

# THE CRIMINAL'S CONFESSION

OR, SYBIL BERNER'S  
VINDICATION

## CHAPTER VIII.—(Continued).

"Knock him down! Brain him! but don't hurt the woman," shouted some one in the crowd. And some other one, armed with a heavy iron poker, dealt him a crashing blow upon the bare head. And Sybil's brave defender relaxed his protecting hold upon her form, fell broken, bleeding, perhaps dying at her feet.

A piercing scream broke from her lips. She stooped to raise her husband, but was at that instant seized by the officer, and forced from the spot.

"Shame! Shame!" cried a bystander. "Take the handcuffs off the poor woman and let her look at her husband."

"Poor woman, indeed!" exclaimed Jones, the officer, "she's the biggest devil alive! Do you know what she's done? Not only murdered a beautiful lady; but blown up a church and killed half-a-dozen men!"

A shudder shook the crowd. Could this be true? A score of questions was put to Bailiff Jones. But he would not stop to answer any one of them. Calling his coadjutor Smith to help him, they each took an arm of Sybil and forced her from the scene.

Faint, speechless, powerless under this sudden and awful accumulation of misery, the wretched young wife was torn from her dying husband and thrust into a stagecoach, guarded by three other bailiffs, and immediately started on her return journey.

Resistance was useless, lamentations were in vain. She sat dumb with a despair never before exceeded, scarcely ever before equalled in the case of any sufferer under the sun.

There were no other passengers but the sheriff's officers and their one prisoner.

Of the first part of this terrible homeward journey there is but little to tell. They stopped at the appointed hours and stations to breakfast, dine, and sup, and to water and change the horses, but never to sleep. They travelled day and night; and as no other passengers joined them, it was probable that the sheriff's officers had engaged all the seats for themselves and their important charge.

During the whole horrible journey the hapless young wife neither ate, drank, slumbered, nor spoke; all the faculties of mind and body, all the functions of nature, seemed to be suspended.

It was on the night of the third day, and they were in the last stage of the journey.

They were going slowly down that terrible mountain pass, leading to the village of Blackville. The road was even unusually difficult and dangerous, and the night was very dark, so that the coachman was driving slowly and carefully, when suddenly the bits of the leaders were seized and the coach stopped.

In some alarm the bailiffs thrust their heads out of the side windows to the right and left, to see what the obstacle might be.

To their horror and amazement they found it surrounded by half a score of highwaymen, armed to the teeth.

## CHAPTER IX.

"The road robbers, by all that's devilish!" gasped Jones, falling back in his seat.

"Good gracious!" cried Smith.

And all the brave "bum-bailiffs" who had so gallantly bullied and brow-beaten Sybil, and her sole defender, dropped panic-stricken, paralyzed by terror.

"Get out of this, you vermin!" ordered a stern voice at one of the windows.

"Ye—ye—yes, gentlemen," faltered Jones.

"Take all we have, but spare our lives!" pleaded Smith.

"Well, well, get out of this, you miserable cowards. Empty your pockets, and you shall be safe! It would be crueler than infanticide to slay such miserable helpless wretches!" laughed the same voice, which poor Sybil, as in a dream, recognized as belonging to Captain Inconnu.

The trembling bailiffs descended from the coach and gave up their pocket-books and watches, and then submitted to be tied to trees.

The coachman and the guard yielded to the same necessity.

The horses were taken from the coach and appropriated to the use of the victors.

And lastly, Sybil, who was rendered by despair indifferent to her fate, was lifted from her seat by the strong arms of Moloch, who held her a moment in suspense, while he turned to his chief and inquired:

"Where now, captain?"

"To the rendezvous! And look that you treat the lady with due deference!"

"Never you fear, captain!" answered the giant, as he threw the half-fainting form of the lady across his shoulders and strode up a narrow foot-path to where several horses were tied.

He selected the strongest of the group, mounted and lifted the helpless form of the lady into a seat before him,

and set off at full speed, clattering through the rugged mountain pass with a recklessness of life and limb that at another time would have frightened his companion half out of her senses.

But now, in her despair of life, there was even a hope in this mad career—the hope of a sudden death.

But the gigantic ruffian knew himself, his horse, and his road, and so he carried his victim through that fearful pass in perfect safety.

They reached a deep, narrow, secluded valley, in the midst of which stood an old red sandstone house, closely surrounded by trees, and only dimly to be seen in the clouded night sky.

Here the robber rider slackened his pace.

The deep silence that prevailed, the thick growth of leafless weeds and briars through which their horse had to wade, all showed that this house had been long uninhabited, and the grounds long uncultivated.

Yet there was some one on guard; for when Moloch rode up to the door and dismounted, and holding Sybil tightly clasped in his left arm, rapped three times three, with his right hand, the door was cautiously opened by a decrepid old man, who held a lighted taper in his withered fingers.

"Ho, Pluto! who is here?" inquired Moloch, striding into the hall, and bearing Sybil in his arms.

"No one, sir, but the girls and the woman! and they have just come! And no fire made, and no supper ready? Come, bestir yourself, bestir yourself, and make a fire first of all. This lady is as cold as death! Where is Iska?"

"In this room, sir," answered the old man, pushing open an old worm-eaten door that admitted them into a large, old-fashioned oak-paneled parlor, with a wide fire-place and a high corner cupboard, but without other furniture.

On the hearth knelt Gentiliska, trying to coax a little smouldering fire of green wood into a blaze.

"What the d—l is the use of puffing away at that? You'd just as well try to set fire to a wet sponge," impatiently exclaimed Moloch.

And he went to one of the windows, wrenched off a dry, mouldering shutter, broke it into pieces with his bare hand, and piled it in among the green logs. Then from his pocket he took a flask of whisky, poured a portion of it on the weak, red embers, and in an instant had the whole mass of fuel in a roaring blaze.

Meanwhile Sybil, unable to stand, had sunk down upon the floor, where she remained only until Gentiliska saw her by the blaze of the fire.

"You are as cold as ice!" said the kind-hearted girl, taking Sybil's hands in her own, and trying to warm them. "Come to the fire," she continued, assisting the lady to rise, and drawing her toward the chimney. "Sit here," she added, arranging her own red cloak as a seat.

"Thanks," murmured Sybil. "Thanks—you are very good to me."

"Moloch, she is nearly dead! Have you got any wine? If you have, give it to me!" was the next request of the girl.

The giant lumbered off to a heap of miscellaneous luggage that lay in one corner, and from it he rooted out a black bottle, which he brought and put in the hands of the girl, saying:

"There! ha, ha, ha! there's some of her own old port. We made a raid upon Black Hall buttry last night, on purpose to provide for her."

"All right. Now a tin saucepan, and some sugar and spice, old Moloch! and also, if possible, a cup or tumbler," said Gentiliska.

The giant went back to the pile in the corner, and after a little search brought forth all the articles required by the girl.

"Now, good Moloch, go and do for old Hecate what you have done for me. Make her a fire, that she may have supper ready for the captain when he comes," coaxed Gentiliska.

"Just so, princess," agreed the robber, who immediately confiscated another shutter, and carried it off into the adjoining back room to kindle the kitchen fire.

"You were wrong to leave us! You got into trouble immediately! You would have been in worse by this time, if we had not rescued you! Don't you know when the laws are down on you, your only safety is with the outlaws?" inquired Gentiliska, as soon as she found herself alone with her guest.

"I don't know. I don't care. It is all one to me now. I only wish to die. If it were not a sin, I would die by suicide," answered Sybil, with the dreary calmness of despair.

"Die by suicide! Die by a fiddlestick's end! You to talk so! And you not twenty years old yet! Bosh! cut the law that persecutes you and come with us merry outlaws who protect you. And whatever you do, don't run away from us again! You got us into awful trouble and danger and loss when you ran away the last time; did you know it?"

"No," sighed Sybil, wearily.

"Well, then, you did; and I'll tell you how it all happened; the secret of your abode at Pendleton Park was known to too many people. It couldn't possibly be kept forever by all. It is a wonder that it was kept so long by any. They kept it only until they thought you were safe from pursuit and arrest. Then some of Captain Pendleton's people—it is not known whom—let it leak out until it got to the ears of the authorities, who set inquiries on foot; and then the whole thing was discovered, and as usual, misinterpreted and misrepresented. You got the credit of voluntarily consenting with us, and of purposely blowing up the old Haunted Chapel. And the new warrants that were issued for your arrest charged you with that crime also."

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed Sybil, forgetting all her indifference; "what will they not heap upon my head next? I will not rest under this imputation! I will not!"

"Neither would I, if I were you—that is, if I could help it," said the girl, sarcastically.

But Sybil sat with her thin hands clasped tightly together, her deathly white face rigid as marble, and her large, dilated eyes staring into the fire heedless of the strange girl's irony.

"But now I must tell you how all this hurt us. In the first place, when your flight from the cavern was discovered, we felt sorry only on your account, because you ran into imminent danger of arrest. We had no idea then that your arrest would lead to the discovery of our retreat; but it did. When our detectives brought in the news of the warrants that were out against you, they also warned us that the authorities had the clew to our caverns, and that there was no time to be lost in making our escape."

With her hands still closely clasped together, with her pallid features still set as in death, and with her staring eyes still fixed upon the fire, Sybil sat, heedless of all that she heard. The girl continued her story.

"We let no time be lost. We gathered up the most valuable and portable of our effects, and that same night evacuated our cavern and dispersed our band; taking care to appoint a distant place of rendezvous. Satan watched the road, riding frequently to the wayside inns to try to discover the coach by which you would be brought back. He was at Upton this evening, when the stage stopped to change horses. He recognized you, and immediately mounted, put spurs to his fast horse and rode as for life and death to the rendezvous of his band, and got them into their saddles to intercept the stage coach. He also gave orders that we should come on to this deserted house, which he had discovered in the course of his rides, and which he supposed will be a safe retreat for the present. That is all I have to tell you, and I reckon you know all the rest," concluded Gentiliska.

But still Sybil sat in the same attitude of deep despair, regardless of all that was said to her.

While Gentiliska's tongue was running, her hands were also busy. She had prepared a cordial of spiced and sweetened port wine, and had set it in a saucepan over the fire to heat. And now she poured it out in a silver mug and handed it to Sybil, saying:

"Come, drink; this will warm and strengthen you. You look like death, but you must not die yet. You must drink and live."

"Yes, I must live!" said Sybil. "I must live to throw off this horrible imputation from the fame of my father's daughter."

And she took the goblet and drank the cordial.

And soon a new expression passed into her face; the fixed despair rose into a settled determination, a firm, active resolution.

"You look as if you were going to do something. What is it?" inquired Gentiliska, in consternation.

"No, I am not mad. On the contrary, it seems to me that I have been mad, or I never could have borne the fugitive life that I have been leading for the last two months! I will bear it no longer. I will give myself up to trial, come what will of it. I would even rather die a guiltless death than lead an outlaw's life! I will give myself up!"

"After all the pains we have taken, and risks we have run, to rescue you?" exclaimed Gentiliska, in dismay.

"Yes, after all that! And yet I thank you all the same, I thank you all, that you have set me at liberty, and by so doing have given me the opportunity of voluntarily delivering myself up."

"Just as if Captain Inconnu would let you do it. I tell you he has his own reasons for saving your life," angrily retorted the girl.

"And I have my reasons for risking my life upon the bare chance of rescuing my good name," said Sybil, firmly; "and your captain would scarcely detain me here as a captive, against my will," she added, smiling strangely.

"Well, maybe he would, and maybe he wouldn't! But here he comes, and you can ask him," said the girl, as the galloping of a horse's feet was heard in the front yard.

A moment passed, and then the robber chief, with three or four of his men, entered the room, bringing with them the mailbags and other booty taken from the stage coach.

"Good evening, Mrs. Berners! You are welcome back among your devoted slaves!" was the greeting of Captain Inconnu, as half in defiance, half in mockery, he raised his cap and bowed low before the lady.

For an instant Sybil was dumb before the speaker, but she soon recovered her self-possession, and said:

"I ought to thank you for your gallantry in rescuing me from the custody of those rude men; especially as the

freedom you have given me affords me the opportunity of voluntarily doing that which I should not like to be forced into doing."

Captain Inconnu bowed in silence, and in some perplexity, and then he said:

"I am not sure that I understand you, madam, as to what you would do."

"I would go freely before a court of justice, instead of being forced thither," explained Sybil.

"I trust you would never commit such a suicidal act!" exclaimed the captain, in consternation.

"Yes, I would and I will. I care nothing for my life! I have lost all that makes life worth the living! All is gone but my true honor—for its mere semblance has gone with everything else. I would preserve the true honor! I would place myself on trial, and trust in my innocence and in the help of Providence," said Sybil, speaking with a stoical firmness wonderful to see in one so young.

Captain Inconnu, who had listened in silence, with his eyes fixed upon the ground, now lifted them to her face and replied:

"Sleep on this resolution before you act, Mrs. Berners, and to-morrow we will talk further on this subject."

"I must of necessity sleep on it before acting," said Sybil, with a dreary smile, since nothing can be done to-night; but also I must tell you that nothing can change my resolution."

"Thus let it stand over until to-morrow," replied the captain. Then with a total change of tone and manner he turned to Gentiliska and said:

"Now, let us have supper, my little princess, and afterward we will open the mailbags and see what they have brought us."

Gentiliska clasped her hands together to summon the old woman of the band, who quickly made her appearance at the door.

"Supper immediately, Hecate!" said the girl.

The woman nodded and withdrew. And in a few moments she reappeared and summoned them in to the evening meal.

The supper was served in the rudest possible fashion. There were neither table nor chairs. A fine tablecloth, not too clean, was spread upon the floor, and on it were arranged a few plain articles of food such as could be quickly prepared.

"You will excuse our imperfect house-keeping, I hope, Mrs. Berners. The fact is we have just moved in, and have not got quite comfortably settled yet," laughed the captain, as he folded his own cloak as a seat for Sybil, and led her up and placed her on it, and sat himself down by her side.

Other members of the band joined them at the meal, and Captain Inconnu and Gentiliska did the honors.

## CHAPTER X.

When Sybil woke the sun was streaming in at the unshaded windows, and by its blaze of light she saw that two of the women had left the room, and left no one with her except Gentiliska.

The girl was up, and was making what shift she could to wash her face with the aid of a tin basin, a stone ewer, and a crash towel, all of which, for want of a washstand, were placed upon the bare floor.

When she had finished washing, she carefully emptied the contents of the basin out of the window, and refilled it again with fresh water for Sybil. Then, happening to turn around, she discovered that her guest was awake.

"You rested well?" she said with a smile.

"Yes, for I was worn out. This is the first night in four that I have lain down and the second night in eight," answered Sybil.

"My gracious goodness! How could you stand it? You cannot be rested yet. You had better lie a-bed longer."

"No, I would rather get up," said Sybil, rising.

As on a former occasion, the girl attended the lady at her rude toilet, rendering the assistance of a dressing-maid.

Just before they left the room, Gentiliska, chancing to glance out of the window, uttered an exclamation of surprise and delight.

"What is it?" inquired Sybil.

"The captain's son! Oh, a beautiful boy, Mrs. Berners! An angel among devils! He has been gone so long!"

And now he has unexpectedly come back again. Look, Mrs. Berners! Oh! how I do wish somebody would deliver this boy from this band; would save this pure young soul alive!" exclaimed Gentiliska, with more feeling than Sybil had ever seen her display.

Following the glance of the girl's eye, the lady looked from the window.

Prepared as she had been by Gentiliska's praise to behold a boy of rare beauty, she was really startled by the angelic loveliness of the lad before her.

The charm was not alone in the soft, bright, golden hair that shone like a halo around the fair, open forehead, nor in the straight brown eyebrows, nor the clear blue eyes, nor the sweet serious mouth, nor in the delicate blooming complexion; it was also in the expression of earnest candor and trusting love that beamed from every feature of that beautiful face.

"Yes, indeed; he looks like a seraph. What is his name?" inquired Sybil, in a burst of admiration.

"It is Raphael."

"Raphael! an appropriate name. So might have looked the child-artist Raphael, in his brightest days on earth. So may seem the love-angel Raphael to those who see him in their dreams," said Sybil, gazing, as if spellbound, on the beauty of the boy.

(To be continued.)

## WHOLESALE MUSIC

### One Thousand Four Hundred and Thirty-Seven Instruments.

A combination of brass bands that might be quite equal to bringing down the walls of Jericho will be heard at a fete to be given at Government House, Aldershot, England.

All the bands of the Aldershot Army Corps, drawn from 27 separate regiments, and comprising nearly fifteen hundred separate instruments, are to play together. This will form one of the most gigantic orchestral combinations ever attempted.

The actual number of instruments engaged will be 1,437, made up as follows:—

Flutes and piccolos .....	34
E flat clarionets .....	33
Oboes .....	23
1st B flat clarionets .....	114
2nd B flat clarionets .....	62
1st cornets .....	61
Trumpets .....	9
Euphoniums .....	34
2nd Trombones .....	24
Brass basses .....	72
Drum basses .....	45
Alto clarionets .....	9
3rd B flat clarionets .....	58
Saxophones .....	20
Bassoons .....	53
Horns .....	86
2nd cornets .....	51
Allhorns .....	26
1st trombones .....	25
Bass trombones .....	19
String basses .....	21
Side drums .....	135
Bass drums .....	19
Bagpipes .....	23
Fifes .....	295
Bugles .....	86

Mr. Henry Sims, R.A., will conduct this vast array of musicians.

## VOICE BY GRAMOPHONE.

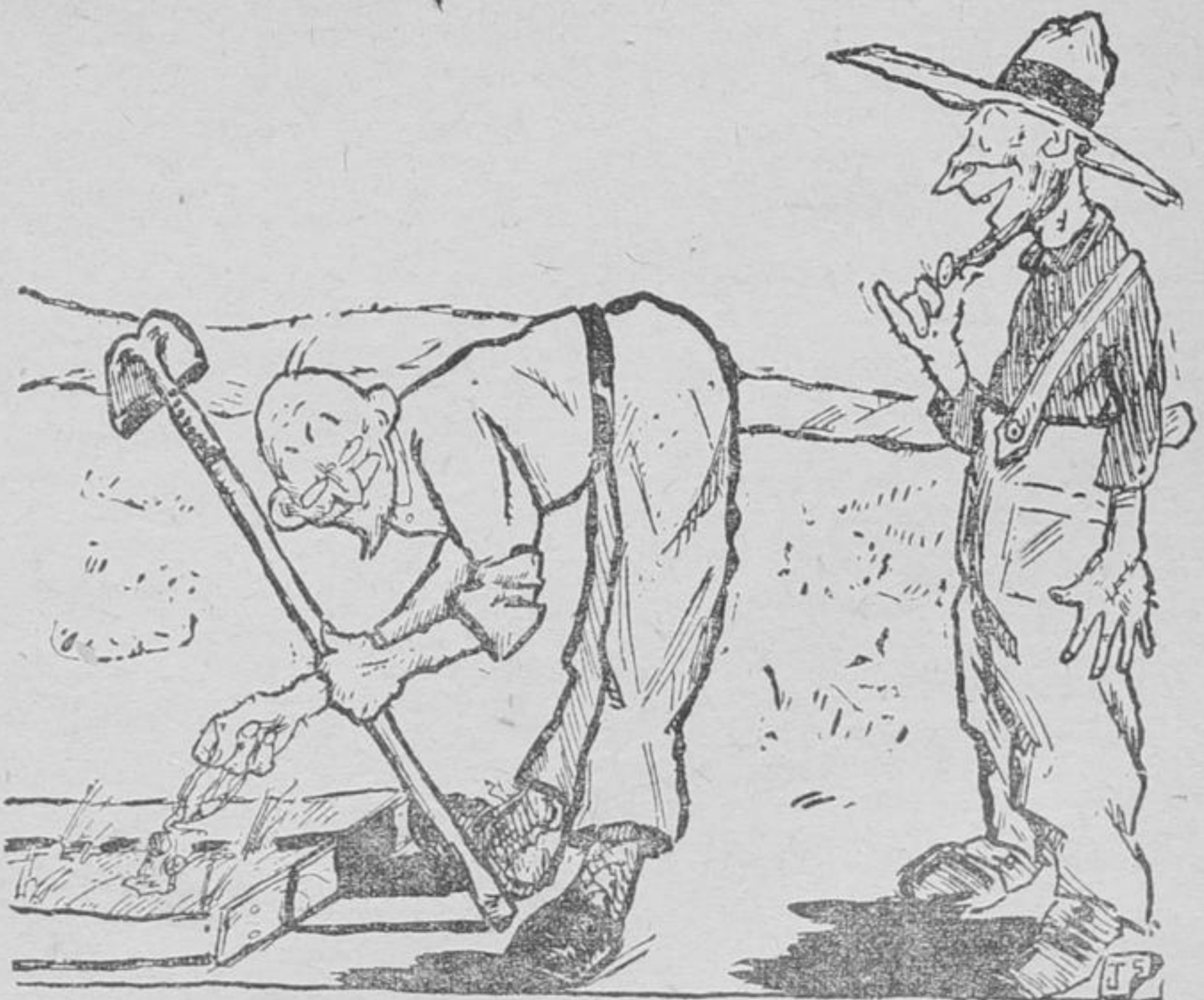
A young lady from Australia has just won a singing scholarship in London under novel circumstances. From her Colonial home she sent to a well-known professor in London a "record" of her voice, with the request that he would test it on the gramophone, and inform her whether he thought its qualities sufficiently good to justify her in taking so long a journey for an examination for a scholarship. The professor listened to the "record," was duly impressed by the possibilities of the voice, and wrote to say he thought she might try. Encouraged by this report, she reached England just in time for the examination, and was one of two successful candidates out of 190 competitors.

## IRRESISTIBLE.

"This dog, madam, would be cheap at twenty dollars."

"I would take him, but I am afraid my husband might object."

"Madam, you can get another husband much easier than a dog like that."



## ADVICE.

Abe—Say, Zeke, what's the best thing to do when one of your hosses takes to coughin' an' sneezin', all day?  
Zeke—Sell it!