

JOTTINGS.

[By WILLIAM REED DUNROY.]

From a wheezy old hand organ came strains of the old song, "In the Sweet By and By." The throng on the street surged and eddied about the place where the droning sound came from. A little circle formed about the corner and over the rim of this, new comers craned as they formed other layers to the ever thickening rim of human beings.

The author of the music was an old man. He sat on a camp stool and held his beloved hand organ in his lap. His right arm went round and round steadily, as though it were a rod on the drive wheels of an engine.

His face was old and wrinkled and his beard hung from it like the mildewed moss from a weather beaten roof. His matted hair hung in a grizzly tatch, hiding a little the horrid vacancy of his sightless, orbless eyes.

One scrawny hand shakingly held to the unsympathetic crowd, grasped a tin cup in which now and again the hoarded pennies of some youngster rattled loudly, as the young man, whose heart had not yet been seared with the hot iron of indifference, dropped his dream of candy into the beggar's cup.

But the sightless old man marched the pageant of humanity. The swish of silken skirts reached his sharpened old ears, and also the dull drag of rags and calico, the merry laugh of the light hearted and the sighs of the weary and hopeless. He heard the cursing of drunken men and the ribald speech of lewd women, the braggadocio of youth and the whining of old age.

But the sightless old man was spared the worst curse of it all. He could hear all the misery and the merriment about him, but thanks be to whatever gods there be, he could not see the hard faces of those who looked upon him in his misery and rags. He could not see the faces set as a flint, or see the pitiless eyes of the more fortunate human beings about him glare at him.

He only heard the dull monotony of the strains of that song, which doubtless meant something to him, blind and a beggar:

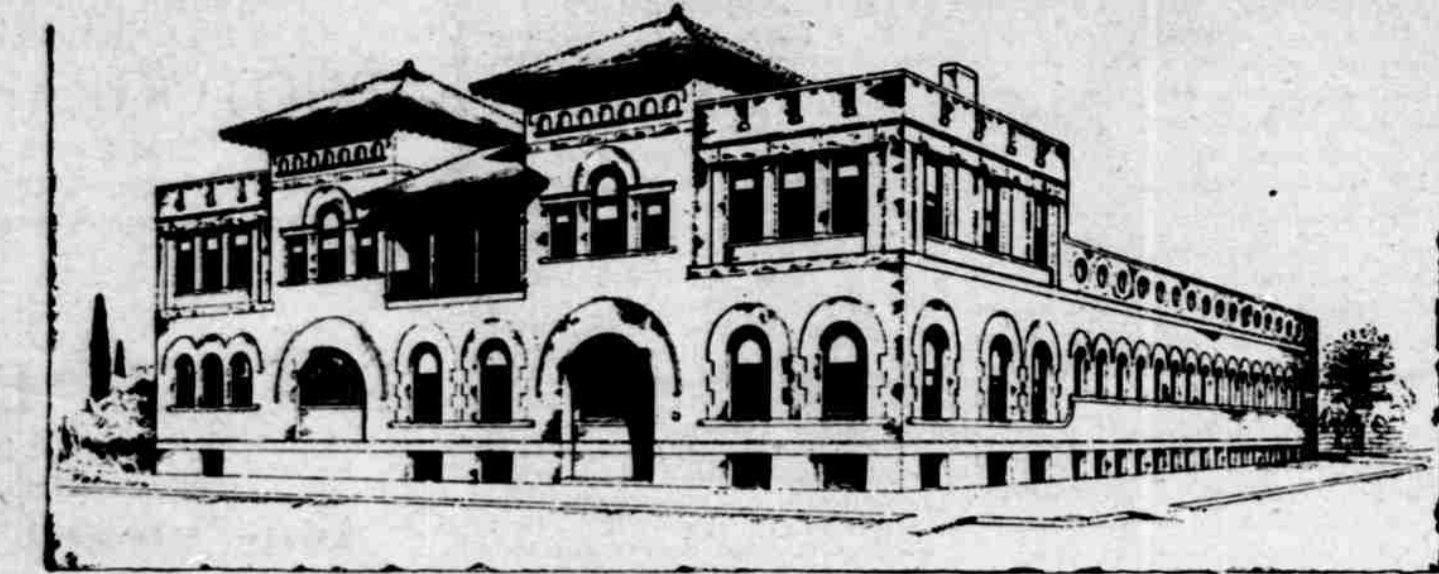
"In the sweet by and by We shall meet on that beautiful shore."

and the clinks of coins in the tin cup before him.

On another corner stood a fiddler. Over the quivering strings of a cheap fiddle, for it would be a sacrilege to call it a violin, he drew his rasping bow. The fiddle squealed and whined and shuddered like a lost soul in outer darkness.

The man was young, but his right hand was missing. To the poor maimed stump was strapped the bow which he drew across his instrument of torture. The crowd, ever ready to see something outre and bizarre, crowded and trampled about him on the stone pavement. Some of the people in the crowd hummed the popular airs played by the wandering musician, and some called off the changes in the dance as the musician played fast and furious, old country dance tunes.

After the crowd had gathered in sufficient force to make it paying, the man passed his old hat around and gathered what he could of the small gleanings of change from the pockets of those who had two hands to help them fight their way through the world. His harvest was light, and yet the gleaning in many fields evidently was sufficient to keep body and soul together, for the man's face was sleek



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and fat and he looked not a whit less comfortable than many who looked curiously at his musical performance.

And yet farther down the street stood a man about whom the people would not congregate. He stood there with his face marred and changed from all semblance of a human being. Out to the shuddering public he held shoe strings and lead pencils, begging in piteous tones for the hurrying throng to buy. In horror a few took from the old man the things he had to sell and gave him in turn coins to keep the life burning in his wrecked and tottering frame.

And the wonder of it is why such men cling to life so tenaciously. Old and forsaken, hideous and brushed hither and thither, the scum on the great sea of humanity, it is a wonder that they do not slip out of life into the beyond, through some self-sought loop hole. Yet still, life seems as sweet to them as to those who lie and bask in the sunlight of prosperity. The never ending clinging to life is a wonderful thing. We all cling to this world of sunlight and trees, this world of prairies and mountains, and deserts and seas with all the forces of our natures. We sing of the home beyond, of the rest that is to be, but alas we fear to approach the gate that leads out. Rather do we love to walk the dirt paved streets of this city and live in wooden dwellings, or mayhap, the sod-walled house, than stoop to enter through the grave door a dream city of golden paves and glittering houses studded with diamonds and pearls.

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