

The Man Who Bet His Pockets.*

BY DON MARK LEMON.



HE had bet his pockets, and lost. There was nothing of value in them at the time. What trifles there were — a few coins, knife, handkerchief, memorandum book, and cigars — he had retained. The bet had been made over the height of a building. His friend had stated it to be ninety-eight feet four inches, while he had declared it only eighty.

“Bosh!” exclaimed his friend, “I know its exact height. It is ninety-eight feet four inches to the top of that cornice.”

“I’ll bet it’s just eighty feet.”

“Nonsense!”

“Will you bet?”

“Yes.”

“How much?”

“I’ll bet a hundred dollars against” — the friend considered a moment — “against your pockets.”

“You mean what’s in ’em?”

“No; just your pockets.”

“What do you mean?”

“It is ridiculous for you to dispute my statement of the building’s height, so I shall make the terms of the wager ridiculous. If I win, you can never again wear a pocket in any of your clothes; if I lose, you get the hundred dollars.”

“Done!”

When measured the building proved to be exactly ninety-eight feet four inches in height. A story had been added some time before, and Henley had failed to notice that fact. He had estimated the height of the building as originally erected. His friend had placed a bid for building the additional story.

* Copyright, 1906, by The Shortstory Publishing Company. Copyright secured in Great Britain. All rights reserved.

The following day Henley appeared on the streets in a suit of clothes without a pocket, and began life over.

His watch and chain were suspended from a button on his vest, while he carried his handkerchief, bill-fold and cigars in his hat. At the first corner he met a lady acquaintance, lifted his hat, and spilled its contents to the sidewalk. The lady stared and passed on, while Henley returned his belongings to his derby and swore. He bought a newspaper, and then glared at the change for a dollar bill, saying, "I've no place to carry the stuff."

He hurried away from the crowd that gathered to scuffle for the coins, took a cigar from his hat and chewed the unlighted weed viciously. He had no matchbox!

As the shadows lengthened his temper grew worse, and by nightfall he was in the dangerous mood of an outcast from society.

His bald head was chafed from the rubbings of the bill-fold, and bits of cigar-wrapping irritated the raw parts painfully.

The next day he sallied forth with nothing in his derby but his head, for which he had suddenly taken a deep dislike, and when he felt the need of a handkerchief to mop his sweltering forehead, he stepped into a store and bought a paper napkin. His money he carried in a bill-fold in his hand.

"I was a fool to bet my pockets!" he snarled. "But who'd have thought a man couldn't live without pockets. I might as well be a woman and carry a handbag!"

The following day a crook attempted to pick Henley's pockets, while that gentleman was endeavoring to lose his miserable identity in a crowd at a fire. The thief failed wholly in his attempt, and when caught in the act by a police officer and hustled away to the station-house, with Henley cited along as a witness, he put up the novel defense that he could not be held for attempting to pick the pockets of a man who had no pockets.

This defense did not save the crook, but it instantly made Henley famous as the man without a pocket, and to the inconvenience of his pocketless state was added the annoyance of notoriety.

He could not go anywhere without being pointed out as a freak, and a comic opera was written and staged, and a two hundred page sensational novel placed on the market, on the strength of the newspaper notoriety given the subject.

His friend refused to release him from the bet, so he packed his trunk, and with the brass check in his hat sought to lose himself in the great southwest. But his pocketless state followed him as unmercifully as the noisy Australian jackass bird follows a fleeing convict, and everywhere made him an object of curious and vexatious interest.

With his revolver in his belt and a dozen Mexican dollars in his boots, he fled into southern Arizona. Here at first he kept his tobacco pouch in the band of his broad-brimmed sombrero, but whenever the boys were out of the weed they would playfully shoot a smoke from his hat, and as the bullets tickled his bald head, he kept his tobacco in his hat-band no longer but suspended it from a string around his neck.

Later, he was reported to have joined a tribe of reservationless Indians, but having no pocket in which to keep a pack of playing cards, or a bottle of bad whiskey, he was expelled from the tribe.

His state was now so low that even the newspaper men lost track of him, and for a long time nothing authentic was learned of the man who had foolishly bet his pockets.

But one day, not long since, Henley's friend, who had won the odd wager, happened to be passing through the Mexican capital, and there, at a tobacconist's, observed a petticoated purchaser of a cigar acting in a peculiar manner, as if anxious to avoid notice, even in a locality where many women smoke.

It was the handbag awkwardly carried that first attracted his attention, and a closer look convinced him that it was no other than the unfortunate pocketless victim of his bet, whom he now felt willing to release from his onerous obligations, and Henley is now again in the States, a happy man, wearing a new suit of male apparel, having a double supply of pockets in every garment.

