



TRAVELING leisurely from the far west to New York Tib and I had left the ante-ratific port and his vestibled home at Beaville—I won't name the state—in an idle quest for tormalines and amethyst, often found in that locality. A horse-dealer had told us of the place, and Tib immediately took a fancy to loiter about a few days. It was while at Beaville that we heard of Tanker's Mills, 13 miles back in the mountains. It was connected with the outside world largely by heart-throbs, for the rough country road evidently was constructed while the workmen were entertaining the delirium tremens.

"It seems that at the close of the civil war the only insane asylum in the state burned down, and that a score of the inmates in escaping the flames wandered up to Tanker's and took possession of a few deserted cabins. As the commonwealth was bedridden with debt, and as the little colony was quiet and gave no trouble the authorities decided to leave it alone to market its own garden sass. In the settlement were several men of unusual culture, perfectly rational except on some one subject, and as they controlled the weaker-minded and more perfectly crazy inhabitants, the taxpayers were glad to be rid of the whole outfit. As the years passed, the colony grew, and the individual streaks of non compos were relegated to and merged in a general plane of oddity. It became the custom when a man or woman got daff to take them up there to be heard. The ruined shacks had given place to neat frame houses, and the queer people took the best of care of any sufferers from the outside world and often sent them back cured. Funny craft, eh? Tib said it was a case of similia similibus curantur. And, mind you, those people weren't rank crazy. They averaged enough rationality to prosper and to care for an occasionally violent voter. But they were peculiar, eccentric, and of course every little while some one would get to telephoning to himself and cutting up didoes.

"We are all batty on some one subject," he declared to me. "I'm sane until it comes to shows. Another is evenly balanced until it comes to north poles, and so it goes. I'll bet those simple folk are more rational than the average alderman."

"To cut across lots, we came to Tanker's at nightfall, and saw from the brow of a hill a scattering settlement of white houses. As we entered the main street we observed a grocery store, a blacksmith shop and a small hall. And what surprised us was the busy-bae activity of a crowd of men bunched in front of the village smithy's place of business.

"What's doing, fair and merry sirs?" accosted Tib, cheerily. In his old free-and-easy way, as we poked up to the gang.

"Instantly they turned, and an old man with a Chris Kringle beard started back as though faced by a hooded cobra, and with one dramatic lean finger pointed at us, cried, 'By my faith! he has come! it is he!'

"Odd bodkins, put him to death!" cheerfully advised an urchin, who impressed my startled gaze as being 18 feet in height.

"Odd Hooligans!" cried Tib. "And why?"

"Well, sir, the old man threw back his head and pealed out a laugh that sounded about as mellow as a rusty buzz-saw eating a rock-mistle knot, and as he chortled in unseemly glee he ejaculated, 'Walked into the trap! Stab my vitals, and had he called on me at St. James, or Whitehall, I had not been more surprised.'

"From his tone I realized, sir, that we were about as popular with them as a safety deposit vault full of scarlet fever germs. Tib was impressed after the same fashion, for he whispered to me:

"What's up, Billy? Have we struck them at the harvest time of lunacy? Their speech savors of ye olden time and good Queen Bess, with it please ye. Then he asked aloud, 'Kindly identify us, reverend sir, and then yourselves.'

"Monmouth, thou wert ever a false-hearted knave, but prithee, didst think to dull my royal eyes by that disguise?" demanded the ruler-gardener of the mental aberrations in his shrill voice.

"Nay, sire," denied Tib, looking back only to behold all escape cut off. "And you are—?"

"Your uncle, sirrah, King James!" was the stern response.

"Strike me purple, Billy!" whispered Tib, "but we are invaders, and if I recall my history rightly, Mr. Monmouth lost his head."

"I say, old chap, this is getting tiresome!" I murmured to Tib. "Tell me, I'm plain Billy Campbell and a staunch supporter of the throne."

"A Campbell!" shrieked King James. "Ay, smite me bleeding, King I know the foul Scottish brood! But Argyle or Campbell, we shall hang and change from the quick to the dead more readily than ever ye shifted aliases."

"Probably some one has opened a quart bottle of pleuroid," murmured Tib, "and they are unduly excited for the minute. Anyway, if they are going to behave like this, I don't care how soon we desert them. I feel like an historical romance."

"But, sir, the minute we tried to turn we were surrounded. And what do you suppose those oddities were armed with? Pikes, sir, pikes! And that was what the smithy was busy turning out. As a rule, Tib's air of confidence would incite a cowardly pug dog to throw rocks at an elephant, but he was a bit puzzled over this situation.

TIBERIUS SMITH

The Brain Tangle at Tanker's Mills

By HUGH PENDEXTER

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ation. We'd met lots of heathens and irresponsible persons in our day, but once you realized their status you could dope out their susceptibilities and comprehend the logical trend of their intentions. But a score of incompetents might glide from one personality to another at any second and pluck us from one epoch only to plant us in another, and in every event would probably insist that we hold the most onery cards and be soundly spanked.

"It's no use, Earl of Argyle, to dodge our identity," remarked Tib to me, gravely. Then to the king, Yes, I am Monmouth, your dutiful nephew, come all the way from Brabant to kiss your august hand."

"The crowd of peasants jeered at this admission, and one stalwart roganse seemed determined to explore our physical systems with his long prod. 'Nay, nay,' prohibited the king. Their seeming frankness shall avail them naught, but retribution must overtake them in an orderly manner. My Lord Chief Justice Jeffreys shall try them in the meantime lay them in the tower with the spy who was captured three days ago."

"We were enamored with even this repite, for Tib declared it was an ill omen to be slaughtered in front of a prosaic blacksmith's shop, and, surrounded by the pikemen, we were dragged to the little town hall and thrust inside. 'Hello, spy, where are you?' demanded Tib, sparring neatly

through the open window to one of the guards—'want to earn 50 cents?' 'The man jabbed at us playfully with his spear and mumbled something about the king.

"See?" cried Tib, 'the old one has led these poor incompetents into believing he's king and they are his subjects.' Then to the guard again, taking care to keep out of range: 'What's your name, fellow? Not your stage name, but your real name?'

"The guard looked puzzled for a moment, and then replied, slowly: 'Why, I was always called Al Smikins, but since the king come I'm Colonel Kirke. That's me, Kirke.'

"When did the king come?" soothed Tib. "Why, let's see. Yes, it was just before the blackness settled down, and the guard grinned triumphantly at remembering this much. 'Me and Jed Burkins, him that's my Lord Chief Justice Jeffreys now, had just got back from selling some garden truck in Beaville. But I forgot. There ain't any Beaville now. It's Brabant, and this is England. Hooray for King James!' Stand back from that winder, ye poisonous critter! and we all three leaped aside just in time to escape being decorated with the pike. 'And if ye git sassy I'll climb in there and larrip ye,' warned the yeoman, in conclusion.

"Gramercy for thy courtesy," growled Tib, rubbing his barked knuckles. 'If ever I catch ye chasin'

and they decided the spy can live, as he warned us of your coming.'

"Hooray!" shouted the drummer, with a vulgar display of enthusiasm. "Shut up!" growled Tib. "So you foretold our coming, eh?"

"Sure; had to, to save my hide," grinned the drummer, happily. "Of course it was only con on my part, but luckily it worked out all bunkey. All's well that ends well, you know. 'You needn't be so devilish gay over it,' snapped Tib, 'or you'll find it's sad work to double-cross even the pretender.'

"Oh, come now," whined the drummer, "you fellows wouldn't spike a poor man's game? Don't you see, just as soon as I get to Beaville I'll catch a constable and come back and rescue you both."

"No ye won't," chuckled the guard, whom we'd forgotten. 'Cause King James says ye can't go till after they've been executed, whatever that means—for danged if I do. And before ye go, we're going to brand the word 'traitor' on your brow.'

"Well, that doubled the drummer all up. He tried to bribe the guard to run up to the corner store and beg the king to modify the sentence. 'I'll give two dollars if you'll get him to change his mind and brand me on the leg or in the newspapers,' he offered, hysterically.

"Odds tomatoes!" I whispered to Tib, "but we must leave here in very sooth."

"I snun, but ye're touchy, I guess!" broke in the corn-haired youth. "I only want ter do what's right. If ye don't want 'em killed, say so. I didn't think 'twould make no difference. I'm sartin no one would miss either an 'em."

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"I trow we shall not part in scorn," assured Tib. "Then let that tall feller stop his rantin'," remonstrated another.

"Beshrew me," groaned the drummer, keeping close to us; "but say, fellers, this isn't real, is it? I'm still traveling for the Buffalo house, ain't I?"

"I don't know why we took anybody besides Monmouth fer," declared the leader, stopping short and eying us evilly. 'Before this queer spell come on I don't remember as we had any call ter rescue anybody but Monmouth.'