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The Black Cat's Questions

By Lawrence W. Booram.

PART I.

"Joe," I called, "come here." Joe Flatly, my office boy who aspired to be the world's greatest detective, arose lazily from his chair where he had been reading "Sleuth-Hound Pete" and shambled in my direction. "Well?"

"Think there's any mail for me?" I asked.

He grinned as he balanced his weight on one foot. "Dunno. Might be."

"Unless there is," I began slowly, "this will be your last day as my office boy and assistant."

Joe carefully marked his page and left for the post-office, leaving me in the dingy little room where I occasionally wrote a story that sold. The proceeds of the story kept an advertisement running in the paper, paid Joe's salary and supplied me with fifteen-cent lunches. This was also the office of detective Williams—myself—who tried to solve mystifying things; but in reality nobody had ever tried to hire me as a detective. Ever since I was a youngster I wanted to be one, and after studying under different men and in different schools for seven years, here I was—a failure.

I heard Joe come in; he came over toward me and said, "A letter for you, boss." He grinned at me accusingly. I looked around with a start and took the letter. The envelope was of very high-grade stationery, and the handwriting was undoubtedly that of a lady. I stared at it and the postmark, for I knew no ladies in the town. I opened the letter very carefully and read it. As Joe was a privileged character, he leaned over my shoulder and read also:

The Black Cat Farm.

Dear Mr. Williams: Noticing your advertisement in the local newspaper as a private detective, and being in need of one, I would like to secure your services for a short time, if you are not too badly pressed. Call at three o'clock this afternoon and I will explain.

(Miss) Wanda Morris.

I almost choked with joy—it was my first job. "No more work this morning," I told Joe. "We deserve a half day's vacation."

"Gee whiz!" muttered Joe perplexed. "That's some name for a farm—'The Black Cat'. Funny how some people will name things. They ought to be arrested for cruelty to animals." This attracted my attention, and I also wondered.

Exactly on the stroke of three Joe and I were at "The Black Cat Farm" for our interview with Miss Morris. A maid opened the door and ushered us in. Miss Morris wasted no time in getting down to her business with us: "My father died very recently—last March to be exact—and until lately I thought he left me in good circumstances," she said. "I knew he had little ready cash, but thought he had many valuables that he could easily turn into cash,—pearls, especially. In his young days he had often been on pearl fishing expeditions and found many large, valuable pearls. He never sold them, but always kept them somewhere—I always thought in some bank's vault, but I was mistaken. Where they are, I don't know; that is what I want you to find out, for my surplus money is gone, and I am in need of more. Father often talked about the pearls, but he would never tell where he kept them; and he also said they were kept for me to have after he was dead and I needed money—that's the reason he would never sell them. The banks knew nothing of them, nor can I find any written statement to help me. If you can find the pearls I will give you a large reward; and if you can't find them, you probably will get nothing. Are these terms satisfactory?"

I gave a respectful, "Yes," and then waited for her to say something more; but she didn't. She expected me to get to work. I confess that I was stumped. Where to begin I didn't know.

"Well, did your father leave you anything that seemed a little strange to you at the time?" I asked.

She shook her head slowly. "I don't think so. He left me this small farm—wait a minute. Yes; he left me a small brass cat; and why—I don't know. He also told me that the cat meant more to me than I thought it did. However, I gave it little thought then nor since. I thought father—was not right—you know."

"May I see it?" I asked.

"It's upstairs; but I'll send Edna after it."

The maid soon returned with a small cat, made of brass, that looked more like an ornament than anything else. But I guessed differently. I examined it carefully with my eyes, and then produced a lens from my pocket. The tail and head of the cat were hinged, and there I thought was a combination to get into the inside of the cat. Neither the tail nor the head would unscrew, so I had to use different means. The form was of a cat crouching as if to jump at something, and the tail was sticking almost straight up. I knew no cat would hold its tail up when ready to jump at something, so I thought that was part of the combination.

Although the tail would not unscrew, it seemed as it if were slightly loose. I turned it as far as I could and then examined the head. While it was absolutely tight before the tail was twisted, it was loose afterward. I turned it as far as it would go; when it stopped I heard a faint click. Then to my surprise the tail could be unscrewed. As I unscrewed it the head of the cat dropped to the floor.

The cat was hollow, and contained a paper. This I drew out and handed it to Miss Morris. "Perhaps this will explain matters,' I said. As she read it a puzzled look came over her face. After she had finished, she handed the paper to me. Here is what it said:

Three Questions Asked by The Black Cat

1. Do I look out of my right or left eye? 2. Where do I look? 3. Where will my height throw a shadow at 1 p.m.?

"Great Jessups!" Joe exclaimed. "What do you think of that?"

"Very, very simple," I explained. "That is, I think it is."

"I don't see any sense in that," Miss Morris said.

"It doesn't look like much," I remarked, "but I think it tells where the pearls are. Now this farm is named 'The Black Cat,' isn't it?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Why?"

"I don't know; father named it."

"Anything to signify the name?"

"Well, there is a sign father had painted on the barn— ——"

"What is it?" I almost shouted.

"He had a sign painter put 'The Black Cat Farm' on it, and a picture of a black cat above the sign."

I jumped. "What? The picture of a black cat! Why didn't you say so before? Now we've just the same as got the pearls in your pocket (forgetting that women seldom carry their money in pockets as men do). Show me the cat and I'll show you where your fortune is."

(To be continued.)

ELEPHANT LICENSE NEEDED

In Order to Hunt Wild Animals in South Africa.

If you should ever wander through Africa and come across a wild animal, do not take it for granted that you may capture it. Quite aside from any objections which the animal may offer, you may be trespassing upon the big game preserves of the World Zoological Trading Company. This company has capturing rights over 55,000 African acres, or eighty-seven square miles.

How many animals, and what kind of animals, does such a tract contain? It is impossible to give any definite figure, for officials jib at taking a wild animal census, but according to Mr. Jordan, the managing director of the Zoological Company, their game preserves contain about a thousand elephants, a thousand red buffalo, herds of roan and sable antelope, eland and waterbuck, besides crowds of smaller creatures.

Orders for these animals—many from America—are coming in steadily. If you want to keep a pet red buffalo, you had better write at once, or they will all be booked. Arrangements are now being made for the capture of as many of them as will permit themselves to be captured. But do not go out there yourself without permission. Should a hunter minus a permit to kill a wild elephant go, he will have the Zoological Company down upon him, whereas a wild elephant needs no permit to kill a hunter.

At the Peace Conference.

"Judge," said the man at the bar, "there's no use of you trying to square this thing up. My wife and I fight just so often and just so long and we can't help it. So there you are."

"And about how long do you keep it up?" asked the judge.

"About two weeks, judge."

"All right. I'll give you fifteen days in jail: in other words, you are interned for the duration of the war."

Save soft tissue paper for polishing lamp chimneys and mirrors.

We not only need to develop a good working stomach on a calf, but a good acting heart. This cannot be done without pure air, sunlight and plenty of exercise.

Systematic Housecleaning.

As the heavier part of the cleaning cannot be done to good purpose until fires are out for the season, we will be wise to begin using every spare moment to get those tasks done which take so much time and can be attended to now as well as later.

First of all, closets should be turned out, the contents aired, sorted and brushed. Garments to be repaired should all be put in one place by themselves such as a roomy utility box. Those to be stored for the summer must be cleaned and properly cared for. The cleaning of the closet itself should be very thorougly done, and if any traces of moths have been found, it should be tightly closed and a sulphur candle burned so as to penetrate all crevices. Once the closet is in order again, we are sure to be surprised and delighted, even as we are every year to find how much extra space we have.

Next, bureau drawers and all boxes and cupboards can be taken in order one by one, for these are really the things which take time. It is surprising, too, what a lot of supplies we will unearth which can be used to good purpose in our spring sewing and summer fancy work. One resourceful woman already has laid aside enough bright materials of good quality to make knitting bags for most of her Christmas presents next December. You see she believed in preparedness.

It is much better judgment to discard things which have outlived their usefulness than to keep putting them away with the idea that they may come in handy. The chances are that they will just harbor moths and dust. Give them away or do something with them which will put them to work to the best purpose.

During the summer the fewer pictures and pieces of bric-a-brac we have around the better, so these articles can all be cleaned, wrapped, labeled and laid away. Heavy draperies can be taken down, brushed and renovated. Lace hangings should be soaked in cold water until the dust and grime are removed, then laundered. This will give them a much better color than if put into warm water. In fact, many a handsome pair of curtains has been made gray and ugly by plunging them into warm water.

Everything is now in readiness for the cleaning of each room when the time arrives, and it is not nearly so tiresome a task to do this when there are no small things to handle and no accessory cupboards or drawers to clean.

Before beginning the remainder of the cleaning, have everything in readiness—ammonia, brushes, chamois, furniture polish, stepladders, pails, rubber gloves and cleaners. Doing housecleaning systematically robs it of its terrors and makes it much less tiresome and disagreeable.

Disease Germs in Dishwater.

Be careful how you wash your dishes if you want to avoid typhoid fever and other serious diseases.

Investigation made following an epidemic of typhoid fever showed that each dinner plate as it leaves the table in the ordinary household harbors from 30,000 to 90,000 bacteria. Most of these were harmless bacteria; still, if the plate were such fertile ground for harmless bacteria, it would make a rich culture for dangerous disease germs.

Next a long series of experiments were carried on to learn how many bacteria were left on these plates after they had been washed.

The average dinner plate, when washed in lukewarm water and dried without rinsing, was found to have on its surface 250,000 bacteria, or almost five times as many as it had when brought soiled from the dinner table!

This statement may seem amazing and improbable; but a little thought will show that it is logical, and the result what might have been expected. What are the necessities for rapid bacterial growth? Warmth and food. And what does the housewife give to those bacteria when she puts a lot of dinner dishes in lukewarm dish water? Warmth and food!

Thousands of housewives are still washing dishes in water no hotter than they can bear their hands in. It is not hot enough to kill bacteria; in fact, it encourages them.

"So they multiply and increase, and the dishes that are taken out of this water have on them five times as many germs as they had when put into it.

This source of danger can be eliminated from the household by the use of hotter dish water and the careful rinsing of dishes in boiling water.

It is not enough that your dishes merely look clean. The only way to have sterile dishes is to use boiling dish water and boiling rinsing water.

But the housewife should take every precaution to [illegible] to have clean dishes on which to serve her meals. There are six rules by which one may achieve the maximum of cleanliness in dish-washing:

First—Carefully scrape all plates and platters before washing.

Second—Do not allow any one recovering from any form of contagious disease to hande dishes during washing.

Third—Do not cough or sneeze while working with the dishes.

Fourth—Have the dish water hot. Use a dish-mop.

Fifth—Rinse all dishes in boiling water.

Sixth—Use clean dish-cloths and dish-towels.

When We Visit the Sick.

To know just when to call, how long to stay and just what to do and say when visiting the sick, requires tact, judgment and common sense.

The first thing to consider is the selection of a seasonable hour. The patient needs regular and periodic care and the visit should be timed with reference to this and not merely to the caller's personal convenience.

Most invalids are better able to enjoy seeing their friends during the middle of the day than at other times. Few invalids care to receive their friends until the room has been freshly aired and set in order for the day, the daily bath and toilet completed and the doctor's morning visit over. Neither early morning nor late evening are favoralbe visiting hours.

Some visitors never know when to go. As a rule, from fifteen minutes to half an hour is a sufficiently long period, for it is far better to go while the welcome lasts. If the visitor is wise, she will not allow herself to be entreated to remain longer or to prolong her call by the invalid's plea that she is "not a bit tired."

She is probably more or less excited though not able to realize her real feeling until after her guest's departure.

But more important than all else in visiting the sick, is the atmosphere the caller consciously or unconsciously carries with her. Conversation, manner, even the tones of the voice have their effect on the invalid.

Too much sympathy with the patient is a mistaken kindness and often positively harmful. After a few kindly enquiries, the visitor should tactfully lead the conversation away from the patient's ailments into other channels. Diversion of the right kind is really as valuable to a sick person as a dose of medicine.

The visitor should carry cheerful news and avoid all that may be depressing. One's own personal worries and trials should be left outside. Entertaining news items, descriptions of the latest book read and letters from absent friends will all be of interest to the lonely shut-in.

The caller should dress attractively. Only those who have experienced much illness, realize what a positive refreshment a caller's charming toilet may be nor with what delight the tired eyes take in every bright detail. You must remember that what is merely an episode to the caller is an event to the patient.

Just what to take a sick friend may be a problem. Flowers, fruits and jellies are customary gifts. If your friend is supplied with these dainties, a new book or magazine, will be even more appreciated as bringing a fresh element into the sick room.

Any little novelty that helps to break the daily monotony will prove attractive.

GIANT BRITISH CRUISER

Powerful Warship Now in Course of Construction is 900 Feet Long.

Details of the biggest and most powerful warship which is being built on the Clyde for the British navy can now be told. The ship is His Majesty's Hood, whose designed speed, the representatives of the London Daily News learn on official authority, will be 32 knots, and which may be increased during her trials to 35 knots.

Details of this vessel hitherto have been secret. She is a battle-cruiser, and her length will be 900 feet, or only one foot less than the Aquitania, the largest of the British liners. The Hood is expected to be in commission within six months.

Since the keel was laid down, several striking innovations in naval shipbuilding have been made, chiefly as the result of the lessons learned by experts during 1918, and these have necessitated alterations in the ship's internal arrangement. She will be mine and torpedo-proof, her hull being surrounded by a "blister" or outer cushion, and there will be steel-armored walls inside the vessel, which will be an additional safeguard.

A heavy fall of snow in Alberta will add to the limited moisture in the soil, and has thus relieved anxiety as to spring seeding conditions.

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PROBLEM OF THE "RELIGIOUS SPY"

WHO HELPS TO SPREAD THE BUDDHIST FAITH.

An American Missionary Working in Japan Describes Methods Adopted by Propagandists.

All the world is familiar with the military spy. but the religious spy is something new—at least to the Occidental world. It has remained for the Buddhists of Japan to develop and perfect the religious spy system. According to Christian missionaries in that country, Buddhism is spying out, as it believes, the strong points of the Christian religion as presented at the missions and adapting them to the spreading of Buddhism.

Buddhist girl spies committing Christian Sunday school lessons and gospel hymns to memory, heathen preachers using Christian sermons verbatim except for substitution of the name of their god, for that of Christ, pagan religions attempting revivals along Occidental lines—these are some of the curious phases of the life of Japan to-day as told by Somner R. Vinton, a missionary home on furlough.

"As Hinduism is trying to fight back the conquering armies of Christianity in India and as Mohammedanism is attempting a like task in Africa, so the devotees of the religions of Japan are waking up. And just as Japan copies western industrial and governmental life she is trying to adopt our religious methods," said Mr. Vinton.

Revivals In Pagan Religions.

"There is a Shinto revival and a Buddhist revival. The first named is an attempt to substitute patriotism for religion. It is a huge experiment in national psychology. If it succeeds it may have the same result as a similar plan had in Germany—Japan may out-Prussianize Prussia.

"As to Buddhism, we have a proverb in Burma, where I was born and lived eighteen years, "The dying frog gives a last kick."

"The Shin sect of Buddhists has two branches in Japan, the Nichi Hongwanji and the Higashi Hongwanji. The Nichi Hongwanji is the progressive denomination which is conducting the revival movement. The movement has had an unhappy history. Large funds were collected and these were used secretly by some of the insiders for speculation on the Tokio Stock Exchange. The result was a huge scandal. The Japanese newspapers printed indignant articles and the government finally took over supervision of the budget. This Buddhist budget last year was about $10,000,000, of which $6,500,000 was credited to the Hongwanji.

"The Nichi Hongwanji is establishing Sunday schools throughout Japan. It has a big church and Sunday schools in the Hawaiian Islands, and I was surprised to see when I visited it that the church building bore a certain type of chrysanthemum in its decoration, which in Japan can mean only that the enterprise using it enjoys imperial patronage.

A Buddhist Sunday School.

"I visited a Buddhist Sunday school in Japan with a missionary friend and was cordially received. The Buddhists eagerly showed us all over the building, and then they began to ask us about American Sunday school methods. My missionary friend gave the information desired freely. He told me later he did this because he was determined to bring these Buddhist leaders themselves to Christ, knowing what a great victory that would be.

"But the Buddhists do not always get their information in this open way. For instance, a young Japanese girl professed conversion and became an active member of one of our Sunday schools. She was one of the ornaments of the church, and they were quite proud of her.

"Six months later she disappeared. For some time no trace of her could be found. Then we discovered she had been sent to learn all our methods. She had gone so far as committing our best hymns to memory. To-day she is back imparting these methods for the glory of Buddha.

"The Japanese now have regular Buddhist institutes for training men with all the methods used in our American Christian training schools. They have taken over our methods in every phase. They study in these institutes our church services and Sunday school activities.

Competition in Education.

"Some of the young men in training come to listen to our sermons, commit them to memory and then preach these same sermons in Buddhist pulpits, only substituting Buddha for Christ whenever the word occurs.

"Another side of Buddhist competition with Christianity is in the schools. A wealthy man set up a splendidly equipped high school for girls in the neighborhood of one of our Methodist high schools. It was an opposition school, and having unlimited funds, it is now graduating more pupils.

"In many ways this Buddhist school is excellent, but I thought I could detect in the faces of the girls that it was not turning out the fine type of womanhood we were. A curious development, however, is that this school is becoming less and less a Buddhist institution every year. The Buddhist side is disappearing. Perhaps some day the school may become Christian."

LAUGHTER-LOVING PEOPLE.

British Literature and Drama Prove the Mirthfulness of Britons.

We British, despite an ancient fable of the rest of the world that we are stern-faced, are a laughter-loving people, says the London Daily Mail. The literature and drama of a country is always a mirror of its character, and British literature and drama have provided some of the greatest laughers of all time.

Shakespears, whose surpassing genius was a distillation of the British spirit, was the greatest of all the world's laughers. Fielding and Smollett, fathers of the world's novelists, were mighty laughers. Charles Dickens, although so intimately, colloquially, and almost insularly a British author, sent ripples of laughter round the world in translations into other tongues that will raise laughter among generations yet unborn.

We have had, too, our great laughing poets—Herrick, who laughed at lovers laugh, happily and daintily; Byron, who laughed satirically; Burns, finest laugher of them all, who laughed broadly, generously and humanly, and from a heart whose laughter rose more mellow from the deeps of sorrow, like the laugh of the people in our streets to-day.

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