THE OVERCROWDED ICEBERG

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THE OVERCROWDED ICEBERG

There was a deal of ice about, and it came streaming south, in all kinds of shapes, right into the track of ships. There were flat-topped bergs and ice-fields, and there were all kinds of pinnacled danger-traps which were obviously ready to turn turtle and load up any unwary steamer with more ice than she would ever require to make cocktails with. That year ice was reported in great quantities as far south as latitude 40°, and there is every reason to believe that there was more ice run into than was ever reported by one unlucky liner and five tramps which were posted at Lloyd's as "Missing." The Western Ocean is no-peace-at-any-price body of water, and it tries those who sail it as high as any sea in the world, but when the Arctic turns itself loose and empties its refrigerator into the ocean fairway it becomes what seamen call "a holy terror." For ice brings fog, and fog is the real sea-devil, worse than any wind that blows. It was a remarkable thing in such circumstances that Captain Harry Sharpness Spink of Glos'ter preserved his equanimity. As Ward, the mate of the Swan of Avon, said, he wasn't likely to preserve the Swan.

"Dry up, Ward," said his commanding officer, "be so good as to dry up. When I require your advice to run the Swan I'll let you know, but in the meantime any uncalled-for jaw on that or any other subject will make me very cross."

"Do you think you can lick me since you went to see that swab at the Foreign Office?" asked Ward, as he edged towards Spink. "Don't you savvy, Spink, that I'm just as able as I was before to pick you up and sling you off of this bridge on to the main-deck?"

"That's as may be," said Spink, "and I don't deny by any means that you are a truculent and insubordinate beast. That's why I shipped you. But it don't follow by no means that because my unfortunate disposition compels me to have officers that can lick me, that I should let 'em navigate the Swan on the high lonesome principle. As I said before, you
will be so good as to shut your head. Ice or no ice, I'm going at my speed, not yours. Do you think you are out yachting that I should look after your precious carcase?"

"I believe you are ready to cast her away," said Ward. "Are the bally owners going shares with you?"

Spink shook his bullet head.

"They ain't, and you know it, Ward. There are men who would take such an insinuation as an insult, and if I could lick you perhaps I would. But you know as well as I do that if I wanted to cast her away I'd not do it here. There's no kind of fun that I so despise as open boats in cold weather, and the Western Ocean in ice-time isn't my market for a regatta. I ain't called on to explain to a subordinate my idea in running full speed through this fog and ice, but out of more regard for your feelings than you ever show for mine I don't mind revealing to you that I'm trusting to my luck."

"Your luck!"

"Yes, my luck," replied Spink with great firmness; "for luck I have and no fatal error. I've been thinking of it a lot this trip, and come to the conclusion that I've more solid luck than any man I know intimate. To say nothing of my commanding a rust and putty kerosine can like this old tramp at the age of thirty, when you, that can lick me in a scrap, have to be my mate though you're older, didn't I come out of that little affair at Aguilas with flying colours?"

"You came out with a hole in the funnel that you had to pay for yourself," said Ward. "I don't see where your luck came in."

"Don't you see it might have been worse, you ass?" cried Spink irritably. "But that's nothing. What I've been pondering over chiefly is my very remarkable luck in never having been caught, for a permanency, by any of the ladies that have been after me."

"They haven't lost much," said Ward discourteously. "And I reckon that you are mistook when you think you're that enticing that women hankers to drag you in by the hair of your head and kiss you by force."

"I never said so," replied Spink; "but the fact remains that I'm not married."

"You're a selfish beast, Spink, and I sincerely hope you'll be married before you're through," said Ward.

"You are the most insolent mate I ever had," replied Spink, "and the most unfeeling. Did you hear a fog-horn?"
Though it was in the middle of the forenoon watch it was pretty nearly as dark off the Banks as it would have been inside a dock warehouse, for the fog was as thick as a blanket. The rail and the decks were slimy with it, and the skipper and his mate were as wet as if it had been raining. The fog came swirling in thick wreaths, and sometimes half choked them. The wind from the north-east was light but very cold, as if it blew off the face of an iceberg, as it probably did. The Swan had an air of thorough discomfort, and in spite of it was steaming into the west at her best speed of nine knots.

It is no wonder that Spink and Ward quarrelled; there was hardly a soul on board who was not in a bad temper. Nothing disturbs seamen as much as fog, and the fact that Spink refused to be disturbed by it made it all the worse for the others. Ward was distinctly nervous, and let the fog play on his nerves. He saw steamers ahead that had no existence, and heard fog-horns that were nothing but the sound of his own blood in his ears.

"Yes, I do hear a fog-horn. It's on the starboard bow," he said anxiously.

"Not a bit of it, Ward, it's on the port bow. It's some damned old windjammer. I'll give her a friendly hoot."

He made the whistle give a melancholy wail, which was not answered by the ship for which it was intended, but by a gigantic liner which burst through the fog looking like high land, and booming at the rate of at least twenty knots. She loomed over them in the obscurity, and Ward gave an involuntary howl which fetched the Swan's crowd out on deck in time to see that there was no need to kick their boots off and swim for it. They were also in time to answer the insulting remarks of the liner's two officers on the bridge, as she scraped past them with about the length of a hand-spike to spare.

"You miserable, condemned tramp," said the liner as she swept by.

"Oh, you man-drowning dogs," replied the crowd of the Swan.

And everything else that was said never reached its mark. The liner was swallowed up, and resumed her attempt to make a good passage in spite of what she logged as "hazy" weather.

"What did I tell you about my luck?" asked Spink coolly, and Ward very naturally had nothing to say till he got his breath. What he said then could only have been said to a
skipper who had so unfortunate a disposition towards violence that he had two ship officers who could lick him.

"You are a wonder," said Ward, "and I wish you had been dead before I saw you. Ain't you thinking of others' lives if you ain't of your own?"

"What's the use of arguing with a thick-head like you, Ward?" asked Spink. "If that blamed express packet slowed down to our jog-trot her skipper would feel as sick as if he had anchored, and he'd log it 'dead slow,' and the rotters that judge divorces and collisions would call him the most praiseworthy swine that ever ran another ship down. What's the logic of it? Why should I daunter along at five knots? I might be lingering just where I'd be caught by such another or by a berg. I trust in Providence and my luck, and if you don't like it you can get out and walk."

At this moment a bellow was heard for'ard, "Ice on the starboard bow," and Spink, who for all his talk had the eyes of a cat, motioned to the man at the wheel to starboard the helm a few spokes. The Swan ground past a small berg, and had a narrower shave than with the liner.

"If we'd been going a trifle slower, Ward," said the skipper, "I might have plugged that lump plump in the middle, and you would have been down on the main-deck seeing the boats put over the side."

"There's no arguing with you," growled the mate, "you'd sicken a hog, and I wish it was Day's watch instead of mine. If he has the same temper when he wakes that he went below with, you'll have a dandy time with him."

He relapsed into a silence which Spink found more trying than open insubordination, for Spink was a cheerful soul.

"Here, I can't stand this, Ward——"

"What can't you stand?" asked Ward sulkily.

"Not being spoken to, of course," replied the skipper. "I order you to be more cheerful. I don't ask you to be polite, for I know you can't be; but you can talk when you aren't wanted to, so you just talk now."

"I won't unless you slow down," said Ward. "I don't see why I should talk and be cheerful with a sea-lunatic."

"Well," said Spink, "I'll slow her down to half speed to please you, for the Lord knows there's enough ice about without my having a lump of it for a mate. Ring her down to half speed, and be damned to you!"
Ward rang her to half speed without any second order.

"And I sincerely hope I shan't regret bein' weak enough to give way," said Spink, "for I'm a deal too easy-going and reasonable."

He lighted his pipe and smoked steadily. As both Ward and Day admitted, he might be hard to get along with, but he had nerves which would have done credit to a bull. Most skippers in the Western Ocean get into the state of mind which sees disaster before it is in sight, and if they don't take to drink, it is because they die of continued scares. Spink feared nothing under heaven, and though he sometimes drank more than was good for him, it was not because he wanted it, but because he liked it. There is a great distinction between these two ways of drinking. After a few minutes of silence he turned to Ward.

"Do you feel easier in your mind, Ward?"

"I do," said Ward. "I own it freely."

Spink snorted.

"As sure as ice is ice when you get a command of your own, you'll take to drink," said Spink. "And now, as you're satisfied at getting your own way, I'll go below and have a snooze."

About six bells in the forenoon watch the Swan ran out of "Bank weather" into beautiful sunlight, and Ward rang her up to full speed. All about them were icebergs small and large, which sparkled like jewels in the sun. There was one long, low berg right ahead of them, there was one to the south'ard which was peaked and scraped and pinnacled into the semblance of a medieval castle. Ward, as Spink said, had no soul for beauty unless it wore petticoats, and to him, as to all seamen, ice in any shape was ugly.

"If he's had his way she'd have come a mucker on that beggar ahead," said Ward, as he passed to windward of the big, table-topped berg. "I wish we was out of it. This fine spell won't last long, and there is more thick weather ahead of us or I'm a Dago."

He gave her up to Day at noon with pleasure, and took his grub alone as the skipper was fast asleep. When he turned out again at four o'clock he found the fog as thick as ever, and Bill Day as cross as he could stick at having to yank the whistle laniard every minute or so. As soon as Ward showed his nose on the bridge Bill let out at him.
“What kind of a relief do you call this?” he demanded savagely. “I wish I’d had this laniard round your neck, I’d have had you out of your bunk in good time, I swear.”

As a matter of fact, Ward was only three minutes behind time, and always prided himself on giving a good relief.

“Has Double Glos’ter been worrying you that you’re so sick?” he asked. “You know damn well that you owe me hours. Oh, don’t talk, go below and die, as you always do when you see blankets. Has there been much ice?”

“It’s blinking well all round the bally shop,” returned the second mate. “Didn’t you wake when I stopped her dead?”

“No,” said Ware.

“And you talk of my dying when I get below,” retorted Day. He slid off the bridge, and proceeded to justify the mate’s accusation by falling asleep before his head touched the pillow, in spite of the melancholy hootings of the Swan as she picked her way delicately in the fog and ice. It was very nearly eight bells again before Captain Harry Sharpness Spink of Glo’ster showed on deck. As he meant to stay on deck all night he had really been very moderate.

“So I’ve missed Newcastle?” he said.

“Lucky for you,” returned Ward; “his temper was horrid.”

Spink sighed.

“I’m the most unfortunate man that ever commanded any blasted hooker that ever sailed the seas,” he said. “Day tries me more than you do, Ward. There are times I regret I ever knew him. I must have been brought up badly to have such a disposition as I have. Well, well, it can’t be helped, a man is what he was meant to be, there is no getaway from that. But I should admire to see you plug him. Oh, I say, it’s fairly thick, ain’t it?”

It was a deal thicker than much of the pea-soup served up in the Swan, though Spink rather prided himself on the way the men were fed in her.

“Are you nervous?” asked Spink.

“I ain’t, by any means happy,” said Ward; “and no seaman worthy of the name can be happy on the Banks in weather like this.”

“That’s a slur on me, I know,” said Spink, “but I look over it.”

“What would you do if you didn’t?” asked Ward.
Spink did not reply to this challenge, and inside of a minute both he and Ward had something to think of besides quarrelling about nothing. The fog lifted for a moment, and showed ice all about them. The air grew bitterly cold, and was soon close on the freezing point. Spink slowed her down again, and almost literally felt his way through the obstacles. Once he touched a small berg, but when he did so he was going dead slow. Ward stood by and saw the "old man" handle the Swan with admiration. When they were once more through the thick of it he spoke.

"I wish I could understand you, Spink," he said, with far more respect than he often showed. "You're the most reckless skipper I ever sailed with, and now you're more careful than I should be."

"I don't trust in my luck till I can't see," said Spink, and he turned her over to Ward, saying, "Go your own pace, my son. It's most agreeable when you are civil."

And next minute the catastrophe happened, for at half speed the old Swan bunted her nose into a low but very solid berg, and the result was very much the same as if she had tried conclusions head on with a dock wall. She crumpled up like a bandbox when it is inadvertently sat on, and it would have been obvious to the least instructed observer that her chance of going much farther was a very small one indeed. She trembled and was jarred to her vitals, her iron decks lifted up like a carpet, with the wind underneath it, one of the funnel stays parted with a loud twang, and the crowd forward came out on deck as if the devil was behind them. And the fog was still so thick that it was impossible to see them from the bridge. But they soon saw Bill Day, for even his ability to sleep through most things could not stand being thrown out of his bunk.

"What's up now?" roared the second mate. And the skipper showed at his very best.

"Ward would have her at half speed," said Spink coolly, "and that gave the southerly drift time to bring that blasted berg just where it could do its work."

And poor Ward hadn't a word to say. Spink had plenty. He spoke to the crew below.

"Keep quiet there—you," he snapped, without the least sign of a disturbed mind. And up came the chief engineer, McPherson, in pyjamas and a blue funk.
“What’s happened, captain? Oh, what’s gone wrang the noo?” he cried.

“She’s hit more than a penn’orth of ice, Mr. M’Pherson,” replied the skipper, “and if I were you I’d get my clothes on. Tell me what water she is making, and look slippy. Mr. Ward, see to the boats. Mr. Day, take the steward and a couple of hands and get some stores up on deck.”

He was so cool that he inspired unlimited confidence, although it was now obvious to them all that the Swan’s very minutes were numbered. It did not require old Mac’s report that the water was coming on board like a millstream to show them that. The engineers and firemen came on deck, and Spink addressed them in what he considered suitable and encouraging terms.

“Now then, you stokehold scum, less jaw there; you won’t get drowned this trip.”

They were exceedingly glad to hear it, for a lot of them were of a different opinion and said so. There was no time to waste, and indeed none was lost. The real trouble began when it was found that one boat wouldn’t swim, after the manner and custom of boats in the Mercantile Marine, and when another was staved in by a swinging lump of ice the moment it took the water. This lump was a small “calf” of the larger berg which they had struck on, and the next moment the original obstacle swung alongside, and ground heavily against the steamer.

“There ain’t enough boats,” said the skipper. “Mr. Ward, d’ye think you could hook on to that berg? We’ll have to board it and make out as best we can.”

As the Swan was a vessel of close on fourteen hundred tons, her kedge anchor ought to have weighed something like four and a half hundredweight. As a matter of fact it had once belonged to something in the shape of a tug, and it weighed barely two. Ward picked it up as if it was a toy and hove it on the berg, and followed it with a warp.

“Bully for you,” said the skipper, and as he spoke the Swan gave forth a noise very much like a hiccup. “Down on the ice the port watch, and the others get the stores over the side. Steward, all the blankets you can get. Mr. Day, put over the side anything to make a raft of; we may want one if the berg melts.”

Spars and hencoops and everything that would float went
over the side, some of it on the ice and some of it into the water. A couple of hands in the only sound boat kept her clear of the berg and the Swan, and shoved the floating dun-nage to those on the new vessel, which had promptly been christened "The Sailor's Home." Their late home was about to disappear, and said so in terms that were quite unmistakable by the initiated.

"Now then," said Spink, "when the rest of you are over the side I'm ready. Ward, take the chronometer as I lower it down. And be careful with this bag, there's the ship's papers and my sextant in it."

"Now boom her off," said Spink, "for the Swan's going."

There was a tremendous crack on board.

"The fore bulkhead," said Spink, and then the poor old Swan cocked her stern in the air. A furious gush of steam came up from the engine-room and all the stokehold ventilators, until the sea came almost level with the after hatch.

"She's going down head foremost," said the crew, "poor old Swan."

And then there was a mighty shivaree on board. The whole of the cargo in No. 1 and No. 2 holds fetched away, and evidently shot right out at the bows. All this mixture of cargo must have been followed by the engines slipping from their beds, for instead of doing a dive head foremost, the Swan's stern, which had been high in air, went under with a big splash, and she lifted her ragged bows in the fog before she went down with a long-drawn, melancholy gurgle.

"She warn't such a bad old packet after all," said the sad crew. And for at least a minute no one said another word. Then Ward spoke.

"Where the hell's your luck now, Spink?"

"What's become of your theory that half-speed in a fog is any better than going at it at my rate?" asked Spink. "You haven't a leg to stand on, and I don't propose to take advice from you again. You've disappointed me sadly! My luck is where it was, except in the matter of my officers, and it's notorious that I have no luck with them. We're out of the Swan without a life lost, we've got heaps of grub, plenty of blankets, and a fine comfortable iceberg under us. There's many this hour in the Western Ocean that might envy us, and don't you make any error about that. I come from Glo'ster, and my name is Captain Harry Sharpness Spink,"
and drunk or sober it's as good as havin' your life insured to sail with me. Oh, I'm all right, and I propose to plug the first man that growls, if he's as big as the side of a house."

None of them was in trim to take up the challenge, and Spink lighted his pipe.

"Three cheers for the captain," said the crew, and they cheered him heartily, for which he thanked them most regally, though he somewhat spoilt the effect of it afterwards by telling them to go to hell out of that and pick a place to camp in at a little distance.

"So far as I can see in this fog there's plenty of room for everyone," said Spink, as the night grew dark. That was where he was wrong, for they soon discovered, by falling into the water on the far side, that they were on no great ice island, but had picked a very small berg indeed. Spink consoled them by telling them that they wouldn't be on it long, and they could hardly help believing him as he seemed so certain of it.

"And after all," he said to Day and Ward, "the old Swan was insured for more than she was worth, and I shouldn't be surprised if the owners were pleased with the catastrophe."

He wrapped himself in blankets and lay down. In five minutes he was breathing like a child.

"I tell you," said the second mate, "the 'old man' is a wonder, for all we have to treat him like a kid. I say, Ward, let's be kind to him to-morrow and say Glo'ster is just as good as any other county."

"I don't mind," said Ward; "but if we do he'll take advantage of it."

"Oh, let him," said Day. "He's a fair scorch, and if he gets too rowdy we can always put him down. On my soul I'm gettin' to like him. He's got the pluck of a bull-dog. Where's old Mac?"

They found Mac sitting in a puddle of melting ice-water, weeping about his family at Glasgow. The second engineer, whose name was Calder, was trying to console his chief by saying it might have been worse.

"It canna be waur, man," said old Mac. "What can be waur than bein' wreckit, and on a wee sma' bit o' ice that's visibly meltin' as I sit on it? The cauld is strikin' through to my very banes, and in the hurry I've had the sair misfortune to come away wi'out the medicine for my rheumatics."
To-morrow I'll be i' a knot wi' 'em, and nothing for it but caul water, which I couldn't abide sin' I was a bairn. And all my work on the engines wasted. I'm a mournful man this hour."

He drank something out of a bottle. As he had left his medicine behind it could not have been that. It certainly did him no good, for he wept all the more after taking it, and throwing himself in Calder's arms he insisted that the second engineer was his mother, and begged her not to insist on his having a cold bath.

"He's a puir silly buddy," said Calder, "and I've no great opeenion of him as an engineer, though he's no' the fool he seems the noo."

And the night wore away while Mac wept and Spink slept the sleep of the righteous, and Ward and Day smoked in silence. As for the crew, they lay huddled up together, and only woke to swear at the new kind of "doss." On the whole, everyone but the chief engineer was not unhappy, and even he, by reason of the attention he paid to the bottle which did not contain medicine, fell fast asleep and snored like a very appropriate fog-horn. The dawn broke very early, at about three, and it found most of the inhabitants of the berg still unconscious. In the night the fog lifted, and the sea was almost as calm as a duck-pond. What wind there was now blew from the west, and was much warmer than it had been. Within a mile there were two or three other small bergs, but when Spink grunted and yawned and crawled out of his blankets there was nothing else in sight.

"Humph," said Spink, "this is a rummy go, and if I didn't come from Glo'ster I should be in a blue funk. I must keep up my spirits, and show 'em what my luck's like. I've been in worse fixes than this many a time, and after all, with a good seaworthy berg underfoot, and lashings of grub, I don't see why anyone should growl. If anyone does I'll knock his head off. Now, which of these jokers is the cook?"

He found the steward, and booted him gently in the ribs. At least he said it was gently, whatever the aggrieved steward thought of it.

"Now then, Cox," said the skipper, "turn out and find me the cook—he's one of this pile of snorin' hogs—and let's have some breakfast."
By the time the grub was ready, Ward and Day were "on
deck," and the sun was beginning to think of doing the
same. The two mates looked round the horizon and saw
nothing to comfort them. The only cheerful thing in sight
was the skipper, and for very shame the more pessimistic
Ward screwed up a smile.

"Not so bad, is it?" asked Spink.
"It might be worse, I own," replied the mate. "What
course are you steerin', Spink?"

did you chaps sleep?"

Ward said he hadn't slept at all, but Day averred that he
had dreamt he had been locked in a refrigerator belonging to
some cold-meat steamer from Australia. And just then the
steward said that breakfast was ready. It consisted of cold
tinned beef, iced biscuit, and melted berg. There were signs
of a mutiny among the crew at once.

"Say, cook, where's the cawfy?" they asked, and they
were only reduced to a proper sense of the situation by a few
strong remarks from Captain Spink. The riot subsided
before it really began, and all the "slop-built, greedy sons of
corby crows," as Spink called them, sat down meekly and
ate what they were given. And then the sun came up and
warmed them, and they soon began to feel well and happy.
But now the real trouble of the situation began to develop.
The heat of the summer sun when it once got high enough
to do some work began to melt the berg. It was rather
higher in the middle than it was on the edges, and it was
most amazingly slippery. The water ran off it in streams,
and as it was barely big enough to start with, it looked as if
they would shortly be crowded.

"I never thought of this," said Spink. "I tell you, Ward,
she'll turn turtle before we know where we are. We must
put all the stores in the boat, and have a man in her to keep
her clear if the berg capsizes."

"Your luck ain't what you let on," said Ward gloomily;
"the thing faid melts under us, and we'll have to swim."

"To thunder with your croaking," said Spink. "Oh, do
dry up."

"I wish the berg would," said Ward, as he superintended
the shipment of the stores. When it was done he put a
cockney deck-hand into her and made him shove off.
“Blimy,” said Lim’us, “I’m likely to be the on’y dry of the ’ole shoot.”

The word “shoot” soon threatened to become highly appropriate, for about noon the berg was distinctly cranky. However fast it melted above, it was obviously melting much faster down below, for they had apparently struck a streak of comparatively warm water, and when ice does go it goes fast. The “crowd” got very uneasy, and Spink got very cross as he arranged them so as to trim his craft.

“Sit still, you swine,” said Spink. “Do you want to capsize us?”

“But we’re so cold be’ind, sittin’ still, sir,” said one bolder than the rest.

“I’ll warm you if I have to come over and speak to you,” said Spink, and he presently undertook to do it. The moment he rose to carry out his threat the iceberg wobbled in the most dreadful manner, and so encouraged the offender that he laughed.

“If you come to ’it me, captain, she’ll go over,” he said with a malicious grin.

“So she will,” said Ward, laying hold of the skipper to prevent his moving. But Spink was not to be balked. He spoke to another of the men sitting near the mutineer.

“Jackson, you come here while I go over there and dress Billings down.”

“Don’t you go, Jackson, for if you do I’ll dress you down to a proper tune arterwards,” said the insubordinate Billings, as he grabbed hold of Jackson, who looked at the skipper appealingly.

“What am I to do, sir?” he asked.

“You’re to obey orders,” said Spink.

“Don’t you forgit I’ll plug you if you do,” said Billings. Poor Jackson was obviously in serious difficulties, for Billings was the boss and bully of the fo’c’lse. He could even lick any of the firemen, and there were some very tough gentry among that gang.

“If I don’t come over to you, sir, what will you do?” Jackson asked the skipper nervously.

“I’ll come over to you, if we’re in the drink the next moment,” replied Spink firmly. “Don’t any of you Johnnies think you can best me. Are you coming or are you not?” Jackson shook his shock head.
“This is very hard lines on a peaceable cove like me,” said Jackson; “but if I am to catch toko, I’d much rather take it from Billings than from you, sir.”

And as he spoke, he smote Billings very violently on the nose. Billings, who expected nothing less, let a horrid bellow out of him and promptly slipped on the ice. He fell, and slid overboard with a howl, and the berg came near to capsizing then and there.

“Well done, Jackson,” said Spink approvingly, as Billings disappeared in the sea, “very well done indeed.” And then Billings rose to the surface.

“Can you swim, Billings?” asked Spink with an air of kindly curiosity. “Oh yes, I see you can, so keep on doing it till you feel a little less mutinous.”

It took Billings rather less than a minute to become obedient, for though the sea was warm enough to melt the berg it was by no means so warm as a swimming bath, and he presently howled for mercy and was dragged upon the ice once more.

It was lucky for Billings that the sun by now was really hot. He stripped off his clothes and squeezed them as dry as he could, while he threatened to kill Jackson as soon as he could. His threats were interrupted by the sound of a large crack, and presently there were obvious signs that the berg was about to capsize. Lim’us got quite excited as they discussed the situation, and came in close, till Ward ordered him to get farther away. As he rowed off reluctantly he encouraged them by yelling, “She’s goin’ over! May the Lord look sideways at me if she ain’t.”

“Oh, oh!” said poor old Mac, “I’m a puir meeserable sinner wi’ a sore head and no medicine, and I’ll be wet in a crack, and I’ll die wi’out a wee drappie. Oh, oh, oh!”

And the berg stopped cracking but took on an ugly cant. A big lump of ice broke off it down below and came up to the surface with a leap.

“Steady, you swine,” said Spink politely to his unhappy crew; and Ward asked him where his luck was. Whatever answer he was to get he never knew, for with a curious heave the berg started on a roll, and with a suddenness which took them all with surprise she bucked them into the Atlantic, together with what materials they had for a raft. It was a lucky thing for at least half of them that there had been time
to save such dunnage from the Swan, for half the crowd, including M'Pherson and Day, could not swim a stroke. Ward grabbed Day and helped him to a spar, and Spink did the same for old Mac. And in the meantime Lim's us made everyone furious by squealing with laughter in the boat. Billings threatened him with death when he got hold of him, and Spink had no mind or breath to rebuke the horrid and bloodthirsty language with which the late mutineer reinforced his threats.

"Oh, oh!" squealed old Mac when the skipper laid hold of him; "oh, oh, I'm drooned, I'm drooned! and I've the rheumatism bad in a' my joints."

And Spink said he was the howling and illegitimate descendant of three generations without any character whatever, as he dragged him to a floating oar alongside the capsized berg. Now it was not so high out of water, and there was far more space on it. For some time it would be comparatively stable, and when Spink scrambled on it the first of anyone he congratulated himself on his never-failing luck. He helped the rest on board, and the whole space was soon occupied by an unclad crowd wringing the Atlantic out of their clothes, and trying to get warm in the sun. It was quite astonishing how cheerful everyone was, with the single exception of that confirmed pessimist the chief engineer. At their end of the berg the men took to skylarking, and Billings actually forgave Jackson.

"You done what I'd ha' done myself," said Billings, "for I owns now I'd a'most as soon take on that big brute Ward as 'ave the skipper get about me. But when I give 'im that back-talk I was that icy be'ind that I was like froze Haustrial mutting, and as cross as if my old woman 'ad been relatin' what 'er mother thought of me. I furgives you, Jackson, I furgives you this once. But don't you hever 'it me on the sneller agin, or a penny peep-show won't be in it for the sight you'll be."

It was considered by the crowd that Billings by this act of nobility had shown himself a "gent," and Billings swaggered greatly on the strength of it.

The crew, of course, did not think. They were not paid to do so. All that was the officers' business. It hardly occurred to them that the ice on which they stood wasn't likely to last for ever. In the warmth of the sun they forgot
the discomforts of the past night, and did not think of the
night to come. But Ward did, and he was still very gloomy
on the situation.

"Just as she spilt us," said Ward, "I was askin' you your
opinion of your luck. What do you think of it now? Per-
haps you'll use that regal authority of a skipper to get us out
of the hole you've got us in."

If ever any skipper had the right to be justly indignant,
Spink thought he was that man.

"The hole I got you in! I like that, oh, I do like that.
Who was it, I ask, that pestered me to go half speed, and
almost wept till I said 'Have your own way, you cross-eyed
swine'?

"You never addressed them words to me," said Ward
truculently, "or I'd have given you what for, and well you
know it."

Spink shook his head.

"I ain't saying that I used them very words," he urged,
"all I mean is that that was what I meant when I let you have
your own silly way, which has landed me and Day, to say
nothin' of the rest, on a penn'orth of ice in mid-Atlantic,
more or less."

"Don't bring me into the argument," said Day. "You're
a cunning sort of a chap, Spink, but you needn't try to raise
ructions between me and Ward, for I won't have it. I know
you, Spink."

"I'm a very unfortunate man," said poor Spink, "for at
this very moment I'd give three months' pay to be able to
lick the pair of you. I did think after what the Chief Foreign
Officer said of my authority that I should be more civilly
treated by my officers, even if I have an unfortunate dis-
position which compels me to lick them if I can. I shipped
you two because I can't, but that ain't any reason for makin'
me miserable, or at any rate more miserable than bein' in the
position of not bein' able to."

"Oh, all right," said Day, "go ahead and moan. Nobody's
stoppin' you, is he? Let him alone, Ward. He's all right;
and as for fightin', I believe I could teach him to be too
much for myself in a month with the boxin' gloves."

"I wish you would," said Spink. "Oh, Day, you've no
notion how I should enjoy pastin' you."

He fell into contemplation of such a joy, and did not
speak till Ward clapped him on the back and said he was a very good sort after all.

"And if it's any use to you, I own that my havin' gone half speed that time may have put us here. But sayin' so much don't mean that I now approve of buttin' headlong into an ice-pack at twenty knots an hour. But to go back to what I was sayin' before you started this row, where's your luck, Spink? To my mind it don't look so healthy a breed of luck as you let on, and it's my own notion that old Mac is of my opinion, to judge by the sad expression of his countenance."

"To blazes with the old fool!" said Spink. "Who cares what he thinks? My luck is where it was, and I reckon to get out of this with flyin' colours, and never a man short and nothin' against the certificates of any of us. I've noticed all my life that I seem to be under the special care of Providence, and I don't believe Providence will go back on me after plantin' me here all safe and sound on an iceberg. Day, rake up that cook, and give the cockney in the boat a hail. We'll have some grub. I've a twist on me like a machine-made hawser."

They went to dinner, and the sun did something of the same sort. At any rate, it went out of sight, and a thick fog came down on the castaways.

"We 'opes no bloomin' packet 'll come and run us pore blighters down," said the men as they fell to work on the grub, "for accordin' to the 'old man,' who is the cheerfulest bloke in difficulties we ever struck, we're right in the track of the 'ole shoot of 'em, and may be picked up or scooted into the sea again any minute."

As a matter of fact, they were then on the southern tail of the Bank, for when the Swan butted her nose into the berg, she was pretty well at the locality on the Grand Bank where the usual "lane" to New York is left for the lane to Halifax. The very watch before the collision they had verified their position by flying the "blue pigeon," as seamen call the deep-sea lead, and ever since then they had been floating in the Labrador current to the south and east. To locate them exactly, they were just about where the Great Circle Track of steamers from the English Channel to the Gulf of Mexico crosses the tail of the Bank. There was every chance of something coming along there, even if it was getting late
enough in the season for the big liners to take the route to the south’ard for fear of the very ice which had brought them to grief.

“Oh yes,” said the crowd, when they were full up with food, “we’re all right.”

Nevertheless the fog did not cheer them up to any great extent, and when it showed signs of lasting all day they grew less happy.

“A hundred vessels might pass us in this,” said Ward, who for all his bigness had much less endurance than the skipper, and was now hardly more cheerful than old Mac. “I wish I was out of it.”

“Oh, wish again,” retorted Spink contemptuously. “Do you know, Ward, that you make me tired? What do you get by howlin’ and growlin’? I know this is goin’ to come out all right, and I won’t be discouraged by any silly jaw of a man that ought to know better. Shut up.”

And to Day’s surprise Ward shut up. At that very moment there came a bellow from Billings, who had relieved Lim’us in the boat.

“Berg, ahoy!” roared Billings.

“Hallo!” replied the skipper. “What’s the matter now?”

“I ’ears a steamer, so help me Dick!” bellowed Billings joyfully. “I ’ears ’er plain. Don’t none of you blokes ’ear ’er too?”

There was such a buzz among the crowd that it would have been hard to hear a fog-horn, and it was not until Spink had hit three, kicked half a dozen, and used at least ten pounds’ worth of bad language, according to 19 Geo. II, cap. 21, that anything like silence was restored. Then it was obvious that Billings had made no mistake. The sea was fairly calm, the breeze from the west was light, and any sound carried long and far.

“She’s coming from the westward,” said Spink, as he consulted a toy compass on his watch-chain.

“No,” said Day, “she’s bound west, or I’m a Dutchman.”

“Then you come from Amsterdam for a certainty,” said the “old man” crossly. “Now, men, shout all together when I say three. One, two, three.”

And just as the men yelled there was a boot-too-oot from the steamship, which for a moment made them believe she had heard them. But Spink knew better, and when there was another hoot he grabbed Day by the arm.
"By Jemima," said Spink, "we're both right, Day. There are two of 'em; that second squeal never came out of the same whistle that the first one did!"

Now the nature of fog is something that no fellow can understand. Seamen must not think they are a long way off if they hear a sound faintly, or even if they do not hear it at all. That's bad enough, but there is worse behind. They are not to reckon they are near because they hear it plainly, or that it isn't to be heard farther away at some other spot if they cease to hear it at all. And, furthermore, any notion that a sound comes from any particular direction is the biggest trap of the lot. Now the uninitiated can understand that they do not understand, and that seamen are in the same awkward fix whenever a fog comes down to cheer them on their weary way. The two steamers coming out of nothingness and butting into it were commanded by men who trusted to the evidence of their senses, as if they were police magistrates trusting to policemen. They hooted and bellowed in the most wonderful manner, and said with one short blast that they were directing their course to starboard. And as neither knew where the other was, or where he was himself, they directed their courses with the most marvellous precision to the exact spot on the tail of the Grand Bank in the Western Ocean where they could collide. And they did so with a most horrid grinding crash, and with one long, last, fearful and hopeless wail on their steam-whistles.

"Holy sailor," said the iceberg's crew, "this time they've been and gone and done it!"

Ward asked Spink sickly if he had any remarks to make about his luck. Spink hadn't, but he had some remarks to make about Ward, which in other circumstances would have led to war. While he was relieving his overcharged mind there was a horrid uproar coming out of the fog; for both the steamships were blowing off steam, and everybody on board of them appeared to be running the entire show at the top of his voice. And just as it was all at its extreme point of interest the fog played one of its commonest tricks, and with an anacoustic wall shut off the whole dreadful play in one single moment.

The castaways turned to each other in alarm, and Billings, who had nearly lost himself in the fog, rowed in close.

"I think they've both foundered," said Billings, and it
certainly looked as if he were right, in spite of what Spink said to him.

"I believe the josser is right," said Day; and old Mac wept and said he was sure of it, and that he had the rheumatics badly, and that he was very cold. And to add to Spink's joy, once more Ward asked if he still thought he was under the especial protection of Providence. Then for the first time Spink lost his temper and went for Ward, and by dint of taking him by surprise served him as Jackson had served Billings.

"Take that, you swab," said the enraged skipper. "I'll teach you to be so discouraging and so blasphemous as to cast a slur on Providence."

And when Ward climbed upon the ice again all he said was:

"All right, Spink, you wait till we're on board that beastly packet you and Providence have up your sleeves."

And everyone sat down and smoked, and said how grieved they were for the poor unfortunate beggars who had been drowned through having no nice comfortable iceberg to take refuge on. Then they had their supper and went to sleep, leaving all their cares in the faithful hands of poor Spink.

"Ah," he sighed, "my unfortunate disposition cuts me off from all real sympathy. I've no one to confide in at sea or ashore, and as if bein' a shipmaster wasn't solitary enough I must plug Ward and make him hostile. I wish I'd been brought up better and licked more before I got into this fatal habit of fighting."

He couldn't go to sleep, and took to walking as far as the narrow limits at his disposal would allow him. When he found that he was in for a restless night he told the man on the look-out that he could turn in. Jackson, who happened to be the look-out, lingered a little before he did as he was told.

"Do you think, sir," he asked with some trepidation at his daring to speak to the skipper, "do you think, sir, that we shall ever get out o' this?"

"Of course we shall," said Spink. "What do you suppose I'm here for? Go to sleep, Jackson, and mind your own business. You'll be all right."

And Jackson, who was a simple-minded seaman of the real old sort, fell asleep feeling that the "old man" was to be
THE OVERCROWDED ICEBERG

relied on even on an iceberg in the Western Ocean and in a fog as thick as No. 1 canvas.

For by now the fog was thick and no mistake. As Spink walked the ice, and squelched with his sea-boots in the melted puddles, he could hardly see his hand before his face, and more than once he nearly walked overboard. At midnight it was even thicker, and he was obliged to give up walking and come to anchor on a tin of corned beef, and though he was on watch it has to be owned that he dozed for a few minutes, just as Limpus did in the boat which lay a little way off the berg. When Spink woke he found it just about as dark as their prospects. When his eyes cleared, he sighed and looked about him, with a mind which took some of its tone from the fog and from the dull dead hour of two o’clock in the morning.

“I wonder if my luck is out,” he sighed, and he stared stolidly into the solidest darkness. It was certainly monstrously dark in one direction. He rubbed his eyes and grunted. Then he lighted a match and looked at his little compass. His mind went back to the lady in Bristol who had given it to him.

“She was a very pretty piece,” said Spink thoughtfully. “But I’m damned if I can see why it should be darkest towards the east.”

He rose up and peered into the fog. Again he rubbed his eyes and then stood staring.

“Perhaps another berg,” he said, “but—”

He stood as still as if his figure had been turned into stone, and presently he looked to the sleeping crowd, who were all as solid with sleep as if they were dead, and nodded in the strangest way.

“Oh, oh, if it is; if it only isn’t a horrid delusion,” he murmured. He turned to the darkness again and shook his fist at it and the fog. At that very moment the fog rolled up like a curtain. Right in front of Spink, and not farther than a man could chuck a biscuit, there lay the strange and almost monstrous apparition of a silent, lightless, and derelict steamer!

“What did I say to Ward about Providence?” asked Spink of the whole Atlantic Ocean. “Ward cast a nasty and uncalled-for slur on its ways when he said what he did. But now I’ve got the bulge on him, and no fatal error about it.”
He rubbed his hands together and smiled very happily.
"There'll be fine pickings in this and no mistake," he murmured. "Oh, this'll be something like salvage. And I'll lay dollars to cents that I can tell how it ever happened. Ah, here comes the fog again!"

The fog dropped down in a thin veil, till the dim and ghostly derelict looked still less substantial than it had done. Then it heaved and rolled in, and the deserted packet could be seen no more. Spink sighed but was happy.

"I'll give Ward the biggest surprise he ever had in his life," he said, as he turned to the boat in which young Lim'us was doing a very solid caulking. Spink kicked some ice into small lumps, and at the third attempt he hit the sleeper on the side of his head. Lim'us woke with a start, and heard the captain's voice just in time to prevent him threatening to eviscerate the swab who was slinging things at him.

"Hold your infernal jaw," said Spink in a savage whisper, "and pull in here quiet, or I'll murder you."

Lim'us obeyed instantly, though he had doubts as to whether it was wise to come within arm's length of the skipper after having been caught asleep.

"I warn't asleep, sir; stri'my blind if I was," he began as he came up to the berg.

"Dry up and say nothin'," said Spink. "If you wake anyone I'll see you don't sleep again for a week. Hand up some of that truck and get the stem sheets clear, I want to get in myself."

There was more than a chance of not finding the derelict and of losing the iceberg, and Spink knew it. Just as he was about to chance it he remembered that he had a couple of balls of strong twine in the bag into which he had dumped all his belongings, including the precious ship's papers, when he left the Swan. As he recalled this lucky fact a heavenly smile overspread his handsome features.

"It's a splendid notion," said Spink. "I feel as proud of it as a dog with two tails! I wish those chaps at the Foreign Office were here now; they would enjoy it better than a play."

He stepped to his bag as lightly as a Polar bear after a sleeping seal, and when he found the twine he tied the end of it to Ward's leg.

"Ward at one end and Providence at the other," said Spink with a grin. "Oh, won't he be surprised!"
And the skipper went back to the boat, paying out the twine as he went. He was chuckling in the merriest way, and poor Lim'us, who was cold, and very sick of the whole affair, thought that the strain had been too much for him.

"'E's balmy on the crumpet, that's what's the matter wiv 'im," said Lim'us as he obeyed orders reluctantly, and pulled into the solid fog with a mad and grinning skipper, who would probably scupper him as soon as they were out of earshot of the crew.

"I wish I was in Lim'us," said he. "I'd give all my wyges to see Commercial Rowd agin."

And still Spink chuckled and paid out the twine, until suddenly the boat ran into a still deeper darkness.

"Easy, boy," said the skipper, with a strange note of exultation in his voice. "Easy, we're there now."

As he spoke the boat ground up against the side of the derelict, and Lim'us turned about on the thwart and touched the iron plates with his hand.

"If you let a yell out of you," said the captain, "I'll cut your throat from ear to ear."

But indeed Lim'us was incapable of yelling. All he could do was to gasp, and he did that as effectively as if he was a bonito with the grains in him. And the boat drifted towards the vessel's bows, while Spink looked for the easiest way on board.

"They ran like rats," said Spink. "Oh, I know the way they ran. They got on board the other boat, and think this one is now surprisin' the cod-fish."

They reached the bows at last, and came round on the port side, and there Spink found what he looked for. The vessel had been cut down to within six inches of the water's edge about forty feet aft from the bow.

"Just as I laid it out in my mind," said Spink. "Catch hold you, while I get on board."

He dropped about ten fathoms of the twine into the water, and with the rest of the ball in his pocket he scrambled up the horrid gash in the derelict's side and got on deck. He walked for'ard and got the twine clear out on the starboard side, pointing for the unconscious mate. Then he made it fast and took a look at his new command. In spite of the fog it was not difficult to see that she was a fine new boat of about two thousand tons, built and fitted, as was pretty
obvious from her derricks, for a fast freight-boat. It was equally obvious that the whole crew had evacuated her in a panic, for Spink found the skipper's berth with the bed-clothes on the floor, along with a sad and derelict pair of trousers. The "old man" had evidently been in his bunk instead of being on the bridge, and, so far as Spink could see, he had stayed to grab nothing but the ship's papers, without which there can be no maritime salvation.

"This will be a very valuable salvage job," said Spink, as he licked his lips after taking a pull at a bottle of whisky which he found only too handy to the lips of the former skipper. "There's money in this, oh, lots of it. And now I'll show Ward where my luck comes in. And I'll have old Mac and Calder patch up that rent in her before it comes on to blow again."

He put the bottle in his pocket and went for'ard, feeling a deal more proud than if he owned a fleet. For the deserted steamer, the name of which was the Winchelsea of Liverpool, was a direct proof that his luck was still what it had been. He found the end of the twine, and hauled in the slack very cautiously.

"I wish I could see his face," said Spink, as he gave the twine a yank which made Ward sit up suddenly and wonder what had happened to him.

"Oh, oh, oh!" said Ward. And then Spink gave the line another yank which almost started Ward on an ice run for the water. But this time he found out what was the matter, and laid hold of the twine.

"Who the devil's pulling my leg?" he roared in such stentorian tones that the whole crowd woke up instantly.

"I am," said Spink. "And I'll thank you to pay attention, and not lie there snoring while I do all the work."

"Where are you?" said Ward. "I can't see you."

"Where d'ye think I am?" asked Spink. "While you were asleep I went out and looked for a new job and found it."

As he spoke there were sudden signs of dawn, and once more the curtain of the mist rolled away, and the late crew of the Swan saw a big steamer within fifty feet of them, with the late skipper of the Swan leaning over her side smoking his morning pipe.

"Jerusalem!" said the crew, and they shook their heads with amazement, while Ward scratched his. Day whistled,
old Mac burst into joyful tears, and Billings used some awful language to show his gratitude. And Spink said:

"When you have washed and shaved and put on clean collars, I should be much obliged by your coming on board and doing enough work to melt the hoar-frost that's on you. Limehouse, scull over to the berg, and look slippy about it."

In ten minutes they all found themselves on board, and Mac and Calder set to work before breakfast, to patch her up. The engines and furnaces were still warm, and it took little time to get up steam. But Ward took some to get up his. As he said, it was a fair knock-out, and it seemed like some black magic on the part of the skipper, who walked the bridge after breakfast as if he owned the whole North Atlantic.

"She was bound for England, and we'll go home," said Spink. "And as soon as maybe we'll find out what's in her. This is my first salvage, and it's goin' to be a good one."

"You're a wonder," said Ward.

"Didn't I always say so?" replied Spink modestly. "And now I hope that you and Day will behave yourselves, and not trade on any weaknesses that I may have, for I won't put up with it if you do."

"How do you propose to stop it?" asked Day. "You can't plug me or Ward any better now than you could before. Why don't you behave? Then there would be no trouble. I'm fair sick of hearin' about your unfortunate disposition."

"So am I," said Ward.

Spink shook his head with disgust.

"And this kind of talk after what I've done," he said. "I wish you would read old Kelly's little book on the Mate and His Duties, Ward. It would teach you how to behave."

"I had it in the Swan," said Ward, "but though it had a lot in it about land-saints and sea-devils, there was nothin' in it that fitted a man like you."

"Perhaps not," said Spink thoughtfully. "I own I'm rare, I'm very rare."

The fog cleared right off, and the sun shone and the calm sea sparkled. In such happy circumstances everyone ought to have been happy, but Spink said he wasn't.

"I wish I wasn't so rare," said Spink.
CAROLINE'S CHRISTMAS

STEPHEN LEACOCK
In his serious moments Stephen Leacock is a professor of Political Economy at McGill University, Montreal, but he is far better known to the world as a parodist and writer of delightful humorous sketches. Of these he has published *Literary Lapses, Nonsense Novels* and many other volumes.
CAROLINE'S CHRISTMAS

It was Xmas—Xmas with its mantle of white snow, scintillating from a thousand diamond points, Xmas with its good cheer, its peace on earth—Xmas with its feasting and merriment, Xmas with its—well, anyway, it was Xmas.

Or no, that's a slight slip; it wasn't exactly Xmas, it was Xmas Eve, Xmas Eve with its mantle of white snow lying beneath the calm moonlight—and, in fact, with practically the above list of accompanying circumstances with a few obvious emendations.

Yes, it was Xmas Eve.
And more than that!

Listen to where it was Xmas.

It was Xmas Eve on the Old Homestead. Reader, do you know, by sight, the Old Homestead? In the pauses of your work at your city desk, where you have grown rich and avaricious, does it never rise before your mind's eye, the quiet old homestead that knew you as a boy before your greed of gold tore you away from it? The Old Homestead that stands beside the road just on the rise of the hill, with its dark spruce trees wrapped in snow, the snug barns and straw stacks behind it; while from its windows there streams a shaft of light from a coal-oil lamp, about as thick as a slate pencil that you can see four miles away, from the other side of the cedar swamp in the hollow. Don't talk to me of your modern searchlights and your incandescent arcs, beside that gleam of light from the coal-oil lamp in the farmhouse window. It will shine clear to the heart across thirty years of distance. Do you not turn, I say, sometimes, reader, from the roar and hustle of the city with its ill-gotten wealth and its godless creed of mammon, to think of the quiet homestead under the brow of the hill? You don't! Well, you skunk!

It was Xmas Eve.

The light shone from the windows of the homestead farm.
The light of the log fire rose and flickered and mingled its red glare on the windows with the calm yellow of the lamplight.

John Enderby and his wife sat in the kitchen room of the farmstead. Do you know it, reader, the room called the kitchen?—with the open fire on its old brick hearth, and the cook-stove in the corner. It is the room of the farm where people cook and eat and live. It is the living-room. The only other room beside the bedroom is the small room in front, chill-cold in winter, with an organ in it for playing “Rock of Ages” on, when company came. But this room is only used for music and funerals. The real room of the old farm is the kitchen. Does it not rise up before you, reader? It doesn’t? Well, you darn fool!

At any rate there sat old John Enderby beside the plain deal table, his head bowed upon his hands, his grizzled face with its unshorn stubble stricken down with the lines of devastating trouble. From time to time he rose and cast a fresh stick of tamarack into the fire with a savage thud that sent a shower of sparks up the chimney. Across the fireplace sat his wife Anna on a straight-backed chair, looking into the fire with the mute resignation of her sex.

What was wrong with them anyway? Ah, reader, can you ask? Do you know or remember so little of the life of the old homestead? When I have said that it is the Old Homestead and Xmas Eve, and that the farmer is in great trouble and throwing tamarack at the fire, surely you ought to guess!

The Old Homestead was mortgaged! Ten years ago, reckless with debt, crazed with remorse, mad with despair and persecuted with rheumatism, John Enderby had mortgaged his farmstead for twenty-four dollars and thirty cents. To-night the mortgage fell due, to-night at midnight, Xmas night. Such is the way in which mortgages of this kind are always drawn. Yes, sir, it was drawn with such diabolical skill that on this night of all nights the mortgage would be foreclosed. At midnight the men would come with hammer and nails and foreclose it, nail it up tight.

So the afflicted couple sat.

Anna, with the patient resignation of her sex, sat silent or at times endeavoured to read. She had taken down from the little wall-shelf Bunyan’s Holy Living and Holy Dying. She
CAROLINE'S CHRISTMAS

tried to read it. She could not. Then she had taken Dante's *Inferno*. She could not read it. Then she had selected Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. But she could not read it either. Lastly, she had taken the Farmer's Almanac for 1911. The books lay littered about her as she sat in patient despair.

John Enderby showed all the passion of an uncontrolled nature. At times he would reach out for the crock of buttermilk that stood beside him and drained a draught of the maddening liquid, till his brain glowed like the coals of the tamarack fire before him.

"John," pleaded Anna, "leave alone the buttermilk. It only maddens you. No good ever came of that."

"Aye, lass," said the farmer, with a bitter laugh, as he buried his head again in the crock, "what care I if it maddens me."

"Ah, John, you'd better be employed in reading the Good Book than in your wild courses. Here take it, father, and read it"—and she handed to him the well-worn black volume from the shelf. Enderby paused a moment and held the volume in his hand. He and his wife had known nothing of religious teaching in the public schools of their day, but the first-class non-sectarian education that the farmer had received had stood him in good stead.

"Take the book," she said. "Read, John, in this hour of affliction; it brings comfort."

The farmer took from her hand the well-worn copy of Euclid's *Elements*, and laying aside his hat with reverence, he read aloud: "The angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal, and whosoever shall produce the sides, lo, the same also shall be equal unto each.

The farmer put the book aside.

"It's no use, Anna. I can't read the good words to-night."

He rose, staggered to the crock of buttermilk, and before his wife could stay his hand, drained it to the last drop.

Then he sank heavily to his chair.

"Let them foreclose it, if they will," he said; "I am past caring."

The woman looked sadly into the fire.

Ah, if only her son Henry had been here. Henry, who had left them three years ago, and whose bright letters still brought from time to time the gleam of hope to the stricken farmhouse.
Henry was in Sing Sing. His letters brought news to his mother of his steady success; first in the baseball nine of the prison, a favourite with his wardens and the chaplain, the best bridge player of the corridor. Henry was pushing his way to the front with the old-time spirit of the Enderbys.

His mother had hoped that he might have been with her at Xmas, but Henry had written that it was practically impossible for him to leave Sing Sing. He could not see his way out. The authorities were arranging a dance and sleighing party for the Xmas celebration. He had some hope, he said, of slipping away unnoticed, but his doing so might excite attention.

Of the trouble at home Anna had told her son nothing. No, Henry could not come. There was no help there. And William, the other son, ten years older than Henry. Alas, William had gone forth from the old homestead to fight his way in the great city! "Mother," he had said, "when I make a million dollars I'll come home. Till then good-bye," and he had gone.

How Anna's heart had beat for him. Would he make that million dollars? Would she ever live to see it? And as the years passed she and John had often sat in the evenings picturing William at home again, bringing with him a million dollars, or picturing the million dollars sent by express with love. But the years had passed. William came not. He did not come. The great city had swallowed him up as it has many another lad from the old homestead.

Anna started from her musing——

What was that at the door? The sound of a soft and timid rapping, and through the glass of the door-pane, a face, a woman's face looking into the fire-lit room with pleading eyes. What was it she bore in her arms, the little bundle that she held tight to her breast to shield it from the falling snow? Can you guess, reader? Try three guesses and see. Right you are. That's what it was.

The farmer's wife went hastily to the door.

"Lord's mercy!" she cried, "what are you doing out on such a night? Come in, child, to the fire!"

The woman entered, carrying the little bundle with her, and looking with wide eyes (they were at least an inch and a half across) at Enderby and his wife. Anna could see that there was no wedding-ring on her hand.
"Your name?" said the farmer's wife.
"My name is Caroline," the girl whispered. The rest was lost in the low tones of her voice. "I want shelter," she paused, "I want you to take the child."

Anna took the baby and laid it carefully on the top shelf of the cupboard, then she hastened to bring a glass of water and a dough-nut, and set it before the half-frozen girl.
"Eat," she said, "and warm yourself."
John rose from his seat.
"I'll have no child of that sort here," he said.
"John, John," pleaded Anna, "remember what the Good Book says: "Things which are equal to the same thing are equal to one another!"

John sank back in his chair.
And why had Caroline no wedding-ring? Ah, reader, can you not guess. Well, you can't. It wasn't what you think at all; so there. Caroline had no wedding-ring because she had thrown it away in bitterness, as she tramped the streets of the great city. "Why," she cried, "should the wife of a man in the penitentiary wear a ring?"

Then she had gone forth with the child from what had been her home.

It was the old sad story.
She had taken the baby and laid it tenderly, gently on a seat in the park. Then she walked rapidly away. A few minutes after a man had chased after Caroline with the little bundle in his arms. "I beg your pardon," he said, panting, "I think you left your baby in the park." Caroline thanked him.

Next she took the baby to the Grand Central Waiting-room, kissed it tenderly, and laid it on a shelf behind the lunch-counter.

A few minutes later an official, beaming with satisfaction, had brought it back to her.
"Yours, I think, madame," he said, as he handed it to her. Caroline thanked him.
Then she had left it at the desk of the Waldorf Astoria, and at the ticket-office of the subway.
It always came back.

Once or twice she took it to Brooklyn Bridge and threw it into the river, but perhaps something in the way it fell through the air touched the mother's heart and smote her, and she had descended to the river and fished it out.
Then Caroline had taken the child to the country. At first she thought to leave it on the wayside and she had put it down in the snow, and standing a little distance off had thrown mullein stalks at it, but something in the way the little bundle lay covered in the snow appealed to the mother’s heart.

She picked it up and went on. “Somewhere,” she murmured, “I shall find a door of kindness open to it.” Soon after she had staggered into the homestead.

Anna, with true woman’s kindness, asked no questions. She put the baby carefully away in a trunk, saw Caroline safely to bed in the best room, and returned to her seat beside the fire.

The old clock struck twenty minutes past eight.

Again a knock sounded at the door.

There entered the familiar figure of the village lawyer. His astrachan coat of yellow dogskin, his celluloid collar, and boots which reached no higher than the ankle, contrasted with the rude surroundings of the little room.

“Enderby,” he said, “can you pay?”

“Lawyer Perkins,” said the farmer, “give me time and I will; so help me, give me five years more and I’ll clear this debt to the last cent.”

“John,” said the lawyer, touched in spite of his rough (dogskin) exterior, “I couldn’t, if I would. These things are not what they were. It’s a big New York corporation, Pinchem & Company, that makes these loans now, and they take their money on the day, or they sell you up. I can’t help it. So there’s your notice, John, and I am sorry! No, I’ll take no buttermilk, I must keep a clear head to work,” and with that he hurried out into the snow again.

John sat brooding in his chair.

The fire flickered down.

The old clock struck half-past eight, then it half struck a quarter to nine, then slowly it struck striking.

Presently Enderby rose, picked a lantern from its hook, “Mortgage or no mortgage,” he said, “I must see to the stock.”

He passed out of the house, and standing in the yard, looked over the snow to the cedar swamp beyond with the snow winding through it, far in the distance the lights of the village far away.
He thought of the forty years he had spent here on the homestead—the rude, pioneer days—the house he had built for himself, with its plain furniture, the old-fashioned spinning-wheel on which Anna had spun his trousers, the wooden telephone and the rude skidway on which he ate his meals.

He looked out over the swamp and sighed.

Down in the swamp, two miles away, could he but have seen it, there moved a sleigh, and in it a man dressed in a sealskin coat and silk hat, whose face beamed in the moonlight as he turned to and fro and stared at each object by the roadside as at an old familiar scene. Round his waist was a belt containing a million dollars in gold coin, and as he halted his horse in an opening of the road he unstrapped the belt and counted the coins.

Beside him there crouched in the bushes at the dark edge of the swamp road, with eyes that watched every glitter of the coins, and a hand that grasped a heavy cudgel of blackthorn, a man whose close-cropped hair and hard lined face belonged nowhere but within the walls of Sing Sing.

When the sleigh started again the man in the bushes followed doggedly in its track.

Meantime John Enderby had made the rounds of his outbuildings. He bedded the fat cattle that blinked in the flashing light of the lantern. He stood a moment among his hogs, and, farmer as he was, forgot his troubles a moment to speak to each, calling them by name. It smote him to think how at times he had been tempted to sell one of the hogs, or even to sell the cattle to clear the mortgage off the place. Thank God, however, he had put that temptation behind him.

As he reached the house a sleigh was standing on the roadway. Anna met him at the door. "John," she said, "there was a stranger came while you were in the barn, and wanted a lodging for the night; a city man, I reckon, by his clothes. I hated to refuse him, and I put him in Willie's room. We'll never want it again, and he's gone to sleep."

"Ay, we can't refuse."

John Enderby took out the horse to the barn, and then returned to his vigil with Anna beside the fire.

The fumes of the buttermilk had died out of his brain. He was thinking, as he sat there, of midnight and what it would bring.
In the room above, the man in the sealskin coat had thrown himself down, clothes and all, upon the bed, tired with his drive.

"How it all comes back to me," he muttered as he fell asleep, "the same old room, nothing changed—except them—how worn they look," and a tear started to his eyes. He thought of his leaving his home fifteen years ago, of his struggle in the great city, of the great idea he had conceived of making money, and of the Farm Investment Company he had instituted—the simple system of applying the crushing power of capital to exact the uttermost penny from the farm loans. And now here he was back again, true to his word, with a million dollars in his belt. "To-morrow," he had murmured, "I will tell them. It will be Xmas." Then William—yes, reader, it was William (see line 503 above) had fallen asleep.

The hours passed, and kept passing.

It was 11.30.

Then suddenly Anna started from her place.

"Henry!" she cried as the door opened and a man entered. He advanced gladly to meet her, and in a moment mother and son were folded in a close embrace. It was Henry, the man from Sing Sing. True to his word, he had slipped away unostentatiously at the height of the festivities.

"Alas, Henry," said the mother after the warmth of the first greetings had passed, "you come at an unlucky hour." They told him of the mortgage on the farm and the ruin of his home.

"Yes," said Anna, "not even a bed to offer you," and she spoke of the strangers who had arrived; of the stricken woman and the child, and the rich man in the sealskin coat who had asked for a night's shelter.

Henry listened intently while they told him of the man, and a sudden light of intelligence flashed into his eye.

"By Heaven, father, I have it!" he cried. Then dropping his voice, he said, "Speak low, father. This man upstairs, he had a sealskin coat and silk hat?"

"Yes," said the father.

"Father," said Henry, "I saw a man sitting in a sleigh in the cedar swamp. He had money in his hand, and he counted it, and chuckled—five-dollar gold pieces—in all, $1,125,465 dollars and a quarter."
The father and son looked at one another.
"I see your idea," said Enderby sternly.
"We'll choke him," said Henry.
"Or club him," said the farmer, "and pay the mortgage."
Anna looked from one to the other, joy and hope struggling with the sorrow in her face. "Henry, my Henry," she said proudly, "I knew he would find a way."
"Come on," said Henry; "bring the lamp, mother, take the club, father," and gaily, but with hushed voices, the three stole up the stairs.
The stranger lay sunk in sleep. The back of his head was turned to them as they came in.
"Now, mother," said the farmer firmly, "hold the lamp a little nearer; just behind the ear, I think, Henry."
"No," said Henry, rolling back his sleeve and speaking with the quick authority that sat well upon him, "across the jaw, father, it's quicker and neater."
"Well, well," said the farmer, smiling proudly, "have your own way, lad, you know best."
Henry raised the club.
But as he did so—stay, what was that? Far away behind the cedar swamp the deep booming of the bell of the village church began to strike out midnight. One, two, three, its tones came clear across the crisp air. Almost at the same moment the clock below began with deep strokes to mark the midnight hour; from the farmyard chicken coop a rooster began to crow twelve times, while the loud lowing of the cattle and the soft cooing of the hogs seemed to usher in the morning of Christmas with its message of peace and goodwill.
The club fell from Henry's hand and rattled on the floor.
The sleeper woke, and sat up.
"Father! Mother!" he cried.
"My son, my son," sobbed the father, "we had guessed it was you. We had come to wake you."
"Yes, it is I," said William, smiling to his parents, "and I have brought the million dollars. Here it is," and with that he unstrapped the belt from his waist and laid a million dollars on the table.
"Thank Heaven!" cried Anna, "our troubles are at an end. This money will help clear the mortgage—and the greed of Pinchem & Co. cannot harm us now."
"The farm was mortgaged!" said William, aghast.
“Ay,” said the farmer, “mortgaged to men who have no conscience, whose greedy hand has nearly brought us to the grave. See how she has aged, my boy,” and he pointed to Anna.

“Father,” said William, in deep tones of contrition, “I am Pinchem & Co. Heaven help me! I see it now. I see at what expense of suffering my fortune was made. I will restore it all, these million dollars, to those I have wronged.”

“No,” said his mother softly. “You repent, dear son, with true Christian repentance. That is enough. You may keep the money. We will look upon it as a trust, a sacred trust, and every time we spend a dollar of it on ourselves we will think of it as a trust.”

“Yes,” said the farmer softly, “your mother is right, the money is a trust, and we will restock the farm with it, buy out the Jones’s property, and regard the whole thing as a trust.”

At this moment the door of the room opened. A woman’s form appeared. It was Caroline, robed in one of Anna’s directoire nightgowns.

“I heard your voices,” she said, and then, as she caught sight of Henry, she gave a great cry.

“My husband!”

“My wife,” said Henry, and folded her to his heart.

“You have left Sing Sing?” cried Caroline with joy.

“Yes, Caroline,” said Henry. “I shall never go back.”

Gaily the reunited family descended. Anna carried the lamp, Henry carried the club. William carried the million dollars.

The tamarack fire roared again upon the hearth. The buttermilk circulated from hand to hand. William and Henry told and retold the story of their adventures. The first streak of the Christmas morn fell through the door-pane.

“Ah, my sons,” said John Enderby, “henceforth let us stick to the narrow path. What is it that the Good Book says: ‘A straight line is that which lies evenly between its extreme points.’”
THE FACTS

RING LARDNER
Ring Lardner in his capacity as a reporter and journalist on several of America's most important newspapers gathered a great deal of material which he embodied in many of his short stories. These have now been collected together under the title of *Round-up*, the publication of which has gained him much posthumous fame.
THE FACTS

I

The engagement was broken off before it was announced. So only a thousand or so of the intimate friends and relatives of the parties knew anything about it. What they knew was that there had been an engagement and that there was one no longer. The cause of the breach they merely guessed, and most of the guesses were, in most particulars, wrong.

Each intimate and relative had a fragment of the truth. It remained for me to piece the fragments together. It was a difficult job, but I did it. Part of my evidence is hearsay; the major portion is fully corroborated. And not one of my witnesses had anything to gain through perjury.

So I am positive that I have at my tongue’s end the facts, and I believe that in justice to everybody concerned I should make them public.

Ellen McDonald had lived on the North Side of Chicago for twenty-one years. Billy Bowen had been a South-Sider for seven years longer. But neither knew of the other’s existence until they met in New York, the night before the Army-Navy game.

Billy, sitting with a business acquaintance at a neighbouring table in Tonio’s, was spotted by a male member of Ellen’s party, a Chicagoan, too. He was urged to come on over. He did, and was introduced. The business acquaintance was also urged, came, was introduced and forgotten; forgotten, that is, by every one but the waiter, who observed that he danced not nor told stories, and figured that his function must be to pay. The business acquaintance had been Billy’s guest. Now he became host, and without seeking the office.

It was not that Billy and Miss McDonald’s male friends were niggards. But unfortunately for the b. a., the checks always happened to arrive when everybody else was dancing
or so hysterical over Billy’s repartee as to be potentially insolvent.

Billy was somewhere between his fourteenth and twenty-first highball; in other words, at his best, from the audience’s standpoint. His dialogue was simply screaming and his dancing just heavenly. He was Frank Tinney doubling as Vernon Castle. On the floor he tried and accomplished twinkles that would have spelled catastrophe if attempted under the fourteen mark, or over the twenty-one. And he said the cutest things—one right after the other.

II

You can be charmed by a man’s dancing, but you can’t fall in love with his funniness. If you’re going to fall in love with him at all, you’ll do it when you catch him in a serious mood.

Miss McDonald caught Billy Bowen in one at the game next day. Entirely by accident or a decree of fate, her party and his sat in adjoining boxes. Not by accident, Miss McDonald sat in the chair that was nearest Billy’s. She sat there first to be amused; she stayed to be conquered.

Here was a different Billy from the Billy of Tonio’s. Here was a Billy who trained his gun on your heart and let your risibles alone. Here was a dreamy Billy, a Billy of romance.

How calm he remained through the excitement! How indifferent to the thrills of the game! There was depth to him. He was a man. Her escort and the others round her were children, screaming with delight at the puerile deeds of pseudo heroes. Football was a great sport, but a sport. It wasn’t Life. Would the world be better or worse for that nine-yard gain that Elephant or Oliphant, or whatever his name was, had just made? She knew it wouldn’t. Billy knew, too, for Billy was deep. He was thinking man’s thoughts. She could tell by his silence, by his inattention to the scene before him. She scarcely could believe that here was the same person who, last night, had kept his own, yes, and the neighbouring tables, roaring with laughter. What a complex character his!

In sooth, Mr. Bowen was thinking man’s thoughts. He was thinking that if this pretty Miss McDowell, or Donnelly,
were elsewhere, he could go to sleep. And that if he could remember which team he had bet on and could tell which team was which, he would have a better idea of whether he was likely to win or lose.

When, after the game, they parted, Billy rallied to the extent of asking permission to call. Ellen, it seemed, would be very glad to have him, but she couldn’t tell exactly when she would have to be back in Chicago; she still had three more places to visit in the East. Could she possibly let him know when she did get back? Yes, she could and would; if he really wanted her to, she would drop him a note. He certainly wanted her to.

This, thought Billy, was the best possible arrangement. Her note would tell him her name and address, and save him the trouble of phoning to all the McConnells, McDowell’s, and Donnellys on the North Side. He did want to see her again; she was pretty, and, judging from last night, full of pep. And she had fallen for him; he knew it from that look.

He watched her until she was lost in the crowd. Then he hunted round for his pals and the car that had brought them up. At length he gave up the search and wearily climbed the elevated stairs. His hotel was on Broadway, near Forty-fourth. He left the train at Forty-second, the third time it stopped there.

“I guess you’ve rode far enough,” said the guard. “Fifteen cents’ worth for a nickel. I guess we ought to have a Pullman on these here trains.”

“I guess,” said Billy, “I guess——”

But the repartee well was dry. He stumbled downstairs and hurried toward Broadway to replenish it.

III

Ellen McDonald’s three more places to visit in the East must have been deadly dull. Anyway, on the sixth of December scarcely more than a week after his parting with her in New York, Billy Bowen received the promised note. It informed him merely that her name was Ellen McDonald, that she lived at so-and-so Walton Place, and that she was back in Chicago.

That day, you’ll remember, was Monday. Miss McDonald’s parents had tickets for the opera. But Ellen was honestly
just worn out, and would they be mad at her if she stayed home and went to bed? They wouldn’t. They would take Aunt Mary in her place.

On Tuesday morning, Paul Potter called up and wanted to know if she would go with him that night to “The Follies”. She was horribly sorry, but she’d made an engagement. The engagement, evidently was to study, and the subject was harmony, with Berlin, Kern, and Van Alstyne as instructors. She sat on the piano-bench from half-past seven till quarter after nine, and then went to her room, vowing that she would accept any and all invitations for the following evening.

Fortunately, no invitations arrived, for at a quarter to nine Wednesday night, Mr. Bowen did. And in a brand-new mood. He was a bit shy and listened more than he talked. But when he talked, he talked well, though the sparkling wit of the night at Tonio’s was lacking. Lacking, too, was the preoccupied air of the day at the football game. There was no problem to keep his mind busy, but even if the Army and Navy had been playing football in this very room, he could have told at a glance which was which. Vision and brain were perfectly clear. And he had been getting his old eight hours, and, like the railroad hen, sometimes nine and sometimes ten, every night since his arrival home from Gotham, N. Y. Mr. Bowen was on the wagon.

They talked of the East, of Tonio’s, of the game (this was where Billy did most of his listening), of the war, of theatres, of books, of college, of automobiles, of the market. They talked, too, of their immediate families. Billy’s, consisting of one married sister in South Bend, was soon exhausted. He had two cousins here in town whom he saw frequently, two cousins and their wives, but they were people who simply couldn’t stay home nights. As for himself, he preferred his rooms and a good book to the so-called gay life. Ellen should think that a man who danced so well would want to be doing it all the time. It was nice of her to say that he danced well, but really he didn’t, you know. Oh, yes, he did. She guessed she could tell. Well, anyway, the giddy whirl made no appeal to him, unless, of course, he was in particularly charming company. His avowed love for home and quiet surprised Ellen a little. It surprised Mr. Bowen a great deal. Only last night, he remembered, he had been driven almost desperate by that quiet of which
he was now so fond; he had been on the point of busting loose, but had checked himself in time. He had played Canfield till ten, though the book-shelves were groaning with their load.

Ellen’s family kept them busy for an hour and a half. It was a dear family and she wished he could meet it. Mother and father were out playing bridge somewhere to-night. Aunt Mary had gone to bed. Aunts Louise and Harriet lived in the next block. Sisters Edith and Wilma would be home from Northampton for the holidays about the twentieth. Brother Bob and his wife had built the cutest house in Evanston. Her younger brother, Walter, was a case! He was away to-night, had gone out right after dinner. He’d better be in before mother and father came. He had a new love-affair every week, and sixteen years old last August. Mother and father really didn’t care how many girls he was interested in, so long as they kept him too busy to run round with those crazy schoolmates of his. The latter were older than he; just at the age when it seems smart to drink beer and play cards for money. Father said if he ever found out that Walter was doing those things, he’d take him out of school and lock him up somewhere.

Aunts Louise and Mary and Harriet did a lot of settlement work. They met all sorts of queer people, people you’d never believe existed. The three aunts were unmarried.

Brother Bob’s wife was a dear, but absolutely without a sense of humour. Bob was full of fun, but they got along just beautifully together. You never saw a couple so much in love.

Edith was on the basket-ball team at college and terribly popular. Wilma was horribly clever and everybody said she’d make Phi Beta Kappa.

Ellen, so she averred, had been just nothing in school; not bright; not athletic, and, of course, not popular.

“Oh, of course not,” said Billy, smiling.

“Honestly,” fibbed Ellen.

“You never could make me believe it,” said Billy.

Whereat Ellen blushed, and Billy’s unbelief strengthened.

At this crisis, the Case burst into the room with his hat on. He removed it at sight of the caller and awkwardly advanced to be introduced.

“I’m going to bed,” he announced, after the formality.
"I hoped," said Ellen, "you'd tell us about the latest. Who is it now? Beth?"

"Beth nothing!" scoffed the Case. "We split up the day of the Keewatin game."

"What was the matter?" asked his sister.

"I'm going to bed," said the Case. "It's pretty near midnight."

"By George, it is!" exclaimed Billy. "I didn't dream it was that late!"

"No," said Walter. "That's what I tell dad—the clock goes along some when you're having a good time."

Billy and Ellen looked shyly at each other, and then laughed; laughed harder, it seemed to Walter, than the joke warranted. In fact, he hadn't thought of it as a joke. If it was that good, he'd spring it on Kathryn to-morrow night. It would just about clinch her.

The Case, carrying out his repeated threat, went to bed and dreamed of Kathryn. Fifteen minutes later Ellen retired to dream of Billy. And an hour later than that, Billy was dreaming of Ellen, who had become suddenly popular with him, even if she hadn't been so at Northampton, which he didn't believe.

IV

They saw "The Follies" Friday night. A criticism of the show by either would have been the greatest folly of all. It is doubtful that they could have told what theatre they'd been to ten minutes after they'd left it. From wherever it was, they walked to a dancing place and danced. Ellen was so far gone that she failed to note the change in Billy's trotting. Foxes would have blushed for shame at its awkwardness and lack of variety. If Billy was a splendid dancer, he certainly did not prove it this night. All he knew or cared to know was that he was with the girl he wanted. And she knew only that she was with Billy, and happy.

On the drive home, the usual superfluous words were spoken. They were repeated inside the storm-door at Ellen's father's house, while the taxi driver, waiting, wondered audibly why them suckers of explorers beat it to the Pole to freeze when the North Side was so damn handy.

Ellen's father was out of town. So in the morning she
broke the news to mother and Aunt Mary, and then sat down and wrote it to Edith and Wilma. Next she called up Bob’s wife in Evanston, and after that she hurried to the next block and sprang it on Aunts Louise and Harriet. It was decided that Walter had better not be told. He didn’t know how to keep a secret. Walter, therefore, was in ignorance till he got home from school. The only person he confided in the same evening was Kathryn, who was the only person he saw.

Bob and his wife and Aunts Louise and Harriet came to Sunday dinner, but were chased home early in the afternoon. Mr. McDonald was back and Billy was coming to talk to him. It would embarrass Billy to death to find such a crowd in the house. They’d all meet him soon, never fear, and when they met him, they’d be crazy about him. Bob and Aunt Mary and mother would like him because he was so bright and said such screaming things, and the rest would like him because he was so well-read and sensible, and so horribly good-looking.

Billy, I said, was coming to talk to Mr. McDonald. When he came, he did very little of the talking. He stated the purpose of his visit, told what business he was in and affirmed his ability to support a wife. Then he assumed the role of audience while Ellen’s father delivered an hour’s lecture. The speaker did not express his opinion of Tyrus Cobb or the Kaiser, but they were the only subjects he overlooked. Sobriety and industry were words frequently used.

“I don’t care,” he prevaricated, in conclusion, “how much money a man is making if he is sober and industrious. You attended college, and I presume you did all the fool things college boys do. Some men recover from their college education, others don’t. I hope you’re one of the former.”

The Sunday-night supper, just cold scraps you might say, was partaken of by the happy but embarrassed pair, the trying-to-look happy but unembarrassed parents, and Aunt Mary. Walter, the Case, was out. He had stayed home the previous evening.

“He’ll be here to-morrow night and the rest of the week, or I’ll know the reason why,” said Mr. McDonald.

“He won’t, and I’ll tell you the reason why,” said Ellen.

“He’s a real boy, Sam,” put in the real boy’s mother. “You can’t expect him to stay home every minute.”
“I can’t expect anything of him,” said the father. “You and the girls and Mary here have let him have his own way so long that he’s past managing. When I was his age, I was in my bed at nine o’clock.”

“Morning or night?” asked Ellen.

Her father scowled. It was evident he could not take a joke, not even a good one.

After the cold scraps had been ruined, Mr. McDonald drew Billy into the smoking-room and offered him a cigar. The prospective son-in-law was about to refuse and express a preference for cigarettes when something told him not to. A moment later he was deeply grateful to the something.

“I smoke three cigars a day,” said the oracle, “one after each meal. That amount of smoking will hurt nobody. More than that is too much. I used to smoke to excess, four or five cigars per day, and maybe a pipe or two. I found it was affecting my health, and I cut down. Thank heaven, no one in my family ever got the cigarette habit; disease, rather. How any sane, clean-minded man can start on those things is beyond me.”

“Me, too,” agreed Billy, taking the proffered cigar with one hand and making sure with the other that his silver pill-case was as deep down in his pocket as it would go.

“Cigarettes, gambling, and drinking go hand in hand,” continued the man of the house. “I couldn’t trust a cigarette fiend with a nickel.”

“There are only two or three kinds he could get for that,” said Billy.

“What say?” demanded Mr. McDonald, but before Billy was obliged to wriggle out of it, Aunt Mary came in and reminded her brother-in-law that it was nearly church time.

Mr. McDonald and Aunt Mary went to church. Mrs. McDonald, pleading weariness, stayed home with “the children.” She wanted a chance to get acquainted with this pleasant-faced boy who was going to rob her of one of her five dearest treasures.

The three were no sooner settled in front of the fireplace than Ellen adroitly brought up the subject of auction bridge, knowing that it would relieve Billy of the conversational burden.

“Mother is really quite a shark, aren’t you, mother?” she said.
"I don't fancy being called a fish," said the mother.
"She's written two books on it, and she and father have won so many prizes that they may have to lease a warehouse. If they'd only play for money, just think how rich we'd all be!"

"The game is fascinating enough without adding to it the excitement and evils of gambling," said Mrs. McDonald. "It is a fascinating game," agreed Billy.
"It is," said Mrs. McDonald, and away she went.
Before father and Aunt Mary got home from church, Mr. Bowen was a strong disciple of conservativeness in bidding and thoroughly convinced that all the rules that had been taught were dead wrong. He saw the shark's points so quickly and agreed so whole-heartedly with her arguments that he impressed her as one of the most intelligent young men she had ever talked to. It was too bad it was Sunday night, but some evening soon he must come over for a game.

"I'd like awfully well to read your books," said Billy.
"The first one's usefulness died with the changes in the rules," replied Mrs. McDonald. "But I think I have one of the new ones in the house, and I'll be glad to have you take it."

"I don't like to have you give me your only copy."
"Oh, I believe we have two."
She knew perfectly well she had two dozen.

Aunt Mary announced that Walter had been seen in church with Kathryn. He had made it his business to be seen. He and the lady had come early and had manoeuvred into the third row from the back, on the aisle leading to the McDonald family pew. He had nudged his aunt as she passed on the way to her seat, and she had turned and spoken to him. She could not know that he and Kathryn had "ducked" before the end of the processional.

After reporting favourably on the Case, Aunt Mary launched into a description of the service. About seventy had turned out. The music had been good, but not quite as good as in the morning. Mr. Pratt had sung "Fear Ye Not, O Israel!" for the offertory. Dr. Gish was still sick and a lay reader had served. She had heard from Allie French that Dr. Gish expected to be out by the middle of the week and certainly would be able to preach next Sunday morning.
The church had been cold at first, but very comfortable finally.

Ellen rose and said she and Billy would go out in the kitchen and make some fudge.

"I was afraid Aunt Mary would bore you to death," she told Billy, when they had kissed for the first time since five o'clock. "She just lives for the church and can talk on no other subject."

"I wouldn't hold that against her," said Billy charitably.

The fudge was a failure, as it was bound to be. But the Case, who came in just as it was being passed round, was the only one rude enough to say so.

"Is this a new stunt?" he inquired, when he had tested it.

"Is what a new stunt?" asked Ellen.

"Using cheese instead of chocolate."

"That will do, Walter," said his father. "You can go to bed."

Walter got up and started for the hall. At the threshold he stopped.

"I don't suppose there'll be any of that fudge left," he said. "But if there should be, you'd better put it in the mouse trap."

Billy called a taxi and departed soon after Walter's exit. When he got at his South Side abode, the floor of the tonneau was littered with recent cigarettes.

And that night he dreamed that he was president of the anti-cigarette league; that Dr. Gish was vice-president, and that the motto of the organization was "No trump."

Billy Bowen's business took him out of town the second week in December, and it was not until the twentieth that he returned. He had been East and had ridden home from Buffalo on the same train with Wilma and Edith McDonald. But he didn't know it, and neither did they. They could not be expected to recognize him from Ellen's description—that he was horribly good-looking. The dining-car conductor was all of that.

Ellen had further written them that he (not the dining-car conductor) was a man of many moods; that sometimes he was just nice and deep, and sometimes he was screamingly funny, and sometimes so serious and silent that she was almost afraid of him.

They were wild to see him and the journey through
Ohio and Indiana would not have been half so long in his company. Edith, the athletic, would have revelled in his wit. Wilma would gleefully have fathomed his depths. They would both have been proud to flaunt his looks before the hundreds of their kind aboard the train. Their loss was greater than Billy’s, for he, smoking cigarettes as fast as he could light them and playing bridge that would have brought tears of compassion to the shark’s eyes, enjoyed the trip, every minute of it.

Ellen and her father were at the station to meet the girls. His arrival on this train had not been heralded, and it added greatly to the hysterics of the occasion.

Wilma and Edith upbraided him for not knowing by instinct who they were. He accused them of recognizing him and purposely avoiding him. Much more of it was pulled in the same light vein, pro and con.

He was permitted at length to depart for his office. On the way he congratulated himself on the improbability of his ever being obliged to play basket-ball versus Edith. She must be a whizz in condition. Chances were she’d train down to a hundred and ninety-five before the big games. The other one, Wilma, was a splinter if he ever saw one. You had to keep your eyes peeled or you’d miss her entirely. But suppose you did miss her; what then? If she won her Phi Beta Kappa pin, he thought, it would make her a dandy belt.

These two, he thought, were a misdeal. They should be reshuffled and cut nearer the middle of the deck. Lots of other funny things he thought about these two.

Just before he had left Chicago on this trip, his stenographer had quit him to marry an elevator-starter named Felix Bond. He had phoned one of his cousins and asked him to be on the look-out for a live stenographer who wasn’t likely to take the eye of an elevator-starter. The cousin had one in mind.

Here was her card on Billy’s desk when he reached the office. It was not a business-card visiting-card, at $3 per hundred. "Miss Violet Moore," the engraved part said. Above was written: "Mr. Bowen—Call me up any night after seven. Calumet 2678."

Billy stowed the card in his pocket and plunged into a pile of uninteresting letters.
On the night of the twenty-second there was a family dinner at McDonald's, and Billy was in on it. At the function he met the rest of them—Bob and his wife, and Aunt Harriet and Aunt Louise.

Bob and his wife, despite the former's alleged sense of humour, spooned every time they were contiguous. That they were in love with each other, as Ellen said, was easy to see. The wherefore was more of a puzzle.

Bob's hirsute adornment having been disturbed by his spouse's digits during one of the orgies, he went upstairs ten minutes before dinner time to effect repairs. Mrs. Bob was left alone on the davenport. In performance of his social duties, Billy went over and sat down beside her. She was not, like Miss Muffet, frightened away, but terror or some other fiend rendered her temporarily dumb. The game Mr. Bowen was making his fifth attempt to pry open a conversation when Bob came back.

To the impartial observer the scene on the davenport appeared heartless enough. There was a generous neutral zone between Billy and Flo, that being an abbreviation of Mrs. Bob's given name, which, as a few may suspect, was Florence. Billy was working hard and his face was flushed with the effort. The flush may have aroused Bob's suspicions. At any rate, he strode across the room, scowling almost audibly, shot a glance at Billy that would have made the Kaiser wince, halted magnificently in front of his wife, and commanded her to accompany him to the hall.

Billy's flush became ace high. He was about to get up and break a chair when a look from Ellen stopped him. She was at his side before the pair of Bobs had skidded out of the room.

"Please don't mind," she begged. "He's crazy. I forgot to tell you that he's insanely jealous."

"Did I understand you to say he had a sense of humour?"

"It doesn't work where Flo's concerned. If he sees her talking to a man he goes wild."

"With astonishment, probably," said Billy.

"You're a nice boy," said Ellen irrelevantly.

Dinner was announced and Mr. Bowen was glad to observe that Flo's terrestrial body was still intact. He was glad, too, to note that Bob was no longer frothing. He learned for the first time that the Case and Kathryn were of
the party. Mrs. McDonald had wanted to make sure of Walter's presence; hence the presence of his crush.

Kathryn giggled when she was presented to Billy. It made him uncomfortable and he thought for a moment that a couple of studs had fallen out. He soon discovered, however, that the giggle was permanent, just as much a part of Kathryn as her fraction of a nose. He looked forward with new interest to the soup course, but was disappointed to find that she could negotiate it without disturbing the giggle or the linen.

He next centred his attention on Wilma and Edith. Another disappointment was in store. There were as many and as large oysters in Wilma's soup as in any one's. She ate them all, and, so far as appearances went, was the same Wilma. He had expected that Edith would either diet or plunge. But Edith was as prosaic in her consumption of victuals as Ellen, for instance, or Aunt Louise.

He must content himself for the present with Aunt Louise. She was sitting directly opposite and he had an unobstructed view of the widest part he had ever seen in woman's hair.

"Ogden Avenue," he said to himself.

Aunt Louise was telling about her experiences and Aunt Harriet's among the heathen of Peoria Street.

"You never would dream there were such people!" said she.

"I suppose most of them are foreign born," supposed her brother, who was Mr. McDonald.

"Practically all of them," said Aunt Louise.

Billy wanted to ask her whether she had ever missionaried among the Indians. He thought possibly an attempt to scalp her had failed by a narrow margin.

Between courses Edith worked hard to draw out his predicated comicality and Wilma worked as hard to make him sound his low notes. Their labours were in vain. He was not sleepy enough to be deep, and he was fourteen highballs shy of comedy.

In disgust, perhaps, at her failure to be amused, the major portion of the misdeal capsized her cocoa just before the close of the meal and drew a frown from her father, whom she could have thrown in ten minutes, straight falls, any style.
“She’ll never miss that ounce,” thought Billy.
When they got up from the table and started for the living-room, Mr. Bowen found himself walking beside Aunt Harriet, who had been so silent during dinner that he had all but forgotten her.

“Well, Miss McDonald,” he said, “it’s certainly a big family, isn’t it?”

“Well, young man,” said Aunt Harriet, “it ain’t no small family, that’s sure.”

“I should say not,” repeated Billy.
Walter and his giggling crush intercepted him.
“I didn’t notice it,” lied Billy.
“No, I s’pose not. ‘Ain’t no small family.’ I s’pose you didn’t notice it. She isn’t a real aunt like Aunt Louise and Aunt Mary. She’s just an adopted aunt. She kept house for dad and Aunt Louise after their mother died, and when dad got married, she just kept on living with Aunt Louise.”

“Oh,” was Billy’s fresh comment, and it brought forth a fresh supply of giggles from Kathryn.

Ellen had already been made aware of Billy’s disgusting plans. He had to catch a night train for St. Louis, and he would be there all day to-morrow, and he’d be back Friday, but he wouldn’t have time to see her, and he’d surely call her up. And Friday afternoon he was going to South Bend to spend Christmas Day with his married sister, because it was probably the last Christmas he’d be able to spend with her.

“But I’ll hustle home from South Bend Sunday morning,” he said. “And don’t you dare make any engagement for the afternoon.”

“I do wish you could be with us Christmas Eve. The tree won’t be a bit of fun without you.”

“You know I wish I could. But you see how it is.”

“I think your sister’s mean.”
Billy didn’t deny it.
“Who’s going to be here Christmas Eve?”
“Just the people we had to-night, except Kathryn and you. Why?”

“Oh, nothing,” said Billy.
"Look here, sir," said his betrothed. "Don’t you do anything foolish. You’re not supposed to buy presents for the whole family. Just a little, tiny one for me, if you want to, but you mustn’t spend much on it. And if you get anything for any one else in this house, I’ll be mad."

"I’d like to see you mad," said Billy.

"You’d wish you hadn’t," Ellen retorted.

When Billy had gone, Ellen returned to the living-room and faced the assembled company.

"Well," she said, "now that you’ve all seen him, what’s the verdict?"

The verdict seemed to be unanimously in his favour.

"But," said Bob, "I thought you said he was so screamingly funny."

"Yes," said Edith, "you told me that, too."

"Give him a chance," said Ellen. "Wait till he’s in a funny mood. You’ll simply die laughing!"

It is a compound fracture of the rules to have so important a character as Tommy Richards appear in only one chapter. But remember, this isn’t a regular story, but a simple statement of what occurred when it occurred. During Chapter Four, Tommy had been on his way home from the Pacific Coast, where business had kept him all autumn. His business out there and what he said en route to Chicago are collateral.

Tommy had been Billy’s pal at college. Tommy’s home was in Minnesota, and Billy was his most intimate, practically his only friend in the so-called metropolis of the Middle West. So Tommy, not knowing that Billy had gone to St. Louis, looked forward to a few pleasant hours with him between the time of the coast train’s arrival and the Minnesota train’s departure.

The coast train reached Chicago about noon. It was Thursday noon, the twenty-third. Tommy hustled from the station to Billy’s office, and there learned of the St. Louis trip. Disappointed, he roamed the streets a while and at length dropped into the downtown ticket office of his favourite Minnesota road. He was told that everything for the night was sold out. Big Christmas business. Tommy pondered.
The coast train reached Chicago about noon. It was
Thursday noon, the twenty-third.
"How about to-morrow night?" he inquired.
"I can give you a lower to-morrow night on the six-
thirty," replied Leslie Painter, that being the clerk's name.
"I'll take it," said Tommy. He did so, and the clerk took
$10.50.
"I'll see old Bill after all," said Tommy.
Leslie Painter made no reply.
In the afternoon Tommy sat through a vaudeville show,
and at night he looped the loop. He retired early, for the
next day promised to be a big one.
Billy got in from St. Louis at seven Friday morning and
had been in his office an hour when Tommy appeared. I
have no details of the meeting.
At half-past eight Tommy suggested that they'd better go
out and h'ist one.
"Still on it, eh?" said Billy.
"What do you mean?"
"I mean that I'm off of it."
"Good Lord! For how long?"
"The last day of November."
"Too long! You look sick already."
"I feel great," averred Billy.
"Well, I don't. So come along and bathe in vichy."
On the way "along" Billy told Tommy about Ellen.
Tommy's congratulations were physical and jarred Billy
from head to heels.
"Good stuff!" cried Tommy so loudly that three
pedestrians jumped sideways. "Old Bill hooked! And
do you think you're going to celebrate this occasion with
water?"
"I think I am," was Billy's firm reply.
"You think you are! What odds?"
"A good lunch against a red hot."
"You're on!" said Tommy. "And I'm going to be mighty
hungry at one o'clock."
"You'll be hungry and alone."
"What's the idea? If you've got a lunch date with the
future, I'm in on it."
"I haven't," said Billy. "But I'm going to South Bend
on the one-forty, and between now and then I have nothing
to do but clean up my mail and buy a dozen Christmas presents.”
  They turned in somewhere.
  “Don’t you see the girl at all to-day?” asked Tommy.
  “Not to-day. All I do is call her up.”
  “Well, then, if you get outside of a couple, who’ll be hurt? Just for old time’s sake.”
  “If you need lunch money, I’ll give it to you.”
  “No, no. That bet’s off.”
  “It’s not off. I won’t call it off.”
  “Suit yourself,” said Tommy graciously.
At half-past nine, it was officially decided that Billy had lost the bet. At half-past twelve, Billy said it was time to pay it.
  “I’m not hungry enough,” said Tommy.
  “Hungry or no hungry,” said Billy, “I buy your lunch now or I don’t buy it. See? Hungry or no hungry.”
  “What’s the hurry?” asked Tommy.
  “I guess you know what’s the hurry. Me for South Bend on the one-forty, and I got to go to the office first. Hurry or no hurry.”
  “Listen to reason, Bill. How are you going to eat lunch, go to the office, buy a dozen Christmas presents and catch the one-forty?”
  “Christmas presents! I forgot ’em! What do you think of that? I forgot ’em. Good night!”
  “What are you going to do?”
  “Do! What can I do? You got me into this mess. Get me out!”
  “Sure, I’ll get you out if you’ll listen to reason!” said Tommy. “Has this one-forty train got anything on you? Are you under obligations to it? Is the engineer your girl’s uncle?”
  “I guess you know better than that. I guess you know I’m not engaged to a girl who’s got an uncle for an engineer.”
  “Well, then, what’s the next train?”
  “That’s the boy, Tommy! That fixes it! I’ll go on the next train.”
  “You’re sure there is one?” asked Tommy.
  “Is one! Say, where do you think South Bend is? In Europe?”
  “I wouldn’t mind,” said Tommy.
"South Bend's only a two-hour run. Where did you think it was? Europe?"

"I don't care where it is. The question is, what's the next train after one-forty?"

"Maybe you think I don't know," said Billy. He called the gentleman with the apron. "What do you know about this, Charley? Here's an old pal of mine who thinks I don't know the time-table to South Bend."

"He's mistaken, isn't he?" said Charley.

"Is he mistaken? Say, Charley, if you knew as much as I do about the time-table to South Bend, you wouldn't be here."

"No, sir," said Charley. "I'd be an announcer over in the station."

"There!" said Billy triumphantly. "How's that, Tommy? Do I know the time-table or don't I?"

"I guess you do," said Tommy. "But I don't think you ought to have secrets from an old friend."

"There's no secrets about it, Charley."

"My name is Tommy," corrected his friend.

"I know that. I know your name as well as my own, better'n my own. I know your name as well as I know the time-table."

"If you'd just tell me the time of that train, we'd all be better off."

"I'll tell you, Tommy. I wouldn't hold out anything on you, old boy. It's five twenty-five."

"You're sure?"

"Sure! Say, I've taken it a hundred times if I've taken it once."

"All right," said Tommy. "That fixes it. We'll go in and have lunch and be through by half-past one. That'll give you four hours to do your shopping, get to your office and make your train."

"Where you going while I shop?"

"Don't bother about me."

"You go along with me."

"Nothing doing."

"Yes, you do."

"No, I don't."

But this argument was won by Mr. Bowen. At ten minutes of three, when they at last called for the check,
Mr. Richards looked on the shopping expedition in an entirely different light. Two hours before, it had not appealed to him at all. Now he could think of nothing that would afford more real entertainment. Mr. Richards was at a stage corresponding to Billy's twenty-one. Billy was far past it.

"What we better do," said Tommy, "is write down a list of all the people so we won't forget anybody."

"That's the stuff!" said Billy. "I'll name 'em, you write 'em."

So Tommy produced a pencil and took dictation on the back of a menu-card.

"First, girl's father, Sam'l McDonald."

"Samuel McDonald," repeated Tommy. "Maybe you'd better give me some dope on each one, so if we're shy of time, we can both be buying at once."

"All right," said Billy. "First, Sam'l McDonald. He's an ol' crab. Raves about cig'rettes."

"Like 'em?"

"No. Hates 'em."

"Sam'l McDonald, cigarettes," wrote Tommy. "Old crab," he added.

When the important preliminary arrangement had at last been completed, the two old college chums went out into the air.

"Where do we shop?" asked Tommy.

"Marsh's," said Billy. "'S only place I got charge account."

"Maybe we better take a taxi and save time," suggested Tommy.

So they waited five minutes for a taxi and were driven to Marsh's, two blocks away.

"We'll start on the first floor and work up," said Tommy, who had evidently appointed himself captain.

They found themselves among the jewellery and silverware.

"You might get something for the girl here," suggested Tommy.

"Don't worry 'bout her," said Billy. "Leave her till last."

"What's the limit on the others?"

"I don't care," said Billy. "Dollar, two dollars, three dollars."
"Well, come on," said Tommy. "We got to make it snappy."

But Billy hung back.
"Say, ol' boy," he wheedled. "You're my ol'st frien'. Is that right?"
"That's right," agreed Tommy.
"Well, say, ol' frien', I'm pretty near all in."
"Go home, then, if you want to. I can pull this all right alone."
"Nothin' doin'. But if I could jus' li'l nap, ten, fifteen minutes—you could get couple things here on fir' floor and then come get me."
"Where?"
"Third floor waitin'-room."
"Go ahead. But wait a minute. Give me some of your cards. And will I have any trouble charging things?"
"Not a bit. Tell 'em you're me."

It was thus that Tommy Richards was left alone in a large store, with Billy Bowen's charge account, Billy Bowen's list, and Billy Bowen's cards.

He glanced at the list.
"Samuel McDonald, cigarettes. Old crab," he read.

He approached a floor-walker.
"Say, old pal," he said. "I'm doing some shopping and I'm in a big hurry. Where'd I find something for an old cigarette fiend!"

"Cigarette-cases, two aisles down and an aisle to your left," said Old Pal.

Tommy raised the limit on the cigarette-case he picked out for Samuel McDonald. It was $3.75.
"I'll cut down somewhere else," he thought. "The father-in-law ought to be favoured a little."

"Charge," he said in response to a query, "William Bowen, Bowen and Company, 18 South La Salle. And here's a card for it. That go out to-night sure?"

He looked again at the list.
THE FACTS

He consulted Old Pal once more. Old Pal’s advice was to go to the third floor and look over the books. The advice proved sound. On the third floor Tommy found for Mother “The First Principles of Auction Bridge,” and for Aunt Harriet an English grammar. He also bumped into a counter laden with hymnals, chant books, and Books of Common Prayer.

“Aunt Mary!” he exclaimed. And to the clerk: “How much are your medium prayer-books?”

“What denomination?” asked the clerk, whose name was Freda Swanson.

“One or two dollars,” said Tommy.

“What church, I mean?” inquired Freda.

“How would I know?” said Tommy. “Are there different books for different churches?”

“Sure. Catholic, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Lutheran——”

“Let’s see. McDonald, Carey. How much are the Catholic.

“Here’s one at a dollar and a half. In Latin, too.”

“That’s it. That’ll give her something to work on.”

Tommy figured on the back of his list.

“Good work, Tommy!” he thought. “Four and a half under the top limit for those three. Walter’s next.”

He plunged on Walter. A nice poker set, discovered on the fourth floor, came to five even. Tommy wished he could keep it for himself. He also wished constantly that the women shoppers had taken a course in dodging. He was almost as badly battered as the day he played guard against the Indians.

“Three left besides the queen herself,” he observed.

“Lord, no. I forgot Bob and his missus.”

He moved downstairs again to the books.

“Have you got ‘The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife’?” he queried.

Anna Henderson looked, but could not find it.

“Never mind!” said Tommy. “Here’s one that’ll do.”

And he ordered “The Green-Eyed Monster” for the cooing doves in Evanston.

“Now,” he figured, “there’s just Wilma and Edith and Aunt Louise.” Once more he started away from the books, but a title caught his eye: “Eat and Grow Thin.”

“Great!” exclaimed Tommy. “It’ll do for Edith. By
George! It'll do for both of them. 'Eat' for Wilma, and the 'Grow Thin' for Edith. I guess that's doubling up some! And now for Aunt Louise."

The nearest floor-walker told him, in response to his query, that switches would be found on the second floor.

"I ought to have a switch-engine to take me round," said Tommy, who never had felt better in his life. But the floor-walker did not laugh, possibly because he was tired.

"Have you anything to match it with?" asked the lady in the switch-yard.

"No, I haven't."

"Can you give me an idea of the colour?"

"What colours have you got?" demanded Tommy.

"Everything there is. I'll show them all to you, if you've got the time."

"Never mind," said Tommy. "What's your favourite colour in hair?"

The girl laughed.

"Golden," she said.

"You're satisfied, aren't you?" said Tommy, for the girl had chosen the shade of her own shaggy mane. "All right, make it golden. And a merry Christmas to you."

He forgot to ask the price of switches. He added up the rest and found that the total was $16.25.

"About seventy-five cents for the hair," he guessed. "That will make it seventeen even. I'm some shopper. And all done in an hour and thirteen minutes."

He discovered Billy asleep in the waiting-room, and it took him three precious minutes to bring him to.

"Everybody's fixed but the girl herself," he boasted. "I got books for most of 'em."

"Where have you been?" asked Billy. "What time is it?"

"You've got about thirty-three minutes to get a present for your lady love and grab your train. You'll have to pass up the office."

"What time is it? Where have you been?"

"Don't bother about that. Come on."

On the ride down, Billy begged everyone in the elevator to tell him the time, but no one seemed to know. Tommy hurried him out of the store and into a taxi.

"There's a flock of stores round the station," said Tommy. "You can find something there for the dame."
But the progress of the cab through the packed downtown streets was painfully slow, and the station clock, when at last they got in sight of it, registered 5:17.

"You can't wait!" said Tommy. "Give me some money and tell me what to get."

Billy fumbled clumsily in seven pockets before he located the pocket-book. In it were two fives and a ten.

"I gotta have a fevee," he said.

"All right. I'll get something for fifteen. What'll it be?"

"Make it a wrist-watch."

"Sure she has none?"

"She's got one. That's for other wis'."

"I used your last card. Have you got another?"


Tommy hastily searched and found a card. He pushed Billy toward the station entrance.

"Good-bye, and merry Christmas," said Tommy.

"Goo'-bye, and God bless you!" said Billy, but he was talking to a large policeman.

"Where are you trying to go?" asked the latter.

"Souse Ben," said Billy.

"Hurry up, then. You've only got a minute."

The minute and six more were spent in the purchase of a ticket. And when Billy reached the gate, the 5:25 had gone and the 5:30 was about to chase it.

"Where to?" inquired the gate-man.

"Souse Ben,'" said Billy.

"Run, then," said the gate-man.

Billy ran. He ran to the first open vestibule of the Rock Island train, bound for St. Joe, Missouri.

"Where to?" asked a porter.

"Souse," said Billy.

"Ah can see that," said the porter. "But where you goin'?"

The train began to move, and Billy, one foot dragging on the station platform, moved with it. The porter dexterously pulled him aboard. And he was allowed to ride to Englewood.

Walking down Van Buren Street, it suddenly occurred to the genial Mr. Richards that he would have to go some himself to get his baggage and catch the 6:30 for the north-west. He
thought of it in front of a Van Buren jewellery shop. He stopped, and went in.

Three-quarters of an hour later, a messenger-boy delivered a particularly ugly and frankly inexpensive wrist-watch at the McDonald home. The parcel was addressed to Miss McDonald, and the accompanying card read:

"Mr. Bowen: Call me up any night, after seven. Calumet 2678. Miss Violet Moore."

There was no goodwill toward men in the McDonald home this Christmas. Ellen spent the day in bed, and the orders were that she must not be disturbed.

Downstairs, one person smiled. It was Walter. He smiled in spite of the fact that his father had tossed his brand-new five-dollar poker set into the open fireplace. He smiled in spite of the fact that he was not allowed to leave the house, not even to take Kathryn to church.

"Gee!" he thought, between smiles, "Billy sure had nerve!"

Bob walked round among his relatives seeking to dispel the gloom with a remark that he thought apt and nifty:

"Be grateful," was the remark, "that he had one of his screamingly funny moods before it was too late."

But no one but Bob seemed to think much of the remark, and no one seemed grateful.

Those are the facts, and it was quite a job to dig them up. But I did it.
H. G. Wells completed his education at the Royal College of Science and soon afterwards began writing the clever and often humorous stories with a scientific background which made his name. Only less famous than his novels are The Outline of History and his ingenious prophecy of the future entitled The Shape of Things to Come.
THE POTWELL INN

I

When a man has once broken through the paper walls of everyday circumstance, those unsubstantial walls that hold so many of us securely prisoned from the cradle to the grave, he has made a discovery. If the world does not please you, you can change it. Determine to alter it at any price, and you can change it altogether. You may change it to something sinister and angry, to something appalling, but it may be you will change it to something brighter, something more agreeable, and at the worst something much more interesting. There is only one sort of man who is absolutely to blame for his own misery, and that is the man who finds life dull and dreary. There are no circumstances in the world that determined action cannot alter, unless, perhaps, they are the walls of a prison cell, and even those will dissolve and change, I am told, into the infirmary compartment, at any rate, for the man who can fast with resolution. I give these things as facts and information, and with no moral intimations. And Mr. Polly, lying awake at nights, with a renewed indigestion, with Miriam sleeping sonorously beside him, and a general air of inevitableness about his situation, saw through it, understood there was no inevitable any more, and escaped his former despair.

He could, for example, "clear out."

It became a wonderful and alluring phrase to him—"Clear out!"

Why had he never thought of clearing out before?

He was amazed and a little shocked at the unimaginative and superfluous criminality in him that had turned old, cramped, and stagnant Fishbourne into a blaze and new beginnings. (I wish from the bottom of my heart I could add that he was properly sorry.) But something constricting
and restrained seemed to have been destroyed by that flare. *Fishbourne wasn’t the world.* That was the new, the essential fact of which he had lived so lamentably in ignorance. Fishbourne, as he had known it and hated it, so that he wanted to kill himself to get out of it, *wasn’t the world.*

The insurance money he was to receive made everything humane and kindly and practicable. He would “clear out” with justice and humanity. He would take exactly twenty-one pounds, and all the rest he would leave to Miriam. That seemed to him absolutely fair. Without him, she could do all sorts of things—all the sorts of things she was constantly urging him to do.

And he would go off along the white road that led to Garchester, and on to Crogate and so to Tunbridge Wells, where there was a Toad Rock he had heard of but never seen. (It seemed to him this must needs be a marvel.) And so to other towns and cities. He would walk and loiter by the way, and sleep in inns at night, and get an odd job here and there, and talk to strange people.

Perhaps he would get quite a lot of work, and prosper; and if he did not do so he would lie down in front of a train, or wait for a warm night and then fall into some smooth, broad river. Not so bad as sitting down to a dentist—not nearly so bad. And he would never open a shop any more.

So the possibilities of the future presented themselves to Mr. Polly as he lay awake at nights.

It was springtime, and in the woods, so soon as one got out of reach of the sea wind, there would be anemones and primroses.

A month later a leisurely and dusty tramp, plump equatorially and slightly bald, with his hands in his pockets and his lips puckered to a contemplative whistle, strolled along the river bank between Uppingdon and Potwell. It was a profusely budding spring day, and greens such as God had never permitted in the world before in human memory (though, indeed, they come every year and we forget) were mirrored vividly in a mirror of equally unprecedented brown. For a time the wanderer stopped and stood still, and even the thin whistle died away from his lips as he watched a *water-vole* run to and fro upon a little headland across the stream. The vole plopped into the water, and swam and