

Marsh Richard

**Frivolities, Especially Addressed
to Those Who
Are Tired of...**



Richard Marsh

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Marsh Richard

Frivolities, Especially Addressed to Those Who Are Tired of Being Serious

The purse which was found

I

The first applicant arrived just as I was sitting down to breakfast. I went out to him in the hall at once. He was tall, thin, and distinctly seedy.

"I have called with reference to the advertisement of the purse which was found." I bowed. He seemed to hesitate. "I have lost a purse." He looked as if he had-long years ago. "I have reason to believe that it is my purse which you have found. I shall be happy to hand you the cost of your advertisement on your returning me my property."

"When did you lose it?"

My question seemed to escape his notice.

"I am a clergyman in the Orders of the Church of England, and the inscrutable laws of the Divine Benevolence have placed me in a position which makes such a loss a matter of cardinal importance."

"Where did you lose it?"

"In town, sir-in town."

"In what part of town?"

"In the west, sir-in the west."

"Do you mean in the western postal district?"

"My topographical knowledge of this great city is scarcely sufficient to enable me to enter into such minutiae." He assumed an air of candour which ill became him. "I will be frank with you. I do not know where I lost it. The shock of the loss was so great as to make of my mind a *tabula rasa*. I have an appointment at some distance from here in less than half an hour. Might I ask you to give me my property without any unnecessary delay?"

"With pleasure, on your describing it."

"Unfortunately there again you have me at a disadvantage. The purse was my daughter's, lent to me only for the day. I have not preserved a sufficiently clear mental picture to enable me to furnish you with an adequate description."

"But your daughter can?"

"Precisely, if she were in town. But she is not in town. And it is of paramount importance that I should at once regain possession of the property. If you will allow me to look at it I shall be able to tell at a glance if it is mine."

"I am afraid that I must request you to describe the purse lost before I show you the one I found." He drew himself up.

"I trust, sir, that your words are not intended to convey a reflection?"

"Not at all. Only, as I have not breakfasted, and you have an appointment to keep, it might be as well if you were at once to communicate with your daughter, and request her to favour you with the necessary description."

"Excuse me, sir, but you mistake your man. I am a gentleman, sir, like you-a university man, sir. I came here to regain possession of my property; you are in possession of that property; until you

return it to me I do not intend to quit this house." As he had suddenly raised his voice, and evinced symptoms of raising it higher, I opened the front door by way of a hint. On the doorstep stood one of the unemployed, the remnant of a woollen muffler twisted round his neck.

"Beg pardon, gov'nor, I've come for my purse."

"What purse?"

"You know very well what purse—the purse what's advertised. You hand it over to me, and I'm game to pay all costs. It's mine. I lost it."

"Describe the one you had the misfortune to lose."

"It was a leather purse."

"Then that is not the purse I found."

"Shammy leather, I mean."

"Nor is it shammy leather."

"Covered with sealskin outside."

"Nor is it covered with sealskin outside."

"Just you take and let me have a look at it. I'll soon tell you if it's mine."

"Before the purse is shown to any claimant he must satisfactorily describe it."

"Very well; that's all about it. If it ain't mine, it ain't mine. You needn't be nasty."

"I have no intention of being nasty."

"Then don't be. Because a pore feller loses his purse he don't need to be trampled on. You can be pore but honest."

With the utterance of this trite and, possibly, admirable observation the man strolled off, with his hands in his pockets. My clerical friend, who had lingered in the hall, endeavoured to take me by the button-hole. He addressed me in a confidential whisper.

"Pardon me, sir, but circumstances over which I have no control have temporarily crippled my resources. Since, from motives which I understand, and which I honour, sir, you prefer to continue to be the custodian of my family property, might I with confidence ask you to oblige me with a small loan till I am able to place myself in communication with my daughter?"

"You might not."

"I fear that I am already late for my appointment. The only way to reach it in time will be to take a cab. May I, at least, ask you to enable me to pay the fare?"

"You may not."

He sighed.

"I believe you said you had not breakfasted? Neither, sir, have I. You will hardly believe it, but it is a positive fact that I, a clergyman, a master of arts of my university, have not tasted food for more than four-and-twenty hours. If, sir, you will suffer me, a humble stranger, to join you at your morning meal—"

"Good-day, sir."

He sighed again. Then, putting his hand up to his mouth, he asked, in a sepulchral whisper:

"Will you lend me sixpence?"

"I won't—not one farthing."

Then he went, shaking his head as he passed down the steps, as if the burden of this world pressed on him more weightily than ever. He was still descending the steps when a cab dashed up, from the interior of which an elderly gentleman flourished an umbrella.

II

"Hi! Is this 25, Bangle Gardens, where they advertise that a purse was found?"

I admitted that it was.

"Was it found in Regent Street on Wednesday afternoon-silver monogram 'E. L. T.'-containing between nine and ten pounds in silver and gold?"

I said that it was not.

"Sorry to have troubled you. Throgmorton Street, driver. Push along."

I was closing the door when I was hailed by a woman, who remained standing at the foot of the steps. She was a young woman, evidently of the artisan class. She wore an air of depression, and carried a baby in her arms.

"Was the purse which was found mine, sir?"

"What was yours like?"

"I lost it in the Mile End Road on Saturday night, sir. My husband's wages was in it-twenty-four and sixpence. He see the advertisement in the paper, and sent me round to see. Leather it was-leastways, imitation-red, and the clasp was broken."

"I am sorry to say that your description bears no kind of resemblance to the one which is in my possession."

She looked at me for a moment, scrutinizingly, as if desirous of learning if what I said was credible; then, without another word, moved off.

I had succeeded in closing the door just as there came another rap upon the knocker. I reopened it, to find myself confronted by another of the unemployed.

"I ask your pardon, guv'nor, but seeing an advertisement about a purse as was found, I thought I'd just come round to see if it might happen to be mine. Mine wasn't a leather purse, nor yet it wasn't a shammy leather, nor yet it wasn't one of them sealskin kind of things."

As soon as he said that I suspected that this was a friend of the other unemployed, from whom he had recently gathered certain data.

"Mine was more one of them sort of bag kind."

"What bag kind?"

"Well-" He fixed me with his gaze. If he had been acquainted with the fact that images are photographed upon our eyes, I might have suspected him of an intent to decipher the image of the purse in mine. "Was this here purse you found tied round the top?"

"Was yours?"

He read the answer in my eyes.

"No, I can't say as how mine was; but I thought as how this here one you found might have been-some purses are, you know."

Unless I erred he was endeavouring to consider what sort of purse that purse might be, his knowledge of the varieties of that article being limited. He taxed my patience.

"If you have lost a purse, my man, be so good as to describe it without delay. I can't stop here all the morning."

"Well, as I was a-saying, it was one of them sort of bag kind."

"Then it's not the one I found."

Without more ado I slammed the door in his face. I went in to breakfast. As I was sitting down there came a single knock. Saunders turned to leave the room to answer it.

"One moment, Saunders. I don't know if I mentioned to you that, the day before yesterday, I found a purse?"

"No, sir."

"Well, I did, and I'm beginning to wish that I hadn't. I've inserted an advertisement in to-day's papers to the effect that the owner may have it on applying to me. I've had five applicants within five minutes-three of them rank impostors. I'm rather inclined to think that the person who has just knocked is one of them come back again. I doubt if he ever had a purse in his life-he certainly never had the one I've found. Tell him if he doesn't take himself away at once I'll send for the police."

Saunders vanished. There was the sound of voices-one of them belonging to Saunders, the other, undoubtedly, to that member of the unemployed. He seemed to be shouting at Saunders, and Saunders, in a dignified way, seemed to be shouting back at him. Presently there was a lull. Saunders reappeared.

"Well, has the fellow gone?"

"No, sir. And he says he isn't going."

"Did you give him to understand that I should send for the police?"

"He says he should like to see you send for the police. He says that the police will soon show you if you can rob a poor man of his purse. He's a most impudent fellow. As for the purse which you found being his, sir, I don't believe he knows what a purse is. He's a regular vagabond!"

"I quite agree with you, Saunders-quite! That is my opinion of the man precisely."

"There are five other persons who wish to see you. Three of them have cards, and two of them haven't."

He held out three cards on a waiter, taking my breath away.

"Five, Saunders! Where are these people?"

"In the hall, sir."

"I won't see anyone till I've had my breakfast. I'm not going to have all my habits disarranged simply because I happen to have found a purse. I ought to have stated that no applications were to be made till after twelve; I never dreamt that people would have come at this time of day. Show the people with the cards into the drawing-room, and leave the others in the hall. And, Saunders, it would be a little obvious, perhaps, to remove the hats and umbrellas from before their very faces, but keep a sharp eye on them!"

I glanced at the trio of visiting-cards, as, once more, I made an attempt to continue my meal. "Mrs. Chillingby-Harkworth, Pagoda Mansions, S.W.," "Colonel Fitzakarley Beering," "George Parkins." The idea of a number of entire strangers being turned loose in my drawing-room was one I did not relish. I felt I ought to have stated that applications in writing would alone have been attended to.

I had imagined that, by not taking my find to the police-station, I should be saving myself trouble. I perceived that my imagination had been at fault. I had had no notion that such a number of people had lost their purses. A constant fusillade was being kept up on the knocker. I might have been giving a fashionable assembly, and requested the guests to arrive in time for breakfast. All at once there was a violent ringing at the drawing-room bell.

In came Saunders with a stack of cards on a tray and some telegrams.

"Well, Saunders, many people here?"

"More than twenty inside the house, and I don't know how many there are outside-I know the pavement's getting blocked. The drawing-room is full, and the hall is crammed. Queer ones some of them are; they don't look to me as if they were the sort to lose their purses. And now the lady whose card I brought up to you has rung the bell, and says that she insists on seeing you at once."

"Show her up, and, when I ring, show her down again. Then send them up one after the other. I'll get rid of them as fast as I can. And, Saunders, if ever you find a purse lose it again directly, and don't breathe a word of it to anyone!"

III

In came a lady, looking every inch a Mrs. Chillingby-Harkworth-tall, portly, middle-aged, richly dressed. As she eyed me through a pair of long-handled spy-glasses her volubility was amazing.

"May I inquire your name, sir?"

"Burley is my name, madam."

"Then, Mr. Burley, I have to inform you I was never treated with so much indignity before. I come here in answer to an advertisement, at great personal inconvenience to myself, and I am shown into a room with a number of most extraordinary characters; and one person, who, I am sure, was the worse for drink, asks me the most impertinent questions, and when I appeal for protection to another individual, he tells me that he has enough to do in attending to his own business without interfering with other people's, and I have positively to ring the bell twice before I can receive any proper attention."

"I am sorry that you should have suffered any unpleasantness in my house. May I ask if you have lost a purse?"

"I can't say I have—at least, not for years. I only lost one purse in my life, and that was when I was quite a child—I've always taken too much care of my things to lose them. But the friend of a niece of mine, who was staying with me a week or two ago, took her little boy to the Zoological Gardens, and she lost her purse. She hadn't the faintest notion where or how, and when I saw the advertisement I thought I would call and see if it was hers."

"May I ask you to describe the purse which your friend lost?"

"My good sir, I can't do anything of the kind. I only saw it for a moment in her hand as she was going out. You mustn't ask me to perform impossibilities."

"Perhaps your friend could describe it."

"Of course she could, if she were here, but she isn't; she's at the other end of the country. I've come to look at the purse which you have found, don't I tell you, and wasted a whole morning in doing so. I daresay I shall be able to form a pretty shrewd idea as to whether it is hers, as those who know me best will tell you. My sense of observation has always been exceedingly keen."

I shook my head.

"I am afraid that that is what I cannot do. According to your own statement you have not lost a purse. I am unable to produce the one which I have found until I am furnished with a satisfactory description by the actual loser."

She stared.

"Good gracious, my good man, you don't mean to say that after bringing me here, and after what I have gone through, you refuse to show me the purse which you have actually advertised?"

I rang the bell.

"Possibly your friend will place herself in communication with me. Saunders, show this lady out."

I fancy she was so taken aback by my manner that for the moment she was speechless. Anyhow, she went, and regained the use of her tongue when she got outside. I heard her rating Saunders soundly as she went downstairs. A young man came next, with something about him which smacked of a provincial town.

"My name's Parkins. You've got a pretty crowd downstairs. I didn't expect this sort of thing, or I wouldn't have come. A lot of Johnnies seem to be on the prowl for a purse. Was the one you found plain leather, with a single pocket, and three fivers inside?"

"Not the least like it."

"Oh! The fact is, I'm up in town for an holiday, and the night before last I went on the razzle, and some Johnny boned my purse, and I thought you might have got it."

I do not know what he meant, or if he intended to insult me—he seemed to be a simple sort of youth—but he was gone before I had a chance of asking him. He was followed by an elderly gentleman, whom I had reason to suppose, before I had got rid of him, was either a seasoned liar, or more or less insane. He seated himself—uninvited by me—crossed his legs, and nursed his silk hat and umbrella.

"I suppose it is a purse you've found?"

"Of course it is. Have you lost one?"

"It isn't a Gladstone bag?"

"A Gladstone bag?" I was a little dazed by my efforts to grasp the man's meaning, and the question was such an absurd one.

"I take it that if it had been a Gladstone bag I should have mentioned it in my advertisement. I am still able to distinguish between the one and the other."

"Nor a silk umbrella with a silver mount and a crest on top, like this?"

He held out the one he had been holding.

I stiffened my back, suspecting him of a humorous intention.

"My time is valuable, as, having just come from downstairs, you must be aware. May I ask if I am indebted for the pleasure of your presence here to the fact of your having lost a purse?"

"A purse? On my soul and honour, sir, in my time I've lost hundreds—hundreds! Positively hundreds!"

I believe I gasped—he spoke with an airy indifference as if that kind of thing were commonplace.

"As I was saying to some of those fellows downstairs, if there's a man in England who has lost more things than I have, I should like to meet him. It's a genius I have; as sure as I get a thing I lose it. And the more it costs, the more it's lost. As for purses, they're my strongest point. I suppose I lost more than a score last year, and already more than a dozen this. Only last week my wife bought a steel chain with a steel purse at the end of it. She chained it round me. If you will believe me, sir, the very next day I went to a Turkish bath and left it there—never set eyes upon it since. I take it it isn't that purse you've found?"

"It is not."

"Nor a large square trunk, iron-bound, weighing about two tons, which I left on the Boulogne Quay a fortnight last Thursday?"

"It is not that, either. Pardon me if I appear to interrupt you, but, since you seem to have been unfortunate on so large a scale, I fear I must ask you to go home and have a list printed of the purses which you have lost at different times, and send it to me at your leisure. I shall then be able to perceive if it is one of them which I have found. But I beg you will not include in it any ironbound trunks. Good-day."

I rang the bell; the man sat still.

"It isn't only trunks and purses which I lose—I lose everything. The day before yesterday I went into the City to buy groceries; filled two great parcels four feet square; had them put with me into the cab so that I might keep them well in sight; got out on the road to have a drink; when I had had it got into the wrong cab; never discovered the mistake till I reached my own doorstep. Those groceries haven't yet come to hand—"

"These anecdotes—"

"Excuse me, I'll tell you another thing I've lost. Six months ago I lost my wife. Took her for a run on the Continent; on the way home dined at a restaurant on the Boulevards; went out to buy a cigar; forgot all about my wife; left her eating an ice; came over by the night boat; never noticed she was missing till I was between the sheets in bed." He paused, as if to meditate. "She wasn't a dead loss; turned up afterwards, as I've reason to remember."

Whether the man was or was not mad, or whether he was merely amusing himself at my expense, is more than I can say. We had the greatest difficulty in getting rid of him. By the time I had interviewed another dozen applicants I came to the conclusion that, if I had to go through much

more of that kind of thing, my brain would turn. One red-headed man came into the room with a huge portfolio under his arm. Before I could stop him he had unfolded it before my astonished eyes.

"I have here one of the finest works ever issued from the press. It is a universal gazetteer and general encyclopædia of information, and contains 22,000 more references than any other work of the kind which has been previously produced. It is most superbly illustrated, in the most lavish manner, by the greatest artists, two or more full-page illustrations to each part, besides innumerable smaller illustrations, splendid maps, and magnificent coloured pictures, which are quite worthy of being framed. It is issued in monthly parts price sevenpence, and with the first part is presented a free gift-"

It was all I could do to prevent myself kicking him downstairs. He was not by any means the only offender in this direction. One young woman, after beating about the bush in a manner which, although I was becoming familiar with it, was none the less maddening, explained that she had come to solicit contributions towards providing a day in the country for some ragamuffins at the other end of the town.

IV

The worst of it was that, though I scampered through the applicants as fast as ever they would let me, the number of them, instead of diminishing, increased. The clamour of their voices filled the house. Saunders and the maids were becoming alarmed-for the matter of that so was I. The people swarmed into the house like flies. The downstairs rooms were full, the hall was blocked, the stairway choked, a continually increasing crowd was on the pavement. Everyone wanted to see me at once. Judging from the noise quarrels were frequent. I had heard of the astonishing number of the applications which are received for an advertised vacant clerkship; judging from results I might have advertised not for one clerk, but for half a dozen.

"I think," suggested Saunders, pale, though heated, "that we had better send for the police."

I had just disposed of a man who, after explaining that he had lost a purse something like twelve months ago, had assured the crowd, from the top of the stairs, that I was a colourable imitation of a thief, because I had declined to show him the one which I had found a couple of days before. He had been followed by an acidulated-looking female, who, I felt certain, was a tough morsel, and who was eyeing me, as Saunders spoke, as if I had been a convict at the least.

"Why? Are the people misbehaving?"

Saunders's face was more eloquent than his words.

"I don't believe there'll be much furniture left in the drawing-room if something isn't done. Cook's locked herself in the kitchen, and some of the people have gone downstairs-a pretty sort they are! If they aren't in the plate cupboard, they're in the pantry."

This was pleasant hearing. Before I could speak the acidulated lady-proving that my diagnosis of her character had not been unfounded-answered for me.

"And serve you quite right too! I believe that the whole affair's a swindle. You ought to be made to suffer. I don't believe you've found a purse at all."

"My dear madam, I assure you that I have!"

"Then why don't you let any of the poor creatures who have lost their purses have so much as a sight of it? If you have found a purse, why don't you show it to them like an honest man?" I sighed-the logic of people who had lost their purses was wonderful. "As for me, I'm not going through the farce of describing the purse I lost, because I know very well you haven't got it; but I'll tell you this-I've come all the way from Hackney, and I've wasted a day, and I don't mean to leave this house till you've paid me my expenses. I'll teach you to play tricks with innocent people! And" – she suddenly raised her voice-"if other people take my advice they will insist upon having their expenses paid them too!"

Before Saunders or I could interpose she had thrown the door wide open, and was addressing her, by now, excited audience, as if to the manner born.

"My good people, I am Sarah Eliza Warren, of Greenbush Villa, Hackney, and, like yourselves, I have been brought to this house by what seems to me to amount to false pretences. I don't believe that a purse has been found at all. If you take my advice you will do as I am doing-you will insist on being compensated for your loss of time, and for your out-of-pocket expenditure!"

I plainly perceived that further argument was useless. The idea of compensating that motley gathering for effecting a burglarious entry on to my premises was one which was too terrible to contemplate.

I threw up the window.

"Police! police!" I shouted.

A solitary policeman was in sight. Considering that the street in front of my house was rendered practically impassable by the concourse of people and of vehicles, the wonder was that the whole force had not been on the spot an hour ago. His attention had been attracted by the crowd; he was hastening

towards it. Some fifty to sixty persons endeavoured to explain the situation as he advanced. He waved them majestically from him as only a policeman can. As he came near the house I shouted to him:

"I'm the owner of this house! I require your assistance, constable! I want you to turn these people out!"

The effect of my words was spoilt by the opening of the drawing-room window, which was immediately under the one at which I was. Half a dozen men and women thrust their heads out. They simultaneously addressed the constable. Under the circumstances he did the best thing he could have done—he blew his whistle.

V

There ensued a scene of considerable excitement. Never tell me again that policemen do not come when they are wanted. As soon as that whistle was blown blue-coated officials began to appear in all directions. A policeman running is a sight to be seen-so the general public with leisure on its hands seemed to think, because each came attended by a tail of stragglers. What the neighbours thought of the proceedings Heaven only knows. People stood on the doorsteps, heads were thrust out of every window. Bangley Gardens had never before experienced such an occasion in the whole course of its history.

The behaviour of the persons who had lost their purses-or wished me to believe that they had-was disgraceful. Judging from the sounds they were wandering over the house wherever their fancy led them. A scuffle seemed to be taking place on the stairs, another in the hall, and there was plainly contention in the drawing-room. Mysterious noises in the basement. Eight or nine excitable people had forced their way into my room, and, headed by "Sarah Eliza Warren," were addressing me in a fashion which, to say the least of it, was lacking in decorum. Meantime the original policeman was standing with his hands in his belt, waiting for the support of his colleagues before taking any steps whatever to save my property from being looted.

"Constable!" I screamed, "I am the owner of this house, and I shall hold you responsible for any damage that is done to my property. Come inside, I tell you, and turn these people out."

He apparently paid no heed to me whatever; I was not the only one who was screaming; The people at the drawing-room window were behaving as if they had just broken loose from Bedlam. From what I afterwards ascertained it seems as if some of them imagined that they were in for a colourable imitation of the original affair of the Black Hole of Calcutta.

Suddenly I became conscious that the proceedings in my immediate neighbourhood had positively increased in liveliness. Turning, I perceived that Saunders was engaged in what looked very like a bout of fisticuffs with still another member of the unemployed; he had detected him in the act of pocketing a silver statuette. Regardless of who was standing in the way I rushed to his assistance. I struck out at somebody-somebody struck out at me. What immediately followed must have borne a strong family resemblance to the "divarsion" which marked the occasion of that immortal "Irish christenin'."

"What's the meaning of all this? Who's the owner of this house?"

Never was anything more welcome than the sight of the stalwart, blue-coated figure of the representative of law and order standing in the doorway. I tremble to think of what would have happened if his arrival had been delayed much longer.

"I am-what's left of him."

"Then, if you're the owner of the house, what are all these people doing in it?"

"Perhaps you will be so good as to ask them; they have certainly not been invited by me."

A voice was raised in explanation-the voice of "Sarah Eliza Warren."

"We 've been made the victims of a scandalous hoax, policeman, and if there's a law in the land this person ought to be made to suffer. He's lured people by false pretences from all parts of the country, and I, for one, don't mean to leave this house till he has compensated me for the loss and suffering he has caused me."

"More don't I," chimed in, of all persons, that felonious member of the unemployed.

"Officer, I give that man in charge for theft; my man has just caught him in the act of appropriating my property."

The man began to bluster.

"What are you talking about? Who do you think you are? You rob a poor bloke like me of a whole day's work, and then won't give me so much as a ha'penny piece to make up for it! A nice sort you are to talk of robbery!"

The constable raised his hand in the orthodox official manner, which is intended to soothe.

"Now, then! now, then!" He addressed me. "Is what these persons say true-have you been hoaxing them?"

"Most distinctly not; as, if you will be so good as to rid my house of their presence, I shall have much pleasure in promptly proving to you."

The sergeant-he was a sergeant-made short work of the clearance, even managing, by dint of an assurance that he would listen to all she had to say afterwards, to dislodge "Sarah Eliza Warren." Then he turned to me.

"Now, perhaps, you will tell me what this means. If you're the householder, as you say, you yourself ought to turn anyone out of your own house you want to turn out, as a policeman has no right to come into a private house unless an actual charge is to be preferred. I don't know what you've been doing, but you seem to be responsible for something very like a riot."

I felt that it was hard, after what I had undergone, to be addressed in such a strain by a man in his position.

"When you have heard the explanation which I am about to give you, you will yourself perceive how far you are justified in adopting towards me such a tone." I paused. I seated myself-the support of a chair having become an absolute necessity. "The day before yesterday, as I was turning from Knightsbridge into Sloane Street, I saw a purse lying on the pavement. I picked it up. I inquired of several people standing about, or who were passing by, if they had dropped it. No one had. I brought it home, and yesterday I sent an advertisement to the papers. Here it is, in one of them."

I pointed it out to him in a newspaper of the day.

"Found, A Purse. – Owner may have it by giving description and paying the cost of this advertisement. – Apply to 25, Bangley Gardens, S.W."

"It's too vague," objected the constable.

"I purposely made it as vague as I could, thinking that if I left all the details to be filled in I should render it certain that it could only be claimed by the actual owner, and, to make sure it should be claimed by him, I had it inserted in all the morning papers."

The constable smiled the smile of superiority.

"If you had let me know what you had done I'd have sent my men down in time to protect you. A vague advertisement like that appearing in all the papers is bound to attract the attention of half the riffraff of London, who are always ready for a little game of trying it on, not to speak of the hundreds, perhaps thousands, who are losing their purses every day."

"I have discovered that fact-a day after the affair."

"You ought to have taken it at once to a police-station. Everyone ought to take the things they find. It would save them a lot of bother."

"That, also, I perceive too late. I was under a different impression at first. I know better now. Perhaps you will allow me to repair my error and confide it to your keeping at this, the eleventh hour. Then I shall have pleasure in referring all further applicants to you."

As he placed the purse in the inside pocket of his tunic the sergeant grinned.

"Don't think you'll get rid of them by giving it to me now, because you won't. Look at the street. There's a pretty sight for you."

It was a pretty sight-of a kind. The usually deserted Bangley Gardens was filled with a clamorous crowd. It distinctly comprised all sorts and conditions of men-and women. Two or three policemen, standing at the foot of my steps, were doing their best to keep the people back. It seemed incredible that all this bother could be about a purse. If ever I found another I would know the reason why.

"I shall have to leave some of my men to keep the people circulating, and to save you from annoyance. I shouldn't be surprised if you have them worrying you for several days to come. If you take my advice you'll put an advertisement in to-morrow's papers, to say that you have handed the purse to us."

I did put an advertisement in the next day's papers, though it was not couched in the terms which he suggested. For the joke was that scarcely had the sergeant turned his back when I took up, half absent-mindedly, a telegram from the heap which was constantly arriving, and found it contained this message—a tolerably voluminous one:

"To 25, Bangle Gardens.

"Referring to advertisement of purse found in to-day's *Times*, Lady Hester Hammersmith, of Hammersmith House, Grosvenor Square, on Thursday afternoon, between three and four, dropped, probably outside Cane and Wilson's, green silk network purse, secured by two gold rings—emerald in one, sapphire in the other. At one end of the purse were four ten and one five-pound notes; at the other, about nine pounds in gold and silver. As Lady Hester Hammersmith values the purse apart from its intrinsic value, and is greatly troubled at its loss, if this is the purse found, please wire at once. Reply paid."

I rushed to the door.

"Saunders, where is the boy who brought this message? Run after that sergeant of police and bring him back again—this is the purse I found."

It was. And so it came about that the second advertisement which I inserted was not worded as the sergeant had suggested, but was to the effect that no further applications need be made to anyone, because the purse which was found had been restored to its rightful owner.

For One Night Only

"Once I were a waiter. Never again. It was like this here-

"At that time I was fresh from the country-ah! I was fresh-and I was in a situation along with old Bob Perkins, what kep' a greengrocer's shop in the 'Ampstead Road. One day Mr. Perkins says to me:

"'Brocklebank,' he says, 'would you like to do a little job of waiting?' I knew as he went out acting as waiter at private parties and such like, so I says:

"'I don't mind,' I says; 'not that I knows anything about it, if that don't make no odds.

"'Lor', no! that don't make no odds,' he says. 'It's only the cloak-room you'll have to look after, and you'll get 'alf-a-crown and your grub for doin' it.'

"'Cloak-room?' I says. 'What's that?' 'Why,' he says, 'where the gents puts their 'ats and coats and umbrellas.' 'I'm on,' I says. 'I shouldn't be surprised if I was able to keep a heye upon a humbrella; I should think that was about my style.' But I were wrong, as I'm a-goin' to tell yer.

"In the evening I went up with Mr. Perkins to a house in the Camden Road. I had on a old dress suit of Perkins's, which wasn't no sort of fit, seeing as how he was fifty-two in the waist and I was twenty-five. Mrs. Perkins, she'd what she called 'caught the trousers up' in the back, and she said as no one would see me it would be all right, which I hoped it would be. It didn't feel all right, I tell you that.

"When me and Mr. Perkins got up to the house they put me straight away into a little band-box of a cupboard sort of place, where there was some shelves and some 'ooks and some pieces of paper, with numbers on-the same number on two pieces of paper-and a box of pins. The servant girl as shows me in says-a saucy piece of goods she was! – 'There you are! and I hope you're more 'andy than you looks, because if you mixes of the things there'll be excitement.' Mr. Perkins, he'd told me what I'd have to do as we was coming along, so I wipes my 'ot 'and upon his breeches, and I 'opes for the best.

"Presently the people begins a-coming to the party. A young gent, he comes up to me, and he 'ands me his overcoat, and a billycock 'at, and a silk scarf, and a umbrella, and a pair of india-rubber shoes, and I was floored at once; because Mr. Perkins had told me that I was to pin one number to whatever a gent gave me, and I was to give him the same number, so that he might know it by that number when he came again. So when this young gent gave me all that lot of articles I began pinning one number to his 'at-it was a 'ard 'at and not easy to drive a pin in-and another to his overcoat, and another to his umbrella, and another to his shoes, and another to his scarf-as I'd understood Mr. Perkins to tell me. But this here young gent, he wouldn't have it. He wanted me to pin one number to the lot of them; and as I was a-arguing with him, and tryin' to understand how he made out as I could do that, seeing as how the pins was little ones, and the numbers not large ones neither, a lot of other gents came up, and this here young gent he got quite red in the face, and he snatched a number out of my hand and he walked off, and he left me staring.

"Well I got on pretty well, considerin', so long as the people didn't come too fast. But I tell you, if you're not used to pins, they're more difficult to manage than you might think. You never know where you're driving of them. I know that, what with the 'eat and the 'aste, some being all of a flurry, I drove more of them into my 'ands than I quite liked. And I soon saw that that there box of pins wouldn't never last me long, seein' as how I bent three out of every two, so as I couldn't use 'em-not to speak of others I dropped and couldn't stop to find.

"But, as I was a-sayin', I got on somehow, and I daresay I should have got on, somehow, to the end, if it hadn't been that I was fresh from the country. Of course, I didn't know what gentlefolk wear, and one 'at was like another 'at to me-and that was where I was deceived. One gent fair took me aback. He came in with a 'igh top-'at on his 'ead, and when he took it off he put one end against his chest and he gave it a sort of a shove, and he squashed it as flat as my 'and. I tell you, I stared. I thought he'd been having a drop to drink, and had busted his brand new 'at for a sort of a joke. But he seemed to be sober enough, so far as I could see, and he didn't seem to mind what he'd done to his 'at,

not a little bit. Presently another gent came alone, and he done the same to his top-'at. Then another, and another-in fact, a whole crowd of them. And there was me, a-perspiring like one o'clock, with Perkins's breeches a-coming undone where his old woman had caught 'em up at the back, a-standing in the middle of a lot of squashed 'igh 'ats, what was lying all over the place. So I began to see that there was more in the nature of a 'igh 'at than I'd supposed.

"Bless you! there wasn't nearly room for all the things that these gents kept a-handing me, and unless I took to standin' on 'em, I didn't see what I was to do. So when there came a sort of a lull like I looks round to see how I could make a bit of room. 'Alf them gents hadn't squashed in their 'igh 'ats, like the other gents 'ad done, and I sees at once as how they were takin' up more than their fair share of space. So I makes up my mind to squash 'em for 'em, and I sets about a-doin' it. I takes up a 'igh 'at what a old gent had just a-give me-a beautiful shiny one it was-and I sets it against my stomach and I starts a-'eavin'. I'd no idea it'd be so 'ard. Them other gents had seemed to squash theirs easy, but this 'ere one took some shovin'. And, when it did go, it went all lop-sided like. I had to sit on it before it'd lie down flat.

"I had my 'and full, I tell you, squashin' all them 'igh 'ats. There was forty of 'em, if there was one. Fair 'ard work I found it. I supposed there was some knack about the thing as I 'adn't yet caught. And when I'd finished the lot I took a squint at 'em. If you'll believe me, a shiver went up and down my back. Somehow I didn't like the way as they was lookin'. There was a crumpled sort of look about 'em which didn't seem like as it ought to be. I was a-perspirin' all over. Perkins's breeches had come undone behind, and was 'anging about me anyhow; my collar had come unpinned at the back of my shirt; the bow that Mrs. Perkins had give me for a necktie had worked loose in front. A lot of them articles hadn't got no numbers on, and most of them as had I felt certain as I'd given to the wrong parties; and, altogether, I began to wish as how I hadn't come.

"Presently the old gent as had given me the 'igh 'at as I had started squashin' came up to the door. He was a tall old gent, very fierce-lookin', with a long white moustache-a regular toff. As he'd been the last to come, and it seemed as how he was goin' to be the first to go, it looked as if he had soon had enough of the party. 'Give me my 'at,' he says.

"I knew which was his 'at, though it 'adn't got no number. I had good reason to. So I routed it out from under a 'eap of others. He looks at it, and then he looks at me.

"That's not my 'at,' he says.

"Excuse me, sir,' I says, 'it is your 'at-leastways, it's the one as you gave to me.'

"He looks at the 'at again, and then again he looks at me, and all of a sudden he went quite red in the face.

"Mine was a new 'at!'

"Yes, sir,' I says; 'so I thought, sir, when you gave it me. It didn't look as though it 'adn't never been worn. If you try this 'at on, sir, you will find, sir, as it's yours.'

"Then he takes the 'at out of my 'and, lookin' at me once more, searchin' like, and he turns it round and round, and he squints inside of it.

"As I'm alive,' he says, 'I do believe it's mine!'

"I says,' I'm sure, sir, as how it is. I noticed it most particular.'

"But, good 'evins!' he says, 'whatever 'ave you been a-doing to it?'

"I've only been a-squashin' of it, sir,' I says.

"Only been a-squashin' of it!' he says, and he gives a kind of gasp. 'Are you drunk, man?'

"No, sir,' I says, 'and that I'm not. I haven't had so much as 'alf a pint since I've been inside this 'ouse!' Which I 'adn't, and my throat was gettin' regular parched.

"He did flare out!

"Then if you're not drunk, man,' he says, 'what the devil do you mean by tellin' me that you've only been a-squashin' of a brand new 'at?' He gives another squint inside of it. "Ang me if it doesn't look as if he'd been a-sitting down upon the thing!"

"'I had to,' I says, 'to make it stay down flat.'

"'I thought he would have had a fit.

"'My God!' he says, 'what sort of a place is it that I've got into?' Then he uses language what I'd always been taught was most unbecomin' to anyone what called 'imself a gentleman. 'You damned scoundrel, you!' he says. 'If you was my servant I'd have you sent to gaol for this! I might have expected that something would come of ever entering such a dog-'ole of a 'ouse! Take the 'at, you 'ound, and be damned to you!'

"'And if he didn't throw his own 'at into my face with such violence as not only to break the skin right off my nose, where it 'appened to 'it me, but as to make me feel for the moment as if I had gone silly. When I come to myself, as it were, if he hadn't gone right into the street, for all I knew, and left his 'at behind him. As I was thinkin' what I ought to do-for I ain't accustomed to havin' 'igh 'ats chucked in my face as if they were brickbats, not even at a party-three other gents came 'astening up-young ones, they was.

"'Ats, waiter!' they says. 'We're in a 'urry'-which I could see they was.

"'What is your numbers, gentlemen?' I says.

"'You never give us none,' says they.

"'In that case, gentlemen,' I says, 'I shall have to ask you for to be so good as to choose your own 'ats.'

"'So I takes up in both my 'ands a 'eap of squashed 'igh 'ats and I 'olds 'em out to 'em. You should have seen their faces! First they looks at me, and then they looks at each other. Then one of them gives a sort of grin.

"'Ain't you made some sort of mistake?' he says.

"'As 'ow?' I says.

"'Ours was 'igh 'ats,' he says.

"'Well, and ain't these 'igh 'ats?' I says.

"'Then again they looks at me, and again they looks at each other; and another one, he speaks-a short, puffy young fellow he was, with curly 'air.

"'They looks to me as if they was low 'ats,' he says; 'uncommon low-I never saw none look lower.'

"'All three laughs. What at was more than I could say. I didn't know what to make of 'em. There was they a-starin' at me, and there was I a-starin' at them, with both my arms 'eaped up with them there 'ats. Then the third one, he has a go-a stylish-lookin' chap. He was very 'an'some, like you sees in the barbers' shops.

"'Waiter,' he says, 'are you a-'avin' a game with us?'

"'A game, sir?' I says. 'Beggin' your pardon, sir, I'm not 'avin' no game with no one. Do I look as if I was?'

"'Which I didn't feel it, I can tell you that.

"'Well,' he says, 'I asks you for my 'at, and you offers me my choice of them leavings from a rag-and-bone shop; so, if you ain't a-'avin' a game with me, I don't know what you are a-'avin'.'

"'Come, waiter!' says the one as had spoken first; 'didn't we tell you as 'ow we was in a 'urry? Let us 'ave our 'ats. Don't keep on playing the fool with us!'

"'You must excuse me, gentlemen,' I says, speaking a trifle warmish-because, as you'll understand, I was beginning to feel a little badgered like; 'if anyone's a-playin' the fool it seems to me-asking of your leave-as it's you as is playin' the fool with me!'

"'Us as is playin' the fool with you?' they says, all together, as it might be.

"'Eggsactly,' I says. 'That is what I says,' I says, 'and that is what I means,' I says. 'First, you asks me for to give you your 'ats; and then, when I offers you some 'ats for you to take what is your own, you starts a-larfin'. If, as you says, you're in a 'urry, perhaps you'll step inside and cast your

eyes around, and point out which is your 'ats. You can take which ones you please for all I care; I'm sure you're very welcome.'

"With that they stepped in. When they was in, and I was in, there wasn't much room left for anything but breathin', and 'ardly room enough for that.

"Where is the 'igh 'ats?' says the stylish-lookin' feller.

"Where is your eyes?' I says. 'Ain't they all over the place? Why, you're a-steppin' on one now!'

"You should have seen the 'op he gave!

"These 'ats,' he says, 'from what I can see of 'em-which isn't much-looks to me as if they had all been squashed.'

"Of course they has!' I says. "Ow do you suppose I was a-goin' to find room for them if they wasn't? This ain't the Halbit 'All, and yet it ain't the Crystal Pallis!'

"Then they looks at each other again; and, from the way in which they done it, I felt as 'ow there was something which wasn't altogether what it ought to be. So I goes on-

"If them 'ats hasn't been squashed eggsactly as they ought to have been squashed, that ain't my fault,' I says. 'You ought to have squashed them for yourselves, as the other gents done. I don't know nothing about the squashin' of 'igh 'ats, and I never laid myself out as knowin' nothing. I just put them against my chest and I gives 'em a shove, and then I sits on 'em to make 'em lay down flat. That's all I done!'

"While I was speakin' I could see them there young gents' mouths was gettin' wider and wider open, and when I stopped they burst out larfin' fit to split. What there was to larf at was more than I could see. All I knew was, that I wished I 'adn't never come. They staggered out into the 'all, and the curly-'eaded one, he cries out:

"Oh, Sheepshanks, do come 'ere!' Then a cove comes up, as I found out afterwards was the bloke as was a-givin' the party. 'Oh, Sheepshanks!' says this young feller; 'if he ain't squashed them just eggsactly as they ought to have been squashed, don't you blame him. He never laid himself out as knowin' nothing about the squashin' of 'igh 'ats, but he's done his best-he's sat down upon them to make them lie down flat! Oh, Lord! Someone put a piece of ice down my back, afore I die!'

"This 'ere curly-'eaded young feller kep' on larfin' so I thought he would have bust. Mr. Sheepshanks, he comes up to me, lookin' a bit pinky. 'What's the matter? What's the meanin' of this?' he says.

"Oh!' says the curly-'eaded young feller, still a-bustin' of 'isself a-larfin'; 'nothing! That waiter of yours has only been a-squashin' the 'igh 'ats-every man-jack of 'em. For goodness sake ask him about them-don't ask me! My gracious! why don't someone bring that piece of ice?'

"Mr. Sheepshanks, he came into the little band-box of a room, looking pinkier and pinkier. He looks at some 'ats which I was a-'oldin' in my 'ands.

"What have you been a-doin' to those 'ats?' he says.

"I've only been a-squashin' 'em,' I says; 'that's all!'

"You've only been a-squashin' 'em?' he says-and he gives a kind of gasp, like as if he was taken short of breath upon a sudden. And he looks about the room.

"What 'ats are these?' he says.

"They is the 'ats,' I says, 'what was given to me by the gents as is at the party.'

"He gives another sort of gasp, and there came something into his face what I didn't altogether like the look of.

"Who's been a-destroyin' of 'em?' he says.

"No one ain't been a-destroyin' of 'em,' I says. 'I've only been a-sittin' on 'em to make 'em lie down flat.'

"Oh!' he says, short and sharp like. 'Is that all you have been a-doin'? And what sort of a drunken idiot may you be, pray?'

"'I'm not drunk,' I says, 'seein' as 'ow I haven't even seen the sight of liquor since I've been inside this blessed 'ouse. And, as for idiot, I ain't so much of a idiot, perhaps, as you are'; for I didn't care who he was, nor yet what he was. I'd had about enough of being bully-ragged.

"'May I venture to ask who brought you here?' he says.

"'No one brought me 'ere,' I says, 'seein' as 'ow I came along of Mr. Perkins, to oblige him; and now I wish I hadn't, and so I tell you straight.'

"'I also,' he says, 'am inclined to wish you hadn't.'

"'Very hard and stern he was. I didn't like the look of him, nor yet the sound of him. 'Send Perkins to me,' he says. Presently Mr. Perkins, he comes 'urryin' up.

"'Perkins,' says Mr. Sheepshanks, 'what scoundrel is this you have brought into my 'ouse?'

"'It's only a young man from the country, sir,' says Perkins, 'as I brought with me to 'elp in the cloak-room. I do 'ope he has been doin' of nothing wrong?'

"'And he gives me a glare out of his eye, like as if I had been doin' anything to him.

"'I don't know if you're a-thinkin',' says this 'ere Mr. Sheepshanks, a-puffin' and a-pantin', as it seemed to me, with rage, 'that I asked my friends to my 'ouse to have their 'ats destroyed; because your young man, as you says is from the country-and I 'opes to goodness as 'ow he'll soon go back to it! – has done for every one of 'em.'

"'I denies it!' I says. 'I tells you again, as I tells you afore, that I've only been a-squashin' of 'em and a-sittin' on 'em to make 'em lie down flat!'

"'When I says that, the way Mr. Perkins goes on at me was what I never had expected. He abused me scandalous. He took me by the neck, and he 'ustled me into the 'all. And there was all the people what was at the party a-crowdin' on the stairs. If you'll believe me, before I 'ardly knew what 'ad 'appened, I found myself a-standin'...!'

"'Yes, that were the first time ever I acted as a waiter-likewise, it was the very last.

"'When I goes round to put the 'orse ready for market, his missus, she meets me at the door. She gives me the money that was due to me, and she says as 'ow she didn't think as 'ow I had better stay for to have a talk with Perkins, because as 'ow he might be violent. So I didn't. And I've never set eyes on him from that day to this.

"'It was some time before I quite understood what it was had made the gents what was at that there party so excited. One day, comin' along a street near the Strand, I sees in a shop window a 'igh 'at what was a-shuttin' of itself up and a-openin' of itself out without, so far as I could see, no one a-doin' nothing to it. Some sort of machinery, I expect as 'ow it was. So I stops and I takes a look at it. There was a boy a-lookin' at it too. So I says to him-

"'What kind of a 'at do you call that?' I says.

"'It's a hopera 'at, ain't it?' he says. 'Who do you think as you're a-gettin' at?'

"'I wasn't a-gettin' at no one, and it was like that there boy's impudence to suppose as 'ow I was.

"'Oh! a hopera 'at, is it?' I says. 'You don't 'appen to know if that's the same as a 'igh 'at, do you?'

"'A 'igh 'at!' he says. 'Go on! Ax your grandmother! P'r'aps your mother 'ardly knows you're out! Go and prig the parish pump and pop it with a peeler!'

"'And that there boy, he 'ooks it. And it was well for him he did. If I had a-got my 'ands on him he'd have known it. But, from the way in which that 'at was a-goin' on in that there window, and from what that there boy says, I took it that there was two kinds of 'igh 'ats-the hopera kind and the other kind. And, in supposin' that the other kind could be squashed in, like the hopera kind, was just where I had made my error."

Returning a Verdict

It was in the country, at the last Quarter Sessions, a case of theft. James Bailey, in the employ of Samuel Nichols, a fishmonger, was charged with stealing certain trusses of hay and bushels of corn. The jury had retired to consider their verdict.

"Of course," observed the foreman, who had seated himself at the head of the table, "we've only come out here as a matter of form. There's no doubt that the young scamp did it."

William Baker, leaning towards him, shading his hand with his mouth, whispered, with the evident intention of addressing him in strictest confidence, "I say guilty!"

Some of the jurymen were standing about the room talking to one another audibly on subjects which had not the slightest connection with the case they were supposed to be considering.

"What I want," said Slater, the butcher of Offley, to old George Parkes of Wormald's Farm, "is a calf-a nice one-just about prime."

With his heavy hand old Parkes nursed his stubbly chin.

"Ah!" he reflected. "I haven't got nothing, not just now, I haven't. Might have in about a month." Slater shook his head. "Must have it Friday."

"Ah!" Mr. Parkes paused. "I haven't got nothing." Paused again. "I might have, though."

A. B. Timmins, secretary of the local branch of the Primrose League, was calling across the room to Mr. Hisgard, a well-known amateur vocalist, with a view of retaining his services for an approaching "smoker." The foreman looked about him. He raised his voice, rapped on the table.

"Gentlemen, please-business!" Somebody laughed, as if the foreman had been guilty of a joke-so he improved on it. "Business first, pleasure afterwards." The laughter held his peace-the joke fell flat. The jury seated themselves-not with any air of over-anxious haste. The foreman continued-he was one of the most flourishing auctioneers in that division of the county-and now spoke with that half persuasive, half authoritative manner with which many of them were familiar in the rostrum. "We must remember, gentlemen, that the court is waiting. So, with your permission, we will come to the point at once. Those who are of opinion that the prisoner is guilty will please hold up their hands." Seven hands went up. "Those who are of the contrary opinion." One hand was raised-Jacob Longsett's. Mr. Grice, the foreman, eyed the three gentlemen who had made no sign on either occasion. He addressed himself to one of them, "Well, Mr. Tyler, which is it to be?"

"The fact is, Mr. Grice," said Mr. Tyler, "that I've had a bad earache-it was the draught which must have given it me. I think I didn't quite catch all that was being said now and again; but I'm willing to say what the other gentlemen do!"

"You mean that you'll vote with the majority?"

"That's just what I do mean, Mr. Grice."

"I ain't going to say nothing," declared George Parkes, who had also refrained from expressing an opinion. "I don't know no good about young Bailey, nor yet about Sam Nichols neither. Sam Nichols, he's owed me nigh on four pound these three years and more."

"I don't think," observed the foreman, "that we ought to allow personal considerations to enter into the case. It's our duty to speak to the evidence, and to that only."

"I don't care nothing about no evidence. The one's as big a thief as t'other."

Old George clenched his toothless jaws and blinked.

"What'll he get if we bring him in guilty?" asked Mr. Plummer, the third abstainer.

The foreman shook his head. "That oughtn't to influence our decision."

Mr. Plummer differed, and said so.

"It'll influence mine. James Bailey is not yet eighteen. To send him to prison will do him more harm than good. If his case is to come under the First Offenders Act, we shall know where we are."

"We might make a recommendation to that effect," suggested Captain Rudd.

"Excuse me," interposed Mr. Moss, "but I doubt if I could agree to our doing that. I'm afraid that Master Bailey deserves some punishment. This is not the first time he has done this sort of thing. He was dismissed from his last two places for dishonesty."

Again the foreman shook his head.

"That didn't come out in the evidence. You know, gentlemen, what we have to do is to dismiss from our minds any knowledge of the parties which we may have outside the case, and confine our attention to the sworn testimony."

Mr. Moss smiled, declining to be pooh-poohed.

"That's all very well in theory, Mr. Grice, but in practice it won't do. Nichols, with his fish-cart, has done a daily round in this country of some twenty miles or so for the last twelve or fourteen years. I doubt if there is a person in this room who has not some knowledge of him. As for Bailey, his mother lives within a hundred yards of my house; I have known him ever since he was born. I am acquainted, too, with his last two employers, and with the circumstances under which he left them."

"I know nothing of either of the parties," said Captain Rudd.

"You are a new-comer. I doubt, as I say, if any other person present can say the same."

If any other person could, he didn't. There was a pause-broken by the foreman.

"Let us understand our position. Eight of us say guilty-Mr. Tyler goes with the majority; two of us have not yet made up our minds; and Mr. Longsett is the only one who says not guilty. May I inquire, Mr. Longsett, on what grounds you favour an acquittal?"

"You've no right to ask me anything of the kind. This is not the first jury I've served on. Although you're foreman, you're only like the rest of us. What you've got to do is to ask me if I say guilty or not guilty. I say not guilty."

"I believe, Mr. Longsett," insinuated Mr. Moss, "that Bailey is a relation of yours?"

"That's no business of yours."

"Then are we to understand, Mr. Longsett" – the foreman spoke with almost ominous suavity-"that you have arrived at a point at which you are impervious to argument?"

"I say not guilty."

"Even though it may be demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that the prisoner is guilty?"

"It's no good talking to me, Mr. Grice. I say not guilty."

The foreman, stretching out his hands in front of him, looked round the table with an air which was eloquent with deprecation. Old Parkes banged his fist upon the board.

"And I say guilty, and I hope they'll give him seven years-the thieving varmint!"

"Arrived at a state of sudden conviction-eh, George?"

This was Mr. Timmins, who was middle-aged and jaunty.

"Some people are easily convinced," growled Mr. Longsett.

"You're not one of that sort, are you, Jacob?"

This again was Mr. Timmins.

"You won't convince me."

Nor, judging from the expression of Jacob's visage, did there seem to be much probability of their being able to do anything of the kind. There was another interval of silence-broken this time by Captain Rudd.

"Then because this gentleman chooses to differ from us, without condescending to give us his reason for so doing, are we to stultify ourselves, and is justice to be balked? Is that the situation, Mr. Foreman?"

"Excuse me, Captain Rudd, but Mr. Longsett is not alone. I also say not guilty. The observation of Mr. Parkes, expressing a hope that the prisoner will get seven years, shows to me that a spirit of malignancy is in the air, and to that spirit I am unable to subscribe."

The speaker was Mr. Plummer. The others looked at him. The foreman spoke.

"Pardon me, Mr. Plummer, but why do you say not guilty?"

"Because I decline to be a participator in the condemnation of this mere youth to a ruthless term of penal servitude."

"But, my dear sir, he won't get penal servitude-Mr. Parkes was only joking. He'll get, at the outside, three months."

"That would be too much. It would be sufficient punishment for one of his years-my views on the subject of juvenile delinquency I have never disguised-that he should be requested to come up for judgment when called upon."

"But, my dear sir, if the magistrates leave us a free hand to do our duty, why can't we leave them a free hand to do theirs? The issue we have to decide upon is a very simple one; the responsibility of acting on that decision will be theirs."

Mr. Plummer settled his spectacles on his nose and was silent. Captain Rudd addressed him.

"I suppose you will not deny, sir, that all the evidence goes to prove the prisoner's guilt?"

"There are degrees in guilt."

"Possibly-but you admit that there is guilt, even though it may only be in the positive degree?"

Again Mr. Plummer was still. Mr. Slater called to Mr. Longsett across the table:

"You're a sportsman, Jacob, and I'm a sportsman. I tell you what I'll do. I'll toss you, guilty or not guilty. I can't stop messing about here all day-I've got my beasts to dress."

Mr. Longsett was obviously tempted; the offer appealed to the most susceptible part of him. Still, he shook his head.

"No," he grunted, as if the necessity of announcing such a refusal pained him. "I shan't."

Mr. Plummer was scandalised.

"Such a proposal is disgraceful-it ought not to be allowed to be made. Making of justice a mockery!"

Mr. Slater declined to be snubbed-at least by Mr. Plummer.

"Seems to me as if you don't quite know where you are. First you want to preach to the magistrates, then you want to preach to the jury; perhaps you think you're at the corner of High Street?"

There were those who smiled. The reference was to Mr. Plummer's fondness for open-air expositions of "the Word." Mr. Grice drummed with his fingers on the table.

"Come, gentlemen, come! we're wasting time. As business men we ought to know its value. Now, Mr. Longsett, I've too much faith in your integrity not to know that you're open to conviction. Tell us, where do you think the evidence for the prosecution is not sufficiently strong?" Mr. Longsett did not justify the foreman's faith by answering. "Be frank, on what point are you not satisfied?"

After more than momentary hesitation Mr. Longsett replied, without, however, raising his eyes.

"It's no use talking to me, Mr. Grice, so that's all about it. I say not guilty!"

Mr. Moss explained.

"The plain fact is, Mr. Foreman, Mr. Longsett is a relation of the prisoner; he ought not to have been on this jury at all."

This time Mr. Longsett did raise his eyes-and his voice too.

"I've as much right to be on the jury as you have-perhaps more. Who do you think you are? I pay my way-and I pay my servants too! They don't have to county-court me before they can get their wages. Only the other day I was on a jury when they were county-courting you. So it isn't the first jury I've been on, you see."

Mr. Moss did not seem pleased. The allusion was to a difference which that gentleman had had with one of his servants, and which had been settled in the county court. Again the foreman drummed upon the board.

"Order, gentlemen, order!"

Mr. Timmins turned to Mr. Hisgard. He winked.

"Have a game at crib, Bob? I knew Jacob would be here, so I came provided!"

He produced a cribbage-board. Once more the foreman interposed.

"Keep to the business we have in hand, please, gentlemen."

"Oh, they can have their game, I don't mind. Perhaps I came as well provided as anyone else."

As he replied Jacob took from his pocket a brown paper parcel of considerable dimensions. Tom Elliott, who was sitting by him, instantly snatching it, passed it on to Mr. Hisgard.

"Have a sandwich, Mr. Hisgard?"

"No, thank you. But perhaps Mr. Timmins will?"

He passed the packet to Mr. Timmins. That gentleman made a feint of opening it. Mr. Longsett, rising from his chair, reached for his property across the table.

"None of that; give it back to me." Mr. Timmins tossed the packet to the other end of the table.

"Now, Timmins, what do you mean by that? Do you want me to wipe you across the head?"

Mr. Timmins addressed Mr. Grice. "Now, Mr. Foreman, won't you offer the jury a sandwich each? It is about our dinner-time."

Mr. Grice eyed the packet in front of him as if he were more than half disposed to act on the suggestion.

"I really don't think, Mr. Longsett, that you ought to eat sandwiches out of a pure spirit of contradiction."

"Never mind what you think; you give me back my property, or I'll give the whole lot of you in custody." The parcel was restored to him. He brandished it aloft. "There you are, you see, a lot of grown men go and steal another man's property, and you treat it as a joke. A mere lad goes and looks at a truss of mouldy hay, and you want to ruin him for life. And you call that justice! You ain't going to get me to take a hand in no such justice, so I tell you straight!"

"It went a little farther than 'looks,' didn't it, Mr. Longsett? 'Looks' won't carry even mouldy hay three miles across country."

"And 'looks' won't carry my property from where I'm sitting down to where you are! If Jim Bailey's a thief, so's Tom Elliott-there's no getting over that. Why ain't we sitting on him instead of on that there young 'un?"

"See here, Jacob." Mr. Timmins stretched out towards him his open palm. "Here's a sporting offer for you: if you'll bring Jim Bailey in guilty, I'll bring in Tom Elliott!"

"I won't bring in neither; the one's no more a thief than the other."

"Nice for you, Tom, eh?"

"Oh, I don't mind. I know Jacob. It's not the first time a member of your family's been in trouble, is it, Jacob?"

"By-! if you say that again I'll knock the life right out of you!"

The foreman rapped upon the table.

"Order, gentlemen, order! Keep to the business in hand, if you please."

Mr. Longsett confronted him, towering over Elliott, with clenched fists and flashing eyes.

"Keep him in order then-don't keep on at me! You make him keep a civil tongue in his head, or I will." He glared round the board. "I don't care for the whole damned lot of you. I'm as good as any one of you-perhaps better! I'm here to do my duty according to my conscience and conviction, and I'm going to do it, and I say not guilty, and if we stop here till Christmas you won't make me say no different!"

This announcement was followed by an interval of silence; then Captain Rudd attempted to voice the sense of the meeting.

"In that case, Mr. Foreman, we may as well intimate to the court that we are unable to agree."

"What'll be the consequence of that?"

"The prisoner'll have to stand another trial, when, should none of his relations happen to be upon the jury, there will be no hesitation about bringing in a verdict of guilty-in which case the young scamp will get his deserts."

Stretching his body across the table, Jacob shook his clenched fist in the speaker's face.

"Look here, Captain Rudd, you may be a captain, but you're no blooming gentleman, or you wouldn't talk like that. Captain or no captain, the next time you say anything about Jim Bailey being a relation of mine I'll crack you in the mouth!" Straightening himself, Jacob shook his fist at the eleven. "And I say the same to every one of you. It's no affair of yours what Jim Bailey is to me—so just you mind it."

The captain curled, at the same time, his lip and his moustache, his bearing conveying the scorn which he doubtless felt.

"If you suppose, sir, that I shall allow you to play the common bully with impunity, you are mistaken. You forget yourself, my man!"

"Oh, no! I don't forget myself—it's you who forgot yourself. And as for playing the common bully, it's you began it. You're trying to bully me when you taunt me with Jim Bailey being my relation; you think if you keep it on long enough you'll frighten me into acting against my sense of duty."

The foreman intervened sharply: "Order! Mr. Longsett, your language is improper and irregular; if you are not careful I shall have to report it to the court."

"It's no more improper and irregular than theirs is. We're here to say guilty or not guilty, not to pry into each other's private affairs. If they don't make no personal remarks, I shan't."

"Listen to reason, Mr. Longsett. Do I understand, Mr. Plummer, that you will acquiesce in a verdict of guilty if we prefer a recommendation to the court that the case shall be treated under the First Offenders Act?"

"You are at liberty to so understand, Mr. Grice."

"And you, Mr. Longsett? If we are unable to agree the prisoner will have to go back to prison, and, on his again standing his trial, I have no hesitation in saying that he will be found guilty, when he will be likely to receive much less lenient treatment than now, when we are ready and willing to recommend him to mercy."

"We're going to agree."

"That's good hearing. You agree to a verdict of guilty, coupled with a recommendation to mercy?"

"I don't do nothing of the kind."

"Then what do you agree to?"

"I agree to a verdict of not guilty—that's what I agree to."

"Then, in that case, we're likely to disagree. You can hardly expect eleven men to go against the weight of evidence for the sake of agreeing with you."

"There's no hurry that I knows on. We'll wait a bit. I have heard of juries being locked up for eight-and-forty hours. I daresay before that time some of you'll have changed your minds. Seems to me that there's three or four already that can change their minds as easy as winking." He began, with a certain amount of ostentation, to untie the string which bound his brown paper parcel. "I'm getting peckish. If you don't mind, Mr. Foreman, we'll talk things over while I'm eating."

The unfolding of the paper revealed the fact that it contained a comfortable number of succulent-looking sandwiches. The eleven eyed them—and their owner—sourly. Carefully taking the top one of the heap between his finger and his thumb Mr. Longsett took a bite at it. Seldom has the process of attacking a sandwich had a more attentive audience.

"I say, Jacob," observed Mr. Timmins, "aren't you going to give me one?"

"What, give you the food from between my own lips! Not if I know it. We may be here till this time to-morrow. I've got to think of myself, Mr. Timmins."

"I'm not going to stop here till this time to-morrow, Jacob Longsett!"

As he spoke old Parkes banged his fist upon the table.

"All right, George Parkes, nobody asked you to, so far as I know. Seems to me you're uncommon keen to send the lad to gaol."

"I don't wish the lad no harm."

"Seems to me as how you do."

"I say I don't!"

Mr. Parkes punctuated each of his remarks with a bang upon the board.

"Then why don't you do what you've sworn to do, and bring him in not guilty along of me?"

"I don't care what I brings him in. It don't make no odds to me. It ain't none of my affair. I've got my own business to 'tend to, and when a man's got to my years he don't care to meddle in no one else's. I'm willing to bring him in not guilty along of you, Jacob Longsett."

"That's more like it. If there was more like you and me, George Parkes, we'd soon be outside of this."

Captain Rudd, who had listened to this short dialogue without evincing any signs of approbation, once more endeavoured to urge the foreman to action.

"Don't you think, Mr. Foreman, that the time has arrived for you to communicate the fact of our disagreement to the court?"

Mr. Longsett made haste to differ.

"Excuse me, Mr. Foreman, but, if Captain Rudd will allow me, I don't think it has. We haven't been here hardly any time. There's no hurry, so long as we're doing our duty. I daresay we'll all agree yet before we've finished. All we want is a little patience."

"And something to eat," said Mr. Timmins.

"Then do you mean to say," exclaimed Mr. Longsett, as he commenced upon another sandwich, "that you'd send a young lad to gaol, and blast his good name for ever, just because you're hungry?"

"May I be permitted to make a remark?" The inquiry came from Mr. Tyler. He was holding his handkerchief to his ear; his general expression was one of suffering. "Considering how little of the evidence I really heard I don't wish it to be supposed that I have any objection to a verdict of not guilty. And I may add that not only is my earache driving me nearly mad, but my health, as a whole, as some of you know, is bad, and I am easily exhausted. Had I supposed that any of this sort of thing would have taken place I should have procured a medical certificate excusing me. I appeal to gentlemen to arrive as rapidly as possible at a decision, which will enable me to obtain measures of relief."

"Hear, hear!" Mr. Longsett rapped with his knuckles on the table.

"I'd never have come," declared old Parkes, "if I'd a known I was going to be kep' all day without my dinner. When a man gets to my years he wants his victuals regular. I didn't have hardly no breakfast, and I ain't had nothing since."

"I tell you what it is," cried Slater; "I want my dinner, and I've got my business to attend to—this is the busiest day of the week for me. So far as I can see it doesn't make much difference how we bring it in. You say that if you bring him in guilty you're going to get him off: then why shouldn't you bring him in not guilty right away? If you bring him in guilty I can't help thinking that he ought to be punished—he won't care nothing for your bringing him in guilty if he isn't; while, if you bring him in not guilty, he'll thank his stars for the narrow squeak he'll think he's had, and it'll be a lesson to him as long as he lives."

"There is," allowed Mr. Plummer, "a good deal in what Mr. Slater says."

"There is one thing against it," murmured Mr. Moss. His voice was rather squeaky, and, as if conscious of the fact, he generally produced it as softly as he could.

"What's that?"

"The evidence. We are supposed to be influenced by the evidence, and by that only."

"It struck me that the evidence was all one-sided."

"Precisely—on the side of the prosecution. Since the case was practically undefended the presumption is that the prisoner had no defence to offer."

"But, as practical men," persisted Mr. Plummer, "does it not occur to you that there is a good deal in what Mr. Slater says? If we find the lad not guilty we shall teach him a lesson, and, at the

same time, not be placing on his character an ineffaceable slur. We might, for instance, state in open court, through the mouth of our worthy foreman, that we are willing to give the prisoner the benefit of the doubt."

"But there is no doubt. Let us do justice though the heavens fall. Have you yourself any doubt that James Bailey stole Samuel Nichols's corn and hay?"

"Ah, dear sir, there is only One who can say. He has no doubt. We are not omniscient."

"That sort of talk may be all very well in a pulpit, Mr. Plummer. It is out of place in a court of law when we are dealing with ascertained facts."

Mr. Plummer raised his hands and shook his head, as if he was sorry for Mr. Moss.

"Let us show mercy, that we may be shown it," he all but whispered.

"In other words," struck in Captain Rudd, "we are to do evil in order that good may come-even to the extent of prostituting truth."

"I am afraid, in our present situation, these things are not arguable. Some of us, thank Heaven, see things through eyes of our own."

"Precisely, and it is because they don't appear to be arguable that I once more suggest to the foreman that the court be informed that we are unable to agree."

"And I again take leave to differ. Why now, there's" – Mr. Longsett pointed with his finger-"one-two-three-four-five of us as says not guilty. We're agreeing more and more every minute. I dare bet any money we'll all be like one family before we get outside this room. If the foreman ain't got no particular objection I'll have a moistener. I never could eat dry." Taking a black bottle out of an inner pocket in his overcoat he applied it to his lips. Such of the eleven as were not keenly observant ostentatiously turned their eyes another way. He took a long and hearty pull, then he smacked his lips. "Good stuff that; I always like a drop when I've been eating-helps digestion."

"This is more than human nature can stand," groaned Mr. Timmins. "Mr. Foreman, I move that the magistrates be informed that we are unable to agree, and I request that you put that motion without further delay."

"I second that motion," said Captain Rudd.

"And I say no!"

Jacob flourished his bottle. Mr. Timmins's visage, as he confronted Mr. Longsett, became slightly inflamed.

"We don't care what you say. Do you think we're going to sit here, watching you guzzling, as long as ever you please? If you want to give a proper verdict you give one which is according to the evidence-we're not going to let you play the fool with us, Jacob, my boy."

Extending the open palm of his left hand, Mr. Longsett marked time on it with the bottle which he was holding in his right.

"Excuse me, Mr. Foreman, but perhaps I know a bit of law as well as the rest of you, and I say that the law is this, that before a jury can tell the court anything it's got to agree upon what it's going to tell. And what I mean by that is this, that before any one of us-I don't care if it's the foreman, or who it is! – can tell the court that we disagree we've got to agree to disagree-and I don't agree!"

Mr. Moss put a question to the foreman.

"Is that really the case?"

The foreman smiled a wintry smile-and temporised.

"I shouldn't positively like to say."

"But I do say positively. You can ask the magistrates, if you like, and see if I'm not right. Why, if you go into court now and say that we disagree I shall say we don't! I shall say that if we only have a little more time we shall agree yet; all we want's a chance of talking it over."

The foreman, pressing his fingers together, addressed Mr. Longsett with an air that was acid.

"Then, according to you, if one member of a jury chooses to make himself objectionable his colleagues are at his mercy?"

Jacob rose from his seat in such a flame of passion that it almost seemed he was going to hurl his bottle at the foreman's head.

"Don't you call me objectionable, Mr. Grice! I won't have it! I'm no more objectionable than you are! I've got as much right to an opinion as you, and because my opinion don't happen to be the same as yours you've no right to call me names. If we all start calling each other names a nice state of things that'll be. A pretty notion of a foreman's duties you seem to have!"

Mr. Grice, who was not pugilistic, turned a trifle pale; he did not seem happy. Captain Rudd, tilting his chair backwards, and thrusting his hands into his trouser pockets, looked up at the ceiling.

"This is the sort of thing which brings the jury system into contempt."

"What's that, Captain Rudd?" Mr. Longsett, who was still upon his feet, chose his words with much deliberation, emphasising them with shakings of his fist. "You mean you're the sort, I suppose? You're quite right, you are. You've been in the army, you see, and you think we're soldiers, to come to heel whenever you tell us, and that's where you're mistaken, Captain Rudd. We're free Englishmen, and we don't choose to have you come the officer over us-and that's how you make the thing contemptible by trying."

There was silence. His colleagues seemed to be arriving at the conclusion that Jacob was a difficult man to differ with.

"It strikes me," said Mr. Timmins, when the silence was becoming painful, "that if the law is really such that we've got to stop here till our good Jacob takes it into his generous head to let us go, you and I, Mr. Hisgard, might have that little game of crib I was speaking of; it may help us forget where we are, and that we're not going to have any dinner till it's past supper time."

"Just you wait a minute. Perhaps," replied Mr. Hisgard, "I may be allowed to say a word." No one appeared to have any objection. "What I wish to remark is this. With all deference, I think Mr. Slater spoke as a practical man. I don't see that there's much difference between saying guilty and at the same time asking the magistrate to award no punishment, and, as Mr. Slater puts it, bringing it in not guilty right away."

Mr. Timmins, who had been shuffling a pack of cards, replaced them on the table.

"All right. Let's have it that way and make an end of it. Suppose we all say not guilty and caution him not to do it again-what's the odds?"

"So far as I'm concerned," observed Tom Elliott, "I'm willing to bring him in not guilty. It's my belief he's been led into it all along, and I know perhaps as much about it as anyone. There's a good deal about the affair what's been kept quiet by both sides. Perhaps I might have said a word for one."

Mr. Moss interrogated the foreman with uplifted eyebrows.

"Do you think it does make any difference?"

The foreman shrugged his shoulders. He was still. Captain Rudd spoke for him.

"It makes the difference between right and wrong-that's all."

Mr. Plummer leaned his elbows on the table; his spectacled countenance wore its most benevolent smile.

"Hearken to me, dear sir. We are all Christian men-"

"Not necessarily at this moment; at this moment we are jurymen-only jurymen."

Mr. Plummer sighed, as if in sorrow. He turned to the others, as if desiring their forgiveness for the captain.

"This gentleman-I trust he will pardon me for saying so-puts a curb upon his natural generosity. His is what we may, perhaps, term the military mind-precise, and, if we may say so, just a little-the merest atom-hard. For my part I think, Mr. Foreman, we might, as Christian men, conscientiously return a negative finding, intimating at the same time that, owing to the prisoner's tender years, we are not unwilling to give him the benefit of the doubt."

The captain dissented.

"What sort of mind do you call yours, sir? Were we to return such a verdict, we should make of ourselves the laughing-stock of England."

The foreman shook his head.

"I hardly think England will interest itself in our proceedings to that extent. Similar verdicts in similar cases are, I imagine, more common than you may suppose. I am not advocating such a course, but I believe it would be logically possible for us to inform the magistrates that, while some of us entertain strong opinions on the subject of the prisoner's guilt, being desirous to arrive at a state of agreement, and also bearing in mind the youth of the accused, we are willing to acquiesce in a verdict of acquittal."

"I agree to that," cried Mr. Longsett. "That's fair enough. Now, is it all settled?"

"I'm not."

The speaker was the captain. All eyes were turned on him.

The foreman spoke.

"Don't you think, captain, you-might swallow a gnat?"

"I don't wish to set myself up as a superior person, but, under the circumstances, I'm afraid I can't."

"Quite so. Now we know where we are." Mr. Longsett composed himself in his chair; planting his hands against his sides he stuck out his elbows; he screwed up his mouth. "It just shows you how one man can play skittles with eleven others."

The captain was silently contemptuous.

"I really doubt if it matters." It was Mr. Moss who said it; he whispered an addition into the captain's ear: "If the young scamp isn't hung to-day he'll be hung to-morrow."

The captain ignored the whisper; his reply was uttered with sufficient clearness.

"Perhaps, sir, your sense of duty is not a high one."

The eleven eyed each other, and the table, and vacancy; a spirit of depression seemed to be settling down upon them all. Old Parkes, with elongated visage, addressed a melancholy inquiry to no one in particular. "What's us sitting here for?"

Jacob responded-"That's what I should like to know, George. Perhaps it's because a gentleman's made up his mind to ruin a poor young lad for life."

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