

The Curse of the Clock

By Laurence MacDonald

Journal entry - 1st May 1857

Yesterday, crossing the town square to take luncheon at my hotel in this little Tennessee backwater, I was obliged to step aside smartly to avoid being run down by a carriage driven with much haste and little regard. Luckily, being alert, I preserved myself from certain injury or death under hoof and wheel but in doing so I almost stumbled upon a distressed young man slumped on the steps of the town's clock-tower. Ordinarily, when encountering a figure such as his I would make a show of consulting my watch, frown as if alarmed at the lateness of the hour, and hurry past with a determined step. But, perhaps because he made no entreaty for help, I was moved to stop and ask the fellow what troubled him. Without so much as an upward glance, he gave a curious reply:

“Oh, I'm done for,” and added in an anguished murmur, “that's all.” Naturally, I could not be content to let the

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“Well now.....” strike.” He evidently believed that those few words should explain all and he waved his hands limply in a gesture of hopeless defeat.

“My good fellow,” said I, “what kind of a riddle is this?” He then looked up at me with large, mournful eyes and rejoined, “Ha! Of course! You are a stranger in town. Oh well, some matters of fact are best left unknown. Take me for example, if I didn't know about the thirteenth strike I would feel all was well with the world. I would be heading to my shop for the afternoon's work and there I would set some jewelry - that is, I mean, *was*, my trade - then go upstairs to my apartments and join with my beloved wife for a hearty dinner. Later, we might have stepped out to some entertainment; there is a Menagerie show in town don't you know? But now! What have I to look forward to? Why! I have less then twelve hours left to me and each one blighted with the knowing that it might be my last - for I am to be dead and gone by midnight.”