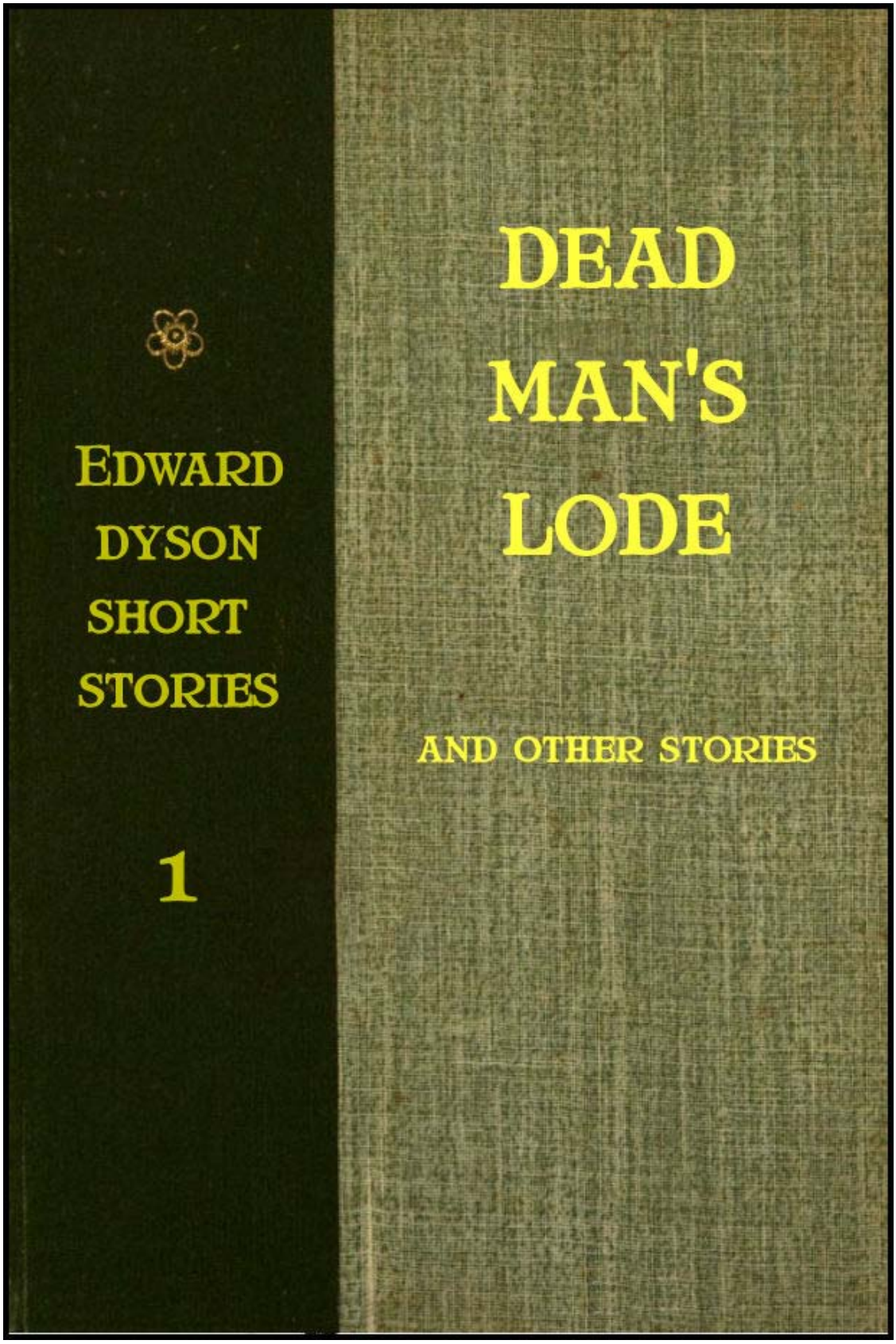
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DEAD MAN'S LODE

and other stories

EDWARD DYSON

This original collection edited and produced by Terry Walker, 29 March 2025

Edward Dyson
1865-1931
Australian journalist, poet, playwright, novelist, and short story writer

Edward Dyson was the son of a Mining Engineer, and he grew up on goldfields in Victoria and Tasmania. In 1883 the family settled in Melbourne and he worked as a factory hand, and took to writing. This proved so successful that he son became a full-time freelance writer under an ever-growing list of pseudonyms: Dy Edwardson; Ed Ward; Silas Snell; E.D.; Ward Edson; Eddyson; and many more.

While his contemporaries such as Henry Lawson wrote of the life in the bush and the suburbs, Dyson's unique upbringing led to many stories set in major mines, on factory floors, and shops. *Austlit*'s entry lists some 2,400 items— stories, poems and articles— by him.

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1: The Splendid Quest

Punch (Melbourne) 21 Oct 1909

APPLETON AND LEES, peripatetic entertainers, proprietors of the justly celebrated bear, raconteurs, comedians and vocalists, lay weatherbound on the west bank of Teel River. It was a frizzling hot day. You might have grilled a bullock on the barbed-wire fence which skirted the track behind them. The firm was short of rations and in danger of perishing from thirst. Further progress under a sun that swathed the weary pedestrians in thin flame was not to be thought of.

The three artists— Eric, Ephraim and the bear— sprawled in the shadow of a clump of odorous gum saplings. They were all afflicted, and the great bear kept up a pitiful complaining. He mopped his head with his feet and rolled on the crisp grass, vainly seeking ease. He sprawled with his paws turned upward; he sat up limply, gasping, a pale purple tongue hanging from his mighty mouth. He rolled on his back again, paws up. There was no comfort anywhere or anyhow for an unfortunate Russian bear in an Australian temperature of 105 degrees in the shade.

"Eric," gasped the fat partner, "dip my poor Bruno a hatful of water, won't you ?''

Appleton was lying on his back, his bony knees in the air, chewing a blade of grass. "See yeh jiggered first," he said. "Whose bear is he, anyhow? Tend to the needs of yer own fam'ly if yer a man an' not what yeh look, a stranded sperm whale."

"But, Eric, consider me figure— my infirmities!"

"So, because yer fed up like a Zoo walrus, I gotter be wet-nurse to a blighted bear all me days?"

Eric had arisen, however, and was selecting the better of the firm's two hats.

" 'Tain't no good, anyhow. Cold water won't touch his complaint. How'd yeh like it yerself?"

Ephraim groaned. His thirst was virulent, but waterproof.

Appleton dipped a hatful of river water and carried it to Bruno. The bear nuzzled into it, and then threw it over his back with his nose, but he did not drink.

"What 'id I tell yeh ?" growled Eric. "Lot o' good offerin' water to a bear whose taste has bin vitiated be long indulgence in cheap wine. Ephraim, this 'ere animal 's a shockin' example; that's wot he is, 'n' it's all your doin'. Yiv

indulged him in demented 'n' unmerited liquors till he's first cousin to a jimjam, 'n' a draught from the crystal spring ain't no more use to him than a Bible in perdition."

"Appleton, I'd give me soul for a bottle of beer," groaned Ephraim Lees.

"It ud be a fraud on the publican," answered Eric; "but I lend meself to it for a sniff of the cork."

Eric was down with his head pillowed on a root watching the river between his knees. There had been heavy rains, and the Teel was almost at flood. Occasional scraps of wreckage passed by indicative of trouble up stream. The bear was rocking to and fro all the time, and swearing in the Russian language.

"I say, Perfesser," said Appleton, dreamily, "did yeh ever have visions iv rivers iv beer— whole bloomin' streams iv hop-juice flowin' through a barren land, hot as the stokehole in Tophet?"

Professor Lees heaved a profound sigh. The bear embraced his own muzzle and grunted his anguish.

"Yer travellin' over a sandy plain," continued Eric in a poetic vein. "The sun curls up yer whiskers, 'n' raises blisters wherever he hits yeh, 'n' yer that parched yer inner traps 'n' wares rattles in yer dried hide like peas in a tin. Then, sudden like, veil strikes the river. It's a beautiful river. The green cool banks is deep in fresh rum shrub, 'n' the peppermint gums overhang the stream like weepin' willers. First yeh think it's jest water, 'n' yer pleased, but not wot we'd call profoundly moved. Yeh gets down to take a temp'rance drink. All iv a sudden yeh know ye've struck a river iv beer— a broad, deep, steady stream of fresh ale. Yeh see it, glowin' amber 'n' gold, with chance junks iv ice floatin' in it. It's a Niagerer iv grateful booze. Yfoh follow it t' where it goes slidin' over the granite walls inter the white marble basin a mile below, 'n' yeh sees clouds iv snow-white foam boilin' and sparklin'. Up, up, up, in fleecy mountains, an' yell stands for a moment there, teazin' yer thirst. Then yeh dives— dives straight down through them billers 'n' billers iv foam inter the bottomless pool iv beer, 'n' then yer wake up."

"Eric, fer pity's sake, stop," moaned Lees. "You harrow my feelings. You distress the poor bear. Stop; I really cannot endure it. Stop, I implore."

Appleton had stopped. He had jerked himself into a sitting position, and was staring hard at the river.

"Ellen Tommy!" he said, "wot's that?"

And he pointed at a dark object bobbing gaily down stream. Ephraim Lees could not raise himself at a moment's notice. The process was difficult. He rolled on to his face, and then propped his great bulk on his hands, and looked eagerly in the direction indicated.

"It looks like a barrel, Appleton," he said. "Very like a beer barrel, I think."

Bruno lifted his head and cried miserably. Bruno knew the name of beer in ten languages, including Austrian.

"It is a bar'l!" said Appleton. "But it's empty. Iv course it's empty."

"It's very low in the water, Eric!"

"To be sure, 'coz it's half full of water. Who'd let a bar'l iv beer escape this weather?"

The idea was preposterous. The three entertainers watched the derelict go by. It was interesting if only for the sake of fond associations. Then all subsided on the grass again. Eric and Ephraim tried to sleep; the bear resumed his lamentations.

Eric was awakened ten minutes later by a shout. A horseman from the track was endeavouring to force his nag in their direction; but the animal's eyes were fixed on Bruno, and with flattened ears and distended nostrils he hung back.

"Is that beast dangerous?" asked the horseman.

" 'Bout ez savage ez a rabbit," said the lean showman, the stubble on whose face was like flaking rust on an old keg. Eric was fanning himself with an ancient straw hat that looked as though it had been sampled by goats.

"What's yer trouble?" he asked.

"I suppose you fellows haven't seen a barrel go down the river?"

Ephraim Lees was about to reply, when Appleton's fierce, covert kick cracked his shinbone, and he became inarticulate in his agony.

"No," said Eric, thoughtfully. "Was this here jist a hordinary bar'l?"

"It was a barrel half full of beer. My pub up at the Pole Bridge was flooded last night, and a barrel is missing."

"It's a sad loss to you, I daresay," said Eric with some sympathy. "All the same, I'm a temp'rance man meself, I don't hold with beer."

"That be blowed for a yarn," said the incredulous stranger. "It saps the vitals 'n' brings man to the level iv the beasts what perish," Eric continued. He swept a hand over the river.

" 'Ere I have sufficient fer me simple needs."

"And you haven't seen a barrel?"

"No barrel has passed this way. I've bin sittin' here watchin the crystal tide fer ever flowin' this hour, 'n' I can swear to it. Maybe it's snagged higher up, or bin stranded on one iv the flats."

"Very likely."

"Let us 'ope," said Appleton, earnestly, as the stranger turned his horse's head, "that it ain't fallen inter the hands iv some misguided swaffman what ud put it to evil uste. I tremble to think, iv a 'ole bar'l iv beer runnin' wild in this 'ere peaceful solitude seekin' whom it may devour."

"Oh, take a fit!" called the contemptuous publican.

Eric Appleton placed his thumb to his nose, and wriggled his four fingers at the back view of the horseman.

Relieved of the necessity for disguising his feelings, the portly blonde was tenderly chafing his damaged shin, and the breath drawn sharply between his set teeth made an elegant symphony of pain.

"Appleton, this is a cruel outrage," said Epliraim, fretfully. "My poor shin, it is shockingly bruised, and I was already grievously afflicted. Upon my soul, I could weep!"

"Forget it," retorted Eric. "Ain't I told you a 'undred times to leave diplomatic matters to me. Little Ephie has the brain power iv a babblin' babe; it's fer him to resign business negotiation to the 'ardened sinner. Another gasp 'n' you'd 'ave wrecked 'n' ruined a noble opportunity. As it is that beer's ours."

"Ours! The whole barrel?" The fat partner was transformed. He was suddenly electric with hope; his bin was forgotten.

"Ours— meanin' mine. Mine to have and to hold."

"But, Eric, we must hasten. What is to be done, my "dear Annleton ?" "Load the whole bag iv tricks on the bear, 'n' get down stream licketty-split. There's a punt chained to a gum butt at the bend."

Never had Bruno been loaded with such expedition. He complained broken-heartedly as he loped down the riverside track under his burden, but the fat man tugged at the nose-ring in his feverish haste. That was an exhausting run that nearly prostrated Lees, but the prospect of refreshment upheld him. Bruno's great strength was utilised to tear the punt chain from its staple, and then Eric Appleton put out into the stream, and with a pair of rough-hewn naling-poles for oars commenced the heroic chase.

No man knows what splendid valour and tremendous endurance he is capable of till strung to his task by a glorious aim. Eric Appleton was a born loafer, and had aggravated his natural tendencies by a life of studied indolence. Ephraim Lees was a fat sloth who never stood where he could lie, and to whom movement of any kind was repellent.

Yet, under the stimulus of a high purpose, Eric was struggling with strenuous zeal out under a furious sun, his hands blistering on the rough paddles, the perspiration streaming from his aching limbs. And in even more pitiful stress Ephraim forged through the dust along the river hank, towing the anguished bear. You favoured ones to whom the curse of Adam is no s vious infliction, are not fitted to judge more sensitive and delicately-constituted natures on which labour bears with unremitting torture..

Not even remotely can you appreciate the splendid endurance under weariness and pain displayed by the poor showmen, Eric Appleton and

Ephraim Lees, in their never-to-be-forgotten pursuit of the missing beer. Ephraim stumbled along, and the sweat of his brow sprinkled the track; his feet, pie-shaped in their old canvas shoes, slapped the roadway, like the flappers of a huge seal; the bear shuffled by his side. Between them they raised as much dust as a flock of sheep. On the river, which flittered like polished steel in the falling sun, Eric tugged at his ineffective oars, throwing an occasional eager glance over his shoulder in quest of the quarry.

Oh, the agony of that run.

A yell from the rower informed Ephraim that the barrel was sighted. Eric was paddling his hardest now. Lees put his last reserve of energy into a marvellous sprint. Even Bruno seemed to be infected with the spirit of the chase, and was silent, waddling gamely under his load.

The cask was captured. Eric secured it to the punt-chain with a stout nail, and towed it to the most convenient bit of shore in sight under cover of a clump of scrub. And now, utterly exhausted, the wanderers collapsed in the shade, and lay panting, their greedy eyes fixed on the prize.

"We've got no time to waste," said Eric after a few minutes. "That bloke on the neddy may chance along at any moment."

A severe task lay before them. It was necessary to get the heavy cask out of the water and up the bank. The job would have been an easy one for Bruno if his strength could have been properly directed; but, excited by the prospect of drink, the bear became fidgetty, almost hysterical. He would witharaw his tremendous head at a crucial moment to go fussing about sniffing thirstily, and uttering impatient grunts and yelps. When he did this the barrel rolled back on Eric, flattening him into the river mud, and then there was a cessation of operations while the victim gave expression to his sentiments.

Lifting, pushing, groaning, sweating and cursing, the two showmen struggled with their booty. Once, when it was almost secured, Bruno withdrew suddenly. The barrel rolled back, jumped from a projecting root, and striking the fat man in the middle pitched him heels over head into the water, where he floated helplessly like a balloon. Ephraim was rescued with difficulty, and spread out in the sun to recover.

Half-an-hour was spent before he was again fit to direct the operations of the bear. But Bruno was more reasonable now. He clung to his post, too, and, behold, the barrel was landed, end on, high and dry; and once more the heroes rested from their labour.

"Open it, in pity's name, Eric, my friend," groaned Epliraim; and while Appleton sought a rock Lees dug a pint pannikin out of the company's bundle. Eric's rock was not big enough, but after three tries the impatient bear came to

the rescue. The second blow of his paw smashed the cask-head like matchwood. It was three parts full.

"Wine!" yelled Eric. He seized the pannikin, dipped it full, and carried the liquor to his lips. He took one gulp. Then he backed away, spitting, spluttering and coughing.

"Eric, Eric," shrieked Ephraim in dire apprehension, "oh, what is it? Speak to me—"

Then he snatched the pannikin, dipped hurriedly, and drank; and he, too, spat and spluttered. The bear dabbled his paws in the liquid and sucked them, and his keen disappointment was expressed in human cries.

"Vinegar"' said Appleton. His intonation was that of a man who had lost his last shred of faith in Providence.

"Vinegar!" said Lees. He sat down, muddy, sun-blistered, and worn, a blighted man. And the hot tears coursed down his muddy cheeks. Eric Appleton opened his lips to swear. It was like attacking a bush fire with a penny squirt. He said nothing but rolled down on the grass without a hop e in life.

The cask contained river water flavoured with vinegar. The Splendid Quest had been all in vain.

It was thus that Bryson and Morgan, the mounted policemen from Three Trees, found them two hours later. Bryson was furious over his stolen boat. Alas! they had neglected to tether the punt, and it was gone. There followed a long, dreary march to the lock-up at the township of Three Trees.

"Someone's been pulling your leg, my man," said Morgan when he heard the sad story. "There's no pub at the Pole Bridge. Maybe ye'll remimber it's the first iv April."

The charge was one of feloniously removing.

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2: Luck

(as by Dy Edwardson)
Punch (Melbourne) 5 Nov 1914

"LUCK is pictured as a woman," said Hastings, "because you never know what she means to do next. I don't think there's a man living Luck's played such pranks with as she has played with me.

"I thought Luck my direst enemy. She and Fortune (which includes Misfortune) had combined to make my lot on earth as miserable as possible; and it always seemed to me that her tricks were deliberately malicious.

"My mother died when I was born. My father drank. I wasn't reared. I sort of fought my way up through a sea of misfortunes. At twenty-five I was working in a tannery, and not in the most pleasing branch of the business either. I'd managed to learn to read and write, I can hardly tell how, the knowledge having been picked up in scraps here and there. I was getting thirty-five shillings a week, and hated the work like the deuce and all.

"It was part of my ill-luck not to be able to reconcile myself to my lowly station and my somewhat malodorous line of business. Other fellows did the work, and took the money, and didn't worry. I, in addition to the work, had to struggle with my fierce disinclination. I was always hoping and yearning for better things and pleasanter ways of earning a crust than puddling in a tan pit or mauling rawhides, but could never see a way out.

"Then one night I got in some good work at a fire at an hotel opposite to the house at which I was lodging. I knew there was a rather gouty old gent living in the room facing mine, and I went up after him, found him helpless m his bed, and humped him downstairs through the smoke.

"We were burning a bit when we came out, and the firemen put a hose on us, which just about finished the old bloke. He had to be put to bed; but he sent for me next day.

" 'Look here, my lad,' he said, 'you did me a great good turn last night. Is there anything you'd like me to do for you?'

" 'Well,' I said, 'I don't want to trade on having given a man a helping hand in a tight place, but I've got the rottenest billet on earth, and if you can get me a better one. I'll reckon you've more than evened matters up.'

" 'You're modest,' said he, 'and that ought not to he hard. Look here, I'm fairly fixed financially, but the dashed gout gets me down. How would you like to take charge of me, help me about, and be a sort of valet?'

" 'I'd jump at it,' I said, 'and I'll swear you won't get anyone to do you better than I would.'

" 'I'll chance that, youngster. Two pounds ten a week, and your keep, and you can come on to-day.'

"It seemed a godsend. He'd taken rooms in another hotel, and was bedridden, the dosing from the hose having just about outed him I was with him five days, and he'd taken to me like a father, when rheumatic fever took hold and finished him.

"I was out of a grip again, and Luck was grinning vindictively wherever I turned. Listen. That old chap proved to be my own uncle, my dead mother's brother, and he left thirty-five thousand pounds to ten charitable institutions. I swear that if he'd only guessed my identity every penny would have been mine. But Luck had me set.

"Picture me now right down to it. I'd lost my billet, I'd lost my home, and having bought decent clothes suitable for my position as companion to a gentleman of leisure I hadn't a bean left.

"Of course, it was a tough time. The country was right down to it. There was a wolfish drove of unemployed tramping round Melbourne, and a thick, black drought had settled on the country. Nobody wanted to take me on, most business people being in the act of putting hands off.

"Right there began the perish of my life. I'd been in a perish before, but this was the worst ever. Looking for work ceased to be an occupation. I'd dropped to the uselessness of it after three weeks' desolate tramping, and now I sat miserable, thinking of my finish, or mooned about at night, trying to walk away from the dreary task of contemplating my woeful lot.

"These are the times when a man gets in solid thinking, and running my life over I saw it as nothing but a succession of strokes of ill-luck, each a little worse than the other. Even the episodes that had seemed turns of good fortune proved to be bad turns in disguise. I was always entertaining devils unawares.

"I'd been something of a gambler from the start. When I had a bit by me I was always willing to venture in the hope that the ghastly fate that pursued me was not chronic. I'd invested in scores and scores of tickets in Tatt's at one time or another, always with the same miserable result. I never won a bean. Then came the conviction that I never would win anything— that it was hopeless to try, that so far as the good things of this world were concerned I was down and out.

"Sitting round starving, these piquant ideas come to you to cheer you up. All my misfortunes and failures paraded before me in a dreary procession, and I came to the point of wondering whether the easiest way out was by drowning or hanging. I remember I favoured hanging, but was compelled to admit that I must be content with drowning, since I couldn't afford a rope. The river was free to all.

"There had been a girl when I was about twenty-two— a nice, mild-mannered, gentle-eyed girl named Alice. I met her when working on a Riverina farm one harvest, and she admitted a fondness for me. I was wholly in love with her, but couldn't see how I was going to give a nice girl anything like a fair show for happiness as my wife. Her father settled the problem by shooting three ounces of sparrow shot into my left leg, and carrying the girl off while I was in the hospital, having the pellets picked out.

"I thought a great deal about Alice as I starved. She, too, stood for a stroke of bad luck; but I was compelled to admit her old man was right. The luck might have been worse; she might have been there to share my misfortunes.

"You've never starved? I don't mean just hungered. Being merely hungry is rather pleasant, especially with the assurance of a fat dinner just ahead. Starving is a totally different matter, the sick, sinking feeling accompanied by sharp pains, the long animal craving that makes you bare your fangs like a wolf at the thought of meat—that's the thing to take the conventional prettinesses and the niceties of civilisation out of you.

"I had reached that stage— a stage when a few scraps of broken food would have been received with keener gratitude than is bestowed on his saviour by a wretch snatched from a dreadful death. I'd begged twice during the day, but my luck pursued me even in this. Once I was refused point-blank; a second time a policeman caught me at it, threatened me with arrest, and helped me on my way with a punt.

"Thoughts of thieving were busy in my brain, and I was still prowling when it struck midnight. About half-an-hour later I came suddenly on a squabble in the street. Three lads were attacking a stout gent in evening clothes. Pulling a picket from a fence I got among them, laid one out, lamed another, and started the third on a brilliant sprint.

"They were thieves, and had been after the gent's small valuables. He was drunk. He leaned against the fence, and looked at me gravely.

" 'Shanks," he said. "Shanks, old f'ler, you shaved my life.' He went through his pockets, and hope sprang in my heart. 'Awful shorry,' he said, 'got no money.' Then his face brightened. 'Here,' he said, 'here, take thish ash spression of gratitude;' and he gave me a piece of paper, and went lurching on his way.

"The piece of paper was a five-shilling ticket in Tatt's. Conceive my feelings. I started to tear it across in my rage, but thought better of. it, and crumpling it up stuck it in my vest pocket. However, it meant nothing to me. I had bought sweep tickets in the past, till the belief in my ill-luck became an absolute conviction.

"I starved that night through, and in the morning, utterly desperate, stole a small loaf a baker had left on a cottage verandah, took a jug of milk from another verandah, and ate and drank.

"In this way I lived for nearly a fortnight. Then I realised at noon one day that it was the first Tuesday in November— Cup Day. It concerned me little. I had drifted to Heidelberg, and had breakfasted very poorly on stolen fruit. I wandered to the river bank, and lay in the shade of a tree to sleep the day away.

"I was, I admit, a deplorable object. The nearest thing to a shave I could get was a close clip with an old pair of scissors I had found. I cut my own hair after a fashion with the same implement, and I had a soapless wash in the river. My clothes were wretched, my boots had to be tied together with twine to keep them on my feet, I was thin to the bone, and. if I did not look like a man ready to pray on his kind my looks belied me.

"At noon I was famishing again, but tried to fill my stomach with sleep and lavish dreams of gorgeous, seven-course dinners, such as I had read of.

"When I awoke from a drowse at about two o'clock there was a small picnic party, consisting of a young lady in a white dress and a neat black hat and two children, camped on the other side of the shrub that concealed me.

They had a basket of food and bottles of lemonade, and were very gay.

"Surely they would give me a mouthful. I arose, and took a detour so as not to come upon them too suddenly.

"It was she! Yes, Alice. I knew her at once, and she knew me, although she stared as if I had been some fearful monster risen from the depths of the stream.

"George!" she said.

"I wanted to run, but it was too late. Besides, my legs were in no condition for running.

" 'Yes,' I answered, 'George.'

" 'What are you doing ?'

" 'Just now I am busy starving. I was going to ask you to give me a little food.'

"She tumbled all she had before me in a sort of feverish agitation. She poured a drink for me, and sat with clasped hands and eager eyes, watching.

" 'Oh, you poor fellow!' she said.

" 'Do you know, that beat me. I'd kept something like a stiff upper lip till then, but those words, the light in her eye, the sympathy in her heart, combined with my miserable weakness, beat me. I went on my face in the grass, and cried like a kid.

"She hovered over me, condoling, pleading, her little hands touching me like flowers. God, she was good! She had me all right again in a while, and before we parted I was almost a man.

"Alice had left her father largely on my account. She had come from Sydney to Melbourne thinking she might find me, and was now nursery governess at a lawyer's home in Heidelberg. She filled me with strength and hope, and my love for her came back in a great surge. She was improved, better grown, more handsome, with a quiet, serious manner.

"When my tale was told, she said she could get me work if I was willing to take a rouseabout billet. I was willing to take anything, and told her so.

" 'Perhaps in a while,' she said, 'you may get something better.'

" 'Yes,' I said, mad with a new hope, 'I shall get something better. I feel like a man born again.'

"She let me kiss her.

"I got the billet all right, and worked at it for three weeks, when I'd pulled myself round, and got into a decent suit, and was something like a sane, sound human creature again.

"We saw each other quietly. I insisted in this, as there would have been some chance of endangering her place had she been seen with a man looking as near to a beat as I was.

" 'And you have kept your love for me all this time?' I said one night.

" 'Yes,' she answered simply, 'that I shall always keep.'

"I took her in my arms, and kissed her closely. That, I think, was the best moment of my life. I don't believe there is a sweet or generous emotion possible to a man that had not a place in my breast. My luck, it seemed, had turned.

"The next morning, going through my old suit before discarding it I found the forgotten Tatt's ticket in the vest pocket.

"You know the rest, boys. That ticket was a winner. I drew close upon six thousand pounds, and was married within a month.

"Luck was a bad enemy; as a friend she has been a marvellous sticker. Every investment I've had a hand in since that old November has tumbled money into me, and here is my mascot," concluded Hastings, as his pretty wife came smiling into the room.

3: McSwash's Bitter Experience

(as by Ward Edson)
Punch (Melbourne) 10 April 1902

I CALL HIM McSwash because that is a not his name, a very excellent reason, as all editors who have been called upon to deal with men who insist that a they are the unpleasant heroes of printed stories know well. McSwash was not an unpleasant person.

He was a large, bland, blonde man with glasses, not common 'specs,' but those artistic affairs that grip a man's nose, and give him a very superior air and an intellectual expression. Leonard John McSwash was a traveller for a city house, and a certain evening of a certain day (dates not necessary) he was driving a lame horse drawing a shattered trap along an awful road in a Victorian bush district, feeling about as awful as a man could feel and yet desire to live.

McSwash was uncommonly hungry, he was devilishly thirsty, he was thundering tired, and as dusty as the ash pits in Gehenna. Add to all this the fact that L. J. McSwash was lost, and the circumstance that his brakes had refused to work on the top of Pegger's Hill a mile back, with the result that the horse bolted to the bottom, banged into a log, lamed himself, litho-fractured the wagon, and humped the driver out on his forehead, and you arrive at some vague idea of Mr McSwash's frame of mind, provided you are a sympathetic person, and can enter into the feelings of another.

But do not forget that the day had been like a picnic amongst the friers in Hades, 140 in the shade, and all Tophet in the sun, with a hair-curling north wind blowing all the loam in this lost district through the whiskers of McSwash.

'Ger-up, you blankety, bloomin' flyblown crowbait!' growled Leonard, heaping abuse on his unfortunate horse which limped along slowly, drawing the creaking, lop-sided vehicle behind it.

'Oh, for a drink!' growled the commercial, in an agonised soliloquy. 'Oh for a cold, frothing length of good colonial beer!'

This petition may have a certain humorous atmosphere about it to the reader, but McSwash never put up a more earnest prayer in his life. He spoke from the bottom of a sun-baked dust-covered soul, and as he opened his eyes behold there stood by a twist in the road a small pub, built mainly of palings, and over the door dangled a sign:

STEVE HEELEY,
LICENSED VICTUALLER.
GOOD ACCOMMODATION

Exactly three seconds later McSwash was pounding on Heeley's bar counter.

Mr Heeley appeared, after having been aroused out of the stable by a shrill female voice, and asked: 'What'll ye be afther havin', sor?'

'I'll have a beer to begin with,' said McSwash.

The traveller had the beer. It was not so long or cold as it might have been, but the weary wayfarer swore it was nectar.

'Now I'll have the best dinner you can spread out in five minutes by a fast clock.'

The dinner was provided, and McSwash, refreshed and rested, and feeling better pleased with the world, and more kindly disposed towards the Fates, smoked luxuriously, and ordered a bath.

'What is it, sor?' said Heeley.

'I'll have a bath. I feel like Dusty Rhodes, and I want to establish my identity as a white man,'

'A wash is it?' said Heeley, when McSwash had bellowed directions and orders in his ear.

Heeley was a small, pluckered, skinny Irishman, with little green eyes, and the round, red tip of a small, shiny nose peeping curiously out of a great mass of whiskers. He was deaf, too, but otherwise an obliging man within his limitations, but the limitations of Heeley's Inn were very narrow.

After an absence of five minutes Heeley announced that the bath was ready in there, and, investigating. Heeley found two pints of water in a tin dish.

McSwash blustered: 'Look at me, man,' he cried. 'I weigh fourteen stone without all this real estate that I gathered along the road; do you expect me to take a swim in a pie dish?'

Heeley explained that the district afforded no facilities for bathing; there was not a bath tub within nine miles, and the creek was running so shallow that a bullfrog could not keep himself wet by rolling in it.

Of course, McSwash, finding he couldn't have a bath, wanted it more than anything else on earth, burned for it, was sure he would pass a miserable night without it. But Heeley couldn't help him, and there wasn't another house of accommodation anywhere within reach.

'I'll tell ye what, sor,' said Heeley, coming to McSwash half an hour later, 'there's the big rain bar'l, it's three parts full o' warther, an' if ye don't moind waitin' till the weemin folks have gone to bed ye might shlip in in the dark, an' have a shwim. The warther ain't used for dhrinkin', an' you're welkim.'

McSwash accepted the offer gratefully, and settled down to wait with what patience he possessed. Meanwhile his horse was being doctored in Heeley's

stable, and after tea Heeley himself set off with the broken trap to the nearest blacksmith's seven miles away.

Beside Mrs Heeley there was a plump, red-headed servant girl at the hotel. Mrs Heeley herself was a not uncomely and well-kept woman of forty. McSwash had not seen a sign of any other person so far as eye could reach.

Leonard the wayfarer got weary of waiting for Mrs Heeley to go to bed, and fell asleep himself at about ten o'clock. He woke at midnight, and, stealing out in his pyjamas, he found the house buried in sleep. A faint, far-off, melancholy snore indicated the direction of the Heeley bedroom. McSwash crept out noiselessly, closing the door after him, and made his way to the rain barrel.

The barrel was erected on a square wooden stand, and was on the shady side of the house, between two chimneys. Tossing his pyjamas under the wooden structure, Leonard climbed to the top of the barrel with the aid of a box, and gently let himself down into the water. It was delicious.

The night was close and oppressive, and the water was delightfully cool, but the bulky commercial found the barrel rather a tight fit. The addition of his substance brought the water almost to the top of a the barrel, and McSwash stood there, soaking and quite enjoying himself. It would have been better had he been able to move about, but one has to be content with something short of perfection at bush pubs. Mack was feeling quite delightful, and stood indulging in the delights of the bath, and a gentle reverie, when suddenly the sound of soft voices was borne to his ear. He listened tremulously.

'Se'p me bob, Jim, I do love yer!'

It was a woman's voice. McSwash now heard stealthy footsteps approaching. His first thought was of flight, but he was a modest man, and it occurred to him that if he must be discovered a barrel was a fairly effective costume. He waited in great anxiety, and presently a young man and woman came round from the back of the house and stood close to the commercial's bath tub.

'If the missus knew I got up to go a-courtin' with you she'd gimme the run.'

It was the attractive red-haired servant, and a tall, bearded bushman was holding her round the waist as if he owned her.

'Let's sit down 'ere,' he said, indicating the bench on which stood the barrel containing the rain-water and a fat and bashful man of forty.

'Right oh,' said the girl, 'but I must not stay long, you know.'

'Thank heaven!' thought McSwash. But they did stay long. They sat n there hugging each other, and exchanging the soggy conversation customary between country lovers, while the comfortable coolness at first experienced by McSwash turned to a decided chill, and till harsh, shooting pains began to

travel up his legs and attack his interior, and the man in the barrel prayed fervently that something might happen to Jim and Jane— something that would cause them to leave the immediate vicinity in a great hurry, with such damage as would serve to teach them to keep better hours in the future.

The moon rolled slowly over the dark surrounding bush, and an occasional monkey bear grunted, or a possum squeaked, and McSwash hung to the edge of the barrel and suffered, and still the lovers lingered below. It had come to the point when Leonard felt he must disclose himself or perish of cramp, when Jane smartly disengaged herself from a lingering kiss, and fled into the house. Jim arose from his seat, yawned, cursed, and then strode a off into the bush.

Now was Mack's chance. He'd had all the bath he wanted, and he made an effort to climb out.

Horror! he could not do it. He struggled heroically, but in vain. Do what he would, he failed to hoist himself more than breast high above the barrel rim, and to add to his a terrors a great, gaunt brute of a dog, disturbed by his struggles, darted suddenly around the corner and commenced to bark furiously. McSwash shook his fist at the dog, and ordered it off, but it promptly went at him with a flying rush and a jump, and snapped a bit off his finger.

Mack promptly retired as far as possible into his barrel again, once in a way raising his head to expostulate with the dog, an action which only served to increase the beast's fury, and set it jumping for succulent mouthfuls.

The unhappy drummer raised one cry for help, but remembered the same instant that Heeley had not returned, and there were only women in the house. The cry increased the dog's indignation to a point of madness, and it jumped and snapped, barking frantically the while, until McSwash was glad to seize the wooden cover, back down low into the water, and hold the cover partly over the top of the barrel to protect himself.

He had been in this position about ten minutes when he heard Mrs Heeley calling to the dog: 'Down, Dingo, down! Whatever's of the matter with the dog?'

McSwash remained in the water, quaking.

'Jane! Jane! called Mrs Heeley, 'come here; I do believe there's someone hangin' round the house. Bring the gun.'

There was a pause during which the dog renewed his attack on the barrel, and then Jane arrived with the gun.

'I'm sure I heard some one call as if Dingo had nipped him. Give me the gun, I'm a better shot than you. Now, if anyone shows up I'll put a pint of shot into him before he can say Jack Robinson.'

'Oh, lor!' groaned McSwash inwardly; 'if I speak now I'm a dead man.'

'He's somewhere about here,' said Mrs Heeley. 'Down Dingo! Be quiet, blast you!'

At that moment the unhappy wretch in the barrel felt himself grabbed by the hair.

'I've got him, mum! I've got him!' cried Jane's voice. 'He's here in the barrel.'

Further disguise was useless. McSwash's head and shoulders bobbed out of the barrel, the women yelled, the gun exploded in the confusion, while Dingo literally whirled in a fit of ungovernable ferocity.

'Stick to him, Jane!' cried Mrs Heeley. 'Gimme a hold too!'

She took two handfuls of McSwash's hair, and the two women pulled with in all their power, while McSwash yelled and protested.

The miserable man felt his barrel of refuge toppling; for an instant it poised on its edge, then over went man, a women, barrel, and all. Substantial Mrs Heeley struck the dog in falling, and knocked it flat. Jane got the benefit of the flood that jerked from the barrel, and McSwash was jerked about half out of his refuge by the force of the fall and the burst of water, but here his greatest circumference jammed in the narrow part of the barrel, and he lay helpless, half a man and half a keg.

Dingo was the first to recover. He le took a business-like grip on McSwash's shoulder blade and began to haul at McSwash. Mrs Heeley, who recognised the traveller at last, seized on the tail of the dog, and pulled with all her might. They shifted the barrel, but they did not relieve McSwash, and even when the dog was pulled off and locked up, it was impossible for various reasons to get McSwash out of his barrel, and McSwash could not help himself.

'Lie still, sir,' said Mrs Heeley, as an' we'll roll ye into the barn, where ye can stay till me good man comes home. Maybe he'll find a way out.'

They rolled McSwash into the barn, and there he stayed in his barrel— a much suffering, greatly swollen, and sorely tried man— till Heeley returned chopped him out with an axe.

McSwash says he'll never bathe in a rain barrel again if he has to go unwashed to the end of his days."

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4: The Knock at the Door

The Lone Hand, 1 Dec 1910

A traditional Christmas ghost story in an un-traditional setting

THE boys sat round a small fire of twigs, their faces pale and luminous ; to right and left ran a thin string of rail fence knotted with dark clumps of furze. Between the boys and the irregular line of scattered houses that composed the township of Waddy lay a wide ironstone road, rust colored in the day, furrowed with ruts and gutters by the storm water. Beyond the township was the bush, silhouetted sharply against a prodigious yellow moon hanging desolate in the waste of grey-blue night.

The houses threw black, defined shadows towards the boys, creeping nearer and nearer, reaching long arms. The township was very still. No lights shone in its windows; no sound of revelry by night came from the Shepherds' Inn. In point of fact, the Shepherds' Inn was deserted, save for a bearded he-goat, his fat nanny and family, with a few invited friends, who slept on all-fours in the bar parlor. Quite two-thirds of the houses of the township were uninhabited and desolate; for Waddy was dying off. The families were drifting away, leaving their homes agape and wide-eyed, as if stunned by this base desertion. Those families remaining had long since crept into their beds. There was nothing to sit up for in Waddy; a-bed was not more monotonous than abroad, and in sleep the people did not feel the prevailing depression.

The boys sitting at Tommy Orphan's charmed fire were devoted members of The Circle of Seven, and had stolen from their cribs to attend a midnight meeting of the brotherhood. The Circle of Seven had strange rites and a terrible purpose. It was the aim of the Secret Seven to restore human faith in ghosts and goblins, and revive the simple trust that peopled every old road with a headless horseman, and gave every ancient house a spectre of its own.

Maybe, in forming The Circle of Seven, Tommy Orphan only sought to secure an audience for his tales of supernatural and eerie doings, in the concoction of which he developed a cunning almost diabolical. No merely human boy could hear Tommy tell the story of Bluebeard, with original variations, and fail to be thrilled from his heart's core to the extremity of every nerve in his being with delicious throes of terror, a terror dreadful but intoxicating, that brought the lads creeping together, with furtive eyes drifting towards the dark, that chilled their blood, and yet stirred some deep, abominable delight, linking their souls to myriads of the forgotten dead.

To-night the raconteur was particularly effective. Tommy was an artist.

Never could he be betrayed into telling ghostly tales by day. A ghost story cannot be effective under the sun. The moon may serve a turn, but better the

pitch blackness of a starless night, with a little band drawn about a fire that solidifies the darkness behind, and sets free the fantastical wraiths of the caverns and the shadows.

True, the moon was full, but there was an abnormal quiet in the night and a new fear stirred abroad. To the ruined and broken houses left desolate, another had been added; but in this last the dead lay side by side, white on a white bed, their thin jaws held up with strips of linen, the hollows of their eyes stopped with pennies.

This morning died long William Vickers, an oldest inhabitant of Waddy. The neighbors found his wife sitting by the bedside, staring fixedly at the dead, tearless, a puzzled expression in her eyes. When spoken to the old woman swayed forward on to the bed, and slipped from there to the floor. They lifted her up; and she, too, was dead. Doctor Holman was brought from Yarraman. At odd times the doctor had attended the old people. He showed only a perfunctory interest.

"Death from natural causes," he said.

So the neighbors were left to perform what simple service the dead ask.

William they dressed in his best white shirt, and Mary in her best white linen nightgown; and now, under the white sheet they lay, white haired, all white, like a fantastic scheme in marble. After school the boys of the Circle of Seven stole in on the heels of their elders, and looked at the lifeless faces, and the rigid figures stiffly outlined under a sheet.

From that bedside the lads brought an awe that gave keener terror to Tommy Orphan's stories. They shuffled nearer and nearer, till a compact ring of humanity hemmed the fire and its feeble flames scorched their shins. Henry Betters felt cold fingers touch his spine, and dared not turn to see what eerie thing laid hands on him. Bartholomew Ryan knew there were little devils scampering in his hair.

All bent their eyes on the fire, all were pale, not even excepting Tommy, who trembled and sweated from cold pores at the horror of his own inventions. But Tommy was fearful with a difference— terror never deterred him; a desperate boldness urged him to deeds at which his superstitious flesh shuddered and jumped on his bones.

He was telling the story of The Two Tall Ghosts of Baker's Plain, the two goblins in floating draperies that shone with white fire, which hunted Bill the Herdsman from his bed, and chased him on the common night after night, driving him to the mouth of the old Norman Shaft, and, ever as they came near, whispered in his ear "Jump!"

When Tommy said "Jump!" it was a wailing cry that stopped your heart as with a blow. One night the ghosts pressed Bill the Herdsman so hard that he

was forced nearer and nearer to the shaft mouth. No matter how he turned and doubled, the spectres headed him back ; and presently he hung over the deep black shaft, and the ghosts said, "Jump!" And the doomed herdsman threw his hands up and jumped. Then the ghosts sprang into the air, screaming, and shot down after him, and as they went down a great flame of blue fire belched from the shaft into the pitchy night— Here Tommy Orphan dashed a double handful of sulphur into the mystic fire of the Circle of Seven— a blue flame danced before the boys' eyes. They cried out, and cowered together, clinging to each other.

Fod Elliott's cap fell into the fire, and he did not heed it; Nigger Edson's moleskin knickers were alight, and he did not know. For fully a minute the terror held them.

"Yah-h, Nigger, yer afraid!" It was Tommy who spoke. His own teeth chattered, and his voice was scarcely raised above a whisper.

"Am I! Am I!" retorted Nigger in low, quavering tones. "Betcher I'm not; betcher pound."

"Y' are! Y' are! Anyone can see yer afraid."

"Prove it!" retorted Nigger with a better show of truculence. "Prove it; go on!"

"Well, if yeh ain't afraid, are yeh on to knock et Vickers's door?"

It was a mad proposition, a fearful idea. The boys sat and stared at Tommy Orphan, stupefied by the desperate valor and the folly that inspired the suggestion.

Long Willie Vickers and his lean, hard wife had been something of pariahs in Waddy; they were people apart, had shunned their neighbors, and lived lonely lives in their neat two-roomed skillion surrounded by a well-kept garden that was their only pride, with no company but an ancient sulphur-crested cockatoo. For years the boys of Waddy had baited Vickers and his wife. Often the members of The Circle had stolen down that garden path and knocked at Vickers's front door to enjoy being "sweated" by long William or pursued with hoarse curses by the cockatoo.

That was rational fun, but to creep through the garden now at dead of night and disturb the pale corpses with ribald knockings. Whew! it was hideous. Tommy Orphan's scalp twitched to think of it, and his teeth chattered a little as he scoffed at his mates for their cowardice- But he clung to the idea, fascinated by the awful possibility of disturbing Willie Vickers in his long sleep.

"Who's scared now?" he jeered, pointing a tremulous finger at Nigger. "Look et him shiverin'. Cowardy! Cowardy! Mummy's own!"

"I ain't! Don't care, I ain't," muttered Nigger. "Ain't scared; but— but it ain't religious t' be cheeky t' corpses. "

"Gerrout! 'Ear 'im? 'Tain't bein' cheeky. Yeh jest steal up 'n' knock et the door, tha's all."

"Scared yerself. Yes y'are— yes— yes!"

''Am I? If you'll go, I'll go."

Nigger was silenced for a moment He moved uneasily. "Don't care. I ain't frightened— much," he said.'

"Ain't yeh! Anybody can see. Scared t' death y' are. Yah, Nig's in a blue funk! He's goin' t' cry. Look et him snivellin'!"

Nigger pulled himself together. "It's a lie, see; I'll go if they'll go."

"Come on!" said Tommy Coffin in a low voice. He rose to his feet. The others clustered about him, hating the mission, but gripped by that weird allurement which the terrible has for all of us.

Tommy Coffin led the way, and the six followed him, holding to each other's clothes, walking like cats.

Tommy opened the gate. Together they crept down the garden path to the very door; quaking, they stood.

"You, Nigger," whispered Tommy— "you got ter do it."

Nigger hung back, but was urged forward by strong hands. Then, with sudden desperation, he struck twice on the panel. They fled for the gate together, but Tommy was before them. His face shone whitely in the shadow, his brow was wet, his legs shook under him. He stood at the closed gate and urged them back.

"No, no;" he said, "we orter wait. That ain't fair. Knock, 'n' then wait t' show we ain't scared. Come on; it's me t' knock this time."

They followed him back to the door, each eager to rebel, but no individual daring to run.

"Mind yer, no scootin'," said Tommy Orphan, "we stan' together."

He held Nigger with his right hand, and struck three distinct knocks. Then terror hung on their limbs like lead, and fear froze their hearts and slid ice into every vein; for the lock clicked, the door opened, and, before them, erect in the doorway, horribly distinct against the blackness of the interior, stood the dead woman in her shroud, her chalky face as visible as if lit with an inward light, the cavernous eyes glowing, the thin, rigid jaw tightly bound with a strip of linen knotted above a narrow brow, and on her shoulder perched the bedraggled cockatoo, his little beady eyes shining like points of light, his crest angrily erect.

Fod Elliott had fallen among the violets, and was squirming away on his stomach with marvellous speed, no longer sensate, scarcely human.

"Run away, you boys!" squealed the uncanny bird. "Run away, you boys!"

Tommy Orphan seemed petrified. He stood a moment, his head thrust forward, his mouth open, his hands spread, staring at the gaunt apparition of the dead woman.

Then, as if with the touch of a finger, the springs of volition worked, and he turned and fled wildly from the spot.

The boys were piled against the gate, fighting insanely. A few minutes later seven boys, possessed with terror— a terror that was almost madness— rushed into as many homes, screaming their fear.

The elders came from their beds dubiously, cautiously. They gathered at Vickers's gate. In low voices they discussed the situation. On the whole, it was thought best to send for Dr. Holman. The doctor came, angry but curious.

The bolder spirits followed him to the death bed. Mrs. Vickers lay by her husband, but the pennies that had covered the hollows of her eyes were scattered on the floor, the sheet that had been so smooth and orderly over both was under her body, and on the foot of the bed drowsed the old cockatoo.

Dr. Holman examined the woman's body, and then turned troubled eyes on the knot of shrinking people at the door.

"She is dead," he said. "She has been dead about fifteen minutes."

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5: His Ghostly Counsellor

Sydney Mail 30 Nov 1921

THOMAS THOMAS, otherwise 'Tom Tommy,' and Daniel Parberry, had been mates for years, always getting on at the same claim and in the same shift, on the same level, if possible. They had been in several tributes together, and when Parberry was killed in the Old Euchre Pack at Waddy, Tom Tommy was braceman, and it was into his hands the battered body of Parberry was delivered when it was brought to the surface, and upon him devolved the duty his breaking it gently to the widow, and thereafter lending his counsel and assistance in setting Mary up in business when she decided on opening a little fancy goods shop in Main-street, which thoroughfare lost nothing of the dignity of its title from the fact that it was the only street Waddy possessed.

There was a sort of misty idea floating about to the effect that Tom Tommy would carry consolation to the limit and marry Parberry's widow. The idea did not emanate from Tommy in the first place. It is hard to say whence such ideas do come in small centres like Waddy or how they spread. They seem to be an insidious moral seepage from the community. They come without volition, nevertheless involving a serious responsibility upon the subjects. Tommy had not hinted at marrying the Widow Parberry, his attentions had been only sympathetic, and friendly; but when a whole population starts thinking a certain man should marry a certain woman the banns might as well be published.

There was one man. certainly, who directly, indirectly, and deliberately, fostered the idea of Tom Tommy marrying Mrs. Parberry, a man whose motives were mercenary and selfish. The match maker was David irons, the widow's brother-in-law, a working miner living in a weatherboard skillion at the back of the township where the thin bush still lingered hopefully.

Irons, having a wife of his own, with three children, and bright prospects of an increase, was much concerned al the possibility of some part of the burden of the widow and the orphan (there was a little Parberry falling upon his shoulders, and Tom Tommy, a sober, industrious man, with reputed savings, would make an excellent brother-in-law— one who would not only raise .Nellie above the necessity of appealing to her relations, but a chap to whom an impecunious relative (a brother-in-law, for instance) might turn in an hour of need.

But Tom was slow in complying with general expectations. He drifted into the widow's shop once or twice a week, and bought more notepaper than a non-literary man like the little Welshman could have conceivable use for: but

this was more from a friendly desire to help the business than from any discoverable tenderness towards Mrs. Parberry herself.

Yet Nellie Parberry was a nice, round, neat, little widow, who filled her clothes in a manner that did not fail lo give gratification to the masculine eye. She was red-cheeked and had a dark eye with a glint in it that was distinctly provocative. Tom Tommy was not foolishly insensible to these charms; he knew about her small curled ear, too, and the little clusters of reddish-brown hair, more bright than the rest, that twisted and hung around the white nape of her neck; but he was a slow kind of man, with no faith whatever in himself considered as a lady-killer; and Irons saw with great chagrin the possibility of a futile sort of philandering being maintained for years. It was manifestly his duty to Nellie, and to himself and his three children in *esse* not to mention the one or two in *posse*; to hasten matters.

TOMMY himself gave David the big idea. There had been a lecture on spiritualism at the Waddy schoolroom by a peripatetic theosophist, and Tommy had been heard to admit: 'Fer my part, I'm durn well sure there's more in these here spirits than most of us thinks on, look you.'

'Did you ever see one?' exclaimed Steve Carter.

'No: I never did: but it ain't to say I won't.'

'No: an' you never saw the pigs begin to fly; but it ain't to say you won't.'

'Pigs and spirits is two very different things, mark me. If we become angels when we die, who's to say a few of us don't' get sorter crowded out, an' go knoekin' round on the loose?'

His argument provoked noisy derision, but Tommy was greatly impressed, and claimed that although his own personal acquaintance with spirits had yet to begin, he had an Aunt Sarah in ihe Old Country, who was once chased right, round a cemetery by the tattered spook of her lamented father, who, it appeared, was incensed against his only surviving relation because she would not bury bottles of gin in his grave.

'Flowers! Flowers!' the ghost had said. 'What-in-ell is the good of flowers to a man?'

Thereafter Tommy's Aunt Sarah had buried occasional small bottles of gin in her parent's grave, and his perturbed spirit had sunk to rest, and chased her round the cemetery no more.

It was sufficient for David irons. He resolved that Tommy must strike up an acquaintance with the denizens of spirit land straight away, and, sitting on the hill at the back of Tom Tommy's two-roomed paling hut on the following Sunday afternoon, he studied the possibilities minutely, and gave weighty consideration to the matter of ways and means.

When something was afoot David Irons was not the man to breed frogs in his boots. He had already studied the interior of Tommy's humble home, and now his way was clear before him.

It was Sunday and Dave had conscientious objections to stealing on the Sabbath, objections that had often induced him to put off a good opportunity, of robbing the Chinaman's sluicebox till the following evening; but this was an exceptional case. Dave did not hesitate.

As soon as darkness fell he crept on to the lease of the Lone Hand Cold-mining Company and surreptitiously removed a 50ft length of one-inch garden hose from the big tank. He was borrowing, he told himself, as some salve to a chapel-going conscience: but in the absence of compulsion the hose would never be the property of the Lone Hand Company again. Dave took the hose straight to the small prospecting shaft at the back of Thomas Thomas's hut.

The tip surrounding the hole offered good cover for his purpose; in fact, by simply wedging a slab across the narrow shaft, five feel; down, he could find a most suitable hiding-place in the hole itself.

First the primitive telephone must be rigged. This was a simple matter. Dave thrust one end under a loose shingle of Tommy's roof, where it would be hidden from within by the sugee lining, but where if was sufficiently close to Thomas's head as he lay in his bed. Irons then clamped the hose close to the hut wall with a stone, but it was well hidden behind a clump of cape-broom growing by Tommy's window. The hose extended, from here to the little shaft in the side of the hill, and, lying behind the pipeciay lip with his mouth at this end of the hose, the operator was able to send his voice with, perfect distinctness right into Tommy's sleeping apartment. Irons had some native latent as a mimic.

We need not affect to be as surprised as Tommy was at midnight that night when, awakening from a kind of half sleep, he heard wilh astonishing clearness the voice of his dead mate Dan Parberry calling hiin.

'Thomas Thomas!' said the voice. 'Thomas Thomas! Thomas Thomas!'

Tommy lay perfectly still, frozen into inaction. His heart began to thump, thump, thump with heavy blows that seemed to shake the bunk under him. Had he dreamed?

'Thomas Thomas!'

Tommy jerked himself into sitting posilion, his scalp suffused with a. creepy, crawly sensation.

'Good lor' — Dan!' whispered he.

Although Dan Parberry had never called him formally 'Thomas Thomas' in the whole course of their acquaintance, Tommy did not doubt for a moment it

was Daniel Parberry's voice he heard. Daniel Parberry's spirit was addressing him, and it was reasonable to suppose that a spirit, being a sacred and dignified thing, would not descend to frivolity or undue familiarity.It could not, for instance, bring itself to call a man 'Tom Tommy.'

'Thomas Thomas!'

'Yes, yes, yes, yes, Mr. Daniel Parberry,' faltered Tommy. 'Wh-wh-what is it, Daniel, sir?'

Parberry had been plain 'Dan' to Tom for eleven years, but you cannot call a spirit 'Dan.'

'Thomas Thomas, I cannot rest. I'm troubled about Nellie and the little girl. I want to see my Nellie settled again; I want her in safe hands. Can't you— you— ou-u--oo-oo?'

The voice trailed away and was lost.

'Yes, Daniel?' faltered Tommy. Then, after a pause, a little less weakly, 'Yes, Daniel?'

But there came no further word that night. Tommy could see the interior of his hut in the dim light, a wisp of moon provided, but he sprang from bed. going warily for fear of colliding with a spirit, and lit a candle. He peered about his bed room, he peered into the kilchen- breakfast- dining- and sitting- room, the only other apartment, he even peered out into the placid, grey night. Then he went back to bed, very tremulously, his teeth clicking as he went.

He left the candle burning, and lay with his nose above Ihe bed clothes searching the room. He, sniffed, fancying he delected a spirituous atmosphere: but he was not disturbed again that night. Tommy, lying awake till day peeped in, thought of the amazing message he had received, not of its purport.

He thought that over all next day. He did not doubt for one moment that Dan had risen from his grave to impose a task upon him. He was to look after Mrs. Dan and little Nellie, but was it a reasonable thing for any right-thinking ghost to call upon a mortal, however much a male, to accept so grave a responsibility? Suppose all the spirits of the neighbourhood, misled by Parberry's example, were to take it into their heads to inflict him with the care and upkeep of their surviving relations!

Tommy had a bit put by, but was in no position to finance an orphan asylum in conjunction with a lone widows' home. Just imagine his position if Tom Canty, for instance, came up from the tomb to request him to take over the care of Sheilah Canty and the six little Canty brats! Sheilah used to beat Canty when he was in the flesh, and since his death had attacked and damaged two men over whom she held no legal rights in the course of disputes about their wash bills. Tom fervently prayed Canly's ghost might not walk and talk.

PLAINLY it was a matter calling for the gravest consideration— graver than the grave consideration the dead man had, no doubt, given to it. Meanwhile, not to be unfriendly, and to give the late lamented Parberry to see that he was open to reason, Thomas Thomas called to see the widow, making kindly inquiries. He was pleased to hear that she was well, but grieved to find that the business was not prospering.

'I shall have to lake in sewing,' said Mrs. Parberry, wiping a tear from the left corner of her right eye: 'I may even have to go to Tingle of Herringbone as cook. Boddycomb tells me there's an opening there at the homestead.'

She sighed deeply.

Tommy patted Nellie on her round arm, and bade her bear up.

'It'll all come out right,' said he.

'I could p'r'aps marry again in a while, Dan bein' willin',' said the widow.

Tommy understood that Boddycomb was the man she had in mind. He departed, much concerned.

How would Daniel Parberry like this? Obviously he had no such contingency in mind. Tommy uttered an ejaculation of impatience. He wished ghosts would not be so enigmatic.

Three nights passed before Tommy received an other visitation. He was then called from his sleep at about half-past midnight— the hour when Irons, who was on 4 o'clock shift, would be returning from his work. The spirit spoke deliberately and impressively, as before—

'Thomas Thomas! Thomas Thomas!'

Tommy awoke, quaking. He was not, as terrified at the idea of being haunted as he would have expected himself to be: but then the ghost was that of Dan Parberry, and he knew Dan so well. Dan wouldn't hurt a kitten. He had a creepy sensation, and a cold moisture chilled his skin, and his heart beat like a piston; but he bore up very well.

'Yes, Daniel,' he quavered.

'I had hopes of you, Thomas Thomas,' continued the voice. 'I counted on you.'

'What for, Daniel?' Tommy moistened his dry lips and tried to speak up for himself. 'I dunno what I ain't done that I ought to have done.'

But the. other cut in upon his speech.

'I reckoned you was the man would love and cherish her, Thomas Thomas.'

'Meanin' Mrs. Dan?' queried Tommy.

'Beware!' said the voice, with terrible emphasis. 'Beware!'

Tommy found a threat in that 'Beware.' He covered his head with the rug in self-defence.

'I dunno as this is doin' the fair an' square thing be an old mate, Daniel,' he murmured. But silence fell. The spirit had gone.

When Tommy next called on Mrs. Dan, Boddycomb was at the shop, engaging all her attention. Tommy noted this with increasing concern, not wholly on the ghost's account, he had recounted Nell's charms again and again, wilh the object of keeping himself up to the mark, and they were very real to him, very significant.

'Never saw a nicer way iv smilin' in all me life,' said he, but he was thinking of how the widow had smiled on Boddycomb.

Tommy entered upon a systematic courtship of the plump widow, but Tommy was no Don Juan, no Gay Lothario; he had had small practice. Courtship with him would be a long, slow siege, no process of taking by storm— meanwhile Boddycomb was getting in his good work.

One night after calling on the widow, and being practically driven from her kitchen by Boddycomb's persistence, Tommy retired in no pleasant frame of mind. He was ready for the spirit that night.

'Ah, go on,' he retorted with some heat. 'If marriages are made in heaven you must be plumb seven miles deep in the pit not to know she's going to marry Phil Boddycomb.'

The ghost paid no heed to this, it continued to exhort him.

'Well,' retorted Tommy, 'I'll arst her; a man can't do no more than arst her.'

But Tommy didn't ask, mainly because Boddycomb, strangely enough, was always on hand when he felt he had the courage to do it.

It was perhaps four weeks after the first call of the spirit that Mrs. Parberry paid her visit to Thomas Thomas in Tommy's own hut. She was dressed in her best mourning, and looked ravishing, Tommy thought. The widow sat down on the stool near the door, took out her handkerchief, and opened proceedings with tears. Tommy hovered round, offering a pannikin of creek water, spluttering and expostulating.

'Arr, go on,' said he, 'whatjer wanter cry fer? There ain't nothin' to cry fer.' Is it Dan?'

'That's it,' sobbed the widow. 'Is he happy?'

'Why, acourse he's 'appy. Why for not?'

'Well, he— he— he— he called on me last night. He said I had to get married.'

'Get married? Did he say that def'nit?' The widow nodded vigorously, her handkerchief still at her eyes.

'Quite def'nit. Angry he was with me for not thinkin' of it before.'

'Yes, Mrs. Parberry.' Tommy gulped audibly. 'Did he say who — who — who's the feller?'

'Boo— hoo! Ye— es. It's you!' With a shrill cry the widow sank her tear-stained face on the table.

Tommy was over her, he ventured to put an arm about her.

'That's all right, Mrs. Par— Nellie,' he said. 'That's quite all right. He's bin at me about it. I was goin' to ask you, on'y I thought Boddycomb was the feller.'

'Dan don't seem to care for Boddycomb,' sobbed Nellie.

'Well, then, it's settled.'

'The fifteenth of December,' said Nellie. 'I always get married on the fifteenth of December.'

SO it was arranged they were to be married on the fifteenth of December and Waddy was delighted to find that it had guessed accurately again, while Irons plumed himself mightily on his success as a match-maker. In fact, in the course of a few weeks Phil's triumph prompted him to use his stratagem still further, but more, to his personal advantage this time, with the result that, after a long rest, Tommy found himself again called up by the spirit.

'Thomas Thomas!' cried the ghost, with even more than the usual impressment.

Tommy jumped out of his sleep.

'Hello! Hello!' he said, not quite understanding.

'Thomas Thomas!'

'What, is that you again, Daniel Parb'erry?' said Tommy protestingly. 'Ain't you never satisfied, Daniel? We're marryin' in a week.'

'Buy Phil Irons' share in the Lone Hand tribute.'

'Wh—a—t?' gasped Tommy. 'Why, it don't hardly pay for tucker.'

'Buy Irons' share in the Lone Hand tribute.'

The ghost had been at Tommy several times before he began to consider seriously the idea of buying Irons out. He had argued to himself; 'Daniel Parberry is now a spirit, and spirits know a thing or two. Daniel is anxious for his widow's welfare, and that of his child. It may be that the tri'bit is going to pan out rich after all.'

He went to see Irons. Irons opened his mouth very wide.

'Fifty quid,' said Irons. 'Not a ha'penny less, not a penny more.'

'Fifty!' snorted. Tommy. 'Why, she don't pay four bob a shift.'

'Fifty quid!' said Irons emphatically. 'She's lookin' more 'opeful. Might strike a rich make any day.'

Tommy got Irons' share in the tribute for £45. The transaction was completed a week before the wedding, and Tom went in to work his share, but was let off for the wedding.

The marriage took place in Waddy, and the happy couple went to Melbourne for their honeymoon. Within that week Tom Tommy realised a great happiness. He had not been exactly in love with Nell, but before the week ended he realised that he had got the best on earth, and he blessed the ghost of Dan Parberry.

'I'll bear Dan in kindest remembrance 'slong as I live. He's the bes' friend a man ever had,' said Tommy.

'It's so unlike my Dan, too,' mused the bride. 'He was that jealous. Couldn't bear a man near me, he couldn't.'

'There's nothin' mean and selfish like that about a ghost,' said Tom Tommy confidently. 'Leastwise not about Dan's ghost.'

And then, when they were on the eve of returning, came a telegram from Tarlton, Tommy's shift mate at the Lone Hand, that brought a new happiness.

Tom Tommy and Mrs. Tom Tommy returned at once. Tommy loved his wife, he loved her little girl, and things were going well with him.

That evening Phil Irons came upon Tommy digging the earth about Dan Parberry's grave in the Waddy cemetery.

'What yer.doin' that fer?' asked Phil.

'Well,' said Tommy, 'It's like this— Daniel here put me on to the best thing I've ever had— my Nellie.'

'Oh, did he?' sneered Phil.

'Yes, and he put me on to the nex' best thing, too, the Lone Hand tribit.'

'The devil he did!'

'Yes, and I think it's up to me to keep the earth nice an' loose about his grave in case he should ever want to rise up and give me a tip for the Cup.'

'Go on,' said Phil, anxiously, 'but what yer drivin' at about the Lone Hand tribit?'

'What;' replied Tommy, tantalisingly; 'd'yeh mean to say you ain't heard? Well, you'll hear from others soon enough.'

Phil Irons heard the truth within an hour, and when he did he jumped up, beat on his forehead with his hard fists, tore at his whiskers, even plucked out a fair quantity of his thinning hair, and behaved altogether like a madman, and not without reason, for the tributers at the Lone Hand mine had struck a new make of reef, four ounce stuff, it seemed, and Tom Tommy, on the strength, of the share Phil Irons had imposed upon him, was likely to make his pile.
And make his pile Tommy did.

6: The Vengeance That Miscarried

(as by Dy Edwardson)

Punch (Melbourne) 19 June 1913

WHEN SIMON LEES went to Sydney and started business as William Dickenson he was a sullen, discontented sort of man; but as Simon Lees he had been a person who habitually carried an expression suggestive of toothache and disappointed ambitions, so we may take it that more than a change of name is essential in bringing about a revolution of character and temperament.

The essential difference between William Dickenson and Simon Lees sprang from the fact that Simon's wife, an unreasonable creature, who had an unradical antipathy to soured characters, had run off with some person unknown, who might be reasonably supposed to have some trace of sweetness in his disposition. This dereliction of duty on the part of Mrs. Lees gave William Dickenson, alias Simon Lees, a substantial grievance. He was a forsaken, dishonoured man.

There was nothing but slender, circumstantial evidence to prove that Mrs. Lees had gone off with another man; but there was proof positive that she had gone off. The other man was taken for granted. Believing himself despised and scorned because of his wife's rash act, Simon Lees waited long enough to secure a divorce, then sold up his business in Battersea, London, England, and presently reappeared in Redfern, Sydney, New South Wales, at William Dickenson, in the hope of retrieving his good name and making much money.

In reality, what contempt Simon Lees had earned in Battersea was due to the inherent disqualifications of his character; but we always think much more of the trifling mischief others do us than of the big mischief we do ourselves. William Dickenson was not better liked in Redfern than Simon Lees had been in Battersea, simply because Dickenson, alias Lees, was not a likeable, genial gentleman.

Dickenson was a tallish, heavy man, big-tooted slow of gait, with a large, clean-shaven face that looked as if it had been modelled in stale dough by a caricaturist's hand. There were three distinct loose rings of flesh under his eyes, and a loose strip running from his chin to his Adam's apple. Nobody liked Dickenson, yet Dickenson's Redfern business prospered.

The devil's luck was behind him. He struck Redfern with just the shop it wanted, in the right place, at the right moment, and the first week's dealings showed a fat profit. After that progress was steady. But prosperity did not serve to cheer up William Dickenson. He had his settled sorrow. He nursed it. It was his sole consolation. His wife had dishonoured him. She was a vicious, irreclaimable wretch. It would be a just and righteous thing to strike her down wherever he might meet her.

This grievance served as a sort of working excuse for Dickenson's native moroseness. If there were anything gloomy and evil in him now it sprang from the infidelity and despicable infamy of the recent Mrs. Lees.

When Dickenson had been about two months in business in Sydney, it became necessary for him to engage an assistant. Times were not too good in Sydney at that date, and about thirty men of all ages responded to William's advertisement.

The proprietor of the Dickenson Emporium was slow as usual and deliberate as ever in making his choice; and, strange to say, although there were several distinctly melancholy types among the applicants, Dickenson eventually selected Arthur Sherwood, a young man of thirty, brown-haired, brown-eyed, bright from top to toe, and distinctly good-looking on a strong, brown, square-headed, square-jawed "

"One thing I have to stipulate," said Dickenson to his new hand. "No women. You understand me? I detest women, and the fewer there are about this place the better. You are a married man?"

"Yes," said Sherwood, feeling that this was the finish.

"So much the better," replied Dickenson sourly. "It means you will have none tagging round the place after you. Don't mistake me, I'll have no women about, either wives or sweethearts. I must necessarily have close dealings with you; but that involves no acquaintance with your womenfolk. Keep them away."

"Oh, very well. It is not likely in any circumstances that my wife would interfere. "Then that's satisfactory. You can come in to-morrow."

DICKENSON'S choice of an assistant proved to be a wise one. Sherwood brought to the business the one thing it lacked, a pleasant personality, and again there was a jump in William Dickenson's taxable income. It was scarcely believable among Dickenson's regular customer's; but young Arthur Sherwood got along remarkably well with the gloomy proprietor. This was largely due to Sherwood's adaptability. This native cheerfulness was proof against all Dickenson's distressing humours.

"He is a man with a bug," Arthur confided to his wife. "The sort of gloomy character that retires within itself as into a 'dark cellar, simply because it dislikes sunshine. He's sullen, but let him be. That doesn't hurt. It provides a sort of foil to my own happiness."

Then Sherwood gathered his quiet little wife into his arms, and kissed her, and Sherwood's quiet little wife merely pressed her cheek to his heart and said "Arthur" in a soft voice like an infinite caress.

In six months' time Arthur Sherwood was indispensable to the business. He had taken hold of it with both hands. Two suggestions of his for developing the trade had been acted upon with splendid results, and it was already necessary to extend the premises.

"I hear the man in the fruit shop next but one on the left is dissatisfied with his business," said Sherwood. "It would be a wise move on your part to secure the place, Mr. Dickinson."

"For what?" replied Dickenson. "We can't work the business in detached shops."

"No. But it would be a good move to take that place. The business next door on the left is a good one. We couldn't get them out without paying a big price; but if we had the shop next them to offer as a further inducement a hundred or two might shift them one door higher up."

The notion was sound. Dickenson had sense enough to see a good thing when it was put to him. He acted on Sherwood's advice, and so secured the lease of the adjoining shop at a minimum price, and Dickenson's emporium began to spread itself.

When twelve months had gone, Sherwood was practically manager of Dickenson's, and had five hands under him. He was the active agent, the visible head. The gov'ner had a dismal sort of office in keeping with his dismal disposition, where he brooded all day.

One day the proprietor called Sherwood into his office. Pointing to the seat at the other side of his table, he said: "Sit down."

Sherwood sat down.

"Anything amiss?" he asked.

"There's always something amiss with me. I'm an embittered man— a man whose life has been ruined by the perfidy of another."

This was the first time Dickenson had mentioned intimate personal matters to Arthur, and the young man looked towards the door and shifted uneasily, fearing maudlin confidences.

"Perhaps if you tried to stiffen up a bit, sir, and get out into the sun," he ventured.

"There's nothing will brighten me up, Sherwood, but revenge. But that is not what I want to say to you. I have to acknowledge that you have been a good man for the business."

"I have done my best."

"I admit it. I've tried you a hundred ways, and you've proved yourself a man in whom confidence may be reposed. I am going to make you manager, Sherwood."

"Thank you, sir." "You shall have six hundred a year from the beginning of July."

Sherwood jumped to his feet, and staved at Dickenson in amazement.

"Six hundred a year?" he said. His present pay was four pounds fifteen a week.

"You are worth it, Sherwood."

Sherwood knew he was worth it. He had long recognised that he was worth a great deal more to the emporium, but realisations of one's worth and realising the cash are two distinct and widely different things.

Dickenson went on dully, "I do not stop at that, Sherwood. You are to be a partner, with a fifth interest."

Sherwood fell back into his chair. Dickenson was mad. There was no doubt on that point— he had gone stark mad. Hitherto, he had shown himself close-fisted and suspicious. This sudden burst of confidence and liberality could only be the outcome of a painful intellectual collapse.

"I— I don't know how to thank you," Arthur stammered.

"I don't want thanks. I want continued efficient service, continued faithfulness."

"You can rely upon that, sir."

"I have assured myself of it."

"HE MUST have heard that Whiting and Job were after me," Arthur explained to his wife. "Anyhow, he's done the thing handsomely, and now we're all right, dear."

When the papers were signed, and Arthur Sherwood entered into his junior partnership, there was a second intimate interview with the gov'ner.

"I've done this, Sherwood," said Dickenson "because I want to leave the business in good hands, under the best conditions. I'm taking a holiday—"

"And you couldn't do better," Arthur responded. "Get out into the sunshine. Seek cheerful surroundings."

Dickenson stood up. "I am not seeking cheerfulness," he said. "I am going to seek my wife."

"But you told me she was infamous. I understood you detested her."

"That's true. That's why. Somewhere that woman is living in ease, perhaps in happiness. That consideration blackens my life. When I think what she did to me; when I realise that she made me a mock and a byword, the thought of her living happily in her iniquity almost chokes me. I am going to seek her, to find her out, and tear her down. At least I can expose her to her world, whatever it is, as a black adultress."

Dickinson's pale, dough-like face had become almost purple with passion, his bloodshot eyes gleamed in his head. There was a strong suggestion of mania in this weird mission.

Arthur stammered a few words of dissuasion, but Dickenson waved them aside.

"I will confide in you fully," said the boss. "My wife ran away from me. She was young and beautiful. I thought her good. She went off with some other man of whom I know nothing. My belief is that they fled to Australia. I have never forgotten or forgiven. My hope has always been to track them down. I am always seeking. Sydney has disclosed nothing, but I shall search more thoroughly. Then I shall go to Melbourne, and seek there. Then on to Adelaide. Then to the West. Meanwhile, I want your help. Keep your eyes open for this woman. Never forget what you owe me. Hunt for her— hunt— hunt!"

The two men were on their feet, Dickenson almost bloated with passion, Sherwood filled with amazement.

"I seek her," he said—I? But I do not know her."

"You will Here is her photograph. That is the vile creature."

He thrust the portrait into Sherwood's hands, and for a minute the young man stood transfixed, staring at the fair face of the picture.

"Was this your wife?" Sherwood's voice was only a thin whisper.

"Yes. My true name is Simon Lees. She was my wife. You will seek her. Never forget her."

Sherwood went from that interview, trembling in every limb. In his own office he mechanically doffed his working jacket, and putting on his coat and hat turned to the door. There he lingered in thought for five minutes, and then, returning, hung up his hat, and sitting at the table went quietly on with his work.

William Dickenson went out on his strange pilgrimage.

He spent a whole month hunting about the streets of Sydney, only looking in at the emporium now and again. Then Arthur heard from him in Melbourne. Occasionally he wrote a letter in a black spirit of disappointment at the failure of his mission. Nowhere could he find a trace of the former Mrs. Lees.

"He has gone on to Adelaide," Arthur told his wife one evening. "From there he intends to go to Perth and the big mining towns in Western Australia. After that it should not be difficult to keep him seeking. He is a handicap on the business. He, might be sent to New Zealand or even America with some imaginary clue. Anything to keep him away—"

Mrs. Sherwood seemed deeply concerned, but she offered no reply.

Dickenson spent a year seeking in Western Australia and Queensland, and after that sailed for California. His search did not prosper, and one night he

was shot by a drunken criminal in a low quarter of San Francisco. The murderer claimed that Dickenson had insulted his companion, a woman of indifferent character and picturesque antecedents.

Dickenson had left a will in the hands of a firm of lawyers in Sydney. What money he had he bequeathed to charities, with the one strict condition, that no woman was to benefit by it, directly or indirectly. His share in the emporium Dickenson bequeathed to his partner, Arthur Sherwood, whose fidelity he had never doubted, and whose ability and industry had gone so far towards building up the film of Dickenson and Co.

In his own home Arthur Sherwood drew his wife to his side, and held her fast.

"Now you may know all, my darling," he said. "Dickenson's true name was Lees— Simon Lees. This is the photograph of the woman he was seeking. Now you know why I was so careful of you."

Mrs. Sherwood took the picture. The face that smiled at her from the cardboard was her own.

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7: The God Shoo Shan.

(As by Dy Edwardson)
Punch (Melbourne) 3 July 1913

One of the series "The Hobbies of Austin Porteus".

THE SHOP of Mr. Austin Porteus was a peculiar shop, and Mr. Austin Porteus was a peculiar man; a man of medium height, very broad-shouldered, somewhat corpulent, with a large head, made much larger to the view by a plenteous growth of curling white hair and a handful of curling white whiskers on either cheek. Out of this snowy fleece Mr. Austin Porteus peered through a pair of steel-rimmed glasses with thick lenses.

He had chubby, red, round cheeks, and a chubby, red, round, clean-shaven chin. His upper lip was shaven, too, and it was a perfect Cupid's bow of an upper lip. Mr. Porteus had a mouth like a baby. In fact, his whole face suggested Cupid grown elderly and run to whiskers, without having lost his peculiar interest in men, women and affairs.

Mr. Porteus sat behind the small counter in his small, rather dusty shop, and peered closely at a bronze cist, evidently an antique, beautifully chased, and embossed with charming figures. Mr. Porteus was, in fact, an archaeologist— a collector of antiques. His curious little shop was well stocked with objects of quaint interest— some delightful, others ugly, all strange and unusual. The shop was situated in a narrow, out-of-the-way street in a little-frequented corner of the city. It had one small window, not very carefully attended, through the dusty glass of which you might discover— if you were quite determined about it— a few articles of pottery, some scraps of South Sea ornament, such as armlets, anklets, necklaces and feathered head-dresses, and several aboriginal weapons. Mr. Austin Porteus seemed to trouble little about customers. If you. called to deal you were as likely as not to find the little shop closed light, and Mr. Porteus away. This might make you angry— but Mr. Porteus was never upset. He knew that his customers would come again.

It was early in the afternoon of a warm day in October, Mr. Austin Porteus chuckled over the ancient metal chest, flipped it with his thumb-nail, and chuckled again.

"A forgery!" he said, and giggled like a happy child. "A lovely forgery!"

Then Mr. Henry Brain looked in.

Mr. Brain was an entirely different type of man— tall, lean, clean-Shaven, dressed in a neat blue sac suit; shrewd of face, not more than 'forty-five— a man of the world in every twitch and crease of him. He might have been an eminent lawyer; he was actually a successful detective.

"Lord, I'm lucky," said Mr. Brain. He took off his hat, and wiped his square brow. "Was afraid to death you wouldn't be in."

"What is it ?"' asked Mr. Porteus quietly, wrapping his fictitious antique in tissue paper with loving care. "Something very much in your line. Will you come? We can talk as we travel. It's at Riverton, and it's serious."

"Dear me," said Mr. Austin Porteus. "Dear, dear me." He locked his cist in a large, iron-lined cupboard, and followed Brain out, locking the door after him. Brain had a cab at the door, and a moment later the two were being bowled at a smart pace in the direction of Kiverton, a suburb priding itself on its exclusiveness and its aristocratic inconveniences. In the daylight between the shop door and the cab the contrast between the two men was flashed upon us with glaring emphasis'— the rather shabby, somewhat dusty black suit of Mr. Porteus looking particularly seedy and unkempt alongside Mr. Brain's gentlemanly neatness. It was noted, too, that Mr. Porteus wore carpet slippers, rather down at the heel, and that his tie had not been knotted.

"Murder?" said Mr. Porteus in the cab.

"Why that guess?"

"You have your murderous air, my friend."

The detective smiled. "I suppose I had. I am very much at a loss. Here are the details as closely as possible. It's either suicide or murder, and Mr. John Pride is the victim.''

"John Pride!" ejaculated Mr. Porteus. "Bless my soul! I knew him. He was a bit of a collector himself; now and then a customer of mine."

"Good, you will be doubly interested. He was found at about half-past two this afternoon stabbed and dead on the floor of his room in most extraordinary circumstances.

"He was a bachelor, you know," Brain continued, "and lived in rather a fine house in River-street, Riverton. He intended leaving the house, and two people called at about a quarter past two to look over the place. While the housekeeper was showing these people through the back premises, they having already seen the front, of the house, a shriek was heard from the drawing-room, and the general servant— a girl of about seventeen— rushed into the kitchen, white with horror, and crying murder. She had found her master lying upon the drawing room floor, with a knife through his heart."

"There was nobody with him in the interval between the strangers leaving, the room and the discovery of his body?"

"Nobody we know of. It hardly seems possible that anybody could have reached him unobserved."

"And this servant girl?"

"A timid, rather foolish, country-bred creature. She is almost dead with terror. Quite out of the question."

"In affairs of this kind, my dear Brain, nobody is quite out of the question. What of the visitors— these people looking over the house?"

"They are Americans, a Mr. and Mrs. Decken. He is a member of a his Chicago firm of packers, a rich man, and has been in Melbourne about five months. They have a servant with them, a Chinese boy, Won Yen."

"And these people were under observation during the whole of the time?"

"Practically. They had just been through the conservatory, which is a very fine one, had entered the kitchen, when the alarm and was given. The housekeeper was with them all that time."

"Then if the man were alone the whole of the time there is no escape from the certainty that he suicided."

"I cannot quite reconcile myself to that. There is no discoverable reason. Pride was a man comfortably off, a man of cheerful disposition, and it seems to me— and here the doctor supports my opinion— that the blow that drove this curious weapon clean through the man's body was not self-delivered. Then again I admit that in falling, the weight of his body may have driven the knife further. He was lying on his face."

"There is one thing quite certain, Brain, that if a man is found stabbed, and no living; soul has been near him. he has stabbed himself. Detective science eliminates miracles. Are all the people of the house accounted for?"

"One curious incident remains. The Chinese boy who followed the Deckens over the house carrying Mrs. Decken's wraps was left in the conservatory."

"Oh, oh ! This is quite another story."

"Wait. He was not with the party in the kitchen when the body was found, and was not thought of till ten minutes later, when the hubbub had subsided somewhat, and the Police had arrived. Then he alone was missing. A hurried search was made. Telephone messages were sent in all directions advising the police of the adjacent suburbs to look out for him. Our friend John Hop imagined he had a soft thing, and that Won Yen was the guilty man.

"But," said Brain, "Won Yen came to light a few minutes' later. He was heard calling in the garden, and the constable himself found him in the conservatory."

"Where he had been hiding?"

"Where he was securely locked up. Mrs. Camden, the housekeeper, had locked the conservatory securely on leaving. It was a precaution her master had always insisted upon. Won Yen, who had loitered behind the others, examining the peculiar flowers, was overlooked for the time. He was not,

liberated till the policeman himself unlocked the door in the presence of four witnesses, all of whom are positive that the door was locked."

Not another word passed between Mr. Austin Porteus and Brain, during the remainder of the ride. Mr. Porteus sat in his corner, twiddling two fat thumbs, and murmuring at intervals, "Bless my soul! God bless my soul!" Detective Brain had taken all necessary precautions.

The body remained on a couch in the drawing room, the witnesses were all detained. Mr. Porteus looked down at the mortal remains of the late John Pride, without a trace of emotion. He examined the weapon with which the deed was done, and recognised it immediately. as a valuable sample of an old art peculiar, to one notoriously martial Burmese tribe.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Porteus. He walked slowly round the room, and halted before an art object here and there. Mr. Pride had been a judicious collector of curios. He knew a good thing, and had purchased many.

Austin Porteus paused finally before a remarkable object standing on a fine carven, black-wood bureau in one corner of the room. It was a gross sample of Asiatic fancy, a monstrous conception, half-human,. half-frog, marvellously wrought in three metals— brass, silver and gold— touched with a pearl-like enamel in green and red, chased with exquisite art. Its large, blood-red eyes were twin stones having extraordinary fire. Its teeth were true pearls, and a great crystal was embedded in its breast.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Porteus. He polished his glasses, and looked more closely, and lingered so long that presently Brain ventured to remind him.

"After all, my old friend, we are not here to study curiosities, are we?"

"Aren't we?" replied Mr. Porteus, beaming over his steel-rimmed glasses. "Aren't we, though, really?" Porteus went back, to the body, and pondered that as he had pondered the graven image.

Then he took up John Pride's right hand.

"Bless my soul," he said. "Now I should like to see these people— the Deckens. I would prefer to see them alone for a minute, if you don't mind."

Mr. Porteus spent only five minutes with the Deckens, eliciting nothing of any importance, it would seem. The case troubled him, apparently. He went into the garden to ponder it. He drifted in and out of the conservatory, and round the left wall of the house. He spent a minute or two under the window of the drawing-room, then startled the people in with the body by suddenly appearing among them. He had accomplished this by pushing up the window and clambering nimbly into the room. For a stout, elderly man he did it remarkably well.

"You did not hear me," he said. "You saw me, of course, but you did not hear me." "What of it?" asked Brain. "Just to show that it was possible for a

man to get in from the garden, stab John Pride, and get out again, as Won Yen did."

"The Chinaman?"

"Won Yen is not a Chinaman."

"You have seen him? He has confessed?"

"I have not seen him; but you had better put him under arrest at once, I think."

Brain signalled to a constable, who hastened from the room.

"Then you do not uphold the idea of suicide?" Brain said, turning to Mr. Porteus.

"John Pride was murdered as he stood at this table!" Mr. Porteus took the dead man's right hand in his, and pulled aside the clenched fingers. "See," he said.

Brain looked closely. Under the fingers, against the palm, was a small object like a beetle carved in stone.

"What is it ?" he asked.

"That is a scarab. It is genuine."

"But what does it prove?"

"Only that a man does not stab himself whilst holding another article than the knife in his right hand, unless he, is a left-handed man, which John Pride was not."

"But if it is a murder what is the object— the motive?"

"There is the object and the motive." Austin Porteus pointed to the squat metal monster on the black bureau.

"That appears only the fantastical work of some decadent sculptor to a casual observer— it is really Shoo Shan, a very venerable object to you if you happen to be a Burmese, an object of absolute sanctity for which you would happily lay down your earthly life in the certain hope of celestial glory if you happened to be a Twoi Burmese, of the Pakoi hills, where the pure Buddhism of Lower Burma is mixed with the hideous superstitions of Assam and Tibet. Shoo Shin was stolen from a Twoi pagoda temple seven years ago. Pride bought it in China, and brought it here. Won Yen is a Burmese, a Twoi of the Pakoi heights, and no Chinaman. He killed John Pride to restore Shoo Shan to that Twoi Pagoda out from Manchi. I know the history of Shoo Shan. I expected trouble for the owner while I envied him the treasure, but I did not know Pride was that man."

"But Won Yen was locked in the conservatory."

"Where he locked himself after killing John Pride."

"Where the housekeeper locked him before the killing of John Pride."

"The conservatory is practically a hot-house. It is built of glass. There is a loose pane in the wall near the door. This pane slides in its leaden setting. Won Yen, your Chinese boy, is a Twoi priest of forty. He has a subtle mind and a keen eye. He discovered the loose pane, or he made it loose. Slipping the pane aside, he put his head through, unlocked the padlock, let himself out, stole through the window, and killed Pride with the knife he had seen lying on the table when he went through the loom with his master and mistress. He saw Shoo Shan at the same time; but it is a thousand to one he had long known it was in Pride's possession, and was only waiting and plotting for a chance to recover it. When he had killed Pride, he escaped through the window, closed the window, relocked himself in the conservatory, and waited with celestial stoicism to be found there by the first silly policeman who might be called in."

"But, confound it all, he didn't steal the idol."

"That was not necessary. John Pride was a single man. His collection will be sold under the hammer. The god, Shoo Shan, will be bought, by an emissary, from the Twoi, and returned to its temple."

"Thank God, we have Won Yen hard and fast."

"Don't be too sure. He. is probably dead by this," said Porteus, sweetly.

Brain uttered an exclamation of amazement, and darted from the room. He was too late. He found a horrified policeman standing over Won Yen, who lay convulsed upon the kitchen floor.

"Why didn't you warn me earlier?" Brain complained when next he met his friend, the archaeologist.

"It did not occur to me sooner that he would kill himself when arrested. However, the chances are it would not have been prevented. Won Yen was prepared for any emergency, be sure of that."

HENRY BRAIN and Austin Porteus were present at the sale of Pride's belongings a few months later. Porteus bid high for the marvellous idol, Shoo Shan, but was outbid by a small, quiet, dark-skinned man who looked extremely odd in his European setting— a black frock coat, white linen, and a high silk hat.

"That," said Porteus, "is Won Yen's confederate."

Brain jerked a short oath. "Can nothing he done?" he said.

"Nothing," answered Austin Porteus. "You wouldn't work up a conviction in a thousand years."

8: John Leslie's Burglar

(as by Dy Edwardson)
Punch (Melbourne) 14 Aug 1913

DETECTIVE BRAIN looked troubled.

"I'd be awfully obliged, Porteus, if you could spare me a few moments," he said. "It may be something the same as the Harding case. Another mess like that, and I'd never hold up mv chin again. The bovs haven't done jollying me about .it yet."

Mr. Porteus reached for his hat, gave his spectacles a characteristic forward pull, balanced them right in the middle of his straight, short nose, knocked his white fleece into shape before a magic mirror from old Japan, and, "Why, certainly," he said.

"Dedrick is receiving every attention at the local lockup," Brain explained in the cab. "I'd like you to run a look over him. He's not a bit the usual type, and he won't talk. Seems quite resigned to his little lot, and its not the pleasantest going on the available evidence. This is how it stands. Leslie, the proprietor of the big white house back from Homan-road, a wealthy widower, with one child, declares that he "was awakened by hearing movements in a room at some little distance from his own. He stole along the passage, armed with a largo, ebonv ruler, and discovered a man at the open window in a room overlooking the side balcony. He stole upon this man, challenged him, and then knocked him senseless with the ruler before he could draw a weapon."

"Had he a weapon to draw, by the way?"

"In point of fact, he hadn't. Nothing was discovered on the young man that usually goes with the amiable housebreaker— not a single implement ; and he's the most guileless midnight marauder I've struck up to now."

"This Leslie sent for the police."

"He did. 'Phoned them up at the local lockup. and had done everything: so neatly and expeditiously that when the Hop arrived the rest of the household were still sleeping peacefully, and our worthy widower wias standing guard over the prostrate burglar, with the ruler ready, quite prepared to sock him another should he wink a lid. But Master Ernest Dedrick had taken all he wanted for the time being. He had a seam in his head like a large pipe, and if liis skull hadn't been extra hard-baked and as thick as a fish-plate it must have been a plain pine coffin and a clay bed for Ernest."

"Bless my soul! Poor boy. But, as vou have him safely gaoled, and the details so clear, whv am I invited to intervene?"

"We have Ernest, but we want Ernest's partner in guilt. When the police arrived old Leslie ran a sudden survey over his goods and chattels, and reported all well; but Ernest was no sooner comfortably housed in the guests'

chamber at the Pell-street lockup than in wings a message from Leslie to the effect that a desk in his library had been broken open, and cash to the value of £230 lifted, and removed from his ken and guardianship."

"Tut, tut, tut!" Mr. Porteus clicked his tongue as if quite distressed at such wickedness, and glowed pleasantly at the detective through his absurd spectacles, which were horn-rimmed, and should have had a conspicuous place in his stock of antiques.

"And had the poor young man the money about him?"

"Not a bean of it. He possessed a scarce supply of small silver, but the quids are not discoverable, nor to be accounted for, excepting on John Thomas Leslie's theory that Ernest had passed them to an accomplice in the garden below. I want that accomplice, and this is where you come in, if you'll be so good. I can't find a trace of the man who passed into the darkness and the void with Leslie's two-thirty. There are Dedrick's tracks in the garden below, but no hint of Dedrick's pal. Leslie explains that when he first saw Dedrick the fellow was apparently in the act of passing something from the window."

Mr. Austin Porteus was introduced to Ernest Dedrick in the privacy of Ernest's cell. Young Mr. Dedrick sat on his bunk, a slightly-built, fair youth of perhaps twenty-six, dressed in a dark tweed suit, well cut, but damaged by service. His boots, too, though carefully kept, were almost through at the sole, and Porteus registered the fact as implying a motive for the crime. He had observed that men, naturally honest, are often betrayed into misdeeds when their feet come into contact with the pavement.

Dedrick's broken head was done in a professional binding of white linen, his pale face peering out of the neat folds betrayed none of the characteristics of the hardened villain. In point of fact, it suggested an absurdly chaste idea to Austin Porteus, reminding him of a nun.

Ernest Dedrick would not talk. Beyond saying he had nothing to say he was mute. To any questions put to him he merely shook his head and smiled, and when, the business grew wearisome he coolly extended himself on the bunk, turned his face to the wall, and fell asleep.

"An extraordinary young man," said Austin Porteus. "Bless my soul, a most extraordinary man! His silence is edifying— and instructive."

"Instructive?" smiled Brain.

"Instructive ' Yes, with the sort of instruction Shakespeare got from stones."

Mr. Porteus onlv smiled his benevolent, cherubic smile.

"Let us call on Mr. John Thomas Leslie," said he.

AUSTIN PORTEUS examined the fine home of Mr Leslie from the hansom.

"A beautiful place," he said, "and a high wall; but our—" He drew up sharply, and blinked at the house, a series of twenty quick blinks. "Bless my soul," he said. "Bless my soul!"

"What is it?" asked Brain sharply. Mr. Porteus sat back and beamed at the white house.

"I was going to say our young friend would negotiate the wall easily enough. No, no, Brain, let the cabman remain where he is for a moment. I like the appearance of the house, I do, indeed. It is Greek in its fine simplicity. Leslie is a man of taste."

For quite five minutes Austin Porteus stared at the house through his ridiculous spectacles Then said he, with a little, fat chuckle:

"Do you know, Brain, I believe that balcony suggests the solution of our problem?"

"The balcony?" answered Detective Brain in surprise. "Of course: Dedrick climbed that balcony; but how ths deuce can it offer a solution?"

"Only if you have imagination, my friend— the right kind of imagination. My idea is almost entirely imaginative and sentiments but then in dealing with criminal riddles my theories are almost invariably imaginative. I imagine the plot, so to speak, after some preliminary investigation, and then work up to it I leave it to you to say I have been fairly successful. To be correct in such circumstances calls for a knowledge of human nature, human motives, and human impulses and actions that is almost an instinct. Mv good Brain, if I am right in this case, the fact will illustrate I have been telling you most effectually."

"Well, I don't know how the deuce you do it Austin; but it's a picture palace to a peanut you'll be right."

MR. JOHN THOMAS LESLIE did not offer Austin Porteus and Detective Brain an exuberant welcome. He was a testy man, probably close on seventy, lean, big boned, Scotch, rust-coloured, and tough, with a mouth that dropped suddenly to his chin at the corners.

"Eh, eh, eh!" he snorted. What's this? More dommed detectives? It is no sufficient to be robbed in one's own house, but ye must come, one and anither o' ye, mackin' a, dommed nuisance o' it, too?"

"The matter has to be cleared up, Mr. Leslie, said Brain in a conciliatory tone, "and the sooner the better for all of us. If it can he cleared up, Mr. Porteus is the man for the job.

Mr. Porteus, not in the least disconcerted by the householder's outburst, was smiling gently and plucking; with caressing forefinger and thumb at his soft side-whiskers as his gaze wheeled round the apartment.

"Bless my soul!" he said. "And this is the room? Dear me! And that is the window? Well, well well, well! The window from which you saw the money thrown? Bless my soul!"

He walked to the window, and looked out over the small, quaint verandah into the garden below. Then he looked at the window sash.

"You locked the windows. Mr. Leslie, my friend Brain tells me?" said Mr. Porteus.

"I did. Before ganging t' my bed, I mack a point o' seem' all secure."

"There is no mark of a housebreaking tool at all on the sashes."

"Mebee, no. I'm thinkin' the rascal thrust a knife between the sashes an' sprung the catch."

Mr. Porteus examined the catch as if it were a matter of great importance.

"It, could be done, I dare say," he chatted. "Yes, yes, I have no doubt it could be done."

Mr. Porteus wandered about, the room in an aimless, drifting way, drifted into the passage beyond, and looked up and down, with John Thomas Leslie at his heels.

"This room?" he inquired, tapping a door opposite.

" 'Tis to a spare bedroom that's no often occupied."

"This door?" He tapped on the next one.

"The door o' me daughter's bedroom, sir," said Leslie sharply, "an' I make no sense o' these inquiries, I may tell you."

"Bless my sou! I Yon have a daughter ?"

"I have, sir, 'an why no'?"

Mr. Porteus held up an apologetic palm. "There's no reason why not—none in the world, Mr, Leslie. Doubtless she is a very charming young lady. May I ask if she has been questioned in this matter?"

"No, she has not, and I will no have her questioned, mind ye that." Mr. Leslie was very angry. "She is verra much upset, naturally, bein' of a nervous, sensible disposition; an' she has no left her ain room since the miserable affair."

"Poor young lady," said Mr. Porteus sweetly. "Most natural, I'm sure. This room?"

He did not wait for the host's reply, but walked into the long library.

"I should like," he said, "to see the desk from which the money was abstracted."

Leslie's dour expression deepened. He rang a bell, and when a manservant appeared he growled: "Aleck, ye micht show these gentlemen over the hoose. Deny them nathing. Show them everything, Aleck, no matter how dommed impertinent they may appear, and then, Aleck, ye may show them the door."

Mr. Leslie was striding from the room, but Mr. Porteus barred the way. smiling gild kindly.

"Before you go, sir, a word as to the money. You said two hundred and thirty pounds?"

"I said twa hoonderd and theerty poond."

"Bound with a red rubber band, you said?"

"Nathin' o' the kind, sir. It was no bound at all."

"Two hundred and thirty single pound notes loose?"

"No, sir, not all single pound notes; tens maistly, an' two fivers."

Leslie slammed the door after him, and smiling and unperturbed Austin Porteus turned his attention to the desk. This he examined with great care. There was the mark of a tool that had been used to prize the baize-covered flap of the desk from its brass fastenings, and this mark Mr. Porteus peered at from every possible angle for a space of twenty minutes, using Brain's magnifying glass, and deriving great seeming gratification from the work When satisfied he turned to the man-servant.

"I should like to look into your master's bedroom," he said.

"Yes, sir, certainly. This way, sir."

Aleck led the way into Leslie's large bedroom furnished with heavy old blackwood furniture, and Austin Porteus, with Brain at his elbow, went only as far as the bedside, then turned abruptly and left the room, without making any investigation whatever. It would appear that nothing but vulgar curiosity had led him to peer into the host's sleeping apartment.

In the library Mr. Porteus stood at the desk pursing his lips and thinking hard then he said: "Aleck—Aleck is your name, I believe?"

"Yessir."

"Will you be so kind as to ask vour master to rejoin us? And, Aleck—"
"Yessir."

"You might tell him it is rather important I have made a discovery of some interest. It is really necessary that lie should see us "

Mr. Leslie came back with the man, grimmer than ever.

"Well," he said, "when I'm robbed again I'll have the gude sense t' bear it in silence, I'm thinkin."

"Mr. Leslie," said Austin, "we might all sit down I think, excepting Aleck. Aleck can go "

"And has it come t' this—that ye give orders in my ain hoose?"

"Will you please ask the man to go, Mr. Leslie. I am sure you would rather not have him hear the whole details of the coming inter view."

"You can go," growled Mr. Leslie.

"Now," said Austin comfortably, when Aleck had gone, "I want to know if you have the numbers of the missing notes, Mr. Leslie'"

"I have not."

"Well, well, perhaps it does not matter, after all."

"Doesn't matter ? Maybe yi'll be tellin' me it's no matter me havin' my house broke and my property stolen ?"

"Your house was not broken, Mr. Leslie your property was not stolen. Sit down if you please, and let us be friendly and confidential. In the first place, the window in the next room was not forced from the outside. A knife used to push the catch aside must have made some impression on the soft brass. There is none. In the second place, no money was thrown from the window. You will remember Brain, what kind of a night last night was. You, Mr. Leslie cannot have forgotten that it was decidedly boisterous. Had a loose roll of notes been thrown from the window they would have blown all over your spacious garden, sir, and some of them must have been recovered this morning."

Mr. Leslie sat in a large, oaken arm chair, and stared blankly at Austin Porteus. Austin Porteus peered back at him with the amiable interest of a nice old gentleman, who was settling a family trouble in the pleasantest way possible.

"This desk was not broken open by the young man Dedrick; it was broken open by you, and you used the flat blade of a curious pair or very old brass candle snuffers. They are now in that delightful old candlestick by vour bedside. No, no, sir, don't stir. They are there. I assure you. I know the snuffers well. I have the same brass set in my stock, and prize them highly. If you will look at the impression in the smooth wood of the desk with Brain's glass you- will actually find a vivid impression of the embossed brand from the snuffers. I recognised that brand at once. That being there, a faint trace of verdigris is not necessary to substantiate my theory.

"You admit the so-called burglar was not in your room; you say you had been awake for an hour. You admitted lighting this very candle when you were disturbed by the sounds in the balcony room. Breaking open the desk was an afterthought on your part. You desired to do young Dedrick as much mischief as possible, so you faked this theft, relying on the young man's chivalry to keep him silent even under such a grim iniustice. He is silent for the young lady's sake."

Austin Porteus was now standing. John Thomas Leslie was cowering, in his chair, speechless.

"If you will take my advice, Mr. Leslie," said Austin Porteus in the friendliest way, "you will let the young people marry. This Dedrick seems to be a

gentleman, if a poor one. As for the lady, I assume she loves him, or she would not have unlocked the window to admit him to the house at such an hour without her father's knowledge. Good day, sir."

Outside, in the cab again, Brain said, "Well, I'm jiggered! This licks Gehenna! But how did that balcony suggest a solution?"

Austin Porteus sighed with quite a touch of sentiment. "It reminded me of Romeo and Juliet," he said.

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9: The Little Fiddler

(as by Dy Edwardson)
Punch (Melbourne) 8 January 1914

IT WAS AGREED in Pansy Avenue that Hermann Holl hadn't a ghost of a chance. In the city Hermann Holl may have been a violinist, but in Pansy Avenue he was only a fiddler, and Jack Anderson was a cabinct-maker in constant employ, and earning close upon £5 a week.

Hermann Holl played in a small orchestra for a small salary by night, and took in small pupils by day. More often the small pupils took in Hermann Holl.

Then Hermann lacked style; his clothes were always shabby and often dusty, and he was pale-faced and subdued, where Jack Anderson was ruddy and aggressive and very good-looking, according to the somewhat material standards of Pansy Avenue.

Besides, Hermann Holl was a Dago— that is to say, he was neither English, French, nor German, and all other non-Engiish speaking Europeans are "Dagoes" in Pansy Avenue.

"I am not the Dago," Hermann explained quietly. "I am the true Bohemian. When you say 'Dago' at me I do no approve."

Naturally, Jack Anderson laughed at this. As if it mattered a tinker's cuss what the small fiddler approved or disapproved.

Violet Greenless, also of Pansy Avenue, had not been consulted; but Pansy Avenue had made up its mind about the matter, and she must abide by the decision of the majority, of course.

Violet, however, showed no particular eagerness to accept public opinion. She had known Jack for two years. She was aware that he was an excellent workman. She knew he was sober. She could see for herself what an uncommon fine fellow he was. Jack gave her every opportunity.

Naturally, Anderson did not take the little fiddler seriously as a rival. It was not in reason that a sensible girl like Violet would accept a sprat of a Dago musician, while she had the chance of a splendid specimen of the British mechanic like Jack Anderson.

Not that Hermann Holl really was a sprat. He was five feet eight inches and a half, slim, and so neatly put together that his curious disregard for clothes mattered little. Strange to say, Hermann's old clothes usually looked much better than Jack's new ones— but not in the opinion of Pansy Avenue. However, Jack was over six feet, and heavily built, and, comparatively speaking, Hermann amounted only to a sprat in Pansy Avenue.

It did not trouble Hermann Holl what Pansy Avenue might be thinking, or doing, or saying. He had his violin and a small and old but tuneful piano in his room at Mrs. Archer's, where he boarded and lodged for nineteen shillings and

sixpence a week, with two and sixpence extra for the use of Mrs. Archer's parlour for his classes. These filled his mind.

Hermann should not have been badly off, as his needs were trifling, but somtewhere on a mountain side in Moravia there was an old mother, whose hold on his heart-strings was strengthened by the length of the pull she had on him, and in Sydney were not a few compatriots who found it easier to become rooted in the soil of the strange, new land by reason of Holl's generosity.

Violet met Hermann at the coming-of-age party of Billy Archer. Hermann had been good enough to promise to play, and he kept his word like a hero. He gave them what they wanted. But there was one little thing for her— a quaint old folk-song of the goat-herds of Erzigebirge— and he played it right into her heart.

The romping ceased while the curious and vaguely understood complainings of a heartbroken peasant stole from his violin, and haunted the corners of their souls. All were touched, but Violet was possessed. Never had music meant so much to her.

He spoke to her two or three times in the intervals between dances, and while the guests were ravaging Mrs. Archer's wonderfully laden table, and when the great event was over she bade him good-night, a little timidly, and said:—

"Mother would like you to come and see us. We live in the white cottage with the Virginia creeper. Will you come, and play that strange air for us ?"

"You did like it ?" he asked.

"It hurt me," she said. "But I want to be hurt like that."

"That means you have some of the soul."

Hermann called on the following evening. He played the folk-song and other quaint, primitive tunes of the peasants of the Giant Mountains. He gave them in his own way, and with much of his own temperament infused.

"Why don't you do those things at the music halls?" asked Vdolet simple. "People would love them."

"I am too little for the music halls, lady," he said. "And too big," he added proudly.

After that Hermann Holl visited often at Mrs. Greenless's. He had undertaken to teach Violet to sing.

"The voice it is small," said he, "but it is sweet— none more sweet that I know."

He could say little things like that beautifully. They would have sounded awkward and foolish from Jack; but Hermann seemed to put his music into them. Their echoes echoed in her heart. They brightened her days at Madam'e

Aganbett's, where Violet assisted in fabricating Paris hats for Madame's Potts Point customers.

Jack often met the Dago at Violet's home now, but did not take him seriously as a rival. Holl was the teacher, but Violet was learning to please Jack. That was Jack's very natural summing-up of the situation.

Meanwhile, Hermann Holl had fallen deeply and desperately in love with Violet Greenless, and the world had taken on a new aspect. He awoke to a sudden appreciation of the value of money.

"Ah! it is the terrible thing this money," he told her one Sunday afternoon. "It must be that we have it or we lose so much. We need so much the heart craves for, but to earn it we must make our souls unclean."

She regarded him with surprise. "I don't think that is quite true," she said. "Why should honest work for honest wages make us unclean?"

He shook his head till his long dark hair flapped about his ivory face. "No, no, no, no! Honest work, no! But can we have honest work always? My honest work would make me starve, so I do the unclean work, scraping the fiddle wretchedly in the wretched band that makes the ragtime and the 'Ole Bull and Bush.' In my soul I am artist— I have great hopes, ideas. I want to make the music that is in me; but no one ask for it— no one pay for it. The bad stuff give me bread— the good stuff give me a stone. You see now; you know?"

"I think I do." She looked at him sadly. "I am sorry it is so."

"But it is not with bread only that the bad stuff have his reward. He offer love, too."

"Love for the bad stuff?"

"Yes, it is so. If I love— if I love much, terribly, that my heart blaze up with it, and make a great torch in the darkness here,"— (he struck his breast)— "how am I to win that which I love ?"

"Love wins love." She was quoting something she had read recently, and thought it very convincing.

He shook his head. "No. To win that which I love I must not be shabby, and poor, and disregarded; I must cease to dream the big dreams. I must do the mean things that are paid for. You say I that already do in my bad orchestra over there. And that is true. But it is so little. That with the bad pupils is shut off. After it is done I forget, and I have time for the good. But to make the un-clean thing win, to make it bring me success, much money, all that love asks, I must give myself to it— all, all myself."

He seemed quite distracted, and although she did not understand she pitied him; and voice and eyes were so full of this when she spoke that he turned upon her wildly.

"You must not talk to me like that," he cried. "It make me all fire. Why? Because I love, love, love, love you! Yes, you, only you in all the world."

He had taken her in his arms, he was kissing her vehemently, and she, with relaxed limbs, lay her mouth against his kisses, and knew absolute rapture.

But it lasted only a minute. "You mustn't! You mustn't !" she whispered. She broke from his arms. "I am engaged to Mr. Anderson," she said.

"Engaged!" He clung to her with fingers of steel. "Engaged! That mean you will marry. You will marry to that big, good, empty, happy, foolish man?"

"Yes," she answered.

"No!" He almost screamed the word, beating his knuckles on the table. "No, no no! It is not possible. You, you, so beautiful, so fine, with a soul that is like the bud of the rose that an artist might open to the great glory. No, no, No!"

"Mother has promised him."

"But you, you— you have not promise?"

"Mother likes him very much. He does so well. He is steady. He has a house and a thousand pounds. He is going to start a factory of his own. He will be rich."

"But I will be rich, too. I will. I have the soul to sell. It shall bring not one thousand but ten, twenty, fifty thousan'! All for you. Wait, wait ! You will wait?"

"I have made no promises,"' she answered a little shyly.

He left her precipitately. She saw him dash down the street, his violin case in his hand. Next day Hermann Holl's piano was carted away from Mrs. Archer's. Hermann had sold his treasure.

For five or six weeks Jack Anderson had it pretty much his own way at Mrs. Greenlee's. Violet saw little of Hermann, and what she saw was not reassuring. He was wilder and shabbier than ever. Mrs. Archer came across one evening with a complaint that he was back in his board.

"And the silly man's gone and give up his job in the band at the livin' pictures," said Mrs. Archer. "It's well you didn't have nothin' to do with him, my dear."

Violet blushed. "But I did," she said bravely. "I am his friend. I like him very much."

"Nonsense! A mad fiddler. All them Dagoes is more or less dotty, if you ask me."

"I am sure he is not. But he is unhappy. He is a musician, a fine musician, and must earn his living playing with a lot of wretched tin-kettlers." Violet was quite eloquent.

"Well, if he don't pay his board he'll have to go," said Mrs. Archer decisively.

Violet saw Hermann Holl that afternoon. He admitted he had left the orchestra. He agreed he was worse off than ever.

"But there is still the soul to sell to the devil," he, said grimly.

"Oh, Hermann, don't !"

"Does it hurt you. Ah-h, it hurts you! I am glad. Fiendishly glad I am, because that mean you care. You love me!"

"What chance is there now? You are poorer than ever. You may even be hungry."

He nodded. "It is very like," he said. "I leave Mrs. Archer. I must dress the soul up well if the devil is to pay a good price, and money mus' not be wasted on food. Do not look so much frightened. The devil I sell to is not the old Mephisto; it is the commercial devil— the devil who pays best."

For over a month Violet saw nothing of Holl, heard nothing of him, and Jack was be-coming insistent. Once they had quarrelled when he caught her crying.

"You are thinking of that cursed fiddler!" he said.

She did not deny it, and he stormed for twenty minutes, like an ordinary, healthy, young lover, who has no other outlet for his emotions but in noise.

Next day Jack was back begging her pardon. He had a peace-offering in the shape of dress circle tickets for a show.

"You'll like it," he said, "and it will do you good. There's a fiddler there who'll knock all your silly notions about Holl clean out of your head. He'd play Holl stiff. He's a wonder. Do come. I want you to see the man just to make you understand what a tripester that pauper Dago was! He's down and out, and I don't want to crow over him, but you're harbourin' dilly notions that'll just evaporate when you hear what real fiddlin' is."

"Very well, I will go,'' she said.

"That's right. You've got to see this fellow. Sydney's shook on him. He's got the place by the scruff, and just does as he likes with the crowd."

She went, and sat through five eommonplace turns before Pilson appeared. Pilsen was billed as "The Mad Fiddler." Violet knew him at once. It was Hermann Holl. He was cerious-ly dressed in a rich travesty of a Moravian peasant costume. His costume was black with a very light trimming of barbaric red, gold, and green silk braid; the fiddle was black; the player's face was ivory white, with a red mouth, and eyes blacked in to look cavernous and wild.

The programme described Pilsen as an eccentric genius of Prague, who had amazed Europe with his weird handling of the violin; but Violet was never a moment in doubt. It amazed her that Jack did not recognise him.

Pilsen played many things all in a strange, eerie fashion. In one effort he represented a drunken man rocking home late, and ending his debauch by killing his wife. The effect was thrilling, the audience was delighted, awed, and completely captured. He played better, but nothing suited popular taste quite so well as that. Several of the folk-songs of Eastern Europe, played in Pilsen's way, were wonderfully effective. No one could doubt his triumph.

The effect on Violet was the last Anderson expected. She knew Hermann was lost to her. He was a popular idol, a man of the moment, in demand in a thousand homes. Probably she was already forgotten. She would see no more of him; but, come what might, she could never be Jack Anderson's wife, and shc told him so that night.

"I do not care for you, and I do care for someone else," she said. "I could die much easier than marry."

The tone left no room for doubt. Jack Anderson was thunderstruck, but convinced, as a man is apt to be when thunderstruck.

Next day was Sunday. There was a visitor in the afternoon. Violet went in to him. It was Hermann, dressed in a quiet suit of dark grey, looking marvellously well, she thought.

He was not content with one hand, he took both, and drawing her nearer kissed her lips.

"Well," he said, "you see I have made the sale. It is a success. I shall have much money. I can even afford to be happy. Will you have me now ?"

"No," she answered, "but I would have had you when you were poor, if you had asked me."

But, of course, that was not her final answer. When Pilsen sailed for Europe to make a new reputation in an Old World, Violet went with him. Hermann no longer thinks he has sold his soul.

"I have revealed the heart of my people to the world," he said, "and that is no mean thing."

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10: The Supernatural Agent

(As by Silas Snell)
Punch (Melbourne) 23 July 1914

One of a series os short stories by Dyson under the general heading "Miss Trigg, Domestic" published in the Melbourne Punch *during 1914.*

WE DISCOVER MISS TRIGG with her ear at the keyhole of her mistress's "stoodio."

The situation is not unique. Domestics have been discovered in a like position earlier in history. It is on record. In fact, there is a widespread belief among civilised peoples that this is an ingrained habit and custom with domestics, and one no kindness and no form of drastic treatment will eradicate.

Madame Annette Holmes, clairvoyant, futurist, and expounder of the human palm, was with a client, and Miss Minnie Trigg was piecing up a good general knowledge of that client's affairs.

It is worth recording that the clients of futurists and fortune-tellers of all sorts and complexions, gipsies or Albinos, go to these people and pay them their prices to be told about their own affairs, and invariably stay to tell much more than they are told.

In fact, the chief feature of the art of the fortune-teller is the ability to make the sitter tell the things she expects to be told. A stranger entering the dim, dusty parlor of a modern witch masquerading in a wig devised from the tail of a black horse, and a fresh-laid walnut complexion, presents a problem to the operative— she must be made to talk, for the great revealer can only reveal to the client what the client has already revealed to her.

Madame Annette Holmes was past-mistress m the delicate business of drawing-out a caller. She had an ingratiating and sympathetic manner, she had tact, patience, discernment, and a wide knowledge of woman-nature, which is very like human nature in many respects.

Madame was gently drawing-out the small, fair client, who had already become tearful and confidential. Presently. Madame would enter into a perfunctory kind of trance, communicate with an affinity or two in Spookland, and reveal to the fair and ingenious client sundry things the distressed little lady had herself revealed to Madame. The revelation would be touched up and given an air of spectral versimilitude by reason of certain astute deductions, all Madame's own, and the silly little lady with the fluffy, golden hair and the wide-open, absurd, childish eyes, would go away amazed at the superhuman wisdom of the medium.

Meanwhile Miss Minnie Trigg, at the keyhole, was taking in all the material facts of the case, and coming to conclusions even more exact and satisfactory than tnose of Madame.

Minnie had caught a glimpse of this particular client at a former "sitting," and her sentimental interests had been violently aroused. The young lady was very young, and looked younger. She was slim and pretty, her grey eyes had an infantile simplicity, and she wore a wedding ring.

It was Madame's policy to advise her patrons to come again. Every call meant a fee, and one must live. The necessity of living is apparently as strong in a spiritualistic medium who recognises the futility of this existence as it is in the most sceptical materialist of the bunch.

The grey-eyed client came again, and apparently her sorrows were accumulating. Now and again Minnie's tears splashed on the linoleum as she bent with her dexter ear glued to the keyhole, and there they might have been discovered, eloquent evidence of Miss Trigg's transgression, had Madame been an accurate observer of trifles.

"Pore little beggar!" Minnie said, addressing her best friend, Miss 'Arriet Brown ; "she's worryin' 'erself into her grave, an' she: orter be sittin' in 'her mother's lap, bein' coaxed an' petted instead iv tearin' her 'eart out over a 'ulkin' 'usb'and."

"All 'usbands is brutes," said Miss Brown dully, but oracularly.

"They are," Minnie admitted, "an' has t' be treated as such. But we pore women gets tied to 'em, an' it's up to us t' make the best iv a bad job."

"The better yeh do fer 'em the worse they get," murmured 'Arriet, with the conviction of a servant with a wide range of experience.

"Mostly because their wives dunno how to 'andle them," Minnie persisted. "There's silly bits iv girls what would scream themselves into a fit if put in the same room with a rat, an' what wouldn't fer their lives go into the same cage with a fat, ole, flat-footed, 'armless lion, will marry a man without a wink or a tremor, an' start out t' face life with him, ez ignorant of the ways iv the hanimal ez a toothless babby. Naturally, they butt up against trouble in next to no time. They find their bloomin' 'ero iv romance is a greedy slob, sullish. hard, an' given t' ways iv wickedness, not 't' mention whisky; an' then they're beat— they ain't got no more idea what t' do than if they was turned in t' train a wild helephant."

"There ain't nothink to do," said 'Ariet, with the air of one resigned to the worst, "but t' 'it 'im on the 'ead with a cruet now an' agin! That's what the missus does 'ere."

"G-arrt ! " snorted Minnie, "There's ways iv 'andlin' tihe worst iv them. I've seen a reg'lar tough brought down be a bit iv a woman what had sav-ee, and

fair taught t' eat out of her 'and. That's what this little girl orter 'ave bin taught afore she married. Then she wouldn't be 'elpless ez a sick kitten when her John plays it up a bit in the bars, or takes a taxi load iv pink barmaid fer an airin' in the cool iv the evenin' "

"Goes orn, does he?"

"Somethin' iv that like. An' she's askin' Madame' t' use her influence with the ghosts t' find out his little games an' track him down. Fat lot o' good the ghosts'll do 'er. I'm done with spirits. They're a most unrelierable lot. What this little girl's naughty boy wants is fer someone big ez a house t' get to him with a clo's-prop. There orter be a public persecuter t' deal it out to evil disposed 'usbands that way.

"No court bizness," Minnie continued, "no tales in the paper; jist a quiet little investigation, an' then the public persecutor t' take John into the stable, an' dust his bones with a yard iv hardwood till he promises faithful on his oath never t' do so no more. But more'n everythink else, young, girls should be taught what 'usbands is likely t' be like. All girls can't go into service an' learn fer theirselves, so there should be what they call a preparrotary school for girls what's about t' marry, where cute old married women an' servant girls like me, what's seen a thing or two, could learn 'em all about 'usbands, an' 'ow t' 'andle them.

"Me 'eart fair cracks 'earin iv this poor little woman's troubles, an' she pretty enough fer any sensible bloke t' want t' tend her close an' careful all his life. Madame don't seen t' mind it much. She's used to 'em. Besides, she ain't romantic like me. I cry in bed over the pore girl."

"Ain't it lovely, cryin' in bed?" said Arriet.

The fair little lady with the grey, infantile eyes made several calls upon Madame, at all of which Miinnie was present in the spirit, so to speak, though unavoidably detained on the other side of the door.

"I've found out all about 'er," Minnie told Miss Brown. " 'Er name's Clarice. I know where she lives, an' I'm v ateliin' over 'er."

" 'Ow?" asked the phlegmatic 'Arriet.

"I'm her guardyin angel. But' I dunno what t' do fer 'er. I've seen 'i n, too. Saw 'im an' 'er together in the garding day afore yesterday. He ain't bad lookin', an' he's quite young hisself. If he had that public persecutor what I was talkin about t' give him a good hidin' every first Chewsdee in the month for a year 'r so, he might be a all-right John. What's more, he seemed fond iv 'er, but she was lookin' very broken spirited. I never wanted t' be a mother to no one so much in all my life." Minnie wiped a moist eve

'"Gaar-rn!" said 'Arriet heavily. "You mother to a grown-up? Why, you ain't much more'n a kid yerself."

"Some is born mothers," said Minnie. "I'm one iv that sort."

IT WAS three days after this that Madame Holmes fell ill. She had an attack of an old complaint, and was forced to take to her bed.

"I was to get two guineas to run a gipsy's tent at a big charity garden party at Whitwold to-morrow," she said to Minnie. "Do you think you could manage it?"

"Me, a gipsy's tent?" gasped Minnie. "Why, I dunno what it is."

Madame Annette explained. "They rig up a tent in the grounds, and you are supposed to be a gipsy living in it. The guests come to you to have their hands read, and you tell them anything that comes into your head. Surely you know enough to manage that after all you have seen here?"

"Oh, I could do that all right," said Minnie confidently.

"Then you go. I'll give you half the fee. There's a costume here will suit you. Put on the black wig, brown your skin a bit with Condy's, and you'll have a good time."

Minnie appeared at the Whitwold garden party in the guise of a wicked gipsy, and was the most popular item. In the course of three hours she filled a small sand bucket with the silver with which her laughing clients crossed her palm. Her earnings, however, went to charity.

Miss Trigg looked the part. She was an impudent and vivacious gipsy maiden, resembling a madder Carmen, and the fortunes she told were sometimes broadly comic, sometimes extravagantly melodramatic.

When she had been driving a thriving business for about two hours, a young girl, who had been busying herself cajoling clients to the tent, came, towing a tall, dark-eyed, clean-shaven man of about twenty-six.

"You must, Mr. Clement," she said. "Everybody's doing it. Read his palm, Gipsy, and charge him five shillings for giving me so much trouble."

Minnie looked the newcomer over, and her heart, nearly "jumped the gate," as she put it in a subsequent explanation of events.

" 'Tis well you came," she said in sepulchral tones.

The man laughed. "Came?" he said, "I've been dragged. I'm an unwilling agent, and now I'm to be robbed."

"Trifle not with the mysteries," warned Minnie, using Madame's pet phrase.

"The mysteries? Rubbish! I know more of my fate and fortune than all. tlie sages, witches and seers on earth, and all the spooks above can ever tell me. But here you are. Have a shot."

Minnie took Mr. Clement's palm, and examined it closely, following line by line with a trembling finger.

"There's one thing you. don't know," she said; "you're smashin' up your own 'appiness."

The young girl laughed. "Be hard on him," she said."I'll hunt up some, more."

"What the deuce do you mean by that?" said the man somewhat coldly, looking into Minnie's cold eye.

"I mean," said the mock Gipsy, "that you dunno what a fool you're makin' of yourself, much as you think "you know, Mr. Clever'ead, an' I'm dead serious when I say it. There's a dark woman here, and here she is again, and here, and here!" She stabbed his palm in several places. "An' she's no business here. Wherever she crops up in your 'and she means mischiff."

"A dark woman? What the deuce do you mean?" Mr. Clement was no longer jocular.

"Do you wanter know? Well she's dark, she has blue eyes, she is a little older than you, she knows more of the world than you, she's wrecked other lives." Minnie had adopted Madame's manner and Madame's language. "She will wreck your life if you go on. And there is another here whose happiness she is crushing out." (The Gipsy peered closer.) "A fair child. 'Yes, a mere child in heart. She has grey eyes, she has a sweet spirit, but her heart bleeds— she suffers. She suspects— nay, she knows! Her spies follow you. You are watched. Everything is known. The end is near, and if it comes the crash will wreck your life. The fair girl will die. The dark woman—let me see, let me see. She goes across the water. You are alone."

Clement, snatched his hand away. "What infernal rot is this ?" he said, but his face was pale.

"Gimme yer 'and," said Miss Trigg, " 'n' I'll tell yell m'ore. Let me look closer, let me think, 'n' I'll tell yeh everythin'. You're married. The fair girl's your wife. She loved you, but her poor heart is bein' eaten out."

Again he snatched his hand away "You're an insolent cat," he said. "You have been prying into my affairs."

"Never saw yeh before in all my life," said Minnie, solemnly. "Never wanter see yeh again; but that fair girl seems worth savin', 'n' there's time. It's not too late. She knows you. She's had you watched. She means to break from you; but she loves you, and it's not too late."

"It's not true," he said. "It's not true."

"Every word is true," said the gipsy. "I have fooled with the others, but there's tragedy in your palm. Beware!"

It was three weeks later that. Minnie confided the sequel to her friend, 'Arriet Brown.

"She's called on Madame agin t'day," she said. "I mean the pretty, fair woman with the baby eyes. She was ez appy ez a blessed lark, 'n' a blessed lark it was. It seems 'er 'usband 'ad found out she'd got privit detectives on his track; 'n' he'd confessed everythin', 'n' begged her t' forgive 'im, 'n' promised t' be a good, true 'usband fer ever 'n' ever, amen."

" 'N' she's forgive 'im, iv course," said 'Arriet. "They alwiz do."

"Yes; but he's never t' see the dark woman no more, 'n' it seems how the truth was revealed to 'im be soopernatural agency."

"Soopernatural hagency— what's that?"

"By way iv the spirits. That's what he told his wife, and that's what she told Madame; but I happen t' know a thing or two myself."

"Which is what?"

"Well, *I* was the soopernatural agent."

"Ah, garn! How yeh talk."

"I was. Wasn't I the gipsy what read his palm, 'n' wasn't he Mr. Clement, the bloke whose fortune I told at the Whitwold garding party?"

"My word," gasped 'Arriet, "you are a one!"

11: A Sunday at Deadwood

The Lone Hand. 1 June 1908

Bored sheerers on an outback sheep station miles from anywhere; and a travelling showman with a boxing bear. What could possibly go wrong?

THE company's stay at Deadwood was not lengthy, but it was varied. The time was well chosen. It was three o'clock on the Sunday afternoon when that astute entrepreneur, Eric Appleton, Esq., led his celebrated vaudeville company through Ackerman's slip-rails, and advanced upon the assembled hands, scattered in the shade of the long, barn-like shed.

Shearing was in full blast at Deadwood, but the shearers were observing the Sabbath, and keeping it holy, in a manner of speaking. They sat, crouched, and sprawled in various attitudes of languid discomfort along the belt of shade; some smoked, some chewed, a few drowsed, several slept. Two or three were diligently patching fractured trousers and repairing torn flannels. One divided his attention between the moral education and sanitation of a cattle pup and a kerosene tin, in which a month's washing had been stewing for hours over a small fire in the open. A patient, apathetic, four-handed euchre game was in progress at one end; two rouseabouts looked on listlessly. A curly-headed shearers' cook, squatting on the ground with a candle-box between his legs, wrote a laborious love-letter.

This quaint assemblage was the congregation of the Rev. Whitemore Brown, a peripatetic missionary of no known creed, who had devoted his time and talents to the ungrateful task of bringing shearers to repentance. The reverend, a short, weather-beaten, close-grained, ginger man, with ragged whiskers and a mad eye, was standing out in the sun, bare-headed, the fierce light shining vindictively on his bald occiput, an open book in his hand, preaching with intemperate zeal. Rivulets of sweat ran down the crannies of his weazened neck, flecks of foam hung in his beard, his voice was raspy and indistinct, no three consecutive words of his sermon were explicit to the smoking, dreaming, card-playing rapscallions curled in the shade.

The parson's horse— a limp, bony grey, strangely encrusted with enormous warts— hung on his tether at the end of the shed. A few huts were scattered on the barren land down to the left; beyond, a big dam glittered through the visible air, that lapped the middle distance like the ghost of a great sea. Over all, about everybody, into everything, but detectable only to the untrained nose, crept the tang of sheep, oozing from the new harvest of wool and from the flocks drifting in the paddocks behind the shed.

Naturally, the advent of Appleton, Lees, and their great bear, created a diversion in the congregation of the Rev. Whitemore Brown. Dave Gale uttered

a cry of astonishment, and pointed out the newcomers with the tail-end of his soaped pup.

"By cripes!" he ejaculated; "what is it?" Along the line eyes turned upon Appleton's Al Fresco Entertainers.

" 'Ell! it's a wombat!" said Gale. Gale's natural history was limited and local.

The apathy fell from Ackerman's hands and the lordly shearers; they sat up, some arose to their knees, a few actually stood erect. The rasping preacher was disregarded, all attention was upon the quaint trio marching down the track in a nimbus of silver dust; Eric on the right, fat Ephraim on the left, the cheerful bear ambling between, loaded with bundles and the starry sphere on which he performed some of his most popular evolutions. A pack of dogs barked excitedly in the van. The Rev. Whitemore Brown jerked his head, and foreseeing competition of a pernicious and worldly character, developed a shriller scream and new exuberance of gesture, clamoring for some regard.

"Blank me, if it ain't a blinded bear," said Simmons. "A show!" he howled,

with sudden inspiration. " A show ! A show ! Give 'em a hoy, lads." The congregation sprang to its feet, joining Simmons in a barbaric yell of welcome. The dogs yapped with fatuous exuberance.

Eric halted his company in line. He bowed grateful acknowledgments.

Ephraim bowed, so did Giordano Bruno, the celebrated performing bear. Meanwhile the preacher's voice had soared to the top of his pitch. The Rev. Brown swung into a diatribe on ungodly exhibitions. He warned his hearers to beware of unrighteous worldlings and desecrators of the Sabbath, vain tricksters, and blasphemous and vulgar showmen —particularly to avoid the bear that goeth about like a raging lion seeking whom he may devour. But the congregation was weary of exhortation, and hungry for entertainment. It yelled against the shepherd.

"Time! Time!" cried Simmons.

"Time! Time! Time!" chanted the chorus.

"Oh, ring off, parson, 'n' give the other bloke a charnce," said Gidley.

"Ain't we give you a fair hearin'?" asked Clay, piteously. "Yiv bin at it an hour."

The Rev. Brown relapsed into angry colloquy. He was shocked that an assemblage of presumably Christian men should prefer the ribaldry of buffoons and the caperings of an abominable bear to the preaching of the Word. The congregation chanted, "Time! Time! Time!" The dogs barked insanely, and the good missionary was forced to either depart or be one of the audience at the unholy show. He departed. There was no collection that Sunday.

There followed an energetic descent upon the dogs ; several were captured, the rest were driven beyond stone's-throw, and again the gifted management bowed its thanks.

"Gents and mates," said the Proselyte, "I take great pleasure in interdoocin't' yer notice 'n' hattention Eric Appleton's celybrated Al Fresco Entertainers, unequalled by few, excelled by none. We aim to amoose yeh this afternoon with er variety performance iv ther 'ighest quality, er performance which, I may tell yeh, has won rapturous happlause 'n' thunders iv happroval frim 'igh-class 'n' interlectual audiences throughout Australia, abroad, 'n' elsewhere." He then formally introduced himself, Ephraim, and the bear, with a short, eloquent, and immodest account of the natural gifts and acquired specialties of each.

"In conclusion, gents," said Eric, "with yer kind permission Perfesser Ephraim Lees will sing that noble Welsh song, 'Men of Garlic.' "

The fat pilgrim sang "The Men of Harlech" in a pure young voice, which at first provoked astonishment and derision. A piping, almost effeminate, strain from Ephraim's huge bulk seemed unnatural and absurd. Lees was promptly christened Euphemia. There were cat-calls and affectionate appeals in ridiculous falsetto, but Ephraim sang on serenely. Though gentle in manner and seemingly diffident, the Professor was densely indifferent in the face of ribaldry and any criticism that did not descend to missiles. His "Men of Harlech" was not a martial song, but a weird and eerie appeal. A few susceptible souls were stirred, and Ephraim did not go without applause.

Bruno was more to the taste of the hardened reprobates of Deadwood. His tricks provoked shouts of approval and storms of laughter. They wanted a lot of Bruno. Eric Appleton, "character actor and raconteur," in his uproarious absurdity, "The Remittance Man" hit the shearers' taste, but Ephraim's art was above them.

"We want nothin' more from 'Phemie," said Simmons. "No more of the boy soprano, if yeh please."

"Why don't yeh grow hair on it, 'n' exhibit it ez the whiskered woman?" asked Kemp.

So, in response to almost general request, the Professor's second song was cut out, and he wrestled with the bear while the actor-manager made a hurried and eloquent perambulation with the hat. The appeal for funds was very successful; Eric secured all the Rev. Whitemore Brown's threepenny bits, and many larger coins to boot, while his corpulent partner labored with the bear. Ephraim hated this wrestling turn, more particularly in the open under a pitiless sun. After three falls he was utterly exhausted, and retired to the shade, a humid and panting mass, where he lay steaming like a bag of hot

grain, leaving the management of the boxing bouts entirely in Eric's hands. Bruno had only recently added boxing to his other accomplishments, and it was easily his most profitable endowment with shed audiences, railway gangs, dam sinkers, and the like.

The bear's fore-paws were clothed in gloves, large and cushiony enough to inspire confidence in the desired competitor, he was placed on the line of a circle about 3ft. in diameter, and Eric explained:

"Now, will any kind gent box ther bear? Ther celybrated boxin' bear, George Brown, stands before you, 'n' ther management iv Appleton's Al Fresco Hentertainers is prepared t' lay two t' one no sport can stay three minutes agin him. Ther rules is these: Yeh fight all in, no spot barred, 'n' ther bloke leavin' ther ring inside ther limit is counted out. Ther bear has no footwork, he trusts to his marvellous right cross. Will any willin' lad back hisself agin Brown fer arf er dollar? "

There were a dozen there with reputations to sustain, reputations founded on performances and on talk. The others would accept neither excuses nor apologies; the champions were rushed into battle, and within a quarter of an hour Bruno had demolished all pretensions, and cleaned up the shed. In that quarter of an hour he earned the firm 30 shillings. Bruno's boxing was not purely scientific, but it was effective. He made a lovely soft punching-block, and his opponent enjoyed it immensely till the bear's right paw came across like a soft meteor, and batted the rash amateur end-over into adjacent space. There was no evading that punch, and no withstanding it; it would have shifted a cow, and yet it was merely playful on Bruno's part. Had it been otherwise it would have killed the cow. Knotty Corboy had the misfortune to take the bat on the mark, and the programme was suspended while the shearer was being restored to sensibility, Bruno standing aside dangling his gloved paws and wearing his customary expression of blended benevolence and joy.

It was at this stage that five Deadwood shearers, who had been absent on a quest, rode back to the shed. They returned at a gallop, with a babel of hoof-beats, barking and shouting. Their quest had been the capture and recovery of "Ringer" Beecham, who, after a week's indulgence at the Trap Shanty, had been seen running wild in scant garments in Ackerman's back paddock. The quest was successful, and Beecham and his illusions were imprisoned together in the log hut. His captors had rewarded themselves with a great superfluity of beer, hence their clamorous home-coming. The new arrivals were vastly interested in Bruno. The boxing game was quite to their liking, but they despised rules and defied authority, and their good humor was of the drunken order that edges on viciousness. They took the bear's big punch in bad part, and the sport degenerated into open, unchristian bear-baiting. The sober

hands were not averse to a new diversion, and presently poor Bruno, standing on end, flapping his gloves aimlessly, his mouth open in a wide grin of childish goodwill, was the centre of a boisterous ring of tormentors, on the outskirts of which Professor Ephraim Lees, reduced almost to tears, revolved, pleading in appealing accents.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, be kind to him. Do not hurt the poor bear. He is so good, my Bruno— so gentle, so affectionate!"

The young men punched at Bruno from all sides; they prodded him with sticks.

A string of cow-bells was dropped about his neck. He wheeled awkwardly, and as the aggravation increased he wept, and his cries of dejection provoked yells of laughter. Eric Appleton, for interfering, was rushed against the shed, and left, sitting with his back to the wall, dusty and dismantled. His philosophy of non-resistance coming into play, he remained there composedly smoking Clay's meerschaum. The excitement about the bear flagged a little.

"Bring Beecham," cried a shearer, "bring the ringer!"

The proposition provoked a roar of delight. Beecham was in the illusory stages of D.T's. Wherever he turned he saw himself beset by kaleidoscopic devils, and distorted, malignant creatures. The crowd was curious to experiment on him with the bear. Beecham, still scantily clad, was brought from the hut; the laughing shearers pressed about him, forcing him to face Bruno. The man's eyes wandered; he did not see; he maundered insanely, and drifted almost into the arms of the bear before his diseased vision took in the strange shape, and then, Heaven knows, with what distortions and what monstrous bedizenment his eyes beheld it. For a moment he glared through spread fingers, thrown up to ward off this new horror; his dead, yellow face was convulsed; his mouth wide, his eyes red with blood and ablaze with madness. Then he shrieked.

Scream after scream burst from his breast— screams so terrible, so fraught with the utmost possibility of human agony and fear that the crowd was thrilled and subdued. It broke apart, and Beecham rushed away, breaking into the hut and grovelling in the darkness under a bunk.

The shearers soon recovered their exuberance, and the attack on Bruno was resumed. This time the dogs were introduced. The bear was beset by half-a dozen snapping collies. But Shellman's big cattle dog Peter was not content to snap, he went straight at Bruno's throat. Bruno received him with open arms: he embraced him with a long, deliberate hug, and dropped Peter to the ground, a pulped tyke that stirred feebly in its dying agonies.

"By 'll 'n' fury, he's throttled my dorg!" yelled Shellman. Shellman was drunk, Shellman was very injudicious. He tore a long-bladed clasp-knife from his belt, and went at the bear.

Bruno received Shellman as he had received Shellman's dog. The shearer inflicted a slight wound, but he was enfolded in the brute's soft, dreadful hug, before he could lift a hand again. Bruno's head lolled over the man's shoulder, his expression was still benevolent and kindly, but some old devil was stirring in him. He drew Shellman closer, and Shellman's face went purple, his tongue shot out foolishly; his eyes protruded, red and hideous.

The crowd fell back now, horrified.

"He's killin' Shellman!" said Simmons. He thought he was noising the fact, but his voice did not rise above a ridiculous whisper.

Ephraim rushed in. He yelled authoritative words in Bruno's ear, and the bear dropped Shellman, and forgot him, turning to fondle the Professor, uttering infantile complaints, and Shellman stirred feebly on the ground as his dog had done. The shearer, however, had the luck to get off with a broken rib, and when his breath returned, and he was able to vociferate, he clamored furiously for vengeance on the bear.

"He's a murderin' brute! " cried Shellman. "No one's got any right t' keep a man-eatin' beast like that. Kill the cow! "

"No, no," pleaded Ephraim. "No, no, gentlemen; you must not harm the bear. He is not vicious— indeed he is not. He is distressed, agitated."

"It's up to us lads," said Shellman, catching up a split rail. "Do fer the bear."

Several men seized sticks; the crowd moved round Ephraim and Bruno again; but before a blow was struck those on the outskirts raised a cry of warning, and the shearers fell back hastily before one man— a gibbering, tortured wretch, whose red eyes glittered with drunken mania. It was Ringer Beecham. A few tatters of clothes clung to his limbs; in his hand he carried a keen axe. A revulsion of feeling had come over Beecham; he was prepared to slay his enemy now. Crouching low, and muttering as he came, he crept upon the bear.

"Keep him back!" cried Ephraim. "He is mad. Oh, my poor bear. Bruno! Bruno!" Manfully the fat singer ran, encouraging the bear to follow, and Bruno waddled after him.

Beecham rushed, and Bruno increased his pace. Ephraim was outclassed in twenty yards. The bear seemed to have awakened to a sense of his danger; he galloped heavily. His pace looked slow and his action ungainly, but he kept a good lead, jangling the bells about his neck. Bruno headed for the big dam. Beecham followed, screaming in a fury, and brandishing his axe. Bruno lamented as he ran, twisting his head from side to side, looking back at his

enemy, whining patient protestations. The whole of the hands of Deadwood followed Beecham, and Ephraim puffed heavily at the tail of the procession.

Reaching the dam, Bruno took refuge upon the trunk of a fallen tree, which, though still rooted in the soil, lay along the face of the water. Running nimbly, the madman followed him. At the end of the log Bruno arose on his haunches, and faced his enemy. His long tongue hung to his breast; his china-white eye was set in a comical stare; he seemed to be smiling. Beecham's trot ceased; he began to creep. Cunningly, cautiously, he stole to within striking distance; then, raising his axe, he poised himself for the blow, but Bruno's right paw swept across, punching the shearer under the ribs, and Beecham shot head first into deep water. Sprawling on the log, the bear watched for his enemy, and when Ringer's head appeared above water, a great gloved paw fell on it, and drove him under again.

Thrice Beecham was pushed down, while the stupefied crowd gazed mutely at the grim spectacle. Then it occurred to Long Aleck to attempt a rescue, and he waded in, and towed the unconscious Ringer ashore by one leg.

While several devoted themselves to applying the rules for the restoration of the apparently drowned to Ringer Beecham, the outcry against poor Bruno was resumed by Shellman. The bear's treatment of Beecham had created a further prejudice.

"I tell yeh, lads, if he's left t' go he'll do in one of us," said Shellman. "Half-a-dozen of yeh keep him on the log, while me and Bill and Spotty gets guns. We'll show the cow."

Shellman and two or three others ran towards the huts, and again Ephraim's touching appeal was heard. On hands and knees the fat man made his way along the log. He set up his big bulk between Bruno and his enemies.

"I cannot permit it, gentlemen," wailed Ephraim when Shellman and his friends returned with their guns; and tears rolled from the singer's tender blue eye down his plump, pink cheeks. "I positively cannot permit it."

" If yeh don't come out o' that, mister," said Shellman, threateningly, "I'll have a pot at you."

" No, no," pleaded Lees. "My poor bear. Ah, he is so loving, so kind. He would not harm a baby. It was only his play. And if you would only let him go, gentlemen, he would depart with me quietly."

Four men stood on the bank with guns, they were backed by a dozen with clubs. " A couple of youse blokes crawl along, and pitch Fatty in the dam," ordered Shellman.

At this point Eric Appleton arose from his recumbent attitude against Ackerman's shed, put Clay's meerschaum in his pocket, and taking a fire-brand from under Clay's simmering stew of washing, trailed it through the thin dry

grass, and threw it where the grass was thicker and longer, tufted under the edges of the ant-eaten wall. Then he passed round the shed, and sauntered down towards the dam from the other side.

Two men crawled out along the log to depose Ephraim Lees, but Ephraim clung to the bear, appealingly dolorously, and the bear clung to him, and when Costigan drew near Bruno leaned over and batted him into the dam; hereupon

Clay retreated precipitately.

Shellman was valiant. "Leave it to me," he said, " I'll go out 'n' blow his blinded head off."

Eric Appleton interposed. "I give yeh doo legal notice," he said. "That bear's registered under th' Act, 'n' hactions fer 'eavy damages will foller any harm done t' him. Valued et eight 'underd 'n fifty pounds, he is."

"But what about self-defence?" snorted Shellman. "Killin' bears is self-defence!"

"Eight 'undred 'n' fifty quid," said Eric impartially. "Please yerself."

"He's my meat," declared Shellman.

"Fire!" yelled a voice at the back of the crowd. "The shed's afire!"

"Cripes!" quavered Clay, "my washin'!"

Diversions are the key principle of strategy. Instantly the bear, Ephraim and Eric were deserted. There was a unanimous rush for the shed. Even Beecham was forgotten, creeping on his hands and knees, picking purple tarantulas off the clay bank. A hard fight was made, and the shed was saved, but by that time the Al Fresco Entertainers were camped in a cool, green nook, some miles from Deadwood.

"That fire was an act of Providence, Eric," Ephraim insisted.

"Yes," admitted the Proselyte, " 'n' although I ain't what yeh'd call er pious man, Ephie, I agree there is times when acts iv Providence is very advisable."

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12: The Heroes of Duckfoot

Evening News (Sydney) 2 March 1907

JOHN HENRY COLLARD and Peter Alexander Bodycomb had been regarded as the rising young men of Duckfoot till their hair was very thin on the top and rather grey at the edges, and they were still spoken of as promising young Australians at Band of Hope meetings, debating assemblies, and functions of like moment. John and Peter had been rivals for scholastic honors when they attended old Killgower's "College" on the flat by the pile bridge, and since then they had been rivals in politics, rivals in religion, rivals in business, and rivals in love.

Public opinion at Duckfoot was definitely divided on all questions debatable amongst sensible, self-respecting, and respectable men. Duckfoot took every question, and halved it sharply, as you might split an apple, and Duckfoot society enlivened the monotony of existence at Duckfoot, with its disagreements. In all these disagreements, John Collard stood for that section which regarded itself as the Liberal party. This party even believed itself almost Radical in its more passionate moments; the Conservative element of Duckfoot attained its highest fruition in the person of Peter Bodycomb.

Peter kept a grocery on one side of Constitution-street, Duckfoot, and John Collard kept a grocery on the other side. The rivals spent much of their time at their opposing doors, in long white aprons, watching each other, each fearing that his opponent might take advantage of a momentary lapse of vigilance on his part to revolutionise business. Bodycomb had seized the opportunity when Collard was afflicted with sandy blight, to mark sugar down a halfpenny, and when John Collard took to spectacles, Peter followed suit immediately.

"A man looks so very much more intellectual in spectacles," Peter explained. "We really cannot permit the Democrats to have the sole benefit of even such adventitious aids."

Public opinion at Duckfoot was so fairly apportioned that the rival grocers had each almost a precise half of the business of Duckfoot township and district, and Peter and John were so truly representative of local thought that if a customer of Peter's began dealing with John everybody knew it indicated a deliberate change of political sentiment on the part of the customer. True, this occurred rarely. It was no easy matter to vary the political beliefs of an elector of Duckfoot.

It would appear that Peter's conduct in falling in love with Miss Henrietta Powlet, immediately it became known that John was paying Miss Powlet marked attention, was an act of "cussedness," but it is possible that the seeming-jocular providence which shaped their ends to uncompromising

rivalry in other matters, had willed that John and Peter should round off the comedy by being competitors for the hand of one fair lady.

Henrietta was a pert little woman, with pursed lips, and brows curiously elevated in the centre, over small, round, brown eyes, giving her an alert, bird-like air, which was accentuated by the sharp little bill, that might have been a nose. She was the local dressmaker and milliner, and was doing so well that she could afford to affect a marked superiority to man, even to man at his highest point of development, in the person of John— or Peter.

Miss Henrietta did not walk, she bounced; she was always in a hurry, always business-like, and always prim. Had Duckfoot possessed a sense of humor, the quaint spectacle afforded by John Collard or Peter Bodycomb walking by Henrietta, and endeavoring to assume a leisurely and lover-like air, while the little dressmaker bounced along at the rate of five miles an hour, apparently occupied with concerns of vast moment, would have provided food for a year's gaiety.

For twelve months John and Peter had been rivals for the hand of Miss Powlet, and neither had a hap'orth of advantage. Henrietta would walk, or, more correctly, bounce to church, with John, and bounce home with Peter. She would go for a bounce with either on Sunday afternoon, showing no discrimination whatever, and those walks were always hurried and energetic. It was the most difficult matter in the world for a diffident man to make progress in the affections of Miss Powlet. She never remained still long enough for a slow man to get an arm round her waist, and neither Collard nor Bodycomb was a cavalier of the dashing type.

John prayed daily for an opportunity of distinguishing himself, that would impel Henrietta to grant him some preference, for he had long recognised that the addition of her millinery and dress and mantle-making business to his general store was a most desirable thing. Unfortunately, Peter's prayers for precisely the same boon were just as regular, and the rival petitions nullified each other. Duckfoot watched the competition with little interest, but several spinsters of the township and district were piteously envious of Miss Powlet, for marrying men were scarce, and John and Peter were both highly desirable, al-though no longer young, and both cast in the same commonplace mould, being tall and thin, with projecting knees and rounded shoulders; both had long noses, weak eyes, and moustaches feeble in texture, and ginger in color.

This was the situation when the great event happened, and thrilled Duckfoot to its very core. The news that John Collard had saved Peter Bodycomb from a watery grave, with immense heroism, and at the risk of his own life, travelled up the river and down the river, and far inland, in an incredibly short space of time. Within two hours a crowd had assembled

before John's store. It was composed of the Liberals of Duckfoot. It cheered John with immense enthusiasm, and was not content till he appeared on his own verandah, and delivered a modest little speech.

"I feel that I have only done my duty, fellow citizens and friends," said John. "I have only done what any one of you would have done in similar circumstances. Peter Bodycomb and I have warmly opposed each other on every question that has interested the people of this thriving township. We are rivals in business, and are against each other on almost every point, but Peter is a man, and a brother, and I could do no less." Here John gave indications that emotion was overcoming him. He drew out his handkerchief.

"Friends, and good people of Duckfoot, I thank you," he said, "but I trust you will be as quiet as you can for poor Bodycomb's sake. He has sustained a severe shock; he is probably prostrated."

"It's a lie!" cried a voice. "I am not prostrated, any more than you are." Peter had appeared on his verandah. He seemed excited; he was gesticulating wildly.

"People of Duckfoot," he cried; but it was the Liberal party he addressed, and it resented his attitude towards his saviour, and drowned his protesting voice with cheers for Collard. The grand incident of the day, as it presented itself to John's mind, was a trifle fogged. He knew he was rowing up the river, and Peter was rowing down the river. Their boats collided in midstream, and were overturned. John remembered that he and Peter grappled in the water; he remembered some comings up and goings down; the gulping in of much yellow river water, and then came a period of obfuscation, followed by the slow return to light and life, and finding himself on dry ground, with Peter still in his tight clutch. He was some moments grasping the situation, and then he realised that the thing he had long prayed for had been vouchsafed to him. He was not only alive, but he had saved the life of his rival, Peter Bodycomb. Peter, too, had revived. John, with some presence of mind, lifted Peter, intending to carry him to the nearest house, and so assert his claim to the honor and glory; but Peter, recognising his intention, no doubt, resisted fiercely, and endeavored to carry John. First John carried Peter a few paces, then Peter came into the ascendant and carried John, and so on, for about fifty yards. The struggle was wildly absurd, and resembled a long-distance wrestling match. The pair desisted when they were quite exhausted, and walked home, aloof and indignant, two quaint, bedraggled objects, hatless, dripping, and coated with river mud.

Duckfoot simply let itself go about John; the story of his heroism swelled as it rolled; his brave action was the one theme of conversation. Within four hours a movement was on foot to recognise his reckless daring, and a letter

was drawn up and dispatched to Sydney, drawing the attention of the Royal Humane Society to the noble action of "our worthy and respected townsman, John Collard."

Miss Henrietta Powlet actually called upon John, and breathlessly congratulated him.

"Oh, please don't mention it!" said John, exulting inwardly.

"Everybody must respect valor," said Henrietta, "and appreciate self-sacrifice and willingness to give one's life for a fellow-creature, and all that, John."

It was the first time she had called him John. Collard felt his bosom stir with those ebullient emotions that make a conquering rooster fly on to the shed and crow.

John's act gave Liberalism a decided impetus at Duckfoot. The party rallied round its hero. It was its bounden duty to show the world that Duckfoot knew how to appreciate valor. On the morning of the second day everything was ready; and the excitement was at its highest. A public meeting had been called. The citizens of Duckfoot were making a presentation to John Collard, Esq. Their mark of esteem took the shape of a large gold medal, suitably inscribed. Fortunately the watchmaker had one in stock. There were many speeches before the presentation, all couched in fervent and florid language. Somebody recited an appropriate set of verses, written by the local poet at a moment's notice; somebody sang, "Let Me Like a Soldier Fall;" and the medal was hung on the hero's breast. Miss Henrietta Powlet, as Grand Dame of the Duckfoot Order of Sensible Sisters, decorated "their splendid and illustrious townsman." This was considered very apropos. The enthusiasm was enormous, the people cheered madly. It was the happiest moment of John's life. He stood before them all, his hand pressed to his heart, his head slightly bent to suggest humility, the renovated medal gleaming upon his bosom, a hero in his own right.

At this intensely dramatic moment Proudfoot the baker, rushed into the hall, hatless and disordered, crimson with indignation. He dashed on to the platform.

"Stop! Stop!" yelled Proudtoot, throwing up an imperious palm.

A sudden silence fell upon the meeting.

"The other crowd are holding a meeting," cried the baker. "They're making a presentation to Peter Bodycomb. They've given him an inscribed gold watch. Listen."

The meeting listened with absorbing interest. It heard the sound of distant cheering.

"That's the Conservatives cheering Bodycomb," said Proudfoot. "They say he saved the life of John Collard!''

The announcement paralysed John's meeting for an appreciable space of time; it was dumb and motionless. The hero was horror-stricken at such mendacity. Presently murmurs arose.

"They say Peter Bodycomb dragged John Collard out of the river, and carried him towards the township. It's infamous!"

"It's an outrage on the common instincts of humanity," blurted the hero, his medal palpitating with righteous indignation.

"It's gross ingratitude!" exclaimed Maugher, the chairman.

Henrietta moved away from the hero into the background. There was a moment of painful indecision on the part of the assemblage, and then the echoes of another frantic outburst of cheering at Bodycomb's meeting were borne in upon them, and the spirit of the Liberal party asserted itself, the people sprang to their feet, and cheer after cheer rang out. John Collard smiled again. The situation was saved.

To the great disgust of the Liberals, Peter Bodycomb persisted in his claim. He had had a terrible struggle with John in the river; he had dragged him ashore at the risk of his own life, and John had repaid him by an act of treachery unequalled in the annals of our country. Peter assumed the airs of a hero. He made an unblushing display of his inscribed gold watch. The watch had cost 20 guineas, whereas John's medal had only cost five. Certainly the friends and admirers of John Collard could not conscientiously allow the matter to rest here. They offered John a complimentary banquet, and John accepted. There were more eulogistic speeches at the banquet John, sitting in the place of honor, was crowned with mock laurel. His health was drunk after a storm of cheers; but the effect was spoiled by the tumultuous cheering of a crowd across the way, where the Conservative party, was tendering a complimentary banquet to Peter Bodycomb.

Daniel Maugher spoke with loathing of the nefarious efforts of the Conservatives to rob the true hero of the credit of a brave and glorious deed; and at the same time Thomas Strach, over at Peter's banquet, was describing with rugged eloquence how the fair fame of Duckfoot was being contaminated by the ignoble scheme the Liberals had concocted to pass on to a number of their own party the honor and glory due to Peter Bodycomb. Duckfoot had been hotly divided on many questions; never had it shown such keen and bitter partisanship as it developed in connection with this business of the rival heroes. Peter was given a complimentary picnic to Emu Head, and on the same day John enjoyed a picnic given in his honor at the Lagoon. Peter was presented with many gifts, John received an equal number of tributes, all

suitably inscribed. Maugher wrote for the metropolitan papers a glowing account of John Collard's act of heroism; Strach wrote an equally glowing account of Peter Bodycomb's daring rescue of a drowning man. Both accounts were published; disputations arose in the correspondence columns, and the editors treated the matter in a frivolous spirit, stating that as there was some doubt whether Peter had rescued John, or John had saved Peter, it would be wisest to divide the honors, and say each saved the other. Following this was a curt intimation that "this correspondence must now cease."

Peter's partisans struck their cruellest blow at John's smoke social. After the hero had been presented with a smoker's kit, "suitably inscribed," Strach, who had not been invited, jumped on a chair, and said: "Mr. Chairman, permit me to say, in the interests of public decency, that you are lavishing praise and presents upon a man who is a fraud and a humbug."

At this there were fierce yells, and an attempt was made to tear Strach down; but he continued, in a louder key, "And whom I can prove to be a fraud." Strach pointed a terrible finger at John Collard, who stood pale and expectant, "Mr. Chairman, that man Collard cannot swim a stroke."

Dead silence followed these awful words. John went paler still, his weak knees were trembling visibly and audibly, trickles of perspiration stole from under his thin hair.

"Is—is that true, John?" said Maugher.

"Well," quaked John, "it's true that I can't swim, but—but—" He bogged there, and the silence that followed was broken by the exultant laugh of Strach, as he strode from the room.

Maugher had a brilliant idea. "Well, gentlemen," he cried, "if John cannot swim, his act in saving Bodycomb's life is all the more remarkable, his heroism the higher. I call for three cheers for John Collard, the Liberal hero."

The cheers were given, but they were feeble, and were quite drowned by the roars of insolent triumph belched from the room in which Peter Bodycomb was being feted.

It cannot be denied this development did John's cause a lot of harm. It sapped the enthusiasm of his party. Henrietta went to church with Peter on the following Sunday. She walked home with Peter. She attended the Cinderella ball in Peter's honor on, the Monday evening. John had no ball. He lurked at home, morose and envious, concocting vengeance. Perhaps it was a random shot, but it was effective.

At the Band of Hope meeting on Wednesday evening John solemnly declared that Peter was obtaining public credit under false pretences.

"Odium has been heaped upon me," said John, "because it is assumed that my claim is invalidated by reason of the fact that I can't swim. I admit I cannot

swim. I defy anybody to prove that I ever said I could— but in the excitement of that great moment when I saved Peter Bodycomb's life, I for-got I could not swim. And now, ladies and gentlemen, it is for Peter Bodycomb to explain how he saved me, since he himself is totally unable to swim."

Peter jumped up on the platform passionately protesting, but he could not truthfully say he was a swimmer, and John's cause revived again.

Henrietta, as a mark of contrition, bought some sugar at his shop next morning, and spent quite five minutes in conversation with the hero. By this time the difference between Peter and John had become viciously personal; they forgot their divinity; then bandied words with each other across the road; and their language was not as well studied as was to be expected from acknowledged leaders of public opinion. Peter undercut John in tea, and John reduced yellow soap a penny a bar, and gave a pipe to every purchaser of a pound of tobacco.

The dispute culminated in a garden party, given to John by Maugher, on the north side of the river. Strach was equal to the occasion, and gave a garden party to the rival hero on the south side of the river. Only a strip of water divided the opposing forces, and neither money nor trouble was spared by each party to outdo the other. The speeches, songs, and recitations in John's honor were literally hurled at Peter's party; and the songs, recitations, and speeches, descriptive of Peter's valor, were spouted at John's party, across the water. When the festivities were at the highest, the little river steamer Bunyip, with two barges in tow, steamed in between the rival factions, and the captain noting the lavish nature of the festivities, slowed up.

"Hello!" cried Captain Tarbut, "what's all this? What's a-going on here?"

"It's a garden party in honor of John Collard, who almost sacrificed his own life to save that of his enemy, Peter Bodycomb," cried Maugher. "Come ashore, captain, and drink the hero's health."

"This is a complimentary garden party extended to the hero, Peter Bodycomb, who nobly saved John Collard from an untimely death in the river, on this spot," cried Strach.

Captain Tarbut held up his hands to still the tumult.

"Give us it one at er time," he said. "Who saved who?"

"Peter Bodycomb rescued John Collard!"

"John Collard saved Peter Bodycomb."

"Was this on the fifteenth iv last month et erbout two o'clock?"

"Yes," cried a dozen voices from either side.

"Then, maybe, I kin square yer def'rence. The *Bunyip* was passin' here at that time, 'en we come on er pair iv idiots fightin' in the water, like cats in er bag, longside their up-turned boats. I dug er boat-hook in 'em, 'n' yanked 'em

ashore, 'n' jist, left 'em there t' drain, havin' no time t' waste on jabberin' jackasses, what don't know enough t' come in outer ther wet."

Then there was much murmuring from both banks.

"So yer don't believe me. I refers yer t' me crew," said the captain.

"That's the golmighty truth, s'elp me!" said the crew, grinning from his perch on a tallow cask.

Blankly the people of John's party gazed into each other's faces, dumbly the people of Peter's party met eye to eye. Peter lingered for a few moments in the painful silence, and then turned, and drifted away. John stood his ground for 50 seconds, and then sneaked behind a clump of saplings, and retreated from the scene.

It took the rival parties about five minutes to grasp the situation, and then one took possession of Captain Tarbut, and the other took possession of Edward, his crew, and they feted those stalwart mariners, for, after all, they were the true heroes of Duckfoot.

Next Sunday Miss Henrietta Powlet, dress-maker and milliner, bounced to church with Tom Swimmerton, a young selector, and a man of no parts— not even parts of speech.

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13: The Sad Case of Willie Borlow

(as by "Silas Snell")
Punch (Melbourne) 28 May 1914

"Miss Trigg, Domestic" appeared in a series of comic stories in the Melbourne Punch *during 1914.*

IT WAS Mr. Borlow engaged Minnie Trigg at the registry office. Something in her raffish eye and her ginger-for-pluck appearance appealed to him.

"The job is easy," he said. "Fifteen shillings a week, a five-room'ed villa, no children, no cats, no callers, and no confounded piano or phonographs. I hate, loathe, and despise phonographs. I have the greatest contempt for cats."

" 'Ow many in the fam'ly?" asked Minnie with a judicial air. "Is the washin' sent out? What nights off, an' is a girl 'lowed to be seen 'ome?"

"There are myself and my mother," replied .Mr. Borlow. "Mother doesn't talk much, and can't hear very well. Mother crochets. It's her only vice. Don't care a fuss what you do with the washing. You can go off pretty well every dashed night for all I care, and you can come home with a blessed circus and I won't growl, provided there's no brass band. Mind you," he added fiercely, shaking a threatening finger at Miss Trigg, "no brass bands. I hate brass bands. And I hate monkey organs. Dash it all, girl, if you encourage monkey organs about the place I'll kick you out of rhe house!"

"Yer barmy!" said Miss Minnie Trigg mildly.

"BUT I took on the job all right," Miss Trigg confided to her friend, 'Arriet Brown, a few days later. "My troubs erbout his kiekin' me out or puttin' any silly bizness across me. He ain't no higher than that. I cud kick his bloomin''at off, but he's ez queer- ez a van-load of apes comin' back frim a picnic. He's got money, I fancy, jist enough t' live on. an' liis mother lives with him. He's old, but she's older. 'Sttuth ! I never saw sich an old body. She 'sits in a chair what creaks, an' her bones creak, an' her voice creaks. She don't talk often, an' when she does you'd think it was tlie wicker work furniture comin' round after hem' sat on by a fat gatherin'."

"Don't sound ez if you was t$oin't' be worked to a shadow at 'Willis Villa, " said 'Arriet.

"No, I ain't quite killin' myself; but I reckon it's goin' t' be worth the money to live with Willie. Willie's the boss. His mother calls him Willie, an' seems t' think he's still a kid in knickers, though he's near sixty, an' a widower, with a whisky freak, an' one foot in a ten-pound bundle mostly along of gout."

But Minnie learned a great deal more of her new family before a fortnight had fled. Mr. Borlow was a short, thin, merry gentleman of a very excited

manner, with round, staring eyes, and thin, bristling, grey hair. He shaved clean, and his face was pale, lit up with one touch of colour. The extremte tip of his nose was so red that the illumination looked artificial, and suggested a circus down in an angry humour. I

Minnie's first real adventure with Mr. Borlow happened early one morning. She had served breakfast, and was having her own meal, when Mr. B. made a sudden, dramatic entrance into the kitchen. His eyes were rounder than usual, his thin hair was erect, the danger signal on the limit of his trunk burned with electric fury. He held a decapitated egg in his left hand. He paused in the middle of the room, held up the egg, and pointed a rigid forefinger at it.

"Call that an egg ?" he squealed. "Call that an egg, do you ? You— you— you wretch! You she devil, do you call that an egg?"

"'Taint a wheelbarrer, is it?" said Minnie. "An' it ain't a mangle."

"Smell it !" Mr. Borlow strode forward, pushing the offending egg at her. "Taste it !"

"Garn, chase yerself! If it ain't a noo-laid I'll take yer word fer it," said Miss Trigg.

"New laid ? New laid ? New laid ?" with every repetition of the query. Mr. Borlow's voice jumped up the scale. "Why, dash it all, woman, it's an antique! It's a Babylonian relief. It's from the tombs of the first Pharaohs, and it smells like all the plagues of Egypt. How dare you serve me such a dirty trick?"

"Blime!" said Miss Trigg. "You don't expect me to know the birth an' breedin' of every egg that comes into the 'ouse, do you?"

"I know this, that it's like your infernal cheek to give me an egg for breakfast that is totally unfit to associate with gentlemen. Don't you grin at me, you whelp of the slums. Don't you dare!"

Mr. Borlow threatened Minnie with the egg. Minnie ducked, and the offending ova was bowled against the wall, where it hung in an offensive blob.

Mr. Borlow kicked over the kitchen table. "I'll teach you to give me improper eggs," he squealed. He took up a plate, and crashed it on the floor. "There's for your putrid egg," said he. He seized the milk jug, and hurled it through the window. "That'll teach you to know a demoralised and unsound egg when you see it!" he howled.

Miss Trigg was not much disturbed. "Oh, go on," she said, "don't mind me. There's the sugar basin. Have a go at the butter dish."

"You— you vixen. You ginger vixen!" cried Mr. Borlow. He chased her twice round the overturned table, and threw half-a-loaf at her as she skipped through the kitchen door.

"Natural," said Miss Trigg, telling the adventure to Miss Brown, "I reckons it's all up with yours at 'Willis Villor,' an' I'm goin' about t' pack up me goods,

when 'long comes his niblets a nour after, calm ez cold-biled rice, an' sez he, ever so sweet an' gentle: 'It's a nice day, is it not?' I sez it's a moderate fine day, barrin' a little thunder, an' a slight shower iv eggs an' things. 'Maybe, Minnie,' sez his gills, 'you'd like the afternoon to yourself an' half-a-crown to spend.' He flicks me arf er doller, an' goes off. Well, I ain't one to 'arbour spite, so I unpacks an' resolves t' ferget the bad egg."

Minnie enjoyed another week of comparative peace and quiet with the Borlow's, but a second demonstration came in due course. She had served the dinner, and was entering the diningroom with two coffee cups on a. tray, when Borlow sprang upon her from behind the door.

"What're these?" yelled Mr. Borlow in a seeming frenzy. "What in the deuce's name are these things?" In the fright of the preliminary outburst Minnie had dropped the tray, and the fragments of the cups and saucers strewed the carpet.

"They're pancakes, of course," stammered the girl.

Borlow held all the pancakes she had served for the sweets' course piled on his left hand. He was pointing at them tragically with the forefinger of his right. To all appearances he was more distressed about the pancakes than he had been about the egg.

"Ho!" he yelled, "so, ho! they're pancakes? Well, take your infernal pancakes." He slapped one clear in her face. He pelted her with three others. He seized her in a paroxysm of fury, and pushed a pancake down her back.

Miss Trigg was not what you would call a long-suffering damsel. She knew her rights as a superior domestic, and would not admit that any master was within his rights in pushing pancakes down her back.

"I was that roused," she told 'Arriet, "I 'ardly.knew what I was up to afore I'd grabbed a tureen iv cauliflower, an' fair smashed it on his 'ead. He went down, sorter sittin' with his 'air an' eyes clogged with biled vegetable, gapin' at me like somethin' struck by lightnin'.

"There was I," continued Minnie, for the edification of Miss Brown, "standin', knocked sorter silly by my own rash act, wonderin' what was goin' t' happen next, when all iv a sudding ole Mrs. Borlow begins to cackle. It was the funniest cackle you ever 'eard. Blow me, if the old girl wasn't laughin'. It sounded like snappin' twigs, but it was laughin' all right, an' she was rattlin' in her chair, makin' her bones crack somethin' awful, an' croaks she: 'Tha's right, my dear! Tha's right! That'll do Willie good, that will!' With that I scooted out the room. When I comes back with the coffee sorter shy, Borlow was sittin' carm an' placid in his chair, with a bump on his 'ead 'bout ez big round ez a grey kitten, an' sez he: "Coffee? Ah ! thank you, Minnie, thank you very much."

An' strike me up a tree, if he doesn't come into the kitchen while I'm washin' up, an' give me a shillin'."

It was only a day later that Mr. Borlow interviewed Minnie in the bathroom concerning cats. He was carrying a large, writhing, blasphemous, yellow she-cat by the tail, and was in a great state of moral unrest.

"What.did I tell you about cats, miss?" he. gasped, whirling the cat threateningly. "Didn't I say no cats ? Didn't I give you distinctly to understand I would not have rats ?"

" 'Taint my cat!" Minnie protested.

"I said no cats," persisted Willie Borlow; "and what do I find but this disgusting animal in my trunk— with six kittens!" He took a kitten out of his coat pocket, and threw it at Minnie.

"Six kittens, you harridan!" he yelled. He produced another kitten, and threw it. "How dare you encourage cats in my. trunks?" he squealed. "What do I keep you for, you red-headed she-devil?"

He threw another kitten.

By this time Minnie had come to a sort of appreciation of Mr. Borlow s great need. She replied with a lump of soap, which took him in the ear. Willie Borlow threw another kitten, and whirled the mother cat for a grand assault ; but Minnie swabbed him in the face with the mop, rammed him to the floor, and gave him three, to go on with. In the excitenent the cat escaped.

"Dear me," said Willie Borlow, sitting with lis back to the door, and rubbing his huits. "Dear me, this is very Home-like.''

"Home-like?" murmured Minnie. "Home-like?" then she sat on the side of the bath, and laughed. "Homelike!" She had never struck anything so ridiculous in the course of her long public service.

The old woman hobbled into the kitchen that afternoon. "I believe you have been beating my Willie again," she cackled.

"That's ' right* Te-he-he. That's right. Don't be afraid, stand up to him. He-he-he-he. it soothes him. Tehe-he."

The ancient crone seemed quite happy.

"You see," said old Mrs. Borlow, "my poor Willie lost his dear wife five years ago, and he's never got over it. He misses her awfully. Having no one to have it out with is a terrible trial to him. But you seem to suit, my dear— you seem to suit."

"I do my best, mum."

"While Willie's poor wife was alive he used to have it out with her, and she used to hit him with the bellows. That was very soothing."

"D'yer mean t' say 'e likes it ?" queried Minnie in amazement.

"I don't know, my girl; but it's necessary to him. Willie must have it out with somebody. When I was younger he used to hive it out with me. But now I'm too old. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! now I'm too old. I always used a fish skillet. A wooden fish skillet, has a very soothing effect on my Willie. But a mop will do— a mop will do."

"Do you really say now I've got to hit Mr. Borlow about when he has them tantrums?" asked Minnie.

"He expects it. He's used to it. He s been used to it all his life. For thirty years I beat Willie when he. was too obstreperous— for thirty years his poor wife did. it. She's dead now, poor thing, and I'm too old."

"Hadn't yeh better get a man in, mum?"

"Oh, no ! Oh, dear, no, my child ! A man won't do at all. Willie must have a woman to roar at. It has always been a woman. His late wife did it very well. He can't recollect some of the beatings she gave him without weeping. He was very fond of her. Once he assaulted her with a whole dinner, from soup to fruit. He thrashed her quite severely with a boiled pullet. Then she hit him with the piano stool, and whipped him so severely with a carpet beater that he had to stay abed for three days. Don't hesitate, dearie, if he seems to be getting out of bounds. Use your mop on him."

"I'll do my best, mum."

"Do, do, and my Willie' is. not ungrateful. He will probably raise your wages."

"And 'ere I am," Minnie explained to her friend, 'Arriet Brown, "fixed in a nice easy grip, with seventeen an' a tizzie a week, where I ain't got much to do, an' where I'm expected t' deal it out good an' 'ard t'. the boss. I hit him in the weskit with a vegetable m'arrer on'y this mornin', 'cause he went ravin' over the way I done his shirts up. It's dead funny the way I knocks him about with the mop, when he gets tryin' t' kick the roof off. 'Selp me, you'd think we was married."

Minnie was really quite comfortable, with the Borlows. Sne had discovered that there -was no particular harm in Willie if he was properly handled and , severely dealt with at the right moment. He had to explode at times, and bore no ill-will when corrected after the manner practised by his late lamented wife.

"I don't miss her so much now," Willie confessed one morning after he had been driven round the garden with a yard broom, to soothe an outbreak brought on by a hole in his sock.

Miss Trigg had been with the Borlow couple for over twelve months at the time when, she took a week's holiday to go to her sister's wedding at Traralgon. When she returned she found strangers in Willie's villa, and learned,

to her great amazement, that Willie Borlow was dead. He had died suddenly the evening before, and preparations were being made for the funeral.

"You see, my girl," explained the aged mother, "he had an awful bad attack of tantrums, brought on by some burnt toast at breakfast. He had long recognised it was no use going on at a poor, useless old body like me, so he went roaring round the house, looking for someone to have it out with; but, of course, there was nobody. That was the death of my dear Willie— his having no one to have it out with. I always dreaded the moment would come. Suddenly he recollected, and cried out: 'Great heavens I made the toast myself.' And with that he fell in a fit. He never recovered. Poor Willie! Poor, poor, little Willie! He would have been alive and happy to-day if he had only had somebody to have it out with."

MINNIE was weeping when she told 'Arriet. "It on'y shows," she said, " 'ow a girl should stick to her dooty. I feel as if I'd killed him. It was me goin' away an' leavin' him with no one t' ease his feelin's on what brought on that fit."

"There, there, don't go an' carry on," said the mournful 'Arriet.

"I carn't 'elp it, 'Arriet,. Me 'eart's touched. I believe pore Willie was goin' t' ask me t' m'arry him, he was that took with my way of 'andlin' a mop."

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14: The Funerals of Malachi Mooney

The Bulletin, 24 Feb 1900

A NUMBER of Bungaree farmers, called from the fields, stood bare-headed about the sick-bed in attitudes of grievous constraint. Mrs. Mooney, seated on a low stool, wept sluice-heads, with wailing and querulous protestations. She had been replenishing the fountain of tears with whisky, and now cherished a great grievance against Malachi for dying, and the time chosen, and the manner thereof.

"There's hwhisky by the jar, min," said the dying man in a thin wheeze. "Be dhrinkin'."

Hogan gravely assumed authority over the jar, and filled up for the company with judicial impartiality.

"Good luck to ye, Mullocky," said Hogan, raising his cup.

Malachi waved his thin hand in expostulation. He was beyond all chances of fortune in this world, and knew it. Hogan temporised.

"Good luck to ye, Mullocky, pwhere ye're goin'."

"How dar ye doi, Mooney—how dar ye do id?" wailed Mrs. Mooney, throwing her apron over her head, and rocking her body to and fro. The company drank with one action, quite military in its precision, and then looked towards Malachi Mooney for further orders, and Malachi lay peacefully, happily dead with a smile on his lips, and the half-drained mug in his wasted fingers.

"Oh, ye divil! t' be dyin' on me like dthis," moaned Mrs. Mooney under her apron. "I'm disaved in yeh, Mooney! disaved! disaved! Whurra whroo! "

Presently, perceiving that Malachi was beyond argument, she lifted up her voice and filled the house with dolorous cries, and wailed dutifully and monotonously far into the night, when the chant was taken up by eerie, wrinkled old crones, smoke-dried grandmothers lent for the occasion by sympathetic families from the four quarters of the wilderness.

WHAT a wake that was! It lasted all night, and right up to the time fixed for the funeral. There was no end to the willing drinkers, and no limit to the whisky. Indeed, the miraculous manner in which tiny kegs, loaded to the bung, rolled from under the bed on demand, confirmed the local opinion that "Mullocky" Mooney had more than a finger in the snug still, the smoke from which curled so artfully up from a charred trunk on Peter's Hill, and was thoughtfully given a supernatural origin by the neighborly people of the district.

The funeral was advertised to move from the home of deceased at 10 a.m. sharp. It was a long march to the Ballarat old cemetery, and an early start was deemed necessary in consideration of the fact that Hooley's funeral, which happened a month earlier, had been fined for furious driving, by reason of the anxiety of the mourners to reach the graveyard before closing time.

The vehicles began to arrive at seven in the morning, the farmers and settlers driving, and their wives and "childer" loaded in behind. A funeral was a "trate" that didn't happen every day, and it would have been considered a sin to deprive the "byes" and "gurrls" of a bit of "enjymint " that cost nothing. But many of the mourners had been at Mooney's all night, "kapin' the carpse company," and daybreak disclosed a baker's dozen scattered about the farm, sleeping where they fell. One hung over the dog-leg fence "forninst" the house, like an old shirt, with down-swinging arms. Canty, recumbent against the butt-end of a gum, rigid as a stump, slept so profoundly that the old guttural Brahma-pootra had perched on his bald and awful head, and was defying creation with senseless repetitions of his cracked clarion. Others reposed curled against the house, and several dotted the paddock like quaint hieroglyphics, objects of wonderment and noisy speculation to the familiar pigs.

Michael Morrissey was the first to drive up. Michael was to occupy an honourable and responsible position at the head of the procession. He had generously offered the use of his trap as hearse, and it was appropriately draped for that solemn office. This vehicle was an American waggon, and it had been roofed over about two feet from the floor, and was ordinarily used for the conveyance of meat, Michael being a butcher. There was a door at the back, and just room within for Mooney's coffin. Quinn's trotter, The Imp, was in the shafts. The Imp had been borrowed for the occasion because he was the only black horse in the district; but although his complexion was satisfactory, his disposition quite unsuited him for so grave a duty. He was old, and had a semi-bald tail; but there was a peculiar and aggressive jauntiness about the beast altogether out of harmony with his years and the situation in which he found himself. He held his head high, and pricked his ears, and his tail had a perky elevation that exhibited the bald butt to the worst advantage, and excited popular derision wherever he went.

When the friends of the late Malachi Mooney arrived, they walked reverently into the room where Malachi still lay on the bed amongst his monumental candles, and gazed on him for a moment with pensive sadness, as in duty bound.

"Pore mahn, he have the peaceful shmile on him."

"He have, he have."

And after repeating the sentiment several times, with nodding heads and much wise clicking of tongues, having paid their respects to the dead, they withdrew to the kitchen, and devoted themselves to the whisky.

The coffin had been delivered, and stood on two bush stools in the kitchen, decently covered with a black shawl. Mrs. Mooney sat at the foot, adjacent to a pannikin, and continued to upbraid Mooney for his inconsiderate conduct in dying, and "lavin' a lone lorn widdy."

The funeral moved at 11, when it was quite certain that only one baby keg remained. This keg Morrissey took with him on the improvised hearse, as a wise provision for the first half of the journey, which lay through a barren land. Many of the mourners had to be helped into their vehicles, and after the start many remained in only by a miracle. Morrissey led the way, The Imp stepping along with a frivolous kind of a four-footed jig that robbed the cortege at the outset of any pretence to dignity. O'Connor's old waggonette followed, O'Connor driving carefully, strapped down, and Mrs. O'Connor and the "widdy" occupying the back seat. Then came Clark in his spring-cart, driving The Imp's rival, Colleen. After him two or three miscellaneous vehicles, and then a long string of wood drays, each in charge of an unnaturally rigid and solemn Irishman perched on a candle box, and each containing one or two women and three or four children, the former squatting composedly on the bottom of the dray with their substantial feet swinging out behind. A dozen sleepy, unshaven, unshorn agriculturists brought up the rear, riding two abreast on large morbid horses that shuffled moodily through the dust with drooped heads and sagging under-lips.

The women in the drays maintained a shrill conversation along the line, but for the most part the men observed an owl-like decorum until the Travellers' Rest was reached, that is if the puffing of abbreviated black clays be not considered derogatory to true reverence. Meanwhile, the day being hot and the way dusty, a couple of short halts had served to drain the keg on the hearse. It was a gritty, drought-stricken funeral that descended upon the Travellers' Rest, and when it moved again it left the wayside inn as dry as a powder-mill, having drunk up everything in the bar, and demolished the water-butt.

And now a great spirit of unrest took possession of many of the mourners, and there was much whooping and many manifestations of a wild and unholy desire to convert the procession into something like a steeplechase. The Imp was stepping out gaily with his deceitful double-shuffle, game as a pebble despite his age and infirmities, but it was Clark with Colleen who led the breakaway. Springing up with a whoop and whooroo, Clark whipped his mare alongside the hearse.

"Morrissey," he cried, "I can bate that bumble-footed ould crock to the Pint beyant fer tin bob!"

"Ye can't!" roared Morrissey, all the sportsman stirring within him.

"Ye loi!" Clark fairly shrieked, laying the whip on.

Michael lashed The Imp, and the veteran, scenting a contest, snorted defiance, and hit out with all four afflicted legs at once. Then, bounding over ruts, jumping the boulders, rocking and rearing, the two vehicles went thundering through the dust, Colleen leading and The Imp following, flinging wide his legs with the action of a startled tarantula as he rushed down the hill, his body working with the antic spasms of two pigs in a bag.

The other drivers flogged their stolid horses into unwonted activity, and in this way the mad funeral, strung out a mile long, tore through one affrighted township, scattering sows and sucklings, goats, dogs, poultry, and shrieking children, raising a dust that blotted out half the landscape, and filling men and women with a wonderment that lasted many days. Half a mile beyond, The Imp, with a triumphant tail and starting eye-balls, flung past the Colleen with a rush and a roar, neatly carrying away Clark's near wheel, which went humming ahead down the well-worn track.

Morrissey obtained control over his blood horse and succeeded in pulling up about a mile further on, and there he waited for the rest of the funeral in a humble and contrite frame of mind. The procession arrived in sections, the heavy horses spent and reeking, and the mourners coated thickly with powdered clay that caked rapidly in the sun on their perspiring faces. The women, particularly the stout ones, tumbled and bumped out of all knowledge and restraint, were loud and fierce in their complainings, and the men agreed that it was "ondacent" and "agin religion" to conduct a funeral at a hard gallop. So Michael led away again, holding his trotter hard, and proceeded as reverently and demurely as was possible with such a horse and so much whisky.

Matty Clark was reported unharmed, and busy fixing a skid in place of the lost wheel. It was expected that he would turn back, and be no more a disturbing element in his neighbor's funeral. The procession travelled into the outskirts of Ballarat without any further misadventure. In fact, most of the drivers and several of the ladies were asleep, and the weary plough-horses drowsed along at their own gait. The Imp, in spite of the apparent sprightliness of his action, was a very slow walker, for the reason that he generally dropped his hoofs in almost the spots from which he had just lifted them, and sometimes behind.

But at this point, cries of warning and of wondernment and disgust ran along the line, and looking back, Morrissey beheld Matty Clark in the distance,

erect in his cart, gesticulating like a maniac, and rapidly over-hauling the funeral. Matthew had fixed a sapling under his trap for a skid, and on this and one wheel he presently rattled up alongside the hearse again, oblivious to the threats and expostulations of the mourners.

"Mike Morrissey, ye divil ye!" yelled Mat, red, panting, and furious, "to the cemmethry fer a quid!"

"Niver a won av me," replied Morrissey, hanging on to The Imp.

"Yis, be the powers!" roared Clark, shooting ahead, and slashing viciously at the hearse-horse as he passed.

Michael clung to the reins, and hauled with all his might, but The Imp was not to be denied. Squealing shrilly in reply to the challenge, he broke into his old, ungainly, link-motion combination of canter, amble and trot, and spread himself all over the road in pursuit of Colleen.

A couple of horsemen put their nags to a gallop to head-off Matty Clark, and in this way the funeral broke in upon Ballarat, careering down Humphrey-street, and stirred the city to its depths.

Fortunately Colleen was headed just before reaching the main thoroughfare, and Daly and O'Mara seized upon Matty, who was a small, bristly Hibernian, and fought like a peccary. They they got him down and tied him up. Then, after throwing their turbulent captive into the cart, O'Hara sat on his chest and led the horses, and Daly, driving Colleen, now blown and humbled, took up a subordinate position at the tail of the procession ; while the funeral, which had paused to collect itself once more, moved on, followed by a delighted crowd of children and many envious adults.

Many astonishing funerals had come up out of Bungaree into Ballarat East, but Malachi Mooney's funeral was the most weird and wonderful that ever invaded any town on the Australian continent, and news of it seemed to have electric passage through the place. The improvised hearse with the well-intentioned effort to rig a pair of plumes of cock's feathers upon it, the strange, jocund horse that hauled it, and the great, red, clayed-up, hairy, wild-eyed Galway man driving, were alone sufficient to have brought the whole population into Bridge-street ; but with the added attractions— the awful procession of drays, their dusty, kiln-dried occupants, and the last vehicle riding jauntily on its skid, the funeral simply stopped business, and took possession of the town, and drew the people after it in crowds.

Morrissey had the reins wound about his wrists, and with his heels dug in and his eyes obtruding and all his faculties intensely concentrated hung to The Imp. The matrons still swung their stout feet, and here and there a worn-out mourner slept in his dray, Heffernan and Moore with their heads suspended over the tail and their mouth sopen.

The police followed too, and eyed the procession dubiously, half-inclined to arrest the whole funeral; but by exercising the severest self-restraint and the greatest caution the mourners contrived to pull through, and arrived at the cemetery with the coffin in good order and condition at half-past four.

After the usual preliminaries the coffin was carried to the graveside by four of the late Mooney's most intimate friends, and, considering all things, their progress down the path was not as devious as might have been expected, but they landed the pine casket with a dump that produced the greatest sensation of the day. The coffin lid had not been screwed down, and it slipped to one side, making a revelation. There were many cries and much commotion when it was seen that the coffin contained packages of sugar and tea and miscellaneous groceries, and nothing more.

Malachi Mooney was not there!

Consternation sat whitely upon every face, and the women crossed themselves vigorously.

"He's bin shpirited away!" wailed the "widdy."

"Did annywon see us dthrop him?" asked the dazed Morrissey in a small, awed voice.

Flynn remembered now having packed the groceries in the coffin the day before. He it was who carted the casket out from Ballarat, and having goods to carry at the same time, packed them into the "piner" for "convanience," and by reason of the thirst that came upon him and possessed him for two days "disremembered ivirything aftherwards."

In truth the late Malachi Mooney still lay undisturbed upon the bed in his humble home in Bungaree, and the last of the yard-long candles guttered in the brass-sockets at his head. The corpse had been forgotten!

And this is how Malachi Mooney came to have two funerals.

15: Two and a Telephone

(As by Ed. Ward)
Punch (Melbourne) 1 Feb 1912

IT IS THE OFFICE of Mr. Gilbert Hogg, general agent, a rather smart apartment of its kind, with unusual pictures on the wall, all in black-and-white, neatly-framed Norman Lindsay drawings, a couple of Phil May originals, two or three smart caricatures of local celebrities, and a fine, bold Rembrandt print in the place of honour.

Mr. Gilbert Hogg is evidently a general agent of some taste and judgment ; his furniture is simple in design, but very pleasing; his carpet is well chosen, like his wallpaper, and the whole room harmonises nicely with Mr. Gilbert Hogg himself, a dark-haired man of about thirty, who sits at the well-kept office table tucked in the right hand corner of the room as we face him.

Opposite Mr. Hogg and against the wall is a cosy saddle-back couch, just behind on his left is a door, in the same wall a fireplace with neat irons and bronze fender, and a skin rug. Conspicuously, placed on the mantelpiece is a cabinet photograph of a handsome woman of twenty-four.

Gilbert Hogg, general agent, appears to be rather troubled. He jabs the pen into the ink with unnecessary energy, crippling the instrument beyond repair. He makes a few distempered drawings on the blotting paper, roughs up his hair, and then hurls the unoffending pen into a far corner, springs up, kicks his chair back, and starts walking the carpet. After two desperate laps, Mr. Hogg pulls up, and says, "D—n!" with great emphasis. He scratches his ear, continues the scratching down his chin, and half round his neck, ending with both hands in his hair, and repeats the good, familiar expletive. "D—n," says Mjr. Hogg. The ejaculation affords him little comfort, and he goes on ruefully:

"What's the good of a man being bad, if he can get no good out of it ? There was a time when I could jakey a bit, and be as merry as a lark—merry as a lark? Gee whizz! I was as merry as a whole barnyard of game cocks, and now I drift into a miserable little wickedness, and I'm as worried as a Wowser with a yellow-haired Flossie on his conscience."

He crosses to the mantel-shelf, and takes the cabinet photograph, looking at it ruefully.

"This comes of being married. Dreadful thing being married; it robs you of your nerve. Wonder if I'd undo it if I could?"

He looks fondly at the photograph.

"Not much. She's the best on earth." He kisses the picture. "That's the trouble, I shouldn't have married the best on earth, I should have been content with the second best, or say something third-rate, then being found out

mightn't look so frightful a possibility. Being found out by absolutely the best woman on earth must be a ghastly trying business."

He goes on addressing the photo.

"Don't find me out, Ruth, old girl. Don't, there's a darling. Best not. Square and all, best not— best for you, and best for me."

A sharp ring at the telephone causes him to start like a guilty thing. He goes to the telephone stand on the table, the photograph still in his hand.

"Hello! Hello! Yes—yes. That you, Maria, darling? What? What? Nonsense; I said Maria. How absurd of you to think I said Maria. Of course, I haven't forgotten. Yes, a private room at the Geneva, and the nicest little dinner I could dig out. Yes, it will be safer to meet there. A quarter to seven. That was the arrangement. I thought we'd fixed it all nicely. What? What? Oh, hush!"

He looks anxiously at the photograph, and hastily places it on the shelf, returning to the telephone.

"You love me so much you just had to ring me up. Well, well, but we must be careful. Nothing to be ashamed of. I know all about that; but don't forget I'm married, and my wife's notions of these things don't coincide with mine or yours. Married yourself? Of course, you are; but your husband's in South Kensington, my wife is in South Yarra. What? Hello! What? Oh, certainly."

He kisses into the receiver, and rings off.

"Confound the woman, I wish she hadn't those large, appealing blue eyes. I never could withstand large, appealing blue eyes."

Goes to the shelf, and replaces the photograph on its stand.

"It's all right now, old girl. Come, don't look like that. You know I was a miserable sinner when you married me. Oh, yes you did. Didn't you take me for better or worse? Well, this is a bit of the worse."

He kisses the picture again, and goes back to his work. After a few moments devoted to securing a new pen and a fresh nib, and some little, rueful regard to the telephone, he resumes his writing, but is only just settled down to his stroke when the door behind him opens, and a pretty, dark woman of twenty-four, the original of the photograph, steals in, and covers his eyes with her two hands.

"Maria!" ejaculates Hogg.

"Maria?" Ruth's face hardens. "*Maria*?" she repeats, liberating, him.

Hogg turns on her with an expression of consternation.

"By Jove, Ruth!"

"You said Maria."

"Of course, I did. Of course, I said Maria. I always say Maria now. Since you insisted on my dropping swear words, Maria is my favourite expletive. Where other men say fearful things, I say Maria. Man must say something, you know."

Ruth Laughing: "Oh, is that it? Maria! Ma-r-i-i-*a*-*a*! It does sound a bit like bad language."

"Yes, the sort the cat uses."

"So you picked it up from the cat."

"Of course." "I wish I knew which cat. You knew so many."

She seats herself on his knee, one arm about his neck.

"But I only know Tomcats now, Ruth. You've completely reformed me."

"I'd just give my little finger to be sure of that."

He takes her little finger, and kisses it.

"My darling, I'm not worth it— not worth one joint of this little finger."

"You're worth the whole world to me. Gilbert."

"Am I?" He glances anxiously at the telephone. "I wish I deserved you. I wish it came natural to me to have an angel wife."

"Now, Gilbert, you know perfectly well I am no angel. You'll know a great deal more on that point if— if—"

Anxiously: "If what, dear?"

"Well, if there is too much Maria, for instance."

"Maria!" He yells the word as an expletive.

"Naughty Gilbert. That must have been meant for a frightful swear."

She kisses him again, and smothers him in a hug from which he finds it difficult to extricate himself.

"But my sweet wife has not told me what it is brings her into the sweltering city this beastly afternoon."

"There, I would have forgotten." She takes a paper from her pocket. "Bracket and Branscombe want to you about this. I can't make head or tail of it, and the more they explain the less I understand. Do run down and see them about it."

"Why, certainly. I suppose it's all right if you had the things."

Taking his hat— "Will you come?"

"No- The heat is awful. I'll stay till you return."

"Right-o. I shan't be five minutes."

He goes out, and she moves about the room, humming an pir. Comes to his photograph, and looks at it closely. "Oh! Oh!" (in an ecstasy). "Oh, the darling— the dear!"

She takes the photograph.

"The precious darling. There's a wet spot on my photograph. He's been kissing me."

The telephone bell rings sharply.

"Who can that be ? I'll answer it." She goes to the telephone, and giving, a very fair assumption of her husband's voice calls:

"Hello! Hello! Yes. Yes. Who is it ?"

"Maria."

"Maria ?"

"Yes, of course. Maria Wibley, you foolish boy."

Ruth covers the receiver with her hand. Fiercely— "Maria? Maria Wibley. What can she want with my husband?" Into the 'phone— "Oh, I beg your pardon, dear. What is it ?"

"You did not give me the number."

"The number—which number?"

"Of the room, stupid."

'The room?"

"Yes, the room at the restaurant. The Geneva, you know, for the dinner this evening."

Ruth (aside, her whole face changed, her manner cold and calculating) : "The Geneva this evening. This, then, is the meeting to organise the new Agency Club?"

Into the 'phone— "Oh, thirteen, sweetheart."

"Thirteen? How could you? Such an unlucky number."

"Yes, isn't it?"

"There's one more kiss, and I promise I won't bother you again."

Ruth turns from the telephone and sits against the table.

"One more kiss. Maria. So that is the Maria he expected— Maria Wibley? My friend! The cat! The devil! What am I to do? My God, what am I to do? To lose him would be worse than death. I can't lose him. I can't live without him. What to do? What to do?"

She hears his step returning, and, rushing to the couch, throws herself upon it, with her face to the wall.

Hogg enters, throws aside his hat, and looks about for his wife.

"Ruth!" He sees her on the couch, and hastens to her, turning her face to him. "Why, what's the matter, old girl?"

"It's all right, dear. I felt a little faint. The great heat. Get me a drink, will you?"

He goes to the water bottle, fills a glass, his manner betraying some anxiety, and gives her a drink.

"This is very unlike you, Ruth."

"Yes, it is. I'm ashamed of myself." She sits up. "Have you made it all right with the drapers?"

"Yes. You got mixed over the payments for those previous things."

He has seated himself beside her, with his arm about her. "My sweetheart." Draws her fondly to him and kisses her.

"Gilbert, I— I have something to tell you."

"Something important. What's wrong ?"

"When I said it was the heat of the day upset me, I did not tell the whole truth."

"No. You are making me anxious."

"There is something else. It has been on mv inind for some hours."

"And vou are going to confide in inc."

"I think I had better."

"Yes, yes, of course—why not?"

"Why not, as you say? My whole happiness seems threatened."

"Good heavens, girl, why don't you tell me?"

"It's about Mrs. Wibley."

He starts from her, a look of amazement and apprehension in his face.

"About Mrs. Willley— Mrs. Wiblev, vou said ?"

"Maria."

"Maria!" He almost shrieks the word.

"Her name is Maria, you know."

"Is it? Why, yes, of course it is. I'd forgotten."

"Mrs. Wibley and I have quarrelled."

"Quarrelled— recently?"

"Yes, to-day."

Hogg—away from her, and standing erect— "Out with it, Ruth, say it, whatever it is."

"I called on Mrs. Wibley to-day. Our conversation turned upon husbands, then upon my husband in particular. I was saying that you were, well, rather fast before I married you, but that I had completely reformed you."

" Reformed me! You— You said this to her— to Mrs. Wibley?"

"Yes. Why not? I have reformed you—" (taking his hand), "haven't I, Gilbert?"

"I— eh—. Well, go on."

"Mrs. Wibley was quite unpleasant, I thought. She sneered. She said she did not believe in these post-nuptial reformations. I said that it was true, whether she believed or not, that my husband was devoted to me, as I was to him. She laughed at that, noisily, coarsely, I thought. It hurt me. It seemed rude, vulgar. 'Your husband is like every other woman's husband, Mrs. Hogg,' she said. 'He's good when he's watched.' I said that that was a shameful remark. 'Nonsense,' She replied, 'don't be a fool. Gilbert can be led like other men if a pretty woman makes the attempt.' I said it was false, that her accusations were scandalous. and then—then—"

"Well, what then?"

"Then she said she could lead you herself."

"She said that to you."

"Yes. I was furious with her, and left the house without another word. It upset me terribly."

"My darling, my dear wife."

"At first I thought I would not tell vou, that I would keep a watch, and see if she intended carrying out her threat."

"Ruth!"

"Then it seemed to me that that was not trusting you. I resolved to speak out. You don't love her, Gilbert ?"

"No, no— It was like her infernal impudence."

"And she couldn't lead you away from me?"

"She could only drive me closer to your heart, my sweet wife."

Ruth rises, throws her arms about him, and breathes a sigh of great satisfaction. "And now you'll promise me you'll not speak to her again, will you? After what she has said to your wife you should cut her dead."

"Ye-es, I suppose so."

"You know she cannot be my friend. How can she be yours. We have done with her."

Gilbert, firmly— "Yes."

"Then, tell her so."

"Oh, I say, I couldn't do that! What, to the woman's face?"

"There's the 'phone. Tell her over the 'phone."

"I couldn't— I have not the face."

"I will."

"Don't, Ruth. Just let her drop."

"You are afraid. There was something in what she said, then."

"No, no; I swear there was nothing in it but a woman's conceit or a woman's vindictiveness."

"Then let me."

"After all it would serve her right— the fool, the idiot."

Ruth (at the 'phone): "It would."

She rings up and calls for a number.

Gilbert: "What are you going to say?"

"Wait and hear." An answer comes over the 'phone. Ruth assumes her husband's voice and calls:

"Is that you, Mrs. Wibley? It is I, Gilbert Hogg. My wife is here with me. I wish to tell you that from this moment our acquaintance ceases. You will guess why. You understand, we are now strangers."

There is a confused sound in the 'phone.

Gilbert: "What did she say?"

"I daren't repeat it, Gilbert. It was much worse than Maria."

"So that's ended. Thank God!"

He takes Ruth in his arms. "Yes. Yes, thank God that's ended."

"I feel quite happy, Ruth. Say, old girl, let's go out to dinner to-night, will you?"

"To the Geneva?"

"Yes."

"A private room?"

"Why, of course."

"Darling."

"Dearest."

(Curtain.)

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16: Dead Man's Lode

Clarence and Richmond Examiner (NSW) Nov 1895
(credited to "*Cosmos*", no date)
Collected in *Below and on Top and Other Stories* 1898

IT was bright and cosy within the pile-getters' hut; outside the night was wet and stormy, and the wind piped a deep, mournful organ tone in the gnarled and stunted gums on the hill-side. The three young men had finished tea, and washed up and squared up— that is to say, Dayton had stowed the bread and butter and the remains of the salt beef in the kerosene box that served them as a larder, M'Gill had dipped the tin plates in hot water and wiped them carefully on a superannuated white shirt, and Woodhead had raised a tremendous dust under a pretence of sweeping out the hut with a broom extemporized from a bundle of scrub ferns; for it was the first principle of their association that every man should "do his whack" in the matter of attendance to domestic duties.

"Too thunderin' wet to go down to the camp, an' too blessed windy to climb up to Scrubby's," said Dayton, who was curing himself of an extraordinary habit of profanity for a wager, and found the task of filling in the blanks rather a trial. "I s'pose cut-throat's our little dart," he continued, producing an overworked euchre pack.

M'Gill was fighting his way into a stubborn oil-skin coat that crackled like tin armour.

"Not cut-throat to-night, boys," he said; "I'm going up the gully a spell."

"Where bound, Mack?" queried Dayton, with quick suspicion. The young men had discovered a pretty girl at Scrubby Scanlan's settlement, two miles off, and each thought he had an exclusive right to the friendship and hospitality of Scanlan and the smiles of his handsome, hard-working, and very sensible eldest daughter.

M'Gill smiled.

"Not there, old man," he said. "I promised 'The Identity' I'd give him a look in to-night."

"Well, you ought!" with great derision. "What d'ye want foolin' after that evil old beast? If he was well to-morrer he'd bang you on the head for half a quid. That's my straight say-so. I'll be sworn he shook our crosscut; an' here you are, dancin' attendance same 's if he was clear white!"

"The poor devil is as harmless as a baby," said M'Gill. "Anyhow, I can't leave a sick man to take his chances in that miserable hole up there."

Joe M'Gill went out amidst a rush of wind and rain, and left his mates to their game and the comfort of their warm, watertight hut.

"Off his bloomin' chump!" commented Dayton emphatically, slapping down the cards.

The philosophical Woodhead, who was smoking placidly, looked up and cut.

"Joe's all right," he drawled. "Always had a weakness for sick things. I've seen him take more trouble with a lame dog than most men would over a poor relation. Besides, the old man is real bad, and if Mack didn't give an eye to him I expect I would have to do it myself. I'm awfully soft-hearted that way, and I like to see other fellows looking after the poor and the sick— it saves me the trouble."

Meanwhile M'Gill was boring his way through the storm towards a point of light showing fitfully amongst the thick, supple saplings that rolled like a sea in a gale. "The Identity's" hut stood at the head of the gully, in the centre of a small clearing. It was sheltered on one side by the abrupt rise of Emu Hill, and exposed on the other (saving for the intervention of the leafy young peppermints, the growth of recent years) to the fierce winds that seemed to gather the rains into the narrow confines of the gully, and drive them pounding up its whole length, in eddying torrents, to be thrown back in tumbling yellow floods from the invulnerable side of Emu Hill.

Peter Shaw, variously known as "The Identity," "The Hermit," "Blue Peter," and "Old Shaw," was a veteran fossicker, a reticent, gruff man, whose almost complete isolation had recently been broken by the appearance in the locality of Brown's Patch of a few parties of sleeper-cutters and pile-getters, driven thitherward by the approach of the railway to Bunyip.

Peter was living in the same chock-and-log hut at the head of Grasshopper Gully when the first selector settled in the district, and when the reputation of Brown's Patch as an alluvial field had already faded and been forgotten, and when the fact that the creek, and the hill, and the gully had once rattled and rung with the clatter of cradle and puddling-tub, pick and shovel, and windlass-barrel was unknown to all within the jurisdiction of the Bunyip Shire Council, with the exception of old Shaw. Even now Peter's settled neighbours were few and far between, and until the arrival of the timber-getters his beloved seclusion was but rarely disturbed by man, woman, or child. He lived, according to the common belief, on the vegetables he grew, eked out with the supplies he brought from Bunyip at long intervals— supplies bought with the price of the few "weights" of gold won by fossicking patiently and laboriously up and down the creek and in the many little blind gullies running into Emu Hill.

Of course "The Identity" was talked about. Whenever two or more selectors were met together Peter's character and habits were sure, sooner or

later, to come under discussion, and as he was one of the the stock themes of the local fabulist, the history attached to him did not lack romantic interest. He was generally credited with having stolen everything that went missing in the district, and, amongst the women at least, there was a profound belief that he and "the old devil" were on excellent terms and exchanged visits frequently; but for all the attention Shaw gave these people they might have been merely stumps or stones by the way.

M'Gill pulled the catch of the old man's door, and entered without knocking. The remains of a big log were smouldering in the wide sod chimney, and a slush lamp, manufactured from a sardine tin, guttered on the bush table, filling the hut with a villainous smoke. On a narrow bunk, face downward, lay the half-clad figure of a man. "The Identity" lifted himself upon his hands as the door clanged to, and turned a haggard face, surrounded by a scrub of iron-grey hair, towards the intruder. His eyes brightened as he recognized Joe.

"Good on you! Good on you!" he gasped, extending a shaky hand. "I was hopin' you'd come."

Joe threw open his oilskin, and drew a couple of small parcels from his shirt.

"Here you are, old party," he said; "I've brought you some stuff for beef tea, and a bottle of medicine." Shaw took the bottle in his hand and examined it. It contained a patent medicine then very popular with bushmen as an infallible remedy for all the physical ills that man is heir to, from cuts to consumption.

"It's too late, my boy," he said, "I'm a done man; but a dose might ease me a bit if it's hot enough— gimme a dose."

Joe poured out a quantity of the medicine into a pannikin, and held it towards him; but the sick man clutched his hand, and a sudden excitement lit up his deathly face as he whispered:

"Did you do the other thing what I told you?"

M'Gill nodded.

"Put your pegs in an' make your application fer the lease all correct an' accordin' to law?"

"Yes, yes, just as you told me. Now drink!"

Shaw drained off his medicine, but retained his grip on Joe's arm.

"Certain you didn't let on to no one?" he asked, with a look half suspicious, half cunning in his eyes— "no p'lice, no doctors— eh?"

"Not a soul; I always keep my word. But for all that I think you should have a doctor."

"No, no, no!" cried the old man, with fierce energy; "no doctors— no p'lice! I'm peggin' out— don't I know it?— an' I won't have doctors, damn em! Can't you let a man die his own way?"

"Right you are," said Joe, soothingly; "you'll buck up again, though, when you get outside a pint or two of this."

M'Gill threw the wood in the fireplace together, and set about preparing the beef tea, and Shaw, who had relapsed into his former position, face downwards upon the bunk, watched every movement with one alert eye. Presently he spoke again.

"I said I'd tell you the whole yarn t'-night, Joe."

"Not to-night, Peter, you're not equal to it— wait till you are stronger."

"Stronger! stronger!" The fossicker had started up again, and was glaring angrily. "Wait till I'm dead an' dumb, you mean. No, it mus' be t'-night. One of the chaps up at the camp'll be knockin' together a coffin fer me t'-morrer."

M'Gill admitted to himself, as he looked into the brilliant, deep-set eyes of the man, and saw the grisly configuration of the skull standing out under the stark yellow skin of his face, that nothing was more probable. Shaw looked like a man face to face with death, sustained only by the feverish excitement that blazed in his restless eyes and manifested itself in the uneasy motions of his wasted hands. The young man offered him a pannikin of the beef tea, but Peter put it aside after trying a couple of mouthfuls.

"No, I can't take it, boy," he said, "I can't take nothin', I don't want nothin', only to tell you all before I cave in. Sit here on the edge of the bunk. I'll hold you so you can't go till I'm through. Wait— go round the hut, see no one's listenin'."

M'Gill, to please him, did as he was directed, and then resumed his position by the side of the bunk.

"Joe," said "The Identity," "you come here to help me, an' you've took a lot of trouble with me, 'cause you're a good sort, an' can't help it, like; but you don't like me. I could see you didn't like me— you suspicioned me from the first, eh— didn't you?"

This was quite true, but the young man returned no answer. There had never been anything about Peter Shaw to invite affection; in health he was sullen, covert, and uncanny, and in sickness evil-tempered and childish in his wants, and, more particularly, in his fears.

"I knew it— I knew it!" he continued, "but because you are a good sort, an' because I must out with this load here, here!"— he struck his breast feebly with his hand— "I'm goin'to tell you somethin' that'll make a rich man of you, Joseph M'Gill."

Clutching Joe's sleeve with his bony fingers, he went on with his story, speaking in quick undertones, with a sort of insane energy that sustained him to the end.

"I came to this district twenty odd years ago, my lad. Brown had just struck the surfacin' down the gully by the creek, an' we called the rush Brown's Patch. Two days after campin' I picked up my mate Harry Foote— Stumpy Foote we named him 'cause he was bumble-footed. He was a dog, a mean hound, but he didn't look it, an' he was a good miner. We went to work on the alluvial, an' did fairly, but we both had a great idea about a good reef in these hills. All the indications pointed to it, an' presently we slung the wash an' started prospectin'. We trenched, an' travelled, an' trenched fer weeks without strikin' an ounce of quartz, an' Stumpy got full of it; but I grew more certain about that lode, an' hung on. So we agreed that he'd go back to the alluvial again, an' I'd keep on peggin'away after the reef, an' we'd be mates whatever turned up. Well, we kep' this up fer a long time, me trustin' Stumpy all the time, an' intendin' t' do the square thing by him when I lobbed on the lode, as I was sure I would. I worked like a fiend. I was mad fer gold then. I hadn't been out on'y a few years, an' strikin' it lucky meant everythin' t' me; meant— But no matter, that ain't anythin' t' do with the story. You wouldn't understand how I felt if I told you, an' I believe I don't understand meself now. Stumpy did poorly, or told me as much. I got barely enough as my share to pay tucker bills, but he kep' workin' away, sluicin' the surfacin' down along the creek— a patch he had hit on himself."

"One night I returned to the tent unexpected. Foote had told me the week afore that he was goin' to roll up his swag an' skip, an' I'd bin out on those hills beyond Scanlan's ever since. A light was burnin' inside, an' Stumpy didn't hear me till I'd thrown back the flap of the tent. He was leanin' over the table, an' he looked up at me sudden, an' his face went milky white. Well it might— I caught him in the act of sweepin' a pile of gold into a canvas bag. A pile— a heap— hundreds of ounces it looked t' me— hundreds of ounces in coarse nuggets an' rich specimens. The cur fumbled it in his hurry t' get it out of sight, an' spilled some of the finer stuff on the floor."

"I went mad at the sight of all that gold, an' at the thought of the dirty trick he'd served me. I didn't speak, but jes' grabbed him so, by the neck, an' dragged him outer the tent. I don't think I meant murder— I don't know what I meant, but there was a pick handle leanin' agen the sod chimbley, an' I took it in my right hand. He opened his mouth to yell, an' I hit him once— jes' once— an' he went over like a wet shirt. I waited fer him to get up, but he didn't move agen, an' when I come t' look at him he was dead. The paper-skulled, chicken-hearted cur, he was dead!

"I didn't funk— I didn't lose my head fer a second. I was never cooler in my life; my brain was clear, but I saw on'y one thing at a time— on'y one thing, an' I acted on it. After dousin' the light in the tent, I took Stumpy up on my shoulder, an' carried him over the hill to the slope furthest from the camp.

" 'Twas a clear, moonlight night, bright enough t' read Bible print by, but the sides of Emu Hill was well timbered, an' the saplin's was thick as scrub, so I was not likely t' be seen. I dropped the body in a small clear space amongst a thick patch of scrub on that spur above the soda spring. There was a good depth of soft vegetable soil there— a beautiful quiet place fer a grave.

"Then I went back t' the tent, careless like, case anyone should chance along; but the camp was a good step down the creek from our tent, an' I never met a soul. Stumpy had his swag ready fer rollin' up— he meant to cut and leave me. I took up his things an' a pick an' shovel, an' trudged back t' the body. It lay sprawlin' in the shadder of the scrub, jest as I'd dropped it, one hand reachin' out into the light clawin'the grass; but I on'y thought of my job, an' I set t' work t'dig his grave at once.

"I worked quietly— the pick made no noise in that soft ground— but I worked hard. I meant t' bury him deep, an' bury him well. A neat hole I made him, seven by two, an' as plumb as a prospectin' shaft. As I dug an' shovelled— quite cool in my mind, fer all the body was spread out there behind me in the shadder— my thoughts went wanderin' over my bad luck, an' the idea that Stumpy had been on good gold, an' meant to rob me of my fair half, made me vicious, an' I belted in hard an'fast.

"I had her down 'bout three foot, an' reckoned that'd nearly do. I was squarin' up the end when my pick struck agen somethin' that made it ring. I dug away a bit around that somethin', a sudden excitement growin' in me, an' makin' me ferget I was diggin' a grave— a grave fer a murdered man. Down in the west corner of the hole I saw the white gleam of quartz. Stoopin', I lit a match to examine it. By the Lord, Joe! I'd struck it— struck it thick an' rich!"

Old Peter's agitation became so intense at this stage that Joe was compelled to put his arms about his attenuated form, and hold him on the bunk.

"See that fire, boy?" he gasped, pointing an uncertain hand, and glaring as if in a frenzy. "Well, it was like that— the live embers, the glowin' red gold in it! Rich! It seemed all gold. I'd struck the cap of the reef, an' I went a'most mad with joy at the sight of the beautiful, beautiful gold. I staggered back agen the other end of the hole, starin' at the reef. I was goin' t' yell an' dance, thinkin' of nothin' but my lovely luck, when I half turned, an' caught a glimpse of Stumpy's white, dead face glowerin' et me in the moonlight, an' I funked fer the first

time. The shadder had crep' back, leavin' jest his face showin', an' there it was, with a spark in each of its big eyes, mouthin' at me— grinnin' horribly!

"I went dead cold, my legs broke under me. All of a sudden I was dreadfully afraid. Then I thought: 'Pete, this is a hangin' match— Pete, they're after you. What's the good of a golden reef to a hanged man?' I crawled out of the hole, wantin' t' run, but It's devilish eyes followed me. Oh! I crawled like a worm, crazy with fear— sick with it! The findin' the gold there in his grave seemed a damned trick of his an' the devil's t'spite me— t' make me mad. I seemed t' know then, while the horror was on me, what it all meant— thet I'd cursed meself fer ever— thet, good luck or bad luck, fer the future 'twas all the same t' me.

"But I was strong enough t' bury him. I turned his face down, an' dragged the body along, an' flung it into the hole on top of the reef; and when it was out of sight, under a foot or so of dirt, I began t' feel stronger an' braver, an' t' reason a bit. I would bury him beautifully there, I said to meself, an' wait, an' some time I would dig him up again, and hide him far enough away, an' then I could work the reef, an' by-an' bye go home to— to— go home a rich man!

"I did bury him, an' then crawled back t' the tent, an' tried t' sleep, but couldn't. At daylight I was back at the grave again, smoothin' it with my fingers, rakin' dry leaves, an' grass, an' bark over it t' hide every trace, shiverin' in my boots all the time. They reckoned me a brave man once. I'd done some things that made men think me game. But I've been a cur ever since the night I killed my mate— a coward in the night an' in the day, before men and before devils.

"Durin' the day I managed to go down among the men an' make inquiries 'bout Stumpy. None of the chaps seemed surprised t' hear he was not around, an' one or two hinted pretty straight thet I wasn't likely t' see him agen— thet he'd been doin' pretty well down the creek, an' had cleared with the gold to do me outer my share.

"Joe, I never dared t' touch Stumpy's grave from thet day t' this. Fer five years small parties was workin' about the creek off an' on, an' I kep' tellin' meself that when they'd all gone some day I'd shift Stumpy's bones. Then the Chows came fossickin', an' time went on, an' as it passed I grew more an' more of a coward. Once or twice there's bin prospectin' parties out here after the reef, an' I think I was stark crazy while they was about. The fear of them strikin' the lode used t' drive me wild, an' I grew t' hate every man who come near Emu Hill, an' gradually to loathe the sight of human bein's. I shifted up here t' be further from the grave, an' 'cause I'd got luny notions that Stumpy was walkin' about o' nights.

"There was on'y a hundred ounces or so in my mate's bag, after all. It'd looked five times ez much t' me. It's buried in the ground jest under the head

of my bunk. Onst I sold a few ounces of it in at the township, but it was coarse stuff, an' the news got 'round, an' the next thing I knew there was another small rush along the creek, an' diggers was pokin' about everywhere. That frightened me again. If the reef was struck Stumpy's bones would be found, an' they'd hang me, sure ez death. Half a dozen men lived at Wombat who'd remember my mate's disappearance, an' there was things I'd buried with Stumpy that'd make his bones known. So I buried the gold, an' never tried t' sell another colour of it.

"Since then I've had scores of chances of shiftin' them bones, but I wasn't the man t' do it, an' then I begun t' find thet I didn't want to— thet I didn't want the gold— thet I didn't want any of the things thet I'd wanted like mad before. But I didn't go away. I was chained here, an' I always thought thet some day someone would find Stumpy, an' I would be wanted, an' all these years I've dreaded it, an' waited fer it, an' hated, an' suffered, an' here I am, an' there, out on the hill, are Stumpy's bones, an' the gold— the beautiful yellow gold! It's yours, Joe— all yours. I leave it to you! You know the spot. I planted that stunted bluegum, with the limb thet turns down to the ground, right on the top of the grave the mornin' after I buried him. You'll find his bones in among its roots."

"The Identity" sank back on his bed, cold and exhausted.

"You'll bury them bones decent, Joe?" he murmured in a voice that had suddenly grown faint.

"Yes, Peter," replied M'Gill, in whose mind the story had created both amazement and doubt.

"An' you've got the lease, Joe, sure?"

"I've applied for it— the ground is secured."

"Yes, yes, an' you'll stick by me while I last, eh— you won't go? An' no p'lice, mind— no p'lice!"

It was already daylight when Joe M'Gill awakened his mates stumbling into the hut.

"Old Shaw is dead," he explained to the indignant Dayton. "You might dress, Jack, and go and stay by him, for decency's sake, while I have a few hours' sleep. And, Woodhead, you must go to Bunyip and bring the police. They will have to take charge of the body."

M'Gill and his mates found the skeleton of Foote exactly as Peter Shaw had said they would, and the grinning skull rested upon the cap of the golden reef that was eventually known as "Dead Man's Lode," and which, before twelve months went by, had enriched the three young men, and had yielded small fortunes to many dozens beside.

17: Von Windenberg's Last Command

A Fantasy

Punch (Melbourne) 6 June 1918

THE IDEA had been industriously spread among the legions of the Hun that von Windenberg was dead. This was merely another manifestation of subtle craft on the part of Germany's wise ones. German method, which is like the grace of God, inasmuch as it passeth all understanding, was again at work.

Formerly it was necessary for the supreme command in war to be at least within view and hearing of the battles. The supreme command might be up a tree or behind one, but it must be there or thereabout. It need not be within gunshot, but must be within eyeshot.

We have altered all that. Modern inven-tion has rendered the position of great com-mander absolutely secure. He need not even run the risk of catching a cold in the head, or a kidney chill. He fights upon scientific methods, aided by scientific instruments. He has mechanical eyes to see, and electric ears to hear, and an ingenious device to talk withal, and if his grand battle is to take place in Eastern France, he might as well be in Berlin or Wurtemburg as right on the job.

Von Windenberg was not dead. He was very much alive and kicking. "Business as usual" was his motto. It was assumed by the astonishing superminds in Berlin that the belief that von Windenberg had gone to Gott would fill the enemy with an unbounded elation, and make him loose and reckless in his military doings, imagining that he could quite easily mop up the Hun now that the most formidable general the world had ever known, or was ever likely to behold, had accepted a conspicuous sinecure in the vicinity of the Golden Throne.

In truth, Windenberg was sagaciously bestowed in an underground fastness hewn from solid rock at the foot of a rugged granite range in the Black Forest. Windenberg's retreat was quite palatial. He had a drawing-room superbly furnished. Nothing in the Kaiser's Palace in Berlin exceded the German elegance of this noble apartment. He had a library stocked with choice military books, and scientific treatises on slaughter-houses, abbatoirs, vivisection, and kindred subjects in which the heart of this great man delighted.

Von Windenberg's dining-room was spacious and furnished in massive old mahogany. His kitchen had six cooks and sixteen assistants, for the General was a vigorous devourer of meat market materials and general produce.

There were three bedrooms in the General's palatial dug-out, and the wonderful man slept in the three alternately, and occasionally simultaneously, to bewilder any, any spies who might be prowling the forest.

But General von Windenberg's workroom, or study, was the most remarkable apartment in a most remarkable dwelling-place. At a huge table in the centre was seated the for-midable figure of the General, his tremendous bulk disposed in an iron chair, designed and built at Krupp's, strong enough and stout enough to accommodate an adult bull mam-moth in a recumbent position.

All about the General was spread an array of exquisite scientific implements, including telephones and wireless transmitters. With the aid of these General von Windenberg kept his colossal dexter finger, like a bulky sausage, on the pulse of battle.

Here were all the wonderful devices perfected by Germany's marvellous scientific and engineering genius. Seated in the midst of the apparatus that annihilated space in all essentials, the General was minutely in touch with everything going on at the Front.

Spread before Windenberg were his singularly accurate plans. Every detail of the country over which the forthcoming terrific offensive must operate was visible to this astonishing man at a glance. He was already familiar with the topography of the vast field.

Seated here, scores and scores of miles from the actual fighting, buried in a mountain fastness, screened from all possible harm and any chance of observation, secure alike from the bomb of the airman and the chance bullet of a spy, the Hun's White Hope was to conduct the final battle destined to overthrow the united foe, and carry the Kaiser on a triumphant grey wave of German soldiers right into the heart of Paris.

Already General von Windenberg's thumb— the thumb of a giant— was on the brass knob, one pressure of which would serve to fling Germany's accumulated millions upon the hapless foe. Von had only to press the button, they did the rest.

Windenberg lingered gloatingly. Here under his eye on the table he seemed to see the veritable battlefield. Every detail of preparation was here. And on his left, on a board upon an easel, was the big man's time-table.

The General consulted his watch— a watch like the man, large, terrible, rugged, its case of the coarsest boiler iron, its proportions those of a footbath; its tick shook even these solid walls.

One last glance at the position, the material, the reserves, and the number of the foe, and von Windenberg pressed the button

The war was on!

Almost as if von Windenberg had sprung a mine with an electric spark, all those miles away, the offensive broke forth, with a roar of guns, a chaotic upheaval of men.

Just as completely as if he were on an elevation overlooking the field of battle, von Windenberg saw what was being done. His superhuman mind pictured the play of the artillery, and the movements of the men on the maps beneath his hand. He did not forget the air forces— nothing was overlooked.

Indeed, it is true that the White Hope in his luxurious cavern saw far more clearly, more definitely and surely, than any commander in actual contact with the struggle could possibly do. Here were no limitations to the scope of the human eye. The whole length of front extending over fifty miles was comprehended by von Windenberg in a bird's-eye view. Here was no battle smoke to cloud the movements, no nervous apprehension of a bolt from the blue to distract the mind of the greatest military genius of all time.

Accurately, precisely, with machine-like action, the movements of troops were registered on von Windenberg's maps. He registered them as they were made, with only an occasional glance at his time table to verify the record.

True, in the first half-hour, von Windenberg's hand went to the wireless apparatus and tapped out two of those vital, pugnant sentences for which he was famous, but they were only words of cheer. His plans were too well laid in advance for there to be need of orders now. The machine at the Front would work with the certainty of the planets in their courses.

Later, when the struggle had produced new conditions, it might be necessary to send orders. Von Windenberg waited with supreme confidence. Now and again he breathed a word into the telephone at his left hand. Out of the distance came the expected replies. All was moving as had been planned, the forseen was happening right and left. The terrific weight of the new artillery was heaving whole acres into the air. It was as if the wrath of *Gott* had descended upon the enemy.

Von Windenberg smiled grimly. "The wrath of *Gott*!" said he. "No, a wrath that is more terrible still— the wrath of Gustaff von Windenberg."

He pressed a smaller button. A small square opened in the table before him, and a tray shot up, bearing the General's favourite lunch, a bucket of mare's milk with ox-blood and brandy, and the roast neck of an American bison, with the hair on.

Von Windenberg fed himself with one hand. His strength was prodigious.

So passed the first afternoon of the last offensive, an afternoon full of incredible slaughter, marked with previously inconceivable destruction, and the wonder man, Windenberg, supreme in a sense not limited by worldliness conducted the contest for Germany.

The night fell without, but here was no night. The electric lights burnt brilliantly about von Windenberg. At odd hours came messages over the wires, by word of mouth from the telephone, or by cipher on the wireless, telling of progress.

"*Ach*!" was Windenberg's only word. His eyes went to the time table. The battle was moving precisely as he had outlined it. No conductor of a sports programme could have timed his events with more meticulous certainty.

The night was hot and close in Windenberg's retreat. He sprang an electric fan, but still the sweat poured from under his thick hair, down his rugged face, like a mighty mountain boulder, and splashed upon the floor, forming a pool in which his favourite Kaiser, the rattlesnake, the only pet he ever had about him, was drowned.

All through the night Windenberg sat there watching progress. There was no sleep for his eyes, no rest for his stupendous mind until the final crushing of the enemy.

Morning found him, a little paler, perhaps, but still strong and resolute. All was going well. So closely did the news of develop-ments at the Front chime in with his timing of these things, it might have been the tick of the clock following the swing of the pendulum.

Von Windenberg grew impatient of the conformation of his forecasts, they seemed unnecessary; that things must happen as he had arranged and foreseen was inevitable.

"You need not trouble to tell me," he thundered over the long-distance phone. "Do I not know? Have I not willed it so?"

So, heeding only his time table, the General followed the battles hour by hour. Occasionally, he touched the button signalling the kitchen, and a full meal was served with lightning rapidity, for von Windenberg ate with the strength, capacity and speed of a corporation stone crusher. Sometimes he commanded only a tonic— raw brandy and petrol— which he gulped by the barrel; or a keg of raw red herrings with clotted cream, an appetiser for which he had a notable weakness.

Midnight on the second night found von Windenberg still at his table, poring over the battle. He was stripped to his shirt and regulation underpants, a little gaunt now; his eyes wilder, his hair ruffled, and still the man perspired. *Gott*! how he perspired. It had been found necessary to work the automatic pumps to drain the room, and save the General from a watery grave.

Communications from the Front were more numerous now; von Windenberg's answers were more frequent, more emphatic.

Generals were appealing for advice here and there; Windenberg supplied the needed ideas with scarcely a moment's thought. The time table was being

worked out. But progress developed issues that had not been foreseen or had not been fully met. Windenberg's commands barked into the telephone or snapped from the wireless.

Gott conducting his universe. That is how Windenberg would have appeared to his adoring fellow countrymen if it had not been found necessary to keep secret his whereabouts— nay, his very existence.

The third day this Colossus still laboured on, unshaven, his bloodshot eyes poring upon his maps and plans, his weary hands registering progress with a red pencil that, as it were, dotted the fields of battle with clotted blood.

Communications from the Front had ceased; but von Windenberg knew why— it was because his Generals found nothing necessary beyond the plans and orders the Supreme Command had left with them.

Windenberg's hand went forth and registered in red another advance, another triumph for Germany, as the clock struck five.

Paris was still far ahead— Paris was the climax. Windenberg occasionally lifted his weary eyes to it, feverishly, greedily. Its time would come.

The fourth day, at noon, found the nation's hero still awake, still waging his war. The entrance into Paris was fixed for noon on the sixth day. According to Windenberg's time table the Hun armies were now within ten miles of the French metropolis.

Triumph was within his reach, within the grip of Germany. Windenberg laughed aloud, and bent again to his task, the wreck of his former self. For twenty hours he had forgotten to order meals up. Physical exhaustion had reduced him to a tremulous, hollow-cheeked, wasted creature; but he was hardly conscious of his own sufferings.

Now the final stroke was at hand. Von Windenberg was held up by the excitement burning within him like a fire, but do what he would his thoughts would stray occa-sionally to his little fat frau and their beloved twenty-eight little fat children, all in batches, for Windenberg had never begotten less than three in a clutch.

In weaker moments he dreamed of the peace of home, and the calm satisfaction of kicking one's wife. A great sob broke from him, and he bent to his work again.

That whole night long Windenberg's wireless was busy, shooting words of encouragement for his men, short, sharp phrases to sting the soldiers on to conquest like the prick of a sword.

Morning of the fifth day found the General sustained only by the fever consuming him— the thought of Germany's conquest of creation, of Germany supreme. Now he watched, timepiece in hand, ticking off the tramp of German feet towards Paris.

His nerveless hand rapped out wireless messages. "On, on, soldiers of Germany! The world is under your heels ! On, on !"

The hour was here. With the eye of faith he beheld the Germans knocking, as it were, upon the door of Paris. From his time table his eye flew to his watch.

The hour had struck. "*Hoch*! *Hoch*!"

The huge iron door behind the General flew open, a blood-stained, ragged, gaunt-faced, battered German officer entered and saluted.

"General !" he faultered, "no others would come to you. All is lost."

"Lost !" roared Windenberg. "Impossible ! Impossible ! Our soldiers are in Paris. Look at the time table."

"Sir," the officer said, "the Allies are approaching the Rhine. We were annihilated three days ago !"

18: Leonard's Reward

(As by Ward Edson)
Punch (Melbourne) 11 Oct 1917

WALKER was the most cordially detested man I had ever met. I was not long enough acquainted with the dear man, or in sufficiently close contact to have worked up the warm loathing for Henry that all the neighbours felt, but even at a distance, and without previous acquaintance or preliminary enquiry, Walker was sufficiently unpleasant.

You disliked the man for just living. Distrust of him was instinctive. His appearance, it was said with some truth, would turn a dog against him.

Henry Justin Walker's actions and attitudes were not deliberately planned to conciliate the people with whom he came in contact, or to conciliate public opinion at Woonah.

The man was a widower of about fifty-six, a short, heavily-built, bony man with thick, close-cropped hair and whiskers, and small, slow, sullen eyes. It was explained that there were sons and daughters, but all had fled from him as soon as they found their legs.

Walker's wife had died with the greatest pleasure imaginable, after twenty years of connubial blister with Mr. H. J. Walker.

"She was buried with real and abiding satisfaction," Morton said, and Morton had known her as well as it was possible for any of the neighbours to know anything of Walker. "I never saw relief so profoundly impressed upon the face of a corpse." Morton was wont to add— "Wherever that woman is, she is glad to be dead."

Henry was left alone in his large, square, bluestone house, a very gaol of a place, a bitter vicious, sullen man, without a discoverable friend, or even acquaintance, in the wide, wide world.

Only an entire stranger would work for Walker, and no man could remain an entire stranger to Walker for any length of time.

So, in time, Henry ceased the effort to work his land, and devoted himself to the task of becoming the most pertinacious and complete common nuisance known to man.

In the absence of proofs to the contrary, I may say he succeeded. He fought with everybody, he abused everybody, he would take unimaginable trouble to work off the meanest little schemes to the detriment of a neighbour, and any movement for the betterment of local conditions found in Henry Justin Walker an energetic and persistent opponent.

Most of the people in the district met Walker warmly in his own spirit, giving word for word and hurt for hurt; but Leonard's attitude was that of a man who regarded Walker as a distressing but inevitable defect in the

landscape to which it was advisable to shut one's eyes, an evil odor to which it was expedient to close one's nose, and' an awful noise that necessitated the plugging of one's ears.

Ned Leonard was a neighbouring farmer who had come into the district in recent years; but it is-held that under his attitude of ignoring Walker lurked a hatred even keener than, that his neighbours cherished for the *bête noir* of Woonah.

Presently, when Henry Justin Walker became fully seized of the insulting significance of Leonard's treatment of him he began a dead set at the newcomer.

The first overt act on Walker's part towards his neighbour was purely malicious. Finding Leonard's big bay mare in the American waggon standing unguarded before the office of the "*Banner*" in Woonah township one day, Walker, who knew the mare well, passed under her nose, making an. ostentatious flourish of his pocket handkerchief.

Naturally, Jennie came near to throwing a back somersault, and bolted, arriving home with the shafts, the rest of the American waggon lay in scattered fragments along the road.

It was believed in the district that Leonard's Jennie had at same time in her career "seen a ghost." She was as staid a neddy as any sober-going farmer could desire; but show her a fluttering bit of white linen, and she lost all horse-sense and judgment, and, if not under strong restraint, went through anything to get away from her especial abomination.

On this occasion she practically went through Holloway's store. At any rate, she raked down the verandah, tore out the front window, and scattered Holloway's natty display of household! goods and ware all along the road.

Leonard, in addition to the practical loss of the trap, had to pay Holloway substantial damages, and Ned was in no position to part with ready money. The result of the trouble was a mortgage of £200 on the farm, for which Leonard had to pay 6 per cent, and the usual "charges" of those gentle philanthropists the financial agents.

Everybody thoroughly understood that Walker's act in flourishing the handkerchief under Jennie's nose was done with malice aforethought. He had anticipated the result, he openly rejoiced in it, and when next Ned passed along the road which Walker's stone house fronted, Henry sat on the gate, and greeted him with a guffaw that might have been, heard a mile off, and which followed Ned to his own door.

Ned Leonard was no angel himself. His blood was hot enough but he had restraint. Walker's laugh raised all the black bile in him. He would have felt less

compunction about shooting Walker at that moment than over the killing of a predatory dingo.

But Walker was secure. "You cannot have the law on a man for merely using his pocket handkerchief in the street," as Morton explained to Ned. "If your horse had a bitter prejudice against pocket handkerchiefs, it is for you to keep an eye upon her in civilised resorts where people use handkerchiefs. I don't believe 'Walker ever used a handkerchief in his life before, but you can't prove that. You can't prove deliberate intention. He's got you, and you have to let it go at that."

Leonard shook his head. "No, I haven't," he said; "I'll get even with the dog yet."

That was the beginning of an open and malignant feud between Walker and Leonard.

Leonard no longer held his mouth, stopped his nose, and plugged his ears.

He met Henry Justin Walker in his cornet paddock one morning. Walker habitually cut across that paddock on his way to the township.

"Get off my land, you dog!" said Leonard. Henry Walker stood and grinned a mirthless grin like the grimace of a satyr.

"Get off!" Leonard repeated, approaching him threatingly.

They fought there and then. Leonard had some little proficiency in pugilism, and was a strong, well-set-up man of forty-four; but Walter was extremely powerful and, moreover, a dirty fighter. He fought all in. Anything that helped him went. He would bite, kick or gouge, and had no absurd prejudices against the use of sticks and stones.

Mrs. Leonard found her husband lying in an unconscious state some little time after, with a wound in his head, the result of a blow from a club as big as a fencing post.

Again Walker had no recourse to law. The blow had been dealt in self-defence. Moreover, Walker continued to use the paddock. He even walked in it more than before, and with insolent ostentation.

Ned Leonard was in a state of everlasting fury. He posted notices warning trespassers of prosecution. He set man traps, and one day, to his tremendous satisfaction, Walker was taken in a spring trap that nearly broke his leg, and caused him to walk with a limp for weeks.

This was some comfort, but the gratification was short-lived. Presently, Henry Justin Walker appeared in the paddock again, and with a pick and shovel, and his bovine laugh rattled at Leonard's windows.

This time Henry could not be put off. Walker had actually applied for a mining lease of a section of Leonard's corner paddock, and obtained it under the privilege of the mining on private property act.

Now, fortified by the law, Walter made daily excursions upon Leonard's land. Ned could not deny him access; and to maintain his right, Walker made some specious show of carrying on mining operations.

A fierce summer was upon Woonah, and Walker put in just enough time in his shaft to give an air of plausibility to his claim. The rest of the day he spent sitting on the flat rock overhanging the big, deep, quarried, spring-fed dam that was Leonard's chief water supply.

Sometimes Walker dangled his feet in the water from this rock, sometimes he drowsed upon it with a bottle of rum at his elbow, finding sufficient satisfaction in the knowledge that every hour so spent added to Leonard's fury.

Leonard had come to Woonah with the money carefully saved from long service in an office in the city. He had come with the determination to make his land pay, if hard continuous work and fair intelligence could do it. Now his better resolutions were forgotten, swamped by the burning passion of antipathy Walker had implanted in his heart.

It seemed now that nothing mattered but the necessity of being rid of this haunting incubus.

The thought of Walker as of something supernatural that must poison his whole life and enervate his every effort if he could not throw it off.

Then one morning, Billy, Leonard's helping hand, dashed into Leonard's kitchen, white-faced breathless, and stood facing his boss, scarcely able to articulate, so agitated was the boy.

"Walker!" he gasped. "He's in the dam. He's drowndin'!"

Leonard arose from the table. "He's fallen in ?" he said.

"Yes, yes. The big flat rock fell in with him. Quick, quick!"

"Why should I be quick?"

"But he's drowndin'. It's deep. He can't swim."

"Let him drown." Leonard sat down.

"But you must— you must, Ned," pleaded Mrs. Leonard. "You can't leave a fellow creature to perish."

Leonard looked his wife coldly in the eye, and strode forth. He went to the stables, threw the log-snagging harness on a horse, and then led the animal down to the quarry holes. The big flat root had gone. There was Walker still afloat, an empty rum bottle keeping him company.

Ned went into the water, fastened the snagging appliance to Walker's body, and then, going to his horse's head, deliberately towed the corpse out of the water on to the grass, where it lay, limp and contorted.

"I won't have the d—d carrion on my land," said Ned to the boy.

He struck the horse a blow, and drove it . across the paddock, towing Walker's body be

hind,, out through a. broken set of rails on to the high road, where he cut the objectionable thing loose.

"I couldn't leave that to fester in my dam!" said Leonard, pointing to the body. "Now I don't care a curse what becomes of it."

Ned turned deliberately, replaced his rails, drove the horse back to the, stable, and, going indoors, resumed the task on which he had been engaged when first Billy appeared.

His wife came in a few moments later, pale as death, regarding Leonard with terrified eyes.

"I didn't think you could do it, Ned," she said.

Ned turned on her. "I have no more respect for that carcase that I would have for the body of a dog," he said.

"Billy has gone for the constable," said Mrs. Leonard. "Oh, this is terrible— terrible!"

Constable Hover took up Walker's body, and that evening came further astonishing news. Walker was not dead. There had remained a spark of life in his body, and on this Hover and Dr. Beachcoom had worked for three hours, till at length animation was restored.

Walker was taken on to the Horsham Hospital, and was very bad for some time, pneumonia having resulted from his great misadventure.

One thing Woonah gained from Walter's misadventure— he never returned to the district.

Henry Justin Walker sold his Woonah property, and in the course of three hard years, Leonard almost forgot him. But Ned was having a terrible hard time. The first mortgage had necessitated a second, and now, with the red hand of drought upon him, Leonard saw no prospect of lifting either.

Then came news of Walker's death. Henry had died in a Melbourne suburb, generally execrated.

There was a will. Walker had died worth twenty-seven thousand pounds.

The will bequeathed the whole of that money, "to," as the testament said, "the only man who deemed my life worth saving, the man who rescued me from drowning— Edward Leonard, of Woonah."

Walker had accepted Ned's action in dragging him from the water as an act of grace. Probably he had been told nothing but the bare fact that Ned had actaully dragged him from the dam.

Certainly, Walker never knew that in the darkness of the night previous to the accident Leonard had gone under the overhanging rock, and, with a pick, so loosened its foundations that it must subside with the weight of the first man who might tread upon it.

19: Her Last Curious Case

(As by Dy Edwardson)
Punch (Melbourne) 26 June 1913

ARTHUR HENRY Ward was an interesting object to the ladies at Scobie's "Mountain Retreat," He was young, sufficiently young, at any rate, to he considered romantic in his ailments. At fifty-five one's sicknesses are not invested with sentimental significance by the other sex, but at thirty-five it is different. Arthur Henry was tall, too, and rather good looking. To be young, tall, good-looking and becomingly pale is to be invested with romance wherever two or more women are met and assembled.

There were many women at Scobie's "Mountain Retreat," most of them convalescents, lying about becomingly in charmling tea-gowns, and looking as romantic as nature and circumstances would permit. Arthur Henry Ward was a convalescent.

Scobie's "Mountain Retreat" was a well-known resort for convalescents. It's air was peculiarly salubrious; its cooking exquisitely delicate, its mineral waters (springs on the premises) most invigorating. For terms, see advertisements.

Arthur's had been a case of nerves. There had come a time when the stress of toil, in conjunction with somewhat "hard" living, had induced frequent visits from a little blue devil. Mr. Ward's familiar spirit was a very peculiar kind of devil, blue all over with a skin like a scraped pig, and similar hoofs. Out of his head grew one long ivory horn, and he had white porcelain eyes, which he would take out and juggle when bored with the monotony of sitting in the big black chair in Ward's bedroom.

Arthur knew his little blue and white porcine Mephistopheles to be an illusion; but he was none the less real on that account. In fact, to Arthur he was the most real and significant thing in existence. The devil would come after Arthur had gone to bed, and seat himself in the big, black chair, and twiddle his pettitoes, and gaze blandly at Arthur out of his china-white eves. He must have brought the black chair with him. It had black plumes at the back of it, and there was no such article in the room ordinarily. After sitting so for a couple of hours the blue imp would take his porcelain eyes out and juggle with them. His juggling was most marvellous. It kept Arthur Ward awake all night.

Of course, this had to have an end, either in the lunatic asylum or in a long vacation. Arthur explained things to the head of the firm of Muntchin, Muntchin and Low, wholesale jewellers, and then retired to Scobie's "Mountain Retreat." To Arthur's great disgust the blue and white devil found him out, and appeared on the first night, as usual, and brought his black chair with its hearse plumes, and juggled his china white eyes till four in the morning. But after Miss Eva Neil arrived the blue devil began to sicken.

Miss Neil arrived on the third day. That very night Arthur noticed that the blue of his "devil" had become much paler. Three nights later he was only a vapoury object, the colour and substance of cigarette smoke, and he no longer juggled his eyes— he was too weak. Then Miss Eva Neil spoke to Arthur, and that night the devil went out altogether. He trailed away like the last whiff of a blown candle. It was a remarkable proof of the efficacy of Scobie's mountain air.

What Miss Neil said was: "You'll forgive me, won't you?"

"Why, certainly," answered Arthur from his couch under the window. Nothing would delight him more than to forgive her anything— everything.

"The fact is," said Miss Neil, "I noticed you were reading *The Infinite Capacity*. I have finished my book, and have nothing to read. . If—"

"Delighted !" responded Arthur. He was on his feet with promptitude; he departed with alacrity; he returned with all speed— and *The Infinite Capacity*.

"So good of you," said Miss Neil. "But one would be bored to death in this place without a good book."

"Yes; it is rather a dull hole. Salubrious, but stale."

"I have tried the ladies. They will talk of nothing but their complaints, and I came here to forget complaints— my own and others."

"I, too."

"Are you forgetting?"

"Splendidly. And you?"

"I have forgotten that I ever had any old thing the matter with me. Let me lend you my book. *Regina*, it is called, by Sudermann. It is fine."

"Yes," said Arthur. "I have read it. Look here, since the ice is broken, don't let us read. Let us talk and walk."

"Perhaps it would be better for us."

"I am sure it would. Do you know what I have been thinking, living here these two days?"

"I didn't think you were thinking at all. You seemed to be industriously reading."

"Seemed to be— Really, I was watching you most of the time, and thinking how utterly stupid it was that two people, obviously well suited to interest each other, should be wasting their time over printed words, stories of things, when they might be living the stories for themselves."

"What sort of stories, for instance?"

"Heaven knows. Here we are at work on the introductory passages, however. Let the plot work itself out."

She laughed with great good nature. "I hope it will not be tragedy," she said.

"I hope it will not be comedy," he answered.

"It might be both."

"Let the fates decide. Shall we go for a walk?"

"Very well. My doctor sent me here for the rest cure. He enjoined persistent lassitude, but surely a walk through the long orchard will not kill me."

"No, no, our story is not going to terminate fatally. But you look strong."

"Yes. That, I understand, is the serious nature of my malady," she laughed. "But you do not look strong. You are grey, and thin, and nervy."

He nodded. "Yes. But it's going. With attractive company I shall soon be all right. But no more about symptoms. We must play in the sunshine. The play's the thing."

They walked out into the big orchard; they strolled in the sun, and lounged in the shade, and returned hungry and invigorated. No wonder Arthur's devil looked pale and distressed that evening.

On the following night Arthur Henry Ward thought more of Miss Eva Neil than of his familiar spirit. He saw her sitting under the big apple tree, whose boughs let the sunlight through to sprinkle her beautiful auburn hair with powdered gold, and the blue devil wisped at this neglect.

Eva was a woman of twenty-six, a little over middle height; a tailors-made type, clean cut from her low brow and short, straight nose to her neat, high instep. There was a direct, business-like air about her; but her smile was soft, and womanly. The brown eyes were full of kindness.

It was on the third afternoon. It was under the big apple tree in the orchard. She was sitting on a rug; he lay at full length beside her. The hand on which she leaned, was almost touching his cheek. He turned suddenly, and kissed the pink knuckles. He clung to her wrist, and kissed the dear hand a dozen times. She had not stirred. She looked down upon him. There was a harder look in the brown eyes than he had ever seen there.

"I love you," he said. "It's no use vacillating and pretending. I adore you. I have to wait for a few weeks to pass in order that we may be said to have had the conventional courtship; but I can't. I love you now as well as I could in ten years." He raised himself, and moved nearer to her.

"What do you say?" he asked eagerly. She was avoiding his eyes. He tried to turn her face to him, then took her in his arms, and kissed— eyes, lips, cheeks, hair, neck— kissed wherever there was a touch of her.

"I love you! I love you!" he whispered. She pushed him away. Her face was flushed, but her eyes were cool.

"Well?" she said.

"Do you love me? Can you care for me?"

"And if I do?"

"Will you be my wife?"

"This is rather serious, isn't it? You know nothing of me."

"Very well, I take you on trust. Without asking one question, without expecting one word of who, or what, or whence, I'll take you, and thank God for his goodness."

"I may not be so trusting.''

"Of course, you don't know me either. I am Arthur Henry Ward. You did not know the Henry. I am a clerk with Mutchin, Mutchin and Low, wholesale jewellers, city. I get £5 a week, and have expectations and no encumbrances, neither fathers, no mothers, sisters nor brothers, and what uncles and aunts I have are too far removed to he any inconvenience. And, dearest, dearest, I love you!"

"Five pounds a week?" she said, and smiled. "Five pounds and expectations."

He looked a little anxious now. "You think me poor?"

"Well, not exactly impoverished. With £5 a week one need not want for bread and butter and ready-made dresses, dirt cheap at 25/ a little late in the season."

He was sorely abashed. "I never thought of the money side," he said, and his hand fell from her neck. "It seemed to me that I was fairly well fixed, that I could keep a wife very decently on my screw. Denton, at our place, who only gets £3/15/- seems to get along very well, and he has a wife and kiddy."

"Very likely. I have known it done. But then Mrs. Denton must be simple and domesticated— a good housewife. I am not simple. I am not domesticated. I couldn't housekeep for the life of me."

"And you—you don't care for me?"

"That's quite another matter. I do cara for you. 1 suppose I love you."

"You love me! You love me!" He caught her in his arms again. His embrace was not that of an invalid. He held her close and tight.

"If you love me it will be all right. I'll work. I'll get on."

She allowed him to kiss her. She even kissed him. He played with her beautiful hair; he wooed her with a kind of eloquence that she found very sweet.

That night Arthur's blue devil passed. He laughed after it. It was gone for ever. Never again would his life be tortured with such visitors. He would live cleanly. Everything Eva would not approve of must be cut out— cards, horses, wine, women and song— all might go to the devil. He had her.

But the question of ways and means was a barrier between them. When he talked of marriage she said: "You mustn't be absurd. I couldn't think of marrying a man with vour income. It is utterly impossible."

"Will you wait ?"

"What is there to wait for? At the best in a few years you might have three hundred, or three hundred and fifty a year. That would never do. I am rather fond of the good things of life. I should be miserable without many indulgences that are rather expensive."

"You will make no sacrifice for love, then?"

"Yes. I would make some sacrifice, but not this much."

"You don't love me."

"That is a boy's talk. You are no longer a boy. I am a woman. Let us be practical."

"Then we are to part?"

"Have you no other source of income apart from the shop?"

"'None whatever."

"No means? No savings?"

"Nothing."

She would not say no, she would not sav yes, and the money question was discussed again and again. She always came to the point of some possible money-making scheme apart from his earnings as a clerk. She grew inquisitive. She plied him with questions. It seemed to him at length that she doubted his word.

"Do you imagine I am keeping something from you?" he asked. "Do you think that if I possessed means of any kind I should hide the fact from you, knowing; that I can only win you with money?" He spoke bitterly.

"I cannot marry a poor man."

"Poor! I do not call myself a poor man—"

"Comparatively poor. If you cannot do something I am afraid it would be better if we had never met. If you had seven thousand pounds— five."

"Absurd ! I haven't fifty pounds to my name."

"Then I cannot see what is to be done."

On the following afternoon Arthur had been riding. He returned earlier than he had anticipated. He walked across the velvet laAvn io the open window of his room, and looked in.

Eva was there. She was very busy.

Quietly and systematically, she was searching the place. She looked through the drawers of , the small dressing-table; she searched his trunk and portmanteau. Evidently she had already subjected other articles of furniture to

a rigid, examination. When she had finished she went to the door, listened for a moment, then, softly opened the door, and disappeared.

What did it mean?

Arthur puzzled over the matter for the rest of the day. He could not bring himself to question her. Evidently her suspicion that he possessed property still lingered, and she had hoped to satisfy herself by the discovery of some evidence.

He tried to speak to her of the matter in his mind, but failed. She had fallen far in his estimation. He was cold towards her— full of suspicions.

She found him alone in the orchard next morning. She carried an opened telegram in her hand.

"Will you read this?" she said. He took the message from her fingers, and read:—

WYLIE ARRESTED. CONFESSES ALL. YOUR MAN RIGHT OUT OF IT. RETURN.

Arthur looked at her inquiringly. "What is the meaning of this?"

"It means that my work here is done. It means that you had no hand in the big robbery from Mintchin and Mintchin's last June."

"My God! I? Of course I hadn't. Did the firm suspect me?"

"No, but the police did. I was sent here to watch you. My name is not Eva Neil, but Alice Barnes. I am a sort of female detective. I often assist the police in cases of this kind."

"This accounts for the search in my room, then?"

"Yes."

"And for your apparent interest in me."

"Yes."

"For your concern about my means."

"Yes. I thought to trap you into confessing you had money. The proceeds of the robbery."

"Rather a bit of bad luck for you you did not discover me to be rich!" He spoke sincerely.

"I am grateful to heaven with all my heart and soul to find you a poor man."

"Do you mean that? Do you, mean it? I still love you. I shall always love yon. Oh ! my darling, have I a chance now ?"

"I think, dear, I'm an excellent housekeeper, and we could get along splendidly on £5 a week."

And they have done.

———————

20: The Trapping Of Santa Claus

(as by Ward Edson)
Punch (Melbourne) 7 Jan 1904

THE STUDLEY BOYS were not all their father expected, but their mother thought them quite as satisfactory as any reasonable person could look for in mere mortal boys in excellent, health.

"I have noticed that good little boys always enjoy imperfect health," said Mrs. Studley, "and I'd rather have my boys commonly healthy than uncommonly good."

Unregenerate people will argue from this that Mrs. Studley was a sensible little woman; they may also deduce from facts stated the opinion that Mrs. Studley did not always consider Mr. Studley a reasonable person.

Andrew Cameron Studley was a squatter of the old school, but it does not follow that he was an old man. Andrew C. Studley was still under forty-four, but he was a profoundly conservative Englishman, with a Scotch mixture. He believed in everything old, established and respectable. He supported all the institutions his fathers respected, and supported them in the same spirit. He believed profoundly in the saving grace of dignity and the importance of deportment. He never forgot himself under any circumstances, and always had the best possible attitude ready for any contingency. Irreverent station hands had christened A. Studley, Esq., His Grace, and he was known far and wide by that sobriquet for years without ever becoming aware of the fact.

Although all sorts and conditions of people were willing to laugh at Andrew's little airs and eccentricities, nobody was willing to offend him, for the reason that it was recognised that he was a good man right through, and could be trusted to do the right thing as implicitly as if he were a machine devised for that purpose.

The conditions prevailing at Chesterfield, which was the name Mr. Studley had given his run, although it was known to everybody else as Paddys, for the reason that it had once been overrun with pademelons or kangaroo-rats, were very similar to those prevailing in an English village fifty or sixty years ago, when the squire was a very great and important personage.

Andrew Studley was the squire of Chesterfield, and tried to maintain al! the traditions. He always dressed with scrupulous care, his house had an ancient air about it, his furniture was massive, and looked quite venerable, his hospitality was lavish but dignified, and Andrew Cameron Studley desired nothing better than to be known as a fine old English gentleman. It was His Grace's desire to bring his boys up to be patterns of all the fine things he respected, to be, in short, elegant little models of himself, but here nature intervened, and Thomas Courtley Studley, aged 12½, and Edward Arthur

Studley, aged I0½, could not by any process of training short of tyranny— and His Grace was incapable of tyranny— be made to conform to pattern.

"My dear Christina, I despair of those boys," said Mr. Studley, "they have no sense of dignity, no repose of manner. They differ from the children of my employees only in dress and in having a trifling advantage of education."

"My dear Andrew," Chris, replied (all her friends called her Chris), "a boy of twelve with dignity must be a little prig; a boy of ten with repose of manner must be sick."

"Yes, yes, I do not expect my sons to be Admirable Crichtons, but they are wild, positively wild."

"They must catch it from the horses," Chris, said, smiling.

Andrew made a despairing gesture, and sighed: "Well, well, we are at the antipodes, and must expect reversals, but, it would be painful to me to think my sons could not be what my father's were."

Mrs. Studley, who was the daughter of an Australian judge, could not discover anything in the prospect to mourn over. Tommy and Ted were as lively a brace of lads as a father could desire: their turbulent spirits were nothing more than the expression of splendid vitality, their worst mischief was nothing more than the outcome of the thoughtlessness that goes with the headlong exuberance of youth, and it was this thoughtlessness that led to the undoing of Santa, Claus at Paddys.

Mr. Studley's love of the institutions made him respect all the phases and features of the British Christmas. If he could have introduced snowdrifts and iced rivers at Chesterfield at the end of December, in the middle of the raging Australian summer, he would have done it. What he could do he did. He regarded the great Christmas pudding with veneration, and would almost as soon have thought of denying the existence of a Creator in the presence of his children as to have questioned the reality of Santa Claus, so the, Studley boys combined with their natural Australian irreverence a profound faith in the Saint of Toys.

And so it came about that Tommy and Ted discussing the possibilities of the season amongst the sweet hay in the stable-loft, wondered over Santa in particular.

"S'pose he comes on a spankin' horse," said Ted. "He must see the distance he's got to go in one night."

"Garn," replied Tommy, with the confidence of age, "he don't ride any horse; he goes in a sled pulled by stags— hundreds an' hundreds of stags."

"Ram stags ?" queried Ted.

"No, you gonoff— deers. They go quicker'n lightning."

"Ee gosh I wisher I had one. But—" and here Ted became thoughtful ; "I don't think Santa Claus has got much sense fer all that."

"Me neither," added Tom. "He don't give you the things you want. Once, years ago" (it was last Christmas) "he gave me a little red whip with a whistle in it, when I asked him fer a really stock whip."

"An' he gave me a rotten toy gun when I wanted a rifle fer kangarooin'."

"He means well. Oh, yes, I reckon he means well, but he don't seem to get on to the rights of things. Now, if we could on'y get hold of him and have a pitch with him we could put thim up to a thing or two 'bout what boys want in Australia. He seems to know good enough fer England, but he don't know Australia. How could he; him on'y comin' hoppin' out here once a year, on Christmas Eve?"

"Maybe we could leave a letter fer him."

" 'Tain't no good," said Tom. "I tried it once. He's in too much of a hurry to read letters. But there's somethin' what we could do— trap him—"

Ted's eyes enlarged enormously at the audacity of the suggestion, and he gazed at his terrible brother for a few moments in speechless admiration.

"Hoo, crikey!" he said.

"Yes, trap him," Tommy insisted. "An' why not? It's time someone did. It's on'y fair to him for someone in Australia to catch him an' tell him things, so's he won't go on makin' a fool of hisself."

"How?"

"Why, givin' toys you don't want, an' stuffin' a grown-up cove's stockin's with lots o' rot that's on'y fit fer kids. He'd he grateful fer someone to tell him that boys here like guns, an' workin' whips, an' saddles, an' bridles, an' them things."

"An' cuttin' knives, an' pipes, an' dog-collars, an' mouth-organs," said Ted.

"Of course. Well, it's up to us to trap him."

Ted paled a little, and looked about apprehensively. It seemed like meddling with the supernatural.

"Quite sure he'd like it, are you?" he said.

"Take me oath on it," replied Tom, with conviction. "What'll he want to give boys things fer at all if he didn't want to please 'em, an' what's the good o' him goin' on givin' them things what ain't any satisfaction, I'd like to know. We'll trap him."

"How can you but?"

"With one o' them big spring traps they used fer the wild dogs."

"Ooh, it 'ud hurt him awful."

"Yah, you are a sillikin! 'Ow yer goin' to hurt Santa Claus? He ain't human; he's a ghost."

This declaration did not seem to encourage Ted to take part in the enterprise, but the subject was discussed at great length and with profoundest interest, and Tommy prevailed over all his younger brother's scruples, as he usually did, and it was resolved that one of the snap traps must be smuggled into the boys' bedroom that evening.

There ain't no chimbley fer him to come down into our room," said Ted.

"So he must come in by the window," replied Tom.

"Or the door," suggested Ted.

The idea of Santa Claus using so commonplace an entrance as a door was immediately scouted by Tommy, and when the boys said their prayers and tumbled into bed that Christmas Eve a formidable snap-trap was set for Santa Claus under the window, chained to the bed-leg, and carefully disguised with the curtains, so that when Mr. and Mrs. Studley stole into the room at eleven o clock that night to fill the lads' stockings with the usual Christmas treasures, they found the boys sleeping sweetly, and no indications of mischief any where.

IT WAS TWO HOURS LATER, and the homestead was very still in sleep, when, after a cracking of wood work, the bolt, broke from the window in the boys' room, the window-sash was softly raised, and a dark figure carrying a bag stepped into the room. Instantly there was a sharp crack, followed by a cry of agony, a cry that awakened the lads, and brought them to a sitting position in their beds.

Tommy gazed for a moment at the writhing figure, heard the curses it uttered, and was the first to understand.

"We've got him," he cried triumphantly. "Ted, Ted, we've got him!"

"Ye-es," faltered Ted, who did not relish the situation, and was inclined to run. "He don't seem to like it, does he?"

"I say, is that you, Santa Claus?" said Tom boldly.

The voice ceased cursing, there was silence for a moment, and then the dark figure asked: "Who're you?"

"We're Tom and Ted. We set a trap for Santa Claus. Are you him?"

"Yes," answered the voice with a fierceness that sounded murderous; "and if you don't get up and open the thing I'll—I'll—"

That was enough for Ted; he slid out of bed on the off side, and stole to the door, and half-a-minute later a trembling, terrified figure was tugging at his father's hand. Mr. Studley heard his little son's voice.

"Father, come quick. We've got Santa Claus in a dog-trap, an' he's going to kill Tommy."

Studley sprang out of bed, and, taking a poker and a box of matches, ran to the boys' room. He understood the situation immediately on entering, and the match he struck revealed a man cowering against the wall, his leg nipped just below the knee in the cruel steel teeth of a dog-trap.

His Grace took matters very coolly. He lit a candle, and then faced the prisoner. He turned over with his foot that bag upon the floor. It contained burglar's tools.

"I see," said Studley, weighing his poker. "You are after the silver, my man?"

The man cursed volubly.

"You've broke my leg, d—n you," he said.

"Tommy, run and bring up Fields and Quickston," said Studley, and then he spoke to the burglar again.

"You came up from Melbourne to do this; you have the professional air. As for the trap, that is a little device of my boys to catch Santa Claus. Apparently they have caught a Tartar."

The burglar was secured, and the Nar Nar police were sent for.

"Santa Claus must 'a' come in at the door after all, smarty," was Ted's triumphant declaration on finding their stockings full.

"I'll set two traps next time," said Tommy.

21: Mrs. Edward Ellerker's Diamonds

Edward Dyson

Punch (Melbourne) 6 June 1912

HIS NAME was Thaddeus Tittmarch, or Tittmouse, or something equally un-Irish, but he was known professionally as Titt. The reason the prefix will be plain enough before we have done with him. As for Thaddeus, the victim complained: "I dunno why me parents dun it. 'Twas a dirty trick t' play on a bit uv a kid widout stick or stone t' purtect himself at all. 'T has bin a great dthrawback troo life. If 'twasn't fer the Thaddeus a man might iv bin wan o' thim Prime Ministers, or a pole hexplorer, or maybe aven a sargint iv police, God will in'. But did ve iver hear iv a Thaddeus doin' anythin' fer himself? Ye didn't, an' ut's all be raysin iv the name tacked to him."

Tell-tale Titt when we knew him was attached to the studio of a successful black-and-white artist as model, philosopher, and handyman. What he had been before he may be left to explain.

Titt was something over fifty, a fine, useful figure of a man in a studio, garrulous, drunken, a most delightful liar, a better cook, a fine bachelor's housekeeper, nine-and-ninety kinds of a blackguard, scrupulous in nothing but cleanliness, but a faddist in that.

"While I trow you this attichude," said Tell-Tale Till, " 'twill be the comfort t' revale to you a bit iv a curious doin' what happened t' me wan night whin I was a braver man than I am, and a smarter.

"Thim times Thadd. was niver short fer long. What he hadn't he took, which same is the way iv 'business all the worrld over, on'y that Thadd. took his wantin's straightforward an' manly, wid a mask to his face an' a bit iv stick to his fisht, whoile thim business sharps do ut undtherhand an' mane, trickm' yeh wid a slimile an' a whimper. Divil fly away wid them!

"Well, it so happdned I was mighty short all iv a suddint, me bit iv savin's all havin' gone in foolishness wid the darlinest, black-eyed, gowlden-haired gur-rl whativer mixed up her complexion conthrairy an' perverse— the fiend snatch her! But that ain't me prisint story

"Hill, but this July-is Caesar attichude is thryin' t' the shpinal marrer! Wad ye aise me back wid a shlight bind t' the aist, Mister Norton?

"Bein' so short that I cudn't reach a pint iv bitter beer, which is ridiclus fer a man iv me inches, I gets t' work considerin' the exits an' the enthrances iv a nice, upstandin' house iv red brick wid ladders adjacent be teason of the painthers bein' on the job slappin' a beautiful new elephant's breath tied to it.

"I had some acquaintance wid said house an' lands, a for-rmer gyrl iv me, own havin' ministhered to the wants iv the fam'ly in the incapacity iv maid-in-waitin', 'r something equally illegant in a white hat the size iv a thripny.

"In this way it come to me ears that the misthress have as nice a little wad iv diamines fer chest wear as iver stirred invy in the hear-rt iv a woman, 'r fired a man, sufferin' wid a bad attack iv impecuniosity, t' deeds of darin' an' schames iv great enginuity an' skill.

"I am also well-informed iv the location iv the fam'ly jool's, an' the nature an' 'abits iv the matt married into said fam'ly, himsilf bein' a sport, an' ez bright a boy ez'ever put his head inside a hat, Ellerker be name.

"This Misther Edward Ellerker was a good-lookin' bla'guard, wid a sunny shmile, an' always a high light on aich cheek, an' a silkie bell-topper to him. His wife wasn't so young as she uster was, not anythin' too lovely t' live, bein' given t' dissipation in warts wid goatees to 'em, which same is unseemly an' precocious in woman. Maybe the sex is comin' by whiskers in joo time, 'cordin' t' thim perfessors an' learned men, but meanwhile the lady wid hair on her chin, chin, chin is presumptchus an' rude. Annyhow, thim's the sentiments iv Thadd.

"Prim information received I gather that Edward Ellerker did what manny a fine lad done before, him, married fer beans, an' nivir received delivery iv the goods. 'Tis wan thing t' marry fer money, an' another horse altogether t' get what yeh married fer. Mrs. Ellerker was the financhill partner, ah' the party in char-rge iv the bulk sum, likewise the petty cash, an' she was the one t' sit on the money box wid a firrm hand. When Eddie wants a few pence t' back a hot; favrit et six t' four on Annie hits him wid a cold scowl, an' reminds him in a harrd, gratin' voice that the Oof is hers, t' have an' t' hold, tellin' him iitl the pleasin' langwidge peculiar to the married, that if he wants money t' dissipate he better get out after it with a pick.

"This naturally hurts ftddie, an' there's a nice, amyibble, fam'ly dust-up, with talk from the *Home Illocutionist* an' *Polite Phrases Per the Domestic Hearth*, which me gurrl hears be reason of her ear gettin' fast t' the keyhole an' refusin' t' come unglued.

" 'Tis well t' know the kind iv fam'ly yer goin' t' call on. A man don't want t' go mixin' 'himself up wid anny old sort, an' when I entered the house of Misther and Missus Edward Ellerker inofficial somethin' afther two one windy mornin', I was well acquaint wid the geography iv the house an' the characters, ways and temperamints iv the occupants.

"I didn't waste time on formalities at all, 'twas never me way. Me business was with a certain black bureau in the boodwar iv Mrs. Edward, an' I got to it widout preamhulations 'r beggin' yer pardon.

" 'Twould have been an aisy enough job on'y 'twas necessary t' make it a quiet wan, fer there beyond a bunch iv curtins was Mrs. Edward sleepin' the sleep iv the just, wid th' wind blowin' troo her whiskers. A little too much

racket in smashin' the bureau, an' yer uncle would have t' dale wid a hefty woman of oncertain timper an' great physical disproportions, not t' mention thim whiskers anny more.

"I was gettin' along nicely when me jemmy slipped, an' bashed in the bingie iv a quare old pot god frim the Far East, what was squattin' near handy, overlooldn' the job. The Asiatic made a divil iv a welter over his breakin', an' u.p t' heaven an' a'jacent places goes the wild squeal of Mrs. Edward Ellerker, first cousin t' Belial, an' connect in a direct line wid Reelzebub an' the Hairv Witch of Donegal on her mother's side.

"Natural, yer friend Thadd is on his feet in two secs, lookin' fer loopholes, himself not bein' one givin' t' hittin' a woman widout doo provocation, however whiskery. I darts to a door. Up from that direction goes another howl of terror an' dishmay.

"Thadd. doubles, an' gets in touch wid the street by a larrge windy. Nivir, be heavins, fer there below, lookin' up curious in the light av a street lamp, an' sniffin' the air like an anxious buffalo, is Misther Policeman.

"Manewhile, Mrs. Eddie is buckin' on her bed in a kind iv hysteric fit, complicated wid whiskers, an' bellerin' wid cow-like ferocity. What's Thadd. t' do? He butts fer another door. It's locked. He begins t' have the feelin's iv a-cat in a fit, an' in another minute he'll be runnin' dilly up the walls an' tryin' t' walk horizantal.

"Then sudden an' silent that locked door opens, an' poor Thadd. is confronted wid Mr. Edward Ellerker. Eddie is wearin' his pink silk pyjamas, an' an expression iv natural surprise. —

" 'Hello!' sez he, soft an' low.

" 'Hello-o !' sez I, swingin' me jemmy.

"But he ducks it, an' puts a Japanese come-ither on me fist that makes me taste poignant anguish.

" 'Not that, yeh darned fool,' sez he. 'Here.' He springs to the bureau. Two twists an' a wrench an' he has half the side out of it. He grabs a bunch of jools out of a pretty box, all diamints, an' shoves 'em on me.

"Cud yeh drame iv a situation fuller iv surprise an' consternation tinctured wild doubt ? Yeh cudn't. I'm shtandin' like somethin' foolish iv the hen-tribe, stuffed wid wonder, holdin' me left fist full iv diamints, an' Edward's standin' forenist me.

" 'Wake up, blighter!' he snorts. Get a shift down the flieht. First,' he sez, 'land me one.' He holds his dim out to me like an infant beggin' kisses.

"It was too much. 'D'yeh mean it?' sez I.

" 'I want it, an' I want it harrd,' sez he.

" 'Are yeh mad or loonatick ?' sez I.

" 'Tain't yer business. Hit and get,' he answers.

"Then I hit Edward jist where his lady's whiskers was thickest, an' down he wint all in pretty pink heap iv huddle on the flure.

"If yi'll bilave me, Thadd waited fer no more; he dived troo the dure, he shot the shute down thim stairs, took the back way out, waltzed over a dividin' fence, ducked an' manoeuvred, an' got home later, wid diamints in his pocket worth 'twixt an' between two thousand quid.

"Me lavin' was accelerated be the conduct ot that curyit po-liceman who, Havin' his latent suspicion aroused be the hoarse cries iv Mrs. Edward, was batterin' like thunder at the Ellerker front dure, imaginin' afther the manner iv po-licemen what's thoroughly trained t' their juties, that the burglar or burglars raysonably suposed t' be risponsible fer the racket inside would come down prisintly, polite an' kind, an unlock the primises fer him.

"I saw all about it in the avenin' paper, how Mrs. Ellerker's house had been bruck into, an' her beautiful bureau all smashed to flinders, an' her lovely diamints, valued et two thousand, pounds, stolen away. There was further remarks concernin' Misther Edward Ellerker's heroic dalin's wid the gang, how bravely he had grappled wid the miscreants till rendered insensible wid a crooel blow on the jaw. The newspaper, t' settle all doubts declared that the burglars got clear awav wid the shpoil.

"Fer hours an' hours I'd bin sittin' down hard, thinkin' iv Mr. Edward. What did he mean be it? The more I thought the less I knew. There was the diamints all right. The paper called 'em shpoil, but niver a wan was shpoiled.

"What was Eddie's game? It bate me clane through, but there was somethin' in the nature iv a hauntin' suspicion that me notole knew more of your Thadd than was good 'n' comfortable, 'n' would prisintly chip in wid an affable claim for 50 percent iv the loot.

"I waited days in a shtate iv great dubiosity, but no Edward came, so agin me doubts begun to assail me. I got narvis. 'Twasn't natural fer a man t' be givin' away diamints with both hands. Then like a whipe wid a shtick it come to me. This was Eddie's revenge, this was how he med it up to Annie fer the unwifely treatment she doled out to the head iv the house.

"Afther that Thadd was aisy in his mind. The po-lice was chasin' a total stranger away in Sydney, 'n' niver the ghost iv a suspicion breathed the way I went.

"When the time was ripe I takes a stone 'r' two, 'n' makes inquiries in the right direction, wid the result that I presently had of urgent 'n' imperative business wid Edward Ellerker, Esq at his office in town.

"See me marchin' in on Edward where he sat comfortably eatin' the fat end of a black ceegar, 'n' lookin' over the sportin' column of his fav'rit daily, easy, airy, 'n' well disposed to all men.

" ' 'Ello !' sez he.

" 'Hell-o again,' I sez, ' 'n' I see veh know e.'

" 'I do, Mike,' sez he, ' 'n' that was a fine, fat punch you dealt me.'

" 'Twould have been a finer 'n' a fatter, me man, if I'd knowed then what I know now.'

" 'Tis live and learn, Pat,' sez he.

" 'True for yeh, Edward, 'n' so I've come to larn what you'll be givin' me not to send them diamints back to Mrs. Ellerker.'

"I won't give you a cent, Tim," he sez, sweetly. 'But don't let that cause any ill-feelin' between us.'

"I thought you'd think it Worthy twintv at least not t' have them diamints sent back.'

" 'Your calculations are all out a mile, Pat.'

" 'Say fifteen, p'raps.'

" 'This is my busy day. See here, suppose you send the stuff back, will she believe the stolen stones wete returned? Not on your life, Michael. I'm on velvet. Make any sort of noise at all, my bdy, and you're potted for ten. That's a cert.'

"He was right. 'What the devil's a man to do wid 'em?' sez I.

"He seemed a bit sorry for me. 'The gold mounting is good,' sez he; 'boil it down, make what you can out of it. Here, I'm flush this mornin'; hook this fiver, and pass out of me life!'

"Thadd hooked the five 'n' passed. The facts was these: the noble Edward, lovin' husband iv Annie aforesaid, had at some time disposed of his wife's beautiful diamints on his little alone, then he'd bin persecuted wid twinges iv remorse 'n' qualms iv conscience, fearin' the wife iv his boosom would tumble t' how he'd rung the changes on her.

"That's why he was pleased t' meet me when illegally on his premises. That's why he was so joyous 'n' jublent in shovin' the family jools into my arms 'n showin' me the quick way out. The stuff I got was all paste."

22: The Third Chair

Punch (Melbourne), 27 Dec 1917, 3 Jan 1918

Why not a traditional Christmas Ghost story?

MY DEATH was wholly unforseen. It was the result of miscalculation. The man I intended to kill killed me. I was so intent on killing him that I did not notice he had killed me.

Possibly all people who die are as surprised and incredulous as I was on finding, myself dead and translated into the Ever Ever. Perhaps those sensations are peculiar to certain people who die sudden and unexpected deaths.

I was eventually conscious of great change; yet disbelieved, resisted, refusing to admit that I was finally and forever cut off from my kind. This talk will appear preposterous to people who have never been dead. I can say with authority that quite a number of men and women in every large community have been temporarily dead, and have inhabited the Ever. Ever at one time or another, in some cases have a full realisation of the fact.

There was the case of Steven McEvoy, the well-known Irish poet of Australian birth. For seven years Steven insisted that he had on one occasion been absolutely drowned. He had been immersed some time; he had experienced all the pangs of dissolution, during which process his sins had been made manifest to him in a sort of five-reel phantasmagoria. He had come to some understanding with his Maker. His spirit had forsaken the flesh. Only when the rules of expeditious resuscitation had been vigorously operated for three and a half hours did he show symptoms of returning vitality. Meanwhile he had been in the Ever Ever.

Steven McEvoy, no doubt, entered into a transitionary state reserved for emotional poets. I have felt myself close against such a state and such elements; but in the Ever Ever we are divided by modes of thought, not by distances. I am no poet. I was a school teacher, a creature of routine. It is very likely I have ten thousand years to go before attaining that stage to which Steven stepped straight from his mortal shape. He had a fine, kaleidoscopic mind, but was an unqualified rascal. The longer I am dead the more surprised I am at the disproportionate value people put upon mere morals.

On the second evening after my death I found myself entering by the front door of the small shingle house at Clayball at precisely half-past six. During the last five or six months of my life I had gone daily from my living room at the school to this two-roomed shingle hut across the creek to take dinner. I had no longer any need of dinner, but I was still in a large sense a creature of my mortal habits.

When I entered the ugly man and his young wife were already seated. Tommy's head was bent, as if intent on his plate, but through his thick, dark eyebrows, like goblins in ambush, his burning eyes were fixed on Evelina's face. She was looking out of the window towards the path from the schoolroom. Was she expecting me? She was pale and worn, as if with nights of weeping. Her clenched hand on the table had drawn the white cloth into its grip. The atmosphere of a recent horror was over the pair.

It irritated me that I was not noticed. Roughly I clutched at my chair, still by the wall. My hand failed to grasp it. I stood in consternation. Once again I tried. My hand fell upon the back like vapour. I was powerless to lift it. Sudden anger welled in me.

Here was further evidence of my immaterial state. I could have danced with rage, but such conduct must appear very unbecoming in a well, a dematerialised being. I controlled myself, and in cooler moments consciousness of my power came to me. I could not lift the chair; but I commanded a force that might as easily have toppled the house over. The force was not magnetic, it was not the power of the vacuum, but I can bring it no nearer the human understanding than by comparing it with these.

I drew the chair noiselessly from the wall, and set it in my accustomed place at the table. I seated myself in it. There was no revengeful motive in this; I was merely doing a customary action, prompted by a desire to be what I had been to appear the thing I formerly was.

There was cold salt beef on the table. I drew a plate across the cloth, and was reaching for a knife, when I became conscious of the man's thought. He was staring fixedly at the plate, with the agony of a peasant nature in the pre-sence of the inexplicable. He had seen the plate move without beholding the agency that moved it, and immediately supernatural terror pos-sessed what trifling intellect was his.

Wantonly I drew the bread, I broke it, I raised a piece to my mouth. Tommy's attitude was feline; he suggested a crouching leopard, but an agony of unreasoning fear was substituted for brute ferocity. His eyes went to the chair.

"The chair!" he said. He spoke, out of a dry mouth. He arose, approached the chair, and passed a stretched, quavering hand over the seat, covering his face with his left arm.

Tommy fell back into his seat. The hand he pointed across throbbed on the table, making an audible knocking. "The chair!" he said, fiercely. "The chair! The ch—" Power of articulating left him. He sprawled upon the coarse cloth, his writhing face livid.

"I didn't !" The voice was Evelina's. "It was against the wall. I didn't move it. You did it yourself. You must have. You did! You did!" She screamed at him, beating the hand in her plate, seeking to convince herself.

The man littered a gurgling sound, and worked his chair back into a corner, his arm's covering his face, his body cowering as if from expected blows.

Suddenly the situation struck me as extremely ludicrous. I faced the poor breeder of turkeys. I laughed immoderately till it struck me that an invisible man laughing noiselessly was a crass absurdity itself.

Then I realised. This was the man who killed me. It had seemed of so trifling consequence I had not taken it into account. He it was who beat me to death with a stick among the rocks on the west slope of Little Mt. Long.

The fool thought I was haunting him!

In a spirit of mischievousness almost childish I drew a cup and saucer slowly, silently across the cloth.

Evelina screamed. With a yell Tommy sprang to his feet. "The lamp!" he cried. "The lamp ! Quick, for Good's sake; light the lamp !"

He threw the door wide open, he snatched a long-handled, bush broom from the wall, and began a vigorous sweeping of the room. He whirled his broom in a sort of frenzy, making a "shooing" as he did when urging his turkeys. He swept the air and the ceiling. The frantic simpleton was seeking to sweep out the ghost of his victim. He passed through me several times in mad pursuit of the invisible, intangible thing, chanting a childish incantation as he ran:

"Mother, and Father, and Saints of the Host,
Rid us of goblin, and demon and ghost !"

He dashed the crockery from the table, he developed incredibly agility. Not a corner, not a crack must escape his besom:

"Mother, and Father, and Saints of the Host,
Rid us of goblin, and demon, and ghost !"

Having made a final, terrific sweep, he hurled himself against the door, crashing it to and locking it. With the mat of sacking he stopped the crack under the door. With soft bread he plugged the keyhole.

"Mother, and Father, and Saints of the Host—"

From the next room he dragged his bedding. "He'll come down the chimbley!" he said and stuffed the mass up the flue among the thick soot.

"Rid us of goblin, and demon, and ghost!"

The lamp was now burning brightly upon the table. Tommy turned it higher. He lit two candles. Then he seated himself, still piteously tremulous, his back hard against the plastered stones of the wide fireplace, his ghastly face to the room, his huge, pitted, pendulous nose white as a toadstool.

Tommy watched the furniture with unabated apprehension, his quivering heels beating a tattoo on the hearth. The woman, stated low in the opposite corner, her apron over her head her hands pressing it to her eyes, wept noisily, foolishly.

I had no interest in this woman— her troubles were nothing to me. Yet it was for the sake of her red lips I had undertaken the killing of her husband. It was because of her small breasts that her husband had seized the opportunity, and entered so gladly into the killing of me.

I was seeing this fellow with a new sense— no, longer as a grotesque of God, but as a valuable entity in a well-knit world, a unit with an appointed function which he enacted to perfection, a man extraordinarily skilled in the management of turkeys, one who entered into a finer understanding of turkeys, a kindlier sympathy with turkeys, and a more generous regard for the needs of the turkeys he herded than I had ever entertained for the children herded in my hot school-house every day. I saw Tommy honest in his relations towards his fellow-men. I saw the ramifications of his faithful service extending to a hundred households in far-away places.

I perceived also that perfect knowledge must be wholly destructive to the comic spirit.

Even while sympathy surged towards my murderer, I had done an impish thing. His eyes were upon his wife. For the moment I was not uppermost in his perturbed mind, and I had drawn the third chair forward, and set it be-tween them, as I had done many times when we three lived. I sat facing the fireplace, the woman on my right, the man on my left. I cocked my leg, I reached for a pipe, asserting our common humanity.

She had dropped the apron from her tear-stained face. She first saw the third chair at the ingle, and cried out like a frightened child. The man made no sound, but as he looked his eyes were slow-blinking haunts of horror. He spread his arms against the walls behind him, slowly he drew up his knees, as if dragging the least part of him from this fearful thing. Yet he saw nothing but an empty chair and a wooden pipe suspended in space!

So we remained for I cannot say how long. My conceptions of time had grown hazy. But eventually, in the whiteness and terror of my friend's face, grew a new consternation, another nausea of dread. His mouth worked like that of a man in a paralytic seizure, the awfulness of his eyes took on a tragedy more poignant, more cruel.

He could see me! What shape I took, what menace was in the apparition Almighty knows, but I was visible. The fact gratified me. I felt an impish glee. I was still an object, an item, a man among men. I tried to place the pipe jauntily in my mouth, but it fell to the floor, and broke to piece's on the stones.

With a yell more like the scream of a man beset by flame than any human cry, Tommy rushed across the floor tore open the backdoor, and precipitated himself, into the darkness. The woman was cowering in a heap on the floor, her face pressed into the corner.

I went out from the house. The school-house drew me; but as I passed the big slab-fenced enclosure I saw a curious thing— Tommy sitting on a low stone, haunched, with his head almost between his knees, in the centre of a flock of turkeys. The still birds stood all about him— a refuge and a rampart.

Wandering about the dark school-house, I was perplexed by pedagogic worries. I sat on the high stool, resenting, as I had done for years, the Sisyphean task of eternally rolling scholastic stones up the same knoll, and ever finding the same stones at the foot again. But I clung to my duties.

Grey day was drifting down the slope of Little Mt. Long, when I found myself speeding along the hillside from Clayball, drawn by a dog-like instinct. Something was happening to me up there— something I feared. Among the larger granite boulders about three miles from the creek a man was working.

A great resentment swelled within me. Here was a final act— a treachery that threatened to cut me off definitely and for ever from companionable and beloved things. I flew at the worker as a valiant mother bird might fly at a trespasser assailing her young, beating my ethereal limbs against his solid body. Again I forgot the power that was mine, and fought, impelled by lingering human instinct, with a strength I no longer possessed.

He was unaware of my presence. But now he dug with a short-handled pick, then cleared away the loose stones, and dirt with the energy and action of a burrowing dog. At hand, standing among the moss-caked, fantastic granite rocks, was a herd of turkeys, as still as the stones themselves.

Once the digger looked up at the coming day. He was wet with the sweat of terror, his eyes were haunted. But he went down desperately to his task again. Close by him something lay huddled on the ground; something I wished to save from the earth, the terrible alchemist; something I fought for, feeling in my struggles like thin smoke blown against the wall.

Tommy dragged the dark mass into the shallow hole he had made, piling little earth and flat stones upon it, and how I felt that here was the end without doubt.

My murderer was burying me.

I HAD BEEN chief mourner at my own funeral. I had wept by my grave side. There under a small mound of stones I lay, my resting place marked with a little dead bracken loosely scattered over the fresh-made grave to hide it from the eye of any curious chance wanderer in those solitudes, and down the slope of Little Mount Long, his pick on his shoulder, went a live man, skulking among his turkeys, sweating with fear, yet hugging a sick joy bred of the hope that now he had disposed of his enemy for good and all.

He is a strange man to look upon, this turkey-herd, with his longish, lean legs and short, somewhat misshapen body, his narrow face of such exaggerated length that the chin lies habitually on his chest, his complexion like the inside of a sun-dried lambskin, and his hair that was once dark, but is now the hue of scorched grass, the result of daily hatless excursions on the bleak, or blazing, hills with his herd of mournful birds.

According to accepted ethics, the poor wretch was quite justified in killing me; but he was a simple soul, no more subtle than the turkeys he herded, and lacked the perspicacity to nut the matter in that light to the ghost that haunted him.

Besides nobody argues with ghosts. There is too great a respect for ghosts. If people re-alised that the spirit plaguing them is in all probability nothing more than a snivelling waif, divided from humanity only because of its inability to incorporate itself with material things, miserably, heltlessly drifting about familiar associations as a foolish cat goes meowing around a burnt house, they would meet the wraith in a rational temper, and something really helpful might be the outcome. But the senseless fear of death has bred this insane dread of the thing beyond death— the deathless thing.

I wished the turkey-herd no ill until he discovered his intention of burying me away from the world. It was thus he hoped to rid himself of the spook besetting him. There is that belief among men. While the body lies tainting the air the restless spirit will walk the earth. Curiously enough, there was in my case some truth in this seemingly absurd supposition. I hated the thought of being buried. It threw me into a curious state of flurried excitement. I felt passionately resentful; but my anger was accompanied by a more than childish impotence, and now that all was over, I sat on a rounded stone and wept; while Weegull went off in the morning mists among the huge boulders, gathering his turkeys about him, cowering among them as if to so hide his identity or to share out his guilt.

The day was almost upon us. I sat there, gazing with non-existent eyes at my poor grave, weeping immaterial tears, feeling all the pangs of the flesh where no flesh was. A man who has lost a leg may be troubled by the aches of an old corn or the twinges of his familiar gout. A ghost, it would appear,

retains, for some time, at any rate, in a similar vague way the sensations of his discarded flesh. But I knew my loss; I longed for my body; I would not let it lie there in the earth to rot. I merely waited, with sly caution till Weegull should be gone.

Suddenly, as I gazed I felt the presence of a new danger. A great, grey beast came slinking between the boulders, a wraith himself in the dull light of the new day. He stretched his nose and sniffed the air, then went forward, snout to the ground, smelling his way. He came to the grave and pushed his muzzle among the earth, and with a powerful paw raked a stone away.

The brute was a wild dog, mastiff like, one of a number in the hills, escaped from domes-ticity and returned almost to the wolf. He clawed again, and thrust his nose into the hole, sniffing eagerly. I attempted to use the absent organs of articulation in a cry; I snatched at a stone; but ghostly cries are inaudible, ghostly fingers do, not grasp material things. I stood over the beast, whimpering foolishly for quite a minute, while he scratched at the shallow grave.

Then came the consciousness of my new power, and I laughed as heartily as a poor ghost may. The force I exerted was not unnatural (there are no unnatural forces— there are no unnatural laws), but it came from no source compatible with the dog's instinct. At first, feeling the strain on his hindquarters, he turned and snapped viciouslv, and endeavoured to resume his digging. Again I drew at him, and again he snapped back right and left. I drew him further and further away. He fought with terrific ferocity, snatching furiously at the thin air, tumbling and rolling in the dirt, biting himself in his passion, tearing his lean flanks, contending with the unseen in a proxysm of un-governable rage.

Only when on the point of exhaustion did the dog yield, and then he lifted himself painfully on his quavering legs, and stood a moment with heaving sides flecked with froth, bleeding from a dozen wounds, his fangs bared in a hideous snarl, his eyes rolling from side to side, seeding his enemy. He limped away, still snarling, looking to this side and that, and was lost to view among the boulders.

I went to the grave, and sucked the stones from their setting. I scattered the loose earth, and drew my body from the hole, couching it upon the bracken in the full light of day. Crouched by it, I peered into the pale face with a sort of mothering love. I yearned over my own poor flesh, fondly protective. A rust of hair had grown on the chin and thin cheeks in the last few hours; there was much dirt in the long dark hair, and above the temple a broken wound, black with clotted blood, stood out like a symbol.

A quavering cry interrupted me. Weegul had come back. He was standing off from the corpse, looking down at it in terrible amazement, his almost toothless mouth open, his twitching eyebrows lifted into his wrinkled forehead, his hands clawing against his breast. Presently he began to speak, but only to utter the words, "God !" and "Christ" in frantic whispers. His turkeys stood ahout him, the sleepy birds making no sound, but craning their necks foolishly, an occasional bird lifting his wings with a curious hint of dull weariness that was almost a yawn.

So the sun found them, falling first on the dead man where he lay, lighting up his palor, making play on the black brand seeming to glide into his thick hair.

"He's up from his grave!" said Weegull. "He's raised hisself. My God! he's raised his-self." He lifted clenched hands to heaven, and in this attitude he advanced slowly, as if fascinated by his own terrors, the ungainly birds at his heels craning their thin necks after him.

Tommy Weegull bent to the body, and let one hand fall gingerly upon it. "Dead!" he whispered. "Oh, he's dead— he's quite dead!"

His eye encountered a paw print in the broken soil. He went upon his knees, peering at the tracks, following them up, his nose almost in the dirt. He arose in an ecstasy, capering like a child.

"Dogs!" he said. "Dogs! Dogs! Dogs!" He made a sort of song of it. His turkeys moved sedately aside, repudiating, his foolish levity. "Dogs! dogs! dogs!" Tommy chortled. He had found an explanation of the disinterment that was simple and natural, one that left open to him still a chance of escaping from his recent terrors, and his sudden glee was apeish, yet pitiful. "We'll bury him deep," he said. "Very deep. We'll pile stones on him to keep him down— big stones. We'll fill his grave with 'em. So many, he'll never comes up again.

Weegull went to the grave, and set to work within it. He toiled upon his knees, using the short pick with extraordinary vigour, clawing the dirt and stones away with his calloused fingers. From a distance I watched him at his strange task, feeling again a fever of trepidation for the fate of my bones, forgetful again for the moment of the force at my command.

The sun hung above Eagle Head, deluging the valley in hot light, and Tommy Weegull had disappeared in the grave he was digging with fearful industry, I saw only the dirt and stones spring up as he threw them from the excavation. Meanwhile the turkeys stood scattered among the boulders, brooding drowsily making no attempt to find sustenance on that arid patch, uttering no sound, yet in some strange way suggesting an eerie sympathy with the digger.

Tommy came up from the grave. He had almost forgotten his terrors in the violence of his energy. He was drenched with perspiration. Pausing not for a moment he ran to and fro, bearing large stones to the edge of the ex-cavation, and piling them there.

Now my murderer was prepared for me. He paused for a moment on hands and knees, gazing at the body. Compunction grew in his face. He looked piteously on trees and sky, seeking a god for the prayer in his heart, and then he crept nearer, and laid a hand on the dead man that was I. I fought with him, holding the slim corpse with superhuman power.

Weegull put forth his strength, and sought to drag the body to him. I resisted with scarcely an effort, and Tommy tried again, putting all his strength into the endeavour. Surprise and consternation sprang into his eyes, and he drew away a moment to rest himself, breathing deeply, staring fixedly at the dead, cold terror creeping back into his heart. I was five feet eight inches only, and lightly built; the turkey-herd had the strength of a fatless athlete, toughened by a hard, open-air life on the steep hills and the exercise of primitive tillage. He rested a full two minutes, and then, taking the body by both ankles, he pulled with a steady strain. There was no responsive movement. It was as if all the strength had gone from his limbs, or the weight of the great, grey granite boulders had been given to the dead thing in his hands.

With dry tongue Weegull sought to moisten his cracked lips, and a fearful greyness stole through the tan of his streaming face. Once more he tried to move the body. Again he failed, and, springing to his feet with an anguished cry, he faced the situation in a flare of utter desperation. Standing across the prone figure of William Clint, he grappled it about the waist, and lifted with all his might. I put my force against him, and he failed. A riot of madness seized him, and he struggled ferociously with the dead thing, tearing at it with his iron fingers, blaspheming in a low voice, the blood flowing down his chin from deeply-bitten lips, every thew showing sharply in his tense arms and his rigid neck.

Again he failed to shift the body, and in his wild fury he fell upon it, and taking the dead man's throat in his two hands, he put all that was in him into a frantic endeavour to choke out of the body the uncanny life with which he believed it still to be invested. The murderer was seeking to slay his victim yet again.

I threw my power against him, and forced Weegull to his feet and back from his victim, step by step. He fought me all the way, strug-gling as if with a tangible foe, straining himself till the blood sprang from his muscles, and cursing all the time in a barking, bestial way. It was only a repetition of the

struggle with the wild dog; the man was as blind, he was as irrational. He tore at his clothing, he lascerated his own skin, and from his throat welled guttural sounds of fury such as any brute might make fighting for its life.

Straining forward towards the corpse, Weegull was urged away, striving distractedly till he floundered into the open crave. He no longer resisted, but lay where he had fallen, shrunken together at the bottom of the hole, a quivering, shapeless thing.

I watched, and Weegull grovelled there for many minutes. Presently he appeared from the ground again, peering towards the body. He drew himself out of the hole, and scrambled away, going some yards on hands and knees. Rising to his feet, he fled, with an arm hiding his face, and the turkeys, grouping together, flowed after him, with the mincing gait of dancers, but still impassable and genteel.

There was a fear that he might return, and I stayed with my dead. Did ever another ghost employ itself as I did during the following hours? I was infused with a pitiful longing to return into my flesh, to feel again the stability of my bones, to have the warmth of blood and the sensations of the body. Have you ever seen a small bird, bred in captivity released from its cage, struggling to get back into its barred prison, fluttering in an agony of apprehension from one side to the other, desisting only when beaten into helplessness by its vain efforts? So I strove about my body, seeking ingress, woefully eager to regain mortality. So I failed. There was no response to my appeal, no way, no hope.

It was an hour after noon when I drifted away down the side of Little Mt. Long, drawn back to humanity.

As I went through the boulders and warped trees like crutchless cripples, a sudden shower struck the range-side, veiling the sun, and set-ting a vivid rainbow astride the valley. The rain was not more than enough to drench the trees, and start the lichen-covered boulders steaming, veiling the near distances in a faint purple vapour.

I came on him unexpectedly. The vision was a curious one. He hung, as it were, silhouetted under the arch of glory, something of the rainbow's tints filtered into the mists about him— a queer, misshapen object dangling by the neck from the limb of a sprawling gum, suspended on his own waist belt.

On the flinty soil a large flock of turkeys gathered, lifting weary wings, making occasional low, guttural complaints, but loyally awaiting the pleasure of Tommy Weegull, permanently up a tree.

23: The Passing of Mrs. Phinny

(A Comedy in one Spasm)
Punch (Melbourne) 27 April 1916

MRS. PHINNY in bed, a small table at her hand, with phials, a cup, a tablespoon, a pill-box, some bits of linen, a bottle of linament, etc. Mrs. Phinny is in white night-dress, and wears a large white nightcap like a sun-bonnet tied under her chin. She is covered with a rug.

Phinny is sitting near on a low stool, smoking dreamily at a short clay. He is a small Irishman, bald and slovenly, his boots unlaced. He has a strip of whiskers round his face like a frill.

Mrs. Phinny sighs and groans, and moves in her sleep. Phinny eyes her. Goes stealthily to table, pours out a drink of the linament, and returns to his seat, sits with his back towards her.

Phinny (*sipping linament*).—A-h-h!

Norah opens eyes, raises her head, goes down, looks under bed. Pulls out crutch-stick, leans over, and pokes Phinny hard in the ribs.

Norah.—For who will veh be dthrinkin' me rubbin' mixture, yeh greedy gomon, yeh ?

Phinny (*bitterly*).—Lord shpare me from a dyin' woman.

Norah.—Gimme me pills, man !

Phinny (*at table gulps the last drop in the cup*).— The red wans, is it?

Norah.—Sorra's me, it is. (*Takes one, holds it up*.)— The red eyeballs of .the holy devil himself they are. (*Gulps it*.)

(*Phinny resumes his seat and his pipe. Norah chokes*.)

Norah (*gasping*).— Phinny, veh bla'guard!

Phinny.— Haven't yeh the shtick to push it down wid ?

Norah (*groaning*).— 'Tis dyin' I am this day. (Fiercely):—Will yeh not shtop yer shmoke ?

Phinny.— Better maybe if yid get used to at, Norah, me gurl.

Norah.— Yill be a widdy man before mornin', I'm thinkin'.

Phinny.— Tut-tut-tut!

Norah.— Wan never knows, but there's hopes iv it.

Phinny.— There is. I saw a black cat this morn, 'n' that's lucky.

Norah.— I'm goin'. See the fierce black, medicin' himself give me. Black is fer mournin'.

Phinny.—God help us iv'ry wan.

Norah.—I'm lavin' yeh, Phinny, 'n' you not fit t' lave a minute: 'n' there'll be me poor childer widout a mother, 'n' wid a father is a burden on himself, 'n' a poor, witless fool, Lord love him!

Phinny.—'Tis true what' ver savin'.

Norah.—What's a poor body t'' do wid yeh ? I'd lave yeh in me will was there a good, kind, motherly soul t' lave yeh to.

Phinny (*slyly*).— There's the Widdy Moran herself is down in the kitchen this minute

Norah (*raising herself*).— The Widdy Moran? The very one! Send for her. Quick, will yeh? Creepin' like a shlug, 'n' your poor wife passin' away.

Phinny (*calling*).—Mrs. Moran ' Mrs. Moran, ma'am! Herself is askin'.

(*Enter Bridget Moran, a neat woman of thirty*.)

Bridget.— 'N' are yeh no better at all?

Norah (*taking her hand*).—Nothin' but a dead woman is talkin' to veh, Mrs. Moran.

Bridget.—Tut-tut-tut ! Can comfort yer dyin' I will.

Norah (*wailing*). —Dyin' I am, 'n' there's me ten little pigs to be mothered, 'n' me silly ould man t' be done by, 'n' me little childer t' be washed 'n' mended.

Bridget. —Die aisy, ma'am. Die aisy. The livin' will care for thimselves.

Norah. —'N' how's a body t' die wid anv sat-isfaction, 'n' her childther nadin' a mother's hand wid the mischiff they're in day 'n' night? I'm sinkin' fast, ma'am. Look et the drugs gave me— black wid mournin'. Passin' t' the blessin's iv Paradise I am, 'n' lavin' himself, wan wid no head fer dealin' or management, will let the place go to the devil 'n' all. Will yeh be grantin' me last wish, Widdy Moran, ma'am? Will yeh wed wid me man whin I'm gone where I'm goin' ?

Bridget, (*looking at, Phinny, bracing herself up*).—I will, Mrs. Phinny—I will that. 'Tis contrary, t' me hopes 'n' dreams, but Bridget Moran's not the wan t' be denyin' the longins iv the dead—rest their souls!

Norah (*sharply*).—Martin Phinny, d'yeh mind I'm dyin', yeh crazy Omahdon?

Phinny (*casually, withdrawing pipe*).— I do, Norah, I mind it well.

Norah.— Well, then, will yeh wake up meanwhile, 'n' be thinkin' iv marryin' wid the,Widdy Moran when I'm gone— her t' bake, 'n' clane yeh, 'n' bake, 'n' clane, 'n' dthress me childther?

Phinny.— I will that, Norah, dear.

Norah.— Divil doubt, yeh, yeh bla'guard !

Phinny.— 'Tis a small thing t' do for the love I have yeh, me poor Norah.

Norah.— Then get ye together there be the sofy, 'n' begm yer courtin'.

Bridget.— Till never mind it, ma'am?

Norah (*impatiently*).— There no time to waste. Sit yeh down wid himself, ma'am. (*They sit together*.) Let me hear yeh be savin' the shweet wor-rds. Let yeh be squeezin' and kiss-in' be each other both. (*Phinny sits closer to Bridget,*

turns with, comical diffidence.) Sit yeh, round. Take ver dirthy pipe from yer ugly face, 'n' kiss the lady, poor body, (*Phinny puts his pipe out, and kisses Bridget at the back of her head. Bridget is cool and unconcerned*.) Ah-h, ye poor, shmall thrifler, yeh! 'N' fer what has a woman a face that vid be canood-lin' wid her back hair ? (*To Bridget*.)— Yill nade be givin' him much encouragement 'n' dthrawin' him out a great deal, ma' am.

Bridget (*taking his hand*).—Martin.

Norah.— Make it sthronger. Himself's no frisky rascal, 'n' niver was at all. Don't I know it. Kiss him in betwixt; 'n' caress him, will yeh, if it's not askin' too much ?

Bridget.—Dear Martin (*kisses his chin*).

Norah.—'Tis hard I know. But would veh. trate him same ez if he was a bearable man wid the fine bold eye to him, and the fine figure 'n' all.

Bridget (*kissing Phinny*).—I'll do best by yeh, Mrs. Phinny.

Norah.—Yer verry kind, ma'am, God bless yeh! Phinny, yeh poor, die-away gonoph, squeeze the lady !

Phinny (*to Norah*).—By your lave, ma'am. (*Arm about her, draws closer, kisses her hand*.)

Norah.— Look at that now. Would you think it was in him?

(*The two get very close and lover-like*.)

Phinny.— Ye have the ourty hair, Biddy, dear?

Bridget.— Have I that ? Go 'long wid veh !

hinny.— 'Tis like the new gold of a Queen's crown, so 'tis.

Bridget.— 'Tis a nate hand yell are wid a girrl, Martin boy.

Phinny.—Not so bad, ma'am—not so bad. (*Squeezes and kisses*.)

Norah. (*with misgiving*).— 'Tis very lifelike 'n' earnest yeh are. I believe ye mane well be me.

Bridget.— We do, ma'am, indeed (*both arms about Phinny's neck*).

Phinney.— There's a shmall waist fer yeh. Twice I'd go round it, 'n' divil a wance cud I go round Norah. (*Bridget starts up angrily, but subsides again*.) A man have no nade with more waist in a gir-rl than his arum will hold.

Bridget.— Thrue. Me owm man (rest his soul) had a fine likin' fer me figure, Martin.

Phinney.— 'Tis swate, 'n' nate, 'n' slim. Wid little to ut maybe 'tis swater shtill.

Bridget (*coyly*).—Go way wid yeh. 'Tis not proper talk to a lady.

Phinny.—Tush, ma'am, 'n' we near wid, waitin' only fer Norah t' be dyin'.

Norah (*aside*).—Yeh ould scoundrel!

Phinny.— 'N' don't I love yell, gir-el?

Bridget.— 'Tis'nt lovin' me ye are— not rale lovin' 'n' longin' ?

Phinny.— Lovin' you, is it. Don't I be lovin' you bether, 'n' sthronger, 'n' braver than iver woman was loved be ragin' 'n' tearin' Hercules, 'r be man iv any kind, giant or shmall.

Bridget.— Martin, darlin' !

Phinny.— Bridget, Mavourneen !

(*Norah is staring at them in wonder, her agitation growing. She is half sitting up, but they no longer pay any attention to her*.)

Bridget.— Yer a fine man yerself, Martin.

Phinny.— 'N' yer no woman at all, ridget, but a wee, shweet fairy, 'n' I find a great glory in the kissin' yeh.

Norah (aside).—Did iver mortal hear the like iv it ?

Phinny.— Niver did I have kiss iv woman be-fore wid the honey in it.

Bridget.—'N' yill give me a fine weddin', darlin?

Phinny.— The best gould can buy.

Bridget.— 'N' a great white cake fer me breakfast?

Phinny.— Covered wid cemint.

Bridget — 'N' orange blossoms fer me dthress ? Phinny.—Begob ! yill not have jist orange blossoms to ut--rale oranges I'll give yeh.

Bridget:— I love yeh, Martin, wid me whole heart.

Phinny.— 'N' whoi not— haven't I loved you this manny a day?

Norah (*aside*).— Ho, ho ! Have yeh, then?

Bridget.— Me likin's not new nayther.

Norah (*aside*).— Look at that ! (*She is working up in a burst of fury*.)

Phinny.— I'd be married this minute, but herself's a shlow one dyin'— none shlower.

Bridget.— Yid not hurry the poor body?

Phinny.— Not I— the mornin' will do me well.

Bridget.— The avenin' iv to-morrow, annyway.

Phinny.— I'd have her finish her medcin' before goin'— 'tis dear stuff it is. Would we have herself buried first, or would the weddin' go forem'ost ?

Bridget.—I dunno. 'Twould be as well maybe.

Phinny.—Except we combined the two, stoppin' the funeral at the church, 'n' havin' the weddin' over, 'n' then hurrvin' on wid the buryin'.

Bridget.—'N' drivin' straight home in the mournin' carriage.

Phinny (*sighing*).—'Tis a pity thim undertaker's horses is so slow.

Bridget.—So it is.

Phinny:—We'll be long gettin' home. 'N' we two married, lovin' ez we do.

Bridget—Lovin' 'n' longin'. (They kiss, and hang on.)

(Norah's feelings have become too much for her. She picks up the stick, slips out of bed, and fetches Phinny a lick on the head that leaves him dazed. She beats Bridget. Bridget screams.)

Norah (*yelling*).—'Out iv me house, veh onda-cent woman iv Babbling, yeh ! (To Phinny.)— Release her, yeh smoodgin', canoodlin', thriphey Don June ! Are yeh goin', me fine lady (*Hits Bridget*.)

Bridget (*dodging her*).—Oh, ma'am, Mrs. Phinny, is it mad yev clean gone, 'n' you dyin' this minute ?

Norah.—Dyin', ma'am, dyin'? Don't flatter yerself. I've no intintion of doin' the like, though much yid wish it, thavin' away a woman's husband on her! (*Beats her*.)

Bridget (*weeping*).—Didn't veh ax me to have him ? Wasn't I doin' yeh a kindness, offerin' t' clane him, 'n' bake 'n' cook him, 'n' the childther, too? What, d' yeh mane be such misconduct 'n' murder ?

Norah (*shaking her stick, storming*).—I mane, ma'am, I've changed me moind 'n' wid your lave. I'll clane him mesilf, 'n' bake him mesilf, 'n' so good-day to you.

(*Dashes at Bridget, who runs out, pursued by Norah*.)

Curtain falls. Sounds of great beating heard, cries of anguish from Phinny. The curtain rises after a few seconds, disclosing Phinny in Norah's bed, with bandages round his head, and Norah, wrapped in the rug, sitting where he first sat, comfortably smoking his short clay pipe.

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24: A Property Deal

(Which is nevertheless a story of love and cunning, with casual goblins thrown in.)

(As by Dy Edwardson)

Punch (Melbourne) 13 Aug 1914

FRANK WRILE was twenty-six, and lived for the moment; Mr. Henry Strand was sixty two, and gave much consideration to the morrow. A man looks to the future when he hasn't any.

Frank Wrile's vast unconcern with regard to the days to come, rainy or otherwise, gave Mr. Henry Strand no little concern. Cause why? Frank Wriles was doing his utmost to engage himself to Mr. Strand's daughter, Ada, and Ada seemed rather inclined to be an aider and abettor of the improvident Mr. Wriles.

True, the young man was fairly well off. He had an income of at least £1,100 a year; but it was derived from mining stock, and as a man of the world, and one who had seen many shifts and changes of fortune, Mr. Strand had no great faith in the lasting qualities of an income derived from mining stock.

The late lamented James Wriles, father of the said Henry Wriles, having certain definite ideas of his son's irresponsiblity, and his frivolous methods of finance, and great faith in the future of the New Big Hills Mining Company's property, had left Henry the income from the Big Hills shares; but had thoughtfully deprived him of the power to sell, so that Henry's fortune was irretrievably bound up with the fortune of the New Big Hills Mine, and Mr. Strand, affectionate father of Ada Strand, thought the Big Hills mine might be worked out one of these days.

Fathers of sixty-two will discover a certain amount of sound sense in the reluctance of Henry Strand to hand his daughter over to Mr. Frank Wrile; sons of wenty-six will think him a nervous old curmudgeon.

"I should not mind, my dear," said Mr. Strand to Miss Strand, "if the boy showed any ability."

"Oh, pa, he waltzes lovely."

"Confound it, Ada, do you want to be dependent for a crust on a confounded dancing master?"

"He's a good rider, too. And I'm sure no one can handle motor better than Frank."

"To be sure, if the worst comes, he may fend off starvation as a steeplechase jockey, till he breaks his precious neck over a stone wall; or he may provide you with bread and treacle as a chauffeur at £3 a week, till he runs his singularly empty head against a telegraph post, as he nearly ran mine a week ago No, my dear, that young fellow will habe to show me there's something more in him that the capabilities of a third-class dancing m!aster

and a fifth-class chauffeur— labelled dangerous— before I can willingly trust your future into his hands.''

"Oh, bother my future!"

"Better bother your future than have your future bother you; and that's what I foresee. Has the boy ever earned a penny in his life? Let him prove to me that he can earn, say, a couple of hundred pounds off his own bat, and I may change my mind."

When Ada put her parent's views before Frank that cheerful young gentleman was little disturbed.

"This comes of letting your old people go to picture shows," he said. "They have the old such romantic notions. I've seen half-a-dozen films lately in which Her pa wanted him to sail in, and prove his powers as a money-maker before handing out the usual formula— 'Bless you, my children.' If I had my way no one over fifty would be admitted to picture shows. Fortunately, it doesn't matter much in this case— we shall just have to save pa the wear and tear of giving consent and bestowing blessings."

"How, dear ?."

"By dispensing with non-essentials. By marrying without."

"Oh, no, no, no,, no ! You mustn't think of it. I won't. I won't."

And she wouldn't. Frank was compelled to admit after a fortnight's trial that she really wouldn't.

"Very well," said Mr. Frank Wrile, "I'll humour the old boy. I'll earn a hundred. I don't know just how just yet; but give a man air, allow my mind elbow room, I'm settling back to think."

Mr. Strand fixed the sum at £400 when Ada (and abettor) brought the parties together to arrive at a definite understanding.

"Make £400, make it how you like, by business, speculation, work, any way you please, only show me it's your own doing, and I'll probably relent. Meanwhile you and my daughter are mere acquaintances."

"Of course it's all frantically absurd and wildly unreasonable," said Frank. "Why should I be set to earn money when I've got a lot of Johnnies busy making it for me? But if you insist, of course, I'll get this four hundred. It'll be useful, I dare say— four hundred often is— and I must have Ada anyhow.''

So Frank took elbow-room for his giant intellect, and plunged into the mysteries of finance, high and low, He thought of taking a job as a chauffeur, but found it would take him at least 20 years to earn the money stipulated. Then he bought a motor for £300, and tried to sell it to a Hebrew blind in one eye for £500. But, as I have said, the Hebrew gentleman was only blind in one eye, and eventually he got the motor for £250. This left Frank £50 to the bad. He did not mention that transaction to Mr. Strand.

"It wouldn't interest the old fellow," he said.

"But it proves you can sell motor-cars, doesn't it?" said Ada.

ABOUT A WEEK after this the rumour that "Arcadia" was haunted began to get about the suburb. People were talking of the wraith that had been seen through the front window by three responsible citizens, one a J .P., and quite a dozen witnesses could be found who had heard "The Noises."

"The Noises" were the chief items in the haunting of "Arcadia" villa. The presiding ghost or ghosts were featuring noises— peculiar, long, low, dismal noises, with here and there a distinguishable word, but no intelligible sentence. It was as if a choking spook were trying to voice its agony, and give the assassin away.

Now, "Arcadia" was owned by Mr. Henry Strand, and Mr. Strand had been drawing £2:5:0 a week rent for years. The former tenant had not complained of ghosts, and suspicion had attached itself to the place only during the period in which the villa was uninhabited. Mr. Strand himself had heard "The Noises.'' Peeping through the front window at night, he had seen in the Haunted Bedroom something he could not quite explain— the passing of lone, pale, trailing presence in the darkness, a Something the vulgar ahd superstitious might easily have mistaken for a true ghost.

Mr. Strand was reluctantly compelled to reduce his rent to £1:15:0 to accommodate a bold person who declared he cared little for man or devil. The new tenant moved in on Monday. He moved out on Friday.

"Like your infernal impudence, sir," he said to Strand, "begulin' a nan's family into a dashed hotbed of blasted spooks. Had my three daughters in hysterics for three nights running with your beggaring ghosts dripping moisture and exuding germs all over the place, and last night my wife had a fit across my chest in bed, sir, and, let me tell you, my wife weighs 17 stone, sir!"

"I'm sorry— I'm very sorry," replied Straad; "but you don't imagine for one moment I keen these ghosts, or goblins, or what the deuce ever they are, about the place for my amusement."

"I don't care a dump what you keep them for if you'll only keep 'em to yourself, sir. Dashed, damp, nasty things trailing over a man's face in his sleep. Horrible dying noises round one place, piling one's daughters in heaps of hysterics. Demmed if I haven't half a mind to sue you for damages, sir."

That tenant left; but before going he allowed himself to be interviewed by a newspaper man, and the tale he told fixed "Arcadia's" reputation as a haunted home.

The tenant had heard strange noises at night. An occasional word like "Blood," or "Death," or "Help" was distinguishable, but the sentence was-

smothered in a horrible, gurgling cry. The tenant's wife had heard this, so had the tenant's daughters. Furthermore, the tenant and the tenant's wife had been awakened in the dark, early and awful hours by the trailing of dank draperies across their faces, and had seen a sort of pale, ghostly shapelessness disappear in the darkness.

"Arcadia" was suddenly notorious. People flocked from adjoining suburbs to look at the haunted house. They augmented the crowds of local residents who gathered in the street at night and watched at a respectful distance in a state of delirious tremor, expecting ghostly manifestations. In any such crowd you might easily have found a score ready to swear they had seen a ghost, and had heard its blood-curdling maunderings.

Once when a party of three ventured to the window of the Haunted Bedroom they actually saw the pale shapeliness, and heard "The Noises." They fled pell-mell, and two rushing over the third, who had fallen in the gateway, trod, on him so severely that two ribs were broken, and his nose, was never again the ornamental organ it had been.

When the house had been empty eight weeks, Henry Strand was a willing listener to a city agent who called with talk of a buyer. Bellweather, the proposed buyer, was a man interested in psychological research. He was buying solely because he desired to possess a ghost, and to be in a position to study ghostly habits and customs at first hand.

Naturally Mr. Strand did not stick out for a fancy price. He was glad to have the haunted villa off his hands, and actually accepted £1,075. Bellweather, the new resident, shifted into "Arcadia"— a tall, dark gentleman in dingy black, who had the quaint similarity to an improvident undertaker that seems to go with specialists of the sort. Within a week he expressed himself a. bitterly disappointed man.

"You have deceived me," he said. "You have perpetrated an imposition— a fraud. There is no ghost in 'Arcadia'. I don't believe there ever was a ghost."

"Well, Mrs. Strand mildly remonstrated. "I did not really sell you a ghost. I did not guarantee a ghost."

"Nevertheless, you knew I was buying this place on a definite understanding that a ghost went with it. I have been deceived, defrauded. I shall write to the papers!"

Bellweather did write to the papers, making an elaborate'exposure of r'he fatuous story of the alleged ghosts at "Arcadia". He even scoffed at "The Noises." There were no more noises than the wind made in a couple; of peculiarly constructed drain pipes, and the only trailing draperies that crossed his face were casual cool draughts from an ill-placed ventilator.

"Arcadia's" reputation fled as quickly as it had been raised. Within two months its condition in the real-estate market was normal again, and a good, commonplace tenant who had succeeded Bellweather was paying two pounds a week.

Then Frank Wrile made a special business call on Mr Strand.

"I want to fix the date of my marriage with Ada," he said, "and arrange the little preliminaries "

"Yes," replied Mr. Strand with a trace of sarcasm. "You have made that £400, of course."

"Don't let us talk about it, Mr. Strand. A mere trifle."

"Oh, but we shall talk about it. Four hundred, I said."

"So you did. I almost wish you had made it £4,000. I should have been so much the better off."

"Do you mean to tell me you have made £400?"

"I do. I made it in one single deal. I could grin at the importance you business men attach to the simple gift of money-making."

"What was the deal?"

"A house and land transaction. I bought the villa, 'Arcadia,' for £1,075. I have been offered £1,500 for it."

"You bought 'Arcadia'?"

"Yes, with a little assistance from one of the financial institutions. However, the profit is all mine— £425."

"I want proof of this. Proof, too, that there is a buyer at £1,500."

Frank furnished the necessary proofs, and Mr. Strand admitted— "You seem to have scored. I will take one week for meditation and prayer before going further."

FRANK showed Ada how he had managed it all.

"Arcadia" was next to his own house. With the aid of a length of garden hose tucked into a ventilator, and used as a talking-tube, he had simulated "The Noises." With the assistance of a ladder and a roof-light he had gained the ceiling, and worked the piece of cheese-cloth that served as a spectre through a hole dug behind a cornice in the ceiling. Bellweather was merely a hired assistant in the scheme.

"To make a pile in the real estate market you just knock down values and buy, then boost up values and sell," he said. "That's what I did with 'Arcadia." The ghost dodge was the easiest way to bring down the price. I'll work the idea on big lines if, as your father seems to think probable, I'm ever compelled to earn a crust."

Ada did not seem to like the idea too well. She told pa all about it.

When Frank called for a definite reply, Mr. Strand had it ready for him.

"There's the door, young man," he said. "My daughter is going abroad for a year. She does not want to see you again."

"But your promise," wailed Frank. "I've made the four hundred."

"Oh, dear, no. You see, I intended giving that villa, 'Arcadia,' as a wedding present to my daughter, so that instead of making £425 you would, if you married Ada, be losing £1,075, the price you gave for it. I could never entrust my daughter's future to such a bungler. Good day!"

25: The Washerwoman of Jacker's Flat

The Bulletin, 21 Dec 1889

THE EXTREME disparity in the number of male and female denizens of Jacker's Flat was a source of sore discontent to the former. That refining influence which fair women are said to exert over rude mankind was a long-felt want, as, out of a population of twelve hundred and odd, only nine were of the feminine gender. Four of the ladies were mated— a reverential regard for beautiful truth forbids us saying married— and stultified the glorifying womanly attribute to a great extent by persisting in a course of intemperance, and rarely appearing abroad, excepting under the stimulus of rum. Deduct from the five of the softer sex who remain unallied so to speak, three under the age of six, and that the malcontent of the men was a rational grievance becomes patent to the meanest understanding. It has been said that where women and children are few, men of affectionate natures lavish their surplus sentiment on the lower animals. This characteristic did not prevail on the Flat— indeed, experience has taught us that there, as elsewhere, men so circumstanced invariably cleave to the intoxicating cup and abandon themselves to the seductive wiles of euchre, crib, and Yankee-grab.

The few dogs of the camp were lean and debilitated, of a furtive habit, and noted for their agility in dodging missiles; the cats were unkempt and fearful, and much disposed to abandon civilisation for the joys of a wild, free life on Mount Miamia; but there was not a pack of cards or a dice-box on that flat that did not bear unmistakeable traces of good handling and long attention, and Monkey Bill, otherwise Mr. William Monk, the local publican, had no just cause to complain that the worshippers at the shrine of the god set up in his temple, "The Pick and Barrow," were wanting in numbers or in religious zeal. However, these joys are vain and meagre substitutes for the companionship of lovely woman, and small wonder that the sign-board hung out before the new tent down the creek should excite pleasurable anticipations in the susceptible breasts of the local bachelors. The sign itself, apart from its terseness and the originality of its orthography, was not an object of the deepest interest, for it was merely the bottom of a candle-box, on which had been inscribed with a ball of blue, in large, irregular capitals, that staggered across the board at independent angles, two words, "WASHING DID."

Nor was the eloquent message which this laconic advertisement was intended to convey calculated to carry any great amount of satisfaction to the masculine soul, for, if truth *must* prevail, the negligent diggers seldom had any washing to be "did," as many of them, reckless in the pride of big yields, utterly abandoned a "rig-out" when once its appearance called very loudly for soap

and water. Others acknowledged but one limit to the time an article might be retained in wear without washing, and that was regulated by the durability of the garment in question. Economy commended this latter usage, and it was most popular. No, the sign had a deeper, a more sacred import to the lone diggers; it announced a very welcome addition to the one-sided population, and signified— A WOMAN. What style and condition of woman she would prove was the subject of earnest speculation in Monkey Bill's canvas bar on the evening following the first appearance of the placard.

"I hope t' goodness she ain't hitched," moodily remarked a long, angular man with a phenomenal growth of red hair and whiskers, who was revelling in the luxury of twist tobacco and raw brandy— a combination which seemed to suit his taste, as the "quid" was never removed to make way for the liquor, each pull at the pannikin being preceded, however, by mechanical and voluminous expectoration. The observation was greeted with derisive laughter.

"Anyhow, you won't stand a show, Bender; I'll bet a cabbage-tree you're the ugliest man from Home!" observed Dick Freen, with refreshing candour. "You've got no luck, old Frightful. Don't forget the time when you smiled at Martin's daughter on Bendigo and made her horse bolt."

"I don't, I don't, Dick," said Bender, as calmly as if he had been paid a flowery compliment; "I ain't built to please horses— and asses; but ladies is different; some of them takes to ugliness!"

And the speaker resumed his mastication with an air of supreme complacence, and passed his hand feelingly over his nose, which organ had been badly battered by a blow from a shovel in an encounter with a "jumper" at Deadman's Rush in '52, and afforded no contrast to his natural facial deformities, which were many and various.

"For my part, I'd rather she were married," observed a tall, rather handsome, young fellow, conspicuous by reason of his immaculate rig-out, who was sitting on a bush table. "Young, you know, and married to a beautiful youth like Bender!"

"Well, supposin' her boss does happen t' be anythin' like Joe Bender?" replied that gentleman, evidently nettled by the other's sneer. "Supposin' he is; if he ever catches you sneakin' round his tent he'll knock yer stiff for a blessed crawler! That's what Joe Bender 'ud do, me Honorable John, an' you'd best make a note of it, case y' forget!"

The Honorable John laughed lightly, and, turning his back on the group, entered into conversation with a digger who was drinking alone in the shadowy part of the tent. In common with every other man on the Flat, he believed that it was not advisable to go too far with Mr. Bender, who (like every other man with a broken nose) had quite a reputation as a "slogger." He

was known to have knocked out Black Anderson after a tightly-contested battle of twenty-seven rounds at Specimen Hill one Sunday afternoon, and was, although rather proud of his unique ugliness, prepared to instantly resent any derisive levity, especially if it emanated from a person like the Honorable John, whose well-greased wellingtons, careful shave, and neatly-arranged curls, earned the contempt of four-fifths of the miners.

John Blake could not have been more scrupulous about the set of his Crimean shirt, the arrangement of his silk sash and tie, or the curl of his moustache, had the township boasted a large assortment of fair maids instead of being limited to so meagre a female population. With the few women at hand, however, he was on the very best of terms. "I'm of good family, and a gentleman, by G— !" was his stock boast. The community accepted the statement in good faith, and dignified him with the title of "Honorable."

The man who was drinking alone in the dark corner was Mr. Stephen Bacon. It was a peculiarity of Mr. Bacon's that when he was drinking, in which agreeable recreation he passed most of his spare time, he loved to sit in the shanty, as far out of sight as possible, and drink alone— a particularly detestable characteristic in the eyes of the average digger.

Mr. Bacon was a widower of three years' standing, and he drank, it was stated, to drown the grief occasioned by the loss of his wife. What terrible woe gnawed at his vitals and gave rise to an insatiable thirst for brandy previous to the demise of that lamented lady was never known, but that it was intense and irrevocable is proven by the knowledge that Stephen's unremitting but ineffectual endeavours to drown some secret sorrow in large quantities of ardent spirit had been the main factor in bringing his still young but broken-hearted spouse to her grave. After that sad event Mr. Bacon was able to start afresh and found his thirst on a tangible grievance. As an evidence of the enormous quantity of alcohol a settled sorrow can withstand, it may be mentioned that Steve Bacon had not exhaled a breath untainted with brandy for many years. He and "Mite" Power had "struck it" in a hole below the bend, but Monkey Bill "cleaned him out" pretty effectually before each sluicing-day came round. Every night saw him in the shanty, where he would sit and absorb grog till his hair became moist and clung to his temples in clammy rings, and the perspiration oozed from his forehead in large beads. At this stage he was wont to weep great tears of fusel-oil, and call upon his dead wife in lugubrious tones, or chummer over his sorrow with drunken dolorousness, till he was warned off by the forcible curses of the company, or unceremoniously ejected by a disgusted digger— whereupon he would stagger to his canvas residence and reassert his manliness by knocking his only child down and kicking her for falling.

Cecilia Bacon, known on the Flat as "Cis.," was about seventeen, slight and pale, with very fair hair, and large, frightened eyes of a light-blue tint. Her whole bearing was one of excessive timidity. Of a shrinking, retiring disposition, imagining herself a burden to her besotted sire, since the death of her mother her life had been a joyless one. She was not an interesting girl, never associated with the other females of the camp, and thought she had but one friend in the world— the Honorable John. He was very kind; he overcame her bashfulness, walked and talked with her, and being interested in the daughter was gracious to the father. Often and again had that sallow, fragile, awkward girl stolen into the shanty after midnight to guide the eccentric footsteps of her drunken parent to his tent, fearing he might stray into some abandoned hole and break his worthless neck if left to come home alone, and almost as often had she been heartily kicked for her pains.

The fair lady whose condescension in shedding the lustre of her charms on Jacker's Flat had awakened tender anticipations in the breasts of the forlorn bachelors of that encampment by her preliminary announcement, made her first public appearance on the following evening at Monk's hostelry. The usual brilliant assemblage was gathered together in the "bar" of that elegant establishment, engaged in the usual convivial pursuits, when universal attention was suddenly withdrawn from cards, dice, and brandy by the entrance of a stranger.

An apparition would not have been more startling. A coarse skirt alone betokened the stranger's sex; she wore a man's black slouch hat, which bore palpable traces of having seen long service "below," and was trimmed with a narrow leather belt; she smoked a highly-coloured meerschaum pipe, the bouquet of which eloquently testified its strength; she had on a short guernsey buttoned up the front like a coat, whose sleeves, rolled to the elbow, betrayed an arm that might have graced a navvy; her hair was cropped short, and bristled almost six feet from the floor. Fleshy, broad-shouldered, and straight as a sapling, her hands thrust into the pockets on either side of her skirt with an air of aggressive manliness, the new washerwoman strolled into the room and up to the counter, coolly oblivious of the impression she had created. In a strong, masculine voice she ordered "stout." Mr. Monk could scarcely express his sorrow— he had no stout— didn't keep it.

The lady calmly anathematised his eyes, cleverly lumped his soul, shanty, and immediate relatives, in a brief but comprehensive curse, and "made it gin."

The gin was satisfactory. Then she replaced her pipe, after throwing off the "nobbler" with scientific abruptness, thrust her hands into her side-pockets once more, and, lounging against the counter in a devil-may-care, intensely-mannish attitude, boldly surveyed the company.

Everything about the woman bespoke her manly sentiments. Those skirt-pockets were a brazen plagiarism of the refuges for idle hands in the nether habiliments of the lords of creation, and her upper lip bore unmistakeable traces of an earnest endeavour to grow a moustache; even her distorted nose seemed to suggest the pugnacious male.

Monkey Bill's patrons were astounded; they gazed at the washerwoman and at each other in grave surprise, and continued playing their hands with unwonted solemnity. Bender alone seemed capable of grasping the situation, and, after concluding the game in which he was engaged, left his seat and advanced to the new-comer with outstretched hand.

"Brummy Peters!"

"What! Bender?"

"That same."

"Well, I'm —!"

After a hearty, hail-fellow-well-met sort of greeting, Bender ventured the query:

"Well, Brummy, how's things?"

To which the lady replied that things were very slow indeed, emphasising the assertion with an ejaculation only admissible in the pulpit, and informed Bender, in a casual way, that Peters was no more.

Mr. Bender did not seem to think himself called upon to exhibit very violent grief over this sad intelligence; he merely remarked:

"You and Peters weren't spliced, were you?"

One might think that the palpable indelicacy of this question would have affected the lady to anger; but no, it touched only her pride.

"Spliced!" she ejaculated, and all the scorn she felt for that feminine weakness was apparent in her voice. "Devil a fear! We just chummed in."

Further conversation revealed the fact that the late Mr. Peters, whilst under the influence of blended liquors, had fallen into a puddling-machine at Bendigo, a lamentable accident which was only made apparent some time later, when bones, buttons, boots, and other distinguishing features turned up in the sluice-boxes. Mr. Peters' chum, who had been accorded her mate's surname and sobriquet as a humble tribute to her superior manliness, was then thrown upon her own resources— and there she was at Monkey Bill's bar.

Mr. Bender introduced the latest acquisition to the assembled gentlemen as "Brummy Peters," insinuating, with some judicious profanity, that she was a splendid fellow, and had vanquished a reputable pugilist in her time. After which the lady took a hand at crib, and succeeded in winning several pounds, and establishing her reputation as "a good sort of a chap" before the night was spent.

Three months passed by, and Jacker's Flat still maintained its not over-numerous population. The yields, though good enough to keep its pioneers hanging on, were not sufficiently exciting to attract strangers from a distance, and if few had departed less had arrived. Amongst the former was the Honorable John— that gentleman, "by G— ," having furled his tent by night and silently stolen away, without taking the trouble to afford his numerous creditors an opportunity of bidding him a fond farewell. Brummy Peters, by which inelegant appellation the Amazonian laundress became generally known, was a frequent visitor at Monkey Bill's establishment, where she placidly puffed at her meerschaum, dashed off an occasional brandy, called down dire eternal penalties on the urbane host for omitting stout from his stock-in-trade, and engaged in various games of cards and Yankee-grab with so natural an air of manly bravado that her chosen associates at length quite overcame the diffidence that the presence of a woman had occasioned, and comported themselves with their accustomed easy freedom, no longer pausing to select their oaths with an eye to gentility or style, or being deterred by gallantry from raising a row when all didn't seem fair, square, and above-board at the card-table. In fact, since Brummy acted as bottle-holder for Treen, when he and Barney Ryan settled their little difference in a fifteen-round mill, and displayed her signal ability to fulfil that honourable and responsible office, the men had quite disburdened their minds of the impression that she was a woman, and now looked upon her as one of themselves, a compliment for which she was duly grateful. Certainly, Bender was frequently chaffed about his intimacy with Brummy, between him and whom there existed a friendship; but the inferences of these jokes were so preposterous, and the jokers themselves were palpably so cognisant of the absurdity, that Mr. Bender could receive the chaff with as good grace as if, for instance, he had been facetiously accused of an intention of leading his mate, Dick Treen, to the altar. Mrs. Peters did not consort with the others of her sex at the camp, but in the unwholesome-looking daughter of Mr. Stephen Bacon she displayed a sort of fraternal interest, which moved her to tow that lugubrious inebriate from the shanty to his tent on divers occasions in a manner at once unceremonious and emphatic.

The washerwoman had adorned the locality with her rather massive charms for the space of about ten months, when one dark night, deterred by the rain from making her usual visit to the "Pick and Barrow," as she sat on an inverted tub in her cosy tent, her hands deep in her side-pockets, her back against the bunk, her feet thrust out towards the fire that raged up the small sod chimney, and the inevitable meerschaum in her lips (manly even in her solitude), a light, quick step was heard without, the flap of the tent was drawn

aside, and Cecilia Bacon, whiter, more wretchedly woe-begone and desolate-looking a thousand times than was her wont— and she was white and woe-begone at her best— staggered into the tent. Her head was bare, her thin flaxen hair, sopping wet, clung to her face and neck; and the rain dripped from the poor skirt that was drawn up to shield a tiny object feebly wailing at her breast.

Brummy started up, her beloved meerschaum, the object of a year's tender solicitude, fell, unheeded, and was broken on the clay floor. She caught the reeling girl in her arms, and laid her on the bunk, tenderly took the babe from the wet skirt, wrapped dry things of her own about the feeble atom of humanity, and laid it on a 'possum rug by the fire.

After which she turned her attention to the young woman, and without a word proceeded to divest her of her soddened garments and dry her reeking hair. Brummy was a woman now, with all a good woman's gentleness, compassion, and quick perception. She showed neither surprise nor curiosity, but proceeded quietly and quickly with her work; and when the girl, revived by the warmth and the spirit that was forced between her lips, began to moan and cry, she soothed her with pitiful words in a soft, low voice that proved how vain had been the long years of wild, rough life and harsh associations to embitter the soul within.

Cecilia's story was soon told. The Honorable John was the father of her child; he had deserted her without a consideration, without a word. After the birth, fearful of meeting her father, she had left her tent, intending to crawl to the creek and drown herself and her child; but when the black waters lay at her feet she had not the courage to take the leap, and, after wandering about the bush in the wind and rain, distracted with misery and fear, she sought the washerwoman's tent. "Because," she said, "you saved me from him when you could." And starting up, she continued wildly: "He will kill me! I am sure of it! My father will kill me when he knows!"

"No, no," murmured the woman, compassionately; "don't you fear; I will watch you."

"You do not know him," hoarsely whispered the young mother. "You do not know how terrible he is at times. He has threatened me with a pick over and over. He will do it now. Hadn't I far better have gone into the creek with my baby? My blood would not have been on my father's head then, but on his— its father's. Father is drinking again, and he will kill me!"

"Hush! hush! and rest now. If you can, go back to your tent early in the morning. Your father is drinking; he will notice nothing— tell him nothing. Leave your baby with me; I will care for it. Nobody will kill me!" And Mrs.

Peters squared her great shoulders, and thrust her hands into her pockets, with her old assumption of manliness. "No one will kill me, I think!"

The habitués of the "Pick and Barrow" were astounded, mystified, amazed, and virtuously indignant when on the night following the incidents related above Dick Treen entered Monk's bar with the intelligence that "Brummy Peters had got a kid!"

The shock conveyed by the news was general, and confounded the miners. They gazed open-mouthed and dumb. A hurt and resentful feeling succeeded. They had been imposed upon— their confidence had been outraged. To think that Brummy Peters, who had overawed them with her muscle and manly assurance, and hoodwinked them with side-pockets and a billycock hat, was as frail as the frailest of her sex— a weak, wayward woman after all! It was a violation of all their finest sentiments. "And she threw me, Cumberland and Durham style, best three out of five!" murmured a brawny Geordie, in a bated whisper, only now feeling the full force of his degradation. Strangely enough all eyes focussed on Mr. Joseph Bender, who blushed like a school-girl under the concerted gaze, and toyed uneasily with his dislocated nose.

Gradually the look of consternation on the faces of the assemblage gave place to a broad grin, which presently extended to a wild guffaw, and thirty accusing fingers were pointed at the now furious Bender.

"Here, look here, you fellers!" he roared, dashing his glass upon the floor and drawing his sleeves back from his great, knotted fist. "This is too thunderin' stiff, y'know! The first man ez says I've anythin' t'do with that youngster 'll get smashed! Now, notice!"

Nobody spoke, but everybody laughed, and the accusing fingers still pointed. Mr. Bender lingered for a moment on the point of running amok and wreaking his vengeance on all and sundry, but thought better of it, pulled his hat over his eyes, and strode out, his soul a prey to angry passions and injured innocence.

Mrs. Peters fed the child by artificial means; she procured a cunningly-designed bottle and tubes, and went regularly to the station homestead, at the foot of Miamia, for milk. The diggers regarded this conduct with an unfavourable eye; they supposed it to be another display of anti-feminine sentiment, and nothing that Brummy might do now could make them forget that she was a woman— she had forfeited all her rights as a man and a brother irretrievably. She visited the shanty occasionally, and endeavoured to maintain her old footing, but the men preserved a studied coolness, and Curly Hunt even went so far as to suggest that she be summarily ejected; but that perky little individual was brought to a sudden repentance by being knocked over a

bench and thrown bodily through the calico window by the ireful washerwoman.

Brummy appeared to be very fond of the child, but Bender was frequently accused of displaying a criminal lack of parental affection.

Since the arrival of the little stranger the demeanour of this gentleman had undergone a painful change. He had grown moody and furtive; the banter of his companions drove him furious; to be regarded as the father of Brummy's child was bitter gall. Given any other woman, and he might have accepted the imputation with some complacency, but Brummy— Brummy Peters, with her side-pockets, ready fist, and strong meerschaum— it was too much. He determined to vindicate his character, and clear his name of the tender impeachment at any cost.

With this object in view he developed amateur-detective proclivities, and kept a zealous eye on the laundry.

The baby was just a month old, when one night the homely Mr. Bender burst into the "Pick and Barrow" (which, by the way, he had avoided of late), his face radiant, and the ejaculation of an ancient philosopher on his lips.

"Eureka! I've struck it, boys!" he cried triumphantly.

"What? The reef?" exclaimed the men with one voice— there having been some prospecting for a reef on the high ground.

"Reef be d—! No; proofs that you fellers're a lot of blamed asses as've been barkin' up th' wrong tree!" The representation of a lot of asses barking up a tree was certainly not a strikingly felicitous illustration; but Bender was too excited to be precise in small matters. He continued:

"See here, with all yer infernal jaw an' cheek, that kid ain't Brummy's, after all."

"Not Brummy's!"— and great excitement.

"No 'taint. It's his daughter's!"

But, despite Bender's circumspection, Mr. Bacon had heard, and he advanced into the light, the big tears stealing down his cheeks and his favourite look of unutterable woe overspreading his bloated face.

"Whose child did you say, Mr. Bender, sir?" he queried, in tones of deep bathos.

"Nobody's! Go to blazes, snufflebuster! This ain't no business of yours!"

Stephen Bacon retired again to his shades to indulge his lachrymose propensities and sorrow over his brandy, and Bender related in a low voice how, by keeping an eye on Brummy's establishment, noting Cis's frequent visits, and putting this and that together, he had arrived at the conclusion that was to prove him innocent of the delicate peccadillo insinuated against him. Mr. Bacon's settled sorrow was very distressing that night, and he was

subsequently ejected amidst a shower of tears, dolefully calling upon his late lamented wife to come back and comfort his declining years; but that lady, doubtless retaining a lively remembrance of the weight of his fist and the force of his foot, failed to respond.

Next morning being Sunday, an off-day, quite a number of the miners, who were indulging in a game of quoits, and others who were sunning themselves and smoking on the grass, indolent and uninterested spectators, were disturbed by sounds of a row at the tent of their laundress, and as the public interest of the Flat centred for the time in that domicile, the loungers leisurely arose, the contestants dropped their quoits, and all strolled across to the tent. Mrs. Peters was standing with her back to the entrance, her lips were tightly compressed, and there was an awed, sorrowful expression in her face that the men had never seen there before. She held the baby in her arms, in quite a matronly fashion, and calmly faced Mr. Stephen Bacon, who was bordering on sobriety, and whose settled sorrow was subordinated for the time to unreasoning rage.

"You've got my girl here!" he yelled, gracefully turning the sentence with several euphonious curses, and brandishing the pick-handle he held in his hand.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Peters, quietly; "she's in the tent."

"Well, I want her. D—n you! I want her. I've 'eard your little game. It's all up! She got away from me last night, but I'll have her now!"

"She got further away than you think, Steve Bacon; but you can have her."

"You don't want t' see no girl with that in yer fist," said Bender, who had come up with the others, snatching the pick-handle from his grasp.

"And yer want t' be carm, y' know, 'cause if yer hurt yer girl when I'm near, I'll spread y' out quick."

"He can't hurt her," added Brummy. "Come in. Don't go away, boys; she'd like to see y' all. Jest come up and look in."

The men who had turned away, thinking the girl would doubly feel her shame if upbraided in their presence, startled by the tone in which the request was made, went back. Brummy held the flap of the tent aside, and they all looked in.

"Great God! Dead?"

Yes, the pale, slight, awkward girl, scarcely paler in death, her large, light-blue eyes fixed with the frightened expression that had characterised them in life, lay dead upon Brummy's bunk, and from the spare flaxen hair, and the long thin hand, and the points of her clothing, hanging over the side, pools of water had dripped to the floor.

"Yes, she's dead!" said Mrs. Peters, the tears on her lashes belying her harsh tones. "Drowned! I found her body in the shallow water near the bank when I went to the dam this morning. This is your work, Joe Bender."

"No! No! For Lord's sake don't say that!!"

"You told her story at Monkey Bill's last night— he heard you. That snivelling cur was a devil to her. She said he would kill her if he ever knew— he intended to last night, but she got away and took the job off his hands."

Steve Bacon, shocked by the unexpected sight, had fallen into a crouching position in the corner. He straightened himself now.

"And her child?" he muttered, pointing towards the dead girl.

"He is mine. She gave him to me, and I will keep him." And the muscular arms of the washerwoman folded the tiny mite closer to her breast.

On the Monday evening following Brummy Peters was waited on by a deputation. A very respectful deputation it was, and wished to signerfy that the fellers all voted her a brick, an' hoped how she'd pocket that trifle to help her with the youngster, an' say nothin'. That trifle was a roll of notes of all sorts and sizes surrounding a five-ounce nugget, the biggest ever found on the rush, and the contribution of the Geordie. Mrs. Peters, in responding, accepted the gift, and said she knew the boys was real grit, and promised to make a man of the little chap on her bosom if she could.

And right royally she fulfilled her promise; it would astonish you if you only knew who is the foster-son of the washerwoman of Jacker's Flat.

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26: A Big Bluff

The Bulletin, 11 Jan 1912

"THOSE residential hotels are small, opulent democracies in which everything is possible," said Patrick Mackaboy, spooning a cherry into Tanner's cocktail. "And you have it on high authority that almost all the possibilities arrive in due sequence between January 1 and the season of peace on earth and goodwill to men, especially women. No conscientious student of man and his young can claim to have completed the course until he has spent at least six months as an indoor patient at a sumptuous family hotel where the temporarily well-off resort, where there is liberty without license, and where there are no trapdoors on the keyholes.

"Hearken to the story of Cush, the son of Ham. The paternal Ham must have been something of a seeker of the Scriptures. Not so Cush. The present Ham was of the earth earthy. The devils that were cast into the original swine had not totally missed Ham's branch. Our hero was 42 when he swam into my ken. He needed the professional help of P. Mackaboy, and a nicer fellow never breathed a polite requisition for a slice of rye. In Cush there was a curious blending of austere middle age and cheerful juvenility. His hair, that had been a toss-up between black and red, was liberally peppered, and retreating from his brow with some precipitation. He had a clear skin, and a sleepy, smudgy kind of dark eye, but was not strikingly handsome in the sense that we are, gentlemen.

"Cush Ham's prevailing tint was grey. The predominant aspect of his character was a philosophic calm. He was one of those slow men who never get left— an indifferent, unobservant person who missed nothing. That sort of chap always keeps his seat, even if it's an earthquake, and yet contrives to be there in his best clothes with an unruffled girl when eventually you reach the place of safety with the disordered action of an hysterical heifer, bearing the coalscuttle under one arm and the hall curtains on the other, but minus two in the matter of trousers.

"Yes, woman was C. Ham's little weakness. Yet it was no weakness in the accepted sense. He merely struck a careless attitude, and let them come. You would have been interested in the stalking process. The slow ones were a whole week running him down where he sat. Mrs. Greyhurst managed it in one evening, but she was excessively shy. These sweet, foolish, shy, little women can blunder into more indiscretions in a month than a bold, cast-iron lady will arrive at in a year's contriving. For which reason modesty is the best policy. Mrs. Greyhurst was young, and looked younger. She had large, timid, blue eyes, and a slim, timid figure. There was a certain timidity about her pale,

butter-colored hair, too, and her mouth had a continual, sensitive, for-God's-sake, -help -me, -gentlemen expression that made every man think he was set apart by Providence to protect her from all the other rakes.

"I was resident dispenser and house physician at the Occidental, and had opportunities for observation. Cush Ham occupied a suite of two rooms on the third floor, adjacent to the ladies' bathrooms, where pretty well all day, and half the night, the splash, splash of the fat mermaids in the aquarium, and the fetching, musical yap of the young and fair when the shower came down broke the sabbatical monotony of a decorous flat. The tall, short, fat, slim, dark, fair and bleaching all tripped it past his door in silent slippers and sympathetic bath gowns— tender pilgrims to the altar of suds. Believe me, those wayback saints who devoted a long life to the systematic acquisition of holy grime were not mugs on ethics. Cleanliness is next to ungodliness.

"Cush had declined the third room of his suite. And because it opened on the drab dormitory row of the lower-grade domestics, and because it had large, rust-colored weather-charts on the ceiling, and for the reason that the prodigal brother of an arch-deacon had blown his half-portion of brains out on the little praying mat by the bed, as a special favor that room was given to me. The door communicating with Ham's apartments was locked. A curtain covered it on his side. A rheumatic wardrobe with spinal curvature was backed against it on mine. In fact, its existence was forgotten.

"Mrs. Greyhurst first caught Cush Ham's benignant eye at the *table d'hôte.* She blushed. The blush was repeated 11 times between soup and nuts. Blushing is accepted by sentimentalists as the oriflamme of virtue; in villainous fact, and in nine cases out of 10, it is Cupid's method of flagging the enemy to arrange a capitulation. Two hours later, Nellie Greyhurst and Cush Ham were occupying adjacent wicker chairs in the left corner of the long balcony, where the pots raised deprecatory palms.

"Mr. Greyhurst was a fussy, fuming man of 50, with brittle whiskers and an inflamed eye— the sort of man who fights his dinner, sniffs when he's awake, and snores when he's asleep. Jealousy broke out on him like measles. Of course, he was on to the Nellie-Cush philander quite early in the game, and smashed plates and bit the table decorations to hide his chagrin. But Nellie did not seem to care a great deal how many fits John had when there were more interesting events to be timid and distressed about.

"Leaving the principals and one Pat Mackaboy out of the question, and setting the injured husband in a class apart, I don't think anybody was more interested in the Ham-Greyhurst combination than Mr. and Mrs. Jenkinson Sands. Sands was a large, corpulent, ginger Englishman, who had fluked a quarter share in a Westralian lease, out of which they were tearing gold with a

steam shovel. He was a bluff, noisy man, living up to a reputation for great good-nature. Mrs. S. was very much *per contra* — slim, dark, tall, restful, 26— as close up *ne plus ultra* as anything I expected to see till I went to my great reward.

"Sands was obesely jocular about Ham, Greyhurst and Mrs. Greyhurst in the bar. He was an infernal good sort (I have his word for it), always a fellow sinner and a man of the world, splendidly tolerant of the little slips that didn't bark his own shins.

" 'Ham's my friend and Greyhurst's my friend,' he said. 'Both bricks. Good wife is a matter of luck. Greyhurst's luck's out, that's all.'

"Nothing was whispered in Ham's presence. I don't think it would have taken with him. But he got on very well with Sands. They often spent half an hour together in the bar. Cush Ham gave the impression of a quiet man sitting out a comedy. Not more so with Sands than with others. It was his outlook on life. But he was not content with his Seat in the stalls. He occasionally took the stage. He was sometimes a comedian, but always a critic.

"When Sands had no one else to pour his conversation into, he pulled Greyhurst in and blew out his bung. Talk! That man could talk about everywhere and everything, and his say-so settled it. You came out with the idea that when Providence was doubtful, He always rang up Jenkinson Sands. Greyhurst grew prickly and feverish under it, and would snap and snarl and look as merry as an eel on a hook, but he never got out. That was the sort of man Greyhurst was— just loved to have burrs in his shirt.

"Meanwhile, Mrs. Sands held aloof, superior to it all, but not without a certain indulgent concern. I think it was little Mrs. Greyhurst's brazen shyness and reckless timidity that attracted her regard. She observed it all with the air of an impartial entomological expert faintly amused with the capers of a new grub.

"So the ingredients simmered for a couple of months before the hash-up. It was served with a crash one hot afternoon. The respectable family hotel had been drowsing like a huge locust humming faintly. Then bang, biff, clatter, smash! The scandal had exploded. The Occidental was no longer a dreaming locust; it was an active ant-hill, with a military band playing accompaniments. There were footsteps on every stair. A jubilant rush for the orchestra chairs had set in.

"Cush Ham was leaning on the door-post of his own room, his thin hair in perfect order, his heliotrope tie absolutely passive, Greyhurst was capering before him, like an impassioned baboon.

" 'She's in his room! She's in this man's room!' That was John Greyhurst's rabid chant.

" 'You are mistaken,' said Cush Ham, quietly, even gently.

"Greyhurst danced round, and addressed the grateful gathering. 'My wife ! She's in there!' His limbs were convulsed. He jigged foolishly. His whiskers were like a bunch of live wires. 'But I'll have her out.'

He ducked for Ham's door, and Ham put a hand on him, and held him, squirming.

" 'Your wife is not in my rooms,' said Ham. 'You must take my word for it.'

" 'Hear him !' screamed John. 'Take his word for it. Is it likely? I call you all to witness, my wife is in there.'

"Ham stepped forward, and closed the door behind him. Then he stood with his back to it. 'This man is calumniating his own wife and insulting me,' he said. 'He may do as he pleases with what is his, but, unless he is removed, for my own gratification I shall presently kick him down the stairs.'

"Here Sands butted in. He linked his arm in Greyhurst's. 'Come away, old fellow,' he said, soothingly, 'Of course you are mistaken. Your wife wouldn't dream of it.'

" 'Go to——!' squealed Greyhurst, fighting himself free. 'I tell you, I saw— I saw sufficient. She's in there. I'll be the death of them. I'll kill them both.'

"Sands held Greyhurst back, and Greyhurst repeated his baboon act, clawing frantically at Cush Ham.

"Ham raised his hands, and spoke a piece. 'I confess,' he said, 'although it is entirely my own business, there is a lady in my room. That is an excellent reason why I should not admit Greyhurst, for she is not his wife. However, there is a gentleman here, a mutual friend, a man we both can trust, Mr. Jenkinson Sands. To put an end to this shameful scene, and prevent Greyhurst making a still greater ass of himself, I am willing to have Mr. Sands enter my apartments, and satisfy himself that my friend within is not the lady Greyhurst evidently believes her to be, provided Greyhurst agrees to take the word of Mr. Sands. If this does not content Greyhurst, he can take his kicking, an alternative that will afford me the greatest possible gratification.'

"Sands backed Greyhurst against the wall, and expostulated vehemently, and Greyhurst yielded, whereupon Sands marched into Ham's room, and the door was closed behind him. The first apartment contained no lady. Sands looked inquiringly at the door leading to the next room, but Ham linked arms with him, and led him to the window.

" 'You see, Sands,' he said, 'Mrs. Greyhurst is not present. It will have struck you, as a gentleman, a man of the world and a prince of good fellows, that you have here and now a rare opportunity of doing old Greyhurst a good turn, comforting his mind, and smoothing away considerable unpleasantness by virtue of the simple lie. Of course, I cannot let you see the little woman in

there. It would break her heart. Of course, you did not expect me to. You are spoken of as one of the best. Get him away, like a rare good fellow.'

"Greyhurst and the unbidden guests were waiting in the passage, silent, agape with expectancy. Sands stepped forth alone. He took Greyhurst's arm. Come up to your room, and apologise to your wife,' he said.

" 'I tell you she's not there!' squealed John.

" 'Then she has gone into the city. I give you my word of honor she's not in Ham's room. Come away.'

"Sands dragged Greyhurst down to my bar. 'Give him a whisky,' he said. 'Make it as stiff as a post.'

"He fed John with the whisky, filled him with fraternal reproaches, and then rushed him forth. As the doors swung to on Greyhurst's departing figure, Sands turned to me, winked hilariously, and doubled in a paroxysm of silent laughter. 'Mother's love, what a bluff!' he whispered, and dived after the distraught husband.

"Cush Ham did not come down for half an hour. He took a drink, smoked half a cigar, talked a new musical comedy to pieces, and then we were alone.

'"He spread a ten-pound note on the bar counter. 'Mackaboy,' he said, 'I do not know you well, but I have formed impressions. There is an eye at every keyhole in my corridor. I want you to get the key of the door between your room and mine, to unlock that door, and look the other way while a lady passes from my room through yours to— shall we say oblivion?'

"I did not think the matter over. 'I'll do it,' I said. 'It is not for your silver bright, but for your winsome lady.'

"I did it. It took me some time to smuggle Clune out of the office, and find key No. 37 among disused trifles in the odd drawer. But I wasted no time shifting the crippled wardrobe and unlocking the secret portal. The lady was in a funk and too precipitate. She broke through before I could get my face in the corner, gave me a frightened, appealing glance, and fled.

"I sat on my little bed in a dazed condition for fully 10 minutes. 'Here endeth,' think I, as I strolled back to my bar. But the end was not yet. That night as I was going up to bunk I stumbled on a small figure lurking in the curtains on the second landing. It grabbed me. It was very tremulous and chattery, but devilish determined.

" 'You opened that door, barman,' it said. 'You let her out; Who was she?'

" 'I fail to comprehend, Mrs. Greyhurst,' said I, rising my best vocabulary.

" 'You understand very well. You did it. Who was in his room? Who was she? The beast! The cat! The—" Shy little Mrs. Greyhurst slipped a very ugly word. All the time she was scraping at my sleeve, clawing mad with jealousy.

" 'I know nothing about it, madam,' I said severely.

" 'You lie! You know. She passed out through that door behind the curtains. There was no other way. They were all watching for her. There were eyes everywhere. Oh, I've heard all about it. Who was she?'

" 'I have not seen her.'

" 'You did not look? You let her go without seeing? Fool! Idiot! Idiot! Idiot! I would have given 20— 50 pounds to know her for certain. The devil! The beast! Tell me who she was.'

" 'I do not know.'

" 'You are lying. But I'll find her. I'll see it in her hypocrite's face. I'll tear the truth out of her.'

" 'If you don't mean to have a fit on the landing," ma'am, you'll go in to bed,' said I.

" 'I'll find her,' she whispered defiantly, but I put her aside, and went my honorable way to room No. 37."

THERE WAS silence in the bar for a moment. Patrick Mackaboy took up a glass and spun his towel in it.

"Well, who the deuce was in the room?" demanded the scenic artist.

"Mrs. Greyhurst could never induce me to say," answered the barman ingenuously.

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27: Following the Film

(As by "Silas Snell")
Punch (Melbourne) 31 Jan 1918

Identical twin street urchins Bill and Jim, known collectively as Billjim, appeared in several stories by Edward Dyson writing as Silas Snell.

BILLJIM was a most liberal patron of the picture theatre at Porthole. The picture theatre of Porthole was called "The Grand," and was often spoken of in the official dodgers as this "palatial structure," whereas, in point of fact, the Grand was only a fence round a lot— a high fence and a close fence, but, nevertheless, only a fence.

The Grand was distinctly an open-air theatre. It was easy and accessible to the home of tho Brothers family in Drugg-street, and, the prices being "popular," the Twins contrived to see every change of programme.

It does not follow that the Twins always paid the popular prices. They had an appeal of their own, very touching to people of susceptible disposition. Hanging round the door, Bill would turn his round, limpid, blue-black eyes on a promising victim, and say: "Take's in, will yeh, mister?"

It was an appeal hard to refuse. There was such emotion in it. Bill contrived to convey in those few words the inference that if he were taken in Paradise and all beatitude were open to him. If he was not taken in— well, a little, heart-broken boy in such circumstances could always creep away and die.

If Bill got in he presently appeared appealing urgently to the doorkeeper for a pass out. Being small and capable of the secretive movements of a penitent cat, it was not found necessary to go out when the pass out was handed him, and in due course the pass was insinuated through a familiar crack in the outer wall to Jim, waiting patiently there.

Should Jim be the first to win his way in, he did precisely as much for Bill.

This all leads us to tne adventure with Madame Hann, and prepares you to accept with only reasonable dubiety the strange adventure of seeming subletv and virginal innocence that marked that singular enterprise.

Billjim was sitting on a wooden seat on the long foreshore running from Porthole, and fringing the more aristocratic suburbs. Billjim's wandering had brought him into the jurisdiction of the Council of Bayblue. He had been engaged in various adventures on the sea front since nine o'clock that morning.

Billjim's occupation on the seat was connected with an apple just gathered from the asphalt, and concerned the fair division of its edible parts. Bill scooped the bad part out with his thumb, and Jim took the first bite.

"It's bonzer," said Jim.

"Wot 'id I tell yeh?" said Bill, with his mouth full.

So they sat and ate, Bill holding the apple fairly between them, and each biting impartially, 'Madame Hann, who had discarded the apple, watching the enormous enjoyment of the extraordinary pair with the liveliest Polish interest.

"Dit I neffer such a chilterns see," said Madame Hann, and her Iv.nds went up. "Two of doze. Loog at it. Loog at it with the eating."

Madame's chauffeur made no comments. Madame's chauffeur was well trained. It was part of his duty not to chip in when Madame soliloquised. However uointed her remarks, he knew he was not called upon to affect any interest.

"Two of it," Madame repeated. "Und der udder is so like heem. Dit you effer see der udder von so like each ?"

Madame Hann fussed from the car, and, carrying her bag of apples, joined the Twins on the seat. She regarded them with great-eyed wonder.

"Vill you more off the apples have you? Yes?" said Madame, offering her bag.

Bill, the apple firmly . wedged in Jim's teeth, stared at Madame. Jim, going no further with his bite, stared, too. There was something peculiar in Billjim's stare, it was so concentrated ; there was an unfathomable, unblinking concentration in it, and the two sets of eyes were so large, so' round, and so black.

Bill's eyes went to Madame's bag of apples. Jim's eyes went to the bag. The Twins dipped simultaneously. Each secured an apple. Neither spoke.

"Ah-h—-goot !" said the Polish lady. "Vot is jwir name is ?"

M.Jo," salid Bill.

''Dick," said Jim.

"Twins? No?"

Bill nodded. "Both iv us," he said. "Me 'n' him. We ain't got no mother 'n' father."

" 'N' no parents neither," said Jim.

"Orfins," said Bill.

Now, these were lies there was no occasion far. Why Billjim told them we can only conjecture. As students of the films they were ever anticipating adventure, and their studies had convinced, them that romance is permanently divorced from hard fact.

Madame Hann, an emotional lady with a large bust, a tremendous heart, and no family, was toudy.d to the core of her being.

"Poor leedle it." she said. "No farder. No motter— ze both of each. Ah, it break ze heart across. Poor leedle! Poor leedle!"

To Billjim's surprise, Madame hugged them— Bill on one motherly cushion, Jim on the other; and Bill and Jim gazed across that fine expanse of bosom into each other's eyes, and munched their apples.

"Got no home, 'n' nowhere to go," said Jim. "No bed V no breakfiss," said Bill. "No nothink," said Jim.

"'N' never 'ad," said Bill.

"A'h-h, the wicked worl'!" sighed Madame. "He too cruel!" A tear ran down Madame's well-rouged cheek. "Ver then you make your sleep, eh?"

Billjim thought a moment.

"Nowhere," said Jim.

"Never don't sleep," said Bill.

"Never don't eat," added Jim.

"No to eat! None to sleep'.''cried Madame. "Ah-h, the dear small ones—the poor—the poor)'. Yfcwi mus' have the to eat, those to sleep. Come'

wiss."

Madame gathered the Twins closer. She lifted them, and carried them dangling to the car.

She flopped Bill in. "The poor Jo !" she said. She flopped Jim in. '"['he leedle Dick !" she said. Instantly Billjim swarmed the seats. Madame Hann disposed of herself in the car. ''Home !" she said.

Hanging to a leg of each twin to keep the too active hanging-over youngsters from precipitating themselves head first to the road, Madame was whirled to her elegant home in Bayblue.

Half hugging, half dragging her prizes, Madame conveyed them indoors, and so energetic a woman was Madam that a few hours later, when her husband returned from the theatre, he found her in possession of a preposterously clean Billjim dressed as a set in the most superb and picturesque costume, *a la* Fauntleroy, the biggest Chapel-street drapery establishment could provide at a half moment's notice.

Madame explained to Adoloph Hann in voluble French. Adolph Hann was not astonished. He betrayed no particular emotion. If he had any feeling at all it was one of thankfulness that Madame had not adopted a brace of young Northern Territory buffaloes. In Madame's younger days, when she was a queen of song, a prima donna, and a soprano af unprecedented range, her taste had been for crocodiles, and pythons, and such zoological trifles.

Adolph was very human himself, as human as his inhuman duties as a celebrated producer of musical plays would permit of his being, and he found the Twins amusing.

"No one to be its parents at all he haft,'" Madame explained. "He iss by hisself in all ze worl'—heem and it. I will hees farder and hees modder be. So zat iss settle."

Adolph threw up his hands. "Good," lie said. "I will halt the cage built for them."

That night Billjim slept in an elegant little white bed at Madame I-Iann's, and disclosed no thought of the anxious home in Drugg-street, Porthole. All next day the Twins lingered at Madame's elegant home, and Madame played with them, and overfed them with sweet things, and over-gassed them with fizzy drinks.

The second night found Billjim practically on h's own, Madame having tone to the theatre; and Madame's servants (not very amenable to discipline in Madame's presence, utterly regardless of Madame's interests in Madame's absence) away regaling themselves and holding high festival with a neighbour's servants of similar merry tendencies.

Madame's new freak was supposed to be abed, but in truth Billjim was exploring the house. Billjim found his way into Madame's bedroom, and investigated all sorts of cunning little drawers and boxes, and eventually, at about eleven, the Twins found themselves on the carped surrounded with a mixed mass of most lovely beads, and bits of glass and things.

Here it was that the man found them, and it speaks volumes for the worldly wisdom inv parted to the young of man, by persistent study of the films, that Billjim recognised him instantly as The Burglar.

Even if the man had not come in from the balcony through the window, Billjim would have known him as The Burglar.

"Now, you shut up !" said the man in a rusty sort of whisper. "Djer 'ear? Not er word, or I'll blessed well carve the young 'eart out of yeh, see?"

"I ain't speakin' nothin'," snid Bill.

"Me neither," said Jim. "I'm ez quiet ez annythin'."

"Here, wot's this yer got ?" The man gathered up the lovely bits of coloured glass, and the rings and things, and stuffed them in his pocket. "Any more of these ?" he said.

" 'Eaps," said Jim,

" 'Ung in the door," said Bill.

What Billjim referred to was a peculiar set of bead curtains between the rooms of Madame and Adolph. The burglar cursed at them. "Any money anywhere?" he said. "Now, mind, the truth, or out go your brains." He wagged the revolver. But no young student of the films minds a revolver. He knows they are so constituted as to kill only the wicked people.

"Plenty where the lady buries it," said Bill. " 'Eaps, 'n' 'eaps, 'n' 'eaps'!" said Jim, with preternatural gravity. "In where the motorcar goes."

Only some amazing process of telepathy between the Twins could have made this remark possible to Jim. How otherwise could he have known what Bill's small mind had conceived?

"Buried!" cried The Burglar. "Money buried! Here, you take me to it, 'n' we'll go 'alves."

Billjim took him to it. They led him downstairs, through the quiet door into the back garden, and from there into the stout brick garage, with its substantial door and powerful locks.

"Down in that corner," said Jim.

The Burglar dug with tremendous energy, apd presently, to his intense surprise, he found himself alone. A moment later, to his far greater amazement, he discovered that the door was closed on him, and well locked on the other side.

Billjim was searching in the rub'Msh bins. Billjim had divested themselves of the beautiful blue silk pyjamas Madame had presented to them.

"They was put in here," said Hill, still pawing among the rubbish.

"I saw 'em put 'em in," said Jim. "From the winder," said Bill.

The Twins were looking for their own little shirts and pants. It had come upon Billjim suddenly that they wan'ted to go home toi young Mum and young Dad and M'ister Gus, and naturally they wanted to go home in their own dear, familiar clothes.

Billjim went home. Being unable to find their own clothes, they went as they staod, mother naked, through the swell suburb and .along the shore.

Meanwhile Madame and Adolph had returned with a rush, and in great excitement. Adolph had just discovered in his *Herald* that all Porthole was stirred by the disappearance of the Brothers Twins. The police had been dragging the Bay. Plainly the Porthole Twins were identical with Jo and Dick.

Madame and Adolph searched the house. The Twins had gone! They rushed back into the car, and were whirled to Drugg-street, porthole, the address of the bereaved parents, as given in the paper.

Hardly ten minutes before their arrival at the front door of Jerry Brothers Billjim had came home, the pair as ill off for clothing as at the moment of their birth, and Mum Brothers was still hugging the supposed drowned, and weeping over the alleged lost-for-ever, when Madame Hann swung in, voluble with explanations.

"I did not know," said Madame, "he tole me not what iss true. He say he iss alone, wissout hees farder, and hees motter vos deat.'"

Everything was amicably settled. "And now," said Adolph Hann, with marked diffidence. "We are very sorry, but there is the jewels."

"The great many jewels," said Madame.

The Brothers family was obviously bewildered. "We have missed a number of valuable articles," said Adolph. "We thought maybe the children had taken them."

'All so innocen , Madame protested.

"He's got them," said Bill, with some little touch of the contempt a film student in the presence of a person so. ignorant of the ordinary developments of adventures of this kind.

"The Burglar Man," said Jim.

"In the moty-car house," said Bill.

"Locked up,'' said Jim.

It sounded an utterly incredible story ; hut Jerry Brothers went back with the Hanns in their car, and the garage doors certainly were closed, and the outer locks secured.

When the door was opened, cowering in a corner by a small excavation, in the light of a guttering candle, was The Burglar.

The contrite burglar restored Madame's jewels before the police came.

"A dame wot's so careless of them dainties deserves to lose 'em," said The Burglar. "Where them black-eyed twins iv yors got their 'orse sense from Gord on'y knows."

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28: A Damosel in Distress

Edward Dyson

1865-1931

The Lone Hand, 1 Sep 1908

One of the "Two Battlers and a Bear" series of stories

IT was a still, white night, the sickly moon was beating an early retreat, and the showmen's camp fire fluttered pale flames in harmony with the ghostly atmosphere.

Ephraim Lees lay in shapeless abandon on the crisp bracken; his lean partner, tanned and desiccated by a long summer, looked dangerously inflammable as he thrust gum twigs under the droning billy. The bear rocked in half circles round the Proselyte, breaking into little complaints over the delayed meal. About them and above was silence, the profound night quiet of primitive hills.

Appleton's Entertainers were camped in an Australian Stonehenge on Kelly's Spur: quaint needle rocks bristled on the slope; pinnacles of granite, moss-grown and stained with scars of centuries, stood about them like the bowls of ancient trees. Near at hand the vast formation was racked into splinters, and the great rocks gaped, offering cosy sleeping apartments for the party. Here the forest growth was scant and crippled, the gums writhed like sentient things. Some groped along the ground, seeking the sustenance the barren range denied them.

Eric Appleton made the tea and set it to brew. He spread the canvas that served the dual purpose of a tablecloth and a sling for Bruno's bundles, and tumbled the contents of the firm's larder upon it. Bruno jigged happily ; his cries became jubilant. Eric poured the boiled eggs out on the sod, lifted one and placed it on the fat man's stomach. It was the call to tea. Only a thin shirt lay between the sleeper and that blistering egg. Faint complainings were born in Ephraim ; then a sudden, passionate cry welled up as he swept the egg away and jerked himself into a sitting position, embracing his pain.

Bruno flopped after the egg. Bruno loved hard-boiled eggs.

"Eric!" said Lees, reproachfully. He went on in the tone of a spoilt child: "How can you have so little thought? I was weary, I was sad. Is this kind of you? Appleton, there are moments when I am sorry— yes, Appleton, when I really regret that I ever met you."

"Gar-rt! yeh fat cow," said Eric. "I've bin er gentleman 'n' er non-producer all me life; have I come down t' be parlor-maid 'n' kitchen Biddy to er sleepin' beauty with er tub on him like er walrus?"

"I beg your pardon, Eric, if I have not performed my share of the work," the fat man answered, humbly; "but you know my infirmity. I was in a tender and melancholy mood brooding on my wasted life, Appleton. If you please, the ham." Ephraim took a liberal helping.

Meanwhile Bruno the bear was toying with the hot egg, fumbling it, turning it over and over, complaining fretfully. Twice he got it into his mouth, but dropped it again with a squeal. The third time, grown greedy and anxious about the meal progressing without him, he gulped and swallowed. The scalding globule got at his vitals. Bruno hugged himself, he groaned, he wailed like a spanked baby, then charged wildly round the camp fire. Twice he made the circuit, knocking Appleton over, scattering the edibles, treading on Ephraim's sag, and then he rammed his muzzle into the cold water, lapping frantically. Relieved, he sat up, looking across at his friends in comic contrition.

"Well, iv all ther swine!" snorted the disgusted manager, recovering his position. He selected an apple and hurled it at Bruno with a big, bad word. The bear ducked and went after the apple. Searching, Bruno found something of unusual interest in a large fissure between two sloping granite slabs. He sniffed at it inquisitively, he whined an urgent appeal towards Lees that provoked no response, and the reached in an irresistible paw, and tumbled the object out upon the ground in the light of the fire. Appleton and the fat man turned and gaped surprisedly. The work of mastication ceased.

Bruno's discovery looked like a mere bundle of clothes at first glance, but it stirred, and while Ephraim, Eric, and the bear watched it in dumb surprise, a human head worked out of the inverted skirt, a pale, sleepy, human face shone in the glow of the flame, and two dark eyes blinked at the company.

"Jimmy Gee! " gasped the Proselyte in a low, awed voice. "It's er girl! "

"Bless my soul, a young person!" gurgled Ephraim through a mouthful of ham. "A prepossessing young person."

The young woman, kneeling on the bracken, gazed at the showmen like one in a dream. Her eyes drifted to the bear; for a moment they were transfixed, horror took the place of wonder in the white face, and scream after scream echoed along the spur. The girl cowered upon the ground, her face muffled in her skirt. Ephraim was by her side, breathing commiseration and comfort.

"Hush, hush, my dear young lady," he said in his nice, boy's voice. "You are perfectly safe —perfectly. The bear is a good bear. He is gentle, he is kind. I will protect you." Ephraim held her hand, his fatness was a grand bulwark. She ventured to look up. Her eyes fell upon the spread, and she forgot her terror.

"Oh," she gasped, "things to eat! "

"Certainly, my dear," said Ephraim, gallantly. "Allow me." He assisted her to her feet. "Eric, a pannikin for the lady, a plate for the lady."

Appleton was still gaping in a state of suspended animation. "Proselyte! " cried Ephraim, with a touch of reproach, "we have a guest."

Eric swallowed spasmodically, choked, and recovered after a violent convulsion.

"Well, if this 'ere don't bang Bannagher," he spluttered. "Blime, who are yeh, me girl? What 're yeh doin' 'way out here without yer ma?"

"Proselyte," protested the fat man, "manners, my friend. The young lady is our guest, she dines with us. She will take a little ale, Eric."

Already the girl was on her knees beside the spread, her big, hungry eyes fixed on the ham. Eric passed her a frothing pannikin of beer. She accepted it without thanks, and took a big drink.

"A 'am san'wich, miss?" said Appleton.

The sandwich Eric had hastily fabricated looked more like a rough bundle, but the girl took it and ate. Her gratitude was expressed in her avidity. She ate with great appetite. The showmen forgot their own hunger, waiting on her. Ephraim Lees watched her with ineffable tenderness. It was pathetic that so beautiful a creature should have been in such straits. He could have wept. He passed her the whole ham.

The girl was certainly very handsome; her eyes were of the rich, velvety brown that touches on purple; her hair was black and heavy about a neat head; her mouth was small; her complexion creamy without a touch of color, apart from the rose-redness of her full lips. How this charming damsel came to be hidden away in a granite cleft on Kelly's Spur, miles from human habitation, at such an hour, was the problem that possessed the showmen to the utter disregard of their bear. Bruno availed himself of the opportunity to demolish seven hard-boiled eggs and a currant loaf, intended for the gratification of Ephraim's sweet tooth.

"Some more 'am, miss? A negg?" said the Proselyte. The fat man replenished her pannikin from the billy.

She delayed a bite at a shelled egg to smile a wan smile of gratitude at both, which so disconcerted Appleton that he poured his tea into his vest, and tried to bite a mouthful out of a tin plate. The young lady was recovering rapidly under the stimulus of the ham and the eggs, "You are very kind," she whispered, "both of you— very, very kind."

"My dear, we are delighted," said Ephraim, earnestly. "We are charmed. Another egg?"

"And you won't take me back? Oh, you won't take me back." The girl relinquished eating and burst into tears.

"Bless my soul, my dear little lady, never, never!" cried Lees, in great distress.

"And you won't let them take me?" she appealed to Eric Appleton.

"Not till they've dealt with an' done in Appleton, Lees, 'n' ther bear," said Eric, "'n' that bear'll take a bit o' doin,' miss, which his name is Bruno. Bow t' ther lady, yeh cow!" Bruno ducked.

"My friend 'n' partner, Professor Ephraim Lees ; yer 'umble, Eric Appleton. This 'ere is Appleton's Alfresco Hentertainers at yer service—specially ther bear."

The girl smiled at Eric, Ephraim, and the bear.

"My name is Eileen Hanrahan," she said. "I— I have run away from home."

She made a hasty search for a handkerchief, and wept again. "I hid in the rocks and went to sleep; I was so weary, I had walked so far. But you won't send me back."

Ephraim possessed himself of a little hand. He stroked it gently; he soothed her with his low, musical voice. He engaged to die for her on the spot if need be; they would all die for her. The assurances so restored her composure that the dear girl contrived to eat a meal not very inferior to that of Bruno. Then, while Appleton cleared away the remains of the repast, Miss Hanrahan, comfortably disposed upon a convenient rock, with Ephraim Lees by her side, continued her pathetic history.

"Father and mother wanted me to marry Sutton, who owns the Nullah run. I refused. He is a bad man; I do not love him. They tried to force me, but I would have died first. I did not love him." She looked into Ephraim's rosy countenance with her large, dark, trusting eyes, and tears trembled on the curling lashes. Lees patted her hand very tenderly. He was deeply moved. "They locked me up, and threatened to starve me into yielding. Oh, I suffered so much, so much, before I escaped!And now— now— you won't.let them take me? You won't believe what they say of me? You will hide me away from them if they come?"

She clung to the fat man. He seemed to be the only friend she had in the world. Her little hands clasped his arm. Ephraim repossessed himself of the tender morsel. "You can trust me," he said. "I have a romantic soul. I love the tenderness, the beauty, the pathos, the poetry of life. Your sorrow has made me deliciously sad. I want to sing."

And Ephraim did sing. Reclining there on the range, now lying in black shadow, with the girl's hand in his, he sang an old song of hapless love. The glow of the camp fire picked out the picture in pale gold— the white face of the beautiful girl, the rapt face of the troubadour, the head and bulk of the bear, and Eric Appleton reclining on an elbow, ragged and unkempt, drawing

incense from a battered cigar. The singing added enchantment. There was in Ephraim's song the murmur of sweet waters, the soft articulation of amorous birds, the ringing of gold, a wondrous chorus of little melodies that drip from the hearts of roses, and all such beautiful folly of dreams. He sang quietly, and the night seemed hushed to listen— the trees and stones drew near.

"Oh!" said the girl, taking a long, amazed breath when the song was finished.

"Trust him not, gentle lydie," growled Appleton. "He's tryin' t' spoof yeh. He'll steal yer little 'eart away, that's what. When there's wimmin round, little Ephie's got t' warble that way. It's his depraved nature. Blime, er petticoat on er fence sets him goin' sometimes."

But Eileen Hanrahan did not withdraw her hand from the fat man's. She was encouraged to further confidences. She was of age, she said, and no power on earth could make her marry a man she did not love with her whole heart.

"I know now that you will protect and save me," she continued. "You sing so beautifully, you must be good, and true, and noble. If you help me to get to Melbourne you shall be rewarded. My Auntie Rachel lives in Melbourne. Auntie Rachel is very rich, and I am her favorite niece. She would never let them force me into a hateful marriage. I am sure Auntie would give you fifty pounds if I reached her safely with your help."

Eric Appleton sat up abruptly; he threw the bloated cigar butt in the ashes. He was much more alert than was usual with him after meals.

"Fifty quid!" he said.

"Yes," replied the girl, "and I would add something to it myself."

"Fifty quid goes!" Appleton cut in, emphatically. "It's er fair price. If yer likely t' be hunted after, er disguise is called for. Good enough. We've got er boy's suit in our wardrobe— ther suit for ther false bride in our celebrated farce, '*Hogan's Elopement*' —that'll about fit. With yer 'air plaited tight, 'n' run down yer back under yer shirt, th' overcoat collar turned up, er soft 'at, 'n' er bit iv ' make-up,' you'll pass for me son Willie ez well ez any kid breathin'. Does it go, miss?"

Eileen jumped at the idea, and next morning at 10 o'clock, when Mounted Constable Connor overtook Appleton's entertainers en route for Kaola, he gave no more than a glance to the youth in the brown macintosh, who throughout the interview fondled the awe-inspiring bear with a carelessness that betokened long familiarity.

"Good-mornin', me man," said Connor, addressing Appleton, "ma'be yiv thramped from You-Yam 'twixt this and yestherday noon?"

"There'r thereabouts," replied the Proselyte.

"And ye didn't by anny chance stumble on a slip iv a girl in a blue dress— a dark, bold hussy, with a fine eye?"

"Not a one," lied Eric. "Is there such er thing in this Gor-forsaken place?"

"There is, then, and I'd like t' be layin' me two hands on the scamp."

Connor spurred his nag and rode on.

When he was safely away the girl's demeanor underwent a marked change. She was trembling in every limb; her lips were blue with terror, and again she wept. Ephraim consoled her. Eileen had made a deep impression on the susceptible fat man. He was as sentimental as a school-girl, and just as ingenuous in many things, despite the fact that every week's history in his vagabond career convicted him of being an arrant rapscallion, with rather less moral sense than a vagrant cat. Just now he was feeling like a valiant and gallant knight of old. He was rather fat for the part, but he had rescued the necessary beauteous maiden from the customary bad baron, and he glowed with virtuous enthusiasm and other fine emotions. He wiped the girl's tears, he murmured condolences, and Bruno butted in a big, fatuous head, and offered his profound sympathy.

"Ther John Cop's makin' fer Kaola," said Eric, looking after Connor, "which means we do a side-step here, 'n' foot fer Wallader. That's not fer from ther line, 'n' we might smuggle little Willie here aboard er train et the wood-sidin'."

Eileen Hanrahan thanked them through her tears. Eileen often wept. Great tears became her pathetic brown eyes.

She was very clinging and girlish, too, and her innocence was the sweet unworldliness of a spoilt child. Appleton was amazed at it.

"Gorblime!" he said in an aside to Lees, "me little Willie's er seraph. I've adopted er baby saint. It's ther greenest I've struck, Ephraim, 'n' I've lived on green things this twenty year."

"Appleton, the worst of you is that you are so grossly prosaic," said the fat man. "There are no flowers of poesy in your soul. You cannot appreciate sweetness and purity when you meet it."

Ephraim sighed deeply, and turned up his baby-blue eyes.

"Now, don't sing!" ejaculated Appleton, in alarm. "Singin' out iv hours is dead waste, 'n' it makes ther bear restless."

Ephraim looked on Eric with mild reproach, and went and sang to Miss Hanrahan. His singing made her cry, and then the tears stole into Ephraim's dimples, too, and he was suffused with a melancholy happiness.

At Wallader the entertainers gave a matinee and one evening entertainment, and did remarkably well, so well that they were tempted to give a morning performance next day, leaving Eileen at the camp, about half a mile from the township. The morning performance kept Eric, Ephraim, and the

bear in the town-ship till noon, and they lunched at the pub, and lazed away an hour or two under the verandah, while Bruno drew a few offerings from casual patrons, cavorting on the grass.

It was here that Mounted Constable Connor found them when he rode in from Kaola on a lathered and panting horse. Constable Connor was extremely dusty, and in no pleasant mood. He confronted the Proselyte with an air of great official ferocity.

"Look here, mister," he said, "where's that boy yeh consorted wid on the Kaola-road?"

Proselyte thought hard. "What, me little Willie?" he said, innocently.

"Yer little Willie be damned, man. Don't yeh be playin' silly wid th' law, 'r ye'll get hurted. It's th' boy in th' brown coat."

"Me only son," said Appleton, with a fond father's smile.

"That's quare, then, seein' yeh had divil a boy wid yeh at You-Yam at all. I've bin makin' urgent inquiries about that same."

"The fact is, constable, me little boy had bin ill, 'n' he joined ther comp'ny later. He's ther 'Uman Jujube. No doubt yiv 'card iv him— ther 'Uman Jujube, ther lightnin' contortionist iv ther age."

"I'm wantin' t' see th' Jujube, 'n' ye'll kindly take me to him, 'n' if it's aidin' 'n' abettin' ye are, p'raps six years' hard won't be anny too good fer yeh."

"Aidin' 'n' abettin'! " gasped Eric. "Wha's that?"

"It's helpin' criminals to iscape th' law, fer instance. I have an idea yer little Willie is a girl iv th' name iv Sarah Irons, wanted fer a trifle iv attempted murder 'n' arson."

"Attempted murder!"

"And arson!" Constable Connor was looking hard at the showman. Eric's perturbation was very marked, Ephraim was dumbfounded.

"Bless my soul!" gasped the fat man, when he had recovered somewhat. "Murder and arson— that beautiful creature."

"Oh, oh!" cried Connor, "we're gettin' on. I don' mind tellin' yeh further, she's th' cutest scamp iv a girl ever was, that same Sarah, 'n' th' Divil's by way of bein' her first cousin. She was sort iv governess up et Hanrahan's, 'n' took a strong fancy to a young chap name iv Sutton; but Sutton got himself ingaged wid Miss Hanrahan, 'n' me lady Sarah, t' even things up, slipped a pinch iv strychnine into Miss Hanrahan's glass iv milk, 'n' t' still further complicate matters 'n' aise her mind, set fire t' th' homestead. Then she made a break fer parts unheard of, 'n', if I know fer certain they don't raise geese frim gooseberries, she's bin playin' hanky wid two innocent 'n' harmless strollin' gintlemen, 'n' a pure-minded performin' bear."

"Yiv hit it in one, John," said Eric. "She told us pretty stories, 'n' completely bamboozled ev'ry man iv us, includin' ther bear."

Eric joined Connor in a rush to the camp. Ephraim followed more slowly with Bruno, sad at heart, watering the way with his tears. When he arrived, Eric was seated on an inverted bucket, alone.

"She's done er guy, Ephie," he said. "Got out 'ot-foot ez soon ez we left, I guess; 'n' what's more touchin' still, she's hooked our bit iv savin's 'n' all yesterday's takin's. Ephraim, nex' time you wanter be a tinder scul, 'n' adopt er strange female with goo-goo eyes, I'm goin' t' hit yeh clean out with a back-log. Meanwhile, what remains to be done in these circumstances?"

"I think, Eric," Ephraim suggested softly and sadly, "we might get drunk."

"It's th' on'y course open to us," said Eric, " 'n' it's ther general rule. Carried unanimous."

They returned to Wallader with their belongings, and nor man nor bear went to bed sober that night.

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29: The Elopement of Mrs. Peters

In: *Below and On Top and other stories*, 1898

SIMON PETERS, irreverently called "The Apostle," returned to the railway camp late on Sunday night, and found his tent topsy-turvy and his "missus" gone. On the paling table, weighted with a piece of cheese, was a scrap of sugar-paper, on which was written in Fan's dog-leg hand:

"I'm sik. I'm goin' to cleer."

Sim swore a muffled oath under his abundant moustache, and looked around upon the unwonted disorder. The blue blanket and the rug had been stripped from their bunk; the spare, rough furniture of the big tent lay about in confusion; and amongst the grey ashes in the wide sod fireplace was a bunch of reddish hair. Peters fished this out, and examined it with as much astonishment as the phlegmatic, even-tempered navvy was capable of feeling. It was his wife's hair, and had evidently been hacked off in a hurry, regardless of effect. Piled on the bush stool against the wall were Mrs. Peters's clothes. Nothing of hers that Peters could recall was missing; even the big quondong ear-rings, of which she was so proud, were thrown upon the floor. Her hat was on the bed, and her boots were under the table.

Still clutching the mop of hair in his hand, Sim backed solemnly and soberly on to a seat, and sat for a few minutes gravely weighing the evidence. Obviously Fanny had gone off clad only in a blue blanket or a 'possum rug. This was most extraordinary, even for Fanny, but there was some satisfaction in it, since it should not be difficult to trace a white woman so attired.

Presently Peters arose and went forth to prosecute inquiries. On Saturday, before departing for Dunolly, he had asked Rolley's wife to keep an eye on the missus. As he approached the gaffer's tent, however, he heard a woman's voice raised in shrill vituperation, and recognised Mrs. Rolley's strident contralto.

"My poor mother that's in heaven knew you, you—. She always said you was a—."

And poor Rolley was inundated with a torrent of his own choice blasphemies. Simon Peters knew by experience that when Mrs. Rolley dragged her sainted mother into little domestic differences, she was at least two days gone in drink, and quite incapable of recollecting anything beyond Rolley's shortcomings, so he turned away with a sigh, and carried his quest into the camp. Half an hour later he returned to his tent and resumed his thoughtful attitude on the stool. He had secured one piece of evidence that seemed to throw a good deal of light on the situation. Late on Saturday night someone had broken into Curly Hunter's tent and stolen therefrom a grey tweed suit, a black felt hat, and a pair of light blucher boots. Peters, putting this and that

together slowly and with great mental effort, concluded that Curly Hunter and Fanny were about the same height. He recollected, too, the explanation his wife offered when he discovered her back to be seamed and lined with scars.

"Dad done it," said Fanny. "Poor old dad, he was always lickin' me."

"But," gasped Peters, filled with a sudden itch to beat the throat of his deceased father-in-law, "you don't mean to say the cowardly brute lashed you like that!"

"Didn't he?" replied she, laughing lightly. "He used to rope me up to the cow-bail an' hammer me with a horsewhip. Once when I set the grass on fire, an' burned the stable an' the dairy; another time when I broke Grasshopper's neck, ridin' him over Coleman's chock-an'-log fence; an' agen when I dressed up in Tom's clothes, took a swag, and got a job pickin'-up in M'Kinley's shed."

Early on Monday morning Peters had an interview with Curly Hunter. Hunter was sympathetic, and readily sold Sim the stolen things at a modest valuation, promising at the same time to observe a friendly reticence in the matter; but, for all that, two hours later everybody in the camp knew that Mrs. Peters had run off, and that "The Apostle" was away hunting for her. The general opinion, freely and profanely expressed, was that Simon Peters was a superlative idiot. It was agreed that Peters would have exhibited common-sense by sitting still under the bereavement, and casually thanking Providence for the "let off." Since Mrs. Peters started a couple of ramshackle waggons down the gradient, and nearly smashed up Ryan's gang, the camp had suddenly grown weary of her "monkey tricks."

Mrs. Simon Peters was a woman of twenty-six, ten or twelve years younger than her husband, more comely, more decent, and more presentable in every way than the other wives of the camp. She did not get drunk in the bedroom end of Wingy Lee's shanty on pay nights, did not use the picturesque idiom of the gangers in ordinary conversation, and in some respects had been a good mate to Peters. But it must be admitted that the camp had further justification in doubting the complete sanity of Simon Peters's wife. She had an eerie expression that was quaintly accented by keen, twinkling, black eyes in combination with light red hair and rather pale brows; and she was possessed of a spirit of mischief that led her into the wildest extravagances. Her devilment was that of an ungovernable school-boy, without his preposterous sense of humour. An uncontrollable yearning for excitement impelled her to the strangest actions. She had another peculiar characteristic, not unknown to the camp, in her apparent insensibility to physical pain. Peters had been astounded by the fact that a burn, a cut, a scald, or a blow provoked no complainings from his wife and scarcely any regard. This indifference extended to the sufferings of others. After the blasting accident in the North cutting,

Fanny, of all the women in the camp, was the only one who had the nerve to approach the mangled body of poor M'Intyre, and she placidly worked over the shocking mass, still instinct with life, when the strongest men turned sick at the sight of it.

Sim made no effort to understand his wife, which was well, as he was only an average man, and she was past finding out. He concluded that her extraordinary conduct was just the natural unreasonableness and contrariness of women "coming out strong," and made the best of the situation in which he found himself. Being an average man, Sim was a superior navvy; he only got drunk on big occasions, and, drunk or sober, treated his wife with indulgent fondness, and occasionally Fanny seemed fond of him in return; but then she had been very warmly attached to that father who used to bail her up in the cowshed and lash her with a horsewhip in the hope of converting her to sweet reasonableness.

On the Monday morning Peters first went up the road, seeking his wife, but no one at White's had seen a slim young fellow in a grey suit pass that way, so he tried down the road, with better success. Clark, at the Travellers' Rest, had seen "just sich a feller" as Sim described.

"They had a drink here Sunday, an' left, making for Moliagul, it seemed t' me," said Clark.

"They?" queried Peters.

"Yes. There was two of 'em. The big feller shouted. A brown-faced chap, with a black moustache, an' a deep cut in his chin, here."

Simon's grip made a dent in the pewter he held, and a grey hue crept over his cheeks and into his lips. Never before had he doubted his wife in this way; never through all her mad escapades had he had reason to question her fealty as a wife till now. Peters remembered the man distinctly; he had seen him about the camp, looking for work. The peculiar cleft chin would serve to identify him amongst ten thousand. Striding along the road the fugitives had taken, the navvy recollected hearing Fanny speaking enthusiastically of the tall, brown stranger as a fine man, and the grey in his cheek deepened to the colour of ashes, and his jaw hardened meaningly. His quest had suddenly assumed a terrible significance, and that fierce pallor and grim rigidity of the jaw never left him until its end.

Peters heard of them again in the afternoon, but got off the trail towards evening, and it was not till late on the following day that he picked up the scent. Then he talked with a farmer who had seen them.

"They slep' in an old hut up in my grass paddock las' night," said the man, "an' went up the road at about seven this mornin'."

"Did both men sleep in the hut?" asked Peters.

"To be sure!"

Sim continued his journey, steadily, and with apparent unconcern, but cherishing an immovable determination to kill the brown-faced man the moment they met.

Early on the Wednesday morning Peters came up with the runaway. An old man watering a horse at a small creek told him, in answer to his inquiries:

"A tall chap, with a divided chin—name of Sandler, ain't it? He's here. I let him a bit of ringin'. That's his axe you hear up the paddock."

Following the ring of the axe, Peters soon came upon his man. Sandler stopped working as he approached, and turned towards him, resting on the handle of his axe. Sim walked to within a couple of yards of the stranger, and threw off the light swag he carried.

"You infernal hound!" he said; "where is my wife?"

Sandler started up in extreme amazement. "Keep off!" he cried. "What the devil do I know about your wife?"

Peters rushed at him with the fury of a brute, and the two men exchanged heavy blows. Then they closed, and wrestled for a moment, but Simon's rage lent him a strength that was irresistible, and presently the other man was sent down with stunning force. As he attempted to rise, shaken and almost breathless, Peters, who had seized the axe, struck him once with the head of it, and Sandler fell back again and lay perfectly still, with a long, gaping wound over his left eye, from which the blood poured through his hair upon the new chips and the yellow grass. When Peters looked up his wife stood facing him. She wore blucher boots, a pair of grey trousers, and a man's shirt, and carried an axe. She gazed composedly at the fallen man.

"What have you done, Sim?" she asked.

"You ran away with that man?" He pointed at Sandler.

She nodded her head.

"He did not know I was a woman," she said.

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30 The Regeneration of Indiarubber Ike

(as by Dy Edwardson)
Punch (Melbourne) 17 Feb 1916

THIS IS THE STORY of how Indiarubber Ike was made a thief by misadventure.

Isaac Rolland was not naturally disposed to theft, nor had long training in the arts and crafts of the professional deadbeat disposed him to promiscuous lawlessness.

There is always a class of moochers hanging about Melbourne. They are not a numerous class. Sometimes an unemployment problem augments their numbers, and they become noticeable to casual observers, but ordinarily they are few and unobtrusive.

Nor does the metropolitan deadbeat enjoy (or suffer) a long life. Once in a way a lank, long-haired, white-faced, ragged plantigrade, with his feet in bundles, lingers about the city long enough to catch the common eye and become a sort of institution, but then the police or his diseases move him on.

Indiarubber Ike had sense enough to notice this, and he never loitered in one district long enough to excite the attention of the police or win himself notoriety as a landmark.

True, Isaac was known to the select company of moochers and derelicts who frequented the open-air sleeping places about the city, and it was they who provided the nickname. No moocher ever goes by the name his godfathers gave him.

Isaac Rolland became Indiarubber Ike because of his absurd length and preposterous leanness. He really looked like a piece of rubber stretched to its thinnest and its utmost tension.

Indiarubber Ike was a silent man. He never talked even with the choice spirits of his peculiar clan. When, on cold lights, craving warmth, the clan slept in a bunch of ten in an old boathouse, Isaac Rolland offered nothing to the general fund of professional information. For this reason he was also called Dumby.

Isaac's garb, as I saw him one evening lurching on the Cathedral Corner, was the cast-off suit of an impoverished clergyman. The clergyman had abandoned the suit only when he was in danger of being mistaken for a tramp. Indiarubber Ike had since worn them a year in all weathers and all places, and was in no danger of being mistaken for a clergyman.

Yet Indiarubber Ike was a man of some education; he spoke, when he spoke at all, with some refinement. There had been a time when he occupied a decent position and a comfortable home, and possessed a wife and a child. The wife and child were killed in a railway accident, and all the manhood seeped

out of Isaac Rolland. His business went, his energy evaporated, desire went out of him— he seemed to himself to be a curious sort of husk of his former being.

Isaac Rolland became Indiarubber Ike. A nerve affliction added to his physical incompetence, and for years he drifted with the wind— a derelict cadging his bread— lost to every decent instinct, stopping short of crime only because he lacked the incentive.

Indiarubber Ike had no gifts. He begged much as a dog might— mute, as a rule, and with an appealing, extended claw. His appearance frightened children, his eyes were too sensational, they scared women. Indiarubber Ike was often hungry.

To be even a successful tramp you must have a call. The tramps who do best are usually the least deserving; they are impostors, who know and practice the art of imposition. Indiarubber Ike was just a ruined man, internally ruined, morally destroyed, and he got more kicks than ha'pence.

ONE hot Saturday he drifted down a right-of-way in Kew, peering through cracks in fences and over back gates with black, wolfish eyes, seeking scraps of food. In point of fact, he had had small luck even for him during the past week, and he realised that if he were not successful today there was a long perish before him, as a beggar must not beg on Sunday

At one place Ike cautiously opened a gate, and was sneaking in with the intention of tubbing three fat and insolent geese of a plate of crusts, where an indignant fox-terrier discovered him, and in the fury of its just wrath tore many holes in his already all too holey vestments. The dog tore Ike, too.

Ike went limping into the next yard, where there was no dog. A woman shook a broom at him.

"You be off!" she said before he could make a plea. "Be off with you. I saw you."

What the woman meant was that she had seen him being bitten by next door's dog— a proof of his infamy.

Uncomplaining, Indiarubber Ike went on. He avoided the next house because there was a collie in the yard, and the next because the gate opened into a garden where two lovers were sitting under a mulberry tree. But he tried the third.

Ike knocked on the verandah floor with his heel, and presently a woman came out. She was short, and stout, and red-cheeked— a comfortable, overfed matron of a type common in well-to-do middle-class homes, where the mother has little to do but eat, and makes the most of that one duty.

"Madam," said Ike, "I am a miserable man. I am unable to work; will you help me?"

"No, I won't!" replied the housewife with prompt decision. "Help you, indeed! A great, lazy fellow like you ought to be ashamed to beg when the country is crying out for workmen."

"I cannot work, madam."

"Cannot, indeed!" cried the woman in shrill exasperation. "And why not, I should like to know?"

"I simply cannot. I can't do anything. I ask only some scraps of food— the waste of your kitchen."

"There is no waste in my kitchen. Go away. Leave my yard. I would be ashamed to encourage such as you. Simply can't work. Well, I never! Simply won't work!"

"If I could go to work, lady," said Ike in his dull tones, "how would it satisfy my present need? I am hungry now. I shall be more so tomorrow."

"You leave these premises this minute, or I shall ring up the police." The woman flounced indoors.

Indiarubber Ike turned away, and his eye fell upon half-a-loaf of stale bread in a tin dish at the end of the verandah. The dish had water in it, and the bread was half-soaked, but Ike had no nice, epicurean weaknesses about food just then. He seized the loaf, and moved towards the gate.

"Hi, you thief! You thief!" The woman was out again. "You put that down. You impudent villain; how dare you?" Following him she snatched up a pair of old boots. One boot hit Ike in the middle of the back as he went through the gate, the second came over the fence and knocked his hat off.

Ike had dropped the bread in the yard. He raised no complaint— he did not even heave a sign. The boots interested him. They were certainly better than those he was wearing. He picked one up and pulled it on. The change was satisfactory. He put on the second boot, and shuffled out of the right-of-way.

Ike felt the necessity of changing his latitude. Women like this last, in the excess of their virtuous anger, were liable to communicate with the police.

Ike faced towards the city. He found a fairly good apple in the gutter, and having polished it on his sleeve, ate it. That was some comfort.

But the asphalt was hard and hot under his feet. The change of boots was not proving wholly satisfactory. There was a lump under the sole of the left that was beginning to irritate Ike.

The burning spot caused by the nail, or whatever it might be, in the sole of his left boot interested Ike. Now and then it made him forget how hungry he was.

Ike limped on, and the spot grew hotter— an acute pain was set up. But he shuffled on, bearing the sensation as offering some variety in the army of

unpleasant sensations assailing his being. A man who is afflicted with sciatica and incipient starvation does not go into a tantrum over a peg in his shoe.

It was not till he came to the Yarra and seated himself on the grassy bank above the Morgue that Ike gave close attention to his blistered foot and the uncomfortable boot.

There was no nail inside, but the worn sole flapped, torn from the upper nearly half-way to the instep. Jambed under it was some hard substance, probably a stone. Taking a stick, Ike dug the obstacle out. It lay in the palm of his hand, and Indiarubber glared at it with wide, incredulous eyes.

The object in Ike's hand was a diamond ring— a one-stone diamond ring set in platinum, and the ring itself was a wide gold band.

Indiarubber knew the value of the article man to a pound. When Isaac Rolland was a whole man his business had been dealing in articles like this. His business instincts bad not wholly forsaken him.

The mind of Indiarubber worked slowly; but after due thought he concluded that in the course of his long walk the loose sole of his boot had by some means picked up the ring from the street.

"There will be a reward!" said Indiarubber. He wrapped the ring in a rag and tied it in the sleeve of his coat. Then for thirty six hours the man with three hundred and four pounds in his possession starved.

On Monday Ike searched the papers. There was no mention of the ring, and Indiarubber went out to South Yarra and begged.

He searched the papers for a week, and there was no mention of the ring. The he picked the diamond from the ring, broke away the platinum setting, and beat the gold into a lump.

But still he did not dare to sell the gold. That is a thing a deadbeat cannot do. Probably the first tradesman he offered the gold to would send for the police.

Then one morning, ten days after his finding the ring, The Age shocked him with double headlines:

LOST OR STOLEN
THREE HUNDRED-POUND DIAMOND MISSING.

Ike went feverishly through the article. The ring belonged to Mr Andrew Bannister, the husband of the woman who threw the boots at his head. It had been lost for some time probably, but the loss had only just been discovered, as Mr Bannister rarely wore the ring.

Mrs Bannister had told the police of certain suspicions of hers attached to a tall black-haired tramp in a clergyman's coat, whom she had seen about the place in suspicious circumstances.

Indiarubber Ike went back to the Domain to sit and think. Thinking had become a very difficult process.

The result of his thinking was this. He was in danger. The police would be after him. He would not be hard to trace, and if the diamond were found on him, he would be imprisoned. No one would for one moment believe his story. The idea of a ring being caught under the sole of the old boots thrown at him would sound preposterous in all ears.

Indiarubber Ike was provided with a motive, he had at length an object. The law of self-preservation was working within him. He found an old pair of scissors in a rubbish-tip, and having sharpened them on a brick cut his hair close to his head, and his whiskers into the trim, pointed beard Isaac Rolland used to wear.

Indiarubber Ike begged a needle and cotton from a woman in South Melbourne and went assiduously to work repairing his clothes. He completely changed the character of the clergyman's coat.

It was absolutely necessary to earn a little money to buy a celluloid collar and a tie. Ike earned it by pulling down an old fence. He put on the tie and collar. He furbished up an old boxer hat he found in a rubbish bin.

One day Indiarubber Ike felt that he was sufficiently presentable to risk selling the old gold. He sold it to a suburban jeweller for two pounds ten.

There was still talk of the lost diamond. The police were seeking Indiarubber Ike, and Indiarubber Ike, fighting for his liberty, was regaining something of the old Isaac Rolland. He was now a house-dweller. He was earning money in a very menial capacity in a boot factory.

One day Isaac Rolland (Indiarubber Ike being a thing of the past) presented himself at the establishment of a big manufacturing jeweller, and said: "I am Isaac Rolland, can you find me something to do?"

Isaac Rolland went back to his old business.

A YEAR LATER he returned a ring to Andrew Bannister, Esq.— it contained the original diamond. The note that went with it said:

I did not steal your ring, but it came into, my possession in circumstances in which it would have been impossible for me to escape prison had I acknowledged its possession. The danger in which it involved me has been my salvation. I had to fight out, and that light awakened the man in me. May the good luck, the ring brought me ever attend you and yours.

—Man Unknown.

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31: The Haunted Mine

The Argus (Melbourne) 28 Feb 1894

OLD PETE, once Mr. Peter Burns, was an identity of Dodd's Diggings. He was amongst the earliest on the rush when Dodd struck the rich alluvial at The Crowfoot, the stretch of land skirting the serpentine creek from their portion of which Dodd and McMeikan took out six thousand ounces in six weeks, a "slice of luck " to which John Joseph Dodd, Esq., J.P., ascribes his present eminence, and which enabled generous, reckless Steve McMeikan to indulge his unhealthy craving for the "blue ruin" and "hand-made" whisky of the district to such an extent that the sight of that able-bodied digger rushing about Mopoke Hill in unconventional raiment presently lost its novelty, and nobody was very much surprised when a prospecting party found his body on the range seven miles out, where he had died fighting the gruesome creatures of his diseased imagination.

Pete stuck to Dodd's diggings through many vicissitudes. He had seen its glory pass away, and had been content to scratch over the old tailings and puddle and cradle from daylight to dark for a few paltry penny-weights, when the other miners had deserted the district as played out, and only the ring of the axe of some distant splitter indicated that the old field was not given over to its original solitude. He saw the 'possums and monkey bears return again to the brooding gums, and marked the saplings growing in thick green clumps about the deserted shafts and dull yellow tips, as if nature were hurrying to cover up and hide the ravages of her enemy— man.

Then came a sudden return of popularity. A company had been floated at Bendigo to work the reef that was known to exist in the deep ground, and the news that the Happy-go-Lucky Gold-mining Company had started sinking, brought many of the old hands back to Dodd's. These were experienced and discriminating diggers, men who remembered that the small leaders and quartz veins they had worked to a certain depth years before, and had been compelled to abandon there in consequence of the enormous pressure of water below the level, would pay handsomely for the working as soon as the pumps to be put into operation in the deep mine had drained the country.

No one was better acquainted with this fact than Pete. He had not pitched his tent on every field of consequence, from Old Jim Crow and Murdering Flat to the Gympie without knowing "the lay of the land." Long before the Happy-go-Lucky's lifts were in he had found a mate, and pegged out a claim. Then he sat down and patiently "shepherded," waiting for the water in the old shaft to subside.

Dodd's Diggings rapidly assumed an appearance of consequence when the Lucky struck the reef, and tenders were let for a twelve-head battery. The township now boasted a weatherboard post-office and two stores, besides a shanty or two, and a wattle-and-daub chapel, and was agitating for a policeman. Some of the bolder spirits even hinted at a joint demand for a special Parliamentary representative " to their own cheek," and moved for the erection of a galvanised-iron church with a bell, but these were regarded as visionaries by the larger proportion of the inhabitants.

The samples of stone from the Happy-go-Lucky lode sent to Ballarat for assay cleaned up three ounces seven pennyweights to the ton. Shares went up sky high in consequence, and the Happy-go-Lucky Extended, the Happy-go-Lucky No. 2, and the New North Happy-go-Lucky quartz-mining companies were floated without any difficulty, and money became so loose in and about Dodd's that no man who was willing to work for wages need go to be sober, unless he was anxious to win a reputation for eccentricity, and every second resident was a director in a progressing or a prospective mine.

Mr. Peter Burns retained his characteristic gravity and cynicism in this time of great excitement and rash speculation. A number of parties of two were working the leaders and jumbled quartz veins, and doing well. Lawson and Green and Johnson and Martin took out remarkably rich patches, a few feet below the old level, and all were making the money fly in joyful anticipation of the same good luck— all with the exception of Pete; he, although averaging two ounces a week clear, was still content with his primitive stringy-bark hut in the solitudes of One Man Gully, and with the companionship of his goats and his cornet.

Burns's mate was Mr. Mike Cody— "son av Bart. Cody, Esq., County Munster, Oireland, un' edjikated fer a praste. D'ye moind that?"

Mr. Cody was a good theoretical miner but a very tired man. He suffered from a chronic weariness, and not all the arguments of all the philosophers could convince him of the wisdom of working whilst he had the price of two drinks about him. He did work occasionally before the result of the last cleaning up was exhausted, but it was under pressure and protest, and with the feelings of a man sacrificing himself to the ridiculous whims of his friends.

Mike's pet weakness was Irish whisky, but he also gambled with Chinese enthusiasm and without the least judgment, and he was as ready to take a hand at forty-fives or euchre with the first man that came along as he was to accept that individual's invitation out to the back when his excitement rendered a peaceable settlement of the game altogether impossible, although, as the boys expressed it, he couldn't fight " to keep himself warm."

It was considered remarkable that Pete, who was a "hard grafter," every inch of him, should have selected this lazy, light-hearted, light-headed little Irishman for a mate— but Pete was always peculiar. The old hands knew that ever since the opening of the reeling on Dodd's, Burns had held a very high opinion of the locality he was now working with Cody. He it was who worked the claim down to the water level in the early days, and through the intervening years he had "shepherded" it, anticipating operations for the defined reef, and confident of one day striking a magnificent patch, such as had already made the fortunes of six or seven parties on the field.

The second gleam of prosperity that came to Dodd's was not genuine ; at the Happy-go-Lucky, the Extended, the No. 2, and the New North Happy-go-Lucky the gold was being put into the ground— it did not come out of it. The shareholders of the last three soon tired of sinking their capital in the shape of regularly recurring calls, and operations were suspended. The shallow reefing, too, began to give indications of paying out, and the Lucky, despite the extent of the lode and the glorious promise of the trial crushings, was not making expenses.

There was a bad time coming again for Dodd's Diggings. The turnover at MacDougal's shanty was dwindling daily, in defiance of the charms and blandishments of the new barmaid from town— a gorgeous creature, with smudgy, red-ochred cheeks and a bold black eye. Diggers were rolling up their swags daily, and "humping bluey" to fresh fields; the Lucky shares went down below zero, and the gaiety of the choice spirits at Monty's Assembly-room began to lose its spontaneity.

Mike Cody had not had a fight for three weeks, and was getting low-spirited. He frequently talked of backing out and leaving for Dead Horse, where gold was plentiful. The Lucky slackened hands, and the share-holders were asking, in that nasty, insinuating way peculiar to unfortunate shareholders, how it happened that the assays and the trial crushings averaged 3 oz. to the ton, and yet the stone wouldn't yield 4 dwt. when put through their own mill. As if directors could ever answer such a conundrum !

It wanted a week till Christmas. The day had been fearfully sultry— one of those white-hot days common in the Goulburn Valley when there is a simmering mirage in every hollow; when the birds and beasts seek some little shade into which to poke their heads, and stand gasping in miserable fellowship, and when the monotonous ringing whirr-whirr of the myriads of invisible locusts is the only sound that disturbs the silence. Pete had been over at the Extended forge pointing a couple of picks. He dropped the tools upon the slabs at the mouth of the shaft, and leant upon the windlass for a moment.

"Halloo, on top there! That yersilf, Pete?" It was Mike calling from below.

"Hi, hi!"

"All serene up there?"

"All serene. What's the matter?" There was something peculiar in Cody's tone. Pete became strangely agitated.

"Come down es quick es ye can fer th' love av Hiven! We've sthruck it—sthruck it rich!"

Pete clutched nervously at the windlass guard, and turned as pale as was possible to a man with the tan of twenty Australian summers in his skin. He set his teeth together, and braced himself with an effort, and proceeded to fasten the picks to the rope and lower them below. Then having paid out the rope to its fullest extent, he grasped it and slid down into the darkness of the shaft.

Next day neither Burns nor Cody was to be seen on Dodd's Diggings. On the following evening a miner who had leisure enough to be curious crossed to Dougal's Bend, and saw that Cody's tent and all his belongings had disappeared. It was also noticed that Pete's hut door was secured with a chain and padlock, and that the windlass and rope had been removed from their mine.

Then those residents of Dodd's who were at all concerned decided that Cody had abandoned the claim, and that he and his mate had gone to Melbourne to spend the Christmas. They could catch the coach at Rushworth by leaving the diggings before daylight. The fact that Mike's name figured on the slate at Muck's shanty at the head of an elaborate sum in compound addition was sufficient reason for his departing by night, and with-out ostentation, not to mention his little bill at the store and sundry small accounts in various hands. There was no occasion to seek reasons for anything Pete might do ; his known eccentricity accounted for his action.

On the day that Burns and his mate disappeared from Dodd's, the mining manager of the Happy-go-Lucky received orders from his directors to dismiss all hands, and shut down the mine until further orders. So the Happy-go-Lucky was stopped, the windows of the engine and battery houses were boarded up, all doors were locked, and the place was given over to the care of a watchman who was never sober, excepting under circumstances over which he had no control.

Pete returned to Dodd's Diggings about four weeks later, as mysteriously as he had departed thence. Returned to find the Lucky engines silent, and the water filling the workings of his own mine, and rising in the shaft. This discovery had an extraordinary effect upon him— it was totally unexpected. He stood at the mouth of the shaft, and peered into its dark depths, and cursed himself and Fate, and the Lucky's directors, till the foam gathered in the corners of his mouth, and his whole frame was convulsed with rage. Burns

was, ordinarily, silent and imperturbable; now he raged like a lunatic, tore at his thin long hair, and beat with his clenched hands upon the windlass barrel, as if his furious humour could find no relief but in physical pain.

Controlling himself a little, Pete rigged the windlass, attaching a nail-keg bucket to each end of the rope, and started baling with all his might. For an hour he worked at such a pressure that his accustomed hands blistered and bled, and the perspiration oozed through his crimean shirt. He only paused on looking round, like one awakening from a nightmare, and discovering that he was an object of interest and facetious speculation to a crowd of idle diggers attracted to the claim by his extraordinary behaviour. His efforts had not lowered the waters two inches.

Had he allowed himself one moment for rational consideration, he would have recognised the ridiculousness of his endeavours. The Lucky's pumps had been still for a month, and the whole of the country, like a vast sponge, was saturated with water again.

"P'raps, Pete," suggested a jocular miner, "when yer through with that contract you'll step acrost an' bale out the Goulburn with a gridiron."

"Better drill a hole in the bottom an' let her drain," remarked another, with exaggerated gravity.

Pete gazed at them with wild eyes for a moment, and then he seemed to recover himself. He stopped baling, removed the rope from the windlass, unshipped the barrel, and loaded everything of value upon a barrow, which he wheeled away, returning no answer to the sarcastic remarks of the miners. After that he was never seen in the immediate vicinity of the old mine for many years.

Whilst the country remained undrained the further working of the shallow veins was impossible, a fact that distressed very few, as the common idea was that no stone remained which could be worked at a profit. Dodd's Diggings faded for the second time as suddenly as it had risen. A few families whose heads had grown too apathetic to remove— the shiftless human derelicts, a number of which class remain on every worked-out field— remained to subsist on pork and potatoes of their own growing, but the great majority departed after the stopping of the Lucky. Huts were soon bereft of their bark by the elements, and the frames stood in silence and solitude, like bleached skeletons amongst the young gum trees that presently sprung up about them. The few deserted ramshackle weather-board houses began to lean away from the wind that often swept up the gully in fierce gusts, bowed lower and lower, as time went by, and finally collapsed, one after another, and the grass grew thickly between the boards, and the white ants gnawed them to dust. The bush resumed its sway over a great part of the field, and Dodd's Diggings became

little more than a memory. The families remaining relapsed into a semi-civilised condition; the children ran wild, and were remarkable for the scantiness of their attire, the extent and density of their ignorance, and their agility in the pursuit of 'possums and pigs; the women were disorderly in their dress, shock-headed, and utterly ambitionless; the men occasionally got a spell at one of the mines over towards Rushworth, and occasionally did a little fossicking, but were usually to be found sitting on a fence or leaning up against the old engine-house smoking sheep-wash tobacco, and lazily discussing the good old times. Even the pigs were demoralised by the general depression, and preferred to wallow in the battery sand and bake in the sun rather than grub for the succulent "yams" on the hill-side; and the fowls, when they were not clamouring insanely at the draggled skirts of the housewives, were foolishly pursuing the wary and unsubstantial grasshoppers that swarmed on the field.

During these years Pete was the only energetic man on Dodd's Diggings. Every day saw him busy with "tom" and cradle, and tin dish, fossicking in the creek, with pestle and mortar, pounding up quartz specimens or prospects scraped from worked-out blocks, or away on the surrounding hills trenching and prospecting for new lodes. The people of Dodd's and the few settlers and "cockies" living at some little distance now begun to call Burns Old Pete, and to regard him as one of the ancient institutions of the district.

Pete was at this time about sixty, but looked older. His face was deeply lined, his beard long, thin, and grey, like his patriarchal hair. He was very much bent, as if with constant stooping in low drives, and had not a spare atom of flesh upon his bones. He had been sun-baked and re-baked by the recurring summers till his skin was of the colour and texture of sole-leather. Pete had a dim, shifty eye— a furtive eye that would not be caught. He disliked human companionship, and was sullen and silent towards such persons as chanced to look in upon him at his hut or interview him by the creek, impelled by a curiosity to know something of Old Pete, the hermit and the original owner of the haunted mine.

The old digger still occupied his bark hut in One Man Gully, and delighted only in his comet and the company of his goats. It is doubtful if Pete ever really cared for any living thing besides those goats. There was a story which the women of Dodd's were fond of telling strangers, to the effect that Pete came to Australia from England in the early days, when the gold fever had spread round the world, determined upon making his fortune and returning to the sweetheart who had sworn eternal constancy; that he started working with a light heart, saw others bear away the golden treasure he sought in vain during many years, but toiled on till the ambition became a fixed passion, and still

animated him, though he was old and alone and the sweetheart of his youth was dead and dust.

What foundation there was for this is hard to say, but it was strange that whilst new fields were being opened up in other parts of Australia, and stories of enormous yields were passing about amongst the degenerate men of Dodd's Digging's, he was still content to fossick along the creek and potter amongst the old workings for the few pennyweights of gold that served to provide his rough food and scant clothing, spending each day at the some weary work and passing his openings in the solitary gully, sitting in the hut illuminated dimly by a puttering slush-lamp, playing old-fashioned tunes on his old-fashioned cornet— tunes that, when heard echoing on the distant hills or stealing through the moonlit avenues of the solemn bush, thrilled the listener by their quaint melancholy, and held him entranced with their strange, sweet melody.

Old Pete's reputation had now spread even as far as Bendigo, a fact to be ascribed to the association of his name with the story of the haunted mine rather than to his personal jocularities; His old mine, the claim he and Mike Jody had worked, was said to be haunted.

The exact shape and status of the spectre that flaunted its diaphanous draperies and gibbered in the old shaft were never agreed upon.

The rival Oldest Inhabitants described the goblin variously.

By some the phantom was said to be a tall, stately woman in long, white cerements, who rose up from the black mouth of the shaft at certain hours of the night, uttered a peculiar marrow-chilling wail, and then subsided again into the darkness. Others told of a venerable digger of a Rip Van Winkle aspect, with his throat cut from ear to ear, being hauled up on a spectral windlass by a phantasmal brakeman at the dead of night. Yet another swore that at twelve o’clock exactly on certain nights anyone bold enough to venture to the mouth of the shaft and gaze fixedly into its depths for one hundred seconds would see the water twenty feet below become tinged with a phosphorescent glow, and presently a ghastly white face, with wild, wide eyes and livid lips,, would rise to the surface and glare at the and a long, skeleton hand would reach up and beckon three times.

As the person who had the misfortune to see the spectre under these latter circumstances was, according to popular belief, certain to die a violent and exceptionally painful death within three months, Pete's mine was not generally regarded as a pleasant midnight resort.

Of late years Pete had often been seen on moonlight nights standing in a striking attitude on Wombat Hill gazing fixedly over towards the spot where the great white gum spread its skeleton limbs and marked the vicinity of the

haunted mine, and it was therefore assumed that he had more than a casual interest in the spook, ghost, or goblin that frequented the deserted claim. But when Pete was questioned about the matter his extraordinary gift of profanity made itself evident, and he simply cursed his questioner without reserve and classed him with the beasts that parish.

Dodd's Diggings, like many Australian townships that have blazed up and flickered out, and blazed and faded again and again, was destined to enjoy the advantages of another rush. A gentleman of great weight in politics floated the Happy-go-Lucky Gold Mining Company, No Liability on the Melbourne market amongst a generation of speculators who knew nothing of the Lucky of other days. The amount of work done on the mine was represented as an inducement to investors, and the size and quality of the lode were dwelt upon at great length in a glowing prospectus. The public was artfully assured that the mine was not prospected, and that, although stone of extraordinary richness must be available at a greater depth, the body of quartz reached in the old workings could be worked at a big profit under "our improved system," and with the latest gold saving appliances. The Happy-go-Lucky went off beautifully in a booming market, and measures were taken to renew operations without delay. At this time, too, a field of payable alluvial was discovered about two miles off, and helped materially to restore prosperity to Dodd's.

The news that the Lucky was to be worked again had a most remarkable effect on old Pete. After spending many hours in his hut, in alternating fits of great agitation and profound thought, he went forth, and pegged out his old claim. Now the grey beaded digger attracted a good deal of attention and excited much remark by appearing on the claim every day, and remaining there for a certain time, doing a little pick and shovel work about the surface, Pete was shepherding the haunted mine.

The residents of Dodd's were amazed. They watched his movements jealously, and by their insinuations drew upon him the attention of the men employed about the Lucky, and the diggers working the alluvial on Mosquito Flat. An impression went aboard that there was gold in the old mine. Pete fumed under the undesirable publicity, and relieved his feelings by swearing volubly to himself in frenzied whispers, a pleasant little habit that had grown upon him in his loneliness. Dodd's rapidly developed into a somewhat important centre again, under a high-sounding name. Stores were opened, Methodist meetings held, and for the first time the place rote to real dignity in the possession of a licensed hotel.

Pete watched the work at the Lucky advancing with increasing anxiety, and when at length they got up steam, and the lusty respirations of the big

pumping engine were heard once more from the old engine house, his agitation was apparent to everybody, and all were agreed that there must be good reason for it in the shape of golden stone in his mine.

For a fortnight the water gushed in a constant stream from the lifts at the Lucky without making any great difference below, and Pete spent most of his time watching in a fever of impatience as it flowed away. He seemed to have aged extremely during the lost fourteen days he was bent almost double, and become woefully wrinkled and cadaverous. Every morning and evening he took measurements to discover the effects of the pumping at the Lucky on the water in the haunted mine, and presently the result became evident— the water began sinking, and continued to sink rapidly.

Then old Pete was stricken down with sickness, a kind of low fever accompanied with slight delirium. He could not leave his bunk for several days, during which time he was attended by Mrs. O'Brien, the now washerwoman of Dodd's. When at length his brain was quite clear again, the first item of intelligence that reached him was the news that Bunker and Owen Owens had jumped the haunted mine.

The knowledge of his loss filled old Pete with the most violent passion. He raved like a madman, and when left alone be slipped from his bunk, scrambled into his clothes, and rushed across to the mine, swaying and reeling as if under the influence of drink, with hands and teeth tightly set and fiercely staring eyes.

Bunker and Owens were running the rope on to their windlass when Pete reached them. Snatching a pick from the ground, he turned upon Owens in speechless fury aimed a blow at his head, but two or three men standing by seized him, and ho was borne back gasping inarticulate curses.

Presently ho found his voice.

"Thieves! Thieves! Thieves!" he shrieked. "This is my claim— mine for fifteen years! I will brain the first man that goes below!"

" 'Twon't wash, Pete," said Bunker, coolly. "You never took out a right. We did. She's ours, an' we're goin' t' work her, bet yer life,"

"Bunker, you dog! you robber! This claim is mine! It is mine! Mine! Mine!"

Pete spat his words at the usurpers and his eyes gleamed furiously. They were stains of blood on his grey beard, and his hands clawed spasmodically, but the men held him fast.

Bunker and Owens got on the rope, each with a lighted candle in his hand, ready to go below. They both affected a supreme contempt for the stories of the spectre in Old Pete's mine, but neither cared to go alone in the dark, slimy workings, with his mind full of the ghostly woman and the goblin digger with the gashed throat.

"Lower away!"

Down they went, and the man on top watched the candles flickering as they sank in the narrow shaft. Pete's struggles now became quite maniacal. He raved and cursed and kicked and bit at his captors but he was thrown down, and Long Ben pinned him to the ground as if he were a child.

Bunker and Owens reached the lower level and into the yawning drive. The timbers were still sound and the ground secure. Keeping close together, and throwing the light of their candles before them, the two men walked along the drive towards the face, expecting to find there something rich to account for Pete's agitation. Presently, they stopped simultaneously, paralysed with horror, with trembling knees and hands, and faces that had suddenly become bloodless.

Clinging to each other for courage and support, they each, as if impelled by one will, raised a quivering candle, and gazed at the terrible object before them. Part of the footwall had run in, stopping their progress, and on the top of the heap, sharply outlined against the white reef, lay a perfect skeleton, black, bare and ghastly, with a fearful rift in its grinning skull The candles fell from the hands of Bunker and Owens, and hissed out in the wet clay, and the men uttered a simultaneous yell of horror and turned and fled back to the shaft, floundering in the water, and knocking their heads against the cap pieces in the impenetrable darkness. They caught at the rope together, and Bunker shrieked—

"Heave up, for the love of God!"

Bunker and Owens were drawn to the surface, and appeared before the assembled men ghastly pale, blood-stained, wet, and smeared with clay. Bunker fell on his face upon the grass grown tip, and lay there panting, but Owens supported himself against the windlass, and his eyes sought Old Pete's face, and met his eyes with an appalling stare. Pete was liberated, and he glared back into Owen's accusing orbs. He advanced a few trembling stops and stood like one expecting his death-blow, his dry lips drawn back from his teeth, and the perspiration standing in large drops upon his brow. Then Owens raised his shaking hand, and pointed an accusing finger at Pete.

"You murdered Mike Cody!" he said.

Half a dozen men sprang at Pete, but he eluded them, and rushed down the side of the hill, with his long thin hair streaming behind him. Heading for the Lucky, he bounded across the battery sands on the flat, his pursuers on his heels. He was an old man just off a bed of sickness, but he seemed to be possessed of supernatural strength and fleetness, and outran his enemies. The braceman at the Lucky heard the shouts, divined Pete's intention, and rushed to prevent him, but was too late. The old digger sprang into the open shaft,

and disappeared from view. They heard his body strike the centres, once, twice, thrice, and silence followed.

When brought to the surface again Old Pete was quite dead, battered beyond recognition.

Bunker and Owens each took a small fortune out of the haunted mine, but the dark waters fill the shaft again to-day, and the people of Dodd's Diggings point out the claim to strangers and speak in awed whispers of a ghostly figure that rises to the surface at the midnight hour, and points a black, bony hand at a gaping rift in its skull, and subsides again with an awful groan.

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32: Tom Constant's Second Wife

(As by Ward Edson)
Punch (Melbourne) 15 Dec 1904

TOM CONSTANT was determined to make no mistake over his second marriage. One mistake of that kind is enough for an ordinary lifetime, and Tom's first marriage was a terrible mistake. All his friends and relations admitted it long before he did; but when Tom did admit it, it was without reservation.

However, she was gone years ago, and since the first venture had been so dismal a failure, Tom judged he could not do better than trust his happiness to an entirely different kind of woman, and for a year or two it seemed that he had judged wisely.

The second Mrs. Constant was the exact opposite to the first Mrs. Constant in almost every particular. She was petite and fair, shy and domesticated. She knew little or nothing of the world and its ways, and was modest in her dress, her tastes and her manner.

Now, the Constants were living in a neat little villa in a natty street in a very prim and respectable Melbourne suburb, and Tom was living a quiet, orderly, happy life. Not a life of raptures, but of steady comfort and placid confidence. There had been raptures in the first marriage, and then fireworks. Remembrance of the last two years of his former married life always suggested a pyrotechnic display with the sky full of rockets and shooting lights and bung-bungs and squibs exploding at his feet.

May was adapted to assure commonplace comforts. She was nice to look at a little blue-eyed red-cheeked, roly-poly, woman of twenty-five, simple and affectionate, but neither highly intelligent nor warmly demonstrative. The first Mrs. Constant had been highly intelligent and extremely demonstrative. There times when her demonstrativeness was emphasised with missiles, cups and saucers and fire-irons, for instance.

Tom had had enough of demonstrations, he was an intellectual man himself, a type of the brainy workman who had taken to literature, and he was making a comfortable living in journalism. His short stones were popular, his verse was much recited and his paragraphs were in demand amongst discriminating editors. He was writing a novel in his spare moments. May was no companion on his intellectual side.

Now, a busy journalist who is writing a book in his spare moments is liable, to forget that that he is a husband, and that his little wife's life is not as full as his own, and that although he finds the twenty-four-hour day all too short, she may find it dragging wearily.

In truth, Tom Constant's wife loved him much more dearly than he imagined. He underestimated her capacity for affection, and never for a moment did it occur to him that he was neglecting her, or that that neglect was storing up bitterness. In point of fact Constant was in a fair way to play the deuce and all with his second marriage.

May Constant did not willingly make neighbours, but one insisted upon friendship. She was a vivacious, brown-faced young woman living in a cottage next door, the wife of a one-time cycling champion, now settled down to the sober, inglorious but profitable business of selling machines. It was Mrs. Lloyd who took May to the fortune-teller.

"You must come, dear," she said gaily, "its such fun. She's awfully clever, and tells you everything."

"But I don't want to know," said May, who had a secret dread of this Madame Carmen and all dealers in black art, being a superstitious simpleton at heart.

"Oh, there are heaps of things to know. A married woman always wants to know something. You know what these men are, and husbands, my dear, have always got their little secrets—"

"What? Tom— my Tom got secrets?"

"I suppose so. No doubt he's like the rest, The fortune-teller told me a thing or two about Dick, and I'm sure it's true, every word."

May was drawn into the visit. Jessie Lloyd was with her, and Jessie submitted first to the strange woman, and was usual things. She was to beware of a fair woman; and somebody was coming over the sea; there was a fortune in store for her, &c. &c, &c.

"And you," said, the fortune-teller turning to Mrs. Constant.

"Ye-es, please," faltered May, placing her open hand upon the table. Madame Carmen seized her wrist, and looked at the palm long and earnestly.

"I must be alone with you," she said suddenly. "Go," she added, scarcely glancing at May's companion.

"Oh, I say, let me stay. I should like to hear," said Mrs. Lloyd.

Madame Carmen arose, swept to the door, opened it, and commanded Jessie from the room, with a gesture that was not to be denied. May remembered "She" in the novel, and trembled. When Jessie had gone Madame turned the blue light a little lower, and. bringing out a quaint tray decorated with curious Asiatic symbols, she spread a little powder from a

small box upon it, and, placing the tray in May's hands, she ordered her to shake it. The order was unnecessary. Mrs. Constant was trembling so violently that her hands involuntarily shook the powder into little circles and cones, and meanwhile Madame stood towering over her, one hand on each of her

temples, staring into her eyes with fierce, black, glittering orbs. Then Madame examined the powder, and began to talk.

"You are married," she said; "your husband is a tall man, red, ten years older than you. He works with metals— no, he writes."

She talked on quickly, mostly about Tom, telling May many things about him, intimate things about his character, his speech, his manner— all true. May's terror became greater. She felt herself in the presence of some domineering supernatural influence, and her soul quaked within her.

"You believe in him; you trust him. It is written in dust," continued Madame. "Fool! he does not love you. He never loved you, he never will. He neglects you, and you love him; he despises you, and you are his drudge! You creep meekly about him, and he scarcely sees you. You are neglected, scorned, and you love him! Fool, fool, fool! Beware of him; watch him! He loves another. He makes excuses; his work takes him away. It is to visit the other."

Madame Carmen burst into a fierce laugh, and May screamed and threw the tray from her. She was deadly pale, and seemed to be on the point of fainting. Madame gave her water.

"You will come again." she said.

"No, no, no!" cried the wretched woman.

"You must. There is much more you should know. Nothing is hidden from me, and it is best you know the truth."

May did go again, but from that first visit all happiness fled her heart, and an utter hopelessness possessed her. She believed everything— she could not doubt that the truth had been revealed to her. Tom loved another woman— she was despised.

Madame Carmen told more, and everything she told of Tom that May could verify was true, and everything revealed seemed to be devilishly contrived to break May Constant's heart, and it did break it.

Tom was not quick to notice the chance. The visits to Madame Carmen had been going on for a month before it struck him at breakfast one mornine that his little wife was greatly changed in appearance.

"Why, May," he said, "how pale and thin you are looking, are you ill?"

"No," said May hastily, "I am quite well,"

She shrank from the hand he had placed caressingly upon her shoulder. After that she avoided him as much as nossible. She did not watch him. as Madame Carmen had suggested, because she did not doubt for a moment. She believed every time he left her that it was to seek the society of the woman he really loved, and when one of papers sent him into the country for two three days she drew her own conclusions, and they crushed her heart within her.

"Some day he will not come back, and I shall be alone," she told herself, for her mother was dead since their marriage. A terrible tragedy was working itself out in the simple soul of this poor girl, and no word of it was breathed in another ear.

The end of it all came suddenly. Tom was sitting late one night busy on the closing chapters of his novel, when a movement of the Venetian blind dropped on the open, window at his side attracted his attention. One of the slats was turned. Someone had certainly moved there a moment before. Someone had been looking in. He went to the blind, and, peering through, caught the flutter of a white skirt as a figure fled through the garden gate.

Tom Constant stood stood for a moment lost in thought. A white skirt. May had worn a white frock at tea. It must be after midnight— what could she—

He hastened into their bedroom, stirred by a sudden impulse that was almost terror. The room was empty. He turned to search the house when his eyes fell upon an envelope reared against the shaded lamp. He tore it open.

"Dear, dear husband, good-bye. I love you; you do not love me. I know all— everything. I have been told the truth, and it is killing me. I cannot live. You scarcely see me in the house; you scarcelv seem to know that I am near you. It is because you love another. I have been told all, and I cannot live.—May.''

Tom's eyes seemed to devour the lines. He rushed from the house and the garden. Which way should he go? The left led to the river. He ran that way; ran with all his might. He saw the high bridge over the silver water, saw the white figure upon it, saw the jump, and heard the shrill cry, and almost at the same moment plunged into the river. He found her quickly, bore her to the bank, and crushing her in his arms, noted how pitifully small her wasted figure was. He carried her home again, feeling her sobbing against his heart, with a passionate thankfulness to God.

As the little figure lay on the bed he knelt by her and heard the whole story.

"It is a lie— a lie!" he cried. "My little wife, I love— I love you! It was only my work. When the book was finished we were going away, you and I, dear. Oh, God, how could you do it?"

Tom Constant realised now that all the books in the world were not worth to him the thing he had risked.

Next morning Tom and May visited Madame Carmen together. Tom went into the witch's boudior alone. When he came out he was very pale.

"Come away," he said. He led his wife into the gardens, and on a quiet seat among the willows by a tiny lake he said:

"I have a surprise for you, dear. I have had a terrible surprise myself. That woman, Madame Carmen, was once my wife."

"Tom!" cried May, clinging to him.

"She was my first wife, sweetheart. I led you to believe she was dead, thinking it best, but we were divorced. She left me for another man, and I divorced her. That other man nearly killed her with a bottle, a blow she deserved I swear. It was not a chance that you went to her. She inspired the idea in Mrs. Lloyd, and her desire was to avenge herself on me through you. Fortune telling was just the devil's game she would take to."

"Oh, Tom, how mad I have been, and how I have suffered."

Tom held her in his arms. "Deary, the book will be finished in a week," he said, "and then for the honeymoon with my sweet wife— the one I won from the river."

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33: When the Postman Brings the Cheques

(As by Ward Edson)

Punch (Melbourne) 11 Apr 1907

Lovers thrill with rapture fine
When the lady fair to see
Drups the customary line
Swearing life-long constancy,
But romantic ravings tend
Worldly eommonsense to vex,
Since delights that far transcend
Cooling foolishness attend
When the postman brings the cheques.

Base I'm held, and sordid too,
Worthy of the lofty scorn
Of the sentimental crew
Watching out at eve and morn,
But I snigger at the flock,
Knowing well that either sex
Still enjoys a keener shock
Summoned by his double knock
When the postman brings the cheques.

Missives that a friend indites
Oft invite a little loan,
Dainty screeds that Sophie writes
When she says she's all our own
Copies are, perchance, no more;
Other fellows may annex
All their treasures o'er and o'er;
No such apprehensions bore
When the postman brings the cheques.

So the lank, lean bards may reel
Tiresome rhymes about the post,
Singing of his "winged heel "
Dragging in a classic host.
Hermes' staff nor Cupid's toy
My prosaic poem decks,
But I know the little boy
Born of Venus shrieks with joy
When the postman brings the cheques.

34: His Accomplice

(As by Ward Edson)
Punch (Melbourne) 18 Sep 1902

SHE WAS barmaid at the Points Hotel at Maloona, a highly privileged person, whose word was law with "Stiffenem" Clarke, licensed victualler, because of the fact that Miss Jeane Sanders had improved his counter trade by about one hundred per cent., and was a strong-willed young woman, who gave plenty of humbug, and would stand none.

Jeane Sanders was rather tall, with a good figure, square, strong shoulders and a Juno-like bust. Her slightly aquiline features gave Miss Jeane quite an aristocratic air when in repose but her ladylike manner was rather a thin veneer and Jeane had no compunction at all about laying it aside when the occasion seemed to call for a vituperative, speech or a diplomatic display of temper.

His name was Alf Bury, and he was mining manager at the Geordie Miners, a profitable claim belonging to a Sydney company, and situated about seven miles out from Maloona. He was only thirty, but in addition to being a practical miner he was a graduate from the Ballarat School of Mines, and perfect in theory. The directors of the Geordie Miners had implicit confidence in young Bury, and young Bury deserved it. He was a smart business man, a first-class miner and a man to whom honesty was an instinct. He was receiving a fairly good wage, but there were drags on him— a family of younger brother and sisters in Melbourne, and a bedridden father, who needed constant medical attention, and consequently he had few spare sovereigns.

Jeane was an expensive girl for a man to be in love with. Alf had far better have returned the affections of little Miss Heath at the bakery next door. She was fresh and pretty, but not in the least striking, and, unlike Jeane, she would have been content to give all, content with nothing in return but his love.

Jeane had so many admirers, and there were a few well-to-do young chaps from the neighbouring stations amongst the number. They made expensive presents, and did not mean marriage; Alf made cheaper, but to him very costly, gifts, and pleaded once a week with Jeane to be his wife.

Alf Bury was the sort of man any woman might have been proud to have at her feet. He was as fine a type of the educated workman as the country held, and his tenderness towards women, taken in conjunction with his obvious power, appealed strongly to the sex. Jeane Sanders may have liked him. She certainly encouraged him. But then she encouraged young Licton from Blackbutt, and Carver and Beeston, and Tissler, the banker, and Keelor of the big store. The encouragement she gave them was business-like, however;

Licton shouted champagne, and bought ruby rings and gold bangles for the Hebe who dispensed it. He was not to be despised.

"Pooh! they're all decent boys," she said, "and I am a good barmaid. I can't afford to kill business, but I'm not fool enough to think of any of those fellows seriously."

"Do you mean that you do think of me seriously?" asked Bury eagerly,

"Hmm," she said. "I don't know. A girl of sense doesn't take a man seriously excepting at the altar.''

"Take me there. I've asked you often enough."

True; but, my boy, I'm an expensive taste. I cost money. I'm only here to get hold of a good sum, so as to have a pleasant time in Sydney. But you're a nice fellow, Alf, I really think T "

She stooped insinuatingly.

"Yes, yes, you think." He clasped her hand, and, throwing his arm about her waist, drew her to him fiercely. "You are so beautiful— by Heaven. I'd give half my life to win you."

"Would you, well—"

She stooped down, and whispered a few words in his ear. His face whitened: he staggered away a few paces, exactly as if he had been struck, and stood gazing at her in silence for a few moments.

Then he stammered: "You are joking! You don't mean that! You'd despise me. Good God! would you have me a thief?"

"My dear boy, I'd have you with a nice lump, of money; I wouldn't without. Tut tut man; don't look so scared. You can't afford to keep a conscience."

Alf turned on his heel, walked straight to the stables, saddled his mare, and rode away, without even saying good-bye. But he was back on the following Saturday, and called to see her, looking worn and troubled. She treated him very carelessly. Bury rode into Maloona once a fortnight to cash the cheque for the men's pay. But be had been in the habit of riding in every week after the last shift on Saturday night, and staying till late on Sunday night on purpose to be near Jeane. He came for Sunday as usual but Miss Sanders scarcely noticed him.

"How can you treat me like this?" he asked fiercely, meeting her alone for a few moments during the afternoon.

"And why should I trouble to treat you differently," she asked. "You pretend to be madly in love with me, and you are so fond that you will not exert the courage or the resolution of a child to win me."

"But it would be a great satisfaction to win you, and to be thrown into gaol for my trouble."

"You are a fool, Alf, my boy. There would be no gaol. The thing is too easy. It is in your own hands. You have the money, you are bailed up and robbed on the way to the mine. You are a honest young man: who would dispute your word, who could prove you lied?"

"You're an infernal bad lot, Jeane; and I tell you that to your face!" His own face was purple with passion; his whip was raised as if to strike. She looked at him quite coolly, and presently a little smile dawned on her lips. She laughed at him quietly.

"By Jove, you do love me," she said. "There is no surer proof of a man's love than his displays of ferocity."

"Love you!" he said. "I love you so well that I am no longer master of myself— no longer a sane man. Heaven, how I have laughed at the folly of men led to the devil by a worthless woman, and now—"

"Now you do it, Alf?"

"I will not!"

"I think you will."

He had thrown himself on the couch, and was sitting with his back to her, beating the side of his boot with his whip. She threw her arms about his neck, drew his face sharply back, and kissed him on the lips, and then fled. He sprang up, aflame, his cheeks glowing his heart leaping within him, and stood a prey to his passion. This kind of thing was kept up for some time, and Alf Bury did not thrive on it; he was looking comparatively thin; his friends commented on his nervous, restless manner and his hollow cheeks.

Then came the greatest sensation Maloona had known.

Keelor, driving back from the direction of the mines, had discovered Alf Bury, bleeding and in an unconscious condition, tied to a tree-butt alongside the track. His horse lay dead beside him, shot through the temple. The manager's injuries were evidently the result of the fall from his horse. There were no shot-wounds about him.

Bury's story was short, but sensational. A masked man had suddenly jumped out of the scrub, and, confronting him, had shot his horse before he realised what had happened. He was stunned by the fall, and when he came to found himself being tied to the tree.

All his money was gone, and the fortnight's pay was the biggest he had yet carried. It contained, in addition to the usual wages, the money for the contractors busy on the new battery and the dam— over £300.

Of course, there was a tremendous deal of excitement over the affair, and speculation as to the identity of the robber was the only interesting theme of conversation for a week. Half-a-dozen men were suspected, but it never

entered the heads of anybody to doubt Bury's story. Even the Sydney detective, a most astute officer, seemed to take Alf's story for granted.

During the time spent in investigation, Alf and Jeane saw very little of each other, but when the seven days' wonder was past Alf contrived to get a word with her.

"Well," he whispered, "you have it safe ?"

"To be sure, I have," she answered. "When do we go ?"

"Don't be a fool, man. Time enough. Do you want to give everything away?"

"No, but I want you. Ah, Jeane, now that you have won your way, let me see it is not in vain— let me see that you love me."

WHEN NEXT Alf Bury rode up to The Points Hotel he found Clarke behind the bar.

"Where is Jeane?" he asked, anxiously.

"Gone!" replied Clarke, gloomily. "Cleared out for Sydney yesterday. Said she was going to have a good time, and was tired of this slow hole. Here— a note she left for you."

Alf took the letter mechanically, and Clarke forgot his own disgust in the face of Bury's obvious misery. The young man had gone deathly white— he stood as if robbed of the power of movement.

"Come, come! Buck up!" said Clarke. "The boys all seem to be knocked endways, but the others don't take it so bad as this. Be a man. Take a drop to pull you together."

Bury turned from the bar, and strode into the open air. He walked on, without volition, into the bush. There he read her letter:

"Good-bye; I'm off. After all, I can't do you a better turn than by clearing out without you. Don't follow. I'm sure to get you into trouble if you do.—Jeane."

He understood the threat in the last line, but felt no passion, no anger— nothing but a dull, stunned feeling, from which he believed he would never awaken.

The awakening was slow. He resigned, his managership, but the company refused to accept it. They said it was prompted by what they believed to be a misfortune. They had, they declared, every confidence in him. He remained.

It came about curiously enough in the course of two years, during which time Bury's zeal in the company's interests had won him highest praise and increases of salary, that Alf was one Sunday moved to ask pretty little Mary Heath to be his wife.

"Yes," she said; "I love you!"

He held her in his arms for a moment, and she kissed him, and, clinging with her arms about his neck, said:

"Alf, I must tell you that I know your secret. I saw everything that day in the bush. Saw her shoot your horse, and watched you stand while she tied you to the tree. I saw her carry away the gold, too."

He was staring at her, blanched, full of amazement. "And you did not tell?"

"I would rather have been burnt at the stake."

"But why did you spare us?"

"Can't you guess? I loved you!"

End