

THE SILK ENIGMA

BY
J.R. WILMOT

AUTHOR OF
"ZORA, THE INVISIBLE,"
"DEATH IN THE STALLS," &c.

Published by Special Arrangement

Copyright

CHAPTER XXI "THE BEECHES"

The booming of midnight as Philip left the telephone call box gave him a shock. As a matter of fact, he hadn't considered time at all. He recalled that it had been ten o'clock when he had arrived outside Oxtons, but he had really no idea how long he had lain unconscious. After all it could not have been very long. An hour at the most. Now he was faced with another problem. He had mapped out in his mind a plan. It was a rather rough and ready plan, but the first essential of it was getting to Tonbridge.

He took a bus to the railway station—Victoria. He was told that there were no more trains on that line that night, but that the first one was five-thirty in the morning. Since hiring a car was out of the question on account of the expense, he reluctantly decided that there was nothing he could do until the morning. So he went to his lodgings to snatch a few hours' sleep.

The train to Tonbridge was a slow one. It stopped exasperatingly at every station on the line, and as Philip sat back in the corner seat of the "smoker" he chafed at the delay. Of course, he had looked at the problem before him from almost every angle. He had dropped a note in the post to Peter Oxton informing him that he hoped to turn in for duty by midday or shortly after. He explained his self-appointed leave of absence by suggesting that he was following up a clue which, he felt, would lead him towards clearing up the mystery and also finding out what had happened to Phyllis Varley. Philip was none too sanguine about this latter suggestion. He had incorporated it rather to give him some justification for his unconventional behaviour. He knew well enough what Peter Oxton would have said had he waited until that gentleman arrived down at the store. Peter Oxton would have reminded him that it was Scotland Yard's job to solve the mystery of Nikolai Nolescue's death and that were he in possession of any information that might assist them, it was his duty to acquaint Superintendent Beck and leave it to him to adjudicate upon its value and to take whatever action he considered necessary.

But such a course would not have suited Philip at all. He had been wearing his patience thin indeed at his enforced inaction. It was true Beck had commissioned him to "Keep an eye on Oxtons, Mr. Slater, and let me know if anything unusual occurs there." Well, he'd done that. He'd phoned the Superintendent on each occasion anything of a suspicious nature had occurred. But now that he had found something—and the more he mullied it over the more he was convinced that the address on the piece of paper in his pocket was of the utmost importance—he was not to be denied the credit of his discovery. He'd earned it, too. He'd had a punch on the jaw from some mysterious marauder in the store last night, and he'd been uncomfortably trussed up. He had a debt to pay on that score and he was determined that, given the chance, he was going to pay that debt personally.

Of course, there was the reverse side to the medal. That address might be perfectly innocuous. It might, after all prove to be something that the cleaners had overlooked. It might be the address of a customer, hastily scribbled down as a form of reminder. Well, that couldn't be helped now. He was on his way to Tonbridge. If Peter Oxton considered that he'd deliberately acted contrary to regulations, well... he'd hate to have to leave the firm, but if there were no alternative, he would have to abide by the consequences.

Thought of Phyllis Varley strengthened his belief that he was acting rightly. Phyllis could not have disappeared of her own free will without letting him know. She wasn't like that. There was nothing secretive in her nature.

And there was that mysterious affair in the store last night. He'd been thinking over that quite a lot, and it intrigued him. He wondered who the man could have been. It had been quite impossible in the dark to even glean a hint of his nationality. All Philip knew was that the fellow was incredibly strong and that the grip he had exerted on his neck was probably one associated with Ju-Jitsu in some form or another. He had no knowledge of the science himself, but he had read that it was based on a form of paralysis of the nerve centres as a means of rendering the victim helpless, and he'd certainly been that. If he ever encountered the fellow again he'd have to be on his guard. Then there was the reason for the fellow's visit to the store. What had been his objective? What attraction did the Chinese silks department have for him? Once again there was no adequate answer to the question. If only he could have been certain that his assailant had been a Chinaman, that might have given him a clue. But he could only guess at that. One thing he was sure of, however, the man had not been particularly tall. Had he been even of average height that swing of Philip's fist must most certainly have

connected with his jaw rather than with the arm. Still, he debated with himself, conjecture wasn't going to help him very much at this stage, so he spread out his morning newspaper and read the sports page.

Tonbridge at last. He'd never seen Tonbridge before, and he realized that his task of finding a house called The Beeches which was, according to the slip of paper, near Tonbridge, might occupy him the whole of the morning.

But Philip was not interested in crime detection for nothing, and he had no intention of stopping the first person he met and asking so general a question. He had himself directed to the Post Office and there mentioned that a friend of his had come to the district, and that all he knew concerning the address was that the name of the house was The Beeches.

The Post Office people were exceedingly helpful. He was asked to wait for a few minutes while an inquiry was made. When the young woman returned she had in her hand a list of no fewer than seven addresses of people whose houses were named The Beeches.

"What name would it be?" she asked innocently.

Philip thought quickly. "It's just possible it won't be there, if you've taken them from the local directory," he evaded. "He's only recently come to live down here."

The young woman smiled. "I haven't got these from a directory," she told him, disarmingly. "I got them from the sorting-room where we keep lists of houses with duplicate names."

"The name is Rodgers," Philip told her, desperately.

He watched her run her blue eyes down the list, watched her shake her curly head, too.

"I'm afraid there's no one of that name here," she told him. "But if the list is any use to you in case you want to make a call around, you're welcome to it."

Philip murmured his thanks and took his departure.

Outside he studied the list carefully. He saw that six out of the seven addresses were actually in the town itself. It was the other that interested him because it read: "Marcus Stillman, The

Beeches, Upper Donningham, near Tonbridge.

"That's the house for my money," he smiled to himself. "Now how to get somewhere near Upper Donningham."

The task was a lighter one than he had expected. A motor bus company ran a service between Tonbridge and Sevenoaks and the direction board told him that Upper Donningham was en route.

Upper Donningham proved to be little more than a cluster of red-roofed houses flanking a main road with a shop here and there. He looked in vain for a post office and at length decided to make an inquiry at the little general store just past the church.

A benign and bespectacled old man, with a white apron folding his girth, smiled a welcome from behind the little counter laden with a variety of produce that would have done credit to a multiple store.

"Good morning to you, young sir. And what is it I can be selling you?" "I wonder if you know a house in these parts called The Beeches?" Philip inquired, after acknowledging the greeting.

The old man leaned against the counter and scratched his head.

"The Beeches now," he repeated, "it's funny you should ask me that because I've been wondering about that house for a week or more. You're friendly with the people, sir?"

Once again Philip sensed danger. "I'm afraid I'm not. As a matter of fact," he prevaricated, "I came down to deliver a message to a Mr. Stillman who I'm told lives there."

The old man laughed. "That's a good 'un, young sir. Old Mr. Stillman's been dead these past five months. I followed him to the churchyard myself. Nice old fellow, Stillman. Many's the big order I've had from him in my time when he did his bit of entertaining. It's funny you don't know him. He's a funny one, as though he had no intention of letting so rich a joke slip away from him."

"I'm afraid I don't know the gentleman personally," went on Philip. "Only in the way of business, you understand."

"Well, if you be wanting to discuss business with Master Stillman, young

sir, old Bob Prentiss can't be certain of his present address," and "Old Bob" went off into another frolic of droll laughter.

"But you could direct me to the house, I'm sure," coaxed Philip.

"Of course I could, and will," smiled Mr. Prentiss, "but I doubt if you'll be told anything about Mr. Stillman," he added. "You see they're foreigners at The Beeches—yellow foreigners, Chinese I should say. Not that I've any objection to foreigners, sir. It's not their fault, but what I do say is they might patronise the local shops and not send into Tonbridge for their needs."

Philip's interest was aroused to concert pitch, and he told himself that he was probably right, after all, in deciding to take a chance on the address he had found in the store.

"Have they been here very long?" he asked, in a voice that sounded far more matter-of-fact than he actually felt.

"About a month, I should say. Not that we see much of them," he added. "Perhaps they're shy and rather sensitive. I think I should be if I were in foreign parts. Oh, I'm forgetting again. You want to go up to 'The Beeches'.

Well, about three hundred yards down the road on the left you'll find a narrow road. The finger post says Middleham. You take that road for half a mile and on your right you'll come to a house standing all on its own among a fine collection of beeches as ever you did see. That's old Mr. Stillman's place; that was, that is."

Philip thanked Mr. Prentiss and left the shop. He found the road indicated to Middleham and walked leisurely along wondering exactly what he was going to do now he had got this far. He told himself that he could, of course, make some pretext for inquiring about Mr. Stillman, since the village shopkeeper had supplied him with the details.

As Mr. Prentiss had said the beeches were wonderful; particularly the copper variety, although the autumn was beginning to take toll of their foliage. He could pick out the house among the trees and soon came upon the big iron gate between the two grey posts. The gate was not locked and he decided that he might as well make his inquiry for Mr. Stillman and see what sort of a person answered that inquiry.

The old oak door opened slowly, almost furtively and Philip found a pair of almond eyes in a yellow face scrutinizing him.

"I was wondering if you could tell me where Mr. Stillman now lives?" he questioned. "He used to live here, I understand."

For a moment the Chinaman did not speak. Ling Foo was suspicious. "If Honourable sir would mind waiting for a moment I will inquire," he said, and Philip noted that he closed the door as he turned away, leaving him standing in the wide porch.

Ling Foo returned a few moments later. He was sorry but Excellency did not know anything of former tenant. Perhaps the agents...

Philip felt, as he walked down the drive, that he had learned nothing at all except that apparently the present tenants were Chinamen.



6-day weekly service by experienced movers using all modern equipment. And our prices make this offer all the more attractive.

PHONE 435
Vansickle
TRANSPORT R. Vansickle Proprietor

Outside in the road again he decided to make a detour. He had an idea that the back of the house might bear inspection. Unostentatiously he made his way across a field, hugging the hedge-rows until he came to a gap which gave him a view of the house again. For a moment he stared, unbelievably. At one of the tiny upper windows that appeared to be barred after the fashion of a child's nursery, was a face—a woman's face pressed against the glass, and as he saw it a nausea of fear crept upon him as it had done last night.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Hither and Yon (By Frances Franklin)

The evening is cool, and the dew is frosty-white on the grass. A robin calls a bubbling lyric from the top of a tall post, saluting the parting day with melody. From back yards and commons issue the cries of excited children playing ball. A cdr of ancient vintage coughs its way along the white band of road, every one of its parts expressing pleasure with a peculiar rattle of its own. The cubed-off skyline is tinged on one side with indigo, and on the other with hazy gold and crimson. It is twilight in the outskirts of the town.

As Clarence Day has it, we are a simian race. No greater proof can be found than to watch a group of us playing baseball, or football, or, in fact, any of our games. The players chatter and screech at each other, offering advice that is not needed, berating errors or misjudgments; commending good play. The spectators go completely mad, yelling themselves hoarse at a mere point, throwing their headgear into the air, hitting each other upon the shoulders, and when a home run or any other especially brilliant play is made, embracing each other in a fren-

zy of elation. I know of only one other genus so emotional and that is the simian. I have countless times seen these little cousins of ours acting in exactly the same way when playing tag up and down the bars of their cages.

There is something sinister in the pale silvery green of the leaves as they curl over when a storm is approaching. Their whisper seems to take on a warning note; their hunched surfaces are like the huddled shoulders of a group of fugitives from a greater wrath.

Unheard music... the harmony of road and field, of tree and creek, of wind and sky, that is everywhere in the summer. Who has eyes to see, and ears to hear...

If You Like Books (By A. H.)

Poems of all kinds have been written in honour of the greatest friend and confidant anyone ever had—"Mother." They are treasured by one and all, and their theme never ceases to inspire the true poet. Anna Hemstead Branch, an American poetess, has written two of these immortal poems known under the title "Songs for My Mother." The following is the first of these, and the second will be quoted in the next issue of The Advance.

My Mother's hands are cool and fair. They can do anything. Delicate mercies hide them there. Like flowers in the spring.

When I was small and could not sleep, She used to come to me. And with my cheek upon her hand How sure my rest would be.

For everything she ever touched Of beautiful or fine, Their memories living in her hands Would warm that sleep of mine.

Her hands remember how they played One time in meadow streams— And all the flickering song and shade Of water took my dreams.

Swift through her haunted fingers pass Memories of garden things;— I dipped my face in flowers and grass And sounds of hidden wings.

One time she touched the cloud that kissed Brown pastures bleak and far;— I leaned my cheek into a mist And thought I saw a star.

All this was very long ago And I am grown; but yet The hand that lured my slumber so I never can forget.

For still when drowsiness comes on It seems so soft and cool Shaped happily beneath my cheek, Hollow and beautiful.

Everything for the Well Dressed Man

SUMMER STYLES

- Tailored Suits
- Summer Hose
- Summer Ties
- Tailored Underwear
- Arrow Shirts

TAYLOR'S ESQUIRE SHOP
Empire Block

Wedding on Friday at St. Anthony's Church

Miss Leontine Brazeau and Mr. Lionel Brousseau United in Marriage.

On Friday morning, in St. Anthony's Church, Leontine, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Brazeau, 81 Balsam street, south, became the bride of Lionel Brousseau.

The bride, who was given in marriage by her brother, Joseph, wore a powder blue gown with hat and gloves to match and carried a bouquet of large white lilies.

The groom was attended by his father.

After the ceremony a wedding breakfast for friends and relatives was served at the home of the bride's parents. The bride's mother, Mrs. Brazeau, assisted by her daughters, acted as hostess. The bride and groom received many lovely gifts from their friends.

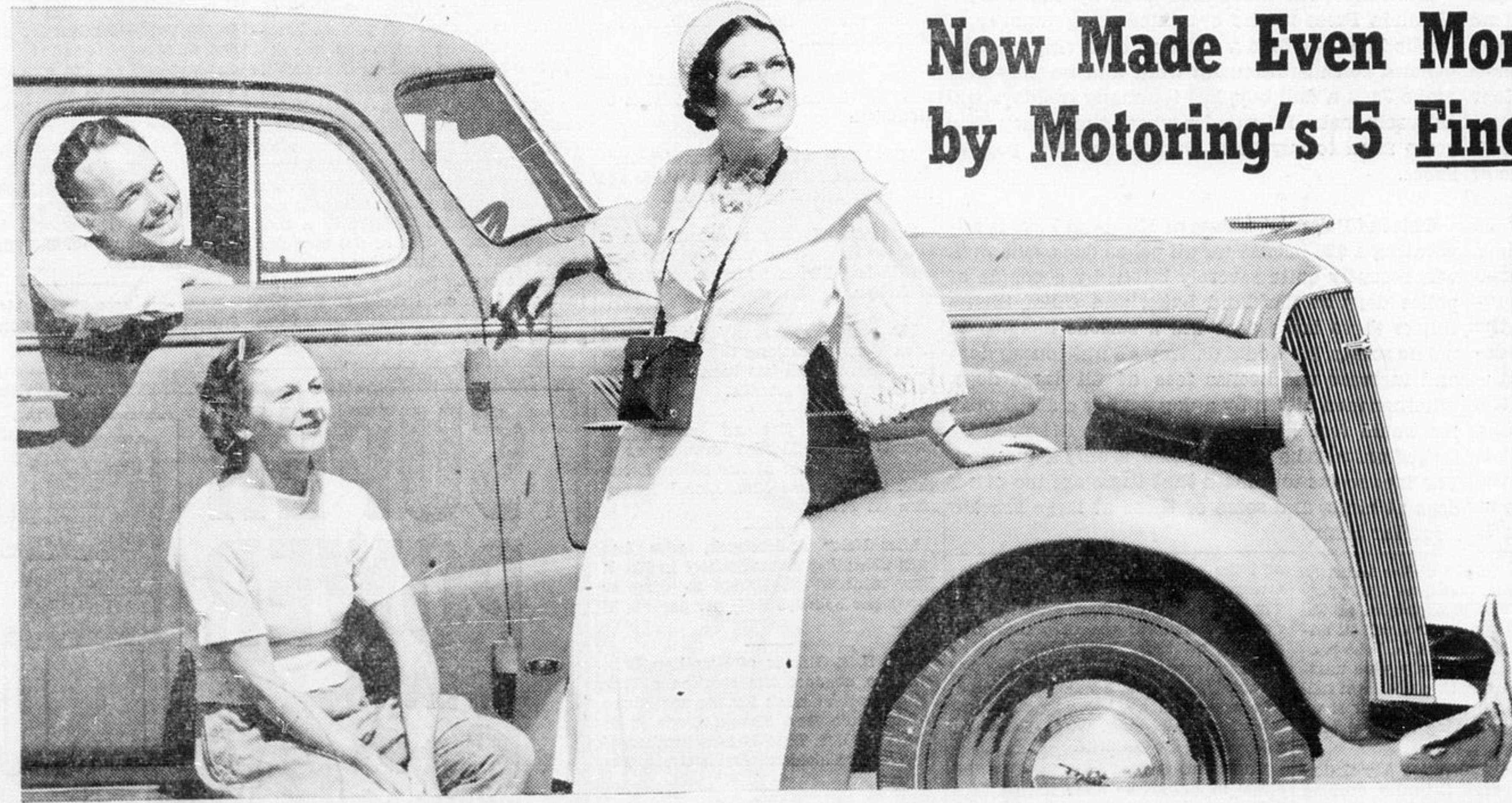
In the afternoon, Mr. and Mrs. Brousseau left on a short honeymoon to Toronto. They will reside in Timmins.

Pleasant Birthday Party With Over Eighty Guests

On the occasion of her birthday, Friday, Miss Marguerite Masson entertained about eighty of her friends at a party in the Hollinger Recreation hall. During the evening two games, musical chairs and lucky city, were played, and an orchestra supplied music for dancing. A delicious lunch was served later in the evening. The lady of the day, Marguerite, received many lovely gifts, and was wished a happy birthday and all future happiness.

Kincardine News. Soaking the rich is like trying to turn a rose on one man in a crowd without wetting anyone else.

FAMOUS CHEVROLET DEPENDABILITY



Now Made Even More Attractive by Motoring's 5 Finest Features!

CHEVROLET

... for economical transportation

OVER the past seven years, more people have bought Chevrolets than any other car! So it's easy to see where Chevrolet gets its reputation for being a satisfying automobile—with everything about it thoroughly dependable. But dependability is just one side of Chevrolet value. What makes this great value outstanding is the fact that Chevrolet steps far ahead of the mere "take-you-there-and-fetch-you-back" kind of motoring—to bring you today's five greatest five-car features! They're listed to the right; and you've heard dozens of motorists praise them. But you'll never know how much they add to your own personal motoring satisfaction until you drive a Chevrolet. NO OTHER CAR in the lowest price field has them all!

- UNISTEEL TURRET TOP BODIES BY FISHER**... Combining All-Steel safety with silence. Wider and roomier. Safety glass throughout.
- PERFECTED HYDRAULIC BRAKES**... Recognized everywhere as the safest, smoothest, most dependable brakes ever built.
- IMPROVED GLIDING KNEE-ACTION RIDE**... The world's safest, smoothest ride. On all Chevrolet Master De Luxe models.
- VALVE-IN-HEAD High Compression Engine**... The heart of Chevrolet dependability—economy—and brilliant performance.
- FISHER NO-DRAFT VENTILATION**... Ends drafts and windshield "logging". Enables you to "scoop in" fresh air on hot days.

PRICED FROM
\$745

Master 2-Passenger Business Coupe delivered factory, Oshawa. Government taxes, license and freight additional. (Price subject to change without notice.) Monthly payments to suit your purse on the General Motors Installment Plan.

TIMMINS GARAGE CO. Limited
Timmins, Ont.

SERVICE GARAGE
Ansonville, Ont.