EDWARD
DYSON
SHORT
STORIES

3

JOHN LESLIE'S BURGLAR

AND OTHER STORIES

John Leslie's Burglar

And other stories

Edward Dyson

1865-1931

Produced and Edited by Terry Walker from stories published in Australian newspapers and magazines

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Edward Dyson

The prolific author used numerous pseudonyms as well as his own name: Dy Edwardson, Ward Edson, and Silas Snell, are some of the better known ones. I have kept the as published name under each story title.

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1: Flood-Bound Lovers

Ward Edson

Punch (Melbourne) 26 Dec 1918

"YOU TWO bright spirits should know each other," said Malvin.

Miss Creet arose, and faced the tall man at Malvin's side.

"Very pleased, I'm sure," she said. She had not yet raised her eyes above the third button of the stranger's vest.

" 'Delighted," said the tall man.

"Miss Creet, Mr. Charlie Stoneham," said Malvin.

The two now looked each other in the face, and; instantly the amiable Miss Creet froze over.

"It was like being fallen on by a ton of snow,'' said Malvin later, explaining matters to the select few at Carlyle's. "But Stoneham took it very well. He merely smiled, and said in the sweetest tones imaginable— "I can quite understand why Miss Creet is described as the most popular young lady guest at 'The Bush.' "

Miss Winnie Creet was attacked about it later. "He's such a nice fellow," said the Star Boarder. "I can't understand you, my dear."

Miss Creet smiled a little wanly. "I take sudden aversions," she explained— "just as I take sudden likings, and I trust my first impressions. I believe implicitly in friendship at first sight."

"And poor Stoneham is not to be admitted to the charmed circle?"

Miss Winnie shook her handsome head. "I am certain I could never stand the man."

"But, my dear, irrational darling, he is handsome, he has the nicest manners in the world, he is most amiable, he is rich."

"Rich!"

"Quite so. Ah, ah! that makes a difference."

"None on earth. Rich or poor, amiable or satanic, I cannot stand the man."

"Vale, Stoneham!" murmured Madeline Sefton, known at "The Bush" as the Star Boarder, partly because she was a star actress, largely because of her popularity with the guests.

"Oh, I don't imagine for a moment the fellow will not survive it," Winnie went on— "he is good, solid indiarubber, he is all bounce."

"There now, that's a curious. simile. Stoneham made his money in rubber."

"Let us talk of something more pleasing— Madeline Sefton, for instance. How do you like your part in the new play ?"

Meanwhile Stoneham, at billiards with two or three of the few men at "The Bush," was being rallied on his failure.

"She took to you like a crate of rats," said Stayfield.

Stoneham brought off his stroke with great deliberation, then suddenly recollected he had been spoken to.

"The lady of the great brown eyes?" he said. "She's a rare and radiant sample. I have never seen a woman I admire more."

"Well, that's what I call magnanimous," commented Malvin, "seeing that she treated you as something to which the attention of the Board of Health should be directed."

Charlie Stoneham laughed lightly. "I don't judge the merits of my female acquaintances in proportion to their appreciation of my many perfections," he said. "Miss Creet is at liberty to hold me in little esteem; I claim a similar liberty to feel towards her the sincerest respect and admiration."

ONE OF the most popular and delightful holiday resorts and recuperation houses available to jaded Melbournians, uniquely constructed, as the advertisements insisted, situated on a unique hill, with a unique view, and possessing many unique advantages for seekers after health and complete rest, "The Bush" drew a regular clientele, and was a sort of country home to a good many fairly well-to-do people from the City, who had no relations to go to at holiday time, or so many relatives at all times that it was an inestimable boon to get away from them.

Manager Carlyle insisted that "The Bush" was the most select establishment in the State.

"We don't profess to be palatial," he would say ; "but I can guarantee decent guests will meet no one here they would not be delighted to meet in their own homes."

Yet Carlyle could not pretend to know the characters and antecedents of all his patrons, he had but one test.

"Table manners," he said. "I trust to table manners. I have always trusted to table manners, and I insist that what a man or a woman really is, come out unmistakably at table."

Carlyle had been a waiter since he was sixteen, and till he was thirty, and a manager of large hotels and residential'establishments for over twenty years, it must be admitted he had unique opportunities of satisfying himself of the truth of his theory.

Another weakness of Carlyle's was the word "unique." Everything at "The Bush" was "unique," all his guests were "unique"— he was "unique."

Mr. Charles Stoneham was a late comer and a newcomer; he was duly accepted on the strength of his table manners. He had come to Melbourne from

Sydney quite recently, and had taken to "The Bush" on the recommendation of a casual friend, seeking relief from "that tired feeling," a certain dubiousness of vision, a tendency to think life, after all, a tedious mistake, and a most disconcertingly feminine predisposition to tears— all symptoms of "nerves," he was told.

The meeting with Miss Winnie Creet was a casual matter. The guests at "The Bush" were supposed to dwell in amity, as children of one family that never "fall out and chide and fight"— Carlyle's unique *en famille* atmosphere.

Manager Carlyle was puzzled over Miss Creet's attitude towards Stoneham, the man was obviously a gentleman, he was never at fault in the course of an exacting dinner. The feud threatened to endanger to some extent the reputation of his establishment as the abode of peace and goodwill to men.

Miss Creet had rested and recuperated at "The Bush" before. She was, he understood, a spinster of comfortable means, without family, old enough to be allowed the run of the world without a chaperone, a person of nice manners, charming appearance, and great saving commonsense.

The one questionable thing about Miss Creet provoked the same query from all comers. "Why hasn't the woman married?"

To an intimate, like Madeline Sefton, Winnie replied:

"I have not married because the man I thought worth while did not think me worth while."

"Nonsense!" said Madeline. "No sane man could think you otherwise. Believe me, my dear, your man who was worth while had sound reasons, apart from inclination."

In a week there was no improvement in the relations between Miss Creet and Mr. Stoneham. The coolness remained, and its frigidity emanated entirely from Miss Creet. Many times Stoneham tried to bring about a thaw. He always failed ; but it must be admitted he failed without disgrace. He came out of each venture perfectly unruffled, smiling, without a trace of enmity or a hint of a grievance.

Meanwhile, it had rained. It had rained for five whole days and as many compact nights, close, insistent, implacable rain, and, behold, Friday was the fifth day, and on the morning thereof the residents at "The Bush" looking forth, beheld water, and more water, and still water— water to the right of them, water to the left of them, water in front of them volleyed and thundered. The water behind them was equally spacious and just as turbulent.

"The Bush," standing on its hill was another ark, and just as inaccessible as Noah's first floating boarding-house must have been. Somewhere a river had slopped over, and added its millions of gallons to the local fall at Gum Valley, and "The Bush" for a time not to be specified, was cut off from the rest of the world.

"So, again a kindly Providence intervenes," said Charley Stoneham, at Miss Creet's elbow.

Miss Creet was on the front balcony, looking out over the flowing tide.

"You cannot keep to your implacable resolution, and go if I stay. I intend to stay, and you cannot go."

"Indeed ? I suppose there are means."

"There are no boats. The water must be ten feet deep at the foot of the hill. You cannot wade. There is no escape."

Miss Creet looked him coldly in the eye, and turned on her heel, and left him smiling at misfortune.

Winnie order the unpacking of a trunk or two. The fellow was right— she could not wade, however great her determination to get away from his distressing society.

Miss Creet stayed. Everybody knew she had intended leaving to avoid Stoneham; everybody said this was carrying an absurd prejudice to an illogical extreme.

On the same evening, Charley Stoneham went into the delightful conservatory attached to "The Bush." He went because he had seen Miss Creet go. He went knowing he was unwanted.

Miss Greet was sitting in a chair behind some palms in the far corner. Miss Creet was doing a strange thing for so commonsense and contained a person— she was weeping.

Stoneham went straight to her; he knelt down by her, he took her in his arms, and in defiance of her struggles, even her blows, he kissed her again and again.

"It's no use, my dear one," he whispered. "It's got to be. You know it's got to be."

Miss Creet still resisted; she would not admit that anything had to be. But there is a limit to a woman's strength; there are bounds to her fiercest. resolutions, and time found Winnie still in Stoneham's arms, and consenting, apparently, to discuss matters like a sane woman."

The discussion went on for hours. You would hardly deem it possible two strange people knowing nothing of each other's affairs could find so much to talk about.

Now came an amazing, sudden change—a change of vast and absorbing interest to the weather-bound people in "The Bush." Charley Stoneham and Winnie Creet had become fast friends, inseparables, in fact, and, moreover, Winnie's behaviour was not quite consistent with "The Bush" iraditiuus of discretion and decorum, nor with what might reasonably be expected from a woman of her years and judgment,

"Like a love-sick school girl," said Malven, who had had hopes himself;

"My dearest girl," cautioned Madeline Sefton, "do go slow. They're all talking about you."

Winnie laughed delightedly; she clapped her hands; she romped across the room.

"Lovely!" she cried. "Do you know, Madeline, I have never been talked about in all my life? I have never been aujthnig but the most staid and decorous of persons, and it has been intolerably dull. I like this— what do you call it?— going a bit gay. I love it. Let them talk. I'd just delight to hear the cockatoos homing in the tall trees."

"Well, you will hear it all right if you don't keep Stoneham more in bounds."

"How can lovers be kept in closer bounds, hemmed in as he is by these flood waters?"

''I've warned you. Really, I'm no wowser myself, but even I want a little more— what shall we call it ?"

"Common decency, my dear."

Winnie laughed aloud, and danced from the room. Now a woman over thirty should not dance from a room. It implies utter abandon. Yet Miss Creet did it very well.

Well, there's no hiding the fact, there is no sense in delaying it, the conduct of Miss Creet and Mr. Stoneham became quite scandalous. The finger of scorn was pointing in their direction all day, shocking whispers followed them, and they were openly and unaffectedly merry.

Manager Carlyle received a deputation of ladies in his office. The thing was past bearing; Stoneham and Miss Creet would have to go, even if it were necessary to construct a raft to remove them.

Carlyle went to Stoneham. "I am very sorry, sir," he said, "I shall need your room."

"Certainly," Stoneham replied. "You can have it."

"But, sir, you must leave. Miss Creet must leave."

Stoneham laughingly put his head outside the office door, and called a crowd of guests dying with curiosity in the middle distance, into the room.

"Carlyle is trying to turn us out," he said— "myself and Miss Creet. I want to tell you all I was married some years ago. My wife left me after one year of married life. She had good and sufficient reason, she thought, yet I loved her. I lost her; and I think it an inhuman thing for you to behave as you are doing."

"But how does this justify your conduct with Miss Creet?"

"My wife when she left me took her maiden name. She wished to be free of any trace of her association with the wretch she imagined me to be. We have had explanations. Peace is restored."

"Yet these scandalous going on with Miss Creet— how would your wife like this?"

"Carlyle, don't be a dunderhead. She will like it very well. You see, my wife is Miss Creet. I mean, Miss Creet is my wife."

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2: Beau Ben's Last Appearance

Ward Edson

Punch (Melbourne) 7 May 1903

THE CONVERSATION had turned on a recent bushranging story in "Punch."

"A woman instinctively loves a scamp," said the official, emphatically.

The other gentlemen raised their eyebrows, in shocked deprecation. They had wives of their own.

"It's true," persisted the official, stubbornly. "I've met with scores of cases in point. There never was a rogue who couldn't find half a score of women to sympathise with him at a moment's notice. The story we were talking about might be true of every bushranger Australia has had. Look at Ben Hill."

The others settled themselves. The official's stories were usually good. The official delighted in telling them, too. This is his story of Ben Hill.

Mr. Benjamin Hill was a polite blackguard and an expert gold-stealer. He had stuck up a few banks, robbed a gold escort, and cleaned out a party of miners who had accumulated a pile of gold dust at Bendigo; and he was the gentlest scoundrel imaginable. He carried on his depredations for years in the late fifties without injuring man, woman or child, and robbed you like a perfect gentleman. He might have produced a "book called "Etiquette for Housebreakers," but he didn't— he was too busy for literary enterprises.

Ben was wanted, of course— wanted all over the place, wanted with all the eagerness that a big price on his head could inspire in the avaricious— but Ben was a mystery. He disappeared most discreetly after every venture, reappearing without any warning to work off another bold coup, and wisely fade into temporary oblivion again. What became of Beau Ben between his raids nobody could say, but everybody had a try, and the wildest conjectures were put about by imaginative minds.

"Beau" was the nickname given to Ben by the gentlemen diggers, and the rest accepted it without troubling themselves as to its meaning. It was alliterative— that was enough. All that was known of Beau Ben was that he was a man of about five feet nine, slim, quick as a panther, and almost as strong. His hair and short beard were coal black, but he was fresh-coloured and his eyes blue, and he spoke with the pleasantest flavour of a brogue. He was. an Irish gentleman, it was said, who had been brought to his present evil courses by misfortune and fraud.

But this was all conjecture. No doubt Ben Hill took to villainy naturally, as ants take to honey; anyhow, he seemed perfectly happy in his iniquity.

It was a smiling face he thrust into Cadwallader's tent at Black Boy the night he cleaned out the First Spec, partners.

"Pleased to meet you, boys," he said. "Cadwallader, I have never had the misfortune to shoot a man in the way of business, but if you shtir that right arum of yours an inch, I shall have to begin here and now."

Cadwallader and his mate were playing cards, and Cadwallader's hand had gone instinctively towards his revolver.

"Price," said Ben Hill, "you have a bag of gold dust in that black billy; kindly pass it to me before I count five, or there'll be a wake on this field in which you will not play a shpeakin' part."

The bag was passed over. Ben had a very convincing way with him.

"Now," he said, "I can see your shadows through the tent, and the man who moves within five minutes will move to another— and I trust a better— world. Good-night, Cadwallader! Good-night, Mr. Price!"

ONE AFTERNOON Mrs. Spencer Bligh, wife of old Pennywise Bligh, of Cootra Run, was out driving a pair of spirited ponies across the back paddock, with the intention of visiting a nextdoor neighbour some twelve miles ofi. Mrs. Spencer Bligh had been warned not to trust those ponies, the same containing as much pure devil as could well be packed into such small hides; but Mrs. Bligh was more spirited than heir ponies, despite her fifty-six years, and she would drive no other horses.

Result: a terrible bolt in sparsely-timbered country, and the sudden and opportune appearance of a tall, cleanshaven, fair-haired, handsome stranger of forty, riding a superb chestnut, who rode beside the maddened ponies, and by a clever and daring feat of horsemanship secured the reins, and prevented the smash which a few minutes before had seemed inevitable.

Further result: the establishment of Mr. Alfred. Goudie, the tall, fair-haired, handsome stranger, at the Cootra homestead in the capacity of honoured guest. It turned out that Mr Goudie was a rich Englishman of good family, travelling Australia: in quest of adventure and to escape the awful ennui that had afflicted him as a social pet and the natural prey of match-making mammas in London society.

Goudie was delighted to accept Bligh's invitation to make Cootra his home for some time. It. afforded him an opportunity. of taking a pleasant rest after much knocking about, whilst enjoying further colonial experience. In return for the hospitality extended to him, Alfred Goudie contrived to make himself most agreeable to the people about Cootra, and Miss Esther Spencer, Mrs. Bligh's twenty year old niece, was the only one who refused to acknowledge his charm. Alfred, who was accustomed to finding pretty girls very willing to be pleased with him, found Esther cold and unresponsive.

"It's all his English impudence," said Esther, with early Australian prejudices. "He comes here with his melodramatic actions and his superior airs, and expects to make a general conquest. I am not so easily deceived."

This was most ungenerous of Miss Esther, and as Esther was not naturally, of an ungenerous disposition the wise might have suspected something behind her present attitude. It was not for want of trying that the handsome Englishman failed to impress Miss Spencer. He was untiring in his attentions to her, he rode with her, walked with her, talked with her, and was evidently rather seriously smitten; but Esther, whilst treating her aunt's guest with proper respect, assumed towards him a proud manner that was quite foreign to her friends.

Goudie did not appear cast down; on the contrary, he gave no sign of discovering anything uncongenial in the girl's attitude towards him, and was a cordial and cheerful companion. He made no effort to hide his admiration, and what his lips did not utter his eyes told bluntly enough. The Englishman was a pleasant companion; he rode well, talked well, danced well, and did each with an air of happy heartiness that conquered all— excepting only the one he most desired to conquer.

One afternoon Goudie returned from a ride with Esther Spencer, with a red wheal across his face, such as might have resulted from the cut of the riding whip Esther carried in her hand. The girl was flushed and evidently deeply disturbed, although she tried hard to hide the fact. Goudie explained that, through riding carelessly, he had received a blow across the face fron the branch of a tree, and had been thrown from his horse. Before the others he apologised to Miss Spencer for the fright he had given her, declaring— quite needlessly it seemed in the circumstances— that he would lay down his life to serve her. Esther left him without a word, and after that they rode no more together, and the girl made no attempt to disguise her efforts to avoid the guest.

There was a sort of party at Cootra about a week later. The homestead swarmed with guests, and the house was full of light and gaiety. Alfred Goudie excelled himself. His strength and horsemanship and his willingness to meet proffered friendship half-way made him a favourite with the men; his good looks, his tact and his reputation as a rich man conquered the women. Goudie was the lion of the night. It was after ten o'clock. Goudie was lounging in the drawingroom, chatting with Mrs. Bligh and a number of guests. Esther was seated in a corner with an amorous young squatter, and the strains of a waltz filled the house.

Suddenly a trooper in uniform appeared in the doorway, pointing a revolver straight at the head of Mr. Alfred Goudie. For half-a-minute. not a word was spoken. The guests stared, open-mouthed, from the trooper to Goudie. The latter's hand had gone instinctively to his side, but he had no weapon, and sat erect, staring the policeman straight in the face.

"Ben Hill, you are my prisoner!" said the trooper.

"Ben Hill," cried Mrs. Bligh; "but this—"

"That is Ben Ilill, ma'am, Beau Ben, the gold-robber," said the trooper, emphatically.

"Don't be disturbed on my account, Mrs. Bligh," interposed Goudie, quietly, "the man is mistaken, or mad. I'll—"

"Not a foot from there, Hill, or I'll shoot you-down like a dingo:"

Goudie had risen to his feet, and motioned as if to leave the room. The trooper's face hardened, and sudden death stared out of his eyes.

"I'll trouble you, gentlemen, to help to bind this man," the policeman continued. One of the station hands, who had been standing behind the trooper, advanced with a rope, and one or two men stepped forward.

"After all," said Cheeseman, "if it's a mistake it'll soon be put right, and this won't hurt vou, Goudie."

"I submit," replied Goudie. "Tie me tight: Ben Hill's a slippery customer, I hear." He laughed lightly. " 'Pon my soul, this is a high compliment," he said.

Esther was standing near, staring at Goudie, pale to the lips; she detected a fictitious ring in the gaiety he had assumed. Only a minute was given to thought, and then she turned and left the room by the French window leading on to the wide balcony.

When she returned, Goudie stood the centre of a throng, his hands were securely tied behind him, and be was conversing lightlv with the guests.

The trooper was busy explaining to "Pennywise" Bligh that a man employed on the run had recognised Goudie as Ben Hill, who, he said, always wore a wig and false beard when engaged upon his various crimes.

Goudie felt a knife cutting through the rope that bound his hands, and heard Esther's voice whisper at his ear:

"Your horse is saddled and standing by the big tank. I have turned the trooper's horse away. Make a dash for the verandah, and ride for the gully."

The next instant Goudie had swent the quests aside, and made a dash for the French Window. The trooper uttered a curse, fired one shot rather wildly. and then rushed after his prisoner. He was confronted at the window, by Esther Spencer, who threw her arms about him and clung to him desperately. When the trooper broke loose the bird had flown. The trooper has thrown Esther aside so violently that she was stunned by the fall. When she came to she would only say: "He saved my aunt's life, risking his own to do it. My aunt has been more than a losing mother to me. I could not see him dragged away to his death without an effort to save him, no matter what he was."

If Miss Spencer ever heard further of Beau Ben nobody else knew of it. Nobody else was ever quite satisfied that Goudie and Ben Hill were identical, and that fact saved Esther from much trouble at the hands of the law; but it is

known that Ben Hill disappeared from the records of Australian crime at this time, and there seems to be little doubt Ben committed his depredations disguised behind a black beard and under a wig.

Of course, it was asserted that Esther had fallen desperately in love with the bushranger and th fre may be truth in that, for, though she had many chances, she never married.

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3: The Enigmatic Emeralds

Ward Edson

Punch (Melbourne) 16 March 1916

WHAT EVERYBODY predicted had happened at last— Mrs. Agnes Inglefield's emeralds had been stolen. Mrs. Agnes Inglefield's emeralds were almost an institution. First night audiences would miss them as much as big Mrs. Agnes Inglefield herself, and a great deal more than little Mr. Agnes Inglefield.

Mr. Agnes Inglefield had probably never noticed the emeralds. He was a little, purblind, comatose sort of man, so absent-minded that he was continually forgetting himself.

Mrs. Inglefield, on the other hand, was a large, exceedingly stout, very wide-awake lady, who never in any circumstances forgot herself, or allowed other people to forget her. She was at least fifty-eight by this. Her profuse dark hair, by reason of its singular uniformity, and the fact that it fitted her with the precision of a man's hard hat, had long sustained the reputation of being a confirmed wig. Mrs. Inglefield raddled her cheeks most unsuccessfully, and was a great, kindly-hearted fool of a woman, who loved to dress herself in spangled materials and expensive emeralds. She looked like a starlit night.

The most 'conspicuous of Mrs. Inglefield's many ornaments was the emerald necklace. Melbourne was quite familiar with these emeralds. It had seen them shedding a green lustre over Mrs. Inglefield's spacious and benevolent bos,om as her brougham crept through the city streets, conveying her to the theatre, a ball, or some social function: it had picked them out scores and scores of times, gleaming in the dim-light down in a seat in the front circle row during the performance of many plays.

Mrs. Inglefield was an inveterate first-nighter, but though extremely rich, she clung to her old-fashioned, comfortable brougham, disdaining the smart motor cars of her acquaintances as dangerous to life and limb. Her acquaintances said she hated the motor head-lights, since they might almost outshine her beloved emeralds.

People, had told Mrs. Inglefield her emeralds would be stolen, but Mrs. Inglefield had replied, "I have emeralds to ornament me, not to illuminate the interior of a vault." Now the emerald's were goner.

It happened so very simply. A block of traffic caused by the escapades of a very drunken and hilarious citizen lying on his back before the wheels of a vice-regal motor car had served to hold up Mrs. Agnes Inglefield's brougham for a few moments. During one of these moments a hand thrust through the open window of the carriage had torn the emeralds from Mrs. Inglefield's neck.

Detective Kewt was given the Inglefield emerald case to handle.

"Might as well set a man to hunt for a white cat in the snows of Siberia," he told his friend, Austin Porteous, sitting on the counter in the latter's little curiosity shop.

The cherubic-looking antiquarian smiled gently. He was turning over a large cameo, examining the substantial gold setting in elaborate basket-work.

Detective Kewt sighed. "The thief may have been watching his chance. Mrs. Inglefield has worn this eighteen hundred pounds' worth of emeralds persistently for years."

Porteous nodded. "I know them," he said. "They are worth more. There are in the necklace four particularly fine stones."

"So some smart criminal may have been dogging his chance. Nimble Hegan is in town."

"Hegan? Yes; it would be worth your while to find out what Hegan was doing with himself at eight minutes past eleven, on Saturday night."

"I have," replied Kewt with a sigh that was almost a groan. "He was leaning on a hotel corner in Bourke-street, talking to a police constable."

Porteous looked up, a bird-like sharpness in the black eves that contrasted so quaintly with his old doll's face. "A deliberate alibi, perhaps. It suggests a confederate."

"I've thought of that, too. Perhaps if you went and saw Mrs. Inglefield, you could get something out of her that would be of value. I couldn't."

"Very well, I'll do what I can."

Tracking criminals was one of the hohbies of Mr. Austin Porteous. His other hobby was collecting ancient articles of art and virtue, and selling them at a suitable profit to cranky amateurs.

Mr. Porteous, saw Mrs. Inglefield; he peered into her mind through his large, horn rimmed spectacles; he peered into the case from the only discoverable point of view, and then admitted that there was nothing in it for the scientific investigator.

"That's about the total make-up," Kewt acknowledged. "I'll get me to the pawnbrokers."

But three days later Kewt reappeared at the little, out-of-the-way shop of Mr. Austin Porteous. Mr. Kewt was accompanied by a slim, brown, cadaverous man in a suit of clothes that might have been the second-best of a not-too-prosperous tramp.

Kewt, holding a position between his companion and the door, took a small tissue-paper pared from his pocket, opened it, and handed Austin Porteous a big emerald necklace.

"Mrs. Inglefield's emeralds," said the antiquarian. "I congratulate you, Kewt. Where did you nab the man?"

"I didn't," Kewt replied. "He nabbed me. Let me introduce Mr. Horace Skews. Mr. Skews, Mr. Porteous."

"Most happy," said Skews, with a marked English accent, at the same time extending a hand which Mr. Porteous was pleased to note was clean, as well as slim and unstained by labour.

"Mr. Skews brought me the emeralds two hours ago," said Kewt. "He says he found them."

"Indeed," said Porteous dryly.

"Yes," continued the detective; "found them two weeks ago."

Austin Porteous was alert in a moment. "Two weeks ago? They were only stolen last Saturday!"

"I found those emeralds two'weeks ago yesterday," said Skews, "and they must have been in the place in which I found them since the previous night at eleven."

"Why?" asked Porteous.

"Because they were in my bed; and I retire at eleven."

"Tell him," said Detective Kewt, "tell him all. '

"Certainly," said Skews. "You must know, Mr. Porteous, I am something of a pariah. My appearance, my costume, my hat have probably told you that I am not at this moment one of the monied class. I have been of the useless rich, but at present I haven't the proverbial bean. I have been sleeping, sir, in a cement barrel. You look incredulous. You think it improbable a man of my dimensions could sleep in a cement barrel. I admit the whole of me does not sleep in the cement barrel, but as much of me as I can get into the barrel does. The cement barrel is in a block at the back of Osgood's big ironmongery. The block contains much of Osgood's property that is of no particular or immediate value— chiefly barrels. On the night of 5th January— that is, Wednesday fortnight— I stole to the corner of the lot where my cement barrel is. Inside the cement barrel were a quantity of old straw and, several back numbers of the *Age*. My bedclothes, Mr. Porteous. I pulled these things out, made myself comfortable with my legs in the barrel and my head on a small zinc-lined case, and went to sleep. I awoke about seven o'clock on Thursday fortnight, and the first thing my eyes fell upon, lying in the straw of my bed, was the emerald necklace. That is all."

"Not all," said Porteous; "not all, my dear sir, since it was a fortnight ago, and you turn up with the necklace-to-day."

"I left the rest to the imagination of a man of obvious intelligence," said Skews' suavely. "An emerald necklace, certainly genuine, was an article of immense value to a man in my unfortunate position. So I thought at first. I found later it was useless, because a man in my position could not venture to dispose of jewels worth perhaps £2,000. I kept my find, searching the papers meanwhile

for some word of the necklace. None came till last Monday morning, when I read of the theft of Mrs. Inglefield's emeralds.

"And there's the story, and there are the stones," said the detective.

"Dear, dear me! A most curious situation. She was robbed of the stones on Saturday, our friend hero finds them on a waste hit several days earlier, and restores them to-day. It looks, Mr. Skews, as if your story wouldn't wash."

"It does, indeed, Mr. Porteous, but happily I can prove I was in a city doss-house from ten o'clock on Saturday night till nine o'clock on Sunday morning."

"That seems to be the truth," said Kewt.

"Bless my soul!" mused Porteous. He was peering into the emeralds with a small magnifying glass. "Most extraordinary story. But miracles don't happen, you know, Mr. Kewt."

"Not in the Criminal Investigation Department," said Kewt.

"Perhaps we can reconcile Mr. Skews's story with fact, without the need of a miracle." Suddenly Mr. Porteous's droll tone was dropped. He became very alert. "I'm interested," he said. "I'm most interested." He peered into every turn and twist of the necklace. "A devilishly delightful case, Kewt. I should certainly like to follow it up."

Mr. Austin Porteous did follow the case up. He went to Mrs. Agnes Inglefield again, and learned of a purely irrelevant young man, one John Weston, a nephew of Mrs. Inglefield's, who had a place in Inglefield's firm, and had practically lived with the Inglefields. This young man had disappeared, ten days before the theft of the emeralds.

"Dear me!" said Porteous, "and you don't know where he has gone?"

"We have no idea; but he is a wild boy— he left his parents' home several times. We have no fears on his account. Oh, his accounts were all correct. There was no reason of that sort. We have every confidence in him."

Austin Porteous left, carrying John Weston's portrait with him. He next went to the police court. There he heard of a case of assault on the police that happened in the vicinity of the waste block at the back of Osgood's big ironmongery store at about ten o'clock, on the night of Wednesday, 5th January. The policeman assaulted had come upon the two men fighting furiously in the locality mentioned. He attempted to arrest them, and they turned on him, and in the hot struggle that ensued the constable was rather severely injured. However, help arrived, and the men were secured. They gave the names of James Queen amd Henry Brown, and were now serving a six - months sentence.

Mr. Porteous obtained permission to call upon Messrs Queen and Brown in their respective cells. He was not surprised to find that Henry Brown bore a startling resemblance to the missing nephew, John Weston.

That evening Austin Porteous was in a position to clear up the mystery of the Inglefield emeralds that were stolen before they were lost. He did so in presence

of Mrs. Agnes Inglefield, Mr. Agnes Inglefield (still sleepy and self absorbed), Detective William Kewt and Mr. Skews.

"It is like all seemingly extraordinary cases." said Porteous, "a very simple matter. The emeralds were found by Mr. Skews several days before Mrs. Inglefield was robbed, and Skews did actually have them in his pocket on Saturday night. No, I am not denying that the lady was robbed. Mrs. Inglefield, the man who stole your emeralds was your nephew, John Weston. He worked in collaboration with a young working jeweller named Carter, now under sentence for assaulting Constable Ryan. Weston and Carter met on that block behind Osgood's on the Wednesday night after securing the emeralds, probably to come to some settlement. They quarrelled and fought. A constable came upon the scene, and Weston dropped the emeralds into the cement barrel, our friend Skews's bedchamber. The two young men were arrested, and were tried and sent to prison under false names. They are in prison now."

"But I had the emeralds after that," said Mrs. Inglefield.

"Certainly, madam, the necklace was snatchid from your neck some time after— but , you need not bother about that. Here are your genuine emeralds. Examine them closely, and you will find traces of plaster of Paris still adhering to the setting. Your nephew and his confederate, the working jeweller, made an imitation emerald necklace sufficiently like your own to deceive you. That you had been wearing for some time while the genuine emeralds were in Weston's hands."

"And the thief on Saturday?" gasped Kewt.

"The Lord knows who he was," replied Porteous; "we need not bother our heads about him. He got what he deserved— a handful of paste!"

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4: The Sad Case of Willie Borlow

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."

5: The Supernatural Agent

Silas Snell

Punch (Melbourne) 23 July 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!"

6: Eph And Effie

Ward Edson

Traralgon Record (Vic.) 17 Dec 1901

EPHRAIM LISTER went to Lee's Creek— called by the natives for oral convenience 'Leecreek'— to recover from the somewhat disturbed condition of his nerves resulting upon the completion of his last novel.

Ephraim was rather a success, as success goes amongst Australian authors, and had published a few books at a profit. His stories sold freely, and as an all-round journalist, with an adaptable conscience and interchangeable opinions, he succeeded in dodging the 'lot austere that waits on men of letters here,' and made an income somewhere between that of an energetic bottle-ho and. that of a fairly popular suburban doctor.

Consequently Mr Ephraim Lister was able to indulge himself in change of scene, country air and complete rest when brain fag supervened upon the last page of *Raven, the Bushranger*.

Ephraim was much admired by the women, and had all a conceited man's success with them, but at thirty he had not married.

'Fact is,' said Ephraim in his best manner, 'I am too close a student of woman-nature to be caught by those gossamer surface attractions which the sex spreads like spiderwebs for unwary flies. I admire, I may even adore, but I escape through the openings in the web which are so obvious to the fly who is really fly.'

There were people who looked upon Eph's low-necked shirt, his obtrusively intellectual brow, and his crown of fluffy hair, and declared in cold blood that he was a superlative fool— not merely a fool, but a fool with Australasiatic adjectives. These people were mostly fools, but without superlatives, because they made the common and, perhaps, not unnatural mistake of confounding egotism with fatuousness.

Lister was a really clever fellow; he wrote better than he observed, but he had plenty of brains, and it was a pity that in believing himself so much cleverer than he was he had not the success which many of us have achieved in disguising the belief.

Lister went to Lee's Creek incognito.

'I want complete rest, complete seclusion,' he told his friend Fred Blackwhite, the artist, 'and if I give my real name I suppose the admirers of ' *The Stockman's Bride* and *Stirrup Songs* up there will simply rob me of what little brain I seem to have left with their kindly but doubtless fatiguing attentions.'

'Right, old boy,' said Blackwhite, 'go as Lister Ephraim, and nobody will a recognise you.'

So Ephraim Lister, the author of *The Stockman's Bride*, went to Lee's a Creek as Lister Ephraim, and nobody recognised him. It would be incorrect to say Eph was wholly delighted with the success of his disguise. He would have been rather pleased had one or two people penetrated the veil of anonymity.

The young author found Lee's Creek quite as picturesque and restful as Blackwhite had painted it. It was green, cool and shady when the rest of the world seemed hot, parched and arid. A score or more of springs trickled from the range that threw its comfortable shadow over Lee's Creek in the early afternoon, helping the creek to keep the soil soft and moist and the grass green. Each of these springs oozed out of it miniature fairyland, and the creek had a hundred delightful nooks among the a willow-like peppermint gums drowsing along its banks, in which it was a keen, new joy to lie and revel in one's favourite authors.

Lister Ephraim's favourite author was Ephraim Lister, a but in these sylvan shades he read his second favourites, or dreamed of new plots and heroines of the most romantic, attractive and profitable kind. In this way Eph passed nearly a week at Lee's Creek without making any more than a few casual acquaintances amongst the young men who played billiards nightly at the Bridge Inn. But Eph was not unsociable; he was too much an egotist for that. It is not good for an egotist to live alone, his heart craves company, which means admirers; and when Sunday came Mr Lister Ephraim had made up his mind that Lee's Creek would be an adorable place had it an intelligent and good-looking society that fully appreciated the merits of the author of *Stockman's Bride* and *Stirrup Songs*.

Yet it was quite by accident that Eph made his first friend on Lee's Creek. He had crossed the rough bush bridge of unhewn logs, picturesque by reason of the bush, green and purple-leaved saplings springing around the piles and between the timbers, and was rambling along the creek— carrying so much clear, deep, still water here that the wonder was it had escaped the more imposing title of river— when he came quite suddenly upon a lady who seemed in dire need of a hero.

The lady in question was young, neatly dressed, slim, small of hand and foot, delightful because unexpected qualties in a country girl. She stood with her back to a gum tree, and evidently imagined that her life was menaced by a sedate and matronly red cow, which stood a few feet off, regarding her with drowsy interest, while a longlegged, ungainly calf jumped about in an ecstasy of clumsy merriment. The girl was frantically menacing the cow with a fragile pink sunshade, and calling for help.

'Shoo ! shoo!' cried the female in distress, exactly if it were an intruding hen she had to deal with. 'Go away, you nasty beast! Help! Help!'

Then seeing Eph at hand, she cried appealingly: 'Oh, please-please!'

The young author realised that he never had in all his life an easy chance of distinguishing himself, and with a rush and a yell he completely routed the foe, and sent her lumbering up the bank, alarmed and indignant at treatment which she evidently regarded as wholly uncalled for. Then Ephraim turned to the young lady. She was leaning against the tree, with a heaving bosom and one hand pressed to her side.

'I hope you are not hurt,' he said.

'Oh, no, thank you very much,' the young lady faltered. 'Only very frightened.'

'But, really, I think her intentions were quite honorable'

'I don't trust them, the nasty things, and I'm very, very grateful to you.'

'Not at all. She would not have harmed you.'

'I am quite positive she had made up her mind to eat my hat at the very least.'

Ephraim laughed, and thought he might safely take advantage of the opening for a compliment.

'Which shows she has excellent taste.'

The girl blushed quite to Eph's satisfaction. It was indeed a pretty hat she was wearing, and she was well aware of the fact. Lister picked her book from the ground, and she thanked him quite in the manner of the simple rural heroine.

'But the cow would have shown better taste had she wanted to eat the heroine,' he continued, rubbing it in.

'You mustn't think me foolish,' said the girl. 'These cows do dreadful things.'

'But I thought it was only the city misses who were terrified in the presence of cows.'

'Indeed, no; I'm very much afraid of them.'

Then she sat on the root of the big tree, and Eph lounged on the grass at a little distance. She learned that he was Mr L. Ephraim, staying at the Bridge Inn for his health, and he learned that she was Effie, the daughter of Mrs Reid, who owned the Lee Creek flour mill. Mamma would be very anxious to thank him for his bravery, and he must call.

It often happened after this that Effie sat on the root of that particular gum tree and Eph lolled gracefully on the grass at her feet, while they talked of poetry and sentiment— and Eph. Eph was a comparatively inexhaustible topic of conversation. Lister said to himself that at last he had met the oft-imagined, pretty, ingenuous little country maiden, innocent and sincere, modest and yet intellectual enough to appreciate the author of *The Stockman's Bride* as he deserved. He had often dreamed of such a divine creature and often thought that should he meet a fair, sweet girl with none of the pert smartness of the city

miss, and yet bright enough to sincerely and truly worship him for himself alone, he might be tempted into matrimony.

In calling Effie Reid pretty, Ephraim already proved himself to be under some influence not coldly intellectual. She was not pretty, but she was a fine, clean-skinned, bright-eyed, picturesque sort of girl, and had Eph been as acute an observer and as well versed in human nature as he imagined himself, her small, humorous mouth and the keen light in her alert grey eye might have warned him that there was less rural simplicity in Lee's Creek than he fondly imnagined.

At their third meeting Effie carried a book which Eph was swift to recognise as *The Stockman's Bride*.

'How do you like the book?' he asked with apparent unconcern when an hour had flown.

'This?' said Effie. ' Oh, very much. I just love the breezy, healthy character of the hero, but I think the title rather ridiculous, don't you?'

'Well, yes, perhaps it is,' Eph admuted. 'Oh, by the way, Mr Ephraim, what is your Christian name?' she asked suddenly.

'Lister.'

'Lister!' she cried. 'There, I knew your name was familiar. Lister Ephraim, Ephraim Lister. That is curious.'

'Yes, it is rather a coincidence.'

The conversation then drifted to other things, and Eph preserved his incognito.

They met again and again to talk and to walk, and Eph took tea at Mrs Reid's when the weather would not permit of excursions abroad; but at Iength the time approached when Eph must return to journalism, although he was reluctant to admit that he was well enough. He was quite satisfied by this that Effie Reid was the most unsophisticated of her kind, and yet possessed of intelligence enough to know his worth. She knew his books, too, and admired them with excellent judgment, he thought, although he was slow to dispute the judgment of anyone who admired his books. But Eph had not thought of marriage with Effie as a possibility.

It was at this stage that Effie persuaded Eph to take her for a row on the fine lagoon about half-a-mile down the creek. The afternoon was beautiful. The deep lagoon reflected heaven's purest blue. Eph had ceased rowing, and Effie lay listlessly in the stern, doing nothing but looking exceedingly attractive. A contemplative silence was broken by Eph.

'Great heaven, the boat is filling!'

It was true that the water was rushing in in a flood ; the plug had been removed from the bottom of the punt. Instead of faking to his oars, Eph made a plunge, seeking for the plug, and before he could do anything sensible the punt had sunk under them, and the two were left struggling in the water.

'Oh, save me! save me!' Effie gurgled, and Eph felt her arms about him.

Eph was a poor swimmer, and he preserved a very dim recollection of what followed. What really happened was that Effie, who swam like a fish, making a clever display of struggling wildly all the time, and pleading with him piteously to save her, actually not only saved herself, but brought Eph ashore too.

When the author of *The Stockman's Bride* was capable of realising what was going on around him, he found himself standing upon the grass with Effie, a limp mass of hair and muslin, crouched at his feet, embracing his legs, and calling him her preserver.

'You have saved my life,' she sobbed. 'How can I repay you, my hero, my preserver?'

Eph was amazed, wondering however he could have done it, but enormously elated. He took Effie home to her mother, and received the tears, the homage, admiration and gratitude of the widow with becoming modesty. When he had changed his clothes at the hotel he found himself the hero of Lee's Creek, and sniffed incense with great gusto.

He called to inquire after Effie that evening, and found her pale, but, he thought, more beautiful than ever. More incense! He was her hero, he had saved her life; what could she a poor, helpless little country girl do to show her gratitude, her devotion? Eph was deeply touched.

First he revealed himself as Ephraim Lister, 'the distinguished young Australian *litterateur*,' and then before Effie could recover from the consternation into which this great revelation had plunged her, he cried:

'Ah, Effie, my darling, look up, I love you!'

'Oh, Ephraim!' said Effie, and sank into his arms.

'Be my wife!' said Eph.

'Oh, Ephraim!' said Effie.

And it was all settled.

Late that night before going to bed Etffie took a letter from her little desk and read one paragraph of it:

'Ephraim Lister is going to visit Lee's Creek for rest and recuperation on my advice. Make his acquaintance. He is egotistical, but I don't think it's chronic. Anyhow he is not a bad fellow, rather romantic, and susceptible through his vanity. If you like him— well, he should he a soft snap for you.'

The letter was signed Frank Blackwhite.

Effie wrote a little note there and then, addressed to Mr Frank Blackwhite.

The soft snap has come off. He has taken my measure for an engagement ring. He's certainly egotistical but I like him— perhaps more than is good for him. But I had to souse him in the lagoon to bring him to the point.

When Blackwhite read that he said: 'Well, the beggar's got the best little woman in the world— just the better half he needed to quality his egotism and romanticism. Lister will be almost bearable in twelve months.'

Lister is quite bearable now, but he insists that his wife is a foolishly romantic little thing.

7: His Unconventional Girl

Ward Edson

Punch (Vic.) 16 June 1904

JOSEPH WARD was verging upon forty, his hair was beginning to succumb , to internal and external wear and tear, and Joseph, who had stuck to his youthful enthusiasm till quite late in life, comparatively speaking, looking at the loose hair drifting about his dressing-table, was troubled in spirit.

"It's about time I settled down," said Mr. Ward.

The idea of settling down is serious to most men; it was particularly so to Joseph. He had preserved his youthfulness by persisting in youthful courses, and though verging on forty, was still attractive enough to catch and hold the roving eye of beauty, even though beauty was still in her teens.

"I must settle down," said Mr. Ward, addressing the collection of lost hair he had gathered into his palm. "To settle down one must have a settler," said Mr. Ward. "Now, who'll settle me? Minnie, Kitty, Annette, Lil, Rube, Molly, Prisc— No, no, not Priscilla!"

Joseph thought over it for another five minutes, and decided that none of the others would do. The girl must be found, and he must start the hunt at once.

"Let me see. my hair will hold out for another twelve month's; Mrs. Kofi swears I don't look more than thirty-four. Very well, for the purpose of this quest, I am thirty-four. I'd marry at thirty-five— per Mrs. Kofi's estimate— and while I have a hair to save me, and now for the girl."

In a month's time several of Joseph's most intimate friends knew that he was "out on the warpath," as Coffer called it.

"He's losing his hair, so he wants a wife. A man can't become bald without desiring a few heirs," said Coffer.

All these people knew that Ward wanted a peculiar kind of a wife.

"An ordinary woman won't suit Ward," said Coffer again; "he wants an extraordinary one. Fool! they're all extraordinary, more or less. What Josey is strong on is unconventionality. He hates the conventional girl— wants a healthy, open-minded honest type. Used to like the open-minded ones myself once, till I found them so dashed deceitful." Coffer was a cynic

Ward could hardly say himself what it was that he wanted but he knew he despised the conventional affectations.

"If a fellow could only hold of a girl who would meet him halfway," he said, "a good chap of a girl— a girl with no cheap pruderies, no humbug. By Jove! I'd like the girl who'd come to me, clap me on the back, and say, 'Joe, you're a dashed decent sort of chap; I rather like you. Is there any just cause or impediment? Why shouldn't you marry me?"

"I'll give the elderly ugly Miss Berry the tip," said Coffer.

"By the great Hookey, if you do I'll cut your throat with a blunt axe. No, no, my girl must be young with it all, and good to look at."

Josey Ward hunted the city for the desirable girl for over six months, and then told his confidential friend that he despaired of finding her in town.

"They're all the same in town, Coffer, old man; what they don't know is not worth knowing, and yet they simper, and blush, and giggle, and pretend to be modest, pink-tipped daisies. Great Scot! look at the Madicks girl— paints an inch thick, and apes the modest violet. No, no. I'll have to look for my male amongst the freer, healthier, honester country girls."

"Try Wallah," said Coffer. "Lots of fine girls amongst the well-to-do farmers up there."

"By Jove! I'll try Wallah."

SO IT HAPPENED that on a beautiful afternoon in February Joseph Ward was riding his polo pony, Quickstep, along a pleasantly-wooded bush road at Wallah when he came upon Henrietta Marsh seated upon a log in the shade of some saplings, a breech-loading gun at her knee, a cute-looking retriever at her side. The dog dashed at his pony, barking angrily, and Quickstep snorted, and began to show a little of the devil in him, which devil his owner admired as a proof of his exquisite breeding.

"Come in here, Mick, you villain!" cried the girl with proper authority, and Mick obeyed, creeping diffidently. "Pony's a bit fresh," she continued, addressing Joe with a breezy frankness that caused him to turn sharply in his saddle and look at her with deep interest. "He has rather a large idea of his own dignity." replied the young, man. The girl laughed. "He must have been reared amongst men," she said; "conceit is catching."

"Reared him myself."

"That accounts."

"So you conclude, after a close intimacy of fifty-five seconds, that I am a conceited man?" Ward was highly delighted.

"To be sure. Else why wear those beautiful riding pants? Any kind of old pair would be more comfortable. Why that red vest, and that pure white collar, here in the bush ?"

"I suppose I must be conceited, then."

Joe slipped to the ground and stood by his pony's head, regarding the girl with a highly amused expression. She was as handsome as Diana, fresh, rosy, good-humoured, but very much more carefully attired than the classic huntress.

"By the way," he continued, "why do you wear so pretty a dress and so sweet hat, not to mention new gloves to go potting a few rabbits here in the bush?"

"Why, bless you, I am conceited, too." She laughed merrily.

"And nobody ever had better excuse for it. May I say so?"

"To be sure."

"You don't mind being complimented, then?"

"Certainly not, if the compliment is prettily turned."

"And mine—"

"Oh, fair to middling."

"Do you know that if I, a stranger, stopped and paid such a compliment to a young lady in the city she would want to give me in charge?"

"Not at all. I know the girls in the city. She would only pretend to want to give you in charge. Ten to one in her secret heart if she thought you nice she would want to take you in charge. Most girls, town or country, like to be complimented by nice men. For what else were men created?"

"Am I justified in finding in all this an inference that I am a nice man?"

"Well"— the girl looked critical— "you're very well so far as you've gone."

"And I may go further?"

"You may sit on the log if you please and talk to me. My name is Henrietta Marsh. My friends call me Harry."

"I venture to hope that I, too, may one day call you Harry."

"I shouldn't be at all surprised. Most people are impudent with me, and all are surprised because I do not mind it in the least. Cut our formal introduction is not complete. That is our house smoking on the hillside yonder. Father is a sort of cockatoo farmer on a large scale, but if you ever meet him, as you value his good graces, do not forget that he is' a squatter and a person of great importance to the country."

"Thanks for valuable information. My name is Joseph Ward; I am staying at the Coach Road Hotel at the township, looking about Wallah for health and recreation."

"You do not seem to be badly off in the matter of health."

"Thanks again. And I no longer need recreation."

"Meaning that I am amusing?"

"You are the most delightful; young lady I have ever met."

Henrietta drew out her watch, and surveyed it with elevated eyebrows.

"Dear me," she said; "you have discovered that in just seven minutes. What penetration."

"It required no penetration; it is on the surface."

"Meaning that my charming qualities are not even skin deep. Perhaps that is a compliment. I'm no judge."

"Of course it is a compliment. How much more do you expect me to find out in seven minutes?"

Joe was absolutely delighted; the girl's merry laugh thrilled him; her frankness filled him with joy: her nimble tongue gave him a keen rapture. Here was a girl after his own heart, a girl without- a spice of humbug or prudery, as free and frank as a decent man. It seemed that he had merely renewed an old and delightful acquaintance, and not just made a new one. He told her so, and they chatted for half an hour about the shooting at Wallah, the weather at Wallah and the people at Wallah, and every theme was productive of cheerful badinage and gay laughter.

Afterwards they walked along the road together, and Henrietta shot a rabbit. She promised to ride to the weir with him when they were better acquainted, and he asked boldly what steps must be taken to improve their acquaintanceship.

"I have been most fortunate to-day; I must follow up my good fortune," he said.

"I shall be at Mrs. White's dance in Wallah to-morrow night," she replied; "perhaps you can manage it."

"I'll move heaven and earth and my friend the shire president," he replied.

JOE was at Mrs. White's dance, so was Henrietta. He found that Miss Marsh was very much in demand, and he had not as much of her society as he would have liked, but she was very generous, and when he parted with her for the second time, if he was not already in love, he was perilously near the brink.

"Harry" rode with him to the weir, as she had promised, and Ward spent the pleasantest afternoon of his life. They raced back, and the girl's slim-legged mare beat Quickstep by a head, much to the disgust of the conceited polo pony.

Ward became a familiar guest at the homestead of John Marsh, J.P., within a month, and by this time he had quite made up his mind that Providence had devised and shaped Henrietta Marsh with the object of providing Joseph Ward with the mate his heart hungered for. Henrietta's manner had undergone no alteration; she maintained the attitude that had characterised her on the occasion of their first meeting, and her open, breezy nature appealed more strongly to him every day. She took him out duck-shooting. The sport was excellent, and the girl seemed no more distressed than he was after the heat and burden of the day, but rode home, looking as fresh as she had seemed in the morning, and chatting just as gaily.

IT HAPPENED on the following Sunday afternoon. He had insisted on her accompanying him to the log on which she was seated when they first met.

"Do you know why I have brought you here?" he asked.

"Do you wish me to be quite honest with you?" she replied.

"To be sure."

"Then all the indications point to the idea that you brought me here with the deliberate intention of proposing."

He gasped. He admired honesty, he loved openness, and hated the little conventions that demanded blindness and stupidity of a girl in such a situation, but he was not quite prepared for candour like this. It threw him into temporary confusion. And then she laughed and he laughed and was well again. He seized her hand and drew her to him.

"And if I had not the remotest idea of doing anything of the kind?" he said, quizzically.

"Then," she said, "oh, then I should be very disappointed woman."

"You darling!" He drew her into his arms and kissed her. She issued from his embrace somewhat ruffled and flushed, and panting a little.

"Am I to understand that this is something in the nature of a formal proposal, then she asked, still quizzically. "I want one woman in the world, and I want her more than all the rest of the world. You are that woman, Harry."

"You must not call me Harry. Only my friends do that."

"What must a lover call you ?"

"Darling, dear, love, sweet—any old familiar thing."

"Sweetest!"

"Joe, I think we are going to be very happy—" He kissed her, and she kissed him, and the thing was done.

Two days later Coffer received a letter in a young lady's handwriting, which ran :—

"Dear old fellow,—It's done. We are engaged. I received your letter of advice, dated the 12th February, and saw the man in quest of the golden girl. Saw him several times, and approved of him. Then I carefully devised a purely accidental meeting (had to sool old Mick on to his polo pony to assure it), he was charmed with my well planned unconventionality, I was pleased; result, a meeting, further meetings, riding, shooting, excursions, alarums, and finally, on Sunday last, a proposal, which I enjoyed very much. We are to marry. I have caught a rich husband, who, incidentally, is a good fellow; he has caught a good wife— an exceptionally good wife. tell him we are going to be very happy, and I am quite sure that we are. Thank you, you dear, good boy, for the points you gave me. I wanted to be married to a regular darling, and regular darlings are so scarce— all the darlings seem to be so irregular nowadays.— Yours, in deepest gratitude, Harry."

Joe and Henrietta were married at Easter. Coffer was best man. Meanwhile Ward had been amazed to hear that his old friend Coffer and his fiancée were first cousins, but it never occurred to him to put this and that together. Ward does not find his wife anything like as unconventional as his sweetheart was, which is just as it should be, he says.

Harry is going to tell him the whole truth one of these days. She says it will amuse him immensely.

"He is so vain, the dear," she adds, "and it is nice to have a vain husband, he is so easily amused."

8: The Favoured Boarder

Silas Snell

Punch (Vic) 12 April 1894

HE CALLED HIMSELF Bernard Osborne Montford, and when he first came to live at our "superior" suburban "home for single men"— bath, latchkey and piano, and a landlady willing to be a mother to the orphan for twenty-five shillings a week— he looked about nineteen, and was quite too sweet for anything.

We colonials thought he was an Earl's son at least. He had several large, weighty trunks, his style was very swagger, and his get-up was just too lovely for anything. At dinner he went up top at once. We could see that he had thrilled the second daughter, the beauty of the family— reserved expressly to tickle the piano, and flirt mildly with the best boarders. The deft centre-parting of his beautiful yellow hair was too much for her susceptible bosom, and his air of being a prince temporarily escaped from his keepers, and travelling incog., impressed the old lady greatly.

Mr. Bernard Osborne Montford, we soon discovered. was a past-master with a poker pack, and he could play euchre like a professor of legerdemain. His command of cards at cribbage, too, was almost supernatural, and be could handle a billiard cue with the felicity of a man endowed with the knack and cultivated from childhood.

The young men at Mrs Tureen's discovered these facts suddenly when he had cleaned them all out. The new boarder must have been a remarkable personality: he won the admiration and confidence of Mrs Tureen.

He was the only boarder who ever did win Mrs. Tureen's confidence. She was a disingenuous woman, one of her eyes was always full of startled iuquiry, and in the other lurked a grave suspicion. Boarding-house keeping for seven years had implanted in her tough bosom a cold distrust of men— especially young men. But B. O. Montford secured a complete mastery over her uncharitable feelings at the outset, and retained his influence. I don't know how he did it, but perhaps it was because he never paid her anything whatever.

We were not told, but we discovered in time that Bernard Osborne Montford lived on his expectations, and what he could catch. He never talked about himself to us fellows, but maintained a sort of consciousness of his own immense superiority over us even when he was taking us down with the dice, and the man who can do that has ability as an actor.

I believe, however, that the charming young man, by implication, and insinuation, and clever little slips of the tongue, contrived to convince Mrs. Tureen that he really was somebody or another, and I know that she examined his handkerchiefs and collars, expecting to find the Royal arms stamped upon them. Then Bernard was very nice to the second daughter— very nice, indeed,

and she quite believed he was one remove from a duke, and cherished all sorts of romantic notions, and awaited developments.

So time went on. We knew that often enough the disguised nobleman was short of the price of a shave, but he kept up his *distingue* air wonderfully, and his board bill mounted up and up, and at length Mrs. Tureen began to look grave. She did not doubt Mr. Montford— dear young man, how could she?— but she thought it was time he threw off his disguise, assumed his title and wrote to his father, the earl, for money enough to pay the lone widow for his meals, his lodgings and his washbills.

No doubt the favoured boarder noticed the anxiety of his landlady. It must have occurred to him, anyhow, that this thing could not go on forever.

One morning whilst we were all at breakfast— that is all excepting Bernard Osborne Montford, who was usually pretty early at meals— Brown, who had the *Age*, and was devouring its contents along with his matutinal roll, surprised us all by half-choking himself by mixing astonished exclamations up with his vicuals.

"Hello, boys, what's this? Listen here."

And Brown read aloud from the agony column:

If B.O.M., who left his parents' home, Deerholm Park, Essex, England, will return, all will he forgiven. Money awaits him in the hands of his father's solicitors.

"Whew! then B.O.M. is straight!" was Smith's half-smothered comment.

"I always knew the dear young gentleman was somebody. I was certain he was some lord's son who had run away from his papa in a boyish fit of temper!" cried Mrs. Tureen, evidently greatly elated by this proof of her penetration. Bernard was not at all surprised when we showed him the ad.

"Yes, it is I," he said, coolly. "I thought dad would come round in time." And he sat down, and ate the nicest bits of toast and all the freshest eggs.

ANOTHER week went by, and an evening arrived when Bernard O. Montford was reported missing. He had departed in the morning, and at eleven had not shown up at the boarding-house. This was unusual, and Mrs. Tureen was visibly distressed. Next day at seven in the morning, the charming youth had not returned, and our landlady could contain herself no longer. She admitted that dear Bernard had proposed for the second daughter's hand, and had been accepted; that he had led the landlady to believe that he was the son of a wealthy English lord, and he had borrowed £70 in all from her on the strength of that "Missing Friends" advertisement. He had gone out on the day previous to

take steps to communicate with his father's solicitors, and Mrs. Tureen was afraid something had happened to the poor boy.

So were we. Close inquiry only disclosed the fact that Bernard had removed most of his things in small bundles at various times, that he had inserted the advertisement in the paper himself, or had had it inserted with the assistance of a confederate, and that we were not likely to see his face at Mrs. Tureen's superior boarding-house again.

And we never did.

Mrs. Tureen is harder, colder, and more suspicious than ever, and the second daughter is now married to a grocer named Hawkins.

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9: The Parson's Revenge

Silas Snell

Queenscliff Sentinel (Vic.), 18 Oct 1884

I WAS a regular church-goer once, and wore black cloth and a sanctimonious countenance; but I never loved parsons. My affections were prejudiced against them by the first one I knew; a lank-legged, lank-locked purveyor of the comforts of religion; who shepherded the plate and the flock of our little corner of the Lord's vineyard.

He carried the name of Sloppy; and used to make poetry and maliciously mingle it in with the sermons, taking advantage of a sleeping congregation to get off his ineffable rot; and he gave us hell-fire enough at one sitting to cure the worst cold ever mortal man was afflicted with. I used to listen for a while in a dazed sort of way; then my thoughts would wander, and I imagined myself a cherub up aloft, playing chuckstones, and letting paving stones from the streets of the New Jerusalem fall onto Sloppy's glossy skull.

He had a nasty habit of convening meetings, presumably for the purpose of discussing church matters; and then reading his villainous rhymes to the people; and when the women said it was beautiful he would put on a look of vacant imbecility, and gurgle about his muses, while I cowered in a corner and struggled to restrain my murderous inclinations.

But one evening, when he got a crowd of us at the parsonage under the plea of arranging for a little picnic and then started mouthing an "Ode to Misery" of some five hundred verses, I let myself out, and stamped on his hat, threw his "Ode" in the fire, and broke some things, called him names, and knocked his bump of self esteem into a knot against the parlor fender, then left.

His friends advised him to fire a lawsuit into me, but he didn't. His revenge was fiendish; he played off the most malicious trick on me he could possibly light on. Next morning's *Age* contained the following advertisement:

Wanted by well to do young man, a housekeeper. If satisfied with her after three months' trial, will marry her. Mother in-law no object.

My name and address were appended to this.

At a glance I recognised the Rev. Sloppy's handiwork. Dim ideas of immediate flit, of barricading my house, or purchasing a reliable bull dog crowded before my dazed vision; but I gave them all up as impracticable, and determined to see it out if it broke me up like a bomb shell. So I sat down to wait for the inevitable. I had not long to wait.

In about twenty minutes there came a knock, and in ambled a decrepid young thing, with weak curls that ran down from her head like the tendrils of a

grape vine. I judged her to be sweet forty five, and she was as homely as a used up crockery crate.

She, said, "He, he he!" and likewise remarked "Good mornin', sir." Then she blushingly drew a copy of the ad. from her hat and asked me was that my advertisement, pointing to Sloppy's imposition as if it was, she had come in answer.

I said "Yes, Miss, that is my advertisement; but I think you will hardly suit, You see I want a woman of some experience, plain-looking; and thirty at least. Young and beautiful brides like you are rather risky investments in these days of rampant and costly divorce cases. Do you understand? I am very sorry to have put you to so much trouble. Good day."

The aged damsel took herself away quite pleasant like, and presently somebody hit the door with a brick, and an angular Amazon strode in, dragging a massive trunk and a tow-headed, watery eyed girl along with her. She dumped the trunk in a corner, and seated her daughter on top of it; then, taking off her bonnet she hung it on the chandelier and proceeded to make herself at home.

"Have you come to stop, ma'am?" I asked. "If you have not, will you oblige by stating your business.

"Didn't you advertise for a missus?"

"I did. Are you going to put in for the job?"

"No, but my darter there is."

"Oh I beg pardon! That's your daughter, is it. Doesn't she appear to you to be a little off her dot?"

"Off her dot? You chunk! Why, that gal can make the best pancakes ever you rolled your tongue over, an' she's the most domesticated little thing in the colonies."

"Hum! Those are inducements, certainly; but she won't suit. The advertisement says mother-in-law no object; and you are an object. You can't get over that fact."

Then the Amazon began to argue with her gingham and probed the lobe of my ear off. But it was no go, and after breaking few things, she left, taking her trunk and daughter along, and brushing by a dissipated female who was the next applicant. This sweet creature was dirtily and scantily clad, and smelt strongly of last week's beer. She had a wild countenance and a nose like a blind bile.

I got rid of her for the price of a drink; and for five hours, after I was bombarded with females both old and young, thin and stout, great and small but one and all outrageously ugly; the unanimity in this line was simply astonishing. I suffered somewhat during those five hours. All the applicants were more or less affectionate, and yearned for something to remember me by

some little memento. It generally took the form of a lock of hair which they pulled out to save time, or a scrap of ear.

The widows were particularly affable. The way they mauled me about to get hair from a spot which experience had taught them was extra tender made me long to have a widow of my own.

And, worse still, when I got rid of the hungriest of the crowd, the domesticated young thing, the artist in pancakes, came back with a burglar who pressingly urged me to unlock the door, that he might tear my sanguinary lights out; and then, because I wouldn't, went round the house, breaking windows and informing me before he left that I had better get in a few funeral trappings, as he'd lay me out afore long, by Hades he would.

For months after that memorable day I received many remembrances in the shape of dead cats and offal, which were left on my doorstep by friends. Sloppy knew what he was about when he inserted that advertisement.

His dog was shot one day. Perhaps I don't know anything about it. Perhaps I don't....

One of the series "The Odd Man Out." Punch *Magazine used the style "M'Tav" which was a not uncommon shortening of Mac at the time; I have preferred the style "McTav" —T.W.*

10: A Provincial Plot

Ward Edson

Punch (Melbourne) 1 Sep 1910

DANIEL EMANUEL ASH had been making a close study of Donald McTav. Donald was a raw-boned, sandy man, whose red face was beset with a ring of confused whiskers, whiskers that looked like a jumble of tufts. His eyebrows were *en suite*, and resembled a belt of red scrub. Donald was a farmer in a small, cautious, canny way of business, and Daniel's study of him was from behind logs mainly. If the proper study of mankind is man, Daniel was thorough in well doing. He oven prosecuted sly inquiries concerning "Tonald" in the Yibly district. These inquiries confirmed the Odd Man's first impression, and on a pleasant afternoon he presented himself at the fence of McTav's backyard, when Mrs. McTav was chopping wood, or at least hitting a wool-heap inconclusive blows with an axe, after the manner of her kind.

"Won't you let me do that for you, lady?" asked the Odd Man in his most winning manner.

Mrs McTav looked up, suspicion in her small grey eyes.

"Get outer this." she said.

"Certainly, madame," Daniel raised his hat. "But it pains me to see a lady occupied at hard manual labour, and I would willingly cut the wood for you."

Mrs. McTav softened. "Yill get nothin' for it, mindjer," she cautioned him.

"Blessed are the humble that expect it in the neck," said Daniel, "for, behold, they have no disappointments. But a morsel of bread and meat, madame, a cup of tea."

Mrs. McTav hit the wood-heap a fifth time, a piece of timber flew up and struck her on the elbow, and Mrs. McTav yelped a bad Scotch word caught from "Tonald."

"Oh, come along, then," she snorted. "Some bread an' meat. But you'll have to get it ate afore McTav gets hack. McTav's a frugal man."

Daniel entered the yard, took off his old dinner jacket, and laid it reverently aside, poised his crumpled bell-topper, and approached his task.

"Mind yeh," said Mrs. McTav warily, "a heap that high, an' yeh get on'y one piece iv bread an' meat."

"And a cup of tea, madame. The tea is an essential condition of the contract."

Mrs. McTav grumbled an assent, and shuffled into the kitchen, growling and rubbing her hurt elbow.

Mr. Ash took up the axe, and struck the wood-heap several times, merely as a guarantee of good faith, not so as to do the wood any material or lasting injury. He made a sort of noise suggestive of a log being attacked in a perfunctory sort of way, but all the time his eye was on a small, male chicken prospecting for grubs.

The chicken was a bird of an unsuspicious character: it had no doubts about the Odd Man tickling the wood-heap, and Daniel took up a billet, and laid for it. The Opportunist seized the first opening, and smote the chicken. It was a dead bird. Under cover of the wood-heap Daniel cut off the chicken's head and caught much blood in a jam tin. Then he dug a hole with the axe, and buried the mangled corpse of his innocent victim. After this Daniel struck the wood-heap with more or less violence nine times, to carry conviction to the woman indoors.

The Odd Man's next action was an extraordinary one. He took off his left shoe, and cut it nearly in half with a blow of the axe.

When Mrs. McTav came out a few minutes later to investigate the sudden silence, she found Daniel Emanuel Ash in a fainting condition, sitting on a log. On a log in front of him rested his left leg, the foot of which was swathed in bandages— the bandages were stained with blood; much blood bestrewed the logs, the axe, and the adjacent landscape.

Donald McTav was full of bitterness when lie found a strange man, and a lowly and unkempt radical at that, reposing on his "colonial" sofa in the kitchen when he returned to his home an hour later. Mrs. McTav explained how the poor man had gashed his foot open when splitting some wood for her, and told admiringly of his bandaging his own hurt, with the intention of stealing away rather than give her trouble. He was too weak from pain and loss of blood to move, however, and now merely desired to rest a little while.

"Mind yeh, I'm no re- e-esponsible," cried McTav. "I dinna admit ta havin' onny liabeelities whateffer. Ye were no engagit by me, an' I'll no be troubled wi' ye."

The wounded man turned a wan face to McTav, and smiled feebly. "You are right," he whispered weakly, "perfectly right and just. I ask nothing, but that I may stay under cover till my foot will support me. The shelter of your roof, a morsel of food for one night, perhaps two, and I shall be able to move. Meanwhile, perhaps I shall be able to more than recompense you. I am a saddler. If you have harness that needs mending I shall be happy to do it."

"Eh, eh!" Donald McTav started digging among his cow-licked whiskers. "I have a wee bittee o' broken harness maybe. But no reesponsibility, mind ye. I dinna employ ye, I dinna come under the preenciples o' the Act in onny way, mind ye that. Mary, I call ye ha' weetness— no reesponsibility, no reesponsibility."

So Daniel Emanuel Ash remained at "Tonald" McTav's, and Donald watched him with dire apprehension, obviously afraid that he was about to be eaten out of house and home when his wife gave the patient a bowl of broth. McTav could hardly tear himself away to return to his work after dinner, so fearful was he that the intruder might rise up and bite the victuals, or bring ruin on the house of McTav with some similar extravagance.

"Mary, ye munna over-feed the laddie, mind ye that," he said impressively as he left.

Daniel Ash was still on the couch in the kitchen when McTav returned that evening, his blood-stained foot resting on a cushion. McTav grumbled and growled about the "reesponsibility," and dug in amongst his clumps of face hair, and occasionally whimpered like a man brought to the verge of ruin by an unmerited visitation of Providence.

After tea he dragged a pile of broken harness into the kitchen, the mending of which would have cost him several pounds in the open market.

"Ye micht be pittin' in a wee bit time, ma man," he said. "It isna righteous ta eat the bread o' idleness."

But it seemed that Daniel, who had eaten a very good tea, was too weak and in too low a state to mend harness; so he lay on the couch, and read the miscellaneous poems of Bobbie Burns, and McTav sat in the corner, and cowered and growled, and grubbed his tufts.

Next morning Daniel had a comfortable resting place made for him in the fruit garden, and he lay in the sun, crippled, but luxurious, and while he lazed away the time here "Tonald" McTav laboured in the fields, a prey to the melancholy reflection that his frugal husbandry was being brought to nought by the ruinous cost of the up-keep of a crippled stranger, whose lavish consumption of mutton broth was making Caledonia not only stern and wild, but unutterably sad.

Here the furtive stranger found McTav.

The furtive stranger was a stout, pale, puffy-faced man, with three days' growth of sooty beard, and a horrid "korf." This man did not descend upon Donald; he crept up to him in a secretive, anxious way, as if seeking cover in the tussocks and behind the stumps.

"I say, blokie," he said huskily, "are you the cove what' lives in the house be the crick?"

McTav clawed his tangled mat, and weighed possibilities.

"Ye-es, maybe," he said.

"And your name's McTav ?"

"Aye, pee-raps. Mind yeh, I admit nothin'."

"Well, do you know who that man is staying at your house?" The furtive one's manner had become awe-inspiring, his pallid, puffy face suggested hideous possibilities. McTav was stricken with terror.

"Mind yeh, I admit no reesponsibility," he gasped. "If ye're a doctor body, or onnything like o' that, I dinna take onny liabeelities."

"Do you know who he is? Do you know what he is ?" asked the other almost fiercely.

"I dinna," said McTav. "I have na' the smallest knowledge o' the creature."

The furtive one looked anxiously to all the points of the compass.

"Then you don't know what he's worth?" whispered the pallid man.

"Worth!" Donald's ears stood out, his whiskers prickled. "Worth! Ye dinna mean yon deeplorable creature has onnythin'— has propeerty?"

"Not a bean," gasped the other.

Donald McTav waited with burning impatience till the stranger worked off a spasm of his horrid "korf." and the furtive one continued. "He ain't got property enough t' exercise a flea on, but orl the same, blokie, he's worth a bit t' me, and he's worth a bit t' you."

"Man!" cried McTav whose whiskers were now electrical with expectation, "dinna tantalise me. Yell make me vexit. Whateffer d'ye mean?"

"Wot I say." Again the stranger indulged his "korf." "He's worth a tidy lump o' money to one iv us.''

"Mind yeh," said McTav impressively. "I saw him first."

"The question is," the other muttered huskily and speculatively, "whether I can trust you?"

"Man, ye can," cried Donald. "I'm always ta be trustit if onnything is ta be made be it."

"Well, that man is— No, I won't. You'll do me in the eye. I takes you into me confidence, and you does me fer every bean. 'Tain't business."

Donald had dropped his hoe. He was dancing with anxiety. "Man, man, ye can trust me," he raved.

"I carn't," retorted the other sourly, "There's two hundred good golden Jimmy-ogobs t' be made out o' that bloke loafin' up et your house, and I'm the man what makes it. Me, Billy Burke— I makes it on me little all-alonesome."

He moved as if to go, but McTav was clinging to his arm.

"Twa hundred poond !" cried Donald with heartfelt anguish. "Twa hundred poond. Ye dinna mean it. Ye're jist foolin' wi' me. Twa hundred poond! Mon, mon, it isna posseeble."

"Ain't, it but. Well, you watch Billy Burke, an' you'll see him gather it in all right."

"Mind ye, I saw him first," McTav repeated fretfully. "There's ma rights ta be conseedered. Aye, an' there's ma expeenses. Man, ye wouldna' believe how von meeserable boddie can lap up the brose. Dinna forget ma expenses."

"My troub's about your expenses," growled Billy Burke. "But I'm willin' t' make a deal with you."

"Come ben the hoose," answered Mack eagerly, tugging at Burke.

"No, no, no!" The pallid man looked alarmed. "He knows me. He mustn't see me. That would spoil everything. See, here, Scottie, do you want to make a lump of money?"

"Man, yes!" Donald's answer was almost a yell.

"Well, we'll go halves. That's a £100 each." He drew Donald to him, and breathed a hoarse, influenza whisper in his ear. "The man at your house is Cooper!"

"Cooper!" squealed Mack. "The gaol breaker?"

Billy Burke nodded. "Yes, the bloke they're offerin' £200 reward for."

"I dinna believe it!" breathed Donald, to whom the news was too good to be true.

"Oh, yeh don't? Well, I do, an' I've no objection to takin' the whole two hundred. Here's off."

"No, no, dinna be hasty. I'm in wi' ye."

"Why, you fool, he's got one of the irons on his leg at this moment, tied up to his knee under his trousers. Go and look' fer yourself. But mind you don't scare him."

There was an extraordinary change in Donald McTav's manner when he went home that morning; he was wheedling and propitiatory to Daniel Ash.

McTav went back to Billy Burke, feverish with greed.

"Yer right, man," he stuttered; "yer right. Let us be goin' for the police bodies. Twa hundred poon'!" He moved impetuously towards the township.

"Here, hold hard," said Burke. "As a matter of fact I'd rather not appear in this, if we can come to a hunderstandin', vou an' me. See, here, I don' wanter see the police. I'm on fer a deal; gimme fifty quid an' you can take the thing on alone."

Instantly McTav bristled with suspicions.

"Na, ye dinna get Tonald McTav doing onnything in the dark," he said. "You won't deal. Then I'm hanged if you'll get a cut at all. I'll do the thing on my own."

"Stay, stay, dinna be hasty. The matter calls for explanation."

"Well, I'll give it. I don't want t' meet the police. That's a fact. I was in quod with Cooper— that's how I knew him. Me and the police ain't on good terms. I don't want to meet 'em; but if I could go with this information perhaps it 'ud be all right. Anyhow, I'd get the two hundred."

Billy Burke and Donald McTav remained over an hour in argument, and in the end Donald's cupidity prevailed— he bought out Burke's right, title and interest in the discovery of the escaped convict for the sum of £25, and Mr. Burke took the straightest route out of McTav's locality, while McTav mounted his roan horse, and sought Constable Ogilvie at Yibly township. When McTav returned with Ogilvie they were consternated to hear from Mary that the patient had gone. She pointed the way, and the pursuit began.

Daniel Ash was overtaken about two miles along the road. The constable reined up, and looked down at him with disgust,

"That Cooper?" he said. "McTav, you're a Highland jackass, if there is such an animal, This is no more like Cooper than I'm like a musk duck. Good day!"

Ogilvie simply wheeled his horse, and cantered back towards Yibly, his soul a seething geyser of disgust. McTav had told him nothing but that he had the convict Cooper safe and sound waiting to be arrested.

McTav sat on his club-footed roan, gazing stupidly at Daniel Ash. "Ye're no the conveect Cooper," he mumbled. "Then who's yon scoondril?"

"Do you mean the pale, unshaved stranger that came begging this morning?" asked Daniel, mildly. "Oh, that was Cooper."

"Cooper!" squealed McTav. "The conveect?"

"Yes, Cooper— the real Cooper!"

McTav wheeled his horse, and rode after Ogilvie, squealing desperately, and Daniel Ash walked on.

Of course Daniel was merely indulging his love for carrying a practical joke to its extreme when he said the pallid one was Cooper; really this was his old friend and sometime collaborateur, the begging letter-writer.

When they met in Melbourne a day later, as per arrangement, Daniel allowed his assistant in the intrigue to keep £10 of the £25 he had taken from Donald McTav.

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11: Mrs. Steel's Jewellery

Almost a Detective Story

Ward Edson

Punch (Melbourne), 25 May 1905

JEWEL MYSTERIES, common as they are in the English magazines (which implies, I suppose, that they are common, too, in everyday life in the Old World), are certainly rare in the Australian bush. In fact, the case of Mrs. Steel's rubies is the only jewel mystery that I have met with in the Antipodean back blocks.

Mrs. Steel was a young woman; Mr. Steel was not a young man. Mr. Steel was a very wealthy man, and the proprietor of one of the best-stocked runs in the state. He was an elderly, quiet, methodical man, soft of speech and gentle of manner, neat in his dress, and extremely unlike the squatter familiar to the readers of Australian fiction.

Josiah Steel married his housekeeper. It was not nearly as astonishing a happening as his friends seemed to think. Really, if Steel was to marry at all, it was clear that he would marry his housekeeper, since he saw little of any other woman. The new Mrs. Steel was not a lady, of course, but, then, Josiah himself was not altogether a gentleman, despite the gravity of his manner, the softness of his speech, and the neatness of his dress. His grammar, for instance, was not perfect, he was not what you would call an authority on table manners, and his birth was very humble. Josiah was entirely a self-made man, and self-made men rarely make so good a job of it.

Mrs. Steel came to Waratah on the recommendation of a Melbourne registry office keeper, who guaranteed that the young woman was sober, industrious and competent.

The new housekeeper proved to be all that, and more. She was cheerful, she was assiduous in promoting Mr. Steel's comfort, she managed his house admirably, instituted a new order, made the rooms bright and pretty, and made Josiah happier in his own house than he had ever been in his life before. It seemed to him that she had let sunshine into the homestead. Clearly since Stella possessed the faculty of making his life happier, it would have been sheer folly on Steel's part to risk the chance of losing her. To avoid that painful possibility the squatter married his housekeeper, and did not, as sometimes happen, spoil a good housekeeper to make an indifferent wife.

Stella was fond of society. She gave the people about the opportunity of coming to Waratah and being excellently entertained there, and naturally their prejudices succumbed.

Josiah grew more and more in love with his young wife. She was not handsome, but she had a good figure, beautiful hair and eyes, and a nice disposition. Mrs. Steel's feelings towards her husband implied the existence of

an easy friendship between them. At least, she seemed grateful, and she had good reason to be grateful. Steel thought nothing too good for her. He had spent much of his life accumulating money, never knowing exactly what to do with it. Now it came in very useful as a means of gratifying his wife. He gave her anything she wished that money could buy.

The rubies were a gift to mark the first anniversary of their wedding day. They were said to be the finest in Australia. They were brought out from Europe on Steel's order, and cost a small fortune. A burglar proof safe was set up at the homestead in which to store them, and yet they were stolen. The stones had been in Mrs. Steel's possession four years when one morning she rushed to her husband white with terror, tremulous with agitation.

"The rubies, Jo," she said, "have you got them?"

"I?" cried Steel, starting up, "of course not. Why, what's the matter, my dear?"

"They're gone— the rubies are stolen!" Mrs. Steel sank upon a couch, buried her face in the cushions and sobbed aloud. Her whole figure shook, she was obviously in a condition of extreme nervous terror. Josiah seated himself on the edge of tne couch and put his arms about his wife.

"Hush, hush," he said, "do not give way. Try and tell me what has happened. Are you quite sure the jewels are stolen?"

It was some time before Stella recovered sufficiently to be explicit, and then she explained that she had gone to bed, leaving the key of the safe in a small drawer under the mirror, and on getting up in the morning found the safe door wide open, the key in the lock, and the rubies and perhaps a thousand pounds' worth of other jewellery stolen.

The house was carefully searched, but nothing that would provide a clue was discovered, saving the fact that one of the front windows on the second floor of the house (Steel had recently built a new homestead) was unlatched, and the housemaid was quite positive she had latched it on going to bed.

The detective office in Melbourne was communicated with, and Detective Hay was sent to Waratah to take the case in hand. Hay was a tall, thin, waspish man, who was angry with everybody for everything that had been done.

"You were too hasty, madam," he told Sirs. Steel. "When you found that your jewels were gone you should have said nothing to anybody but your husband, until the detectives arrived. Somebody in the house is probably an accomplice."

"Surely you don't suspect any of our people."

"Madam, to a man in my profession all people are suspected."

"But I assure you the servants are all honest."

"Lots of people are honest who might suddenly get over it if a fortune in jewels were left lying to their hand."

Hay spent a few days prowling about the homestead and the district. He examined the ground under the unlatched window very carefully, and had all the people about the premises under close cross-examination at one time or another. Then he arrested Peter Scard.

Peter Scard was arrested because he was the only vagabond available. He was a young man of about thirty-five, who was rather lazy, and only worked when urged by dire necessity. At other times he lived by sun-downing, cadging his tucker and sleeping in the shabby little tent in which his swag was wrapped. In all this Scard was just like a good many more bush loafers, but he was unlike them in being evidently a man of some education and breeding. He laughed at Hay's charge.

"Guilty of stealing £20,000 worth of jewellery," he cried. "Great Scot! I wish I were."

Hay called upon Scard to prove where he was on the night of the robbery, and the man declared that he was in his tent a mile from Waratah. The detective could make nothing of him, and he was liberated. After this the detective spent five weeks on an apparently fruitless quest. The Steel rubies had absolutely disappeared; no trace of them had been discovered anywhere. The police had failed to track a single stone, and already Josiah was satisfied that the jewels were lost for good and all.

Then came the arrest of David Hardinge in Melbourne.

This was a great surprise to all interested in the case, and a shock to Mr. and Mrs. Steel, whose guest Hardinge had been. Hardinge was a civil engineer, thirty, tall, handsome, and a great favourite. The news of his arrest caused Mrs. Steel great perturbation of spirit, and at the trial she showed much graver anxiety than the prisoner.

There were circumstances brought out in the evidence that made the case look rather grave against Hardinge. He was staying at the Black Boy Inn, near Waratah, at the time of the robbery, and it was proved that on the night of the crime he had left the hotel at about eleven o'clock, and returned again at one in the morning, looking pale and much upset. At breakfast it was noticed that he had a painful looking cut on his head, which he said was caused by a fall.

When called upon the accused admitted that the story about the injury was not true. He declared now that he was walking in the bush towards Waratah when he was stunned bv a blow delivered by some man who came suddenly up behind him. He did not recover for over an hour, and when he did his coat and hat were lying beside him. He believed he had been drugged after receiving the blow.

Questioned as to the reason for telling a false story at the hotel, and his reason for being in the vicinity of Waratah at such an hour, he refused point blank to tell.

It was Mrs. Steel's evidence that cleared Hardinge. Stella swore positively that she had seen the jewels in the safe at half-past twelve on the night of the robbery. A verdict of not guilty followed, and Hardinge was liberated.

Hay tried a little further, and then practically abandoned the case, and the robbery of the Steel rubies ceased to be a matter of public interest.

ONE NIGHT thirteen months after the perpetration of the theft, Josiah Steel was called upon by a tall, gentlemanly man, who said he wanted to talk on a matter of great importance. He was asked in, and presently found himself seated with the squatter in the latter's library and smoking-room.

"The matter I have to speak of concerns Mrs. Steel very nearly, and I should like to have her present," said the stranger.

"Certainly," answered the mystified squatter, and Mrs. Steel was sent for.

The moment Stella entered the room she recognised the stranger.

"I know you," she said. "You are Peter Scard, the man who was arrested for stealing the rubies."

"Precisely," replied Scard coolly. "I hope you will listen to me, Mr. Steel. It is of the rubies I wish to speak."

"Then you were the thief," cried Steel, springing to his feet.

"No, sir," said Scard. "Please be seated, and please be calm. I am not the thief. In point of fact there was no thief."

"What are you saying?"

"The absolute truth. There was no thief. The jewels were given into the hands of a certain person, and for the sum of £5,000 will be restored minus about £200 worth. These I sold to keep me going."

"Then you are the thief? I'll have you arrested."

"No, sir, you will not. There was no thief, I tell you. If you do not believe me appeal to your wife!"

Stella, who up to now had been standing by the table, here sank into a chair. Her face was pale, her hands trembled.

"Appeal to me?" she faltered.

"Certainly, madam, for it was you who gave me the rubies. You handed them to me out of the left-hand front window, and I took them away, and hid them."

"Handed them to you!"

"To be sure. Shall I explain? Mr. Steel, it is not a pleasant story for you to hear, but it is necessary for me to go on if Mrs. Steel cannot persuade you to pay the five thousand without further parley."

"Tell what you know," said Stella doggedly.

"Very well. Sir, I had the good fortune to overhear your wife and Hardinge planning an elopement, one night in the orchard. I was hidden in some currant bushes, Mrs. Steel. They intended taking Mrs. Steel's jewellery with them to set

up house in some distant country. Mrs. Steel was to hand the valuables out to Hardinge on a night, and at an hour fixed. My plan was instantlv formed. I waylaid Hardinge on the appointed night, knocked him on the head, chloroformed him, took his hat and coat, and the jewels were handed out to me. They are now in my possession, and I have concluded that you will think it worth while— and £5,000— to have this most romantic episode kept dark, and your rubies restored."

Stella had thrown herself at her husband's feet, clinging to him, her face between his knees.

"It's true!" she cried, "it's true! I thought Hardinge had taken the jewels and forsaken me. I believed him guilty, although he swore to me afterwards that he was not. I was going to leave you. Send me away if you will, but I swear before God I have repented that folly— bitterly— bitterly— bitterly! I was, oh! so weary of living here in the bush. I wanted town life, and I had loved Hardinge before I knew you."

Josiah sat in his chair, very still and very pale. He was silent for several minutes, while his wife crouched sobbing at his feet.

"Bring the rubies here to-morrow night, and I will give you a cheque," he said suddenly in a calm voice. "I pay the money on one condition, that you leave Australia and never return."

"That is my intention," said Scard.

The Steels removed to Melbourne shortly after the mysterious restoration of the rubies, and lived there till Josiah's death, which occurred some six years later, six happy, contented years it seemed to all those who were intimate enough to know.

12: Kept Oaths

Ward Edson

Punch (Melbourne) 1 Dec 1910

1: Melbourne

THE OLD MAN and the young man faced each other in Dinan's library.

"Ungrateful hound!"

"Pig-headed tyrant!"

These were no words for an elderly gentleman and a smart, well-bred youth, father and son, to be hurling at each other; but all the astronomical indications pointed to further wind and thunder. The domestic barometer was at "set stormy."

"It is for this that a father expends his care and his money?"

"Damn your money! You have always used your money as a club, a gun, a thumbscrew— something to enable you to gain your ends at the expense of those surrounding you. You have been liberal. Yes, I admit it, but you have given gold coins as slave-drivers once gave iron links, merely to serve as chains upon the limbs of your victims. Well, your money has done its last mischief so far as I am concerned."

"Mischief! My money! Tell me this, you scampi, you waster; what would you have been but for my money, the money earned by my hands and my brain?"

"Yes, I'll tell you. I would have been a man— a free, unfettered man, with the capacity to earn my own living in my own way, and to select my own life's mate as other free men do."

"Well. The door is open."

"I know it. Presently it will close behind me, and never was there a son more glad to be free of the smothering, brutal repression of that most damnable of all tyrannies— the rule of a rich father."

The two men, despite the marked difference in their ages, were strikingly alike. The father's character shone in the son's face— two kindred tempers had met, and the clashing of flints produced fire. Dinan, senior, had now composed himself into a semblance of calmness more vicious than the blaze of honest anger.

"There's nothing to delay you," he said. "The world is free to you, Willie."

The name was contemptuous.

"Nothing delays me but the desire to tell you my mind. And I swear that for the future no man shall call me Willie. Willie— pah! There's servility in the ring of it. I may have to shovel mud, but at least I shall be a man, and be called Bill."

"You understand the situation. When you go out there, a stranger passes. I have done with you."

"You have, thank God! You have done me the last evil in your power. You have separated me from the girl I love, one kiss from whom is more to me than all the foul, infernal money, which, in your egregious vanity and cursed sour selfishness, you imagine endows you with the right to dictate the lives of your miserable relations."

The elder man flushed scarlet; he raised a tremulous hand.

"Blackguard!" he said.

"Yes, your miserable relation. You married my sisters into respectable wretchedness; you used my mother as a thrall, a sort of superior servitor, whose business it was to arrange the social side of your grand pageant. You are a selfish devil, my dear father. You have always been a selfish devil, despite the prodigality of which you made so much in our home, and of which you took particular care the papers should make a great deal abroad."

"Villain!" The old man struck fiercely, hitting his son full in the mouth. For a moment the two faced each other, the father flushed furious, the son pale, rigid. Slowly a bitter smile shaped itself on William's grey face.

"Thank you for that blow," he said. "It is the first I have had from you for seven years. It adds to my enjoyment of the present situation. I am delighted to know how deeply you are stirred. Let me tell you, though, that blow, like most of the actions of your life, was only the act of a tyrant, a manifestation of the tyranny of the weak over the strong. I should not need to remind you that I could very easily break every bone in your body. I suffer you to strike me as I have suffered the imposition of your fictitious power pretty well all my life."

"Go!"

"When I am ready, old man."

"Go now, while I am still under some control. Go, and know in going that if you lay in the mud of the road in rags and sickness and hunger I would drive over you. I would, by God!"

"I shall try not to give you that extreme felicity, old man. I leave your empty house and your empty heart; and this one consolation, that you have emptied my heart and my life in robbing me of Eylie Graceton, and for that I shall never cease to hate you."

William Dinan turned and strode towards the door, but turned and stood a moment, drawing the links from his cuffs, the watch from his pocket, a sovereign and some silver, a diamond stud and a gold sovereign case.

"I cannot go out bare as I would like to, but I shall go owing you as little as possible. Here—" He threw the articles on the carpet, at Joseph Dinan's feet— "If I am to starve I shall starve rather than accept a crumb from you, so help me, Heaven!" And so they parted, father and son.

2: Sydney

IT WAS a wet, windy, winter's night. The speeding wheels of the big, dark-chocolate-coloured motor threw streams of liquid mud behind them. The street was empty of other vehicles, and no pedestrians braved the cold and rain. The hooded motor swept up to the kerb before the iron gates of Andrew Ansell's spacious grounds, and stopped. The chauffeur uttered a cry, and a tall, spare old man sprang from the vehicle with almost youthful ease.

"What is it, Gaire?" he said.

"A man, sir. See, there by the gutter. I think I went over his leg."

"Have a look at him."

The chauffeur approached the prostrate man, and bent over him. The match he struck was extinguished almost immediately, but he saw enough.

"Drunk?" queried the old gentleman. "I think not, sir. Looks more like sickness or starvation. He's almost a skeleton, and as white as a corpse."

"Dead?"

"Oh, no! I don't think he is quite unconscious."

"Get him into the car. I can't take a derelict into Ansell's happy home, can I? Take him to the hospital— no, take him to Dr. Cartwright. I'll give you a note."

While the chauffeur lifted the stranger into the luxurious car, the gentleman scribbled a note in the light of the car lamp.

"Call for me about half-past eleven, Gaire. Give this note to Dr. Cartwright. That will be sufficient."

The tall, old gentleman passed through the gate, and up the paved drive towards the house. An hour later the stranger was comfortably disposed in a white bed in the private hospital of Dr. Andrew Cartwright, and Dr. Cartwright himself, portly, florid, white-haired, genial-eyed, was looking down at him with an air of complete satisfaction.

"He's all right, nurse," said the doctor. "Nothing here that judicious feeding won't cure."

"Starvation, doctor?" queried the nurse. She was bent over the patient, there was a tremulous note in her voice.

"Something very like it, my dear. Utter exhaustion, a little fever, an empty stomach."

"There is no name?"

"Not a clue. His pockets were empty. He's sent here by a man who can well afford the luxury of benevolence, and who has a quaint caprice that must be indulged. He insists on not being made known to the victims of his generosity. This is not the first dealing of the kind I have had with him. He pays any sort of bill I like to send in. 'But don't worry me with the gratitude of the afflicted,' says he. 'I simply can't stand it. If I am to be persecuted with thanks, and tears, and

blessings, I shall retire from active philanthropy with precipitation.' Of course, I humour him. Twenty-five thousand a year has to be humoured."

When Dr. Cartwright left the room, Nurse Alice behaved in rather an extraordinary manner. She sank her face upon the pillow, and pressed her cheek to that of the unconscious patient, and her tears flowed fast.

"Oh, Will," she whispered, "has it come to this— to this, my poor Will?"

She kissed his lips

JOSEPH Winley's case proved rather more serious than the doctor expected. He lay in a fever for over three weeks, and when his eves opened to consciousness he seemed still a little wrong in his mind, for he called Nurse Alice Eylie, and clung to her hand like a lost child that has found a refuge and a friend.

"Eylie, how comes it that I am here, that you are here?" he asked later.

"I became a nurse four years ago, Will. I am Nurse Alice here. I left my father as you left yours. I have earned my own living ever since."

"And for five years I have been fighting the world, and it beat me, dear. I admit it. A rich man's son with an incomplete education is poorly equipped to battle with the world. I took a new name. I was going to make a big success at something, I did not know what, and then seek you out, and proudly invite you to share my fortune. God! how little I knew of the world. I came to be glad to work as a bricklayer's labourer. I lost hope. I drank too much at times. Then came sickness, and hunger. I'm beaten, Eylie, utterly beaten."

"Hush! dear. You will be strong after this. You will try again. I can help you. Oh dearest, be of good heart, you are young, the world is kind."

"You love me still?"

"More and more than ever I love you."

3: Man's Will and God's

DR. CARTWRIGHT had been called in by the tall, thin, gentlemanly proprietor of the dark-chocolate motor.

"Fundamentally strong," said the doctor. "Constitution excellent, but there's grievance. A man at your age should not fret."

"Fret— I fret?"

"Precisely. Worry is deadly. Don't worry. If there's anything you want, go and get it. You can afford most things."

"There are things a man may want more than anything else on earth that millions will not buy."

"Of course. Try distraction. You remember the young man Winley you sent to me seventeen months ago. Do you know, I've promised to give him a sight of his benefactor?"

"I won't have it. I have told you again and again that absolute secrecy is essential. That I simply detest the role of general benefactor."

"Shall I take you to him or bring him to you?"

"You'll do neither, Cartwright."

"He has done pretty well. The recommendation you so kindly wrote secured him the place with Moriss and Roe. Moriss and Roe reckon they have got a bargain. He's the most successful traveller on the roads in his line. He has married the girl who nursed him, an absolutely delightful little woman. She is a lady; he is a gentleman. I am sure they will please you. You need fear no effusiveness, no pushing of their great gratitude. Let me promise them."

IT WAS A WEEK later when Dr. Cartwright told Eylie and Will that their unknown friend had consented to call upon them.

"No," said the doctor. "No names. The thing may as well be carried to an artistic finish."

Dr. Cartwright introduced the tall, grey old man into Eylie's drawing room, and then retired hastily. Will Dinan and the tall old gentleman looked into each other's eves.

"Father," said Will.

Joseph Dinan looked at Eylie, and back at Will.

"It is a trick," he said.

"No trick so far as I am concerned, father," said Will. "I had no idea you were in Sydney. We were expecting another. Dr. Cartwright promised to bring a man who found me dying in the street and befriended me."

The father stared at his son, his lips blanched, he was compelled to support himself against the wall.

"You," he whispered, "you! If I saw you lying starving dying in the mud of the road would drive over you. I said it. My God. I *did* it!"

Will sprang to his father's side, his arm about him.

"Let us forget, for pity's sake," he said. "We were both mad."

"I said it. It was my chauffeur found you on the road; it was in my car you were driven to Dr. Cartwright."

"I swore if I am to starve, I shall starve rather than accept a crumb from your hand, so help me, Heaven," said Will bitterly.

"Mad oaths, my boy, God forgive us. Will, I need you." He opened his arms to his son.

"First, father, let me introduce Eylie, my wife, who was Eylie Graceton, you'll remember."

The old man turned to her. "My daughter," he said. "My dear daughter."

It was into Eylie's arms that Joseph Dinan sobbed out his long sorrow.

Dr. Cartwright peeped in at the little family party, hastily withdrew, and went off chuckling like an amiable old cockatoo.

"You can whirr me into the city, Gaire," he said to the chauffeur. "Mr. Dinan won't need you for some hours, I think."

13: The Homing Drunk

Ward Edson

Punch (Melbourne) 21 July 1910

DANIEL ASH was always good to drunken men. This quality may have sprung from, the natural kindliness of his disposition; on the other hand it might be wholly due to the fact that the process of abstracting small, useful articles, like coins of the realm, for instance, is comparatively easy if the possessor is steeped in drink.

It was ten o'clock p.m., Daniel was leaning heavily on a suburban tree-guard in a somewhat despondent frame of mind, when Gable reeled out of the Star and Garter bar, and fell into his arms.

Mr. Gable, having fallen into strong arms, and feeling himself secure, was inclined to linger. He rested his head on Daniel's breast, and murmured vaguely. Then he fell asleep with dramatic suddenness.

Mr. Ash shook up his new acquaintance. He held him off at arm's length, and shook his false teeth into the little grass plot within the tree-guard.

"My dear friend," said Daniel, "I'm willing to do anything in reason for a brother in misfortune; but I am not a threepenny doss. You cannot sleep all over me."

"You're goo' fellow," said the drunk. "I don' know you, but you're goo' fellow. I'm mis'rable wretch. Lost wife an' family. Seen man's los' wife an' fam'ly anywhere 'bout? Brown family, wife wearin' straw boots an'— (hic!)—tan hat. Take me 'ome!"

Mr. Gable fell against Daniel again, and as he fell he rattled. The Opportunist recognised that rattle; it acted like a tonic. Mr. Gable, though very full of spirits, was not destitute of dough. He could pay his way.

"Certainly, my dear sir," responded the Odd Man cheerily. "Most, happy. Have you a name and address about you?"

The stranger mumbled something in which Daniel Emanuel Ash caught the words "Gable" and "St. Kilda," and Daniel took a firm and affectionate grip of his new friend, and started for the station.

Mr. Gable was pawing his face in a vague, anxious way, as if he hardly recognised it as his own. Presently he pulled up.

"Dunno," he said dreamily, "but it sheems t' me I've lost someshin'. 'Tain't me hat? No. 'Tain't me ears. Shay, I ain't losht an eye, have I? I know! I know!" He brightened. "I've losht me head of teeth, me buful head of teeth. Here's a lark; I've— (hic!)—losht me lovely new packet of teeth. Man can't go home without his teeth. 'Tisn't gen'lemanly act. My goo' friend, my very goo' friend, would you mind whistlin' for my teeth?"

Daniel urged him on. He knew the teeth were safely lodged in the grass within the tree-guard, and held them in reserve for a future reward should Mr. Gable not pan out to expectations. Mr. Gable started on a new tack. He pulled up again, and regarded Daniel with horror.

"I've swallowed 'em !" he cried. He put up a howl of remorse. "I've shwallowed me buful litter iv teeth. Twenty— (hic!)— guineash worsh if buful teeth gone to that bourne from wish no travellersh return."

"No, no," murmured Daniel; "believe me, they are all right."

But Mr. Gable would not be consoled. He put up another howl of anguish, and lay flat on his back by the roadside.

"Le' me die," he said. "Swallowed twenty guineash clutch iv falsh teeth. Le' me die. They're—(hic!)—eatin' into me vitals. Le' me die. Gotter gnawin' pain, Twent' guineash collection iv teeth gone at one fell shwoop. Le' me die. Shwallowed me fam'ly, losht me teeth. Wanter go to heaven."

Mr. Gable was weeping softly.

Daniel got his man on his feet again, and diverted him with promises of whisky distributed with a hydrant, and they reached the station. Mr. Gable gave him a sovereign to buy two tickets to St. Kilda. Mr. Ash bought the tickets, and ten minutes later, when the journey was almost completed, Mr. Gable brightened up, and said: "Thash ri', keep the change. You're goo' man; frien' of fam'ly. Keep the change."

Daniel apologised. He declared he had quite forgotten, but as a gentleman he declined to keep the change, and forced two brass Chinese coins, a punctured penny, and three tobacco tags on the genial inebriate.

"Now we're square," said the Odd Man.

Mr. Gable was much distressed after perambulating several St. Kilda streets to find he had mislaid his residence.

"Teeth shwallowed, lost pale blue wife, brown fam'ly, now house lost." He wept again. "Housen 'ome all gone!" he cried.

"Bear up, and all will be well," murmured Daniel consolingly. "Let us seek further."

"No," said Gable. "No use. I left it here— lef' me 'ousenome ri' here on'y thish mornin'." He pointed to a vacant lot. "Shomeone's purloined it— shome devil in human shape embezzled me 'ousenome, shtole wife (blue wife, age thirty-eight), pinched me brown family, shwallowed me teeth. Le' me die!"

Daniel had much trouble in preventing Mr. Gable from dying by the roadside once more, and they moved up and down several streets, one of which Mr. Gable scandalised by standing in the middle of the road, and yelling for the villain who had swallowed his teeth and run off with his family and his freehold property to come out and fight like a man.

Suddenly Mr. Gable discovered his home, a two-storied brick residence, one of three in a row.

He uttered a cry of great joy.

"Thash my house!" he said. "I'd swear to it in a thousan'. Wha' villain put it 'ere?" He scratched his head, and looked about him in a troubled way, then brightened again. "Yesh, tha's ri'. I live 'ere, number fif'-six. Come in,'ole fel'r."

He,dragged Daniel up the stone steps to the door.

"You're quite sure?" said the Opportunist.

"Sure? Qui' sure. Take me oath on it. My 'ousenome, my wife. Here, dear boy, you pay cab man while I take off boots."

Gable pressed another sovereign on Daniel, and our friend went away a few paces to pay the mythical cabbie. When he returned Gable was sitting on the doorstep with his boots in his hand. He winked knowingly at Daniel.

"Married man yourself," he said. "Discretion berrer part valour. Comen pu' me t' bed."

Daniel tried the front door. It yielded. They entered into a dimly-lit hall. The street door admitted to the second storey The houses were built on a hill-side, and the ground floor was below the level of the street at the front. There was a light below, and Daniel heard the faint sound of voices coming up the back stairs as he assisted Gable to the floor above.

Here Gable stumbled into a large room at the, front. Daniel lit a small lamp. The room was a nicely furnished sleeping apartment, and Gable plunged face downward on the spotless spread of a large brass bed.

"Pu' me t' bed," he gurgled.

Once or twice as Daniel disrobed him, Mr. Gable murmured sadly about his runaway teeth and his swallowed family, but presently he lay quite still, tucked comfortably in the capacious bed, and in a few seconds he was fast asleep.

Daniel had not received a reward that he considered adequate to the service he had rendered, so he looked about him, made a parcel of a few articles likely to be useful, stepped cut on to the balcony, and threw the parcel into a shrub near the gate.

A minute later he stole down the. stairs, went quietly out, and, so far as Mr. Gable was concerned, was lost in the great world.

THREE HOURS LATER Miss Constance Carrie and Miss Victoria Carrie, tall, prim, thin spinsters before whom ages were never mentioned in polite society, returned from the Mayor's Ball. They let themselves in. Jane, the servant, who had been instructed to sit up for them, having let her beloved policeman out by the back gate half-an-hour earlier, was drowsing by the kitchen fire. She was sent to bed, and Miss Constance and Miss Victoria went wearily upstairs.

"Jane has left the lamp burning," complained Miss Victoria. "How often must I tell that girl not—" Miss Constance got no further with the sentence. She was staring at the bed, white with horror, wide-eyed, open-mouthed, the very incarnation of amazement.

"A man!" she squeaked.

"A man!" whispered Miss Victoria.

Vickie reached the door simultaneously with Connie. They jambed there for a moment, two silent, terror-stricken, elderly females.

Connie was first downstairs. She ran down six, stumbled down three, and fell down five. This was fortunate for Vickie, otherwise she might have hurt herself severely, for she fell down seven, but her dear sister broke her fall. They rushed the front door, and fled into the street.

It was only when they found themselves safe in the middle of the road that they dared to give any expression to their feelings.

Then Connie screamed.

"Oh, don't," gasped Vickie. "He may come after us."

Then Vickie screamed. Then both screamed.

For a moment there was silence. A balcony window opened a little lower down, and a harsh, masculine voice called through the night:

"Go home, you drunken trollop !"

The two spinsters hushed their cries instantly in the face of this hideous accusation. The voice suggested awful possibilities. The sisters stole back to their own gate.

"Good heavens! what will people say?" whispered Miss Connie.

"A man in our bed!" murmured Miss Vickie. "What shall we do? The man must have been drunk. He has gone in by mistake. Perhaps if we ask him he will go away."

"It would be dreadful to be talked about."

"Shocking! I couldn't bear it."

After lingering for a quarter of an hour in the hall, and loitering in fear and trembling on the stairs for another ten minutes, the two ventured as far as their bedroom door. Connie looked in.

"He's there," she gasped.

Vickie looked in. "He doesn't look dangerous— at least, not very," she whispered.

Mr. Gable certainly did not look dangerous. He had rather a chubby face and a bald head, and he was sleeping with his mouth open, gurgling in his dreams like an exhaust pipe.

"Hi!" squeaked Miss Connie.

"Man!" called Miss Vickie.

Gable slept on.

The sisters grew bolder, and called louder. They collected some boots, and threw them at the sweet sleeper, but they did not venture into the naunted chamber. A slipper of Vickie's struck Gable on the nose, and his eyes opened like springs. He closed them again, but heard strange voices calling. Again he opened his eyes. He looked round the room, gave a few moments to troubled thought, and then sat up with a jerk. He was in a strange bed in a strange room, and beset by two strange females.

"Wh— where am I?" asked Gable.

"You are in our house, and in our bed, and if you don't get up and go away at once we shall call the police," said Miss Connie severely.

"Great heaven!" groaned Gable. "How did I get here?"

"I am sure I do not know, but you must go away at once."

"I will, I will. Believe me, ladies, I deeply regret this fearful blunder. I am afraid I have had too much to drink."

"We will give you five minutes to dress," said Connie sternly. They withdrew and waited, and presently a wretched voice called througn the bedroom keyhole:

"Miss, madame, for God's sake hear me!"

"Are you going away?" demanded Miss Connie.

"No. In point of fact, I can't go."

"You can't ? But you must."

"I can't, I tell you. I've got no clothes!"

It was hideously true. Among other things in that parcel Daniel Ash had taken away with him was poor Mr. Gable's wearing apparel.

Really, this story should end there, but many may be anxious to know the full extent of poor Gable's misfortunes. There was no male apparel in the spinster's house, and eventually the hapless man stole from the premises disguised in an old skirt of Miss Connie's, and wearing a bedraggled plush hat that was once Miss Vickie's.

So apparelled he went home, and only three months' hard battling and heroic lying kept him out of the divorce court.

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One of a series: The Hobbies of Austin Porteus

14: John Leslie's Burglar

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 only 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.

15: A Property Deal

(Which is nevertheless a story of love and cunning, with casual goblins thrown in.)

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: wan normal again, and a good, commonplace tenant who had succeeded Bellweather was paying two pounds a week.

Then Frank Wrile made a special business mil 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!"

16: The Vengeance That Miscarried

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, "l 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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17: The Man Who Eventually Did

Dy Edwardson

Punch (Melbourne) 24 Oct 1918

HE CAME TO SUNUP (Sunup being an exclusive sort of resort for sore-heads, contrite drinkers, nerve sufferers, and convalescents of sorts), and put up at Wallington's Hospice; but, finding that Hammil's Zephyr Place, was more expensive, commodious, and tony, had his traps and ware carted over next day, and entered into possession of two of the next-best rooms looking east, only because the first best rooms looking north were all occupied.

W. Hanniwell Guest, which was the name scored all over his luggage, was very much hurt to find there was no very best room available, and said so frequently, and with every evidence of exasperation.

"It's the same everywhere, sir. Dem!— the same everywhere," he said, severely, addressing Hammil. "Wherever I go somebody else has got the things I want. Dem! Most aggravating. I say, most— most aggravating and irritating, sir. Dem!"

Zephyr Place was much frequented by a certain type of valetudinarian ladies of elderly airs, even if not always of marked antiquity. There were fattish widows and slimmish spinsters in quantities; and their habit was to sit iii the cool, commodious hall-way, or in the large garden, and knit inexplicable things that had never had a beginning, and would never have an end, and chatter and drink tea.

Mr. W. Hanniwell Guest created commotion among these simple people.

"Most impressive," said Miss Dix.

"Reminds me of Lord Kitchener," said Mrs. Cobb. "Not so much in appearance as in manner. You would think he was always drilling an army."

Guest was a slim, tallish, sandy man of about fifty, with the bones of his face rigidly .outlined, and a tall, thin, imperial nose with two humps like a dromedary. His temper has been described as uncertain. It wasn't. It was dead certain. There was never a more reliable temper afflicted upon a peaceful community. Sun or gloom, warm or cold, wet or dry, W. Hanniwell Guest was always exasperated.

Guest had a curious habit of talking to himself, particularly at meals. At breakfast, over his bacon, he would fix an intense, watery, grey eye, blinking through a sandy fringe of lashes, on the party directly opposite, and say:

"I will. I will. I'll do it. By Jimminy, I'll do it!"

If the party opposite, assuming that he was supposed to be in the conversation, suavely replied: "What is it you will do, sir?" Guest blinked at him for a moment, recalled himself to his bacon with an effort and retorted:

"Dem ! How dare you, sir? How dare you interfere, sir? Go to the deuce, sir!" Which was most disconcerting.

Guest had other extraordinary qualities. He was a ruthless borrower, and his method amounted almost to pillage. If he saw an article he fancied, and he could get his hands upon it, he said:

"Dem! I like this. I'll take a little loan of it. No, no, no, no. I'll hear of no refusal. Just a loan. Dem!" And off he would go.

In this way, William Hanniwell Guest secured Bean's shaving set, Bell's silver-backed brushes, Nicholl's bull-hide travelling bag, Kingham's dressing-gown, Mrs. Patterson's gold-top sunshade, Sloan's calf-bound set of Robert Louis Stevenson's works, and Weber's silver cornet.

Everybody protested, but nobody got any satisfaction out of Guest, and the talk of calling in police assistance and the protection of the statutes concerned him about as much as if they had threatened him with the vengeance of the moth.

But William's most successful efforts were among the spinsters. He was not altogether a dismal failure with the pining widows, but the afflicted spinsters were carried off their heels by his tremendous snorting manner, and his air of a generalissimo dealing with a refractory regiment.

W. Hanniwell Guest made love to ladies in an extraordinary way.

"You're a dem fine little woman, Lucy," he told Miss Dix, when he had known her rather less than two hours— "an uncommonly dem fine little woman. Never saw a dem finer pair of eyes in all my life. Dem!"

"Oh, Mr. Guest!" exclaimed the spinster, quite overcome.

"Now, you are," persisted Guest, threatening her with a forceful forefinger. "No denials. I'll take no denials. I wonder you never married. Dem, if it isn't wholly inexplicable to me, the number of dem fine women who have never married. This will have to be altered. It'll have to be seen to."

"But, Mr. Guest," tittered Miss Dix, "one may have had one's chances. One may not have wanted to get married. Te-he! Te-he he."

"Stuff!" thundered Guest, in his best military manner. "Stuff and dem nonsense! Every woman wants to get married."

Then he fell into his sudden habit of self-communing. "I'll do it!" he said. "I'll do it! Yes, by gad, I will!"

Miss Dix was a timid little thing of thirty-eight, with hair that curled naturally after nine hours close confinement in curl-papers, a long thin neck, too much nose, and a strange, insistent, and most despicable simper.

"Te-he!" she tittered. "What will you do, Mr. Guest. Te-he-he!"

Guest was recalled to himself. "Don't interfere!" he commanded. "Mind your own dem business, if you please."

"But you said—"

"Nothing of the kind." Guest transfixed her with his probe-like digit. "Nothing of the kind, I tell you." Then with one of his surprising lightning

changes. "Pon my word and soul, that's a lovely bangle you're wearing dear lady. Would you permit me? Black opals and diamonds. Yes, yes. Never saw anything finer. Would you mind if I took this to compare it with a set in my collection? Superb ! Superb! Ah, thank you, thank you."

Miss Dix had not said a word, but Guest put her diamond and opal bangle in his pocket. A wild idea had taken possession of her maiden heart.

"He wishes to get an engagement ring to match," she whispered to her own soul.

Guest had paid his first fourteen days' board with a wonderful blue and purple, cheque, signed with a paralyzing arabesque; but it was met all right, and when the bill for the next fortnight was presented, W. Hanniwell Guest suffered a whirlwind of indignation, tore it up, and threw the fragments at Hammil.

"Dem if I'll pay oftener than once a month. Dem if I'll be bothered," he said. "Dem if I ever met such a man. Dem !"

And all this while, W. Hanniwell had been voicing his absurd asides all over the house. "I'll do it ! I'll do it ! Wouldn't you? I will. I will, by gad!"

Newcomers within hearing usually replied, whereupon Guest, awakening from his trance, would retort:

"Dem, madame, never said a word. Dem! Suggest that you mind your own dem business. Dem!"

Guest had since borrowed Plover's gold-top umbrella, Miss Quine's scent spray, MacFarland's telescope, Henty's shaving-mirror, Earle's camera, and Mrs. Pett's hand-painted fan.

One afternoon W. Hanniwell rang up for a stout cord. A length of clothes-line was sent him. He went to the proprietor, raving.

"Dem!" he said, "what you mean? What you mean, sir, by sending a gentleman an abominable thing like this? Dem! Dem, sir, I want something better. I want your best. Dem! Yes, dem!"

He got twelve feet of fine window cord, and seemed content.

"I'll do it," he said that evening over the soup. "I'll do it, by Jove! Why not?"

"Most remarkable man," whispered Miss Dix to Bean, on her right. "Tremendous brain. Always active— thinking, thinking, thinking."

"Dippy as a headless hen," growled Bean. "That's his greatness, if you ask me. The confounded fellow's always going to do it, but he never does— whatever the deuce it may be."

"Ah, but he will. Te-he-he-he-he! He will. He's going to."

"Going to what?"

"He's meditating a— te-he-he !— I don't like to say. I really am so shy. But he is meditating a great event, dear man."

Miss Cobb had fixed the tittering Miss Dix with a cold, hard, scornful eye.

"Much you know about it," she said. "If William has any confidante, it is I. If he were meditating any serious action I am certain he would not keep it from me. Would you, William?"

Miss Cobb had addressed W. Hanniwell Guest, pointedly, across the table. Mr. Guest had borrowed a gold-top umbrella of hers, also a scent bottle of beautiful silver filigree. Miss Amelia Cobb imagined that these facts and same few emphatic remarks on the dem folly of a dem fine girl of Miss Cobb's proportions remaining single gave her right of familiar address.

"Did you address me, young lady?" demanded Guest. He pulled his Norman moustache, and his high old Norman nose was inflated threateningly. "Did you presume to address me in that way? Well, don't do it. Won't have it! Dem impertinence."

Miss Cobb gasped like a cod out of water; she flushed crimson; she half arose.

"Well, I never!" she said. "Well, I never did! In all my life I never did hear of such a thing!"

There were others, of course. From Mrs. Steven Howe, William had taken a handsome wrist-watch, with the accompanying bracelet.

"I want it," he said. "Not for long, perhaps, but it's necessary." He put it in his pocket.

Mrs. Steven Plowe was a little fat widow, full of dimples, a comfortable lady whom the late Howe had left well cared for, and who, although the afore-mentioned, definitely-departed Plowe had not been the sort of husband to induce a woman to repeat the matrimonial experiment, was still willing to try her luck, especially with a gentleman of undoubted breeding and apparent wealth, like William Hanniwell Guest, for instance.

And William had only said: "You're the type of woman that should marry again, and again, and again, if necessary. You should not remain unmarried. It's wrong. Dem me, it's a sin. I— I almost ask 'How dare you?' "

"But, Mr. Guest, one has to be so careful."

"No. Drop that. Don't talk dem nonsense to me. A woman hasn't to be careful. That's for the man. You ought to marry. By gad, you shall marry!"

"Oh, Mr. Guest— William!"

"I'll do it," said Guest, in a half-whisper, again dropping into his absurd habit of soliloquy. "I'll do it. One of these days, I'll do it."

Mrs. Steven Howe took his hand, and pressed it. She had forgotten all about her watch,

"When ?" she said, shyly.

"I'll do it," said Guest. "I'll do it!" and he left her without another word.

Then came Mrs. Thomas Makepeace Beanleigh. Mrs. Thomas Makepeace Beanleigh was a tall, fair, full-busted, severely corseted woman of forty. She had a nose of marked character, and carried a dog, and a lorgnette.

William encountered her as she entered the hall before the knitting guests. He seemed amazed.

"Sophie !" he gasped. Then he seized her clog. "By gad I'm glad you've come. You're going to marry me" he said. 'It's agreed, then ?"

"William, don't be an idiot," said Mrs. Beanleigh. "Before all these people, too. I have just come up to have a little rest and change. I have not altered my mind at all."

"You won't marry me? You are still the same dem obstinate, pig-headed, blackguard of a woman." Guest was dancing with indignation. He dropped the dog.

Mrs. Thomas Makepeace Beanleigh was now conscious of the fact that she was the centre of a throng of distinctly hostile females.

"Excuse me, madam," said one, "but that is my wristlet watch you are wearing."

"And that is my lorgnette," said another.

"And that is my gold-topped sun-shade," observed a third.

"I'll do it!" said Guest. "Dem, I'll do it!" He fled upstairs. From the first landing he cried. "I'll do it ! I'll do it!"

The lodgers at Zephyr Place had made an astounding discovery. Guest had been sending all the articles of value secured from them to Mrs. Beanleigh, in Melbourne. He had even sent her Bean's shaving set.

"He has been wanting me to marry him for two years," Mrs. Beanleigh explained— "ever since soon after my first husband's death. He left me in a rage because I refused him. He sent me these things, and many more, as love gifts."

Hammil, the proprietor, having heard all this, perceived that the moment was opportune to urge a settlement of his bill. He headed a deputation to the rooms of W. Hanniwell Guest.

On the table was a parcel addressed to Mrs. Thomas Makepeace Beanleigh. It contained a clock valued at seven pounds— Hammil's clock.

In the bedroom hanging from the chandelier by a length of window cord was the body of W. Hanniwell Guest. Pinned to the shirt of deceased was a card, on which was written in bold black letters:

"Done it!"

"Unsound mind!" said the coroner's jury.

18: Two Drummers

An Almost True Story

Ward Edson

Punch (Melbourne) 1 Dec 1904

Dave Davis did not give Flo credit for much astuteness, but the fact that he gave her credit for some showed a certain diplomacy in him, because she had none. Flo was extremely pretty, and had many, good qualities besides, but her stock of common sense was very limited.

Florence Dale's mother kept the Commercial Club Hotel at Walla. I am conscious that this confession will go far to discredit my previous assertion re Flo's lack of common sense, since it is a commonly accepted belief that young ladies who are associated with the business of the licensed victualler are invariably endowed with much worldly wisdom of the most worldly kind. But if it is assumed that Miss Dale had any of the average barmaid's large experience and knowledge of men and affairs, the assumption must be abandoned. The bar had been strictly forbidden to Miss Flo.

The late Abel Dale's hotel was always an intensely respectable house, his bar was as decorously conducted as a city lady's four o'clock tea, saving that smoking was not strictly prohibited, but during his lifetime the daughter of the house was never permitted to show her dainty little nose within its precincts.

People who liked to get drunk without restriction said that Dale was utterly unfitted for the calling of a publican, and perhaps he was. Certainly, he had not made a fortune out of the Commercial Club, and the house was better known as a comfortable abiding place than as a boozers' rendezvous, and as an old publicans' proverb hath it, "The boodle is in the beer."

Dale had no respect for the average publican's method of earning a living, and he kept his wife and family as much as possible apart from the retail side of his business, but, of course, Flo saw a good deal of the boarders; indeed, she had known David Davis long before her father embarked upon the enterprise he had recently left to his sorrowing widow.

Perhaps Dave would have progressed better with his little love affair had he been more of a stranger to Miss Florence, but she had known him intimately for five years, and had grown from fifteen to twenty while he was growing from twenty-three to twenty-eight, and as a result he lacked novelty. Mr. Wallace Cartright had all the advantages of novelty on his side. He was new— brand, spanking new— new from the top of his glossy Paris hat to the heels of his glittering patent leather boots. Moreover, he was always new. His clothes never lacked the virtue of seeming to have come straight from the tailor that morning. His very teeth looked new, and there was a newness about the sheen of his fair hair.

Moreover, Mr. Cartright was travelling with a new line, a line full of variety and joy to the heart of woman, a line in jewellery. He represented the Great Eastern Diamond and Pilbert Gold Syndicate, and brought beautiful satin-lined sample boxes filled with beautiful, sparkling, new, jewellery, diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, turquoises, pearls, opals, carbuncles, and half a thousand other stones, set in the most golden of gold. Never had Flo seen such gold. It made the metal in her mother's substantial old 17 carat jewellery look like candlestick brass by comparison.

Beautiful indeed was Mr. Wallace Cartright's line, and Dave Davis, alas! was most stupid and prosaic— oils, disinfectants, powders and washes for the destruction of various insects that plague the lives of pastoralists, poultry farmers and fruit growers, and Meddleton's Patent Sheep Dip. Dave's lines were useful and popular. He did a good, steady, growing business hr the North-Eastern, but, Great Scot! as an object of interest to pretty women what show had Meddleton's Sheep Dip and the Easygo Lubricant alongside the splendid samples from the central depot of the Great Eastern Diamond and Pilbert Gold Syndicate?

The Great Eastern had only recently set up business in the state, and it's handsome traveller. whose hair emulated the brightness of the Pilbert gold, and whose eves were quite as fine as the Great Eastern diamonds, and reflected the greatest credit on the concern, became a tremendous favourite with Mrs. and Miss Dale from the moment he first arrived at the Commercial Club, and after he had given them a private view of his samples he had the respect due to Oriental magnificence.

Dave Davis noticed Wallace Cartright's progress with unaffected concern. Dave was a plain man by contrast. There wasn't a single glitter in his whole make-up. In a bathing establishment Dave might have been remarkable, and Wallace magnificent, but in his frock coat and high hat and blazing with Great Eastern diamonds and Pilbert gold, Wallace quite obscured David. He was the sort of man who caught your eve instantly, and he had audacity enough and vivacity enough to keep it.

Mrs. Dale, who had always been impatient of her husband's methods, was running the hotel on more popular lines, and whilst keeping a very proper motherly supervision, was not averse to thinking that the improvement in business was due to the fact that pretty, piquant Flo was sometimes to be seen in the parlour bar, and now and then handed down the whiskey and provided the glasses with her own fair hands.

Flo was a simple, pleasant, kindly girl, a little vain, as was natural in one whose beauty was discussed with rapture by the shearers of Wantibadge and the holiday-makers of Melbourne. She was sentimental, too, and Wallace

Cartright looked so like a *London Journal* frock-coated, bell-toppered hero that, she could, not help admiring him, altogether apart from his wonderful samples.

The trouble with Cartright was love. He reached Walla at eleven o'clock one night, and before noon next day he was deeply, desperately in love with the lovely daughter of the hostess of the Commercial Club. Dave Davis had been in love with Flo for two years and four months, and it was characteristic of the glittering Cartright that in two days he made a greater display of his affections than Davis had done in five years. Wallace displayed his feelings as he did his samples, always expecting to make a big effect, and Flo said he was very nice and gentlemanly.

It happened that the visits of Davis and Cartright to Walla transpired at about the same time, and Dave had the satisfaction of watching his rival's phenomenal progress. When he saw Flo and her mother bending rapturously over the Cartright samples he thought sadly of his own, relegated to the stable because of their somewhat pungent odours.

"I say, Cartright," he said, one day in the bar, "don't you think it a bit risky to splash those first-water diamonds of yours about the way you do?"

"Not a bit," said Wallace, bravely. "You see, I go prepared."

He displayed the butt of a revolver. Dave saw a glance of admiration in the eye Flo turned upon the representative of the Great Eastern Syndicate, and sighed. Evidently she saw with the eye of faith the fair and flashing Wallace coping successfully with a drove of bushrangers.

WALLACE was very melodramatic in his methods and his attitudes. He skited unblushingly. His brother drummers recognised it as skite, and laughingly crowned him King Skite, but they recognised that skite was part of the great game of commercial travelling, and did nothing to spoil Cartright's pose. The impression Wallace Cartright conveyed to Mrs. and Miss Dale in the course of three visits to Walla was that mere diamonds were nothing to him, and rubies of price were common as cobble stones. With all his samples blazing on Mrs. Dales drawing room table he said, significantly, "The woman I love shall look like that if she wishes. Her jewels shall dim those of other women as the sun dims the stars."

He showed Flo his daintiest samples; he expatiated on their beauty, the elegance of their workmanship, and hung what might well have been a thousand pounds' worth about her pretty figure, and Flo looked at the constellation in a mirror and nearly fainted. Wallace insisted on her wearing some of his most valuable specimens in the bar. He persuaded her to accept a brooch that might have been the chief item of an Indian Rajah's collection. Flo was intoxicated with diamonds.

Once David had driven Flo on long drives up the Cootrabin and to the water works and the river; now Wallace usurped her, and whereas Dave had been quite content with a plain buggy, Wallace had a rakish high dog-cart, and drove a pair of bays tandem, and the bats and dog-cart glittered like everything with which the Great Eastern Syndicate had any dealings.

Naturally enough Dave had a small opinion of Wallace Cartright, but he never voiced it to anyone but himself, and to himself he said often enough and fiercely enough: "The man's a hollow, glittering fraud— paste, paste, paste! To think my dear little girl should go to a gas-blown bubble like that."

Then he sadly remembered many times when the little girl's eyes had looked softly into his, and the little girl's hand had lingered almost lovingly in his own, and he cursed and cursed again, and resolved to buck up.

The process of bucking up is not so easy, however, and when at length in sheer desperation he screwed himself to it, Dave's bucking up took the form of a little ring and a few words. He held the line, a simple pretty ring of diamonds and emeralds towards Flo, and said:

"Will you take this from me, Flo ? I love you, dear, love you so much that I can hardly trust myself to talk about it. Will you be my wife?"

The girl did not answer him for a few moments, but stood looking at him in a half-frightened way. Then she held out her hand on which flashed and glittered a great marquise ring.

"I promised this morning to be Mr. Cartright's wife," she said.

DAVE had borne the blow bravely. It was two months later, and it was in the early hours of a black winter's morning that he was disturbed by a nervous hand shaking him in his bed.

"Get up, Davis, get up!" whispered Cartright's voice. "Thieves! Thieves! They are after my samples."

"Well, why the devil don't you go for them?" answered Davis. He sprang from his bed, and. strode from the room.

"Follow me!" he said.

Dave stole to the room next to Cartright's, the room in which the latter kept his samples, and saw two men in the room, which was illumined with the dim light of a stable lantern. One of them was passing one of Cartright's cases to a third man outside.

When the whole hotel, disturbed by shots, curses and shoutings, rushed pell-mell to Cartright's room, Davis was discovered busily choking the new stable-hand in one corner. On the floor under the table a second man lay with a cracked skull. Dave was bleeding from a bullet wound in the side.

They went to hunt for Cartright, and found him sitting on Davis' bed in his pyjamas, white and dreadfully frightened, a loaded revolver in his trembling

hand. Dave was put to bed, and for a week Flo nursed him. It was the most delightful and satisfactory week he had spent in his whole life.

Down in the bar Flo occasionally heard by chance certain direct comments, upon Cartright's conduct in leaving another man the task of protecting his property.

Dave had been up for two days posing as an interesting convalescent and having a good time. Flo was most attentive, but very quiet. It was afternoon, and they were sitting under the winter roses, when he noticed her take her magnificent engagement ring from her pocket She held it towards him falteringly.

"Have you the little ring you offered me?" she whispered.

"Yes," he answered, producing it as he spoke.

"Will you exchange?" Her face was bent, but he could see the flushes surging on her white neck. "It is a bad bargain, I know. This is paste. All Cartright's stuff was paste."

"Do you mean that you will take my ring, dear?"'

"Oh, yes, yes. I, have been a fool, but I love you, Dave. I do— dearly, dearly!"

"That is enough, Flo. Nothing else on earth matters if you only love me."

"What must you have thought of me, Dave, seeing me dazzled by all that rubbish."

"I thought you a woman, my darling, and was the most miserable wretch on earth."

"It was not so much that his jewellery was all paste, but he was paste, too— most flagrant waste. And I was nearly losing my happiness for this rubbish, and you your life."

"We were both foolish. Let us call it square."

So it is Dave's honest ring that Flo wears now, and the rings of the Great Eastern Syndicate are blackening many fingers in that district to this day.

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19: Leonard's Reward

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 odour 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 wagon 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 wagon 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 instant 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 threateningly.

They fought there and then. Leonard had some little proficiency in pugilism, and was a strong, well-set-up man of forty-four; but Walker 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 same 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 if 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 behind, 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 actually 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.

Is it virtue only that is its own reward?

20: The Trapping of Santa Claus

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 lie 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 all 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 he, in short, elegant little models of himself, but here nature intervened, and Thomas Courtley Studley, aged 12½, and Edward Arthur Studley, aged 10½, 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 likely 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 for 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 stockwhip."

"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 him up to a thing'r 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 in 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 boy's 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," be 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.

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21: His Accomplice

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 lady-like 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. Alt 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 Ieast striking, and, unlike Jeane would have been content to give all, with nothing in return but his love,

Jeane had so many admirers, and there were a few well-to-do chaps from the neighbouring stations among that 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.

"H'mm," 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—" 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 he 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 will 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!"

22: A Virtuous Imposition

Dy Edwardson

Punch (Melbourne) 28 Sep 1916

SHE KNEW she was in a large sense responsible for his going.

"I am no fighting man," he said. "I never was. Even at school when other small boys were always ready and willing, I invariably wriggled out of active hostilities."

"Are you frightened?" she answered, and there was just a suspicion of contempt in the tone.

He looked at her, and smiled whimsically. "I don't know," he said. "Possibly I am."

"Aren't you ashamed to say it?"

He shook his head. "No," he answered. "If I am frightened it is something for which I am not responsible. You do not imagine, Irma, that people are frightened of their own free will! We would all be utterly devoid of fear if we could. Cowardice is held shameful; but no man is voluntarily a coward. Our hatred of cowardice is an inheritance from our ancient forebears, who detested a coward because he was a burden on the tribe, and could not do his fair share of the killing when the tribe was beset by wild animals or wilder men; and because he was a poor hunter, and did not contribute his fair share of meat to the feast. We retain something of that instinctive hatred of the coward long after bravery has ceased to be a daily necessity, although we are supposed to have acquired reasoning powers which should teach us that a man is no more responsible for his fears than he is for the colour of his eyes and his hair."

"But the need for courage has not passed. It is here to-day— a greater necessity than ever before," she said with spirit.

"This is an extraordinary condition," he continued. "I said that bravery was no longer a necessity of our daily life. We have not to look in the face of the lion to get meat; our ordinary life is not beset by hostile tribes, consequently, we have not the same excuse as the cave-dweller had for despising the chickenhearted.",

"I wish you would not talk like that. I know I could not care for a coward."

"Well, my dear girl, I am not pretending to be a hero. I never did a particularly courageous thing. Till I was sixteen or seventeen I was always afraid in the dark; and, even now, alone at the dead of night, my flesh is affected with strange quakings. My mind tells me it is all nonsense; I have no belief in the supernatural. My the terrors of my superstitious forefathers remain in my bones."

"People are talking about you. They say you ought to go."

"I have heard them; and if I go it will be because I am frightened to stay."

"I think you are talking wilful nonsense."

"I am not. I am actually frightened of public opinion. I shrink from the contempt of my friends as I would from the stroke of a whip." '

And in the end Gorge had gone.

"I go," he said, "because you wish it, and because I love you better than anything in the world; but I am no soldier. Nature designed me for a studious worker, and here I am in all the pomp and panoply, aping a son of Mars." He displayed himself in Khaki.

"And fine, and brown, and bonny you look," said Irma proudly.

"I have your promise, sweetheart. If I come back you will marry me."

"If you come back ! Of course you will come back."

He had been gone many months now, and absence had made the heart grow fonder. Irma Stephan had let him go lightly enough, thinking only of the glory he would win, for she put little faith in his presentation of himself as a man lacking the qualities of a fighter; but now she wondered she. had been able to do it.

At first he had written regularly, telling her of incidents of the voyage and experiences in Egypt, and reiterating his love with the fine eloquence of a capable pen driven by an earnest heart. Then came a brief letter:

"We go into action to-morrow, I fancy. I don't know how I feel about it. I have numbed my sensibilities, drugged myself, as it were, by sheer power of will. If I fight well it will not be because I am not afraid, but because I have set my teeth deep into the task, and let myself think of nothing else. There I am wrong, I do think of one other thing— of my love for you. Dearest, if this should be my last word remember that under my lightness, and my love of the whimsical side of things, even of myself, there lay a love for you as sure as the rock of ages."

Irma cried a good deal over that letter. It seemed that she had come to understand him better in his long absence. Or was it that she understood herself better, and knew at length how dear he was to her.

There followed a long silence— and then came a bald announcement : his name in the list of the "severely wounded."

Nothing more for long week's. Driven almost distracted. Irma endeavoured to seek out news of him. Assisted by a distant relative in politics she even reached the ear of a minister; but there was nothing to be gathered here, and the girl's one gleam of comfort was in the fact that the name of George Weldon had not yet appeared in a list of the dead.

At length it came, a feeble letter from Yum, an utterly pitiful document, a mere crumpled scrap of paper with a few tremulous lines to say that he lived.

"I am still in hospital. They say I shall be about again. I do not regard it as particularly good news. There has been an operation. I suppose they will pack home what is left of me as soon as I can be shifted. I hope you are well."

The letter opened: "Dear Miss Stephan"; it concluded: "Your faithful friend, George Weldon."

Irma sat for a whole hour with, the note in. her hand, feeling stunned, as if from a heavy blow.

"He has been. terribly injured," she told herself. "He comes back crippled. He blames me for sending him. He no longer loves me."

There came another brief note four weeks later. He was being sent home with a batch of wounded in the course of a week or two. He said nothing of love.

She went to meet him when he landed, although he had written on the eve of his departure, praying she would not. She saw him helped down the gangway by stronger comrades, and her heart almost broke in her breast. He was gaunt to extreme attenuation; there was a grimness in his face she had never known. He had lost a leg, and she saw later that two fingers were gone from his right hand his drawing hand.

Irma wondered after that her heart did not break there and then. She sat by him in the motor-car! tears streaming down her cheeks; and he talked coldly, evenly, without a trace of his former spirit.

"What will you do ?" she asked wretchedly.

"My grateful country pensions me. I shall be all right," he answered.

''But your drawing— your work?"

"I shall probably never draw another line."

She dreaded the stony quiet of him worse than she would have feared an outpouring of emotion. That night she did not sleep. He no longer loved her; she felt that perhaps he hated her; but her love for him had become boundless, an almost unbearable longing to mother her poor, broken soldier swelled in her heart, till it almost stopped her breathing.

Seeing more of him during the following weeks, Irma came to another conclusion, one that warmed her soul again, and set happiness singing in her soul like a spring bird.

"He still loves me," she whispered; "but because he is crippled he will say nothing."

How to win him became the problem of her life. What would move him?

One day George Weldon received a letter from Irma:

"I am sorry I could not come to see you on Sunday afternoon as I promised. I found at the last moment I could not get away. My mistress needed me, and as she is very kind, as mistresses go, I was compelled to give up my chance of seeing you. Unless others have told you before this, you will be surprised to hear that I am now earning my own living. I have lost

the £7 a week my father left me. The securities were amongst those stolen by Pascott, the lawyer whose defalcations you have probably heard of. I was left with about £60, and before that was quite finished, I went to work. I am doing the only thing I find myself capable of— I am a fairly efficient housemaid at sixteen shillings a week. May I come to see you my next evening off?"

Irma gave the address of the house at which she was working, and after recovering somewhat from the emotions with this surprise packet had filled him, George took his crutch and limped forth. He trammed to South Yarra, and asked boldly at Mrs. Henderson's front door for Miss Irma Stephan.

Irma was permitted to see her friend. She went to him well-aproned, a duster in her hand.

"It's true, then?" he said,

"Why, of course," she replied.

"You a servant." He looked at her in sheer amazement. "I couldn't believe it."

"And why not? Was not I as liable to be robbed as another?"

"Yes, of course. It is not that. But you were given an expensive education. Could you not do something better for yourself?"

"Nothing," she answered, somewhat hopelessly.

"But you could teach."

"I might have become a nursery governess, but it is paid even worse than this."

"Come on your evening out," he said some what tremulously. "We will have dinner together, and have a chat over things."

He told her at the dinner that he was working again.

"I find I am getting something of my old mastery of the pen. The missing fingers are not absolutely necessary, it appears. I sold a drawing."

"No!" she cried, rapturously.

"Yes— a full page in wash. One of the papers is to use it for a Christmas cover. It brought £5. Not so bad."

"Oh, lovely! I am so glad. You have been so— so morbid."

"I am doing line drawings, too— joke blocks. They are going to be saleable all right. I think I am certain to knock out a decent living, and perhaps do fairly well when this lame member has become a little more docile." He was speaking quite cheerfully again.

"It isn't so bad, then, George. Life still has much for you."

"A man must accommodate himself to his circumstances. I have a mechanical leg. It's a bit unmanageable yet, but presently you shall see me stalking round on it, pretending to be a whole man, and you shall tell me how you like it."

That night there was a marked return of George's old manner. Irma's heart told her he was wooing her again.

Three times he took her home on her evenings out. The third time he kissed her at the gate.

"Oh, my dear one, I love you still !" he whispered. "I swore I would never speak a word of love to you again— never offer you a vulgar fraction for a husband, but, circumstances have so changed. At least I can give you something better than a servant's life. Do you care for me, dear?"

"I love you! I love you! You have nearly broken my heart. I have been longing for your love, and you have been like a stone."

"Will you be my wife?"

THEY were married. They returned from their honeymoon to their new home, which was Irma's surprise.

"It is my wedding gift to us," she said.

He looked upon the tastefully-furnished villa. "All our own-house, land and furniture. You see, I was saving so much while I was in service."

"But it's impossible that you could have saved all this."

"George, when a girl loves a man as I loved you, when she sees that to win him in defiance of his pride she must lie— she lies! I lied. I lied because I saw that the only way to win you was to let you see how necessary you were to me. I removed my bonds from the care of Pascott five months ago. I have still my seven pounds a week."

"Base deceiver!" He held her in his arms, pressing the words upon her lips.

"And you'll believe I love you, knowing how much trouble I took to catch you."

"I have been tricked, fooled, bamboozled by the sweetest, the dearest little confidence woman in the world."

23: Her Homecoming

Ward Edson

Punch (Melbourne) 14 Jan 1904

THE HIGH, brightly-polished dog-cart was a kind of conveyance rarely seen on the road at Ringtail, and the bush-bred youth gnawing a horse-carrot on the top of Cameron's chock-and-log fence gazed after it with round eyes, murmuring amazingly: "Well, I'm blowed!"

The horse that drew the dog-cart was a big, sleek chestnut, proud as a peacock, and glittering in the sun almost as gaily. The occupants were the driver— a tall, grey-suited, tanned, and handsome man of about thirty— and a pleasant-looking, fair-haired, blue-eyed, laughing girl of twenty-three or thereabouts.

"You know I've told you what to expect, Pat," said the girl. "I've never pretended to you a little bit, have I?"

The young man chanced a collision with a tree, and gave one arm to the girl's waist, hugging her to him. "If I don't find baronial halls I shall be simply disgusted," he said. "The baronial ball is a two-roomed paling house with a log-hut attached, and a rude iron-roofed skillion behind that. My people are not poor, they need no help, but they are content with the rough life and the rough surroundings of the old home. If it had not been for mother I should never have come back, but she loved me, and showed it as much as she dared after marrying father Stephen. It will give her joy to see me again."

"And a great lady."

"Oh, a tremendous swell. But I am dubious about father Stephen. He will probably show me the door."

"Father Stephen is a nice man, I gather."

"Hard, grim, dour and a step-father. But I cannot feel bitter towards him. He helped to drive me out into the world, and so helped me to win— everything."

"To win me, that is."

The girl smiled and nodded. "The conceit of the man," she said, but she. put her lips to be kissed. The road branched into an unfenced track, diverted here and there by a fallen tree, and the timber grew thicker. After another fifteen minutes' drive, the twistings and delays of which chafed the chestnut almost out of his skin, Dolly's ear caught the sound of a dog barking. She rose to her feet, peering between the trees, and her face flushed. A minute later she pointed.

"The baronial halls," she said. "A Tadmore in the wilderness.'

"Now, dear, you must; let me go in alone. "Mother will be there. Tie the horse securely and follow, but wait on the verandah and see the effect of the return of the prodigal daughter."

She jumped down, and, slipping into the orchard, moved toward the house, hiding herself as much as possible. He secured the horse and followed her.

Dolly walked straight in at the front door, and through the front room into the kitchen, Pat followed her, but remained in the front room, with the door open just wide enough to provide a peeping space. An old woman was leaning over a big pot in the wide fireplace. She straightened herself as Dolly entered, and turned, showing a patient face worn and lined, and browned with wind and sun, but still possessing something of the charm that Pat had never before seen in any face but Dolly's. The old woman stared for a moment as if at an apparition, and put out trembling hands, from one of which a spoon fell to the floor.

"My girl! My girl!" she said in a voice broken with emotion, and mother and daughter were clasped in each other's arms.

"Dolly! Dolly! Oh, my girl, my girl!" moaned the mother, caressing the bright young face, and looking hungrily into the blue eves above her, misty with tears.

"You didn't write to me, dear."

"I did write to you, mother, many times." Dolly kissed her mother's cheek again.

"I got none, never a line. And he wouldn't me speak of you, my darling. Oh, dearie, dearie, why did you go?"

"I had to go, mother; I was forced. It is better. I am very happy. I can make you happy, mother. I told you in those letters that I was succeeding. With the money I had saved, penny by penny, through those hard years here, I took lessons. You remember my passion for music. I succeeded quickly. I became a singer and earned money. You would think it a lot. Mother, in brightest hour of my happiness I have come to you."

At that moment Pat saw tall iron grey man in the garb of a farmer fresh from his work. The man's face was hard and dour, his shaven upper lip exposed a thin line of a mouth closed like a trap, his keen metallic eyes glittered under heavy brows. He stopped mechanically, seeing the stranger, and noticing the fine clothes she wore, lifted his old felt hat from his head.

Dolly turned and faced him, and he recognised her, and the face hardened into broiise. The man deliberately replaced his hat, pulling it well down on his head.

"We did not look to see you again, missie," he said in a cold, forbidding voice.

"Mother did," answered Dolly. "You may be sure I expected no kind thoughts from you, father Stephen."

"Then you'll not be disappointed, missie."

He shook his finger towards her frock and her hat.

"Wages o' sin," he said.

Dolly flushed. "You'll be sorry to hear I am a happy and successful woman, father."

"I know a miserable woman of your making, missie"

"My making?" cried Dolly.

"Aye, missie, your making." And the old man glowered like a thunder-cloud.

"Father! Father!" Dolly's mother an appealing hand on his arm, but he shook it off. "She is yonder at The Forks, the wife o' the man you ran away with."

There was an exclamation m the front room. ir^ment"^" stood eyeing Grill fiercely.

"What was that you said?" he said in a low voice.

Dolly, acting under strong restraint, stepped forward.

"Mother," she said, "this is my husband, Patrick Done. We have been married only a week."

"Your husband," said father Stephen; "then what of Thomas Norman?"

"What of Thomas Norman, father Stephen?"

"Who knows better than yourself? You ran away with him, leaving his wife and children behind to live or— starve— as luck might have it."

"You lie, damn you!" said Pat, hotly ad-vancing towards Grill. The old man regarded him coldly and stubbornly.

" 'Tis not seemly to call a man a liar in his own house," he said, in a regular voice. "It seems to me that if you were sure I had led you'd be a calmei nan, sir."

Pat, stiffened himself. "If vou were a younger man I would beat the life out of you for what vou have said," he answered.

"I'm not a man to be easily beaten," Stephen replied, squaring his large shoulders: "for the rest I speak only the truth, and as a truthful man I am well known hereabouts."

"Wait, Pat," Dolly pleaded. "He believes what he says."

Pat stepped back from her. She saw a strange light in his eyes, and her heart turned cold and heavy within her.

"Ah, dear, wait, wait!" she murmured, piteously. "I know little more of this than you know. Where is Tom Norman now?" she asked, turning to Grill.

"That is a question his wife will ask you, missie."

He had never called her anything but missie, and the word was b tter in his mouth.

"I have never seen Tom Norman since I left Ringtail, four vears and a half ago. I have never heard of him. There were i.hv«v» reasons why I ran away. One was to escape you, father Stephen, the other was to learn something of the music I adored, but more powerful than either was he third reason, the desire to escape from Thomas Norman. He persecuted me. His intentions were an insult. There was no one to protect me, and I hated him. Since the day of the picnic in the gorge I have never set eves upon him."

"Oh, my girl," my dear girl!" cried Mrs. Grill, folding her daughter in her arms.

"You believe me, mother?"

"Yes, yes, yes. Thank God, I do!" Embracing each other, the two women looked towards the men.

Pat leant against the wall, pale-faced, staring at the floor; father Stephen stood with folded arms, gazing sternly at his wife.

"The woman's a fool," he said. "What of Norman's letters to his wife?"

"What of my letters to my mother, telling of my life, my doings in Melbourne?" asked Dolly.

"I burned them, missie, every one. None were opened here. I did not wish mv wife to have dealings with a—" He paused, looking towards Pat, who had lifted a pair of malevolent eyes to his, and said no more.

"Have you believed this from the first?" asked Dolly, with apparent composure.

"We have. He disappeared at the same time. He'd shown his likin' for you. He wrote his wife later, saving vou were with him, defyin' the poor simple body to do her worst."

"He lied. Will you send someone to ask Mrs. Norman to come to me and bring those letters?"

Father Stephen remained glowering at her for a moment and then went out. Pat did not move from his position by the wall: Mrs. Grill was smoothing her daughter's hair and murmuring soothingly: Dolly spoke never a word, and did not lift her eyes to her husband's face again. Grill returned in about twenty minutes, bringing with him a thin, wretched-looking woman of about thirty-four.

He pushed her before him into the room, then stood aside.

"Have you brought the letters, Mrs. Norman?" asked Dolly quietly.

The woman handed her three letters without a word, and Dolly took them. She read one, and passed it to her husband. It said Dolly had gone off with the writer, that she was with him as he wrote where Mrs. Norman would never find them. Dolly stood gazing at her husband as he read. She then passed him the second letter and the third. He read all three.

"Well?" she asked.

"Well?" he replied, dully.

"You do not notice dates. Look at first letter again— it is dated 4th March. you remember 4th March? It is Herr Hellming's birthday. Do you remember the 4th of March 1898? You ought; it was the date of our first meeting."

"The Picnic at Black Rock!" He looked at the other dates. "The Easter of 1899 you were a guest at Telford's," he said.

She went to him, putting her hands on his breast.

"Pat, you have doubted me. Say you believe me now. This man was a liar. He hated me because I despised his love. This was his revenge. He told me he intended leaving his wife. He saw me going, and chose that moment to fly, too, with revenge in his mind."

Pat took his wife to his heart, and held her tightly.

"For God's sake, come away," he said. "Come away!"

"One moment." She turned to Mrs. Norman.

"I swear to you I have never set eyes on your husband since I left this place," she said. She went to her mother and took her in her arms. "You are not happy here, mammie," she said. "Come to me; come when you like. I shall write."

The old woman shook her head.

"No dear," she answered; "Go to your husband; I must bide with mine."

They drove away again as they had come.

IT WAS nearly two years later that Pat revisited Ringtail. This time he brought a man with him, and that man, Thomas Norman, he dragged from door to door throughout the district, and forced him to take back the lies be had uttered, and to apologise to Dolly on his bended knees, and then with a kick and a slash of his whip he handed Norman over to his wife again.

"There is your husband, ma'am," he said. "He took a lot of finding: and I apologise for leaving such carrion on your premises. Good day."

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24: Florence St. John

Silas Snell

Punch (Melbourne) 15 Aug 1918

"SHE DOESN'T LOOK a bit like Florence St. John," said Mr. William Wiegald Nicklepitt, after a peep at the new girl through a keyhole,

William Wiegald Nicklepitt was quite a great man in own line, and the world was paying him respectful attention; but he remained the raffish artist, indolent in everything but his art, the most careless dresser in the Southern Hemisphere, and a man capable of the most juvenile follies and frivolities in his own home.

For instance, young Mr. Nicklepitt did not consider it beneath his dignity to go upon his knees at a keyhole, and take a comprehensive survey of his servant from that discreditable and vulgar point of view.

"You ought to be ashamed, Willie," whispered his wife.

"Why?" asked Willie, ingenuously. "Surely a man may look through his own keyhole! What becomes of the liberty of the subject if a man can't look through his own keyhole? What of our boasted freedom?"

"She might catch you."

"What if she did? I suppose I would be equal to the occasion of a bit of a pot-jostling kitchen Bid caught me at my own keyhole?"

"She's coming. I can hear her. She's coming!"

Mr. Nicklepitt, in the effort to bring off a precipitate retreat from the keyhole, got his feet entrapped in his inevitable dressing gown, fell over the coal scuttle, and shot under the dining-table.

Miss Florence St. John, the new maid, dashed in, anticipating domestic calamity, and encountered the master crawling out from under the furniture. He smiled up at her.

"It's quite all right, Miss St. John," he said. "I— eh— dropped my collar stud."

"I thort how the roof 'ad fell in," said Miss Florence St. John. "If it 'ad uv I'd 'a' reskood you. That'ud be a bit uv orl right. I bin wantin' t' reskoo someone fer a long time. But yeh don't get much iv a charnce in reskooin' people in service, do you, mum ?"

"That's quite all right, Florence," said Mrs. Nicklepitt. "Have you boiled the milk?"

Miss Florence St. John sniffed the air. "There it goes," she said. All a-boilin' 'n' aburnin'. That's the worst iv milk— it's so sudding. Ain't you noticed 'ow sudding milk is?"

"But hadn't you better go to it?" inquired Mrs. Nicklepitt, anxiously.

Miss Florence St. John went in a leisurely way to the rescue of the milk.

"Now, if it had only been a handsome hero in a burning house," Miss St. John sighed.

The opportunities for the play of a romantic nature were, indeed, limited in the prosaic business of scrubbing floors and washing dishes.

William wallowed in his chair, and reached for a cigarette.

"Florence St. John," he said again, with cold contempt. "Pie-faced Jane! Polly Hogg! Jane Ann Gadd!"

"Well, Florence St. John was the name she gave at the registry office," Mrs. Nicklepitt explained. "But I dare say Florence St. John is a *nom de theatre*. She seems a sentimental little thing."

"They run in all shapes. A sentimental little thing has no right to so many pimples. A little thing with such feet should be as prosaic as a boiled ham. She looks like the by-product of a decadent strain, and I know how she dresses— she throws her clothes on the floor and dives into them."

"She is rather slovenly; but, perhaps, I may be able to break her of that."

Mr. Nicklepitt chuckled, then he chortled, twining his long lean legs in the air.

"Break her of it— you?" he gurgled. "I like that. Did you ever succeed in breaking a servant of anything? Don't you know in the sacred recesses of your own soul that your influence is woefully destructive of any good qualities a servant may possess when she meets you for the first time? Aren't you aware on your honour as a gentlewoman that servants begin to deteriorate from the moment they put their noses into your kitchen?"

Nettie sighed. "I admit I don't seem to be able to hold them up to their work. They do seem to presume on my good nature. But, perhaps Florence will be different."

"Let us live in hope if we die in despair. But how is Flo displaying her charming romanticism ?"

"She is going to be a great picture actress."

"Of course she is. That is the proud ambition of every servant girl."

"She says she was not meant to be a mere 'servingkt'."

"No servant ever was."

"She said that if I would promise that we would always call her Miss Florence St. John, and let her dine at our table, she would come for a shilling a week cheaper."

Willie threw his book against the ceiling, dropped his cigarette into his bosom, and twined his legs above him. "Sit at table with us ?" he squeaked. "That, sit at our table?"

"Hush, for Heaven's sake ! She may be listening."

Willie emitted a yell, and dug the live cigarette out of his underclothing. "Well, of all the incandescent cheeks!" he said.

"Of course, I did not consent. I gave her a shilling extra to eat in the kitchen, and allow me to call her Florence."

"Florence! Florence! Listen to me while I christen our beloved. She's The Tick. You hear— The Tick. Now, henceforth and forever, when I address that abnormal insect it will be as The Tick."

"You'll do nothing of the kind, Willie."

And, of course, Willie did not. When next he had occasion to address the maid he called her Miss Florence. Then he went into his study and threw things about, and kicked himself into a corner.

On the third day, Miss Florence St. John said to Mrs. Nicklepitt over the proper division of a jam melon: "Ain't yeh noticed nothink about me, Mrs. Nicklepitt ?"

"No, Florence— nothing in particular."

"Not 'oo I'm the dead livin' image of?"

"No. I cannot say I've noticed any resemblance to anyone I know."

"Ah, gahn! 'Ave another look."

"Who is it, Florence?"

"As if you don't know. Why, Mary Pickford, iv course— the World's Sweetheart."

Florence was small and sallow, she produced a liberal assortment of pimples, she had no eyelashes, and her nose was scarcely visible; while those of her teeth that remained like ancient landmarks were not to be regarded as ornamental, even if they could be considered useful; her hair was a pale mole colour, and her feet, which Mr. Nicklepitt's unfailing eye had picked out, were truly remarkable in one so young and small— they were oval in shape, and thin, and flat, and large, like something you might use to swat a fly with.

"Yes, tha's me," said Florence. "Everybuddy notices it. All the fellers et Scaly Timms's jam fact'ry got on to it. I wiz called the World's Sweetheart there."

Willie howled gleefully when the information was conveyed to him.

"She's just mad about pictures. The first thing she asked at the registry office was if we were handy to the movies. 'Coz,' she said, 'I gotter see the picks reg'lar, t' keep me 'and in' If I didn't se 'em, I wouldn't never leaim 'ow to act.' "

"Went to see Porline Fredericks lars night," said Florence, over her washing up. "She's a good hactress all right. She was' appearin' in 'The Spotless Stain,' or somethink like that, 'n' she's in love with the big, good-lookin', foreign feller with the German whiskers, what is up to somethin'; but the other feller catches him at it, 'n' he goes down in one iv them sinkin' ships— not the other feller the one I said she was in love with afore she was in love with the other one— 'n' when the carsle took on fire he sez: 'Stan'aside'r I'll stab yeh to the bone!' 'n' nished in 'n' saved her hisself. Which the King sez: 'I'm glad as 'ow yer name's cleared of all dishonour, 'n' yer me own child born in wedlock.' So she married the other one after all."

Nettie got a lot of this sort of thing in the course of Florence's few months' stay. Miss Flo St. John spelled her way through quite a mass of movie literature, and was familiar with the lives and works of all the well-known performers.

One morning, Florence was most exuberant.

"I'll have to be givin' you a week's notice pretty soon," she said. "I'll be goin' on the pictures afore long. I'm studyin' for it now."

"Indeed, Florence. What makes you think you will be going on?"

"Oh, I'm gettin' to know the fellers. I'm hacquainted with the door-keeper at the Crescent already. He sez I got a good charnce. He sez to me: 'You look after yerself, Sis, 'n' don't take too many 'ot barfs, 'n' go exposin' yerself to chills, 'n' you'll out Mrs. Petrova yet.' He sez I wanter get me 'air to curl, 'n' put some more fire in me eye, 'n' Margaret Clarke won't be in it with me. So I'm goin' in fer a course at one iv them beauty parlours."

After this, Miss Florence St. John devoted a great deal of attention to her skin and hair. She wasted valuable minutes rubbing various ungents into her hide, and at crucial moments, when pots were boiling over, and the gas-stove had back-fired, and the cat was in the cream, she would be busy in her room, curling her hair by force of arms with the aid of heat, and experimenting with needles for the subjugation of persistent pimples.

"She'll have to go," said Mr. Nicklepitt. "Better fire her at once before the house is burnt, and we're all exploded, or poisoned, or die of eating linoleum strip which have got into the brown hash by inadvei'tence."

"I don't like sending a girl away," said Nettie, wofully. "She may bs bad, but one always runs the risk of getting one worse."

"And, meanwhile, we submit to the idlocyncrasies of a natural idiot whose symptoms are aggravated by movie madness. Yesterday, I walked into the kitchen, and found her casting attitudes to fascinate Prince Eric of Dromania, while Billson's bull-terrier was having a catch-as-catch-can contest with our chicken on the mat, the chicken you had just given four shillings for."

But Nettie clung to the devil she had, fearing the other devil that might step into her shoes, and Miss Florence St. John continued on the track of her destiny as the greatest movies actress of all time.

"I'm gettin' on," she said one morning. "I've been interduced to the gent wot plays the little drum in the orchestrer, 'n' he's goin' to use his influence. He sez I got Pickford's charm 'n' Petrova's grace ; 'n' he's goin' to speak to the gentleman what plays the big drum. He sez the gent what plays the big drum is more thought of than the gent what plays the little drum. I expect I'll be on in a month. Could you tell me, Mrs. Nicklepitt, what about me wardrobe? I orter have a wardrobe. All ac'resses has wardrobes. I wonder would you let me have the one in my room cheap. The drummer was sure I'd have t' have a wardrobe."

But Miss Florence St. John was still with the Nicklepitts when six months had fled, and then came the beginning of the end.

"I've bin discovered, Mrs. Nicklepitt," she told Nettie, during the preparations for lunch.

"Discovered, Florence?"

"Yes— found out. Me talents has been discovered. You gotter be discovered afore you go on in the pictures. Sometimes its a big gent what owns a picture fact'ry discovers you, sometimes it's just somebody knockin' round. I've bin discovered by a gent name of Scobie. He sez he expects t' make-milllins out iv me. He's goin' t' make a great hactress of me cheap ; but on'y on condition I let him be my manager. Would you sign ?"

"I don't know anything about it, Florence," said Mrs. Nicklepitt. "But I would advise you to be very careful of men like that."

"Oh, he's a orl right John. My troubles if he wasn't. I'd give him a push in the face soon's look et him. But there ain't notliin' wrong about this one. He showed me his card. I pay five pounds down, 'n' ten shillin's a lesson. He thinks I'll be finished in three lessons."

"He might be a fraud."

"Oh, no, mum; he's got it printed on his card. I s'pose I'll 'ave to give you notice now I'm goin' t' be a hactress, but we'll alwiz be friends."

"That's very nice of you, Florence."

"Oh, yes. There ain't nothin' stuck-up about me. I got five pounds saved, but I'll have to go back to the jam t'act'ry so ez I can 'ave all me evenin's off fer study."

Nettie tried to Induce Miss St. John to look upon Mr. Scobie as a possible confidence man, but Florence always assured her : "It's on his card. He couldn't be a crook, 'n' it on his card. Besides, he's got a stewdio where movie actresses is made by the dozens. I-Ie sez he sent a shipment away to America on'y last week."

Florence did leave. Parting, she said : "Look fer me name in the papers, wontcher ?"

"I will, indeed," Nettie replied.

" 'N' me photographs. I'll be took all ways, 'n' I'll send you some, with me name writ across, when I get to America. Me manager don't know yet if I'll go to the Laslcy Company or the Metro, but it'll be one or the other."

So Miss Florence St. John went away to devote herself to her art.

ONE DAY, a few months later, William Wiegald Nicklepitt, climbing to the studio of a friend in a Queen-street building, came suddenly upon the soles of a pair of peculiar, flat, oval-shaped feet. The owner of the feet, a small, slatternly, sloppy object was scrubbing the stairs above him.

"Hello, Miss Florence St. John," said William.

"Skews yerself," retorted the scrubber— "me name's Jinnie Mills." Then she recognised Mr. Nicklepitt. "Oh, it's you," she said.

"Yes, Florence, it is I! You have given up your intention of acting for the pictures."

Florence pushed a prong of mouse-coloured hair from her left eye with the scrubbing brush.

" 'N' what if I have ?" said she.

"Mr. Scobie was not faithful to you. He did not keep his promise true."

"Scobie," said Miss Florence St. John, dully, "was a dirty nark!" And scrubbing operations were resumed.

25: Swinnerton's Wonderful Dog

Silas Snell

Critic (Adelaide) 15 Dec 1900

IF SWINNERTON'S DOG was any good for anything on earth but as a fattening paddock for fleas his appearance belied him; he was a low-browed, boss-eyed, squalid cur, with a dirty yellow complexion and the morals of a warthog. He was of an atrabilious temperament, and had an evil disposition, and was wont to waken suddenly out of a fit of reverie, and start nervously kicking insects off his neck with his hind claw. When Venus started hitting himself behind the ear in that hysterical, energetic way with his left hind leg, it was time to give him air and stand from under, because, instantly, and without further warning, it began to rain large, famished fleas in his vicinity, and if you happened to be in the line of fire you would not be fit for publication in decent society for a week at least.

Swinnerton affected a great pride in his dog, and tremendous admiration for his intellect and moral abilities, but I believe now that he did this with sinister and ulterior motives. Swinny would stand around in front of the pub, when any of the boys were about, and gaze at that old sore flea-emporium of his, with a look of mute admiration in his eyes that was quite touching, and Venus would do nothing to deserve this evident great respect, but chase himself up and down the fence, rubbing all the nap off his ribs on the pickets, or sit kicking fleas at the visitors; and I must admit that he could kick a flea further and straighter than any other tortured dog it has been my misfortune to meet.

At last Swinnerton broke out about his dog. He had a large audience under the pub. verandah, and the day was warm, and he was nearly up to his chin in beer. He had been gloating over the brute in silence for about ten minutes, and he broke out like a man who could retain his feelings no longer.

"See that dog, lads?" he said, "that's the most wonderful dog on earth below."

"Dorg!" growled Blue Peter. "Call 'im a dorg! He's a blanky pea-shooter fer fleas; he's a reg'lar flea squirt. He ain't no dorg!"

"That dog," continued Swinnerton, with emphasis, "is the most wonderfully gifted dog on this here earthly footstool."

"What breed o' dog?'' asked Piper, with the air of an expert.

"Half sheep, half cattle," said the proud owner, "but he's an artist after either. No better sheepdog ever smelt wool, an' he could take a mob o' cattle up the side of a house. Accomplishments! That dog's got more accomplishments than Melbourne University, an' as much intelligence as a science congress. Look here, talkin' about drovin', that dog could yard a swarm o' wild bees into a barrel through the blanky bunghole, an' never lose a single bleedin' bee.

"I call him Venus 'cause he's a good water dog. See here, he's a livin' for the man who owns him; an' easy livin', that's what he is. He's bloomin' well kept me for five years. An' how? Winnin' bets, that's how. It's like this; coves what think they're smart, they see Venus there, loungin' round, leanin' up against things, lookin' too tired to die, and they jump to the conclusion that he hasn't got sense enough to wag his own tail or spirit enough to steal giblets from a consumptive cat. 'Bout this time I chances round, an' makes a airy remark bearin' on Venus's intellectual attainments an' his trickiness generally. They ridicule the idea of his knowin' any more than a tin pan, an' I makes a pretty temptin' bet. They snaps me up, an' I win, 'cause that dog'll do anythin' I tell him.

"Now, s'pose any o' you fellers want a superior sheepdog— a sheepdog what'd round a hard old immoral, moonstruck, buttin' ram into a pill box if you gave him the order— there's yer animal. What's the hardest things in the world to drive?"

"Pigs," said Piper, sententiously. "Wrong again. Pigs are bad, but they are the spirit o' righteousness an the pinnacle o' reason compared to goats. The pig when you want him to go one way insists on goin' the other, an' argues the matter like 'ell in a high falsetta voice. Now, a smart dog soon discovers this. Venus there discovered it in half an hour, an' now when he's asked to drive pigs in one direction he tries his darnedest to drive 'em the opposite way, knowin' that the pigs will go right from blanky contrariness.

"But what about goats? Set a dog to drive a mob o' goats, an' what happens? The bally goats don't go any way, but just rounds on that dog, and tries to butt him into hash an' tatters. I was once very nearly bein' had over Venus through a mob of goats, an' I'll tell you how 'twas. I'd struck some smart flats at a little Gippsland township, an' won five quid from 'em over a bet that Venus could take five hundred sheep through a two foot openin' in a fence without leaving a single strand of wool on the palins. When he'd done it a long feller that'd been lookin' on ups and says:

" 'I'll tell you what, mate, I'll bet you twenty quid I'll bring a mob of twenty that that dog o' yours won't put through that openin' in an hour.'

" 'Done,' I said. "We fixed the time, an' next momin' along came the tall cove with his mob, an' as soon as I clapped eyes on 'em I reckoned I was done brown on both sides. The mob was not sheep at all, but goats, an' most of 'em big buttin' billies that would have fought with the bloomin' pyramids. O' course, I bucked, but what was the use? They were all agen me, an' so I reckoned I'd haw a bustle for my money.

"Well, I called Venus up, an' gave him his order, and he sailed in in his old, cheery, obligin', confident way, but he hadn't had no experience of goats; he hadn't been dealin' in 'em, an' no sooner did he start roundin' 'em up than a

large male, with a deep bass voice an' a beard like Dan O'Connor, of Sydney, whipped round an' butted him from here to the valley of the shadder of death.

"You never saw a dog so surprised in all your born natural, but Venus is not a dog that's easy discouraged. You can see by the way he deals with his fleas that he's a sticker. He pulled himself together, an' had another shot at it. This time four old goats all came at him together, and they bounced off his ribs, an' left him feelin' as if he'd been bumped by a locomotive. When he took 'em on for a third time, a pert little nanny countered, and got in on his brisket, bowling him over endways; another chipped in an' caught him as he revolved, helpin' him on his way; a third took him on the hop, an' passed him on, still revolvin' on his own axis; a fourth rapped him as he bounced, and so they strung him out for nearly a hundred yards, while the crowd laughed. Hair of Higgins! how that crowd laughed. They hung on to each other and roared, they had giddy fits on the grass and yelled, they bounded around like spring idiots an' shrieked, an' the long man began to tell about the things he was goin' to buy fer his old mother with my fifteen quid.

"Poor Venus, he was awfully hurt. He was more depressed when them goats had done bouncing him along than a young an' tender slug what's been rolled over by a fifty-ton road-roller. He looked at me with awful reproach in his eye, as much as to say, 'Well, this is dirty, low, Chinese joke to put upon a dog, isn't it?' But when I gave the word he took it on again.

"Venus is a dog that's quick to learn. Already he had learned the guidin' principle that you want to be able to dodge quick and lively when you go drovin' goats. This time he dodged, and the goats kept him pretty busy. Now and again while he was dodging one billy a second would plunge head-first into his ribs, and land him in the valley of the shadder again, and the crowd would laugh some more, and the long fellow would say that he never knew how sweet it was to be paid fifteen clean, cool quid for havin' a howlin' good day. I was feelin' a great chill in my pocket by this time, but Venus was not done yet; he was pickin' up hints an' splinters all the time.

"Presently he makes a brilliant change in his tactics, an' swings round in front of the goats between them and the hole in the fence, and starts playin' monkey tricks with the old billies, tryin' to lure them on.

"For a time I couldn't get on to his game, but at last he kidded a big bearded William to rush him, and then, like a flash, he was through the opening in the fence, and the goat after him. He'd got one through.

"Venus followed up his success. He came out again, an' started the same game once more. This time three rushed him through the opening, and the crowd suddenly stopped laughing, an' the long fellow said that it promised to be an unpleasant evenin'.

"It was my turn now, an' I encouraged that there dog all I knew. He didn't need it; he'd discovered the weakness of goats; he'd got on to the kink in their intellects, an' he worked it for all he was worth. He worked up them goats into a perfect lather of disgust, an' every time one rushed him he turned tail, an' scuttled through the fence, an' he never failed to get a goat or two on the bounce. Once six followed him in a string, eager to butt his spine up like a shut concertina.

"Sometimes a goat inside would wait for him coming, and get a bat on to him that made his head ache, and shook all his ideas loose, but he never backed down till he'd got the last goat through that fence. He just waited to see the fifteen quid paid over to me fair and square, and to have a good long look at the crowd which was now all crumpled up, an' lookin' as miserable as a wet Sunday in Geelong, before he turned tail an' left for the township.

"When I got back he was waitin' for me to rub him with a bottle of embrocation what he'd stolen from the corner store.

"There he is," continued Swinnerton. pointing to Venus, who was kicking out fleas one at a time and in parcels, "the most accomplished dog from Hobart to the Gulf, and any man that's wanting a dog to be a guide to his old age an' a teacher to his children can have him for two half-crowns an' a medium beer."

There were no takers.

26: The Knock at the Door

Edward Dyson

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."

27: The Accusing Camera

Ward Edson

Punch (Melbourne), 21 August 1902

AMBROSE SLIDES, the photographer, was busying himself in his studio among some plates, when the wild stranger came charging up the stairs. The wild stranger who charged up the stairs was a young man— thirty years or age, perhaps, good looking, athletic, and his air was that of a man possessed with homicidal mania. The stranger confronted Slides, looked at him furiously for a moment, and said:

"Yes, by ——, you are the man!"

And then, before Slides could get a word in, to the photographer's enormous surprise and disgust, the visitor fell upon him and began to do his best to knock the camera artist into the middle of next week. Slides resisted, standing on the defensive for a time and uttering the trite expressions of a scandalised man.

"Great Heavens, sir what is the meaning of this? Who are you? What do you mean?" And so on, etc., etc.

Slides was of a mild and forbearing disposition, but a straight left on the nose drove out all his peaceful emotions, and finding that his assailant was full of lawless energy he began to fight back; and then up and down the place, working devastation as they went, the two men fought and struggled.

The stranger was several sizes too many for poor Slides, and the latter's face began to take on a terrible appearance, and there was blood all over the ruined fittings, and still the fight waged on. Frightened girls employed in the studio below rushed up the stairs, took a terrified look at the "war" being waged amongst the wreckage and screamed and fled/

The fight continued till the stranger sent a swinging right home on Slides' point and Slides was knocked clean out. Then the conqueror seemed to recover his presence of mind and he fled down the stairs after the girls.

Slides was in bed three days under the doctor's hands, and he spent that time puzzling his head to remember how he had given offence, but he could remember nothing, and concluded that the athletic stranger was a homicidal maniac raging round seeking whom he might devour.

ANDREW WARD had had doubts of his handsome wife, but had never expressed them. In fact, he had never actually formulated them even to himself ; but for two years there had been a dull, jealous ache in his heart. He did not like society; his wife did. He lived a quiet home life; his wife was never at ease in her own home. A society function he abominated, a dance bored him. She loved to wear pretty clothes at "at homes" and garden parties, and was never actually radiant excepting when whirling in a waltz in the arms of Harry Peetree.

Andrew Ward's pursuits were intellectual ; he was a quiet man whose health was inferior. His wife had been proud of him at first— proud to bear his name, because it was that of a man of brains whom the people respected; but that feeling wore off in time. His life did not suit her; she wanted gaiety, and went her own way in quest of it, quite disregarding her husband's wishes— in fact never troubling herself to know whether he had any wishes in the matter.

Harry Peetree was a young man with plenty of leisure, an athlete and a man who loved life. He found Mrs. Ward very attractive. Their Platonic friendship was a theme of enraptured comment amongst young ladies of their acquaintance and ingenuous persons who made a point of thinking the best of everybody. Others— suspicious beasts— talked of Platonics with variations, and said that in his capacity as a husband at least Ward was an ass.

But nobody knew less of his wife's affairs than Ward did. He was aware of a friendship between his good-looking wife and handsome Harry Peetree, and it gave him some secret uneasiness but he never for a moment thought of his wife as anything more than light hearted and childishly eager for amusement.

"I can trust to her self-respect," he told himself, and he went about his work as usual.

Then came the well-meaning friend, eager to do a kindness to Ward, that would serve an old grudge against Ward's wife.

"Old man," he said, presuming on an old acquaintance of long standing, "your wife is getting herself talked about. Watch her with Peetree. It is becoming a scandal, but you may avert that."

Ward simply pointed to the door. "Get out of my house," he said. "I despise your judgment and abominate your manners. I shall not know you when we meet again."

This was a fine attitude but Ward could not live up to it. His friends words rankled, and after fighting against his jealousy and his suspicions he yielded to them, following her secretly, spying on her at every opportunity.

In the course of a month he saw enough to fill him with a fierce resolution. He had been a sheep; he became a lion, and his wife did not mistake him in the course of a trying scene, in which there were tears on one side, and icy cold determination on his.

"You must not meet that man Peetree," he said. "I think no serious ill of this connection, but it must be cut."

"He is the friend of all my friends," she answered with petulance; "How can I avoid him?"

"Get new friends."

"That's impossible."

"Then live without! I tell you I can see nothing but ruin for you and disgrace for me as a result of a continued friendship with this man, and the intimacy must cease."

"You insult me!" she was crying weakly.

"You have insulted me— by making my name a jest."

"It is false— they lie!'

"They tell the truth who say that I am a fool to allow my wife liberties with a young man that should be extended only to his fiancée. They say more than that, and that must end."

He frightened her, there was no doubt of that. He had character, and she had none, and she felt, through his quiet manner the grip of a master. After that there was quiet for or three months. She had promised humbly never to meet Harry Peetree again. She ceased to visit houses where he was often a guest. They were rarely seen together, and Andrew Ward believed he had succeeded. When his wife was going out she took the trouble to say where she was going; she was always precise about details.

ONE FINE afternoon towards the end of the third month Andrew Ward entered Peetree's office abruptly, and stood facing the surprised occupant for nearly a minute in silence. Ward was pale, but calm, apparently.

"Good afternoon," stammered the younger man, disturbed by the other's peculiar manner, "To what—"

"To what do you owe the pleasure of this visit, eh? You guess?"

"I'm sure I—"

"I'm sure you're about to tell a lie."

Peetree started up. This was more in his line. If it meant a quarrel he would be quite at home, but in argument he knew himself helpless.

"If you insult me," he said, "I'll throw you out."

"I mean to insult you," said Ward, "and if you stir a foot towards me I mean to shoot you." He drew a hand from under his coat and showed the weapon. "Quite melodramatic, isn't it?" he said, with a laugh.

"I'll call the police."

"You'll sit down, you infernal scamp. Sit!"

Peetree sat down and passed a trembling hand over his forehead. The grim, sardonic face Ward turned towards him was not pleasant to look at.

"You do not laugh," said Ward, cynically. "The wronged husband is always ridiculous. Why don't you laugh?"

"You are mad."

"Ah, the old phrase! I am not mad. You would give a trifle to know that I was. That would be an excellent means of escape. I am a sane, man, and I know

that you and my wife have been making a fool of me— you have made me ignominious."

"It is false! There is not a word of truth in your charge!"

Every word is true. I have absolute proof of it. I have my wife's word!"

Harry started up, now the paler man of the two.

"Sit down!" said Ward, imperatively. "Don't shrink, I have not come here to kill you. The revolver is merely a compliment to your strength and your reputation as an athlete. If I shoot it will he your fault going to have a divorce."

"You'll not get it through me. This is all a conspiracy. I'll fight!"

"I dare say, but you'll lose. My wife fears you are tiring of her. I am going get the divorce that you may prove the contrary by marrying her. I see I need make no melodramatic oaths— you are convinced!'

"I'll fight! I'll fight!"

"I have all the evidence the most exacting man could ask to prove his life blasted his honour sullied. My wife confesses."

"You have frightened her into saying what is not true."

"No, I have shown her the folly of lies. You remember the night of 14th July, the night of the big public ball. Where were you? Ah, never mind the lie, it is useless. My wife was supposed to be at her sister's, the sister who has tried so hard to shield her. She did not come home that night. When she came next day she had quite a pretty string of incidents that had happened at her sister's house. She was never there. You and she were at the ball."

"It is a lie! She—"

"Stay, she did not tell me that— this told me that!"

Ward took a sheet of paper from his pocket, unfolded it, and placed it on the table before Peetree...

"A flashlight photograph of the ballroom printed in a popular weekly journal," he said, "You cannot deny those two faces. Man, man, where was your d—d cunning when you advertised your folly like this? I discovered your faces in that picture by accident. My wife has told me the rest. It's a pretty story."

Peetree started up again; his face was scarlet. He struck at the paper with his knuckles and rapped out an oath with every blow. His fury was tantamount to a confession.

"That is all I have to say now," said Ward; "but do not forget my threat sleeping or waking. I assure you on my simple honour— what honour you have left me— I will shoot you if you forsake Helen after she is freed."

Peetree gave him no answer, and he passed out. Then a sort of fury seized upon the young man. He snatched up the paper and tore it to atoms, and jumped upon the fragments in a paroxysm of blind rage. Then he rushed at his hat, breaking several articles in his insensate anger, and blundered recklessly down the stairs leading from his office.

SLIDES the photographer was a juryman in the divorce case, Ward versus Ward and Peetree, and was amazed to recognise in the co-respondent the rabid young man had assaulted him so furiously in his studio. Friends of the parties almost forgave Peetree when he married Mrs. Ward. He had the good feeling to do the right thing once, the people said.

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28: A Suburban Juliet

Edward Dyson

The Bulletin, 9 Nov 1922

YOUNG Mr. Don was drifting listlessly towards the south suburban boarding-house when he first saw her. Mr. Don had just completed a hard day's work and was fatigued after the heat and burden thereof. He was feeling out of conceit with life, existence was an empty thing, breathing was an arduous business. Better to have died young, far better never to, have been born. Mr. Don's hat was on the back of his head, his hands were thrust into his trousers pockets (his empty trousers pockets), his tallish, well-knit figure had a despondent stoop, he dragged his feet, rasping the broken asphalt, and when he spat at the bob-tailed cat in the cobbler's door it was with a sort of sad malevolence.

Donny's thoughts drifted with him:

"S'e'p me two men 'n' a dorg, why don't a bloke cut loose 'n' do a guy outer this 'ere mud-pie kinder life, go to sea, or rob a bank, or hang hisself? Here's me grindin' me bones from year's end to year's end, gravelly arf me time, without the arf-tizzy to buy a pack iv fags, dry ez a bone, the bloom off me 'at, 'n' the old original me peekin' through me pants aft, 'n' Mother Buddy waitin' at 'er 'ome fer lost souls with two synthetic chops from the saddler's, a lion-'earted pertater, 'n' a sample iv rubber goods maskeradin' as a slice iv pie. Garrt! Struth, there'd be more fun in bein' embalmed!"

At this point a small, long-wool dog like the little lamb Mary had on wheels engaged Don's attention. The creature ran along on the safe side of a garden fence, barking at master Nicholas with an excess of valor quite absurd in so fat, so inept and so plethoric a poodle. Don rapped at the fence, and Tiny simulated ungovernable passion. He was rather angry before, but now his one desire was to tear the stranger limb from limb. Donny lingered to lure the dog along to where a broken paling offered him a chance of booting him out of bounds.

Nicholas wanted to kick that dog. His whole day had been leading up to it. If he could only get a good kick in he might go home to his synthetic chop, if not with pleasure, at least with resignation.

Mr. Don kicked and rapped his sensitive shin sharply against the broken paling. The poodle gave a startled yap, turned a back handspring, and retreated, howling. Donny looked covertly left and right to be sure his great mistake had not been observed and then leaned on the fence and rubbed his shin.

"Whoo!" said Nicholas Don. "Efff!"

He took his other hand to the injured tibia and rubbed hard. There were tears in his eyes. It had been a rotten day : misfortune had marked him for her own. "Eff-f-f-f! Mother, it 'urts!" said Nicholas.

The dog was coming at him again. There was still hope. He sought a stone. He enticed his prey, scraping insolently at a paling, and raised his missile for the fatal blow.

"Oh, please, please, don't!" said the voice. Nicholas Don turned sharply to the right, a burning expletive upon his lip. He turned smartly to the left, a hotter objurgation ready for the leap.

"He won't really bite," said the voice. "He is only pretending."

It was a peculiar voice; a soft, appealing voice, with a tinge of reproach in it that Donny found most irritating and unjust.

"Cri!" he snorted, "who's turn is it to boil over? Who's stuck fer all the trouble up to now

Then he caught sight of her. She was at an upstair window, and in the eye of Nicholas Don she was a thing of unbelievable beauty. Her hair, which was short and curling thickly about her small, shapely nead, was the color of new butter. He could detect the bright blue of her eyes even at inis distance. Her complexion had the clean pink and milk of an expensive wax doll, and her teeth were even and as white as china.

Nicholas dropped the stone, and raised his hat. For once lie was nonplussed.

"Strewth!" he told a bosom friend a day later, "I was fair stiffened. Believe me, 'twas like openin' the back gate of Glory 'Allelujah, 'n' soolin' a 'oly angel et a sufferin' sinner. Believe me, oh, believe me, I was grateful to goodness I hadn't used the naughty word I'd readied up. It was a blitlierer. I felt sorter must-go-but-I'll-hiave-to-stay got-t'-speak-but-mustn't, 'n' perfectly sane 'n' collected but fer a street riot in me 'eart, 'n' a stampede of cattle under me 'at. What I did was to work off a swankin' old Castilian bow picked up et one iv them clankin' secon'-'and drarmers in me extreme youth. Cri! you'd 'a' thought I had two yards of ostrich hide in me lid, 'n' was dressed to kill in nine bobs' worth of nickled tin plate. And what's this I'm sayin'? Fair dink, I couldn't keep it from cornin' up. I might 'a' been Hamlick, Prince o' Denmark, the way I felt. Sez me dilly nibs: 'Beauteous lady, your dorg's sacred to me. I wouldn't 'urt a hair of his tail. Say the word, 'n' he can eat off me hand.' "

This is scarcely an exaggeration of Mr. Don's attitude towards the interesting stranger, and far from being displeased by the seeming grotesquerie, the fair lady leaned further from her window, and smiled down upon him with an expression of sweetest appreciation. "I am so sorry he attacked you," she said; "but he is always petulant when the milkman is late."

"Lady, the fault was mine," said Nicholas Don.

"I am sure it is not that he dislikes you."

"It delights me to have you say so, gracious lady." Donny bowed again. "Any friend of yours is a friend of mine, and if you will just point out that particular

milkman I will leave the varlet so that he will never again dare to keep a dog of your's waiting a single minute."

"Ah, no, no; you must not do that."

"It would be a pleasure; it would, indeed."

The divinity smiled down upon him, shak-

ing her head. "Good afternoon," she said.

Then in a whisper: "Pa might catch me."

Nicholas Don bowed again with antique finish, and continued his homeward journey, but it was a Nicholas revived and rejuvenated. He felt refreshed, he walked erect, square-shouldered, and with the jauntiness of a man whose worth is recognised, and to whom the world is well-flavored and fortune is kind.

" 'Strewth, you done it well, Nickie," said he. "'Beauteous lady!' 'The varlet!' 'Lady, the fault was mine!' Yow! And the bow!"

Nicholas pushed in a laugh with his right hand, and patted himself approvingly on the brow with the left. " 'Ow she liked it. Pretty ez a basket iv pansies, she was, V smilin' all over like a day iv pure delight.

'N' sez she, 'Pa might catch me.' " Nicholas had swung round a corner. He leaned on the fence and laughed. He kicked himself affectionately. After all, life had its moments.

Young Mr. Don was conspicuously frisky at the evening meal. He ate the rubberoid chop with a relish, he openly rejoiced in the case-hardened pie, Mrs. Puddy's bitterly piteous and sniffingly insistent reflections on "irregular pays" as a class left him spiritually serene. Later he returned to the scene of his triumph. In the darkness he surveyed the home of the angel. The house was a weatherboard structure built on the simple lines of the Ark of the Covenant, gable end on to the street. In front of this, on the right, a small shop had been wedged, its window flush with the asphalt. The house was available only through this shop, but it had a downstair window directly below the one from which the unearthly fair had shed her radiance upon him, and the tiny square of "garden" left over from the shop site was filled with a luxuriant pepper-tree.

Nickie had passed the place, scores of times, and on occasions had purchased a brand of conspicuously innocuous cigarettes in the grocery, being served, he recollected, by a large plump man of 50, with floating whiskers and a wicked squint, who was always hunched in the window corner, reading slim fiction of the misused kind that is sold in second-hand baskets at a penny a batch. Mr. Don remembered some of the titles: "For Love Alone," "Because She Loved Him," "Love that Cannot Die," "Love's Reward." and so on.

"That's 'pa' for a quid," said Mr. Don. "Pinch me, but how do these things happen? Her the natural product iv a tup'ny tradesman with a face about ez pleasin' to the view ez a steamed ham, 'n' a figure like a bale of hair." But our

hero was not displeased with, the reflection. The fact that her parent was unquestionably earthly made his lady in the air appear more accessible.

Going to work next morning, Nickie saw nothing of Miss Bradd (Bradd was the name over the shop door), but her pa was sweeping out, and Mr. Don wished him a cordial "Good morning," a compliment that evoked no response. But in the evening Nicholas had better luck. Tiny was at the front fence again, and the young man lingered to make a few ingratiating remarks. He was very cordial to Tiny, and highly complimentary, too. He contrived to make it appear that he had never met a doer that appealed so strongly to his regard. Here, at length, was a dog a man could live with. "Good evening!" She was at the upper window again. There was a flattering suggestion that she had been waiting for him. She was smiling as before, and as she leaned forward a red rose fell from her breast.

Nicholas vaulted the low fence, and seized that rose. He kissed it with the grace and fervor of a Sbakspearean hero. "I hoped you would come," he said. Mr. Don's diction was perfect. He infused a glow into the simple words. As on the occasion of their first meeting, he felt himself impelled into an artificiality of manner not altogether unusual in him in the course of amorous adventure, but in this case the artifice was quite involuntary.

"Hush!" she said, pointing towards the shon. "Pa is there, you know."

Nicholas was hidden from the street by the pepper-tree. He kissed her rose, and tossed it back to her. "Kiss it," said he, "and give it to me."

She kissed the petals three times, and dropped the flower in his face. "Now it is for ever," he whispered.

"You know you don't mean that." She breathed the words down to him.

"By my soul!" He raised his hat, he raised his right hand holding the rose. The attitude left nothing more to be said on this point. Nicholas Don was surprising himself every moment. "Will you come down to me, fair lady?" he pleaded.

"Oh, no. I dare not."

"Ah, please, please do!"

"Not now. Not yet."

"Do you like me?"

She laughed, nodding her head twice, and Nickie experienced a strange surge of feeling. Emotions entirely new to his raffish soul were at play within him. This old game of wooing, with its constant repetitions of tricks and turns, suddenly assumed a vast significance.

"I love you!" He spoke with Romeo's fire.

She laughed like a child. "My name is Dora," she said, and closed the window.

Nicholas Don went his way, with a rose crushed in his hand, and a word singing in his head. This time it was coir-matting steak, and a pudding like a composite ball, but less destructible, and Mrs. Buddy's lament was of the prodigious amount of washing some people expect "along of bed and board for 25 shillin' a week," but Nickie gave heed to neither, his mind was occupied ringing the poetical changes on that adorable word "Dora."

At 9 that night Nicholas Don was under the window again. From the shadow of the pepper-tree he threw pebbles at the pane, till the window was softly opened.

"Dora! Dora!" he called her in a whisper. "Won't you come?"

She extinguished her light and returned to the window. She answered in a whisper, refusing.

He pleaded with her, but she shook her curls in the moon light. He seized a limb, and drew himself into the pepper-tree. There among the branches he was much nearer, and they could converse in whispers, but he could not reach her little hand. He could only tell her in a sort of rhapsody how beautiful she was, and how he loved her, feeling all the time like a character in an acted romance, while refusing to admit any absence of reality. He acknowledged a fine ideal to be lived up to, that was all.

Her father's voice called to her from the distance, and she answered, "Presently! Presently!"

"I know! I know!" Nickie almost cried aloud. 'You should have said 'Anon! Anon. Its Juliet. We. are Romeo and

(irm.' j. jl s our second time on earth."

"They died in a tomb," said the girl sadly.

''Good God, yes!" The thought quite depressed him. He took it home with him, and brooded on it.

" 'Struth!" said he in revolt, "what'm I grousin' erbout. There's a flash Dago gets hisself in a nell iv a knot with his bit iv cuddle 'bout arf a billion years ago, 'n' here's me pesterin' meself bald'eaded jest because, as it 'appens, I'm playing a game of two-up of somethin' the same sort. Cri! Ain't all goin' glorious? Don't she soften to me a fair treat? Ain't I goin' to butt in one iv them days, 'n' grab me little 'andful? You bet I am. Well, get asleep, yeh shrimp-'ead, 'n' dream iv that girl. That girl! Gorstruth, ain't she the wonder iv the world! 'N' then p'r'aps not to get her. Gorstruth! Gorstruth!"

Nickie put up his hands as if to defend himself from the falling heavens.

Five times in a fortnight Nickie pleaded with Dora to come down to him, and always she refused, and always the balcony scene from "Romeo and Juliet" was repeated, Nickie in the pepper-tree, Dora at her window.

"It can't go on fer ever," Nicholas Don told himself again and again. "S'elp me, I'll have her down if I have to fire the humpy 'n' rescue her in her shirt."

Then one evening, as Nickie was coming from work, a tremendous resolution drove him into Bradd's shop and straight for the door leading to the dwelling. Bradd jumped and intercepted him.

"Where yeh goin'?" demanded the grocer suspiciously.

"Well, I wasn't designin' to loot the 'appy home, or to pinch the missus," replied Mr. Don. "I'm jest payin' Miss Bradd a call on her afternoon 'ome. She's a great little ole friend iv mine. We met at a hop— select trifle iv a darnce, yeh know, up et Morrison's."

"Met her at a dance, did you? You're a liar! If you ain't out of this in 10 seconds I'll knock half your head off with this mallet."

"That naughty temper will be gettin' you your face all broke," said Nicholas. "Where's the 'arm in a decent bloke lookin' in on your daughter once in a way?"

Bradd pushed his face into Don's. "Get out o' me shop, you prowlin' bla'guard, afore I get real dangerous." Bradd's squint looked venomous at this moment, and he had taken a long, worn ham-knife in hand, and, despite his pennant whiskers, his paunch and his large face, reminiscent of risen dough, he appealed to Nickie as a man who would use that kind of a dirty weapon.

Nicholas retreated. Bradd followed him to the door, and watched him off. Don did not raise his eyes to her window as he passed, but, looking back from the corner he saw the big, pallid grocer still at his shop door. Bradd made a menacing gesture with the ham knife.

When next Nicholas stopped at the house there was a light in her room. He had gathered a few pebbles, when he noticed that the window of the downstair room was slightly lifted. An instantaneous resolution carried him along. He opened the window very softly, he climbed into the room and crossed the floor towards the opposite door. There was a light in a back room down a passage, and in this passage was a narrow staircase. Without a moment's hesitation Nickie stepped into the passage and crept to the stairs. He mounted quietly but quickly.

The room of his beloved was right before him. He knocked softly on the panel, and then opened the door. He advanced one foot into the room.

She was coming across the floor towards him. Beholding him she stopped in consternation. Their eyes met. In his she read amazement, horror, anguish and despair. While you might have counted 10 he stood so. The fair-faced woman he beheld was seated in a wheeled chair, which she propelled with her hands. She was wholly without legs.

A hand fell on Nickie's shoulder; a voice, the voice of Bradd, spoke in his ear.

"What the devil are you doing here with my wife?" it said.

29: Hocussing of Kookaburra

Ward Edson

Punch (Melbourne) 9 Nov 1905

"IF KOOKABURRA WINS I'm completely done for, Joey, and there's the beginning, end, and middle of the whole business."

"How done for?"

"Done for to such an extent that I won't have one copper to polish on another and won't know which way to turn."

"Not know which way to turn!"

"No, my dear, because all roads will lead to gaol."

"What have you been doing, then?"

"Where s the use of my telling you that? It should be sufficient for you to know that if that infernal horse comes in first he might as well have me dragging at his heels, for I shall be a done man."

"And our marriage?"

"I'm afraid, dear, they are not likely to permit the interesting ceremony to take place in gaol.

"I wonder if you quite know what you are saying to me, Jack?"

"I ought to. I am as sober as a judge, and I know the situation, by heart. It's damning facts that have been dinning in my ears for weeks past."

"And you let me go on in my happiness believing that I was to be done with that hateful old life, thinking that I was soon to have husband, home—picturing myself at peace with the world, with loving, little hands playing at my lips. Oh, Jack, Jack!"

"You blame me for not making you unhappy earlier?"

"Why have you gone into this miserable gambling?"

"I did not go in deliberately, as one goes in for a swim, I drifted in little by little, till I found myself in this infernal whirlpool. Joey, if Kookaburra wins, everything goes. You must help me."

"I help you! Heaven knows I would do anything, anything for you, Jack, but what could I do to prevent Kookaburra winning ?"

"Old Petard owns Kookaburra."

"Well, What of that?"

"You remember Petard? He is the old Johnny that tried to dance attendance upon you before I cut in— used to throw you expensive bouquets from the stalls."

"Oh, yes, I remember that very well."

"In fact, I had to kick him, you know, before he was convinced of the hopelessness of his suit."

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that. The question is, how am I to help?"

"Couldn't you re-awaken Ben Petard's fatherly regard?"

"Jack !"

"Oh, I know, I know. I'm not going to suggest melodramatic things, but perhaps if you restored him to the old footing (I don't mean the footing I did) it might be possible to find a way out of the difficulty."

"You're mistaken about old Petard. You think him a fool. He's very far from it. He admired me, came often to see me act, and made me presents. That may be idiotic, but he's a shrewd, hard man, and if I attempted any double-dealing with him in connection with Kookaburra he'd see through me in a twinkling."

"Well, Joey, I've told you the position. Do you think I should have told you now if I had not been desperate? I love you, old girl, upon my life and soul I do, but I see love, liberty, everything slipping from me. I reckoned on dropping the game if this came out all right, taking a billet, and letting the dad see I meant to go straight. I am sure he'd take me back to his heart if I let him see I had done with the old racket, and I could have done it with you beside me, Jo; but just now I am worse in than ever before. I must fight out, fairly or foully, or I must go down for good."

"If I could only, do something, Jack. I would do it if it cost me my life, because, after all. al! I hope for is centred in you. I'm a wretched actress, a humbug, a fraud. I feel it. I am only suffered because of my prettiness, and good limbs. I never cared for the life; I have hated it, dear, ever since you came and made honourable love, and talked of the little home, and— and— my God, Jack, I would rather die the mother of a crowing babe in a humble cottage than the greatest actress on earth."

Jack caught her in his arms and kissed her cheek. It was wet with tears.

"We'll not give it up without a fight, Jo," he said.

"Only show me how, and I'll fight while I can stand," whispered the girl.

ii

BEN PETARD was a well-known sport, a trusted owner, and a man who knew the game thoroughly. Possibly it was because he knew so much of the people who follow racing professionally, from the gilded owner to the leering imp scouring the stables, that he trusted so few. Ben had a great opinion of his powers of penetration. Those he mistrusted he mistrusted thoroughly; those he trusted he trusted implicitly.

He trusted Chipper Lee. Chipper had ridden half-a-dozen of his horses to the front in big events, and had proved himself square, clean and honest, with twelve years of faithful service. He was too heavy now for more than an occasional mount, but he was the guide and guardian of the stables, and Ben Petard slept easily, knowing that Chipper Lee was in charge of the favourite.

Chipper was a nickname bestowed upon Lee because he was the least chipper, or cheerful, of mortal men. Only twenty-six, he bore himself like a centenarian, with the sins of four generations upon his head. This Cerberus of the stables was as grave as a judge and as dignified as a bishop, and that made his attitude towards Bess Plummer, the new girl at Roseholme, the more remarkable.

True, Bess was very fresh and shapely and had a pretty face and pearly teeth, and a flashing eye, and a saucy and bewitching manner. All the other lads were mashed on Bess; that was quite to be expected, but that the sedate and reserved Chipper should have yielded to her enchantments was matter for amazed debate with all who knew him. Really, Bess had made a direct and deliberate assault upon young Mr. Lee, and after some surprise and a little display of weak resistance, Chipper had succumbed to the extent of becoming Bess' devoted slave.

"But why do you like me better than the others?" he said to Bess one night, under the roses at Roseholme. "That's easy," answered the girl; "I like you best because you are the best."

"But I ain't what you'd call good-lookin', am I?"

Bess took his face between her two hands and kissed it. "You are, Bill," she said; "I think you're just handsome."

"Well, I'd never a believed it," said Chipper meditatively, feeling his face with a new interest. Chipper Lee's old friends, those who thought they knew him, would have been even more greatly surprised had they known how ardent a lover he was. Bess Plummer had awakened within him a passion that made a new man of him, a man he himself almost failed to recognise. Bess's beauty dazzled him, the thought that she cared for him lit up the world with a strange joy and beauty.

Their first lovers' quarrel assumed in his mind the dimensions of a catastrophe.

"It only shows you don't trust me," said Bess, positively, in the accustomed nest under the Chinese roses that whitened the hedge between Roseholme, the residence of the trainer Peter Garner, and the stables, where Kookaburra was guarded like the jewel of a Sultan's harem.

"What d'yer want to go fer?" answered Chipper pitifully.

"I want to go with you."

"But I'll be back in ten minutes 'r so."

"I want to go with you and to go into the stables, and to see the beautiful horse, and pat him."

"You know, none o' the people from the house is allowed in."

"That's why I want to go."

"I couldn't do it, Bess. The boss 'ud fire me this blessed minute if he knew I'd done it, 'n where'd we be fer gettin' married if I got the shoot?"

"And do you think I'd marry a lad what hasn't got confidence in me? No, thank you, Mr. Lee."

"Oh, come, I say, Bess, have a bit o' common."

"You think I'm a fool, you think I don't understand. Those stables are kept bolted and barred to keep out rogues and scoundrels; you won't let me go in and see you feed the horse because people like me are not admitted. It shows the opinion you have of me. You— you can't love me, or you'd n-n-never think so badly of me." Bess was actually crying.

Lee looked at the girl in wonder; he tried to comfort her. She only pushed him off.

"Go to your stables," she said. "I am going back to the house. I'll leave to-morrow. I'll not stay where I'm treated like a— a—"

"Bess, don't, Please, Bess, don't cry. You can come with me. No one will see us. I'll chance it if you'll make it up. Forgive us Bess."

So it happened that Bess stole into the big stable with Lee, and patted the beautiful black horse, Kookaburra, in his stall, smoothing his delicate skin, plunging her hands into his food, going into little raptures over his handsome head and his lean, satiny legs.

But poor Chipper's risk was taken in vain. Bess quarrelled with her mistress that very night, and was ordered to leave her house first thing in the morning, but in her great indignation she packed her box at once, and left, catching the half-past eleven train to Melbourne, and Chipper knew nothing of it till morning, and then his mind was largely occupied with another disaster.

iii

KOOKABURRA had gone back in the betting with an actual slump, and Bobtail was now first favourite, and yet nothing positive was known. However, rumours that Kookaburra had collapsed were persistent. There were a dozen stories, some said he had been kicked, others that he had been injured in training, others that he had taken ill, others that he had been dosed ; but they all meant the same thing, that Kookaburra's chances of winning the big event were down to zero.

The great day came. Kookaburra's position in the betting had improved again. It was said that he had made a splendid recovery, and would have to be reckoned with. Jack Crane and Joey Gillespie, the smart, little burlesque actress, stood on the lawn white-faced, silent, anxious, and watched the horses coming out.

As Kookaburra cantered slowly down the track Jack's left hand gripped Joey's right.

"He looks fit to run for a kingdom," faltered Jack. "God help us!" murmured Joey.

They stood thus watching the race. Kookaburra ran well till the field was rushing into the straight, and then he fell away to nothing, and cantered in last, his head low, his skin foam-specked.

There was no doubt of it, Kookaburra had been " got at."

Jack had not released Joey's hand. "Our troubles are over, old girl," he said.

"And this is the last of it. Jack. You will keep your promise?"

"Yes, Jo. I'll try and make up to you for what you have done."

That night there was a tremendous crowd at the Imperial Theatre to witness the popular Gaiety burlesque, "The Little Widow," and when Miss Joey Gillespie, who had recently been absent through illness, tripped on in her costume of canary silk, and commenced the slight song and grotesque dance that had been one of the hits of the piece, a young man in the front seats of the gallery arose in his place, and uttered a cry that attracted eyes from all parts of the theatre. When leaving the theatre after the performance, and when just about to be handed into the hansom by Jack Crane, Joey Gillespie was fired at by a man, who instantly broke through the crowd and fled.

The young actress lay in a huddled heap at her lover's feet. She was taken to the hospital, and the wound was found to be so serious that her deposition was taken. Miss Gillespie had nothing to tell that was of the slightest use to the detectives. She could not imagine who had fired at her, she had no enemies. It was concluded that some unknown, love-sick admirer had fired the shot, but whoever it was, he escaped Scot free.

To Jack, Joey whispered a different tale, however.

"It was Chipper Lee," she said. "I saw him in the theatre. He recognised me. He knows it was I who put the drug in Kookaburra's food."

This opinion is borne out by the mysterious disappearance of Chipper Lee. Jack Crane is now an exemplary husband and father, and Joey, his wife, is regarded as a model wife and mother by her starchy but good-hearted old father-in-law, and so far her sin has not found her out.

30: His Narrow Escape

Ward Edson

Punch (Melbourne) 20 Oct 1904

HONEYSUCKLE HILL was a lovely place. Horace Quilt admitted that he had been well recommended.

Young Mr. Quilt was an Australian artist with high aspirations. He desired to interpret his country— to make the true inwardness of Australia articulate in paint.

This was a high ideal, but Mr. Quilt misunderstood himself. He started with too big a load. It is all very well to chain your wagon to a star if you have it in you to be a star performer, but it is the crassest folly to go reaching after stars if your mental and moral attitude fits you for the humbler but useful office of plucking cucumbers. Horace went higher than cucumbers; he was a nice young man, amiable, good-looking in an unsubstantial kind of way, and he had a pretty little talent for pretty little things.

The heart and soul of Australia never came near to being crowded into Horace's pictures. He interpreted everything with the spirit of a young man from the tape counter. He idealised and etherealised all things. His very cows were always white and pure, and shed a tender radiance. His sundowners became trim gentlemen masquerading in elegant rags. His bush boys looked as if they had just been confirmed. This to give you an idea of the character of young Mr. Quilt.

Here he was in the heart of the bush at Honeysuckle Hill, with all the Australian "properties" about him, purpling range, purling creek, drowsing gums, feathery saplings, cows, cattle, horsemen and wonderful Australian bush weather. Horace painted zealously. He was most productive. His sketches were very smooth and pretty, but the sentiment of the "*Young Ladies' Journal*" was over them all. Horace's art interpreted Horace only. It was himself. He was a mass of sentiment. He had the most beautiful ideals, and in his dreams and his paintings fair women were superior to the angels.

Mrs. Tobin was a fair woman. Mrs. Tobin was the widow to whose tender mercies Horace had been recommended. She owned a farm picturesquely situated at Honeysuckle Hill. It was an absolutely perfect farm from the point of view of High Art, but as a mere farm it was a failure. It had produced nothing worth mentioning since Tobin died.

The widow was about thirty, a good-looking, shiftless woman, whose hair was never tidy, and whose clothes always seemed to have fallen on her, and to be on the point of falling off again. She had one son, a boy of nine. She was always lying on beds, and the house was littered with cheap reading— cheap

and nasty. Her brother Ben was "manager" at the farm. Ben was a big lout, with a talent for beer.

Horace Quilt paid little attention to his landlady during the first few weeks of his stay, but presently she began to force herself upon his mind. She did it in a most gratifying way. In Mrs. Tobin Horace had found an honest and sincere admirer of his art.

It was one afternoon when the artist came in with a little sketch representing an ethereal Bacchante in a bit of pantomime transformation bush, with the yellow limelight hot upon it, that Horace discovered Mrs. Tobin to be an intelligent woman.

"Oh, do let me have a long look at it, Mr. Quilt," said the widow. "Isn't it beau-ti-ful? Isn't it lovely? Just like Heaven!" There was no mistaking the fact that Mrs. Tobin's enthusiasm was genuine. "Minnie! Minnie! Minnie!" she yelled. "Come 'n look."

Minnie, the kitchen girl, a brown-skinned, big-boned, lurching native, came and looked stolidly. "Isn't it just too lovely?"

"What's it good fer?" said Minnie.

Horace loathed Minnie.

Mrs. Tobin called her boy Billy, and her big brother Ben to admire the picture, and Billy drew a finger through the wet Bacchante, and Ben said he knew "a pub up to Sydney what was papered with them kinder drorin's."

"My oath, mister, you'd getter job et the jam fact'ry drorin' them pictures on the tins anny day, I bet," said Ben.

Horace despised him.

"If I was a rich woman I'd give you five shilling for that paintin'," said Mrs. Tobin, in a burst of frightful generosity.

Horace gave it to her, and the landlady's gratitude made her inarticulate. After that Mrs. Tobin lost all interest in her "penny dreadfuls" and devoted herself to art and the artist.

Their ideals were the same. Mrs. Tobin had gathered hers from love literature of the languishing kind. Horace's had come to him as a natural expression of his own weaknesses. The landlady earnestly admired everything he did, and from admiring his art came to admire him. Horace had delicate, good looks, a small, soft, golden moustache, and a tender, blue eyes the colour of cornflowers. Mrs. Tobin thought him beautiful.

Mrs. Tobin hung about Horace while he was painting; she went into raptures over his cows, and adored his little bits of creek scenery.

"However you do it, Mr. Quilt, I never can tell." she said, amazedly. "You sit here 'n look at that, old creek, 'n then you set to work 'n paint them pictures what's like bits of 'Eaving— that's that' what they're like, bits of 'Eaving."

This was true criticism. Horace would sit by the creek, and would paint scraps more like a scene-painter's idea of Paradise than anything in the Australian heaven above or the earth beneath. Horace liked this. It was very pleasant to be so warmly admired. Besides, the widow was taking more care of her appearance; there was a visible effort to arrange the mass of fair, colourless hair: there was an obvious desire to make it appear that her clothes had been put on, and had not merely been dived into. Mrs. Tobin followed Horace about the bush. She was continually finding him, bringing tea and cake to refresh him, offering small services, and posing when he needed a figure in a picture.

One afternoon she posed for the broken-hearted daughter of a callous squatter, pining in bosky dell for the stockman to whom she had given her heart. This picture was Horace's masterpiece of mushy sentimentality. The squatter's daughter was a beautiful princess in a rare and radiant garment; the bosky dell was an impossible, fairy-like scene a glow of colour. Mrs Tobin sat looking at this picture for ten minutes in silence, stricken dumb with admiration."

"Pore dear!" she said. Later, showing the picture to Ben, she explained. "He painted it from me. I'm the lovely lady crossed in love."

"What, done that from you, did he?" said Ben: "well, all I can say is, he must be awfully mashed."

"What, with me?" gasped Mrs. Tobin.

"In course. Strikes me he's fool enough for anythin'."

The idea filled Mrs. Tobin with a great hope. That beautiful desolate creature in the picture became her pattern. She moulded herself upon her, wore her hair in the same way, strove to cultivate her expression, and copied the rare and radiant garment as closely as her limited means would permit. She called Mr. Quilt "'Orace" now, and persuaded him to walk out with her at night occasionally to see moonlight effects.

Meanwhile Ben slouched and smoked and drank, and said nothing. To himself he admitted that he was allowing nature to take her course.

One day Mrs. Tobin while posing on the bank of the creek for an Australian naiad stepped back incautiously and fell into the water. There was a waterhole just there, unfortunately, and the widow began to drown.

Horace lost his presence of mind, and ran madly up and down calling for help at the top of his voice. Then it came to him as an inspiration that perhaps he could save the poor woman himself, whereupon he caught hold of her dress and pulled her out of the water.

It was a simple matter, but Mrs. Tobin when she came to insisted on regarding Horace as her preserver, and a hero. Horace did not resent the inference.

After tea that night Horace was sitting in his own room finishing a pencil sketch, when Ben entered unceremoniously and closed the door after him.

"You bin savin' the missus's life, I hear," he said.

"Well, yes, I—"

"When's it ter be?" Ben was coming right down to business.

"When is what to be ?" asked Horace.

"Why, the weddin', o' course. You bin knockin' about a bit with Liz, 'n now you go savin' her life, so I s'pose there's nothin' else fer it."

"But," gasped Horace, in amazement, "a chap may save a woman's life without meaning to marry her."

"May be," said Ben, rising and standing over Horace, threateningly; "not up here he mayn't. What yer wanter do savin' her life for 'ceptin' to marry her? Liz reckons it's what yer after. It always happens accordin' to all her books that the young bloke what saves the girl marries her, 'n what always happens in the books must be right. Now, I reckon this has got to be accordin' to the book."

"But— but," stammered Horace.

"Never you mind buttin', young feller. You ain't goin' t' trifle with my sister's widderly affections, savin' her life 'n all that, 'n a weddin' there's goin' to be."

WHEN the sun rose over Honeysuckle Hill next morning it discovered Horace Tobin well on his way to the station at Windmill. He carried one small Gladstone bag. All his paintings and materials to boot were abandoned. He was escaping, and hurried along in fear and trembling, knowing that he was pursued by a tall figure that had appeared on the apex of a rise a mile back. Finding at the next glance that Ben was gaining, Horace began to run— to run blindly, a prey to grimmest anxiety.

"Where 'n thunder yer goin' ter?"

Horace had fallen over a young man lying by the roadside, his head pillowed on a swag.

"Oh, I beg pardon," gasped Horace. "A man's chasing me. He wants me to marry his sister. I don't know what to do."

Horace's condition was pitiful.

The young man eyed him for a moment, and then said: "Gimme arf a quid, 'n I'll punch his head."

"You— you'll keep him from following, me?" cried Horace, hope dawning in his heart.

"Make it er quid, 'n' I'll lay him up for a month."

"Here— here— here's thirty shillings," said Horace, feverishly, fishing out the money.

The young man gathered up the coin. "His mother won't know him fer two months ter come," he said, decisively.

Horace looked hack after he had gone half-a-mile, and saw Ben and the stranger fighting fiercely in a little cloud of dust.

THE SWAGGIE was faithful to his contract. Horace escaped, and got safely back to Sydney, but he never recovered his beautiful Australian paintings, the works that were going to make the spirit of Australia, articulate. He never saw Mrs. Tobin again either, but a year later he discovered his picture of the desolate daughter of the hard-hearted run-owner in the private collection of a wealthy tea merchant, who admitted that he had discovered it in an upcountry farm house, and had given £50 for it.

The picture was called "Eve After the Fall."

"It struck me that that was what it seemed to represent," said the tea merchant.

"Did the widow say anything about the artist?" asked Horace.

"Yes. He was some rascal who had promised to marry her, and then levanted with all her savings and those of her brother."

"Oh-h!" said Horace Quilt.

31: Sanctity of Marriage at Cowford

Ward Edson

Punch (Melbourne) 5 Jan 1911

COWFORD was a Wesleyan community, and prided itself on its high moral standard and its zeal in Sabbath observance. The statistics of Cowford in matters of drunkenness, murder, manslaughter, arson, bigamy, and all the domestic virtues were such as any community might well be proud of.

There was a small, unpainted, hardwood chapel on the hill overlooking the township, with two staring, glass eyes full of admonition and reproof. If any resident of Cowford yielded to the promptings of the devil so far as to sally forth at night with, a bag and larcenous intentions in connection with his neighbour's hens, he was certain to find the eyes of the little chapel, reflecting moonlight or starlight, bent upon him with a reproachful glare, and he would retire precipitately, full of contrition, and minus the poultry.

There was no ordained minister at the chapel, but every Cousin Jack is a preacher by instinct, and there was not half-a-dozen Cornishmen in the township unprepared to conduct a service, preach a sermon, deliver a prayer, or sing a hymn at a moment's notice. The Brethren were ministers by rote, and preached and prayed in turn.

Very few people in or about Cowford failed to go to chapel at least once on Sunday, and to prayer meeting every Wednesday night. To neglect these functions was to invite suspicion, and leave oneself open to a charge of infidelity, or a suspicion of Popish sympathies. For the other nights of the week there were Band of Hope meetings, choir practice, and gatherings of the Mothers' Club, an association that aimed to cultivate temperate habits and a distaste for tobacco and opium in the very young. It will be seen that there was no lack of diversion in Cowford, and no need whatever for public houses, billiard-rooms, smoke socials, and similar inventions of the devil.

Imagine, if you can, the state of public opinion in such a community with regard to a man like Andrew Apps. There were substantial grounds for the belief that Andy was not wholly and completely sober when he arrived at Cowford, and his subsequent conduct was not calculated to allay the common distrust of Cowford towards men who carried swags and lived in tents. Apps was given three weeks' trial, and in all that time he had not put in an appearance at chapel. He had ignored the prayer meetings, and overlooked the Band of Hope. No doubt remained concerning Andrew Apps— he was a lost soul.

In all respects Andy's conduct was calculated to provoke public distrust. He was not working, and had not sought work; he had no friends, and had made no advances and put forth no offers of conciliation.

Furthermore, Andrew Apps was a prowler. At first Andy's prowling was general; of late it was all about the home of Mr. Jacob Honesty. Eventually there remained no doubt that Apps's intentions towards the domicile of Jacob were strictly dishonourable.

Apps was a lurker, and Cowford could not abide lurkers, especially lurkers like Apps, who were secret and silent, who provoked common curiosity to a fever heat, and said nothing, and did nothing to allay the irritation. Andrew was often seen lurking in the vicinity of Honesty's house. Brother Best had come upon the man hiding behind a tree, watching Honesty's house with such absorbed intensity that he had not heard himself addressed. Brother Veal, when out shooting parrots, had discovered the man Apps sitting up a large white gum absorbed in contemplation of Honesty's home. Everybody had something to say about Andy's prowling propensities, and the leaders of public opinion were convinced that steps should be taken; but, as none knew what sort of steps should be taken, or what direction those steps should take, nothing was done.

Then came something in the nature of a climax. Andy Apps and Jacob Honesty had been seen fighting at the latter's back-door. It was Sister Ann Carter saw the dire conflict.

"I jist seen this feller Apps a-creepin' up to Honesty's back-door, and all of a suddink out jumps Jacob, and sorter points him off, me bein' unfortunately not near enough to hear what's said. Apps he ups 'n' replies somethin' what looks like bad langwidge 'n' low abuse. Jacob puts 'ands on him, there's a fight agin Honesty's back-door, all among the ducks. Blows' is 'ammerin' away, ducks is scatterin' wild, 'n' high words is flyin', when Mrs. Honesty jumps out, with a pail of washin'-up in her hands, and swooshes the lot all over both her 'usband 'n' the man Apps, which the latter goes off immejit, wringin' his shirt sleeves, 'n' rubbin' the water out iv his eyes."

It is now apparent that Apps is a lawless villain, prepared to go to any extremes to effect his nefarious purpose, and all the more a scoundrel and a wretch in keeping that purpose secret from a community naturally inquisitive and profoundly concerned with other people's business.

When interviewed, Honesty gave it as his opinion that the man Apps was a little demented. He hoped nothing serious would happen.

Twice after that Apps and Honesty were seen fighting in the vicinity of the latter's home, and then Joseph Praetor arrived right in the middle of a Band of Hope meeting, with a stirring account of an attempt on the part of Andrew Apps to abduct Mrs. Honesty.

Apps, it appears, had seized Mrs. Honesty while she was crossing from the township to her home, and had promptly carried her oft. Mrs. Honesty was a small, slim, dark woman, quite helpless in the hands of a big, powerful man like Apps, and the latter had succeeded in carrying her about a quarter of a mile,

when Praetor and Crowther effected a rescue. Apps, a solemn, silent man, offered no words in answer to the eloquent reproaches of Brother Praetor. He accepted his failure in a philosophic spirit, and retired to his tent.

Apps tried again. He captured Mrs. Honesty in her own garden, took her in his arms, and, despite her kicking and screaming, was. calmly carrying her off when Honesty rushed across from his work and waylaid the body-snatcher. there was a fight, in which Honesty was somewhat injured. Apps was always willing to fight with Honesty, but towards other men he preserved a peaceful manner and a stubborn taciturnity.

Then, three times in rapid succession Apps made bold attempts to abduct Mrs. Honesty. Once he had the audacity to invade her own kitchen and bear her away from the baking of bread, with dough still on her hands, and the flour she had used as a defence thick upon him. In each instance there was a rescue, but Andy was unabashed, and apparently unshaken in his nefarious purpose.

Brother Peter Best's bright brain here cast a luminous light on the situation.

"The villain's a kidnapper, a bigamist," said Peter. "He has no respect for the Commandments that bid us commit no adultery, nor to covet our neighbour's wife. He is an enemy of the marriage tie, a foe to domestic peace, and the sanctity of the home."

This had seemed apparent for some little time, but Brother Best's manner of putting it made Apps appear a common enemy, a danger to the whole community. Public feeing at Cowford waxed very hot against Apps. Cowford sentiment was intensely conservative in matters affecting marriage, monogamy, and the domestic circle. Cowford was prepared to die unanimously in defence of these sacred institutions. Imagination intensified under the influence of Brother Best's eloquence. If Jacob Honesty would take no definite determined action, it was the duty of Cowford to do so in the interests of the home. Cowford could not see wives torn from their homes and carried off under its very nose, and refrain from making an emphatic demonstration of its hatred of such iniquitous goings-on.

It was Apps's daring and absolute contempt of public opinion and common decency that precipitated the general rising. Honesty arrived at Brother Best's door in the wee dark hours one morning, holding up his trousers with one hand, and embracing a huge lump on his head with the other. Apps had broken into his house, bounced a section of fencing material on his occiput, and carried off Mrs. Honesty from her bed.

Brother Best felt that the crucial moment had come. He awoke the town. He led a rescue party, and Apps was captured two miles out on the Burrumbeet road, still carrying his prize.

He was dragged back to Cowford, and tied to the chapel fence. It was felt that, as justice must be done, there was no place like the chapel yard to do it in.

Brother Best read the prisoner a long homily on the iniquity of his conduct and the purity of the marriage compact, while Jacob Honesty helped to light the fire and warm the tar. Peter Best, in the warmth of his fervour for righteous living and lawful observance, gave his own feather bed to the cause.

Justice was to be vindicated at Cowford; the sacred nature of marriage was to be publicly asserted.

The prisoner remained silent and unconvinced. He was a slow-thinking, mild-eyed type of bushman, and if he had his own opinions refrained from expressing them, recognising, perhaps, that Cowford was against him, and that resistance was useless.

The men formed a ring around the infamous lawbreaker, they put a coat of warm tar all over him, they ripped open Peter's contributed feather bed, and they rolled the tarred sinner in the feathers. Andy Apps stood out in the light of dawn, a tall, ungainly bird, feathered from ears to heels. The men of Cowford pulled the chapel gate off its hinges, they set Apps, the kidnapper, the rifler of homes, the coveter of other men's wives, on the gate, and they rode him through the township amidst great enthusiasm and a clatter of tin-kettles, and Jacob Honesty beat the biggest tin.

Andy Apps was left at his own tent, where Brother Best delivered a final sermon and some excellent advice. That day Apps left Cowford.

Within a week five prominent and fairly well-to-do citizens of Cowford, including Brother Peter Best, received a peremptory lawyer's letter intimating that they were to be sued for heavy damages by Andrew John Apps for grievous, assault and despiteful usage.

The defendants were astonished at Apps's audacity, but had no great fear of the consequences. But four days later the five, backed by a pretty large deputation of men and women of the township, rushed Jacob Honesty, and interviewed him at his own door.

"This wretched fellow— this man Apps," spluttered Brother Best, "declares, we assaulted him without fair and reasonable provocation— that he was encased endeavouring to recover *his own wife*!"

"Well," said Honesty, with some natural diffidence, "I s'pose it would sorter bear that construction."

"But *his own wife*?"

"Yes, his own wife in a manner o' speakin'. Yeh see, I ran away with Mrs. Apps a matter o' seven years ago, 'n' I s'pose Jane's still his wife, as it were."

The deputation did nothing to Jacob Honesty; it did not even reproach him— it could find no words to fit the occasion. After gazing at him miserably in stunned silence for three minutes, it turned and walked away.

The fine citizens of Cowford paid Andy Apps the sum he demanded, also his costs, and nothing much is said about the sanctity of marriage in the township nowadays.

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32: The Scientific "D."

Ward Edson

Punch (Melbourne) 8 July 1909

DETECTIVE Serenus A. Nowll was reckoned an ornament to his profession. He was quite the most up-to-date man in the Intelligence Department, and thoroughly investigated every new theory, scheme, and principle for the prevention and detection of crime. Indeed, there were captious critics among his envious rivals who declared that Detective Serenus A. Nowll would be much better employed chasing criminals than pursuing theories.

Of course, this was absurd, and in accordance with the old-time supposition that the chief duty of a thief-taker is to take thieves. Serenus took a loftier view of his profession; he claimed that it was a scientific profession, and aspired to shine as a scientist. In fact the favourite nickname of Serenus A Nowll was The Scientist.

The detective, he said, was not merely a policeman, not merely a keeper of the peace; he was one of the bulwarks of civilisation. Without him, there was danger of the whole structure of society going to pieces. He was society's guarantee against anarchy, and was called upon to deal with, all the subtler manifestations of villainy, all the cunningest foes of order, and to do so effectually must be subtler and more cunning than the smartest enemies of the law.

To perfect himself Serenus A. Nowll studied all those sciences and philosophies that seemed to bear upon his work. He was a profound thinker in psychology, he had given years of his life to the principles of hypnotism, he knew all that the experts could tell him about thought reading and telepathy, and the minor details of a detective's work were all at his finger tips.

When the principle of detection by thumbprints came into prominence, Detective Serenus A. Nowll took the matter up with great enthusiasm.

As years wore on, Detective Nowll gave his time and attention more and more to the collecting of finger prints and the study thereof. In this science he fondly believed lay the supreme hope of society. With the aid of thumbprints detection of criminals would presently become child's play.

Serenus believed he had discovered what he called the criminal's thumb. Just as there is a cricketer's nose, a bicycle face, a billiard eve, and a boxer's ear, he believed there was a criminal's thumb. In the thumbprints of politicians he could trace a marked family resemblance; and was looking forward to the time when criminals would be known by their thumbs, and would be imprisoned on the evidence of their thumb-prints pure and simple.

"Prevention is better than cure," said Serenus A. Nowll, inventing a happy phrase, "and if we can detect a criminal by the markings of his thumb, why

permit him to commit shocking crimes merely to provide further proof that he is a criminal?"

Now, having perfected himself on the scientific side, Serenus A. Nowll became anxious to demonstrate the proof of his theories by practical experience. He began to think about catching criminals. It was high-time, for the burglars, embezzlers, spielers. and crooks, of all sorts were very busy in the city, and were prospering amazingly.

Serenus appealed to be sent for in all important cases, and as he was highly regarded by his superiors as the cleverest theoretical detective in the Commonwealth, his wishes were granted.

Nowll tried several times to run to earth jewel robbers, gold stealers, bank breakers and a murderer or two, but his theories never quite worked, out.

"Entirely the fault of the criminals, we see that, Nowll," said the Chief encouragingly, patting him on the back. "If the criminal classes persistently ignore those scientific principles upon which your life's work is founded, we cannot blame you for your failure, the stigma falls upon the criminal."

"That's true," said Nowll sadly. "Their conduct in wearing gloves after hundreds of thousands of pounds had been devoted to perfecting the system of detection by thumb-prints confirms my worst suspicions; these criminals are utterly depraved."

"Persevere, my boy, persevere!" said the Chief heartily.

Serenus persevered, and then came the great Right Bower diamond robbery.

This was a beautiful case, named after one of the stolen jewels, a brooch fashioned like the Jack of Hearts, the figure worked with emeralds, diamonds and rubies. The stolen jewels belonged to the wife of a thriving bookmaker named Yacob Yacoops. The criminals had broken into the residence of Mr. Yacob Yacoops at the dead of night, and abstracted the jewels from the secret drawer of an old black iron safe set in an oaken bureau.

The work had been done with marvellous neatness, while the occupants of the house slept undisturbed. One side of the safe had been cut clean out. How the thieves could possibly have done this without waking the sleepers the great detective could not understand, until Mrs. Yacoops explained.

"Perhabs it is dot fadder suleep so sound dot you don'd hear a house fall for the sound of him sleeping."

This was a clue, and when Serenus heard Yacob Yacoops's snore he understood that Gabriel's trump might not be heard within a mile of it.

Serenus took up the Right Bower robbery with tremendous zeal. He spent a whole week looking for thumb-prints. Everybody but the official seekers was ordered out of the house, and Nowll and his assistants went over the place with microscopes, seeking thumb-prints.

The search started in the cellar, and worked upwards, going over every inch of the house, in and out, and at length on the stout bureau itself, from which the safe had been torn, quaint and curious prints were discovered. There were many of these prints. Serenus A. Nowll had never seen anything quite like them before. Pieces of the bureau on which the prints were plainest were sawn out, and Serenus took them away and photographed them.

"Never saw such an extraordinary thumbprint in my life," Serenus told Miss Rachel Yacoops after he had studied it for a week.

"But," said Rachel, with natural petulance, "ve do not want the thumb-print, is it? Ve get any old thumb-prints ve vant 2d. a bushel. Vot about the tiamonts?"

"We are coming to the diamonds, my dear young lady."

"Then you bring me to them pretty, soon quick," said the young lady. "I am anxious aboud those tiamonts, not for my own sake, but pecause dey vill pe my properties when ma dies."

"Yes, yes, but don't be impatient. Here is the thumb-print. You see it has all the characteristics of my ideal criminal thumb-print worked up from the prints of ten thousand criminal thumbs."

"Yes, that I see me, but vere is the man with the thumb?"

"That I cannot say, but we have only got to catch him—"

"Dot is all?" said Miss Yacoops with nice sarcasm. "Nodding more. Off you do id pefore dinner I shall please me."

"You are too impetuous. When we do catch him, here, you see, is undeniable evidence against him."

"But vere is the tiamonts ?"

"Give us time. With this thumb-print we are certain to track him down."

"I do not see dot it contains his name and address," said the practical Rachel.

Serenus went away with his precious thumbprint, and compared it with a few thousand more, and the more he compared it the more convinced he was that it was the sign manual of a daring and desperate criminal. Nowll was particularly anxious to succeed in restoring the Yacoops diamonds. He had come from his studies late in life, and had been thrown into the society of charming Rachel Yacoops, and had succumbed to her florid, Oriental charms. Already he was desperately in love. If he could give Yacoops back his diamonds, Yacoops might willingly give his daughter, and, as Rachel would eventually get the diamonds, the prize was worth working for.

Serenus worked. He collected thumb-prints with a tremendous assiduity. He applied to Parliament for a permit to take thumb-prints from all sorts and conditions of people. He got search-warrants to secure citizens' thumbprints. He ran people down on bicycles, and pursued them on motors, and took their thumbprints by force. Nobody was safe from him. He actually took his own chief's thumbprint, and it was found that one man he had run down was a State

Governor. The thumb-print of the Right Bower jewel robber was a curious one; it was shaped in three sections, something like a clover-leaf or a shamrock, and each section was boldly lined.

For a time Serenus A. Nowll made certain that he had got his man. He discovered amongst his vast store of prints a photograph of the thumb-print of a quarryman whose hand had been smashed in a crane. In this print there were three sections, and there were other marked similarities.

"Eureka!" cried Nowll, giving another expression to the language.

He applied for a strong force, and at dead of night led his men to the residence of the quarryman. He posted his men, all of whom were armed, around the house. Then Serenus made his way in through a window, followed by ten men, placed all the occupants under arrest in their beds— and found that the quarryman had been dead a year.

Nowll was not discouraged. He continued his hunt, abroad in the land. He went all over the Commonwealth, collecting thumb-prints. He strove to have an Act passed making the taking of thumb-prints free, compulsory and secular, like vaccination, that the prints of every person in the country might be passed under review.

Meanwhile he was falling more deeply in love with Rachel every day. He kept a few of his men about Yacoops's' house hunting for clues, and taking thumb-prints of everyone who had ever been near the place or was ever likely to be. Every day, when in Melbourne, Serenus A. Nowll called for reports. Never had a detective been more assiduous. He had declared his passion, and Rachel had replied: "Better dot you ask for my hand ven it haff those tiamont rings on it."

One day Serenus demanded the thumb-print of old Yacoops himself, and was kicked out of the house, but there came an afternoon when he was met in the garden by Detective Earlypert, a smart young disciple of his own. Earlypert's face was alive with eagerness.

"You have discovered something!" cried Nowll.

"Yes," said Earlypert. "Look at this." He drew a thumb-print on blotting-paper from his pocket and held it towards Nowll.

"By heaven, the identical thing!"

"Yes, in every detail."

"When did you take it?"

"Half-an-hour ago."

"Where ?"

"Here!"

"You have the party?"

"I have him here. I can produce him at any moment."

"Then, thank God, the job is done. I shall get the family together. We must do this with dramatic effect, Earlypert. Every detective capture should, be smartly stage-managed. Bring him to the dining room in five minutest" Detective Nowll hurried' indoors, and called Mr., Mrs. and Miss Yacoops together.

"I have the thief where I can put my hand on him," he said. "He is here!"

At that dramatic moment Detective Earlypert entered. In his hand he held a large black Tom-cat.

"What!" cried Nowll, "is that the villain?"

"Observe, sir," said Earlypert. He pressed the cat's forepaw on the blotting-pad, producing a thumb-print exactly like that found in the dust on the old bureau.

"Yes, yes," said Nowll, ecstatically, "it is the same. Here we have the criminal who broke your safe and stole your diamonds. Mr. Yacoops. This evidence cannot be denied; it is scientific and irrefragable. Officer," he said, raising his voice, "arrest that cat!"

When the cat was carried away, struggling violently, and swearing at the top of his yowl, Detective Serenus A. Nowll turned to the amazed Miss Rachel.

"And now," he said, I have accomplished my purpose. I have fulfilled my mission. I claim my reward— your darling hand."

He got it, and it was rather more than a week before Rachel Yacoops's thumb-print disappeared from the region of his right eye.

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33: Their Excellent Maid

Ward Edson

Punch (Melbourne) 15 Aug 1912

"IT'S SUCH a novel feeling," said Mrs. Crowther. "It's almost uncanny."

"What's that?"

"Why, being wholly and thoroughly content with one's servant."

"You mean the new housemaid?"

"Yes. I simply cannot find a single fault with her. She's a marvel."

"A marvel? She must be a miracle," said Crowther, with a touch of irony.

"Nonsense. If you imply that I am a faultfinder, you traduce me. My eagerness has always been to find the good qualities of the girls. I am glad to make any kind of excuse For them to avoid the painful task of discharging. But Martin is everything she should be— willing, civil, competent, with no discoverable opinions in the matter of followers, and quite careless with regards to nights off."

"You've forgotten to say how pretty she is," said Arthur Crowther quietly from his end of the breakfast table.

"I do not think her pretty, but I allow for masculine prejudices."

"Good old mater. Will you admit she's charming?"

"She certainly has a quiet charm. Ah, I had forgotten. That is a fault— what a blessed relief."

"Fault?"

"Decidedly. No housemaid has a right to be quite so nice. It shows little consideration for a mistress's peace of mind." Mrs. Crowther wore a smile on her genial, matronly face.

"As how, mum?"

"Where there is a susceptible youth of twenty-seven in the family, and a house-father with a notorious eagle eye for a neat ankle, a charming maid is a continual trial."

Arthur grinned.

"Very well, mother, now you can be rid of your uncanny feeling of absolute satisfaction. I shall arrange it so that you shall be on tenterhooks, as usual. Annette is really pretty."

"Annette? How did you discover that her name was Annette?"

"Susan calls her Annette. I think it a liberty on the part of a plain kitchen wench like Susan towards a superior creation like our Miss Martin."

Mrs. Crowther laughed softly. As a matter of fact, she had absolute confidence in her grave, medical son, who had had quite a middle-aged manner at twenty-seven, and for whom, so far, feminine allurements did mot appear to exist. As for Mr. Crowther's eagle eye, it held a purely speculative interest, and

throughout their long married life James had never given Jane the smallest occasion for concern. There were no reasons in the world, from Mrs. Crowther's point of view, why she should not keep a pretty maid, and her satisfaction in Annette Martin remained without alloy.

A few minutes later there came a gentle knock at the door, and Annette entered with a tray. She was of middle height, with exceptional hair, neither gold nor auburn, but almost the colour of the fruit of an orange. Her eyes were an unusual blue, and looked strange in a face of flawless dark olive. Annette would be called peculiar in any company, but the adjective would be complimentary in nine cases out of ten. In the tenth case it would be uttered by soured members of her own sex, and soured women are incompetent authorities.

The girl went about her work in a quiet, alert way. She knew what was expected of her, and every task was performed smartly, and with a decided grace of manner, while a certain sunniness of temperament radiated from her, and seemed to light up the room.

"She's like the heroine of a light opera," said Arthur when Annette was gone. "Mrs. Colt regards a certain cheerfulness she finds in her as irritating and presumptuous."

"Mrs. Colt is the sort of woman who should be waited on by bullocks."

"She certainly isn't the sweetest. I like Annette's warmth. It is purely temperamental, unconscious and unaggressive. I like the girl altogether."

The above scene was enacted in the breakfast room of John Crowther, manufacturing stationer, a substantial man, well-to-do, without social ambition, but eager to see his only son make a place for himself in the world. The next scene is a fortnight later, and is shifted to the moonlit rose garden on the left of substantial John Crowther's substantial stone residence.

Arthur was standing by a small fantastical summer-house. He held a young lady by the hand. The girl was drawing away, and seemed reluctant. They stood in shadow, but around them the silver moonlight splashed--whitely! upon the walks and the walls.

"I love you, Annette."

"Mr. Crowther, I am your mother's servant, a girl of no consequence "

"I won't listen to that. To me you are of more consequence than anything else in the world."

"Let me go. please. If your mother saw this, I should be blamed."

"Is that your experience of my mother?"

"Your mother is a big-souled gentlewoman, Mr. Crowther."

"And her son?"

"He forgets what is due to himself and to her."

"And is nothing due to you?"

"Yes, much. But in my class we rarely get our dues without fighting for them."

"As you are fighting now."

"You must let me go."

"No."

"You must."

"I will not. You are the sweetest girl I have ever known. What matters to me what your occupation may be? In yourself you are finer than any woman I have ever met, or ever expect to meet. Annette, I love you. Can't you care for me a little?"

He drew her close. Despite her struggles he held her in his arms.

"Mr. Crowther, this is shameful," she panted. "I would never have believed it of you— you, a gentleman."

"I am not a gentleman. I am a lover. Can't you care for me? Will you marry me?"

She ceased struggling, she turned her face towards him.

"You ask me to marry you?" she said. Her voice had lost its hardness.

"I do. I do not merely ask it, sweetheart— I demand it."

"You do not forget that I am your mother's housemaid?"

"I do not. There is no reason why I should. You are a thousand times better than I. You are the equal of anyone I know in refinement and sweetness and beauty."

"And your mother?"

"My mother will eventually consent to anything essential to my happiness."

"Am I then essential?"

"You are. I adore you, Annette. You have taken possession of me with a power that is absolutely compelling. I adore you. Love me, Annette, love me!"

She did not speak. He felt her slender form tremulous in his arms, and kissed her lips.

Next morning Annette Martin interviewed her mistress in the drawing-room. "I am leaving," she said.

"Annette!"

"Yes, if you please. I would be very grateful if you would allow me to go at once, today."

"But, my dear child, I thought you were very comfortable here. I was hoping we should be able to keep you. I admit it, Annette, you have given me absolute satisfaction."

"You have been kindness itself, Mrs. Crowther, but I must go. In fact, your kindness makes it absolutely essential. You have been too good to me. If I stayed I should be doing you a wrong."

"Annette, these are riddles."

"No, it is a simple matter, Mrs. Crowther, Your son says he loves me. He—he has asked me to be his wife."

Mrs. Crowther sank into her chair, her expression was one of absolute amazement.

"Asked you to be his wife," she gasped. "Arthur?"

Annette stood with her back to the door, her eyes upon the carpet, and the distressed mother, gazing at her where the sunlight fell upon her beautiful hair, noting the girl's daintiness, knowing her charm, was quite convinced.

"And your answer?" she faltered.

"I have given him no answer. I am going away."

"He will follow you. Oh, my girl, you were a dangerous experiment. I realise that now. Arthur will not be put off easily. If he says he loves you, and has asked you to be his wife, he means every word of it."

"I am sure of that, Mrs. Crowther."

"And he will not let you go out of his life easily."

"I shall go away. He need not know."

Mrs. Crowther sat clasping and unclasping her hands, tears were on her cheeks.

"You are thinking of me, and of his father," she said. Annette bent her head a little lower.

"I could not break the hearts of those who took me in at a time of dire extremity, and who have shown me nothing but kindness."

Mrs. Crowther arose and took Annette's hands in hers.

"Annette," she said, "you are a sweet girl. I am fond of you. If my son's happiness depends on this, and your happiness, my dear, I would never fight against it."

But when Arthur returned that evening Annette was gone, and had left no trace. It was a terrible blow. He made no effort to conceal its effects. The weeks that followed were given up to a frantic search. Now that Annette was gone he realised the love he bore her in all its intensity. He felt that there was a future for him with Annette, or no future at all. He hunted everywhere, he advertised right and, left, and no answer came.

Then he began to suspect some reasons apart from those Annette had given his mother. She had been so secret about herself, possibly she was already married. A dull apathy seized him, and his father and mother watched its development with increasing anxiety.

It was a Sunday afternoon. There came a sharp ring at the bell, and Arthur stepped to the window.

"Visitors," he said. "I am going. It's a car, a beauty."

Mrs. Crowther stood beside him. "I don't recognise it," she said.

A servant came in with a card.

"Miss Croile," Mrs. Crowther read.

"Miss Croile? The name is strange to me."

Miss Croile was shown in. She stood for a moment in the doorway, and mother and son gazed at her. The slight figure was familiar, but it was superbly clad, and not until the visitor threw up her veil was Mrs. Crowther convinced.

"Annette!" she cried. The girl offered her hand.

"Esther Croile," she said ; "but I do not mind if I am always Annette to you."

She offered her left hand to Arthur.

"Won't you shake hands, Mr. Crowther?" she said. He took her hand, and held it for a moment.

"What does it all mean?" he asked.

"If I may sit down, I will tell you."

He handed her a chair, and she sat facing Mrs. Crowther, with a smile in her eyes.

"I am Esther Croile," she said, "only daughter of Andrew Croile, of Croile, Morgan and Arnold, the big Sydney soft goods firm. You found me an obedient servant, Mrs. Crowther. I was not an obedient daughter. I ran away from home to avoid obeying my parents in a matter which I considered some little importance. My father wished me to marry his father's son. I declined. Papa reminded me of my dependence. I said that I could make my own living if necessary. He said that was fortunate, as I should either marry Harry Morgan or make my own living. One night I slipped away, and took train to Melbourne. The rest you know. I have come to thank you for you excessive kindness to me."

"My dear, dear girl," cried Mrs. Crowther, "we all liked you."

"I know you did. You are the best in the world."

"And you are home— friends with your father again?"

"Oh, yes. Of course, papa was beaten. As soon as he found I was gone he set the detectives to work. He had two terrible anxieties— that I might not return, and that it might become public that I had gone. The detectives were on my track when I wrote forgiving papa everything, and announcing my return."

"And this Harry Morgan," Arthur's voice sounded strange even to himself. His face was very white. Mrs. Crowther looked from one to the other, and slipped from the room.

"He is very well," said the girl, a flush of pink warming her olive cheeks.

"You are going to marry him?"

"No. I have been thinking of marrying someone else, if he will have me— someone who loved me when I was simple parlour-maid."

"Annette, Annette, you mean me?"

"Well, there was a policeman friend of Susan's who showed me quite a deal of attention."

"Annette, don't joke. I have suffered enough."

"You dear darling! I saw your advertisements, I knew you were seeking me, but I had to bring papa round."

"He is quite brought round?"

"He told me to go to the deuce, and please myself for a headstrong hussy."

"Oh, I adore you. My God, how happy I am!"

"I love you with all my heart, my dear, dear boy: and, besides, if I cannot be your mother's daughter I shall never have a mother."

When Mrs. Crowther peeped into the room the two were standing in the sunlight by the window; her head was upon his shoulder, and his arm held her close.

All's well that ends well.

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34: An Amazing Materialisation

Silas Snell

Punch (Melbourne) 2 July 1914

"WELL, I've struck the queerest bunch this trip," said Miss Minnie Trigg, sitting in the kitchen at "Chisselhurst," where her bosom friend, Miss 'Arriet Brown, attended to the wants of a large household for fifteen shillings a week.

"You do get some funny 'uns," Miss Brown admitted. "Wot's this lot?"

"Blest if I know; but thy ole girl looks like a king's aunt. She's big an' dark, an' her eyes glower an' glitter."

"Does she beat 'im?" asked 'Arriet innocently. "That sort generally does."

"Well, she don't exactly take the slipper to 'im, but she lets 'im fully, understand he ain't nothin' much, an' must take up his attitude an' lodgin's accordin' to what's comin' to nothin' much. So he dosses in the little back room over the stable, an' he potters' about the yard most of the time lookin' like a bloke what's paid a quid a week t' do it. That's Arthur Holmes. He's nothin' t' speak of. 'Owever, he seems quite content' t' stand out when madam's friends is on the job. Madame tells 'em Arthur's of a very retirin' an' studious nature. I 'eard her. So far I ain't seen Arthur studyin' anythin' but a 'arf-bottle iv beer, wonderin' how he was 'goin' t' get three glasses out of it."

"Does the missus call 'erself 'Madame'?" asked 'Arriet heavily. "I don't trust 'em when they calls themselves 'Madam,' especially when they spells it with a 'E'. on the end. They ain't up to no good when they does that."

Madame Holmes did spell it with an 'E' on the end"— witness the neat brass plate on Madame's gate. The plate read: "Madame Holmes, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m."

Madame's villa was called "Asphodel", possibly as a hint of Madame Holmes profession, which, way distinctly other-worldly. Madame had direct connection with the Ultimate dim Thule, and co-operated with shades floating across the meads of Asphodel.

In short, Madame was a spiritualistic medium. She called herself a "consulting medium," as some doctors call themselves consulting physicians, but of late Madame had been compelled to conduct consultations with great circumspection, because of the conduct of sceptical constables, and the stringency of laws against fortune telling on a strictly cash basis.

But Madame Holmes continued to thrive.

"There's all sorts a-droppin' in every day," Minnie complained to her sympathetic friend. "They fair keep me bobbin' up an' down tendin' rings. An' you never saw sich a low iv figgers neither— queer ole girls with frightened eyes, an' a few blokes lookin' like sillies from the Asylum fer Soaks. I dunno what her game is, but she has 'em in what she calls her consultin' room, an' she must

make 'em coff up, too, coz I've seem her bloomin' 'andba/g chock-full iv 'arf-crowns. I reckon she's a lady doctor, maybe."

Madame had an assistant, Miss Stella Dray, who came only on special occasions, and seemed, to share Madiame's confidence. (Miss Stella was. a frigid virgin of ajbout thirty, bony and business-like. Minnie saw little of her, and she was not introduced to Madame's clients; hut she seemed to play an important part in Madame's dealings, with the de-materialised.

Miss Bray had a large circle or spook acquaintances, and was hand-and-glove with scores of disembodied persons of importance, judging by her conversations with Madame. She spoke of this spirit and that with an airy familiarity that would have made Miss Minnie Trigg's flesh creep, had Miss Minnie's keyhole searches for enlightenment been as successful as she had hoped they might be.

One evening after Mijinie had been employed at "Asphodel" for close upon a fortnight she met 'Arriet on their mutual night off, with an astonishing lot of news.

"Know what the ole girl is— I mean Madame?" she gasped. "She's one iv them spiritists."

''A spiritist?! Wot, takes a drop, does she?"

"Nb-o-o ! She's a mejum!"

"What's them—sort o' Dagoes?"

"Not a bit like. A spiritist nu-iutn she is. Raises spirits from the dead, an' has talks with them 'bout what's 'appenin'. She can talk with the ghost iv yer gran'mother ez easy az you'd crack a boo with ole Tins the milky."

"Go orn, yer pullin' me leg!"

'Arriet's eyes were, full of apprehension. "That's somethin' orful. I wouldn't stay in no place iv that sort. Do the spirits make calls?"

"My word, do they! She has her day for them."

"Wot! Four o'clock tea an' all that?''

"Somethin' like. Anyway ghosts is reg'lar callers at the house, an' Madame interjuces 'em to her clients, an' they has long talks an' confabs, an' plays up a bit, I can tell you, in the big room she calls 'er consultin' room an' stewdio."

'Arriet shivered. "Hev yeh give notice?" she asked. "It mus' make yer bones creep havin' 'em round. What iv yer was t' meet one in the dark? S'pose one broke loose an' come t' yeh et night when you was sleepin'? Booh! it's wicked havin' spirit evenin's. It ortenter be allowed."

"It does give me the Joes a bit iv nights, but I lock me door secure an' stuff up the keyhole. Ghosts can't get in if yeh stuffs up the keyhole."

"How did yer find out all about 'er ?"

"I spied on .'em. A big push iv the ole sort, owl-fated men an' dingy women with dilly eyes, was rollin' in, an' showed into the consultin' room, where seats was arranged an' a sort iv curtain affair rung across one corner, like ez if one iv

them blitherin' charade games what toffs sometimes plays at was on. Natural, me curiosity was roused, an' whan they're all in, an' the door's locked, I'm hoppin' round fer a crack in the circus.

"Would yeh b'lieve it, the mean cows 'ad plugged the keyhole? A dirty trick that. Things isv gom' on within and I'm clear out iv it, till I remembers another door at the far end iv the stewdio, leadin' to a small room et the back. Instant I does a scurry round, shifts a little table agin the door (which is locked, never been used), an' hikes up to the fanlight. The fanlight's dusty on the other side; but I'm all right for a pretty good view from the gallery.

"I can on'y see faint, coz the lights in the stewdio is dim; but the crowd's all sittin' in tows, lookin' white, their mouths open, an' their eyes gogglin'; an' there's Madame standin' et this end be the curtain in a long black robe, her face fair, white-washed with powder, her two 'ands up, her body stiff ez a block.

"Madame's talkin' jerky, 'Mrs. West's aunt,' she sez, like she was given an order.

" 'Oh, yes, yes, auntie dear— dear auntie,' sez a lean dame in the crowd.

"Then Madame goes on naggin', an' it's supposed that Mrs. West's aunt, what's bin dead these five years, an' orter know better, is talkin' t' Mrs. West, an' frim what I can make out is givin' her reg'lar rats. After that Mr. Orkney's dead wife has a go at Mr. Orkney, an' Mr. Orkney, a chewed-up little man in the corner, bursts into tears. Then Mrs. Gidley hears from her little boy iv nine, what passed hence last year, an' she burst into tears. Afore part one is over most everybody has burst into tears.

"Then they comes to another part, iv the programme. This is act two. 'We will have some apports,' Madame sez, whatever apports is. 'I'm to communicate: with Abrim Rashad to-night,' sez she. 'Please sit very still. I hope no sceptic among us will disturb, to-night's manifestations.'

"Madame goes off again in one iv her stiff fits, her 'ands up, an' sez she, cryin' loud: 'Abrim Rashad! Abrim Rashad!'

" 'Madame, I am 'ere,' sez a voice out iv nowhere.

"Struth, 'Arriet, you could 'ave knocked me down with a fender, I was that flabbergasted. The voice seemed right in my ear.

".'What 'ave you to give us to-night, Abrim Rashad?' cries Madame. 'Place your gifts upon the table, Abrim Rashad,' sez she.

"Well, you won't b'lieve it, but no sooner has she spoke than, biff! a little parcel from no one falls on the table out iv no place whatever.

" 'Any more gifts, Abrim Rashad?' sez Madame, an' the same tick a little bird is flutterin' round the room. She calls for more, an' coins an' rings fall on the table.

"Then sez Madame: 'Abrim Rashad, will you show yourself to us to-night?'

"She no sooner sez it than I sees him. The lights goes black out, but I sees hira, an' I get the blue shakes. I never saw a spirit afore, 'Arriet, an' I ain't accustomed to 'em. I was frightened near into fits. He was long an' thin an' spirally, twistin' up like a corkscrew,' that is, an' he was the colour iv light when the lights go out— a sort iv shadow iv a light, like that on chops in a cellar, or on a lobster in the dark whan he ain't too fresh."

'Arriet Brown nodded her head, and swallowed nothing with a convulsive movement of her throat. She was too awed to speak.

" 'I seen 'im on'y fer a moment, an' he was gone. He was on'y like the smoke of a man, an' I reckon you could 'ave blowed him out; but he had me beat. I was that scared I done a guy, an' plunged into my bed, rollin' meself up in a tight knot in the blankets, an' there Madame found me, 'arf dead with suffercation, when they'd all gone.

"I'm believin' in ghosts now," Minnie continued. "I used to laugh at 'em, but I wouldn't now. I ain't game, when yer livin' et a 'ouse where ghosts is reg'lar callers you get respectful. One might drop in any minute, an' I ain't takin' no chances."

" 'Sides," said 'Arriet almost in a whisper, "it's worth while bein' friends with 'em if they all gives presents like that Abrim Rashad done. All the same, I ain't sorry there ain't no ghosts in our fam'ly. I'd give notice t'morrer if any of our lot started bringin' spirits 'ome."

"P'raps one gets used to 'em, 'Arriet; an' they ain't no trouble. That's one thing I'll say fer a ghost—it ain't 'ard on servant girls. You 'aven't got to open doors for 'em, or get meals fer 'em, or clear their boots; an they don't make washin' an' ironin.' So far ez I can gather, those smokey clothes they floats about in never goes to the wash.''

"That is a comfort, certingly," said 'Arriet. "All the same, I has me natural hinstincts, an' I wouldn't stay in no place where ghosts was on the visitin' list."

HOWEVER, Minnie's faith in the absolute legitimacy of Madame's spooks and spirits did not survive long. The climax is better told in Minnie's own expressive language. Minnie had been three months in the service of Madame Holmes, and had peeped at several seances, when the accident happened to Miss Stella Bray. Miss Bray had the misfortune to be mowed down by a motor car at a moment when her friends of the spirit world were otherwise engaged, and failed to warn her of her danger.

"It's like this, 'Arriet," said Minnie, who had a. nice appreciation of a dramatic climax. 'That Bray female was sort of hassistant to Madame, an' 'when she gets bowled out, it's necessary fer the dame t' ring in another. It so I 'app'ened that her 'usband, who was Stella's understudy ordin'ry, has been toyin' with a bottle iv whisky shook from the kitchen cupbbard, an' is shick an'

helpless in the stable. There's a swagger seance arranged fer the evenin', an' Madame's in a tight fix.

"But, b'lieve me, 'Arriet, Madame ain't one of .the sort what's, easy put down an' out. She's goin' above the speed limit seekin' another hassistant right away, an' she gets her all right. A girl she, is, 'bout my age an' my size, an' she gets her with a promise of a sov'rin an' a silk dress what ain't too old t' make over.

"The new girl's sworn secret, an' told what she's got t' do. She has t' go up through a sort iv a man'ole in Madame s bedroom, crawl along between the ceilin' an' the roof, till she gets over the committee room. There there's a sort iv platform on the rafters, ah' there she lies low till she hears Madame say: 'Abrim Rashad, what have you to give us to-night?' when she puts her mouth to a liopenin' in the ceilin' hid be one of them flowerin', curly-whirly cement centre-pieces, an' hanswers. After that, when Madame gives the 'int, she has t' driop little articles she's took with her on to the table below."

"Well, I'm bloomin' blessed!" cried 'Arriet. "Then she's Abrim Rashad, the ghost?"

"She is in a manner iv speakin'. It was Stella Bray what went up th' flue an' worked the tricks before."

"They orter be pinched!"

"They might be— listen. The seance come off all right. The lights in the consultin' room was turned low ez could be, the shades on 'em left the top of the room in darkness, an' the Tom up aloft drops her parcels all right when she gets the word, lowers a lovely Horiental scarf, an' pushes two or three funny little birds into the room, an' all's lovely. The crowd is sayin' 'Wonderful! Wonderful!' The old girl's snivellin', an' the owl-eyed Johns is scared 'arf t' death.

"But that ain't all. Madame's counted on workin' a new spoof. The girl in the ceilin' has t' strike a sort iv quiet match in little haffair like a small firework, an' hold it down through the openin' in the ceilin.' Well, she ain't feelin' too good up there in the dark', that new girl ain't. She's a bit shaky at this spook business, an' wishes she was 'ome with her ma most iv the time. What 'appens'! She strikes the match too soon, an' she can't get the firework down through the openin' afore it begins, t' gee.

"It's a silent firework that, but it's creepy, an' it goes off like a still devil up in the dark 'tween the roof an' the ceilin', where the girl is on her lonesome; an' what does she see but a sort iv brimstone glow, an' a smoky figure like a man swellin' up an' stretching out his hands over her.

"That's enough fer 'er, thanks. She fetches a yell you could hear a mile, an' hits out. Natural, she forgets all warnin's, an' most important of these was cautionin' her not t' get off the platform, coz down 'tween the rafters was on'y thin lath an' plaster.

"What 'appens ? Oh, ma! she plunges ofl the platform when she yells, an', biff! one leg goes clean through the plaster, an' wags an' wags in the room below.

"Someone down there turns up the lights, just ez the girl gives another howl an' another plunge, and ploughs clean through the plaster, tearin' away the laths, an' plunks with no end 'v a solid bump on the table afore the 'ole gapin' crowd.

"Oh, there's no row, none at all. They don't start to give Madame nothing'. O' course not. Rut Madame's wily. Oh, she's a knowin' ole bird.

" 'A materialisation !' she sqiueals. 'A. materialisation!' And she points wild at the silly yob of a girl sittin' flat on the table, the white cement rainin' down about her.

"Then Madame outs the lights, grabs the girl, an' rushes her into a cupboard, an' presently lights is on agin, an' Madame Holmes is calmin' 'em with hexplanations.

" 'Twas a great manifestation,' she sez—'a most amazin' materialisation!' She quieted 'em all right, but I reckon it's all up with me."

" 'Ow's that?" asked 'Arriet. "Where did you come in?"

"Through the bloomin' roof," answered Minnie sadly. "I was the girl that fell in."

35: Giorgio, Giuseppe and Guido

Edward Dyson

Weekly Times (Melbourne) 21 Feb 1920

A GIFTED ITALIAN gentleman has stated that the descent of the pit is easy. He has never descended from the position of star boarder in an elegant south suburban establishment to that of a slouching Yarra-banker, with first claim on a doss among the cobwebs under a somewhat ricketty boathouse that flapped on its studs in a high wind, like a boot-upper broken from its sole.

George Edward Holt had made that descent, and had found it as easy as a fall down the Great Pyramid, with a terrible jolt at every step of the tremendous stone stair, and had arrived at the bottom with nothing to be grateful for but the fact that his neck was not broken in two places.

At "Willowholm," the select, elegant "residential" at which George Edward Holt put up after his arrival in Melbourne from Brandon, England, via 'Frisco, the young man was noted for the elegance of his manners and the neatness of his attire. For some good reason of his own he had chosen to represent himself as the son of a fairly well-to-do Chicago man occupied exclusively in the useful, if not onerous, task of mincing cattle into a kind of pork, diluting it with beans, and squeezing it into tins for home and general consumption.

Mr Holt retained his politeness, his affability, and, to some extent, the good looks he inherited from his mother, but it was not possible to remain conspicuously neat in a suit that had long since outgrown its usefulness in many respects, that was not even reputable except when sat upon, and which must necessarily bear testimony to the nature of George Edward's' sleeping- out place under the Yarra-Yarra boathouse, south-east corner, past where a board had been kicked off for purposes of ventilation.

In point of fact, though you might have found it hard to believe in the. more elegant days at "Willowholm," George Edward had run precipitately from home, friends, and family after killing a man, and, by virtue of doing what no sane person running from justice could by any stretch of imagination be expected to do, had eluded whatever pursuit was on his heels, and arrived in Australia, after a good time at Honolulu, with close upon two hundred pounds still left of the cash and chattels he had hastily scraped together ere making his break-away.

George had never at any time betrayed the customary mental attitudes of a murderer. He had had no particular compunction, and was not plagued with bad dreams. Even under the boathouse he slept well, and derived all the necessary refreshment therefrom. Doubtless in his own mind George, found ample justification for the act.

We know that there had been beautiful girl concerned, and that the man found on the Fens, with his head wretchedly disfigured, evidently with blows

from his own stick, was young Holt's rival, and young Holt had been heard to say that if Rucknow (the slain man) persisted in a certain course of conduct towards Miss Gertrude Tannfather, something serious would certainly overtake him.

Holt was now penniless, he had nothing of value, and was put to strange shifts to procure his daily bread. He had even learned to be grateful if not even a rind of cheese went with the diurnal crust. There had all along been in the young man's mind a hazy intention of getting work, some light, pleasant, amply remunerative employment that would net take up too much of his time, an elegant office under the Crown for choice: but when at length the money was all gone, and it was a case of the devil driving, George Edward found to his intense amazement that nobody wanted him, and that, as a positive matter of fact, they were justified since he could do absolutely nothing. As his ambition dwindled, and, when the spur of hunger became an insistent goad, George Edward offered himself for the most menial services, and was once actually employed as assistant washer-up and peeler of potatoes at a riverside restaurant, only to discover, to his intense annoyance, that he could not wash up without breaking one dish in five (that was a three days' average), while as a peeler of potatoes he was a most egregious failure. Try as he might there, was no potato left when he had done the peeling.

Many times George Edward had been hungry, often he had been cold and wet. He had lost fastidiousness with the taste for expensive Turkish cigarettes; he now regarded a hotel bar sandwich as a dainty past compare, and a pint of hot pea soup at a cheap eating-house was a thing to day-dream about by the hour as more fortunate men might dream of *houris* and sumptuous banquets in cloud-capped palaces.

George Edward was sitting on a seat by the Yarra, wondering in a casual way how death by drowning took a man. He was not aware of the picture of collapse and utter misery he made, but presently was recalled to consciousness of the world about him by the fall of a coin into his hand. Standing before him was a pretty child of perhaps three.

"For you," she said, and tripped away.

A man who had been amusing her by sending their terrier into the river after sticks took the child's hand, and they walked along the bank.

Holt remained staring half stupidly at the silver piece in his hand, struggling with an effeminate inclination to weep. In his palm lay a fat five-shilling piece. George had to wait till evening for his hot pea soup, but he had it, and he had roast mutton, and potatoes and cabbage, and a liberal helping of solid pudding known as jam roly. That night he slept at the Toff's Doss, so called because the price of a bed was fourpence, a penny higher than the ordinary doss, consequently the establishment was frequented by dead-beats of the more luxurious kind, temporarily in means.

It was at the Toffs' Doss that George Edward met Guido and Giuseppe. They were his room mates. Giuseppe was a barrel organist, Guido was his monkey.

"Excusa me, Giuseppe Visconti," said the peripatetic musician, introducing himself, "and Guido Visconti." This introduced the monkey.

Holt laughed under the humanising of the hot soup, and the cabbage, and mutton, and the roly-poly.

"Any relation?" he asked. The Italian's grin flashed a display of teeth so white that they conveyed an impression of a mouthful of snow.

"He iss firs cousin of me. Goot fella."

He held the monkey in his arm, and the little creature nibbled his ear affectionately, felt a little pang of envy. Poverty and loneliness are great humanising agents. George Edward had reached that condition in which even the fond regard of a little ape seems a desirable thing.

"He's great," said George Edward. "What can he do?"

"Ah, efferyting. Der iss notting he do notto do verra goot, better as myself. Ahh! He fine little a-fella, earna the plenty the mon'. I playa the org, Guido he waltza roun', stan on hees head, turna the head over the heel, twista the steek lika the mad Irish, gather in the sixa pence, the shilla! Ahh, the goot-a lettle ole monk!" He paused a minute, and looked down at Holt sitting on the side of his bunk. "Whata that I hear you seeng?"

"That was a strange song of Eastern Europe, called The Way of the World. I have had a full meal this evening, I was feeling a bit perked up. Hope you'll excuse."

"Eet was fine. Seeng heem again If please. Ahh, he iss fun, I lova the 'Wai, wai, go home now,' Ah, please, if you like."

George Edward sang the song *sotto voce*, and the monkey capered on the floor to the quaint cadence.

"See, see, he like eet! Guido Visconti is please!" cried the Italian in rapture. "Look, I tell you! You gott no mon. You all broke, what? Well whya not you come longa Guido and Giuseppe Visconti? I play the org, you seeng, Guido dance, he collecta da mon'."

Holt sat staring at Visconti. He saw the proposition only in one light, and a light that will appeal to all men who have gone without meals when going without meals was not merely a voluntary hygienic action, but the most awful compulsion in the world, it meant regular food perhaps, possible a decent kind of a sleeping place under a roof.

"But, I say, old chap, I'd be no possible use to you," he faltered.

"Ahh, yes, yes, you seeng the fine tenoro. I giff you the hat of the Tyrol, the beeg ear-reeng, the fine moustache. The great heap mon' we get. But you too beega the swell You noa like."

"Swell!" Holt thrust out a ragged leg. "Swell? Till a little girl, taking me for the rotten beast I was, put a coin in my hand today, I had not had a penny nor a bite for 56 hours Swell! by the Lord Harry I like that!"

"Ver' goot! Ve go halves, iss it? I taka the one half, you take the one half. Guido, the monk, he taka the one half."

Thus easily and simply it came about that George Edward Holt, gentleman, with the breeding, the education, and most of the instincts of the superior class to which he belonged, became an adjunct as it were to a lean Dago, a barrel organ, and a small but agreeable Gibraltar ape in yellow trousers, a red coat, and a blue cap, and sang about the suburban streets for his daily bread. If any fear of pursuit and recognition had ever haunted George Edward's more emotional moments it lied now.

His hair was naturally curly, of late necessity, which knows no hairdressers, had forced him to wear it long; he was given a down-drooping, black moustache, like that of a Bulgarian brigand, great brass ear-rings were swung in his ears, his complexion, as the result of out-door living through a Melbourne summer, was that of a saddle, a cute little rubber contrivance worn between lip and lower gum altered the expression of the mouth, and the eyes took on a languishing Italian quality as the result of Giuseppe's clever touch of make-up. Little indeed of George Edward Holt remained in Giorgio Visconti, companion of Guiseppe and Guido. Their method was simple, and not exacting. They strolled the better class suburb, and wherever there were children they pitched their hypothetical tent, and Giuseppe played. Then Giorgio sang his impish—

Wai, wai, go home now;
Thy husband is ill.
Is he ill? Praise God's will!
Darling Franz, but one more dance;
After that I'll homeward go.

Or he sang some other quaint song of the primitive, mid-European people of which songs he had a fairly large repertoire. Guido capered to the music, and went through his list of tricks, and then came the offertory.

One evening Giorgio assisted in a performance in the garden at "Willowholm," and with profuse bows and liberal thanks in the nearest he could get to Dago English, collected quite a substantial "plate" from many young ladies and gentlemen with whom he had associated on very friendly terms a year before, and nobody dreamed that George Edward Holt lurked behind the bandit moustache and beneath the be-ribboned Tyrolean hat of the minstrel boy.

Giuseppe was delighted with the first day's takings. When he emptied his pouch on the bed at the doss that evening he uttered three words of pagan Latin, not printable here, and lifted his hat against the ceiling.

"Twenta-fi' shill!" he cried, "Twenta shilla and the nina pence. Goot. Seven shilla the eacha one, and weeth the four shilla nina pence, the gran feast. Whata you say? The gran fast and the good wine."

They went together to a little eating house in Exhibition street, and fared well at the price, Giuseppe ordering "the steaka the on', the spagett' with the tomat'," and standing a bottle of Australian burgundy in the great exuberance the success of the partnership inspired.

THEY had been working together over five weeks on that afternoon when they took their stand before a neat establishment in East Melbourne, cut into three flats. There were children playing on the well-kept lawn before the house, and Giuseppe long professional experience had taught him that children were conscionable creatures who believed in seeing that those who amused them were honorably rewarded, and Guido never failed to reach their hearts, even if the organ did not succeed and the gaudy light tenor was not particularly to their taste.

Giuseppe played *Killarney*, Guido danced, and threw flip flaps, and walked on his hands. The children screamed happily at his funny capers and quaint friendly advances. Windows were opened when Giorgio Visconti lifted up his slight, sweet tenor and sang a peculiar Tyrolean Herdsman's Song.

"Goot!" whispered Giuseppe. "Singa the 'gain. They loofe heem. Eet weel be plenty the mon. Seenga the sad song; breaka the heart."

Giorgio sang his sad song.

Ah, gloomy the forest is,
Ah, trees loom on high,
Ah, handsome my sweetheart is,
Ah, proud then am I.

He had finished, and there was some applause, when Guido, attracted by some pleasant scent, or some fond, simian hope, fled down the garden path, and went hand-over-hand up the strands of creeper fronting the balcony.

Giorgio went after him. He reached the verandah and pulled himself up through the thick creeper, intending to stand on the baluster and reach the runaway. Instead he drew himself into sight of a party of two seated at a wicker table on the verandah, taking afternoon tea. They were a man and a woman, the man perhaps forty, heavy featured, with a purpled skin, hinting at dissipation; the woman not more than 22, and extremely pretty. The woman was looking at Giorgio with strained eyes, her face was deadly pale. As the singer's face come into view she started up, extending a tremulous hand.

"That song," she faltered; "that song?"

Giorgio Visconti dropped from the verandah, fled back along the garden path, and without a word to Giuseppe hastened down the street, almost running. He took the first turning and disappeared. He did not return.

Giuseppe lingered about the locality, full of wonder, and shaken with apprehension.

"We do-a not wanta lose heem, Guido." he told the monkey. "Giorgio ver nice chap; whyfor he runa the way. I notta understan'. P'raps he notta come back never."

Giuseppe returned home earlier than usual. They had a small vine-clad cottage at Richmond now, where they batched very comfortably, each putting a fair proportion of his earnings. Giorgio was at home; he sat at the table in the kitchen, all his make-up off, his face very pale, his eyes full of trouble.

"For why?" cried Giuseppe. "Ah, my good-a frien', for why?"

George Edward Holt gripped his arm.

"Suppose you had once loved a woman desperately, Visconti," he said; "suppose that you loved her so much that you once killed a man for her sake. Suppose you fled round the world, and that one day, long after, you climbed a verandah front in this far-out-of-the-way place, and came suddenly face to face with the man you killed and the woman you killed him for, taking tea together, what would you do?"

Giuseppe fell back with staring eyes and twitching hands.

"Body of Christi!" he said.

End