

"Good-evening, Mr. Tidmarsh," he said.

Mr. Tidmarsh, not recognising him, scrutinised his palm for a betting slip, and, not finding one, gazed at him blankly, while Bremner winked at the barmaid in amusement. Tidmarsh was regarded as something of a joke at the Union Jack.

"Lord, but you're well got up," murmured the bookmaker, as Croal went close and revealed himself in a whisper. "Found anything?"

"I've found this," the inspector replied, producing the blank sheet of note-paper which he had unearthed at the Angler's Rest. "Seen anything like it before?"

Tidmarsh's eyes lit up with swift wrath. "That lion!" he snarled. "Yes, I had a letter from her on paper like that—the time she was away in the country, you know."

"Did you notice the postmark?" But Mr. Tidmarsh had not been so observant. As he pointed out, there had been "no call for such eunesses" then. He had thought that his sister was enjoying a happy honeymoon.

Resisting the bookmaker's importunate curiosity, Croal replaced the paper, and was about to fish for an introduction to Bremner, with a view to finding out who had been the young fellow who had evinced such an interest in his lodger, when a diversion occurred.

A dainty, flaxen-haired little maiden of some six summers, with a clean white pinafore over a thread-bare black dress, peeped shyly into the bar, and, catching sight of Bremner, came forward with greater confidence. At the moment the clerk was chaffing to the barmaid, who drew his attention to the child.

"Hallo, poppet!" he cried, turning to the child. "Anything the matter?"

"Please, daddy, will you come home, mummy says. The man in podestun has tumbled in the fire and set alight to himself."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MAN IN POSSESSION.

The little one delivered her message with a shrill distinctness that rang through the saloon bar, and Frank Bremner flushed for very shame. It was too true. On returning from work that afternoon he had been met on the doorstep by his weeping wife with the intelligence that there was a broker's man in the kitchen in respect of the last quarter's rent. With characteristic levity he had remarked that it would be all right, and had straightway gone round to the "Union Jack" to endeavour to right matters by investing some of his few remaining shillings with Tidmarsh.

But this exposure before his boon companions brought him up with a round turn. Even to the careless loungers of a saloon bar it does not look pretty to be drinking and trafficking with a bookmaker in an avowedly sporting house when the home is in danger of disruption; and, his selfishness being more of the head than the heart, he acutely felt the implied rebuke of the glances shot at him.

However, the summons called for immediate attention, and, taking his little daughter's hand, he was making for the door when Croal accosted him, after

whispering to Tidmarsh not to disclose his identity.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I couldn't help over-hearing," said the inspector. "If there's been an accident I might be of service, and shall be most happy—mutual friend of Mr Tidmarsh, Bayly by name. I've been through an ambulance class, and can render first aid if required."

"Come along then," replied Bremner, too perturbed to offer thanks. "It is only a few yards up the street."

On entering the house by the basement door they were confronted by a strong smell of burning and by groans from the kitchen, where they found Mary Bremner and Nance Beauchamp bending over a little wizened old man propped in an armchair. His singed coat had been removed, and lay on the table, emitting evil odours.

"He's getting better, I think," Mrs Bremner informed her husband. "The poor old fellow says he was weak for want of food and fell as he was crossing the front of the hearth, setting fire to his clothes and burning his hand before I could help him."

It was an anxious moment for the inspector when Nance looked up from her ministrations to add indignantly:

"His employers must be perfect brutes. They only pay him ten shillings a week, and though they knew he was starving when they sent him here they wouldn't advance him sixpence to buy a meal."

But the disguise held good. In the ponderous, elderly city merchant there was no resemblance to the square-jawed, keen-eyed detective of the previous Sunday at Barfield-on-Thames. As a matter of fact, Nance thought the inspector was a surgeon.

"Allow me," he said, and kneeling by the chair he examined the burn, called for sweet oil and cotton wool, and soon made the patient comfortable.

Eased of his pain, the man in possession sat up feebly and looked from one to the other of the kindly faces round him with dog-like gratitude. He was very old—75 at least—and a Hebrew of the Hebrews. Croal said to himself, "about the Jewiest-looking Jew outside of Whitechapel."

"May Heaven bless you all, who ought to be my enemies," he wheezed. "Hands that might will be raised against me have bound up and healed. And I cannot repay—I cannot repay! I, Moses Cohen, who have a son fawning on the fat of the land, sleeping in down, and driving in gaudy equipages, can offer naught but the grip of the law to those whom I would fain endow with all good things."

"All right, old chap; don't let the personal question worry you. Heaven knows it's no fault of yours that you're in charge of my sticks," said Bremner with bitter self-reproach, but adding in his whimsical way: "Perhaps that rich son of yours would lend us a bit to be going on with."

The little withered atomy in the chair thrust forward his beak-like nose and bared his yellow gums in contemptuous grimace. "My son help anyone," he chuckled, as though the joke tickled him. "He might lend you money if you had fat bones to pick, broad acres to foreclose on, or a reversion un-

der a will; and naked you would be as at birth when he had done with you. But to such as you his purse-strings would be shut. Me, his own father, he turned penniless into the street ten years since—because there was something he would have me do at which my soul revolted."

Exhausted by his tirade, he sank back in the chair, but Croal reassured them that there was no cause for alarm.

"I'll look after him for the present. You want to put the children to bed, and Mr. Beauchamp is taking a nap and won't need me just yet," said Nance to Mrs. Bremner.

"They go by their own name here, anyhow," reflected Croal, adding aloud, "Well, the patient seems to be in good hands and as I can't do any more for him I'll be off. By the by, Mr.—ah! Bremner, thank you—I thought I saw you talking at the Union Jack to a young fellow I know in the city—Deaken of Highbury?"

"Oh, no," was the reply. "That was Skinner, groom to Leopold Tannadyce, the big West End moneylender. His governor is a client of our firm—that's how I know him."

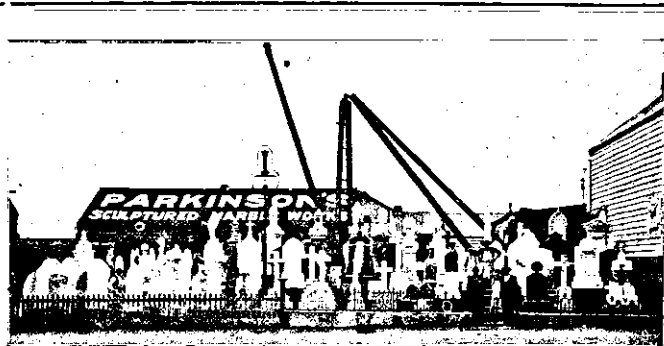
Was it the pain of the burn that sent a sharp spasm across the parchment countenance of Moses Cohen at that moment? Nance thought so, and bent

over him soothingly, murmuring words of comfort.

That was the picture which the inspector carried away in his mental vision—a fair girl with a face full of womanly pity tending the aged and none too cleanly scarecrow whom chance had committed to her mercy. "She isn't a bad sort, whatever her part in this little piece is," the detective told himself, as, having pooh-poohed Bremner's tardy thanks, he walked away up the street. "But Leopold Tannadyce's groom. Where does he come in? Or, by jingo, is it his master who's so curious about her Sundays out?"

(To be continued.)

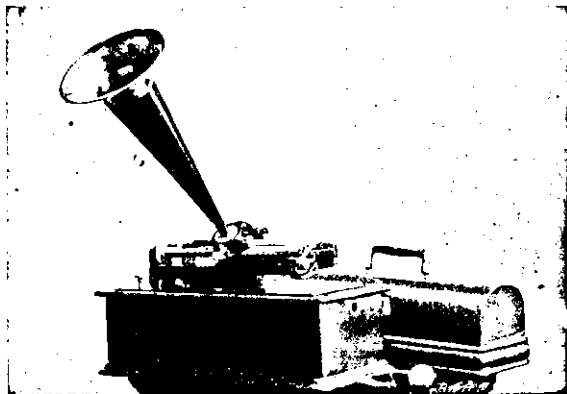
Imagine licking forty to fifty gross of labels a day. Yet this is what women commonly do who are employed to stick the labels on reels of sewing-cotton in certain Lancashire factories. The committee of inquiry which has been at work on the subject declares that the women persist in licking the gummed labels in preference to using the sponges they are provided with. Analysis proved the existence of seven kinds of noxious germs on a handful of these labels, and it is said that the practice leads to cancer of the tongue. Neither labels nor stamps should ever be licked.



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