

A CONSTANT ANXIETY

MR. GEOFFREY C. STRANGE LEADS A TROUBLED LIFE.

He Becomes Morbid and his Trouble Assumes Undue Proportions—He Offends the Mistress of the House Next Door by His Way of Discussing Matters.

The family who live next door to us keep a bird and we keep a cat—in fact, to be strictly accurate, we keep several! Now if there is one thing above another that I dislike it is living next to people who pin their affections upon a bird, and if there is one thing in this world that the family next door abominate is being obliged to live in close proximity to people who are misguided enough to keep a household of cats: so honors are about even. I really think, I have the most to put up, though, because it is not only that I object to the ear piercing yelps which the owners of a canary are pleased to describe as "singing" but I dislike to see the wretched little creature hopping about in his narrow prison, and to hear him pouring forth the story of his wrongs all day, as I am sure he is doing.

In addition to these objections I have that bird on my mind like a nightmare from one end of the year to the other, and I suffer all the anxiety on his account that his owners should do—and double. They are a happy-go-lucky-family as far as the bird is concerned, and leave a great deal more to providence in looking after him than they should, and the care they cast off on his account, I borrow. Of course I am responsible for the cats and they are not, which makes a difference, but I know that if ever anyone was canary haunted I am the person. Suddenly in the midst of a most impressive service in church the awful thought will strike me like a thunder bolt that there was one cat unaccounted for when I left home, and after resisting an almost uncontrollable impulse to spring to my feet and rush home to find out the worst, I will clutch my wife's arm and whisper through my dry lips "Did you count the cats before we came out, and were they all in the woodshed?" She usually does not know, and then peace is not for me until I get home, and find that the other family have gone serenely off to church leaving the bird hanging within easy reach of any tramp cat who chose to reach out a murderous paw and gather him in, while our paupered felines languished and squabbled in the narrow precincts of the woodshed lest temptation should assail them. The family think I waste an enormous amount of anxiety on the bird, and frequently exhort me to take things as philosophically as they do, but it is of no use. It boots it not that one morning our most dangerous cat, the one beside whom Diana herself paled into utter insignificance as a hussess was discovered peacefully snoozing in the other house directly beneath and within paw's length of the bird, who was also wrapped in sweetest slumber—and that she had spent the entire night not only tete-a-tete, but actually shut up in the room with him—I feel that the danger is only postponed, and some day the long looked for catastrophe will happen, provided the bird and the cats live long enough.

With this idea constantly in my mind, the knowledge that the bird is really valued above rubies by our neighbors and the certainty that there is not one of our cats who is not far too valuable in our eyes to be sacrificed for any bird that ever lived, it will be readily understood that the subject assumed undue proportions in my mind, and I grew almost morbid over it. The mistress of the other house is an impulsive little body who goes into everything she undertakes with her whole heart and she always seems to have a great deal on hand, so she is usually in a hurry. We are the best of friends and when anything unusual occurs in her side of the house she generally runs in to tell my wife about it. She moves very quickly, and I think I can safely say that I never hear her rush out of her own door, and into ours without a sudden start and the mental ejaculation "There, I knew it; one of the cats has got the bird at last!" The climax came one day last summer when a daring burglar broke into the next house in broad daylight and literally cleaned it out under the very eyes of all the neighbours. Its mistress returned home from a round of calls and when the starting fact that her house had been broken into, dawned upon her she was quite alone, and naturally the first thing she did was to give the alarm. I heard her rush along the hall, fly out of her own door, and before she had crossed our threshold I felt certain that it had happened at last, and was prepared to swear a solemn alibi for all of our cats.

"Mr. Strange! Mr. Strange! her voice rang through the house with a note of wild alarm in it; even then I wondered why she should call me instead of my wife but I responded immediately and met her almost at the door.

"It was not one of our"—I began, when she gasped out, "Someone has broken into our house while I was out, and stolen everything they could lay their hands on!"

"Is that all?" I responded dropping into a chair and mopping the drops of cold perspiration from my brow. "I thought a cat had got the bird at last! And now we just speak and no more, and our neighbor told

my wife that I had the heart to make fun of her at a moment when she was nearly terrified out of her senses and on the verge of hysterics; so she can never think quite the same of me again.

Meanwhile the bird outlived all the cats but one; and at the present time of writing is still in the enjoyment of excellent health, and shows every indication of outliving

GEOFFREY CUTHBERT STRANGE.

STORIES TOLD BY SIGNOR ARDITI.

Identified by the Back of His Head—A Singer With Nothing on.

In his 'Reminiscences' just published in London, Signor Ardit, the veteran opera conductor, tells many good stories, and does not spare himself when the laugh is on him. This is how he tells his experience with an American back clerk:

"I was in receipt of a check from Mapleson and being anxious to cash it, I drove one afternoon, just before closing time, to the bank at which it was made payable. When presenting the check the clerk asked me if I had not brought any one who could identify me. I laughed, and said: 'Don't you know me? I am Signor Ardit.' The man still appeared to be uncertain as to my identity, when a happy thought occurred to me. I asked, 'Do you ever go to the opera?' The clerk replied, 'Yes, often. Then I turned my back, and raised my hat disclosing my bald head. 'Do you not know me now?' I urged. A grin spread all over his countenance, and he exclaimed, 'Oh, yes; now I know that you are Signor Ardit; it's all right; here's the money!'"

In London, at a promenade concert, one of the singers backed out at the last moment. A Substitute had to be found. Ardit says:

"Mlle. de Lido, that charming Russian vocalist, was seated with her mother in a box, so I ran up stairs and begged her to help us out of our predicament. Womanlike, although she was willing to assist, she thought at once of her toilet, and said: 'How can I sing? I am not dressed.'"

"I persuaded her to consent however, and in my pleasurable excitement at the good news I hurried on to the platform to announce it to the public. Ere I betwought myself the words were out of my mouth. This is what I said:

"Ladies and gentleman, I am happy to say although Mlle. de Lido has nothing on, she has kindly consented to sing in place of Miss X."

In Dublin the gallery gods were on familiar terms with him.

"My appearance in the orchestra was greeted with robust shouting and applause, while such exclamations as 'Viva Victor Emmanuel!' 'Bravo, Ardit!' 'Where's your wig?' and 'How's the Macaroni?' were to be heard emanating from all parts of the house. They even cheered my wife when she entered her box, and cries of 'Three cheers for Madam Ardit and all the little Arditis!' brought down the house."

Another Dublin story relates to the performance of Verdi's 'Macbeth.'

"A funny incident occurred that night during the performance, and one which, although it had well nigh escaped my memory, is worthy of record. In the sleep-walking scene of Lady Macbeth, when the nurse and the doctor appear on the stage together, and confabulate with one another, a loud voice suddenly called out from the gallery, causing a roar of laughter in the middle of a most serious scene. 'Hallo, doctor! Well, is it a boy or a girl?'"

Arditi's best known composition is the waltz song, 'Il Bacio,' which Adelina Patti used to sing in the lesson scene of the 'Barbiere di Siviglia,' and which has been ground out on hand organs throughout the world since 1859. Of this he says:

"Although I was fortunate in 'hitting off' the public taste so conspicuously with regard to this song, incredible as it may seem, I sold 'Il Bacio' to the firm of Cramer, together with three other compositions, for the sum of £50. From that day to this I have never increased my profit to the extent of expense in connection with that song! Flaxland de la Madeleine, who gave 400 francs for the French copyright, on the contrary, made a fortune of 400,000 francs out of the transaction, and boasts that the beautiful business house he was able to build in Paris was the outcome of the enormous profits he derived from my composition, while I heard that the copper plates and copyright of 'Il Bacio' were sold a few years ago in London for the sum of £640."

He was unable to accommodate himself to the slowness of Philadelphia.

"I was walking through the 'Quaker City' one afternoon, when I heard my poor 'Il Bacio' valse being played in such a drawing, funeral tempo, on a decrepit hand organ, that I made a rush for the wretch who was massacring my music and remonstrated with him vehemently. He coolly told me that if I did not approve of the tempo I could play it myself, with which impertinent suggestion I immediately complied. At that moment I espied one or two members of our company, who were strolling in my direction, and seizing the handle of the organ I began to grind out the air, to their intense astonishment, coupled with roars of laughter."

"By that time a crowd had collected round us and I saw being looked upon as a harmless musical lunatic who had escaped from his keeper. I was not to be thwarted, however, so I played the tune to the

bitter end, and then sauntered on despite the comments of the crowd."

Here is an experience he had with Mario and Crisi in Washington: "It was during my first long stay in America, and our company was announced for one night, during a terribly cold winter at Washington. Shall I ever forget the bitter cold of that season? It was as though we had suddenly been transported to the Arctic regions, and the theatre in which we gave our performance was as inadequate to cope with the frost as though we had fixed up a summer tent for the purpose. 'Norma' was the opera, and Crisi instead of appearing in her traditional white robe with flowing folds, was compelled to come on the stage wearing a huge fur coat in which she was huddled up almost to her eyes."

"The house only really rose to the occasion with loud bursts of laughter when Mario made his entrance holding a coachman's umbrella over his head—he, as Pollio, being confronted by Norma in their tragical meeting—under which prosaic safeguards both artists cowered while singing their grand duo. The roof of the theatre has given way under the weight of a heavy fall of snow, and its coating of ice, melting under the heat of the gas, was streaming down on the artists."

And finally a Chicago story of Albani. "Albani was a martyr to superstition. She would never sing on the thirteenth of any month if she could possibly avoid it, or sit down thirteen to table, or travel, or sign a contract on a day signified by that suspicious number. Like most singers, she was subject to acute nervous attacks, and any incident in connection with this dreaded date always filled her mind with misgivings of impending ill-luck."

"Once, on the occasion of our first visit to Chicago, a very small and insignificant town in those days, colonized, as far as I could judge, largely by pigs, we arrived late, and just in time to retire for the night. A great quantity of luggage had been sent on by train in advance, and our business manager had secured a bedroom at the best hotel for Albani:

"The proprietor had been informed of Madam's painful superstition, and had been implored not to give her Room No. 13. As it happened, however, Room No. 13 was the only empty and suitable apartment for the prima donna on that particular occasion, and, in order that she should not become aware of this unlucky fact, the hotel manager caused a piece of paper to be carefully and deftly gummed over the painted number outside her bedroom door. All went smoothly at first. Albani was ushered into her room, her boxes were unpacked by her maid, and she was served with supper preparatory to going to bed."

"Suddenly she started up, agitated by the thought that it would be just as well to know the number of her room. She picked up her candle and peered into the darkness of the corridor in order to reconnoitre. In a far shorter time than it takes me to write these lines the house was a fearful uproar, bells were ringing, and the hotel people and guests rushing about in a state of panic, thinking they were about to be burned alive in their beds."

"Albani was discovered standing in front of her door in the attitude of a tragedy queen, with the candle in one hand and the fatal piece of paper bearing the fictitious number in the other! And, what is more, she was not to be beaten. No persuasion on earth would induce her to retire quietly to rest in No. 13. No one could resist her pleading eyes and face; so finally an elderly gentleman was politely but firmly asked to give up his room, which had to be thoroughly rearranged while he stood about shivering and discomfited, awaiting the signal to take possession of the room bearing the fatal number."

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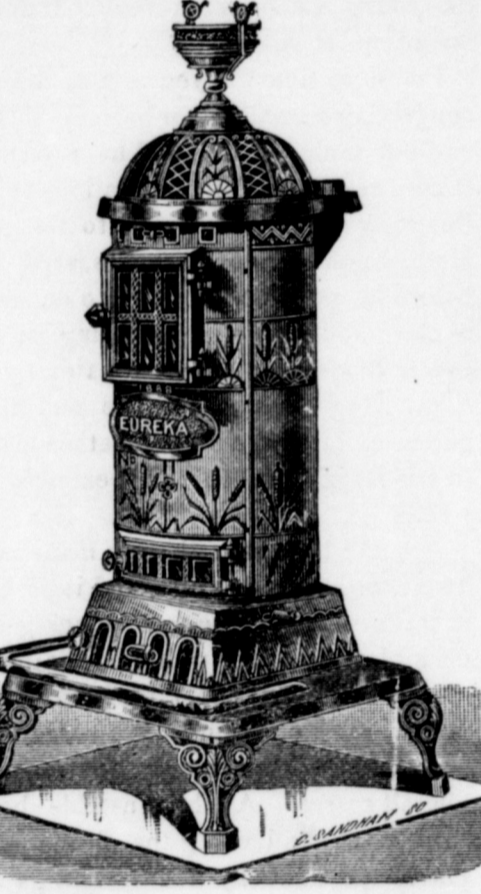
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