Number Seventeen

Nothing happened until eleven o'clock, when the elderly tenant of the suspected premises came out of his door and walked down the steps. He had not got half-way down, however, when it became evident that he had discovered his loss. He paused in apparent consternation, and after looking earnestly at the sidewalk for an instant, ran back with unaccustomed sprightliness into the house. Presently his wife came out with him, and together they carefully examined the footway where the brick had been. If ever two people appeared anxious and alarmed it was this guilty looking twain. All my old suspicions came back to me as I triumphantly beheld the manifest disquietude of the pair, who, after a brief search, and a hurried consultation, went quickly back into the house, from which neither emerged again that day. The next morning another white brick had been planted in its usual position in front of Number Seventeen.

The exaggerated alarm which my experiment had caused in my mysterious neighbors made me a little uneasy as to the possible consequences of my act to myself, and, as nothing definite had resulted, I determined, after a day or two, to remove the borrowed brick, which, being farther up the street, than its owner ever had occasion to go, had remained unnoticed by him, though it had begun to cause amused comment among the neighbors. I had planned to do this on a certain evening, after dark, but on my return from the office that night I found my wife in a state of great doubt and anxiety over a large box which a teamster had left at our house just at dusk.

She had first noticed him driving down from the upper end of the street looking inquiringly at the houses on our side. At the sight of our white brick he had pulled up suddenly, and taking from his cart a large box had rung our bell and delivered it to our servant, without a word of explanation, and then had driven away. Our maid had received it as a matter of course, and there it lay upon the entry floor, marked emphatically upon its upper surface

THIS SIDE UP.
HANDLE WITH EXTREME CARE.

It was an ordinary rough packing case, three feet long by two wide and a foot deep, and was lettered in the bold script employed by commercial packers. The corners of a tag which had evidently borne an address were still held down by four large tacks, but the greater part of the middle had evidently been torn off in the process of getting the box in at the door, and could nowhere be found. There was no doubt at all in my wife's mind, nor in mine, that the case had been intended for our mysterious neighbor, and that the teamster had been led into this blunder in its delivery by our duplicate white brick, which was the first he would encounter in coming down the street from its upper end, and which he had become accustomed, by habit, or instruction, to recognize as the sign of his destination. His mistake, had, perhaps, placed in my hands the clue to the secret of Number Seventeen.

All my previous doubts and misgivings vanished in the face of this piece of providential good fortune, and sending for a hammer I prepared to have a look at the contents of the box, My wife's tremulous promptings to be careful and her scruples as to the propriety of such an act were evidently mere sops to her conscience, for she was inspired with quite as lively a curiosity as my own. The idea of any physical danger from an infernal machine never entered our heads, so entirely commonplace had been all the circumstances of the delivery of the case. So, adapting the usual loose-handled domestic hammer as well as possible to the unequal task, I finally succeeded in getting the lid off. Upon the folds of brown packing paper which covered its contents lay an envelope, black and unaddressed.

From such a wrapper I felt no scruples about taking the note which it enclosed, and accordingly did so; but my wife spared me the shame of violating another person's letter by snatching it from my hand and reading it aloud. It ran as follows:

Mr. James Millican,

Dear Sir;—The sample sent is a great improvement over the last one, and would,, no doubt, be effective against the enemy. We must take no chances in this struggle, however, and when we show our hand it must be to deal a death blow to them. Therefore carry out the improvement you suggest. Do not worry about the cost—at this stage of the game money is nothing. The loss you speak of might be dangerous if the article fell into the right hands, but that is unlikely. We send the chemicals you ask for. Do not take any unnecessary risks, We must guard above all things against premature explosion.

Yours truly,
Sylvester Daft.

At the word "explosion" my wife turned pale and sat weakly down on the edge of a chair looking at me with a frightened air. I, however, with a resolute air, but with many internal misgivings, laid hold of the paper which still covered contents of the box, and prepared to wrip it off. As I turned back the first layer the hammer which I had left upon the edge of the case fell to the floor with a crash, which served to show me conclusively the state of my own nerves. I persisted, however, in my unpacking, and presently laid bare the contents. The box was filled, apparently, with a fine white powder and nothing else. It was tasteless and gritty between the teeth, and bore every physical sign of harmlessness. I was greatly disappointed at this poor answer to my expectations and discontentedly plunged my hand into the yielding mass. As I did so my fingers encountered a hard object.

Carefully digging away the white powder I presently disclosed the neck of a large bottle, which I pulled carefully forth. The label bore a Latinized name, quite meaningless to me, but below it was the conspicuous legend: "Dangerous. Keep in a cool place." I complied at once by placing the bottle as far as possible from myself, and cautiously continued my search. There were four more bottles, containing different liquids, and several packages of unknown chemicals, including one of common borax, which I recognized with relief, as one removal of these articles left the case about half full of the powder and gave our front parlor, where they stood about, the appearance of a chemical laboratory. My wife and I could make little out of all this and after having devoted the evening to vague and profitless discussion, we opened the windows of the room in compliance with the demand printed on the first bottle, and carefully locking the door went upstairs to bed.

But not to sleep. We tossed and turned for several hours, starting at every noise from below, until finally I could stand it no longer, and getting up again I dressed and went down stairs. All was quiet in the parlor, where the chemicals still stood intact. I sat down for an instant in an easy chair where I had them in full view, and there, of all places, fell fast asleep before I had any idea of such a thing.

When I awoke it was half past seven in the morning, and I was stiff with the cold that had poured in all night at the open windows and had another frightful sore throat. I rose with pain and difficulty to shut out the chilling draught, and as I stood at the open window commanding a view up the street toward Number Seventeen, I saw Mr. Millican, as I now knew him to be, coming in my direction, which I had never before seen him take. He was walking rapidly, his hands behind him, his eyes looking reflectively down upon the sidewalk.

A wave of apprehension crossed my mind. His route would take him past my house, where he had never, to my knowledge, passed before, and he would certainly see the stolen white brick. What would happen? Would he face me, or would he take alarm and flee? If he did face me, what should I do—resolutely pluck his secret from him in the interests of the public welfare, or consult my own personal safety in as plausible an explanation as I could devise?

Before I could decide he had reached my door. Without an instant's hesitation or the least appearance of surprise he turned and walked up my steps, taking something from his pocket as he did so. I heard a key rattle for an instant in the lock, which cheaply furnished article readily yielded to the intruder, and in another instant Mr. Millican walked into the room where I stood in frightened perplexity.

He looked first at me in great surprise, and then glancing hurriedly about him, his eyes fell upon the opened box. A look of utter consternation appeared on his face and he sat down in a frightened way upon the edge of the case, playing idly with the white powder with his hand, and looking at me with a baffled air.

Presently he cleared his throat.

"I see you are working on the same track," he said, in a dejected voice. "Well, I knew something was up when my experimental brick was stolen, but I'd no idea you were so near. How did you happen to locate here?"

The harmless dejection of his manner and appearance had already removed the worst of my suspicions, and I had decided to make the best explanation I could, but his opening puzzled me.

"I—I don't understand," I began.

"Then you are not Babelon's man," he cried eagerly, rising as he spoke. "You are not working for Babelon & Co., in this matter?"

I hastened to explain that I was not working for Babelon & Co., in any matter, but was in the insurance business; and then, taking advantage of the high good-humor with which this confession seemed to fill him, I made a very frank explanation of the whole matter, to which he listened with great amusement. I returned to him his white brick and the box of chemicals, and during the next two months was privileged to visit him in his laboratory which occupied the cellar of Number Seventeen, where I spent many pleasant evenings over a pipe in his interesting company. At the end of this period I received one morning this circular:

Mr. Millican's brick had undergone the practical test of actual wear and tear in the sidewalk of Figg Street, to the consternation of its inhabitants, before it was offered to the public, and so was put upon the market in such a state of perfection as to defy all competition. At any rate, Messrs. Babelon & Co., never, to my knowledge, advertised the competing article which had forced upon Millican so much secrecy in his experiments.

The Home

GOOD TO KNOW.

To Candy Lemon or Orange Peel.—Soak the peelings in cold water till all the bitter taste is removed, then cook in clear water till very tender. Make a syrup of granulated sugar, allowing one cup of sugar to six oranges. Simmer in the syrup till all is taken up. Let dry for a day or two on plates and then pack in glass jars. This is very nice chopped fine for fruit cake or mince pies.

The Top Pie Crust.—To make the top pie crust the nice flaky brown that we sometimes see, but which so few are able to attain, roll out the crust and then put little dabs of lard over it and sprinkle lightly with flour, add a few drops of milk and beat lightly with the tips of the fingers until smooth and pasty.

Chocolate Glazing.—The top layer of chocolate cake may be given that desirable "shiny" appearance by mixing a heaping teaspoonful of grated chocolate, two of granulated sugar and one of boiling water, spread the mixture on the cake before it is cold, using a broad-bladed knife dipped in cold water.

Vanilla Souffle.—A souffle is really a puff pudding. Put one pint of milk over the fire, moisten three tablespoons of flour with four tablespoons of cold water. Stir into the heated milk and cook until smooth and thick. Add the yolks of four eggs, take from the fire and stir in the well beaten whites. Fill into greased custard cups, stand in a pan of hot water and bake in a quick oven. Make a sauce by mixing one tablespoon of flour and one-half cup of sugar; pour into this one cup of boiling water and stir until it comes to the boiling point. Now beat one egg light, add grated yellow rind of an orange, two tablespoons of orange juice and one table spoon of lemon juice. Serve at once.

For the Lunch Basket.—Cream one tablespoon of butter, a dust of cayenne pepper and a pinch of salt, and three tablespoons of grated cheese. Warm crackers, spread with the mixture and place on the grate until the cheese is melted.

Another Sandwich.—Cream the yolk of a hard boiled egg with a tablespoon of melted butter, add half a teaspoon of salt, white pepper and mustard and one-quarter pound of grated cheese. Stir in a scant tablespoon of vinegar and spread between thin slices of bread. These sandwiches are delicious.

Pork Cakes.—Chop raw pork very fine, add salt, pepper, 1 chopped onion, half as much stale bread crumbs as there is meat, soak until soft; two well-beaten eggs and a teaspoon of finely powdered sage; mix well together; make in little oblong cakes and fry in boiling lard; serve with sliced lemon.

Home-Made Crackerjack. — Take three pints of molasses and one cup of white sugar, and butter the size of an egg; boil as for taffy; when done add one teaspoon of soda, and while foaming stir in eight or ten ears of nicely popped corn; pour out on a bread board and press into a square loaf, then roll out with a rolling pin until about an inch thick and with a very sharp knife cut off in thin slices and lay on a large platter to set. The cutting must be done while it is yet warm. This is nice for the children; make it real often and see if you don't like it yourself.

Eggs for Tea.—Boil eggs until very hard, lay in cold water for half an hour, remove the shells, cut lengthwise and lay on a platter of crisp lettuce leaves, sprinkle with two tablespoons of vinegar, a dash of pepper and salt. Very nice in place of cold meat.

HOUSEHOLD CHEMICALS.

Even weak household ammonia may destroy the hearing when spilled in the cavity of the ear or destroy the eyesight if it touches a delicate part of the eye. It is valuable as a washing fluid, and is used in the bath to soften water. It should be used, however, very moderately, as it renders the skin dry and rough when used too freely in the water. The same thing may be said of most of the washing powders and other compounds which assist in washing. Soap powders are a fruitful cause of chapped hands. Where any such article as an alkali or a soap powder is used there should be a simple acid toilet wash used afterward to correct its effect on the hands. A proportion of one-fifth citric acid, two-fifths of glycerine, and two-fifths rosewater makes a very good and a perfectly safe preparation to use on the hands. This should be rubbed over the hands after they have been subject to dishwater or laundry suds in which alkali soaps or soap powders or washing fluids have been used. Ammonia is not so good as a little alcohol in washing windows, kerosene lamp chimneys, or any glass about the house. Ammonia is apt to leave a blur over the glass which it is difficult to clean off. Strong ammonia eats into the glass, so that a permanent blur is created.

Salsoda is a chemical that must be used very carefully. As a washing fluid it injures delicate goods, and totally destroys the color of most colored goods. Borax is a safer article to use, as it is comparatively mild in its effects.

Galvanized and polished iron sinks and cooking utensils of polished sheet-iron are cleaned by the use of boiling hot vinegar and salt. Let spiders soak on the back of the stove with a hot solution of strong vinegar and salt in them. When all signs of black are gone, polish the spiders well and wash and wipe them dry. Sinks may be very successfully cleaned with turpentine and boiling water. Turpentine is a very useful chemical to keep in the closet.

A COOKING STAY.

The simple wooden skewers that have served the housewife for so many years in pinning together boneless meats while cooking them have at last been displaced by an elaborate cooking stay. This is preferably made of paralell strips of any flexible fabric, as, for instance, canvas, each of which carries on its ends lacing hooks, such as are usually found on men's shoes, This stay is held in position on the meat by a flexible lace engaging with the lacing hooks in the familiar manner. In order to render the strips composing the wrapper taut while in use, springs are provided on one side, and the constant tension of these, in compination with the lacking, holds the wrapper snug and tight all the time, and enables it to be made to fit pieces of meat of different shapes and sizes. The use of bands instead of our continuous piece of fabric permits of more rapid and effective cooking. No doubt, the head of the family, who has to do the carving, will be one of the most enthusiastic supporters of this novelty, since it will do away with those ubiquitous skewers.

TO MAKE A PICTURE FRAME.

A very inexpensive and pretty picture frame may be made if you will follow these instructions. Make a frame of the size and shape desired of some light wood, and screw it together strongly. Then procure some cork chips. They can be had of almost any fruit seller, as they are used to pack grapes in, but they must be well sifted, before using to get the fine dust from it. Over your wooden frame brush some thin glue and then sprinkle the cork chips on thickly, and and set it to one side to dry. When thoroughly dry, paint over the whole surface with a good gold paint, or some pretty shade of enamel if you prefer. Or, if you wish to preserve the cork appearance of the frame, just go over it with a good quality of varnish.

MIRROR FOR A PIANO BACK.

One of the hardest things in a room to arrange artistically is the piano, now that fashion has decreed that it shall be dragged away from the wall. Many an otherwise perfect apartment has been spoiled by the inartistic arrangement of the piano back. A great aid in overcoming this is a mirror, made the exact width of the piano, and placed flat against its back. On each side narrow curtains may be placed, and the mirror used either as a reflector, or with painting on frame and glass. Palms may be prettily arranged at the foot, to be repeated in the glass surface, or a tiny seat placed there, with cushions of quaint shape and material.

With the mirror as a starting point one may have endless varieties of decoration.

THE SOURCE OF GLYCERINE.

A By-Product of Soap and Candle Factories in Increased Demand.

Glycerine is used in making nitro-glycerine, and nitro-glycerine is the chief constituent of dynamite. It also enters largely into the composition of some of the smokeless powder—cordite, for instance. The South African war, therefore, has brought it into increased demand in England just now, although its exportation has not been prohibited, as was the case with carbolic acid a few weeks ago. The fact is, lyddite in manufacture of which a derivative of carbolic acid is used, can be handled with less chance of accident than dynamite; so that up to the present time the latter has not found any extensive application in war. And even nitro-glycerine gunpowders are going out of favour because of their unstable character and other drawbacks, Still, for the time being glycerine enjoys an enhanced popularity in the markets of Europe.

Something like forty thousand tons of this commodity are made yearly just now, yet there is nowhere a factory devoted primarily to its manufacture. It is a by-product of soap and candle factories. It is not itself fatty, but it is associated with fat in nature. When alkalis are combined with the fat, in making either stearine candles or soap, and then a little salt is added to the compound, the stearine, of soap, will separate from the rest of the fluid, which is called "spent lye." Formerly the manufacturer allowed the latter to flow away: Now, however, he saves it and seeks to eliminate the glycerine.

To begin with he has mixture of water, glycerine, salt and some other impurities. The water is boiled off, the salt recovered for future use, and the residue is crude glycerine. This must be carefully refined before it is fit for use, but the degree of refinement to which it is subjected depends on the particular fate to which it is then to be devoted. Out of a hundred tons of fat not over five tons of glycerine can be obtained.

MESSAGES THROUGH THE AIR.

Major Baden-Powell's War Kites at Modder River.

While Colonel Baden-Powell is gallantly defending Mafeking, his brother, Major B. Baden-Powell, of the Scots Guards, is helping the Intelligence Department at Modder River in a manner all his own.

When Signor Marconi's assistants went out to the war, says the London Daily Mail, with their wireless telegraphy apparatus, the War Office intended that they should work only at the base and on the railways. This was a useless business. So the officers on the spot asked the men to go up to the Modder. They went, and found that they could do nothing because there were no masts available to raise their apparatus to the necessary height.

Major Baden-Powell came to the rescue. He rigged up a number of war kites, he raised the apparatus and men into mid-air, and the anxiously-awaited messages came clicking through.

The latest report is: "Enslin and Orange River have already exchanged wireless despatches, and Major B. F. S. Bader-Powell, Scots Guards, who is in charge of the kite-flying corps, hopes to establish connections thus with Modder River." Captain Kennedy is doing similar work at Orange River.

The kite appears destined to play a growing part in the war. Besides providing a telegraph office in mid-air, it is very useful for reconnaissance work. Major Baden-Powell's particular variety of kite is furnished with a camera, so that a view of the enemy's entire force or a picture-map of the country can be procured. In a car beneath the kite a man can be lifted to any reasonable height, and, as the kite is steady he can see what he wants to without interruption.

The major has always been fond of kiteflying. His first love was the balloon, but after one humiliating day at Dover, when thousands were watching and the balloon would not rise, he said that it was necessary to think of something else. He experimented for years with kites, and found that the secret lay in a number of small kites fastened together. He now raises his man from the ground by means of five kites, three at the top of a geometric figure, and one at each wide angle.

"The more the enemy shoot them," he says, "the better they fly"—which seems to be a characteristic of the family