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## SHORT STORY

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of arranging the wringer so that it would beat cakes up. Altogether she was a beaut and mother practically lived at the flicks, while I spent quite a bit of time at the pool-room down at the corner.

\* \* \*

THEN one day I came back to find mother outside holding the door shut. She looked scared.

"Look through the window," she whispered.

So I did. And what did I see but that machine with one leg on a chair reaching up with the lever that worked the wringer and turning the light switch on and off. You could have knocked me over with a feather. Straight!

"That's my trick," I said. "It's come alive. I always thought it had too many gadgets on it. It's a frankenstein, ma. It's dangerous. We'll have to get rid of it."

"Oh, Henry," said mother, "I feel all of a flutter. I feel quite ill. Here I was just coming in after seeing *Forbidden Love* to look if the washing was done and dinner cooked. And there it was. And it turned and clicked at me. So I got outside. Oh, Henry—what can we do?"

We went down to the coal-shed and sat down to think things over.

"We'll have to do something," I said.

"We should never have bought it," said mother firmly. "It's got the devil in it: I never really trusted it from the day we bought it. It always looked sly to

me. And now it's taken possession of the house."

"I'll go up and have a nosy around," I said.

I looked in the kitchen window and there it was with its radio turned on sliding up and down the room on its rubber wheels in time to the music. It had pushed all the furniture to one side and broken some of it, and it had rolled all the curtains up in the wringer.

This beats everything, I thought. So I tried to get in through the door. But as soon as I was half in the thing saw me and ran over and shot out a hot piece of burnt toast at me. It hit me over the face and hurt like fun. Then it belched half a bucket of boiling water at me and I got away fast.

"It's no good, ma," I said, when I had got back to the coal-shed. "It's taken charge, all right. We'll have to doss out here."

"I knew it, Henry. I knew it. Ever since your father deserted us this kind of thing has been happening."

"We can light a fire anyway," I said. "And there's a pile of sacks in that corner—it's a good job it's not a cold night."

"What's worrying me," I said, "is what the Smiths and the Purviews are going to say in the morning when they poke their noses over the fence and see us sleeping in the coal-shed. We can't tell them we've been chased out by a washing-machine. It's silly."

"What else can we say," said mother patiently. "I always felt this might happen. It's against nature. That's what it is."

## What is this "Freedom of the Press"?

PRESS freedom reaffirmed at London meeting." So ran a heading over a report of the Imperial Press Conference from London the other day. We are constantly hearing about this "freedom of the Press." What is it? Where does it reside? Is it a legal concept? Is it in the Constitution? What exactly does it mean?

There is, I think, a good deal of ignorance on the subject. Many people probably think that freedom of the Press is a definite legal enactment, which gives the Press certain rights. Two statements at the Imperial Press Conference go to the root of the matter. Brendan Bracken, formerly Minister of Information, said "freedom of the Press was a right which was not vested in the Press but which belonged to the public." Major Astor, chief proprietor of *The Times*, put it in this way, that "liberty for journalists was not a privilege, but the fundamental liberty of the subject." These statements express a most important truth. Broadly speaking, the Press does not enjoy any more rights of expression than does the citizen.

"Freedom of the Press" is not written into the British Constitution, or the New Zealand Constitution, or, so far as I know, into the Constitution of any Dominion. It is expressed in the American Constitution, but the application of Eng-

lish Common Law, which was taken to America from England, and common sense, have produced a situation in the United States much like our own.

I don't think you will find the term "Freedom of the Press" in any British Act. It is not a legal maxim. Freedom of expression derives from the old English Common Law, which we have inherited. According to this law, a man is entitled to say or write what he pleases, provided he does not break certain laws governing blasphemy, indecency, or sedition, or does not injure another citizen. If he injures another citizen, the injured person has the right to proceed at civil law. It lies with a jury of average men—the defendant's peers—to say whether the right of free expression has been abused. In other words, the right of free expression is the right to say what a body of citizens decide you may say. The jury is a very important element in the business. In the 18th Century, when judges tried to suppress freedom of expression, juries stood up against them, and did a good deal to win the position that is held to-day.

If a private citizen wishes to criticise a person or an institution, he is at liberty to publish his criticism. He exercises the same right and exposes himself to the same risk as a newspaper. The journalist is only the private citizen with wider opportunities and a much heavier load of responsibility.

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