

"HIS UNLUCKY STAR."

BY C. A. WILKINS.

Illustrated by E. B. Vaughan.

1000, Hereford-street,
Christchurch,
December 12th, 1899.

Mr. Reginald Temple,

DEAR SIR,—We regret to inform you that, owing to impending changes in the office arrangements, we shall not require your services after this day fortnight. Trusting to hear of your speedily obtaining another appointment.—We remain, faithfully yours,

PEPPER & SALT.

THIS letter was handed to Reginald Temple, together with his week's salary, one Saturday at 1 p.m. by the cashier of the firm, John Dixon, who, knowing the contents of the communication, had considerably waited until the other fellows had gone before giving poor Reginald his "walking-ticket." The latter opened the envelope and read the contents as he stood at the counter.

"I'm awfully sorry, old man," said Dixon, when Reginald had finished reading. "I only got to hear of what was in the wind an hour ago. What will you do?"

Temple bit his lip moodily.

"Don't know, old chap. Can't get my thinking-apparatus to work for the moment. This is what Dick Swiveller would call 'an unmitigated staggerer.' Of course there are no impending changes. Have you heard of any?"

Dixon was silent.

He knew as well as the other that the firm had employed a polite fiction to get rid of Reginald.

"No; of course you haven't. It's only another specimen of my infernal luck. I'm beginning to feel about full up of everything. If I were only fit I'd go to Africa and help fight the Boers. There's going to be trouble with the beggars, you mark my words. But I'm not fit. I'm all run

down. I'm one of life's failures. One of the 'not wanteds.'"

"Don't talk rot, Reggie," said Dixon, who was the despondent man's only intimate friend in Christchurch." You are naturally knocked all of a heap by old Pepper's letter. Wait for me while I finish up, and come and have some lunch. You'll feel better afterwards, take my word. Then we'll have a smoke and talk things over a bit. As good fish in the sea, old chap, as ever came out of it. Why, I only wish I had your expectations."

"I suppose you refer to my Uncle Gregory?"

"Of course I do! Isn't he a kind of Cæsus, rolling in riches. Isn't he sixty, and aren't you his heir? Why, you'll be able to buy up Pepper and Salt, lock, stock and barrrel one of these days. Never say die, man!"

"My dear Dixon it's all jolly fine for you to talk! But a chap can't live on his expectations! As for Uncle Gregory, his is what insurance men call a better life than mine, by long odds. Although he's sixty he has the health of a ploughman, and is as likely to see a hundred as any man I know. I'm sure I hope he may, although he hates me. Your successful self-made man has precious little sympathy with an unfortunate chap like myself. And its quite on the cards that he'll alter his will before he pegs out and leaves his money to found a home for lost dogs, or something of the sort. It would be just like him."

At this juncture old Pepper, upstairs in his room, getting through arrears of correspondence, rang his call-bell sharply, and with an "excuse me half a moment, old man," Dixon bounded away to obey the summons. When he returned Reginald Temple had gone.