

PRACTICAL JOKES PROVE SERIOUS

LONG AND SHOCKING LIST OF FATALITIES WHICH HAVE FOLLOWED EFFORTS TO BE "FUNNY"

**Workman's Awful Fate in Factory—
Lockjaw Followed Firecracker "Joke"—
"Ghost" Caused Serious Runaway—
Driven to Suicide by "Joke" Route
—Case of Hydrophobia.**

This is the curious and time-honored description of a certain form of incident. Sometimes the incident means some one's discomfiture. Sometimes it means his distress or his ruin. Sometimes it means death.

The other day Frank Gagner, a Polish worker in a plaster factory at West New Brighton, Staten Island, awoke from sleep on the floor of the factory to meet a frightful fate.

While he had slept a joker had tied a rope to one of his legs. Someone—just who, it is for the police and the courts to determine—threw the end of a rope over a shaft. Perhaps the shaft was not then in motion. If it was in motion perhaps it was thought to frighten the sleeper by simply pulling the other end.

But the strands of the rope caught in the wheels and Gagner was drawn into the air screaming with terror and then whirled and banged until he was dead. The body was thrown violently to the floor, leaving a leg and arm still fastened to the whirling shaft.

The practical joke was over. The joker or jokers fled in horror. Another name was added to the long list of victims to the practical joke.

In the record of daily events in public print appear as many names of those who die from the unintentional violence of the fool joker as by the hand of the man who has murder in his heart.

Firecracker Fun.

A few days ago George W. Lester, an aged man, died in the Kings county hospital because he had the ill fortune to meet one of these jokers. He was dozing on the porch of a hotel when to scare him a lighted firecracker was placed under his chair. His leg was burned and death came from lockjaw.

The firecracker is a favorite instrument of destruction in the hands of the fool joker. By it he has slain and maimed many. Andrew Kirkpatrick was killed at Lanoconing, Md., by one of the usual Fourth-of-July jokes. He was carrying a giant firecracker under his arm when a young man applied a match to it. Kirkpatrick's side was torn open and he died in agony.

In the case of Miss Wilhelmina Smalley at New Brunswick, N. J., the firecracker was used as one of the means of the jokers to make themselves agreeable to a bride and bridegroom. It was thrown in Miss Smalley's hat where it exploded and set the hat and the girl's hair on fire. Prompt measures saved her life.

But of jokes with explosives the most serious was at the squib factory in Scranton, Pa. In that memorable case, five girls and one man were killed and many others dangerously wounded. The property loss was heavy, for the factory was almost totally destroyed.

It all came about from the idea of a girl at the lunch hour, that she could have some fun scaring her companions by exploding a squib in the stove. There was the not unusual miscalculation. The squib confined in the stove blew it to pieces and the flying sparks set off the store of powder in the room. The building seemed to heave up at the second explosion, and several girls ran into the street, their hair and dresses afire, screaming in agony.

"Really, it was only a joke," was the explanation of three men when they were arrested at Middleton, N. Y., and indicted for assault. They had tied Andrew Clark a nervous boy, in a stall with a kicking mule. The boy had convulsions and it was many days before the doctors pronounced him out of danger of losing his life by the joke.

"Ghost" Caused Runaway.

A white-robed figure appeared in the road in front of the carriage in which Frank Dally of Summit, Vt., was driving with the woman he had just made his wife. The "ghost" scared the horse, which ran away. When it was finally checked Dally suddenly threw up his arms over his head and fell limply across the dashboard. The jokers only learned of the tragic sequel when Mrs. Dally drove into town with the dead body of her husband.

Peter Kuhn, was frightened to death by weird noises in the night at Norris City, Ill. His body was found in bed in the morning with a look of horror on his face. A nail driven in a shingle of the roof above the head of his bed held a tin can, to which a long string had been attached. The "practical" jokers, by rubbing this string with risin, produced the sounds. Kuhn was

known by the jokers to be a firm believer in ghosts.

Some young men of Crowley, La., thought it was a good joke to lock Susan Washington in the room with an empty coffin. The girl thought so, too, at first, but became terrified when hours passed and all was still, the jokers having left her to spend the entire night in the room. She died a few hours after being released.

Of course people ought not to die of fright. Neither should they go crazy. Either results from the natural cheerfulness of the joker.

B. B. Messer, a farmer, 65 years old, at Huntington, W. Va., is hopelessly insane as the result of a joke played on him by his grandchildren. At a family reunion, six of his grandsons, ranging from 16 to 30 years of age, residing at a distance, planned, as a joke, that each should write the old man a letter the following week. Each was to express solicitude for his safety, since the writer had dreamed that his grandfather had died.

The letters arrived one by one. On Monday, came the first, Tuesday the second, Wednesday and Thursday like letters followed, all with the same dark foreboding. The matter preyed upon the old man's mind so heavily that by Saturday he lost his reason.

Driven to Suicide.

Frank Dawley, a mechanic at East Rochester, accidentally shot a neighbor in the thigh. The wound did not prove very serious, and Dawley was not arrested. Then the fool joker happened along. He told Dawley the man he shot was dying; that he would be surely arrested. Dawley took the "joke" seriously, went to his room, got a revolver, and told his wife he meant to kill himself. She took the weapon from him, but he found it again and fired it into his head.

A joker of the lying type told James H. Lacy of Wilmington, Del., that his brother had died at sea. Lacy became seized with hysterical convulsions, which resulted in his losing control of his vocal organs. He had come to town to meet his brother, but fell into the clutches of the fool joker, who represented himself as the first mate on his brother's ship that had just put into port. The shock so dazed Lacy that he fell into spasms of weeping, and later lost his power of speech.

A practical joker nearly killed William F. Jones of Boston, by one of the best known methods. Jones was with a fishing party at Arverne by the sea, when one of his companions drew a chair out from under him as he was about to sit down. Jones fell violently. He was taken to the Far Rockaway hospital in convulsions, suffering from injury to the spine.

James Loftus of Weehawken, a member of the Mercury Athletic club, lost his life by this same joke. A member of the club shifted his chair when he attempted to sit down. He died from spinal meningitis due to the injury he received in the fall.

The loaded cigarette is one of the old favorites of the practical joker. It cost Edward Weinschreiber of Williamsburg the thumb and two fingers of his left hand and sent him to the Catherine's hospital suffering from those and other wounds. A friend "fond of fun" had placed a cartridge in his cigarette.

Case of Hydrophobia.

"Are you ready to bark, Jack?" the joker friends of John McDonald, a silk operator at Patterson, called after him, following a tussle he had with a dog supposed to be mad, in which he was severely bitten. The jokers also barked when he came near. Only McDonald and his aged mother knew the torture of the bantering and his horrible conviction borne in on him stronger from day to day that in the end these jokes would come true. McDonald died two months after he was bitten in violent paroxysms of hydrophobia at St. Joseph's hospital.

Once in a while the practical joker pays with his own life for the fun of trying to scare some one else into fits. Mrs. W. S. Lane at Covington, Ky., saw some one stealthily moving about her room when she awoke at night. Fearing she was about to be attacked she seized a shotgun that was hanging near her bed and shot the intruder. She then found she had killed her son, who was dressed in a hallowe'en disguise, and had thought to give his mother a scare.

A jury in Philadelphia last month found Harry Norris guilty of murder in the second degree. Norris was a practical joker. It was as a joke, he now avers, that he "confessed" to the murder of Clara McGonnell, a young milliner. He says he made this "confession" to give his brother a shock. The jury took it seriously, however, and Norris is now serious himself.

Then there was Samuel Ayers, who arranged to "hold up" a friend in the dark cave at Pittsburg and to pretend robbery. Ayers and his companions wore masks and the play began. The only hitch in the joke was that the friend who was being robbed drew a revolver and shot Ayers dead.

An innate cruelty is at the bottom of many of the performances of the practical joker. Whether cruel or only thoughtless, the fool joker is a dangerous type, as this distressing record may serve to show.—Cleveland Plain Dealer.