

Two Blooming

The Adventures of
Two Criminals.

BY
DOUGLAS WINTON.

"I have seen the wicked . . . spreading himself like a green bay-tree."—Psalm xxvii. v. 35.

Bay Trees.

(Continued.)

As he was withdrawing his eye from the hole, he heard the baggage-room door open, and then came a rummaging about of the baggage behind him, to the accompaniment of a string of muttered imprecations, which lasted nearly half an hour. Some passenger wanted a piece of luggage got out in a hurry, and Mr. Macklin was saying what he thought about it. It was luggage that had been stowed pretty deep, too, by the sound. Once or twice, in the course of his rummaging, Mr. Macklin seemed to be not more than two or three cases away from Jack himself. This was alarming; but Jack remembered that, whatever happened, there could be no reason for moving the corner case of all—that is, his own—and kept up his courage. And presently the piece of luggage was found and lugged out, the door clanged to again, and all was still.

"If that's the way I am going to be interrupted, it is as well that I allowed myself lots of time," he thought.

The next thing to be done was to bring into requisition a machine which, like the crab-crawl, the friends had invented specially for this occasion. They had christened it the acid-compass; but this was rather a misnomer—acid ring, or acid circular cutter, would have been a more accurate appellation.

Through the hole which he had drilled in the bulkhead he thrust the end of a short steel rod about a foot long. As soon as the end was through, a hinged cross-piece fell out at right angles and secured it from being pulled back. The part of the rod that projected inward into the box was about nine inches, and the last—that is, the inmost—couple of inches was fitted with a screw thread. Now came the cutter itself. This was something like a very concave, circular hamper top. The rim of the dome was a hollow gutter, U-shaped in section. But gutter, perhaps, is hardly the word, for, supposing the whole machine to be put down on the floor, the open part of the U would be down. The gutter, like the rest of the apparatus, was of steel, but had been very carefully rubber-lined, and this rubber lining projected the tinest bit, say a twentieth of an inch, so as to form two very slight circular rubber lips. Such was the acid compass, or circular acid gutter. To bring it into action, Jack, having first carefully looked it over to be sure that all was in order, placed it, the top of the dome towards himself, the rim against the bulkhead. The little steel rod fitted through a hole

in the centre of the dome, and, by a nut and a spanner, it was the work of half a minute to screw up the whole affair, rigidly into place. The little circular gutter had now only to be filled with the strongest acid, which was done by a hole at the upper part of the circumference, and the acid left to do its work. Jack took the opportunity to dine.

His meal over, he again had recourse to Don Quixote; but not for long, for, though he had no return of his former attack of nerves, yet his philosophy was not quite capable of such an evidence of self-detachment as to lose himself in the pages of Cervantes now that work on the great coup had really begun. He put the book down, and, to keep himself employed, took down and inspected the various jemmies and other tools which were to be used later on. Yet the time passed very slowly. Their calculation had been that the acid should be left to work at least two hours before the iron or steel—they did not know of which the bulkhead was composed, but hoped that it was of steel, as, in that case, it would be thinner—would be sufficiently rotted to be attacked with tools. And barely an hour passed.

Then Jack thought of something that troubled him. When Piggy and he had made the experiments on which their calculations were based, they had used bare iron. But the bulkhead was not bare iron; on the contrary, it was thickly painted with white paint. Query, would this layer of paint act as a preservative against acid? Jack did not know, he was not chemist enough to say. But it seemed likely; for paint—white paint at all events—has generally a good deal of lead in it and Jack knew that lead-lined tanks are made to hold acid. If this be indeed so, it was clear that he was only wasting time. He determined to make an inspection; and, with the spanner, began to loosen the nut, the acid, of course, came oozing out all round the ring. Then he got the whole apparatus off, and was able to see what had happened. The paint had acted as a preservative, but not very efficiently, for both the ring of paint and a thin surface of iron beneath it were rotted away; still, had the paint not been there Jack was pretty certain that the acid would have made more progress.

There was a good deal of noise going on now in the ship, and Jack determined to take the risk of making a little more. With the corner of a very finely-tempered cold chisel he scraped round the ring, easily cutting down a sixteenth of an inch. Then he replaced the apparatus, poured in more acid, of which he had a good

supply, and waited for it to complete its work. And as he waited, it came on Jack that Piggy and he were very fine fellows. Who else could have planned such a coup, so patiently and elaborately? They had foreseen everything had provided for everything.

"Jasus! what a damned stench!" Mr. Macklin's duties had again called him to the baggage-room, and this was his remark on the fumes of nitric acid which now filled it.

And now, indeed, Jack's heart stood still, and with reason. When on first being placed in the baggage-room he had ventured to use the crab-crawl, he had taken a risk, rather more of a risk than he had intended, and when he smoked or made any noise he had taken a risk; but these were risks that had been foreseen, risks with big chances in his favour, and the chances had held. But a smell, a pungent smell like that of a rat in a trap, no chance now of pretending to be a simple stowaway, with no intention of stealing anything more valuable than a passage to South America; with his box littered with jemmies and other tools of the kind, and a way already half-cut into the specie-room, that story would hardly wash.

With a sort of sullen resignation he began to stuff his pipe. He would not get any tobacco, he supposed, when they put him in irons; well, he would take all he could first. His one hope lay in Piggy. Not that he expected that Piggy would be able to prevent his discovery. But afterwards, when he was a prisoner, Piggy, to whom no suspicion would attach, would be still a free agent, and would, somehow, contrive his escape. Yes, trust Piggy for that. Jack had such unbounded confidence in his friend, that he felt sure that his incarceration would not be of long duration. And then suddenly he thought him that Piggy would not be so free from suspicion after all. On the contrary, it was Piggy, in the character of the Rev. John Hawtree, who had had the case sent on board, and would be held to be accountable

with the nature of its contents. And, in any case, the gold—the beautiful gold that they must lose, after so much work and planning! And the sense of failure! There was the hard part—there was the rub! It had been Jack's own scheme, and its success was very dear to him.

"Oh, well," he said to himself philosophically, "one can't always succeed, I suppose."

And he felt in his pocket for a match.

But just as he was on the point of striking it, a sound came to his ears which caused him to stop, motionless in one hand, pipe in the other like a figure in a tableau vivant, waiting to learn what new development it might herald. It was some one speaking—speaking in a curious rather affected and high-pitched clerical sort of voice, the tones of which took Jack back at once to the night of their adventure at Utterson Street and Vigor Square.

"Yes," said the voice, "you are quite right, it was most impractical of me. Not wanting it until my arrival, when I required it for the prosecution of certain experiments, I was careless enough to pack a small bottle of nitric acid among the things in my large portmanteau. I am afraid my clothes will be ruined."

"I'm afraid"—and then Mr. Macklin's remark continued in such a low grumbling tone, that Jack could not hear it. That it was uncomplimentary could be inferred from Piggy's rejoinder.

"Really, you are far from respectful! Not that I mind that so much, but it distresses me—yes, it really does, to see you give way like that. What! a fine, strong fellow like you mind the work of moving a few boxes! For shame! Come, my man, let's get to work; that is the portmanteau; I can just see a corner of it behind those saratogas."

Jack listened wonderingly, while a tossing about of baggage went on. Presently there was a pause and it seemed to him, though he could not be certain, that he heard a portmanteau being unstrapped and opened. Then came the clerical voice again: "Dear, dear! a new frock-coat completely ruined! And shirts—three shirts, I fear; and this pair of boots! Dear me, how provoking! Well, I must not grumble, as I suppose I have no one to thank but myself. Now, my friend, I will remove the bottle, and these damaged articles also, though I am afraid that there is nothing to be done with them except to throw them overboard. I will lock the box, which can stay here. And, er—by the way—since I have put you to all this trouble by my carelessness, perhaps I may ask your acceptance of this slight douceur?"

Then Piggy seemed to have left the baggage-room, for Mr. Macklin's next remark was evidently in the nature of a soliloquy.

"Blimey, if those 'ere toffs don't get 'old 'o some rummy words! Calls them bob a do-sir. An' it ain't a bad name, neither," he added reflectively. "But it seems to me like as if to be a do-sir 'e ought ter give it first. 'Tain't logic else."

And, according to Mr. Macklin's rendering of the work, the point was not badly taken.

Metaphorically speaking, Jack gave

three cheers, and threw his cap into the air. Bravo, Piggy! His last words to Jack, when the van to take the case away was just stopping at the gate of the studio, had been: "We've been confoundedly rushed tonight, old man, but never fear, as soon as they've taken you off I will sit down and think over every step of our plans again, and, if there's a weak link anywhere, it'll be hard if I don't find some way to strengthen it."

(To be continued.)

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ON THE STAFF OF LORD CURZON.

New York, Nov. 26.—Major Colin Campbell, a member of the staff of Lord Curzon, viceroy of India, arrived here to-day on the steamer Philadelphia from Southampton and Cherbourg.

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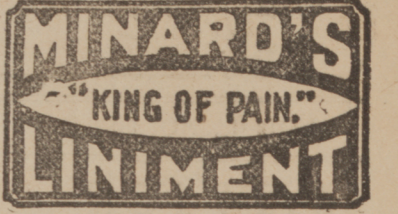
The official trial of the electric locomotive built for the New York Central Railroad by the General Electric Company and the American Locomotive Works took place at Schenectady recently. Pulling a four-car train the locomotive reached a speed at times not far from 70 miles an hour. Along with from thirty to fifty others of the same type yet to be built, the locomotive will be used to haul express trains from Croton to New York!

Although it wasn't on the cards, the prominent railroad men who gathered to watch the trial saw the locomotive beat No. 3, the Fast Mail, in a race of nearly six miles. The train drawn by electric power so outdistanced its rival that when the end of the six-mile stretch was reached the Fast Mail could hardly be seen in the distance.

Vice-President Wilgus of the York Central, said to-day that electrically equipped express trains will run into the Grand Central station in the fall of 1905. The electrical equipment could be completed before that time, but it must wait on the work of excavation. The new locomotive will meanwhile be tested in all sorts of weather, and under every possible condition and the remaining locomotives will not be completed until the railroad officers are entirely satisfied with their first purchase.

The experts who saw the tests to-day agreed that the advantages of electrically equipped express trains between Croton and New York are many. Although some time will be lost in changing locomotives at Croton, this will be more than made up by the speed of the new type. The average speed of the electric locomotive, when drawing a four-car train, is 8 miles per second, said to be about 50 per cent. greater than a steam locomotive. Besides getting under headway more rapidly, the trains will be able to stop quicker than those drawn by steam. The New York Central's suburban traffic into New York will be operated by electricity on the multiple unit system or the same as that on the elevated and subway.

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