

# THE NAIL INSIDE

By H. E. Twinells

*The terrifying mishap of an amateur carpenter, which in turn precipitated a mystery in a hospital.*

“LOOK out, you’ll swallow them!” came a friendly shout, as a man paused in front of the porch, on the roof of which Bullocks sat juggling a mouthful of nails as he repaired his shingles.

“Not me,” laughed Bullocks; “I’m an old hand at this game. Used to be a carpenter when I was a kid.”

The friend passed on, and Bullocks continued the patching. His wife presently stepped out on the lawn and watched his work with an encouraging smile.

Bullocks dived into his nail-box, caught up a handful of nails in a truly professional manner, and thrust them into his mouth.

“Oh, Bob! Don’t do that!” cried his wife. “It’s awfully dangerous. You know what a horror I have of people swallowing things. Why, you remember when Jennie choked on my darning-ball, and—”

“Oh, don’t worry about me,” gurgled Bob Bullocks; “I’ve held nails in my mouth like this for twelve years or more. Why, it’s easier than—”

“Huchh, huchh, ptu, h-h—h—huhhhh!” The man suddenly turned white, then to a violent red; he coughed, spat out the nails, and crawled weakly toward the edge, gurgling and sputtering.

“Oh, Bob, what is it? What’s the matter?” shouted the wife hysterically.

“I—I’ve—I’ve swallowed a nail!” the man managed to articulate.

Dancing around, moaning, and wringing her hands, the frantic wife watched Bullocks let himself down from the porch roof, crawl through the window, and drop in a lump on the floor.

“Are you sure you swallowed one?” she cried for lack of more sensible words.

“Yes—yes! Call the doctor, quick! I’m done for this time.”

“Don’t—don’t say that, Bob!”

The wife fluttered around for a moment, and then rushed to the phone to call the doctor, while her husband lay struggling and gagging on the

floor.

With the aid of the maid, Mrs. Bullocks supported her better half to his bed and undressed him with feverish haste.

The doctor arrived and looked at his patient.

After hearing the story, he decided upon immediate action.

“I’m afraid I can’t handle this,” he told the anxious wife. “You will have to send him to a specialist. If the object were smaller, we might make him vomit it up; but I fear that a nail, with its point, will be a more difficult proposition.”

“But try something, doctor. Oh, do something. He may die.”

The doctor prescribed an emetic that almost emptied poor Bullocks’s stomach, but the nail was not forthcoming.

“No, this is a hospital case,” was the final decision of the man of medicine. “I will not risk anything else. He must have Dr. Payn, the eminent surgeon.”

So Bob Bullocks was rushed off to the hospital and placed under the care of Dr. Payn.

The specialist examined into his condition and found that the fright in swallowing the nail and the resultant worry were fast eating into the strength of Bullocks.

His decision was rapid. He would not be able to get the nail out without an operation, and before an operation he must locate the misplaced bit of metal.

A thin mattress was placed over a heavy, glass-topped table, and Bullocks was carried in, stripped, and placed on the table.

The doctor then brought the X-ray machine into focus on the unfortunate stomach.

“Sure enough. There it is!” he exclaimed.

The nail was still in the stomach, and the point was downward. From his knowledge, the specialist realized that the piece of iron was firmly lodged in the tissue surrounding the stomach’s wall, It was on the right side, and in such a position that it could be easily reached with the

aid of a knife.

"Did you say it was an ordinary shingle-nail?" the doctor asked his patient after the examination.

"Oh, I guess so, doctor. I—I don't know. Oh, this is awful! I'll—I'll never touch a nail again as long as I live."

"I told you so," Mrs. Bullocks reassured him delicately.

"But the nail shown by the X-ray is a much larger nail than the kind they use for shingles."

"Oh, dear—oh, dear! That makes it worse; everything makes it worse!" groaned Bullocks.

A consultation was held. It was decided that for the best of all concerned the operation should take place at once.

The patient was prepared for his ordeal, and finally wheeled to the operating-room.

Dr. Payn, with his assistants, worked quickly and deftly. An incision was made on the right side, just above the place where the nail had showed in the X-ray. The skin was laid back, and the doctor probed for the foreign object.

He failed to find it. Everywhere that he searched everything seemed to be all right, and he met with no obstruction.

Quickly he sewed up the incision and cut the man open on the other side.

But even there nothing could be found.

He examined the whole stomach and could not discover the nail anywhere.

Certain that he had seen it in the X-ray, the doctor consulted a photograph showing its location. Then he made up his mind that the nail must have shifted its position in the interval between the examination and the operation.

Following out this theory, he finished up the work and had his patient removed to the bare glass table for another X-ray examination, while he was still under the influence of the ether.

A thorough investigation of the stomach proved that the nail had disappeared. The doctor examined the body thoroughly, and was certain of the correctness of this conclusion.

When the patient recovered from the effects of the operation the doctor told him that the nail had been removed.

Bullocks groaned, and insisted that he still felt it.

"It's only your nervous condition," the doctor

assured him. "You are very susceptible to suggestion, and in your present state you still seem to feel the nail."

The answer did not satisfy the patient. He persisted in his belief that the nail had not been removed.

The doctor worried for twenty-four hours over the mystery of the nail, and could not solve the question of its sudden disappearance.

At length, to satisfy Bullocks that the object he had swallowed was gone, he caused the man to be carried in on the thin mattress and put again on the X-ray table.

To his boundless surprise, the surgeon now found that the nail was still present in the stomach, but had changed its position. This time the point was upward, and it was on the opposite side. The position had been exactly reversed.

His feeling was almost uncanny as he made sure that it was the same nail.

In sheer desperation he reopened the incisions and probed again for the elusive bit of iron.

Large beads of sweat stood out upon his forehead. He probed the entire organ.

Again the nail was nowhere to be found.

Removing the patient to the X-ray, he examined him again, and found absolutely no trace of the nail.

It became immediately the great question of the hospital. Everybody had a theory, and everybody was free to express it.

Poor Mrs. Bullocks sat around and wept, and would not be consoled. It was her firm belief from the two examinations, which had showed the nail in different positions, that her dear husband had swallowed *two* nails.

Other X-ray specialists were called in and poor Bullocks was examined in every possible way; but the nail did not appear again.

His mind became fixed on the surety that the ghostly bit of metal was still within him, and he would not believe the doctors when they assured him that no trace of it could now be found.

Dr. Payn insisted that his condition was good enough so that he could be discharged, but Bullocks wanted one more examination.

They granted it, and hurriedly carried him in, just as he was, on the mattress, and focused the X-ray for the last time upon his poor stomach.

Dr. Payn staggered back as he beheld the result of the examination.

The nail appeared again, and was in exactly the same position that it had been at first, with the point down and on the right side.

The surgeon reeled away from the examination-table and stared blankly into space, trying to account for the phenomenon.

A young interne, who had assisted at each of the X-ray examinations, as well as the operations, rushed over to him and blurted out: "I've got a theory, doctor."

"For Heaven's sake, what is it?" demanded the frenzied surgeon.

"Have the patient removed, but leave the mattress on the table and I will test it."

The order was carried out, and an X-ray was taken of the mattress alone.

The resultant picture showed the same nail in the same position.

"Don't you see what was the matter?" cried the young interne madly, his face alight with success.

"Why—why," stammered Dr. Payn, "I—I—" "Here!"

The interne grabbed up the light mattress and slit it open with a scalpel. Inserting his hand deftly, he probed around, and at length brought out a shiny nail.

"You see," he smiled, "the operation should have been performed on the mattress instead of the man."

"Great Scott, man! How did you ever discover that the nail had been negligently sewed up in that mattress?"

"I figured it out," answered the young interne. "You see, the first time he was examined we carried him in on the mattress. Then right after the operation we examined him on the table, with just a sheet thrown over it, and of course, no nail showed. The next time was on the mattress again, and the nail showed plainly; then, when we tried it again after the second operation, we didn't have

the mattress, and of course the nail didn't show."

"I see!" the doctor cried; "and all of the further examinations, until this last one were made on the sheet, without using the mattress at all."

"That's it!" the interne enthused. "The thing is most simple. The man only frightened himself into believing that he had swallowed a nail. Such cases are common; and with his worrying wife, you see, she helped a whole lot in scaring him into it. He just choked on the nails and never swallowed one at all."

"I see," replied Dr. Payn; "but you will remember the nail showed in two different positions. That doesn't jibe with your mattress theory. If it was this nail you found in the mattress that was photographed, why wouldn't it always be in the same position—the mattress wasn't changed?"

"Why, that's what made me think the thing out. You remember that the second position of the nail was exactly the reverse of the other?"

"Yes, but what has that to do with it?"

"Why, the mattress was turned around the second time. The man lay the same way, but the mattress was put under him, with the foot of it where the head was before. That made the nail show in the X-ray picture the second time in *an exactly opposite position.*"

"Oh, now I've got it straight," answered the obtuse physician. "The X-ray picture records nothing but hard substances, like bones or metal. It made no record of the mattress: but the nail, being metal, was photographed, and in the flat picture looked as though it were in the man's stomach, alongside his backbone, which showed clearly."

"That's the idea," was the interne's reply. "We'll have to use a better grade of mattresses after this. Probably the man who made this one was picking his teeth with the nail, and it dropped in among the hair. It seems like pretty careless workmanship to stuff a mattress with a nail."