THE LEG-PULLER

"BARTIMEUS"
"Bartimeus" is the name under which Paymaster-Commander Ricci, R.N., who is now serving in the Royal Yacht Victoria and Albert, writes his vivid stories of naval life. Naval Occasions, A Tall Ship and Unreality are the best known of his books.
THE LEG-PULLER

GOVERNMENT departments have been known in their lighter moments to exchange departmental jests. But the individual is not encouraged to be funny at their expense. It has been attempted from time to time; but this is a game in which he who laughs last laughs loudest. And the Government department generally laughs last. There is, however, an exception to every rule of life. The exception in the instance I am about to relate was John Octavius Peglar, citizen of the United States of America. For him was reserved the peculiar distinction of having pulled the leg of the British Admiralty—or, anyhow, one of its departments—and he "got away with it."

He did not look a humorist. Few really funny people do. Moreover, he had no intention of being funny at the Admiralty's expense—up to a point. The Admiralty plainly asked for it. The doubt in my mind is the precise point at which John Octavius decided to give them what they asked for.

He was an urbane, clean-shaven little man, wearing rimless pince-nez, precise and business-like in an unobtrusive way, as befitted the head of a big American business firm giving occupation, chiefly in accountancy, to some hundreds of employees, and controlling several millions of dollars.

John Peglar was in London, transacting business on behalf of his firm, when Great Britain declared war on Germany. Apart from business considerations Mr. Peglar decided this did not call for any active steps on his part. He was perfectly content to let Great Britain and Germany fight while he continued to transact business. But one fine day the Lusitania was sunk, and Mr. Peglar awoke to certain vital aspects of the brawl he had not hitherto considered. He gave his own country forty-eight hours, and then approached a certain influential Englishman of his
acquaintance, with whom he spent a quarter of an hour in private conversation. Emerging from his friend’s office he dispatched two cables: one to his business partner in New York, the other to his wife. He then walked to the Admiralty and sent his card up to an official, with a note from his friend. The official looked up from the note as Mr. Peglar was admitted, and scowled at him.

“Good morning.”
“Good morning.”
“I understand you are a Canadian?”
“Er—yes,” said Mr. Peglar.
“And you wish to join the British Navy as a Paymaster in the Royal Naval Reserve, having failed for the Army on account of eyesight?”
“Yes,” said Mr. Peglar again.
“Have you any experience of accountancy?”
“I know the first four rules of arithmetic,” was the modest reply from the head of the firm of Peglar and Ziegland.
“So much the better. How would you like to be the Paymaster of an armed Boarding Steamer?”
“I could tell you better after I’d been one for a while.”
“It’s of no consequence. You will be appointed to-night. Please leave your address. Good morning.”
“Good morning.” In the courtyard outside Mr. Peglar stopped and gazed up at the soot-grimed windows from which King Charles the First had emerged on to the scaffold. A pigeon swooped past, nearly brushing his shoulders with its wings. “Marvellous!” said Mr. Peglar in an awed voice. Whether he referred to the tameness of the pigeon, or the historical associations of his surroundings, or his recent interview, I am unable to say.

Once more that day Mr. Peglar gave vent to the same expression of emotion, when some hours after he had visited a Naval outfitter, a cardboard box was delivered at the hotel where he was staying. He bore it up to his room, and in its rococo privacy surveyed himself with an expressionless countenance in front of a long mirror, garbed in the uniform of a British Naval Officer.

“Marvellous!” repeated Mr. Peglar.

This is not a war story, or one might be tempted to enlarge on some of Mr. Peglar’s early experiences, assisting to conduct a blockade of the German coast. Doubtless he
found them marvellous, although he did not say so. Nothing, not even seasickness, shook his imperturbable and enigmatical urbanity. But on the subject of the British naval system of accountancy he permitted himself some comments to the Leading Victualling Assistant, who composed his Staff. He spent a forenoon examining the ledger, cash, clothing and victualling accounts, the butt of a cigar between his teeth.

He sighed as he closed the last book. "I stood not long ago beneath the window out of which King Charles the First stepped to execution. I was conscious of the associations with the past which surround Englishmen so closely on all sides. This goes one better. This links one up with Noah and the Ark. It's a fine system, but cumbersome."

"Yessir," said the Leading Victualling Assistant without the least idea what Mr. Peglar was talking about, and bore the books away.

Mr. Peglar found that the task of feeding, clothing, and paying a ship's company of fifty souls did not present any very unusual difficulties. He kept the ledger, checked the Leading Victualling Assistant's accounts, rendered interminable and apparently purposeless returns to the Admiralty. In leisure moments he perused, the inevitable cigar between his teeth, a massive tome that appeared to afford him inexhaustible interest. It was called "The King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions."

Thus two months passed when a cloud rose above the horizon of Mr. Peglar's serenity. A deputation waited on him from the Lower Deck with a request for fresh meat. Owing to the service on which the ship was employed and the fact that she was not fitted with a refrigerator, officers and men had been compelled to subsist chiefly on tinned comestibles.

The ship being still at sea, out of sight of land, Mr. Peglar thought the request somewhat unreasonable. The British bluejacket was new to him. He temporized with the deputation and promised them their fill of fresh meat the first time the ship communicated with the land. He reported the interview to the Captain. "They tell me they wouldn't be surprised if scurvy broke out 'most any time," concluded Mr. Peglar, eyeing his Commanding Officer through his glasses with impenetrable gravity. The Captain, an
ex-Merchant Service Skipper holding a Commander’s Commission in the Royal Naval Reserve, burst into a guffaw. "Scurvy, my foot. They’ve fed like lords ever since the war started; I’d like some of ’em to have been at sea with me when I was a youngster. Windjammers... Scurvy! Well, well! Still, we’ve got to keep ’em happy, I suppose. We shall be near an island in the Northern Hebrides by noon tomorrow. I’ll lower a boat and you can go ashore and see what you can do."

Accordingly, the following day the ship hove to, and Mr. Peglar, after a perilous passage which nearly ended in the boat being dashed to pieces on the rocks, landed on a desolate and barren island. He approached the only habitation in sight, a cottage built of turf with a reed thatch. An old deaf woman came to the door, and Mr. Peglar explained his mission. The old woman understood only Gaelic, and was under the impression that the island was being raided by Germans. The subsequent negotiations took some time, but Mr. Peglar succeeded in conveying his requirements and in paying for eight sheep. The old woman waved a wrinkled hand at the bleak hillside, indicating that her visitor might help himself.

Mr. Peglar went back and collected three of the boat’s crew. With their aid he succeeded, after two hours and a half of the most violent physical exertion in his experience, in cornering five bleating muttons, and conveyed them, struggling wildly, to the boat. He broke his glasses in the course of the mêlée, and finally arrived on board dishevelled and exhausted, but mildly triumphant; his flock were collected in an improvised pen, and Mr. Peglar called for a volunteer butcher.

As has been said, he was new to that most baffling of all human enigmas, the processes of the blue-jacket’s mind. Within five minutes of their arrival on board the sheep had been adopted by the ship’s company, christened, ornamented with bows of ribbon, and fed variously upon cigarettes, condensed milk, tinned vegetables, and haricot beans. Mr. Peglar’s supplications for their execution fell on shocked and outraged ears. They were the ship’s pets, and not a hand would any man raise, except to fondle them.

John Octavius Peglar’s jaw took a hard line. It was unfamiliar to his shipmates, but quite a number of men
in Wall Street would have recognized it and steered clear. He went down to the First Lieutenant's cabin. "Say, Number One," he said, standing in the doorway and breathing through his nostrils. "Say, can I borrow your automatic revolver?"

"What's up?" inquired the startled First Lieutenant.

"Well, these damned sailors asked for fresh meat"—Mr. Peglar slipped the weapon, which the other extended, into his pocket—"and—and they're going to have it."

In due course, the sheep having been consumed, Mr. Peglar rendered his accounts to the Admiralty. They were models of what accounts should be, but in the eyes of Whitehall they lacked one essential detail. Mr. Peglar had omitted to take on charge, and expend by the simple process of throwing overboard, the "arisings" of the sheep.

Now "arisings" are an important item of Naval store accounts. They represent what is left over. For instance, the "arisings" of a candle is a puddle of wax, which is the property of the State. The "arisings" of the sheep after they had been skinned, cut up and eaten were also, properly speaking, the property of the State. In this and similar cases the State was prepared to waive the joys of actual possession provided it was made clear that they had not been disposed of in such a way as to benefit an individual. In other words, provided they were duly certified as thrown overboard this Mr. Peglar, with his New World scorn for non-essentials, had omitted to do.

A few weeks elapsed and the accounts were returned with an official request that it might be stated by the Accountant Officer how the "arisings" of sheep, five in number, had been disposed of. Mr. Peglar was unfamiliar with the term. He summoned the Leading Victualling Assistant to explain. The Leading Victualling Assistant explained, in one terse Anglo-Saxon word that carried complete enlightenment.

"Well!" said Mr. Peglar. "They can search me for them. Do they think I've eaten them, anyway?"

"Couldn't say, sir," replied his Staff helpfully.

"I'll write and ask them," said Mr. Peglar, and did so.

The ensuing correspondence need not be repeated in detail. It reached its climax when Whitehall, having accused Mr. Peglar of attempting flippancy, was told by that urbane gentleman that they wouldn't have thought so if they had seen him handling the First Lieutenant's automatic revolver.
in the sheep-pen. Then Whitehall wearied of the jest after the manner of a Great Government Department who felt that the thing had gone far enough. In curt official phraseology Mr. Peglar was bidden to account for the "arisings" or pay for them. Further, he was informed, in no uncertain terms, that the correspondence on the subject must cease. Whitehall then, deciding that it had laughed last, turned its attention to other matters.

Again Mr. Peglar's smooth jaw took on that ominous prominence. "No, sir!" said the head of the firm of Peglar and Ziegland. "Not my money. But if it's 'arisings' you want, you shall have them."

The ship was then at Dundee, refitting. Mr. Peglar went ashore and requested a policeman to direct him to the nearest slaughter-house. Here Mr. Peglar interviewed a gentleman in ensanguined overalls and explained his mission. "Equivalent to about five sheep," he concluded. The gentleman indicated a heap of assorted arisings and invited Mr. Peglar to help himself. Mr. Peglar filled five sacks and drove them down to the ship in a cab. Here he transferred the contents to a packing-case, nailed it up, and addressed it to the Admiralty Official whose signature ornamented the recent official correspondence. Then feeling in need of refreshment he repaired to the Wardroom.

The First Lieutenant proffered him an evening newspaper.

"America's entered the war," he said.

Mr. Peglar looked relieved. "Then I guess I'll get along and pack my grip." He rose and moved towards the door. The First Lieutenant looked surprised.

"Why? Where are you going?"

Mr. Peglar paused in the doorway.

"America," was the brief reply. "Right now." The curtain swung to behind him and a dry unfamiliar chuckle.

John Octavius Peglar had laughed last.
NO SALE

WALTER R. BROOKS
Walter R. Brooks has had a great success in America as a writer of humorous stories, and has recently had his first novel published in this country—*Ernestine Takes Over*. 
ONCE upon a time there was a broker named George Plaskett. He had a nice house and a wife named Ethel and a seat on the Stock Exchange and a man to drive his car. He lived in Great Neck. He went into the city every day except Sunday when he stayed home and looked at his stamp collection which was in two big books on top of the piano. Every evening when they did not go out to a party the Plasketts turned on all the lights and had a party of their own.

Mr. Plaskett was very popular at parties because he could mix a great many different drinks without even looking them up in the book and because he always told the ladies the funny jokes the other brokers had told him during the day and the ladies told them to their husbands and everybody had a good laugh. All the people in Great Neck said What a lucky man Mr. Plaskett is to be sure.

Well, by and by hard times came along and Mr. Plaskett got worried. Nobody wanted anything done. He kept on going to the city every day but there wasn't anything to do and he spent his time looking at his stamp collection which he had taken in with him. The brokers didn't tell each other funny jokes any more and when he wanted some to tell at parties he had to look them up in old magazines and nobody laughed at them very much.

He didn't say anything to Mrs. Plaskett about the hard times but she guessed it one day when he told her she couldn't have the mink coat she said she wanted for Christmas. She got sort of mad. She said Why George Plaskett how can you sit there and say I can't have that coat when you promised it to me and I can prove you promised it by Mother because she was here and she heard you say it. And Mr. Plaskett said Your mother never stops talking long enough to hear
anything. And Mrs. Plaskett began to cry and went into her bedroom.

Now Mr. Plaskett needed ten thousand dollars very badly that day to save his business. So he sat down on a chair and said hell twice and then he got up and went into the bedroom and said Ethel I guess you don’t know how bad things are brokers would all be committing suicide but they can’t make enough to pay funeral expenses and I may even lose my stamp collection. I sent it over to Beebe and Beebe to-day to see if they would make me an offer for it. Oh what a pity said Mrs. Plaskett and she smiled in a funny way that Mr. Plaskett didn’t like so he said oh dear helplessly and looked unhappy. But Mrs. Plaskett wouldn’t look at him so he sighed very loud and went out in the other room and sat down and thought.

Well after about five minutes he had thought all the thoughts he could think of and Mrs. Plaskett hadn’t come out to see him thinking and his stamp collection was at Beebe and Beebe’s so he picked up a book. It was an old book on magic. It opened first at a page that had recipes on it with notes in Mrs. Plaskett’s handwriting and he thought it was a cook book.

Then he read Take the juice of two spiders and a pinch of powdered thighbone of a parricide and he said That’s funny and looked at the top of the page and read Love philtres and potions. He wasn’t interested in that so he began looking at pictures of famous magicians mostly old men with beards and then he came to a chapter How to sell your soul to the devil. And he read There are many instances on record of great wealth having been attained by those who have made compacts with the evil one, and there were a number of pictures of the devil some with horns and a tail and others very ordinary looking so that you wouldn’t have guessed they were anybody special.

Well Mr. Plaskett went on reading and by and by Mrs. Plaskett stuck her head out and said George what are you doing? And Mr. Plaskett said I am going to sell my soul to the devil. And Mrs. Plaskett said You’d better sell some stocks to your customers. Then Mr. Plaskett got mad and he said I’ve told you fifty times that they won’t buy anything now and I don’t know how to make money any other way and I don’t want to lose my stamp collection. So Mrs. Plaskett said Well
go ahead and sell your old soul then such as it is you might as well get something out of it but for goodness' sake try to drive a decent bargain you know you're a fool at business. And she sniffed and shut the door.

Well Mr. Plaskett hadn't really been serious when he said he was going to sell his soul because he didn't know much about it or have any idea what it was worth. But Mrs. Plaskett made him mad and anyway maybe he could save his stamp collection. So he read over the directions and then he got some gin and put it in four saucers in the corners of the room and tried to light it. But it was the gin he used for company and wouldn't burn so he had to get a new bottle that had just come.

That burned nicely and then he drew pentacles and intertwining circles on the floor like the book said and then he stood in the middle with a lighted candle in his hand and read out loud from the book the magic words. He read them very loud so the devil would be sure to hear and just in the middle of it Mrs. Plaskett opened the door again and said George what on earth.

Oh said Mr. Plaskett please let me alone I told you what I was doing. And Mrs. Plaskett said I smelt gin, and Mr. Plaskett said Of course you did I have to use it in raising the devil. And Mrs. Plaskett said Well if you're going to raise the devil you might at least not do it in my living-room when I'm trying to sleep why don't you go out to the garage? And she sniffed and shut the door again. So Mr. Plaskett began all over again.

And when he got through nothing happened. There wasn't any clap of thunder and there wasn't any smell of brimstone only burned gin. Mr. Plaskett stood still for a minute with the candle in his hand looking foolish and then he began tidying up the room so Mrs. Plaskett wouldn't be cross at breakfast.

And just then the telephone-bell rang. He went to it and said Yes crossly and a far-off voice said Hello Plaskett this is the devil and I got your call but I had a lot of business in Washington and couldn't get there would it be all right if I dropped in to-morrow? And Mr. Plaskett said Sure come to lunch, and the voice said OK about one? and Mr. Plaskett said Swell I'll expect you and hung up and went to bed.
Well, Mr. Plaskett’s mind was so full of the devil that he didn’t sleep very well and he was late at the office next morning. His secretary said Good morning dear there are three men waiting to see you, and Mr. Plaskett said What do they look like? and the secretary said Oh just like three men—nobody I know, and Mr. Plaskett said Well I don’t suppose the devil would send in his own name anyway, and the secretary laughed because she thought it was one of Mr. Plaskett’s little jokes.

So the first man that came in was tall and dark and had a hooked nose and a little red feather in his hatband and Mr. Plaskett felt sure he was the devil. So he bowed and the man bowed and said speaking very quick Well Mr. Plaskett I assume you are still of the same mind about selling, and Mr. Plaskett said yes. And the man said Of course you understand that a lot of these things are being thrown on the market nowadays and I can’t buy everything that is offered to me but I have looked yours over and I will offer you two thousand dollars. What said Mr. Plaskett tut tut that is no offer at all I imagine I know values better than that.

For he had thought that even if his soul wasn’t worth 10,000 dollars he would try to get that for it because it was the exact sum he needed to save his business. Then the tall man talked a lot about how the market had sunk and about how even missionaries were almost a drug on the market and he said he knew it was hard to give up one’s most cherished possessions but after all they didn’t pay any interest and in these times an increase in value was doubtful.

That may be true said Mr. Plaskett but if you get it you’ll pay me 10,000 dollars not a penny less. Three thousand said the man Not a cent more. Nine thousand said Mr. Plaskett. Take it or leave it. Four thousand said the man And that’s my last word.

And so they agreed on seven thousand and the man wrote out a check and then he said You understand I am paying that much for only one reason because I want all those Hawaiian missionary stamps. What said Mr. Plaskett You are not the devil? And the man laughed and said No I am Mr. Beebe of Beebe and Beebe the stamp merchants you will have your joke Mr. Plaskett good morning.

Well well said Mr. Plaskett to himself That was pretty nice and I am glad he wasn’t the devil because I only need
three thousand more and I ought to be able to get that much for my soul. Then the next man came in and he was a Mr. Peabody a fat man in a velour hat and Mr. Plaskett said to himself He doesn’t look like the pictures in the book but it would be just like the devil to wear a velour hat and maybe he’s him and he bowed politely.

Now Mr. Peabody was not the devil at all but an insurance man, and Mr. Plaskett’s politeness was so unusual in his experience that he began to cry. Come come old chap said Mr. Plaskett and Mr. Peabody said, Oh dear please excuse me I’m really very happy my old aunt in Lansing died last week and left me 200,000 dollars and this is my last day selling insurance.

What you are an insurance salesman said Mr. Plaskett Out of my sight. No no shouted Mr. Peabody falling on his knees. Don’t say it don’t say it you are the first man who has been polite to me in forty years and long ago I made a vow that the first man who was really nice to me I would give half my fortune to if I ever had one and now I have one and half of it is yours. What said Mr. Plaskett You mean you will give me one hundred thousand dollars? Yes said Mr. Peabody and he took the fountain-pen he always had ready in his hand and made out a paper that said Mr. Plaskett was to have half his aunt’s estate and shook hands and said good-bye.

Aha said Mr. Plaskett Now I have one hundred and seven thousand dollars and my soul is going up I shall not sell it for less than five hundred thousand dollars and a steam yacht. He looked at his watch and it was half past one and he said Well that last man out there must certainly be the devil because Satan always keeps his appointments. So the third man came in and he was a tough little man with a squint and no hair and Mr. Plaskett thought Well I suppose this is just one of the devil’s disguises but where can we go to lunch so we won’t be seen together? And he said Are you the devil? You said it said the little man Well maybe I ain’t the head devil but the boss sent me around to sell you some protection Just sign this and everything will be O K.

And he handed Mr. Plaskett a paper which would bind him to pay the Brokers’ Protective Association ten dollars monthly for life. But Mr. Plaskett laid the paper down without looking at it and said Well you go pretty fast but understand now I
am to have five hundred thousand dollars and a steam yacht in good order or there's no deal. And the little man said Geest you’re nuts come on buddy sign the paper. How'd you like to come home some night and find your house all blown to hell?

And Mr. Plaskett said It has its points but how about that half million have you got it with you? Then the little man got down off the desk where he had been sitting and put his hand in his pocket and edged toward the door and growled Geest what the boss mean sending me to shake down a looney? And Mr. Plaskett said Are you really the devil? The little man said Sure don’t kid yourself. All right said Mr. Plaskett, Then vanish. And as the little man didn’t say anything Mr. Plaskett said Come on do some tricks.

Well the little man didn't do any tricks just stood and showed his teeth so Mr. Plaskett said Well I guess you aren't him after all but I can prove it. And he began to say in a loud voice the formula he had read in the book which would make the devil disappear. And when the little man heard the Latin words he turned pale and ran out of the office screaming I can't do business with no looney and I won't what's more.

Well Mr. Plaskett waited a while longer but nobody else called and he said to himself Well I guess the devil changed his mind but it's all right with me I have enough money anyway. So he went out to lunch.

A little while after lunch he started home because it was pretty slow in the office without his stamp collection to look at. When he got there the cook came in and said What'll I do about dinner? And Mr. Plaskett said What do you mean do about dinner? And the cook said Well there was a dark complexioned gentleman called this noon he said he was to have lunch with you and you weren't here so Mrs. Plaskett invited him to stay.

My goodness said Mr. Plaskett, where did he go? He thought I meant the house and not the office. And the cook said I don't know Him and the missis went away about three and said to tell you they wouldn't be back and so what shall I do about dinner? And Mr. Plaskett said Serve it serve it he's got her and maybe I'm . . . sorry . . . and maybe I'm not and he went into the living-room. There was a strong smell of brimstone in the living-room and chairs and tables
were knocked every which way. I’m glad she put up a good fight said Mr. Plaskett and lit a cigar.

Well that was the last he ever heard of either Mrs. Plaskett or the devil and he still had his soul and didn’t have to buy a mink coat. And he took some of the money from Mr. Peabody’s aunt’s estate to start a new stamp collection.
A GOOD ACTION

STACY AUMONIER
Stacy Aumonier, one of the most brilliant recent writers of short stories, was an artist of great talent, and also a popular society entertainer before he began writing. Some of his best stories are contained in the volume *Miss Braceyrdle and Others*. 
A GOOD ACTION

It is undoubtedly true that the majority of us perform the majority of our actions through what are commonly known as mixed motives.

It would certainly have been quite impossible for Mr. Edwin Potheary to analyze the concrete impulse which eventually prompted him to perform his good action. It may have been a natural revolt from the somewhat petty and cramped punctilio of his daily life; his drab home life, the bickering, wearing, grasping routine of the existence of fish-and-chips dispenser. A man who earns his livelihood by buying fish and potatoes in the cheapest market, and selling them in the Waterloo Road, cannot afford to indulge his altruistic fancies to any lavish extent. It is true that the business of Mr. Edwin Potheary was a tolerably successful one—he employed three assistants and a boy named Scales who was not so much an assistant as an encumbrance and wholesale plate-smasher. Mr. Potheary engaged him because he thought his name seemed appropriate to the fish-trade. In a weak moment he pandered to this sentimental whim, another ingredient in the strange composition which influences us to do this, that, and the other. But it was not by pandering to whims of this nature that Mr. Potheary had built up this progressive and odoriferous business with its gay shopfront of blue and brown tiles. It was merely a minor lapse. In the fish-and-chip trade one has to be keen, pushful, self-reliant, ambidextrous, a student of human nature, forbearing, far-seeing, imaginative, courageous, something of a controversialist with a streak of fatalism as pronounced as that of a high-priest in a Brahmin temple. It is better, moreover, to have an imperfect nasal organism, and to be religious.

Edwin had all these qualities. Every day he went from Quince Villa at Buffington to London—forty minutes in the train—and back at night. On Sunday he took the wife and
three children to the Methodist Chapel at the corner of the street to both morning and evening service. But even this religious observance does not give us a complete solution for the sudden prompting of an idea to do a good action. Edwin had attended chapel for fifty-two years and such an impulse had never occurred to him before. He may possibly have been influenced by some remark of the preacher, or was it that twinge of gout which set him thinking of the unwritten future? Had it anything to do with the Boy-Scout movement? Someone at some time had told him of an underlying idea—that every day in one's life one should do one pure, good and unselfish action.

Perhaps after all it was all due to the gaiety of a spring morning. Certain it is that as he swung 'out of the garden gate on that morning in April something stirred in him. His round puffy face blinked heavenwards. Almond blossoms fluttered in the breeze above the hedge-rows. Larks were singing. ... Suddenly his eye alighted upon the roof of the Peel's hen-house opposite, and Mr. Edwin Pothecary scowled. Lord! how he hated those people! The Peels were Pothecary's bêtes-noires. Snobs! Pirates! Rotters!

The Peel's villa was at least three times as big as the Pothecary's. It was, in fact, not a villa at all. It was a "court"—whatever that was! It was quite detached, with about fourteen rooms in all, a coach-house, a large garden, and two black sheds containing forty-five fowls, leading an intensive existence. The Pothecarys had five fowls which sometimes did and sometimes didn't supply them with two or three eggs a day, but it was known that the Peels sent at least two hundred and fifty-eggs to market every week, besides supplying their own table. Mr. Peel was a successful dealer in quills and bristles. His wife was the daughter of a post office official, and they had three stuck-up daughters who would have no truck at all with the Pothecarys. You may appreciate then the twinge of venom which marked the face of Edwin as he passed through his front gate and observed the distant roof of the Peel's fowl-house. And still the almond blossom nodded at him above the hedge. The lark sang. ... After all, was it fair to hate anyone because they were better off than oneself? Strange how these moods obsess one. The soft air caressed Edwin's cheek. Little white flecks of cloud scudded pally into the suburban
panorama. Small green shoots were appearing everywhere. One ought not to hate anyone at all—of course. It is absurd. So bad for oneself, apart from the others. One ought rather to be kind, forgiving, loving all mankind. Was that a lark or a thrush? He knew little about birds. Fish now! . . . A not entirely unsatisfactory business really the fried fish trade—when things went well. When customers were numerous and not too cantankerous. Quite easy to run, profitable. A boy came singing down the road. The villas clustered together more socially. There was the movement of spring life. . . .

As Edwin turned the corner of the Station Road, the impulse crystallized. One good action. To-day he would perform one good, kind, unselfish, unadvertised action. No one should ever know of it. Just one to-day. Then perhaps one to-morrow. And so on; in time it might become a habit. That is how one progressed. He took his seat in the crowded third-class smoker and pretended to read his newspaper, but his mind was too actively engaged with the problems of this new resolution. How? When? Where? How does one do a definitely good action? What is the best way to go to work? One could, of course, just quietly slip some money into a poor-box if one could be found. But would this be very good and self-sacrificing? Who gets money put in a poor-box? Surely his own family were poor enough, as far as that went. But he couldn’t go back home and give his wife a sovereign. It would be advertising his charity, and he would look silly doing it. His business? He might turn up and say to his assistants: “Boys, you shall all have a day’s holiday. We’ll shut up, and here’s your pay for the day.” Advertising again; besides, what about the hundreds of poor workers in the neighbourhood who relied for their mid-day sustenance on “Pothecary’s Pride-of-the-Ocean Popular Plaice to eat.” It would be cruel, cruel and—bad for business in the future. The public would lose confidence in that splendid gold-lettered tablet in the window which said “Cod, brill, halibut, plaice, pilchards always on hand. Eat them or take them away.”

The latter sentence did not imply that if you took them away you did not eat them; it simply meant that you could either stand at the counter and eat them from a plate with the aid of a fork and your fingers (or at one of the wooden
benches if you could find room—an unlikely contingency), alternatively you could wrap them up in a piece of newspaper and devour them without a fork at the corner of the street.

No, it would not be a good action in any way to close the Popular Plaice to eat. Edwin came to the conclusion that to perform this act satisfactorily it were better to divorce the proceeding entirely from any connection with home or business. The two things didn’t harmonize. A good action must be a special and separate effort in an entirely different setting. He would take the day off himself and do it thoroughly.

Mr. Pothecary was known in the neighbourhood of the Waterloo Road as “The Stinker,” a title easily earned by the peculiar qualities of his business and the obvious additional fact that a Pothecary was a chemist. He was a very small man, bald-headed with yellowy-white side whiskers, a blue chin, a perambulating nostril with a large wart on the port side. He wore a square bowler hat which seemed to thrust out the protruding flaps of his large ears. His greeny-black clothes were always too large for him and ended in a kind of a thick spiral above his square-toed boots. He always wore a flat white collar—more or less clean—and no tie. This minor defect was easily atoned for by a heavy silver chain on his waistcoat from which hung gold seals and ribbons connecting with watches, knives, and all kinds of ingenious appliances in his waistcoat pockets.

The noble intention of his day was a little chilled on his arrival at the shop. In the first place, although customers were then arriving for breakfast, the boy Scales was slopping water over the front step. Having severely castigated the miscreant youth and prophesied that his chances of happiness in the life to come were about as remote as those of a dead dog-fish in the upper reaches of the Thames, he made his way through the customers to the room at the back, and there he met Dolling.

Dolling was Edwin’s manager, and he cannot be overlooked. In the first place, he was remarkably like a fish himself. He had the same dull expressionless eyes and the drooping mouth, and drooping moustache. Everything about him drooped and dripped. He was always wet. He wore a grey flannel shirt and no collar or tie. His braces, trousers and hair all seemed the same colour. He hovered in the background with a knife, and did the cutting up and
dressing. He had, moreover, all the taciturnity of a fish, and its peculiar ability for getting out of a difficulty. He never spoke. He simply looked lugubrious, and pointed at things with his knife. And yet Edward knew that he was an excellent manager. For it must be observed that in spite of the gold-lettered board outside with its fanfare of cod, brill, halibut, plaice and pilchards, whatever the customer asked for, by the time it had passed through Dolling’s hands it was just fish. No nonsense about it at all. Just plain fish levelled with a uniform brown crust. If you asked for cod you got fish. If you asked for halibut you also got fish. Dolling was something of an artist.

On this particular morning, as Edwin entered the back room, Dolling was scratching the side of his head with the knife he used to cut up the fish; a sure sign that he was perplexed about something. It was not customary to exchange greetings in this business, and when he observed “the guv-nor” enter he just withdrew the knife from his hair and pointed it at a packing-case on the side table. Edwin knew what this meant. He went up and pressed his flat nose right against the chest of what looked like an over-worked amphibian that had been turned down by its own Trade Union. Edwin sneezed before he had had time to withdraw his nose.

“Yes, that’s a dud lot,” he said. And then suddenly an inspirational moment nearly overwhelmed him. Here was a chance. He would turn to Dolling and say:

“Dolling, this fish is slightly tainted. We must throw it away. We bought it at our risk. Yesterday morning when it arrived it was just all right, but keeping it in that hot room downstairs where you and your wife sleep has probably finished it. We mustn’t give it to our customers. It might poison them—ptomaine poison, you know . . . eh, Dolling?” It would be a good action, a self-sacrificing action, eh? But when he glanced at the face of Dolling he knew that such an explosion would be unthinkable. It would be like telling a duck it mustn’t swim, or an artist that he mustn’t paint, or a boy on a beach that he mustn’t throw stones in the sea. It was the kind of a job that Dolling enjoyed. In the course of a few hours he knew quite well that whatever he said, the mysterious and evil-smelling monster would be served out in dainty parcels of halibut, cod, brill, plaice, etc.

Business was no place for a good action. Too many
others depended on it, were involved in it. Edwin went up to Dolling and shouted in his ear— he was rather deaf:

“I’m going out. I may not be back to-day.”

Dolling stared at the wall. He appeared about as interested in the statement as a cod might be that had just been informed that a Chinese coolie had won the Calcutta sweepstake. Edwin crept out of the shop abashed. He felt horribly uncomfortable. He heard someone mutter: “Where’s The Stinker off to?” and he realized how impossible it would be to explain to anyone there present that he was off to do a good action.

“I will go to some outlying suburb,” he thought.

Once outside in the sunshine he tried to get back into the benign mood. He travelled right across London and made for Golders Green and Hendon, a part of the world foreign to him. By the time he had boarded the Golders Green bus he had quite recovered himself. It was still a brilliant day. “The better the day the better the deed,” he thought aptly. He hummed inaudibly; that is to say, he made curious crooning noises somewhere behind his silver chain and cygnets; the sound was happily suppressed by the noise of the bus.

It seemed a very long journey. It was just as they were going through a rather squalid district near Cricklewood that the golden chance occurred to him. The fares had somewhat thinned. There were scarcely a dozen people in the bus. Next to him, barely a yard away, he observed a poor woman with a baby in her arms. She had a thin, angular, wasted face, and her clothes were threadbare but neat. A poor, thoroughly honest and deserving creature, making a bitter fight of it against the buffets of a cruel world. Edwin’s heart was touched. Here was his chance. He noticed that from her wrist was suspended a shabby black bag, and the bag was open. He would slip up near her and drop in a half-crown. What joy and rapture when she arrived home and found the unexpected treasure! An unknown benefactor! Edwin chuckled and wormed his way surreptitiously along the seat. Stealthily he fingered his half-crown and hugged it in the palm of his left hand. His heart beat with the excitement of his exploit. He looked out of the window opposite and fumbled his hand towards the opening in the bag. He touched it. Suddenly a sharp voice rang out:
"That man's picking your pocket!"

An excited individual opposite was pointing at him. The woman uttered an exclamation and snatched at her bag. The baby cried. The conductor rang the bell. Everyone seemed to be closing in on Edwin. Instinctively he snatched his hand away and thrust it in his pocket (the most foolish thing he could have done). Everyone was talking. A calm muscular-looking gentleman who had not spoken seized Edwin by the wrist and said calmly:

"Look in your bag, Madam, and see whether he has taken anything."

The bus came to a halt. Edwin muttered:

"I assure you—nothing of the sort—"

How could he possibly explain that he was doing just the opposite? Would a single person believe a word of his yarn about the half-crown? The woman whimpered:

"No, 'e ain't taken nothin', bad luck to 'im. There was only four pennies and a 'alfpenny anyway. Dirty thief!"

"Are you goin' to give 'im in charge?" asked the conductor.

"Yer can't if 'e ain't actually taken nothin', can yer? The dirty thievin' swine tryin' to rob a 'ard-workin' 'onest woman!"

"I wasn't! I wasn't!" feebly spluttered Edwin, blushing a ripe beetroot colour.

"Shame! Shame! Chuck 'im off the bus! Dirty sneak! Call a copper!" were some of the remarks being hurled about.

The conductor was losing time and patience. He beckoned vigorously to Edwin and said:

"Come on, off you go!"

There was no appeal. He got up and slunk out. Popular opinion was too strong against him. As he stepped off the back board, the conductor gave him a parting kick which sent him flying on to the pavement. It was an operation received with shrieks of laughter and a round of applause from the occupants of the vehicle, taken up by a small band of other people who had been attracted by the disturbance. He darted down a back street to the accompaniment of boos and jeers.

It says something for Edwin Pothecary that this
unfortunate rebuff to his first attempt to do a good action did not send him helter-skelter back to the fried fish shop in the Waterloo Road. He felt crumpled, bruised, mortified, disappointed, discouraged; but is not the path of all martyrs and reformers strewn with similar debris? Are not all really disinterested actions liable to misconstruction? He went into a dairy and partook of a glass of milk and a bun. Then he started out again. He would see more rural, less sophisticated, people. In the country there must be simple, kindly people, needing his help. He walked for several hours with but a vague sense of direction. At last he came to a public park. A group of dirty boys were seated on the grass. They were apparently having a banquet. They did not seem to require him. He passed on, and came to an enclosure. Suddenly between some rhododendron bushes he looked into a small dell. On a seat by himself was an elderly man in a shabby suit. He looked the picture of misery and distress. His hands were resting on his knees, and his eyes were fixed in a melancholy scrutiny on the ground. It was obvious that some great trouble possessed him. He was as still as a shadow. It was the figure of a man lost in the past or—contemplating suicide? Edwin’s breath came quickly. He made his way to him. In order to do this it was necessary to climb a railing. There was probably another way round, but was there time? At any minute there might be a sudden movement, the crack of a revolver. Edwin tore his trousers and scratched his forearm, but he managed to enter the dell unobserved. He approached the seat. The man never looked up. Then Edwin said with sympathetic tears in his voice:

“My poor fellow, may I be of any assistance——?”

There was a disconcerting jar. The melancholy individual started and turned on him angrily:

“Blast you! I’d nearly got it! What the devil are you doing here?”

And without waiting for an answer he darted away among the trees. At the same time a voice called over the park railings:

“Ho! you, there, what are you doing over there? You come back the way you came. I saw yer.”

The burly figure of a park-keeper with gaiters and stout stick beckoned him. Edwin got up and clambered back again, scratching his arm.
“Now then,” said the keeper. “Name, address, age and occupation, if you please.”

“I was only—” began Edwin. But what was he only doing? Could he explain to a park-keeper that he was only about to do a kind action to a poor man? He spluttered and gave his name, address, age and occupation.

“Oh,” exclaimed the keeper. “Fried fish, eh? And what were you trying to do? Get orders? Or were you begging from his lordship?”

“His lordship!”

“That man you was speaking to was Lord Budleigh-Salterton, the great scientist. He’s thinking out ’is great invention, otherwise I’d go and ask ’im if ’e wanted to prosecute yer for being on ’is park on felonious intent or what.”

“I assure you—” stammered Mr. Pothecary.

The park-keeper saw him well off the premises, and gave him much gratuitous advice about his future behaviour, darkened with melancholy prophecies regarding the would-be felon’s strength of character to live up to it.

Leaving the park he struck out towards the more rural neighbourhood. He calculated that he must be somewhere in the neighbourhood of Hendon. At the end of a lane he met a sallow-faced young man walking rapidly. His eyes were bloodshot and restless. He glanced at Edwin and stopped.

“Excuse me, sir,” he said.

Edwin drew himself to attention. The young man looked up and down nervously. He was obviously in a great state of distress.

“What can I do for you?”

“I—I—h-hardly like to ask you, sir, I—”

He stammered shockingly. Edwin turned on his most sympathetic manner.

“You are suffering. What is it?”

“Sh-sh-shell-shock, shir.”

“Ah!”

At last! Some heroic reflex of the war darted through Edwin’s mind. Here was his real chance at last. A poor fellow broken by the war and in need, neglected by an ungrateful country. Almost hidden by his outer coat he observed one of those little strips of coloured ribbon, which implied more than one campaign.
"Where did you—meet your trouble?" he asked.
"P-P-P-Palestine, sir, capturing a T-T-Turkish redoubt. I was through G-G-Gallipoli too, sir, but I won't d-d-distress you. I am in— in— hospital at St. Albans, came to see my g-g-g-girl, but she's g-g-g-gone—v-v—vanished . . . ."
"You don't say so!"
"T-t-trouble is I l-l-lost my p-pass back. N-not quite enough m-mon—"
"Dear me! How much short are you?"
"S-s-s-six shill—s-s-s-six—"
"Six shillings? Well, I'm very sorry. Look here, my good fellow, here's seven-and-sixpence and God bless you!"
"T-t-thank you very much, sir. W-will you give me your n-name and—"
"No, no, no, that's quite all right. I'm very pleased to be of assistance. Please forget all about it."

He pressed the soldier's hand and hurried on. It was done! He had performed a kind, unselfish action and no one should ever hear of it. Mr. Pothecary's eyes glowed with satisfaction. Poor fellow! Even if the story were slightly exaggerated, what did it matter? He was obviously a discharged soldier, ill, and in need. The seven-and-sixpence would make an enormous difference. He would always cherish the memory of his kind, unknown benefactor. It was a glorious sensation! Why had he never thought before of doing a kindly act? It was inspiring, illuminating, almost intoxicating! He recalled with zest the delirious feeling which ran through him when he had said, "No, no, no!" He would not give his name. He was the good Samaritan, a ship passing in the night. And now he would be able to go home, or go back to his business. He swung down the lane, singing to himself. As he turned the corner he came to a low bungalow-building. It was in a rather deserted spot. It had a board outside which announced "Tea, cocoa, light refreshments. Cyclists catered for."

It was past midday, and although tea and cocoa had never made any great appeal to the gastronomic fancies of Edwin Pothecary, he felt in his present spiritually elevating mood that here was a suitable spot for a well-merited rest and lunch.

He entered a deserted room, filled with light oak chairs, and tables with green-tiled tops on which were placed pink
vases containing dried ferns. A few bluebottles darted away from the tortuous remains of what had once apparently been a ham, lurking behind tall bottles of sweets on the counter. The room smelt of soda and pickles. Edwin rapped on the table for some time, but no one came. At last a woman entered from the front door leading to the garden. She was fat and out of breath.

Edwin coughed and said:

“Good mornin’, madam. May I have a bite of somethin’?”

The woman looked at him and continued panting. When her pulmonary contortions had somewhat subsided she said:

“I s’pose you ’aven’t seen a pale young man up the lane?”

It was difficult to know what made him do it, but Edwin lied. He said:

“No.”

“Oh!” she replied. “I don’t know where ’e’s got to. ’E’s not s’posed to go out of the garden. ’E’s been ill, you know.”

“Really!”

“’E’s my nefyer, but I can’t always keep an eye on ’im. ’E’s a bright one, ’e is. I shall ’ave ’im sent back to the ’ome.”

“Ah, poor fellow! I suppose he was—injured in the war?”

“War!” The plump lady snorted. She became almost aggressive and confidential. She came close up to Edwin and shook her finger backwards and forwards in front of his eyes.

“I’ll tell yer ‘ow much war ’e done. When they talked about conscription, ’e got that frightened, ’e went out every day and tried to drink himself from a A1 man into a C3 man, and by God! ’e succeeded.”

“You don’t say so!”

“I do say so. And more. When ’is turn came ’e was in the ’ospital with Delirious Trimmings.”

“My God!”

“’E’s only just come out. He’s all right as long as ’e don’t get ’old of a little money.”

“What do you mean?”
"If 'e can get 'old of the price of a few whiskies, 'e'll 'ave another attack come on! What are yer goin' ter 'ave—tea or cocoa?"

"I must go! I must go!" exclaimed the only customer Mrs. Boggins had had for two days, and gripping his umbrella he dashed out of the shop.

"Good Lord! there's another one got 'em!" ejaculated the good landlady. "I wonder whether 'e pinched anything while I was out? 'Ere! Come back, you dirty little bow-legged swipe!"

But Mr. Pothecary was racing down the lane, muttering to himself:

"Yes, that was a good action! A very good action indeed!"

A mile further on he came to a straggling village, a forlorn and unkempt spot, only relieved by a gaudy inn called The Two Tumblers. Edwin staggered into the private bar and drank two pints of Government ale and a double gin as the liquid accompaniment to a hunk of bread and cheese.

It was not until he had lighted his pipe after the negotiation of these delicacies that he could again focus his philosophical outlook. Then he thought to himself: "It's a rum thing 'ow difficult it is to do a good action. You'd think it'd be dead easy, but everythin' seems against yer. One must be able to do it somewhere. P'raps one ought to go abroad, among foreigners and black men. That's it! That's why all these 'ere Bible Society people go out among black people, Chinese and so on. They find there's nothin' doin' over 'ere."

Had it not been for the beer and gin it is highly probable that Edwin would have given up the project, and have returned to fish and chips. But lying back in a comfortable seat in The Two Tumblers his thoughts mellowed. He felt broad-minded, comfortable, tolerant... one had to make allowances. There must be all sorts of ways. Money wasn't the only thing. Besides, he was spending too much. He couldn't afford to go on throwing away seven-and-sixpences. One must be able to help people by—helping them. Doing things for them which didn't cost money. He thought of Sir Walter Raleigh throwing down his cloak for Queen Elizabeth to walk over. Romantic, but—extravagant and silly, really a shrewd political move, no doubt; not a good action at all. If he met an ill-clad tramp he could take off
his coat and wrap round his shoulders and then—? Walk home to Quince Villa in his braces? What would Mrs. Pothecary have to say? Phew! One could save people from drowning, but he didn’t know how to swim. Fire! Perhaps there would be a fire. He could swarm up a ladder and save a woman from the top bedroom window. Heroic, but hardly inconspicuous; not exactly what he had meant. Besides, the firemen would never let him; they always kept these showy stunts for themselves. There must be something . . .

He walked out of The Two Tumblers.

Crossing the road, he took a turning off the High Street. He saw a heavily-built woman carrying a basket of washing. He hurried after her, and raising his hat, said:

"Excuse me, madam, may I carry your basket for you?"

She turned on him suspiciously and glared:

"No, thanks, Mr. Bottle-nose. I’ve ’ad some of that before. You ’op it! Mrs. Jaggs ’ad ’ers pinched last week that way."

"Of course," he thought to himself as he hurried away.

"The trouble is I’m not dressed for the part. A bloomin’ swell can go about doin’ good actions all day and not arouse suspicions. If I try and ’elp a girl off a tramcar I get my face slapped."

Mr. Pothecary was learning. He was becoming a complete philosopher, but it was not till late in the afternoon that he suddenly realized that patience and industry is always rewarded. He was appealed to by a maiden in distress.

It came about in this way. He found the atmosphere of Northern London entirely unsympathetic to good deeds. All his actions appeared suspect. He began to feel at last like a criminal. He was convinced that he was being watched and followed. Once he patted a little girl’s head in a paternal manner. Immediately a woman appeared at a doorway and bawled out:

"’Ere, Lizzie, you come inside!"

At length in disgust he boarded a south-bound bus. He decided to experiment nearer home. He went to the terminus and took a train to the station just before his own. It was a small town called Uplingham. This should be the last dance of the moral philanderer. If there was no one in Uplingham upon whom he could perform a good action, he would just
walk home—barely two miles—and go to bed and forget all about it. To-morrow he would return to Fish-and-chips, and the normal behaviour of the normal citizen.

Uplingham was a dismal little town, consisting mostly of churches, chapels and pubs, and apparently quite deserted. As Edwin wandered through it there crept over him a sneaking feeling of relief. If he met no one—well, there it was, he had done his best; he could go home with a clear conscience. After all, it was the spirit which counted in these things.

"O-o-oh!"

He was passing a small stone church, standing back on a little-frequented lane. The maiden was seated alone in the porch and she was crying. Edwin bustled through the gate, and as he approached her he had time to observe that she was young, quietly dressed, and distinctly pretty.

"You are in trouble," he said in his most feeling manner.
She looked up at him quickly, and dabbed her eyes.
"I've lost my baby! I've lost my baby!" she cried.
"Dear, dear, that's very unfortunate! How did it happen?"

She pointed at an empty perambulator in the porch.
"I waited an hour here for my friends, and husband, and the clergyman. My baby was to be christened." She gasped incoherently. "No one turned up. I went across to the Vicarage. The Vicar was away. I believe I ought to have gone to St. Bride's. This is St. Paul's. They didn't know anything about it. They say people often make that mistake. When I got back the baby was gone. O-o-o-oh!"

"There, there, don't cry," said Mr. Pothecary. "Now I'll go over to St. Bride's and find out about it."
"Oh, sir, do you mind waiting here with the perambulator while I go? I want my baby. I want my baby."
"Why, yes, of course, of course."

She dashed up the lane and left Mr. Pothecary in charge of the empty perambulator. In fifteen minutes' time a thick-set young man came hurrying up to the porch. He looked at Edwin, and pointing to the perambulator, said:
"Is this Mrs. Frank's? or Mrs. Fred's?"
"I don't know," said Edwin rather testily.
"You don't know! But you're Old Binns, aren't you?"
"No, I'm not."
The young man looked at him searchingly and then
disappeared. Ten minutes elapsed and then a small boy rode up on a bicycle. He was also out of breath.

"Has Mrs. George been 'ere?" he asked.
"I don't know," replied Edwin.
"Mr. Henderson says he's awfully sorry but he won't be able to get away. You are to kiss the baby for 'im."
"I don't know anything about it."
"This is St. Bride's, isn't it?"
"No, this is St. Paul's."
"Oh!" The boy leapt on to the bicycle and also vanished.
"This is absurd," thought Edwin. "Of course, the whole thing is as plain as daylight. The poor girl has come to the wrong church. The whole party is at St. Bride's, somebody must have taken the baby on there. I might as well take the perambulator along. They'll be pleased. Now I wonder which is the way."

He wheeled the perambulator into the lane. There was no one to ask. He progressed nearly two hundred yards till he came to a field with a pond in it. This was apparently the wrong direction. He was staring about when he suddenly became aware of a hue and cry. A party of people came racing down the lane headed by the thick-set man, who was exclaiming:

"There he is! There he is!"

Edwin felt his heart beating. This was going to be a little embarrassing. They closed on him. The thick-set man seized his wrists and at the same time remarked:
"See he hasn't any firearms on him, Frank."

The large man alluded to as Frank gripped him from behind.

"What have you done with my baby?" he demanded fiercely.
"I 'aven't seen no baby," yelped Mr. Potheary.
"Oh! 'aven't yer! What are yer doin' with my perambulator then?"
"I'm takin' it to St. Bride's Church."
"Goin' in the opposite direction."
"I didn't know the way."
"Where's the baby?"
"I 'aven't seen it, I tell yer. The mother said she'd lost it."
"What the hell! Do you know the mother's in bed sick?"
You're a liar, my man, and we're goin' to take you in charge. If you've done anythin' to my baby I'll kill you with my hands."

"That's it, Frank. Let 'im 'ave it. Throw 'im in the pond!"

"I tell yer I don't know anythin' about it at all, with yer Franks and Freds and Georges! Go to the devil, all of yer!"

In spite of his protestations, someone produced a rope and they handcuffed him and tied him to the gate of the field. A small crowd had collected and began to boo and jeer. A man from a cottage hard by produced a drag, and between them they dragged the pond, as the general belief was that Edwin had tied a stone to the baby and thrown it in and was then just about to make off.

The uproar continued for some time, mud and stones being thrown about rather carelessly.

The crowd became impatient that no baby was found in the pond. At length another man turned up on a bicycle and called out:

"What are you doing, Frank? You've missed the christening!"

"What!"

"Old Binns turned up with the nipper all right. He'd come round the wrong way."

The crowd was obviously disappointed at the release of Edwin, and father's only solatium was:

"Well, it's lucky for you, old bird!"

He and his friends trundled the perambulator away rapidly across the fields. Edwin had hardly time to give a sigh of relief before he found himself the centre of a fresh disturbance. He was approaching the church when another crowd assailed him, headed by the forlorn maiden. She was still in a state of distress, but she was hugging a baby to her.

"Ah! You've found the baby!" exclaimed Edwin, trying to be amiable.

"Where is the perambulator?" she demanded.

"Your 'usband 'as taken it away, madame. He seemed to think I—"

A tall frigid young man stepped forward and said:

"Excuse me, I am this lady's husband. Will you please explain yourself?"

Then Edwin lost his temper.
"Well, damn it, I don’t know who you all are!"

'The case is quite clear. You volunteered to take charge of the perambulator while my wife was absent. On her return you announce that it is spirited away. I shall hold you responsible for the entire cost—nearly ten pounds.'

"Make it a thousand," roared Edwin. "I’m 'aving a nice cheap day."

"I don’t wish for any of your insolence, either. My wife has had a very trying experience. The baby has been christened Fred."

"Well, what’s the matter with that?"

"Nothing," screamed the mother. "Only that it is a girl! It’s a girl and it’s been duly christened Fred in a Christian church. Oh! there’s been an awful muddle."

"It’s not this old fool’s fault," interpolated the elderly woman quietly. "You see, Mrs. Frank and Mrs. Fred Smith were both going to have their babies christened to-day. Only Mrs. Frank was took sick, and sent me along with the child. I went to the wrong church and thinkin’ there was some mistake, went back home. Mrs. Frank’s baby’s never been christened at all. In the meantime, the ceremony was ready to start at St. Paul’s and Frank ’issell was there. No baby. They sends Old Binns to scout around at other churches. People do make mistakes—finds this good lady’s child all primed up for christening in the church door, and no one near, carries it off. In the meantime, the father had gone on the ramp. It’s him that probably went off with the perambulator and trounced you up a bit, old sport. It’ll learn you not to interfere so much in future perhaps."

"And the baby’s christened Fred!" wailed the mother. "My baby! My Gwendolin!" And she looked at Edwin with bitter recrimination in her eyes.

There was still a small crowd following and boys were jeering, and a fox-terrier, getting very excited, jumped up and bit Mr. Potheary through the seat of his trousers. He struck at it with his stick, and hit a small boy, whose mother happened to be present. The good lady immediately entered the lists.

"Baby-killer. . . . Hun!" were the last words he heard as he was chased up the street and across the fields in the direction of his own village.

When he arrived it was nearly dark. Mr. Potheary was
tired, dirty, battered, torn, outraged, bruised, and hatless. And his spirit hardened. The forces of reaction surged through him. He was done with good actions. He felt vindictive, spiteful, wicked. Slowly he took the last turning and his eye once more alighted on—the Peel's fowl-house.

And there came to him a vague desire to end his day by performing some action the contrary to good, something spiteful, petty, malign. His soul demanded some recompense for its abortive energies. And then he remembered that the Peels were away. They were returning late that evening. The two intensive fowl-houses were at the end of the kitchen garden, where all the young spring cabbages and peas had just been planted. They could be approached between a slit in the narrow black fence adjacent to a turnip-field. Rather a long way round. A simple and rather futile plan sprang to his mind, but he was too tired to think of anything more criminal or diabolic.

He would creep round to the back, get through the fence, force his way into the fowl-house. Then he would kick out all those expensive Rhode Island pampered hens and lock them out. Inside he would upset everything and smash the place to pieces. The fowls would get all over the place. They would eat the young vegetables. Some of them would get lost, stolen by gipsies, killed by rats. What did he care? The Peels would probably not discover the outrage till the morrow, and they would never know who did it. Edwin chuckled inwardly, and rolled his eyes like the smooth villain of a fit-up melodrama. He glanced up and down to see that no one was looking, then he got across a gate and entered the turnip-field.

In five minutes' time he was forcing the door of the fowl-house with a spade. The fowls were already settling down for the night, and they clucked rather alarmingly, but Edwin's blood was up. He chased them all out, forty-five of them, and made savage lunges at them with his feet. Then he upset all the corn he could find, and poured water on it and jumped on it. He smashed the complicated invention suspended from the ceiling, whereby the fowls had to reach up and get one grain of corn at a time. To his joy he found a pot of green paint, which he flung promiscuously all over the walls and floor (and incidentally his clothes).

Then he crept out and bolted both of the doors.
The sleepy creatures were standing about outside, some feebly pecking about on the ground. He chased them through into the vegetable garden; then he rubbed some of the dirt and paint from his clothes and returned to the road.

When he arrived home he said to his wife:

"I fell off a tram on Waterloo Bridge. Lost my hat."

He was cold and wet and his teeth were chattering. His wife bustled him off to bed and gave him a little hot grog.

Between the sheets he recovered contentment. He gurgled exultantly at this last and only satisfying exploit of the day. He dreamed lazily of the blind rage of the Peels...

It must have been half-past ten when his wife came up again to bring him some hot gruel. He had been asleep. She put the cup by the bedside and rearranged his pillow.

"Feeling better?" she asked.

"Yes. I’m all right," he murmured.

She sat on a chair by the side of the bed and after a few minutes remarked:

"You’ve missed an excitement while you’ve been asleep."

"Oh?"

"Yes. A fire!"

"A fire?"

"The Peels came home about an hour and a half ago and found the place on fire at the back."

"Oh?"

"Their cook Lizzie has been over. She said some straw near the wash-house must have started it. It’s burnt out the wash-house and both the fowl-houses. She says Mr. Peel says he don’t care very much because he was heavily insured for the lot. But the funny thing is; the fowls wasn’t insured and they’ve found the whole lot down the field on the rabbit-hutches. Somebody must have got in and let the whole lot out. It was a fine thing to do, or else the poor things would all have been burnt up. What’s the matter, Ned? Is the gruel too hot?"
A CHAIN OF CIRCUMSTANCE

W. A. DARLINGTON
W. A. Darlington was schoolmaster, soldier and civil servant before he began journalism and authorship. He is well known as a dramatic critic and authority on the drama, and he has written a number of humorous books, including *Alf's Button*.
A CHAIN OF CIRCUMSTANCE

"How I hate lovers!" said Mary Nicholls suddenly, in a venomous tone.
Her husband, outstretched contentedly on the lawn beside her deck-chair, opened his eyes.
"Didn't know you had any," he said.
"Well, of course, if I had any, you wouldn't know. But I didn't mean that, idiot. What I meant was, how I hate having engaged couples staying in the house."
"Meaning George and Caroline?"
"Meaning, especially, George and Caroline."
"Oh, I don't know." Bob Nicholls rolled over on to his stomach—which, he felt suddenly, would look less conspicuous that way—and considered the point. "It means they're practically potty for the time being, I admit. But they work their pottiness off on one another, and don't hurt anybody else."
"That's all you know! D'you realize that I'm never sure from one meal-time to the next whether they're going to be on speaking terms or not? If they're not, they won't sit next to each other. If they are, they want to sit in each other's laps."
"Not an easy position," remarked Bob flippantly.
"Not half so difficult as mine, to have to cope with it. If they've quarrelled they glower at their plates and don't speak, and if they've made it up they hold hands under the table and don't speak either."
"Well, a little silence never hurt anybody. We all talk too much."
"I dare say. But there's silence and silence."
Bob picked a blade of grass and chewed it ruminatively gazing out across the valley and thinking vaguely that the River Wandle looked very pretty when the sun caught it.
"What's the matter with George and Caro?" he asked
at last. "We weren't so up-and-down when we were engaged, were we? I remember you made me feel I'd like to murder you once or twice, but I never let it appear in my manner."

"They've been engaged too long, that's what it is. And I've quite decided not to have them here again together until they're married—or until they've come unstuck for good."

"Jolly little week-enders they'd be then!"

"Jollier than at present, anyhow. Is that George coming this way?"

"It is. And looking like a hearse-horse."

"Oh dear! I did hope they'd have made it up by now.

... Hullo, George."

George Cardwell was one of those people who get christened "George" almost automatically. He was big, solid and, at ordinary times, reliable. He was excellent at games, and pretty good at his work. He was twenty-six years of age.

"Hullo," he returned grumpily.

"'Prithée, why so pale, fond lover?'" inquired Bob, who was a well-read man in a quiet way and never let mere tact stand in the way of an apposite quotation.

"Oh, shut up!" growled George.

"You and Caro haven't been quarrelling again, have you?" Mary demanded in a stern voice. Really, she felt, this was beyond bearing. George and/or Caroline must be spoken to sharply. Preferably George.

"Yes, we have."

"Well, really, George..."

"Don't bother to go on, Mary. I know what you're going to say. I know Caro and I have spoilt your party for you. Well, it won't happen again. It's over. She's chucked me."

He slumped down on the grass and looked so miserable that Mary, in spite of her irritation, began to administer comfort.

"I shouldn't worry. She's done that several times before."

"Yes, but she's never done this before!"

He brought a hand out of a pocket and displayed something which glittered in the sun.

"She's given you back the ring?" said Bob in a surprised tone. "How very Victorian!"
George gave a wry smile.
"Not so very Victorian, as a matter of fact," he said grimly. "She plugged it at my head."
"Did she hit you?" Bob asked with interest.
"I caught it," said George simply. "Force of habit," he added, as if it had occurred to him that some explanation of so undignified a proceeding was necessary. "Rather a good catch, as a matter of fact."
Mary, still the ministering angel, brought the conversation back to the point.
"Never mind, George. She'll come round."
"She won't. It's a real bust-up this time. And upon my word, it's almost a relief."
He did not look relieved, however; and Mary, forgetting how ready she had been a few minutes ago to discuss the possibility of the engagement coming unstuck, broke into protest.
"But, George—it's madness. Look how you love each other!"
"Do we?" George's voice was bitter.
"Of course you do."
"I couldn't face a lifetime of this sort of thing."
"It wouldn't happen once you were married."
"How can you know that?"
"Because neither of you is like that, really. What was it about, this time?"
"Oh, something I said to her about young Harrison."
"Geoffrey? Why, he's only a boy. You don't mean to say you were jealous of him?"
"No, of course not. It was just—oh, just that I couldn't stand seeing Caro buttering him up when she hadn't a civil word to say to me. She was doing it to annoy me, of course. I dare say I've been a fool."
"You certainly have—both of you!" said Mary's husband in heartfelt tones.
"Be quiet, Bob. . . . George, you've simply got to get married."
"Who to?"
"Don't be silly. Caro, of course."
"You should have seen the look in her eyes when she threw that ring. No, that's over. Anyhow, I don't want a wife who throws things."
“She isn’t that sort. You know it as well as I do.”

“Well, she never was before. . . .”

“And she isn’t now. It’s this ridiculous long engagement that’s getting on both your nerves. Why don’t you get married at once?”

“Not enough money.”

Bob sat up straight.

“Why, good Lord, you’ve got heaps for a start. A steady job . . .”

“Five hundred a year,” put in George.

“And Caro’s people will be good for . . .”

“Another hundred at the most.”

“Well, that’s six hundred.”

“And how far will that go?”

“All the way, if you’re careful,” said Mary.

George looked obstinate.

“Caro and I decided at the start,” he said, “that we wouldn’t get married till we could afford it comfortably. So many people”—his voice took on the slight sing-song of one repeating a formula he knows by heart—“make a mess of things by having to start by saving and skimping. We made up our minds to be sensible.”

“Sensible! My aunt!” commented Bob. He got up and marched away.

Mary gazed pensively at his retreating back.

“It doesn’t seem to work, does it, George dear? Why not give up the idea of waiting? You can manage all right now in a quiet way, and you’ll very soon have more. I shouldn’t go on being sensible if I were you—it’s so silly.”

“But . . .”

She faced him squarely.

“Tell me, George, honestly—would you mind making do on what you’ve got, till you get a rise?”

“No, of course not. But would it be fair to Caroline?”

“Who wants you to be fair to Caroline?”

George laughed ruefully.

“Caroline, I expect.”

“Not she. You go and knock her on the head with a spanner, and tell her she’s got to marry you and make the best of it. You’ll be surprised how meek she’ll be, once she sees you mean business.”
George stared.

"But Caro isn't like that," he said.

"All women are like that to some extent," Mary replied
with energy. "Anyhow, try it. You can't make things
worse than they are at present."

"That's true." George jumped to his feet. "You're
right, Mary. I'll see if I can find her now."

He was off, before Mary could utter a word to restrain
him, or point out that it would be wiser to let some interval
elapse before putting her well-meant advice into execution.
She lay back in her deck-chair and sighed. Bob was quite
right. People in love were, practically speaking, potty. No
good bothering about them. She picked up a book from
beside her chair and began to read.

Her peace was not long unbroken, however. A voice
behind her said "Mary" in a tense stage whisper, and Caroline
Coxhead poked her head out of some bushes like a super-
natural character in a pastoral play—a wood-nymph, or
something.

She might have made a very satisfactory wood-nymph,
Mary thought, for she was fair, slight and extremely graceful.
Ordinarily, too, she was a very pretty girl; but at the moment
her features were distorted by love out of their normally
pleasant expression into something more fitted to a satyr
than a dryad.

"Hallo, Caro," said Mary, resignedly shutting her book.
"Did he find you?"

"George? No." Miss Coxhead emerged from conceal-
ment. "I've managed to dodge him. Look here, Mary—I'm
going. I know it's no way to behave, and I'm sorry if it
spoils your party; but I can't stick it any longer. Anyhow,
I'm not fit to associate with."

"But—but when?"

"Now. Your maid's packed my things. And I've just
seen Bob, and he's promised to drive me to Halston to catch
the 3.25."

"But what about poor George?"

"Nothing. I'm not going to see him again. Heavens—
he's coming! Good-bye, Mary. Forgive me sometime."

"Caro . . . ." Mary began. But Caroline had melted
into the bushes again. A real dryad could not have done
it more neatly.
George came up at a distracted gallop.
"I say, Mary—was that Caro with you?"
"Yes," said Mary wearily. Really, she reflected, from the way people shot in and out, she might be a character in a French farce, instead of a lady enjoying the after-lunch peace of her own garden.
"Where’s she gone?"
"I don’t know. But I know where she’s going."
"Where?"
"Home."
"When?"
"Bob’s taking her to catch the 3.25."
"Then I must get hold of her at once."
"She won’t see you."
"I’ll hide in the car, or something."
"That’ll be no good. It’s simply silly to have a scene with her now. You must give her time to simmer down, and then get her by herself."
"How can I if she’s off practically at once? And when she’s gone, I shan’t be able to catch her. She’ll hide from me, or get engaged to somebody else. I must do it now."
"You can’t," said Mary calmly. "There goes the car."
It was true. Bob’s big Sunbeam was clearly audible in the drive. George bounded up a bank to a spot which commanded a distant view of the lodge gates, and was just in time to see the car’s long yellow body turning into the main road.

He turned on Mary furiously.
"Now look what you’ve done, keeping me here talking," he shouted. "Is this a conspiracy, or what?"
"Of course it’s not a conspiracy. I’m on your side, George. Don’t be so violent."
"Dash it, you were telling me to be violent not half an hour ago."
"Yes, but at the proper time, and with the right person. Now listen, George. I’ll tell you what to do."
"Do? It’s too late to do anything!"
"Nonsense! Look at your watch.
George obeyed, and his eyebrows went up.
"Why, it’s barely a quarter to three! They’ll be miles too early for the train."
"Exactly. Caro wanted to get out of your way."
“Well, what do I do? Follow, and have it out in Halston station? Rather public.”

“No, idiot. Get your car and catch the train at the station before Halston. That’s Statham. It’s only seven miles away, and a good road. You’ll do it easily.”

“And then?”

“At Halston, you’ll see Bob putting Caro into the train. He’ll see that she gets a carriage to herself. It’s not hard on that line. At the next stop—Dogferry—you join her just as the train’s starting. And that’ll give you fifteen miles of the slowest local service in England before you get to Templeton Junction. Half an hour to knock her on the head in—and good luck to you!”

But her last words were wasted. George was half-way to the garage by the time they were uttered.

Fred Cropper, guard on the London and Home Counties Railway, blew his whistle, swung himself into his van as it lumbered past him, settled down in the little seat provided for him by his employers, and began to muse morosely on life. Being a guard on the little branch line which ran up the Wandle Valley from Templeton Junction to Barnstead was not an arduous occupation, and he found plenty of time for introspection.

Life, as Fred Cropper saw it, was a safe but dull affair. In the days when he first joined the L. and H.C. Railway Company as a very young porter, he had had a vast, vague ambition. He saw himself becoming, some day, general superintendent, or something of that kind.

Nothing of the sort had happened, however. He had gone from safe, dull jobs to safe, dull jobs. The big occasion, the chance to prove himself had never come his way.

Even in the War, owing to the flatness of his feet, Safety and Dullness had continued to mark Mr. Cropper for their own. In fact, nothing had ever happened to him, and it seemed unlikely, how, that anything ever would.

The Wandle Valley Branch was no sphere of action for an adventurous spirit. It was a friendly little line, on which most of the passengers generally knew one another by sight, and nearly all were known by name to Mr. Cropper. Even
when strangers did appear, he could generally give a pretty accurate guess at their reason for visiting the Valley.

Such a life, thought Mr. Cropper with an unwonted flash of imagery, was as sluggish as the Wandle itself, that torpid stream along which he was carried week in, week out, three times a day (except Sundays) on and on for ever.

The worst part of the whole thing, he mused grimly, was that his work was not even necessary.

Tom Taylor, the driver of the engine, a man of action rather than words, would be perfectly capable of working the Wandle Valley train by himself. All his, Cropper's, waving of his flag and blowing of his whistle was nothing more than a ridiculous formality. So was the word “Guard” on his uniform. Whom, or what, was he ever called upon to guard, and from what danger?

The train here pulled up at Statham. The platform was almost deserted, as usual. Mr. Cropper watched a tousled and flustered young man get in at the back of the train. Then he waved his symbolical flag and blew his redundant whistle, and Tom Taylor moved on towards Halston.

Mr. Cropper went back to his little seat, and let his thoughts play round the tousled young man. A stranger he was, and looked like a gentleman—though you couldn’t always tell, nowadays. Probably staying with the Penfolds at Statham Manor; but why he should be hatless, tousled and flustered was not apparent.

Halston. Ah, here was Mr. Nicholls of Burdsley Grange, seeing off a girl. A very pretty girl, too, whom Mr. Cropper did not remember to have seen on the Wandle Valley Branch before. Perhaps the Nicholls had sent over to Templeton Junction to fetch her when she arrived. However that might be, Mr. Cropper felt pleased that she had not gone back the same way. He was highly susceptible, in a quiet and respectful way, and a passionate devotee of the films. This girl, thought Mr. Cropper, was as beautiful as any film-star.

It seemed to Mr. Cropper that the tousled young man was also highly susceptible. Leaning half out of his carriage window and holding one hand before his face, he was watching the girl in a way which the guard could not help thinking was distinctly furtive.

The whistle blew, the flag waved, and the train proceeded. Dogferry was the next station—a lonely building, little better
than a mere "halt," which seldom consigned many passengers to Mr. Cropper's charge.

There were none to-day. The platform was deserted. For form's sake, the guard alighted. But just as he was about to signal the train on again, the tousled young man left his carriage, and slunk swiftly towards the front of the train. Just before he got to the first-class compartment where the pretty girl was, he paused, and waited.

Mr. Cropper saw his game. He was going to wait until the train started, and then he was going to get in beside the girl, scrape acquaintance with her, annoy her—perhaps worse!

The question was, what could be done about it? As guard, Mr. Cropper felt himself to have duties as chaperone towards this very pretty girl. Yet what could he do? If the young man would only make his intentions clear by getting into the carriage now, it would be easy. Mr. Cropper could then walk along the train and stare in at the carriage window in a repressive way, to let the young man see that Law and Order had an official eye upon him. He might even demand to see the young man's ticket, and order him back into the third class from which he had come.

But so long as the young man stayed on the platform Mr. Cropper was helpless. Once the train started, and the young man was in the girl's carriage, she would be at his mercy for the long run across Templeton Marshes. Mr. Cropper remembered a lurid crime-story he had once read, in which a homicidal lunatic dismembered a woman in a railway carriage in circumstances roughly similar to these. If this nice girl arrived at Templeton Junction in small pieces, would not he, Cropper, be morally responsible? What, oh what, was he to do?

The problem was solved by Tom Taylor who, having spent the past half-minute wondering exasperatedly what the 'ell ole Fred thought 'e was playin' at, took the law into his own hands and started the train. Mr. Cropper gave a convulsive jerk with his flag, nearly swallowed his whistle, and leapt into his van, forgetting entirely in his perturbation to notice which carriage the young man entered. Ah well, he felt, perhaps it was as well. The responsibility was out of his hands now, anyway. And no doubt the girl was quite capable of looking after herself. These modern girls were
equal to anything. Well, perhaps not homicidal lunatics and dismemberment; but almost anything else.

Meanwhile, in ignorance of the perturbation of soul and conscience she was causing to a responsible official, Caro sat hunched up in a corner of her carriage. She was thankful to be alone, and to be able to soak herself in misery away from the tactful sympathy of her late host.

Bob Nicholls had tried her patience very severely. In the car on the way to the station he had engaged her in earnestly cheerful conversation on a variety of impersonal topics, until Caro could cheerfully have brained him. But her only weapon was an umbrella, and there was no room to swing it properly in the Sunbeam.

On the platform, waiting for the train, things had grown worse and worse. Bob had found his stock of impersonal topics rapidly running low, and was obviously asking himself why this infernal girl had insisted on getting here so much too early. Caro, her fingers itching on her umbrella, had tried hard to persuade him to leave her. He would plainly have been thankful to do so, but that his code of hospitality forbade. So he had stayed, and had kept up an increasingly laborious trickle of polite conversation, until Caro had had great trouble to restrain herself from loud yells.

She was in no mood for sympathy. Certain though she was that she had done the right thing in tearing George violently and finally from his place in her life, she was finding the operation exquisitely painful. But now that she was able to suffer in peace, she did feel, in a way, better.

She felt as a man might feel after having had a tooth out. He might value the tooth while it was in his head; but once it had been condemned by the dentist, he must make up his mind not only to its loss, but to the pain that its loss would cause. The pain would be sharp, but temporary; the ultimate benefit would be permanent.

Thinking of the future relief was a great help, she found. The knowledge that the intolerable ache must pass made it seem instantly less intolerable. Just so might the dentist’s victim tell himself, in the midst of his sorrows, how wise he had been not to keep the tooth in his head, and how thankful he would soon be for his wisdom.

For the moment, however, Caro could not deny that she felt very unhappy indeed. She gazed resentfully out of the
window. The tender green of the Wandle Valley was altogether out of keeping with her mood. She ought, she felt, to be gazing out upon a landscape riven by coal-mines and disfigured by slag heaps.

The train stopped at a station. Bathed in sunshine it looked horribly cheerful. Its platform was deserted, except for a small white dog which was scratching itself with a disgustingly contented smile. The spectacle revolted her, and she moved across to the far side of the compartment.

As the train started again—which it did with a jerk, as if it were annoyed about something—her carriage door was wrenched open, and somebody got in. This was the last straw! Now, she supposed, she would have to spend her time refusing the conversational gambits of some garrulous old spinster, or other pest! She gazed resolutely out of the window.

Then it occurred to her that garrulous old spinsters don’t, as a rule, wrench open doors and enter moving trains. Also, the reflection in her window-pane showed her a figure in the opposite corner which, though dim, was obviously large and male.

Shifting her position, she let her eye drift casually round the compartment, to see if her companion was the kind of large male who could be quietly ignored, or the kind that might have to be coped with later.

She gave a violent start.

Decidedly he would have to be coped with, not later but here and now.

"George!" she said, and gasped. "How on earth did you get here?"

She felt the kind of incredulous horror that a dentist’s patient might experience on finding that a tooth which he had thought was safely out had returned to its post, prepared to go on giving trouble exactly as before.

"And what the devil," returned George, "do you mean by playing me such a trick?"

He glowered at her ferociously. During the last half-hour or so he had managed to lash himself into a very satisfactory passion. There was a quality in his glower which Caro did not remember to have encountered in any of the series of stand-up fights into which their engagement seemed to have degenerated. She felt a thrill—but whether of fear
or of pleasure, or a queer combination of the two, she did not give herself time to inquire. She thrust the emotion back into her sub-consciousness, and turned at bay.

"That's my business!" she said defiantly.

"Is it indeed? I'll soon show you about that, my girl!"

George advanced toward her in an attitude of menace. Again Caro felt that untimely thrill. She had never realized that George was so large. But afraid? Of George! What an idea! She was furious, that was all. Still, this certainly was a new sidelight on George's character. She suddenly began to wonder if she knew him quite as well as she had thought.

All the same, fury came uppermost. What a rotten thing it was to do, to corner her like this and threaten her with his superior brute force. If this sort of thing could be allowed to happen, what, Caro demanded of herself, was civilization for?

She glanced about her, and her eye fell on a notice which the L. & H.C. Railway, in an unwonted fit of levity, had put into verse for her benefit.

To stop the train (said the L. & H.C.)

Pull down the chain.

It added, in prose, that if you took this advice for insufficient reason, the tariff charge was £3; a pull.

But Caro was in no mood to boggle about by-laws. At the moment her life had only one purpose—to teach George a lesson. Here was an implement handy to do it with. Very well then.

She reached up and caught hold of the chain.

"If you come one inch farther," she said through her teeth, "I'll pull!"

George laughed.

"Don't be a something fool," he said. Trusting to the fact that in ordinary life nobody pulls down chains and stops trains except in cases of murder or severe illness, he stepped forward. And Caro pulled.

For a long, awful moment they stared at each other. Then the train began to slow down.

"Well," said George. "Now you have done it!"

Caro released the chain, which hung down in a slack loop where only a few moments ago it had been so beautifully taut. She made some futile effort to return it to its original
position, but in vain. It continued to hang in a slack loop; and the train continued to slow down.

"Oh George!" said Caro, suddenly abandoning her high horse and becoming a damsel in distress appealing to her natural protector. "What shall we do?"

George failed to adapt himself to the new attitude.

"What can we do?" he asked unhelpfully. "You were going to give me in charge or something, weren't you? Better go on with it—unless you expect me to explain that I did it for a lark, and produce a fiver."

"It'll have stopped in a second. George!"

There was a note of pleading in her voice which melted George to some extent.

"Oh, all right!" he said. He paused a moment to reconnoitre the situation. Then he lay down on the floor, with an air of distaste and ill-usage.

"I've fainted. Whatever happens, stick to that. I fainted, and you were frightened and called for help."

"But your clothes—they'll be filthy."

"You should have thought of that before you began pulling chains. And anyhow, why does it matter to you how filthy I get?"

He closed his eyes coldly, as the train stopped with a final jerk.

The consternation which the pulling down of the chain had caused in the carriage was as nothing to that which it engendered in the guard's van. Mr. Cropper was in a pitiful panic. He had never had his communication chain pulled before, and had almost forgotten that such things could happen. He applied his brake with the feeling that he was probably signing his own death-warrant. As the train slowed down, he remembered the hefty build of that tousled young man, glanced at his own inconsiderable frame, and shivered.

Nevertheless, duty called. And if it was fate's decree that he should suffer, at least he had the consolation that he would suffer in a worthy cause—for the girl was really a very pretty girl indeed.

As he trotted along beside the line, he hoped that Tom Taylor would have the impulse to come to his assistance.
He needed a man of action. But Tom merely hung a surprised face out of his cab and did not move. As for the handful of passengers, not one of them even troubled to look out of the window. Stoppages on the Wandle Valley Branch were not infrequent, and the Wandle Valley intellect was slow to react even to an emotion so universal as curiosity. Fred Cropper felt very lonely as he arrived at the fatal compartment. Guards on American trains, he seemed to remember from the films, carried guns. He thought it an excellent idea.

He climbed up, peeped in—and nearly fell off the footboard. The girl was standing up, with her back to him. The hefty young man lay at her feet. She had knocked him out! Heavens, what a girl!

Relief surged through Fred Cropper's soul. He suddenly found himself capable of dealing with the situation. He opened the carriage-door firmly.

The girl turned.

"Oh, Guard," she said. "I—I hope you don't mind, but I pulled the chain. You see, this gentleman fainted, and I didn't know quite what to do."

(Fainted I" thought Mr. Cropper sardonically. Evidently the girl was frightened of the effects of her deed. He must reassure her.)

He bent down and felt the young man's heart. It was beating. Indeed, it was pounding heavily.

"It's all right, miss. You haven't hurt him. He's alive all right. You're a brave young lady—what did you hit him with?"

"I haven't hit him." Her astonishment, thought Mr. Cropper, was very cleverly put on. "He fainted, I tell you."

"No need to say that, miss, really there isn't. Anything you done, you done in self-defence. Ugly looking customer, too."

"But I didn't do anything. This gentleman's my—er—he's a—a friend of mine."

Mr. Cropper, noticing her hesitation over the word "friend," drew his own conclusions. Now that the danger was past, she wanted to avoid getting mixed up in a nasty affair. He could appreciate that. But it was his duty to the company not to allow this miscreant to get off scot free; and
it was his duty to himself to get any credit that might be going.

Tom Taylor's grimy and puzzled face appeared at this point outside the window.

"What's up, Fred?"

"Young lady been set on, Tom. She laid him out good and proper, an' now she wants to make out he's a friend of hers."

"But he is a friend of mine," Caro interrupted wildly. "We were travelling together."

Mr. Cropper pounced like a cross-examining counsel.

"There you are, Tom. He wasn't travellin' with her. I seen him watching her out o' window at Halston, an' creepin' along the platform at Dog ferry to get in beside her."

"Ah," said Tom. "'E looks that sort."

This was acute of Mr. Taylor, for he was not in a position to see more of George than his right boot. Caro turned on him indignantly.

"He isn't that sort, I tell you. He's my fiancé."

Fred Cropper shook his head, as one who had come sorrowfully to the conclusion that he could not believe a single syllable that this girl said.

"You said friend just now," he pointed out. "No, miss, I'm sorry, but we got our dooty to do. Let's get him out of the carriage, Tom."

Angry and bewildered, Caro sank down on to the seat. Horrid pictures of police-court proceedings began to pass through her mind.

What could she say or do, now that she was a discredited witness? George might have an idea; but George was committed to remaining an inert mass, and was now being lifted out of the carriage, none too gently, by the big engine-driver and the little guard. George evidently realized that it would be better for him to remain in his faint until she had succeeded, somehow or other, in making the atmosphere less hostile towards him. But how?

They laid George on the grass at the side of the line, and Caro heard the engine-driver say:

"What we got to do now, Fred, is bring 'im to an' then ask 'im what the 'ell 'e means by it. You stand by to bash 'im if 'e tries anything before I get back."
He departed towards the engine on some mysterious errand.

Meanwhile, Wandle Valley had begun to realize that something unusual was up. The passengers were beginning to leave the train and gather round; and a low muttering showed that they were hearing with indignation the guard's highly-coloured version of what had happened.

The muttering grew louder, the indignation deeper. Caro remembering lurid tales she had heard of slow but fierce rustic passions, decided that the time had come for drastic, even dramatic, action.

She leapt from the carriage, and suddenly appeared, standing over the recumbent George and facing the citizenry as Mark Antony did over the body of Caesar.

"Listen!" she said imperiously. "You must listen—all of you. You're making a horrible mistake. This gentleman was my fiancé. This morning we quarrelled, and I broke the engagement and ran away. He followed me, and when he got to my carriage, he fainted. And that's all that happened."

She paused.

The urgency of her words had penetrated the Wandle Valley intellect. If the young chap really had behaved like this, pondered Wandle Valley, then perhaps young chap was not quite such a villain after all. Indeed, young chap was not so much a villain as one of these here great lovers you see on the pictures. Wandle Valley, its dramatic sense pleasantly titillated, waited for the next step.

Caro, who had done a good deal of amateur acting in her time, could feel that she was holding her audience. Suddenly she realized that what was now wanted was a stroke of pure theatre. Well, why not? Since her linen was being washed in public anyhow, let it be washed thoroughly, and with a flourish.

She crossed her hands on her breast and looked demurely "down.

"You see," she said, with an effective catch in her voice, "I love him!"

An ill-timed smile appeared on George's face. Whether it signified gratification or derision Caro did not wait to consider. She delivered a powerful but surreptitious kick to George's short ribs, and the smile was obliterated.
Wandle Valley was impressed. It recognized the familiar signs. The downcast eyes, the blush of modesty (really of shame, but Wandle Valley was not to know that)—such were the known tokens of maidenly surrender. Mr. Cropper's romantic soul was specially touched. His late monstrous suspicions of this admirable young man were now quite gone. He felt, dimly, that it would be a fit conclusion if the young man now came to himself in time for the final embrace and fade-out.

Caro, not at all dimly, felt the same. It was all very well for George to be careful, but she felt he was now carrying caution to a ridiculous extreme. She gave expression to this feeling with another surreptitious but well-aimed kick. George gave a convulsive movement and a realistic groan, and played up.

He opened his eyes.

"Where am I?" he asked, in the accepted form for these occasions.

Then he raised himself on his elbow.

"Caro darling!" he said, and flopped back on to the ground and closed his eyes once more.

Mr. Cropper, and the rest, scarce forbore to cheer. The scene was going well. What is more, it would probably have continued to go well, but for Tom Taylor, who broke in upon it at this point.

That single-minded man of action, bent on his scheme for bringing George to and then asking what the 'ell 'e meant by it, had gone in search of water.

Such water as he had on his engine was hissing hot, and unsuitable as a cure for fainting fits. He had therefore taken an empty coal-bucket, and had filled it at a brackish marsh-pool which bordered on the railway embankment. The fluid thus obtained was muddy, and moreover had proved a fertile breeding-ground for duckweed and a nursery for myriads of tiny tadpoles. Also, the bucket had a rich deposit of coal-dust on its sides.

However, Mr. Taylor was in no mood to consider the finer feelings of the kind of young man who annoyed beautiful girls in trains. He strode into the crowd and, before anybody had a chance to warn him of the change in popular opinion, discharged half of the dingy compound in his bucket into George's face.
It certainly brought the victim to. George sat up, gasping. Duckweed was in his hair, a mixture of mud and soot was running down his cheeks, tadpoles leapt uneasily in his lap. He was a pathetic sight, and all that was maternal in Caroline was roused by it. She forgot play-acting.

"George!" she cried. "Oh, George, my poor sweet!" and she gathered him in her arms.

To Mr. Taylor's intense indignation, it was he that was asked what the hell he meant by it. Wandle Valley turned on him as one man. Not only had he committed an unprovoked assault on an innocent man, but he had spoilt the only romantic close-up that Wandle Valley was ever likely to see in real life with a piece of vulgar slap-stick. Wandle Valley was annoyed with Mr. Taylor, and said so.

Thereupon Mr. Taylor lost his temper in his turn, issued an ultimatum that if Wandle Valley wasn't back in its places in two twos, he would take the train on to Templeton without it. He strode back to his engine, every inch the man of action, and Wandle Valley forgot righteous indignation in an undignified scramble for seats.

Of all this, Caro and George were beautifully unconscious. They had shared the mud, the soot, the duckweed and the tadpoles between them with such impartiality that it would have been difficult for an uninstructed observer to decide which had been Mr. Taylor's original patient, and were now standing up hand in hand, bedraggled but blissful. Lost in a world of their own, they were busy planning a future which took no account of the immediate necessity of getting to Templeton Junction.

Mr. Taylor gave a warning toot on his whistle. They did not hear it. Mr. Cropper walked over to them, and gave a deferential cough. He might have been the Invisible Man for all the notice they took of him.

"Then you'll marry me at once, darling?"

"I'll marry you to-morrow, if we can get a special licence in the time."

"Excuse me, miss . . ."

"And you won't mind being poor?"

"So long as I've got you, I don't mind anything. I knew it when I saw your poor face all covered with mud and stuff."

"Excuse me, miss, but . . ."

"What fools we've been all this time!"
"What utter fools!"
"If you'll pardon me, sir . . ."
"But we've come to our senses at last!"
"Darling!"
"Sweetheart!"
"Please, miss . . ."

"I say," said George, coming to earth suddenly. "We'd better get back into the train, or it'll be going on without us!"

They scrambled to their feet and dashed for their carriage, leaving the Invisible Man following forlornly behind.
THE DEMON POPE

RICHARD GARNETT
Richard Garnett, born in 1835, was an eminent scholar and essayist. He was appointed superintendent of the British Museum reading-room in 1875. He was the father of Edward Garnett, author of The Breaking Point, and grandfather of David Garnett, author of Lady into Fox.
“So you won’t sell me your soul?” said the Devil.

“Thank you,” replied the student, “I had rather keep it myself, if it’s all the same to you.”

“But it’s not all the same to me. I want it very particularly. Come, I’ll be liberal. I said twenty years. You can have thirty.”

The student shook his head.

“Forty!”

Another shake.

“Fifty!”

As before.

“Now,” said the Devil, “I know I’m going to do a foolish thing, but I cannot bear to see a clever, spirited young man throw himself away. I’ll make you another kind of offer. We won’t have any bargain at present, but I will push you on in the world for the next forty years. This day forty years I come back and ask you for a boon; not your soul, mind, or anything not perfectly in your power to grant. If you give it, we are quits; if not, I fly away with you. What say you to this?”

The student reflected for some minutes. “Agreed,” he said at last.

Scarcely had the Devil disappeared, which he did instantaneously, ere a messenger reined in his smoking steed at the gate of the University of Cordova (the judicious reader will already have remarked that Lucifer could never have been allowed inside a Christian seat of learning), and, inquiring for the student Gerbert, presented him with the Emperor Otho’s nomination to the Abbacy of Bobbio, in consideration, said the document, of his virtue and learning, well-nigh miraculous in one so young. Such messengers were frequent visitors during Gerbert’s prosperous career. Abbot, bishop, archbishop, cardinal, he was ultimately enthroned Pope on
April 2, 999, and assumed the appellation of Silvester the Second. It was then a general belief that the world would come to an end in the following year, a catastrophe which to many seemed the more imminent from the election of a chief pastor whose celebrity as a theologian, though not inconsiderable, by no means equalled his reputation as a necromancer.

The world, notwithstanding, revolved scathless through the dreaded twelvemonth, and early in the first year of the eleventh century Gerbert was sitting peacefully in his study, perusing a book of magic. Volumes of algebra, astrology, alchemy, Aristotelian philosophy, and other such light reading filled his book-case; and on a table stood an improved clock of his invention, next to his introduction of the Arabic numerals—his chief legacy to posterity. Suddenly a sound of wings was heard, and Lucifer stood by his side.

"It is a long time," said the fiend, "since I have had the pleasure of seeing you. I have now called to remind you of our little contract, concluded this day forty years."

"You remember," said Silvester, "that you are not to ask anything exceeding my power to perform."

"I have no such intention," said Lucifer. "On the contrary, I am about to solicit a favour which can be bestowed by you alone. You are Pope; I desire that you would make me a cardinal."

"In the expectation, I presume," returned Gerbert, "of becoming Pope on the next vacancy."

"An expectation," replied Lucifer, "which I may most reasonably entertain, considering my enormous wealth, my proficiency in intrigue, and the present condition of the Sacred College."

"You would doubtless," said Gerbert, "endeavour to subvert the foundations of the Faith, and, by a course of profligacy and licentiousness, render the Holy See odious and contemptible."

"On the contrary," said the fiend, "I would extirpate heresy, and all learning and knowledge as inevitably tending thereunto. I would suffer no man to read but the priest, and confine his reading to his breviary. I would burn your books together with your bones on the first convenient opportunity. I would observe an austere propriety of conduct, and be especially careful not to loosen one rivet in the tremendous yoke I was forging for the minds and consciences of mankind."
"If it be so," said Gerbert, "let's be off!"
"What!" exclaimed Lucifer. "You are willing to accompany me to the infernal regions!"
"Assuredly, rather than be accessory to the burning of Plato and Aristotle, and give place to the darkness against which I have been contending all my life."
"Gerbert," replied the demon, "this is arrant trifling. Know you not that no good man can enter my dominions? That, were such a thing possible, my empire would become intolerable to me, and I should be compelled to abdicate?"
"I do know it," said Gerbert, "and hence I have been able to receive your visit with composure."
"Gerbert," said the Devil, with tears in his eyes, "I put it to you—is this fair, is this honest? I undertake to promote your interests in the world; I fulfil my promise abundantly. You obtain through my instrumentality a position to which you could never otherwise have aspired. Often have I had a hand in the election of a pope, but never before have I contributed to confer the tiara on one eminent for virtue and learning. You profit by my assistance to the full, and now take advantage of an adventitious circumstance to deprive me of my reasonable guerdon. It is my constant experience that the good people are much more slippery than the sinners, and drive much harder bargains."
"Lucifer," answered Gerbert, "I have always sought to treat you as a gentleman, hoping that you would approve yourself such in return. I will not inquire whether it was entirely in harmony with this character to seek to intimidate me into compliance with your demand by threatening me with a penalty which you well knew could not be enforced. I will overlook this little irregularity, and concede even more than you have requested. You have asked to be a cardinal. I will make you Pope—"
"Ha!" exclaimed Lucifer, and an internal glow suffused his sooty hide, as the light of a fading ember is revived by breathing upon it.
"For twelve hours," continued Gerbert. "At the expiration of that time we will consider the matter further; and if, as I anticipate, you are more anxious to divest yourself of the Papal dignity than you were to assume it, I promise to bestow upon you any boon you may ask within my power to grant, and not plainly inconsistent with religion or morals."
“Done!” cried the demon. Gerbert uttered some cabalistic words, and in a moment the apartment held two Pope Silvesters, entirely indistinguishable save by their attire, and the fact that one limped slightly with the left foot.

“You will find the Pontifical apparel in this cupboard,” said Gerbert, and, taking his book of magic with him, he retreated through a masked door to a secret chamber. As the door closed behind him he chuckled, and muttered to himself, “Poor old Lucifer! Sold again!”

If Lucifer was sold he did not seem to know it. He approached a large slab of silver which did duty as a mirror, and contemplated his personal appearance with some dissatisfaction.

“I certainly don’t look half so well without my horns,” he soliloquized, “and I am sure I shall miss my tail most grievously.”

A tiara and a train, however, made fair amends for the deficient appendages, and Lucifer now looked every inch a Pope. He was about to call the master of the ceremonies, and summon a consistory, when the door was burst open, and seven cardinals, brandishing poniards, rushed into the room.

“Down with the sorcerer!” they cried, as they seized and gagged him.

“Death to the Saracen!”

“Practises algebra, and other devilish arts!”

“Knows Greek!”

“Talks Arabic!”

“Reads Hebrew!”

“Burn him!”

“Smother him!”

“Let him be deposed by a general council,” said a young and inexperienced cardinal.

“Heaven forbid!” said an old and wary one, sotto voce.

Lucifer struggled frantically, but the feeble frame he was doomed to inhabit for the next eleven hours was speedily exhausted. Bound and helpless, he swooned away.

“Brethren,” said one of the senior cardinals, “it hath been delivered by the exorcists that a sorcerer or other individual in league with the demon doth usually bear upon his person some visible token of his infernal compact. I propose that we forthwith institute a search for this stigma, the discovery of
which may contribute to justify our proceedings in the eyes of the world."

"I heartily approve of our brother Anno's proposition," said another, "the rather as we cannot possibly fail to discover such a mark, if, indeed, we desire to find it."

The search was accordingly instituted, and had not proceeded far ere a simultaneous yell from all the seven cardinals indicated that their investigation had brought more to light than they had ventured to expect.

The Holy Father had a cloven foot!

For the next five minutes the cardinals remained utterly stunned, silent, and stupefied with amazement. As they gradually recovered their faculties it would have become manifest to a nice observer that the Pope had risen very considerably in their good opinion.

"This is an affair requiring very mature deliberation," said one.

"I always feared that we might be proceeding too precipitately," said another.

"It is written, 'the devils believe'," said a third: "the Holy Father, therefore, is not a heretic at any rate."

"Brethren," said Anno, "this affair, as our brother Benno well remarks, doth indeed call for mature deliberation. I therefore propose that, instead of smothering his Holiness with cushions, as originally contemplated, we immure him for the present in the dungeon adjoining hereunto, and, after spending the night in meditation and prayer, resume the consideration of the business to-morrow morning."

"Informing the officials of the palace," said Benno, "that his Holiness has retired for his devotions, and desires on no account to be disturbed."

"A pious fraud," said Anno, "which not one of the Fathers would for a moment have scrupled to commit."

The cardinals accordingly lifted the still insensible Lucifer, and bore him carefully, almost tenderly, to the apartment appointed for his detention. Each would fain have lingered in hopes of his recovery, but each felt that the eyes of his six brethren were upon him: and all, therefore, retired simultaneously, each taking a key of the cell.

Lucifer regained consciousness almost immediately afterwards. He had the most confused idea of the circumstances which had involved him in his present scrape, and could only
say to himself that if they were the usual concomitants of the Papal dignity, these were by no means to his taste, and he wished he had been made acquainted with them sooner. The dungeon was not only perfectly dark, but horribly cold, and the poor Devil in his present form had no latent store of infernal heat to draw upon. His teeth chattered, he shivered in every limb, and felt devoured with hunger and thirst. There is much probability in the assertion of some of his biographers that it was on this occasion that he invented ardent spirits; but, even if he did, the mere conception of a glass of brandy could only increase his sufferings. So the long January night wore wearily on, and Lucifer seemed likely to expire from inanition, when a key turned in the lock, and Cardinal Anno cautiously glided in, bearing a lamp, a loaf, half a cold roast kid, and a bottle of wine.

"I trust," he said, bowing courteously, "that I may be excused any slight breach of etiquette of which I may render myself culpable from the difficulty under which I labour of determining whether, under present circumstances, 'your Holiness' or 'your Infernal Majesty' be the form of address most befitting me to employ."

"Bub-ub-bub-boo," went Lucifer, who still had the gag in his mouth.

"Heavens!" exclaimed the Cardinal. "I crave your Infernal Holiness's forgiveness. What a lamentable oversight!"

And, relieving Lucifer of his gag and bonds, he set out the refection, upon which the demon fell voraciously.

"Why the devil, if I may so express myself," pursued Anno, "did not your Holiness inform us that you were the Devil? Not a hand would then have been raised against you. I have myself been seeking all my life for the audience now happily vouchsafed me. Whence this mistrust of your faithful Anno, who has served you so loyally and zealously these many years?"

Lucifer pointed significantly to the gag and fetters.

"I shall never forgive myself," protested the cardinal, "for the part I have borne in this unfortunate transaction. Next to ministering to your Majesty's bodily necessities, there is nothing I have so much at heart as to express my penitence. But I entreat your Majesty to remember that I believed myself to be acting in your Majesty's interest by overthrowing a magician who was accustomed to send your Majesty upon
errands, and who might at any time enclose you in a box and cast you into the sea. It is deplorable that your Majesty's most devoted servants should have been thus misled."

"Reasons of State," suggested Lucifer.

"I trust that they no longer operate," said the Cardinal. "However, the Sacred College is now fully possessed of the whole matter: it is therefore unnecessary to pursue this department of the subject further. I would now humbly crave leave to confer with your Majesty, or rather, perhaps, your Holiness, since I am about to speak of spiritual things, on the important and delicate point of your Holiness's successor. I am ignorant how long your Holiness proposes to occupy the Apostolic chair; but of course you are aware that public opinion will not suffer you to hold it for a term exceeding that of the pontificate of Peter. A vacancy, therefore, must one day occur; and I am humbly to represent that the office could not be filled by one more congenial than myself to the present incumbent, or on whom he could more fully rely to carry out in every respect his views and intentions."

And the Cardinal proceeded to detail various circumstances of his past life, which certainly seemed to corroborate his assertion. He had not, however, proceeded far ere he was disturbed by the grating of another key in the lock, and had just time to whisper impressively, "Beware of Benno," ere he dived under a table.

Benno was also provided with a lamp, wine, and cold viands. Warned by the other lamp and the remains of Lucifer's repast that some colleague had been beforehand with him, and not knowing how many more might be in the field, he came briefly to the point as regarded the Papacy, and preferred his claim in much the same manner as Anno. While he was earnestly cautioning Lucifer against this Cardinal as one who could and would cheat the very Devil himself, another key turned in the lock, and Benno escaped under the table, where Anno immediately inserted his finger into his right eye. The little squeal consequent upon this occurrence Lucifer successfully smothered by a fit of coughing.

Cardinal No. 3, a Frenchman, bore a Bayonne ham, and exhibited the same disgust as Benno on seeing himself forestalled. So far as his requests transpired they were moderate, but no one knows where he would have stopped if he had not been scared by the advent of Cardinal No. 4. Up to this time
he had only asked for an inexhaustible purse, power to call up
the Devil *ad libitum*, and a ring of invisibility to allow him free
access to his mistress, who was unfortunately a married
woman.

Cardinal No. 4 chiefly wanted to be put into the way of
poisoning Cardinal No. 5; and Cardinal No. 5 preferred the
same petition as respecting Cardinal No. 4.

Cardinal No. 6, an Englishman, demanded the reversion
of the Archbishoprics of Canterbury and York, with the
faculty of holding them together, and of unlimited non-
residence. In the course of his harangue he made use of the
phrase *non obstantibus*, of which Lucifer immediately took a
note.

What the seventh cardinal would have solicited is not
known, for he had hardly opened his mouth when the twelfth
hour expired, and Lucifer, regaining his vigour with his shape,
sent the Prince of the Church spinning to the other end of the
room, and split the marble table with a single stroke of his
tail. The six crouched and huddling cardinals cowered
revealed to one another, and at the same time enjoyed the
spectacle of his Holiness darting through the stone ceiling,
which yielded like a film to his passage, and closed up after-
wards as if nothing had happened. After the first shock of
dismay they unanimously rushed to the door, but found it
bolted on the outside. There was no other exit, and no means
of giving an alarm. In this emergency the demeanour of the
Italian cardinals set a bright example to their ultramontane
colleagues. "Bisogna pazienza," they said, as they shrugged
their shoulders. Nothing could exceed the mutual politeness
of Cardinals Anno and Benno, unless that of the two who had
sought to poison each other. The Frenchman was held to
have gravely derogated from good manners by alluding to this
circumstance, which had reached his ears while he was under
the table: and the Englishman swore so outrageously at the
plight in which he found himself that the Italians then and
there silently registered a vow that none of his nation should
ever be Pope, a maxim which, with one exception, has been
observed to this day.

Lucifer, meanwhile, had repaired to Silvester, whom he
found arrayed in all the insignia of his dignity; of which, as he
remarked, he thought his visitor had probably had enough.

"I should think so indeed," replied Lucifer. "But at the
same time I feel myself fully repaid for all I have undergone by the assurance of the loyalty of my friends and admirers, and the conviction that it is needless for me to devote any considerable amount of personal attention to ecclesiastical affairs. I now claim the promised boon, which it will be in no way inconsistent with thy functions to grant, seeing that it is a work of mercy. I demand that the cardinals be released, and that their conspiracy against thee, by which I alone suffered, be buried in oblivion."

"I hoped you would carry them all off," said Gerbert, with an expression of disappointment.

"Thank you," said the Devil. "It is more to my interest to leave them where they are."

So the dungeon door was unbolted, and the cardinals came forth, sheepish and crestfallen. If, after all, they did less mischief than Lucifer had expected from them, the cause was their entire bewilderment by what had passed, and their utter inability to penetrate the policy of Gerbert, who henceforth devoted himself even with ostentation to good works. They could never quite satisfy themselves whether they were speaking to the Pope or to the Devil, and when under the latter impression habitually emitted propositions which Gerbert justly stigmatized as rash, temerarious, and scandalous. They plagued him with allusions to certain matters mentioned in their interviews with Lucifer, with which they naturally but erroneously supposed him to be conversant, and worried him by continual nods and titterings as they glanced at his nether extremities. To abolish this nuisance, and at the same time silence sundry unpleasant rumours which had somehow got abroad, Gerbert devised the ceremony of kissing the Pope's feet, which, in a grievously mutilated form, endures to this day. The stupefaction of the cardinals on discovering that the Holy Father had lost his hoof surpasses all description, and they went to their graves without having obtained the least insight into the mystery.
THE RABBITS

A. A. MILNE
A. A. Milne was for several years assistant editor of Punch, to which he contributed many humorous sketches and articles. Since the war he has turned his attention to the theatre, and many of his plays have had successful runs. He is also, of course, the creator of that celebrated character “Winnie-the-Pooh.”
THE RABBITS

I

"By Hobbs," cried Archie, as he began to put away the porridge, "I feel as fit as anything this morning. I'm absolutely safe for a century."

"You shouldn't boast with your mouth full," Myra told her brother.

"It wasn't quite full," pleaded Archie, "and I really am good for runs to-day."

"You will make," I said, "exactly fourteen."

"Hallo, good morning. Didn't see you were there."

"I have been here all the time. Fourteen."

"It seems a lot," said Myra doubtfully.

Archie laughed in scorn.

"The incoming batsman," I began, "who seemed in no way daunted by the position of affairs——"

"Five hundred for nine," put in Myra.

"—reached double figures for the fourth time this season, with a lofty snick to the boundary. Then turning his attention to the slow bowler he despatched him between his pads and the wicket for a couple. This, however, was his last scoring stroke, as in the same over he played forward to a long hop and fell a victim to the vigilance of the wicket-keeper."

"For nearly a quarter of an hour," continued Myra, "he had defied the attack, and the character of his batting may be easily judged from the fact that his score included one five——"

"Four from an overthrow," I added in parenthesis.

"And one four. Save for a chance to mid-on before he had scored, and another in the slips when seven, his innings was almost entirely free from blemish——"

"Although on one occasion he had the good fortune,
when playing back to a half-volley, to strike the wicket without dislodging the bails."

"See to-morrow's Sportsman," concluded Myra.

"Oh, you children," laughed Archie, as he walked over to inspect the ham. "Bless you."

Miss Fortescue gave a little cough and began to speak. Miss Fortescue is one of those thoroughly good girls who take an interest in everything. A genuine trier. On this occasion she said: "I often wonder who it is who writes those accounts in the Sportsman."

"It is believed to be Mr. Simpson," said Archie.

Simpson looked up with a start, and jerked his glasses into his tea. He fished them out and wiped them thoughtfully.

"The credible," he began, "is rarely——"

"Gentlemen, I pray you silence for Mr. Simpson's epigram," cried Archie.

"Oh, I always thought Mr. Simpson wrote verses in the Saturday Review," said Miss Fortescue in the silence which followed.

"As a relaxation only," I explained. "The other is his life-work. We read him with great interest; that bit about the heavy roller being requisitioned is my favourite line."

"Mr. Simpson and Killick and Crawford all play in glasses," put in Myra eagerly, across the table.

"That is their only point in common," added Archie.

"Oh, isn't he a very good player?"

"Well, he's a thoroughly honest and punctual and sober player," I said, "but—the fact is, he and I and the Major don't make many runs nowadays. We generally give, as he has said in one of his less popular poems, a local habitation to the—er—airy nothing."

"I thought it was Shakespeare said that."

"Shakespeare or Simpson. Hallo, there's Thomas at last."

Thomas is in the Admiralty, which is why he is always late. It is a great pity that he was christened Thomas; he can never rise to the top of his profession with a name like that. You couldn't imagine a Thomas McKenna—or even a Thomas Nelson, but he doesn't seem to mind somehow.
"Morning, everybody," said Thomas. "Isn't it a beastly day?"

"We'll hoist the south cone for you," said Archie, and he balanced a mushroom upside down on the end of his fork.

"What's the matter with the day?" asked our host, the Major, still intent on his paper.

"It's so early."

"When I was a boy——"

"My father, Major Mannering," said Archie, "will now relate an anecdote of Waterloo."

But the Major was deep in his paper. Suddenly he—there is only one word for it—snorted.

"The Budget," said Myra and Archie, exchanging anxious glances.

"Ha, that's good," he said, "that's very good! If the Chancellor of the Exchequer imagines that he can make his iniquitous Budget more acceptable to a disgusted public by treating it in a spirit of airy persiflage he is at liberty to try. But airy persiflage, when brought into contact with the determined temper of a nation——"

"Who is the hairy Percy, anyhow?" said Thomas to himself.

The Major glared at the interrupter for a moment. Then—for he knows his weakness, and is particularly fond of Thomas—he threw his paper down and laughed. "Well," he said, "are we going to win to-day?" And while he and Archie talked about the wicket, his daughter removed The Times to a safe distance.

"But there aren't eleven of you here," said Miss Fortescue to me, "and if you and Mr. Simpson and Major Mannering aren't very good, you'll be beaten. It's against the village the first two days, isn't it?"

"When I said we weren't very good, I only meant we didn't make many runs. Mr. Simpson is a noted fast bowler, the Major has a M.C.C. scarf, which can be seen quite easily at point, and I keep wicket. Between us we dismiss many a professor. Just as they are shaping for a cut, you know, they catch sight of the Major's scarf, lose their heads and give me an easy catch. Then Archie and Thomas take centuries, one of the gardeners bends them from the off and makes them swim a bit, the Vicar of his plenty is lending us
two sons, Tony and Dahlia Blair come down this morning, and there is a chauffeur who plays for keeps. How many is that?"

"Eleven, isn’t it?"

"It ought only to be ten," said Myra, who had overheard.

"Oh yes, I was counting Miss Blair," said Miss Fortescue.

"We never play more than ten a side," said Archie.

"Oh, why?"

"So as to give the scorer an extra line or two for the byes."

Myra laughed; then, catching my eye, looked preternaturally solemn.

"If you’ve quite finished breakfast, Mr. Gaukrodger," she said, "there’ll be just time for me to beat you at croquet before the Rabbits take the field."

"Right O," I said.

Of course, you know, my name isn’t really Gaukrodger.

II

The Major has taken a great deal of trouble with his ground, and the result pleases everybody. If you are a batsman you applaud the short boundaries; if you are a wicket-keeper (as I am), and Thomas is bowling what he is pleased to call googlies, you have leisure to study some delightful scenery; and if you are a left-handed bowler, with a delivery outside the screen, there is behind you a belt of trees which you cannot fail to admire. When Archie was born, and they announced the fact to the Major, his first question was (so I understand), "Right or left handed?" They told him "Left" to quiet him, and he went out and planted a small forest, so that it should be ready for Archibald’s action when he grew up. Unfortunately, Archie turned out to be no bowler at all (in my opinion)—and right-handed at that. Nemesis, as the ha’penny papers say.

“Well?” we all asked, when Archie came back from tossing.

“They lost, and put us in.”

“Good man.”

“May I have my sixpence back?” I said. “You haven’t bent it or anything, have you? Thanks.”