

TOLD BY PAPERKINS

JERICHO'S CONFLAGRATIONS GIVE RISE TO FIRE DEPARTMENTS.

All Are Willing Heroes, but as Each Man Persists in Voting For Himself as Foreman the Meeting Is Finally Adjourned.

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THE town of Jericho had dwelt in peace and security for forty years when events happened—three of 'em in one day, says Pap Perkins. In the forenoon Abraham Green's old bull got out of the pasture and charged the town and ripped open three barrels of salt and upset a buggy. At high noon a mad dog ran through the streets and bit a hog. At 6 o'clock in the evening as Moses Hepburn was milking his cow by candlelight she kicked the lantern over and set fire to his barn. The flames were extinguished after doing 30 cents' worth of damages, but Moses didn't stop there. The next evening he electrified the postoffice crowd by suggesting a town fire department. There were two or three old conservatives who solemnly shook their heads and declared the conflagrations were the handiwork of Providence and shouldn't be squirted out, but the town in general received the idea with enthusiasm and wondered that it had not been broached before. It was Squire Bradley who rose up in his dignity and said:

"Had this town had a fire department at hand yesterday, what would have been the result? When that old bull broke loose, the bells would have sound-



ABRAHAM GREEN'S OLD BULL GOT OUT OF THE PASTURE.

ed the alarm, and the critter would have been met and turned back in his mad career. That mad dog would never have entered the town, and the fire in Moses Hepburn's barn would have been squirted out with one voluminous squirt."

Inside of half an hour forty men had put down their names as firemen, and the town trustees had named a committee to go to New York and look at a hand fire engine and report on the cost. As if in sympathy with the wave of enthusiasm sweeping over the town Zebro Scott's woodshed took fire that night and was damaged to the amount of \$2, and Saniel Gardner's children played with matches and burned the tail off his Sunday coat. For two weeks nothing was talked of but fire engines, red shirts and heroic rescues from the flames. Some men sat up all night for several nights looking for a conflagration to break out any minute, and they loafed about in the daytime and hoped the schoolhouse would catch fire and give them a chance to show off. When the committee was ready to report, a public meeting was called, and the town hall was packed. It was only after the report had been made and public spirit worked up to the boiling point that a cloud of trouble sailed over the horizon. All of a sudden everybody remembered that a fire department must have a foreman, and everybody felt that he was just the man for the place. It was Absalom Jones who made the first break by rising up and saying:

"I am not the man, as you all know, to thrust myself forward, but on this occasion I arise to say that I am willing to make sacrifices and become the boss of the fire company. All I ask in return in case I perish while doing my duty is that you will visit my grave now and then and cherish my memory."

Then Hiram Smallman got up. Hiram had once assisted to put out a fire in a grocery in Syracuse, and he considered himself a fire veteran. There was no doubt in his mind that whoever was elected foreman would sooner or later tumble off the roof of a burning house and break his neck, but when duty called he was not the man to hang back. He had but one neck, but he would gladly break that and his back to boot in snatching widows and orphans from the grasp of the fire fiend. There were faint cheers as he sat down with moistened brow, but the applause didn't discourage Deacon Spooner.

"Citizens of Jericho," he began as he rose up, "there should be no strife or jealousy over this matter. What we first want is an engine to squirt out fires. What we next want is a competent man to direct the squirting. As you are all aware, I have been in the pump business for the last fifteen years, and I ought to know something about water and squirting. I will take the place of boss and do my best, and

no man can do more. I may perish in the very first conflagration, but if so you will remember me as one who did his whole duty."

As the deacon was sixty years old, nearsighted and deaf in the starboard ear, his offer to sacrifice himself didn't create any great enthusiasm. When he saw this, he sat down with a jar, and Philletus Johnson took his place. He admitted that his experience with conflagrations had only extended to a burning haystack and a blaze in a woodbox behind the stove, but he was willing to learn—not only that, but willing to peril life and limb in the learning. In case of death he would leave a widow and seven children and two cows to mourn his loss, but the town of Jericho would erect a stone to his memory, and on it would be graven the words, "Here lies a man."

For two or three minutes after Philletus sat down it looked as if he would reach the pinnacle of fame, but there were others waiting to have their say. Aaron Warner bobbed up to remark that, while it was his business to buy poultry and ship to the New York market, he would if elected boss of the fire department open a cooper shop and remain in Jericho from Monday morning till Saturday night. David Freeman was another who was willing to sacrifice, and if duty called him to ascend a ladder a hundred feet high and bring down a woman weighing 300 pounds no one should see him falter.

The last speech of the evening was made by Lawyer Tompkins, though only half finished. He started out to tell of the burning of Rome, and how the fire could have been squirted out at the beginning by the right sort of man in command of the fire department, and had gradually worked down to Washington crossing the Delaware when the impatient audience howled him down and proceeded to a ballot. The ballot showed that there were forty-two firemen present and that every one wanted to be foreman. The chairman rapped for order and asked them to remember that the eyes of the whole world were upon them and that one having the true interests of Jericho at heart would willingly give way, but the second and third ballots showed the same result. Then Judge Harmon arose and appealed to the patriotism of the audience, saying that General Jackson always stood ready to take a back seat, but another ballot showed no change. When the result was announced, there was a deep silence for a minute, and then somebody moved to adjourn, and it was carried, and the crowd filed slowly and solemnly outdoors. M. QUAD.

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