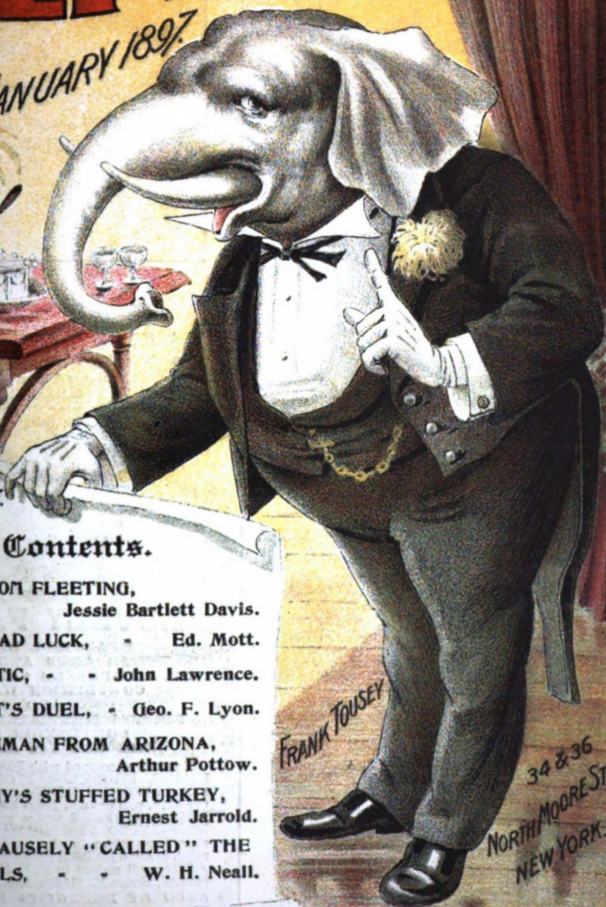


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A Happy
New Year.

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FRANK TOUSEY

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THE GENTLEMAN FROM ARIZONA.

BY ARTHUR POTTOW.



ONE winter evening, a few years ago, Charley Winthrop stood warming himself at an open fire in an apartment of the house in which he lived in New York.

There was a more than usually pleasant look upon his handsome face. For one thing he had been to Manhattan Field, and had seen Yale, his old 'Varsity, triumph. But this fact, gratifying to his feelings as it was, did not account for the frequent quiet laughs which he gave. He held in his hand a letter, and this was the probable cause, for whenever he glanced at it his merriment increased.

He read it again—for the twentieth time during the day—and as he was alone he read it aloud.

“Your Uncle Ephraim, of Denver,” the letter said, “will be at your house to-night, sometime. He will probably present himself in such a form as to hide his identity, for he wishes to put you to a test. He wants to discover what your real character is, and will take you by surprise. The writer ascertained this by accident, and made haste to warn you, having a friendly interest in you for your mother’s sake. Don’t neglect this advice.”

“Wonder who the man is who sent this letter; one of my mother’s old Denver friends probably,” mused Charley. “Anyway, it was awfully good of him. By Jove! I’ll get even with Uncle Eph before this night’s through!”

When Charley received the letter in the morning, his first care was to dispatch a telegram to Denver. He received a reply, saying that his uncle had started for New York, and according to his informant was about due there that evening.

For nearly twenty years Ephraim Harley had lived in the West, toiling hard and gaining riches, and during this time he and his nephew had never met, though they frequently corresponded. The circumstance of his visiting New York, after such a prolonged absence, without notifying his nephew, added weight to the warning contained in this mysterious letter.

"By jingo!" cried the young man, walking rapidly up and down the room, "I see it all. Old Eph's heard of my extravagance and recklessness, and he thinks I'm another Charles Surface. He's returning loaded with dollars, like Sir Oliver Surface in Sheridan's play, and if he finds my heart's all right, I'll fare as well as the hero of the drama did. Heaven knows money will be very acceptable just now."

It was an odd freak on his uncle's part, but he was not greatly surprised that the old gentleman's visit was to be made under such peculiar circumstances. He knew, for he had heard his mother often say so, that her brother delighted in perpetrating practical jokes on his friends, and no doubt the habit was with him still.

Charley Winthrop's financial position was so well defined, that it was only a matter of time, and a very short time, too, when the crash must come. Meanwhile, true to his nature, he was as light hearted as ever.

People said that he was the gayest bachelor in New York, but when they said so they did not mean to imply that he was vicious, for this would not have been true. He bewildered his friends by his eccentricities, or dazzled them by his reckless extravagance, but he never shocked them. His record might have been better, but it could easily have been worse.

At this moment, arrayed in evening dress, he was awaiting the arrival of nine or ten of his friends, whom he had invited to a bachelor dinner at his house to celebrate his birthday.

"Seven-thirty," he said, looking at his watch; "those fellows ought to be here soon," and as he said the words, Parker, his English servant, appeared at the door.

"Mr. Morrison," he announced, as a tall young man entered the room.

"Why Jack, old chap, I'm glad to see you. How are you?" was the cheery greeting of the host. "I've something to tell you."

He had determined to take Jack Morrison into his confidence, but his intention was frustrated. Scarcely had he spoken when in quick succession a number of noisy, laughing young men arrived.

All these "Jacks" and "Charleys" and "Reggies," as they were called, were soon busily engaged in discussing the football game and quarreling over the result.

"I must tell them," said Winthrop, "it's too good to keep to myself."

But he had no chance. The conversation only stopped when there came a loud and continuous ringing at the street bell. For a moment everybody was silent.

"Can't be the sheriff," laughed Jack Morrison.

"I don't expect him—yet," answered the host, smiling too.

He had moved as near the open door as possible, and from where he stood he could hear talk going on in the hall downstairs, and was able to catch most of the words.

"I reckon, young feller, yer boss 'd make ye skip ef he war hyar. By gosh! this ain't the way to treat a gen'leman," said a voice, the tone of which and the language being distinctly of the West.

Charley instantly thought of the mysterious letter and smiled. "Uncle Eph!" he muttered. "Well, I'm ready for him."

He rang the bell, and Parker appeared.

"What is it, Parker?"

"Hit's a low fellow has wishes to see you, sir, and I can't get rid of 'im."

"Wishes to see me, does he, Parker? Why, show him up at once. I won't keep any man waiting."

"Except a creditor," said Jack Morrison, *sotto voce*.

Parker was so well accustomed to his master's eccentricities, and so well drilled, that he had never displayed any surprise at his actions. He blamed himself severely for having done so on this occasion. He had distinctly raised his eyebrows.

"Jim Brook of Brookville, Arizona, that's me. Say, ye kin put 'Mister' on to et, d'ye hear?"

Mr. Jim Brook's voice was so loud and penetrating, and every word he said on the stairs to the servant was so audible to Charley Winthrop and his guests, that there really was no necessity to announce him. He had announced himself. But Parker never forgot the proprieties.

"Mr. James Brook!" he said in a loud voice as the visitor appeared.

"Jim, Mister, Jim, I reckon 's 'bout the size of et, interrupted the gentleman from Arizona, "thar's no 'James' 'bout me."

"Jim or James," said Charley pleasantly as he advanced to meet him, and proffered his hand. "Either will find himself equally welcome here."

The host and his visitor shook hands heartily.

"Yer the whitest man I've struck in this big town, mister," said Jim Brook.

"Charley's overdoing it a bit this time," whispered Algy Sinclair to Jack Morrison.

No one else made any remark or gave any indication that he felt surprise at the strange conduct of his host, though all the guests might have done so without having their good breeding questioned.

For Jim Brook was anything but a presentable person. His attire and appearance furnished a remarkable contrast to the living pictures in black and white that were around him.

Clothed in well worn garments he had a ragged beard and long, unkempt hair, and his shrunken trousers and several apertures in his shoes showed him to be as sockless as Jerry Simpson himself. His red nose gave him a vicious look, and not the least of his charms was a black patch, which apparently concealed the loss of an eye.

Before Charley could ask him the nature of his business dinner was announced.

"You must dine with me, Mr. Brook," said Charley; "we can have our talk later. No, no, I won't take a denial. This is my birthday and I drive no man from my board. Parker, place a chair for Mr. Brook."

"I say, old fellow," whispered Algy Sinclair, "have we got to eat with Dusty Rhodes?"

"Consider him the skeleton at the feast," answered Jack Morrison. "Don't crowd him too close and you won't get hurt."

"Take Mr. Brook's hat, Parker."

"Yes, sir."

"Go slow, young man," said the gentleman from Arizona, handing the servant a dilapidated derby whereof the brim and the crown seemed about to part company, "or ye'll do et a mischief."

His eyes followed the hat as if it were a relic of inestimable value, until Parker had disappeared. Then he sat down.

He not only found himself at Charley Winthrop's table, but inasmuch as he sat at his host's right hand, he might consider himself the guest of honor.

As the dinner proceeded, Charley saw that it was with difficulty that his friends kept their astonishment within due limits. But as they became warmed with wine, they paid less attention to Mr. Jim Brook, and more to the funny stories that were following each other without cessation.

Now Charley was watching his special guest quite keenly, and none the less so because he appeared to be indifferent to the stranger's actions. He became quite sure of the man's identity, for his apparent age and figure tallied with that of his Uncle Ephraim, so far as he could judge from what he had heard, and from portraits he had seen.

If Jim Brook had been accustomed to polite society he certainly succeeded marvelously well in concealing the fact. Charley thought he rather overdid the part he was assuming. But this very circumstance confirmed his suspicions.

"He doesn't know where to draw the line," said the young man.

The gentleman from Arizona might have been rehearsing for a public performance as a sword swallower from the way in which he thrust his knife down his throat, and of the duties of the fork he entertained the most elementary notion.

Still he did not drink from his finger bowl and he was entitled to credit for such abstinence, notwithstanding that his refraining from doing so, so far as the other guests knew, was probably due to the fact that he had a deep-rooted objection to the liquid the vessel contained.

There was little formality at the dinner, and after coffee had been served, the guests moved about freely, interchanging places and applying themselves vigorously to the wines before them.

The host took advantage of this proceeding to whisper in the ears of several of his friends.

"Don't look surprised, old chap, at what I'm going to tell you," said Charley, "I expect you were astonished when you saw him sit down with us. Your faces said as much, and I'm not surprised. Well, now don't shout, Jim Brook's simply my rich Uncle Ephraim disguised. He's worth millions of dollars, my boy. He thought to play me a trick, but this time he got left."

Those to whom Charley had spoken hastened to acquaint their neighbors with this astounding piece of news, and in a few minutes the behavior of all the guests towards the stranger had undergone a change. Notwithstanding their host's admonition they displayed their altered feelings in the respect with which they treated the disguised millionaire. Many were the congratulations Charley received upon his shrewdness.

"It's the smartest thing Charley ever did," said one man, and he expressed the general opinion.

All the men at the table wished to drink with Jim Brook, and he gratified their desire, never refusing what was offered him.

He rose rather unsteadily to his feet, and with shaking hands held his glass before him.

"Gents all," said he, "'fore we part I'd like to jest say 's yer the squarest lot I've ever chipped in with. As fer you, mister,"—addressing Charley Winthrop—"yer a peach. Say, what are ye anyway?"

"I'm a philosopher," answered the young man with a laugh.

"Never heard of that bis'nness 'fore, mister. What may et be?"

"It's a man——"

"Stop!" cried Algy Sinclair. "Jack's going to tell us."

"It's a man," said Jack Morrison, sententiously, "who ignores the past, lives for the present, and forgets the future."

"Wal, Mister Philos'pher, an' gents all, yer dinner's good, and yerselves are better. Hyar's all yer healths."

Mr. Brook emptied two glasses of champagne, for one was not sufficient to do justice to the sentiment.

"You mustn't go yet," said Charley, "you want to have a talk with me, don't you?"

But Jim Brook appeared to be past talking. He threatened to collapse and so it was decided to take him to Charley's room, where he might lie down and recuperate.

After his departure naturally he formed the sole topic of conversation.

"He's my mother's brother," said Charley Winthrop.

"The family likeness was remarkable," observed Jack Morrison.

"My dear Charley," said one of the young men, "pardon me for saying so, but what a very eccentric family yours must be."

"We have some peculiarities."

"Guess he'll put you on your feet again," said Algy Sinclair.

"He must, Algy. I'm the only relative he has in the world, and after the way I've behaved to-night he can't go back on me."

The health of Charley's uncle was then drunk with three times three, and Jack Morrison had just started the bacchanalian ditty "For he's a jolly good fellow," and it was being sung to several different tunes, when Parker suddenly appeared in the room with a handsome elderly gentleman by his side.

"Mr. Hephraim 'Arley," said Parker, in his expressionless way, with his usual cruelty towards the aspirate.

The gentleman who was thus announced, advanced a few paces into the room with his hand outstretched, staring in a somewhat bewildered manner around him at the numerous faces he saw.

"I heard you drinking my health, and I thank you, gentlemen. Which of you is Charley Winthrop, my nephew?" This was all he said.

It was quite enough to strike everyone dumb with astonishment. Charley rallied from the shock quicker than the others. He realized almost instantly what had happened. Jim Brook had left the bedroom by another door, with the connivance of Parker, who, no doubt, was in the secret. Then he had changed his clothes hastily to reappear as the cultured gentleman and millionaire, Ephraim Harley.

Charley burst into a loud fit of laughter.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" he cried, "not bad, uncle. By Jove! it was a clever piece of acting."

Ephraim Harley stared in apparent astonishment at the laughing faces around him, and seemed to be too astonished to say anything.

"But I saw through it," continued Charley, shouting boisterously now. "I found you out in spite of the disguise, for to tell you the truth, Uncle Eph, you rather overdid the part. Still, your make-up was great."

"Young gentleman," said Ephraim Harley, sternly, "you must be either mad or drunk. Please explain yourself, if you're in a condition to do so."

All the young men saw that Uncle Eph was in a very bad temper, and that any further jokes at his expense would be very ill received, and their mirth was immediately restrained. Charley altered his tone too, for he did not wish to damage the good impression his previous conduct must have made.

But still he was bound to laugh loudly as he explained the events of the night to his uncle, and he felt that his doing so was only a farce, for of course the old gentleman was well acquainted with all that had passed, though he flatly denied the accusation.

"I'll see the scamp for myself, and have a talk with him, if he's fit to speak to me," said Uncle Eph, walking towards the bedroom.

"You won't find Mr. Jim Brook there, uncle. He's disappeared forever."

A few minutes later Uncle Ephraim came back and he had a letter in his hand.

"I found this," alluding to the letter, "in the room. It's addressed to 'Mr. Charles Winthrop.' You'd better read it."

"Oh, pray do it for me, sir," laughed Charley. "I daresay you're better acquainted with the writing. You'll find it easier to read than I will."

Charley gave a sly look at his companions as if to intimate to them that it was useless trying to deceive him. His guests were all awaiting the moment when Mr. Harley would make a full confession.

Savagely the last named gentleman tore open the envelope, for he was boiling with rage now, and he read aloud these words:

"I liked yer dinner and yer society very much, Mr. Winthrop, and I've taken jest a few things with me to remember you by. Being a philos'pher, ye won't mind.
JIM BROOK."

Charley sprang to his feet and rushed frantically into the room. He found no Jim Brook there. Neither did any portion of his costly jewelry remain. Everything of a valuable and portable nature had disappeared.

Charley collapsed. He found he had been victimized by a clever scoundrel, who in some unaccountable manner, had obtained an accurate knowledge of Mr. Harley's movements, and had availed himself of it.

Each of the guests was sworn to strict secrecy, which means that within twenty-four hours the matter was the talk of the town.

Glad to escape from the raillery of his friends, and to recruit his fortunes, Charley Winthrop went out West with his uncle. The last time he was in New York—he shows himself there occasionally—he met his old friend Jack Morrison.

"Hello, Charley, old fellow, how are you? I want to ask you a question. Since you've been out West, have you run across 'the gentleman from Arizona?' Stop! Stop! Don't go!"

But Charley had fled.