

# Behind the Clock.

By DERWENT MIALL.

## I.

**T**HIS is a sad story, but if the lesson it holds for all womankind is somewhere taken to heart, it will not have been written in vain.

James Buffin had a large clock on his dining-room mantelpiece. It was modelled upon the cheerful lines of a mausoleum; the sort of clock, in fact, that is often presented to Sunday-school superintendents, curates, and elderly employers of business houses, when they have been a long time in one place without doing any particular harm.

Not that James' clock was a testimonial—be had never deserved anything like that. A too-adhesive label on the back of it still bore the inscription "Lot 203," which certainly suggests that he may have picked it up in a saleroom. But—Heaven knows why—James Buffin prized his clock, and every Saturday night, just before going to bed, he wound it up, and meddled with the regulator in the vague hope of doing some good to its works.

It was in front of this timepiece that his daughter Violet—who had just been promoted to long frocks—was standing one fateful afternoon, as she read a much-creased letter in the sprawly handwriting of George Plimley.

Violet had been forbidden to have anything more to do with the Plimleys, under penalty of being sent—long skirts notwithstanding—to be "finished" at some conventional establishment in France. For James Buffin, since a certain "deal" in which he had not shown his usual business acumen, always spoke of Plimley senior as "that old thief"; and he hated the very sight of George.

George it was, however, who wrote like this to Violet: "I have kissed your darling letter a thousand, thousand times, and am ten thousand times more resolved than ever that they shall never part us. Oh! my sweetest own—" But perhaps you, too, will hate George if I quote any more.

Poor Violet had scarcely time to read her George's letter through more than five times when a step sounded outside, and the door handle turned.

With every sign of terror and confusion upon her fresh young face, she tried to thrust the incriminating missive into her pocket. In that moment her girlhood ended.

Not till then had she fully realised that woman's estate has its sorrows as well as its privileges.

Her new hobble-skirt had no pocket!—or, if it had, it was so placed that it could not possibly be found.

To be discovered with a crumpled paper in her hand might be dangerous. There was no fire; the letter must be hidden somewhere in the room.

Quick as thought Violet slipped it behind the clock. And then James Buffin came in, with a tiresome business friend, who stayed to tea, and supper, and whist.

Violet had to go to bed before he left, and all this time the dining room was occupied. She was too nervous to come downstairs in the dark.

So George's letter remained behind the clock.

## II.

The following morning—it was Wednesday—Violet was down with influenza. Not until Thursday was she well enough to realise her position. Unless George's letter could be reclaimed before Saturday night, when James Buffin would move his clock to wind it—for the key went into a hole in its back—her doom was sealed. She would inevitably be sent away to the convent school.

It was all inexplicably said. The Buffins and the Plimleys were two of the most respected families at Polder's End—which, as you know, is a high-toned Garden City suburb. In this modest sphere both James Buffin and Mr. Plimley were successful men—although, perhaps, no man can be said to have achieved success, in the full sense of the word, who is still subject to the risk of cold mutton for dinner—and a matrimonial alliance between the two families would have been appropriate.

But—there was that feud. Violet thought of it as she lay in bed, and thought how the discovery of George's letter would intensify it. There was no one in the house in whom she

could confide, and the only girl friend she could trust—Amy Pinborne—was not tall enough to lift papa's clock.

At last, she decided that only George himself could help her. She would write—in fact, she did write—to her dearest Amy, enclosing a letter for her to give to George. George was strong enough to lift the clock, and, she hoped, brave enough to call at the house, some time when papa was out.

He would be shown into the dining-room; he would be alone for a minute or two, and he could sneak the letter from its hiding-place.

Violet's temperature dropped two degrees, and she took her beef-tea with some approach to equanimity after the letter to Amy Pinborne had been dispatched.

## III.

There was a headlong directness about George Plimley that made him a terror at tennis tournament and whist drive; and also, said the voice of detraction, at Cinderella dances—but this by the way.

It was characteristic of him that he entered the Buffins' house, not by the



Near-sighted old lady: For shame, Bill Simpson! And you only married a month.

front door, but by the French window of the dining-room, early on Saturday.

It was the shortest route to the clock. In the hushed room—the young man paused one moment to listen, a poised figure of arrested resolution. Then, with lithic and cat-like tread, he went to the mantelpiece, and lifted the gloomy time-piece, destined so soon to be wound, in his strong young hands.

He bumped it down again six inches out from the wall, found the letter, pocketed it, and once more raised the clock, to replace it in statu quo.

And at that moment James Buffin stood in the window!

With the clock still uplifted in his hands, George turned his head, and regarded the horror-stricken man.

James Buffin advanced into the room unsteadily.

"So you're trying to steal my clock!" he said hoarsely. "I didn't think any man could be so wicked!"

George was about to reply that no man would be so foolish, till he reflected that this was no occasion for levity. Somehow, he had got to explain his conduct without betraying Violet's secret.

Very meekly, very carefully, he put the clock back in its place.

"Trying to steal my clock!" repeated James Buffin, with bated breath; "and in broad daylight, too!"

"Nun-nun no," stammered poor George. "Oh, no! Mr. Buffin! I was just lifting it to see—to see if it was heavier than the one we have at home."

He smiled feebly; but the miserable pretence of laughter died out of his eyes, as James Buffin pointed to the open window.

"Go!" he said, sharply. "I have said hard things of your father, and I shall never forgive him. But I should not like even him to know that a son of his tried to steal my clock."

And George, after a moment's reflection, saw that, for Violet's sake, he must accept this condemnation; and he went.

But Violet was sent to the convent school after all; for James Buffin did not want her to be exposed even to the risk of a chance meeting with George.

So two young hearts were separated—perhaps for ever.

And the moral? Is it not to be found in this? The whole tragic business was due to the fact that Violet had no pocket in her dress. So woman's cry should be, not "Votes for Women," but "Pockets for Women"—practicable pockets.

For, after all, you never know when you may be placed in Violet's sad dilemma. Savages are pocketless; but, so long as women are content to be the same, they remain, where George's letter was, behind the clock.

## Suffragette Insanity.

The peculiarly exasperating Suffragette post-box campaign is still being carried on with undiminished zeal, and thus far not a single arrest seems to have been made either in London or the provinces. In spite of police and post office precautions pillar boxes and other receptacles for postal packets are being attacked daily in all parts of the country, and the effects of the destruction and mutilation of their contents are becoming painfully patent in mercantile circles. Emboldened by their successes, the Suffragettes are now openly boasting that what they have already done in the way of pillar-box outrages is nothing to what they will do presently. This is being interpreted to mean that these mad-brained harridans are planning a special visitation to take effect

Of course, the Suffragette's boast may be "all moonshine," but seeing what they have accomplished in the matter of post-box mischief, one cannot afford to ignore their threats as mere "idle vapourings." What these mad-brains of the "Votes for Women" army hope or expect to gain from the wanton and vicious interference with one of the most important and precious public conveniences is beyond the comprehension of the average person, male or female. It is just one of those forms of terrorism that are bound to defeat their object, for, to the ordinary everyday sort of man or woman it seems that the creature who deliberately places destructive agents in post-office boxes, is the last person in the world who should be given a voice in the government of the country. The average man says, "Put them in a lunatic asylum," but the average woman would mete out much harsher treatment.

If they continue their exasperating campaign against the people's post, there will surely be very unpleasant reprisals attempted presently.

Apart from their utterly indefensible attacks on post boxes, the "shrieking sisters" of the Suffrage movement are behaving in ways that invite the strongest possible condemnation. A case in point occurred only a few days ago, when a clergyman who, unfortunately, bore some faint likeness to Mr. Lloyd George, was slashed across the face with a dogwhip by a Suffragette, who imagined she had "treed" the Chancellor of the Exchequer in disguise. This vicious creature has gone to prison in lieu of paying a £10 penalty, but it is to be noted that she has not had even the grace to apologise to the unfortunate cleric, whose face will bear witness to the strength of her good right arm for many a day.

It goes all against a decent Englishman's grain to inflict corporal punishment on a woman, but to-day you may hear highly respectable citizens discussing the advisability of treating post-box raiders and women guilty of unprovoked assaults such as the one mentioned, to bodily discipline.



**OCCASIONAL CONSTIPATION** is a fertile source of many of the minor ills that flesh is heir to. The best way of restoring a state of healthy activity to stomach and bowels is by taking a wineglassful of "Hunyadi Janos" natural aperient water every alternate day before breakfast.

## Epilepsy and Fits.

What Independent Witnesses say—

From "FREE PRESS" (Wexford).

Wexford Union—Mr. T. H. Peacocke, J.P., in the chair. The Clerk said he had a curious statement to make with regard to **TRENCH'S REMEDY—A WONDERFUL SUCCESS.**

Some time ago the doctor had under his charge a girl who was suffering from a very bad form of Epilepsy, and he decided on trying Trench's Remedy. She took the medicine for a year and a half, and never had a fit during the whole time. For the past few months she ceased to take the medicine, and during that time she has had no fit.

Lord M. Fitzgerald: How many attacks had she before she was treated with the Remedy?

The Clerk: She used to be attacked daily, but she has not had an attack since she got this medicine.

Lord M. Fitzgerald: That is quite proof enough.

Testimonials from all over the world. Full particulars post free on application to New Zealand Agents for Trench's Remedies Ltd., Dublin,

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