

Clarence's Mind

BY CHESTER BAILEY FERNALD

ONE night, when me and Clarence was dawdling down to Andy Coggin's place to get a plate of beans, we was enlisted off the street to fight a duel in the full armor of the Middle Ages, at a millionaire's private theatricals. But because they didn't treat Clarence right, and his appetite had made him evil-minded, why, he ups in a terrible huff and leaves the house, with still the armor on him, as I could take time to explain. But what I'm telling is how Clarence come down off the millionaire's steps as shining as a man in a ballet, and turned himself loose in the streets of Newport at midnight, clanking like Hamlet's ghost and carrying a wooden sword. He'd not gone forty rods before he sent an old woman puckering up her petticoats and squawking off through the fog like a fowl. Then, bedad, he begun to wonder if it wasn't a trifle sudden of his temper to be chasing away by himself, wrapped up in this kind of accouterment.

And such being his emotions, all soldered up as he was inside his helmet, and sweating like a man in a diving-suit, Clarence could not keep on the honest road between the electric lights, but he had to lay his course on the broad open lawns of several contidgious estates, where the grass was more silent to the clink of his feet, and he says to himself if he heard the police he would pose as a new bronze statue. Till presently he sees a fancy iron fence before him, and he says he would hang himself by the small of his back on one of the spikes and turn a back somerset to split off the armor. But first he had to pass by a house with an open window. There was a young man sitting at the window, and staring out at the June-bugs that was flitting through the mist to get at the light of the chandelier inside. The young man had his chin in his hand, and there was an empty skull and a big fat sheepskin book on the table beside him; so I'm

thinking 'twas some youngster that was learning to be a doctor and found himself in the mood for diversions. And Clarence's modesty wouldn't let him be seen in such a strange dress as he was, and so Clarence makes to be all careful and ran quiet past, beneath the window, in the sharp patch of dark where the light didn't strike. Which he did; but at the same time he falls several feet beneath the window down a coal-hole, with a clatter of sheet-iron and general consternation like a row in a boiler-shop.

Then up jumps the young man and fetches his electric lamp to the window; and when he illuminates the coal-hole from above he sees an extraordinary little object all cased in metal, trying to crawl out of the place, and bluing the air with exclamations of his feelings, and falling back each time like a bug in a glass bottle. No doubt the youngster says to himself that such a man was either crazy or ought to be. And when Clarence looks up and sees the quiet smile beaming on the youngster's face, it made Clarence hot; and says he, "Good-evening, ye fool; did ye never see a man in a coal-hole before?" And still the youngster beams that contented smile on him, till Clarence says aloud, "The boy is crazy, if there ever was one!" and he shuts down the door of his helmet and takes on to sulk. In a minute he feels something dangling agin his bosom-plate.

"Dearly beloved brother," says the youngster, "tie the end of the lawn-tennis rope around your waist. For I've wine and cigars awaiting ye here. I was full of me thoughts," he explains, all grave as a graven image; "for it might have been that it mightn't have been," says he,—"except for the coal-hole."

And in a minute, with hauling and pulling, Clarence delivers himself through the window at the end of the rope, like a lobster out of the sea. And all to his surprise, here he was in an elegant man-

sion, with the signs of superfluous wealth sticking all over the walls, and being received as a private guest by this youngster that was as tall as a giraffe and as solemn as a mock-funeral. And little Clarence and him looks at each other, and they blinks as sober as though divvle a joke had been let loose in the entire world since the fall of man.

"By pursuing your eccentricities along with mine, we may arrive at a law of nature," says the youngster, with an encouraging smile. "For I observe you're the opposite of me in most particulars," says he; "and since extremes is accused by philosophy of meeting at the ends, then here we are."

Clarence looks at him back, then scratches his helmet, trying to get at his little red head; and he says to himself that either he was up agin one of the most learned men of the times or else a lunatic.

"I didn't get the whole of your question," says Clarence, playing it all polite, "owing to the fog settling in me ear. But I suppose ye'll insinuate some explanation of this tin foolishness I have on me back. Well, ye see, I was merely following down me way to Andy Coggin's this evening, with the intention—"

"Beg pardon," says the youngster, with elegant breeding, "but would you mind beginning with some history of your father and mother, and what complaints was common to them—"

"But what the divvle would that have to do with me going down to Andy Coggin's to get a plate of beans?" says Clarence, pointing with his sword.

"It breaks me heart to interrupt ye," says the youngster, with his hand up like a parson; "but just a few preliminary remarks on the type of your main hallucinations, and whether chronic or intermittent, would throw considerable light—"

"Now you're talking electricity," says Clarence, seeing a lot of strange instruments about the room, "and sure I don't know one spark from another. But, anyway, what would that have to do with me going down to Andy Coggin's—"

"Me brother," says the youngster, "I was approaching the question: how long have you enjoyed insanity?"

"Me insane!" says Clarence. "I was never insane in me life."

"Yes, yes,—but man to man," whispers the youngster. "how long since ye lost complete control of your mind?"

"Sure, I never lost me mind," says Clarence; "but I do begin to suspect that you did."

"Oh, have peace with yourself," says the youngster, all soothing. "Let's burn incense," says he, "and look for truth at the bottom of a bottle, till we find which one of us is craziest."

He sets Clarence in a leather-mahogany chair, and gives him a cigar as long and fat as a railway spike; and into a goblet lined with gold he pours a drink of Madeira that Clarence says was meat and drink and father and mother to him—that pleasant it was, and the bottle left standing so near! And Clarence clung to the bottle like saying good-by to your sweetheart, till he begins to feel as though drifting away on a private cloud.

"Mister," says Clarence, throwing up his feet on another chair, "I don't know whether your mind is off or on, but your heart is still waving at the mast-head, sure!"

"Ah!" says the youngster, pointing both forefingers at him. "'Sh!" says he, going to the door. He looks out in the hall, then out of the window; then he comes on tiptoe, and whispers in Clarence's ear. "I'll give ye me word of honor," says he, "I'm as crazy as you!"

"And several times more," says Clarence. "For me own mind is on as firm as the comb on a cock. And me appearing in this armor—if that's what ye mean—why, I was merely on me way to Andy Coggin's—"

"Listen!" says the tall young man. He takes a piece of paper and draws a triangle and a circle. "The first symptoms of losing your mind," says he, pointing to the circle, and in a loud voice as solemn as a lecture—"the first symptoms is thinking yourself still sane. And the next step," says he, pointing to the triangle, "is thinking your neighbor is crazy. For, laying all reason aside," says he, tearing the paper to bits, "of all authorities, living or dead, I recognize meself as the greatest on earth concerning inflammation of the nerves, lunacy, idiocy, and tomfoolery. And why? Because to perfect me knowledge of the subject I went insane meself!"

"The divvle!" says Clarence, shooting up to his feet. "And that's what's the matter of ye!"

"Ye've hit it in the eye," says the youngster, seeming all full of enthusiasms. "For instance, suppose you was to cover both ears with your hands—if your hands is big enough: now, what do ye hear?"

"I hear like under a bridge with the cars running over," says Clarence.

"That's what you think," says the youngster; "and some of them surgeons of the mind would know no better. But, in fact 'tis the first sign of insanity. 'Tis the maggots ye hear—at work on your brain, and chewing on the chain of your thoughts."

"Bedad, not in my case," says Clarence. "For me own head is on as straight as the knob on a door. The reason of me acting perhaps a trifle queer when you first saw me, why—"

"Between bottle-companions," says the youngster, as kind as a father to him, "ye need have no modesty at all about your condition. Let's see ye cross one knee over the other."

Clarence crossed his knees to show how easy he could do it; and when the youngster was not looking, Clarence claps a hand to his ear again and hears the maggots working there again, and says to himself, bedad, it was queer. And the youngster hit him a cut with the sharp of the hand on top of the knee-pan, and Clarence's leg flew up all astonished at itself beyond control; and Clarence says to himself, by the great horn spoon, he wouldn't let his leg behave that way again. But as often as the youngster hit him on the knee, up flew the leg, whether he liked it or not. And Clarence sees the youngster shaking his head; and that shook the peace of Clarence's soul; and says he,

"What would ye make of that, doctor?"

"It means," says the youngster, "that ye've lost your responsibility complete below the knee. If ye was to commit violence with your thumb, the eye of the law would regard ye as criminal. But if ye was to accomplish evil with your feet, they would do no more than examine your legs for insanity. What's the matter of ye?" says he. "Is your cigar too strong fer ye?"

For Clarence had put down his goblet, and set thinking as hard as the maggots would let him. He had found something wrong with his eyes—they wouldn't seem to be driving in harness together; and he forgot of the wine he had drained, and he asked himself if 'twas true he was leaving his wits.

"Didn't I start out all intelligent with Sudd Lannigan," says he, with a fall of the voice, "to get a plate of beans?"

"Dear me," says the youngster, with his face like a coroner's jury; "I hate to tell ye, but you're getting rapidly worse. I've noticed a change since ye come through the window."

"Worse, ye say—and permanent?" says Clarence, breaking out in the brow with cold perspiration.

"Upon your soul, as one raving maniac to another," says the youngster, "can ye say that in the last two hours no one has taken exceptions to your acts? Am I the first to intimate you was crazy?" says he, pacing the floor, and stopping to deliver that at Clarence.

"What if he did?" says Clarence, all stewing in his collar. "It was only me best friend, Sudd Lannigan, when I was fighting the duel; and he's a dom fool, anyway. It ain't true, and I ain't crazy."

"It ain't true!" says the youngster, with a laugh. "And you parading Newport at this hour of the night, dressed up like that!"

"I tell ye 'twas pure accident," bawls Clarence. "I tell ye 'twas nothing but absence of mind."

"Absence of mind! Absence of mind!" says the youngster, from the other room, pointing at him. "That's what it is—for your mind is clean absent and gone, like the meat of a nut!" He gives a sniff of professional pride, and he leans up agin something that looked like a sideboard; but 'twas an orchestrion inside, and the youngster pulls the handle of it. "Put your hands to your ears agin," says he, "and listen if the maggots is any better."

So Clarence covers his ears, and the orchestrion begins to play the music of the Turkish patrol, arising more and more in the distance, till ye could hear it through your hands. Clarence starts up in his chair.

"Say!" says Clarence, "where will that music be at this time of night? Don't I hear a military band?" says he, to the blank face of the youngster.

"I have no doubt ye think ye hear something," says the mock-doctor. "Each crazy man has delusions of his own. I once believed I could hear the divvle himself, preaching sermons to the damned," says he, "and most entertaining. But a dishonest lunatic stole the delusion from me mind with a bodkin," says he; "and the next day—"

"Whist! That *is* music," says Clarence; "real music! Don't ye hear it?—it's growing louder."

"Poor man!" says the youngster. "Do ye suffer badly?"

"I tell ye it *is* music! Are ye deaf?" says Clarence.

"Deaf?" says the other. "Sure me ears is as sensitive as a chronometer—I can hear the beating of me own heart in the middle of a drum corps," says he; "but I don't hear any military band at this moment."

"Ye can't hear that—growing louder and louder?" says Clarence, his forehead bursting with dew. "Now—now, ye do hear *that*, doctor?" says Clarence, clutching him by the arm.

"There, there," says the youngster, all soothing; "don't let it get any louder. You must control yourself. Take some wine. I command ye not to let it get any louder!" says the youngster, pointing his finger.

"Why not?" says Clarence, all caving in. "Why not?—for it *is* growing louder. I could swear—Holy Mother," says Clarence, turning round, with his head behind him, "I could take me oath 'twas in the house!"

"Come, now," says the youngster, embracing him tight, "hold fast, and don't let it get any louder. If it does," says he, "'twill burst out your ear and escape from ye, and the world be full of illegitimate notes. Be a man now!" says he. But Clarence couldn't stop it. The Turkish patrol was arriving in front of him, and smashing the cymbals in a way to raise the dead.

"Ah!" says Clarence, with his eyes starting out like a horse. "Ah!" says he, with a dying shriek. Then the band begun moving away again and going round

a corner. "Oh!" says Clarence, with a look of mild surprise.

"Is it passing off?" says the youngster, holding his head. "Is it growing less?" he says.

"Yes, maybe—maybe," says Clarence, sinking back. "Yes, yes, I think 'tis passing off," says he, in a moment. "But, doctor, doctor," says he, drawing a snort, "by the saints, that was a narrow escape! The drum of me ear was blowed up like the belly of a moon-fish, and every minute I thought 'twould explode. Dear, dear, what am I coming to, anyway?" says Clarence, rolling his eyes with the realization of it. "Couldn't ye give me some kind of oil to rub on me scalp?" says he.

The young man sits looking all grave at him, and finally shakes his head. The orchestrion had died away, but the dew was still standing on Clarence's brow. He reaches and gulps a half-bottle of wine by the neck.

"I'll forget me name next, I suppose," he mutters, clapping his hand on top of his helmet. "I'll meet meself in the looking-glass and never bow acquaintance!" A sob came bubbling out of his throat, and it turned to a foolish laugh at the end of his tongue. "Doctor," says he, "I would give the head off me neck to get me brains back. How's that for an offer, ye extraordinary divvle!" Then he falls away sad again; but in a minute he bursts out with: "Doctor, why is it I want to laugh? I would laugh," says he, "till I burst the shell off me back, if it wasn't irreverent to me misfortune of losing me wits." Then a terrible pink flush swept over the inside of him at the sound of his silly words; but he couldn't bring what reason he had to the end of his tongue. Good-by to me senses, says he to himself; good-by, Sudd Lannigan, and good-by the ship and the crew and the whole sailing-match; and hello the clink and the mad-house for evermore. "The divvle take you!" says Clarence, turning on the youngster. "I'd never known I was mad, nor any one else, if I hadn't been fished up through your window. But if it's mad I am, then mad I *am*—and I'm going to have a good time!" He snatches a Maori war-club from ornamenting the wall. I'm thinking the twinkle went out from the youngster's eye. For he tries to lay hold of

Clarence to prevent him from wrecking the room; and the tough little man shook him off like a drop of water on a dog.

"What are ye doing?" says the youngster, with his feet clinging to the floor. Clarence was swinging the war-club over his head.

"Doctor," says he, "do ye see that elegant crystal bowl there?"

"What!" says the youngster. "'Tis worth thousands of dollars!"

"Hurrah!" says Clarence. "I'll cut it into ten thousand dimes!"

"Wait, wait," says the youngster, all in a gasp. "It's all a mistake—you're not crazy—don't smash that! It's me father's pet bowl!"

"I'm as crazy as ever was made," says Clarence, swinging the club. "I never saw a big piece of glass yet but I wanted to smash it; I suppose it was me lunacy growing inside. And I'm going to smash that bowl," says he; "for they'll take me away in the luny-cart whether I smash it or not."

"Look here—as a personal favor to me—for the wine and cigars," says the youngster, throwing himself on Clarence's bosom, "will ye kindly put down that club till I tell ye something?" Clarence puts down the club to lay hold of the goblet on the table, and the youngster whisks the club out the window, down the coal-hole. Then the youngster draws up his breath from his boots. "It's three o'clock, and time to go home, now," says he, giving the broad hint.

"Oh, don't you live here?" says Clarence, shaking hands with him.

"Yes; but you don't," says the young man. "Well, I'm glad you enjoyed your wine and cigars," says he, moving towards the door. "And I'll tell ye now that you are no more insane than I am."

"No, for I couldn't be," says Clarence, sitting down in a chair. "But I'm terrible daft, doctor," says he, clean puzzled not to find the club where he had put it. "I think I'll have to smash that bowl with me hands," he says, staring suspicious at the youngster.

They looks at each other a second. What Clarence would do the next minute the young man was waiting with terrible fear. He hits on a plan to be rid of Clarence by strategy.

"I'm sorry to suggest your going now,"

says the young man, "but in fact I feel a fit coming on. And when I have me fits, then I'm in possession of the divvle and the strength of ten men. And I might have homicidal intent and malice aforethought breaking out on me."

"Sure, I never watched a fit before," says Clarence, settling back in the arm-chair and getting his humor.

"I feel it coming on," says the young man. "Ye'd better go and leave me alone," says he, "for I'm apt to murder ye."

"What kind of a man would I be to go and leave ye alone," says Clarence, "when by staying here I can prevent ye committing a murder?"

"Ye thick-skin!" says the young man, grinding his teeth. "I'll put it this way: I want ye to go, because I'm bored with your society. How's that?"

"Such impoliteness is the first sign of your fit, I suppose," says Clarence. "But I'm understanding ye." Clarence was leaving the scare about the music far enough behind him to begin to get back his heart. But the young man was rising in rage.

"Oh, look here, now," says the youngster, "what's the matter with us two laying this nonsense aside and speaking as one sane man to—"

"How the divvle can two raving lunatics speak as one sane man?" says Clarence, getting roiled. "Why don't ye go on with your fit?" says he. "Bedad, if I was having a fit I'd have it, and not talk so much."

"Shall I ring up the police?" says the young man. "Shall I have ye taken away by force, then? Ye poor fool," says he, from the bottom of his wrath, "I'm no lunatic."

"Ye poor lunatic," says Clarence, "I'm no fool. It just strikes me this: if you get swinging on the chandeliers here with the strength of ten men and pull down the ceiling, then the blame is on me. 'Tis better I ring up the police meself, and let 'em take care of ye till your folks come home."

The young man unlocks the front door, and Clarence follows him to the hall.

"There's the door," says the young man, "and there's the police call. Ye can use the one or the other; but if ye don't go in two minutes it will be I that

will have the police come and carry ye down the steps," says he.

Clarence looks at him in disdain, and saying nothing, goes and pulls for the police. "I shall tell 'em to treat ye kind and harmless," says Clarence, all calm, sitting in the hall chair.

"I shall tell 'em you *are* a lunatic," says the young man, planting himself sulky in the chair opposite. "'Twill save explanations and serve you right."

Clarence sits up with all the dignity of a nigger. "I shall tell 'em you're the same," says Clarence.

He begun thinking that after all 'twas not such a bad evening, though he did feel the need again of them beans at Andy Coggin's. And the more he considers the more he says to himself 'twas a mistake him being insane. He'd been deceived awhile by this poor lunatic; but no matter. He would get the credit for having saved the young man from harming the elegant gimcracks on the walls; and the least the old man of the house could do, thinks Clarence, would be to give him ten dollars and recognize him next day in the street.

"Bedad," says Clarence, whispering to himself, "Sudd Lannigan thinks I've been arrested for going the streets in disguise. But I'll get the police to unscrew this armor off me, and then I'll drop it somewhere in the tall grass, and the man that owns it will not take the trouble to hunt me up aboard me ship. And I'll have the laugh on Sudd Lannigan for once, sure!"

Then the two of 'em heard the hurry of two burly-boys on the gravel walk in the dark. The two burly-boys pounds up the steps, with their hands over their stars, and looks through the glass doors into the hall. They saw on one side the young man standing and pointing at Clarence O'Shay, that sat still inside of his antique armor-plate, as sure and smiling as the tin-plate trust. Then they opens the door.

"This man is crazy," says the youngster, pointing to Clarence.

Clarence gets quiet to his feet, all solemn and dignified. He clears his throat, and gives a nod to the police. "I'll explain the whole story from end to end," says he. "This evening, at nine o'clock, as I was pursuing me way to Andy Coggin's place for the purpose of taking on a plate of beans—when—"

"He refuses to go," says the young man, "and I want him removed from the house, please."

"—taking on a plate of them beans of Andy's," says Clarence, as though no one had spoke, "when me and Sudd Lannigan was picked up off the street and hired in to fight a duel at some millionaire's private Punch and Judy show with nothing in me stomach. And—"

"Come along," says the burly-boys, clapping their hands tightly on Clarence's wrists.

"What, ye lunatics?" says Clarence.

"Come *along*; *that's* what!" says the burly-boys.

And in the split of a wink Clarence felt himself lifted as by an earthquake, and carried out of the house and down the steps, gesticulating, procrastinating, and expostulating from the soles of his feet to the top of his voice.

The next minute Clarence was the main consideration of a small crowd of fly-by-nights that was escorting him and the police to the station. And, bedad, if we at Andy Coggin's hadn't heard him passing by and rolling the clouds with his objections, and if we hadn't run out and tore him in the dark from the police to a boat convenient by and pulled for the anchorage of the fleet—why, they'd have had him up in court the next day on charge of losing his mind.

But the minute I had the armor off him and throwed it overboard—then overboard went Clarence himself, and swum for the shore.

"Where ye going?" says we.

I could hear him grinding his teeth like nails.

"I'm going to Andy Coggin's," says he, "to get a plate of beans."



THE
DESERTED
VILLAGE

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