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# Big Bill Meditates

Feature Story By W. L. Blythe

Big Bill exchanged his street shoes for his bedroom moccasins, slipped into his smoking jacket, and having lighted his "Meditation" on its business end, settled down in the big easy rocker to spend a literary evening at home.

All day something had been preying on his mind. Try as best he might he couldn't figure out what it was that was worrying him. In fact, he didn't even know that he was worried. His oatmeal that morning had been cooked just exactly the right number of minutes, and he would have sworn that the dairyman hadn't watered the milk that went with it. He knew for an absolute fact that he hadn't forgotten to kiss his wife good-bye before going to the office. His motor had run like a top all the way down town; his stenographer hadn't put on too much rouge this particular morning; and business had been quite as well as usual.

And yet ever since the moment when he had set down at his desk to be greeted by the calendar's bold black "June 10" and a pile of correspondence he had felt a vague uneasiness.

It couldn't be anything serious he was satisfied. Probably his subconscious mind was warning him that he was on the verge of missing a deal or of losing a few dollars, but after all he would put it aside tonight and go back a small matter of seventy-five or a hundred million years with his old friend, Mr. H. G. Wells. His wife across the table from him was reading the latest "Theater Arts Magazine" and appeared to be interested to such an extent that she probably wouldn't annoy him with any more of those silly questions. Little Bill, the three-year-old member of the firm, was playing with his electric train over in the corner, but he would soon be tucked in his little bed and dreaming of driving a great big locomotive with a long string of cars, and so would not be a cause of annoyance to his dad. Big Bill stretched his feet out in front of him, blew a smoke ring toward the ceiling, and began to feel very contented. "Sonny," he called to the youthful railway man in the corner, "won't you run in the library and get daddy that big brown book that's lying in there on the little side table?"

The engineer applied the brakes, toddled into the library, and in a moment returned with a book almost as large as himself.

"Hello; what's this you've found, sonny?" asked his dad as he took it from the little fellow. "By George, Mother, he's brought out the old school annual. I'd almost forgotten the old book. Where's it been all the time, and how did he happen to find it?"

Mrs. Bill looked up. "I was just thinking of old times today, and so I went upstairs and got it and I was looking at it in there; that's why Billy found it. Did you want some other book?"

"Well," replied Big Bill, "I had intended to read some more hundred thousands of years in 'The Outline of History,' but I guess I'll let H. G. wait a while and glance over the old book myself. Want to see some pictures of daddy when he went to college, sonny?"

Sonny, of course, was always interested in anything that concerned his daddy, and so in a moment the two

Bills were eagerly bending over the old book that told of four years that meant so much to Big Bill—four years into which were crowded a hundred years of ordinary living, years chock full of the pure joy of living, years of play, of fellowship, of work. Yes, Bill had worked. He had accomplished. He had never let studies interfere with his college life, it is true, and yet he had not wasted his time at school. Many honors had been his. In student activities he had taken a very prominent part. On all the boards of the different college publications he had served; in the literary fraternities he had been one of the chief muckety-mucks, as well as a ferocious wielder of the paddle.

Big Bill was indulging in memories. He blew another smoke ring, and in it he saw a field. Around the four sides of the field spread a sea of humanity; mighty cheers rose toward the sky; two cheerleaders in white were capering in front of the stands; they were yelling somebody's name. He recognized it as his own. They were yelling to Big Bill to take it over. And Big Bill had taken it over!

Big Bill leaned farther back in his chair. Sonny had begun to drowse. Yes, he had taken the ball over. He had been a big man at the old school. Memories. Sad to think of the old times that have forever passed. Yes; but he had taken it across when they had called upon him. Mighty satisfactory feeling, though.

The smoke cleared away. Big Bill looked at the book again. Yes; there was the old club. Swell boys, those fellows! Wonder where they all are tonight? Wouldn't I like to get all the bunch back in the house, and have another big "bull session." But dear old Bob has transferred his membership to the Eternal Chapter, and Slim—wonder where Slim is? Haven't seen him since the last night before Commencement.

"By George," Big Bill was talking ever so gently to himself. He could knock down a whole end of a line, but then he could talk as gently as a woman sometimes. "They were swell chaps, those boys. I'll never forget 'em." A tear trickled down Big Bill's cheek. "God bless 'em all—wherever they are. I'd go through hell for any of 'em! I swore an oath a mile long to stick by 'em anywhere—anytime—and I meant it—and still mean it."

For a long time he looked at the picture of his fraternity group. Each face he seemed to study—thoughtfully and tenderly. Why had he looked at the book anyway? Why should he be boo-hooing like an infant? Yet he continued to boo-hoo—at least a restrained kind—and he seemed to enjoy it. The greatest passion of the human heart had stirred him. He had loved those boys, and with each succeeding year that love had grown stronger, deeper, more God-like.

Love?  
Big Bill remembered. There had been a little co-ed. She had been on his Dramatics class. He remembered that he had spoken to some of the fellows about her and they had bet him he would not take her out to a show. And he had taken her. And he had taken her another time—and another—and then he stopped counting. She had played the leading lady in one of the plays—at Commencement, wasn't it? Yes, yes. Certainly.

Why shouldn't he remember THAT night? That night of all nights.

That night he had taken her home after the play was over. It was the last day. He had received from the hands of the Governor or the State that very morning—his sheepskin! And that night she had captured the house. She had acted remarkably well. All the alumni and visitors had fallen for her. And so had he. And that night after the show when they had reached home, he had told her so! He had always been a writer. The campus said he was the best of them all. But on this particular night he had not written a story. He had told one. And with the help of the moon—Big Bill was remembering fast—and, well, anyway, he had told her, and she had said that it was the most beautiful story that she had ever heard, and—Big Bill was smiling broadly now, but there was still that tender look about the eyes and mouth.

Sonny's grip loosened on the book and it started to slip from his daddy's lap, but Big Bill caught it in time. Some of the leaves had turned. He looked at it again.

"By George," said Big Bill, "Mother, look what I found."

Mrs. Bill came over to the two Bills.

"That's what I've been looking at today," she said ever so quietly.

"Remember what happened that night after the play, old girl?" said Bill mischievously.

"Yes. And you dear, foolish old boy, you've never even noticed the date when the play was given."

Big Bill looked at the annual again.

"By George," he replied with the old twinkle in his eye, "no wonder I've been feeling so funny today. It says that all that happened on June the tenth—ten years ago."

And as Big Bill cautiously carried little Bill to his bed there was a new look of tenderness on his face.

"Mother," said he, as he tipped back in his chair after giving his wife an extra kiss, "I wouldn't take a billion dollars for that little story I told you ten years ago tonight. Even if I was half scared to death!" he added with a chuckle.

As we have said before, it takes a good man to last out forty-five minutes in our Library and then come out "un-vamped."

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