



Bodleian Libraries

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

This book is part of the collection held by the Bodleian Libraries and scanned by Google, Inc. for the Google Books Library Project.

For more information see:

<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dbooks>



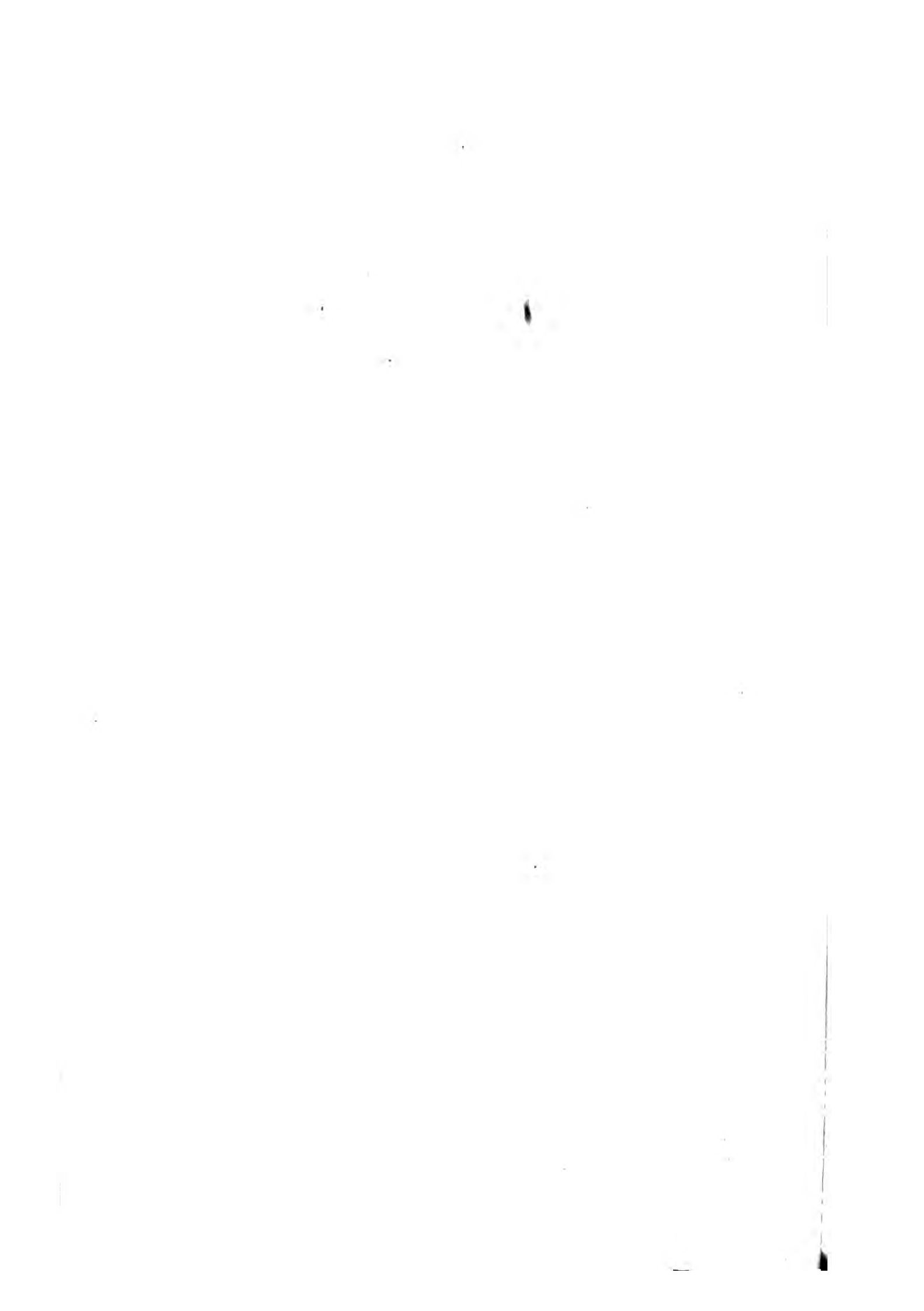
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) licence.

His Book

RICHARD MARSH

25611 e. 1185

—



Sam Briggs : His Book

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

CURIOS

ADA VERNHAM, ACTRESS

MRS. MUSGRAVE AND HER HUSBAND

MISS ARNOTT'S MARRIAGE

THE MAGNETIC GIRL

CONFESSIONS OF A YOUNG LADY

THE GARDEN OF MYSTERY

UNDER ONE FLAG

THE ROMANCE OF A MAID OF HONOUR

A WOMAN PERFECTED

London, JOHN LONG, Ltd., Publishers

Sam Briggs : His Book

By
Richard Marsh



London
John Long, Limited
Norris Street, Haymarket
[All Rights Reserved]

First Published in 1912

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE LADY OF THE SANDS	7
THE GIFT HORSE	37
HER FOURTH	64
A MODEST HALF-CROWN	97
A SOCIAL EVENING	127
THAT HANSOM	156
THE STAR OF ROMANCE	181
THE SKIPPER'S DAUGHTER	211
A DIP IN THE BRINY	236
THE LIMERICK	262
OUTSIDE	286
NINEPENCE	298

Sam Briggs : His Book

THE LADY OF THE SANDS

TALK about adventures ! I had an adventure which beat anything I ever heard of, either in a novel or a play. It was last year at Sand-by-the-sea. I was there for my holiday—ten days altogether. It happened on the Saturday before the Monday on which it was to be a case of first train up to town. I had been doing myself a fair treat—riding on char-a-bancs, sailing boats, rowing-boats, steamers ; in fact everything that was going. I give you my word that I missed nothing. That sort of thing makes the pieces fly. So that Saturday afternoon I was on the look-out for something that would provide the most amusement at the smallest cost. I was looking for it on the sands.

A lot of cheap excursions had come down that day—twenty-four in a compartment for half-a-crown—that kind of thing. And the crowds ! You couldn't see the sands because of the people. As for getting near the pierrots, or any one of

Sam Briggs : His Book

the entertainments, it was not to be done, unless you were an acrobat, and could stand on any head that was handy. No doubt there were plenty who were enjoying themselves, but having been there all the week it was nothing new to me, and I was just beginning to feel that it would have to be a case of another twopence for the pier—the money a pier does run away with, what with the twopence every time you go on, and the feeling that you must spend something when you are on!—when the adventure began.

She was a girl. Not much to look at. Certainly nothing in the way of dress. Plain brown holland, that was what she had on, one of those cloth caps with peaks, a bit of blue ribbon worn as a necktie, no gloves, black shoes. Not one single article that could be called stylish. So it was not her get-up that drew me. She had two pockets in her skirt—queer cut skirt I thought it. With a hand in each she was looking about her with a sort of a kind of a smile. I stood by her for about a minute, just to see how the land was lying; then I looked at her with a twinkle in my eye. She looked me straight in the face, and she smiled. So then, of course, I broke the ice.

“Fine weather, isn’t it?” I remarked, just by way of a beginning.

She kept on looking me straight in the face; I was never looked at straighter. Then she said :

The Lady of the Sands

“It rained last month.”

There was something about the way she said it which took me a little aback. It was a second or two before I gave the conversation another turn.

“I daresay it did; but as that was some time ago I can't say I remember much about it. Good many people on the sands to-day.”

She kept on looking me straight in the face, and a fine pair of eyes she had to do it with.

“I've counted ten during the last five minutes—you make eleven.”

Then I caught her drift.

“You're fond of your joke, I see.”

“I always have been fond of a joke.”

She smiled till she showed as nice a set of teeth as anyone could want.

“Same here. Ever since I was a nipper.”

“A what?”

“A nipper; don't you know what that is?”

She shook her head.

“I haven't had your opportunities.”

“That's very likely. Though I say it myself, I've seen as much as most and a good deal more than some.”

“You look as if you were a person who knew his world.”

“You may take it from me that anybody will have to know a bit who wants to teach Sam Briggs.”

“Sam Briggs?”

Sam Briggs : His Book

“Yours obediently. Allow me to introduce you to Samuel Briggs, Esquire.” I took my Panama off and did the graceful. “Staying here?” She nodded. “Cheerful place, I call it.”

“At this time of the year it is—cheerful.”

She kept looking about her, still with that sort of a kind of a smile.

“I mean at this time of the year. In the winter it must be awful.”

“You think so?”

“I’m told that after September there’s hardly a soul about the place—no, thank you. None of your nature for me; I like life. The study of humanity, that’s my hobby. Not, mind you, that after a time you don’t begin to have enough of it. I’ve been here ten days.”

“So long as that?”

“Ten days, Monday. Then it’s back to the nuts and oranges.”

“Nuts and oranges?”

“I’m in the dry fruit trade—wholesale; at least, my governor is. Been there four years. Started with five shillings a week. Now I’m getting thirty. Mean to have three pounds before very long.”

“Three pounds a week?”

“I don’t mean to marry till I have got it. If a girl cares for a man she’ll wait for him. I say the same to you that I say to every young lady: I don’t hold with love in a cottage.”

The Lady of the Sands

"How old are you, Mr. Briggs?"

"Twenty-one the year after next. And up to now I've never been so much as engaged. How old are you?"

"There's not much difference between us."

"That's what I thought. Might I ask if you're engaged?"

"I can't say that I am—as yet."

"Ah! You will be. He'll find you. You'll know him when he comes. There's time."

"I think myself that there still is time."

"You may take it from me that there is. That's a subject on which I'm allowed, by those who know me best, to be something of a judge. What might be your line?"

"My line?"

"What do you do for a living?"

She gave what you might describe as a sigh.

"I'm afraid that I'm not doing anything at present."

"Out of a berth, are you? That's hard lines. My sister, she was out most of last year. Fretted something cruel, she did. It's not nice for a girl to have nothing coming in of her own, even when she has a good home."

She sighed again. A sudden idea struck me. There was something about her I liked. So I did what I had never meant to do when I came out; as you might put it, I dropped a hint.

"It's a bit thick on the sands. Would you like to come on the pier? I'll pay."

Sam Briggs : His Book

“ You’ll pay ? ” She looked at me with those twinkling eyes of hers for I daresay a good half minute ; they were twinkling more than ever. “ That is very good of you. Do you know I have never been on the pier. Is it very exciting ? ”

That did tickle me. I suppose there are people who never do a turn on the pier because of what it costs ; but it did seem rough on a girl like her.

“ You’ll enjoy yourself if you never have been, I give you my word. For one thing, it’s much more classy on the pier than it is down here ; but, of course, it would be. In fact, in my opinion, in the whole place there’s not a more agreeable way of spending an afternoon or evening.”

Off we went. I shelled out for the two. Before I started I hadn’t meant to spend so much as a copper ; but when I saw the way she was enjoying herself I didn’t begrudge the money—not a mite. Soon as we had passed the turnstyle she sort of laughed. I didn’t know what she was laughing at, but I liked to hear her ; it made you feel that she was having a real good time. Presently we came to some automatic machines. The way she went on you would think that she had never seen anything like them in her life before. Nothing would suit her but that she should have a go at them. She had several goes. Bang went fivepence—of mine—in what you might call the twinkling of an eye.

The Lady of the Sands

From what I could see she was game for a go at every blessed machine there was on the pier. A nice treat for me that would have been ; especially considering that after I had paid my bill, and such like, I did not know how there was going to be more than four shillings, at the outside, to see me through my next week's dinners, and everything else as well. So when she wanted to have another try at the cricket machine, which was supposed to return your penny if you hit a boundary, but which, so far as I could make out, would not act as it ought, I said, casual like :

“ You don't happen to have twelve coppers for a shilling on you, do you? ”

She shook her head.

“ I'm afraid I haven't.”

“ Ah, that's a pity, because these machines only take coppers.”

A party who was standing close to me said, as I felt, most officiously :

“ I can give you twelve coppers for a shilling.”

“ Thank you,” I replied. “ I'll get them from the proper person who's appointed to give change, if you don't mind.”

And off we went. Before we had gone very far I began to wonder if I wasn't in for more than I had bargained for. I never saw anything like her for those automatic machines. There was not one she did not want to have a go at—or several goes, for all I could tell. And there was that party who kept on offering to give me

Sam Briggs : His Book

change till I could have hit him, he made me so mad. There are a lot of people in this world who'll hang about an automatic machine all day long waiting for someone else to put a penny in; and when he does, they'll crowd round it and spoil his show. I know; I'm not so simple. It would not have taken much to tell that party that if he kept on wanting to give me change I'd give him change. But I kept myself in.

At last we got to the end, where they were having tea out in the open air. Then I had it full in the face. When she saw the people eating and drinking, she sang out :

“Oh, I should like to have some tea! Couldn't we have some tea?”

That was what you might term a straight tip; so far as I am personally concerned I have never had one straighter. I felt in my pocket to make sure that there was still something there. Coming across a shilling and a sixpence I made the best of things.

“Of course we could. And I'll pay. Let's find a table.”

We found a nice little marble table, and we had it to ourselves. After waiting maybe ten minutes she began to fidget.

“Where are all the attendants? Why doesn't somebody come?”

I tried to take advantage of what I thought might be an opening.

“If they're too busy to care for our custom

The Lady of the Sands

we won't force it on them. What do you say to going? Being kept waiting don't suit me."

But evidently she wasn't one of those birds which are to be caught with salt. I'd got hold of a Tartar. My luck all over.

"Oh," she went on, "but I want some tea. It's ever so much past tea-time."

I looked at my watch. Sure enough she was right. They would just be about finishing tea up at my boarding-house. Not only was I not having any, though I should have to pay for it, but here I was paying for two more teas as well. Next time I took a young lady on the pier I'd give her to understand that I was not going to keep on forking out. But there was something about her which made it difficult for me to even drop a distant hint. When the waitress did come up I asked her what she would have, hoping, I don't mind owning, that she wouldn't have much.

"Oh," she said, "tea and cakes, and anything nice they have. Let them bring us all sorts of things."

Good hearing for me. I fingered my eighteen-pence, and wondered if I had not better mention, before things had gone too far, what was the exact amount I ran to. While I was bringing myself to the point, back came the waitress with a whole tray full; pastry enough for a dozen, and not cheap-looking stuff either.

"Shall I give you a cup of tea?" says my young lady, as free as if she was doing it all

Sam Briggs : His Book

on her own. "Milk? Do you like it sweet?"

She handed me my cup of tea ; it seemed that a nice cup of tea I was going to find it. I had not meant to have any, feeling that it would take me all my time to pay for what she had ; but she had such an off-handed way about her that I was sipping away almost before I knew it. She took hold of a plateful of pastry.

"What funny looking cakes!"

"I shouldn't be surprised if they were twopence each."

I just managed to slip it in, so as to give her an idea of how things were going.

"Are they? twopence each? really?"

There were three children looking on, as some children will when there's food about.

"Do you like cakes?" she said to them. "Would you like one of these?"

If you will believe me she gave them a whole cake each. I thought I should have choked. There was another sixpence gone to three strange kids! Saucy little monkeys as ever I saw. I was making up my mind as to whether I had not better plank down my eighteenpence, and say, "There you are. You can do what you like with that little bit, but you won't get any more out of me, because that happens to be all I've got," and then walk right off and leave her to do as she pleased, when back came those three youngsters stuffing themselves with twopenny cakes and with them two more boys.

The Lady of the Sands

“These are my brothers,” said one of them. My young lady was quick enough at taking a hint, when it was of the wrong sort.

“Are they? And do they like cakes?” She gave them one apiece; I suppose just to find out. Fourpence more; that left eightpence. She went on. “What a number of children there do seem to be about. And they all look as if they liked cake. Shall I try?”

She tried. She gave a cake to every kid that came crowding round till she had cleared two platefuls. I was speechless. By the time I had thought of something to say the plates were empty. Then I said it,

“Excuse me, I don’t want to seem unpleasant; but I don’t know who’s going to pay for this little treat of yours, eighteenpence being every farthing I’ve got on me.”

The waitress, who was standing by, must have heard me. She slapped a bill down on the table.

“Four-and-eightpence, if you please sir.”

My young lady had given away two dozen cakes at twopence each; the eightpence was for the tea.

“You’ll have to take eighteenpence on account. I’ll bring you round the rest when I get to my boarding-house. There’s been a mistake.”

My young lady laughed, though I didn’t know what at. Her ideas of a joke were different to mine. I never felt so small in my life—or so done.

Sam Briggs : His Book

“I think I have some money,” she said.

She put her hand into one of her pockets and she pulled out a sovereign. I tell you I stared. She gave the waitress a shilling out of the change too ; I saw her do it.

“You don’t seem stoney,” I said, “although you are out of a situation. Considering that there’s nothing coming in aren’t you a bit fond of throwing it about ? ”

“Oh,” she answered, “I get my money out of other people’s pockets.”

“I don’t understand.”

I did not. She leaned her elbows on the table, and she laughed again. Dead nuts she seemed on laughing ; particularly as half the time it puzzled me what there was to laugh at.

“You see, it’s easier than working for it—getting it out of other people’s pockets.”

“I don’t see how you’re going to do that.”

“Why, by putting your hand in of course.”

“Putting your hand in? That sounds like pickpocketing.”

“Well, some people might call it that. So much depends on a name.”

Whether she was in earnest or not I could not tell. I did not half like the look of it. I wished more than ever that I had kept myself to my own society. The feeling was growing on me strong that she was the sort who was capable of anything. On she went :—

“Mr. Briggs, I have to thank you for a very

The Lady of the Sands

delightful afternoon. And now I propose that, as a pleasant finish, we should go for a little ride together."

"I'm sorry ; but eighteenpence don't go far when it comes to riding, and I never let a young lady pay for me under any circs. To my mind, it ought to be the other way about ; and where I'm concerned it's always going to be. And, anyhow, the char-a-bancs have left off before this."

"I didn't mean in a char-a-banc. I was thinking of a motor."

"A motor? Why, that costs more than a char-a-banc."

"As it happens, a motor has been waiting for me all this time."

"What motor?"

"Well," she pressed the tips of her fingers together, smiling more than ever, "if it comes to that, I suppose it's my governor's."

"Your governor's? I thought you hadn't got one."

"I mean my father."

"Is your father in the motor trade?"

"I can't say that he is exactly. Please Mr. Briggs, do come for a ride with me."

She had such a I-lay-you'll-do-as-I-want-you sort of way about her it fairly knocked me. Before I had made up my mind to do anything like it I found myself walking beside her down the pier. I didn't half fancy what she had said

Sam Briggs : His Book

about taking money out of other people's pockets. There cannot be the slightest doubt that in such places there are any amount of bad characters. It would not suit me to get myself mixed up with a female swell-mobman, not though she was as pretty as paint. I tell you I kept a sharp eye on her—without her knowing it—while we were going down the pier. Nice figure I should cut if she was to get up to any of her pranks, or get herself locked up, while she was in my society. She kept her hand clear of other people's pockets while she was with me. But you never can be sure. That class of person is so artful.

I had been a bit doubtful about that motor of which she had been speaking ; being more than a bit doubtful about her altogether. But when we got to the road there was a little car—one of those small ones with a single seat, and room for two. In it was sitting a young man about my age, a gentlemanly young fellow, so far as looks went. When he saw her he hopped out on to the road as if he was pressed for time.

“Get in Mr. Briggs,” she said.

I got in. She got in also, paying no more heed to that young man than if he was not there.

“There's plenty of room for your friend,” I said, squeezing to one side so that he could get between us.

“My friend? Oh!” She glanced at the young man. “It doesn't matter about him. He understands.”

The Lady of the Sands

It was more than I did. I had not had a chance of saying another word when she had caught hold of the handle and we were off, leaving the young man standing in the road as if he was carved out of stone.

"I hope I haven't turned your friend out of his seat," I remarked. I never had seen anybody treated more off-handish.

"You have," she said.

"Then if you don't mind going back he can either have my place or there's plenty of room for him between us."

"Aren't you comfortable as you are?"

"I'm not very eager to go for a ride anyhow, seeing how the time's getting on. I want to get back to my boarding house for dinner before six; we dine late at my place. By then I shall feel like handling a knife and fork. And, if you'll excuse my saying so, if you was to treat me as you've treated that friend of yours I shouldn't like it; and I shouldn't forget to let you know it too."

"Dear Mr. Briggs!"

If I was to try for a month I could not explain how she said it. It was just like they do it on the stage. She looked at me out of the corners of her eyes, with her face turned just a little up, and a smile that killing—and, I may say, crushing—it left me speechless. It was as if she was on the very tip-top of St. Paul's Cathedral and I was down in the crypt. I daresay we had gone

Sam Briggs : His Book

a mile before I found my tongue, feeling bound to make some sort of conversation.

"Fancy your being able to drive a motor," I said. "I should never have thought it."

"Would you like to drive?" she asked.

"Me? I catch myself at it. Why, we should be over the hedge and goodness alone knows where else before I'd properly started."

"I sometimes have accidents—particularly when I go like this."

I am not prepared to take my affidavit as to what she quite did, but she gave a twist to the handle, the car gave a sort of jump, and, my word, were we not moving!

"Aren't we going a bit fast?" I asked.

"We are going over the legal limit. We shall get into trouble if a policeman sees us. Let's hope we sha'n't, or that nothing will turn up unexpectedly for us to run into."

"Excuse me, but I don't care myself for going quite so fast as this. If it's all the same to you perhaps you'll go a little slower."

"Don't you really like going fast? I do; as fast as one possibly can. I like to feel that one carries one's life in one's hand; that it all depends on the way in which one crooks one's little finger whether or not one's in for a glorious smash."

"Then all I can say is that I don't agree with you."

I very much did not. To tell the truth, the

The Lady of the Sands

way we were whizzing and bumping along was beginning to give me a nasty feeling in the small of the back. I was not made more comfortable by the way she talked.

“I think I’ve got as far as I care to go ; so if you’ll turn round now, and start off back, I shall feel obliged.”

“Turn round?” she said. “Why should I do that? I’m not obliged to take you back.”

“Not going to take me back?”

“Of course I’m not, Mr. Briggs—the idea! I’m going to take you on, and on, and on.”

I stared. There was something about her I fancied less and less.

“I know you’re fond of your joke,” I said ; “but there’s such a thing as carrying a joke too far. When I tell you that at my boarding-house they dine at six, and that if you’re not there to time the chances are that there won’t be much food left, and what is left isn’t worth having, you’ll understand how it is.”

“I assure you, Mr. Briggs, that you won’t dine at your boarding-house this evening. I am not going to turn, either now or ever. I tell you again that I am going to take you on, and on, and on ; unless, that is, you choose to drive yourself—and I shouldn’t advise you to try, because I’m perfectly certain you’ll come to everlasting grief if you do.”

In a general way I am not one to use what I call strong language ; but I could have used some

Sam Briggs : His Book

then. Out loud, too! To think that a man like me should have let myself get into a mess like that; trust myself alone with a strange young female in a motor-car—a thing I never had had a fancy for. I was beginning to suspect every moment more and more that she was not altogether right in her head, to speak of nothing else. I was so helpless. What she said was right enough. I might as well break my neck right off as try to drive the thing. All I could do was to sit still, while, as she put it, we went on, and on, and on, farther and farther from my boarding-house and my dinner. I give you my word that I was not feeling cheerful.

“How long are you going to keep this up?” I asked, when we had gone goodness alone knew how far.

“Your tone is not very flattering, Mr. Briggs,” she said. “No one to look at you, or to listen to you, would think that you were enjoying yourself very much.”

“I am not. Don’t you make any mistake about it. This may be your idea of fun, but it’s not mine. I never did care for practical jokes; and when it comes to this sort of thing it seems to me that it’s a case for the police. You’ve got me here by means of a trick, that’s what you’ve done; and if that’s not against the law I don’t know what is. If I’d thought you were going to carry on like this before I set foot in it I’d have—”

The Lady of the Sands

“Yes ; you’d have—?”

“Never mind what I’d have done. I’d have kept out of it ; you can take that from me. No wonder that friend of yours didn’t mind being left behind. He knew a good thing when he saw it. How far have we come?”

“Fifteen or sixteen miles.”

“Fifteen or sixteen miles! Great smoke! Where’s the nearest railway station?”

“There are practically no railway stations round about here. You see, we are getting to a part of the world which may be said to be remote from civilisation.”

I had not noticed, as we went flying along, that houses seemed to be getting fewer, and the country—from what you could catch of it—wilder and wilder. With eighteenpence in my pocket, when she did put me down, what was I going to do in a place like that? I never was much of a hand at walking. It was growing dusk. It would soon be dark. The idea of me walking fifteen or sixteen miles, and maybe twenty, and maybe more, through the pitch darkness, when I had no more idea than anything where I was, was most ridiculous. And in my boarding-house that greedy crowd was putting away my dinner. In my mind’s eye I could see them at it. So that I was being got at both ends. A kind of desperation came over me. I believe in another half-minute I should have made a grab at the handle, no matter what happened, because

Sam Briggs : His Book

nothing much worse could happen, than was happening already. Only just as I was bringing myself to do it the car gave a sudden twist, we went whizzing through a pair of great gates—which, as luck had it, were open—and she was flying along what looked like an avenue of trees.

“This is private property,” she said. “If trespassers are seen on it the gamekeepers pepper them with shot, or if the police catch them they lock them up.”

“So far as I’m concerned,” I gasped, hanging on to my seat by my eyelids, that sudden twist having all but jerked me on to the road, “the gamekeepers can do all the peppering they want to ; and if it comes to locking up it won’t be me who’ll get the worse of that.”

On we whizzed—anything like the pace I never saw or heard of. All at once we came to a huge house. It was that big at first sight I took it for a public institution. She gave the car another twirl—almost jerking me off it again. Then, before I quite knew if I was off or on, she brought it to a sudden dead standstill right in front of the very hall door. Out of it she hopped. There was a party standing close by.

“Mr. Briggs,” she said, “allow me to introduce you to my governor.”

The party raised his hat.

“Very glad to see you, Mr. Briggs.”

I got a sort of general idea that he was a tall,

The Lady of the Sands

handsome, straight-standing old party, with a stick under his arm. But I was in such a state of fluster that, so far as keeping my head went, I was not worth a row of pins.

"Pater," she said, "Mr. Briggs is staying at Sand-by-the-sea. He's given me a most delightful afternoon, including tea on the pier. As I told Mr. Briggs, before to-day I was never on the pier; so he was so sorry for me he took me on it there and then. Wasn't it good of him? So I took him for a run on my car. We had a charming run, didn't we, Mr. Briggs."

I could not answer her; just then I could not have said "Bo!" to a goose. I would never have believed that a man could have felt as I felt then, as if all the bone had gone out of my back and all the sense out of my head.

"Are you fond of motoring, Mr. Briggs?" asked the old party. I had to stammer out something.

"I can't say that I've seen much of it, so to speak."

He looked me up and down. Then he turned to her.

"Is Mr. Briggs an old friend of yours?"

"No; he introduced himself to me on the sands this afternoon."

"Introduced himself to you on the sands, did he?"

"And he has been so kind to me. I must leave you to thank him properly. But in the

Sam Briggs : His Book

first place you must persuade him to stop for dinner ; his own dinner-hour is at six."

"At six, is it? Mr. Briggs, you must dine with us."

I could no more have refused than I could have flown. There was a commanding way about him which settled it. I mumbled something about being very glad and tried to look it, though I cannot honestly say it was much of a success.

"We dine at eight," she said. "Pater, I'll leave you to entertain Mr. Briggs till then."

Off she skipped up the steps towards the house.

"Come back!" he shouted. "What do you mean by leaving me to—to bore your young friend?"

"Oh, pater, you won't bore Mr. Briggs. Mr. Briggs isn't so easily bored. Why, even I haven't bored him. I've lots of things which I must do, and I'm quite sure Mr. Briggs will be quite safe in your hands till dinner."

"You—you—!"

He shook his stick at her. She kissed her hand, laughed, and went into the house. And there was him and me left alone together. I would have given the eighteenpence I had in my pocket a good many times over to have been somewhere else. He had a way of looking at you which made you feel as if you were all over pimples, and as if he was wondering how on earth you got them.

The Lady of the Sands

“Well, Mr. Briggs,” he said, when he had had about enough of looking, and I had had a great deal too much, “what shall we do to amuse each other?”

“I’m sure I don’t know,” I said.

“Would you like me to show you round the place?”

“I don’t mind,” I said. “It doesn’t take much to amuse me.”

“Doesn’t it? That is fortunate. Because in that case, even I may succeed. Perhaps it’s rather late for a tour of inspection. What do you say to a game of billiards?”

I can play billiards. Many is the game I have played at the “Crown and Anchor.” I can give my friend, Tom Pope, fifteen out of a hundred, and beat him every time; if I’m on my game, and he keeps off his fluking. So I thought I could manage to keep my end up in a game of billiards.

We went into the house. Talk about Buckingham Palace! Not that I have ever actually been there; but from what I have heard or read I should say it was not a bit better than that was. And the servants there were about! All men—powdered heads—and such liveries! Why, the hall alone was big enough to hold a couple of houses like ours—that is a solemn fact. And the furniture, and the pictures, and the wonderful things there were all over the place. But there, it is no use my trying to describe what I only saw

Sam Briggs : His Book

in a kind of a dream. And the passages we went through—pictures on every wall—not to speak of statues, and men in armour. Holding on one side a velvet curtain, and opening a door which was beyond, the old party led the way into the finest room I was ever in in all my days. It was a billiard-room. He touched the button of an electric bell. Someone came in at another door. Turning, I saw my young cousin, Bob Williams, dressed like some sort of a page, getting out the billiard balls. At sight of him I felt more than ever that I must be dreaming.

“Bob!” I cried.

He never said a word or moved a muscle, but stared straight past me as if I was not there. I could have almost bet it was a nightmare I was having.

“If you will choose a cue which suits you, Mr. Briggs,” said the old party, “and will amuse yourself by knocking the balls about, I will return to you in a very few minutes.

Directly his back was turned Bob burst out,

“Sam Briggs, what in goodness’ name are you doing here?”

“That’s what I want to know,” I answered.

“I never had such a day! Before you ask another question or say another word, you just tell me this—where am I?”

Bob did stare.

“Where are you? Why, you’re at Woodgarde.”

The Lady of the Sands

“Woodgarde? Is that the name of the house? And who’s the old party who just went out?”

“You’d better not let anyone hear you call him an old party. That’s the Duke of ——.”

I do not want to mention names—so far as that goes, this is private and confidential—but he mentioned the name of one of the best known dukes in all England, who, I have been told, is descended from royalty itself. As the saying is, you might have knocked me down with a feather, and no wonder.

“And who’s the girl?”

“What girl?”

“In a sort of holland dress, with big, brown eyes and a saucy smile; I believe she’s his daughter.”

“If she’s his daughter you must be talking about the Lady Adeline Beaumanoir.”

“Then I took the Lady Adeline Beaumanoir on the pier, so as to give her a bit of a treat.”

“Sam Briggs!”

“I thought she was one of them cheap excursionists, till she herself put the idea into my head that her lay was picking pockets.”

“Well, Mr. Briggs, have you found a cue to your liking?”

There was the old—I beg pardon, the Duke back again. Bob Williams, all at once, was as if he was a wooden image. I was all over confusion; but then that was nothing fresh. I got hold of

Sam Briggs : His Book

some sort of a cue, then we started playing. I soon found out that the Duke did not play the kind of game I was used to at the "Crown and Anchor." He made hay of me, simply. There was only one person in that game, and it was not me. What with being all of a tremor, the way he had of looking at me every time I opened my mouth or made a stroke, and the feeling I had that Bob Williams's eyes were piercing me like corkscrews, it was all I could do to hit the balls. I do not know how many I scored ; I only know that he kept on scoring like a house on fire, while most of my time was taken up by making misses. After, I suppose, he had had about enough of making rings round me he told Bob to ring the bell. A party appeared with powder on his head.

"Show Mr. Briggs into a room where he can dress for dinner."

Off I toddled with this party till we came to what I have reason to believe was meant for a dressing-room though it was more like a drawing-room than some I have seen. There was silver lying everywhere, every brush had got a silver back to it. There were lots of silver-topped bottles with goodness only knows what inside them ; not to speak of half-a-dozen different kinds of soaps, and, for all I know, a dozen different kinds of water. Why, the very water came out of silver taps.

"Is there anything I can do for you, sir?" asked the powdered party.

The Lady of the Sands

“No,” I said, “I don’t think there is.”

“When you are quite ready, sir, if you will ring I will come and show you downstairs.”

And off he went. When I came to have a glimpse at myself in a looking-glass—there were a few of them—I felt worse than ever. My collar was not extra clean, nor my shirt either, the next day being Sunday. My suit of flannels, which I gave twenty-two and six for just before I left home, I had worn ever since I had been away, and, somehow, it did not look so fresh as it might have done. Altogether, I not only felt cheap, but what was much worse, I had a sort of suspicion that I looked it; and, mind you, in a general way I rather prided myself on my appearance. When I had tidied myself up I never rang the bell; I had not got the nerve to do it. At last that powdered person came back of his own accord.

“If you are quite ready, sir.” I was not quite ready, far from it; but as I should never have been more ready in that place I went with him. “I think, sir, that Lady Adeline is in the small drawing-room.”

If he called that a small drawing-room, I wondered what he would have called the drawing-room in our house at Walham Green. She was there, but—changed! My word! She looked that beautiful—a queen she looked—a queen of beauty, if nothing else. And in a dress—I never saw one like it, not even in the shop windows.

Sam Briggs : His Book

Now, if she had come on to the sands in that dress, or anything like it, I should not have made of myself the idiot I had done ; I should have known her for what she was. It fairly dazzled you to turn your eyes her way. In front of her I felt as if I were nothing at all ; I do not mind owning it. Especially with the Duke looming high overhead, in about a square yard of shirt front. We went in to dinner, me with the Lady Adeline on my arm. A pretty pair I lay we made. It did not make me feel any better when, on entering the dining-room, I all but ran into my Uncle Williams, with powder on his head. I stared at him, but, like Bob, he stared at me as if I was not there. Somehow it did not seem home-like to have your own uncle handing you the soup from over your shoulder, and you not daring to ask him how he was. I knew that Uncle Williams was in good service in high families, but I never had realised that he was in a place like that. And, between ourselves, I am rather partial to my cousin Susan Ann.

That was something like a dinner, fit for Windsor Castle, and that is where it was ; it was above me, clean. I cannot say truly that I enjoyed myself on the whole. Lady Adeline was affability itself, and the Duke was all politeness ; yet all the while I could not get rid of the idea that they were cutting me up between them. Afterwards we went back to the drawing-room. Lady Adeline played and sang. Hers was

The Lady of the Sands

singing! Talk of the Pierrots, or that young lady who drew such crowds to hear her on the beach, it was not the same thing! Presently another powdered person appeared in the doorway.

“The carriage is waiting,” he said. And almost before I knew it I was saying good-bye to the Duke and Lady Adeline, and walking along a wide passage to the front door, where there was a carriage waiting, an electric brougham, if you please! And in it I was whizzed back to my boarding-house. I do not mind admitting that I enjoyed that drive more than anything that had happened since I first spoke to her on the sands.

Some of the boarders were still hanging about the front door of my boarding-house; kept pretty late hours some of them did.

“Where have you been?” asked one of them, as I got out of the electric brougham.

Like his sauce it was to ask it, too; it being no business of his where I went.

“I’ve been dining with the Duke of —— and Lady Adeline Beaumanoir,” I said.

“Go on! What oh! Cheese it!” That is what he answered. “Tell your tales to your uncle, and ask him what he’ll lend you on them.”

He was a vulgar monkey, not that he was the last who doubted me when I told the simple truth. My own family, when I told them exactly what had happened, they would hardly

Sam Briggs : His Book

believe me ; at least, until there came a letter from Uncle Williams. And it was not a very civil letter either. I have felt a coolness towards him ever since it came. But I had the laugh of them, when a few days afterwards there arrived a parcel addressed to "Mr. Sam Briggs, Junior." In it was her photograph, in a silver frame, and on it she had written, in her own handwriting :

"To Mr. Sam Briggs,
In memory of an Afternoon's Entertainment, from Lady
Adeline Beaumanoir."

It is hanging in my bedroom at the present moment. It will hang in my drawing-room, some day, when I have a house of my own. And to think I took her for a tripper.

THE GIFT HORSE

I HAVE heard it said that you never ought to look a gift horse in the mouth. If the meaning of that is that you ought to take everything that's given to you, and ask no questions, and look pleasant, and be grateful, and make out that it's just what you have been looking for, then all I can say is that that's not my opinion. I cannot say much about horses, but about a ticket for a steamer to Margate I can say something, because one was given me by my friend, William Huggins, not so long ago, and if he had kept it to himself I should have been obliged.

"Sam," he said to me, one morning, "I've got something to give you."

As he is not what you might call of a giving sort, I just gave my cigarette a twiddle, and I replied, "Have you?"

"No humbug," he went on; and he looked me so straight in the face that I suspected him more than ever. "Would you like a day at Margate?"

Sam Briggs : His Book

“Were you thinking of giving me one?” I asked. “Because, if so,” I said, “I suppose you don’t happen to have it in your pocket?”

“That’s where you’re wrong”—he took out his pocket-book, and out of it he took a card and held it out in front of him—“because I do.”

“What’s that?” I asked.

“What I told you,” he answered. “A day at Margate.”

“I suppose you mean it’s a ticket for a bean-feast, or something like that?”

“That’s where you’re wrong again, because it’s not. If that ticket was yours you might go to Margate—and back—any day you chose—free, gratis, and for nothing—on a steamer.”

“I never have been on one of those steamers”—which, at that time, I had not; and I may say, straight off, that I am not particularly set on going again. “If that’s what you’re going to give me, hand it over.”

“One moment.” He drew the ticket back. “That ticket’s worth six shillings; you can have it for a bob.”

“I thought you said you’d give it me.”

“Letting you have it at a shilling is giving it you, considering that, as I say, it would cost you six.”

“Let’s look at it.”

He handed over the ticket as if he was afraid I should swallow it, and kept his eyes fixed on it

The Gift Horse

as if he had made up his mind that when it did disappear he would see where it went to.

BIRD STEAMERS, LTD.,
From LONDON
to
MARGATE.
Return.
First Class.
OUTWARD JOURNEY. | RETURN JOURNEY.*

*This portion is available for the return journey from Margate to London at any time during the Season.

It was like that—just an ordinary ticket. Across one of the corners was written in ink, “Complimentary.” I spotted that at once.

“It didn’t cost you anything,” I said, “so whatever you do get for it is all clear profit.”

“What it cost me is neither here nor there. The point is that it would cost you six shillings, and I’m letting you have it for one—giving it away, I am.”

“Are you? Then perhaps you’ll give it away for sixpence.”

“Sixpence!”

You should have seen his face and heard him talk. We had some conversation—William Huggins would have kept it up till tea-time if I had let him—but the end of it was that I got the ticket for sixpence—“a fair gift,” he called it—though I give you my word that that sixpence left my pocket pretty empty.

Sam Briggs : His Book

When I had got the ticket, the more I looked at it the more I grew to like it. Before William Huggins showed it me I had no more idea of going to Margate than I had of going to the moon, but from that time on it took fair hold of me. In less than no time, as it were, I had made up my mind that I would go. But that is my character all over ; when I do resolve on a thing I do it in less than half the time some fellows take. On the Tuesday week after I had really got the ticket I decided, finally, that go I would, and on the Saturday three weeks following I went.

Having once decided to do the thing, of course I did it in style, which again is me. What I say is this : either do not do a thing at all or else do it properly, in a way that's a credit to you and everyone you come in contact with. To begin with, I spent a good bit of coin in rigging myself out. I always do hold that a gentleman ought to attire himself in accordance with the occasion. It is not my wish to enter into private details, but I may mention that I bought a pair of new brown shoes at five-and-eleven, a straw hat at one-and-nine, a tie which was just the thing, one of those new-fashioned collars which are all the rage—they had not got my size, so they let me have it cheap because it was a trifle smaller than I usually take, and before I had done with it I wished I had never had it at all—and a pair of yellow dogskin gloves which you could see from one end of Cheapside to the other—not to go

The Gift Horse

any farther. The governor gave me a Saturday off.

When I got down to London Bridge there was a crowd. There was more crushing than I care for. A young lady was in front of where I was, and if it had not been for me there would have been more crushing than she cared for ; so that by the time we got on board we were quite on terms, as you might say, which made the way in which she behaved afterwards the more surprising.

We were fairly off, and I was just beginning to feel that I should have to thank William Huggins for a real good thing, when who should come sailing up but my young lady. I had been having a look round, and had noticed that among a lot of all sorts some very nice young ladies were on board, but the worst of it was that they all of them seemed what you might call attached.

Until she was quite close I never noticed that with her there was a sailor-kind of person—he might have been an officer, for all I know or care. All I know is that if all officers are like him the less I see and hear of them the better it will be for both of us. Before I could so much as pass a remark to her he said to me, though I don't suppose he was more than a year or two older than I was, and not so very much bigger ; from the way he spoke and looked at me he might have been everything and everyone, and me nothing at all :

Sam Briggs : His Book

“ This young lady has lost her purse. Do you know anything about it? ”

It struck me all of a heap. I stared.

“ Lost her purse? What should I know about her purse? ”

To my amazement she put in her word, in a tone of voice and with an air which made me bristle.

“ You were close behind me, and you kept pushing, and my purse was there when you came, and it was gone when I got on the boat, and you had your arm round me all the time.

That did set my back up, her talking like that.

“ Had my arm round you! I had my arm round you to keep the people from pushing, as you very well know.”

“ You were pushing me yourself.”

“ They were pushing behind, and I was trying my best to keep them from pushing you in front, and this is all the thanks I get. Where was your purse? ”

“ It was hanging to my belt with my chatelaine, and my chatelaine's gone too.”

An elderly party standing by struck in.

“ That was a risky place to carry a purse in a crowd, you know—hanging to your belt.”

Another elderly party who seemed to be a friend of his had his say.

“ Young ladies have got more courage than us old men. I wouldn't carry my purse hanging

The Gift Horse

outside my trousers." Someone laughed. "I expect it got loosened in the crush and dropped without your noticing. It don't follow that this young man took it."

Someone asked behind me :

"Was there anything in your purse, miss? "

"All my money. There was half-a-sovereign in gold, six shillings in silver, and fourpence in copper, besides my ticket, a packet of hairpins, a looking-glass, and two voice lozenges, because of my having a cold, and no pocket in this dress ; and whatever I shall do I don't know.

Talking about what she had lost started her off crying. That finished me. I can't bear to see a woman crying ; especially a nice-looking girl. The elderly party, who had been the first to interfere, said :

"Don't cry, missy. We'll have a whip round, and I dare say between us we'll make up for what was in your purse. I'll start with sixpence, and this young gentleman will start with half-a-crown, which, under the circumstances, is the least he can do."

He winked, though what at is more than I can say.

"Under what circumstances? " I demanded. I did not half fancy forking up half-a-crown because a young woman said she had lost her purse. My supply of cash was strictly limited. It cost me half-a-crown. It cast a gloom all over me. So much so that when we stopped at

Sam Briggs : His Book

Tilbury I had as good as half a mind to walk right off the boat and go straight home. It would have been better for me if I had.

What cheered me up a little was seeing a young lady coming along the gangway whom I had met during my last holiday at Sand-by-the-Sea. By the name of Hickman—Adelaide Hickman. She made out that her father was something large in the cheesemonger way—quite wholesale. But a lady friend of hers who knew her, she told me that Mr. Hickman was an assistant in a large shop in the West-end and got fifty shillings a week. I don't blame a young lady for making out to what you might describe as a comparative stranger that her father is something a bit bigger than he really is, but that Adelaide Hickman carried it too far. When she kind of dropped a hint that her mother was a sort of a distant cousin to a baronet, and that lady friend of hers told me that she took in washing, I must confess that that did strike me as strong. Particularly as she was so snubby when I mentioned, casually, that my mother's great-aunt on her father's side was next of kin, to a captain in the navy. She asked me what I meant by next of kin, and if I was sure I did not mean a stoker. Considering what I had had to put up with from her it seemed uncalled for.

Still, the sight of her, in a manner of speaking, cheered me up. So soon as we were off again I strolled across. I found her looking over the side of the boat across the waters with what you

The Gift Horse

might speak of as a thoughtful gaze, in an attitude which suited her. You could not help noticing that every one was looking, and I do like a girl to stand out in a crowd. Perhaps she had ran a little to seed, being, as she told me herself, five feet eleven and threequarters, in what she spoke of as her stockinged feet, but I will say this for her, that she was handsomely dressed. She had on a blue silk dress, with flowers on it, and a pink sash, and a white boa which reached down to her knees, and a big white lace hat with cherries on it, and patent leather shoes with buckles. Of course, you expect a young lady who is dressed like that to put on a few airs.

“How are you, Miss. Hickman?” I said.

She looked me up and down, especially down, she being about six inches taller than I am; then she looked back over the side of the boat.

“I’m afraid you have the advantage of me. I don’t remember meeting you before.”

“Don’t say you’ve forgotten Sam Briggs, Miss Hickman, after the pleasant time we had together last year at Sand-by-the-Sea.”

“Mr. Briggs! Oh, yes, now you mention the name, I do seem to have some slight recollection. I met so many gentlemen while I was there that it’s most confusing, especially as I keep running across some of them almost every day. Did you go to Switzerland?”

“Switzerland?” Her question took me aback—being unexpected.

Sam Briggs : His B

“ You told me you were going to Switzerland for the purpose of climbing some of those mountains? ”

“ Did I? Oh—well, I didn't go.”

“ I thought you wouldn't. I fancied it was only some of your talk. My friend, Miss Wheeler—you remember Miss Wheeler; young lady with reddish hair—she mentioned to me more than once that she kept catching sight of you Walham Green way.”

Miss Wheeler was the young lady who had told me a thing or two about her. But I didn't say so—not then.

“ Did you spend the winter in Italy, as you informed me you intended doing, Miss Hickman, along—if I remember rightly—with your uncle's sister-in-law? ”

It was her turn to start.

“ I can't say I did—not exactly.”

“ Not exactly? You got no nearer to Italy than I did to Switzerland. I see.”

“ I don't know what you mean by that, Mr. Briggs.” Again she looked over the side of the steamer. There was silence. Presently she went off on another track, while I was trying to think of something to say which would put her, as it were, in a corner.

“ Are you still in the same line of business? ”

“ I am.”

“ Let me see ; if my recollection isn't playing me a trick, which is a thing it very seldom does do,

The Gift Horse

you gave me to understand that you were a partner in one of the largest dried fruit firms in Europe.

“Well—that is—a kind of a partner, as it were.”

I could see that she was just going to ask what I meant by a kind of a partner, and I was beginning to wish that I had left her alone and hadn't started her showing off that memory of hers, when who should come along but the sailor sort of chap who had asked me if I knew anything about that young woman's purse. He had a pair of ticket-clippers in his hand, and as he came he kept singing out :

“Tickets, please! All tickets!”

I had no reason to love the man ; quite otherwise, since he had cost me half-a-crown, to speak of nothing else, yet the sight of him just then was a regular relief. I had no more idea that it meant more trouble than a babe unborn. What I wanted was to give the conversation a turn. I pulled out the ticket which I had got from William Huggins and handed it to him as innocent as a lamb. He looked at it and he looked at me—sharp-like.

“What's this?” he said.

“Can't you see what it is? I should have thought it was plain enough—it's my ticket!”

He looked at it again, and then again he looked at me. There was something about his style I didn't relish ; especially right in front of Miss Hickman there.

Sam Briggs: His Book

“Ain’t you made some mistake?” he said.

“I don’t know what you mean by a mistake,” I answered; because what with his sauce and Miss Hickman’s icicles—her manner had all at once grown simply freezing—I was getting soured. “You asked me for my ticket and there it is; and I don’t know what else you want.”

He never replied. He beckoned to another chap, who looked as if he was something superior in the sailor line, with a lot of gold braid on his cap and brass buttons on his jacket. He gave him my ticket, then he pointed my way; they exchanged a few words, and then this other chap came up to me.

“Come this way,” he said, very short and peremptory.

“Come what way?” I asked. “What’s the matter? What do you want with me? I’ve given up my ticket; isn’t that enough?”

“If you take my tip, young fellow, you won’t make any fuss, but you’ll come when you’re told; or—you’re not very big—we shall have to carry you. We don’t often have your sort on board these boats, but when we do we know how to deal with them.”

I tell you I felt queer—queerer than I had done since I got on board, and that’s saying a good deal. It seemed that I was in for a really pleasant day. Of course, I could not help suspecting that there was something wrong with

The Gift Horse

that gift horse of a ticket ; but what it was I had no more notion than the man in the moon. People were gathering round and saying things, and looking more ; and Miss Hickman was sheering off, as if she wished everyone to understand that she had no connection with a person of my character, and never had had. There was nothing for me to do except go with the party with the gold braid on his cap ; which I did. He took me to a little room on the deck, which seemed to be used as a kind of an office. The chap with the ticket-clippers came with us. He stuck to me closer than I cared for. Then another chap dropped in, with more gold braid on his cap than the other chap. From the way he seemed to fancy himself, I took him to be the captain, though he had got only slippers on his feet. With him came another young fellow, in plain clothes and a dirty collar—perhaps he was a clerk. Anyhow, there we were, four against one, and I dare say the lightest of them two stones heavier than me. The chap who had brought me there started off :

“Now, my lad,”—fancy his calling me a lad, and me twenty-one in another nineteen months ; that put my back up to start with—“I’m going to ask you a few questions, and if you’ll take some good advice in answering them you’ll tell the truth ; it’ll be better for you in the end.”

“Of course I’ll tell the truth. Why shouldn’t

Sam Briggs : His Book

I? What do you want with me? That's what I should like to know. There's enough of you, and you're big enough, I do think."

"Now, little boy,"—little boy, he called me, upon my word!—"drop that style, or you'll be sorry. What's your name and address? and mind that it's the correct one."

I gave it him ; I am not ashamed of it. The young fellow in the plain clothes wrote it down. Then the other chap held out that gift horse of a ticket.

"Where did you get this from?"

"I got it from my friend, William Huggins."

"Did you? And what might be the address of your friend, William Huggins?"

It is an odd thing that, though I have known William Huggins, on and off, for a good long time, and met him in all sorts of places, I have never known where he lived—never had the faintest idea. So I told him. He smiled—a nasty smile. He looked at the others, and they all smiled nasty smiles. I could have thrown things at them with the greatest of pleasure.

"It is unfortunate that you should not know where Mr. William Huggins lives—most unfortunate for you ; but I'm not surprised. And, pray, what did you give your friend Mr. William Huggins for this—piece of paper?"

"Sixpence."

"Sixpence?" Again looks at each other, and again smiles. I give you my word my fingers

The Gift Horse

were all tingling. "That's frank, anyhow. You don't seem to have had a high opinion of its value. Did you see the word 'Complimentary' written across one corner?"

"Of course I did."

"Of course you did; and of course you know that complimentary tickets are not to be bought and sold; that they're personal; that it's a fraud to deal in them?"

"I didn't know anything of the kind."

"And of course you didn't know—since it suits you just now not to know anything—that this ticket was two years old, since it was issued the season before last?"

"Two years old!"

As I repeated the words after him I went hot and cold. Cold because of the mess that I was in; and hot to think of William Huggins passing off a two years' old ticket on me and calling it a gift horse. If William Huggins had been within reach of me just then, in spite of everything I would have given him a gift horse for himself.

"I don't know if you've a face like a brass door-plate, or if you're only silly; but I should have said off-hand that you were silly—trying to bring off an impudent fraud like this; you must have taken us for a pretty lot—if it weren't that this man tells me that you were accused of robbing a young woman as you came on board the boat. That gives things a different look. So just you

Sam Briggs : His Book

turn out your pockets and let's see what you've got on you."

I had to. I had to lay out all I had on me on a little table. Oh, I was boiling! Then he turned to the chap with the ticket-clippers.

"What did you say was in the young lady's purse?"

"She said there was half-a-sovereign in gold, six shillings in silver, fourpence in copper, and her ticket, some hairpins, looking-glass, and voice lozenges."

"Then if Mr. Briggs did have it he's managed to pass it and its contents over to a friend, because here is only five-and-ninepence all told, besides a valuable collection of rubbish which is possibly his own—so we'll give him the benefit of the doubt. The first place we stop at is Southend; fare half-a-crown. Give Mr. Briggs a ticket for Southend; here's the money for it."

He handed over half-a-crown of my money, and the clerk chap handed me a ticket. No one seemed to have noticed that my gift horse of a ticket was for Margate, and that, perhaps, that was where I wanted to go. But after what had happened I did not care where I went; Southend would do for me. Only when I looked at the ticket they had given me I saw it was a single.

"Here, this won't do," I said. "I want a return."

The Gift Horse

“Not by this boat you don’t,” said the chap with the gold braid. “If you want to get back from Southend—and for Southend’s sake it’s to be hoped that you won’t stop there long—you’ll have to get back some other way. You may thank your lucky stars that, so far, you’ve had a cheap escape. But if you so much as try to set foot on this boat again, when we’ve once got you off it, you’ll be handed over to the police as sure as you’re alive, so now you understand. We’re not far from Southend. You can take yourself out of this. Let me warn you that there’ll be plenty of eyes watching you, and if you’re not careful there’s still plenty of time for you to land yourself in the arms of a policeman directly we get there. Out with you!”

He opened the door and gave me a shove, and out I went. What my feelings really were not a creature beside myself can ever know. It seemed to me that all the eyes on board that boat were fixed on me, as if they were saying, “Here’s a pickpocket and a cheat, and, although up to now he’s saved himself from a policeman by the skin of his teeth, he may get himself locked up yet when we reach Southend, and serve him right!” And all because of that gift horse of a ticket.

So you may picture my sensations when Miss Hickman came strolling along, with her head in the air, swinging a pair of new kid gloves between the fingers of one hand and a parasol in the other, and with a party who was trying to

Sam Briggs : His Book

look like a yachting man in a blue serge suit and a peaked cloth cap. I know the kind of impostor he was. I have an uncle who does the same, and about all he knows about the sea is that he keeps a fried fish shop. When she came close up she looked right at me as if she was looking right through me, just as if I was not there, and she said, in a tone of voice which I was meant to hear, and I did hear :

“The worst of these boats is that you meet all sorts of people on them, so many of them right down bad characters, and some of them actually try to make out that you’ve met them before, which is most awkward for a young lady if she happens accidentally to be alone.”

To think that she should say a thing like that—at me—to that humbug in the cloth cap! After what took place between us at Sand-by-the-Sea on the pier-head. It cut me to the heart, really, for the moment, considering the situation I was in. Not that it mattered. There were others. But next time I met her friend, Miss Wheeler, I would make a remark or two which I would take care was repeated in the proper quarter; then she would discover what my opinion was.

Presently, while I was still, in a manner of speaking, quivering from her cruel insinuations, who should I see coming in my direction but that young woman who had lost her purse? For a moment, I give you my word, I did not know what to do. I had never felt like that in all my

The Gift Horse

life before ; it was most embarrassing. She was not what I call bad-looking, though without much style. One of those quiet-looking girls, plainly dressed, with what always seems to me to be a kind of air of reserve—as if they were their own society, and liked it. Her eyes were right my way as she came along—I fancy she had seen me before I saw her—with something in them which made me feel as if I was not myself at all. I cannot describe it, but I had a sort of notion that she was pitying me. No young gentleman likes to feel that a strange young lady is pitying him for nothing at all—it is not likely. The more he knows his way about, and the better opinion he has of himself, the more it goes against the grain. I should have asked her what she meant by it, had I been up to my usual standard ; but, if you'll believe it, just then I seemed to be sinking into my shoes. As for looking at her—as an ordinary rule I am not a bad hand at looking anyone in the face, but just then I doubt if I could have given her glance for glance not if you had offered me a five-pound note, and that although she was staring at me as if she had never seen such a sight in her life. Past me she sailed, so close that she almost brushed against me as she went, and all the while she never took her eyes from off my face. I did not need to look at her to know it ; I felt them. Even after she had gone she kept screwing her head round to look at me.

Sam Briggs : His Book

“That was a nasty one.”

When she had gone clean out of sight that was the remark I heard ; and if I could believe my senses, it was made to me by a young fellow in a red tie and a brown felt hat. I looked at him, I tell you, sharp.

“Were you speaking to me?” I asked.

It seemed he was. What is more, he spoke again.

“I was remarking to you,” he said, “that was a nasty one. She was staring at you all over, as if she was trying to make out whereabouts you’d stowed that purse of hers.”

It is not often that I change colour, as if I were a girl, but I did then. Fancy his having the audacity to say to me a thing like that—him, whom I had never seen in my life before, and who was not more than a half-grown lad. I did my best to crush him.

“What might you be meaning?” I said.

He winked—actually winked ; and he grinned. I could have hit him for the way he grinned. There was not any crushing him.

“You’re a fly one ! Putting your arm right round the girl’s waist, so as to get a better hold of her purse. And trying to pass off an old ticket as if it was a new one, and then facing it out—I never ! I’ve seen a few, but you do beat all.”

I did not answer him. I would not demean myself. I walked right straight away, taking no

The Gift Horse

more notice of him than if he was a saw-dust doll. But I would have given a trifle to have been all alone with him by our two selves. I would have taught him manners, if it had taken me all day to do it.

I was still tingling with a wish that I had given him just one when we reached Southend. I was one of the first off the boat ; I could not have stopped on it any longer if it had been ever so. Who should take my ticket but the chap with the ticket-clippers, who had made himself disagreeable to me more than once already, and he did not lose a last chance of doing it again.

“Don’t let’s see any more of you,” he said, at the top of his voice, as I was passing him. “It won’t be good for your health if you do.”

I could have said something back to him, and done something too, but, of course, I had more sense, though you can bet your life that it was not with the pleasantest feelings that I stepped upon that pier. All thoughts of pleasure were over for me that day. I did not want to enjoy Southend. I did not want to see anything of it, and I never should. Not me. Though I have heard that it is as amusing a place as anyone could wish. All I wanted was to get straight back to town—the sooner the better. The next train would suit me—all the more if it was an express. I had a sort of haunted feeling that my luck was off, and that if I was not careful

Sam Briggs : His Book

worse things would happen than had happened already—because of that gift horse of Williams Huggins's. Goodness knows, I was not in any need of that.

Thinking of taking the shortest cut to the railway station, not looking either to the right or left, I put my hand into my trouser-pocket to make sure that the money for my fare was there all right, when—a start went all over me. In that pocket, if my fingers were not playing me tricks, there was nothing, nor in the other pocket either. Where had I put my money? When that impudent party with the gold braid on his cap had taken the half-crown for my ticket I had three and threepence left—three separate shillings and three pennies. I remembered it distinctly. Could I have left it on the cabin table? I half turned to go back and see. Then I stopped. I was as sure as I was sure of anything that I had taken up all the things which were on that cabin table and put them back in my pockets: my money in my trousers, my watch in my waist-coat, my pocket-book—why, my gracious! my watch was missing too, and my pocket-book! Where was that boat? Already moving off, that was what she was doing, and I was a good three hundred yards away; for length that Southend Pier does want some beating! If I shouted what would be the use? Supposing she stopped—and it was a thousand pounds to a farthing that she would not—it would be no good. I knew I had

The Gift Horse

put all those things back into my pockets ; if they were not there now they had been stolen. A nice lot there seemed to have been upon that boat ! I thought of the young fellow with the brown hat and red tie ; how close he had stood up against me. It looked as if, while he was accusing me of picking that young lady's pockets, he was picking mine. The assurance of him—to speak of nothing else. And he had talked about my being a fly one. What a day I was having ! It seemed as if it was going to be a case of Shanks's pony home. I began to wonder how far it might be from Southend to Walham Green, and how long it might take to step it—me not being much of a walker at any time. Evidently there was going to be no riding for me. Not one thing had that young fellow in the brown hat and red tie left on me—not even a pocket-handkerchief ; and I had only bought it new the night before. He was an artist—he was Ar. When he did a thing he did it well. Every one of my pockets was empty, except—something which was in the outside breast-pocket of my jacket. Something hard. I pulled it out.

“ Why, what on earth is this ! ”

If I could believe my eyes—which I hardly could—it was a lady's purse ; one of those bags made of steel rings. As I was staring at it a voice said, as if it were addressing me :

“ Why, you wicked man, you took it after all ! ”

Sam Briggs : His Book

I looked up, and there was that young lady in the cloth jacket who had lost her purse.

“Took it?” I asked. “Took what?”

I felt all stupid-like; though she thought I was something else.

“How dare you be so impudent, when you had my purse all the time?”

Then I understood what she meant. It was only natural that she should think it; though that did not make it any pleasanter for me.

“Is this your purse?”

“Of course it is! You know it is! Give it me at once!”

There was not any giving; she snatched it from my hand. She opened it and found it empty.

“Of course, you’ve taken everything out of it! You dishonest wretch!”

“Taken everything out of it, have I? In that case perhaps you’ll let me know where I’ve put it, because, as it happens, I have not a brass farthing on me, or a brass farthing’s worth. This does beat anything. I’ve been robbed and plundered of everything I possessed, and the thief who did it pops into my pocket an empty purse worth perhaps twopence, and I’m accused of having stolen it!”

My words touched her. She eyed me as if she could not make up her mind what to think, which was certainly no wonder.

“Are you sure—honestly—that you did not take my purse?”

The Gift Horse

“ I’ll swear I never saw it in my life till I took it out of my pocket half a minute ago ; and I’ll also swear that I didn’t know it was there, and that I didn’t put it in.”

“ And do you really mean that you have been robbed too ! ”

“ Of every blessed thing ! ”

I turned my pockets inside out to show her. She was still doubtful. I am not blaming her, I am simply stating the facts. There was she, staring at me ; and there was I, with all my pockets turned inside out, staring at goodness alone knows what ; and there were the people passing up and down looking at us curious like, as if it would not take much to induce them to join in the fun. I felt that wild that for a packet of pins I would have jumped over the side into the water ! Then she said :

“ If they really have robbed you of everything, what are you going to do ? ”

That was a thing to ask !

“ That’s what I want to know,” I answered.

“ Do you live in Southend ? ”

“ Live in Southend ! I never saw it till five minutes ago, and if I never see it again I shall die happy.”

“ Then where do you live ? ”

“ I live in Walham Green, that’s where I live— Acacia Villas, Walham Green.”

“ But how are you going to get to Walham Green if you have no money and no ticket ? ”

Sam Briggs: His Book

“Walk it.”

“However long will it take you? You’ll never be able to do it.”

“Perhaps not; I can only die on the way. This is what comes of your gift horses.”

She seemed to hesitate.

“You subscribed half-a-crown when I found that I had lost my purse.”

“Don’t I know it?”

“I will give you back that half-crown. The fare to London, as I happen to know, is only two and twopence. It will be enough to take you home.”

She held out a coin—no money ever had on me the effect the sight of that did.

“You will not give it me, but I will accept it as a loan—and thank you. If you will let me know where to send it, the money shall be returned to you to-night.”

“My name is Lucy Miller, and my address is 16, Manchuria Road, Newington Butts.”

With that we parted. I could not stop to say any more—I was not sufficiently myself; all I wanted was to get away. And I got away. As luck would have it—it was the first stroke of luck I had had—I just caught a train as it was starting; so I left Southend almost as soon as I got there. It might have attractions for some, but it had none for me—not then. They seemed surprised to see me home so much sooner than they had expected; but I gave them to under-

The Gift Horse

stand that I was in no mood for answering questions. I got a postal order for half-a-crown ; and I wrote this letter, and put it in :

DEAR MISS MILLER,—According to promise, I have pleasure in enclosing herewith the half-crown with which you were so good as to oblige me as a loan this morning on Southend Pier, with many thanks for the same. If you can make it convenient to meet me any evening next week after seven, at your own time and place, I shall be glad to be allowed to explain to you that I am not the sort of person you took me for. Again thanking you for past favours, and hoping to have the pleasure of seeing you soon again,—Yours obediently,

SAM BRIGGS.

Sure enough there came an answer by return of post, very nicely written :

DEAR MR. BRIGGS,—Thank you very much for the P.O. I shall be at the Houses of Parliament end of Westminster Bridge on Tuesday evening at 7.15, if you care to meet me.—Truly, yours

LUCY MILLER.

Short, but to the point. I likewise shall be at the Houses of Parliament end of Westminster Bridge on Tuesday evening at 7.15, and perhaps a little before. And I shall have the pleasure of explaining to her how it all came about through that gift horse of Mr. William Huggins. I trust, with luck, shortly to have a little explanation with Mr. William Huggins also.

HER FOURTH

REALLY it is surprising how one thing does lead to another, especially if you come to think of it. Look at the upset I got into all through being asked to carry a basket of fruit to a lady, and she not young either. At first sight you would not think that anything would come of a little thing like that, yet more than once before it was over I really hardly knew exactly where I was. It only shows you. It was a Saturday afternoon, Mr. Charles Potter, one of my governors, he came to me just as I was getting ready to leave the office, and he says :

“ Briggs,” he says, “ I want you to take this basket of fruit to Mrs. Dewsnap, 47, Bardolph Crescent, Maida Vale. She’s an aunt of ours, and it’s her birthday to-morrow, Sunday ; it’s a little compliment we’re paying her. I thought you might take it on the way home. You’d better have a cab, and here’s the fare.”

On my way home ! I liked that, considering that I live at Walham Green, and Maida Vale’s up St. John’s Wood way. However, I got into

Her Fourth

a hansom with the basket—a very fine basket it was ; if my governors had not been in the trade I should have said it cost them a mint of money ; as it was I knew, and what I didn't know I could guess. We hadn't got so very far before my hansom cannoned into a cart which pulled out suddenly, and over we very nearly went. Quite over the basket went, the fruit was spilt ; three of the finest peaches rolled on to the road. I nipped after them, just in time to prevent a brewer's dray spreading them all over the street. When I'd picked them up I said to my driver :

“Excuse my asking,” I said, “but is this the first time you've ever driven a cab? Because if so you might just as well have dropped me a hint before I trusted myself inside your coffin on wheels.”

He looked at me out of the corner of his eye, but he didn't say anything, because he was saying all that he could think of to the driver of the cart. Off we went again, still all alive ; but when I found that Mrs. Dewsnap's fruit wasn't improved by being bruised I pushed up the trap and had another go at my driver.

“If you was to keep your horse's head straight we should go straight ; you'll pardon my remarking it.”

He shouted back at me like as if he was a fog-horn.

“You silly young josser ! If I was to keep

Sam Briggs : His Book

my horse's head straight we should walk straight into the 'bus in front of us, shouldn't we? "

We very nearly did it, too ; so near that our horse put his nose into the conductor's face. The language which he used as we went by was vivid. We exchanged a few more remarks, my driver and me, as we went along, so that by the time he pulled up and I got out we were not on what might be called the best of terms. I handed him the eighteenpence Mr. Charles had said was his fare. He looked at it as if it was something the likes of which he had never seen before.

"Here," he said, "haven't you given me too much? My fare's only one and fivepence three-farthings ; though, really, between ourselves, I merely drive a cab for pleasure. Here's your change ; your master'll want it."

He was holding out what I could see was a farthing.

"You keep it," I told him, "and pay it to someone to give you a few lessons in driving, and then a gentleman won't have to insure his life before he gets into your dirty cab."

The language he used to me as I went up the steps to the front door I should not like to see in print. A nice-looking young lady opened the door.

"Mrs. Dewsnap?" I asked.

"No," she replied, very sharp, "it's not Mrs. Dewsnap."

She would have shut the door if I hadn't stopped her.

Her Fourth

“Here,” I said, “one moment, there’s some mistake. Isn’t this 47, Bardolph Crescent?”

“No,” she answered, “it isn’t; and very well you know it isn’t. I don’t want any of your impudence.”

That time she did shut the door before I could stop her, leaving me standing on the steps. I felt a bit funny. A boy was passing with an empty basket over his shoulder. I called out to him :

“Isn’t this 47, Bardolph Crescent?”

“No,” he answered, “not unless it’s been and got itself moved since I was round here last.”

“Then where is 47, Bardolph Crescent?”

He swung his basket over on to the other shoulder; then he whistled; then he said :

“Bardolph Crescent, second on the right, third on the left, fourth on the right, round by the Nag’s Head, and then you ask again.”

Whether that boy was getting at me or not I couldn’t say; he went off whistling, so I shouldn’t be surprised. That cab of mine was strolling off down the road; the driver was looking back at me. I could see that he was grinning.

“Now then,” I shouted, “what’s this? I paid you to put me down at 47, Bardolph Crescent; you come back and take me where I paid you for!”

He halloaed back :

“If you buy the cab you can get inside; I

Sam Briggs : His Book

wouldn't have you in it on any other terms. You step it, my sunny Sam!"

How he came to know my name is Sam is more than I can say ; I expect he guessed it. He cracked his whip and off he went. If there had been a policeman about, I'd have shown him! I hadn't the money for another cab if there had been one to be seen, which there wasn't, nor an omnibus either. I can't say how far it was to Bardolph Crescent, but, carrying that basket, it seemed to me some miles. An ornamental basket, loaded up with fruit to the top of the handle—artistic fashion, as they call it—is not an easy thing to carry. Long before I got there I felt more than once like throwing the whole lot down an area.

Forty-seven Bardolph Crescent turned out to be a smallish house, painted green, with flower-boxes in all the windows. The door was opened by about the very tallest woman ever I saw.

"Well, young man," she said, before I had a chance of opening my mouth, "is it the tea-cakes?"

"Mrs. Dewsnap?" I asked.

She stared at me all over ; and I suppose she concluded that I wasn't the tea-cakes.

"Who from?" she said.

"Messrs. Potter, Potter and Sons."

"Oh," she said, "from them! If you are from them you'd better come inside." She led the way into a room where a lady was sitting in an

Her Fourth

arm-chair ; very small she was, and all wrinkled, and though the hair on her head was all brown and curly, if ever I met a wig that was one. "From them," said the tall woman.

The little one looked me all over, like the other had done ; then she asked, in a tone which was so loud and deep it took me aback :

"What do you want inside my house?"

"I've brought this from Messrs. Potter, Potter and Sons," I explained, "with their compliments."

"What did they send it for?"

"Mr. Charles told me that to-morrow was your birthday," I began ; I was going to say something else, but she snapped me up in a manner there was no getting away from.

"He did, did he? Then it's like his insolence. How dare he talk about such matters to a perfect stranger? You tell Mr. Charles Potter from me that I've changed the date, and that my birthday's not for a good three months." Then she looked at the basket, which I'd stood upon a chair. "Fruit this time, is it? Last time it was nuts and oranges. It's generally something out of their stock for which they can find no sale." She took hold of one of the peaches which had rolled on to the road. "It's bruised! There's no mistake about this being old stock. How dare they send such stuff to me? Their sweepings!" Then all of a sudden she asked me, in what you might describe as a regular shout, "Have you been eating any of this fruit?"

Sam Briggs : His Book

She fairly made me jump. There was something about the way in which I told her that I had not which seemed to strike her. She looked at me till I felt uncomfortable ; then she put up a pair of glasses and looked at me through them. She kept on looking as she said :

“Not bad, Ashington. What do you think?”

The tall woman had kept on looking at me on her own account from the other side of the table.

“No intellect,” she answered.

“You don’t want intellect in a man.”

“I suppose not.”

“I’ve got all the intellect that’s wanted in my house. What is wanted in a man is something different. Is it your mother or your father who is fat?” she asked me, in that way she had of speaking as if she was firing a gun at you.

It struck me as being a funny question, but I made no bones about telling her.

“I shouldn’t say that either of them was out of the way,” I said.

“Aren’t they? Then let me tell you that you’d better be careful about what you eat and drink, or you’ll get a double chin. Come here.” I went as near to her as I dared. “Closer!” she said. “Closer!” She made me go as close to her as I could. Then she put up her hand and felt my chin, prodding me in the cheek as a butcher might a pig. I went hot all over. I had never been handled like that before. “Nice and soft,” she said.

Her Fourth

“Like him,” remarked the tall woman, in a voice which I should term snappy.

“What’s the harm if he is? The softer a man is, the easier he is to manage. How old are you?”

“Twenty next birthday,” I told her. I tried to get farther away, but she wouldn’t let me.

“Keep still; stop where you are. That’s young.”

“He’s only a child,” said the tall woman.

“It doesn’t follow that he’s any the worse for that, Ashington. What’s your name?”

“Sam Briggs.”

“Briggs? It sounds plebeian. I don’t know that I should care to be Mrs. Briggs, but the name might be changed.”

“It would cost money,” said the tall woman.

“What if it did? I’ve spent money more foolishly. It’s mine to spend. How old would you think I am, Mr. Briggs?”

That was a facer. I might have made a fairly good shot at it, but I felt that she wouldn’t like it if I did; so I hedged.

“I’m no hand at guessing a lady’s age.”

“Then I’ll tell you. I’m thirty-three. Last year I was thirty-seven, and next I shall probably be thirty-two. I’ve made up my mind that I’ll never again be more than thirty-five. Are you married?”

“No,” I said, “I am not; and what’s more, I’m not thinking of getting married either.”

I meant that to be by way of a hint; because,

Sam Briggs : His Book

really, there did seem to be no knowing where she would be getting to. But it was no good dropping a hint to her; it was like water on a duck's back.

"Then you'll start thinking. What, for instance, do you think of marrying me?"

That was a nice question to be asked. It was what I call a paralyzer. I didn't know what to say; all I could do was to stutter. She kept looking at me all the while as if I was something which she thought of buying.

"I—I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you, but I—I—if you'll excuse me I—I don't think I'd care to—thank you."

"I didn't ask what you cared: I asked what you thought. It's in this way, Mr. Briggs. I've buried three husbands; and as I'm fond of married life, that's hard on me—especially as I hadn't a word to say against one of them. Some women manage to make one last them out; but I've been unfortunate. Providence moves in a mysterious way. And as I'm a woman who isn't happy without a husband—to me a house feels as if it were empty without one—I'm thinking of taking a fourth. It has just occurred to me, why shouldn't it be you? I'm a woman of business, and I don't believe in long courtships. I married my last three days after I met him, and it was quite successful; only his health failed. I don't make a definite proposal. I only ask you to give the matter your consideration, and I'll give it

Her Fourth

mine. Come to-morrow to dine with me at half-past one, and we'll talk it over."

Dine with her! I would have given a trifle to have been able to say "no" right out, and so I tried to make her understand; but it wasn't to be done.

"I—I'm very sorry, but I—I'm afraid I'm engaged to-morrow."

"Don't tell me you're engaged!" she thundered back. "You'll come and dine with me to-morrow at one-thirty if you don't want to lose your situation. I hold Potter, Potter and Sons in the hollow of my hand; and so, if necessary, I'll show them, and you too. Now you can go. Mind you, one-thirty, sharp. I don't like to be kept waiting for my food. And as, since we've gone so far, I may as well admit that it is my birthday, you might bring something to commemorate the day.

When I was out in the hall, which I presently was, the tall woman said to me—speaking as if she was a schoolmistress and I was a small boy:

"Now, Mr. Briggs, let's have no nonsense. You understand that you're to be here to-morrow at half-past one, and not a minute later; and bring a little present with you."

In the street I felt as I did once when I had had a penny electric shock—as if something had happened, but I didn't quite know what. It was three or four minutes, and I had gone quite a

Sam Briggs : His Book

way, before I got back my senses enough to think about going home. I found there were 'buses not very far off which went to Walham Green, and on the top of one of them I did my thinking. Took a bit of doing, that thinking did. Seemed to me that whatever I did I was in trouble. Whether Mrs. Dewsnap was or was not off her dot I couldn't make up my mind ; but, looking at it all round, this way and that, considering that she was the governor's aunt—aunt to all my governors, from what I could make out—it appeared to me that, if I kept my head, no serious harm worth speaking of could come to me if I did go and pick a bit with her. So I went, very much against the grain, mind you, but I went. Though if I'd known what was to come of it I'd have gone a hundred miles to keep away ; and that's where it was.

The tall woman opened the door—same as yesterday.

“You're late !”

That was all she said, and not very cheerfully either. There was something about the manner in which she said it which made me feel uncomfortable right from the very start. She led me into a room in which Mrs. Dewsnap was sitting bolt upright in an armchair. Instead of saying “Good-day,” and “How do you do?” and that sort of thing, what she did say was :

“Twenty minutes to two ; I told you to be here by half-past one.”

Her Fourth

“Excuse me,” I began, “but by my watch—”
But she wouldn’t let me go on ; not she.

“I want to know nothing about your watch. I keep the time, and there it is.” She pointed to a clock which was on the mantelpiece. The way she had of shouting at you was most upsetting ; I didn’t know what to make of her. “Well,” she asked, while I was wondering if I was expected to sit or to keep on standing, “is that all you have to say to me?”

“I’m sure I’m very sorry ; but I had no idea that I was late.”

“Is that all you have to say?”

“The fact is, the ’bus by which I came must have taken longer than I thought.”

“Is that all you have to say?”

There was something about the way in which she kept on saying this which made me wonder what it was that she was driving at.

“I’m sure I beg your pardon, and if you’ll overlook it this time I promise it sha’n’t occur again.”

“Have you forgotten what day this is?”

“Sunday.”

“Sunday?” She turned to the tall woman.

“He has forgotten—it’s incredible.”

“I told you he’d no intellect.”

“It’s not a question of intellect, but of something much more serious. It’s a question of heart.”

Then it came on me, all in a flash, what she was after, and out I burst.

Sam Briggs: His Book

“How forgetful I am, to be sure!” I said. “Do you know, I’d clean forgotten it was your birthday, ma’am. With your permission I’ll wish you many happy returns of the day, if I may take that liberty.”

She never smiled; she never anything; she just sat there like a log of wood.

“It’s rather late to take that liberty, Mr. Briggs. And have you forgotten to bring me some little token in commemoration?”

I had, altogether; it was no use making any bones about it. So soon as the hint was dropped it had slipped my memory. All I could do was to try to explain.

“The truth is,” I said, “that I get my salary on Wednesdays, and being a bit short this week I hoped—”

She cut in before I had a chance to finish, which was just as well, because I really did not know what I hoped.

“No excuses, Mr. Briggs. Excuses are always contemptible. I never accept them; I have made that clear to all my husbands.”

She put up her glasses and looked at me through them. She had been looking at me hard all the time, but it seemed that she could look harder through her glasses; because, all at once, she gave what, for her, was quite a start.

“Mr. Briggs—good gracious!—what have you got on?”

“My best suit,” I told her; which I had.

Her Fourth

Though I had been in two minds about putting it on, seeing the impression I had made on her in my weekday one. Therefore the way that she behaved surprised me to that degree that it was beyond me altogether.

“Your best suit?” she cried. “Is it possible? That conglomeration! Why, there are seven distinct colours in plain sight. Ashington, is there anything of my Henry’s which Mr. Briggs can wear?”

“The blue serge,” said the tall woman.

“Then for gracious’ sake let him wear that. I cannot sit down to dinner with such clothes; it is not possible. Take the man upstairs at once.”

And she took me, before I clearly knew what she was doing. They had such a sudden way of setting about things in that house that really you hardly seemed to know where you were not from one moment to another.

“Come along,” said the tall woman; and she laid her hand upon my shoulder—such a hand and such an arm! Before I gathered what she was after I was through the door and half-way up the stairs as well.

“What’s the meaning of this?” I asked, when I did have a chance of speaking. “I don’t care to be pulled about like this,” I told her. “Not when I come out to dinner,” I said.

She paid no more attention to me than if I was a monkey. She hauled me into a bedroom—a

Sam Briggs : His Book

very nice room it was, and beautifully furnished. She took some clothes out of a drawer, and she threw them on the bed. Then she says :

“Now,” she says, “come out of those horrible things and put yourself inside some decent garments.”

“Excuse me,” I ventured to remark, “but if these clothes of mine are not good enough to sit down with a lady to table in, then I must be allowed to observe that all I can say is—”

She chipped in before I could finish.

“Don’t talk,” she said. “Come out of that frightful coat.” She took hold of me somehow ; she whipped me round like as if I was a top ; and there was I out of my coat, and she with it in her hands. “Now for that nightmare of a waistcoat ; the creature who made it ought to be sent to penal servitude.” If you’ll believe me, she had unbuttoned it from top to bottom and torn it off me, in less time than it would have taken me to sneeze. “The rest of the things you can manage yourself,” she said. “And mind you’re quick about it. I shall be back inside five minutes, and dressed or undressed, downstairs you’ll have to come.”

Out of the room she flounced, with my coat and waistcoat, leaving me scarcely knowing which end of myself I was standing on. The outrageousness of it was what beat me—left there with a blue serge suit of somebody else’s. How-

Her Fourth

ever, since there was only one thing to be done, why, I did it. I took off the rest of my things, as tasty a pair—pale pink stripes on a light blue ground—as anyone could wish to see, and got into that blue serge—at least, as far into it as I could get. Whether it had been made for a man or a walrus was more than I could tell, but it was no manner of fit for me; I was like a pea in a pint pot. Just as I was wondering whether I should ever find myself again inside those things, back the tall woman came.

“Aren’t you ready?” she asked.

“No,” I told her, “and I never shall be. Am I supposed to sit down to dinner with a lady in a suit of clothes like this? Why, if she looks my way she’ll wonder where I am.”

“Those clothes,” she said, “were made for a man, not a microbe. Let me button your waistcoat.” And she did, like as if I was a child. “We’ll manage somehow; the thing is to make sure they’ll stop on you.”

She did manage, with about twenty pins, pinning me up behind and in front and at the side and all over.

“It’ll be a bit of all right,” I said, “if I happen to sit down on some of those pins.”

“If you do,” she said, “you’ll know it. Now, down you go.”

And down I went, with more help from her than I wanted. Mrs. Dewsnap looked at me through her glasses.

Sam Briggs : His Book

“At least at present you are possible ; though the garments are a trifle large.”

A trifle ? There was room inside them for a feather bed as well as me—pillows, bolster, blankets, and all.

“Mr. Dewsnap was a proper-sized man,” said the tall woman.

“He certainly was on the large side ; which is perhaps the more reason why I should try a small one next. Variety is not necessarily to be despised. Mr. Briggs, give me your arm and take me in to dinner. We are already extremely late.”

I gave her my arm. As we were going into the next room, slower than if it was a walking funeral, she said to me :

“You do not appear to shine in conversation. A gentleman ought always to make some appropriate remark to a lady when he is taking her in to dinner.”

“The truth is,” I told her, “that at the present moment I don’t feel like saying anything to anyone ; and if you were in my place I don’t think that you would either.”

“Your manners,” she said, “are incredibly bad.”

“He hasn’t any,” said the tall woman, who was just behind.

“Then he must be taught some.”

“It will take time.”

“With patience much may be done. Besides, it will be an occupation for me.”

Her Fourth

We sat down at a round table—me, Mrs. Dewsnap, and the tall woman. There was a servant in the room, another six-footer, who I dare say was forty-five, though she looked more. Soup was handed round. I was just starting on a spoonful when Mrs. Dewsnap all but made me drop it by the way she shouted at me.

“Mr. Briggs! Please don’t hold your spoon like that! Taylor, show Mr. Briggs how to hold his spoon.”

And if that six-footer of a servant didn’t grab me by the wrist, twist the spoon out of my fingers, and then put it back again in a way that suited her.

“Hold it like that,” she said, “and not at the end, as if it was an umbrella.”

“And don’t take your soup from the end, but from the side of the spoon,” said Mrs. Dewsnap.

“And don’t pour it down your throat as if you were pouring it down a funnel,” said the tall woman.

“And pray, Mr. Briggs, don’t make that distressing noise when you swallow.”

It was very nice for me, but, strictly in confidence, my appetite for soup all went when they started at me like that. But yet when I tried to explain that soup was not one of my favourite dishes, they wouldn’t let me leave it; not they.

“You can pay no worse compliment to your hostess,” said Mrs. Dewsnap, “than not to

Sam Briggs : His Book

consume what she has placed before you. Please take your soup, Mr. Briggs ; not too fast, for that is not elegant, nor too slowly, for that may keep others waiting. And please remember that there are ladies looking at you."

I was not likely to forget ; they took care of that. That soup very nearly choked me, and that's the simple fact. It was the same with the fish.

"Pray don't use a steel knife"—there she was interfering before I was able to get so much as a taste. "Nor a fork and your bread. Fish-knives are provided. Taylor, show Mr. Briggs which is his fish-knife."

That there six-foot servant was at me again ; snatched away my fork and my bread, and shoved between my fingers, as if I was a child, what I had thought was meant more for ornaments than anything else. However, I did the best with them I could. But it didn't suit her—oh, dear, no.

"You haven't a very graceful way of eating fish," she said. Who would have had, treated as I was? It was all I could do to eat it at all. "For Heaven's sake don't drop the sauce down your waistcoat !"

Her shouting at me like that gave me such a start that I dropped it more than ever ; as a matter of fact, I dropped all that I had on my fork. She made me all of a twitter. She did go on.

Her Fourth

“Your table manners are unspeakable,” she halloaed—halloaing with her was the same as speaking with anybody else. “If you can’t eat your food without spilling it all over you put your serviette up in front of you. Taylor, show Mr. Briggs how to put his serviette up.”

If you will believe me, that impudent six-footer took hold of my serviette, which I had kept properly folded over my knee, opened it out, and tucked it inside my shirt collar, all round my neck, like they do bibs in front of babies. The marvel is I did not up and hit her. Very near throttled me she did, and she was about twice my size, even if she was a woman. But I was so flurried by the way they all behaved to me that I felt as if I could do nothing—nor yet say anything either. It went on like that all through the dinner; if I had thrown the plates and dishes at them, it would have served them right. I simply could not have believed that a man could have been so sat upon by three females; so squashed, if I may say so. I might have been a rag doll, the way they used me. Though, mind you, the dinner itself was first-rate—slap-up. I could have done it proper justice if I had only been left alone. Even as it was, by the time that we got to the dessert, and there were a couple of the governors’ peaches on my plate, and a glass of port-wine in front of me, I felt that I hadn’t done myself so very bad. Just as I was

Sam Briggs : His Book

taking a sip at my port—I didn't dare to do more than sip at it, for fear that that six-footer should be told to take it from me—there came a knocking and ringing at the front door. Mrs. Dewsnap looked at the tall woman—not the servant, I mean, but the one who had hauled me up the stairs.

“It's them,” she said.

“So I suppose,” she said.

Mrs. Dewsnap turned to the six-footer—the servant, I mean, this time.

“Show them in here,” she said.

In about half a minute, to my utter astonishment, who should come marching into the room, one after the other, but five of my governors—Mr. John, Mr. William, Mr. Charles, and Mr. Charles's two sons, Mr. Ferdinand and Mr. Adolphus. Mr. John, he went straight up to Mrs. Dewsnap, all smiles.

“My dear aunt,” he said, in the tone which he kept for the best customers, “once more, on this auspicious occasion, we have the felicity of offering you our united congratulations. And we do so with the greater pleasure since each year seems to make you younger.”

“Does it?” she replied, short and sharp. “If that's your opinion, it's not mine.”

The others had not been looking at her; they had been looking at me; and the more they looked the more they seemed to want to look.

Her Fourth

“Who on earth,” remarked Mr. William, eyeing me most unpleasant, “is this person?”

“Why,” came out Mr. Charles, with a sort of a burst, “it’s Briggs.”

“Mr. Briggs,” said Mrs. Dewsnap, very straight and very loud, “has honoured me with his company at dinner on the occasion of my birthday.”

By now Mr. John was also casting his eyes in my direction. All the smiles went off his face when he saw me.

“Honoured you?” he said, speaking in the tone which he kept for the customers whose accounts were a little behind. “My dear aunt!—Sam Briggs!”

“The word I used was ‘honoured,’” said Mrs. Dewsnap, loud as ever.

They stared at her; then they stared at each other; then they stared again at me. Mr. Charles, he turned to Mrs. Dewsnap.

“My dear aunt,” he said, “I fancy that there must be some misapprehension somewhere. This—lad, Briggs, is our office-boy.”

I was not their office-boy, nothing of the kind; I was one of their younger clerks, that’s what I was, but just then I didn’t feel like telling them so. In fact, I didn’t seem to feel like telling anybody anything. The way in which they kept eyeing each other and then me was proof that there was more trouble ahead. I wished with all my heart that I had never come to dinner; it was

Sam Briggs : His Book

dead certain that I never wanted to. A remark which Mrs. Dewsnap dropped did not make it any better for me, not by any manner of means.

“Nephew Charles”—speaking, as always, as if she was a fog-horn in the middle of a storm—“do not dare to make any unpleasant allusions to my honoured guest Mr. Briggs. It is extremely possible that he will be my fourth.”

“Fourth what?” asked Mr. Charles.

“Husband,” she replied, as if she wouldn’t mind if the ceiling did shake.

“Aunt!” they cried, all of them together. Once more they all of them looked at her, then once more they all of them looked at me.

“As you are aware,” she went on, in the same reach-right-across-the-Crystal-Palace tone of voice—she would have been a cure for the deaf if ever there was one!—“I own a large interest in the firm of Potter, Potter and Sons, and it has occurred to me that it would be desirable that my fourth husband should be an active member of the firm, to represent that interest.”

The looks which came upon their faces!

“I’ve no doubt, my dear aunt,” said Mr. William, “that this is a little jest of yours; but at the same time——”

She cut him short.

“I never jest,” she said. I should think she never did. “As you know, when I have once made up my mind, nothing can induce me to change it. Still, if there are any observations

Her Fourth

which you wish to make, and which it is fitting that I should hear, let them be made in an adjacent chamber. Ashington, let us go."

She and the tall woman went ; Mr. John, Mr. William, and Mr. Charles went with them ; Mr. Ferdinand and Mr. Adolphus stayed behind—I wished they hadn't. Mr. Ferdinand was my age, as I happened to know ; Mr. Adolphus was a year younger ; but either of them would have made two of me, all bone and muscle—and both of them Rugby forwards. I had seen them play many a time. They didn't care who they killed to win the game. They both of them began at me almost as soon as the door was closed, as I'd expected.

"You're a nice young blackguard, Briggs!" said Mr. Ferdinand.

"A dirty little rascal," said Mr. Adolphus.

"Excuse me," I managed to get in, "but those remarks are not called for as addressed to me, because I shall be able to explain to you that I'm not here owing to any wish of my own—"

But they wouldn't let me go on—not they.

"And it won't be owing to any wish of ours that you'll stay," said Mr. Ferdinand, in the very middle of my sentence.

"So out you go!" said Mr. Adolphus.

And out I went—they outed me.

"Look here," I shouted, "these clothes aren't mine ; that tall woman knows where my clothes are."

Sam Briggs : His Book

“Never mind about your clothes,” said Mr. Ferdinand; “any clothes will do for you.”

“Here’s your hat,” said Mr. Adolphus, taking it off a peg and clapping it on my head harder than he need have done. “Think yourself lucky to get it.”

“How am I going to get home?” I asked, just as they were opening the front door. “All my money’s in my trouser pockets; these aren’t my trousers that I’m wearing; they’re upstairs.”

“Hang your trousers!” said Mr. Ferdinand. “Here’s half-a-crown for a cab fare; now hook it!”

And I hooked it, owing to the way in which they sent me running down the steps. A hansom happened to be passing.

“Halloa, cabman!” cried Mr. Adolphus, “take this young brute away from here as fast, and as far as you possibly can!”

A nice way to be introduced to a cab in which you were going to ride!

“Pardon me,” I called out to them, as I was getting in, “but if you’ll allow me, I shall be able to explain—”

But I never had a chance. The cab started before I expected, and I was thrown all of a heap on to the seat. It was only by a wonderful chance I was not hurled on to the road. Before I had properly pulled myself together the driver put his nose through the trap-door.

Her Fourth

“Had a nice little kick-up?” he said. “Isn’t it a bit early for that kind of thing, or is it that you’re leaving off very late?”

As familiar as if he had known me for years! I was not going to be spoken to like that by a common cab-driver, and so I let him see.

“Never mind what I’ve had,” I told him. “You mind your own affairs, and then perhaps no harm will come to you.”

“Whose togs have you got on?” he asked.

“That’s my affair,” I said. “You look after your own togs, and leave other people’s alone.”

“I should think that that’s what you’d have better have done yourself, from what I can see.” He was still peeping at me through the open trap—the impudence of him! “I only hope that they won’t fall off you while you’re inside my cab. They look to me as if they very easily might.”

The fact was that, principally because of the style in which Mr. Ferdinand and Mr. Adolphus had handled me, most of the pins which the tall woman had put in had come out, and some of them were sticking into me at that moment; the consequence being that I did not feel safe in those clothes myself. I know this: I shouldn’t have liked to have had to walk far in them. A nice game I had with that driver! He kept calling attention to me as we went along, bawling out to ’bus-drivers, and people like that. A regular

Sam Briggs: His Book

show that cabman made of me—on a Sunday afternoon! But I went back at him. I bet I gave him one or two stingers! When we got to Walham Green we had a row about the fare. When I proved that it was under five miles he said that he always charged double for carrying a Guy Fawkes. Then I talked to him! Luckily none of my people were at home, so that I was able to get in without their noticing what a sight I was. If anyone had said so much as a syllable to me there would have been ructions. Boiling with rage I was—simply boiling.

The next morning being Monday, I did not altogether fancy going up to the office. But as I had to go, I had. So up I went, with the late Mr. Dewsnap's blue serge suit under my arm in a brown-paper parcel. Mr. Charles came out to me directly I got there; he might have been hanging about waiting for me to turn up.

"Come in here," he said.

He took me into Mr. John's private room, and there they all of them were, looking as if they would like to eat me, and as soon as I got my nose inside the door, off they started.

"You're a nice young scamp, Sam Briggs," said Mr. John.

"A miserable, treacherous sneak," said Mr. William.

"A dirty, underhanded hound," said Mr. Charles.

"May I ask," I said, "what it is I am supposed

Her Fourth

to have done?" Because, between ourselves, it seemed to me to be about time that I should get my back up.

"None of your insolence to me!" bellowed Mr. John, jumping up in a way that made me jump back. "You know very well what you've done. You've crawled, like a wriggling snake, into the house of a lady who's a relation of mine."

"Believe me, sir," I said, "I have not. All I did was to take round that basket of fruit—"

"Don't tell me what you've done! I'll tell you what we are going to do. We have been considering three alternatives. Shall we call in a policeman, and give you into his custody?"

"What for?" I asked.

"You know very well what for," he said. I did not, and he didn't either. "Or," he went on, "or shall we kick you out into the street without a character? In which case we'll take care that you don't obtain another situation in the city of London. Or, will you give us, in black and white, your undertaking not to molest Mrs. Dewsnap again; that is, will you promise, on your word of honour, never, under any circumstances, to see her, speak to her, or communicate with her?"

In rushed Mr. Adolphus.

"Here she is," he cried; "she's coming along the passage."

There was a pretty how-d'ye-do!

"What shall we do with him?" asked Mr.

Sam Briggs : His Book

John, looking as if he would like to tear his hair—what there was of it.

“We can’t drop him out of the window,” said Mr. William ; “it’s too high.”

“We can’t shove him up the chimney,” said Mr. Charles ; “it’s too narrow.”

“There’s the cupboard,” said Mr. Ferdinand.

And there was ; a nasty, dirty cupboard in a corner of the room, which hadn’t been cleared out, I shouldn’t think, for a hundred years, with shelves ; and under the bottom there was just room for a middle-sized man to crouch. I know, because they crammed me in under it, and not only shut the door, but locked it.

“Look here !” I said, as the cobwebs came tumbling down on top of me. “This won’t do !”

I heard Mrs. Dewsnap come into the room, and I was still, because I wasn’t very much more anxious that she should see me than they were.

“Where is Mr. Briggs ?” she asked in that shake-the-foundation-of-the-house voice of hers.

“You are an early visitor,” said Mr. John.

“I presume that I know that as well as you do. I have come to take him away with me at once.”

“Take him away with you ? My dear aunt !”

“Don’t repeat my words ; you heard what I said. And don’t ‘dear aunt’ me ; I know you, John Potter. I ask you a second time, where is Mr. Briggs ?”

“Mr. Briggs ?” said the old serpent. “I

Her Fourth

really can hardly tell you. Do you know, William?"

"He's not here just at present," said Mr. William.

"In any case," said Mr. Charles, "you would scarcely be likely to find him in here. At this hour he is probably engaged in his usual duty of sweeping the floors.

Usual duty of sweeping the floors!—me!

"None of your lies," said Mrs. Dewsnap, in that plain-speaking way she had. "They told me outside that Mr. Briggs was in this room."

Then the fun began. I could hear everything from where I was, as plain as if I had been in the room—I shouldn't have been much more comfortable if I had been. You can take it from me that they none of them spoke in whispers. The things they said to each other! and the things she said to them! and especially the things they said to her and about her! If half of them were true she must have been a warm one. The idea of me being her husband made my blood run cold. At last, when they were all getting hoarse, except her—I shouldn't think she ever did get hoarse—she closed the discussion.

"I shall be back in an hour," she said. "I'm going to see my solicitor, on business which you may guess; and if, on my return, I don't find Mr. Briggs awaiting me, the consequences will be serious for all of you."

Out she stamped, and didn't she bang the

Sam Briggs: His Book

door! They all started talking together again—this time under their breaths, so that I couldn't hear a word they said.

"Halloa!" I shouted, hammering against the cupboard door. "Let me out!"

They let me out. Mr. Charles tackled me.

"Sam Briggs," he said, "we're going to look at this matter from the point of view of men of the world. We're not going to lay all the blame for what has occurred upon your shoulders. Although it pains me to have to admit it, in strict confidence, to all intents and purposes Mrs. Dewsnap is a dangerous lunatic. She's already killed three men, and, if she gets the chance, she'll kill three more. So far, indeed, from blaming you, we're going to give you a mark of our confidence; we're going to entrust you with a confidential mission; we're going to send you as our confidential agent on a ship of ours which is starting immediately to Palermo, for a cargo of lemons."

"Thank you," I said; "I'm much obliged," I said; "but I don't know that I quite care to go to—what's the name of the place?"

"We're not asking what you care to do, we're sending you."

"But—I'm no sailor."

"That'll be all right when once you're out at sea."

"When did you say this ship was starting?"

"At once; you'll just have time to catch her."

Her Fourth

"I'm in no hurry," I said.

"No ; but we are."

"But—one moment. What will my mother say when she finds that I don't come home to supper? "

He paid no attention to me ; he turned to Mr. John.

"Is that letter ready? " he asked. Mr. John gave him a letter which he had just been writing. Mr. Charles looked it through, put it in an envelope, and handed it to Mr. Adolphus. "Adolphus," he said, "give that to Captain Rud-dock. Now off you go with Briggs ; there isn't a moment to lose."

"Thank you," I said ; "but I really don't think," I said, "that I'm what you might call keen," I said, "about going," I said.

Mr. Adolphus took me by the shoulders and he shook me—shook me, he did—till I thought he'd have shaken my bones right out of me. Then he observed :

"Briggs, you're coming with me, and you're going to do exactly as you're told, and if you whimper, or if you object by so much as a word, I'll—break—every—bone—in your body."

He treated me to another shaking.

"I'll go," I gasped, when I could. "Only spare my life."

"I won't if you don't behave," he said. "But if you do behave, on board the *Eleanora*—that's the name of the ship on which you're going for

Sam Briggs : His Book

your little jaunt—you'll have the best time you ever had in all your days."

I had my doubts about that myself, but it didn't seem to be much use to say so.

Presently me and Mr. Adolphus were bowling along in a hansom cab, travelling faster than I ever saw a hansom cab move before, and there was I starting on a voyage to—what was the name of the place?—for lemons. As a confidential agent! Oh, dear, yes; a deal of confidence they were putting in me. What my poor mother would say when she found I wasn't coming home to supper I couldn't think—she has said things more than once to me before; she can say them! And it all came from taking a basket of fruit to a lady! As I have already said, it's a positive marvel how one little thing does lead to another. And that's where it is!

A MODEST HALF-CROWN

I HAVE been having an insight into life ; right into the very heart of it. It was a Monday morning, and as we were going up in the train to business a party named Hitchcock leaned over and he laid his hand on my knee.

“ Sam Briggs,” he said, “ do you want to make your fortune? ”

“ Well, Mr. Hitchcock,” I replied to him, “ I’ve no particular objection, not that I know of. Were you thinking of showing me how to do it? ”

“ I was,” he said, “ and I am. Back Solomon for the Park Hill Stakes.”

With that I looked his way, and I showed him how you wink with your left eye.

“ Thank you, Mr. Hitchcock,” I remarked. “ I’m obliged to you ; but I don’t happen to be a racing man. I’ve seen too much of it.”

“ I’m not asking you to be a racing man,” he went on, as if he was very much in earnest. “ Nothing of the sort. I’m simply saying to you that if you want to turn half-a-crown into twenty-

Sam Briggs : His Book

five shillings I'm giving you a chance to do it. A chance? I'm giving you a dead certainty. That's all I say, and it strikes me that that's about enough."

"I suppose," I observed, more for the sake of carrying on the conversation than anything else, "Solomon is a horse."

"Oh yes, he's a horse right enough; he is a horse, he is."

"And the Park Hill Stakes is a race?"

"Yes, and so's the Park Hill Stakes a race; run this afternoon at 2.30. Mind you, Solomon belongs to a stable with which I'm in constant communication; and when I say to you for the Park Hill Stakes he can't lose, I'm only telling you the truth. He'll start at about 10 to 1, so that half-a-crown's worth five-and-twenty shillings."

"Is it?" I said, and looked thoughtful.

Then someone else chipped in, and then another, like chaps will when they are going up to business in the train, and a conversation started. Presently pretty nearly all the lot of them were talking together. I don't quite know how it happened, but the end of it was that when I got out at my station Hitchcock had half-a-crown of mine in his trouser pocket, and I was backing Solomon for the Park Hill Stakes.

Before I had hardly put my foot on the platform I was sorry. I was a bit short that week. Money was wanted for one or two things. I

A Modest Half-Crown

knew no more about horse-racing than a bull's hind leg; and to think that, with funds as they were, I had been such a soft as to hand over half-a-crown of mine to a man like Hitchcock, of whom I knew only a little more than I did about horse-racing, when I did come to think of it it made me wild. I felt like going straight back and telling him that if he would shell out one-and-three he might keep the other half for his pains, and then something would be saved from the fire. But, of course, that was out of the question. All I could do was to wait until I had a chance to kick myself on the quiet.

That afternoon I was going to the Garden on an errand for the firm, when, as I was crossing Blackfriars Bridge, who should I all but run up against but Hitchcock. At sight of me he stopped.

"Well," he burst out, "what do you think of it?"

"Think of what?" I asked, feeling that if I had to tell him what I thought of that lost half-crown he might not like it.

"Haven't you seen?"

"Seen what?"

He stared.

"You're a rum one. Mean to say you don't know? Then I'll tell you. Look at that." He took a paper out of his pocket, and held it out in front of me, pointing at something in it with his finger. "There you are, the 2.30 winner.

Sam Briggs: His Book

‘Park Hill Stakes. Solomon 1, Endive 2, Aristo 3. Won in a canter.’ Now, who’s who?”

I could not quite make out what he meant. I took the paper into my own hand and read it for myself.

“Do you mean to say,” I put it to him, “that I’ve won, that the horse has won which I had half-a-crown on?”

“That’s exactly what I do mean. Can’t you see for yourself? Didn’t I tell you he was a certainty? Now your half-crown’s a sovereign.”

“A sovereign? I thought you said it was worth five-and-twenty shillings.”

“Ah, that’s where I was wrong; that was my one mistake. When I came to try I found that I couldn’t get more than 7 to 1, nohow. Seven half-crowns are seventeen-and-six, and your own half-crown makes a sovereign. Here’s the brief to prove it.”

He gave me a piece of pasteboard, on the back of which was printed, “Ernest Stollery, 37 Effingham Road, S.W.—Mondays.” And on the front was written, “Park Hill Stakes.—7 to 1 Solomon.—2/6.”

“What’s this?” I asked; never having seen anything of the sort in my life before it was only natural that I should ask, though Hitchcock did smile.

“Well, Sam Briggs,” he said, “you are a

A Modest Half-Crown

simple youth." He might find I was not so simple as he thought ; however, I let him go on. "That's your contract note, what sporting men call your 'brief.' That shows that you had half-a-crown on Solomon at 7 to 1. Here you are ; here's its fellow. I had half-a-dollar of my own on ; we take a pound apiece."

He pulled out a piece of pasteboard, which was just like the one he had handed me.

"Where's my sovereign ?" I asked.

"You'll have it on Monday. Don't you see what's printed in the corner there ? 'Mondays,' that's Stollery's settling day."

"Why should I wait for my coin till Monday ? He's had my half-crown, cash down."

"My dear chap, how you do talk. You don't understand. A man with a business like Stollery can't keep forking out after every race ; he's bound to have a regular day ; there's his standing accounts. Don't you be afraid for your money. Ernest Stollery's as safe as the Bank of England, and as straight. Why, he's what you might call a friend of my own. Really, his house is 'The Old Dun Cow,' but, of course, he couldn't give that as his address. It wouldn't do ; you know what I mean ; but there it is. You'll have your postal order, or your cheque, or what not—he gives cheques for all sums over a pound—by the first post on Tuesday morning, as safe as houses, and safer than some."

I would sooner have had the coin there and

Sam Briggs: His Book

then, but as it seemed that there was no getting it I did not mind admitting that an extra sovereign on Tuesday morning would come in most convenient. Hitchcock fell in by my side, and we went over Blackfriars Bridge together. He said, just as we were getting on to the Embankment :

“What I want to know is, what objection have you to our turning our sovereigns into five-pound notes?”

“I’ve no objection,” I told him, “not the least in the world.”

“Spoken like a man and a sportsman! Then, in that case, I may as well tell you that I know something for the Billingshurst Plate which is as good, and perhaps better, than Solomon was to-day.”

“Do you mean more betting?” I inquired of him, because when he talked of turning our sovereigns into five-pound notes it was not anything of that sort I had had in my head when I mentioned that I had no objection.

“Certainly, if you can call it betting when it’s a dead cert. I’ve got some private information about to-morrow—special information.”

“Where did you get it from?”

“Ah, where did I? There’s a good many would like to know; but that’s my business. It’s about an animal which could win at any weight, and, mind you, she’s carrying five pounds less than she ought. See what I mean?”

A Modest Half-Crown

I did not, exactly, but as it seemed that it would not be much use my saying so, I let him go on ; for one reason because I could not stop him. He put his hand up to his mouth, and he leaned over towards me, as if he were afraid of being overheard, and he said,

“The Maiden’s Prayer.”

“Is that his name?”

“Her name, my boy, hers ; she’s a lady, a filly ; A1. The only thing is, she’ll be a bit short.”

“Not tall enough, you mean?”

He laughed ; I did not know what at, but, from the way in which he behaved, something seemed to be amusing him. Some of the people who were passing, stared.

“Something seems to tickle you,” I remarked.

“You are so funny,” he said, stopping himself with difficulty. “You are so full of humour, Briggs.” Then off he went again. “It wasn’t her size I was alluding to when I talked about her being short ; that’s all right enough ; but her price, her market price, my boy. At present she’s at 11 to 2, and she may go shorter ; but, after all, when it’s a certainty what does it matter ? All you have to do is to rake it in, and we’ll rake it in.”

I was not so sure of that myself, and I dropped a hint to that effect when we parted on Waterloo Bridge. But he hopped on to a ’bus and was

Sam Briggs : His Book

off, before I could say all that I really wanted to. I had had my little flutter, as it were, against my will, and I had had enough. What I wanted was my sovereign, it would have come in handy for one or two reasons just then. In fact, my feeling was that I should have been willing to sell it for fifteen shillings, cash down, and so be shut of the whole thing, if I could only have found a customer.

However, the next morning, when the train got into the station, there was Hitchcock hanging out of a window and calling to me like mad. Of course I squeezed myself into his compartment—there were about fourteen in it already—and almost before I was in he said to me,

“We’re on.”

“On what?”

“The Maiden’s Prayer.”

“How much?”

“The lot.”

“What,” I said, “do you mean to tell me that you’ve bet a sovereign of mine on a horse?”

“I do,” he said. “We’re going for the gloves, that’s what we’re going for.”

“Then I’m very sorry to hear it,” I remarked. “That sovereign would have come in useful. Now I suppose it’s done for.”

“Don’t talk silly,” he said. “You’re a pretty sort of sportsman.”

“I don’t care what I am,” I told him. “What I wanted was that sovereign, so now you’ve got it.”

A Modest Half-Crown

“You’ll talk different when you see the numbers go up. Just now you don’t know what you are saying.”

I could have said something to him, only I did not want to have an argument in the train, so I let it alone. That day, for the first time in my life, I found myself taking an interest in horse-racing, to that extent that that afternoon I went out expressly to buy a ha’penny paper. The first thing I saw among the “Stop Press” news was this :

“Billingshurst Plate.—Maiden’s Prayer 1, Cortina 2, Shafto 3. Won easily. 7 ran.”

When I saw it something queer seemed to go up and down my back. As I was still staring Mr. Charles Potter, one of our firm, came up.

“What’s the matter?” he asked. He saw the paper in my hand, and he twigged in an instant what I was looking at, surprising me. “Have you been betting, you young rascal?”

“Well, sir,” I said, hardly knowing what to say, yet not wanting to tell an untruth, “a friend of mine did put a little on for me.”

“And the little’s lost?”

“No, sir, not if what I can make out from the paper’s right and The Maiden’s Prayer’s won the Billingshurst Plate.”

“Did your friend put you on The Maiden’s Prayer?”

“Yes, sir.”

Sam Briggs : His Book

“Then I wish he had put me on. I was on a brute which was not even placed.”

He went stamping off into his office in what struck me as being quite a temper. What he said filled me with amazement. It is true that Mr. Charles was the youngest and the liveliest, but it was generally understood in the office that all the firm were most particular. I had no idea that any of them, even Mr. Charles, had anything to do with horses.

That night we left early, and when I got out there was Hitchcock waiting for me on the pavement.

“Well,” he began, “now who was talking silly? Now who was wrong in going for the gloves? What’s that?”

He thrust into my fingers a piece of pasteboard like the one he had given me yesterday, only what was written on it was different, like this, “Billingshurst Plate.—7 to 2 Maiden’s Prayer, £1.” He went on,

“As you see, and as I told you, the price was a bit short, but even 7 to 2’s not to be sneezed at, considering that we win £3. 10s., which, with a sovereign yesterday, makes four and a half good golden sovereigns. What ho!”

I felt myself that it was what ho! £4. 10s. coming from half-a-crown certainly was altogether beyond anything I had expected and so I as good as told him. He went on,

“What I’m going to do is stand myself a pair

A Modest Half-Crown

of trousers in honour of the event. If you look at these I have on you'll see I want 'em ; and, strictly between ourselves, they're the only pair I have."

In that case he certainly did want them ; anything shabbier than those he was wearing you could hardly want to see.

"And I would suggest," he added, "that you should stand yourself a pair as well. You could do with them even if you have a box full. You always ought to mark an occasion like this, everyone ought ; and what's the matter with a pair of trousers? "

Nothing, so far as I could see. The idea struck me as a good one. Thank goodness I was not reduced to one pair only, but at the same time, an extra pair of trousers never did any harm to anyone.

"We'll order a pair apiece," he said, "made to measure, none of your ready-mades ; and we'll tell 'em to have 'em ready for Tuesday, so that we can pay for them when we get our cheques from Stollery. The question is, do you know a tailor who can make trousers, garments, mind you, which will do us credit when we've got them on? "

I did ; I knew a tailor from whom I had had clothes more than once ; very nice ones too. To him I took Hitchcock. I chose a pair at fourteen-and-six, sort of dove colour with a thin blue stripe, very neat indeed. Hitchcock's were eighteen-

Sam Briggs : His Book

and-six. Evidently he was one of those who, when he could fly, flew high. He said that you might as well have a good pair while you were about it ; though, so far as that went, I could not see that his were any better than mine. However, there it was, we were measured, and the trousers were to be ready, and were to be paid for, on the Tuesday following.

When we got outside Hitchcock said to me, "I say, Briggs, you couldn't lend me two or three shillings till Tuesday ; I'm very short, old man."

"If you're shorter than me," I answered, "you must be. I'm that pushed myself this week that how I'm going to manage till Saturday is what I'm wondering."

He looked at me as if to see if I was in earnest, and when he saw that I was, we parted.

The next day—being Wednesday—I saw nothing of him as I went up to business, but, about midday, the boy came and said that someone wanted to see me, and when I got out there was Hitchcock standing on the pavement.

"Hollo," I cried, "what's up?"

Because, directly I saw him, I saw that something was.

"Well," he began, passing his hand across his chin, which wanted shaving, "last night I went down to The Old Dun Cow to have a chat with Mr. Stollery, and—I had a drink with

A Modest Half-Crown

him ; in fact, I fancy I must have had three or four."

"I thought you had no money."

"I met a friend," he said, "by accident."

"And, I suppose, by accident, you got a bit out of him."

Hitchcock coughed.

"That's exactly what I did do, and now, strictly between ourselves, I rather wish I hadn't."

"Perhaps that's what he'll be wishing before he's done with you."

Hitchcock tried to look as if I had hurt his feelings.

"That remark's uncalled-for. It's my intention to pay him punctually on Tuesday morning ; that is," he coughed again, "if it all comes right."

"If all what comes right?" I asked. I could see from his manner there was something behind. "Out with it—what's up? I can't stand here all day ; I've got my work to do."

"Well, it's this way." He looked about him as if he was trying to find he did not quite know what. Then he went on with a rush. "As I was saying, last night I had a drink or two with Mr. Stollery, down at The Old Dun Cow, and there were some other gentlemen there, with whom I had a little conversation, and—and to cut a long story short, we're on Mark Antony."

"What!" I cried. "We're on Mark Antony, both the two of us." He edged away, as if he

Sam Briggs : His Book

was afraid I should hit him. "Who's Mark Antony?"

"It's the name of an animal which I'm free to confess I never heard of before last night, but which I see from the paper is running this afternoon in the Esher Handicap."

"And how much of my money have you put on this horse you never heard of?"

"The lot—nine pounds—four-ten apiece. Here—here's your brief."

I took the piece of pasteboard he handed me, but I never looked at it. Just then I was called into the office, and back into the office I had to go, luckily for him. At the very least he would have heard a few plain words. My feelings were beyond anything. When I thought of the pair of trousers I had ordered, and of what I had planned to do with the rest of the four pound ten, and of how, through getting among a lot of drinking vagabonds, he had thrown it all away on a brute which, for all he knew, had not four legs to stand on—well, there I could have hit him.

It was a busy day at the office, and things were not made easier by the worry I was in. We were still hard at it when, latish in the afternoon, who should come bursting into the office, without a with-your-leave or by-your-leave, but Hitchcock himself. Before all the other chaps he caught hold of my hand and started shaking it as it never had been shaken before.

A Modest Half-Crown

“We’re millionaires, Sam Briggs,” he cried, “and don’t you forget it. There’s no man in London, there’s no man in England if it comes to that, there’s no man in the whole British Empire who’s got such an eye and nose for a horse as I have. I’ve always maintained it, and now it’s proved! Thirty-one pound is what we’ve won, fifteen guineas apiece. We’re millionaires, my boy, that’s what we are.”

He was in such a state of excitement that it was hard to make out what he was after ; but, by degrees, when he had cooled down a bit it became plain enough, if a thing like that ever could be called plain. It seemed that this horse, of whom he had never heard before last night, and on whom he had staked our all, had actually won—“romped in” he put it. At 5 to 2 we had won eleven pound five each, which, with our original four-ten, made fifteen guineas. All come from half-a-crown! I am not one who wishes to conceal the truth, and I do not mind owning that, when I got a fair grasp of the situation, in a manner of speaking it knocked the wind right out of me. I dumped down on to a stool and stared ; at the moment it was all I was fit for. Fifteen guineas! I had never had so much money all at once—my salary being paid weekly—in the whole of my life, and I don’t believe Hitchcock ever had either. To hear him talk you would have thought that it was all his cleverness had done it.

Sam Briggs : His Book

“There’s no one living,” he told us, “has a keener sense of perception for a horse that’s bound to win than I have; the only marvel is that I haven’t made my fortune before to-day.”

When the other chaps understood what had happened they all wanted me to stand them something; if I had won the National Debt they could not have wanted me to be more generous. Hitchcock pulled out a couple of sovereigns.

“Briggs,” he said, “I’ve got a couple of shiners from a friend, as you may say, on account. Here’s one of them for you; let’s celebrate. An occasion like this ought to be celebrated; it must be, it shall be; and these friends of yours shall celebrate it with us.”

“Hear! hear!” said the friends, or words to that effect. For my part I could not help feeling that he was more free-handed with my money than I should have been, especially as the kind of celebration he was thinking about I never did care for. However, there it was and I was in for it.

“We’ll begin,” he went on, “by treating ourselves to a suit of clothes. Last night it was trousers, but what is the finest pair of trousers when you haven’t got a coat and waistcoat to wear with them? and when I tell you that the only articles of that kind I own I’m wearing, you’ll know what I mean.”

A Modest Half-Crown

We did ; it only needed half a glance in his direction to know that. Round to the tailor's we went, six of us. I chose a suit in a tasty shade of light brown—champagne tint, the tailor called it. Sixty-three shillings it was to cost, and though it was more than I cared to pay for a suit of clothes, in a general way, at the same time I could not help owning that one was worth it. Four guineas Hitchcock was to pay for his. The more I saw of him the plainer I could see that he was one of that sort who, when he did go it, went it. Then nothing would satisfy him but that he should stand one of the four chaps who had come with us a fancy waistcoat. They tossed who should have it, and, after a little unpleasantness as to whether Flinders had his halfpenny down flat on the counter, Percy Saunders won. He picked out a startler ; one of the kind you could see from the other side of London Bridge in a fog.

The rest of that night is one of my bitterest recollections ; though I have been told that I seemed cheerful enough at the time. Flinders turned rusty, owing to the remarks which had been made about his style of tossing, and he went off ; and Tommy Wood, who was his particular chum, went with him ; and if I had had sense enough I should have gone too, but I had not. I do not know what time it was when we got down to The Old Dun Cow, but I know that when we did get there Hitchcock introduced me to

Sam Briggs : His Book

Mr. Stollery, who turned out to be six foot four, and a retired pugilist. Very friendly he was when he saw what manner of man I was. He asked Hitchcock and me into his private room to have a bit of supper. I don't know what had become of Percy Saunders and the other chap; I rather fancy we had dropped them somewhere on the way. There were a good many people in Mr. Stollery's private room; though there was not much in the way of what you could exactly call supper. The talk was all about racing and horses, and someone mentioned a horse named Tintack. Of course I had never heard the creature's name before, and never wanted to again, the whole talk was so much double Dutch to me. I do not know what it was, but something induced me to express my opinion to the effect that Tintack was the finest horse at present on the turf, though I knew no more about it than a baby. Hitchcock, who was sitting by me, said that my opinion was one in which he had every confidence, and, what was more, he was willing to back it to any amount. What induced him to make a remark like that is more than I can say. However, I believe I said that Hitchcock's sentiments were mine. Then Mr. Stollery asked me if I was willing to prove it by backing Tintack at S.P. for the Putney Plate, which was a race I had never heard of. I wanted to know what he meant by S.P., not hinting at never having heard of the Putney Plate. Some of them laughed, and Mr.

A Modest Half-Crown

Stollery said he meant at Starting Price. I told him I did not care what he meant, but that I would put my boots on Tintack, and, if he liked, my shirt as well.

My old dad let me in when I did get home. I rather fancy he made a few remarks. The next morning I never felt worse in my life. I got up to the office feeling not worth a row of pins. I made up my mind that henceforward horse-racing and me were strangers. When I got out about five for a cup of tea—I had had no lunch, I had not seemed as if I wanted any—and found Hitchcock standing on the pavement I could have thrown something at him, if there had been anything to throw. He fell in by my side without any invitation from me, and off we went together as if we were brothers, which we were very far from being. Not a word was spoken till we were sitting down to tea. I had a sort of general idea that he was looking about as much of a funeral as I was, and his first words showed it.

“There’s something fatal about us,” he said.

“Mr. Hitchcock,” I replied, “there will be if our acquaintance continues. Since I handed you that half-crown on Monday morning I have not known what it is to have a peaceful hour. I must ask you to consider our social intercourse closed.”

He sighed, and put his hand up to his head, as if it ached. I daresay it did. Ache was not a word which would properly describe what I was feeling.

Sam Briggs : His Book

“Seventy-five guineas,” he observed, “is what we’ve won.”

I put down the cup of tea which I was raising to my lips, and I stared at him.

“Perhaps,” I remarked, “you’ll repeat that observation, and explain it.”

“Tintack’s won,” he groaned ; it was more like a groan than anything else I could think of.

“What !” I gasped ; a gasp was all that I felt equal to.

“I should think,” he went on, “that when Stollery heard it he nearly dropped down dead. I’d have given a trifle to have seen his face. Briggs, we’re haunted ; especially me. We sit here as men of means, men of substance, and it all comes from a modest half-crown.”

“Do you think he’ll pay ?”

“Pay ? He’ll pay all right ; what we’ve got to do is to make him pay enough. I tell you that I’m haunted. What do you think I did last night ? Dreamt ! all night I kept on dreaming !”

“I never got so far as that,” I said. “Never slept a wink.”

At that time of speaking it seemed to me that I had not slept for weeks.

“I might just as well not have had a wink, for all the rest I got. Dream, dream, dream, I could do nothing else but dream. And what do you think I dreamt ?”

I did not care. It didn’t interest me, nothing

A Modest Half-Crown

did, not though I was worth five-and-seventy guineas.

“I dreamt that Saltpetre would win the Hyde Park Cup ; what do you think of that ? ”

“I did not think anything ; I told him so.

“Don't talk to me about horses. I never want to hear a horse's name again. I'm clean off.”

“So am I, when I've had this one more plunge. But, Briggs, don't you see that we shall be running against fate if we don't act upon this tip ? I'm as certain that Saltpetre 'll win the Hyde Park Cup as I am that I am sitting here. I'm going to put my lot on him, and you're going to put yours. We're going to turn our pocket-full into a cartload. It's the chance of our lives. We're in the vein, we can't go wrong. We're going to give Stollery the worst Monday he ever had, you mark my words and see.”

I did not want to argue ; I was in no mood for it. I let him talk ; so far as I could make out he was talking silly nonsense, but I let it go. All I wanted was another seidlitz powder, even a cup of tea was beyond me, and a quiet night. I had the seidlitz powder, and I wish I could say I had the quiet night ; but the fact is, there was a little friction at home, and that did not make me any better. The next morning, instead of feeling like going up to town, I felt more like going into a hospital. Not having an extra strong constitution, and being used to regular ways, I suppose that what I had gone through had put me off my

Sam Briggs : His Book

balance altogether. When I did get up to the office I was not easy to get on with ; and so some of them seemed to think. I seemed to be having words with someone all day long. When I went out to tea and again found Hitchcock waiting for me on the pavement it was all I could do to keep my hands from off him. I cut him short before he had a chance to speak.

“Look here,” I told him, “the less I see of you the better, I’ve seen too much of you already ; and if you so much as name the word horse-racing there’s no knowing what mayn’t happen.”

“Briggs,” he said. He took me by the arm ; I could feel his fingers trembling as they gripped me ; it was easy to see what was the matter with him, “we’ve pulled it off again.”

“Where were you last night ? ” I asked him.

“I went down to see Mr. Stollery on the little matter of business about which I spoke to you yesterday.”

“A little matter of business ! Don’t talk to me about your little matter of business, or about your Mr. Stollery either. I’m below par myself, thanks to you, but it strikes me that you’re very nearly a case for the hospital. Take your hand off my arm and let me go ; if I must talk to you I’ll talk to you some other time ; I’m in a hurry.”

“One moment, Briggs, one moment ! I tell you, we’ve pulled it off again ; Saltpetre’s won.”

“Well ? what if he has ? ”

“What if he has ! ” He came closer to me ;

A Modest Half-Crown

I could see that he was trembling all over ; even his voice was shaky. “ We’ve won three hundred pounds apiece, that’s what if he has ! ”

“ Three hundred pounds ! ”

“ Three hundred pounds ! Besides the seventy-five we had ! We’re worth seven hundred and fifty pounds—the two of us—as we stand here ! On Tuesday morning we shall each of us be able to put his hand into his trouser pocket and draw out three hundred and seventy-five golden sovereigns ! ”

The tears stood in his eyes, I saw them. What is more I began to understand that it was not all because of what he had been swallowing. I felt a bit shivery-shaky myself, more than a bit. Three hundred and seventy-five golden sovereigns ! —all my own ! Right there and then I started thinking what a man could do with such a fortune ; I had to ; I could not help it ; it came over me all of a rush. Do with it ! what could he not do with it ! He could do pretty nearly everything ! I could buy myself a home, a tip-top home ; I could marry ; why, if I had only had half the money a few days before, I knew of a young lady who might be calling herself the future Mrs. Sam Briggs at that very moment.

“ Are you sure we’ve won it ? ”

“ Sure ! my dear boy ! Saltpetre won anyhow ! and here’s the brief. ”

He handed me—still all of a shake—the usual piece of pasteboard.

“ But will Stollery be able to pay the money ? ”

Sam Briggs : His Book

“Of course he’ll be able to pay it! It’ll be a mere flea-bite to him! If it were ten times the sum he wouldn’t turn a hair! There’s only—there’s only one thing.”

“What’s that?”

I saw, on the instant, there was more in his tone than met the eye.

“Well, it’s this way; I’ve made a little engagement for you—in fact, for both the two of us—for to-morrow.”

“What’s the engagement?”

“We’re going down with Mr. Stollery, as his guests, mind you, as his particular friends, to Kempton Park.”

“Not much, we’re not; at least I’m not. I’m not going with Mr. Stollery, and I’m not going to Kempton Park.”

“But, Briggs, it’s like this. I’ve been having a little chat with him; in fact, I’ve just come from him. No one could be pleasanter. Some men, you know, would be nasty if they’d lost all that money; but there’s nothing of that about him, not a mite. ‘Hitchcock,’ he said, I’m giving you his words, ‘you and your friend have won my coin, a sack full; but you’re welcome. I pay with a smile, as those who know me will tell you. All I ask is that you and your friend shall come down with me to-morrow to Kempton. I’ll drive you myself, it shan’t cost you a penny, nothing shall. I liked your friend Briggs, what I saw of him; he’s a gentleman with whom I

A Modest Half-Crown

wouldn't mind being seen on any race-course in England. You tell him from me that, as I've made a rich man of him'—and he has, you know, Briggs, he has; he's made rich men of both of us; seven hundred and fifty pounds we're worth, as we're standing here—'I shan't take it nicely if he doesn't come. Hitchcock,' he said, and he clapped his hand upon my shoulder—you know what a hand he's got! he pretty nearly doubled me up, 'I'll put it to you plainly, and you'll put it plainly to your friend Briggs; if you want all that fortune out of me on Monday, you'll both of you come down with me to Kempton Park to-morrow, see?' I did see. There was something about the way in which he spoke which made me feel strongly that it would be the part of policy for us to go. We want his money, and we don't want to offend him till we've got it. So if I was you I should smooth up matters with your people in the office somehow; because I've arranged that we shall both of us be down at The Old Dun Cow ready to start at 10.15 sharp."

Nice ideas he seemed to have of business, to say nothing of Stollery, to think that a man could treat himself to a day off whenever the fancy took him. But, as it happened, things had been smoothed already, because that very afternoon Mr. Charles had remarked to me, with what struck me as a twinkle in his eye, that as I seemed a trifle peaked, a day's rest might do me

Sam Briggs : His Book

good, and I might have it on the Saturday if I felt I wanted it. There did not seem to be much prospect of what might be termed rest in going down with Mr. Stollery to Kempton Park, and if I had had my choice I would not have gone near either of them. But, so far as I could judge, from Hitchcock's manner, it was not a case of choosing. If I wanted that three hundred and seventy-five pounds, without any fuss, I should have to be civil to Mr. Stollery. And as I did want it, very badly—every time I thought of it my heart seemed to jump up into my mouth; why, there I was.

The weather that Saturday was the last kind of weather I should have chosen to go racing in. As I wanted to do honour to the occasion of course I put my best clothes on, though anything less suited to light grey tweeds and patent leathers than the cold wind which was blowing, and the nasty drizzle which kept on coming down, it would be hard to find. When I got to the starting point I found that we were going down in a open wagonette, which, as I had not brought an overcoat, looked as if it were going to be nice for me. Hitchcock had a new suit on. I do not know where he got it from, and I did not ask; but it was not the one he had ordered at my tailor's. There were ten of us going down, besides Mr. Stollery, and when they saw me they all of them seemed interested. Mr. Stollery introduced me.

A Modest Half-Crown

“This is Mr. Sam Briggs,” he said, “a young sportsman who as nearly as possible has broke me, and I shouldn’t be surprised if, by the time we come back from Kempton, he’s done it quite.” Oh, he was an artful one was Stollery! “I drink your health, Mr. Briggs,” he went on, “and I ask you, sir, to drink mine.”

I drank it, in a glass of champagne.

“What do you think of that champagne?” he asked one of his friends, who was smoking one of the very biggest cigars I ever saw in a gentleman’s mouth.

“Very extraordinary,” replied his friend.

“I sell that champagne at sixpence a glass across the counter, and I could let you have it, wholesale, at twenty-seven shillings a dozen.”

“Could you?” said his friend. “It’s a most extraordinary wine.”

Perhaps it was because it was such an extraordinary wine that, by the time we started, I did not seem to notice what the weather was like. Long before we got to Kempton Park it would not have made much difference to me if it had been coming down in buckets-full. I do not know how often we pulled up on the road, but I should not think we passed much at which we could pull up. Before starting I had made up my mind that I would not have a bet, not one; but before we reached the course I do not know how many bets I had not made. And when I was on the course it seemed to me that I was

Sam Briggs : His Book

backing everything for every race, and losing every time. I suppose sometimes something must have won ; but from what I could gather, it was always the one animal I was not on.

I never shall forget that day, never ; what I can remember of it, which isn't much. Oh, dear, how they did cut me up between them. I can see it now ; I could see it even at the time. But what could a young fellow do in a crowd like that? That was what Hitchcock and me were there for, to be cut up ; and we were—in style. They treated him just as they did me. His friend Stollery was a beauty. So were his friend's friends—all beauties.

One of the last things I can recollect is a race being run, and Stollery coming up to me and saying,

“Owed you three hundred and seventy-five pounds, did I? Well, now I don't ; we're quits ; I don't owe you a blessed farthing. And so, Mr. Sam Briggs, I'll wish you a very good-day.”

I believe he picked me up, and I suppose he put me down, but I do not know where. The next thing I do remember is someone holding me by the collar of my coat, and finding it was a policeman.

“Now, my lad,” he said, “you can't sleep here all night, and it's well for you you can't, you'd be dead in the morning.”

All the racing seemed to be over, and all the people seemed to be gone.

A Modest Half-Crown

“I don't want to sleep here all night,” I told him, “I want to go home.”

“And so you shall,” he said. “And this is the nearest way.”

He led me to the gate. Outside it there was Hitchcock. I stared at the sight he was.

“Hitchcock,” I asked him, “where's your coat?”

“That's what I was wondering,” he replied. “I know I had it on. At the same time, and begging your pardon, Briggs, where's your hat?”

I put my hand up to my head and found it was not there. I did not know what had become of it; and I did not seem to mind.

“What we have to find out,” said Hitchcock, “is how we're going to get home. Have you any money?”

Money! Someone had taken from me everything that was worth the taking, even to my collar and neck-tie; only they had left me my coat, which was more than they had Hitchcock. I do not know how I did get home—I lost Hitchcock, or else I left him somewhere on the way—but I did get home at last, and my old dad let me in. I can fancy what his face was like when he saw me by the few remarks which he made next day.

That was the first time I ever had anything to do with horse-racing, and it will be the last. Never again! A modest half-crown was all it cost me in money, but I am ashamed of myself

Sam Briggs : His Book

when I think of what it cost me in other ways. Three hundred and seventy-five pounds was what I was worth once, and I should not be surprised if it was not the best thing that could have happened that I never got the money. Stollery and his friends would never have left me alone ; much good it would have done me. I have not spoken to Hitchcock since ; but the other day I saw him running beside a cab which had luggage on the top. He did not see me, perhaps because he did not want to. He had his coat—such a coat as it was—turned up to his neck ; and there was a look about him altogether which sent a cold shiver up and down my back.

A SOCIAL EVENING

THE first time I met him was in the train. I was going up to business in the same compartment with my friend Tanner, and opposite to us was what I should describe as a long, lean, long-haired, long-bearded, yellow-skinned party, who looked as if he was just recovering from an attack of yellow jaundice. He nodded to my friend Tanner, and then he made a remark, and my friend, he made another, and I made one, and then conversation became, so far as we three were concerned, what you might call general ; and it had not started long before I began to wonder if that party had quite recovered from that attack of yellow jaundice yet. Something was wrong with him, I felt sure. Anyone more cantankerous I never had the pleasure of meeting. I do not wish to say anything against anyone, but my feeling was that he made a dead set against me. I could hardly open my mouth without his wanting to bite my head off.

It is generally allowed that, without being what you might term a politician, I know as much

Sam Briggs : His Book

about politics as most ; therefore, when I express an opinion I am accustomed to having it treated in a gentlemanly manner. I certainly do not think it is the part of a gentleman to call another gentleman a fool simply because his opinions are not what yours are, right or wrong. Which is what he called me. I merely made a remark on a subject which is commonly allowed to be of the nature of politics, and if he didn't lean forward in his seat and say to me, right out loud :

“ You're a young fool ! ” And then he added, most offensively, “ If you were only to talk about what you know something about you'd never speak at all.”

Of course, I am not the sort of person to have a remark of that kind made to me without making the man who makes it prove his words. So, sharp as a razor, I said to him :

“ Before you talk like that,” I said, “ you should go home,” I said, “ and have your hair cut.”

Yellow ! He was yellow before, but when I said that to him he went as yellow as saffron. The general impression in the carriage was that there was going to be positive unpleasantness, and he did say something about throwing me on to the line ; but my friend Tanner, he interfered, and though the atmosphere kept on being a little heated, there was nothing actually disagreeable. Still, at the same time, when we got to the city we were not on what you might call terms of real friendliness.

A Social Evening

Therefore, you may imagine my surprise when, having parted from my friend Tanner, he came up to me and fell in at my side, as if we were going the same way, and said :

“That was a nice little talk we had in the train.”

I could not say I thought so, but I did not know what his motives might be, so I merely remarked :

“I’m glad you think so.”

“I do think so,” he said. “It was a talk which I shan’t easily forget. I’ve a good memory for some things, a very good memory, and the fact of having met you, and having had that talk with you, will linger in it long, Mr. —— I’ve not the pleasure of knowing your name.”

“Briggs,” I said, “is my name—Sam Briggs, and I’m not ashamed of it.”

“I’m sure you’re not,” he replied. “You’re a very remarkable man, Mr. Briggs, one of the most remarkable men I ever met, and it’s because you’re such a remarkable man that I want you to do me a favour.”

I looked at him out of the corner of my eye ; soaping me up like that ! I wondered if he wanted to borrow a trifle—it seemed to me he had face enough ; so I hedged.

“Depends on what it is,” I told him.

“I want you,” he said, “to spend a social evening.”

That took me aback. After what had passed

Sam Briggs : His Book

between us, his saying a thing like that was unexpected.

“Thank you all the same, there’s one thing against it,” I informed him, “and that is that I don’t know who you are, or what your name is, or where you live, or anything at all about you.”

“That need make no difference,” he explained, “not the least, not to a man like you, unless I’ve formed a misconception of your character, Mr. Briggs, which I sincerely, I may say earnestly, hope I haven’t. I shall be very much disappointed if I have. What I want you to do is to call to-night at 44, Violet Villas, Hackney Downs, and ask for Mr. Macfarlane, and I assure you you’ll receive a welcome of a kind you’ve never had before. You’ll spend a social evening you’ll never forget.”

“Well,” I remarked, “as a matter of fact I am not engaged this evening, that is, anything more than I usually am.”

“Ah, no doubt a man like you is in universal request ; but, for once, put aside all other engagements, and promise. I can rely on you. You’ll have a memorable experience. You’ll find some other remarkable men there, and some remarkable ladies, one in particular—a wonderful creature. You want a lady to appreciate you as you deserve to be appreciated. She’ll do it, Mr. Briggs, though you’ll find that the men won’t be backward. Now, do say ‘yes’ !”

A Social Evening

“Since you are so pressing, really— What name did you mention?”

I took out my note-book.

“That’s right, make a note of it, then you’ll make no mistake. I like a man to be business-like, even in trifles. Macfarlane—Willie Macfarlane—ask for Mr. Willie Macfarlane, 44, Violet Villas, Hackney Downs.”

“What about the time?”

“To-night at seven.”

“That’s awkward ; sometimes I don’t get away from the office till eight, and—Hackney Downs? I live at Walham Green. I thought as you came up in the same train you might live round that way.”

“It doesn’t follow, does it?”

“No, that’s quite true. But, you see, I’ve got to get home to change, then get to Hackney Downs. That can’t be done in a moment, you know.”

“Don’t change, don’t dream of it! Go straight from the office, just as you are. It’s you that’s wanted, not your clothes. Go just as you are, and, I repeat, you’ll receive such a welcome as you never had in all your life before. As to time—shall we say as soon after seven as you can make it? Don’t be later than you can help, because the social evening begins at seven, and you don’t want to miss any of the fun, do you?”

I did not ; I felt that myself. So that’s how we settled it ; change or no change I was to be there as close to seven as I could ; he was so

Sam Briggs : His Book

pressing there was no saying "no" to him. When we parted we shook hands in a way I never thought we should have done when he was sitting opposite my friend Tanner. Which only shows, I said to myself as I was hurrying off, being a bit behind, that you never can tell a man's character when first you see him.

It so happened that things at the office were slack that day, so happening to catch one of my young governors in what looked like a good humour, I asked if I might leave a little early, as I had an important engagement which I wanted to keep. He winked at me, which is a way he has sometimes after lunch.

"Yes, Briggs," he said, "you can. It would be a pity to keep her waiting."

Then he smiled, though what at I can't say. It appears to me that now and then your governors take liberties which no one else dare do ; I know it's been like that with me more than once ; and, if it comes to that, more than twice. Anyhow, I took him at his word and I left before five.

"I wish you good-afternoon," I said to the other chaps, putting on my hat all of a sudden and taking them by surprise. "I'm going to spend a social evening with some friends of mine. If there's any of my work left undone, perhaps you'll do it."

Young Hopkins, he picks up an orange and throws it at my head. I ducked, and it went through a pane of glass ; so off I went before the

A Social Evening

trouble began. That pane of glass would cost him eighteenpence ; and serve him right.

There being plenty of time I went home to change. I was thinking of what had been said about a young lady, and it is not in accordance with my ideas to treat a lady, old or young, as if she was nothing and no one. What with one thing and another it was some time before I got really started, and through my never having been in that part before it was later than I expected when I got to Hackney Downs ; and when I got there I didn't know where I was. Nobody seemed to have heard of Violet Villas. I rather wished I hadn't put my new boots on. They are a bit what you might call close-fitting. One party said he thought it was that way ; and when I had gone as far that way as I cared for, and, in fact, farther, another party said he thought it was the other way, so off I tramped again ; the consequence of which was that before I found out where I was I was practically limping.

"I don't know," I said to myself, "if there's supposed to be some joke about this," I said, "but if there's going to be much more of it I'm off home."

My right boot seemed to have grown smaller since I started. I had to hold on to some railings to rest my foot. Presently an elderly gentleman came along.

"Can you tell me," I asked, "which is Violet Villas ?"

Sam Briggs : His Book

He looked at me as if he wanted to know me next time we met.

“Come this way,” he said. He took me to the corner. “Can you read?” he asked.

“Certainly I can read,” I told him.

He pointed up at the wall.

“Look up there; V-i-o-l-e-t, Violet, V-i-l-l-a-s, Villas. Next time you use your eyes, my lad.”

Off he went without waiting for me to say “Thank you;” which was perhaps as well. Of course, it annoyed me to think that I had been standing there wondering where it was; so off I started to look for No. 44, feeling that the first thing I should have to do when I found it would be to borrow a pair of slippers, because that boot was getting to be beyond anything. When I got near the man who sold it to me I’d talk to him! I went up one side and down the other, and if you will believe me there was no 44—at least, if there was I could not find it. An old lady came along, so I tried her.

“Pardon me, madam,” I remarked, “but can you inform me which of these houses is No. 44, Violet Villas?”

“What do you want it for?” she asked.

They seemed fond in those parts of the game of cross questions and crooked answers; but I hate being disagreeable to a lady, so I explained.

“I want No. 44, madam, because I’m going to spend a social evening there with a friend of mine.”

A Social Evening

“Are you?” she replied. “Then you’ll have to wait some time.”

“Wait some time!” I exclaimed. “What do you mean?”

“You’ll have to wait,” she said, “until it’s built; there is no 44. There never has been, and there never will be; at least not in my time. I’ve lived in this neighbourhood five-and-thirty years, so I ought to know.”

Away she sailed before I had a chance to say another word; I might have been getting at her from the way in which she did it. Under the circumstances that was a crowner. I took out my note-book. There it was, perfectly plain—44, Violet Villas; I could have bet a thousand pounds that was the address he gave me. Yet it seemed that I must have made a mistake, because if there was no 44— I looked round, and I found that the last house in the street was 34. So I knocked at that. The door was opened by what I should describe as an acid-looking female.

“Does Mr. Macfarlane live here?” I asked.

“No, he don’t,” she said; and she banged the door in my face as if she’d bang me off the doorstep. Nice people they seemed to be round there! I was beginning to feel a little low-spirited. I had scamped my tea and it was past my supper-time, and that boot of mine was getting worse. I hobbled down the steps, feeling that if something didn’t happen I should have to take it off in the street. There was a policeman

Sam Briggs : His Book

over the way. I cannot say that I care for policemen, not as a general rule ; as a class they seem to me to be so wanting in intelligence. However, I made for him.

“ Can you tell me,” I said, “ where Mr. Macfarlane lives ? ”

“ Willie Macfarlane ? ”

“ Yes ; Mr. Willie Macfarlane.”

I plucked up when he said that ; after all, some of those policemen have sense.

“ You see that house there ? That’s where Willie Macfarlane lives—the house with the red blinds. It’s known round here as the Red House, as you’ll find, if you’re going there, not without reason.”

He looked at me and he smiled, and he went stamping down the street in the way those police have ; though what there was to amuse him was beyond me altogether. I do not mind admitting, at the same time, that there was something about his words and his manner which made one, as it were, what you might call a trifle uneasy. Known as the Red House, was it ? The Red House ! There was something about a name like that which, when you came to think of it, was not, to be perfectly candid, what you might term altogether pleasant. I rather wished I had asked that policeman. I had half a mind to call him back again ; I could not help feeling that I would just as soon he had explained. Because, of course, when you came to look facts in the face,

A Social Evening

my friend was a complete stranger to me ; and when I recalled what I had felt about him when I first saw him in the train, and the decidedly unpleasant remarks he had made to me, I rather felt, upon the whole, that I wished I had not accepted his pressing invitation to spend a social evening. At the same time it would be ridiculous for me not to see it through, especially after coming all the way right across London, just because of what a policeman had happened to say. I would tell them about him ; they would make a great joke of it. So I went up the steps of the house and I knocked at the door. No one answered. My impulse was to creep down the steps and sneak off as if I had never knocked at all ; but if they caught me at it they might wonder what the game was, and that would be awkward. I did not want to begin a social evening with any unpleasantness ; so I went to the other extreme. I caught hold of the knocker and I laid it on. And it was opened like a flash of lightning by a young fellow with the very reddest head of hair I ever did see—positively sinister it made him look. He asked no questions ; he did not give me a chance to open my mouth ; but he began at me at sight in a way that took me by surprise.

“So it’s you, is it? At last! And a nice noise you make now that you are here, trying to knock the door down. Come inside!”

I went inside—at least, he dragged me ; taking me by the shoulder, swinging me round

Sam Briggs: His Book

as if I were a teetotum, so that by the time I knew where I was the door was shut, and he and me were in the passage.

“Does Mr. Willie Macfarlane live here?” I asked.

“Willie Macfarlane? So that’s it, is it? You’ll get Willie Macfarlane soon. We’ll talk to you. Give me your hat and stick. That’s just about the kind of stick we shall be wanting.” I gave him neither, he took them both, and he cut my walking-cane through the air in a style which made me jump aside, in spite of the way my boot was hurting me. “You go in there!”

He opened the door of a room at the back, and he pushed me through it. Then he shut the door behind me with a bang.

I hope I am the last person in the world to find fault without cause, but all I can say is that that young fellow’s style of treating me was not my idea of starting what I should call a social evening. Anything less like sociability than the room looked like into which he had shoved me—because a shove it certainly was—I should say wouldn’t be easy to find. The photographs which covered the walls—well, there! the look of them was enough to crush any feeling towards gaiety I might have had. I was calling myself names for ever having come, when a sound rang through the house which, I can’t say it curdled my blood, but it did make me feel queerish. It was something between the bellow of a bull and

A Social Evening

the scream of a steam-whistle; and it was followed by a noise as if someone overhead was leaving no stone unturned to bring the house down. I was beginning to wonder if I was in a lunatic asylum, and was making up my mind to make a bolt for it while there still was time, when the door opened and there came in one of the most unprepossessing-looking parties I ever yet encountered. He was big, and he was broad, and he was fat, with no neck, a small round head, ginger-coloured hair, such a face, a broken nose, and eyes which, so far as I could judge, were not only bloodshot, but odd ones. He never said a word as he came in, but planting himself in front of the fireplace he stood and stared at me in dead silence. I tried to say something, but, with him staring at me like that, all my words seemed nowhere. At last he did speak.

“I am Ebenezer Posford,” he remarked, in what was more like a croak than a voice.

“Are you?” I said; I felt as if I must say something. “I—I’m very glad to meet you, Mr. Posford. My name—”

“Never mind what your name is; I know all about you. What I want is for you to know something about me. I say my name is Ebenezer Posford.”

“Yes; you—you said so before.”

“Oh, that’s it, is it? Sauce! Very well, sauce away. Only let me tell you that if you speak again before I’ve finished I’ll knock your

Sam Briggs : His Book

head off your shoulders—with that.” He stretched his fist out towards me ; I never saw one like it for size, and colour, and hardness ; it fascinated me, that fist did. “ I say again what I’ve said before, that I am Ebenezer Posford. It is not so long ago that I was known as the Southwark Slogger ; it’s a name you may have heard—a good many have. I tell you this so that you may know exactly where you are ; so now you understand.” I would have given a trifle to have been able to slip out of the room unnoticed ; I don’t think that boot of mine would have kept me from doing a bit of moving ; but that was all I did understand. I certainly did not understand why he should speak to me like that ; and with that fist of his stretched out I did not feel like asking. He went on. “ So now that we do understand each other, is there anything you’d like to say ? ”

There were a good many things I would have liked to say ; but, just then, I did not know how to say them. All I could do was to stammer :

“ I—I—you don’t happen to be aware, Mr. Posford, which is the shortest way to Walham Green ? ”

“ Never you mind about that. By the time I’ve done with you, you won’t want to know the way to anywhere. You’re going to be taught a lesson to-night which, although I dare say you’ve stood in need of more than once before, now

A Social Evening

that you are going to have it, will last you for the rest of your life."

I did not know what he meant—at least, I hoped I didn't—but to look at him, and to hear him, made my blood run cold. I sat down, though no one had asked me to take a chair; but the truth is, it was all I could do to stand.

"I can't help thinking," I managed to get out, "that there's some mistake. I don't say that the fault is yours, Mr. Posford—"

"No, I shouldn't; you might be sorry for it afterwards."

"But I don't remember to have had the pleasure of meeting you before—"

"It's a pleasure which, now that it has come, I don't fancy you'll care to have repeated."

"And—and the fact is I came to see Mr. Macfarlane."

"You'll see him soon enough, you may take it from me."

"What's that?" I cried.

The same sound which ran through the house before came again, only much louder than before, to say nothing of the noise that followed—it made me jump off the chair I had just sat down on.

"That is Mr. Macfarlane."

"Is—is he ill?"

"It depends on what you call ill. He wants to get at you, and they're trying to keep him off you, and, in consequence, that's how he expresses his feelings."

Sam Briggs : His Book

“But—but he asked me to come and spend a social evening.”

“A social evening is what he called it, is it? Macfarlane has his own ideas of humour. You’ll find it a very social evening before he’s done with you ; you wait !”

“You’ll allow me to remark, Mr. Posford, that I also have my ideas, and you’ll permit me to state—”

I was getting warm, and was just about to inform him that I declined to stay in the house another single moment, when the door was opened again and that red-headed fellow re-appeared.

“Getting on nicely together, you two?” he said.

“Oh, very nicely,” said Mr. Posford, “A1 ; just starting to get friendly.”

“He’s not much to look at, is he?” said red-head, looking me up and down as if I was there for exhibition.

“You’ve got to look at him twice,” said Posford, “before you can see him once.”

“There certainly is not much of him to make a fuss about.”

“Fuss! Him! Why, he’s more like a monkey than a man, and not a fully-grown monkey either.”

“Extraordinary what some women can take to!”

“If they can take to him, it is.”

“Extraordinary !”

A Social Evening

It dawned upon me that these observations were meant for my address ; I could not help seeing it, they were so pointed. Now, I am a man who, when things reach a certain limit, puts his foot down ; and so I proceeded to show them.

“You’ll allow me to remark,” I said, “that I’ve not met either of you gentlemen before—that may be my misfortune, or it may not—and I’ve not come here to meet you now. I came here to spend a social evening, at his special invitation, with Mr. Macfarlane.”

“Very well, then,” said red-head ; “you’re beginning by spending the first part of it with me. I’m his son.”

His son ! I stared. I had never dreamed that he was old enough to have a son like that.

“Perhaps,” I ventured to hint, “you mean that he’s your brother ?”

“I mean that I’m his son ; at least, I’m one of them, because I’ve got four brothers, and I’m the youngest. They’re trying to calm my father at this moment, or he’d have killed you before now. So now you’ll understand what my feelings are when I think that a miserable, half-grown, half-baked animal like you has been playing hanky-panky tricks with my sister.”

“Me !—playing tricks !—with your sister !” I gasped. I had to, because it burst upon me all of a sudden that there must be a misunderstanding somewhere. “But,” I said, “so far as I know, I never saw your sister in my life.”

Sam Briggs : His Book

Red-head looked at Posford.

“ You hear that? He has got a face, hasn't he? ”

“ And no mistake! But we'll spoil it for him before we're through—that is, if you can spoil a thing like that.”

“ If you'll permit me to explain,” I cried, “ I'll make it perfectly clear.”

“ Here comes my father, he'll make things clear; he'll do all the explaining you want, and perhaps a trifle more.”

There was a din outside as if half-a-dozen people were falling downstairs; then the door was burst open, and there entered what seemed to me to be half-a-dozen people fighting. The room was all anyhow, and Mr. Posford had me by the collar, as if it had anything to do with me, before I began to understand what really was happening. The biggest man I think I ever did set eyes on—he must have been six feet six if he was an inch, and he was broad to match—was behaving as if he was stark, staring mad. His hair, his beard, and his face were all of them bright scarlet, though there were white hairs here and there, because anyone could see that he was not so young as he had been. Four other chaps, a size smaller than he was, but not so very much smaller, were hanging on to him for all they were worth; there was no mistaking they were his sons, because their heads and faces were the same shade as his was. And when a big woman, who I daresay was somewhere in the fifties, came in at

A Social Evening

the back, with hair of another shade of red, I began to understand what that policeman had meant by saying that the house was known as the Red House. I couldn't have believed, if I hadn't seen it for myself, that people's hair could have been so red. And there was that great scarlet-headed giant shouting and struggling, and going on like a lunatic, shaking the whole house every time he moved.

"Where is he?" he yelled. "Let me get at him! Let me get within reach of the villain who's trifled with my daughter's affections!"

"He's all right; I've got tight hold of him," said Mr. Posford, which, if he meant me, he had—a good deal tighter than I cared for. I should have liked to have told him that it was very far from being all right.

Old Macfarlane looked my way.

"What!" he shouted. "What—that! I thought he was going to have a fit. And the way he shouted, getting louder and louder, it was a wonder it did not bring the roof down. "That thing—that microbe—played the fool with a girl of mine."

"I did not play the fool with a girl of yours!" I bawled. "And don't you call me a microbe."

The red-head who had opened the door started to talk.

"Now, father, if you'll be still I'll see what I can make of this person, and then, if you like,

Sam Briggs : His Book

you can deal with him afterwards. Be as good as to listen to me, Mr. Curling."

Curling? It seemed that he was calling me Curling.

"My name's not Curling," I interrupted.

"Oh, now it's not Curling; you've had so many names in your time that it's a little difficult. What does your name happen to be just now?"

"I've only had one name all my life, and I've got it now, and that's Briggs—Sam Briggs."

"Briggs? And you've only had one name all your life? This is getting better and better. You introduced yourself to my sister—"

"I tell you I never did!"

"Posford, can't you make him keep his mouth shut till I have had a chance to get a word in edgeways?"

"If he opens it again before you've finished I'll twist his windpipe."

"You introduced yourself to my sister under the name of Lancelot Montgomery, and you asked her to call you Lance; it was only later that she learned, by accident, that your name was Curling—Augustus Curling. I understand that she has known you as Augustus Curling for some time now; as Augustus Curling you as good as asked her to be your wife; and, in consequence of your conduct to her as Augustus Curling, my father, who is sitting here, wrote and requested you to come and make yourself known, as a man

A Social Evening

should do, to her relations and her friends, and to furnish those explanations which he felt, and which we felt, were required, and therefore it is as Augustus Curling you are here."

"Pardon me—" I got no farther; Posford stopped me.

"One moment, then you shall speak. What we want you to do, in the first place, is to tell us, quite frankly and clearly, what, with respect to my sister, are your intentions. Posford, let him answer."

Posford let me answer, though it was some seconds before I had breath enough to do it.

"My intentions?" I said. "What's the use of asking what my intentions are? I have no intentions."

"You have no intentions?"

"No intentions!" roared the six-foot-sixer; up he jumped again. "Let me—let me!"

But they would not let him, luckily for me; there was another few minutes' excitement; then peace once more; and the red-head again.

"Father, if you'll only keep calm I shall soon have done with him, then you can have your turn." He turned to me. "Did I understand you to say that, with respect to my sister, you have no intentions?"

"How can I have when I've never met your sister?"

"You have never met my sister?"

Sam Briggs : His Book

“ I’ve never even seen her.”

“ You—as my father says—you microbe ! ”

“ Don’t you call me a microbe ! And, anyhow, I’d as soon be a microbe as have hair the colour of some I see ! ”

Then I thought there was going to be trouble. There was completer silence than there had been yet ; I believe they were so taken by surprise that all idea of killing me was surprised right out of them. Off started red-head again.

“ You’ve an agreeable way about you, Mr. Curling.”

“ My name’s not Curling ! ”

“ You have impudence enough to stand there and say, before all of us, that you never met my sister, that you never saw her ; so perhaps you’ve impudence enough to deny that you wrote her these letters, that you gave her these presents, though I’ll admit they didn’t cost you much.”

He held out what looked like a packet of papers in one hand and a parcel in the other.

“ If they are letters which you’ve got there, I never wrote them, I don’t care who they’re to ; and I’ll swear I never gave a single present to your sister, it’s not my habit to give presents to anyone, and certainly not to a young lady I don’t know anything at all about. It seems to me that there must be some extraordinary misunderstanding somewhere, and if you’ll give me a chance to

A Social Evening

“speak, perhaps I may be able to show you where it is.”

“I agree with you that there is a misunderstanding, but I rather fancy that we shall be able to show you where it is. He’s a curiosity, Posford.”

“And no mistake ; he’s such a curiosity that he fairly tickles me. Suppose we give him what he calls a chance to speak ; perhaps we shall find out that way all there is to him. Now, little man, speak on.”

I spoke on, in spite of his insulting style of addressing me—that is, I explained so far as I could, and so far as they would let me. As I went on the excitement grew ; by the time I had finished it was about at boiling-point. They were all of them talking together, and the old six-foot-sixer was, as seemed to be his usual custom, as nearly as possible off his head. But red-head No. 1 managed to get himself heard over all the lot of them.

“Do you mean to tell us,” he halloared, “that Augustus Curling got you to come here instead of himself?”

“I don’t know what his name is ; how is it likely when I never heard it, and never saw him in my life until this morning? I understood it was Macfarlane. He invited me to spend a social evening, and told me to ask for Willie Macfarlane ; 44, Violet Villas, I understood him to say, was the address ; but as it seems there isn’t a 44, I

Sam Briggs : His Book

suppose I've got it wrong. Here, I put it down just as he told it me ; you can see it for yourself !” I took out my note-book and I showed him what I had written in it ; nothing could have been plainer. He not only looked at that, but he turned over the page and looked at other entries, in what I call a most ungentlemanly way. I made no bones about putting in my oar. “ Here, none of that,” I said. “ You look at what I pointed out to you, and nothing else ; the rest of what's in that book is private and confidential, and for me only.”

He was a cool hand. He went on turning over the pages.

“ It seems to me that this is a most mysterious business,” he observed. “ I mean to get to the bottom of it. There's something at the back of all this, unless I'm very much mistaken.” He turned to the old lady. “ Mother, you go upstairs and send her down.”

Out went the old lady. He passed my note-book round. They all had a squint at it. You can imagine my feelings ; there are some most private things in that note-book of mine. Presently there was a noise outside, and then the door was opened and a female came in who must have been over six foot, and whose hair was the reddest of the lot. Whether she was young or not I am not in a position to say ; no woman with hair that colour ever would be young to me.

A Social Evening

“Oh, Augustus!” she howled, holding her handkerchief up to both her eyes, “why are you treating me like this? After all that’s passed between us, and all you’ve said and promised, I never thought you could have done it.”

“So,” chipped in red-head No. 1, “you are him, after all!”

“I’m nothing of the kind,” I said; “and don’t you make any error. Can’t the lady take the handkerchief from before her eyes and have a look at me?”

“Now, Flora,”—fancy calling a female like that Flora!—“look at him and tell us who this is.”

She removed her handkerchief, and stared about her like a moon-struck calf.

“Where is my Augustus?” she inquired.

“Isn’t this him?”

“That!” She glanced my way; from her manner she did not seem to like the look of me any more than I liked the look of her. “That! My Augustus! How dare you insult me!” If she did not stride right over to me and pick me up off the floor and hold me right up in the air—which will show the kind of person she was! “What have you done with my Augustus?” she demanded; and she shook me so that I could almost feel my teeth rattling.

“If you don’t put me down,” I said, “I shall hit you!”

Sam Briggs : His Book

Hit her! I might as well have hit the Monument; I was like an infant in her hands. That is the worst of being a neat figure.

Oh, dear, there was some lively doings! Talk about Hampstead Heath on a Bank Holiday!—it was a wonder they did not bring the house down. What happened to me I can't exactly say; seemed as if I was like the ball at a Rugby football match; everyone had a grab at me. All I know is that at last I was thrown down the front door-steps into the street, and my hat and stick thrown after me. I believe it was done to save my life. But I was so addled that for ever so long I could not stand up; and when I did stand up I was so stiff I couldn't move; and when I started to move, what with my aches and pains, and my tight boot, I could only hobble. It took me I don't know how long to get round the corner, and then who should come sailing up to me but the party of the train, as bold as brass and as perky as a pigeon.

“Good-evening, Mr. Briggs,” he said, quite affable.

I could only gasp; it was a case where it was impossible for anyone to have done more.

“You!” I said, “you! Well, upon my word!”

“Have you had a social meeting, Mr. Briggs? Been having a pleasant time with Willie Macfarlane and his family? Nice healthy lot, I've been

A Social Evening

given to understand, with hearty manners. And Miss Macfarlane—have you seen her? I hope that, as I said she would do, she has appreciated you at your proper worth.”

“You beauty!” I said, “if I wasn’t already pretty nearly falling to pieces,” I said, “I’d—I’d—”

While I was searching for language with which properly to express my feelings I heard a voice behind me which I had heard just lately.

“Augustus! Oh, there’s Augustus!”

He heard it too, and he gave a jump.

“You little hound!” he said, in quite a different tone of voice, “is this a trap you’ve laid for me?”

Off he scooted like a runaway motor-car. I looked round, and there was Miss Macfarlane, and Posford, and some of her brothers. Some of them went after him, but they never caught him; too soon they came back to join in the fun.

“You young rat!” said Posford, “you told us that fellow was a stranger to you, and that you never saw him before this morning; and here he is hanging about round the corner, waiting to meet you. It’s a conspiracy between you, that’s what it is, and it would serve you right if we were to break every bone in your body!”

He started to do it, too, and he might have

Sam Briggs : His Book

succeeded if the policeman of whom I had asked the way had not come up and stopped him.

“Here, what’s all this?” he asked.

Posford, what he called, explained.

“Officer, this young scoundrel has been treating a lady shamefully, disgracefully! It would be no more than he deserves if we were to take the skin right off his body.”

That policeman, with the sort of common sense a policeman generally shows, took it all for granted.

“I saw him hanging about some time ago, and I wondered then what game he was up to. Now, what you had better do is to take yourself right off.”

I took myself right off, with, as it were, my tail between my legs—as if I had done anything wrong! I got home at last—I don’t know how, but I did get home somehow; I know that when I did get home I was simply no good for anything. My word, what a night I had!

The next morning when I got down to the station my friend Tanner was asking me if I had brought my eye up against an open door or something, when in came the train, and if that party didn’t put his head out of one of the windows and begin shouting to me.

“Halloa, Briggs!” he shouted, at the top of his voice, so that everyone could hear. “How

A Social Evening

are you, Briggs? Come in here, Briggs, and tell me all about the pleasant time you had at Willie Macfarlane's!"

I simply rushed at him.

"Let me get at him!" I yelled.

But they would not let me, they dared not; a porter held me tight, the train went out of the station, and left me standing on the platform. That was a nice thing! The consequence was that I was late at the office, and got a wiggling, besides having unpleasant things said about the marks upon my features.

That was two months ago. This evening a small parcel came to me at my house. In it was a cardboard box, and in the box was a piece of wedding-cake, and on the top of the cake was a card, and on the card was: "With Mr. and Mrs. Augustus Curling's Compliments"—that was engraved; and underneath was written, in ink, "Mrs. Curling was Miss Macfarlane. In Memory of a Social Evening."

Fancy me touching that piece of wedding-cake! Think of me eating it! Why, a crumb of it would have choked me! There are some nice people in this world!

I gave it to my sister. She tells me that it was not worth eating. I have no doubt whatever that she's right. He was that kind of man.

THAT HANSOM.

LAST Boxing Day! my word! A day and a half that was. After breakfast I started off with Tom Edwards for a walk. Called on Arthur Timmins at Putney. His mother brought out a bottle of sherry wine and a cake. Everybody's health was drunk. I know there was not much left in that bottle by the time we'd finished. A nice young lady, Arthur's sister; a bit big, perhaps; for my part I never should take up with a young lady who could pick you up with one hand, and, if she was a trifle warm, drop you, careless like, over the garden wall; but, for those who like them on the large side, she was A1. Then Tom and Arthur and me went over to Percy Saunders, Wandsworth way; and if he did not make us stop to dinner, all the three of us. There was a lot of food, he said, left over from Christmas Day, which wanted eating, and, I give you my word, we ate it. He has just been married, Percy Saunders has, and whether his wife quite liked the way we did eat it I should not certainly like to say. I know that she stared

That Hansom

when she saw Tom Edwards what he called "clean up" what was left of their goose, and that when Timmins, after eating three mincepies, said it was a pity to leave any on the dish, and took a fourth, she turned a trifle yellow. Saunders wanted to come with us to see a football match, which Timmins was full of; but his wife said straight out that if he did he would find her missing when he came back; so, as there seemed to be a bit of breeze in the air, Timmins and Tom and me we left them to it.

A good match it was, though I could not rightly say who it was between, one of the players on one of the sides being a friend of Timmins; but there was a good deal of warmth about, though the day was cold. The name of Timmins' friend was Charlie Harris, and he was something like a player he was. He was not going to let any referee sit on him, and so he told them plain. A bumptious little chap that referee was, always blowing his whistle, and when Charlie Harris could put up with him no longer he simply knocked him down. Then there was a nice few minutes. Pretty nearly everybody started fighting, though I could not quite see why. Someone bashed in my hat, and gave me one in the eye which I knew I should carry about for a week. Charlie Harris, when he saw the state I was in, he behaved like a real friend. He took the three of us home to what he called tea. It turned out he was a butcher, and his was what you might

Sam Briggs : His Book

describe as a butcher's idea of tea. Pork chops and stout we had, and as that is not what I have for my tea, not as a general rule, by the time I had done in my share I did not seem to care much what happened.

After tea we had a little sing-song ; we weighed in on the choruses for all we were worth. When we had kept it up for an hour or so the party next door sent in to say that if we did not stop it he should start a row of his own which would make us wish that we were dead. Timmins wanted to talk to him. He said that such a message was insulting. But it seemed that the party was Charlie Harris' landlord, and as there was a little trouble about the rent already, he did not want to have any more unpleasantness than he could help. So we had a quiet little game of nap instead ; a quiet little game Tom Edwards said was what he wanted, but as Charlie Harris played nap in the way that he played football, and every time anybody won anything he wanted to knock him down, there was not so much quietude about it as might have been expected. I know that when I went nap, and took the kitty, with one and ninepence in it, Charlie Harris said things to me which I would not stand from any man, and when I said as much he started handling me in a way which put my back up, so that I told them I was going home. When they saw I meant it they all of them began talking at once, so that there was as much noise as if we had started

That Hansom

another sing-song. The end of it was that everyone begged everyone else's pardon, and we decided that, as it was Boxing Day, to let bygones be bygones. So we all of us shook hands, and by way of finishing up the evening in an appropriate and festive manner, we started for a stroll round town.

The farther we strolled the more we felt that it really was Boxing Day. And at last we came to a house where there was a hansom cabman who had been doing himself too well even for Boxing Day. His cab was at the door, and he offered to sell it to anyone who would give him the price of another quart. Whether the cab was or was not his to sell I don't know, but they persuaded me to give him the price of a quart, and then, according to them, his cab was mine. They took off his badge and put it on to me, he wishing me a Merry Christmas while they were doing it, in spite of my explaining to him that, accurately speaking, Christmas might be said to be past, and then they went with me outside, and helped me up to the box, or whatever they call the thing which is at the back of a hansom cab. There is no doubt that for uncomfortableness the seat of a hansom cabman is bad to beat; and so I told them as I was settling down.

"If I don't take care," I said, "I shall tumble off this," I said, "and if I do tumble there'll be damage done. I think I'll get down before there's an accident, if you don't mind."

Sam Briggs : His Book

But they would not have it.

“You’re all right,” said Timmins, who was not what I should call quite himself. “All you’ve got to do is to catch hold of the reins, and before you get that cab home you’ll have made a fortune.”

“Excuse me,” I replied, “but I don’t see how I am going to do that considering that I don’t know where I am.”

“You’re driving a hansom cab, that’s where you are, and very well you do it, Sam ; you might have been doing it all your life.”

“I may be driving a hansom cab,” I explained, “or I may not, but that’s not what I mean when I say I don’t know where I am. What I want to know is, is this Westbourne Park or is it Lambeth Marsh ? ”

The plain fact being that we had been doing so much strolling about that I really had lost my bearings altogether. Before they could answer, a gentleman came rushing across the road.

“Hi cabman !” he cried. “Get me to Euston Station inside twenty minutes and I’ll give you half-a-sovereign ! ”

The gentleman took me aback. The idea of me going in for fares, and driving people about as if I really was a regular cabman, had never entered my mind not for a single second. I was just about to explain that I was merely sitting up at the back of somebody else’s hansom cab for the sake of a little joke by way of winding up

That Hansom

the festive season, when Charlie Harris, who certainly ought to have known better, took the gentleman by the arm and helped him in, before I had a chance of saying even so much as a single word. And when I did begin they would not let me get out more than a word or two. I had got as far as,

“You must allow me to remark, sir,” when Arthur Timmins, whose conduct was outrageous, reached up and caught me by the coat, and nearly pulled me off my seat.

“Now, Sam, look lively!” he cried. “If you get the gentleman to Euston inside twenty minutes it will mean ten bob for you to take home to your wife and family, and you know how much they are in want of it, so mind you get him there. The gentleman’s a family man himself, no doubt, and that’s why he’s so anxious to catch the very last train that will bring him to them.”

“Look here, Arthur Timmins,” I said, “I’ve no more got a wife and family than you have; and you very well know it,” I said.

I was just going to give him a few words of a kind when Tom Edwards nipped the nosebag off the horse’s head, who had been feeding as comfortably and nicely as any horse could have been. He ran round and hitched it up somewhere underneath where I was, and he gave me a bang in the back which almost knocked the wind right out of me, and he sang out,

“Now then, Sam, off you go! Don’t you hear the gent’s in a hurry?”

Sam Briggs: His Book

And, mind you, I had had as much confidence in that man as if he had been my own brother! Charlie Harris, who was a person I had already wished more than once I had never had the misfortune of meeting, asked the party who was inside the cab,

“Did you say Euston, sir? The driver didn’t quite catch what you said.”

“Of course I said Euston,” he shouted. “Is the man deaf, or is he drunk? Why isn’t he moving? Didn’t he hear me tell him I wanted to get there inside twenty minutes?”

“You let me get down,” I said. “That’s what I want to do, I want to get down.”

If that there Arthur Timmins didn’t hang on to my jacket at the back, so that he kept me glued down on the thing which was supposed to be a seat, while Tom Edwards stuck to my leg, so that I could no more move than if I was a wooden image. The gentleman he stood up and bawled at me over the top of the cab; touched in the temper he seemed to be.

“If you don’t start at once, my lad, you’ll be sorry.”

“You’ll be sorry if I do start,” I told him.

“None of your insolence?” he shouted.

“No, Sam,” said Charlie Harris—he had no right to call me Sam, considering that he had only known me an hour or two, but that was the kind of character he was, “don’t you cheek the gentleman—behave!”

That Hansom

“Why, Sam Briggs,” said Timmins, “wouldn’t your poor wife be surprised if she saw you up there, going on like this!”

Then I was so mad that I could not find words to speak.

“It’s only his playfulness,” said Charlie Harris to the gentleman. “As a matter of fact he’s one of the most remarkable drivers in London, and when he’s once got his horse going he’ll take him along in a way that’ll startle you.”

It is my belief that Tom Edwards gave the animal a kick in the ribs, because before either the gentleman or me could say a word off he went with sort of a hop, skip, and jump which almost upset the show at the very start. It would have been better for me if it had done. The gentleman, who had been standing up, disappeared inside like as if he had been a jack-in-the-box. I had been standing up on the perch behind, and so I had to cling to the iron rail which ran round the roof goodness alone knows how, to keep myself from going goodness alone knows where. The first few minutes after the horse had started were among the very worst I ever had known. It is no joke sitting on the horrible perch they call a seat at the back of a hansom cab; from the experience I had I should say it takes some practice to do it anything like properly, especially when the horse is going he can’t tell where, and you can’t either. Owing to my not being so tall as some, when I was sitting on the thing there were my

Sam Briggs : His Book

feet dangling in the air, and there was only a thin rail about two inches high to keep me from tumbling on to the street, how I was going to get sufficient purchase so as to get a good hold on the horse's mouth was what I should very much like to have been informed. When I did get myself something like settled I found that I was mixed up with a rug or something in such a way that I hardly dared to move for fear I should go flying overboard. Luckily the reins were knotted to the rail in front of me, and at last I was able to get hold of them just in time to stop the horse from walking into a public-house window. Up to then he had had the road all to himself, and had kept something like a bee line, and what induced him to step on to the pavement all at once, and make for that public-house window is more than I can say. There was a party leaning against it who had been keeping Boxing Day in style, and when he saw a hansom cab making straight for him I should not be surprised if he supposed he had been keeping it even better than he thought he had. He began to holler,

“Here! what's this? Where are you coming to? Am I on the pavement, or are you? Will you keep that horse of yours in its proper place, or shall I have to make you?”

He took hold of the creature's head in a regular fury. I endeavoured to explain.

“Excuse me, but at the present moment I'm

That Hansom

mixed up with something on this beastly seat so that I can hardly move a limb, but if you'll kindly keep tight hold of that brute's head I'll get down as soon as ever I can, because I can assure you that it's owing to no fault of mine that I'm up here, but on account of a little joke which some friends of mine have been having I find myself in a situation which I've no wish to occupy—"

He did not wait for me to finish, but he swung the horse's head right round, and shoved us off the pavement in a style which nearly laid the whole caboodle over on its side; then he gave a wild whoop, and took his hat off, and hit the horse with it, and off we started again about fifteen miles an hour. All the people had come out of the public-house to see the fun, and when we went off they all cheered. Anyone who felt less like cheering than I did it would be hard to find. When I was younger I used occasionally to drive a goat-chase at the sea-side, and I remember once holding the reins of a char-à-banc while the driver went inside to get some refreshment; but beyond that I could not say that I had had much to do with horses, and considering that I was swaying about upon that perch at the back, expecting to find myself every moment I did not know where, and that the reins had got crossed or something, so that when I pulled the right one the horse went to the left, and when I pulled the left he went to the right, which I was

Sam Briggs: His Book

convinced was what ought not to happen, it was a position in which, as a driver of a hansom cab, it would have been as well that I should have had more experience of driving than I really had had. It was latish, pretty near to closing time, and about there there was no traffic to speak of, so that the corkscrew style we had of going along, first on one side of the road, and then on the other, did not attract so much notice as it might have done. How it was going to end was what I wondered, because stop that horse I soon found was more than I could do. Whether his master had any little trick of his own for stopping him I could not say; I only wished I could say. All I know is that every time I gave a pull at the reins he gave a kind of jump, and went off faster than ever, making for the other side of the road, as if he thought that that was what I wanted—which showed what kind of animal he really was. What my sensations were, as we went careering down that road, will be understood when I mention that I had clean forgotten there was a gentleman inside, till all of a sudden he pushed up the trap-door in the roof, and a voice came out of it which gave me a start which nearly finished me.

“Do you know,” that voice said, “you nearly murdered me starting the way you did? I must have knocked my head against something which drove the senses right out of it, because I’ve only just come back to consciousness to find myself

That Hansom

inside your cab ; my head's still going round and round like a teetotum, so perhaps you'll explain what you mean by your behaviour." The ridiculousness of asking me to do a thing like that ; as if my head was not going round and round as bad as his, and I was game to bet a good deal worse. I said nothing, but I held on to the reins as tight as I dare, and I gritted my teeth, and hoped that I should find out some dodge to get that horse to understand that I should be obliged if he would stop. Up came the voice through the trap door. "Did you hear what I said?"

"Yes, I heard," I told him.

"Then why don't you speak? I believe there's something injured inside of me ; I feel queer all over."

"That's all right," I said. "Don't you worry ; let's hope you won't feel any worse by the time we've finished."

The voice sounded waspish.

"Don't you speak to me like that, I won't have it! How far are we from Euston?"

"No idea," I said.

The voice sounded more waspish than it did before.

"What do you mean by talking in this way? Didn't you hear me tell you I wanted to be at Euston inside twenty minutes?"

"I heard something about it, but it was no business of mine what you wanted."

Sam Briggs : His Book

There was a sound inside the cab as if something had happened.

“You insolent scoundrel! Where are we?”

“That,” I said, “is what I should like to know myself.”

“Do you mean to tell me that you’ve lost your way?”

“I’ve no more idea where we are than you have. I’m a stranger in these parts.”

“A stranger! Why, good gracious, I’ve only eight minutes to catch my train; shall I do it?”

“You’ll owe it to the horse if you do, you’ll owe nothing to me. Perhaps he’s more intelligent than he seems; up to the present I haven’t got to his intelligence myself, but there’s no knowing.

“But I must catch my train; I must!”

“Then, let’s hope you’ll do it, but I shouldn’t like to bet on it myself.”

“I believe you’re drunk. I insist on your telling me where we are.”

“I can tell you we’re alive, and if this animal takes it into his head to pull up before there’s much mischief done, we shall keep on being alive, but that’s all I can tell you.”

“You are drunk! Stop your horse at once.”

“I wish I could; it’s what I’ve been trying to do ever since I’ve been up here.”

“Do you wish me to understand that he’s running away?”

That Hansom

“I don't know what he's doing, and if you knew as little about horses as I do you wouldn't know either. I only know that it don't seem as if he means to stop for me. I've always heard that when you wanted a horse to stop you tugged at his reins, but the more I tug the more he goes, until I've got to that state that I hardly dare touch the reins at all. He's doing just as he pleases so far as I'm concerned, and if you were up here like I am you'd know what that means. It's all very well for you to go on while you're safe inside, but if you were outside and me inside you'd feel different.”

“You a drunken scoundrel, that's what you are. I suspected it when I got inside your cab. If you don't stop this instant I'll call the first policeman I see.”

“You can call to who you please for all I care!”

But he had no chance of calling to anyone; because, all of a sudden, that horse turned round a corner, sharp, sharper than I should care for as a general rule; so sharp indeed that one wheel went about a yard on the pavement. Why he did it I can't say; I suppose he had reasons of his own; so far as I know I did nothing to induce him to do it. The consequence was that before I had an idea of anything of the kind there we were in the middle of a street full of traffic; and not only in the middle of the street, but going straight across it, as if we were making

Sam Briggs : His Book

a bee line for the other side. There was a little confusion ; everyone seemed as surprised to see me, and the hansom cab, as I was to see them, especially where that horse had taken it into his head to go. We put a stop to everything ; the wonder was that between them they did not put a final stop to us. There were 'buses, and cabs and carriages on either side, and some of them pretty well on top of us. The language I heard ! That horse went so far as to look through the window of a motor 'bus, and then he did what I had not been able to induce him to do, he came to a standstill ; with the hansom cab behind him, drawn right across the street. So far as I could make out everyone was speaking at once ; and they all seemed to be talking about the same thing.

“ Now, then, where do you think you're coming to ? ”

“ Where might you have come from ? ”

“ Think you own the street ? ”

“ Want someone to go right over you ? ”

“ You driving the horse, or the horse driving you ? ”

The gentleman inside jumped out and nipped into the cab whose driver was asking me that last question. He shouted something at me as he went, but what it was I neither heard nor cared ; I fancy he made a remark to the effect that he was not going to pay me my fare, as if it was that that troubled me. It was impossible for me to

That Hansom

speaking to everyone at once, like everyone was speaking to me, or I would have tried to explain. Before I could do anything of the kind some officious person, taking hold of the horse's head, brought the cab into safety alongside the kerb, and everything went on as before, except that there was a policeman on the pavement talking to me. The sight of him gave me an uncomfortable feeling of a fresh sort, and goodness knows I had already had uncomfortable feelings enough and to spare. I have seen and heard enough of policemen to be aware how off-handed they can be, and what a trick they sometimes have of locking you up first and asking questions afterwards; and when I saw that one it suddenly struck me that I had no more right to be where I was than I had to break into the Bank of England. He might accuse me of stealing that cab for all I could tell. If he found out that I was an unlicensed person driving another man's hansom that would be sufficient to make it a case of the police station for me, as safe as houses. The idea sent cold shivers all down my back, and I was cold enough to start with. The joke had been all on one side as it was, and if I was to spend Boxing Night in a lock-up, and then be brought before a magistrate in the morning, that would be a joke, that would. At the least it might be twenty shillings and costs, or a month, and then where should I be? Especially considering that I had to be at the office at eight

Sam Briggs: His Book

o'clock to the tick. It was no good talking to him about the outrageous treatment I had been subjected to, and by those, mind you, who called themselves my friends. What I had to do was to look pleasant; and make out that I had been driving a hansom cab since the days of my early childhood; and try to settle myself on the thing they called a seat so that I should not feel every moment as if I was going to fall off; which would have been easier if I had not felt so uncertain in my mind as to what that horse would take it into his head to do next.

"That horse of yours fresh?" asked the policeman.

"He is a little that way," I answered; if he wasn't that then he was something else.

"Got a bit out of hand?"

"He did a bit." I could have sworn that safely!

"Yet he doesn't look as if he was over and above fresh."

"Some do and some don't, you never can tell; some look one thing and some look another, and that's what it is."

Something in what I said, or in the way I said it, seemed to strike him. He glanced up at me with what I should call a touch of sharpness.

"You look very young to be up there."

I felt it; if he had only known how young he would have been surprised; but it would never have done to have told him so. So I did a little dodging.

That Hansom

“There you are again, you never can tell what a man’s age is from his appearance. Look at you, in the prime of life, I daresay; and yet you look as if you were almost too young to be a policeman, from where I am.”

That seemed to rile him; though I don’t know why. He struck me as being quite a decent-looking young chap, for a policeman.

“I don’t know how old you are, but I do know you’re not big enough to drive a hansom cab. Why, your legs are dangling in the air, and your feet don’t even touch the footboard.”

Now the question of my size is a delicate one with me. While not holding with your giants, I am aware that I might, without much harm being done, be the merest fraction taller than I am. So I let him have one for himself.

“We don’t make ourselves,” I said. “I daresay if we had,” I said, “you’d have taken a little off your width and added it to your height.”

There was what I have heard described as an ominous pause. That policeman was, we will say, plumpish. If I had known what was the matter with the reins, and that horse had had any intelligence, I should have driven off; but as it was I had to wait and give him a chance of getting back at me. He took out his pocket-book, and his tone was grim.

“Where’s your badge?” he asked. I was ready for him there; I showed him the other

Sam Briggs: His Book

party's badge. He took down the number; it looked as if there might be trouble coming for the gentleman who ought to have been where I was. Then he asked a question which was in the way of something like a facer. "What's your name and address?" he said.

While I was wondering what I should like him to think it was another policeman came up, as if one at a time was not enough. The very first question he put to me showed his unfriendliness.

"What do you mean, cabman, by taking your horse across the road like that?"

His tone was nasty.

"Excuse me," I explained, "I did not take my horse, it was my horse took me."

"That," said policeman No. 1, "is how he answers when you speak to him. I was taking his name and address when you came up."

"Quite right," said policeman No. 2. "It's a wonder there weren't half-a-dozen accidents. From the way he brought that horse and cab of his across the road I should say he couldn't drive."

I could not, but, at that moment, it was not for me to say so. People were gathering round, there was getting quite a crowd, I was getting more uncomfortable than ever, there was something disagreeable about those policemen's manners, when suddenly somebody said, speaking as if he thought he was someone,

"Officer, I require a cab."

That Hansom

That policeman with the pocket-book, as if he felt he had gone too far with me, and was disposed to change the subject, and it was well for him he was, moved forward,

“A hansom, sir?” he said. “Here’s a hansom.”

The gentleman who had spoken came into view.

“Oh, is that a hansom?” he observed. “Then why wasn’t I informed?”

It was not necessary for him to make any further remark, that was more than enough to show how he had been spending Boxing Night. A regular swell he was, top hat, fur coat, and all, dressed up to the nines all round, he was. That policeman smelt something for himself at the sight of him.

“Yes, sir, this is a hansom, and the driver has a good horse, and he can drive it.”

“He’d better; he’s not to let him stand on his head, because I won’t have it.”

“No, sir, I shouldn’t. You hear, driver, you’re not to let your horse stand on his head, because the gentleman won’t have it.”

Some of them laughed. They were beginning to enjoy themselves, which was a good deal more than I was. The notion of being supposed to drive somebody else somewhere, and him a swell who had been overdoing it, was one I did not like at all. It was all very well to laugh at the idea of the horse standing on his head, but if he

Sam Briggs : His Book

wanted to he would, for all I could do to stop him, and that was certain. So I interfered.

“Look here,” I said, “this won’t do at any price; I’m not taking any more fares. I’m going to my stable at once, that’s where I’m going.”

The difficulty was that I could not own up how I really was placed in the presence of those two policemen, and that’s what made it so awkward. Of course they took advantage of me at once.

“You talk sense,” said the one who had taken the old gentleman in hand. “You’re plying for hire. I just saw a fare get out of your cab. You take the gentleman where he wants to go.”

“I shall write to the papers if he doesn’t,” said the gentleman. “And, what’s more, I shan’t pay him anything either.”

“Very proper too, sir, don’t you pay him anything if he doesn’t drive you where you want to go. And where might you want him to drive you, sir?”

The policeman handed him into the cab. Rather tottery he was, but he did manage to get in. I felt him drop with a thud on the seat. Wonderful how shaky a hansom seems when you are hoping you won’t fall off the thing stuck up in the air at the back.

“My name is William Shepherd,” said the gentleman, very solemn and serious, “William Shepherd, and I want him to drive me home. Everyone knows where I live. And, officer, here’s half-a-crown for yourself.”

That Hansom

“Thank you very much, sir. I rather fancy the driver’s an ignorant man, sir; hadn’t you better tell me where you live, and then I’ll let him know?”

But the gentleman would not have it.

“If the driver is an ignorant man, officer, then why is he driving a hansom cab to the public danger? In these days, when the ratepayers are being robbed to pay for other people’s education, I ask you why. And let me tell you I won’t have it.” All at once he got quite warm. I do not know what took him, but he did. He stood up in front of the cab and waved his stick in the air. “Why am I being kept waiting? If an ignorant driver won’t start his horse then I will.”

And he did. He brought down his stick on the horse with a regular crack—more of a crack, I daresay, than he meant. The horse seemed taken aback, as if he wanted to know what he had been doing to be used like that. Up went his heels, over went the gentleman into the policeman’s arms. The policeman, as if surprised to find him coming, lay down on the pavement, with the gentleman on top. And that was the last I saw of them. Apparently that horse had had about enough of it; I expect he had found my style of driving a little trying, and the crack with that stick was the final straw. Off he went, my word he did go. How I hung on was a marvel. To be frank, I was wondering whether to keep trying to hang on, or to drop at once

Sam Briggs : His Book

and chance it. But I concluded that there would not be much chance about it if I did drop, so I decided to stick while I could.

After all, that policeman was right, that horse was fresh ; he must have been, the way he went. The cab was first on one wheel, then on the other ; how it managed to keep on one at all was a mystery. There was me being swung backwards and forwards like a monkey on a stick. Someone might have stopped us, or we might have run into something and stopped ourselves, for good and all, if the horse had kept straight on ; but he did nothing of the kind. He was a horse and a half, that horse was like that Boxing Day ; never came across such an animal before. He went where he pleased, and how he pleased. I don't know how he got on with his own driver, but he had some nice larks with me. I had never guessed that driving a horse felt like that. There was a motor omnibus just ahead, and just as I was asking myself if he fancied he could knock it over, and what he expected to do afterwards, he showed that he had ideas of his own by sweeping round a corner as if there was no corner there. That was a sharp corner, that was ; he went so close to a lamp-post that it seemed he was doing his best to take it with us. However, he left it behind, and off we went without it ; goodness only knows where he went, or how. It really had very little interest for me. I had a sort of feeling that he

That Hansom

had got among a lot of streets where everyone had gone to bed, which was like his artfulness, seeing that in consequence there was nothing to run against or stop us ; though the wonder was that the clatter he made did not wake them all up again. Fire engines they must have thought we were, those who heard us. I had lost all reckoning where the reins had gone to ; not that it made any difference, but as I had seen nothing of them since we had started again, they might have got mixed up with that horse's feet for all I could tell. My hat had gone ; the cushion off the thing they called a seat had gone after it ; the rug in which I had got my legs tangled up at the beginning of that little jaunt had fallen overboard. I had got my feet on the footboard at last, and was clinging to the thin rail which ran round the roof in front of me for all I was worth. A nice sight we must have looked, if there had been anyone there to look, which there wasn't ; that artful animal had taken care of that. They would have been startled if there had been ; it was a picture they would have remembered. They would have taken it for granted that we had been doing justice to that Boxing Day, all the three of us—me, the hansom, and the horse.

Round another corner went that horse, then round another. The way he took them made me feel as if something had turned a somersault inside me. He paid absolutely no attention to the pavements, and I dare bet he took chips off

Sam Briggs : His Book

the corners of some of the houses. Round another corner—swish! and I am bothered if he had not turned into some mews. Then he slowed down, and began to move along as if he thought the time had come for him to mind his p's and q's. He stopped in front of a stable door, and if he did not lift up his front leg and knock against it with his hoof, as if by way of giving a gentle hint to those inside that he was there. That horse had come home—he had brought himself home, and me, and the hansom, and if he had left my hat, and the cushion, and the rug, and his master behind him on the road, you could hardly put that down as being any fault of his. I did not wait for him to knock again. It would not have done for me to have waited for someone to open that stable door—his master, or his master's wife, or anyone else, and then start asking me questions—no, certainly not! Now that I had the chance I jumped down off that horrible perch faster than I had ever jumped before, and I nipped off down the mews as quickly and as quietly as ever I could. When I reached the corner, there was that horse lifting his leg to knock again, standing as patient and sober as you please, and I daresay tired out, and anxious to get to bed. After all, he was about the most intelligent creature I had seen that Boxing Day, that horse was, and I will say that for him.

THE STAR OF ROMANCE

I do not say that I have been engaged, and I do not say that I have not been engaged. As to whether I am engaged at the present moment, that's another question. Where a young lady is in the case sometimes you really do not know where you are, and that's where it is. The first time I spoke to her on the top of the 'bus we were not what you might call strangers, seeing that we had gone up to town by the same 'bus off and on, for I don't know how long. That morning I found myself on the same seat as she was; I don't say that it did not require a little bit of management on my part, but that's neither here nor there. She was reading—I had noticed that she generally was—but when her umbrella fell my way I picked it up, and that broke the ice. I mentioned that I had had the pleasure of travelling on the same omnibus with her on previous occasions, and how it had caught my eye that she generally had something of what you might describe as a reading nature in her hand. And when she said there were few things

Sam Briggs : His Book

she liked better than a good story, that smoothed the way ; and, having once started, she kept on—my word she did ! I have found it like that more than once before. Until you speak to a young lady she says nothing, but when you do speak to her it's about the last chance of speaking you ever do have ; she does all the talking for ever afterwards. There's no mistake that some young ladies do have the gift of conversation. Miss Blott had.

Her name was Blott, Irene Blott. She asked me if I thought the name was a pretty one ; but before I had a chance of answering she went on to remark that she was in a tea shop off Cheapside, but her soul wasn't there, and never would be. She said that when we were at the Walham Green end of the Fulham Road ; and as she kept on talking until we reached Cheapside, there was not much about her I did not know by the time we got there. At least, that was the impression that was left upon my mind.

Romance was what she cared for. Really and truly she could hardly be said to live for anything else. And if you couldn't get romance in a story, where could you ? She subscribed to the Star of Romance Series of Complete Novels by leading authors at one penny each. You couldn't call that dear, could you ? I should have said I couldn't if I had had a chance, but I hadn't. Her custom was to buy the new number on the Saturday, to read it through before she went to

The Star of Romance

bed, and then to start reading it again on the Sunday, and again on the Monday, and again on the Tuesday; in fact, she read each story seven times from cover to cover, seven days running; and that way she found she got it into her head. Because, after all, what was the use of reading a story if you didn't get it into your head? Though even then, as likely as not, she had forgotten all about it a week or two afterwards.

She was what I call a pretty girl, Irene Blott was. I had thought so the first time I had seen her on the 'bus. And it was pleasing to hear her talk, because, looking at it at its lowest, it saved you the trouble of thinking what to say. And when she turned and looked at me—nice eyes she had, though there was something about one of them which made you wonder if they were quite a match—and said that she never should have thought my name was Briggs, because I reminded her of a character which was in a story she had read, it might have been a month ago, there was something about the manner in which she said it which made a sort of shiver go all over me.

The character in question was a nobleman of the highest rank, and my likeness to him was simply startling. Did I think that the author had drawn that nobleman from me? Because, if I came to read the story, I should see that he must have done, since it really was impossible that two persons could be so much alike by

Sam Briggs : His Book

accident. The similarity had struck her the first time she had seen me on the 'bus, and ever since, if she might use the word, it had haunted her. I asked her what kind of looking party this nobleman was. I did manage to get in that much. She said that all she could tell me then was that he was of striking appearance, and once seen never to be forgotten ; but if I would meet her that evening she would go into the mystery to the very bottom, for a mystery she was persuaded there must be, and one which ought not to be hidden from me.

I said I would meet her, and I did, at the corner of Newgate Street, and she was twenty minutes late. As soon as we were on the 'bus—there happened to be one waiting, so we hopped up—she asked me if there had ever been a nobleman in my family whose name began with a "D." I said that so far as I was aware there had not been. She wanted to know if I was perfectly certain. I told her that I could not go so far as that, especially as I had an uncle whose name was Dawkins, and that began with a "D." No, it was no name like Dawkins. Perhaps it would assist me if she were to ask if I had a pink scar on the small of my back shaped like a Maltese cross. I felt that that was rather a delicate question to be asked by a young lady on the top of an omnibus ; and I looked round to see if anyone had heard it. Then I hinted that, though I wasn't so well acquainted with the

The Star of Romance

small of my own back as she might think, to the best of my knowledge and belief I had not.

“Oh,” she said, and she gave a kind of sigh, “then the mystery deepens. Have you any pressing engagement, Mr. Briggs?” As a matter of fact my supper would be ready for me when I got home, and I should be ready for it. But before I had a chance of saying so she went on: “Because if you haven’t, and we were to go together for a little walk in Hyde Park, where we should not be so likely to be overheard, I think I could make it plain to you that there is something mysterious about you of which you haven’t any notion.”

I did not see how that could be, since it stood to reason that I knew more about myself than she did; still, I did not like to disoblige a young lady, so the end of it was that we got down at Hyde Park Corner and turned into the park. When we had gone a little way she put a question which took me by surprise.

“Mr. Briggs, have you ever rowed in the University Boat Race?”

“No,” I said, I had not; though I perhaps knew as much about boats as most men, especially as I had nearly been drowned in one—which I was once in in Battersea Park.

“I asked,” she explained, “because I have a picture of last year’s Oxford crew, and you’re the very image of one of them.”

“Which one?”

Sam Briggs : His Book

“I couldn't exactly tell you—not from memory ; but the likeness is there, unmistakably.”

“Seems to me that I'm like more people than I thought I was.”

“Ah, you shouldn't laugh at it. No one can ever tell. It may be the hand of destiny.” There was a way about her as she said it which was beyond me altogether. Then she asked another question which took me more by surprise than the first had done ; though, at the same time, it put me more on my own ground.

“Mr. Briggs, have you ever been in love ? ”

“That depends, Miss Blott, on what you call being in love.”

“I mean, have you ever been engaged to be married ? Perhaps you are a married man ? ”

“Do I look it ? ”

“There's no telling. Not long ago I was walking out with a gentleman who turned out to have buried two wives, and to be married to a third.”

“I have not yet had a chance of burying one. Sam Briggs is a bachelor, Miss Blott.”

“Ah,” she said, “so was he ! ”

“I beg your pardon,” I remarked, “but who might you be referring to as ‘he’ ? ”

“The nobleman I was telling you about. I should mention that I was mistaken this morning when I told you his name began with a ‘D.’ It really began with a ‘B.’ ”

The Star of Romance

“Same as my name does.”

“That deepens the mystery. What makes it more mysterious than ever is the fact that the young lady to whom he became attached, she was in a tea-shop.”

“Was she?”

“And her name began with a ‘B.’”

“Did it? Was she what you might call good-looking?”

“Oh, Mr. Briggs, you mustn’t ask me such a question. If I was to answer it you’d think that I was fishing. Do you like fair young ladies?”

Now she was dark, with that fuzzy-wuzzy, black, horse-hair kind of hair. So I said: “Certainly not. If there’s one thing I can’t abide it is a girl who looks as if there’d been soda in the water, and as if her colour’d run in the wash.”

“Mr. Briggs, you are severe. Perhaps you don’t care for young ladies, whether fair or dark.”

“Don’t I? Do I look as if I was that kind?”

“To be quite candid, the young nobleman whom I’ve mentioned, he was extremely fond of the fair sex; and, as I’ve already told you, your likeness to him is striking.”

“In that respect it is. If there’s any man who’s fonder of the fair sex than I am I’d like to meet him. But perhaps you don’t care for men, Miss Blott?”

Sam Briggs : His Book

“ Oh, Mr. Briggs ! ”

“ Now what kind of men do you care for, as a rule ? ”

“ Oh, Mr. Briggs, you mustn't ask me, really ! It isn't fair. ”

“ Do you like 'em—what you might call—a bit—dashing ? ”

“ Oh, Mr. Briggs, how can I answer such a question, after such a short acquaintance ? Doesn't it seem strange that we should only have spoken to each other for the first time this morning ? Do you know, I feel as if we were quite old friends. ”

“ You don't look it. ”

“ I suppose not. All my friends tell me how young I really look. It's rather a drawback sometimes. How old would you think I was ? ”

“ Seventeen ; not a day more. ”

“ What a good judge of age you are ! It's wonderful. As a matter of fact, I'm eighteen ; what you might call nineteen. If it's not seeming too curious, Mr. Briggs, might I ask how old you are ? ”

“ I'm what you might call nineteen ; though, mind you, in many ways I'm more. ”

“ He was your age. ”

“ Meaning the mysterious nobleman ? ”

“ Isn't it extraordinary that you should be so alike in every respect ? ”

“ Not so extraordinary as perhaps you might

The Star of Romance

think. Do you know that I'm only telling you the simple truth when I tell you that I have been told that there are several persons about like me? ”

“ I wish I'd met one of them before.”

That took me, as you might put it, a bit aback. It was the way she said it—in a sort of a whisper, with a kind of a sigh in the middle. The trouble was I wasn't prepared for it just then, and we were right under a gas-lamp before I saw the chance I'd missed. We walked on some little distance ; she still for once in a way, and me not feeling quite up to my usual form. Then she said :

“ Isn't it queer how some people do resemble other people? Haven't you noticed how I resemble someone? ”

“ I was struck by it the first time I saw you.”

“ Were you, really? How observant you are ! Though, of course, other people have been struck by it also. I have been told that the likeness is surprising.”

“ Never saw anything like it in my life.”

“ The features are so similar.”

“ Every one of them.”

“ Except the nose.”

“ Well, perhaps there's a shade of difference about the nose.”

“ And the chin ; hers is more pointed.”

“ It might be, a trifle.”

Sam Briggs: His Book

“Too much pointed, I’ve heard them say hers is.”

“That certainly is my opinion.”

“And then, of course, she is much more beautiful than I am.”

“That I’m bothered if she is.”

“Oh, Mr. Briggs! According to her pictures in the papers!”

“I don’t care about the papers.”

“I suppose that sometimes the papers are not to be trusted. But you mustn’t flatter me, really, remembering who and what she is.”

“I’m not flattering you. And who and what she is makes no odds to me. I never flatter. I consider that to flatter a young lady is to insult her.”

“I am so glad you think so. That’s exactly what I feel. I always tell all my friends they are not to flatter me. I have quite enough compliments paid me without that; indeed more than my share. And then she’s taller than I am.”

“I shouldn’t have thought it.”

“I know it as a positive fact. I’m five feet four and a half in my stockings; and she’s five feet four and three-quarters—and, I believe, a trifle over.”

“But, then, look how you hold yourself.”

“I have heard it mentioned that I don’t hold myself badly. I do think that a good carriage makes a difference, don’t you?”

The Star of Romance

“ All the difference ! ”

“ Isn't it strange, Mr. Briggs, that you should be so like him, and that I should be so like her ? ”

“ It's more than strange ; it's—it's jolly queer. ”

Then I got away as fast as ever I could. I was afraid she might ask me who it was I thought she was like if I was not careful, and I hadn't a notion. What's more, I was getting peckish. For all I could tell she was getting the same. In fact, she did throw out a kind of hint that there was rather a good restaurant over the road where a gentleman she knew once took a lady friend of hers to supper. The hint was enough for me. From the top of the Brompton Road to Walham Green the 'bus fare is twopence, and twopence is every farthing I had on me. So we parted, as you might say in a bit of a hurry, and also, you might add, with a touch of coldness, owing to my suddenly remembering that I had an appointment over by Chiswick, which I was bound to keep, on account of its being with a party who had every confidence in my being punctual. All the way home on top of the 'bus I kept trying to think who it was that she thought she was like ; and the more I tried the more I couldn't hit it. Still, I am not denying that she had made what you might describe as an impression on my mind.

The arrangement was that I should look her up

Sam Briggs : His Book

the next morning about lunch-time in her tea-shop ; and there I was, right to the tick. I saw her directly I put my nose inside the door, in spite of the crowd. She was carrying a large tray with about enough things on it for a small bean-feast. Just as I got in, she hit a young lady, who was lunching off a cup of tea and a sardine, on the head with one of the corners in a way that young lady did not seem to like, though I saw Miss Blott look round and beg her pardon, in a manner which made her drive another corner into an old gentleman who was putting on his hat. I found an empty seat at one of the tables she was serving. As I sat down I took off my hat, and I said, "Good-morning, Miss Blott."

But not only did she not answer, but, so to speak, she didn't even notice me. She gave me, if you might call it so, one short side look, as if I was a stone image, and off she went. Two other parties were sitting at my table ; one of them digged the other in the side with his elbow, and the other, he dug him back. Then they both of them smiled. I was just on the point of asking what it was they happened to see to smile at when one of them remarked to his friend, "Nice girl that."

And his friend replied, "So chummy."

Then the first one said, "Still, I shouldn't be surprised if she knew how to keep some people in their places."

And his friend answered, "Still, William, it's

The Star of Romance

very hard to be snubbed by a nice girl like that."

Then they both of them were silent. I was almost on the verge of asking if either of those remarks had been addressed to me, when they started off afresh.

"Do you call her pretty?"

"Fair to middling. I've seen them better and I've seen them worse. She's one of that sort who look better from behind."

"She's not like Miss Porter, is she? Not in the same class."

"Miss Porter is a lady; it's not the same thing."

"Excuse me," I cut in, "but it's only fair that I should warn you that you're speaking of a friend of mine."

"You know Miss Porter?" asked one of them.

"No," I observed, "I do not; and I can't say I want to, either. I was alluding to this young lady here."

"Ah," he said, "we noticed that she seemed to know you; her manner was so warm."

As I was about to give him a word or two back, up came Miss Blott again. As she came, she drove the corner of an empty tray into the back of my neck. It might have been an accident, but I have my doubts.

"May I ask if you're serving this table?" I inquired. "Good-morning, Miss Blott."

Again she gave me what you could not help

Sam Briggs : His Book

but call the cold shoulder—with her head in the air. All she said was, "That seat you're on is reserved for one of my regular customers."

Those two parties laughed right out. I didn't like it.

"When one of your regular customers comes he can have this seat; till then he can't. In the meantime, perhaps you'll be so good as to bring me a steak pudding and a cup of cocoa; I'm in a hurry."

Just then somebody at one of her other tables called her, or she pretended that they did; and off she went without paying the slightest attention to me. What was the meaning of her behaviour was more than I could imagine. Those two parties were positively offensive.

"Seems to me," said one, "that if you're in a hurry to be served your shortest way would be to go and get something at the counter. You don't want to sit here all day, doing nothing."

"I don't know," I retorted, "what business it is of yours what I do."

"It's no business of mine at all," he said. "Don't let the idea get into your head."

"Nor what difference it makes to you," I added, "when I'm served."

"It doesn't make the slightest difference. I shouldn't care if you were never served at all. Only the notion struck me that you might have come in here with the idea of getting something to eat."

The Star of Romance

With that he laughed. They both of them got up.

“We’re going now,” the other said. “If you like we’ll get you something at the counter as we go, in case you’re hungry.”

“Never you mind about my being hungry,” I said. “And don’t you bother about getting me anything at the counter, either. What I advise you to do is to look after your own affairs.”

I could hear them sniggering together as they went down the shop. If it had been outside I would have talked to them in a different way. But I didn’t want to be the cause of unpleasantness with two strangers in a tea-shop. Some persons might not have a reputation to keep up; I have.

Hardly had they gone than back she came. I felt huffy; and I showed it.

“Perhaps you’ll let me know if you took my order for that steak pudding; to say nothing of the cocoa.”

That is what I said. What she said was altogether different. Surprise is not the word to describe the feelings with which I heard her. She leaned over the little marble table, and she spoke in a thrilling whisper which reached my ear alone; which, on the whole, was perhaps as well.

“Why do you pursue me? Is it manly? I have discovered everything. Need you ask for more? Do not let us be seen talking together. Go while you are still safe. Delay may mean

Sam Briggs : His Book

your ruin ; to say nothing of mine.” She laid a folded slip of paper before me on the table. “Read that when you are outside. It will explain all. But, in the name of all that’s merciful, don’t glance at it till you’re outside ; it may be my undoing. Now go, I implore you, before mischief is done which may never be repaired—go at once !”

I went. I had not the dimmest notion what the trouble was ; but I went ; without that steak-pudding, let alone the cocoa. Her words and manner gave me such a start that all I thought about was getting clear. When I got outside I opened that piece of paper. This is what was on it :

“I have discovered that the nobleman whose name begins with a ‘B’ was a monster of wickedness. Your likeness to him is simply frightful. I dare not tamper with my conscience. It is true that my innocence is all I have, but leave me that. I warn you I am not without friends. Cease to pursue me. I desire that our brief, but eventful, acquaintance should be at an end.—I. B.

“You know who I am so like. Her name begins with an ‘M.’ My mother’s name began with an ‘M.’ There may be another mystery here. Which is another reason why I should avoid you.”

Taking it on the whole, it seemed to me that Miss Blott’s behaviour was peculiar. And so far from that paper explaining everything, to my mind

The Star of Romance

it explained rather less than nothing at all. Considering that I had come a good deal out of my way for my lunch at her express request, and that I was pressed for time, it was precious poor consolation to have to go without it merely because, so far as I could gather, somebody else's name began with a "B," whether he was a nobleman or whether he wasn't. And as for his being what she called "a monster of wickedness," what that had to do with me was beyond me altogether. No one who knows me can say I'm "a monster of wickedness," or anything near it, I do not care who it is. My jovial moments I may have, being as fond of a bit of fun as anyone; but farther than that Sam Briggs does not go—no! It was cruel hard that I should have to go without my lunch because someone else did.

All the rest of that day, as you might put it, I was off my usual; I am sure no one can say it was surprising. That evening I tried to catch her on a Walham Green, so that I could have it out with her as she was going home. I hung about for nearly an hour, but never caught so much as a glimpse, though I chased two or three wrong young ladies up the 'bus steps, and nearly had trouble with one who had with her what might have been her husband. When I did get home they saw that something was wrong with me; but I am not one to wear my heart upon my sleeve, and when my mother talked about half an ounce of castor oil I as nearly as possible lost my temper.

Sam Briggs : His Book

All that night Miss Blott's conduct towards me rankled to that extent that it almost kept me from my natural sleep. It seemed to me so uncalled for. The first thing the next morning I resolved that I would go again to that tea-shop, no matter what happened, being determined to find out just how I stood with her. I don't care to have a young lady treating me as if I was so much dirt, for nothing at all. In such cases, when it is to be got, an explanation I will have. So I meant to show her. And I did.

About lunch-time round I went. It being Saturday it wasn't so crowded. I saw her directly I was inside ; and, what is more, she saw me. She was standing, twiddling the cloth she used to wipe the tables with between her fingers, looking towards the door, so that, as I entered, our eyes met. But beyond their meeting, which I could not help, I took no notice of her whatever. As for going to one of her tables, after her treatment of me the day before—not me ; I had more self-respect. I chose a table as far from her as I could get, in the extreme corner, in fact. And there I planted myself. A very nice young lady waited on me, very nice, all smiles, as it were, as ready to pass the time of day as if we had known each other for years. Very quick she was in bringing what I ordered ; quite different to what I had had to put up with yesterday.

All the time, though I might not have shown it, I kept looking at Miss Blott out of the corners

The Star of Romance

of my eyes ; to that extent I hardly knew what I was eating. I could not help wondering what she thought at seeing me sitting there. I might be hurting her feelings more than I meant by putting such a slight on her in public. When that idea occurred to me, if it had not been that it would have seemed so queer, I would have picked up my food and carried it to one of her tables—really I would. Suddenly I glanced up, and there was she, looking at me with what I should describe as a stony gaze. When she saw that I saw her she clasped her hands in front of her, then passed them across her face, and turned away. Was it tears she was brushing from her eyes? Was she crying because of me? The thought made me go hot, then cold. Yet it was extraordinary how impossible I seemed to feel it to get up and speak to her a friendly word. Smoked sausages I was having. I was just getting to the end of my second when the young lady who was attending to me came up and said, in a mysterious whisper, like :

“Are you Mr. Briggs?” When I said I was she planked down a piece of folded paper. “Then that’s for you.”

And off she went to give an elderly party at the next table a sardine and butter. I glanced up, and there was Miss Blott peeping at me over a tray full of plates. So I took up the piece of paper, feeling a trifle nervous, because really in dealing with her it seemed that you never knew what might happen, and on it was this :

Sam Briggs: His Book

“What I have suffered because of you this past night no pen can tell. What can be the reason? I will trust you still. I cannot help myself. It seems that I am haunted. Be at the Cockspur Street corner of Trafalgar Square to-morrow afternoon at 2.45, and, to prove that my confidence has not been reposed in you in vain, wear a bunch of primroses and a blue necktie. All might still be well. Be merciful as you are strong; 2.45 sharp.

“P.S.--Can you have placed on me a spell?”

Referring to her last question, it was more than I could say. I seemed to have placed something on her. Some queer communications from young ladies have come my way, but to my mind she beat anything. Why she wanted to make an appointment in Trafalgar Square when we both of us lived out towards Walham Green was funny. And how I was going to show that her confidence had not been reposed in me in vain by wearing a bunch of primroses and a blue necktie was beyond me altogether.

However, a young fellow does not see as much of the world as I have without finding out that women are very different to men, and that sometimes the most agreeable young ladies behave as if they were not quite right in their heads. So I just waited to give her a nod as she was making out a customer's bill, and on the Sunday afternoon 2.45 found me in Trafalgar Square. In fact 2.15 found me; which was a pity, because just as I got there

The Star of Romance

it began to drizzle. An umbrella I had not brought, but I had got on a light grey suit and patent leather shoes, so that rain was not altogether what I wanted. It did not come down what you might call hard, but by the time I had waited on a doorstep a good half-hour I began to think that there might be pleasanter ways of spending a Sunday afternoon. A quarter to three came, but no Miss Blott, ten minutes to three, five minutes to three, three o'clock, but still not so much as a glimpse of her. At a quarter past three I was feeling that I had had about enough of it; when, just as it was coming down harder than ever, who should appear in sight but Miss Blott, under an umbrella which was hardly large enough to cover the whole of her hat.

"Halloa!" I called out, because she was sailing past without looking towards the doorstep on which I was. "Excuse me, one moment!"

Hearing my voice she came across the sloppy pavement with what you could not describe as a smile on her face.

"It seems to me, Mr. Briggs," she said, "that you must have been born under a fatal star."

"I don't know what I was born under," I replied, "but I do know that I've been standing in the rain for a jolly good hour, and that now it looks as if there was going to be a flood."

"And I've got on my new delaine," she said, "and goodness only knows what it's like round

Sam Briggs : His Book

the bottom ; and my hat's spoilt. A nice thing your bringing me all this way on a day like this!"

That did strike me as being an uncalled-for thing to say.

"I thought," I remarked, "that it was the other way round ; that it was you who brought me. Who asked me to wear a bunch of primroses and a blue necktie? "

She had not even glanced at what I had on ; she didn't do it then. What she replied was :

"If you're going to make insinuations, Mr. Briggs, there is no more to be said."

"I don't want to make insinuations," I told her. "All I want is to have things clearly understood. What I've really come for is to have an explanation."

"An explanation of what? "

"If you don't think an explanation is required, you may be correct, but all I can say is that that opinion's not mine. When I consider that I had to go absolutely without my lunch on Friday—"

"I don't know what right you have to speak to me like that, Mr. Briggs. I can soon tell you what I came for."

"I was thinking that you might have come to see me."

We were not having at all the sort of conversation I had hoped to have ; so my idea was to try to give it a turn. But it was not to be done. Anything more stiff than her manner you could

The Star of Romance

not imagine. Of course, I followed suit. As I have said, I am not one to wear my heart on my sleeve. I could be as cold as anyone.

“Then that’s where you’re wrong,” she said. “I have not come to see you; far from it. I have simply come to tell you that all is over between us.”

“All what?” I asked.

“Everything,” she said.

I am not denying that it was of the nature of a blow to be spoken to like that, especially after giving up my Sunday afternoon to stand in the rain; but you have to learn to bear things.

“All right,” I told her. I daresay my tone was a bit bitter; you cannot keep all your feelings hidden. “I’m willing. Though, so far as I’m concerned, I wasn’t aware that there was anything between us.”

“That’s it,” she said. “There wasn’t. And there never will be.”

“Then why worry?”

“I am not worrying; certainly not. Though when I think of how little I know about you I cannot help wondering if I have done right in letting things go so far as they have done; because, really, when you come to consider, what I do know about you amounts to simply nothing.”

“You seemed to know everything; in fact, you seemed to know too much. You talked about my being so like that nobleman whose name began with a ‘B.’”

Sam Briggs : His Book

“Please don't throw that in my face. Is it gentlemanly?”

“No harm meant. Seems to me you give a twist to everything I say.”

“A young lady has to be careful, Mr. Briggs ; in my position she has to look ahead. I may tell you I have other friends in my eye.”

“Gentlemen?”

“Certainly. Do you imagine for one moment that I'd have anyone for a friend of mine who wasn't a gentleman?”

“What I meant was, weren't any of them ladies?”

“Of course, I have lady acquaintances, heaps ; too many, perhaps ; but hardly, as you might say, friends, at least, not in the same sense.”

“I suppose not.”

“You see, a young lady in my position has opportunities ; and she owes it to herself to make the most of them.”

“I'm afraid I don't quite follow.”

She smiled, and she put her hat straight. I could not help feeling that she was nice-looking. It seemed hard to be on such terms with her. If she had only talked as she had done that first night in Hyde Park ! It only shows you how a girl does change.

“If you held a position in a tea-shop, Mr. Briggs, and were a young lady who has been considered to be not without attractions, you would understand what I mean. Why, if I chose, I

The Star of Romance

might walk out with a fresh gentleman every evening of my life.”

“Might you?”

“I might, if I were that sort, which I’m not. There are few who have more chances than I have to pick and choose, though I say it.”

“I shouldn’t wonder.”

“You must admit that a young lady owes it to herself to take advantage of her chances while she has them; now do you follow me?”

“I’m beginning to.”

I was! But when she went on she took me right aback.

“To show what I mean,” she said, very seriously—she made me feel serious too—“I may mention that another gentleman is waiting for me on the other side of the Square, in front of St. Martin’s Church, with whom I have an appointment at a quarter to four.”

“Oh!” I said; practically, at the moment, that was all I could say.

“And I expect that shortly there’ll be another gentleman at the corner of Suffolk Street, whom I am to meet at a quarter to five.”

That time I could say nothing; I could only look at her. It seemed to me that she had a partiality for the neighbourhood of Trafalgar Square.

“And perhaps later on,” she added, “there may be another in Spring Gardens.”

That was a shade too much, as I let her see.

Sam Briggs: His Book

“Pardon me, Miss Blott, but if I’d known that you’d had all these other appointments I should have stayed at home.”

“Now, it’s no use you adopting that tone, Mr. Briggs, because what is a young lady to do?”

“I’m sure I don’t know.”

“But I do; she has to do what she can. Situated as I am, having to make several new friends every week, I am bound, as I put it, to test them, or very soon I shouldn’t know where I was. And Sunday being the only day I have to myself, I use it to sift the false from the true—meaning no offence. But I cannot afford to waste my time, nowadays no young lady can; and what I have to ask myself, when a gentleman makes himself known to me, is, are his intentions serious, and can he afford to keep a wife and a servant; because a servant I will have, even though it’s only a young girl. Now, Mr. Briggs, I will be quite candid with you, knowing nothing of you, and will say this: supposing we were to become attached to each other—and I own that there’s something about you which might soon make you dangerous to my peace of mind, because, as it is, you’ve kept me awake two nights; and if you don’t dislike me—because, of course, if you do, there’s an end of the matter—”

“I never said that I disliked you.”

“Then what I say is, supposing that we were to fall in love, so that I couldn’t be happy without you, and you couldn’t be happy without

The Star of Romance

me, and the whole world was full of each other ; because I'm of a very loving nature, Mr. Briggs, and where a gentleman is fascinating might all too quickly become attached. In that case, and, of course, only in that case, are you in a position to provide a wife with all that a loving husband should provide her ? ”

“ I'm afraid not—not at the moment. But, of course, I hope to be.”

“ When ? ”

“ That's the question, isn't it ? ”

“ It is the question ; because I don't mind telling you that, if I were to fall in love with you—and I feel you're dangerous—I should like to marry at once. I should feel safer.”

I did not know what to say to her. She had a way about her which made me feel confused. I had no idea she would talk to me like that when I left home, not having the faintest glimmering of an idea that she was that kind of girl. How often it is like that ! Upon my word, when you are dealing with a young lady you never know where you are.

“ It's like this with me, Miss Blott,” I managed to get out at last, when I felt that her eyes were piercing me like gimlets : nice eyes they were, though not quite a match. “ At the present time of speaking I'm getting thirty shillings a week, and I'm not marrying on that.”

“ Hardly keep a servant on that, could you ? And at least a young girl I will have.”

Sam Briggs: His Book

“I’m not saying you’re wrong, though servants are not all blessings—at least, so I’ve been given to understand.”

“Anything put by for the furniture?”

“Not one penny.”

“Ah!” she sighed. I could not have looked at her just then not for any amount; to that extent did her sigh go through me.

“You ought to save, Mr. Briggs.”

“I’ve always said to myself, Miss Blott, that under three pounds a week I’d never marry; my own tastes being what some might describe as a bit lofty.”

“And is there any immediate prospect of your getting that amount?”

“So far as I’m able to judge—no.”

“Is there any certainty that you’ll ever get it?”

“I can’t say that, either. The firm I’m with is not one that jumps you up by leaps and bounds.”

“Then am I not right in saying what I have said? Circumstanced as we are, is it not better that we should part, before our feelings get beyond us? And I would ask you not to come to the tea-shop for a few days; the sight of you might be unsettling. For I’m free to admit that you made an impression on me directly you spoke to me upon the omnibus; perhaps I’m more sensitive than some, but you did. And now, as the time is going on, I think that I had better keep the appointment with my friend

The Star of Romance

who is waiting for me in front of St. Martin's Church. So good-bye, Mr. Briggs; I hope we part as friends?"

"Certainly, Miss Blott, so far as I'm concerned; good friends. This is an experience I sha'n't soon forget."

"Ah, Mr. Briggs, I've had many such!"

As I watched her picking her way through the pools across the Square, under that small umbrella of hers—it was still coming down cats and dogs—I did not doubt that she had. Very attractive she looked from behind as she went through the rain, holding her skirt up. A neat way she had of doing everything; it is not every young lady who has an attractive way of holding her skirt up. As I saw her going I seemed to have lost something. I hoped that the party in front of the church would be worthy of her. Though I could not help thinking that if she was going to talk to him as she had talked to me, I should like to see his face and hear what he said to her. And it would not have been bad sport to have been present at the interview with her other friend at the corner of Suffolk Street; to say nothing of the party who might be in Spring Gardens.

The more I thought it over—and I did a deal of thinking before I went to sleep that night—the plainer it became to me that there's something about a girl which is altogether different to a man. I am not saying that she was not right—I own that it is only common-sense that a girl

Sam Briggs : His Book

should look after herself, but it does seem strange that with a romantic nature like hers—and anyone more romantic I never met—she should be so practical. I dare say she will make a good wife to whoever gets her ; and, from what I could see of the way she handles things, I should say that it will be no fault of hers if someone does not get her soon.

Though, considering that she did not take the least notice of them, why she made a point of my wearing a bunch of primroses and a blue neck-tie—and they both of them cost me money—is beyond me altogether.

THE SKIPPER'S DAUGHTER

THERE was the wharf, there was Mr. Adolphus, and there was a ship just starting. Mr. Adolphus shouted to a man on board the ship.

“Look out, Ruddock—catch!”

He picked me up as if I was a baby, and, dash my buttons! if he didn't throw me through the air. I thought that all was over, but it wasn't. The chap on the ship caught me, somehow.

“You've got a way of your own of coming on board,” he said.

He seemed surprised; the people on the wharf seemed surprised; everyone seemed surprised. No wonder! I was surprised myself.

“Here's a letter for you, Ruddock,” shouted Mr. Adolphus. “Sam Briggs is coming with you as a passenger. This letter will explain to you why.”

He whizzed an envelope through the air, in the same way he had whizzed me; it fell at the feet of the chap who had caught me. I had a sudden thought.

Sam Briggs : His Book

"I've got no clothes," I sang out to Mr. Adolphus. "Not even a change of pocket-handkerchiefs!"

"That's all right," said Mr. Adolphus. "You'll find all that you want on board."

I hoped I should, but I did not feel so sure of it as I should have liked to have done. Something gave a heave; bang I went against a party with ginger hair. He gave me a shove over towards a party the colour of whose hair I had no time to notice, he was so quick in passing me on to someone else; and there was I being handed about as if I was I don't know what. By the time I had a chance to look about me the wharf was pretty well out of sight and a tug was towing us down the river. My feelings! I let 'em go!

"This is an outrage!" I said. "That's what it is!" I said. "And if there's a law in the land," I said—

A party gave me a clip on the side of the head; three times my size he was, with a peaked cap, and whiskers enough to stuff a cushion.

"Stow that!" he remarked. "Go and lend a hand with those ropes there; we don't want no loafers aboard this craft."

Before I knew it I was pulling at ropes, working like a nigger slave, hauling here, pushing there, tumbling over everything there was to tumble over, and being handled as if I was a bale of damaged goods. Then I was right in the front

The Skipper's Daughter

of the vessel, doing something at I don't know what, being ordered by I don't know whom, leaning forward to get at a rope which was just out of reach, when suddenly something gave a lurch, over the ship's side I went, right into the water. Shall I ever forget my feelings as I remembered that I was being drowned in the only suit of clothes I had brought on board? Down, down I went, as it seemed to me about two thousand feet. As I came to the top, something was hitched into me, and I was being drawn up through the air at the end of what I have reason to believe was something of the nature of a boat-hook. Some people would have thought that the crew of that ship, on seeing me rescued from a watery grave would have been melted to tears, as I have read about in books, but they did not do things like that, not there they didn't. The chap with the boat-hook planked me down on deck, and hardly had I come to the conclusion that I was still alive when the party with the whiskers picked me up by the scruff of the neck and shook me as if he was trying to shake the water right out of me; there was no signs of his being melted to tears.

"Don't you try any of those tricks here," he observed, "or you'll be sorry."

What he meant I have not a notion, unless he supposed I had tumbled into the water on purpose; I soon found out that on board that ship they were capable of supposing anything.

Sam Briggs : His Book

Scarcely had I got back some of the breath he had shaken out of me along with the water than someone else grabbed me by the shoulders, and if it was not what I should describe as a mere lad.

“Look here,” I cried, “I’ve had enough of being mauled about, and when it comes to a kid like you I’ll just trouble you to understand—”

He did not wait for me to finish.

“The captain wants you,” was all he said, and if he did not begin dragging me across the deck as if I was a sawdust doll.

It seemed that on board the *Eleanora* that was the fashionable way of saying by your leave ; and lad or no lad I could feel by the grip of him it was no use my speaking ; his fingers felt to me as if they were steel rods. He brought me to a standstill before a party whom I recognised as the party who had caught me when Mr. Adolphus threw me on board ; short and square he was, with a face which was the colour of my mother’s mahogany sideboard.

“What on earth do you mean,” he asked, only the language he used was stronger, “by coming on to my quarter-deck in a state like this? Look at the state you’re making my deck in!” The truth is, I was a trifle moist, which wasn’t amazing considering that I had only just come out of the water. “Why the something,” he stormed, “don’t you change your things before venturing on my quarter-deck?”

The Skipper's Daughter

“There are several reasons,” I explained, “and one of them is that I haven't anything to change 'em for.”

I never was looked at in the way he looked at me ; if he had ordered me to be taken downstairs and cooked for his dinner I should not have been surprised ; I was getting to feel that that was quite the sort of thing which was to be expected. However, instead of roaring at me he roared at the lad who had brought me.

“Take him away,” he said, “and put him into some other clothes, and bring him back to me when he's got 'em on.”

What happened to me after he said that I do not rightly know unto this day. All I do know is that the lad who had brought me gripped me by the shoulder again and took me back the way I had come ; and farther, right to the other end of the ship. And there was a sort of doorway which led down into a kind of a hole in the deck ; and he gave me a shove, and down I went to the bottom, all bruises, with pieces chipped off all over me ; and he followed me down what seemed like a ladder ; and there we were in a sort of a kind of a cellar, only worse, the smell being like nothing I ever had come across before. And there were two or three other chaps, sailors or something,—and the things they said when they saw it was me !—and between them they stripped me of every single article of clothing, and put me into what if they were meant for

Sam Briggs : His Book

garments were garments such as I had never seen before, no shape, no cut, no style, all odd ones, not two that matched. You could not even call the trousers a pair, seeing that one leg was patched with what looked as if it had once been a piece of scarlet cloth, and the other with a slice of Scotch plaid. And as for fit! all the things had been made for people of different sizes, and not one of them had ever been in the least like me. With one boot and one shoe on, what I must have looked like I do not care to think, though the job of dressing me up amused those sailor men, so that by the time they had finished they had almost killed themselves with laughing. Then a voice came down the hole in the deck.

“Captain Ruddock’s compliments, and if you don’t send that gentleman friend of his to dinner inside two two’s he’ll take the skins off all the lot of you!”

Up the ladder they hoisted and bundled me, just as I was; across the deck they shoved me; everybody who caught sight of me splitting himself with laughing; down a staircase I was pushed, and before I knew it I found myself in a kind of a sort of a room, which I afterwards learned was the captain’s cabin. There was a table laid for dinner; at one end sat the man with the mahogany face; on his right was the party with the whiskers; on his left was a chap who was smaller than me, and ugly! It did not dawn on me clearly till

The Skipper's Daughter

later how ugly he really was, but I could see even then that he seemed to have only one eye, and hardly a hair on his head. At the other end of the table, facing the captain, was a young lady; when Mr. Adolphus threw me off the wharf I had had an idea that she was on board the ship; I seemed to see her in a sort of dream as I was being handed about among the crew; when I was dragged on to the quarter-deck I had had a dim notion that she was standing behind the captain; and now there she was at the end of the table. And me coming on her unexpectedly rigged out like that, and feeling—but what my feelings were no pen can picture. When they saw me the captain and those two other men they burst out laughing, and she laughed too; though not so loud or so long as they did. In fact, if it had not been for her I daresay they never would have stopped. She wiped the tears out of her eyes with her pocket-handkerchief, and she said,

“Poor little man! It's a shame to laugh at him. Come and have some dinner; you look as if it might do you good.” She put me into a chair beside her; and the moment she was seated off she went again. “Oh, you do look so funny!” she gasped; putting her handkerchief before her mouth as if she was choking. And off they all of them went; a young fellow who came into the room with a tray had to put it down for fear he should drop it. “Have some boiled beef and a dumpling,” she said, holding on to her sides as

Sam Briggs : His Book

if they ached. "Oh, I really must not laugh any more, it will make me ill, but where did you get those things from?" and off everybody started afresh.

Boiled beef and a dumpling, with the place all going up and down, and me feeling as I was feeling then! I could as soon have eaten the Monument! She gave me a platefull, but all I could do was sit and look at it. Then the captain he began to talk; speaking to me as if I had been guilty of all the crimes in the Newgate Calendar.

"I don't know if you're aware, Mr. Briggs, that coming aboard the way you have done I should be entitled to treat you as a stowaway, and to put you in irons, and to clap you under hatches until I reach my port of lading." I said nothing, because just then I seemed to have nothing to say; I could not have said it if I had had. "What I want to know is why you've come aboard my ship at all? What have you been doing, young man, that you should be chucked on to my deck as if you was a bundle of old rags?"

"Yes, Mr. Briggs," said the young lady, "what have you been doing?"

Then I told her, as best I could.

"I've been fallen in love with; that's what I've been doing."

"Fallen in love with!" she put her elbows on the table, and clasped her hands, and looked at me with her big black eyes. "Oh how romantic! Mr. Briggs, who has fallen in love with you?"

The Skipper's Daughter

"My governors' old aunt. She wanted to marry me, and because my governors were afraid she would, they've put me on board this ship, so as to get me out of her way. It's an outrage, that's what I've been subjected to; it's a case of kidnapping, that's what it is; and if there's a law in the land I'll have it."

"Don't tell any of your tales in here," said the man with the whiskers. "As if any woman in her senses would want to marry the likes of you."

"I don't think that you're justified in saying that, Mr. Flanagan," put in the young lady; and bad though I felt, I could see that as she said it every hair in his whiskers seemed to stand out straight; while the bald-headed man looked black; and the captain's mahogany face was one big grin. "I can't help thinking that lots of quite sensible women might be very glad to marry Mr. Briggs. Indeed, when he came on board I thought what a pretty little man he was; and even now he is not without a charm of his own. See, for instance, what pretty little hands he has."

One of them happened to be on the table. She started stroking it in a way which made me snatch it off pretty quick.

"And how shy he is!"

"Pretty!" growled the bald-headed party. "Fancy a man that is a man, being pretty!"

"Of course, Mr. Mumford," said the young

Sam Briggs: His Book

lady, "there are different types of beauty. There is Mr. Briggs' type, and there is Mr. Flanagan's, and there is yours."

Those two men looked like murder; both of them must have known they deserved to be in the Chamber of Horrors, if only because they were so hideous. When I found myself on deck again I was ill; the world was going round one way, and I was going round the other, and everything inside me was turning upside down. I had been on a steamer to Southend, and had meant to go to Margate, so that you could not quite say I was no seaman, but never before had I been on a sea like that was, never before in all my days. While I was leaning over the side, not caring if I was pitched into the water, and never taken out of it again—the sight of those waves as they kept going up and down!—Mr. Flanagan came on one side of me, and Mr. Mumford on the other, and they both of them began talking to me in a way which, if I had been feeling more myself, I should have let them know I was not accustomed to.

"Young man," said Flanagan; he laid a hand upon my shoulder which weighed me down as if it had been a ton of lead. "My name's Flanagan." Which I knew already. "I'm first mate of the *Eleanora*." That I'd guessed. "Miss Ruddock's a particular friend of mine; a particular friend." So much of his face as you could see for his whiskers looked

The Skipper's Daughter

as if he wished me to understand something altogether out of the common. "I don't allow no liberties, my lad, where Miss Ruddock is concerned. You take my hint, or you'll be sorry."

"Same here," said Mumford.

"Same there," said Flanagan. "Mr. Mumford's second mate on board this ship. Him and me's both particular friends of Miss Ruddock, and where she's concerned we don't neither of us allow any liberties. So you watch out."

"Or prepare for squalls," said Mumford.

"I'm very sorry for her."

Just at the moment that was all I could say ; and that did not seem to please them. The language they used I should not care to print. In the very middle of it up came the young lady herself.

"Oh, Mr. Briggs, how ill you are !" I was ill ; at the same time I was not too anxious to have attention called to it like that. "If you begin already what you will suffer when you get among the raging tempests, and are at the mercy of the storm-tossed billows." That was how she went on ; nice hearing it was for me. "If we encounter hurricanes, and our masts are all blown overboard, and the ship stands first on one end and then on the other, it may be months before we come in sight of land, and, even if our provisions last, and we spring no leak, what will become of you ?"

I'm sure I did not know ; and, at that time of

Sam Briggs : His Book

speaking, I did not care. All I did was to keep myself glued to the side. I daresay Flanagan and Mumford found that sort of talk to their taste ; but when she started on another line I don't fancy they were so amused.

"But what," she exclaimed, "shall we do about a berth for you, Mr. Briggs? This ship is not meant to carry passengers. I don't know how we shall find you a cabin, unless Mr. Flanagan will give you his."

"Me!" gasped Flanagan. "Give him mine!"

"Unless," she added, "Mr. Mumford would care to give his up instead."

Mumford said nothing ; in fact neither of those two men said anything while I kept looking at the sea. If they had done I rather think it would have been no place for a young lady. Then, when I drew myself a little straighter, as the violence of the paroxysm abated, Flanagan suggested,

"Let him go into the forecastle with the men. They'll find a shakedown for him somewhere."

"We can't possibly do that," she said. "Mr. Briggs is a passenger."

"A passenger?" growled Flanagan. "He looks as if he was a passenger. Where's his baggage?"

"In a manner of speaking he's a friend of the owners. He came on board in a hurry."

"Yes," agreed Flanagan, "there's no doubt he came on board in a hurry. I saw him come."

The Skipper's Daughter

"Same here," said Mumford.

"There's a kind of a cabin next to mine," remarked Miss Ruddock.

"That's where your father keeps his onions."

"I know." She seemed to sigh. "I wish my father wasn't so fond of onions, and wouldn't insist on bringing quite such a quantity with him to sea. It was always a bone of contention between him and my mother, especially when he wanted to store them underneath her bed." Those two men were silent. For reasons I could not be sure, but I daresay they were looking at her with what they meant to be sympathetic eyes; pity they should have been two pairs of odd ones. "Still I think," she went on, "that there might be room for Mr. Briggs, in spite of the onions. It isn't as though he had much luggage, or was very big."

"Big?" said Flanagan. "There's nothing to him."

"To speak of," said Mumford.

"Do you think," she asked, "that you'd mind sharing a cabin with my father's onions?"

I couldn't answer her, not just at the moment; I had to, whether I minded or not. She had forgotten to mention that besides onions enough to season all the geese in Leadenhall Market there were a few bushels of potatoes, turnips, carrots, and odds and ends like that. It seemed that Captain Ruddock had a small plot of land of his own, and that he made a rule of taking all

Sam Briggs : His Book

that it produced with him to sea. As that cabin was not much more than a cupboard when that produce was inside there was not what you might call much room for a passenger as well. Not that it made much difference to me. I could sleep on top of a sack or two of onions as well as anywhere, when I wasn't ill, which wasn't often. Let no one talk about a life on the ocean wave for me ; I am not built for it, and never shall be either. When the sea was like a pond, and there was not wind enough to move the ship, as it was once, I did manage to keep pretty well, but directly there was sufficient breeze to push us along, back it all came again. I have had some times in my life ; but that was the time. The crew made game of me, the tricks they were up to ! Even the very cabin-boys ! The captain treated me as if I was a cut between a man and a monkey. When she was not making her sides ache with laughing Miss Ruddock pretended to make love to me, just enough to drive Flanagan and Mumford into punching my head, which they did do more than once. The third mate was an unhealthy kind of man who used to tell me stories which curdled my blood, about ships which were years at sea, without food or drink, until the crews had to eat each other ; he told me that one voyage he ate as many as seven. Whether he was a liar or not it was horrid to listen to him ; especially with a delicate stomach.

At last it came to a crisis. One evening I was

The Skipper's Daughter

at my usual place, leaning over the side of the ship, when Miss Ruddock came up to me and said,

“Sam”—everyone called me Sam, even the cabin-boys; I was not treated with an atom of respect by anyone—“would you like to get on land?”

“Would I like to get on land!” I groaned. “Would I!”

There had been what they called a choppy sea on, and I had been very bad that day. I was beginning to feel that there was nothing left of me but skin and bone.

“Suppose,” she said, “we were to fly together.”

She was fond of talking like that when I felt ill.

“I feel like flying,” I remarked, “with anyone.”

“But, Sam,” she held my arm a little tighter than I liked; that young lady was close on six feet high, and so far as strength went, she might have been made of steel wires; “I am in earnest. Are you happy on board this ship?”

“I’m that happy that if ever I do get off it I don’t care if I never see another ship for twenty years.”

“And do you think that I am happy?”

“I lay a shilling you’re happier than I am. Because of an old woman you haven’t been unexpectedly chucked on board as if you were a bundle of old rags, and you don’t have to get

Sam Briggs : His Book

what sleep you can in a cupboard full of onions."

A sound came from her which might have been laughter, but perhaps I was mistaken ; her voice was steady enough.

" Ah, Sam, with all your knowledge of the world after all how little you can read what is in a woman's heart. If you only knew what is in my bosom now you'd tremble."

" I am trembling now," I told her, " with the cold."

" Ah, Sam," she said, and slipped her arm round my waist, " how practical you are."

" Stop that," I observed. " It's Flanagan's watch. When you've gone he'll give me one."

" What does it matter if he does? "

" It mayn't matter to you, but it does to me. It makes all the difference who he's hitting."

" Sam, to-morrow, the day after, in a day or two, it all depends upon the winds and tides, we shall be within reach of land. When we are will you fly with me? "

" Why can't I fly alone? What's the matter with your stopping on the ship? It seems to me you're all right here. How about your father? To say nothing of Flanagan and Mumford? There'd be blue murder if I was to fly with you ; peace is what I want, and dry land."

" You cannot go without me."

" Why not? Who's to stop me? You don't

The Skipper's Daughter

mean to say they'd try to stop me if I express a wish to go ashore. They can't treat me as if I was a prisoner. It's against the law."

"They might; they might shut you in the cupboard with the onions, then what could you do? But it isn't only that; we shan't go close enough to land to enable you to step ashore; we shall stay outside the harbour mouth. Can you swim?"

"Not a stroke."

"Can you row?"

"I tried my hand once on the lake in Battersea Park, but I can't say I made much of a hit of it. I know the chap who had the boats wanted me to pay four and sixpence for the paint he said I'd knocked off, but I didn't pay, not much."

"Then you can't go without me. I will take you ashore in my father's gig." I thought a gig was a thing on wheels, but I said nothing; I had learnt a thing or two since I had been at sea. She went on, "the fates are on our side; I will row you ashore with my own two hands; we will fly together. Hush! here comes Mr. Flanagan."

I went; I did not want to talk to Flanagan. He had a way of talking, that man had, which I did not care for. If I had been within reach of a policeman I could have got him six months more than once for the way he'd handled me.

Sam Briggs : His Book

It blew hard the next day ; I knew it blew hard because I did not feel like leaving that cupboard with the onions. A slip of paper was passed inside just as it seemed to me that it was blowing hardest. As you might put it, between the blows I had a look at it.

“ We are not yet in sight of land. A storm is raging. Bear up.”

It was in a woman's writing ; I guessed it was hers ; like most of the things which had come my way from her I did not find it cheering. There was no need for her to say a storm was raging ; I knew it without her telling me, and without going up on deck to see. It raged all that day and night, and the next day too. There were the onions, potatoes, carrots, turnips, and me, being pitched about together ; I did not notice then, I was otherwise engaged, I dare say they did not notice me. A sack of onions burst just over where I was. I could not help remarking them as they came down, but as just about that time I seemed to be standing on my head, a trifle like that made no difference to speak of. Another slip of paper was passed inside.

“ Yet no land. The storm still rages. Keep a stout heart.”

That was all I was keeping, if I was keeping that ; everything else was going from me. Later in the day, as the night came on, it grew calmer, and although I had never moved outside that

The Skipper's Daughter

onion store, I did not need anyone to tell me a little thing like that. Just as I had come to the conclusion that I had better go in search of something to supply the place of all that I had lost, the door was opened, and there she was looking for me among the produce of her father's plot of land.

"Sam," she said, "how strong it smells of onions."

I made no direct reply, the observation was too ridiculous. I had long ago decided that I should smell of nothing else but onions for the whole of the rest of my life.

"I'm mixed up with these vegetables," I remarked, "so that I'm not quite sure which is me and which is them; but if you lend me a hand I daresay I'll find out."

She pulled me out of the cabin, and my arm nearly out of the socket.

"Sam," she said, "the time has come."

"If you felt like I do you'd know it. You don't happen to have any food about you?" I inquired.

"Food! How can you talk of food at such a moment?"

"One reason is because I'm starving. A crust off last week's loaf wouldn't be amiss."

"Come up on deck." I went up on deck, not exactly because I wanted to, but because she hauled me; I had scarcely done anything for any other reason since I had been on board the

Sam Briggs: His Book

Eleanora. It was dark, but it was steady; the deck did not keep jumping up at you. She led me to the side, and pointed. "See! there are the lights of the city—land at last!" It appeared to me that the lights were a good distance off, and so I told her. "Not so far as you think," she said. "I have strong arms and a good boat; I will row you there before you know it; we will fly together. Look! there is my father's gig." I could see that in the water, close to the ship's side, was some kind of a rowing boat, a long way down it seemed. She went on, taking as it struck me, a good deal for granted. "Everything is ready; here is a rope made fast; we have only to slip down it; in a couple of seconds we shall be in the boat, and away. You go first."

Certainly there was a rope, and so far as I could make out, it was tied tight; yet I did not altogether care for her idea. The side of the ship, seen in the darkness, was like a great, high wall, with a lot of damp at the bottom. I never had slipped down a rope, or ever wanted to. How was I to tell I should not slip down it faster than I meant; to say nothing of the chance of finding the water at the end of it, instead of her father's gig.

"Excuse me," I observed, "but this is a game which I don't believe I'm any good at."

"Then I'll go first," and she did. She was over the side in a twinkling, and went skimming

The Skipper's Daughter

down that rope as if she had been doing nothing else since the day she was born. Presently she sang out, "It's all right, Sam, now you come!"

Somehow I was no more disposed to slip down that rope than I had been before. Seeing the style she did it had not braced me up a bit. I was no monkey on a stick, and never should be. I leant over the edge to explain.

"If you don't mind, and it's all the same to you," I said, "I'll wait until to-morrow before I go ashore."

What had struck me was that there did not seem to be anyone on deck, no watch or anything; it was all deserted. But all of a sudden she gave a little whistle, and if one of those cabin-boys did not come running forward, a great hulking lout they called Bolter; he had a rope in his hand, and if, without so much as a word to me, he did not begin tying it round my middle.

"Look here," I said, "stop it!" I said. "I've stood enough from you, and I'm going to stand no more, so you take my tip and don't you go too far. There's land in sight, and if there's a law I'll have it, and I warn you that before you're very much older—"

But I might as well have talked to the wind for all the notice he took; they had their own way of doing things on board the *Eleanora*. He went on tying that rope round me as calmly as

Sam Briggs : His Book

if I were making no remarks at all, and if he did not lift me off my feet, and hoist me over the side really before I hardly knew it. And when I felt myself being lowered through the air, with that rope cutting me in two, and the side of the ship scraping off me all there was to scrape, the thought of what would happen to me if that there Bolter let go, kept me from even squealing. When I found myself at last in the boat at the bottom, and I came into it with a pretty hard bump, I seemed to go queer all over ; by the time Miss Ruddock had untied me I was in a regular temper.

“Oh Sam,” she said, “I am so glad you’ve come.”

“That may be,” I answered. “But all I know is that I was chucked on board that ship, and now it seems to me that I’ve been chucked off it. There’ll be more heard about this than some people may think. Here! what’s happening?”

The boat had begun to rock from side to side like a seesaw.

“I’m only settling in my seat, Sam, and getting out the oars. But what does it matter if we are upset? We shall be drowned together.”

“I’m not keen on being drowned, either with you or without you if you don’t mind. I’m still young.”

“I’m not old.”

The Skipper's Daughter

"You may not be, but you're older than I am."

"You—you little wretch!" There was a change in the tone of her voice which surprised me. "There are not two years' difference between us."

"There may not be. I say nothing."

"How old do you suppose I am?"

"Couldn't say. I've no doubt that you look younger."

"I don't see that there's any necessity for me to do that. I'm twenty-three."

"I'm sure you are."

"What do you mean by that? Who's been telling you tales about me?"

"I happened to overhear someone saying that you'd been cruising about with your father for more than twenty years."

"Sam Briggs! no wonder everybody loves you! It wouldn't take much for me to drop you overboard."

"Of course," I observed, thinking I might have gone too far, and knowing that she could do as she said whenever she wanted. "I felt that, in that case, you must have been going about with him when you were in long clothes. I certainly should never have set you down as more than twenty; hardly that, indeed."

She was silent; what you might describe as meaningly silent. And I was silent. In fact, we both of us were silent. I was rather inclined to

Sam Briggs : His Book

wish that I had kept my tongue between my teeth. It's a delicate matter to talk to a young lady about her age, especially in such a position as I was then. On she rowed, and on, and on, and on without our appearing to be getting nearer anything.

"I suppose," I ventured to inquire, "you do know where you are going."

"Oh yes," she said, what you might call grimly, "I know where I'm going."

I tried to put a touch of lightness into my voice when I spoke again ; it required an effort to do it.

"I need hardly say, Miss Ruddock, that in your hands I know I'm perfectly safe."

"Don't you speak another word to me, Sam Briggs," she said, "or you won't be so safe as you think."

The way in which she said it was sufficient ; after that I was dumb. I had once seen her handle Bolter ; the way in which she had done it, considering that it was Bolter, did me good ; but I did not want her to start to handle me ; at least, not just then.

On she rowed, and on. At last we were creeping alongside what seemed to be a tremendously high wall ; so high that, in the darkness, from where we were you could not see the top. The water was perfectly calm. Suddenly the side of the boat struck against something ; she stopped rowing. Then she spoke.

The Skipper's Daughter

"There are the landing steps. Jump ashore, Sam Briggs."

"Excuse me," I replied, groping and stumbling about as best I could, "being a stranger in these parts, and the light being what it is, I can't pretend to do much in the way of jumping; but, at the same time—"

She gave me a push; I believe with the end of an oar. I found myself with one foot on what appeared to be a slippery stone step. Before I could get the other clear the boat was off. I all but fell back in the water; it was only by good luck that I kept myself from doing it.

"Good-bye, Sam Briggs," she said, after I had been some seconds wondering if I was going to fall. I could hear her oars, though I could not see her. "I am going back to the ship." The treachery of her, after proposing that we should fly together. Not that I wanted to fly with her, but the deceit of it. Then her voice came from further off. "I'm going to marry Mr. Flanagan," she said.

"It was Flanagan," I shouted, "who told me that you'd been cruising about with your father for more than twenty years!"

Language came back to me through the darkness which, especially considering it was a young lady who was speaking, I should be sorry to repeat.

A DIP IN THE BRINY

THE morning I left Sand-by-the-sea, my last holidays, I had a bathe in the sea. It was a thing I had not done before ; but there are people who, when they know you have been to the seaside, ask you how you like sea-bathing, and I thought that next time they asked me it might be just as well if I was in a position to tell them, so that's how it was. My time was up at my boarding-house after breakfast, and as I had arranged to go up to town by the one o'clock train I carried my bag round to the station, and off I started for a bathe. Having an appointment with a young lady at eleven-thirty I could hardly be said to have much time, but then, of course, I did not expect that the bath would take me long ; I just wanted enough of it to enable me to pass an opinion. A nice young lady she was, of the name of Hopley—Gladys Hopley. I had had a few words with a young gentleman who was staying at the boarding-house only the night before about her, of the name of Carter—Horatio Carter. Although she had known him all the time she had been down there, and she had been there four days

A Dip in the Briny

that Tuesday, and she was going to stay a fortnight, she had thrown him over, in a manner of speaking, in favour of me. When he heard she was going to meet me on the parade, and was going to see me off by the train, some of the remarks he made to me I should be sorry to repeat, though one of the things he said almost caused me to smile.

“Going to meet you on the front, is she? I shouldn’t be surprised if, when she sees you on the front, she doesn’t want to know you.”

The idea of Miss Hopley not wanting to know me was so ridiculous that, of course, the only thing to do was to treat him with that contempt which is implied by silence, which I did.

My intention was to bathe off the sands, and that for two reasons. In the first place bathing machines are so public, and the first time you go into what I have heard described as the “boundless deep,” you do not want to have all the world looking on at you. My second reason was that bathing off the sands is cheaper. When you are at the seaside money does fly, and when it comes to having to count your cash in pence it is not likely that you want to spend any more than you can help on such a thing as a bath. So I made up my mind that I would go down among the breakwaters, where I had been given to understand people did go, and take a towel, and have my bath for nothing. Somehow when I got there I did not seem so keen as I had been.

Sam Briggs : His Book

However, after making up my mind about a thing like that, I was not going all that way for nothing, so I did go in, and when you were once in the water it was not by any means so bad, so long that is, as you did not go in too far. There was something treacherous about that coast, because once a wave came all over me, even wetting my hair ; if it had carried me off to sea I might have been drowned for all there were about to save me. That gave me quite a turn, and when I got back to where it was really shallow I sat down to think things over. That was the best part of it, where it was shallow. It was a blazing hot day, so that the water was not what you could call cold, and so long as I sat down where I could sit down in comfort it seemed to me that sea-bathing was a thing which could not do anyone much harm ; though, on the whole, my impression was that there is more fuss made about it than there need be.

When I had had enough I started off up the sands—though why they were called sands, when they were mostly great stones, which were uncommonly nasty walking when you had nothing on your feet, is more than I can say—meaning to get back inside my clothes. I had left them by one of the breakwaters, on the side farthest from the town, so that I might be more private like, but when I got to the place it seemed as if I must have made an error. My clothes were not to be seen. There was nothing like them anywhere. I must have mistaken the breakwater ; there was

A Dip in the Briny

a lot of them about. And yet I did not see how I could have done it. I had walked straight down from that breakwater right into the sea. I could have betted that I had not gone five yards on either side of it, and as the next one was fifty or sixty yards away, at least, how I could have mistaken one for the other was beyond me altogether. And yet my clothes certainly were not there, nothing like them. About the place where I could have declared I left them were what looked like some left-off garments of somebody else. Very much left off, they were. I hardly cared to stand too close, to say nothing of touching them. Positively offensive they struck me as being. I must have been wrong about that breakwater, at least that was what I told myself, because if those old rags had been there when I undressed I certainly should have given it the cold shoulder, if I had had to walk a mile to the next. At the same time if that was not the one, which was? It was not the one nearer the town, because I peeped over to look, and there were no clothes there. Between me and the next there were great rocks, and pools of water, and I remembered most distinctly saying to myself at the sight of them, "No, thank you, I'll stop where I am," and I stopped. Therefore, if it was not the one on the right, and it was not the one on the left, which was it? That was the conundrum.

My towel was there all right, folded up on the

Sam Briggs : His Book

bottom rail of the breakwater, where I had put it, and that made it queerer than ever. Because, if my towel was there— Suddenly it struck me that there was something queer ; because, as I was about to remark, if that was the breakwater by which I had left my towel, why was it not the one by which I had left my clothes ? It appeared to me that was a nut which wanted cracking. It was no use telling me that I had put my towel by one breakwater, and my clothes by another. It was not likely that I should go wandering about those rocks with nothing on so that my towel could have a breakwater all to itself. I knew better. I am not that sort. Therefore if my towel was there my clothes ought to have been there ; and if they were not there, where were they ? That was what I wanted to know.

Just as I was casting my eyes about to look for some way out of the puzzle I saw some ladies walking along the shore, as if they were out for a stroll. A towel is not much, but I had to do what I could with it, and hide close down to the breakwater till they were past. Very nice that was for me. While I was down there wishing that I had never let such a silly thing as the idea of bathing get into my head, it struck me all of a sudden, suppose my clothes had been stolen ? Those ladies were passing just as the idea came to me, yet it gave me such a shock that I almost dropped the towel. I know, in the first horror of the thought, I brought my toe against the

A Dip in the Briny

sharp corner of a great stone, with a degree of violence which nearly made me yell. My word, if they had been stolen, I should be in a pretty pickle; with my bag up at the station, with all my other clothes inside it, and Miss Hopley expecting me on the parade at eleven-thirty. What to goodness was I to do?

The more I thought the more I saw how it might have been done. Let anyone ever catch me bathing again! I had sat in the shallow water for perhaps ten minutes, or it might have been a quarter of an hour, looking out to sea; anything might have happened behind my back without my knowing. Unsuspicious as a newly-born baby, I had never once thought of looking round; and all the time some scoundrel might have been helping himself to my clothes, while I was telling myself that, after all, sea-bathing was not so bad. It made me want to knock my head against a rock to think of it. If the villain had taken my clothes, were those things I had noticed his? My goodness if they were! Directly those ladies were far enough off to make it safe for me to move, I had another look at them. I do believe that never, on any tramp, did I see such things as they were, for being old, and ragged, and dirty. The idea that the party who had worn them, was now wearing mine, made me go over so queer that I sat down, without thinking, on a great heap of stones, which cut me as if they had been so many knives.

Sam Briggs : His Book

Seven articles there were altogether. One of them might have been a shirt, or it might not ; there was not enough of it to show, and it looked as if it had not been washed for ages. Another was perhaps once a pair of trousers, a good many years ago. Another, about the same period, might have been a coat ; what either of them was like when they were new I would have defied anyone to guess. There was a thing which might have been meant for a neck-tie, or a handkerchief, or a duster, but which I would not have touched with a pair of tongs. There was what appeared to be the remains of what had once been some sort of a stocking ; it seemed as if the party who owned the things had only worn a stocking on one leg at a time ; and there were two odd boots, one laced, the other buttoned ; the laced one had hardly any sole, and the buttoned one no buttons, and holes all over it.

An agreeable position I was in, when it came to considering. Not only had I to meet a young lady on the front, when all the people were there, at half-past eleven, but I had my train to catch at one. I had lost my money, which was not of much consequence, because I had had precious little to loose ; but what was a good deal worse, I had lost my ticket. How was I going to get up to town without a ticket ? And how was I going to get to the station, anyhow, to explain ? To say nothing of meeting Miss Hopley on the front. I could not bear the notion of getting into those

A Dip in the Briny

filthy rags ; yet I should have to get into something, and that soon. I could not walk about in a towel, and time was moving.

I had brought myself to the point of picking up the things which were meant to be trousers, when, all at once, something caught my eye ; though perhaps I should say someone. I kept looking about, to see if anyone came in sight, hoping if it was a man that he might turn out to be a friend in need ; though how, under the circumstances, he was going to do that, was more than I could tell, because I could scarcely ask him to let me have the garments he was wearing as a loan, or even any satisfactory part of them. The breakwaters were high, a good deal higher than I was, so that I could not see far, and I was giving up all hope, when, happening to glance round the end of the one behind which I was, I saw a party running down the shore towards the sea, for a bathe. The idea struck me, there and then ; what about his clothes ? Someone had borrowed mine, and left his own in exchange ; what about borrowing his, in my turn, and passing those others on ? It was not a time for splitting straws, as the saying is. No one could expect me to hang about that breakwater all day long ; and I could hardly march into the town in nothing but a torn towel. It was a case of needs must. Only let him go far enough into the sea, that was all ; we would do all the talking that had to be done afterwards.

Sam Briggs : His Book

He was not my sort, that party, that was plain, he had been into the sea before, luckily for me. He walked right straight out into it, as if he knew all about it, and when the waves began to tumble over him he began to swim. He could swim—like a whale, or whatever it is that can swim.

Right out to sea he went. I watched him for a moment or two, and then, when it was quite plain that he could not see what was taking place behind him on the land, unless he had eyes at the back of his head, I nipped from my breakwater across to his. It was not so easy as it sounds, running bare-footed and bare-everything else, across those rocks and stones, with a bundle of rags in your arms, and having to use one eye to notice if there was anyone in sight on land, and the other to make sure that he was not looking round in the sea. I had one or two nasty accidents by the way, short though it was, coming down a regular sprawler once, over a slippery seaweed-covered rock, with sharp points all over it, which hurt me something cruel. But that was not a moment to think about whether I was hurt or not ; I had other things to occupy my attention. When I got to the other breakwater there was his clothing piled in a neat heap. I dumped the rags which had been palmed off on me down by them, and started dressing for all I was worth ; fortunately the other party was still swimming out and out, and had never once looked back.

A Dip in the Briny

It did not take me long to find out that he was a good many sizes larger than I was. It is not easy to find a man of my figure, but he really was almost beyond anything, especially considering that I had to get into what were supposed to have fitted him. Half a glance was enough to show that his trousers were simply a good six inches too large in every direction both as regards length and girth. And then the pattern of them, a check which would have looked out of place even on an elephant. As I thought of my pearl grey ones, with the light blue stripe running down them, I nearly felt like crying. When I was inside that pair I was absolutely lost. And his braces, I never had so much trouble with anything as I had with that man's braces. There was no getting them short enough, even knotting them was practically no use, to say nothing of the fact that going about in a pair of braces with half-a-dozen knots tied in them is not what you might call comfortable, even at a pinch. Then his shirt, it would have made three of mine. His collar as near as possible went twice round my neck. And the height of it! It was no use pretending to attempt to wear a collar like that, it could not be done. To crown the matter his necktie was only a made-up green and yellow bow. When I thought of the sight I was making of myself, with Miss Gladys Hopley probably waiting and watching for me on the parade at that very

Sam Briggs : His Book

moment, I wondered if, after all, it would not be better to get inside those rags. His socks, and boots! I take a small seven—I should say he took a large fourteen; I like mine pointed, his were nearly as broad as they were long; as big, ugly, shabby a pair of old brown boots as ever I saw, they were; soles about an inch thick, and nails in them. Until I had them on I could not have thought the human foot could have been so disfigured. His waistcoat almost came down to my knees, and his coat to my heels; after I had turned the sleeves up eight or nine inches I still could not find my hands. Then his hat, that was the crowner! It was a curly brimmed white topper, with a mourning band nearly up to the top. If the idea of that was to hide the stains it was thrown away, that hat was stains all over. What manner of man it could be who wore a hat like that at Sand-by-the-sea was beyond me altogether, unless it was a 'busman who was down for the day, and had brought his hat with him, or someone in the circus line. Perhaps he was a nigger minstrel. The idea of me being inside a nigger minstrel's rig-out gave me the creeps all over. I believe that at the very idea I should have cast it from me, and taken up with those rags in spite of everything, if suddenly something had not almost made me drop right out of it without any trying. Just as I was least expecting it a voice, that was a voice, came and nearly cracked the drums of my ears, like a foghorn,

A Dip in the Briny

not that I have had much experience of foghorns, but there it is.

“Here, you there! What the something are you doing with those clothes of mine?”

The party out at sea, without my noticing, through being otherwise engaged, had turned, and was swimming back to land, and seeing something was going on, was shouting at me in just the sort of voice you would have looked for in a man who owned such clothes as those. It gave me such a start that, without thinking, I clapped on that old white hat; it came down over my nose, so that I could not see an inch before my face; in the sudden darkness I caught the toe of his boot under a rock, and over I went into a pool of water, among the shrimps and seaweed. By the time I was up again, and out of it, he was shouting away, using language it was awful to listen to, in a tone of voice which was more like a bellow than a human organ. It was plain that that was no place for me. I did not want to stop and argue with a man who could so far forget himself as to talk like that, so off I started to run, at least as close an imitation to a run as could be managed over that class of country, and in that style of suit. I had not gone half-a-dozen yards when he got into shallow water, and I heard him come splashing after me, never ceasing for a moment to address me in language I should be sorry to describe. Talk about steam, I put it on, with his white top hat in one hand, and

Sam Briggs : His Book

holding on, so to speak, to his clothes with the other. Some people, considering the condition he was in, when they got out of the water, would have made for a breakwater, or fetched a towel, or something ; but not him, he came tearing after me as if he had been dressed for a ball.

“What are you doing with those clothes?” he kept on demanding, as if it was not plain for anyone to see what I was doing with them. “Take them off!” he shouted, as if I was likely to. “You wait till I catch you!” which was the very thing I was doing my best to show him, and everyone else, I had no idea of doing.

What surprised me was the way he kept on following, running right past the board on which it was painted as large as life that no one was allowed to bathe that side of it except out of a bathing machine. Really I was that steaming hot I was beginning to wonder if he had no more sense of what was right and proper than to dash right on to the parade among the people. One thing was sure, if the running was bad for me it was a good deal worse for him ; how he got over those stones and rocks, and things at all was a marvel. I should think they must nearly have cut him to pieces. At last he did have about enough of them. He came a frightful cropper, I did not look behind to see, I judged from the sound ; and I fancy that about finished him. When he picked himself up he stood and

A Dip in the Briny

had a last shout at me, he did not try any more running. According to him I was everything that was bad, and more. Of course it was no manner of use for me to stop and try to explain that I had a young lady to meet on the front, to say nothing of having to go up to town at one, and that as soon as I could get into my own clothes I would send his back again. It was as clear as anything could be that he was in no state of mind to understand. Most unreasonable, not to say scandalous, were the remarks he kept addressing to me from behind my back.

Not that I was much better off than he was, not when you came to look things in the face. Those clothes of his were something awful—they weighed a ton—on a hot day like that ; so soon as I realised that he had given up the chase I had to sit down to get my breath. When he saw me doing that off he started again, so off I had to start, he would not give me a moment's rest. The consequence was that by the time I reached the parade, I was in a condition which you would have thought would have moved anyone to sympathy, anyone, that is, with a grain of feeling in them. Not that it did, certainly not ; it was quite the other way ; which only went to show that there is something in human nature which there did not ought to be. The first person I met was an old gentleman ; what you might describe as venerable ; a grandfather I daresay he was ; and what do you think he did? He

Sam Briggs: His Book

stopped and stared as if I was a don't-know-what, instead of my being a mere fellow-creature in an unfortunate situation. It so annoyed me that I stopped too, and I asked him :

“ Might I inquire what you think you are looking at? ”

And what do you think he answered, with, as you might say, one foot in the grave?

“ Why,” he said, “ that's just what I was wondering.”

As if he did not know ! Before I could address him again, as I should have done, and to the point, somebody laughed. Looking round there were two young ladies laughing, as if they saw something to laugh at, and staring straight at me. It was no good me asking if they noticed anything amusing ; it was the same thing the whole way along ; I should have had to put the same question to pretty nearly everybody. What I suffered as I walked along the parade in that other chap's things is not to be told in mere words ; no, I found out that day that some things are not. A young lady, who was sitting on a seat, said to me as bold as brass, as I was going by,

“ Would you mind putting on your hat, sir? ”

I was so taken aback when I suddenly discovered that I was carrying the horrible thing in my right hand, that, in my surprise, without thinking of what had happened when I put it on before, I put it on again, and over my face, and eyes, and nose it dropped once more. The way

A Dip in the Briny

the people laughed you would have thought there was something funny going on! By the time I had got it off again, which, in my annoyance, was not such an easy thing to do, the hat seemed to have got stuck. I was so hot with rage, as well as with ordinary heat, that I could have thrown it from me into the sea, only I knew they would have laughed more than ever if I had done.

All at once I ran up against a number of young fellows of the excursionist type, who, I daresay, had never been to a respectable seaside place before in their lives. When they saw me they began to fire off remarks at me, as if I had been one of their own class.

"Excuse me, sir," said one, "but would you mind informing me if you're a duke in disguise?"

"Can't you see," said another, "that the gentleman has got the family suit on; there's only that one among seven. It's not his fault if the rest of his family don't happen to be in it just now."

"What I should like to know," observed another, taking his hat off his ginger head to me, as if I had been his particular friend, "is, where did you get those boots from?"

Another of them replied to his ridiculous inquiry, as if, anyhow, it was any business of his.

"They're not boots," he said, "they're rafts. He walks on the sea in them instead of going out in a boat."

Sam Briggs : His Book

I hope I need scarcely state that I paid no more attention to them than if they had not been there ; though other people did. They seemed to be entertained by the silly, senseless things they said ; it is a curious fact how little it does take to amuse some people. I give you my word that they did not amuse me. I marched along, with my chest out and my nose in the air, just to show how I regarded with scorn and contempt those persons, I cared not what their age, or sex, or position in life might be, who did not know the mere elements of proper behaviour ! and the more I did it the more they nearly split themselves with laughing, really I thought some of them would have burst ; they held their hands to their sides and went at it in such a manner again and again. In the middle of all the giggling and guffawing who should I see, on a seat, not a dozen yards in front of me, but Miss Hopley. The sight of her gave me quite a turn. Owing to what I had been going through, and the way in which everyone was misbehaving, the simple truth is that she had escaped my memory altogether, and when I saw her I stared, and she stared too. I had a sort of dim impression that she stared even more than I did. In fact, as I walked straight up to her, the impression she made on me was that I had never seen such a look on a young lady's face before as there was on hers when she saw me coming. She went white, and red, and yellow, and green, and she put her hand to her side, and she gasped for

A Dip in the Briny

breath. Upon my word I thought she was going to be ill, so I made all the haste I could to explain, fanning myself with that white topper to see if I could get myself a little cooler, because it is no exaggeration to say that perspiration was making me nearly as wet as the sea had done.

“You must allow me to apologise, Miss Hopley,” I said, “if I happen to be a trifle late, but you’ve only got to look at me to see that it has not been all plain sailing since I saw you last ; the long and the short of it being that I have had a very nasty adventure, owing to my clothes having been stolen while I was bathing in the sea, in consequence of which, these being the only ones I could lay my hands on, I have had to make the best of them I could, which has been the cause of delay ; but if you won’t mind walking with me up to the station, where my other clothes are in my bag, I’ll tell you all about it as we go along.”

To say that I was amazed by the manner in which she received my explanation is to say absolutely nothing at all ; I was hurt. I could never have believed it of her. It cut me to the heart. She got up with a face on her as if I were something too dreadful for contemplation, and she drew herself away, and her skirts as well, and she said, in a tone of voice compared to which freezing was heat,

“How dare you speak to me? A sight like that! You disgraceful creature! Make a laugh-

Sam Briggs : His Book

ing-stock of yourself, if you please, at this hour of the day, but don't you make a laughing-stock of me, because I won't have it. You have made a mistake in thinking that I would, Mr. Briggs."

There was quite a crowd gathered round us, boys and girls, and grown-ups and all, and somebody sang out,

"How dare he speak to her? yes, how dare he!"

And somebody else said,

"Oh Mr. Briggs!"

Then, of course, everybody laughed. I would have given the whole lot of them one for themselves if I had had my way. While I was still boiling who should come dashing through the crowd but Mr. Horatio Carter, red in the face he was, as if he had been running. At the sight of me he pretended to be struck all of a heap.

"My uncle and my aunt!" he cried. "What's this?"

The crowd roared; comical they seemed to think him. It was not like that he appeared to me. In the midst of the roaring I heard Miss Hopley say to him,

"Mr. Carter, might I ask you to give me your arm, and to take me away out of this?"

He gave her his arm, like a shot, trust him!

"With pleasure," he said, "delighted. I quite agree with you, Miss Hopley, that this is certainly no place for you." When she was hooked on to him if he had not impudence to turn round, and

A Dip in the Briny

say to me, with a grin all over, "Didn't I tell you, if Miss Hopley saw you on the front, that I shouldn't be surprised if she didn't want to know you?"

Before I could answer, or get myself together enough to give him a little what for, such a noise arose that I wondered if the whole world was going mad. People shouting and laughing, and a great heap of them coming along the parade towards us. In front of them was a man who was the most extraordinary figure of fun ever I set eyes on, it was him all the noise was about. At the first glance I thought he must be stark, staring mad, but at the second glance I knew, I understood, I recognized my clothes although he was bursting out of them; my clothes on a great giant of a chap who would have made two or three of me. He was carrying my boots, and socks, and tie, and collar, and hat, in his hand, it was altogether hopeless for him to think of trying to get into them, and what he had got into—after a fashion! did not cover half of him. The sight of my things on such an object as that made me so furious that I was just going to leap at his throat, when a creepy crawly feeling went all over me as I recognized in him the man who had been swimming out to sea while I borrowed his clothes, which, distinctly owing to no wish or desire of my own, I still had on. What was I to do? When his eyes came my way he might make mincemeat of me; it would be no trouble

Sam Briggs : His Book

to him to do it. It was right enough that if he would only give me time, it would be easy for me to explain that there really was no fault on my side, but then would he? From what I had seen, and more especially heard, of him, I had my doubts. My feeling was that he was one of the kind who would knock the stuffing out of you first, and then ask you if there was any reason why he should not do it afterwards. My desire being to have no more unpleasantness than I could help, having had more than sufficient to last me for once already, what I wanted to do was to hide behind the people, and then slip off unobserved. But I had no chance, not a morsel! To begin with my feet, in his boots, felt as if they were glued to the asphalt, and then before I had time to unglue them he was on to me. Made straight for me he did, and picked me up into the air as if I was a baby. The crowd roared more than ever, though what at beat me.

“Put me down!” I shouted. “You put me down!”

“Put you down?” he said. “Yes, I’ll put you down!”

If he did not, still holding me, jump off the parade on to the beach below, a height of eight or nine feet if it was an inch. It was a mercy we were not both of us broken up in half-a-dozen places; I know the shaking I got as we landed among the stones and pebbles made me think that

A Dip in the Briny

all was over. Then he went striding across the shingle with me tucked under his arm as if I were a small child ; as they watched him the people on the front screamed themselves hoarse, and no more than he deserved, making himself so ridiculous. I told him what I thought of him, as plainly as I could from where I was.

“I’ll pay you for this!” I warned him. “I’ll make you smart! You wait! You put me down, that’s all!”

But he would not wait, or put me down either, not he, he knew better ; not though I kicked, and struggled, and landed out with both my fists at what I could reach of him, for all I was worth. He paid no more attention to what I said or did than if I had not been there. We came to a bathing machine which a lady was just coming out of. If he did not take her by the hand and jump her down, without her saying a word about wanting to jump ; and then if he did not go into her machine, with me still under his arm. So soon as we were in he put me down, and he bolted the door.

“You little whippersnapper!” he said. “What tomfool game have you been playing? You come out of those clothes of mine before I strip the skin right off you!”

“It strikes me,” I replied, “it’s the other way about! What do you mean by getting into those clothes of mine? a man of your figure!”

“Do you think,” he asked, “that a man of my

Sam Briggs: His Book

figure wants to get into a lot of Tom Thumb's doll-clothes? But what else was I to try to get into when you'd walked off with mine? Smarty, aren't you? Here, just you hurry! I'm the Modern Hercules, the strong man; I've come here with the circus; we've got a parade at twelve; how do you suppose I'm going to get there without my clothes? Out you come!"

And out I did come; he got me out of his clothes faster than he got himself out of mine. The Modern Hercules, was he? I had heard the name. Now that I had encountered him again I noticed he looked it. As fine a figure of a man as ever I saw; with muscles like iron bands, and a chest that was a wonder. And much pleasanter than I had expected. In fact, as he was dashing into his clothes he burst into a roar of laughter which almost blew the roof off the machine.

"A nice sight," he said, "you looked in my wardrobe!"

"I don't know," I returned, "that you were much of a picture in mine."

"I should think not," he roared. "Fancy me in General Tom Thumb's costume! I should have liked to have seen myself walking along the front in it, it must have been a sight worth seeing. When they hear about it at the show they'll burst themselves!" That was what he was very nearly doing then, laughing, and talking, and dressing all at once, the bathing machine

A Dip in the Briny

shook as if it had been made of paper. "The next time," he went on, "you change clothes with anyone I hope they'll be a better fit. Good-bye, kiddie!"

Before I had a chance of answering back he had opened the door, and shut it again, and gone. Calling me kiddie! Me a grown man! So soon as he showed himself the people who had been waiting on the parade cheered and laughed; and if he did not shout at the top of his great voice—it was a voice!

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am obliged to you for this flattering reception. Allow me to introduce myself to you as the Modern Hercules, the strongest man now before the public. I form one of the innumerable attractions of Lord Alexander Cæsar's world-famed circus, the parade of which, through this town, as you will shortly see for yourselves, will present a scene of dazzling magnificence. Performances will take place this afternoon at three, and to-night at eight, when I trust, ladies and gentlemen, to have the pleasure of meeting you all again."

He was a smart chap, that Modern Hercules, turning the whole thing into a first-rate advertisement. But I was not going to hurry merely because he chose to, certainly not. Some of my clothes had suffered, and I am more particular about the way I put them on than some are. When there was a knocking at the door and a voice asked,

Sam Briggs : His Book

“ Now then, aren't you coming out of that ? ”

“ When I'm ready,” I said, “ and not before,” I said.

And I did not go before, not me. When I did go a seafaring man came up with his hand held out.

“ Ninepence,” he remarked, “ is the charge for that machine.”

“ Is it ? ” I inquired. “ Didn't the other gentleman pay ? ”

“ No,” he said, “ the other gentleman did not pay. No one's paid.”

“ Then,” I informed him, “ no one is going to pay. I did not go into that machine of my own free will ; I was carried in ; you ask anyone who saw it. You won't get ninepence out of me.”

And he did not.

I suppose that the people had scattered after the Modern Hercules came out, because, so far as I could judge, no particular notice was taken of me. Presently, when I got on to the parade, who should I see but Mr. Horatio Carter and Miss Gladys Hopley walking side by side. The sight of that fired my blood. I went straight up to them and I let fly.

“ Mr. Carter,” I said, “ you stole my clothes,” I said, “ while I was bathing in the sea,” I said, “ which was a low trick to play,” I said. “ In consequence of which let me tell you that you're no gentleman.”

He was going to say something when Miss Hopley interfered.

A Dip in the Briny

"Mr. Carter," she asked, "can it possibly be true that you stole Mr. Briggs' clothes?"

"It is true," I told her. "He did it to prevent my meeting you. You've only got to look at him to see it printed on his face."

Carter tried to carry it off with an air, which he did not do.

"Let me tell you, Mr. Briggs," he said, "that I did it to teach you a lesson, which I hope you've learnt."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Miss Hopley, in a manner which took him rather aback. "Then let me tell you, Mr. Carter, that I've learnt a lesson too; because a person who can play a trick like that is not my idea of a gentleman, so I'll trouble you not to address yourself to me again while I remain at Sand-by-the-sea. Mr. Briggs, if you are going to the station I'll walk your way."

And she did; we both of us walked it together. I explained to her the whole affair as we went along. I won't say she was not amused at certain parts of it, because she was; but she was amused in a ladylike way, and she saw Carter's conduct in its proper light. We had a sandwich and a small lemon at the station. Then she saw me off by my train. And just as the train was starting she was very nice to me indeed. If Mr. Horatio Carter had seen what took place he would have suffered.

THE LIMERICK

It's an extraordinary thing that you never do know your luck. Who would have thought that coming into what you might call a hatful of money would have been the cause of my very nearly losing every friend I have, to say nothing of their all wanting to knock me to pieces. I found the letter on the breakfast-table. Being a trifle late and in a hurry to catch the train, I tore it open anyhow, and took out what was inside between, as it were, a mouthful of bacon and a drink of tea. There were two papers. One was—well, I've taken a few cheques to the bank for the governor, so I ought to know a cheque when I see it, and if that wasn't one it looked uncommonly like it. But when I saw what was written on it I thought someone was having a game with me; "Pay Sam Briggs or order—Eighty-nine pounds eleven shillings and sevenpence."

"All right, my boy," I said out loud, "whoever you are don't you think you've got the laugh on me just yet; because we're not quite so simple

The Limerick

as we look." But when I opened the other paper I stared. According to it the Editor of *Tit-Bits* had much pleasure in forwarding me a cheque for eighty-nine pounds eleven shillings and sevenpence, which was the prize which had been awarded me for the last line which I had supplied to that week's Limerick. That was not just how he put it, but that was what it came to. I tell you that I was so taken aback that, before I knew it, I had knocked over my cup of tea. For the first moment I had no more idea of what it all meant than the man in the moon. Then, by degrees, a hazy recollection began to come over me, and a pretty hazy one it was. I remembered that at that party at Tom Dowling's there had been some conversation about what they called a Limerick, which was a thing I had never heard of in my life before; and—my word! If that was it, I knew, before I had had time to set the cup up straight in the saucer, that there would be more conversation about the cheque, by a good deal, than there had been about the Limerick. There was a bit there and then. While I sat there, with the cheque in one hand and the letter in the other, staring at them like a gaby, my sister Amelia came into the room.

"Sam," she cried, "what was in that envelope with *Tit-Bits* at the back?" I hope I have sense enough to get in out of the rain; and the sight of her was quite enough to start me cramming

Sam Briggs : His Book

the letter and the cheque into my jacket pockets. But she is so quick, is Amelia, that she had had a peep at the cheque before I could hide it away. "I do believe," she said, "that you've won a prize! You've got a cheque! Oh, Sam! For how much is it! Let me look at it!"

"Excuse me," I remarked, buttoning up my jacket, with the cheque safe in the right-hand bottom pocket, "but when I require your interference in my affairs I'll let you know."

"Sam Briggs," she went on, "you have won a prize. Mind, I'm going to have my share, and Tom's going to have his!"

"Your share! Tom's! Really, Amelia, you do run on." And so she did. "As I have to catch a train, if you'll be so good as to stand away from that door I shall feel obliged, unless, of course, you want to get me the sack."

She stood aside ; but she ran on.

"All right, Sam Briggs ; I know you! I'll buy this week's *Tit-Bits*, there'll be all about it there ; and, whatever it is you've won, you trust Tom to take care that you don't cheat either of us!"

That was a nice observation of your own sister's to have ringing in your ears just as you were starting out late for business on a rainy morning. What I wanted was a quiet think, so that I might have some idea of where I was ;

The Limerick

but no such luck, I never had the chance. As I was going down the street, who should come running down it but Bob Willett. I heard him shouting after me,

“Halloa, Briggs! Stop a minute!” I did not want to stop a minute—not much. But he was coming along at such a pace that even if I had taken to running too, he would have caught me. “Seen *Tit-Bits*?” he asked.

“No,” I told him, “I have not. And, if you’ll excuse me, I have to catch a train.”

“All right—plenty of trains! Briggs, we’ve won that prize!” I did not want to ask him what prize; I did not want to ask him what he meant by “we”; I did not want to have an argument with anyone. I could see plain enough that there was no call for me to say a word; he could talk enough for two.

“Look here! See that?”

He held *Tit-Bits* out open in front of me. I had no wish to see it; but my wishes were nothing to him.

“There you are—large as life!—my line!”

I did prick up my ears at that; his line! Was it his line? I had no more notion of whose line it was than the policeman over the way. I could see plain enough there was trouble ahead.

“Eighty-nine pounds eleven shillings and sevenpence that line of mine has won. I knew it was a topper! I say, Briggs, that cheque

Sam Briggs : His Book

ought to reach you to-day ; according to them, prize-winners get their cheques before they get the paper.”

I said not a word about what was in my jacket pocket. I desired to have no contention with him, or with anyone, out in the street. There would have been contention had I not been careful, as his next remark showed.

“Of course, according to law, the line being mine, the money’s mine, all the jolly lot of it ; but I’m generous to a fault, and always have been, so I’ll not only content myself with two-thirds, but I’ll make you a present of the other third, and I think, Briggs, you’ll call that handsome.”

I did not tell him what I thought, as a matter of fact I did not think anything ; I wasn’t feeling the same man I had been when I sat down to breakfast. Fortunately, his office lay in a different direction to mine, so I got rid of him before I reached the station, he promising that if he couldn’t come out with me for dinner he would look me up before I left the office ; and, anyhow, he would come round to my house that night. I did not gain much by getting rid of him, because when I came to the station there was Arthur Timmins standing in the doorway. He came rushing up at sight of me.

“I’m late for the office, and I’m in for a wiggling, but I couldn’t go without seeing you, my Samuel. Have you seen *Tit-Bits* ? ”

The Limerick

"Excuse me," I told him, "but I have to catch a train."

"Right O! We'll catch a train between us."

Down the stairs we rushed. There was one at the platform; we got on to it just as the doors were being shut, and the train started. He began at me before I had had time to find a strap, to say nothing of a seat.

"Samuel, that coupon of mine has won one of the prizes."

Coupon—what coupon? I did not know what he meant, so I as good as said.

"You remember that party Tom Dowling gave to celebrate his engagement to your sister?"

It did not look as if I was ever likely to forget it; but that I did not tell him. I kept it locked in my own breast.

"Very well, then, don't you remember I took my copy of *Tit-Bits* there with me?"

I did not. The truth was that, after a certain point, I had no clear recollection of what took place at the party; but it was not to be expected that I should be so simple as to say anything of that sort to him.

"Then I started talking about that week's Limerick, and one person suggested a last line, and a second person suggested a line; then they all started talking at once, and one thing led to another, and the end of it was that I cut the coupon out of my paper, and on my coupon a

Sam Briggs : His Book

line was written, and my coupon was sent in ; and now, as it's my coupon which has won one of the prizes, I'm fairly entitled to half of it, as you can see for yourself."

If Bob Willett was going to have two-thirds and I was going to have a third, and Tom Dowling was going to have one share and Amelia another, I could not see how he was going to have half, try as I might. I saw it still less when Charlie Harris came squeezing in at Earl's Court and began to make unpleasant remarks to me over another party's shoulder.

"Now, Sam Briggs, hand over that twelve pounds fifteen shillings and elevenpence !"

That's the way he began at me, right off! without so much as saying good-morning or asking how I was, as if I owed him money.

"When you explain," I said, "I'll talk to you."

"Come off of it!" was his reply. "Don't you try that on with me! You know very well what I mean! There were six of us put a penny each towards the postal order, and somebody else gave the stamp, and the understanding was that if anything came of it we were to cut it up between us."

"Now that Mr. Harris mentions it," exclaimed Arthur Timmins, who was on the other side of me, "I have a recollection of something of the sort."

"I should think you had ; it'd be funny if you

The Limerick

hadn't! So don't you play any of your tricks, Sam Briggs, because there'll be seven of us to talk to you if you do."

"You'll bear in mind, of course, Mr. Harris, that it was my coupon on which the line was written, cut out of the paper for which I'd paid; so as it was my coupon which won the prize it stands to reason that I'm entitled to come in with the rest of you, so that there'll be eight of us to share."

"I don't know anything about any coupon, and I don't see what a coupon's got to do with it anyhow. All I do know is that the understanding between us seven who put up the money was that, if anything did come of it, it would be equal shares."

It was unnecessary for me to enter into any argument; they did all in that line that anyone could have wanted. There was Charlie Harris hanging on to one strap, and there was Arthur Timmins hanging on to another, and there was me and half-a-dozen other gentlemen in between them, and if we had not been between them there is no knowing what might not have happened; we had hardly passed a couple of stations before Harris mentioned that he had punched men's heads for a good deal less than half of what Timmins had said to him. Timmins got out at the Mansion House, but Harris not only came on to Aldgate, but he walked with me right to the office door. I need not say un-

Sam Briggs : His Book

invited. What with the remarks he made and the insinuations he let drop; and what with my wanting to shift that cheque from the outside bottom pocket of my jacket to an inside one, where it might seem a little safer, by the time I did get to the office I had wished him at Jericho more times than I should care to count. There are two other clerks in the same room with me; before I had had time to hang my hat on its peg they were both of them at me. Percy Saunders was the worst.

“How about that eighty-nine pounds eleven shillings and sevenpence?” he asked. “When that cheque comes along don’t you forget my share, my Highland laddie!” Why he calls me Highland laddie beats me. Anything less like what I understand as a Highland laddie than I am I should say would be hard to find. But there is no knowing what the Postscript—which is what I call him—means by anything he says. It was like his impudence to speak to me at all, seeing that for some days we had not been on the best of terms, and that we had not so much as recognised each other the whole of that week. On he went, “Perhaps you are not aware, Mr. Briggs, that I was one of the subscribers to the postal order, and that, as such, I am entitled to a seventh share.”

“And I’m another of the subscribers,” said Augustus Brown.

The Postscript turned to Brown.

The Limerick

“Excuse me, Brown, but that is not according to my recollection.”

“Who cares for your recollection? Who ought to remember best—you or me? I tell you that I subscribed a penny.”

“I have put down the names of the subscribers on this piece of paper, as I remember them, and I believe I have them right. This is most important, you know; because, Briggs, when you do get that cheque you’ll merely be holding it in trust for us. Here’s my list: Tom Dowling, Miss Briggs, Bert Barlow, Frank Martin, Jack Carter, and me. We subscribed a penny each, and Phil Davis contributed the stamp.”

“I beg your pardon,” cut in Augustus Brown, “I contributed the stamp.”

“Just now you said you gave a penny.”

“Doesn’t it come to the same thing?”

“You mentioned a coin—one penny. You said nothing about a stamp.”

“Davis handed over a stamp, and for it I handed him a penny. Now do you see what I mean?”

“I see what you mean; but I know nothing about your handing any penny to Davis; that you’ll have to talk to him about.”

I made an observation.

“I noticed one name wasn’t on your list—Charlie Harris; he says he gave a penny.”

“Charlie Harris!—says he gave a penny! He did nothing of the kind!”

Sam Briggs : His Book

"I'm under the same impression," said Brown.

"All I can say is that he and Timmins came near to fighting about it in the train; and he walked with me right to this very door to tell me that he did about a hundred times over."

"I'm surprised at Harris, I really am. My recollection is that he was sitting in a corner of the room with one of the young ladies, and that he took no part in the discussion at all."

"I don't know where he was sitting; but I dare bet he didn't subscribe a penny."

"It strikes me, Briggs, that, about this, there's going to be what looks very like sharp practice somewhere."

"Is that meant for me?" asked Brown.

Then they started at each other, just as Timmins and Harris had done in the train. While they were still at it in came George Hopkins, as if he was in a hurry and short of breath.

"I can't stop a second," he began, but I've just seen that your name's in *Tit-Bits* as one of the winners in this week's Limerick, Briggs. Of course, that's rubbish; because, whatever part of it I may choose to give you, it's my eighty-nine pounds eleven and sevenpence, as I wrote the winning line."

"Do you mean to say," I asked, "that it was you who made it up?"

The Limerick

I was thinking of what Bob Willett had said about its being him.

“Not exactly,” he replied. “As a matter of fact, I don’t think it could be said that any one person made it up; we made it up between us. What I mean is that it was I who wrote it on the coupon. If you’ve any doubt you can go to the office and you’ll see it’s my writing; and as the prize goes to the one who wrote the winning line, that settles it. So I just looked in to warn you not to touch a penny of that cheque when you get it; or, as it’s against the law to compound a felony, I shall be compelled to take steps which I shall be very sorry to have to take against one who was once a friend.”

He did not stop to say any more; from the way he went it looked as if he was pressed for time. It was well for him he was. Saunders and Brown would have thrown things at him if he had stayed, to say nothing of me.

“Well,” cried Saunders, almost before he was out of the door, “he’s a nice chap, is George Hopkins—upon my word!”

“Oh, there are some nice chaps about,” said Brown. “You seldom have to go far to find one who’s ready to diddle his friends.”

“I don’t want to say anything to you,” began Saunders; if that was the case it was a pity he said so much.

The office work must have suffered, because they were still slanging away when Harold Parker

Sam Briggs : His Book

appeared. Parker is a shop-walker at one of the large drapers in St. Paul's Churchyard. If he is anything near such a big man as he fancies himself, I wonder he does not go about in a show. As he stood there in front of the empty fireplace, with his hands under the tails of his frock-coat and his top-hat a little on one side of his head, to look at him you would have thought he owned the street. The way he talks gives me the needle. They say he is president, or something or other, of the West Brompton House of Commons. I am sorry for them if he is.

"I have looked in, Mr. Briggs, with reference to an announcement which I have observed in the current issue of *Tit-Bits*—referring to the Limerick, Mr. Briggs, the Limerick. I note that your name is in the list of prize winners. In view of that fact I wish to point out to you that, as you are, doubtless, already aware, my sister, Miss Lily Parker, was one of the subscribers to the cost of the postal order with which the entrance fee was paid."

"Begging your pardon, Parker," struck in Saunders, "but your sister was nothing of the kind ; you're wrong."

"I'm not aware, Mr. Saunders, that I was addressing you. Kindly confine yourself to your own affairs. There were six persons who contributed a penny each and one who contributed a stamp. There then remained the question of the halfpenny with which to pay for the order. I

The Limerick

happened to be near my sister when, drawing out her purse, she observed to Miss Maud Simpson, who was beside her, 'I'll give one farthing, Maudie, if you'll give another.' And with that she took a farthing out of her purse, and Miss Maud Simpson took a farthing out of hers, and the two coins were added to the general fund. As the understanding was that all contributors were to be treated alike, I have to request you, Mr. Briggs, to see, when the prize money comes to hand, that my sister receives her proper share. There is another point. As the copy of *Tit-Bits* from which the coupon was taken was my property, that makes me a contributor, and I also become entitled to a *pro rata* share."

"I don't know, Mr. Parker," I told him, "how you make out that it was your copy of *Tit-Bits*, seeing that Arthur Timmins says it was his."

"The truth is," said Saunders, "there were three or four *Tit-Bits* about the room, as I specially noticed, and I'll defy anyone to say out of whose copy that coupon came."

Parker gave one little sideways glance at him—like a whale might look at a sprat.

"Once more, Mr. Saunders, I was not aware that I was addressing you. I can only warn you, Mr. Briggs, that, as regards that money, when it does arrive you will be in the position of a bailee, and that you will be held responsible for its equitable disposition. Unless my sister, as well as

Sam Briggs : His Book

myself, receive, in the course of the next few hours, our proper shares, you will receive from my sister's solicitor, as well as from my own, communications which will call you to a severe account. Good-day, Mr. Briggs."

With that he went, without anyone throwing anything at him either. He had hardly gone than back he came, with an envelope in his hand.

"I had almost overlooked the fact that Mr. Johnson entrusted me with a communication which I undertook, Mr. Briggs, to deliver to you."

He laid the envelope on the desk beside me, and that time he took himself off for good. Who Mr. Johnson was I had no idea, till I found this letter inside the envelope :

DEAR MR. BRIGGS,—On behalf of Miss Maud Simpson, to whom I am engaged to be married, I beg to inform you that she was one of the subscribers to the postal order, and therefore, she is entitled to her share of the prize. As I hope soon to become her husband, it is my duty to advise you that unless cash is forthcoming within twenty-four hours of this date immediate proceedings will be taken to enforce payment of same.

Yours obediently,
RICHARD JOHNSON.

"I shouldn't be surprised," remarked Saunders, when I had handed him this communication for him to read, "if there was quite a lot of excitement about this Limerick. It strikes me, Briggs, that you're in for a real good time."

The Limerick

I was, oh, I was; especially before the day was over. Six telegrams came to me before dinner; such a thing had never occurred in all my life before. Two of them were from Bert Barlow and Jack Carter, who both claimed to have subscribed a penny; and one was from Phil Davis, to mention that he had given the stamp—he said nothing about having had a penny for it from Augustus Brown. I pointed this out to Brown. He said that perhaps it had slipped his mind, but that he would soon recall it when they had had a little friendly talk together. I had my doubts about that myself; and so, I rather fancy, had Brown. Another telegram was from a man who was a total stranger to me, but who Saunders said, on the face of it, was an untruthful bounder, to say that he had given a penny. A party named Sheepshanks telegraphed to remind me that it was he who had written the winning line, and another named Everett had spent sixpence to convey the information in a hurry that it was out of his copy of *Tit-Bits* that the coupon had been cut. Altogether there was the prospect of as lively a time in front of me as anyone could reasonably desire.

But the crowner was to come—just as I was starting out for dinner, too. All the morning I had been looking for a chance to shift that cheque. I had a feeling that it would not be safe on me, and I had an idea of putting it in a certain spot of which I knew, where it would be

Sam Briggs: His Book

safer. If it was out of the reach of certain persons then I should be in a position to make proper terms before I consented to produce it. But not so much as the ghost of a chance to hide it had I had. I was saying to myself that now that I was going to dinner I would take certain steps which would make it safe, when, just as I was reaching down my hat, who should come in but Tom Dowling and Frank Martin. Directly I saw those two I would have made a bolt for it if I had thought that it would be any good ; but I knew that it would not. All I could do was to give them clearly to understand that I did not mean to allow them to take any liberties with me. It was Dowling who began—my brother-in-law that is to be ; a great six-foot elephant ! The very first words he said to me were these :

“Now then, Sam, you know what I’ve come for. Hand over !”

“Hand over ! Hand over what ? I’ve got nothing of yours that I’m aware of ; perhaps you’re forgetting who you’re talking to. As it happens to be my dinner-time, if you’ll stand aside from that door I’ll go and get it.”

Dowling turned to Martin, who is about two inches bigger than he is.

“You see, Frank ? I told you how it would be. The shortest way is, perhaps, the kindest.”

What he meant I had no notion ; and before

The Limerick

I could ask, if Martin did not take me from the back and Dowling from the front, lay me on my back on the top of my own desk, and start searching my pockets! And if Dowling did not take the cheque from out of one of my jacket pockets and the Editor's letter from another—and me helpless! If that was not highway robbery, I don't know what is; and so, as soon as they had taken their hands off me, I up and told them:

“You're thieves, that's what you are—dirty thieves! As for you, Tom Dowling, if you don't give me back that cheque I'll have the police to you!”

Oh, I did let them have it! But that Tom Dowling—what Amelia sees in him I never could understand—took no more notice of me than if I had not been speaking. He examined the cheque and the letter—my cheque and my letter!—then he let Martin have a look at them; then he coolly folded them up and put them in his pocket-book—before my eyes! Then he spoke to me.

“That's all right, Sam; don't you worry; and, if you'll take a hint from me, the less you talk about the police the better.”

“You don't mean to say,” burst out Saunders, who, with Augustus Brown, had been looking on at what was nothing else than an outrage, without so much as offering to lend me a hand, “that he's had the prize money on him

Sam Briggs : His Book

all the time? If that isn't a facer! You're a beauty, Sam Briggs, upon my word you are!"

Dowling took him on.

"Don't you bother yourself about Sam, Mr. Saunders; Sam's all right. When you've once got used to his funny little ways you'll find that there's no more harm in him than there is in a baby, only you've got to get used to them first. As there seems to be some slight difference of opinion as to what ought to be done with this nice little cheque which the Editor of *Tit-Bits* has been so good as to send along, I've intimated to all those ladies and gentlemen who honoured me with their presence on a recent auspicious occasion that I shall be very glad to see them at my place again to-night at half-past eight sharp, when very probably we shall be able to arrive at a common amicable understanding. Perhaps, Mr. Saunders and Mr. Brown, you may find it convenient to be there also; and Sam, if you're very good and promise to behave, we may let you come too."

Let me come! He could not have stopped me; wild horses could not have done it. I should have liked to have seen them try. I was there at half-past eight to the tick. They were all there, in Tom Dowling's front room; and there was not much room left for anyone else who might happen to drop in. As I went in someone said:

The Limerick

“Here’s the winner!” and some of them started to cheer.

I cared nothing ; I could not have had a lower opinion of them than I had already. Then Tom Dowling made what you might call a sort of speech.

“Ladies and gentlemen, it is not long since you did me the honour to assemble in this humble apartment for the purpose of offering me your congratulations on my engagement to a charming young lady.”

“Hear, hear !” said someone. It was certainly not me.

Amelia bowed. Fancy anyone calling her a charming young lady ! He would talk differently when he knew her as well as I did.

“You will remember that, after supper, someone introduced the subject of Limericks ; in fact, someone produced a copy of *Tit-Bits*, in which all and sundry were invited to try their skill in supplying a last line to an unfinished Limerick.”

“It was my *Tit-Bits*, Dowling, which was produced.”

This was Arthur Timmins.

“Excuse me,” cut in Harold Parker, “but it was mine.”

“Softly, gentlemen, softly,” said Dowling. “It appears that there were no less than four copies of *Tit-Bits* in the room that night, and the owner of each is under the impression that his

Sam Briggs : His Book

was the copy which was used. The four lines which were given were these :

There once was a lady whose hair
Was found on the back of a chair ;
It occasioned much talk,
She had gone for a walk—

What was required was a fifth line. I suppose some dozens of lines were discussed, and possibly a suggestion was made by nearly every person in the room."

"The line which was actually chosen," called out Bob Willett, "was my composition."

"You're mistaken," cried someone who was not known to me. "It was mine."

"My own impression, gentlemen, is that in its entirety it was no one's ; that it was a case of here a little and there a little ; and that, in a manner of speaking, it was concocted between us."

"Anyhow, I wrote the line upon the coupon."

"I believe, Hopkins, that you did, and for that you shall have credit. There then arose the question of the sixpenny postal order. Six pennies, two farthings, and one stamp were contributed by, I am given to understand, thirteen persons. It seems as if there must be something a little wrong somewhere, and that, in four cases, memory must be playing tricks."

Harold Parker put in his word.

"I trust that you are not suggesting, Dowling—"

"I am suggesting nothing, Parker, as, if you

The Limerick

will let me finish, you will see. On one point I believe we shall be all agreed. When the line was found there arose the question of who was to sign the coupon. My honoured friend, and, I trust, soon to be relative, Samuel Briggs, Esquire, was asleep on the couch, his slumber having possibly, in a measure, been induced by his polite attention to the negus at supper."

Some of them laughed. I do not know what at, I am sure. I was all ears. I had been wondering, ever since I saw it, how that cheque had got to me.

"He had taken no part in the discussion ; was in complete ignorance of what had taken place ; so I suggested that we should wake him up, and that he should sign. You will remember that he did not wake up in the very best of tempers ; that he had not the vaguest notion of what it was to which we persuaded him to affix, with rather a shaky hand, his signature ; and that, almost as soon as he had affixed it, he was asleep again—and snoring."

More laughter from some of them. It made no difference to me ; so far as I was concerned, those might laugh who liked. Now I understood how it was I had had such a hazy recollection of the whole affair. Strictly between ourselves, I was glad to find that I had had something to do with it ; I was beginning to be afraid that I had not. Dowling went on :

"I gathered together the pennies, the farthings,

Sam Briggs : His Book

and the coupon. The following day, with the money which had been subscribed, I purchased a postal order and dispatched the coupon. By what no one need regard, unless he likes, as a lucky fluke, our line has been adjudged one of the best sent in, and this morning a handsome cheque reached our dear friend Samuel. He feels, as we feel, that its coming to him was a mere form, and that, as it was a joint transaction, it should be regarded and treated as a joint cheque. There were twenty-two of us present on that occasion, and there are twenty-two of us present now. My proposition is that the proceeds of the cheque should be divided into twenty-two equal parts; that each of us should have one; and then there will be no room for feeling that anyone's claim has been slighted."

Before he had finished they were clapping their hands and stamping their feet and saying "Hear, hear!" So on he went again.

"I take it, ladies and gentlemen, from the kind way in which you have received my proposition that the sense of the meeting is in favour of it, and that it has been carried *nem. con.* Now, you public benefactor, Sam Briggs, if you'll oblige us with your signature a second time, this time on the back of this cheque, to-morrow I'll get it cashed; and in the course of to-morrow you will each of you receive a twenty-second part."

Oh, I put my signature on the back of the cheque; oh, yes, I always have been one to do

The Limerick

anybody a good turn, and I was quite willing to oblige Tom Dowling, in spite of the way in which he had treated me. Anyhow, I did get four pounds, and four golden sovereigns are quite worth having. Though, of course, when you compare them with eighty-nine pounds eleven shillings and sevenpence! Still, all the same, I did not do so badly, considering. And Tom Dowling himself had to admit that I had been a public benefactor.

OUTSIDE !

STACEY-LUMPTON wanted to go in a cab. I said that a 'bus was good enough for me. He looked me up and down as if I were some inferior kind of animal.

“ I'll pay for the cab.”

That settled it. I told him that I could not think of allowing such a thing. He brushed a speck of dust off the silk facings of his frock-coat. Then, with his pocket-handkerchief, he brushed the top of one of the fingers of his lemon-coloured kid gloves, where it had touched his coat.

“ But I've never travelled in an omnibus.”

“ In that case it'll be a new sensation, and a new sensation's everything! Read the daily paper ; it's the salt of life.”

“ But all sorts of extraordinary people travel in an omnibus ! ”

“ I should rather think they do. Why, the very last time I was on one the Archbishop of Canterbury sat on the seat in front of me, the Duke of Devonshire was on my right, a person high in

Outside !

favour at Marlborough House was just behind, while there was no one below the rank of a baronet in sight."

He looked at me, as he fumbled for his eyeglass, as if he thought I might be getting at him. Before he could make up his mind a "Walham Green" came lumbering towards us. Stopping it, I hustled Stacey-Lumpton in the road before he in the least understood what was happening.

"Now then, look alive ! Here's the very 'bus we want ! Jump up !"

I assisted him on to the step. He made as if to go inside. I twisted him towards the stairs. He remonstrated.

"My dear fellow, I really must beg of you to allow me to get inside this omnibus."

"Nonsense. You'll be crushed to death, besides being suffocated alive. There's plenty of room outside. Up you toddle."

I don't know about toddling, but urged, no doubt, to an appreciable degree by the pressure which I exercised from behind, he did begin to mount the stairs gingerly one by one. I followed him. When he was near the top I sang out to the conductor,

"All right !" The conductor stamped his foot. The 'bus started. Then, to Stacey-Lumpton, "Hold tight !"

He held tight just in time. He seemed surprised. "Good gracious ! I almost tumbled !

Sam Briggs : His Book

The omnibus has started! Tell him to stop at once, I'm falling."

"Not you. The police won't allow them to stop more than a certain time. They're bound to keep on moving. Shove along."

"This is most dangerous. I'm not used to this kind of thing. And the roof seems full."

"There are two empty seats in front there, just behind the driver; move on."

He moved on after a fashion of his own. He seemed to find the task of preserving his equilibrium, and at the same time of steering his way between the two rows of occupied garden seats, a little difficult. He struck one man upon the head. He seized a lady by her bonnet. He all but thrust the point of his umbrella into another person's eye. He grabbed an old gentleman by the collar of his coat. This method of proceeding tended to make him popular.

"Driver!" exclaimed the old gentleman whom Stacey-Lumpton had grabbed, slightly mistaking the situation, "This person is drunk. He ought not to be allowed in such a condition on an omnibus."

Stacey-Lumpton was too confused to remonstrate. He went floundering on. Presently he kicked against a box which a gentleman of the coster class had placed beside himself on the roof. In trying to recover himself he brought his hand

Outside !

down pretty heavily on its owner's hat. Said owner lost no time in calling his attention to the thing which he had done.

"Where do you think you're a-coming to? I shouldn't be surprised but what you thought this 'bus was made for you. You do that again and I'll send you travelling, and don't you seem to forget it neither."

Stacey-Lumpton had reached a vacant seat at last. I sat beside him. Immediately behind us was the coster. He had taken off his hat and was lovingly examining it. It was an ancient billycock, which had been in somebody's family for several generations. A friend accompanied him.

"If I was you, Jimmy," observed his friend, "I should make that cove pay for your 'at."

"Make 'im pay for it? He ain't got no money. Do 'e look as though 'e 'ad?"

"Well, I should make 'im give yer 'is 'at for yourn. He's bashed your 'at in, ain't 'e?"

Jimmy acted on the hint. Leaning forward, he thrust his reminiscence of a head-covering under Stacey-Lumpton's nose.

"I say, I don't know if you know that you've bashed my 'at in, guv'nor?"

Stacey-Lumpton raised his fingers to his nostrils.

"Take it away, sir; horribly smelling thing."

"Wot are you calling a 'orribly smelling thing? Wot would you say if I was to bash your 'at in?"

Sam Briggs : His Book

"I should bash it in if I was you, Jimmy."

"So I will if 'e don't look out, and so I tell 'im."

The gentleman whose coat had been grabbed still seemed unappeased, and still seemed labouring under a misapprehension.

"Persons who are in an intoxicated condition ought not to be allowed on public conveyances."

I turned to Stacey-Lumpton.

"I don't know if you are aware that you almost pulled that gentleman's coat off his back?"

The old gentleman's observations, although addressed to no one in particular, had been audible to all. Twisting himself round in his seat, Stacey-Lumpton proceeded to explain.

"I hope, sir, I didn't hurt you."

The coster chose to take this remark as being addressed to him.

"But you 'urt my 'at! I gave fourpence for that 'at not three months ago. 'Ow d'yer suppose I'm going to keep myself in 'ats?"

"If I have been so unfortunate as to damage your hat, sir, I shall be happy to present you with the sum of fourpence with which to provide yourself with another."

Jimmy's friend highly approved of this suggestion. He immediately proceeded to embellish it with an addition of his own.

"That's right. You give 'im fourpence, and you give me fourpence. That's what I call be'avng like a gentleman."

Outside !

Stacey-Lumpton failed quite to follow the line of reasoning.

“ Why should I give you fourpence ? ”

“ Why ? Because I asks for it. I suppose you can 'ear me. You bashes in my friend's 'at, and I'm 'is friend, and we shares and shares alike. As you treats 'im, you treats me. Ain't that right, Jimmy ? ” Jimmy said it was.

“ Quite right, 'Enry—it's quite right. If the gentleman is a gentleman 'e'll give you fourpence apiece—both the two of us. 'E looks a gentleman, don't 'e ? 'Is 'at wasn't never bought for fourpence, no, nor for three fourpences neither.”

A feminine voice was heard in the rear. It was the lady Stacey-Lumpton had seized by the bonnet ; she seemed to have been nursing a grievance.

“ And what about me ? I suppose it doesn't matter anything at all about me. Oh dear no ! I have had my bonnet tore almost off my head, and my hair too, but, of course, I am nobody. If a drunken wretch was to handle some wives some husbands would want to know the reason why. But if I was to be thrown right off the omnibust, and trampled under foot, my husband would sit still and never say a word—oh dear no ! ”

The husband in question appeared to be a stout individual who, seated by the lady's side, leaned

Sam Briggs : His Book

his chin on the handle of an umbrella. He seemed to consider that the remark was, at least, partially addressed to him.

“It was only an accident, Eliza.”

“Oh, of course, it was only an accident. Whenever anyone insults me it always is an accident. Some husbands wouldn't say it was an accident, but I have to look after myself, I have.” She immediately proceeded to do it. Raising her voice she addressed herself to Stacey-Lumpton. “Young man, I don't know if you happen to be aware that you've scrunched my new bonnet out of shape, and drove a hairpin through my head. Is that the way you always get on omnibuses?”

Stacey-Lumpton was all apologies.

“I beg ten thousand pardons, madam, but the fact is I am not accustomed to travelling on an omnibus, and I'm afraid—”

“Fares, please.” The conductor came along cutting the apologies short. “Your fare if you please, sir.”

“What is the fare?”

“'Arf-a-crown.”

This was Jimmy's friend.

“Where are you going?”

This was the conductor. I explained.

“We want a pennyworth.” I turned to Stacey-Lumpton. “I have no coppers. Have you got twopence?”

He produced a sovereign purse.

“Have you change for a sovereign?”

Outside !

This to the conductor, and the conductor was contemptuous.

“Change for a sovereign! I haven’t got change for no sovereign, unless you like to take it all in coppers.”

“Take change for a sovereign in coppers? What do you suppose I should do with a sovereign’s worth of coppers?”

“I don’t know nothing at all about it. I’ve got to do with ’em, haven’t I? Twopence, please!”

Jimmy’s friend interposed.

“You ’and me over the sovering. I’ll change it. I got sevenpence-’apenny.”

Jimmy chorussed.

“And I dessay I could make it up to a bob, and then we’ll give yer wot’s left next time we sees yer—eh, ’Enery?”

The driver, turning his head, nodded to his colleague.

“That’s all right, Tom. You give the gentlemen their tickets. I’ll see you get your twopence. The gentleman can owe it me.” He gave his whip an artistic twirl. “I’ve known myself what it’s like to have a sovereign and no change to be had—ah, and more than a sovereign, though you mightn’t think it to see me here.”

Not feeling inclined to be indebted to an omnibus driver for the loan of twopence, I suddenly discovered that I had two coppers.

Sam Briggs: His Book

The conductor retired. There was an interval of silence, spent, I imagine, by Stacey-Lumpton in endeavouring to smooth his ruffled plumage. Presently Jimmy's friend began again:

"I say, Jimmy, how about our fourpences?"

"That's what I say. Guv'nor, 'ow about our fourpences? I ain't seen no fourpence."

I tendered Stacey-Lumpton a word of advice.

"If you are wise you will give them nothing."

"I don't intend to."

"Oh, you don't, don't you? Well, that's 'andsome! Now, supposing I bash in your 'at?" All at once he made a fresh discovery. "If 'e ain't smashed the blooming box!" He picked up from beside him the box which Stacey-Lumpton had kicked against. "Smashed it right in—straight, 'e 'as! Well, there's a thing to do!" He thrust the box in question between Stacey-Lumpton and myself. "Look 'ere, there's bloaters in that box." We did not need his word to make us conscious of that fact. The perfume was enough. Stacey-Lumpton recognised that this was so with, on his face, an expression of speechless horror. "You've busted in the box and spiled the lot of 'em. Who's going to buy bruised bloaters, I'd like to know? I don't mind my 'at so much, but when it comes to bloaters—they're my living."

An interposition from the lady whose bonnet had been "scrunched."

Outside !

“Parties like him think no more of taking the bread out of the mouths of the struggling poor than if they was insecs !”

Her husband seemed to think the remark slightly uncalled for.

“That’s you, Eliza, all over. You must put your spoke in everybody’s wheel. You can’t keep quiet, can you?”

“It’s as well some of us are like that. Some of us would keep quiet till we was dead. I’m not that sort, I thank goodness.”

A gentleman on the seat on the other side of the driver, leaning towards me, proffered a suggestion ; his accent was distinctly nasal.

“If I vus your vriend I vould gif him a gopper or two to keep him quiet.”

At last Stacey-Lumpton found his voice.

“Take that horrible thing away, man.”

“’Orrible thing! Wot are you calling a ’orrible thing? Everythink’s a ’orrible thing accordink to you. Don’t you come trying no toffs over me, my funny bloke, or you’ll soon know.”

Thereupon something happened which I had not expected, and which, I am pretty sure, Jimmy had not expected either. Stacey-Lumpton took that box of bloaters in his kid-gloved hands, and in another moment it was lying in the road. He had thrown it overboard. What immediately ensued may be described as larks. I had not anticipated anything of that kind when I had

Sam Briggs: His Book

suggested that we should ride outside. Jimmy "went for" Stacey-Lumpton with a full-mouthed imprecation.

"He's took my bloaters—his eyes!"

The driver pulled up. "Now then! now then! what's all this? Might I just inquire? Some of you'll get hurt, you know."

Stacey-Lumpton rose from his seat. He turned. He lifted Jimmy off his feet. Jimmy was one of those half-grown coster lads who in London may be regarded as common objects of the sea-shore. His opponent was twice his size and he was an athlete, although he was a "toff." Lowering Jimmy, in spite of his frantic struggles, over the side of the omnibus, he dropped him on to the street. 'Enery, who also evinced symptoms of violence, went by the same route after his friend. Stacey-Lumpton tossed a sovereign after them.

"Provide yourselves with another box of bloaters and a new hat out of that, my men."

But Jimmy was not to be appeased. His honour had been wounded in its most tender place. Tossing his injured billycock into the mud, he began to tear his coat off his back.

"Come down! Meet me like a man!"

The driver played the part of peacemaker.

"Don't be silly, my lad! The gentleman could swallow you! Pick up your sovereign. You'll never see as much money in your life again." He started his horses. "Good-bye, my

Outside !

little dears. If I was you I'd have a bloater each for tea."

When, having arrived at the end of his first 'bus drive, Stacey-Lumpton found himself on solid ground again, he delivered himself of a sententious observation :

"I fancy that some of the passengers on that omnibus were beneath the rank of a baronet."

I agreed with him. I thought it possible that they were.

Not that I think much of a baronet either.

NINEPENCE

I HAD gone in to get a glass of ale—into the four-ale bar. The place was pretty full. Scarcely had I begun to absorb my liquid when a gentleman of the nondescript sort, having a remnant of a red handkerchief tied about his neck, favoured me with this inquiry :

“ If a party what you knew nothink at all about, and never seed afore in all your dyes, was to ask you to lend 'im ninepence, would you lend it 'im? ”

As I thought it possible that the party in question might be himself, I lost no time whatever in replying, “ Certainly not.”

He turned to a friend with sandy hair and a suit of clothes which, unless he had decreased to half his size since first he had them, must originally have been somebody else's.

“ That is what I says. Isn't that what I says? I says I wouldn't. No more I wouldn't.”

The friend tilted his cap over his eyes, and he dug the knuckles of his right hand into the back of his head. I have not the faintest notion why. And he held forth thus :

Ninepence

“It was like this here. I was in the bar, yer know, along with some other parties, yer know, as it might be me and you in 'ere, when 'e comes in.”

“Who come in?”

“Why this 'ere bloke. He says to me, ‘If this ain't a pretty start, what is?’ I says, ‘What's up now?’ He says, ‘Just cast your eyes round me.’ And he lifts up the tails of 'is coat—'e 'ad a tail-coat on, leastways it 'ad been a tail-coat once—and 'e says, ‘Them's trousers.’ I says, ‘They don't look it.’ 'E says, ‘They don't. And that's 'ow I'll lose a fortune.’ I says, ‘'Ow do you make that out?’ 'E says, ‘I'll tell yer, seeing as 'ow you're a friend.’”

“Was 'e a friend of yourn? I thought yer said yer'd never seed 'im afore?”

“More I 'adn't. 'E draws the back of 'is 'and acrost 'is mug, and 'e says, ‘I suppose you couldn't spare a sup?’ Well, I let 'im 'ave a drop, and 'e pretty nearly drained me. ‘I'll tell you all about it,’ 'e says. ‘It's like this—like this 'ere. I'm a hartist, that's what I am—a profeshunal—yes. And I've got a hingagement to-night at one of the fust music 'alls in London, the very fust. I'm going to do my hextra speshul turn. It'll be worth to me every farden of 'arf-a-quid, yes. And now it's orf.’ I says, ‘'Ow do yer make that out?’ 'E pulls up the tails of 'is coat, ‘'Cause of them. Speaking, as it

Sam Briggs: His Book

might be, as one hartist to another hartist, as a hartist, 'ow would you like to go on to do a hextra speshul turn in one of the fust music 'alls in London in them for trousers? And, mind you, mine's a drawin'-room entertainment, and no lies, that's what mine is. Yes, straight.' 'Well,' I says, 'I shouldn't.' 'E says, 'Of course you wouldn't, you couldn't. Why they'd 'oot at yer. Yes. So I've got to chuck it.' I says, 'That's 'ard.' 'E says, 'It is 'ard, it's bitter 'ard, cruel 'ard.' 'E leans agin the counter, and he takes 'old, casual like, of a pewter what belonged to a chap as was be'ind 'im, and 'e lifts it to 'is lips, as if 'e didn't know what 'e was a-doing of. But the chap as the pewter belonged to, 'e grabs 'old of it, and 'e says, 'Excuse me, who's a-payin'?' And this bloke says, seemin' quite took aback-like, 'I beg your pardon, sir. It was a haccident.' And the chap, 'e says, 'We'll call it a haccident,' and he drains the pewter right off, so as to make sure. And this 'ere bloke what I'm a-telling you of, wipes his mouth agin, and he looks at me. But I wasn't a-taking any. So 'e says, 'And what makes it all the 'arder is what I'm going to tell yer, you bein' a friend o' mine.' "

"I thought you says 'e wasn't a friend o' yourn."

"More 'e wasn't. 'Ow could he be? Don't I tell yer I never saw him afore? "

"Well, 'e 'ad got a nerve, 'e 'ad. Some of 'em does 'ave."

Ninepence

“It was only ’is kid, you know. ’E says, ‘I’ve got one of the finest pair of trousers there is in all England—straight, I have. ‘Well,’ I says, ‘if I was you I’d put ’em on.’ ’E says, ‘They’re spouted. I was just a-going to get ’em out when I come in ’ere.’ ‘Why don’t you ’urry,’ I says, ‘and get ’em out?’ ‘I can’t.’ ‘Why can’t you?’ ‘Sold the ticket.’ ‘What for?’ ‘Tuppence.’ ‘Can’t yer buy it agin?’ ‘Aven’t got the tuppence.’ ‘I can’t make you out,’ I says. ‘Fust yer say you’re going to get your trousers out o’ pawn, then yer say you’ve sold the ticket, then yer say you haven’t got the tuppence to buy it back agin. Where do you think you’re going to get the tuppence from?’ ’E says, ‘That’s what I want to know. Where am I?’ I says, ‘’Ow much is there on the trousers?’ ’E says, ‘Sevenpence.’ ‘What,’ I says, ‘sevenpence on the finest pair of trousers there is in all England. They must be odd ’uns.’ ‘I might ’ave ’ad an ’eap o’ money,’ ’e says, ‘an ’eap, but I didn’t want it. That’s where it was.’ ‘Was you in funds when you pawned your trousers?’ ‘Of course I was.’ I says, ‘I don’t see no of course about it.’ ’E says, ‘Where else was I to put ’em?’”

“I says, ‘Wasn’t there your legs? Was yer legs in pawn?’ ’E says, ‘That’s different. I wasn’t speakin’ about that.’ I says, ‘Well, then, I am.’ ’E leans back agin the counter, and ’e

Sam Briggs : His Book

looks up at the ceiling, and 'e says, 'Ninepence between me and fortune. Every farden of 'arf-a-quid. Perhaps several 'arf-a-quids. If any lady or gentleman'—'e spoke like a reading book —'was to advance me the loan of ninepence for to enable me to clothe my legs with a pair of trousers as was suited to one of the fust music-'alls in London, and as would do credit to any hartist on the boards, I shall not cease for to remember the haction while the breath remains within my body. That is hall I 'ave to say. I say no more.' But 'e'd said enough. You should 'ave 'eard 'im—done yer good. Of course, that 'ushed the patter. No one wasn't going to say nothing after that. Not 'ardly. Presently one woman says, 'I'll give a penny if anyone else will.' This 'ere bloke took off 'is 'at. 'Madam, I thank you ; as a hartist I thank you.' Then a lady what was with this other lady says, 'Susan, if you'll give a penny, I'll give a penny too.' Then this 'ere bloke's 'at come off again. Then there was a whip round. But it hung fire a bit. Nobody didn't quite ketch on. So this 'ere other lady, she says, 'It seems 'ard that a man can't earn 'is daily bread 'cause he ain't got no trousers to earn it in, don't it, Susan?' And Susan says, 'It do seem hard.' And this 'ere bloke 'e says, 'It's cruel 'ard.' Then one chap says, 'I'll give a pennyworth.' And another chap give a pennyworth. And presently there was the ninepence."

Ninepence

“ Did you give a pennyworth ? ”

“ Not me.”

“ Why didn’t yer ? ”

“ ’Cause I hadn’t got it.”

“ Would yer if yer ’ad ? ”

“ Not me.”

“ Why wouldn’t yer ? ”

“ ’Cause ’e was only a kiddin’.”

“ ’Ow d’ye know ’e was only a kiddin’ ? ”

“ Anyone could tell ’e was.”

“ Them other parties couldn’t tell ’e was.”

“ That’s their look out.”

“ ’Ere’s a bloke what’s going to earn ’arf-a-quid—”

“ ’E warn’t going to earn no ’arf-a-quid no more than you are.”

“ If I wanted yer to lend me ninepence, would yer lend it me ? ”

“ No.”

“ Why wouldn’t yer ? ”

“ ’Cause I ’aven’t got it.”

“ You never don’t seem to ’ave nothink.”

“ I ’ave as much as you, perhaps, once in a while.”

“ I’ve just stood yer ’arf a pint.”

“ And I’ve stood you ’arf a pint more than once, and more than twice.”

“ I don’t say you ’aven’t.” The original speaker turned to me. “ If a friend was to ask you to lend ’im ninepence, wouldn’t you lend it ’im ? ”

Sam Briggs : His Book

“That would depend on whether I had it.”

“You, being a gentleman, of course you would have it.”

I had finished my ale. I sidled towards the door.

“I fear that does not necessarily follow.”

The man advanced.

“Look 'ere, if I was to ask you to lend me ninepence—”

“Excuse me. I'm afraid I must be off.”

And I was off.

I have a moral conviction that if I had stayed much longer that man would have tried to wriggle ninepence out of me.

THE END

JANUARY, 1912

MESSRS. JOHN LONG'S NEW BOOKS

NEW SIX SHILLING NOVELS

DANGEROUS DOROTHY

By CURTIS YORKE, Author of "Miss Daffodil," etc.

This delightful and original Novel deals in a singularly attractive manner with life in a mining camp in Spain. The scenes and incidents are peculiarly realistic, the love story dainty, and the dialogue, as in all this author's novels, is both clever and natural. "Dangerous Dorothy" will be one of the most widely read books of the season. As the *Times* has said, "there is always a charm about Curtis Yorke's books."

AUSTIN'S CAREER

By VIOLET TWEEDALE, Author of "Hypocrites and Sinners," etc.

In "Austin's Career," Violet Tweedale deals with the life of a young Guardsman, who early in his career gets into an entanglement with a young peeress. Lord Silchester, the husband, refuses to divorce his wife, and the story—a true one—describes the Bohemian life led by the lovers in Paris. As time goes on, the young soldier's thoughts revert to his home in Devonshire, and incline towards marriage with the girl he has learned to love. Just when release seems possible, Lord Silchester divorces his wife, and Austin sees that love and family life can never be for him. The many characters and side-lights with which this novel abounds make it one of deep and sustained interest.

JOHN LONG, Ltd., 12, 13 & 14 Norris Street, Haymarket, London

Messrs. John Long's New Books

NEW SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*continued*

SAM BRIGGS: His Book

By RICHARD MARSH, Author of "The Garden of Mystery," etc.

The author belongs to the younger generation of writers of fiction, and he can hold his own with the most brilliant of them. His qualities are originality of invention, a command over the weird and mysterious, a clear, straightforward narrative, and a bizarre humour, all the more telling because it flashes at unexpected moments across the page.

TWO MEN AND A GOVERNESS

By OLIVIA RAMSEY, Author of "The Other Wife," etc.

In this novel the author describes, with plenty of swing and unflagging charm, the adventures of a young governess. It is a thrilling story of romantic and absorbing love. The characterisation is far above the average, and the theme handled in a masterly and sparkling manner. This is emphatically a novel that grips from the first page to the last.

CHICANE

By OLIVER SANDYS, Author of "The Woman in the Firelight," etc.

The adventures of her ladyship, as told by her friend and companion, are the last words in frank and amusing originality. Her doings provide a story, the excitement of which is maintained to the end, and her ladyship's character is shown to be resolute loveable, daring, and tender by turns.

JOHN LONG, Ltd., 12, 13 & 14 Norris Street, Haymarket, London

Messrs. John Long's New Books

NEW SIX SHILLING NOVELS—continued

THE ETERNAL STRUGGLE

By NEWMAN HARDING, Author of "Thou Shalt Not."

When man thought out his life to higher ideals than those nursed of earth, he took unto himself the burden of an eternal struggle—the conflict of right and wrong as expressed by love and passion, both born of love, but with the distinction of service and selfishness. It is a contest which stamps man as possessing that divine spark—soul, the one thing that gives the chance of immortality to the human race, and around this fight Mr. Newman Harding has written his enthralling novel.

CLOUDS

By CHARLES IGGLESDEN, Author of "A Flutter with Fate," etc.

"An ill marriage is a spring of misfortune," as this story confirms, for Basil Blake, himself the son of a tradesman, fails in his efforts to raise a pretty farmhouse girl to the status that he himself holds. Mr. Igglesden knows every inch of Kent, and, as a sidelight, gives many a glimpse of historic spots in the county. His descriptions of a Kentish point-to-point race and a village cricket match show his intimacy with sport.

A CHANGE OF SEX

By CHARLES KINROSS, Author of "The Ballad of John Dunn."

This, the first novel from the pen of Mr. Kinross, is calculated to give rise to much speculation in the mind of the reader—the title in itself is an enigma. It is a highly amusing book, in which adventure, psychology and the battle of the sexes are happily interwoven. Mr. Kinross has treated the theme with the delicacy it merits. If certain aspects of life are treated as ordinary instead of unusual, it is yet consistent with his many new and amusing ideas, and provides good material for a delightful piece of writing.

JOHN LONG, Ltd., 12, 13 & 14 Norris Street, Haymarket, London

Messrs. John Long's New Books

NEW SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*continued*

THE FEN DOGS

By STEPHEN FOREMAN, Author of "The Overflowing Scourge," "The Errors of the Comedy."

The Author has chosen for his characters a group of Fendwellers who flourished at the close of the Great War, a century ago. There were giants in the Fens in those days—giants in size, strength, passion; in fighting force; in capacity for good and evil; in love and lust; and giants also in their religious emotions and experiences. The love of two of them for the one woman is the motive of the novel, in which the powers of good and evil seem to wage a drawn battle, till a startling and unconventional denouement brings about a happy ending.

A GLORIOUS LIE

By DOROTHEA GERARD, Author of "The Inevitable Marriage," etc.

There is a fine irony in this title, for the novel bearing it is the biography of a lie which, however heroic on the face of it, proved to be the seed from which sprung disaster after disaster. The series of episodes leading to the final wreck, out of which happiness is at the last moment snatched as from a burning pile, teems with interest as well as with thoughtful character drawing.

THE LAST STRONGHOLD

By ELLEN ADA SMITH, Author of "The Busybody," etc.

The author skilfully weaves her story round a false step taken from the best of motives by an impulsive, affectionate, and highly-gifted musician, for the sake of a brother to whom she is devoted. Ellen Ada Smith is unrivalled in the art of faithful delineation of character, and her cleverly conceived types of human nature give added life and interest to a very prettily told and admirably inspired tale.

JOHN LONG, Ltd., 12, 13 & 14 Norris Street, Haymarket, London

Messrs. John Long's New Books

NEW SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*continued*

THE SECRET TONTINE

By R. MURRAY GILCHRIST, Author of "The First-Born."

In this novel Mr. R. Murray Gilchrist deals with the evil influence of a Tontine upon the lives of some Peakland aristocrats.

The atmosphere of mystery is very cleverly sustained, and the *dénouement* creates surprise.

Every character is distinct and well drawn, and the scenes of quiet comedy are in this popular author's best vein.

Mr. Gilchrist has once more provided some really excellent sensational reading.

THE SPINDLE

By ELIZABETH HARDEN, a new Author.

Miss Harden has provided a plot which cannot fail to appeal, and in her heroine portrays a most delightful character—one unique in modern fiction. From the opening sentence, when she tells us that "woman is just an afterthought of the Almighty," the book commands attention to the very end.

THE COMPROMISING OF JANE

By ANNE WEAVER, a new Author.

This novel has for its setting life in English country-house society of the best kind, and the plot is one requiring a delicacy of treatment, which the author has given with quite exceptional success. Its element of light comedy is cleverly blended with a strong love interest and a sub-motif of sex-loyalty leading to dramatic situations.

JOHN LONG, Ltd., 12, 13 & 14 Norris Street, Haymarket, London

Messrs. John Long's New Books

NEW SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*continued*

ANNA STRELITZ

By **LOW LATHEN**, a new author.

From the opening of "Anna Strelitz" to the last page, the reader is borne forward on a narrative that gathers new force with each chapter. The fortunes of the ambitious Jew, who leaves Russia and eventually becomes wealthy in South Africa, constitute a very graphic bit of realism, but everything in this fine novel is subordinated to Anna, the heroine, and her lover. The antagonism between Judaism and Christianity gives occasion for episodes of intense passion, and in places the pathos of the story is overpowering. Through all the heroine holds the sympathy of the reader, and she undoubtedly is a noble woman who sounds quite a new note in sensational fiction. There is plenty of humour, and the scenes of life in South Africa, together with the description of ostrich farming, are true to life.

AT THE COURT OF IL MORO

By **LOUISE M. STACPOOLE KENNY**, Author of "Love is Life," etc.

There is an undying charm about the Renaissance that enthral the imagination, and the author has here drawn a realistic and attractive picture of the splendour-loving court of Milan, and has given life to her characters. The story is a thrilling one, full of life, love, and adventure. The plot is worked out with skill, and in its unravelling the author displays real genius.

THE GUERDON OF FAITH

By **MRS. CHARLES MARTIN**, Author of "Miss Pauncefort's Peril," etc.

The story of two women of directly contrary temperament, who, nevertheless, are drawn together by a curious and thrilling chain of circumstances. The book is full of incident, and the several characters appeal to the reader by their life-like portraiture and their human qualities. "The Guerdon of Faith" is a novel that will live in the memory of its readers.

JOHN LONG, Ltd., 12, 13 & 14 Norris Street, Haymarket, London

Messrs. John Long's New Books

NEW SIX SHILLING NOVELS—continued

A FOOL TO FAME

By J. E. HAROLD TERRY, a new Author.

In this novel is narrated, for the first time, the history of the life, adventures, and death of John Nevison, sometime highwayman, courtier, and champion of the poor—"The Claud Duval of the North," as he has been appropriately called. Nevison is no figment of the author's imagination, but *the man who really performed the amazing ride from London to York between sunrise and sunset of one day.* It is a tale of love and hate, of treachery and loyalty, of stirring adventures and hairbreadth escapes, in the days of Charles II.

A THREE-CORNERED DUEL

By BEATRICE KELSTON, a new Author.

The story of the complications arising from the likeness between twin-sisters and the difficulties besetting a young man who alternately believes himself in love with each. Finally, becoming engaged to one, he realises that he loves the other. A mystery surrounds the whole affair; when it is at length solved, the lover feels that he has been tricked, his pride is up in arms, and disaster threatens. But the end sees him happy, and yet both twins triumphant in this "Three-Cornered Duel."

A TRANSPLANTED AMERICAN

By ELISE LATHROP, Author of "Sunny Days in Italy," etc.

The difficulties and problems which arise from the marriage of a charming young American girl with an Italian, an only son, accustomed to regard his wishes as law, are treated in this novel. The fact that each is quite unfamiliar with the national traits, habits, and mode of life of the other delays the final "happy ending," which is only brought about by a chain of circumstances and the real love existing between them.

JOHN LONG, Ltd., 12, 13 & 14 Norris Street, Haymarket, London

Messrs. John Long's New Books

NEW SIX SHILLING NOVELS—continued

A SOCIETY MOTHER

By EDMUND BOSANQUET. (6th EDITION)

"Mr. Bosanquet, whose charming novel goes to prove that, however little-hearted and little-minded a woman may appear on the surface, at the rock-bottom of her nature may still be found all the qualities which go to make for true womanliness, is to be heartily congratulated upon this work. He does not interest one by jerks; his arguments are quiet, his tone calm. An easy, flowing, clever book."—*Madame.*

A WIFE IMPERATIVE

By A PEER, Author of "The Hard Way," "To Justify the Means," "Theo," etc. (5th EDITION)

The World says:—"This is a capital piece of fiction. It begins with a most excellent situation, and the complications which ensue are by no means commonplace. To suggest their nature would be to spoil the reader's pleasure in a thoroughly good book, in which the interest never flags. Breathlessly exciting."

I TOO HAVE KNOWN

By AMY J. BAKER, a new Author. (2nd EDITION)

Manchester Courier says:—"There must be something in the atmosphere of the veldt to bring out the strong characteristics of human nature. Certainly the fiction, of which the scene is placed in South Africa, has a peculiar and dominant flavour of its own. It is so in this case. The relationship between the man and the woman is described simply and forcibly, but yet without any infringement of good taste. Readers who like their fiction strong will enjoy the book."

JOHN LONG, Ltd., 12, 13 & 14 Norris Street, Haymarket, London

Messrs. John Long's New Books

GENERAL LITERATURE

A LADY'S 20,000 MILE QUEST FOR ORCHIDS

PILGRIMS TO THE ISLES OF PENANCE

Orchid Gathering in the East

By Mrs. TALBOT CLIFTON. With 54 Illustrations from Photographs and a Map. Demy 8vo. 12s. 6d. net.

Daily Express says:—"The fascination of orchid hunting in far-off lands has never been more deftly set forth than in Mrs. Talbot Clifton's 'Pilgrims to the Isles of Penance,' the tale—and a very good one too—of a journey in parts of Burma adjoining the Chinese frontier, and other places in the extreme South. Orchids are the beginning and ending and innermost meaning of the book, which has many beautiful pictures of the rarest and most extraordinary flowers."

**THE HOUSE OF TECK: A Romance of a
Thousand Years**

By LOUIS FELBERMAN, Author of "Hungary and its People," &c. With Photogravure of Her Majesty, over 100 other interesting Portraits, Reproductions of Pictures and Illustrations depicting Family Relics, included in the volume by special permission of Her Majesty the Queen. Demy 8vo. 12s. 6d. net.

Saturday Review says:—"It is 'the romance of a thousand years.' The author has read deeply into his authorities, and there are many interesting stories and odd pieces of history which are not come by in the ordinary way."

JOHN LONG, Ltd., 12, 13 & 14 Norris Street, Haymarket, London

Messrs. John Long's New Books

GENERAL LITERATURE—*continued*

PRINCE TALLEYRAND AND HIS TIMES: From the Reign of Louis XV to the Second Empire

By FRÉDÉRIC LOLIÉE, English Version by BRYAN O'DONNELL, M.A. This work contains material from recently-discovered documents now made public for the first time. With Photogravure and numerous other Portraits. Demy 8vo. 12s. 6d. net.

Pall Mall Gazette says :—" M. Loliée knows his French history in a way in which the compilers of these library biographies as a rule do not know it. He sparkles with anecdotes about Mme. de Talleyrand. We have no fault to find with the adaptation."

Morning Post says :—" This biography is full of variety and interest. Full justice is done a great man who forms the subject of the volume. His career was one of great interest, and furnishes a record which no man of his generation has equalled."

THE FAIR LADIES OF HAMPTON COURT

By CLARE JERROLD. Illustrated with Photogravure and other reproductions from Paintings of the Beauties of the Period. Demy 8vo. 12s. 6d. net.

Daily Telegraph says :—" The work could scarcely be done better than is here the case with the easy, humane, and well-bred narration of Mrs. Jerrold. She has just the right touch, and has succeeded in producing a series of pen-portraits not unworthy of the artistic masterpieces of Lely and Kneller."

JOHN LONG, Ltd., 12, 13 & 14 Norris Street, Haymarket, London

Messrs. John Long's New Books

GENERAL LITERATURE—*continued*

BIG GAME HUNTING IN NORTH-EASTERN RHODESIA

By OWEN LETCHER, F.R.G.S. With Photogravure Portrait of Author, 52 Illustrations from Photographs, and a Map. Demy 8vo. 12s. 6d. net.

Sheffield Telegraph says:—"So vivid are the descriptions of the chase, the natives, and the animals, so splendidly written is his whole story, that one lays it down at the last chapter with a genuine sigh of regret. Mr. Letcher's adventures and misadventures are most absorbing. The book is profusely illustrated and cannot be over-rated."

THE SEVEN RICHEST HEIRESESSES OF FRANCE

By the COUNT DE SOISSONS. With Photogravure and other Portraits. Demy 8vo. 12s. 6d. net.

Morning Post says:—"Surely no man ever had seven such charming nieces as Cardinal Mazarin. After reading the Count de Soisson's account of them all, one is hard driven to say which he would have preferred had he lived in those days and thought it good policy to 'marry the cardinal.' They were wonderful creatures and so was their uncle."

THE FAIR LAND OF CENTRAL AMERICA

By MAURICE DE WALEFFE. Preface by SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE. With 24 Illustrations from Photographs. Demy 8vo. 7s. 6d. net.

Standard says:—"The author writes wittily, charmingly, and pointedly. He is evidently a keen and understanding observer. There is depth as well as colour and humour in his work."

JOHN LONG, Ltd., 12, 13 & 14 Norris Street, Haymarket, London

Messrs. John Long's New Books

GENERAL LITERATURE—*continued*

MANY COLOURED MOUNTAINS AND SOME SEAS BETWEEN

A Book of Travel. By EMMA S. BOYD. With Coloured Frontispiece and several other Illustrations. Demy 8vo. 7s. 6d. net.

Sheffield Telegraph says :—"We congratulate Miss Boyd on producing a book that does much to enhance her reputation as a writer of travel stories. Her book has all the interest of a well-written novel, and is eminently readable."

PONIES AND ALL ABOUT THEM

By FRANK TOWNEND BARTON, M.R.C.V.S., Author of "Terriers: Their Points and Management," etc. With numerous Illustrations from Photographs. Demy 8vo. 7s. 6d. net.

Pall Mall Gazette says :—"The volume can be recommended for a place in the library of every man who has a care for a horse. The illustrations are informative and have been carefully selected."

MY RECOLLECTIONS OF THE SEPOY REVOLT, 1857-58

By Mrs. MUTER. With Photogravure Frontispiece, 16 Portraits and Illustrations, and a Map of the Cantonment of Meerut. Demy 8vo. 7s. 6d. net.

Daily Telegraph says :—"A stirring book which tells the story of the siege of Delhi from the point of view of one who lived in the palace during the terrible winter of 1857-8. It is a tale of the most exciting description, and is richly illustrated from contemporary pictures, together with a plan of the Meerut Cantonment at the time of the Mutiny."

JOHN LONG, Ltd., 12, 13 & 14 Norris Street, Haymarket, London

Messrs. John Long's New Books

GENERAL LITERATURE—*continued*

**KING RENÉ D'ANJOU AND HIS SEVEN
QUEENS**

By EDGCUMBE STALEY, Author of "The Dogaressas of Venice," "Tragedies of the Medici," etc. With Coloured Frontispiece and numerous Portraits. Demy 8vo. 12s. 6d. net. [Ready in January.]

**THROUGH DANTE'S LAND: Impressions
in Tuscany**

By MRS. COLQUHOUN GRANT, Author of "Brittany to Whitehall," etc. With 32 Illustrations from Photographs. Demy 8vo. 12s. 6d. net. [Ready in January.]

PHEASANTS: In Covert and Aviary

By FRANK TOWNEND BARTON, M.R.C.V.S. With four Coloured Plates from life by H. GRÖNVOLD, and numerous other Illustrations from Photographs. Crown 4to. 7s. 6d. net. *Write for Coloured Prospectus.* [Ready in February.]

JOHN LONG, Ltd., 12, 13 & 14 Norris Street, Haymarket, London

Messrs. John Long's New Books

John Long's 6d. Net CLOTH Novels

ATHENÆUM.—“Certainly remarkable at the price.”

WORLD.—“The nature of the Series is frankly popular. It should have a wide circulation.”

BIRMINGHAM GAZETTE.—“For excellence of reading matter and the standing of the authors, John Long's Sixpenny Net (Cloth) Novels are unsurpassed.”

MESSRS. JOHN LONG, Ltd., are now publishing under the above title a Series of Novels by the most popular authors of the day. These Novels are bound in Red Cloth with Embossed Pictorial Design, and wrapped in art paper with most attractive picture in colours. They have a decorative title-page with illustration facing same. Each Novel contains about 320 pages, and is printed in clear type on a superior paper. The volumes are pocket size, 6½ ins. by 4½ ins.

The following is the List of the first thirteen in the Series:—

1	FATHER ANTHONY	...	...	ROBERT BUCHANAN
2	DELILAH OF THE SNOWS	...	...	HAROLD BINDLOSS
3	ONLY BETTY	...	...	CURTIS YORKE
4	THE GARDEN OF MYSTERY	...	...	RICHARD MARSH
5	IN SPITE OF THE CZAR	...	...	GUY BOOTHBY
6	THE VEILED MAN	...	...	WILLIAM LE QUEUX
7	THE SIN OF JASPER STANDISH	...	...	RITA
8	A BORDER SCOURGE	...	...	BERTRAM MITFORD
9	WAYWARD ANNE	...	...	CURTIS YORKE
10	THE GREATER POWER	(Jan., 1912)	...	HAROLD BINDLOSS
11	A CABINET SECRET	(Jan., 1912)	...	GUY BOOTHBY
12	THE EYE OF ISTAR	(Feb., 1912)	...	WILLIAM LE QUEUX
13	A WOMAN PERFECTED	(Feb., 1912)	...	RICHARD MARSH

* * In due course other volumes by equally popular authors will be announced.

JOHN LONG, Ltd., 12, 13 & 14 Norris Street, Haymarket, London

Messrs. John Long's New Books

JOHN LONG'S FAMOUS ONE SHILLING NET SERIES

In this Series none but the most popular and saleable books are included. Each in Crown 8vo., thread sewn, printed on superior antique wove paper. With attractive cover designs in colour. 1/- net.

THE LIFE SENTENCE (an entirely new novel) (April, 1912)	VICTORIA CROSS
A COMPLEX LOVE AFFAIR - - - - - (Jan., 1912)	JAMES BLYTH
IMPROPER PRUE - - - - - (Feb., 1912)	ANONYMOUS
THE WOMAN IN THE FIRELIGHT - (March, 1912)	OLIVER SANDYS
FIVE NIGHTS - - - - -	VICTORIA CROSS
ANNA LOMBARD - - - - -	VICTORIA CROSS
THE OLD ALLEGIANCE - - - - -	HUBERT WALES
CYNTHIA IN THE WILDERNESS - - - - -	HUBERT WALES
MR. AND MRS. VILLIERS - - - - -	HUBERT WALES
THE WIFE OF COLONEL HUGHES - - - - -	HUBERT WALES
HILARY THORNTON - - - - -	HUBERT WALES
THE MEMBER FOR EASTERBY - - - - -	JAMES BLYTH
THORA'S CONVERSION - - - - -	JAMES BLYTH
THE PENALTY - - - - -	JAMES BLYTH
AMAZEMENT - - - - -	JAMES BLYTH
RUBINA - - - - -	JAMES BLYTH
TO JUSTIFY THE MEANS - - - - -	BY A PEER
THE HARD WAY - - - - -	BY A PEER
THE GREAT GAY ROAD (Novel of the Play) - - - - -	TOM GALLON
BURNT WINGS - - - - -	Mrs. STANLEY WRENCH
LOVE'S FOOL - - - - -	Mrs. STANLEY WRENCH
HIS MASTER PURPOSE - - - - -	HAROLD BINDLOSS
THE DIARY OF MY HONEYMOON - - - - -	LADY X
THE MASK - - - - -	WILLIAM LE QUEUX
FOR FAITH AND NAVARRE - - - - -	MAY WYNN
*KISSING CUP THE SECOND - - - - -	C. RAE BROWN
*THE GREAT NEWMARKET MYSTERY - - - - -	C. RAE BROWN
A JILT'S JOURNAL - - - - -	RITA
KEEPERS OF THE HOUSE - - - - -	COSMO HAMILTON
THE PROGRESS OF PAULINE KESSLER - - - - -	By the Author of "The Adventures of John Johns"
ADA VERNHAM—ACTRESS - - - - -	RICHARD MARSH
SWEET "DOLL" OF HADDON HALL - - - - -	J. E. MUDDOCK
CONFESSIONS OF A PRINCESS - - - - -	ANONYMOUS
CONFESSIONS OF CLEODORA - - - - -	CARLTON DAWE
SECRET HISTORY OF THE COURT OF BERLIN - - - - -	HENRY W. FISCHER
*THE KING'S FAVOURITE (Coronation Novel) - - - - -	NAT GOULD
*THE CHANCE OF A LIFETIME (Novel of the Play) - - - - -	NAT GOULD
*THE LUCKY SHOE - - - - -	NAT GOULD
*THE ROARER - - - - -	NAT GOULD
*THE STOLEN RACER - - - - -	NAT GOULD
*A RECKLESS OWNER - - - - -	NAT GOULD
*A GREAT COUP - - - - -	NAT GOULD
*A CAST OFF - - - - -	NAT GOULD
*GOOD AT THE GAME - - - - -	NAT GOULD

* Published at the outset in this form.

JOHN LONG, Ltd., 12, 13 & 14 Norris Street, Haymarket, London

Messrs. John Long's New Books

THE AUTHOR WITH THE LARGEST PUBLIC

*The Sales of Nat Gould's Novels exceed
SEVEN MILLION Copies*

Nat Gould's New Novels

ATHENÆUM, June 10, 1911, says:—"All living writers are headed by Mr. Nat Gould, and of the great of the past, Dumas only surpasses his popularity."

Crown 8vo. Paper Cover, three colours. 1/- net; cloth gilt, 2/-. 256 pp.

THE STOLEN RACER
A RECKLESS OWNER
THE ROARER
*THE CHANCE OF A LIFETIME
THE LUCKY SHOE
A GREAT COUP

†THE KING'S FAVOURITE
A CAST OFF
GOOD AT THE GAME
A MEMBER OF TATT'S [March, 1912
THE TRAINER'S TREASURE
[May, 1912

* Founded on Mr. Nat Gould's drama of the same name. † Special Coronation Novel.

IMPORTANT NOTICE.—Messrs. JOHN LONG, Ltd., are now the sole Publishers of all Mr. Nat Gould's NEW Novels. The Trade and Public are earnestly requested to see that they get the Novels of Nat Gould bearing the imprint of JOHN LONG, otherwise they are buying only the very early productions of this author.

NAT GOULD'S ANNUAL, 1911 (Ninth Year)—THE PHANTOM HORSE

Demy 8vo., 160 pp. Illustrated. Cover in colours. Paper, sewed, 1/-

Nat Gould's New Sixpenny Novels

In large demy 8vo., sewed. Striking cover in three colours.

ONE OF A MOB
THE SELLING PLATER
A BIT OF A ROGUE
THE LADY TRAINER
A STRAIGHT GOER
A HUNDRED TO ONE CHANCE
A SPORTING SQUATTER
THE PET OF THE PUBLIC
CHARGER AND CHASER
*THE LOTTERY COLT

A STROKE OF LUCK
THE TOP WEIGHT
THE DAPPLE GREY
WHIRLWIND'S YEAR
THE LITTLE WONDER
A BIRD IN HAND
THE BUCKJUMPER
THE JOCKEY'S REVENGE
THE PICK OF THE STABLE
THE STOLEN RACER [April, 1912
IA RECKLESS OWNER [June, 1912

* Formerly entitled "The Chance of a Lifetime."

JOHN LONG, Ltd., 12, 13 & 14 Norris Street, Haymarket, London

