

LEGENDS.

THE SERAPHIC BANJO CLUB.

A number of years ago—it was before you ever saw the university, so you don't care for the date—the school had among other good things which it does not possess now a banjo club. It was one of the real kind, four banjos, a couple of banjeourines for leads, a picollo banjo and a bunch of guitars for bass. It took all the material the school offered to compose the club. Every man who had a banjo and could play it was pressed into service, besides some who had them and could not play, and others who played on borrowed "shells." There were several banjos that were in use which cost under \$100—notably Laurie Packard's. Now, Packard's banjo was the unhappiest musical consummation that was ever heard in the university. No one could play it but himself, which was just as well, because no one cared to. He traded a pair of suspenders for it at a pawn shop, and the Jew beat him badly. It had a long swan-like neck studded with five mismated pegs, a sheep skin head with part of the wool on, and an ornate tailpiece weighing about two pounds. (If you have ever played a banjo, freshman, you laughed then. If you haven't, the force was lost on you.) The club was under the direction of a Circassian-headed Indian who received his board and washing at the conservatory in re-pay for services as instructor.

At this time Sieveking, the great pianist, was holding forth at the university. He was booked for a concert at Beatrice and the banjo club was invited, not at Sieveking's instance let it be said, to go down with him and help round out the program. Did the club go? Well, the train started at 2:30 p. m. and every man had afternoon classes and drill that day. This ought to be answer enough, inasmuch as the chancellor was excusing all performers who took part in the concert. Every man was on hand at the starting time, including Packard, who had his banjo under his arm wrapped in an old quilt.

The concert was a grand success. Sieveking's nerves were at high tension and he made the boys go clear down into the furnace room of the opera house and sit on the ash pile while they tuned up, lest his sensitive ears be shocked. The boys didn't mind their quarters at all, because they had been practicing regularly in Palladian hall. There was a stunning soprano with the company and Sieveking took a great shine to her. He stood in the wings and batted his hands together and said "Bravo!" after every song. This tickled the boys. "Bravo" was a new one on them. And they laid for Mr. Sieveking going home.

The trip back to Lincoln was made in a special car. It was pretty swell for the banjo crew, but they could adapt themselves with ease to anything, from an ash bin to tune up in to a palace car in which to hold a rough house. Sieveking sat with the soprano and tried to make a hit. At the proper time the boys, who were sitting all over each other in the extreme rear of the coach, conceived the bright plan of singing in an inharmonious chorus all the songs the soprano had given with so much effect. In order to complete the burlesque they unwrapped Packard's old tub to use for an accompaniment. The original intention of putting it badly out of tune was discarded as unnecessary—Packard's banjo was never supposed to be in tune. At the first note his highness squirmed and at the end of the ditty he came back and told the gang to quit their fool noise. The boys met him with a bland smirk and made no promises. He went back and the crowd began "Because I Love You, Dear," Russell Thorp singing tenor. This brought Sieveking back on a canter. He began swearing at them viciously, but this only made the boys feel more at ease. Then he threatened to whip them separately or collectively.

He was a whale, this man, and an athlete, too, and not one of the club now would deny that he could have done so with ease, but they didn't think so then, and told him as much with some directness. At the first talk of fight Packard wrapped up his cherished banjo and put it under the seat. It would be hard to predict the ending had not the soprano herself come back and began talking with the crowd in her own fascinating way. This beat worrying Sieveking all to pieces and the concert was indefinitely postponed. It didn't help his highness' temper, however, and he paced the aisle ceaselessly until the train struck Lincoln.

That night on the way home the boys were talking over their escapade in high glee. "If he had come back to whip us," said Ed O'Franklyn, "I should have clubbed Pack's old banjo and busted it over his head."

"No you wouldn't," broke in Packard, with earnest warmth, "or it would have cost you \$15."

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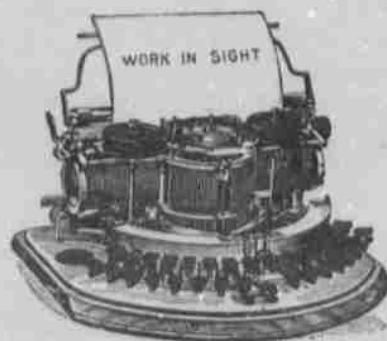
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