This memorable piece of vernacular humor launched Mark Twain's national literary reputation and, in a way, remained his signature piece for many years to come. Twain had heard a man named Ben Coon tell the story in a mining camp on California's Western Slope, and, seeing something literary in it, he recorded in bare-boned fashion the incidents of the tale. What most struck Twain was Ben Coon's deadpanned way of telling the yarn—for Coon was evidently unaware that there was anything funny about what he was saying. When Artemus Ward requested a contribution from Twain for a collection he was putting together, Twain wrote up the story. The completed tale arrived too late to be included in Ward's collection, however, and instead was first published in the New York Saturday Review for November 18, 1865. It was subsequently reprinted in newspapers throughout the country, and Mark Twain became an instant celebrity.

The author had chosen to cast this story in the familiar form of the frame tale, in which a genteel and refined character begins the story, a vernacular character spins his yarn, and the genteel narrator returns in the final paragraph. Twain adopted the form to his own purposes, however, and, unlike other humorists, refused to condescend to his created character or to make fun of him. Wheeler's genuine admiration of the exploits of Jim Smiley and the mysterious stranger, combined with his vivid and often fantastic vernacular metaphors, makes for an affecting as well as a hilarious specimen of Twain's humor.

* * *

Mr. A. Ward,

Dear Sir—Well, I called on good-natured, garrulous old Simon Wheeler, and I inquired after your friend Leonidas W. Smiley, as you requested me to do, and I hereunto append the result. If you can get any information out of it you are cordially welcome to it. I have a lurking suspicion that your Leonidas W. Smiley is a myth—that you never knew such a personage, and that you only conjectured that if I asked old Wheeler about him it would remind him of his infamous Jim Smiley, and he would go to work and bore me nearly to death with some infernal reminiscence of him.
as long and tedious as it should be useless to me. If that was your
design, Mr. Ward, it will gratify you to know that it succeeded.

I found Simon Wheeler dozing comfortably by the bar-room stove
of the little old dilapidated tavern in the ancient mining camp of Boomer-
ang, and I noticed that he was fat and bald-headed, and had an ex-
pression of winning gentleness and simplicity upon his tranquil
countenance. He roused up and gave me good-day. I told him a friend
companion of mine had commissioned me to make some inquiries about a cherished
boyhood named Leonidas W. Smiley—Rev. Leonidas
W. Smiley—a young minister of the gospel, who he had heard was at
one time a resident of this village of Boomerang. I added that if Mr.
Wheeler could tell me anything about this Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley, I
would feel under many obligations to him.

Simon Wheeler backed me into a corner and blocked me there with
his chair—and then sat down and reeled off the monotonous narrative
which follows this paragraph. He never smiled, he never frowned, he
never changed his voice from the quiet, gently-flowing key to which he
turned the initial sentence, he never betrayed the slightest suspicion of
enthusiasm—but all through the interminable narrative there ran a vein
of impressive earnestness and sincerity, which showed me plainly that
so far from his imagining that there was anything ridiculous or funny
about his story, he regarded it as a really important matter, and admired
its two heroes as men of transcendent genius in fineness. To me, the
spectacle of a man drifting serenely along through such a queer yarn
without ever smiling was exquisitely absurd. As I said before, I asked
as follows. I let him go on in his own way, and never interrupted him
once.

There was a feller here once by the name of Jim Smiley, in the winter
of '49—or maybe it was the spring of '50—I don't recollect exactly,
some how, though what makes me think it was one or the other is
because I remember the big flume wasn't finished when he first come to
the camp; but anyway, he was the curiosetest man about always betting
on anything that turned up you ever see, if he could get anybody to bet
on the other side, and if he couldn't he'd change sides—any way that
suited the other man would suit him—any way just so's he got a bet,
he was satisfied. But still, he was lucky—uncommon lucky; he most
always come out winner. He was always ready and laying for a chance;
there couldn't be no solitory thing mentioned but what that feller'd offer
to bet on it—and take any side you please, as I was just telling you: if
there was a horse race, you'd find him flush or you find him busted at
the end of it; if there was a dog-fight, he'd bet on it; if there was a cat-
fight, he'd bet on it; if there was a chicken-fight, he'd bet on it; why if
there was two birds sitting on a fence, he would bet you which one
would fly first—or if there was a camp-meeting he would be there reglar
to bet on parson Walker, which he judged to be the best exhorter about
here, and so he was, too, and a good man; if he even see a straddle-bug
start to go any wheres, he would bet you how long it would take him
to get wherever he was going to, and if you took him up he would foller
that straddle-bug to Mexico but what he would find out where he was
bound for and how long he was on the road. Lots of the boys here has
seen that Smiley and can tell you about him. Why, it never made no
difference to him—he would bet on anything—the danged fester. Parson
Walker's wife laid very sick, once, for a good while, and it seemed as
if they wasn't going to save her; but one morning he come in and
Smiley asked him how she was, and he said she was considerable
better—thank the Lord for his infinit mercy—and coming on so smart
that with the blessing of Providence she'd get well yet—and Smiley,
before he thought, says, "Well, I'll risk two-and-a-half that she don't,
anyway."

Thish-yr Smiley had a mare—the boys called her the fifteen-minute
nag, but that was only in fun, you know, because, of course, she was
faster than that—and he used to win money on that horse, for all she
was so slow and always had the asthma, or the distemper, or the con-
sumption, or something of that kind. They used to give her two or three
hundred yards' start, and then pass her under way; but always at the
fag-end of the race she'd get excited and desperate-like, and come
ca-vorting and spaddling up, and scattering her legs around limber,
sometimes in the air, and sometimes out to one side amongst the fences,
and kicking up m-o-re dust, and raising m-o-re racket with her cough-
ing and sneezing and blowing her nose—and always fetch up at the
stand just about a neck ahead, as near as you could cipher it down.

And he had a little small bull-pup, that to look at him you'd think
he wasn't worth a cent, but to set around and look Ornery, and lay for
a chance to steal something. But as soon as money was up on him he
was a different dog—his underjaw'd begin to stick out like the for'castle
of a steamboat, and his teeth would uncover, and shine savage like the
furnaces. And a dog might tackle him, and bully-rag him, and bite him,
and throw him over his shoulder two or three times, and Andrew
Jackson—which was the name of the pup—Andrew Jackson would
never let on but what he was satisfied, and hadn't expected nothing
else—and the bets being doubled and doubled on the other side all the
time, till the money was all up—and then all of a sudden he would grab
that other dog just by the joint of his hind legs and freeze to it—not
chow, you understand, but only just grip and hang on till they threw up the sponge, if it was a year. Smiley always came out winner on that pup till he harnessed a dog once that didn’t have no hind legs, because they’d been sawed off in a circular saw, and when the thing had gone along far enough, and the money was all up, and he came to make a snatch for his pet holt, he saw in a minute how he’d been imposed on, and how the other dog had him in the door, so to speak, and he ‘peared surprised, and then he looked sorter discouraged like, and didn’t try no more to win the fight, and so he got shucked out bad. He gave Smiley a look as much as to say his heart was broke, and it was his fault, for putting up a dog that hadn’t no hind legs for him to take hold of, which was his main dependence in a fight, and then he limped off a piece, and laid down and died. It was a good pup, was that Andrew Jackson, and would have made a name for himself if he’d lived, for the stuff was in him, and he had genius—I know it, because he hadn’t had no opportunities to speak of, and it don’t stand to reason that a dog could make such a fight as he could under them circumstances, if he hadn’t no talent. It always makes me feel sorry when I think of that last fight of his on, and the way it turned out.

Well, thiss yer Smiley had rat-terriers and chicken cocks, and tom-cats, and all them kind of things, till you couldn’t rest, and you couldn’t fetch nothing for him to bet on but he’d match you. He ketchet a frog one day and took him home and said he cal’lated to educate him; and so he never done nothing for three months but set in his back yard and learn that frog to jump. And you bet you he did learn him, too. He’d give him a little hunch behind, and the next minute you’d see that frog whirling in the air like a doughnut—see him turn one summerset, or maybe a couple, if he got a good start, and come down flat-footed and all right, like a cat. He got him up so in the matter of ketching flies, and kept him in practice so constant, that he’d nail a fly every time as far as he could see him. Smiley said all a frog wanted was education, and he could do most anything—and I believe him. Why, I’ve seen him set Dan’l Webster down here on this floor—Dan’l Webster was the name of the frog—and sing out, “Flies! Dan’l, flies,” and quicker’n you could wink, he’d spring straight up, and snake a fly off’n the counter there, and flop down on the floor again as solid as a gob of mud, and fall to scratching the side of his head with his hind foot as indifferent as if he hadn’t no idea he’d done any more’n any frog might do. You never see a frog so modest and straight-forward as he was, for all he was so gifted. And when it come to fair-and-square jumping on a dead level, he could get over more ground at one straddle than any animal of his breed you ever see. Jumping on a dead level was his strong suit you understand, and when it come to that, Smiley would ante up money on him as long as he had a red. Smiley was monstrous proud of his frog, and well he might be, for fellers that had travelled and ben everywhere all said he laid over any frog that ever they see.

Well, Smiley kept the beast in a little lattice box, and he used to fetch him down town sometimes and lay for a bet. One day a feller—a stranger in the camp, he was—come across him with his box, and says:

“What might it be that you’ve got in the box?”

And Smiley says, sorter indifferent like, “It might be a parrot, or it might be a canary, maybe, but it ain’t—it’s only just a frog.”

And the feller took it, and looked at it careful, and turned it round this way and that, and says, “H’m—so ‘tis. Well, what’s he good for?”

“Well,” Smiley says, easy and careless, “He’s good enough for one thing I should judge—he can out-jump any frog in Calaveras county.”

The feller took the box again, and took another long, particular look, and give it back to Smiley and says, very deliberate, “Well—I don’t see no points about that frog that’s any better’n any other frog.”

“Maybe you don’t,” Smiley says. “Maybe you understand frogs, and maybe you don’t understand ’em; maybe you’ve had experience, and maybe you ain’t only a amateur, as it were. Anyways, I’ve got my opinion, and I’ll resk forty dollars that he can out-jump any frog in Calaveras county.”

And the feller studied a minute, and then says, kinder sad, like, “Well—I’m only a stranger here, and I ain’t got no frog—but if I had a frog I’d bet you.”

And then Smiley says, “That’s all right—that’s all right—if you’ll hold my box a minute I’ll go and get you a frog;” and so the feller took the box, and put up his forty dollars along with Smiley’s, and set down to wait.

So he set there a good while thinking and thinking to himself, and then he got the frog out and prised his mouth open and took a teaspoon and filled him full of quail-shot—filled him pretty near up to his chin—and set him on the floor. Smiley he went out to the swamp and slopped around in the mud for a long time, and finally he ketchet a frog and fetched him in and give him to this feller and says:

“Now if you’re ready, set him alongside of Dan’l, with his forepaws just even with Dan’l’s, and I’ll give the word.” Then he says, “One—two—three—jump!” and him and the feller touched up the frogs from behind, and the new frog hopped off lively, but Dan’l give a heave, and hysted up his shoulders—so—like a Frenchman, but it wasn’t no use—he couldn’t budge; he was planted as solid as an anvil, and he couldn’t no more stir than if he was anchored out. Smiley was a good deal surprised, and he was disgusted too, but he didn’t have no idea what the matter was, of course.
The feller took the money and started away, and when he was going out at the door he sort of jerked his thumb over his shoulder—this way—at Dan'l, and says again, very deliberate, "Well—I don't see no points about that frog that's any better'n any other frog."

Smiley he stood scratching his head and looking down at Dan'l a long time, and at last he says, "I do wonder what in the nation that frog threw off for—I wonder if there ain't something the matter with him—he 'pears to look mighty baggy, somehow"—and he ketch Dan'l by the nap of the neck, and lifted him up and says, "Why blame my cat if he don't weigh five pound"—and turned him upside down, and he belched out about a double-handful of shot. And then he see how it was, and he was the maddest man—he set the frog down and took out after that feller, but he never ketch him. And—

[Here Simon Wheeler heard his name called from the front-yard, and got up to go and see what was wanted.] And turning to me as he moved away, he said: "Just sit where you are, stranger, and rest easy—I ain't going to be gone a second."

But by your leave, I did not think that a continuation of the history of the enterprising vagabond Jim Smiley would be likely to afford me much information concerning the Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley, and so I started away.

At the door I met the sociable Wheeler returning, and he buttonholed me and recommended:

"Well, thist-ye Smiley had a yaller one-eyed cow that didn't have no tail only just a short stump like a bannister, and—"

"O, curse Smiley and his afflicted cow!" I muttered, good-naturally, and bidding the old gentleman good-day, I departed.

BRET HARTE

The Luck of Roaring Camp

This story was published in 1868 in the second issue of the California journal *The Overland Monthly*, of which Harte was the founding editor and frequent contributor. The piece appeared unsigned, and though many local readers objected to its coarseness, when it was reprinted in the East the tale was welcomed with unreserved enthusiasm. When the author's name was disclosed, Harte became an overnight sensation and the most celebrated exponent of local-color writing. The manner of this and other stories is distinctly literary, however, and owes more to Dickens and Hawthorne than to the vernacular energy of California mining communities. Nevertheless, the charm of the tale resides in the author's seemingly effortless fusion of diverse, even paradoxical, elements. The illegitimate offspring of a prostitute, "Cherokee Sal," works a redemptive change on the maimed and violent citizens of Roaring Camp, their awkward and unaccustomed attempts to care for the child serving as better burlesque of genteel customs than deliberate satire. On the other hand, the child they christen "Thomas Luck" may or may not be their savior; the transformations of the local roughs may be little more than the ill-fitting garments of sentimentality. The child, at all events, is, as Kentuck admiringly describes him, a "d——d little cuss" in more ways than one. If his birth recalls a homespun version of the Nativity, the manner of his death is reminiscent of the deluge God sent to rid the world of wickedness. The net effect of this ambiguous story is at once amusingly parodic (of both Western manners and strained religiosity) and genuinely affecting.

There was commotion in Roaring Camp. It could not have been a fight, for in 1850 that was not novel enough to have called together the entire settlement. The ditches and claims were not only deserted, but "Tuttle's grocery" had contributed its gamblers, who, it will be remembered, calmly continued their game the day that French Pete and Kanaka Joe shot each other to death over the bar in the front room. The whole camp was collected before a rude cabin on the outer edge of the clearing. Conversation was carried on in a low tone, but the name of a woman was frequently repeated. It was a name familiar enough in the camp,—"Cherokee Sal."

Perhaps the less said of her the better. She was a coarse, and, it is to be feared, a very sinful woman. But at that time she was the only woman in Roaring Camp, and was just then lying in sore extremity, when she most needed the ministration of her own sex. Dissolute, abandoned, and irreclaimable, she was yet suffering a martyrdom hard enough to bear even when veiled by sympathizing womanhood, but now terrible in her loneliness. The primal curse had come to her in that original isolation which must have made the punishment of the first transgression so dreadful. It was, perhaps, part of the expiation of her sin, that, at a moment when she most lacked her sex's intuitive tenderness and care, she met only the half-contemptuous faces of her masculine associates. Yet a few of the spectators were, I think, touched by her sufferings. Sandy Tipron thought it was "rough on Sal," and, in the contemplation of her condition, for a moment rose superior to the fact that he had an ace and two bowers in his sleeve.
which surrounded his bed,—he dropped over the bank on his head in the soft earth, and remained with his mottled legs in the air in that position for at least five minutes with unflinching gravity. He was excreted without a murmur. I hesitate to record the many other instances of his sagacity, which rest, unfortunately, upon the statements of prejudiced friends. Some of them were not without a tinge of superstition. “I crep’ up the bank just now,” said Kentuck one day, in a breathless state of excitement, “and dern my skin if he wasn’t a talking to a jaybird as was a sittin’ on his lap. There they was, just as free and sociable as anything you please, a jawin’ at each other just like two cherry-bums.” However, whether creeping over the pine-boughs or lying lazily on his back blinking at the leaves above him, to him the birds sang, the squirrels chattered, and the flowers bloomed. Nature was his nurse and playfellow. For him she would let slip between the leaves golden shafts of sunlight that fell just within his grasp; she would send wandering breezes to visit him with the balm of bay and resinous gums; to him the tall red-woods nodded familiarly and sleepily, the bumble-bees buzzed, and the rooks cawed a slumberous accompaniment.

Such was the golden summer of Roaring Camp. They were “flush times,”—and the Luck was with them. The claims had yielded enormously. The camp was jealous of its privileges and looked suspiciously on strangers. No encouragement was given to immigration, and, to make their seclusion more perfect, the land on either side of the mountain wall that surrounded the camp they duly preempted. This, and a reputation for singular proficiency with the revolver, kept the reserve of Roaring Camp inviolate. The expressmen—their only connecting link with the surrounding world—sometimes told wonderful stories of the camp. He would say, “They’ve a street up there in ‘Roaring,’ that would lay over any street in Red Dog. They’ve got vines and flowers round their houses, and they wash themselves twice a day. But they’re mighty rough on strangers, and they worship an Injun baby.”

With the prosperity of the camp came a desire for further improvement. It was proposed to build a hotel in the following spring, and to invite one or two decent families to reside there for the sake of “The Luck,”—who might perhaps profit by female companionship. The sacrifice that this concession to the sex cost these men, who were fiercely sceptical in regard to its general virtue and usefulness, can only be accounted for by their affection for Tommy. A few still held out. But the resolve could not be carried into effect for three months, and the minority meekly yielded in the hope that something might turn up to prevent it. And it did.

The winter of 1851 will long be remembered in the foot-hills. The snow lay deep on the Sierras, and every mountain creek became a river, and every river a lake. Each gorge and gulch was transformed into a tumultuous watercourse that descended the hillsides, tearing down giant trees and scattering its drift and debris along the plain. Red Dog had been twice under water, and Roaring Camp had been forewarned. “Water put the gold into them gulches,” said Stumpy, “it’s been here once and will be here again!” And that night the North Fork suddenly leaped over its banks, and swept up the triangular valley of Roaring Camp.

In the confusion of rushing water, crashing trees, and crackling timber, and the darkness which seemed to flow with the water and blot out the fair valley, but little could be done to collect the scattered camp. When the morning broke, the cabin of Stumpy nearest the river-bank was gone. Higher up the gulch they found the body of its unlucky owner; but the pride, the hope, the joy, the Luck, of Roaring Camp had disappeared. They were returning with sad hearts, when a shout from the bank recalled them.

It was a relief-boat from down the river. They had picked up, they said, a man and an infant, nearly exhausted, about two miles below. Did anybody know them, and did they belong here?

It needed but a glance to show them Kentuck lying there, cruelly crushed and bruised, but still holding the Lucky of Roaring Camp in his arms. As they bent over the strangely assorted pair, they saw that the child was cold and pulseless. “He is dead,” said one. Kentuck opened his eyes. “Dead?” he repeated feebly. “Yes, my man, and you are dying too.” A smile lit the eyes of the expiring Kentuck. “Dying,” he repeated, “he’s a taking me with him,—tell the boys I’ve got the Luck with me now”; and the strong man, clinging to the frail babe as a drowning man is said to cling to a straw, drifted away into the shadowy river that flows forever to the unknown sea.

MARK TWAIN

The Story of the Old Ram

This humorous sketch was interpolated into Roughing It (1872), where it first appeared. It perfectly illustrates the rules for telling a humorous tale, which Twain formulated in his essay “How to Tell a Story” (1895); it wanders about and strings together incongruities and absurdities at its leisure; the narrator, Jim Blaine, is perfectly unaware that there is anything funny in what he is saying; and, largely through masterful
punctuation, it conveys the sense of an absentminded immediateness of presentation. Of course, telling a story and writing a story that gives the reader the imaginary feeling of hearing a tale told are two different matters. For that reason, Twain, functioning as the genteel narrator who introduces a vernacular character, provides something of a user's manual in the opening paragraph. He sets the scene, gives us the dramatic occasion for the tale, and carefully describes the almost reverential quality of Jim Blaine's voice and the inebriated abstraction of his mood. Once Blaine commences, however, he is never interrupted, and his tale bubbles along in a single meandering paragraph. Twain may claim that he has been hoodwinked or "sold" at the end, but readers are more apt to feel that they have been treated to an awfully good time.

* * *

Every now and then, in these days, the boys used to tell me I ought to get one Jim Blaine to tell me the stirring story of his grandfather's old ram—but they always added that I must not mention the matter unless Jim was drunk at the time—just comfortably and sociably drunk. They kept this up until my curiosity was on the rack to hear the story. I got to haunting Blaine; but it was of no use, the boys always found fault with his condition; he was often moderately but never satisfactorily drunk. I never watched a man's condition with such absorbing interest, such anxious solicitude; I never so pined to see a man uncompromisingly drunk before. At last, one evening I hurried to his cabin, for I learned that this time his situation was such that even the most fastidious could find no fault with it—he was tranquilly, serenely, symmetrically drunk—not a hiccup to mar his voice, not a cloud upon his brain thick enough to obscure his memory. As I entered, he was sitting upon an empty powder-keg, with a clay pipe in one hand and the other raised to command silence. His face was round, red, and very serious; his throat was bare and his hair tumbling; in general appearance and costume he was a stalwart miner of the period. On the pine table stood a candle, and its dim light revealed "the boys" sitting here and there on bunks, candle-boxes, powder-kegs, etc. They said:

"Sh—! Don't speak—he's going to commence."

THE STORY OF THE OLD RAM

I found a seat at once, and Blaine said:

"I don't reckon them times will ever come again. There never was a more bullier old ram than what he was. Grandfather fetched him from Illinois—got him of a man by the name of Yates—Bill Yates—maybe you might have heard of him; his father was a deacon—Baptist—and he was a rustler, too; a man had to get up rather early to get the start of old Thankful Yates; it was him that put the Greens up to jinng teams with my grandfather when he moved West. Seth Green was probly the pick of the flock; he married a Wilkerson—Sarah Wilkerson—good creature, she was—one of the most likist heifers that was ever raised in old Stoddard, everybody said that knew her. She could heft a bar'flour as easy as I can flit a flapjack. And spin? Don't mention it! Independent? Humph! When Sile Hawkins come a-browsing around her, she let him know that for all his tin he couldn't trot in harness alongside of her. You see, Sile Hawkins was—no, it warn't Sile Hawkins, after all—it was a galoot by the name of Flikkins—I disremember his first name; but he was a stump—come into pra' meeting drunk, one night, hooaring for Nixon, becuz he thought it was a primary; and old deacon Ferguson up and scotched him through the window and he lit on old Miss Jefferson's head, poor old sally. She was a good soul—had a glass eye and used to lend it to old Miss Wagner, that hadn't any, to receive company in; it warn't big enough, and when Miss Wagner warn't noticing, it would get twisted around in the socket, and look up, maybe, or out to one side, and every which way, while t'other one was looking as straight ahead as a spy-glass. Grown people didn't mind it, but it most always made the children cry, it was so sort of scary. She tried packing it in raw cotton, but it wouldn't work, somehow—the cotton would get loose and stick out and look so kind of awful that the children couldn't stand it no way. She was always dropping it out, and turning up her old dead-light on the company empty, and making them uncomfor- table, becuz she never could tell when it hopped out, being blind on that side, you see. So somebody would have to hunch her and say, 'Your game eye has fetched loose, Miss Wagner dear'—and then all of them would have to sit and wait till she janned it in again—wrong side before, as a general thing, and green as a bird's egg, being a bashful creature and easy set back before company. But being wrong side before warn't much difference, anyway, becuz her own eye was sky-blue and the glass one was yaller on the front side, so whichever way she turned it it didn't match nohow. Old Miss Wagner was considerable on the borrow, she was. When she had a quilting, or Dorcas S'ity at her house she gen'ly borrowed Miss Higgins's wooden leg to stump around on; it was considerable shorter than her other pin, but much she minded that. She said she couldn't abide crutches when she had company, becuz they were so slow; said when she had company and things had to be done, she wanted to get up and hump herself. She was as bals as a jug, and so she used to borrow Miss Jacobs's wig—Miss Jacobs was the coffin-peddler's wife—a ratty old buzzard, he was, that used to go roost-
ing around where people was sick, waiting for 'em; and there that old rip would sit all day, in the shade, on a coffin that he judged would fit the can't be; and if it was a slow customer and kind of uncertain, he'd fetch his rations and a blanket along and sleep in the coffin nights. He was anchored out that way, in frosty weather, for about three weeks, once, before old Robbins's place, waiting for him; and after that, for as much as two years, Jacobs was not on speaking terms with the old man, on account of his disap'inting him. He got one of his feet froze, and lost money, too, becuze old Robbins took a favorable turn and got well. The next time Robbins got sick, Jacobs tried to make up with him, and varnished up the same old coffin and fetched it along; but old Robbins was too many for him; he had him in, and 'peared to be powerful weak; he bought the coffin for ten dollars and Jacobs was to pay it back and twenty-five more besides if Robbins didn't like the coffin after he'd tried it. And then Robbins died, and at the funeral he bursted off the lid and riz up in his shroud and told the parson to let up on the performances, becuze he could not stand such a coffin as that. You see he had been in a trance once before, when he was young, and he took the chances on another, cal'rating that if he made the trip it was money in his pocket, and if he missed fire he couldn't lose a cent. And by George he suec Jacobs for the rhino and got judgment, and he set up the coffin in his back parlor and said he 'lowed to take his time, now. It was always an aggravation to Jacobs, the way that miserable old thing acted. He moved back to Indianty pretty soon—went to Wellsville—Wellsville was the place the Hogadorns was from. Mighty fine family. Old Maryland stock. Old Squire Hogadorn could carry around more mixed litter, and cuss better than most any man I ever see. His second wife was the widdier Billings—she that was Becky Martin; her dam was deacon Dunlap's first wife. Her oldest child, Maria, married a missionary and died in grace—et up by the savages. They et him, too, poor feller—bled him. It warn't the custom, so they say, but they explained to friends of his'n that went down there to bring away his things, that they'd tried missionaries ever other way and never could get any good out of 'em—and so it annoys all his relations to find out that that man's life was fooled away just out of a dern'd experiment, so to speak. But mind you, there ain't anything ever reely lost; everything that people can't understand and don't see the reason of does good if you only hold on and give it a fair shake; Prov'dence don't fire no blank ca'tridges, boys. That there missionary's substance, unbeknown to himself, actu'ly con'verted every last one of them heathens that took a chance at the barbeque. Nothing ever fetched them but that. Don't tell me it was an accident that he was bled. There ain't no such a thing as an accident. When my uncle Lem was leaping up agin a scaffolding once, sick, or drunk, or suthin, an Irishman with a hod full of bricks fell on him out of the third story and broke the old man's back in two places. People said it was an accident. Much accident there was about that. He didn't know what he was there for, but he was there for a good object. If he hadn't been there the Irishman would have been killed. Nobody can ever make me believe anything different from that. Uncle Lem's dog was there. Why didn't the Irishman fall on the dog? Becuz the dog would a seen him a-coming and stood from under. That's the reason the dog warn't appinted. A dog can't be depended on to carry out a special providence. Mark my words it was a put-up thing. Accidents don't happen, boys. Uncle Lem's dog—I wish you could a seen that dog. He was a reglar shepherd—or ruther he was part bull and part shepherd—splendid animal; belonged to parson Hagar before Uncle Lem got him. Parson Hagar belonged to the Western Reserve Hagar family; his mother was a Watson; one of his sisters married a Wheeler; they settled in Morgan County, and he got nipped by the machinery in a carpet factory and went through in less than a quarter of a minute; his widdler bought the piece of carpet that had his remains wove in, and people come a hundred mile to 'tend the funeral. There was fourteen yards in the piece. She wouldn't let them roll him up, but planted him just so—full length. The church was middling small where they preached the funeral, and they had to let one end of the coffin stick out of the window. They didn't bury him—they planted one end, and let him stand up, same as a monument. And they nailed a sign on it and put—put on—put on—sacred to—the m-e-m-o-r-y—of fourteen y-a-r-d-s—of three-ply—car-pet—containing all that was—m-o-r-t-a-l—of—W-i-l-l-i-a-m—W-h-e-n—

Jim Blaine had been growing gradually drowsy and drowsier—his head nodded, once, twice, three times—dropped peacefully upon his breast, and he fell tranquilly asleep. The tears were running down the boys' cheeks—they were suffocating with suppressed laughter—and had been from the start, though I had never noticed it. I perceived that I was "sold." I learned then that Jim Blaine's peculiarity was that whenever he reached a certain stage of intoxication, no human power could keep him from setting out, with impressive unction, to tell about a wonderful adventure which he had once had with his grandfather's old ram—and the mention of the ram in the first sentence was as far as any man had ever heard him get, concerning it. He always maundered off, interminably, from one thing to another, till his whisky got the best of him and he fell asleep. What the thing was that happened to him and his grandfather's old ram is a dark mystery to this day, for nobody has ever yet found out.