

Punch, or the London Charivari, Volume 153, December 19, 1917 eBook

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IX.

PENNYROYAL.—A CAROL.

*"Far away in Sicily!"—
A home-come sailor sang this rhyme,
Deep in an ingle, mug on knee,
At Christmas time.*

In Sicily, as I was told,
The children take them Pennyroyal,
The same as lurks on hill and wold
In Cotsall soil.

The Pennyroyal of grace divine
In little cradles they do weave—
Little cradles therewith they line
On Christmas Eve.

And there, as midnight bells awake
The Day of Birth, as they do tell,
All into bud the small plants break
With sweetest smell.

All into bud that very hour;
And pure and clean, as they do say,
The Pennyroyal's full in flower
On Christmas Day.

*Far away in Sicily!—
Hark, the Christmas bells do chime!
So blossom love in thee and me
This Christmas time!*

W.B.

* * * * *

[Illustration: *Lady (to uniformed friend)*. "I SHOULDN'T A BIT MIND WEARING UNIFORM IF ONLY ONE COULD CHOOSE ONE'S OWN COLOURS AT THE WAR OFFICE."]

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THE V.C.

My cousin Agatha has been a bad correspondent ever since she married my old friend, George Thimblewell, which means for the past five-and-twenty years, so in ordinary circumstances I do not expect more from her than a “hasty line” to tell me how the youngsters are doing (George, of course, never writes at all). But I must say I was surprised and not a little hurt when, in the skimpy margin of a letter dealing mainly with the difficulty of devising breakfast-dishes, she scribbled in the most casual manner conceivable, “George has got the V.C. at last.”

George, my dear old school-chum, with the V.C., and his wife tells me of it as casually as if it had been a gumboil! I sat with her letter before me and looked back through the years, seeing us two—George and myself—as we were long before Agatha even knew him. Had I not fostered the yearning for heroic deeds in his young bosom? Was it not possible, nay probable, that the influence of his boyhood’s companion had helped to mould his character and prepare it for this glorious if belated achievement? Upon my word it seemed to me that I myself might well take a certain amount of credit for that decoration. And here was his wife mentioning it as though she scarcely expected me to be interested. Never a date, never a detail.

I was so ruffled that I decided, since she vouchsafed no information, to ask for none, as became a man with proper pride. I adopted a semi-jocular vein to meet the case.

“I have known your V.C. longer than you have, Agatha,” I wrote, “and am as pleased and proud as you can be. The strong silent type—you can rely upon them. Quiet and domesticated, requiring little attention, helpful about the house, undemonstrative perhaps, but all the time ready for the most desperate emergency. Let me know when George is to be at home, and I shall come to dinner and hear all about it.”

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As I sealed my note it occurred to me that George must be the first special constable to win the Cross, and I felt a glow of satisfaction to realise that we must now be eligible for that most glorious of all decorations.

A few days later came another note from Agatha, about sugar-cards this time, but with a postscript which said, "It isn't like you to chaff me, James. I don't see that there is anything particularly funny about George having got the Vacuum Cleaner which he promised me long ago."

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BIG GAME.

"General Allenby reports that Budrus and Sheikh Obeid Rahid, to the north of Midieh, were captured by Gurkhas, 50 Tanks being killed and 10 taken prisoners."—*Evening Paper*.

* * * * *

"Ruler wanted, experienced, male or female (male preferred); wages according to ability; removal assistance; away from raid area; permanency to suitable applicant."—*Eastern Daily Press*.

This might suit the KAISER, when Sir DOUGLAS HAIG has provided the necessary "removal assistance."

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"WHERE EX-TSAR KEEPS HIS GLOOMY COURT.

"Built mostly of wood, the Imperial family occupies a brick mansion."—*News of the World*.

We are intended to infer, presumably, that if the Imperial Family had been constructed of stouter material it might still be in the Winter Palace.

* * * * *

[Illustration: *Motor Driver*. "NAH, THEN, WHERE'S YOUR REAR LIGHT?"

Countryman. "NOW, THEN, YE OWD ZEPPEERLEEN, DO YE THINK I'M GOING TO SHOW YE WHERE I BE?"]

* * * * *

TO THE REGIMENT.

A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE.

So Christmas comes and finds you yet in Flanders,
And all is mud and messiness and sleet,
And men have temperatures and horses glanders,
And Brigadiers have trouble with their feet,
And life is bad for Company-Commanders,
And even Thomas's is not so sweet.

Now cooks for kindlewood would give great riches,
And in the dioxies the pale stew congeals,
And ration-parties are not free from hitches,
But all night circle like performing seals,
Till morning breaks and everybody pitches
Into a hole some other person's meals.

Now regiments huddle over last week's ashes
And pray for coal and sedulously "rest,"
Where rain and wind condemn the empty sashes,
And blue lips frame the faint heroic jest,
Till some near howitzer goes off and smashes
The only window that the town possessed.

Yet somehow Christmas in your souls is stirring,
And Colonels now less viciously upbraid
Their Transport Officers, however erring,
And sudden signals issue from Brigade
To say next Tuesday Christmas is occurring,
And what arrangements have Battalions made?

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And then, maybe, while everyone discusses
On what rich foods their dear commands shall dine,
And (most efficiently) the Padre fusses
About the birds, the speeches and the wine—
The Corps-Commander sends a fleet of 'buses
To whisk you off to Christmas in the line.

You make no moan, nor hint at how you're faring,
And here in turn we try to hide our woe,
With taxis mutinous, and Tubes so wearing,
And who can tell where all the matches go?
And all our doors and windows want repairing,
But can we get a man to mend them? No.

The dustman visits not; we can't get castor;
In vain are parlour-maids and plumbers sought,
And human intellect can scarcely master
The time when beer may lawfully be bought,
Or calculate how cash can go much faster,
And if one's butcher's acting as he ought.

Our old indulgences are now not cricket;
Whate'er one does *some* Minister will cuss;
In Tube and Tram young ladies punch one's ticket,
With whom one can't be cross or querulous;
All things are different, but still we stick it,
And humbly hope we help a little thus.

So, Fellow-sufferers, we give you greeting—
All luck, all laughter and an end of wars!
And just to strengthen you for Fritz's beating,
I'm sending out a parcel from the Stores;
They mean to stop my annual over-eating,
But it will comfort me to think of yours.

A.P.H.

* * * * *

THE BANK'S MISTAKE.

"I wish," said Francesca, "you would explain something to me."

"I am full," I said, "of explanations of every conceivable difficulty. You have only to tap me and an explanation will come bubbling out."

"I am not sure that I want the bubbling sort. On the whole I think I prefer the still waters that run deep."

"Those too can be provided for you. All you have got to do is to ask."

"What a comfort it is," she said, "to live constantly in the mild and magnificent eye of an encyclopaedia."

"Yes," I said, "it saves a lot of running about, doesn't it? Come now, fire off your question."

"What is your opinion of the Bank of England?"

"The Bank of England?" I gasped. "One doesn't have opinions of the Bank of England. One just accepts it, you know, and there you are."

"Yes," she said, "that's exactly what I felt about it. I thought it was one of the signs of our superiority to everybody else, with its crisp banknotes and all that."

"You mustn't forget its detachment of the Guards to protect it. Many's the good dinner I've had with the officer of the Bank Guard in the old days."

"I'm afraid that leaves me cold, not being able to take part in it."

"If it gave me pleasure to dine at the Bank, I should have thought the subject would have interested you."

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"Well, it wasn't exactly what I wanted to consult you about."

"What was it then?" I said. "You know you mustn't cast doubts on the financial stability of the Bank. You'll be put in prison if you do."

"I shouldn't dream of doing anything of the sort."

"Come, then, be quick about it. This suspense is making me tremble for my War Loan Bonds."

"Is the Bank," said Francesca, "a generous institution?"

"Banks," I said, "cannot afford to be generous. They are just and accurate and there's an end of it."

"The Bank of England," she said, "being so great, is an exception to the rule. Anyhow, it has been generous to me, for it has given me one hundred pounds."

"Do you mean," I cried, "one hundred pounds that don't belong to you?"

"Of course I do. If they had belonged to me there wouldn't have been anything to make a fuss about."

"This," I said, "is one of the most breathless things ever known. A mere woman, who is unskilled in finance and has only the dimmest recollection of the rule of three and compound interest, gets the better of the greatest banking institution in the world to the tune of one hundred pounds. It's incredible. Of course you've made a mistake."

"That's right," she said. "Always go against your wife and think her wrong, even when it is only an institution that she's contending with."

"It's precisely because it is an institution that I doubt your statement."

"You're not very helpful; you don't tell me whether I'm to sit down under the burden of owning one hundred pounds of the bank's money that doesn't belong to me."

"Francesca," I said, "you must calm yourself and tell me as clearly as possible how you came into possession of this extra hundred pounds which is apparently burning a hole in your pocket—if indeed you have a pocket, which I doubt."

"You're quite wrong; I've got two pockets in the dress I'm wearing at this moment."

"I will not," I said, "discuss with you the number of your pockets. Now tell me your pathetic story. I am all ears."

“Well,” said Francesca, “it’s this way. I put one hundred pounds in the old War Loan, and then Exchequer Bonds came along, and I put one hundred pounds of my very best savings into them, and then came the new Five per Cent. War Loan, and somehow or other I got converted into that. And after that there was what they called a broken amount, which I brought up to fifty pounds or a multiple of fifty pounds. That cost me about forty pounds. I don’t know why they wanted me to do it or why I did it.”

“Probably they thought it would be easier for the Bank.”

“That’s paltry; easiness ought to have nothing to do with it.”

“Anyhow,” I said, “I make out from your statement that you ought to have two hundred and fifty pounds of Five per Cent. Stock to your credit.”

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"Precisely," said Francesca impressively, "but yesterday morning I received from the bank a dividend thing—"

"You may call it a warrant," I said.

"A dividend warrant," continued Francesca, "for eight pounds fifteen shillings on *three* hundred and fifty pounds, so what have you got to say now for your precious Bank of England?"

"Your tale," I said, "has interested me strangely, but there is one point you omitted to mention."

"I am innocent, my Lord," said Francesca. "I have told you the truth."

"But not the whole truth, prisoner at the bar. Don't you remember that when the new Loan came out you borrowed money from me in order to take up one hundred pounds of it?"

"Is *that* it?" said Francesca. "No, I hadn't remembered that."

"Of course," I said, "a financial magnate like yourself would easily forget so wretched a sum; but the Bank has done no wrong."

"Yes, it has; it sent out a lot of papers that were very confusing, and it's no wonder I made a mistake."

"The question in my mind," I said, "is this: when are you going to repay what you owe me—with interest?"

"We'll talk about that another time," said Francesca.

R.C.L.

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FOR OUR SAILORS AND SOLDIERS.

The Veterans Association is giving a Special Entertainment at the Alhambra on Sunday afternoon, December 30th, on behalf of their Imperial Memorial Fund which is being raised to expand the Veterans Club into an adequate Institution for the comfort of ex-sailors and ex-soldiers, and to provide an Imperial Memorial for those who have given their lives in the War. The Veterans Club in Hand Court, Holborn, has already done a great work during the six or seven years of its existence in looking after sailors and soldiers. Free medical and legal advice is given, and the homes of the men are protected by the storing of their furniture while they are on active service. Employment

is also found for soldiers and sailors whose service is done. For the Entertainment at the Alhambra on the 30th, the following artistes, among others, have generously volunteered their services: Miss VIOLET LORAINÉ, Miss PHYLLIS MONCKMAN, Miss WISH WYNNE, Miss ESME BERINGER, Messrs. LAURI DE FRECE, MARK LESTER, HERBERT GROVER and GEORGE ROBEY.

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ANOTHER SEX PROBLEM.

“Henry III. was Queen Mary’s brother-in-law, she having been for a short time the husband of his predecessor, Francis II.”—*The Sphere*.

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[Illustration: THE SPREAD OF THE QUEUE HABIT.]

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OUR BOOKING-OFFICE.

(BY MR. PUNCH’S STAFF OF LEARNED CLERKS.)

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One of the most interesting features, to an English observer, in the impressive spectacle of America girding herself for war is the sight of our great Ally passing through all those phases of initiation that to us are now remote memories. Such a phase is the coming of the first war-books, exemplified for me by the appearance of *From the Fire Step* (PUTNAM'S). As his sub-title indicates—*Experiences of an American Soldier in the British Army*—the writer, Mr. ARTHUR GUY EMPEY, has proved himself something of a pioneer. In a singularly vivacious opening chapter he tells how, after waiting with decreasing expectation during the months that followed the *Lusitania* crime, he decided to be a law unto himself, and came alone to offer his personal service in the cause of freedom. You will hardly read unmoved (by laughter as much as by sympathy) his story of how this offer was at first refused, then accepted. Throughout indeed you must prepare to find Mr. EMPEY an entirely independent, though generous, critic of our men and methods; it is precisely this attitude that gives his book its chief interest as a survey of all-too-familiar things from a refreshingly new angle. I hardly suppose there will be anything in the actual matter, from church parade to gas-attacks, which readers on this side will not by now have seen or heard about, times beyond number; but one can imagine sympathetically with what concern it will all be received in the homes overseas; and after turning its high-spirited and encouraging pages can warmly echo the admonition of their writer: "Pacifists and small-army people please read with care!"

* * * * *

Since there is probably no writer who can approach Mrs. FLORA ANNIE STEEL in the art of telling Indian tales about Indian people, one is specially happy to find her in *Mistress of Men* (HEINEMANN) with her foot once more upon her special terrain. Not for the first time, I think, she has gone to the records of the House of AKBAR for her material; the result here is hardly to be called a novel so much as amplified history, since it is really the life story of an actual (and wonderful) woman, NURJAHAN THE BEAUTIFUL, wife of the Emperor JAHANGIR. Naturally the writer has experienced not only the great advantages but the hazards of such a building upon fact. To explain the marriage of your heroine with the Imperial lover by whose orders her first husband was killed, and not to lessen sympathy for her in the process, is a problem to test the skill of any novelist. One sees, however, even without Mrs. STEEL'S own declaration, that it has been for her a grateful task to set down "a record of the most perfect passion ever shown by man for woman." This was the adoration of the EMPEROR for his consort, an amazing romance of Oriental domesticity, which makes the story of the pair stranger and more fascinating than fiction. A love-tale indeed; and, since 'tis love that makes a book go round, one may trust the circulating libraries to see to it that *Mistress of Men* is well represented on their shelves. As a study of an alluring, dazzling and masterful personality it was well worth writing.

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There is a sad interest in the title-page of *Irish Memories* (LONGMANS), since only by a pathetic fiction does it bear the names, as joint authors, of E. OE. SOMERVILLE and "MARTIN ROSS," those two gifted ladies whose association has been such a happy chance for them and for us all. Really the book, though in part compiled from the letters and journals of "MARTIN," is an eloquent tribute by Miss SOMERVILLE to the partner whose death has robbed her of a friend and the world of so much kindly laughter. But, haunted as it is by this shadow of bereavement, you must in no way think of it as wholly a thing of gloom. Looking back into the good years, the writer has recalled many incidents and scenes full of that genial and most infectious merriment that we have learnt to expect from her—tales of the wonderful peasant chorus that one remembers first in the pages of *An Irish R.M.*, exploits after hounds (it needs no telling how well both authors loved them), and much besides. There will be interest also for many uninitiated admirers in the account here given of how the famous stories came first into being. Of its more intimate and personal side I hesitate to speak; those who loved "MARTIN ROSS," either through her writings or in the closer relationship of friend, must be glad that her *ave atque vale* has been spoken, as she would have wished it, by her whose right it was. It will send many to read again those delightful volumes with a new appreciation of the sympathetic and lovable personality that helped in their making.

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I am afraid that something of the charm which, in a sympathetic preface, M. HENRI BORDEAUX claims for *A Crusader in France* (MELROSE) is veiled by a rather faltering translation. I would counsel all who appreciate the exquisitely sensitive *Recit d'une Soeur*, with which he not unfavourably compares it, to go rather to the French original of these letters of a young captain of the famous Chasseurs Alpains. Captain FREDERIC BELMONT fell near the stubbornly-contested Hartmannsweilerkopf in 1916. He was the third of his family to give his life for France. The letters reveal a character that hardships and dangers not only strengthened but refined. He writes with a noble French ardour of his country in the crisis of her fate. He dreads, but rises greatly to the height of, his heavy responsibility as Captain at the age of twenty-one. The coveted cross of the Legion of Honour comes to him before the end, and he wins the affection and confidence of his men—a soldier's highest prize. A deep religious conviction unclouded by superstition sustains his courage. He is a product of the French Catholic tradition at its best. He writes intelligently of his work, and with a greater freedom as to detail than our more exigent censorship allows; so that you get an excellent picture of the daily life of a campaigner in the greatest of all wars. He met the English in Flanders, admired and liked their looks and ways.... A very charming record of a gallant soldier, a chosen soul.

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In the first few pages of *At the Serbian Front in Macedonia* (LANE), Mr. E.P. STEBBING tells so many little anecdotes that I began to wonder if he was ever going to get there. When, however, he has got into his stride, he gives us information which is all the more valuable because we hear so little of the Macedonian campaign. Mr. STEBBING was appointed Transport Officer to a unit of the Scottish Women's Hospitals that was sent to the Serbian Front. Naturally he has much to say of the work done by these brave and untiring women. Under exceptionally difficult circumstances their courage never failed, and it is good to remember that their arrival at Ostrovo was of the greatest possible service to the Serbs. That is one part of the book, and it is well told. The other is of actual war, and here Mr. STEBBING was given ample opportunities to observe. No one can read his account of the taking of Kajmakcalan without feeling the keenest admiration for the gallantry of the Serbs. He also describes very graphically the frontal attack by the French upon the Kenali lines in October, 1916. The British public is too apt to look upon the Macedonian campaign as a prolonged picnic, and for them a dose of Mr. STEBBING would be excellent medicine. I wish someone with our own troops would do as sound a service for them as is done here for the Serbs and French. But let him avoid anecdotes.

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I am a little puzzled about *A Bolt from the East* (METHUEN). The publishers, who surely should know, call it "A modern and up-to-date romance, which deals mystically but boldly with the greatest and most pertinent of all questions—'Is Life Worth Living?'" But for my own part the greatest and most pertinent question suggested by Mr. G.F. TURNER'S up-to-date romance was whether it could possibly have been intended as serious. I despair of giving you any adequate idea of its contents. There are lots and lots of characters, and, as several of them seem to own more than one personality, it is often more than a little hard to say who is what. The central figure is an Indian Prince of marvellous beauty and mysterious powers, who, being jilted by the girl of his heart, wishes to be revenged upon the human race. To this end he employs the activities of a German Professor, who produces what one might call a *Kultur* of the sterility germ. However, these cheery projects go astray, though in precisely what manner I have no very clear idea. But the end came at a gathering where the *Prince* played psychic music, and a chance union of hands between hero and heroine transmuted the former from "a dilettante" and "polished ladies' man" to "a virile male filled with the blasting vehemence of primary passions." Incidentally it proved altogether too much both for the *Professor* and his inoculated rabbits, all of whom expired on the spot. Just about here that most pertinent question became more acute than ever. Fortunately it was the last page but one of the story.

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[Illustration: *The Visitor*. "I HEAR YOUR BOY IS IN PALESTINE. HOW INTERESTING IT MUST BE FOR HIM TO MOVE AMONG THOSE SCENES WHERE EVERY SPOT BEINGS UP SOME RECOLLECTION OF THE WONDERFUL EVENTS OF BIBLICAL HISTORY!"

The Mother. "TED DON'T SAY MUCH ABOUT THAT IN 'IS LETTERS. 'E SEEMS TO THINK THE COUNTRY IS SUFFERIN' FROM A FLY-PAPER SHORTAGE."]

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"Senhor Rodrique Bettencourt will be Premier, and Senhor Adinterin, President of the Republic."—*Dublin Daily Express*.

But is nothing to be done for Senhors Defacto and Dejure?