

PROFESSIONAL CAREER

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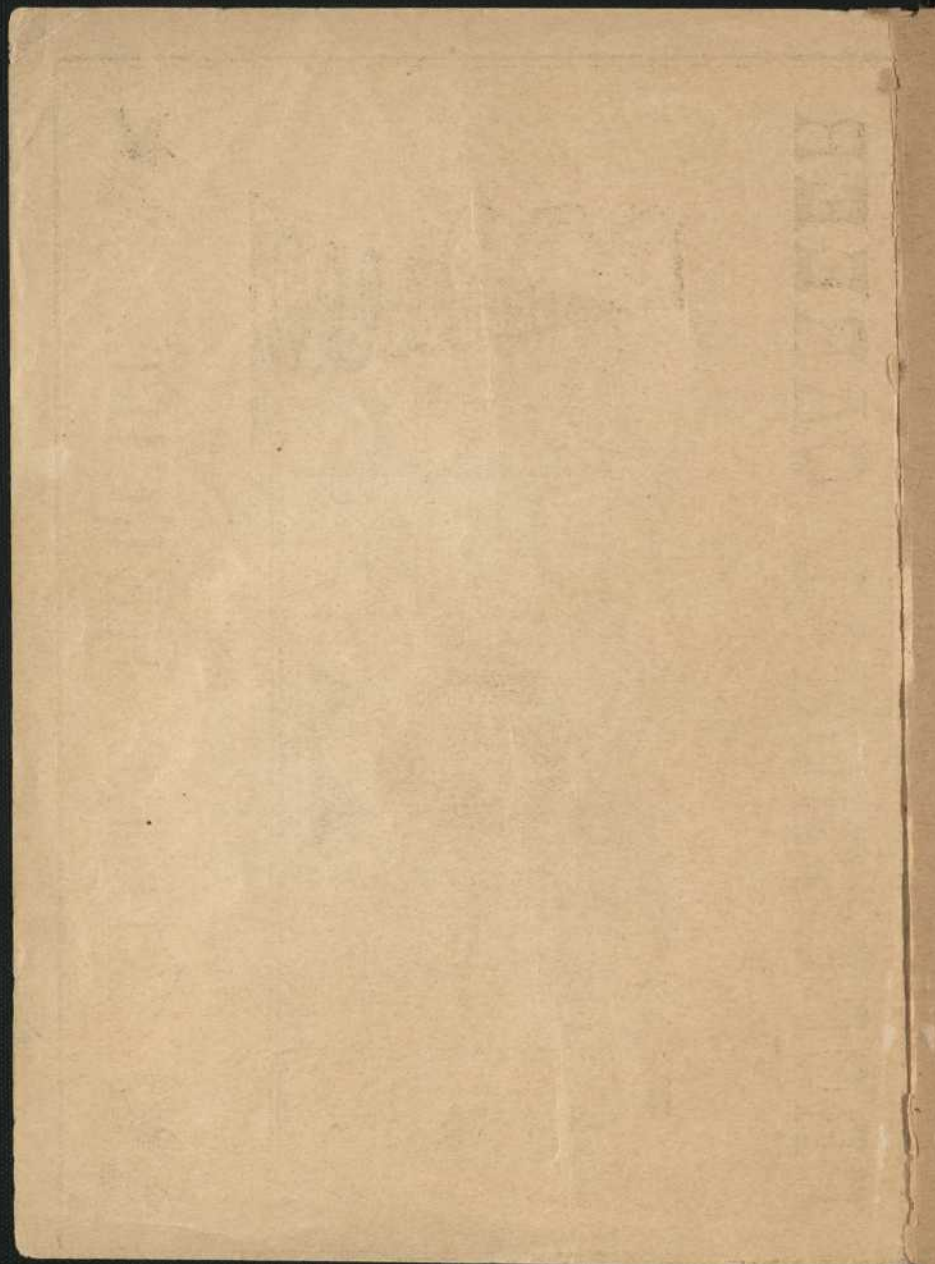


C. 1890

BY

AIMÉE HERCHT.





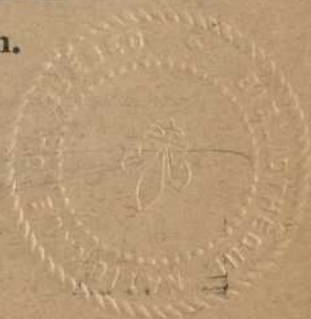


Achille Phillion.

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AN ARTIST'S PROFESSIONAL CAREER.

Written and Compiled by

AIMÉE HERCET.

ACHILLE PHILION, the subject of this sketch, was born in the village of St. Martine, near Montreal, Canada, of French Canadian parentage, on the twenty-third of May, eighteen hundred and fifty-one.

When he was but two years old, his father, Alexis Philion, (then in the cloth manufacturing business) moved to Bytown, Upper Canada, a mere village in the midst of a wilderness, and there started a woollen mill. The beautiful Chandiere Falls affording probably the greatest water-power in the entire world, were located immediately above the little village of Bytown, and Alexis Philion made use of it as a motive power for his woollen mill. The advantages offered by this immense volume of water were very soon thereafter recognized and one mill after another was built, (mostly saw mills,) in the neighborhood of the Falls. As the village increased in size and population it changed its name to Ottawa, and to-day,

not only is it the Capital of Canada and the seat of Parliament of the Dominion, but it is without exception the greatest lumber district in the world. It was here where Achille Philion was brought up, and as soon as he was old enough he was placed by his father in St. Joseph's College where he studied until 1865. In December of that year he was offered a position in the post-office which he accepted and held till April 1st, 1872.

From his infancy he showed a great liking for all sorts of gymnastic feats, and though it was against his parents' wishes, he with other boys would retire to some secluded spot among the lumber piles and erect either a Horizontal Bar or Trapeze of some kind, then with bags and baskets they would carry a quantity of sawdust which they would place underneath this temporary apparatus, and after school hours this is where young Philion could be found attempting all manner of break-neck tricks, very often receiving heavy falls but always escaping with slight injuries that would never be noticed by his parents. In time he became an expert at gymnastics, and his college mates used to take delight in making the young lad perform his various feats.

After he left college and went to work in the post-office he still continued practicing, and in course of time he determined to resign his position in the civil service and try his luck as a full-fledged gymnast, acrobat and juggler. By this time he had formed a partnership with another Ottawa boy named Maurice Ahearn, and as Ahearn and Philion they joined Washburn's Last Sensation Company, on April 18th, 1872, for the summer season. They met

with instantaneous success, and remained the entire season with that company.

In the fall of 1872, Maurice Ahearn, whose family was greatly opposed to the theatrical profession, decided to return to Ottawa and go in business there with his brother William Ahearn. Therefore, Achille Philion started out on his own account as a Globe performer, besides Slack Wire and Trapeze Acts and Jugglery, and on November 11th, 1872, he joined Hudson's North and South American Circus, and sailed on that day for Port of Spain, Trinidad, West Indies. As the trip was by a sailing vessel, it took twenty-six days to reach that city, and it was not till after the middle of December, 1872, that the company gave its first performance. He continued with that company for one year, visiting Trinidad, Barbadoes, Demerara, British Guiana, Granada, St Vincent, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Antigua, St. Thomas and Porto-Rico. From the City of Ponce, Porto-Rica, the company chartered another sailing vessel and sailed for Halifax, Nova Scotia. They then visited all the principal cities and towns in Nova Scotia, Prince Edward's Island, New Brunswick and Quebec, until they reached Montreal where they disbanded in November, 1873.

By this time Achille Philion had struck upon a new idea about his Globe Act, and he determined to try it. A high pedestal was made and an inclined plane was adjusted from the ground to the top of this pedestal. His idea was to ascend the inclined plane to the the top of the pedestal, and while balancing in that difficult position, perform all sorts of juggling feats the same as other

jugglers usually performed on terra-firma. The idea turned out to be a great success, and as "the Original and Only Pyramidal Juggler on a Revolving Globe," Achille Philion appeared in most of the principal theatres in the country.

In the spring of 1844, he formed a partnership with James W. Smith, and engaging two other performers, a lady and a gentleman, the quartette sailed from New York for Kingston, Jamaica, West Indies. It was at this time that Achille Philion attempted for the first time, feats of Legerdemain, among others the Aerial Suspension, which, by the way, was an entire novelty in the tropical countries up to that date. As usual, he met with success, and after playing for four weeks at the Theatre Royal in Kingston, he decided to make a tour of the principal towns around that beautiful island. After a two months trip he and his coadjutors returned to Kingston after having cleared a handsome little sum of money. By this time the Victoria Circus, a native concern, was organized in Kingston by Messrs. Stein and DePass, and as Philion was the first and only artist who had ever visited Jamaica, to perform what is known as the "Balancing Trapeze," and as that act had been declared the most daring trapeze performance ever seen there, an offer was made for him to appear at the circus. A contract was signed for two weeks at One Hundred Pounds Sterling per week, and Achille Philion filled the engagement, adding greatly to his laurels.

He then determined to try his luck on a larger scale, and taking the steamship "Etna," of the Atlas Steamship

line, he sailed for New York for the purpose of organizing a Strong Dramatic Company for a tour of the West Indies. On arrival in New York, one of the first persons he met on Broadway, near West Third street, was his old friend whom he had known for years in Canada, and who to-day is one of the best known, most popular and wealthiest actors in the world, Denman Thompson.

After a friendly shaking of the hand, Mr. Thompson asked him where he had been, and Achille Phillion answered that he had just arrived from the West Indies and that he was coming after a dramatic company. It took but a few minutes and Mr. Denman Thompson was engaged as Stage Manager and first Low Comedian of the company.

He (Thompson) had also just arrived in New York from Syracuse, where his trunk had been held for a board bill of eleven dollars. Phillion quickly telegraphed for the trunk and the next day it was in New York. In two or three days the entire company, numbering seventeen persons in all was engaged, and by the time the steamship "Etna" was ready to sail again for Jamaica, the company was on board. This was July 9th, 1874. On arrival at Kingston, six days later, the company landed and went direct to a hotel, where they learned that small-pox had broken out in that city, and was spreading very rapidly.

The theatre, churches, and all public halls had been ordered closed for a time to stop the spread of that dreadful disease, but still they managed to get a permit to give a few performances. As may be imagined the business

was bad. For two months the company remained in Kingston quarantined. There was but one port open, and that was Savanilla, New Grenada. Phillion struck another idea and quickly put it into execution. The company was turned into a Pantomime Company, and they at once commenced rehearsing "Humpty Dumpty," in order to visit the Spanish countries. All the trick scenery was gotten up, and by the time the first steamer went to Savanilla the pantomime was ready. Joseph M. Freeman, who had for many years been with Maffitt and Bartholomew, in this country was clown, the celebrated Eduardo Velarde, of the original Ravel Family, harlequin; Emma Wheeler, columbine, and Denman Thompson, pantaloon.

While playing in the City of Baranquilla, New Grenada, it was learned that a big Fair was to be held in a little town which was a sort of centre, for eight days, and that it was expected there would be between twelve and fifteen thousand strangers there during that eight days. Quick as thought, Achille Phillion took a steamer to that town called Magangai, to see if a suitable building could be found in which to give performances. To his great surprise nothing could be found but mud huts; not a hotel nor even a boarding-house could be found in the place. He found out that nearly everybody who came to the Fair each year, made arrangements to live on board the steamboats that brought them up, as this so-called town was a distance of about forty-eight hours by boat up the Magdalena River from Baranquilla, and it was customary for the steamboats to remain in port during the whole Fair, and board and lodge the people.

That part of the business being arranged, the next question was to find a place to give performances in. No tent could be had, so Achille Philion engaged a number of natives and started out after bamboos. In one week the Fair was to begin, and as the company was coming, a place had to be prepared to show in.

The bamboos were brought to the town by mules, and men were put to work to build a sort of theatre, (we will call it that for the want of a name.) When the company arrived the place was ready to receive them, and it was immediately named "Philion's South American Bamboo Opera House." Humpty Dumpty was given to full houses for one week, and that ended the "Eureka Dramatic and Pantomime Company."

From this place the company dispersed, some returning to New York, some to Jamaica, some going to California, etc. Philion then formed a partnership with Herr Willio, the famous bird imitator and prestidigitateur; Miss Emma Wheeler was engaged to assist in their performances, and the trio started for Panama. From there they went to Curacao, and then to Caracas, Venezuela, where they met with immense success.

During the engagement at the "Teatro Caracus," Mr. Philion's gymnastic feats had attracted the attention of Gen. Guzman Blanco, who was then President of Venezuela, and he was sent for by that distinguished gentleman. Upon calling one day on the President, this gentleman proposed to Mr. Philion to open a first class gymnasium in Caracas, where the military as well as private pupils could come and exercise. Philion was also

to receive a certain amount as a subvention from the government, besides certain fees from three different colleges where he was to give lessons each week, and with the private pupils it would have given him a handsome revenue. So he quickly accepted the position, and the few thousand dollars he had accumulated were spent in fitting up what he afterwards called "La Academia Gimnastica de Caracas." All that Gen. Guzman Blanco had promised failed to be realized, and in three months Achille Philion left Caracas a poorer but a wiser man. He immediately sailed on the steamship "Ville de Bordeaux," of the French Transatlantic Line for St. Pierre, Martinique, where he resumed his profession of Prestidigitateur, Equilibrist and Gymnast.

After a successful engagement here he again visited Guadeloupe, Antigua, Barbadoes, Trinidad, and Demerara; from there he went to Berbice, and then to Paramaribo, Dutch Guiana, returning by way of St. Thomas, and thence to Fernandina, Florida. A tour of the Southern States was then made as far as Texas, from which State Prof. Philion returned to New York. After reorganizing, he visited the principal cities of Canada, and then again returned to New York.

From that time on Achille Philion devoted a great deal of his time to outdoor attractions, furnishing all sorts of gymnastic and acrobatic features to big Festivals, Fairs, Summer Resorts, etc.

In January, 1883, he leased a small Hall in Paterson, New Jersey, and tried his luck in that city. The place was run as a Variety Theatre, and proved such a success

that an offer was made by a capitalist to build him a theatre. The offer was accepted, contracts signed, and in the Fall of 1884, Philion's Peoples' Theatre was opened in West Street, Paterson, New Jersey. Mr. Philion still continued to manage this house until October, 1889, devoting his entire attention to the Peoples' Theatre during the regular theatrical season, and during the summer months he ran a summer theatre, and all kinds of sporting on Philion's Little Coney Island, also in Paterson, New Jersey. Neither of the above ventures proved successful, and he therefore abandoned both places as soon as his leases ran out.

In July, 1889, he met Prof. Baptiste Penaud, the Famous French Air Diver, who offered his services to him. At first it was thought impossible that a man could dive head foremost from the top of a Tower one hundred and twenty feet, as the Professor offered to do. However, after studying the matter over, an idea was struck by which a netting could be fixed in a certain manner to receive Prof. Peynaud from even higher than one hundred and twenty feet, and it was immediately agreed upon that a dive could be performed with perfect safety, from a height of one hundred and fifty feet.

Achille Philion, as manager for Prof. Peynaud, immediately called on Thomas J. Brosnan, proprietor of the Sea-Side House, at Rockaway Beach, Long Island, and after giving this gentleman an idea of his great novel feature, Mr. Brosnan, who is always on the alert for novelties, expressed his opinion to the effect that if such a feat was possible it would prove the greatest attraction

ever known in this country. An engagement was immediately entered into between Achille Philion and Thomas J. Brosnan for the first appearance of Prof. Peynaud at the Sea-Side House, Rockaway Beach, Long Island, and on August 5th, 1889, Peynaud ascended for the first time, a tower one hundred and fifty feet in height, for the purpose of accomplishing a feat that no other human being ever attempted in the entire world.

About twenty-five thousand spectators had assembled to watch the Professor "break his neck," as every one predicted, but instead, they witnessed the most daring feat ever attempted on earth, performed with ease and grace.

Never did any public performance create so much enthusiasm before or since that day as did this wonderful dive, and during the four weeks that followed, Peynaud appeared in his dive twice each day, before more than eight hundred thousand spectators, who flocked to Rockaway from every part of the United States and Canada.

From Rockaway, Mr. Philion took Peynaud to Ottawa, Canada, where he repeated his success at the Central Canadian Fair. Then an engagement of eight days was filled at Montreal, and another at the Inter-State Fair, Trenton, New Jersey.

It was then decided upon between Messrs Philion and Peynaud to go to San Francisco, California, and from there to Australia, and on October 30th, 1889, they left New York for those far distant points. On the way out they stopped at New Orleans to give a few exhibitions there. That engagement had scarcely commenced how-

ever, when Prof. Peynaud received a slight injury in his spine which caused paralysis to set in, and in fifty-four hours after, he died. This ended the career of the most daring acrobat of modern ages. Mr. Philion buried him in St. Louis Cemetery in New Orleans, and his wife who accompanied him on his travels was sent back to her relatives in France.

Upon his return to New York, Mr. Philion decided to bring out another novelty for the summer season of 1890. A contract was again made with Thomas J. Brosnan of Rockaway Beach, for him, (Philion) to perform a Grand Ascension up a Spiral Tower while standing on a Revolving Globe and propelling same with his feet. From the top of this tower is stretched an apparatus which represents a Tight-Rope, across which Mr. Philion rolls the Revolving Globe while still standing on it, and then returning to the top of the Spiral Tower, descends again to the ground in the same manner. This act, as represented by Mr. Philion is entirely original, and is performed by him only. As to its merits, it is left to the public to judge for themselves.

Mr. Philion has also secured another gentleman to perform the Dive from a Tower one hundred and fifty feet high, whose professional name is Prof. Roberto.

As Mr. Philion's entire time will be devoted to his Spiral Tower performance during the season of 1890, he has associated himself with two young gentlemen from New York, Mr. Barney Link and Mr. William P. Fay, who will look after the Business Management of Prof. Peynaud's successor.

Mr. Philion, in his various ventures, always originates and never copies from any one, and therefore he hopes to meet with the success that he justly deserves in his latest attempt to please and entertain the amusement-loving public of his chosen country.

THE EXILE'S LAMENT.

Copyrighted 1886, by FRANK HARDING.

As Sung by HARRY D'ESTA.

Words and music of this song will be sent postpaid, by E. E. Benedict,
19 Park Place, N. Y., to any address, on receipt of price, 40 cents.

Beneath a fair Australian sky an Irish exile lay,
The sand from out his glass of life was ebbing fast
away;
The friends that stood around his bed his eyes could
scarcely see;
His thoughts, which soon would be at rest, were far
across the sea.
In spirit once again he stood upon his native sod,
Where as a child, and as a man his foot had lightly
trod;
In fancy he could feel upon his brow the mountain
air,
And from his parted lips there issued soft the exile's
prayer.

CHORUS.

Lay me on the hillside, with my face towards the
West;
Towards that sacred island, the land that I love best;
Let a bunch of shamrocks green be planted o'er my
grave;
My dying pray'r is "May god bless the island of the
brave."
Eviction foul and cruel sent him far across the foam,
From that sweet spot which Irishmen, where'er they
be, call home.
The land whose halls have felt the tread of princes
and of kings,
Whose harp once wooed the world is now a mass of
broken strings.
They were forced to leave the land which gave their
fathers birth,
As strangers and outcasts to wander o'er the earth.
The time came back to him again when he was but a
child,
With mem'ries of sweet rambles thro' her woods and
valleys wild.

DOWN WENT MCGINTY.

Sheridan and Flynn's Greatest Hit.
Copyright 1889, by Spaulding & Kornder, Brooklyn, N. Y.
Sent post paid on receipt of 40c.

Sunday morning just at nine, Dan McGinty dress'd
so fine,
Stood looking up at a very high stone wall,
When his friend young Pat McCann, say, I'll bet
five dollars, Dan,
I could carry you to the top without a fall.
So on his shoulders he took Dan to climb the ladder
he began,
And he soon commenced to reach up near the top,
When McGinty cute old rogue, to win the five he
did let go,
Never thinking just how far he'd have to drop.

CHORUS.

Down went McGinty to the bottom of the wall.
And tho' he won the five, he was more dead than alive,
To cure his ribs, and nose, and back were broke from getting
such a fall,
Dress'd in his best suit of clothes.

From the hospital Mac went home, when they fixed
his broken bones,
To find he was the father of a child;
So to celebrate it right, his friends he went to invite
and he soon was drinking whisky fast and wild,
Then he waddled down the street in his Sunday suit
so neat,

Holding up his head as proud as John the Great,
But in the side walk was a hole, to receive a ton of coal
That McGinty never saw 'till just too late.

CHORUS.

Down went McGinty to the bottom of the hole,
Then the driver of the cart gave the load of coal a start,
And it took us half an hour to dig McGinty from the coal,
Dress'd in his best suit of clothes.

DOWN WENT MCGINTY.

Concluded.

Now McGinty raved and swore, about his clothes
he felt so sore,

And an oath he took he'd kill the man or die;
So he tightly grabb'd his ck, and hit the driver a lick,
Then he raised a little saunt on his eye.

But two policemen saw the muss and they soon
joined in the fuss,

Then they ran McGinty in for being drunk,
And the Judge says with a smile, we will keep you
for awhile,

In a cell to sleep upon a prison bunk.

CHORUS.

Down went McGinty to the bottom of the jail,
Where his board would cost him nix, and he'd stay'd ex-
act y six,

They were big long months he'd stopp'd for no one went
his bail,

Dress'd in his best suit of clothes.

Now McGinty thin and pale one fine day got out of
jail,

And with joy to see his boy was nearly wild,
To his house he quickly ran to meet his wife Bedaley
Ann,

But she'd skipp'd away and took along the child.
Then he gave up in despair and he madly pull'd his
hair,

As he stood one day upon the river shore,
Knowing well he couldn't swim, he did foolishly jump
in,

Although water he had never took before.

CHORUS.

Down went McGinty to the bottom of the say,
And he must be very wet for they haven't found him yet,
But they say his ghost comes round the docks before the
break of day,

Dress'd in his best suit of clothes.

LISTEN TO MY TALE OF WOE.

Copyright, 1884, by John F. Ellis & Co.

Words and music of this song will be sent to any address,
post paid, by E. E. Benedict, 19 Park Place, N. Y. on receipt
price 40c.

A little peach in the orchard grew, listen to my tale
of woe;

A little peach of emerald hue,
Warmed by the sun and wet by the dew,
It grew, it grew, listen to my tale of woe.
One day in passing the orchard through, listen, etc.
That little peach dawned on the view
Of Johnny Jones and his sister Sue,
Them two, them two, listen to my tale of woe.

CHORUS.

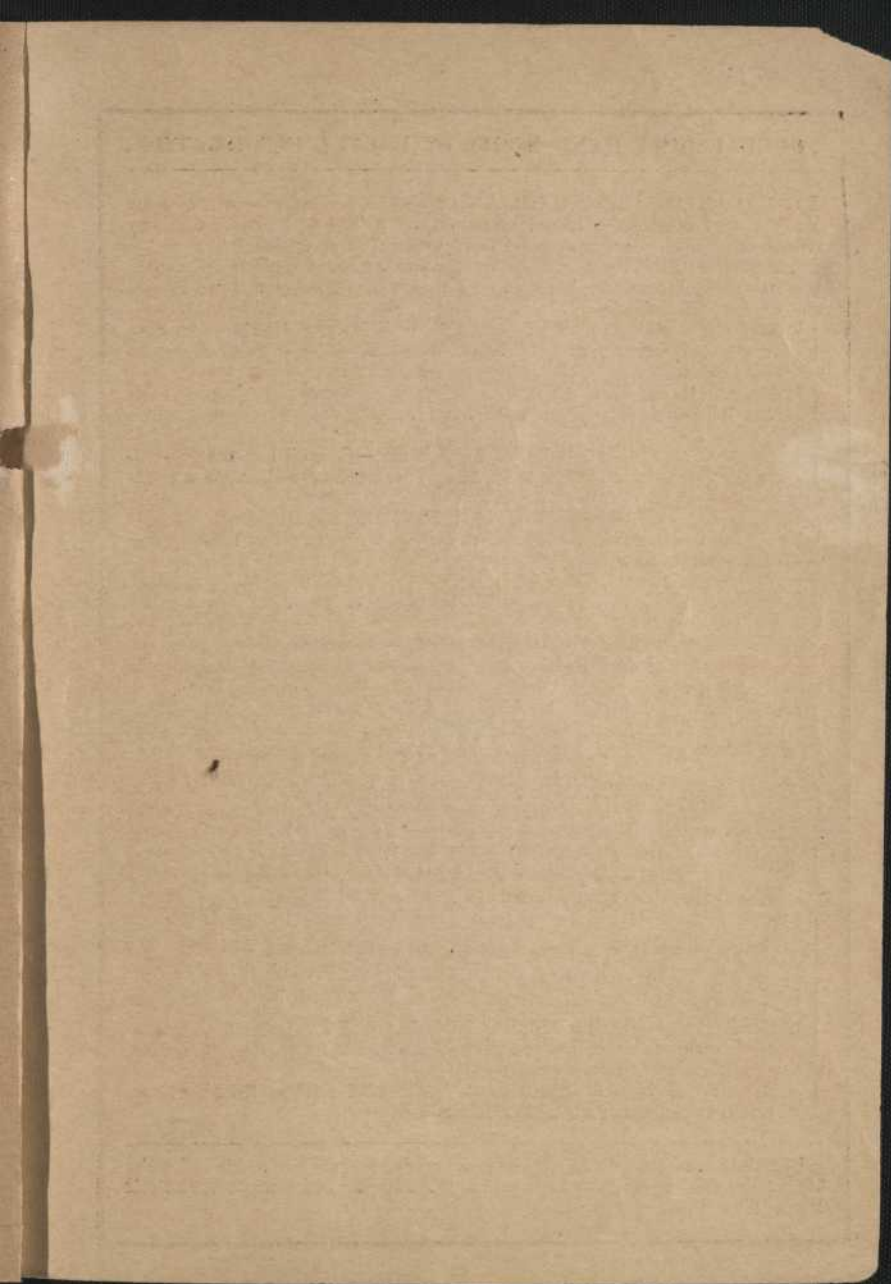
Hard trials for them two,
Johnny Jones and his sister Sue,
And the peach of emerald hue
That grew, that grew, listen to my tale of woe.

Now up at the peach a club they threw, listen, etc.
Down from the stem on which it grew
Fell the little peach of the emerald hue,
Poor John, poor Sue, listen to my tale of woe.
Now she took a bite, and John a chew, listen, etc.
And then the trouble began to brew,
A trouble that the doctor couldn't subdue,
Too true, too true, listen to my tale of woe.

CHORUS.

Under the turf where the daisies grew, listen, etc.
They planted John and his sister Sue,
And their little souls to the angels flew,
Boo-hoo, boo-hoo, listen to my tale of woe.
But what of the peach of emerald hue, listen, etc.
Warmed by the sun and wet by the dew?
Ah, well, its mission on earth is through,
Adieu, adieu, listen to my tale of woe.

CHORUS.



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