An Old Offender

BY R. E. VERNEDE, IN BLACK AND WHITE.

NO ONE seemed to know who Mr. Burstall was, or why he had settled in Heath House. He drove up one day—it was thought from London—in a coach with a man servant, and many brass-bound boxes with the smell of the sea on them followed him. There was not much to be deduced from these, but a village must have its gossip, and since the old man shut himself up, reserved and unfamiliar, and could only be seen at a distance walking in his grounds, very lion-like in his great stature and hardihood, with flashing eyes and a bush of iron-gray hair unthinned by his age, the gossip about him grew.

It was alleged that he had been a member of a hell-fire club in the bad old days, and for that and other villainies transported to Botany Bay, where he had made an immense fortune—all kept in the brass-bound boxes—by ranging the bush. The wiseacres vowed it was impossible to reveal his monstrous language and the fits of fury that disturbed the walls of Heath House at certain times when, as they declared, the old baresark convict spirit took him and shook him to a thunder and lightning of irrevocable anger. Their listeners oh'd and ah'd, and would have given their ears to be present at an exhibition of it.

I give these rumors, not because they turned out to be true, for they were mostly false, but because they led up to the only instance of Mr. Burstall's fury that I am acquainted with and justified it. For, as I discovered, most of his ill repute was due to the tongue of Michael Ferney. People bore with this fellow because he was a county man and known—known indeed to be fairly dissipated, vulgar, too, and coarse-minded—but known. And in a county familiarity breeds tolerance. So that George Winton, who was now 'squire, even encouraged him to dangle after Eva, and was set in his priggish way against any attentions being shown to the owner of Heath House, merely because Ferney disapproved of him. Dorothea Winton and I, being engaged, disapproved of Ferney still more strongly, and for that reason and because Mr. Burstall had confided to me his desire to make the Wintons' acquaintance, we set ourselves to persuade George.

"I shall bring the old man over to lunch with you tomorrow," I said.

"Doesn't he drink?" said Winton.

"Like a fish," I said.

"Well, then, you must see that——"

"He can stand it, which is more than some people can," I said.

The idea of sottishness as the mark of polite education was beginning to go out of fashion then, though Ferney was somewhat behind the times.

"You forget," said Winton, reprovingly, "that my sisters are not accustomed to the society of convicts."

"Gossip!" I said. "He's a gentleman.'

"He's a dear!" said Dorothea, "and we shall expect him tomorrow."

Winton shook his head and finally acquiesced. Protestation suited him, but it satisfied him too. Thus he supported his dignity, played the prudent man, and was at liberty to wash his hands of any business that turned out ill. Some people like to feel right. However, I had extorted the invitation and went over myself to deliver it. I met Mr. Burstall on the road. He seemed in high spirits, and protested that nothing could have given him greater pleasure than the prospect of accompanying me on the morrow.

"It's an omen," he said, "a good omen, and you must come back now and have dinner with me. I come of age today."

"Of age?" I repeated, puzzled.

"Yes, sir," he said hilariously, and broke off short, as Ferney came riding down the road towards us. "If you will excuse me," he went on, "I desire a word with this gentleman."

Ferney was walking his horse, and he gave me a nod in passing, but paid on heed to my companion. Mr. Burstall, however, did not mean to be ignored.

"Mr. Ferney," he said, "I have called on you three times, having a very important question to ask you—"

"Indeed!" said Ferney.

"And each time I was told you were out."

"Naturally," said Ferney, with a sneer. "I am never at home to sots or vagabonds."

The rejoinder was so heartlessly insulting that I could not help crying shame. What the old man wanted with Ferney I did not know, but Ferney had plainly put himself in the wrong. I saw Mr. Burstall take a step toward him, as if to drag him from his horse, but he controlled himself with a great effort, and next moment Ferney had quickened his pace and was disappearing down the road.

Mr. Burstall never spoke a word till we had gone into his house and he had rung for a bottle of port. He sat still and flushed, and I noticed that his gayety had vanished. When the servant had brought the bottle and he had poured a glass for either he turned to me with a husky laugh: "I come of age today—I'm twenty-one, sir."

There was no pleasure in the laugh, and he shook with his anger, repeating it:

"Just twenty-one. Perhaps that is why I nearly took that fellow by the throat and shook his cursed life out of him. Bah! Could I have done it—how?"

He looked at the knots on his wrists and half lifted himself, as if for a struggle. I thought to myself that in all probability Ferney had been nearer discomfiture than he would have cared to know. Mr. Burstall bent forward in his chair and went on:

"Why did I tell you I was just twenty-one? I'm a fool—it's thirty years today since then. Somehow I felt—your invitation, too, reminded me——"

"Glad you're coming," I said lamely, as he broke off again, without reason, as it seemed. He appeared to be struggling with some bitter memories, for he began without noticing.

"Thirty years—gone like a dream. There's a man's life for you—there's splendid achievement. To be able to look back on the day of one's coming of age and know that the years between have passed like a dream."

"You've done work," I said, trying to draw him away.

"A little hum-drum work—year in, year out the same—no interests—port" (he waved his hand at the bottle); "always more of it; the man becoming the sot, as that fellow said—the ambitious dying—dead. There's work done." He spoke in an excess of self-contempt and continued passionately: "My God! Fancy thirty years of dream for a boy who was bursting with enthusiasm, believed everything, hoped everything."

I was dismayed by his outburst, and suggested some commonplace about life being found always a poor thing in the end. He rounded on me at that.

"No, no; don't believe it," he said. "Don't take it from me that the world is a mean place or that life must go dreaming. I never said it. I never told a young man yet that the things he hoped were the things I hoped, or that, like my life, his would come to nothing. I'm not that way. I carry a smile with most, and most, I pray, have not hoped as much as I hoped, and lost all—all."

He drew himself up again.

"I'll tell you how it was, that you may think the worse of me, not of life; and if I speak to you of a woman I loved, I'm not blaming her."

He laughed hilariously, as if the idea of blaming the woman he loved were beyond the pale of absurdity.

"Thirty years ago I came of age, and on that day I would have asked her. She did not know. I remember it so well—a garden—an English garden, that's to say, green—greener than—but I needn't tell you. It'll make you sick to hear an old man drivel on about a garden and—and——"

He reached for the bottle and poured himself another glass.

"I would have asked her then, but I got a letter suddenly. And—something happened—and I found myself bound for Australia—the ends of the earth."

I picked up my ears at that, mindful of the rumors. But he went on disjointedly—all gaps.

"She married—some one else—a good man. She lived happily. I had hopes of returning some day until I heard—that. Then my ambition went out like a splashed candle. I ought to have gone on hoping and doing things because I had the honor to love her, but—I didn't. I threw my life away. Nothing very bad—only poor, unworthy of her."

Again he paused and mechanically began to pour himself another glass of the wine—then:

"Only" (the passion grew into his voice) "I have not forgotten, and sometimes when some one presumes to laugh at me for what I seem to him, it comes back, and the boy of twenty-one had a temper—and, by heaven, they have no right to laugh at the man who loved her. * * * That's how I came of age."

He sat back in his chair, wearily. I dare say I put my hand on his arm, but he never moved, only adding: "And today I come of age with a difference. I can look back on the boy and his hopes. I have not got them."

He reached for his bottle, filled his glass and drained it. The bottle was nearly empty then.

I did not stay to dine with him after all. I pleaded haste, and promised to fetch him next day. I wanted to try to think out the sequence of his story, to fill the gaps. What was this letter that made so great a change in his life, and why had he gone to Australia so suddenly? It could not be that the rumors, so industriously propagated by Ferney (everyone seemed to have heard them through Ferney) were true. Again, for what purpose had the old man been so anxious to call on him? And why Ferney's malice?

In the end I had to wait until the next day, and then the gaps filled very suddenly. It was when Mr. Burstall and I were entering the drawing-room at the Manor House (for I had induced him to come, though his depression continued) that I heard Ferney speaking very rapidly, as the door opened:

"A drunkard and a scamp, that you knew. But there's more—he's an old offender—sent to Botany Bay years ago to serve his time—forgery."

We were inside the room before Ferney had finished speaking. I saw Mr. Burstall flush like a boy, Ferney looked uneasy. He had lounged in from riding, evidently, and now he assumed a staggering pose.

Eva said, "Oh, dear!" and Dorothea, "I don't believe it." George Winton stood with his hands behind him, and made no movement toward his guest.

"What is the meaning of this, Winton?" I asked, indignantly.

"Excuse me," he said, "if I appear inhospitable, but I should like to know to whom I am speaking?"

And he looked toward the old man frigidly. Mr. Burstall answered at once:

"My name is Alexander Winton."

It was George's turn to flush with shame.

"My—my father's brother?" he stammered.

"Yes," said the old man.

"Back from Botany Bay," added Fernew with a snigger.

The girls looked at each other with troubled faces. It was plain that they had not heard of this family disgrace. I began to have a dim recollection of old villagers shaking their heads over a Winton that went wrong long ago. There was silence until the old man spoke.

"I did not expect in returning to bring shame upon you. I came because—but you will understand when I have told you my part of the story. Thirty years ago I had a great friend, and on the day that that forged check was presented at the bank I had a letter from him confessing that he had done it and asking me to help him escape detection—under a promise of secrecy. Well, I gave him the promise."

Ferney guffawed loudly.

"Not knowing at the time that suspicion would fall on me as it did. By a curious combination of circumstances the evidence went strong against me, and I was condemned to penal servitude for life. Before I was transported my friend came to see me. He kept me to my promise, but swore in return to leave a statement of the truth to be used ater his death. He was the kind of man who fancied he would not live long with a guilty conscience. At the time I thought him onty a coward, and I thought perhaps too much of honor. Afterward I heard that he proposed to the woman I loved. That was playing me false. But she would not have him. She married one who had not known my hopes, as he knew them—my brother!"

Eva began to sob at this and Ferney said "Bah!" I edged my way between him and the door. I meant to settle an old-standing hostility. The old man went on with even tones.

"That friend of mine has since died." He turned suddenly and faced Ferney in a great anger.

"Did your father leave no such paper as he promised?"

Ferney turned red and white and sniffed.

George Winton suggested, mildly: "I think you overhauled your father's papers, didn't you?"

"You don't believe that my father"—began Ferney, blustering, and he ended, "It's the merest lie."

Alexander Winton waited, and then drew from his pocket a faded letter.

"There's only this, then," he said, "to speak the truth." He handed it over to George Winton, who read it gravely, and said: "It seems to be your father's handwriting, Ferney, he confesses to the forgery; I'm sorry. It can easily be tested, of course."

"Do you deny it still?" asked the old man.

For answer Ferney struck him across the mouth with his riding whip. Next moment the whip had changed hands, and the old man in a whirl of rage was lashing him unmercifully. None of the rest of us stirred. The sins of the father and the son seemed to be equal and to deserve what punishment might be meted out. Then suddenly, as Ferney still writhed in his grasp, the old man slackened his hold and fell to the ground.

I think that Michael Ferney never wished to enter the Wintons' house again. Certainly he never did enter. Not that there was any fear of encountering Mr. Burstall there again. That old offender had—so to speak—served his time.

Who Can Write the Best Short Story?

The Tribune Offers Cash Prizes to Local Writers of Local Fiction

$25.00 FOR THE BEST STORY.

$10.00 FOR THE SECOND BEST.

$5.00 FOR THE THIRD BEST.

A LITERARY COMPETITION WHERE EXPERIENCE IS NOT NECESSARY IN ORDER TO WIN.

In view of the fact that considerable time has elapsed since there has been any public competition through the local press for the purpose of stimulating the literary ability latent among the people of Northeastern Pennsylvania, The Tribune has decided to offer a series of prizes as a stimulus in this direction. It is desirous of securing for use in its columns a number of short stories treating of local themes. In order to furnish an incentive it proposes to pay

$25 for the best story of not to exceed 3,000 words in length;
$10 for the second best story, and
$5 for the third best story.

Manuscripts not successful in securing one of these prizes will be published and duly credited if the authors so desire.

Stories tending to bring out the romance and legendary lore of the anthracite mining industry will have preference. In connection with every mine in the valley there is a mass of tradition, including hair-breadth escapes, narratives of spooky happenings and other details bordering on the weird or supernatural which has never been gathered together in literary form. This opens a field which is practically inexhaustible and which should supply the material for some exceedingly interesting fiction.

The task of passing upon the merits of the manuscripts submitted will be assigned to a disinterested judge, whose name will soon be announced, and who will read the manuscripts but have no knowledge of the identity of the authors. The envelopes containing the real names of the authors will be preserved unopened until after the awards have been made.

Should this initial competition prove encouraging, it may be followed by other prize offers of similar tenor.

CONDITIONS OF THE CONTEST.

All manuscripts must be submitted not later than March 30.

All manuscripts must be signed by a fictitious name and accompanied by a sealed envelope containing the fictitious name and also the writer's real name and post office address.

The scene of each story must be laid in Northeastern Pennsylvania, but the names of real persons must not be used.

One further condition must be understood. Contributions intended for this contest will be accepted only from present subscribers to The Tribune or from those who may, during the contest, become subscribers by payment of at least one month's subscription in advance.

Address,
STORY CONTEST,
Scranton Tribune,
Scranton, Pa.

ART INDUSITRIAL PRODUCTS.

Splendid Display to Be Made at the Pan-American Exposition.

There will be a very comprehensive display of art industrial products at the Pan-American exposition, including articles which fill the gap between regular manufactures and fine art productions. In this department will be shown gold and silver work of the jeweler's art, jewelry of every description, carved ivory and wood, designs in marble and stone, wrought iron articles, metal work, stained glass windows, enamel ware, pottery, stamped leather, certain textiles, porcelain, etc.

The large number of applications for space for the exhibit of individual art products decided Algar M. Wheeler, the superintendent of manufactures, to make it a distinct division, which is a departure from the methods at former expositions, where these products have been merged with the manufactures and fine arts departments, thus rendering their effectiveness almost void.

The art industrial products exhibit will be housed in the Manufactures and Liberal Arts building, which is an elaborate structure 500 feet long by 350 feet in width. The building as originally designed contained an open court or patio in the center, in conformity with an old Spanish mission house design. The demand for space became so great that the management decided to roof this patio with glass and install therein exhibits.

The glass-roofed section will be treated as a sub-tropical garden, thereby giving large and wealthy dealers in expensive art decorative articles an opportunity to make elaborative displays amid surroundings which are worthy and appropriate, having an adornment of foliage, interspersed with ornamental pavillions, climbing vines and many odd forms of vegetation. The original design of an open patio with historical water court and fountain could hardly be more artistic, and certainly could not be as interesting or entertaining. The change instead of detracting from the popularity of the buildings wil lenhance the artistic effect, besides gaining a great deal of much-needed space for this valuable collection. The advantage to be gained by this arrangement will be a setting of unusual beauty in a court that will be light and airy, with the additional charm which always accompanies odd varieties of growing plants.

The arrangements for the exhibit of art industrial products comprehend ample room, adequate facility and abundant light.

The Manufactures and Liberal Arts building is practically completed. The staff has been put on the exterior and its intricate designs are being beautified by the application of rainbow colors and placing of statutary. It has been wired and lamped for electrical illumination. The architecture of this building is a free treatment of the Spanish Renaissance style, and in this respects it corresponds with the other large buildings on the grounds.

The door by which the president of the republic, the King of Sweden, the Shah and other distinguished visitors were in the habit of entering the Paris exhibition has been sold for 12 guineas.

KING EDWARD'S TITLES.

They Are Not Repeated Very Often, Thank Heaven.

Spencer Townsend, in Cram's Magazine.

To those of us who for a life time have been well acquainted with the name and reputation of the Prince of Wales, the title of Edward VII., King of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, and Emperor of India (Kaisar-i-Hind), will sound strange. But so, Albert Edward, long Prince of Wales, Duke of Cornwall, Earl of Chester, Duke of Rothsay, Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, Prince of Saxony, Earl of Carrick, Earl of Dublin, Baron Renfrew and Lord of Isles, becomes by the death of his illustrious and much mourned mother.

The titles which have been above accredited to Edward VII in his role as the Prince of Wales, are by no means all that he is entitled to. To them, among many others, may be added the following: The Most Honorable Privy Counseler both of Great Britain and Ireland, Knight of the Most Honorable Order of the Garter, of the Most Ancient and Most Honorable Order of the Thistle, of the Most Illustrious Order of St. Patrick, Great Master and Principal Knight of the Grand Cross and Field Marshal of the Most Honorable Order of the Bath, Grand Knight Commander of the Most Exalted Order of the Star of India, Knight of the Grand Cross of the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George, Grand Commander of the Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire, Knight of the Grand Cross of the Royal Victorian Order, Grand Prior of the Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem in England, to say nothing of countless foreign decorations, fellowships and honorary memberships in societies of all sorts, the mere enumeration of the initials of which would fill one of these pages.

The importance and dignity of the heir to the throne in England, as well as the former and ceremony that hedges around the person of such a prince, is well illustrated by a list of some of the principal officers of the private household of the Prince of Wales. In this household we find the following officials in the order of their precedence, most of the offices being filled by members of the nobility:

Lord warden, keeper of the privy seal, attorney general, recorder general, clerk of the council, auditor, groome of the stole, two lords in waiting, four equerries, six extra equerries, two honorary aides-de-camp, two orderly native officers, a private secretary, a domestic chaplain, a librarian, a chief clerk with two assistants, three physicians in ordinary, three surgeons in ordinary, a surgeon to the household, five honorary physicians, a superintendent of stables, two surgeons apothecary, a surgeon dentist, an agent, a house steward and two housekeepers. These are entirely separate from the household of Her Royal Highness, the Princess of Wales.

It is interesting this connection to read the names of the honorary aides-de-camp and the orderly native officers, who are High Higness Maharaja Sir Nripendra Narayan, Padahur, of Cooch Behan; Lieutenant Colonel Maharaj Dhiraj Sir Partab Singh, Bahadur, Regent of Jodhpore; Rissaldar and Woordie-Major Ahamed Kahn, Bahadur, Kaim Sahib Bengal Lanciers. This retinue, however, is modest as compared with that by which Edward VII. will now be attended and served.