SCENES FROM LIFE'S STAGE,

BEING TEN ORIGINAL STORIES,

WRITTEN FOR THE DISPATCH

BY SIR GILBERT E. CAMPBELL, BART.,

Author of "Detective Stories From Real Life," "The Avenging Hand," "The Mystery of Mandeville Square," Etc.

VI.

THE MAJOR'S BUNGALOW.

Some three miles from the thriving town of Slowchester stood a house which differed very widely from those in its immediate vicinity, and indeed from any other in the neighborhood. It was a one-storied, white-washed building, surmounted by a pyramidal shaped roof of thatch, the eaves of which came down to within eight feet of the ground, after the manner of Anglo-Indian residences. The building was raised on a platform, some four feet in height, which was approached on four sides by flights of steps, and a wide veranda ran all round the building.

Had it not been for the smiling English landscape which was visible on all sides, and the absence of torrid sun and hot winds, the spectator might have imagined that he had been transported suddenly to the far East, and was standing in front of one of the residences termed "bungalows;" and in the latter part of his surmise he would not have been far wrong, for the strange looking dwelling had been erected by a retired Major of the H. E. I. C. S., who had declared that if he must end his days in England he would do so in a house erected after the fashion of that in which he had spent the best years of this life.

In addition to the various large and small rooms, all on the same floor, the Major had caused a series of underground chambers to be constructed, known in Indian parlance as "tykanna" and used as refuges from the heat, though of what use they could be in the climate of Great Britain, it would be hard to imagine.

As soon as the building was completed Major Strangeways took up his abode in it, and, after a seasonable plunge into society, led a narrow and solitary life. The fact was that the Major, in addition to his military rank, had held the post of political agent at the court of a native Rajah, and had been such an excessively great man there that he could not understand why everybody in the country did not bow down to him. As he was of a touchy and quarrelsome disposition, he soon found what he considered legitimate cause of grievance against some of the county families, and after much acrimonious correspondence and a proposal for a hostile meeting in Calais Sands with the Duke of Fakenham's sons (which His Grace declined), the Major in high dudgeon shut up the bungalow and returned to town, resolving that he would never set foot in Slowchester or the neighborhood again.

Some months after the hegira of Major Strangeways, the London police were much puzzled by the skill and daring of a gang of coiners, the members of which appeared to defy detection. Not only was their spurious money of such excellent make as to impose upon the most practiced experts, but it was uttered in such a judicious manner that the worthlessness of the coin was seldom detected until it had passed through various hands, rendering recognition of the original holder almost an impossibility. Heavy rewards were offered by the authorities, and the best-known and most skilled detectives set to work, but the coiners still remained at large and as undiscoverable as the philosopher's stone on the land of Eldorado.

Some six months had elapsed since the Major had, metaphorically, shaken the dust of Slowchester from his shoes when, to the surprise of its inhabitants, he suddenly made his reappearance in that town, and this time not alone, but accompanied by a young and pretty woman, some four-and-twenty years his junior, whom he addressed as Mrs. Strangeways.

After a short sojurn at one of the principal hotels in the town, the Major and his wife took up their quarters in the bungalow.

And now a fresh, and a very uncomfortable phase appeared in the Major's life. Mrs. Strangeways, being young and fond of pleasure, was naturally a good deal disgusted at finding that her husband's quarrelsome disposition had debarred her from the enjoyment of the balls, concerts and dinner parties with which the inhabitants of Slowchester and its environs were accustomed to recruit themselves, and spoke her mind pretty freely to her husband on the subject.

For servants, those unlicensed purveyors of scandal, and the source from which so many society papers draw their revelations as to the doings of the fashionable world, reported terrible scenes of recrimination between the husband and the wife, he alleging that she had married him entirely for his money, and she asserting that she had entered into the bonds of wedlock for the purpose of being buried alive in a benighted house with a quarrelsome old curmudgeon.

"At any rate," said the irate lady, "if I can see no one else, I presume I may have some of my own relations down to visit me."

"No, you may not, madam," snapped the Major. "It was a part of the bargain when I married you, that you were to cut yourself adrift from all that low crew, who were scarcely unfit to associate with an officer, and a gentleman, who has had the honor to hold the office of Political Resident at the court of the Rajah of Nawaballagange."

"Why, according to your own showing no one seems fit to associate with you," sneered the Lady. "It seems to me as if people had the same idea about you, and I am not certain that they are far wrong; at any rate I am not going to be mewed up in this dull hole, and if I can't have pa and ma down to see me, I suppose there will be no objection to brother Will; everybody says he is quite the gentleman."

"Quite the gentleman," snarled the Major. "A fellow with the look of a bully, the manners of a prize-fighter, and the language of a tout. No thank you, madam, no brother Will for me."

"You conceited old humbug," retorted the lady, placing her arms akimbo, "you would be glad enough to be a fine young fellow like Will; but you were not anything but a beggarly swaddy, all red cloth and pipeclay; and only a sham one at that, for my I find you never were in the regular army after all."

This was too much for the Major's patience. He had great faith in corporal punishment, and making for a favorite bamboo which stood in the corner of the room, and with which he had chastised many recent khitmaghars, Syces and beaters, he proceeded to lay it over his wife's shoulders.

The lady, however, was not disposed to submit tamely to marital discipline, and as this altercation had taken place at the breakfast table, the Major, after a deluge of scalding tea, was compelled to beat a retreat, followed by a well-sustained fire of buttered muffins, rumbled eggs and fried bacon.

Mrs. Strangeways had achieved a decided victory, and the Major never afterward attempted manual correction, contenting himself with violent objurgations, accompanied by currents of abuse in Hindustani.

Even brother Will was permitted to pass a visit, and in the time he arrived, a swaggering, bull-necked young man, evidently possessed of great strength, and of a cast of countenance seldom seen outside of one of Her Majesty's Houses of Detention. In his own way he tried to be civil to the gov'nor, as he invariably termed the Major, but the ex political resident would have none of his advances, and so the visitor cursing his host for a stuck up old dog, subsided into his sister's society.

"And you think that there would be no chance of persuading the old bloke, Sue?" asked brother William, as he was seated in the veranda's smoking a long clay pipe, and drinking gin and water.

"Not an atom," answered the lady, decidedly. "He would be the first to hand you over to the gents in blue."

"It's an infernal pity," returned brother Will, in musing accents. "The crib is built so if he had the business in his mind, and more, that people in town are getting so mighty inquisitive. The plant would thrive well in country air."

"Well, there's no use in thinking of it," answered the lady, taking a hearty sip of her brother's refreshment, "at least, as long as he is alive, and how long his inside will last with all those burning things he takes, is more than I can say. 'Cholly,' he calls 'em. 'Hot 'uns,' says I, if you ask me."

"As long as he is alive," repeated Will, thoughtfully, "then it isn't you, as has any objection?"

"Not I," returned Mrs. Strangeways, "do you think if I was a widow with plenty of oof, I'd stay down here? No, in such a case London for me, my lad."

"Here, come out into the grounds and let's have a talk, Sue," said her brother. "No one knows who is around the corner listening in this thundering verandy."

Mrs. Strangeways complied, and for nearly half an hour brother and sister paced up and down, engaged in earnest conversation.

The next day Brother Will, alleging that he had to attend a race meeting, took his leave, and the Strangeways were left to enjoy their connubial happiness undisturbed.

Two days afterward every available spot in Slowchester was placarded with bills announcing the arrival of Hermann Trismegisters, the wonderful Magician of the Four Winds. Mrs. Strangeways declared her intention of being present at what the magician modestly declared to be his "Unparalleled Scene of Preternatural Delusions."

"Pooh, pooh," remarked the Major, "the fellow is a humbug. You should see some of our Indian jugglers, Mrs. Strangeways. I wouldn't stir a step to see the fellow."

"So I supposed," answered his wife, placidly, "and therefore you can stay at home, and take care of the house. I am going to take all the servants, and as the nobs don't think me good enough to associate with, I have secured the two rows of front seats, and have given the tickets to all the loafers in the town. I'll make the swells sit up a bit, you bet."

Major Strangeways was secretly delighted at this snub to the Slowchester aristocracy, but he felt it his bounden duty to grumble at being left at home, to which, however, his wife paid no heed.

The performance was a long one, and when Mrs. Strangeways, at the head of her establishment, returned home, a terrible surprise awaited her, for swinging from the rafters of the veranda of the bungalow, was the body of Major Strangeways hanging by the neck, and as dead as the late Rajah over whom he had exercised surveillance in a political capacity.

Of course, the female servants shrieked, the males stared, and the bereaved wife thought it necessary to go into a fit of tearing hysterics, destroying everything which came within her reach. The police and medical assistance arrived in due course, and when the Major was cut down the two men who were supporting the body were almost prostrated by the enormous weight of the corpse.

An examination of the clothes of the deceased, however, showed that every pocket was filled with coin; and that a handkerchief, heavily weighted with 4 and 5 shilling pieces, was fastened round the waist.

At first it was surmised that the Major had thus loaded himself with silver coinage in order to make his death immediate; but when everyone of the pieces of money was discovered to be base metal, and of the same manufacture as had puzzled the heads of the Scotland Yard authorities, the county police began to open their eyes very wide indeed. Further inquiry showed that during the Major's visit to town after his quarrel with the neighbors, he had gone down to the docks to see the last of some old friends, who were about to sail for the land of the Pagoda tree; and that in Jamaica road he had been seriously smitten by the charms of a buxom damsel, who was walking swiftly along. "No fool like the old fool," as the saying goes, and so the amorous Major stalked his quarry to a low beer shop kept by the father of the charmer.

Explanations ensued, and after a very brief delay the Major found himself married decidedly in haste, and left to repent very much at his leisure.

Curiously enough the beerhouse from which the Major had taken his bride, had, from various suspicious circumstances, been strictly watched by the police when on the lookout for the coiners, but the proprietor was a wary old bird, upon whose tail the detectives had been unable to sprinkle one grain of salt. The rural police were now quite satisfied, the Major's capital had set the spurious mint to work, and after amassing a gigantic fortune, remorse had overtaken him, and he had hanged himself with such of his base metal as he had been unable to dispose of, stowed away about his person. This view was generally adopted by the county. The Coroner's jury returned a verdict of "Suicide while labouring under temporary insanity," and as soon as the funeral obsequies were over the widow returned to London and began to enjoy herself thoroughly after her own fashion.

There was one person, however, who, in his own mind, declined to accept the explanation, and that was a detective of the name of Renshaw, who had been one of those engaged in the unsuccessful attempt to hunt down the coiners. On the news of the tragic occurrence he had hurried down to Slowchester and made a minute examination of scene of the sad occurrence. He found that before going out and hanging himself, the Major had been recruiting nature with a glass of brandy and water—brandy pani, as he would doubtless have termed it—for an empty tumbler and uncorked bottle of brandy, and a glass jug, containing water, were standing upon the table in a room close to the spot where the Major had made his exit from this world of trouble. He must have then either fallen backward heavily or else dashed his chair upon the ground with such violence as to break the back, and then, doubtless enraged at this occurrence, and having a nice coil of of greased rope handy, an article no gentleman is ever without, gone out into the verandah and hanged himself.

"And," mused the detective, "hanged himself in the rummest manner I ever saw. How he managed, being a short man of 4 feet 9, to get the rope over the rafter so as to fasten the other end to one of the pillars in the veranda, is more than I can tell, but we will let that pass for the time. When he was found his feet were some four feet from the ground, and as there was no chair, stool or table near, he must have made a shot at the noose, and with all that weight of pewter round him, have jumped his neck clean into the loop and done the trick. It won't wash, Tom Renshaw, it won't wash, and so it's no good saying that it will."

The result of his cogitation was that Tom Renshaw had an interview with the Coroner, and pointed out to him that if these points were made public, the criminal, supposing that the Major had not come to his death by fair means, would be on the alert, and most likely baffle the police.

The Coroner agreed to take this view of the matter, and several important points were not brought before the jury, though a post-mortem examination of the body was made by a medical man, to whom the bottle of brandy found upon the table was handed over.

Until the departure of the widow, Renshaw pervaded the neighborhood, but with no result, and for three weeks he appeared to take no further notice of the matter. One day he returned to his lodgings after having been summoned to a consultation with one of his superiors in the Yard, and lighting his pipe, began, as was his custom, to soliloquize. "And so our friends, the smashers, have started a new game, and are taking in the money changers, with the best imitation of the Napoleon I have ever seen," added he, glancing at the shining coin in his hand. "The police have found the den where they are manufactured, but the birds had all flown, and there wasn't a single piece of duffing make left behind. I believe firmly that fellow Will is in it, brother of her that married the poor old Major. He ain't in town, and hanged if I haven't my own thoughts as to where the stuff may have been planted for safety's sake. Anyhow, I'll risk it."

Having come to this determination, Tom Renshaw examined the contents of a Gladstone bag with great care, and then, having seen that a small deal case was perfectly secure, took the train, and in the course of three hours was safely deposited at the Slowchester station.

Tom Renshaw appeared to take matters very easily. He partook of the best dinner which the inn let; hastelry at which he put up could supply, and then descending to the bar, lit his pipe and listened to the conversation which was going on around him.

The matter which was being discussed with such vehemence evidently had relation to the existence or non-existence of ghosts, and the believer in the supernatural had just put forward what he evidently considered a clinching argument.

"Well, if thee doesn't believe in 'um, jest let thee come along with me to the old Major's bungalow, as he called it, and if thee doesn't see the old man hanging himself, I'm a dutchman, and I can't say no fairer than that."

"Perhaps you'll say you saw it yourself," retorted his opponent, with a sneer.

"That's jest wot I did," answered the other, "now, will thee come along of I and get convinced?"

"Not I," returned the other, "not that I believe in the rubbish, or am a bit afraid—but—"

"He doan't believe, gentlemen, and he ain't afraid," broke in the first speaker, with withering sarcasm, "but for all that, he'd be danged afore he'd come."

The conversation threatened to take rather an acrimonious turn, and Renshaw hastened to interfere, and, by dint of supplying beer to both disputants, he contrived not only to make peace, but also to be put in possession of the facts, which were that the deceased Major had been seen by more than one person who had ventured near the deserted bungalow after nightfall, walking up and down the veranda, with a rope in his hand as if meditating suicide.

The detective listened very attentively to the long rigmarole which was poured into his ears, and, after mentally separating the chaff from the wheat, astonished the company by abruptly wishing them "good night," and retiring to bed.

The next morning he rose with the lark, and after paying his bill made his way to the police station, carrying with him his small amount of luggage, not forgetting the deal box which he handled with the greatest care.

After a long private conversation with the inspector, he remarked: "Then 11 o'clock tonight."

"Yes," replied the official. "I and the other will meet you at the bridge over the Swirl."

"You will do the thing all right, I know," observed Renshaw; "but how about the other fellow? some of these yokels are so confoundedly stupid."

"I am not going to take one of my men," returned the inspector, "but my brother-in-law. He has seen so much of the work that he is almost as good as a professional; besides, I will post him up."

"All right," answered Renshaw, "then good-by, until 11 to-night."

"Won't you come and have a bit of dinner with me?" suggested the inspector, "the missis will have some boiled pork and greens ready at 1."

"No, thank you," replied Renshaw; "I shall devote to-day to pleasure, I think I will go over the county jail."

* * * * * * * * * * *

That evening, at 11 o'clock, three men might have been seen crossing the fields which led to the house formerly occupied by the unfortunate Major. They did not venture into the open, but kept as much to the cover afforded by the hedgerows as they could, and by that means reached a small plantation which stood within a few yards of the bungalow. After a brief consultation two of the men stepped out into the bright moonlight and walked leisurely toward the front of the house, while the third crept quietly toward the back.

The two men who had advanced toward the front, suddenly stopped short, and raised their hands in the air with a gesture of intense horror, for, standing in the veranda was a figure which might well have filled the stoutest heart with dread. It was that of a man dressed in an old-fashioned, brow frock coat, a nankeen waistcoat, and Hessian boots, such as the deceased builder of the bungalow had been in the habit of wearing. The face was white and colorless, and in its hands it had a noose with which it made sundry weird movements, throwing it up into the air and catching it on its neck, then straining at it with both its hands, as though striving to tighten it around its throat. All at once another figure glided round the corner of the house, and took up its position immediately behind the apparition which had caused so much apparent alarm to the spectators. The second figure was dressed in the same manner as the first, but the face was even more white and dead-looking, and the eyes, which were sunk deep into their sockets, seemed to burn with a lambent fire. For a moment it stood motionless, and then with a sudden movement grasped the rope, and drew the noose tightly round the neck of the first figure.

With a sharp cry the first apparition faced swiftly about and found itself in extreme proximity to a fac simile of itself.

With a wild shriek he fell to the ground, his limbs quivering, and the foam flying from his lips, evidently stricken down by the extremity of his terror.

In a moment the spectators darted forward and laid their hands upon the struggling man.

"Why, who are you?" demanded the inspector playing the ghost, dressed up in the dead man's clothes. "You will have to give an account of yourself over this, I can promise you."

Somewhat revived by the sound of a human voice, the prostrate man opened his eyes but closed them again with a faint cry as they fell upon the figure which had so much alarmed him, standing motionless a few yards off, with its arm raised in a gesture of menace.

"Save me!" cried the terror-stricken man; "there is the Major's ghost; he tried to strangle me just now!"

"The Major's ghost!" repeated the inspector's companion, looking round; "why, I can see nothing of the sort."

"Do you mean to say," demanded the terrified ghost player, in quivering accents, "that you do not see his ghost standing there, shaking his fist at me?"

"I see no ghost," returned the inspector, stolidly.

"Then I may as well give in," muttered the brother of the Major's widow. "See, there he goes," he added, as the figure glided out of sight behind the corner of the house, "but he will come back, and I shall go mad if I see him again. Take him away; I killed the old man."

"Remember, any statement you may make will be used against you," said the inspector.

"I don't care; only don't let me see his white face any more," groaned the man; "take me off, and hang me out of the way."

And then the terrified wretch poured out his confession. He had long wanted the bungalow to carry on his nefarious traffic, and finding from his sister that his brother-in-law was impracticable on the matter, he had determined to make away with him. On the night of Mrs. Strangeway's visit to the conjurer he had stolen back and managed to drug the Major's brandy, and when the poor old man fell insensible from his chair had ruthlessly strung him up to the veranda and left him to strangle slowly. Afterward he played the ghost, so that the bungalow might have a bad name, and so that he might carry on the work undisturbed. He declared that his sister was perfectly ignorant of the crime.

Renshaw, as already stated, had entertained certain suspicions from the first, and had some sort of vague idea that the bungalow would be made the headquarters of the crime. In order to pursue his investigations with greater safety to himself, he had determined to impersonate the Major's ghost, and in that end had had a complete suit made similar to that which the old man was in the habit of wearing. In addition to this, by the connivance of the doctor, a plaster cast had been taken of the dead man's features, and it was this extraordinary resemblance to his victim which had so terrified the murderer.

Brother Will was hung upon his own confession, but Renshaw thought it best to keep in the background the fact that he had played the second ghost at the Major's bungalow.

[THE END.]

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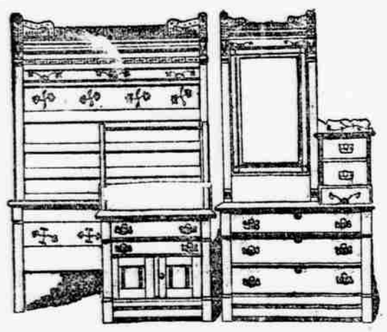

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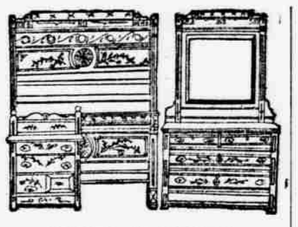

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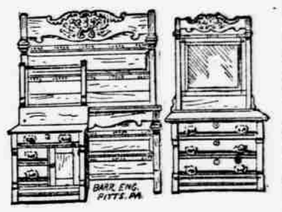
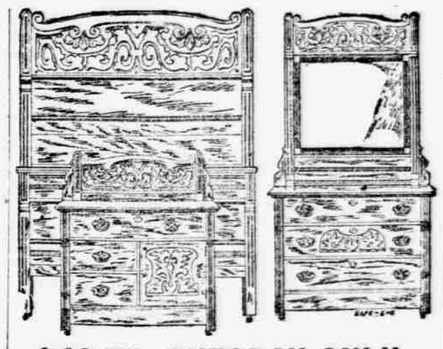
13 Suits, 60;	worth	80.00
5 Suits, 69;	worth	98.00



$43.25, TUESDAY ONLY.

Solid oak, deep-set panels, massive carvings, heavy bale handles, beveled mirror; a regular $65 pattern.

5 Suits, $73;	worth	$100.00
9 Suits, 85;	worth	120.00
8 Suits, 95;	worth	135.00
7 Suits, 112;	worth	150.00
4 Suits, 135;	worth	175.00



$49.75, TUESDAY ONLY.

Only 76 in stock. Deep hand carvings. Solid oak. Hard, oil polished. Large drawers. Extra large Bed, Dresser and Washstand. A chance for you to make $21.25—by saving it—as this suit is worth $70.

$37.50—16 Solid Walnut Suits;	worth	$55.00
58.00—12 Solid Walnut Suits;	worth	87.00
74.00—19 Solid Walnut Suits;	worth	110.00
175.00— 10 Solid Walnut Suits;	worth	225.00

All with Marble Tops and Toilet Washstands.

250 Woven-Wire Bed Springs, $1.50 Each.

215 Luxurious Soft-Top Mattresses, $2.25 Each.

300 Pairs Good Feather Pillows, 75 Cents Each.

TO SATISFY YOU THAT WE ALWAYS SELL THE GOODS WE ADVERTISE

BRING THIS PAPER WITH YOU AND ASK TO SEE THE GOODS.

GOODS BOUGHT TUESDAY ON WHICH YOU PAY A DEPOSIT WILL BE HELD FOR ONE WEEK FOR YOU TO PAY THE BALANCE IF YOU SO WISH IT.

MAIL ORDERS WILL RECEIVE OUR PROMPT and CAREFUL ATTENTION.

635 AND 637 SMITHFIELD STREET 635 AND 637

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