

**THE LOBSTER
AND THE LIONESSE**

and other stories

Ernest O'Ferrall

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1881-1925

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Ernest Francis "Kodak" O'Ferrall (16 November 1881 – 22 March 1925) was a popular Australian poet and short story writer born in East Melbourne. He contributed numerous articles, stories and poems to *The Bulletin* from 1901 and *The Lone Hand*, often under the pseudonym "Kodak". He commenced writing as a young single man, working in a bicycle shop then for the International Harvester Company, and living in a series of boarding-houses, which formed the basis of many of his stories.

Books

Bodgers and the Boarders: Bookstall, 1921

Odd Jobs: Art in Australia, 1928 (verse)

Stories by Kodak: Endeavour Press, 1933

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1: Brown and the Monster

The Lone Hand Nov 1907

MANY years ago, when I was young, I read a most affecting little fairy-tale about a princess. (All fairy-tales are about princesses, but, as every girl thinks she is a princess, it doesn't matter.) In this fairy-tale, a wicked dragon threw a spell over the princess, so that the maiden had to walk behind him wherever he went. This arrangement continued until the usual knight appeared and slew the alligator, or dragon; but, as that was and is the end of all fairy-tales, it didn't interest me. The part that fascinated and thrilled me with horror was the idea of the maiden following always in the track of the awful monster. It seemed so weird, so unnatural.

Up to last Thursday I had quite forgotten that old story ; but last Thursday I met Brown— Brown, my old college-chum, the man who, with a yard start, beat the touring champion of the world in a hundred yards sprint, and sent the University off its head for a month. Was it fifteen years ago? Good Lord! how time flies !

I did not recognise Brown at first. I stared blankly at the fat stranger who had caught me by the arm in the vestibule of the "Princess."

I mumbled, "No, really, I am afraid—"

"Brown," said the fat man, grinning, "Dick Brown, of Trinity; you remember."

I stared at him wildly. "Good Heavens!" I groaned, and immediately fell into a waking trance, in which films of old impressions reeled themselves off like a mad biograph entertainment in the back of my brain.

First of all, I could see the University cricket-ground on that eventful day 15 years before, and, in the midst of a crowd of admiring undergraduates, a slim, boyish figure in running costume. After that came the race, a little line of crouching athletes, a sudden puff of smoke, and then five streaks of white skimming across the ground to a black crowd and a tape.

After that, a blurred vision of a slender, laughing boy being carried shoulder-high by a surging mob of yelling students.

This Brown? Impossible!

I became aware that the absurdly fat man was offering me a drink in a plethoric, over-fed voice.

I assented mechanically, and started to take stock of him, searching for old facial landmarks that had become obscured by the rising tide of flesh. Then his red, fancy vest caught my eye, and my gaze became riveted upon that portion of his anatomy adorned by his watch-chain. Instantly the mad biograph of

memory raced off a film showing a maiden of the Middle Ages walking slowly behind a waddling dragon.

I broke into Brown's reminiscences with a wildly idiotic remark. I caught myself saying, in a dry, matter-of-fact voice, "Seen any dragons lately, Brown?"

Brown— he had grown dull as well as fat—laughed until his waistcoat palpitated ominously.

"No you don't!" he gasped. "None of your haves ! I don't know what the answer is and, damme, I won't try to guess. Tell us, like a good chap."

I put him off somehow, and thereafter tried to listen intelligently to what he had to say.

Under the stimulus of three whiskies— I saw clearly that his fatal facility in disposing of spirits had materially assisted the dragon— he unwittingly revealed how utter was his subjection to the monster in possession. One expression in particular— he said it twice during the hour we were together— made me shudder. Speaking of a new food— tragically enough, most of his conversation seemed to be of eating and drinking— he said, "I can't take it. I like it well enough, but my stomach doesn't."

Then, a little later on, of a poet who shall be nameless, "I hate the man— he turns my stomach!" (Note that the poet did not turn Brown; he turned Brown's st— well, let us compromise and call it his vest. Vest sounds so much nicer, doesn't it ?)

I don't know how long Brown stood there drinking whisky and telling me what things agreed with his vest and what didn't. I hated him for being a dull, fat caricature of the fine young chap I had known 15 years before—a chap who could run faster than the hundred yards champion of the world, and hadn't been captured by a dragon, behind which he was doomed to walk to the end of time.

And the worst of it was that Brown didn't seem to be aware of the fact that he had been captured and enslaved. He talked about the monster and told me what things it liked and what things it disliked, and a hundred and one dreadful particulars which I tried not to hear, but all the time he assumed the air of a free man, which he isn't, and talked as if he had a soul of his own, which isn't the case. I got away from them— Brown and the monster— as soon as I could, and I'm going to take good care not to meet them again. Also, if I ever see them coming up the street I'll cut them dead.

I know now that the fairy-tale was all wrong. The lady never got away from the dragon. She walked behind it till she died.

2: "*The Giggle*" Newspaper Company

The Lone Hand Feb 1908

JABBERS leant on the washstand and declaimed passionately: "A snappy weekly— *that's* what's wanted! People don't want *tripe*, they want something to *read*! Look at the thousands of people that have to buy the tripe you see on the bookstalls! What d'ye think they buy it for? Because they must have something to read, and the tripe is the only thing they can get for their money! Do you seriously think all those people would shy their money away on piffle if they could get a snappy weekly, written and illustrated by chaps like ourselves— chaps who can turn out bright stuff, with ginger in it? Eh?"

I shook my head sadly. Jabbers struck the washstand a hideous blow, and made the candle leap into the air.

"The people are *waking up*!" he declared. "I tell you the people are waking up —and they're hungry for the bright stuff. They want *your* stuff and *my* stuff, and the stuff of every chap who can drive a pen. I'll tell you what happened to me the other night. I was going home in the train, and I met Lusher. You know Lusher, of the *Daily Gabble*. Well, he had a copy of *Stodgy Cribs* with him, and he said to me, 'Jabbers, old chap, why th' devil don't you and some other chaps start a paper that people can read? People must have something to read, old man, and they might as well read good stuff, while they're at it, as this muck. Why don't you drag some fellows together and start a bright weekly?' Now that's what Lusher said, and Lusher knows what he's talking about— one of the smartest chaps on the *Gabble*. Look here!" Jabbers gripped the wash stand and glared at me wildly.

"*If I start a paper, will you do some stuff every week?*"

The mere thought of Jabbers starting a paper made me get excited and lose my head. Without knowing exactly what I was doing, I started to expostulate weakly. I pointed out that I lacked experience, was too busy, couldn't be relied on, etc., etc.

Jabbers waved my protestations aside. Then he told me to get my hat and go with him. I asked him where we were going.

He told me we were going to see two or three of the fellows, and fix up with the printer. I got my hat and went with him.

We found the other conspirators— there were three of them— in a dingy hotel, drinking inferior beer, and talking about races. The man who seemed to lead the horse conversation was a fat optimist named Totton. He was to be the sporting writer. One of his associates was a tall, pale, anxious man. Jabbers told me he knew every living soul in Australia, and had a marvellous nose for

scandal. The third gentleman wore his boxer over his eyes and talked incessantly about advertising; so I assumed he was to be the business manager.

Jabbers introduced me all round, and we sat down and plunged into the subject. Jabbers led off. "Well," he said, "we've decided that the thing is to be a bright, breezy weekly, illustrated, with political, social, sporting, and dramatic news, and so on. Price to be thrippence. We put our brains into it, and Fodgers finances and prints." A thought seemed to suddenly strike Jabbers. He rose, and peered round excitedly in the smoke. "By the way, where *is* Fodgers? Anyone seen him?"

The eminent scandal-writer shook his head mournfully.

"I'm afraid Fodgers is weakening," he remarked; "he's been avoiding us all day."

Jabbers, white with fury, leant on the table, and stared angrily at the long man. "Weakening! Why, what the devil does he *mean*?"

"I dunno— but I know he's funking it."

"Has he said anything? "

"No; not exactly."

"Hasn't anyone been able to see him?"

"No."

"Where's his place?"

"Up Little Collins-street."

Jabbers thumped the table. "Come on," he said, angrily. "Put on your hats, and we'll go up and see him!"

Somebody suggested that nine o'clock at night was not a likely hour.

Jabbers retorted, " I know what I'm talking about. Fodgers is one of these religious beggars. He prints the *Gamp of Ignorance* —or *The Lamp of Innocence*— and as the thing is published to-morrow it goes to press to-night. Come on everybody! "

We filed out obediently after Jabbers, and proceeded up Little Collins-street, past the darkened and shuttered windows of many shops, till we came to a narrow lane, at the end of which was a dimly-lighted doorway. Jabbers led us along the lane to the door, and up the steep, wooden stairs, that soared heavenward an enormous height. As we ascended, the roar and clatter of printing presses drowned the sound of our footsteps. When we spoke we had to shout in one another's ears. Jabbers pushed open the door marked "Fodgers and Blast," and beckoned us to follow.

A furtive little man, partly bald and with black sideboards, looked up as we entered. He put down the copy of *The Lamp* he had been reading, and sat

gazing at us, limp with horror. Jabbers went over, caught him by the hand, and howled something in his ear.

The little man looked blank.

"How do, Fodgers?" yelled Jabbers above the mumble of the machinery. "What about *The Giggle*? I suppose it's all right, eh?"

Fodgers shook his head miserably, and screeched back ; "I'm sorry; the Bishop won't hear of it!"

Jabbers went a beautiful purple.

"What!" he thundered. "What's that!"

"The Bishop!" squealed Fodgers.

"The Bishop says he won't hear of it!"

"Who the blazes wants him to hear of it?"

Fodgers waved his inky hand at the machinery, and wailed: "The Bishop says *The Lamp* must be produced in a Christian atmosphere. He says he is afraid *The Giggle* will not be of a strictly moral tone. The Bishop feels very strongly on the subject! "

"Well, let him!" howled Jabbers. "Let him feel anything he wants to. What about *The Giggle*?"

Fodgers writhed before him. "I'm afraid!" he shouted. "Canon Ditchwater, the Bishop's secretary, told me His Grace could not promise a continuance of the contract for *The Lamp* if we published Socialistic papers!"

Jabbers made some outrageous remark about the Canon, and enquired in a mild roar if Mr. Blast was in. The word was passed along, and Mr. Blast, a mournful man, with a glittering dome of a head, came hurrying forward with a copy of *The Lamp* clutched in one hand.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Blast?" howled Jabbers, shaking him violently by the hand.

Mr. Blast bowed.

"Mr. Fodgers," yelled Jabbers— "Mr. Fodgers says he is not disposed to print *The Giggle*."

Mr. Blast put his mouth to Jabbers' ear, and moaned: "You know, Mr. Jabbers, we have had *The Lamp of Innocence* for twenty-three years. It is a highly profitable thing. We feel very doubtful—"

Jabbers instantly, and with great cheerfulness, advised him to throw up *The Lamp*, and tell the Bishop to go somewhere or other, and take the Canon with him.

"Look here!" he shouted at Blast, while Lodgers doddered miserably round the pair of them, "we're going to make money— tons of money! If you take on the printing of *The Giggle* you'll be riding in motors inside of a year, instead of falling round here getting out this tripe!"

He seized Fodgers' copy of *The Lamp*, and opened it before the scandalised junior partner. "Bazaar!" he snorted.

A bazaar in aid of the Destitute Cannibals' Handkerchief Fund will be held in St. Wren's schoolroom during the whole of next week. Parishioners are earnestly invited to attend and help along the good cause by subscriptions and gifts. A proportion of the profits will be devoted to paying off the debt of recently incurred by the guardians of St. Wren's, for the beautiful new spire.

He passed the paper to Totton, who turned the page and read out the following:

The rector of a small parish in the Far North-West has written, drawing our attention to the heart-breaking case of an aboriginal washer-lady in his district. It seems that this poor woman, until quite recently, made a small, but steady, income by washing the clothing of the miners belonging to a neighboring claim. The Bunyip River, however, since the advent of the dry season, has been so low that the people of the little settlement have, for the time being, abandoned washing, and the unfortunate woman has been compelled to subsist on charity. Our correspondent thinks that if the case is brought before the more fortunate of our friends enough money could be got to set up the innocent victim in a small business. He suggests that a circulating library would do well in the district, and it is his intention to purchase a number of second-hand copies of Hall Caine's and Marie Corelli's works. Other standard authors will be added as opportunity occurs. We recommend this appeal to our readers, and confidently anticipate a liberal response in the shape of subscriptions and gifts.

Then the advertising manager of *The Giggle* fell upon *The Lamp*, and criticised it from a business standpoint.

"Who," he demanded, "who would advertise in a thing like *this*—" He held up *The Lamp* with one hand and flipped it contemptuously with the back of the other. "What is there in it that anybody wants to read?"

He looked round, indignantly, and caught the eye of the eminent scandal-writer.

The eminent scandal-writer shook his head and observed, gloomily, that there didn't seem to be a smart personal paragraph in the whole thing. "You must spice your stuff," he growled. "Must spice your stuff, or it won't go!"

Fodgers burst into the conversation with a cry of anguish. (Blast had, some little time before, disappeared between a line of clashing machines, and turned off the current. The big presses, with their skeleton steel fingers arrested in mid-air, stood motionless, and furtive printers tip-toed about in the strange silence, and pretended to arrange the paper, while they listened to the conference of the Powers.)

"This paper," gasped Fodgers, rescuing the thing from the hands of the advertising manager-to-be of the future *Giggle*, "This paper is not a secular

publication, at all! We don't want personal paragraphs! The Bishop holds very strong views on the matter. He says—"

Jabbers told him to be quiet. "Look here," he said, taking hold of Fodgers by the arm, "you're on the wrong track altogether! You've got confused! We *don't want* to waste any brains on the *The Lamp*; we want to put our brains into *The Giggle*! Now— are— you— prepared— to— take— on— The— Giggle? Yes, or no?"

Fodgers took a deep breath, and said "No!"

Jabbers looked at him in amazement, and yelled, "What!"

Fodgers shuffled his feet, glanced in a sidelong fashion at Blast, and shook his head. Blast turned, and shouted to the foreman, "Right!"

"Look here, Fodgers," said Jabbers, as the current was switched on again, and the machines started their preliminary clacking, "I've given you a chance to make money, and you've simply thrown it away— just chucked it in the gutter. This paper of ours is going to go , my friend! Don't forget that, it's going to go!"

The big presses here burst into full speed with a deep-toned roar, and the giant steel arms, propelled by electricity, rose and fell at an amazing rate, lifting copies of the *Lamp of Innocence* from the spinning rollers. Watchful printers moved about, seeing that the machines licked up the sheets safely, and youths staggered round with enormous bundles of the number containing the touching appeals for the Destitute Cannibals' Handkerchief Fund and the Aboriginal Washer-lady.

Jabbers looked on at the busy scene for a minute and gritted his teeth.

"Look at 'em!" he shouted, indignantly, above the thunder of the machinery. "Look at 'em getting out that tripe, when they might be printing *The Giggle*!"

We looked at them, as requested— looked at them as we might have looked at a gang of lunatics; but the spectacle was too melancholy to dwell on, and we drifted towards the door.

Jabbers bullied Fodgers to the very last. When the door was open, and as we waited in a line below him on the staircase, he patted Fodgers condescendingly on the shoulder, and yelled— he had to yell to make himself heard above the opulent crashing of the presses— "Well, good- bye, old man ! Don't forget I gave you the chance, and remember what I say. *The— Giggle— will— go*! Good-bye , old chap!"

The door closed, and, turning round, we descended to the street, where the rumble of Fodgers and Blast's establishment became merely a mocking undertone, muttering of fame and fortune high up in the night.

Jabbers took off his hat and wearily mopped his brow. It had been very hot and close up in the printing-room, and the interview had been trying.

"Well," he muttered, "of all the fools I ever met, he's th' worst!"

We all murmured assent.

"I showed him we'd make money! Wasn't it plain to all you fellows that we'd make money!"

Again we all murmured in chorus. It sounded like a solemn ritual.

"And didn't I tell him *The Giggle* would go?"

"You did!" we answered.

"And so it shall!" concluded Jabbers, furiously. " That paper is going to go if I have to break my neck! Come and have a drink!"

We followed our leader into the hotel just opposite, and there, most wonderful to relate, Fate delivered into our hands an ambitious printer with a little money, who wanted to be associated with men of genius.

By 11:30 we had concluded all arrangements for the bringing out of the first issue, and as we swept down the silent street on our way home, we stopped and howled some insulting remarks through the keyhole of Fodgers and Blast's deserted establishment.

The Giggle "went" — even as Jabbers had predicted. It " went " so high and so far that it took the ambitious printer with it, and, so far as I know, he never came down again.

Precisely which one of the eighteen libel actions destroyed *The Giggle* Newspaper Co. would be hard to say, but the eminent scandal-writer—while deploring the fate of *The Giggle* —took the public outcry against it and its untimely end as a tribute to the accuracy of what he called "his inside information." Jabbers certainly set great value on the "Personal" column in *The Giggle*, and an examination of the one and only complete file of the paper— now in my possession— will disclose the bones of more of the scandals of '93 than an ordinary painstaking historian could fish out in a life time. *The Giggle* is a very dead publication now, but there is not in the whole Commonwealth a more flourishing firm of printers than Messrs. Fodgers and Blast, publishers of *The Lamp of Innocence*, *Ecclesiastical Dogstealer*, *Mosque Mutterings*, etc., etc.

Jabbers fled the country some years back over some private unpleasantness, and the rest of the staff have mercifully been dispersed by time and tide. I am humbly engaged in commercial pursuits, and take but a faint interest in journalism. One other survivor, however, is still on the trail, and often instances *The Giggle* as one of the slaughtered innocents of Australian literature. He is for ever deploring the early death of that painfully outspoken print, and has developed an intense hatred— which nothing can abate— for the respected firm of Fodgers and Blast, whom, for some totally insufficient reason, he chooses to regard as part-murderers of his beloved paper.

If you happen to see any scathing references in the *Snorting News* to "a firm of huckstering humbugs— publishers of certain church organs— who have done their very utmost to dam the springs of native genius," you will recognise the hand of the avenger— that able journalist and implacable foe of all evil-doing— the eminent scandal-writer.

3: The Escaped Hero

The Lone Hand June 1909

THE old gentleman had a bad habit, very common amongst old gentlemen and fairly frequent with old ladies. Given a little sunshine and a quiet corner, or a cosy fireside and a murmur of conversation, or a little music— not too loud, he would "drop off." On this occasion it was sunshine and peace, and the scene a retired seat in the Botanical Gardens.

When he awoke, feeling a little annoyed with himself, he discovered a young man, with a melancholy expression, sitting with folded arms at the other end of the seat. The old gentleman surveyed him attentively through half-closed eyes, and noticed that he was a fine, athletic-looking fellow, well-dressed, and apparently in the best of health. His hair was a trifle longer than most men wear it nowadays; he was clean-shaven, and in place of the usual boxer or straw hat, he wore a sombrero, pulled down to shade his face.

"An actor," murmured the old gentleman, drowsily, and immediately "dropped off" once more.

"I BEG YOUR pardon, sir."

The old gentleman woke with a start, muttering: "Yes, I suppose so. *What?*"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the stranger, in a deep, bass voice. "I beg your pardon, but I thought you addressed me."

"Ah ! I'm afraid I was only snoring. I have a bad habit of falling asleep in the sun."

The stranger sighed and cast a look full of meaning at the old gentleman.

"You are fortunate, sir. Sleep is sweet solace for the restless soul!"

"I find it annoying at times," said the old gentleman, rather sharply.

"If Grief would but sleep!" exclaimed the young man, extending his right arm in an elegant gesture.

"*Who?*" asked the old gentleman. (He was rather deaf at times.) "*Who* did you say couldn't sleep?"

"If *Grief* would but sleep!"

The old gentleman glanced at the young man, and decided in his own mind that he was posing.

"Yes— yes! Quite so!" He turned away, as if to conclude the conversation, and looked down at the lake. But the exaggerated young man would not be denied. He edged up a little nearer, and pointed in the direction of Richmond. Then he remarked, in his deep, rich, ringing bass: "I have come back from there; back from the sun-drenched plains, where the winds wander where they

list, and every man can ride and shoot, and every girl is true. Tell me, friend, did you ever feel the want of a handshake, or wait in vain for the one word from a woman's lips that lifts a man's soul to Heaven?"

The old gentleman pondered for a moment, and came to the conclusion that he couldn't be fully awake. Under the circumstances he thought it best to temporise. Possibly he would understand the matter better if the stranger explained it a little. He replied that, so far as his recollection served, he had never been in either predicament.

The young man nodded mysteriously, and said:

"Such is Life! You are of the beaten track. I am of the waste places— a nomad under the stars— a wanderer in the desert! I tell you I have carried an image in my heart, and now, at the end, I am punished for my idolatry. My idol is overthrown, and a name— her name— is as dust in my mouth.

"Ah, well!" with a sigh, "I suppose it was written in the Beginning."

"The beginning of what, my man?"

"I said 'in the Beginning.' "

"Yes," said the old gentleman, impatiently, "but which beginning?"

The young man sighed again. "How can one explain?" he cried. "How throw one's heart to the vultures? Shall not her name suffice?"

"It might help," observed the old gentleman, tartly.

"It is as dust in my mouth!"

"What is it?" inquired the old gentleman.

"I have forgotten!" said the amazing young man.

The old gentleman sat bolt upright, and pointed with his cane at the man with the dusty taste in his mouth.

"Young man!" he shouted, " I don't know what your motive is, or if you have any motive at all, but I warn you that if you persist in talking nonsense and trying to make a fool of me, I'll not listen any further. You're confoundedly impertinent, my friend!"

"I have forgotten!"

The young man made no direct reply to this speech. Instead, he fixed his serious eyes on the old gentleman, and asked softly: " Shall I tell you a story, old man?"

"No I I don't want to hear any stories!"

" But this is not as other stories, sir.It is not a thing compounded merely of words. It has three lives in it, many tears, and maybe a heartache or two. Do you not think a man might pause a moment to hear such a story?"

"Oh, it's not the time I object to! It's the feeling that you're acting that makes me unwilling to listen. However, if you'll give me your word that you're

neither acting nor trying to play a practical joke, I don't mind hearing your 'story,' as you call it."

The young man inclined his head gracefully. "I thank you, sir," he said, very simply.

There was a dramatic pause.

"It began out on the plains— the big, sun-drenched plains, where the winds wander where they list, and every man can ride and shoot, and every girl is true."

"What was the name of it?" asked the seeker after truth.

"Names are nothing to me, sir," answered the evader of facts.

"But they are to me, sir! I like names and dates and— and plain speaking. I tell you frankly, my man, I don't like this fly-away style of talking that you've got. It doesn't inspire confidence, and, if I were you, I'd drop it!"

"One cannot get rid of one's heart," observed the mournful young man, looking away.

"I didn't ask you to get rid of it! I merely asked you to be a little more definite in your statements."

"I shall do my best, sir."

"Very well, then! Go on!"

The young man turned and, fixing his eyes on his listener, said: "Tell me, friend, did you ever feel the want of a hand-shake or wait in vain for the one word from a woman's lips that lifts a man's soul to Heaven?"

The old gentleman fixed his eyeglasses firmly on his nose, and stared angrily at the storyteller. "Why, confound it, you asked me that same question a few minutes ago!"

"And one might ask such a question a thousand times, sir!"

"Yes, said the old gentleman grimly, "one might! But one wouldn't get a thousand answers! D — d impudence!" he snorted, turning his back.

"Will you not hear me, old man?" pleaded the stranger. "I have journeyed a long way, and am like to journey further ere the end is reached. Surely the tale is worth the telling?"

The old gentleman wheeled round, and, fixing the storyteller with a warning eye, said: "Now, before we go any further, I want you to tell me if you're going to ask for money when you've finished this 'story' or whatever you call it."

"I swear to you on my soul that I will ask for no money!"

"Very well, then. Go on, and for good-ness' sake talk plainly, and don't use these exaggerated expressions. I do hate high-flown nonsense."

"I shall begin," murmured the young man, "at the Beginning, and go right on to the end, sparing nothing. I shall tell you all!"

The listener nodded sympathetically.

"That's the best plan. Tell me all."

"Yes," repeated the young man, "I shall tell you all!"

"Yes— yes!"

"Everything!" said the young man, dramatically. "'Will you not hear me, old man?'"

The old man thumped with his stick on the lawn. "Oh ! confound it all, will-you-go-on-with-the-story?"

A dreamy expression stole over the storyteller's face, as he raised his arm and pointed once more at Richmond. "I have come back from there," he said. "Back from the big, sun-drenched plains where the winds wander where they list, and every man can ride and shoot, and every girl is true. Tell me, friend, did you ever feel the want of a—"

"Stop it, sir ! Stop it instantly! I tell you I will not listen to that rubbish again!"

"But, sir, it is in my story!"

"Well, leave it out!"

"Mayhap it will mar the story?"

"No it won't," said the old fellow confidently. "Whenever you come to a part like that you skip it. Now go on, and try and tell it sensibly."

The young man took a deep breath, and indicated Richmond in the usual way. "I have come back," he said, "Back from the—"

"Shut up!" shouted the old gentleman, throwing civility to the winds. "If you dare to repeat that nonsense about the sun-drenched plains I'll give you a clout on the head! Now be off with you out of this, or I'll give you in charge to the first policeman I see!"

"But, sir!—"

"Silence, you blackguard! Do you think I've got nothing else to do but listen to confounded recitations? I hate recitations! A big, strapping man like you ought to be ashamed of loafing about, fooling away the time talking twaddle ! Now take my advice and clear out of this as quick as you can!"

"But you haven't said the right things!" protested the young man. "I don't believe you're a proper character at all!"

The old gentleman managed, by a severe effort, to control himself.

"My young friend," he growled, "the less you say about characters the better. Now take yourself off, or I'll call that gardener over and have you taken up to the lodge. Go on! Clear out!"

The young man, with a resigned shrug, turned and strode gloomily away among the trees.

The old gentleman, feeling very ruffled indeed, resumed his seat and relapsed into a brown study, pressing his cane into the lawn and puzzling over the ridiculous interview, until a feminine voice broke into his reverie with a timid "Excuse me!"

The old gentleman started, and, looking up, discovered a quietly dressed little lady of about thirty-five, wearing pince-nez and a dismayed expression.

On seeing who it was he stood up and asked if he could be of any assistance.

"I am so sorry to bother you, but I have just had a very serious loss!" The little lady spoke rapidly and showed an inclination towards hysterics. "I am a writer. I was at work on the hill over there an hour ago when I missed my hero. He is tall and good-looking, has brown eyes—"

"Hair rather long?" shouted the old gentleman, taking up the parable. "Wears a monstrosity of a hat? Talks about his love affairs to everybody? Uses nonsensical expressions? Eh? That him?"

The authoress nodded frantically.

"Why, damme, the fool was here twaddling to me half the morning! I thought all the time he talked like a book! He went down that walk not three minutes ago!"

The authoress, regardless of the hole in her stocking, picked up her skirts and fled recklessly in the direction indicated.

4: The Dance Amongst the Roses

The Lone Hand July 1909

EVELYN was a tall, fair, earnest girl, with a gentle, grey-haired mother and no sense of humor. She lived with the gentle, grey-haired mother, and ruled her with a rod of iron until she was twenty-seven, and then she gave her suburb a gentle shock of surprise by taking in marriage and by main force poor old Fogey, retired gentleman, aged seventy-five, who had lived since the beginning of gossip in the big house with the rose garden at the top of the hill.

When the wedding was the main topic of conversation with Evelyn's suburb and its Sunday visitors, some people expressed their astonishment at the union. Most of them, however, were strangers to the district, and none of them had ever met the young and undeniably beautiful bride.

Evelyn— for all her haughtiness and her resemblance to a lily of the valley— was of an affectionate disposition. She had, undoubtedly, been a great favorite; but somehow her popularity seemed to have waned, and the only young man she was at all friendly with came from afar off.

The young man was training for Holy Orders, had a rather small income, and was intensely in earnest. After an acquaintance of three months, he assured Evelyn one evening that he loved her with all his heart, that he would never love anyone else, and that he felt sure she would be a great help to him in his life's work. Evelyn kissed him, said that she loved him dearly, and that she would try to be a help to him. So it came to pass they were engaged, and Evelyn languidly drew off her gloves in the train so that the ladies of the suburb could see the ring for themselves. Also, the young man eased off a bit on the Holy Orders, and studied the time-table until he almost knew it off by heart.

It was more or less a dispensation of Fate that brought about the breaking-off of the engagement. One night, just when Evelyn had ordered her mother off to bed and was turning out the lamp in the sitting-room, there came a loud ring at the front-door bell. Evelyn— who was not of a nervous disposition— swept gracefully up the hall, and, opening the door, discovered a woman like an upper servant in a very bad stage of fear.

"Oh! Miss Desmond!" she cried. "Oh! Miss Desmond!"

"What's the matter?" said Evelyn, sharply.

"Mr. Fogey!" gasped the woman, "He's ill! Oh! terribly ill! Will you please come back with me? I'm so frightened!" She started to cry in a helpless way, and Evelyn, telling her to wait, got her hat and walked quickly with her the little distance that separated the two houses.

When they got inside they found the old man lying back in his chair before the fire, with the agonised look of one whose heart is having a close race with

Death. Evelyn, who had no knowledge of nursing, loosened his collar and ran to the telephone in the hall. Luckily the doctor had just come in from the theatre, and his motor was then throbbing at his front door. In ten minutes he was by the old man's side, and in another two hours he was able to assure both women that all the danger was over. He left, saying he would call about breakfast time, and, the housekeeper assuring her that she would not stay in the house alone, Evelyn consented to stay the night. She stayed for a month, and never left the quiet old gentleman alone except when she went down to wield the iron sceptre a bit at her mother's house.

On towards the end of the month, when Evelyn had got thoroughly used to the quiet luxury of old Fogey's house, she began to argue seriously with herself about Horace. (Horace was the young man of the Holy Orders and the time-tables.) She began to doubt whether she would be a "help" and a "good influence," and all the other things Horace was so sure about. She considered Horace's prospects and salary as a sweet, sensible girl should; and finally, after a gentle pang or two of lady-like remorse, she wrote Horace one of the little notes he cherished:

My Dear Horace,

Will you take me across to the Gardens next Saturday? Poor Mr. Fogey is much better, and I am longing for a talk with you. Meet me at the Library about three, if you can come.

Lovingly, Evelyn.

P.S.—I have something to tell you.

Of course, Horace took her. He would have deserted an archbishop to see her for five minutes at a busy street corner. They walked along slowly to the Gardens, talking just as persons in love always talk. Or it might be more correct to say they talked like one person in love and one sensible person. When they arrived in that green abode of peace, they found one of those places where the doves coo in the dappled afternoon sunlight and the voices and footsteps of approaching loungers give ample warning. There they sat down, and Evelyn, beautiful in a clinging white frock and shady hat, drew figures on the gravel with the point of her parasol and talked seriously, while the young man's face lost its boyish look and grew white and set. He heard her to the end, watching carefully the diagrams she drew with such precision, and, when she was quite finished, turned away and stared at the river glinting between the trees.

"I'm most awfully sorry!" she ventured, after a long pause.

He turned round, misery in his eyes.

"Are you serious?" he pleaded. "This— this hits me hard, dear. I don't know what to say. You seem to have thought it all out."

"Oh! I'm so sorry!" she cried impulsively, and laid her gloved hand on his.

He looked her in the eyes, and she met his gaze frankly.

"Hear, I'm not the right girl for you. Some day— in a few years, perhaps— you will meet someone you like better. I'm sorry, dear! Really, I'm most awfully sorry!" She didn't actually cry, but her eyes undoubtedly had tears in them.

He looked at her mutely and took out his watch. Then, "It's four o'clock," he said hoarsely. "Shall we go?"

She rose silently, and they walked slowly away down the shady path. He had behaved very well indeed.

AT the end of the summer the young man was appointed a curate, or something of the kind, and sent away up country; and Evelyn quietly appropriated the old man and the rose garden in holy matrimony, and went to live in the house on the top of the hill.

Mr. and Mrs. Fogey lived very quietly. Evelyn had not many friends, and those of her husband were mostly dead. He was extremely quiet even for a man of seventy-five. If he wasn't sitting in front of the fire with some heavy English periodical he was admiring his rose garden, and when he wasn't doing either he was in bed in his room, sleeping like a child. He had no ailment that would provide an excuse for Evelyn fussing about him. His tired old heart had gone along very well since the night of the historic seizure; and he could have completed his daily circle of fire, rose garden and bed just as well if he had simply been left to his quiet, self-effacing housekeeper and her staff of two maids. However, Evelyn had married him, and he gave her his home and handsome dresses and old-fashioned courtesy, and now and again tried to talk to her of his old friends in the cemetery. This sort of conversation, though, proved rather melancholy and depressing; and generally, after he had been talking for a minute or so, he would recollect that it was hardly the sort of thing to entertain a young bride with, and apologise gently for what he called "my thoughtlessness, dear child." Then he would relapse into placid thought and stare at the fire until he dropped into a gentle doze. At intervals— perhaps once a week— he smoked a mild cigar, but with great care and the air of one making an experiment for another world.

Looking at him, you would have felt quite certain that he had been a man of no vices who had drifted quietly into the haven of old age and dropped anchor there unnoticed. It seemed strange that Fate should have endowed him with a beautiful young wife— until you remembered that the young wife was Evelyn.

They lived this life—or Evelyn sat by him while he lived it —for three or four months, and then the one defect of the alliance cropped up. It would have been an ideal round for an old couple of seventy-five— or even two old

gentlemen of seventy-five— but Evelyn was only twenty-seven. Horace had quite gone out of her life. He hadn't even written, and Evelyn quite unreasonably felt hurt. As a matter of fact, Horace had found the nice girl she had predicted for him, and was on the verge of being engaged ; and, while Evelyn sat by her old gentleman in town, Horace, happy and flushed, was playing tennis with his nice girl in the rather uneven grass court of the country vicarage.

At the end of four months Evelyn took the reins of the establishment firmly in her slim, white hands, and started to wake her old gentleman up. At first she did not make any effort to bring people to the house, but together they went to concerts and theatres and lectures, and the old gentleman fell asleep at all of them. They hired a hansom three afternoons a week and went driving, and the old gentleman dozed in a gentlemanly fashion nearly all the time. They went to church twice every Sunday, and the old man slept devoutly through everything. He was a restful old person; he made no suggestions or objections ; he went everywhere she could think of, and was very agreeable and courteous until he fell asleep. And then he never snored or made himself noticeable in any way. Take him all in all, he was as satisfactory an old gentleman of seventy-five as you could have found anywhere.

But at last the strain of sleeping in unaccustomed places began to tell on Evelyn's husband; and his doctor hinted that it might be as well if he did not go out quite so much. He had been accustomed for so many years to his quiet home life that even the gentle dissipations insinuated on him by Evelyn were telling on his small stock of strength. So most of the lectures and concerts and drives were cut out, and the old man reverted to his old circle— fire, rose garden, bed. And again, fire, rose garden, bed. Sunday was his busy day. On Sunday it was church, rose garden, fire, bed. And usually on Sundays he went to bed very tired.

Evelyn, at the second attempt, lasted out three months of this existence, and then one day she told the old gentleman she thought it would be nice to ask some people to dine with them. The old gentleman said gently: "Certainly, my child; ask some people by all means."

He stared thoughtfully at the fire for another minute or so, and then sank to sleep as usual.

Evelyn wrote to a married brother and several other sober, settled-down relatives, and they all came and were very formal and dull, and left early. The old gentleman made an effort and kept awake, and he and Evelyn's brother— who was a stout, bald man of forty-two— agreed about the government of the day and the situation in Egypt, and things of that description. The old gentleman told one or two quiet stories of men who were dead and gone, and

Evelyn's brother— who was a man without humor— spoke ponderously of the expansion of trade "within the last five- and- twenty years." The old gentleman nodded his white head and said that "Australia would be a great country in years to come, sir— in years to come."

Evelyn's brother cleared his throat and said: "Undoubtedly, in years to come."

Then conversation languished until the old gentleman told another story about another man who was dead and gone. The guests went early, on the plea of trains, and the old gentleman went off to bed looking rather more tired than usual. He had had a heavy day.

The dinners, however, became quite an institution. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that they became a solemn rite, performed at frequent intervals. Other relatives were gradually drawn into the vortex, until "dinner at Evelyn's" became quite a common expression amongst them.

The old gentleman, though, never seemed to acquire the ease of the practised host. He was invariably polite and attentive, but, even when telling a story of someone who was dead and gone, he wore a strained look. The dull people who frequented his table whispered to each other that he would be more at his ease when he knew them better; so they came more often.

Evelyn found that her relatives were not enough to fill up her life, so she started to take her obedient old husband out again. The old gentleman went along to everything she proposed, until one evening, on being asked if he would not like to go out, he ventured to say that he was just a little tired and thought he would prefer to stay at home. "However, dear child, don't you stay here with me. You get a cab, and go along and enjoy yourself. You'll be quite safe, and I'll be all right here."

Evelyn threw off her wrap immediately.

"Oh! I couldn't think of leaving you here by yourself! I should be anxious all the time."

"Nonsense," said the old fellow, gently. "Now, run along and enjoy yourself, just to please me."

Evelyn sat down resignedly. "I simply can't go out by myself and leave you here alone. What do you think people would say if they saw me without my husband?"

The old gentleman looked up in amazement.

"God bless me! What would they say?" (He hadn't heard anyone say anything for years.)

"Why, they'd say, of course, that I was neglecting you! "

"Dear, dear! That would be very unjust indeed—very unjust! I'm afraid, my dear, you are too sensitive."

"I want very much to go to this concert ; but, of course, if you don't feel inclined—"

The old gentleman rose without another word, and toddled off to his room to get his coat. He had a vague idea that the little dialogue was fifty years too late. He felt that he might have escaped this sort of thing if he had had the forethought to marry Evelyn's grandmother. Then, instead of being Evelyn's husband, he would have been Evelyn's grandfather— probably patting her children on the head by this time. He muttered peevishly to himself as he pulled on his boots and tottered round after his coat and hat. He began to realise the trouble of being a husband. Something irritated him; the stick couldn't be found. He stood in the middle of the room for a minute, fidgeting and fretting. Then he remembered that, only for his young wife, he would be sleeping happily in front of the fire. Instantly his long pent-up feelings burst out in a very old man's snarl:

"Pshaw! Why the deuce did she marry me?"

Now it happened that Evelyn was at that instant standing in the doorway, having come in to help him.

"John!" she exclaimed, horror-struck.

He turned round, still fuming, as if he were her father. "Well, I can't help it, my child! I'm sure I don't know why you did! "

"John! This is dreadful!"

The old fellow opened the wardrobe door and peered in. His voice floated out somewhat muffled:

"What on earth a handsome girl like yourself can see in an old fellow like me passes my comprehension. I'm too old for anything! I fall asleep everywhere! I'm just an old fool!"

This was hitting Evelyn's vanity very hard, but worse was to follow. He emerged from the wardrobe without his stick, but with his white hair ruffled fantastically and his old face flushed with annoyance.

"There, you see! "he cried. "I'm too much of an old fool to remember where I put my stick! I'm for ever pottering about looking for things! What's the use of me? God bless me, girl, you shouldn't have married me! Why on earth didn't you marry that young fellow I used to see you with? He would have been a companion to you. All I'm good for is to sit in front of the fire and snore."

"You are talking utter nonsense."

"Not at all! I know what I'm talking about. I was an old fool to marry you!"

"John!"

"I mean I was an old fool to let you marry me. Confound it all! I'd got along by myself for seventy-four years. Why couldn't I have got along for another two or three? I can't live much longer— it wouldn't be reasonable to expect it."

" Oh, don't talk in that silly way! "

"My child, it's not silly at all; it's sensible. I'm too old to pretend anything, and you mustn't expect it of me. I'm just a plain, stupid old fellow, only fit to sit in front of the fire."

Evelyn had recovered herself by this time. Her patience had run out, and, seeing that he would probably run on in this disconcerting fashion for some time, she decided to institute another system of management. Drawing herself up, she said, coldly: "Are you quite ready now?"

The old man gave one startled glance, and picked up the first stick he could find. "Yes, my dear," he said, quite sulkily.

Then they went to the concert, and the old husband was so excited and angry that he never flagged or dozed off once. They had turned the first corner in their married life.

Thereafter she took him out relentlessly to all sorts of entertainments— theatres, concerts, lectures— the old, weary round. And, by-and-bye, he began to wear the helpless, patient look of a child that is being towed rapidly along a busy street by an inconsiderate grown-up. He went to lectures where comparative youths— men of forty-five or so— explained all about Life, and bored him horribly. He had put Life aside years ago, and the theories, or parrot-like repetition of other men's theories, didn't interest him. If the lecturers could have said anything worth listening to about the after-life he could have borne them. But, of course, they couldn't. Concerts he reckoned a trifle worse than lectures. Theatres were for the nursery of Youth. Still he went on with it, and was only irritable now and then. He was a very patient old gentleman.

There was about a year of this feverish pursuit of sedate pleasure, and then the Scandal happened. The old gentleman never referred to it as "the Scandal." He twice called it an "unfortunate affair" and once a "nuisance," and after that he never called it anything at all, but went to sleep in front of the fire, and— apparently, anyhow—forgot all about it.

Briefly, Evelyn went out one evening to visit her mother and never returned. A letter which the old gentleman found on his pillow informed him that she was a very wicked woman and was departing that night for a foreign country. He was to try and forgive her. Also, she would always remember him, and how kind he had been. That made half the scandal. A young doctor of the next street was missing next morning; and, as he left no note and didn't return, that made the other half. Subsequent rumors and reports from the deep sea

confirmed the suburb's most enthusiastic suspicions, and an avalanche of sympathy descended like a vast shower-bath of retribution on the forlorn but placid old husband.

The avalanche came down in one mass— Evelyn's dull, bald brother. He explained that Mrs. Desmond— who was utterly prostrated— had begged him to say how keenly she felt it. Mrs. Desmond felt quite incapable of going out, otherwise she would have come herself.

He himself was astounded and shocked beyond measure. He puffed out his cheeks and blessed his soul with great unction innumerable times, while the white-haired old man looked into the fire and listened.

When Evelyn's brother had quite run down, the old man looked up and gave his views on the matter.

"Well, you may consider me shocking, but I'm not very distressed about it. That nonsensical marriage was really the first big blunder of my life. You know, my dear sir, it was an utter absurdity! But it's no use talking about it now. The only thing I regret is that the girl is hampered by bearing my name. Nominally anyhow, she is my wife. I will release her legally as soon as I can. It is an unfortunate affair "

The fat brother puffed gratefully. "You are most generous, sir! When a young wife goes on in such a scandalous fashion a man would be justified—"

The old gentleman broke in impatiently.

"I look upon it merely as an unfortunate affair! I thank you for your sympathy, but I would rather not say any more about it. You might please explain to Mrs. Desmond how I view the matter. It is rather a nuisance, but we must look at it in the proper light."

The old gentleman got slowly to his feet, and Evelyn's brother, somewhat nonplussed; picked up his hat and stick, and, after saying good-bye at the door, departed, never to return. The old man came back to his armchair in front of the fire and stared at the coals until a gentle tap at the door roused him from his reverie.

It was the quiet housekeeper. "What time shall I serve lunch, sir?"

"One o'clock, please, Jane. I am not going out to-day."

The woman went out and he was alone again. The clock chimed twelve, and a red cinder fell out of the grate and turned rapidly to grey. He looked reflectively at the coals....

Later on he got up, took his old garden hat and a stout stick from the hall-stand, and went out into the rose garden. There had been a slight shower of rain a little while before, and in the spring sunlight the drops on the blooms sparkled like jewels. A delicious smell of wet earth and roses hung in the air, the sky was blue, with here and there a few retreating clouds, and wisps of

steam stole upward from the drying asphalt path. A particularly joyous baker pulled up his cart at a house on the other side of the street, and, seizing his basket, ran whistling in the gate. Somewhere close at hand an eager boy shouted impatiently for his mate and banged on a back-yard gate. It was a holiday. The old man's eye kindled, and he swung his cane to and fro.

Then the dance happened. It wasn't much of a dance— not more than a tottery step or two, and it might easily have been mistaken for a stumble. But it wasn't a stumble at all. It was a feeble old Dance of Delight to celebrate his ancient freedom— a hardly perceptible step and stagger, but sufficiently shameful to indicate the state of mind he was in.

And, after he had recovered himself, he glanced round and met the wild stare of a scandalised small boy. Also, an impression of a baker, paralysed in the act of delivering bread, seared itself on to his brain as he turned and fled inside.

It was a contented, sleepy old voice that, two minutes later, remarked from the depths of an easy chair: "I'll tell Jane to have a look for those old slippers."

5: The Policeman Who Was Kissed

The Lone Hand July 1910

THE stout, red-faced policeman, with his ridiculously small lunch basket tightly clutched in one hand, climbed the stairs heavily, paused for a moment on the dark landing, and then dived at the door marked "Editor." He knocked upon it.

"Come in!" drawled a weary voice. The constable pushed the door open and thrust in his head.

"Can I see th' editor?"

"I am the editor," retorted the owner of the weary voice, wheeling round on his chair. He was a fierce man, grey with habitual overwork; and he looked as if he could have written while Sydney burned. Astonishment was beyond him, and for twenty years he had not enthused over anything save a good news-story.

He was bald-headed, an atheist, and feared nothing but a libel action. The policeman noticed the bald-headedness, and realised the other things in a sub-conscious way as he sat down on the Vienna chair indicated by the pen-handle, and dandled his helmet on one knee and his absurd lunch-basket on the other, much as he would have nursed his twins at home.

"I called about that bit ye put in th' paper about me," he chanted, and put down the twins on the floor, preparatory to diving into the inside pocket of his tunic for the copy he had brought with him.

The editor checked him with a look and a wave of the pen, which he still grasped in his hand— partly from force of habit, partly as a sign that the interview was not to be a prolonged one.

"Th' carters are makin' fun of me," went on the aggrieved constable. "I can't get any peace at all since th' parrygraph came out."

"I'm sorry," chattered the editor in a testy manner; "I'm very sorry, indeed. But you know these things will happen. It will be forgotten in a day or so."

"Did ye sack th' man that wrote it, as ye promised me ye would?"

"I did!" lied the editor. "I sacked him five minutes after you'd gone."

"I'm glad t' hear it! Did he give ye any explanation as to how he come t' put 'Policeman Kissed Be a Horse' instead of 'Policeman Kicked Be a Horse'?"

"I didn't give him time! I told him he was an idiot, and shot him out of the place before he could answer back."

"Who is he, and where does he live? I'd like t' talk t' him a bit meself and tell him what I think of him. He's made me look a fool, ye understand; and I'd like to get a bit of me own back."

The editor fidgeted in his chair.

"I'm afraid I can't do that. Anyhow, I think the fellow has been punished enough. I understand that he has a wife and twelve children— or fourteen children, I forget which— and that his mother-in-law is partly dependent on him. You noticed, of course, that we corrected it in this morning's paper and apologised for the error? I presume that we may now consider the matter closed?"

The policeman started to get red in the face, and to look unhappy in a boiled-lobster sort of way. "It's caused me a lot of worry, sir, an' annoyance. I don't think you writing gentlemen know much about carters and th' likes of them. It's hinderin' me in th' course of me jooty. Bits of lads that I could put across me knee, instead of payin' me th' respect which is me joo, are jeerin' at me in a sidelong way. 'You're th' one!' they shout t' one another as they drive by; and this mornin' one whipper-snapper kissed his hand to a mate an' shouts, 'Remember me t' th' mare!'

"Twas all I could do t' keep from liftin' him off his dray be th' scruff of his neck and givin' him th' father of a hidin'."

"Oh, they'll forget it in a day or so," muttered the man of ink.

"Divil a bit of it!" shouted the constable, now thoroughly aroused. "Th' likes of them'll keep a good joke goin' for many a long day. Why, wasn't there Buck Maloney, that was a sergeant when I joined. One dark night, down in Woolloomooloo, he was takin' a dirty old baggage called Wall-Eyed Mary t' th' station, when she flung her arms round his neck and sobbed on his shoulder, 'Michael, yer me own true love, after all!' An' poor old Buck was called True-Love Maloney till th' day they took him away t' Rookwood with the band thumpin' out 'Th' Dead March in Gaul.' No! that sort of joke don't die out in a day or so!"

He picked up his helmet and stroked it lovingly as he was wont to stroke the cat after dinner. The editor, looking at his immense, caressing hand, recognised the cat-petting action, and wondered in an idle and perfectly useless way if the dome-like headgear could by any means be fitted with a purr.

"Of course," he muttered at last, "of course, you have not suffered by it."

"Not suffered!" echoed the policeman. "What else have I been doin' but sufferin' these two days? I tell you, sir, that every carter that goes by me tries t' make a fool of me!"

"That is merely a trifling annoyance. Believe me, it will soon be forgotten. What I meant is that you haven't suffered any injury in your profession ; for instance— your officers have not reprimanded you about it, have they?"

The choking policeman rose up and thumped heavily on the top of the editor's roll-top desk. "Why would they reprimand me?" he thundered. "Was it

my faulty that your fool paper said that a dray-hliorse kissed me? If your ray-porter is too drunk to know one word from another, d' ye think my officers is goin' t' blame it on to me?"

"Then they haven't reprimanded you?" said the editor as blandly as he could.

"Of course , they haven't!"

"Well, then, there is no harm done, is there?"

"There's this much harm done," whined the regulator of traffic, "ev'ry Tom, Dick an' Harry is kissin' their hand to each other, an' shriekin' like girls playin' kiss-in-the-ring at a picnic. If it keeps on much longer, I'll lose me temper and give one of them bright lads a few clouts on the ear to go on with. Then I'll have th' jacket taken off me back as sure as Death; and, maybe, I'll come askin' you for a job."

His oration concluded, he sat down heavily; and the editor looked in a distracted manner at the ink-bottle for the space of three minutes.

Then— "Well, leave it with me, and I'll see what I can do about it."

The constable, with a deep sigh, gathered up his helmet and his lunch-basket:

"And when will I call again, sir?"

"Say four o'clock on Wednesday," muttered the editor, with a hungry look at a pile of proofs.

"Thank you, sir," said the constable, moving towards the door.

"Good-day, sir."

"Good-day," echoed the editor without looking up— for he was already at work.

The door banged softly, and the room once more was comfortably silent and empty.

Five minutes later, the editor's left hand dropped the first proof, corrected and initialled, on the empty chair, while his right reached out in a strangely mechanical way and scrawled rapidly on the memorandum pad, "Tell M. to square kissed copper— £1 petty cash."

6: Brown's Inflammable Card Party

The Lone Hand Aug 1910

EVEN now I don't know why I went to Brown's place at all— for I hardly knew the man. But I am quite certain that when he invited me first he told me that it was to be a fancy-dress ball; that is why I turned up in a complete fireman's costume to play euchre with a roomful of Brown's dull relatives and friends. Brown, instead of charitably telling me that I had made a mistake, and letting me make my escape, kept me waiting in the hall whilst he prepared his barbarian friends for the joke, and then ushered me into the middle of them. Maniacal howls and shrieks of joy from sixty apparently respectable people greeted my appearance. Stout old gentlemen got up on chairs and cheered; and venerable old ladies in caps, and young ones in spectacles, shrieked and cackled like a forest full of kookaburras at sunset. I tried to tell Brown what I thought of him; but the storm of laughter drowned my voice; and at last I sulkily accepted a chair at which two old ladies and an old gentleman were fumbling with cards. I felt like a new warder who has been left in sole charge of a lunatic asylum with instructions to humor the patients. When the worst of the uproar had subsided, and we were almost ready to begin, I tried to take off my heavy brass helmet; but they insisted on my keeping it on. It was too bright a joke to be hidden away; the oldest and most stupid guest had only to point at it, and instantly everyone in the vicinity set up a maddening cackle.

I played with set teeth waiting and longing for supper time to arrive. Then I meant to get as far as the garden on the pretext of having a smoke and escape. But it was not to be; they were so infatuated with the game that they grudged the interruption; and at ten o'clock refreshments were brought round to the various tables. Apart from my annoyance at being made a fool of, and the discomfort of being belted up in a hot costume in a stuffy room, I had been experiencing a fiendishly dull time. I felt that I couldn't face another hour or so of it, and confidentially inquired of a comparative youth of fifty if there was a smoking room upstairs or anywhere about.

He looked up from the sandwich he was champing, and answered cheerfully, "Oh, no; nothing but hats and coats and things upstairs."

Shortly afterwards all the guests finished taking their nourishment and started gambling with renewed fury; and, the very oldest lady in the room complaining shrilly of a draught, a gallant old gentleman with an unnatural hatred of fresh air got up and closed the two windows nearest me. I almost swooned with rage and suffocation, and felt horribly tempted to take off my brass helmet and stun him with it. Only my partner's indignation at my inattention diverted me from my awful purpose.

We played on and on, in a desperate, futile way; and the room got hotter and hotter, till I felt myself becoming light-headed in spite of the intolerable weight of my metal headgear. I couldn't get at my watch because of the way I was belted up; there was no clock near me; and I had been overheated and bothered for so long that I knew I wasn't capable of making a decently accurate guess at the time. The guests were making as much noise as a disturbed cage of parrots. Once, in a lull, I thought I heard afar in the cool night the rattle of hoofs and an ominous rumble of heavy wheels; but the uproar broke out with renewed force and drowned all other sounds with sense and meaning to them.

Later, when the clatter slackened for a second or two, I seemed to hear the sound of rushing water or myriads of rushing feet, or both together; but that too in turn was swallowed up in the delirious noises made by the party. I gave up wondering what was happening outside, and glued the remnants of my common-sense on the burlesque of a game we were playing.

It was when my aged partner had stopped the game to administer to me her fifteenth rebuke that I became aware that a madman or a number of madmen were pounding on a door. I shouted to my partner to excuse me for a minute, and stood up with the idea of attracting Brown's attention. But, before I could move, the door of the room was thrown back with a crash and another fireman appeared and shouted something at the chattering players! Then he saw me standing in my rig with my hands full of playing cards.

His jaw dropped. I stared back at him like a fool; and straightway Brown's fool friends howled and rocked with unseemly mirth. They thought it was another fool-guest! The fireman in the doorway (I saw he was an officer by his silver helmet) was yelling angrily at me across the room; but I hadn't the slightest idea what he was saying. I waded to him through the press, and was just in time to see a couple of firemen run upstairs dragging a heavy hose between them. The hall was full of acrid smoke; water was splashing plentifully down the staircase; and outside in the street I could hear the quick eager pumping of fire engines and the restless shuffle-shuffle of a big crowd.

"What the blazes are you doing in there?" shouted the fire chief. Then, without waiting for my explanation, he shoved me back into the room, saying rapidly, "Get all these people out quickly! Don't let 'em rush! See that they all get clear, and report to the deputy for duty!"

I didn't try to argue with him; I had endured three hours of sitting still in that infernal costume and being made a fool of by that absurd collection of people; the chance to be of some real use and boss them round a bit was too good to be missed. I jumped back into the room and shouted, "You've all to go into the street at once!"

Dead silence supervened; and Brown rose indignantly to speak ; but I waved him aside and shouted again, "All hands into the street at once! Ladies first!" Whilst they were still staring, I assisted a middle-aged woman to her feet and pushed her gently towards the open door. A wisp of acrid smoke sneaked into the room, and a thin, reedy voice squeaked, "FIRE!"

Then the frightened rush came; and, amid a great scuffling and screaming, they streamed out into the night like sheep. An old gentleman was the very last to run out; I noticed as he shot past me that he still gripped fanwise in his hand the last cards dealt him. Part of the sodden ceiling fell as I dodged after him through the door, and water commenced to pour down into the room. I ran out the front door and found the whole street brightly illuminated and filled with a murmuring crowd; firemen were everywhere. The whole of the top storey of Brown's house was blazing to the skies!

Somewhere behind me an engine was puffing and blowing off steam with fierce energy. Strong hands seized my arm, and a voice of authority snapped, "Relieve the man at the engine!"

A shovel was flung down on the road with a clang. Someone picked it up and thrust it into my hands, and I suddenly found myself stoking the engine and asking a worried-looking fireman with smears on his face, "How long has that house been on fire?"

With an oilcan in his right hand and a lamp in his left, he looked up from the job in hand and growled back, "Matter of half an hour or so. Didn't you come down on th' reel?"

My answering "No," was drowned by a vicious hiss from the engine.

"There goes th' roof!" yelled a boy's voice.

"Keep back there!" commanded a shadowy policeman.

"Oh-h! my hat! My beautiful new hat!" The wild, falsetto wail cleft the gloom like a sword-stroke. I recognised the voice of my censorious partner, and shot another shovelful of coals into the firebox with a thrill of savage joy.

7: The Undertaker's Hat

The Lone Hand Feb 1911

THE lodger was dead. After many sleepless nights, he lay straightly in his coffin with white hands folded, so soundly asleep that had all the doors in the house been banged simultaneously, he would not have heeded. He had always hated the way the other lodgers banged the doors— especially the big front door. It was the only thing that ever made him really angry. And now it didn't matter how careless they were; so everybody went about on tip-toe and closed the doors as softly as if he could hear the slightest sound.

Everyone had liked the delicate, nervous man.

Bertie, the small, dirty-faced child of the landlady's daughter, had loved him; and now he stood fearfully at the bottom of the staircase, with his sickly kitten in his arms, waiting to see his sick benefactor go for a ride in the black cart with the flowers on top that stood at the front door.

He had made one or two half-hearted attempts to climb up, step by step, to the sickroom on the first floor; but each time he had been detected and haled back by a tall, angry-looking man in a black coat, who seemed to be the father of four other men in long black coats who stood whispering at the far end of the hall. Bertie hated the tall man; but he wanted to see if his long, black, shiny hat was hollow inside or solid like the blocks out in the woodshed that sick Mr. Brown used to chop every evening until he started staying in bed all day. The long, black, shiny hat had been left upside down on the hall-stand; and Bertie, measuring the distance with his eye, reckoned he would be able to see into it easily if he got up on the chair and stood on the very tips of his toes. So he stood at the foot of the stairs out of the way, nursing his cat and waiting his chance. Meanwhile he put in time staring round-eyed at the multitude of strange people who went ceaselessly up and down, talking in whispers, shaking other people's hands, shaking their own heads, now and then crying and wiping their eyes with white pocket handkerchiefs.

Bertie felt dimly that there was some reason for all this crying; but he couldn't reconcile it with the party that was going on in the darkened drawing-room. There, on the big dining-room table, was enough cake and fruit to fill the little shop at the corner where he spent his pennies; amongst it all, too, were bottles of yellow water and bottles of red. He had strayed in there early in the afternoon, and had been given a bit of plum cake by an old lady who kissed him, and a banana by a gentleman with very shiny boots, who patted him on the head and said, "There's a good little man." He had sat on three ladies' laps and been kissed and petted, and finally discovered and carried out by his mother, a bit of cake and half a banana to the good. It had been on the whole a

depressing adventure, but a profitable one; and he had enjoyed the refreshments because dinner had somehow been overlooked that day.

The tall, angry man in black kept moving about everywhere, whispering orders to the sad people not to block up the hall, and not to stand on the stairs because it would be coming down shortly. The sad people always did what he told them; but they grumbled amongst themselves every time he moved away, and Bertie felt that they, too, hated him. One lady with very red eyes was very angry, and said loudly that she wished she had got someone else who wouldn't have bothered her friends in their "hour of trial" — whatever that was. Then the other sad people told her not to mind, and that perhaps he meant it "for the best," Bertie remembered that he had heard three people say that about Brown since his visit to the party, and he wondered vaguely what "for the best" meant.

The kitten mewed weakly in his arms, and he cuddled it and whispered to it to be quiet.

Suddenly the tall, angry man appeared at the head of the stairs and crooked his finger at the four men in black near the door. They stopped whispering together and, tip-toeing up the hall, went upstairs softly two steps at a time. The lady with the red eyes rustled up after them; and some other ladies and gentlemen followed. Then the people came out from the party and went outside on the verandah, or right into the street. The hall became empty. The long, black, shiny hat stood unprotected on the hall-stand.

The child gave one guilty glance round and started towards it. Without relinquishing his arm-hold of the cat, he climbed quickly but carefully up on the chair, and, catching hold of an unoccupied branch of the rack, leant forward and peered into the depths of the upended bell-topper as a tourist peers into the crater of a volcano. The wonderful thing was hollow! Bertie was still marvelling at the strangeness of it, when there was a sudden stir and rustle at the head of the stairs. Taken by surprise, he started guiltily and dropped the kitten. The tiny thing fell on the edge of the wonderful hat, made a weak effort to right itself, and succeeded in struggling right in! Bertie, panic-stricken and ready to weep, scrambled down from his chair and ran to cover at the foot of the stairs, just as the people started to come down. The hall was soon full of people again. They stood all round, towering over him and talking in whispers.

At last the tall, angry man appeared again; and behind him came his four friends, carrying very carefully on their shoulders a long, black box with handles on it.

"Stand back, please!" whispered the tall, angry man; and all the people stood back and allowed the wonderful box to be taken past them without even asking to see what was inside it.

Bertie, dumb with amazement, suddenly remembered that he would be able to see better by climbing up on the edges of the stairs outside the banisters. He clambered high enough to see the tall man take up the wonderful hollow hat and walk out in front of the long, black box. Then the people closed in and spoilt his view. He looked round for another vantage point and observed the empty stairs. In a minute he was toiling up step by step sideways, with a definite and splendid plan in his head. It was a long journey, but he got to the top step at last. Then he ran as fast as he could along the dark landing, past Brown's closed door, and out on to the balcony. There was a wonderful lot of people in the sunlit street; but only the ones he had seen in the house were getting into the carts. The long, black box was in a big cart like a glass case on wheels; and the tall, angry man, with his wonderful hat fixed on his head, was standing by it and telling one of the four men that his cart was in the wrong place, or that he had the wrong people in it or something.

While he was talking, Bertie saw the lady with the red eyes get out of the cart and go up to the angry man, while some of the people in the carts put their heads out of the windows and looked. As soon as the angry man saw her coming, he raised his hat and there, sitting on his head, was the kitten.

"He's— got— my—kitten," wailed Bertie from the balcony with terrible distinctness.

"Take that cat off!" hissed the indignant lady, with the red eyes, pointing with a gloved forefinger.

"I haven't got my hat on!" retorted the tall man, very red and confused.

The woman's arm went up swiftly and plucked the mewling mite of fur from the undertaker's head.

She put it safely on the stone base of the iron fence where all the mourners could see it, and turned to the ruined autocrat of the tomb.

"Now, if you're ready, we will start," she said, and stepped into the first mourning coach.

Bertie, from the balcony, watched the procession move off. In the last cart he discerned the red-faced man with the shiny boots who had given him the banana at the party, shaking and rolling in his seat and holding his sides.

"He got a pain at the party," said Bertie to himself, and went down through the silent house to collect his cat.

8: A Flood of Trouble

The Lone Hand Dec 1910

"CAN you fight?" asked the man in the dray from the midst of his oilskins.

The wet swagman glanced keenly at him from under his dripping hat brim.

"A bit."

The man in the dray nodded approvingly. "Chuck your swag in the back there and climb up. I'll tell you what I want as we go along."

The swagman thankfully threw his wet Matilda over the tailboard, carefully placed his blackened billy alongside it, and hopped in. The driver slapped the reins on his horse's flank, and the dray jolted off along the muddy road.

"The river's riz a lot," said the swagman-

"It'll rise a dashed sight higher," muttered the driver gloomily.

"Think there's a flood comin'?"

"I don't think— I know!" The driver's tone was one of utter hopelessness.

"Think it will cover th' plain 'ere?" The swagman was becoming alarmed.

"Sure thing; this plain will be a lake to-morrow."

"Oh, I dunno; th' storekeeper in the town said he reckoned th' worst of it was over."

The driver waved his whip at the leaden skies and remarked, "There's lots more rain coming, and it's going to be an old man flood— I've lived all my life in this district, and I know how that old river can spread itself out when th' water from the hills comes down. That's why I want you!"

"Why?"

"It's this way. I've got a nice little place about two miles further on. The house is on a little bit of a rise; and if the flood comes down (as I reckon it will) it'll make a sort of desert island of the place."

"What can I do?"

"Hold on, and I'll tell you! I got married last week. The girl's family couldn't stand me because I was a divorced man, and wouldn't give their consent. We married in spite of them, wired the news to them at home, and came on down here to the farm. It was raining— had been raining for five days, and we didn't think it was worth while going away for a honeymoon. So we just came on to the farm."

The swagman nodded. "Best thing yer could have done— save money and bother."

"It didn't save any bother— it made

it. Last night her father and his two sons arrived and raised the finest row I've ever been in. I tell you there's been a perfect hell of an argument raging up. We sat up half the night talking fight; and they started off this morning by

threatening to punch me off the face of the earth. At last I quit and went into the township to see the J.P. about it; and I would have had them cleared off by now only the troopers are up to their eyes in work getting the settlers out of harm's way. I've told these darned relations of mine that there's a big flood coming for sure, and that they'd better get back to town while they had the chance; but they're too busy threatening me to think about floods. They're certain to be caught to-night or to-morrow if they don't clear; and God only knows when they'll be able to get away. It might be over a week. I didn't like the prospect of being alone, you understand; so when I saw you mooching along I thought I might rope you in for my side. What do you think?"

The swagman looked solemnly ahead. "Can any of their side fight?"

"I don't know, old man; they've only talked about it so far."

"Well, can you fight yourself?"

"No," said the driver, in a frank and cheerful manner; "I'm no good with my hands."

Doubt seized upon the pilgrim immediately.

"Look here, mate, what do I get out of this? I can scrap a bit, but I can't fight three on my own. Then if there's any bother afterwards, and they haul me up, how do I stand then? I know how these country J.P.'s are down on a chap like me. I tell you straight, I don't like it."

"Don't worry," said the bride-groom reassuringly. "They mightn't do anything after all, and anyhow I'll see you through. Look! There's the house on the little hill. That's the old man on the verandah, and the two sons by the fence. They're all waiting for me to come home. Faithful, affectionate beasts!"

The cart jolted along through an open gateway, creaked up the rise, and, skirting the house, drew up at the stable opposite the back door. The big, old man on the verandah watched it sullenly all the way, but made no sound of greeting. It was a gloomy home coming. Then the driver got down, and, unharnessing the horse with the assistance of his ally, led it to the stable and made it comfortable.

After the dray had been run under a rough shed, the bridegroom invited his aide to follow him, and, whistling drearily through his teeth, led the way towards the house. An anxious girl with reddened eyes met them at the door.

"How is it, Jack?" she asked.

"Tell you later," he replied, patting her shoulder. "Look! I met this chap on the road. He's going to take the fencing job when the rain clears. In the meantime we'll give him a shake-down here. Oh, I say, I forgot to ask your name?"

"Fred Johnson," said the swagman.

"Right-o, Johnson. Now how about some tea?"

"It's all ready. You and Mr. Johnson go in, and I'll call the others. I'll lay another place for myself. "

The two men tramped into a room lit by a swinging kerosene lamp in which there was a table at which places were set for four people. The host took a chair on one side and drew out the next for his guest.

"If you want the bread or anything, Johnson, point at it, and I or the wife will get it for you. This isn't a sociable family just now, and passing is off. Here they come, hang them."

The muffled tread of heavy men sounded in the hall, the door was thrown open, and the three tramped in and silently took their places on the opposite side of the table to that occupied by Johnson and his host. The bride arrived immediately afterwards with a tray on which were five steaming cups of tea. She distributed these round and retired, re-appearing a minute or so later with two immense plates of hot scones. Then she retreated to the kitchen, where she stayed. The five men ate and drank steadily in unfriendly silence for three minutes; then the rain, which had been merely drumming lightly on the roof, started a steady and deafening bombardment.

Johnson, with his mouth full of hot scone, turned to his host and shouted, "My word, it won't take much of this to bring that flood along!"

The father-in-law—a grim man with an iron-grey beard—scowled horribly on the talkative stranger, and, looking round, noticed for the first time that he was occupying his daughter's place. Putting down his knife, he roared angrily, "Mary!"

The girl appeared at the door as if by magic, rubbing her floury hands on her apron. "Yes, Dad. Do you want some more tea?"

"Why aren't you having your meal in here?" demanded her parent.

"Me? Oh, I'm just having a cup in the kitchen. I want to keep my eye on the scones."

"Can't you eat your meal in here instead of sitting out in the kitchen like a servant?"

"I'd rather have it out here, Dad. It's all right." She disappeared hastily and opened and shut the oven door to reassure him.

"Bill," said the old man, addressing the bigger of his two sons, "Mary doesn't seem to have done much good for herself by changing her name to Smithers. I don't know the name of her husband's friend—"

"Johnson!" interpolated the swagman promptly.

The old man turned on him in a fury. "I didn't ask you your name!"

"I know you didn't!"

"I don't care what it is!"

"Thought you might like to know," muttered Johnson quietly.

"Well, I don't!"

"Right-o," said the philosophical Johnson, and went on eating. The rain roared steadily on the iron roof; and beyond the walls rushing water gurgled fatuously of peace in a liquid undertone. It was a fearful night— both indoors and out.

The business of eating and drinking went forward steadily, the young wife dodging in and out fearfully with plates of hot scones and cups of tea. There was no further conversation of any kind; and at last the three, having quite finished, rose silently and tramped out of the room, the last man shutting the door with a tremendous and totally unnecessary bang. They filed up the hall, went into a distant room, shut that door with another bang, and were heard no more.

"Now for a smoke," said the bride-groom cheerily. He produced pipe, knife and matches from one pocket, and from the other half a plug of tobacco, which he pushed towards his guest. Then he proceeded with the excruciating business of scraping out the bowl of his ancient cherrywood. The rain roared harder than ever on the roof; and somewhere close handy a disconsolate and overworked pipe sobbed and slobbered an unintelligible complaint. The wife tiptoed in from the kitchen with a dishcloth in one hand and a gleaming plate in the other.

"Have they gone, Jack?"

"Yes, Girl. Can I give you a hand?"

"No; you sit and smoke. Terrible heavy rain, isn't it?"

The husband nodded and reached for the tobacco. Then the two men smoked comfortably, and yarned about everything except the hostile party in the front room, until the wife came in with some sort of sewing job in her hands and took up a position where she could hear everything that was said without having to join in the conversation. This finally drifted round to floods, and stayed there till 11 p.m., when the wife folded up her work and remarked that she had made up the guest's bed in the kitchen. Then the party broke up with muttered good-nights. In a few minutes the last light was out; and the house of dissension sat like an immense, dejected fowl on the rise.

And the pitiless rain poured down.

"IS THERE anyone in this 'ouse? "

Smithers awoke with a vague idea that someone was singing a song, the refrain of which was, "Is there anyone in this 'ouse ?" It seemed to have been going on for hours.

A vigorous attack on the front door at last shattered his dreams. He hastily lit a candle; and, pattering up the hall, unchained the door. The light revealed a

drenched and incredibly dirty man in some sort of uniform holding the ear of a wet elephant.

"What the blazes is this?"

The man outside shivered wretchedly.

"Oh Gord! I've been ridin' Peter 'ere 'arf th' blanky night; an' I reckoned I was done for when we struck this 'ere island and seen the 'ouse. "

"This isn't an island," retorted the dazed householder.

"Yes, it is," insisted the elephant rider. "It mightn't be an island at ordin'ry times, but th' flood's round it now."

Smithers, holding the candle on high, discerned dimly illimitable water. So the flood had caught them at last!

"What are you doing with that elephant?"

"Tryin' t' save me life," chattered the dirty man. "Me an' old Ram Chunder was takin' Pete across th' flats t' th' States Circus' new pitch at Watson's Crossin'. We was 'arf-way over w'en th' flood caught us proper. Old Ram climbed a tree and wouldn't budge; so I climbed up on Pete 'ere and started ridin' 'im round lookin' f'r dry land. 'E Found this place some'ow. I thought it was one of them islands in th' middle of th' river. Say, mate, is there any place I can put th' pore old josser? I don't want t' leave 'im out in the cold if I can 'elp it; he cost th' boss a lot o' money."

Smithers lost his temper at the unreasonableness of the request. "Do you think this place is an orphan asylum for elephants? I've got enough trouble on me already without you bringing your blithering wet elephant along! Why don't you talk sense?"

"Blimey, yer needn't go off pop on a man! I wouldn't have worried yer at all only th' flood came down on me. I'll leave th' pore old beggar loose— he won't hurt anythin'."

"I suppose there's nothing else for it," grumbled Smithers, relenting somewhat and holding the candle higher with the idea of seeing how big the brute was and if he looked dangerous. But a gust of wind blew the candle out and foiled him.

An indignant shout rent the night in twain. "Who's trying to pull me out of bed? Help! Strike a light!"

Smithers recognised the bellow; it was his father-in-law's voice. Sounds of scuffling and falling furniture were heard, the room of the front bedroom was thrown open, and someone stumbled into the passage and bumped heavily into the hall-stand.

"What's up?" asked Smithers, who had no matches and so could not relight his candle.

"Someone pulled me out of bed!"

"It must a bin Peter," cried the elephant man without. "Th' winder's open; he muster reached through!"

"Who is that talking outside?" shouted the enraged old man. "Bring me a light, someone! I'll knock his head off if someone will bring me a light! Get me a light!"

One of the solemn sons shuffled out half-asleep with a flaring candle. The father seized it and hobbled to the door roaring, "Show me the scoundrel who pulled me out of bed!" Directly he got to the door, and before he could look, the wind blew his candle out with a vicious, icy puff; the elephant, which was black, remained invisible.

"It was Peter that done it, Mister," whined the circus man from exterior darkness.

"D—n the candle! Who are you, and who is Peter, you blackguard?"

"It was the elephant," said the voice of Smithers calmly, as if stating a commonplace fact.

"Do you think I'm mad, young man? What's the matter with the house? It's a conspiracy! No lights— horseplay I'll prosecute someone for this!"

"What's th' old bloke goin' orf about?" asked the Voice in the Rain. "Strike a light and show 'im th' bloomin' elephant; then p'r'aps he'll be satisfied!"

"What larrikin is that out there talking about elephants? Bring me a light!"

"Oh-h, give 'im a light!" appealed the Voice in the Rain.

"A light!" shouted Smithers lustily.

Lights started to come from everywhere. A straggling procession of four figures, bearing four flaring candles, came down the hall. The wavering illumination illuminated one side of the streaming elephant and the whole of the soaked man. There was an excited babel of questions and replies out of which the elephant-man's incredible story struggled in pieces.

The wet soughing of the wind and the steady musical tinkling of rain on a vast expanse of water made a running accompaniment to it all. Finally, the elephant was dismissed with a slap, his rider admitted to the house, and the door closed. Within the hour, the refugee had been provided with an impromptu bed, his soaked clothes hung up in the kitchen to dry, and the house once more had relapsed into darkness and settled down for the night. Outside the rain fell steadily, the wind moaned, and something vast, resembling an uncompleted cathedral, waved its flexible spire in the air and made muffled screams with the organ concealed inside it.

It might have been two hours or two months afterwards that something like a floating candle factory with flame shooting from its chimney came mooning along, and a delighted man shouted hoarsely, "We're all right now Bill! Here's Big Toe Island!"

Another voice shouted some unintelligible direction; and the pattering of rain was drowned by the vigorous threshing of paddle-wheels. When the strayed river steamer had manoeuvred itself right in front of Smithers' front door, the anchor was let go and the ship came to rest right over the submerged vegetable garden. Then a shadowy boat was dropped into the water; and two shadowy men got in with a lantern and pulled for what they imagined to be the clump of trees on Big Toe.

When Smithers was awakened for the second time that night by vigorous pounding on his front door, he rose and groped mechanically for the matches and candle; but, failing to find them, he felt his way to the front door and opened it.

The light of a hurricane lamp dazzled him so that he could make out nothing distinctly. "Who's there?"

"The *Water Lily*," answered an anxious voice. "What bloomin' place is this? We thought it was Big Toe Island."

Smithers, who had not heard distinctly, thought it was the rest of the circus, and flew into a passion instantly. "Well, you're wrong! I wish you'd take your blighted elephant away; it's been squealing out at the back all night!"

"What are yer talkin' about?"

"Elephants! Aren't you the circus?"

"Circus be blowed! We're from the steamer *Water Lily*, that's at anchor out there in the river!"

"Why, you fool, the river's two miles away to your right! This is a farm'."

A flare of flame from the *Water Lily*'s funnel showed Smithers where the vessel was lying.

"Hey! he yelled. "Your rotten craft is cruising about on top of my cabbages! Tell the lunatic in charge that he's on top of my cabbages! Tell him if he starts his engines and ruins that bed, I'll punch his nose for him!" Then, ignoring the two mariners, he made a megaphone of his hands and bellowed, "Ship, ahoy!"

"Ahoy-y!" replied a rusty voice.

"Keep off those cabbages, can't you!"

"Keep— off — what?"

"Keep— off— those —cabbages!"

There was a pause. Then — "What's— th'— blanky— joke— anyhow?"

Smithers and the two mariners, all howling their loudest, repeated the mysterious warning in unison, "Keep— off— the— cabbages!"

After that the ship was strangely silent.

Smithers then, at the earnest solicitation of the two mariners, described their exact location, and told them how, if they didn't get their boat away before the flood-waters fell, the liner would be left high and dry, and only be

useful as a summer residence. Smithers was dwelling on this aspect of the matter when the visitors' boat came butting at their legs like a playful sea-calf.

"Why, it's rising faster than I thought," said the householder. "It will float us off if it gets up another inch or so!"

"Lucky for you we came," remarked the man with the lantern.

"I'll go aboard and tell the old man," said the seaman who was holding the boat. He scrambled in and rowed off in the direction of the cabbage anchorage.

Smithers groaned. Then he recollected that it was time they got ready to depart, and howled a warning to the other inmates of his endangered home.

While the flood lapped hungrily at the doorstep, they gathered in the hall, and were solemnly informed that the place was doomed, and that they would have to go aboard the river steamer. Mrs. Smithers sobbed twice, and hurried away to show the others what she wanted to take along. They trailed after her; and shortly the depressing cries of enquiry which always accompany packing arose on every side. While they gathered and tied and knotted, the flood lapped and rose to the very edge of the hall. The minutes fled— or swam— by.

Suddenly the house lifted, tilted over to one side, spun slowly round, and, amid cries and shouts, began to drift with the flood.

"Chuck us a rope!" howled Smithers to the ship.

"Haven't got one long enough!" yelled the ship.

Johnson, the hired defender, staggered out of the sloping kitchen and shouted some advice. "Jump out, Smithers, and hold on to the old home! I'll help you!"

"Rot!" yelled his frantic host. "How the devil can we hold a house against a flood?"

"Well, let's anchor her with something! What is there? Here, quick! give us a hand with the mangle! Got a clothes line? Right-o! Double it quick! Now tie it to the mangle and give her a shove down the hall! Away she goes!"

The absurd evolution was performed with almost miraculous swiftness. Johnson, the inventive nomad, and Smithers, the landowner, rushed the laundry appliance down the hall, tipped it into the swirling water, and rapidly tied the end of the line to the leg of the dining-room table, which, as the rope became taut, rose up, slid forward and jammed in the dining-room doorway. The house came to a dead stop and rode safely at anchor— or mangle.

"That," said Johnson proudly, as they hung on to the doorpost and watched the hempen cable, "that's what I call bosker! I wouldn't mind betting a fiver this is the first house in Australia that was ever anchored; but I'm willing to stake my life it's the first one in the world that was ever anchored with a

mangle. I reckon it's the brightest idea I ever had in my life, and I'm proud of it. If a man could have one idea like that every week regular he wouldn't have to work. Hullo! what's up with his nibs?"

"What's the matter with this house? Has the elephant got underneath it?"

"All right, now," shouted Smithers in reply. "The flood lifted it off the piles, so we tied a line to the mangle and pushed it overboard— I mean through the front door. We're safe so long as the elephant doesn't sit on the back doorstep and try to keep his feet dry. By the way, where is the brute?"

The voice of the elephant man floated in from the kitchen.

"I've got 'im 'ere, pore ol' chap! He's standin' outside th' kichen winder and askin' f r somethin' t' eat. Wish I 'ad somethin' t' give 'im —some straw or somethin'. Say, Mister, don't suppose I could give 'im a bit o' th' straw outer this 'ere mattress, could I?"

"No, I'm blowed if you can!" snapped Smithers, who was lighting another candle preparatory to looking for his few legal documents.

"Well, 'ave yer got an ole straw 'at yer don't want?"

"No, I haven't! Give him your own hat if he wants one!"

"Strewth! I give 'im me own 'at at tea-time w'en we was flounderin' out on th' flats. 'E scoffed it too— 'ficial badge, red band, and all. I 'ope th' dye ain't poisonous; th' boss 'ud give me 'ell if anythin' 'appened to 'im!"

Something wooden bumped softly against the front wall of the house, there was a rattle of oars, and one of the mariners appeared holding on to the window-sill.

"All aboard!" he chuckled. "Cap'n says he wants t' get back nearer t' th' river t'night in case this blanky flood drains off quick and leaves th' *Lily* out on th' flats. We're only simple seamen, and don't feel up t' runnin' a summer boardin' house which is what th' *Lily* will be if we get left. I'd hate t' have t' tranship th' cargo inter drays on dry land and walk home through th' dust like a bloomin' navy. Are you blokes nearly ready?"

"Stop gassin' an' take th' taxi round t' th' front door," retorted Johnson, as he struggled with a roll of bedding.

"Hurry up, all of you," shouted Smithers. "The ark in the garden wants to go home!"

Answering murmurs came from all oarts of the house; they were all getting ready to embark. The family feud had been shoved into the background by the ridiculous happenings of the night; and something remotely resembling good fellowship pervaded the place from the front door, where the beaming seaman waited in the boat for luggage to ferry, to the kitchen window, where the wet elephant waited hungrily for a straw hat to eat.

From the elephant's chauffeur or caterer presently arose a wail of enquiry.

"I say, what am I goin' t' do with ole Peter? Can I get 'im on board th' ship? 'E only weighs a ton an' a quarter."

The waiting boatman hooted at the suggestion.

"Say, bloke, is that there Jumbo a relation of yours? How do yer reckon we're goin' t' hoist yer blanky ole two-ton uncle an' his trunk aboard in th' open sea? Swim out and ask th' old man that, an' I reckon he'll throw th' binnacle at yer."

"Well, can I tie 'im t' th' stern?"

"No, yer can't do that, neither! We can't risk havin' a full-powered elephant hitched on to th' hindquarters of th' *Lily*. Our engine has t' be nursed as it is; an' we couldn't give old luggage van a tow even if he was a broken-down liner with a pot o' salvage money hangin' to him. If our didn't agree with yer uncle's an' th' tow-line held, I reckon we'd have t' go his way; an' he don't look as if he had a master's ticket in 'is recticule. No, I reckon he'll have t' walk behind."

Smithers' stern parent-in-law at this stage hove in sight at the end of the hall. He was partly hidden by an immense roll of bedding which rode on his chest like a bass drum. Breathing gruff warnings to everyone to get out of his road, he carried it to the edge of the doorstep, where it was received as cargo by the waiting seaman, and stowed in the bows of the heavy boat. The two solemn, silent sons followed with kitchen utensils, pictures and other sundries; and Smithers and Johnson together contributed immense, mysterious bundles until the gondolier warned them they were not leaving much room for themselves.

Suddenly there was a spluttering shriek from the *Lily's* whistle, and a hoarse hail from the skipper, "How much longer are they goin' t' be, Bill?"

Bill passed on the warning; and after a last search of the rooms, they gathered at the doorstep and sadly embarked by the light of the hurricane lamp. As the laden boat slid past the corner of the desolate, anchored home, something like a tug-boat with all lights out and a madman sitting in an armchair on top of the wheelhouse splashed ponderously after them. It was Peter, with his devoted rider perched on the roof of his enormous skull.

The business of transhipment to the *Lily* did not take long; but the elephant rider, from the hurricane deck of Peter, addressed a long, impassioned appeal to the captain of the *Lily* to be allowed to lead Peter from the stern; and the captain's refusal from the bridge took the shape of a lengthy and impassioned address; so it was some time before the understanding was come to that the *Lily* was to go slow in front like a hearse, and show the way, if Peter would follow respectably like a first mourning coach, and not try to climb over the stern or fool about with his trunk

The cortege then moved off and splashed slowly across the waste for about half an hour. Then the paddle-wheels of the *Lily* ceased to go round, and before Peter's helmsman could goad him out of the way, the *Lily* had drifted back against his head. However, he calmly took hold of the stern with his trunk and held it away from him.

"What's wrong with th' blanky engine?" howled the captain.

The begrimed face of an apologetic engineer rose from a hatch. "That fool of a crank's gone again, skipper. We'll have to anchor here and whistle for a tow."

"Whistle f'r your Aunt Kate!" roared the master. "Hitch that there elephant to the bows; he'll look just as sensible in front as behind!"

Peter's manager instantly demanded one straw mattress on account, and stipulated that the fodder be placed in the stern within easy reach of the trunk, and that the *Lily* be anchored until the end of the meal. This was done with all despatch; and Peter leisurely handed himself the innards of the engineer's bed. The operation took some time, and dawn was just breaking as he sidled into position to commence the tow. Far ahead, the roofs of a flooded river town gleamed white and cold above the leaden waters.

"Steer Fr th' main street," shouted the captain to the first mate of Peter. "Don't let him go astern or stop suddenly— he might sit down on the *Lily*'s bows! Hanged if I ever thought I'd come down t' this," he added, bitterly, and busied himself with his steering by way of avoiding the eyes of his passengers.

Then Peter splashed patiently forward, the *Lily* sagged after him, and the rim of the rising sun showed above the cold roofs of Riverbend.

It was the licensee of the Royal Hotel who sighted the insane marine procession from the balcony of his half-submerged pub; and he didn't raise the alarm because he had been dreading something of the kind for days. For nearly a fortnight he had been expecting the flood and complete ruin; and, by way of preparing for the worst, had broken all his previous brandy-drinking records. The D.T.'s were just about due; and when Peter and the *Lily* struggled up the main street, or canal, he reckoned they had arrived in force.

Rushing back into his room, he scrambled shudderingly into bed and drew the clothes over his head. That is how the great rescue of the Smithers' household and the utter and complete degradation of a popular river skipper escaped being made into History.

9: The Prophet in the Dock

The Lone Hand June 1911

WHEN Jim Sheedy received his sentence of five years for his share in the North Shore burglary he looked his Judge in the eye and said, with terrible earnestness, "This will do you no good later on!"

"Remove the prisoner!" snarled his Honor; and Jim was hustled away to the cells.

Mick Donovan got up and walked quietly out of the stifling court into the sunshine. He and Sheedy had been partners in the job; but Sheedy had been a bit clumsy, with the result that an athletic householder, with a revolver, had cornered him. Jim had a prejudice against the useful "squirt," and never carried one; so the householder had had an easy job. Mick wondered savagely, as he went towards Woolloomooloo, if Jim would have the same Peace Society ideas about firearms in 1916. Meanwhile, he realised he was without the necessary pair of helping hands he wanted for the revengeful raid he had planned on his Honor's own house that very night.

Half-way to the 'Loo, he turned down a dusty side-street and dived into a third-rate pub, where a flash barmaid was serving drinks to a rowdy group of three.

As soon as she could get away from her customers, the girl hurried along to the quiet end of the counter where Mick was waiting, and, leaning across, whispered anxiously, "What luck, Mick?"

"Five years!"

"Oh, my God!"

"Cheer up, Nell," said Mick grimly; "the old boy was in a rotten humor, and I thought he was going to get seven. Give us a beer."

Mechanically the dazed girl drew it for him, and took the coin.

"Any of the lads about, Kid?"

She shook her head miserably.

"Waiting, Miss!" shouted the man who was paying for the next round.

The girl hurried to serve them, and Mick took his drink over to a cool corner. The old clock over the door gave a preliminary wheeze and struck three slow, rasping strokes. Mick looked up at it where it hung ticking with immense deliberation, and cursed softly. He realised with fresh force that five years was a big stretch out of a young man's life.

"Going anywhere to-night, Miss?" The youngest of the three drinkers flung the query at the barmaid as she drew the last beer.

She whitened, and took the shilling without a word.

Mick, from his corner, watched her as she hit up the amount on the cash register and passed over the change.

"Poor old Kid," he muttered. "Poor old Kid! It's d —d hard on you!"

The swing doors opened, and a blear-eyed wreck of a man fell in and stood peering about him. The barmaid adopted an air of virtuous hostility.

"Don't you let the boss see you in here, or you'll be sorry! You know quite well you were told not to come in here any more!"

"I'm orright! Don' *you* worry!" retorted the wreck, with an attempt at dignity.

"Leave him alone, Nell," said Mick quietly. Then, to the despised, "Mac, get Nell to give you a beer, and bring it over here. I want to talk to you."

"Right you are!" gurgled the wreck delightedly. "Come on, Nellie, my girl! Give us a long 'un!"

The beer was drawn and handed over with a bad grace; and the newcomer seized it and carried it carefully to the corner, where Mick gave him the threepence wherewith to recompense the house. The debt honorable paid, the grateful guest waved his drink in the air and sucked half of it down with his best respects to his host. Then he seated himself easily beside him and beamed on all— including his sworn enemy, the barmaid.

"How are you getting on, Mac?"

The wreck's face clouded slightly.

"I regret to say—"

"Pretty bad, eh?"

"Rotten, my boy! Rotten!"

Mick produced a packet of cigarettes and passed it along. "I was up at Darlington this morning, Mac."

Mac finished lighting his cigarette before he replied lightly, "I trust no friend of yours was in difficulty, Mick."

"Jim Sheedy got five years over that North Shore case."

"Outrageous!" cried the man who had once been a gentleman. He started to storm, "Blast me if I can understand how any jury—"

"Shut whispered the other fiercely; and the wreck subsided.

Evidently Mick did not expect sympathetic indignation in return for his hospitality. He waited patiently until it should please his benefactor to speak again.

"Mac, I want you to give me a hand to-night with a job. Are you on?"

The ex-gentleman looked thoughtfully at his broken boots. "Perhaps you want me to fill the place of—"

"That's it."

"What is the business, Michael?" with a keen glance at the drinking group.

"I want to take possession of some property— that's been left for me."

"Ah-h!" The ex-gentleman sat back in the corner seat and regarded the bottle-laden shelves with deep interest for a moment or two before he returned to the subject.

"And what share do I take in the enterprise?" he enquired at length.

Mick explained. It was simple, but entailed some risk.

His guest looked at his broken boots again and considered gloomily, "D—d if I ever thought I would come to this!" he remarked, half to himself. "I suppose I *have* come to it, though. "

"Anything wrong, Mac?"

"I was wondering, Mick, if the game was worth the candle."

"How much candle have *you* got left?"

"D —d little, and tha's a fact! Still, mind you, I wouldn't have done it *once!*"

"Oh, I daresay! Will you do it now, though?"

"Yes, I will!"

Mick rose. "Right-o! Now finish that beer of yours and let's walk down the street."

The derelict seized his glass and drained it.

"This job is a bit out of the ordinary run," confided Mick, as they walked towards the tram-line. "I've been chewing it over ever since the trial. You know that old cow was d—d rough on Jim; and I want to get back on him. I thought you would lend me a hand if I asked you to."

"Quite right, my boy. I owe friend Jim more than one good turn."

"Did you ever hear that the old boy is one of these coin collectors?"

"I think I have read it somewhere."

"Well, to-night I'm going to take his blanky collection and dump it into the harbor. None of the D's will ever get it back for him once I get clear of the house. It ought to be dead easy to do the trick. The house is that big green one on the Point. We will row down there from the bay about three in a skiff, land at the house jetty, and collect the goods without any trouble. What do you think of it?"

"Seems delightfully simple," muttered the broken gentleman. "I daresay we shall do very well if there are no light sleepers in the household. The thought of it gives me the same sort of thrill that orchard-robbing used to years ago. I perceive that there is a certain fascination about piracy even when one is past middle-age. When and where am I to meet you?"

"Oh, you and me will knock round this afternoon and I go up to one of the shows to-night to fill in time. I don't want the thing to be messed up at the last minute through your appointments. Here's a tram coming. Let us ride into town; I want to see a chap about the boat."

A WATERY moon was hurrying through a waste of scattered white clouds when the skiff slid up to the private jetty of the Judge's house and made fast.

"Hadn't we better take her into the pool?" whispered the rower.

"No! It's handier for a bolt here. Got your lamp?"

"Yes."

"Well, come on. Be careful!"

One of the paddles rolled ever so slightly as the rower stepped out.

"Look out!"

They went swiftly across the lawn and through the tennis court to a flight of steps. A shadow glow of light from Mick's electric pocket lamp to show the way, and they crept up like shadows. Then along a fern-bordered walk to a French window. A swift glance round, and Mick was at it. It yielded weakly to his magician-like touch within the minute; the pocket-lamp glowed again, and he disappeared inside.

Mac stood, staring stupidly.

"Come on! What are you waiting for?"

The amateur stepped fearfully into the room; it smelt of cigar smoke and roses.

"Stand where you are for a second !"

Mac stood, listening intently. Somewhere close handy there was the occasional faint suggestion of a snore. Mick's lamp glowed once in the corner. Then there was the faint click of an electric light switch and the filament of a shaded lamp on the table glowed red and blossomed into a white flower of light. They were in the library.

Mick pointed to the chair in front of the writing table. "Sit down," he whispered. "The lock of this cabinet will take me a few minutes. Better have a rest!" He opened his handbag like a surgeon, and, selecting a drill, knelt in front of the collector's steel treasure-chest.

Mac sank gratefully into the cushioned chair; his knees felt strangely weak. Slight as were the noises made by Mick, they seemed to him to be echoing through the house. And the sleeper whoever he was seemed hideously near. The clock on the mantelpiece ticked on sedately. Mac's eyes roved round in search of something to take his mind off his peril.

An oil portrait of a buxom woman in evening dress hung on the opposite wall. He leant forward in his chair and peered at it with his bloodshot eyes. It interested him; he got up out of his chair with infinite caution and tip-toed across the room. For a minute he stared at it; then turned and began a swift, systematic search for something. Mick worked steadily at the Judge's cabinet....

"My God! It's Sarah!"

Mick wheeled savagely from his work to find his assistant holding an open photograph album on his thread-bare knees.

"What the devil's the matter with you? What are you shouting about?"

"Sarah!" hissed the derelict incredulously.

"Sarah who?"

The derelict tapped the album and pointed with grimy forefinger at the picture.

"My wife!" he breathed. "Good God ! I thought she was dead... Last saw her in London in '87.... Wonder when she married him—"

He staggered up out of the chair and stood before the full-length portrait of the Judge in his robes.

The clock ticked on remorselessly. Mick, his cabinet still unopened, got slowly to his feet and looked at him hopelessly. "What are you going to do, Mac?" he whispered at last.

The husband turned slowly from the survey of the Judge's portrait and gripped the burglar's shoulder.

"Never mind about his coins now, my boy. Pack up your things and get away. I am going to stay to breakfast."

10: The Lobster and the Lioness

Bulletin, 14 Dec 1911

AT 11 o'clock Thomson, who had broken his glasses during a last whirling argument re the chances of the Liberal candidate, was pushed gently out the side door and told to go home. Instead of taking the barman's advice, he sat on the horse-trough, and held an indignation meeting with himself until Sergeant Jones happened along.

"Good-night, Mr. Thomson," said the sergeant, kindly.

Thomson pushed his boxer hat to the back of his head. "Good evenin'," he returned sulkily.

"Are ye comin' down the street?" ventured the sergeant.

"Cert'nly not!" said Thomson. "I've lost me glasses, an' me eyesight's 'stremely bad. I can't see what I'm doin'!"

"Well, come along and walk with me. I'll see ye as far as the gate."

Thomson rose unsteadily. "I tol' you before I've broken me glasses. Do you mean to 'sinate I'm drunk?"

"I do not!" said the sergeant. "I never saw a soberer man in my life! But come along now, an' I'll tell ye somethin' I heerd to-day about Prince Foote f'r th' Cup. I'm goin' your way!"

On those honorable terms, Thomson condescended to take up his lobster, and allow Jones to pilot him gently toward his lodgings.

According to Thomson's reckoning, they had trudged through 283 deserted streets, and turned 1,834 strange and unexpected corners, when he found they were both standing still on a vacant piece of land, in front of an enormous board with "For Sale" on it.

"Whasser matter?"

"I heerd a strange sound," answered the sergeant. "Be quiet a minit! Maybe we'll hear it agin!"

They waited breathlessly....

A deep, muffled grunt arose close by.

"That's it!" said the sergeant excitedly. "Somebody's drunk," sighed Thomson wearily. "Sailor prob'ly."

The sergeant snorted. "No sailor ever made a sound like that! Look, it's gettin' up! Is it a dog?...Run, man! run for your life!" he yelled, and ran heavily up a dark lane.

Thomson, swaying on his feet, patted his leg and called encouragingly to the appoaching thing, "Goo' dog!"

Two yellow eyes glowed in the darkness.

"Goo' dog!" cooed Thomson encouragingly, and patted his leg again.

A deep, hungry growl.

"Come on, ole feller. I won't hurt yer!"

The thing with the smouldering yellow eyes came a step nearer, and Thomson cried out in delight, "By George! that's finest mastiff I've ever seen! I'll get him to foller me back to boarding-house!" He staggered off sideways, murmuring endearments, and stopping every few yards to flick his fingers or pat his leg. And the escaped circus lioness followed him as if he had been another Daniel.

They went slowly up the long, flat street that stretched away to a plain of burnished silver— the sea. The moon had slipped from her cloud dressing-room, and was hurrying down the sky like a woman going in search of a policeman.

Thomson staggered on, hugging his lobster, till he reached a lamp-post. Then he sat down, and, calling affectionately to the lioness, started to eat. "Here yer are, ol' boy," he cooed. A claw hit the lioness on the nose- and dropped to the pavement. The beast growled at the indignity, but ate the fragment, and licked her chops with evident pleasure.

Thomson methodically dissected the food with his hands and cnewed stolidly, occasionally throwing a bit over his shoulder with a mumbled word of encouragement. The lioness sat on her haunches and growled between courses, but accepted the scraps with a sort of eager humility. This went on till the lobster was no more. Thomson then wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, leant against the lamp-post, and closed his eyes. In a minute he was asleep. In another 30 seconds, he gave a long, whistling snore like the wail of a distant siren.

The wild beast, sitting erect like a thing of stone, growled nervously.

Thomson snored again.

The lioness growled angrily.

Thomson awoke with a start. "Who said that?" he demanded. "Who denies that Wade's done more f'r th' d—d country than th' blanky Labor party— eh?" He turned slightly and beheld the enormous beast.

"Goo' dog!" he cooed. "Goo' dog!"

Faintly, from the distant sea of city lights, came the clear chimes of a clock, followed by 12 deep, solemn notes. Brother timepieces to right and left answered it like watchful guardians of the hours.

Thomson rose slowly with a look of determination and flicked his fingers. "Come on, ol' boy! Mus' be gettin' home!" He staggered along for about 20 yards, and the lioness, her head down and her tail straight out, tracked him step by step. Then he paused. The beast stopped dead, with her glowing, yellow eyes fixed on his face. Thomson didn't notice her; his mind was

grappling with some tremendous problem. "Where did I leave it?" he moaned at last. "I'll go back an' look!" With tremendous care, he steered a wavering course back to the lamp-post, moored himself to it, and peered all round the circle of light. The thing he sought was nowhere to be seen.

"Dammit! I wonder where I lef' that lobster?...I'm certain I had it —an' I can smell it now!... Somebody's done me for it!"

Far up the street, approaching boot-heels made a clear, crisp clatter in the still night.

"I'll ask this chap if he's seen it!" murmured Thomson, and took a firmer grip of the post.

The lonely pedestrian came up rapidly, and proved to be a slight young man in evening dress.

Thomson raised his hat. "'Scuse me, did you notice a 'stremely large lobster as you came 'long?"

The stranger stopped dead, stared past Thomson into the gloom beyond, and, with a muffled cry of horror, turned in his tracks, and ran with amazing swiftness into the night.

"Hol' on!" yelled Thomson after him, but there was no answer— merely the sound of a man running.

The lobster-loser turned disconsolately and found the lioness looking intently in the direction the stranger had taken.

"Served him right if I sooled th' dog on him!" he reflected bitterly. Then, with an air of resignation, "Come on, Carlo, ol' boy; if coffee stall's open, I'll get a pie." Once more he set sail, and the immense beast of prey followed stealthily in his footsteps at a distance of three paces.

Down the road they went, round two corners and across an unoccupied grassy lot, then along a dark, shop-lined street. At the far end, near the kerb, gleamed the head-lights of a coffee-stall. As Thomson drew near, the proprietor was seen leaning on the counter absorbed in reading, by the light of his big lanterns, the account of the previous night's fight.

Out of the darkness a command came to him: "Hey! give's a pie an' 'nother f'r th' dog!"

The proprietor looked up cheerily.

"Right-o!" He put down his paper and turned to fill the order. As he opened his oven door, a delicious whiff of hot meat perfumed the frosty air. The lioness in the shadow growled loudly.

"Oo did that?" asked the hot pieman, suspiciously.

"Sorrigh," Thomson assured him; "th' dog won't hurt yer."

"Wot sorter dorg is it?" persisted the pie-man, vainly endeavoring to see what species of animal was beyond the light.

"Mastiff," explained the amateur lion-tamer wearily. "Prize mastiff— mos' fectionate beast. Gimme two pies!"

The pie artist extracted two of his finest works from the oven, and placed them on the counter just as the lioness growled hungrily again.

"Better give us another pie f'r th' dog," said Thomson, putting a shilling down on the counter, and taking up one of the band-boxes of nourishment.

The coffee-stall man ignored the order, and, leaning far over the counter, looked into the shadow. His eyes bulged with apprehension. "That ain't no mastiff," he breathed at last. "It looks more like a— *Gorstruth!*"

With one mad bound he was over the counter and away.

Thomson howled after him indignantly, and waited for five minutes to see if he would come back. He didn't. At last, Thomson climbed carefully over the counter, threw two sizzling pies to the lioness, and recommenced on his own. Fortunately the lioness's share fell into the gutter, and was thereby cooled, otherwise tragedy would probably have happened then and there.

After the light refreshments had been consumed, Thomson climbed down and invited Carlo to follow him again. Some blind instinct guiding his feet, he at last came by devious ways to the terrace-house where he wasn't a star-boarder.

Hanging on to the frost-cold, railings in the moonlight, he communed with himself thus: "If I take tli' dog roun' back, I'll wake up all th' dogs in th' place and fall over dust-box. Let's see!... Yes, I better take ole Carlo in fron' door and go through house. That's it ! That's what'll do. Come on, ol' chap!" .

With extreme care and patience he at last found the keyhole, and flung wide the door. Then he lit a match and cooed encouragingly, but in vain, until the flame burnt his fingers. "I'll get him in!" he muttered, and, stumbling through to the kitchen, he found a large piece of raw steak. After opening the back door, he returned to the front and waved it at the lioness.

"Come on, Carlo!" he commanded. The beast, growling slightly, started to follow him. He backed into the hall, intending to lure his prey right through; but she was too quick for him. At the foot of the stairs she darted forward, and snatched the steak from his outstretched hand.

"Give it here, d—n yer!" he hissed, and made a wild grab at the goods.

The brute snarled horribly, and thumped the floor angrily with her heavy tail. Thomson staggered back and his match went out. A door on the first landing opened explosively, the wavering light of a candle illumined the upper part of the staircase, and a quavering soprano voice cried, "Is anyone there?"

"Sorrigh. It's only me!" replied Thomson. irritably. "I've gotter dog!"

The candle, a wrapped-up head and a long thin arm appeared over the banisters. "Do you mean to say you are bringing a dog through the house, Mr. Thomson?"

"It won't hurt th' d—n house!" retorted the bringer-home-of-lions, staring upward defiantly.

"Mr. Thomson," chattered the partially-hidden landlady, "you are not in a fit state to argue. I will speak to you in the morning."

The hand that held the candle shook with rage, and, as a natural consequence, the light wavered considerably.

"I am fit t' argue, and I will argue 'slong as I please ! An', what's more, I'll do what I d —n well please in th' rotten house, and bring as many dogs as I want inter it! Why. yer know yerself it's only fit f'r dogs! Come on, Carlo, ol' chap!"

He made a grab at the lioness's head, but missed. The brute snarled again, louder than the largest-sized dog.

"If you have any respect for yourself," wailed the landlady, "I say if you have any respect for yourself, you will take that blood-thirsty brute out of the house!"

"Gorrer bed !" shouted Thomson. "Gorrer bed, an' mind yer own bizness, you— you ole meddler!"

"How dare you!" shrieked the landlady, and fled horror-stricken to her room. Then, alone and unseen in the hall, Thomson performed a really fine taming feat. Lighting his second last match to see what he was doing, he walked behind the lioness and gave her a hearty kick.

"Gerrout!" he yelled, and the lioness, with an ugly shriek, ran lightly down the hall, and out into the yard. Thomson then shut both doors, back and front, and stumbled heavily upstairs to his room, where, without troubling to undress, he climbed solemnly into bed.

ON THE stroke of three he awoke and muttered, "Warrer! I wonder if warrer-bottle's been filled?" He struggled sadly out of bed, and blinked at the washstand, dimly visible by the light of the waning moon. He could not make out a water-bottle, but something white and round like a china bowl gleamed invitingly by the wash-basin.

"I dunno what's in it, but I'll drink it, whatever it is!" he sighed, and made dry-mouthed for the waiting refreshment. He seized the bowl, and conveyed it half-way to his lips, then dashed it to the floor. It bounced lightly under the bed.

"Blast th' collar!" he shouted, and started to fumble for matches. He persevered nobly until the water-jug meanly bumped against his elbow and smashed with a terrific sound on the floor.

"That settles it!" he said, and plumped down on the bed. "I'm not goin' t' degrade nieselself by gettin' drink for meself in soap-dish!" For five wrathful minutes he sat and savagely wondered how best to revenge himself. Finally, he opened his room-door and bawled: "Where's my shavin' water?"

The house remained submerged in sleep.

"Where's my shavin' water?" he howled again.

The dumb walls flung the echoes back at him; and outside in the yard the iron dust-box rolled to and fro in agony. Something hungry was ransacking it for nourishment.

"D'ye think I'm goin' t' wait all day f'r my sharin' water!" roared the mastiff-finder for the third time.

The landlady's door flung open, and she appeared on the threshold, done up like a sort of original mixture of Lady Macbeth and the Worst Woman in Sydney after a gas explosion.

"How dare you?" she cried tragically. "How dare you make such a noise Aat this hour! What do you mean by asking for shaving water at this hour!"

Thomson, not at all abashed, lurched to the lobby railings, and leant over like a candidate addressing an election crowd from the balcony of a hotel.

"What do I want warrer for? I'll tell yer why! I want t' drink it!! I've decided t' reform and, join ill' No License crowd. I'm goin' t' be a wowser! That rotten 'ole paper y' gave me last week with picture of two horses at a trough sayin' 'We only drink warrer' has made me better man! I'm goin' t' vote No License! I think pubs are a curse to ev'ry man! If there were no pubs, you'd have t' keep beer in th' house, and we wouldn't have t' go out f'r it. D'ye understan' that, Missus? D'yer see?"

"You forget yourself, sir!" trumpeted the landlady.

"Forgot who?"

"I say you forget yourself!"

"Oh, no, I don't! But I wish you wouldn't forget t' put warrer in my room! Look here, it's all d—n fine t' gas 'bout 'totalism, but why don' you s'ply some warrer? Has warrer gone up?"

"This is too much!" wailed the wretched landlady. She turned and tapped sharply with her bony knuckles on the door of the next room, and a sleepy male voice said: "All right! Be there directly."

Thomson leaned far over the railings and sniffed suspiciously. His nose wrinkled in disgust, and he said something in an undertone about the place smelling like the Zoo.

"Who's keepiu' bears?" he demanded excitedly at last. "I'm not goin' t' stay in place if you're goin' t' take in bears!"

"You are drunk!" chattered the landlady furiously. "How dare you say there are animals in the house !"

Thomson sniffed again. "Why, the house stinks like a circus! It's bears, or tigers or somethin'!"

The landlady raised a shaking hand, and pointed an accusing finger at him. "If there is anything in the house, you brought it in yourself!" she intoned.

A sudden gust of rage shook Thomson to the foundations of his being.

"Same ole gag!" he roared. "Tha's exactly what y' said when I found th' what-d'ye-call-it! 'Muster brought it in yerself! I tell yer I didn't bring anythin' in! There's bears in th' house, an' I'll leave it t'-morrer! D'ye think I'm going t' live in a m'agerie? S'pose you'll tell me nex' I don' know what a bear smells like!"

The door of the other room opened, and a tall, thin, spectacled man, in a purple dressing-gown, stepped out. "What is all the noise about?" he inquired bitterly, holding his candle on high like the Torch of Liberty.

"I say that there's bears in th' house!" repeated Thomson.

The tall man inhaled deeply. "There certainly is a strong odor of animal s," he remarked acidly.

"What did I tell yer?" cried Thomson, triumphantly. His voice rang through the house, and two more doors were heard to open slightly.

The tall, embittered man turned to the land-lady.

"I suppose, Mrs. Tribbens, Mr. Thomson has brought home a monkey or something of the kind. He seems to be able to do just as he pleases in this house. I daresay we shall become used to the smell in time; but I really must object to being called up in the middle of the night to talk about the matter. Surely it would have done in the morning!"

"You don't understand, Mr. Pyppe," retorted the landlady with fearful hauteur.

"No, I'm afraid I don't," said Pyppe, irritably. "The whole thing seems ridiculous to me. Why on earth I should be called out of bed at this hour of the night to talk about an unpleasant smell with a man who is obviously"—

Crash! The tinkle of glass falling on stone told the landlady that the kitchen window had succumbed.

"What's that?" she gasped. Down the pitchdark hall, they heard sounds which suggested a burglar in stockinged feet dragging the body of a murdered boarder over the linoleum.

"I will see what it is!" Pyppe announced in a loud voice, and went cautiously downstairs, a step at a time.

Thomson and the landlady stared after him.

"Who is there?" cried the brave investigator, holding his candle far out over the railings.

There was no answer.

"Who is there?" he snapped. His candle tilted, and a drop of hot wax detached itself, and fell into the well of gloom. A grating, bestial roar of rage rang through the place, and a lithe, yellow animal sprang into the lighted radius, and stood lashing its tail.

"My God, it's a lioness!" shrieked Pyppe, really shaken for the first time in his life. His candle clattered from his hand, and he rushed upstairs into his room and slammed and bolted the door

"I tol' yer so!" shouted Thomson exultantly outside the landlady's door, from behind which came hysterical sobs and the shrieking of castors. "I tol' yer there was bears in th' house !"

"The police!" wailed the distracted woman. "The telephone! Ring for the police!"

"I give you notice now," continued Thomson, above the sounds of hurried barricading.

"I think it's disgustin'! Why, your d—n lion might have eaten my dog! I'm goin' t' leave t'-morrer, d'ye hear? I'm not goin' t' live with lions! I'm sick of yer stinkin' house!"

A deep, menacing growl floated up the staircase. Thomson sprawled over the rails.

"Shurrup!" he commanded, and the lioness, absurdly enough, was still. "Stinkin' brute!" he muttered, without the slightest sign of fear, and made for the telephone on the landing.

In a minute or so he had the police station, and was speaking: "That th' p'leece station. Yesh? Well, this is Thomson speakin' here. Eh? Yesh, Thomson, of Gladstone Manshuns (I don't think!). Can yer hear?... I say, there's a lion in th' hall here waitin' t- be fed.... Eh?... Yes, a lion!... No, I'm wrong, ol' chap— it's th' lion's wife. Are you there?. Well, it's waitin' t' be fed. I dunno who it b'longs to, but I'm goin' t' leave in mornin'. It's stinkin' th' place out. Eh?... What's that?... Yesh, Gladstone Manshuns— you know th' place near th' Town Hall! Eh!... No, nobody's killed; there's nothin' here t' eat but boarders—never is! Are you comin' along?... Right-o!" The bell tinkled hurriedly in the darkness. Thomson fumbled his way into his room and shut the door.

It was a lovely, peaceful morning. There wasn't a sound until two policemen and a little man. in the ring-costume of a tamer, trotted round the corner.

Thomson waved frantically to them from his window. "Go roun' side an' get in th' scullery window!" he howled. "Look out f'r my dog in th' back yard— he's

big mastiff, but he won't hurt yer. If he growls give him a bit o' lobster—he loves lobster!"

11: When Smith Was King

The Lone Hand Dec 1911

JUST as we dropped the anchor, in that dirty Dago harbor (said Smith), one of the big turret guns on the battleship-cruiser put out its big red tongue at the city on the slope. We heard the long scream of the shell, saw a puff of smoke, and one of the palace towers fell over as if it was tired.

"Thunder!" yells the Old Man from the bridge, "The revolution's on! Lemme get ashore!"

We was three weeks out from Capetown, and havin' no wireless, knew nothin' of what was goin' on in the world, or how many diplomatic relations had had their necks wrung. We was all ready for some excitement, and the Old Man— one of the hottest members I ever struck— was dancin' mad until we got the boat into the water and was pullin' like blazes for the shore.

By that time the bombardment of the city by its own ships was in full swing. There was two big cruisers, a dingy little second-class, and a couple of destroyers; and each of 'em was spittin' flame and smoke like so many gratefuls of gassy coal. The air was full of shells, and the city— which was beginnin' to hum and roar like fifty football finals rolled into one— was dotted with little driftin' balls of white smoke.

"Pull, d—n yer eyes!" yells the Old Man; "it'll be all over by the time I get there!"

We dug our oars in and spun close under the stern of a big German tramp. As we slid past the bridge, there was a bit of a lull in the firin', and I heard the crackle of her spark.

"They're talkin'!" I said.

"Shut up and pull!" screamed the Old Man. So we pulled— like blanky horses.

Within ten minutes we hit a quiet little stretch of beach with a solid bump, jumped out anyhow and ran the boat up. The Old Man scrambled over the side, and, tell in ' us to stand by the boat and wait for him, ran off with his grey whiskers blowin' round his neck like a muffler. For a man of sixty he was a wonder!

"This is quiet enough for me," I says, and pulled out me pipe.

"Same here," says Kelly and Tony, sittin' down on the sand side by side like haptic twins at a Sunday-school picnic.

I was just gettin' a light when a big motor with two or three chaps in uniform rushed along the sea-front and stopped close by.

"We can't get up this way, *Señor*," says the shover, who was jumpin' in his seat every time a gun went off.

One of the officers swears. "I'll ask these sailors," he says and, openin' the door, yells to me to come over. I ran across, and the minit he looks at me he says "Holy Moses!"

"Wrong !" I says.

One of the chaps with him— a sallow, thin-faced cove— caught him bethe sleeve. "Ze King— Carlo !" he says.

"Not guilty!" I says.

But the two of them took no more notice of me than if I was dirt. They started jabberin' away in Spanish or somethin' like it and got into an argument with one another. At last they settled it; and the chap who could speak decent English turns to me.

"Will you come with us?" he says quickly. "We won't keep you long, and there's dollars and some fun hanging to it. "

Well, I didn't take long to make up my mind. I knew the last time the Old Man had gone to a revolution he was away for three days. I jumped in and we were scooting uptown before the door was closed.

There wasn't much sense in keeping to the water-front; so we went by all the back streets the shover could find— and he seemed to know 'em all.

Once or twice I saw bricks and heaps of building rubbish in the street; but the shells didn't seem to have done much damage about that part. At last we took a turn and went whizzing towards the broad streets and trouble at top. About the time I was beginning to feel cold round the spine we skimmed in through a big stone gateway and pulled up in front of a back door like the entrance to the Jenolan Caves. A sentry rather white about the gills gave me the salute, and I said. "Thanks, old cock," and went in with the others.

"Keep your mouth shut, you fool, or there's no money in it for you!" says the one who had got me the job.

"All right. Boss," I says. "But tell us what it is. What do you want me to do?"

"Keep your mouth shut!"

The mob of us hurried through that darned castle or museum for about a quarter of a mile and pulled up in a real comfortable sort of lounge. They told me to wait for 'em there, and rushed out. I sat down on a gold chair and looked round at the rest of the time-payment sticks. Outside the crowds and the guns were playing h—I by the noise they were makin'.

Once a shell hit the top of the shanty, and a few hundredweight or so of stone fell past the winder. At the same minit I hears a howl right in the next room, and a chap the dead spit of meself runs in yellin', "I won't go, I tell you! I won't go out to be murdered!"

Before I could guess what it meant, my boss and the thin-faced Dago run in after him and starts beggin' that scared reflection of me in two languages to do whatever it is they want.

"It will calm the people, y'r Majesty," says my boss.

Then I tumbles and puts me pipe in me pocket. I reckoned it was only a fair thing, ship's tobacco bein' a bit strong for indoors.

"I won't go!" shouts the King, throwin' himself down on a couch an' lookin' very like a man in a blue funk— which he was.

"Thank God we found him," says my boss, lookin' at me.

"Always willin' to oblige," I says. But neither of them took any notice.

The Dago says something through his ugly teeth in the King's ear, and my boss signs for me to follow him. He took me into a sorter library of clothes and helped me into the best suit of soldier's clobber I ever seen out of a pantomime.

"Excellent!" he says, as soon as he had buckled a sword round me.

"What is it, Boss?" I says.

"A drive round the city by King Carlo and his Queen, to calm their loyal people and make the revolutionary crowd go cold." he says.

"I'm short of a Queen," I says. "Try another deal."

"Shut up!" he says. "An' remember to *keep* shut up!"

He takes me out again, and waitin' in the other room I finds the handsomest girl I've seen since we left Sydney. She was dressed to kill, but was white in the face and shaky on her pins.,

"Her Majesty!" says my boss; and you bet I bowed as if I was at a social, gettin' introduced to a new tart. I couldn't say anythin', havin' been told to shut up about fifteen times already.

Well, she was a real blue-blooder, that Queen. The shells was playin' h—l out in the streets, and we could hear the bangin' of rifles every minute or so above the yells of the crowd. The King was lyin' down with his hands to his ears. The Queen didn't give him as much as a look as we passed out, but went by with her nose in the air.

We found carriages and a regiment or two of fancy dress Light Horse waitin' for us below in the yard, which was pretty gloomy, as it was near nightfall, and plenty of thick rain-clouds hangin' low. The thin-faced cove and my boss handed in the Queen; then they bowed me in, and got in themselves. The fancy dress horse marines closed in round us; and next minute we were movin' out like an Eight Hour procession. My boss, with a business look in his eye, leans over as we pass out the gate an' says, "Touch your hat, your Majesty, now and then. But say nothing, *you understand!*"

I nodded and edged away a bit from the Queen, because I felt nervous about that ship's tobacco I'd been smokin' just previous to me appointment, so to speak.

When we swung round the corner we found the whole town out lookin' for fun and murder—which is practically the same thing in them parts. Directly they sighted us they threw up their hats and yelled; some of 'em might have been doin' it because we were still alive; but most of 'em looked hostile to the Rile Family. I started touchin' me hat every ten yards, an' out of the corner of me eye I seen the Queen bowin' right an' left an' makin' a brave try to twist her lips into a smile. By jingo, she was plucky, that girl!

Every block or so I seen holes knocked in the buildings and masses of bricks behind the howlin' lunatics that filled up the streets until there was hardly enough room for us an' the escort. But the ships seemed to have got sick of knockin' the city about for the time bein'; there was no more shells cornin' in, an' everyone seemed to be waitin' for the next move. In the meantime me and th' Queen was calmin' em— I don't think!

I was beginnin' to enjoy the fuss when some sneakin' brute with a bomb give me a sickener of the whole thing. We had stopped for a second in a narrer street to let the escort clear a track, when I seen a chap run out in a little balcony with something like a big cricket ball in his hand. He took aim at the Queen and let fly. Before I knew what I was going' to do, I jumped up and caught that whizzin' lump of sudden death! —yes, I caught it, softly, as if it was just the ordin'ry lump of leather! I heard a scream go up as the thing lobbed in my two hands; and the same second a jugful of ice-water run down the back of me neck and froze me to the heels. I seemed to hold on to that d—d bomb for about half an hour while the silly crowd kept up one long howl. Then I seen we had stopped opposite a pawn-broker's; and I let out a yell and aimed that handful of lightning straight through the front winder! There was a dull bang and a ton or so of unredeemed pledges and the Jew that kept it went up in the air. The crowd went right off its head then, the escort drove em back easily, and we went on.

"Viva!" they yelled. "Viva!"

"Viva yourselves!" I says under me breath, and touched me cocked hat as if I was used to it. I seen that the Queen's eyes was shinin' an' winking like the Morse lamps of a flagship; an' that made we fair drunk with conceit.

"Mashed the Queen!" I sings to meself. "Mashed the Queen! By G—d, this country's mine!"

"Good catch!" whispers the boss.

"A d—d good catch! But... keep your mouth shut I "

We drove on and on— me touchin' me hat, the Queen smilin' like an actress an' the crowds shriekin' like lunatics out for the day. Then, havin' showed ourselves to pretty well the whole asylum, we commenced to circle round towards home. The cheerin' crowds got thicker an' thicker, so that we had to go dead slow. After a while they got so bad that we had to stop every now an' then because they were jammed against the wheels. While one of these crushes was on, I seen a familiar bunch of whiskers stickin' over the door, an' behind them the Old Man— red in the face with shovin' and cold sober. He knew me all right!

"What in th' name o' paralysed thunder are you doin' in there?" he roars above the crowd. (The Old Man was used to howlin' against hurricanes and would ha' made himself heard in Hell, I guess.) "Where's the boat, you lop-sided son of a dressed-up gorilla?"

One of the escort tried to prod him away, but he pinched the horse's nose, called the Colonel on it a Boy Scout, and howled at me worse than ever.

"Let me knight that old man," I yells in the boss's ear. "Let me make a K.C.M.G. of him before he can get away; it might do him good."

The boss laughed and shook his head; and the mad crowd—who thought the Old Man was tryin' to assassinate me pulled him off the carriage by one leg and kept him so busy fightin' an' swearin' that he hadn't time to attend to us. Then the escort got the way cleared again and we drove on.

It was one blaze of cheerin' all the way back to the palace, which we reached after dark. The big gates were shut in the face of the mob and we rattled up to the door and disembarked in good style. Then the boss took charge again and led us upstairs.

When the servants were out of the way, the boss turns to me and says, "Take off them clothes and then come in to me, and I'll give you that twenty-five dollars."

And then, the Queen bein' present and me bein' quite drunk with it all, I says, "Keep your dirty dollars! I reckon I'll hang on to these duds a bit longer in case I have to save the country again."

While the boss was lookin' ugly at me, the thin-faced man turned to that shinin'-eyed Queen and snaps, "Well *Seen-youra*, it is over. Now shall we be ourselves again?"

"Oh!Oh-h!" says the Queen in a heart-broke way, and comes about half an inch nearer to me.

"Come!" says the thin-faced cove. "You have played your part well; but it is all over. I promise you the Government will not forget it."

"One hour more," says the Queen, clutchin' at her chest like they do in the third act.

"No," says the thin-faced cove.

"Yes," I says. "While I'm on deck, her Gracious here will do just what she wants to. An' don't you forget it, neither!"

The thin-faced cove looked at me with me hand on the hilt of me sword; then he looked at the Queen with her hands clutchin' her chest. Then him and the boss looked at each other and roared— yes, they roared in our faces. I let 'em have their laugh out. Then I come straight to biz.

"Look here," I says to the boss, "what's the strength of it?"

"Her Majesty," chuckles the boss, "would make you a good wife. My wife can speak for her; she has been in our employ as housemaid ever since I have been in charge of the Embassy. If you feel like pairing off, you can have the job of caretaking the Town Hall— twenty dollars a month and light and quarters free."

I unbuckled that d—d silly sword and pitched it and the King's cocked hat under the table. "Give me them dollars quick!" I says; "and lemme get back to my ship."

12: The Eye-Witness

A Newspaper Story of a Tragedy of the Sea.

The Lone Hand Jan 1912

"NO, I don't give a hang for verse, either," said the news editor.

He swung round on his chair, and dropped his pencil on his blotting-pad with his right hand, while he reached for his pipe with his left. "No man should write unless he's got something to say; and if he's got anything, it's a darned sight easier to put it in prose."

He scraped a match viciously along the rim of his desk, and held it to the charred bowl of his cherrywood. Havis, the sub-editor, temporarily unemployed, settled himself comfortably against the table, and waited until his brother-in-ink had finished firing up. The shaded electrics threw a flood of hard, white light on desks, chairs and littered floor; from the street below came the roar of passing trams, occasional cries, curiously distinct in the cool night air, and, at rarer intervals, the soft ring of hoofs.

"I admit that verse— or poetry, if you like— has its points; but they make no appeal to me. I used to read verse, but I don't now, and I don't believe the public does either. They'll listen to a good comedian or a good balladist singing any sort of balderdash; but it's no use giving them rhymed stuff to read."

"Exactly!" chimed in the sub. "I had a hammer-and-tongs go with old Jack Western the other day about it. I believe he'd write his leaders in verse if they'd let him. One of the things he tried to ram down my throat was that a description could be better done in verse — especially if it was something to do with the sea."

The news editor laughed. "If he can show me anything better in verse than Crane's 'Open Boat', I'll promise him to read it."

"I see you're quite hopeless, like myself," remarked the sub. cheerily, as he walked out.

"I am," agreed the news editor, grimly, and took up his pencil.

In five minutes' time the sub. was back again, wearing his busy look.

"Young Hampden has just rung up from the *Globe*. He has some good fresh stuff about that murder. Wants to know if he can have half a column."

"Confound young Hampden," retorted the news editor, with the utmost placidity. "Does he think the *Call* is the *Evening Skull*? Tell him he can have two sticks if he gets his stuff in early enough."

The sub. repaired to the 'phone, and immediately returned. "He says it is a big thing, and that he's sure the *Globe* will give it at least half."

"Tell him he can have his half then," grumbled the news editor, and turned away as though he had been robbed of something very precious— which, of course, was the case. There is nothing more precious than space.

Half an hour later, when the pulse of the office had quickened to about 120° a minute, and neither the news editor nor anyone else had a second to squander, a burly, fresh-complexioned young giant, preceded by a nervous messenger, walked into the news editor's room, and tramped over the litter of papers towards the desk.

The news editor whirled round on his chair. "What is it?" he enquired, sharply.

The giant sat down unasked. "I want to put something in your paper," he said, simply.

The news editor had met his sort of new-chum before; but he decided to give him a minute— or forty seconds, anyhow.

"What is it?"

The stranger tapped the editor's desk impressively with a stubby forefinger.

"A true story of the sea, sir. I'm a deck-hand on the steamer *Penguin*, now anchored in Chowder Bay, I think you call it. I came up the harbor just now in the police boat with the captain, who's gone out to see a dying relation. I'm just telling you this, sir, to show you that what I'm going to tell you is the truth."

"Well?"

"You haven't heard anything at all, sir, of the lost steamer *Sultan*, have you?"

The news editor sat up. "Not a word! Do you know anything?"

The man from the sea prodded the desk excitedly.

"She was blown up by her Chinese crew out there" — indicating the Pacific— "two weeks ago. They mutinied, murdered the white officers, set her on fire, and cleared out in the boats. We picked up a boat-load of the swine last Wednesday week as we were making for the smoke of the burning ship. They lied to us, of course; but we didn't like the look of things when we saw they had no white officer in charge. We took the dozen of 'em aboard, and made for the poor old *Sultan* at full speed. In their hurry they had messed up the job of firing her, and the second had no trouble in getting aboard. He found the captain's body in the chart-house. He had been hacked about something horrible, and clenched in his right hand was a piece of silk and some coarse black hair. They must have thrown the other bodies overboard, as the only other traces of murder the second could find were bloodstains on the decks. He brought the dead captain's body back with him in the boat. I believe there

was some talk of trying to get the fire out; but it was lucky we didn't try it. While we were standin' by, there was an explosion aboard the burnin' ship, and she tipped and slid down bows first. The fire must have got to some explosives, I think."

"You haven't told this to anyone else?"

"No sir, not a soul!"

"Good ! Yow, I tell you what I want to do. I want you to tell this to one of our staff, with any other particulars you can think of. Just tell it as simply and directly"

"You mean that he is to write it, sir?" The seaman's tone was distinctly hostile.

"Yes, of course."

The man with a story to tell shook his head vigorously. "Oh, no sir! That isn't my way of doing business. This is my story, sir. I want to write it myself. Let me write it and bring it in to you to-morrow."

"But look here," cried the news enthusiast, desperately; "this is a big thing, and by to-morrow all the other papers will be on to it. It would be much easier to rattle it off to one of our men. He'll take a shorthand note, and fix it up in good shape for you."

He reached for the plug of the speaking-tube.

"No, sir! I want to write this myself. I'll tell you what I'll do. Can you give me a quiet room and let me write it there?"

"Very well, then." The news editor made the concession grudgingly; but he wanted the story, and that seemed the only way to get it. He shot orders through the place that swept angry, copy-laden men to one side, and started them grumbling in odd corners. The result of all the confusion was that a room somewhere in the hive was cleared, and the man from the sea locked in with pen, ink and paper.

The news editor informed him, before closing the door, that he had two hours in which to put the story of the *Sultan* into a column, and that he would not be disturbed by anyone, as he intended to take the key with him. Then, with the key in his vest pocket, he walked along to the sub.'s room, and interrupted that worried man with his story.

"A column on your cable page, Mr. Davis," he concluded, firmly.

"All right," said the sub. briskly, and, with his pencil between his teeth, started to search. "The Farmers' Conference and the Liberal League can go over to Page 9," he announced at last. "There's your space. Can your man fill it?"

"I think so. Anyway, I'm stopping to see that he does. I had to make the experiment to get the story," he added.

The sub. looked at his watch. "Just eleven o'clock. Let us have it as quickly as you can." He bent again over his work.

The news editor ran into young Hampden at the head of the stairs. The boy was dancing with excitement and anxiety. "Mr. Evans, can I have a column? This thing turned into a two-handed murder half an hour ago, and the arrests have been made. It's the biggest thing we have had for a long time."

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Hampden. Any other time, yes; but to-night a sailor turned up with the story of the missing *Sultan*, in which the whole world is interested. The *Globe* will miss this altogether. It's a big mutiny story, and we've scooped it."

"That's so!" The boy's face fell. "I suppose I'll have to carve it." He looked at his watch and hurried away to write up.

The news editor went into his room, and, putting his watch in front of him, started to look over proofs....

IT WAS five minutes to one, and the sub. was fretting and fidgeting in his chair of thorns, when a worried-looking boy looked in and informed him that the news editor would like to see him in his room. The sub.'s chair revolved three times from the force with which he left it.

Evans, quite drunk with rage, slammed three crumpled sheets of paper on the corner of his desk as he entered.

"Look what that damned drivelling fool has been doing! He's been down here for the last two hours twisting his hob-nailed feet and getting ink in his hair trying to put that 18-carat yarn into verse! *Verse!*"

The sub. had the reputation of never having lost his temper in a crisis. As Evans, quite overcome, sank back in his chair, he gathered up the poem and read, in a sweetly composed way, the following lines:

A MARINE TRAGEDY OF THE SEA

*Alas! 'twas on the roaring main we saw a burning barque;
The Captain with his eagle eye had seen it smoking. "Hark!
Oh, listen now to me, my lads! Here something is amiss!
Come, let us steer for yonder barque! I must see into this!*

*But what is that in yonder boat? Twelve Chinamen I see!
I do suspect foul play, my lads—"*

"We can't use this," remarked the sub. gravely.

"Use it?" shouted Evans, jumping to his feet. "I'd like to!"

The sub. snapped his watch. "I'll have to close down in a quarter of an hour; and there's that column."

Evans groaned and clenched his teeth. "If I'd only known the brute was doing that!"

The plaintive face of young Hampden appeared round the door. "I say, Mr. Evans. It's hard to fit this blustery into half a—"

The news editor swung round. "The very thing! I'd forgotten about you, Mr. Hampden. Don't cut that murder story. Mark back all you've marked out. Stick every line in, and do it quickly, and" — turning to the sub. — "if it's what he says, run headings through it, and lead it. That'll about fill the column. I'll vamp up something myself from this drivelling maniac's verse— about half a column; and that'll pull us out."

"Guess that's about the best way out of it," muttered the sub. thoughtfully. "All right, Mr. Hampden. It's getting alongside closing time," he added ruefully.

The news editor didn't hear. He was already writing, smoothly and swiftly.

Down in the front office, a disconsolate, wandering seaman was entrusting a message to a reluctant and suspicious messenger. "I want you to tell the gentleman upstairs that, after thinking it over, I'd like the name of the poem to be changed to 'The Old Captain's Story,' or, 'A Sad Tale of the Rolling Sea.' "

13: The Lost Bishop

The Lone Hand Feb 1912

THE stout turbaned man, wrapped in the faded Union Jack, sat in a perspiring heap on the sea-shore, and glared disapprovingly at the insane charwoman, who was step-dancing on the stranded raft to a humming accompaniment of her own.

"Poor— Uncle— Toby he was— fair —knocked— up!" panted the charwoman in a peculiarly masculine voice, her two nimble feet twinkling and clattering in perfect time on the sun-scorched boards of the raft, and ending up at the end of the line with a loud stamp. Then the comedian (for the charwoman was a "female impersonator," wrecked whilst voyaging to Australia) minced to the edge of the impromptu platform, smirked, curtsied to an imaginary audience, smoothed back an imaginary lock of hair, folded his arms meekly, and sighed.

"My first 'usband," he remarked confidentially to the unresponsive audience of one, "my first 'usband was a tripe finisher." (Pause.) "Yes, a tripe finisher! But, mind yer, 'e wasn't one to waste 'is money! 'E got two pounds a week, an' every Saterdee night 'e useter bring me 'ome forty shillin's— five shillin's in silver an' thirty-five shillin's in beer!"

"Dear, dear!" sighed the Union Jacker hopelessly, hitching the Grand Old Flag closer round his neck.

The female impersonator stopped the performance abruptly.

"What's the matter now, Bishop?" he asked sneeringly.

The loyal but unhappy churchman looked despairfully at the grotesque figure between him and the thundering breakers.

"What a mockery!" he groaned.

"Mockery of *what*?" demanded the performer.

"Of womanhood of everything! Why do you keep on doing it?"

"Because I don't want to get out of form, that's why! Suppose we were picked up in a month or so, and I was to get back to the halls right out of form! Where'd I be then? What would be the use of this advertisement if my show wasn't worth seeing?"

"But we may never be picked up!"

"Oh, rats! We'll be picked up all right. You keep up your spirits and try and not look so much like a military funeral. All you want at the present minute is a band walkin' in front playin' the Dead March, and a gun carriage to lie on. Then you'd be right."

"What I want now," retorted the Bishop fiercely, "is my boots, skirt and shawl! Will you please give them back to me and take your flag?"

"I haven't finished rehearsing yet!" said the impersonator, hastily preparing to resume.

"I can't help that," cried the Bishop testily. "And I really cannot listen to any more stupid vulgarities to-day. Really, when I think of the state my poor wife must be in, and ask myself how that trouble about the vestments is proceeding at St. Gloom's, I feel like shrieking aloud!"

"Well, shriek at me and cheer yourself up! Lots of people pay to do it!"

"God forgive them!" muttered his Lordship, brokenly.

The impersonator flushed angrily, and the broken feather in his gem hat trembled.

"Hold hard there! You're no more than an opposition showman when all's said and done— and a darned poor one at that! Look at the pull you people have and the rotten houses you draw! People come to chaps like me to be cheered up after you've sent 'em away miserable enough to drown 'emselves!"

"The church is not an entertainment, sir!"

"Oh, isn't it!"

"Well, I at least do not regard it as such!"

The grotesque female gesticulated passionately in front of the roaring background of green and white water.

"And I don't regard the stage as an entertainment neither! It's all hard work to me, I can tell yer; but, Gord bless yer, that don't make no difference to the public! They come along an' grin like Cheshire cats if I'm good, an' growl an' say I'm rotten if I'm not up to dick. Do you think it's all fun dancin' an' sweatin' an' waitin' for them to catch on to th' gags?"

"You mean the jokes, I presume?"

"Yes."

"But why don't you get some sensible 'gags' that are not vulgar, instead of these stupid vulgarities?"

"Because they wouldn't understand, that's why! Unless you're one of the very best, you can't go bungin' new gags into my congregation any more than you can into your crowd. People don't like 'em— most people, anyhow. What the crowd wants is the gag they know. There are some of 'em that'll always raise a laugh. Look at that there winner of mine about the cheese that gets up in the night and chases the cat. I'll guarantee that'll make *anyone* laugh."

"It never made *me* laugh, Mr. Kybosh."

The demented charlady sat down on the edge of the stage and made an impatient gesture. "Because you never let yourself go! You're not free an' easy. You've got inter the way of lookin' at things seriously. All hewmer is rot— more or less— if you stand on yer dig. and pull a long face. You want to loosen up a bit an' look at th' hewmerous side of things."

"I beg your pardon," boomed the Bishop. "It may surprise you, Mr. Kybosh, but I am not altogether lacking in a sense of humor. I take London *Punch* regularly."

Kybosh, the Electric Stepper, sprang on to the stage, and stood with his garments fluttering in the wind.

"Spare me days, Bishop, *Punch* isn't a hewmerous paper! What made yer think *Punch* was funny? Was it th' bits of Latin they put in the jokes?"

"It is effective, Mr. Kybosh, when done neatly. Of course one must have some acquaintance with the tongue to appreciate it."

"Oh, no, yer needn't! I don't know anythin' about Latin, but I've got one or two Latin gags. Look here!"

Whisking the shawl over his shoulders, he assumed the smirk of the elated charwoman, folded his arms flatly across his chest, and commenced to pour out a stream of patter in his shrill stage voice. The Bishop, frozen into silence, glared at him from the depths of the flag.

"I'll never forget th' day that I married my pore, dead 'usband! ('Course 'e's dead now, an' I believe in lettin' bygones be 'asbeens, although 'e did kick me round th' yard reg'lar ev'ry Saterdee night!) We 'ad two of everythin'. Fancy that, you girls there in front!... Yes, an' every think was stamped with our good old family motto, '*Nux vomica*.'... What do you think of that, Bishop?"

The Bishop rose majestically to his feet. He looked like young Mrs. Britannia's grandfather. "That is all I can endure to-day!" he remarked wildly, and turning, trailed up the beach towards the wreck depot.

The impersonator stared after him, muttering vindictively, until the splendidly patriotic figure disappeared from view. Then he turned away with a shrug, and recommenced his absurd jiggling and singing. The freshening wind caught up his joyous notes and the echoes of his feet and bowled them along the sand to where the Bishop sat brooding in the hut.

*"Upon the stairs they lay in pairs,
In the cellar and the kitchen, too!*

(Ta-ra-ra !)

Poor Uncle Toby, he was fair knocked up.

So they put him in the kennel with the bull-dog pup!

Left in the lurch,

I roosted on the perch

With the cock-a-doodle-doodle-doo!!!"

And the approaching storm shrilly whistled the accompaniment to the concluding breakdown on the sunbaked boards of the raft on which they had come ashore together.

IT WAS COLD, bitterly cold, and the cave was damp; but the famous female impersonator was nice and hot with indignation.

"You're a grateful bloke, I must say! I've given you the only suit of men's clobber on the damned island an' th' flag as well, and still you keep on growlin'! I've tried to talk, an' I've tried to cheer you up with a bit of a song an' dance, but you sit there like a boiled owl! By cripes. Bishop, I don't think much of you and yer Christian resignation!"

The Bishop, garbed in a haphazard way in a curious mixture of clothes, the most prominent article of which was a white, bob-tailed steward's jacket, looked out at the boiling, creamy surf and sighed.

"I wish t' Gord you wouldn't keep on doin' that!" snapped the impersonator. "It makes things a damned sight worse than they are! An' Lord knows they're bad enough! Shake yourself up!"

"How can I?" moaned the Bishop.

"Get some exercise! Don't sit round an' think until your liver gets you down! Jump round a bit an' you'll jolly soon be cheerful an' hopin' for the best!"

The Bishop started as if he had been hit heavily with an idea. "Do you know, I really believe that is why I have been so low spirited! I want exercise!"

"Well, it's easy enough got," retorted the practical Kybosh.

"The island isn't big enough for walking," demurred his Lordship.

"But it is for dancing! Come on, Bishop, an' I'll teach you I'll do you good an' amuse me. Come on!"

The ecclesiastical dignitary allowed himself to be led into the centre of the cave, and the lesson commenced forthwith. At first his Lordship danced with reluctance and jolted himself heavily into the air like a clockwork elephant; the frivolity of it shocked him, and several times he broke away with protesting cries. But Kybosh, the Electric Stepper, coaxed him back to his work, and gradually got him warmed up and interested, so that he leaped less ponderously, and began to get in some rather neat heel-and-toe work.

"It— is— really most exhilarating!" he panted, during the first rest. "I— feel— much— better—already!"

"Come on again!" cried Kybosh as he shuffled. The Bishop recommenced willingly, and they shuffled face to face while Kybosh slowly hummed his favorite air:—

*"Upon the stairs they lay in pairs,
In the cellar and the kitchen, too!*

(Ta-ra-ra !)

Poor Uncle Toby, he was fair knocked up.

So they put him in the kennel with the bull-dog pup!

Left in the lurch,

I roosted on the perch

With the cock-a-doodle-doodle-doo!!

(NOW, HIT IT UP!!)"

Together in fairly perfect time they clattered through the breakdown, and wound up with a shout of joy.

"Good boy!" panted Kybosh, patting his pupil on the back. "Now, take off those boots and have a rest while I show you where you went wrong. You oughter make a good dancer when you pick up the knack of it."

The Bishop, cheered and invigorated by his exercise, did not make any protesting sounds, nor moan about the trouble at St. Gloom's. He simply sat down on a rock, and, smiling proudly, removed the boots for his instructor. And when Kybosh clattered before him and invited his particular attention to new steps, his Lordship bent forward eagerly and watched the intricate feet tangles with intense interest. He had taken the first few hundred steps on the downward path.

The wind howled protestingly outside, and the ocean roared its entire disapproval. But the lesson in the cave went on.

IT WAS a lovely blue morning a month later. The Electric Stepper finished tying on the sandals of canvas and wood he had made with such labor, and stood up straight. "I reckon they'll do, Bishop."

"Comfortable?" asked his Lordship, as if he were discussing a new school-room.

"Right as rain. I feel rather proud of these things. Now, let us get on with rehearsal." He stepped on to the raft and tried a few steps which the Bishop watched with critical interest.

"Yes, they're A1. Now, Bishop!"

His Lordship, very ragged and bearded, stepped up nimbly and smote his instructor gaily on the back with his open hand.

"Well, Percy!" he cried, in good patter comedian style.

Kybosh languidly turned his head.

"Well, Harold!" he drawled, twisting the end of his ragged moustache with his right hand and twirling a light piece of driftwood in his left.

"I saw you down the street last night, Percy," persisted the shameless Bishop.

"Did you, dear boy?"

"Yes, dear boy, I did! Do you know what a Salvation Army johnny said about you?"

"No, dear boy. What did he say?"

"He said that you were driving straight to destruction."

"Did he really?"

"Yes, dear boy, straight to destruction!"

"By Jove! how clever! But you see, Harold, I didn't go as far as destruction. I got out two blocks before the accident happened!"

"Ha-ha-ha! I say, that's awfully smart, you know!"

"Oh, no, it isn't, dear boy! I often say things like that. Only last night I came home and found my wife trying to put up some curtains. She was standing on a chair, but, like Cook, she couldn't reach the pole. See? She said, I do wish we had a ladder!' I said, 'Well, my dear, here are a few steps!' (Off you go, Bishop!")

Instantly the pair of ragged figures were step dancing in perfect time with their backs to the sea. As they clattered and jumped, they sang the now familiar lines:—

*"Upon the stairs they lay in pairs,
In the cellar and the kitchen, too!*

(Ta-ra-ral)

*Poor Uncle Toby, he was fair knocked up.
So they bunged him in the kennel with the
bulldog pup!*

Left in the lurch,

I roosted on the perch

With the cock-a-doodle-doodle-doo !!"

The ship's boat, which had sailed round the point before the wind as they began the performance, shot in on the crest of a big wave, and grounded on the shingle.

The officer in the stern-sheets stood up, and stared as the three rowers jumped out and ran the craft up the sand. "Hey, you!" he yelled, above the thunder of the breakers.

The two unconscious performers didn't hear him. The surf was very heavy that morning; and, besides, they had started an encore dance, and were clattering through a set of intricate steps. The officer jammed his hands in his

pockets, and, followed by his grinning men, walked across and watched the absurd cavortings from the back of the platform. At the final stamp, the four spectators broke into loud applause. The performers leaped into the air.

"Good boys!" cried the brassbound rescuer very heartily, as they turned scared faces towards him. "I never thought I'd see such neat stepping on a Pacific sand-bank. Which of you is Kybosh, and which Climax?"

"Oh— oh, shake hands!" faltered Kybosh, advancing. "I'm— I'm Kybosh. Who are you?"

"My name is Ford," replied the officer, seizing the trembling hand of the castaway. "Second officer of the steamer *African*, lying on the other side of the island. We're out looking for you people. Are there any others here besides yourself and your partner Climax?"

Kybosh, quite overcome, smeared the back of his sunburnt hand across his dry lips, and motioned weakly towards his dumbfounded companion. "That's not Climax. That's the Bishop!"

"Oh, come!" protested Ford. "No joking, now. Tell us who he is, because you know we have to send the names of all the rescued by wireless."

"I am the Bishop of Ballaburn!" broke in the browned and bearded outcast in the bob-tailed steward's jacket.

"Now, Mr. Climax, this is serious, *really!*"

"But I tell you, sir, that I *am* the Bishop of Ballaburn, Queensland!"

"You will have your joke, I see!"

"But, sir, I *assure* you—"

Kybosh caught the officer by the sleeve. "He *is* the Bishop, really!" he muttered earnestly.

Second-officer Ford flushed, turned to the Bishop and touched his hat stiffly. "Beg pardon, sir. After seeing the way you danced, I felt certain that you were joking."

The Bishop purpled. "Yes, yes! I quite understand. It was a natural mistake. I'm afraid that I— well, the fact is, Mr. Kybosh very kindly taught me in order to keep me from fretting. I am sure I am very grateful to him, but— well, I'm afraid that it wasn't at all dignified!"

"It was a splendid performance, sir!" said the rescuer, taking the Bishop's limp hand and shaking it. "I never saw a slicker bit of stepping in my life. You could earn your living at the game if you liked."

The Bishop swallowed and nodded.

"Shall we go aboard?" he asked, with a flash of his old dignity.

The little party turned and made for the boat. The Bishop got in first, stepping lightly over the side and seating himself without any elephantine fussing or fumbling with coat-tails such as one expects from bishops and other

heavyweight dignitaries. Kybosh, observing him, realised for the first time that the Bishop had altered tremendously, and that he (Kybosh) was wholly responsible. The thought chilled him; he was a simple, good-hearted worldling who respectfully avoided, as far as possible, all contact with the serious things of life, including, of course, bishops. And here he had been re-constructing or demolishing one, he wasn't sure which.

He stopped reflectively and shivered.

"Get in, if you please," muttered Second-officer Ford behind him.

Kybosh stepped in like a man in a dream and sat down. He did not remember much of the journey to the ship. The boat rose and fell, the oars creaked wearisomely, and the buzz of escaping steam became gradually louder; but the Electric Stepper, hunched on the thwart, looked back at the receding island like a man crushed with the weight of some terrible responsibility.

THE SEE of Ballaburn, rendered vacant by the totally unexpected resignation of the Bishop soon after his sensational return on the search steamer, has been filled now, and the papers have ceased discussing the probable motives of his Lordship; but if you ever visit England or America, look out for a male team of tanglefoot dancers and cross-talkers whose label is "Kybosh (Carl) and Union (Jack)." The big partner has a grave and reverend manner which is very effective, and produces roars of laughter.

Your next-stall neighbor will probably volunteer a preposterous story of how Jack Union was once a bishop who was (professionally speaking) "discovered" by his partner Kybosh on a desert island. The church folk, on the other hand, assert that he was lost (professionally speaking) on a desert island.

It all depends on the view you take of the affair.

14: The Boarder's Revolver

The Lone Hand March 1912

One of several stories by the author about the boarding house and its inhabitants, and featuring Mr Bodger.

LEMPSON squinted along the barrel of the immense cowboy revolver he had purchased that day for the purpose of slaughtering burglars. Three fellow boarders sat on the edge of his bed watching him apprehensively.

"Don't point it this way!" cried the partly bald young man in the centre.

"It's all right!" replied Lempson irritably, fiddling with the trigger. "No need to be alarmed. The thing isn't loaded. I took all the cartridges out ten minutes ago."

There was a flash and a deafening report; the acrid smell of burnt powder filled the room; a little torrent of dust poured from the bullet hole in the wall: and, in the next room, a deep-voiced man roared like a wounded bull. The white-faced Lempson, with the smoking revolver grasped in his right hand, stood irresolute in the middle of the floor while the three horrified spectators surged, shouting, towards the door.

"Bodger's shot!" they proclaimed. "Mr. Bodger's shot!"

Other boarders came running, and an hysterical female voice asked wildly from the floor above who had done it.

"It was an accident!" repeated the three witnesses from the landing. "Lempson shot him by accident!"

"Is he killed?" shrilled the thin woman who worked in the Post Office.

"Killed!" wailed the voice upstairs. "Don't tell me he's killed!"

Someone ran towards the victim's door; but it flew open at the same instant, and a stout, middle-aged man, with a flowing beard, dressed simply in singlet and trousers, jumped out. There was a considerable amount of lather on his face, and he was in a towering passion.

"Why, you're all right!" shouted the assembled company, rather resentfully.

"I've been shot at!" yelled Bodger, glaring about him like a cornered wild beast. "Someone just tried to kill me!"

Lempson, still carrying his revolver, scrambled on to a chair and looked over the heads of the intervening boarders.

"Mr. Bodger!" he panted. "I'm sorry, sir! It was my revolver, Mr. Bodger! I didn't know it was loaded, sir!"

"Get a constable, somebody!" panted Bodger, shoving desperately amongst the crowd that barred his way. "Take that weapon from him, and get me a constable. He nearly killed me!"

There was a dreadful uproar, which only ceased when the dreary voice of the landlady was heard inquiring if blood had been shed, because, if it had, she was ruined for ever.

"Are you hurt, sir?" chanted the three witnesses of the accident, "Mrs. Tribbens wants to know if you're hurt?" (Dead silence.)

"No, thank God, I'm not hit!" (Cries of relief.) "But it smashed the wash basin and drilled a hole through my box. Will you take that weapon away from that fool and get me a constable!"

The uproar broke out again, and Bodger made some half-hearted attempts to get through the crowd to the badly-shaken revolver owner. "If you won't get me a constable, let me at him! I'll teach him how to use firearms! I'll give him a damned good flogging!"

"I didn't mean to hurt you!" cried Lempson. "It was an accident, Mr. Bodger!"

Everyone took up the cry. "He didn't mean to hurt you! It was an accident!"

"Accident!" panted the furious Bodger, still pushing and shoving. "I tell you all, it was damned nearly a fatal accident!"

"But he didn't mean it!" wailed the company, getting in the way as much as possible.

Bodger, purple-faced and breathless, stopped shoving for a moment and glared about him with a baffled expression.

"Well!" he roared. "Am I supposed to be pleased because you think he didn't mean to murder me outright?"

"Now, Mr. Bodger!" shrilled the Post Office lady— a keen admirer of Lempson— "Now, Mr. Bodger, you are over-excited. You are rushing to conclusions, Mr. Bodger! Don't be unjust and ridiculous!"

"Mind your own business, ma'am!"

"How dare you speak to me like that!"

"I've been shot at, ma'am! I might have been killed!"

"Well, you're not killed, you know!"

It was merely the simple truth; yet Bodger reeled before it.

"Yes; but, God bless my soul!"

"You're not even injured!" added the Post Office lady tartly.

"But— but I might have been, ma'am!"

"Why can't you take it calmly, Mr. Bodger? You're all right!"

The chorus took it up and chanted reassuringly, "Take it calmly, Mr. Bodger! You're all right now!"

This was treating him as an hysterical individual. And he prided himself on his courage!

"Oh, confound it!" he yelled. "I know I'm all right!"

The murmuring crowd stupidly took him up again. "Yes, you're all right now!" they chanted soothingly, and started to melt away to their various rooms.

Bodger, inarticulate with rage, rudely shoved past a couple of boarders who were peering in his door at the ragged hole in the lath and plaster wall, and the mess of broken crockery and water on the floor.

"Send someone up to fix my room!" he shouted over the banisters.

There were alarms and excursions below stairs; and presently a maid came toiling up with cloth and bucket, and set to work. Bodger roamed round, fuming to himself; two or three boarders lurked about and discussed the accident in low voices.

Lempson, in an unarmed state, walked out of his room and rapped nervously on the side of Bodger's door.

"In there, Mr. Bodger?" (The whole house listened.)

"You haven't got any firearms about you, I hope," roared the inmate.

"No, Mr. Bodger."

"I don't want any more of your damned didn't- know- it- was- loaded pranks, you know!"

Lempson was far too badly shaken, and grateful to Providence, to resent loud insults.

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Bodger! Really, I'm very sorry. I'll be more careful in future, sir!"

"You learn how to use the damned thing, and try and get some sense!" was the final bellow.

Lempson crept back to his room and gloomily stowed away his murdering appliance.

"Why did you buy the thing, Lempson?" asked the partly bald young man, who had been hovering round and gloating over the bullet hole.

"Because I don't think it's safe to be without one."

"Safer than with it," retorted the other with a sickly grin.

Lempson shut the drawer impatiently. "Oh, that was only a bit of bad luck! I got it on account of the burglars we've had round here lately. A revolver is a mighty handy thing to have, I can tell you! Suppose somebody got in here at night. What would you do?"

"I'd get up and see who it was."

"Yes, and perhaps get shot for your trouble! Now, if I heard anyone moving round, I'd get out my gun and put a bullet through them pretty quick."

"All right, Lempson. I won't get up in case you take me for the burglar."

"Oh, don't be a chump! You're nearly as bad as old Bodger! I'm not going to kill anyone. I was going to try a few shots in the garden this evening: but I suppose I'd better put it off for to-night, as we've had that silly row."

Next day a silent plasterer came and healed the death-wound in the wall; and, the excitement having blown over, diplomatic relations were resumed between Bodger, Lempson and the Post Office lady.

Two nights later, the evening calm was punctuated by a dozen or so loud reports; Lempson was having his target practice. Bodger made a few heated remarks; but the rest of the household bore it in silence.

Then, on Sunday morning, Mrs. Tribbens went round the house telling everyone that the senior tomcat was ill, and she was "afraid something would have to be done for it." Everyone guessed that the "something" would have to be drowning; but no one save Bodger had the heart to lacerate the poor woman's feelings by going into brutal details. Bodger, on being approached, immediately started to talk cheerfully about bags and bricks. He was left talking, and retired in a passion to his room, colliding on the way with a new boarder who was suffering from an overdose of fermented refreshment taken the previous night.

The new boarder recoiled dazedly from Bodger's swollen vest, tottered to the woodshed— a cool, quiet place, the door of which was screened with bagging— and, finding it well furnished with empty coal bags, went in and lay down. His two feet, encased in pathetically busted boots, protruded, toes up, from beneath the screen. Bodger stumped on upstairs, condemning the landlady, the new boarder and the cat in the same curse.

When Lempson, who had been out for a morning swim, was told about the illness of the cat, he went straight to the landlady.

"I hear the old cat's sick, Mrs. Tribbens?"

The worried old woman wiped her hands on her apron. "Yes, indeed, Mr. Lempson. He's very sick, poor thing. I'm afraid something will have to be done."

"Now, don't worry, Mrs. Tribbens," said Lempson cheerily. "I'm rather a good hand with sick cats. You leave him to me. I'll fix him up for you!"

Then he hurried off.

"Oh, thank you so much, Mr. Lempson!" called the distressed cat-owner after him, and returned to her duties.

Ten minutes went by, and all was peace and the smell of dinner. Then, afar off, were heard the muffled noises of a hue and cry. Doors opened and shut; excited voices called and replied; feet shuffled. It reminded the old lady dimly of the street scene in a French Revolution drama she had seen some months

before, when the howling rabble rushed about looking for fugitive aristocrats. She suspended her potato peeling to listen.

"HAS ANYONE seen the old cat about?" The clear tenor of the tea salesman came clearly to the listening ears. "Anyone seen the old cat? Lempson wants it."

At that moment, a slinking grey shape ran noiselessly in the kitchen door and crouched by the stove. It was the wanted cat. The old lady, observing it, was reminded of the hunted Duke in the play, when he burst into the peasant woman's hut, slammed the door to, and implored her aid.

"Here's the cat in the kitchen!" she called, and went out into the garden to hunt up the girl.

An excited concourse of jabbering boarders streamed into the yard, and the desperate thing, sheltering in the kitchen, was cornered and captured. Then the ladies present withdrew hurriedly with shrill screams of horror, and fluttered up the hall, considerably startling the landlady, who was on the return trip from the garden.

"Goodness me! What's the matter?"

"The cat!" screamed the lady boarders in chorus. "Don't go into the yard, Mrs. Tribbens! Mr. Lempson's going to shoot the cat!"

Mrs. Tribbens uttered a faint, faded war whoop, and charged like an elderly moth through the lady boarders' ranks. Down the hall she flew, and, bursting into the yard, caught one glimpse of Lempson holding down a squirming grey object with his left hand, and brandishing his immense revolver in his right. Murder was in his eye; scared male boarders were watching him from every vantage point.

"You blood-thirsty wretch! I thought you said you were going to cure the cat! Let it go, sir! Let it go, I say!"

"A bullet is my cure!" shouted the assassin. "Please go away!"

"Let that cat go, sir!"

"Take her away, someone!" pleaded Lempson, struggling with the condemned. Not one of the fascinated audience moved.

"Oh, you cruel wretch! Oh, you murderer!"

As the immense report re-echoed round the sleeping suburb, and the smoke blew over the fence, the dazed cat scrambled, spitting, on to the roof of the fowl-house, leaped into the mulberry tree next door, and disappeared.

"Oh, you cruel murderer!" sobbed the landlady; and scuttled indoors.

A window flew up with a squeal, and the head and shoulders of Bodger protruded.

"Who's shot now?" he roared, staring about. The boots of the recumbent boarder in the woodshed caught his eye.

"By the Lord, he's riddled someone this time! I knew he'd kill someone before he'd finished! Good God! A man might as well try to board on a battlefield as in this place! Nothing but gun practice from morning till night, and bullets whistling past your ears! Well, this ought to be the finish of it! Have you sent for the police and the doctor yet, you people?"

The boarders in the yard, observing the boots for the first time, were too excited to answer; so Bodger was left to stare and fume at his window. Inside the house, the frightened women screamed and called to one another. When the confusion was at its height a white helmet rose slowly above the fence, as the full moon rises above the hills. Beneath it was a red face which asked, in a loud, mournful voice, "Is anywan usin' firearms heer?"

The tumult in the yard was stilled instantly.

Lempson, flushed, dishevelled and angry, advanced with his revolver. "I am!"

"Get a doctor!" yelled Bodger from the window. "Bring the man out and get a doctor for him!"

The policeman hurried in, and sighted the busted boots.

"Get him out, some of yez. And you, there, hand over that gun! How'd it happen?" he demanded sternly of Lempson.

"I tried to shoot the cat," snapped the incompetent executioner.

"An' shot th' mahn, eh? This looks a bad business!"

A commotion commenced in the woodshed.

The constable spun on his heel, and saw four boarders dragging forth the sleepily reluctant drunk. "Where is th' mahn shot? He seems to be in agony. Be gintle wid him!"

"I'm sure he's not shot!" asserted Lempson passionately. "The man's not shot at all! It' all damned rot to say he is!"

"Get a doctor!" roared Bodger. "Don't maul him about! Get a doctor!"

Indoors the women screamed with renewed energy.

The drunk, finding himself being vigorously prodded and questioned, sat up.

"I'm orright!" he growled. "I'm orright, I tell yer!"

"There you are!" cried Lempson. "He says himself that he's all right! I knew I didn't hit him."

"Is he bleeding?" howled Bodger.

"See if he is bleeding! Even if he isn't he may be hit! Don't take his word for it!"

"I'm orright!" repeated the drunk angrily, and, struggling to his feet, made off into the house, in spite of the first-aiders.

"He looks all right, sir," shouted the red-faced constable to Bodger. "Did he fall when this young man fired?"

"I didn't see him fall at all," shouted Bodger back.

"Don't take any notice of that old fool!" entreated Lempson. "He doesn't know anything about it!"

Bodger's window slammed down; the screaming inside gradually ceased; and the boarders one by one drifted inside, leaving the policeman and Lempson together in the blood-sprinkled yard. The policeman was patiently explaining to Lempson that he had broken the law in several places; and Lempson was wearily agreeing and looking at his gun with a disgusted expression.

ONE hot evening, two weeks later, an aged but well-preserved cat walked proudly past the verandah-full of resting boarders as they gossiped after tea. The old landlady broke off her conversation with the first deaf dowager to call the attention of all hands to the animal's superb health.

"Doesn't he look well?" she shrilled. "The wound on the ear that Mr. Lempson gave him set him up nicely. That bit of blood-letting did him the world of good; it seems to have been the very medicine he needed to put him right!"

The boarders dutifully mumbled suitable responses: and the cat, languidly flourishing its tail, strolled round the corner of the house.

15: Louis XIV and the Lodger

The Lone Hand April 1912

WHEN the worried little landlady came into the dining-room, she found most of the food-mutinous lodgers listening to the tea-salesman, who was reading aloud part of an evening paper article on the gluttony of King Louis XIV of France:

"His Majesty," proclaimed the seller of inferior tea, "had as many as 1500 men to cook for him and to wait at his banquets. Here is a menu of one of his ordinary dinners: One broth made of two fowls, and one of four partridges and cabbages; one additional soup made of six pigeons, and one of cocks' eombs; two further soups, one of fowl and one of partridge; a 20 lb. side of veal and twelve pigeons; a fricassee of six chickens and two hashed partridges; three roast partridges, six braised pigeons, two roast turkeys, three truffled hens, two fat capons, nine chickens, nine pigeons, two young chickens, six partridges and four pigeons. The dessert consisted of two china bowls of raw fruit, two of jam, and two of compote. No doubt the King did not eat all this—"

"I should think not!" breathed the limp landlady.

"Go on!" cried the audience triumphantly.

"—but he certainly more than touched it, as shown by his supper menu of the same day, which consisted of two capons, twelve pigeons, one partridge with parmesan, four more pigeons, six chickens, 8 lb. veal, one pheasant, three partridges, three fat hens, four young chickens. And on that particular day the King did not find the supper sufficient to satisfy his Royal appetite, and called for more!"

(Applause and laughter from the other lodgers interrupted the recital. The landlady gave an exhausted cry.)

The tea salesman continued gaily.

"Let's see, where was I? Oh, yes ! And called for more! The following had to be added to the menu: Four partridges in sauce, roast pie of two fat chickens, two capons, two woodcocks, two teals and five partridges!"

"Anything more?" asked the Post Office lady in the proper high-pitched telephone voice.

"Just another line or two: 'Hors-d'oeuvres are not mentioned, but they included such things as black pudding, sausages and truffled pies.' "

"Goodness me!" chirped the Post Office female with a bitter little laugh; "a king can order just what he likes, can't he?"

The old landlady, who had been taking the count, burst into the deliberations with a perfect shout of indignation.

"I don't believe a word of it! I don't believe poor Edward could have eaten a quarter of that lot! The *idea* of saying his Majesty—!"

Her voice was drowned in a storm of mirth. The lodgers flung themselves in their chairs, shrieking and cackling like a flock of kookaburras. The Post Office lady's staccato shrieks and the wild brays of Lempson, the armed lodger, rang high above the tempest. The dazed old lady, with her lower jaw slack, sat back in her chair and gazed helplessly at her disorderly drove.

In the midst of the din, a stout, middle-aged man with a flowing beard rose in his place, and glaring angrily about him, shouted in thunderous tones, "ORDER! SILENCE!!"

The careless lodgers gradually became aware that they had incurred someone's high displeasure. As quickly as possible they straightened up, and with flushed faces and bright eyes looked towards the bearded figure of vengeance.

"What's the matter, Mr. Bodger?" came from all sides.

"I never saw such an exhibition of bad manners in my life!" puffed Bodger, swollen and bristling with indignation.

The table was up in arms immediately against this censor of conduct.

"How ridiculous!" shrilled the Post Office lady.

"Rot!" grunted the tea-traveller. "Mustn't we laugh *at all*?"

"Some people can never see a joke!"

"Like his confounded cheek!"

Bodger raised his hand like an archbishop. "Blackguardism!" he roared. "Going on like a pack of larrikins!"

This was too much for the Post Office lady. She became slightly hysterical, fell back in her chair, and started to laugh low, mirthless laughs. The other lodgers grew sullen, and muttered resentfully.

The tea-salesman, affecting an attitude of cold and lofty scorn, flung his paper on the table, and called out, "Mr. Bodger, perhaps you would be good enough to explain to Mrs. Tribbens that the article refers to Louis XIV., of France, not to the late King Edward VII?"

"I will explain nothing, sir!" fiercely retorted Bodger. "You have treated this lady in a blackguardly manner, and, as a gentleman—"

The Post Office lady here giggled.

"Who says I'm not a gentleman?" roared Bodger. "WHO says I'm not?"

"Oh!" cried the Post Office lady, on the verge of tears. "Oh, please don't mind me!" Stuffing her handkerchief into her mouth, she wept a little and giggled some more.

Young Lempson, who admired the hysterical one, thought it was up to him. "Look here, Mr. Bodger, you mustn't try to bully Miss Gummer, you know!"

Bodger turned on him like a large dog. "Mind your own business! I know how to conduct myself, thank God!"

Lempson, very flushed and angry, subsided with a mumbled observation, which highly amused the young iron-monger on his left.

"What is all the excitement over?" drawled the golden-haired flower-shop girl. "Anybody might have made the same mistake that Mrs. Tribbens made. I never heard about that greedy king's dinners before, and I don't wonder at poor Mrs. Tribbens saying she doesn't believe any man could eat so much."

The company joyously pointed out to the flower-shop girl that she had got hold of the wrong end of the stick as usual. "She thought it was King Edward," they chanted together.

"Oh!" said the flower-shop girl, and fixed her eyes on the ruins of the inferior pudding.

The plaintive voice of the landlady was heard. "I'm sure I don't want any unpleasantness on my account; but I look to be treated with respect at my own table, and I must say—"

(Hasty expressions of loyalty from all sides interrupted her speech at this point.)

"But I must say that such readings about food at meal-time seem very personal indeed, seeing that I have to provide for you all, though goodness knows the prices of things are really terrible just now."

"I didn't mean to be personal, Mrs. Tribbens!" muttered the tea-salesman in a shamefaced way.

Bodger the ever-ready sprang to his feet. "Silence!" he roared.

"Oh, shut up!" howled the tea-salesman. "D'ye think I'm going to take orders from you? Mind your own business!"

The lodgers— always easily excited— supplied a mild uproar, above which heated exchanges were audible.

"This is my business, sir!"

"Oh, no, it isn't your business! You merely think it is!"

"Don't you give me any of your damned impudence!"

"Oh, rats! What right have you got to boss people, anyhow? You don't run the house!"

"—promise you a damned good flogging!"

"—damned old bully!"

"—get any more of your larrikinism, by the Lord, I'll teach you how to treat a lady!"

Then, in the heat and dust of argument, the shell burst which exploded the magazine. "Oh, for Heaven's sake, Bodger, talk sense, and be honest! You've been growling about the food yourself for weeks!"

"YES!" thundered the chorus. "YES! SO HE HAS!"

A frightful calm descended on the scene. Bodger went down beneath the blow; that is to say, he sank slowly into his chair, grasping at his whiskers as the drowning man is alleged to clutch at the always convenient straw.

The tragic figure of the landlady rose in the half-darkness and peered about.

"Who has been saying things behind my back?" trumpeted the shadow accusatively. To everyone's great relief, she went on without waiting for an answer. "If you do not think my food good enough, Mr. Bodger, I will thank you to tell me so, and not go complaining to the other lodgers, and setting them against me, Mr. Bodger, because I am a poor woman, and the more people I have talking behind my back the less people will say to my face. So you see, Mr. Bodger—"

"One moment, Ma'am," boomed Bodger. "I must at least tell you that I am not the only person who has been complaining about the food."

"What!" shrilled the landlady. "Have you set them all against me already! Do you mean to stand there and tell me, after scolding Mr. Peekin for reading out about that greedy king, that you've been talking behind my back? Oh, Mr. Bodger!!"

Bodger started to choke. "I didn't set anyone against you! Damn it all, I didn't need to! Everyone's been saying that the food hasn't been fit to give to a dog!"

Tremendous sensation. Panic-stricken lodgers fell about in their chairs and cried out passionately that it wasn't true. Bodger was denounced by all and ordered to withdraw the libellous statement. They had never said a word against the food!

When Bodger realised that they had turned against him in face of the enemy, and were ordering him to humiliate himself, he went purple, and exploded. "Humbug!" he shouted. "Why don't you have the courage to admit you've been running down the woman's food? BAH!"

"We never said a word against it!" they thundered over and over again.

Bodger shouted against them, and tried to obtain silence by making ecclesiastical gestures. But it was no use, and he had to sit down. Then the tumult and the shouting died, and the landlady rose...

"To think that I have been feeding a snake in the grass!" she intoned. "A snake in the grass that talks behind my back, and poisons the minds of people by telling them the food isn't fit to give to a dog! Three meals and a bed to a viper, and his boots cleaned for him into the bargain, all for twenty-two and sixpence a week! What is the answer to *that*?"

It sounded like an unusually difficult problem in mathematics. None of the silent lodgers suggested a method of working it out. However, the snake in the grass upreared himself, and made ready to strike.

"Don't call me a viper again, Ma'am— or a snake in the grass, either! I tell you I haven't been poisoning the minds of your damned people! But I'll tell you what you've been doing! You've been poisoning their *stomachs*!"

(Uproar.)

"Oh, how *atrociously* vulgar!" wailed Miss Gummer, distractedly, above the noise. "Such *language*!" She gazed imploringly into Lempson's eyes. It was an appeal which he felt bound to respond to. Leaping to his feet, he shouted, with a magnificent show of indignation.

"Mr. Bodger! Please remember *there are ladies present*!"

All the male boarders took up the cry. "Ladies present!" they shouted sternly. "Ladies present, Bodger!"

"God bless my soul!" stuttered Bodger. "Can't a man say—"

"Silence!" shouted Lempson. "Remember there are ladies present! Be a gentleman!"

"Dammit, I won't be muzzled by a pup! I will talk plainly, and say what I like!"

"Behind people's backs— like a viper!" added the landlady, timing her acid remark with beautiful precision.

"Such words!" moaned Miss Gummer.

"He says anything at all when he's angry," complained Mrs. Tribbens. "I wouldn't have believed it if anyone had told me he was a snake in the grass ready to ride roughshod over people's feelings and poison their minds, and say things that weren't true! The idea of saying that I— I poisoned people's—"

"People's STOMACHS!" howled Bodger. "I will say it. Don't shout at me! I tell you there's nothing else a sensible man can call it. It's perfectly true— you know that she has been poisoning your stomachs!" (Dissent.) "Yes, and that you've been saying so for weeks!" (Uproar.) "Yes, behind her back, you've been saying it!" (Deafening denials.), "Well, if you say you haven't, you're a pack of damned cowardly hags and humbugs!" (Shrieks.)

Lempson, white with suppressed passion, was pointing an accusative finger straight at Bodger's vest when the tea salesman, who had been out of the room, slipped unobtrusively into his seat.

"You have disgraced yourself, sir,"

Lempson was stuttering. "No gentleman would use such expressions such as you have used here to-night in the presence of ladies!"

Bodger leaped to his feet and shouted: "You're an ignorant whelp!" His hand clutched the loaf of bread. "Another such remark, and—"

"Don't take the whole loaf away, Mr. Bodger! Don't take the food from the table!"

The gabbling ceased instantly. All hands— Bodger included— turned in amazement, and found the tea salesman smiling in a sickly way. There was an instant of complete silence while they passed through the centre of the conversational typhoon.

"WHAT'S THAT?"

"You musn't take the loaf, sir. It— it isn't fair when your overcoat pockets are full of scraps!"

"Don't tell me he's been taking the food from the table!" wailed the landlady. "Don't tell me that!"

The flower-shop girl turned up her eyes. "Oh, he's been taking food from the table!"

"I HAVEN'T!" yelled Bodger, quite beside himself. "Bring me my coat! Bring me my coat, and I'll show you all that he's a liar! Then I'll flog him within an inch of his life! MY COAT!!"

The lodgers started to murmur threateningly like stage rabble when the tumbrels are approaching. Flat feet charged down the hall and back again. The door opened, and the wooden-faced serving-maid entered precipitately with an old-fashioned overcoat in her arms. Bodger snatched the garment, and held it up before the room.

"Here we are now! Watch this, and then let me at him!" With a rapid movement, he threw the coat over, caught the tail of it, and shook it vigorously. *A perfect avalanche of bread poured out of the pockets.*

A long-drawn, horror-stricken "OH-OH!" went up from the company as the useless rubbish clattered on the plates and rolled on the floor.

"There!" cried the tea-salesman judicially; but his eyes had an apprehensive look, and his lips were twitching. Bodger, inflated with rage, and with his whiskers bristling, was regarding him murderously, while he groped blindly amongst the cutlery for a suitable weapon. The tragedy was about to happen.

To an accompaniment of stifled screams, the tea-salesman rose jerkily from his chair. "Mind— what— you're about!" he gasped. "Don't you— strike—"

The heavy loaf of bread hit him violently on the last button of his waist-coat, thereby completely shutting off further conversation. He fell back, limp and breathless in his chair, a vast white smudge of flour like a target on his black vest. The projectile fell with a thump on the floor and rolled under the table.

"Mr. Bodger!" squeaked the landlady querulously. "What are you doing, Mr. Bodger?"

But Mr. Bodger didn't answer. He was making a tremendous dumb oration to his fallen enemy— either that or pronouncing a frightful soundless curse on him. No one could decide exactly what it was; but it was mysterious and terrifying. First he shook his clenched fist in the air, and made words with his whiskers; then he flung both arms outwards with a passionate gesture, and noiselessly consigned him to the Devil; finally, looking up to the ceiling so that his vibrating whiskers seemed to be balancing precariously on his chin, he reached up taloned hands and carefully scratched opposite sides of an invisible column, chewing, meanwhile, great mouthfuls of atmosphere. In Biblical costume, he would have been invaluable to any artist as Moses in an ecstatic moment.

The paralysed company watched him as though he were engaged in some perilous supernatural experiment. Of a sudden he shocked and startled them by dropping his arms to his sides with a loud plop. "BAH!" he yelled to the ceiling, and, stumbling out, shut the door with a crash.

The lodgers listened intently to his retreating footsteps, and when satisfied that he had gone right out of the house, sighed together tremulously.

The old landlady sniffed hysterically. "Such goings-on!" she sobbed.

Miss Gummer, like a true heroine, dabbed resolutely at her red eyes, and leant across the table towards the stricken tea-salesman. "Are you hurt, Mr. Peekin? Are you *sure* you're not hurt?"

Everyone leant forward breathless.

Peekin moistened his lips. "Oh, no," he mumbled. "I'm— I'm all right, thanks. He merely gave me a nasty knock in the— Oh, it only struck my *chest*, you know!"

All the ladies sighed gratefully in chorus.

"Such a *gentleman!*" murmured the tea-room girl admiringly. "Now that's what I call a *real gentleman!*"

16: The Opium Eaters

The Lone Hand May 1912

ONE by one the twelve filthy Chinese who had travelled down from Hong Kong on the boilers of the S.S. *Mongol* crept across the darkened deck, and slipped overside into the waiting oil launch, which was decked out with flags like a picnic boat, and had a concertina player stationed in the bow purely for stage effect. When the passengers were all stowed, comfortably it cast off and went spluttering up the harbor in the dusk to the wheezy strains of the instrument. Just as night fell, it coughed its way to a secluded boat jetty and tied up. The dozen prohibited immigrants were hunted ashore by two English-speaking countrymen, and a hoarse-voiced European guide.

"Come on! This way," he whispered, and led the way up the quiet waterside street. The crowd followed meekly, like sheep, and the launch churned into the centre of the stream and smacked away in the gloom as if glad to be rid of its dangerous cargo.

The suspicious-looking file, led by the guide, tracked along for miles without trouble by back streets until it reached a region of faded houses and dried-up gardens. There something alarmed the man in front; he waved excitedly to the two Chinese who constituted the rearguard, and the whole grimy flock was driven into the first lane.

"Whaffor, Bill?" shouted one of the whippers-in.

"Come on !" shouted Bill, and started to run.

The band immediately broke into a shamble and pursued him. Round an elbow of the lane, Bill ran into two young men who were smoking and yarning at the back gate of a large house. There was a rapid colloquy between him and the strangers, who seemed inclined to resist until he thrust some coins into the hand of each. Then their opposition melted, and Bill turned and shoved all his charges into the yard and closed the gate.

"Now get us inside," he commanded.

"I'll have to see if the coast is clear," demurred one of the pair.

"All right, mate. Hurry up, though!"

It was the time of day when the dwellers in brick streets strew themselves round the verandahs; so the scout tiptoed into the darkened house feeling fairly confident that all hands would be in front out of the way. In a minute or so he returned, and whispered to his fellow-lodger:

"Yes, we can get them inside now. But where are we to put them? It's no use trying to stick them in our room, because Smith is bound to be there lying on his bed. If he isn't there now, he's bound to come in soon."

Bill edged forward eagerly. "I only want the place for an hour or so, yer know. You must stick 'em somewhere, mates! I'll make it worth your while—don't you fret about *that!*"

"I know!" said the second boarder triumphantly. "Put 'em in Bodger's room! He won't be home till late tonight; he's gone to that Masonic dinner. Wait a jiff while I make certain there's no one about."

He looked inside the back hall, found all safe, and signalled the little crowd in. Quietly as shadows they flitted into the drowsy, fly-haunted house, and crept upstairs to a room, which the second boarder then locked.

From the keyhole floated some last directions by Bill.

"Watch that gate, mind! And if any of them D's come pokin' round, you know nothing! See?"

"Right-o!" replied the boarders, and returned to the back gate, where they waited patiently for a whole hour for a few hawk-eyed detectives to tell lies to. At intervals one of them would sneak upstairs and whisper to Bill that no police had appeared, and that the road seemed clear; but Bill was a pessimist; also, he appeared to be under the impression he had leased the room for a long term, for he stayed doggedly on. The two Lessees were conferring gloomily at the back gate about 9:30 when a loud, angry voice inside the Chow-stricken dwelling was heard to shout:

"Where's the key of this room? I can't get into my room!"

"Gosh! Bodger's back!"

"Wonder what brought him home so early? He couldn't have got the ticket!" The two boarders looked at each other helplessly. "What can we do?" they chanted together dolefully.

"Mrs. Tribbens!" bellowed the desperate Bodger within doors. "Mrs. Tribbens, ma'am! Where's the key of this room?" (Great commotion and sounds of people running in slippers. Mr. Bodger always had to be attended to at the double.)

"We'll have to try and keep him out of that room, Lempson."

"Oh, Lord, yes!" muttered Lempson, and nervously fingered the key in his pocket. "Come on, let's go in and see if we can't put him off."

Side by side, they hurried in the back door and found a middle-aged man with a flowing beard bullying and brow-beating a worried little landlady, while a few inquisitive boarders hovered in the background.

"Good evening, Mr. Bodger," said Lempson cheerily. "You're home early, aren't you?"

"Good-evening, Lempson. I don't suppose you have seen the key of my room, have you?"

"No," replied Lempson, lying with facility and despatch.

"Confound it!" snorted Bodger. "I can't even put a key down in this house for an hour but it's lost!" He glanced angrily about, and started to light matches.

"I really don't know *where* it can have got to!" whimpered Mrs. Tribbens wretchedly.

Miss Gummer, of the Post Office, paused on her way upstairs to make a suggestion.

"Perhaps Mr. Bodger put it in his pocket and lost it while he was out?"

Bodger— he had just burnt his finger rather badly— looked up and retorted violently: "I didn't do anything of the kind!" Then, in a lower but perfectly audible undertone, he said, as he lit another match, "Damned humbugging woman!"

Miss Gummer recoiled like a lady. "Mr. Bodger! I'm *surprised* at you!"

She swept upstairs like a queen and slammed her door so hard that it sounded like the first gun of a royal salute.

Lempson, her faithful admirer, swallowed his resentment for the time being, for Bodger had to be got away somehow.

"Never mind about the key now, Mr. Bodger. It's bound to turn up in a little while. Come for a stroll down to the Arms."

"Yes, later on," mumbled Bodger, hunting about and striking match after match. The landlady hurried away for a candle to assist him, and the Chow-harborers conferred again in whispers.

The place was very quiet and dark for a moment. Then Bodger emitted a perfect howl of excitement.

"There are men in my room! I'm being robbed!"

The house boiled over. Boarders came hurrying from all sorts of dark corners— dazed, excited boarders who blinked sleepily in the light of the landlady's candle, and pleaded passionately for news.

"What's the matter, Mr. Bodger?"

"When was he robbed?"

"Did he say there were burglars, in the house?"

"*Burglars!* Good Lord ! Where *are* they?"

"What's the *matter*, Mr. Bodger?"

Bodger waved his hands for silence.

"Burglars, I tell you ! I heard them just now in my room! They wanted to know if the coast was clear! Get me a policeman, someone!"

A fiery little man from Wales, who had Just arrived that day, danced with impatience. "Open your door, sir! Don't be *afraid* of 'em! Open your door!"

Bodger, always extremely sensitive when his courage was impugned, bellowed defiantly: "I'm not afraid of them! Someone's taken the key of my room! I can't get in!"

"The burglars have taken it, *of course!* How could they lock the door if they hadn't the key with them? Why don't you *think?*"

The boarders vigorously applauded this speech.

"Of course they have! Why didn't you think of that before, Mr. Bodger?" they chorused.

"Get me a constable!" persisted Bodger angrily.

Mrs. Tribbens advanced tremulously.

"Now, Mr. Bodger, I don't want to have my house filled up with constables just because the door happens to be locked. This is a respectable house, Mr. Bodger, and I don't want to have the neighbors saying my house is filled with policemen from morning till night, because that gives a place a bad name, Mr. Bodger, and people won't come to it. How do you know there is anyone in there, Mr. Bodger?"

"Because I distinctly heard someone, ma'am."

"But are you *sure*, Mr. Bodger, that you heard someone?"

"Why, of course, I am!"

Lempson, in the background, raised his voice. "I didn't hear anything! I think Mr. Bodger must be mistaken. How could burglars get into this crowded house! My idea is that someone has just locked the door."

"For a lark," added Miss Gummer, with a malicious giggle.

"Yes," sang the boarders. "Someone's done it for a lark!"

Bodger here worked off some of his accumulated rage by banging on the closed door and shouting: "No more humbug, d'ye hear! Who's in there?"

Dead silence.

Mrs. Tribbens advanced and tapped lightly with her knuckles. "Is anyone in there, *please?*"

More dead silence.

"There you are, Mr. Bodger," said the landlady, decisively. "You see there isn't anyone in there after all!"

Bodger spluttered helplessly: "Well, where's the *key?*"

"Why it must be *lost*, Mr. Bodger, and we must *look* for it, that's all! If you will only give us *time*, Mr. Bodger, we will see if it is about the house. Are you *sure* you didn't take it out with you, Mr. Bodger?"

"Why, ma'am, I'm positive I didn't!"

"Then it must be about the house, Mr. Bodger, and we must find it for you!"

As Bodger fell back vanquished, Lempson said to his confederate the ironmonger:

"Smuggle 'em out as quickly as you can, Parman! I'll keep him down at the Anns until you come and tell me his room is clear." Then, with consummate tact, he gentled Bodger and led him from the house towards the refreshments.

He managed to keep his charge safely in the private bar of the Builders' Arms for half an hour at an expenditure of four drinks. At the end of that period, Bodger grew restive, and insisted on returning home to aid in the search for the lost key. Lempson accompanied him, mumbling pathetic protests all the way. The big house, still hot from the long day's sunning, seemed dark and quiet again as they approached the gate. But, just as they arrived at the door, Bodger struck a match unexpectedly. Immediately there was a babel of voices and a sort of scuffling stampede down the hall towards the back door.

"My God ! The house is full of filthy Chinamen! Who filled the house with Chinamen? Lempson! Look at the filthy thieves running!"

Lempson, in a frenzy, dashed out the expiring match with his cap.

"What the devil are you thrashing about for? You've knocked the match out! Light another, quick!"

"What's the matter, Bodger? What is it?"

"Why, damn it man, you saw those Chinamen, didn't you?"

"*What* Chinamen? I don't know what you're talking about!"

(The back door slammed hard on the retreating rabble.)

"They've gone out the back door!" yelled Bodger. "I tell you they've gone out the back door! Surely to God, you *saw* them?"

"I tell you I didn't see *anything*!"

"You must be blind! Light a match, can't you!"

"I haven't *got* a match."

"Matches!" shouted Bodger, stamping with both feet. "Lights! Bring some lights! The house is full of Chinese thieves!" With the despairful Lempson at his heels, he stumbled to the back door, seized the handle and pulled. But the door wouldn't open; it was locked on the outside.

"Open the door someone! Get the key and open the back door!"

The house started to boil over again like a prodded ants' nest. Mrs. Tribbens, lighting the Jets as she advanced, led the massed boarders to the scene of trouble.

"What's the matter *now*, Mr. Bodger?" she chanted.

"There are Chinamen in the yard— filthy Chinese thieves! I saw about twenty of them run downstairs. Lempson here saw them!"

"I didn't!" blurted Lempson.

Bodger shook the door-handle again, and breathed hard. "I don't know so much about that! Where's- the- key- of- this -*door*?"

"Chinamen!" intoned the landlady, stopping dead in her tracks. "Chinamen! In *my* house!"

"Where's the KEY?"

"I can't believe it," shrilled Miss Glimmer, hysterically. "It's too *awful*!"

"I didn't see any Chinamen," proclaimed Lempson above the rising storm of excitement. "Mr. Bodger is mistaken."

Bodger, rattling an accompaniment with the door, panted: "I'm convinced— some hanky-panky— going on— here!" Then once again he roared at his unsympathetic audience: "What's this door locked for? Get me the key of this door instantly!"

To the landlady a mere lost key or two was now of no importance whatever. With her shocked boarders clustered round her, she kept on repeating:

"Chinamen in *my* house! The *idea*! I never had a Chinaman in the place!"

"You had to-night, ma'am!" boomed Bodger over his shoulder. "If I saw one, I saw at least twenty filthy Chinese running down the stairs!"

"But," cried Miss Gummer angrily, "Mr. Lempson didn't see them!"

"Lempson didn't see them!" chanted the boarders,

"Bah!" snarled the door-wrestler.

"I tell you all they ran out this door before my very eyes."

"Well, why didn't you run after them?" snapped Miss Gummer.

"Why? Because I had no light!"

"How could you see them running, then?"

"Oh, I lit a match! *Haven't any of you got this confounded key?*"

"The match went out," added Lempson in a loud voice. "I didn't see anything *at all*!"

Miss Gummer sniffed; all the lodgers sniffed after her.

"It sounds to *me*," announced the landlady, "like a cock and bull story!"

"Do you mean to insult me, ma'am?" boomed Bodger, turning round.

"I don't want to insult *anyone*, Mr. Bodger! But when a person is told by another person that a lot of dirty Chinamen have just run out of the house, and no other persons have seen them, though present on the identical spot, the person so insulted has a perfect right to say that it sounds like whatever she thinks it is— which happens to be a cock and bull story, Mr. Bodger, and I think that everyone here will say the same."

The boarders murmured applause to this long and dignified speech, and Bodger was on the point of replying when the key turned in the lock, and the

door opened cautiously, admitting the head and shoulders of Parman, the young ironmonger.

"Mr. Parman!" shouted the grand chorus.

Parman, who seemed shaken by his fine reception, recoiled nervously.

"Where have *you* been?" enquired Bodger, seizing him by the coat.

"Me? Oh, I've been smoking at the back gate this last half-hour, Mr. Bodger."

Bodger prodded him excitedly in the chest with his forefinger. "Then *you* saw that mob of filthy Chinamen, *didn't* you?"

Parman dashed one guilty glance at the cluster of eager faces, and, swallowing in his throat, replied huskily; "No; I didn't see any Chinamen."

Bodger staggered. "What!" he roared. "D'ye mean to say you didn't!"

Suddenly giving way to his rage, he flung the liar from him, and turned to his audience.

"It's no good!" he roared. "I tell you all there's some hanky-panky business going on here some damned ugly hanky-panky!"

"Hanky-panky! In *my* house!"

"Yes, ma'am, in *your* house! And right underneath your nose, too! But I won't stand any humbug! I won't be humbugged about and hoodwinked! I'll get to the bottom of this hole-and-corner, pig-in-a-poke nonsense, and give some scoundrel a flogging before I'm done with it!"

This heroic fury left the listening boarders in the dark; but it was tremendousty stimulating, and they waited eagerly for more. They would most certainly have got it, had not the prehistoric maid at this stage put her head over the banisters, and shrieked joyously: "Hey, Mr. Bodger! Yer room is open now, an' there's pounds an' pounds o' lovely beef sossiges on yer bed!" She trailed off into sluieks of insane merriment, in which the boarders gladly joined. Bodger, by this time keyed up to a fine pitch of frenzy, waded roughly through the laughter, and tramped upstairs, to find that the maid had merely shrieked the ridiculous truth. The sausages— there was an enormous pile of them— were stacked on his clean white quilt. For a moment he looked at them in amazement. Then, with a cry of rage, he gathered up the cables of meat, and dropped them on the landing, where the maid stood shrieking.

"Here you! Take the cursed things away, and pitch them out or cook them, whichever you like! Do *anything*, so long as you get rid of them."

His door crashed to, and the maid, with a glad cry, caught up the ropes and ran downstairs with them to her mistress, who was standing at the foot of the staircase, saying over and over again with great dignity: "A nice thing to happen in a person's house! Such a cock and bull story! The *idea*!"

SOME TIME before the dinner gong went, a queer, hot, musty smell stole through the house, and started all hands sniffing and guessing. As the feeding hour drew on, the smell grew stronger, and the windows squeaked as the boarders pushed them up to the limit.

"What on *earth* is it?" asked Miss Gummer, fanning herself meanwhile with a copy of Marie Corelli's latest work— or job.

The prehistoric maid, a trifle more dazed than usual, galloped up from the kitchen.

"Mrs. Tribbens!" she screamed, "there's somethin' wrong with these 'ere sossiges! They're smellin' somethin' 'orrible!"

The landlady was promptly on deck.

"Have you tasted them, Alice?"

"No, I ain't! Won't you please come an' 'ave a look at them, Mrs. Tribbens?"

The landlady went; saw, and indignantly pronounced them fit for boarder consumption. The gong went almost immediately, and the boarders gathered round the table that had never groaned in its life.

"What's that queer smell, ma'am?" asked Bodger, as he shook out his napkin.

"It's your sausages, Mr. Bodger!" returned the landlady, very stiffly.

"They're not my sausages, ma'am. I merely found them in my room."

"Well, Mr. Bodger, I hope we will all enjoy them at any rate. I suppose they're some new sort of seasoned sausage that one of you gentlemen has brought, and thought he would have a joke with."

Bodger grunted dangerously, and at the same instant the sausages were carried in, smoking hot, on an immense dish. They were served round with practised haste; but the boarders did not start to eat with their usual polite ferocity. They just sat with their loaded plates before them, and either turned the strange-smelling things over with their forks, or else looked at them doubtfully from a safe distance.

At last Miss Gummer cut one in half, and gasped in the fumes that arose from the severed ends. "Why, it's just like a chemical ! Oh, I wouldn't eat a bit of it for worlds!" She pushed her plate from her, and pulled her handkerchief out of her belt.

"It looks like treacle and sawdust inside," said Lempson, looking closely at the mystery.

The stout man next him— Mr. Dadclip, of the Customs, and always late for tea— made a sudden dive at the plate.

"Excuse me, Mr. Lempson! I have an idea what it may be!"

One good look and two sniffs seemed to satisfy him completely, for he turned excitedly to the landlady, saying: "Why, this is opium, Mrs. Tribbens! Where did you get these sausages from? The Chinese opium smugglers put the drug up like this."

The tea things danced from the blow Bodger dealt the table.

"Didn't I tell you there were Chinamen in the house? *There* you are! I knew I saw Chinamen!"

"No one but yourself saw them!" interjected Lempson.

After some screaming Mrs. Tribbens managed to tell Mr. Dadclip that Mr. Bodger had found the sausages— or opiumosages— on the bed in his room.

"How many people saw these Chinamen?" demanded the Customs officer.

A great silence descended.

"I did!" boomed Bodger aggressively, for Dadclip was no friend of his.

"But didn't anyone else see them?"

Slowly and painfully he extracted the facts of the case. When everyone had finished, he said: "It is my duty to report this at once to the detectives. I must ring up right away." The landlady protested weakly; but Bodger glared fiercely at Lempson, and remarked darkly: "Now, perhaps, we'll see if there's any hanky-panky going on in this house!"

With that he rose and retreated to his room until such time as the second meal should be ready.

Within half an hour, and long before the gong went again, four detectives crawled to the house on the bent knees of a cab-horse, and without delay penned Bodger in his room and started to interrogate him harshly in the usual professional manner behind the closed door.

The other boarders have no more than a muffled idea of what transpired at that dreadful interview. There were never less than eight of them eavesdropping on the stairs; but the only voice they could hear distinctly was that of one of the detectives. Quite early in the ordeal the boarders heard him emphatically declare: "Well, personally, I'm convinced that this man knows nothing!" He kept on repeating it for two hours, until it seemed to be not only a declaration of faith but a passionate assertion regarding Bodger's blank and baffling ignorance of everything useful. Bodger, for his part, just bellowed like a bull all the time. How and then the sounds heard without suggested that they had cornered and over-awed him; but always the angry bellow broke out again. Muffled by the thick door, it sounded merely like a bestial cry of rage; but he was probably calling them "scoundrels" and "black-guards," and threatening floggings all round.

About 11.15, when the exhausted listeners were sitting on the stairs in attitudes of dejection, the turmoil at last slackened and died. Then the door

opened, and the four big saturnine men came out like mourners and waited sullenly on the landing. A second later Bodger emerged. His eyes were dilated, his beard bristled, and his bell-topper was jammed hard on as if he expected a gale of wind outside. Two of the detectives respectfully preceded him down the stairs; the other two reverently brought up the rear. It looked more like a triumphal procession than an arrest. Arrived at the kerb, the decayed cab swallowed them all with a painful effort, and crawled heavily away like an overfed reptile. The overawed hoarders watched its dim, red light blink slowly round the corner; then they adjourned to the dining-room to squander the rest of the night in wild surmises as to what had happened, and the probable outcome of it.

JUST BEFORE the breakfast gong went next morning, Bodger, unaccompanied and in an unshackled state, tramped in the front door, and, without a sound of greeting to the few boarders standing about reading their papers, hung up his bell-topper, and proceeded heavily to his usual place at table. So terrible was his aspect that not even the most idiotic ventured to ask him how he was, much less who had bailed him out. Even the boarders who ran downstairs whistling and humming stepped lightly over the threshold, and spoke in whispers when they observed him sitting like a spectre in his chair. The old landlady emitted a sort of sub-shriek and tiptoed to the head of the board. Finally, the gong droned, and the crowd, taking courage, rustled forward and silently surrounded it. The serviettes were opened like prayerbooks. A demented scuffle in the hall, and the prehistoric maid entered tremblingly with the outsize dish, and shoved it desperately at her mistress, who was dabbing at her face with her handkerchief, though the morning was by no means warm. Still the agonising silence remained unbroken by human speech.

Suddenly: "Well, ma'am, and what have we for breakfast this morning?"

The simple inquiry, fiercely spoken, seemed to completely demoralise the landlady. She stopped in the act of lifting the great dish-cover, and looked wildly about her. Then she dabbed at her lips, sniffed, and said quaveringly:

"For breakfast, sir, did you say? Why, Mr. Bodger, I— I didn't know you were coming home, sir, or I'm sure I would have got something else....It's— well, it's *sausages*, Mr. Bodger— *that is, if you have no objection, sir.*"

17: The Reincarnated Cabman

The Bulletin, 18 July 1912

IT was a clear, frosty night, and the cab-horses on the rank shivered and stamped under their rugs till the gloom was full of the music of jingling bits and ringing hoofs. Inside the cosy, well-lit shelter, eight heavily-wrapped and unemployed cabmen talked loudly together, and laughed at a small, red-headed horse-chauffeur who appeared to be nursing a grievance. Fragments of his story could be heard from the other side of the street whenever the running fire of rough banter slackened.

"An' ten minutes after 'e 'ad engaged me, 'e says, ' 'Ere, fer Gossake take this 'arf crown and get back ter th' rank. That there 'orse o' yours gimme th' creeps. I'll go an' get a taxi,' 'e says. An' with that 'e gets out'er me cab. An' I sez, 'Orright, Mr. Wilson,' I sez, 'you gotter please yerself,' I sez. 'I bin drivin' you fer a long time now,' I sez ; 'but I s'pose that don't count no more. That there 'orse uster go fast enuf for yer; but 'e ain't no gas ingin,' I sez, 'an' I ain't goin' ter treat 'im as such, not for no one.' An' with that I leaves 'im larfin' on th' kerbstone, and comes back 'ere. Well, I 'ope 'e's satisfied with 'is stinkin' taxi!"

Out of the darkness came a friendly but imperative hail.

"Keb wanted over at th' station. 'Urry up, Jim, ol' son!"

The small cabman broke away from the group in the shelter, ran along the stamping line, cast loose the moorings of his ancient craft, and steered it across to the station, where he picked up a stout, full-bearded man who had just arrived by a late country train.

"I want to go to 40 Blankly-street, Snarling Point," boomed the fare through the window. "Mrs. Tribbens' place. D'ye know it?"

"I know it, sir," said the cabman. "I druv Mr. Wilson there often."

"Wilson," repealed the fare importantly. "I don't know anyone of that name. At least he wasn't there when I was there— I've been away a couple of months though."

" 'E's been an' gorn while you was away, sir." The cabman, who was of a gossipy disposition, turned round in his seat and let the reins hang slack. "I bleeve 'e only stayed a week, sir. 'Ad a little difference with th' landlady erbout a lion wot 'e brought 'ome with 'im w'en 'e was tight, an' fed over th' banisters with crayfish.... 'Ere! wot's up? You ain't goin' ter get out, are yer?"

But the fare was already out and heading straight for an unemployed policeman with whom he almost immediately returned.

"I call your attention to the fact that this man is not fit to be in charge of a cab. My name is Bodger— John Bodger— and I'm not going to risk my life—"

"Oose arskin' yer ter risk yer life?" burst in the indignant cabman. "W'y ain't I fit ter be in charge? Wotcher gettin' at?"

"He told me some nonsense about a person taking home a lion in his cab!"

"I never said nothin' of th' kind! 'E didn't take it 'ome in me cab at all! 'E led it 'ome thinkin' it wuz a dog, it bein' lost out of the Zoo an' 'im bein' squiffy. It's true, I tell yer, an' if yer'll only git in and lemme drive yer out to the 'ouse, yer'll 'ear it for yerself!"

There was a bewildered pause. Then:

"All right; I'll let you drive me out."

The stout Bodger was preparing to climb aboard when the stolid policeman placed a restraining hand on his arm, and asked gravely: "Are you satisfied the man isn't drunk?"

"I suppose so!"

"Very good, then. I'll take no further steps in the matter."

Bodger then climbed in, grumbling in his beard, and the ancient vehicle moved off, the driver cursing very heartily under his breath and jogging the reins.

When the watchful policeman had been lost sight of, the cabman let the weary animal choose its own pace, and turned round to have it out with his traducer.

" 'Ey! wotcher want ter go an' do that fur? You mighter got me inter trouble!"

The shadowy fare cleared his throat.

"Well, my man, I thought you said this Mr. What's-his-name had taken home a lion in your cab. Naturally I concluded—"

"That I wuz shick!" interjected the driver wrathfully. "An' so off you goes an' tells a John that I'm not fit ter be in charge! Wot right 'ave you got to go an' get me inter trouble? Wot 'ave I done ter you? Gors-trooth, it's 'ard enuf ter get a livin' without bein' worried be Johns. You wanter be careful, Mister!"

"No harm done!" boomed the shadow uneasily.

"No thanks ter you!" retorted the driver. "It's th' likes o' you as makes it so 'ard fer th' likes of us—"

"Confound it, man. are you going to keep me here all night? Drive on, and let's have no more humbug!"

The cabman turned away sulkily, and urged the decayed horse on its journey with whip and reins. Thenceforward he occupied himself agreeably in directing at the stumbling animal the fierce and bitter language he would have liked to use towards his passenger. It all cannoned off the horse on to the passenger, who gradually became restive under the shower of insults. Just as

12 o'clock struck, and they reached a lonely, ill-lit road, Bodger felt compelled to act.

"Hey!" he cried warningly. "Don't you talk like that! Your horse can get along without all that blackguardly language!"

The cabman pulled up with a jerk and a yell. "Well, if you ain't the lurid limit! First you try ter give a man in charge fer nothin', and then you won't let 'im drive 'is 'orse 'is own way. You ain't bought th' bloomin' cab, yer know!"

"I won't stand any d—d impudence!" roared Bodger. "The first constable I see I'll give you in charge for insulting language !"

"To an' 'orse! Blimey, it's a good thing Johns is so scarce! You can't pass a pleeceman, you can't, without givin' someone in charge!"

"That'll do, now!"

"Oh, rats ! I'm not goin' ter be roused on be th' likes o' you! Ain't you ever 'ad a ride in a cab before, or wot's wrong with yer?"

"The very first constable I see—"

"Can't you think o' nothin' else but pleecemen? W'y don't you 'ave one of yer own like th' bloomin' Guvner?"

"I believe you're drunk, after all, you scoundrel!"

"P'raps you are th' bloomin' Guvner! You put on as much dog as a bloomin' king! Wot's 'appened to yer moter-car that you're messin' round in my cab?"

"Will— you— drive— on— sir?"

"Certainly, yer Excell'ncy— that is, purvidin' you let me drive in me own way!"

"Now, look here! I don't want any more of your d—d impudence. If you don't drive on—"

"GIT UP!" snarled the driver, slashing suddenly with his whip. The cab started off with such a jerk that the wrathful Bodger nearly fell sideways into the road. They rattled on for a quarter of a mile at a pace that was almost merry. But, striking a long patch of half-made road, the cab slowed down to a walk, and went rattling and lurching over the stones. Bodger, who was very tired after a long afternoon's travel, fell into a sort of half-doze in the swaying vehicle. The stoppage of the elderly bathing machine brought him back to full consciousness. He found a rather thin and shivering Mephistopheles climbing in and greeting him in friendly accents.

"Why, it's Lempson," cried the sleepy passenger, extending a large hand. "Been to some fancy dress foolery, haven't you?"

"Glad to see you home again, Mr. Bodger," said the Devil, sitting down on the opposite seat with a weary sigh. "I caught sight of you as I was walking home from the cricket club's fancy-dress affair. Someone got away with my

overcoat, and I was jolly glad when this cab overtook me. I hope you don't mind me sharing it with you?"

"Certainly not, my boy! Certainly not!"

The face of the cabman appeared at the bars.

"Drive on?" he asked sneeringly.

"Yes, of course!" shouted his ferocious hirer.

"Or-right! Or-right!" mumbled the driver, and the cab wearily resumed its bumping. But it had hardly done more than three bumps when a loud, angry shout was heard and a dead stoppage supervened.

"OOSE THAT?" howled the cabman without. "Leggo that there 'orse's 'ead, will yer?"

"SHURRUP!" yelled the highwayman. "You're dead! What d'yer mean by drivin' yer ghost round this time o' night?"

The cabman, who had been standing up and peering wildly into the gloom, sat down suddenly. "I mighter known 'oo it wuz!" he snarled.

"What have you stopped for?" bellowed Bodger.

"Becos I carn't 'elp it! 'E's got the 'orse be th' 'ead !"

"Is he a policeman?"

"Naw!"

"Well, dammit, if he won't let go, give him in charge!"

The cabman indulged in a wild, despairing laugh. "Blimey, Whiskers, you're always thinkin' o' pleecemen! You bin talkin' pleecemen an' givin' in charge ever since we started!"

"You scoundrel! If you are not more respectful I'll take your number!"

"No good doin' that," hiccupped the shadow at the horse's head. "He hasn't got a number any more— he's dead's door nail!"

"W'y don't yer give 'im in charge?" asked the cabman jeeringly. "'Im or the 'orse?"

Bodger craned his neck out the window.

"Get away from that horse, you!" he roared.

A shadow slowly approached the door of the cab. The dim interior light showed the highwayman to be a well-dressed person of large proportions. His face was flushed, and his sleepy eyes had an angry look in them. "Hullo, Father Chris'mus," he gurgled. "How long have you been dead?"

"My name," announced Bodger fiercely, "my name, sir, is Bodger, and I have engaged this man—"

"Stone dead!" breathed the large stranger, catching hold of the rails on either side of the door. "I 'sure you that I was last man to 'gage him alive. It happened some c'nsider'ble time ago. He was drivin' me 'long somewhere or other when his d—d old horse burst into flames without any warnin' 'soever,

an' 'pletely c'nsumed itself an' cab, also cabman. I only got out just in time. It made mos' dreadful smell, an' fire brigade most 'bligingly drove me back to town. What— what cem't'ry you bound for?"

The cabman started to shout excitedly.

" 'E's torkin erbout th' taxi! It muster been burnt under 'im! 'E left me ter go an' git one o' th' stinkin' things!"

"I didn't!" cried Wilson, angrily. "I won't be contradict' by ghost! I distinctly saw you burnt!"

"It's no good tryin' ter tork sense!" wailed the driver. "I know 'im! 'E won't listen ter nothing!"

Bodger took a hand. "I'm not going to be kept up all night listening to nonsense! Drive on, will you !"

The driver promptly hit the horse, and the cab jolted forward. But Wilson hopped on the step and insisted on climbing in. And when at last he had stowed himself on the seat next to Bodger, he dimly perceived Lempson in his fiendish red costume sitting opposite. After the first start of surprise, he sat quiet for awhile, and took in the situation. Then: "How's Hell, ol' man?"

"Warmer than I am!" replied Lempson with a shiver.

Wilson gravely considered a moment.

" 'Scuse me, but— are you with Chris'mus?"

Lempson guffawed. But Bodger thought it was time to show that he would stand no more nonsense. "I don't know your name, sir, but I would like to remind you that I have engaged this cab"

"It's a rotten cab," interjected Wilson. "It wasn't much of a cab when it was real and the horse and driver were alive. Now it's jus' rotten!"

"I engaged this cab, sir, to go home in quietly!"

"Yes, so used I! But it's the sort of cab you never could go home in— even before it was burnt to ground."

"I didn't engage it to talk nonsense in, and if you will only"

"But, my dear Chris'mus, that's jus' the sort of cab it is! I mean it is just the sort of cab it used to be before—"

"Oh, th' blanky cab's still 'ere!" Thus the worn-out cabman.

"And I'm paying for it!" boomed Bodger.

"And while I'm doing that"

"You're bein' robbed!"

"While I'm doing that, I've got a right to say who is to travel in it, and have things done in a proper manner. Now, I've had a great deal of trouble and annoyance since I set out to-night in this conveyance. In the first place, the driver very impudently told me a cock-and-bull story about a boarder in our establishment taking home a lion."

"Hewmer 'im!" sneered the driver through the bars. "Hewmer 'im! 'E don't orften buy cabs!"

"I'll report you !" blustered Bodger.

"No, gimme in charge fer a change! I ain't been arrested fer a quarter of an hour. Git up, yer long-bearded, top-hatted swine!" (This last, of course, to the flagging horse.)

Bodger swallowed his wrath, and resumed with the sleepily-attentive Wilson. "In the second place, you stop me to joke with my driver—"

"That's rich, that is!" whined the cabman.

"Joke with th' driver! liar, liar!"

"To joke with my driver and ride in my cab without introduction or invitation. Now, I'm not the sort of man to stand on ceremony, but I'm not going to be humbugged about. A joke's a joke, but this is going too far."

"Why don't you tell'm ter stop?"

"I don't mean the cab, sir! Now, don't pretend that you misunderstand me!"

Wilson looked him straight in the eye and said: "Been dead long yerself?"

Bodger stirred angrily, and muttered: "Bah! what can you expect of a man who takes home lions!"

At this Wilson sprang to his feet with a yell, crushed his hat against the roof, and fell back in his seat with another yell. "It's a lie!" he thundered. "Who's been tellin' lies 'bout me?"

The cab pulled up guiltily.

"Ask your friend, the cabman," suggested Bodger stormily.

Wilson dashed at the window. "Did you tell Chris'mus here I took home lions?"

The shrinking cabman whined: "Well, I 'eard as 'ow you took 'ome a lion and fed it with crayfish over the banisters!"

"IT WAS A LIE !"

"I thort it was!" cried the cabman, eager to placate the furious man. "Th' minit I 'eard it I thort it wuz a lie! It didn't sound like you, som'ow."

"That's why you told it to everyone, includin' this ol' pot!"

"/ didn't! I didn't tell 'im nothin' of th' sort, an' if 'e says 'as I did, 'e's a blanky liar, that's all!"

"You told me so distinctly!" shouted Bodger.

"I DIDN'T!"

"Some cow muster told him!" proclaimed the furious Wilson, whose rage was making the cab rock on its springs. "I didn't do it 'tall. I'd scorn to take lions home! It was done by man called Thomson— man I don't like!"

"That's th' name!" shrieked the cabman exultantly. "I remember now!"

"Why don't you 'member 'fore you libel a man behind his back? What do you mean by tellin' this ole stiff?"

The maddened roar of Bodger wrecked the peace of the night.

"I will not be insulted in my own d—d cab. GET OUT! What do you mean by thrusting yourself—"

"You said I took home lions!"

"Thrusting yourself into my cab"

(" 'IS cab, mind yer!")

"Into my cab and insulting me— a man old enough to be your father!"

"I don't care how old you are! You're dead now, anyhow !"

"BAH! I don't know why I argue with you! Here! drive on!"

"Lor lumme, ain't this where yer want'er go? We bin standing 'ere fer th' larst three minits!"

Bodger looked out in dismay and found that it was indeed true. He and Lempson thereupon disembarked, and drag ged his bag from under the cabman's feet. After a long and angry consultation in subdued voices, certain moneys were passed over and the dark transaction was closed with surly good nights. The interior of the cab maintained a thoughtful silence until Bodger and Lempson had struggled inside a dark gate and gained admission to a still darker house.

Then the cabman turned hopelessly to the bars, and said, "'Ey, wake up! Where am I ter drive yer?" Getting no reply, he inserted the thin end of his whip and stirred carefully, saying, " Wake up an' tell us where I'm ter drive ter?"

And a drowsy voice said, "To the cem'try, you ghost!"

Whereupon the driver cursed and drove slowly away.

Now their way back to town lay past a suburban cemetery, and the Jehus on the rank do say that when the red-haired cabman was driving past it, Wilson woke up and forced him to stop. Fortunately the gate was locked, so the cab could not enter. But they remained outside the place of tombs and argued fiercely in spasms until the chill wind of dawn revived Wilson's defective memory, and the thin light enabled him to see that the outfit was solid. And, when he got everything properly focussed, he turned irritably to the frozen driver, and asked in an amazed way, "Why th' blazes didn't yer tell me so?"

18: The Eighteen-Footer

The Lone Hand Oct 1912

"THERE'S th' cow!" excitedly shouted the old fisherman, pointing at the torpedo-like blur in the clear water at the base of the cliff. "W'y th' 'ell can't 'e take th' bait and be done with it?" He looked down sourly at the neglectful shark, and made a despairing gesture.

"Bin tryin' ter get 'im fer th' larst two weeks, we 'ave. But 'es a cunnin' brute! Won't look at ther bait, 'e won't! How, 'ere's Eight-Hour Day cornin' erlong, and us with a tent an' all, an' a chap ready ter stick th' noos of th' captcher in ther paper, an' that there cow jus' swims up an' down 'sif 'e wuz doin' it ter nark us!"

"That there shark," said the glum one solemnly, "that there shark 'ud be worth a matter of ten quid if 'e'd swaller that ther 'ook before ter-morrer!"

"Wot are yer *torkin* ' erbout?" The old fisherman refreshed himself by a generous expectoration. "Ten quid be blowed! If that there shark ain't worth more'n twenty"

"If yer get th' crowd, Bill!" hastily interjected Sore Feet.

"Well, wot's ter stop yer from gettin' th' crowd? All yer have ter do is ter get a bit in th' papers about th' cow and 'is photygraf, if possible. Yer want ter let people know yer've got a Weedin' shark, though! It's no good 'idin' it like them Atkinses did with that there shark they got! That ain't no good! I'm goin' ter get this cow in th' papers, I am! You don't catch me 'idin' 'im with a Eight-Hour Day crowd round me— don't you make no errer erbout *that*. 'E won't be no ten-quid shark!"

The young fisherman coughed humbly, and changed ,the subject. " 'Ere's 'Arry," he muttered.

A middle-aged and black-bearded fisherman came toiling up the path in the blistering noonday heat. His bare feet were caked with dust, and he looked disgusted and angry.

"'E ain't took that flamin' bait yet!" he grumbled as he Joined the group. "There's six bleedin' schnapper on that line— think of it! A good 'arf crown's worth o' fish fer a blasted shark, an' 'e won't look at it —th' cow!"

" 'E's been swimmin' round it, though, 'Arry," ventured the glum junior nervously.

'Arry spat viciously and turned to the old fisherman.

"Wot th' 'ell's th' good of 'im swimmin' round it? Wot's th' good o' that?"

"That's wot I been sayin'," whined the old man.

'Arry walked to the edge, took one scornful look, and plodded off with rounded shoulders like an absurd Napoleon from some preposterous Waterloo.

The young fisherman looked after him pathetically. "Wot's th' matter with 'Arry th' smorning? 'As 'is missus been roustin' on 'im 'bout last night?"

" 'Arry's missus is alwuz roustin'!" said the old man severely, "'Arry's worryin' 'bout that there shark— that's wot's th' matter with 'im!"

The understudy was silent for a space. "They wuz askin' up at th' 'Grand' th' smornin' w'y we' adn't no fish for 'em. Ole Jones, th' manager, wuz goin' orf pop erbout it. I tole 'im there wasn't none ter be got, an' 'e arst me w'y th' 'ell we didn't go an' look for 'em 'stead o' loafin' on ther cliffs. 'E muster seen us 'ere yesterdee."

"Wot's that gotter do with 'im?" The old man wiped his lips with his ragged sleeve and pointed dramatically at the big hotel facing the beach. "Does 'e think we're goin' ter bust ourselves gettin' fish for 'im when there's this 'ere shark knockin' roun' an' Eight-Hour Day near doo? Let 'im get 'is fish from town if 'e wants it!"

"That's wot I sez, Dad!"

" 'Ere's 'Arry," reported the meek under-fisher.

'Arry limped sullenly back the path he had gone. He did not stop when he reached the group, but bundled straight on, remarking as he passed: "Nice charnce we gotter catchin' that cow! 'E knows 'ow ter read an' write, 'e does!" Still grumbling in his beard, he hobbled down the slope and disappeared.

"Terrible bloke ter fret, 'Arry," ventured the understudy, folding his arms tightly across his chest.

"Well, so would you fret if you 'ad as much bad luck as 'im! W'y carn't th' bloomin' shark take th' blanky bait an' be done with it, 'stead o' keepin' us bangin' erbout?"

Both men then relapsed into silence and stared down sulkily at the sea, while the shark took gentle swimming exercise at irregular intervals.

The junior fisherman, who seemed to be a sort of marine edition of that strange Parliamentary official known as the Usher of the Black Rod, again intimated that 'Arry was approaching.

That restless individual duly arrived in a state of extreme depression, and applied the usual oath to Jones, who, it appeared, had encountered him on his way back to the fishless pub, and told him what he (Jones) thought of the syndicate and its methods. "So I sez to 'im: 'Orright,' I sez. 'Ave it yer own way! Get th' fish where yer d—n well like, an' may they rot on yer measly 'ands,' I sez."

The old man nodded approvingly.

"That's th' way ter tork ter th' likes o' 'im! Wot does 'e care"

" 'E'S TOOK IT!!!" screamed the junior fisherman, getting fearfully excited, and pointing dramatically to where an oil drum dipped and bobbed madly amid disturbed water.

"Well, 'e's bin long enuf erbout it, AIN'T 'e!" yelled the old man, who seemed to resent the understudy's display of emotion.

"*Don't stan' torkin erhout it!*" howled 'Arry. "Come an' get th' cow ashore!"

The three of them hurried off together wrangling in shouts and gesticulating like scarecrows in a high wind.

"Th' captcher" was a long and desperate performance, and was watched intently from the hot beach by half the town, for the news fled round with wonderful rapidity. Visitors and inhabitants alike flocked along to see the dynamic sea-thing muddled to death in three volumes. At last, after an incredible amount of confusion and bad language, the body was made fast and pompously towed ashore. The morose 'Arry, in a skiff rowed by the junior fisherman, glided ahead of the cortege and loudly ordered two sun-tanned and abject old beachcombers who were then ankle-deep in water to, "Nick up an' get that there tent, yous Bargoese! Goo on! Shift yerselves!"

They fled gradually and more or less together over a sandy rise, and presently re-appeared staggering under a giant sausage of dirty canvas. Behind them came an untidy, bare-footed and hatless man of middle age, whose encouraging gestures were superb. He went on like a prophet leading a multitude out of bondage. But he made no attempt to assist the two sausage bearers.

Meanwhile 'Arry, Dad and the junior fisherman were shoving the crowd back from the vast heap of carrion they had won from the sea. When a curious sightseer approached too close, they carried on like the guardians of a sleeping princess. Then the tent was put up with remarkable speed on a convenient patch of sward. The body of the dead shark, after being photographed by the village camera man, was dragged reverently inside its pavilion and a scrawled sign, "SHARK —6d.," blossomed on the ridge-pole. That done, the three principals, the two aged A.D.C.'s and about twenty casual helpers and shouters engaged in mutual congratulations both loud and blasphemous.

In the midst of it all, the voice of the tent-owner was heard to inquire earnestly: "An' wot sorter cut do / get outer it?"

"Wot erbout 'arf er dollar?" suggested 'Arry, offhandedly.

"Blimey!" yelled the horrified owner. " '*Arf er dollar!* Lorluvver-duck!" Quite breathless with indignation, he appealed tragically to the crowd for its collective opinion of this dastardly offer. A sort of nervous silence descended on the company, and the wrangle proceeded deafeningly

"Wotcher squeakin 'erbout! Ain't that enuf fer yer silly old tent?"

" 'Arf er doller's no good ter me, not by a long sight!"

"Lessay a doller then?"

"NO! 'Arf er *quid*'s my price!"

The three shark-owners roared indignantly at this extortionate demand. Insults were heaped on the excitable tent-proprietor until he threatened, in a frenzy, to tear down his double-blanked tent. "Three 'arf dollers" were being heatedly discussed when the young fisherman snatched some publicity for himself by reporting the rapid approach of two of "them there Atkinses," who in due course arrived and demanded immediate audience of 'Arry.

One of them was a very tall, barefaced man with a pronounced stoop and long bare arms. He was cock-eyed, and could not converse comfortably unless he stood over his victim and let his baleful gaze play over his countenance like a search-light. Followed by his brother— a long-faced lad with wild blue eyes— he elbowed through the noisy crowd and took a bird's-eye view of the principal shark-proprietor.

"We 'ears yous 'as gotcher shark," he began ominously.

The whole crowd listened attentively.

"Wot erbout it?" demanded 'Arry, on his guard immediately.

"'S'like this. Us blokes gotter big stingaree th' smorning, an' seein' as 'ow ter-morrer's Eight-Hour day—"

"Wot erbout it?" trumpeted 'Arry, bristling.

"—an' seein' as 'ow yous blokes 'as got a tent an' all, we thought as 'ow we might show 'em tergether, an' go 'alves like. Wotcher say?"

"Wot do I SAY! I say take yer rotten stingaree an' darn well eat it! D'ye think we're goin' 'alves with a rotten stingaree? 'Oo th' 'ell wants ter see a bleedin' stingaree!"

The tall man started to give him back bellow for bellow. "An' 'oo wants ter see a blighted shark! W'y, yer can see sharks any bloomin' day!"

"Orright then! You keep yer busted stingaree, an' see 'ow many'll pay ter look at it!"

The tall Atkins trembled with anger.

"Well, ain't yer goin' ter share at all?"

"No, we ain't! Yot if you was ter bring a 'undred an' go down on yer knees an' arsk us ter show 'em for yer!"

"Ah—h, keep yer stinkin' shark then!" screamed the taller Atkins, and elbowed his way out again. They went off down the beach together like drunken semaphores.

And again the voice of the tent-owner was heard crying passionately: "I want 'arf er quid! 'Arf er quid, or I takes me double-blanked tent and gives it to them there Atkinses! Come on now, 'Arry! 'Arf a quid!"

"Orright! Orright! 'Arf er quid and be dashed to yer !" said the harassed shark capitalist amidst general applause. The free performance was now over, and most of the small mob drifted away towards the hotel. The young fisherman and the two abject old beach-combers stayed behind at the canvas morgue, and took two shillings' gate-money from some aimless new arrivals.

By nightfall, nine shillings had been taken, and the dead shark was starting in a small way to do its own advertising. Then darkness came, and the tent was shut, and the shark lay in state and ripened, while the wind sighed ever so gently like a young widow in the spring.

And sometime before dawn, light-footed, piratical shadows came in a boat and flitted about the sand burying mysterious treasure everywhere. They also climbed the trees near by, and carefully concealed more treasure in the branches. The secret job finished, they embarked and put noiselessly to sea just before sunrise brought 'Arry down to inspect the dead asset. And while he was still some distance away, he drew a deep breath and spat. The shark, quite fresh the day before, seemed to be petitioning Heaven and threatening to serve Peter with a writ unless it was immediately provided with a grave. 'Arry dashed at the tent, tore his way inside, and, in the very presence of the dead, inhaled deeply. He was astonished to find that the smell inside was about one-twentieth the strength of the smell without. But the remunerative hours were still a long way off, and the sun would presently arrive to commence his deadly work. Something would have to be done to stay it. Ice! Within ten minutes he was pounding determinedly on the closed door of the Grand. Mr. Publichouse answered the racket from the first-floor balcony.

"Hullo! who's there?"

"It's only me, Mr. Jones— Arry!"

"Oh is it! What the devil do you want?"

"I wanter get some ice, Mr. Jones."

"For fish, I suppose? Well, let me tell you that I've got to have first pick, whatever it is!"

fish, Mr. Jones. We ain't got none. That there shark we got yesterdee is gittin' high, an' I thought as 'ow you might—"

"Well I *won't*! D—n your stinking shark! If you won't catch fish for me, you can get to blazes out of this! Go on. Clear!"

The window closed down with a squeal and a crash.

'Arry left with great reluctance. And at breakfast time old Dad arrived and whined about ice until he was driven off with threats by the furious hotelkeeper.

When he got back to the tent he found 'Arry arguing deafeningly with the Mayor— who was also the proprietor of the open-air refreshmentry opposite.

He had been knocked over by the smell on arriving to open up for the holiday, and had immediately torn across to raise a row about it.

"Th'shark wuz fresh yesterdee, I tell yer!"

"Well, it ain't fit to be above around now! I'm not goin' to 'ave my day rooned be a stinkin' shark! Get a dray and take it away to the destructor, or I'll give 'ficial instructions about it!"

'Arry roared with rage. But old Dad reeled where he stood and clasped his hands.

"F'r heving's sake, don't take it away! he pleaded. "Don't take it away! It means munney to us!"

The Mayor pointed magisterially at the pavilion of death. "If that there thing ain't taken away in 'arf an hour, I'm goin' ter move in th' matter under Section Fifteen of the local Guvmint—"

But 'Arry burst into the speech with, "If that there shark ain't fresh!"

"It ain't fresh!" roared the Mayor. "It ain't fresh, an' I ain't goin' to 'ave th' beach rooned by lettin' people exhibit rotten fish! Now remember, I've given you 'arf an hour to take it away an' burn it!" Without more ado he rushed off, got his coat and hurried away in the direction of the council chambers.

The glum understudy hurried up as the speeding Mayor turned the corner. "Lumme!" he exclaimed. "Lor-lumme! Wot's that stink?"

"Wot stink?" shouted 'Arry passionately. "Wot stink? I don't smell no stink! You're as bad as th' ole blighter of a Mayor!"

"Wot's up with th' Mayor?" faltered the understudy.

"'E says," gibbered old Dad, "'e says this 'ere shark ain't fresh, an' that we gotter take it away an' hum it! FRESH !" he screamed, in an ecstasy of rage. "I only wish I wuz as fresh as that there shark— *I'd show 'im!*"

"Wotter them there Atkinses 'angin' round fer?" cried the understudy sternly, pointing at the other side of the street. 'Arry and the broken-hearted old Dad looked up in time to see the stingaree proprietors dodge round the corner.

"'Ere's them Bargoese!" announced the lookout next minute. "They just come round th' corner."

The two old beachcombers ambled up with the air of poor relations hurriedly summoned to a funeral. The dirtier of them commenced before they had reached the kerb. "We 'eard uptown 'bout th' shark, Wot's up with them Atkinses? They wuz larfin' w'en we parst 'em?"

"D—n them Atkinses!" muttered 'Arry hopelessly. "I dunno wotter do!"

"Are— are they goin' ter take it from yer, Arry?" asked the second Bargoese tremulously.

The understudy, his arms tightly folded across his chest, nodded gloomily. A silence of desperation descended on the group, and a number of passers-by— principally morning bathers— stood off at long range and spoke their minds freely in loud, clear voices. The sun and the wind conspiring together were spreading the shark round the suburb and vindicating the absent Mayor. One by one the friends and helpers of yesterday drifted along and discussed the unfortunate situation well to windward. The half-hour of grace wasted away, and none of the shark-owners made a move to get a dray.

Then a small procession appeared round the corner. First of all came the sergeant of police, looking as if he had desperate duty to perform. Following him were the Mayor and the nuisance inspector. Next came one of the council's drays, followed by two regular employees. The cortege made straight for the tent, and, after a short, sharp parley, the flap was opened, and the job of removing the condemned was commenced by the two employees, who quickly found that an eighteen-foot shark is a heavy item. A call for volunteers was responded to by "Them Atkinses," who suddenly arose front nowhere in particular, and gladly rendered valuable assistance in getting the mass of dead shark into the dray. As soon as the body was out of the tent, the furious owner approached the taller Atkins and offered to hire it for the stingaree exhibition. The offer was accepted amidst bitter and unjustifiable comments by the shark-owners.

The funeral moved off to the accompaniment of subdued cheers, the relieved Mayor making a generous but ineffectual attempt to raise the bereaved syndicate's spirits by calling out: "This won't cost you chaps nothin'! It'll be burnt right away, and we won't say nothin' 'bout the charges!"

Strangely enough, a whole hour elapsed before 'Arry made the astonishing discovery that the smell had not departed with the shark. "Them Atkinses" and four helpers, all wearing grins of triumph, were taking down the tent preparatory to putting it up further along the beach-front, when the leader of the shark company ran into a disastrous smell current, and was moved to look up a small tree close at hand. He beheld a small but very dead shark carefully lashed to a branch! And it was not alone! On the same tree at least half a hundredweight of mouldering fish had been concealed with villainous skill. Furthermore, he discovered that where he had disturbed the beach with his feet, more high-smelling infamy had been lightly sanded over!

The triumphant Atkinses and their friends were too busy with the tent to notice 'Arry passing the word to the clan, or to observe the clan stealthily possessing themselves of the worst and heaviest specimens they could get. Consequently, when war broke out with a chorus of yells and the Philistines leapt upon them, they were caught in a defenceless state, and were bashed

and clouted along the beach for a mile and a half amidst uproarious excitement. The only stand they made was when the two aged Bargoos, who were armed with a dead eel apiece, were taken prisoners and roughly disarmed. But, unhappily for their dazed and filthy captors, the eels had by then been worn out and broke almost at the first swipe. The retreat was made a rout by 'Arry's 14-stone wife tempestuously arriving on the field of battle with the tail of the show stingaree, which she had found unguarded, and had ruthlessly mutilated in order to provide herself with an effective weapon.

19: A Set of Furs

The Bulletin, 6 Feb 1913

MRS. TRIBBENS'S boarders were distributed about the verandah after the Saturday mid-day dinner, when word was passed along that distinguished-looking stranger in the top hat and frock coat, who had just passed up the street, had returned and was making for the front gate. All conversation ceased as he walked slowly up the steps and rang the bell. Mrs. Tribbens herself answered it and seemed puzzled at his first question. Then she gave a perceptible start of recollection and hurriedly asked him to step inside. In a few minutes, she reappeared alone on the verandah.

"What is it, Mrs. Tribbens?" they pleaded in whispers.

The landlady looked about her nervously.

"He's a lawyer, and he's come to see Alice, the maid."

"Alice!" they chorused blankly. "What on earth for?"

"I don't know. But he says he has good news for her, so I expect it must be money."

Looks both envious and incredulous were exchanged. "Money! Just fancy."

"Some people do have luck!" drearily murmured Miss Gummer, the Post-Office girl.

She and her fiance, Mr. Lempson, were then scraping and saving in anticipation of the manifold expenses of matrimony, and here money was simply showering on the maid, who already possessed a decent bank account.

A few minutes passed, and then all were startled by peals of loud laughter from the sacred drawing-room.

"Just listen to that girl!" cried the women. "Whatever will the lawyer think of her?"

They were shocked later on when the giggling maid emerged from the ball entrance with the abashed visitor, and brightly waved him off the premises with a friendly, "Well, ta-ta for th' present. *Be good.*"

As soon as the top-hatted one had escaped they crowded round the lucky girl, started to congratulate her in a patronising way.

"You must be glad!" they moaned. "How perfectly *wonderful* to come into all that money!"

Alice laughed at them happily.

"It ain't so much— a matter of six 'undred an'twenty punds."

"Oh, how lovely!"

"Yes," continued the happy savage carelessly, "it ain't so bad, but it ain't a surprise. It's from me uncle s estate— I knoo it was comin' some time."

"Why, you're quite a rich girl now! You won't work any more, will you?" cried poor Miss Gummer.

"Why, o' course I will, Miss Gum'r! I ain't rich enough to stop workin', and, what's more, I wouldn't leave Mrs. Tribbens, not fer worlds! She's been like a mother to me, an' besides, I wouldn't know what to do with meself, any'ow."

There was some subdued applause at this; but it didn't exactly fire the enthusiasm of her female listeners.

"If I came in to some money," announced a bleak spinster freezingly, "I would go for a trip round the word and Broaden My Mind!"

This speech was applauded to the echo.

Alice, the practical, wiped her hands on her apron. "Aw, I'll just put it in the bank for a bit, till I make up me mind. I'm all muddled-like just now— don't seem to know what I'm doin', what with the fuss an' all. Money's rotten in a way— worries you an' brings sorrer, I think. I don't know anythin' about 'vestments, and shares, an' such; an' propperty's nothin' but payin' rates, an' gettin' the drains seen to, an' arf the time the people won't pay up. I'll just leave it in the bank fer a bit."

Having saddened herself with these reflections, she returned to her kitchen and left the idle women to wear the subject to rags.

The eminent Mr. Bodger, senior male boarder of the establishment, encountered the excited gossips on his way in to tea, and was immediately bailed up and overwhelmed with full particulars of the legacy. After considering the six different accounts, he expressed his unbounded admiration of Alice's prudence, and undertook to give her the benefit of his ripe experience.

"I always liked that girl," he concluded ponderously. "No fal-lals or foolery about her at all. She's too smart to throw away the money on trips or dresses. She's got a good head— knows her proper place, and doesn't want to leave it. Damme, I wish all women were as sensible!"

As usual, he left his female audience somewhat annoyed. Bodger's downright style was apt to be disconcerting.

After the evening meal, Mrs. Dodd-Garstead, a vitriolic, overdressed woman who spent all her life grading the world and proving conclusively that one-half of it wasn't fit to black the other half's boots, expressed it as her firm opinion that the girl should be instantly discharged, as she would not now be worth her salt as a servant. Money, she explained, always had that effect on the lower classes. Anyhow, it was intolerable that, while one had to scrape and save, the servant was simply reeking of money, and must be sneering and laughing behind one's back. It was too idiotic altogether— the Law should see

to it that money went to the gentlefolk who knew how to use it, not to servant girls who were only fit to wash up dishes and make beds.

After this outburst, the boarders on the verandah were silent for a space. Bodger, who had listened to it in stunned silence, was clearing his throat preparatory to defending the good sense of Alice, when a giggling female courier arrived with the news that the lucky one was now talking wildly about Paris over the washing-up tin, and threatening to get into the best society and go to balls and receptions every night of her life. There was a burst of malicious laughter, and Bodger sank back in his deck chair and fell to gloomily stroking his beard.

"What did I tell you?" snapped Mrs. Dodd-Garstead.

"If I had that money," began Mr. Dadclip thoughtfully, "I would buy a nice little place within handy distance of town and go in for poultry." He unfolded his scheme at great length, and showed that there would be heaps of money in it. It was a rather good round game, and they each took a hand in it with more or less success. By the time they had quite finished, someone else arrived with the intelligence that Alice was now talking severely of giving it all to the church, because she wanted to do a bit of good in her life, and what was the use of going to Gay Paree if you couldn't talk the language and didn't know how to be gay like the rest!

Whilst Mrs. Dodd-Garstead was working off the rage generated by this communication, Bodger heaved himself out of his chair and went off, rudely grunting something to the effect that no confounded woman was not to be trusted with a penny piece.

And all this time, Lempson and Miss Gummer, whose wedding-day was now in sight and who were, consequently, very nervous and worried about many things, especially furniture and finance, were wretchedly calculating if, by any chance, Alice would consider a proposition to build them a small cottage and let them pay it off as rent. They agreed that it would be a splendid investment for her; but neither of them could bear to broach the subject to the only capitalist in the house.

During the next three days, Alice got more inexpert advice about the investment of her money than a shipload of heiresses could have absorbed. She was implored to start tea rooms, poultry farms, lolly shops,, boarding-houses, boatsheds, hatshops, manicure parlors, registry offices, toy shops, news agencies billiard saloons, boatsheds and other enterprises. Mr. Dadclip grimly estimated that she would require £75,000 capital to follow all the suggestions.

Listening respectfully to all this advice used up a good deal of her working time, and usually, when she escaped from some financial genius to the kitchen

it was only to reject the heart and hand and horse and cart of some love-lorn tradesman. The butcher was repelled the first day; and being a full blooded man, used to having his own way he ever afterwards dashed the meat down on the kitchen table in a wild and desperate fashion. The other kitchen-door callers went down one after the other, and anon there was no laughter or chaff to be heard round the back. The only one who retained his good spirits was the milkman— a professed bigamist, who was prepared to do anything for money except commit matrimony. Then Parman, one of the young-men lodgers, made a determined attempt to borrow £50 and, the fact becoming known, was roasted whole several times by the censorious members of the household.

And at last, when everyone was mentally exhausted through the efforts to spend her money for her, Alice gleefully broke the news that she had spent every penny of it on a 600-guinea set of ermine furs .

The shocking announcement— it was made at dinner— instantly put a stop to all eating. Knives and forks fell with a clatter that suggested a beaten regiment laying down its arms.

The first coherent exclamation came from Bodger. It was a deep and heartfelt "Good God!"— the cry of a strong man who had just received his death-blow.

Miss Gummer, tired and fretted with endless arguments and calculations, shrieked faintly and dabbed at her lips with a small handkerchief.

Lempson, the bridegroom-elect, went pale and nodded his head hopelessly.

Mrs. Tribbens fanned herself weakly with the tea cosy.

Mr. Dadclip, the poultry enthusiast, settled his glasses on his nose and looked wildly about him.

But Mrs. Dodd-Garstead was the hardest hit of all. When she realised the full significance of the grinning maid's news, she rose slowly from her chair and gasped, "How *dare* you! The idea of *you*— a servant— *daring* to buy such furs— things that only *ladies* should wear! Oh, how dare you! You ought to be thoroughly *ashamed* of yourself. You don't know your place! I— I.... Oh, I can't bear it!" And she fell back in her chair, and, leaning her elbows on the table, supported her distorted face in her hands, while she wept with the greatest possible enthusiasm into the remains of her pudding.

Within a week Alice was the chief amusement of the suburb, then in the throes of a dull summer. Whenever ordered out on an emergency errand, she would say archly, "I think I'll just go and put on me furs!" And she would, no matter how murderously hot the day. Some of the remarks wrung from Mrs.

Dodd-Garstead by these bear-like foraging excursions into the blazing heat were classics in their unpleasant way.

Then Alice achieved fame easily by fainting one morning in the street whilst hurrying home with a parcel of sausages, and being borne tenderly to the hospital in a passing motor. A Sunday paper got hold of the story of the Girl in Ermine, and with photography made an interesting four columns of it. Alice's full history was set forth, and she was honorably bracketed with a leading musical-comedy actress as the owner of the best furs in Sydney. Felicity brought her all sorts of friends and enemies. Artistic, comfort-loving people praised her for her appreciation of the nice things of life; clerics denounced her from their pulpits for her dangerous love of luxury. Some charitable people were furious with her for spending all the legacy on herself; a lot of uncharitable folk said she never *had* a legacy. Amongst the latter class was Mrs. Dodd-Garstead, who, such was her rage and envy, heroically disregarded all the circumstantial evidence and bluntly intimated that she knew the girl was no better than she should be. She seemed almost unable to control herself when the Most Talked-of Maid in Sydney approached; and when that paragoned female hurriedly retreated, her manner suggested that it was as much as she could do to keep from pursuing her and doing her a deadly injury. All day long she watched Alice's comings and goings like a cat, and snarled over them to the exclusion of every other subject. The set of furs was wearing her out body and soul, and all hands grew apprehensive. Alice herself tottered to and fro, wearing the look of one who waits for a typhoon to break. The snowy, black-tailed splendor had become a curse.

There was exactly two weeks and three days of this sort of thing before the tragedy happened.

It was just before tea, when Alice was busy with the table, preparations, that Mrs. Dodd-Garstead ran in from the yard, shrieking that the house was on fire. The dining-room rose as one boarder and ran to make sure she wasn't lying again. It was quite true. Smoke was pouring from the window of Alice's room, and the flicker of flames could be seen through the glass.

As luck would have it, Lempson had been lazy, as usual, and had left the garden hose screwed on to the tap, instead of uncoupling it and putting it away. The ladder, too, was lying handy; so it didn't take him long to climb up and get a stream playing on the fire. A quarter of an hour later the house was safe, but Alice's room was a charred and evil-smelling den.

Mrs. Dodd-Garstead, very bright-eyed and flushed, hovered on the outskirts of the stunned crowd, murmuring consoling things and giving, on the whole, a very fair imitation of a sympathetic woman shocked by an overwhelming catastrophe.

White-faced Alice flew upstairs as soon as the fire was out to assess the damages. When she came down, after five minutes' absence, Mrs. Dodd-Garstead was the very first to approach her.

"Your coat, dear," she cooed, "is it really burnt?"

Bodger, in the background, grasped his beard and stared hard at the back of her neck.

The stricken Alice seemed genuinely touched by this exhibition of sympathy.

"Yes'm," she panted ruefully, "it's burnt orl right— burnt all to cinders!"

"Oh, you poor thing!"

Alice nodded, misty-eyed. "I dunno! I 'spose it wuz a judgment on me for wantin' to go to Paree an' be a gay. Ah well! I won't buy no more furs when I get me money from th' 'nsuranee company."

Mrs. Dodd-Garstead fell back two steps; her jaw fell about two feet. "Do you mean to say—!"

"Yes, mum. Wasn't it lucky!"

Mrs. Dodd-Garstead expressed her delight by rushing straight up to her room and having violent hysterics. When she had quite done, Mrs. Tribbens, attended by Messrs. Bodger and Lempson, A.D.C.'s, waited on her and presented an ultimatum, in as dignified a manner as possible, through the keyhole. She and her husband were to be out of the house by eight o'clock, and a cheque for the damage would be required within a week.

Then they descended solemnly to a band of boarders oppressed with a sense of disaster and the outrageous odor of burnt clothing. Dinner was taken in funereal silence, and, until someone told her to stop, simple Alice kept on moaning in a dazed way, "Pore thing! Didn't she take it to 'art? Funny 'ow things turn out. Y' know, I used to think she didn't like me wearin' it. Pore thing!"

20: Balloons and Sausages

The Lone Hand March 1913

THOMSON leant on the bar and stared offensively at the glum little man who had been introduced to him some time in the remote past. He could not recall the glum one's name, and didn't want to. He remembered that he had not liked him when someone or other told each of them who the other was, ere drifting away to catch a train. But they had gone on buying each other drinks in a solemn, automatic way, and talking gravely in between.

The glum stranger did not seem to mind being stared at. As a matter of fact, he was not aware of Thomson's close inspection until the latter blurted indignantly, "You don' look any better for yer drinks!"

"Beg pardon," murmured the glum one respectfully, and fingered the abundant dry moustache that sprayed out from his patient, sheep-like face.

"Don' look any better for yer drinks— *you* don't!"

"Put it all inside," mumbled the other, wearily, "Every drop— inside!"

"I don' like dry whiskers," persisted Thomson. "Make me thirsty."

"Well, what 'bout 'nother, eh?"

"Why don't yer get 'em off?"

The stranger sighed. "Orright. That seems perfectly fair an' reason'ble— perfectly fair."

"I'm glad you 'gree with me, anyhow !"

"Oh, I 'gree with you, cert'nly. I see your point view perfectly

"Why don' you do like me, then? What's use goin' round like that?"

A look of mild astonishment stole into the blue eyes of the whiskered one.

"Do I?" he inquired.

"Cert'nly you do!" replied Thomson in a very severe manner.

There was a reflective interval.

Then— "I'm 'stremely sorry. I hope you 'cept my 'pologies?"

Thomson gravely considered. The thread of the subject seemed to have been lost somewhere. "It's no use," he announced bitterly at last, "No use talkin'!"

Next thing he knew they had left the bar, and were walking along the street side by side. At intervals they helped each other to dodge a new and dangerous variety of tram that ran from side to side, and could only be evaded by standing perfectly still. Loud voices yelled angrily whenever they allowed themselves to be frightened by one of these things. The dry whiskers of the unknown were still troubling Thomson, and he promised himself that he would renew the subject at the first opportunity.

They had been walking quite a long time when Thomson suddenly discovered that Dry Whiskers was missing. He carefully turned himself round and went back until he saw his companion leaning his feverish forehead against the window of a pork butcher's.

"Are yer hungry?" asked Thomson.

Whiskers looked at him dreamily.

"Oh, so hungry!"

"Would you like a sossige?"

"But I can't drink a sossige!" he miserably expostulated.

Thomson waved his hand impatiently. "I'll get yer some," he said.

Whiskers leant limply against the window, and was half asleep when he felt a large, clammy parcel thrust into his arms. They went on together without a word, and Whiskers dropped the parcel fifteen times. Then Thomson got mad and said that wasn't the proper way to carry sausages at all. Without further delay he burst the string, ripped off the decent paper covering, and draped the cables of meat over his friend's arm. They resumed their journey to nowhere, and Thomson was somewhat annoyed to find that people were stopping and staring at them.

That was bad enough; but they had also, in some mysterious manner, acquired a retinue of abject dogs, which got mixed up with the traffic and occasioned a lot of rage and confusion. Occasionally, when halted by a temporary traffic block, the eager retinue caught up to them, and, before they knew where they were, they were wading knee-deep in curs. Sometimes they nearly pulled the swaying Whiskers off his feet in their frantic efforts to tear off one of the frayed sausages that dangled behind him. He never connected their presence with the salvages, for the simple reason that he had forgotten he had ever been burdened with them.

"Look at dogs!" he whined at last. "Too many dogs!"

"Never mind 'em," gruffly advised Thomson. "They'll go 'way by um bye."

"But why do they foller me! I don't want 'em!"

Thomson fixed him with his eye.

"They want yer sossiges, yer fool! Didn't yer know that?"

Whiskers was amazed to find his arms full of meat.

"/ don' want 'em!" he sighed, and threw the whole mass to the ravenous pack. Instantly there was a mad chorus of yelps and snarls and a hideous fighting tangle. Thomson rushed blindly into the uproar, and kicked out with both feet until he had driven the famished brutes off their meal. He picked up the armful of dusty, tooth-marked remnants, and solemnly delivered them into the arms of the patient Whiskers.

"Waste!" he said, sternly. "Never throw good food ter dogs!"

"Orright! Won' do it again!"

The objectless march was resumed, and the procession of kicked dogs trotted along in the rear, hopefully licking their chops. When Thomson and his friend paused to let a lorry pass up a lane, they caught up once more and swirled tempestuously round the legs of the sausage-bearer till he cried out in anguish, "Too many dogs! Sick of them! GERROUT!" There was a certain amount of kicking and yelping, and, the lorry passing, the procession again straightened out.

Half a block more, and they arrived at the open gate of a church-hall, at the door of which was a placard: "Your Digestion (Illustrated). Lecture This Afternoon at three o'clock. Admission Free."

Thomson shoved his hat to the back of his head and stared at it. "Let's go in an' get away from dogs," he mumbled. They wandered in unchallenged, and stumbled amongst cane chairs and muttering lecture fiends until they found two unoccupied seats next to the matting-covered aisle. In front of them was a platform, a large white picture sheet, across which colored diagrams were flitting, and a mournful, bald lecturer encumbered with a long pointer. The pair listened attentively, and presently discovered that he was talking about stomachs and vegetables. The pictures were slides of stomachs he had been acquainted with— good, upright stomachs that had been nourished on vegetables, and bad stomachs that had been ruined by meat. Now and then the audience applauded when the portrait of a specially interesting stomach was shown.

"All disgustin' lies!" said Thomson, passionately.

The audience "Sh-h-d" warningly.

Whiskers, patiently clasping his armful of sausages, looked round to see what was hissing at him, and emitted a "GERROUT!"

That instant he was tugged out of his seat. The biggest and hungriest cur had stolen in after him and fastened to the last and second-last sausages. There was a brief, dreadful struggle on the matting, which was terminated by Thomson kicking the hairy brigand in the ribs and shooting him half-way up the aisle.

As they resumed their seats, an elderly usher scuffled down and expostulated in a whisper with Thomson for bringing dogs in.

"I tell you, I didn't bring dogs in!"

"But he followed you in, sir! I saw him myself!"

"He wasn't my dog at all! Wouldn't own such a stinkin' brute!"

The sleepy voice of Whiskers floated out of the gloom. "He wanted a sossige! Give him a sossige for me an' I'll give it back to yer later on."

The attendant couldn't see the sausages, and took it for a deliberate insult. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves interrupting a lecture this way!"

The irritated audience united in a loud "Sh-h-h!"

All argument was suspended, and the usher retreated reluctantly mumbling threats. Then there was peace in the hall until the lecturer's lantern man threw on the screen the portrait of a meat-eater's stomach. The lecturer started to make nasty remarks about it.

Thomson shifted in his seat, and roared: "SHAME!"

The angry audience rose in a body, hissing and hooting, and demanded the interrupter's instant ejection.

The noise roused Whiskers, who had fallen asleep. Thomson's absurd interjection must have been ringing in his head, or perhaps Thomson told him to do it. At any rate, he also rose in his place and defiantly yelled: "SHAME ! SHAME!!"

The turmoil increased, and, at the lecturer's request, the lights were turned up.

Whiskers was revealed standing with his arms full of sausages. "SHAME!" he howled, utterly regardless of the threats of the audience.

The lecturer came down from the platform and cautiously approached the objector. His expression was a curious mixture of fury and curiosity. Thomson, sitting gravely alongside, looked as shocked and puzzled as the oldest and most furious lecture fiend present.

"To what do you object, sir?" shrieked the lecturer from the aisle. Then, as Whiskers continued to call out: "Stop calling out 'Shame,' and tell me what statement of mine you disagree with?"

Whiskers started on hearing the high, clear voice so close to him. He opened his mouth to say something, faltered, and suddenly compromised with a plaintive, "I gotter lotter sossiges here!"

The lecturer peered at the ragged, dusty bundle he bore, and recoiled in haste. "So I see! But what do you object to in my lecture. Tell me at once, sir!"

Whiskers toyed nervously with a frayed sausage. "I— I dunno!" he sighed.

Public opinion or something wafted them out to the calm, sunlit footpath with an extraordinary amount of noise and confusion. When they had collected themselves somewhat and dusted their clothes, Thomson remarked explosively to the closed door: "Well, who wants ter stay in yer rotten show!" The door made no reply, and they sadly and silently resumed their march. And behind them, hopeful as ever, trotted the dogs.

It was about five miles or five hours further on, and, after a particularly trying passage with the hungry, hairy retinue that Whiskers cried out in anguish:

"Too many dogs— too many sossiges! Won't carry 'em any more!"

With that he flung his burden on the footpath like a sulky child, and watched Thomson beating off the pack with his feet.

Thomson eventually emerged like a diver from the flowing river of dog with the dusty cables in his arms.

"Mustn't throw rubbish on footpath," he quoted; "Lor' Mayor won't stand it. I'll carry sossiges." They advanced half a block. Then Thomson remembered that he had conferred the sausages on Whiskers, and insisted on him resuming the encumbrances. Whiskers was too broken up to protest. But Thomson, in giving them back, promised that he would find some way of getting rid of them if he was so ungrateful as to desire it. Whiskers, by way of reply, merely groaned.

Far down the street, a grave Italian gentleman stood on the kerb holding the threads of a cloud of beautiful red and blue balloons that rolled and tugged in the strong wind. Thomson's eye lighted up, and he urged the rebellious sausage-bearer to hurry. They approached the balloon merchant at top speed, the faithful pack of hounds panting behind them.

"How much fer b'lloons?" gurgled Thomson.

"Fourpen' each," grunted the merchant. "Red or blue?"

Thomson waved his hand regally.

"How much fer the lot?"

"One poun' for lotta!" cried the balloonist, thrusting the thread into Thomson's outstretched hand.

"Right y'are. Pay yer next time."

And he moved off.

The whole street was shocked by the shout of rage emitted by the swindled Italian. He waded after them through dogs, alternately praying and cursing in his native tongue. But Thomson only waved his disengaged hand, and urged him not to worry.

The astonishing procession made its disgraceful way to the top of the street, Thomson all the way explaining that the Lord Mayor would not have rubbish thrown on the footpath, and that he had invented a way of getting rid of it. And when they arrived at the crest of the hill, he showed what it was by rapidly hitching the balloon threads to the cables of meat and casting the mixture loose upon the wind, to the accompaniment of wild shrieks by the defrauded Roman and a deafening chorus of barks by the leaping dogs.

The balloons dragged their comet's-tail of sausages through the air about ten feet from the ground; and beneath it the Roman and the dogs gave an insane jumping performance. Sometimes the running balloonist tripped and fell, and was momentarily obscured by dogs; but he rose again every time, and

resumed his leaping and running. Thomson and Whiskers stood side by side silently watching the receding riot.

Down at the end of the street, an important foundation stoning was taking place. There was the usual respectful frock-coated crowd, a ragged mixture of scaffolding and flags, and a Lancer orderly waiting beside a large motor. A bare-headed, frock-coated gentleman was going through talking motions on a platform, which was further burdened with a crowd of silent, social heavyweights of both sexes.

The storm of dogs, balloons, sausages and Italian profanity whirled madly downhill towards the dignified function, and was right on the heels of the attentive crowd before the armed orderly noticed it. He had been waiting for years for a chance to defend the peace and dignity of his Excellency, and when at last it came, he wasn't ready. The startled people melted like snow before the onset of a frantic horseman, who stood in his stirrups and lunged at the air. He punctured six balloons before the flying absurdity floated out of reach, and, under the influence of some air current, spun high into the air above the platform.

His Excellency had paused in confusion at the sudden panic and disorder amongst his audience, and was about to condude his speech when the heat from the donkey engine chimney ignited the hovering rubber gasbags. There was a brilliant flash, and a stream of dusty, ragged meat, fell from the innocent sky into one of the most illustrious belltoppers in Australia and knocked the glittering crown out of it, to the eternal confusion of its owner and the shame and indignation of the assembled loyalists,

Away up at the top of the hill, a blinking Thomson, utterly unconscious of the devastation he had wrought further down, was proudly pointing out to a little, dry-whiskered man that his splendid device had rid them for ever of the sausages, the dogs and the Italian.

"An', mind yer," concluded, "I didn't throw any rubbish on th' footpath! I just tied it to th' b'lloons, an' *phoof!* off it went!"

21: The Prompter

The Lone Hand June 1913

THE electric tram was whining slowly up the hill with its flushed and joyous load of holiday-makers. As it wound along, the crowded passengers caught momentary glimpses of the great blue harbor, flecked with a few homing sails. It had been a bright day, and everybody was in an excellent temper.

A hot and flustered young fare collector scrambled along the footboard and braced himself in the doorway of the second compartment.

"Fares, please," he mumbled.

His accent gave him away. He was an immigrant, and obviously very new to his work. The patient people, as is usual, began to collect and pass one another's fares, while he thumbed heavily at his long book of tickets and dredged his bag for change, stopping every now and then to lean back, watch the safe descent of some passenger and press the electric starting-bell. It was a slow and distressing performance; but he got along somehow, until a thin-faced woman with a little girl asked anxiously, "How many stops are we from Smith-road? I want to get off there."

A baffled expression took possession of the collector's face, and he answered awkwardly, "I don't know, mum. I'm strange to this line."

The passengers smiled tolerantly and started to cross-examine one another as to the exact location of Smith-road.

But a little woman dressed in black delved into a bag of odds and ends and fished out a street map decorated with a wavering green line, and speckled with numbered red dots. One hurried glance at this, and she turned severely to the collector.

"Smith-road is the second stop from the Junction, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself for not knowing it!"

The fat man in the corner led the shout of laughter that greeted this prompt correction and rebuke. The apoplectic collector snapped his bag shut and tried to escape along the footboard; but the amazing old lady held him with, "A nice thing to come out tram-guarding and not know your streets!"

"I hadn't forgotten!" shouted the unfortunate boy, rippling merriment all round him. "I just couldn't place it for the moment!"

"If you'd stay in of nights," persisted the privileged passenger, "if you'd only stay in of nights like a Christian, and learn your streets, instead of gallivanting round with bits of girls! You can't expect to have me along of you all the time, you know!"

The fat man shook silently and wiped his streaming eyes,

The collector affected not to hear, Stepping off the footboard as the tram stopped, he muttered huskily to some dilatory passengers, "Hurry on, please!"

"Hurry on, please!" shrilled the irrepressible old lady. The whole caravan broke into a roar of laughter at the parrot-like imitation. The fare collector, looking absolutely murderous, hopped on at the next compartment and started business there,

"The idee of warning people like that!" chattered the unabashed instructress as the tram rolled on. "Why, I declare I could hardly hear him myself— and I suppose I was as close to him as anyone! I've told George again and again that he'll have a serious accident some day with some of his passengers if he doesn't speak up. Now I'm sure everyone on the tram heard me!"

"That they did!" chuckled the fat man.

"Here we are again!" announced the instructress complacently, as the tram slowed down at the next corner. Thrusting her bonneted head out she looked up and down for her victim and called out in a penetrating treble, "Now, George, speak up! Howard-street! Hurry on, please!"

The whole tram was instantly disorganised. The waves of laughter ran up and down the sombre public vehicle, melting all social barriers, and making every individual feel that he or she belonged to one united picnic party. Those who had to get off did so slowly and reluctantly, holding on to the guard rails to the last instant, and waiting by the track to see it depart. The only unhappy person was the conductor— now frankly and freely "George" to every sport on board.

As the tram moved away from Howard-street the old lady placidly explained to the delighted and attentive travellers in her compartment. "Young George, there, is my sister's only child, and I'm doing my best to help him in his tram-guarding; but he's a lazy boy, and will go off of nights instead of staying at home and learning his streets. Whenever I can spare the time I come and do a trip with him, just to see how he's getting on. But it's a slow busines."

"He'll learn if you keep at him," giggled the fat man.

"Oh, I'm not going to give in, sir!" trumpeted the old lady.

The tram pulled up thankfully at the Junction, and the smiling passengers streamed off. The fat man, lingering mischievously, saw the enraged young collector approach his terrible aunt and mutter something. Next moment he was sharply repulsed with the sharp retort, "Laughing at me indeed! They were doing nothing of the kind, sir! They were laughing at your ignorance!"

George snarled and jumped at the car, on which some returning picnickers had triumphantly settled themselves for the journey home.

"Not going back!" he roared. "All off!"

22: A House of Flames

The Bulletin, 3 July 1913

"WHAT do you think?" cried Miss Gummer, rapturously, bursting into the dining-room where the boarders lingered over the ruins of the Saturday midday dinner. Her eyes were sparkling with the excitement of a splendid discovery—something calculated to make the senior dowager sit up and to send flappers flying.

"No! What is it?" chorused all the females present. The male boarders who had reputations for politeness removed their pipes from their lips. The Perfect Brutes— there were three of them— smoked on doggedly.

"Oh, you'd never guess!" bubbled the news-bringer. "Well, Howard Surrey-Sussex and that other lovely actor have taken the place next door for the Sydney season!"

After the first breathless shock, little shrieks of rapture came from every part of the room. The women jumped up and down on their chairs, clapped their hands, and all but embraced one another. Miss Gummer, who had not even taken off her hat or disentangled her fingers the strings of eight minute brown-paper parcels— the trophies of the eternal bargain chase— was pelted with inquiries and exclamations.

"Oh, how perfectly lovely !"

"Is it true —really?"

"Who told you?"

"Are you sure?"

She waited triumphantly until the noise had abated, then -mt in the knock-out. "Oh, it's quite correct. They are coming across about three o'clock in Harold Stagehaunter's new launch— so you will be able to see for yourselves!"

She made a radiantly triumphant exit, and was back again in a hatless state before order had been restored.

The women waited upon her abjectly, and begged for whatever dregs of news she had left. Such a triumph had not been witnessed within the memory of the oldest surviving boarder. The room now being like a disturbed cage of parakeets, the men for the most part sat back in their chairs, and smiled indulgently at the pretty raptures of the female section. But Mr. Bodger, who had been interrupted in a masterly exposition of the tangle over the Speakership, stroked his impressive beard and glowered at the chatterers.

Suddenly two ladies started simultaneously to talk. The dead pause and usual polite wrangle as to who should go first enabled Bodger to edge in the first discord in the happy scene.

"I can't see," he boomed. "I can't, for the life of me, see what there is in these confounded actors to make a fuss about."

The scornful remark brought forth a chorus of protest from the ladies. Miss Gummer led the shrill attack on the scoffer.

"Surely, Mr. Bodger— surely you will allow us to admire genius! Why," she continued passionately, "the *Sunday Babblers* said last week that Surrey-Sussex was one of the greatest actors Australia had ever known!"

The worshippers murmured devoutly, and stared coldly at Bodger, who grew red in the face, and retorted with considerable heat and excessive violence.

"Well, the *Babblers*'s wrong as usual! I know that Sussex fellow! He isn't any good— on the stage or off of it!"

This was too much. Even the men boarders joined in the uproar, and strove to point out to the flushed and defiant Bodger that the mime with the double-barrelled name had for years been playing principal parts to adoring audiences, and was a favorite with all playgoers.

"I don't care *what* you say!" boomed the staunch unbeliever. "Nothing will convince me that he's any good!"

After this had been repeated in a wild, reason-defying below about 20 times, the admirers of genius drew off in a breathless and overheated state.

The atmosphere then gradually cleared.

Lempson, the recognised "boy" of Miss Gummer, led off for the second round. Leaning forward, he inquired in a grave and friendly manner: "What is your objection to Surrey-Sussex, Mr. Bodger? Is it his limp you object to or his lisp?"

"I object to him altogether!" was Bodger's curt and unsatisfactory reply.

Lempson was unruffled. He admitted freely that he knew old Bodger's ways, and was evident he intended to gentle his fiery subject and extract what reasons, if any, he had for his dislike of the star.

"Don't you like him in any part?" he persisted insinuatingly.

"*I've never seen him act!*" boomed Bodger. "I wouldn't go across the street to see him. He's no good!"

Some of the astounded boarders broke into scornful laughter. Others turned away in hopeless gestures and pitying smiles.

"But you can't condemn a man offhand like that," cried Lempson amid the stir.

"No, indeed!" chattered Miss Gummer and several other angry ladies.

Bodger said "Pshaw!" and carefully flicked the crumbs off his waistcoat.

"But you can't, you know," wailed Lempson, warming to his work. "As a fair-minded man, you can't say Sussex is no good when you haven't seen him act."

"Yes I can," bellowed Bodger. "I don't want to see him act. I don't need to see him. I *know* he's no good!"

Lempson lost the remnants of his hitherto carefully-kept temper.

"Oh, that's just your stupid prejudice, or spite, or something!"

"It's nothing of the kind!" roared Bodger, now thoroughly roused.

"Oh, yes, it is!" insisted the desperate young man, while the company listened apprehensively. "It's just spite— idiotic spite! How on earth can you possibly know whether an actor's good or bad"

"*No* actor is any good!" proclaimed Bodger stormily. "I'm a damned sight older than you are, and I know that every actor is a damned mountebank, and not fit for decent society! I tell you, it makes me sick the fuss these tuppenny-ha'penny rags like the *Babbler* make over these scoundrels—putting silly ideas in women's heads, and making them run after the painted scamps! I never knew an actor yet that wasn't a brainless blackguard! D'ye think the women would run after them if they had *brains*? Bah! Why, damme, when I first came to this country years ago, I lived in the same house with a tallow-faced scoundrel that played Hamlet—"

Someone made the discovery that a beautiful white launch was approaching the landing stage at the foot of the cliff. There was a general stampede upstairs to the balcony commanding the view of the cliff steps and the next-door garden. There they all congregated in a whispering mass, and prepared— if such a thing were possible— to stare the actors out of countenance. They were quiet enough to be able to hear Bodger fidgeting and fussing in his room close by.

As the white boat swept up to the wharf, the watchers saw, sitting in deck chairs in front of the cabin, two gracefully-posed figures in white flannels and carefully tilted grey hats. Those hats were so exquisitely poised that they might have been placed in position by women. An ostrich feather a piece might have been added without spoiling the general effect. The two wearers were immediately identified with delighted cries, and the crowd settled down to watch the disembarkation and approach to the hired house.

It was well stage-managed. The launch swept up neatly to the wharf, and Stagehaunter's two paid hands made it fast. Then, with practised grace, the stars rose languidly from their chairs and sauntered ashore, with many graceful hand-waves and peals of insincere but beautifully modulated laughter. Some

light banter in high, clear tones, as the launch, with Stagehaunter at the wheel, backed away, served to rivet the attention of the water front on them; which much accomplished, they began the ascent of the steps. This was taken very slowly, with several halts, during which they posed like generals conferring on a height, and drew each other's attention to the view, satisfying themselves by rapid, sidelong glances that they were holding their audience. But, hungry as they were for attention, the concentrated glare of the packed and breathless balcony load seemed to almost unman— or unactor— them when, at last, they arrived at their own front gate.

Surrey-Sussex, who was the first to notice the boarders, faltered in his performance, and remarked in an irritable aside, quite audible to the onlookers: "I say! Look at all those people up theah!"

The resplendent Montmorency looked as commanded, and recoiled gracefully. "Oh, I sa-y! What a dreadful crowd!"

"Tell them they mustn't stare so!" directed his chief, pettishly.

Though the balcony fiends were only a few feet above his head. Montmorency, through force of habit, put his hand to his mouth.

"Hallo, there, you people! Don't stare so, please!"

The stupid group made no sound or move.

"Oh, tell them to go away!" cried the great but disconcerted actor. "I simply *won't* be stared out of countenance in my own garden."

"You've got to go away, please!" cried the transmitter of orders appealingly. Do go away, like dear, good people, and don't *stare* so."

After a slight pause, the abashed group or heap of the balcony stirred and started to disintegrate.

"Have you people finished looking at those damned barnstormers?" shouted Bodger from his roon.

Mrs Tribbens, who had joined the watchers on tiptoe during the actors splendid entrance, and who had not had time to have a really good stare, put her finger to her lips warningly.

"Sh-h-h! Don't speak so *loud* Mr. Bodger! They just told us not to stare so, and to go away."

"*Who* told you that, ma'am?"

"The actors did, Mr. Bodger."

Bodger blew out his cheeks and dilated his eyes. "D'ye mean to to tell me—
"

Without finishing the sentence, he strode to the rail, and, stroking his beard, stared long and contemptuously at the stars below.

"You've got to go away," cried Montmorency. "Don't stand and stare when we—"

"*What!*" shouted Bodger. "D'ye think I'm going to be ordered off my own balcony by a filthy barnstormer like *you!* Mind your own business and keep a civil tongue in your head or you'll get a flogging you won't forget."

"Come away, Montmorency," entreated the dismayed Sussex. "Come away, for Heaven's sake, and let the old ruffian discharge his Billingsgate at someone else. We shouldn't have noticed him at all."

Miss Gummer wrung her hands in front of the old landlady. "Mrs Tribbens," she gasped tragically, "You see! Mr Bodger's gone and offended those perfectly *wonderful* men, and now we'll never get to know them well enough get their names in our autograph books. It's simply dshameful the way he insulta people! I am sure they will put us down as horrid second-raters, and despise the the whole lot of us. Oh, it does make me so *angry!*"

"He is hasty," said Mrs Tribbens sorrowfully. "But what can I do, my dear? He is a gentleman, and he means well. But he's so vi'lent," she added thoughtfully, "so fearfully vi'lent and hasty!" She edged away, muttering consolation, and disappeared down the stairs.

FOR the next two weeks the actors next door were the sole topic of conversation amongst the women of the household. Their comings and goings, their elegance, their clothes, visitors and pastimes— upon these topics they breakfasted, dined, supped and afternoon- and morning tea-ed. A sudden flurry on the landing or a wild, rustling charge upstairs meant that Surrey-Sussex, beautifully dressed for the occasion, was about to push a razor-edged mower over the already close-clipped slip of lawn, or indulge in some other light outdoor amusement.

Meanwhile, Montmorency, faultlessly attired and gracefully posed on a ladder, snipped leaves and twigs off the creeper with a new pair of shears. They did not garden roughly in old clothes, or grub about usefully like ordinary humans. They simply made gardening an excuse for appearing in exquisite shirts and incomparable ties, and hats of the most expensive varieties. Everything they did was observed, faithfully reported and excitedly discussed by the womenfolk at meal-time— also before and after. Bodger brought down numerous storms on his head by his fiercely insulting comments; but nothing could burst the theatrical boom, and the only satisfaction he got was when he stared down from his balcony until he drove the actors indoors.

Then came a cold day and colder night of drizzling rain which sent the household of Bodger early to bed, and made of the great, rambling establishment a hash-tower of darkness, long before the late boats from the city landed their little groups of shivering play-goers on the wet and windy wharf. Bodger himself was one of the first to retire; and he remarked to Mrs.

Tribbens, whom he met on the stairs on his way up, that he was glad on such a night to feel he was home, "instead of humbugging about a theatre like *some* silly women." (Miss Gummer had at the last minute decided, after changing and rechanging her mind, to brave the perils of the dark and go and witness for the ninth time "The Grand Duke's Marriage," the play in which everyone agreed the great Sussex was at his best.)

AT 11.50 poor Miss Gummer was standing at the gangway of the second-last boat, in the sacred shadow of the haughty star himself, when she happened to glance up at the shadowy house-littered hill towards which the craft was gliding. She was struck hysterical by the sight of long, red flames issuing from the top-storey window of one of the dark buildings, and licking at the roof shingles. A second terrified glance showed her that it was Mrs. Tribbens's place. Her shrill scream shocked the whole drowsy company, and made Surrey-Sussex and his lieutenant give real starts.

"What's the matter! Hyah, I say! What's the matter? Has someone fallen over the side?"

Miss Gummer extended a rigid arm, laughed mirthlessly and sobbed : "See! The house! It's on fire!"

The slowing boat at that moment grazed the pontoon, and the three— Miss Gummer, Surrey-Sussex and Montmorency— rushed tumultuously ashore and sped up the dark steps, calling like three escaped lunatics to the unconscious and invisible inmates of the tall, dead premises on the silent hillside.

"Fire!" shrieked the three. "Fire! FIRE!"

A window somewhere squealed up, and a white square of light appeared as the startled person behind it lit the gas.

"FIRE!!!"

Two more windows further away went up, and a front door opened. Someone came running.

"Where's the fire?"

"In that haouse theah!" panted Sussex importantly. He turned to the ever-ready Montmorency.

"Ring up the brigade, while I knock them up! Come on. Miss—er!"

With Miss Gummer sobbing in his tracks, he made for the front door of Mrs. Tribbens's place, and kicked and shouted: "Within there! Ho! FIAH!!!"

At last a wavering light came swiftly down the hall, chains rattled, and the door swung back revealing a man in pyjamas whose eyes were only half-open. "What's the matter?" he said. Surrey-Sussex struck an attitude and exclaimed: "The haouse! It's on *fiah*, man! Raouse everyone! *FIAH!!!*"

The dazed boarder opened his mouth, put down his guttering candle with a clatter, and stumbled up the hall yelling. Thin, acrid smoke swept out of the dark tunnel into the white faces of the star and Miss Gummer, and the subdued but ominous hum of wind-blown flames came to their ears. The dark house—terribly like a place of death—seemed to breathe a threat at them not to enter. It was undoubtedly the right tragic atmosphere. As the house awoke to Lempson's hysterical cries, Montmorency ran up panting.

"Got the fire brigade! They're coming now! What'll I do next?"

Surrey-Sussex flung out an arm.

"The hose! There's not a moment to be lost! Hurry, Montmorency! Remember, there are lives depending on it!"

Montmorency fled to obey, and Surrey-Sussex struck another attitude at the door, through which frenzied and unrecognisable figures were beginning to shoot, scuttle and stagger. No one having had sense enough to light the gas, the fugitives merely fled from the smoky darkness in front of the star into the darkness and confusion behind him. No one seemed to have any idea what sort of a hold the flames had on the house. Dim boarders darted here and there with extraordinary speed, begging for particulars and shouting inquiries for lost friends amongst the wavering, terrified pyjama ghosts, and the animated bundles which represented women. The frenzied hunt would not have been so hopeless if no strangers had been present. But by this time half the neighborhood had risen from its bed, and, arrayed in odds and ends of clothing, rushed down to witness the destruction. Amongst the dark, scattered crowd of expectant onlookers, half the disorganised pack of Mrs. Tribbens coursed vainly in search of the other half. The remarkable slowness of the fire in blazing up and illuminating the scene helped to keep the round game going at a high speed.

Without warning a high shriek cleft the medley of noises. "Oh! it's raining, again! We're saved! The house won't burn now! It's raining!"

It wasn't— it was only Montmorency making his futile attempt to hose from the actors' garden the second-storey window of the burning house. He had drenched half the crowd before someone discovered him and forced him to stop. He then joined his fussing superior in front of the doomed mansion, and helped him in a fine but almost unnoticed series of tableaux expressive of heroic grief and Man's utter helplessness in the face of overwhelming disaster. Unfortunately the necessary background of flaming ruins was absent; so the performance had to be given in the murky hallway. The only person who commented on it was the sharp-eyed pantryman from next door, and he merely asked— after requesting to be struck dead— "what them there blokes

thought they was doin'?" A ripple of malicious laughter ran through the crowd. At the same moment a glad shout went up, "Here's the brigade!"

Surrey-Sussex and Montmorency turned at the rumble of wheels, and saw in the distance a couple of big hose-cart lamps lurching down the rough road at the back. The fire flared up in welcome, and the crowd started to buzz uselessly in a higher key. The firemen pulled up at the back of the house. The crowd cheered and fixed its attention on the flashing helmets now busy over lengths of hose. The two actors were utterly unnoticed for several minutes. Then a female voice wailed piercingly, "Mr. Bodger! Where's Mr. *Bodger*?"

There was an instant's hush. No answer.

Voices everywhere shouted in the dark, "Bodger! Where's Bodger? Speak up, Bodger!"

Still no answer— only the horrified buzz of the frightened crowd and the fiercer roar of the flames.

The woman's voice shrieked again, "*He's in the house! It started in his room!*"

A roar went up from the crowd. All eyes turned again to the front door, where Surrey-Sussex and Montmorency were posing for their lives.

A couple of stout and indifferent firemen dragging a hose shouldered past the actors and ran fearlessly up the smoke-veiled stairs. On the first landing, a stout, pyjama'd figure stumbled past them. It was Bodger— alive and unsinged, but furious with alarm.

"Why didn't they wake me?" he bellowed as he ran. "Why didn't they wake me?"

The firemen sped upwards without answering. Bodger bounded on and came within sight of those standing before the front door.

"Bodger's coming!" was telegraphed round the crowd. Cheers were given, and everyone crowded forward to greet him.

He was only a few steps from the bottom when Surrey-Sussex dashed forward, followed by Montmorency. The breathless actors bounded up to meet him, grasped an arm apiece, and, before he knew what they were about, were half lifting and half dragging him towards the front door.

"Courage!" panted Sussex. "Courage, Father! We'll save you!"

"Bah!" howled Bodger, and made extraordinary efforts to wrench himself from their devoted grip.

"Let me go, damn you! Let me go! I'll 'Father' you!"

The three rolled and staggered drunkenly together.

"Come on! We'll save you!" gasped Sussex, shoving and dragging at the captive, who was falling over umbrella-stands and other furniture.

Bodger snorted and plunged like a draught horse, but failed to get away. "Damn you, I saved myself! Let me go!" They crashed against the wall and fought on, amid the wreckage of a bandbox, a brown paper parcel and an old coat.

The amazed crowd without cheered wildly. It seemed to refresh the actors. They dragged with renewed strength, and Sussex again gasped "Father," and urged Bodger to have courage.

Bodger howled in his beard. "You— call me 'Father' again—I'll *flog* you! *Let me go, you scoundrels! Hands off!!*" (Frightful shoving and reeling. Frantic cheers from the crowd.) "Will you let me— *bah!*"

"We'll— save— you!" sobbed Sussex grimly.

"Now, Montmorency!" Montmorency responded nobly at the right moment. They put their shoulders under Bodger's arms and rushed, him into the night amidst cheers and hysterical laughter, barking his shins against a shrub. He kicked weakly at them as they dropped him amongst the crowd.

"I'll prosecute them!" he raved. "Assault and battery— I'll prosecute them and flog them!"

Hardly anybody heard him. They were all cheering the winded and deadly-serious actors, who were some little distance off, being interviewed by the only fully-dressed man in the crowd. It turned out afterwards he was a reporter who had seen the flames from the city and hurried across in the last boat.

Before the excitement over the rescue had abated, the two firemen unexpectedly emerged with their hose. Being assailed by a number of the interested parties, they replied briefly:

"Yes, the blanky fire was out, and for Gossake get off them there 'ose— we want take it 'ome with us."

They were allowed to depart without further hindrance.

The crowd stood about in the sudden darkness, chattering, and waiting for something more to happen, or for a band to play the first bar or two of the Anthem. Nothing more happened, and of course no band played.

The night— now morning— became colder. Rain began to fall— softly and steadily, as if commencing a steady, all-day job. The crowd reluctantly went off shivering, and the Tribbens household decided by slow stages to make the experiment of sleeping in a partially-burnt tenement. The women went in first in twos and threes. The men followed in a solid, talkative bunch, with Bodger, raving incoherently, in their midst.

NEXT morning the first Tribbensite to read the paper found that Bodger had become the best advertisement of Surrey-Sussex. The principal daily had half a column on the cable page headed "Plucky Rescue— Gallantry of Two

Well-known Actors— Old Man Snatched From the Flames." In the report, Bodger's forcible abduction from the perfectly safe hall of Tribbens, and the dragging of him through the umbrella-stand was made to appear as the heroic exploit of two dauntless super-men. It was hinted that his struggles were the result of abject fear. No one had the courage to convey the news to the victim. But the marked paper was sent up to him by Alice, the prehistoric serving-maid, just before breakfast. There was no sign for five minutes. Then an upstairs door was heard to open and slam like a 12-inch gun and a few fragments of the valuable journal fluttered down into the hall.

23: Gold In His Teeth

The Lone Hand Oct 1913

THREE men of the Domain sat in attitudes of dejection in the shade of a giant Moreton Bay fig tree and stared at two figures standing somewhat apart on the rise overlooking busy Woolloomooloo Bay. One was a spruce and brawny policeman, the other a particularly abject member of their own order.

“ ‘E thinks ‘es safe so long as ‘e keeps near Murphy,” whined the largest and fattest of the three under the fig tree.

The man with the chewed straw hat groaned and rolled into a sort of natural couch formed by two roots. “So ‘e is—unless yer can think o’ some way ter scare ‘im orf.”

“Or ter get Murphy ter scare ‘im!” sneered the third man, an unpleasant-looking person with a drooped eyelid.

“ ‘Ow can yer manage that?” whined the fat man, who foresaw difficulties in everything.

“ ‘Ow erbout tellin’ Murphy somethin’ ‘orrible erbout ‘im?” suggested Straw Hat.

“Well,” sighed the fat man, “I carn’t think o’ nothin’ ‘orrible enuf ” He stretched himself but and put his hat over his face as if to signify that the problem was quite beyond him. But he presently lifted his old boxer to add a postscript. “Any’ow ‘oo’s goin’ ter tell Murphy ? I ain’t!” He replaced the hat as if it were a pot lid and settled down to simmer.

The other two, somewhat depressed by the fat man’s early resignation from the board, stared moodily across the stretch of sunlit grass and tried to think of something to say. The dossier on the ridge hovered miserably like a tattered vulture in the vicinity of the still, rock-like policeman.

Then the voice of the acidulated member with the drooped eyelids cut the accumulated silence like a knife.

“ ‘Ow would it be ter tell Murphy ‘e was follerin’ ‘im round’? Praps ‘e ain’t noticed ‘im?”

The straw hat man started up from his root bed.

“I bet ‘e ain’t!” he cried. “Murphy never saw anythin’ in ‘is life!”

“But ‘oo’s goin’ ter tell ‘im?” whined the fat man, fearful that the hot duty would devolve on him.

“I’ll do it, Fatty,” growled the man of ideas. “Don’t you get in a sweat! You lie where you are an’ keep yourself cool!”

Fatty grunted defiantly. “That’s jus’ what I was going ter do!”

Without saying further words, the self-elected envoy dragged himself to his feet and set off, the other two watching him furtively from the grateful shade.

They saw him pass by the seeker of protection and plod straight up to the park policeman, whom he hailed and addressed respectfully from a distance of about three paces. Murphy seemed to grant him a disdainful audience, and to dismiss promptly with a few sharp words. As the envoy marched away, he looked after him in a terribly searching manner. Then suddenly he seemed to wrench his attention off the unpleasant object and focus it on some playing children.

The envoy returned sweating and in a state of nervous irritation.

"Blarst 'im!" he ejaculated, and sat down in the shade again.

"Did yer tell 'im?" enquired Fatty, who, like most inactive people, was never anxious for the latest news from the front.

"Yes, I tole 'im! If 'e don't 'unt Toey it won't be my fault!"

The man with the straw hat tactfully refrained from asking questions until he should have cooled down. But he ventured a suggestion.

"When yer rested, Mick, we'll get a move on. I bet 'e's only waitin' fer us ter go ter 'unt Toey. Them Johns never likes ter let yer see they're hactin' on yer information."

The fat man stirred like one troubled by evil dreams. "I was jus' gettin' comfortable 'ere!" he complained. "This 'ere's th' bes' side of th' park ter-day, what with th' breeze an' all."

Nobody paid any attention to him.

"Come on," said the messenger presently. He struggled to the perpendicular and waited till the other two had risen. The three drifted away in silence.

As soon as the stone gateway of the Botanical Gardens had reluctantly swallowed them, Constable Murphy allowed his eyes to wander to the wavering Toey. He advanced two steps threateningly and waved one blue serge arm. "Get out o' this, yon! If I see you bangin' round here any more!"

But the horrified Toey was already scuttling away at top speed beyond the range of spoken threats.

Constable Murphy clasped his hands behind him and resumed his pleasant beat.

The Domain is not wide enough for a man to keep out of the way of two sets of enemies'. So, after a day and a night's dodging, Toey humbly made application to be received again into the society of his fellows. This was exactly what they had aimed at; but like good diplomatists they made the concession grudgingly.

"What made yer go an' foller 'im roun' like er dorg?" piteously asked Fatty, when the unfortunate breach had been healed.

The returned prodigal immediately became gloomy. "You know!" he replied meaningly.

The man with the straw hat showed signs of anger. "Well, wot if we did? he yelped. "If any of us blokes 'ad a gold crown on a tooth, and we 'adn't 'ad a drink fer days, d'ye think th' bloke wot 'ad it would kick up a row erbout pullin' th' blanky thing out?" His speech ended in a sort of staccato scream. Toey wilted where he sat and looked round hopelessly for support. There was none forthcoming. Fatty plucked a grass stalk and looked away. The man with the drooped eyelid abstractedly gnawed one end of his rat-tail moustache.

"A decent cobber," continued the straw hat moralist severely, "a decent cobber wouldn't keep a bit o' blanky gold in 'is mouth w'en other cobbers was starvin roun' 'im!" He emphasised his words by spitting on the path immediately under a notice which implored the public not to do so.

The man with the crown looked thoroughly miserable. "Look 'ere! If this 'ere thing come orf, I'd near go barmy with toothache!"

"No yer wouldn't," declared the straw hatter. "That there blanky tooth's dead long ergo!"

"It 'ud ache, I tell yer!"

"Well let's 'ave a try eny'ow!" He advanced eagerly on the patient and looked disgusted when he shrank back with one hand over his closed mouth.

"You are frightened! I ain't goin' ter hurt yer!"

Fatty became suddenly interested and sat up. "Be er man now, Toey! Let 'im try!"

The man with the drooped eyelid sneered. "Let 'im 'ave 'er try, carn't ver!"

"I ain't goin' ter get toothache fer nobody!"

"Aw, a drop er beer 'ull soon stop toothache!"

"Wot's toothache any'ow! It don't kill yer!"

"You won't get no toothache at all! Come on now, Toey! Be er sport!"

"Yes, be er sport! Let 'im pull th' flamin' thing out an' get rid of it! Wot th' 'll's th' good of it in there?"

"I tell yer I WON'T!" The badgered Toey backed away from the wolfish three. But the light was almost gone and the roots of the Moreton Bay are brutal things to walk among. As he retreated, one of the ridges caught his heel, and he pitched fairly on his shoulders.

They were on him in a minute, and might have triumphed only for his strong boots, teeth and lungs. With Fatty doubled up with a kick in the vest, Mick shaking and nursing a bitten finger, and someone running towards them in answer to the lusty yells, they reckoned it was good enough to get. They hurried indignantly from the scene and were promptly lost in the shadows.

Constable Murphy, somewhat breathless after his sprint, was mad when he discovered the identity of the howler for help. "Oh, it's you, is it?..Well, what's up with you?"

Toey stood up looking fearfully ashamed of himself. "Er— some of th' blokes was jus' tryin' ter get somethink orf me."

The professional suspicions of Murphy were aroused at once. "What was it?"

"Me crown," faltered the dosser.

"Your what?"

"Me crown, sir—th' bit o' gold on me tooth."

The little group of night prowlers and passers-by, attracted by the yelling, laughed unfeelingly.

"What do they want your crown for? To buy beer with, I suppose?"

"Yessir —at least I think so, sir."

"Do you want to do anything about it?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Well don't get kicking up a row again or I'll lock you all up. I'm getting sick of loafers, especially you."

He retired majestically. Toey trembled violently and, having no home to disperse to, went rapidly elsewhere. The fugitive three collapsed on the grass when they reached the other end of the Domain.

"It's no use tryin ter git it orf 'im be force," groaned Fatty. He put both hands tenderly on his kicked vest. "'Ope this kick ain't th' start of internal troubles. I don' wanter go inter 'orspittle!"

Mick of the dropped eyelid critically inspected his nipped forefinger by the light of the arc lamp. "If that there finger's poisoned, dy'e know what I'll deter that cow?" (He proceeded to give full details of the tragedy).

The man with the straw hat listened impatiently till Mick had finished, then unfolded his plan. The central idea was that Fatty was to hand over the half-crown he had found that afternoon to Mick, and that Mick was to go forth alone, chum up with the golden galleon and make him as drunk as possible. The tooth burglary could then be accomplished with ease in some dark corner of the park.

Fatty, who was lying flat as usual, sat up when the straw hatter had quite done.

"Ain't nobody but me investin' nothin'?" he whined. "Serpose I'm the only share'older, what sorter cut do I git out of it?"

"You'll get a blanky good cut, don't you fear!"

"So I orter! Why can't yous blokes put nothin' in?"

"Aw, tork sense! We ain't been pickin' up 'arf-crowns!"

“Wot are these tooth-crowns worth eny’ow ? Th’ blanky thing might be brass fer all you know!”

Mick cut in impatiently. “You don’t know nothin’, Fatty! All these ’ere things wot they puts in teeth is pure gold— five or six quid’s worth of it! They melts down sovrins ter fill up teeth with. Ain’t that good enuf for yer?”

“There yer are!” barked the man with the straw hat. “You heard wot ’e said! Now give’s yer ’arf-crown an’ shut up!”

The coin changed hands without further fuss.

“I’ll git arfter ’im ter-morrer,” muttered Mick determinedly, as he stowed the coin away. The fat man lying prone on the grass, sighed tremulously and clasped his hands over his stomach. A nervous night wind went shuddering through the trees and shadows.

Next morning at ten o’clock, Mick set out on his quest and the man in the straw hat started to shepherd Fatty the capitalist through what proved to be a day of doubt and agony. The stout investor was so worried that he could not sleep even in the choice positions picked out for him by his absurdly solicitous guardian. In his worst moments, he drew fearful word pictures of Mick in town having a lone, illegal drunk with the embezzled half-crown. The day and the patience of the straw hatter wore away together, and he was transported with joy when, about three in the afternoon, Mick was observed coming back alone. When he arrived, he was found to be in a towering rage. Handing two shillings to the agonised Fatty, he cursed a little to relieve his feelings and explained.

“I bin walkin’ th’ whole blanky day! Muster walked near twenty mile before I come across th’ cow in a pub down George Street. And what d’ye think ? ’E was full up ter th’ neck an wouldn’t reckernise me! ’E ’ad three sailors with ’im. I don’t know ’oo was buyin’ th’ beer but there they was. Well I done me best, but I couldn’t get ’im away. Th’ blanky sailors threatened to punch me on th’ nose if I didn’t clear out. So I cleared.”

The other two sat appalled at the news. Then the straw hatter cried, “Where did ’e get th’ money?”

“Muster went through someone,” muttered Fatty brokenly. He jingled his two shillings change during the thoughtful interval that followed.

“I ’ad two drinks,” announced the envoy sternly. “Two drinks I ’ad, an’ I d— n well earned ’em!”

“That’s orright, Mick,” whispered the brooding financier.

The shadow of the great grief still hung over them when night came again to hide their misery, and the eternal candles of the stars twinkled on the blue mantelpiece of Heaven.

Later on, three sorrowful figures issued from the silent place of trees and wandered disconsolately towards Woolloomooloo. The regular thump- thump-

thump of a Salvation Army drum became faintly audible as they turned into busy William Street. They found the noise, the torches and the usual crowd in one of the side lanes and drifted along to see what was doing.

The captain, an energetic, red-faced man with a heavy moustache, was jumping about inside the ring, clapping his hands explosively and leading a few shy lassies and dejected male members in the concluding verse of a home-made hymn. When he had shoved them through it, he whipped off his cap, half-wheeled, and waved it cheerily at the street: "Well, dear friends, I'm shoor I'm glad an' thankful ter see so many of you 'ere ter night listenin' to th' words o' joy that—"

Something fell into the ring— something in the shape of a man that held its face in both hands and moaned, "I sold me crown! I sold me (hic) golden crown f'r drink, an' now I'm suff'rin' — pains of Hell!"

The crowd murmured excitedly; three men in the background shouted with rage and tried vainly to break their way through the press; but the captain with a joyful cry threw one arm round the shoulder of the kneeling convert in the helpful, loving attitude so often seen in religious prints.

"Hallyloolyer!" he roared. "Our brother 'as found repentance! Cheer 'im onward with a verse!" Clapping his hands vigorously, he danced beside the man with raging toothache and led his lay figures in an absurdly appropriate verse;

*" 'E'as lorst'is goldin crown—own!
'E 'as lorst 'is goldin crown!
But with 'elp an care
'E will get in w'ere
'E will FIND 'IS GOLDIN CROWN!"*

And when the words of cheer had been wailed and howled, and the delighted leader was about to erupt in a thanksgiving speech, a cold, cutting voice from the back called out, "'E'll find 'is goldin crown in th' pawnshop, an' that's jus' where the cow put it."

24: Doing Good

The Lone Hand July 1913

THE solemn-faced office boy with the enormous spectacles took up one of the pile of filled and addressed envelopes lying before him on the counter, held it in front of his face like one performing a sacred rite, and ran his tongue slowly and lovingly over the gummed part of the flap. Then he laid the thing face down on the blotting pad and carefully massaged its back with the side of his clenched fist till he was quite sure that the flap had been well and truly laid. Finally he interred it reverently and without indecent haste in the leather post bag, and turned to take up the next. Time, one minute. There were quite 300 flaps to be gummed down, so, at a rough estimate, he had five full hours' work ahead of him, exclusive of interruptions. He was feeding tigerishly on the second envelope when there was a shout of anger from the manager's room, adjoining.

"Hey, you! Didn't I tell you to get a sponge for that work?"

The boy stopped dead and gazed reverently through his immense glasses.

"Yes sir!"

"Well, why didn't you *do* so?"

"Oh, I don't mind licking them, sir. So I thought I'd save the money for you, sir!"

A chair fell over in the manager's room, and a flushed man of fifty or so appeared in the doorway. His grey hair was rumpled, and his hands were full of papers.

"Who asked you whether you minded licking them? I didn't!"

The boy flinched slightly in his awful, ready-made clothes; but his great spectacles heliographed righteousness. He was a religious boy, full to the neck with high moral principles, and possessing armor-plated views about his duty to God and less tremendous matters.

"No, sir," he faltered, but with the merest suggestion of moral superiority, "you didn't ask me, sir; but I just thought I would go on quietly in the old way, sir, and save expense to the office."

"Who asked you to save expense to the office," barked the persistent manager.

"No —nobody, sir!"

"Well in future you do what you're told, d'ye hear? Get that sponge now and don't let's have any more balderdash about saving expense. I'll attend to that part of the business."

"It's late now, sir," intoned the faithful boy, "and these letters have to catch the mail. Can I lick these, sir?" A true-till-death expression spread over his pasty countenance as he waited open-mouthed for the verdict.

"No; you can't lick them! And if you want to know why, it's because it makes me thirsty to look at you!"

The manager turned away angrily, but instantly faced round again.

"Get that sponge now, and be quick about it."

Instead of going back into his room as he had intended, he bundled morosely along the corridor to give the chief clerk some instructions.

The boy-martyr, left to himself, took down his new straw hat from its peg and placed it carefully on his head, preparatory to walking round to the firm's stationers. As he passed the door of the manager's room he drew a little paper-covered booklet from his pocket and slipped inside. A moment later he emerged and proceeded gravely downstairs, wearing his accustomed air of religious placidity— the glassy calm that is popularly supposed to indicate a soul riding safely at anchor.

The instant he arrived back with his purchase there was an explosive yell of "Boy!"

Hastily hanging up his hat, he tiptoed to the manager's room, where he found his chief sitting back in his swing chair with the booklet open in his hand.

"Did you leave this temperance tract here, my boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"For *me!*" (the manager's whiskified shout seemed to fill the whole building).

"Ye—yes, sir!"

"And what the devil do you mean by it? Are you in this office as a missionary, or what?"

The boy flinched— but only slightly. He was a born reformer, who had carefully keyed himself up to the correct martyr pitch. "I am only trying to do good, sir!" he bleated.

The manager— a kindly and sympathetic man at heart for all his bellowing— calmly threw the irritating fragment of temperance literature into his brimming basket, and waved the lad from his presence. "For God's sake try and mind your own business or you'll be getting into trouble! If I drink, that's *my* affair; and if you make me thirsty by licking envelopes in front of me, that's *my* affair too. Attend to your work, my boy, and don't run round bothering people like a meddling old woman. That'll do."

He slammed the door of his busy den on the squeaking heels of the reformer, and sat down to attack his letters. The boy went calmly back to his unimportant occupation.

Next morning but one the chief clerk stepped into the manager's room wearing a broad grin.

"Here's a letter from Westbury I thought you might like to see."

He laid the typewritten sheet before the manager and stepped back to observe the effect. The manager adjusted his glasses and read as follows:

Messrs. Aston, Lee & Co.

Dear Sirs, —We are in receipt of your favor of the 14th instant, and are glad to note that the order handed you by our Mr. Renn will be filled early next week. With regard to the enclosed catalogue or prospectus, we regret to say that we are unable to find anything in it likely to be of interest to our customers. We are, therefore, returning it to you with our best thanks. —Yours faithfully,

GILBERT, RENN & CO.

per F. GILBERT.

The manager looked over his glasses at the chief clerk. "What catalogue is he talking about?"

Very gravely the chief clerk laid before the manager a copy of the same tract the religious office boy had inflicted on him. It was an immoderate temperance outburst entitled, *What Can be Better than Water?*

"Boy!" howled the manager.

The martyr appeared.

"Did you send this confounded thing in this letter to Gilbert, Renn & Co.?"

The boy's eyes goggled apprehensively behind the immense glasses.

"Yes, sir! But I only wanted to do—"

"Well *don't* do it! I *won't* have you interfering with the firm's correspondence, d'ye hear? If you want to do this sort of thing, do it in your own time, and keep it apart from your work here. Do you *understand?*"

"Ye—s, sir."

"Very good! Bear it in mind. All right!"

The door closed. The manager turned disgustedly to the head of the office staff.

"Better write to old Gilbert and tell him it must have been included by mistake. And, Brownly, keep an eye on that kid and see that he doesn't make a fool of the office again. He's a decent youngster and only needs knocking into shape. Pity he's so full of this teetotal rot."

The interview then terminated, and the morning routine of the office continued undisturbed.

All went well until the afternoon mail arrived. Out of the snowdrift of letters, the chief clerk, who opened and distributed all the correspondence to the staff, sorted a dozen protesting letters.

Each of the writers had received a copy of *What can he Better Than Water?* It had apparently gone forth broadcast, primly attached with pins to receipts, polite requests for orders, acknowledgements of orders received, and briefly-worded requests for prompt settlements.

Most of the correspondents jested about it in a condescending way; but the prompt settlement group were really fierce. One of them asked bluntly if the firm thought his inability to pay was due to drink?

The superheated manager arranged these damning documents before him, then sent formally for the doer of good.

The wretched but intrepid youth promptly slunk into his august presence and, entrenched behind his spectacles, waited the decision of the court like a glassed-in rabbit.

"This is a nice state of affairs!" blustered the manager, waving the letters like a towel. "Here are a dozen more insults from people who have got copies of your d—d tract! Didn't I tell you that you were not to send—"

"But, please sir, I sent those out *before* you told me!"

The manager held his breath for just one second. Then it burst out in a protesting shout.

"Surely to goodness you knew that you had no earthly right to use the firm's correspondence to distribute these things! *Surely* you knew *that!*"

The boy hung his head and mumbled wretchedly, "I was only trying to do good, sir!"

The manager swung round on his chair and hurled his valuable fountain pen into the basket. Then he blew off some more of his honest rage in intemperate language. Through the crash of profanity could be heard such scraps as "What can a man do!" "—sort of thing people never forget!" "—can't be expected to run a business with maniacs!" Presently he ran down, and notified his return to partial sanity by grovelling for and rescuing his pen from its temporary grave.

"Now this is the end of it I hope!" he thundered at last, "You didn't send it to any *more*, did you?"

The frozen boy peered helplessly at him through his motor searchlights. His silence seemed ominous.

"I say I hope this is the *last* of it! Now *don't* tell me—"

"Please, sir," squeaked the reformer in a feverish voice, "*I sent it to about three hundred, sir!*"

There was dead silence for three seconds.

A distraught manager looked at a shaken chief clerk and said brokenly, "Did you hear *that*? He says he sent out three hundred! *There's* push for you! *There's* hustle, eh? Clever lad!...." And he started once more to be unfit for

publication. Gradually he became aware that the boy was snivelling quietly behind his shirt-cuff.

"*All right!* All right, my boy! Don't stand there blubbering now! Go back to your work, and stick to it like a sensible lad, or I'll have to send you away— and I don't want to do that if I can help it. Run away, now!"

The door closed softly behind a very broken-up reformer, and the manager went to his private safe and extracted a flask of whisky and a glass. After he had swallowed a stiff nip and wiped his moustache, he turned to the waiting clerk. "You'll have to square this the best way you can, Brownly. Better dictate a circular letter to all these people, apologising and explaining that the thing was included by a new boy who doesn't know the ropes. Tell whoever has charge of the overdue accounts to go easy for a few months on the people who got them. This rot puts us in an awful hole. I don't think that kid will break out again. If he *does*— well, I'll shoot him straight out of the place. That's all, I think."

Brownly's diplomatic letter, which was dictated, typed, and posted away in record time, staved off the avalanche of protesting letters which would otherwise have come down on the office. But, here and there an isolated correspondent got in first with his satirical or indignant efforts. The replies were just numerous enough to keep the office heads swearing for a week.

The reformer, meanwhile, stuck strictly to his job and began to be of some real use in the place. The manager, who believed in dropping occasional words of encouragement, hovered at the counter one day and asked him kindly how he was getting on. The doer of good goggled nervously and made grateful sounds, but exhibited no signs of his old trouble. However, next morning he shuffled into the fatherly head's room and pushed at him a handsomely-bound volume with gilt edges and emblazoned covers. "I'd like you to read that, sir— and think it over!"

The manager took the book and looked hard at the flashing title — *Whither Are You Going ?*

"Very good, my boy," he said quietly.

When the reformer had gone the victim swore softly to himself and dropped the book into a spare drawer muttering,

"I suppose I brought that on myself!"

He allowed it to rest there for a few days, then fished it out and sent it back to the owner, congratulating himself that the incident was honorably concluded.

Next morning, on entering his room, he saw another book lying on the out-drawn flap of his roll-top desk. He picked it up and scanned the gold-lettered cover: *The Safer Way (Companion volume to Whither Are You Going?)*

He turned hurriedly to the title page where a careful, roundhand inscription gravely notified "This Book is the Property of Charles Herbert Parlsmere."

"Charles!" shouted the manager.

Charles Herbert Parlsmere, Moral Reformer and Doer of Good, appeared almost instantly, and stood waiting expectantly behind his circular window panes.

"I'm afraid I'm too busy to read this book, Charles. Thank you all the same."

Charles very reluctantly received his property. "I— I'm not in a hurry for it, sir. Perhaps, when you're not so busy, sir?"

"No, my boy, I'm afraid *not*! Run and see if Mr. Brownly has my mail sorted." The moral attack had failed under the fierce pressure of business.

No further insidious reforming attempts were made on the manager through the agency of the printing press.

But, about a week later, the little humorless collector— a capable and very valuable member of the staff waited on the manager and dumped an immense and intolerable grievance before him in many words. He belonged, or rather he *was*, one of the shining lights of a small, but intensely enthusiastic sect calling themselves the Universal Church of Prime Gospel Celebrators. All his spiritual affairs were in apple pie order and, as he often assured enquiring strangers, he was only waiting for his call. He considered himself quite safe and beyond the reach of doubt. But the indomitable doer of good, after being light-heartedly repulsed all round the office, had barged into him, told him that he was on the wrong tack altogether, and urged him to up anchor and run for spiritual shelter to his (the doer's) own particular church. By way of proof he had burdened the furiously protesting collector with a handful of his own brand of religious literature, all of which the collector had very carefully refrained from reading.

The puzzled manager thought for a moment, then inquired somewhat testily, "I see, Yentnor. What do you want me to do?"

The collector sniffed unhappily. "If you would only tell him, sir, that I don't want to be worried?"

"I will do that, certainly! Ask him to come here, will you?"

The Prime Gospeller darted out like a ferret, and returned in quick order with the apprehensive reformer.

"Charles, Mr. Yentnor tells me that you've been worrying him about religion. Now, I don't want to have any more of this sort of thing here. I told you before "

"Please, sir, I only wanted to—"

"That's enough, my boy! I know exactly what you're going to say! You wanted to do good, didn't you? But don't you remember that I told you to keep that sort of thing apart from your work here?"

"But, sir," whined the doer, "I am keeping it apart! I only work for the Good Cause in lunch time!"

"Yes!" chattered the miserable and impatient collector, "I can't get my lunch, sir! You don't know how he comes and *argues!*" There was a world of bitterness in the word as the Prime Gospeller spat it out.

The manager looked sternly at the doer. "Have you been bothering Mr. Yentnor intentionally? You mustn't pester people, my boy!"

The boy looked solemnly at his chief.

"I was only trying to save him, sir! They all resist, sir! We have to conquer, sir!"

Mr. Yentnor, despite the fact that he was in his reverend manager's presence, omitted an inarticulate cry of rage. The heated manager, who valued his financial bulldog more than the rest of the office staff put together, then uttered the final and most impressive warning:

"Look here! I've had all I can stand of this racket. I've put up with a lot of your interference because you didn't seem to know any better; but don't you think you are going to mess about here as long as you like. If you can't mind your own business, you'd better get your hat and clear out before we have any more unpleasantness."

"The good work *must* go on!" quavered the zealot.

"*Don't talk like that to me!*" shouted the manager. "This is a business house— not a church !"

"I— I only tried to do good, sir— *and you wouldn't let me!*"

The head of the firm stared murderously at the reformer.

"Ye—s, that's quite right! You tried to do good to me, and to the customers, and to Mr. Yentnor here —and none of us would let you!" (Pause). "This is a d—d ungrateful place, my boy! I guess the best plan is to part before we have another row!" He turned to the triumphant Gospeller. "Yentnor, would you mind asking Mr. Brownly to step in here for a moment?"

The chief clerk promptly appeared blinking humorous enquiry through his eyeglasses. The manager addressed him very solemnly: "Mr. Brownly, Charles is going to leave us. We haven't responded to his efforts, so he is going away."

"I am undaunted!" proclaimed the terrified reformer in a shrill key.

"Yes, but *we're* not!" retorted the manager. "Brownly, just bring along the wages book and the necessary cash."

Brownly departed full of laughter, reappearing in a few minutes with the requisites for dismissal.

The signing of the book and the acceptance of the few coins was an outwardly solemn ceremony rather like the signing of a treaty. When all had been concluded, the departing doer of good fumbled his hat and squeaked, "I— I'm not leaving of my *own* accord!"

His late employer smiled grimly.

"Do you want me to mention that in the testimonial I am posting to-night?"

The reformer made no reply.

"Good-bye, my boy," said the manager in friendly fashion.

Charles limply shook the extended then mechanically agitated the hands of Brownly and Yentnor in turn.

That little ceremony finished, he made his dazed exit.

The party of three dispersed without unseemly mirth. For the rest of the tragic morning the reformer's unoccupied desk stood like an uninhabited island in the lake of books and business.

Towards the end of the afternoon a worried-looking accountant, laden with several open books, hurried to the manager's room. He had made a dreadful discovery, which took a lot of explanation, very painful to listen to.

Brownly gave both parties his moral support during the ordeal. The plain facts of the scare were that the stamps were twenty-five shillings short. And the stamps had been the special charge of the doer of good.

The accountant fully expected some acidulated remarks on the office book-keeping. But the manager, much to his surprise and relief, when he had got all the facts, sat back in his chair and chuckled as if someone had just told him a good yarn.

"Well that's d—d amusing, isn't it! While he was trying to reform me and everybody else, he was sneaking the stamps. Wonder what the young hypocrite spent it on?"

The accountant who, like most of his tidy trade, hated disordered figures, smiled wanly. "Er— what is to be done, sir? I mean, how shall I square the account?"

The chief laughed and clicked a sovereign out of his gold case. To it he added a couple of half-crowns dredged from his trouser pocket. "I guess it's up to me. I got him into the office, and it's worth the money to have got him out. If he'd stayed on he might have been more expensive."

The accountant humbly received the twenty-five shillings. "It's very sad to think of such a lad going wrong, sir."

"Think so, Evans? Perhaps, though, he never made any attempts to reform you?"

Brownly laughed mischievously.

"I'd give a bit more to know how he spent it," said the good-humored chief, and turned back to his interminable papers.

LIGHT was cast on the dark spot some four days after the dismissal, when a nervous clerical gentleman came in to call on Master Charles Parlsmere. He was not in the place more than three minutes, but, being of a garrulous disposition, he found time and opportunity to tell Brownly, who interviewed him, that "Master Parlsmere was an unusually earnest lad, and had contributed no less than twenty-five shillings to the mission fund within the past month."

He seemed wildly astonished to learn that Master Parlsmere had left for good, and hovered undecidedly at the counter before drifting downstairs. He never came back.

The manager was delighted when Brownly transmitted the news. "This," he announced, with a wave of the arm, "this rounds off Charles *beautifully!* I consider that I've had my money's worth and an encore. I forgive him for trying to reform me. The account is closed."

25: The McSozzle Ministry

The Lone Hand Jan 1914

"YOU might try and get a picture of Blithers," said the editor, amiably, to McSozzle, his wandering cartoonist. "I don't think Blithers' lot will last much longer, and we might as well use them up while they are on hand." He smiled again at the depressed cartoonist, drooping before him in the spare Vienna chair. "If Blithers isn't to be had, you might catch Snazzle, the Attorney-General— I don't think we have had him yet. Then there are Fuddleton and Wasteley, the Treasurer. Any of that crowd would do nicely for next issue."

He smiled again encouragingly by way of farewell, and turned back to his work.

And the sad cartoonist said him never a word, but rose up slowly like a man emerging from a mud bath and went forth and drank— drank swiftly and in dead silence, until he felt that he had had enough. (It was really more than twice too much.) When his straw hat was hanging precariously on the last rearward angle of his skull, and his heart was bursting with his wrongs, a friend drifted in, and to him the disconsolate artist raved:

"D'ye know what I've got to do now? I've got to go and do Blithers— Blithers, the commonplace, putty-face blob! I've got to go and draw him so that people will know him right off! And the !*?!*! blighter has about as much individuality and character as a cow! I can take you out into the street now and show you half a dozen men just like Blithers. They're so like Blithers that if he saw one of them on the other side of a mirror-frame he'd think he was looking at his own reflection. And yet I've got to go and draw the cow so that everyone will know him from the hundreds of other Blithers that— Oh, let's have a drink. Hey, Miss!"

When he had swallowed that drink and the return drink, and the attempt to change the subject had failed, the cartoonist erupted again.

"Yes; and it's the same cursed story with Fuddleton, and Snazzle, and Wasteley, and all the rest of them! They're just smug, tidy, commonplace waxworks! There's about as much fun in drawing them as in making pictures of bars of soap. They're all built on the same rotten pattern! And, just because the dull brutes are in politics instead of being in gaol, I've got to follow them round and search them for the individuality they haven't got, and make pictures of them so that— Oh, bah! Let's have another! Hey, Miss!"

They drank again while the cash register tolled the death of a shilling.

There was beer froth on the cartoonist's upper lip when he resumed, and he made no attempt to wipe it off.

"What makes me— makes me so wild is 'cause I see splen ('scuse me, ol' man!) *splen-d'd* bits character kickin' 'bout. Why can't I go draw character where I see it, eh? 'Spose I see ol' man sell'n' bootlaces— dirty ol' man sellin' bootlaces? Why can't I tell bar soap poltish'n go th' devil an' draw ol' man— dirty ol' man with character, eh? Why devil should I be draw'n' man jus' 'cause he's pol'tics? No man pol'tics now got any charact'r! All modern men blanky bars o' soap— peas in pod— anything yer like— *all same!*"

He drank again, swept the accumulated froth from his lip with a regal gesture, and rambled on.

"In ol' days *plenty* good character politics! Look at Parkes— *all* character! Looker Robertson— *all* charact'r! George Reid— *byooful* subject— *fuller* charact'r! Those days men let their whiskers grow— let their beards grow— let *everythin'* grow!"

One waving hand swept the friend's glass to the floor. The cartoonist was profoundly affected, and would not resume until the damage had been paid for and another filled glass set before the sufferer.

"Now— not a blanky bit o' whisker, an' not one of 'em got pluck let hair grow! Why, it's much as somer them can do ter keep from gluein' their hair down to the back o' their necks like fancy sockers!"

The straw hat suddenly lost its hold and fell to the floor with a hollow rattle. He picked it up again with difficulty and put it on crooked.

"I tell you straight, ole Phil May himself couldn't do anythin' with these blighters! Is that your glasser mine, eh? Oh, orright! No charact'r—*all same!* My word. I wish they'd give me jobber formin' Ministry—'Smajesty's commish'n! I'd get 'em a lot that 'u'd be worth lookin' at! I shay! That's splen—splend'd idea... Formin' Ministry — *all* charact'r! No blanky politics— *all* charact'r.... what?.... Gotter go? Well, have 'nother one 'fore yer go! Yesh, ol' man— I 'sist! J us' one more! Miss!"

When he came to, or resumed observation, he was holding on tight to the counter of a small newsagency. And the woman behind the counter was holding up a full hand of postcards and saying, "Will that be all?"

He had a misty idea that she had been asking him the same question for some considerable time— perhaps hours.

He pulled himself back from the verge of sleep. "Cert'nly," he sighed, "that'll be all!" And he shook himself and added with great dignity, "Isn't that 'nuf?"

"It all depends what you want them for," said the patient lady behind the counter.

Suddenly he recollected his great purpose. Waving his arms he shouted triumphantly, "Dism'ss th' Guv'ment! Dism'ss th' lot of 'em! *No good!*"

"There s your postcards!" muttered the lady uneasily, thrusting the little packet into his hand.

"Guv'ment no charact'r! Down with th' cows!" He waved the postcards aloft, and was immediately blinded by a sudden shower of descending literature from the string he had shaken. Then he went out into the night, and clambered dozedly about the noisy, unstable earth until he lost track of himself.

Away in the backblocks of his mind he saw himself sitting down on the kerbstone and saying, "I won't foller him any longer! Sick of th' cow!" And sitting there, he watched himself go resolutely round the corner. At that weary moment he did not care if he never saw himself again. The sight of his own back depressed him, and he fell asleep. He woke to utter darkness and silence.

"Dead!" he wailed. "*Dead f'r years an' years!*"

The glare of the match showed him that he had miraculously arrived in his own room. The bundle of postcards on the floor reminded him for the fifteenth time of his Great Resolve, and, in panic haste lest he should sleep again, he dragged the heavy table across the room to his chair. The pen and ink were captured pretty easily, and enough ink was saved from the carpet to do the trick. Very solemnly he sat down and, on the first card, wrote briefly to the Hon. the Premier, informing him that he was an utter failure from an artistic point of view, and that his services would not be required any longer. He was instructed to draw a week's salary in advance from the Treasury and vacate his office at once. Similar sharp notes were written to the rest of the Ministry; but the Attorney-General, a very kindly man, was informed in a postscript that any future application of his for employment as a public character would be favorably considered by the writer, providing that he (the Attorney-General) either let his hair grow down to his shoulders or cultivated a set of Dundreary whiskers.

"So much f'r th' Blither Ministry," soliloquised the unmaker of Governments.

As he groped for his hat he remembered that he had not summoned His Excellency the Governor to town from his summer residence to receive the resignations of the out-going Government. Fortunately, he had a postcard left for this purpose. The despatch was soon written, and then he went forth again and wasted a lot of time trying to burgle his correspondence into a penny-in-the-slot weighing machine. A kindly bystander who knew not what he did, found him and guided him to a pillarbox. The despatches safely posted, he got a horse-cab— a very old horse-cab driven by a small, red-haired angry man— and set out to find and form his Ministry. He had had his Premier in view ever since he started out, and he told the cabman to drive with all speed to the fried

fish shop that kept and was kept by the future head of the State— an enormously fat man with a bare, egg-shaped skull and a ridiculously small tuft of chin whisker.

The fat man was good at humoring alcoholics, so, as soon as the position was offered to him he accepted with joy, shook hands with the delighted cartoonist, and helped him back into his cab.

"I'll bring rest of Ministers down here," gurgled the great McSozzle from the door of his chariot.

"Bring 'em all down!" cried the new Premier, with a hospitable wave of his hand towards the fried fishery, and waddled back to attend to a customer.

About twenty minutes later a young city constable saw a swaying, shouting crowd in the centre of a shadowy city by-way, and, hurrying up, found a man in a straw hat arguing persuasively with a wooden-legged man with bootlaces over his arm. The wooden-legged man, for some reason or other, was in a stuttering rage.

"What's the matter here?" asked the constable, elbowing his way in.

McSozzle looked round and made a despairing gesture. "I've jus' offered him portfolio of Labor in new Cab'net! Dam fool won't take it! Mus' be *one* wooden leg in new Guv'mint!"

" 'E's not goin' ter make a fool o' me!" proclaimed the wooden-legged man. "I know I've gotter wooden leg—"

"Yes," shouted McSozzle, angrily; "but you haven't got the only wooden leg in th' country! 'Spose you want ter be 'Torney-Gen'ral! Jus' like your blanky cheek. Why, I wouldn't make you 'Torney-Gen'r'l if you had a full set whiskers an' a glass eye *as well as* yer blanky wooden leg! Yer greedy cow! I won't have yer in Cab'net *at all!*"

He tacked across to his waiting cab, and the constable started to soothe the angry and bewildered seller of bootlaces, while the crowd lingered round inquisitively and guffawed.

McSozzle, the organiser and compiler of the First Really Picturesque Ministry, enlisted his Minister for Mines outside a waterside hotel. He was a large buck nigger, and McSozzle remarked, as he helped him into the partially ruined cab (the Hon. the Minister for Mines required a lot of help) that his face looked like a junk of coal, and furthermore, that it would always remind him of coal when he sat in the House. After driving away from the waterside pub with the Minister for Mines' boots dangling over the back step, McSozzle disappears into a legendary beer-haze. The one cab rapidly becomes a procession of cabs trotting aimlessly about the city and growing longer and longer as the night draws on. It is said by those who should know, that the Attorney-General was a wooden-legged saveloy merchant with one real hand and a hook; that the

Minister for Labor and Water Supply was a torpid Domainiac with a rubicund face and a nose that was one immense grog bouquet; that the Minister for Education was a gibbering and incredibly ugly Chinaman, who had to be terrorised by the hook-handed Attorney-General, into whose charge and cab he was solemnly delivered. You must imagine this caravan, steered by angry and mystified cabmen, click-clacking wearily about the dark streets in search of freak Ministers, at the whim of the delirious McSozzle, who, by this time, had lost all sense of proportion, and had appointed fourteen honorary Ministers.

The rest is chaos. McSozzle's Ministry, after interminable arguments, arrived somehow at the closed door of Sydney Government House— the mansion that hasn't sheltered a potentate since the Governor-General was evicted. And then or thereabouts they slept, in the glorious belief that McSozzle had been sent for, and that the country was theirs to govern.

26: The Four Organists

The Lone Hand March 1914

THE young policeman stood on the pavement by the shop windows and looked keenly at the barrel-organist; and the organist, an abject man in a battered felt hat, looked piteously at the constable and churned away desperately while his ancient machine wheezed and shrilled "Auld Lang Syne" from the gutter. A flaring placard hung on the pavement side of the organ. It proclaimed proudly— "Blind for Forty Years." This was what the constable was waiting to investigate. But, like a gentleman, he waited until the nervously expectant minstrel came to the end of the selection.

Then he stepped forward briskly.

"What have you got that sign up for? You're not blind, are you?"

The organist fumbled his hat-brim respectfully.

"No, sir; th' bloke wot owns this— Blind Dick Connors, sir— 'e was took bad larst night, sir, and I'm takin' it round to 'is clients."

"You're a relation of his, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, sir; I'm just 'is secketerry, sir."

"His what?"

The minstrel blushed unhappily. " 'Is secketerry, sir, I take 'im round, sir. Ever since 'is son went away, I been takin' 'im round."

The young policeman fingered his shaven chin thoughtfully and looked at the placard.

"You're sure you're not collecting this money for yourself?"

"Oh, no, sir!" (The organist writhed at the suggestion.)

"Because, if you were, it would be false pretences." He took a last long look at the placard, as if to impress it on his memory, and strolled off.

The grateful organist shifted a key, and, by turning the handle, made the appliance do dreadful things with the "Last Rose of Summer."

"The Rose" was about half mangled when three decayed men drifted unexpectedly out of a side street, and, seeing the minstrel, shambled over and dropped anchor in front of the organ. The organist, turning steadily with one hand, eyed them with apprehension. The three decayed men, for their part, gloated over him quite openly.

"I ain't goin' ter give yous blokes nothin'!" bleated the organist, suddenly, above the wheeze and whine of his blackmailing apparatus. It was getting near the end of the selection, and he would presently have to leave it and hurry round with the collecting tin. (Blind Dick's clients objected violently if they got too much melody for their money.)

"W'y don't yer let us 'elp yer?" growled the fattest of the three men of prey.

"Becos you'll want somethin' for yerselves!" shrieked the organist.

"Well, wot if we do?" shouted the man with the dropped eyelid— a very sinister looking person. "D'yer expect us ter work fer nothin'?"

"I don't want yer ter work at orl!" screamed the organist. "This 'ere thing ain't mine— I'm only managin' it fer ole Dick! I carn't go payin' blokes ter 'elp me !" (The selection here ended with a long shriek. The organist relinquished the greasy handle, and, taking up the collecting tin, waited watchfully for the three to move.)

The fat man extended his right hand with a commanding air. " 'Ere, you gimme that there tin! I'll do th' collectin' w'ile you keep th' machine goin'! Come on, now!"

The duly accredited manager shrank back.

"No yer don't, Fatty! I ain't goin' ter engage 'elp on this job; ole Dick wouldn't stand it."

" 'Oo th' 'ell cares fer ole Dick ?" demanded the fat man, valorously. He stepped off the pavement and stretched forth his hand again.

"Don't be a nark, now! Give us th' tin an' start th' machine!"

But the organ manager eluded him and darted towards the open door of a boot shop to collect the owner's weekly subscription.

"Th' cow!" sneered the man with the dropped eyelid. "There's a fair cow for yer! Won't even let us 'elp 'im with 'is rotten organ!"

Fatty spat on the pavement and looked angrily at the unguarded instrument. Suddenly he flung out a ragged arm at the third member of the band— a glumly silent individual with beady, thievish eyes. "Go an' turn the 'andle!" commanded Fatty, excitedly. The glum man hobbled eagerly to the machine and started turning at top speed,

"The Last Rose of Summer" started to hurry out as if it wanted to catch up to the rest of the season's crop.

"Wot'll I do?" asked the man with the dropped eyelid.

"C'lect on the other side of th' street!" directed Fatty, who was already perspiring with his executive duties.

"I ain't got no tin," demurred the new collector.

Fatty pushed him away with one podgy hand. "Take it in yer 'at!" he hissed. "Yer 'at looks better than a tin— more respectful like. I gotter stay 'ere an' watch fer— Look out! 'Ere 'e comes!"

The new collector turned tail and scuttled off across the busy street, just as the rightful manager issued tempestuously from the boot shop. "Leave that there machine alone, carn't yer?" he wailed, and hovered irresolutely, tin in

hand. The awful music continued to stream from the organ, beside which Fatty was proudly posed.

"Go on with th' collectin'!" he shouted, and pointed imperiously at the next place of business.

Then he added scornfully, "Don't you worry yerself, we'll keep it goin' for yer!"

The man with the tin looked wretchedly about him, and, evidently deciding that there was nothing else for it, scuffled in untidily to collect the dues of the next customer on the register. While he was inside, the man with the dropped eyelid hurried back gleefully, hat in hand, from the other side of the street.

"Eightpence," he confided hoarsely to Fatty. "Wot erbout it? 'Ow do we cut it up?"

"We'll cut it up later," said Fatty, very decidedly. "Give it ter me f'r th' present, we'll treat th' cow fair." The collector disgorged slowly and reluctantly. As he was doing so, the rightful heir hurried out of his second calling-place and detected Fatty in the act of pocketing the money. He rushed to the wheeled organ, and, using it as a counter, leant on it and pointed a denunciatory finger at the man with the dropped eye-lid. "'You ain't collectin'!" he shrieked.

"Yes, I am!" (The music went on madly.)

"'Ow much did yer get?"

"I got eightpence, if yer want ter know!"

"Well give it 'ere !"

Fatty pushed the man with the tin away from the squealing machine. "I've got th' munney safe 'ere! No need fer you ter worry erbout it! Go on, yous two! Get busy an' we'll fix it up later on !" He jingled the coppers in his pocket and looked proudly about him as if he were the manager of a large and prosperous theatrical business. The man with the dropped eyelid dodged off to the other side of the street to resume duty; but the man with the tin of office stood miserably on the path, whence he shot glances of weak hatred at the usurpers.

"Ole Dick'll go orf pop erbout this w'en 'e 'ears of it!"

"Ho, 'e won't!" blustered Fatty. "If I know ole Dick, 'e'll be glad to 'ear 'e 'as a few decent cobbers ter look after 'is bizness w'en 'e's sick. Go on with yer collectin'! Don't stand there cryin'; we ain't goin' ter rooin' yer!"

"W'y carn't yer leave a man alone?" whined the dispossessed one.

"Becos," said Fatty, severely, "becos you ain't fit ter be left alone! Any'ow," he added, "a bloke carn't expect ter run a thing like this on is own. A bloke on a job like this re-quires elp even if 'e aini got sense enuf ter arsk fer it. You orter

be glad we're 'elpin 'yer instead of growlin' an' goin' orf pop. Wy don t yer 'ave some sense an' get on with yer collectin'!"

The man with the tin snarled helplessly, and, turning away, shambled into a little newsagency in search of more hush money the uninstructed organist continued to rapidly unwind "The Last Rose." He did not know where to find the shift key, and as Fatty seemed to have an idea that contributions would cease if the machine stopped for an instant, the third repetition of the doleful air was soon deafening the neighborhood.

A little man in his shirt sleeves with a pen behind his ear dashed out of a brass-placed entrance and rushed straight at the up-roar.

"Play something else, can't you!" he shouted,

The startled organist churned a little faster. Fatty put his hand to his mouth and bellowed gracefully, "Orright, sir! 'Nother section in a minute, sir! Gotter finish this one first."

He leered hungrily at the infuriated rate-payer and thrust his fat loafer's palm under the ratepayer's nose. "Spare a coin for the music, sir?"

'No, d—n it!" screamed the baffled victim. He recoiled a few paces and looked round as if searching for something unpleasant— a policeman, perhaps.

While he was hanging fire the two collectors hurried towards the machine from different points with their respective gleanings. A furious argument of the hungry dog variety broke out and raged shamelessly. The organist barked and yelped just as loudly as the others; but he never ceased turning for an instant. The whole block was now beginning to take a distant interest in the riotous conduct of the barrel-organ company. The shopkeepers and passers-by had never before seen four apparently able-bodied men running a virulent street noise for gain. The angry little man had acquired a group of sympathetic listeners, and was making a passionate speech about it:

"Here am I," he roared, "here am I advertising for men to work in my factory, and I can't get them! Yet there are four hulking men driving me mad with a barrel-organ!" (Laughter and cheers.)

"I say it's an iniquitous thing!" howled the little man. He was almost choking with rage, and the finger with which he indicated his foes trembled terribly. "There's the Labor Party for you! That's what you get when you put the Labor Party in power! Manufacturers begging and praying for men, while fat loafers play barrel-organs under their very windows!"

He gulped pathetically and started again. "Look at the sign on that organ! It says Blind for Forty Years! Which of those men is blind? Is any one of them blind? No; it's a fraud— that's what it is ! A— dirty— Socialistic fraud!"

"What's all this?" The policeman who had approached unnoticed pushed his way into the miniature crowd, and was immediately attacked by the manufacturer.

"Those four men with the organ, constable—they're frauds. Not one of them is' blind!" This with tremendous emphasis.

The constable looked round dazedly. The mangled music had ceased abruptly, and the barrel organ was being wheeled away at a brisk pace in a cloud of recrimination and argument.

"What d'ye want me to do?" asked the policeman. "I can't interfere with them because they're not blind." He stared resentfully at the manufacturer as if he suspected him of being a fool.

The manufacturer started to wave his hands desperately. "But there's a placard on the organ which says Blind for Forty Years. I'll take my oath none of them are blind! Isn't that false pretences?"

"I'll have to look into this," said the constable in his severest manner. He set off in pursuit of the four, and because a policeman walking briskly always indicates drama, if not actual tragedy, many people who could spare the time tailed on. It was a truly imposing procession that overtook and enveloped the four, just as they had picked on a new pitch.

"Which of you men has been blind for forty years?" commenced the investigator, when he had focussed his prey.

"None of us blokes is blind," retorted Fatty, with sulky respect.

"Who does this organ belong to then?"

The accredited manager struggled into the limelight. "It belongs to Blind Dick— Blind Dick Connors, sir. 'E ain't 'ere now— 'e's 'ome sick, an' I'm takin' it round for 'im."

"Oh, that's it, is it? What are these three men doing? Are they taking it round, too?"

(The inner section of the crowd that could hear the dialogue laughed mischievously.)

"They're 'elpin' me," said the wretched manager. "They're givin' me a 'and, if you can understand— with th' collectin', sir."

(He licked his dry lips and looked threateningly at the others. The policeman noted the look and decided in his own mind that the four had stolen the organ.)

"But it doesn't take four men to run an organ, does it?" (The crowd laughed again and pressed closer. The ones on the outskirts couldn't hear properly.)

Fatty perspired anxiously, and looked with moist eyes at the inquisitor. "Sometimes we sings," he faltered.

"I didn't hear them sing!" shouted the vengeful little manufacturer— a conspicuous figure without coat or hat. "I've been looking at them and listening to their noise for the last quarter of an hour, and I haven't seen one of them open his mouth— except to blackguard the others and argue about the collection. I don't believe they sing at all!"

("Give us a song!" howled a red-faced man.)

Fatty fixed the manufacturer with a rage-inflamed eye. "We don't alwiz sing!" he sneered.

"You can't sing!" shouted several joyous voices.

"Give us a song!" bellowed the red-faced man. He was evidently one of those cheery souls who love noise of any kind.

The constable looked sternly at the manager of the organ. "Have you got any written authority from the owner of this instrument?"

"I ain't got nothin' written, sir!"

"Well I don't see how I can let you go on playing it. That sign says 'Blind for Forty Years.' You're not blind?"

"No, sir."

"None of those other men are blind?"

"No, sir." (The crowd laughed happily; the constable scratched his chin and tried to look like a High Court Judge; and the four organists looked thoroughly wretched and conversed in whispers.)

"What's your name?"

"Wagglin, sir."

"Are these men sharing the collections?"

"Oh, *no*, sir!"

"Hm!" While the constable was thinking, the tram bells started to protest loudly; the crowd had grown large enough to obstruct the traffic.

"Move on, please!" pleaded the other two policemen who had been drawn from afar by the sight of people swarming. The timid edges of the crowd started to melt away.

"You'll have to alter that sign." The voice of the original policeman could be heard faintly above the conversational buzz and the rattle of traffic.

"Orright, sir! And will that make it safe, sir? Will we be able ter play the organ without bein' disturbed?"

The crowd swayed and laughed. The voice of the angry factory-owner rose trumpet-like above the merriment. "*There's* Socialism for you! Four strong men allowed to loaf with a dirty organ—!"

"The organ's as good as *you*, any'ow!" Thus the infuriated fat man.

"I'll write to the papers about this! It's not much good advertising for men to work !"

"You're a *sweater*— that's what you are, a *sweater*!"

"—advertising for men to work—!"

"You're a dirty sweater!"

"—advertising for men to work when strong men are allowed to cadge with barrel organs!"

"*'Oo are you callin' cadgers?'*" (Loud and sympathetic murmurs from the fickle crowd. The original policeman, alone in the midst of argument, looked hot and unhappy.)

"*'Oo are you callin' cadgers?'*" Once more the fat man's indignant query drew sympathetic cheers from the loungers. A few honorary champions of the poor started to hoot lustily.

"I didn't call *you* a cadger!" The hysterical pitch of the manufacturer's voice seemed to indicate that he had made the same remark several times already.

"*Yes, yer did!*" (Cheers from the absorbed crowd, which was now being hustled by the impatient policemen on the outskirts.)

"*Boo-oo!*" roared a fool-youth, who really only had a sketchy idea of the plot, but who loved riot and disorder for its own sake. One of the annoyed policemen promptly collared him, and the fool, being a thorough sort of fool, threw himself down on the footpath and started to kick. A very brief and dusty scrimmage commenced, and the fickle crowd left the organ and the argument and surged round the arrest. Presently, after a lot of plunging and wrenching, the policeman got his hatless man up, and, assisted by his mate, started to march him off. The crowd followed devotedly. The gesticulating group round the organ were left in comparative peace, and the useless wrangle, refereed by the unwilling policeman, ended in a series of defiant shouts.

"Well, don't you play again outside my place, that's all!"

"We'll play where we like!"

"Advertising for men and—"

"Aw, go an' get work!"

"*Work!*" shrieked the manufacturer. "You dare tell *me* to get work, you—"

The policeman persuaded him to cut off there and leave the four. "I'll look after them," he added, reassuringly. The manufacturer shot a last look of hatred at his enemies, and, finding a friend and neighbor at his elbow, went fuming with him up the street.

"You'll have to alter that sign," said the policeman to the attentive Wagglin.

"Yessir!"

"And don't you be too fresh with people or you'll get yourself into trouble."

The quartet mumbled a suitable response, and cursed him in whispers directly his broad blue serge back was turned. Then there was a hurried conference, at the end of which Wagglin detached the "Blind for Forty Years"

sign and took it into a small news-agent's shop. In five minutes or so. He returned triumphant and replaced it on the organ for the inspection of his colleagues. It had been hastily altered with paper, ink and gum, and now read— "Blind for Forty Years— Played by Dicks Seketerry and Asistants."

The effect it had on business was astonishing. People began to collect almost immediately; within three minutes, without a note of music being played, there was a considerable crowd; and in the centre glowed the red face of the song-lover.

"Give us a song, boys!" he roared, encouragingly. The cry was taken up with enthusiasm:

"Give us a song, boys!"

"Buck up, Secretary!"

There was a general laugh, and the four idle organists seemed almost embarrassed.

"You ain't dumb, too, are yer?" bellowed the song-lover. Then, with rising indignation, "Go *on!* Give us a song!"

The organ, worked feverishly by the beady-eyed man, suddenly burst into a shrill, windy version of "The Soldiers of the Queen."

There was a muffled cheer from the crowd, and, when the chorus part was reached, the red-faced man, who had somehow become possessed of a pewter pot full of beer, waved it in the air, called upon all present to join in the chorus, and himself set a good example by roaring the boastful words at the top of his voice. There was a fairly good response, and the swinging patriotic air, gathering strength and volume as it went, worked gradually up to a thunderous cheering climax, much to the astonishment of the shop-keepers and passers-by, who thought for a bewildered moment or two that Empire Day had caught them unawares.

"We'll 'ave that again!" roared the happy, red-faced man, who was luxuriating in his first great public success. He had often instigated noise in bar parlors and such retired places; but this impromptu daylight concert in a busy street was intoxicating.

"*Ongcore!*" he yelled. "Turn 'er on again!"

"*Turn 'er on!*" echoed the crowd.

The organ obediently started to squeal again, and Wagglin and the man with the dropped eye-lid, acting under the direction of Fatty, started to worry through the crowd in search of contributions. But the singers, perhaps because they considered they were supplying the entertainment, cheerfully ignored the collectors and their muttered appeals. During the singing of the last verse, the pair fought their way back to the organ and informed Fatty of their failure. Fatty looked resentfully at the roaring patriots around him, and, stopping the

machine with one hand, howled, "That's enuf for yer! If yer won't part up, that's th' end o' the music!"

There was an astonished pause. Then the indignant choir expressed itself in hoots and yells. The red-faced man went on like a stage-manager facing a strike of stage hands on the opening night. "Yer ough ter be lumbered, yer takedowns!" he bellowed.

The angry shouts and buzz of the mob had been drawing people steadily, and very soon there was a shifting flock of thousands impeding the traffic. Those on the outskirts could just make out that there was a storm-centre by the swirl of hats. Deliberate policemen began to arrive and waded through the plain-clothes sheep. Soon there were three helmets and a sub-inspector's cap at the seat of war. It began to look and sound like a riot. But the impressive disturbance wasn't complete until a sturdy blind man, holding a thick stick in one hand and a small boy in the other, came roaring down the street. With the uncanny instinct of the blind, he seemed to sense the crowd from afar, for he came straight at it with his sightless face held up to the sky. "It ain't to be sung to!" he proclaimed in his tremendous vome "Old Blind Dick's organ ain't to be sung to!"

There could be no doubt about it. This was the proprietor of the machine coming to forbid (for reasons only known to himself) the use of it in connection with patriotic choir practice. So magnificent was his entrance that a broad way opened before him. He passed unerringly up the centre of the Jane, roaring all the way: "It ain't to be sung to! Old Blind Dick's organ ain't to e sung o. 1 lie crowd closed in respectfully behind, and he was hidden dramatically from view.

The seance was in full blast when there was a sudden chorus of shouts far up the street, and people fled like fowls to either kerb, leaving the centre of the road clear for a fire engine, which tore along at full gallop.

"Look out!" yelled the crowd round the organ, and promptly melted away like butter thrown into a furnace. The dazed and protesting blind man was swept aside with the rest, and his organ was left deserted where it stood. The frenzied trampling of the iron-shod horses drowned all protests and warnings, and, before anyone could go to the rescue (not that anyone particularly wanted to go the rescue), they had swept down on the organ like a hurricane and it was all over. Eight hairy hoofs and four flying wheels smote and burst the old blackmailing kit; for a dazzling second or two, the air was full of squeaks, pipes and wooden fragments; then, as the horse-storm thundered past and the noise diminished, there was a sound of small futile things falling and jingling on the road.

People— the loose-end sort of people who love chance excitement and never have anything better to do— started running madly after the fire-men. The whole street flowed away in a bewildering charge, and in it went the three assistant organists. Fatty, the treasurer, was in the centre of the little group of runners, all of whom travelled with their ears laid back.

When the multitude had passed by on rushing feet, Blind Dick, who seemed to be quite dazed by the hustling and uproar, waved his stick at the scattered relics of his organ and shouted something which was drowned by the traffic noises.

The constable who had stood by him inclined his head, and asked:

"Was that your organ?"

"It *is* me organ!"

"It isn't an organ any more," said the constable, "it's busted all over the road— the horses kicked it to bits."

Blind Dick roared incredulously.

"That's right," chattered Wagglin, miserably, "th' organ's busted—an'—" almost weeping— "them cows 'as ducked with th' c'llection!"

"*Wot* cows?" yelled Dick.

"W'y Fatty an—"

"I didn't employ nobody but you! You're in this, Wagglin! You been an' framed this up on me!"

"I'll take me dyin' oath !"

"No yer don't, Wagglin! I know you, an' I know Fatty an' 'is mob! You part up that munney! Go on!"

"I ain't *got* no munney, I tell yer!"

"Look 'ere you! If yer don't part up—"

The constable interposed. "Do you want to give him in charge?"

Wagglin reeled with horror. The blind man hesitated.

"Yes; I give 'im in charge!"

Wagglin yelled with rage as the arm of the Law reached out for him.

"Orright!" he foamed, and danced a little on the kerb. "*Orright, yer fraud!*" He turned eagerly to the constable, gulped, and pointed at his prey. "*'E ain't blind!* 'E ain't any blinder than wot I am! 'E reads th' paper reg'lar ev'ry evenin'; improves 'is mind, 'e does— *th' dirty dog!* Lumber 'im fer false pretences an' see if I ain't right! *Go on!*"

Obviously there was nothing else for it. The fact that Dick was roaring and brandishing his stick in a perfectly demented way proved nothing. The embarrassed constable beckoned to the hovering cab, assisted his uproarious captives in, and they all rolled off together in search of the truth. A small boy

with a box truck dived into the traffic and rescued three wooden fragments of the ruined organ. It looked to him like good kindling.

27: The Sympathy Bureau

The Lone Hand June 1914

MRS. LAURA JANE SWEETBREAD was just a boarding-house widow, with her hair parted smoothly in the middle and a smile that never wore off, when Elvin G. Barnstutter arrived in inflated garments from the U.S.A. and impressively engaged the front room from Mrs. Tribbens, the agitated landlady. Barnstutter was a large man— but not so large as his clothes. He was also blatant in a gentlemanly, drawling fashion, and the very first week he spent in the place he confided to Mr. Bodger, the suspicious senior lodger, that “a smart guy jurt couldn't help gettin' rich in Australia— the folks was there waitin' ter shove th' dollers inter th' pockets of th' first live man that happened alarnj. It was too easy, sir,— too easy!”

Mr. Bodger glared at him disapprovingly, stroked his beard and growled that, in his humble opinion, it was all humbug.

“You take my word for it, sir, money is just as hard to make here as it is anywhere else. Personally, I resent this tone you Americans take, that the people here, are a lot of simpletons who are ready to give their money—”

Barnstutter flushed and held up a protesting hand. “Excuse me, sir, I did not say anything of the kind! I regard th' people here, sir, as real smart. But they don't get a whole heap of things they want. They ain't catered for. But they just pitch their money at th' Murrikun because he gives them what they wanted, but didn't know how to ask fur. Now, tell me, who gave Australia the all-day picture show? An Amurrikun! An' there's lots o' things just as good. Don't mistake me, Mr. Bodger, there's money waitin' in this country for any live man who has a notion about him.”

“What's your notion?” demanded the forthright Bodger.

Barnstutter laughed and tapped him familiarly on the shoulder. “Now ain't that queer you should ask me that to-night, just when I've pretty well clinched matters— clinched 'em right here in this house?”

“You mean—?”

“I mean, sir, that I found my notion right here in this place—on th' first day as you might say.”

“May I ask what it is?”

“Why, certainly! Did you ever notice that widow lady, Mrs. Sweetbread writin' letters?”

“Writing!” growled Bodger, ominously. “Dammit, man, she never does anything else! I can't go out of the house that she doesn't give me half-a-dozen letters to post!”

“Just so!” murmured Barnstutter, blandly. “Do you know what’s in them letters?”

“The usual twaddle, I suppose— twaddle about about hats and operations and babies?”

"Them letters, sir," intoned the reverent American, "them letters is full of th' holiest an' sweetest sentiments of womanhood— that an' advice about everythin' under the sun. There's lots o' woman journalists over there in th' States drawin' big money for turnin' out stuff that's plain hogwash alongside them letters."

“All the same, I don't see what use it all is— unless it's some twaddling woman's paper.”

I have a scheme, sir, which will enable Mrs. Sweetbread to spread her sweet influence over all this great continent— to speak to hundreds where she now speaks to a dozen or so intimate friends. The first hour I spent in this house, sir, I saw that that grand woman was bein' wasted. So I thought out a little scheme right away, put it before that sweet lady, an' next week, sir, we'll start right in in my arfice in Kingpitt Street.”

“Well, you astonish me!”

“You wouldn't never thought of it yourself?” queried the genius.

"Never!"

Barnstutter waved his fat hand gracefully. “Just what I was sayin', Mr. Bodger! When a live man comes alarn, he sees chances that you local folks pass by every day.”

Bodger grunted ungracefully. But Barnstutter was as good as his word. Within the week, the chronic letter-writer was installed in a really stylish town office with two typistes to do her bidding, and Barnstutter to superintend.

Laura Jane Sweetbread must have imagined that she was being converted into a sort of philanthropic institution, because she was plainly shocked, when, after a week's private practice on the old easy-going lines, somewhat accelerated by two typewriter girls, Elvin G. Barnstutter showed her a printer's proof of a quarter-page, advertisement that he had inserted in all the papers. It flowed along in this fashion: —

THE SYMPATHY BUREAU

Plato Chambers, 472 Kingpitt Street (Third Floor)

Manager: Elvin G. Barnstutter.

Principal: Mrs. Laura Jane Sweetbread.

Friend, are you lonely? Do you need advice? Are you longing for sympathy and encouragement? If so, let us hear from you. Let us help you out. The Bureau has been established by our Mr. Elvin G. Barnstutter to fill a long-felt want. Thousands of people in

this old world to-day are just plugging along from day to day; the same folks would be stepping out gaily if they knew that some sweet soul was interested in them and what they were doing. The influence of good women keeps the world sweet and wholesome.

Have you anyone like that looking after you? Do you ever hear from mother— or auntie? Do you ever long for a word from sister?

Ah, friend, if you are alone in this world and all is cold and dreary, send us a sixpenny postal note, some particulars about yourself and your full address, and we will send you in return a Sample Letter from Home, containing a searching heart-to-heart talk by our Mrs. Laura Jane Sweetbread, one of the sweetest and wisest women that ever lived.

Do not turn aside or forget! Send sixpence, and let her exert her sweet influence over you! Come in out of the turmoil of the world and join her circle. You will never regret it!

(Annual subscription: £3:3s.; half-yearly: £2:2s.)

Gold "Sweetbread" membership badge (eighteen carat) £1:5s. post free.

Laura Jane protested in her harmless way against this commercialism; but the voluble and resistless Barnstutter overwhelmed her with reasons why it was a good and necessary step. The advertisement duly appeared, and soon after a tide of letters started to flow into the office of the Sympathy Bureau. The bulk of them were serious communication's, and enclosed the regulation sixpence. Barnstutter promptly engaged a girl clerk, and had the names carefully entered in an elaborate card system. Then he set Laura Jane to work on an introductory letter of welcome. It was carefully phrased to suit all ages and conditions, and Barnstutter saw to it that it contained a strong appeal to the correspondent to go in for a years subscription and wear one of the specially-designed "Sweetbread" golden badges. (Price £1 5s."post free.) This letter commenced gushingly, thus: —

"Dear, Dear Friend! Let us shake hands in spirit! Let us sit by the fire and talk together—you and I. The wind is howling outside, the rain is beating on the pane; but inside all is warmth and light and joyful faces, for have not two friends met together? Draw up your chair the blaze, good friend, and let us talk. Have you been lonely? Has the work been hard? Have you missed the dear companionship that should have been yours? Ah, I see by your face that it is so. But the dark hour is past! Give me your hand!"

There were several pages of this, all of it designed to warm the reader up in spirit and make him hungry for more. The Bureau office record subsequently recorded that 983 copies of No. 1 Letter were posted out to different points of the Commonwealth. About half of those written to "bit," and cheques and money orders began to roll in gaily. Of course, a few prospective clients were disappointed, and took the trouble to say so. One of them scrawled :—

"I don't want none of youre dam sympathy. Out 'ere it's 107 in shade and all that there talk about comin and settin be fires made me sweat like an orse. No good to Gundy."

This man, though pursued diligently by post, was never recaptured.

The particulars of themselves supplied by the various correspondents were carefully recorded on the cards. Being requested to go into details, they went in fathoms deep. Some of them were embarrassingly frank.

But out of the welter of confidences, Barnstutter and his female clerk winnowed the information they wanted, and stored it up in the card system. Barnstutter then classified the various classes of customers— lovers, lonely business men, bush men, flappers, letter-wanting women, unhappily married wives— and carefully dissected Mrs. Sweetbread's letters into paragraphs, so that presently he had a tremendous library of them covering hundreds of subjects, and adapted to every emergency. By using a little discrimination in make-up, a letter to fit any particular case could be assembled in a minute or so.

Barnstutter would swing into his chair each morning with a large cigar stuck in his face, and attack the pile of letters left opened for him by the clerk. Perhaps a long blithering letter from a remote lover would be on top of the pile. He would skim rapidly through this, chewing his cigar-end where the going was heavy, then scrawl on the blank printed slip attached.

"Pars. L-14, 22, 37, 50, 63, 92, 98."

"Guess, that'll fix him," was his usual benediction as he dropped the thing into one of the baskets. The orders— Barnstutter called them "orders" in his curt, commercial way— would be later rattled up mechanically by one of the four typistes, and sent along to Mrs. Sweetbread for signature.

Some trace of her gracious personality clung to the typewritten letters; but she was like a woman lost in a maze. She might have deserted altogether only the artful Barnstutter had induced her to sign an agreement for a year. She stuck to her job loyally while Barnstutter went ahead and boomed the scheme with blatant advertisements, all of which were decorated with her photograph, showing the hair beautifully parted in the centre. But she had to enter a protest when he told her that he wanted her to grant personal interviews to clients.

"But how am I to do that, Mr. Barnstutter? Fancy talking to a strange man without knowing who he is, or what—"

Barnstutter waved his cigar majestically.

"Just allow me to explain, Mrs. Sweetbread. Any client who wants an interview will have to give at least one day's notice, and be registered for an appointment. Durin' that time we wdll have him looked up on the cards, and a typed re-port made out for you. This will enable you to know exactly who and what he is, and what correspondence has passed. But suppose while he's right

here you want to find out something more. You just lean over a bowl of flowers that is really a masked telephone transmitter and say "Is that so?" or "Dear me!" or "Well now!" These remarks will be signals, you understand, to the card clerk, who will at once bring you a typed slip with the required information on it. I'm jus' workin' on the signal code now."

"I won't do it!" said Mrs. Sweetbread, decidedly.

"But, look here now—!"

"I refuse to do it!" repeated Mrs. Sweetbread, almost fiercely.

A long, futile argument started. Of course Mrs. Sweetbread had to give in at last; but not before Barnstutter had told her in his own stately way that "he hadn't put her in there and advertised her all over Australia just to play Aunt Mary to a few pet co-respondents." That struck fire from even Mrs. Sweetbread, and she told him to go on with his scheme.

Applications for interviews started to pour in after the first press announcement had been made; and one morning, on coming in to work, Laura Jane found a typewritten list of eight names on her desk with the times allotted for the interviews. A comfortable chair was set ready on the other side of her desk, upon which stood the telephonette disguised as a rose bowl. Barnstutter's code— an elaborately indexed booklet— lay handy, and eight typewritten sheets of personal details about the expected callers rested under a bronze paperweight. She found she had a full hour in which to get ready for the first caller, and started forthwith on his case. His record, as compiled by Barnstutter, ran this way: —

Brown, Charles Frederick, Faraway Plains, N.S.W.

(known as "Bowler" to friends of youth), aged 62; farmer all his life; wife been dead eighteen years— named Louisa; frequent references to her in correspondence. Four sons, three daughters. Had great trouble with son Billy, who was last heard of at sea. Prosperous now, but has seen some hard times. Lonely man with sandy whiskers, and suffers occasionally with his heart. Corns very troublesome in wet weather. Sentimental disposition. Favorite hymn "Lead Kindly Light." False teeth in upper jaw: blue eyes; Methodist. Correspondence to date; Stock Letters—1, 2,3, 18, 27, 32, 75, 89, 96. Regular subscriber, and always wears gold "Sweetbread" badge.

Just as Mrs. Sweetbread had finished reading the records and experimented a little with the Code and telephonette, Barnstutter walked in holding his cigar in his hand— always a sure indication that there was somebody behind him. "Morning, Mrs. Sweetbread. Are you ready for Mr. Brown? I've got him right here."

Mrs. Sweetbread hurriedly closed her code book and clutched at her back hair.

"Oh, quite ready! Please show him in!"

Barnstutter turned and called to the invisible unknown.

"Step right in, Mr. Brown. Mrs. Sweetbread is most anxious to make your acquaintance, sir." He stepped aside, and smiling greasily, as a nervous, elderly bushman in crumpled clothes shuffled forward from the dark corridor, laid one white hand on the stranger's dusty shoulder.

"Now, Mr. Brown, we want you to regard this as your second home. Mrs. Sweetbread, this is our Mr. Brown!" (Mrs. Sweetbread smiled and bowed.) "Now"— pushing the doubtful visitor into the chair— "I guess I'll get right along and 'tend to them letters."

He seized Brown's limp hand, shook it, told him again to regard himself as one of the family, and escaped. Brown and Mrs. Sweetbread looked into each other's eyes.

Then Brown looked round to make sure that the obtrusive Barnstutter had vanished, and, seeing that he had, jerked his thumb at the closed door and croaked confidentially,

" 'Ey Lorer Jane, 'oo's that there Yankee Bloke?"

Mrs. Sweetbread gave a slight jump.

"He's Mr. Barnstutter, the manager— and you mustn't call me Laura Jane, it's too familiar."

The eyes of Brown widened. "But he— didn't that bloke say I was to regard meself as one of the fambly?"

"He was only speaking figuratively."

The client showed signs of annoyance.

"I don't know 'ow 'e was speakin', but I 'eard what 'e said, and, bein' a member an' all, I only tried to be friendly. If yer don't bleeve I'm a member, there's me gold badge!" He pulled back the lapel of his coat and proudly exhibited the glittering badge of membership.

"Oh, that's all right!" murmured Mrs. Sweetbread, faintly. "Now suppose you tell me all about yourself?"

Brown thawed at once before the sunny smile she gave him. "Right yer are! That's jest wot I come down fur. Yer know, Mrs. Sweetbread, them letters o' yours 'as been a great comfort ter me."

"Yes?"

"You jest bet they 'ave. It sorter gives a lonely cove a noo int'rest in life when 'e gets a reglar letter from a girl ev'ry week— sorter breaks th' monotony, if yer know wot I mean?"

Mrs. Sweetbread, who had jumped again at the word "girl," pulled herself together and nodded encouragingly. Brown tugged his chair a little nearer to the desk (Mrs. Sweetbread felt glad that it was a wide desk) and leered in her

face. "Th' blokes back 'ome there, they all sez ter me, "'Ullo! Mother letter from th' girl. Fred. W'en's it gain' ter be?"

Laura Jane was still vainly trying to get him off this line of conversation, when Barnstutter appeared again at the door and announced austerely, "Mrs. Sweetbread, next caller's been waitin' three minutes already."

"Er— very well," faltered Mrs. Sweetbread, and extended her hand to the astonished and indignant Brown. "I'm afraid we've exceeded our time. Good-bye!"

"But I ain't 'ardly begun !" shouted Brown. He pointed one stubby finger at the doorway, from which Barnstutter had vanished. "'Oo did yer say that bloke was?"

"He's Mr. Barnstutter— the manager, you know."

"Well I don't go much on 'im!" growled Brown. "Wot's 'e want to come stickin' 'is oar in fur?"

"I suppose the other client will be annoyed if he is kept over his time. They all have to pay for their interviews, you know, Mr. Brown."

Brown thereupon dived one hand into his pocket and fished out a handful of silver.

"'Ere! wot does it cost fur another 'arf-'our, Missus? I won't be shoved outer th' place before I've 'ad a yarn with yer. Call in ole What's-'is-name an' let's see wot 'e'll charge."

"Oh, I couldn't think of it!" protested the lady, and gave him four separate reasons why it could not be done.

When she had finished. Brown was left temporarily speechless. But he had just one more idea.

"Wot time d'ye git orf?" he enquired, pleadingly.

It took her a good five minutes to get him to the door, where the indignant Barnstutter took him in hand and argued him out of the place.

All the male callers were more or less like Brown. The women were fairly easy, though one young ass kicked up some sort of half-hearted row when she found that Mrs. Sweetbread did not tell fortunes.

After doing interviews daily for a month or so, Mrs. Sweetbread developed a new professional hardness of manner which considerably surprised and disappointed the bulk of her callers, who had been lured to her presence by the disarming gentleness of her correspondence. They came prepared to fling themselves on her bosom, or sit at her feet; but most of them finished up by regarding her respectfully from a distance. About the time she got quite hardened to the disguised telephone, the signal code and the rest of the polite fakes, a letter arrived from Brown, the first caller: —

“Dear Laura Jane, —No doubt you will be surprised to here from me, but I am chucking up my sub. with your firm as I now know it is all a dam fraud. I’m glad I come down to see you, dere Laura, because I see that Barnstorer bloke an’ got the strength of the whole thing. You and him can’t pull my leg no more. I’m sick of youre letters and all that there skite about encouragin’ me. You never give me any encouragement, as you well know.

Well, my dear Laura, I must conclude and wishin you all the luck in the world (I don’t think)— I remain, youre loving friend,

FRED BROWN.

p.s. I give that there brooch to the new girl up at Mick Doolan’s pub. She is a bonzer, and worth two of youre sort.

The angry recipient was about to take this insulting document to Barnstutter, when that great genius himself hurried in.

“Look at that insulting letter, Mr. Barnstutter!”

Barnstutter picked up Brown's outbreak and read it with perfect calm.

“That’s ar-right, Mrs. Sweetbread! We’re through with him. He don’t owe us nothing!”

“But— but he insults me!”

Barnstutter permitted himself to be mildly surprised. “Oh him!— he don't know any better. Let him go!”

“But have I got to put up with that sort of treament?”

“Well— what can we do?”

Then Mrs. Sweetbread cut loose and told him all her troubles. After that she blamed him for bringing them on her by shoving her into the light of publicity. Finally she gave notice, and intimated that she would not put herself in a false position for as much as one more day.

Now, if the Bureau had just been starting, Barnstutter would have calmed her at any cost; but the thing was apparently well established with a comprehensive library of Sweetbread letters, and the need for retaining the hardened Laura Jane was not apparent. Her personality had been marketed, and she had nothing more to give, for Barnstutter was dimly conscious that the commercial work of the Bureau had completely altered the gentle lady who had inspired him to start it. She was no longer a person who radiated charm and trust through the post, but an austere business woman. So he amazed and delighted her by releasing her from the balance of her engagement, and she left the place for ever, on the distinct understanding that, at the end of the year, her name was to be ruled off the office stationery.

Next day, for he was a prompt man, Barnstutter installed a large chemical blonde called Mrs. Blanche Emerald in the chair of the departed Mrs. Sweetbread, and, under her direction, the correspondence and the interviews were continued.

Outwardly the Bureau looked like a huge and permanent success and so it was until the morning the obscure husband of the chemical blonde arrived at the Bureau, mad with drink and jealousy, and burst the whole show by firing at and missing Barnstutter with three chambers of his cheap revolver.

A faint and lying whisper about the Bureau being a depot for White Slavery dispersed the staff like a puff of smoke, and all was over, Barnstutter and the chemical blonde now have a place where you may learn the tango in four lessons for 10/6. Several innocent fool women in Mrs. Sweetbread's retired boarding-house have informed her gleefully of the fact.

But she has not turned up to take advantage of the offer.

28: The Brothers of Mount Rest

The Bulletin, 11 June 1914

MRS. BELLEVUE, the stout, fair wife of the eminent K.C. of that name, passed her visitor a cup of tea and took up the dropped thread of her discourse.

"Oh, I thought everyone knew of the Brothers of Mount Rest! My dear, it's the most splendid idea, and Howard's nerves have been ever so much better since he joined. It's a sort of week-end rest-cure started by an American gentleman— a Mr. K. Stanthorpe Potts. I can't explain all the details, dear, but everybody wears monks' dresses from Saturday to Monday, and nobody talks more than is necessary, and there are walks in the grounds and choir singing, or else you can read an improving book, or do some work for the poor. The Home, you know, is that lovely old abbey place that rich Jabberson, the ironmonger, built out in the wilds of Gloomsome Hills before he went insolvent and committed suicide. It's just the place for the 'monastic rest cure,' as they call it. I'm just wild to see over the place, and Howard is dreadfully keen to study up and be promoted to Choir B— that's the higher grade, you know. He is in Choir A now, and has to study the most dreadfully difficult books. Mr. Stanthorpe Potts is most particular, and will not allow any of Choir A to mix with the B's. They are kept entirely separate from the moment they enter on Saturday evening to the time they leave on Monday. In fact, I believe, they leave at different times, so they never get a chance of meeting. I don't know very much about it, because Howard is under a solemn vow not to divulge any of the secrets of the place. What I have told you I have just had to dig out of him. Oh! I had almost forgotten! You know that man Wagglin who was employed here for a little while? Well, I believe the poor fellow is there doing kitchen work. Now do let me give you another cup of tea! That's right, my dear! One or two lumps?"

THE HOME motor whirred up to the main door of the Abbey with the Brother it had brought from the wayside station. A cowled figure stood on the threshold.

"Welcome, Brother Bellevue," it cried in good American, and deftly relieved the plain-clothes member of the heavy suit-case he carried. "How goes the outside world?"

Bellevue sighed gratefully as the great door swung open and the cool silence of the high, stone-flagged hall enveloped them.

"Noisy as ever, Brother Potts. I'm very glad to get away from it and back to my cell."

Brother Potts patted him encouragingly on the shoulder. "That's the right spirit. Peace— good works—reflection. You have found nothing better than the watchwords of the order, Brother?"

"Nothing!" sighed the plain clothes member.

"Good ! Now, I guess you will find everything ready in your cell. Brother Richard will carry your bag up for you. Meditations are at eight, Brother."

"Very well, Brother," returned the novice, and, handing his suit-case to the habited underling, he panted up the carpeted staircase in his wake.

"The Abbey" (Stanthorpe Potts had given the place the title after purchasing it) was a beautifully appointed Gothic mansion surrounded by acres of grounds and close handy to a State forest. From the second-floor windows the Brothers looked over miles of treetops. No woman was ever allowed inside the place, and it had all the restful privacy of a good club without a good club's dissipations. That was how Bellevue described the place in his confidential conversations with trusted friends.

On reaching his "cell" — actually a well but plainly-furnished room— he washed his face and hands and changed into his habit. Then

he sighed once more, and opened the immense, leather-bound tome lying ready on the table. The contents consisted of soothing passages selected by Potts from a modern American author who specialises in soul-stirring. He had just read and meditated on "Look Into Yourself— search your heart for Doubt, and be Valiant," when the great bell in the tower clanged three times— the signal for the evening meal.

Closing the book, he walked softly on sandalled feet from the darkened room and joined the cowled procession passing noiselessly down the lamp-lit stairs to the Choir A refectory. He spoke to nobody and nobody spoke to him. Mr. Potts had adopted, as far as practicable, the Trappist rule of silence, for he held that the manufacture of small talk was one of the greatest of modern evils and one of the chief causes of brain exhaustion. The Choir B Brothers were understood to enjoy more license; but those of Choir A were strictly enjoined to speak only when it was absolutely necessary. The consequence was that the members of Choir A were not even acquainted with one another, for they sat at meals or study and went to and fro merely as animated habits. Bellevue, sitting at his numbered place at meals, knew that the little brother on his right had an irritating habit of clicking his teeth, and that the fat brother on his left had clumsy red hands and a black moustache. But there his knowledge ended. He did not know their names, and could not have identified them in their ordinary clothes.

That night, as he ate the plain but excellent food served round by the cowled steward-brothers, Bellevue heard a lot of muffled laughter. It seemed

to come from the other side of the dividing wall, and he decided that the B refectory must be in that direction. It had a grateful sound, and he looked round distastefully at the dumb and sombre figures surrounding the board. Sometimes the silence and restraint of Choir A depressed him and made him long for the time when, having progressed sufficiently in nerve-control, he should be promoted to the jolly and sociable side of the house.

The silent brothers, as they finished their meal, rose and glode away to their various evening employments without saying a word to those who remained. Bellevue, being moodier than usual, sat long over his food, and was, in consequence, the only one left at table when the stewards came to clear away. Some very discouraging part-singing broke out as the collection of dirty dishes was being taken up. The twelve "singing" brothers had started their evening practice, and, as Brother Bellevue knew, there would not be an end of it for two long hours.

He sighed heavily inside his cowl, and was about to rise when the steward nearest him edged along and whispered hoarsely, "Good evenin', Mr. Bellevue!"

"Who's that?" gasped the startled recluse.

The steward, under pretence of piling some plates, swung round and faced him. Brother Bellevue discerned inside the other cowl the face of Wagglin, his late man of all work.

"I bin tryin' ter get a word with you this lars' two week-ends, sir," he breathed. "I wanter tell yer" A plate rattled at the other end of the room, and he looked round to assure himself that he had not been detected breaking the rule of silence. "I wanter tell yer somethin' erbout this 'ere place! There's somethin' dead wrong, sir! Lars' night I 'card... See yer later, sir!... Don' mix up with th' crowd ter-night, sir... Keep outer th' way and wait fer me! Look out!"

He grabbed his pile of dishes and evaporated just as one of the other stewards approached.

Brother Bellevue, now thoroughly unsettled, rose from his chair and rustled from the room wondering what information it was the depraved Wagglin had to impart. He felt certain in his own mind that it must be either a murder or a scandal. There could be no rest for him now until he knew exactly what it was. But where was he to wait?

He went to pass along to the hall where the brothers were meditating. As he moved off a habit and cowl bumped into him and a voice hissed, "Keep outer there! They'll lock yer in! Keep out, I tell yer!"

Brother Bellevue jumped, and the habit and cowl scuttled away and disappeared round a corner.

Where could he go to? Disregarding the clang of the bell that called to meditations, he made his way shrinkingly upstairs towards his cell, eyeing narrowly every monkish figure that drifted past him. The groaning of the alleged "singing" brothers pursued him all the way like a prolonged and dismal curse. At the top of the staircase he paused irresolutely and looked about him.

Every now and then a cowled figure went by mysteriously like a challenging riddle. It was practically impossible to distinguish between them in the dim light, and he came at last to the state of mind when he felt convinced that it was the same figure all the time. It only needed another shock to quite unsettle him, and in due course it arrived.

A cowl and habit shuffled along which he felt sure contained Wagglin. He moved along, and, judging his distance nicely, shouldered it sufficiently to necessitate a whispered apology. At the impact the other's habit swung open and revealed a glimpse of evening dress. And the other spoke, rapidly and harshly in the voice of Brother Potts:

"Keep these d—d fools in A locked up and get 'em on choir practice. If they come, we'll make 'em look like thirty cents, that's all! I'll go in now to the boys in B and start biz."

He passed on, and Brother Bellevue shrank into the shadows. He could not imagine who "They" were, and he was not quite clear who was to be made look "like thirty cents." But he knew now, on the authority of Potts himself, that the Brothers in A were regarded as d—d fools, and that B division was full of "boys" carrying on some sort of business to which the head went attired in evening dress.

The dismal exercises of the singing brothers were still making the night fearful; but the cowled figures had ceased to pass to and fro. A jingle of keys was heard downstairs and a couple of locks snapped. Then the keys jingled away, and the house was as much at peace as the attempted choristers would allow. Bellevue, flattened against the wall on the dark landing, reflected bitterly that no train would pass the wayside station until Monday morning, and that there was no possible chance for a man of his weight to walk the distance to the nearest junction. He felt utterly alone and ridiculous.

Suddenly a far door slammed and a cowl and habit bounded up the stairs as if pursued by the Devil.

Bellevue jumped out of his retreat, and the flying figure gasped. "There you are! Run!"

A canvas bag fell at Bellevue's feet. He snatched it up and set off after the flying brother. Upstairs they sped, the K.C. gaining at every bound. They reached the third floor in record time, and rushed down a passage neck and

neck. When the leader threw himself against a door. Bellevue also hurled his stout person at the same target.

But, to his amazement and horror, the other emitted a curse and shouldered him roughly back. "Not here, you fool! Get back, or they'll nail you! RUN!"

Bellevue realised with a sick sensation that he was involved in some dangerous enterprise.

"Get back! GET BACK!" hissed the furious stranger, and slipped inside the room. The door slammed and the key turned.

Bellevue went thoughtfully down the stairs, the mysterious bag clutched to his chest. As he reached his landing, another cowl and habit rushed at him waving its sleeves and hissing, "Git upstairs, sir! Git upstairs!"

Bellevue, his breath coming in loud sobs, wheeled again and charged up the staircase like a failing warhorse. The breathing of Wagglin toiling behind him sounded like an old gas engine.

When they struggled to the top landing Wagglin flung himself flat on the floor and half threw his late employer. Quite exhausted, they lay side by side on the carpet and fought for breath.

"Gawd!... that...was a run!" Wagglin gasped thankfully, and dragged himself to where he could peer over the edge of the landing into the hall below.

"What... didger run upstairs fer?"

Bellevue raised himself on one elbow and whispered faintly, "I... followed... someone I thought was you!"

"'Oo *was* it?" breathed the anxious Wagglin. "Didger see 'is face, sir?"

"Didn't see his face at all! He told me to run and gave me this!" The canvas bag was pushed cautiously along the carpet. Wagglin touched it with his hand and stifled a cry of alarm.

"What's the matter *now*?"

"My Gawd, sir! That mus' be some of th' munney!"

"*What* money?"

Wagglin squirmed nearer and hissed. "That's what I wanted ter tell yer. All this 'ere singin' an' muck is nothin' but a blind, sir. This ain't a monkey reely—it's a 'igh-class gamblin' 'ell. Yous gennelmun in A sorter covers up th' doins in B, sir. You're jus' ere ter bluff th' pleece if there's a raid. One of th' kitchen blokes gimme th' tip a couple o' weeks ago. I bin waitin' ter git a charnce ter tell yer."

"Is this true?" demanded Brother Bellevue wildly.

"True, sir! I give yer me word it's orl true!"

"Then, by Heaven, I'll give information to the police! I'll not be made a fool of by—"

Wagglin pulled desperately at his sleeve to make him modulate his voice. "It's too late, sir— at least, I am afraid it is. I 'ear they've been expectin' a raid f'r th' larst two weeks, an' I swear blind I seen two pleecemen down th' road this mornin'. They was pertendin' to be 'awkers, but I knows a John when I sees one. No, Mr. Bellevue, sir, we gotter try an' keep outer th' way ter-night, an' be ready ter do a git if there's trouble. You wouldn't look well as a monk in gaol, sir."

"What about this money, then?"

"Blimey! I was fergettin' erbout that! It's a mix-up. I believe Brother Potts had arranged with the chief archbishop to get away with the funds before the pleece came, and either Potts took you for the archbishop or the archbishop took you for Potts."

"That's it, Wagglin!" whispered the old K.C. "How are we to get rid of it? Can you think of anything? We mustn't be caught with it, you know. We would be roughly handled."

"You bet yer life we would!" shivered the servitor. "Lemme think now!" He relapsed into silence and hard breathing.

Bellevue lay on his chest and stared down into the hall.

At last Wagglin spoke— in the usual hoarse whisper. "It's no use, sir! We'll jus' 'ave ter chuck it downstairs! 'Ere goes!"

A bag containing about 2,000 sovereigns soared over the banisters and flashed downward into the hall. It hit the great Chinese gong in the centre and produced a perfectly deafening series of sounds— first a sort of metallic yell warranted to make anyone jump, then a long roll of musical thunder that made the whole house vibrate.

As the thunder trailed away into an angry buzzing, a door flung open, and the voice of Brother Potts shrieked, "Who's makin' that Ghardam noise?" There was no answer.

But a second or so later there was a second and a wilder yell. "Th' safe's been robbed! Gee! there's been a Ghardam robbery! Thieves, boys! Thieves!"

Sounds of men running were heard, and the silent watchers upstairs were aware that the lights in the hall had been turned up. An ever-increasing crowd of disturbed gamblers in habits and cowls poured into the hall through the door opened by the enraged Potts, who was dancing about in evening dress, flourishing in one hand the recovered bag of money and in the other a large revolver. The murmuring gamblers eyed this display of energy with approbation, and roared appreciatively when he cried, "Pull out these lop-

eared rest-curers and we'll dahm soon find out who got away with the boodle! Pull 'em out!"

They were pulled out from their meditations with all speed, and very astonished they looked on finding the hall full of raging brothers who cursed and shouted about money. The habits and cowls quickly mingled in one tossing, shouting sea of brown cloth, which presently began to heave tumultously and fight itself, in spite of the demented efforts of Potts to restore order, or enough order to enable him to do a little cross-examining. Plainly the bag of cash flung to Mr. Bellevue had been only a portion of the loot.

It was at this uproarious moment that the front door began to shudder beneath a furious and thunderous assault.

"Th' police!" yelled a stout brother, and the crowd in an instant ceased wrangling and fled like rats from the threatened portal. Some of the most panicky at first bounded upstairs; but, seeing the others streaming towards the dark back regions, they turned back and fled after them. Furniture and ornaments fell and crashed as the stampeded rest-curists and gamblers flowed away together like a receding tide. The attack on the front door grew fiercer.

"What can we do?" wailed Brother Bellevue on the dark landing.

Wagglin scrambled up. "I was only waitin' till they got clear, sir! Come on with me before that door goes! I know a way out!"

They flitted down the stairs, shivering at every crashing axe-stroke on the stout, iron-bound door. They noticed a distinct smell of burning as they passed a refectory, but of course could not stop to investigate. Wagglin went on unswervingly up and down dark corridors, and presently they came to a small side door. The key was found in the lock, and, in a second or so, they were outside, with dark shrubberies all around and the calm, cold stars overhead.

"This way, sir!" hissed the guide. They trotted along a pitch-dark overgrown path, got through a post-and-rail fence, and found themselves plodding through heavy ground.

"Must rest a bit!" gasped Bellevue, whose knees were going underneath him. He sank down thankfully with one hand on a dew-wet cabbage. Wagglin subsided without a word on the next vegetable.

Sounds of riot and panic came faintly to them across the cool night, and once they heard the report of a revolver. The upstairs portion of the mansion was dim, but several of the downstairs windows were golden with light.

"What's that glare downstairs?" asked Bellevue.

Wagglin emerged cautiously from his cabbage and gazed at the illumination.

"W'y, the 'ouse is on fire!" he moaned. "They muster upset some of them lamps. Blimey! there she goes!" As he spoke, flames burst from the heat-cracked windows, and thick smoke rolled out.

"They'll never git it out! There ain't no water 'ere!"

Fascinated by the spectacle, they lay low and watched the rapid progress of the fire until it had fairly caught the top floors and started to light up the neighborhood in a dangerous way. They suddenly found themselves lying in a blaze of light, and Wagglin with a cry of fear besought his late employer to get up and resume his flight.

"Why didn't we bring my suit-case?" moaned the habited K.C.

"No good, sir! We couldn't run with an 'eavy thing like time!" He seized Bellevue's arm, and, despite breathless protests, started to run him across the vegetable garden,

"I— can't— run any more!....Too— done up!"

"Come on, sir! There's— pony in stable— down 'ere!"

They blundered on into the dark and presently came to a dark outbuilding. "Wait a jiff!" muttered Wagglin, and disappeared utterly. Bellevue leant against the slab wall and longed for brandy. Then Wagglin appeared or loomed up, leading a four-footed shadow which turned out to be a fat, docile pony saddled with a bag and arrayed in a halter. He helped the incoherently grateful Bellevue to mount and directed him to hold on as lightly as possible by the mane. That done, they started off into the wilderness of the night, two monkish wayfarers travelling in simple ancient fashion towards safety,

JUST after dawn an early ploughman, twenty miles away over the hills, heard a nervous coo-ee from the fence, and turning saw a couple of drooping monks, one of whom was seated on a fat pony.

He lounged across and heard with surprise that Mount Rest had been burnt down the previous evening soon after he had retired to bed.

"I'm real sorry to 'ear it," he drawled in simple country friendliness. Rather to his surprise, the two brothers received the remark with weary indifference. The one on the pony made some earnest inquiries about the possibility of getting a breakfast and some ordinary clothes.

"Right yer are!" said the ploughman heartily, and let down the sliprails for them. The worn-out travellers entered and allowed themselves to be piloted across the field to a little house on a hill, from the chimney of which blue smoke was spiralling into the still air.

At the door, the mounted brother gradually unloaded himself from the pony with numerous groans.

The ploughman watched him sympathetically. "Bit stiff, brother, ain't yer?"

Exhausted as he was, Bellevue turned on him. "Don't call me *brother!*" he entreated.

The ploughman, who was a man of some reading, looked very abashed.

"Beg pardon, sir, I think I understand. I didn't know what you was up to at first goin' about that way; but I suppose now this is what these 'ere books calls 'travellin' incog.,' so ter speak?"

29: A Ruined Tragedy

The Lone Hand July 1914

THEY sat together, yet more or less apart on a dark park seat. Far away through the Moreton Bay fig-trees that skirted the fence a line of unwinking electric globes marked the street where the snarling cars whirred along with the poles striking green, sticky flashes from the overhead wires.

"Orright then!" said the boy, tensely. And again, in a threatening way, "Orright then!"

The girl sobbed quietly.

"If yer *won't*— well that's th' end of it! I— I ain't got no more ter say!"

The girl continued to sob.

"I know wot ter do now!"

She half turned her head and sobbed into her handkerchief. "You ain't!— you carn't!" Then her voice trailed into silence.

He shifted his feet miserably. "We'll see erbout *that*! I won't be messed erbout no more! Always messin' erbout!" he whined fretfully. And again, "I'm sick of it!"

"I— carn't— 'elp— it— can I?"

The girl's sobs came faintly through the handkerchief like tentative telegraphic signals.

"O' course yer can!"

"I— I carn't! Reely I carn't!"

"Orright then! *Orright!*"

A pair of passing shadows, clinging lovingly together, looked back over their shoulders and laughed heartlessly.

"I DUNNO where that girl gets to every evenin'," sighed the stout woman on the Balmain cottage veranda.

Her stout, grey-haired husband emerged like a pantomime demon from the depths of the evening paper and pointed his pipe-stem at her. "If eny 'arm comes ter that kid I'll break 'er back, an' I'll break 'is back, *too*— I don't care 'oo 'e is!"

"Yer carn't keep girls in these days!" wailed the stout woman. "They ain't got no re-speck for their parents! If I've told that girl once—"

"It ain't no use tell in' 'em anything, mother."

"You're right there!" snorted the stout lady.

"Pitcher shows an' skatin' rinks is ruinin' th' youth of th' country," growled the head of the house. "If I 'ad my way, I'd 'ave 'em all yarded at sundown an' I'd put a fire-stick in all th' dam' skatin' rinks."

"Fer *my* part," continued the stout lady, "I wouldn't mind a bit if I thought she was jus' skatin' or lookin' at pitchers. It's the 'uggin' an' messin' erbout in parks that does th' damage an' brings shame on re-spectable people. It's enuf ter turn yer 'air grey th' way them boys an' girls goes on w'en they gets on to a beach or a park bench. I'll give 'er a bit of me mind w'en she gits 'ome— th' gaddin' brat!"

And once more the head of the house announced with judicial calm, "I'll break 'er back, an' I'll break 'is back, too— I don't care 'oo 'e is!"

"Well, thank goodness, there ain't no 'casion to do that yet awhile!"

" 'Ow do you know there ain't?"

"Well I should 'ope not, eny'ow!"

"Don't you be too shoor! I wouldn't trust any kid these days— they're too cunnin'!"

"I alwiz tole Ruby ter bring 'er troubles ter me! I trust me daughter!"—this last defiantly.

The paper screen came down with a crackle. "Well, 'as she ever brought eny of 'er troubles to yer?"

"I carn't say 'as she 'as."

"No, an' she *won't*! You take my word for it, Missus, she won't! I tell you th' kids these days are blessed cunnin'— they know a sight mor'n you or I do!" Up went the paper.

The stout lady fanned herself with her apron and looked out anxiously to where the white park lights blazed.

"I carn't think where she gets to!" she whimpered, half to herself.

IN A small, one-eyed cottage, situated about half-a-mile from Ruby's home, a man unbraced, and, with his boot-laces whipping the floor, showed his bath-ruffled hair at the door of the room where his wife sat sewing close to the kerosene lamp.

"Where's Dick, Mum?"

The old mother stopped sewing and tore off her spectacles with a deft, impatient movement. "Gone out again!"

"I thort so!" sneered the heavy father. "Say where 'e was goin'?"

"No; 'e jus' went out."

"Curse 'im!" breathed Dick's father, and clung thoughtfully to the doorpost.

The mother calmly resumed her spectacles and her sewing. "I tole 'im you'd be wild if 'e didn't stay in a bit an study for is exam.!" she remarked, placidly.

"Wot did 'e say ter that?" queried the father.

"'E larfed!"

"Like 'is cheek!" breathed the ramshackle parent, and relapsed into thought or something resembling it. Presently he broke out again. "Wot's th' use o' puttin' a boy to the engineerin' if 'e won t trouble ter study? I wish ter Gord I'd 'ad 'is chances. I 'ad ter take th' first thing that come erlong an' stick to it till I could find somethin' better. Nobody 'elped *me!*"

The sewer gave her lop-sided specs, an uppercut, and slewed them round the other way. "I tole 'im you'd be wild," she remarked with quiet triumph, and resumed her virtuous job.

"I serpose now," shouted Dicks father, working himself into a fury, "I serpose 'e's messin' erbout drinkm', or sittm with is arm round some fool of a tart e s picked up. Th' parks is full of 'em these nights.

The needle stopped. All the mother s calm had vanished. "I do 'ope e don't come ter no 'arm!" She fidgeted and muttered something pathetic about " 'ussies an' innocent boys."

"Oh, 'e's well able to take care of 'imself," growled the father. "These boys an girls knows more'n we did when *we* was their age, you take it from me!"

"But I don't *like* 'em bein out so much. An' 'e should be studyin' 'ere at 'ome! 'Ow is 'e ter get on if 'e don't study? I tole 'im only the other night that 'e'll be wantin' ter marry some day, an' 'ow could 'e marry if 'e didn't study an' get a better job in th' De-partment. But d'ye think e'd listen ter me? Not 'im!"

The father sighed. "I'll 'ave ter 'ave a tork with that young man w'en 'e comes in— that is if 'e ain't too late."

" 'E orter be ashamed of 'imself!" chattered the mother, sewing feverishly. "Lord knows livin's dear enough without time when there's a chance o' workin' up an gettin' a better billet. I don't know wot's goin' ter become of 'im, I don't, reely!"

Dick's father sighed again and stumbled out to the dark veranda, where he sat down. The mother, with head averted, sewed away without rest.

THE CHEMIST was just preparing to close up for the night when the last customer arrived.

"Wanter bottle o' Shriekol!"

The yawning chemist mechanically reached one down from the shelf and started to wrap it up in white paper.

"Don't matter erbout wrappin' it!"

The chemist hesitated and looked at the grimy hand eagerly outstretched for the bottled fire. Then for the first time he shot a glance at the customer's face; it was almost hidden under the felt hatbrim. If the transaction had happened during the day he might have made some enquiries; but it was the end of a hot day, and he was weary to the bone.

"Right you are!"

The cash register chimed loudly— the cash drawer snapped. "Hey! you've left your change!"

But the customer had gone. The chemist, his eyes fixed on the doorway, put the sixpence aside on the shelf. For a minute he seemed to be fighting his own doubts. Then he yawned comfortably and looked at his watch.

"YOU ORTER be ashamed of yerself!" sobbed the old mother sitting by the bed in the hospital ward. "Nice disgrace ter be found kickin' and frothin' on th' footpath, an' brought 'ere ter be stomach-pumped an' all! W'y you went an' done it I *don't* know! If you 'ad 'arf th' troubles I've 'ad, me lad, there might be some excuse for yer; but ter go an' do that fer a worthless slip of a girl ! An' it might rooin yer stomach an' yer digeschun fer life, pourin' that filthy, burnin' stuff down yer throat! Well, thank Gord they 'ad th' stomach-pump, that's all— though it was all printed in th' paper with yer name an' address an all! Such a *disgrace!*" She brooded awhile over this aspect of it, while the boy in bed fidgeted guiltily, and a nurse moved about softly at the other end of the ward.

"I do 'ope this will be a lesson to yer, an' that yer'll give up this gaddin' about with girls, an' study for yer exams, when yer get outer 'orspittle! I dunno 'ow I've lived through these last two days an' nights! Seems as if I 'adn't rested a minit ever since Mr. Smith come in with th' noos that you was dyin' 'ere an' I was ter come at once if I wanted ter see yer alive!" (She broke off and dabbed feebly at her eyes.) "I 'spose I'll 'ave ter be goin' now —they alwiz wanter push yer outer th' place before yer've said 'arf yer wanted to. Ah, well!" —stowing away the handkerchief, "I 'spose I'll jest 'ave ter put up with it. Good-night then, dearie. I'll be up again ter-morrer. Gord bless yer."

The hovering nurse rustled forward and showed her out.

"YOU AIN'T goin' ter get out ter-night, Miss!" Ruby's mother stood over her threateningly, and, behind her, Ruby's father waited ready for any emergency.

The heroine of the evening paper hit her lip. "I wasn't goin' out!"

"Don't lie ter me! You was goin' out!"

"You stay 'ome," boomed her father. "'You stay 'ome, or I'll break yer back!"

"No more boys for you, me lady!" added her mother.

"If," supplemented her father, "if I see yer with a boy I'll break 'is back!"

That seemed final. Ruby dropped limply into a chair. Her male parent regarded her bowed shoulders with a dreadful air of satisfaction. "Th' boys you get poisons themselves in front of yer I"

As this seemed to be a frightful reflection on her personal charms, Ruby buried her face in her hands and wept tumultuously. When she had pulled herself together at the direction of her unsympathetic parents her mother solemnly took down from the little hanging bookshelf her last Sunday-school prize. It was only opened during disciplinary terms as a sort of sentence.

"You stay at 'ome like a decent girl an' read yer Shakespeare! What are yer up ter now?"

Ruby listlessly turned the pages.

"Romeyo an' Joolyet," she breathed, damply, and forthwith tried to lose herself in the other love tragedy— the one that happened long ago, before the stomach-pump was invented for the destruction of romance.

30: Mr. Bodger's Joy Ride

The Lone Hand March 1915

"IT'S a fairly good road after you leave Parramatta "said Lempson proudly to the assembled boarders. He had become the owner of a motor-car and was taking Mr. Bodger, the senior boarder, for a run to the mountains. The vehicle itself— a small thing of small horse-power but great antiquity— stood ready at the gate.

A large hamper was strapped on at the back where it get most dust, and the inside was heaped with rugs and coats.

"When do you expect to get there, Mr. Lempson?" inquired Mrs. Tribbens, the landlady.

"Oh, in about three hours," replied Lempson in the easy confident manner of the experienced tourist. "It ought to be a nice run up."

The boarders massed on the veranda to view the departure murmured enviously.

The car owner stepped to the hall doorway.

"Come on, Bodger!" he shouted impatiently.

Volunteer couriers detached themselves from the group and coursed excitedly around the premises in search of the other traveller,

"Coming!" boomed a large, important voice. The missing Bodger, stout, hot and generously bearded, hurried downstairs and joined the congregation.

There was a sort of general and uproarious farewell at the door, and then a triumphal procession to the gate. Bodger was assisted into his seat by half the company. Then all hands drew off and manned the kerbstone. Lempson solemnly adjourned to the front of the engine and, seizing the crank, gave it a vicious twist. After five tries, the motor hitherto decently composed, started to shudder violently, 'while the engine commenced a peculiar oil-drum tattoo. Bodger, who was now shaking in his seat like one afflicted with the palsy looked doubtful; but the face of Lempson was radiant, as he climbed into his place behind the steering-wheel and waved his hand to the cheering boarders (The cheers could just be heard above the clatter of the engine.)

"Now we're off!" he howled in Bodger's ear, and did something to a lever. There was a dreadful grating sound as if the most sacred parts of the contraption were going to smash and the car threw itself forward a foot, nearly dislocating the necks of the two occupants. Then the engine fired five ear-gjgfm rapid succession and stopped, with a shrill whirr. In the blessed silence that followed, the boarders on the other side of the blue haze could be seen laughing very heartily.

"That was a d—d unpleasant experience," growled the passenger from the middle of the stinking petrol cloud.

Lempson, busy with the engine, seemed to swear

"*What's* that you say?"

"It did that because the engine was cold," mumbled the engineer, seizing the crank. Five more twists and the engine commenced again on the deafening oil-drum tattoo. "We're right this time," he remarked, as he resumed his seat in the shaking car.

They weren't all right. It was an encore performance, except for the fact that this time there were ten explosions instead of five.

"How often does it have to do this before it starts?" demanded Bodger, when the boarders' second burst of merriment was over.

"It doesn't do this at all usually," groaned the harassed owner.

Bodger looked nervous and angry. "I hope there is no danger of it exploding, or anything like that?"

"None whatever," snapped Lempson, and got out to make his third attack on the unwilling engine. This time the thing continued to run, after firing the customary opening salute. The boarders on the kerb grew hilarious, and the rest of the street started to take a kindly interest.

"Mind it doesn't shoot you, Bodger," was the injunction screamed at him, as the elderly thing started off with a spine-cracking jerk and toiled uproariously round the corner.

The joy of having the thing actually going seemed to go to Lempson's head. As they swept out of sight of the jeering boarders, he shouted in Bodger's ear, "I'll take it round the block and pass the house again— just to show them how well it's going. We can't let them have the laugh on us."

Bodger nodded helplessly, and the excited thing drummed itself round the far end of the block and came rattling down to its triumph. As it came within sight of the boarding-house again, all the inmates were observed on the veranda cheering.

"There they are," shouted Lempson, and shoved down a lever with the evident intention of flying triumphantly past the jeering mob. Instantly there was a fusilade of shots from the engine, and the motor propped and shook itself like a wet dog.

Bodger threw up his hands, whirled round on his seat, and shouted to be let out. The boarders howled delightedly and started to stream down to the gate. But at that instant the cranky old machine woke up and played itself round the corner, with Bodger gesticulating like a clockwork man. Immediately it had passed from sight, the watchers on the threshold heard another series of sharp explosions and a heartbreaking whirr.

"He's busted again," said Parman, and went off to investigate. He found the attempted travellers stranded in front of a villa with a nice garden. Lempson had removed the dish-cover from the engine and was peering wretchedly into its hot, oily depths, while Bodger pestered him with questions.

"D—n it man, there must be something wrong with it!"

"It wants warming up!"

"It ought to be warm enough now— it's been going on like a d—d gun for the last ten minutes. Why does it go off like that?"

"Because it's cold, I tell you!"

"Can't you warm it up, then? There must be some way of warming it up!"

"This warms it up!"

Bodger grunted as Lempson slammed on the dish-cover and approached the crank.

"It's a d—d unpleasant way of warming, anyhow!"

The crank was wrenched nine times before the engine made any demonstration. Then it merely gave the sitting Bodger another severe shaking, and fired a salute of eight shots. That done, it subsided again with the usual hopeless whirr. Bodger rose from his seat and alighted amidst the usual blue haze.

"What are you getting out for?" demanded Lempson, desisting from his labors to expostulate.

"I'm not going to be shaken to death for nothing," barked the passenger. "I'll wait here until you get it going again; it's unpleasant sitting in there— besides, I don't feel at all comfortable with all that shooting going on underneath me."

Lempson turned away disgustedly.

"Have you got enough oil in it?" suggested Parman, who knew nothing at all about motors.

The honorary chauffeur wiped the perspiration from his brow and gave the crank another wrench. This time the engine woke up properly and gave an imitation of the Battle of Waterloo, with smoke and screams complete. When it was all over, a stout lady was observed by Bodger signalling at the gate of a villa.

Bodger thought she might have some advice or refreshments to offer, and went over to attend to her.

"You really must go away at once " commenced the stout lady fretfully. "It is most inconsiderate of you to stay here making those disgusting noises! Then there is that dreadful smell of oil! Why don't you go away and do it somewhere else?"

Bodger flushed. "The motor needs a little adjustment, ma'am," he commenced.

"Yes, yes, of course! But why don't you do it at home, instead of stopping right opposite my gate? It's given me the most dreadful headache! Really, I think you might go and do it somewhere else."

"The motor has broken down, ma'am! It is out of order."

The stout and unreasonable lady waved her handkerchief feebly at the clouds of vapor rolling down towards her. "This has never happened before," she moaned. "Never in my life have I been so annoyed." Then she tried to move Bodger with a pathetic appeal. "Why don't you get a better car— one that doesn't smell so fearfully? I can't imagine how a gentleman like yourself can bear to ride in such a shooting thing. Don't you get tired of it sometimes?"

Bodger stroked his beard. "It isn't my car, ma'am. It belongs to my friend. He—" Here the engine drowned all conversation with an imitation of an eruption.

"Oh, why does it do that?" asked the stout lady plaintively when the selection was finished, and Lempson was holding a hopeless consultation with Parman.

"The engine needs warming up," said Bodger, who knew nothing else to say.

"Our motor doesn't do that," persisted the lady. "That shooting noise must be really terrible! Does it have to do that, or isn't it right?"

"I don't think it's right," said Bodger.

"It seems to do that just before it stops— or just afterwards."

"They ought to be able to do something for that," said the stout lady thoughtfully.

"Yes."

"Some oil, or something like that— or perhaps it is a screw that needs turning'."

"Yes."

"Such little things seem to upset these motors."

"Yes."

"How often does it go off shooting like that?"

"Only when it stops, ma'am. When it's really going it makes a different sort of noise— a sort of tin kettling sound."

"Oh, that's what I heard just now! I thought it was soldiers or children playing. How curious! I suppose now that is one of the old-fashioned motors?"

"I think it is, ma'am."

"Such funny little things, aren't they? I always think the people in them look like toys, you know. Oh, dear me! there it goes again! I do wish your friend would take it away!"

Bodger looked round unhappily at the motor, now in full blast again.

"That's just what he's trying to do, ma'am. We just—"

"Come on, Bodger!" howled Lempson, pointing excitedly at the quivering machine. "We're all right now!"

Bodger raised his hat perfunctorily to the stout lady and hurriedly took his place in the car. Lempson nodded good-bye to Parman, jumped in, and did something rash with the levers. The machine whined miserably, moved forward one yard, and died pathetically in a thick cloud of stifling smoke that belched from the exhaust pipe.

Parman on the kerb clapped his hand over his mouth and nose and bowed in silent laughter.

"Oh, how disgusting!" shrilled the stout lady at the gate, and disappeared.

Bodger, coughing and spitting, stumbled hurriedly from the fumigating appliance and dragged his coat with him. "That's enough for me!" he stormed. "I'm not going to be made a fool of!"

"Where are you going?" shouted Lempson.

"I'm going back! I'm not going to sit there all day!"

"We're not going to be here all day! I bet you I get it going next shot!"

"I don't care if you do! And how do I know you'll keep it going? I'll get off now while I'm close to home."

"Oh, all right! Have it your own way!"

Lempson turned away wearily as his late passenger joined Parman on the kerb. "I'll get it going and do the trip on my own."

Bodger and Parman then left him fumbling disconsolately with the engine and returned to the boarding house, where they received an ovation. There were cheers of uncharitable delight when the boarders heard that Lempson was giving a petrol smoke concert in the next street. For half an hour or so there was a general laugh each time a miserable whirr or a bang was heard; a sudden fusillade excited them to cheers. Everybody made a joke about it. Then the novelty of it wore off and the veranda congregation scattered. Lunch time approached quietly.

It was the rapid clanging of the hosecart alarm that roused the house once more. The red vehicle with its load of brass helmeted firemen clattered dustily down the street and swept round the corner on two wheels. Then, like the rustle of a wave came the pursuing crowd. The excitement, whatever it was, seemed to be just round the corner judging by the tumult. So it was.

When the goggled Lempson arrived home with his rug and thermos flask (all he had been able to save) he supplied a brief explanation:

"I think there must have been a leak in the petrol tank. What the devil's the good of a motor if you can't smoke near it? I'm glad the rotten thing's burnt!"

31: Your Respected Uncle

(Being the Weekly Confidential Report of George Albert Hodge, immigrant, in charge of a mental case.)

The Lone Hand 1 Nov 1914

HONORED Sir and Master,

I got here safely by the train last Thursday evening, and was met by Mr. James, who kindly drove me out, sir, to the house where your respected uncle stays. When we got to the house, your uncle was up a tree singing. Mr. James kindly told your uncle, Mr. Thomas, who I was, sir, and that I was to be his companion. Your respected uncle, sir, showed his teeth at me and threw an apple which hit me on the nose, but otherwise was quite agreeable to me. Under the instructions of Mr. James, I left the usual saucer of milk at the foot of the tree and came out to collect your respected uncle at sundown, after he had drunk it, as is his custom when he is doing the cat. As soon as he descended from the tree, I went over to pet him, as per instructions of Mr. James, but he refused to be petted and bit me in the leg. Knowing that it was only his play, I humored him as much as possible; but when he tried to kick me in the stomach, sir, I took the liberty of shielding myself with a chair, which I subsequently repaired, and it is now as good as new. I succeeded in getting him back to the house by running there ahead of him. He was most eager to get in, but I am afraid, sir, that I had to mislead him a little by leading him to believe that we would set fire to the house together, and that he could then hit me on the head with a hammer— a little fancy he seems to have, sir. He was greatly disappointed when he found that he would have to forego these things. He started then to throttle me. I am afraid, sir, that your respected uncle will soon come to dislike me, because I then had to wrestle with him. Before he would consent to go to bed, I had to promise to let him throttle me next day. Then, sir, he crawled underneath the bed, and when I tried to put the clothes over him, he said I was the Devil heaping coals of fire on his head, and that nobody loved him. I told him, sir, that I loved him; but he screamed and said that he didn't want the Devil to love him. I trust, sir, I have not made a mistake here. Should I have humored him, sir, by pretending that I was the Devil? As you know, sir, I am anxious to oblige you and your respected uncle, and, though it would be against by religious principles, I would be the Devil, sir, if I thought it would give him any little pleasure. You might please let me know, sir, if I am to be the Devil.

After locking his room, I took the liberty of going to bed, sir, being somewhat tired after ray first day's humoring of your respected uncle. Some time in the night he managed to climb through the fanlight over his door (an extraordinary fine performance for an old gentleman, if I may say so) and

called through the keyhole that he would take particular care in the morning to cut my throat from ear to ear as well as throttling me. I thanked him, sir, knowing that he only meant it as a favor. He then started to run up and down the hall and howl. I think he also did a certain amount of jumping. When I asked him, as a personal favor, to go to bed, sir, and get some rest, he told me that he was waiting for the morning and getting his muscle up. I thought it best, sir, to humor him by going to bed myself. Besides, sir, I must admit that I did not feel equal to struggling any more that night with your respected uncle, Mr. Thomas, who is uncommonly tough and quick for one of his age.

Next day we were very busy, sir. Your respected uncle, Mr. Thomas, was up before me and waiting behind the bath-house with the axe. He was much annoyed when it missed me, and chased me across country as far as Taylor's farm, which I am told is two miles. I did not mind, sir, the morning being cool and I lightly clothed. Your respected uncle, I am sorry to say, was much exhausted by his effort, and I told him, sir, that he should not be so energetic. He refused to walk home, sir, and I had to carry him on my back. He was quite pleasant and agreeable except for a little kicking, which I assure you, sir, does not matter, the bruises being nothing to speak of.

Well, sir, we arrived home at last, and up to the middle of dinner Mr. Thomas was as pleasant as a gentleman could be. He asked after my family, sir, and left the room to get a portrait of himself in full uniform, but came back instead with a double-barrelled gun, which, I must say, greatly surprised me. I took the liberty of crawling under the table, until your respected uncle had shot the roast beef with both barrels. Then, dear sir and master, I hurried away from the house and proceeded as fast as I could to the cemetery on the hill. Mr. Thomas was some distance behind me. I managed to keep him amused, sir, most of the afternoon. He had brought a lot of cartridges with him, and I hid behind tombstones while he fired them off. I am afraid that I did not do enough running in the open to please him, but that could not be avoided. But I did my best for him by poking up my hat on a stick and moving on to another tombstone when he came to view my remains. The hat lasted out the afternoon, sir, but I am afraid I will not be able to wear it any more.

I was somewhat worried, sir, as to how I was to get him home. But he sat down under a tree and fell asleep, and I tied his legs in a bag and brought him home in a cart for a shilling. He was quite pleasant, sir, and offered to show me the photograph of himself in full uniform, if I would give him the gun and some cartridges and leave the door of his room open. I thought, sir, it would be better not to do so.

At tea that evening, sir, he told me there were evil spirits in the stew and refused to eat it. Thinking the hot weather might have been disastrous to the

meat, sir, I put my face down to smell it, when your respected uncle pushed me, and while I was blinded with stew, tried to brain me with the bread. I then struggled with your respected uncle; but this,, time, being somewhat weakened, I was unsuccessful and he wrapped me in the table-cloth and told me he was going to alter the shape of my ears which had been annoying him for some time. While he was sharpening the knife, sir, I hurried away and obtained the assistance of the gardener.

When we got back, sir, prepared for a struggle, your respected uncle was quite cheerful and trying to stand on his head in the dish of jelly, which, he said, was cooling for the head when there were fools about. He would only consent to go to bed after I had signed an agreement to fight him next day with axes for the heavyweight championship of the world. I am afraid, dear sir and master, that I cannot afford to be strictly truthful with your respected uncle, Mr. Thomas, who gets very strange fancies. He will have it now, sir, that it's me that has to be humored, and, just to please him, I pretend that it is. But even to please him; I cannot agree to do all that he requires of me. Do you think, sir, that it will do him any good at all by watching me dance on the table? It seems to be a great fancy of his to see me dance on the table, and this morning, he, having been very quiet, I was obliging him with a few steps, when he ups and runs out of the room saying he must show me the portrait of himself in full uniform. As he always says that, sir, before he gets the gun, I thought it best to run after him. He was waiting just outside the door with a horse-rug, and got me properly before I knew what he was at. I was afraid, sir, when he said something about fire; but he changed his mind and just kicked me a few times. Then all of a sudden, sir, he had one of his quick changes, and helped me up saying how he hoped I was enjoying myself, and not to be afraid to ask if there was anything else he could do for me. We then went out for a long walk to the river, sir, and your uncle, Mr. Thomas, was quite gay and sociable, only getting annoyed when I refused to lean far over the bridge railing and let him hold my feet. He said the view was wonderful when you looked at it that way, and that I was a coward not to let him do it. But I saw what he wanted, sir. I knew he would be up to his tricks again.

I have to give you notice, sir and master, that your respected uncle has lately been getting the best of me in the little tussles that we have. I have found out, sir, from him that he is using a fighting system invented by the Japs called "The Jew Gets You," though I can't think why they should call it that. This "Jew Gets You" is a little book with pictures of Japs to show you how to do it; and, sir, your respected uncle Mr. Thomas, is studying it all the time and will not lend it to me, though I have asked him many times. He says there is in it many ways of breaking my neck and that he is learning them all. I would thank

you, dear sir and master, to get me a copy of "The Jew Gets You," so that I may resist your respected uncle more easily.

I have found my position more trying than usual, sir, since the fly papers were put out. Mr. Thomas, sir, has proved himself most ingenious with these papers, and is hardly ever without one. He says, sir, that it is his ambition to wrap me completely in these things and to drive me out of the country. I have indeed to be careful when he has one in his hands.

Last night, sir, under instructions from Mr. James, I took Mr. Thomas to a political meeting, and, though I asked him not to, he pushed himself forward and took a leading part in the talk, making a long speech in his usual style all about everything. He got along extraordinary well, sir, his talk going down capitally. When somebody asked him if the country didn't want more immigrants, he said, "What the country wants is more fly-papers to put on the immigrants it has got already." Then, dear sir and master, everybody laughed as if he had said something sensible. After that, sir, all the platform gentlemen having let him run on, he proposed what he called a vote of censure on the Labor Government, and everyone seemed to be in favor until your respected uncle called upon all those in favor to signify in the usual manner by standing on his or her head. With that, dear sir and master, your respected uncle, though a man well on in years and unfitted for such exercises, stood on his own head, and all the fruit and marbles in his pockets fell on the stage, and everybody saw there was something wrong and called out "Shame!" though the shame was to them for having let him go on, though I suppose, sir, that his talk was so like the other gentlemen's that they didn't know the difference. It took two policemen as well as myself to get him off the platform and into a buggy, and I think, dear master, it would be better for your respected uncle not to go in for politics any more.

In conclusion, dear sir and master, I am glad to say that I like the situation, though your respected uncle is sometimes so full of spirits that I hardly know what to do. I will have to conclude now, as I notice he is dragging the garden hose this way. Will you please send me a copy of "The Jew Gets You" as soon as possible, dear master, so that I may cope with your respected uncle?

Your respectful servant,
George Albert Hodge.

32: "Opperashuns"

The Lone Hand Aug 1915

"HOW is she?" panted the grotesquely fat woman. "Did she git over it orright? These opperashuns is such terrible things."

The woman who was not so fat fanned her flushed face rapidly with the menu card.

"This beef's too 'ot," she remarked, severely.

"But 'ow erbout yer sister?" pleaded the other, in a tone loud enough to compel the attention of the whole room.

"I'll speak to that waitress when she comes back! Oh, Mary's over it orright; but she 'ad a terrible time— twenty stitches, an' under chloroform f'r four hours!"

"Poor thing!"

"Th' doctor said 'e never seen a worse case— when it was all over, that is. 'Corse we didn't know nothing till it was all over."

"No?"

"No; they wouldn't tell us. The doctor told us they was afraid of 'er 'eart. They 'ad ter cut so much, yer know, ter get to th' 'pendix."

The austere young man, who was dining with the bald young man at the next table, coughed appealingly; but the rush of medical conversation didn't ease off.

"—brother 'ad a choomer that killed 'im at forty. That just shows yer!" The grotesquely fat woman flourished her knife triumphantly and went at the steak.

"These 'ere growths are 'orrible!" said the other, gloomily.

"Th' knife fer me every time!" shrilled the fat woman. "You've got ter 'ave it! Much as you may 'ate it, if th' doctor says you've got to 'ave it, you've got ter ave it!"

(The bald young man coughed and shuffled his feet unnoticed by the two conversationalists.)

"All the same, I don't bleeve in too much cuttin'!"

The champion of the knife leant ominously across the table and propounded this: "Where would I be ter-day if it wasn't for opperashuns? I been 'acked about enuf, an' look at me! Ain't I 'ealthy enuf?"

"I say it ain't nacheral ter be laid out there an'—"

(The explosive coughing of the young men caused them to miss the rest of the speech. But they found the conversation still in full blast when they had recovered.)

"—an' look at Alice!" (It was the much-operated-on speaking.) "Where would Alice 'ave been but for 'er opperashuns? W'y when she come cryin' ter me, I sez 'Don't be a *silly*,' I sez. 'You won't feel nothin', I sez. 'You see yer doctor, an go inter orspittle, an' 'ave yer operashun, an be thankful for it,' I sez. Well, wot was th' result? She went in an' 'ad it, an since then she's 'ad two more, an' she'd 'ave another ter-morrer if she felt like it. You ask Alice if she don't bleeve in opperashuns!"

"Wot did she 'ave out?" asked the insatiable friend.

(The coughing of the two young men here almost annoyed the gossipers. They glanced resentfully before resuming.)

" 'Er glands," moaned the fat woman. "She suffered somethin' dreadful, too. Pars th' bread, dear."

The bald young man looked his austere friend in the eye, and his voice rang out like a trumpet. "I'm sorry you can't come this afternoon, Doctor, but I suppose you can't leave such a desperate case?"

"Oh, no ! Couldn't think of it!" The austere young man coughed importantly and shot a rapid glance at the women to make sure they were both listening. They were. Their knives and forks were suspended dreamily over their plates, and their heads were turned just as much as they dared.

"You say it was an extraordinary dangerous operation?"

("Extraordin'ry dangerous opperashun!" repeated the women, and waited breathless for more.)

"One of the most extraordinary and dangerous I ever assisted at," said the austere young man with an undertakerish air. "You know, McStormer" (here he named a very eminent surgeon) "is a wonderfully daring man— does things that take your breath away. I'm used to him, but he quite knocked me over this time."

(" 'Ear that?" hissed the fatter woman. Her friend nodded frantically.)

"What was the trouble?"

"A very simple one. The patient— a middle-aged woman— has a slight growth in her throat. I would have removed it in two minutes in the ordinary straight-out way, and left it at that. But directly McStormer started he said, 'H don't like the look of this at all. I may be mistaken, of course, but just to make sure, we will open the chest and have a look at the lungs.'"

("That's wot I call workmanlike," breathed the fat woman. "Finish a job while yer at it, I say.")

("It muster been orful f'r er," whimpered the other.)

"Well we got out the lungs, and McStormer said at once, 'I thought so! The left has practically gone. Put it aside, its only taking up room there. Now for the liver.' When we got to that, one look was enough to show McStormer that she

had had incipient duplexia of the liver for years. He took out the liver— or most of it— saying that it was no use cumbering the woman with such stuff."

"By George!" breathed the bald young man.

("Took it clean away," announced the unnecessarily fat woman.)

("They 'ad no right ter do it!" trumpeted her friend, by now almost panic-stricken.)

"That wasn't the end of it," growled the doctor. "Anyone but McStormer would have stopped there, but he was just getting interested. Tm going to give this patient a thorough overhaul,' said he. 'Another bottle of chloroform, nurse.' Then, if you will believe me, he got fairly to work and took that woman to pieces as if she had been a watch. Very soon everybody in the operating theatre had a sample. Of course, the heart and a few essential parts were not shifted."

("Well, I should 'ope not!")

("I carn't stand much more of this, Jane!")

"They were merely probed a bit and strengthened. Then McStormer started to put back a few of the exhibits— just as few as he possibly could, and I assure you they weren't many. McStormer has his own views about the number of organs that are absolutely necessary. He says Providence overloaded us; so, whenever he gets a chance he corrects Providence's work."

"Do you mean to say that he—?"

"I mean to say that he rejected most of the material he took out. There were quite a lot of fittings left over when he had finished."

("They 'ad no right ter do it! I say it was a sin and a shame ter!")

(" 'Old on ! Let's 'ear th' rest of it!")

"—put back just as few as he could. It was a thoroughly smart job."

"So the patient now has—?"

"The patient now has practically nothing!"

"McStormer must have taken a frightful lot of trouble over her!"

"He did. But he put it this way to me afterwards. 'If I let this woman go after fixing her throat, she would probably come back to me two or three times at least. Three or four short operations take more time than one long one. Therefore, while we are at it, let us attend to everything.' Well, he attended to everything!" The austere young man waved his knife comprehensively and settled down to eat.

There was a slight commotion at the table beyond, and the woman who was not so fat swept towards the door with the unnecessarily fat one in pursuit, with their joint and united parcels. At the door they paused irresolute like escaping hens.

"I don't care, I tell yer! I call it butchery— butchery an' murder! Ter go cuttin' an' snippin'!"

But the champion of the knife, though obviously shaken, was loyal to the last.

"It does seem crool, o' course— if yer ain't been done, that is. But—" (with tremendous emphasis) "—if yer must 'ave it, yer must 'ave it, an' that's all erbout it!"

As they escaped down the stairs, the bald headed man said to the austere young man: "Thanks Bill, old chap; you did the McStormer business very well."

33: The Bishop and the Merry-go-Round

The Lone Hand March 1917

THE sodden bannerettes of the beach merry-go-round flapped and curled feebly in the chill Spring breeze, and the dismal proprietor of the machinery of joy stood inside the sacred circle of staring wooden horses and gilded chariots, cursing the wet weather. The wheezy engine which he had fired and burnished so carefully that morning, hissed unprofitably behind him and the heat of the furnace served only to warm his flannelled legs. In deference to the calendar and the gaiety of his job he had that morning put on summer clothes and the unscheduled cold change had caught him both ways.

"Orstralia's no good now!" he declaimed passionately to his sole companion, the husband of the woman who kept the beach tea kiosk close by. "Wot with th' war thinnin' out th' crowds and the amusement tax cuttin' down profits, there won't be nothin' in caterin' for th' public soon."

" 'Ow long you been in th' bizness?" pointedly enquired the kiosk manager— not a very sympathetic type.

"It's only me first season is this bizness, but I know 'ow things are— one of th' chaps down at the Pink City is an ole cobber of mine."

"Wot's 'e do?"

"Shootin'-gall'ry."

"Parrysites!" said the man from the kiosk, severely.

" 'Ow d'ye mean?"

"Ain't legitimate bizness!"

"W'y not?"

"Because it ain't necess'ry! Makes people spend money an' don't do 'em no good— like this 'ere facus o' yours."

The merry-go-roundsman sneered. "Jus' like that there shop o' yours, you mean!"

"Ah, that's where you're wrong! We give 'em something! We give 'em a quid pro quo !"

"You give 'em stale muck that makes 'em sick, if that's what you mean. I heard an ole tart goin' off a treat about your lollies lars' Saterdee! She reckoned you oughter be prosecuted under th' Pure Foods Act."

"Oh, did she! I suppose she never thought of blamin' this ole boneshaker of yours for makin' 'er kid sick?"

"It wasn't 'er kid at all— it was 'erself!"

"Ah, well, I suppose she was watchin' it go round. It nearly makes me sick sometimes."

"What d'ye watch it for then!"

"Oh, it makes such a dam row, an' there ain't so much to watch down 'ere! 'Ere comes th' rain again, blast it!"

The black rain-squall swept inshore, rustled across the sand -and presently was drumming on the taut canvas roof. The merry-go-roundsman shivered.

"Dammit! th' bush was dryin' nicely before this come up! Th' crowd'll never come up this end on a day like this, an' th' rotten council won't give me pitch at th' other. They don't give a man a charnce in Orstralia!"

But hope revived with the first burst of sunshine, for round the point came a picnic ferryboat with flags flying and children waving.

"That's a bit o' luck," said the husband of the tea kiosk, "i'll go up an' give th' missus a hand!" He scrambled out between a horse and a chariot and made off across the wet grass while the owner of the machine tooted the whistle shrilly and set the empty contrivance revolving gaily to the old air of "A Bicycle Built for Two."

The picnickers disembarked with the rapidity of fresh troops going into action. Presently the bleached pier was swarming with colored dots of living confetti which whirled round and round the legs and coat-tails of two sad figures in black— the appointed clerical guardians of a steamerful of life and gaiety. There was a pause on the pier while the leaders of the picnic searched the wet beach and hinterland for a reasonably dry lunching-place. And the eager man in charge of the merry-go-round tooted his whistle again and made the steam organette scream the ancient waltzing song that was composed in the days when the tandem pneumatic-tyre bicycle was a new wonder:

*Daisy! Daisy! give me your answer, do!
I'm half crazy all for the love of you!
It won't be a stylish marriage—
I can't afford a carriage;
But you'll look sweet
Upon—the —seat
Of a bicycle built for two.*

The insane noise presently attracted the attention of the brighter youngsters and the mob presently started off again with shrill cheers. Within a couple of minutes there was a seething mob of picnickers round the ancient roundabout and the flannelled owner was being interviewed by the two clergymen.

"Er— what is your usual tariff?" enquired the clergyman who wasn't wearing the gaiters.

"Thrippence a ride," said the manager glibly, his eyes bright with hope.

"That is far too much!" boomed the Bishop pompously. "A penny should be quite sufficient in war-time."

"It wouldn't pay!" yelled the merry-go-roundsman, "I couldn't run this thing at less than thrippence a ride!"

"We have two hundred children heah," interjected the Bishop's understudy. "Surely it would pay you if they all had a ride?"

"Not at a penny it wouldn't!"

"Nonsense!" boomed the Bishop. "How many children have you had on the machine this morning now?"

"That ain't the point, sir! I gotter to keep up me tariff!"

But the Bishop was a remorseless bargainer. Fixing the writhing entertainer with his eye, he said very solemnly, "This is not an ordinary occasion. Some of these children belong to soldiers at the front— men who are giving their lives to keep you here in comfort. Now I'm sure you will not object to make a special prairie— considering the weather and so forth?"

"Oh well, if you put it that way, sir, I suppose I must. But it's very 'ard on a man all th' same!"

But the Bishop, having carried his point, had no further time for his financial victim. He turned to his A.D.C. fussily.

"Now, Bathbrick, will you see to the distribution of tickets to the children? Be careful to see that no child gets more than two rides. I read only yesterday that it is bad for the brain and gives them a tendency to atheism. But we must do something to keep them off the wet grass."

Bathbrick got a couple of books of tickets from the owner of the machine and started to course about amongst the flock at a tremendous speed. He bullied them, lined them up, arranged them in fours, shoved them and finally got the first relay stacked on board the cars and horses.

"All ready!" he called across the neck of an absurdity labelled Carbine, and with a shrill toot of warning the machine started to revolve to the wails and shrieks of "A Bicycle Built for Two."

The depressed man in charge gave the load of customers what he considered was a fair thing considering the cut price. But when he had quite stopped the machine and the organette had ceased shrieking, he found the Bishop and his aide commanding the passengers to keep their seats.

"That won't do!" shouted the Bishop to the man at the engine. "You must give the children fair value for their penny!"

"Strike me fat!" shouted the merry-go-roundsman, "I uster think this thing belonged to me, but I ain't so sure since you come along!"

"Don't be insolent, sir!" bellowed the Bishop, now very red in the face. "If you don't treat me with proper respect, I shall speak to the Council and the

trustees of this estate as well as writing to the police. Start the roundabout at once!"

Once more the whistle tooted and the merry-go-round creaked wearily and began to spin to the agony of "A Bicycle Built for Two." The proprietor threw open the furnace door and dashed in two shovelfuls of very inferior coal. Stinking smoke at once flowed out of the chimney and the inshore wind hurried it across the green and wafted it into the tea kiosk. The irritable lady who kept the place was presently sighted hurrying across to protest. She arrived very soon full of spite and started to upbraid the engineer across the moving haze of happy children and wooden horses.

"What d'ye want to fire up like that for? My shop's full of smoke!"

"Carn't 'elp it, Missus Porkwen. They're makin' me carry a 'eavy load for next to nothin'! I gotter do it!" He turned back to his engine and did something to the organette that made it scream louder.

" 'Orrible smell!" chattered the tea kiosk lady. Then she found the Bishop and attacked him. " 'Ere! Mister Firespring ses you're makin' 'im fire up like that be forcin' im to carry a overload. That right?"

The Bishop put his hand to his ear. "I beg your pardon?"

Missus Porkwen repeated the accusation.

The Bishop went purple with indignation.

Ridiculous! I think the man must be making that smoke out of spite. He will get himself into trouble if he isn't very careful!"

Mrs. Porkwen sniffed and hurried back to her kiosk with the gratifying feeling that her duty of stirring up strife wherever possible had been done.

When the machine stopped whirling at last the Bishop warned the wretched Firespring that his particular method of sabotage or whatever it was would imperil his lease. Then he ordered Bathbrick, ecclesiastical A.D.C., to embark the second relay and signified that he would honor the roundabout by doing the trip in person in one of the gilded chariots. There were loud but respectful cheers when he mounted the shaky platform and seated himself in a painted tub fit for a fairy queen.

Firespring watched his antagonist sneeringly from behind the organette and when Bathbrick, after running all round to see that every child had a firm hold, gave the starting signal, he jammed the lever down and flicked up the stop on the screaming apparatus. The groaning merry-go-round started on its flight with the most eminent passenger it had ever carried and the organette began its ten millioneth rhymed proposal to Daisy.

How the merry-go-round had been well fired and the proprietor had been well warned to give good value, so no official notice was taken of the Bishop's first distress signals. The fifth revolution had raised a doubt in the Bishop's

mind, and the twentieth had confirmed it; his roundabout days were over, and, after alighting as gracefully and steadily as possible, he would direct the machine to continue whirling, and go away somewhere and sit down on something immovable. That was the dignitary's intention; but fate and circumstances were against him. He had done quite forty rounds before he managed to attract the attention of the engineer and five more after that before he managed to make himself understood as he whirled on his way.

"Stop! Want— get— off."

Firespring saw how green he was and had to grin. The fleeting Bishop saw it through his biliousness and when he noticed the engineer tinkering unavailingly in the centre of the madness at a starting-lever that had jammed he thought it was only being done to torture him. When the incompetent engineer became alarmed and leaped on the platform to tell him that he was about to go for assistance, the wilting dignitary denounced him weakly as a scoundrel and then lay back helpless in his chariot.

Firespring dived from his own devilish contrivance, dodged past Bathbrick, who was waltzing helplessly on the outskirts and ran as fast as he could for expert assistance. A plumber friend had a shop half a mile away at the top of one of the steepest hills in the State, and if he wasn't out on a job or away drinking, Firespring calculated that they could rescue the Bishop within twenty minutes. As he panted up the hill-path, the organette shrieked interminably to "Dais-y! Dais-y!" and begged for an answer, adding that it was half-crazy. The relief expeditionary cursed it very heartily and for the first time sympathised with his complaining neighbor of the tea kiosk.

In ten minutes he was at the door of his friend's shop thanking Heaven that his luck was in. Not only was his helpful friend at home but he was sober as well. "Ullo, Bill ol' boy! wot's doin'?"

"Get some tools quick an' come down to th' dam merry-go-round! Got a load of kids an' a parson on board an' can't stop it!"

"Wot's wrong?"

"Lever's jammed or somethin'! Come on!"

The willing plumber threw some tools into a bag and they rushed out together, the expert informing the owner that "he knoo that there lever would jam some day." As they reached the brow of the hill, steam yells of "Dais-y!" floated up from the beach and the engineer cursed again.

"Wish I'd remembered to shut off the organ! Seems to make it worse some'ow!"

Down the path they pounded, the chattering plumber in the lead. When they appeared trotting at the foot of the slope, Bathbrick rushed to meet them.

"Hurry please!" he implored. "I fear the Bishop is seasick!"

The two exhausted specialists charged at the whirling platform, swung up and across it, and in a minute the sound of hammering was followed by a merciful slowing of the circular platform and the dying yells of the amorous organette.

The instant the thing stopped, Bathbrick hopped aboard and helped Firespring and the plumber to lift the speechless Bishop from his chariot to the grass. It appeared that, during the race for help, Bathbrick had repeatedly urged his heavyweight superior to jump off and break his neck, but without success. Mrs. Porkwen from the kiosk presently joined the group, and when the victim was able to open his eyes and look the whole world in the face without seeing specks, he hailed her as a deliverer. "Would you allow me to rest at your place, Madam? I have just had a terrible experience and feel very ill."

"Cert'nly, sir— cert'nly!"

"Thank you very much. Bathbrick!"

"Sir?"

"Don't allow the children near that dangerous machine! I won't allow them to waste their money and risk their lives!"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't pay him anything, Bathbrick!"

"Very good, sir!"

"And remind me to write to-morrow to the trustees and the council."

"I'll make a note of it, sir."

"How I think I am well enough to walk," sighed the Bishop, and they dragged him to his feet and assisted him away, followed by all the children.

In a little while Porkwen emerged from the kiosk and strolled down to the empty and motionless merry-go-round, before which the owner and his friend the plumber were conversing sadly.

"You've made a mess of it this time, Firespring. That ol' pot'll shut you up for sure."

No answer from the friends.

"Ah, well, I won't be sorry! I've 'ad all I want of that there 'Bicycle Built for Two!'"

34: Seen in Passing

The Lone Hand May 1917

LET no man flatter himself that he is above suspicion in the Caesar's wife manner. He isn't. But he is above suspicion in the sense that he sits upon a keg of the high explosive all his days, and is never seen again if Chance puts a match to it. The fatal accident has happened to people with irreproachable records— Lonnan, for instance.

Bert Lonnan is one of the steadiest men on his line— a very moral one that climbs steadily into the hills past thousands of virtuous homes until it reaches a whited dead-end at a saintly altitude; then the engine shunts regretfully and drags the train back to the sinful city, which is forty-five feet above sea-level and below everything else.

Bert can't drink and doesn't want to, so he doesn't know a barmaid from a deaconess, chorus girls appal him, the little tobacco he smokes is the mildest sort and he spends so much money on garden seeds and liver pills that he hasn't any left to play ha'penny nap with. He takes part in a Shakespearian reading once a fortnight, sings in the Royal Apollo Club (late Sydney Leidertafel), writes letters to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, supports C. G. Wade, shovels for Mr. Arthur, works for the Red Cross, collects stamps, lends his garden for charity and church fetes and has lunch with his wife whenever she happens to be in town. You'd think a man like that was safe, would you? Well listen!

Lonnan was hard up. Not through riot and dissipation, because he didn't know their address, but just through the ordinary family man's expenses that pile up so rapidly at times. He had fallen behind through interest payment on house mortgage, two dentists' bills, two doctors' bills— one of them for an operation, one housepainter's bill, one life insurance premium— and a variety of other commonplace things that nobody gets any fun out of. The wretched accounts were fretting his nerves and he thought he would be able to work better and get more joy out of life if he could get a lump sum in advance from the accounting firm for whom he did extra audits. Never having done such a thing before, he felt rather diffident, for though open financial confession may be good for the soul it is unpleasant if a man has any pride. Financially he took his courage in one hand and his pen in the other and wrote to the starchy senior partner of Ledger and Journal;

Dear Mr. Ledger,—

I have a number of accounts which are worrying me rather. If the firm could let me have this week an advance of £100 (the usual half-yearly audit fees run to about £115), I would be deeply grateful. Will you please let me know if it can be managed?

*Trusting I am not asking too much,
I am, yours faithfully,
B. LONNAND.*

Next day Lonnannd got this answer to his note:

*Dear Mr. Lonnannd, —
Referring to your application for an advance of £100. I think it can be managed and
have asked Mr. Journal to go into the matter with our accountant. He will advise you to-
morrow.
Yours faithfully,
JOHN LEDGER.*

Lonnannd, whose simple ambition was to get out of debt, shook hands with himself and mentally chalked it up to the credit of old Ledger who had granted the favor without asking for details. The old man had the reputation of being mean and a terrible wowser; but Lonnannd, after reading the letter, guessed the outside world had made another slight miscalculation. He went out to lunch with brass bands playing triumphal marches inside his head. How good it would be to push Ledger and Journal's fat cheque into his shrivelled bank account and write out some of his own for his waiting creditors. So far as he was concerned, it would be a mere shuffling of paper slips without any holidays or little luxuries— only the honest man's joy of feeling free and unencumbered.

IT WAS just one o'clock and the city pavements were thronged with the lunch-time crowds. Lonnannd, walking at a steady marching pace to those splendid brass bands of solvency, stepped past the slow wayfarers and was passed in turn by the nervous scufflers with appointments to keep and trains to catch. But he was in a happy frame of mind and they all seemed good people. Suddenly he found himself passing the Frivolity Theatre. Then, some twenty paces away and coming in his direction, he saw old Ledger. His benefactor-elect had not yet sighted him; but, being more anxious than usual not to pass the old gentleman without the usual salutation, Lonnannd kept his eyes fixed on his stern proud face. It may have been that his look of respectful deference was misinterpreted as conscious guilt.

However—

Old Ledger was just three paces from Lonnannd when Lonnannd at last caught his eye. To his immense surprise, the old man, instead of giving the usual smile and nod, opened his eyes, flushed and lifted his silk hat in a sweeping salutation. Next instant he was past, and the amazed Lonnannd,

turning to look after him, found himself staring into the powdered face of a very pretty and very overpowdered stage lady who had (quite by accident) walked step for step alongside of him for a pace or two. As he paused irresolute, the “perfect (in form and figure) stranger” rustled past and was gone for ever. Ledger and Journal regretfully refused the advance by the afternoon post. They wouldn’t lend their sanctified money for that sort of thing. And poor old straight-going Lonnand doesn’t feel up to calling on old Ledger and explaining the extraordinary accident in three volumes. Old Ledger would probably feel insulted, and Lonnand would feel humiliated and everybody would feel awkward. No, it couldn’t be done.

But it just shows that no man is safe, no matter how shining his record may be.

35: How The War Ended

The Lone Hand Jan 1919

THE soldier, who had been dreaming, awoke suddenly with a convulsive start and lay on his elbow till he had reassured himself by looking round at the commonplace fittings of his English lodging, now just visible in the grey light of morning.

"God!" sighed the dreamer of battles, and, rising to a sitting position in the bed, rubbed his face wearily with both hands. Fully awake now, he threw aside the bed-clothes, walked to the window and opened it. Just across the deserted parade was the Channel. There was a chill mist on the leaden water and nothing could be seen but the soft outlines of a fishing boat anchored close in. A heavy ground swell crashed at regular intervals on the shingly beach. From behind the mist curtain through the morning hush came a sound familiar and threatening, but very distant— the low endless mutter of the guns in France.

The soldier looked at his wristlet watch.

"Six-thirty. That gives me an hour and a half before the train leaves. I guess I'll pack first and have my bath afterwards."

He started to collect his few things, and was just folding a shirt, when he stopped and looked up sharply. The mutter of the guns had cut off in an instant, and the regular crashing fall of the sea had stopped. Instead he heard a puzzling sound as of great waters rushing away smoothly and swiftly and people running and shouting.

"What on earth!"

As he reached the window with the folded shirt in his hand, he noted that the fishing boat, lately floating on an even keel well out from the beach, was now stranded and fallen over on one side. The sands were bare and glistening and he traced with amazement the white surf edge of the troubled sea now hundreds of yards out. The tide— if it was the tide— was running out at express speed from the whole coast as far as one could see, and the receding edge of it was a boiling mass of sand and foam. The rushing sound of it filled the heavens.

"Good God! It looks as if the sea's falling in!" muttered the watcher, and then, remembering his powerful field glasses, jumped to get them out of their case. The lenses showed him something that made his gasp. Far, far out in the gigantic sandy valley which was its bed, the edge of the sea was now a receding wall of dark water. Beyond the wall small boats and bathing boxes drifted and tossed as helplessly as chips in a gutter, and a small steamer, heading doggedly up Channel, went sideways to France with the resistless mass of water. The sun had come out and wisps of mist trailed raggedly across

the field of vision. The soldier watched the awful phenomenon of nature to the horizon edge, and then saw something that made him start again. The sea had stopped in its flight was banking up.

Up, up went the level of the water, and then the watcher realised that it would come back, roaring and foaming across the miles of sand as a tidal wave. Abandoning everything, he raced from the room, leapt downstairs as he was in pyjamas and bare feet and, dashing open the front door, ran into the street. A motor with a party of early bathers was just crawling past. All aboard were staring at the sea. He sprang on to the running board of the car and, waving his field glasses at the driver, shouted, "Drive hard as you can to the top of the big hill! The sea has turned and is coming back in a wall. There's no time to rouse the front. Drive, I tell you! Can't you hear the water?"

The driver's mouth hung open as he fiddled with the controls. But the engine's easy purr increased to an angry roar that almost drowned the angry drumming of the miles of racing water, and the machine snaked easily round the first corner and flashed away to safety up the steep slope.

"Look back all!" shouted the soldier as they topped the rise and shut off. Right and left the thunderous sea was sweeping majestically back in a tumbling sixty-foot wall, and all the helpless floating things on the jellifying plateau of waters behind were coming back with it. Far out the little steamer was spinning like a beetle. In roared the avalanche and a sort of scream seemed to go up from the whole doomed front below. As the soldier brought his glasses to his eyes again, he saw tiny little figures dash out of some of the houses, stare at the moving wall, and turn and run in a ridiculous way.

"Oh, God! they've got no chance!" cried one of the men in the car. And then they all stood up to see the end. The wall caught up the stranded fishing boat from which men were now running and bowled it along anyhow. It hit the sea wall and burst. There was a league-long burst of foam as the charging line of the ocean hit the stone wall of the promenade, and next instant the wide roadway was the floor of the sea and the trim houses of the front had gone down with a muffled boom in a welter of foam. The sea rushed in everywhere, spouting and roaring, and more walls and houses went down before it, and strewed the tossing, broken water with timber, furniture and bodies. Here and there among the whirlpools and eddies a tiny figure would be glimpsed struggling for an instant and then lost. The bottom of the capsized fishing boat showed far out amongst the light floating wreckage, now drifting rapidly out with the backwash.

"The sea's running out again!" cried one of the men in the car, and, from where they stood, they could see the streaky, wreckage-laden tidal waters draining back to the sea-bed from the whole ravished coastline. The morning

was now murmurous with grief. People came running from the houses on the high ground, and somewhere a church bell started clanging. A motor fire engine with its helmeted crew staring at the wreck swung round the corner, and started to descend the hill towards some dripping ruins whence sounded the shrieks of a crazed woman.

"They're calling for help down there," mumbled the driver of the car, and shamefacedly set it rolling down the hill in the wake of the fire engine.

"We can help now," said one of the others. "But we had to get out of the way of that wave. Where's the chap who told us?" He turned interrogatively in his seat.

The soldier was staring at the sea which seemed to be running all ways. The little steamer, which had been swept dangerously close inshore, was now well out again, rolling and pitching in the back-wash. His glasses showed him a number of her crew trying to get a boat away to the rescue of a man on a floating baulk of timber.

"I'm here," said the soldier, handing his glasses to the stranger who was plucking at his elbow for them.

"I woke up just in time to hear the guns stop in France and the sea start running out."

"You heard the guns stop in France?" repeated his questioner, and the whole party looked at him, though there was distraction enough in the scenes of horror all round them.

"Yes, I heard the noise cut off all at once— just as if someone had shut a door. Then I heard the hiss of the sea."

"What's happened in France?"

"God knows! Then I got my glasses and saw the sea stop its rush from the land and bank up and up— horrible it looked, all black and threatening behind the edge of boiling sand that stretched as far as I could see. I realised somehow that it would come back in a wall, and I rushed out of the house just as I was without trying to warn anybody. Well, what could a man do?"

"Nothing!" shouted the others. "It's only a chance we're not all dead down below there with all the others."

"Well, what are we going to do now, Westgate?"

Westgate, a middle-aged man with an air of authority and evidently the owner of the car, looked round at the crowds of seashiders swarming down to the wrecked front.

"Perhaps we'd better go home and dress first. They'll be anxious about us at home, anyhow. We'll see what we can do afterwards." He turned to the soldier, "All your traps must be lost, sir. I presume you had none of your people with you?"

"No; I was only spending part of my leave in one of the boarding houses."

"That's fortunate. I think I can fix you up with some clothes, if you like!"

"You're very good. I know nobody here, and all the money I had with me was lost down below."

"Right you are. Drive us home, Dick."

The car turned cautiously in the now-crowded street, and went hooting up the slope. At the top it turned and ran along till it reached an old house standing back amongst pines. At the entrance to the drive stood a young girl, obviously in a state of great excitement. She ran towards the returning party.

"Is it really true, Dad? Mardie has just telephoned that something terrible— a tidal wave or something has just wrecked the front, and that hundreds are dead."

"Quite correct, dear. The wave came in just as we were about to bathe. This gentleman saved us all. He saw it coming through his field glasses. We got up the hill in the car just in time."

The girl looked gratefully at the soldier.

"Now let us in and tell your mother we're all safe and sound, and will be ready for breakfast in a quarter of an hour."

The car whirred up the drive to a side door and the owner touched the soldier lightly on the arm.

"By the way, I quite forgot to ask your name."

"Oh, I should have told you before. My name's Marrick— lieutenant in the Australian Infantry. And I must say I'm very grateful to you for taking me in like this off-hand,"

"It's an honor, my dear sir." The Englishman looked at him with new interest. "You Colonials have done wonderful work over there. My boy is in the R.F.C. and has seen you fellows going over many times. Now come along to my room and I'll look out some of his things for you."

They went in together, and the others dispersed to their rooms to dress, filling the anxious house with explanation.

At breakfast Mrs. Westgate proved to be the usual anxious warmother of middle age. The narrow escape of the menfolk had shaken her sorely-tried nerves and she kept on speculating if "those awful Germans" had not done something stupendous to the sea. Evidently her faith in the offensive powers of the Hun were limitless. It was too pathetic to smile at and the men ate in thoughtful silence. So till the telephone bell rang. The alert daughter had the transmitter up in an instant...

"What's that?... Jack has landed in the town park and is coming straight down in your car... What's that? Yes, yes! He's all right, but has terrible news? (Oh, mother!) Yes, thank you, Mardie! Thank you, dear. Good bye."

The party in the breakfast room looked at one another and a babble of conversation began which kept up until the warning toot of a horn was heard at the gate and a car rushed up the drive with a young man in full air kit on the seat beside the driver. Mother, father, and sister hurried out to greet him; the others stayed. Presently he came in, his mother hanging fondly on his arm, his sister carrying his flying helmet.

"Some brandy, Dad, if you've got it!" He sank into the nearest arm-chair, nodded in a surprised way to the men-friends, and gratefully took and swallowed the spirit his father put into his shaking hand.

"Thanks, that's better. I never thought I'd make it." His eyes closed momentarily and the mother made an anxious start forward.

"No, don't worry, mother. I'm not ill— just sick and dizzy with what I've seen this morning. Oh, it was horrible horrible!"

His eyes closed again and he leant his head back against the leather cushion, and gripped the arms of the chair until the knuckles showed white.

They waited as patiently as they could.

"You people here, you don't know— you can't guess what it looked like over there." He waved one arm wearily in the direction of France. "But it's all done now— the sea has finished it!"

Westgate came forward, wide-eyed. "The sea, my boy? What has the sea done?"

The airman came to his feet shouting.

"Done! Why it's covered everything. It happened just after I had gone up on patrol this morning near the coast. I was 5,000 feet up making for our front trenches when I saw it— saw the whole Channel coming across like a great silvery-grey carpet, foaming and unrolling itself as fast as a train, and blotting out the roads and trenches and drowning everything. As far as I could see it was rolling in over the land— a sight to drive you mad! You can imagine what it felt like to sit up there and watch everybody drowning and not be able to help them. I did not realise how fast the infernal sea was travelling until I turned my machine (I'd come down to about 500 feet by then and could hear the tremendous roar of the water over that of the engine). Even on my best speed, ninety miles, I had all I could do to keep up with the tumbling edge of the horror. I saw little hills I knew the height of covered in a flash, and the damned deluge went rolling on as if it were going down hill. I got sick of following it and watching men and horses drown, so I turned back. There were other airmen there, of course— Huns as well as our own, all flying about together like sea-gulls, and never firing a shot. On the way back I saw a couple of naval chaps taking some poor devils off the top of a wrecked and floating Zeppelin. The monitors off the coast were asking themselves and us questions by signal. They

had stopped shelling the coast because there was no more coast to shell. Flanders was gone— sunk to glory!"

"Flanders gone, boy?"

The young airman looked dazedly at his father. "This wasn't a tidal wave, sir; it was nothing more nor less than a great inrush of the sea across miles and miles of country. I don't know, but I think the land has sunk— the whole coast region so far as I know. But there may be more of the nightmare. Perhaps all Europe's gone."

The cry of a newsboy was heard in the street and one of the Westgate's friends dashed out to get a paper. He returned in a couple of minutes with a single sheet extra which was half headlines and half close print:

EUROPE SINKING!
OVERWHELMING NATURAL
DISASTER.
FLANDERS FLOODED BY SEA
THIS MORNING.
OPPOSING ARMIES DROWNED.
AIRMEN TELL STORY.
TIDAL WAVE ON BRITISH
COAST.
WIRELESS DISTRESS CALLS
PROM GERMANY.
BRITISH HIGH POWER STATIONS
NOW COMMUNICATING.
GERMAN HIGH SEAS FLEET OFFERING SURRENDER.

From that hour bereaved England lived from hour to hour on wireless news, for all the cables from the east coast had been snapped in the wrecking of half the civilised world. Shallow-draught war vessels, sounding less and less cautiously the farther they went, steamed eastward on new voyages of discovery and reported back, hour by hour, and day after day, soundings of many fathoms where there should have been dry land and cities. And each succeeding day showed greater and greater depths. To satisfy himself one captain cruised for two days in the same spot and carefully checked the soundings.

"I thought so," he said softly when the results were brought to him; "the land is going down further all the time. Wonder why any of us ever doubted the story of lost Atlantis."

The first ship of the survey fleet that reached the position of Berlin reported 600 fathoms on the first day, and 650 on the second.

And the explorers for the lost half of the world were fed through the void with amazing news of the whole High Sea Fleet— or what was left to it — surrendering gladly with a fleet of U-boats to a light patrolling British squadron met off the sunken coast line of Holland.

Others that had escaped wreck in the Baltic were steaming to England from the waste of sea which hid the lost Fatherland. Wireless reports from the Mediterranean told of the submergence of all but the highest parts of the coasts; and they were rapidly going down into the sea. The only armies left alive in Europe were the Italian and Austrian, lately fighting among the mountain tops; and even they were likely to die of starvation amongst the snow peaks.

And that's how the Great War was ended— by the flooding of the immemorial European battlefields by the sea. Perhaps in a few hundred years, when the mourning world has recovered itself, it will find something as well worth fighting about as poor old congested Europe and its kings.

But I doubt it.

36: A Duke in Business

The tragedy of a newspaper man, a beauty actor, and the landlady.

The Lone Hand May 1919

I FIRST sighted Surrey Sussex years ago during the original production of the great costume drama, "His Majesty Intervenes."

Dropping into the Princess's in search of another pressman, I found the great scene of "His Majesty" being put through. The stage was set as a fine old English interior with late afternoon limelight streaming through the mullioned windows. A villainous, snuff-taking Chief Justice of England, wrapped in the scarlet robe of his office, was snarling at a noble-looking young man whose sword had been taken from its scabbard, and whose arms were held tightly by two men-at-arms. The young man's head was thrown proudly back, and he was looking his judge fearlessly in the eye. The judge didn't like it. I leant on the barrier at the back of the circle and listened:

Chief Justice (snarling): "I hate all traitors! You have conspired against the sacred person of His Majesty the King "

The Noble Prisoner (very fearlessly) ; "You lie!"

Chief Justice and snatching up riding whip): "Silence! You have been found guilty of high treason after a fair trial "

Noble Prisoner (steady as a rock): "You lie!"

Chief Justice (raving):

"SILENCE!You have been found guilty and must pay the penalty of death' (Throwing down whip and taking overdose of snuff). You die— upon the block— at dawn to-morrow!"

Noble Prisoner (mockingly): "If the next world is to be free of you, my Lord Chief Justice, I will right gladly enter it!" (Chief Justice is greatly upset and is just about to lash the helpless prisoner across the face when there is a slight stir at the door and the King enters unannounced —a most unusual thing. Chief Justice cowers just like a trained actor, while the King makes fire dart from his eyes— (every actor knows how to do it).

Noble Prisoner bows as deeply to his King as the guards' hold on his arms will permit.)

King (who, of course, knows the true state of affairs and has come to the rescue —poses with his long tasselled stick, works his eyebrows up and down at cowering Chief Justice, and says in a sneering way); "So, my Lord Jeffreys! Not content with robbing me of my money, you would also rob me of my friends! Odsfish, methinks it is time England had a new Lord Chief Justice!"

Then the house sighed deeply, knowing the noble Surrey Sussex ("Duke of Essex" on the programme) would not go to the block that night. The knowledge gave many honest citizens a thrill of satisfaction. In that setting,

and with that snarling Chief Justice taking snuff like a gas engine in front of him, Surrey Sussex looked the most valuable man on earth. The idea of treating such a beautiful vision as if he were a Christmas goose appalled thousands during the run of "His Majesty," which really was a fine show, and would have remained an artistic memory for me if I hadn't subsequently met Surrey Sussex in real life, which isn't the right setting at all for romantic actors.

The Duke of Essex, sad to say, never paid landladies— he only made love to them. He never wasted his sweetness in any of the commercial establishments where actors were common, and expected to pay their pay, but made his way into some boarding-house off the beaten track run by a lonely fading lady of middle age, to whom six feet of manly, attractive beauty and affectation were a novelty and a delight. There he would roost free and borrow money till the company moved on; then he would bid "the little woman" be of good heart, and promise to come back gloriously in the third act and clear his character and his obligations. It always worked, and he put the money he should have paid for board and lodging into more interesting speculations. He had devoted and unpaid landladies in every show-town in Australia, and they all worshipped him enough to put him up indefinitely if only he would return. For he was a splendid creature.

And then after years on the boards Sussex somehow became a business man; not the ordinary bag-carrying, desk-bowed scuffler of commerce, but an immense florid business duke who asked for you in a deep rich voice just outside the door, and then strode in to frighten you with long speeches about soap. He could take possession of a plain office and overwhelm all opposition in a minute.

To him at least all the world was a stage, and all the business men humble supers. It was no use trying to stop him with the usual gags, for he didn't know their meaning, and treated all protests as vulgar interruptions from the gallery. His overbearing method was successful everywhere, and he made quite a lot of money— when he was working. Drink had started to get hold of him, and he averaged one long spree every six months. So his business career was brilliant but intermittent.

He was steered into the little circle of business men I knew by a cheery soul who had paid something in salary and time for the knowledge that Sussex was a long-distance drinker when he got started. There was nothing about it in the glowing letter of recommendation he presented to Haberfield, so Haberfield engaged him at a suitable salary, instructed him in the uses and beauties of Borndrunk's Imperial Soda Machine, and sent him out to get orders. The perfectly sober Duke started out on the trail and almost at once orders started to pour in for Imperials— mostly from hotelkeeping widows. Sussex was

working on his old sympathy method; but the innocent Haberfield only knew that he was getting orders at an unprecedented rate. The Australasian agent for Borndrunk's Imperial Soda Machine knew nothing until one evening just when he was closing up, the telephone rang, and a muffled voice that he hardly recognised as the Duke's begged him to rescue him from the dark interior of a ham and beef shop in a distant' suburb.

"What's the matter?" snapped Haberfield after a long and involved speech from the other end.

"I'm locked in!" complained the distressed Duke.

"Who locked you in?"

"I locked myself in— I had to!"

"Why?"

"Because the police want to get in and arrest me!"

"What have you been doing?" "Nothing!"

"Oh, rot! you must have done something!"

"Well, I only chucked a fellow out!"

"Who was he?"

"He said he was the husband of this lady— you know! the lady who keeps this place!"

"Oh!"

"What's the matter?" (This in a distinctly anxious voice.)

"All right. I was only trying to think of something!"

"Don't stand there thinking! Are you coming to help— they're battering at the door now!"

"No, I'm not! You let the police in and don't be a fool— you've got nothing to be frightened of!"

"That's all you know!"

"What the devil have you been doing? Why don't you tell me the whole truth like a man?"

"I've told you all there is to tell! I just gave the little brute a fright and threw him out!"

"How did you frighten him?"

"Oh, I just held him out over the stair-rail and threatened to drop him if he didn't behave himself!"

"I see! Well, if you go on like that you deserve all you get. I'm not going to mix myself up in it!"

"Oh, don't leave a man in the lurch, Haberfield!"

"I tell you I won't mix myself up in it now! You let the police in and if you've got to be bailed out, tell them to ring me up at my house. Good-night." He rang off and hung up the receiver, from which faint curses were buzzing.

Haberfield heard no more of it that night; and the two following days were filled with a deep, unnatural silence. Also Sussex had apparently vanished. Haberfield was just thinking of looking for another traveller— was actually drafting an advertisement for the "Professional" column— when his office door was flung open and slammed again. Borndrunk's worried representative looked up and beheld a hunted and dishevelled Duke panting after a headlong rush up three flights of stairs.

"Here! Where have you—"

Sussex made a quick, un-actorish movement with one hand. "Hide me, for God's sake—he's after me!"

"Who's after you?"

"Never mind who! Hide me, and I'll tell you afterwards!"

Haberfield glanced despairingly round his tiny office for a good hiding-place for a six-foot man. "It isn't the police again?"

"No, no! God! here he comes! That'll do— I'll get in there!"

The big actor darted towards the agent's roll-top desk, shoved the chair aside, flung out the waste-paper basket and crowded himself like a dog into the boarded recess meant for the desk-owner's legs.

"Quick, Haberfield! Sit down, man, in your chair, and tell him that you haven't seen me! Hurry— he's at the door!"

There was no help for it. Haberfield fairly sprang into his chair, replaced the overturned waste-paper basket and put both feet on one of the noblest actors that ever defied a stage Chief Justice of England.

And just as they got settled, the door burst open again and in came a little man, in a highly excited condition, and with a large revolver gripped in his right hand. Haberfield found himself, at thirty seconds' notice, cast for a harder part than Sussex had ever faced; and his lines were not written for him either.

"Where's that damned scoundrel?" shouted the utter stranger.

"What are you talking about?" demanded the compulsorily heroic agent for Borndrunk's Imperial.

"I saw him come in here!" roared the stranger. "Where is he? I'm going to shoot the dog!"

"Don't wave that revolver in here!"

But the stranger was too excited to notice.

"I saw him come in here!" repeated the visitor. "Where is he hiding? Bring him out!"

"Look here!" shouted Haberfield, and tried to stand up. But Sussex had too firm a clasp on his legs and he flopped back into his chair. "Look here! you can see for yourself there is nobody in this room! I didn't see anybody come in, and

if he did he must have gone again! Now you put away that revolver and get out!"

Haberfield's own pulse was going strong now. for the aspiring murderer was waving his revolver in generous curves and seemed to be regarding the desk with suspicion. But apparently the idea of a man of the Duke's size crowding himself under a small desk never occurred to his passion-dazed mind. Still he was loath to go, and stood glowering about him like a bull.

Suddenly his eye alighted on the door that communicated with Haberfield's next-room tenant— a quiet, elderly architect, with a weakness for singing simple nursery songs in a mumbling bass during his slack hours.

"That's where he's gone! Now I'll get the scoundrel!" A lightning leap, and he had flung open the door and was through. Haberfield sprang at the open door, slammed and locked it just as a furious duet broke out in the next apartment.

"Now's your chance, Sussex!" he hissed. "Get out now! He'll be out of that room in a minute!"

Six-feet of actor scrambled out from under the desk, sweating its thanks, and fled with dusty knees. Haberfield saw the fugitive glimmering down the stairs before he hopped back into his room and turned the key in the door that opened from the vestibule.

"Thank God!" he muttered, and poured himself a drink of water with a trembling hand. In the next bathing-box the nursery rhyme basso was roaring like a frightened bull about police, and begging the stranger to put away his revolver and be sensible.

Some plain commercial slave travels unsensationally for Borndrunk's Imperial Soda Machine now. He is highly respected by all the Imperial customers; but occasionally in his rounds he encounters a lady in the Indian Summer period of life who sighs and asks if Mr. Sussex— "You know— that tall gentleman!"— is still in business. And the plain commercial slave can only tell the one poor fact he knows, which is that Sussex when last sighted was outward bound with a lady who owned a laundry. He was always particular about his linen, was Sussex.
