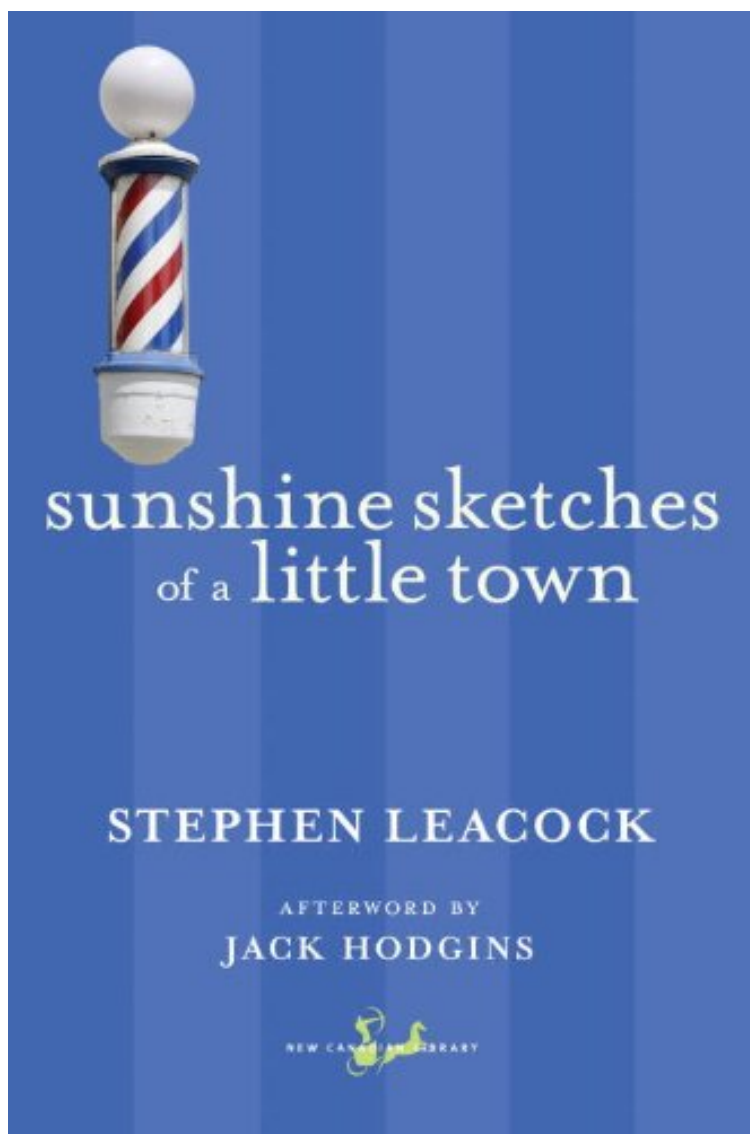


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Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town



Par Stephen Leacock
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[Library ebook] Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town

Par Stephen Leacock : Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town:

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Description : Description du produitIn the city, people never read the newspapers, not really, only little bits and scraps of them. But in Mariposa it's different. There they read the whole thing from cover to cover, and they build up on it, in the course of years, a range of acquirement that would put a college president to the blush. Anybody who has ever heard Henry Mullins and Peter Glover talk about the future of China will know just what I mean.

Prsentation de l'diteurAffectionately combining both the idyllic and ironic, Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town is Stephen Leacocks most beloved book. Set in fictional Mariposa, an Ontario town on the shore of Lake Wissanotti, these sketches present a remarkable range of characters: some irritating, some exasperating, some foolhardy, but all endearing. Painted with the skilful brushstrokes of a great comic artist, the delightful inhabitants of Mariposa represent the people of small towns everywhere.As fresh, funny, and

insightful today as when it was first published in 1912, *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* is Stephen Leacock at his best colourful, imaginative, and thoroughly entertaining. From the Trade Paperback edition. Extrait The Hostelry of Mr. Smith I dont know whether you know Mariposa. If not, it is of no consequence, for if you know Canada at all, you are probably well acquainted with a dozen towns just like it. There it lies in the sunlight, sloping up from the little lake that spreads out at the foot of the hillside on which the town is built. There is a wharf beside the lake, and lying alongside of it a steamer that is tied to the wharf with two ropes of about the same size as they use on the *Lusitania*. The steamer goes nowhere in particular, for the lake is landlocked and there is no navigation for the *Mariposa Belle* except to run trips on the first of July and the Queens Birthday, and to take excursions of the Knights of Pythias and the Sons of Temperance to and from the Local Option Townships. In point of geography the lake is called Lake Wissanotti and the river running out of it the Ossawippi, just as the main street of Mariposa is called Missinaba Street and the county Missinaba County. But these names do not really matter. Nobody uses them. People simply speak of the lake and the river and the main street, much in the same way as they always call the Continental Hotel, Pete Robinsons and the Pharmaceutical Hall, Eliots Drug Store. But I suppose this is just the same in every one elses town as in mine, so I need lay no stress on it. The town, I say, has one broad street that runs up from the lake, commonly called the Main Street. There is no doubt about its width. When Mariposa was laid out there was none of that shortsightedness which is seen in the cramped dimensions of Wall Street and Piccadilly. Missinaba Street is so wide that if you were to roll Jeff Thorpes barber shop over on its face it wouldnt reach half way across. Up and down the Main Street are telegraph poles of cedar of colossal thickness, standing at a variety of angles and carrying rather more wires than are commonly seen at a transatlantic cable station. On the Main Street itself are a number of buildings of extraordinary importance, Smiths Hotel and the Continental and the Mariposa House, and the two banks (the Commercial and the Exchange), to say nothing of McCarthys Block (erected in 1878), and Glovers Hardware Store with the Oddfellows Hall above it. Then on the cross street that intersects Missinaba Street at the main corner there is the Post Office and the Fire Hall and the Young Mens Christian Association and the office of the Mariposa Newspacket, in fact, to the eye of discernment a perfect jostle of public institutions comparable only to Threadneedle Street or Lower Broadway. On all the side streets there are maple trees and broad sidewalks, trim gardens with upright calla lilies, houses with verandahs, which are here and there being replaced by residences with piazzas. To the careless eye the scene on the Main Street of a summer afternoon is one of deep and unbroken peace. The empty street sleeps in the sunshine. There is a horse and buggy tied to the hitching post in front of Glovers hardware store. proprietor of Smiths Hotel, standing in his chequered waistcoat on the steps of his hostelry, and perhaps, further up the street, Lawyer Macartney going for his afternoon mail, or the Rev. Mr. Drone, the Rural Dean of the Church of England Church, going home to get his fishing rod after a mothers auxiliary meeting. But this quiet is mere appearance. In reality, and to those who know it, the place is a perfect hive of activity. Why, at Netleys butcher shop (established in 1882) there are no less than four men working on the sausage machines in the basement; at the Newspacket office there are as many more jobprinting; there is a long distance telephone with four distracting girls on high stools wearing steel caps and talking incessantly; in the offices in McCarthys block are dentists and lawyers with their coats off, ready to work at any moment; and from the big planing factory down beside the lake where the railroad siding is, you may hear all through the hours of the summer afternoon the long-drawn music of the running saw. Busy well, I should think so! Ask any of its inhabitants if Mariposa isnt a busy, hustling, thriving town. Ask Mullins, the manager of the Exchange Bank, who comes hustling over to his office from the Mariposa House every day at 10.30 and has scarcely time all morning to go out and take a drink with the manager of the Commercial; or ask well, for the matter of that, ask any of them if they ever knew a more rushing go-a-head town than Mariposa. Of course if you come to the place fresh from New York, you are deceived. Your standard of vision is all astray. You do think the place is quiet. You do imagine that Mr. Smith is asleep merely because he closes his eyes as he stands. But live in Mariposa for six months or a year and then you will begin to understand it better; the buildings get higher and higher; the Mariposa House grows more and more luxurious; McCarthys block towers to the sky; the buses roar and hum to the station; the trains shriek; the traffic multiplies; the people move faster and faster; a dense crowd swirls to and fro in the post-office and the five and ten cent store and amusements! Well, now! Lacrosse, baseball, excursions, dances, the Firemans Ball every winter and the Catholic picnic every summer; and music the town band in the park every Wednesday evening, and the Oddfellows brass band on the street every other Friday; the Mariposa Quartette, the Salvation Army why,

after a few months residence you begin to realize that the place is a mere mad round of gaiety. In point of population, if one must come down to figures, the Canadian census puts the numbers every time at something round five thousand. But it is very generally understood in Mariposa that the census is largely the outcome of malicious jealousy. It is usual that after the census the editor of the Mariposa Newspacket makes a careful re-estimate (based on the data of relative non-payment of subscriptions), and brings the population up to 6,000. After that the Mariposa Times-Herald makes an estimate that runs the figures up to 6,500. Then Mr. Gingham, the undertaker, who collects the vital statistics for the provincial government, makes an estimate from the number of what he calls the demised as compared with the less interesting persons who are still alive, and brings the population to 7,000. After that somebody else works it out that its 7,500; then the man behind the bar of the Mariposa House offers to bet the whole room that there are 9,000 people in Mariposa. That settles it, and the population is well on the way to 10,000, when down swoops the federal census taker on his next round and the town has to still, it is a thriving town and there is no doubt of it. Even the transcontinental railways, as any townsman will tell you, run through Mariposa. It is true that the trains mostly go through at night and don't stop. But in the wakeful silence of the summer night you may hear the long whistle of the through train for the west as it tears through Mariposa, rattling over the switches and past the semaphores and ending in a long, sullen roar as it takes the trestle bridge over the Ossawippi. Or, better still, on a winter evening about eight o'clock you will see the long row of the Pullmans and diners of the night express going north to the mining country, the windows flashing with brilliant light, and within them a vista of cut glass and snow-white table linen, smiling negroes and millionaires with napkins at their chins whirling past in the driving snowstorm. I can tell you the people of Mariposa are proud of the trains, even if they don't stop! The joy of being on the main line lifts the Mariposa people above the level of their neighbours in such places as Tecumseh and Nichols Corners into the cosmopolitan atmosphere of through traffic and the larger life. Of course, they have their own train, too the Mariposa Local, made up right there in the station yard, and running south to the city a hundred miles away. That, of course, is a real train, with a box stove on end in the passenger car, fed with cordwood upside down, and with seventeen flat cars of pine lumber set between the passenger car and the locomotive so as to give the train its full impact when shunting. Outside of Mariposa there are farms that begin well but get thinner and meaner as you go on, and end sooner or later in bush and swamp and the rock of the north country. And beyond that again, as the background of it all, though its far away, you are somehow aware of the great pine woods of the lumber country reaching endlessly into the north. Not that the little town is always gay or always bright in the sunshine. There never was such a place for changing its character with the season. Dark enough and dull it seems of a winter night, the wooden sidewalks creaking with the frost, and the lights burning dim behind the shop windows. In olden times the lights were coal oil lamps; now, of course, they are, or are supposed to be, electricity, brought from the power house on the lower Ossawippi nineteen miles away. But, somehow, though it starts off as electricity from the Ossawippi rapids, by the time it gets to Mariposa and filters into the little bulbs behind the frosty windows of the shops, it has turned into coal oil again, as yellow and bleared as ever. After the winter, the snow melts and the ice goes out of the lake, the sun shines high and the shanty-men come down from the lumber woods and lie round drunk on the sidewalk outside of Smiths Hotel and that's spring time. Mariposa is then a fierce, dangerous lumber town, calculated to terrorize the soul of a newcomer who does not understand that this also is only an appearance and that presently the rough-looking shantymen will change their clothes and turn back again into farmers. Then the sun shines warmer and the maple trees come out and Lawyer Macartney puts on his tennis trousers, and that's summer time. The little town changes to a sort of summer resort. There are visitors up from the city. Every one of the seven cottages along the lake is full. The Mariposa Belle churns the waters of the Wissanotti into foam as she sails out from the wharf, in a cloud of flags, the band playing and the daughters and sisters of the Knights of Pythias dancing gaily on the deck. That changes too. The days shorten. The visitors disappear. The golden rod beside the meadow droops and withers on its stem. The maples blaze in glory and die. The evening closes dark and chill, and in the gloom of the main corner of Mariposa the Salvation Army around a naphtha lamp lift up the confession of their sins and that is autumn. Thus the year runs its round, moving and changing in Mariposa, much as it does in other places. If, then, you feel that you know the town well enough to be admitted into the inner life and movement of it, walk down this June afternoon half way down the Main Street or, if you like, half way up from the wharf to where Mr. Smith is standing at the door of his hostelry. You will feel as you draw near that it is no ordinary man that you approach. It is not alone the huge bulk of Mr. Smith (two hundred and eighty pounds as tested on Netleys scales). It is not merely his costume, though the chequered

waistcoat of dark blue with a flowered pattern forms, with his shepherds plaid trousers, his grey spats and patent-leather boots, a colour scheme of no mean order. Nor is it merely Mr. Smiths finely mottled face. The face, no doubt, is a notable one, solemn, inexpressible, unreadable, the face of the heaven-born hotel keeper.

It is more than that. It is the strange dominating personality of the man that somehow holds you captive. I know nothing in history to compare with the position of Mr. Smith among those who drink over his bar, except, though in a lesser degree, the relation of the Emperor Napoleon to the Imperial Guard. When you meet Mr. Smith first you think he looks like an over-dressed pirate. Then you begin to think him a character. You wonder at his enormous bulk. Then the utter hopelessness of knowing what Smith is thinking by merely

looking at his features gets on your mind and makes the Mona Lisa seem an open book and the ordinary human countenance as superficial as a puddle in the sunlight. After you have had a drink in Mr. Smiths bar, and he has called you by your Christian name, you realize that you are dealing with one of the greatest minds in the hotel business. Take, for instance, the big sign that sticks out into the street above Mr. Smiths head as he stands. What is on it? jos. smith, prop. Nothing more, and yet the thing was a flash of genius. Other men who had had the hotel before Mr. Smith had called it by such feeble names as the Royal Hotel and the Queens and the Alexandria. Every one of them failed. When Mr. Smith took over the hotel he simply put up the sign with jos. smith, prop., and then stood underneath in the sunshine as a living proof that a man who weighs nearly three hundred pounds is the natural king of the hotel business. But on this particular afternoon, in spite of the sunshine and deep peace, there was something as near to profound concern and anxiety as the features of Mr. Smith were ever known to express. The moment was indeed an anxious one. Mr. Smith was awaiting a telegram from his legal adviser who had that day journeyed to the county town to represent the proprietors interest before the assembled License Commissioners. If you know anything of the hotel business at all, you will understand that as beside the decisions of the License Commissioners of Missinaba County, the opinion of the Lords of the Privy Council are mere trifles. The matter in question was very grave.

The Mariposa Court had just fined Mr. Smith for the second time for selling liquors after hours. The Commissioners, therefore, were entitled to cancel the license. Mr. Smith knew his fault and acknowledged it. He had broken the law. How he had come to do so, it passed his imagination to recall. Crime always seems impossible in retrospect. By what sheer madness of the moment could he have shut up the bar on the night in question, and shut Judge Pepperleigh, the district judge in Missinaba County, outside of it? The more so inasmuch as the closing up of the bar under the rigid license law of the province was a matter that the proprietor never trusted to any hands but his own. Punctually every night at 11 o'clock Mr. Smith strolled from the desk of the rotunda to the door of the bar. If it seemed properly full of people and all was bright and cheerful, then he closed it. If not, he kept it open a few minutes longer till he had enough people inside to warrant closing. But never, never unless he was assured that Pepperleigh, the judge of the court, and Macartney, the prosecuting attorney, were both safely in the bar, or the bar parlour, did the proprietor venture to close up. Yet on this fatal night Pepperleigh and Macartney had been shut out actually left on the street without a drink, and compelled to hammer and beat at the street door of the bar to gain admittance. This was the kind of thing not to be tolerated. Either a hotel must be run decently or quit. An information was laid next day and Mr. Smith convicted in four minutes, his lawyers practically refusing to plead. The Mariposa court, when the presiding judge was cold sober, and it had the force of public opinion behind it, was a terrible engine of retributive justice. So no wonder that Mr. Smith awaited with anxiety the message of his legal adviser. He looked alternately up the street and down it again, hauled out his watch from the depths of his embroidered pocket, and examined the hour hand and the minute hand and the second hand with frowning scrutiny. Then wearily, and as one mindful that a hotel man is ever the servant of the public, he turned back into the hotel. Billy, he said to the desk clerk, if a wire comes bring it into the bar parlour. The voice of Mr. Smith is of a deep guttural such as Plancon or Edouard de Reske might have obtained had they had the advantages of the hotel business. And with that, Mr. Smith, as was his custom in off moments, joined his guests in the back room. His appearance, to the untrained eye, was merely that of an extremely stout hotelkeeper walking from the rotunda to the back bar. In reality, Mr. Smith was on the eve of one of the most brilliant and daring strokes ever effected in the history of licensed liquor. When I say that it was out of the agitation of this situation that Smiths Ladies and Gents Caf originated, anybody who knows Mariposa will understand the magnitude of the moment. Mr. Smith, then, moved slowly from the doorway of the hotel through the rotunda, or more simply the front room with the desk and the cigar case in it, and so to the bar and thence to the little room or back bar behind it. In this room, as I have said, the brightest minds of Mariposa might commonly be found in the quieter part of a summer afternoon. To-day there was a group of

four who looked up as Mr. Smith entered, somewhat sympathetically, and evidently aware of the perplexities of the moment. Henry Mullins and George Duff, the two bank managers, were both present. Mullins is a rather short, rather round, smooth-shaven man of less than forty, wearing one of those round banking suits of pepper and salt, with a round banking hat of hard straw, and with the kind of gold tie-pin and heavy watch-chain and seals necessary to inspire confidence in matters of foreign exchange. Duff is just as round and just as short, and equally smoothly shaven, while his seals and straw hat are calculated to prove that the Commercial is just as sound a bank as the Exchange. From the technical point of view of the banking business, neither of them had any objection to being in Smiths Hotel or to taking a drink as long as the other was present. This, of course, was one of the cardinal principles of Mariposa banking. Then there was Mr. Diston, the high school teacher, commonly known as the one who drank. None of the other teachers ever entered a hotel unless accompanied by a lady or protected by a child. But as Mr. Diston was known to drink beer on occasions and to go in and out of the Mariposa House and Smiths Hotel, he was looked upon as a man whose life was a mere wreck. Whenever the School Board raised the salaries of the other teachers, fifty or sixty dollars per annum at one lift, it was well understood that public morality wouldnt permit of an increase for Mr. Diston. Still more noticeable, perhaps, was the quiet, sallow looking man dressed in black, with black gloves and with black silk hat heavily craped and placed hollow-side-up on a chair. This was Mr. Golgotha Gingham, the undertaker of Mariposa, and his dress was due to the fact that he had just come from what he called an interment. Mr. Gingham had the true spirit of his profession, and such words as funeral or coffin or hearse never passed his lips. He spoke always of interments, of caskets, and coaches, using terms that were calculated rather to bring out the majesty and sublimity of death than to parade its horrors. To be present at the hotel was in accord with Mr. Ginghams general conception of his business. No man had ever grasped the true principles of undertaking more thoroughly than Mr. Gingham. I have often heard him explain that to associate with the living, uninteresting though they appear, is the only way to secure the custom of the dead. Get to know people really well while they are alive, said Mr. Gingham; be friends with them, close friends, and then when they die you dont need to worry. Youll get the order every time. So, naturally, as the moment was one of sympathy, it was Mr. Gingham who spoke first. Whatll you do, Josh, he said, if the Commissioners go against you? Boys, said Mr. Smith, I dont rightly know. If I have to quit, the next move is to the city. But I dont reckon that I will have to quit. Ive got an idee that I thinks good every time. Could you run a hotel in the city? asked Mullins. I could, said Mr. Smith. Ill tell you. Theres big things doin in the hotel business right now, big chances if you go into it right. Hotels in the city is branching out. Why, you take the dining-room side of it, continued Mr. Smith, looking round at the group, theres thousands in it. The old plans all gone. Folks wont eat now in an ordinary dining-room with a high ceiling and windows. You have to get em down underground in a room with no windows and lots of sawdust round and waiters that cant speak English. I seen them places last time I was in the city. They call em Rats Coolers. And for light meals they want a Caff, a real French Caff, and for folks that come in late another place that they call a Girl Room that dont shut up at all. If I go to the city thats the kind of place I mean to run. Whats yours, Gol? Its on the house. And it was just at the moment when Mr. Smith said this that Billy, the desk-clerk, entered the room with the telegram in his hand. But stop it is impossible for you to understand the anxiety with which Mr. Smith and his associates awaited the news from the Commissioners, without first realizing the astounding progress of Mr. Smith in the three past years, and the pinnacle of public eminence to which he had attained. Mr. Smith had come down from the lumber country of the Spanish River, where the divide is toward the Hudson Bay, back north as they called it in Mariposa. He had been, it was said, a cook in the lumber shanties. To this day Mr. Smith can fry an egg on both sides with a lightness of touch that is the despair of his own help. After that, he had run a river drivers boarding-house. After that, he had taken a food contract for a gang of railroad navvies on the transcontinental. After that, of course, the whole world was open to him. He came down to Mariposa and bought out the inside of what had been the Royal Hotel. Those who are educated understand that by the inside of a hotel is meant everything except the four outer walls of it the fittings, the furniture, the bar, Billy the desk clerk, the three dining-room girls, and above all the license granted by King Edward VII, and ratified further by King George, for the sale of intoxicating liquors. Till then the Royal had been a mere nothing. As Smiths Hotel it broke into a blaze of effulgence. From the first, Mr. Smith, as a proprietor, was a wild, rapturous success. He had all the qualifications. He weighed two hundred and eighty pounds. He could haul two drunken men out of the bar each by the scruff of the neck without the faintest anger or excitement. He carried money enough in his trousers pockets to start a bank, and spent it on anything, bet it on anything, and gave it away in handfuls. He

was never drunk, and, as a point of chivalry to his customers, never quite sober. Anybody was free of the hotel who cared to come in. Anybody who didnt like it could go out. Drinks of all kinds cost five cents, or six for a quarter. Meals and beds were practically free. Any persons foolish enough to go to the desk and pay for them, Mr. Smith charged according to the expression of their faces. At first the loafers and the shanty men settled down on the place in a shower. But that was not the trade that Mr. Smith wanted. He knew how to get rid of them. An army of charwomen, turned into the hotel, scrubbed it from top to bottom. A vacuum cleaner, the first seen in Mariposa, hissed and screamed in the corridors. Forty brass beds were imported from the city, not, of course, for the guests to sleep in, but to keep them out. A bar-tender with a starched coat and wicker sleeves was put behind the bar. The loafers were put out of business. The place had become too high toned for them. To get the high class trade, Mr. Smith set himself to dress the part. He wore wide cut coats of filmy serge, light as gossamer; chequered waistcoats with a pattern for every day in the week; fedora hats light as autumn leaves; four-in-hand ties of saffron and myrtle green with a diamond pin the size of a hazelnut. On his fingers there were as many gems as would grace a native prince of India; across his waistcoat lay a gold watch-chain in huge square links and in his pocket a gold watch that weighed a pound and a half and marked minutes, seconds and quarter seconds. Just to look at Josh Smiths watch brought at least ten men to the bar every evening. Every morning Mr. Smith was shaved by Jefferson Thorpe, across the way. All that art could do, all that Florida water could effect, was lavished on his person. Mr. Smith became a local character. Mariposa was at his feet. All the reputable businessmen drank at Mr. Smiths bar, and in the little parlour behind it you might find at any time a group of the brightest intellects in the town. Not but what there was opposition at first. The clergy, for example, who accepted the Mariposa House and the Continental as a necessary and useful evil, looked askance at the blazing lights and the surging crowd of Mr. Smiths saloon. They preached against him. When the Rev. Dean Drone led off with a sermon on the text Lord be merciful even unto this publican Matthew Six, it was generally understood as an invitation to strike Mr. Smith dead. In the same way the sermon at the Presbyterian church the week after was on the text Lo what now doeth Abiram in the land of Melchisideck Kings Eight and Nine? and it was perfectly plain that what was meant was, Lo, what is Josh Smith doing in Mariposa? But this opposition had been countered by a wide and sagacious philanthropy. I think Mr. Smith first got the idea of that on the night when the steam merry-go-round came to Mariposa. Just below the hostelry, on an empty lot, it whirled and whistled, steaming forth its tunes on the summer evening while the children crowded round it in hundreds. Down the street strolled Mr. Smith, wearing a soft fedora to indicate that it was evening. What dyou charge for a ride, boss? said Mr. Smith. Two for a nickel, said the man. Take that, said Mr. Smith, handing out a ten-dollar bill from a roll of money, and ride the little folks free all evening. That night the merry-go-round whirled madly till after midnight, freighted to capacity with Mariposa children, while up in Smiths Hotel, parents, friends and admirers, as the news spread, were standing four deep along the bar. They sold forty dollars worth of lager alone that night, and Mr. Smith learned, if he had not already suspected it, the blessedness of giving. The uses of philanthropy went further. Mr. Smith subscribed to everything, joined everything, gave to everything. He became an Oddfellow, a Forester, A Knight of Pythias and a Workman. He gave a hundred dollars to the Mariposa Hospital and a hundred dollars to the Young Mens Christian Association. He subscribed to the Ball Club, the Lacrosse Club, the Curling Club, to anything, in fact, and especially to all those things which needed premises to meet in and grew thirsty in their discussions. As a consequence the Oddfellows held their annual banquet at Smiths Hotel and the Oyster Supper of the Knights of Pythias was celebrated in Mr. Smiths dining-room. Even more effective, perhaps, were Mr. Smiths secret benefactions, the kind of giving done by stealth of which not a soul in town knew anything, often, for a week after it was done. It was in this way that Mr. Smith put the new font in Dean Drones church, and handed over a hundred dollars to Judge Pepperleigh for the unrestrained use of the Conservative party. So it came about that, little by little, the antagonism had died down. Smiths Hotel became an accepted institution in Mariposa. Even the temperance people were proud of Mr. Smith as a sort of character who added distinction to the town. There were moments, in the earlier quiet of the morning, when Dean Drone would go so far as to step in to the rotunda and collect a subscription. As for the Salvation Army, they ran in and out all the time unreprieved. On only one point difficulty still remained. That was the closing of the bar. Mr. Smith could never bring his mind to it, not as a matter of profit, but as a point of honour. It was too much for him to feel that Judge Pepperleigh might be out on the sidewalk thirsty at midnight, that the night hands of the Times-Herald on Wednesday might be compelled to go home dry. On this point Mr. Smiths moral code was simplicity itself, do what is right and take the consequences. So the bar stayed open. Every town, I suppose, has its meaner

spirits. In every genial bosom some snake is warmed, or, as Mr. Smith put it to Golgotha Gingham there are some fellers even in this town skunks enough to inform. At first the Mariposa court quashed all indictments. The presiding judge, with his spectacles on and a pile of books in front of him, threatened the informer with the penitentiary. The whole bar of Mariposa was with Mr. Smith. But by sheer iteration the informations had proved successful. Judge Pepperleigh learned that Mr. Smith had subscribed a hundred dollars for the Liberal party and at once fined him for keeping open after hours. That made one conviction. On the top of this had come the untoward incident just mentioned and that made two. Beyond that was the deluge. This then was the exact situation when Billy, the desk clerk, entered the back bar with the telegram in his hand. Here's your wire, sir, he said. What does it say? said Mr. Smith. He always dealt with written documents with a fine air of detachment. I don't suppose there were ten people in Mariposa who knew that Mr. Smith couldn't read. Billy opened the message and read, Commissioners give you three months to close down. Let me read it, said Mr. Smith, that's right, three months to close down. There was dead silence when the message was read. Everybody waited for Mr. Smith to speak. Mr. Gingham instinctively assumed the professional air of hopeless melancholy. As it was afterwards recorded, Mr. Smith stood and studied with the tray in his hand for at least four minutes. Then he spoke. Boys, he said, I'll be darned if I close down till I'm ready to close down. I've got an idea. You wait and I'll show you. And beyond that, not another word did Mr. Smith say on the subject. But within forty-eight hours the whole town knew that something was doing. The hotel swarmed with carpenters, bricklayers and painters. There was an architect up from the city with a bundle of blueprints in his hand. There was an engineer taking the street level with a theodolite, and a gang of navvies with shovels digging like fury as if to dig out the back foundations of the hotel. That'll fool 'em, said Mr. Smith. Half the town was gathered round the hotel crazy with excitement. But not a word would the proprietor say. Great dray loads of square timber, and two-by-eight pine joists kept arriving from the planing mill. There was a pile of matched spruce sixteen feet high lying by the sidewalk. Then the excavation deepened and the dirt flew, and the beams went up and the joists across, and all the day from dawn till dusk the hammers of the carpenters clattered away, working overtime at time and a half. It don't matter what it costs, said Mr. Smith; get it done. Rapidly the structure took form. It extended down the side street, joining the hotel at a right angle. Spacious and graceful it looked as it reared its uprights into the air. Already you could see the place where the row of windows was to come, a veritable palace of glass, it must be, so wide and commodious were they. Below it, you could see the basement shaping itself, with a low ceiling like a vault and big beams running across, dressed, smoothed, and ready for staining. Already in the street there were seven crates of red and white awning. And even then nobody knew what it was, and it was not till the seventeenth day that Mr. Smith, in the privacy of the back bar, broke the silence and explained. I tell you, boys, he says, it's a caff like what they have in the city a ladies and gents caff, and that underneath (what's yours, Mr. Mullins?) is a Rats Cooler. And when I get her started, I'll hire a French Chief to do the cooking, and for the winter I will put in a girl room, like what they have in the city hotels. And I'd like to see whos going to close her up then. Within two more weeks the plan was in operation. Not only was the caff built but the very hotel was transformed. Awnings had broken out in a red and white cloud upon its face, its every window carried a box of hanging plants, and above in glory floated the Union Jack. The very stationery was changed. The place was now Smith's Summer Pavilion. It was advertised in the city as Smith's Tourists Emporium, and Smith's Northern Health Resort. Mr. Smith got the editor of the Times-Herald to write up a circular all about ozone and the Mariposa pine woods, with illustrations of the maskinonge (piscis mariposis) of Lake Wissanotti. The Saturday after that circular hit the city in July, there were men with fishing rods and landing nets pouring in on every train, almost too fast to register. And if, in the face of that, a few little drops of whiskey were sold over the bar, who thought of it? But the caff! that, of course, was the crowning glory of the thing, that and the Rats Cooler below. Light and cool, with swinging windows open to the air, tables with marble tops, palms, waiters in white coats it was the standing marvel of Mariposa. Not a soul in the town except Mr. Smith, who knew it by instinct, ever guessed that waiters and palms and marble tables can be rented over the long distance telephone. Mr. Smith was as good as his word. He got a French Chief with an aristocratic saturnine countenance, and a moustache and imperial that recalled the late Napoleon III. No one knew where Mr. Smith got him. Some people in the town said he was a French marquis. Others said he was a count and explained the difference. No one in Mariposa had ever seen anything like the caff. All down the side of it were the grill fires, with great pewter dish covers that went up and down on a chain, and you could walk along the row and actually pick out your own cutlet and then see the French marquis throw it on to the broiling iron; you could watch a buckwheat pancake whirled into existence under your eyes and see fowls

legs devilled, peppered, grilled, and tormented till they lost all semblance of the original Mariposa chicken. Mr. Smith, of course, was in his glory. What have you got to-day, Alf? he would say, as he strolled over to the marquis. The name of the Chief was, I believe Alphonse, but Alf was near enough for Mr. Smith. The marquis would extend to the proprietor the menu, *Voil, msieu, la carte du jour*. Mr. Smith, by the way, encouraged the use of the French language in the caff. He viewed it, of course, solely in its relation to the hotel business, and, I think, regarded it as a recent invention. Its comin in all the time in the city, he said, and yaint expected to understand it. Mr. Smith would take the carte between his finger and thumb and stare at it. It was all covered with such devices as *Potage la Mariposa Filet Mignon la proprietaire Ctelle la Smith*, and so on. But the greatest thing about the caff were the prices. Therein lay, as everybody saw at once, the hopeless simplicity of Mr. Smith. The prices stood fast at 25 cents a meal. You could come in and eat all they had in the caff for a quarter. No, sir, Mr. Smith said stoutly, I aint going to try to raise no prices on the public. The hotels always been a quarter and the caff s a quarter. Full? Full of people? Well, I should think so! From the time the caff opened at 11 till it closed at 8.30, you could hardly find a table. Tourists, visitors, travellers, and half the people of Mariposa crowded at the little tables; crockery rattling, glasses tinkling on trays, corks popping, the waiters in their white coats flying to and fro, Alphonse whirling the cutlets and pancakes into the air, and in and through it all, Mr. Smith, in a white flannel suit and a broad crimson sash about his waist. Crowded and gay from morning to night, and even noisy in its hilarity. Noisy, yes; but if you wanted deep quiet and cool, if you wanted to step from the glare of a Canadian August to the deep shadow of an enchanted glade, walk down below into the Rats Cooler. There you had it; dark old beams (who could believe they were put there a month ago?), great casks set on end with legends such as *Amontillado Fino* done in gilt on a black ground, tall steins filled with German beer soft as moss, and a German waiter noiseless as moving foam. He who entered the Rats Cooler at three of a summer afternoon was buried there for the day. Mr. Golgotha Gingham spent anything from four to seven hours there of every day. In his mind the place had all the quiet charm of an interment, with none of its sorrows. But at night, when Mr. Smith and Billy, the desk clerk, opened up the cash register and figured out the combined losses of the caff and the Rats Cooler, Mr. Smith would say: Billy, just wait till I get the license renood, and Ill close up this damn caff so tight theyll never know what hit her. What did that lamb cost? Fifty cents a pound, was it? I figure it, Billy, that every one of them hogs eats about a dollars worth a grub for every twenty-five cents they pay on it. As for Alf by gosh, Im through with him. But that, of course, was only a confidential matter as between Mr. Smith and Billy. I dont know at what precise period it was that the idea of a petition to the License Commissioners first got about the town. No one seemed to know just who suggested it. But certain it was that public opinion began to swing strongly towards the support of Mr. Smith. I think it was perhaps on the day after the big fish dinner that Alphonse cooked for the Mariposa Canoe Club (at twenty cents a head) that the feeling began to find open expression. People said it was a shame that a man like Josh Smith should be run out of Mariposa by three license commissioners. Who were the license commissioners, anyway? Why, look at the license system they had in Sweden; yes, and in Finland and in South America. Or, for the matter of that, look at the French and Italians, who drink all day and all night. Arent they all right? Arent they a musical people? Take Napoleon, and Victor Hugo; drunk half the time, and yet look what they did. I quote these arguments not for their own sake, but merely to indicate the changing temper of public opinion in Mariposa. Men would sit in the caff at lunch perhaps for an hour and a half and talk about the license question in general, and then go down into the Rats Cooler and talk about it for two hours more. It was amazing the way the light broke in in the case of particular individuals, often the most unlikely, and quelled their opposition. Take, for example, the editor of the *Newspacket*. I suppose there wasnt a greater temperance advocate in town. Yet Alphonse queered him with an *Omelette la License* in one meal. Or take Pepperleigh himself, the judge of the Mariposa court. He was put to the bad with a game pie, *pt normand aux fines herbes* the real thing, as good as a trip to Paris in itself. After eating it, Pepperleigh had the common sense to realize that it was sheer madness to destroy a hotel that could cook a thing like that. In the same way, the secretary of the School Board was silenced with a stuffed duck *la Ossawippi*. Three members of the town council were converted with a *Dindon farci la Josh Smith*. And then, finally, Mr. Diston persuaded Dean Drone to come, and as soon as Mr. Smith and Alphonse saw him they landed him with a fried flounder that even the apostles would have appreciated. After that, every one knew that the license question was practically settled. The petition was all over the town. It was printed in duplicate at the *Newspacket* and you could see it lying on the counter of every shop in Mariposa. Some of the people signed it twenty or thirty times. It was the right kind of document too. It began *Whereas in the bounty of providence the earth putteth forth her*

luscious fruits and her vineyards for the delight and enjoyment of mankind It made you thirsty just to read it. Any man who read that petition over was wild to get to the Rats Cooler. When it was all signed up they had nearly three thousand names on it. Then Nivens, the lawyer, and Mr. Gingham (as a provincial official) took it down to the county town, and by three o'clock that afternoon the news had gone out from the long distance telephone office that Smith's license was renewed for three years. Rejoicings! Well, I should think so!

Everybody was down wanting to shake hands with Mr. Smith. They told him that he had done more to boom

Mariposa than any ten men in town. Some of them said he ought to run for the town council, and others wanted to make him the Conservative candidate for the next Dominion election. The caff was a mere babel of voices, and even the Rats Cooler was almost floated away from its moorings. And in the middle of it all,

Mr. Smith found time to say to Billy, the desk clerk: Take the cash registers out of the caff and the Rats Cooler and start counting up the books. And Billy said: Will I write the letters for the palms and the tables and the stuff to go back? And Mr. Smith said: Get em written right away. So all evening the laughter and the chatter and the congratulations went on, and it wasn't till long after midnight that Mr. Smith was able to join

Billy in the private room behind the rotunda. Even when he did, there was a quiet and a dignity about his manner that had never been there before. I think it must have been the new halo of the Conservative candidacy that already radiated from his brow. It was, I imagine, at this very moment that Mr. Smith first realised that the hotel business formed the natural and proper threshold of the national legislature. Here's the

account of the cash registers, said Billy. Let me see it, said Mr. Smith. And he studied the figures without a word. And here's the letters about the palms, and here's Alphonse up to yesterday. And then an amazing thing happened. Billy, said Mr. Smith, tear em up. I aint going to do it. It aint right and I wont do it. They got me

the license for to keep the caff and Im going to keep the caff. I dont need to close her. The bars good for anything from forty to a hundred a day now, with the Rats Cooler going good, and that caff will stay right here. And stay it did. There it stands, mind you, to this day. Youve only to step round the corner of Smith's

Hotel on the side street and read the sign: ladies and gents caf, just as large and as imposing as ever. Mr. Smith said that hed keep the caff, and when he said a thing he meant it! Of course there were changes, small changes. I dont say, mind you, that the fillet de beef that you get there now is perhaps quite up to the level of the filet de boeufs aux champignons of the days of glory. No doubt the lamb chops in Smith's Caff are often

very much the same, nowadays, as the lamb chops of the Mariposa House or the Continental. Of course, things like Omelette aux Truffles practically died out when Alphonse went. And, naturally, the leaving of Alphonse was inevitable. No one knew just when he went, or why. But one morning he was gone. Mr. Smith

said that Alf had to go back to his folks in the old country. So, too, when Alf left, the use of the French language, as such, fell off tremendously in the caff. Even now they use it to some extent. You can still get fillet de beef, and saucisson au juice, but Billy the desk clerk has considerable trouble with the spelling. The

Rats Cooler, of course, closed down, or rather Mr. Smith closed it for repairs, and there is every likelihood that it will hardly open for three years. But the caff is there. They dont use the grills, because theres no need to, with the hotel kitchen so handy. The girl room, I may say, was never opened. Mr. Smith promised it, it is

true, for the winter, and still talks of it. But somehow theres been a sort of feeling against it. Every one in town admits that every big hotel in the city has a girl room and that it must be all right. Still, theres a certain

well, you know how sensitive opinion is in a place like Mariposa. From AudioFile Long before Lake Wobegon became part of our collective fictional geography, there must've been other lakes on the radio. And

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