

IS THERE A CONSPIRACY?

Who Poured that Oil on Beer's Lumber Pile.

WAS IT PRESTON?

EVERYTHING SEEMS TO PROVE IT WAS NOT.

A Very Curious Story Told by Two Prominent Danbury Citizens.—To be Generous Some People Say the Two Citizens Dreamed the Story.—Others Say Worse Things and Hint that the Two Prominent Citizens Were Over Anxious for the \$2,000 reward.—The Details of the Story

DANBURY, Feb. 14.

BEING HONEST, UPRIGHT

DID VIRGIL E. BARNUM, one of Danbury's recognized first citizens, pour kerosene oil over a pile of lumber in Beer's lumber and coal yard a week ago and try to lay the blame on a tramp

take down what the night prowlers were saying. Suddenly Mr. Bevins said the time had come and he dashed out, and the first thing Mr. Barnum knew Mr. Bevins had a man by the shoulder with his left hand and he pushed a big revolver under his chin with the other and tickled his throat. Then he announced: "By G—, I'll have him!"

The man had been lying down on a pile of lumber and appeared to be sober. Mr. Bevins started at once for the police station with him and he was locked up on a charge of drunkenness and vagrancy.

But when Mr. Bevins returned he and Mr. Barnum took their lanterns and searched about the place. They found two burned matches some eight or ten feet from where they found the man, and soon afterwards they discovered that the lumber around where the man lay was soaked with kerosene, and a half pint bottle, with about a teaspoonful of kerosene in the bottom of it, was also found near by.

Mr. Barnum at once dispatched Mr. Bevins for Sergt. Wagener, and the latter came up with a transparency and looked over the ground. He took a photograph of the matches and tasted the oil and pronounced it kerosene, and at once Mr. Barnum entered information that he had captured the fire-bug.

There was nothing said of the reward of \$2,000. Mr. Barnum is rich and does not need such a small sum.

Then at once there was a wild halloo.

arson, or any knowledge of such an attempt. He was simply a poor dog Tray, and the court fully understood it, and he found him guilty of drunkenness alone, but suspended sentence.

His honor, the mayor, was not satisfied, however. He took all Mr. Barnum's story of the kerosene oil, etc., as gospel truth, and he insisted on Preston's commitment to jail for ten days that some further investigation could be made. Subsequent events proved more than conclusively that Preston was entirely innocent, and Friday he was released from jail and made a bee line for the city limits.

Now how did that oil come there? It was just in the place where Preston was found asleep, but it was not there as Mr. Barnum afterwards admitted, when he made his corrected statement next day, when Preston was found. It must have been put there during the time that Bevins was away at the station house with his prisoner, and Mr. Barnum says no one could have done it as he was there on guard.

Mayor Hopkins was very warm on the matter, and when Prosecuting Attorney Averill laughed at it, his honor said: "Well, there is only one of two things. Either Preston put that oil there, or either one of these two reputable citizens did."

"You are very logical in your remarks your honor," said Mr. Averill, "you were never more logical in your life. Either Preston or these two reputable

and try to lay the blame on a tramp blacksmith, in order to catch the reward of \$2,000 offered by the city of Danbury for the capture of the fire bug?

Did Frederick Bevins, another of Danbury's well known citizens, pour that oil there, either of himself or from orders from some one whom he did not disobey, and perhaps did not care to disobey?

Did Lawrence Brown alias James Preston, the unfortunate drunkard, who was found in the yard that night, do it? Or did some outside parties, as yet unknown, steal in there while Mr. Barnum was watching, and throw that oil around and attempt to burn up the place?

These are the questions being asked by our good citizens, and there are a good many rumors about town, too, and some of them do not at all reflect any credit on certain of the parties interested in the case, so far as their truth and veracity is concerned, and it will be some time before the idea is gotten out of a good many. Thinking citizens say that the arrest of "James Preston," followed by the two different sworn statements by Mr. Virgil E. Barnum, was a plan to gain considerable renown, and at the same time gain considerable money.

It is not only the fishy taste of the story told by Mr. Barnum and his ex-Private Secretary Bevins that has caused the people to talk, but the fact that Mr.

Then at once there was a wild halloo. Mr. Barnum and Mr. Bevins started for the police station and they told the story of their valiant deed into the ears of admiring hearers, and they were the heroes of the hour. They bore their honors modestly, however, and departed for their homes with the feeling that when the city of Danbury awoke in the morning the people would learn that they were at last free from the fire fiend, and would rise up and call them blessed, and they went to sleep to dream of floral offerings, a reception in their honor at Metropolitan park and a bronze medal struck off with Mr. Barnum and his lantern on one side and Mr. Bevins with a big revolver under a man's chin on the other side, and the whole appropriately inscribed.

When His Honor the Mayor arrived at the City hall in the morning he was informed of the condition of affairs and he at once visited the scene, smelled the oil soaked board and put the two burned matches in an envelope in his inside pocket and he started back to the city hall to order prosecuting attorney to at once indict "James Preston" for arson.

The prosecutor thought that if Preston was really the fire bug some more time than a few hours should be spent on investigating so that there would be no chance at all of the miscreant escaping; so he said he would not try him that day but spend the day getting down to the bottom of the bottom of the affair, and if the case warranted it he would make it hotter

Either Preston or these two reputable citizens put that oil there. But Preston never put it there."

CAMP'S PARK NIGHT.

Mr. Skinner and Mamie Ride Out For Pleasure.

MERIDEN, Feb. 14.—Johnny Sullivan and Henry McNish took a hack apiece Tuesday night with a pretty girl in each hack and went for a drive. The girls were hungry, having had no supper, and their considerate escorts stopped at Yost's bakery and bought a dozen doughnuts and a loaf of rye bread apiece to feed the dames on.

Then the ride began.

The next stop was at the South Meriden hotel, where something was bought to rinse down the doughnuts and rye bread. Then out across the plains by the Silver city hotel sped the team with the passengers performing acrobatic feats inside. At Camp's park McNish, who was known as Mr. Skinner, wanted to get out of the hack and take a walk around the park with his Mamie and hear the birds sing. The walk was a pleasant one and the nightingale sang sweet melodies many times. Into the hack and away to the Park house Mr. Skinner and his Mamie were driven and from here to the depot where Mamie took a sleeper for Hartford, where she was to make a speech on woman's rights before the Guls' Friendly league in the evening.

When McNish's hack got home it was found that a part of the floor of the hack and the neckboards were broken.

the people to talk, but the fact that Mr. Barnum was connected with the case at all—that he, a man with some \$60,000 to \$75,000, a contractor who has made hundreds after hundreds of dollars out of the city, a real estate dealer and real estate owner was playing the role of a private night watchman, paid by the city at the rate of \$2.50 per night, holding his appointment from the mayor, who has been granted special privileges in the matter of appointments and attending to his own business during the day, and staying up all night to catch the rascal who has held up a reign of terror in Danbury for the past two years.

Mr. Barnum is too well known in Danbury to need his picture reproduced in these columns. He is the gentleman who some three years ago was shot by his brother-in-law for interfering in some domestic matters which the latter thought he could settle himself without any outside interference. He didn't die as it was expected he would, but lived to serve the good people of Danbury and prove himself a man with a public spirit and with the good of the city at heart.

Mr. Barnum is the bondsman of his honor, the mayor, in the latter's capacity as deputy sheriff. Shortly after the last big night of fires the council got together and voted that there must be something done to catch the fire-bug and the reward for his capture was "histed" and a special committee appointed to act. They were to delegate the power of appointing special police-

warranted if he would make it hotter for Preston than any fire he ever lit, hotter in fact than the crimson hereafter, and he decided to have an examination the next afternoon.

That afternoon Messrs. Barnum and Bevins were notified to call at the mayor's office, and they responded. Mr. Barnum was told to sing his song. He did so in a manner that ought to win him a place on the dramatic stage. Never was a song so dramatically detailed and never were gestures so appropriately used or the voice so well inflected as during the recital. The detailing of the execution of Nanki Poo wasn't in it at all with Mr. Barnum's story, and he held the hearers spell bound for a half an hour while he described the dark nes and the moaning wail of the wind, the stealthy footsteps and the whispered conversation, then the sudden rush of the captor and his cry of "Eureka" as he captured his man and pulled him up from his recumbent position.

He told of afterwards hearing a whistle across the street and of getting his lantern out to see if there were any evidences of an arson having been attempted just as soon as Mr. Bevins went away with the prisoner. He described the finding of the oil and was dead sure that no one could have put it there after the prisoner was found, as he watched the place all the while. It was impossible for any one to have done it.

Then Mr. Bevins was told to speak his piece. He gave the same detailing of

hack and the neckboards were broken. The liveryman does not understand just how it could have happened, but it is supposed that the calisthenic exercises gone through are responsible.

Just previous to Mr. Skinner's departure in the hack, he and Michael Costello had a short scrap over Mamie, as it is understood that Michael wanted Mamie to accompany him on a journey to Laurel Grove. But Mr. Skinner won the game and Costello went to Ben Clark's to wash off the mud and blood.

Johnny Sullivan strayed away from Mr. Skinner, but he returned safely Wednesday morning and reports having had a good time.

Artistic Decorating.

To any of our citizens who may require work in this line, either interior or exterior, we cheerfully recommend our friend, WM. GRANT, JR., whose headquarters are at 33 Elm street, this city. You will find his stock complete. Oils, paints, varnishes, brushes, etc., etc. Ready-mixed paints in any shade desired. In fact everything that you may call for in his line. He will give you estimates if you so desire promptly and surely. If you study your own interests you will call and see him.

WANTED A PRIVATE FUNERAL.

"Bab" Selects a Spot For a Grave on the Ball Grounds.

MERIDEN, Feb. 14.—"Bab," the foreman at O'Brien's livery stable, thought strongly of dying the first of the week, but he could not do it. "Bab" never

the power of appointing special policemen to watch nights, and the mayor was naturally looked to as the man to suggest the appointments. Naturally Mr. Barnum was appointed, and so also was his hired man, Frederick Bevins, who at that time had a little too much leisure time on his hands.

Just what the idea was in appointing Mr. Barnum does not appear, for it is commonly known that Mr. Barnum couldn't catch a hitching post with a lasso, to say nothing of catching a man who has proved himself as slick as Danbury's fire-bug has. In fact it is doubtful whether Mr. Barnum could catch a horse car if it was coming towards him.

But, however, he was appointed and he went on duty some weeks ago to watch the Beers lumber yard on Main street just above the Franklin street crossing. Mr. Barnum is a good and faithful man, and when the interests of the people of Danbury are jeopardized he can stay up twenty-four hours around and he is never found wanting if there is three weeks of night and day duty to be done. He had as his companion Mr. Frederick Bevins, who for some eight years has worked for him and been paid at the rate of \$18 per month and "found," and the two made a pretty good pair. There could be nothing going on in that lumber yard while Messrs. Barnum and Bevins are around, but there were no suspicious persons who dared to show up there until the night they arrested James Preston and locked him up for drunkenness and vagrancy, and afterwards charged him with attempting

piece. He gave the same detailing of the capture pretty much as Mr. Barnum did, while the latter chimed in at every sentence and told the prosecutor that everything was correct, because he was there and saw it.

"That's right, Mr. Bevins, I was there, wasn't I and saw it," he repeated a dozen times until Detective McManus of the Pinkerton force told him if he didn't shut up he would fire him out in the other room. This had the effect of quieting Mr. Barnum for the time being and the committee adjourned.

The next day there was a court trial and the funny part of the case came in.

"James Preston, or Lawrence Brown, as his proper name is, is a tramp blacksmith and known all over the state as one of the best of workmen, but one whose enemy, rum, has undone him. At one time he worked at Wethersfield when he was a young man, and was known as "Larry the dude," as he dressed better than his fellow-workmen and sought different amusements from those indulged in by the ordinary run of mechanics used to hard manual labor. He is a tall, broad-chested man, perhaps 5 feet 11 inches in height, with a splendid physique and a strong, open face. He has been travelling around from post to post for several years, working long enough in one place to get enough money to start him on a spree, and then he steals a ride to the next town.

He struck into Danbury the day before he was arrested, and was on a

but he could not do it. "Bab" never thinks of passing in his checks unless he is full of stable ammonia, which occurred last week.

For a half day "Bab" was out on the Meriden base ball grounds with a small boy hunting an appropriate place to dig his grave. First he thought of being buried under the pitcher's box, but the small boy said if he were buried there it would queer the ball and the pitcher could never put a curve on. "Bab" then took a shovelful of dirt from each one of the bases, but he thought his body might be disturbed when the players slid for the base and he decided to abandon the bases as a spot for his grave. But he at last struck the spot when he put his shovel in the dirt where the umpire heps around to avoid being hit by the balls and rotten eggs sent at him.

"There is the spot for my weary body to repose," said "Bab" to the small boy, who wiped the tears from his eyes on the tail of his overcoat.

"Don't weep for me, sonny," said "Bab" to the boy, "I will rest here in peace as I can tell the umpire to come to h—l every time he calls a strike that ought to have been a ball. Yes, sonny, I will be better off here. I will stick this clay pipe in the ground right here where I want you to tell them to bury me. Now we will go home. See to it well, lad, all that I tell you, and your reward awaits you on high."

"Bab" then went to the stable and bade the men an affectionate good-bye. He told them that he wanted them all

snow up there until the night they arrested James Preston and locked him up for drunkenness and vagrancy, and afterwards charged him with attempting to set fire to the lumber yard.

According to Mr. Barnum's sworn statement they were together in the yard along towards 10 o'clock on the night in question and were discussing the best method of passing the night when suddenly the sound of voices broke upon their listening ears. There were two persons talking. Mr. Barnum is sure, and they conversed in whispers, and the tenor of their remarks could not be heard above the breeze which softly sighed through the lumber piles and bore the salt sea breeze from the Still river across their brows. However, the men talked for some time and then Mr. Barnum's eagle eye caught a flash of light which might have been made by a fire-fly had it been a pleasant evening in June. Mr. Barnum is sure he saw the light. Then he caught Mr. Bevins by the wrist and they both bent forward in the darkness and Mr. Barnum rang up a messenger boy to send him to the house for a phonograph to

spree, and then he steals a ride to the next town.

He straggled into Danbury the day before he was arrested, and was on a spree. He was seen around the streets that afternoon in an advanced stage of intoxication, and later in the evening he entered a saloon on Keeler street and asked for a drink. He was so drunk that the bartender refused to give it to him, so it can be judged how intoxicated he was when a Danbury bartender thinks he had too much. He was noticed by the police staggering along up Main street towards the lumber yard, but they were only too glad to let him get out of the way and get to sleep so they didn't bother with him. He stumbled into the lumber yard and lay down to sleep. He doesn't remember anything then until he was rudely awakened by Bevins and marched off to the police station, but he was too drunk to know that he was going there.

The man's clothes were searched. There was not a smell of oil about them. There were some matches in his pocket, but they were not the same kind as were found at the fire, and he was evidently innocent of any attempt at

"Bab" then went to the stable and bade the men an affectionate good-bye. He told them that he wanted them all to stay away from his funeral as he wanted it to be a private one.

"I want no one to follow this cold corpse to the grave but Mrs. O'Brien and Mrs. Austin and they must go in separate hacks."

Then "Bab" went to bed, fully expecting to wake up a corpse, but he awoke in the morning and saw the sun shining. He felt himself to see if he was really alive, and when he found that he was his disappointment was great.

Last night he went to the ball grounds and pulled the clay pipe from the ground and painted it in mourning.

To the question. Which is your favorite poem? There may be a great variety of answers; but when asked, Which is your favorite blood purifier? there can be only one reply—Ayer's Sarsaparilla, because it is the purest, safest and most economical.

Light on the subject—A match applied to a cigar.