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A HUMOROUS STORY.

THE BATHROOM DOOR.

Mr Samuel Bird, the recently promoted manager of the Kensington branch of the London, Country and Suburban Bank, was in a very bad temper.

Yet it was a bank holiday, and he had just had his breakfast in bed, a luxury which his soul loved, so he should have been happy. But he was not, and as he lay digesting his meal, he fretted and fumed for he deemed that Fate was treating him very scurvily.

For twenty years he had slaved as a clerk behind the grill of the great building which was the head office of the bank, a typical, steady, reliable, bank clerk. Then about two months before the time when this story opens, the managership of the important branch of the bank at Kensington fell vacant, and Samuel was offered the post.

He had jumped at the chance, for, a quiet, level-headed fellow, he yet had his ambitions. The managership carried a good salary, far beyond what he had been getting. He would have a house to live in rent free, and, more than all, he would, as the manager of an important branch of a great bank, have what he had always secretly longed for, an assured social position.

For Kensington was an aristocratic suburb standing on the banks of the Thames, with a couple of lords and half a dozen baronets as residents—and they all used the Country and Suburban as their bankers.

It had looked so rosy at first. Mrs Bird had been almost as delighted as her lord when he broke the news to her. Mavis, their daughter, a beautiful girl of nearly twenty, would, her mother reflected, be thrown into the best society, and would be practically certain to make a good match. It would be nice for Clarence, their eight-year-old son, also, said Mrs Bird, the riverside was so healthy, etc., etc.

But now—

The partial crumbling of their fine air-castles had come about in this wise.

Bankers and bank managers are, from the nature of their business, always objects of interest to the fraternity known as the "heads." They deal in money, and money is what the "heads" love more than anything else on earth, provided they do not work for it. And sometimes when a change is made in the managership of a branch, an enterprising sharp will take it into his head to test the capacity of the new man and his worthiness for his job.

Being new, they argue, he will not be so much up to his job as the old and wary man he has probably succeeded, and carefully worked, there may be "something doing."

We will not go into wearisome details (which were all, by the way, carefully set out by industrious reporters when the case was being heard), but all that is necessary to state is that a certain exquisitely dressed gentleman endeavoured to entrap Mr Bird into making him a present of £1,000 or so.

He did not succeed. Samuel was too old a bird and too much of a man of business not to be on his guard; but the matter entailed the calling in of the police, and that was where the trouble really started. For the officer who, by reason of his intelligence and capacity, was given the handling of the case was P. C. Cecil Havelock.

Besides being a clever fellow, Cecil was what young ladies like to call a dream of a man. Oliver six feet tall, weighting 13 stone, with not an ounce of fat, he had the flaxen curly hair and dinkie moustache that no girl can resist.

He had handled the matter of the attempted fraud in first-class fashion; but the case entailed the necessity of several visits to the branch, with the consequence that Mavis Bird saw him, and the two young people fell in love.

And that was one reason why Samuel fretted and fumed. He and Mrs Bird had secretly hoped that when they came to Kensington, their pretty daughter would meet with the son of one of the local lords or baronets, or at least with the heir to one of the richer clients of the bank, and now she had undoubtedly made up her mind that she would rather be the wife of a policeman than anything else in the world.

Not that there was anything against Cecil. On the contrary, he was a fine fellow, and one who was bound to get on in the force. One day he would undoubtedly be an inspector—even a superintendent; but nothing could alter the fact that at present he was a policeman, a common copper, a member of the fraternity which is sometimes the object of derision on the part of small boys in the street and comedians on the music-hall stage.

It was in Mr Samuel Bird's view a most desirable match, and the more he considered the matter, the more cross he became. There were other things, also, which were the cause of irritation to Samuel. One was the house in which he lived rent free. It was old, draughty, and inconvenient and Mrs Bird had not ceased to rail at it for these reasons since they had taken up residence. If you succeeded in opening a window, she said, you would never close it again, not a lock in the house would act properly; it was a perfect dust-hole; and, in brief, was endowed with all the defects least desired by a British housewife.

Then, since the attempted fraud, Mrs Bird had developed a maddening dread of burglars. They had been marked down once by thieves, she said, and it was absolutely certain that robbers would come again if it was only to avenge the exquisite friend, who had been laid by the heels by Samuel's acuteness. No fewer than five nights out of the preceding seven she had routed him out of bed to search for thieves, who were, of course, non-existent.

The house was old, and whenever the wind blew it creaked and made mysterious noises, which Mrs Bird declared simply must be caused by the footsteps of depredators.

These things, therefore, accounted for the fact that Mr Samuel Bird was in a gloomy and irritable mood, even though it was a bank holiday, and he had had his breakfast in bed.

"Yes, there's no doubt about it," he growled as he contemplated the ceiling. "I was a thundering sight better off when I was clerk at the chief office than I am in this hole. Well, it's no use lying here fuming. I'll get up, have a bath, and go for a walk. Perhaps that will clear off some of the blue-devils I've got."

Mr Bird arose, slipped on a pair of slippers, and then, just as he was, clad only in his old-fashioned night-shirt—he had always eschewed pyjamas—he stalked off to the bathroom—another source of irritation, for it was perched at the top of the fact that the bathroom window was a converted dressing-room.

Samuel, being still in a vile mood, banged the door behind him viciously. Then he switched on the taps and proceeded to divest himself of his only garment.

There is a moral to this story. It is that bank managers, and, in fact all those who desire to shine socially, should never allow their tempers to get the better of them. For had Samuel not been in a dull blind rage, he would have taken notice of the fact that the bathroom window was wide open, and he would never have flung his one remaining link with civilisation—his night-shirt—in that direction.

But that is what he did; and he did not realise what he had done till he caught sight of his disappearing garment as it fluttered to the garden down below.

Samuel Bird made use of an expression which one does not often hear used by responsible and highly respectable bank managers.

But he jumped into the now well-filled bath.

"Shall have to put a towel round me to get back to my dressing-room," he muttered. And then he glanced at the towel-horse stand against the wall.

It was empty.

One of Mrs Bird's many grievances against the neighbourhood of Kensington was that the tradesmen were unreliable to a man, and now it was evident that the laundry had failed.

He jumped out of the bath, and went to the door of the bathroom.

It would not open.

He had many times abused the locks of the old house; but this one was acting only too well.

The room being of the converted variety the lock was a mortised one, and though Samuel pulled and tugged till he was purple with exertion, yet the door would not budge.

"I almost catch my death of cold," he said, as he picked up a slipper, hoping to attract the attention of Mrs Bird; but no answering sound reached him.

He sat shivering on the edge of the bath and pondered.

Of course he had heard the front door bang to, about a quarter of an hour before. It was obvious what had happened. A tradesman, acting up to the traditions of the district, had disappointed her in the delivery of some article, and his wife had gone out—on a bank holiday, too—to try to obtain the missing commodity.

The Birds had no servant—another grievance—and therefore he, Samuel Bird, manager of the Kensington branch of the London County and Suburban Bank, was alone in the house and without visible means of existence, or indeed anything at all.

He had another tug at the recalcitrant door. But it was a stout old lock, and had evidently made up its mind that no matter what pressure was used upon it, it would never desert its post of duty.

"It is of no account to me," it seemed to say to Samuel, "that you are the master of this house, and I am only a humble lock. But I am a lock. It is my duty to keep a door shut, and this one is going to remain shut, until I am torn from my place and my springs and bolts are shattered into nothingness. If you did not wish this door to remain shut, why did you bang it so viciously? Yes you tug, my dear sir, but I was made at a time when locks were locks. None of your cheap, flimsy suburban locks about me. When I say 'shut,' then 'shut' it is, and you can spare yourself any further exertion, unless it amuses you."

And at last from sheer exhaustion Samuel desisted, and once more sat on the edge of the bath, breathless but deeply thoughtful.

He had an appointment at twelve with an important client of the bank, who wanted to discuss a weighty transaction with him. The bank would never forgive him if he displeased this wealthy customer. But what was he to do?

As the glow induced by his exertions subsided, Samuel began to shiver.

He would catch his death of cold. He would contract influenza, then pneumonia, and then death would follow.

He shut the window with a bang, and then he had another go at the door handle.

In a sense, perhaps his efforts were more successful this time but he had not improved matters to any considerable degree, for he had pulled the handle off.

He looked at it ruefully as it lay in his hand. Well, it was something more to bang at the door with when somebody came in, if anybody ever did come in.

As it was, there was nothing more to be done, except to resume his seat on the edge of the bath, and think furiously.

He had never before realised how helpless a poor man was without his clothes. He had a fine jack-knife with which he could have cut away the woodwork round the lock. But that jack-knife was in the pockets of his trousers downstairs.

Would no one ever come in, or was he to remain there until he pined away and died, and his rotting skeleton be found in the bathroom?

Suddenly he brightened up. His ear had caught the sound of someone moving below, and a childish treble was raised to implore someone to come back to Woolloomooloo. It was Clarence, his eight-year-old son.

He was saved.

He attacked the door of the bathroom with the handle, and shouted at the top of his voice for Clarence. After he had continued doing this for about ten minutes, there came a pattering of childish footsteps up the stairs.

"Did you call me, dad?" queried his son.

"Call you, I should think I did!" cried Samuel. "I'm locked in—locked in here—in this infernal bathroom! Get a screw-driver, or a crowbar, or something, and pass it under the door."

"Right dad," and the boy's feet pattered downstairs.

He soon came up again, and then tried to pass various articles under the door to father.

But that door was the only well-fitting one in the house. No single tool in the household of Samuel Bird could be induced to pass under it. Once or twice Samuel did catch a maddening glimpse of the edge of a screw-driver, but that was all.

"It's no good," said the long-suffering man at last; "you'll have to bang the door down. Go for it with the coal-hammer!"

The lad was nothing loth. Like any other boy would have done, he attached the door with zest. But at eight years of age, the strength of a lad is not sufficiently developed to be equal to a task of this sort, and therefore the door remained impervious to his attack.

When he was convinced that the task was more than the boy could manage, Samuel told him to desist.

"Go round to the nearest locksmith," he commanded, "and tell him to come round here and get me out of this at once. If you can't get a locksmith, get a carpenter! Anyway, get somebody, and get 'em quick!"

"Right, dad!" said Clarence.

Clarence ran out of the house full of importance of his errand.

At the end of the quiet street he met another youth, with whom he had already scraped an acquaintance. And he noticed with envy that Charley Thomas had a brand-new scooter.

"Hallo, Charlie!" said Clarence.

"Hallo, Clarence, where are you going?" said Charlie.

"Going to get a locksmith," said Clarence proudly. "My dad's locked in our bathroom."

"Well, he'll have to stay locked in," said the pessimistic Charles. "You won't get no locksmith to-day. It's Bank Holiday, and locksmiths always go on the spree on a Bank holiday. 'Sides I don't know where there is one. See my new scooter."

"Yes, isn't it a fine one!" said Clarence, as he noticed the fact that the toy had real pneumatic tyres.

"Like to have a go on it?"

"Would I not! Rather!"

"Well, here you are then. Don't go any further than the end of the street."

As pleased as Punch, and completely forgetting his poor father's plight, Clarence mounted the scooter, and put its capabilities well to the test.

They took turns in riding the vehicle for about half an hour, and then it dawned upon Clarence that he was out on an errand, and that his father was urgently expecting his return.

"Must go and find that locksmith now," he said.

"You won't find any locksmith to-day, I tell you," said Charles. "Coo, look, there's young Wilkins with his scooter! He thinks it's the finest about these parts. But you watch me race him!"

Fascinated by the prospect, Clarence watched several races between the two young rivals. But young Wilkins had more power of leg muscle than Charlie, and the consequence was that in spite of the excellence of his machine, Charlie was invariably defeated.

"Here, let me have a go!" said Clarence. "I'll show you how to beat him!"

"All right; I'll take you on!" said young Wilkins.

Preliminaries having been fired up, the two young racers got to work.

Clarence worked with all his might, and soon found that thanks to the fact that he was stronger and more nimble than Charlie; he was an easy match for young Wilkins; the scooter he had borrowed, as has been explained before, being an excellent one.

He forged on ahead, up streets and down them, full of boyish excitement.

But suddenly he realised that he was by himself, in a street he did not know.

He had in fact outdistanced his opponent to such an extent that he was nowhere to be seen. And Clarence realised something else. He realised that he was completely lost, and he had a scooter that did not belong to him.

Well, that was something, anyhow. There was no one about from whom he could ask the way, and so, like a philosopher, he made the best of things, as it were, and made good use of Charlie's scooter.

By-and-by a butcher's boy came along, and Clarence asked him where he could find a locksmith for his father.

The butcher's boy was a lad with a strong sense of humour, which he evinced by sending Clarence for a tortuous two-mile run to a place where no locksmith was or ever had been.

"Spect father's a bit cold waiting for me," speculated Clarence, as he scooted along. "But 'tain't my fault. It's the butcher boy's. He oughtn't to have sent me to a place where there isn't any locksmith."

There came the sound of a loud halloo. It was uttered by Charlie who had tracked the boy who had borrowed his scooter.

"Here!" he cried, "what did you do and try to sneak my scooter for?"

"I never! I got lost!"

"Yes you did try to pinch it. I shall tell everyone that the boy at the bank is a thief. That'll make everybody take their money out of the bank, and your father will go broke. Where you been?"

"Trying to find a locksmith for my father, who's locked up in the bathroom," said Clarence.

(Continued on page 4.)