is an delicately wrought as a spider's web, and represents the figure of Hercules, wielding a diamond sword. The sword blade is composed of a mass of perfectly matched steel-white stones, and a superb blue diamond scintillates from the hilt. The present owner inherited it from his mother, who was a Miss Canning before her marriage to the Irish lord, and the plaque is practically priceless. Aside from its value to collectors, and its worth as a specimen of rare and exquisite art, it is incrustated with a fortune in jewels.

Clever Method of Bribing.

One of the cleverest bits of electioneering dodger was devised by an agent who had been forbidden to corrupt the electors. He called a meeting and attended with his pockets full of gold. "I have to inform you, gentlemen," he began, "that there is to be no bribery on our side during this election. (Hear, hear!) For my part, I do not intend to give away a penny piece (Uneasy silence.) But I

am afraid there are some d-d rascals in this room, and that presently they will lay me on the table and take 500 sovereigns out of my pockets." The next few seconds he spent upon the table.—London Chronicle.

Let Me Go Hungry.

Sometimes men do things out of selfishness rather than out of kindness. Recently a club woman told this story:

"An old couple came in from the country with a big basket of lunch to see the circus.

"The lunch was heavy. The old wife was carrying it. As they crossed a crowded street the husband held out his hand and said:

"'Gimme that basket, Hannah.'

"The poor old woman surrendered the basket with a grateful look.

"'That's real kind o' ye, Joshua,' she quavered.

"'Kind!' grunted the old man. 'Gosh, I was afeared ye'd git lost.'

It takes a smooth tongue to sidetrack a bill collector.

MONUMENT TO A GOOD LIVER

Bellefleur, in France, to Honor the Memory of Brillat-Savarin, Noted Gourmand.

Bellefleur, a little town in the southeast of France, is about to raise a monument to the glory of one of its sons, Brillat-Savarin. The author of "The Physiology of Taste" was the absolute realization of the typical good liver. The revolution confiscated his property and removed him from his

office as civil judge. He fled to Switzerland and then to the United States, where he played a fiddle in a New York theater to gain a living.

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