

# The Pursuit Of Mr. Overalls

By HOWARD FIELDING

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JOHN WILDE is a man of great wealth and restless energy, and he owns a newspaper called the Citizen, which is an organ of the common people. A fiery and erratic genius named Henry Bond was editor of the Sunday issue, and I was his assistant when the events here chronicled occurred.

Pardon me one moment while I introduce myself. I am a mild eyed, melancholy, lazy and generally incompetent fellow, having no appetite for a strenuous life and very little for any other sort. Upon the editorial staff of the hustling Citizen and assistant to Henry Bond I was as much misplaced as a Quaker in a swearing match. A spurious reputation for—well, I scarcely know what procured me the position, and I took it because I needed the money. Bond, whose geese were always swans, declared to Wilde that I was the greatest man in the two Americas.

One day an item of news drifted into the office to the effect that a horny handed son of toil had been refused admittance to the Museum of Art because he presented himself at its portal clad in his overalls. By the best of our information it was purely a question of dress. There was no claim that the man had been intoxicated or that his conduct had been open to objection.

"We've got to get hold of that man," said Bond, running his hand backward over his hair, which was so full of electricity that it always stood up straight and crackled every time it was touched. "There's a peach of a story in this case."

"Out of sight!" I responded, with enthusiasm.

"Take it right in hand," said Bond, making a movement as if he were passing the matter to me on a large platter. "It's our first page yarn for next Sunday."

I had no appreciation of the story nor any power of guessing what my chief desired, but I knew better than to ask questions. I sent for a reporter, and when he had come I laid the facts before him.

"Find this man and interview him," said I. "Get a photograph of him and of his wife and children, if he has any; also a view of the interior of his humble home, showing books on the table and some good pictures on the wall. He's a man, you understand, who appreciates art. Here's a card to a friend of mine who runs an art store. He'll lend you the pictures. You can get the books anywhere. Telephone me when you've found the man, and I'll send up a photographer."

It was early in the day when the reporter went upon this errand. About noon he telephoned that he was having trouble in his search, that all the papers in town were after the story and that some of them had as many as four or five men out on it. This was bad luck. We had supposed that our information was exclusive. I sent all the available reporters by way of reinforcements and authorized the general of this little army to pay Mr. Overalls \$10 if he would agree not to give his story to anybody else.

Mr. Overalls was not found that day. The next morning's papers had the story, but not the man. There was not even a description of him that savored of authenticity. He remained nothing but a suit of overalls, to which some of the papers added a decoration of machine oil or of whitewash.

This mysterious individual became the subject of a newspaper rivalry so

which lasted until the coffee was served. Then he absentmindedly lighted two cigarettes and, holding one in his extended right hand and the other in his mouth, he said earnestly:

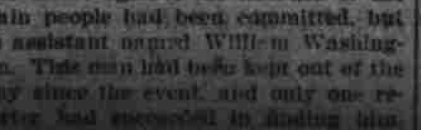
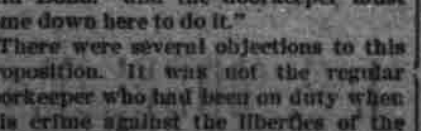
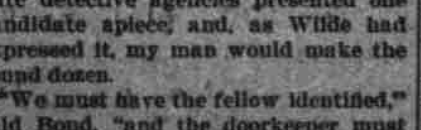
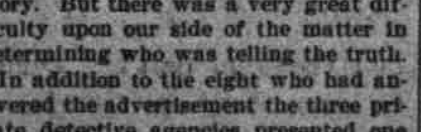
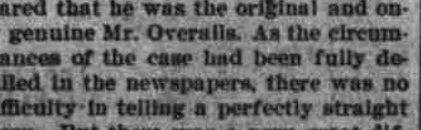
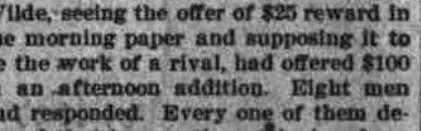
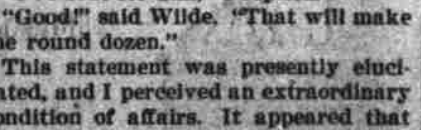
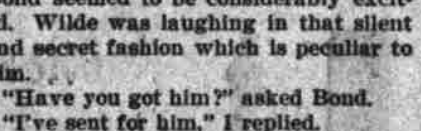
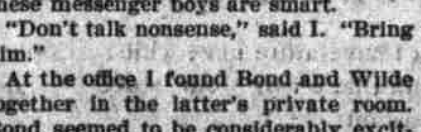
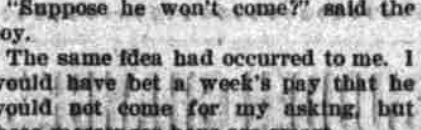
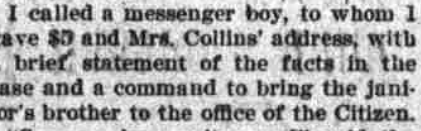
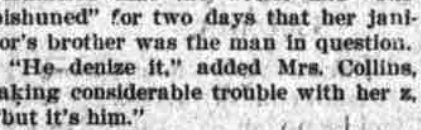
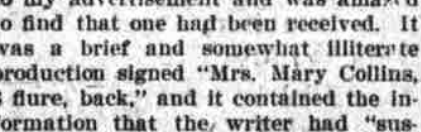
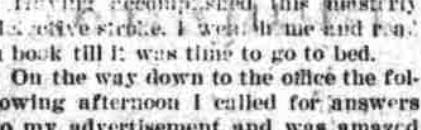
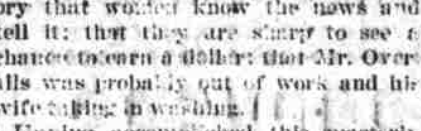
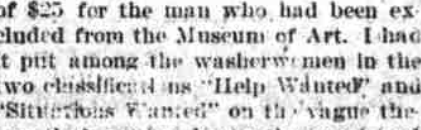
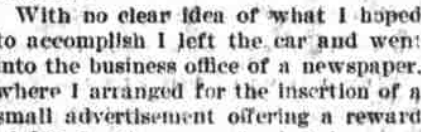
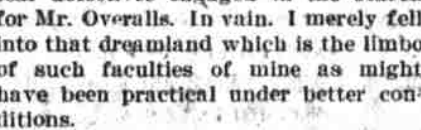
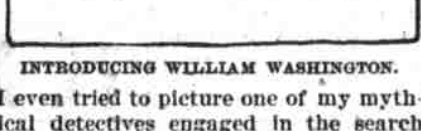
"You ought to be able to do this job yourself. You've written more detective stories than there have been crimes committed since Cain killed Abel. You've been thinking about this sort of thing all your life, and you ought to know just what to do."

The man who writes a detective story has the great advantage of knowing who did the deed, but I would not make such an observation to Bond. A lack of confidence is the unpardonable sin in his eyes. I began to speak in an assured tone, with the air of an expert. This sort of thing is not lying with me. It is mere weakness and exhaustion.

Bond was impressed. He saw a great triumph.

"It's not my fault," said he, "that all these men have been put on to the case. I said that I could do it with my own staff, and here is where I prove it. You get right out on this fellow's trail, and if you catch him I'll add \$50 to your salary this week."

As I rode uptown in a car I tried to think of this man hunt as a sober fact.



To this reporter Mr. Washington had declared that he could not remember Mr. Overalls; that he didn't even know whether he was white or black. Undoubtedly this was a falsehood, yet it was likely that he would stick to it. Certainly he hated all newspapers after the "roasting" to which he had been subjected, and a yoke of oxen couldn't drag him to the Citizen office for the purposes of this investigation. Nevertheless Bond said to me cheerfully:

"Go out and get this man Washington and have him here within two hours."

I felt a faintness succeeded by an agreeable desperation.

"Sure!" said I and stalked out of the room.

A desperate man can accomplish much. In exactly fifty-five minutes I re-entered that room and introduced Mr. William Washington to Wilde and Bond. He was a tall colored man with a very magnificent air and a shrewd, piercing eye; a man of very distinctive—I had almost said distinguished—appearance.

"I have come entirely as a matter of friendship for this gentleman," said he, waving his hand toward me. As a matter of fact I had given him \$10.

We began immediately to admit our candidates, who had been detained here and there in the building upon various pretexts, and with considerable difficulty, for some of them were getting scared. We tried first the men whom the detectives had discovered. Mr. Washington looked at each of them with close attention and courteously declared that he had never had the pleasure of seeing them before. They fled like men experienced in the art, but Mr. Washington was entirely unshaken.

Then we began upon the fellows who had answered the advertisement, and they fled through the room one by one. Some of them gave up the game when informed of the presence of the doorkeeper, while others protested even to the point of violence.

Toward the close of the examination Wilde took me aside.

"This man is throwing us," he said. "In my opinion the first fellow we had in here was the real article, and Washington knew it."

I ventured to differ in a respectful manner, and just then the last of the lot was led through the room. When he had vanished in a smoke of sulphurous language, Jim, the office assistant, who had been busy with the formalities of admitting and sending away the candidates, whispered to me:

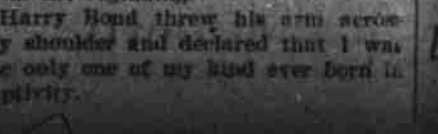
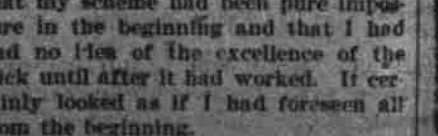
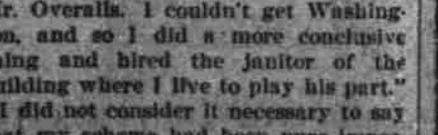
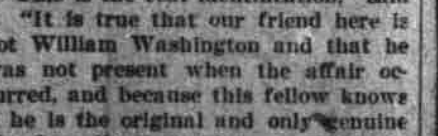
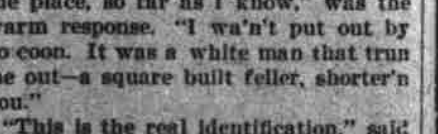
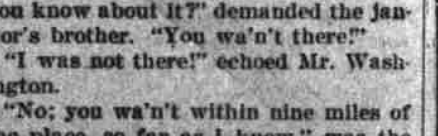
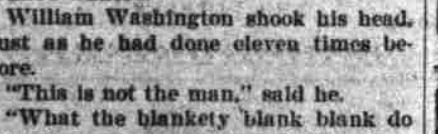
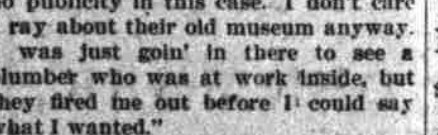
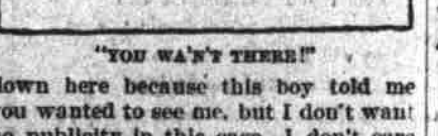
"There's another one with a messenger boy."

"Send him in," said I, and then to Bond, "This is my man."

Wilde overheard the remark and glanced ineffectually at Washington. It was his last chance to serve us. If he failed this time, we had no more to offer. Washington remained dignified and impassive as Mrs. Mary Collins' janitor's brother was led into the room.

He was a stout yet an honest looking fellow, which was more than could be said for the others.

"See here, gentlemen," said he, looking from one to the other of us. "I come



Trollope Disagreed.

Although Anthony Trollope never smoked, he liked being with those who did. It soothed his nerves, he said, and sent him to sleep. On one occasion, when he had just returned to London from South Africa, he was talking at the Cosmopolitan club to Lord Carnarvon, Lord Derby, Froude, the historian, Lord Wolsley and one or two others equally famous on the future of that country. In the midst of the discussion Trollope fell asleep, and after a quarter of an hour's doze he awoke, shaking himself together like the faithful, growling Newfoundland dog he so much resembled. Dissatisfied even in his unconsciousness, he spluttered forth: "I utterly disagree with every one of you. What is it you said?"

Rain and Plants.

Many persons must have noticed that the most diligent sprinkling of lawns and flower beds fails to impart to the grass and plants a vital stimulus equal to that which comes from a good shower of rain. A correspondent reminds us of the reason for the difference. It is because rain, falling from a great height through the air, brings with it a considerable quantity of carbonic acid, of nitrogenous particles and of other elements nutritious to plants which it has washed out of the atmosphere. So a sprinkler used from the top of a tall building might be slightly more effective than when employed at the surface of the ground.

Hoped He Might Improve.

(Husband (venerably)—I was an idiot when I married you, Mary. Wife (quietly)—Yes, Tom, I knew you were. But what could I do? You seemed my only chance, and I thought then that you might improve a little with time.—Washington Times.

His Jubilee.

Judge—Are you aware of any mitigating circumstances in your case? Criminal—Yes, your honor; this is the fiftieth time I have been arrested for vagrancy, and I thought that perhaps we might get up a little jubilee.

Brevity.

Irate Author—What did you do with that article of mine on the American forests? Editor—Well, sir, to make a long story short, I cut it down.—Baltimore American.

The Chinese Cheng.

The Chinese have a singular instrument called cheng, or mouth organ. It is a circular bundle of small reeds of different lengths pierced with finger holes at proper distances and communicating with a common air chamber beneath. The notes are produced by stopping the holes with the fingers.

Cuba's Corn Crops.

Four crops of corn are produced yearly in Cuba. The first crop is planted in December, and the fourth crop is harvested in December.

A Point in Law.

An agreement by an applicant for life insurance that the medical examiner appointed and paid by the insurer shall be the agent of the applicant in recording the medical examination is held in Sturman versus Metropolitan Life Insurance company (N. Y. 57 L. R. A. 318), to be prohibited by public policy.

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Through our Medical Department we offer advice and help. Write us freely about your case, as nothing you say will ever go beyond our office. Let us help you to get rid of this fearful disease, for which some one else no doubt is to blame. It matters not how long the poison has been lurking in your system, S. S. S. will purify and build up your blood, and eliminate every atom of the deadly virus from the system and make a complete and permanent cure. S. S. S. is the only antidote for Contagious Blood Poison and has been curing it for fifty years. It contains no mercury, potash or other harmful mineral ingredients, but is a purely vegetable remedy that cures without leaving any bad after effects. Our special Home Treatment book gives all the symptoms of this disease. We will mail you a copy free.

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Notice is hereby given that application will be made to the General Assembly, of North Carolina, at the session of 1903, for changes in the Charter of the Town of Kinston, N. C. By order of the Board of Aldermen. Dec. 16th, 1902. GEO. E. WEND, Mayor, L. J. MEWBORN, Clerk.

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