SLUMBER SONG.

Creep into my arms, my baby dear,
And mother will sing to you soft and low,
A little song you'll [illegible] ar
Of the old moon sheep and her lambs, that go
Up the sky
And down the sky,
And over the hills that seem so high.

The moon is the mother sheep, my dear;
The stars are her little lambs, and they
Follow her, follow her, there and here,
In the wide sky meadows to leap and play.
Up the sky
And down the sky,
And over the hilltops by and by.

Rock-a-by, baby, and go to sleep;
The little star lambs will sleepy grow
And all [illegible] with the moon to sleep
Till the sun goes down at night, and so
Up the sky
And down the sky
The moon and her little white lambs go by.
Go to sleep
And mother'll keep
Watch o'er her lamb, like the old moon sheep.
—Youth's Companion.

A LUCKY "SPEC."

A black nor'easter was working its wicked will in the harbor of Alexander, the capital town of one of our colonies, as we steamed into it on board the Omeo in June, 1874. Blinding rain poured pitilessly down. The whole of the magnificent sheet of water which forms the landlocked harbor was a seething mass of foam, and as we rounded the inner heads the roar of the surf on the Eritonga beach, which faces the entrance to the harbor, was ominously distinct. Under the skillful guidance of our skipper, Jock Maclean, familiarly known on the coast as Hell Fire Jock, we felt our way to the pier. I had been spending a long holiday in sightseeing. What between Rotomahana and the Hot lakes, Sydney, Melbourne and Hobart Town, when I landed on the pier at Alexander I possessed three portmanteaus and 7 shillings. However, I chartered a buggy and drove with all the confidence in the world to the Empire hotel.

Having done justice to an excellent dinner, I determined to hunt up an old press comrade, Frank Gifford, who, I had heard, was the editor of the Alexander Daily Post. The rain was coming down with tropical vengeance, and from all the numerous hills upon which the Empire City, as they call it, is situated, miniature torrents of water poured down and inundated the Te Aro flat, the business portion of the town. It was an uninviting night, but the stimulus of an empty pocket overcame my repugnance to quit the cheerful halls of host Moeller. Luckily the offices of The Post were close handy, so I was not quite drowned by the time I was shaking Gifford by the hand.

He welcomed my advent in a reassuring manner, which eased my mind somewhat as to the inevitable mauvais quart d'heure. We had the usual shop talk. Fisher of the Gulgong Advertiser had died in a fit of delirium tremens, Clarke of The Argus had been dismissed for sending in a glowing criticism of a theatrical performance which had not taken place, Holloway of the Waillato Times was editing the Tauranga Trumpet, Dillon had ratted and now swore by Bogle, the premier of the day; Jock Danderson had abandoned journalism and was keeping a public house, and so forth. Then Master Frank dilated upon his own prospects. He had but two complaints to make—firstly, his proprietor was an old brute; secondly, his subeditor was a young fool. My experience is that most newspaper proprietors are old brutes, and that most subeditors are—not so wise as they would be thought. "Subeditor!" said Frank. "He's excellent at the 'devouring element,' admirable at 'casting a gloom over the entire community' and altogether unapproachable when he has to record the fact that 'our esteemed and enterprising fellow townsmen, Stains & Kircaldie, have added to their emporium a new shop front, which is a credit to the town and quite an ornament to Te Aro street;' but, as to subediting, he knows as much about it as Mount Cook does of a policeman."

Sympathizing deeply with my friend, for I, too, had had bitter experience of paste and scissors men, I suggested that perhaps on the whole it wouldn't be amiss if Mr. Mosely were sent about his business and I were installed in his chair. Frank jumped at the idea, but explained that the "old brute" had an absurd quixotic belief in Mosely because that eminent paste pottist, though not a genius, was always sober.

A deep plot was then concocted whereby the old brute was to be got round and Mosely circumvented. As a part of this plan it was arranged that I should attend a performance to be given that evening at the Odd Fellows' hall by Professor Beda, who described himself as the premier equilibrist tight rope walker of the world and champion prestidigitator of the universe. I was to return to the office and write as excellent an account as I could. "You'll have, in fact," said Frank, "to 'fake' it." And I did.

The rain was still pelting down as I struggled to the hall. The roads were in places two feet deep in water. What with the wind, the rain and the darkness of the streets—there was no gas in Alexander in those days—I had considerable difficulty in getting to the place at all, but at last I reached it, presented my ticket to an attendant who glared at me as savagely as a balked box keeper and entered the room. The place was well lighted, warm and comfortable, and was a pleasing contrast to the horrors of the night outside. A dejected looking pianist was playing a lively tune, and all things were ready for the feast. All things but one—the audience. There wasn't a soul in the place but myself, and I was a deadhead. Seeing that it was now half past 8, and that the performance should have commenced at 8, this did not look promising. However, my business was to report the show, so down I sat and read the programme through half a dozen times, dimly conscious the while that the piano was informing me that "there was a good time coming, boys, only wait a little longer." What with the music and the lulling effect of the raindrops pattering with monotonous regularity on the shingled roof, I fell asleep and awoke to find the dejected pianist thundering out: "There is nae luck about the house; there is nae luck at all."

I looked at my watch. Five minutes to 9, and I was still the oldest inhabitant. There was to be nae luck that night; that was certain. The pianist disappeared behind the curtain. I sat stolidly on. I was there to report that show, and report it I was determined to, whatever happened. Everything happens to him who waits.

This happened to me. Professor Beda, in a shabby suit of evening clothes, looking as though they were suffering from a long course of being let out on hire, came before the curtain, and addressing the audience said, "Sir." The novelty of the exordium aroused my attention, and looking at the professor closely I recognized him. Professor Beda, the premier tight rope dancer of the world and champion prestidigitator of the universe, was no other than Harry Becker, who had been a private in my company of Forest rangers during the war.

"Sir," said he, "I am sorry to see so small an attendance here this evening. However, it is my boast that I never disappoint the public, and though I am afraid the proceeds of the evening's entertainment will barely pay expenses, nevertheless with your kind permission the performance will now proceed."

And it did proceed. As gravely and cheerily as though the hall had been crammed to suffocation the professor went through his entertainment. He borrowed my watch and pounded it in a mortar; he begged the loan of a half crown—it was all I had in the world, but I trusted him with it—he spirited my pocket handkerchief into the center of a candle and performed a number of other tricks with ease and dexterity. All his little jokes and funniments, all the antics of his assistant—Sprightly he was called in the programme—were punctually gone through, and a very fair show it was—for the colonies. When he came to "This concludes the first portion of the entertainment. There will be an intermission of 10 minutes," I could stand it no longer. The melancholy pianist was announced to sing a comic song, which perhaps precipitated my decision. I asked him to tell Professor Beda that the audience would be glad to speak to him for a minute or two. I "went round."

"I am glad to see you, sir," said the professor. "Pray be seated. May I offer you a little whisky and water? You are a gentleman of the press, sir, I understand."

Yes. I represented The Post and was there to do his show.

"I thought, sir, I would give you a specimen of what I can do, and if you'd like it I am quite prepared to go through the whole entertainment."

I explained that there was no occasion for that, because I could write about it quite as well without seeing it—perhaps better. If "gentlemen of the press" were to confine themselves to what they see, the business would soon go to the dogs.

We had some whisky and water, and the professor began to talk less formally.

"Well, sir, they told me down south Alexander was one of the best pitches in the profession. It doesn't look much like it. Seems to me about the one horsedest place ever I was in, except Naipaw, and that ain't even a one donkey place. Not a soul in the house but you, sir, and this here blessed show has cost me out of pocket £5 10. Paid in advance too. A couple o' pound for the hall and the lights, a pound for the pianner, a couple o' pound for fixing up the rope and 10 bob for a money taker. Think of that, sir! Ain't it hard? Ain't it cruel? Ten bob for a money taker!"

That did seem hard indeed, but I explained that I thought that shows usually took especial care to have a money taker of their own for obvious reasons.

"So they do, sir, and so do I. My wife takes the money always—always has done ever since I took to the business—but my luck's dead out. She's up at Britten's—you know, sir, the hotel—in bed with a smashed foot. Some clumsy fool on the Star of the South as we were coming here from the south lets a great packing case right on her foot and smashes her. The doctor says she'll be a fortnight or better. Ten bob for a money taker! If it ain't the cruelest thing as ever I hear! And then the rain! Did anybody ever see it rain like it? It's been a-coming down, down, down like this for three blessed days. Not a soul in the house. Ten bob for a money taker! Help yourself, sir."

I suggested that he might have better luck the next night and corroborated the opinion he had heard down south that Alexander was an excellent place as a rule for performances of all kinds.

"No, sir. The luck's out, and I'm about broke, that's what I am, and I ain't got the money. There's the hall, they will have it in advance; there's the pianner, they wants that in advance, and there's the advertisements, not a line they'll give me till I've paid for today's ads, nor a line, not The Post, nor The Independent, nor none of 'em. 'Advance New Zealand.' That's their motto, is it? Pay in advance it ought to be. Ten bob for a money taker!"

Then a brilliant idea occurred to me. The professor was stone broke. So was I. I knew what the professor did not apparently—that these black nor'easters at Alexander never lasted more than three days. In all probability the next day would be bright and lovely, cold and sunshiny. If so, the sloppy roads would in a few hours be hard, firm and dry, for the soil is limestone. I knew how prone the people of all conditions were to shows. The money for the hall and the "pianner" I could borrow from Gifford. The ads I could manage with a little persuasion, not unmixed with cheek, and as to the money taker I'd be my own, so that "10 bob" and the mortification attaching thereto would be saved. Happy thought! I'd risk it.

"Professor Beda," said I, "otherwise Harry Becker"—he gave a start—"yes, you were in my company of the Forest rangers. I've grown a beard since and altered a good deal no doubt. Now, professor, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll pay for the hall and the 'pianner,' and the ads tomorrow. You do your entertainment. I'll take the money, and after £10 we'll share the receipts."

"I should never have known you, sir, with that beard. The old Forest rangers! Do you remember Captain Rose being shot alongside me and you, sir, at Waiapu? How he did bleed! I should never have known you, sir. Well, sir, I'll tell you what it is, it ain't no risk to me, and I'll do it. I can't be no worse off than I am. How I'm to leave the town and pay the hotel and doctor and passage money on to Tauranga, blessed if I know. I'll do it, sir. Shake hands on it. It's a bargain. Me and you divides after 10 pound."

We cemented that arrangement with another whisky, and away I posted to the office of The Post. The venture looked unpromising enough. The rain was still sluicing down with purposeful pertinacity. I half repented of my bargain. But the bond was as binding as though it had been signed, sealed and delivered and witnessed by all the attorneys on the rolls. So I sloshed my way to the office of The Post knee deep in mud and water. The "old brute" had not turned up and was, in fact, on one of his "bursts," as certain fits of temporary aberration are called in the colony. I propounded the matter to Gifford. He was more cautious than to me appeared good. But I wooed him with my golden tongue, not only out of the harmless necessary fiver, but out of a letter to the other papers, guaranteeing the money for the next day's ads.

"How about the show?" said Gifford.

"Magnificent! You wait and see what I write about it when I return." And away I went to The Independent and The Herald, polished up the professor's ads, and as no report had been done at either place I wrote as puffing a paragraph as I thought they would stand for each paper and then hurried back to The Post to concoct as flaming an account as I could contrive, and I think I may say that it was strong. I may even venture to go further and to say that it was about as glowing as such notices can be made. Repeated applications to Roget's Thesaurus were necessary. Gifford, who was reading my slips as I finished them, objected once or twice. "Come, I say, this is too hot. The old man'll have a fit." The old man was the "old brute."

"Well, from what you tell me," I replied, "he's likely to have one anyhow, so it won't matter." Had the professor been Houdin, Heller, the Wizard of the North and Herr Frikell combined I couldn't have been more lavish of my admiration.

It is usual to conclude this kind of article with some notice of the audience present, and here for a minute or two I was fairly nonplused. But the old story occurred to me of the audience of one at the Portsmouth theater. The performance was proceeding merrily when the manager missed the audience. Hurrying to the front, he asked anxiously, "Where, where is the audience?" "Sir," said the boxkeeper, "he has gone to get some beer, but he is delighted with the performance and says he'll be back in a minute." "Let business proceed," said the manager. And it did proceed. Why I do not know, but this story suggested to me a way out of the difficulty I was in. I concluded with the following peroration: "Altogether Professor Beda's entertainment is one of the most admirable and entertaining that have ever visited Alexander or the colonies. At its conclusion the entire audience arose as one man and applauded the professor to the echo." It must indeed have been "to the echo."

Gifford was nervous about the article; but, as I pointed out to him, no one could possibly contradict a word that I had written, and ultimately my notice, which extended over a column and a quarter, was allowed to pass holus bolus.

The rain had ceased when I returned at 8 in the morning to the hotel. Half a dozen times before daybreak I was out of bed inspecting the weather. No rain, the clouds had cleared off, and at 5 o'clock the stars were shining. A cold, bright morning succeeded. At breakfast I heard people asking, "Were you at the hall last night?" "No. Were you?" "No." At luncheon the mayor of the city said, "It's an odd thing; I've asked every one I've seen today about the performance at the Odd Fellows' hall, and not a soul seems to have been there." And I inwardly thanked Mr. Mayor for an excellent advertisement.

The professor and the other persons concerned held their tongues. I had to make it worth their while to do so. "Ten bob for a money taker" developed into a promise of a sovereign if the show paid.

And pay it did. The seat plan at Lyon's, the bookseller, was well spotted with names by 5 o'clock. It was an off day at the house of representatives, it was the height of the Alexander season, and the evening turned out one of those brilliant, cold, starlight nights that New Zealand alone can produce. The doors were opened at half past 7, and I ensconced myself, wearing a pair of green spectacles, in the pay place. The melancholy musician struck up a lively tune, and at 17 minutes to 8 the first shilling for a back seat came in. I have it now. Luckily shillings and half crowns came in plentifully at first, for had any one tendered a sovereign and wanted change I should have been considerably embarrassed. By and by the front seats (5 shillings) began to pour in, and up to a quarter past 8 I was taking money as fast as I could receive it.

The show was a great success—to us. What the audience thought of it I don't know. I do know that the professor and I divided £53 12s. 6d. The plot succeeded, the old brute was malleable, Mosley became "our reporter," and I was for two years subeditor of the Alexander Daily Post.—R. Halkett Lord in London Theater.

THE CURIOUS LEMMING.

A Remarkable Animal Found in the Highlands of Norway and Sweden.

Very nearly related to the field mice are the lemmings, which are in their way among the most remarkable of animals. They are about five inches long, with very short tails. Dwelling in the highlands of the great central mountain chain of Norway and Sweden, they build their nests of straw lined with hair under stones and tussocks of grass. They are very pugnacious. When disturbed, instead of trying to escape, they sit upright, hissing and showing fight.

Certain cultivated districts of Sweden and Norway, where these creatures are ordinarily unknown, are occasionally, at intervals of from 5 to 25 years, overrun by armies of them, which steadily and slowly advance, always in the same direction, regardless of all obstacles, swimming across streams and even lakes several miles in breadth and committing great devastation. In turn they are pursued and harassed by crowds of beasts and birds of prey, such as bears, wolves, foxes, wildcats, weasels, eagles, hawks and owls. Even domestic animals—cattle, goats and reindeer—join in the hunt.

None of these migrant lemmings ever returns by the course from which it came. The onward march of the survivors never ceases until they reach the sea, into which they plunge, and swimming onward in the same direction as before perish in the waves.

As a matter of fact, the lemmings which perish in the sea are acting under the same blind impulse that led them previously to cross smaller pieces of water in safety. No survivors of the migrating hordes ever live to transmit their final and fatal experience to subsequent generations, and so this gigantic mistake is periodically repeated.

Abnormal increase of number and consequent necessity for food bring about the migration from the highlands to the lowlands, winding up in the ocean. The animals only travel at night and pause when they find sustenance plentiful. Exhaustion of the food supply compels them to proceed. Naturally they would not turn back on their tracks, the region behind being eaten bare. It is a curious fact that during these journeys they multiply enormously and even more rapidly than at home. Such a migration lasts from one to three years.—Pittsburg Dispatch.

Snake Charming.

The secrets of snake charming are much simpler than most people imagine. The snakes to be handled are gorged with food until they become drowsy, or else they are drugged so that their senses are dazed. Sometimes they are kept in iceboxes, and the cold puts them in a semitorpid condition. In either case the snakes are only half alive.

In handling the reptile the hand must always grasp it at certain places where the head can be guided and held from the body. This is the hardest thing to learn; but, like everything else, it comes with practice. By dint of dexterity and strength the snake is easily passed from one hand to the other and is allowed to coil about the body. The snake charmer, however, must be on the alert. When the snake becomes too lively, it is put back into the icebox.

In handling a reptile with the fangs in—which ought to be prohibited by law—one requires great strength, as the strain on the system during the performance is very great. The grasp and movements must be precise and accurate. There is no room for hesitancy or uncertainty. Most of the snakes handled, however, are harmless so far as poisoning is concerned.—Charles Robinson in Lippincott's.

Popular Stones For Jewelry.

Through all changes, when every stone seems to have its day, the diamond stands alone, incomparable. In these days stones are brought into prominence to meet the demand for variety, and such stones as the amethyst, the aquamarine, the chrysoberyl, the golden carnelian and many other stones known as semiprecious are so wonderfully cut and set as to greatly increase their intrinsic value. These stones are very fashionable just at present set in the form of collar and girdle. The turquoise has been more universally adopted in recent years than any other stone. The greatest number and some of the most beautiful have of late years been found in our own country. During the last three years $100,000 worth of American turquoises have been used. And the opal—that exquisite stone with its fairy light dancing over its delicate surface—just now it is finding its reward after many years of prejudice. Indeed, so far has the old superstition regarding this stone been removed that it has become, when set in diamonds, one of the chosen stones for the engagement ring, and the woman who can claim among her associates the most beautiful opal is to be envied, not pitied.—Jewelers' Circular.

Who Owned the Bird?

A hawk captured and killed a carrier pigeon in Druid Hill park a few days ago after a protracted chase. The chase was witnessed by a number of persons. The lightninglike movements of the pursuer and pursued were a revelation to those who were not versed in the flights of birds. The pigeon, as long as it kept in a straight line, beat the hawk flying, but on becoming frightened and confused it began a zigzag course and was then an easy prey. Captain Cassell frightened the hawk so that he got the pigeon, but the pigeon was dead when it struck the ground. On one of its legs was a metal band bearing the capital letters A. S. H. C., the large figures 201 and the small figures 86.—Baltimore Sun.

How He Was.

X. is a malade imaginaire whose chief hobby it is to get a doctor to visit him every day. A friend called to see him one morning. "Well, how are you today?"

"I don't know—the doctor hasn't been here yet!"—Grillon.

R

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