

Hector

By Edward Ostrom, Jr.

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"Cling! cling!" said the fire-bell with her silver voice. "Cling! cling! cling! There's a fire not far away!—and the roof of the building is falling in! and the smoke is pouring out of the windows! and it'll be all up with the women and children if you don't hurry up!" "Cling! cling! cling! cling!"

Hector strode out of his stall with a loud snort, a towering giant of a black horse, with fire in his eyes, and fire in his nostrils and fire under his hoofs as he stepped. Tossing his head contemptuously, he took his place of honor between the poles of the engine, the other horses falling quickly in on either side of him, looking like ponies in comparison with their big leader. All were harnessed ready to go before a label could have burned off a gasoline can. No 10 was hissing spitefully, and Skinny, the driver, was settling himself comfortably upon the box. Hector however, had been pawing the ground.

"Get up, Hector!" said Skinny, "do you think this is a funeral?" Hector tossed his giant head again, and pulled the engine and the other horses playfully out upon the street. "All together now," said Skinny persuasively as he shook out the long reins.

And with that they were off and away, with a wild clatter and ring, up the long, crowded street.

Back of Skinny the men who a few minutes before had been peacefully pulling at their corn-cob pipes and swapping stories with their friends, the boys of the neighborhood, were clanging with desperation to the poles of the roaring engine and horse-cart as they rushed down the crowded street, rocking around sharp corners and winding an intricate path to the scene of their duty.

"Wonder what's the matter with Skinny to-day," said Bill Hoffman as he jammed his helmet tighter on his head. "He's driving wide every-where—acts as though he was scared of something."

"Oh, you never can tell about Skinny," replied his companion. "He's the craziest kid on the works. Some days he drives as if there was a baby under the wheels all the time. Then again he's clipping 'em like a pair of scissors."

"Feet braced against the foot-board, arms hands strutting with all their power against the excited horse, head bare to the rushing wind, eyes set to the front, never wavering, face stern with the responsibility that rests upon the man who is guiding a brass comet through city streets with eager spectators—this was Skinny."

"Looks like a soldier charging the enemy," said one man half to himself.

"You're right, sir, he is a soldier; but with those fellows death is all in the day's work," and his neighbor turned again as the battalion chief whined clanging by in his buggy in the wake of the flying engine.

But with Skinny on the driver's seat it was different to-day. To the outsider Skinny was the same irrepressible, keen-eyed driver who loves to show his daring and skill and devotion to duty. Even his comrades at the fire-house had noticed no marked difference, for he had always been an erratic lad and made few intimate friends.

Hector was the only one to whom he had given all his heart and all his confidences.

"Yer safe if ye tell yer secrets to a horse," he often said, and then he had half laughed.

But the men knew that Hector was more to Skinny than a child would be to some men, and they respected him for it even if they joked with him about it.

And to-day with Skinny was different. A sense of calamity had been with him since morning, intangible, undefinable.

"Somebody's going to happen, old boy," he had murmured to Hector when he went to his big horse's stall in the morning.

Hector had sniffed at the back of Skinny's head while he poured out the oats, but had vouchsafed no answer. He was hungry for the oats and pawed impatiently at the floor.

"Somebody's sure going to happen," he said later and Hector had turned and whinnied to him while he polished the buckles and joints of his horse's harness.

"I feel just the way Johnny Burns did the day before that piano factory fell on him. Gee, I hope I ain't goin' to lose my nerve or my horse," thought Skinny.

The alarm had come as a welcome relief from this gloomy foreboding.

Once on the seat Skinny was himself again—almost, but as he threaded his way down the long street he found himself going over in memory the days since he and Hector had gone into the department.

Then had come the other incidents of their life together—the big apartment house fire when, with all the windows spitting fire and smoke, Skinny had crawled slowly up the front of the building with his scolding ladder and brought down the old woman and her two little grand-

daughters. The next day the paper flamed with accounts of his heroic exploit. Hector was made the driver of the engine after that—the promotion he had always secretly longed for. How he and Hector could work together! No one else could manage the fiery animal so well and so fully. There was the bond of friendship—of love between them. They understood each other.

Hector it was after the long run to the car-barn fire last winter when the snow was deep in the side streets and the water frozen in gutters, over the pavements and walls that seemed to know instinctively the peril of the tottering wall and communicated his fears to Skinny.

The pulsating, throbbing engine had been dragged away only a moment before the street was filled with a ruin of fallen and smoking brick.

Hector again responding to the firm but delicate guidance of his friend had by his enormous strength snatched the engine from its course and barely clear of a big eight-wheeled automobile filled with white-faced, frightened tourists. Skinny had grinned at them as he passed, but he knew only too well that it was Hector who had saved a "tail-dog" from a probable probable his own.

Did you wonder that he loved his big horse? Through all the best part of his life he had gone together, friends, sharing dangers, comforts and treasures. Out of his door, one Skinny with a stick in his hand, the last corner at the foot of the hill they dashed at reckless speed. The blue-coated policeman sprang out from the curb and shouted down the avenue to clear the way.

The whole street shrank out of the way except one little baby carriage with dazed eyes. Skinny stood up, the reins in a madman's grip, jammed on the brake.

When Hector saw death what he heeded horses.

The great horse gaped with mirth at the bit and tried to hold her on his haunches. Plunger staggered on his left but he held him up for several yards then heer stumbled to his knees. Plunger went under the merciless wheels and the engine came to a stop. It was all over as quick as a kiss. Plunger lay quivering with a broken back. Hector was stone dead, his skull crushed in like an apple by Hector's terrible hoof. Hector himself, panting and sweating stood bravely quiet with his knees shaved to the bone.

"My girl who a moment before had been smiling and happy was safe on the sidewalk, her small face hidden in her frock, sobbing the scarce-known why."

Then Hector took the engine up the hill alone. His reins stood out so painfully beneath the strain, however the sweat poured over his muscular flanks thickly, and the panting of his huge sides was so terrible to hear that it seemed to poor Skinny as if his favorite too, must kill himself before they reached the top. But the smell of the fire came to Hector, and he lifted his weary feet into a canter. The horse soon stretched with a familiar quivering on every head and the firemen were running ahead of him with their bright axes. He was there in the thick of it at last, the red blood dripping from his nostrils.

"I want to take my horse home, sir," said Skinny to the Chief, touching his hat.

"Why?"

"Skiny explained his misfortune in short sentences.

"I might better killed the kid than that horse," he added sadly.

"Take him home, lad," said the Chief, wiping the smoke from his eyes.

"I'll send someone up with your engine."

So Skinny took Hector by the bridle, and led him gently all the long way down the hill, sympathizing with him tenderly, and patting his soft nose as they went. Poor Hector could scarcely drag one hoof behind the other. At the foot of the hill the little girl, with screams of laughter, was tearing the yellow wing from a butterfly.

"Oh, poor horse!" she cried as Hector limped past with bleeding knees. But Skinny turned away his face and swore.

Upon reaching home Hector gave a snort that was half a groan and walking unsteadily into his own stall, leaned up against the side, and the boards cried out beneath his weight, and the stanchions shifted their feet unwillingly. Some oats were in the manger, wet and fragrant, though Hector cared not even to sniff at them, but let his huge head, a mountain in itself, droop lower and lower down.

"Poor old rascal," whispered Skinny, kissing the horse's nose furtively. "I hope to God yer ain't busted!"

The man came slowly but of the stall, and the big horse lay heavily down and closed his eyes.

"Hector's busted," said Skinny, trying to explain the sorry situation in a business-like voice to the green head who had been left on watch.

The latter slipped over to Hector's stall and peered in mutely. Hector paid no attention to him. Skinny threw two blankets over the prostrate horse, and slid another rolled up for a pillow under his head. The flies were buzzing lazily over the fragrant oats.

Skiny, who seized every chance to swear at the green head, phoned for a veterinarian, and then stamped about like a baited bull, cursing the long delay. When the surgeon at last arrived with his little satchel, and looked at poor Hector with his cold,

unsympathetic eyes, he pursed up his lips hopelessly, and shook his old head.

"He's pretty bad, ain't he?" blurted Skinny. "Oh, yes, I know it—I felt sure from the first there wasn't no hope oh, yes, I give him up clear from the start."

Skiny's shoeing came untied as he spoke, and he was a long time fixing it. The veterinary meanwhile explained with obvious satisfaction that Hector had had a serious hemorrhage, and might even then be bleeding slowly to death inside.

"Keep him quiet," he said warningly.

But Hector showed no disposition to move, lying wearily, with closed eyes and heavy breathing oblivious to all that went around him. Even toward evening when two or three horses came rubbing up to the door, he did not offer to raise his head.

He did not lift his heavy eyelids when the clamor newcomers staggered and stamped on the slippery concrete, in their violent straining to accomplish what he could have done alone. He did not pluck up his ears when the wondering men drew near and staring at him in open-mouthed amazement.

Called Hector softly with their well-known voices and even when his good friend Straggles, the speckled covered dog, came of bounded rab fashion into the stall and sniffed noisily with tickle whiskers at the ice bandage he gave no sign of life. Nothing seemed to affect him. So the men on tipses went slyly about their work of cleaning up the floor continued to buzz undisturbed in Hector's manger and Skinny with blind eyes made a mournful pretense of furnishing up the harness.

Suddenly however a strange thing happened. It was not that the alarm began to ring with its fearful gong the note of warning for that, was a common enough thing, but it was a note of a different sort from Hector's. Answered at last by the familiar bell the great horse seemed to be struggling to answer the summons. The straw flew furiously in all directions, the partition wall of the stall kicked over by the mighty iron shoes scathed over the concrete floor like a square of pasteboard. Hector arising with a mighty groan, came forth.

Whoa boy! whoa! hee! hee! old man cried Skinny running to his head.

But Hector staggered against Skinny who rebounded backward against the ill-fated wall then the horse came blundering for ward, watering fire with an unsteady tread. Disregarding the blindness of his eyes and the weakness of his knees, giant Hector took his accustomed place of honor between the poles of the engine. But no one came to fasten his harness though he stretched out his neck for the collar no collar was lowered upon him and though he opened his mouth for the bit no bit was placed between his teeth. Tettering then from side to side, the red blood pouring from his nostrils, and pawed the air with his terrible hoofs falling at last, baffled by his engineers upon the oxen nose of the engine, which snapped beneath his weight with a deafening crack but it was a useless precaution for Hector lay on the floor like a stone.

The men stepped forward and stared in silent wonder at the great quiet body which nearly reached from the brass pole on their right to the brass pole on their left. The strange horse in the dim light of their stalls, stood spectrally gazing out with outstretched necks and pricked up ears. Straggles crouched in a shivering heap in the delectate stall, where the flies were buzzing, buzzing their mournful tune.

At last Skinny came limping forward, and knelt stiffly by the silent head.

"Hector's gone," he said presently, in a smothered voice.

The Bank of England.

When first created the staff of the Bank of England consisted of only fifty-four employees. To-day the bank employs about one thousand and people pay \$250,000 yearly in wages and \$35,000 yearly in pensions.

The Bank of England is an extensive building covering over two acres, and standing in three parishes. It is allowed by its charter to sell beer.

There are two private banking houses still carrying on business in London which were established before the Bank of England. These are Child's, established in 1663, and Hoare's, in 1670.

Clerks are admissible to the Bank of England between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, and each one on joining is obliged to insure his life with an insurance society established within the bank, in connection with which are a savings bank and a guarantee fund, all maintained and managed exclusively by and for the officials of the establishment.

Besides this, the directors maintain a provident or benevolent fund, for the benefit of the widows of employees.

The clerks, printers, porters, messengers, etc., have also pensions to the extent of two-thirds of their salary when past work.

A handsome library has been fitted up by the directors within the precincts of the bank for the benefit of the clerks each of whom contributes 10s. annually, or a life subscription of 25s. toward its funds.—London Tit-Bits.

GEISHAS AS THEY ARE.

Avaricious and Ambitious, They Delight in Intrigues.

As the pagan society of Japan is organized, the geishas are simply indispensable, and they are not ignorant of their advantages. For one thing, they serve as social substitutes for those wives, sisters and daughters who are not allowed to be present at a dinner party in a Japanese nobleman's home, much less in a tea house. But as a matter of fact, many of the more refined men lose their youthful enthusiasm over the feminine fascinations of the geisha, and tire of her falsetto voice and her dance, which, as Mr. Finck truly remarks, is rather pantomimic than saltatorial.

These same refined men, however, know that the geisha, quite apart from her more sensuous merits, has a peculiar value from her superb tact in entertaining a guest by talk and chess designed to further the game that the host her "protector" is trying to play. At such functions, where drama is banished, she does not draw the serious No, but the comic Kigen.

Again the geishas are male adepts in intrigue. They are also artists, and subtle. And, being brighter and more accomplished than the average run of Japanese women, they are able to hold their own in repartee with any masculine way. They are over their business and political so-called, and these they are not always seen to the highest bidder, though it might be added that they are generally true to their friends.

When a pair of geishas leave the house wherein they are inmates on a professional errand a servant is sent with them to take care of their outer wraps and, more especially to watch their conduct for no small portion of the money paid them the monthly allowance goes to their employer, and it is the latter's policy to see that the geisha remains faithful to her benefactor.

China's Need of Railways.

All recent writers are agreed that one of the most pressing needs of China politically, strategically and commercially is the means of rapid transit. Already falling into disrepair or laid to their utmost capacity in congested areas, the wonderful water ways of the country do not provide those facilities which are necessary for the development of China's potential resources. Travel by shallow rivers and canals is invariably slow, often dangerous days and weeks are consumed in penetrating the interior, and huge tracks of country far distant from the centers of population are unutilized or with their mineral resources untouched because of the lack of communication.

Thousands starve annually in one province while there is an abundant harvest in an adjacent province, merely because transport at all times is restricted because of the cost of the people thereby reduced.

It is claimed by the advocates of railroads that improved communication would enable the central government to exercise more efficient control of the provinces, would enable the provinces to put down rebellious movements in their incipient stage, give the government the ability to cope with the rapidly changing times of war, increase the people from congested to less populous provinces, provide facilities for famine relief, develop inter-provincial trade and create channels for the distribution of cheap raw materials and foreign goods entering at the treaty ports.—Engineering Magazine.

Negro Sold at Auction.

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union has been holding a rummage sale for several days.

An old colored man entered one of the women "I'm tired of tramping around the country and I'll work for anybody the rest of my days for my victuals and clothes."

One of the women suggested that the old man be placed on a table with a price mark on him, but after further talk with the negro to be certain that he was in earnest it was decided to auction him off to the highest bidder. The old man was put on a stool and one of the women got on the counter and began to cry the bargain.

The first bid was 50 cents. The bidder explained that he simply wanted to give the auctioneer a start. The next bid was 75 cents, and quarter bids were received until the old man was valued at \$2. Then there was a lull in the bidding, but the cryer persisted, and the bargain was finally knocked down to H. W. Shea, a commission merchant, at \$2.30.

The negro eyed the commission man closely and announced that he believed he would like to live with him. He said he had had no home for years and he was tired of living from hand to mouth. Mr. Shea told the woman that he would give his new purchase some light work around his commission house, and if he proved to be trustworthy, the job would be permanent. He agreed to give the negro a suit of clothes and plenty to eat. The old man thanked the woman or having found a home for him and went away with his new master, seemingly quite satisfied.—New York Sun.

ORIGINAL METHOD DUELING

At One Time Law Allowed Murderers to Challenge Accuser.

The duel in its original form, different from the combats of gladiators and classic heroes, was devised by a Burgundian monarch of the sixth century, and accorded with the superstition of its age. Trial by ordeal had been in the hands of the church, which had grossly "faked" verdicts dictated by self-interest and other base motives. The duel became a direct appeal to Heaven to vindicate the right. In the fourteenth century a man was alleged to have dishonored the wife of another man. Trial by combat was ordered, and in the presence of Charles VI of France and his nobles a duel was fought. The accused man was defeated and hanged in the arena, and all the people acclaimed the justice of God. Soon after a man was arrested on a quite different charge and confessed that he was the culprit in the matter for which the unfortunate duelist had died.

In England we had trial by combat long after the Norman monarchs who introduced it were dust. So late as 1817 a man accused of murder took advantage of the old law to challenge him who made the charge. It was proved that it was within the right of the murderer to do so. The battle was refused and the culprit escaped the consequences of his crime. An act of Parliament in the following year put an end to this preposterous state of the law. But duelling did not die. While such notable men as Alexandre Dumas, John Bulling and Lord Byron were men like Fox Pitt, Poligney, Hervey, Leaning, Castlereagh, the Duke of York, Stratford, and the Duke of Wellington in this country were all called out or killed when out it was not to be expected that men less eminent would relinquish the chance of nobility by any means.

Intermittently despite the law duels were fought in the British army and in society. Some of the cases on the Bites. The French proposed courts of honor secret tribunals which should arbitrate between parties after the fashion pursued in the Bavarian army. The suggestion came to nothing. The army did not want it, and the navy was not sensible to fool away its lives in duels. Ultimately the persistence of the Prince brought an amendment of the army regulations making it the most heinous offence to be principal in or accessory to a duel. And so the matter stands today.—St. James's Gazette.

Unhealthy Palaces in Russia.

The illness of the czar has been attributed to the insalubrious condition of many royal palaces in Russia. It may be so but there are cases where inflammation of the ear arises from quite other causes. There is of course considerable difficulty in renovating the private apartments of a monarch whose life is in constant and imminent danger from obstinate and unwholesome intrigues.

Unless rumor gravely lies the czar himself does not know where he will sleep before night comes and to throw upon the geography of the place to be examined would increase its terror.

The best plan would be to employ foreigners and preferably Englishmen who are least of all troubled by hatred of monarchy. A court is always conservative like a university and it is not surprising to compare the statements about the damp and unhealthy palaces of Russia with the famous American mother's characteristic condemnation of the colleges at Oxford.—London Daily News.

New Guinea Cannibals.

New Guinea is a country with great natural wealth and whether the people who wish to take advantage of it go among cannibals, savages or civilized Christians depends on themselves," said the Rev. W. R. Mounsey when describing the work done by himself and his colleagues of the British New Guinea mission on the north coast. This part of the world was twelve years ago inhabited by a race of dangerous cannibals.

On one occasion the Bishop of New Guinea had his whalboat wrecked on the coast and lost everything he and another clergyman laid their wet clothes on the beach to dry in the sun. Presently they saw a crowd of savages watching them, and fearing mischief they dressed and walked boldly toward the crowd, which slowly dispersed. It was afterward learned that the boat had been watched and a great feast planned in which the bishop and clergyman were to be eaten.

How the Mink Hunts.

If you wish to see a mink in the snow any winter day it will usually lead you, before long, to the mute story of a tragedy—just some tramp sled snow and a red stain. The whole method of the mink's hunting is told by the snow. We see how it follows a rabbit, taking every precaution not to betray its presence while the wretched creature feeds, for then it is alert, how it follows bunny to where it sleeps beneath a log, an upturned root or the snow-covered top of a fallen tree, and then stealthily creeps on the unsuspecting prey.

How sometimes the rustling of a dead leaf warns the rabbit, who leaps forward perhaps just in time to avoid the furious onslaught of the mink; though more often too late, and the red stain tells us that the rabbit has been eaten where it expected to sleep.—Country Life in America.

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