

THREE BLACK BAGS.

As I often say to my wife, when she blames me for forgetting her little commissions, it's a queer thing, is the mind, and great is the force of habit. I never forgot to do anything I'm in the habit of doing, but as Tilly usually attends to the shopping herself I'm not in the habit of calling at the butcher's or the grocer's on my way home from business, and therefore—well therefore, I don't call three times out of five that she tells me to.

Don't I catch it? No; not overmuch, anyhow. For one thing, we haven't been married very long, and Tilly agrees that it's only reasonable I should have time to learn to be more careful, and, for another, if it wasn't for the hold a habit has on me, I doubt whether we should be married yet, or at least we shouldn't be living in our own house, with the furniture all bought at a large discount for cash.

I am a clerk in the service of a firm of colliery and quarry owners at Lington, and every Saturday morning I go out to West-terby, a village some thirty miles off among the moors, to pay the quarrymen their wages.

It's an awkward sort of journey. I have to start by the first train in the morning, which leaves Lington at 6, change at Drask, our junction with the main line, leave the main line again at Thurley, some ten miles further south, and do the rest of the distance in the brake van of a mineral train.

The money (nearly 100 pounds, mostly silver) I always carry in a little black leather bag, one of those bags you see by scores every day, which may contain anything from a packet of sandwiches and a collar to a dynamite bomb, and it's my habit when in the train to put my bag on the rack facing me. I rarely keep it on the seat by my side, and I don't like to put it over my head.

If it has to go there because the opposite rack is full I am always uneasy about it, fancying I shall forget when I get out. I never have forgotten it yet, but one Saturday in November, 1893, I did something which might have been worse. I took the wrong bag when I left the train at Thurley.

It happened in this way. On Friday night I went out with Tilly to a party, which broke up so late that I had only just time to change my clothes and get a sort of apology for breakfast before catching my train. Consequently I slept all the way from Lington to Drask, and at Drask I stumbled, only half awake, into the first third-class compartment I came to.

Three of the corner seats were occupied and I took the fourth, though there was no room on the opposite rack for my bag. I couldn't put it on the seat at my side, either, because the man opposite in the other corner had his legs up and I didn't care to disturb him. I ought, of course, to have kept it on my knees, but it was rather heavy and I was very sleepy, so I just slung it over my head, settled myself down and dropped off again almost before the train was clear of the station.

I didn't wake up until we stopped at Thurley, and even then I fancy I should have slept on if the two men at the far end of the compartment had not wanted to get out.

"What station is this?" I asked, sitting up and drawing my legs from across the door to let them pass. "Otterford, I suppose?"

"No, Thurley," said one, and up I jumped in a hurry, took my bag, as I thought, from the rack opposite me, and got down on to the platform just as the guard whistled the train away.

"You ran it a bit fine that time, mister," remarked the man who had saved me from being carried past my destination. "I wonder if that other chap meant going on? He was as fast asleep as you."

"Oh, he's all right," said his companion. "He's booked for London. I heard him say so when he got in."

I felt much refreshed when we arrived at the quarries. After I had had a wash and done full justice to a second breakfast at the "Miner's Arms" I felt ready to face my morning's work of making up the men's pay sheets. Then, as I felt in my pocket for my keys, my memory began to entertain a vague suspicion that that bag was somehow unfamiliar to it. However, my key fitted the lock and as I turned it my suspicion vanished, but only to be replaced a moment later by an astounding certainty.

Instead of resting upon the familiar brown paper packages of silver and little canvas bags of gold, my eyes were dazzled by a many-colored iridescence, which shone forth from the inside of that bag as soon as I opened it.

"Diamonds, by jingo!" I cried as I started back amazed.

I thought it best to keep my discovery to myself. The bag, I guessed, was probably the property of a jeweler's traveler—a traveler in a large way of business, too, thought I, as I peered into it in the least exposed corner of the office and found it almost full of what, little as I knew about precious stones, I felt certain were valuable jewels.

Rings, brooches, bracelets, loose stones, at least one necklace, a gold watch and chain, some bank notes and a considerable sum of sovereigns were all mixed up together in a chaotic confusion which seemed at least inconsistent with their habits. I began to doubt whether it was consistent with honest possession of, at all events, the consent of the bag on the part of my late fellow passenger—see man who was booked for London, and who had been asleep when I left the train at Thurley. No doubt he was awake and also aware of his loss by this time. What a state of mind he must be in too. But, just as I was trying to realize his state of mind—a murmur of gruff voices and a shuffling of heavy feet in the yard outside reminded me that it was time to pay the men.

Hurriedly summoning the foreman, and telling him that a mistake had been made in supplying me with money, I went down

into the village, and, after some trouble, succeeded in collecting enough silver and copper to serve my purpose. Then, with that precious bag out of sight between my feet, I paid the men.

As soon as I had finished my task I returned, per mineral train, to Thurley, and there I broke my journey. On calmly reviewing all the circumstances of the case in the seclusion of the brake van I had decided that the police rather than the railway authorities ought to be first informed of my mistake, and the inspector to whom I told my story agreed with me.

"I am very glad you came straight to me," said he, turning the contents of the bag out on his desk. "If you can hold your tongue for a week or two it's just possible we may catch the gentleman who put this nice little lot together."

"You think they have been stolen then?" I asked.

"Think!" he repeated, smiling at my simplicity. "I know, my boy. And when and where, too; though, unfortunately, not by whom. Run your eye over this."

"This" was a list of jewels and other valuables missing from Erlingthorpe, Lord Yerbury's place, where, the inspector said, a well-planned robbery had been carried out on the Thursday evening.

"You seem to have nailed a lot," he went on; "but we may as well go through the articles seriatim."

We did so, and found there was nothing missing except the money I had taken to pay the men.

"Now, look here, young man," he went on, eyeing me keenly, "I'm not in charge of this case—yet—but, if you'll do as I tell you, I hope I may be in the course of a few days. There's a tidy reward offered for the recovery of the property, as you see. That, I take it, you've earned already; but are you game to help me catch the man? There's a further reward for nabbing him, which, of course, I can't touch—officially—and don't particularly want. My aim is promotion. Do you understand?"

"I think so," said I; "and I am willing to help you all I can. What do you want me to do?"

"Nothing," he replied; "just literally nothing. Go home. Keep a still tongue in your head and a sharp eye on the agony columns of the London papers and wait till you hear from me. I'll take charge of these articles and give you a receipt for them, but don't be surprised if you see them still advertised as missing."

A few days later the inspector set his trap. It took the shape of an advertisement begging the gentleman with whom "G. C." inadvertently exchanged bags to communicate with G. C. at the address he would find in G. C.'s pocketbook.

Personally, I didn't think our fish would be foolish enough to rise to this bait, but my friend, the inspector, was more hopeful.

"Luckily for us, Mr. Corner," said he, when I took advantage of my next visit to the quarries to call upon him, "there's always a sort of wary or twist in the mind of the habitual criminal which prevents him from believing in the honesty of other folks. Now, not a soul but you and I and the chief constable knows those jewels are as good as back on Lady Yerbury's dressing-table, or wherever she's in the habit of leaving 'em lying about. Therefore the hue and cry after them's not likely to die away yet awhile, and there'll be a genuine ring about it which should persuade our unknown friend that you've got 'em and mean to convert 'em to your own use, as we say in the profession, but, being an amateur, don't know how to go about turning 'em into more cash than the reward comes to, and that, consequently, you are anxious to come to terms with him. See?"

For a month Lady Yerbury's diamonds were sought in vain and for a month "G. C." continued to appeal to his late fellow traveler, also in vain, but at the end of that time his patience was rewarded by the appearance of an advertisement, telling him, if he really meant business, to write to "B. H." at a given address.

The letter I wrote of Inspector Bland was more cautious than incriminating, but as it produced a reply which the inspector deemed satisfactory it was followed by others less carefully worded, until at last it stood pledged to personally deliver, for the consideration of £2,000, the stolen jewels to one Benjamin Hurst, whom I was to meet at a public house in Chillingham.

Now, I don't pretend to be braver than the average man of peaceful and sedentary habits, and when I saw what sort of a house the "Spotted Dog" was I began to wish I had refused to have anything to do with Inspector Bland's scheme.

The little company of disreputable-looking loafers hanging about the bar eyed me curiously as I entered, and when I asked the landlord if Mr. Hurst was in, one of them raised a general laugh by offering to carry my luggage up to him.

"No larks, Bill," said the landlord sternly. "Mary, show the gentleman Mr. Hurst's room."

I found Mr. Hurst a decidedly surly rascal. He began by grumbling at the hardness of the bargain I was driving with him, and swearing at his luck generally. Then being perhaps emboldened by the conciliatory manner I thought it prudent to adopt, he tried to make better terms, offering me first £500 less, and finally insisting that he ought at least be allowed to deduct from my £2,000 the sum I had used to pay the men.

Inspector Bland had allowed me a quarter of an hour for negotiations. At the end of that time he proposed to make a raid upon the house.

"And mind," he had said in his jocular way, "we don't find the property still in your hands, Mr. Corner. It would be a pretty kettle of fish if we had to prosecute you for unlawful possession, wouldn't it?"

In accordance with these instructions I haggled with Mr. Hurst a little while and then allowed him to have his way, whereupon he, having satisfied himself that the bag which I restored to him still contained his spoils, handed me £1,900 in what afterward turned out to be very creditable imitations of Bank of England notes.

"I suppose you don't want no receipt?" he growled.

"No, thank you," said I. "I think we may mutually dispense with that formality. Good morning."

I turned to leave the room as I spoke, but before I could unlock the door it was burst open from the outside, not, unfortunately for me, by the police, but by the man whom the landlord had called Bill, a powerful ruffian, who promptly knocked me down and knelt upon my chest.

"Quick, Ben, get out of this," he cried.

"It's a plant. No, no. The window, you fool," he added, as Mr. Hurst, bag in hand, made for the door. "The police are in the bar already."

As Mr. Hurst opened the window he cursed me with much volubility and bitterness, and as soon as he was outside on the leads he hid worse.

"Stand clear, Bill," he cried, and his friend obeyed him. I scrambled to my feet, but immediately dropped again with a bullet from Mr. Hurst's revolver in my shoulder.

I am not at all sorry that Mr. Hurst fired at me, as Inspector Bland says it was much easier to convict him of attempted murder than to prove he actually stole those jewels, and the inspector doubts, too, whether he would have got fifteen years if merely charged with receiving them. But I do wish he hadn't hit me.

However even the pain my wound still gives me is not without its compensation. It prevents me from feeling any twinges of conscience when I reflect that my furniture cost Mr. Hurst his liberty, for Lord Yerbury took it for granted that he was the thief, and paid me the extra reward he had offered for his apprehension.

Inspector Bland won the promotion he coveted, and is now stationed at Lington. His wedding present was characteristic. It was a black bag, with my initials on either side in white letters about six inches long.

Some Strong Men.

Thomas Thompson lifted three barrels of water, weighing together 1836 pounds, on March 28, 1841. He also put an iron bar on his neck, seized hold of its two ends and bent it until the latter met. On another occasion he raised with his teeth a table 6 feet long, supporting at its farthest end a weight of 100 pounds. He also tore without serious effort a rope of a diameter of 2 inches, and lifted a horse over a bar.

Some years ago a negro appeared in London who, with one hand and his arm straight, lifted from the ground a chair on which was seated a full-grown man having on his lap a little child.

It is on record that a German called Buchholz lifted with his teeth a cannon weighing about 200 lbs. and fired it off in that position. While performing at Epernay, in France the same feat, the barrel of the gun burst. Miraculously, he was not killed, although several of the fragments were thrown over 50 yards away.

There are stories of other strong men who did not appear in public. A butcher lived in South Holland who killed calves by strangling them. A Dutch count, in a private entertainment, bent an iron bar by beating it with his right hand against his left arm, protected by a leather bandage, bending it afterward straight again by beating it the other way.

Charles Louvier, a carpenter of Paris, found it child's play to roll a tin basin between his fingers into a cylinder. On one occasion he carried off a soldier on guard who had gone to sleep in the sentry box, depositing both on a low churchyard wall close by. An equally amusing story is told of a Dane, Knut Knudson, a locksmith, who, while standing in a window on the ground floor, lifted with one hand half a bullock from the shoulder of a butcher who was toiling past with his load.

Notes on Lions.

The tongue of a lion is so rough that a close look at it will almost take the skin off the looker. It is not safe to allow a lion to lick your hand, for if he licked the skin off and got a taste of the underlying blood supposing it to be there, he would want the hand and everything adjoining thereto.

Nothing more perfect in modern machinery exists than the mechanism by which a lion works his claws. He has five toes on each of his fore-feet and four on each of his hind-feet. Each toe has a claw. Nothing about a lion is without reason, and the reason he has more toes and claws on his fore than on his hind feet is that he has more use for them. If this were not so, the majority would be the other way. The lion is nocturnal by choice. He has no particular objection to daylight, but likes to spend it in the bosom of his family, or at least adjacent to it. It should not be supposed that because he roams about at night he neglects his family. He roams in order to fill the family larder. He kills to eat, not for amusement. He never bothers small game so long as there is big game within reach. When feeling fit, he can take an ox in his mouth and jump fences and ditches like a professional steeple-chaser.

"At Home."

An amusing story is told of the late Principal Pirie, of Aberdeen, Scotland. Just after "at home" cards became fashionable, one of the dullest specimens of the old professional regime was surprised to receive a missive, which read as follows: "Principal and Mrs. Pirie present their compliments to Professor T—, and hope he is well. Principal and Mrs. Pirie will be 'at home' on Thursday evening, at 8 o'clock." This was something which evidently required an answer, but the recipient of it was quite equal to the occasion. He wrote: "Professor T—, returns T—, becomplement of Principal and Mrs. Pirie and informs them that he is very well. Professor T— is glad to hear that Principal and Mrs. Pirie will be at home on Thursday evening, at 8 o'clock. Professor T— will also be at home."

Tea Drunkards.

It seems that tea is to be no longer considered the cup that cheers but not inebriates. A New York doctor declares that of the patients applying to the dispensary fully 10 per cent. are tea drunkards, and that tea ranks as an intoxicant only second to alcohol. These patients suffer from vertigo, headache, insomnia, palpitation of the heart, nightmare, nausea, hallucination, depression of spirits, and sometimes suicidal impulses—surely a formidable list of symptoms. Dr. Wood thinks that this evil may be greatly lessened if only freshly-steeped tea is drunk.

BRITISH AND FOREIGN.

A letter of Cardinal Richelieu's was sold recently in London for \$190; one written by La Fontaine, the poet, brought \$150, and one by Robespierre \$61.

At Helsingfors, in Finland, a newspaper has been started, edited, and managed entirely by women. The chief editor is Miss Minna Kant, who is well known among the Finns as a novelist.

Electricity is now used for coloring leather more quickly and deeply. The hide is stretched on a metallic table and covered with the coloring liquid; a pressure of a few volts is then applied between the liquid and the table, which opens the pores of the skin and allows the color to sink in.

Opposition to the use of the anti-toxine treatment for diphtheria has already taken an organized form in England. A deputation headed by Lord Coleridge has protested to the authorities against its use in the hospitals on the ground that "public money ought not to be devoted to experiments in psychology."

Nickel steel armor plates made by Krupp on a new system were successfully tested at Meppen. The plates were about 5½ inches thick and showed a resistance equal to plates of 9½ inches made by the old process. The plates were struck without injury by five shots each from six-inch and eight-inch guns.

Sir Charles Algernon Coote, Bart., of Donnybrook, the last male descendant of the Earl of Bellamont, who was Governor of New York in King William's time, is pilloried in Truth as a professional writer of begging letters. His great-grandfather was made a baronet because he was the illegitimate son of the last Earl.

High angle fire gun mountings and turrets tried on the Centurion, Admiral Fremantle's flagship in China, and with electric motors on the Barleur, have proved satisfactory, and will be applied to the new Renown. The system finds favor because it is independent of steam and hydraulic power and can be worked by hand.

At Staroja, in the Government of Novgorod, Russia, a girl of 14 was lately arrested on the charge of strangling a two-year-old child, which she was employed to look after. She thereupon confessed to having killed sixteen children in this way, and gave as her reason that she did not like the trouble they gave her.

Iron, through its uses for electrical purposes, seems to have developed a new quality, magnetic fatigue. In tests made of transformers lately in London to ascertain the open circuit loss, it has been found that the loss increased steadily for the first 200 days until it reached a fairly constant value of 40 per cent. more than at starting.

In Manchester, England, the Town Council is about to put \$1,250,000 into clearing the slums. An overcrowded and unhealthy space of five acres in the centre of the city will be taken, the buildings torn down, and new model workmen's dwellings erected in their stead, with large areas for playgrounds, and trees and flowers planted in the open spaces.

Badges worn in the buttonhole have taken the place of commutation tickets in Belgium, where the new system of fortnightly season tickets good on the railroads over the whole Government system has greatly increased the number of commuters. Differences in color distinguish the nature of the ticket and the class by which the holder is entitled to travel.

In Prussia the Catholic Church seems to retain its vitality. In 1872 there were in the kingdom 914 conventual establishments, with 8,795 members; three years later, in consequence of the repressive legislation of the "May laws," over a third of the institutions were dissolved, but in 1893 we find 1,215 establishments, with 14,044 monks and nuns.

At a recent sale at Christie's in London a sheet of pen drawings by Michael Angelo was discovered thrown in with a lot of unimportant drawings, and brought \$1,900. On one side of the sheet are two compositions for Holy Families or charities; on the other an allegorical group, a woman and child seated on the ground. There are on it also some satirical verses.

Mrs. Gladstone's nephew, the Honorable Alfred Lyttleton, has been proposed for election to the Liberal Unionist Club, his sponsors being the Duke of Devonshire and Sir Henry James. He will stand for Parliament at the general election as a Liberal Unionist. Only a few weeks ago Mr. Lyttleton was appointed Recorder of Oxford, a place which he still holds, by Lord Rosebery's Government.

At Brighton, England, a Christmas dole of half a sovereign has been distributed for years to the oldest poor inhabitants. It was given this year to 150 persons, 95 women and 55 men, who averaged over 83 years of age, and, as the day was fine, 96 of them appeared in persons headed by an old lady of 95. She was followed by eight more old ladies who were over 90. The oldest man present was 89, but an old gentleman of 100, who could not come, headed the list.

This season's crazes in Europe have been collected by an Italian editor. In England it is clay modelling, the chief victims being Mr. Gladstone and Sir William Harcourt; in Paris it is riddles, in Italy and southern France it is jumping beans, painted to represent prominent persons; they jump best on hot plates. In Belgium they have slow smoking races; the pipes are filled with half an ounce of tobacco each and the winner is he who can hold out longest without relighting. The record so far is sixty-seven minutes.

Alfons Czibulka, whose "Stephanie Gavotte" has been played in almost every country in the world, died of apoplexy last month in Vienna. He was born in Hungary and began his musical career as an infant phenomenon, playing for several seasons in southern Russia. He wrote "Amorita," which was one of the successful comic operas of the earlier Casino days, and the waltz "Dream After the Ball," which is still popular. Anton Seidl played it on last Sunday night at the Metropolitan Opera House and was compelled to repeat it. Czibulka was 54 years old, and had been of late years the leader of a military band.

At Pirano, in Istria, the tablet with inscriptions in Italian and Slovenian, which has excited all the Italian-speaking provinces of Austria, was lately set up again on the Court House, according to the decision

of the Government. Two companies of infantry occupied the market place, but their presence was not needed. The people kept indoors; the stores, cafes, and public buildings were closed; the houses were draped with black, and on the shipping in the harbor the flags were at half-mast. At noon the women and children appeared in the streets dressed in black; the men were nowhere to be seen. All traffic in the town is stopped.

PRINCE OF WALES IN RUSSIA.

The Close Family Ties Between English and Russian Royalty.

A writer in the Paris "Gaulois" gives some impressions of his visits to St. Petersburg and some advice to Frenchmen on the attitude which they should now adopt. After speaking of the strong liking for England formed by the new Czar during his stay there, he says:

"No other Prince in the world, perhaps, likes his ease better than the heir to the English throne, yet see the terrible task undertaken by him for more than a fortnight, from Livadia to the day of the funeral of Alexander III., accompanying the Russian family twice a day to the religious ceremonies solemnized before the open coffin of the late Emperor, and after each service mounting the steps of the catafalque behind the Empress and Nicholas II. to kiss the brow of the August deceased. His attitude was not less remarkable in the private circle of the Anitchkoff palace. There he endeavored, after each of these sad ceremonies, to effect a consoling reaction against grief, being affectionate toward all, and even going the length of playing with the children. This attitude was certainly deliberate, but who can say that it was not sincere? How could it help being highly appreciated, and how could it help bearing fruit? The Russian royal family, particularly the Emperor Nicholas and the Empress, are deeply grateful for it. Ties have been formed in these days of mourning, and they have assumed a political character which will perhaps last longer than is imagined, and which, as the first result, has inspired the two countries with a desire to live on friendly terms."

After remarking that France by intelligence and tact might benefit by this understanding, but that the outcry against military attaches and the series of press scandals tend to discredit her in Russian minds, the writer says:

"The Anglo-Russian understanding imposes on France the obligation of arranging once for all with England the long-standing differences between them. Not that Russia makes this obligation, it is not for her to utter the word, but I can affirm without fear of contradiction that there is an august desire there for a good understanding between Paris and London. The Franco-Russian understanding may evidently exist concurrently with the Anglo-Russian rapprochement, but henceforth it can not have true solidity unless we at once, or at least as speedily as possible, amicably settle our affairs with England."

The writer then speaks of the friendly disposition of England, perhaps a result of the rapprochement with Russia, and dwells on the peculiar fitness of Baron de Courcel for restoring good relations, as also on the duty of Frenchmen not to interfere with diplomatic action. He concludes by exhorting the Colonial party not to obstruct, by excess of zeal or unreasonable words, an understanding which they must themselves desire.

Soiled by Trade.

Mrs. Wayupp—"Don't invite those Highupp girls again. Their father has disgraced himself."

Mias Wayupp—"Impossible! He is a noted scientist, and president of a college."

Mrs. Wayupp—"Yes, but the vulgar fellow has recently been making a study of the trade winds. It's in all the papers, too."

Abundant Proof.

She—"I wonder whether Chinamen ever use intoxicants to excess?"

He—"The war has demonstrated that they don't. You don't hear of their doing anything but taking water."

The Very Latest.

"What's the latest thing out?"

Asked a gossip she.

"I think," was the answer,

"My husband must be."

Its Equivalent.

The prisoner had been before the court so many times for vagrancy that the judge concluded to give him a dose he wouldn't forget.

"So," he said sternly, as he looked down on the chronic, "you are here again?"

"Yes, yeroner," replied the prisoner humbly.

"Same old charge, I suppose?"

"Yes, yeroner."

"All right; I'll just fine you a hundred dollars and send you down."

The prisoner threw up his hands like a drowning man. "Geusalem! yeroner," he exclaimed; "why don't you give me a life sentence and be done with it?"

Papa Caught.

First Little Boy—"What you laughin' at?"

Second Little Boy—"Papa is scoldin' everybody in the house, 'cause he says he can't lay a thing down a minute without someone pickin' it up an' losin' it—he, he, he!"

"His he lost?"

"His pencil."

"Where is it?"

"Behind his ear."

Sorry for Bobby.

First Boy—"I feel sorry for Bobby Blinksers. He's got a step-mother."

Second Boy—"Is she strict?"

First Boy—"Awful! She makes him wear rubbers every time it rains."