

and be a man among men. I could, you know. I'm not so weak and soft as I look. But what chance have I had, brought up among women in a fancy goods store? Then, when the big department stores crowded us out and we had to close, and Mother died—well, I had to do something. And all Auntie would let me try was stenography; so I—I'm that. But I'm through! There! Hang the old notebook! And bang it goes, clear across the room. "Drat the beastly pencils!" Algy sends a shower of 'em against the safe. "Darn the old typewriter, too!" With which he lands a kick on the tin cover of the machine.

"Fine!" says I. "But what next?"

"Why," says Algy, "now I'm going home and tell Aunt Hattie that I start tomorrow to be a cowboy."

"Algy," says I, "don't."

"But I will," says he. Algy has his chin up too, and his shoulders back, and there's a businesslike look to the way he holds his jaw.

"Just as you say," says I; "but lemme give you this tip: You won't be out among them flannel shirts two days before they'll have you skinned alive. Why, Algy, don't you know you'd be as welcome on some ranch as a pussycat in a roomful of fox terriers? Go on, Algy; but as you're jumpin' across the prairie some night, with your eyes bugged and a bunch of frolicsome beef producers behind tryin' to shoot the heels off your shoes, just remember that you was warned."

"Pooh!" says Algy. "Cowboys don't do that sort of thing nowadays, you know. Besides, if it comes to that, I could do a little shooting too."

"What with," says I, "an air rifle?"

And that was the first time I'd ever fetched a pout out of Algy. "See here!" says he. "You come up to Henry's with me now, and I'll show you whether I can shoot or not!"

WELL, just for the fun of it, I let Algy tow me up to a gallery on Eighth-ave. I stood one side while the boss dug out a special gun that he seemed to keep reserved for him. It wa'n't any .22-short affair, but a real blue steel baby cannon with life sized bullets. And, while I ain't any judge, I should say by the way Algy rung the bell and blew up the clay pipes that he was some crack.

"Good work!" says I. "You must have burned some powder here."

"Ask Henry," says he. "It was nearly five years ago that he began to teach me to shoot."

"What about ridin' them buckin' broncos, though?" says I. "You know they don't herd steers in taxicabs."

"But I can ride some too," says Algy. "You shall see. Come on up to Morland's."

"Morland's, eh?" says I. "Say, Algy, why the disguise? Why didn't you tell us you was a plute sport?"

"I'm one of the evening instructors there, that's all," says he. "Of course, I had to pay at first; but I got them to give me lessons at odd times for half price. And, say, they've just brought in a new mustang that's rather lively. If you don't mind waiting a few minutes, too, I'll get into my cowboy costume and bring out myariat."

Say, there was no hot air about Algy's talk. He produced the goods. I couldn't hardly believe it was him, either, with them fringed things on his legs, and the spurs and the wide brimmed hat. Honest, he looked the part, and the stunts he did on that wicked eyed little mustang you wouldn't believe. Then when it came to the lasso business he had me with my tongue out for fair. You've seen 'em twirl the rope in them gunpowder shows they used to have at the Garden, makin' a loop and jumpin' through it, and all that? Well, what does Algy do but jump the blamed pony through his loop, and him in the saddle all the time.

"And you mean to say you've always lived in New York, too?" says I.

"I've never been west of Paterson," says Algy. "But, you see, this is the sort of thing I've lived for. I've spent all my spare time and money on it, so as to be ready when my chance came. Now, take throwing the rope; an ex-cowboy whom I found working in a livery stable taught me to do that. But I had to practise hours and hours, week in and week out. I was bound to get it, though."

"Guess you have," says I. "Algy, you're a wonder! Still, when it comes to mixin' with one of them ranch crowds, I can see your finish."

"Oh, I guess I can take care of myself," says he. "I'm going to try, anyhow."

I EXPECT, too, if it hadn't been for this little session with Algy, I'd never noticed the argument a pair of gents was havin' in the seat across from me, ridin' down in the subway. One was a tall, flashy dressed party, and the other was a short, thickset duck that answers to the name of Mandelbaum and converses mostly with his hands.

"Vell, fire him, vy don't you?" says Mandelbaum.

"After me bringin' him clear on from San Antonio to play the part?" says the other. "You said get the real thing, and he's it. Anyway, he has a reputation as a gun lighter, and claims to be the champion bronco buster and lariat juggler of ten counties. But he missed three rehearsals this week, and we can't have him spoil three thousand feet of films on us, can we?"

"Vell, fire him, fire him!" insists Mandelbaum.

"But, my dear man," says the other, "I can't go out on Broadway and pick up cowboys at a moment's notice. Who can I get to fill his place?"

"Excuse me for buttin' in," says I, "but maybe I've got the answer."

It was a brassy thing to do, I admit; but I'd got more or less int'rested in Algy's case, and it was worth a chance. After starin' a minute they gave me an openin', and first thing I knew we was each statin' our case.

Seems this Mr. Kreegan, which was the name of the other gent, was up against it. He was manager of a big movin' picture outfit and had a bunch of forty people somewhere over on Long Island rehearsin' for one of them film dramas—"The Cowboy's Wooing," or something like that.

He explains how they was sparin' no expense to get the right people for the leadin' roles, which was why he'd brought on this Red River Bill from so far away. But Bill had got the shine of the white lights in his eyes so bad he couldn't see anything dimmer'n illuminated café signs, and he wa'n't lettin' rehearsals bother him at all. Hence the furrowed brow on Kreegan. Also that was why he was willin' to listen to my description of Algy's stunts.

"Huh!" says he, after I've sketched out the shootin' gallery and ridin' academy acts. "But is he the real thing?"

"Ah, say!" says I. "Would I know him if he was?"



F. FORTER LINCOLN

Honest, He Looked the Part, All Right.

Course he ain't. But he can look the part, and when it comes to puttin' up a classy Wild West performance—well, you ought to see him, that's all."

"Vy nod?" says Mandelbaum. "Maybe we could get him cheap."

"That's so," says Kreegan. "See here, Son, when could we—"

"Right now," says I. "Here; change at 14th and jump an uptown express. We'll catch him before he leaves the academy."

IT was a queer thing for me to be doin', towin' a pair of strangers up to meet Algy; but that story of his about how he'd always wanted a chance to play the real man kind of got me shinnin' on Algy's side. Course, I knew he didn't have it in him to make good as the genuine article; but here was an openin' that seemed to fit him to the life. Actin' the cowboy would probably satisfy all that secret yearnin' of his; and, anyway, it would be a lot safer for him.

So, inside of half an hour Algy was goin' through his whole bag of tricks again. Did he make a hit? Why, Kreegan was tickled to death!

"Great!" says he. "He's the slickest rope handler in the business, and if we can get those stunts on the films we'll have 'The Great Train Robbery' beaten to a frazzle. How about offerin' him seventy-five a week?"

"Make it fifty," suggests Mandelbaum.

And, in spite of my tryin' to give Algy the holdout signal, he signs up for that on the spot. Can you blame him? He'd been drawin' down about that much a month at the Corrugated.

"Good!" says Kreegan. "There's a check for the first week in advance. Report at ten sharp tomorrow morning. I'll hunt up Red River Bill and fire him to-night. He'll be sore, I expect; but if he comes around making any trouble I'll have him put away."

Which last remark begins to worry me more or less, right from the start. Course, I wa'n't exactly responsible for Algy's gen'ral health; but if I'd been and let him in for a muss with this Bill party, and anything sudden should happen—well, it wouldn't be nice.

"Look here, Mr. Kreegan," says I, takin' him one side, "just remember that my friend ain't used to bein' handled rough."

"Oh, we'll look out for him, all right," says Kreegan. "And I'm much obliged to you for puttin' us next. Reckon I owe you five or so as a commission for—"

"Nix," says I. "Spend it on keepin' Algy from gettin' punctured."

AND the more I thought the thing over, the uneasier I got. My first move, of course, is to tell Old Hickory what had become of his private stenographer, and as soon as he found he'd got rid of him for good, he begins rememberin' Algy's good points, too. Also he has the same suspicions I do about what this Red River gent might hand to Algy if he got fussin' around.

About the third day after he calls me in and wants to know if I've heard anything from Algernon.

"Not a word," says I. "There ain't been any accounts in the papers, either."

"A case of that kind might be hushed up, though," says Mr. Ellins. "Meanwhile, there's no tellin' what they've done to him, he's such a helpless creature. I'll tell you, Torehy, you had better look up this moving picture firm and make some inquiries."

That was enough for me. With a chilly feelin' down the spine I starts off to find out the worst. They had a Broadway office, and I pikes right for it. By luck I nails Kreegan just as he's comin' out of the entrance.

"Hey, you!" says I, grabbin' him by the elbow. "Is—is Algy all right?"

"Is he?" says Kreegan, rubbin' his hands enthusiastically. "Why, he's a topline! We're tryin' to sign him up for a two years' contract."

"Then he ain't been shot or carved up by Boozey Bill yet?" says I.

"What, him?" says Kreegan. "Well, hardly! Oh, Bill came around, all right, loaded for trouble; but he hadn't much more than stated his grievance and let out a few yelps before that

Algy of yours had roped him and dragged him through a creek. Yes, Sir, slam bang through four feet of muddy water, and if we'd had the picture machine trained on the scene I'd have given a thousand dollars. Bill? The last we saw of him he was headed southwest, running like a scared pup. Say, you can trust Algy. All I wish is that we could count on him for the rest of the season."

"Why, he ain't goin' to quit, is he?" says I.

"I'm afraid so," says Kreegan. "It's all Mrs. Managan's fault—Panhandle Kate, you know, who does the fancy gun shooting for us. She's a widow, and quite a looker. Used to travel with the big tent shows; but now she owns a ranch of her own down in the long grass country, and she only does this for the fun of the thing. She took a shine to Algy that first day, and they've been getting thicker and thicker ever since. It's a match, I reckon, and as soon as we run off this set of films I expect they'll both be quittin'. Your Algy will be bossing a fifty-thousand-dollar ranch by this time next month. And, say, I pity the fresh cowpuncher who picks him out for a softy. He's more or less of a man, Algy is."

What do you know, eh? Algy! Think of it! Well, wishin' and tryin' will do wonders sometimes, won't they?

HELPS TO A SHORT LIFE

BY EUGENE L. FISK, M. D.

The Bird of Time has but a little way
To flutter,—and the Bird is on the Wing.
—OMAR KHAYYAM.

ONE help to a short life is the philosophy of Omar, if you take him literally. But there is good reason for thinking that this persuasive singer did not practise what he sang. It is reported that Omar was really a very respectable old gentleman, more likely to be found under a tree with a scroll of parchment than with the "Jug," the "Loaf," or the "Thou" so seductively pictured in his quatrains. No doubt he was simply an untamable insurgent, striking at cant, hypocrisy, and superstition with such weapons as he could find.

Nevertheless, there is a beautiful collection of texts in old Omar to back up the votaries of "a short life and a merry one," and it is the duty of the neurologist to denounce him.

Here and there a pagan spirit arises who can put some real living into slow suicide; but to the philosophic medical mind the average "short and merry" existence is a stupid, sordid affair, resembling nothing so much as a prolonged epileptic fit, when it is not resembling general anesthesia.

While it may seem like stating the obvious, nevertheless, for the benefit of some people, it is necessary to point out that all trustworthy mortality statistics of the "primrose path," or, if you please, the "Great White Way," should take into account not only the gray haired survivors at the end of the route, but the wrecks that are strewn along the way, skulkers and deserters from the real firing line of existence.

Life insurance companies, keenly alive to mortality waste, are accustomed to scrutinize the "moral hazard." It is not uncommon for a man with plenty of money and a sound physique to knock in vain at the door of a life