

Of Simplicity, and £7

by "SUNDOWNER"

IF we except the sacred relics of religion, far more than half of which are monstrous frauds, the things that find their way into antique shops, and out and in again, are as strong proof as any one needs of the gullibility of the human race. It is not so long since a woman solemnly assured me that she possessed the table on

APRIL 10 which the Last Supper had been spread. How long she had possessed it I did not ask or how much she had given for it. I knew that she had given more than she or anyone else could afford emotionally, whatever the money cost was, but she was such an earnest simpleton that it would have been cruel, if in fact it had been possible, to "confuse her with shadowed hint." But it seemed almost as strange to me today when a hard-headed business man—hard-headed in business—told me that he "would give anything for one of Churchill's cigars."

Reverence of that kind is beyond me. The proper name for it is, I feel, an unpleasant word that should have disappeared with Ben Jonson. The word remains because the habit remains; and I find that a distinctly depressing fact. I know that it will remain for generations yet.

This is why I know. My mother left Scotland because Scotland starved her out; but Scotland was still "bonnie" while she lived. Like many other Scots—thousands, I suppose, all over the world—she brought with her a romantic legend which she almost, but not quite, allowed herself to believe: a ridiculous story about an ancestor who had helped the Young Pretender and received the old sword in her cottage home as a mark of gratitude. She did not believe it, and deep down did not wish to; but there were weak moments

when she would have been glad if it had been true, and could have been proved to be respectably true. She would have been ashamed, if she had ever read Boswell, of old Mrs. MacDonald who, after the Pretender had left her house, "took the sheets in which he had lain, folded them carefully, and charged her daughter that they should be kept unwashed, and that, when she died, her body should be wrapped in them as a winding sheet."

Neither romantic nor religious awe would have reconciled her to lying in unwashed sheets. But romance and not reality ruled her. It anchored her to a false past. It prevented her from seeing historical figures, pageants, revivals, resurrections and build-ups, for the hollow shams most of them are. She would not have valued Mr. Churchill's cigar since tobacco in any form nauseated her. But she would have preserved an authentic lock of Mary Stuart's hair.

IT'S always too soon, Roy Milligan said to me once, until it's too late; and I would have saved myself much trouble if I had listened. But it was easier just to agree. I said Yes with my lips. Taihoa with my will, finding Now too sharp a word. And that is only half the story; the moral half.

APRIL 12 The material half is a long succession of tasks done twice over, of prices paid and paid again, of doors shut hours after the escape of horses.

It happens to us all. But when I went out this morning and saw three trees blown down which I had been intending for two years to top, a necessary fence levelled and my two dogs, miraculously still wagging their tails, waiting for me in a mass of splintered pinewood, I knew why there are wars in the world,

and famines, and revolutions, and tyrannies, and why Mrs. Hubbard's friend got no bone. I knew, too, why my first thought was that it could have been worse, why that was followed at once by the reflection that there was not likely to be another gale of equal severity for many years, and why I then caught myself wondering if topping, in such a storm, would have been effective, anyhow.

I MET a man at Addington today who owes me seven pounds; who knows that he owes it; who has as many pounds as I have shillings; who would take his brother to Court for less than he owes me; who knows what I think of him; but who knows, too, what I think of myself, and believes that it would give me less

APRIL 15 pleasure to expose myself as a fool than to pin him down as a rogue. He is right, and because he knows that he is right, and therefore safe, he met me without embarrassment, was easy and even jovial in his conversation, and in no hurry to escape. I think it pleased him to meet me again and reflect, as he talked to me, what a poor fish he had proved me to be in business. It was the kind of meeting Jack Johnson could have had with Tommy Burns a few years after their encounter in Sydney.

What surprised me, however, worried and shamed me, was my discovery that my feelings as I talked to him were no loftier than his own. I could think of very little, as we leaned against the rails, but my lost seven pounds; and as often as I did that I knew that we were standing on the same level, with his boot firmly on mine. He had not only robbed me. He had reduced me, at least while I was with him, to thinking his thoughts and indulging his mercenary desires; and he somehow knew it. It is not always true that the man who steals our purse steals trash and nothing else. This man had part of me inside the purse and would not let me forget it.

(To be continued)

(Solution to No. 642)

S	E	R	E	N	A	D	E	F	P
L	E	I	A	G	A	M	U	T	
I	N	C	H	O	A	T	E	L	R
P	A	B	E	N	G	L	I	S	H
S	I	N	G	E	R	D	A	E	
H	T		P	E	A	C	E	S	
O	P	E	N	A	D	Y	U	L	E
D		D	I	N	G		P	R	
C	L	G		G	A	T	H	E	R
C	A	R	G	O	E	S	P	R	A
B	H		R	E	C	R	E	A	N
G	L	O	A	T	E	I	S	E	
E	U		E	M	P	L	O	Y	E

Clues Across

- In short, we see the doctor make an admission, apparently only to lose his life in the water.
- Tin legs would naturally sparkle.
- This sticky substance is largely composed of claret.
- Claw.
- Modifying.
- The responsibility is on us.
- Loathing.
- Listen in confusion.
- This garment could be a bore.
- Established reputation.

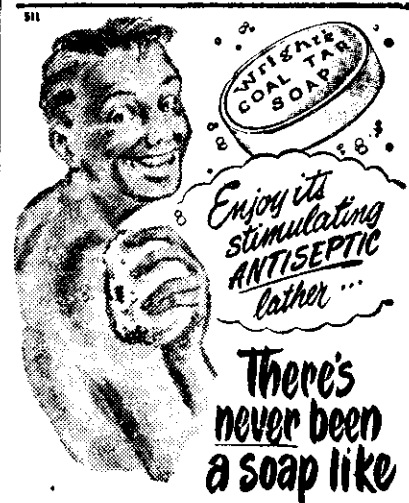
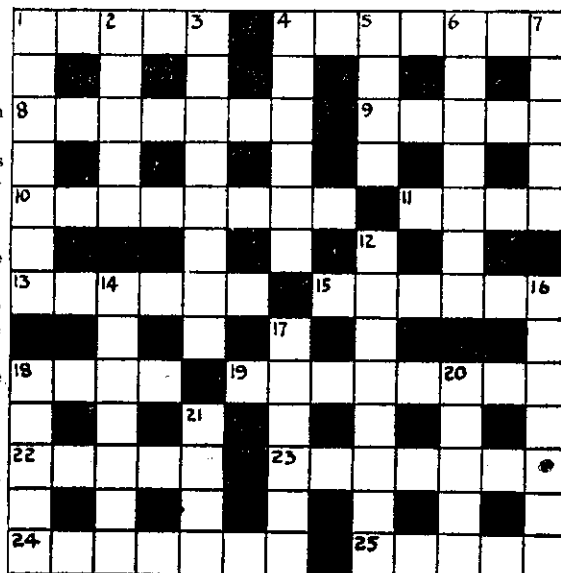
"THE LISTENER" CROSSWORD

- "Go your ways, and pour out the — of the wrath of God upon the earth" (Revelation XVI).
- Charm in a French antique shop.
- Real dew (anag.).
- Correct.
- Wait upon.
- Make merry.
- Senseless.
- Part of Australasia? Surely not!

No. 643 (Constructed by R.W.H.)

Clues Down

- Tread in (anag.).
- Found in reverse in a rare poison.
- Minute distinctions of pleasant neckwear?
- Confused angles.
- Jot a letter to the Greeks.
- They figure in the second parable in Matthew XXV.
- Eighth day before the Ides.
- Clean pin (anag.).
- Offence.
- "And all our yesterdays have — fools The way to dusty death" ("Macbeth," Act 5, Scene 5).



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