

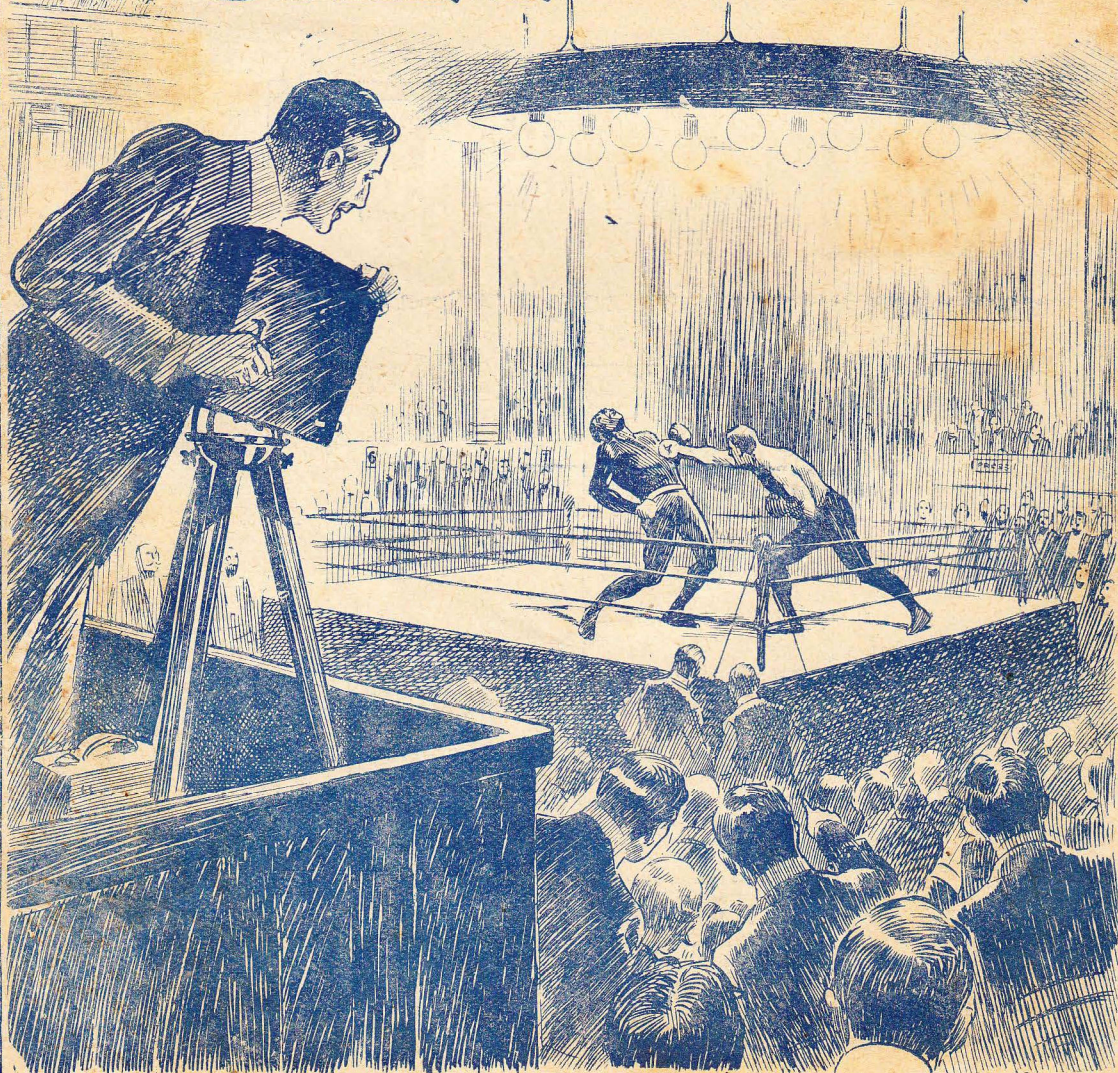
GOOD FUN! PRIZES AND STORIES FOR XMAS.

PLUCK

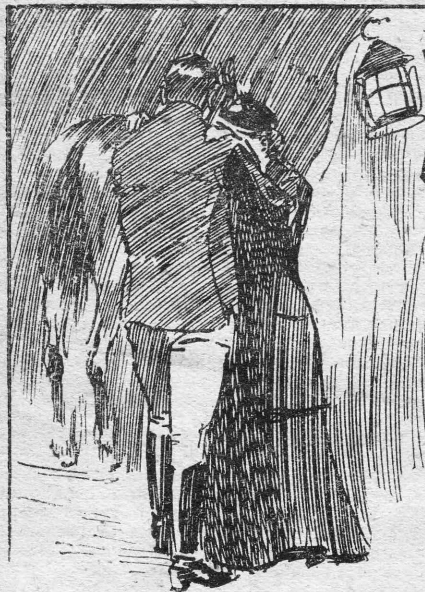
NO. 269.
NEW SERIES

Complete Stories of British Sport and Bravery

AT CALL OF "TIME!"



The cinematograph operator grinned, for he reckoned that after all he was going to see something that would make pictures!

The Second Long Story.Complete in this Issue!

THE REFORMATION OF BIBBY.

A Tale of Jack Talbot and
Clotilde, Queen of the Ring.

By HARRY DORRIAN.

CHAPTER I.

A Dangerous Customer.

THE original Joey Pye stopped in the middle of one of his best wheezes—stopped dead. Signor Tomsonio, the circus master, stood stock still, and glared. From the people "in front" came a curious murmur.

Tomsonio's Circus was full up.

It was the evening performance. The circus was pitched on the edge of the moor, close by the market town of Wayland, in Sussex. It was market-day in Wayland, and on that day the quiet old Sussex town was always crowded. And the market crowds had found every hoarding, every dead wall, affare with the huge blue and red posters announcing that Signor Tomsonio's Circus had pitched near at hand, and inviting them to roll up in their thousands to see the finest performance on earth, a performance which the crowned heads of Europe were in the habit of jostling one another to see. The folk of Wayland had responded nobly to the invitation, and there had been an endless clinking of shillings and sixpences at the entrance.

Nearly every seat was taken, even the half-crown ones, and the select five-shilling "loges" were occupied, and a broad smile of contentment had overspread Signor Tomsonio's fat face as he first looked round upon the crowded house.

And the performance had gone with a swing so far.

Miss Clotilde had gone through her act with the bareback horses in splendid style, to loud applause; and Jim Carson, the Handsome Man, had performed his acrobatic feats amid hurrahs. Joey Pye, the clown, had been cracking time-honoured jests to the accompaniment of ripples of laughter; and the face of Signor Tomsonio glowed like unto his own fancy waistcoat, which is saying a great deal.

Then, suddenly, the jokes of Joey Pye, and the wide smiles of the ring-master, were stopped in a second. The audience, scenting something wrong, stared in the direction in which Signor Tomsonio's startled gaze was turned.

A man had appeared at the staff entrance of the tent—a fat man, with a good-humoured Teutonic face. Many of the audience knew him by sight—Herr Biberach, the German tiger tamer. Time had been when the herr had been one of the greatest attractions in the circus, and his tiger turn had elicited rounds of applause. That time was over, and it was the herr's own fault. He was nobody's enemy but his own. Jack Talbot went through the performance with the tigers now, and was more popular than the herr had ever been. For Herr Biberach was a strong supporter of the brewery interest, in the way of consuming all the strong liquor he could possibly get hold of. And after dangerous accidents in the tiger's cage, owing to the herr's state, Signor Tomsonio had wisely "barred" him. The German had nothing more to do with the tigers, excepting to feed them.

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GREAT COMPETITION.

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In his sober moments, the German Tiger Tamer admitted that the signor was quite right, and that the tiger's cage was the last place in the world where a drunken man had any business. But in his cups he was apt to feel injured and slighted—and in that he was encouraged by the Handsome Man, who found amusement in making the big German intoxicated, and who strove to make between him and his successor, Talbot, bitter blood if he could.

And Herr Biberach had been drinking again now. He entered the ring with a slow and uneven step, his fat face flushed, his eyes rolling, and his mouth half open with a foolish smile. But that was not all. An intoxicated intruder into the ring could have been ejected on his neck, and no harm done.

But the herr was evidently on the warpath. He had taken a gun from Talbot's van—the young tiger tamer always kept one there in case of need. And Herr Biberach had it in his hands now, and he was carrying it with his finger on the trigger.

He blinked round the ring with his bleared eyes, evidently in search of someone.

"My only hat!" murmured Signor Tomsonio. "Do you see him, Joey?"

"What-ho!" said Mr. Pye.

"The drunken idiot has got Talbot's gun!"

"Looks like it."

"Go and tell him to get out of the ring, Joey," said the signor persuasively.

Mr. Pye closed one eye significantly.

"I ain't bullet proof," he remarked sententiously. "Only got one life, too. If I had three or four, signor, I'd let you have one or two or three at a reduction; but, having only one, I want to keep it. It's got to last me fifty years yet!"

"Is this a time to be funny, you ass?" growled the signor.

"Hark!"

The German was calling out:

"Vere is he? Vere is tat man who vould sack me?"

The signor shivered.

"He's looking for me, Joey."

"Exactly!"

"Go and persuade him to put that gun down."

"Suppose it's loaded," said Mr. Pye dubiously.

"Well, if I thought it wasn't loaded, I'd speak to him myself. He won't hurt you, Joey. Go and get the gun away, and I'll hoof him out. Look, the audience are beginning to go into hysterics!"

Many of the audience were on their feet now. Most of them imagined that it was a part of the show, and that the herr was playing a part, and that the gun was quite harmless. Others, however, guessed more correctly, that the fat German was really intoxicated, and meant mischief; and they were startled and frightened, for a bullet is no respecter of persons.

Joey Pye cast a glance at the audience, and nodded quickly. "All right, signor, I'll do my best!" And he advanced towards the German in a series of somersaults. This convinced most of the audience that it was all part of a wheeze, and they laughed loudly. Joey Pye did not feel like laughing. He knew that the gun in the tiger tamer's van was usually kept loaded, and he knew that at any moment his somersaults might be cut short by a bullet searing through his body. The German's finger was on the trigger, and at each of his staggering steps the gun might explode.

"Vere is tat man?" "Hello, herr," said Joey Pye, stopping before the German right end up, "come and have a wet, old son." The German shook his head slowly. "I tinks I have trunk enoff." "You're jolly well right there," murmured Joey Pye, "righter than you know, you burbling ass." He winked at the audience, to assure them that it was all a joke; and Joey Pye's wink was irresistible. There was a roar of laughter.

The German gazed stupidly round. "Vere is tat man?" "What man?" "Tat man who say tat he gif me te sack. Tat man who call me drunken peeg, and keep me out of te tiger's cage, ain't it?" "Do you mean the signor?" "Ja, ja, ja!" "Oh, he's gone to talk to Balfour about Tariff Reform," said Joey Pye. "They're going to send another telegram!"

And the audience shrieked. "I tinks I kill him." "Better come and have a drink." "I kills tat man first," said Herr Biberach, with the gravity of intoxication. "I kills him first, and ten I comes and have a drink mit you after." "Let's have the drink first." "Nein, nein. I tells you after. Vere is tat man?" "Come on, this way," said Joey Pye. "Let me carry your gun."

"I carries him meinself, ain't it." "But it's heavy, and you're carrying enough already." The audience laughed again, and Herr Biberach grinned. But he kept tight hold of the rifle. "Vere is tat man?" "This way, sonny."

Joey Pye stretched out his hand to take the gun. If he could have got hold of it, and turned the muzzle upward, he would have closed with the tiger tamer, and soon brought him to terms. But, with drunken cunning, Herr Biberach guessed his intention. He backed away a pace, brought the gun up at a level, and aimed it full at the clown. "Keep te hands off, aint it." "Oh!" gasped Joey Pye; and he fell upon his knees, fully expecting the gun to go off. And the audience roared with laughter.

CHAPTER 2.

An Unrehearsed "Turn."

HERR BIBERACH kept the gun at a level, and his unsteady eye blinked along the barrel at the original Mr. Pye. Joey closed his eyes for a moment. But Eibby did not pull the trigger.

"I tinks tat you are not te man," he said slowly. "The man I kills is te man who giffs me te order of te poot. Vere is tat man?" "Turn that gun away, you idiot!" "Vere is tat man, ain't it?" "Oh, dear," groaned Mr. Pye. "Mumma, you will never see your darling boy again!" "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the audience. "Vere is tat man, after?" "He's gone to get a shave," said Mr. Pye feebly. "He'll be back soon, if they've got one that suits his complexion." "Ha, ha, ha!" "I tink tat I finds him."

And, leaving Mr. Pye still on his knees in the tan, the big German marched on in search of the man who had given him the "sack."

Signor Tomsonio was trying to dodge out of sight behind the centre pole of the tent. As the pole was some nine inches wide, and the signor nearly two feet, this was not an easy task. The signor, as he would have explained, was no coward. But to argue with a rifle in the hands of an intoxicated man with a grievance was asking too much of anybody. Signor Tomsonio was in terror for himself, and in terror lest the gun might go off at any moment and injure somebody in the audience. A man falling with a bullet in his flesh would have made the onlookers realise suddenly and tragically that the whole scene was not an extravagant farce.

Herr Biberach came on with slow, uncertain steps. "Don't he do it well?" said several voices in the crowded seats. "You'd never believe that man was really sober!"

"Ach! I tink I sees him." Herr Biberach caught sight of the signor. He came lumbering towards him, fumbling with the rifle, and the signor dodged round the tent-pole.

"Hold on," he gasped. "Don't be a fool, Bibby!" "I tinks I kills you." "No, don't be hasty!" implored the signor. "I—I shall be missed; you know. That—that was only a little joke about giving you the sack."

"You giffs me te order of te poot." "Only in the way of a joke!" groaned Signor Tomsonio, with a reckless disregard for facts, caused by the levelled rifle. "Do you think we could do without you in the circus? Why, the whole show would go bust." "I tinks you tells lies, ain't it." "Look here, come and have a drink." "I tinks I kills you first." "Better leave it till afterwards. Joey Pye, come and collar him from behind," said the signor, in a shrill whisper. Joey Pye cautiously approached.

Herr Biberach swung suddenly round, and Joey Pye backed hastily away, with an elaborate effort to look unconscious. "I tinks you keeps off, Shoey Pye." "I—I—I—" "Or else I tinks I kills you." "Oh, dear," groaned Mr. Pye, "don't do that! There's a dearth of really first-class humour already." "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the people "in front." "They'll be laughing t'other side of their chivies soon, when one of us gets shot into catsmeat," murmured Mr. Pye. "Come here, you peeg," said Herr Biberach, as the signor was backing away, his eyes still fixed on the rifle. "Stand still!"

"I—I—all right." "I tinks I kills you. You giffs me te sack, and I kills you," said the herr, feeling for the trigger again. "You says your prayers, ain't it?" "Oh, dear; somebody stop him! Help!" "You says your prayers, I tink, ain't it?"

Instead of saying his prayers, the signor made a rush to get out of line with the rifle. Herr Biberach followed him, trying to get aim again. The signor dodged to and fro as if worked by clockwork, and the audience simply screamed at the absurd antics of the fat circus master.

"Ach, I tink I kills you soon, ain't it!" And Bibby dashed straight at the signor, who, with a desperate bound, caught the rope by which the acrobat Carson had climbed to the trapeze, and swung himself off the ground.

With extraordinary activity for so stout a man, the signor swung himself up to a height of eight or nine feet, and the German stopped and stared at him blankly. Signor Tomsonio swung wildly to and fro, to keep the intoxicated tiger tamer from taking aim. The rifle sagged to and fro in the hands of Herr Biberach.

"Tat you comes down!" he roared. "Somebody hold him!" "I tinks I shoots you, ain't it." "Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the audience. Herr Biberach took careful aim; but the rifle wagged to and fro.

"My only hat!" gasped Joey Pye. "He's going to fire! Help!"

Jack Talbot, the boy tiger tamer—known on the circus bills as Jungle Jack—ran into the ring. He shouted to the German. "Bibby! Herr Bibby! Stop!" "I tinks I kills tat man who giffs me te sack." And as Jungle Jack rushed towards him, the fat German pulled the trigger. There was a click, and that was all. The rifle was not loaded!

CHAPTER 3.

Bibby Takes his Call.

"HA, ha, ha!" roared the people in front. The whole scene was utterly ludicrous to them. The German's expression when a report failed to come from the rifle tickled them immensely.

Signor Tomsonio slid down the rope, and landed in a sitting posture on the tan, and sat there, gasping like an escape of air from a badly punctured tyre.

The German stared at the gun; and Jungle Jack ran forward and jerked it away from his hands before he could do any damage with it. Herr Biberach stared at him blankly and stupidly. Then he began fumbling in his pockets.

"Come away, Bibby," whispered Jack. The German shook his head. "Tat man giffs me te sack, ain't it." "That's all right." "It is not all right before. I tinks I kills him." "Do come away." "Mein modder come to see me at te circus, ain't it," said the

herr want'ringly. "Suppose she come and see tat I have te sack."

"Take him away!" groaned the signor. "I'll have him looked up. I'll have him put on the treadmill! Oh, I'm all of a tremble!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come with me, Herr Biberach."

"You waits a minute while I kills him," said Biberach, feeling in his pockets. "I haf a knife here somewhere, and—"

Jack and Joey Pye seized him, and jerked the pocket-knife away, and then forcibly bundled him towards the ring exit. The German resisted and protested all the way.

"It is all right," he roared; "I will come in ein minute! I only wants te keell to signor first."

"Can't have you making a mess on the sawdust here!" said Mr. Pye indignantly. "Do you think this is a blessed butcher's shop? Get out!"

"I tinks—"

"You've done enough tinkin'. Travel!"

And the German travelled at top speed, hardly knowing how he was going; but knowing that with two strong pairs of hands shoving he had to go. He was bundled out of the ring; and the signor, breathless and exhausted, staggered to his feet. The audience cheered him loudly. Signor Tomsonio recovered his silk hat, jammed it on his head, and raised it again and again to the audience. Since they had concluded that the whole scene was in fun, it was better to leave them in their error, and let it pass.

But the cheering and stamping did not cease. The signor groaned in spirit. It was a "call" for the German! The audience were so pleased with his supposed performance that they wanted him to come on again and take a call.

"My only hat," murmured the signor, "they mean it, too!" He raised his hat again, and there was a yell.

"Send Fatty on!"

"Hurray!"

"Where's the Dutchman?"

"Hurray!"

The signor rolled over to the ring entrance. He put his head out and called to Jack Talbot.

"Talbot! Waere are you? Where's that Dutch beast?"

"Here he is, signor. Joey is dousing his chivvy with cold water to bring him round."

"The people in front want him."

"My hat!"

"It's a call," groaned the signor. "They think it's a comic turn."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's not a laughing matter!" hooted Signor Tomsonio. "Is the brute sober enough to be trusted in the ring? Hark how they're stamping!"

"Well, we'd better hold him and march him on."

"Good; be quick!"

Talbot and the clown grasped the herr, who was streaming with water and half out of his wits. He struggled feebly.

"Tat you lets me go," he murmured. "It is tat I am dirsty. I have dirst, and I wants to take a trink, ain't it?"

"Rats!" said Mr. Pye. "You've had enough to drink and a little too much. Come on; you've got a call."

"But I have not been acting mit mein tigers!"

"No; you've been acting the giddy goat," growled Mr. Pye. "Come on! Yank the silly ass into the ring, Jackie."

"Right-ho!"

They bundled the fat German in as they had bundled him out. The signor kept at a wary distance from him. He did not know but what the German might produce a pistol or a carving-knife from his pocket at any moment.

"Hurray!" yelled the audience, clapping their hands. "Bravo!"

The German stared at them blankly. He did not know in the least what all the fuss was about. His glassy eyes rolled from side to side.

"Bow," whispered Jack in his ear.

"Vat for?"

"Bow, you idiot!" growled Mr. Pye.

"Vy I pows?"

"Never mind why. Bow."

"I tinks I kills tat man who have giff me te sack."

Mr. Pye took hold of the German behind the neck, and forced him forward. Herr Biberach bowed, whether he liked it or not; and Joey Pye made a grimace at the audience which almost sent them into convulsions.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hurray!"

"Now come off," said Joey Pye.

"I tinks I kills tat man first."

"Run him off," said Mr. Pye.

"I tinks I not come, ain't it."

"Then your tinkin'-machine is out of gear," said Mr. Pye cheerfully. "For you're coming." And the German was propelled to the ring exit again and taken out; and the audience

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let him go this time, and settled down for the next turn. "Keep him out of the ring, Jackie," said Mr. Pye. "I must go in again. If he won't stay out, brain him."

Talbot laughed.

"All right, Joey!"

"I will not be prained."

Joey Pye chuckled, and disappeared into the tent again. Jack Talbot held on to Herr Biberach, who followed, or rather, tried to follow him. He swung the herr back, and Bibby almost collapsed in his arms.

"Stay here with me, Bibby," said Talbot persuasively.

Herr Biberach, his mood changing—as is frequently the case in intoxication—from ferocity to maudlin friendship, clung round Jack's neck.

"I tinks I stays mit you," he said; "I luffs you."

"Good!" grinned Jack.

"You vas ein goot poy. You performs mit te tigers, and lets me draw te salary, ain't it. You not takes te place and shifts out to man who taught you, eh? Goot poy."

"Come and sit down."

"I rests in te arms of mein friend," said Herr Biberach, his whole weight—which was very considerable—thrown on Jack's chest. Fortunately the young tiger tamer was strong, and could stand the strain, though it made him stagger. "I luffs you. I shows you to my modder when she come; and she luff you, too."

"Jolly good. Let's get a seat."

"I luffs my young friend. I tinks he stands by me."

"I jolly well sha'n't stand long at this rate!" gasped Jack.

"Here, Sammy, lend me a hand with Bibby, will you? He's crushing me."

Samson, the Strong Man of the Circus, came up grinning. He lent a hand with the herr, and Bibby was bundled over to a bench, and seated there.

He kept hold of Jack with one hand, and Samson with the other, and turned maudlin smiles upon them alternately.

"I tinks you vas mein friends," he said. "I luffs you both, ain't it. I tinks tat I tells you a ting. Mein modder, she come te circus to see me."

"I hope she isn't here now, with you in this state," growled Samson.

"Mein modder liff in England now, ain't it."

"He's wandering," said Sammy.

"I tinks I tell te troot."

"You are not sure of it?" asked Jack, with a smile.

The German blinked at him stupidly.

"I tinks it is so. Mein modder she write to me, and she say tat she come te see me at te circus, ain't it."

"By George!" said Samson. "I shouldn't wonder. He seems to have the idea fixed in his head, anyway. When is she coming, Bibby?"

"I tinks tat she comes to-morrow afternoon, ain't it?"

"Good. You'd better chain yourself up somewhere where you can't get at a bottle."

"I tinks—"

"Go to sleep."

"Ja, ja, mein fren. I tinks I goes to sleep after, aint it, before."

And Herr Biberach closed his eyes, and began to snore upon Jack Talbot's chest. Samson burst into a laugh.

"Well, of all the comic cusses," he exclaimed, "I really think tat Bibby takes the cake. Let's get him to his van."

"Right you are!"

Between them they half-carried, half-dragged the snoring herr to his caravan. Herr Biberach did not wake up, but he grunted and grumbled in his sleep.

They laid him down on his bed at last, and left him. The herr was sleeping soundly. With great relief they retired, and left him slumbering there.

CHAPTER 4.

The Order of the Boot.

JACK TALBOT went through his turn in the ring, with the usual success and the applause to which he was growing accustomed.

Jack did a double turn at every performance—first as Jungle Jack, the Boy Tiger Tamer, his old role; then as Cowboy Dick, the Texan bareback rider.

On the back of Demon, Jack rode in the ring as few circus riders rode, and his tricks with the horse, which he was improving every day, always took the public fancy.

Many and many a trick he went through on the tan, which the public fondly believed to be a display of Texan horsemanship; but, as a matter of fact, Talbot had never been out of England. The signor had given him the name of Cowboy Dick, because he thought it looked well on the bills, and for no other reason. He left the public to draw their own conclusions, and they drew them—as the public usually do—wide of the mark. Most of them thought that Talbot was a cowboy fresh from the wild and woolly West, others imagined that he was a young nobleman

in disguise. Few knew or cared to know that he was the son of an honest carpenter, and that he had worked his way up from poverty by honesty, industry, and pluck.

Clotilde, the Queen of the Ring, took part in the cowboy act, in which Jack figured as a horseman. They left the ring together, after taking their call again and again. Clotilde's eyes were shining.

"It's a great life, Clotilde," said Jack, as he slipped from Demon's back, and patted the horse's glossy neck, a pat to which Demon responded by snuggling his black muzzle against the young rider's ribs.

Clotilde nodded.

"I love it, Jack."

"One only needs to be cool, and plucky, and to have plenty of grit," went on Jack. "In the ring, and out of the ring, I mean. There are lots of temptations in this kind of life, but I suppose there are in every other, too. A chap needn't yield to them unless he chooses. The only thing is, it's hard to stand off when others want to be social."

Clotilde laid a gentle hand on his arm.

"Jack!"

He looked at her.

"What is it, Clotilde?"

"You will never give way; you will never be weak?" she breathed. "Jack, if you are tempted to yield, and to be what you call social, remember what has become of Herr Biberach."

"I am not likely to forget, dear."

"Where would he be but for you?" went on Clotilde. "The signor dares not trust him with the tigers. If you did not take his place, and insist upon a great portion of the salary being paid to him, he would starve."

"But he deserves all I can do, Clotilde. He taught me all I know."

"I know that, Jack, but his weakness makes him dependent on you, and if you failed him, he would go to utter ruin. If you followed in his footsteps, what would become of you?"

Jack laughed.

"I am not likely to do so, Clotilde."

"No, Jack, I am sure of that."

"I am not old enough yet to either drink or smoke, if I wanted to," said Jack. "I suppose I shall smoke when I am grown up—most men do. But I shall never drink. Poor old Bibby is lesson enough to me on that subject."

"Poor old man!" murmured Clotilde. "He is so good and kind-hearted. It is often the good and kind men who fall slaves to such a miserable weakness. I wish something could be done to cure him."

"His mother is coming to see him to-morrow, so he says," said Jack thoughtfully.

Clotilde started.

"His mother!"

"Yes, he says so. It may be simply a fancy; he often has fancies when he is intoxicated, and I have heard him speak of his mother before."

"Jack, if she comes, she must not see him—you understand?"

"I will look after him if I can, you may be sure, Clotilde."

"Do your best, Jack. It would be a terrible shock for her."

"The worst of it is, that the signor declares he shall be kicked out to-morrow," said Jack, with a troubled look. "And, really, after that scene in the ring this evening, one can hardly wonder at it."

"I will try to make him change his mind."

"Well, if anybody can move the signor, you can, Clotilde," said Jack.

The girl nodded with a smile, and rode away. Jack put up his horse. The performance was nearly over now.

When the crowd was streaming out, the signor came out of the tent.

The performance had been a great success, and the public were satisfied, and so far, all had gone well.

But Signor Tomsonio had not forgotten Herr Biberach's performance in the ring, which might have ended very differently.

The signor was in an implacable mood. Joey Pye was vainly striving to soften him as they came out of the tent together. The clown had been the signor's circus comrade in his younger days, and was treated always as an old friend, and he ventured to put things very plainly to Dick Thompson.

"Better look over it, signor," he urged. "The chap was intoxicated, you know—fairly blue. He didn't know what he was doing."

"That's the very point," said the aggrieved signor. "Suppose that gun had been loaded?"

"Well, it wasn't."

"But suppose—"

"Never mind supposing," said Mr. Pye. "Supposing's all hosh! The gun wasn't loaded, and very likely Bibby knew it wasn't all the time. Now, signor, he's been with us a good many years."

"Yes, and now he's come to the end of 'em."

"Give him another chance."

"I've given him another chance a dozen times already."

"Well, yes, I know you have, but—"

"When it comes to being chased round one's own circus by a maniac with a rifle, I think it's time to draw the line," said the signor. "Herr Biberach has passed the limit. He's got to go."

"What's he to do?"

"Well, I'll pay him for the hire of the tigers, and that will be enough for him to drink himself to death with."

"He may insist upon taking the tigers away with him."

"He can't. I'm half-owner."

"But—"

"Besides, he couldn't even feed 'em—unless they ate him, which would be very likely to happen in one of his drunken fits."

"The poor old chap will be very cut up."

"He should have thought of that before he chased me round my own circus at the end of a rifle."

"Well, yes; but another chance—"

"I've made up my mind."

"I heard somebody say that his mother was coming to the circus to see him to-morrow," said Mr. Pye persuasively. "What a shock for the old soul to discover that her son has been sacked for drunkenness."

The signor shifted uneasily.

"Well, there's no need to tell her that. Simply say he's going."

"She may be dependent on him."

"Look here, Joey Pye," exclaimed the signor, stopping and facing the clown. "Do you think I'm to be shot at in my own ring by a chap because he's got a mother dependent on him?"

"Well, no. But—"

"I'm jolly well going straight to his van now, to give him a bit of my mind, and the order of the boot," said the signor, and he strode away to Bibby's van.

He jerked the door open, lighted a candle, and saw the herr laying on his bed in his clothes. His boots had been taken off, and his collar unfastened, his waistcoat unbuttoned, but that was all. The signor surveyed him with great disdain.

"A nice state for a civilised man to get into, Joey Pye," he growled.

Mr. Pye shrugged his shoulders.

"And we've never been like it ourselves," he remarked.

The signor coloured.

"None of your gags here, Joey. Keep your beastly humour for the ring; the public like it—I don't. Here, Bibby, wake up—wake up!"

He shook the fat German violently by the shoulder. Herr Biberach started up from heavy slumber, staring about him wildly. He blinked at the signor with a puzzled expression.

"Ach! I tink tat is my modder."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Joey Pye. "He takes you for his mother, signor. He is beginning to see things, and no mistake."

"Wake up, Bibby!"

"Ach! What is it?"

"You're sacked."

"Vat!"

"I told you yesterday you were sacked, and I told you so this morning," roared the signor. "You're sacked because you're a beastly, drunken blackguard. Understand? You're sacked, and you're going to leave the circus to-morrow morning. Savvy?"

"I tink—"

"That's all. Now sleep, if you like."

"I tinks tat—"

"You're a bloated barrel!" said the signor. "You're a German wine-skin. You're a beast. You're a murderous, drunken hooligan. You're going to be kicked out. Savvy?"

"I tinks—"

"Now go to sleep."

And the signor, greatly relieved in his feelings, tramped out of the van. He slammed the door with a slam that made the caravan rattle. Herr Biberach stared after him stupidly. He was left in darkness, but there was something he could always find in the dark! It was a bottle—and the sound of gurgling showed that the herr was once more imbibing the potent spirit that had done him so much harm already.

CHAPTER 5.

Clotilde to the Rescue.

JACK TALBOT was up early in the morning, as he always was. But there was another riser in the circus troupe as early as Jack that particular morning. It was Herr Biberach. Jack found him walking up and down outside the big marquee as he came down the steps of his van.

Herr Biberach blinked at him. The German's fat face looked very flabby and unhealthy in the clear morning light. It was the face of a hard drinker, never pleasant to look upon in the clear light of the sun.

"Shack!"

"Hallo!" said Talbot. "Good-morning!"

"Shack, mein poy—"

"Feel bad?" asked Jack.

"Ja, ja, I tinks I feels pretty pad, ain't it," said the herr.

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"But tat is not all. I tinks I vas vat you call toxicated last night, ain't it?"

Talbot smiled.

"Well, I think you were," he remarked.

"Did I make der droubles?"

"You did, rather," said Joey Pye, putting an unshaven face out of his van. "You did, you unreasonable beer barrel."

"I say, Shoey—"

"You gave no end of trouble."

"I am sorry—"

"Too late, my beery boy, too late," said Mr. Pye, shaking his head solemnly.

"Vat is it-tat I do?" asked the herr despondently. "Ven it is tat I tinks mit meinsel, I tinks tat I loses mein head, ain't it?"

"I tinks you do," agreed Mr. Pye, grinning. "What do you say to chasing the signor round the ring with a loaded gun?"

"Ach!"

"And making him climb up a rope as if he were a giddy acrobat."

"Mein Gott!"

"And nearly killing him with fright."

"Himmel!"

"You've passed the limit, Bibby. It's the order of the boot," said Mr. Pye sadly.

"Ach! I tink it vas all a dream, after."

"It was real enough last night, and a nice job we had to get you to bed," said Mr. Pye. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Bibby!"

"Ach, himmel! I am ashamed of meinsel, Shoey!"

"Then why don't you turn over a new leaf?" demanded the clown. "Why don't you take an example by me, for instance?"

"I turns ofer new leafs efery day," said poor Herr Biberach, "and den it somehow go on te old vay again."

"Look at me," said Mr. Pye, righteously virtuously. "I never take any kind of intoxicating liquor—"

"Vat!"

"Except when my medical man orders it—"

"Oh!"

"And he only orders it three times a day, with a dozen extras in case of necessity," said Mr. Pye. "Follow in your uncle's footsteps, Bibby, and be a man!"

"I tink—"

"Make a fresh start when you leave the circus—"

"I tinks I not leaves te circus."

"But you've got the sack."

"I not takes te sack."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mein modder come to see me to-day," said Herr Biberach, greatly distressed. "She is an old lady. Vat she say ven she hear I get te sack?"

"Blessed if I know."

"She gone dis afternoon. I must be here to see her. I must explain to te signor. I did not shoot him last night, after all, I tink?"

"Ha, ha! No!"

"Shoey—and you, Shack—you speak mit te signor, and get him to gif me anoder chance," said Herr Biberach coaxingly.

"I tinks tat in future I keeps sober, ain't it?"

"I'll try," said Jack. "You know I should be sorry to lose you. But you must admit that to chase the signor round the ring with a gun is coming it a little too strong."

"Ja, ja! I tink I vas troonk!"

"Yes, I think you were. I'll speak to the signor when he comes out, and see what I can do. He was very angry last night."

"And he let the sun go down upon his wrath," said Joey Pye, shaking his head.

There was a clatter of hoofs, and Clotilde dashed up on her Arab. The girl had been for an early morning canter on the moor. Her face was flushed with health, and her eyes sparkling.

Jack ran to assist her to alight.

Herr Biberach blinked at her. The sight of the fresh young girl seemed to make him feel more dilapidated, more beer-soaked, more disreputable than ever.

"Mees Clotilde—"

"Good-morning, Herr Biberach."

"I tinks you does me a favour, mees."

"Certainly, herr," said Clotilde, with a compassionate look at the flabby, worn face. "What can I do?"

"You speaks mit te signor for me."

"Oh, I will do that with pleasure," said Clotilde brightly.

"You don't want to leave the circus, do you?"

"Ach! Nein, nein!"

"The signor was very angry last night."

"I tinks you move him if anybody can," said Herr Biberach. "I will keep out of sight, I tink, for a leetle bit."

And the German retreated to his van.

"We must make the signor let him stop," said Clotilde, especially as his mother is coming to see him. I wish poor

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Herr Bibby would be more careful. He is too good a man to have that dreadful habit of drinking."

"We'll speak to the signor as soon as he's had his breakfast," said Jack. "He's always in a better temper after a meal."

And Clotilde laughed and nodded.

But the signor proved to be irascible, even after a hearty breakfast. He simply could not forget the ridiculous exhibition in the ring the evening before.

"No!" he roared, bringing his fist down upon the table with a crash that made the crockery dance. "No! He goes!"

"But, signor—"

The signor thumped the table again.

"It's no good, Jack. I'd rather anything than let that soaking brute stop in the circus. He might have killed me last night."

"Yes; but—"

"Nuff said, Jack! It's settled."

Jack was silent. He felt that he could not push the matter any further, sorry as he was for the unlucky German.

"Oh, signor," said Clotilde, softly.

"Now, don't you start on me," said the signor, looking alarmed—with a man's helpless feeling when a woman begins to persuade him, knowing full well that in the long run he must yield. "Now, Clotilde, dear—"

"His mother is coming to see him, signor."

"I can't help that."

"Perhaps her influence over him may make him better," suggested Clotilde. "She may make him ashamed and turn over a new leaf."

"He is always turning over new leaves" howled the signor. "I never knew such a chap for turning over new leaves as Bibby."

"But—"

"But he always goes back to the bottle."

"But his mother's influence—"

"Well, it hasn't done much for him so far."

"He has been away from her so many years," said Clotilde softly. "You know how bad it is for men to be away from feminine influence, don't you, signor?"

The signor grunted.

"I don't know, because I've never been away from it myself," he said. "I believe you like twisting me round your finger, you little torment."

"Of course I do," said Clotilde demurely. "If you weren't the best, nicest, kindest-hearted man in the world, you wouldn't be twisted round my finger, would you?"

The signor grinned.

"I suppose that means that Bibby is to stop," he said. "Very well, then. Go and tell him he can stop, and I'll break his neck if I catch him staggering again."

Clotilde threw her arms round the signor's neck and kissed him on both cheeks.

"You are a dear, good, kind, surly bear," she told him, and then she ran off to reassure Herr Biberach with the signor's message—slightly modifying it in transit.

Herr Biberach thanked Clotilde with tears in his eyes.

"It is goot," he said. "I owe you ferry much. I shall pe ferry happy, ain't it, to see mein modder."

Clotilde looked a little anxious.

"She is coming this afternoon, herr?"

"Ja, ja!"

"You—you will be careful," faltered Clotilde.

"How do you mean, Mees Clotilde?"

"You will be careful not to—to drink before she comes," said Clotilde. "Suppose she found you as—as you were last night—"

"Mein Gott!"

"You will be careful?"

"Ach! I will be ferry careful!"

And Clotilde left him somewhat relieved in her mind.

CHAPTER 6.

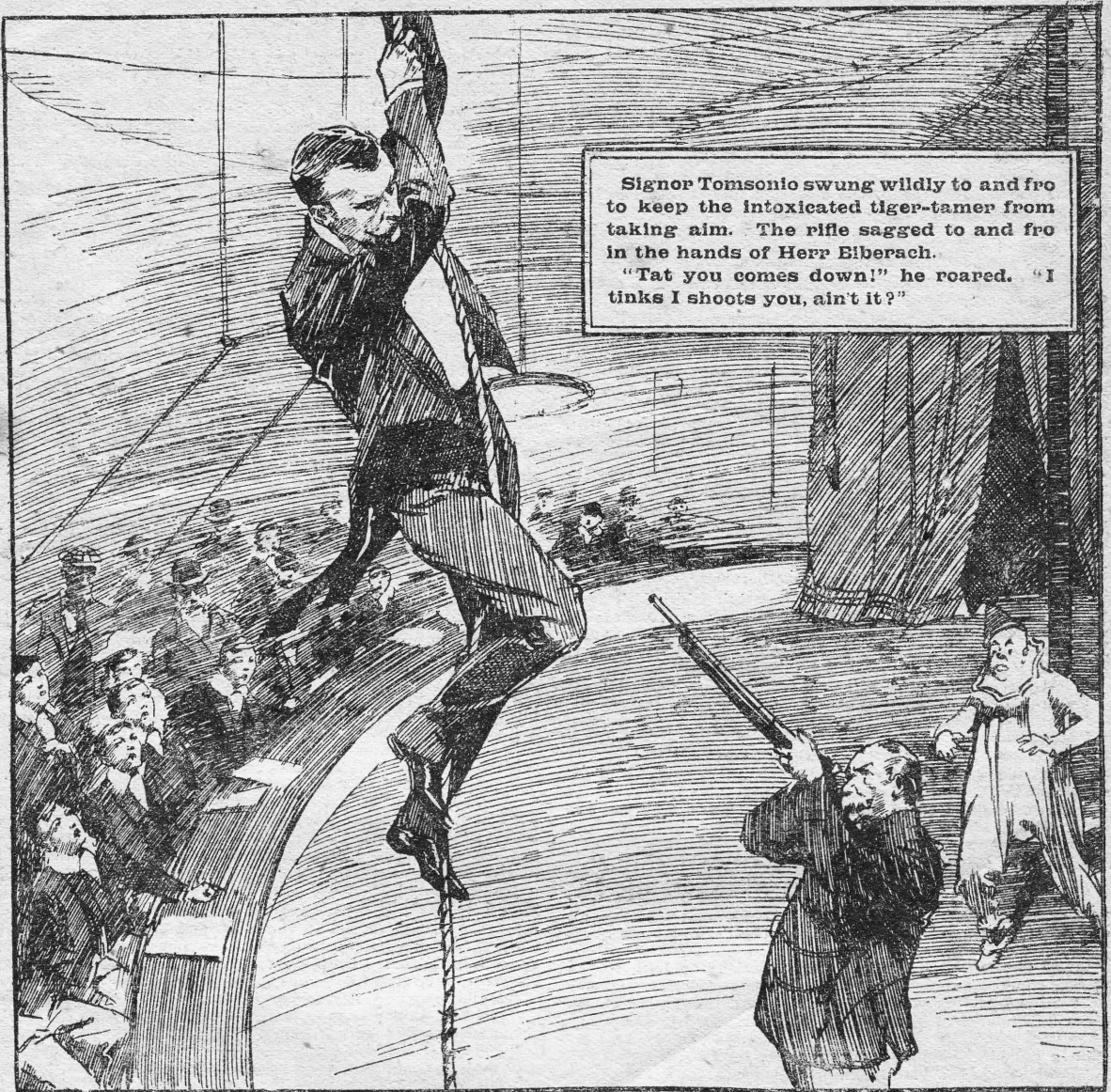
Saved!

HERR BIBERACH went about that morning looking exceedingly sheepish, and very much worried. Clotilde's words had made it clear to him that he must not touch his favourite stimulant. The thought of being in a state of violent intoxication when his mother arrived was horrible. And the German vowed solemnly that he would not touch a drop of liquor that day.

Only one who has been a slave to drink can guess what it cost him to keep that vow, even for a few hours. The very fact that he felt he must not touch it, made the craving more intense. And the herr had got into the habit of taking morning

TOM SAYERS

In "The Marvel" Library.



Signor Tomsonio swung wildly to and fro to keep the intoxicated tiger-tamer from taking aim. The rifle sagged to and fro in the hands of Herr Eiberach. "Tat you comes down!" he roared. "I tinks I shoots you, ain't it?"

nips to revive him after a "burst" over-night, on the principle of the "hair of the dog to cure the bite."

Now the morning nips were barred. Bibby felt weak, ill, shattered, aching. He felt that a steady drink would set him up, and he knew perfectly well that if he took one drink he would take another. He groaned and resisted the temptation.

The circus company felt for him. Most of them heartily condemned his excesses, but there was nothing Pharisical about them. They felt sorry for him, and would willingly have helped him in any way.

"Go for a walk," suggested Mr. Pye.

"He'll pass an alehouse if he does, and drop in," said Jack Talbot. "If you go for a walk, Bibby, take somebody with you."

"I'll go with you, Bib," said Mr. Pye.

The herr nodded.

"It is goot. I tinks I goes!"

And the German and Mr. Pye strolled away together, and took a pleasant walk through the old market town of Wayland. Then they followed the road towards the ruined castle, where in the summer the boys of the neighbouring school often picnicked.

They passed more than one alehouse on the road.

The German looked longingly at the first, and tramped on resolutely. At the second he looked more longingly still. On the benches outside the alehouse were a couple of healthy-looking countrymen, drinking foaming mugs of ale. The German's mouth watered.

"Ach! I tink I am tired," he remarked. "That's a pity," said Mr. Pye blandly. "Because we're not going to stop here."

"I tinks I rests for a minute on te bench."

"I tink you won't."

"I tink—"

"Come on!"

"But mein dear Shoey—"

Joey Pye grasped the German's arm, and rushed him past the alehouse. Herr Eiberach gasped, and licked his dry lips.

"Oh, Shoey! I am horribly dirty!"

"There's a spring on the hill yonder," said Mr. Pye, "shall we go that way and get a drink? Good cold water, you know."

Bibby shuddered.

"Nein! I tinks not."

"Then you can't be very thirsty."

The German was silent.

They turned back by another path, and followed a lane leading by a roundabout course to Wayland Moor. Another hedge alehouse hove in sight, and the German turned a glance of yearning upon it.

His thirst was terrible now, though it was not a thirst that water could quench.

"Tat ve walks on quick!" he exclaimed.

"Right-ho," said Joey Pye, quite pleased by this instance of firmness in the German. "Buck up, then."

"Let us run."

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"Right-ho."

"I will race you to tat tree," exclaimed Herr Biberach, pointing to a large elm a hundred yards or so beyond the alehouse.

"Good! Are you ready?"

"Quite reddy."

"Then start."

They started.

Mr. Pye ran quickly and lightly, the heavy German pounding along by his side. The clown forged ahead, without exerting himself much. He reached the tree, and turned round to look for the herr, expecting to see him toiling on behind.

He gave a jump. The road was empty! Herr Biberach had disappeared!

"Great Scott!" muttered Joey Pye.

For a moment it really seemed as if the earth had opened and swallowed up the German tiger tamer.

Then like a flash it came into Joey Pye's mind how he had been "done."

Bibby had followed him only as far as the alehouse, and had then coolly walked in. The proposed race was only a dodge to get rid of Mr. Pye for a few minutes while he dodged into the alehouse and obtained a drink.

Mr. Pye turned red. He prided himself upon his keenness, and to be thus easily taken in by the fat German was a blow to his pride.

"The fat bouncer!" muttered Mr. Pye. "The cunning barrel! I'll jolly well put a stop to his dodges!"

And Mr. Pye ran back to the alehouse like the wind. He bust into the quiet, shady room with its sawdusted floor, and there stood the herr, in the very act of raising a tankard to his lips.

Biff!

Mr. Pye's stick smote the tankard, and it whirled through the air. A considerable quantity of the liquor it contained went over the herr, and the rest into the sawdust on the floor. Herr Biberach gave a howl.

"Ach!"

"Out you go!" shouted Mr. Pye. "You—you rotter!"

"I vas so dirsty," groaned the unfortunate herr.

"Outside!"

"But——"

"Outside! Pay for the drink, and out you go."

The man behind the bar was staring blankly at Mr. Pye, evidently thinking that he was a lunatic. The herr paid for the drink, replaced the tankard on the bar, and tramped out slowly and heavily.

Mr. Pye followed him triumphantly.

"Saved!" he exclaimed dramatically.

"Ach!"

"Come on! Time we got in to grub," said Mr. Pye, consulting his watch. "I've saved you, Bibby, and I'll keep an eye on you for the rest of the day, if you like."

Herr Biberach only groaned.

Mr. Pye watched him like a hawk all the way back to the circus, and the unhappy German had not the slightest chance of escaping his vigilance. They reached the circus camp, Herr Biberach still perfectly sober, but looking dreadfully depressed.

Jack Talbot greeted them with a smile.

"All right, herr?" he asked.

"Ja, ja!"

"Safe, sound, and sober," said Mr. Pye. "I've saved him."

"Ja, ja!"

"Feel all right, Bibby?" asked Jack. "Better for your walk?"

"Ach!"

"You've enjoyed your stroll?"

"Ach! Ferry mooch."

"And you feel jolly glad you're still sober, don't you, Bibby?"

"Ach! Ja, ja!" groaned the herr.

But he did not look glad.

CHAPTER 7.

A Bad Time for Bibby.

WHEN the circus company ate their midday meal, Herr Biberach joined the table at which the signor sat with a downcast face. Good-natured Dick Thompson looked across at him.

"Cheer up, Bibby," he exclaimed, "it's all over now! I'm not a chap to bear malice, and so long as you keep sober, you're all right."

"Ach!"

"No more guns in the ring, that's all."

"Ach!"

"Cheer up!"

"I vas all right."

But the German spoke very heavily. Joey Pye chuckled.

"He's not thinking about the sack, signor," he whispered, "he's thinking about his bottle. I've been watching him this morning, and keeping him sober."

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Signor Tomsonio laughed.

"Good!"

"He's jolly well going to be sober this afternoon when his mother comes, or I'll know the reason why," said Mr. Pye emphatically.

"Good, again!"

Clotilde tapped the herr on the shoulder when she left the table. There was an afternoon performance that day, and she had to prepare for it. She smiled down into the heavy face of the German.

"Your mother will be here soon, herr," she said brightly.

Herr Biberach nodded.

"How nice that will be for you."

"Ver' nice," said Bibby.

"It will not be long now."

"I tink not. I am feery happy."

Clotilde tripped away. The German went off to smoke a cigar after dinner, and then dropped into the circus stables to lend a hand with getting the horses ready. Then he said he thought he would take a walk while the performance was going on, as he would not be wanted till the tiger act.

"No, you won't," said Signor Tomsonio promptly.

"But, mein Herr——"

"You'll stay here."

"Ach! I——"

"If you go you'll come home rolling drunk this evening," said the signor. "I know you, Bibby. You'll stay here."

"I tinks I takes a walk——"

Signor Tomsonio frowned.

"Well, you can take a walk if you like, but if you do, you needn't come back to the circus. It will be the sack, my man."

"Ach!"

"So take your choice."

And the signor, resplendent in silk hat and gorgeous waist-coat, whip in hand, went into the big marquee.

The German grunted.

"It's all right, Bibby," said Joey Pye encouragingly. "You've stuck it out all the morning, make an effort and keep sober for the rest of the day."

"Ach! I vas feeling quite ill, ain't it."

"You'll feel better afterwards."

Herr Biberach shook his head, and walked dolefully away.

Joey Pye went in for his turn, and the herr sought out Jack of the Jungle, and talked to him while he was getting ready for the show. The tigers were going through some new tricks, under the eye of their young master, and they took no notice of Herr Biberach. They had almost forgotten their old master now.

Jungle Jack looked up with a smile. Weak and drunken Herr Biberach might be, but Jack Talbot never forgot that he owed his chance in life to the herr, and that was a debt he could never repay. He might receive mockery from others, never from Talbot. From the Boy Tiger Tamer he always had respect and kindness.

"Hallo, herr! What do you think of this?"

"Goot!" said the herr, without even looking at the trick the two tigers were going through. "Oh, Shack!"

"What's the matter?"

The fat German sank down upon the box with a groan.

"Oh, Shack, I vas suffer!"

Jack looked concerned. The German's look and tone showed that he was suffering.

"I'm sorry, herr. But you will feel better later."

Herr Biberach shook his head.

"I feel ferry bad. And I have to trink in my van, Shack, but I not touch him, after. I tinks I keeps sober because mein modder come."

"That's right, herr. Think what a shock it would be to her if she came and found you—well, anything like you were last night."

"I tink of it," groaned Bibby. "It is fearful! Shack, never in your life take to tat vile habit of trinking. It begins as a pleasure, but it ends as a torture. I feel tat I must take it."

"But not to-day, herr."

"No," groaned Bibby, "not to-day! I will be careful for mein modder's sake. I tink I die mit shame if she see me like tat. She think me decent, you understand, she neffer know tat I trink like a peast."

"Poor old Bibby."

The herr smoked another cigar, and sat and watched Jack for some time. Then he strolled out into the camp again, weary and disconsolate.

A dark, handsome fellow tapped him on the shoulder. Herr Biberach looked round, and found Jim Carson, the Handsome Man, looking at him with a smile.

"In the dumps?" asked the Handsome Man.

"Ja, ja!"

"What's the matter?"

"I think noting to-day, because mein modder is coming dis afternoon."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Vy for you laff? I do not feel merry."

"I suppose you are allowing Talbot to dictate to you," said the Handsome Man contemptuously. Carson always took a kind of selfish pleasure in thwarting Jack Talbot, and in causing Herr Biberach to make a fool of himself, because it troubled the lad. "Why don't you do as you like?"

"Ach! But—"

"Drink if you want to."

"But mein modder," said the German dolefully, "mein poor old modder, she come this afternoon, and she see me."

"Well, have a nip to keep yourself up," said Carson encouragingly. "Come with me, and I'll mix you a little one."

The German shook his head.

"I tinks I not gome."

"Oh, be a man!"

"Vell, perhaps a ferry little vun," said Herr Biberach.

"That's right."

"I tinks I gome."

"Come on, then."

Carson was turning away to his van, when Jack Talbot strode up, with flashing eyes. He had seen the two together, and guessed that the Handsome Man meant mischief.

"You hound!" he exclaimed.

"What!"

"You hound! You are deliberately trying to make trouble for the herr."

Carson ground his teeth.

"This to me, you—you cub!"

"Yes, to you, you cur! Bibby, keep away from him!"

Carson convulsively gripped the riding-whip he carried in his hand. It seemed as if he would bring it down across Jack Talbot's flushed, indignant face. But the Strong Man of the Circus strolled up, with a look on his face that made the Handsome Man hesitate.

"Don't use that whip, Jim Carson," said Samson quietly.

The acrobat snarled.

"Mind your own business, man!"

The Strong Man shrugged his shoulders.

"This is my business, Carson. And don't try to make the herr drunk, when his mother's coming this afternoon. I won't have it, any more than Talbot will, so you can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

The Handsome Man shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, it's nothing to me!"

And he strolled away, whistling carelessly.

The Strong Man laid his hand upon Bibby's shoulder.

"Bibby, don't be an ass! You ought to have more sense. Blessed if it wouldn't be a friendly action to tie you up, hand and foot."

"I tinks it is all right."

"I don't feel so sure about it."

The German walked away aimlessly. He went to his van, and left it again without entering; then he strolled towards it again, and repeated this several times. Finally he went in and closed the door.

Jack Talbot was busy with the tigers, and the Strong Man was dressing for the ring. The Handsome Man, from a distance, saw Herr Biberach enter his van, and he smiled.

The herr sat down on his bed. He fixed his eyes upon the locked chest, where he kept the poison that had sapped away his manhood by slow and sure degrees. The fierce craving of the drunkard was upon him, and he felt his resistance crumbling away.

"I tinks tat I takes a leetle," he murmured. "Shust ein glass tat it makes me feel petter tan I feel now. I tinks so."

He unlocked the chest. He took out a bottle of brandy and a glass. He filled the glass with the neat spirit and drank. He gave a great gasp of relief when the fiery fluid had trickled down his throat. His pallid face flushed, his eyes sparkled, and a grin of pleasure came over his features. He seemed to live again.

"Ach! Tat is petter," he murmured.

He filled the glass again. He regarded it doubtfully for some moments; but the craving was too strong, and the sickly smell of the spirit was strangely fascinating to him. He drank again.

And after that there was no resistance. He drank, and drank till his head was reeling, his hand shaking, and the glass slipped unconsciously from his grasp and smashed on the floor of the van.

Herr Biberach sank back on the bed, his head going round. There came a knock at the door of the van.

"Bibby! Bibby! Are you here?"

"Ach! Who was tat?"

"It's me, the signor."

"Ach!"

"Open the door! I want to speak to you!"

Bibby did not move. The signor tried the door, and found it open. Herr Biberach sat on the bed, as a flood of sunlight

poured in upon him, and blinked at the man standing in the doorway. For the moment the signor did not observe what was the matter with him.

"Come, Bibby!" he exclaimed. "I want you to go into the ring with Talbot. You'll be better there, for one thing, and 'makes a better show. Get into your things!"

"Ach!"

The signor sniffed suspiciously. The smell of the spirit was strong in the confined space of the van.

"What! What! You've been drinking again!" he cried.

"Ach! I tinks—"

"You—you bloated lumbug!" exclaimed the signor. "So this is the end of it, is it? You've lost your last chance. Out you go from my circus to-day!"

"Himmel! I tinks you gif me te sack."

"Yes, I do; and my boot with it if you don't clear out sharp!" exclaimed the angry circus-master. "You—you swilling brute."

"Ach! I tinks I kill you!" Herr Biberach staggered to his feet, and picked up a stool. Signor Tomsonio beat a hurried retreat from the van. "Ach! Peast!" shouted the German, shaking his fist after him. "I tinks I kill you, ain't it? Peast! You gif me te sack, ain't it, pefore?"

"He's been at it again, Jackie," gasped the signor. "What price keeping him in the circus after this, my boy?"

Talbot shook his head sadly.

The herr was evidently hopeless, and he could not, for very shame's sake, ask the signor to give him another chance.

"I'm sorry," he said. "And his mother's coming this afternoon. He must be mad."

"He is as mad as a hatter. I shall have to post three or four men to see that he doesn't get into the ring again!" said the signor savagely. "By James! This is the last time I'll have his tricks in my show!"

And the signor went into the big marquee, red with rage.

CHAPTER 8.

Frau Biberach Arrives.

"ACH! Mein young Herr!" Jack Talbot had just come out of the ring, after his turn, when the voice fell upon his ears. He looked round quickly, thinking for a moment that it was Herr Biberach who had spoken, though the voice was softer.

He raised his cowboy hat as he found himself looking at a little old German lady. She was a little woman, absurdly small to be the mother of the ponderous Bibby; but very like him in features, with the same blue eyes and flaxen hair and good-natured smile.

Jack knew at once whom she was, of course.

"Madam Biberach?" he asked.

The little old lady nodded.

"Ja, ja! I am Frau Biberach," she said. "Tat my sohn is here, at te circus. You speaks te Sherman?"

Jack shook his head.

"Very little, I'm afraid."

"Neffar mind," said Frau Biberach. "I speaks te English, all te same as Englishwoman. I tinks you understand, ain't it?"

"Certainly," said Jack, with a smile.

"Vere is mein sohn?"

"I'll take you to his van," said Jack. "This way!" He threw the reins of Demon to the stableman, and was leading the little lady towards Herr Biberach's van, when Samson came up quietly. He proceeded to make signs to Jack. The young circus-rider understood at once. Herr Biberach was not in a state to be seen by his mother. "Ah! Come this way, madam," said Jack, at once catching on. "Sit down in this tent and rest, and I'll bring Bibby to you."

"Thank you, mein poy."

"You must be tired if you have walked from the station," said Jack, leading the little lady into the refreshment tent. "Can I offer you anything—a cup of tea—"

"Thank you; you are ferry good."

"Not at all. You just wait here while I find Bibby. I may be a few minutes finding him." And Jack hurried out of the tent.

Clotilde, in her Texan costume, fresh from the ring, was standing outside the tent chatting with the signora. Signor Tomsonio was still in the ring, where the Handsome Man was going through his acrobatic performance.

Jack hurried up to them, his face greatly distressed.

"What is the matter?" asked Clotilde quickly.

"Mrs. Biberach has arrived."

"The herr's mother?"

"Yes."

"How pleased he will be, especially as he has kept sober on purpose," said the signora. "Where is he now?"

"That's the worst of it," said Jack ruefully. "Sammy has just told me that he has broken out, and isn't fit to be seen."

"Oh, dear!"

Clotilde's face became very grave.

"Can you look after the old lady a bit?" said Jack. "I'll

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do what I can for the herr. Give her some tea, and keep her talking to gain time. She looks a dear little woman, and I wouldn't let her see the herr in one of his fits for anything."

"Yes, yes," said the signora.

"Thank you so much."

Jack Talbot hurried away to find Bibby. The kind-hearted signora and Clotilde entered the tent, and proceeded to "look after" the Frau. They both took a liking to her at once, and they could understand how anxious Herr Biberach was to keep his shameful secret from her knowledge.

Talbot hurried to Herr Biberach's van. Samson joined him, and they arrived at the caravan together.

There was a voice proceeding from the interior, the voice of the herr raised in stumbling song.

"In tiefen keller sitz ich hier,
Auf einem Fass voll reben."

"Drunk as a lord!" said Samson.

"The duffer! The silly ass!"

"Es braust ein Ruf wie Donnerhall!" roared the voice of the herr from the interior of the van. "Wie schwertge klirr und Wogenprall."

"Oh, dear, he's got on to the 'Watch on the Rhine,'" said Jack. "That means that he's in the last stage. He'll be wanting to fight the French next."

The door of the caravan opened, and the herr appeared on the steps.

His fat face was flushed, and his eyes were sparkling. He roared out the chorus of the "Wacht am Rhein."

"Lieb Vaterland, magst ruhig sein—"

"Oh, blow the Fatherland!" exclaimed Jack. "Herr Bibby, your mother's come."

"Lieb Vaterland, magst ruhig sein—"

"Shut up! She's in the tent yonder—"

"Fest steht und treu die wacht—"

"She'll hear you."

"Die Wacht am Rhein—"

"Oh, make him shut up!" said Samson, and they grasped the herr together, and rolled him off the steps of the caravan upon the ground.

CHAPTER 9. Kind Friends.

HERR BIBERACH bumped on the ground, and struggled and roared.

"Down mit te French!" he shouted. "Ach! Mein fader he fought at Grayclotte, ain't it, and killed dem by dozens. I tinks I kills you."

"Shut up!"

"Vere is tat man who giff me te sack?"

"Quiet!"

"I tinks I kills him."

"What on earth are we to do with him?" gasped Samson. "The old lady may look out of the tent any minute, and what will she think if she sees me sitting on her blessed son."

Jack could not help grinning.

Herr Biberach was on his back, and Samson was sitting on his chest to keep him there. The German was struggling, and frantically waving his arms and legs.

"Blessed if I know what to do," said Jack. "We can't let her see him in this state."

"Rather not."

"Will you be quiet, herr?"

"Deutschland!" roared Bibby. "Deutschland über alles In der Welt."

"Blow Deutschland!"

"I tinks I kills tat man who giff me te sack, ain't it."

"What on earth shall we do with him?"

"Hallo! Here's Joey! Pye, Pye!"

The afternoon performance was over, and Joey Pye had come out, still in his clown garb, of course. He came towards the scene in a series of somersaults.

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" he asked.

"Look at Bibby."

"The ass! After the way I looked after him like a brother," said Mr. Pye, indignantly. "The beast!"

"His mother's in the tent yonder."

"Phew! By gum!"

"She may come out any minute," said Jack anxiously. "The signora and Clotilde are looking after her, but she must be wondering why I don't bring Bibby."

"Cut off and tell her Bibby will be coming along soon," said Mr. Pye. "Say he's got an engagement for the moment with Mr. Pye, the most important person in the circus. I'll make him sober while you're gone."

"All right! But—"

"Mind she doesn't look out of the tent til he's out of sight."

"Right-ho."

Talbot hurried off to the tent.

"Now, then, we've got to get the beast out of sight," said Joey Pye, in a business-like way. "Bring him into the stables."

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"Good!"

"A good ducking in cold water will help him round."

"Perhaps!"

They dragged the struggling German into the canvas stables. There two or three of the circus hands were called upon to help, and they willingly lent their aid, Herr Biberach being reduced to a state of helplessness by the grasp of many hands. Then Mr. Pye proceeded to duck him mercilessly.

A dozen buckets of water from the spring were at hand, and Mr. Pye picked up the first of them and approached the herr.

He lay on his back, blinking up at the men who were holding him, and struggling to get free. He was still possessed with the amiable desire to seek the man who had given him the sack, and kill him.

"Tat you keeps tat pucket away!" he exclaimed, as he saw Mr. Pye's intention.

"I'm going to bring you round," said Mr. Pye blandly.

"Ach! I tinks—"

Swish! sloosh!

The water streamed over the herr's fat, flushed face. He roared, and choked, and spluttered, and gasped.

"Ach! Help! help, ain't it! Yah! Yaroooh!"

Swish came the second pail.

"Groo! Geroooh!"

Swish! swish! splash! swish!

The unhappy German writhed and wriggled and roared.

"Ach! ach! Help, ain't it! Geroooh yaroooh!"

Mr. Pye laughed till the tears ran down his face.

The sight was absurd enough, and of course he was acting only out of pure kindness, and not from love of a joke.

Six pails had been recklessly splashed over the herr when the clown paused to see now he was going on.

"Do you feel better, Bibby?"

"Ach!"

"Sober now?"

"Ach! I tinks I kills you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Peast! Peastly pounder!"

"Don't you feel better?"

"Yah! I smashes you! Tat you lets me go!"

"Hold him tight!" exclaimed Mr. Pye hastily.

"What-ho!" said Sammy.

"Ach! Tat you lets me go! I tinks tat I kills tat peast!"

"Hold him tight! Aonther half-dozen buckets, and he'll be all right."

"Hold! Ach! Tat you stops! I—ich—ach—ho—oh!"

The German spluttered and choked again as the torrent of water descended upon him. He was drenched, soaked, swimming, all over, and undoubtedly the succession of cold douches did much to clear the fumes of liquor from his brain.

"Feel better, Bibby?"

"Yah! Gerrooch!"

"We'll bring him round in time. It's only a question of sticking to it," said Joey Pye cheerfully. "The original Joe Pye is never at a loss for a wheeze, gentlemen. The crowned heads of Europe—"

"Ach! I tinks I kills you."

"Not this evening," said Mr. Pye, splashing another bucket over the herr. "Hallo! What's the row?"

Puggles, the tumbler looked in.

"I say, the old lady is coming this way."

"What!"

"Talbot told me to warn you. She's insisting on coming to see her son as he doesn't come to her," grinned Puggles.

"She's coming this way."

"By gum!"

"My hat!" said Samson. "Where can we hide him?"

Mr. Pye glanced quickly out of the stables. Frau Biberach had been to her son's van, and as he was not there, she was looking for him. She had waited nearly half an hour already and she was getting anxious about her son.

Clotilde was with her now, but evidently the girl was quite unable to induce the old lady to wait patiently till her son should come.

"By gum!" said Mr. Pye, again. "She'll be here in a minute! We must get the idiot out of sight somewhere."

"What-ho!"

"Ach! I says—"

"Shut up, Bibby! Here, lug him behind this straw, and two or three of you sit on him," said Mr. Pye hurriedly. "That's the only dodge."

"Right you are."

"Quick's the word."

"Here goes!"

"Ach! I tinks—"

"Never mind your tinkling now, Bibby. Here goes."

The stout German was dragged behind the great pile of straw, and Samson and Mr. Pye sat on his chest, and a couple of stablemen on his legs, and Mr. Pye thoughtfully jammed his handkerchief into the German's mouth.

There was a voice beyond the straw.

(Continued on page 28.)

"Ach! I wish to see mein sohn."
 "Will you look at the horses, Frau Biberach," said Clotilde, who did not know that the German was in the stables.
 "Ach! Ja."
 "This is my horse, Demon——"
 "Ach! He is fery pretty! But vat is tat? Dere is something moving behind the straw!" exclaimed the Frau.
 "Is it tat you keep te wild animals here?"
 Clotilde laughed.
 "Oh, no, there is nothing there."
 "I hear someting," said Frau Biberach, in alarm. "Perhaps it is a tiger or a snake, pefore."
 "Oh, no. But I will look."
 Clotilde glanced behind the pile of straw.
 What she saw there almost made her fall down.
 The fat German, stretched on the ground with Mr. Pye stuffing a handkerchief into his mouth, Samson sitting on his chest, and the stablemen holding him down, formed a sufficiently startling sight.
 The girl gave a little cry.
 "Vat is it, mein dear?"
 "Perhaps we had better leave the stables, Frau Eiberach," said Clotilde hurriedly.
 "Vat——"
 But Clotilde did not allow her to finish.
 She hurried the little old lady from the stables, and Joey Pye gave a gasp of relief. Herr Biberach gave a gasp too, but not of relief.

CHAPTER 10. Reformed at Last.

"THANK your lucky stars," said Joey Pye, severely.
 "Thank your lucky stars, Bibby, that you had kind friends to stand by you at a time like this!"
 The German spluttered; he seemed to be choking, and Mr. Pye mercifully drew the gagging handkerchief from his mouth.
 "Feel better, Bibby?"
 "Ach! Tat you lets me go!"
 "Rats!"
 "I tink tat I go see mein modder!"
 Mr. Pye shook his head solemnly.
 "You're not in a fit state to see her, Bibby. I'm not going to have you giving that estimable old lady fits."
 "Peast! I tink——"
 "You can pile yourself on that straw and sleep it off," said Mr. Pye. "I'll keep an eye on you and see that you don't get away."
 The German blinked at him. The heap of straw looked very inviting to a man with his wits fuddled by liquor. Herr Biberach sank down upon it.
 "I tink I goes to sleep."
 And the fat German closed his eyes and began to snore, a snore that rang and echoed through the stables.
 Joey Pye grinned.
 He stepped over the German, and pinched him to make sure that he was not shamming. The Tiger Tamer grunted and stirred in his sleep; that was all.
 "He's all right," said Mr. Pye. "That's genuine enough. He'll sleep there for a bit, and we must keep his mother from looking for him, somehow."
 "Good!" said Samson.
 And they quitted the stable.
 The German snored on.
 He was indeed fast asleep—but presently he began to turn and roll, as drunken visions flitted through his brain and disturbed his rest.
 He sat up in the straw at last. Joey Pye, who had indeed had some experience in that sort of thing, had imagined that the German was safe for hours. But on this occasion the mirth-merchant of Tomsonio's Circus was mistaken. It was less than a quarter of an hour before the German was awake again.
 He was lying warm and snug enough in the straw, and Joey had thrown a stable-rug over him. The German tossed it off, and staggered to his feet.
 "Ach!" he murmured. "I tinks tat I goes and sees mein modder!"
 And he moved with unsteady steps to the stable door, and emerged into the open.
 It was dark now, and the place was lighted by naphtha lamps and stable lanterns. The herr blinked round him dazedly.
 He was still strongly under the influence of his potations; he had a very vague idea as to what had happened, but in his blurred brain was an idea that his mother was coming to visit him, and that he must see her.
 "Vere is mein modder?" he murmured, as he groped on.
 "Ach! Vere is she?"
 There was a sudden exclamation in German.
 A little flaxen-haired old lady, who was talking to Clotilde, suddenly caught sight of the powerful form of the Tiger Tamer.

"Mein sohn! Ach! mein sohn!"
 And she ran towards the German.
 "Mein sohn!"
 Clotilde gave a little cry.
 "It's done now!" said Jack, between his teeth. "It can't be helped, Clotilde dear. I wonder what she will think of him?"
 Frau Biberach ran towards the German with outstretched arms.
 "Mein sohn!"
 The German staggered, and the amazed Frau staggered in his embrace.
 Jack Talbot and Joey Pye ran to the rescue.
 They seized the fat German by his shoulders, and supported him, and Frau Biberach released herself with a little cry of dismay.
 "Ach! He is ill—mein poys is ill!"
 "I think he only requires sleep, ma'am," said Mr. Pye.
 "Den I vill sit by him!"
 The staggering German was helped to his van. He seemed willing enough to go, fortunately. He might have been violent; but perhaps his mother's voice penetrated through the mists of drink to his mind, and he knew that he must be careful.
 He was bundled into his van, and laid upon the bed, and there he sank at once into a deep and heavy slumber.
 Jack went into the ring, and went through his work, and soon forgot about Bibby; but when the show was over that evening, and he came out, he found the Tiger Tamer, sober, and looking decidedly glum.
 "Ach, Shack," said Bibby, heavily. "I haff been found out."
 "Eh! How's that?"
 "You know tat mein modder lias come here?"
 "I know."
 "She know all apout it. Ven I voke up she was dere!"
 "But she did not know——"
 The German shook his head.
 "She knew, Shack. She did not say vun vord, and so I knew tat she knew. Mein modder know tat I vas trunken as a peast!"
 "I'm sorry, Bibby."
 The German shook his head mournfully.
 "It can't be helped, Shack. I vish she did not know—but she does know."
 "But she has not said so?" said Jack.
 "She say noting!"
 "Then, perhaps——"
 "I tink to look in her eye show tat she know all apout it."
 "Stuff," said Mr. Pye, breaking in. "I'll tell you what, Bibby."
 "Vat you tell me, Shoey?"
 "Your mother is staying at the circus a bit, isn't she?"
 "Ja, ja! Te signora ask her to stay, and find her room in a tent, ain't it, while tat te circus stay in dis place."
 "Good!"
 "But now she know——"
 "Not a bit of it. Look here, if you are careful to keep straight while she's here—never touch a drop again—she won't think you were drunk to-day," said Joey Pye. "All you've got to do is to keep steady from this time forward."
 The German looked dubious.
 "Ach! You tink so, Shoey?"
 "I'm sure of it."
 "I tinks I tries it, den."
 And Bibby walked away with a more hopeful look. Jack Talbot looked at Joey Pye with a smile.
 "There's something in that, Joe," he remarked.
 Joey Pye nodded emphatically.
 "By gum!" he remarked, "I think there is—and I'm sure of one thing, Jack, and that is, that it's the Bibby's last chance. If he doesn't turn over a new leaf, he'll be under the ground in a year, I know that."
 "I hope he will turn," said Jack. "He's one of the best fellows breathing, if he would only keep sober."
 "I shall keep an eye on him."
 "And I, too."
 And they did. And day after day their hopes of Herr Biberach's reformation grew, till, at the end of a week, when the herr had been steadily sober all the time, they felt that he was out of danger. And Bibby, too, somewhat to his surprise, found that the longer he resisted the craving, the less strong it grew; and he found his reward, too, in improving health, in a steadier hand, a clearer eye, and a lighter heart.
 The signor had watched the progress of the experiment with a grim eye. Had the herr made a single relapse, he would have been kicked neck and crop out of the circus. But he did not. And at length even the signor had to confess that Bibby had proved himself a true man, and that he was worthy of retaining his place in Tomsonio's World-Famous Circus and Hippodrome.

THE END.

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