

ADAM'S LUCK.

When Adam went a-courting Eve
He didn't have to watch the clock,
Regretting when 'twas time to leave;
There were no gossips there to shock.

She didn't make him sit away
Across the room and talk about
The newest book or latest play
That others had been bringing out.

She had no red plush album there,
With photographs of Uncle John
And Aunt Louise and Cousin Claire
And others who were dead and gone.

He never when she sweetly sighed
Was forced to flee with all his might,
In order to obtain a ride
Upon the last car out that night.

Ah, happy Adam! He was free
From grief the later lover bears—
Eve never whispered suddenly;
"I think I hear pa on the stairs."
S. E. KISER.

A SPECK OF DUST.

My experience has taught me that the role of a private detective is not always what fiction would suggest—a comfortable walk along the path of fame. Unless some brilliant coup is effected it is generally a monotonous round of tracking missing relatives or shadowing suspected "trusted" clerks.

At the time of which I write I had been in the profession for about three years, with no probability of obtaining recognition other than that afforded by the little brass plate bearing my name.

Then came the hurried message from Sir Thomas Johnson, the eminent engineer and head of the firm which bore his name, and I knew intuitively the longed-for opportunity had arrived.

Immediately on presentation of my card I was shown into a private office, where Sir Thomas, together with a young lady, seemed to be anxiously awaiting my arrival. In the latter I recognised his daughter, and furthermore, that she was weeping.

"You are a private detective?" he asked, brusquely.

I bowed affirmatively.

"I sent for you to unravel what appeared to be a very mysterious matter, but fortunately for all concerned, my daughter has, unknowingly, been the means of explaining the whole business, and therefore your services will not be required."

I made some congratulatory remark, but inwardly cursed the girl's interfering propensities.

"Stop," she cried, as I prepared to retire. "Father, have you indeed made up your mind that Mr. Whitbury is the culprit?"

He appeared surprised at her eagerness, and hesitated as though loth to distress her. "Suppose," he said at last, "my convictions are corroborated by this professional gentleman, will you grant that my actions are justifiable?"

"Yes," she replied, slowly. "That's fair; at any rate I'll try."

"Then," said Sir Thomas, drawing himself up, and proceeding in a businesslike manner, "the facts are these. For some years past the firm has been engaged in experimental work in connection with textile manufactures, the nature of which is of no consequence at the present moment. We aimed at an entirely new method of production, differing from every known process in its extreme simplicity and the remarkable saving in the cost of manufacture. To obtain strict secrecy our experiments were conducted in premises apart from the works. Entrance to this building can only be obtained by the directors, four engineers, and the labourers necessary for the rough work. These are all paid a high rate of wages to ensure our confidence not being misplaced.

"The initial stages having been successfully passed, the directors devised more drastic methods to prevent the nature of their experiments leaking out, and for the past twelve months it has been a rule that the four engineers must all be present before any one of them can enter the premises. They are all, I may add, old servants of the firm, whilst the labourers have been chosen for their physical strength and intellectual being unnecessary in their case.

"With these precautions we thought we were perfectly safe, but judge of our surprise when a rival firm a short time ago patented a certain piece of mechanism which proved conclusively that they were on the same track as ourselves. This as a coincidence, was remarkable, and we waited further developments. None appeared; but immediately we proceeded to work again and perfected another portion, this was also patented by our rivals. Since that period various 'mistakes' have been made on purpose, and these being also patented justified us in coming to the conclusion that—to put it plainly—we were being given away.

"We, of course, endeavoured to trace the culprit, without result, and finally had to close our experiment shops pending his discovery. This loss of time may alone prove disastrous to us, but, on the other hand, progression appears to be simply giving the other firm the benefit of our ideas.

"It was to trace the culprit that your presence was requested here today. Before you arrived, however, my daughter chanced to call and showed me some pictures of local views presented to her by Mr. Whitbury,

our managing clerk, for her stall at the forthcoming bazaar. Engrossed upon the subject of the betrayal of our secrets, I was only half interested, until the thought occurred to my mind that a man so experienced was fully competent to take photographs of our experimental work, particularly when the keys were under his control. He was immediately called here, and, replying to my questions, admitted taking photos inside the works, although he knew perfectly well we have a rule strictly forbidding it. He had the audacity to show me these, but, of course, denies all knowledge of the secret work. His actions, however, have, to say the least, been suspicious, and I submit I am perfectly justified in suspending him until further inquiries have been made."

He stopped and leaning back, waiting my decision. It was an anxious moment. The man's guilt appeared conclusive, through circumstantiality so. I looked at the daughter; she was pale, and breathing heavily. Poor girl, I pitied her, and, pitying, made up my mind. I guessed her secret, and resolved to help her, if possible.

"Could not the engineers have taken drawings?" I suggested.

"No," he replied, firmly. "They are paid to submit to the indignity of being searched if necessary, and this course has several times lately been carried out."

"But surely details could be stored up in the mind, and afterwards put down on paper," I urged.

"Too complicated," he answered, decisively.

"At present I see nothing in Whitbury's actions to justify a conviction of his guilt," I remarked.

Sir Thomas sprang up in surprise, and his daughter let slip a genuine "Thank Heaven." Then the baronet rang the bell and asked the managing clerk to attend.

"This gentleman, Mr. Whitbury," he said, after a few introductory remarks, "thinks I may have been somewhat hasty in making the charge imputed to you. However, if you are willing, nothing further shall be said or done for another month. You will continue your duties as before, but if in a month from this date the real culprit is not produced I trust you will—well, have left the country."

"The conditions are hard, sir," returned Whitbury, with a sigh; "especially when the traitor has eluded capture so long. But, nevertheless, I accept them. To you, sir," he continued, turning to me, "my thanks are due; I know not the ways and means of detectives, but prove me innocent and all I have is yours."

"Yes, do it, and I'll add to your reward £50," cried the girl, impetuously, and immediately retreating with blushing countenance.

Had the roof fallen the surprise could not have been greater. Whitbury seemed to forget his trouble, and held his head at least a couple of inches higher. Sir Thomas motioned him to retire, and, deep in thought, suggested the same course to his daughter.

Immediately the door was closed he grasped my shoulder. "She offered you £50. Prove Whitbury innocent and I'll double it," he said.

The next day I obtained permission to look round the building in which the experiments had been conducted. It consisted of two rooms. One was filled with numerous engineering tools, the other being used as the erecting shop of the finished portions of the new work. I immediately recognised the impossibility of information of any value being obtainable from the mechanics' room. There parts of machinery were scattered about in seemingly hopeless confusion, and until they were erected in the second room I was informed that even the men themselves were unable to form any idea of the complete machine which they, as a whole, represented. It was in this erecting shop, therefore, that I commenced my operations. Not the slightest clue of any description was obtainable, and yet a close inspection confirmed my conviction that the guilty person was one of the employed, and one with a perfect right of entry. The only inlet was through the door leading from the mechanics shop, whilst the windows, glazed with obscured glass and barred, offered no possibility of admission being obtained through them.

There was only one hope; work must be commenced again, and I must be one of the workers. To this arrangement Sir Thomas readily agreed, and the next day I adopted the role of a labourer. The men, however, appeared above suspicion, interesting themselves very little, if any, in the work going on. Day after day we simply smoked the time away, occasionally giving the mechanics a hand with some particularly heavy work. When we arrived in the morning, the four engineers being present, we were admitted, and the doors locked. At noon we were as carefully watched out, no man being allowed to have his meals in the place. In the evening the same process was adopted.

In this manner three weeks passed, and Sir Thomas commenced to ask very pointed questions as to my progress, whilst Whitbury appeared to get more anxious as the days flew.

One night as I was pacing the office, mad with defeat, he entered and, with a forced calmness, handed me an envelope. It con-

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tained a copy of a formal notice to the directors of a meeting to be held five days later, for the purpose of "Handing them certain information he, Sir Thomas, had obtained respecting the betrayal of the firm's trade secrets," and enclosed in the same envelope was a first-class ticket to America. I threw the notice down and manifested impatience at the baronet's unreasonable spirit. And yet I could but express my appreciation of his kindness in helping a man whom he thought guilty to escape from the punishment which he merited if his treachery should be fully established. It was a strange mixture of duty and friendship.

"I have definitely decided to remain and see the business through," said Whitbury.

The next evening Sir Thomas sent for me to his private house and suggested that, as my efforts appeared to have been in vain, I had better discontinue them. It was what I had expected and prepared for.

"No," I replied, firmly. "I have been given a month to unravel the mystery. My professional reputation is at stake"—he smiled—"and I'll do it."

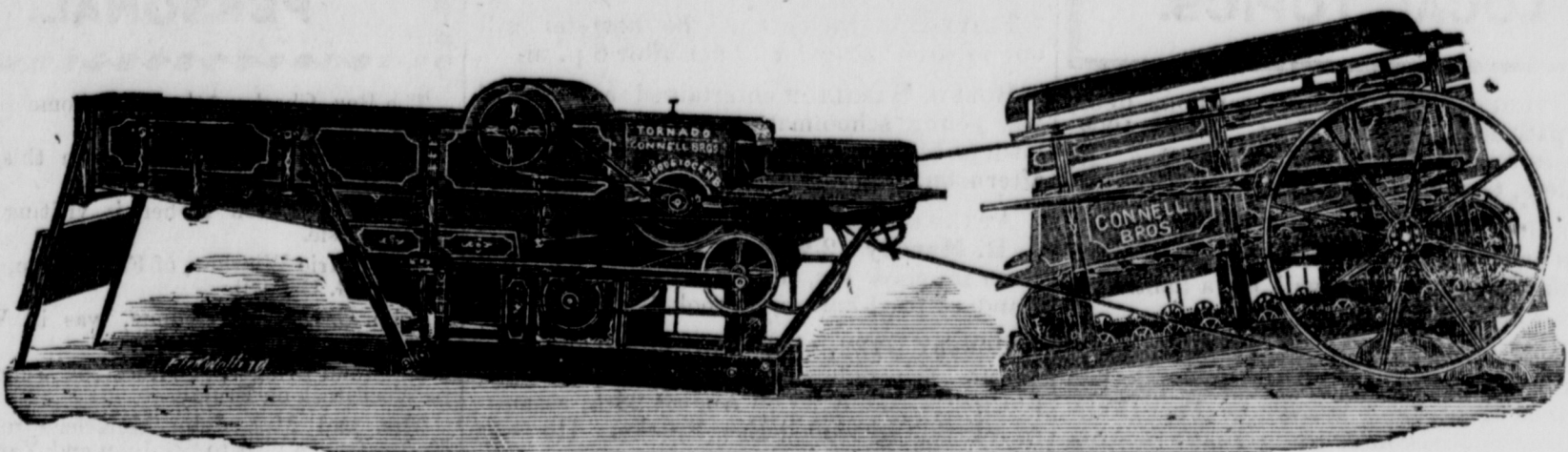
"Does it not strike your professional mind as absurd," he continued, sarcastically, "to so completely ignore the evidence which already exists against—"

"Whitbury is innocent," I replied.

"Then, confound you, prove him so," he almost shouted. "But, remember, the time is short."

I left him crestfallen. Here was success waiting for me, and I was utterly incapable of grasping it. My brain reeled and commenced playing curious tricks. Trivialities before unnoticed now appeared strangely prominent. The men's characteristics, their apparel, the different sounds of the machinery in motion, all seemed to rise and claim their share of attention. One man smoked, another was always chewing. Yet another seemed blessed with an abnormal appetite, and appeared to be perpetually on a walk across the erecting shop to take a biscuit out of the tin box he carried. This box was the subject of many a joke. There was nothing particularly striking about it, simply a plain square tin thing common enough amongst workmen carrying their meals about, but the tender care bestowed upon it by its owner, the careful manner in which he always carried it away when leaving the building, to return and replace it in exactly the same position on top of a cupboard in the erecting shop, made him the butt of our ridicule. He only smiled, however, and said the box had been given to him by an old chum, which partly explained

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THE DISPATCH,

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the attention it received.

It was the eve of the last day, and utterly dejected I was preparing to leave the premises for the night, next day to admit failure, and in all probability see Whitbury arrested, when suddenly I observed on the floor the charred end of a piece of paper, used presumably to light someone's pipe. Whose I knew not. I picked it up unnoticed, and felt inclined to shout. It was black, and of the kind used to wrap round photographic plates. I called upon Whitbury and informed him of my success. Photography was being used—but how? Now that I had got something substantial to work upon the time allowed had almost expired.

The next morning, immediately I entered the premises, I prowled round the pieces of machinery, but hunted in vain. Not a trace of anything in the shape of a camera could I find. Looking up suddenly, however, I noticed Roberts, the possessor of the tin box, intently watching me. Fool, it dawned upon me in an instant—the box was in reality a camera. To obtain possession was my next move, but he appeared to anticipate such a course, and resolutely kept near me.

Noon arrived with a note from Whitbury, left at the restaurant I usually dined at, stating that he was hourly expecting to be informed that he was to consider himself under arrest.

One o'clock—we returned to work. The box seemed to fascinate me. Time after

Continued on 6th page.

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