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THE STRAND MAGAZINE

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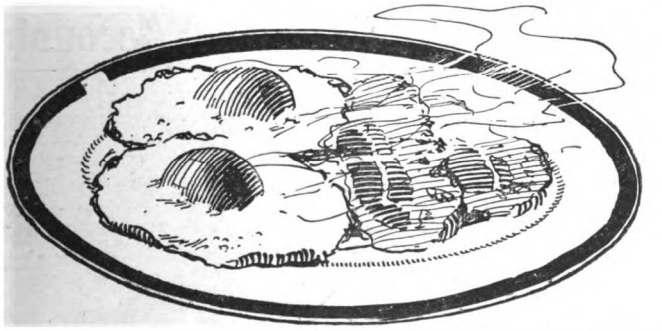

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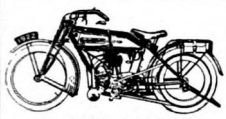

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Contents for September, 1922.

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THE
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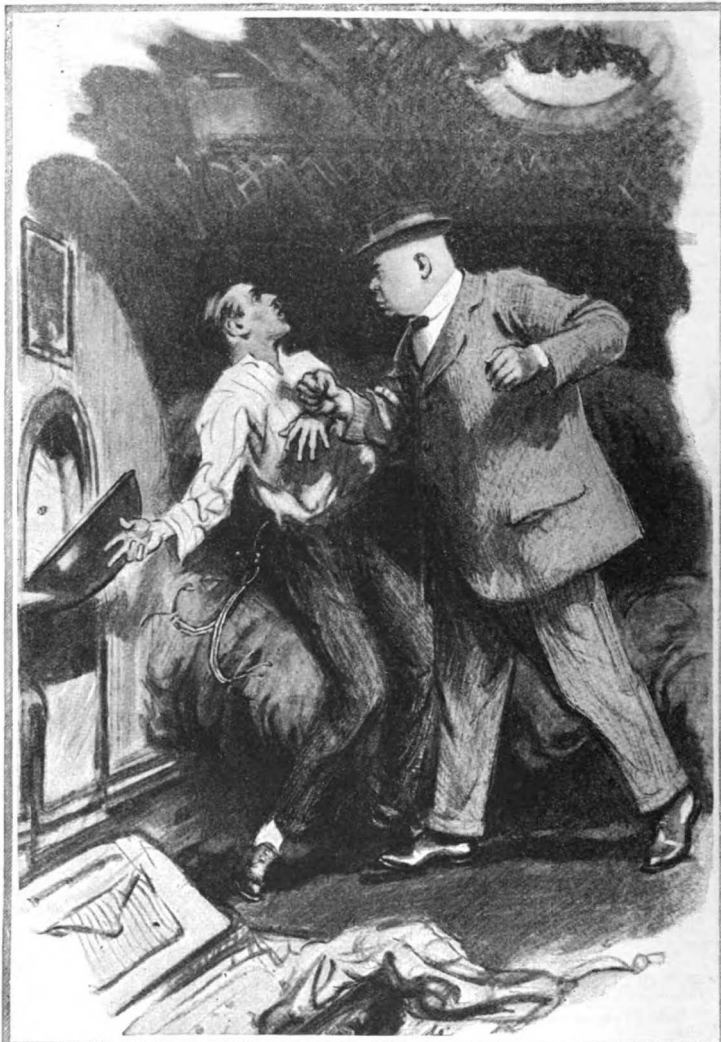
September, 1922.



WITH A SUDDEN MOVEMENT HE FLUNG HIMSELF AT ME. I MADE AN ILL-DIRECTED GRAB AT THE BLUE EMERALD. MISSED IT, BARKED MY KNUCKLES ON THE EDGE OF THE BASIN, AND SAW IT SWINGING BACK INTO ITS VERTICAL POSITION.

(*See page* 198.)

GIBSON AND THE BLUE EMERALD

BY

DENIS MACKAIL

ILLUSTRATED BY
F. GILLETT R.I.

ONCE every two years the Caviare Club is closed for cleaning and decorating, and for about three weeks members are permitted to accept the hospitality of some rival institution, where they slink about forlornly, exposed to the critical glances of its inhabitants, and feeling rather like new boys during their first term at school. It is a difficult period for all of us, but at its conclusion we are so glad to be back again in our old quarters that it never occurs to us to inquire—as we might otherwise do—why the Caviare looks just as dirty as it did before we went away. In the rapture of regaining our favourite chairs and our own wine-list, this question remains unasked and unanswered. And like a colony of ants who have been disturbed and then replaced, we resume all our former habits exactly as though we had never been interrupted. It becomes, indeed, almost a point of honour to pretend that our banishment has never taken place.

I was a little surprised, therefore, when a few days after our return from the St. John's Club—which, as of course you know, prides itself on its diplomatic and Foreign Office connection—Gibson appeared by my side in the smoking-room, and inquired :—

"Well, how did you get on among the proconsuls ?"

"At the St. John's, do you mean ?" I asked. "Oh, nothing to complain of. But I only went there once. They seemed rather—well, rather fond of talking."

Gibson nodded agreement.

"I didn't go at all," he informed me. "They let me stay here, because I've got one of the bedrooms. But I knew the St. John's set well in the old days. I might even have been a member by now, if things had turned out differently." He smiled faintly, and then added : "But perhaps you didn't realize that I'd ever moved in that kind of circle ?"

"No," I answered. I didn't particularly believe it either, but the time had long passed since I used to trouble myself about Gibson's veracity.

"I did, though," he went on. "I was two years in the Foreign Office before I resigned. In fact, I might well have been there yet, but for the jealousy that I aroused by being given the Order of the Golden Cow when I was still only a Third Secretary."

"The Golden Cow ?" I repeated, interrogatively.

"Yes," said Gibson. "Fourth Class, with the right to remain covered in the presence of everyone below the rank of archdeacon. That's a bit of a rarity in these days, even at the St. John's Club."

I could well believe it, and I said as much.

"Perhaps it might interest you," he suggested, "to hear how it was that I gained such an unusual distinction. What ? Oh, no ! Quite a short story. I'll tell it you at once."

And leaning back in his chair and pressing the tips of his long fingers together, he began immediately.

YOU must excuse me (said Gibson) if in the course of this narrative I find it necessary to suppress or alter the real names of some of the persons and places concerned. Quite apart from the provisions of the Official Secrets Act, there are good reasons why, in the present state of international politics, I should be very careful to avoid giving any clue as to the identity of the very high Personages to whom I shall have to refer. But as regards my own share in the matter I shall be as scrupulous in dispensing with any kind of exaggeration or misrepresentation as—well, as you have always known

me to be. And it is, fortunately, with my own share that I shall have principally to deal.

I was, as I have already told you, a Third Secretary in the Foreign Office in London. For nearly two years I had gone to work in a black coat and a bow tie, had shared a room looking over the quadrangle with two of my colleagues, and for about six hours a day had occupied my time either in writing minutes to other members of the staff or in drafting communications which might eventually serve as the basis of official despatches. It was, on the whole, both a dignified and a peaceful existence, and if about ninety-five per cent. of everything that I wrote found its final resting-place in one of His Majesty's waste-paper baskets, no taxpayer had in those days ever been heard to complain of it.

ONE morning in the late spring, when I had finished feeding the pigeons on my window-sill and was just beginning to turn my mind to the thought of work, a messenger came in with the intimation that Mr. Vere-Tiverton—the head of my branch—would be glad if I would step along the corridor and see him at once.

I found him sitting alone in his room, writing impressively with a quill pen on blue paper, and after I had stood watching him for about ten minutes he turned abruptly to me and said :—

"You speak Transylvanian, Mr. Gibson, I believe?"

"No," I replied. "I'm afraid not."

Mr. Vere-Tiverton picked up his quill and resumed his writing, and I was just on the point of returning to my room when he suddenly laid it down again and added :—

"Wait."

So I waited. Presently he stopped writing, read and re-read his composition with great care and a quantity of grimaces, and then, folding it over and over about sixteen times, he locked it away in a scarlet despatch-box.

"Now, then," he said, taking off his spectacles and putting on a pair of eye-glasses; "would you be prepared to start for Spain to-night?"

This was the first time in my official experience that it had ever been suggested that I should leave England, but as Mr. Vere-Tiverton was now looking out of the window, my surprise passed unnoticed.

"Certainly," I answered after a moment. "Only isn't a King's Messenger going off to——"

He interrupted me by tapping with his keys on the desk.

"Yes, yes," he said. "But the King's Messenger will be known. We must send someone who will not be suspected."

"Oh," I said, feeling rather bewildered.

"This is the position," continued Mr. Vere-Tiverton. "A certain Personage—in fact, I think I may safely say a certain Personage in a Very High Quarter—wishes to convey a gift—an extremely valuable gift—to a Scarcely Less Exalted Recipient, on the occasion of the Recipient's betrothal. The assistance of the Foreign Office has been requested, but we have been warned that the nature of the intended present has become known, and that attempts may consequently be made to intercept it *en route*. In these circumstances it seems to the Under-Secretary and myself that it would be better to entrust its transmission to someone who, while fully fit to assume such a serious responsibility, will be less liable to invite attention or suspicion than one of our ordinary messengers."

"Oh," I said again. And if I hadn't been in the service for nearly two years, I might have added, "Then why not send it by registered post?" But experience had taught me that where my department was concerned, the longest way round was regarded, not sometimes, but invariably, as representing the shortest way home. So I held my tongue.

Mr. Vere-Tiverton picked up a paper-knife and rattled it against his knuckles.

"By the way," he said, "I suppose you've got a uniform?"

"A uniform?" I repeated, wondering what this had got to do with it. "I've got my rig-out in the Yeomanry, if that's what you mean."

"That will do," said Mr. Vere-Tiverton. "His Serene Highness has always been very punctilious on questions of costume, and never more so than since his exile."

"Do you mean that I shall have to wear uniform all the time?" I asked.

"Not while you're travelling," he explained. "But you had better put it on as soon as you arrive. And now, if everything's quite clear, you'd better take this chit to the Finance Branch and see about getting your ticket."

I took the slip which he handed me and moved towards the door. But half-way there an idea struck me.

"Wouldn't it be as well," I said, coming back to the big desk, "if you told me where it is that I've got to go, and whom it is that I've got to see?"

Mr. Vere-Tiverton reflected for a moment on this suggestion, and then he rose, looked carefully round the room, and, coming close up to me, whispered something.

"I beg your pardon?" I said, taking out my handkerchief and drying my ear.

"His Serene Highness Prince Stanislas of Sauerstadt," he repeated. "Just outside San Sebastian."

"Oh, yes," I said. "Quite."

"Here are your instructions," he added, unlocking the red despatch-box and taking out the document which he had been writing when I came in. "I think you had better memorize them carefully, and then destroy them. It wouldn't do for them to be found on you."

"Certainly," I said. "Thank you very much." And then, just as I was leaving, yet another thought came into my head.

"By the way," I asked, stopping by the doorway, "what is it that I've got to take to His Serene Highness?"

"Ah," said Mr. Vere-Tiverton. "Yes. Of course. Just as well you reminded me." He opened a drawer in his writing-desk, and took out a little leather case. "This," he explained; and as he spoke he pressed the catch and opened the lid.

Blinking on its white velvet bed, from where its myriad facets seemed to shine into every corner of the lofty room, I saw a large oval blue stone. Right into its clear heart I peered, where mysterious fires seemed to leap and sparkle, and as I gazed at it in admiration and astonishment, Mr. Vere-Tiverton closed the lid again with a snap.

"It's an emerald," he said.

"Don't you mean a sapphire?" I suggested.

"No," he said, shortly. "It's a blue emerald. So far as I am aware, it is the only blue emerald—at any rate of anything approaching this size—in the whole world. Take it," he added, "and understand that you are in no circumstances to let it out of your sight or keeping for a single instant, until you place it in His Serene Highness's hands. Your success on this mission is of the utmost importance, not only to your career and to the Department which you serve, but also to—well, to a Very High Personage whom it would perhaps be better that I should not name."

I bowed deeply, and put the case in my pocket.

"*Bon voyage*," said Mr. Vere-Tiverton. "It is a pity that you don't speak Transylvanian, but I understand that His Serene Highness converses very fluently in French; and in any event all you will have to do is to give him the case and come straight back. I shall see you next week, then. *A rivederci*."

"*Auf wiedersehen*," I replied, and this time I really did leave him.

I RETURNED to my room and, disregarding my colleagues' request for details of my recent interview, set myself to mastering my written instructions.

They seemed simple enough. All I had to do was to proceed to Biarritz by the ordinary route, which would take me about a day and a half, drive over the frontier to His Serene Highness's headquarters at the Villa Frangipanni, present my visiting-card to the Chamberlain, Count Zybska, hand over the jewel in its case to Prince Stanislas himself, and come home again. I repeated these particulars to myself until I was satisfied that I was word perfect, and then tore the paper two or three times across.

But my room had no fireplace in which I could burn these pieces, and as I didn't like to take the risk of throwing them where someone else might afterwards pick them up, I stuffed them in my pocket, meaning to put them on my own fire when I went home to pack. And so it was that, while crossing the Horse Guards' Parade, I pulled out my handkerchief to blow my nose, and instantly became aware that I was the centre of a kind of miniature blue snow-storm.

"Dash!" I said, stooping down to gather up the scattered fragments of minute paper.

A bulky but good-natured stranger came to my assistance, and between us we had soon retrieved all but a negligible quantity. I'm not sure that I shouldn't have managed it more quickly if I had been by myself, for the stranger was severely handicapped by his size, but I felt it would only look odd if I declined his help. So I thanked him warmly, and in a few more minutes I was back in my rooms. Once more I emptied my pocket of the scraps of paper, threw them on to the fire, and watched them twist and shrivel into ash. Once more I took out the little leather case, opened it, gazed wonderingly at the blue emerald, and then, just as I was going to put it back again, I changed my mind. The jewel itself should return to my pocket, but the case, which had added appreciably and therefore suspiciously to my contour, should travel separately in my dressing-bag. I smiled knowingly to myself as I made this decision, and, having carried it out, went through into my bedroom to begin packing my Yeomanry uniform.

I caught the boat-train at Victoria with plenty of time to spare, had a reasonably good crossing, with no signs that I was attracting any unusual kind of attention, and as soon as I reached Calais made my way to the *wagon-lit* which was to run right through to Biarritz. In accordance with Mr. Vere-Tiverton's directions I had booked a whole compartment to myself, but in spite of the fact that I had paid for and held two tickets, there was a little trouble with the conductor before we started. The whole coach, it appeared, was full, and a monsieur who had seen from the

corridor that I was by myself would be very grateful if I could let him share my section. He was, of course, prepared to pay, and I gathered that he had already shown his ability to tip. But my instructions were definite. I was very sorry, I explained, but I had recently been very ill, and in the circumstances must insist on my right to remain undisturbed.

The conductor tried persuasion. The other monsieur, it seemed, had also been ill. Then he tried being rude. But I stuck to my point, and at last, shrugging his shoulders and spitting unpleasantly through the window of the corridor, he took himself off. I bolted the door after him and prepared to undress.

But first of all, as soon as I had opened the folding wash-basin which was fixed opposite the end of my berth, I took the blue emerald out of my waistcoat pocket and laid it down where I could keep my eye on it until such time as I should be ready to transfer it to the pocket of my pyjamas.

I unlocked my dressing-bag, took out my sponge and tooth-brush, and was perhaps half-way through my preparations for bed, when my attention was attracted by a sound as of someone trying the door of my compartment.

"Who's there?" I said, sharply. And then, as an after-thought, I added: "*Qui est là?*"

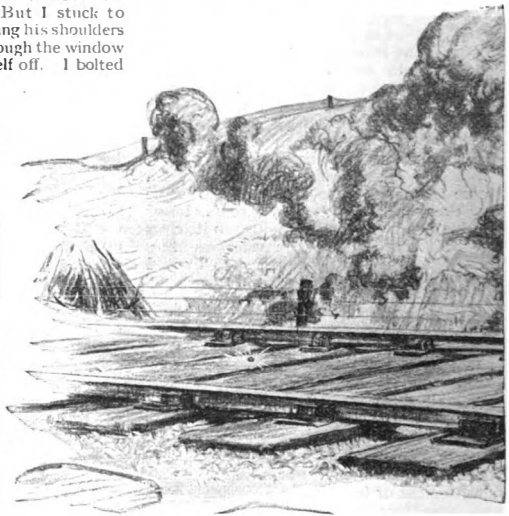
There was no answer.

"What do you want?" I called out. "*Qu'est que c'est que vous voulez?*"

Again there was no answer. The rattling had ceased, but even as I decided that my question had shown the would-be intruder his mistake, I suddenly saw that the bolt was moving slowly back. The next second, and before I could reach it, the door had opened. On the threshold was standing the same bulky-looking man who had helped me to pick up those pieces of paper on the Horse Guards' Parade.

My mind leapt to the explanation like a flash of lightning. He must, while offering me his uninvited assistance, have caught sight of some scrap of writing which had given him a clue to my mission, and from that moment, I supposed, he had never really let me out of his sight. I saw at once that there was no time to snatch up the blue emerald and attempt to conceal it. To do so would only be to indicate its position immediately.

For what felt like many minutes, but must in reality have been a matter of seconds only, we stood watching each other beneath the glare of the electric light. And then, with a sudden movement of his hand from behind his back, he flung himself at me. I raised my left arm to protect myself, made an ill-directed grab at the blue



The emerald hadn't even fallen into a crack. It was

emerald, missed it, barked my knuckles on the edge of the basin, and saw it from the tail of my eye swinging back into its vertical position, and the next instant my wrist had gone down before a violent blow, and I was struggling powerlessly against the overwhelming, choking sweetness of a pad of chloroform.

WHEN I regained consciousness (Gibson continued, after a short but effective pause) I found myself lying across the lower berth. My head was throbbing intolerably, the noise and vibration of the train were insupportable, and I felt that at any moment I might be devastatingly sick. But the thought of the blue emerald gave strength to my stricken limbs. I tottered to the window and flung it up. We seemed to be running steadily through thick wreaths of early-morning mist, and as I drew the fresh air

into my lungs the first feeling of nausea left me. I turned back to examine the inside of my section.

Never in my life have I seen such an appalling vision of disorder and chaos. The contents of my dressing-bag and of the pockets of my clothes—including even my bundle of bank-notes—had been flung broadcast all over the little compartment. The carpet had been dragged from the floor,

perched temptingly on the very middle of a sleeper.

the blankets from the berths, and a series of gashes had been made in the two mattresses. Even the green shade had been torn from the light in the ceiling.

I set painfully to work to repair some of this confusion before summoning such doubtfully sympathetic assistance as might be rendered by the conductor, and, as I did so, a sudden thought struck me.

If my assailant had indeed been in search of the blue emerald, as his contempt for my money would suggest, why should he have caused all this destruction, when all the time it was lying ready to his hand by the side of the wash-basin? Could this, by any miraculous chance, mean that he had overlooked it? I crossed again to the little folding cabinet and pulled it open. The next second a terrifying memory had flashed into my mind. I saw a vision of that last protective movement before unconsciousness had overcome me, and I realized that in missing my real object and knocking up the basin I must have sent the blue emerald slithering down the waste-pipe, and that it was now lying on the permanent way at some unknown point on the two or three hundred miles which separated me from Calais.

I sank back on my berth with a groan. What was the use of having accidentally saved my precious charge from that obese ruffian, if my only clue to its present whereabouts was represented by an indeterminate length of railroad track situated in some unknown portion of Picardy? If only I had even the faintest idea of the time at which the attack had taken place, it might have been some help; but although I knew when the train had been due to leave Calais, I had taken no steps to check its punctuality. I couldn't even recall having looked at a clock since I had left Victoria.

Automatically I raised my aching arm to glance at my wrist-watch, and the next instant my heart seemed to stop beating, as a wild, desperate hope darted into my mind. The glass had been shivered to atoms by the force of that sudden blow; even the case was dented and flattened against my bruised flesh; but the little hands, arrested in their eternal progress, still pointed faithfully to seven minutes past one. Resolutely I disregarded the possibility of failure, while even such a faint chance of success yet remained. I bolted the door again, brushed my hair, resumed my discarded clothes, packed my bag, and sat down to await the train's next stop. I had a bad moment when I found that the little leather jewel-case was no longer anywhere to be seen, but even on this ominous sign I would turn a blind eye as long as it could possibly be done.

And so, about a quarter of an hour later, you must imagine the long train pulling slowly into a sleepy-looking station. The very second that it stopped I dropped my bag through the window, and in another moment I had dodged past the conductor and, seizing the bag from where it had fallen, was tearing up towards the front of the train.

Raising my hat politely, and at the same time ostentatiously fingering a twenty-franc note, I addressed the engine-driver in my best French.

"Pardon me, monsieur," I said, "but would you have the goodness to inform me as precisely as is possible where this train was at seven minutes past one this morning?"

"*Hein?*" said the engine-driver, spitting unsympathetically on the floor of his cab.

I repeated my question.

"*Cinquante francs*," said the engine-driver this time.

There was no time for argument, and besides, the taxpayer would have to foot the bill. I handed him up his fifty francs.

"*C'est ça*," said the engine-driver. "*Et le train était sur la voie.*" And he laughed heartily at his own wit.

"You dashed idiot," I thought. "I hope you get your head knocked off in the next tunnel." But aloud I said: "Your pleasantry is very amusing. But am I to report you to my brother-in-law the general manager?"

"By no means," said the engine-driver. "But for myself, I have only directed this machine since Amiens." And with these words he pulled a handle somewhere in his cab, so that all further conversation was made impossible by an agonizing noise of escaping steam.

I REMAINED hidden until the train had left, and then set about discovering the quickest means of returning to Amiens. By three o'clock in the afternoon I had found my way to the office of the *chef de gare* at that station.

"Pardon me, monsieur," I said, "but I had the misfortune to drop from one of your excellent carriages on the Biarritz express last night a photograph of my late wife, which is of inexpressible value to me for reasons of sentiment the most pure. Might I beg you to inform me at what point on your superb line the express found itself at seven minutes past one, the hour of my loss so sad?"

"Monsieur should address himself to the bureau of lost propriety at Paris," replied the station-master.

"Without doubt," I said. "Nevertheless I would desire particularly to assure myself of the exact neighbourhood of my misfortune, in order that I may light a candle, or possibly several candles, in the nearest church, and thereby receive the assistance of the blessed saints in my search."

"For myself," replied the station-master, coldly, "I am an atheist."

"A freemason perhaps?" I suggested.

"And what of it?" he inquired.

"Simply this," I said. "I am myself a Past Grand Master of the Ancient and Honourable Jupiter Lodge, number seven hundred and fifty-six, of Great Britain." And seizing his hand as I spoke, I dug my finger-nails forcibly into the fleshy part of the palm.

"It is enough," said the station-master, wincing. "At seven minutes past one this morning the express for Biarritz was between Rue and Noyelles. I have the time-sheet here in my bureau."

"A thousand thanks," I replied. "Monsieur is of an amiability prodigious." And giving his hand a final grip, I hurried from his office.

At half-past four I had reached Noyelles in yet another train, and, leaving my bag in the cloak-room, I set out quickly along the road to the north. In a few minutes I had left the houses behind me, and at once I clambered over the nearest fence, hurried across a couple of fields, and so reached the permanent way.

Keeping my ears wide open for the sound of any approaching train—for the workings of French railway signals have always been an insoluble mystery to me—I began slowly making my way between the rails of the up-line in the direction of the coast. The sun beat down pitilessly on the metals, but never for a second did I interrupt my crouching progress from sleeper to sleeper. Every inch of the ground was closely examined, and if I had time I could tell you of many unexpected things that I found, but though my hopes were raised again and again by a piece of broken bottle gleaming in the sunlight, of the blue emerald there was still no trace. At the end of an hour I straightened my back and refreshed myself with a cigarette, and then, just as I was preparing to start again, I suddenly saw, lying in the middle of the six-foot way, an object that made my heart leap into my mouth. For though its lining had been wrenched out and its hinges broken, there could be no mistaking that little leather jewel-case.

In the excitement of this discovery I was as nearly as possible run over by a goods train on the down line. But in another minute its last wagon had rattled out of sight round a curve, and, placing the damaged case in my pocket, I resumed my weary walk.

My hopes were now running high. It seemed clear that the thief, enraged by the discovery of the empty casket, had first wreaked his vengeance on the thing itself, and then flung it through the window. Surely, then, unless I had been forestalled, somewhere between this point and the station at Rue I should come on the blue emerald itself, lying lodged in a crevice of the road-bed.

And the astonishing thing is that I did. As a matter of fact it hadn't even fallen into a crack. It was perched temptingly on the very middle of a sleeper, and I first saw it winking at me when I was quite fifty yards away. The very next platelayer to come that way must inevitably have gone off with it, for it was simply asking to be taken. My luck seemed incredible; for a moment I thought I should actually faint with excitement before I could reach it.

But I didn't; and by eight o'clock I had resumed possession of my bag; by ten o'clock I was back at Amiens; and by two o'clock I was sitting up in a crowded second-class compartment, jolting towards Paris. So far as my present trip was concerned, I had finished with such dangerous luxuries as sleeping-cars.

I won't describe the next stage in my exhausting journey. But at last, about noon the following day, after travelling almost unceasingly for over sixty-five hours, I found my seventh train steaming into Biarritz. I waited until everyone else had left the compartment, even until the platform had begun to empty, and then, hot, stiff, and dirty, I climbed down the steps, and went in search of my registered luggage, which had preceded me by twenty-four hours.

And here, as I approached the *douane*, my luck turned again, and I found that a second misfortune had befallen me. Why I hadn't discovered it before, I don't know. But I was certain enough now. My bundle of bank-notes, my visiting-cards, and my booklet of travelling-coupons were all there, safe enough; but of the baggage-check for the box which contained my uniform there was no shadow or sign. Could I have overlooked it when I was gathering up my other property, or had—— I rushed to the custodian of the *douane*, and raised my hat.

"Pardon me, monsieur," I said, "but I have had the misfortune to lose the ticket for a box of mine which arrived last night on the *train de luxe* from Calais. Might I beg to be informed where one should address oneself in such circumstances?"

The *douanier* spat skilfully over his counter.

"A box?" he repeated. "What description of box?"

"A brown box," I explained. "With many labels on it. Also on each end it was marked with my initials, 'H. G.'"

"And of what size?" asked the *douanier*.

"Like this and like that," I said, demonstrating with my hands.

The *douanier* seemed to be weighing his answer carefully, and again I took a bank-note from my pocket and twisted it negligently between my fingers.

"*Ça c'est pour moi*," said the *douanier*, leaning over and seizing it. "As for the box, monsieur should perhaps address himself to the police. A box of such a nature was claimed by a gross gentleman, it is now yesterday."

"You mean he gave up the ticket for it?" I asked.

"Naturally," said the official, and at this he cleared his throat so terrifyingly that I shut my eyes. When I looked again he had gone.

THE explanation was obvious, even if unsatisfactory. Foiled in his attempt to discover the emerald in my compartment or on my person, my assailant must have leapt to the conclusion that I had concealed it in my registered luggage. Barring the uniform, which would be expensive to replace and was, moreover, essential to my mission, the whole loss could well have been covered by ten pounds. And even this my department would in all probability be quite content to pay. But was I to risk international complications by appearing at the distinguished exile's Court in a much-soiled travelling-suit, or ought I to telegraph to London for another uniform and so remain in uneasy possession of the blue emerald for a further indefinite period?

In the end, after much uncomfortable cogitation, I decided to proceed to the Villa Frangipanni and lay the case, in confidence, before Count Zybska. And accordingly, after a bath and a shave at the Carlton, I chartered an automobile in which to complete the last stage of my journey. You may be sure that I scrutinized the chauffeur pretty closely before I started, and that I kept a keen look-out on the road as we bowled along. But nowhere on the ten-mile ride did I detect any indication that I was being watched or followed. I had a nervous moment, it is true, at the frontier, but I was only detained for a couple of minutes, asked a few perfunctory questions, and immediately released.

And so at last, about a quarter to three, my car drew up at the outer gate of His Serene Highness's temporary Court. I handed my card to the porter on duty, and explained my desire for an interview with Count Zybska. The porter seemed to be expecting me.

"The automobile," he said, "must rest here. But if the señor will proceed to the Villa by the path which I shall show him, and present his card to the doorkeeper, he will then be conducted to His Excellency's apartments."

"Ten million thanks," I replied. The

porter scrawled some illegible symbol on the back of my card, returned it to me, pointed out the route with a wealth of southern gesture, saluted, and withdrew again into his lodge. I started at once up the steep and winding path.

I MUST have walked for quite ten minutes through a forest of palms and cactuses, sweltering in the heat and beating the flies off with my handkerchief, before I first caught sight of the white walls of the house itself. And as I had no wish to increase the embarrassment of my visit by arriving in too sodden and exhausted a condition, I paused for a moment to recover my breath and to dust my boots on the grass at the side of the path. For the thousandth time since I had started I made use of the opportunity to feel the little lump in my waistcoat pocket; and then, to make assurance doubly sure, I glanced quickly round and, inserting my finger and thumb, extracted the blue emerald for a final inspection.

Yes, there it was: as dazzling, as fairy-like, and—to me—as odious as ever. I gave it one more polish against the sleeve of my coat, and then, just as I was on the point of putting it back, it seemed suddenly to leap from my hand and, before I could catch it again, it had gone.

I bent down at once to recover it from the grass at my feet, but while my hand was still less than half-way there I heard a hoarse command from the direction of the nearest bush, a scurrying sound behind me, and instantly my two elbows were seized in a vice-like grip, while something that felt like a knee was thrust forcibly into my back. And at the same moment there stepped out from the protection of an *araucaria imbricata* an unwelcome but familiar figure. For although he had now chosen to decorate his bulbous countenance with a small crêpe mask, there could be no mistaking my old friend of the Horse Guards' Parade.

He wasted no time in words, for I was completely at his mercy. His pudgy fingers darted at my pockets, turning out the contents with a machine-like rapidity. I heard a startled gasp as he came on the damaged jewel-case, but the next second he had flung it away and was hard at work again. He snatched at my hat, ran his hands rapidly over it, and tossed it aside; he seized my nose so that I yelped with pain, and took the opportunity to gaze into my mouth. And at each failure his methods became rougher and more objectionable. For days afterwards I was black and blue all over.

And yet, for all the annoyance and even agony of the mauling to which I was being subjected, I was hard put to it to conceal my triumph. Five seconds earlier and nothing could have saved the emerald from being his. I kept my eyes resolutely from the ground, determined to make no sign which could give him the slightest clue to my knowledge of its whereabouts.

It was the brute behind me who put the idea into his head. I heard him muttering something in an unknown tongue, and at once my bulky enemy had hurled himself on all-fours and was tearing over the ground like an ill-conditioned retriever. But, miraculously as it seemed to me, the blue emerald still eluded him. Again and again he passed over the exact spot where I was certain that it had fallen, plucking feverishly at every inch of the ground, but with absolutely no result. I could scarcely believe my eyes.

Suddenly he stopped short and, sitting back on his feet, pulled out a long-barrelled revolver, tastefully mounted in mother-of-pearl.

"The emerald," he panted, directing his weapon at my stomach. "Where is she?"

I looked at him stupidly.

"What emerald?" I asked.

"Assassin!" he shouted, taking deliberate aim at me; and at the same moment the desperate chance on which I had counted came off. The villain behind me had no desire to be spitted on the same bullet which deprived me of my life, and he did exactly what I should have done myself. He let go.

At once I slipped hastily to one side, leapt into the air, and fell heavily on the kneeling gunman. The pistol jerked out of his hand, and as my thumbs sank deep into the rolls of his throat I really thought I had got him. But the odds were too heavily against me. As he choked and gurgled beneath my grip, I saw from the corner of my eye my other assailant creeping nearer and nearer. With a quick movement he had seized the mother-of-pearl pistol, and as he brought the butt-end down on the back of my skull I relapsed, for the second time in the last thirty-six hours, into utter unconsciousness.

I DON'T think (Gibson went on) that I can have been knocked out this time for very long, but when I came round again there was no sign of either of the thieves. My head was aching fit to burst, but I set to at once to begin hunting for the blue emerald. My own explanation of the fat blackguard's failure was that I must have been standing on it the whole time, but after twenty minutes of rapidly-increasing anxiety the appalling fact had to be faced: the emerald simply wasn't there. After all the horrors that I had been through, after travelling unceasingly for nearly three days, after being chloroformed, sandbagged, and reft of my

I sank against a cactus, and as I did so a gorgeously-attired flunkey made his unexpected appearance.

luggage, I had reached the very threshold of success only to lose that infernal stone within half a mile of the Prince's villa. Of course the two thieves must have seen it the second they had laid me out. They would have bolted at once, have left the grounds by climbing one of the walls, and already they were over the frontier or on the sea. I sank against a cactus, groaning aloud, and as I did so a gorgeously-attired flunkey made his unexpected appearance.

"It is the visitor for Count Zybska?" he inquired in Spanish.

"Yes," I said, feebly.

"His Excellency is waiting," said the flunkey. "But perhaps the señor is unwell?"

"No," I said, rudely. "I've only been making a daisy-chain. Take me to His Excellency at once."

He bowed impassively, and struggling to my feet I followed him across the rest of the grounds and through a French window into a large and handsomely-appointed room. The Count rose from a desk at which he was writing, and wrung my hand warmly.

"Your Excellency," I said, "you must pardon my abruptness, but there is no time to be lost. I have just been assaulted within five hundred yards of this very house, and though I did all that I could to protect it, the blue emerald has gone. Two men, one extremely stout and the other smelling strongly of garlic, have escaped with it. Apologies and explanations must wait, but let me beg of you to telephone instantly to the mayor, or whoever controls the local police, so that an attempt may be made to arrest them before it is too late."

"Yais," replied Count Zybska, smiling at me amiably. "It ees vairy fine days."

I saw at once that he had failed to apprehend my meaning, so I repeated myself in French.

"*Barfaitment*," said the Count, when I had quite finished; and pointing towards a door in the corner, he went through an imbecile pantomime of washing his hands.

"No, no," I shouted. "Listen to this." And I was just starting off again, this time in German, when the portière at the end of the room rattled on its rings, and there entered a short stocky figure in a green knickerbocker suit with a bald head and, as far as I could judge at a hasty glance, an impediment in one of his eyes.

"Zut!" said Count Zybska, with an appearance of some alarm. "It ees 'Is Serene 'Ighness." And turning to the new arrival, he embarked at once on what I took to be an explanation of my presence.

Prince Stanislas listened stonily, occasionally looking towards me with his less imperfect eye, and when the Count at length ceased, he said, in French:—

'It is enough. But where, then, Mr. Gibson, is your uniform? Do you think to insult us?"

"No, no, your Highness," I exclaimed. "Never would I have appeared in your presence without my uniform. But in the course of my voyage, alas, one has stolen it from me."

"Stolen!" repeated the Prince. "And the emerald, then. Is that also stolen?"

"Your Highness," I said, quaveringly, "I will tell you everything." And I did. In the faint hope of mitigating his severity by explaining all that I had suffered for his sake, I began at the beginning. If I exaggerated a little here and there, then I think it was no more than anyone else would have done. And, to tell the truth, the more I piled it on, the better the story seemed to be going. I described how twelve armed men had burst into my sleeping-compartment in the train, and took all the credit for the ingenious idea of dropping the jewel down the waste-pipe and simultaneously breaking my own watch.

"*C'est magnifique*," said the Prince, slapping his knickerbockers.

ENCOURAGED by this success, I went on to describe how twenty-four armed men had flung themselves on to me at Biarritz station, and how, though I had wounded most of them, they had succeeded in seizing my baggage. I told of the running fight over the frontier, in which I had been chased by forty-eight armed men in motor-cars. And I was just reaching the point where ninety-six men, all armed to the teeth, had ambushed me in the very grounds of the villa, when His Highness stopped me.

"It is terrible," he said. "It is superb. And you escaped them all?"

I had gone too far to go back.

"All," I replied.

"Monsieur," said His Serene Highness, "you are a hero from a land of heroes. With ten men such as you, do you think we should be content to remain exiled in this desolate and abominable hovel? Never. But we can and we will reward you. The Order of the Golden Cow (Fourth Class) shall be yours. Kneel, Monsieur Gibson, and receive it from the hands of a Prince who, whatever his misfortunes, can still recognize devotion when he sees it."

The whole situation seemed to have passed out of my control. I prostrated myself with a jerk on the polished parquet, His Serene Highness raised his walking-stick to administer the royal accolade, and—there was a little tinkle on the floor, as from the turned-up end of my despised, civilian trouser-leg the blue emerald rolled out between my knees.

"Your Highness," I said, brokenly, as I snatched it up and held it out to him, "this is the most fortunate moment in my whole life!"

(Another of Gibson's adventures will appear in an early number.)

MISS BRACEGIRDLE DOES HER DUTY

by

STACY AUMONIER

ILLUSTRATED BY S. SEYMOUR LUCAS

"THIS is the room, madame."

"Ah, thank you—thank you."

"Does it appear satisfactory to madame?"

"Oh, yes. Thank you—quite."

"Does madame require anything further?"

"Er—if not too late, may I have a hot bath?"

"*Parfaitement*, madame. The bathroom is at the end of the passage on the left. I will go and prepare it for madame."

"There is one thing more. I have had a very long journey. I am very tired. Will you please see that I am not disturbed in the morning until I ring?"

"Certainly, madame."

Millicent Bracegirdle was speaking the truth—she *was* tired. But then, in the sleepy cathedral town of Easingstoke, from which she came, it was customary for everyone to speak the truth. It was customary, moreover, for everyone to lead simple, self-denying lives—to give up their time to good works and elevating thoughts. One had only to glance at little Miss Bracegirdle to see that in her were epitomized all the virtues and ideals of Easingstoke. Indeed, it was the pursuit of duty which had brought her to the Hôtel de l'Ouest at Bordeaux on this summer's night. She had travelled from Easingstoke to London, then without a break to Dover, crossed that horrid stretch of sea to Calais, entrained for Paris, where of necessity she had to spend four hours—a terrifying experience—and then had come on to Bordeaux, arriving at midnight. The reason of this journey being that someone had to come to Bordeaux to meet her young sister-in-law, who was arriving the next day from South America. The sister-in-law was married to a missionary in Paraguay, but the climate not agreeing with her, she was returning to England. Her dear brother, the dean, would have come himself, but the claims on his time were so extensive, the parishioners would miss him so—it was clearly Millicent's duty to go.

She had never been out of England before, and she had a horror of travel, and an ingrained distrust of foreigners. She spoke a little French, sufficient for the purpose of travel and for obtaining any modest necessities, but not sufficient for carrying on any kind of conversation. She did not deplore this latter fact, for she was of opinion that French people were not the kind of people that one would naturally want to have conversation with; broadly speaking, they were not quite "nice," in spite of their ingratiating manners.

She unpacked her valise, placed her things about the room, tried to thrust back the little stabs of home-sickness as she visualized her darling room at the deanery. How strange and hard and unfriendly seemed these foreign hotel bedrooms! No chintz and lavender and photographs of all the dear family, the dean, the nephews and nieces, the interior of the Cathedral during harvest festival; no samplers and needlework or coloured reproductions of the paintings by Marcus Stone. Oh, dear, how foolish she was! What *did* she expect?

She disrobed, and donned a dressing-gown; then, armed with a sponge-bag and towel, she crept timidly down the passage to the bathroom, after closing her

bedroom door and turning out the light. The gay bathroom cheered her. She wallowed luxuriously in the hot water, regarding her slim legs with quiet satisfaction. And for the first time since leaving home there came to her a pleasant moment, a sense of enjoyment in her adventure. After all, it *was* rather an adventure, and her life had been peculiarly devoid of it. What queer lives some people must live, travelling about, having experiences! How old was she? Not really old—not by any means. Forty-two? Forty-three? She had shut herself up so. She hardly ever regarded the potentialities of age. As the world went, she was a well-preserved woman for her age. A life of self-abnegation, simple living, healthy walking, and fresh air had kept her younger than these hurrying, pampered, city people.

Love? Yes, once when she was a young girl—he was a schoolmaster, a most estimable, kind gentleman. They were never engaged—not actually, but it was a kind of understood thing. For three years it went on, this pleasant understanding and friendship. He was so gentle, so distinguished and considerate. She would have been happy to have continued in this strain for ever. But there was something lacking—Stephen had curious restless lapses. From the physical aspect of marriage she shrank—yes, even with Stephen, who was gentleness and kindness itself. And then, one day—one day he went away, vanished, and never returned. They told her he had married one of the country girls, a girl who used to work in Mrs. Forbes's dairy—not a very nice girl, she feared, one of those fast, pretty, foolish women. Heigho! Well, she had lived that down, destructive as the blow appeared at the time. One lives everything down in time. There is always work, living for others, faith, duty. At the same time she could sympathize with people who found satisfaction in unusual experiences. There would be lots to tell the dear dean when she wrote to him on the morrow: nearly losing her spectacles on the restaurant-car, the amusing remarks of an American child on the train to Paris, the curious food everywhere, nothing simple and plain; the two English ladies at the hotel in Paris who told her about the death of their uncle—the poor man being taken ill on Friday and dying on Sunday afternoon, just before tea-time; the kindness of the hotel proprietor, who had sat up for her; the prettiness of the chambermaid. Oh, yes, everyone was really very kind. The French people, after all, were very nice. She had seen nothing—nothing but what was quite nice and decorous. There would be lots to tell the dean to-morrow.

HER body glowed with the friction of the towel. She again donned her night attire and her thick woollen dressing-gown. She tidied up the bathroom carefully in exactly the same way she was accustomed to do at home; then once more gripped her sponge-bag and towel, and turning out the light she crept down the passage to her room. Entering the room, she switched on the light and shut the door quickly. Then one of those ridiculous things happened. just the kind of thing you would expect to happen in a foreign hotel. The handle of the door came off in her hand. She ejaculated a quiet "Bother!" and sought to replace it with one hand, the other being occupied with the towel and sponge-bag. In doing this she behaved foolishly, for, thrusting the knob carelessly against the steel pin without properly securing it, she only succeeded in pushing the pin farther into the door, and the knob was not adjusted. She uttered another little "Bother!" and put her sponge-bag and towel down on the floor. She then tried to recover the pin with her left hand, but it had gone in too far.

"How very foolish!" she thought. "I shall have to ring for the chambermaid—and perhaps the poor girl has gone to bed."

She turned and faced the room, and suddenly the awful horror was upon her.

There was a man asleep in her bed!

The sight of that swarthy face on the pillow, with its black tousled hair and heavy moustache, produced in her the most terrible moment of her life. Her heart nearly stopped. For some seconds she could neither think nor scream, and her first thought was:—

"I mustn't scream!"

She stood there like one paralysed, staring at the man's head and the great curved hunch of his body under the clothes. When she began to think she thought very quickly and all her thoughts worked together. The first vivid realization was that it wasn't the man's fault; it was *her* fault. *She was in the wrong room.* It was the man's room. The rooms were identical, but there were all his things about, his clothes thrown carelessly over chairs, his collar and tie on the wardrobe, his great heavy boots and the strange yellow trunk. She must get out—somehow, anyhow. She clutched once more at the door, feverishly driving her finger-nails into the hole where the elusive pin had vanished. She tried to force her fingers in the crack and open the door that way, but it was of no avail. She was to all intents and purposes locked in—locked in a bedroom in a strange hotel, alone with a man—a foreigner—a *Frenchman!*

She must think—she must think! She switched off the light. If the light was off

She turned, and suddenly the awful horror was upon her. *There was a man asleep in her bed!*

he might not wake up. It might give her time to think how to act. It was surprising that he had not awakened. If he *did* wake up, what would he do? How could she explain herself? He wouldn't believe her. No one would believe her. In an English hotel it would be difficult enough, but here, where she wasn't known, where they were all foreigners and consequently antagonistic —merciful heavens!

She *must* get out. Should she wake the man? No, she couldn't do that. He might murder her. He might—oh, it was too awful to contemplate! Should she scream? Ring for the chambermaid? But no; it would be the same thing. People would come rushing. They would find her there in the strange man's bedroom after midnight—she, Millicent Bracegirdle, sister of the Dean of Easingstoke! Easingstoke! Visions of Easingstoke flashed through her alarmed mind. Visions of the news arriving, women whispering around teatables: "Have you heard, my dear? Really, no one would have imagined! Her poor brother! He will, of course, have to resign, you know, my dear. Have a little more cream, my love."

Would they put her in prison? She might be in the room for the purpose of stealing or she might be in the room for the purpose of breaking every one of the ten commandments. There was no explaining it away. She was a ruined woman, suddenly and irretrievably, unless she could open the door. The chimney? Should she climb up the chimney? But where would that lead to? And then she thought of the man pulling her down by the legs when she was already smothered in soot. Any moment he might wake up. She thought she heard the chambermaid going along the passage. If she had wanted to scream, she ought to have screamed before. The maid would know she had left the bathroom some minutes ago. Was she going to her room?

AN abrupt and desperate plan formed in her mind. It was already getting on for one o'clock. The man was probably a quite harmless commercial traveller or business man. He would probably get up about seven or eight o'clock, dress quickly, and go out. She would hide under his bed until he went. Only a matter of a few hours. Men don't look under their beds, although she made a religious practice of doing so herself. When he went he would be sure to open the door all right. The handle would be lying on the floor as though it had dropped off in the night. He would probably ring for the chambermaid, or open it with a penknife. Men are so clever at those things. When he had gone she would creep out and steal back to her room, and then there would be no necessity to give any explanation to anyone. But heavens! what an experience! Once under the white frill of that bed, she would be safe till the morning. In daylight nothing seemed so terrifying. With feline precaution she went down on her hands and knees and crept towards the bed. What a lucky thing there was that broad white frill! She lifted it at the foot of the bed and crept under. There was just sufficient depth to take her slim body. The floor was fortunately carpeted all over, but it seemed very close and dusty. Suppose she coughed or sneezed! Anything might happen. Of course, it would be much more difficult to explain her presence under the bed than to explain her presence just inside the door. She held her breath in suspense. No sound came from above, but under the frill it was difficult to hear anything. It was almost more nerve-racking than hearing everything—listening for signs and portents. This temporary escape, in any case, would give her time to regard the predicament detachedly. Up to the present she had not been able to focus the full significance of her action. She had, in truth, lost her head. She had been like a wild animal, consumed with the sole idea of escape—a mouse or a cat would do this kind of thing—take cover and lie low. If only it hadn't all happened *abroad!*

She tried to frame sentences of explanation in French, but French escaped her. And then they talked so rapidly, these people. They didn't listen. The situation was intolerable. Would she be able to endure a night of it? At present she was not altogether uncomfortable, only stuffy and —very, very frightened. But she had to face six or seven or eight hours of it, and perhaps even then discovery in the end! The minutes flashed by as she turned the matter over and over in her head. There was no solution. She began to wish she had screamed or awakened the man. She saw now that that would have been the wisest and most politic thing to do; but she had allowed ten minutes or a quarter of an hour to elapse from the moment when the chambermaid would know that she had left the bathroom. They would want an explanation of what she had been doing in the man's bedroom all that time. Why hadn't she screamed before?

She lifted the frill an inch or two and listened. She thought she heard the man breathing, but she couldn't be sure. In any case, it gave her more air. She became a little bolder, and thrust her face partly through the frill so that she could breathe freely. She tried to steady her nerves by concentrating on the fact that—well, there

it was. She had done it. She must make the best of it. Perhaps it would be all right, after all.

"Of course, I sha'n't sleep," she kept on thinking. "I sha'n't be able to. In any case, it will be safer not to sleep. I must be on the watch."

SHE set her teeth and waited grimly. Now that she had made up her mind to see the thing through in this manner she felt a little calmer. She almost smiled as she reflected that there would certainly be something to tell the dear dean when she wrote to him to-morrow. How would he take it? Of course he would believe it—he had never doubted a single word that she had uttered in her life—but the story would sound so preposterous. In Easingstoke it would be almost impossible to imagine such an experience. She, Millicent Bracegirdle, spending a night under a strange man's bed in a foreign hotel! What would those women think? Fanny Shields and that garrulous old Mrs. Rusbridger? Perhaps—yes, perhaps it would be advisable to tell the dear dean to let the story go no farther. One could hardly expect Mrs. Rusbridger to not make implications—exaggerate. Oh, dear! what were they all doing now? They would all be asleep, everyone in Easingstoke. Her dear brother always retired at 10.15. He would be sleeping calmly and placidly, the sleep of the just—breathing the clear sweet air of Sussex, not this—oh, it *was* stuffy! She felt a great desire to cough. She mustn't do that.

Yes, at 9.30 all the servants were summoned to the library. There was a short service—never more than fifteen minutes; her brother didn't believe in a great deal of ritual—then at ten o'clock cocoa for everyone. At 10.15 bed for everyone. The dear, sweet bedroom, with the narrow white bed, by the side of which she had knelt every night so long as she could remember—even in her dear mother's day—and said her prayers.

Prayers! Yes, that was a curious thing. This was the first night in her life experience when she had not said her prayers on retiring. The situation was certainly very peculiar—exceptional, one might call it. God would understand and forgive such a lapse. And yet, after all, why—what was to prevent her saying her prayers? Of course, she couldn't kneel in the proper devotional attitude, that would be a physical impossibility; nevertheless, perhaps her prayers might be just as efficacious—if they came from the heart.

So little Miss Bracegirdle curved her body and placed her hands in a devout attitude in front of her face, and quite inaudibly murmured her prayers under the strange man's bed.

At the end she added, fervently:—

"Please God protect me from the dangers and perils of this night."

Then she lay silent and inert, strangely soothed by the effort of praying.

It began to get very uncomfortable, stuffy, but at the same time draughty, and the floor was getting harder every minute. She changed her position stealthily and controlled her desire to cough. Her heart was beating rapidly. Over and over again recurred the vivid impression of every little incident and argument that had occurred to her from the moment she left the bathroom. This must, of course, be the room next to her own. So confusing, with perhaps twenty bedrooms all exactly alike on one side of a passage—how was one to remember whether one's number was one hundred and fifteen or one hundred and sixteen? Her mind began to wander idly off into her schooldays. She was always very bad at figures. She disliked Euclid and all those subjects about angles and equations—so unimportant, not leading anywhere. History she liked, and botany, and reading about strange foreign lands, although she had always been too timid to visit them. And the lives of great people, *most* fascinating—Oliver Cromwell, Lord Beaconsfield, Lincoln, Grace Darling—*there* was a heroine for you—General Booth, a great, good man, even if a little vulgar. She remembered dear old Miss Trimmings talking about him one afternoon at the vicar of St. Bride's garden-party. She was *so* amusing. She—— *Good heavens!*

Almost unwittingly Millicent Bracegirdle had emitted a violent sneeze!

It was finished! For the second time that night she was conscious of her heart nearly stopping. For the second time that night she was so paralysed with fear that her mentality went to pieces. Now she would hear the man get out of bed. He would walk across to the door, switch on the light, and then lift up the frill. She could almost see that fierce moustachioed face glaring at her and growling something in French. Then he would thrust out an arm and drag her out. And then? O God in Heaven! what then?

"I shall scream before he does it. Perhaps I had better scream now. If he drags me out he will clap his hand over my mouth. Perhaps chloroform——"

But somehow she could not scream. She was too frightened even for that. She lifted the frill and listened. Was he moving stealthily across the carpet? She thought—no, she couldn't be sure. Anything might be happening. He might strike her from above

—with one of those heavy boots, perhaps. Nothing seemed to be happening, but the suspense was intolerable. She realized now that she hadn't the power to endure a night of it. Anything would be better than this—disgrace, imprisonment, even death. She would crawl out, wake the man, and try to explain as best she could.

She would switch on the light, cough, and say: "Monsieur!"

Then he would start up and stare at her.

Then she would say—what should she say?

"*Pardon, monsieur, mais je*—— What on earth was the French for 'I have made a mistake'?

"*J'ai tort. C'est la chambre*—er—incorrect. *Voulez-vous*—er——?"

What was the French for "door-knob," "let me go"?

It didn't matter. She would turn on the light, cough, and trust to luck. If he got out of bed and came towards her, she would scream the hotel down.

THE resolution formed, she crawled deliberately out at the foot of the bed. She scrambled hastily towards the door—a perilous journey. In a few seconds the room was flooded with light. She turned towards the bed, coughed, and cried out boldly:—

"Monsieur!"

Then for the third time that night little Miss Bracegirdle's heart all but stopped. In this case the climax of the horror took longer to develop, but when it was reached it clouded the other two experiences into insignificance.

The man on the bed was dead!

She had never beheld death before, but one does not mistake death.

She stared at him, bewildered, and repeated almost in a whisper:—

"Monsieur! Monsieur!"

Then she tip-toed towards the bed. The hair and moustache looked extraordinarily black in that grey, wax-like setting. The mouth was slightly open, and the face, which in life might have been vicious and sensual, looked incredibly peaceful and far away. It was as though she were regarding the features of a man across some vast passage of time, a being who had always been completely remote from mundane preoccupations.

When the full truth came home to her, little Miss Bracegirdle buried her face in her hands and murmured:—

"Poor fellow—poor fellow!"

For the moment her own position seemed an affair of small consequence. She was in the presence of something greater and more all-pervading. Almost instinctively she knelt by the bed and prayed.

For a few moments she seemed to be possessed by an extraordinary calmness and detachment. The burden of her hotel predicament was a gossamer trouble—a silly, trivial, almost comic episode, something that could be explained away.

But this man—he had lived his life, whatever it was like, and now he was in the presence of his Maker. What kind of man had he been?

Her meditations were broken by an abrupt sound. It was that of a pair of heavy boots being thrown down by the door outside. She started, thinking at first it was someone knocking or trying to get in. She heard the "boots," however, stumping away down the corridor, and the realization stabbed her with the truth of her own position. She mustn't stop there. The necessity to get out was even more urgent.

To be found in a strange man's bedroom in the night is bad enough, but to be found in a dead man's bedroom was even worse. They would accuse her of murder, perhaps. Yes, that would be it—how could she possibly explain to these foreigners? Good God! they would hang her. No, guillotine her—that's what they do in France. They would chop her head off with a great steel knife. Merciful heavens! She envisaged herself standing blindfold, by a priest and an executioner in a red cap, like that man in the Dickens story. What was his name?—Sydney Carton, that was it. And before he went on the scaffold he said:—

"It is a far, far better thing that I do than I have ever done——"

But no, she couldn't say that. It would be a far, far worse thing that she did. What about the dear dean; her sister-in-law arriving alone from Paraguay to-morrow; all her dear people and friends in Easingstoke; her darling Tony, the large grey tabby-cat? It was her duty not to have her head chopped off if it could possibly be avoided. She could do no good in the room. She could not recall the dead to life. Her only mission was to escape. Any minute people might arrive. The chambermaid, the boots, the manager, the gendarmes. Visions of gendarmes arriving armed with swords and notebooks vitalized her almost exhausted energies. She was a desperate woman. Fortunately now she had not to worry about the light. She sprang once more at the door and tried to force it open with her fingers. The result hurt her and gave her pause. If she was to escape she must *think*, and think intensely. She mustn't do anything rash and silly; she must just think and plan calmly.

She examined the lock carefully. There

was no keyhole, but there was a slip-bolt, so that the hotel guest could lock the door on the inside, but it couldn't be locked on the outside. Oh, why didn't this poor dear dead man lock his door last night? Then this trouble could not have happened. She could see the end of the steel pin. It was about half an inch down the hole. If anyone was passing they must surely notice the handle sticking out too far the other side! She drew a hairpin out of her hair and tried to coax the pin back, but she only succeeded in pushing it a little farther in. She felt the colour leaving her face, and a strange feeling of faintness came over her.

She was fighting for her life; she mustn't give way. She darted round the room like an animal in a trap, her mind alert for the slightest crevice of escape. The window had no balcony, and there was a drop of five storeys to the street below. Dawn was breaking. Soon the activities of the hotel and the city would begin. The thing must be accomplished before then.

SHE went back once more and stared hard at the lock. She stared at the dead man's property, his razors and brushes and writing materials. He appeared to have a lot of writing materials, pens and pencils and rubber and sealing-wax. Sealing-wax!

Necessity is truly the mother of invention. It is in any case quite certain that Millicent Bracegirdle, who had never invented a thing in her life, would never have evolved the ingenious little device she did, had she not believed that her position was utterly desperate. For in the end this is what she did. She got together a box of matches, a candle, a bar of sealing-wax, and a hairpin. She made a little pool of hot sealing-wax, into which she dipped the end of the hairpin. Collecting a small blob on the end of it, she thrust it into the hole, and let it adhere to the end of the steel pin. At the seventh attempt she got the thing to move.

It took her just an hour and ten minutes to get that steel pin back into the room, and when at length it came far enough through for her to grip it with her finger-nails, she burst into tears through the sheer physical tenseness of the strain. Very, very carefully she pulled it through, and holding it firmly with her left hand she fixed the knob with her right, then slowly turned it.

The door opened!

The temptation to dash out into the corridor and scream with relief was almost irresistible, but she forbore. She listened. She peeped out. No one was about. With beating heart she went out, closing the door inaudibly; she crept like a little mouse to the room next door, stole in, and flung herself on the bed. Immediately she did so, it flashed through her mind that *she had left her sponge-bag and towel in the dead man's room!*

In looking back upon her experience she always considered that that second expedition was the worst of all. She might have let the sponge-bag and towel remain there, only that the towel—she never used hotel towels—had neatly inscribed in the corner "M. B."

With furtive caution she managed to retrace her steps. She re-entered the dead man's room, reclaimed her property, and returned to her own. When the mission was accomplished she was indeed well-nigh spent. She lay on her bed and groaned feebly. At last she fell into a fevered sleep.

It was eleven o'clock when she awoke, and no one had been to disturb her. The sun was shining, and the experiences of the night appeared a dubious nightmare. Surely she had dreamt it all?

With dread still burning in her heart she rang the bell. After a short interval of time the chambermaid appeared. The girl's eyes were bright with some uncontrollable excitement. No, she had not been dreaming. This girl had heard something.

"Will you bring me some tea, please?"

"Certainly, madame."

The maid drew back the curtains and fussed about the room. She was under a pledge of secrecy, but she could contain herself no longer. Suddenly she approached the bed and whispered, excitedly:—

"Oh, madame, I am promised not to tell—but a terrible thing has happened! A man, a dead man, has been found in room one hundred and seventeen—a guest! Please not to say I tell you. But they have all been here—the gendarmes, the doctors, the inspectors. Oh, it is terrible—terrible!"

The little lady in the bed said nothing. There was indeed nothing to say. But Marie Louise Lancret was too full of emotional excitement to spare her.

"But the terrible thing is—— Do you know who he was, madame? They say it is Boldhu, the man wanted for the murder of Jeanne Carreton in the barn at Vincennes. They say he strangled her, and then cut her up in pieces and hid her in two barrels, which he threw into the river. Oh, but he was a bad man, madame, a terrible bad man—and he died in the room next door. Suicide, they think; or was it an attack of the heart? Remorse; some shock, perhaps. Did you say a *café complet*, madame?"

"No, thank you, my dear—just a cup of tea—strong tea."

"*Parfaitement*, madame."

The girl retired, and a little later a waiter entered the room with a tray of tea. She could never get over her surprise at this.

It seemed so—well, indecorous for a man—although only a waiter—to enter a lady's bedroom. There was, no doubt, a great deal in what the dear dean said. They were certainly very peculiar, these French people—they had most peculiar notions. It was not the way they behaved at Easingstoke. She got farther under the sheets, but the waiter appeared quite indifferent to the situation. He put the tray down and retired.

When he had gone, she sat up and sipped her tea, which gradually warmed her. She was glad the sun was shining. She would have to get up soon. They said that her sister-in-law's boat was due to berth at one o'clock. That would give her time to dress comfortably, write to her brother, and then go down to the docks.

Poor man! So he had been a murderer, a man who cut up the bodies of his victims—and she had spent the night in his bedroom! They were certainly a most—how could she describe it?—people. Nevertheless she felt a little glad that at the end she had been there to kneel and pray by his bedside. Probably nobody else had ever done that. It was very difficult to judge people. Something at some time might have gone wrong. He might not have murdered the woman after all. People were often wrongly convicted. She herself. If the police had found her in that room at three o'clock that morning—— It is that which takes place in the heart which counts. One learns and learns. Had she not learnt that one can pray just as effectively lying under a bed as kneeling beside it? Poor man!

SHE washed and dressed herself and walked calmly down to the writing-room. There was no evidence of excitement among the other hotel guests. Probably none of them knew about the tragedy except herself. She went to a writing-table, and after profound meditation wrote as follows:—

My Dear Brother,—

I arrived late last night, after a very pleasant journey. Everyone was very kind and attentive, the manager was sitting up for me. I nearly lost my spectacles in the restaurant-car, but a kind old gentleman found them and returned them to me. There was a most amusing American child on the train. I will tell you about her on my return. The people are very pleasant, but the food is peculiar, nothing plain and wholesome. I am going down to meet Annie at one o'clock. How have you been keeping, my dear? I hope you have not had any further return of the bronchial attacks. Please tell Lizzie that I remembered in the train on the way here that that large stone jar of marmalade that Mrs. Hunt made is behind those empty tins on the top shelf of the cupboard next to the coach-house. I wonder whether Mrs. Buller was able to come to evensong after all? This is a nice hotel, but I think Annie and I will stay at the Grand to-night, as the bedrooms here are rather noisy. Well, my dear, nothing more till I return. Do take care of yourself.

Your loving sister,

MILLICENT.

Yes, she couldn't tell Peter about it, neither in the letter nor when she went back to him. It was her duty not to tell him. It would only distress him: she felt convinced of it. In this curious foreign atmosphere the thing appeared possible, but in Easingstoke the mere recounting of the fantastic situation would be positively indelicate. There was no escaping that broad general fact—she had spent a night in a strange man's bedroom. Whether he was a gentleman or a criminal, even whether he was dead or alive, did not seem to mitigate the jar upon her sensibilities, or, rather, it would not mitigate the jar upon the peculiarly sensitive relationship between her brother and herself. To say that she had been to the bathroom, the knob of the door-handle came off in her hand, she was too frightened to awaken the sleeper or scream, she got under the bed—well, it was all perfectly true. Peter would believe her, but—one simply could not conceive such a situation in Easingstoke deanery. It would create a curious little barrier between them, as though she had been dipped in some mysterious solution which alienated her. It was her duty not to tell.

She put on her hat and went out to post the letter. She distrusted an hotel letter-box. One never knew who handled these letters. It was not a proper official way of treating them. She walked to the head post-office in Bordeaux.

The sun was shining. It was very pleasant walking about amongst these queer, excitable people, so foreign and different looking—and the *cafés* already crowded with chattering men and women; and the flower stalls, and the strange odour of—what was it? salt? brine? charcoal? A military band was playing in the square—very gay and moving. It was all life, and movement, and bustle—thrilling rather.

"I spent a night in a strange man's bedroom."

Little Miss Bracegirdle hunched her shoulders, hummed to herself, and walked faster. She reached the post-office, and found the large metal plate with the slot for letters and R.F. stamped above it. Something official at last! Her face was a

'Oh, madame, I am promised not to tell—but a terrible thing has happened!"

little flushed—was it the warmth of the day, or the contact of movement and life? —as she put her letter into the slot. After posting it she put her hand into the slot and flicked it round to see that there were no foreign contraptions to impede its safe delivery. No, the letter had dropped safely in. She sighed contentedly, and walked off in the direction of the docks to meet her sister-in-law from Paraguay.

H. G. WELLS

on

THE SIX GREATEST MEN IN HISTORY

An Interview by
BRUCE BARTON

Photo. Bereaford.

MR. WELLS got up from his seat by the window and came forward pleasantly, a medium-sized man, rather stocky, with the clipped moustache that his photographs have made familiar to all of us.

"I received your letter," he said, cheerfully. "A very interesting letter, Mr. Barton, and in one or two points even amusing. Your second question, for example—now, that's an amusing one. You ask whether it is possible to name the half-dozen outstanding figures of history—which is quite harmless—and then you complicate the thing by adding, 'Would there be a woman among them?'" He laughed. "One's chivalrous instincts would make him want to say 'Yes' to that question," he continued, "but the honest historian must answer 'No.'"

I brought my chair up closer, for he speaks rapidly and in very low tones. He is probably a poor lecturer, and, recognizing that fact, cancelled his American lecture tour. That is one of the evidences of greatness, I imagine—to know your own limitations and stick to the thing you can do best.

"If you don't object, I should like to start with my first question," I said. "Now that you've taken a good look at all the folks who have played this game of life, which is the greatest of all? Which one, in character and influence, has left the most permanent impression on the world?"

There was no hesitation in his reply.

"THE DOMINANT FIGURE IN HISTORY."

"You probably expect me to answer, Jesus of Nazareth," he said. "There can be no other answer; His is easily the dominant figure in history. I am speaking of Him, of course, as a man, for I conceive that the historian must treat Him as a man, just as the painter must paint Him as a man. We do not know as much about Him as we should like to know. The accounts of His life and work as set down in the four Gospels are sometimes obscure and contradictory; but all four of them agree in giving us a picture of a very definite personality; they carry a conviction of reality. To assume that He never lived, that the accounts of His life are inventions, is more difficult and raises more problems in the path of the historian than to accept the essential elements of the Gospel stories as fact.

"Of course, you and I live in countries where, to millions of men and women, Jesus is more than a man. But the historian must disregard that fact; he must adhere to the evidence which would pass unchallenged if his book were to be read in every nation under the sun. Now, it is interesting and significant—isn't it?—that an historian, setting forth in that spirit, without any theological bias whatever, should find that he simply cannot portray the progress of humanity honestly without giving a foremost place to a penniless teacher from Nazareth. The old-fashioned historians ignored Jesus entirely; they ignored the growth and spread of His teaching, regarding it as something apart from life, something, as it were, that happened only on Sundays. He left no impress on the historical records of His time. Yet, more than nineteen hundred years later, an historian like myself, who does not even call himself a Christian, finds the

picture centring irresistibly around the life and character of this simple, lovable man.

"All sorts of dogma and tradition have been imposed upon His personality, of course; it is the fate of all great religious leaders to be misinterpreted by their followers. But from underneath this mass of the miraculous and incredible, the man himself keeps breaking through. We feel the magnetism that induced men who had seen Him only once to leave their business and follow Him. He filled them with love and courage. Weak and ailing people were heartened by His presence. He spoke with a knowledge and authority that baffled the wise and subtle. But other teachers have done all this. These talents alone would not have given Him the permanent place of power which He occupies; that place is His by virtue of the new and simple and profound doctrine which He brought—the universal, loving Fatherhood of God and the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven.

"It is one of the most revolutionary doctrines that have ever stirred and changed human thought. His followers failed to grasp it; no age has even partially understood its tremendous challenge to the established institutions of mankind. But the world began to be a different world from the day that doctrine was preached; and every step toward wider understanding and tolerance and good will is a step in the direction of universal brotherhood, which He proclaimed.

Gautama Buddha.

THE HISTORIAN'S TEST OF GREATNESS

"So the historian, disregarding the theological significance of His life, writes the name of Jesus of Nazareth at the top of the list of the world's greatest characters. For the historian's test of greatness is not 'What did He accumulate for himself?' or 'What did He build up, to tumble down at his death?' Not that at all, but this: 'Was the world different because He lived? Did He start men to thinking along fresh lines with a vigour and vitality that persisted after Him?' By this test Jesus stands first; and if you ask for another name to write under his, there is Gautama Buddha.

"Here again it is difficult to disentangle the man himself from the mass of accumulated legend. To my mind, the most successful attempt to portray Gautama is that of Rhys Davids, the author whom I quote so fully in 'The Outline of History.' Any such portrayal lays itself open to the charge of representing one man's prejudice and judgment. But as with Jesus, so with Gautama Buddha, you sense the reality: you see clearly a man, simple, devout, lonely, battling for light—a vivid human personality, not a myth.

"He, too, brought a message universal in its character. It knows no limitations of time or of place; many of our best and most modern ideas are in closest harmony with it. All the miseries and discontents of life are due to insatiable selfishness, he taught. Selfishness takes three principal forms, and all are fraught with sorrow: The first is the desire to satisfy the senses, sensuousness; the second is the craving for personal immortality; and the third is the desire for prosperity, worldliness. All these must be overcome—that is to say, a man must be no longer living for himself before he can be serene. And his reward is Nirvana; which is not oblivion, as we have wrongly assumed, but the extinction of futile personal aims, whose going lets serenity into the soul.

"Jesus said, 'Seek ye *first* the Kingdom of God,' and 'Whosoever will save his life shall lose it.' Gautama in different language had called men to self-forgetfulness five hundred years before. There comes to you from reading his life, as from the life of Jesus, the impression of a mind so powerful, so penetrating, that after him things make a fresh start. He stands on one of the corners of history; events hinge upon him; his influence persists."

"Would you class Mohammed and Confucius with these two?" I asked Mr. Wells.

"They founded great religions also."

"We know too little about China to

include Confucius with our half-dozen greatest," he answered. "He was certainly a powerful intellect. As Hirth says, 'There can be no doubt that he had a greater influence on the development of Chinese national character than many emperors taken together.' But his teachings lack the universality of Jesus's teaching and Gautama's; he was great, but until we know China more intimately we cannot say that he was among the greatest. As for Mohammed, he seems to me to have been clearly surpassed by two of his associates: Abu-Bekr, his close friend and supporter, and the Caliph Omar, his successor.

"There is too much of the clay of human weakness mixed with the finer elements in Mohammed's character. He had too many wives and too much trouble with them. Allah was too often called upon to intervene with a special revelation designed to extricate the Prophet from domestic difficulties. He was vain, egotistical, and filled with hot desire. I do not place him among the greatest of human figures, nor am I one of those who find the Koran wholly inspiring and splendid. I own it in two translations and I have made diligent effort to like it, but I am unable to lash myself into a glow of admiration. Mohammed was the immediate cause of calling forth a power much greater than himself—the spirit of Islam. It grew out of the character of the Arab people. It was, and is, something vastly more significant than the man who made himself its spokesman.

"A GREAT NEW THING IN THE WORLD."

"No, I would leave out Mohammed. Instead of his name I would write the name of a wise old Greek, Aristotle. He began a great new thing in the world. Before his time, men had asked questions about themselves and their world; but he set them to classifying and analysing the information which their questions brought forth. He was the tutor of Alexander the Great, whose support and resources made it possible for Aristotle to carry on his studies on a scale never before attempted. At one time he had a thousand men at his disposal, scattered throughout Asia and Greece, collecting material for his natural history. It is reported that he sent assistants into far-away Egypt to study the Nile and to chart its habit of overflowing its banks. Political as well as natural science began with him. The students of the Lyceum under his direction made an analysis of one hundred and fifty-eight political constitutions.

"The death of Alexander and the breaking up of his empire put a too early stop to Aristotle's work, and after him things lapsed for a long time. But the world had been given a taste of the scientific method and never wholly forgot it. Again and again men kept turning back to the great, clear, penetrating intelligence that had set the example. Plato and other philosophers had said: 'Let us take hold of life and remodel it.' Aristotle said: 'First of all, let's get the facts.' That insistence on facts and the rigid analysis of facts, that determination to look the truth in the face, to deal with the world as it is rather than as we might wish it to be, was a big new step in human progress. As a younger man I was a Platonist; the poetry and fine imaginative power of his philosophy captivated me. But as I began to dig into the cause of things in preparation for 'The Outline,' I became convinced that Aristotle's scientific beginnings were a far more significant thing in the processes of history. He was the founder of the scientific method; and when we stop to consider what humanity owes to the development and achievements of the scientific spirit, I think we must agree that the name of Aristotle must have a place on our honour roll."

"Aristotle the teacher goes on the roll," I suggested, "and Alexander the Great stays off. Is that correct?"

"Unquestionably."

"And that holds for Cæsar and Napoleon, too, doesn't it?"

THE CLAIMS OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT—

"I have gone to some pains to make my position clear on those three gentlemen in 'The Outline,'" he answered with a chuckle. "What were their permanent contributions to humanity—these three who have appropriated to themselves so many of the pages of our histories? Take Alexander first. Inheriting an effective military machine from his father, he conquered Persia and remained in undisputed possession of that vast empire for six years. What did he create? Historians have said that he Hellenized the East. But Babylonia and Egypt swarmed with Greeks before his time; he was not the cause but a part of the Hellenization. For a time the whole world from the Adriatic to the Indus was under one rule, and that unification had been his father's dream. But what did Alexander do to make the unification permanent? He built no roads, established no secure sea communications, gave no thought, apparently, to institutions of education.

"He did one thing that historians have held up as indicating a vision of a melting together of racial traditions. He held a

great marriage feast at which he and ninety of his generals were married to Persian brides; at the same time several thousand of his soldiers who had married the daughters of Asia were showered with gifts. This wholesale wedding may or may not have been part of a vague plan of world unity. If it was, it is about all the evidence of that plan that we know.

"As his power increased, his arrogance and violence grew with it. He drank hard and murdered ruthlessly. After a protracted drinking bout in Babylon a sudden fever came on him, and he died at the age of thirty-three. Almost immediately his empire began to break up. One custom remained to remind men of him. Previously most men had worn beards. But so great was Alexander's personal vanity that he would not let his face be covered. He shaved, and so set a fashion in Greece and Italy which lasted many centuries. A good fashion, perhaps, but not a very significant contribution to the race.

Aristotle.

CÆSAR—

"As with Alexander, so with Cæsar. Here, again, historians have claimed to discover evidence of marvellous world policies. But what are the facts? There can be little doubt that he was a dissolute and extravagant young man. And in middle age, at the crest of his power, when he might have done so much for the world if he actually possessed the vision ascribed to him, he spent the better part of a year in Egypt feasting and entertaining himself with the lovely Cleopatra. He was fifty-four when the affair began. Surely that year in Egypt seems to reveal the elderly sensualist, or sentimentalist, rather than the master ruler of men."

AND NAPOLEON.

"And Napoleon——"

A copy of "The Outline" was on the table. Mr. Wells opened it and turned to that passage which is so magnificently at variance with the traditional histories that it is worth quoting again. After relating how France had put herself completely in Bonaparte's hands, it continues:—

"Now surely here was opportunity such as never came to man before. Here was a position in which a man might well bow himself in fear of himself, and search his heart and serve God and man to the utmost. The old order of things was dead or dying; strange new forces drove through the world seeking form and direction; the promise of a world republic and enduring world peace whispered in a multitude of startled minds. Had this man any profundity of vision, and power of creative imagination, had he been accessible to any disinterested ambition, he might have done work for mankind that would have made him the very sun of history. . . . There lacked nothing to the occasion but a noble imagination. And failing that, Napoleon could do no more than strut upon the crest of this great mountain of opportunity like a cockerel on a dung-hill. . . . Until, as Victor Hugo said in his tremendous way, 'God was bored by him . . . !'"

I read the passage and laid the book on the table.

"An American professor made a study of eminent men by measuring the amount of space given to each one in the biographical dictionaries," I suggested. "Napoleon's name led all the rest."

"That is easily explained," Mr. Wells replied. "A biographical dictionary is a record of activities, not a weighing of personalities. A London wine merchant with a list of all his customers and the clubs he had joined might conceivably occupy a very impressive space in a biographical dictionary. But that would not prove that the wine merchant was an impressive character. Neither the wine merchant nor Napoleon belongs to our list. One great monarch does deserve nomination, however; or so it seems to me at least."

"Charlemagne?" I asked.

"No, not Charlemagne. Charlemagne was one of the 'magnificent barbarians,' as I have termed them. Like a number of others, he pursued the futile ambition of

restoring the Roman Empire. That proves that he lacked something," Mr. Wells added, with a smile. "For one of the tests of greatness is a man's capacity to recognize that when a thing is dead it's dead.

King Asoka.

From a Tibetan painted banner.

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A MONARCH WHO "SHINES ALMOST ALONE, A STAR."

"The monarch I have in mind lived long before Charlemagne or even Cæsar. He ruled a vast empire which stretched from Afghanistan to Madras; *and he is the only military monarch on record who abandoned warfare after victory.* After a successful war — his one and only war —he announced that he would henceforth turn from battle and devote himself to the happiness of his people. He organized the digging of wells and the planting of trees for shade. He appointed officers to supervise charitable works. He planted gardens for growing medicinal herbs, and provided for the education of women. He sought to develop in his whole people an understanding of the teachings of Buddha as a guide to successful living. For twenty-eight years he worked sanely and unselfishly for the real needs of men. Among all the thousands of kings, emperors, and majesties, great and little, Asoka shines almost alone, a star. More living men cherish his memory to-day than have ever heard the name of Charlemagne."

I had never even heard of Asoka until I read "The Outline," and I said so to Mr. Wells.

"It's a rather appalling thought that among so many monarchs who lorded it over men only one should get his name written on our list," I continued. "And is there no Prime Minister? No Richelieu, no Talleyrand, no Pitt?"

THE ONE ENGLISHMAN WHO DESERVES A PLACE.

"Oh, no; they were quite incidental," Mr. Wells replied. "But one Englishman does deserve a place, it seems to me. He was a man who lacked many of the elements of greatness, yet he was very cardinal in human progress; his name was Roger Bacon. We know very little about his life, but his books, hotly phrased and sometimes quite abusive, voiced a passionate insistence upon the need for experiment and of collecting knowledge. 'Experiment, experiment,' he cried again and again; and as a promise of the progress which experiment would make possible, when once men had thrown off the chains of ignorance and authority, he wrote this famous paragraph, which has been often quoted. Remember that it was written more than six hundred years ago, somewhere between 1210 and 1293:—

Roger Bacon.

"'Machines for navigating are possible without rowers, so that great ships suited to river or ocean, guided by one man, may

be borne with greater speed than if they were full of men. Likewise, cars may be made so that without a draught animal they may be moved *cum impetu inestimabili*, as we deem the scythed chariots to have been from which antiquity fought. And flying machines are possible, so that a man may sit in the middle, turning some device by which artificial wings may beat the air in the manner of the flying bird.'

"Thus Roger Bacon, too, set men to thinking along new, fresh lines, and left an influence that has lived for the benefit of all generations. There will be those, of course, who will dispute his right to a place on our roll; some will have candidates whose claims can be urged in very convincing fashion. A man rises out of his age; it is always difficult to determine how much he owes to his contemporaries; how much of what he seemed to be was due to his own innate force, and how much to accident. But in my judgment these five names represent basic contributions to human thought and progress.

Photo. W. S. Campbell.

Abraham Lincoln.

WASHINGTON OR LINCOLN?

"Now, when you come down nearer to our own times and ask for a sixth name to complete the list, the problem is difficult. There is one striking phenomenon in modern history, however. That phenomenon is America. It represents something so new, so tremendous, so full of promise for the future of the world, that it seems as if America ought surely to have the right to nominate at least one member to our list. Shall it be Washington or Lincoln? Without Washington, there would hardly have been a United States; and yet Washington is not the typical American. He was essentially an English gentleman. All his tastes, all his traditions, and many of his associations and friendships ran back to the mother country.

"America might have imported her Washington, full grown, from the old world. She had to grow her own Lincoln.

"He, better than any other, seems to me to embody the essential characteristics of America. He stands for equality of opportunity, for the right and the chance of the child of the humblest home to reach the highest place. His simplicity, his humour, his patience, his deep-abiding optimism, based on the conviction that right will prevail and that things *must* work themselves out—all these seem to typify the best that you have to give. And they are very rich gifts indeed.

"It is interesting and significant to the historian that the Lincoln legend has already grown to such proportions. He has been dead only half a century, yet already he has a secure and permanent place in the affections of men, not only in America, but everywhere. I think we are safe in including Abraham Lincoln in our list of permanently great figures; not merely because of his own greatness, but because of the greatness of the spirit of America, which he, better than any other American, embodies and exemplifies."

A LIST TO STIMULATE WONDER.

Mr. Wells folded up the paper on which my questions were written as if to intimate politely that he had talked long enough. I glanced at the list of six names—Jesus, Buddha, Aristotle, Asoka, Roger Bacon, Lincoln. Surely a list to stimulate wonder, to provoke questionings in a man's mind about the objects for which lives are lived;

yes, and questionings about himself I thought of the thousands of kings who had erected temples and arches to bear their names—seeking by brick and stone to ensure remembrance; of the emperors who determined to lay hold on immortality while they still lived, by decreeing their own divinity. Not one of them is in the list. No millionaire is there, except perhaps Asoka, who is included not because of what he had but because of what he gave. It seemed a grim sort of joke that these men who *sought* fame with every ounce of their selfish energies should have failed utterly to be remembered, while six simple, very human men should achieve lasting eminence. I recalled Emerson's observation that the mass of men worry themselves into nameless graves, while here and there a great unselfish soul *forgets* itself into immortality.

I quoted the line to Mr. Wells.

"There is truth in that," he answered. "We think of human history as being very long; but it is not. In Ceylon there is a tree which is probably the oldest living thing in the world. It was planted from a cutting of the Bo Tree, the tree under which Buddha had his remarkable spiritual experience, and it has been tended with extraordinary care through the centuries. Its limbs are supported by pillars; and earth has been repeatedly terraced about it so that it could keep sending out fresh roots. How many more generations of men it may look down upon we cannot foretell, but we know how many it already has seen come and go. It was planted in 245 B.C.

"When Cæsar was born the old tree was already old. That is a startling thought—that almost all the years since men began to make dependable records are spanned by the life of a single tree. We are still in the beginnings of things; yet enough centuries have already passed to enable us to see what kind of lives and what sort of influence persist beyond the grave. In writing 'The Outline of History,' where everything had to be compressed, we could find no space for many of the Roman emperors, we could not mention even the names of many of the kings of France and Germany and Great Britain. But we gave a good many lines to a poor monk named Luther and to two other very humble, very simple beings, Loyola and St. Francis of Assisi. Why? Because the kings and emperors only *took*; these men *gave*; and by the spirit of their giving they wrought permanent changes in the thought and lives of many millions after them.

WHAT CHARACTERISTICS MAKE FOR REAL HAPPINESS AND PERMANENT INFLUENCE?

"So with the six whose names we have placed in our highest honour list. If the readers of THE STRAND MAGAZINE want to discover what characteristics make for real happiness and permanent influence, they can hardly do better than read whatever they can find about the life and works of these six. The characteristics which they embody are the characteristics to which humanity is going to pay more and more tribute in the future. Napoleon had a run of almost twenty years. A Napoleon to-day would hardly run five years; indeed, I think I may say that a bad case of Napoleon, so to speak, would be nipped before he had a chance to get really started. The world has passed the place[where it will any longer tolerate—to say nothing of honouring—men who are merely 'getters.'

"A rather striking instance of the change that is taking place everywhere was furnished by a speech given before the head masters of English schools at Leeds some time ago. The late Mr. F. W. Sanderson, head master of the Oundle School, where the sons of some of England's proudest families are educated, was the speaker.

"'We have been training our boys for aristocracy,' he said. 'We shall have to train them now for service.'

"That was spoken only a few months ago, but it is merely an echo of what Jesus spoke nineteen hundred years back, and Buddha, in different language, five hundred years earlier. Our list of great names proves the truth of the injunction that he who would be greatest must win his place and hold it by rendering the best and largest service.

"Without such absorption of one's self in the service of the business the large rewards do not come. We shall see that truth more and more manifest. Therefore we are giving helpful advice, I take it, when we suggest to ambitious men that they make themselves familiar with the lives of the six men we have named. Such reading will give no promise of an easy road to wealth or position, but it will reveal something infinitely more valuable. It will furnish an inspiration to the sort of living that makes for permanent influence through real service. That *is* success."

MUSTARD-POT-HUNTSMAN

by

GILBERT FRANKAU

ILLUSTRATED BY GILBERT HOLIDAY

I.

SINCE most hunting women and all hunting men are liars, and since even the veracity of my friend Mustard-Pot (sometime The Yellow Peril, sometime Butter-pat) may be questioned by modern readers in search of modern realism, I wish to state very clearly at the outset of this, the strangest episode in Mustard-Pot's strange career, that the main outlines of it were given to me one cold kennel-inspecting Sunday afternoon by one of the most matter-of-fact among my acquaintances in the Shires, by one whom I would as soon suspect of skirting as of falsehood, by none other, to wit, than Rutland Romeo.

Now Rutland Romeo, though he is a stallion-hound of no mean lineage, tracing his pedigree back through Rallywood and Reckless to that greatest of all kennel-ancestors, Rambler himself, belies his name—being, in cold fact, so ugly in appearance that when the hunt float first decanted him at the Home Farm of Lomondham Hall, Sam Slooman, Vic. Lomondham's Lincolnshire cowman, to whose care, in company with the handsome Wanderer, he was entrusted for his puppy-walking, declared him a cross between a badger-pied beagle and a blooming bulldog.

Wherefore, in his puppyhood, Romeo's lineage failed to counteract Romeo's looks: it being the well-formed Wanderer and not his bow-legged kennel companion whom Sam Slooman's daughters petted and Sam Slooman's wife over-fed; the straight-limbed Wanderer whom, on sunny summer mornings, Naomi Lomondham permitted to follow her from the rose gardens to the kitchen gardens and from the kitchen gardens to the paddocks. So that, although he was too well-bred for jealousy, the sensitive puppy-soul of Romeo suffered as only sensitive puppy-souls can; and when in the fullness of time, loping aimless and mischievous across far pastures, he found him a friend, a huge upstanding horse-friend, yellow as a buttercup and garrulous as a magpie, he lavished on that horse-friend all the devotion which other happier hounds lavish on human kind.

They became inseparables—the bow-legged badger-pied pup and the straight-limbed saffron gelding; and Sam Slooman, who was imaginative for a cowman, used to swear they talked to each other, "just like Christians," all through those long summer afternoons when Lomondham Vale drowsed like a tired fox-huntress and the rare wheatfields ripened red-gold as Mrs. Monty Perivale's hair against the green of league-long ridge-and-furrow.

Possibly those talks were the Primary Cause of which the following story is only the Secondary Effect.

II.

"I WISH to goodness I hadn't railed those nags to Up-Tollaton," grumbled Sir Victor Plowright Lomondham, Bart., as he peered across the vast dining-room of the Hall to where, between two impossibly-attired seventeenth-century Lomondhams, the broad mullioned window showed a late March landscape, sunless and laced with that driving rain against which not even the most expensive red coat avails the frozen shoulder-blades.

"It's putrid weather," agreed Lady Lomondham, pouring herself another cup from

the Georgian coffee-pot. "Still, I think I'd better make a one-horse day of it."

"I shouldn't if I were you," said Lomondham, gloomily. "It'll be as cold as charity messing about in Lornham Big Wood."

Naomi Lomondham drained her cup in silence. She, too, felt gloomy. She had the hump, a regular hunting hump. This second season after their marriage had been a rotten one—first frost, then foot-and-mouth disease, and, finally, an influenza epidemic in stables which was still laying up a round dozen of their four-and-twenty horses. "It *might* clear up," she ventured, striving for cheeriness.

"It won't." Her husband filled his cigar-case from the cabinet on the sideboard. "And even if it does, what are you going to ride?"

"Well, there's Selim."

"I'll want Selim for Saturday."

"Ali, then."

"Ali's to be shod this afternoon."

Brightly, Naomi suggested other horses—Nigger Princess, Quicksilver, Silver Glory. Darkly, Lomondham vetoed each and every one. "Just as well give them a rest to-day," decided Sir Victor Lomondham. "Give yourself a rest, too. It'll do you good."

"No, it won't." Naomi's black eyes flashed. "It won't do me a bit of good. I hate missing days at the end of the season."

A knock and a footman announcing, "The car's at the door, Sir Victor," interrupted them; and Victor, who would have preferred hunting through the deluge to a first-class cabin in the ark, cheered up a little. "I'll tell you what you can do if you like," he said, laughing. "You can have Mustard-Pot."

"Can I?" Naomi did not laugh, for Mustard-Pot—though slightly tamer than two years since—had never been backed by female. "Can I really? That *is* kind of you, Victor." And she continued, her husband's over-night decision to hunt thirty miles away from home with a pack whose followers included that particularly hard-thrusting and even harder-flirting lady, Mrs. Monty Perivale, adding acid to the words: "You don't want me to break my neck, do you?"

At which juncture any ordinary husband would have kissed his wife and the domestic breeze subsided. Lomondham's instinct, however, being all for dominance, whether of wives, horses, or tenantry, drove him on a different course. "Dash it all," he thought, remembering his first hunting experience on Mustard-Pot, that seven-mile bolt which had culminated in his engagement to Naomi, "she made me ride the brute once. I'll make her ride him this time." "Of course, if you haven't got the nerve," he said, with the suspicion of a sneer; and at that the domestic breeze blew to a well-mannered gale.

"Are you trying to put the wind up me, Victor?" asked Naomi, her mind visualizing Mrs. Monty's auburn hair and pale complexion.

"Of course not." Lomondham's instinct drove him on. "Of course I'm not trying to put the wind up you. There's nothing the matter with Mustard-Pot these days. All you have to do is to keep hold of his head, ride him well up, and wide of hounds."

"And supposing he bolts with me? Supposing he puts me down?"

"He won't bolt with you, and he's never put anyone down in his life."

Whereupon their eyes clashed; and Lomondham, without another word, marched for the door.

III.

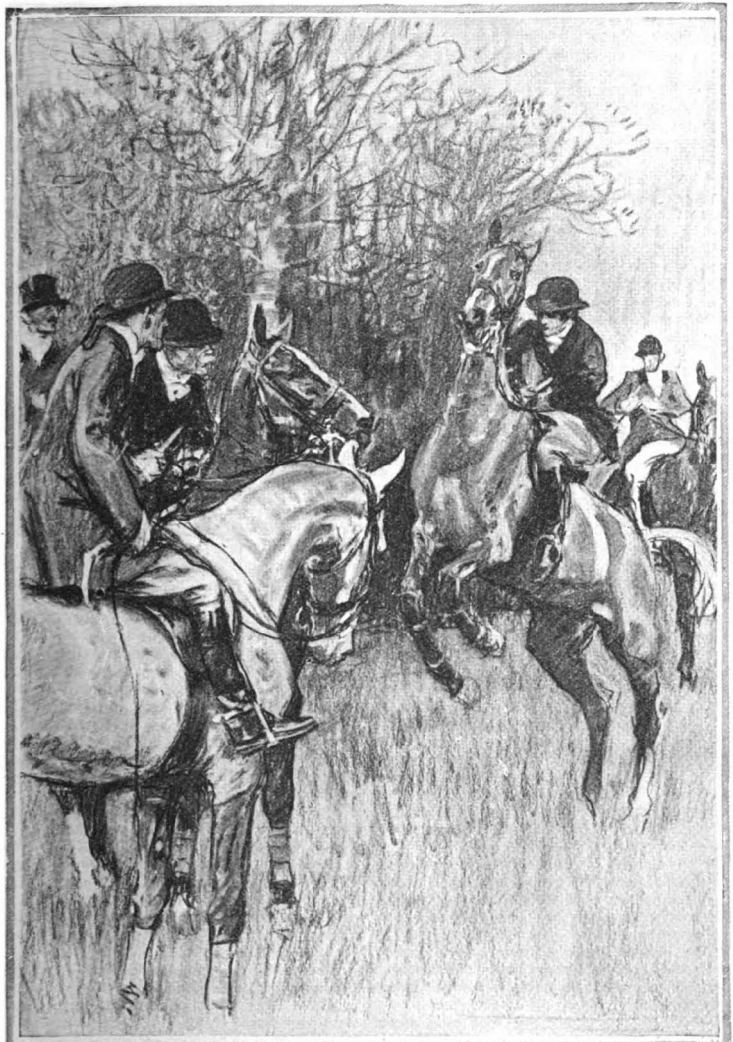
THE breakfast things had been cleared away, the car gone a good half-hour; but Naomi still sat on in the dining-room, alone with her thoughts. "Vic's a brute," she mused; "a domineering, selfish brute. Vic wants all the horses for himself. Vic's getting tired of *me*. He doesn't want *me* to go out with him. He'd rather go out with Mrs. Monty."

Angrily she rose and moved to the window. Angrily she looked out across the terracing downsweep of Lomondham Vale. The rain-clouds were lifting. Vague gleams of brightness peeped through the grey. But the wind had risen. Leafless branches tapped against the mullioned window-pane. "Rotten weather for hunting," thought Naomi, "and we never do get a run from Lornham." Rotten weather would be Mrs. Monty's opportunity. She would flirt—flirt all day long at covert-side with Victor. Probably they'd knock off early, and Vic would drive her home in the Rolls.

Naomi wandered out of the dining-room into the hall. The Chippendale clock on the Tudor mantelpiece pointed to half-past ten. "And I've got to stop at home," she mused. "I've got to stop at home till he comes back, unless—unless I ride Mustard-Pot."

Mustard-Pot! How dared Victor dare her to ride him! Victor couldn't be serious. Mustard-Pot was the hardest puller in all Leicestershire. Naturally, the idea of riding Mustard-Pot put the wind up one. Mustard-Pot would put the wind up anybody Still——

Dubiously Naomi inspected her slim hands, her slim wrists. If that gigantic yellow gelding took it into his head to bolt, no woman's hands, no woman's wrists could hold him. Yet Victor, her own husband,



Mustard-Pot began to fidget, rearing and plunging till it took all Naomi's horsemanship to simmer him down.

had actually suggested—— Surely Victor must be bluffing. This challenge to ride Mustard-Pot was merely Victor's way of ordering her not to go out. Victor *was* a brute. He wanted everybody to go his way. Supposing, though, just supposing that she were to call his bluff——

Naomi's temper rose, and her courage with it. Furiously she remembered Victor's courtship of her. Victor, by riding that very horse, had frightened her into confessing her love for him. What was the use of loving Victor? Victor would rather be loved by Mrs. Monty. Very well, then.

Vaguely and subconsciously Naomi Lombadham's mind conceived the semblance of a plan. Even as once Victor had frightened her into yielding to him, so now she would frighten Victor, frighten him away from hunting with other women.

"But you may break your neck," said thought.

"Oh, damn my neck!" said Victor's wife.

IV.

DRIVER, the stud-groom, watched the pair as they walked away down the drive—the boyish, almost manly figure completely dwarfed by the enormous yellow horse. "Hope to God he doesn't get one of his mad fits to-day!" panicked Driver, turning back to his veterinary duties.

Naomi, trotting out between the lodge-gates, panicked hardly at all. She was still in the worst temper of her existence—a temper of recklessness.

Gradually, though, as her horse made the high road and broke to an easy canter along the grass at side of it, Naomi's temper passed. The rain had stopped, but the sky was darker than ever. "Mustard-Pot's on his best behaviour," she thought. And Mustard-Pot cantered on, easily as a child's pony, his steady hoofs pashing the shallow mud-pools, his steady ears forward, and his eyes bright as brown stars. "I wonder if Romeo's out to-day," thought the yellow gelding, slowing to a perfect hack pace along the grassless macadam.

So they came, a quarter of an hour past time, to Lovers' Clearing. Here a small field, some thirty all told, intimates every one, greeted her with gay "Good mornings" and, greeting, stared.

"Oh, curse! Here's Mustard-Pot," muttered the master, whom only Vic's two-hundred-guinea subscription prevented from forbidding our yellow gelding the chase.

"Damned if I'd let *my* wife ride that brute," muttered Young Tom Cork, who was rising forty-five, to Old Tom Cork, who was just off seventy.

"Victor's at Up-Tollaton. The chances are he don't know anything about it," muttered back Old Tom; and "My whiskers! What a prad!" he went on muttering, as Mustard-Pot began to fidget, rearing and plunging till it took all Naomi's horsemanship to simmer him down.

"Steady!" muttered Naomi. "Steady, old thing!" And miraculously Mustard-Pot steadied himself, steadied himself so well that, for the best part of an hour, a whole fruitless hour during which the invisible pack, as is its habit on Lornham Big Wood days, bustled invisible foxes between ride and ride, he gave a bare hundred per cent. more trouble than a well-trained hunter should.

"He won't bolt with *me*," mused the pleased Naomi, when, at the end of that hour, the disgruntled and foxless field found themselves back in Lovers' Clearing. "It's only a question of hands. Probably Victor hangs on to his curb too much." Mrs. Monty forgotten, she began to laugh at her forthcoming score over her husband.

But Naomi's laughter was short-lived. For suddenly, startlingly, a great red dog-fox with a hound, a clumsy, bow-legged, badger-pied hound giving tongue for dear life close at his brush, popped across the avenue into covert; and at sight of that badger-pied hound, Mustard-Pot, with one forty-horse-power buck which nearly catapulted her over his head, started in fighting, fighting like a mad mastodon, to get away.

Followed despairing seconds when—her arms nearly wrenched from their sockets—she was aware, dimly, of Old Tom Cork's "Whoo-hoop"; of Young Tom Cork's "Tally-ho"; of the Master's "Give 'em a chance, Lady L.; for God's sake give 'em a chance!" of twenty crazy hound-couples streaming by, an inch and an inch under Mustard-Pot's rearing hoofs; and of Jim Rogers, the huntsman, his horn at his lips, cannonading past her up a sodden ride. Then, irresistibly, Mustard-Pot took charge of her.

The ride was a mile of twisting danger, soggy with the yellow mud whereunder flat stones tip-tilted to the pound of the yellow horse's galloping shoes; and as they rounded the last of its curves, Naomi, seeing Jim Rogers's scarlet slow to a cautious trot and disappear among blind alleys of branch and bracken, thought, "I'm done for. I'm done for if I can't stop him."

She sat tight, hoping for the best, expecting the worst. But Mustard-Pot, when he came to those blind alleys, dug both forefeet into the ground and stopped of his own accord—stopped dead as mutton—stopped and stood, his cocked ears listening, listening as only a horse can, to the twanging horn and the crash of hound-voices. Those voices, Mustard-Pot knew, were circling, circling

dubious, here and there among the ungallopable woods. If only he could hear Romeo, his friend Romeo who had found the fox!

Naomi, too, was listening, listening as well as humans can, to that music. She tried to get some hint of which way the quarry might break; but the music dwindled, dwindled away and away. Looking over her shoulder she caught a glimpse of the field. "Back," they signalled, "back"; and as, turning their horses, they pelted off, Naomi heard the pack. The pack, once more in full cry, were making for the south corner of the wood. She tried to turn Mustard-Pot . . . .

But the yellow horse would not turn. He answered neither to rein nor to leg. His ears went back to the backing reins. She tried to coax him with her voice. "Come along," she coaxed. "Come along, Mustard-Pot, old boy."

Useless! She might as well have tried to coax Victor. Victor-like, Mustard-Pot refused to budge. Still he stood; still as a rock, still as the tree-trunks whose branches moaned in the wind above her head. Only his ears moved—cocking, flattening, twitching. Fruitlessly she tugged at the near curb. Fruitlessly she drove her off heel into his flanks. That Mustard-Pot of all horses should jib, frightened her—frightened her more than any bolting. She felt powerless, ridden rather than rider.

Southward, farther and farther went the music. Presently it died—died to an utter silence through which she guessed rather than heard the faint "View-holla" of the First Whip, the faint "Gone away" of Jim Rogers's horn. All the while, do what she would, Mustard-Pot refused to budge. "Damn! Oh, damn!" she thought. "It's a run—and I'm out of it." Then lifting her whip to cut Mustard-Pot on the shoulder, she knew a great amazement.

One hound, one solitary hound, was still hunting in covert. Weirdly she heard him giving tongue. Mustard-Pot's ears twitched and twitched. Closer the hound drew, and closer. Mustard-Pot's muscles flexed to taut steel. His whole body quivered between her thighs. She thought, "I wonder if Mustard-Pot heard him before I did. I wonder if that was why he jibbed."

Simultaneously, horse and rider saw the hound. Bow-legged and badger-pied, still throwing his tongue as though all the pack were at his heels, he came leaping among the bracken. Naomi recognized him for the puppy Sam Slooman had walked last year. She could see that he was hunting a line of his own. It flashed through her mind, "There must have been two foxes. He's still on the first one." Instinctively she called to him. "Yoi-doit, yoi-doit, Romeo, old man."

For a moment the hound looked up from his work and his note changed. It was as though he no longer spoke his fox; almost as though he were speaking in some strange language to the cocked ears of Mustard-Pot. Then his nose dropped to ground and he went mute, mute as the bracken. Then suddenly he began feathering. Then he gave a whimper—a second whimper. Then, still puzzling his line, he loped away from her between the trees.

AND now Mustard-Pot jibbed no longer. Slowly, picking his every pace through the undergrowth, he began to follow Romeo. Mysteriously Naomi was conscious of a link, of a definite link between horse and hound. Mysteriously she knew herself powerless to break that link; powerless to do anything save sit still. The hound quickened, and Mustard-Pot with him. Presently Romeo approached the north edge of the wood. Soon, between the tree-boles, Naomi could see the rotten boundary-fence, and beyond the fence, green fields empty under grey skies. Once more she called to the hound, "Yoi-doit, then, yoi-doit, Romeo." Once more the hound looked up. Once more she heard that eerie cry of his. Then, not dubiously, but full-throated for blood, he threw tongue again and scrambling through the boundary-fence went away like blazes.

Naomi had no time to think, no time to take Mustard-Pot between her knees. Unasked, unsteered, the great horse sprang to a canter and hurtled at his fence. She heard the top rail crack as they went over, heard Romeo's music fifty yards ahead. Mustard-Pot began to gallop. Galloping, she thought, "This is a dream, a dream. This is the sort of thing that couldn't happen." She looked forward at Romeo. Romeo was on a breast-high scent, going like the wind over ground flat as a billiard-table. Romeo was gaining on Mustard-Pot. Gaining and gaining. He came to his second fence, naked timber; and went through it like a streak of pied lightning.

Naomi felt Mustard-Pot stride to speed; felt him balance himself, felt him lift under her as they cleared. Landing, she knew herself still powerless. Between her and the horse was no link, no understanding. His thoughts were not with his rider. His thoughts were with the hound, with the one solitary hound ahead. Once more she thought, "This is a dream, a marvellous, impossible dream."

Yet what a dream! Exhilaration took her by the throat. She whooped as she rode. The great horse quickened and quickened. But the scent was still breast-high; and still Romeo gained on him. Four fields flashed by. Four rails flashed under. To Naomi the whole countryside seemed empty,

empty as some green desert through which she and Mustard-Pot and Romeo and that invisible prey whose flight drew all three of them tore like beings possessed.

Came uglier fences—thorned raspers whose ditches were death-traps. They slowed Romeo, but Mustard-Pot they could not slow. His great hocks drove him—drove him yards and yards beyond the death-traps. Presently he began to gain. Presently horse and hound were almost level. Mustard-Pot of his own accord drew wide a little, easing the pace. Ahead, blurred against its crest of meadow-land, Naomi saw Cobb's Gorse. She realized for the first time that it was raining, a cold rain which stung the cheeks and blinded the eyes. She thought, "Scent'll fail."

But scent did not fail. Straight it led and straight, up the slope, to the Gorse. Mustard-Pot drew level at last. Side by side, horse and hound raced for the crest.

V.

THE ways of a woman, the ways of a horse, the ways of a hound—of these man may know a little. But no man knows the ways of Reynard in his March-madness. Perchance there was a vixen in Cobb's Gorse, some old flame with whom Romeo's quarry tarried flirtatious a while. Perchance he did not find the earths to his liking. Perchance he scorned pursuit by one solitary hound, one solitary horsewoman. Who shall say? Remains as fact only that he waited—waited till Romeo, leaping red-eyed to the fresh taint, jumped almost atop of him at the far edge of Cobb's Gorse; so that it seemed no miracle of speed, no miracle of cunning, could save his brush.

Yet that dog-fox saved it—saved it by fractions of inches, eeling between ridge and furrow as he raced for the north!

Of the three, only Naomi saw him racing. For Mustard-Pot's eyes were on Romeo; and after that one glimpse, Romeo's eyes, as Romeo's nose, were on the ground. Away he went and away; stern straight, hackles up; across ridge-and-furrow that rolled like the sea; under double-oxers, under single rails; over blackthorn and through hornbeam; across ploughlands and across roadways; past rare cottages from whose washtubs hoof-deafened women looked up to see a vast saffron steed, foam-flecked and sweat-sodden, striding as never steed strode yet in pursuit of his hareing friend. "'Tis Badger-pie!" thought the women. "Badger-pie and Butter-pat. Butter-pat's bolting again—bolting with Sir Victor's wife."

But Naomi knew that Mustard-Pot was not bolting blindly. Naomi knew that she was safe—safe as any horsewoman might be across a country—unless sheer fatigue dropped her from the saddle.

That first fine exhilaration had long since passed, and her brain, one tense concentration on the ground ahead, was busy with topography. Already they were six good miles from Lornham Big Wood. Already the flat lands lay behind them and the uplands in front. Still the dog-fox held on—held on for his point. He had gained gained a full three fields on his loud pursuer. But his pursuer, the dog-fox knew, was still linked to him, linked by the taint in the air and the taint on the ground, and the lust for his blood.

He swerved down-wind to the west—swerved for Saxenham Parva over a rain-channelled ridge-and-furrow where even Romeo's nose could scarcely hold the line.

VI.

NAOMI, watching Romeo as Mustard-Pot's slowing hoofs spurted the rain-channels to yellow fountains, could see that the hound was at a loss. Almost she felt glad. Her knees were cold lead under the wet buckskin. Her thighs ached. Her mouth, despite the beat of the rain, was a parched torment. She could feel the sweat pouring down between her breasts, between her shoulder-blades. A mile to the west, she knew red roofs under leafless trees for Saxenham Parva. There was an inn at Saxenham Parva. She needed that inn—needed it desperately in her weariness.

But Mustard-Pot was still unwearied, though the breath steamed from his nostrils, and his yellow ears were caked brown with sweat and the thorn-pricks had bloodied his belly. Tireless, he jig-jogged in the wake of the hound. The hound refused to own defeat. Nose to ground, he tried each splashing furrow. Nose to ground, he tried each sodden ridge.

"Shall I whip him off?" thought the weary Naomi. Somehow she could not whip him off. The tie between fox and hound had snapped; but the link between horse and hound still held. Now she too was linked with them. She could feel a Power gripping her—gripping her like a man's arms round the waist. Then, once, twice, and again, Romeo feathered. Then, finding his line, he gave tongue and went off—slowly—slowly along the ridge at fence-side—through an open gateway—and down wind past Saxenham Parva towards Middleton-on-the-Hill.

Breasting that hill, the trail turned up-wind again; so that the first snow-scurry caught Naomi full in the face. The driven flakes blinded her, blinded Mustard-Pot; but Romeo they could not blind. Romeo's nostrils still whiffed his quarry. His quarry

had veered again, veered left-handed down the slope.

The snow-scurry blew clear; and the rain with it. Wiping her eyes, Naomi saw the wooded swells and grassy falls of High Leicestershire spread out map-like below. "Up-Tollaton Thorns," she thought, as Romeo swerved on the hillside. "Up-Tollaton Thorns will be his point."

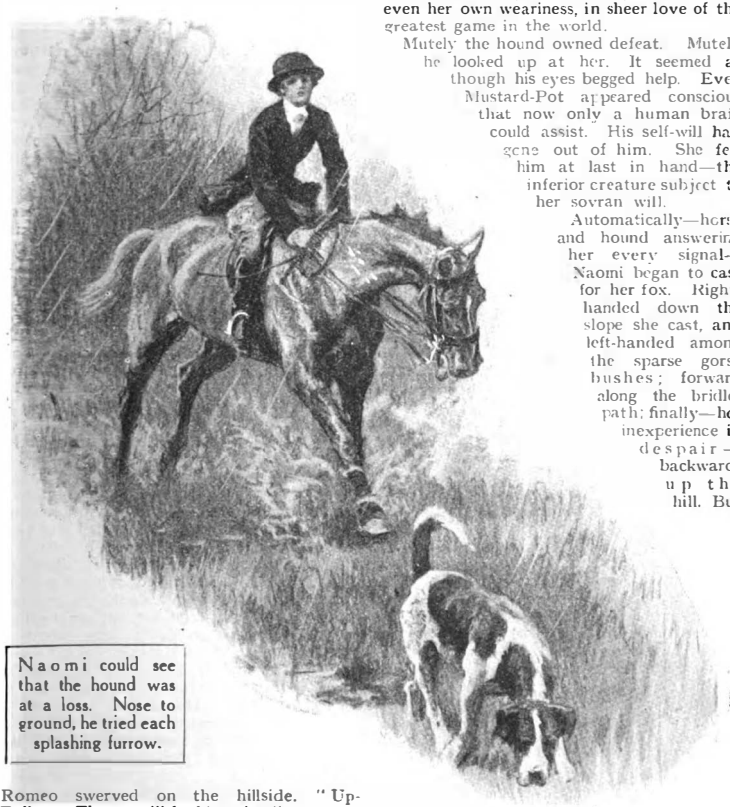
And at that thought, for one fleeting second, she remembered her husband. Somewhere among those wooded swells and grassy falls her husband and another woman rode side by side. The thought stung her. Convulsively her wet knees gripped the wet saddle-flaps as Mustard-Pot went skating for the valley.

Ahead of them, Romeo hunted mute on a dying scent. Behind them, Middleton Hill rose high and higher, blocking out the known country. "Up-Tollaton Thorns," she thought again. "Seven good miles if it's an inch. And I hardly know a fence of it." Then Romeo checked dead at a water-logged bridle-path, and she forgot Victor, forgot Mrs. Monty, forgot everything in the world, even her own weariness, in sheer love of the greatest game in the world.

Mutely the hound owned defeat. Mutely he looked up at her. It seemed as though his eyes begged help. Even Mustard-Pot appeared conscious that now only a human brain could assist. His self-will had gone out of him. She felt him at last in hand—the inferior creature subject to her sovran will.

Automatically—horse and hound answering her every signal—Naomi began to cast for her fox. Right-handed down the slope she cast, and left-handed among the sparse gorse bushes; forward along the bridle-path; finally—her inexperience in despair—backwards up the hill. But the snow-chilled ground gave Romeo never a whiff of fox.

Utterly baffled, Naomi drew rein. Utterly despairing, she looked down along the bridle-path, across the gate at the end of the bridle-path, over the roadway and up the ant-heaped ground beyond. "Not a sign of him. You've had rotten luck, Romeo,



Naomi could see that the hound was at a loss. Nose to ground, he tried each splashing furrow.

old boy; you deserved your kill," she said to the beaten hound.

The hot fury of the chase was out of her, and the hot temper of early morning with it. Cold shook her as she sat. A deadly depression nagged at her mind. She had lost her fox—she had lost Victor—she had lost everything that made life worth while. Leg-weary, arm-weary, and love-weary, she made to turn Mustard-Pot for home.

And then, without warning, there happened the greatest miracle of all that miraculous day. For suddenly, strangely, stupefyingly, Mustard-Pot—his great head lifted, his great eyes staring, and his great ears flatter than pancakes—began to whinny, as Naomi had never heard horse whinny before, to rider on his back and to hound at his heels. "Look! Look! Look!" whinnied Mustard-Pot, watching the slope, where a speck, a far and a fox-shaped speck, fled zigzagging between the ant-heaps.

Naomi, flung hard against the saddle-peak, never saw that speck, never realized the miracle. As the rested Mustard-Pot, whinnying no longer, sprang to full gallop, Fear, the fear of things uncontrollable—that fear which had turned even Victor's bowels to water—entered into her. Hardly her knees found their grip again; hardly she knew Mustard-Pot heading for the gate; hardly she knew Romeo following. Speed and panic blinded her every faculty. She could only cling, cling in desperation, to the rain-slippery saddle.

They came to the gate, to the roadway. Over the gate, over the roadway, flashed Mustard-Pot. Through the gate, over the roadway, flashed the badger-pied hound. For Romeo had understood, dimly, his friend's whinnying. He and his friend were one mind, one body now—canine nose and equine eye each helping each as the need arose. Who cared for humans? Up hill, missing the ant-hills with every instinctive stride, bounded the trusty Mustard-Pot. Up hill, close at Mustard-Pot's heels, bounded the trusting Romeo.

Yet still Naomi could not realize the truth. Even when Mustard-Pot, halting a second among those ant-hills, whinnied for the last time, and Romeo, nose to ground, answered his whinny with one full-throated burst of blood-mad music, she failed to understand. Fear paralyzed her every thought; so that the next four miles were madness—a madness of swished blackthorn and rapped timber; a madness of scurrying fields that vanished, as landscapes vanish from train windows, under Mustard-Pot's terrible hoofings; a madness of hills up-galloped and down-galloped; a madness of wind-whistle and rain-drizzle and snow-scurry; of shouting wood-cutters and pointing cyclists and dumbfoundered carters glimpsed sideways as one leaped from turf to road.

But always through her madness Naomi heard hound-music; and always, even in her madness, she knew that neither horse nor hound, neither fox nor rider, could hold that pace across the cut-and-laids of Tollaton Vale.

VII.

"ROTTEN, isn't it?" murmured Mrs. Monty Perivale to Sir Victor Lomondham, Bart. "Why didn't you take my advice and knock off at the cross-roads?"

"We may find at the Thorns." Sir Victor scowled through the rain-drizzle at the jig-jogging pack. Mrs. Monty had headed the only fox of the day—and he was hating her pretty vigorously.

"What's the good of finding at this time in the afternoon?" she retorted—thinking of Sir Victor's Rolls-Royce.

They jig-jogged on up Little Tollaton Hill. Behind them trotted the last remnants of a disappointed field. Ahead of them, the Lady Master and her huntsman whispered in consultation. "I'd take 'em by Madman's Lane if I were you, Hatcher," said the Lady Master. "Farmer Luffenham told me there's an outlier in one of his fields."

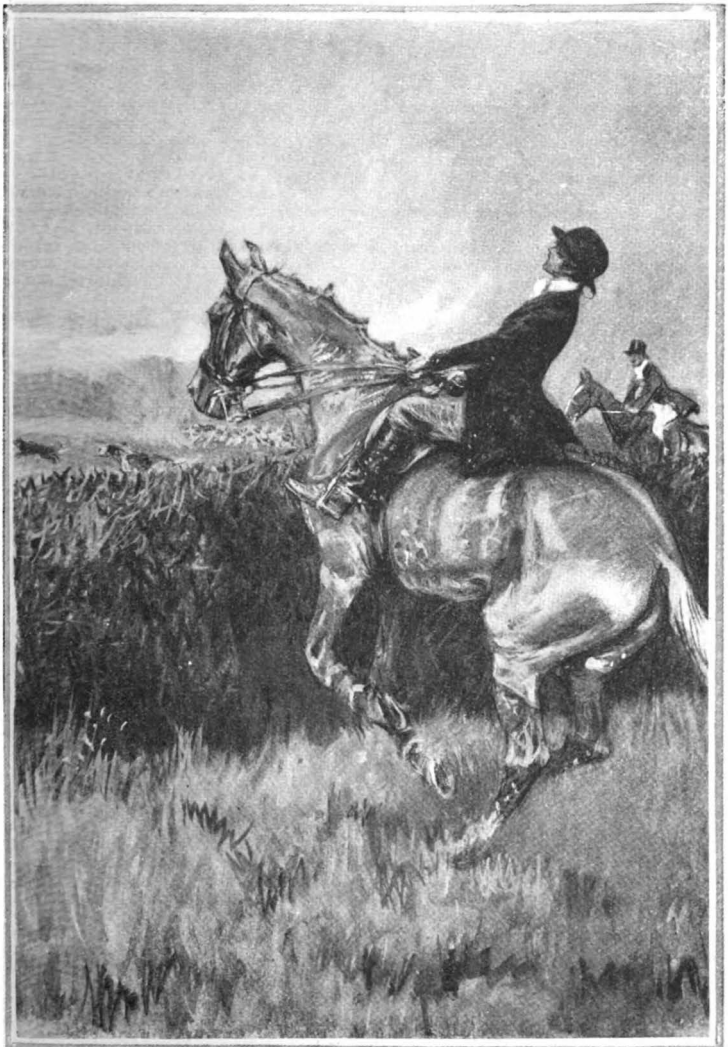
The First Whip knocked a gate open, and Masterful, Hatcher's grey, the pack at his heels, squelched heavily down the lane.

"Might just as well have gone home," grumbled Hatcher, looking about him over the low hedges. On his right plough lands stretched stickily to the tree-hidden spire of Up-Tollaton Church. Two miles ahead of him, down a dip and up again, Tollaton Thorns showed black and ragged on the fence-barred slope. Towards the Thorns, half in view and half crest-hidden, serpentined the green of Tollaton Vale.

"Funny," thought Hatcher. "I'd swear I heard a hound." He drew rein, and the pack halted at his grey's heels. He clapped a hand to his ear. He listened. "Queer!" he muttered under his breath. "Deuced queer! Must have been a cur-dog. Can't have been a hound. No meet within twenty miles of us."

He took his hand from his ear and squelched on. What the devil was the matter with Masterful? Had Masterful, too, heard that uncanny cur-dog? Hatcher halted again; and halting eyed the Vale. Waiting his will, the bitch-pack quivered round Masterful's heels.

"Why don't he go on?" grousted Sir Victor to Mrs. Monty; and even as he spoke, Hatcher stood up in his stirrups, and with one terrific "View holla!" capped his pack down the lane, out of the lane and



"Jump or die," she thought as she rode. Somehow, she and Mustard-Pot must struggle over this last obstacle.

full-split for the Thorns. After him went the field, and, first of the field, Victor.

Victor had forgotten Mrs. Monty. He could hardly believe, as he took his roan between his calves and lifted him out of the lane, that his eyes had told him the truth; that he had really seen a fox with one solitary hound at his brush and one solitary rider bucketing to catch up with them emerge from the green of the Vale and toil desperately up the slope towards the Thorns.

Yet there they went, fox and hound and horseman, barely two hundred yards in front; and there, on his right, hareing diagonally up the fence-barred slope to cut them off from the Thorns, went Hatcher with twenty couples streaming to his cap. The fox was dead-beat. His brush draggled the ground. Hardly he crawled through the last of his fences; hardly he held on up the slope.

And now Hatcher's horn twanged; and now Hatcher's pack, streaming into view over that ultimate blackthorn, burst to fiercest music; and now Romeo summoned his last ounce of strength lest these upstart bitches rob him of blood; and now, suddenly, Victor recognized the solitary rider for his wife, the solitary horse for Mustard-Pot; and now, recognizing Mustard-Pot at the last gasp and his wife's face death-white with fatigue, the heart under Victor's scarlet grew cold with fear at thought of the ditch beyond the blackthorn—the ditch which even freshest horse might fail to clear.

BUT Naomi, riding that desperate finish, never recognized Victor. Her mind—all that fatigue had left her of it—was concentrated on Mustard-Pot's fencing. Somehow, she and Mustard-Pot, each aiding each, had struggled through Tollaton Vale. Somehow, they must struggle over this last obstacle. Somehow, not this new pack which had sprung suddenly from nowhere, not this fresh huntsman, but weary she and weary Mustard-Pot and weary Romeo must kill the fox they had run through half a county. "Jump or die," she thought as she rode. "Jump or die," she muttered as the giant gelding, wise to his roan stable-companion racing diagonally to be level with him, gathered hocks under belly for the spring.

She felt that gigantic fore-hand lift between her aching thighs; glimpsed blackthorn under her boots; felt rather than saw the unexpected ditch; felt Mustard-Pot double-jump in mid-air to carry it; realized, even before the stirrups flew up from her toes, that he had just failed; felt her hat crumple to the smash of the ground—and waited, waited endlessly in gathering darkness, waited paralysed all through that century of a second which would tell her whether or no she had fallen clear.

ÆONS after that century-long second, Naomi Lomondham rolled over on her left elbow and opened her eyes. The world had gone queer. She saw it double through the blur of concussion and fatigue; saw two Victors wrenching two roans to their haunches; saw two Mustard-Pots staggering to their feet; saw—strangest sight of all—a brace of badger-pied hounds pull a brace of foxes over in the open. Then a thousand black-and-tan couples smothered badger-pies and foxes, and she heard herself say faintly through the renewing smother, "Hallo, Victor! I thought you were with Mrs. Monty."

"Thank God she's safe; but what the hell's she talking about?" thought Sir Victor Lomondham, Bart., who was inclined to be coarse when under strong emotion.

VIII.

"TALL?" protested Mustard-Pot, when I went to him for confirmation of the tale. "Tall? I don't call that a tall story. Why, one of Romeo's great-great-great-grandfathers——"

"You mean Rambler?" I interpolated.

"Of course I mean Rambler." Mustard-Pot stamped his off-fore on the stable-tiles. "Didn't Rambler once hunt a fox on his own—twenty miles without even a horse to help him—and kill at ten o'clock o'night?"

"Admitted," said I. "But what about *your* viewing the fox? No human will believe that, you know."

"More foo's humans!" The yellow horse laid his ears back and snapped at Silver Glory through the bars of the loose-box. "*You* ought to know that that's perfectly possible."

"I?"

"Yes. You. Didn't that big screw of yours——?"

I protested at this unkind reference to my one poor animal, but Mustard-Pot, who has twice in his own varied career fetched as low as a ten-pound note, went on scornfully.

"Screw! Of course Ladybird's a screw. What can you expect at that price? Still, she hunted a fox once. On her own. Don't you remember? You were hacking across those fields from Little Overdine station and Charlie popped out just in front of you. Now, I ask you, did Ladybird follow that fox on her own or didn't she?"

Whereupon I broke off the argument and went thoughtful to tea with Naomi.

"Victor can't bear the Perivale woman," she confided, pouring it for me.

WHEN X EQUALS MAUD

by

HERBERT SHAW

ILLUSTRATED BY BALLIOL SALMON

THE discovery was too sudden, too brutal. It seemed to the pretty young wife of the Reverend Leonard Miles that her life and the lives of the two children had slammed at full speed into an unexpected terminus. And she was bending over the wreckage. Very quickly other thoughts came, not one at a time, so that she could deal with them with her usual unhurried clearness, but jumping unfairly at her hand-in-hand. The persisting thought, for quite a while, was that this cheque she had found among the littered papers of the writing-table was the first real secret she had ever had from Leonard.

It was the secret itself, in picture form. Constance Miles had imagination, besides a cheery courage which expressed itself in wonderfully efficient handling, both of her unpractical dreamer-husband and of the work necessitated by one maid, two children, a quite inadequate number of hundreds a year, and her position as a clergyman's wife. Quite gaily, Constance Miles made every week an adventure in economy; there were few weeks in which she could not honestly claim a victory over the bogey of expenditure.

She didn't know why she was still staring at the cheque. It looked oddly blurred. Even for Leonard's familiar, careless writing the letters were more waggly than usual. "Pay Maud Scrutton twenty-four pounds. Leonard Miles."

Suddenly Constance was violently afraid of the wretched thing. She thrust it far under the heaped papers, almost at the bottom, and some of the papers above it slithered down and disclosed Leonard's cheque-book. Sixty seconds of absorbed and half-guilty accountancy disclosed three or four counterfoils that were equal calamities with that astounding cheque.

Constance Miles reburied her discoveries. She sat upright, stared thoughtfully at nothing for a little while, and then laughed.

"Poor old Leonard!" she said. "Fancy coming in for *my* cheque and finding this!"

All the unmarried philosophers tell you wisely that married life is merely a succession of discoveries, big and small. The clever fellows leave it at that. They provide no useful text-book to tell wives what to do when the crisis comes. Should they scream or sit tight? Ask cunning, trap-like questions or keep darkling silence? Should they shut themselves up in resentful gloom or cynically sparkle? Job or George Graves—under which banner? In short, should they act or think?

It depends on the sort of husband, the sort of wife, and the sort they visualize Maud as being. But there is one unchangeable rule in these affairs. In the first unpleasant shock of discovery Everywoman feels rather as if she had forgotten to put on her blouse that morning. Looking down to reassure herself that this is not so, making certain at the same time that her hair is not falling down, she resolves, sensibly but fiercely, *never to tell anybody.*

Do you think that's wise of them?

Anyway, Constance Miles got as far as that. Then she obeyed an impulse, almost as unalterable as that other rule of Everywoman's, when she got up and looked at herself in the oval mirror above the mantelpiece.

She wondered vaguely, not without a faint amusement, rather like making up a story—exciting to invent the ends——

Where *was* Maud? Not here in Cedarswood, that select and attractive suburb. Leonard was popular and above gossip,

careless and impetuous, but he would never have risked the wagging of tongues in Cedarswood.

In London, where you can hide any knots that time makes in marriage ribbons? Farther, in the North, where Leonard went sometimes to see his people? What *was* the name of that girl in saxe blue who was so friendly with me that week Leonard and I stayed at the Avalon in Brighton?

She could not remember the name, but she was certain that one wasn't Maud. Mauds into saxe blue don't go. They're more likely to be rather yellowy persons, on the big side, in black charmeuse, with a strong dash of diamond rings. Or so Maud came to life, vaguely, behind the intent Everywoman that faced Constance from the mirror.

"Find Maud," commanded Everywoman. "But how do you start?" asked Constance. both in silence. And both of them, gazing fixedly at each other, pressed hard with four forefingers just where the lines come that matter most and worst. From the inner corners of four eyes, steadily along the top of their cheekbones. They smiled in friendly reassurance. Not even a baby crow had dared to alight there. Maud, shadow somewhere out in the unknown, no matter what you are like, you will never be able to better the lustrous hair, the challenging eyes, the bright mouths of these two earnest students of the situation your sudden appearance—by proxy of one cheque and four counterfoils—has created.

The steady eyes of Constance Miles signalled a confident "Well, *I'm* all right!" to her close friend in the mirror. There wasn't a dissentient vote. But there was an interruption. The front door of the house was opened and slammed. Thus, habitually, Leonard entered.

Constance allowed herself just one more (look out, Maud!) glance of completely satisfied appraisal. Then she ran out of Leonard's study, rounded the second flight of stairs with the silence and speed of a Rolls on top gear, gained her own room, and, still without any noise, shut the door.

From the top of the first flight Leonard called out "Constance!" waited, called again. No answer. Cicely, the maid, appearing suddenly with broom and accessories, looked at him in her slow way. It was her second appearance in the passage. She had pushed her nose and her broom slightly into the passage a moment before, and had only just missed being overturned by the whirlwind retreat of Constance. Cicely, a romanticist, noticed things. She said, lying but truthful:—

"Mrs. Miles is very busy in her room, sir."

"Oh," said Leonard. "I say, if you find the *Times* knocking about, bring it up, will you?"

He withdrew into his study. He sat down, ran his fingers over his unbusiness-like hair, looked worried, thought with disgust of his golf handicap and the childish way he had played last Saturday, tried the telephone for the second time that morning and again found it woodenly dumb, pushed aside the heap of papers, dashed at the inkstand, and began to write letters. Leonard always dashed at things. He didn't like letter-writing—especially this morning. He groaned, and told the untidy little study about it.

"This won't do," he declared, and his tone was unresigned but hopeless. "It's got to stop."

He wrote on.

In spotless bedroom, in untidy study where brooms are rarely allowed to enter, the opposing forces are entrenched. For the moment the front lines of both are quiet. It looks like rain, if not worse. The story is simple, mathematical. Illustration follows:—

LEONARD AND CONSTANCE.
X

In plain words, Leonard and Constance are divided by Maud, and *X* is Maud; but though we know that, it gets us no farther. You do not know Maud. Before long you shall. You are quite right about one thing. She is not a nice person.

THE doors of the study opened. The hunched shoulders of Leonard—Leonard busily writing—looked as though he would grunt when he said anything next. He did. He grunted:—

"Put it down anywhere!"

"What?"

"The *Times*, of course. Couldn't you find it?"

Leonard popped the sealed envelope safely into the heap, felt a draught, turned, and saw Constance instead of Cicely. He slewed round.

"I beg your pardon, old girl. I thought it was Cicely with the paper. I sit on it all through breakfast. I can't make out why I always lose it directly I get up. Can you?"

Constance advanced into the room—metaphorically, into the centre of the ring. The opening was there. She sparred for another.

"There are lots of things I can't make out," she remarked, gloomily.

The attempt at another opening flopped. Leonard did not notice her gloom, her seriousness.

"I should say there are," he agreed,

brightly. "There's this wretched telephone still out of order. I write to tell them about it. Do they come? No. Sit down, Connie. What's that you've got in your hand?"

"It's the list of the things the children want at school—the things they must have. Two new serge frocks, and more shoes. And Nancy must have a new coat.

Leonard popped the sealed envelope safely into the heap, turned, and saw Constance instead of Cicely. He slewed round.

The one Babs has will have to do for the present."

Leonard became thoughtful.

"I think I can get everything for fifteen pounds; I've made out a list. You said you would let me have a cheque."

Leonard fumbled. He was awfully nice and he was awfully sorry, but he had forgotten. He admitted being a confirmed forgetter. But just now he had run very short. Didn't want to write another cheque if he could possibly help it. There were lots of things—vaguely. How about next month? The children must have the frocks, of course. "For the cheque, I mean?"

It was a facer. Constance retreated to the ropes. This refusal of the promised shopping cheque was so unexpected. It made

the secret jump up blackly, and it made her lose courage. "Pay Maud Scrutton twenty-four pounds." She felt hot and angry. The silence and Leonard were both uncomfortable.

"We always pay at once for things, Leonard," she objected at last.

"I know we do. But just for once—— Get them somewhere else. You needn't go to London for them this time, even if you do have to pay a few shillings more. Get them at Bird's. I've seen some very nice kiddies' things in Bird's windows."

"All right," said Constance. She got up. Leonard had the air of hoping she wasn't going to stay in the room another minute. Then a determined Klaxon bellowed outside, and Leonard came to life. He jumped up.

"I knew there was something I had to tell you!" he exclaimed, reproachfully. "That's Kentish. He's come for you, Connie."

"George Kentish——!"

"There's his car. He wrote this morning, and I slipped out to telephone him. He's not going into town to-day, and he said he'd come down for you and drive you back to the Court."

"Why ever didn't you tell me?"

"I forgot. But, anyway, it's all right, Connie. I don't know what we'd do without Kentish in Cedarswood. Directly any fine weather comes along you can have the grounds of the Court for your bazaar. He thought you'd like to look over the place and make all your arrangements in good time. Anything you want, he said."

The door opened as though a storm had taken command, and the big man who entered looked first at Constance and then at her husband before he took the Corona from his lips.

"Good morning, Mrs. Constance. How do you do, Leonard? He's quite right, Mrs. Constance. Anything you want, I told him—you can have all the downstairs rooms of the Court if they're necessary. And all the flowers the gardeners can get together. You and I are going to make this bazaar go. Eh? We'll have them talking!"

The rich bachelor who lived at the Court radiated the cheerfulness, self-reliance, and prosperity of the business man to whom every day brings increasing success. The best friend they had in Cedarswood, he owned the largest house in the place, the lordliest cars, the greatest number of servants. Constance's eyes sparkled.

"You're always helping us, Mr. Kentish! It's tremendously good of you. It was unfair of me to ask you again."

"Nonsense!" His big, jolly face was all smiles. "A lonely old man like myself wants every chance he can get of doing a bit for charity. I'm going to ask Leonard if he can spare you for the day. I'm ready whenever you are, Mrs. Constance."

"I won't be five minutes." Constance hurried from the room. George Kentish made Leonard take a cigar, and asked if he might use the telephone.

"It's out of order," Leonard apologized.

"May I use your window, then?" said Kentish. Pushing up the window, he leaned out and called to the blue-uniformed chauffeur in the huge blue Daimler. The man looked up.

"Swish back and tell them Mrs. Miles will be staying for lunch. And then come back here just as soon as you can."

Shutting the window, he looked at Leonard. "Three times five minutes, of course," he said, sounding his cheery laugh. "I know them. He'll be back in plenty of time. How are things with you?"

"Fine, thanks," said Leonard, in a rainy voice, and his visitor looked at him again—thoughtfully. "I say, Kentish, it's awfully good of you to let us have the Court. Connie is very keen on making a success of that show."

"Now, then," warned Kentish. "No thanks, if you please. She'll make a success of it all right; your wife's a wonderful woman, Miles."

"She's the best in the world," Leonard asserted, very warmly.

THANK you, it had been really perfect—a lovely day. She had enjoyed herself very, very much. Almost a brushing shadow of regret, of envy, to tarnish her honest and sincere gratitude. No trouble or annoyance even seemed able to come near this big house with its moneyed easiness of life, this big, comfortable, smiling man, with his kindly thoughts and his shrewd, intelligent eyes.

"I'm very glad you enjoyed it," George Kentish said.

As Constance watched for the lights of the Daimler to appear she realized for the first time that the day had been like an hour of release.

She had almost been able to forget her discovery of the morning. She must now go back to it.

Constance Miles's little sigh was unconscious. The man sitting near to her on the wide, soft window-seat moved his position.

"What's the matter between you and Leonard?" asked big George Kentish, bluntly. "What's wrong?"

He was suddenly very grim. His eyes and his mouth were very hard. Any intelligent man who had seen George Kentish just now would have suffered a shock. Would have placed this big, cheery fellow as a ruthless thruster towards his own

purposes; would have wondered whether the breezy kindliness of George Kentish might not be a mask for cunning. But Constance did not look at him. She felt too frightened. She exclaimed, with incredulous awe :—

"Mr Kentish! You *know!*"

He shook his head. "I don't know what the matter *is*. But I know very well there's something the matter. You're worried to death. I didn't want second sight to spot that the moment I saw you and Leonard this morning."

"Leonard's worried," she said, lamely. On the drive wheels grated to a standstill before the house. Constance got up unsteadily. "I'll go and get my things on, I think, Mr Kentish. There's the car."

"Just as you like, Mrs. Constance."

HER host's voice was quite ordinary. He stood before her now, astonishingly solid against the darkness of the great room. And Constance did not quite finish standing up. She seemed to tumble back upon the wide seat, beaten. Beaten—by herself. That was what made it humiliating. She knew now that she was just like any ordinary wife. The gay spirit with which she had confronted that morning's revelation was all pretence. It wouldn't hold. She had dared to think that she could keep that secret hidden, could remain undisturbed, confident—willing to watch Leonard. The beastliness of watching Leonard——

Did she really know Leonard? Constance shrugged her shoulders. At least, she knew the best of Leonard too well to wish to watch him.

"We'll have a little light," said Kentish, turning in the darkness. The softest light came from a ceiling bowl, the blinds came down at a touch. "Take it easy, Mrs. Constance. How do you feel? If you're in a hurry you've only to say so."

"I'd rather wait a little while, if you don't mind."

"Of course you would. Don't disturb yourself now; I can get those curtains without your moving an inch. That's it."

She lifted her white face. "Mr. Kentish, I'm afraid for Leonard. I shouldn't say anything—but I'm desperately afraid. You know what Cedarswood is, and how popular Leonard is with everybody. There are lots of nice people, but put them all together and they'd smash Leonard if there was any scandal. Wouldn't they? Leonard's like a big boy; he never thinks what he's doing, never considers very much. And I'm sure there's something wrong. Yet I wouldn't ask Leonard about it. This morning I thought I could. But I couldn't—not then. And now—it's funny—I know I could never ask him."

She stopped dead. Had she told him? She did not know. One second Constance hoped she had, the next she tried to recall exactly what she had said. It was odd to see his usually smiling face so grave. But he still looked very friendly. And solid—that was the word, Constance decided, looking at him in her distress—one of those rare men whose foundations are impregnable. There was such a quality of safety about George Kentish. He conveyed the idea that his future was impregnable also.

"Rather a lot about Leonard," he commented, dryly. "What about yourself?"

She stared at him. She said, blankly but quite truthfully. "I don't understand. I'm thinking of Leonard. And then there's the children—it's horrible!"

"For the moment," Kentish told her, stolidly, "I'm thinking of you, if you don't mind. Is money the trouble?" He was aware of a little awkwardness, his big hands moved a little. "That's easy; that's down my street."

"It isn't money." Her denial was vehement. He saw the fingers of her hands grip together.

"Then it's a woman," George Kentish pronounced flatly. "I'm going to talk straight, Mrs. Constance. I never could beat about the bush—never found it worth while. You'd better let *me* ask Leonard, if you can't. I'll frighten him out of his life; it's the only way. I'll pull him up. Trust me!"

Constance was aghast. Then she *had* told him. She heard his voice queerly, as if it came from the end of a tunnel. "Of course I'm right. It's an infernal shame!"

"You wouldn't tell Leonard what I've told you!"

"No. I'm not going to ask you another question. If you don't want to tell me what Master Leonard has been up to, I'll find out myself. Whatever it is, I'll see that he stops it. Because if he doesn't, as you said yourself, he'll go smash. I know Cedarswood people."

Constance tried to consider, tried to think. But she only looked at George Kentish—realized nothing except his determination, his strength.

"Leonard would listen to you."

"He'd have to. Nobody outside would know anything; I'd watch that. Mrs. Constance, I've been here at the Court nearly five years. When I first took the place everybody in Cedarswood wanted to know all about me. They pumped me to know why I had never married, how much I made a year, just what my business was in the City, and all that nonsense. I very soon put a stop to that, and they learned to leave me alone. What's my business got to do with them?

"They can take me or leave me—and I guess they take me all right now—I'm worth something to the place. They don't look down their noses at me now, as they did then. I'm business all the time—always have been—and everything goes back to money, when you work it out. I'm very fond of you and your husband. There wasn't any of that questioning flummery about you; you were nice to me from the start. I've backed him every way I could, I——"

"You've been the kindest friend to us both, Mr. Kentish—to me."

"It's been all pleasure. Leonard's a good boy, but he's got no business. He doesn't want it, perhaps, in his work—we all know there isn't another church in Cedarswood that's packed every Sunday. I've helped there, Mrs. Constance, though I say it myself."

He was right there. George Kentish was one of the most prominent, certainly the most influential, of the members of Leonard's church. She recalled his unfailing help, the value of his quiet advice on occasions hard to count. She murmured, "If only you could help Leonard——" and stopped.

"Leave it to me," he declared, instantly. His confidence made her think of George Kentish as a rock, of Leonard as drifting sand, blown near the edge of a cliff. "I said I wouldn't ask another question; I'm not going to. If Leonard's gone off the rails, I'll put him back again. Without a soul in Cedarswood knowing, except you and me. That's a promise, Mrs. Constance. And Leonard will never know you told me a word. I promise that too."

She gazed up at him during a long moment of silence. Something of his own confidence passed to her, and she welcomed it with a wonderful sense of relief. Again Constance thought of him as impregnable. Could it be true that the thing which was worrying her to death was there only to be swept away—by him? Suddenly she felt it must be true. And after that it was inevitable. She told George Kentish everything.

She felt years younger. She felt every bit as young as yesterday morning, when Leonard and the children had been everything there was to think about. Before the intolerable shadow of Maud had come into her house.

"I'm your plain man," George Kentish told her. "I'm money and common-sense, you might say. And money and common-sense can settle anything in the world. I'll settle this. You're to go home and forget all about it till I've got something to tell you. Leave it to me."

He helped adjust her coat (its second season), patted her shoulder, held her hand for quite a little while, opened the door of the magical Daimler himself. Waved good-bye to her till the bend of the drive took the car. Went back into the big room and stood in exactly the same position. A dark discontent changed the jolly face of George Kentish. He seemed to see Constance Miles still sitting there before him, welcomed a return of a pleasant thrill. George Kentish was a rich man, but he was a lonely man. The last half-hour of Constance's visit, the slow half-hour in which his sympathy had persuaded her to confession of her trouble, had been none too long for him.

He roused himself, shaking off that vision of Constance sitting there, shaking off regretfully that other vision of a woman like Constance moving like light about the rooms of his big house. George Kentish became money and common-sense again. Problems; To find Maud; to frighten Leonard Miles out of his life about Maud; to send Maud packing. And Leonard must on no account know how George Kentish had known of Maud's existence.

He had promised that.

Money and common-sense rang up his office in the City, asked a few quick questions. Then Kentish rang up the superintendent of the telephone area which included Cedarswood. Money and common-sense never forgets anything, always knows the right men, always has a pull.

"I want to ask a favour," said George Kentish. "You know the Miles's house in Hillcrest Avenue? His telephone's out of order. Would it hurt anybody very much if it wasn't put right again for three days from now? Or two days, even, might do—I'll let you know."

THREE days later George Kentish called at the Miles's house. Constance was out, and he found Leonard in his study, waiting for tea. Tea came. Kentish allowed his host to enjoy half a cup, and then pulled the rope—hard.

"This won't do, you know, Leonard," he said, bluntly.

Leonard's first bewildered fancy that he was referring to the tea crumbled to dust at the sight of the other's face.

"What on earth do you mean, Kentish?" he asked.

"Maud," said Kentish.

It was brief but alarmingly adequate. Leonard stared at him as though he had been a wizard. Kentish awaited anger, rebellion, or passionate denial, but none of these things came. Leonard Miles just stared at his accusing guest with terror in his eyes.

"Maud," repeated Kentish. "Maud Scrutton, Old Yorke Street, London, W. For your sake, Leonard, I've been making a

lot of inquiries about the lady. Some friends of mine on the Baltic Exchange know pretty well all there is to know about the way she does business. It's hard for anybody to get out of her clutches once he gets in. But I'm going to get you out, Leonard. You must have been mad!"

"I meant no harm. I've done nothing wrong. I hoped——"

"Cut it out," the other ordered. His face was hard. "The Bankruptcy Court is full of hopers who didn't stick to their own job. Hopers who back horses get there quicker than the ordinary kind. How much have you lost to this advertising woman bookmaker? How long has it been going on?"

Leonard Miles recovered a little. He gasped his chin back into position, and tried to meet the other's eyes.

"What's the good of your bullying me, Kentish? You're rich—you've everything you want. You couldn't understand, you——"

"I'm a plain man, and perhaps I can't understand," Kentish interrupted, disgustedly. "But don't forget I'm talking to you as a friend, and that sort of whining excuse makes me sick. I never backed a horse in my life, so I don't know much about it. But I've friends in the City that do. I've made it my business to collect information from them about this Maud Scrutton. Did you ever have a win from her?"

"Two or three pounds now and then," Leonard answered, miserably.

"I thought so. And you're afraid to tell me what you've lost. And you've got the best wife in the world, two jolly children—and you sit there and tell me I've got every thing. I know what you get from the church, Leonard. Five hundred would almost cover your income. It isn't only that: you put your whole future in jeopardy. How long do you suppose Cedarswood would stand you if you were known to be a betting man?

"What's the matter between you and Leonard?" asked big George Kentish, bluntly. "What's wrong?"

They'd have you out the quickest they know how. You'd be finished—done!"

Leonard's silence admitted it. He felt—and still looked—like a convicted prisoner at the bar. He could find only two words of defence:—

"Nobody knows."

"Not your fault if they don't." Judge and prosecuting counsel spoke, as it were, together. "The day before yesterday I saw you coming out of the little post-office at the end of the town. Suppose you thought it clever not to use the main one. I shouted after you, but you didn't hear. I had to send a wire, and there on the pad, scratched with a hard pencil in plain English, I saw the impression of the wire you had just sent. I've got it here."

He unfolded it.

"There it is, as plain as if it was actually written. Code, I suppose. Wouldn't it make anybody curious, anybody who knew you, anybody who liked you? 'To Maud London. Hunt Galloping Dick.' Signed, 'Miles.' That's how I knew. Galloping Dick is the name of a horse. That's obvious to an idiot. What's 'Hunt' mean?"

"I forget," said Leonard, honestly.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Kentish. "And you tell me you hoped to make money out of backing horses! Did you remember what it meant when you put it down, or didn't you?"

"Of course," Leonard Miles answered, with dignity. "I don't suppose you'll believe me, but I was really very careful. That's the first wire I ever sent from any Cedarswood post-office. I always used the telephone, but it got out of order, and I can't persuade them to send anybody to see to it. I'll tell you what 'Hunt' means in a minute. Here you are." Leonard announced, unlocking a drawer of his writing-table and fishing from a heap of papers a neat gold-printed card. "This is the code. 'Hunt' means two pounds."

"To Maud Scrutton or to you?" Kentish inquired, with sarcasm. "Did Galloping Dick win or lose that day?"

The effort to remember was obviously painful. It lasted over a minute.

"She lost."

"Who? Maud?" asked Kentish, not very hopefully.

"No. Galloping Dick."

"I think I should have guessed it," Kentish commented, dryly. "Any other winners this week?"

Leonard shook his head. "I decided," he said, brightly, "to do nothing more till the telephone was in order. Yes, I remember now, I decided that—firmly."

"You are visited by occasional moments of sense," remarked his questioner, approvingly. "Did you lose anything last week?"

"Did I? Let me think." Leonard consulted a few samples from the muddle of papers with a painful slowness. "Ah, I've got everything here. I put it down systematically. I'm afraid I lost last week, it seems."

George Kentish was valiantly patient, though his hands moved irritably. "How much?"

"A bad week, I fear," replied Leonard, in a kind of frightened whisper. "No, not a good week at all."

"How much?"

"I have it here." Leonard's wavering forefinger pinned down a piece of paper. "I have everything here—if I can find it. Last week—twenty-four pounds. The *Times*—in other matters an excellent paper—favoured, wrongly, a filly with a very pretty name. Etta-something—no, that isn't right—nearly right, though. Now I have it—Coronetta. It—she—came in, I believe, fourth."

KENTISH saw red. Perhaps he thought of the worry Constance had suffered, and he slammed one of his great hands upon the table so that the other man jumped.

"Twenty-four pounds!" he echoed. "Twenty-four pounds in a week—and you don't earn six hundred a year. What have you got to say for yourself, man?"

Leonard jumped again, and said it. And slowly the hard face of George Kentish changed. Constance hadn't been well lately—she wasn't up to things—there was too much work in the house—and then the Church work. Leonard had dreamed a wonderful dream of, somehow, getting enough money together to send her to Switzerland for a month. Kentish, always so decent to them, would understand. There had come, addressed to the previous tenant of the house next door, which had been empty for some time, one of the inviting circulars of Maud Scrutton, Old Yorke Street. Leonard, like the lamb he was in all practical matters, had jumped at the bait with the utterly foolish hope of getting the funds to provide a really good holiday for Constance.

He had lost. He had won, by sheer fluking, a pound or so. He had lost. He had kept on. Still dreaming. The holiday for Constance was farther off than it had ever been. In short, Maud triumphed. Leonard was ashamed, penitent, bitterly remorseful.

"I see," said Kentish, at the end of this confession. His voice was a great deal softer. "I'm going to get to the end of this business—I want the facts. Turn out all those notes you've got there, Leonard, and push them over to me. I want to know how much you've lost altogether. I've got an idea."

In his scrambling way, on odds and ends of paper, Leonard Miles had made a note of every winning and losing transaction in his futile career as a gambler; had kept—carefully locked up—several of the weekly accounts of Maud Scrutton. Kentish's painstaking accountancy of profit and loss was suddenly interrupted by a startling discovery. His exclamation awoke Leonard, brooding painfully over his folly.

"Didn't you tell me you never backed in big amounts? There's no less than two thousand mentioned here—on this coloured slip. What does that mean?"

"I *do* remember that one," Leonard explained, with a kind of jerky pride. "It's a double event. Long odds, they call it—you risk your money a long time before the races are run. You back two horses together. I remember thinking that bet alone would settle Constance's holiday and leave a lot over. Two separate races—two thousand pounds to two pounds—but *both* horses have got to win, you understand?"

"No, I don't," Kentish grumbled. "This slip says, 'Dear Sir, I have obtained the following commissions for you: Cesarewitch and Cambridgeshire, two thousand pounds to two pounds win. Odd Money and Double'—Double something—what's the name of the second horse?"

"Double Baulk," replied Leonard, readily. "Wait, though—there were two horses with names very much alike, Double Baulk and Double Blank. I remember hesitating for a long time. Let me think. Yes, I remember now. I decided on Double Baulk for the second race, just because the *Times* said it hadn't a chance, and I'd been playing billiards with Horton at his new house. The first race is over—the Cesarewitch. It was run the other day, and Odd Money won. Didn't you know?"

"I did not," said Kentish, testily, looking at the slip. "You've got me all tangled up. Do you mean to tell me that if Double Baulk wins the second race this Maud Scrutton person will pay over a couple of thousand to you?"

"Of course," Leonard answered, simply. "And if it doesn't win I shall owe her two pounds. It's a thousand to one against—what did she call it in a special circular she sent?—spotting the double. So you can see for yourself that's the same as two thousand to two."

"It seems wonderful to me," remarked Kentish, and a sudden recollection came to him. "By the way, they were shouting something as I drove past the station. When's that second race of yours run?"

Leonard couldn't remember for the moment. So he found the *Times* under a pile of manuscript paper and library books, and opened it.

"By Jove, it's to-day!" He was quite surprised. He looked steadily at Kentish. Quite unexpectedly, he took the other man's hand.

"You've put me right, Kentish. I've been an utter fool. If you like, I'll promise you that I'll never have another bet of any kind. But just fancy, if Double Baulk *has* won, I'll be able to arrange for that holiday for Constance straight away. Two thousand pounds! And you'll have to come with us—I shall insist upon that."

George Kentish laughed. But he did not let go at once of the other's hand. "There's nothing would give me more pleasure," he said, heartily. "If you've brought this amazing chance off——"

And then he pulled his hand away. "I've a paper here," he cried. "I stopped the car and bought a paper for the result of the East Darkshire by-election. Let's have a look."

Even stolid George Kentish was conscious of an odd, but not unpleasant, tingling of excitement. "Double Baulk," he whispered, unconsciously, and Leonard Miles, already looking over his shoulder, echoed, "Yes, that's the one. Double Baulk!"

THERE it was, in the Stop Press, in rather sludgy type. Very near, but very different. DOUBLE BLANK 1—at the head of a list of fourteen runners.

Midway down the list of useless names was Double Baulk. The holiday for Constance was still uncharted.

"Well, that's that," Leonard murmured. He sat down, rather white. "Of course, you couldn't expect it to happen."

"No," agreed Kentish, refolding the stupid paper carefully. "Sit there and try to forget about it, Leonard. Give me those notes of yours again. Now I'll get back to the ordinary world. To work—Lord, if you knew what I think of all this gambling! It ruins nine out of every ten who fool about with it."

"It's not going to ruin Constance and me," declared Leonard. "I've finished with it."

"Good man!" said Kentish. But he spoke abstractedly, busy with the other's puerile figures. Nearly ten minutes had gone before he looked up and laid down his fountain-pen.

"Now, then, Leonard. I've got it all down. You seem to have been feeding Maud Scrutton with pocket-money for the last eleven weeks. Before we go any farther, is there anybody else in this line?"

"On my honour, no."

"I only asked. In those eleven weeks you've won a shilling or two over twenty-one pounds. Were you stupid enough to pay these losing accounts by cheque? The bank would know where it was going——"

"Always by notes. Except this last week. I paid the twenty-four pounds by cheque."

"It can't be helped. Then all these losing accounts are paid? Right. Then in eleven weeks you've paid this woman just over ninety pounds. Maud Scrutton benefits by a balance of seventy odd. She would!"

Leonard sat silent. He found himself wondering. George Kentish seemed to him to be suppressing a savage mirth. He saw the other pull a cheque-book from his pocket, and he cried out:—

"What are you doing?"

"Making good your losses," Kentish barked, crossly, rather as though a dog under the writing-table had suddenly bitten him. "I hate seeing good money wasted. Seventy pounds—on your solemn promise that you drop all betting, all gambling, for ever."

Leonard touched his arm violently.

"Don't, please, Kentish. It's absurd! I won't take it from you."

"Do you mean you won't give me that promise?"

"Certainly not. I've given it you already. Don't be afraid I sha'n't keep it."

"I'm not in the least afraid of that. I think you've learnt your lesson."

He began to write. Leonard fumbled with ineffective words of remonstrance. He fidgeted nervously, determined not to let Kentish do what was in his mind. Suddenly George Kentish jumped up. It was astonishing that he should be the first to know that Constance Miles was standing in the study by the door.

"I'm having trouble with an obstinate husband," Kentish informed her. "I'll transfer the discussion to you, if you'll let me explain."

"You needn't. I've been listening for the last five minutes. You were too busy with the paper to notice when I came in."

Constance spoke gravely. But then she laughed. And George Kentish noted that her eyes were shining and that she stood very upright. She was not the same woman who had made confession to Kentish in his house. She had discovered Maud. A smile moved the lips of Kentish and danced for a second in his heart. She went across to her husband. Kentish scarcely heard her musing whisper, "Poor old Leonard!"

"Touching this little matter of a holiday," began Kentish, without hesitation, and lifted a warning hand. "I'm in the chair—I don't want either of you to speak a word, please. I'm a faddy person, and I've got to be humoured. I've got money, and nothing to do with it."

"What ever are you talking about, Mr. Kentish?"

Kentish looked at her, whipped out his watch, pretended to be flurried for time.

"It's quite simple, Mrs. Constance. Lord, I shall have to hurry! Leonard's got to take you on a holiday—a real holiday—Mrs. Constance, as soon as he can find somebody to take his place for a Sunday or so. And the bill's mine. There's nothing more to be said. To please me!"

He turned savagely on Leonard—on Leonard expostulating.

"I can't hear you! Take hold of this—quick!" Leonard making no movement, he stuffed the cheque into Leonard's nearest pocket. It's two hundred; balance over the seventy is for holiday money. If you tear that up—if you don't present it before the end of this week—you'll lose me as a neighbour. I'll put the Court into the market and clear out of Cedarswood. Get me?"

That was George Kentish. Always, they reflected, he meant what he said, meant whole-heartedly what he did. While they stood in silence, intently getting him, he glared at them both in turn.

"Aren't I godfather to your little Nancy?" he half shouted. Then Constance moved.

"Won't you stay and let us try to thank you?" she said.

Kentish threw back his head. "Thank me! What for? I'd love to stay, but I've something I must fix up in town. Good-bye, both of you. Mind you have a good time."

THEY would never forget it, either of them. They said so to each other many times.

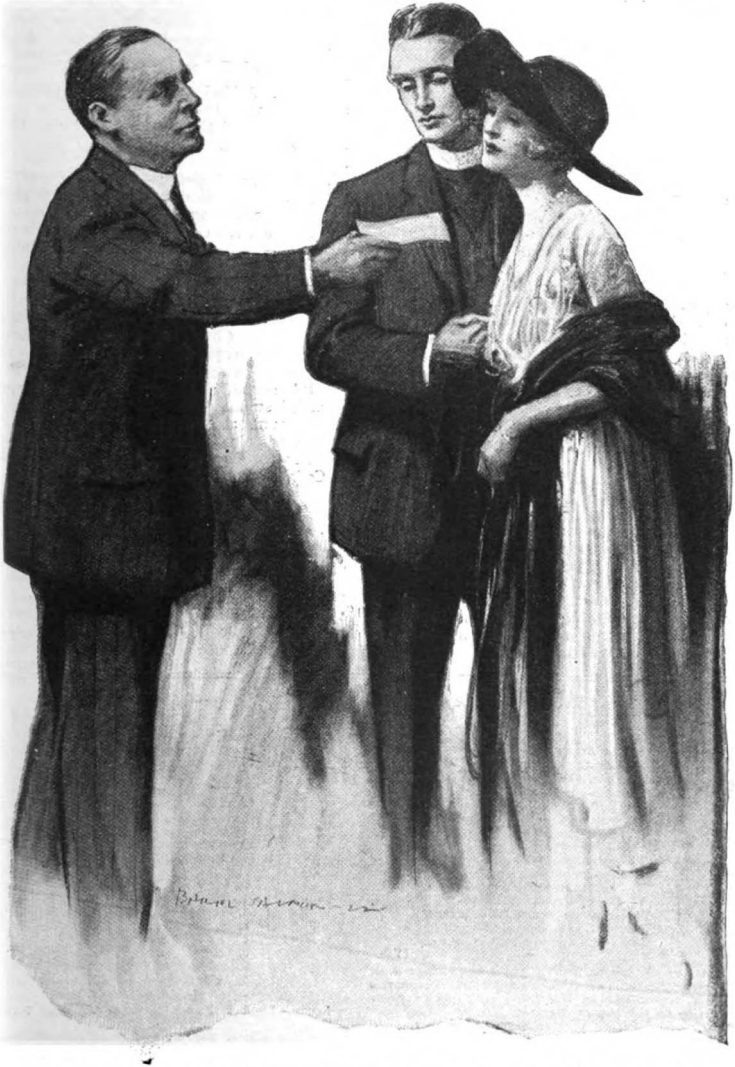
George Kentish drove his fast two-seater very fast to London—the same car in which he had patiently waited at the outlying post-office—waited for hours, till Leonard should come to send a telegram. His campaign was over. He glowed with success.

All the offices on the third floor, to which the lift took him, were his. George Kentish entered the small and beautiful room which was his private office. Here there were three prints of Hiroshige, two wonderful armchairs, and one Aubusson carpet of great merit. One shining tape-machine, at which George Kentish looked and frowned. A couple of favourites—the devil fly away with all favourites!—had won the last two races.

The sallow clerk who came at his summons was dressed to equal the appearance of a Prime Minister's secretary.

"Any news?" asked Kentish.

"Not so good." About the black brushed head of the confidential clerk a shade of gloom was almost visible. "Some mug punter in a suburb called Cedarswood has done the dirty on the book. Miles, whoever he is. He's had the nerve to click the Cesarewitch and Cambridgeshire double—we laid him two thousand pounds to two some weeks back—Odd Money and Double Blank."



"Leonard's got to take you on a holiday—a real holiday—Mrs. Constance. And the bill's mine. Take hold of this—quick!"

"Fluked the double, has he?" murmured Kentish, thoughtfully. "Well, what do you think of that?"

The clerk defined it angrily as a nasty jar. Kentish told him to bring the books.

He brought a big book, open at the name of Miles. Kentish dismissed him and sat down. George Kentish is Maud Scrutton; I hope you haven't guessed it. These serene and discreet offices in Old Yorke Street, the Daimler, the Rolls, and the two-seaters, the spreading gardens and the big house at Cedarswood called the Court, are all Maud's. Maud, the lucky wench, George Kentish, the merry well-doer, here in Old Yorke Street (and nowhere else) meet as one.

George Kentish took from his pocket the slip of tinted paper that recorded the winning bet. Already, in the book before him, neat round figures announced Maud Scrutton's indebtedness of two thousand pounds to Leonard Miles of Cedarswood. Kentish had studied the book on the previous afternoon. Five minutes before he had entered the Miles's house on this exciting day he had known that Leonard had backed the winner and won two thousand pounds.

Leonard Miles had successfully remembered only his *intention* to back Double Baulk. He had successfully forgotten that he had abandoned that intention and backed Double Blank instead. All the evidence of that glorious change of mind was in the slip George Kentish now inspected with a cheerful eye. *Double Blank*, the winner, seemed to leap from it in foot letters. He addressed the slip as though it were human.

"I was cold all over till I'd got hold of you, my darling," he told it, chattily. "And I kidded Leonard Miles he was on Double Baulk! Two thousand to a couple of measly jimmies—not likely! I ask you, *what* a forgetter!"

Silence. A kind of digestive silence, while a Corona was being procured from store, and on the wall the Japs of Hiroshige went blandly through their rice-fields and their rain.

Soliloquy, with puffs:—

"How do I stand? A hundred'll settle the fitments they want for their bazaar—and two hundred the cheque. Saved a solid two thousand—on balance I'm a clean seventeen hundred pounds up. Good enough!"

George Kentish rang the bell, took up a broad-nibbed pen, and splayed a thick line diagonally across the account of Leonard Miles, wrote CLOSED across it in huge, painstaking capitals. By this time the magnificent clerk looked on.

"I'll settle this man Miles's account myself," said Kentish. "And I'm closing his account altogether. Writing him; I don't want him to bet with me again. And I don't want any circulars sent to any address at Cedarswood in future. I've a reason."

"Bet you have," grinned the young nobleman, cheerfully. He was a privileged person. "They're a bit too hot for you down that quarter, what? Two thousand to two!"

IT'S an odd world, an unjust world. Business is business, sure enough. Isn't it nice to write a story where *everybody* is happy at the end? Even Maud!

ACROSTICS.

DOUBLE ACROSTIC No. 110.
(The Second of the Series.)

Men cling to place; in *first* for *last*
They stick, when usefulness is past.

1. They measure what you cannot see,
   And carriage free will guarantee.
2. In this, a princess comes to view:
   An insect small is in it, too.
3. On ground forbidden prone to rush;
   Though naught is in it, 'tis a crush.
4. Land where reversed is style behold,
   By footgear strangely crossed of old.
5. Vain talk; a poet would appear
   If stones enough were added here.
6. Not hard, as interposed; for you
   From midshipman may take your cue.

QUIVIS.

Answers to Acrostic No. 110 should be addressed to the Acrostic Editor, THE STRAND MAGAZINE, *Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, and must arrive not later than by the first post on September 12th.*

To every right one alternative answer may be sent; it should be written at the side. At the foot of his answer every solver should write his pseudonym and nothing else.

ANSWER TO DOUBLE ACROSTIC No. 109.

Leaving town and work behind,
Leaving care of every kind,
Simple joys in life we prize—
Cloudless days and sunny skies.

I. Red was suit of thievish knave.
2. Greater part of Gallic grave.
3. Classic tongue, of bygone time.
4. Cornish saint, in riddling rhyme.
5. Mild expletive, mostly tree.
6. Elsewhere—oft a useful plea.
7. Money, turn a marshal round.
8. Scottish isle with heavenly sound.

PAX.

1. H	eart	S
2. O	mbea	U
3. L	ati	N
4. I	ve	S
5. D	as	H
6. A	lib	I
7. Y	e	N
8. S	ky	E

NOTES.—Light 2. French, *tombeau*. 5. Ash. 7. Marshal Ney.

The last light of No. 107 lends itself to a few other answers besides the published one, and these five words must be accepted: Three (Oneyer, Tyrone, Oenone); Tantalise and Tantalize (Tanree, Talbot, Iseult, and Izeutz); Twenty-one (Tweeny, county, Oenone); Tatlanthe (Tatare, Lanark, Ianthe).

He no longer sees the girl as she is; he sees the idealized image of her which love has created in his heart.

by

Arnold Bennett

THE CONTROL OF LOVE.

I WONDER how many people grow up with the fixed idea that love is a thing which human intelligence cannot effectively control? The percentage of citizens—and especially Anglo-Saxon citizens—thus deceived about a vital matter must be very large. We probably get our notions concerning love and falling in love from the sentimental drawing-room ballad, which, at any rate in Britain, has an immense influence over the private dreams of the population. (There is no sentimental drawing-room ballad in France—or none to speak of, and the institution of the ballad concert is entirely unknown there.)

In the sentimental drawing-room ballad one special girl awaits one special young man; they meet by accident or by the will of the gods; at the meeting she looks into his eyes, he into hers; a miracle happens; and they both know that from that moment their two lives were changed for ever and ever, and also that no other girl could have had the wondrous effect that that special girl had on that special youth, and *vice versâ*. They know further that the affair could not have been avoided, love being a sort of inscrutable higher power tyrannizing over human beings, and that nothing on earth matters except the one supreme fact of love.

The sentimental drawing-room ballad regards love as mankind used to regard disease and pestilence—that is to say, as a visitation, vastly more agreeable, of course, than an epidemic of smallpox, but nevertheless a visitation, which mortals did not cause and

cannot cure—something similar to a thunderstorm or a flood. All delusions have some basis of truth, and the delusion propagated by the sentimental drawing-room ballad can occasionally find justification for itself in certain very odd and striking phenomena; but broadly speaking it does not at all correspond to life as we know life, and it has been the cause of more unhappy and tedious marriages than anything else since marriage was invented. I might put the case more strongly, but I will not do so, lest I should anger the ballad-loving Anglo-Saxon publics, who love to dwell upon the alleged awful ravages of love, and upon the helplessness of love's victims, and upon the futility of trying to escape love when Love has made up his mind to have you.

Falling in love, being in love, loving—three stages of a single process—constitute often an exceedingly fine experience, possibly the finest of all worldly experiences. The experience, however, does not lie entirely beyond human control. Nor is it generally, or often, productive of more happiness than unhappiness. It sometimes is, but not frequently. This statement contains no cynicism; it is the fruit of quite benevolent observation, and few really mature impartial observers would challenge it. I am, nevertheless, well aware that it will infuriate a considerable proportion of readers—men as well as women.

Love, despite the sentimental drawing-room ballad, is usually determined by individual circumstances of a material kind. For example, if a man who has been too poor to marry comes into a sufficient income, the chances are a hundred to one that soon afterwards he will be in love with some likely girl. You may argue that the thing was a coincidence, and that he would have been in love with that young woman anyhow. But is it not far more probable that he fell in love because he was ready to fall in love—in other words, because he had deliberately prepared himself to fall in love?

Similarly, a man who begins to find life a bore will fall in love.

And, conversely, a man who finds his existence full and interesting, an ambitious man, will not fall in love. He misses the visitation because he does not want it.

Again, a man who has been baulked in a love affair will fall in love a second time within a brief period, for the reason that he wanted, not a particular girl, but love itself. He had tasted it and he was determined to get his fill of it.

Instances could easily be multiplied to illustrate the broad truth that people who want to fall in love will fall in love, and those who don't, won't. So far from Cupid running after you with a bow and arrow, you must run after Cupid and bare your breast and entreat the fellow to shoot if you desire to feel the dart. I admit willingly that there are exceptions to this proposition. Now and then an individual may be positively struck down by love in a highly inconvenient and even tragic manner. He may curse, and strive against it, and still be conquered by it. But this individual is very rare—save in ballads.

As for the ballad theory that every youth and every girl has his or her particular "fate," and unless or until he or she meets that "fate" his or her life cannot be "fulfilled," it is as certain as anything human can be that in the average happy marriage the husband would have been equally happy with any one of ten thousand other women, and the wife with any one of ten thousand other men. (And when I say ten thousand I am understating!) The choice of a partner is seldom due to aught but fortuitous circumstances. If each individual has his "fate," it is extremely curious that his fate so often happens to be living in the same town, or even in the same street!

Am I seeking to rob life and love of their romance? Assuredly I am not. Life and love are incredibly and incurably romantic, and the more honestly you examine them the more romantic they seem. A man does not find his "fate." He takes a woman—one of tens of thousands—and gradually fashions her *into* his unique fate. Is not this astonishing process more romantic than the prosaic business of lighting on her by accident ready-made?

THAT nearly every man has a very large measure of control over the love which may make or spoil him cannot be doubted. In order effectively to exercise that control he must give his mind to the subject of love and its probable influence upon his career. This does not mean that he must spend his days in dreaming of the delights of love. It means that he must begin by putting certain questions to himself and answering them as sincerely as he can. On the other hand, it does not mean that he must try to lay down a plan of love as he might lay down the plan of a career. No! Love is a ticklish and incalculable affair; it cannot be reduced to a formula; it cannot, without absurdity, be approached exclusively in a spirit of pure logic; it may easily upset the schemes of hard common sense. But it is in general amenable to the suggestions of sagacity. And, seeing its importance, its beauty, its magnificence, its romance, its immense consequences, every effort should be made by the reasoning faculty to guide it wisely.

Now the young man who is not a fool

will first decide whether or not he is ready for love. He will deliberately decide it; and no jeering of sentimentalists shall move me from this statement.

Is it better to marry earlier or later? It is unanswerably better to marry earlier, provided that the material basis for marriage exists. It is better because it is more natural, because it is more healthy, because it is more agreeable, because the young more easily accommodate themselves to one another, and because their offspring have in every way a better chance on earth.

But none of these considerations can properly weigh against the absence of a suitable material basis. If the income of the married couple would be inadequate to the needs of wedlock and is without a fair prospect of improvement, or if the income is precarious and unreliable, then no marriage could rightly take place, despite anything that ballads may assert to the contrary.

And if no marriage can rightly take place, then the young man must decide that he is not ready for love, and get himself into a frame of mind accordingly. The frame of mind duly arrived at, he will be much less liable to fall in love, no matter how splendid may be the girls he meets! Thus he will save himself, and perhaps another, from a lot of trouble which a less prudent young man might unreflectingly tumble into.

Of course, there may be cases in which a young man who has both the material basis and the desire for marriage would still be foolish to adopt the frame of mind favourable to love. Such a case is that of the ambitious man who has sworn to rise high in the world. If this man marries young he may discover that his wife, through no fault of her own, is incapable of rising with him. Too early marriages have marred the lives of countless ambitious men—and of not a few ambitious women.

They meet by accident; a miracle happens.

CHOOSING.

Let us assume that a young man is in a position to marry, and that he has reflected, not unfavourably, about the state of marriage, and that he has the ordinary facilities for encountering young women. That young man is almost certain to meet fairly soon a young woman concerning whom his first thought will be: "She is not a bad sort." We say: "He has taken a fancy to her," but the situation would be more correctly described by the words: "His fancy has been taken."

Now here is the moment of peril. If at this moment circumstances arose which prevented him from ever seeing the girl again, he would not suffer. No harm has been done. The strange little microbe is only on the surface as yet; it has not penetrated into the system; it can be brushed off. Reason and judgment are still in control of the proceedings. The young man ought to realize, and can easily realize by an effort of detachment, that he is playing with fire. He ought to realize that he may be

at a crisis of his life, and that within the next few weeks things may have happened in his heart which will affect profoundly the whole of his career. He ought not to conduct himself lightly.

Yet few young men do in fact realize these matters. The average young man just goes carelessly on, listening to his fancy alone. He will see that girl again. He does see her again. In a couple of months, even if not betrothed, his affections may be so deeply involved that reason has ceased to be in command of the proceedings. He no longer sees the girl as she is; he sees the idealized image of her which love has created in his heart. He no longer sees the pros and cons of the tremendous and endless enterprise which we call marriage; he sees only the pros, and he sees them greatly exaggerated.

The affair, of course, may turn out excellently well; but if it does he is lucky—not meritorious, because he has neglected the early precautions which he ought to have taken.

The lesson is: that if reason is to act in a love affair, it must act in the earliest stages, or it cannot act at all. By deliberate thought and intention reason can be made to act, and its operation will be invaluable.

How should reason act? At the very start, before the matches have even been brought into the chamber where the powder-barrel lies, the young man should say to himself: "I am thinking about that girl. Before I go any farther let me think seriously and widely; dreaming about the attractiveness of her is not serious thinking. I must stand on one side and try to see the situation as a third person would see it."

The first point for his attention is this: From the inception of any love affair, a continuous process of falsification is going on. The girl is showing the best of herself and hiding the worst of herself. She cannot help doing so. Sometimes she does it unconsciously, but as a rule she does it quite deliberately. She is anxious to please; she is anxious to be esteemed and liked—whether or not she regards the young man favourably as a suitor. He is not seeing the girl in full, and it is impossible that he should see her in full. And even the carefully selected portions of her individuality which he does see are seen by him through the rose-coloured glasses of his excited fancy. If he marries her he is certain to experience disillusion, because he has been asking for it.

Further, the young man himself, precisely like the girl, is showing the best of himself and hiding the worst of himself. Both parties, therefore, are being continuously misled, and the disillusion will be mutual.

Let the young man reflect upon this, so that his enthusiasm may be duly tempered. Let him also reflect that, just as in the project of marriage he is "out" mainly for his own interests, so is the girl "out" for her own interests. Drawing-room ballads notwithstanding, love and self-interest are quite compatible. The simple realization of this unquestionable truth will help the young man to judge with more reason and less passion than otherwise he could do.

A GREAT deal depends upon the circumstances in which the first meetings occur. If these, as often happens, are in a resort of pleasure, the difficulties of true judgment are gravely increased. A girl who is ideal at a social entertainment may be a very different girl in the eternal dailiness of marriage. (And be it ever remembered that marriage is about seventy-five per cent. humdrum, twenty per cent. troublesome complications, and a bare five per cent. festivity of one kind or another.)

The girl is excited. The young man is excited. The material available for wise judgment is very meagre. The young man, however, can trust to at any rate three symptoms. If she is obviously a devotee of pleasure, beware, for she cannot fail to be disappointed—with the usual results upon character. If she shows no thought for what he is spending with her or on her, beware, for either she is selfish or she is incapable of putting herself in his place. Thirdly, if she speaks ill of women in general, beware, for she is a woman herself. And in this connection I will add that if the young man catches himself thinking that by a most fortunate chance she is free from the characteristic feminine faults, let him rule out the notion instantly. She is not. No woman is. A woman may have these faults in a greater or less degree, but she has them, and if the young man does not discover this soon he will discover it too late. The same, naturally, is true of men. (Yes, young man, all men, including yourself, have characteristic masculine defects of character.)

If the early meetings occur in a place of business, under business conditions, the chances of a sound judgment are considerably strengthened. But the young man should see the young woman in her own home, difficult though this often is to arrange in the preliminary stages. And if her own home is not satisfactory, let him guard against imagining that she has escaped all the faults of her family. She hasn't; and to imagine such an absurdity is a sure symptom that the young man is losing his head and his reasoning faculty about her.

In any case, the young man should take measures, however awkward they may be.

to see her in prosaic circumstances, and circumstances which are apt to be trying for her. circumstances which ordinarily do bring to the surface the roots of the character. He can even create these circumstances himself.

And, lastly, he should meditate upon the possibility that he is not the seeker but the sought. He may fancy that he is about to choose the girl, whereas the

and, second, that, while it is controllable, it ought in the interests of individual and general happiness to be controlled so far as possible by the guidance of reason.

Love is, I believe, the greatest and the finest phenomenon in human life; its in-

Girls have immense advantages. A beautiful or a charming girl, in order to be admired, has simply to *be*; a man, in order to be admired, must *do*.

fact is that the girl is about to choose him. He may conceive himself as playing the active *rôle*, whereas in truth he may be playing the passive *rôle*. The nature of men and women is such that a girl can just as easily select and mark down and capture a man as a man can select and mark down and capture a woman. Provided that a girl has a fair amount of charm and is suitably situated as regards material conditions, she can, in my firm belief, win almost any man she chooses—and this without in the least departing from the rules laid down by society for the deportment of nice girls.

There are those who will here protest, and perhaps violently, that, in spite of my previous assurances to the contrary, I am, as a fact, in the above suggestions, committing an outrage upon love, trying to make love a matter of cold calculation, and Heaven knows what else. But it is not so. I wish merely to insist, first, that love is not uncontrollable in its first manifestations,

fluence is tremendous; nothing transcends it in importance. Why should reason and deliberate judgment be excluded from it at the very moment when they can make themselves useful? Some people seem to think that it is a grand thing to throw oneself blindly into romantic danger and to risk the welfare of a lifetime in an hour of abandonment. I do not agree, and I doubt whether the said persons are wholly sincere. I behold them as the victims of the sentimental drawing-room ballad. Reason, I admit, cannot do everything in love. No man, however young and omniscient, can completely arrange his heart's destiny by taking thought. Love cannot be treated as an algebraic equation. But Reason can emphatically do something—and something worth doing—to lessen the risks of a disaster, if only she is called into consultation soon enough.

THE WOMAN'S CASE.

So far I have, at any rate in appearance,

regarded the matter from the man's point of view; and in the acid judgment of ardent feminists I may have had the air of treating the wonderful preliminaries to marriage as a struggle of calculation in which the man should be encouraged to do the very best he can for himself while ignoring the claims of the woman. Such is not my attitude. Nearly all the suggestions which I have offered for the conduct of young men I would offer with equal vehemence for the conduct of girls in this great and critical affair; and indeed, with the necessary changes of detail, they can obviously be applied with at least as much force to the woman's case as to the man's. If a man should give heed, a woman should give more heed.

Some say that modern social conditions have fundamentally changed the girl's relation to the man. They have changed it, but not fundamentally. In essentials it remains the same as it was. A girl can now earn her own living; she has freedom, including the freedom to think for herself; she is not so afraid as she used to be of becoming an old maid. She has a far larger choice of men than her ancestress, merely because she goes about more. True! But she cannot earn her own living as well as a man; with all her new freedom she has less freedom than a man; and she still has a horror of becoming an old maid, whereas men still contemplate with perfect calm the prospect of becoming old bachelors. The crucial fact is that maidens still hanker after the wedded state a great deal more than young men do. Further, there are more maids than young men.

The theory, launched in various quarters, that girls are no longer particularly interested in marriage, that they prefer their salaried work to the hard labour of housekeeping and rearing children, and that if the truth were known they would prefer not to marry—this theory does not at all accord with the evidence of my eyes daily seen. I am quite ready to call it a grotesque theory, invented by persons whose visual organs are in grave need of an oculist. The differences of sex survive, and are likely to continue to survive for quite some years yet.

GIRLS have immense advantages; on their own ground men cannot touch them. A beautiful or a charming girl, in order to be admired, has simply to *be*; a man, in order to be admired, must *do*. And the husband, in the majority of marriages, has the sole financial responsibility; the wife's responsibility in spending is less serious in the same degree as creating is less serious than dissipating. On the other hand, girls have immense disadvantages. They grow old! For many of them, if not for most, this is a genuine tragedy. Their share in the vast business of producing the next generation is incomparably heavier than that of men. And also, whatever their financial independence may have been before marriage, they generally lose it after marriage. Financially, the average wife is little better than helpless.

On the whole, I consider that the disadvantages of being a woman outweigh the advantages. I think that women, during the major part of their lives, have a somewhat harder time of it than men. I have not yet met a man who really regretted that he had not been born a woman; but I have met many and many a woman who really regretted that she had not been born a man.

Finally, marriage is always a captivity; it may be and often is delightful, unique in its satisfactoriness; but it is a captivity, and sometimes a terrible captivity. And nearly invariably it is more of a captivity for the wife than for the husband.

Hence we arrive at the triple conclusion: that maidens desire marriage more than men do; that, being numerically superior, they have a more restricted choice than men; and that as a consequence of her financial dependence and of her liabilities as a mother, an unsuccessful marriage will bear more hardly upon the wife than upon the husband.

I maintain, therefore, that the girl has more cause even than the young man to bring her reason into play immediately and without the slightest delay when her affections begin to be engaged. I doubt whether a woman is less calculating than a man before her affections are caught, but I am quite sure that, once her affections are caught, she can be more devoted than a man, more sacrificial, and more capable of grief.

It would be absurd to attempt general advice to women about men. Tastes differ infinitely, and there are mysteries in marriage incomprehensible save to the two people chiefly concerned. No one can safely predict that a given man will not prove satisfactory to a given woman.

But one generalization may be suggested without excessive rashness. Beware of any man whom men do not like. Such men often please women; they absolutely fascinate women; they seem to mesmerize; they are adored to the point of ecstasy. But never for long. A moment always comes when the woman learns, as a rule to her cost, that the general masculine judgment was right. There may be exceptions to this rule, but for myself I have not met one.

I would venture no other generalization. All else that can be said in this connection amounts to a vague warning against shutting the eyes and rushing forward until the heart has obtained complete control and reason has been reduced to a nonentity.

A queer false shame adversely influences the earthly relations of a man and a girl who have at the back of their minds some idea of ultimately marrying each other. And the girl usually has more of this false shame than the man. Conversations, instead of being serious, are superficial: and the exhibition of a legitimate curiosity on vital matters is genteelly avoided. The girl should acquire knowledge concerning not merely the financial status of the possible man, but about his health and about his tastes, particularly about his tastes. For she will be more at the mercy of his tastes than he of hers.

Of course, no social interchanges can go on without some useful information being obtained. And yet it is astonishing, it is pathetic, the small quantity of information that actually is obtained. Lots of couples enter into the most solemn compact that exists, and they know no more of each other than their respective preferences in furniture and in theatrical entertainments.

And now, when, for good orevil, the choice has been made and the compact sealed, the young woman should bethink herself conscientiously of a matter which has a greater influence upon the success or failure of marriage than anything else lying outside the affections. Before he is accepted as a *fiancé*, the young man must put his cards on the table. He must reasonably demonstrate his ability to maintain a wife and a household in a satisfactory manner. If he cannot demonstrate this there is trouble, and he may be asked what he impudently means by expecting a girl accustomed to comfort and all the proprieties to entrust herself to his incompetent arms. He expects to be called upon for this demonstration, and neither he nor anybody else is surprised at the insistence on the ordeal. But supposing that, when the couple had arrived at an unspoken or spoken understanding, the young man's mother were to send for the young woman and say to her: "You want to marry my son. Which means that you will have to run his house for him and bring up his children. I must request you to prove to me that you can run a house, manage servants, buy food economically, cook it attractively, make rooms attractive, keep order, be punctual," etc., etc.

Naturally the girl would be startled.

But she would have no right to be startled. The error into which innumerable girls fall is of expecting the man to bring various important things to the marriage while forgetting that they, too, have responsibilities to discharge and duties to fulfil in an accomplished manner. Girls are too apt to imagine that in giving their hearts they have given all that the mutual bargain of marriage demands from them. It very emphatically is not so.

"You want to marry my son. I must request you to prove to me that you can run a house."

Love is enormous; but love is not enough. To be a wife is a profession, and a skilled and a learned profession at that. While she is engaged in loving the young woman should also be engaged in more material and earthly affairs. And you may cryout against reason and practicality and mechanical household efficiency as much as you please—there is nothing like these for supporting and preserving love in its fight against time.

The tendency of the age is towards marriages of reason. A good tendency! But courtships of reason are equally to be desired.

MR. ARNOLD BENNETT'S NEXT ARTICLE WILL DEAL WITH "MARRIAGE."

THE SINISTER QUEST OF NORMAN GREYES

by

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES CROMBIE

No. 10.—THE MYSTERY ADVERTISEMENT.

MICHAEL TELLS THE WHOLE STORY.

IT has always been my custom, as a notorious and much-sought-after criminal, to give special care to the building up of a new identity. It is my success in the various impersonations I have attempted which has enabled me for many years to completely puzzle that highly astute body of men leagued together under the auspices of Scotland Yard.

After my brief but successful career as Colonel Escombe, of the Indian Army, I determined upon a complete change of characterization and circumstances. I established myself in modest rooms at the back of Russell Square, took a small office at the top of a block of buildings in Holborn, had cards and stationery printed and a brass plate engraved, and made a fresh appearance in the Metropolis of my fancy as Mr. Sidney Buckross, jobbing stationer. I cannot say that my operations made very much impression upon the trade which I had adopted. I transferred a thousand pounds to my credit at a well-known London bank, wrote myself several letters a day, which I opened and replied to at my office, sallied out with a small black bag soon after ten, and, with the exception of a leisurely hour for my midday meal, spent the rest of my time in the safe seclusion of the British Museum.

I re-established a new hobby. In the intervals of idleness which the spasmodic activities of my profession had entailed, I had always been fascinated by the subject of ciphers. I knew perfectly well, for instance, that half the advertisements in the Personal Column of the *Times* contained, to the person for whose eyes they were intended, a meaning utterly different from their obvious one. For example, one afternoon, after having wasted a score of sheets of paper and an immense amount of ingenuity, I was able at last to find the real message conveyed under this absurd medley of words :—

"*Charles. What you require may be found in 1749. Laughing Eyes bids you have courage. Bring James.*"

With only one word of the cipher at first clear to me, I looked upon it as something of a triumph when I was able to extract from this rubbish the following message :—

"*Lady in green, man dinner jacket and white tie. Frascati's 8 o'clock Monday. Will bring documents. Have currency.*"

The announcement interested me. If these documents were worth money to the person to whom this invitation was addressed, they were probably worth money to me. I decided, without a moment's hesitation, that I would meet the lady in green and the gentleman in a dinner coat and white tie on Monday at Frascati's, notwithstanding the shock to my sartorial instincts which the costume of the latter was likely to inflict. My only trouble was, not to clash with the person for whom the advertisement was really intended. At this I could only make an attempt. I inserted the following advertisement in the Personal Column of the *Times* on the following morning :—

"Frascati's 7 not 8."

The upshot I was compelled to leave to fate.

AT ten minutes to seven on Monday evening I arrived at the restaurant indicated. I ordered a table for three and the best dinner the place could offer. The moment I stepped back into the reception-room I recognized, beyond a shadow of

doubt, my prospective guests. The man was a powerful-looking fellow, with large, clumsy limbs, a mass of untidy hair, a bushy brown moustache streaked with grey, a somewhat coarse complexion, and bulbous eyes. He wore, gracelessly, the costume which the advertisement had indicated. The woman in green had somewhat overdone her colour scheme. There was a green plush band in her hair and she wore an evening gown of the same colour, cut very low and distinguished by a general air of tawdriness. She was, or rather had been, good-looking in a bold, flamboyant sort of way, and she had still a profusion of yellow hair. They both stared at me when they saw me looking around, and with a little inward shiver I took the plunge. I went boldly up to them and shook hands.

"I have ordered dinner," I announced. "Will you let me show you the way?"

They accepted the situation without demur, and viewed the gold-topped bottle in the ice-pail, and the other arrangements for their entertainment, with considerable satisfaction.

"I must say you're not quite the sort of chap we expected to find, is he, Lizzie?" the man remarked, as he seated himself heavily and performed wonderful operations with his napkin. "I thought all your lot were water drinkers."

I smiled.

"We are often misunderstood," I ventured.

WE settled down and took stock of one another. The woman looked approvingly at my black tie and pearl studs. I have made it a rule never to be without a supply of the right sort of clothes.

"I'm sure, if I may say so, it's much more agreeable to do business with a gentleman," she remarked, with a sidelong glance at me. "Makes one feel so much more at home."

"Cocktails, too!" her companion exclaimed, cheerfully, as the wine waiter approached with a silver tray. "You're doing us proud and no mistake."

I bowed and drank their healths. A cordial but cryptic silence seemed to me to be my best *rôle*. I had always the fear, however, of the other man arriving before the business part of our meeting had been broached. So as soon as the effects of the wine had begun to show themselves in some degree, I ordered another bottle and leaned confidentially forward.

"You have brought the documents with you?" I asked.

"You don't think we are out to make an April fool of a gentleman like you!" the lady replied, with a languishing glance. "But I would like you to understand this, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Martin," I suggested.

"Mr. Martin," she went on. "I would never have rounded on Ted if he had kept straight. He and I didn't get on, and that's the long and short of it. He was all right so far as the drink was concerned, and I never saw him look at another woman in his life. All the same, Mr. Martin, for a woman of my temperament he was no fitting sort of a husband."

I felt a moment's sympathy for Ted. The lady, however, had more to say.

"When first he started those proceedings for divorce," she went on, dropping her voice a little and adopting a more intimate manner, "I was knocked altogether silly like. You know that, Jim, wasn't I?" she added, appealing to her male companion.

"Same here," he growled. "I'd have broken his blooming 'ead if I'd thought he was having us watched."

"And it's a broken head he'll get, the way he's going on, if he's not careful," the woman continued, truculently. "Talk about making him a Cabinet Minister, indeed, and me left without a penny just because he got his divorce! I'll show him!"

"To revert for a moment to the documents," I ventured.

The lady touched a soiled, shabby handbag, opened it, and gazed inside for a moment.

"They're here all right," she announced in a tone of satisfaction. "Mixed up with my powder and rouge and what not. You shall have them presently, Mr. Martin."

"That is, if you are prepared to part," the man intervened. "Cash down and no humbug about it."

"Part? Of course he's prepared to part!" the woman declared, sharply. "Wouldn't be here if he weren't. That's right, isn't it, Mr. Martin?"

"Naturally," I agreed. "I have brought a considerable amount of money with me, quite as much as I can afford to part with, and the only question left for me to decide is whether the documents are worth it."

"You talk as if you were doing this little job on your own," she remarked, looking at me curiously.

"I have to be as careful as though I were," I replied. "I am sure you can understand that."

Her escort laughed coarsely.

"I guess you'll see there's some pickings left for yourself," he observed. "You know what I heard your boss say at Liverpool once."

"That will do, Jim," the woman interrupted, impatiently. "Remember we are here for business."

I returned to the subject of our meeting.

"I think," I suggested, "the time has arrived when you might allow me to glance through those documents."

The woman looked across the table at her companion. He nodded assent.

"No harm in that, so far as I can see," he observed. "There's all in them as I promised, and a trifle more. Enough to cook Ted's goose, and his swell friend's."

The woman opened her hand-bag and produced a dozen pages of typewritten manuscript, soiled and a little tattered.

"Just cast your eye over that first," she invited. "That's an exact copy of the speech which Ted prepared, for the mass meeting in Liverpool in March."

"In Liverpool," I repeated, hoping for some elucidation.

"The meeting that was called to decide upon the shipping strike," she explained, a little impatiently.

I glanced through the typewritten pages. They seemed to consist of a vehement appeal to the dockers, bonders, and Union of Seamen to inaugurate on the following day the greatest strike in history, promising them the support of the miners and railwaymen, and predicting the complete defeat of the Government within six weeks. The speech concluded with a peroration full of extreme revolutionary sentiments, and on a blank page at the end, under the heading of "Approved of," were the signatures of a dozen of the best-known men in the Labour world.

"This speech——" I began, tentatively, for the matter was not yet clear to me.

"Was never delivered, of course," the man interrupted. "You know all about that. Ted went down to Liverpool as mild as a lamb. He stood up there on the platform and told them that the present moment was inopportune for a strike. Not only that, but the next day he bamboozled them into accepting the employers' terms."

"Satisfactory so far as it goes," I observed didactically, but with caution. "And now ——"

"Here," the woman interrupted triumphantly, "is Lord Kindersley's letter, delivered to Ted that afternoon in Liverpool."

I read the letter, dated from South Audley Street, and its opening phrases were illuminative. I knew now that Ted was Mr Edward Rendall, the present leader of the Labour Party in the House of Commons.

"*My dear Mr. Rendall*," it began,

"*This letter, which I am dispatching by aeroplane messenger, will reach you, I*

"If we make a deal and you part with these documents to me, what use do you expect me to make of them?"

"Any use you choose, so long as you pay enough," the woman answered, bluntly.

trust, before you address the meeting this evening. The matter with which it is concerned cannot be dealt with by the Federation of Shipowners, but, confirming our recent conversations, Sir Philip Richardson and I are willing, between us, to advance to-morrow bank-notes to the value of fifty thousand pounds, to be paid to the funds of your cause

or to be made use of in any way you think fit, provided the strike threatened for to-morrow does not take place.

Faithfully yours,
GEOFFREY KINDERSLEY.

P.S.—In your own interests, as well as ours, I suggest that you immediately destroy this letter.

Things were now becoming quite clear to me. I even began to wonder if I had brought enough money.

"As a matter of curiosity," I asked, "why did your husband not take Lord Kindersley's advice and destroy this letter?"

The woman laughed unpleasantly. There was mingled cunning and self-satisfaction in her expression.

"He told me to," she replied. "As a matter of fact, he thought he saw me tear it up. It was just at the time that I was beginning to have my suspicions of Master Ted, so I tore up a circular instead, and put this by for a bit."

"A pretty clever stroke of work, too," the man opposite murmured, with an approving grin. "You put a rod in pickle for Ted that day, Lizzie."

"And serve him right, too," the lady remarked, glancing in her mirror and making some trifling rearrangement of her coiffure.

There was a brief silence. The man drew his chair a little closer to the table and addressed me with a business-like air.

"Now, Mr. Martin, or whatever your name is, let's finish this job up," he proposed. "You've got a copy of the speech that Ted Rendall promised his pals to deliver at Liverpool, typed at Mrs. Simons's office, number twenty-three, Dale Street. You've got the original letter from Lord Kindersley, proving up to the hilt why he didn't deliver it, and," he went on, striking the table with his fist, "I am now going to tell you that that fifty thousand pounds was handed over to Ted at the National Liberal Club the following evening at six o'clock, and was paid in by him, to his own credit, to five different banks on the following morning. The names of the banks are there, in pencil, on the back of Lord Kindersley's letter."

"And when I asked him for a hundred a year to keep me respectable," the woman declared, with an angry colour rising to her cheeks, "he sent my letter back through his lawyers, without a word."

I leaned back in my chair and felt my way a little farther.

"If we make a deal and you part with these documents to me," I said, "what use do you expect me to make of them?"

"Any use you choose, so long as you pay enough," the woman answered, bluntly.

"We know pretty well whom you're acting for," the man put in, with a knowing grin. "I guess it won't be long before

Charlie Payton handles these documents, if we come to terms."

"You have no conditions to make?" I asked.

"None!" the woman snapped. "I've finished with Ted. He's a cur. You can publish the whole lot in the papers if you like, for all I care."

"Then there remains only the question of price," I concluded.

The flush of wine and the momentary expansiveness of good feeding seemed to pass from the faces of my two guests. A natural and anxious cupidity took its place. They feared to ask too little; they were terrified lest they might scare me away by asking too much.

"They'd be worth a pretty penny to Ted," the woman muttered.

"You don't want to sell them to him," I pointed out.

"I don't, and that's a fact," she admitted. "Look here, Mr. Martin, they're yours for a thousand pounds."

A thousand pounds was precisely the sum I had brought with me. Without remark, I counted out the notes and pocketed the documents. The man and woman seemed very surprised at this uneventful finish to the proceedings. The latter tucked away the notes in her handbag whilst I paid the bill. When I rose to take leave of them I could see, standing in the doorway and looking at us with a puzzled expression, a middle-aged man who I decided at once was the individual whom I had impersonated.

"The business is over, and, I trust, pleasantly," I said. "Will you forgive me if I take my leave? There are others who are anxious to hear from me."

The woman clutched her bag with her left hand and extended her right.

"Well, I'm sure you've been quite the gentleman, Mr.—Mr.—let me see, what was the name?"

"Well, it doesn't matter, does it," I replied, "especially as it was only assumed for the evening. Good night and good luck to you both," I added, as I made my escape.

There was a fine rain falling outside, but I walked steadily on, obsessed with the sudden desire for fresh air. The atmosphere of the place I had left, the character of my companions, the sordid ignominy of the transaction which I had just concluded, had filled me with disgust. Then I began to laugh softly to myself. It was a queer anomaly, this, that I, the notorious criminal for whom the police of the world were always searching, should feel distaste at so ordinary an ill-deed. I had robbed, and struck ruthlessly enough, in my time, at whoever might stand in my way, but, as a matter of fact, blackmailing was the one malpractice which had never happened to come my way. In any case, as I reminded myself, the ignominious part of the affair was over. Its continuation was likely to appeal more both to my sense of humour and my natural instinct for cruelty. Over a late whisky-and-soda that night in my room, I began to build my plans. It seemed to me that the career of Mr. Edward Rendall, M.P., and the reputation of Lord Kindersley were equally in my hands. It was surely not possible that the two combined would not produce a reasonable profit upon my outlay of a thousand pounds. As I sat and smoked another idea occurred to me, and before I retired to rest I wrote a long letter of instructions to Mr. Younghusband.

I REMAINED at my office in Holborn on the following morning until I heard from Mr. Younghusband upon the telephone. As usual he was most formal, addressing me as though I were one of his ordinary and respected clients. It was obvious, however, that he was perturbed.

"I have carried out your instructions to the letter, Mr.—er—Buckross," he announced, "but the magnitude of the operation which you have ventured upon has, I confess, rather staggered me."

"Let me know exactly what you have done," I said.

"I have sold," he continued, "on your account, through various firms of stockbrokers, twenty-five thousand ordinary shares in the Kindersley Shipping Company at six pounds each. Fortunately, there is no immediate prospect of a rise in shares of this description, and I was able to arrange to leave cover amounting to only ten shillings a share—namely, twelve thousand five hundred pounds."

"Very good," I assented. "What is the price just now?"

"The shares have dropped a trifle, naturally," the lawyer replied, "owing to your operations. The stockbroker, however, at whose office I now am, advises me to disregard that fact. He thinks that they will probably recover during the day."

"Just so! When is settlement day?"

"On the fourth. Apropos of that, the various brokers with whom I have had dealings on your behalf desire to know whether you would wish to close your transactions, or any portion of them, during the next few days if a profit of, say, a quarter a share is shown."

"Not on any account," I insisted. "The transaction must remain exactly as it is until I give the word."

I rang off, filled my bag, as usual, with stationery samples, and took the Tube to Bond Street, whence I walked to South

Audley Street. Upon arrival at my destination, I was informed, by an imposing-looking butler, that Lord Kindersley was at home, but it was scarcely likely that he would receive me unless I had an appointment. I risked the butler's being human, and bought my way as far as the waiting-room. Once arrived there, I managed to impress an untidy and bespectacled secretary with the idea that it might be worth Lord Kindersley's while to spare me a few minutes of his time. In the end I was ushered into the great man's sanctum.

"What can I do for you—er—Mr. Buckross?" he inquired, glancing at my card.

I was anxious to test my new identity and I stood full in the light. It was obvious, however, that Lord Kindersley had not an idea that we had ever met before. He did not connect the slightly nervous business man who now addressed him with the wood-man-chauffeur who had brought him safely from the Forêt du Dom to England.

"I have come to see you on a very serious matter, Lord Kindersley," I said, "and I am anxious that there should be no misunderstanding. I do not wish for a penny of your money. I am here, in fact, to save you from the loss of a great deal of it. My visit, nevertheless, has a very serious side."

He looked at me steadily from under his bushy eyebrows.

"Go on," he invited, curtly.

"Last March," I continued, "you averted the threatened shipping strike and saved yourself the loss of at least one of your millions by bribing a well-known Labour leader to declare for peace instead of war. You and one other great shipowner were alone concerned in this matter. That other man, I gather, is dead."

Lord Kindersley was looking at me with a queer look in his eyes. I realized suddenly how heavily pouched they were underneath, how unwholesome the power of his face. His voice, when he answered me, was unsteady.

"What on earth are you talking about?"

I TOOK the two documents from my pocket and moved a little nearer to him.

"Here," I said, "is Rendall's proposed speech, counselling the strike and signed by the leaders of the various Unions. Here, also, is your letter to Rendall, making him the offer of fifty thousand pounds to withhold it, which sum was paid to him the next evening at the National Liberal Club."

All the initial affability and condescension had gone from Lord Kindersley's manner. He looked like a man on the verge of a collapse.

"My God!" he muttered. "Rendall swore that he had destroyed my letter!"

"He instructed his wife to do so. She retained it for her own purposes. A few months ago her husband divorced her. This is her revenge. She has sold the copy of the speech and the letter to me. I know, also, the other facts in connection with the case."

Lord Kindersley took out his handkerchief and mopped his forehead. Already he began to see his way.

"I will buy those documents from you," he proposed.

"Your lordship," I replied, "I am not a blackmailer."

"You shall receive the money quite safely," he went on, eagerly. "I should not dream of communicating with the police. I shall look upon it as an equitable business transaction. Name your price. I am not a mean man."

"Neither, as I remarked before, am I a blackmailer," I persisted. "My use for these letters is predestined. They go to the Press."

Lord Kindersley sprang to his feet.

"What good will that do you?" he demanded, hoarsely.

"Not very much financially, perhaps," I acknowledged. "On the other hand, I know one newspaper, I think, which would pay me a large sum for them."

He brushed the idea on one side.

"Listen," he said, impressively. "No newspaper would deal with you as liberally as I am prepared to. Those documents must not be published. If it were generally known that I had bribed Rendall to hold up that speech, the Unions would declare war against me to-morrow. Not a man would stay in my employ. Besides, it would bring discredit upon my Party. It would ruin me politically as well as actually. Come now, Mr. Buckross, you look like a business man. Let's talk business. I'll write you a cheque for ten thousand pounds this morning."

"Your lordship," I replied, "if I dealt with you in the way you suggest, it would amount to a criminal offence. My conscience forbids it. I can deal with the Press fairly and openly. Your political ruin I cannot help. Your financial ruin I may help you to modify. I offer you four days' grace, during which time you had better get rid of as many of your shares in the Kindersley Shipping Company as you can."

"You promise to do nothing for four days?" Lord Kindersley exclaimed, eagerly.

"I promise."

He leaned back in his chair and mopped his forehead.

"Well, that's a respite, at any rate," he said. "Now, Mr. Buckross, you and I have got to understand one another on this deal."

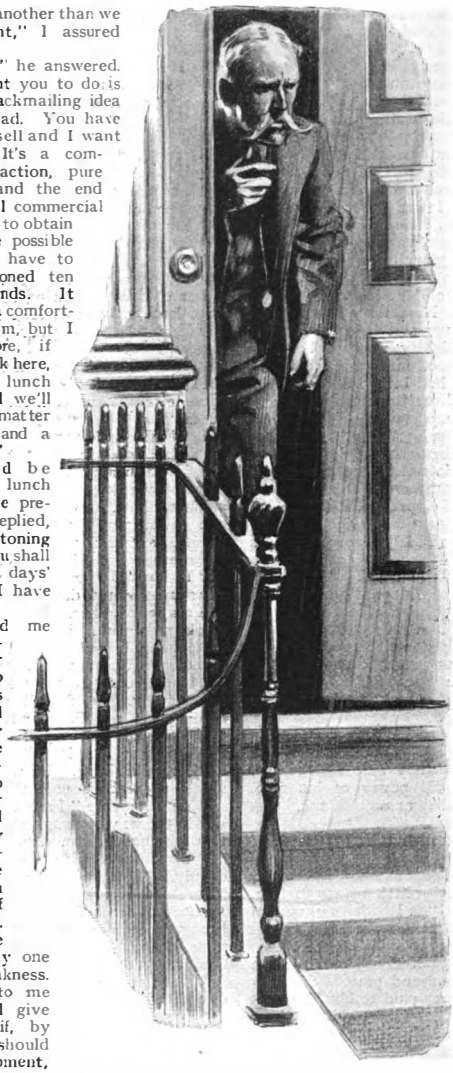
"We shall never get any nearer under-

standing one another than we are at present," I assured him.

"Rubbish!" he answered. "What I want you to do is to get that blackmailing idea out of your head. You have something to sell and I want to buy it. It's a commercial transaction, pure and simple, and the end and aim of all commercial transactions is to obtain the best price possible for what you have to sell. I mentioned ten thousand pounds. It seemed to me a comfortable little sum, but I can afford more, if necessary. Look here, stay and have lunch with me, and we'll discuss the matter over a cigar and a glass of wine."

"I should be taking your lunch under false pretences," I replied, rising and buttoning my coat. "You shall have the four days' grace which I have promised."

He followed me to the door, entreating me for my address. So convinced was he that I would change my mind that he sent his secretary out into the street after me. In the end I made my escape by promising to see him again on the evening of the third day. I made the promise in my one moment of weakness. It occurred to me that it would give me pleasure if, by any chance, I should see, for a moment, the girl whose courage was of so fine a quality that she neither feared a hideous death on the verge of a precipice nor disgrace in a London drawing-room.



He followed me to the door, entreating me for my address. So

I took my usual leisurely lunch and afterwards made my way to the uninspiring neighbourhood of Streatham. "The Towers," which I had discovered from a book of reference to be Mr. Edward Rendall's address, was a hopelessly vulgar edifice of grey stone, approached by what is generally described as a short carriage drive. An untidy-looking servant admitted me, after some delay, and escorted me across a linoleum-covered hall, odoriferous of a hot meal, to a small study at the back of the house, filled with shoddy furniture and hung with imitation prints. The popular M.P., as was his boast, was not in the least difficult of access. He came into the room within a few minutes, a pipe in his mouth, and giving evidence of all the easy good-nature which befitted his position.

"Don't know who you are, Mr. Buckross," he said, noticing with some surprise that I had not availed myself of the opportunity of shaking hands with him, "but sit

out into the

down, and welcome. What can I do for you?"

"I have brought you bad news, Mr. Rendall," I announced.

"The devil you have!" he answered, removing his pipe from his teeth and staring at me. "Who are you, any way? I don't seem to recognize your name."

"That really doesn't matter," I replied. "You can call me a journalist, if you like. It's as near the truth as anything about myself that I'm likely to tell you. Something very disagreeable is going to happen to you on the fourth day from now, and, as I am partly responsible for it, I have come out here to give you a word of warning."

"You're getting at me," he protested, uneasily.

"Not in the least," I assured him. "The facts to which I allude are these. I have in my possession a copy of the speech which you ought to have made at Liverpool last March and didn't, and also the original letter from Lord Kindersley offering you fifty thousand pounds to hold it up. I also know that you received that money on the following evening at the National Liberal Club, and I know what banks you entrusted it to."

Rendall was, I believe, at heart, just as much of a coward as Kindersley, but he showed it in a different fashion.

"You d——d, lying blackmailer!" he shouted. "How dare you come here with such a story! Get out of the house or I'll throw you down the steps."

"I have fulfilled my mission," I told him. "I shall be very glad indeed to go."

"Stop!" he shouted, as I turned towards the door. "How did you come by this cock-and-bull story?"

"How should I have come by it at all unless it were the truth?" I answered. "The whole world will know the facts soon enough. I obtained the papers from your wife."

"That's a lie, then," he declared, truculently, "for I saw her destroy the letter."

I smiled. The man, after all, was poor sport.

"She deceived you," I replied. "You saw her destroy a circular. She kept the

convinced was he that I would change my mind that he sent his secretary street after me.

letter. Perhaps she had her reasons. I bought it from her and another man at Frascati's Restaurant last night."

Conviction seized upon Mr. Edward Rendall, and, with conviction, fear.

"Look here," he proposed, "let's sit down and talk this over. I'll tell the girl to bring in cigars and a drop of whisky."

"I have not the least idea of accepting any hospitality from you," I assured him. "The documents are going to the Press in four days' time. I came here to give you that much notice."

His eyes narrowed a little.

"How do I know that the whole thing isn't a kid?" he said, suspiciously. "Have you got them with you?"

"I have," I told him.

He attempted nothing in the way of subtlety. He relied, I suppose, upon his six feet and his brawny shoulders. He came at me like a bull, headdown and fists swinging. It was a very ridiculous encounter.

NEXT morning there were sensational paragraphs in most of the financial papers. Shipping shares all reacted slightly in sympathy, but the slump in Kindersley's was a thing no one could account for. They had fallen from six to five within twenty-four hours, and as soon as I reached my office in Holborn I received frantic messages from Mr. Younghusband, imploring me to close with a profit of over twenty thousand pounds. There was nothing whatever wrong with the shares, he assured me, and they were bound to rally. I listened to all he had to say, gave him positive instructions not to disturb my operations in any way, and, disregarding his piteous protests, rang off and made my way to the great newspaper offices, where my business of the morning lay.

It took me an hour to get as far as the assistant editor. He was a lean man, with horn-rimmed spectacles and an inevitable sequence of cigarettes. He told me frankly that I had as much chance of seeing the editor as the Pope. So I told him my story and showed him the documents. He went out of the room for a moment and returned with the editor. They looked at me curiously.

"Who are you, Mr. Buckross?" the editor asked.

"A speculator," I answered. "I bought those papers from Rendall's divorced wife. She has a spite against him."

"How can one be sure that they are genuine?"

"Anyone who studies them must know that they are," I replied. "If you want confirmation, I told Lord Kindersley yesterday of their existence and forthcoming publication, and advised him to sell as many of his shares as possible. Your financial column will tell you the rest of the story."

The two men whispered together for some time. Then the editor, who was a grey-haired, clean-shaven man, with a mouth like a rat-trap and a voice like a military martinet, drew up an easy-chair and seated himself by my side.

"What do you want us to do with these documents, Mr. Buckross?" he asked.

"I want you to give me a very large sum of money for them, and then publish them," I replied.

"You know that there will be the devil of a row?"

"That will be your look-out. Their genuineness will be your justification."

The editor looked thoughtfully out of the window. His face was as hard as granite, but he had very grey, human eyes.

"We should have no compunction about bringing the thunders down upon Rendall," he said, "but with Lord Kindersley it is a little different. He is a considerable and reputable figure in Society."

"He might survive the disclosures," I suggested. "After all, there was a certain amount of justification for his conduct. He averted a national disaster, even if the means he used were immoral."

"A case can be built up for him, certainly," the editor remarked, musingly. "What is your price for these documents?"

"Ten thousand pounds, and they must not be used before Thursday," I replied.

"Why not before Thursday?"

"I have given Lord Kindersley so much grace."

"You will leave the documents in our hands?" the editor proposed.

I considered the matter. I could think of nothing likely to alter my plans, but I was conscious of a curious aversion to taking the irrevocable step.

"You shall have them," I agreed, "if you will give me a letter acknowledging that they are my property, and promising to return them to me without publication, should I desire it, on Wednesday afternoon."

"What about the money?" the editor asked. "Do you want anything on account?"

"You are prepared to give me the ten thousand pounds?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"We never bargain," he said. "There is no standard value for such goods as you offer. The question is whether you want anything in advance?"

"No, thank you," I answered. "I'll have the whole amount on Wednesday afternoon, or the documents back again. I think that it will be the money."

"I trust so," my two editorial friends replied, in fervent unison.

ON Wednesday morning the Kindersley Shipping Company shares stood at three and three-quarters, and a brief notice in the *Times* announced that his lordship was confined to his house in South Audley Street, suffering from a severe nervous breakdown. Some idiotic impulse prompted me, after I had paid my brief visit to my office, to take a stroll in that direction. A doctor's carriage was waiting outside Kindersley House, and, as I passed on the other side of the way, the front door opened, and the doctor himself stood on the threshold. The thought of Lord Kindersley's sufferings had, up to the present, inspired in me no other feeling than one of mild amusement. By the side of the doctor, however, Beatrice Kindersley was standing. I knew then that the end of my career must be close at hand. I was weakening. My nerve had gone. The instincts of childhood were returning to me. The morbid curiosity which had brought me to the house had been gratified with a vengeance. I had received a psychological stroke. The girl's drawn and tear-stained face had disturbed the callousness which I had deemed impregnable. A new scheme was forcing its way into my mind. There was only one redeeming point about it all—I walked for the next few hours in peril of my life.

AT half-past two that afternoon Beatrice Kindersley hastened into the little morning-room on the ground floor of Kindersley House to receive an unexpected visitor. Her lips parted in amazement when she saw who it was. I held up my finger.

"Colonel Escombe," I reminded her.

"You!" she exclaimed.

I knew that there was not a flaw in my make-up or deportment. I was the Colonel Escombe who had attended Norman Greyes' wedding, and in connection with whose presence there there had been some slight question concerning a pearl necklace.

"What do you want?" she asked, breathlessly.

"To help you," I answered. "I saw you this morning, and you seemed in trouble."

She smiled at me gratefully, but a moment later her face was clouded with anxiety.

"It is dear of you," she said, "but you must go away at once. You are running a terrible risk. Sir Norman Greyes is in the house. He is with my uncle now."

"What is he doing here?" I demanded.

"My uncle sent for him to see if he could help. There is some serious trouble. I don't know what it is, but my uncle says that it means ruin."

At the thought of the near presence of my old enemy my whole being seemed to stiffen. Yet, alas! the weakness remained.

"Listen," I said. "What does your distress mean? Has your uncle always been good to you? Is it for his sake that you are unhappy?"

"Entirely," she answered, without hesitation. "I know that a great many people call him hard and unscrupulous. To me he has been the dearest person in the world. It makes my heart ache to see him suffer."

I glanced at my watch.

"Listen," I said. "Give me five minutes to get clear away. When I am gone, give him this message. Tell him that Buckross has changed his mind and that he will hear from him before five o'clock."

"What have you to do with all this?" she asked, wonderingly.

"Never mind," I answered. "Be sure to give me five minutes, and don't deliver my message before Norman Greyes"

She walked with me to the door, but when I would have opened it she checked me. Already her step was lighter. She took my hands in hers, and I felt her soft breath upon my face.

"I am going to thank you," she whispered.

It was an absurd interlude.

BOTH the editor and the assistant editor did everything, short of going down on their knees, to induce me to change my mind. They offered me practically a fortune. They hinted, even, that honours might be obtained for me. They tried to appeal to my patriotism, to every known quality, not one of which I possessed. In the end I obtained the documents, addressed them to Miss Beatrice Kindersley, bought a great bunch of fragrant yellow roses, hired a messenger to go with me in the taxi-cab, and saw them delivered at Kindersley House.

That night I spent in my room, taking stock of myself. On the credit side, my deal in Kindersleys had brought me a profit of something like thirty thousand pounds, likely to be considerably added to as I had bought again at four. Further, I had abstained from becoming a blackmailer and I had knocked Mr. Edward Rendall down. On the other hand, I might easily have made a hundred thousand pounds—and I had behaved like a fool.

Perhaps the most disquieting feature of it all was that I was satisfied with the deal.

Next month: "The Great Elusion."

The METROPOLITAN TOUCH

BY

P. G. WODEHOUSE

ILLUSTRATED BY A. WALLIS MILLS

NOBODY is more alive than I am to the fact that young Bingo Little is in many respects a sound old egg: but I must say there are things about him that could be improved. The man's too expansive altogether. When it comes to letting the world in on the secrets of his heart, he has about as much shrinking reticence as a steam calliope. Well, for instance, here's the telegram I got from him one evening in November :—

I say Bertie old man I am in love at last. She is the most wonderful girl Bertie old man. This is the real thing at last Bertie. Come here at once and bring Jeeves. Oh I say you know that tobacco shop in Bond Street on the left side as you go up. Will you get me a hundred of their special cigarettes and send them to me here. I have run out. I know when you see her you will think she is the most wonderful girl. Mind you bring Jeeves. Don't forget the cigarettes.
—BINGO.

It had been handed in at Twing Post Office. In other words, he had submitted that frightful rot to the goggling eye of a village post-mistress who was probably the mainspring of local gossip and would have the place ringing with the news before nightfall. He couldn't have given himself away more completely if he had hired the town-crier. When I was a kid, I used to read stories about knights and Vikings and that species of chappie who would get up without a blush in the middle of a crowded banquet and loose off a song about how perfectly priceless they thought their best girl. I've often felt that those days would have suited young Bingo down to the ground.

Jeeves had brought the thing in with the evening drink, and I slung it over to him.

"It's about due, of course," I said. "Young Bingo hasn't been in love for at least a couple of months. I wonder who it is this time?"

"Miss Mary Burgess, sir," said Jeeves, "the niece of the Reverend Mr. Heppenstall. She is staying at Twing Vicarage."

"Great Scott!" I knew that Jeeves knew practically everything in the world, but this sounded like second-sight. "How do you know that?"

"When we were visiting Twing Hall in the summer, sir, I formed a somewhat close friendship with Mr. Heppenstall's butler. He is good enough to keep me abreast of the local news from time to time. From this account, sir, the young lady appears to be a very estimable young lady. Of a somewhat serious nature, I understand. Mr. Little is very *épris*, sir. Brookfield, my correspondent, writes that last week he observed him in the moonlight at an advanced hour gazing up at his window."

"Whose window? Brookfield's?"

"Yes, sir. Presumably under the impression that it was the young lady's."

"But what the deuce is he doing at Twing at all?"

"Mr. Little was compelled to resume his old position as tutor to Lord Wickhammersley's son at Twing Hall, sir. Owing to having been unsuccessful in some speculations at Hurst Park at the end of October."

"Good Lord, Jeeves! Is there anything you don't know?"

"I could not say, sir."

I picked up the telegram.

"I suppose he wants us to go down and help him out a bit?"

"That would appear to be his motive in dispatching the message, sir."

"Well, what shall we do? Go?"

"I would advocate it, sir. If I may say so, I think that Mr. Little should be encouraged in this particular matter."

"You think he's picked a winner this time?"

"I hear nothing but excellent reports of the young lady, sir. I think it is beyond question that she would be an admirable influence for Mr. Little, should the affair come to a happy conclusion. Such a union would also, I fancy, go far to restore Mr. Little to the good graces of his uncle, the young lady being well connected and possessing private means. In short, sir, I think that if there is anything that we can do we should do it."

"Well, with you behind him," I said, "I don't see how he can fail to click."

"You are very good, sir," said Jeeves. "The tribute is much appreciated."

BINGO met us at Twing station next day, and insisted on my sending Jeeves on in the car with the bags while he and I walked. He started in about the female the moment we had begun to hoof it.

"She is very wonderful, Bertie. She is not one of these flippant, shallow-minded modern girls. She is sweetly grave and beautifully earnest. She reminds me of—what is the name I want?"

"Marie Lloyd?"

"Saint Cecilia," said young Bingo, eyeing me with a good deal of loathing. "She reminds me of Saint Cecilia. She makes me yearn to be a better, nobler, deeper, broader man."

"What beats me," I said, following up a train of thought, "is what principle you pick them on. The girls you fall in love with, I mean. I mean to say, what's your system? As far as I can see, no two of them are alike. First it was Mabel the waitress, then Honoria Glossop, then that fearful blister Charlotte Corday Rowbotham——"

I own that Bingo had the decency to shudder. Thinking of Charlotte always made me shudder, too.

"You don't seriously mean, Bertie, that you are intending to compare the feeling I have for Mary Burgess, the holy devotion, the spiritual——"

"Oh, all right, let it go," I said. "I say, old lad, aren't we going rather a long way round?"

Considering that we were supposed to be heading for Twing Hall, it seemed to me that we were making a longish job of it. The Hall is about two miles from the station by the main road, and we had cut off down a lane, gone across country for a bit, climbed a stile or two, and were now working our way across a field that ended in another lane.

"She sometimes takes her little brother for a walk round this way," explained Bingo. "I thought we would meet her and bow, and you could see her, you know, and then we would walk on."

"Of course," I said, "that's enough excitement for anyone, and undoubtedly a corking reward for tramping three miles out of one's way over ploughed fields with tight boots, but don't we do anything else? Don't we tack on to the girl and buzz along with her?"

"Good Lord!" said Bingo, honestly amazed. "You don't suppose I've got nerve enough for that, do you? I just look at her from afar and all that sort of thing. Quick! Here she comes! No, I'm wrong!"

It was like that song of Harry Lander's where he's waiting for the girl and says "This is her–r–r. No, it's a rabbut." Young Bingo made me stand there in the teeth of a nor'-east half-gale for ten minutes, keeping me on my toes with a series of false alarms, and I was just thinking of suggesting that we should lay off and give the rest of the proceedings a miss, when round the corner there came a fox-terrier, and Bingo quivered like an aspen. Then there hove in sight a small boy, and he shook like a jelly. Finally, like a star whose entrance has been worked up by the *personnel* of the *ensemble*, a girl appeared, and his emotion was painful to witness. His face got so red that, what with his white collar and the fact that the wind had turned his nose blue, he looked more like a French flag than anything else. He sagged from the waist upwards, as if he had been filleted.

He was just raising his fingers limply to his cap when he suddenly saw that the girl wasn't alone. A chappie in clerical costume was also among those present, and the sight of him didn't seem to do Bingo a bit of good. His face got redder and his nose bluer, and it wasn't till they had nearly passed that he managed to get hold of his cap.

The girl bowed, the curate said: "Ah Little. Rough weather," the dog barked, and then they toddled on and the entertainment was over.

THE curate was a new factor in the situation to me. I reported his movements to Jeeves when I got to the Hall. Of course, Jeeves knew all about it already.

"That is the Reverend Mr. Wingham, Mr. Heppenstall's new curate, sir. I gather from Brookfield that he is Mr. Little's rival.

and that at the moment the young lady appears to favour him. Mr. Wingham has the advantage of being on the premises. He and the young lady play duets after dinner, which acts as a bond. Mr. Little on these occasions, I understand, prowls about in the road, chafing visibly."

"That seems to be all the poor fish is able to do, dash it. He can chafe all right, but there he stops. He's lost his pep. He's got no dash. Why, when we met her just now, he hadn't even the common manly courage to say 'Good evening'!"

"I gather that Mr. Little's affection is not unmingled with awe, sir."

'Well, how are we to help a man when he's such a rabbit as that? Have you anything to suggest? I shall be seeing him after dinner, and he's sure to ask first thing what you advise."

"In my opinion, sir, the most judicious course for Mr. Little to pursue would be to concentrate on the young gentleman."

"The small brother? How do you mean?"

"Make a friend of him, sir—take him for walks and so forth."

"It doesn't sound one of your red-hottest ideas. I must say I expected something fruitier than that."

"It would be a beginning, sir, and might lead to better things."

"Well, I'll tell him. I liked the look of her, Jeeves."

"A thoroughly estimable young lady, sir."

I slipped Bingo the tip from the stable that night, and was glad to observe that it seemed to cheer him up.

"Jeeves is always right," he said. "I ought to have thought of it myself. I'll start in to-morrow."

It was amazing how the chappie bucked up. Long before I left for town it had become a mere commonplace for him to speak to the girl. I mean, he didn't simply look stuffed when they met. The brother was forming a bond that was a dashed sight stronger than the curate's duets. She and Bingo used to take him for walks together. I asked Bingo what they talked about on these occasions, and he said Wilfred's future. The girl hoped that Wilfred would one day become a curate, but Bingo said no, there was something about curates he didn't quite like.

The day we left, Bingo came to see us off with Wilfred frisking about him like an old college chum. The last I saw of them, Bingo was standing him chocolates out of the slot-machine. A scene of peace and cheery good-will. Dashed promising, I thought

WHICH made it all the more of a jar, about a fortnight later, when his telegram arrived. As follows:—

Bertie old man I say Bertie could you possibly come down here at once. Everything gone wrong hang it all. Dash it Bertie you simply must come. I am in a state of absolute despair and heart-broken. Would you mind sending another hundred of those cigarettes. Bring Jeeves when you come Bertie. You simply must come Bertie. I rely on you. Don't forget to bring Jeeves.
—BINGO.

For a chap who's perpetually hard-up, I must say that young Bingo is the most wasteful telegraphist I ever struck. He's got no notion of condensing. The silly ass simply pours out his wounded soul at twopence a word, or whatever it is, without a thought.

"How about it, Jeeves?" I said. "I'm getting a bit fed. I can't go chucking all my engagements every second week in order to biff down to Twing and rally round young Bingo. Send him a wire telling him to end it all in the village pond."

"If you could spare me for the night, sir, I should be glad to run down and investigate."

"Oh, dash it! Well, I suppose there's nothing else to be done. After all, you're the fellow he wants. All right, carry on."

Jeeves got back late the next day.

"Well?" I said.

Jeeves appeared perturbed. He allowed his left eyebrow to flicker upwards in a concerned sort of manner.

"I have done what I could, sir," he said, "but I fear Mr. Little's chances do not appear bright. Since our last visit, sir, there has been a decidedly sinister and disquieting development."

"Oh, what's that?"

"You may remember Mr. Steggles, sir—the young gentleman who was studying for an examination with Mr. Heppenstall at the Vicarage?"

Of course I remembered Steggles. You'll place him if you throw your mind back. Recollect the rat-faced chappie of sporting tastes who made the book on the Sermon Handicap and then made another on the Choir Boys' Sports? That's the fellow. A blighter of infinite guile and up to every shady scheme on the list. Though, thanks to Jeeves, we had let him in pretty badly on the Girls' Egg-and-Spoon Race and collected a parcel off him in spite of his villainies.

"What's Steggles got to do with it?" I asked.

"I gather from Brookfield, sir, who chanced to overhear a conversation, that Mr. Steggles is interesting himself in the affair."

"Good Lord! What, making a book on it?"

"I understand that he is accepting wagers from those in his immediate circle, sir. Against Mr. Little, whose chances he does not seem to fancy."

"I don't like that, Jeeves."

"No, sir. It is sinister."

"From what I know of Steggles there will be dirty work."

"It has already occurred, sir."

"Already?"

"Yes, sir. It seems that, in pursuance of the policy which he had been good enough to allow me to suggest to him, Mr. Little escorted Master Burgess to the church bazaar, and there met Mr. Steggles, who was in the company of young Master Heppenstall, the Reverend Mr. Heppenstall's second son, who is home from Rugby just now, having recently recovered from an attack of mumps. The encounter took place in the refreshment-room, where Mr. Steggles was at that moment entertaining Master Heppenstall. To cut a long story short, sir, the two gentlemen became extremely interested in the hearty manner in which the lads were fortifying themselves; and Mr. Steggles offered to back his nominee in a weight-for-age eating contest against Master Burgess for a pound a side. Mr. Little admitted to me that he was conscious of a certain hesitation as to what the upshot might be, should Miss Burgess get to hear of the matter, but his sporting blood was too much for him and he agreed to the contest. This was duly carried out, both lads exhibiting the utmost willingness and enthusiasm, and eventually Master Burgess justified Mr. Little's confidence by winning, but only after a bitter struggle. Next day both contestants were in considerable pain; inquiries were made and confessions extorted, and Mr. Little—I learn from Brookfield, who happened to be

The brother was forming a bond. She and Bingo used to take him for walks together.

near the door of the drawing-room at the moment—had an extremely unpleasant interview with the young lady, which ended in her desiring him never to speak to her again."

There's no getting away from the fact that, if ever a man required watching, it's Steggles. Machiavelli could have taken his correspondence course.

"It was a put-up job, Jeeves!" I said. "I mean, Steggles worked the whole thing on purpose. It's his old nobbling game."

"There would seem to be no doubt about that, sir."

"Well, he seems to have dished poor old Bingo all right."

"That is the prevalent opinion, sir. Brookfield tells me that down in the village at the Cow and Horses seven to one is being freely offered Mr. Wingham and finding no takers."

"Good Lord! Are they betting about it down in the village, too?"

"Yes, sir. And in adjoining hamlets also. The affair has caused widespread interest. I am told that there is a certain sporting reaction in even so distant a spot as Lower Bingley."

"Well, I don't see what there is to do. If Bingo is such a chump——"

"One is fighting a losing battle, I fear, sir, but I did venture to indicate to Mr. Little a course of action which might prove of advantage. I recommended him to busy himself with good works."

"Good works?"

"About the village, sir. Reading to the bedridden—chatting with the sick—that sort of thing, sir. We can but trust that good results will ensue."

"Yes, I suppose so," I said, doubtfully. "But, by gosh, if I was a sick man I'd hate to have a looney like young Bingo coming and gibbering at my bedside."

"There *is* that aspect of the matter, sir," said Jeeves.

I DIDN'T hear a word from Bingo for a couple of weeks, and I took it after a while that he had found the going too hard and had chucked in the towel. And then, one night not long before Christmas, I came back to the flat pretty lateish, having been out dancing at the Embassy. I was fairly tired, having swung a practically non-stop shoe from shortly after dinner till two a.m., and bed seemed to be indicated. Judge of my chagrin and all that sort of thing, therefore, when, tottering to my room and switching on the light, I observed the foul features of young Bingo all over the pillow. The blighter had appeared from nowhere and was in my bed, sleeping like an infant with a sort of happy dreamy smile on his map.

A bit thick, I mean to say! We Woosters are all for the good old mediæval hosp. and all that, but when it comes to finding chappies collaring your bed, the thing becomes a trifle too mouldy. I hove a shoe, and Bingo sat up, gurgling.

"'s matter? 's matter?" said young Bingo.

"What the deuce are you doing in my bed?" I said.

"Oh, hallo, Bertie! So there you are!"

"Yes, here I am. What are you doing in my bed?"

"I came up to town for the night on business."

"Yes, but what are you doing in my bed?"

"Dash it all, Bertie," said young Bingo, querulously, "don't keep harping on your beastly bed. There's another made up in the spare room. I saw Jeeves make it with my own eyes. I believe he meant it for me, but I knew what a perfect host you were, so I just turned in here. I say, Bertie, old man," said Bingo, apparently fed up with the discussion about sleeping-quarters, "I see daylight."

"Well, it's getting on for three in the morning."

"I was speaking figuratively, you ass. I meant that hope has begun to dawn. About Mary Burgess, you know. Sit down and I'll tell you all about it."

"I won't. I'm going to sleep."

"To begin with," said young Bingo, settling himself comfortably against the pillows and helping himself to a cigarette from my special private box, "I must once again pay a marked tribute to good old Jeeves. A modern Solomon. I was badly up against it when I came to him for advice, but he rolled up with a tip which has put me—I use the term advisedly and in a conservative spirit—on velvet. He may have told you that he recommended me to win back the lost ground by busying myself with good works? Bertie, old man," said young Bingo, earnestly, "for the last two weeks I've been comforting the sick to such an extent that, if I had a brother and you brought him to me on a sick-bed at this moment, by Jove, old man, I'd heave a brick at him. However, though it took it out of me like the deuce, the scheme worked splendidly. She softened visibly before I'd been at it a week. Started to bow again when we met in the street, and so forth. About a couple of days ago she distinctly smiled—in a sort of faint, saint-like kind of way, you know—when I ran into her outside the Vicarage. And yesterday—I say, you remember that curate chap,

Wingham? Fellow with a long nose and a sort of goofy expression?"

"Of course I remember him. Your rival."

"Rival?" Bingo raised his eyebrows. "Oh, well, I suppose you could have called him that at one time. Though it sounds a little far-fetched."

"Does it?" I said, stung by the sickening complacency of the chump's manner. "Well, let me tell you that the last I heard was that at the Cow and Horses in Twing village and all over the place as far as Lower Bingley they were offering seven to one on the curate and finding no takers."

Bingo started violently, and sprayed cigarette-ash all over my bed.

"Betting!" he gargled. "Betting! You don't mean that they're betting on this holy, sacred—— Oh, I say, dash it all! Haven't people any sense of decency and reverence? Is nothing safe from their beastly, sordid graspingness? I wonder," said young Bingo, thoughtfully, "if there's a chance of my getting any of that seven-to-one money? Seven to one! What a price! Who's offering it, do you know? Oh, well, I suppose it wouldn't do. No, I suppose it wouldn't be quite the thing."

"You seem dashed confident," I said. "I'd always thought that Wingham——"

"Oh, I'm not worried about him," said Bingo. "I was just going to tell you. Wingham's got the mumps, and won't be out and about for weeks. And, jolly as that is in itself, it's not all. You see, he was producing the Village School Christmas Entertainment, and now I've taken over the job. I went to old Heppenstall last night and clinched the contract. Well, you see what that means. It means that I shall be absolutely the centre of the village life and thought for three solid weeks, with a terrific triumph to wind up with. Everybody looking up to me and fawning on me, don't you see, and all that. It's bound to have a powerful effect on Mary's mind. It will show her that I am capable of serious effort; that there is a solid foundation of worth in me; that, mere butterfly as she may once have thought me, I am in reality——"

"Oh, all right, let it go!"

"It's a big thing, you know, this Christmas Entertainment. Old Heppenstall very much wrapped up in it. Nibs from all over the countryside rolling up. The Squire present, with family. A big chance for me, Bertie, my boy, and I mean to make the most of it. Of course, I'm handicapped a bit by not having been in on the thing from the start. Will you credit it that that uninspired doughnut of a curate wanted to give the public some rotten little fairy play out of a book for children published about fifty years ago, without one good laugh or the semblance of a gag in it? It's too late to alter the thing entirely, but at least I can jazz it up. I'm going to write them in something zippy to brighten the thing up a bit."

"You can't write."

"Well, when I say write, I mean pinch. That's why I've popped up to town. I've been to see that revue, 'Cuddle Up!' at the Palladium, to-night. Full of good stuff. Of course, it's rather hard to get anything in the nature of a big spectacular effect in the Twing Village Hall, with no scenery to speak of and a chorus of practically imbecile kids of ages ranging from nine to fourteen, but I think I see my way. Have you seen 'Cuddle Up'?"

"Yes. Twice."

"Well, there's some good stuff in the first act, and I can lift practically all the numbers. Then there's that show at the Palace. I can see the *matinée* of that to-morrow before I leave. There's sure to be some decent bits in that. Don't you worry about my not being able to write a hit. Leave it to me, laddie, leave it to me. And now, my dear old chap," said young Bingo, snuggling down cosily, "you mustn't keep me up talking all night. It's all right for you fellows who have nothing to do, but I'm a busy man. Good night, old thing. Close the door quietly after you and switch out the light. Breakfast about ten to-morrow, I suppose, what? Right-o. Good night."

FOR the next three weeks I didn't see Bingo. He became a sort of Voice Heard Off, developing a habit of ringing me up on long-distance and consulting me on various points arising at rehearsal, until the day when he got me out of bed at eight in the morning to ask whether I thought "Merry Christmas!" was a good title. I told him then that this nuisance must now cease, and after that he cheesed it, and practically passed out of my life till one afternoon when I got back to the flat to dress for dinner and found Jeeves inspecting a whacking big poster sort of thing which he had draped over the back of an arm-chair.

"Good Lord, Jeeves!" I said. I was feeling rather weak that day, and the thing shook me. "What on earth's that?"

"Mr. Little sent it to me, sir, and desired me to bring it to your notice."

"Well, you've certainly done it!"

I took another look at the object. There was no doubt about it, it caught the eye. It was about seven feet long, and most of

the lettering in about as bright red ink as I ever struck.

"What do you make of it, Jeeves?" I said.

"I confess I am a little doubtful, sir. I think Mr. Little would have done better to follow my advice and confine himself to good works about the village."

"You think the thing will be a frost?"

"I could not hazard a conjecture, sir. But my experience has been that what pleases the London public is not always so acceptable to the rural mind. The metropolitan touch sometimes proves a trifle too exotic for the provinces."

"I suppose I ought to go down and see the dashed thing?"

"I think Mr. Little would be wounded were you not present, sir."

THE Village Hall at Twing is a smallish building, smelling of apples. It was full when I turned up on the evening of the twenty-third, for I had purposely timed myself to arrive not long before the kick-off. I had had experience of one or two of these binges, and didn't want to run any risk of coming early and finding myself shoved into a seat in one of the front rows where I wouldn't be able to execute a quiet sneak into the open air half-way through the proceedings, if the occasion seemed to demand it. I secured a nice strategic position near the door at the back of the hall.

From where I stood I had a good view of the audience. As always on these occasions, the first few rows were occupied by the Nibs—consisting of the Squire, a fairly mauve old sportsman with white whiskers, his family, a platoon of local parsons, and perhaps a couple of dozen of prominent pew-holders. Then came a dense squash of what you might call the lower middle classes. And at the back, where I was, we came down with a jerk in the social scale, this end of the hall being given up almost entirely to a collection of frankly Tough Eggs, who had rolled up not so much for any love of the drama as because there was a free tea after the show. Take it for all in all, a representative gathering of Twing life and thought. The Nibs were whispering in a pleased manner to each other, the Lower Middles were sitting up very straight as if they'd been bleached, and the Tough Eggs whiled away the time by cracking nuts and exchanging low rustic wheezes. The girl, Mary Burgess, was at the piano, playing a waltz. Beside her stood the curate, Wingham, apparently recovered. The temperature, I should think, was about a hundred and twenty-seven.

Somebody jabbed me heartily in the lower ribs, and I perceived the man Steggles.

"Hallo!" he said: "I didn't know you were coming down."

I didn't like the chap, but we Woosters can wear the mask. I beamed a bit.

"Oh, yes," I said. "Bingo wanted me to roll up and see his show."

"I hear he's giving us something pretty ambitious," said the man Steggles. "Big effects and all that sort of thing."

"I believe so."

"Of course, it means a lot to him, doesn't it? He's told you about the girl, of course?"

"Yes. And I hear you're laying seven to one against him," I said, eyeing the blighter a trifle austerely.

He didn't even quiver.

"Just a little flutter to relieve the monotony of country life," he said. "But you've got the facts a bit wrong. It's down in the village that they're laying seven to one. I can do you better than that, if you feel in a speculative mood. How about a tenner at a hundred to eight?"

"Good Lord! Are you giving that?"

"Yes. Somehow," said Steggles, meditatively, "I have a sort of feeling, a kind of premonition, that something's going to go wrong to-night. You know what Little is. A bungler if ever there was one. Something tells me that this show of his is going to be a frost. And if it is, of course I should think it would prejudice the girl against him pretty badly. His standing always was rather shaky."

"Are you going to try and smash up the show?" I said, sternly.

"Me!" said Steggles. "Why, what could I do? Half a minute, I want to go and speak to a man."

He buzzed off, leaving me distinctly disturbed. I could see from the fellow's eye that he was meditating some of his customary rough stuff, and I thought Bingo ought to be warned. But there wasn't time and I couldn't get at him. Almost immediately after Steggles had left me the curtain went up.

Except as a prompter, Bingo wasn't much in evidence in the early part of the performance. The thing at the outset was merely one of those weird dramas which you dig out of books published around Christmas time and entitled "Twelve Little Plays for the Tots," or something like that. The kids drooled on in the usual manner, the booming voice of Bingo ringing out from time to time behind the scenes when the fat-heads forgot their lines; and the audience was settling down into the sort of torpor usual on these occasions, when the first of Bingo's interpolated bits occurred. It was that number which What's-her-name sings in that revue at the Palace—you

would recognize the tune if I hummed it, but I never can get hold of the dashed thing. It always got three encores at the Palace, and it went well now, even with a squeaky-voiced child jumping on and off the key like a chamois of the Alps leaping from crag to crag. Even the Tough Eggs liked it. At the end of the second refrain the entire house was shouting for an encore, and the kid with the voice like a slate-pencil took a deep breath and started to let it go once more.

At this point all the lights went out.

I DON'T know when I've had anything so sudden and devastating happen to me before. They didn't flicker. They just went out. The hall was in complete darkness.

Well, of course, that sort of broke the spell, as you might put it. People started to shout directions, and the Tough Eggs stamped their feet and settled down for a pleasant time. And, of course, young Bingo had to make an ass of himself. His voice suddenly shot at us out of the darkness.

"Ladies and gentlemen, something has gone wrong with the lights——"

The Tough Eggs were tickled by this bit of information straight from the stable. They took it up as a sort of battle-cry. Then, after about five minutes, the lights went up again, and the show was resumed.

It took ten minutes after that to get the audience back into its state of coma, but eventually they began to settle down, and everything was going nicely when a small boy with a face like a turbot edged out in front of the curtain, which had been lowered after a pretty painful scene about a wishing-

"Good Lord, Jeeves!" I said. "What on earth's that?"
"Mr. Little sent it to me, sir, and desired me to bring it to your notice."

ring or a fairy's curse or something of that sort, and started to sing that song of George Thingummy's out of "Cuddle Up." You know the one I mean. "Always Listen to Mother, Girls!" it's called, and he gets the audience to join in and sing the refrain. Quite a ripeish ballad, and one which I myself have frequently sung in my bath with not a little vim; but by no means—as anyone but a perfect sapheaded prune like young Bingo would have known—by no means the sort of thing for a children's Christmas entertainment in the old village hall. Right from the start of the first refrain the bulk of the audience had begun to stiffen in their seats and fan themselves, and the Burgess girl at the piano was accompanying in a stunned, mechanical sort of way, while the curate at her side averted his gaze in a pained manner. The Tough Eggs, however, were all for it.

At the end of the second refrain the kid stopped and began to sidle towards the wings. Upon which the following brief duologue took place:—

YOUNG BINGO (*Voice heard off, ringing against the rafters*): "Go on!"

THE KID (*Coyly*): "I don't like to."

YOUNG BINGO (*Still louder*): "Go on, you little blighter, or I'll slay you!"

I suppose the kid thought it over swiftly and realized that Bingo, being in a position to get at him, had better be conciliated whatever the harvest might be; for he shuffled down to the front and, having shut his eyes and giggled hysterically, said: "Ladies and gentlemen, I will now call upon Squire Tressidder to oblige by singing the refrain!"

You know, with the most charitable feelings towards him, there are moments when you can't help thinking that young Bingo ought to be in some sort of a home. I suppose, poor fish, he had pictured this as the big punch of the evening. He had imagined, I take it, that the Squire would spring jovially to his feet, rip the song off his chest, and all would be gaiety and mirth. Well, what happened was simply that old Tressidder—and, mark you, I'm not blaming him—just sat where he was, swelling and turning a brighter purple every second. The lower middle classes remained in frozen silence, waiting for the roof to fall. The only section of the audience that really seemed to enjoy the idea was the Tough Eggs, who yelled with enthusiasm. It was jam for the Tough Eggs.

And then the lights went out again.

WHEN they went up, some minutes later, they disclosed the Squire marching stiffly out at the head of his family, fed up to the eyebrows; the Burgess girl at the piano with a pale, set look; and the curate gazing at her with something in his expression that seemed to suggest that, though all this was no doubt deplorable, he had spotted the silver lining.

The show went on once more. There were great chunks of Plays-for-the-Tots dialogue, and then the girl at the piano struck up the prelude to that Orange-Girl number that's the big hit of the Palace revue. I took it that this was to be Bingo's smashing act one finale. The entire company was on the stage, and a clutching hand had appeared round the edge of the curtain, ready to pull at the right moment. It looked like the finale all right. It wasn't long before I realized that it was something more. It was the finish.

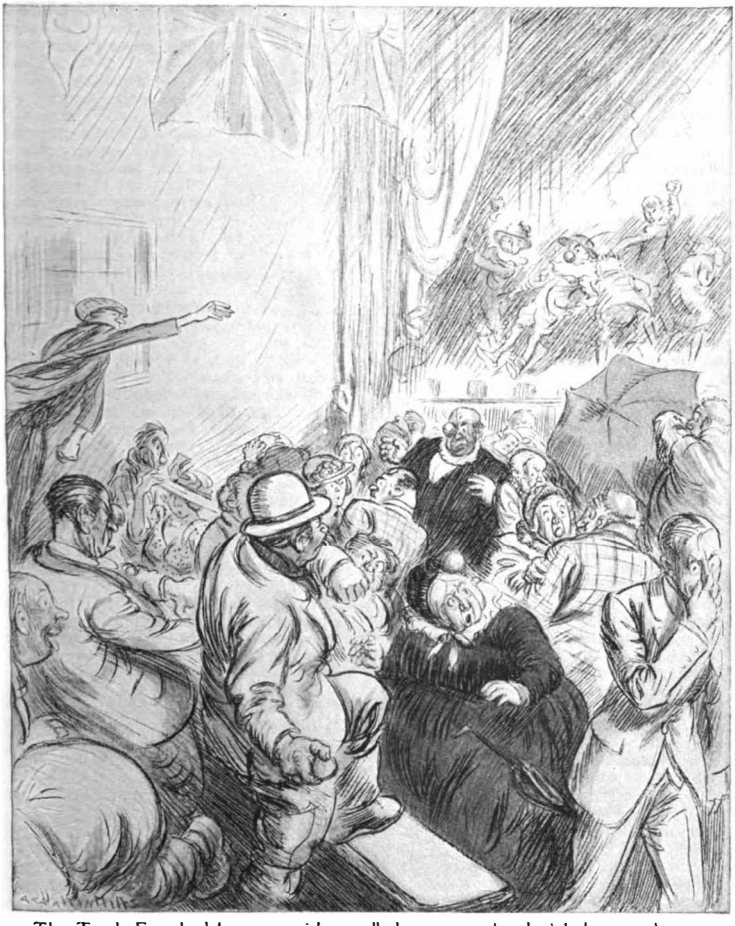
I take it you know that Orange number at the Palace? It goes—

Oh, won't you something something oranges,
My something oranges,
My something oranges;
Oh, won't you something something something I forget,
Something something something tumty tumty yet:
Oh——

or words to that effect. It's a dashed clever lyric, and the tune's good, too; but the thing that made the number was the business where the girls take oranges out of their baskets, you know, and toss them lightly to the audience. I don't know if you've ever noticed it, but it always seems to tickle an audience to bits when they get things thrown at them from the stage. Every time I've been to the Palace the customers have simply gone wild over this number.

But at the Palace, of course, the oranges are made of yellow wool and the girls don't so much chuck them as drop them limply into the first and second rows. I began to gather that the business was going to be treated rather differently to-night, when a dashed great chunk of pips and mildew sailed past my ear and burst on the wall behind me. Another landed with a squelch on the neck of one of the Nibs in the third row. And then a third took me right on the tip of the nose, and I kind of lost interest in the proceedings for awhile.

When I had scrubbed my face and got my eyes to stop watering for a moment, I saw that the evening's entertainment had begun to resemble one of Belfast's livelier nights. The air was thick with shrieks and fruit. The kids on the stage, with Bingo buzzing distractedly to and fro in their midst, were having the time of their lives. I suppose they realized that this couldn't go on for ever, and were making the most



The Tough Eggs had begun to pick up all the oranges that hadn't burst and were shooting them back, so that the audience got it both coming and going.

of their chances. The Tough Eggs had begun to pick up all the oranges that hadn't burst and were shooting them back, so that the audience got it both coming and going. In fact, take it all round, there was a certain amount of confusion; and, just as things had begun really to hot up, out went the lights again.

It seemed to me about my time for leaving, so I slid for the door. I was hardly outside when the audience began to stream out. They surged about me in twos and threes, and I've never seen a public body so dashed unanimous on any point. To a man—and to a woman—they were cursing poor old Bingo; and there was a large and

rapidly growing school of thought which held that the best thing to do would be to waylay him as he emerged and splash him about in the village pond a bit.

There were such a dickens of a lot of these enthusiasts and they looked so jolly determined that it seemed to me that the only matey thing to do was to go behind and warn young Bingo to turn his coat-collar up and breeze off snakily by some side-exit. I went behind, and found him sitting on a box in the wings, perspiring pretty freely and looking more or less like the spot marked with a cross where the accident happened. His hair was standing up and his ears were hanging down, and one harsh word would undoubtedly have made him burst into tears.

"Bertie," he said hollowly, as he saw me, "it was that blighter Steggles! I caught one of the kids before he could get away and got it all out of him. Steggles substituted real oranges for the balls of wool which with infinite sweat and at a cost of nearly a quid I had specially prepared. Well, I will now proceed to tear him limb from limb. It'll be something to do."

I hated to spoil his day-dreams, but it had to be.

"Good heavens, man," I said, "you haven't time for frivolous amusements now. You've got to get out. And quick!"

"Bertie," said Bingo in a dull voice, "she was here just now. She said it was all my fault and that she would never speak to me again. She said she had always suspected me of being a heartless practical joker, and now she knew. She said—— Oh, well, she ticked me off properly."

"That's the least of your troubles," I said. It seemed impossible to rouse the poor zib to a sense of his position. "Do you realize that about two hundred of Twing's heftiest are waiting for you outside to chuck you into the pond?"

"No!"

"Absolutely!"

For a moment the poor chap seemed crushed. But only for a moment. There has always been something of the good old English bulldog breed about Bingo. A strange, sweet smile flickered for an instant over his face.

"It's all right," he said. "I can sneak out through the cellar and climb over the wall at the back. They can't intimidate *me!*"

IT couldn't have been more than a week later when Jeeves, after he had brought me my tea, gently steered me away from the sporting page of the *Morning Post* and directed my attention to an announcement in the engagements and marriages column.

It was a brief statement that a marriage had been arranged and would shortly take place between the Hon. and Rev. Hubert Wingham, third son of the Right Hon. the Earl of Sturridge, and Mary, only daughter of the late Matthew Burgess, of Weatherly Court, Hants.

"Of course," I said, after I had given it the east-to-west, "I expected this, Jeeves."

"Yes, sir."

"She would never forgive him what happened that night."

"No, sir."

"Well," I said, as I took a sip of the fragrant and steaming, "I don't suppose it will take old Bingo long to get over it. It's about the hundred and eleventh time this sort of thing has happened to him. You're the man I'm sorry for."

"Me, sir?"

"Well, dash it all, you can't have forgotten what a deuce of a lot of trouble you took to bring the thing off for Bingo. It's too bad that all your work should have been wasted."

"Not entirely wasted, sir."

"Eh?"

"It is true that my efforts to bring about the match between Mr. Little and the young lady were not successful, but still I look back upon the matter with a certain satisfaction."

"Because you did your best, you mean?"

"Not entirely, sir, though of course that thought also gives me pleasure. I was alluding more particularly to the fact that I found the affair financially remunerative."

"Financially remunerative? What do you mean?"

"When I learned that Mr. Steggles had interested himself in the contest, sir, I went shares with my friend Brookfield and bought the book which had been made on the issue by the landlord of the Cow and Horses. It has proved a highly profitable investment. Your breakfast will be ready almost immediately, sir. Kidneys on toast and mushrooms. I will bring it when you ring."

Next month: "The Delayed Exit of Claude and Eustace."

GAME and SETT

by

OLE LUK-OIE

(Author of "The Green Curve," etc.)

ILLUSTRATED BY
W.R.S.STOTT

> The Ball no question makes of Ayes and Noes,
> But Right or Left as strikes the Player goes;
> And He that toss'd you down into the Field,
> He knows about it all—HE knows—HE knows!
>
> —*The Rubáiyát.*

I.

NO curfew tolled the knell of parting day; nor did any lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea. But the advance parties of flying foxes stringing out across the sky, slowly flapping their leathery wings as they "zoomed" over the mango trees of the *Bagh* on their nightly foray to the fruit gardens on the other side of the river, announced as clearly as any bell the approaching close of another long, long Indian day.

In front of the Gymkhana club-house sat a few ladies talking listlessly and discussing tea or ices. They were inactive. But all round were sights and sounds which showed that the British male cannot take his ease or enjoy relaxation after his daily toil without the assistance of a spherical body of some sort, whether it be hollow or solid, or of indiarubber, boxwood, ivory, bamboo-root, or of string sewn up in kid. From the hard tennis courts—there were no such things as grass courts—came the pat of the balls and the voices of the players scoring; from the croquet ground came the bang of wood against wood; from inside the club-house the click of the billiard and pool tables; from the nearer polo ground the thud of hoofs on hard soil, and from that farther off the same sound reduced to a mere drumming; while from the roofless rectangular mass of brickwork behind one end of the club echoed the shrill cries of a racquet marker calling the game, the smack of the ball, and an occasional loud report as the wood skirting received a hard drive.

The searing hot wind which had been blowing all day had now dropped, and there was not sufficient breeze to disperse the straight ascending cheroot smoke of the two men clad in flannels who were seated outside the racquet courts, waiting their turn for another game and idly watching the distant polo through the dust haze.

They sat for a few minutes silent, smoking and sweating, especially sweating. A hard single at racquets is no gentle exercise. When played within four walls whose dull black surface has been drinking in the heat of the tropical sun for hours, only to radiate and give it out when the sun itself goes down, the players can verily be said to lard the lean earth. At last one spoke: "Who's in No. 3 Court?"

"Rayce and Leslie Jerome."

"I can't make out why young Jerome is such pals with Rayce. He's a rotter."

"He's not so bad really, if he didn't lift his elbow quite so much and always play to win. But I must say he was the limit last Wednesday. Were you here?"

"No; I was at polo."

"But haven't you heard what an infernal ass he made of himself?"

"No."

"I should have thought it had gone the round of the station by now. We were playing a four—me, Rayce, Tomkins, I think it was, and the Colonel."

"What, Foxy Grandpa?"

"No, no, Tomkins's Colonel, old Tomato. I was playing with him. We had had a jolly tight game and had got to one sett all and were leading in the third and Rayce was in. Rayce had been rather ratty the whole game. He served a fault, and then old Ghafoor,

who was marking, called his second a fault. I thought he was right, but it was a very fast ball near the line and difficult to judge. I don't know if Rayce, who'd put up a run of six, was just riled at serving himself out or really thought it was a wrong call, but he turns round, curses Ghafoor for not keeping his eyes open, then walks up to the end wall, where there were dozens of used balls, and whangs one slap at him as hard as he can—and you know how he can hit. Luckily he misses by a few inches, and the surprised Ghafoor, who wasn't taking any chances, gently fades backwards on to the floor of the gallery. Rayce was too angry to see this, and without saying any more continues to let fly at the corner of the gallery like a bally machine-gun. It was funny. As soon as Ghafoor hears a ball hit the angle or whiz safely overhead into the gallery, he pops up his silly old face like a Jack-in-the-Box and begins to whine out: '*Ghareeb parwar—mera khasoor*'—and the usual song, when—' Ping,' up comes another hot one, and down goes his head. Of course, all the balls that didn't chase each other round the gallery seats or biff out into the middle of the polo ground came back round the angle like lightning. Rayce was too angry or too muzzy to notice them or to dodge, and when one catches him a fair dinger on the brisket he only gets madder than ever. At first, when we saw that Ghafoor was in no danger, we others thought it rather a joke. But when the ass went on, and there were about three balls in the air at once, all travelling about a hundred miles per hour, it got a bit thick."

"How priceless!"

"M'yes! Anyway, it was too much for our money. First we cursed the fool and told him to chuck it. Then we threw ourselves spread-eagled on our bellies, with our racquets over our heads."

"Old Tomato as well?" chuckled the other.

"Rather. He was the first to play spatchcock. It was 'Ping' from Rayce's racquet, 'B-r-r-r,' 'Smack,' 'Smack,' 'Smack,' on the walls, and then a treble-barrelled volley of oaths from three mouths just raised off the floor, before the next shot. Finally the Tomato, almost apoplectic, puts up his old purple phiz behind his racquet and roars out in his best brigade drill voice: 'Mr. Rayce, if you don't stop this infernal nonsense at once, sir, I'll put you under arrest.' By then Rayce, who'd got close to the end wall without noticing it, smashes his racquet slap in half and throws the bits at the place where Ghafoor no longer was. When the 'Cease Fire' sounds, up spring Jerome and me smartly to attention, and the Tomato scrambles to his knees, all black as sweeps from the muck on the floor. 'What the devil do you mean, sir?' starts off the old boy, and didn't he dress Rayce down to rights neither? That sportsman, if you please, tried to bluff it out; insisted on finishing the sett; said he was winning and wanted to bet on the result! The Tomato naturally not only refused to go on, but said he'd never play with Rayce again, and would report the whole matter to his C.O. And he was jolly well right, I say."

"Yes, but what had bitten Rayce? He's usually a pretty cool card, a bit too cool, I've always found."

"I don't know if it's the heat or the other thing, but he has been looking very bulgy about the collar lately. I think he's also had a bad month at cards. It's a pity, because if he would only take a pull at himself he'd be all right. He's a jolly good all-round man."

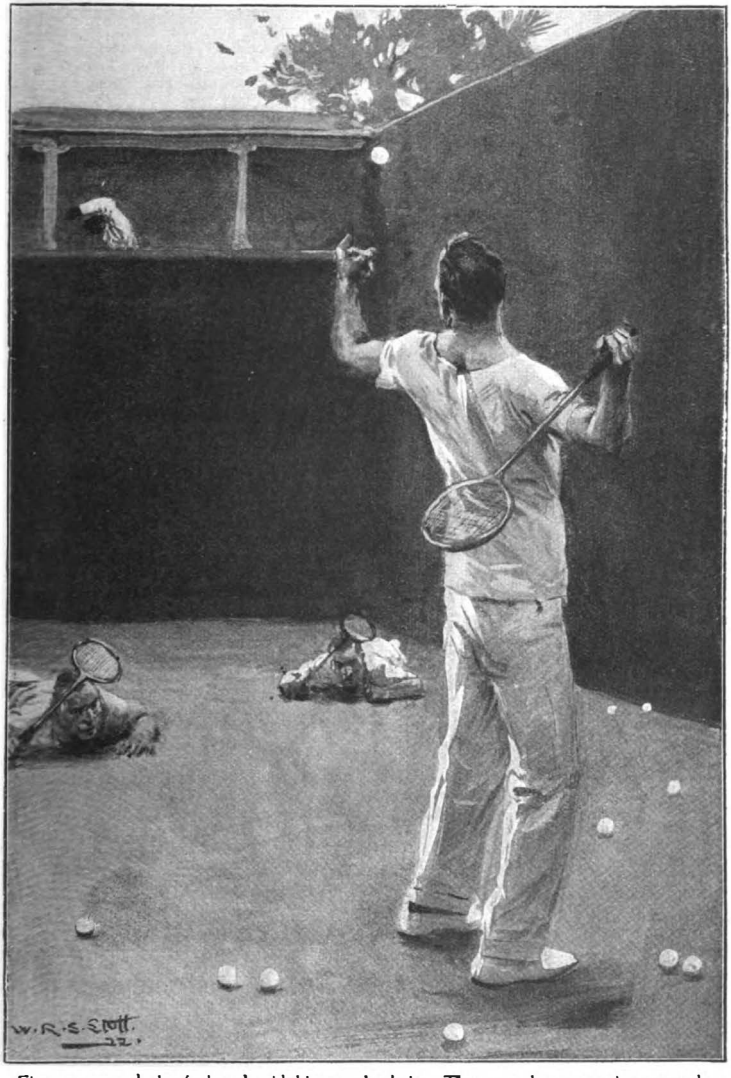
"Yes. God's given him a straight eye and a quick wrist. But a man ain't a sportsman simply because he's good at games; and I have no use for Rayce. I don't know anything about his birth; but he's one of Nature's cads, and his charm and *savoir faire* make him all the more dangerous—showy bounder. It's a pity that young Leslie Jerome's so thick with him."

"Oh, I dunno. I think you're a bit hard on him. I'm rather sorry for the poor devil. I kind of suspect he's up against it in more ways than one. Anyway, he's not entirely the scheming bad man of the play. He does give himself away sometimes."

"His uncontrollable brandy temper gives him away, as in the case you've just been telling me about, and then the hairy heel comes out. Fancy plugging old Ghafoor! There's Mummie's real little gentleman for you! He's got cad stamped all over him in plush letters a foot high. Thank God he's not in my regiment. It ain't for nothing they call him 'Honest Henry' in his own, my boy. Dam' 'im, anyway. It's gettin' dark pretty quick. Any use waiting for another game?"

"Yes. I thought I heard 'game ball' called in No. 3, so they may be near the end. Let's wait a bit. There's still light."

He was correct. In No. 3 Court the native squatting on the parapet at the corner of the gallery, bag of balls at his side, little scoring board in his hand, had just called "game ball." Leslie Jerome and Henry Rayce were playing a single; it was fourteen-ten in Jerome's favour, the games standing at one all. Jerome, a slight, pleasant-faced, freckled youth with light hair, was a good player. His opponent, some five or six years his senior, was a bulkier man and in a fleshy way good-looking, with dark crisp hair and blue eyes. He was powerfully



First we cursed the fool and told him to chuck it. Then we threw ourselves spread-eagled on our bellies, with our racquets over our heads.

built, especially about the neck and shoulders. At the moment the expression on his face, now purple with exertion, was distinctly unpleasant, for he was losing. He did not like being beaten at anything, and owing to his skill and generally cool temperament rarely was.

The youngster was " in." He served one of his best, hoping to finish the game. But he was a little over-anxious and hit too straight, and the ball came back down the middle of the court. Rayce saw his chance and took it. He volleyed the service low and hard in an absolutely untakeable return.

" Ten-FourTeen," sang out the marker.

Rayce had a glint in his eye as he went across to the right-hand serving box, holding up his hand for a new ball. He bounced it, found it too soft, and threw it away. After trying two more he was satisfied. He then served, and the rasping twang of the catgut told of the vicious cut put into the stroke.

" Perlay," cried the voice from the gallery.

The serve was a beauty which, hard as it was, hugged the walls and left Jerome guessing.

" Elleven-FourTeen," echoed from above.

With three more equally unplayable serves which almost split the ball the score mounted up; and the voice on high, vibrant as that of a muezzin from a minaret, rang out: " Perlay "—" Terweluv-FourTeen." "Perlay "—" ThatTeen-FourTeen." " Perlay "—" FourTeen Arl. Game Ball Arl. Sahib e'sett ? "

" Anyone waiting ? " asked Jerome.

" Assuredly; two sahibs are without."

" Sudden death, then,"

From the left-hand serving box, " Honest Henry," perhaps to give his opponent a chance, perhaps to set a trap, knowing that he had him rattled, deliberately served a " donkey drop " down the middle. Jerome took the bait, ran forward, and tried to kill it, but hit too low; and the game ended with a deafening report on the wood.

" Damn ! " said Leslie Jerome.

" Game and e'sett," called the impassive voice of Fate.

THE two dripping figures passed out of the four-walled oven, and sank into the chairs vacated by the waiting pair, who had got up on hearing the game called.

" Peg ? " suddenly remarked Jerome. " Sun's about down."

" Thanks," said the other, who did not attach much importance to the altitude of the sun when it was a matter of drinks. " Gave you a sportin' chance with my last."

" Yes, I know," was the slightly disgusted reply. " I took the bait all right; but you'd got me rattled and, of course, I foozled. Thought I'd got you beat. You made a splendid recovery with that service of yours; couldn't get near it; don't know how you get so much cut on. It's enough to pull the skin off the ball."

" M'yes, it seems to bally well pull the guts out of my racquets. I wonder what my bill is going to be this month ? Ghafoor is no earthly at re-stringing, and Ali is a perfect coolie. Once a racquet goes it's done. And they're fifteen dibs a time now. Yes, I knew you thought it was all over but the shouting," he chuckled—" but, as I've often told you, a game is never lost till it's won. ' Game and——' is the only thing that counts."

" Yes, I know," was the rueful reply. " When it's ' game ball,' or ninety-nine in a hundred up, against you, up goes your tail and you make a special effort. It's no good trying to rattle you, 'Onest 'Enry, you only produce some more trumps. But still, I don't agree about ' Game and——' being the only thing that matters. If the match is a good hard one I like it, whoever wins. But push down your drink and come and change. I want to poodle-fake for a bit. Don't you hear the band a-callin' ? "

" Right-o. The mosquitoes have chewed the pattern of the seat of this chair on me by now." The tone was one of indifference. At heart the speaker was the reverse of indifferent. He had been itching to get away, but did not want to show it, and did not dare propose it for fear of giving away his motive. Jerome, however, was totally unsuspicious of Rayce's hidden desire or of the existence of the motive.

" By the way," continued Rayce, as both strolled towards the dressing-rooms, " about to-morrow; playing polo ? "

" Yes, on the Gunners' ground."

" I'm playing here. What about having a swim afterwards at the Civil Club, and a bite of dinner together ? "

" Good egg."

" Well, I'll pick you up here and drive you down and back. No; we'll go straight down as we are and dress after bathing. I'll collect you at your ground. Is that a deal ? We'd better fix it now, as I don't suppose I shall see you again this evening."

The tone of the last sentence was again quite casual, but *if* the supposition of the speaker were correct there was something in what he said which might convey a hidden meaning to the listener, and possibly provoke a reply and the disclosure which the speaker sought. However, if it had really been Rayce's intention to draw his friend he was disappointed.

" Right," said Jerome; " meet me at the Gunners' ground. I'll send my kit down to

the club." He turned his head away slightly as he spoke. He felt for some reason annoyed. He also realized that he was blushing.

II.

THERE is a cause for everything.

There was the usual cause for Rayce's suggestion that he was probably seeing Jerome for the last time that evening; and, unknown to either, she was actually walking past the front of the club-house on her way to her father's barouche, with its pair of fat Walers, just as the two men entered the dressing-rooms at the back. Patty Graham was one of the not very numerous band of ladies out of all the cold-weather crowd of femininity which had not flown to the Hills with the general exodus at the end of April. She had insisted on staying down through the heat to look after her old father, the Civil Commissioner, whom, after many years' separation, she had come out to join the previous autumn. He was a widower, now nearing the time of retirement and pension.

Of the many swains at her feet it was not possible to point to any one specially favoured. Nor amongst half-a-dozen was it easy to name the man who was outwardly and visibly most devoted. But at heart no one was more her slave than Leslie Jerome, though he had not yet given open expression to his passion, having so far, owing to shyness and natural diffidence, refrained from speaking the word. He nevertheless intended to put his fate to the test shortly, for he realized that there were others who might have the same intention as himself, and that if he wished to win he would have to speak soon. About his infatuation there is nothing to be said. It was natural, open, and without ulterior motive.

But in spite of his realization of the existence of competitors, one thing he did not even dream was that his *blasé* friend, Rayce, had entered the lists against him. As a matter of fact it was only recently that the latter had fallen a victim, much to his own surprise. To the type to which he belonged, the art, or knack, of pleasing the opposite sex comes natural. And from his previous experiences Rayce had no reason to doubt his powers of fascination when he chose to exercise them. His tastes, however, lay really in the direction of more sophisticated fair ones of greater knowledge and riper charms than Patty Graham; and though her youthful freshness had at first appealed to him, it had been more in the way of admiration for a charming child than any stronger sentiment. Gradually, however, she had begun to exercise a certain intriguing attraction for him. He found himself unconsciously trying to ingratiate himself with her, to attract her favourable notice. Being what he was, he was even guilty of "showing off." But the friendly aloofness with which his half-veiled, easily assumed gallantry had been received at first surprised and then piqued him. He found himself thinking a great deal of this slip of a girl; and the more calmly unconscious of his attentions she was the more desirable did she seem, and the more did she occupy his thoughts.

His feelings and motives were perforce more subtle and complex than those of his friend and unconscious rival. Since he had realized what an attraction the damsel he had at first called "a nice little filly" had begun to exercise over him, he had set himself to "appreciate the situation" in all its bearings, even to contemplate the prospect of marriage. He was a thoroughly selfish man and there were many considerations. Possessing small means, he was cursed with expensive tastes, but had always managed to "do himself well," one of his favourite sayings being that for him the best, or "a little bit off the top," was good enough. His good looks, his address and skill at games had all helped him in an environment where externals count a good deal. Always extravagant and always a gambler, his last racing season had been disastrous, and for some time the moneylenders had been extremely troublesome. Being in a popular regiment, with the consequent slow promotion, his captaincy was still in the distant future.

Now, old man Graham was one of the "Heaven-born." He had served uncounted years in India, during which he had held a succession of fat, well-paid posts. He was a widower with one child, and having simple tastes and an economical nature must have put away a considerable amount of money; not much, perhaps, as money goes, but still a tidy little sum. When Rayce began to work things out on cold business lines, everything pointed to the fact that marriage with Patty was the solution of all his troubles. It was obvious. So soon, therefore, as he had come to this conclusion and found that the girl was by no means the easy conquest that he had at first anticipated, he had, again like a good soldier, altered his tactics and added to his frontal attacks on the lady herself a flank approach through the father. And not for a long time had the Civil Commissioner received so much deferential personal courtesy from a member of the garrison. But, gratifying as this attention was, Mr. Graham did not like Rayce in spite, or perhaps because, of his politeness, and he partly appreciated his motives. But he said nothing. Patty did not show any signs of

succumbing to the advances of this dasher; and there was no need to speak. So to Rayce the flank approach appeared to be progressing favourably.

BUT Life is full of snags, and there was another obstacle in the way of Rayce's success. Jerome, who was not of a secretive nature, had for months past unbosomed himself to his friend in regard to his feelings for Patty. Rayce had listened to his rhapsodies at first with good-natured amusement, then with hardly concealed boredom. But recently, because of his own feelings, he had forced himself to show warmer sympathy. He had guessed that Jerome intended very shortly to take his courage in both hands and settle his fate, and somehow his advice all tended in the direction of the necessity for caution, and of the inadvisability of "rushing fences," since a girl of Patty Graham's disposition could not be rushed. And his sage counsel had been accepted by the inexperienced youngster. But this pose made it all the more difficult for Rayce too openly to pay court himself to the girl.

Provided there was not already an understanding between her and Jerome, and he practically knew that matters had not gone so far, he felt sufficient confidence in himself to imagine that if he could get a chance to bring all his broadside into play he could, so to speak, cut out the prize from under his rival's guns. To come up with a rush at the end when all was nearly lost was, as he often boasted, a game he liked to play. To the ethics of deceiving his pal in such a matter he attached no importance. Was not all fair in love and war? If Jerome was such a fool as to allow himself to be cut out by someone more enterprising, it was his own funeral. Nevertheless, dilatory as Jerome was, he had apparently at last made up his mind to act. So had Rayce. This explained the latter's eagerness to get away after his game of racquets. He hoped to meet Patty Graham before Jerome or anyone else and to have an hour's walk and talk with her. An hour was a long time for a man who knew what he wanted and was not too shy to ask for it, or too modest to press his claims.

But Rayce's luck was out. In India much time is of necessity taken up in ablutions and the changing of garments, which duties form some of the few pleasures of life. And their punctual performance depends so much on the co-operation of others. As a matter of fact, on this special evening the two subalterns had decided to change rather earlier than usual. Jerome's servant had by chance turned up unnecessarily soon and was awaiting his master, who proceeded to tub and dress at once. Rayce's had not arrived, and Rayce had the pleasure of waiting whilst his rival got ahead of him. After fuming about for five minutes and cursing his absent bearer, who was not to blame, he made a false step. He decided to walk to his bungalow some quarter of a mile away, find out what had happened, and change there. He did so, to discover that he must have passed the man, who had already started for the club. This necessitated a hurried return journey on foot along the dusty road. It was in no sweet temper, therefore, that Rayce, in a clean flannel suit, with a tuberose in his button-hole, but still very hot, finally walked down the club steps about half an hour after his friend. He felt that he had lost his chance.

Threading his way between the chairs, he twice wended his way from the entrance gates to the bandstand and back, looking in vain for a well-known figure in a white dress. Nor did he see Jerome anywhere. He then joined the crowd at the peg table, where he washed down the dust of the road with a brandy and soda, and, refusing either to play a rubber or take a cue at pool, thought things out. It was obvious. No Jerome. No Miss Graham. They must have met half an hour before, and were probably driving round the cantonment in his crazy little bamboo cart. He had also, possibly, at last screwed up his courage to the sticking point.

Anyway, Jerome was certainly with the girl, and even if he saw the pair Rayce could hardly butt in and make a third. However, he was not beaten easily, and after a second drink determined to press his suit by the flank attack and to seek out and do the polite to old Graham, who would either be playing a rubber or sitting in his carriage. But the Civil Commissioner was also not to be found.

In the circumstances Rayce did not feel inclined for cards or billiards, still less for "coffee-housing" with his friends of either sex. He was dining out and had a longish drive, and he finally decided to stroll home and think things out. As he passed within fifty yards of the deserted racquet courts he thought he heard voices echoing from the walls, and looked up involuntarily. Then he stood still and stared. In the angle of the buttress of one of the high walls, with their backs to him, stood a man and a girl. Perhaps they imagined they were in the shadow of the buttress; perhaps they were so absorbed as to be oblivious, but as a matter of fact they were full in the slanting rays of the rising moon. The girl was in white. The man was wearing the Fusilier blazer, which was of so loud a pattern as to be unmistakable even at that distance in that light. And he had his arm round the

girl, whose head was on his shoulder. After a moment they walked on, his arm still round her waist, and vanished round the corner of the building. This circumstantial evidence of identification would not have been accepted in a court of law, for other officers of the garrison besides Jerome had the right to wear the Fusilier blazer, whilst a white frock was the usual apparel amongst the ladies of the station. But it was enough for Rayce in his then mood. Like many other people he saw what he was looking for, and in his mind there was no room for a suspicion of doubt. Whilst he had been wasting his time sweating in the dust to his bungalow and back, Jerome had done the trick. For, as there was no doubt in his mind as to who the pair were, there was for that very reason no doubt as to the nature of their relations. With two people holding the views that these two did it could mean one thing only.

Rayce stood still for some moments after they had disappeared from view. Then he said out loud, possibly to the moon, to the trees, or to the few stragglers of the flying foxes overhead, since Leslie Jerome was not in hearing, "'Game ball' perhaps, Leslie, my boy, but not 'game'—yet." With that he continued on his way, filled with evil intentions towards his bearer.

How was he to know that that day was the anniversary of the death of Patty's mother, and that, without waiting for the band, she had gone with the old Civil Commissioner for a moonlight drive to the cemetery some miles away? And without entering the billiard-room, how could he have guessed that Jerome, equally disgusted and disappointed at not seeing the lady whom he had hurried to meet, was even then missing every shot and steadily losing money at a game of pool?

And yet that night, at dinner at the General's, no one was more full of life and more entertaining than Honest Henry.

The man had his arm round the girl, whose head was on his shoulder.

III.

THE club in the Civil Lines was housed in an old palace. Not very old, for India, nor very large, for a palace, it was a rambling three-storeyed block, all length and little breadth, stretching along the river bank.

It was on the whole a sad and depressing place; and of its many apartments none was more gloomy than the swimming bath, into the perennial twilight of which no direct ray of the sun ever penetrated. At its brightest, even at noonday height, this place was dark and grey. The walls, the floor, and the sides and bottom of the bath itself were of drab cement; there were no white or gaudily-hued tiles to shimmer up through the ten feet depth of sombre green water; and but little light caught its ripples when disturbed. At the centre of one end was a spring-board covered with old coir matting, which was responsible for the musty smell of decay pervading the place. From this board it was the delight of any swimmer to try to "shoot," without swimming a stroke, the whole length of the bath. But, depressing as were its surroundings, the water was always cool.

It was getting towards dusk on the following day when Rayce's red-wheeled trap pulled up under the club porch. In spite of the arrangement made on the previous evening, Rayce was alone, for as he had mounted just before the last chukker of his game, a coolie had brought him a scrawled pencil note folded up into the usual silly strip about the size of a spill. This ran as follows:—

"Dear H.,—Sorry, shall be detained after the game for a bit. Don't wait for me. You go on to club. I'll drive myself or cadge a lift and follow later.—Yrs., L. J.

"P.S.—I have a bit of news to tell you."

Having read this with difficulty, owing to the fidgeting of his excited pony, Rayce had stuffed the paper hastily into his breeches pocket. He was not surprised that Jerome was going to be "detained." In the circumstances he was more surprised that he did not rat altogether from the club engagement. And he did not need to be told the "news." Had he not seen enough up in the *Bagh* the night before? He had gone on with the game; but his play, which had not been up to his form during the afternoon, became positively dangerous. Consequently, also, it was in an unpleasant humour that he stepped out of his trap at the Civil Club to await the arrival of his friend. His faithful bearer, who, with Jerome's, was seated in the veranda, having brought down his master's change of clothes and mess uniform, rose and salaamed, ready to assist him to change.

"*Abhi nahin*—Not yet," growled Rayce. "Wait till Jerome Sahib comes." Slowly and moodily he stalked through the dressing-room and wandered on down the passage to the swimming-bath. This passage led to one end of the bath directly behind the spring-board, which was in prolongation of it, and its position enabled anyone desirous of making a long dive to start his run at the far side of the dressing-room.

Except for one oil lamp on the wall of the passage the bath was practically in darkness. It was Rayce's preoccupation in other matters which alone prevented him from noticing this unusual lack of illumination. Sitting on the spring-board, he gazed downwards unseeing and absorbed in his own thoughts. After a few moments something attracted his attention. He suddenly rose to his feet and gave a low whistle. He then turned as if to go back into the dressing-room, hesitated, again looked into the bath, and finally walked back along the passage, more purposefully but even more slowly than he had come. As he did so, he observed affixed to the wall just under the lamp a notice which had escaped his eye when he had passed a minute or two previously. He read it, pondered, once again whistled softly, and appeared to come to a sudden decision. Alertly, but quietly, almost furtively, he tiptoed on into the still empty dressing-room, looked round, returned quickly to the notice and took it down. Whatever its import, he saw as he turned away that it had been written on the inside of the half cover of the ordinary purplish grey mottled or marbled exercise-book. He stood still, staring at this coloured back. Then, as if once more struck by a sudden inspiration, he took two brisk steps to the swimming-bath end of the passage and placed the piece of card on the floor, back uppermost, in a position in which it might quite well have fallen. Even to one knowing that it was there it was almost invisible, so closely did its hue match that of its background. As Rayce glanced at it he muttered: "'Game ball,' but not 'game'—yet," and his jaw set. After which he sauntered in a casual and natural manner back into the dressing-room. Though the room was still untenanted, he again looked round carefully as he threw himself into a long chair, in a state of perspiration which aroused to mordant activity all the prickly heat latent in his skin. Having apparently settled upon some course indicated by his recent rather mysterious actions, he was, in fact, for the moment preoccupied as to how he should prevent Jerome imparting the precise nature of the

good news at which he had hinted in his note. More than guessing what it was, he did not feel exactly in the mood for gush or to have to congratulate his friend and shake his hand. He was obviously ill at ease. "Bearer," he shouted, and continued when the servant appeared noiselessly through the French window. "Look down the road and see if the sahib is coming."

On hearing that there was as yet no sign of Jerome's arrival, he got up and made his way to the bar at the other end of the club, his footsteps on the polished floors re-echoing through the empty rooms. But, to their surprise, because he was in a way popular and rather sociable, he did not join the knot of men he found seated there. Ordering a double brandy, he gulped it neat and left the room.

"That's a curious drink for a hot-weather evening," remarked the Civil Surgeon, also the honorary secretary of the club and a privileged person. "I don't like it," and he shook his head.

"You're right, Platt," said another. "I'm thinking 'Honest Henry' Rayce will have to take a pull if he wants to get through this hot weather."

OBLIVIOUS of the comment he had excited, Rayce, feeling hotter than before, and with his eyes slightly bloodshot, returned to the dressing-room and again sat down to wait—and think. Before five minutes had passed his bearer announced the sahib's approach, and within another minute a trap drew up under the porch with a rattle similar to that of Rayce's, and Jerome bounced into the room, full of apologies, but so radiant and smiling as at once to confirm Rayce's suspicion, or rather conviction.

"So sorry to put you off. Couldn't possibly help it. Colonel sent for me." Jerome then looked at Rayce, who was still fully dressed in polo kit. "What? Not been in? I say, I do feel a cad. But we've just time for a wallow, haven't we?"

Rayce was wondering why Jerome, usually so honest, should have thought it necessary to lie so transparently, and a sour smile flickered across his face. He knew who the "Colonel" was. "Oh, yes. I thought I'd wait. There's no one down here to-night, and it's darned dull bathing alone in that sarcophagus." His voice was as calm as he could make it; but jealousy lay bitter on his soul.

"By Jove, I've got a thirst! Shall we have a drink now or later?" Whilst talking both had begun to empty their pockets preliminary to undressing.

"Better wait till after our swim," was the prudent reply. Then, as if inspired by a happy thought, Rayce added, with overdone boyish glee, "Last man in pays for the drinks. Bustle up."

"Right-o. *Jaldi*, bearer," said Jerome, eagerly accepting the challenge; or was it again swallowing the bait?

Whilst continuing to undress he turned to Rayce. "I say, Henry, about my bit of luck——"

But "Henry" did not want to listen. Apparently not hearing and absorbed in the disrobing race, he started loudly abusing his bearer for being so clumsy over his polo boots, which, in spite of his wretched man's herculean efforts to act as a human bootjack, were refusing to come off in a way that had never happened before. Beneath his breath the surprised and perplexed body-servant was objurgating: "When have I known the sahib's boots to behave like this? Such devil's work have I never seen."

But, strange to relate, no sooner was one of Jerome's boots off than by some miracle Rayce's right foot slid so easily out of its covering that the bearer, tugging at it, fell over backwards, which event formed the subject of more abuse and adjurations to haste. Similarly Rayce's left boot did not release its hold until Jerome's second was off. A moment later the latter, who had obviously forgotten what ever he wanted to say, stood up ready for the bath, naked, a splendid figure of a man in the prime of youth. Rayce was still in shirt and breeches.

"*Shabash!* excellent, O Buldeo, we win," said Jerome to his servant. "H.H. The drinks are on you, my boy! Who's for a cooler? Worry, worry." He was in great spirits. With a whoop he backed to the wall of the room, gave a hop or two to adjust his stride to the distance, and began running across the room, his bare feet pattering first on the matting and then on the hard floor of the passage.

As he started, Rayce, who was close behind him, suddenly thrust his bearer to one side and stood up. His face was congested and working in a manner unpleasant to see, and the veins in his neck stood out. He took a step forward and stretched out an arm. At that moment a yell of pain, followed by a rapid acceleration of footsteps as of a runner endeavouring to pull up in haste, sounded from the passage, and Jerome's angry voice rang out clear:—

"Damnation! Fetch a light. *Bati lao jaldi*. I've been bitten by a snake. The infernal thing is clinging to me. No, it's a bit of paper with a tin-tack in it. Who the blazes leaves nails about here?"

Rayce, who was swaying in a curious way,

threw up his head as if to shout, uttered a croak, put one hand to his throat, and crashed forward on his face.

Then Jerome limped into the room. In one hand he had the exercise-book cover, at the back of which he was staring, and with the other he was feeling the point of a drawing-pin firmly fixed in the cardboard, in the centre of a large spot of blood. He was so taken up that he did not at first observe Rayce lying face downwards on the floor, a thin trickle of blood streaming from his mouth. He dropped the paper, rushed forward, picked up his friend, and placed him in a chair. "My God, what's happened?" he said, as he held up Rayce's head, then shouted to his servant: "Buldeo, run quickly. Say that Rayce Sahib is very ill, and a Doctor Sahib must come at once. Also fetch some brandy *shrab*."

Before a minute had passed several men, headed by Dr. Platt, had collected in the dressing-room. But there had been time enough for Jerome whilst holding a sponge to his friend's head to wonder what it all meant. Surely the heat, which, great as it was, was normal, could not alone have been responsible so suddenly for this seizure? As he looked at Rayce's purple face he wondered if it were death.

Platt at once took charge. He felt Rayce's heart. "Gone!" he said. "Stroke, I expect. Often thought he'd go like this. Can't do anything. Poor chap!" He laid the head on the limp neck on the back of the chair, reverently closed the staring eyes, and placed a towel over the face.

All present, though accustomed to sudden death in many forms, stood silent, shocked. There was one exception. The dead man's bearer crouched in the corner of the room wailing "Ai, Ai, Ai."

"Poor Rayce," continued the doctor. "But what the deuce has been happening? You both look as if you'd been going to have a swim?" he queried, in a tone of great surprise, turning to the nude Jerome.

"We were."

"But can't you read, man?"

"Read?" faltered the youngster, who by this time was himself feeling very queer.

"Yes—read; read the notice that was up. Why, what's that?" he asked, sharply, pointing to the floor. "And what is it doing in here, with blood on it?"

Jerome turned and glanced in the direction pointed out. There he saw the piece of card he had dropped. It was lying face upwards now, and on it he read in bold hand-printed letters over an inch high:—

NOTICE.
DANGER!
BATH EMPTIED FOR CLEANING.

He could not speak, and his knees were trembling. He clutched the back of a chair.

Meanwhile the sharp eyes of the Civil Surgeon had observed lying on the floor, just below the dressing-table upon which Rayce had deposited the contents of his pockets, a crumpled piece of paper.

"And what's been in this?" he said, as he picked it up. From its folds it looked rather like one of those papers in which powders are wrapped. He smelt it, unfolded it, and shook it. He then saw some writing in pencil which he proceeded to read out aloud:—

"Dear H.,—Sorry, shall be detained after the game for a bit. Don't wait for me. You go on to club. I'll drive myself or cadge a lift and follow later.—Yrs., L. J.

"P.S.—I have a bit of news to tell you."

"That don't help much. Hold on, there's something more on the other side: 'Have come in for a pot of money from my uncle.' Anyway, this throws no light on this affair. I was afraid that this scrawl of paper might have contained poison. Looks like a note from you to him?" turning to Jerome again.

Jerome endeavoured to explain. He made one or two efforts to speak. But the shock of the imagined snake-bite; the second shock of his friend's sudden and mysterious death; and, lastly, the revelation of the fate he himself had only just escaped, were together too much for him. His knees gave way and he collapsed before the man standing nearest him could catch him.

As he was being brought round, incidentally with the aid of the brandy he had ordered for his dead friend, the doctor saw the blood oozing from the prick on his foot.

"Hallo!" he remarked, "this is a queer business. More trouble. I wonder if that's a snake-bite?" Demanding water, he began to sponge the wound in search of the fatal double puncture. As he did so he turned to the two bewildered servants, now both weeping:—

"Have you both been present with the sahibs?"

In chorus they snuffled: "Without doubt, Protector of the Poor."

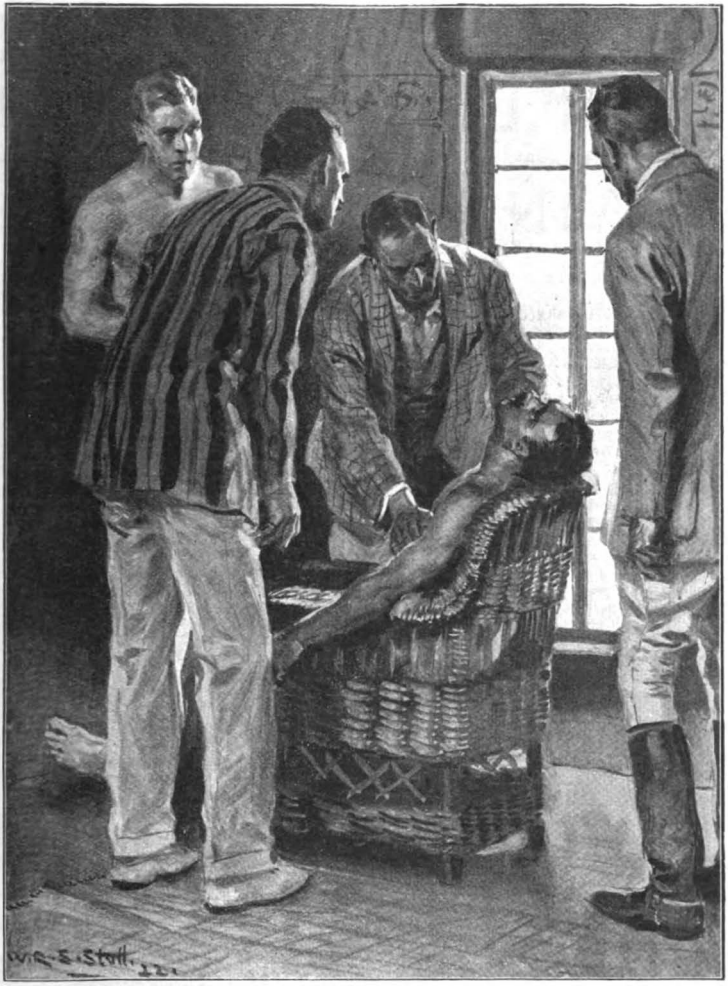
"Has there been any snake?"

"We have seen no snake, which is the truth."

"Then tell quickly what has happened."

Again did the reply come as if from one man:—

"God knows, sahib. God knows."



Platt at once took charge. He felt Rayce's heart. "Gone!" he said. "Stroke, I expect."

Five miles away the flying foxes were once again skimming over the mango trees. And it was but a few minutes since the voice of the muezzin perched up in the racquet court had called for the last time that day, "Game and e'sett."

SHERLOCK HOLMES IN REAL LIFE

By a Barrister and ex-Official of New Scotland Yard.

SHERLOCK HOLMES is, beyond doubt, as M. Poincaré has described him, "a very wonderful fellow"; but it is questionable whether he could give many points away to the detective of flesh and blood, who has little, if any, of his glamour and fame.

Where in fiction can you find crimes unravelled from more unpromising clues than serve their purpose so effectually in real life? The scratch of a nail on a country road; minute particles of bran found in the seam of a boot-sole; the dirt collected under a man's nails; the mark left by a gloved hand; the dust beaten from a coat; a ring of candle-grease; a partly-eaten apple: a fragment of a button—these and hundreds of clues equally microscopic have been sufficient to bring criminals to justice.

When, some years ago, M. Martin, Receiver of Taxes at Bilguy, was shot through the heart, part of the paper wadding with which the charge had been rammed down was found in the wound, and on it were a few scarcely legible words, used only in glass manufacture. This little bit of blackened and blood-stained paper was quite sufficient for the French police, who, with infinite labour and skill, tracked down the murderer—the son-in-law of the proprietor of a glass-factory who had supplied the glass of which the fragment of wadding was part of the invoice.

In another case a reveller in the garden of a Paris restaurant had a quarrel with a dragoon, who split his skull with a stroke of his sabre. The sabres of all the dragoons who had been out of barracks that day were collected and sent to the Sûreté for microscopic examination. None of them bore a trace of blood; but in the cutting edge of one an almost invisible particle of a blade of grass was observed in an almost invisible notch.

This was sufficient. The soldier to whom the sabre belonged was arrested and questioned, and finally admitted his guilt. He had cleaned the blade in the moist grass of the garden, and wiped it with a cloth; and the cloth had left in the notch that minute fragment of grass which sufficed to bring the guilty man to his punishment.

In a recent big jewel robbery in a Cannes hotel there appeared to be no smallest clue to the thief until the keen eyes of a detective observed, on the green-plush-covered seat of a chair in the room from which the jewels had been stolen, faint white marks which, after long examination and speculation, suggested to him the figures 39 reversed. How could they have come there? The solution came to his clever brain in a flash. The chair had been used by the thief to reach the top of the wardrobe on which the jewel-case had been placed; and the number had been chalked on the soles of his boots, as is the custom at most hotels where visitors leave out their boots at night to be cleaned. He thus had little doubt that the wanted man had occupied room No. 39 in the hotel. And so it proved; for, though the bird had flown, he was caught and the missing jewels were found on him.

But such cases of the solution of crime mysteries from the slenderest of clues could be multiplied almost indefinitely. And in following them up the detective of real life exhibits a skill and pertinacity no less wonderful than his prototype of fiction.

ONE day a gruesome discovery was made in the courtyard of a cheap restaurant and lodging-house in the Rue Princesse, Paris. In a deep well were found two parcels—one, a human leg wrapped in a cloth; the other, of black glazed calico, containing another leg encased in a long

stocking, on which was a mark consisting of a capital B with a cross on each side of it, thus—+ B +.

It was clear that a crime of a peculiarly horrible character had been committed; and its elucidation was entrusted to M. Gustave Macé, a young Commissary of Police, who threw himself heart and soul into the unravelling of this terrible mystery.

He quickly satisfied himself that the glazed calico cover, the peculiarly knotted ends, and the black cotton stitching were the handiwork of a man-tailor; and that the parcels must have been thrown down the well by someone who had occupied or visited the house to which the courtyard was attached. And he set to work to discover a man who satisfied both these conditions.

From the concierge he learnt that among the lodgers who had left the house was a pretty seamstress, Mlle. Dard. She was occasionally visited by a young man called Pierre, who brought white waistcoats for her to make up, and made himself useful by carrying water from the well for Mademoiselle's use. M. Macé's next step was to interview Mlle. Dard, whose address the concierge gave him; and from her he learned that the water-carrier was a Monsieur Voirbo, who "never worked much, yet seemed to have plenty of money, played cards, drank, and frequented *cafés*." He had one particular friend, whom he called Père Desiré, and whose aunt, a Mme. Bodasse, lived in the Rue des Nesles.

When M. Macé next interviewed Mme. Bodasse, she informed him that she had a nephew, Desiré Bodasse, whom she had not seen for two months. He had saved money, and was "eccentric and mean." And on accompanying M. Macé to the Mortuary she identified the stocking with the mysterious marks as his. There seemed now no doubt that the murdered man was Desiré; and with his aunt, M. Macé next paid a visit to his room in the Rue Dauphine, only to find, as he expected, that he was not there. On entering the room, the door of which he forced, the detective found that the bed had not been slept in; the dust lay thickly on the furniture; and Bodasse's strong-box had been broken open, and a pocket-book containing securities, which he was known to keep in it, abstracted.

M. Macé now proceeded to track Voirbo, the suspected murderer, who, he learnt, had left his rooms in the Rue Mazarin and was now living in the Rue Lamartine; but on his arrival at that address he found that his man had disappeared. He learned, however, from the concierge that Voirbo was a man of extravagant and dissipated habits who had been heard to say that he hated Bodasse for refusing him a loan of ten thousand francs.

A still more important discovery he made—that Voirbo had tendered in payment of his rent a five-hundred-franc share of Italian stock which had formed part of Bodasse's missing securities.

M. Macé now considered the evidence sufficient to justify Voirbo's arrest, and at last he found himself face to face with the man who, he had no doubt, was Bodasse's murderer. An examination of his pockets revealed a passage-ticket which showed that Voirbo was on the point of flight over the seas when arrested; and in his room were found a hank of cord similar to that with which the parcels containing the remains had been tied; a butcher's cleaver, such as might have been used in the dismemberment; and, concealed in a cask, a tin cylinder containing Bodasse's missing securities.

It now only remained to prove the dismemberment, and Voirbo's actual handiwork in it; and for this purpose the prisoner

The keen eyes of a detective observed faint white marks which suggested to him the figures 39 reversed. How could they have come there?

was conducted to his old room in the Rue Mazarin—now occupied by a young married couple—where he was placed on a chair between two policemen. So far from showing any anxiety, he prepared to watch the proceedings with a smile of amused unconcern on his face.

On first entering the room, M. Macé had at once noticed a certain peculiarity. The tiled floor sloped downwards from the window to the bed in the recess. He had also realized, from the quantity and position of the furniture in Voirbo's time, that the only part of the room in which there was space to move freely was around the circular table. He concluded, therefore, that, if the murder had been committed there, it must have been near that table; and, further, that probably the dismemberment had been performed upon it.

Then, taking up a jug full of water, he said aloud:—

"I notice a slope on the floor. Now if a body was cut up on this table, the effusion of blood would have been very great, and the fluid must have followed this slope. Any other fluid thrown down here must follow the same direction. I will empty this jug upon the table, and we will see what happens."

At these words there was an immediate change in Voirbo's demeanour. Terror seized him, his face grew ashy pale, and his staring eyes were fixed upon the water-jug.

The water flowed from the table on to the floor, straight towards the bed, and collected beneath it in two great pools. The exact spot thus indicated was carefully sponged dry, and a mason was fetched to take up the tiles of the floor.

A quantity of dark stuff, presumably dried blood, was found below. The inference was obvious; the blood had flowed from the body and run through the interstices of the tiles, thus evading the washing of the floor, and proving the incompleteness of Voirbo's precautions. Later, the whole of the tiles and the saturated mortar were submitted to analytical test, and were beyond doubt proved to contain human blood.

This terrible discovery, effected in his own presence, so affected Voirbo that there and then he made full confession of the crime.

THAT the provincial detective of England need not fear comparison with his brother of New Scotland Yard has been proved again and again, as in the following case.

A few years ago a man, arrested at Liverpool on a charge of giving a false name and address to a pawnbroker when attempting to pledge a "diamond-set" locket and a gold chain, was suspected of being a systematic swindler, who was reaping a rich harvest by passing off jargoons (stones which have the brilliance of diamonds) as diamonds of many times their value; and the task of following the case up was given to a local detective who had won some reputation for skill.

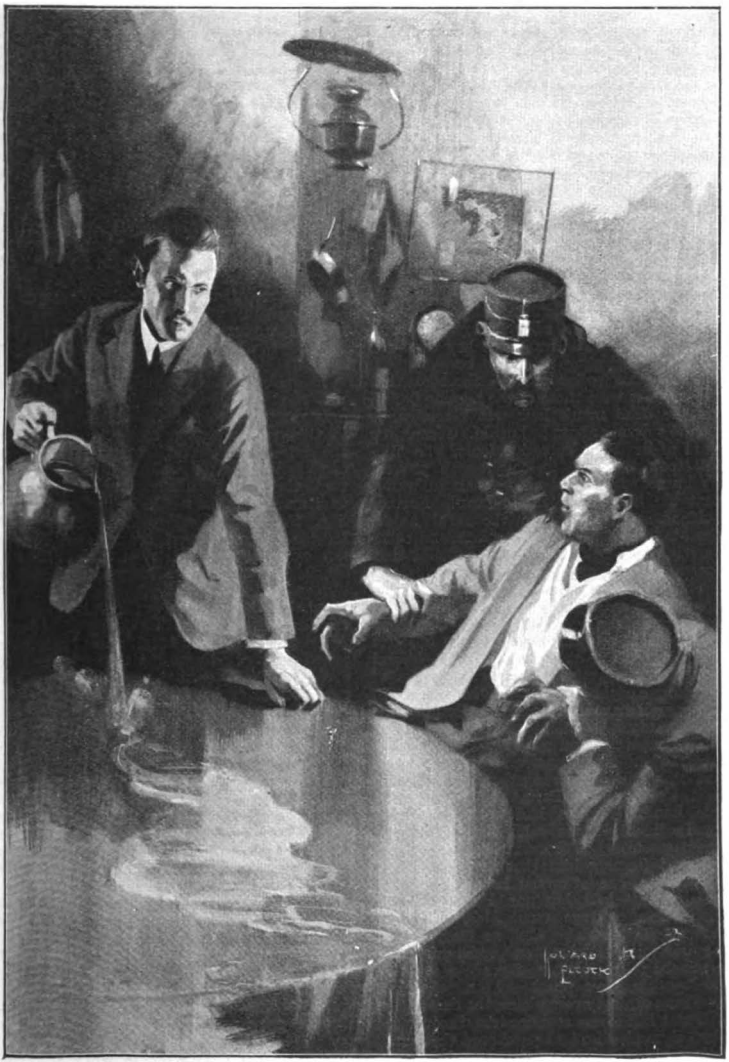
His first step was to interview every pawnbroker in the city, and from at least a dozen of them he learnt that a strange man had recently pawned with them a jewelled locket and an eighteen-carat chain, in each case under a different name and address; but in no case had he described the stone as a diamond. At last, however, he discovered a pawnbroker who had advanced twelve pounds on a similar pledge, and who held a contract-form signed by the pledger in which the articles were described as "a single-stone diamond locket and eighteen-carat gold guard." Here was the evidence the detective was seeking; and on the strength of it the prisoner, after being identified by the pawnbroker, was formally charged with fraud and remanded for further inquiries.

The detective's next step was to visit the prisoner's lodgings; and there he found a bunch of keys, all of which, with one exception, fitted one or other of the bags or trunks in the room. If he could only discover the lock for this mysterious key he felt sure he would make a valuable discovery. It seemed clear that somewhere in Liverpool the prisoner had a hidden store of the fraudulent lockets of which he had already disposed of so many, and this store he now set himself to find.

He visited every left-luggage office at every railway-station in Liverpool and Birkenhead; but nowhere could he find a bag or box left by anyone answering the prisoner's description. He was almost reduced to despair when one day, on his way from Birkenhead, his eyes chanced to fall on the Safe Deposit building in Exchange Street East, and at the sight of it the idea flashed into his mind that this might be the very place he sought.

After procuring a search-warrant he entered the building, and, producing the key, asked the manager: "Does this belong to any of your boxes?" The manager, in view of the warrant, gave him every assistance; and before an hour had passed the required box was found and opened by means of the key, when it revealed a large number of lockets set with jargoons—the facsimiles of those palmed off on a dozen or more of Liverpool pawnbrokers—several second-hand gold chains, and a number of jewellers' tools.

Thus after months of patient and at times almost heart-breaking labour, with marvellous skill and pertinacity, the scoundrel's



"I will empty this jug upon the table, and we will see what happens." At these words there was an immediate change in Voirbo's demeanour.

guilt was conclusively brought home to him. He had clearly come to Liverpool with a large stock of fraudulent "diamond" lockets, which he systematically set to work to pawn for much more than their value at the rate of five or six a day. It was proved, moreover, that each visit to a pawnbroker was preceded by one to the Safe Deposit building, from which he had taken another locket and chain.

ON July 20th, 1889, the Paris police were informed of the disappearance of M. Gouffé, a well-to-do bailiff, who lived in the Rue Rougemont; and a fortnight later his body was discovered, in an advanced state of decomposition, by a road-mender, in a thicket by the road-side about ten miles from Lyons. Two days later, near the same spot, were found the fragments of a trunk, the key to which had been picked up near the body.

The Lyons police scouted the idea that the remains were those of the missing bailiff, for the dead man's hair was black, while Gouffé's was auburn; but M. Goron, the head of the Paris detective force, who himself took the case in hand, soon proved, by immersing a lock of the hair in water, that the hair was really auburn. Further evidences—an injury to the right ankle, the absence of a particular tooth, and other peculiarities—established beyond doubt that the remains were those of Gouffé.

Four months elapsed from the bailiff's disappearance without yielding the least clue to his murderer, when M. Goron accidentally learned that another man and his mistress had disappeared at the same time—Michel Eyraud and Gabrielle Bompard, persons of questionable character, who, he suspected, might well have had some connection with the tragedy.

This suspicion was confirmed a few weeks later, after the fragments of the trunk had been skilfully put together and exhibited in the Morgue at Paris, and a reward of five hundred francs had been advertised for its identification. M. Goron received a letter from a London boarding-house keeper informing him that in July two of his lodgers, one of whom he only knew as "Gabrielle," had left for France, taking with them a large trunk, identical with that at the Morgue. And, as the result of inquiries in London, an assistant at a trunk-shop in Gower Street recognized the trunk as one purchased on July 12th by a man strongly resembling the description of Eyraud. It now remained to discover the man, Eyraud, who had purchased the trunk.

Several weeks, however, passed in vain search for the fugitives, when one day, to M. Goron's amazement, Gabrielle Bompard walked into the Préfecture and, calmly seating herself on the Prefect's desk, unfolded the following story. Towards the end of the previous July she had been living in the Rue Tronson-Ducoudray with M. Eyraud. At his instigation she had lured Gouffé to their rooms with intent to rob him. While she was sitting on his knee she had playfully slipped a noose round his neck; Eyraud, who was concealed behind a curtain, had pulled the cord, which ran over a pulley in the ceiling and was attached to the noose, and had strangled the bailiff. They had put the body in the trunk, bought for the purpose in London, and the following day had hidden it in the thicket where it was found. Then they had gone to America, where he had deserted her. Her part in the murder, she declared, was taken only under the irresistible compulsion of "that serpent Eyraud," who had alone planned and executed the crime.

In spite of her plausible story Gabrielle was promptly lodged in jail, and it now only remained to find the principal partner in the crime; and a merry dance he led the detectives before he was at last run to earth. Week after week they followed his trail through Canada and the States—a trail marked by acts of thieving and swindling. From New York to San Francisco and Mexico they followed him; and it was not until May 20th, 1890, that he was caught at Havana, on information supplied by one of his old *employés*, who had recognized in the ragged, unkempt wanderer the once prosperous distiller of Sèvres. After a highly-sensational trial both were found guilty; Eyraud was sentenced to death, and his accomplice to twenty years' penal servitude.

LATE one December night a police-constable named Cole was found lying dead in Ashwin Street, Dalston, presumably shot by a burglar who had attempted to enter a Baptist chapel in that street. Of his murderer the only traces discovered were a black wide-awake hat, a couple of chisels, and a bullet extracted from the dead man's brain. The only evidence of identity was that of two policemen who, half an hour or so before the tragedy, had seen a man in a similar hat in the neighbourhood of Dalston Lane; and of a young woman who had witnessed the affray and had rushed off to summon help. The only clue, in fact, to the assassin of any value was the word "rock," which a microscopic examination revealed, scratched on the blade of one of the chisels. And with this slender clue Inspector Glasse set to work to solve one of the most puzzling problems of crime.

The letters "rock" had most probably

been scratched on the chisel as a mark of identification by some man who had sharpened it; and the Inspector proceeded to make inquiries of every tool-manufacturer and setter and every employer of cabinet-makers in and around Dalston. For a whole year he vainly prosecuted his search far and wide, until at last his patience was rewarded. An old woman in the East of London remembered that the chisel had been brought to her late husband to be sharpened; and she herself had scratched the letters on it. Its owner was a man named Orrock, a young carpenter.

An organized search for Orrock, who was known in Dalston, was now set on foot, and he was at last run to earth in Coldbath Fields prison, where he was serving a twelve months' sentence for burglary.

Once caught, there was little difficulty in placing the noose round his neck. He was identified by the policemen who had seen him near Dalston Lane on the evening of the crime; two of his "pals" who had been in his company the same evening gave evidence against him; the man from whom he had bought the revolver recognized the bullets; and his sister declared that on the night of the murder he came home hatless and with his trousers badly torn. And, finally, a further examination of the chisel under a more powerful microscope revealed a very faint capital O and another "r," thus completing the name "Orrock."

IN 1885 an old man, in the Department of Savoy, was found lying dead on his back in his bed, his head pierced by a bullet; his pillow was covered with blood, the bed-clothes pulled up to his chin; and on the outside of the coverlet, half-way down, lay a small crucifix. On pulling down the bed-clothes it was found that an old blood-stained blue blouse covered the man's chest; his arms were stretched out along each side of the body, and in the right hand was clasped a revolver, held so tightly that it required no little force to release it. The bed was perfectly tidy; there was no evidence of any struggle.

The matter was investigated and the conclusion arrived at was that the man had committed suicide—that he had fired the fatal shot when sitting up in bed and had then fallen back on the pillow—dead.

Several years later, however, suspicion was drawn to a ne'er-do-weel son of the dead man, and the affair was re-opened, under the direction of a Dr. Lacassagne, an amateur detective of considerable skill, who set to work to prove that it was a case, not of suicide, but of murder. As the result of experiments in various hospitals and at the Morgue he was able to prove that, if a pistol is placed in the hand of a recently-dead man, when rigidity comes on the weapon is held so firmly that it can only be removed by force, precisely as in the case of a suicide.

From the fact that there was no trace of singeing on the hair, or scorching of the face, it was obvious that the shot could not have been fired close to the head, as would be the case with a suicide. The fact, too, that the man's eyes were found closed negatived the theory of suicide; for Dr. Lacassagne was able to prove from abundant evidence that, in cases of sudden and violent death, the eyes are either wide open or only partly closed. Thus the closing must have been done after death.

Moreover, as he pointed out, it would have been impossible for a man who died instantaneously, as in this case, to slip his arms under the blankets when quite dead, pull up the clothes to his chin, and place the crucifix outside the coverlet. It was thus clear that the man must have been murdered, his eyes closed, and his body and the bed arranged after death by someone else, probably his murderer. So conclusive was this evidence that, supplemented by other evidence which pointed to the son's guilt, a verdict of murder was given against him, which led to the full confession of his crime.

THAT civilized man has no monopoly of detective skill is proved by many a feat, bordering on the miraculous, with which the Australian aborigines are credited. The Australian native indeed is a born detective, with a keener scent than that of a bloodhound, a microscopic sight that can detect clues invisible to any other human eyes, and a sense of smell positively uncanny in its sensitiveness. So amazing are his feats that they seem almost incredible, as the following story—one among many equally astonishing—proves.

Some years ago a Victorian squatter disappeared on his way to Melbourne with a large sum of money, and there seemed to be no clue whatever to his fate. All that was known was that his horse had returned to the station without its rider, saddle, or bridle. All else was profound mystery. The Victorian police vainly wrestled with the problem until, in despair, they enlisted the service of a native employed on the station, with results that soon amazed them.

Starting from the missing man's house, the black walked with eyes downcast, and occasionally stooping to smell the ground,

for several miles until he came to a remote shepherd's hut, where he halted. Pointing to the earth at his feet, he said to the police who accompanied him: "Two white mans walk here." His companions closely examined the hard-baked ground, but could detect no smallest trace of a foot-mark.

Proceeding a few paces, the native exclaimed: "Fight here! Two mans have big fight! And here," he continued, walking a few paces farther, "here kill—kill!" On examining the spot indicated the police found that the earth had been disturbed; and beneath it they found a quantity of clotted blood.

It certainly looked as if murder might have been committed there. But, if so, what had become of the victim's body and of his slayer? This problem the black man set himself to solve. With bent head he resumed his walk with unfaltering steps towards the almost dried-up bed of a stream a mile or so distant, guided by foot-marks imperceptible to the others. For a few miles he proceeded up the bed of the stream, pausing at intervals at small pools in which the water had collected, until he came to a large pool on which a dark scum was floating. Here he halted, skimmed some of the scum into his hand, smelt it, tasted it, and said with conviction: "White man here!"

Grappling irons were produced, the pond was dragged, and from its dark depths was brought up a sack, weighted with stones, and containing the mutilated remains of the murdered squatter.

Suspicion naturally fell on the two shepherds who occupied the hut, which had in all probability been the scene of the crime, both men of bad character—one a ticket-of-leave convict, the other a deserter from the English Army. A thorough examination of the hut was made; in the outhouses were found a coat, a waistcoat, and two pairs of trousers, bearing dark stains like those of blood. And on the strength of this discovery the two men were placed under arrest and taken to Melbourne.

The police next set to work to discover the missing saddle-bags, which had no doubt held the squatter's money; and again they started the black fellow on the trail. This time he set out in a different direction, following by sight and smell the footsteps of the two men, though again not a trace of them was visible to the eyes of his companions. With unerring steps he proceeded mile after mile until he came to a gully, in which was a mound of stones.

Smell leather," he exclaimed, "here"—pointing to the pile. The stones were removed; and, sure enough, the saddle-bag was revealed; and in it was found the squatter's gold to the value of over two thousand pounds. The bag had doubtless been buried by the assassins under the heap of stones for removal later, when it was considered safe.

The evidence, thanks to the uncanny cleverness of the native tracker, was now complete. The two shepherds were brought to trial, and received the sentence of death they so well deserved.

WHAT detective of fiction, we wonder, has performed a feat as wonderful as this? A short time ago the body of a woman was found on the top of a mountain near Haverstraw, in New York State. It had been lying there so long that little more than the skeleton remained; and there was not the slightest clue to the identity of the woman.

The cleverest detectives in the States had to confess that they were completely baffled, and the crime was about to be added to the long list of mysteries that defy solution, when Mr. Grant Williams, a retired officer of the New York City Police, who had made a life-long study of anthropology and the allied sciences, offered his assistance, with results little short of miraculous.

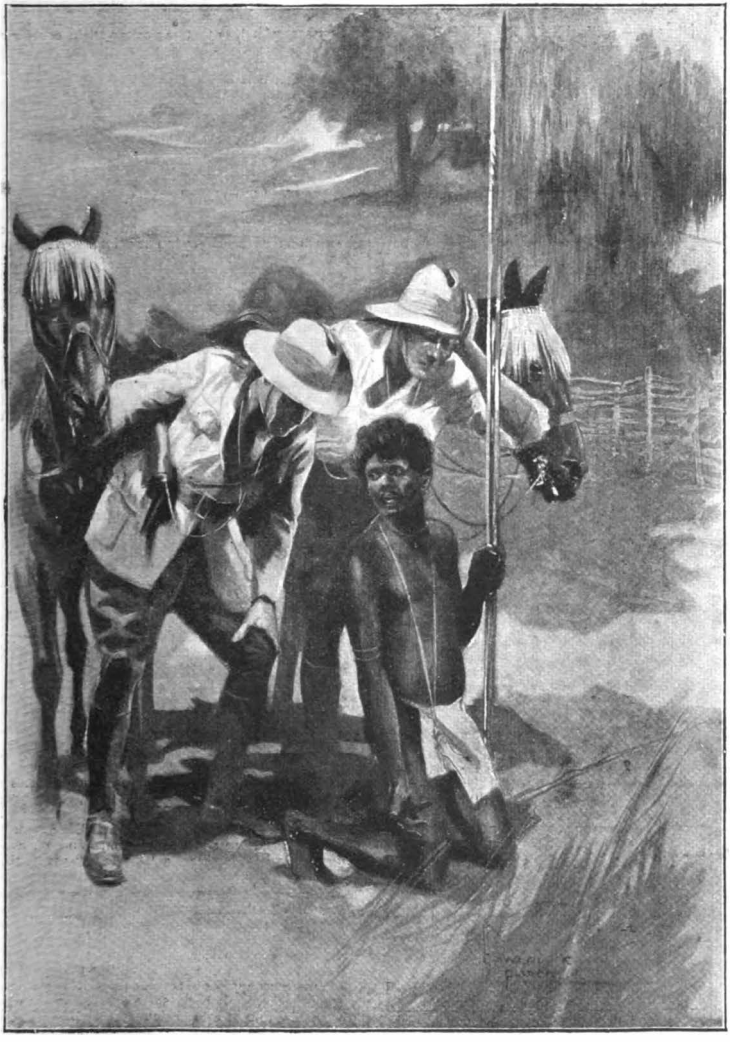
Within half an hour of seeing the remains, we are told, he informed the police that the skeleton was that of a girl of mixed Polish-Irish ancestry. He added that she had a violent temper and was probably mentally defective.

Then Williams took the dead girl's skull; and, with a quantity of plasticene, using the contours of the face as a guide, he proceeded to remodel her features. He constructed dummy shoulders and round them draped a blouse found near the body. On the top of the skull he arranged a quantity of hair of a colour corresponding to that on the portion of the scalp remaining on the head, and arranged it as it appeared to him to have been dressed in life.

The police then sent for officials of a neighbouring institution for mentally defective women, without telling them for what reason their presence was required.

To the amazement of the detectives, who had scoffed at Williams and his methods, they recognized the face at once. It was that of Lilian White, an inmate of the home, who had disappeared into the mountains some months before with a wild creature known as "the cave man."

The relatives of Lilian White were summoned, and the resemblance proved to be so startling that one sister of the dead girl collapsed in hysterics.



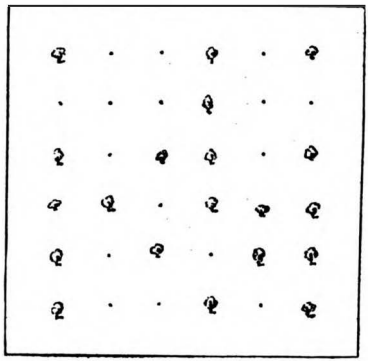
The native exclaimed: "Fight here! Two mans have big fight! And here," he continued, walking a few paces farther, "here kill—kill!"

PERPLEXITIES.

By HENRY E. DUDENEY.

615.—A PLANTATION PUZZLE.

A MAN had a small plantation of thirty-six trees planted in the form of a square. Some of these died and had to be cut down, in the positions indicated by the dots in our illustration. How is it possible to put up six straight fences across the field so that every one



of the remaining twenty trees shall be in a separate enclosure? As a matter of fact, twenty-two trees might be so enclosed by six straight fences if their positions were a little more accommodating, but we have to deal with the trees as they stand in regular formation, which makes all the difference.

616.—A WORD SQUARE.

A DYING *fourth*, within his cell, upraised
The *first* of his poor weary eyes and gazed.
Secure from *third* of life he hither came,
Nor longed for gold or *fifth*, for power or fame.
His end had come—as come it ever will—
The blood in every *second* of his *sixth* stood still,
And all was quiet in that lonely place.
Let those who may a word square herein trace.

617.—THE NEW FLAG.

A NEWLY-CONSTITUTED kingdom required a flag, which was to be three vertical coloured stripes on a

white ground, as shown in our illustration. A selection from ten different colours was allowed and material for three stripes of every colour was supplied (and the necessary white), so that any colour might occur once, twice, or three times in a flag. In how many different ways might the flag be made? Note, in the example given, that if A B is against the staff it is a different flag from one with C D nearest the staff, whereas in some cases (such as three red stripes) such a reversal would not be different. Though our flag represents two, it is only one in the count.

618.—PUZZLES IN A GARDEN.

My friend Tompkins loves to spring on you little puzzling questions on every occasion, but they are never very profound. I was walking round his garden with him the other day, when he pointed to a rectangular flower-bed and said, "Now, if I had made that bed 2ft. broader and 3ft. longer it would have been 64 square feet larger; but if it had been 3ft. broader and 2ft. longer it would then have been 68 square feet larger. What is its length and breadth?" Well——!

Later on I happened to be discussing the tenancy of his property, when he informed me that there was a 99 years lease. I asked him how much of it had already expired, and expected a direct answer. But his reply was that two-thirds of the time past was equal to four-fifths of the time to come, so I had to work it out for myself. The task was not a difficult one, nor will it probably be found so by the reader.

619.—A CHARADE.

My *first*, attained to lofty state,
Amongst sweet singers is renowned;
My *next* is hateful to the horse;
My *whole* in gardens will be found.

Solutions to Last Month's Puzzles.

611.—PERPETUAL CHECK.

I HAVE received the following solution from J. M in three moves: 1. P—K B 3, P—K 4; 2. K—B 2, B—B 4, ch.; 3. K—Kt 3, Q—Kt 4, ch., etc. Black can now force a perpetual check by playing alternately Q—R 4 and Q—Kt 4.

612.—MARKET TRANSACTIONS.

THE man bought 19 cows for £95, 1 sheep for £1, and 80 rabbits for £4, making together 100 animals at a cost of £100.

613.—TWO LITTLE PARADOXES.

IF W and E were stationary points, and W, as at present, on your left when advancing towards N, then after passing the Pole and turning round W would be on your right, as stated. But W and E are not fixed points, but *directions* round the globe; so wherever you stand facing N you will have the W direction on your left and the E direction on the right.

In the reflection in a mirror you are not "turned round," for what appears to be your right hand is your left, and what appears to be your left side is the right. The reflection sends back, so to speak, exactly what is opposite to it at every point.

614.—AN ENIGMA.

THE answer is the figure 8.

To face end of Text.

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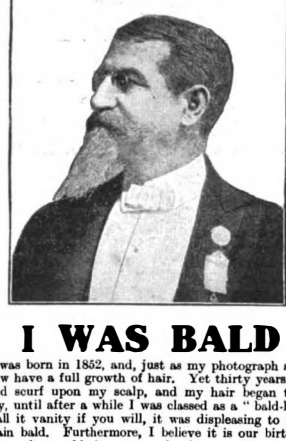

I WAS BALD

I was born in 1852, and, just as my photograph shows, I now have a full growth of hair. Yet thirty years ago I found scurf upon my scalp, and my hair began to fall away, until after a while I was classed as a "bald-head."

Call it vanity if you will, it was displeasing to me to remain bald. Furthermore, I believe it is our birthright to have plenty of hair upon our heads.

SEEKING A HAIR GROWTH.

It is scarcely necessary for me to state that, in the hope of growing new hair, I had experimented with one thing and another—the usual array of lotions, pomades, shampoos, etc.—without getting any benefit. At that age I looked older than I do now. Later, when I became a trader in the Indian Territory of U.S.A., some of the Cherokees joocosely called me "The white brother without a scalp lock."

AMERICAN INDIANS NEVER BALD.

I never saw a bald Cherokee Indian. Both braves and squaws almost invariably use tobacco, eat irregularly, frequently wear tight bands around their heads, and do other things which are commonly ascribed as causes of baldness. Yet they all possess beautiful hair. What, then, is their secret?

Being on the spot—most of the time at Tablequah—and upon very friendly terms, it was easy for me to gain information from the usually taciturn Cherokees. I learned exactly how American Indians grow long, luxuriant hair, avoiding baldness and eliminating scurf or dandruff.

MY HAIR GREW AGAIN.

Then I applied these secrets to myself, and my hair began to grow. There was no messing or trouble about it. The new hairs emanated from my scalp as profusely as grass grows on a perfectly-kept lawn. I have had a plenitude of hair ever since.

Numerous friends of mine in Philadelphia and elsewhere asked me what had performed such a miracle, and I gave them the Indian Elixir. Their hair soon grew over bald spots. Scurf disappeared wherever it existed—and it never returned. That these persons were amazed and delighted is stating the fact mildly.

The hair that grows is strong and silk-like. It has beautiful lustre and imparts the appearance of health and vigour.

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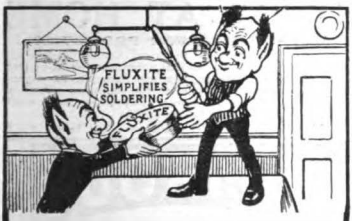

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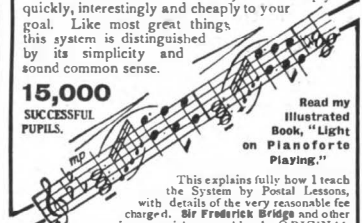

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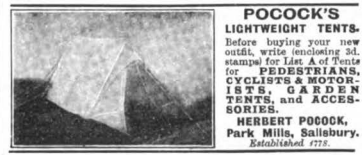

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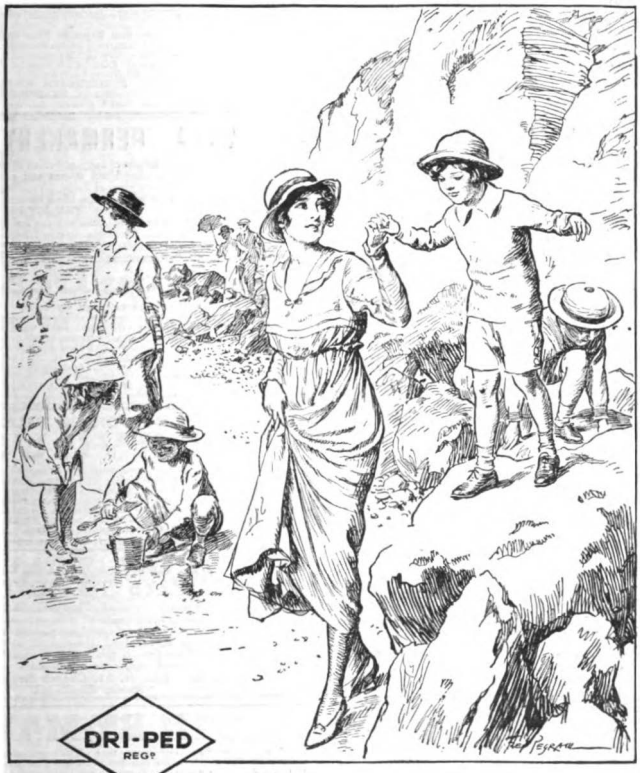

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