

THE HAWKINS CRANO-SCALE.

BY EDGAR FRANKLIN.

Some experiences in a coal-bin, with an account of the resolve born of the ignominious method of deliverance therefrom.

I HAD intended it for a peaceful, solitary walk up-town after business on that beautiful Saturday afternoon; and had in fact accomplished the better part of it. I was inhaling huge quantities of the balmy air and reveling in the exhilaration of the exercise.

But passing the picture store, I experienced a queer sensation—perhaps “that feeling of impending evil” we read about in the patent medicine advertisements.

It may have been because I recalled that in that very shop Hawkins had demonstrated the virtues of his infallible Lightning Canvas-Strecher, and thereby ruined somebody’s priceless and unpurchasable Corot.

At any rate, my eyes were drawn to the place as I passed; and, like a cuckoo-bird emerging from the clock, out popped Hawkins.

“Ah, Griggs!” he exclaimed. “Out for a walk?”

“What were you doing in there?”

“Going to walk home?”

“Settling for that painting, eh?”

“Because if you are, I’ll go with you,” pursued Hawkins, falling into step beside me and ignoring my remarks.

I told Hawkins that I should be tickled to death to have his company, which was a lie and intended for biting sarcasm; but Hawkins took it in good faith and was pleased.

“I tell you, Griggs,” he informed me, “there’s nothing like this early summer air to fill a man’s lungs.”

“Unless it is cash to fill his pockets.”

“Eh? Cash?” said the inventor. “That reminds me. I must spend some this afternoon.”

“Indeed? Going to settle another damage suit?”

“I intend to order coal,” replied Hawkins frigidly.

He seemed disinclined to address me

further; and I had no particular yearning to hear his voice. We walked on in silence until within a few blocks of home.

Then Hawkins paused at one of the cross streets.

“The coal-yard is down this way, Griggs,” he said. “Come along. It won’t take more than five or ten minutes.”

Now, the idea of walking down to the coal-yard certainly seemed commonplace and harmless. To me it suggested nothing more sinister than a superheated Irish lady perspiring over Hawkins’ range in the dog days.

At least, it suggested nothing more at the time, and I turned the corner with Hawkins and walked on, unsuspecting.

Except that it belonged to a particularly large concern, the coal-yard which Hawkins honored by his patronage was much like other coal-yards. The high walls of the storage bins rose from the sidewalk, and there was the conventional arch for the wagons, and the little, dingy office beside it.

Into the latter Hawkins made his way, while I loitered without.

Hawkins seemed to be upon good terms with the coal people. He and the men in the office were laughing gaily.

Through the open window I heard Hawkins file his order for four tons of coal. Later some one said: “Splendid, Mr. Hawkins, splendid.”

Then somebody else said: “No, there seems to be no flaw in any particular.”

And still later the first voice announced that they would make the first payment one week from to-day, at which Hawkins’ voice rose with a sort of pompous joy.

I paid very little heed to the scraps of conversation; but presently I paid considerable attention to Hawkins, for

while he had entered the coal office a well-developed man, he emerged apparently deformed.

His chest seemed to have expanded something over a foot, and his nose had attained an elevation that pointed his gaze straight to the skies.

"Good gracious, Hawkins, what is it?" I asked. "Have they been inflating you with gas in there?"

"I beg pardon?"

"What has happened to swell your bosom? Is it the first payment?"

"Oh, you heard that, did you?" said the inventor, with a condescending smile. "Yes, Griggs, I may confess to some slight satisfaction in that payment. It is a matter of one thousand dollars—from the coal people, you know."

"But what for? Have you threatened to invent something for them, and now are exacting blackmail to desist?"

"Tush, Griggs, tush!" responded Hawkins. "Do make some attempt to subdue that inane wit. I fancy you'll feel rather cheap at hearing that that thousand dollars is the first payment on something I have invented!"

"What!"

"Certainly. I am selling the patent to these people. It is the Hawkins Crano-Scale!"

"Crano-Scale?" I reflected. "What is it? A hair tonic?"

"Now, that is about the deduction your mental apparatus would make!" sneered the inventor.

"But can it be possible that you have constructed something that actually works?" I cried. "And you've sold it—actually sold it?"

"I have sold it, and there's no 'actually' about it!"

And Hawkins stalked away through the arch and into the yard beyond.

The idea of one of Hawkins' inventions actually in practical operation was almost too weird for conception. He must be heading for it; and if it existed I must see it.

I followed.

Hawkins strode to the rear of the yard without turning. About us on every side were high wooden walls, the storage bins of the company.

Up the side of one wall ran a ladder,

and Hawkins commenced the perpendicular ascent with the same matter-of-fact air that one would wear in walking up-stairs.

"What are you doing that for? Exercise?" I called, when he paused some twenty-five feet in the air.

"If you wish to see the Crano-Scale at work, follow me. If not, stay where you are," replied Hawkins.

Then he resumed his upward course; and having put something like thirty-five feet between his person and the solid earth, he vanished through a black doorway.

Climbing a straight ladder usually sets my hair on end; but this one I tackled without hesitation, and in a very few seconds stood before the door.

In the semi-darkness, I perceived that a wide ledge ran around the wall inside, and that Hawkins was standing upon it, gazing upon the hundreds of tons of coal below, and having something the effect of the Old Nick himself glaring down into the pit.

"There she is!" said the inventor laconically, pointing across the gulf.

I made my way to his side and stared through the gloom. Something seemed to loom up over there.

Presently, as my eyes grew accustomed to the change, I perceived the arm of a huge crane, from which was suspended an enormous scoop.

"You mean that mastodonic coal-scuttle?" I inquired.

"Precisely. That's the Hawkins Crano-Scale."

"And what does she do when she—er—crano-scales things, as it were?"

"You'll be able to understand in a moment. That coal-scuttle, as you call it, is large enough to hold four tons. See? Well, the people in the yard are going to want two tons of coal very shortly. What do they do?"

"Take it out, weigh it, and send it," I hazarded.

"Not at all. They simply adjust the controlling apparatus to the two-ton point and set the Crano-Scale going. The scoop dips down, picks up exactly two tons of coal, and rises automatically as soon as the two tons are in. After that the crane swings outward, dumps the coal in the wagon, and there

you have it—weighed and all! It has been in operation here for one month,” Hawkins concluded complacently.

“And no one killed or maimed? No Crano-Scale widows or orphans?”

“Oh, Griggs, you are—— Ha! She’s starting!”

The Crano-Scale emitted an ear-piercing shriek. The big steel crane was in motion.

I watched the thing. Gracefully the coal-scuttle dipped into the pile of coal, dug for a minute, swung upward again. It turned, passed through a big doorway in the side, and we could hear the coal rattling into the wagon.

The Crano-Scale returned and swung ponderously in the twilight.

“There!” cried Hawkins triumphantly.

“It works!” I gasped.

“You bet it works!”

“But it must cost something to run the thing,” I suggested.

“Well—er—I’m paying for that part,” Hawkins acknowledged, “until I’ve finished perfecting a motor particularly adapted for the Crano-Scale, you see.”

I smiled audibly. I think that Hawkins was about to take exception to the smile, but a voice from without bawled loudly:

“Two—tons—nut!”

“Ah, there she goes again!” said the inventor rapturously.

This time the Crano-Scale executed a sudden détour before descending. Indeed, the thing came so painfully near to our perch that the wind was perceptible, and when the giant coal-scuttle had passed and dropped, my heart was hammering out a tattoo.

“I don’t believe this ledge is safe, Hawkins,” I said.

“Nonsense!”

“But that thing came pretty close.”

“Oh, it won’t act that way again. Watch! She’s dumping into the wagon now! Hear it?”

“Yes, I hear it. I see just what a beautiful success it is, Hawkins—really. Let’s go.”

“And now she’s coming back!” cried the inventor, his eyes glued to the remarkable contrivance. “Observe the ease—the grace—the mechanical poise

—the resistless quality of the Crano-Scale’s motion! See, Griggs, how she swings!”

I did see how she was swinging. It was precisely that which sent me nearer to the ladder.

The Crano-Scale was returning to position, but with a series of erratic swoops that seemed to close my throat.

The coal-scuttle whirled joyously about in the air—it was receding—no, it was coming nearer! It paused for a second. Then, making a bee-line for our little ledge, it dived.

“Look out, Hawkins!” I cried.

“It’s all right,” said the inventor.

“But the cursed thing will smash us flat against the wall!”

“Tush! The automatic reacting clutch will——”

The Crano-Scale was upon us! For the merest fraction of a second it paused and seemed to hesitate; then it struck the wall with a heavy bang; then started to scrape its way along our ledge.

The wretched contraption was bent on shoving us off!

“What’ll we do?” I managed to shout.

“Why—why—why—why—why——” Hawkins cried breathlessly.

But my course of action had been settled for me. The scoop of the Crano-Scale caught me amidships, and I plunged downward into the coal.

That there was a considerable degree of shock attached to my landing may easily be imagined.

But small coal, as I had not known before, is a reasonably soft thing to fall on; and within a few seconds I sat up, perceived that I was soon to order a new suit of clothes, and then looked about for Hawkins.

He was nowhere in the neighborhood, and I called aloud.

“We—ll?” came a voice from far above.

“Where are you?”

“Hanging—to—the—scoop!” sang out the inventor.

And there, up near the roof, I located him, dangling from the Crano-Scale coal-scuttle!

“What are you going to do next?” I asked, with some interest.

"I—I—I can't—can't hang on long here!"

"I should say not."

"Well, climb out and tell them to lower the crane!" screamed Hawkins.

I looked around. Right and left, before and behind, rose a mountain of loose coal. I essayed to climb nimbly toward the door which the Crano-Scale had used, and suddenly landed on my hands and knees.

"Are—you—out?" shrieked Hawkins. "I can't stick here!"

"And I can't get out!" I replied.

"Well, you—ouch!"

There was a dull, rattling whack beside me; bits of coal flew in all directions. Hawkins had landed.

"Well!" he exclaimed, sitting up. "I honestly believe, Griggs, that no man was ever born on this earth with less resourcefulness than yourself!"

"Which means that I should have climbed out and informed the people of your plight?"

"Certainly."

"Well, you try it yourself, Hawkins."

The inventor arose and started for the door with a very convincing and elaborate display of indomitable energy. He planted his left foot firmly on the side of the coal pile—and found that his left leg had disappeared in the coal in a highly undignified fashion.

"Humph!" he remarked disgustedly, struggling free and shaking something like a pound of coal dust from his person. "Perhaps—perhaps it's more solid on the other side."

"Try it."

"Well, it is better to try it and fail than to stand there like a cigar-store Indian and offer fool suggestions!" snapped the inventor, making a vicious attack at the opposite side of the pile.

It really did seem more substantial. Hawkins, by the aid of both hands, both feet, his elbows, his knees, and possibly his teeth as well, managed to scramble upward for a dozen feet or so.

But just as he was about to turn and gloat over his success, the treacherous coal gave away once more. Hawkins went flat upon his face and slid back to me, feet first.

When he arose he presented a remarkable appearance.

Light overcoat, pearl trousers, fancy vest—all were black as ink. Hawkins' classic countenance had fared no better.

His lips showed some slight resemblance of redness, and his eyes glared wonderfully white; but the rest of his face might have been made up for a minstrel show.

"Yes, it's devilish funny, isn't it?" he roared, sitting down again rather suddenly as the coal slid again beneath his feet.

"Funny isn't the word. What's our next move to be?"

"Climb out, of course. There must be some place where we can get a foothold."

"Why not shout for help?"

"No use. Nobody could hear us down here. Go on, Griggs. Make your attempt. I've done my part."

"And you wish to see me repeat the performance? Thank you. No."

"But it's the only way out."

"Then," I said, "I'm afraid we're slated to spend the night here."

"Good Lord! We can't do that!"

"I have a notion, Hawkins," I went on, "that we not only can, but shall. You say we can't attract any one's attention, and I guess you're right. Hence, as there is no one to pull us out, and we can't pull ourselves out, we shall remain here. That's logic."

"It's awful!" exclaimed the inventor. "Why, we may not get out tomorrow——"

"Nor the next day, nor the one after that. Exactly. We shall have to wait until this wretched place is emptied, when they will find our bleaching skeletons—if skeletons can bleach in a coal bin."

Hawkins blinked his sable eyelids at me.

"Or we might go to work and pile all the coal on one side of the bin," I continued. "It wouldn't take more than a week or so, throwing it over by handfuls; and when at last they found that your crano-engine wouldn't bring up any more from this side——"

"Aha!" cried the inventor, with sudden animation. "That's it! The Crano-Scale!"

"Yes, that's it," I assented. "Away up near the roof. What about it?"

"Why, it solves the whole problem," said Hawkins. "Don't you see, the next time they need nut-coal they'll set the engine going, and the scoop——"

"Four—tons—nut, Bill!" said a far-away voice. "Yep. Four tons. Start up that blamed machine."

"What? What did he say?" cried the inventor.

"Something about starting the engine."

"That's what I thought. They're going to use the Crano-Scale, Griggs! We're saved! We're saved!"

"I fail to see it."

"Why, when the thing comes down be ready. Ah—it's coming now! Get ready, Griggs! Get ready! Be prepared to make a dash for it."

"And then?"

"And then climb in, of course. There won't be much room, for they're going to take on four tons, and the thing will be full; but we can manage it. We can do it, Griggs, and be home in time for dinner."

"And you're a fine looking object to go to dinner," I added.

Hawkins' countenance fell somewhat, but there was no time for a reply. The coal-scuttle of the Crano-Scale was hovering above us, evidently selecting a spot for its operations.

"Here! We're right under it!" Hawkins shouted. "This way, Griggs! Quick! Lord! It's coming down—it'll hit you! Quick!"

And I dived toward Hawkins as he was struggling for a foothold, and then——

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A line of asterisks is the only way of putting into print my state of mind—or absence of any state of mind—for the ensuing quarter of an hour.

My first idea was that some absent-minded person had built a three-story house upon my unhappy body; but I was joggling and bouncing up and down, so that that hypothesis was manifestly untenable.

The weight of the house was there, though, and all about was stifling blackness.

I tried to turn. It was useless. I couldn't move. The house had me pinned down hard and fast.

Then I wriggled frantically, and something near me wriggled frantically as well. Then one of my hands struck something that yielded, and there came a muffled voice from somewhere in the neighborhood.

"Griggs!" it said.

"Yes?"

"W-w-w-where are we? This isn't the coal-bin. Are you hurt?"

"I give it up. Are you?"

"I think not. Why, Griggs, this must be one of the big coal carts!"

"I shouldn't wonder," I assented vaguely.

"But—how——"

"Your miserable coal-scuttle must have stunned us, picked us up, and dumped us in with the coal!" I exclaimed, suddenly enlightened.

"Do—you—think——" came through the blackness. "Huh! It's stopped!"

For a long, long time, as it seemed, there was silence. The weight of coal pressed down until I was near to madness. Hawkins was grunting painfully.

I was speculating as to whether I was actually succumbing—whether I could stand the strain myself for another minute—when everything began to slide. The coal slid, I slid, Hawkins slid—the world seemed to be sliding!

We landed upon the sidewalk. We struggled and beat and threshed at the coal, and finally managed to rise out of it—pitch-black, dazed, and battered.

And the first object which confronted us was the home of Hawkins! We had been delivered at his door, with the four tons of nut-coal.

"They'll have to sign for us on the driver's slip," I remember saying.

That person let off one shriek and vanished down the street. Then the door of the Hawkins home opened, and Mrs. Hawkins emerged, followed by my wife.

That numerous things were said need not be stated. Mrs. Hawkins said most of them, and they were luminous.

Mrs. Griggs limited herself to ruining a fifty-dollar gown by weeping on my coal-soiled shoulder as she implored me never again to tread the same street with Hawkins.

It was a solemn moment, that; for I saw the light. I realized how many

bumps and bruises and pains and duckings and scorchings might have been spared me, had I taken the step earlier.

But it is never too late to mend. Probably I had still a few years in which to enjoy life.

I turned to Hawkins—a chopfallen, cowering huddle of filth, standing upon two pearl-and-black legs—and said:

“Hawkins, when in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one man to sever those friendly bands which have connected him with another, and to assume a station apart, a decent respect for the opinions of the latter usually make it necessary to declare the cause of that separation. It is not so in this case. You know mighty

well what you’ve put me through in the past. There’s no need of going into it in detail.

“But this Crano-Scale business is my limit—my outside limit,” I went on, “and you’ve passed it. If you ever attempt to address another word to me, or ride in the same elevated train, or even sit in the same theater, I’ll have you arrested as a suspicious person—and locked up for life, if money’ll do it! Hawkins, henceforth we meet as strangers!”

And Hawkins, piloted by the unhappy woman who bears his name, walked up the steps, turned, and stared stupidly at me, and then stumbled into the house and out of my life—forever.

NOBODY’S FOOL.

BY JAMES F. DEMERIT.

A matter of money taking wings in the literal sense, and of the desperate expedient to which its loser was driven.

I.

OLD Medbury, of Medbury & Smathers, smote his desk resoundingly with a heavy fist and glared with speechless wrath after the “bean-pole” figure of Charlie Jewett as that brisk young man went out of the offices.

Smathers, who knew his senior well, waited for Medbury to get his breath and his power of speech. The present was not a favorable moment for hurrying Mr. Medbury.

Besides, he had overheard most of the conversation between his partner and young Jewett.

When Charlie had come in half an hour before, Smathers had smiled most ingratiatingly upon him. Charlie wore a band of crape upon his arm; there was a little pucker between his brows; his face seemed to have lost its boyish expression only for a moment.

For it could not be denied that Jewett was young, and that the sudden responsibility of his uncle and guardian’s death was a heavy one. Just past his majority, he had not troubled to look

into his own affairs until the wire had recalled him from an outing in Canada to attend his uncle’s funeral.

And the firm of Horace Jewett & Co. was in a mess. Anybody could see that with half as keen an eye as Charlie’s.

Every cent his uncle had possessed, and every cent of his own estate, were tied up in that same firm of commission brokers and shipping agents.

And if Charlie learned this after two weeks’ hard work at the firm’s books, Medbury & Smathers had known it much longer.

The very night Horace Jewett was stricken in his office with apoplexy, and the news had gone out upon the streets before closing time, Medbury and Smathers had discussed the matter in secret over their dinner.

“It will fall into our laps—it’s bound to!” exclaimed Smathers, rubbing his hands together, and the senior partner had nodded ponderously.

So there was reason for Smathers’ smile and Medbury’s fatherly handclasp when Charlie Jewett walked into the office of the rival house on this morning. The plum was about to fall, and