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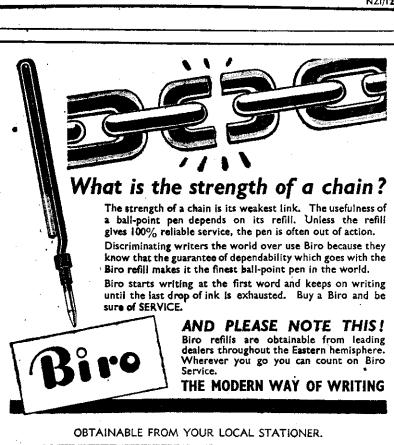
THE NEW ZEALAND INSURANCE COMPANY

LIMITED

HEAD OFFICE: AUCKLAND

The Pillars of Security"





Bardell's Gremlins

Written for "The Listener"

by F. L. COMBS.

friend but a privileged bore who infests my leisure hours, is convinced that he has a personal gremlin. The last time he dropped in, the ostensible reason was to borrow a stamp. I hunted up one that

had been thriftily removed from an unsent letter (containing a birthday cheque to a female cousin). It was gum-

less and there was no gum in the gum on Bardell, trying to keep the facts in bottle. We tried some aged paste and it spread a dark stain through to the face of the stamp.

Bardell raising his hands to heaven said this was the last straw. He had started out to stamp his letter with two stamps in hand. One had vanished heaven knew where. He, Bardell, was firmly convinced that it had been spirited away. The other he had left lying on the table while he went to answer the 'phone. When he returned his youngest, Rupert, had been vainly attempting to affix the stamp and had licked the gum off. Somewhat impatiently Bardell pounced on the stamp and half tore it in two. By the time that, by the aid of gum, he got the stamp attached to the envelope it was so battle-scarred that it looked like an attempt to defraud the post office. After searching in vain for the other stamp he had come on to

I hunted round and found in my wife's purse a penny stamp and two halfpennies, all rather the worse for the dumb forgetfulness that haunts the corners of purses, and we fixed up a reasonably transmissible letter. Bardell thanked me profusely and, although I did find him a trial, I genuinely sympathised with him, for I know what a harassing business it is to get a friendly letter despatched in most homes,

We sat by the gas fire and talked of sundry matters. His foot getting over hot, he took off his left boot to ease a corn and there adhering firm and fast to the sole was the missing stamp!

All Bardell could do was to register comic despair. Before leaving he gave me the letter to post, as I daily pass the G.P.O. on my way to work, Two days later he met me in the Royal after office hours for a couple. When we loosened up he started to joke about the stamp incident, and ended by saying, "But after all we got the confounded letter away, didn't we?"

I, too, had been joking, but in a split second I registered intense inward discomfort. For I remembered that in my breast pocket as he joked so amicably was Bardell's still unposted letter. I did not mention the fact as there are limits to what a gremlin-dogged man can bear.

BUT Bardell's case seemed worth investigating, and I determined to try counterpart of psycho-analytic

ARDELL, who is not my methods. This was easy as he is even less reluctant than most human beings to talk about himself.

> I induced Bardell to lie down on the couch in his front room, placed a bottle of tonic on a small table between us and got him to agree to level pegging. Then I locked the door. Such an action in my

house causes intense suspicion, a suspicion which I have never vet succeeded in dissipating.

Then I started in

chronological order, viz.

Boyhood

- (1) His family had had many removals. In every new home they went to there was a clothes line over the only spot convenient for cutting stove wood. In the end he had become case-hardened to the way in which the axes, catching on these lines, had recoiled on his forehead. He attributed a permanent bump over the right temple to these gremlinlocated lines.
- (2) Always when he was in urgent need of getting to school on time (as, for instance, after three "lates" running) his bootlace had broken or been purloined by a brother in a similar pre-
- (3) His school cap became notorious for planting itself-this in days when no boy however otherwise disreputable would dream of flouting the decencies by not wearing a cap.
- (4) There was always an unduly large number of sticks with knots in them in the cord-wood delivered over the back fence-gremlin matai, surely.
- (5) He had failed at three inspections through getting a hard arithmetic card when his next neighbours were dealt easy ones. Even today he registers resentment at the phrase "To be kept clean and returned to the inspector," or anything of the kind on paste-board of any kind.

RUT enough of these juvenilia which, I admit, to those who have doubts about gremlins will read like trivia.

When we went on to the misfortunes of his youth, Bardell spoke first of the trouble he had had with neckwear which always delayed him when, dressed in something like taste, he had a date to keep. "If it wasn't the tie," he said, "it was the confounded back stud. I have at times had to go out with a paper clip rasping the back of my neck-only to find three back studs in the cuffs of my pants next morning. Try to tell me that isn't gremlins."

But his worst misfortune was to fall in love with an identical twin, a beautiful but giddy young creature whose sister, of course, was exactly the same. Being in the coquettish stage they thought it sport to take turn and turn

(continued on next page)

N.Z. LISTENER, OCTOBER 21, 1949.