A GREAT DEAL of fun and profit comes from reading late 19th-century American newspapers. Quickly one is made aware of three characteristics of such papers that set them off from their counterparts of a later day. First, they tended to be viciously partisan in politics second, their narratives of the days' happenings were overly detailed; and finally, they frequently printed unforgettable stories. Those stories included accounts of competitions and contests of all sorts. There were butchering competitions, whistling championships, stone-cutting challenges, not to mention eating competitions of the strangest types; an oft-recurring one involved eating 30 brace of quail in 30 days. And finally, there were the speed-shaving matches.¹

Equally memorable were accounts of the trials and tribulations of the seducers and the seduced. In the 19th century many states had laws against seduction. The Iowa Code of 1897, for example, defined it as follows: "If any person seduce and debauch any unmarried woman of previously chaste character, he shall be punished by imprisonment in the penitentiary not more than five years, or by fine not exceeding one thousand dollars and imprisonment in the county jail not exceeding one year."

The code, however, went on to state that "If, before judgment upon an indictment the defendant marry the woman thus seduced, it is a bar to any further prosecution for the offense." But, "Every man who shall marry any woman for the purpose of escaping prosecution for seduction, and shall afterwards desert her without good cause, shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor and shall be punished accordingly."

In the 1870s and 1880s there were often news stories of charivaris that ended disastrously. Apparently almost everyone was in danger when the bride or the bridegroom ceased to be amused by the festive, often obscene, and certainly noisy serenaders gathered in front of their house. Sometimes the bridegroom would fire into the crowd. Sometimes one of the celebrants would fire into the house. More than a few bridegrooms must have spent their wedding night in jail.²

Two kinds of stories appeared in late 19th-century newspapers that were truly grim, if not awful. Their basis in fact might well be doubted. One concerned sensational cases involving burying someone alive, a common motif in folklore. Such tales generally followed one of two patterns. Either someone was convinced that there was color in the face of the deceased before the burial and fought for an exhumation, or a close relative who had traveled a great distance arrived late for the funeral and was granted a last look at the deceased. In either case, the shock was sometimes beyond belief. Mourners would find the interior of the coffin torn up, the face of the corpse scratched, the hair sometimes pulled from the head, and the body turned over—all evidence of a hideous mistake.³

¹ For results of a butchering contest, see Boston Sunday Globe, August 19, 1885, p. 1; on quail eating, see Chicago Daily News, January 27, 1883, p. 1; for a shaving-match challenge, see Daily Inter Ocean (Chicago), January 16, 1883, p. 3.

² Annotated Code of the State of Iowa. 1897, sec. 4762-4764.

³ For accounts of destructive charivaris, see, for example, Council Bluffs Daily Nonpareil, January 20, 1878, p. 1; Omaha Daily Bee, November 1, 1889, p. 2; and Idaho Daily Statesman (Boise City), January 13, 1891, p. 8.

⁴ This is a common story element in folklore; on such themes, see Stith Thompson, Motif-Index of Folk-Literature (Bloomington, Ind., 1932).

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The second kind of grim and awful story concerned grave robbing. These tales cannot be so easily doubted as those previously mentioned. Though they tend to be remarkably similar, these reports simply point to some highly irregular practices in medical colleges of the period. The practice arose from the need to teach anatomy at a time when public opinion tended to oppose dissection, and, consequently, was against the framing of adequate laws. In simplest terms, the medical colleges needed to find subject matter on which faculty and students could study anatomy. In Minnesota, for example, dissection had been legalized in 1872. Under the terms of the law, medical colleges had the right to unclaimed bodies. They did not always get them, even from hospitals, however, and the supply was never enough to meet the demand. Consequently, in Minnesota and elsewhere, the college faculty either encouraged a clandestine trade in stolen stiffs, or cadavers, or suggested that students themselves provide, in some fashion, the bodies that would be dissected.

Perhaps the most famous body-snatching case in the annals of that period was one in which Benjamin Harrison's brother John, while searching the Ohio Medical College in Cincinnati for the purloined body of then General Harrison's great-nephew, pulled that of his own father from a shaft in the building. Neither he nor his brothers were aware that their father's grave had been violated and his body illegally pressed into the service of science. It was a well-publicized affair. The great-nephew actually turned up in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Obviously individuals who dealt in bodies in the service of science. It was a well-publicized affair. The great-nephew actually turned up in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Obviously individuals who dealt in bodies in the 1870s were capable of meeting the terms of the market almost anywhere.

In 1885, grave robbers and body-snatchers were still actively pursuing their professions, generally close to some medical facility. It should be pointed out that medical teaching facilities were more numerous than they are today and were not nearly so well regulated. Headlines alone give a sufficient picture. An Iowa paper announced "A CHARTEL HOUSE. REVOLTING DISCOVERIES IN AN EVANSVILLE MEDICAL COLLEGE": another, more simply, ran a headline. "BODY SNATCHING." A story entitled "STANDING GUARD OVER THE GRAVE OF AN INDIANA GIRL" concluded with the sentence: "On account of the fear of doctors in search of curiosities, the grave was made in the yard, just under the window, and a close watch is kept over night." The reputation of the medical profession was clearly not the best in the 1880s.

Nor was the Minneapolis Tribune less than graphic when it published a story on January 2, 1885, under the following sets of heads: "AN EXCITING CHASE. Two Medical Students with a Stolen 'Stiff Make a Wild Flight for Safety. Chaska, Carver County the Scene of a Daring Grave Robbery. The Sheriff Captures the Dissecting Material but the Students Escape. Who They Are, and How They Became Involved in the Scare."

What followed was an involved, colorful narrative of student life, of medical education, of body snatching, of the slowness of justice in the 19th century, and, finally, of no particular conclusion. When last mentioned in the columns of the Tribune that January of 1885, one student was still in the hospital with frostbitten feet; one was still not available either to the press or to the authorities; and the brother of the latter, a doctor in Chaska, who had been charged with "complicity in the grave robbery," had "waived an examination and gave bonds." What really happened is difficult to know, but it didn't seem to disturb the course of medical education at the Minnesota College Hospital in Minneapolis for more than a short time. Here is the account:

"THERE WAS considerable commotion in the College hospital on last Wednesday afternoon. . . . On the afternoon above named a great event was to occur at the hospital. Two young men well known to all of the students were about to leave upon a delicate, an interesting, and an exciting excursion."

"It was an inspiring sight, as a two-horse sleigh, with room enough for several trunks, appeared at the porch. The two students who were about to start away, shook hands with their roommates and classmates, and were soon hurrying down the steps."

"Scarcely had the two young men in the sleigh left before a message came to the TRIBUNE:

"'Two of the students of the College hospital have gone out after a stiff!'"
“There was nothing particularly new in this, and for the following reasons: The College hospital, must have its 'subjects.' Without them it would not be a college at all. Of late it has had considerable difficulty in finding 'subjects' of any kind, and inducements have been offered to other cities which might have enterprising people to keep the supply up. . . ."

After an exchange, the informant, "A young man[,] made his appearance in due time and told this story: 'Two of the students of the College hospital left this afternoon to rob a grave near here. The grave was that of a young lady recently interred. While engaged in their work, they were attacked by friends of the family of deceased and killed on the spot. This all happened while I was looking on. You can now take me before any justice of the peace in Henepin [sic] county and I will swear to it.'"

The editors received other versions of the affair and finally reported: "The facts in the case were at length arrived at, and although they do not appear as sensational as the above reports, they are bad enough, inasmuch as one of the parties concerned in the matter will probably lose his life.

"A WILD ADVENTURE. There are connected with the college hospital two young students of an adventurous disposition. One of them is a Turk, the other an American. The former has been engaged in numerous wild adventures, and, although a student at the hospital here, is, or rather was, willing to undertake anything that had the elements of excitement about it. It is understood that on several occasions he has volunteered his services to procure 'cadavers' for the students in the hospitals when he found that they were short of 'dissecting material.' A few days ago the dean of the college, Dr. F [rederick] A. Dunsmoor, received a telegram from a party residing, or supposed to be residing, in Chaska, Carver county, Minn., running as follows:"

"Dr. Dunsmore [sic] College Hospital, Minneapolis: 'I have fine, healthy cadaver here. Do you want it? [Signed.] ________'"

The doctor answered that the college was in need of dissecting material but asked and then reiterated "'Are you certain that this is perfectly legitimate? We do not want any resurrectionist business.'"

The reply came back:

"'This is straight. All is right. Send men to brick yard [near Chaska], as I have directed in letter.'"

"It appeared to be straight. The college had been looking for 'subjects' for some time. Here was an opportunity to get at least one, and perhaps more, 'stiffs.' The interests of science required it. Without cadavers, a medical college could no more be conducted than the opera of 'Pinafore' tomorrow night without Little Buttercup. The person who sent in that the subject was all right, had been in one way or another useful to the college in the past and there was no occasion for mistrusting him now. He had given many beautiful subjects for the dissection table. His word

DOCTOR Frederick A. Dunsmoor

10 Dunsmoor was a prominent Minneapolis surgeon and a founder of the University of Minnesota medical school. Warren Upham and Rose B. Dunlap, *Minnesota Biographies*, 192 (St. Paul, 1912).
was as good as anybody's engaged in the business. Therefore Dr. Dunsmore [sic], the dean, telegraphed him:

"'All right. We will have men on hand to take it.'

'This accounts for the scene with which the article begins . . . The students who left the college do not care to be known in connection with this affair. The faculty of the college do not care to have their names known. They did not leave, and were not permitted to leave upon their expedition until the whole matter appeared to be legitimate. Under no circumstances would the college have anything to do with body-snatching. The young Turkish student who had gone out on other expeditions of this kind was particularly anxious to engage in the enterprise, and another young student was easily found to accompany him. It was midnight before they reached the brickyard near Chisler [Chaska?]. . . . A box containing a body—it is not known even now whether it was the body of a man or woman—was transferred from one wagon to the other, and the students drove away . . . The night was cold . . . The temperature was 35 below zero, and it was almost impossible for the one to drive while the other warmed his benumbed fingers. They calculated upon making Minneapolis in four hours at least, but the team was stiffened by the cold, and it was almost impossible for the one to drive while the other warmed his benumbed fingers. They calculated upon making Minneapolis in four hours at least, but the team was stiffened by the cold, and it was almost impossible for the poor animals to travel through the snow . . . several feet deep. In spite of all the efforts the young men could make, their progress was slow . . . The young American student, however, felt his heart freeze within him as now and then he could hear the corpse turn over in the box as the sleigh was jostled on the rough and snow-clad road.

"TWO MILES away from Chaska a shot [shout?] was heard. It came first like the murmur of the winds across the desert which they traversed. Their ears were tied up and they could scarcely hear each other speak. But there was something in the air which told them of danger. Looking back they could see nothing but a long stretch of snow . . . Before them there was a forest, and for this they were making all the speed they could get out of their willing animals [animals?]. There was again a shout. It was faint, and yet there was that in it which caused the Turk to turn once more in his seat and look back into the moon-lit plain. But nothing could be seen. Whipping up the horses the students sped on. The shout was heard again, and from a direction in which they had not thought of looking before they saw the forms of mounted men crossing the snowy plains at full speed. The Turk knew what it meant.

"Turning to his companion he said: 'We are pursued [sic]. We will be captured. We will be lynched!'"

The American student argued for beating the posse and tried to wrest the reins from the Turk. "All this time the corpse was tossing around in the box and the body could be heard striking the sides as the two men struggled on the wagon . . . the mounted horsemen were gaining. . . . The shouts, which had been at first vague and indistinct, now assumed a more threatening character, and before the border of the woods was reached the cry was heard:

"'Stop! or I'll blow the whole top of your —____— head off — do you hear!'

"The Turk grew nervous, and tried to regain the strings.

"'You let those reins alone,' said the American student, 'or I throw you out.'

"The shouting from behind became closer.

"'In the name of Carver county,' said a voice behind, 'and as sheriff of Carver county, I demand your surrender.'

"This settled it with the Turk, and he jumped out of the sleigh."

Abandoned by his Turkish friend, the young American realized his plight: he knew from experience what a night in the woods could be at this time of year; he also saw that the college hospital faculty had been deceived; and that he recognized the impossibility of explaining the facts "to a crowd of angry men, even though Sheriff De Toil was in charge." Furthermore, he did not care "to abandon his college friend to a dreadful death, so he too, after whipping the horses into a run, jumped from the sleigh and took to the woods . . . The posse followed the running horses . . . In a short time the horses stopped, and the posse found the sleigh empty. It was toward morning before the young men came together. They had not dared to shout for some time after leaving the sleigh, and they wandered aimlessly about the woods. When they did meet, the young Turk, Saluwea [sic], was frozen in both
SHERIFF Frederick Du Toit

legs, and could scarcely be kept from freezing to
death."

"The two young students . . . understood enough
about such matters to know that to cease walking or to
allow themselves to be overcome with sleep meant
death. The American was clothed in a heavy buffalo
coat, but the Turk was clad much thinner. They
walked — as near as they can tell now — from 2 a.m.
until daylight, and finally reached the College hospi­
tal. The feet of the young Turkish student will prob­
ably have to be amputated to save his life.

"Salueva was brought to the hospital about 3 o’clock
yesterday afternoon, and was placed in one of the
wards, where he is now under the constant charge of
a nurse. His frozen feet produced the most excruciating
pain, and a very liberal dose of morphine was neces­
sary to aleviate [sic] his sufferings. . . . A medical
examination of his limbs did not determine whether
amputation of both feet would be required, but the
indications were that the frost had gone in so far that
at least a portion of each foot would have to come off.
This morning another examination will be made, and
the physicians will make some move. Both legs are
swollen to a horrible extent, the long exposure without
medical aid having induced much inflammation."

A TRIBUNE reporter interviewed Dr. Dunsmoor,
dean of the college hospital, who "disclaimed any
definite knowledge in regard to the reported robbery of
a grave at Chaska.

"Early yesterday forenoon, the dean remarked,
Paul Shillock, who is one of the young medical stu­
dents at the hospital, came to me and said that his
brother, who is a regular practicing physician at
Chaska, had been arrested by the authorities on a seri­
ous charge. . . . I do not know anything in regard to
the affair except what I have heard, and I don’t know
how much of it is reliable. Dr. Shillock I know per­
sonally and well, and I would regret to learn that anything
had occurred to affect his good standing. The doctor
was formerly one of my students, and ended his studies
at College hospital about four years ago. He went to
New York and graduated at the New York university,
with high honors, about two years ago. Since his
graduation he has been practicing at Chaska, where he
enjoys a good reputation, and as good a business."

"Dr. Dunsmoor further said that, if any one had
accompanied young Shillock from the college, he was
not aware of it . . . they went out to Chaska . . .
of their own accord, and the college was in no way
responsible for their conduct. The hospital authorities
did not approve of this way of doing. There was a regu­
lar way of securing ‘material’ for the dissecting room.
Whenever a person died at a public institution and the
body was not claimed by relatives, the hospital author­
ities could issue a requisition upon the body, which, as
a general thing, was surrendered. Yesterday, when
the report reached Minneapolis, and when College
hospital was mentioned, Dr. Dunsmoor visited the hos­
pital, but could find no traces of any wrong-doing by
any of the attaches."

Another reporter, hoping to see the young student
whose name appeared in connection with the sensa­
tional affair, visited Matilda (Mrs. D. G.) Shillock,
mother of Paul Shillock, at 1811 Fourth Avenue South.
"Mrs. Shillock, a lady upward of 50 years of age, . . .
was quite reticent, but finally made a statement sub­
stantially as follows:

"I know nothing more than what my son told me
this morning. He said that his brother, Dr. Shillock,
had been arrested at Chaska, and had given bail in the
sum of $1,000 for his appearance for examination on
Monday next. He said I would know the full extent of
the trouble in a few days, when the doctor would visit
me and tell me about it. My young son left here on
Tuesday to spend a few days with the doctor . . . ."

"It was apparent that the old lady possessed more

[11] The sheriff was Frederick Du Toit, long prominent in
the Chaska community: Upham and Dunlap, Minnesota
Biographies, 193; the Turkish student’s name variously ap­
ppeared in Minneapolis city directories as Thomas Sulaba
(1885-86, p. 701) and Thomas S. Suleeba (1886-87, p. 741).
[12] Chaska, a Minnesota River City, 2:194, 195 (Chaska,
1980). The older brother was Dr. Peter F. Shillock.
The newspaper offered another version of the episode on January 3 and three days later reported that Dr. P. F. Shillock, who was on trial as an accomplice in the grave robbery, had waived examination and given bonds. A week after the affair, there appeared a brief mention of "Salueva, the Turkish student, whose feet were so badly frozen at Chaska . . . still at the College hospital. His case is progressing satisfactorily and it is not likely that it will be necessary to amputate more than the toes. . . .

"Salueva was described to the reporter as a fairly intelligent Turk, who had lived in the country about two years. He is, perhaps, 22 years old. Salueva entered the medical college last October, at the beginning of the term and has pursued his medical studies with much zeal. He appears to be as bright as the average student, though Dr. [J. W.] Donnell, the house physician, remarked that he had not displayed very much sharpness in his recent exploit.

"Dr. Donnell also informed his midnight visitor that there had been a scarcity of dissecting material this winter. The state allows the hospital to take all bodies that are not claimed by the friends of the deceased, but the supply from this source has been short the past season. Dr. Donnell did not know who acted as procurer of 'material,' and disclaimed any knowledge of the influences which induced Shillock and Salueva to make their visit to Chaska. He thought this was the first time that there had ever been any business of this kind going on about the college. . . ."

The newspaper concluded that the whole affair had been the work of a resurrectionist. "There is no question now but that the body was stolen. The man who offered the 'cadaver' for sale is a professional in his way, but it was not supposed that he would deliberately rob a grave. The fact that the college has been looking for a subject, has got out, and there is a class of men which is always ready to turn over a hundred dollars in this way. The students, although they were in search of an adventure, had no desire to take part in any illegitimate business. The colleges are always in need of dissecting material and always in receipt of offers of the kind which came from Chaska, but it is seldom that they are deceived. The officers of the college are in no way to blame for the occurrence so far as the TRIBUNE knows at this hour."

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