

A Yarn about an Enterprising young Journalist.

THE SCOOP.

Sir, Arthur Benson, the great newspaper magnate, pressed the bell on his desk.

One of his numerous secretaries entered the room, in response to his summons, and stood respectfully awaiting his instructions.

"Send Mr Paget to me immediately, please," said Sir Arthur.

"Very good, Sir Arthur," replied the secretary, and disappeared silently.

Sir Arthur's word was a law unto itself in this great building, which was the home of "The Daily Searchlight," one of the most popular and powerful journals of the day.

It had been said that "The Searchlight" had made and broken more statesmen than could be counted on your two hands.

"The Searchlight" was really only another name for Sir Arthur Benson, for he was the presiding genius who pulled the strings.

A worker himself, he looked to his staff to work equally hard as the example he set.

A severe taskmaster, but one who was quick to spot budding talent amongst his "young men," as he called them, and to handsomely reward and encourage those who showed promise.

And this it was that he came to send for Michael Paget!

Paget had but recently joined the staff of "The Searchlight," having served his apprenticeship on a provincial paper. Then he came to London and managed to secure a post as junior reporter on Sir Arthur Benson's paper.

And Sir Arthur had been keeping his eye on this young fellow from the provinces, intending to give him his chance when the opportunity came.

It had come, now.

A few moments later, a tall, broad-shouldered, good-looking man, of about twenty-eight years of age, stood before the great newspaper man.

It was Michael Paget.

"You wish to see me, Sir Arthur?" said Paget.

"Yes," replied his employer quietly. "I have something for you to do, I know you are only waiting for your chance to show what stuff you are made of, and here is your opportunity."

"Thank you very much," said the young man gratefully. "It was very kind of you to think of me at all. What is it you wish me to do, Sir Arthur?"

Sir Arthur's eyes twinkled humorously. "Well," said Sir Arthur, looking straight into Paget's eyes, "I want you to see Lord Averingham, and obtain an interview with him, before next Tuesday, when I believe, he is to make a great speech in the House on the Budget."

The young journalist's face fell.

"The Prime Minister!" he gasped. "But Sir Arthur, you know that that is practically an impossibility! He will never even see a journalist, and as for giving him an interview—"

"Very well," interrupted Sir Arthur, "there's your opportunity. If you prefer to give it up now, without a trial, I can hand the job over to somebody else."

But young Paget was made of sterner stuff, and Sir Arthur knew it. He was only putting the young man on his metal!

"No, Sir Arthur," said Paget, in a quiet, determined tone, "I will do my level best; in fact, I will guarantee to get this interview. Is there any particular point upon which I am to question Lord Averingham?"

"Yes, Paget," said Sir Arthur, smiling at the young man's self-assurance and confidence, "I want to know what is to be taxed in this coming Budget, and, most especially, if there is to be a further tax levied upon tobacco."

"Very good, sir; you may rely upon me doing my utmost to obtain the information you require!" answered Paget, firmly.

"Thanks! That's all!" replied Sir Arthur. "And good luck, Paget!"

"Thank you, sir!"

And Paget left his chief's sanctum.

THE "LAY-OUT."

Michael Paget strolled to his diggings that evening in a thoughtful, although somewhat elated, mood.

He could not but feel flattered that that very astute business man, Sir Arthur Ben-

son, should have chosen him from amongst the ranks of a large number of journalists to perform a task, which, until this time, had proved impossible.

During the whole of his wonderful and stirring career as Prime Minister, Lord Averingham had never once allowed himself to be interviewed.

It was one of his boasts that reporters never got at him, and in the newspaper world it seemed that journalists had given up striving for the unattainable.

"If only I could do it," mused Michael, "I shall have proved that I am worth something. But how on earth am I to succeed when so many other older and more experienced men than I have failed? How can I get at him? It is well known that all his servants have strict orders to let nobody into his room without instructions from him, and it is rumoured that he even has bars bolted across the outside of his bathroom window for fear somebody should break in and beard him in his morning tub."

After a frugal supper, Paget again went into the streets, this time with a definite object in view.

He was on his way to Downing street, to spy out the land.

Upon reaching the door of the Prime Minister's house, he rang the bell.

The door was opened by a flunkey.

"Is Lord Averingham at home?" inquired Paget, knowing very well that, even if he were, he would not be admitted.

"No, sir," replied the servant. "His lordship is at Warneford House, taking a rest."

"Thank you!" said Paget, and retraced his steps.

Warneford House was the Prime Minister's country seat, as Michael Paget knew full well.

"Right-ho!" thought Paget. "First thing to-morrow morning, I make tracks for Warneford, to see what's doing down there."

Paget knew, of course, that his absence from the office would not matter, since he was on a special commission for Sir Arthur, and so, early next morning, Michael caught a train which carried him to Warneford.

Upon making inquiries of a porter, he learned that Warneford House was about two miles from the station, but, as it was still early, he decided to walk.

"I might get a brain wave whilst tramping," he muttered to himself. But when he reached the wall which surrounded the grounds of Warneford House, Paget had to admit to himself that he was no nearer evolving a plan by which he could reach the Prime Minister than when he had left London.

As he strolled along by the wall, he came to a gate leading into the grounds which was open.

Paget could hardly believe his eyes. It seemed too lucky to be true.

Without a moment's hesitation, and as though impelled by some hidden force, Paget passed through the gate.

A gardener working just inside looked up at him in surprise.

"May one look round the grounds?" Paget inquired quickly.

The gardener hesitated before replying.

"Well, sir," he said at last, "the public are allowed in here most times, but, you see, his lordship is in residence at the moment, and he never wishes to be disturbed when he's here, sir."

"What a pity!" said Michael pleasantly. "I am only here for a short time, and I've heard such a lot about the roses that I should very much like to see them; in fact, I got up early this morning and walked over purposely."

The gardener eyed Paget up and down.

"Well, sir," he said, still hesitatingly, "his lordship is not back from his morning bathe yet, so if you would like to have a quick look round, sir, you can, but his lordship will be back in about ten minutes, and he uses this gate, so please be quick!"

"Why, where does Lord Averingham bathe?" asked Paget, as he strolled along by the gardener's side. "I did not know that he was swimmer."

"It's like this," commenced the gardener, becoming quite confidential, "his lordship swims jolly well—it's one of his hobbies—and whenever he's down here, he makes a point of walking to the river every

morning, undressing on the bank, and then comes back to breakfast."

"Alone?" queried Paget, in surprise. "Yes, sir," replied the gardener. "He seems fond of his own company down here. He goes out about eight o'clock, and gets back about half-past. He was a bit late this morning, but he stopped and told me to have the gate unlocked specially early to-morrow morning, because he wants to have his swim and be back at the house again by nine, as he has an important conference with some members of the Cabinet, who are coming down here specially."

Michael Paget nodded; his brain was working quickly. It must be admitted that he paid little attention to the roses, although the gardener went to great lengths to point out the best specimens.

However, the man was quite pleased when Michael slipped something into his hand as he passed out through the gates of Warneford House once more.

"Thank you very much," remarked Michael. "I am much obliged; it's all been very interesting."

But it was the information about the Prime Minister's early morning swim to which he was referring—not the roses.

THE ACHIEVEMENT.

It was the following morning, and Lord Averingham had already taken his header.

"It's fine in the water this morning," murmured the Prime Minister to himself, as he swam slowly towards the bank of the river and climbed out.

After a hasty glance up and down the bank, he stood quite still, with a puzzled expression upon his well-known features.

Everyone knew the Prime Minister by sight. He was quite a character! He might easily have been the original of the well-known figure of John Bull, with his square set features and "mutton-chop" whiskers. More than one caricaturist had shown him as representing Britain in his cartoons, dressing him in the character of John Bull.

At the moment, however, Lord Averingham was looking for his clothes, which he had dumped on the river bank before donning his swimming costume and diving in.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he ejaculated. "I'm certain I put them there! Who the dickens could have moved them?"

Just then a little breeze disturbed the atmosphere, and Lord Averingham shivered slightly.

At that moment a young man stepped from behind a bush, whistling pleasantly.

"Good-morning, my lord!" he said cheerfully.

"Oh, good-morning!" returned Lord Averingham, in a rather impatient tone. "I've lost my clothes. I left them here whilst I swam. Somebody has had the impertinence to steal them. I suppose you haven't seen anything of any tramp who might have stolen them?"

"Not stolen them, my lord," replied Michael Paget, for it was he. "Just borrowed them for a short time, shall we say? As a matter of fact, it was I who removed your clothes. I am the tramp!" he added, with a light laugh.

"What on earth do you mean, sir?" cried the Prime Minister, in astonishment.

"If you have my clothes, bring them to me immediately. I fail to see anything funny in the affair. Bring them here at once, so that I can get back to my house, where I have an important conference to attend, with half the members of my Cabinet awaiting me. Give me back my clothes, you young scoundrel!"

"I will certainly return your clothes," replied Michael gravely, "but, of course, at a price. That is why I took them."

"Oh, all right!" retorted his lordship. "I see that you are just an ordinary thief. If it's money you want, then I'll give you ten pounds. Now be quick, and return my clothes!"

But Michael shook his head slowly.

"Not enough for me," he said.

"Then twenty pounds—thirty—forty," went on Lord Averingham angrily. But the young journalist continued to shake his head.

"Well, hurry up, young man!" cried the Prime Minister. "How much do you want? Name your own figure, but I may tell you that if it weren't that I have this important conference to attend, I'd sit here, cold or not, until somebody came along, and then I'd give you in charge of the police as a common thief. This is absolutely monstrous! Be quick, and name your price!"

"I don't want any money, my lord," replied Michael, with an enigmatical smile.

"Now, don't begin to waste more time by talking rubbish!" cried the irate statesman. "For what other reason could you be withholding my clothes from me, if not more mere, vulgar monetary gain?"

"For an interview, Lord Averingham," returned Paget gravely. "I am a journalist, and have determined to reach you

somehow, and this is the best opportunity that has presented itself."

And, as he spoke, Michael drew a pencil and notebook from his pocket.

For a moment Lord Averingham was nonplussed.

"I never grant interviews," he commenced, in a dignified tone. "I have never allowed a newspaper man to interview me—"

"Until now," broke in Michael, with his pencil poised. "But I feel sure that the time has now come when you will have to give way. Allow me to make a bargain with you."

"I will do no such thing!" stormed his lordship. "I refuse to bargain with—"

"Very well, then," remarked Michael, making as if to close his notebook. "Then I will be off with your clothes."

"No, wait!" cried the Prime Minister. "Well, listen to my suggestion," said Paget. "I have several questions to ask you, and, as you give me an answer to each one, I will, in exchange, hand you back an article of clothing, so that you need not go on giving me information unless I keep to my part of the bargain."

By the way, I have your clothes safely behind that bush. No, don't try to get them yourself, unless you prefer to miss your conference—"

And here Michael again paused significantly.

"Confound you!" cried the statesman. "Get on with your question!"

"Excuse me whilst I get your clothes," smiled the journalist.

He disappeared behind the bush, to appear in less than a minute carrying Lord Averingham's clothes in a bundle.

"Have a cigarette, my lord," he said. "You will probably be able to give me more concise replies if you smoke. Try one of your own brand of cigarettes. I can recommend them."

As he spoke, Michael drew a cigarette from the Prime Minister's own pocket, and offered it to him.

Try as he would, the statesman could not resist a smile at this young man's brazen effrontery, as he accepted a cigarette and a match.

"I'm beginning to think that you almost deserve this interview for your infernal cheek," he gasped. "Now be quick about the rest of your audacious business."

"Thank you, my lord," said Paget, now very respectfully. "In the first place, I understand that next Tuesday you are to make a very important speech bearing upon a new Budget. Am I correct?"

"Confound you, yes," replied Lord Averingham. "That is, if you only let me get back in time to arrange the final details with the members of my Cabinet now awaiting me."

"Thank you," said Michael, as he gravely handed over to his lordship a shirt. "Here's number one garment, in exchange for that bit of information."

Lord Averingham practically snatched it, so eager was he to get partially clothed.

"M," murmured Michael; "and now, my paper is very anxious to know if a further tax is to be levied upon tobacco."

"Well, let it be! I'm hanged if I'm going to tell," started the Prime Minister hotly.

"You'd look rather strange walking back to Warneford House clad only in a shirt," Paget reminded the Prime Minister. "Come, now, you'd better tell me. Is there going to be a further tax upon tobacco?" repeated Michael firmly.

Lord Averingham subsided, with a gasp of futile anger.

"Oh, yes," he said shortly, and grabbed from Paget's outstretched hand, without a word of thanks, his hat, which he crammed down on his head.

"How much on tobacco?" was Paget's next question.

If ever you have seen an elderly man, with side whiskers, clad in only his shirt and hat, you will realise just what a ridiculous picture the Prime Minister of England presented at that moment.

For a moment Lord Averingham stared at the journalist haughtily hardly believing his ears.

"Are you mad?" he roared. "Do you think I would tell you that?"

Michael Paget smiled dangerously, and, feeling in his pocket, he produced a small folding camera.

"My paper," he remarked, in a casual tone, "publishes photographs on the back page. Now, a picture of the Prime Minister clad in only his hat and shirt would, I am sure, strike a new note."

And, as the enterprising young journalist spoke, he raised the camera, and, pointing it in Lord Averingham's direction, shielded the view-finder.

"Stop!" roared the Prime Minister. "I'll tell you! It's to be twopence per ounce!"

In payment for this his lordship received his socks and one boot.

"What else is being taxed, my lord?" asked the journalist.

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