

Saturday's Story

Nervy Jim and the Belt Man

"So Jim Landon's dead!" exclaimed the old timer, as he laid aside his newspaper and gazed vacantly at the faces around him.

"Yes, poor Jim's gone," he continued in response to their exclamations of inquiry. "Game feller him. Wouldn't swaller a bluff, no matter who served it up. Never hunted for trouble, Jim didn't, but when a man stepped on his toes once he wouldn't never care to try it again. Yes, Jim was a game little man who weren't afraid to mix it up with the old varmit hisself. And he wasn't no taller than a fourteen-year-old kid, and he had a waist like a girl's. He used to be marshal in my town when I lived over in Iowa ten years ago. Jim kept the peace pretty well and made the people respect him a whole sight more than the law he represented. Yes, we had a pretty quiet run of things, till that electric belt guy struck the town.

"That feller drove in one day in a shack of a rig and anchored hisself in the center of the square, and bellowed away as if someone was drivin' nails into the top of his head. Well, of course, the folks all went yawpin' up like blamed fools to see what's the disturbance. Then he begun the most thunderin' spiel, and took 'em all in like a toad swallerin' flies.

"It came about in this here fashion. After he had got the whole crowd around him, he opened a trunk and hauled out an electric belt. He held it up for a minute, then broke loose with a rather stunnin' proposition.

"Some folks say I'm crazy," he said, "cause I've got my own peculiar way of doin' business, but I don't happen to know of any better way of disposing of money than by giving it to them who needs it."

"Then he stopped for a moment and looked around to see what the folks seemed to think of it. Well, that crowd was as still as if they was attendin' a funeral. They just stood there as if they was expectin' a benediction. And the feller hisself! I'll admit my own feelin's were a little mussed up, as I watched him. There he stood, a towerin' above the crowd like a cottonwood in a clump of cedars. And I can say fer certain that I never yet seen a man who could match him for size. He was all of six and a half feet tall and weighed every bit of 250 pounds. He stood there as cool as a man in a steam-heated room, with a cunnin' slick smile a playin' about the corners of his mouth. The whole look of the man set me agin him at once, and yet there was somethin' fascinatin' about him. It was a creepy, sickly sort of fascination, and though I couldn't help feelin' that his next move would be a wicked one, I just stood there and stared with the rest of 'em. He had some sort of a queer lookin' search-glim stuck in his neck-tie that glistened in ugly green flashes and glared in a sullen sort of way I'll never forget. My eyes were glued on the cussed thing, and it seemed that I didn't have no-power to tear 'em away. I was a feelin' rather numb in the top story, when all to a sudden that feller let out a shriek that could a been heard five miles out in the country.

"Come on! Come on!" he roared. "I haven't no time to waste. Who wants a belt? Nudge up and get one. A dollar apiece!"

"A farmer standin' below him made the first break. Then a startlin' thing happened. The cuss gave the old hay-

seed a belt; and not only that—he wrapped a paper dollar around the silver one and handed that back along with the belt. Another guy tried his luck and got the same treatment. Several more tried it and quit a belt and a dollar ahead. But it was pretty plain that the cuss had some sort of a scheme fermentin' in his head, for he didn't look exactly like a saint. It was mystifyin' for certain. Well, he served 'em up to about a dozen. Then he fired some quarters into the crowd, and by this time they was all crazy.

"You never saw such a pack of cussed fools! Why, they all made a grand rush to see which could get pinched the worst. They jumped up on the steps and stood on the spokes of the wheels, so as to attract his attention and shell out their dollars. It was all done in two minutes. They had fired their dollars like a hired man shovellin' snow when the boss' around. But all to a sudden they got a pretty powerful jolt. The feller had for some reason or other run out of wrappin' paper, but anyhow they was all gettin' their belts without any extras. There came a sort of a sudden stop, and then the crowd was on to the game and raised a howl. But it was too late. The guy raked the dollars into his pocket; then he eyed them a moment, a takin' their measure and makin' ready to spring his bluff.

"By this time the folks were pretty well on their ears, and were squealin' like a pig with his head caught in the fence. They wasn't goin' to stand for no such treatment, and commenced to cuss in solid fashion, and it looked as if somethin' would soon be doin'. They were pretty badly worked up and commenced to close in on the feller. But he reckoned that it was about time to call a halt. And I guess he did it. Whippin' out a six-shooter, he laid down the law to 'em. The crowd didn't lose no time in tumblin' back and each man tried to get farthest away. The feller smiled and lit a cigar. The game was all his way. Then he roasted 'em.

"You're a gang of sneakin' coyotes," he said, "a tryin' to run an honest man into the ground when he's doin' an honest business. Supposin' I did give away a few shin-plasters, hasn't a man got a right to show his good will? I gave you your belts, so what more could you ask, seein' I didn't agree to do more. I'm runnin' a straight business, and if any of you fellers intend foolin' with me, you'd better get yourselves insured."

"The feller stood there as big as a lord, and no one cared to tackle him. He'd have got clean away with his bluff if Jim Landon hadn't happened along. The feller was a standin' there with a devilish, exasperatin' grin on his ugly face, a pointin' that gun of his around in the crowd, and our nerves were worked up to a thunderin' high pitch, when all of a sudden there came a commotion. Next moment we were all gapin' at Jim Landon, the little town marshal, who was cuttin' his way through to the main attraction.

"The feller seen him comin', but didn't seem a bit mussed up about it. He stood there puffin' at his cigar and waitin' to see what Jim had on tap. Jim didn't keep him waitin' long, but waded right up and stated his business: "Put up that gun," he said. "I've got a bill against you. Fakirs can't run skin games in this town without a license. So fork over ten dollars and get out of town."

"Well, that was a stunner. We just pretty near keeled over with astonishment. And the big cuss hisself—he well nigh tumbled, but pickin' hisself together again, he simply exploded.

WHEN WILLIE CAME TO SCHOOL.

Number II of a series of seven cartoons on The Adventures of Freshman Willie.



Some one lets it out that Willie's Pa is the owner of a patent churn factory, and he is immediately sought after by the various fraternities.

"Do you think I'll be run out by a kid?" he snarled. "Do you think I'll whack up and get out for every blamed striplin' that tells me to? Then he did some fancy swearin'. Finally he straightened up and covered Jim with his gun.

"Jim was ready for him, and yanked out his '32.' Drawin' a bead on him, he started in to lay down the law.

"Blaze away, you sneakin' copperhead, if you dast," he said. "I'm none afraid of you. If you don't make a mighty quick hustle at droppin' that gun I'll perforate your hide so bad that it won't be fit to sell."

"It was plain to see that Jim meant it. His jaws was set like a bull-dog's and there was a look in his eye that showed he was out for business. The big cuss was up against it for once in his life and he was the first to realize it. After all he was the yellowest coward that ever abused the privilege of livin'. Why, his knees just shook as he looked at the muzzle of Jim's gun, and it was plain to see that he had found more than he was prepared to meet. Then he smiled sort of sickly like and started to explain:

"Just a little good-natured fun," he said. "Only my own peculiar way of doing business. Wouldn't harm no one."

"But Jim was in no mood for listenin' to explanations. He made the big cuss climb down, and collarin' him, he marched him off to jail, to await trial for resistin' an officer. And the crowd went mad with yellin'. Now that all danger was over they wasn't so mum. And you bet they didn't spare their lungs in cheerin' for Jim, either. That was his triumph, and he deserved it, too.

"Yes, the little cuss was nervy, but he's met a feller that no one can bluff. Old Death's a hard 'un to deal with, and poor Jim has knuckled under at last."

R. J. J.

Ernest Thomson Seton will give one of his famous stereopticon lectures in St. Paul's church Wednesday, March 18th. Admission 50c, children 15 and under 25c. Students are cordially invited to attend.



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