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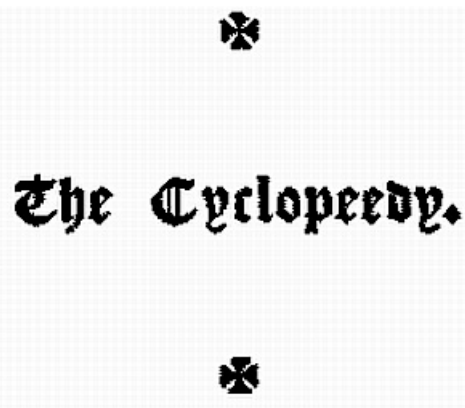
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THE CYCLOPEEDY.

Havin' lived next door to the Hobart place fr goin' on thirty years, I calc'late that I know jest about ez much about the case ez anybody else now on airth, exceptin' perhaps it's ol' Judge Baker, and he's so plaguey old 'nd so powerful feeble that *he* don't know nothin'.

It seems that in the spring uv '47—the year that Cy Watson's oldest boy wuz drowned in West River—there come along a book agent sellin' volyumes 'nd tracks fr the diffusion uv knowledge, 'nd havin' got the recommend of the minister 'nd uv the select men, he done an all-fired big business in our part uv the county. His name wuz Lemuel Higgins, 'nd he wuz ez likely a talker ez I ever heerd, barrin' Lawyer Conkey, 'nd everybody allowed that when Conkey wuz round he talked so fast that the town pump ud have to be greased every twenty minutes.

One of the first uv our folks that this Lemuel Higgins struck wuz Leander Hobart. Leander had jest marr'd one uv the Peasley girls, 'nd had moved into the old homestead on the Plainville road,—old Deacon Hobart havin' give up the place to him, the other boys havin' moved out West (like a lot o' darned fools that they wuz!). Leander wuz feelin' his oats jest about this time, 'nd nuthin' wuz too good fr him.

"Hattie," sez he, "I guess I'll have to lay in a few books fr readin' in the winter time, 'nd I've half a notion to subscribe fr a cyclopeedy. Mr. Higgins here says they're invalerable in a family, and that we orter have 'em, bein' as how we're likely to have the fam'ly bime by."

"Lor's sakes, Leander, how you talk!" sez Hattie, blushin' all over, ez brides allers does to heern tell uv sich things.

Waal, to make a long story short, Leander bargained with Mr. Higgins for a set uv them cyclopeedies, 'nd he signed his name to a long printed paper that showed how he agreed to take a cyclopeedy oncet in so often, which wuz to be ez often ez a new one uv the volyumes wuz printed. A cyclopeedy isn't printed all at oncet, because that would make it cost too much; consekently the man that gets it up has it strung along fur apart, so as to hit folks oncet every year or two, and gin'rally about harvest time. So Leander kind uv liked the idee, and he signed the printed paper 'nd made his affidavit to it afore Jedge Warner.

The fust volyume of the cyclopeedy stood on a shelf in the old seckertary in the settin'-room about four months before they had any use fr it. One night 'Squire Turner's son come over to visit Leander 'nd Hattie, and they got to talkin' about apples, 'nd the sort uv apples that wuz the best. Leander allowed that the Rhode Island greenin' wuz the best, but Hattie and the Turner boy stuck up fr the Roxbury russet, until at last a happy idee struck Leander, and sez he: "We'll leave it to the cyclopeedy, b'gosh! Whichever one the cyclopeedy sez is the best will settle it."

"But you can't find out nothin' 'bout Roxbury russets nor Rhode Island greenin's in *our* cyclopeedy," sez Hattie.

"Why not, I'd like to know?" sez Leander, kind uv indignant like.

"'Cause ours haint got down to the R yet," sez Hattie. "All ours tells about is things beginnin' with A."

"Well, aint we talkin' about Apples?" sez Leander. "You aggervate me terrible, Hattie, by insistin' on knowin' what you don't know nothin' 'bout."

Leander went to the seckertary 'nd took down the cyclopeedy 'nd hunted all through it fr Apples, but all he could find wuz "Apple—See Pomology."

"How in thunder kin I see Pomology," sez Leander, "when there aint no Pomology to see? Gol durn a cyclopeedy, anyhow!"

And he put the volyume back onto the shelf 'nd never sot eyes into it agin.

That's the way the thing run fr years 'nd years. Leander would've gin up the plaguey bargain, but he couldn't; he had signed a printed paper 'nd had swore to it afore a justice of the peace. Higgins would have had the law on him if he had throwed up the trade.

The most aggervatin' feature uv it all wuz that a new one uv them cussid cyclopeedies wuz allus sure to show up at the wrong time,—when Leander wuz hard up or had jest been afflicted some way or other. His barn burnt down two nights

afore the volyume containin' the letter B arrived, and Leander needed all his chink to pay fr lumber, but Higgins sot back on that affidavit and defied the life out uv him.

"Never mind, Leander," sez his wife, soothin' like, "it's a good book to have in the house, anyhow, now that we've got a baby."

"That's so," sez Leander, "babies does begin with B, don't it?"

You see their fust baby had been born; they named him Peasley,—Peasley Hobart,—after Hattie's folks. So, seein' as how it wuz payin' fr a book that told about babies, Leander didn't begrege that five dollars so very much after all.

"Leander," sez Hattie one forenoon, "that B cyclopeedy aint no account. There aint nothin' in it about babies except 'See Maternity!'"

"Waal, I'll be gosh durned!" sez Leander. That wuz all he said, and he couldn't do nothin' at all, fr that book agent, Lemuel Higgins, had the dead wood on him,—the mean, sneakin' critter!

So the years passed on, one of them cyclopeedies showin' up now 'nd then,—sometimes every two years 'nd sometimes every four, but allus at a time when Leander found it pesky hard to give up a fiver. It warn't no use cussin' Higgins; Higgins just laffed when Leander allowed that the cyclopeedy wuz no good 'nd that he wuz bein' robbed. Meantime Leander's family wuz increasin' and growin'. Little Sarey had the hoopin' cough dreadful one winter, but the cyclopeedy didn't help out at all, 'cause all it said wuz: "Hoopin' Cough—See Whoopin' Cough"—and uv course, there warn't no Whoopin' Cough to see, bein' as how the W hadn't come yet!

Oncet when Hiram wanted to dreem the home pasture, he went to the cyclopeedy to find out about it, but all he diskivered wuz: "Drain—See Tile." This wuz in 1859, and the cyclopeedy had only got down to G.

The cow wuz sick with lung fever one spell, and Leander laid her dyin' to that cussid cyclopeedy, 'cause when he went to readin' 'bout cows it told him to "See Zoölogy."

But what's the use uv harrowin' up one's feelin's talkin' 'nd thinkin' about these things? Leander got so after a while that the cyclopeedy didn't worry him at all: he grew to look at it ez one uv the crosses that human critters has to bear without complainin' through this vale uv tears. The only thing that bothered him wuz the fear that mebbe he wouldn't live to see the last volume,—to tell the truth, this kind uv got to be his hobby, and I've heern him talk 'bout it many a time settin' round the stove at the tarvern 'nd squirtin' tobacco juice at the sawdust box. His wife, Hattie, passed away with the yaller janders the winter W come, and all that seemed to reconcile Leander to survivin' her wuz the prospect uv seein' the last volyume uv that cyclopeedy. Lemuel Higgins, the book agent, had gone to his everlastin' punishment; but his son, Hiram, had succeeded to his father's business 'nd continued to visit the folks his old man had roped in. By this time Leander's children had growed up; all on 'em wuz marr'd, and there wuz numeris grandchildren to amuse the ol' gentleman. But Leander wuzn't to be satisfied with the common things uv airth; he didn't seem to take no pleasure in his grandchildren like most men do; his mind wuz allers sot on somethin' else,—for hours 'nd hours, yes, all day long, he'd set out on the front stoop lookin' wistfully up the road for that book agent to come along with a cyclopeedy. He didn't want to die till he'd got all the cyclopeedies his contract called for; he wanted to have everything straightened out before he passed away.

When—oh, how well I recollect it—when Y come along he wuz so overcome that he fell over in a fit uv paralysis, 'nd the old gentleman never got over it. For the next three years he drooped 'nd pined, and seemed like he couldn't hold out much longer. Finally he had to take to his bed,—he was so old 'nd feeble,—but he made 'em move the bed up aginst the winder so he could watch for that last volyume of the cyclopeedy.

The end come one balmy day in the spring uv '87. His life wuz a-ebbin' powerful fast; the minister wuz there, 'nd me, 'nd Dock Wilson, 'nd Jedge Baker, 'nd most uv the fam'ly. Lovin' hands smoothed the wrinkled forehead 'nd breshed back the long, scant, white hair, but the eyes of the dyin' man wuz sot upon that piece uv road down which the cyclopeedy man allus come.

All to oncet a bright 'nd joyful look come into them eyes, 'nd ol' Leander riz up in bed 'nd sez, "It's come!"

"What is it, Father?" asked his daughter Sarey, sobbin' like.

"Hush," sez the minister, solemnly; "he sees the shinin' gates uv the Noo Jerusalem."

"No, no," cried the aged man; "it is the cyclopeedy—the letter Z—it's comin'!"

And, sure enough! the door opened, and in walked Higgins. He tottered rather than walked, fr he had growed old 'nd feeble in his wicked perfession.

"Here's the Z cyclopeedy, Mr. Hobart," says Higgins.

Leander clutched it; he hugged it to his pantin' bosom; then stealin' one pale hand under the piller he drew out a faded bank-note 'nd gave it to Higgins.

"I thank Thee for this boon," sez Leander, rollin' his eyes up devoutly; then he gave a deep sigh.

"Hold on," cried Higgins, excitedly, "you've made a mistake—it isn't the last—"

But Leander didn't hear him—his soul hed fled from its mortal tenement 'nd hed soared rejoicin' to realms uv everlastin' bliss.

"He is no more," sez Dock Wilson, metaphorically.

"Then who are his heirs?" asked that mean critter Higgins.

"We be," sez the family.

"Do you conjointly and severally acknowledge and assume the obligation of deceased to me?" he asked 'em.

"What obligation?" asked Peasley Hobart, stern like.

"Deceased died owin' me fr a cyclopeedy!" sez Higgins.

"That's a lie!" sez Peasley. "We all seen him pay you for the Z!"

"But there's another one to come," sez Higgins.

"Another?" they all asked.

"Yes, the index!" sez he.

So there wuz, and I'll be eternally goll durned if he aint a-suin' the estate in the probate court now fr the price uv it!

1889.

[End of *The Cyclopeedy* by Eugene Field]