

BLACK MONDAY

By Leslie McFarlane

CHAPTER THREE Trouble Brewing

"Now what," said Lucas, as Aunt Janet left the room, "did she mean by that?"

The colonel shrugged. "Nothing. If we paid any attention to Aunt Jane's mysterious utterances we'd be in constant turmoil. As I have told you, she has an idea that the War is still on, that the Germans have invaded the country and that it is only a matter of hours before they will be ransacking the house. We've done our best to convince the poor old thing that she's quite safe, but she won't believe us. Come now, we'll go and meet Mr. Gardiner and the others."

They left the colonel's study and as they approached the main hall they heard voices and a girl's easy laugh. Three people had just entered the house and were taking off their wraps. As Lucas and the colonel came into the hall they found two young men engaged in a mock argument over the honor of assisting an undeniably pretty girl out of her coat.

"I assure you, my dear Arthur," said a plump, moon-faced youth with horn-rimmed spectacles, "the privilege is mine."

The tall, fair-haired, stoop-shouldered young man facing him made an exaggerated bow.

"But, my dear Jacob, I insist that the pleasure should be mine!"

The girl, standing between the pair, flung back her head and laughed with delight. She was slender, delicately built, with great dark eyes, a mass of bronze hair and flushed cheeks.

"You fools!" she chuckled. "I'm quite capable of taking off the coat myself."

"But no," said the moon-faced youth, "we cannot permit that. The matter must be settled. Mr. Kellatt, I insist that I have the honor of removing Jane's coat."

"And I," said Kellatt, solemnly, "maintain that you helped her off with her coat yesterday. Today it is my turn."

"But yesterday, when it rained, you had the great honor of carrying her umbrella."

"We talk of coats today, Jacob. I beg of you--"

"I demand of you--"

"Let me know how the argument comes out," laughed the girl, slipping out of her coat and hanging it upon the rack. "Hello, Colonel," she said, seeing Brand. "My two cavaliers are at it again."

"And if I were thirty years younger I'd be in the thick of the battle myself," said the colonel, gallantly. "Jane, may I present Mr. Holt, my nephew. You've heard me speak of him. He just arrived from Chicago today."

Jane bowed. She flashed a curious glance at Lucas. "So pleased to have you with us, Mr. Holt." The pause before she pronounced his name was slight, but Lucas was none the less uncomfortably aware of it.

He was introduced to the moon-faced youth, Jacob Wirth, and to Kellatt, the stoop-shouldered young man. They were polite, agreeable fellows, who shook his hand firmly and expressed the hope that he would enjoy his visit.

"And now," said the colonel, beaming, "we'll go up and meet Mr. Gardiner."

Lucas experienced a sense of disturbance as he ascended the stairs. There was something in the girl's manner that puzzled him. He glanced back at her, standing at the foot of the stairs, and his composure was by no means increased when he saw that she was looking up at him, an enigmatic smile upon her lips.

They found Jonathan Gardiner in his room, seated at an old-fashioned writing desk by the window. He was a tall, cadaverous man, clad in a long dressing gown that accentuated his height. Don's first impression of Gardiner was that the man was ill. His eyes were sunken and lusterless, his skin like parchment and his hand, as he extended it in greeting, trembled nervously.

"Meet you, Mr. Lucas," said Gardiner, his voice hoarse. "I supposed you used to calling me 'uncle' though. Might as well get used to it. I don't mind it."

"Sit down," he said, pointing to a chair. "Sit down, please."

I ask you to run along, Colonel? Some things I want to talk over with this young man."

"Not at all, Jonathan. I explained to him about the robbery."

"Yes. Yes. Very good. However—I'll talk it over with him."

The colonel went out. Jonathan Gardiner did not resume his chair. He paced up and down the room, the skirts of the dressing gown swishing about his ankles.

"Colonel Brand told you about the money, eh?" he said, sharply. "He did," said Lucas. "Have you any theory yourself, Mr. Gardiner?"

"Theory?" The man paced over to the window and back. "Haven't the faintest idea. Bad business. Puzzling affair. It's a serious thing for me, I can tell you. Brand and I, so far as we know, are the only two people who have the combination to the safe. Yet it was opened by the combination."

"The colonel is above suspicion?"

"Quite," declared Gardiner, emphatically. "Absolute confidence in Brand. Honest chap."

"Perhaps it was a professional job?"

"No. Someone in this house took the money," Gardiner's tone did not brook contradiction. Suddenly he flung himself into the chair. "I'll tell you something, Lucas. I'll tell you why that money was there in the first place."

"I have been wondering."

"Because my life is in danger," Lucas waited.

"I believe I am in danger of being murdered," declared Gardiner. "I drew that money from the bank because I thought it would be best for me to go away. Disappear. Perhaps I'll do it yet. But I hate to disappear without money."

"Is it as serious as all that?"

"Quite. Look!" Gardiner opened a desk drawer and withdrew a sheaf of envelopes. "You are the only person I've ever shown these to. What do you think of them?"

Lucas went through the stack of envelopes. Each was sealed with a blob of black wax. Each contained nothing more than a page from a calendar pad. On each page, the date of the coming Monday was blotted out by black ink and on each page a successive date was marked by a small red cross, just as on the calendar pages Colonel Brand had shown him.

His face betrayed no expression. "What do these mean?"

"For the past six weeks I have received one of these every morning."

"Have you placed the matter in the hands of the police, or the post office?"

"No."

"What makes you think you are in danger of being murdered?"

"Those letters."

"Is that all?" Lucas laughed. "Has it occurred to you that the thing may be some kind of advertising dodge. When Monday arrives you will receive the last of the series—an invitation to buy a new radio, perhaps."

"When Monday arrives," said Gardiner, grimly, "an attempt will probably be made upon my life. That's all I'm going to tell you, young man. I haven't told the police. I haven't told anyone. Your job is to keep an eye on things."

"If you are so sure that you are marked for murder, perhaps you can tell me why. Who are your enemies?"

"I don't know. I think I know why these warnings have been sent out but it won't do any good if ANYTHING should happen to me, however, I want you to bear one thing in mind. It won't be suicide. Understand? It may look like suicide but it will be murder."

Gardiner's eyes were fixed intently on the younger man. Lucas had an impression that Gardiner's nerves were frayed to the point where the mind shows a lack of balance.

"I think," he said, "you should tell me more."

"That's all I'm telling you," snapped Gardiner. "If you don't care to accept the assignment, to get into this affair of the money, to keep watch on the safe and grounds, I'll tell the

agency to send another man. Take it or leave it." Lucas shrugged. "A bit unsatisfactory, but I'll take it." "You are armed?" "Yes." "Good. That's all I have to say to you." Gardiner rang a bell on his desk. "Rochet will show you to your room."

A moment later a servant appeared in the doorway. He was a red-faced, cheerful looking soul, not at all the suave, discreet valet of tradition.

"Yes, sir!" he said, breezily. "Show Mr. Holt to his room, Rochet."

Rochet led the way down the corridor, flung open a door and stepped aside. Lucas saw that his club bag had already been placed on a small stand at the end of the bed. "Here you are, sir," said Rochet. "If you need anything, just ask for it. Colonel Brand's nephew, aren't you?"

"Yes."

Rochet winked and stepped into the room. His genial face beamed. "And that's all right with me," he said. "But I'll give you a tip."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't say I told you. But I've been with Mr. Gardiner for years, and I wouldn't advise you to pay too much attention to that business about the letters."

"You know about that?"

Rochet nodded. "You see, it's happened before."

"Oh."

"It happened when we were in Portland. And it happened in Omaha. And now I'll be darned if it hasn't happened here. Want me to unpack your bag? No! Fine. I always think it's a lot of nonsense anyway, although they say they go in for that in England, and some of the guests see into expect it." Rochet turned to leave.

"Just a minute. What do you mean by saying that it happened in Portland and in Omaha?"

"Letters. He got a flock of letters, just like he's getting now. And he was worried sick. But nothing ever happened. Sometimes I think he sends 'em himself just to get people guessing. However, it's none of my business. I just thought I'd tip you off. He told me you were coming, of course." Rochet winked again. "If you need any help you can rely on me."

Lucas affected a blankness of expression.

"I'm sure I don't know what you're driving at."

"Good!" said Rochet, approvingly. "That's the way to put it over. You're no more Colonel Brand's nephew than I am, but I think you'll get away with it all right."

He closed the door gently behind him.

By the time Don Lucas had washed and changed he had reached the conclusion that this assignment was by all odds the strangest he had encountered in five years of his connection with the Devenant Agency.

He wondered if Gardiner's mental balance was all that it should be. For a man who believed he was marked for death he appeared to be acting very strangely. Why didn't he notify the police? Why didn't he seek to have the letters traced? And then there was the garrulous Rochet. Apparently Rochet didn't take the letters very seriously, knew all about them, said his master had received them in other cities.

Lucas was puzzled. When he went downstairs he was wondering just how Rochet knew that he was in the house under false colors. He moved toward Colonel Brand's study, resolved to ask the colonel how Rochet had stumbled on this secret.

He halted outside the door, when he heard voices within the room. Lucas was just about to turn away when he was arrested by the colonel's emphatic tones.

"But I tell you, Jane, he IS my nephew."

"When," came the girl's voice, "did you see him last?"

"Er—about ten years ago."

"And he came from Chicago this morning?"

"Yes."

"I'd advise you to check up on the young man. I don't think he's your nephew at all and I'm quite sure he didn't come from Chicago this morning. I think he's an impostor."

"But, my dear," sputtered Colonel Brand, "do you think I would make a mistake like that. I know my own nephew when I see him. What makes you think

he didn't come from Chicago?"

"Because I saw him in the city a week ago. I recognized him at the moment I laid eyes on him. He was standing in front of a theatre. You had better check up on your nephew, Colonel; I'm warning you."

The rustle of a dress almost at his side made Lucas start guiltily. A tall, gaunt woman was advancing toward him. She had entered the corridor in silence and he was not aware of her approach until she was only a few feet away.

The woman eyed him severely, nodded, and passed on. She had narrow features, thin lips and a stern expression. Her disapproval was quite manifest.

Lucas moved away from the door. He felt uncomfortable. The tall woman, obviously Mrs. Platt, the housekeeper, had caught him in the act of eavesdropping. He began to feel that his position in this household was going to be awkward.

(To be Continued)

The keeping quality of milk is determined more by the temperature at which it is held than by any other factor. To keep satisfactorily, market milk must be cooled to around 45° F. and held at that temperature.

HEALTH

by *Gordon*



A HEALTH SERVICE OF THE CANADIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION AND LIFE INSURANCE COMPANIES IN CANADA

MIDDLE LIFE

None of us is perfect. We accept, as a matter of course, that in one way or another we fall short of perfection. It is, however, a matter of importance for us to know in what ways and to what extent our bodies are defective.

Some defects are of but little or no significance other than from an aesthetic point of view. There are, however, other defects, or disturbances which mean a deviation from the normal, and these may be of grave import in their significance.

Most of the diseases of middle life are insidious in their nature; from insignificant beginnings, they slowly progress to the point where disabling symptoms are noticed. This applies to the chronic diseases of middle life, known as the degenerative diseases, which are due to changes in the heart, arteries and kidneys.

It would be most desirable to have these diseases detected early so that by proper treatment and through changes in the habits of life, particular-

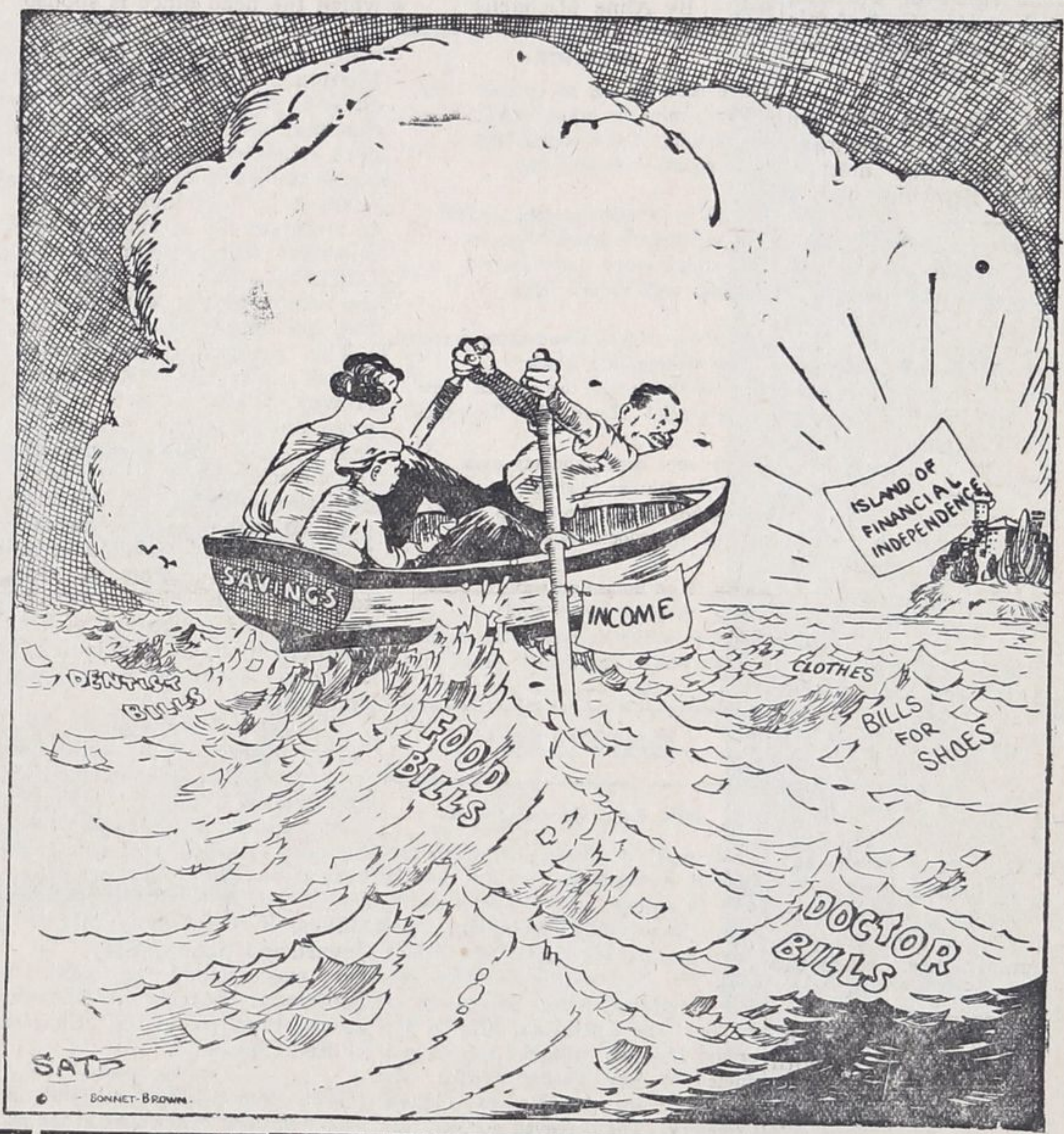
ly with regard to diet the condition might be corrected or checked. One purpose of the periodic health examination is to find out the condition of the various organs of the body and to detect any changes which may have occurred.

It is in middle life that such changes should be looked for because it is at that time of life that they begin to develop. That is why the business man's practice of making at least an annual inventory should be extended to include an annual health inventory of the business man and his family. Health is our most precious possession. If it is worth while to take stock of our financial position, it is much more necessary to take stock of the physical and mental condition of our bodies.

To accept disease as inevitable and to make reasonable effort to ward it off places us on a level with primitive people who considered disease is the work of evil spirits. The body is a complex machine. It requires a periodic overhauling to keep it running smoothly and efficiently, and thus prevent the breakdowns which otherwise will occur.

Age should not mean incapacity. Too little attention has been given to the needs of adult life. We have accepted the health supervision of babies and school children as desirable; there is every reason to carry out this same desirable practice into middle and later life.


It's Pretty Hard Going Right Now



ODD—But TRUE

DISTILLERS

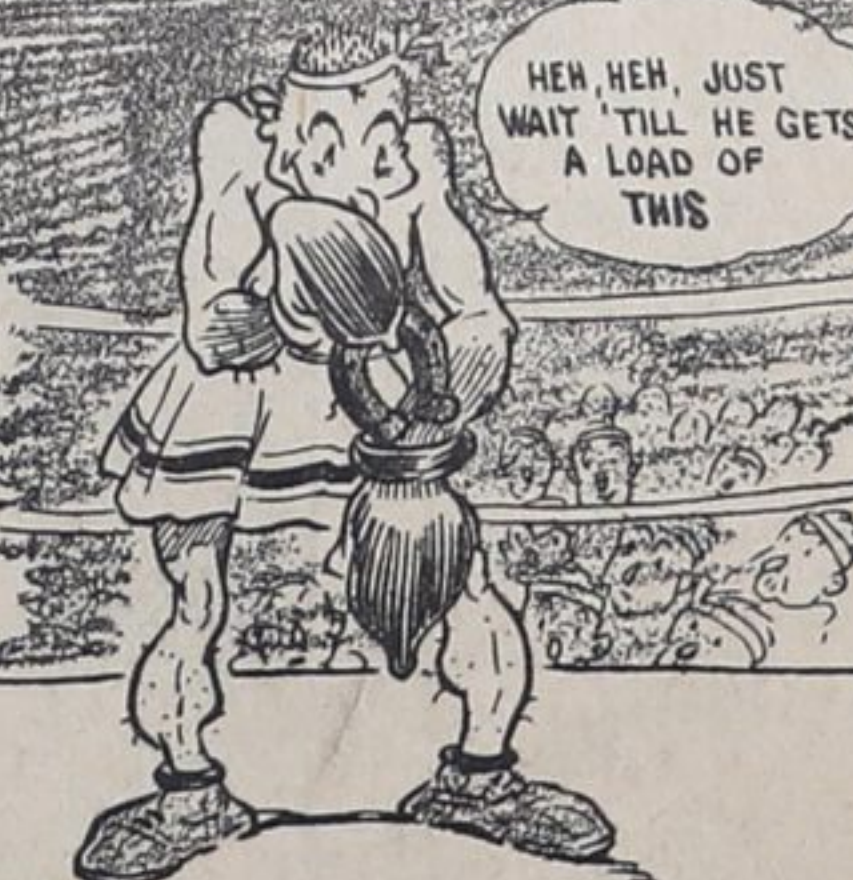
USED TO LOAD THEIR LIQUORS ON BOATS AND SEND THEM TO CHINA AND BACK AGAIN - THE ROCKING OF THE BOAT HELPED TO AGE THE BEVERAGES





“MON, OSCAR, JUMP!”

FISH CAN BE TAUGHT TO DO TRICKS



“HEH, HEH, JUST WAIT ‘TILL HE GETS A LOAD OF THIS”

PRIZE FIGHTERS, IN THE DAYS OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE, WERE ALLOWED TO PROTECT THEIR HANDS IN ANY WAY THEY SAW FIT

YOUR HEART IS ACTIVATED BY ELECTRICAL IMPULSES

