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ALADDIN & THE BOSS COCKIE

RANDOLPH BEDFORD

# ALADDIN and the BOSS COCKIE



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ALADDIN AND THE BOSS COCKIE





Percy Lindoan

"I don't want no actors ere," stormed Gronthead.

*Aladdin and the Boss Cockie.*]

[See page 110

# ALADDIN and the BOSS COCKIE

BY  
RANDOLPH BEDFORD

Author of "True Eyes and the Whirlwind"  
"The Snare of Strength," "Billy Pagan"  
"Silver Star," :: "Daydawn,"  
"Explorations in Civilisation,"  
Etc., Etc.

DRAWINGS BY PERCY LINDSAY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE PEA AND THIMBLE.

"This comes of keeping bad company," said the thief, as he went to the gallows between the hangman and a monk.

"GOOD-DAY, Aladdin!"

"Same to you, Cold-feet!"

"Don't you call me Cold-feet!"

"Don't you call me Aladdin! I tell the truth, and you don't. I'm not Aladdin, and I've lost my lamp; but you're Cold-feet, alright. What's doing?"

"It isn't what's doing, my boy—it's what's being done."

"Not what, Cold-feet, who! And I'm who!"

"I'm sorry for that."

"Don't tell lies, Cold-feet, You beared my stock, and you fainted when you thought I'd got you and the others with your boots off; and then Willie the Wowser found that that crook, Bamfield, was ready to break the pool. You've delivered and busted me. I'm not squealing, but don't tell me you're sorry." He paused a moment, looked round the marble walls and marble flagging and stucco ceiling of the Stock Exchange vestibule, and grinned. "If you tell that lie again, Cold-feet, the roof of this Pea and Thimble will fall in with a loud bang."

Cold-feet Jones liked his nickname none the less that Aladdin had given it him, and less again because Aladdin was his prospective son-in-law. Was!



Cold-feet heard himself thinking "has been." He was a round, tubby man—he seemed to be made of puddings, and as he affected tightly-fitting raiment it often seemed in moments of stress that the puddings were bursting their cloths. His face was mottled, and his ears were elephantine, and his usual condition was fear of losing his money. It was the first expression that came to his watery eyes on being suddenly stopped in the street or spoken to. The fear of the borrower or the pirate—a childish fear as of the greedy schoolboy, ever afraid that he can never eat lollies quickly enough to escape lawless boys whose mouths leak.

Cold-feet Jones, as a member of that Stock Exchange, resented the nickname for it of the Pea and Thimble, but his resentment showed itself only in silence as the hard-faced members passed in, and but with rarely even a curt nod for Aladdin Biddulfson, the man whom last week all the bears had crawled to—asking for God's sake to let them know the worst they had to pay for being short on Blue Duck Gold Mining shares—let them know the worst and get it over. And now Bamfield, the one-time friend of Biddulfson—the partner in the pool "on honor"—had broken the pool, supplied the bears, smashed the corner, and ruined Biddulfson. The highly-respectable gentleman known as Willie the Wowser passed Biddulfson, and gave him a most unchristian look of hatred, for Willie the Wowser had been afraid for his dearest possession—his money; afraid that, having made a foolish bet and lost, he would now have to pay. Willie the Wowser was rectitude and regularity from his squeakful boots to his little round hat. His peaked face ended in a pointed white beard, so that his head seemed a wedge of bone and hair almost fleshless, and as he passed on his boots squeaked out the last Commandment, "Thou shalt not collect from me when I lose; for every man is my meat, and I am every man's poison."

Bamfield, the pool-breaker, had saved him from paying very much, but he had had his fright, and couldn't forgive Aladdin Biddulftson in a hurry.

"This lot would run a dead-heat for the ugly stakes," said Biddulftson, almost bitterly, as he regarded these men who had sold their youth for money. He himself was still young—very young—as young as he was daring; mercurially cheerful, almost tall, and very slightly fleshy, pink-cheeked, blue-eyed, and apparently as innocent as his small and very new yellow moustache would have him to be.

"Don't get shirty," pleaded Cold-feet Jones—whose feet were now much warmer than they had been for all the weeks of the Blue Duck shorts. "Come an' have a drink—or some lunch, eh?"

"No. My lunch will be a cheese sandwich. But I'll split a Condy's fluid with you—your reputation demands it."

"I think you're insulting," said Cold-feet, indignantly. "And I'm glad I didn't tell you what's to come, and let you down light," he added to himself, and moved off as Aladdin turned to speak to a good-looking dark young man, of small hands and feet and features, and big eyes, optimism writ large all over him, as it was written even larger on his companion—another hopeful, blue-eyed man of scrupulous neatness of dress, and a big chest jutting forward in defiance of all the failures that the world has ever known.

"Well, Aladdin!"

"Well, old pal!"

"Bill and I were just wondering how you'd come out!"

"My dear old Joe! Bill and you can hear me telling you that I come out on the point of the boot. I bought all the Blue Ducks the bears didn't have, and Bamfield supplied, and I've got all the shares."

"Then you own the mine."

"It isn't a mine—it's a peanut."



"No good?"

"Not worth argument. I've had bad luck with all the minerals now—except arsenic and spa water."

"No gold in the Blue Duck, then?"

"I don't think so—but there's lots of water, and if a bad drought comes I might make fifty thousand pounds selling it at tuppence a glass."

"What will you do now?"

"I'll go and sit on that mine and think a bit. If I go on as I'm doing, I'll be prosecuted for optimism in excelsis."

"What's that?"

"Fraudulent insolvency."

"Owe much?"

"Ten thousand, and got dashed little to pay it with!"

"Wish I could help. You know where I am; whenever the clock strikes three I thank God there's another day gone."

"I see! Every day ends with banking hours."

"Practically."

"Where are you, Bill?"

"My dear old chap," said—as usual—Bill, the big-chested optimist, "after next month I'll have all the money you want, and you're welcome to it."

"Live! Horse! The grass is growing for the Spring," said Aladdin Biddulfson, cheerfully. "Man never is but always to be blest. But thank you for the good heart."

"You'll pull through, Aladdin. Why, what do they call you Aladdin for?"

"Some nonsense. My father called me, 'Hey! You!'"

"You're called Aladdin because everything you rub gives money."

"If I rubbed my lamp now my hand would catch fire with the friction, that's all."

"I've heard it said that if you fell into a sewer you'd come out with a diamond ring."

"One time, yes. One time everything I touched turned to gold—it was mug's luck."

"Nonsense! There was plenty of ability in it—genius, I say. Why, if you rubbed a synagogue now six pawnbrokers would be killed in the rush to lend you money without interest. Stay along here in town and wait for things to come right."

Aladdin Biddulfson shook his head. "Too much like standing in a volcano on the off-chance of catching a diamond," he said.

"So you'll clear out, then, Aladdin?"

"Yes. Pretty soon; if I don't hustle I might get so slack that I'd become a candidate for gaol."

"I don't blame the business man who gets there," said Bill, the ever-kindly. "You never know how hard he was jammed."

"I don't wait to be jammed. Ever heard of the foolish policeman?"

"Which one?"

"He was foolish enough to go to the Stock Exchange unprotected, and Cold-feet Jones and Willie the Wowsler stole his uniform."

The friends laughed, and Aladdin was quite cheerful again by reason of his certainty of the friendship of these two at least. And then he thought of Bamfield, and said of that loud and insincere self-advertiser—as Martin Luther said of Tetzl: "God willing, I will make a hole in his drum."

This being in his mind, it seemed to him right that Bamfield should not be left in the dark as to his intentions. He sought Bamfield straightaway, and found him—a large, white-faced, fat man, with a square hat on a square head, a big white moustache, three chins, and the eyes of a sneak-tearful, sorry, apologetic, desolate—ready to do anything but disgorge—at least not now.

"Let it be for three or four months," he said. "And I'll see what I can do."



"You'll see what you can do!" replied Aladdin contemptuously. "I'll try to forget I was ever fool enough to ask a worm like you to do the manly thing; but I'll never forgive myself for being taken in by such a pitiful crawler. I deserve all I've got and more. If I've got a kick coming about anything, it's because I'm not punished enough. It's up to me to go out and hire a circus elephant to spank me with his trunk for eight hours a day. You made promises that reminded me of Heaven—they were so indefinite—and yet I trusted you. A pool on honor with you! Good Lord! I could almost lift myself by my own ears. Don't be afraid! I won't hit you—all the scorn and ill-treatment I have I'll keep for myself . . . but" . . . his face was very grim as he arose and stood over Bamfield. "When I think I've beaten my joss enough, I'll come back to you, Bamfield, and I'll get your last copper. . . . I don't blame Cold-feet Jones at all; and I don't even blame Willie the Wowser so much, although he nosed you out and prompted you to play traitor; but the treachery act itself was yours, and you shook hands with me every day you were playing it. But I didn't get my nickname Aladdin for nothing, and I'm the sort of man who comes back."

He was gone, and Bamfield, feeling that his tongue was only as moist as a pipe-chip, went out very shakily to drink a little—a very little—old brandy, if you please, and some corked soda.

## CHAPTER II.

### DOWN AND OUT.

Make not thy love to the mother if thine heart be drawn  
to the daughter!  
Be not the foolish packhorse carrying wine and drinking  
water!

—The Maxims of Billy Pagan.

AFTER dinner that night Aladdin Biddulfson went out to see his girl—Vanilla, the daughter of Cold-feet Jones. Aladdin had objected to the name, but Cold-feet Jones said it meant beauty and fragrance—tho' the real reason for his admiration was that he had once heavily backed a mare of the name in a race for which all the other horses were pulled, and the mare with the ice cream flavouring title having survived the heart disease threatened by the discovery that she had really passed the post first. Cold-feet Jones landed a big stake, which put him on his chilly extremities again. After that his feet were always cold at the first hint of loss, he had never forgotten his first fright, and he fled to cover whenever Stock Exchange weather threatened rain. So from his cold feet came money, and much money; but he never forgot his second start in life. He had a house named Vanilla, and a motor boat named Vanilla, and a daughter named Vanilla; and it seemed almost blasphemy that Aladdin Biddulfson, his son-in-law elect, should laugh at the name, and call his girl Cocoa and Piccalilli, and the names of other condiments.

All these annoyances had been cumulative — but Aladdin's financial failure was the capping of it. Cold-feet told his daughter so that evening just before Aladdin's arrival.



"I saw Brisbane Biddulfson to-day, Van," he said.

"You saw who?"

"Brisbane Biddulfson."

"You mean Aladdin?"

"Yes—his real name's Brisbane."

"But Dad! what's happened?"

"My dear Vanny—don't cry."

"I'm not going to cry, Dad."

She said it almost contemptuously, and she was just the sort of girl to condemn the tears of anybody, her iron self included. She was tall and big fair-haired, placid-faced, lips rather thin, skin rather pale, but of excellent smoothness of texture—a large, healthy, selfish, peach blonde, big-mouthed and ox-eyed, so unemotional and equipoised that her friends said she had no nerve. They should have said that she had very little heart—except for her own woes, and then, if she pricked herself with a pin, that same heart bled for her skin.

"That's good," said Cold-feet Jones. "Don't cry"

"I won't. Go on—Aladdin is——?"

"Well—Aladdin then—Aladdin insults me—you—all of us."

"No—no—he's just a dear, nice boy—full of spirits."

"I tell you he insults me—he nicknamed me Cold-foot Jones and everybody calls me that now."

"But you did squeal, Daddy, when he caught you short in Looters Hills."

"Well, now we've got him long, and he's broke to the wide world."

"Is that why I'm not to cry?"

"No, wait a minute, Vanny. He's too fresh—that what—and he's laughed at most of the members of the room and they're glad to see him go."

"They're not white men, they're Red Indians, Dad, and he's lashed them to pieces with his wit, I know."

"Wit! Wit! Is it wit to call your father Cold-foot Jones? To call Mr. Bowser Willie the Wowser?"

"Yes—it's so true and so short."

"Vanny—true? Cold-feet Jones—it's insulting. And nobody will help him."

"He can help himself."

"He hasn't got a cent. When a man blows out like that it's a 100 to 1 he never expands again. That's why"—he shivered as he said it—"that's why I get frightened at beginning to lose—for your sake, Vanny."

"Dear old Dad," she said, as carelessly as if she were asking the time, and passing her hand over his bald head as if he were a dog—"But Aladdin will get up again."

"He insulted you, Vanny."

"Never—Dad—never."

"He called you Sago, and some other d——, I mean some other name——"

"Piccalilli! but that was his fun. He's very clever, Dad. He made up a song about it like this—just right off without writing it—

"Piccalilli—

For you I'm dilly,

I love you better far than Maude, or May, or Kate, or Tilly,  
From Crosse and Blackwell's in Soho, and down to

Piccadilly— Piccalilli,

My Pickle Queen."

She had danced about the room, heavily, slowly, as she did everything, but at the third line she tired of the exercise, and for the last two lines she beat the time upon the protesting head of Cold-feet Jones.

"Don't beat my head, Vanny—don't, I tell you. I'll be annoyed directly. It's disrespectful."

Vanilla put her cool lips down upon her father's head and kissed him lightly, slowly—never seriously or in a hurry.

"There now, you're a good girl. Now, you won't cry?"

"I couldn't. I'm not like Mother was."



"She certainly could cry when she'd made up her mind to it. Vanny! You are all I have in the world. Are you very fond of Biddulfson?"

"We-e-ll! I like Aladdin, you know. I couldn't say I don't."

"But only as everybody likes him"—he corrected himself hastily—"as everybody used to like him."

"Before he lost his money, you mean?"

"No-no-no-no!" He was so vehement that he made plain the fact that he had meant that. "But as you—you know—get to like—a superficial, plausible man at the beginning."

"I see. Well, yes, I like him."

"You wouldn't break your heart if you were to lose him?"

"No, no! I wouldn't do that. Of course, he's good-looking and clever and amusing, and all that, and I liked to show him off, but if he couldn't keep up a position——"

"The only position he can keep up is against a post in Broke-street, Vanny."

"Don't be unfair, Dad! He wouldn't do that. Aladdin would hunt around and chase little, greedy people who want to make more money until he made them drop all they had already. Aladdin may be a pirate, but he'd never be a loafer. He'd rather walk the plank. So don't say it, Dad."

"Well, I won't——"

"But, of course, if I had to live in a poor way, and have people look down at me—well, I simply couldn't."

"My dear"—he rose hastily and grasped her hands as the door-bell rang—"that's what I want you to say to him, Vanny. I haven't worked to see you marry into poverty. Tell him so. He's in the hall now."

He left the room for his own, almost at a run, after pressing on her cheek a very saturated kiss, which Vanilla immediately rubbed off.

Aladdin, shown to the drawing-room by a maid who had a sympathetic understanding of the wants and habits of engaged couples, and who giggled and fell over herself in her hurry to be gone, closed the door, advanced to the daughter of Cold-feet Jones, and, standing three paces from her, rehearsing their little comedy as usual.

"Piccalilli!" said he. "Come and be pickled." But Vanilla ignored the cue and stayed where she was, so that he had to advance—finding gravity from her silence.

"What's up, Van?" asked Aladdin, and kissed her. She drew away immediately.

"You had that kiss in cold storage, Van."

"I want to talk seriously, Aladdin."

Aladdin made a wry face. "For Heaven's sake, you're not going to call up the overdraft, too?"

"I want to know your plans?"

"I suggest a quick marriage. That's all. Marry to-morrow, and then start out next day to win the socks of these village lads who've got me in a cleft stick. That's the plan."

The words did not flush her in the least. She remained as cool as if they were talking about the scenery—looked at him calmly, with a half-smile. Aladdin looked, too, and saw not the one woman his own thoughts had made her, for this wild young man of the Bourses had idealised her from the woman she was not; inventing a beautiful white lady as Dante invented Beatrice, spinning her from the moonlight of his dreams. Her demeanor, instinct told him, was wrong and unnatural, seeing that he was in trouble; he beheld simply a woman as luscious as a peach, and as unruffled as a well-fed cow. So he read her reply without saying a word.

"I see!" said Aladdin. "You, too! I thought you loved me, Van. I thought that whether I skinned the bears or broke myself, you at least were safe. Are you playing their game, Van?"



The pain in his voice—the friendliness of it—surprised her into feeling a little sorry for him, though still with overwhelming pity for herself.

“Wait a minute, Aladdin,” she said; “I want to think.” She turned to the French window opening to a loggia looking down from the waterfront heights of Mosman, over tree-tops, to the bay and across the harbour, to the marvellous panorama of Sydney and its million lights. She knew that beyond those lights, that spoke of only gaiety and opulence, were many pitiful things—privations, illness, and, worst of all, love weakened by poverty at last eating itself as hunger gnaws bread. And in a moment she shrank from it, for there was no love of Aladdin to strut and strike heroic attitudes and make her ready to defy poverty and all the world—a foolish formula, like other formulæ of the true lover—seeing that the world is attending strictly to its own business and chasing a crust, and has not even time to listen to itself being defied. Behind the lights, Poverty and Aladdin, who had lost the wonderful lamp that makes money by rubbing; and here above the beauty of Mosman Bay, the old life of close-clipped lawns and soft carpets, and a billiard-room in silky oak, the car, and the motor launch, and all the warm luxury of the petted cat which belonged to the spinster daughter of Cold-feet Jones.

“Well,” said Aladdin, almost coldly. “You’ve had the minute—three of them. . . . What is it? You mean to turn me down, Van?”

“No—no! But wait—wait till your position is assured again.”

“And if I waited, and the years went, and the position assured itself that it would steadily grow worse? What then, Van? Marry me! I’ll take the risk. I’ll never want you more than I want you now.”

“Oh, I couldn’t. You’ll have to start all over again.”

"I'll make a quicker recovery if I have something to fight for."

"You'll still have me to fight for. Wait!"

"I'll have a shadow to fight for—and I ask for substance."

"Oh, don't be so crude—do wait."

"Wait! No more time bargains for me. I'm not gambling in futures when it comes to a wife—though a wife's a time bargain, anyhow, and you never know when Fate calls for more cover. Marry me now!"

"Oh, I can't, really! I wouldn't—there—but just wait, there's a dear boy."

"Me to be tied, and you to be free? Not for me! It's playing with a double-headed penny, that is. Heads you win and tails I lose. Come on, Van. You love me or you don't! Which is it to be? Marry me to-morrow or quit! Which?"

"You have no right to talk so to me—it's brutal—demanding a girl to make up her mind right off."

"It's the way I'd talk to you if we were married whenever it came to a question of principle. I'd make my wife definitely make up her mind—and I ask you to do it."

She looked at him in his agitation, and was even calmer and cooler as she spoke than before.

"You want me to answer definitely—I say No! You are unreasonable—if you would only wait."

"You say No!"

"I say No!"

"Then I take it."

"You what? How can you?"

"I can. Everybody I had business with threw me down and I didn't squeal. I wanted to see if you would stick to me, and you failed. So I start life again naked, and I'm—I'm very glad of it."

"You'll see to-morrow that I'm reasonable, Atad-din."

"There'll be no to-morrow, Van. This is the



Finish." He turned to the door, but the girl took the engagement ring off her finger and placed it on the table.

"Your ring, then."

"I don't want it," replied Aladdin, turning at the door. "But, I say, you might give it to Willie the Wowser for the New Guinea Mission. . . . Good-bye, Van. I'll let myself out."

He was gone, but she knew she could see him as he passed down the many flights of stairs in the rock to the water front, and she went out to the loggia.

"Aladdin!"

"Hallo! Piccalilli! Were you joking?"

"I couldn't, really—it's asking too much."

"Settled, then. Good-bye, Van."

"Good-bye, Aladdin. Take the ring."

"Give it to the poor."

"If you don't take it I'll give it to the sea."

"Do!"

"There, then, you made me."

It flew above him in a little circle of lucent gold, fell into the green water, and was gone in a ripple.

"You made me, Aladdin."

"You made yourself. That's the end."

"Good-night, Aladdin."

"Good-bye, Piccalilli."

"It doesn't hurt," said Aladdin. "It doesn't hurt at all. It was only the ingratitude coming on the top of everybody else jumping on me. I felt alone in the world before, and I'm just alone now—It doesn't hurt. . . . Yes! it does hurt. I did love her. I can't bear to pull her out of my heart by the roots—not yet, but I will. . . . Anyhow, good luck to her to find before marriage instead of after that she couldn't last the distance. Good luck to her?"

As the boat tied up at the Quay he threw the end of his cigar into Sydney Cove.

"My grief," he said again. "Supposing she'd waited till after marriage to find that out — that would have been hell. Well! I thought she was 18-carat, and she isn't—and she hurts, does Piccalilli, the Fickle Queen."

At ten o'clock he went to bed and slept like the dead for eight hours. When he awoke he began to whistle; then he remembered and stopped to say, "It doesn't hurt! It doesn't hurt! . . . Yes, it does hurt, it does!"

Aladdin Biddulfsen sold all that he had and paid his creditors as far as the all would go, and then he went north, into Queensland, where the Blue Duck mine lived, and sat down on his property to see if he might make something of it. The plant was old and inefficient; the working capital was down to £800. Aladdin cogitated, drifted, couldn't make up his mind.

One week later the Blue Duck made up its owner's mind for him. One pump broke down—the other broke away, and went to the bottom of the shaft. The water rose to the sills and the Blue Duck was drowned.

Eight hundred pounds is not even a gin and vermouth to the appetite of a non-productive mine under water. Aladdin applied for exemption from labour, and secured protection of the mine leases; he telegraphed the mine secretary to hold the funds intact until further capital could be subscribed. Then he left the mine which had made much money for Coldfeet Jones, Willie the Wowser, and others and drove to the railway. On the station platform he faced south—Sydney lay that way; and turned north—towards Townsville. North he went, with less than a hundred pounds for capital to begin life again—but a real capital of youth and strength and cheerfulness which money cannot buy, and which is never appraised at its real value, because it is never seen in a balance-sheet. Sometimes it is entered as good-will,



but that is only after the death of youth and strength.

“If I hadn’t tried to catch the bears I’d have kept Van, and now she’s gone. If——” said Aladdin to himself, and then he broke in upon his own first thoughts with contradictions of them. “If my aunt had whiskers she would have been my uncle. What’s the good of regret? Whatever a man does he’ll be sorry for it.”

He looked once at the comely waitress who served him at the railway refreshment rooms, and though he thought no more of her, it comforted him to know that there were other—maybe kinder—women in the world.

“What sweets will you have?” she asked, looking down at him gravely. “We have vanilla custard.”

“No—no!” replied Aladdin. “No vanilla.”

She looked at him, and said to herself, with all the swiftness of natural selection, as her dark eyes sought his face for a moment, “What a nice boy!” but aloud, only, “Vanilla is all we have.”

“No vanilla,” said he, rising, and immediately forgot her existence.

Then Aladdin, believing that for ever he had lost his lamp, went north to Cleveland Bay.

### CHAPTER III.

#### “ENTER WILLY FRONT.”

Worse pigs than thou in the litter  
Get the best pears—what of that?  
If thy father hath given thee a head,  
Thy head will soon get thee a hat.

—The Maxims of Billy Pagan.

PAST Lion Island and through the beauty of Whitsunday Passage, that hottest of ships, the “Bareoo,” bore Aladdin, and in the early hours of Monday morning dropped anchor in Cleveland Bay. Aladdin, having to change a sovereign to pay cab hire to the Queen’s—the bougainvillea-covered hotel on the Strand at Townsville—discovered incidentally that his capital had depreciated to £73—less than often the profit of a day in the old life.

During the morning he renewed acquaintance with the big men he had known on outback fields—Sam Arden, actively engaged in killing himself by working all day and taking office work home at night; Bill South, once a gigantic man of the Mounted Police, and now a publican, and not a sinner, but worse, because he was fattening himself for Christmas; also the editor of the morning paper, who told him of the deaths of friends to cheer him up, and of many new fields, always 700 to 1000 miles away, and either rotten with copper or peppered with gold. At lunch time he met a goat in Flinders Street, the goat of the Federal Hotel, whose eye was as the eye of a vicious old man, by reason of his daily drinkings and fuddlement by beer.

There seemed to be nothing nearer than 1000 miles good enough for a broken speculator, but Aladdin



knew that his father had given him a head, and that therefore his head would soon get him a hat.

"If I don't have a place in the world to-night," he told himself, "it will prove that I'm not poor enough to find one, and then I'll throw my clothes away and start off scratch." And he ate the excellent lunch of the old Queen's with full appreciation—having an excellent digestion and no cares.

He smoked on the corner of a big verandah looking out to Magnetic Island, and in the luxurious half dream that attends a good cigar and a tranquil mind, he heard voices near him—a man's voice clamant, and a woman's voice angry.

"Please don't speak to me. You are a stranger."

"I see you twice at the telegraph office. I'm Charles Dubbin; everybody knows me."

"If you please, I don't wish to. I am resting here for a moment—please—please—don't bother me!"

"I could see you were broke. I got money. D'ye know, plenty o' girls 'ud like to meet me. I'm a self-made man. D'ye know, I started life with one drum of oil, and now I'm a partner in the biggest oil and varnish house in Brisbane. I'm goin' to be in the Council, too, an' then I'll be mare!"

"If you will not leave me I must go away."

Aladdin could hear her chair moving as she rose. The cad had driven her from the cool verandah into the breathlessness of the sun haze, and Aladdin rose too, though as yet he did not see them.

"I'm going south," continued the varnish traveller, insinuatingly, and Aladdin came behind and tapped him on the shoulder.

"You're going south, or north, or anywhere, but you won't stay here and worry this lady."

"What you mean interferin'?" asked Dubbin, sulkily. He was a fellow with grey hair and an oakum moustache; slant-eyed, evil and treachery in every glance of him.

"I wanted to, that's all."



“Miss Pardon can look after herself.”

“Miss Pardon has me to look after her. Isn't that so?” He looked at her fully, to see if she accepted his glib use of her name, and saw, for the first time, a slight, quiet girl in black, of that distinction that catches the eye in a moment; a girl with a small, well-set, graceful head, dark and serious eyes, and skin of the pallor of ivory. Her beauty took his mind prisoner—he turned on Dubbin an eye full of menace, and the meaner creature slunk before the stare—muttered something about catching the boat for the south, and so left to save a little of his face.

All the old impulsive Aladdin was dominant again as she thanked him, and said that she would go now.

“Give that cad time to get away—unless I may come with you.”

She shook her head. “No! thank you—but—I was only putting in time before going back to the telegraph office.”

“Don't go—just a minute. That fellow said—pardon me—he said you were broke. Now, just think of me not as a man, but as a pal. Are you?”

“I'm waiting for money to be wired from home.”

“Is it far away?”

“In the North.”

“But suppose it doesn't arrive?”

She made a gesture of despair.

“You have no friends here?—I thought not. Now, let me be your banker.”

“I couldn't.”

“If the money comes so much the better. If it doesn't you will be safe. Now, don't fear. I won't follow you or pretend to know you again if you'd rather not. Let it be a tenner.”

“I only want six.”

“There, then!”

“Oh! I'm robbing you—but I'm so afraid.”

“I stole it from somebody else.”

She smiled wanly. “But you can spare it?”



"I'm the richest man in the world. I have enough."

"But who shall I send it to?"

"Mr. Anyhow or Sometime."

"At least give me a name to think of with gratitude."

"Call me Aladdin—Aladdin who lost his lamp."

"You know my name—it is unjust that you should not tell me who I have to repay."

"Aladdin, who has found the lamp again by meeting you."

"I'll find your name at the hotel office, Mr. Aladdin, and thank you. Good-bye."

He felt that the good-bye was an instruction not to accompany her, and he watched her go down the stairs, and a few minutes later pass under the verandah and go towards the town.

"Now, that's a girl," said Aladdin. "Dead broke and in trouble, and yet relies on herself to get herself respected. Now! Piccalilli! Oh! Piccalilli's down south, and I'm as forgotten as the dead. This one's right, I'll bet; the old confidence trick runs in all shapes, but she put that bounder in his class, and—this one's alright. But put her out of your mind, Aladdin, the Busted Superstition. Girls are not for you—only work, and the speedy taking down of the unwary fellow-creature."

Then with the best cigar stocked by the house he lounged in a big Bombay chair on the upper floor, shaded by the crimson of the bougainvillea. A steely haze spread from Magnetic Island over the sleeping bay to the Bombay chair—the hot afternoon invited quietness; Aladdin, with the cigar still smoking lazily in his down-hung hand, dozed profoundly. And then the chair became the judgment seat, the viewpoint for the generalissimo watching his troops parade—and Aladdin reviewed his army of creditors.

He could hear the orders of the officers: Creditors to assemble alphabetically; A to G on the left flank, H to M in the centre; N to Z right flank. They

were a fine lot, though not graded as to men by reason of alphabetical restriction; fat creditors, thin creditors, long, anxious creditors, short, tubby creditors, who appeared as if they cared not for the debtor, and regarded the parade as a joke. He knew them all—the veterans, regiments whose debts were a year old, the Heavy Brigade, the Cadet Corps (whose accounts dated back but three months), and lastly the scanty regiment of volunteers—the few good men who had made him take loans when they knew he was doomed.

Then at the word the army saluted Aladdin—for he made them, and not them themselves. He awoke with the tramp of their march past still in his ears—the cry of the thousands—“Ave! Aladdin! we who are about not to be paid salute thee!” In the first struggle of returning consciousness he saw them march out on the steely sea that was as flat as a board, and melt into the haze of Magnetic Island.

“Ave! Aladdin!” said Aladdin, and laughed at his phantom army. “The sooner I hustle the sooner they’ll stop saluting me.”

While he slept Vera Pardon, believing that now her anxieties were over, walked towards Flinders-street, and at the hotel corner met a man, from whom she instinctively tried to retreat, though he was her best friend, and though his presence meant that the money she waited for would never be telegraphed. He was a big and very powerful iron-grey man, cleanshaven as to upper lip, his strong iron-grey beard projected as stiffly as the bristles of a paint brush. His eyebrows were bushy and iron-grey, and mantled deep-set eyes; his nose jutted aggressively; he was a strongly-marked, strongly-featured man, fleshy, but not too fat; long weathering had marked his great neck into the lines and folds of alligator skin. And then she knew that he had seen her, and she ran to him crying, “Uncle!”

Tom Gronthead, of Eclipse Corner, known to all



people west of Bauhinia as the Boss Cockie, put his arms round the dainty fragility of his niece's form and laughed as a man relieved.

"Why, it's little Vere," he said. "I was just going to ask for you at the Queen's. Come around—yes, I tell you—come around there with me, and I'll get a glass o' beer and we can talk."

She did not wish to go—she desired to avoid that hotel as if it held a pestilence, and not a friend, but she did not dare persist in an obstinacy she could not explain, and retraced her steps—looking up to the big man who walked beside her, and feeling comforted in his presence. He had taken her hand in his own, and led her so, as if she were still a little child. The Boss Cockie could see her as nothing else.

"Little Vere," he said again, as he brought her to a chair in the hotel loggia, and she glanced fearfully up the stairs, wondering if Aladdin would walk down there, and at the loggia opening to the street, fearing the reappearance of some other person who might make explanations necessary.

"I went to every decent hotel, and they didn't know y'," said the Boss Cockie, after he had ordered his beer. "Where have y' been livin'?"

"At the—at the Coffee Palace, Uncle."

"What! I know them places—a palace like a pigstye, an' the corfy all grounds. We got your wire for money, an' Mother says, 'Don't send it.' She says, 'Y' can be in Townsville in three days. father,' she says. 'Go an' see what's up with the girl, and bring her home.' So down I come in the 'Lass o' Gowrie,' and got here two hours ago, an' back we go in the 'Lass o' Gowrie' this afternoon."

The suddenness of projected departure frightened her; she did not like to abandon her sisters in distress so quickly, nor to leave without thanking that careless benefactor, and repaying him, so she said in amaze:

"Must we go—back—to—to-day?"

“Why not? Mother’s waitin’ for y’ to come home. It’s the first time y’ went away, an’ she says it’ll be the last. She says to me, ‘Go an’ bring that poor girl back,’ she says, ‘an’ if I catch me own darlin’ daughter Judy ever leavin’ ‘ome like that,’ she says, ‘I’ll chop her legs off. I’ll skin her.’ That’s what y’r Ant says.”

“But couldn’t we take the next boat?”

“What’s come to y’, Vere? Whatcher want to stay for? I wouldn’t stay away from Eclipse Corner a day more than I could help. Why, there on the steamer yestiddy there was a liar, with a hat like a Madam Melba billycan, tried to tell me his uncle give him two thousand pounds to give to me if I would show him two thousan’ pounds I’d got by honest work. An’ I told him I got twenty thousan’ pound by swindlin’ chaps with yarns like that, an’ he gives me a windsifter cigar. I nearly broke me neck tryin’ to draw that cigar, an’ it’s stripped right down to its underpants. So we’re goin’ back now.”

“If we must, then——”

“Must! Anybody ’ud think y’ had a fine time bein’ governess an’ teachin’ school, but if y’ liked it y’ wouldn’t have wired——”

“I know. I——”

“Were y’ governessin’ all the time? When did y’ leave off teachin’?”

“Some—some days ago.” She changed the subject quickly. “How are they all at home?”

“Y’r Ant’s well. Only when your wire came she went off pop. What made y’ wire? Didn’t they pay y’?”

“Yes—yes. I was extravagant. Is Judy well?”

“Jude’s all right now. She got barbwire poisonin’ in the arm, riding after cattle in the dark. She’s playin’ well on the mouth-organ, too, and singin’. She eats a pound o’ blade-bone steak for breakfast, an’ she can sing the hide off Madam Fatti, or whatever her name is. A pound o’ blade-bone steak



for breakfast. We got a noo cook—he's a cock angel, though he is a pong."

"And Wire Fence?"

"Still after Judy an' frightened to talk an' tryin' t' pop the question in the deaf an' dumb language."

"And Jim?"

"Inventin'—inventin' mad. Billy Nor West got on to a good patch of tin an' it gave him eight hundred pound. He had a trip down to Sydney an' he come back a terrible liar. He says there's a big hotel where Paddy's Markets used to be. I don't b'leeve he's been in Sydney at all. Tom Tuft was there the same time an' he never seen him."

"And how's Mr. Tuft, Uucle?"

"No good since he married that pub at Bauhinia with six hundred an' forty aeres an' a widder. Spare me days! All he does now is writin' all over the place tips for the Melbourne Cup two days after the Oaks. He's left his ole woman now—she was always speakin' out of her turn. And that's all the noos."

He rose and put a great friendly hand on each of her shoulders, and said, with a little emotion:—

"An' we'll be glad to have y' back, Vere. It ain't good for a young girl goin' round on her own. Let them suffragettys talk of bein' independent an' show their liberty by stickin' hatpins into pleesmen's iegs, but the decent woman's place is in the home—not talkin' politics or dancin' on the stage 'arf-dressed—or teachin' other people's kids, either."

Vera interposed hastily and fearfully, "Then we are to leave by this boat?"

"My word—no more waitin'. Once bit, twice up the pole."

"Then I'm ready," she replied swiftly, coming to a decision. "That's as soon as I have written two notes."

"Right you are, Vere, an' I'll send a telegraft to y'r Ant."

He drank his beer and sent for the waiter, and

telegraphed to Eclipse Corner that Vera and himself were homeward bound, and that neither Bagum nor Walrus Whiskers, another gentleman of Eclipse Corner, were to be given credit, and that Mr. Gronthead and his niece sent their love. The waiter wrote the telegram at this length, and at last reduced it to seventeen words, representing a cost of tenpence. This Mr. Gronthead reduced to ninepence by striking out the "love," and then, quite illogically, he gave the waiter a shilling extra for his trouble. By that time Vera Pardon had written a letter to a lady with an enclosure, and a letter to Aladdin, which referred to that enclosure, but had none of its own.

That done, she handed the notes to the waiter, who carefully placed them in the letter rack and forgot their existence immediately.

"Come on, Vere," said the Boss Cockie, lumbering to the door of the loggia with much exerueiating squeaking of new boots. "Down to the ship and up North and home. There's no place as good as home—speshly when it's better than any place outside."

Vera, following him, looked up the stairs, half hoping to see Aladdin descending them. And when the little "Lass o' Gowrie" dropped down Ross River and pointed her nose for Magnetic Island, the girl who had been rescued from terror looked up at the big frame of the Boss Cockie beside her, and moved nearer him in gratitude.

"And God bless Aladdin," she said to her own self. "God bless Aladdin, and may he find his lamp again."



## CHAPTER IV.

### AIM AT PIGEONS AND SHOOT CROWS!

Lend not except to the rich,  
Not then—till his riches be proven,  
And give a piece of your cake  
To a man who has pies in the oven.

—The Maxims of Billy Pagan.

ALADDIN went downstairs, wondering if adventure were far away; and, adventure being for the adventurous, he found it at the hotel door. "It" was a thin little man—in trouble, but still with much impudence in his face, so that he reminded you irresistibly of a London sparrow. In prosperity he would have been perky; now he was merely peeky—he looked half fed. He partially wore a hard little felt hat with the tip of a rosella's wing in the band; the hat was not really worn, because it covered but two-thirds of the top of his head. Although the heat was that of the Red Sea, he wore a tightly-buttoned double-breasted black overcoat—with the waist and tails of a morning coat, the collar and cuffs of a black heavy, woven crinkled wool, intended to imitate astrakhan.

His attitude to the hotel manager was one of pleading; but that person—a hireling with a cold eye and the well-known air of hotel managers, which is the air of a disgraced duke, added to the mien of a butler—was refusing so absolutely that his refusal was contemptuous. The little man in the astrakhan coat, which made him apparently as un-

comfortable as a polar bear at the equator, pleaded again, and the manager turning on him furiously, the little man's hat fell off as he swerved in anticipation of a blow.

"No! No! No! No!" said the manager, and turned into the hotel.

The sparrow-man picked up his hat, tenderly brushed it on the imitation astrakhan cuff, and went away slowly, sorrowfully, his gait expressing disappointment and weakness, and the crimson flames of the bougainvillea hid him. Aladdin followed him swiftly and walked behind the sparrow-man to the next street, watching him expressing all the gamut of despair—hands clasped behind him for a moment, head lifted for a moment, as if to ask the impotent skies for help, eyes bent to the ground again in full acknowledgment of defeat.

They were passing the Federal Hotel when Aladdin decided to speak. With a hand-slap on the shoulder he stopped the little man at the hotel entrance, where the depraved goat, having drunk much beer, now regarded the street with dull, unfriendly eyes.

"Hallo!" said Aladdin. "In trouble?"

The sparrow-man forgot his despair and recovered his importance, so that he looked almost prosperous.

"No, sir!" said the sparrow-man. "I was thinking—rather deeply, it is true—on a matter of very important business."

Aladdin, looking at his wrists, saw not any shirt cuffs, and understood the unseasonable covering up with the imitation astrakhan. And he saw also that the little man was hungry.

"I'm just going in for a drink," said Aladdin. "Will you join me?"

"It's very good of you. I wonder if I have time?" replied the sparrow-man.

"Surely! It's only half-past two or so. Come on, I hate drinking alone."

"I'll risk it," said the sparrow-man, as if a for-



tune were awaiting him around the corner to be withdrawn in case of delay.

They entered. Aladdin suggested stout seeing that he was hungry, and that stout is meat and drink, and under its influence the sparrow-man recovered a little. His face flushed with hope again; he grew quietly patronising; he recovered his importance and self-respect—which are the same thing, practically—and produced his “card”—a large and chaste printing in black, green, and gold.

“My card, sir!” he said.

“It’s big enough to have New Year greetings on it,” said Aladdin, and then, seeing that the little man started, as an insult to his dignity, Aladdin concluded hastily: “A very nice card, Everard Montgomery, Advance Manager, The Great Australian Dramatic Company.” My name is Alad—I mean Bid-dulfson.”

“Yes. I am advance manager. We have been playing very successful seasons at Barcaldine, Longreach, Houston, Hughenden, Prairie, Charters Towers, and Ravenswood. Our leading lady is Miss Mildred Floyd, from all the principal theatres; Miss Athene Pallas is the heavy woman. We carry two soubrettes, who also do song and dance team work as the Fluffy Sisters. On the other hand we have Saxby Leicester, our leading man, who has played dramatic roles at Drury Lane, Covent Garden, the Opera Comique, La Scala at Milan, and San Carlo at Naples. We have also Mr. Irving Kemble, the greatest tragedian in the world, and Trewhella Jordan, who does character work, and Mr. Carbide, the general manager, plays all the low-comedy roles. We have had startling successes everywhere—record booking, in fact. The after-cash often twenty pounds a night—twenty pounds a night—and——”

“I say,” said Aladdin, pityingly, for the lies were in themselves piteous, “let’s get a bottle of stout and go to the oyster saloon next door. I’m hungry.”

"Well, if you're hungry, Mr. Biddulfsen——"

"I am," said the cheerful and kindly liar. "I could eat the shells."

"I am at your service, Mr. Biddulfsen," replied Montgomery, trying to give the words aristocratic repose, but he followed Aladdin almost eagerly after the stout had been purchased. He ate two dozen oysters and all the accompanying bread and butter, and emptied the cruet of vinegar. After that he began to lie again.

"A cigar now," interrupted Aladdin, and when the cigar was in full smoke he stopped the flow of boastful eloquence, and said: "Now let's have the truth."

"The truth, sir! I was telling you of our season here, opening the day after to-morrow."

"And not a bill out. It's no use. I know you're stranded. I admire your grit, but it's a slight to my intelligence. Come on—let's have it all."

The sparrow-man trembled, put his cigar upon an oyster shell, and put one hand to his eyes.

"Come on," urged Aladdin again, "or I'll think your name is something else."

"Mr. Biddulfsen," said the sparrow-man, "you have been very good to me. Perhaps people would be kinder to me if I gave them a chance—if I told them the truth. But—you see, I like doing everything in a big way, and if you can't blow and brag you might as well get out of the show business. But you know—and what's the use? Carbide, the manager, brought us out three months ago, and has never paid salaries—sometimes not even board. He told us he had four hundred pounds—he only had seven pounds ten over the fares to the first town. Yes," he added, with some pride, "we've kept going three months—that is to say, I've kept them going. I've planned and faked and got printing on tick and never paid for it, and owed for halls, and we've gone steadily to the bad. Carbide hasn't treated us fairly."

"And where's the company now?"



"At the railway station, waiting for me to tell them where to go. We played at Ravenswood to the chairs, and there was just the fare to 'Townsville.'"

"And the record bookings and the successful seasons?"

Montgomery blushed. "Oh, Mr. Biddulphson!"

"And what were you doing at the Queen's?"

"I was trying to get the ladies under shelter, but he wants money in advance. Somebody has put him wise."

"But you went to the best hotel."

"It's easier to owe for champagne than ale."

"Eh! I like you for that thought, Mr. Mont—no, I'll call you Willie Front."

"Please, Mr. Biddulphson!"

"Willie Front it is! You've the cheek of a dozen."

"I had to be cheeky for the ladies' sake."

"I know—if you've no confidence you'll get no Christmas-box. And they're waiting up there now?"

"Yes."

"Come on, then. They can't be left there. Has this Carbide no money?"

"I think he's kept a bit for safety."

"And four women and four men to carry about."

"There's more—I forgot Miss Pardon."

"Miss Pardon! Go on!"

"Yes, the angernoo. You see, we started out twelve strong from Brisbane, but the men who could bully Carbide out of salary got it and went back. At Rockhampton we met Miss Pardon—she's a girl from the bush, in the North—she got stage-struck, and gave Carbide twenty pounds to give her an engagement."

"I see! Any more?"

"There's the creditor."

"The what?"

"The travelling creditor. We owed him money at Longreach, and as he couldn't get it there, he arranged to come along with the show till he could be paid."

"A permanent creditor travelling with a show," laughed Aladdin. "That's fine! And hasn't he been paid?"

"How can he be paid?"

"But why doesn't he get tired and give it up?"

"To tell you the truth he likes it now. The show pays his board sometimes—and he plays small parts, and he's as happy as Larry."

"But you said you'd play here. Where are the bills?"

"The shipping people won't let us have them till we pay freight. We got them on tick from Sydney, and now they're no use to us."

"If you got them could you do anything here?"

"Certain!" replied the sparrow-man enthusiastically. "We've got a beautiful new play, 'The Blood-stained Village.' We played it at Ravenswood one night. At Charters Towers it would have run nine nights, only——"

"The audience made you run nine miles—well, never mind that. I'm sorry for people in bad luck, though my own is so bad that if it were raining soup and everybody else had a spoon I'd be left with a fork. What about the hall here?"

"Theatre! We've paid half a night's rent deposit for the night after to-morrow."

"Well, take me along to see the people. If they're decent I'll give you the money for the bills, and I'd guarantee the ladies' board anyhow."

"Come along," said the sparrow-man, joyfully, seizing his hat. "You're an angel."

"Wait! You can't walk about like that. That coat will stifle you. Open it! . . . Open it, Willie Front, and let's see if you are all Willie as I suspect, and no Front."

Montgomery opened the coat and showed that beneath it he wore but singlet and trousers. "They took my baggage at Hughenden."

"I'll get it for you if it isn't a great deal. There's



two pounds. Jump into the outfitter's next door and get a shirt or two and a white suit."

He smoked alone until a new Montgomery joined him, dressed in spotless duck and wearing a white calico hat.

"I've left the other stuff there till I know where to send 'em to. God bless you, Mr. Biddulphson—that bear-skin coat looks very nobby in the Winter, but it nearly killed me."

"That's alright—let's get along to the station. The day is very warm, and the ladies must be tired." He knew that they were hungry and thirsty too.

With the stout and oysters, and the glory of immaculate and seasonable raiment, all Montgomery's aplomb returned, and bettered itself. He talked loudly of the splendor of the Great Australian Dramatic Company whenever they passed a stranger, so that Aladdin was forced to order quietness, brusquely enough.

At the sun-baked railway station, where only the dripping water bags were cool, they found three women and three of the men. Mildred Floyd, forty, blue-eyed and lean, with a complexion intended for artificial light, and yellow hair already showing the evaporation of dye at the roots; Athene Pallas, dark, clear-eyed and of clear complexion, massive and heavily respectable, knitting interminably; two fair, thin girls with frizzled hair—the Fluffy Sisters. Of the men, Trewhella Jordan slept in a corner of the waiting room, snoring in a full, round voice, wherefore his open mouth was kept circular to preserve the fullness of tone. Irving Kemble, a grey-haired and benevolent-looking man with a red clean-shaven face and a big nose, dozed—his hands clasped over his walking-stick. And the leading juvenile, Saxby Leicester—a tall, willowy English blonde of twenty-three years or thereabouts, with a classic profile and a foolish, trusting and languid eye—hovered over Miss Floyd, and whenever she smothered a sob, smoothed her hands and piped: "You pooah dee-ah!"

But as Montgomery entered, and their surprised eyesight became accustomed to his new clothes, they read from those new clothes new hope, and pelted him with questions, while Aladdin stood at the door, wondering which was the stage-struck girl who had paid £20 to play "angernoo" parts. Montgomery explained the change of fortune. Then he introduced them to Aladdin, and Mildred Floyd decided on sight that here was a millionaire, and immediately set herself to make romances about him.

"I'm very glad indeed to meet you," said Irving Kemble. "Mr. Carbide and the—ahem—his secretary have gone down the street on business."

"And the gentleman in the corner?" asked Aladdin, indicating Trewhella Jordan, who still drove his pigs to market with unfaltering voice.

"Let him sleep until we've finished talking," interrupted Montgomery. "He talks thirteen to the dozen."

"And didn't you say there was another lady?"

"Miss Pardon."

"Yes," replied one of the Fluffy Sisters. "She went down the street to the telegraph office."

"Well, we'll go to the hotel if you ladies are ready," said Aladdin. "She may be there."

They replied that they were ready; they were more than that—they were eager.

He led the queer assortment of people out of the station, while Irving Kemble awoke Trewhella. In that moment he decided that he would help the Great Australian Dramatic Company to play "The Blood-stained Village," and told himself that he did so to help these other people, for whom he did not care a straw. And he knew he was doing it for Miss Pardon's sake.

He guaranteed the company's board at the hotel, and handed Montgomery the money to free the printing, so that before dusk the enthusiastic sparrowman covered most of himself and a hireling with paste in billing the town with wondrous printing, im-



ported as samples of plays which had nothing to do with "The Bloodstained Village." The sparrow-man indeed was in despair because he could not use a large circus poster, showing hippopotami and tigers, surrounded by ring attendants in the gorgeous uniforms of Privy Councillors.

Meantime Aladdin met Carbide, the manager, and distrusted him on sight—disliking him mainly because he had taken twenty pounds from the stage-struck beauty. He also met the travelling and permanent creditor, Mr. Drinkwater, and liked him less than nothing when he discovered that Mr. Drinkwater drank nothing of the sort; but he waited principally for Miss Pardon, and the delay enhanced her value until he could think of little else.

With his sense of self-preservation half-asleep, he agreed to pay three nights' theatre rent on the strict understanding that he should pay himself with the first receipts; yet Miss Pardon did not appear.

Then at dusk the excited cackle of Miss Floyd and the Fluffy Sisters told him that Miss Pardon had had money telegraphed from home; she had written each of the women, enclosing two pounds for a fare to somewhere, and had left for the north by the little spluttering coaster, the "Lass o' Gowrie," late in the afternoon.

"And she is so good," said Mildred Floyd, crying quietly—all her little jealousy of the younger and beautiful woman evaporated more easily because the benefactress had removed herself. "She says she's glad we've got a new manager, but she's cured of the life, and wishes us luck. Bless her!"

"The 'Lass o' Gowrie'?" Aladdin repeated. "I wonder if she's gone?"

"Cleared Magnetic Island at six o'clock going north," they told him.

He had lost her, then, and financed this mad business for nothing. And a good girl, too! She was sick of it all, and so determined to go that she gave nobody the opportunity to persuade her to stop; gone

without a spoken farewell, yet she stood to her own sex. The money sent to each of the women represented the six pounds he had given her, and showed her faithfulness. For many women can be leal to a man, but there be few women loyal to a woman.

"She's glad they've got a new manager," repeated Aladdin. "Well, I'm in for it. On with the dance, let joy be unconfined. But she was 18-carat."

And Willie Front, alias Everard Montgomery, splashed paste over himself and felt that all was right with the world.

At the hotel that night Aladdin found a letter:—  
"Dear Mr. Biddulfson,—I know your name, and shall refund the money as soon as I can. I had a remittance from home, but you told me you were the richest man in the world, and I have sent your money to four ladies who need it as badly as I did. Thanks.  
—Your grateful friend, VERA PARDON."

"She's 18-carat!" said Aladdin, the entrepreneur.



## CHAPTER V.

### EXIT CARBIDE.

Do, or undo, or pretend,  
But at one of these never be ending;  
For these are the ways of the world—  
Doing, undoing, pretending.

—The Maxims of Billy Pagan.

ALADDIN, beginning by being kind-hearted, drifted into a merry vagabondage—liking these actor people, who were as simple as babies outside of their business, and growing into a cold abhorrence of Carbide, the manager, and all his works and methods.

He found their advertising at the wrong end; and the advance agent, who was always with Carbide's company, because there had been no money to send him ahead, seemed to be advancing in the rear; a scout who followed the army and brought up the ambulance. Aladdin's own hatred of disorganisation made him advance money to Wilfred, or Willie Front, to keep a week ahead—for a time, at least—and then he hunted people for patronage, and advertised to the disappearance of the last article of truth, and so secured audiences which the shocking material of the company, rather than the company itself, drove away after one experience.

The "scenery" had most of the paint worn off it by a hard life on railway tracks; but there were two cloths painted in dyes, and were carried folded up in baskets. The excellent order of these two exteriors as compared with the worn interior scenes suggested that all weather happens inside houses and under cover.

Meantime the company's indebtedness to its guarantor increased a little, and open warfare was threatened with Carbide, because Carbide could not brook another man carrying the war chest.

The trouble came to a head when Carbide displayed some marvellous posters of the wild play called "The Blood-stained Village," and rehearsed it for a second visit, or, as he billed it, "A grand return season at Charters Towers"—made possible by Aladdin paying the debts of Carbide's earlier season, which had not been grand, and had promised no return. He paid for it partly out of the balance of accumulated receipts, but the discovery of the actual balance of his own capital made him grin as if he didn't like it.

Aladdin saw the performance of "The Blood-stained Village," and began to understand why people lose taste in the romantic drama.

"For the love of George," he said to Carbide, the disrespected manager, "is this drama raw, or do you stew it with onions?"

"It's all right, ain't it?" protested the dark and furtive man. "Doory Lane, y' know."

"Doory Lane! You mean Little Bourke-street. It's worse than an alarm of fire."

The dark man, sensible of his own ignorance, but not good enough to cure it, flushed at the repetition of "Doory Lane," and to cover his confusion, he said: "Well! I've put the Fluffy Sisters inter the Casiner scene—'ere they come now."

The Fluffy Sisters, red-legged, red-skirted to half-way above their knees to the thigh, pranced on to the stage, danced for a moment with all the counterfeit animation of Dutch dolls, and burst into song with little regard for the conventions of music, and even less for the language:

O! I luv ter take a rambul  
In the jewy month er Jewn.

Aladdin's soul revolted at them. He felt that if justice were to be done, the money must be returned,



even to the last of the nine pounds fifteen shillings of the night's receipts.

"Good voices, ain't they?" asked Carbide.

"Good to eat with," replied Aladdin, "but not for making noises."

"They can darnse, enyway."

"Yes—they certainly dance well enough—but their voices take 90 per cent. discount off their feet. There go two more of the audience. We charged 'em three shillings to come in, and I think they'd pay three pounds to go out. I've half a mind to try 'em."

The Fluffy Sisters danced off, and a thick silence followed their exit; but as the villain of the play re-entered to spin his foolish plot, in loud soliloquy, the audience became gay again, and laughed openly at the woes of the heroine who followed him.

Aladdin bore another act with the resignation of a Christian martyr waiting for unwilling lions, and then he asked Carbide to talk with him in the little theatre office.

He opened the conversaton with his usual directness.

"This is no good, Carbide. It's no wonder that you're up against bad luck; the marvel is that you haven't been assassinated. It's the worst play in the world.

"It was good printin'," replied the manager, sullenly. "I bought the play and the printin' for the price of the printin'—an' that's good biz."

"If it draws no biz, as you call it, it's bad biz."

"What's it got to do with you?"

"This much. I don't see how I'm going to get my money back—outside of that I don't like to see women stranded through the sheer stupidity of a manager they've trusted."

"I'm the boss o' me own show," said Carbide, showing his teeth—which was foolish, as he did not dare to bite. "I'll put on what I like—an' I'll tell you more, Mr. Bluffson, or whatever y'name is—I'm goin' to

take half the 'ouse, an' you take the other half till you'se paid."

"No, I stick to the agreement."

"Wot about the people?"

"I've guaranteed their board and lodging—you failed to do even that, and they were homeless. I'll make an equitable division, even before I'm paid in full."

"If I don't take the money t'morrer night an' keep 'arf, y' don't play 'The Blood-stained Village.'"

"You won't take the money, and I will take all, and as I want the 'all' to be something, we won't play 'The Blood-stained Village' any more—not till my money is refunded, anyhow."

"Then t'morrer night the theatre 'ull be dark."

"All the better for the drama," replied Aladdin, laughing.

The armed truce lasted till next night, and then Carbide saw that his bluff had failed. The theatre was dark, and Carbide left for the south the day following. To do him justice, he did not leave without warning or farewell. He told his late company that it had no loyalty, which merely proved his ingratitude, and he parted from them as if they had done him an injury—an injury now melodramatically forgiven.

The company, expecting nothing of him, were glad of his departure. They came to Aladdin—Irving Kemble, the tremendous tragedian, being spokesman.

"As a dee-putation from my confreres of this compan-ay, I am he-ar to request you to ash-oom the manage-ment. If we have a good hou-u-sis we shall share alike as a Commonwealth Company; if un-a-fortunate we shall ask for nothing but ou-ha boa-ard and ou-ah lodging."

"That's good of you," replied Aladdin, laughing in the mere joy of being alive and under thirty. "But there's no capital—no communal capital for this Commonwealth Company. It's more common than wealth. Now, what about that?"



"My de-ah boy," said the ancient and pompous battler. "We regard that as a problem suited to your genius. That imposter, Carbide, has left us stranded, and there must have been at least four pounds fifteen shillings in the house at Dingo Hollow. I counted the house during that big speech of Saxby Leicester's. There is nobody but you—we are all dependent on you; the leading lady, the heavy woman, the juvenile, Trehwella Jordan, the Fluffy Sisters, the advance agent, and myself—and I forgot Pimples." (Pimples was the orchestra.)

"But I only took it on for a joke. I'm no actor."

"I know, my boy—but what a financier! Could any other man have secured the patronage of the Bishop at Sugarville? Could anyone else have captured the Liberal candidate at Woolpack Creek to open his campaign from our stage between the second and third acts of East Lynne? Ah! do not refuse, Mr. Biddulphson—you have, if I may put it so, been elected guide, philosopher, and friend to us all, and you cannot refuse."

"Alright," said Aladdin, "I found you frozen and you found me idle, and now I'm to be father to a lot of people twice my age. Alright! Let her go, then." So "she went." Alteration and change the order of the day—for Aladdin was a very new broom and swept clean. He even asked discipline of Pimples, the scorbutic youth who had been a most insolent orchestra—and Pimples sulked and left them at their grand return season at Townsville.

The level of intelligence of the company was so low that its failure becomes a mystery. Having lost the scorbutic youth who had been the orchestra, Saxby Leicester, the very lady-like leading juvenile from the principal London theatres, represented music by beating the piano to the "toon," as Mr. Drinkwater, the permanent and unpreferred creditor called it—of the "Poet and Pheasant," by "Soup," and by singing hopeful songs when his fortunes as the virtuous hero were at their lowest. Mildred

Floyd, with the yellow hair and pink cheeks of commerce, had made a fetich of a crimson velvet dress, which she wore in the first act as the squire's happy daughter, and in the second act, where she starved in London, and also in the third act, where she came on with her hair down, wailing that she had been betrayed.

The heavy woman, Athene Pallas, had made her clothes on classic lines to fit her name; equable as granite, she had the heavy placidity of a well-fed cow; she knitted always, she never spoke—she elocuted.

Trewhella Jordan had had but two loves—one his own acting, and the other—beer. Heavy, dull, slow to anger and to laughter, with a chronic cold that turned his t's to d's, and m's and n's to b's. There was never anything more funny than Trewhella Jordan's interpretation of Archibald Carlisle, the slow ox-like possessor of Isabel—unless it was his idea of Levison, the ravisher by cunning.

Discipline goes if the treasurer be late, yet Biddulfsen had acquired such a hold over Irving Kemble's affections that he was by him obeyed, and the others copied the obedience—being in fear of losing the man who struck at iron gates with sound because he had no golden hammer; who made barriers fall to words as the walls of Jericho fell to trumpets.

It was Irving Kemble who refound the name Biddulfsen had earned on the Stock Exchange. He called him "Aladdin" once and was not greatly surprised when Biddulfsen answered to the call quite naturally.

But there was one who knew not Joseph, nor made obeisance unto the King. This was the Permanent and Unpreferential Creditor, Mr. Drinkwater, who drank anything else. He had been given the jobs of taking tickets, of being baggage man and undertaking the shopping of bills. Once, in a small town of one street and few houses and many



wandering goats and horses, he had advertised the show by ringing a bell and calling on any person with a shilling to "roll up and pass in on the outside." Once indeed, also, he had been given a one-line part, and had made it as monumental a failure as if the one line were the part of Hamlet. Vanity is the root of all evil, and Drinkwater's successes and his stage-swollen head made him vain-glorious. Aladdin, having ordered him to do some necessary service, this miserable wretch—naturally foredoomed to a life of respectability, but by the grace of creditorship admitted to the enjoyment of art and poverty—had become so proud that he questioned authority. According to his ideas, in the republic of poverty all men are free and equal. Aladdin showed him that in time of danger a republic or kingdom is but a ship in peril, and that freedom and equality stand down before the despotism of a captain.

"I'm as good as you," said Drinkwater.

"You are greater. Carbide owed you ten pounds, and you've spent a hundred pounds' worth of time in following the debt to the office of the official assignee. Indomitable resolution like that is beyond me."

"Well, I ain't goin' to wheel baggage to the station on a truck."

"You're not? I cast you to play the part of baggage porter, with a real truck of real baggage, and you refuse the part, and I've got to engage a real professional porter and pay him half a sovereign. All right! I'll pay you the ten pounds Carbide owed you, and you leave the show."

Drinkwater faltered, stammered and capitulated. He wheeled the baggage truck many times to the railway station, so saving ten shillings to the company, and remained very civil and obliging for weeks thereafter. And Aladdin, rejecting the possibility of a man preferring servitude without wages in a hopeless company of barnstormers, to a life of

comfortable dullness in trade or labor, wondered. Further, Drinkwater had come to drink water, so that now a life of dull respectability was his without the wages.

Had Aladdin enquired of the women he had never need to wonder; for love and a cough cannot be hid. A first-night show gave him the fact the women had known for weeks; their minds being intent on this one matter, everybody they met was not man nor woman, but potential lover, so that the curtain had risen on the first.

It was the last of the mad plays that Carbide had bought for the price of the printing with the play thrown in, and Aladdin, whose financial training made him object immediately to the exaggeration of millions of money by every character of the play, toned down the tremendous interests involved to the lower figures of credibility.

It was a play written of men and women who were never to be met in life, but only in books, whose writers had never met life, outside of a library. Two men discovering gold; one killing the other in self-defence and covering up the body; as soon as the involuntary murderer has departed on his own tracks to bring up Swale, the third man, who has been left behind at the last water—the corpse arises and walks off R.U.E. The murderer, Cardross, returns, finds that the corpse has lost itself, and remarks that ants have taken it. Twenty-five years later, Cardross the murderer is Cardross the steel magnate and stock exchange millionaire; Swale is the keeper of a gambling house in London, and blackmails Cardross on the knowledge of the "murder"; and the murdered man, Silas Arrow, is an American steel trust all to himself, the rival of Cardross, and his bitter enemy. They fight each other on the Stock Exchange, Cardross still ignorant of Arrow's existence, and still believing himself a murderer—and in the fight the father of Eveline



Mayne (most tearfully played by Mildred Floyd) is caught among the bigger men, is ruined and suicides. His daughter makes an alliance with Silas Arrow to ruin Cardross; then all unbeknownst to herself, she falls in love with Robert, the eldest son of Cardross, who she thinks is only a workman in Cardross's works.

With a weak gambler as a second son to Cardross, in love with the daughter of Swale, the gambler, and a blind niece, who isn't blind except in her hopeless love for Robert Cardross, and her brother, a maker of flash notes, who passes them at the rate of a hundred thousand pounds a day, the involved interests become tremendous.

Their last rehearsal, in circumstances of almost insuperable embarrassments, gave the millions of the play sardonic point. Trewhella Jordan, as Cardross, the millionaire, had to talk of champagne, which is hurtful to a man who loves beer and cannot get it.

"Chappade subber at three id the bordig, I subbose. Id's always like id the secod gederatioid. A self-made mad builds up a grade bositioid, add his suds shadder id. I thag God Roberd is differed. But 'for that cubford id would have beed better if I had dever found the gode, bud had lived add died a boor bad."

"Put more feeling into that," said Irving Kemble, solemnly, thorough as if he were producing a great play in a big city, and Trewhella Jordan turned dull and sober eyes on him, and hopelessly and with much bitterer feeling against his drought, replied:—

"Bore feelig! Bore feelig! By Dod! Bore feelig!" And so withdrew into sulkiness—sulkiness late with cues, sulkiness that couldn't find the place, sulkiness that refused to do anything at rehearsal, in supreme confidence of being alright at night.

Mildred Floyd complained that he always let the scene down.

"Yes, Robert Cardross," she said to him, "if

there is anything in your life for which you yourself need mercy, you shall have mercy denied you, even as you denied it to my father."

"You turn pale there, Trewhella," advised Irving Kemble.

"How ab I to do thad?" grumbled the sulky one. "She goes off there and I talk to by sud—who's by sud—oh, Saxby—'Id has cub to my doledge that your brother has borrowed tweddy thousad bouds from yug Deddy Bardod.'"

"Fathah, at Swale's gambling hell to-naight he lost thirty thousahnd pahnds. Fathah! Swale came heah to-naight. He says you murdahed a man in Australyah yahs and yahs ago. He demahnded a quattar of a million blackmail, and he insists you should adopt his daughtah. . . . I gave him one hundred thousahnd pahnds. . . . the rest, fathah, is for you to do."

"It was id self-defedee, by sud—will Swale dever be sadisfied? It would have beed bedder to give hib a billiod ad led him go."

Mr. Swale (a small part played by the Permanent and Unpreferred Creditor): "Hi did a good thing for meself wen. with me hone heyes, hi sor 'im takin' them hi ho yuse frum Denby Bardon's dead body."

"Oh, the aspirate!" groaned Irving Kemble. "The aspirate! It h-u-r-r-t-s m'h."

Saxby Leicester to Athene Pallas (as the blind woman, Silence, who sees everything, and talks throughout four acts to the exclusion of almost all the others): "If you should say that, Silence—you ah—a woman, help-less—bli-ind—I should strike you down at my feet!' No! I made a mistake



they-ah! I should say, 'You are utter-lah and simpl-ah mistaken, but if you were a mahn I would ah strike you down.' That's it."

"I will not bay half a billiod for the gabbling debds of a worthless sud."

"Lord Baurice Fidzgrey is a charbig yug fellow, odly tweddy-wud. He has six billiods add as guileless as ad idfad. Swale bust have half a billiod to pud hib od his feed, ad he's after it."

"I say, shall we cut those millions down a bit more?" asked Irving Kemble.

"No fear; we've cut them in half as it is," replied Aladdin. "When we open to-night our capital is down to six-fifteen-six. Keep on talking millions—it's funny; I like it."

"All right! Mr. Jordan, put more go into that scene where you drink the toast of your son's health."

Jordan groaned. "How cad I? It's torture as id is. I'be doig a braver thing thad the Lide Brigade id going through ad all."

"When he volunteered it would be for active service in the canteen," said Aladdin to Birdie of the Fluffy Sisters, who giggled whenever spoken to.

"Oh! Go on!" giggled Birdie, in great delight.

"I will. He loved voluntary beer more than compulsory service, and he died on the field of bottle."

"Oh! You are a one!" gurgled Birdie, silly with delight.

Trewhella Jordan had heard them, and he resented this statement.

"I dode like beer, by boy," he said. "I take id for the cubbady—the disdreactiod."

"Alright, Trewhella."

"Certainly, Bister Biddulfsud," replied Trehwella with great dignity, and returned to his talk of millions.

"Poor old Trehwella," said Aladdin. "He makes a beast of himself, to forget that he is a man, and over-drinks himself on principle."

"Go on—you're a one!" said Birdie again.

"Listen to that," said Aladdin. "Listen to Saxby giving his father advice. Oh, this is a great play!"

"Fath-ah," said Saxby Leicester, "if you-ah ah a murd-rah, go to Austral-yah—there you will be safe!"

"By boy! By boy!"

"My poor country!" said Aladdin. "This is a great play, surely!"

"He thinks I'm helpless because I'm a girl brought up in the country," bleated Maudie, of the Fluffy Sisters, trying to be artless, as the gambler's daughter.

It was Aladdin's cue, and as the gambling son of Trehwella Jordan, he had but to say a line or two, abjure gambling, promise amendment, kiss Maudie, embrace her violently, and kiss her again, and then walk off to a reformation and a new life. They also went off to eat—Maudie's exit lines being:

"Come and let's have supper. There's cold chicken, jellies, and champagne."

Drinkwater gazed at them rather too seriously for the resentment of a thirsty man tantalised by the talk of liquor. Trehwella Jordan groaned. Athene Pallas—a most serviceable trencherwoman—sighed, and came back to earth as the blind woman.

"I am cursed with a leaning towards crime; it is in my blood—deeply rooted in me, and always urging me to sin, so that I cannot be at peace while my hands are innocent."

"There is pardahn even for you," bleated Saxby.

"No! Even now the irresistible voice is whis-



pering to me to give up being a lady, and go and follow the career of a professional criminal, even though I starve at it. Up to the present my passion for you has kept me back. The hope of you and of the rapture of your love has made me able to resist temptation for years past; but to-night, if you reject my love, I shall not hold myself back any more. I shall follow the career of a felon!"

"Now that you know I am a millionaire, Eveline—do you hate m'h?"

"I could nev-ah hate yew, Robert—nevah. But—oh! you were so deah to me when I thought you were a working man—so much dear-ah."

"That's the cue," shouted Irving Kemble. "Miss Pallas shoots there. Bing! right—Miss Floyd falls. Saxby! you up stage on knees looking down at body. Now!"

Saxby: "Let hurr not day! She is so yahng! so yahng! Have mercy on hurr! Let hurr live—for may."

"That's the act," said Kemble. "Alright. But it must go quickly. So and so! and So and so! Bing! And put more life into your death scene, Trewhella."

"It's a marvel," commented Aladdin. "And I think it will see us right into the woods."

"But at the worst," asked Kemble anxiously, "we'd be able to get out of the town? You can do it, can't you?"

"About as comfortably as a man with one tooth trying to chew a pickled onion."

"One thing," said Kemble. "Since you've been with us, although we had no better luck than we had with Carbide, things have been more comfortable, and our reputation's better."

"We owe and pay long after the due date, and so are better thought of than the man who pays on the nail."

"We've kept ahead well—in spite of all our misfortunes."

"If I can get enough out of the next town or two to ship you people back to a city, I'm out of it for keeps. I hate the subterfuges, the half lies, the sleeping over powder magazines, and trusting to luck. Although all speculative business consists of those things, and this is no worse than another."

"I hope you're not sorry you met us, Aladdin."

"I'm not. I like you all! I've laughed more in the last three months than I did in the year before it, and laughter is worth five pounds a giggle. From the nettle debt we pluck the flower of a merry life."

But the new play called more for money than a life of blamelessness. It was the coping stone of ill-luck and make-shift. It began the carrying on of the current expenses of this town to the debit of the next; travelling on credit; getting through somehow with all the shifts of bankers and cornerers of markets on a small and, therefore, disreputable scale. For little thieves are hanged by the neck, and great thieves are hanged by the purse.

They escaped despair by new industry. Aladdin rejected all the Carbide repertoire, and Irving Kemble put into rehearsal the reliable dramas of East Lynne, Uncle Tom's Cabin, and The Colleen Bawn.

Then mad love came to complicate poverty. Saxby Leicester, as juvenile, naturally was the gallant of Mildred Floyd, who used him as a beast of burden, and made him carry parcels; Athene Pallas joined Mildred Floyd in worshipping Aladdin from afar; Birdie giggled fancy free; Maudie had been appropriated by Drinkwater—though as yet she did not know it, certainly; Irving Kemble's mistresses were memories, and "My art, sir!"; Trewhella Jordan's mistress was beer—an innocent mistress enough, and promising to Jordan more distraction than any other.

Pending the production of the woes of Madame Vine, they had to play the drama of millions in four towns already billed; and for four nights Aladdin, as the gambling son of the millionaire,



kissed Maudie of the Fluffy Sisters with much fervor, and made his exit to supper and reformation.

On the second night he saw Drinkwater, the Permanent and Unpreferred Creditor, glaring at him from the wings. The look startled Aladdin—it was a stare of studied malevolence and to make sure of it he looked over Maudie's head as he was about to kiss her, and saw Drinkwater's face convulsed.

It was for Maudie's sake, then, that he had followed meekly after the debt, which would now never be liquidated—for her sake that he rang bells and played baggage porter with a real truck. Drinkwater was in love—the real love without stint or compromise, and hatred ready to replace it in a day. As they came off he looked at Aladdin murderously; so murderously that Aladdin felt constrained to ask the Fluffy Sister: "Are you and he playing speaks?"

"Not much," said Maudie, scornfully. "He's ratty about me, but I don't take no notice."

At the next town, after the stage embrace had been made more fervent by Maudie, who enjoyed the Simian rage of her admirer as he watched them off-stage, Drinkwater became too desperate for silence, and floundered in words.

"Hi'm nobody," he said, fierce self-depreciation. "Hi'm mad, Hi am." He laughed bitterly and loudly.

"You needn't sing it as if you were understudy to a kookaburra," replied Aladdin calmly. "It's all true—but what of it?"

"Hi carry dash luggage like a 'orse," pursued the frantic Drinkwater. "Ho! yes! like a blasted 'orse. Ringin' the bell—hactin' old gamblers—'andin' over Mordie to another bloke, an' sayin' 'She's me dorter.' Be cripes! I've struck—I'll do not a 'and's turn."

"Then," said Aladdin, calmly, "you'll not go on. Everybody in this concern's got to work his passage. We'll leave you here."

"Hi know yer game," said Drinkwater. "Yer

think ye'll get me houter the way, an' then y'll get Mordie. Hi'll see 'er in 'er coffin first."

"Don't talk nonsense," said Aladdin, generously sorry for the man. "If you are fond of the girl your road is clear of me."

"D'ye mean it, Mister B'dulfson? Gor' bless yer! I'm that gone, I'm dilly. Gor' bless yer! Only do something for me."

"What is it?"

"Don't go—don't go on kissen', kissen', kissen' when y'r hon th' stage with 'er, will yer? I know she's luvverly, Mr. Bluffson, an' a man can't 'elp it."

"Lovely? Not for me. I'd trust her in a tunnel with Henry the Eighth."

"Well, don't go kissen', kissen', kissen'."

Aladdin laughed and promised, and Maudie, missing the fervor of the embrace, played up the more to him, and flaunted her seeming affection for the manager in the face of the unhappy Drinkwater. Trewhella Jordan, finding him in this condition, and desiring a companion, led him to a little public-house, whereof the licensee was a fervent admirer of the stage: loving actors so much that to them he was a supplier of gin and soda without money or limit. Drinkwater drank his trouble in such company, and recovering next day, sought Maudie, showed her the wreck love of her had made of him, and promised amendment if but she would make life endurable by smiling upon him.

But Maudie cruelly despatched him with ridicule.

"Go an' take a look at yerself," she said. "Y' come here sayin' 'I love a-her'—copyin' Saxby Leicester in 'The Bloodstained Village'—an' yer full o' beer, an' yer face is like a fresh-cut German sausage."

Uttering a cry of wounded love and hopeless despair, Drinkwater ran from her presence and returned to Trewhella Jordan. He, having found a new admirer of the stage, invited the Permanent



Creditor to drink at the new admirer's expense many explosive bombs of mixed alcohols.

When Drinkwater next saw Aladdin he was in no fit condition to rehearse his wrongs coherently, and at last Aladdin said to him sternly:

"If I have any more complaints, we'll pay you all that's owing you, and discharge you from the company."

Then Drinkwater, making many promises of amendment, burst into tears. Then he remembered he had a letter for Aladdin. It was a money order for six pounds—it had followed Aladdin from Townsville, on from town to town. There was a line of writing with it—"Always your grateful friend, VERA PARDON."

"Bread on the waters," said Aladdin. "Six pounds comes when it does the most good. I threw bread overboard, and the next tide brings me cake."

## CHAPTER VI.

### WAX AND CLAY.

Enjoy all thy world whilst yet  
Thou hast seeing eyes in their sockets,  
Ere ever thou wearest at last  
The shirt that is made without pockets.  
—The Maxims of Billy Pagan.

BUT for the love affairs of Drinkwater, Aladdin found little trouble that was not quite financial. Certainly there was once a heated argument between Saxby Leicester, Trewhella Jordan, and Irving Kemble. To please an enthusiastic patron of the drama who had bought three pounds' worth of tickets, the company made a disastrous attempt to play *La Tosca*.

Trewhella Jordan as *Scarpia* had greatly enjoyed himself at the beginning of the torture scene, but when *Caravadossi's* groans under torture changed to bleatings, and the audience laughed itself to apoplexy, Jordan left the stage, roaring his injured vanity.

"Who's guying be?" he demanded. "You, *Kebble*?"

"You, thed, *Saxby*?"

"I regard the accusation as an insult, *Mr. Jordan*."

"Thed I go back."

As he turned to the stage again the bleating was resumed.

"B-a-a-a-a!"

"There it is agaid—it is udder the stage. I'll puddish adybody who guys be."

He ran down to the lower floor of the dressing-rooms, and sought the dim region below the stage.

"Baa-aa-aaa!"

Trembling with passion, Trewhella ran under the stage, and found there a calf—for the caretaker of the hall used the space below as a byre.



"Dab the calf," said Trehwella, as the curtain fell on *La Tosca*, half-played by the Great Australian Dramatic Company for the first and last time.

Then came trouble—over and above monetary difficulty—in the Great Australian Dramatic Company. Aladdin found his forces at Uranquinty with another general in possession of the field, this being the error of Marshal Montgomery, the advance agent—the sort of error which made Napoleon lose Waterloo by reason of the unexpected arrival of the Prussians. The enemy in this case was Hamstinger's Wax Works and Vaudeville Company, which often performed in a tent, but was now in possession of the Shire Hall.

Montgomery had booked the less important hall—Abbott's—and had further complicated matters by billing the town for the second night of Hamstinger's two-night season. Mr. Hamstinger was a grave, melancholy man of fair complexion, and long yellow Viking moustaches, enjoying his own tribulations solemnly, punctuating the description of his adversities with something between laughter and snivelling.

Montgomery had left them with a night vacant, and that was the opening night of Hamstinger's Wax Works and Vaudeville. Hamstinger extended to the Great Australian Dramatic Company the courtesy of "The Profession," and its members visited the Shire Hall, and prior to the vaudeville turns, inspected the Wax Works. It consisted of a score of dummy figures—mere pegs to hang clothes on—thirty heads, interchangeable on the dummy figures aforesaid, and much wardrobe.

Hamstinger's opening night was very poor. "Dot bore thad five ponds id," said Trehwella Jordan, gloomily. "A dice place to brig a legitibate cobady, I dod't thik."

"There's a great make-up," cried Birdie, shrilly, pointing to the wigged, knee-breeched figure purporting to represent Robespierre. She had addressed

Saxby Leicester, but he was deeply interested in the figure of Lord Beaconsfield, or rather in the dress suit which covered it.

"That's Gladstone," explained the morose Hamstinger. "An' that's Ned Kelly. 'Ere we have Mary Queen o' Scots before her marriage with Philip o' Spain. That's Deeming!—No! not that one—that's the Lord Mayor. . . There's President Garfield an' the anarchists that asinated him; here we have Florence Nightingale, Sir Henry Parkes, Daniel O'Connell and Lord Edward Fitzgerald. On the other side is Captain Cook, who discovered Australia with the first fleet. This group represents the Judgment of Solomon. . . 'Seuse me, the orchestra's stopped."

He put a new needle in the gramophone arm, wound up the clock-work and re-started the old record—a peculiarly lugubrious reproduction from *The Bohemian Girl*.

"When Other Lips an' Other Tarts," he said in explanation—"by Mick W. Balfe. There's a lot of Irish here to-night. . . An' now Mr. Bluffson, if you'll sit down an' take your company we'll get to the vaudeville. Take the front row; none o' this hungry town push have paid more than two bob, and the front seats look empty."

He showed them the front row where they were so neighbourless that, as Aladdin said, they felt as lonely as an egg in a cathedral. Hamstinger then walked to the left side of the hall, while Birdie gave him sotto voce stage directions, reversing positions against the auditorium.

"Straw Mo goes right—speaks to ole bloke what's seen better days."

He had. They saw the old man addressed by Hamstinger lift his head and show a face until then hidden by an old style Paris hat—its silk brushed the wrong way by weather and neglect. When he stood up to reply to Hamstinger they saw his clothes



—of a past magnificence and present condition to suit the hat.

“That there frock coat was just the thing when Victoria was crowned,” said the cruel and irrepressible Birdie—“an’ his pants was at Eureka Stockade.”

“Be quiet,” whispered Aladdin, for the man himself was terribly pathetic.

“Go on yourself,” replied Birdie impudently. “That ole hat belongs to the vintage of eighteen-seventy-eight.”

“If you don’t stop buttin’ in’,” threatened Saxby, “we’ll put you in the Chamber of Horrors and label you Ananias and Sapphira.”

The old man, carrying his battered hat at his hip, moved towards the little stage, and they saw him walking very delicately, as if he were afraid of falling. His slight figure was defined in all its thinness by the tightly-buttoned frock coat; its seams shining and its spaces dull, and the silk had been worn off the buttons so that they shone, too. Silvered hair and a silvered beard accentuated the venerableness of the face; it was the face of a gentleman, had been the face of a pocket Antinous. The Wax Works show had not been able to rob him, even in age, of his inherent dignity—a dignity which was mainly kindness and simplicity, and so had not suffered by adversities which would have made mere pompousness a craven long ago. As he walked to the stage they saw that he was ill, a dry little cough shook his spareness, and when he mounted the four wooden steps from the auditorium he held his hand to his left breast as if merely breathing were pain.

Birdie opened her mouth for another witticism, but all her fellow-strollers turned on her irritably, and she became silent, while the old man crossed the stage before the curtain and entered at the little door on the prompt side of the proscenium.

Hamstinger followed him, having adjusted the gramophone to a very welcome silence, and a minute

later the curtain rose in folds as slowly and indecisively as if a child were furling it. And then they knew that the slight old man was at the curtain ropes, and that he was very, very weak.

There were two pairs of wings of hessian, with wallpaper pasted over it, and a back cloth showing an impossible gum tree like a grape vine, framing a castle with Lake Como in the foreground, and two blobs of red paint pretending to be Neapolitan fishermen. Right centre a foursquare painted canvas frame like a small bathing box, and centre and a little upstage a dressing-table trying to hide itself under a red suburban tablecloth. On the table two wooden bars shaped like A and bearing graduated lengths of metal, and two little wooden mallets. Also and behind the wooden bars, a cornet of very brilliant brass.

"Oh, my stars!" said Birdie—unchecked now that poor old Pathos was hidden in the prompt entrance. "Straw Mò has graciously consented to do a cavatina on the sillyphone."

Hamstinger had. He graciously entered; as proud and self-conscious as if he were primo tenore at La Scala, singing a new opera before the crowned faces of Europe. He walked majestically to his place behind the table, seized a mallet in either hand, and played most of the music which was newest when gold was first discovered at Ballarat.

"Hold me," said Birdie. "Here's all the tunes that's got whiskers on 'em."

With a more than becoming reverence for his job, Mr. Hamstinger played The Blue Bells of Scotland, The Wearing of the Green, Ring the Bell, Watchman, and Silver Threads Among the Gold.

Answering some misguided applause from the boys in the back seats, he played The Mocking Bird, and having imitated a peal of bells with more or less fidelity, he laid down the mallet and bowed to his audience so majestically that the dead-heads in the front seats felt compelled to clap their hands, as



part of the etiquette of THE profession, which never criticises until after the performance.

"I knew it," said Birdie again. "The sillyphone turn's finished, an' now he'll shorten our lives with that bit of brass pipe. Oh, mother! Mother!"

Hamstinger's air of devotion to the cornet—his respectful handling of it—said more plainly than words that the cornet was sacred. He became no mere musician—he was the Hierophant of Blare, the Archpriest of Noise.

He slowly elevated the cornet to the level of his mouth and lipped it as if he were about to drink it. His eyes bulged as he blew; the pathos of loves abandoned became a blatant scream that sought the listeners' bones—

When oth-er hearts  
And oth-er-er lips  
Theyar tale of loove shall tell.

"Oh, me!" said Birdie. "The Micks are gettin' old Ireland to-night, but it's givin' me goose flesh."

"Ssh!" said Aladdin: "you're a guest."

"Is that any reason why he should turn me blood inter sawdust?"

"Quiet!"

Hamstinger concluded with a triumphant shriek to the effect of "You would remember me"—which was merely stating the obvious—and then, in response to non-existent encores, he played other old favourites—which would be even greater favourites if they were given Christian burial. And then he made his announcement that his company would play on one more occasion in this beautiful little town; that the show was refined and could not offend the most fastidious; that the wax works were full of highly moral teaching (he was looking at that moment directly at Deeming, Ned Kelly, and the uncomfortably reversed infant of the Judgment of Solomon waiting for the arbitrament of the sword). Finally, he said that the curtain would fall for a

moment, and rise on the concluding part of the entertainment. Then he bowed with tremendous importance, and the curtain fell on him falteringly and unevenly, as if the old man's hands were not sure of the weight.

It rose again with a rush, for Hamstinger was on it this time, and then they saw that another curtain had risen also; a curtain in the upper part of that draped frame which looked like a small bathing box.

The dry little cough came from within the frame; two marionettes danced and threatened upon the six-inch wide stage above; the cracked voice of the sick man began to play all the parts of the immortal drama of Pontius Pilate, or Punch and Judy, as you will.

While the general audience laughed and applauded, the Great Australian Dramatic Company in the front seats were silent. Even Birdie found pity for the hidden comedian—coughing in reality between his simulated chuckles, struggling for the elusive breath and battling bravely to the end.

Suddenly, when Punch, having killed Judy, is evading arrest by the murder of the policeman, they were conscious of a change in the invisible cast.

"That's the way to do it," the marionette should have squeaked; but it uttered the callous impudence as if it were saddest tragedy.

"That's the way—to do—to do it." Then the stricken brain felt that here had been an unforgivable liberty with the text, and attempted to return upon itself. "That's—that's the way——" The draped side of the booth was forced outward—there was no noise of a fall, but only as if something very frail had collapsed upon itself; only the rustling of falling clothes.

Hamstinger dropped the curtain in haste. Aladdin, followed by the Great Australian Dramatic Company, ran to the stage, and found there the venerable old man with blood upon his beard.



"Oh—the poor thing!" cried Birdie. "An' me chippin' him about his pants."

They hurried her and the other women off the stage, while Hamstinger dismissed the audience with an invitation to come to-morrow night and to the matinee in the afternoon, and Aladdin, seeing that here was no passing indisposition, ran to the grocer's shop and borrowed the grocer's cart, and, having laid the old man therein, drove him to the hospital.

"It's an unfortunate affair," said Hamstinger. "But no man can arrange his life. At one time I used to play a B flat clarinet in Charini's Circus; but an enemy, Mr. Bluffson, ruined my clarinet future by chewing lemons in front of me. He was a business rival, and chewed lemons till my lips were all puckered up and I couldn't tongue the reed. Now it struck me just now that, as we cannot play the drama of Punch and Judy to-morrow, the vaudeville will be represented only by the zylophone and corn-et. Now, instead of us playing opposition to one another to-morrow night, why not join forces, send the bellman out, and let your company provide the variety part of the entertainment?"

"Yes—sharing equally."

"You're on. I'll get the bellman out in the afternoon."

They rehearsed next morning—Birdie at her song and dance, Athene Pallas reciting Ostler Joe and playing in a scratch farce with Kemble and Trehwella Jordan, and Mildred Floyd and Saxby Leicester in a sketch of dull soliloquy and elephantine humor, with burnt-cork marks on their cheeks to give point to *A Kiss in the Dark*. Trehwella was also to read a sketch from Dickens.

It was noted later that Trehwella Jordan and Saxby Leicester had been deeply interested that afternoon in the figures of Sir Henry Parkes and Lord Beaconsfield.

In the monotony of their work and wandering from township to township, whereof all seemed built to the same plans and specifications, the change to variety from the drama excited them all as if it were the first night of a new play, though they pretended that they were suffering a loss of cast.

"Bit of a come-down," said Birdie, "'playin' in vodvil."

"Voderveel, my child," corrected Athene Pallas.

"It all depends whether your university was Oxford or Cambridge," replied Birdie, pertly. "I'll ask 'em all on the stage."

She did, and returned with many variants in pronunciation.

"Accordin' to all you voice-producers," said Birdie, "it's voydyvill, an' voadvil, an' you say vodyveel, an' Hamstinger calls it vaudville. I say vodvil, an' I think it's vodvil. It's as good as any other, an' they can't prove it against a girl, anyway."

"It's a great house," said Hamstinger to Aladdin. "Fourteen pounds six. Your people are doing all right. They dress their sketches well, too."

Aladdin agreed, and laughed, with all the joke to himself. Trewhella Jordan, in a very new evening suit, had read *The Death of Little Nell*—a rather amusing item, considering his inability to pronounce m's and n's; and at the moment Saxby Leicester came on the stage. He wore a fine new frock coat, his boots were highly varnished; what though his trousers were at half-mast by reason of having been made for shorter legs than his, he was magnificent.

Aladdin, sitting with Hamstinger, rather liked the nonchalant character Saxby gave his part, and Hamstinger was openly enthusiastic, and hinted at a permanent amalgamation of forces.

Saxby, persistently debonair, crossed his left leg over his right knee, and exposed the sole of his varnished boot.



Hamstinger looked, and looked again, and, as the horrible truth came to him, he clutched Aladdin's arm, and uttered a cry of pain.

"What's the matter?" asked Aladdin.

"Look at his boots."

"Well, I'm looking."

"There's a little square hole in the middle of the heels."

"Yes."

"That's where the rod goes through to hold the figure upright on the floor."

"He's taken the boots off the figure? What a lark!"

"Lark! Lark! Taking my wardrobe! I b'leeve they've got more, I'll see."

He left Aladdin, who did not see him again until the audience had gone home. Then Aladdin found him in the hall, ready with seven pounds three shillings as the share of the Great Australian Dramatic Company, and full of cold fury at that company's conduct in the matter of wardrobe. He sat among his figures—stripping them and packing them for removal to the next town—wardrobe in a trunk on the left of him, wax heads in a great box to the right, uprights and body frames in front to await their crates.

"Seven pounds three, Mr. Bluffson," he said. "There it is. You're a gentleman, but I want nothing more to do with actors like those two fellows. Yes—I've got the wardrobe again—but imagine my feelings. Thinking all was right with the show, and after I find out about the boots, I search for Sir Henry Parkes and Lord Beaconsfield. Where do I find them, sir? Under the stage, Mr. Bluffson—even their shirts taken off—those two great statesmen, sir, stark naked."

He stopped for a moment to look at the busts nearest to his hand—the wax imitations of Robespierre, Mary Queen o' Scots, Deeming, President

Garfield, and Ned Kelly, and resumed his speech and his packing.

"I know what ingratitude is, Mr. Bluffson. I know it as well as these figures here. I have known trouble, like all of them," he indicated the martyrs and the murderers, and the queen who was more murderer than martyr, and sighed resignedly, as one of whom all the bitterness of death is past. "They understand me, and I understand them—because both myself and them have been up against it, all of us victims of treachery and ingratitude."

So Aladdin left him with his sympathisers, and as his departure next day was to be early, he departed from wax and went to the hospital to see clay. The personality of the old gentleman—whose past or family none knew of, not even Hamstinger, but who had known better days—was now represented by a mere shell of a man fluttered by despairing breath. He would never buffoon again; never cover up the slaying of Judy with the murder of a policeman. He lay there quiet and content, glad to be in hospital and die in clean cool sheets.

"That's the way to do it," said Aladdin, and laughed as if he were afraid he would cry.

"Ah, do!" cooed Mildred Floyd. "Without you we are lost."

"Cub along with us, my boy," urged Trehwella Jordan. "We are id for a glorious tibe—cub! lead us to bake both fabe and dabe!"

"Fame and name in these E flat towns! John the Baptist played to fifteen bob because he stuck to the wilderness. It's wrong—but——"

All the carelessness and hopefulness of Aladdin came back renewed, at this confession of weakness and dependance uttered with all the solemnity of a man who was born portentous—portentous even when asking for another egg at breakfast, and most portentous when most futile.



## CHAPTER VII.

### HALF THE FLUFFY SISTERS.

Out of a garment cometh moths, and from a woman wickedness.

Bad luck did not pursue them; it went with them, keeping step for step, linking fingers with them as if they were all children in the dark. Aladdin tried to leave it all and couldn't; towns behind them closed automatically and they were forced on.

"I'm like a man with a live wire," said Aladdin. "I can't let go."

Then for two nights they had fair houses, and bad luck came again. Only three little towns ahead was the end of the railway; westward there were only sheep and unfenced runs, and few men and little water, and the Northern Territory; northward the rivers of York Peninsula and the crocodiles thereof; south-westerly two mining towns, and from the second of them a narrow-gauge railway to the Gulf. Aladdin decided to leave the railway and take the desperate step of long coach journeys to back-country towns, where never a dramatic company had been to make fastidious the taste for drama.

The despairing townships of Arawatta and Walroonga furnished a second travelling creditor, who went with the company to collect moneys for hall rent and transport. Drinkwater greatly disliked this second creditor—one Egg—a short, dark, thin man, with a black and red beard—for though Drinkwater was complaisant of the long delays in payment, he resented any appearance of a new encumbrance on his vested interests.

"It's all right," said Aladdin, soothingly. "He has

## HALF THE FLUFFY SISTERS.

only a second mortgage, and he can't touch any till you're fixed up."

"Well, tell 'im so, Mr. B'dulfson. 'E says yestic 'e says, 'the 'ole show's mine,' an'—an'—'e's got to hide ter talk to Mordie Fluffy."

"I'll warn him off the property," Aladdin promised him. "I'll tell him you're the owner, and warn him off."

The which having been done, Aladdin found that all Drinkwater's hatred and jealousy were aimed at Egg, and that Egg returned both with interest.

They were but one town off the end of the line when Drinkwater complained of the new trouble. "Hi get a girl," he said; "a girl what's nearly lovin' me, an' hup comes this 'ere new damfeller with whiskers like the hace o' spades, an' crools me."

"You mustn't bother me about it, Drinkwater. I've told him."

"I know—an' now 'e's worst. Ho! Hi'm mud alright. 'E's made me miserbul. Hi got the 'ump, Hi 'ave."

"Well, get a job as understudy to a camel."

"I struck 'ard-'arted blokes in me time," said Drinkwater; "but you—oh! spare me days!—well."

"It isn't enough that I'm bothered with high finance," said Aladdin to the three actors, "but now they trouble me with their love affairs. The next one to go under to old Cupid will be Trewhella, I suppose."

"Do! by boy," replied the morose actor. "Dever!"

"All along the road the crows sing to me, 'Broke! Broke! Broke!' and this fellow Drinkwater sits before me half the day and makes gluggy noises like a baby trying to cut teeth and spoiling a bib over it. He's the dampest man I ever met is Drinkwater. You're not going to complicate matters with love, are you, Leicester?"

"My deah chap," replied the juvenile, flushing, "myself and Miss Floyd understand each other—she understands me more than any other lady I ever met."



## ALADDIN AND THE BOSS COCKIE

"She ought to understand you, she's old enough to  
your mother."

"Nonsense! Our positions remove any discrepancy  
of age. The leading man is always supposed to be in  
love with the leading lady. I am not, but I give her  
those attentions which are my duty."

"All right, old chap, but no complications like  
Drinkwater's and Egg's. You and Kemble here as  
deadly rivals would be no joke."

"My boy! My boy!" protested Kemble. "Softly!  
Here are the ladies."

Mildred Floyd and Athene Pallas came to ask the  
name of the next town, and Aladdin replied that there  
might not be any next town; he waited a letter from  
Montgomery, the advance agent, and "after that," he  
said, "we must find a miracle—ordinary transport  
won't do."

"Is it the end?" asked the leading lady. "The end  
at last?"

"It depends on to-night. If it's no good I'll have to  
go into an orphanage or the lost dogs' home."

Miss Pallas smiled, and said that surely he could  
qualify for neither.

"Yes," replied Aladdin; "I am fatherless, mother-  
less, brotherless, penniless. I'm even auntless. I'm  
Aladdin, the orphan boy."

"Stay, lady, stay, for mercy's sake, and hear a  
helpless orphan's tale," quoted Kemble. "No, my  
lad, you're not friendless."

"I'm not. I've got seven good friends, two mad-  
men, and an advance agent, and how I'm to feed them  
all I don't know."

"A big house to-dight," said Trewhella, gloomily  
optimistic. "I dever dew East Lydd to fail."

He had the experience that night—East Lynne did  
fail, and left them without a new town to go to—at  
least without advice from Wilfred Montgomery. And  
while they waited came the tragedy.

For a day the energetic Aladdin fretted at inaction.  
All the distraction possible was the watching of a

rooster in the main street of the township—a rooster with legs so short that he seemed to be of the breed of dachshunds, and a dog whose tail was shorter than the rooster's legs—so short that Aladdin speculated for a few minutes as to whether the tail had been pulled out or pushed in.

But after that five minutes he hustled the company to a rush rehearsal of the drama of "Millions of Money," and ran about the township forcing patronage from the chairman of the Roads Board and the members thereof. Late in the afternoon, as hope came back to him, the new trouble developed itself. It was Drinkwater, of course, and the new creditor, Egg, now banded against a common enemy—Drinkwater, loud and open-mouthed; and the man with the whiskers like the ace of spades, quieter of demeanour, but in deadly earnest.

"Mister B'dulfson," shouted Drinkwater. "Mister B'dulfson! You're the manager—we want yer—tell yer what she did."

"Sing it quietly," said Aladdin, impatiently. "You're used to the Anvil chorus—what is it?"

"One of the Fluffy Sisters—we think it's Maude—gorn an' sneaked orf an 'got married to the schoolmaster."

"Good girl. She's sure of her board and education anyhow. But she's quick off the mark."

"Met 'im night before last—sneaked orf an' got married."

"The dam schoolmaster got married, too," said Egg, coldly ferocious.

"Naturally—but even if he's married he mightn't be reconciled to it. Hope on."

"Wot har you goin' to do habout it?" demanded Drinkwater.

"I? Nothing. The girl's her own."

"You're the manager! Can't yer stop it?"

"Oh! go and hoorah for yourself. The girl's married and you're dead—loud cheers."



"Tell y' what," said the man with the ace of spades beard, "I'll fight that schoolmaster—anyway he likes—axes or crosscut saws. Marquis o' Slaughter-house-berry rules—gongin' not barred." He added with terrible meaning, so overdone that it was comic, "First eye out for a quid—that's if it's Maudie. If it's Birdie, he'll get my blessin'."

Breathing vengeance on the schoolmaster should the bride be Maudie, they left him, and Aladdin sought Irving Kemble.

"I know the trouble. Half of the Fluffy Sisters has married the schoolmaster," said Kemble, with real tears in his eyes. "Thus does life rob us of our fairest flowers."

"Fairest flowers nothing," replied Aladdin, joyfully. "We save a fare, and the show can't be worse than it was. Which half was it?"

"Maudie."

"That's fine. Birdie was two-thirds of the show, anyway, so there's only 30 per cent. discount to it."

"But who will sing the other part of 'I love to take a ramble in the jewy month of June'?"

"Let Birdie sing it as a duet."

"A duet! alone?"

"Yes, it's a novelty. You don't know how gay I feel. One less fare and one less to feed."

The schoolmaster's bride was Maudie. She brought her new husband to the show that night, and made him take four front seat tickets, and when she said "Thank you!" to Egg for showing her to the front seats, the black-bearded man gnashed his teeth. Also she laughed openly at Drinkwater when he was on as the gambling-house keeper, and Drinkwater choked and forgot his lines.

"I don't like her leaving her sister," said Egg. "I could forgive everything but leavin' her little sister."

"Birdie ain't 'er sister," replied Drinkwater. "Only perfeshional sisters, on' Birdie 'ates her."

The morning brought a letter from the advance agent; he was billing a town 150 miles away by coach; Eclipse Corner was halfway, a little hamlet and only three houses, and not worth playing at. His letter instructed Aladdin of the route, the date of the first performance of the three nights' season, and the hotels he had billeted them for; the only omitted information was as to the money for the coach fares. And the last two nights left them only sufficient for fares to the railhead and a very few pounds over.

"We can't go back," said Aladdin. "It's forward."

The Fluffy Sisters parted after recriminations, threatened assaults, and tears—in the matter of certain bedraggled and disputed finery which they called wardrobe. Maudie said good-bye to them coolly enough, and so went back to the schoolmaster's house and out of the story; and the Birdie half of the Fluffy Sisters remarked that Maudie never had any style, and was a perfect stranger, anyhow, and all the women spoke of her as having left "the profession" as if Maudie were now completely dead.

"Married like a lady," sneered Birdie. "A swell weddin', I don't think. She only had a quarterer dozen of everythink. Stole me pink tights, too; three-quarter silk, they were, an' not a ladder in 'em."

The little narrow gauge train had drawn into the station when Aladdin missed Egg and Drinkwater.

"Where are they?" he asked of Trehwella Jordan, whose vinous eyes showed that he had met the happy schoolmaster and wished him joy.

"They're dot cubbig. They're sick of the show dow that Bordie's barried, and they're waiting here to get revedg od the schoolbaster. But he's by fred—a clever had, the schoolbaster, ad a good husbad to Bordie."

"Why! we're in luck," said Aladdin, joyfully. "Get aboard, I'll get the tickets—here's two fares saved."

"How?" asked Mildred Floyd.





Percy Lindsay

“Lemme go! you goat of a porter!”

"Our pretty little creditors are lost. What shall we do without them?"

"Bethigks you wadded to lose theb."

"There were fares for only so many, and in time of wreck excess baggage goes overboard. But now they've jettisoned themselves; so, bless the luck."

He danced to the booking office and back to the train with the tickets. The porter punched the tickets and locked them in; the engine whistled, and the train drew out.

As it left the station, Drinkwater and Egg, red and incoherent from their wassailing, rushed to the platform and were held back from death by the porter and the stationmaster. The Royal Australian Dramatic Company had become a habit to Drinkwater, and Egg, having lost his love, could not brook the loss of his security.

Drinkwater wept aloud, but the man with the whiskers like unto the ace of spades, was lunatic with anger. They heard his crude insults shouted after the train.

"Lemme go! Actors! lugbiters! crooks! guns! whisperers! tale-tellers!—Lemme go! You goat of a porter! They owe me a tenner! Beer chewers! actors! guns! writin' tips all over the place for the Melbourne Cup two days after the Oaks. Don't screw me arm. You give me the frogs' march! Lemme get 'em! Actors! lugbiters! crooks!—"

And then the train left his voice behind.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### STRANDED.

Do well, or do ill, or do something  
Rather than rust or rot;  
Sickness comes not to the busy,  
Nor flies to a boiling pot.

—The Maxims of Billy Pagan.

“OUTWARD bound for Emuford, Bauhinia, and Mylmeridien,” said Aladdin, “and the Lord knows how far we’ll make.”

“You’ll pull through all right,” said Kemble.  
“Don’t lose confidence.”

“I can’t! I’m a confidence man. But I think the game’s up.”

“But think of what you’ve done. Remember Mitchell’s Crossing. Could anyone else have borrowed railway fares for the whole company from a perfect stranger and carried him along with us to collect his money at the next town?”

“At the next town we were lucky enough to draw the money. It might not be so always.”

“My dear boy, with your genius we must win.”

At Emuford it seemed as if they must win. He secured places on the mail coach—to be paid for at destination—and hurried them to the coach in the early hours of a rainy morning. That rainy morning gave him further anxiety. It was not ordinary rain, but the beginning of the rainy season—hot and steaming Summer, with rain in sheets and douches for six weeks to come; heavy, tropical, interminable rains; cyclones, thunder, lightning, and deluge. Yet

he ran them into the coach cheerfully and briskly enough.

"Now, you Roscians, the rain it raineth every day, and the road won't be long open. It's nearly daylight; so get aboard the coach and sing *Nunc Dimittis*."

"You're a wonderful man," sighed the dyed leading lady as the manager stood by the coach talking to the inside passengers—the sigh a woman uses when she is most hopeful. "Won't you come inside?"

"I like the scenery," said Aladdin, lying with native ease and precision, for there was no scenery but mist and steam, and steely clouds falling in rain; and he was beginning to be afraid of the leading lady. In the beginning she had appropriated him to carry parcels after the manner of leading ladies; on the second day she had called him Brisbane, and on the third "dear." She also tried to look blushfully self-conscious when Aladdin was mentioned, and she told designing girls of the towns that she and the handsome, debonair "financier" were to be married as "soon as he could build a metropolitan theatre." Aladdin, hearing this variant of the Greek Kalends, laughed and permitted the story to grow.

"Scenery for me," he said again, as she pressed him to remain. "The gipsy's life. You're all snug here, so let's begone before the Resident Travelling Creditor catches us and presents me with the D.S.O. for money fakirs."

"Stand up, Mud Island," said the driver as Aladdin mounted to the box seat, and the earth-caked horses dragged the coach over the strips of metallated road that preceded the hundred miles of mud.

"Safe at last," said Irving Kemble, dramatically, and at that moment the brakes squealed and the mud-crusteds horses stopped unanimously.



"I didn't touch wood," said Aladdin to himself, seeing dimly in the dawn that the man whose signal had stopped the coach was the clerk of the absent coach proprietor. Aladdin, his fair boyish face showing none of the anxiety he felt, alighted for the double purpose of meeting trouble without delay, and to keep any monetary objections secret from the driver that he might, not prove a bad advance agent in the next town.

The coaching clerk was civil enough. Aladdin took him aside to learn that which he already knew by anticipation. The clerk had thought again of his own complaisance in accepting a promise to pay at the end of the journey; in the absence of the proprietor he must hold the coach. The proprietor would return that morning. Meantime cash, or not a wheel should turn.

The inside passengers saw their Providence talking earnestly and with many gesticulations to the clerk in the everlasting rain; saw the rain gleaming on the pink cheek of the entrepreneur-by-compulsion, and the innocent blue eyes of Aladdin hold the suspicious gaze of the clerk until it wavered and broke. Then the clerk nodded in resignation, and the Royal Australian Dramatic Company knew that all was well.

Aladdin returned to the coach. "You all go on," he said; "I'll follow later."

"But, by boy," began Trehwella Jordan, his chronic cold made acute by the climate.

"We'll be lost without you, dear old chap," said Saxby Leicester, the juvenile from the leading London theatres.

"Who's to stand 'em off when they 'awsk for money?" demanded the Birdie-half of the Fluffy Sisters.

"Don't leave me," wailed the leading lady, and the heavy woman said that all she asked was that they should die together.

"Silence!" said Irving Kemble. "Let the master speak."

"The master's only this to say," said Aladdin. "You must do as I decide or quit. Haven't we got that blighter, the permanent creditor, on the track? If all you people are safely away before he catches up he can't hurt me worth a peanut. I'll drive on after you, but I must wait for this coach proprietor."

"But——"

"But nothing. I'm in pawn; but I'll get out as soon as I can talk with this coach merchant. How much money have you, Kemble? You're the treasurer till I meet you again."

"My boy, I have three thousand pounds in notes."

"Not stage notes—how much in real money?"

"A real one pound note and seventeen shillings in silver."

"Hang on to that real pound note as if it were your little baby. It may save all our lives. I have two pounds five. Give me a million or two of that stage money."

The portentous man handed over a thick roll of dramatic money, and disregarding the women's little gurgles and cries of fear in being abandoned by the Providence, Aladdin shook hands with them all; the tragedian, as being promoted to the command of the army, mounted to the box seat, and wrapped his martial cloak around him, and the coach rattled off the metalled road and rolled through the mud.

"I wonder whether I'm right," said the clerk as they walked back to the Royal Hotel.

"You're more than right," replied Aladdin. "Your stable will earn a pound or so more, because I'll have to hire a saddle-horse to follow them."

His hand closed on the notes in his pocket; he was at rest again, serene in the chances of his victory over the coach proprietor and his own escape into the mud before the last of the permanent creditors could overhaul him.



"You're in a hurry, alright," said the clerk.

"Can't lose dates," said Aladdin, airily. "Booked for a long season at Melbourne and Sydney theatres—a missed week is a lot of money."

He lied glibly though never deceiving himself. "If time is money," he said to himself, "I can pay forty shillings in the pound."

He felt that the end justified the means. "I'm sorry," says Napoleon, "to kill men and injure non-combatants, but I must win this battle."

"I'm sorry," said Aladdin to himself, "but the Royal Australian Dramatic Company must play East Lynne somewhere in Mudville even if I lose the Permanent Creditor and owe for a coach."

He waited for the early train to bring the coach-owner, and waited with a light heart.

## CHAPTER IX.

### BETWEEN FLOODS.

A stomach that's good and an evil heart  
Are the weapons to win the bout,  
To help you pluck the public goose  
And never make it cry out.  
—The Maxims of Billy Pagan.

DOWN by Eclipse Corner there had been the smell of the rain on the broken earth, but that was a fortnight past. The monsoon had come in his immutable season, but the rain had been driven further south than usual, and the possibility of drought had changed to the certainty of flood.

The creeks were running bankers; the basaltic soil a black glue-pot, the chocolate plains sticking closer than a brother. The earth had been iron and was now mush—springing into bloom of poison peach and rosella and lilac and amaranth wherever the water retreated and left it consistent. Spear-grass growing in the steamy air so quickly that the eye might almost measure it, life breaking everywhere in ant hill and spider web and air, beetle, grasshopper, butterfly and bird; life and beauty come to earth again, and growing with marvellous quickness in that Turkish bath which is North Australia in the wet Summer—and with the beauty the new green-world was dirtied and blackened by flies and those humorous and painful insects which have red-hot tails and sting from the moment that they sit down.

The big coach swaying on its leathern thorough braces at the tails of the eight big weary horses



progressed at the pace of a bullock waggon over the black soil which held like glue, so that the wheel spokes disappeared and the wheels appeared to be made of earth.

The coach-driver, Tom Tuft, a red man, who had been made a black man by the soil thrown up by horses' hoofs and the slowly revolving wheels, struck the toiling pole horses and insulted the off-sider by calling him Mud Island. He then remarked to Irving Kemble that each of the horses walked not on four feet, but on four portmanteaux, by reason of their accumulation of viscous mud.

All the morning he drove the coach through the black sludge; listening to the dignified bragging of Irving Kemble and occasionally putting in a statement succinct but illuminating.

Within the coach Trewhella Jordan and Athene Pallas, the placidly gloomy, heavy woman, rehearsed their great scene, and Saxby Leicester rehearsed his great scene with the leading lady, who, while agreeing that it was a great scene, held that the greatness thereof was all her own; meantime Birdie, the dejected and remaining half of the Fluffy Sisters, read the several little parts she doubled and trebled so that they might play Uncle Tom's Cabin and The Colleen Bawn with six people, and incidentally leave Birdie in a whirl of confusion as to her identity in the play.

While the coach slipped slowly over the face of the rain-soddened earth the "reading" proceeded with interruptions.

Birdie's silly, pretty little face broke into smiles as she mimicked Trewhella Jordan; she shook her fluffy hair and laughed shrilly, so that the superior Saxby Leicester winced at the sound.

"Don'd ibitate be, by gal," complained Trewhella, "I'm a Shagesperiad agdor, I ab; dod't dry to ibitate be. You cad't ibitate be—dobody cad."

"Keep that confounded gamp of yours quiet,

Birdie," said Saxby Leicester. "You're poking the mud off that bally wheel all over me."

"What's there to do except poke the mud off the wheel? Oh, I'm sick of me life, I am."

"You must cultivate placidity, repose," said Athene Pallas.

"Oh, give repose to the silver-fish. I want repose before a fire an' the baby asleep, an' a nice 'usband comin' 'ome an' readin' murders to me outer the paper. Maudie's all right—she's got her schoolmaster an' she pinched me pink tights, an' she'll play twice a year with amachures an' 'ere am I slippin' all over Australia in the mud with a lot of crooks that don't pay their way. Oh! I'm sick! sick sick! I 'avèn't got a home. Oh! oh! oh!"

The two other sorely tried women forgot resentment and ministered to her hysteria; the leading juvenile from the principal London theatres looked out from under the looped curtains, and Trewhella Jordan, murmuring that there was "more raid id-side thad outside," became ashamed and silent.

The leading lady began to sob and collapsed on Saxby Leicester, and at last Athene Pallas gave way, and she and the remaining half of the Fluffy Sisters wept in company, and swore eternal friendship, pledging each other in tears.

The two actors, used to dependence on someone, to fix what they should eat, or say who they should be, and where they should go, were utterly helpless in this unprecedented happening of naturalness. Saxby Leicester gnawed the crook of his walking cane, and Trewhella Jordan, his heavy fat face wrinkled in indecision, leaned from the coach window and called to the treasurer pro tem.

Irving Kemble, seated on the box with Tom Tuft, wrapped his martial cloak around him, and acted to himself for three miles through the wet aisles of bush. This old, rather heavy featured actor, was still a child in kindness, simplicity and hope,



and acted to himself always, so that make-believe had become natural. First he was Sir John Woolfe, with his martial cloak and all the other properties, and then he put his hand inside his overcoat and felt the bundle which was the wealth of melodrama, and one pound in real money, and the action made him feel like Napoleon. That was it! Austerlitz was won and forgotten, and he was in charge of an army of five retreating from Moscow—may be advancing on Waterloo. The Napoleon of the bush—until Napoleon Biddulfsen should reappear, the Napoleon who was also Aladdin, rubbing people as if they were the magic lamp, and finding money where no money had been before. That made him think of Biddulfsen heroically, securing retreat for them all, and forming the rear guard; and at that Irving Kemble, who was genuinely fond of Biddulfsen, forgot to act and awoke to hear Tom Tuft talking of the man who had stayed behind.

"He's a smart bloke, your boss," said Tom Tuft. "Got an eye on him, he has. I always look at a eye—man or 'orse—eyes that's proud and kind, too, always gets me. Now, you've got a glassy eye," he continued with great frankness. "As shiny like a glass marble in a soda water bottle, but he looks at yer 'sif he'd like yer ter like him, but didn't give a penn'-orth o' feathers whether y' did or not."

"He's a very admirable man," replied Irving Kemble, beginning to act again, and speaking his lines without regard to truth. "He is a man made for Napoleonic success in the theatrical world. What is it that keeps him from owning a dozen theatres?"

"Hasn't got the money, I s'pose," said Tom Tuft.

"Money? Certainly not!" said Kemble, with quick disdain. "Money! Bah! What keeps him from owning all the theatres in Australia is jealousy, sir, jealousy."

"Buy 'em out," said Tom Tuft, stating the obvious so conclusively that Irving found no answer ready in his long and impudent experience. He continued, however, in his praises of the absent party, partly because he was fond of Biddulfson, but principally because, in such a case as his, one is for all, and all must be for one—and he pumped his information into Tom Tuft so that Tom Tuft might prove a good advance agent, and an advertising medium without money and without price.

"What do you do at the play actin'?" asked Tom Tuft. "Clog dancin'?"

The insulted tragedian choked and looked at the driver, but seeing in Tom Tuft's face no intention to offend, he said: "No, I play heroic parts—Julius Cæsar, Henry the Fifth—armor parts."

"Ever in a battle yerself?"

"Yes, but we died hard."

"Died?"

"It was the only time I ever knêw East Lynne to fail—it was terrible! We had just had a successful season in Wantabadgery, too—we turned money away. And after that to fail in Porepunkah."

The desire for a friendly talk with a man who had no suspicions so possessed him that he was completely off his guard, and said in a burst of confidence: "It took us a week to walk back."

"Eh?—all the horses dead?"

"Yes—but also a technical term—meaning to—ah—retrieve our losses."

"I see—there's the change."

"Where? Where?" demanded the tragedian excitedly, as if he thought that Tuft had seen money by the roadside, and Tuft said, "There—the coach change," pointing ahead where a pale blue creek rushed between grass trees and pandanus and zamias over granite sand, and by the creek a hut and a horse-yard.

It was at that moment that Trewhella Jordan cried from the depths for succor.



"The girls have fainted," he cried. "Cub dowl."  
 "I cannot alight at this moment," responded the dignified one. "They must wait; we have arrived at the coach change."

"But I tell you they've fainted."

"Give them some cold water."

"Thad's whad bade theb fainted—they've had too buch."

The coachman stopped at the change, and a half-drowned man came from the hut. Kemble, rising on the box heard the sound of horse-hoofs, squeelching through the mud, and there was Aladdin, his horse and himself spattered with mud from head to foot. Aladdin's pipe was drawing well, and he smiled as he pulled up his horse, and emitted a little cloud of tobacco smoke.

"He's done it," said Kemble, with that hero worship small boys give to bushrangers. "God bless him! He's done it."

The women heard his voice, and hope returned to banish hysteria. He marshalled them as if he had been their mother, led them into the hut and seated them by the wide chimney, to be cheered by the sight of the fire, despite the monsoonal heat, and he put the leading juvenile to the making of tea, and so was available for the cross-questioning of Irving Kemble.

"You did it?"

"Yes."

"How? What plans did you make?"

"None—till I had met the man—and then I saw he was a good fellow—a kindly chap—so I told him the truth, and promised I'd get him the money from Sydney."

"Good Heavens! What a frightful risk to tell him the truth! What did he say?"

"Said he liked my face, and he'd trust me."

So saying Aladdin looked Kemble squarely in the eye, and Kemble felt ashamed of the thought that any man could distrust the owner of the glance.

"The coach-driver said you had a good eye, my dear lad—he said you looked squarely at everybody."

"I know," said Aladdin, with a touch of bitterness against himself. "'The Village Blacksmith' eye does it: 'he looks the whole world in the face and owes to every man.' And when I meet good people I'd sell myself for a peanut."

"And he gave you the saddle-horse, too?"

"No, I paid for that. I leave this one here and take the coach to the next stage for a relay, and I'm down to one pound two shillings."

"But, my boy," protested the perennially hopeful one, "how could prospects be brighter? The permanent creditors lost, and this man trusting you for the coach. Luck must change."

"If it doesn't we'll be drowned. The permanent creditor was enquiring for horses when I left Emu-ford."

"But we've got a good start on the—the—ruffian."

"No! I called in at a telephone station five miles back—there's floods ahead."

"A matter of a day."

"Or weeks. If we don't reach the other railway line we'll have to turn back—without a penny."

"And everything but two pounds lost."

"Lost forever, like the sound of a great Amen. Say nothing to the others—the women are weepy and those two fiery and untamed actors are just children. Don't worry—I'll get you through, and after that stand my trial and be convicted. There's the coach. I'll travel with the driver and get the run of things. What's his name?"

"Tom Tuft—I've given him a lot of information about you, my dear boy."

"I'll return the favor. My imagination's in good working order. No lie will be too terrible. I'll tell him you're an actor."

"My deah boy—"



"All aboard," cried Tom Tuft, and the coach swayed on again through the viscous mud.

"Great ole skiter, that actor o' yours, sir," said Tuft to Aladdin. He had addressed Irving Kemble as "mate."

"He is a very fine old actor," replied Aladdin, and his calm gaze somehow made the coach-driver feel rebuked. He proceeded with more respect.

"Has he been long on the stage?"

"Long on the stage! He was playing East Lynne in the small towns of the Red Sea when Pharaoh butted in with a circus. Now, where's that corkscrew?"

"Do you always carry a corkscrew, Mr. — Bluffson?"

"Not Bluffson—Biddulfson. I would no more think of forgetting my corkscrew than my hymn-book. And if you've got a bottle when you meet a stranger, a corkscrew is the best letter of introduction. And here it is. Pop! Shall we be introduced?"

"Not for me. Can't stand beer. I got roomatics. Y' haven't got any whisky?"

"No, I never carry fire water."

"Just's well y'avent got none. It's ruined many a man, it has. There was a mate o' mine always goin' to give it up an' in the long run it give him up. It's a curse, is whisky, and I wish to goodness gracious I 'ad a quart of it now. . . . Somebody's signallin' you."

Aladdin turned and saw the face of Trehwella Jordan protruding from the canvas curtains of the inside, a face that was rapidly disappearing under the assaults of the wheel splashes.

"What is it?" demanded the Napoleon of the Bush, taking the bottle from his lips.

"Give be sub beer."

"Not on your life. How am I to get you through all this if I don't keep up my strength."

The mud-splashed face of the heavy man dis-

appeared with a groan, and Tuft said, "Y' don't give him nothin'."

"Only the swift answer that turneth away froth. If I pampered him with beer he'd strike me for a rise in salary, and I get him cheap now—only twenty-five pounds a week. Pampering actors makes them fat and saucy, and he's too much that way already."

"He's got a bad cold, that chap."

"He's had it for years, it's natural to him. He used to play the double bass euphonium before he was an actor. A fine big roomy instrument it is, and when he was thrown out of a boarding-house he used to sleep in it. That's how he caught cold."

Tom Tuft grinned. "You're a quick-tongued chap, anyway, Mister," he said. "Your wife must have a fine time—always laughin'."

"I'm not married," said Aladdin, quickly.

"Beg y'r pardon—I heard the old lady inside call y' dear, an' I thought she'd got her brands on you."

"No fear," replied Aladdin, his steadfastly innocent gaze changing to an expression of trouble. "I'm only the manager."

"Good enough," said Tuft. "I thought at first there's another poor chap leg-roped."

"Are you married?"

"Wuss luck, yes. Last time I seen her y' could have fried eggs on what she said to me. I 'adn't seen her for four muncie, the time I come back from the Gulf, and I was a hundred pound strong. She could sing, too. She'd eat a pound o' blade-bone steak for breakfus', an' she could sing the hide off Madam Fatti. Oh, my word, yes!"

"And you came back with a hundred?" asked Aladdin, trying not to appear eager.

"Yes. Thirty pound in a draft an' twenty in notes, an' I had fifty sovereigns in me belt. She got it all."

"Oh, well! I see!" said Aladdin, trying to keep his appearance of interest.



"Y' know what women are, always harpin'. 'Come 'ome, me darlin', I might never see y' agen,' an' about twenty blessed crisscrosses for kiss-me-quicks. Well, I goes 'ome. She met me on the boat, and I'd been thinkin' an' thinkin' about 'er until I thought her a queen to what she was."

"Oh, for the touch of a banished hand and the sound of a voice that was thrill," misquoted Aladdin, shamelessly.

"That's poetry all right, mister—that actor of yours was spoutin' it this mornin' on the box."

"Kemble? He's got a poetical license," said Aladdin, the disappointment of the hundred pounds quite forgotten.

"License for what?"

"I don't know. So he can get a drink on Sundays. I suppose."

"I see. Fust thing she says to me was, 'How much yer got?' 'Two ton o' love,' I ses. 'Oh, that,' ses she—not that, stupid. How much money?' 'Twenty notes,' I ses, a bit took back, an' gives it to her. Nex' mornin' she got the fifty outer me belt, an' gives me five bob, an' tells me to go an' enjoy meself for the day. Money grubber, that was it. So by an' bye I felt she was a yeller spider always watchin' me, an' me a little spinnifex fly, so I give her all I had an' come away. An' rather'n go back again I'd take a job blowin' up balloons at tuppens a ton. Straight wire, mister, believe me or don't, just's y' like. . . . H'lo, there's a bloke waitin' by the road. He's got noos."

He had, and the great entrepreneur felt as down-hearted as if he were in an elevator run by an amateur.

"I don't think you'll get through to Bauhinia—all the rivers were up yesterday, but you're safe through to Eclipse Corner."

"Where's that?" asked Aladdin.

"Seven miles worse than half way," replied Tuft.

"Fifty-three mile from the railway."

"Any township there?"

"No—on 'y ole Gronthead's—the Boss Cockie, they call him. He's got about twenty thousand acres good grazin' land, an' a mob o' cattle."

"But nowhere to stop at?"

"He's got a pub too—wayside license—an' there's a store an' a butcher's shop. There's a lot o' cockies around there and about a hundred men gettin' stream tin. Bill," he said, "you telephone ole Gronthead's place there's six people on the coach."

Mildred Floyd, who had heard the conversation, put her face, now very streaky as to make up, from the coach, and demanded that they should return at once to the railway, and Aladdin silenced her with a look.

Behind them were the permanent creditor, the kindly coach proprietor, who had backed him with belief, and all the battlefields where lay their dead and wounded creditors; and, sharpest spur of all, the shame of turning back after putting hand to plough.

"You can't turn back!" he said to Tuft with trepidation.

"Not me!" said Tuft. "I'm no coach-driver, now, only relievin' a mate o' mine, an' I carry the mails. She's got to go thro' until the water takes the mail bag."

"Good man," said Aladdin, much relieved, as the steaming messenger disappeared in the scrub towards the telephone station, and the mud-soiled wheels revolved again.

"I told him to telephone Eclipse Corner," said Tom Tuft, "an' when y' get there they'll be ready to welcome y'."

Aladdin hoped so—hoped it fervently—but he uttered one word, "Thanks."

At the next stage the entrepreneur gave his final instructions to Irving Kemble.

"I ride in," he said, "half an hour or so after you get there. If we're not held up by floods



there'll be no necessity for all this; but there may be. So miss nothing. Now, what are you to do?"

"My dear boy. Trust to me."

"Repeat, then."

"But I'm letter perfect. I know it backwards."

"I want you to know it the other way. Repeat."

"I go there—I enter—the company is around me. I am centre, I introduce them. I explain that the manager——"

"You don't say 'manager,' you say 'proprietor.'"

The proud tragedian baulked slightly at the word, but he said it. "My proprietor—rode through—preferring the action of a horse to the confinement of a coach slowly moving over the, ah, face of the waters. I ask for rooms—I am very particular about the best room for my, ah, employer. I relate that the flood will probably lose us thousands of pounds, if we are unable to keep our dates at, ah, theatres in Sydney and Melbourne. I say that we are terribly anxious to get through to the railway and that the delay is heart-breaking. I say that the ladies are very tired, and I pack them off to their rooms, so that they cannot get hysterical in public, and talk as the remaining half of the Fluffy Sisters did this morning. Then I wait your arrival, organise a welcome, work up the scene, and lead the cheers when you arrive."

"That's right."

"Do I burst into tears and seize your hand, sobbing, 'My dear governor, we were fearful you had been drowned'?"

"No—nothing of the sort. Overdo this thing and we're ruined. These people are not stupid—they're hard-headed enough and Tom Tuft is as sharp as he is kind. If he had a suspicion that I hadn't paid before I left this morning we'd be gone to the woods. And I believe the coach-owner has 'phoned ahead for me to pay Tuft the money. Now, mind, Trewhella Jordan is not to have a drink."

"Not one?"

"Not one."

"I obey, Aladdin. I am the slave of the ring.  
Do I—er, have a drink?"

"Yes, one; and the ladies one each."

"Saxby Leicester?"

"None—he would share it with Jordan."

"Poor old Jordan—it's terrible."

"It would be ruin to us. Beer to him is like blood  
to a tiger. Now, good-bye, old man, and speak by  
the card, or equivocation will undo us."

"All aboard! See y' later, Mr. Bluffson. That  
chestnut 'ull carry you alright. Hold her head up  
an' she'll go like Crismus. All aboard."

"One word more," said Irving Kemble. "Do I  
shout?"

"Shout! D'ye think I'm bringing Rothschild  
with me on the crupper?"

"But as a matter of policy?"

"Well, yes."

"Ah!"

"If you can owe for the drinks."

"Um!"

Crack! Tom Tuft opened the road out for the  
last fifteen-mile stage to Eclipse Corner.



CHAPTER X.

THE BOSS COCKIE.

When poverty comes, altho' used to cake, be content with a crumpet,  
And thankfully take the band part for the drum tho' you  
once were the trumpet.

—The Maxims of Billy Pagan.

LEAVING the coach staggering to the north-west, we, by book magic, go forward to Eclipse Corner, and backward in time upon our paper wings.

Loaded waggons, bogged to the bed in the rich slurry which fifty inches of rain had made of the volcanic soil; horses floundering from the slurry to a precarious foothold on the rounded basalt "gibbers," with cerebral markings, so that the mud looked like an ancient battlefield of low grade man. The hot rain fell to the steaming earth, and men sweated under the saturated skies. Waggons and horses by the score, all bogged and flood bound. The evening came early, and the tree boles shone in flakes of pale green light, changing as moonlight changes with a cloud; the millions of insects phosphorescent and great caterpillars leaving tracks of light; every mushroom shining weakly like candlelight surprised by dawn; tiger beetles seeking artificial light and death; everywhere life rising, breaking its grave at the call of the rains. In the rooms of Gronthead's public-house, great green frogs from the new swamps squatting on floors and wash-basins, croaking unceasingly, stating all the kinds of water there be: "Hot wattah! deep wattah! more wattah! plain wattah! wet wattah!"

There were but three other houses in the one "street" of Eclipse Corner, which was really the main road to the Gulf; the main road that seemed to have wandered among the houses, and been glad to escape to the bush at the other end of the village. There was a butcher's shop—Gronthead's; the store—Gronthead's; the public-house—Gronthead's; and the homestead, the original Gronthead house of long ago, when there were no passers-by and no need of wayside accommodation.

People called Gronthead the Boss Cockie still—although he was larger than that; a lessee of fifty thousand acres and the owner of a further ten thousand. There were but two buildings which were not his, and those the Chinese store, and the adjoining joss-house—now filled with excited Orientals from the mining camps at the head of the Fossilbrook, driven in by the floods. They had lost tin and their camps, and were now teaching their wooden god the error of his ways—offering the Joss the melon seeds and eumquats of his innocent pre-cyclonic days, and taking them ostentatiously away from the stolid image before he could help himself. A water-fall, like an egg beaten in milk, had just made its appearance at the rear of the joss-house, and for permitting this destruction and sacrilege the worshippers were now beating their Joss with heavy sticks.

To their noise was added the cries of drunken gentlemen, who were already sick of being held up by floods, and now roared to sing the time away; and the barkings of a large black panther-like dog, fastened by a trace-chain to a tree by the butcher's shop. A bough shelter pretended to keep the rain off him, and the bullocks' heads and feet, which had been his slaughter house perquisites for many years, held him up from the mud; but he was saturated and unhappy, and leaped against his tether on his throne of skull and bone, and was red-eyed and incoherent with rage. Only a trace-chain would hold



him; it was Aladdin who called him "the lion of Judah" because he broke every chain.

On the verandah and in the soddened street were the tin "scratchers" from the many camps outside Eclipse Corner. These wore no boots when in town; removing them at the threshold of the bar, which is unholy ground. But one of them was without boots by compulsion; he had lost his boots at the last creek, Easterly, and, as he phrased it, "walked the last three miles with ten pound weight of Queensland clinging to each foot."

"As good a man as ever went barefoot," they say—a simile which belongs to the local language for ever.

The bar was full of men drinking, arguing, quarrelling—one gentleman, with but a sovereign in the world, offering loudly to wager "a level million" on any subject on earth. He had blue eyes and a large and curly nose, and long, red moustaches, shaped like the tusks of a walrus. Weary of leviathan betting he left the bar, and finding a man—whose pink, red and orange mottled and macerated legs showed that he was a "streamer" of tin—asleep in the rain, he uttered a loud cackle of self-congratulation, and harnessed himself to the sleeper, using the sleeper's legs as shafts. Still laughing, he dragged the sleeper through the mud and over the skull-shaped rocks of basalt, and when weary, simply flung away "the shafts" and returned to the bar.

Behind the bar was that which had been the original kitchen, then became a storeroom, and was now, by reason of the number of people held up by the floods, the dining-room of the "shilling table," and a sleeping room for all such as were not worthy of a room alone and a seat at the half-crown table. This kitchen was built of great blocks cut from a termitarium, or the nest of the white ant, which isn't an "ant." All the galleries of the "ant" nest had been preserved in the building blocks,

so that the house was a great hive for wasps, bees and hornets, mingled with flies with red hot tails, They were in clouds around the heads of the sleepers, and invaded sugar and jam at the shilling table, so that the man with the walrus moustaches was able to make his one joke a dozen times an hour:—

“ 'Ere's me eatin' jam an' pufferlooners, and up comes a wasp an' a 'ornet an' takes the scone out o' me 'and.”

The half-crown table where the “toffs” lived was on the other side—the newest side—of the group of buildings, and there the use of Cypress pine kept the white ants away, and there was no harbour for wasps and bees. It had but one occupant at the moment—a merry man who had determined to beat the floods with patience. In pursuance of this for three days he had made people curse his habit of opening doors at inopportune moments and offering valueless and superfluous information of the rainfall always in the one formula, “The tank's full.”

His name was Bagum.

To the pleasant room where the beetles and gnats and all the insects of the wet season came to commit suicide in the lamps, there entered two tall, spare young men—the drover and prospector type of the Australian-born horse masters. They may have had ordinary names at one time, but now they were known only as “Billy Nor'-West” and “Jimmy from the Wire Fence.” “Nor'-West” was there to escape from the Scylla of the rains and the Charybdis of the uproarious bar. “Wire Fence”—his chances discounted by his habit of rarely talking, though he must have known that women are wooed by the ear as men by the eye—to encourage his much-discouraged passion for Judy Gronthead, the eighteen-year-old daughter of the Boss Cockie. That young lady, good-looking in a hard-faced way, the induration of her skin being chargeable to the climate—coming in a moment after his arrival, affected not



to see the by-play of Bagum and Billy Nor'-West, who with many nods and winks intimated to each other that it would be kindly to give Wire Fence an open field with Judy. As they left the room the despairing lover coughed apologetically—thus making certain the girl's attack on him.

"Whatcher follerin' me about for, Wire Fence?"

The big man looked like an unjustly reprov'd schoolboy, and mumbled that he wasn't doing any harm.

"Alwys traipsin' after me. You're jellers agen o' that ole Professor Melrose."

"He's always with you."

"Why shouldn't he—ain't he me tooter? Ain't he teachin' me?"

"I don't like him."

"I ain't stuck on the ole chook meself—but that's no reason for you alwys follerin'—follerin'—makes a girl tired."

"Where does he come from, anyway?"

"Didn't I tell yer? He came 'ere broke an' the coach wouldn't take him any further. 'Then father gave him tucker an' sent him out streamin' tin, an' he cries an' ses the work's too 'ard."

"He's an old loafer."

"He ain't a loafer. 'E's a tooter. 'E tells father he can learn me, an' I got no edgercation—not like father."

"Why don't he teach you?"

"He's too busy. Oh, I don't like the Professor, neither. He wouldn't sit at the shillin' table, an' he don't like steel forks, an' he sends down to Allen's in Townsville, an' he gets a plated fork an' spoon, an' a white-'andled knife with 'For a good girl' on the top o' the card."

"Well, don't let him sit so close to you."

"Look here, Wire Fence, I'm in charge o' meself. An' here's father—you better go."

So Wire Fence went away gloomily, as the bull roar of the Boss Cockie filled the building.

"Where's mother? Who's lookin' after me? 'Ave I got to die here alone?"

Judy giggled, ran to the verandah door whence came the deafening chorus of the frogs, trying to drown the noise of the rain on the iron roofs, and called "Muthair!"

The Irish-born wife of the Australian-born Boss Cockie, answered the call with much deliberation. She was a round, apple-shaped woman, with an expression of mingled good-humor and stupidity.

The Boss Cockie met her with a sneeze, and she put him into a chair out of the line of the outer door, and fussed over him until the help he had called for irritated him. He was one of those big men who hate pain viciously. His iron-grey whiskers showed a face shaven only on the upper lip—a long, humorous upper lip, with a large craggy nose above it—deep-set eyes, and eyebrows like the moustaches of a man built on a smaller scale. His great neck was so weathered that the back of it was marked and lined like crocodile hide.

"Lemme alone, mother—lemme alone. Y' got me raw with yer mustard plasters. Where's the prescription the doctor left last coach?"

"And where'd be the good of it, father? Y' can't read their Latin."

"Gimme it—I knoo Latin afore you was born."

"I burned it, then, father, an' the medsin I trew away."

"Trew away three shillin's worth o' good medsin! Why?"

"Yer a fool, mother."

"May be—God's good—devil a better."

"Oh, I'll go back to bed—I'm on fire with that mustard, and me cold 'ull do no good till the rain stops."

"It's going to be a old man flood," said Judy, looking from her ironing.

"Devil doubt ye'd be glad of it, so you can get outer yer school."



"No, the professor's goin' to give me me rivers o' Russia before he goes back to the 2-mile camp."

"An' where's that lad—Jim?" asked the Boss Cockie—"Not to his lesson's, I'll swear. Away somewhere inventin', dodgin' multiplercashun tables. Busted the noo fryin' pan, he did, tryin' to invent it into a egg biler. Oh, me chest—on fire I am."

"Never mind, father. I'll make him do it. He don't get a bite of tea here till he can do nine times nine is forty-seven."

"There's a lot o' row goin' on at the shillin' table. What was it, Jude?"

"The cheek of them—all grumblin' at the tucker an' that Walrus Whisker's asken for pickles."

"Pickles! no less."

"Pickles!" said Judy, scornfully. "He thinks it's Crismus."

"Pickles! Just's soon as I get sick that feller comes here soakin' his walrus moustaches in the tea I paid for."

"It's all right, Dad—he paid in advance. Oh! an' they 'phoned up from the Fifteen Mile to get seven bedrooms ready. There's a coach with a theatrical company goin' thro' the Bauhinia."

"What? Why, if the river's up they'd be stuck here. Oh! I'm going back to bed. Don't take 'em in mother, unless they got the money. Them theatrical troupes y' got to keep y'r eyes on. Oh, I'm burning, I am. Shut the door, can't y'r? Who is it? Come in, purfessor. Who's that? Billy Nor West! . . . Come in—you."

"How are you, Mr. Gronthead?" asked Billy, ingratiatingly.

"As well's I can be with them blokes asken for pickles, tryin' to starve me out. Well, I'm dyin', burnin' to death. I want a broncho quineen."

"They couldn't kill you without sharpening the axe," replied Billy. "You've had all the medicines in the British Cornucopia, and it don't seem to touch you. You've got palpitation of the pluck."

“Who you talkin’ tō?”

“A big tombstone,” said Billy Nor West, grinning. “With a patient sufferer at rest.”

“You’ll hear the patient sufferer roaren dreckly,” gasped the Boss Cockie. “What’s got hold of you any way, Wire Fence?” to the silent bushman; and he not replying, he repeated the question to Nor West.

“Them,” replied Billy Nor West, indicating Professor Melrose—a clean-shaven, dark, hawk-like man with a blue chin and enough hair to make two wigs of the time of Charles the First. “Them! Him an’ Jude—always talking.”

“How d’ye think she’ll ever get edgercated if she don’t talk? Why! ’e’s a professor, got a lot of letters after his name.”

“I know!” said Nor West, “A.E.I.O.U. and sometimes P. and Y.”

“Nonsense! Them’s the fowels. I know. It’s other letters he has after his name. J.D.K.Z.—I think, or somethin’.”

“Him an’ his rivers o’ Russia. What’s the good?”

“Yes, what’s?” said Wire Fence, speaking for the first time.

“Be quiet, will ye, Wire Fence,” said Mrs. Gront-head. “An’ I’ll take the ould man back to bed.”

She assisted the sick giant to his room, and as Nor West returned to the bar, Jimmy from the Wire Fence then suffered the torture of hearing master and pupil on the one lesson Melrose was capable of imparting—the rivers of Russia, taken from almost the only educational book in the establishment. He suffered the sight of Melrose leaning over the pupil—as straight and lithe as a maize stalk on a river flat; and the drone of Judy as she gave enlightenment to the world.

“The Volga, the Don, the Dneiper, the Wieser, the Vistula, the Neva. . . .” She stopped, beginning to resent Melrose’s cold scorn of Wire Fence—for like all such women, though she loved making her



lover feel the uncertainty of his position, she hated anybody else to join in the torture.

"Now, where does the Volga rise?"

"I d'no," replied Judy shortly.

"You're a very ignorant girl," said Melrose, over-satisfied of his authority, which all the independence of the bush girl was suddenly aroused to break, and she countered with a question.

"Where does the Lynd River rise?"

"I don't know," said Melrose.

"It rises close up near the back door. Y'r a very ignorant ole bloke."

Then she glanced around at her lover, and knew that he was grateful; and when Melrose, after vainly trying to forget the blow to his vanity, closed the lesson, she unconsciously hurried his departure by mentioning the name of the leading lady of the dramatic company then on the road. When she said Mildred Floyd, Melrose gasped like a fish trying to breathe air, and went away. She even permitted herself to continue to be kind. Then, finding Wire Fence inclined to make his progress faster, she got rid of him with the coolness of a woman of the world by calling in Vera Pardon and telling him direct that she wanted to talk to her "cousint."

So this was the asylum of Vera Pardon—the girl who had really decided Aladdin on financing the Royal Australian Dramatic Company. She had been stage-struck and had discharged herself cured; yet it was plain to see she was unhappy.

"You been cryin'," said the lynx-eyed Judy. "What's up?"

"Auntie has been scolding me."

"Mother again! She is a hard one. But why don't you tell her where you were?"

"I can't—she wouldn't believe me now. She's never finished with accusations, and that man, Dubbin, has been telling her—or insinuating, at least—because he never says anything outright."

"That mean little sneak, that's travellin' for var-

nish an' paint? The little brute's comin' here to-night, ain't he?"

"He's just driven over from the Lynd. He tried to talk to me on the verandah, and I came in to escape him."

"I can't stand him—a sugary sneak—with a voice like Turkish delight gone mouldy."

Bagum put his head into the room, shouted exultantly, "The tank's full," and went away chuckling, as Mrs. Gronthead came from her husband's room, and seeing Vera Pardon, said aggressively:

"Where y' get to, I dunno! An' where y' got to for two or three munce was to no good, thin."

"I'll not have you say that to me. You have no right."

"I'm yer ant. . . . Oh, come in, Mr. Dubbin—come in, then," as the slant-eyed traveller in paints and oil came dripping from the verandah.

"The old room, I s'pose?" said Dubbin. "I can leave me samples on the v'randa all night—undoubterbly."

"I'll show yer there," said Mrs. Gronthead.

"Oh, Miss Veerer can do that," hastily corrected the bagman. "She knows—undoubterbly."

"I'll show you," said Mrs. Gronthead, grimly, and went to the verandah. Vera Pardon's pale face was averted, but the moustache of Dubbin, which seemed to have been made of oakum, was still too near to her, and the voice was full of vulgarity and insinuation.

"I say," he said, "you're lookin' splendid—undoubterbly."

She turned quite away from him then—so decisively that though he still grinned he could but go. As he went to the verandah, Judy heard him muttering oaths; the vulgar vanity of the fellow could not believe that he could be unwelcome; and he cursed the time and the circumstance.

Then suddenly there were whip-cracks as of the last ounce of power being forced from horses at the end of a despairing journey; the big headlights of



the coach shone on the gleaming oilskin coats of Irving Kemble, and Tom Tuft, and Billy Nor' West and Jimmy from the Wire Fence joined Vera Pardon and Judy as the sounds of arrival stirred the rain-soaked and whisky-soaked villagers to new life. And to the accompaniment of the laughter of Billy Nor' West, the Boss Cockie began to yell his fears of dissolution anew.

"Call mother; I'm dyin'—"

"I'll call her," said Nor' West, "an' if he dies we'll have a post mortius nisey bonum on him—all reg'lar and up to diek. Pore ole Bill! Hey, Missus! Bill wants yer. He says he's dyin' at the top of his voice."

"Is he, then? Well, 'tis no use him dyin' wit' the house full of people, an' me with but wan pair of hands. Alright, father! I'm comin' . . . You girls! Look after the theatricals."

She disappeared to do the last offices for the man who was dying so noisily and robustly, and Vera Pardon was left to receive Mildred Floyd, Athene Pallas, and Birdie, the survivor of the Fluffy Sisters.

## CHAPTER XI.

### ENTER SEVERALLY.

Hold thine head to the skies and none will dare accuse,  
Height saves the moon from the wolves, and fear gives the  
stiff-necked shoes.

—The Maxims of Billy Pagan.

IRVING KEMBLE, the rain glistening on his mackintosh, alighted from the coach, a very anxious man, as one who was to stage-manage the arrival of Aladdin and unable to depend on his colleagues. He took the centre of the stage, and so everybody looked to him as spokesman. He bowed very solemnly to the company, and Vera Pardon, smothering an exclamation of frightened astonishment, backed from the group and disappeared. None noticed her agitated withdrawal but the smirking varnish traveller, and he because he had eyes for no one else.

“My employer,” said Kemble grandly, “preferred to ride horseback. To one of such enterprising character as he, the battle with the elements had more charm than the more conventional progress per coach. I trust you will secure for him the best accommodation —after, of course, the ladies have been suited. The floods will probably cost us many thousands of pounds if we are unable to keep our dates in the great capitals. The ladies are worn out and will probably prefer to go to their rooms at once. I will then send them some warming refreshment. I do not think that the great entrepreneur, Mr. Brisbane Biddulfson, will be long delayed.”

“Will ye take a drink here?” asked Mrs. Gront-head. “The bar-room is very rough now, with all the stream-tinners there.”



"Thank you! We will have it here."

"Take the ordhers, Judy—an' where is that Vera?"

Vera heard and knew that concealment was impossible. She returned to the little group of women, and was introduced as "my niece." They were about to exclaim upon her appearance when the girl made such a terrified gesture for silence that Irving Kemble broke in and saved the situation. But nothing had missed the furtive scrutiny of Dubbin; he knew that the girl had not met these theatrical people for the first time. The drinks were served; Kemble displayed a roll of notes, and with all the suddenness of naturalness said, "Never mind! Charge them to me," and returned the notes to his pocket. In the freemasonry of drinking, these strangely opposed people became quickly friends.

And then ere the women could get to cover they heard the noise of horse-hoofs splashing through puddles and slipping on the stones; the door was opened from without, and above the noise of the frogs and the ever-falling rain they heard the voice of Aladdin directing the groom as to the treatment of the horse.

"Ha!" said Irving Kemble, "Mr. Brisbane Biddulfson at last. All cheer, please."

The cheers were very ragged and perfunctory, and Kemble continued: "My friends, Mr. Biddulfson, the great actor-manager."

"Cut it out," said Aladdin in his ear. "Get down to cues."

"The greatest manager in Australia," said Kemble, not to be balked of his lines, "and by a very fortuitous circumstance his genius irradiates this hamlet to-day. By reason of the deluge we are——"

"Stranded," whispered Aladdin. "Hurry up."

"No; half-drowned. I will introduce you. Mrs. Gronthead, our hostess; Boy Jim, I understand here, is a great inventor; Miss Judy Gronthead, the heiress; Mr. Tuft you know;; Mr. Jimmy from the—ah—Wire Fence; Mr. Billy Nor West; Mr.—ah—Dubbin; and—ah—Miss Pardon."

Then Aladdin turned in her direction and saw, first the cad of the Queen's Hotel, and then the elusive girl again. This time Dubbin was sure that theirs had been no second meeting, though Aladdin saw that she did not desire recognition, and talked hurriedly.

"The great loss arriving from our muddling of dates at many theatres in the cities, by reason of the flood, is to a very great extent paid for by the pleasure of meeting you all."

"Hear, hear!" said Kemble. "Cheer there, Trew-hella."

"By crums!" said Dubbin to himself, "I'll go and tell Gronthead, undoubterbly."

He backed clear of the crowd, knocked at Gronthead's door, and when the big man's voice told him to come in he entered. So began his underground engineering against the strollers; partly from the callous meanness which gives a kick to the falling; partly because he recognised the superiority of Aladdin, stroller though he was, and hated him for the encounter at Townsville, and was therefore made pitiless by the insult to a vanity as colossal as ignorant.

"Take the gang out and give them a drink," whispered Aladdin to Kemble.

"Give me the pound note then?"

"Not on your life—the danger isn't over yet, and it's all we've got in the world."

"All? Then they'll put us out in the rain. That bagman fellow means mischief."

"Give me all the stage notes."

"I've got a thousand pounds worth of them, Aladdin, and I'd give the lot for a pint of co-lo-ni-al wine."

"With this real money on the outside I can defy Fate. Go and give 'em all a drink and leave the rest to me."

"Even if they kill me I'll die in a good cause. Come gentlemen, I invite you all to the bar to drink success to--to--"



"Success to the flood," said Aladdin as they went out to the verandah and left him standing alone; to be joined immediately by Vera Pardon.

"I know how good you've been to them. I can imagine it, as you were so good to me," she said swiftly—not looking at him but at her aunt. "For my sake go away."

"For your sake I'll stay," said Aladdin. "For you sake and my own."

"Oh go! That man means trouble—I hate him and he hates you for that—hates you on sight."

"We can't go, we're stranded—I have three women dependent on me. Here we stay."

She made a gesture as of one in great trouble, and obeying at last the nods and becks of her aunt joined that massive lady at the verandah with Judy, and the three of them went to prepare the rooms. Then Aladdin ordered the groom to see to the baggage, and in such a certain tone that the waiting actresses were reassured. But Mildred Floyd saw that his face was unusually grave, and asked him if everything was alright.

"I don't know yet," said Aladdin, seriously.

"Then what are we to do? What indeed? It is a terrible position you have brought us to."

"I didn't, my dear lady—it's the flood."

"The flood," cried Birdie. "I ain't Noah, and I got no ark."

"Be tranquil," said Athene, quietly knitting. "Have self control."

"Oh you'd keep on with that old wool if you was goin' to be hanged."

"We should have turned back," wailed Mildred. "I told you so."

"Turned back," said Aladdin impatiently. "On every battlefield our dead and wounded creditors are lying in heaps."

"Oh dear," said Mildred, weeping. "What can we do?"

"I say! I say!" said Aladdin. "I'm bankrupt, but that's no reason why you should go into liquidation. Tears are never worth a ha'penny a million gallons at any time, but we're damp enough now without 'em. And you'll start the others. Birdie! If you cry now—you'll spoil everything and ruin us."

"But—but—"

"Look after her, Miss Pallas. Make both of them keep a grip on themselves—and here's the big scene. That waster has brought out the boss on us. I hear them talking."

"Mother, come here!" roared the Boss Cookie—such a bull roar as brought her running to his room.

"Actors!" he yelled as the door opened. "I'll show 'em!"

"But you're not well enough, father—"

"Ain't I? Jest you wait till I get my boots on?"

Dubbin came out of the room grinning in triumph at Vera, who had heard the last words of the Boss Cookie and his wife.

"You said you were dyin', father."

"Dyin'! While actors are round tryin' to get out without payin'. If anybody robbed me of a shillin' I'd come back from the dead. Wait a bit."

"Oh, please!" said Vera Pardon.

"You'd better go," said Dubbin.

"The strongest reason for remaining is that you want me to go. I may be a bad dog, but at least I'd never leave the lamb to the mercy of the dingo. Savvy? Undoubterbly you do! Mr. Plenipotentiary for Fish Oil."

Of course, Tuft must enter at this most awkward moment.

"I say, Mr. Bluffson—your mate's run out o' change, an' the feller with the cold nose is close up cryin' because they won't give him no beer."

"Mr. Tuft—I've run out, too—I've only notes."

"I can give him some sugar, if that's all."

"Ora pro nobis, Mr. Tuft, and thanks."

"What's that?"



"Pay for us."

"My word," said Tuft. "Of course. Great language, French." And he went back to make Kemble financial, enjoying this novel experience to the full.

At that moment the Boss Cockie burst into the room, fire in his eyes, menace in his voice.

"Good evening," said Aladdin.

"I ain't talkin' to you. Hey, Bill! Jimmy! Put all the troupe's luggage on the coach. No play actin' here."

"My dear sir," said Aladdin, "we don't want to play in your house, or anywhere. We only want to keep dry."

"I don't want no actors 'ere!" stormed Gronthead. "Last year the Flyin' Lovegroves came—ten pounds they flew with, they did, and then the Flyin' Vanderloos."

"But ours is a dramatic company—we're not acrobats."

"The Lovegroves wasn't acrobats—but they flew, anyhow, just as well as the others, and I'll only have God-fearin' people in my premises—licensed to retail fermented an' spirituous lickens and the like o' that."

Mildred sobbed loudly, but that did not prevent Dubbin saying, to stiffen the Boss Cockie's resolution: "You're quite right, undoubterbly."

"A moment, Mr. Gronthead," said Aladdin.

"Not a wink! I don't have nobody playin' 'The Blood-stained Whiskers' in my house."

Mildred became hysterical despite Athlene Pallas' ministrations. Birdie Fluffy uttered little shrill staccato screams that were almost yelps, and Vera Pardon and Judy ran to hold her hands.

"My dear sir," said Aladdin. "We cannot leave here because we are flood-bound, and have lost much money by it. But that is not your fault, and in deference to my usual custom I will pay in advance."

And he tapped the huge wad of stage money with the real £1 note sitting proudly in the front seat.

"Wha-a-at?" from Dubbin.

"Whatchersay?" gasped the Boss Cookie. "In advance!"

"Yes—how much?"

The Boss Cookie drew back. "No, sir," he said. "Bill Gronthead couldn't do a thing like that. Now I see y' got it it's all right."

"I see. If I hadn't had it you were determined to be paid, but as I've got it you don't want it."

"I trust a gentleman when I see one," replied the Boss Cookie, turning furiously on his wife. "Whatcher mean by insultin' the genl'man, mother?"

"'Twas Mr. Dubbin there, so 'twas."

"You're alwys poken y'r nose into somethin'," said Gronthead to Dubbin. "Alwys sneakin' an' crawlin', you are. Put y'r money back, Mr. Bluffson—the best in the 'ouse is jes good enough for you. I'll go back to bed. Good night, sir; good night, ladies!"

His wife followed him to his room. Dubbin sneaked off to the frog noises on the verandah; Judy and Vera Pardon went to see that the rooms were made ready for these honored guests, and left Aladdin and the actresses together.

He was not satisfied. He knew that Vera Pardon had seen through the bluff of the stage money. Also there was Birdie, waiting not to kiss but to criticise.

"You're a bonzer schlenterer," said Birdie. "You could get birdseed out of a cuckoo clock, you could. Gor bless yer!"

"You wonderful man," said Mildred Floyd, her face dried by magic, her face radiant with hope. "You wonderful man." And going she kissed him in a way that said she wouldn't run fast.

"Hang it all!" said Aladdin, wiping off the kiss. "I'm a bad man, but I didn't deserve that."



## CHAPTER XII.

### “TANK’S FULL.”

Go not by rule or by rote,  
Let experience be the token,  
For horses and cakes and laws  
Were only made to be broken.

—The Maxims of Billy Pagan.

THE morrow brought two new surprises: the miraculous disappearance of Professor Melrose, though the man with the walrus moustaches said that he had seen Melrose after the arrival of the coach—and the tremendous friendliness of all the women. Aladdin was puzzled and then afraid of it. Such unnatural affections between three ladies with the vanity of actresses and the less aggressive vanity of two women who were not actresses, could surely not last long.

Mildred Floyd had had speech with Vera Pardon, and undertaken to tell the company that she must not be recognised.

The rain fell without change; every morning the men went to the rivers; life was bounded by three meals a day, rain for ever, little sleep in a hot bed, and the hourly and joyful cry of Bagum, “The tank’s full.”

On the second day of imprisonment one came to say there was a man caught on an island in the big river 10 miles away, caught in the attempt to cross. There came another to say that Jimmy from the Wire Fence was going out to swim to the wrecked one, and all the men of Eclipse Corner, with Aladdin and his actors, started for the river. The old men actors gave up at the first mile, for though the foresight of the Boss Cookie had supplied them with horses, they had had enough of the rain. And away on the left flank

of the little army rode Judy astride—the Judy who pretended disinterest in Wire Fence until he was in danger, and then rode 10 miles in the rain—“jus’ f’r fun, y’know—not that I wanted to see that feller, anyways.”

They met a mob of 1000 bullocks nearing the end of a walk from the pastures that bred them—a walk that had lasted 2000 miles—their drovers sitting stolidly on patiently-enduring horses, travelling but 10 miles a day, or rather each day punching a ten-mile hole in the rain.

They met a blind horse, his eyes eaten out by flies—fleeing from the sound of the voices of the rescue party, and blundering into trees head foremost as he ran: and then they reached the river, a saddle-colored current 50 feet deep and a mile wide; its banks already covered with fleshy growths of spinach, pig-weed, fat hen, and summer grass. So that the bank top was awash the river swelled high—a mile of mad water with green islands and capes of the tops of trees, their trunks for eleven months of the year dry in the river sand—not clean water, but rich, nauseating, mucilaginous, like a Nile flood in a fat season.

Revolver shots came from a hidden island of tree tops upstream.

“Now then!” said Nor-West. “There’s his gun—he’ll be comin’ d’rectly—watch!”

Piled-up foam like brewer’s yeast came from a side channel, to signify that the waters were falling and had liberated it. The masses of flocculence like dirty wool curtseyed to one tree and split around another, and then through a passage in the trees and stream they saw three saplings enter, lashed together, and kept under water by the weight of the man who crouched in the middle of the crude “boat.” A round speck like a cocoanut moved in the water beside it—he swam ahead and the flood took him, hurling him like a stone from a sling, and the man on the saplings followed him with equal velocity—they saw the rope sag.



“Wire Fence has been towin’ him,” said Nor’-West. “He’s let go—what’s he goin’ back for?”

They looked amazed at the man in the lead. He struck out of the current to the further shore, and as he did the saplings were forced under the weight of the flood, and their passenger left struggling.

“I’m done, lads,” he said, and the water went on with him. The flood brought him against the supple branches of a tree top almost level with the water—he whipped his legs around it and let the flood go over him for a moment. They saw his pale face as he lifted it bravely to the gum leaves, the face of a man sick—not with fear, but of stomach. He put a finger down his throat, and vomited the river he had swallowed, and was easier, rested a little, and then he lifted his head, and they knew from the direction of his glance that he would make for a little beach a hundred yards below. They ran down stream to receive him, encouraging him, each according to his way, some with, “All right, mate, you’ll do it,” some with oaths intended to hearten him. The walrus man, with tears in his eyes, shouted that if the swimmer were careless enough to drown himself, he—the walrus man—would give him a dam good hiding; and Bagum cried, “Don’t bring any water, old man—the tank’s full.”

A stranger would have cursed them for hard hearts; Aladdin knew that the outback Australian is tremendously emotional, and soft-hearted, and to hide himself makes himself appear as callous as a Kalkadoon during the ceremonies of initiation.

They saw on the other bank the white figure of Wire Fence rise from the yellow river and disappear in the greenness; running, not for modesty, but from flies. The man on the tree gave himself to the mill race again, steered for another tree nearer shore, caught it, rested, and tried again; and Nor’-West, creeping out on a gum bough so that it bent like a whip, caught him and drew him to the mud ashore.

He lay panting in the summer grass, and let the flies have their will of him.

"Cover up," said Nor'-West, remembering Judy and the flies too. "What did y' want to cross for, mate?"

"We wanted beef," panted the salvage.

"Didn't y' have no tucker?"

"We had whips o' fowls, an' bacon, but our teeth was leakin' for a steak."

"A nice thing," said Judy, from her horse on the outskirts of the little crowd. "Y' might have drowned Wire Fence for your dashed steak."

"What did he cross for again?" asked Nor'-West.

"There's three horses on the island," said the rescued man. "He put 'em into the water, but they ringed and went back, so he's gone back to drive 'em."

"The fool!"

"He's all right—he's a man-fish."

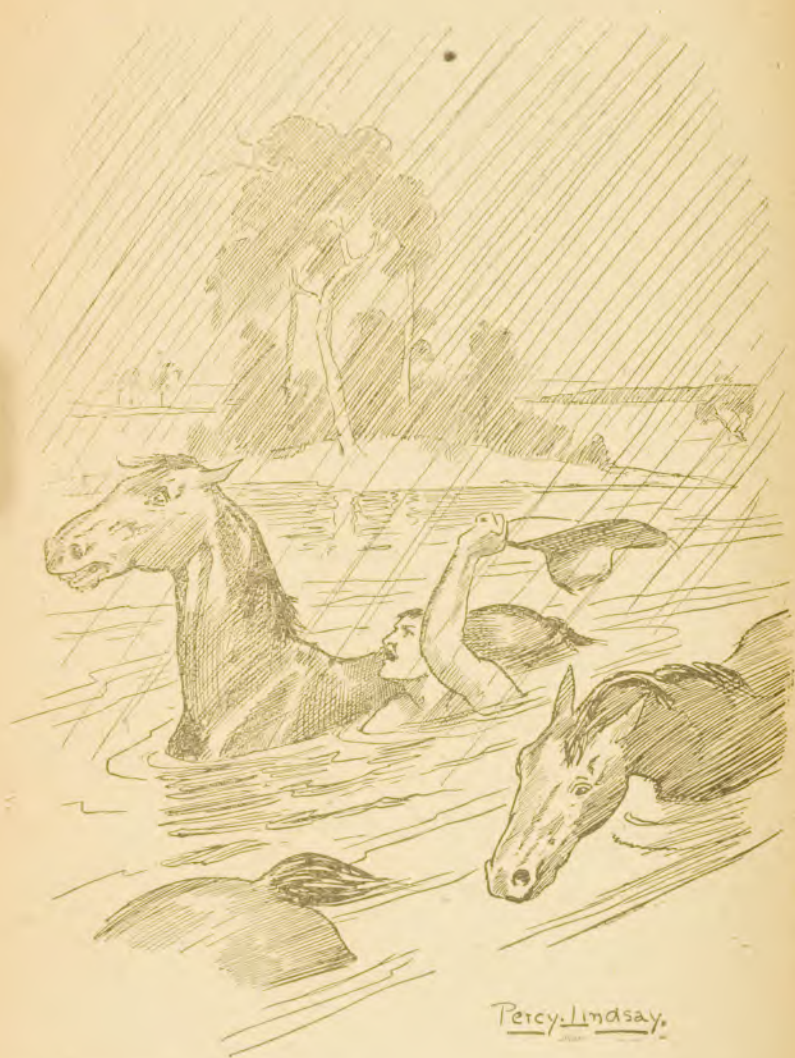
"There he is—his clothes is strapped on his head."

Judy rode away a little—about 25 yards. Wire Fence, alias the Man-Fish, appeared in a ring of three swimming horses. He was naked but for his hat, and that he wore in his hand, and used to beat the heads of the baulking horses to the eastern shore, striking at their ears and eyes as they tried to ring—until at last he got them into the current, and then they had to go east. At last, seeing them forced to the bank, he swam into a tree and beat the water from his precious hat, and then came quietly ashore.

Judy beat them to Eclipse Corner by an hour; she had her own spurs and a stranger's horse.

When they returned to Eclipse Corner they found the brook higher—80 feet of crazy water, the white gums on the banks up to their middles in flood, and everything discontented but the white ants, joyous with soft soil, and working three shifts, to enlarge a great termitarium at the back of the hotel an "ant hill" shaped like a humble elephant, his





He was naked but for his hat, and that he used to beat the heads of the baulking horses.

trunk meekly depressed to the sodden mud that spewed its surfeit.

That evening somebody killed a carpet snake on the wall plate of the "shilling table" room; the men with mottled pink-and-orange arms, tin scratchers, flayed by sunlight and day-long stretches in water, gambled and quarrelled; and one—skinned in patches from neck to toenails, so that he looked like a harlequin from a pattern by an uncertain amateur—sang of some lady who was the pride of his heart. Men talked of things that mostly miss the eyes of use; of the deafening cicada and crickets of the day; of the indecent speed of the grass to maturity; of gross fatness in stalk and leaf of every plant and every bloated vine. Men ate without relish in the waspery, and helped the wasps to drown each other in the water jugs. Wire Fence, who had been among sheep a lot, made a set of boots for Judy's dog against the season of speargrass seed; Judy's dog, who, having no sheep to "work," "worked" fowls instead, driving them from fossicking in the horsefeed, and returning always to talk to Judy in his own language—a sort of barking, tail-wagging shorthand.

Nor'-West believed the rains to be near their end, for down in the old horse yards he had seen the chance-sown maize now climbing to the top rail and ready to look over the fence.

"An'," said Nor'-West, "that's what the rains was for—to make that maize grow—and now it's grown—what's the good o' more?"

But he had forgotten, or disregarded, the drunken prodigality of Australia.

Judy played half of Ring the Bell, Watchman, on a mouth-organ, even unto seventy times seven, and her brother Jim, the long-necked, downy-cheeked, dreamy-eyed youth, took a clock to pieces and couldn't put it together again; so that music and engineering research came to one abrupt finish as soon as the still-suffering Boss Cockey came to under-



## ALADDIN AND THE BOSS COCKIE

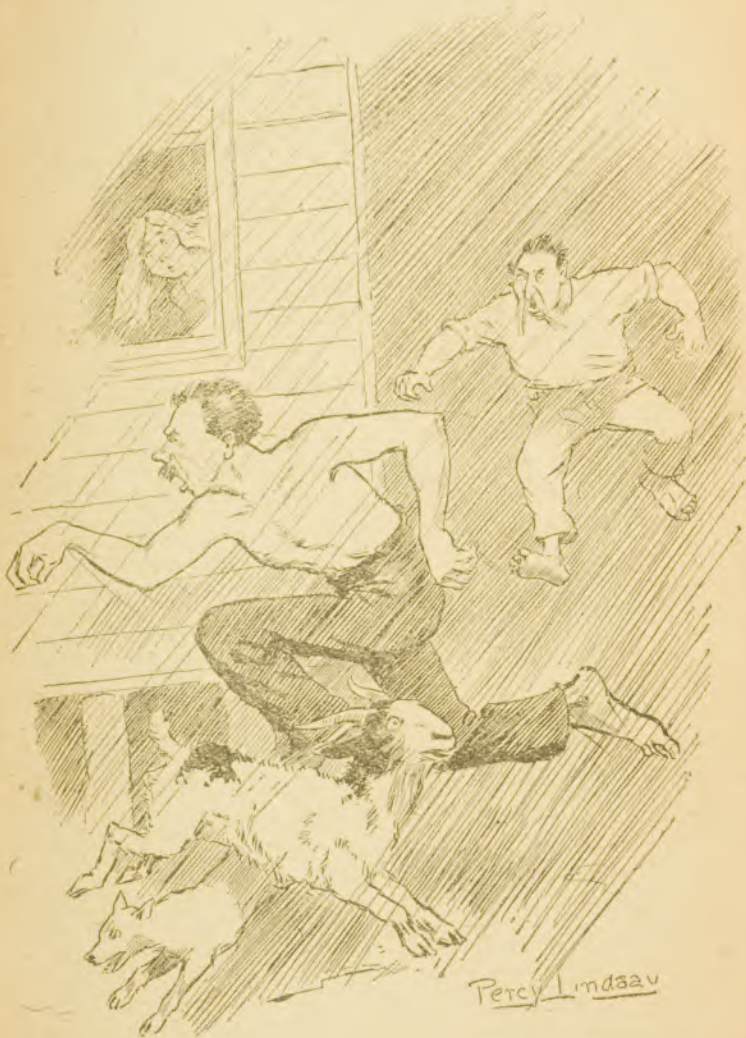
stand the facts. Aladdin recommended some softer source of heat than a large tin of mustard and a pint of water, and so gained the partially flayed Gronthead's kindly regards.

Eclipse Corner put out its lights after the gentlemen of the shilling table had been barred out to the verandah, and the waspery, which was their dining-room. But there was little sleep for the "half-crown table" people, who tried to rest in their resonant bedrooms of galvanised iron.

Birdie, once satisfied of shelter, began to rail at the appointments of the house, objecting most violently to a toilet set of white delft with fierce red roses blazoned thereon—roses which had apparently been stolen from the loudest of Brussels carpets. According to Birdie, she wouldn't demean herself looking at anything so cheaply vulgar, but she discounted her sincerity by continuing to look at them with much ferocity. Meantime, Miss Floyd, who occupied a bed in Birdie's room, carried on a loud conversation on intimate subjects with Athene Pallas, through the galvanised iron partition, so that for a quarter of an hour thereafter the hotel was a sounding board.

Aladdin went to his room, a room alone, as befitted the entrepreneur of Dingo Flat, Emuford, Waitabit, Suddenjerk, Uranquinty, and Eclipse Corner. He removed eight squashy insects with red feelers and four goggle-eyed grasshoppers which roosted on his bed curtains, and opened the window to admit air. Immediately a hundred diaphanous flying things entered and committed suicide in the candle flame and extinguished the light. He went to bed in the dark, to laugh, not to sleep.

A youthful dog who pursued everything, chased a score of goats—and goats hate rain as the Christians of one sect hate the Christians of another, around the house and around again, and a dozen sleepy voices cursed him. One man pursued instead of the dog, and the goats fled into the rain.



Percy Lindsay

The pursuit around and around the house began again.



There was a noise in the "waspery" as of butchers beating meat, and then a bootless man ran around the house, and another bootless man followed him at intervals.

After the tenth round the pursued one was joined by the Walrus man, who demanded that the pursued should "stay and be a man, Bob Prilly."

"I didn't take his pound," replied Bob Prilly, indignantly. "He hit me on the eye an' swolled it like a ant hill."

"Stay an' be a Man."

"I will! He ain't goin' to chase me round an' round mud 'oles without me boots. Y'see this stick? Soon's he comes out I'll hit him right on his eyeball with it—just where he swolled me. I'll up like this, an' hit him like that, an' I'll——"

"Bob Prilly," shouted the pursuer at the other end of the verandah, "where's me pound? Wait till I come an' eat yer, Bob Prilly."

But Bob Prilly had forgotten to stay and be a man, and the pursuit around and around the house began all over again.

"Whack! Thump!"

"Athenia," called Mildred Floyd, still afraid like the other women in their new, strange environment. "There's burglars under the house trying to break in."

Aladdin laughed himself weary as Birdie took up the tale, talking most chillingly and virtuously to the bad bushranger who sought to destroy the sanctity of my lady's chamber.

"Whack! Whack!"

"Go away at once, or I'll tell our manager. Whoever y'are, you got no encouragement from us. We're not straight-laced, but we keep ourselves to ourselves."

"Whack! Thump!"

"I can assure you, my good man," said the measured voice of Mildred Floyd, "that you are making a very grave mistake, which will only recoil

upon your own head. We are travelling in the company of noble and chivalrous gentlemen.”

“Mildred,” Miss Pallas called from her room, “the most foolish thing possible is to talk to such cads. Ignore them, and they will go away.”

“Whack! Whack!”

“I’ll ignore ’em if I get to ’em,” said Birdie. “If Mr. Nor’-West was ’ere he’d show ’em. Low cads, that’s what they are.”

“Whack! Thump! Whack!”

“We’ll call for Mr. B’dulfson if you knock again. Got no respect for nobody, I s’pose. Never had no mother’n sisters of your own.”

“Whack!”

“There’s two of us here, so mind y’r own business.”

“Whack! Blup!” The desperate scoundrel made a noise under the floor as if a horse were walking upstairs, without having had the manners to first take off his boots.

“You’re dilly,” cried Judy, from two rooms away, not yet forgetful of the insult of the toilet set with the Brussels carpet roses. “Can’t the poor goats camp under the ’ouse, an’ hit the floor with their ’orns, ’course they’re annoyed at gettin’ their feet wet?”

Then came the sound of half-smothered laughter from every room; nature would not be denied, they laughed aloud, and went to sleep gaily, as the dog routed the goats from beneath the house, and forced them into the rain. And the lightning flamed in fathom lengths all through the hot night.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### EXCURSIONS AND ALARUMS.

In adventures be ready for all—the hard roads or the treacherous bogs,  
And in the strange street carry handfuls of meat—or of stones—for the dogs.

—The Maxims of Billy Pagan.

ON the third day, in the continued absence of Professor Melrose, Trehwella Jordan offered his services as tutor. Jimmy from the Wire Fence had also offered. But Mrs. Gronthead frowned the proposition out of court.

“I know ye have the education, Wire Fence,” she said, “but ’twouldn’t look well—ye being sthruck on Judy an’ all.”

Then Trehwella Jordan offered himself. The risk Aladdin had removed the night before had frightened him—so that he had not played Autolyceus—picking up considerable trifles in the bar—as on the night of his arrival. Water had never appeared so utterly uninviting as it did falling in endless rains, and he was anxious to propitiate these gods who held the keys of heaven, and could if they would deliver him to the flood.

So he offered his services to the Boss Cockie—a new Boss Cockie, for Aladdin had treated him with quinine and antiphlogistin, and told him stories, so that he burned and sweated and laughed his way back to health, and the Boss Cockie, with an air of tremendous professional importance, cross-examined Trehwella.

“I’m edgercated alright,” he said, “but the kids didn’t have much chance beyond readin’. I want Judy teachd afore she gets married. Nobody wants too much edgercation, but I like ’em to get some.

That boy o' mine, Jim—he's a silly inventor—talks about a milkin' machine—the old hand style ain't good enough for him. All this invention is laziness. Now edgercation—y' want a bit of, but not too much. The Morecons, they went to big schools an' colleges, and never come to no good—one's a book-maker, and one's a J.P., an' one's a missionary—all turned out bad."

"I be sorry to hear such a thing."

"Puden's son goes to college to learn to be a writer. What's he do? Writes another man's name to a cheque and gets 20 years, or hanged, or some-thin'. The brother got edgercated out of the War Cry. Kep' his mind on 'eavenly fields and got prickly pear all over his earthly paddocks. The only real big edgercated man I know that ever did any good was a parson first, but he married a good woman, an' she converted him."

"Add what is he dow?"

"He's a money-lender. Well, now we'll just do cogitatin' over this."

"Yes, two heads are better thad wud."

"Not if you're caught with 'em playin' two-up. Now the Professor was strong on the rivers of Russia. D'ye know them?"

"Every wud."

"Ave y' got any readin' books "

"Yes, here's wud, the Febale Idstrugtor."

"It looks old, ain't it?"

"By dear sir—by grandfather gave it to by buther whed she was a girl. I have carried it only for those sagred associatiods."

"An' you'll teach her to read well out loud?"

"By dear sir, I will so teach her she will brig tears to your eyes."

"Then teach her the other way—don't teach her no electrocution, y' understand, plain readin'?"

"I do it backwards."

"But do y' know it frontwards, too—that's the way it's got to look."



"Of course?"

"Then that's settled. A pound a week an' keep an' eat at the arf-crown table."

"By dear sir, I wasd't askig for buddy. I do it as a coblilet to by host."

And Trehwella walked off very stately to interview his pupil in the kitchen.

"Now, there's a genl'man," said the Boss Cockie. "An' the first night he was 'ere I thought he was a man that'd drink without any consideration of age or sex. Mornin', Mr. Bluffson," he continued, as Aladdin came from the verandah. "Got any more yarns? I was talkin' to that ole chap, Kemble, last night. He's got funds of anecdotes."

"They're the only funds he has," replied Aladdin, quite truthfully, but the Boss Cockie roared as if it were a good joke, and retailed it to Kemble, who thought it no joke at all. And Kemble, not being then handy, the Boss Cockie straightway made for the bar, and told the great joke about "funds" without delay.

While Aladdin lounged on the verandah looking at the rain, he saw Vera Pardon and heard the loud voice of Mrs. Gronthead from her concealment in a room.

"You be civil then to the man. Yes, the good lord knows he ain't Sapphira to look at, but you ain't Judas Iscariat, neither, wit' your big black saucer eyes, an' he's doin' well in the varnish line, is Dubbin then. You're an orphan, an' you ain't got a copper. What kin you do, answer me that."

"I can go away and earn my own living."

"You did that before, an' you had to come back again three months ago. An' what were you doin' while you were away. I'd like to know. You were up to no good, I'll be bound."

The door slammed in Vera Pardon's face to emphasise the accusation; she turned towards Aladdin and he saw that she was crying.

"I'm so sorry. Can I help you?"

"Help me by going away. I like you all, and you'll all be humiliated before me, and she may find out that I was on the stage and left it because I was stranded, and then—she'll say anything."

"There's no fear of that. The Boss Cockie's quite tame."

"You laugh at people who haven't been paid. Oh, you seem to enjoy it."

"I don't. I hate it! But if I didn't joke I'd have to be miserable, and all these people are dependent on me."

"Mr. Gronthead is very warm-hearted, tell him."

"He is good. He'll die with his hat on the side of his head. He stopped growing old at 19, and all he's got to show how long he's been on earth is his grey whiskers. But I daren't tell him."

"You must! How can you expect to be happy?"

"The only way to be happy is to hope for no wages. Then all you get is bunce."

"The only way to be happy is to do your duty."

"What is my duty? To be honest and leave these helpless people stranded, or to keep up the old lie and help them?"

"You may be unable to move now—I am only asking you to give up this careless, laughing swindling. Yes, that's all it is, though you don't like the word. It is a reckless life. According to you, one should only pay when one has lots of money."

"Now, I didn't say that. I said one couldn't pay when one has no money at all."

"Only to be honorable when it is agreeable, then?"

"The creed of nearly all the world."

"So much the worse for nearly all the world. You're stranded, and you hope the flood won't lift because you can't go on."

"I hope the flood won't lift because I want to stay. I want the rain to fall for forty days and forty nights, so that I can be near you."

"Oh! I thought you were better, and you're as bad as he."



"You don't think so—you wouldn't care what he did because you dislike him—but you hate to see me acting lies because you like me—isn't that it? You like me as I like you. I joined that company because I thought you would be in it."

"Oh, don't talk to me like this. Think of yourself. You gave Tom Tuft an order for the coach fares."

"Yes! but it couldn't go away for the floods."

"He gave it to a horseman, and he swam the river miles higher up. Mr. Gronthead sent it—he cashed it for Tuft."

"H'm—but that's alright. I sent a wire from Emuford to a friend South to pay to my account money he's owed me for months."

"But if he fails?"

"It will be very humiliating—very bad, indeed."

"Oh, I hope it isn't so. But get away from here—leave these people who seem to take subterfuge and lying as part of the game—and go back to your own way of life."

She had taken his hand impulsively, but dropped it in a moment, and was gone.

"My own way of life," laughed Aladdin. "It was all right, too. As truthful as a prospectus, as honorable as Bainfield, and as courageous as Cold-foot Jones."

A great thunderstorm raged late that afternoon and drove all living things at Eclipse Corner to cover, and when the people of the half-crown table met for dinner, Aladdin felt that more than the air was electric.

They sat down with the Boss Cockie, now quite recovered, at the head of the table, and in a great good humor, with a chip and a joke for everybody.

"Have your tea, father," said Judy.

"What is they?" asked the Boss Cockie, sharpening the carving steel so that Mildred Floyd shuddered and put her fingers to her ears, and Birdie squeaked that it made her blood get fish hooks in it.

Judy regarded this proof of feminine weakness with open scorn; she had disliked the remaining half of the Fluffy Sisters on sight.

"Them eggs is home-reared—so's the butter, Miss Floyd," said the Boss Cockie. "Get to 'em. Ye've only got one enemy here, an' he's here for you to eat."

"No, father, them eggs do come from Butcher's Creek."

"We got whips o' fowls," says the Boss Cockie, "but the damn things lays away."

"A bit o' pork, Wire Fence?"

"No thanks."

"Oh, you ain't so bigoted. I seen you eatin' pork chops."

"I ain't a Jew," growled Wire Fence, blushing because Judy laughed.

"Prove it," said the Boss Cockie.

"I won't have pork, anyway, there," said Wire Fence, giving his cup to one of the red-dressed, barefoot black girls who waited at table.

"That proves it, then," said the Boss Cockie. "It's no good offerin' corn to a clothes-horse. Have some pork, Mr. Bluffson—our cook's a cock angel, though he is a Pong."

"No, thanks, Mr. Gronthead, just an egg."

"Mr. Kemble, anything you fancy?"

"I think not, sir."

"Where's Dubbin? Underground engineerin', I suppose. There, he's always last. What is it, Mr. Dubbin?"

"Steak and onions, please."

"Tell cook, Judy."

Judy, annoyed at the trouble of the special dish, crossed the room to the kitchen shoot and called in a Boanergetic voice, "Bull and magnolias!" at which all laughed but Dubbin, and he, with that vanity which was 90 per cent. of his mean soul, scowled at Judy, whom he hated. She had the eye of truth and the tongue of swiftness, and used it



whenever she was minded so—and that was grievously often.

“You broke into the new flour, mother,” said the Boss Cockie, leaving the table.

“Yes, true for you! All the rest goes to the shillin’ table.”

“The cook’s makin’ two breads,” supplemented Judy. “I give the common blokes the weevily.”

“I see,” said the Boss Cockie, satisfied with life—his dinner ended, his pipe alight, and the rain on the roof. “Where’s Jim?”

“At his books in his bedroom, father.”

“Judy, you an’ Mr. Jordan have y’r lesson.”

“Yes, me an’ y’r cousin will tend the gins.”

So as the gins padded in and out of the room and Mrs. Gronthead followed them about, scolding their clumsiness, and Vera Pardon corrected them gently and almost silently, Dubbin devoured the girl with his mean eyes—bringing into the face the neanness, the lust, the treachery and greed which are essential to melodrama, and are more common off the stage than on it.

At last he crossed to her where she sat putting away cutlery as it was handed to her from the kitchen shoot. She did not notice his presence except with the aversion she might have shown for a spider.

“Say somethink, Miss Pardon . . . Eh! You’re very quiet. I expect a conversation lolly with my tea.”

“I have none.”

Her aversion for him was such that Aladdin, standing by, turned to him.

“You heard the lady say she had no conversation lollies in stock—hadn’t you best go to the butcher’s and buy bull’s eyes?”

Miss Pardon arose and walked away.

“I don’t come from nowhere,” snarled Dubbin. “Everybody knows I come from Queensland.”

“That’s where the ticks come from, too, isn’t it?”

"I'll find out all about you," said Dubbin, vicious as a biting mare.

"It's all in the library, but you'll have to learn to read," said Aladdin, and he turned from the varnish traveller, regretting that in the circumstances he had ever been led into dispute with the man.

Meantime the Boss Cookie talked with Mildred Floyd, Athene Pallas, and Birdie Fluffy, and they flattered him so deftly that he began to believe himself a great man.

"I wish I was thirty agen," he said, "I been too good, I have. When I think how modest I was I'll never forgive myself for missin' all the harm I might ha' done in the world."

"Go hon," said Birdie. "Poor girls."

Mrs. Gronthead, re-entering from the kitchen, heard her and called sharply.

"Father!"

"Yes."

"Come here."

"Awright. 'Seuse me."

He lurched over to his wife unwillingly, his boots squeaking, complaining of the interruption.

"What is it?"

"Go an' hear Judy and Mr. Jordan on lessons."

"Awright—not so much 'father' before the actresses." He went to the right-hand corner of the room where Judy and her new tutor coned a book with heads very close together, and Jimmy Wire Fence seated a dozen feet away scowled at the proximity. Birdie laughed shrilly at this by-play, and Judy, hearing the laugh, thought it was meant in derision of her attempts at education, and registered a vow of vengeance. Aladdin heard the laugh; saw Judy's resentful face, and Mrs. Gronthead taking sides against the women by talking amicably with Dubbin. And Aladdin was glad that Vera Pardon had left the room, for while the thunder crashed and crackled without, little less stormy passion seemed to be brewing within, Kemble





'Awright—not so much 'father' before the actresses.'

and Saxby Leicester seemed to feel it coming, and promptly left the room; but the women held their ground, and Aladdin felt that he must stand by.

The irritation of the long wait in that trying climate, the gradual wearing down of patience, the weariness of proximity, seemed to be culminating in a dispute which would arise probably from nothing.

"Go on," said the Boss Cockie. "What's it to-day?"

"History, Bister Gronthead—the dates of kigs."

"Quite right—let her know everything about them kigs—they were a poor lot, when you got alongside 'em."

"What kig was crowd id sevedteed sixty?"

"George the something—the third."

"Right! When was the last corodatioid?"

"Nineteen hundred an' three."

"That was when Billy Nor'-West found the hundredweight slug on the Oxide."

"Was that in the coronation year, father?"

"Yes, it was."

"No, father, it was the year the goat eat the bloomonge."

"I tell you I know—the time the English bloke got at me for a pound, keepin' up his loyalty, I s'pose. That was the year."

"It wasn't corination year, father—'twas the year the goat eat the bloomonge."

"Will y' be quiet, woman? It was the corination year. Quit now," and as she went to the verandah he said in a loud stage-whisper:

"A good woman—mother—a grand woman, but not edgereated. She spells 'Eaven with a little e."

The foolish Birdie of the disbanded Fluffy Sisters cackled again; a laugh with vulgar insult in it, and the bush girl rose in a passion of defence for her mother, as Vera Pardon entered, and stayed, unable to run away from the storm that was breaking.

Judy took two books from the table and threw



them at Birdie, while she cursed in vivid speech all actresses, buskers, and people who strut their hour upon the stage and fret the audience for a week.

"Torkin' o' my mother—laughin' at my mother. You! a lot o' little spruikers in a show. We got no edgereation—we've been fightin' the bush an' you come here and laugh at us! You—you—"

"By dear Joody——"

"Your dear Judy—you old bloke with the cold nose—you call me dear Judy—there!"

She tore the book from his grasp and beat him on the head with it so that he was fain to run away, for all the men seemed paralysed by her action and incapable of assistance. Vera Pardon had run to her cousin, and seized her arms.

"Judy, dear, don't."

"I will, Vere. They laugh at you, too, I s'pose, an' you're a lady—better edgereated than ever they were. Ole actresses with dyed hair and a little squeakin', yellin' idjit that doesn't know anything. Birdy Fluffy! Ho! dear me! Birdie Fluffy! What a name to put on yer portmanter! Birdie the great actress, I don't think!"

"No, y' don't think!" screamed Birdie, beside herself with rage. "We're dyed-hair actresses, are we, and yer cousin's a edgereated lady—is she? She——"

"Birdie!" shouted Aladdin. "Silence!"

"Will I? Vera Pardon—she was a actress, too, with us, on'y she wasn't even good enough for that."

And then she knew the damage she had done, and being not bad, but only a fool, immediately repented.

"So that was it, was it?" said Mrs. Gronthead, bearing down on the shrinking girl, and taking her by the wrist. "Come, then—an' be done wit' yure lies—come to me room, an' I'm glad y'r mother's not alive to see the day."

Judy, white-faced for the first time in her life, hurried after them; the three actresses made good their escape in her wake; Dubbin alone was happy,

but the Boss Cockie destroyed the happiness with a gesture.

“ ‘Seuse me,” he said. “I’m goin’ to talk with these gen’l’men.”

He awaited Dubbin’s departure, and then said to the anxious Aladdin, and the beaten, astounded Trehwella:

“I live happy here and so could men—but women is hell. Soon’s they marry y’ they want to make y’ miserable, because every woman’s at heart a widder. But I ain’t goin’ to be troubled by wimmen that don’t belong to me, nor me wife and daughter insulted. Oh! I know you’re sorry, and it ain’t your fault, but there’s another reason now why this here flood’s been unlucky. We didn’t know where my neist was for two months an’ more—she put us off—an’ now we find she was on the stage, and the less she sees o’ the stage people the better I’ll like it. I got no grudge again yer, but as soon’s the river’s getoverable, y’ must go.”

He left them then, his boots squeaking the rigidity of his decision.

“And the raid’s stobbig,” said Trehwella. “Ad dowhere to go.”

“Just as I thought I was alright till I could hear from Sydney with money—I am all wrong. Oh! life’s a stringer-on—the original gold-brick man and bunco-steerer—the only reliable uncle from Fiji—that’s life.”

“It’s worse thad that,” said Trehwella, gloomily. “Life’s a abateur tryout at a vaudeville batinee; ad just as you thig you’ve got the audiedee paralysed with your beautiful voice, up cubs Death the stage badager, add calls out, ‘Get the hook!’”

Bagum put his round, cheerfully-foolish face in at the verandah door, and said, “The tank’s full,” and went away.

“There’s but one thing to do,” said Aladdin.

“What’s that, by boy?”

“The tank isn’t full enough yet, tho’ our cup is. We must pray for rain.”



CHAPTER XIV.

PRAYERS FOR RAIN.

If you shovel sand, be thorough,  
Glory lies in degree,  
Be the greatest and noblest dustman,  
Or the highest berg at sea.

—The Maxims of Billy Pagan.

“AND so you been an actress?”

“It was nothing terrible, Judy, dear—only foolish, and I was soon cured.”

“But you don’t look wicked.”

“There’s wickedness everywhere, Judy, and goodness too. Those people were very simple, really—most of them had only one fault—they had no money, and people didn’t come to see them.”

“Why?”

“There were many reasons, dear—one of them was nobody thought the show was worth the money.”

“All the other reasons don’t matter. An’ after that?”

“We were stranded, and I sent to uncle for the fare, and came back. And now I’m very miserable.”

“But you’ve been back three months.”

“It’s worse now than it was then, Judy.”

“Why? I know! You got a boy, it that it?”

“No!—no!—”

“I’m sure. Gor bless yer! I’m only seventeen, but I’ve had a bigger experience keepin’ Jimmy from the Wire Fence in his place—I know, me child. Go on, tell y’r little cousin Judy all about the boy. It’s Mr. Bluffson.”

"Oh, Judy!—that wild man!"

"Oh, say what y' like. A girl likes a man with a bit of ginger in him. An' he's not a sneak like ole Dubbin."

"He's not a sneak—but he isn't all he seems to be. But, never mind, I told Aunt everything—about myself, at least—and it will be all as we used to be once they've gone."

"Oh, they're not goin' in a hurry. Bluffson's a nice chap, an' I'll ask Dad not to hurry 'em—tho' I don't think the rain 'ull stop for years."

"They say the river will be open to coaches in a week."

"Anyhow, Vere, I was too quick. I don't think that little squeakin' yeller-'aired actress meant to laugh at me an' mother. Come to think of it, it must be funny. I'll ask Dad to tell Mr. Bluffson he didn't mean what he said."

"No, no! Leave things as they are."

But a new factor came to clinch Judy's resolution. Athene Pallas bringing a red-nosed and whimpering Birdie to make the amende honorable.

"I didden mean nothin'," said Birdie. "'Pon me sivvy I didn't. I was just laughin' because your father said somethin' funny."

"All right," replied Judy, full of generosity. "I was just like a kid lookin' for trouble, and I s'pose I didn't have no more sense than you when I was your age. Just forget it."

And the reconciliation with Judy was the reconciliation with the household, for the hard-faced bush girl had much force of character in her small bird-like head, and when she made up her mind other people had their minds made up for them.

So while the rain descended in sheets, douches, spray and emulsion, and the frogs cried, "Cold wattah" under every leaf in the garden, and Bagum cried his joke of "The tank's full," there was peace in the house. Dubbin was not at peace with anybody—he was merely sullen, sent to Coventry, and



waiting for the trump card to come in his hand by the reinstated mail when the floods should be over; but the others kept away from him, hating the sneak they instinctively felt him to be. There were still the usual excursions and alarms among the rain-imprisoned habitués of the shilling table; Walrus Moustaches especially crying aloud for vengeance on some man who had cheated him, or, as he put it, stolen of him ten post holes, and becoming frantic with rage when, having eaten his weevily bread, he looked in at the half-crown table, and complained bitterly of the gentlefolk eating scones, or, as he phrased it, "the bloomin' toff's eatin' pufferlooners."

Mischief for all of them came from the enforced indolence and the sense of being well-fed and well-protected from the endless torrents without. In Mildred Floyd it became an exaggerated fondness for Aladdin. She referred with wearisome repetition to their "salvation" by him, and at last tripped up to him with an affectation of coyness, drew a sprig of artificial orange blossom through his buttonhole, and triped away. Vera Pardon passed the verandah door at the moment, saw the action, and turned her head away, and Aladdin blushed like a schoolboy detected in sentiment, tore the orange blossom from his coat, and threw it to the frogs in the garden. Irving Kemble settled himself to wait with all the patience of his age, a grave, quietly smiling, almost silent, and very lovable old gentleman, very glad of the asylum the floods had provided, and but a little anxious of the days when the rain should be no more.

Judy and Trewhella Jordan had settled down to their respective roles of pupil and tutor—the late highly-disrespected Professor Melrose being now quite forgotten and antediluvian, having, in fact, existed before the flood. Jordan had not been so well off for years. His employment made him independent of the rules of the Royal Australian Dramatic Company, and he enjoyed his cakes and ale, and ginger was hot i' the mouth.

And fear seemed so far away that they began to be more natural than they had been for months; Athene Pallas, bending her placid big dark head over her crochet. Mrs. Gronthead, who had taken a great fancy to her, sitting opposite and sewing in amity, as if they had been life friends; Mildred Floyd, whose hair was rapidly evaporating its dye in that steamy air, pretending to read, but looking mostly at Aladdin with an air of gentle proprietorship—and a touch of mature wantonness in the gaze. She was sometimes surprised by Vera Pardon discovering those glances of ownership, and in turn surprised the girl looking at Aladdin tenderly and sorrowfully. Aladdin read and played draughts with the Boss Cockie, and for every waking moment cursed the inaction of his imprisonment; Dubbin sat alone, pretending to copy from his order book, but regarding Vera Pardon as a cat watches a mouse or a snake a bird—his impudent glance more insulting than speech.

Billy Nor'-West and his silent mate, Jimmy from the Wire Fence, sat together and talked monosyllabically.

"Still rainin', Wire Fence."

"Ye-e-es."

"When'll it stop?"

"D'no—might be for years an' might be for never."

"Ground soaked."

"Um!"

"Ground won't be good for travellin' for muncee."

"Yow."

"It's so soft it 'ud bog a muskeeter."

"Ye-e-es."

"I s'pose you won't get away till March."

"No-o-o."

"I s'pose them big mobs o' horses o' yours——"

"I can't hear Judy's lessons, an' if you keep on talkin' rain that goat Bagum will come along and yell 'Tank's full!'"



“But, I say, Wire Fence——”

“Oh, dry up!—y’r always talkin’, talkin’, talkin’.”

“What is the dabe of the largest towd id Scotland?”

“Glasger—poperlation—I forget.”

“Alright—it dod’t batter—we’ll have the elocutiod lessod. Begib frob page one hudred ad eighty-three of the Febale’s Cobpadiod. ‘A tailor sub tibe ago, who was dagerously ill, had a bost rebarkable dreab.’”

Saxby Leicester, to Billy Nor’-West, who had left Jimmy Wire Fence to the music of the beloved voice of Judy:

“Of course, in England I had my privit inkum.”

“What’s that?”

“My privit inkum.”

“Do it again, mate.”

“You know, I had privit means.”

“Oh! income, y’ mean. Don’t be so dam English. Alright, now we start fair.”

“Well, my trustee was a bound-ah!”

“How’s that?”

“Talked sense and economy and all that sort of rot. So I joined Sir Henry Irving at Drury Lane.”

“Was he hard up?”

“Good gracious, no! Why do you ask?”

“What was he livin’ in a lane for?”

“Drury Lane is a theatre, my dear chap—the greatest theatre in the world.”

“I see—what then?”

“Then I came to Australia, starring.”

“Starving?”

“Starring—playing star parts. Later, I joined Mr. Biddulfson.”

“Saxby,” said Aladdin, “Mr. Nor’-West isn’t interested—talk about the weather, or——”

“Anythin’ but weather,” interrupted the Boss Cockie. “Unless it’s dry.”

“I’m readin’ about England an’ Drury Lane, an’ Covent Garden, an’ all that,” said Judy, breaking

away from the elocution lesson. "The Earl treated Lady Muriel cruel, an' when she ran away, he follered an' brought her back."

"Those whom the Lord loveth he chaseth," said Aladdin, trying hard to make Vera Pardon laugh, and succeeding with a ghost of a smile.

"An' she was presented at Court. Were you presented at Court, Mr. Lester?"

"Yes—at Bow-street," replied Aladdin for him.

"I've just been thinkin'," said Mrs. Gronthead, "why don't you play actors play somethin' here in this big room, an' the shillin' table can have seats on the verandy. You could play it for the hoshpittle down at Bauhinia, an' send them the money."

"Mother, you know a thing or two," said the Boss Cockie. "It's a good thought that. Charge everybody ten shillin's; they might as well do their brass in that way."

"We could play Camille," suggested Mildred Floyd, who greatly admired herself in the character.

"Or Leah the Forsaken," said Athene Pallas.

Irving Kemble negatived both propositions. "We want all our good friends here in it—Miss Judy and Miss Pardon, and ladies like to dress up, I know. We have a wardrobe which can be used for all. I say Peg Woffington."

"Good!" said Aladdin. "A benefit performance of Peg Woffington in aid of the Irrigation Fund."

"We don't want to find any more water. I say, mother's scheme's right—the horspittle, tickets ten bob."

Dubbin sneered. "Who's goin' to be treasurer?"

"Mr. Gronthead," replied Aladdin, looking at him steadily. "He's more to be trusted than you or me."

Dubbin was silent, rage making him speechless as he saw that Vera Pardon laughed as if in applause.

"Have we got the manuscript?" asked Irving Kemble.

"I have two parts," replied Trewhella Jordan.

"Ad I cad fake the play from theb."



"Can you now? Well, that's clever, then, to write them out of your own head," and Mrs. Gronthead looked at him with a new respect.

"I ab both author add publicist, badam."

"I knoo a chap too that used to read his poetry in a public 'ouse."

"By dear Bister Gronthead, you bisudderstadd be."

"But you haven't enough people," said Aladdin, still ignorant of the marvellous elasticity of casts:

"It would be doing the impossible."

"We have done even that," replied Irvine Kemble, chuckling. "Why, we once played East Lynne with three men and two women. I was Levison, Carlyle, and Little Willie."

"I'd just eat it," said Judy. "Oh, go on, mother. What's the good of learnin' yellerention if I don't practise. And so would Veer."

But Vera Pardon shook her head as negative, and bent over her work, distrusting this sudden welcoming of the stage by those who had so ignorantly and bitterly hated it.

"Devil a doubt," said Mrs. Gronthead. "'Tis for the hoshpital, an' real ladies have sold kisses for a pound to help the poor—tho' they helped the min who helped themselves, I'm thinkin'," she concluded, with a twinkling of eyes that had more merriment in it than mere laughter.

"Biss Floyd—Peg! ad by clever pupil Biss Judy shall be Babel Vade—that's all I ask. Cast the rest yourselves."

They cast it loudly, quickly—Billy Nor'-West accepting with a grin a part yet to be written; Jimmy from the Wire Fence shortly refusing participation on the grounds that he hated a lot of talk.

"Boy Jim—where's Boy Jim?"

"Inventin' in his room," groaned the Boss Cockie. "Found him there t'day inventin' somethin' t' explode clouds and bring rain. He said it would stop droughts, so I give him a clip under the ear. Leave him out! He's inventin' mad."

The project gave them a new interest in life—the tutor turned “author—from memory,” as he called it; Kemble awakened to the production; Saxby Leicester already posturing mentally; and Mildred Floyd heading the women to the baggage “wardrobe” being naturally the first thing to be thought of.

After dinner that night they went to it—cutting out and altering and tacking, and the whirr of the sewing machine came from Judy’s room. Trehwella Jordan wrote steadily at the manuscript to be fabricated of memory and Charles Reade; Aladdin copying parts; and Saxby Leicester, Mr. Gronthead, and Dubbin—with the far-protruded upper lip of an insulted baby—sat together to play that blackfellow’s game of euchre.

Dubbin—with that hospitality which is dishonest because it is mainly prompted by the vanity of the host—asked them to have coffee and liqueurs (which he pronounced lickers), and so accidentally made the word intelligible to the Boss Cockie.

“What d’y want that for?” demanded Judy. “Y’ just had tea.”

“Never mind,” replied her father. “Go an’ get the coffee an’ send Billy Nor’-West fer the lickers. Now, what lickers?”

“Brand-ay and lump sugar,” said Saxby Leicester, and so decided for the three. The brandy and the coffee and the lump sugar were brought; the leading juvenile placed two lumps in a spoon, balanced the spoon on the coffee cup, poured the brandy over the sugar, and lighted it nonchalantly. Dubbin, with much affectation of superiority, placed the saucer on top of the cup, gave the saucer three lumps, and having half-filled the saucer with spirit, lighted it.

Tremendous enthusiasm from the unsophisticated.

“That’s a noo one,” said Billy Nor’-West.

“Look at the saucer afire!” said Judy.

“Well, then—well, then—it’s like the flames of the bad place, then,” said Mrs. Gronthead.

“My oath!” said Wire Fence.



"Why! that's nothing," said the Boss Cockie, vainly reaching for the brandy bottle.

He copied Dubbin in the saucer trick, but increased the sugar to four lumps; then he poured a good saucerful of the spirit and lighted it.

Saxby Leicester's mere spoonful had burned itself out, and he poured the melted sugar into the coffee. Dubbin, who watched him carefully, now saw that the moment had arrived, and as his saucer still blazed, he blew at the flame to extinguish it. At the same moment the Boss Cockie's saucer sent up a brilliant display, and frightened him a little at the height of the flame, which threatened to crackle among his whiskers; and Dubbin blew again. He blew the brandy all over the company, and the women separated, shrieking, and the Boss Cockie, now afraid of the spirits he had raised, tried to lay them with his breath. It was disastrous. The burning brandy blew all over the affected Dubbin and made him almost natural for a moment. He got up roaring, and Judy and her mother cried in panic. Aladdin shouting that there was no danger, and that the brandy would burn itself out—which it did in a few moments.

"That's a dam silly trick of yours," said the angry Gronthead to the sulky Dubbin. "Burnin' the good licker and then blowin' it all over the scenery. What's the good o' yer fireworks, anyhow—burnin' good brandy, 'stead of drinkin' it like a Christian?"

"It's the up-to-date way," said Dubbin, sulkily.

"Up ter date, is it? The nex' bloke that brings modern improvements 'ere gets a punch on the nose."

He strode off in his squeaking boots, and did not recover his native good humor for half an hour.

Next day, and the day after, flood-bound men began to straggle through from outback camps—men and horses and saddles and bridles, saturated—men with sodden swags who had headed the rivers, and even then had for a score of times narrowly escaped drowning. Everything had rotted in the weather—camp

gear, and food, and soddened bread, and saturated soil, vomiting new springs at every dozen yards. For the earth was full of water and was vomiting it—oozing it—sweating it in the attempt to become fit for feet again.

They brought the news that the horse mailman had got through to the railhead—after a week of struggle through black soil and red mire—of making boats of wreckage, of swimming floods with one hand-hold of a despairing horse's mane. But he had got through; a week of lonely and steadfast duty and ever recurrent danger, to carry through one little thin bag of Australian mails, and to earn his sixty shillings a week.

Vera Pardon came to Aladdin as soon as she heard the news, which she suspected on noting the malevolent grin of the self-satisfied Dubbin.

"The mail got through."

"I know."

"With your cheque in it."

"Yes."

"If it comes back you will have to answer to Dubbin."

"To that fellow? Why?"

"He got to know that uncle had the cheque, and he gave uncle gold for it, saying he would post the cheque to his account at Bauhinia."

"I see. He's an enemy all right. Well?"

"If it comes back? Oh! I couldn't bear to see you humiliated by that mean, mean, imitation of a man. I told aunt nothing of your circumstances except your kindness to me. They know nothing. Go before it is too late."

"I could get away alone, but I can't leave these people here. They're dependent on me—they look to me to fight their battles. I couldn't leave them. When will the fate of the cheque be known? He'd have the fate wired to Bauhinia."

"The mail reached Bauhinia four days ago, or five; a week to Brisbane is two days hence; a telegram from there to Bauhinia one day ~~more~~."



"And how many days Bauhinia to here?"

"If the weather is better, three days; if worse, no one knows—if as bad as now, five days."

"Safe for five days then—let us be good to one another for those five days, for after then we may be strangers."

She had been so anxious for him that his careless optimism annoyed her. "I won't be good to you. We ARE strangers—you are a madman. I never want to see you again."

"In that case," said Aladdin to himself, as she left the room, quick of her indignation, "I'll call in the dark next time, or put out the light."

But he was heavy hearted at the news; Dubbin had the cheque, and was thus armed where before he had been contemptible.

Still five days—much may happen in five days. "And besides," said Aladdin, "is he a genuine holder for value, or a malevolent holder for spite?"

He went out to study the question more deeply, for there was a lull in the rain—a suggestion of cloud-obscured sunlight, and steam rising from the earth. But five days for the knowledge that Billy the Optimist, of Sydney, had failed him, or made good, and paid in to his account, so that the cheque held by Dubbin improperly, might properly be retired.

There were no such heavy thoughts for Birdie Fluffy and Billy Nor'-West. That big bushman trembled before the glance of this wren among women. She sighed, dropped her glance modestly—too modestly for naturalness, except that her naturalness was flagrant art—and Billy Nor'-West felt too mean to live upon the same earth with this angelic girl. Timidly he put out a big brown hand—so brown that the fair hairs upon the back of it shone like gold—and touched her stubby little fingers with reverence.

Birdie drew away indignantly, looked at him so chillingly that as she herself said, "the day was cold enough to freeze the vanity of a vaudeville manager."

"Beg y'r pardon," said Billy Nor'-West.

"Insultin' a lady just because she happens to be an actress," cried Birdie, and wept until further notice.

"I wouldn't! I wouldn't! I'd rather fall dead than do it," protested the unhappy Nor'-West. "Go on! Y' don't think I'd insult a lady."

"I don't s'pose y' would, reely," sniffed Birdie, allowing herself to be comforted.

"An' I never thought of y' bein' a actress. I thought y' might give that up—for a good home an' a good man to—to—well—love you—there! 'Pon me soul! I mean that."

"I'd do anything to give up the life," said Birdie, drying her eyes. "D've know, I'd like to be a nun."

"No fear! No fear!" replied Nor'-West, energetically, repelling the sacrilege. "A fine girl like you——"

"I've had me sorrers," said Birdie, now acting well down stage, and remembering a bit of Mildred Floyd's lines in *The Bloodstained Village*. "Tho' life once was full of love—of love—and a—hope."

"Poor girl! Was yer married?"

"I was——"

"Dead or divorced?"

"No, he died before we could be married—I was only engaged. It was the sorrow of my life—but—the—the little child——"

"Child!" exclaimed Nor'-West, leaping from the table whose corner had supported him while he listened to Birdie's woe—"Me Gord! the child!"

Birdie turned on him a virtuous eye of purest ray serene.

"I adopted one—it was left on my mother's doorstep."

Judy, listening carelessly at the verandah, had been first amused, then shocked; now an expression of contemptuous incredulity replaced all others, and she listened with all her soul.

"——on me mother's doorstep one cool Winter's





“You’re a good man,” said Birdie; “be good to me.”

night. Oh! I never knew life until I knew the purity of that poo-ah little loverly, lonerly, deserted cheild."

Billy Nor'-West, quite subjugated by all this beauty and goodness, began himself to cry, murmuring brokenly as he took her in his arms and kissed her.

"Poor girl! You 'ave suffered. But I'll see y' never do any sufferin' any more."

"You're a good man," cried Birdie. "An' I have suffered, so—be good to me—be good to me."

"My oath I will," said Billy Nor'-West, and meant every letter of it, and the spirit, too.

"A-ar-hum!" coughed Judy, and Billy Nor'-West gave Birdie a final kiss and made for the door.

"I seen you," said Judy, to encourage him.

"I was only talkin'," protested Billy Nor'-West, his shame making him inarticulate.

Not so Birdie! Where his was modesty, hers was triumph to be advertised—she followed him, passed Judy, and stood at the verandah door, throwing kisses after the bashful one.

Judy was not deceived, and used the theatrical slang she had acquired during the last week or so to prove her sophistication.

"Oh, rats! rot!" said Judy. "Get the hook."

"How dare you? We love each other."

"Oh, get up!" continued Judy, scornfully. "The curtain's down an' the audience is gone home—you needn't be dead any more."

"Alright," said Birdie, and laughed. "It's no good if you know."

"I heard all of it. What made y' tell that poor chap lies like that?"

"I reely couldn't help it when I saw how big it went. If it had been on a real stage I'd ha' got two curtain calls."

"You oughter have six months. What was that about the poo-ah loverly, lonerly little cheild?"

"All guff! I'm a wowser, reely. Mother always



calls me straight-laced. But if you on'y knew the road as I do with snide comp'nies, you'd do anything to get out of it into a life where there's no one-night stands, an' the food's certain. It's safer, an' I'm sick o' dodgin' landlords."

"Poor ole liar y' are! An' does Mr. B'dulfson do that, too?"

"Stand off landlords?" said Birdie, anxious to prove somebody worse than herself; "why, he's been knighted for it. He's got the Victoria Cross for leg-pullin' in many lands."

"Birdie!"

They heard the stern tone of Aladdin—he looked at the fool for a moment, and walked away again, believing that now the game was ended.

"Oh, my 'eavens!" gasped Birdie, clinging to Judy. The bush girl pushed her away and ran after Aladdin. He felt her hand on his arm, and turned to see a sun-browned, rain-sprinkled face expressing generous pity, and heard her words.

"It's all right, Mr. B'dulfson. I don't believe a word of it. Her tongue's on a swivel—that one—an' I don't carry tales. An' Vere likes you, all right."

"She likes anybody else better?"

"No fear; but I ain't surprised if she thinks she does—we women are all dippy."

She sped back to the verandah, and Aladdin walked down to the creek bank, trying to think, and bringing all his thoughts back to the same dead end.

Judy treated the feather-brained one with such open scorn that the Boss Cockie, who believed greatly in his daughter's good sense, took a dislike to her, too. That caused a coolness between even such old friends as the Boss Cockie and Billy Nor'-West. In the afternoon, Birdie, giving herself airs for the deep impression of Billy Nor'-West, put aside her needlework, arose, and said:

"If you ain't using the pianner, Miss Gronthead, I'll go an' de me scales."

She departed without waiting for agreement, and the Boss Cockie looked after her, and said with meaning:

"She's another scaler—sings about nothin' but herself. Seven-stone-six of good for nothin', she is."

Billy Nor'-West looked at him indignantly, and followed Birdie. She sang the egotistical exercises consisting exclusively of scales to the word "Me! me! me! me!" repeated to infinity, all the afternoon.

Aladdin returned when the rains were gathering heaviness for the night. He found Mr. Gronthead waiting for him in flattering impatience—for the Boss Cockie had come under the charm of the adventurer, and in his absence was ill at ease.



CHAPTER XV.

ALADDIN RUBS THE LAMP.

Give the public what it asks for,  
Gamble or sure five per cent.,  
Sell surfing suits at Christmas,  
And turn fishmonger in Lent.

—The Maxims of Billy Pagan.

THREE days later, and Aladdin felt that the next two days must pass quickly, or irritate him to insomnia. He wanted to know whether the Sydney account was in credit—not so much now to disappoint the malevolence of Dubbin, nor to free his dependents when the rains stopped—but to find money for a new thing—the newest thing which is always the greatest thing in the world. That search for a way out which had called for the long walk in the rain had discovered for him a possible salvation made by the floods.

Eclipse Corner is in the centre of an alluvial tin belt; in the hills to the immediate east the floods had torn ravines and two of these exposed strong lodes carrying tin. He was glad of the rain now, since nobody followed him, and he had pegged three leases, knowing that he had not the money to pay the fees on one. And for that he waited, and to take the edge off his impatience he repegged the leases every day, and went further afield to a great hill of drift surrounded by granite mountains, and in the as yet untried creeks between the granites and the drifts he washed many dishes of prospects.

But the coach made no appearance on the sixth day, and he determined to wait no longer. He was quite

decided not to let this prize slip; scruples should not stand in the way, nor uncertainties—he would do possible evil that certain good might come.

Dubbin hung around the sitting-room so that Vera Pardon deserted it; but if she treated coolly the man she disliked, her reception of the man she liked was antarctic. Without intending so to do, Aladdin had done the best thing possible to soften her. She ascribed his daily absences to her own treatment of him, and so far relented that on this day she opened the conversation. The weather, of course; then the date of the charity performance dependent on that weather; then the rehearsals; then the principals—lastly, naturally, and inevitably, each other.

Judy later seeing them, their heads very nigh one another looking over the big family album of photographs, giggled sympathetically and joyously—being that eternal matchmaker—a woman.

“That is uncle,” said Vera Pardon, pointing to a photograph of the Boss Cockie, very stern in very new and uncomfortable clothes. “That’s auntie. And that’s Judy when she was a baby—they’re not good photos—they were all taken by travelling photographers.”

“They’re very interesting,” said Aladdin. “Where are you?”

She turned the insets over a dozen weird and faded portraits of the people of thirty-five years ago—cabbage-tree hats for white mole-skinned, spurred and bearded bush dandies; wide skirts and bustles, fearsome bonnets, sternly folded shawls, tasselled fichus and formal dolmans of their women; and stopped at a photograph of herself of two years ago—black-dressed, slight, slim, pathetic—looking more seventeen than the twenty years that had then been hers.

“May I?” whispered Aladdin.

“What?”

“May I keep it?”



"It's an old one—very dull-looking, too."

"Let me have it."

"You'll only throw it away."

He seized the tactic permission, extracted the little portrait, and as if pretending not to know, she turned over two insets hurriedly, and took up a cabinet picture loose in the book. Her photograph was in his pocket now, and as he looked down at her he saw that she looked at this new photograph with misty eyes.

"Your mother?" said Aladdin, softly.

"Yes—she died ten years ago, but I could never forget her. My father? He died nearly twenty years ago. Yes, I'm twenty-two—a little more."

"It's a beautiful portrait—though it is faded and old."

"Yes, isn't it? It was taken in Sydney long before I was born."

She turned to the back of the picture, and Aladdin saw thereon—"Bismarek—photo"; and below it a newspaper cutting pasted. She caught his glance and said, "I used to wonder at the meaning of that. '£640. 640. M.F. 31a. Everard Pardon'."

"I wonder, too—it's a strange thing to have on the back of a portrait."

"My father was Everard Pardon. I think mother must have pasted it on her own picture, because it had father's name to it."

They chatted to the disgust of Dubbin, who looked in at intervals of ten minutes, and went away sulkily until the Boss Cockie came in from his daily ride to the river to see if the floods had abated on the earth. And Aladdin, more than ever determined to win after knowing the gracious Vera Pardon of that afternoon, opened the business at once.

"Mr. Gronthead," he said, "I want thirty pounds."

The old suspicions of the Boss Cockie seemed to return to him as he replied.

“Money! Y’ better go an’ get examined by two doctors.”

“But my cheque?”

“Oh, that’s all right—I thought you wanted to borry.”

“It’s the same thing,” said Aladdin.

“You’ll have y’r joke,” laughed the Boss Cockie, very pleased with himself. “Come along to the bar,” and Aladdin followed him, and was followed by Vera’s look of scorn, which he felt, because he had seen her standing among the giant lillies on the verandah, and knew that she had heard.

A horseman left that day and Aladdin sent his application and the fees in notes to the warden’s office at Bauhinia, and then he led the Boss Cockie out through a dwindling rain that was fast thinning to a mist, and showed him the new tin fields. The Boss Cockie re-discovered his own energy immediately; he ran excitedly up hills and fell over rocks, retaining his enthusiasm even when he had barked his shins on a new outcrop. He pegged two lease and returned to Eclipse Corner in the watery dusk, pleased with the whole world.

That night there came the wonder of a new world to the rain-weary people of Eclipse Corner. At eight o’clock darkness folded up, moisture dripped only from saturated eaves.

“The moon! the blessed moon!” said Mrs. Gront-head. “Glory be to all—the moon—turn your money, Judy—tell Jim to never mind his seven time’s seven—an’ come an’ see the moon.”

They crowded out upon the wide verandah; through the veils of water-smoke ascending from the earth fell the rays of the big white electric tropic moon—long hid, and now dropping light and a gentle heat. Dubbin came nigh Vera Pardon—she moved away a step, and saw Aladdin near, and their hands met somehow, and held. A great friendliness came to them all; a desire for nearness after the long deferred reprieve.



"It's good to see it, mother," said the Boss Cockie, putting his right arm across to her right shoulder, so that by and bye it slid naturally around her neck. Judy allowed Wire Fence to take her hand prisoner, and a moment was patting the gaoler; Mildred Floyd and Athene Pallas cuddled one another; and there was never any doubt about Birdie. At first sign of softening in others Birdie melted—melted and then clung. Nor'-West had paddled her hand; what then shall Birdie do but stretch her arm to take her lover's big waist and be forced to compromise with a handful of his coat at the further hip.

"Oh, it's luverly," bleated Birdie. "I e'd just die."

"Die quiet," said Judy fiercely—"I'm listenin'."

"Tinkle! Clank! Tink! Clank! Clonk! Tink! Clank!"—up came the sound of the horse bells from the flats; horses making home for the first time in weeks—horses no more flood-bound, and making back to old habit and the servitude that comes to men. There were forty bells aringing, apparently all cast from the one deplorable foundry to that one note, which is the mother of all files. And to the strollers came the great admiration for this bush girl who read the sound of night by ear, as they would with eyes have read the printed page.

"That's Jim's horse," said Judy, plucking at Aladdin's arm in her excitement, as a more than usually unidentifiable "clank" tortured the ear,— "an' there's yours, Vera! . . . That's one o' the buggy 'orses, Dad. An' there's mine—Ginger—he's been away three weeks. . . . Ain't it fine, Mr. B'dulfson?"

"I think you are," said Aladdin. "You're wonderful. How do you ever educate the ear to remembering all those little differences of bells? I can't hear any difference at all."

"It's nothin'," replied Judy, shamefacedly, now

that she was found to have a knowledge known to no other.

"Talkin' of edgercation," said the Boss Cookie. "It's time you went to yours, Jude—Mr. Jordan 'ull be waitin'."

"Alright, Dad."

"Whatcher on now?" he asked for an answer to impress the company with his own tremendous learning. "Electreuction or what?"

"Elereuction," replied Judy, "an' Bible readin's."

"Right you are. Not much o' the Ole Testerment tho'."

He continued confidentially to Aladdin, who was reminded by a warning pressure from Vera's fingers that he would be an enemy if he laughed. "There's too much o' that there writin' on the wall—'Minnie, Minnie, tickle the parson.' I heard it in the church down in Townsville, an' they got narked with me because I larft."

Judy, taking with her the glad Jimmy from the Wire Fence, went along the moonlit verandah to the little sitting-room, whence by and bye arose the marvellous elocution—guiltless of the sounds of M or N—of Trehwella Jordan.

Then came the man with the walrus moustaches, slipping in the moonlight across the greasy soil, uttering his loud and foolish cackle of joy and shouting that the river northwards was fordable, and the coach from Bauhinia was starting to cross with twelve horses. The people of the long siege raised a cheer; the stream miners awoke from the lethargy of weeks, and the actors in the long spree sat up and treated their heads with great tenderness—prior to asking the brains therein to now start work again, and think a little.

The Boss Cookie roared around the house giving many orders, each partially contradictory of the others. Mrs. Gronthead ran to rescue Judy from mere education and reclaim her to hotelkeeping. Athene Pallas and Mildred Floyd sought Aladdin,



and Mildred Floyd went to her room in great agitation when she discovered that Aladdin had eyes but for Miss Pardon; while Athene Pallas, finding Saxby Leicester in his room, called to him through the window that the night was fine, and that they might rehearse their great scene in Peg Woffington under the moon. Dubbin's rage grew so that he paled to the lips as he marked the mutual concern of Aladdin round the angle of the building. He would have been glad, yet still more enraged had he seen her next action, and heard her words to the adventurer; enraged at her solicitude, glad because she showed her fear of Dubbin himself.

"The coach!" she said. "And the cheque. It may be returned."

"I hope not."

"Why don't you wait at least to be sure without taking more money from my uncle?"

"I did it to save these people, and myself, too. It's a new tin mine I found. It will be a certainty."

"Will be! Will be! Why don't you do honest work—plod honestly—not be ever after these rapid fortunes that are only in the air."

"Honest work? Trade? It's as big a fraud as any other. Adulteration of food, and short weight, and crooked balance-sheets."

"Never mind trade—honest work."

"No man ever got rich at that, and I want to be rich to pay my debts and get you."

"You never will. Don't talk wild nonsense. Let's think a way out. You'll be humiliated by that cad. Oh! let's think a way—let's think a way."

She had moved towards him as she spoke; and without conscious volition he took her in his arms, and held her so, and let her cry for a moment.

And then there came the noise of wheels—the barking of dogs, the sound of horsehoofs on the rounded stones, the squeaking of brake blocks, and many voices all talking at once in congratulation of the coach-driver from Bauhinia, who had restored

communication after nearly three weeks' loss of it.

Ere the welcomes were over the headlights of the coach from Emuford were seen upon the southwestern road, and Tom Tuft alighted to congratulate the Bauhinia driver on the world being an open road again. So to the accompaniment of loud talk and hearty laughter, the new arrivals fed, while Judy, as postmistress, aided by Jimmy from the Wire Fence, an honorary sorter, opened the mails—the Bauhinia bag first. The anxious Aladdin waited in the little group around the office, saw Dubbin's letters delivered to him, saw the little bunch of people separate, and at last had to recognise that there were no letters for him. His friend in Sydney had failed then—annihilation at the hands of the enemy had to be faced.

"What will you do?" asked Vera Pardon, seeing the trouble in his eyes.

"Bluff it—spar for wind—gain time."

"A shame that a man of your abilities should put himself in the position requiring subterfuge to escape from it. But I won't say anything to hurt now. Did you see the bag emptied?"

"Yes, they threw it out on the floor—nothing for me."

Sometimes the mailman is given loose letters after the bag is sealed. . . . Listen!"

It was Dubbin's voice of accusation, deprecated by the Boss Cockie.

"The cheque you give me of his," said Dubbin, "isn't worth a pint of cold water."

"I'dno so much about that," replied the Boss Cockie. "It's only your sayso."

"What will you do?" whispered Vera Pardon to Aladdin.

"It's a golden hammer for an iron gate," said Aladdin, "and I've lost mine—there's no letter in the mail for me, so I must tear down the walls of Jericho with words."

"Hush! Listen!" said Vera. "The cheque's



back, listen!" and her face paled as if it were her own danger, while they listened to the voices in the room.

"It's a bad cheque," said Dubbin. "Here's the wire—he's no good undoubterbly."

It was not the loss of the money, but the loss of the prestige of being the smartest and best edged-out man on Eclipse Corner that filled the Boss Cockie with resentment. And yet he was very fond of Aladdin—he instinctively disliked Dubbin. Aladdin had discovered the new tin field and he had seen Aladdin and Vera talking without in the greenness of the new world, and being an honest and a kindly man the youth of it all appealed to him. He would not condemn Aladdin unheard.

"I like 'im," he said. "I cashed another cheque for 'im two or three days ago. Say what y've got to say while he's around. I'll send for him."

Vera faltered back into the gloom of the verandah, and Aladdin stepped into the room to hear the protestations of Dubbin, who did not favor this enforced making of accusations in open court.

"No need, Mr. Gronthead," said Aladdin. "I'm here."

"Jus'swell you are," said Dubbin, menacingly. "It's no use trying to hide yourself behind a woman now."

"It isn't," replied Aladdin, out to gain time to think. "not in these days of X-ray skirts."

"Y'know, Mr. Bluffson, I gey him that cheque o' yours, an' he says it's bad."

"It is, undoubterbly," said Dubbin, his voice triumphant.

"That bank's always sending back cheques," said Aladdin. "It can't have any money."

"That's no good to me," replied Dubbin savagely, but Gronthead stopped him.

"If Mr. B'dulfson says that—that goes," said the Boss Cockie—"I see the cheque. It says, 'Pay the

bearer, whoever he was, and if they didn't pay, it shows they didn't carry out instructions."

"That's it," said Aladdin, sparring heavily for wind. "It's a very disobedient bank," and Vera, who had condemned him, understood, and with a new hope, ran to search the mail bag again.

"I don't believe his cheque's no good, any way," said the Boss Cockie.

"Here's the wire saying it's not paid, undoubtedly."

"P'raps you stopped payment?" suggested Gront-head.

Aladdin laughed and replied: "No, it stopped payment itself. Now, these are the facts. I wired to Sydney to a friend who owes me money to put my account in order, and I drew in anticipation of that. For all I know, and I can't believe that it isn't so, the account is now in credit, and I won't believe there's anything wrong with my cheque until I see it."

"There's the wire."

"Where's the cheque? Produce it and I'll give you gold for it."

"I will, anyway, if you haven't got enough," said the Boss Cockie, and at the moment Vera Pardon ran into the room and placed two letters in Aladdin's hand.

"They were in the loose mail," she said. Aladdin broke the seal of the more official envelope, scanned the contents, then read aloud the banker's short and very sweet acknowledgment that the sum of one hundred pounds had been placed to the credit of Brisleaver Biddulfson.

"You've got your wire dated the day before the letter, but I'll bet you twice the amount of the cheque that it's paid. You got the cheque to do me a bad turn if you could, and I've nothing to say to you. But you are satisfied, Mr. Gront-head?"

"Course I am," said the Boss Cockie. "I always



liked you, Mr. B'dulfson—an' you put me on to that noo tin field."

"The cheque was crook," insisted Dubbin, full of cold hatred. "It was only luck that put it good. If it isn't good after all," he added, "look out."

As he went to the door, forcing back the many papers he had taken from his pocket in the agitation of defeat, he dropped a letter, enveloped, stamped and ready for the post. Judy, on the verandah, picked it up and read the address, "Mrs. Dubbin, Rosalie, Brisbane."

"Mr. Dubbin," she said. "You dropped this."

Dubbin turned and snatched the letter from her hand.

"Grrrh!"—he went away with a growl, showing his teeth as a retreating dog who dare not stay and bite. And Judy, saying to herself, "Mrs. Dubbin, Rosalie, Brisbane," threw the broom down and went back to the little sitting-room, where her own natural aptitude and the ministrations of Trewhella Jordan had educated her, almost as much as had the stage slang of the stranded company during the thirty days of flood. She had an idea. She loved her cousin, liked Aladdin, and despised Dubbin. She knew also that Aladdin was worse than poor, having helpless dependents, and that Dubbin's better financial status inclined Mrs. Gronthead to him, and she fought for the seemingly weaker, as women of her stamp mostly do.

"I'll write to his mother, and tell her he's after a bush girl here—that'll start her off to stop him."

With much agony of spirit and physical travail of following the movement of the pen with her tongue, she wrote to Mrs. Dubbin, Rosalie, Brisbane, thus:

"Dear Madam,—I want to tell you your son is here for weeks now, running after a bush girl who doesn't want him and is loving another chap. The girl has no money, and hates him close up, but he won't let her alone. Please send for your son, as

she loves the other chap.—Yours faithfully, JUDITH GRONTHEAD.”

But she did not post it immediately—not being yet quite satisfied with it as a literary production. She put it away for a day or two.

Aladdin sought Vera, and found her, now that the trouble was over, more distant than ever. He was justified in imagining a tenderness as part of all her intimate knowledge of his difficulties, and her sympathy in his escape, so Aladdin, going joyfully to his reward, met with a more fiery and direct enemy than Dubbin.

“How dare you,” she said. “You think now it’s over that it never was, and that you can do it again with impunity. I never want to see you again.”

“Now!” said Aladdin, addressing himself, for she departed without giving him an opportunity to answer. “What are you to do with a girl who helps you like a mate, and talks to you like a copybook?”



CHAPTER XVI.

THEFTS AND ENTERPRISES.

Get all you want, and more, no law the greedy breaks,  
This is a world that gives a man just as much as he makes.  
—The Maxims of Billy Pagan

JUDY was not pleased with Aladdin's latest discovery of tin—it postponed the performance of Peg Woffington for the benefit of Bauhinia's hospital, and when she loudly upbraided her father for permitting work to interfere with pleasure, he callously told her to wait for the next flood. But he softened the delay by telling her that he would build a noo big hall for them—Gronthead's Theatre—next the hotel.

A bird flew away with the story of tin—men came from all the winds—new hands and old hands, and men who knew, and men who didn't. Some said that Judy's old tutor, Professor Melrose, had got a claim on a still newer field than Aladdin's—that near Pandanus Crossing.

The day after the mail got through saw a new settlement at Eclipse Corner; many men and a canvas town.

Men came by horse and camel and boat, and swarmed over the new field; a week after the rivers opened there came an enterprising publican with a provisional license in his pocket, and an hotel dismantled from a site forty miles away, and carried on two waggons as boards.

Irving Kemble, being honorably acquitted of treachery by Aladdin, and assured that there was no disloyalty to the old management in establishing a new dramatic company now that the old management had abandoned Art for Trade, re-organised the old show, and with Aladdin's credit and the Boss Cockie's money, built a theatre of bush timber, can-

vas and galvanised iron, and within a month was playing many ancient melodramas to enthusiastic and unsober audiences.

But while all this was waiting, or in the doing, Aladdin rubbed his lamp of tin, and assisted by the labour of ten men, broke out twenty tons of high-grade surface stone in a week and sent it to the battery, thirty miles away.

That done, he took the Boss Cockie into his confidence, and the Boss Cockie advanced the money, by cheque signed by Mrs. Gronthead, to pay all the creditors who had been killed or wounded in the many fights of the Royal Australian Dramatic Company. Among others, Drinkwater was found at Emuford by telegram, and this was wrong; for Drinkwater had thus Aladdin's address, and came to Eclipse Corner to play his old part of general nuisance. He became also a mining promoter—with the luck of the novice and the naivete of a pirate who regards himself as a business man.

The owner of the newspaper at Bauhinia came to Eclipse Corner to spy out the land for a new journal; he ordered a press to be sent and an office to be built, and he telegraphed "Sensational mining discoveries" and hot air to the city papers—and a dull Stock Exchange, eager for a new gambling counter, did the rest.

Aladdin, feeling a boom in his bones, could not stay out of it: could not be content with breaking out ore and shipping it, and taking the returns as if they were profits on soap making.

"What's a mine without a romance?" said Aladdin. "We'll float her. We'll float our two blocks together—Buckley's Chance United; capital, £20,000 in 40,000 shares of ten bob."

"I see," said the Boss Cockie, dubiously. "An' who do we sell the shares to?"

"We take most of them ourselves, and pay out of profits. This and the next camel shipment will give us the money. And then, Mr. Gronthead, we're



out for money, and we want fifty thousand off the bears before we come in again. I know! The public will feed, and we'll let 'em have so little they'll put the price up, and then the professional market will bear, and we'll buy their bear down to the last of his flat feet."

"It's good to me—I don't understand it, but it talks good. D'ye know these whaty' call 'em—bears?"

"I think so—the men I'm out to catch are Bainfield, Willy the Wowser and Cold-feet Jones."

Within a week Buckley's Chance United were quoted at twenty shillings buyer. No self-respecting bear could hold off that unfortunate name. Cold-feet Jones laughed over his sale notes.

"My word, Vanilla," he said. "How can a thing called Buckley's Chance be worth par, and here they are at two bob premium? It's tempting Providence not to sell 'em till the cows come home."

Willie the Wowser and Bainfield, the ancient breaker of pools on honour, were seized with the same madness of unbelief in Buckley's Chance United. They bought back a few shares, and the scrip seemed free enough, and they sold without fear, and heavily.

Aladdin had sent away the orders to buy heavily, and now was free for the hill of drift tin he had found at the height of the rains. He remembered suddenly that he had been content to take up one man's ground on it when money for lease fees was scarce, and when he walked over the ground he found pegs—new pegs of an 80-acre lease, which covered the ground of Aladdin's brand-new miner's right, or, at least, surrounded it. And the initials on the pegs were "C.D."—and the tattered application form was in the name of Charles Dubbin, who had used the information foolishly given by the Boss Cockie in his attempt to defend Aladdin in the matter of the returned cheque.

"Still, we've got two men's ground," said Aladdin

to himself, "though it might be jumped by now, as we've been too busy to work it."

He had walked up a steep track of granite, and on the summit, among the twisted yellowjacks, he found a low cairn of stones, and looking in its direction down the mountain, saw that it pointed to an old swathe cut through the trees.

"A survey line," said Aladdin, and followed it down. It led him to the rotted remains of a peg, and then to a tree—its bark defaced for a record—and there he made out the letters:

"M.F.,

31a.

"H'm!" said Aladdin. "So before I discovered this hill there was another Columbus, at least thirty years ago."

From mere habit of note-taking he copied the letters and figures into his pocket-book, and returned to Eclipse Corner, to tell Mr. Dubbin that whereas a jumper is unpopular, the jumper of a claim held by the discoverer of a field is anathema.

There disappointment awaited him. Dubbin had gone by the midday coach to Bauhinia. Billy Nor-West, too, had departed for his first visit to a city.

Vera met the adventurer, and the mere sight of her reminded him of the characters on the tree. But he said nothing of it either to Vera or to her uncle—merely remarking that he would ride to Bauhinia next morning, starting at daybreak.

"Take 'em down," said the Boss Cockie, who was taking very naturally to the new ways of quick money. "Get to 'em. Don't leave 'em any socks."

"S-s-sh!" said Aladdin, glancing apprehensively at Vera, who had already heard, and looked at him with the old scorn.

"It's all right," said the Boss Cockie. "Vere knows. I was tellin' her how clever y' were—gettin' back at the blokes that bit yer," he concluded glibly with the names. "Willie the Wowser, Bain-



field, and Cold-feet Jones—I told her, an' she laughed."

She laughed again then—a laugh with bitterness in it, and walked away. Aladdin followed her, and caught her in a minute.

"I'm sorry you know," he said. "I'm off to-morrow—down to Bauhinia, and on to Brisbane. I want you to think kindly of me."

"How can I? You're sure to get money now, and you want more at any cost."

"It isn't the money—it's the game. . . . It's early in the afternoon yet. Will you come for a little walk—you've been tied to the house for weeks? Or I'll get the horses round and we'll drive."

"No—get two saddle horses. I'll be ready."

They rode up the wide tree-grown mire called a street, passed the claims of the tin streamers over the flat, and into a little valley like a hop garden, with vines of the wild grape that grow as soon as you take your eye off them.

Then suddenly Vera pulled up her horse, looked around for a moment, and pointed south.

"That's almost the way we came," said Aladdin. "A little further west, I suppose."

She shook her head as in deprecation of speech, and he followed her in the new direction, down through broken rocks, across a creek flat, and to a cleared hill. When they breasted the hill he saw a white railing enclosing two poinciana trees, their lettuce-green feathers dripping moisture and shining molten in the sun, and a great frangipanni scattering ivory blooms and penetrating scent over a grassy mound and a white headstone.

"My mother," said Vera Pardon—after a moment, and turning her horse she led him more south-easterly.

"Vera!"

"Don't speak yet."

They cut the Bauhinia-road in less than a mile.

Easterly was the new township of Eclipse Corner shining in the sun.

"Vera!"

"I took you there because my mother married a man like yourself. She was happy only when she was with him, and he was as adventurous as you, and as greedy to win as you are. He died early because he couldn't help taking risks, and she died early and unhappily."

"But——"

"There's only one thing worth having in the world—happiness—and we get it only through duty—work."

"Well—I'm doing it."

"You call that work—laying traps for Cold-feet Jones! Oh! I can't talk to you."

And she didn't—not for an hour or two. But after dinner, when Judy was at lessons with her tutor, and Jimmy from the Wire Fence attended her as chaperon, Aladdin became decisive, telling her that he was leaving next day and must make himself right in her eyes.

"You can only do that in one way."

"How?"

"You're going South to catch the people who caught you—fighting one theft with another. If you want to please me you'll let these people off."

"After I win—anything you ask. But to forgive them now when I've got them——" He laughed at her; he was the old, careless, charming Aladdin again, and she did not want to escape from his arms for a moment.

"I'm out to win. Clear stage—strike the Christian resignation scene—I'm on for my big revenge act."

She wrenched herself from him, her eyes fiery with dislike for his flippancy.

"Go, then—and don't come back."

"I'm going to find out more than you have any idea of, Vera—something of someone very dear to you—something of somebody very hateful to me;



and then to put Cold-feet Jones in his class and come back to you."

"Don't come back unless you come back clean."

"I'll come back," said Aladdin. "If you play football you get muddy—I'll play the game and wash after."

He found on leaving that though Vera Pardon might scorn him ever so scornfully, Eclipse Corner still held one faithful heart. As he went to the buggy Mildred Floyd came to him, though he had shaken hands with her before.

"You are leaving us, Aladdin," she said, "after preserving us from death and dishonor. Oh, say you'll come back—to me."

"I will come back," said Aladdin uneasily, never knowing the whereabouts of Vera, but well knowing how public was a whisper in that sounding-board called a hotel.

"Say you will come back to me. . . . I wait for you."

"I will certainly return, Miss Floyd—er—good-bye."

She had caught him by the left lapel of his coat—and now she showed that she had held concealed in her hand all this time a sprig of artificial orange blossom—of the stiff, hard, scentless sort used for the veils and cakes of brides. She pinned it in his coat while he stood irresolute; and feeling utterly foolish and resourceless Aladdin stepped into the buggy. Then he heard laughter, saw Judy's smiling face and Mrs. Gronthead laughing heartily, and the ridiculous orange blossom covered him with blushes of shame. As he wheeled the horses he tore from the coat the orange blossom, and threw it into the mud.

Mildred Floyd uttered a piercing scream of despair and called for help. Looking back, Aladdin saw Athene Pallas and Birdie Fluffy leading the deserted one into the hotel, and Aladdin said a naughty word or two, and treated the offsider to a cut of the whip.

CHAPTER XVII.

COLD-FEET AGAIN.

Let thy sins fit thy credit,

And woe if they be worse.

For little thieves are hanged by the neck,

And great thieves are hanged by the purse.

—The Maxims of Billy Pagan.

ALADDIN, driving through the cooling aisles of eucalypti at the tails of two swift horses, and with the knowledge that down South Cold-feet Jones waited to be eaten, felt that life held no expression for his joy in it. Fighting and the game again, and the beloved waiting at the end of the first trick.

At midday he halted at Carpentaria Creek—half way to Bauhinia, and there he saw a delicate little man trying to build a lean-to addition to a skillion, and hammering his thumb once to every six strokes at the nails. Something familiar was in that air of a London sparrow; Aladdin hailed, the little man turned, and showed the birdlike face of Wilfred Montgomery—he who was one time possessed in mid-summer of a Melton overcoat with astrakhan trimming on the cuffs and collar.

“Mr. Biddulfson! And I’ve been worrying where you were. I got through to Bauhinia—I put out all the billing—but these rains. All the three sheeters I posted were ruined.”

“They’ll never be wanted again. But what are you doing here?”

“I was stranded and a man at Bauhinia engaged me to do odd jobs here. I’m not much good at it. I’m not strong. . . and I’ve a cold. . . and the weather and the food is right for strong men. . . but I’m tired.”

“You wait for the coach to-morrow and go on to



Eclipse Corner. I'll give you a note."

"But the company?"

"It's playing there three nights a week. . . there's a little tin boom on. Irving Kemble's been running a seratch melodrama outfit down there, and he's on tour now in the E'flat townships, but only for a little. I'll spring something for you to manage the benefit for the Bauhinia Hospital. Great show—Peg Woffington. It was postponed because the boom got in the road; but they're rehearsing every day and the show's on two months from now."

"I'll go then. You see, if I'm outside of the profession I'm like a fish out of water."

"But the profession won't keep you too well down there. I'll give you a note to the Boss Cockie, and he'll give you an office in the new building. We'll start a Stock Exchange there if the field lives. Somehow or other a mining camp without a Stock Exchange looks lonely."

"What are my duties?"

"You sit in the office and send me wires about developments on the claims—our manager will bring you the news and you copy the Stock Exchange quotations from the wires I'll send you, and post 'em outside the office. If anybody comes in to give you money you take it and enquire afterwards."

"Do I pay accounts?"

"Only those you're sure of, but Mr. Gronthead will tell you what to pay. . . There's the letter, Monty. My address is the Bellevue, Brisbane, and, so, good luck."

Aladdin pulled up at Bauhinia and found himself famous—the discoverer of the new tin field of Buckley's Chance.

The barman at the Carpentaria Hotel told him all the news—of Dubbin having gone south with "the richest tin mine in the world."

"That's according to Dubbin," said Aladdin, "But he chews his wishes and spits lies."

"It's a big show, anyhow," said the barman. "About a mile nor'-west of Buckley's Chance."

Aladdin began to understand the temperature at the extremities of Cold-feet Jones; but he changed the conversation by asking for Billy Nor'-West, who they told him had gone through to Brisbane, and even further, and might stay in Sydney a week.

Aladdin searched the records of the Warden's office and found two reasons for disquietude; one an application for forfeiture of his own claim on the drift—the other a transfer of the Boss Cockie's claim to Charles Dubbin.

The Boss Cockie had played false, then. "I'm always being taken down," said Aladdin, bitterly. "God guard me from those I trust; from them I distrust I can guard myself, and yet—he's not the sort of man. Now, could it be—? Not likely! I can be back in three weeks or so—I'll let it slide till I return."

At Brisbane he grinned and saw that he might "let it slide" for ever. For the tin drift hill which he had pegged and Dubbin had "jumped" was part of a mineral freehold (the "M.F. 31a" of the decaying peg and the barked tree, and the photograph of Vera's mother), and 640 acres had been purchased outright for £640 by Everard Pardon, Vera's father, and now, save a few formalities of the law, was hers. So Aladdin did not fight the forfeiture application, nor write to the Boss Cockie to question the treachery of the transfer, nor even object to the triumphant flotation of the two men's ground and Dubbin's lease into the Great Carpentaria Tin Co. in 100,000 shares of £1. But a week after the flotation he questioned in a signed letter to the newspapers the title of the Great Carpentaria to its land, and the mere questioning put the stock out of quotation. Dubbin did not then know it; he was on the road to Eclipse Corner, arrogant with his small success, very hopeful of Vera Pardon with the watch dog out of the way.



Aladdin saw Billy Nor'-West, too, on his way back North—a slightly scared Billy Nor'-West, much impressed and very nervous of the traffic of Sydney.

Aladdin lay perdu while the shorts were waking up. But at last there came a time when Cold-feet Jones, Willie the Wowser, and Bainfield had to ask: "Of whom shall we buy Buckley's Chance—what is his name?"

For by this time they could feel that there was but one man to deal with. When came the reply, "Aladdin Biddulfson," Willie the Wowser said a prayer, Bainfield called for some dark brandy, and Cold-feet Jones' teeth chattered.

One by one they came and bought themselves off, and Aladdin, finding to his sorrow that some little holder had squealed and helped the first three out of most of their commitments, put the price up for the remaining shares short, until those three screamed their anguish, as they paid, after exhausting all the means of delay and demur, and most of the subterfuges invented since Abraham introduced his wife as his sister.

But there was no scream left in Cold-feet Jones—he could only look unutterably miserable.

"Don't be hard on me, Aladdin," he said.

"If you make it big for me, I can't pay without letting other creditors slide."

"Who are they?"

"Mr. Bowser, Mr. Bainfield, an——"

"Let 'em slide—and cough up to me."

"What! Rob Peter to pay Paul?"

"Certainly! If you don't like Peter. And if you're paying up to me you're not paying up to them, and that makes me feel good—I get 'em both ways. It's no good talking, Cold-feet. You made a wager that you knew more than I did, and I've got you fairly—not as you got me, by treachery, and Bainfield's breaking of the pool. It would be wrong for me to let you off. As the Chief of the

Embezzlement Department, we look to you, Cold-feet Jones."

"If you squeeze me too hard you'll have to whistle for your money, Mr. Biddulfson."

"I can't whistle, Cold-feet; but if you don't pay I'll make you cry."

He felt sorry as he saw the old gambler walk away dejectedly, and was half inclined to let him off—and then he remembered how they had bitten him with treachery.

"If I let him go I'd only be filing his teeth sharp for another softy," said Aladdin to himself. "It's soft-heartedness that makes criminals."

But he was not prepared for Cold-feet's next move; simply because he could not believe that the loss or gain of money could so modify a man's sense of self-respect. Cold-feet sent Vanilla to Aladdin.

She waited for him in the drawing-room of the hotel, and there Aladdin found her, as he had left her, cool, equable, fair, clear, luscious—a little more like a ripe peach than before. He knew that she knew how to dress to emphasise that placid sleepy, selfish charm; in flowered and sprigged silk muslins, worn as if she had been born with them.

"Oh! Aladdin"—there was almost excitement in her voice for a moment, and she was calm again.

"Vanilla! I'm glad to see you."

"You used to call me Piccalilli."

Aladdin became suddenly grave; that calm gaze of hers disconcerted him a little, as her light words frightened him into cautiousness.

"You threw the ring away. . . . and then I had to accept your decision."

"I was wrong, Aladdin. It can be as it was before. . . . if you like. . . . I really mean it. I was irritable—foolish—that night."

"Did your father send you to me now, Vanilla?"

"Yes, Aladdin! If you press my father we are absolutely ruined. Except—"

"Except the house you're living in, and the motor



boat and the car, and a few thousand pounds which are all settled on you."

"Oh, well!—you know. Well! Father told me that if you let him off a little he wouldn't object to us—being—engaged—again. He broke it off, you know—I didn't."

"I was going to marry you, Vanilla—not your father. You listened to him then—why should I listen to him now, because he is talking, not you?"

"I'm talking—a little—too. I always liked you, Aladdin."

"A bad beginning—liking only. Why, you might love somebody else."

"I love nobody, Aladdin; but I like you best of all the men I've ever met. And they can't keep you down. You were broke in Townsville only a few months ago, and now you're successful again. I like a man like that."

"Vanilla! You wouldn't break your heart over a man like that or over me, or anybody else, would you?"

"I don't know that I would—but I do know that I couldn't."

"Run along, then—and if the rude forefather of the hamlet's not asleep, tell him to see me early to-morrow."

"You're a good kind, nice chap, Aladdin. You may kiss me."

"It's a deal, Vanilla," replied Aladdin, kissing her cool, flower-like mouth, and wondering why he could not take this gift of the gods and go no further, to fare better or worse. "You taste of peaches and cream, Vanilla—send the author of your being along next A.M."

"You understand that I'll marry you if you let father off."

And with that she was gone.

"Seems to me," said Aladdin, "that if I play the good and kindly Christian and let Cold-feet Jones off, I marry Vanilla; and if I eat him down to the

last eyelet in his boots I'm free for Vera Pardon. If that's the price, I'll keep on rejoicing in my sins."

Cold-feet Jones was more hopeful when they met next morning. The engagement made through Vanilla could only mean a softening of the heart.

"Well?" said Cold-feet Jones. "Vanilla told you?"

"She told me you were ready to appoint me son-in-law if I resigned the job of executioner."

"She didn't put it that way, surely?"

"She didn't—but that's what it means. It means that I may have Vanilla if I let you off?"

"More than that," said Cold-feet vaguely. "I'll put you on to a good bear."

"It's no use—I can't be a bear any more than you can be a bull. Bulls and bears are born so. You fellows did a shameful thing. You started to knock out this stock when it stood at four shillings; and you might have knocked out a good prospect and shut up what might develop into a good mine. And then you're caught and squeal for mercy and at long last you send a lady to tell me to be nice and not ruin poor daddy or I can't be his son-in-law. Now listen to me out. You sold four thousand nine hundred and fifty Buckley's Chances at six shillings, and you've delivered a thousand. I'll let you have the other three thousand nine hundred and fifty shares at five pounds each."

Cold-feet Jones groaned like a dying buffalo.

"I'm ruined, then."

"Not you! I know better. But because I can't be rude to one woman or disregard the wishes of another——"

"I don't understand."

"You needn't. I'll let you off at a pound a share."

"God bless you——"

"Never mind that—on one condition."

"I agree to it."

"The condition is that Vanilla is not to consider herself engaged to me."



"My boy——"

"Not your boy—that's just what I'm saving. Vanilla is not to sacrifice herself to me for you."

"She likes you."

"She doesn't love me—tell her I thank her for her nobleness of character—but that I can be noble, too. The sacrifice is refused."

"I'll tell her—you are a noble chap, Aladdin."

He closed the door and Aladdin laughed at the humor of it until tears came into his eyes.

So two women—Vera Pardon and Vanilla Jones—saved Cold-feet from extinction; the one because she was beloved of Aladdin, the other because she wasn't.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### GOLD FOR TIN.

Make your price more than you want so you may lower a tittle;

He who wants a great deal must never ask for a little.

—The Maxims of Billy Pagan.

WHEN the coach stopped at Carpentaria Creek to pick up Montgomery, it was boarded by a new passenger. He was a clean-shaven man of thin face and eagle beak and dark and piercing eyes. He told Montgomery that he had a claim at Pandanus Crossing, and was going to Eclipse Corner to try a sale to the new man there. Let's see! his name was Biddulfsen. Whereat Montgomery told him that he himself was secretary to the great Biddulfsen—the said Biddulfsen having departed South a fortnight ago, and his secretary being at the time engaged in another—er—vocation, that secretary had been forced, as a matter of honour, to give a fortnight's notice. Confidence begetting confidence, the dark-eyed man said that his name was Professor Melrose, that he had been tutor to Miss Judy Gronthead—and Master James Gronthead, the inventor, more occasionally—and was now returning to the scenes of his old triumphs, which he had left for a painful and unublishable, but quite adequate reason. Neither spoke of the stage or of The Profession—they unconsciously acted to each other, the secretary to the mining magnate, and the tutor turned tin king.

At Eclipse Corner Judy was in her glory, for Eclipse Corner had become a township, and the



daughter of the Boss Cockie was Lady of the Manor. The large, good-humored Mrs. Gronthead did not count, being too busy—and also too settled in habit to find new airs and graces.

All that was left of the Royal Australian Dramatic Company had waxed fat and was kicking. They were earning money now—self-respect had returned to become arrogance, and banish all that old Bohemian desire to please. The happiest of all at Eclipse Corner was Jim, the boy inventor and spoiler of clocks. Aladdin had formally admitted him to privileges with ore trucks, and the little half-mile tramway that carried the dressed ore to the loading stage, and in a spirit of scientific research he ran trucks off lines and galloped them down grades, and by his life worshipped Progress and Aladdin with a good dog's love for a careless master.

Vera went through life mechanically, thinking much of that gay pirate, Aladdin, and wondering dully if he would ever return. For there was much in him to be doubted, and if he were to persist in his intention of eating up the substance of Cold-foot Jones, the city and its money fight might claim him for always. She scarcely smiled at even Judy's new clothes.

\* There were not enough real claims to go round, and when the little sharebrokers of Eclipse Corner and Buckley's Chance had increased to three, the wild cat mine had to come, and with it "experts," who were most expert in collecting their fees, and little geologists able to classify every stone between Chelsea and the Thames Embankment at Blackfriars.

Out at Buckley's Chance there were the chocolate of new earth in the green frame of new grass, an irregular hill like a camel's hump, a few shafts and dumps, and the surface of the world scarred by costeens representing a search for tin actuated by the hope that springs eternal. While the miners sunk on the field for tin, the promoters in the cities sunk in the pockets of the public for gold. Mad

syndicates with no management or working capital issuing as many shares as can be sold, much on the classic lines of a barmaid's raffle, and a cheerful lunatic regarded six inches of granite in a hole ten inches deep and referred to it solemnly as the "lode."

The little figures of red-faced enthusiasts hitting valueless rocks with little hammers and murmuring "hundreds er millyuns er thousands"—chewing wishes and spitting lies. All the wild hope which is the income of the fool; hopelessly hopeful people with brains like to those of the monkey who hides away the nuts of Autumn against a rainy day, and immediately forgets the place he hid them in.

During these excursions into mining and finance one man had done nothing, so saving his money. It was Jimmy from the Wire Fence, who had at last found words enough to persuade Judy to promise to say "Yes"—a reply educed from a woman by only one question.

"Goin' to marry him?" said the Boss Cockie in surprise. "Why! you was always pickin' at him."

"That's why, I s'pose," admitted the prospective bride with a new meekness.

"Bless their onion, anyhow," said the Boss Cockie, "Judy's got the best of it. The husband fights for both, and the woman holds his coat. Mother 'ull be lonely, but y' can't keep birds in the nest till they moult. What's the matter, mother?"

"Jordan's gone, quarrelled with that nice man, Mr. Kemble."

"It's a good job too. I was goin' to say to you before, get rid of him or we're broke. He's couch grass; y' can't get him out. I thought he was here as a tooter for life. Thank the Lord he's gone."

Yet strangely enough they missed him next day, and the day after that they wished him back again.

"Y' get used to him like y' get used to a 'oller tooth, an' if it 'asn't ached much y're sorry when it's gone," said the Boss Cockie.

Yet on the fourth day when the wanderer returned



dusty and penitent and tearful, the Boss Cockie became enraged. He met Trewhella at the hotel door and said without a sign of welcome, "Back again?"

"I couldn't go for good away frob by fredds. Whed I thought how happy I had beed here—how iddoect by life had beed abug you, I had to cub back. I will give way to Irvig Kebble—I will obey disciplid. I will eved eschew colonial wide—addythig to rest by bodes abug you."

"Back for keeps, Mother," said the Boss Cockie. "God help us all."

"God's good," said Mrs. Gronthead. "The devil a better. Let him teach the little children down at Buckley's Chance."

But for the present Trewhella devoted himself to the forthcoming charity performance of Peg Woffington.

It was on the day that brought the coach with Monty and Professor Melrose to Eelipse Corner that Mildred Floyd justified her worst suspicions of Saxby Leicester. They had rehearsed the first act in the Boss Cockie's dining-room; and Mildred left the room with Judy and most of the others at the end of the rehearsal.

Returning momentarily she saw that false caitiff, Saxby, holding the ample Athene Pallas in his arms. The scoundrel's back was towards the betrayed one; she uttered an excellent stage scream, and Saxby turned hurriedly.

"You frightened m'h," he said, and then he lost all sense of Mildred's presence, and turned solicitously to the heavy woman. "Did she frighten you, poo-ah de-ah?"

"She—poo-ah dee-ah," repeated Mildred Floyd, snarlingly. "You shall answer to me for this. Go!"

She had taken the centre of the stage as usual and bewildered by her virtuous rage into the belief that they had done something wrong, they hurried from the room as the coach from Bauhinia drew up at the verandah. From the coach alighted a little

man in an astrakhan coat—immediately recognised by Saxby Leicester, and carried off to present his letter of introduction to the Boss Cockey—and a clean-shaven, dark man with dark and deepset eyes.

He walked into the dining-room, and set his bag down. Then Mildred Floyd uttered another stage scream, tottered towards him for a few steps, and carefully measuring her distance, fell heavily into his arms.

“Hang it!” said Professor Melrose. “Why! it’s Milly!”

She recovered as by a miracle, and said “George! Why did you leave me?”

He wanted to tell her that he had left her because he wanted to, and hearing that she was in the company expected at Eclipse Corner, he had left his tutorship to avoid her. But he had not seen her for years, she had improved a little, and old habit is strong and made him think that she had improved a great deal. He supported her to a chair and sat next her holding her hand. Then another old habit returned to him, and they began to act to each other, he first telling the truth.

“I left you because you told me to leave you.”

“Oh, George! I was wrong, and since then I thought you were dead. It is six years ago.”

She recalled an old expression of archness, and resumed it—“I was nearly marrying again, you know.”

“I couldn’t blame you if you had, Milly. Six years is a long spell of loneliness.”

“We’ll be together again now, dear.”

“Yes, we’ll go away. I have a mine near Bauhinia, and if it’s no good I’ll float it into a company. I have a hundred pounds, anyway. Did the manager of the company you were in pay your salary?”

“It was a commonwealth, George! And I wouldn’t ask him for a penny now—I wouldn’t be beholden to him for anything. He—he jilted me.”

“The damned scoundrel—where is he?”



"In Brisbane—but he was not the only one. Saxby Leicester—oh, my dear—a burlesque as a leading man, nobody could play leads like you, George—he jilted me too."

"By Jing! Where is he? I'll see if he dare jilt a wife of mine."

"Treat them with contempt, dear. Come with me."

It was for this reason that Mrs. Gronthead asked her niece's forgiveness for all the things that she had said under the impulsion of her love and anxiety; and that in deference to Mrs. Gronthead's desire Vera Pardon accepted the part of Peg Woffington, vice Mildred Floyd—retired from the profession on resuming the practice of matrimony.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### OIL IN THE LAMP.

Chase not the little trader, but the great thief sure to rise,  
And give thy time to the Highest Fraud—eagles hunt not  
flies.

—The Maxims of Billy Pagan.

THEN Dubbin returned and was divided between his two passions—the love of money, and the pursuit of Vera; two pursuits made easy in his own eyes by his own rotten vanity, but really crowded with dangers to such a stupid and conceited man. The shares of his company had taken a decisively downward turn, but he comforted himself with the knowledge that the mine had tin in it, that it looked better with every succeeding day, and that tin doesn't fly away until after it has been turned to gold.

He drove the girl to the sanctuary of her room, and yet pestered her so carefully and cunningly that decent men—thinking no evil, and half blind to it—could not see enough to justify the administration of the beating they all hankered to give him. Fighting as he did the weak with time and persistence, he depended for his greater security on a certainty, the certainty that most women never complain of even the unwelcome suitor—a fact which ties their protectors' hands.

A hand laid upon her hand, and she drew it away; the sneaking pressure of a foot on a foot at once withdrawn; always the furtive approaches of this mean coward who would have fled at the sight of the first fist clenched for punishment. She could do nothing but be silent, or run away to her room,



or retreat to the safety of numbers—to the big room with its talk of rehearsals and money and tin and Aladdin, who had telegraphed that he was soon returning. And she was very glad of the little play of Peg Woffington; it gave her expression, and that is what most people crave who have it not already.

Then Billy Nor'-West came back and made new life for them. He had much to tell of the cities, and the Boss Cockie, who had not been south for twenty-five years, contradicted him flatly and at last refused to believe that he had ever been further south than Townsville.

The boom had lasted four weeks, and now began its dry rot, the time of wassailing and scrip-printing, and lying and elevation of share prices nearing its end, and the time came for real work with steel and sweat and dynamite.

Quilty, the expert sexton, had sold and received on 82 shares in the four weeks between his pegging and the dry rot of the boom, and a week thereafter he had but £30. Some of it had gone in riotous living, some in fine raiment, some in by-drinkings, but nearly half of it had gone by the water as it came by the wind. Other enterprising promoters had told Quilty the same tales of the Tin Flat Extended, and the Cassiterite Hill No. 1 North Consolidated, as he had told Berger and others of the Brian Boru, and he had believed them.

Then the boom cracked with a noise that was heard at Townsville, and Tom Quilty woke up. He went to bed early that night. His head ached. He tried for the second time in his life to think. Here was a great tin mine—the Brian Boru—and it had no capital for its discoverer to eat and to drink and to be clothed withal. He thought that day until his brain had corns on it by reason of the pressure of his skull, and that night he packed his new portmanteau and faded away towards the New South Wales border.

He left three good claims on payable tin and his

departure began the exodus of all the merchants of hot air and water, of old self-deceivers with wire whiskers, of prattling, red-faced geologists explaining the genesis of tin by galvanic eruptions, of wild men with pegs and granite outcrops doping themselves with "hundreds er millyuns er thousan's," ignorance and mad optimism leaving in the long run the burden of actual work to be shouldered by sane men.

But the workers of Eclipse Corner went on very happily working all day, and by night resting some, and some strutting their little hour at rehearsals, for Peg Woffington was billed to appear within two days of the flight of Mining Engineer Tom Quilty, and innocent vanity and the charity of the Bauhinia Hospital were to be served at the one hand.



CHAPTER XX.

THE DOUBLE EVENT.

If a dog be disliked, let him live on an island where there are neither sticks nor stones.

THE coach had arrived from Bauhinia, and Vera, dressing in the clothes of Peg Woffington, was conscious of depression as she heard the Boss Cookie ask for Aladdin, to be told that he had driven from Bauhinia to Buckley's Chance direct. It did not help her much that, as Judy told her later, he would arrive in time for the performance; hope had been so long deferred that now an hour seemed a week away.

Judy withdrew with many mysterious winks and smiles, ran to the bar for cool water from the bag, and came back along the verandah to Number Sixteen. She closed the door behind her and smiled at the newest arrival by coach—the slight faded little woman who sat upon the bed.

“And you wrote to me?” said the faded woman.

“Yes.”

“Where did you get the address?”

“He dropped an envelope, and I thought you were his mother.”

“It is very terrible that he should be running after another woman. Is the girl—er—nice?”

“One of the best—she hates him and likes Aladdin—Mr. Biddulfsen, I mean—you don't know him, and Vera's so good and quiet. If she complained to them about your—Mr. Dubbin—they'd drag him through the brook.”

“Oh; don't let him be hurt. He was good to me.”

“He was too good to be true. Don't you worry—I may be a bit of a girl, but I've had a lot of experience watching my married friends. Now! What are you going to do?”

"I'll take him home."

"What! Forgive him? Now, don't be rash. Think over it for an hour—he'll be back by then."

"He is not returned yet then?"

"No—you rest. I'll send you a hot cup of nice tea, an' when the waster comes back I'll tell you."

She left the room, and the faded little woman lay back against the pillow, still with her bonnet on—as if she were here but for a minute, to gather her sneaking husband to her and go back that night to take up the strands of the old life which he had broken. She did not sleep, but looked up at the iron roof with wide open eyes, asking herself always that one question the deceived put to themselves when they discover the disloyalty of the beloved, "Why? why? why?"

Aladdin, driving in from Buckley's Chance, was bailed up a hundred yards from the hotel by the Boss Cockie.

"Don't go in there fust—give Jim the 'orses and have a pitch in the bar parlor fust. Somethin's botherin' me."

Aladdin handed over the horses to the wildly-elated boy inventor and followed Gronthead to the bar parlor. The Boss Cockie looked at him and liked him more than ever, and so disliked Dubbin more.

"I want to know," said the Boss Cockie, "if you've gone nap on Vera."

"Yes," replied Aladdin.

"Good enough! I know which is the best man. You make up to her. Of course she's on'y a second-hand kind o' niece. Her mother was me second cousin—well brought up, too—an' her father was pedigree stock. I think he's botherin' her, so if you're playin' for keeps, take y'r hand an' play it."

"I will," said Aladdin. "And it makes no difference to me that she's got money either. I'll leave that sensitive stunt to the fool. I find Vera's en-



titled to a mineral freehold left by her father. Ever hear of it?"

"No," replied the Boss Cockie promptly, quite unconscious that Aladdin was searching him with his gaze.

"Dubbin jumped my claim on the Tindrift Hill. He pegged a lease over it and floated it as The Great Carpentaria Tin——"

"I got some shares in that."

"Why? for transferring your claim?"

"No—I never transferred any claim—for puttin' up the notices on the ground."

"Well, that ground is covered by Vera's mineral freehold."

The Boss Cockie burst into hearty laughter. "So he's done, is he?—the little oil-pedlar's done like a dinner—good enough."

"Well, you beat me," said Aladdin. "You've got shares in it, too."

"What's that matter? I'd give a bit to see Vera all right, and that sneakin' waster all wrong."

"H'm," said Aladdin. "And you never signed a transfer?"

"I said so."

"H'm! Well—by the way, have you got a late newspaper—what's the date of it?"

The Boss Cockie flushed brick red, took up the paper, and turned it over awkwardly.

"It's the 6<sup>th</sup>!" he said at random.

"Thanks! Any news at all? It's the Bauhinia paper, I see—any local news?"

Gronthead turned over the paper as a man ill at ease.

"Nothin' in it—nothin' in these dam papers, any time," he said, "except advertisements."

Aladdin rose and looked over the edge of the paper. "Why, man," he said, with a queer, hopeful lift in his voice, "you're reading it upside down."

"So I am! So I am!" replied the Boss Cockie apologetically, turning the paper around hurriedly.

"Just read from there," said Aladdin, pointing to the top of a column. "Under that heading, Divorce News."

"Die-corse news," parrotted the Boss Cockie; and then, with a new inspiration, he said, "From our own co-respondent."

"By George!" shouted Aladdin. "I've got you! There's nothing about divorces on that page, and that column is headed Shipping Intelligence."

"Sssh! Somebody'll hear."

"Never mind. Look here—is that your signature?"

"Well—I can't write."

"Read it."

"I can't read. What's the good of edgercation?"

"Come on—you don't think that."

"I know I don't. I'm ashamed of it. Mother writes the cheques, and never gives me away."

"Then you did transfer the claim—that's your mark."

"Dubbin bluffed me into it quick on the jump—said I was only witnessin' something."

"And gave you back a few shares to square his rotten conscience. I was looking to make trouble for him, and I've got it. I can gaol him for getting that transfer by fraud."

"All through me makin' one of them miserable little beer X's. Edgercation never did no good to nobody—an' I wish I had a bit of it all the same."

"I've half ruined him by proving his lease no good, because it's on a mineral freehold and he'll have a fine time squaring the people who've bought the shares in his company, but I could put him in the dock for this."

"Aladdin, don't do that. It 'ud come out that I couldn't read and had to sign with an X off a beer bottle. I've told the blokes here how edgercated I am. Don't do it."

"If I can get him any other way I won't."



"Good. Come an' have a drink. There's the actors in the other parlor."

And so they were—Trewhella and Saxby and Irving Kemble and their amateurs, and all made up and waiting for a drink to keep away stage-fright.

Montgomery also was there, in a quite new evening suit and a frilled shirt with one of Saxby Leicester's stage diamonds blazing like an acetylene headlight. From without sounded the vocal publicity of the bell man: "Roll up! Roll up! To-night! To-night!"

"There's one man who isn't going to see the show," said Aladdin to the Boss Cockie, "and that's Dubbin. Come on."

He was stopped at the verandah entrance by Athene Pallas.

"You have come here," she said very solemnly, "to punish that fellow. For your own sake have nothing to do with that man. I hear" (she had muddled the hurried information given by Judy in the intervals of making up) "that he deserted a widow with four children."

"And where is she?"

"Here, with Judy."

"Here? It's the best revenge of all. I won't let him off a minute of it."

"I'll go back to Judy," said the heavy woman. "She's nearly made up," and so departed.

There was Judy smiling before him, and Aladdin knew.

"Congratulations, Judy?"

"I got me brands on Wire Fence. 'Judy' in a heart an' a diamond."

"And Birdie?"

"Goin' strong. She's a wonder. She's made Nor'-West b'leeve she's a great actress. So long—and don't you take Vera's impudence like Wire Fence takes mine."

It was a new and brilliant Birdie almost dressed for the part.

"H'to, Aladdin," she said. "Give us yer fist. You might have bit landlords' ears, but you made us all. This is me last perfeshinal appearance before I'm Mrs. Nor'-West."

"And how are you, Birdie?"

"I'm alright—everybody's alright. This is a fine town now. D'ye think I envy Maudie? Let her have her schoolmaster, let her have her old three-quarter silk pink tights. I'm her superior, thank Gord, an' I'm goin' to get into me costoom and play this orjence right out o' the slidin' roof. Billy Nor'-West's so good. Wasn't Maudie a fool? She might have met Nor'-West, an' instead she sold herself for a kid-beater an' a pair o' old pink tights, an' a prop. weddin' ring. No prop. weddin' rings for me. Ours is goin' to cost four pounds. I got sense, I 'ave."

"Stick to him, Birdie; he's a good man."

"Won't I? Oh, I'm so happy—it's a shine night an' I'm goin' to act 'em silly. . . . There's Nor'-West."

She ran to the garden, and found Nor'-West, as usual, round-eyed with wonder of his luck, and saying always, "Ain't she great? Ain't she? My word!"

Meantime, by the door of the big dining-room, Dubbin, maddened by Vera's contempt and fortitude, had waited and waylaid her, and now, made almost reckless by the beauty so set-off by that most fortunate costume of Peg Woffington, he forgot all caution and burned his boats.

"All's fair in love and war," said Dubbin; words originally spoken by a thief who was too small to love and too cowardly to fight.



CHAPTER XXI.

ALADDIN DEFEATS ABANAZAR AND FINDS  
THE PRINCESS.

And be ever a merry-hearted,  
Tho' dolorous be the days;  
If your house catch fire in the Winter,  
Laugh—and warm yourself at the blaze.  
—The Maxims of Billy Pagan.

IN the dining-room Vera came to admire herself in the long mirror over the unnecessary fire-places. Women call this ceremony "seeing if they look alright."

And seeing that she was beautiful, she naturally began to wonder if everybody else thought similarly, and a quite natural transition from that was an enquiry into Aladdin's opinion.

From without sounded Judy's mouth-organ—played by Judy's brother, Jim—Judy being too busy beautifying herself to reckon of the sacrilege. Though Judy had an excellent ear for horse bells, her progress in music was but slow, whereas her brother had a sort of genius for it, so that he made the mouth-organ eloquent. And Vera, taking a head of poinsettia, tried it in her glossy hair, and then substituted for it a crimson hibiscus, and finally three volutes of the cream and ivory frangipanni, which she knew she would decide on all along. And while she tested the relative effects of poinsettia, hibiscus, and frangipanni, she sang softly, in sympathy with the mouth-organ of Boy Jim. Finally she pinned the frangipanni decisively in her hair.

The door opened; in the glass she saw Dubbin close that door behind him and advance to her.

She turned and backed behind the table, facing him; too nervous, as she was too proud, to run away.

"Won't y' sit down?" asked Dubbin, forming his words with difficulty, for his mouth was dry.

"No, I must go to the stage. We begin directly."

"Don't go. I must talk to you. I must! I can't let you go!"

He caught at her dress, and she strove to withdraw her sleeve without tearing the fabric; while Dubbin, all restraint lost and all caution cast to the winds, spoke words without meaning—through which his meaning made itself very quickly clear.

"Come with me. I can't do without you."

"Let me go."

"I'm a self-made man," said Dubbin. "I'd get on if you were nicer. . . . Let's clear."

"What?"

"That feller Biddulfsen got engaged again to that girl Jones. He let her father off on her account."

"That is nothing to me."

He was beside himself now, his trembling hands clutching at her—his words broken and incoherent.

"I'll marry you as soon as me wife divorces me."

"Your wife?"

"I married her for her money. I'm tired of her—we'll go away."

She blazed at him a dismissal more by eye and hand than voice, as Aladdin opened the door, came behind him, and twisted him round so that they were face to face.

"Get out!" said Aladdin.

"You been listenin'—eavesdroppin'."

"Undoubterbly—just in time to hear you telling this lady something about your wife."

"Mean—c'ntempterbul—dishon'bl'."

"It's no meanness to catch a thief? You cur! to worry this lady as you've done. You never bore an equal fight in your life, cruel to the weak, and brave in attacking the dying. I've got you all ways.





Percy Lindsay.

“Get out!” said Aladdin.

Your company hasn't a mine. Oh! I'm sure. It's an old mineral freehold of Everard Pardon's, and belongs to his daughter. But here's something that belongs to you."

He beckoned from the verandah the little faded woman who had heard Dubbin say that he had married her for money. She was colorless, but big in heart—she showed no resentment of his treachery, but went to him and took his arm, saying, "Come home dear,—we all want you."

"Oh!" cried Vera Pardon, pityingly—"to deceive you so."

"He's so good to me," said the little woman, and Aladdin and Vera looked at her and then on that despicable figure which the cad they knew as Dubbin had become immediately on the entrance of his wife.

"Come home," said the little woman, and led him away to wait the outward bound coach at the new big hotel of Eclipse Corner, and so he faltered out of the story.

Boy Jim's music on the mouth-organ stopped.

"That big tin show is mine?" asked Vera, eagerly.

"Yes. I traced it from the old news cutting on the photograph."

"I'm so glad. I wanted to be rich—for other people's sakes."

"I say!" cried the Boss Cockie, coming hurriedly from the verandah, "what's up—where's Dubbin off to?"

"He's gone away with his wife."

"His wife, an' he was after Veer here. Bigamy, my word. He close up struck the double."

"Oh! the wretch!" cried Vera Pardon. "He told me he married his wife only for her money, and asked me to run away with him."

Aladdin sprang for the door, but found the Boss Cockie in the way, and Vera Pardon hanging to his arm.



"Let me go," he said. "I'll beat him up for keeps."

"You mustn't—you mustn't," cried Vera.

"I'll kill him."

"Talk sense," said the Boss Cockie. "The law's a damn fool, an' if you commit insecticide, y' get hanged."

"He'll be punished in other ways," said Vera.

"Promise."

"I promise."

Judy ran from the verandah in the brilliant and old world clothes of her stage character, her shadow, Jimmy from the Wire Fence, lounging after her at a slower gait.

"I say," said Judy. "That little woman's too quiet. That Dubbin—he's the villain of the piece. Ain't he to be arrested or hanged or something?"

"Worse'n that," replied her father. "That little woman's got a lot o' firmness, an' he'll have a nice good rest, I s'pose. She'll talk to him for years about growing 900 bushels o' wild oats to the acre."

"I'll tell Miss Pallas," cried Judy, and was gone.

Then did that fine example of silence, Jimmy from the Wire Fence, break his rule, and that with emphasis.

"Good enough for him," he said, and drifted out of the room in the wake of Judy.

Vera and Aladdin looked at one another and then at the Boss Cockie. He returned the glance enquiringly, and then arose as if he had suddenly discovered something demanding immediate attention on pain of death.

"I'll jus' see whether Walrus Moustache is owin' any more in the bar," he said ferociously, and departed with a grin which said nothing but his own good humor and content. But he came back to say something. "It did me good to see that there Dubbin tremblin' like a yooman bloomonge—he's lost his

sting, and the other bees stung him to death—my word!” and chuckling loudly he was gone.

But only to return again. “It’s true all over,” he said. “Put a beggar on horseback like Dubbin an’ he rides the ’orse to the nearest saleyards an’ sells him for ten pound under his value. Hurry up! the band’s goin’ to play Poet and Pheasant, by ‘Soup.’”

He left them, and that time he was really gone.

“I’ve come back,” said Aladdin, stating the obvious very seriously.

“Did you come back clean?”

“I made Cold-feet Jones pay a fair thing, but I didn’t skin him.”

“Why?”

“Well! Cold-feet said that if I let him off altogether Vanilla would marry me, so I had to eat him up a bit in self defence.”

“Was that all the reason?”

“Well, you asked me not to. It wasn’t for the sake of ethics, but for yours.”

“You were merciful because I asked you to be merciful. That is ethical enough for me. And I know how good you are when I knew how bad that—that man—was.”

“Then——,” said Aladdin, and took her in his arms, though she still held him off with one hand against his shoulder.

“But—you saw Vanilla again. Are you sure you don’t love her now?”

“Quite sure! I thought Vanilla was real pickles—true metal, fine gold. Then I believed that she was silver-lead with a lot of zinc; and now I know that she wasn’t any sort of metal, only a flavouring for life, while life is comfortable. She was not the bread of life—only the spice of it—to be kept away on a high shelf with the nutmegs and the cloves. She threw me down because I was taken down.



But you love me for myself, and you hated me for my ways of making money. You're the goods."

"Am I? I hope I am."

"Now I've got you my luck is right, and I'll rub the lamp again and dare all superstition. I've got one mine called Buckley's Chance, and another is Hobson's Choice, and my luck's good enough to beat both names."

"How whimsical you are, the same mad Aladdin."

"And when I've rubbed the lamp I'll catch Coldfeet Jones short, and I'll make Bainfield and Willie the Wowser chew files, and flee to the mountains where the whang doodle mourneth for his first born."

"No you won't. You'll catch nobody. You'll work."

"But I want you to be rich."

"And I want you to be happy, Aladdin. You're out of debt and danger now—stay out."

"You'll make me respectable and dull, Vera."

"I'll make you happy, Aladdin, please God!"

Boy Jim opened the door and through it they heard the sounds of woodwind, brass and strings.

"Beginners, please," cried Boy Jim, as many times rehearsed by the celebrated tragedian, Irving Kemble. "Beginners, please."

"That's us," said Aladdin. "We begin here all over again."

The End.

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