

A CHRISTMAS "LOST AND FOUND"

Mr. Dinglebury was not a society man. Once he had been in his palmy days, but neither was Mrs. Dinglebury a society woman.

By GORDON ROGERS

Illustrated by DUDLEY WARD

MR. DINGLEBURY had acquired habits, which in adversity, were about as serviceable as a silk hat in a blizzard and as he made no visible effort to rehabilitate himself, Society showed him the door. But, unfortunately, turning Mr. Dinglebury out turned Mr. Dinglebury down as well as out. He had a chronic habit of being out of work, a Micawber-like willingness to wait for something to turn up; which, when you have neither money nor credit to keep your end up, is very bad form. And Mr. Dinglebury had acquired other habits which, like weeds, had sprung from the soil of too much untilled time. He—but enough of Mr. Dinglebury.

Mrs. Dinglebury was not a society woman. She had moved in a very nice circle, within which she had met her fate in the slender form as well as purse of Mr. Dinglebury. In the course of time Mr. Dinglebury's form lost its slender-

brush; but Thomas Theodore was not to be summarily denied.

"I think she'd like the album," he said stoutly, gazing at a gaudy affair of red plush and gilt.

"It's no use," said the more practical Silas. "There's two albums in the house now, an' what good are they? Nobody ever looks at them, except Joe Fisher, an' I guess Annie's picture is enough for him."

Thomas Theodore looked at the brush, wistfully regarded the artistic horror in plush and gilt, and manfully hauled down his flag.

Mr. Dinglebury emerged and with curious eyes watched the twins as they squeezed their way to the crowded counter. The momentary resolution to hold them up and borrow "the price" was gone. Why, it seemed only yesterday that they were creeping around the floor, getting into everyone's way, except each other's. The brush was doubtless for their mother. He recalled that Mrs. Dinglebury's "crowning glory" was getting thin as well as gray. But where had they got the money? Why should they have money, while he—Mr. Dinglebury experienced a thrill of righteous indignation, and thought of the glamour of a warm, tobacco-scented bar, rows of glittering and gleaming bottles, and a steaming hot Scotch. Against such odds he could scarcely be expected to conjure up a vision of the two little fellows hoarding every penny and never flinching from a great purpose.

Mr. Dinglebury, watchful and envious, saw the brush taken from the window—for the twins insisted upon that particular brush, and none other—and with covetous eyes saw them pay for it. He experienced an inclination to stop them on their way out and "borrow" or "demand" their change. But the desire was half-hearted, for some reason which Mr. Dinglebury could not explain to himself, and the twins, emerging from the bazaar, were swiftly lost in the human current of the broad pavement.

So it was Christmas Eve! Mr. Dinglebury had not hitherto thought of it. He brushed the flaky snow from the sleeve of his shabby ulster, and gazed in an abstracted way at the crowd hurrying by. Why had he not bought something for Mrs. Dinglebury? And the twins—would somebody buy them Christmas presents, too?

Mr. Dinglebury moved towards home. He was hungry. Yet he would like to get some little trifle—for the twins. Perhaps Annie would lend him a dollar. She had done it before, and she would hardly refuse him such a small sum on Christmas Eve—even though he had failed to return former loans.

Mr. Dinglebury tilted his head well back to see if the offices of Sharp and Shrewd were still lighted. They were; and he took the elevator to the fifth floor, and stepping out, tapped at a glass door; but receiving no reply, he opened the door and entered the office where his daughter was still busy.

The tired girl glanced up, saying: "Well, Father?" in a colorless way. She had expected this.

Mr. Dinglebury cleared his throat.

"Look here, Annie," he said. "I want you to lend me—er—a couple of dollars for a day or two. Dobson—you know Dobson—owes me quite a sum, and has promised me part of it. But—er—this is Christmas Eve, you know, and I'd like to get some little thing—Oh! just a trifle or two—for the twins, you know. The little shavers will expect something."

"I have something for them," said the girl, regarding her father curiously. He had not been drinking; but she did not believe him. That was plain. Mr. Dinglebury winced.

"Which means, I suppose, that you think I want the money for myself?"

"Not altogether," said the bread-winner, gently. He was her father, after all, and she was sorry for him. Through her experience in and with the working world, she knew and understood better than her mother had ever known or could understand, what drink can do and undo. But she would not waste one hard earned penny. "I am going to give mother a coat," she said, and if there is anything over we shall need it, for we must have some sort of a Christmas dinner, if only for the twins' sake." The girl placed one hand on the man's shoulder and looked him bravely, yet wistfully in the eyes. Instinctively, Mr. Dinglebury drew himself up at that touch, and squared his shoulders. But his gaze wavered and fell. "You will stay at home to-morrow,

won't you—for the little shavers' sake? I know Mother will be happy if you do. And, Dad—don't drink."

Mr. Dinglebury muttered something about "important business," and beat a hasty retreat. He wished this confounded lump would not keep rising in his throat. This sentimental weakness—where was it going to end?

Wondering at himself, he refused a "hot Scotch" offered by Dobson, who accosted him on the corner.

"Low devil, that Dobson!" he muttered. "Confound him! How the deuce did I ever get in with such a fellow? Eh? What?" And Dobson was wondering much the same thing about that "good for nothing sponge, old Dinglebury."

There was something wrong at home. The twins, mute and wide-eyed, were at the tea table, and Mrs. Dinglebury, her hat awry, wept on the sofa.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Mr. Dinglebury, gazing about, "What's the matter? What's up?"

"Mother's lost her purse!" chorused Silas and Thomas Theodore in perfect unison; and as though moved by one single string, they gravely nodded their small heads together.



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ness, but the form of the purse altered not. The arrival of tribulation proved Mrs. Dinglebury to be made of good stuff. She demonstrated that "D" stood for devotion, determination, diligence and doing. There was not very much in her physical make-up; but what there was had the hall mark of sterling worth.

Mr. Dinglebury, in a long, shabby ulster, which had seen seven winters, walked slowly down one of the principal shopping avenues on Christmas Eve. His faded black Derby pulled low down over his brows, his soft ungloved hands plunged deep in his pockets; and possessed of a thirst for a hot Scotch. He glanced lazily right and left, and wondered why everyone seemed to be in such a frantic hurry.

But, pausing by the window of a brilliantly lighted bazaar, Mr. Dinglebury became aware of the proximity of two tiny mortals. The Dinglebury twins, Silas and Thomas Theodore, were unique. They were known as the Sober Twin and the Funny One. They stood for facial tragedy and comedy.

Silas the Sober was the "delicate" one. He had come last. Thomas Theodore, the robust, had come first; had insisted upon it. "After you, my dear Thomas Theodore," Silas probably said.

But to-night, before the big window, Thomas Theodore the humorist, was serious too. His expression, therefore, struck the curious eye of Mr. Dinglebury as strange. Moreover, that the twins should be abroad on a big, crowded street, hours after nightfall struck Mr. Dinglebury as curious too. Their small, round heads together, they stared into the big, bright window. There was a very convenient dark doorway, within earshot of the twins; and Mr. Dinglebury availed himself of it.

"I think we'd better buy the hair brush," Silas said. "She wants it worse'n anything. I heard her say t'other day, that if there was anything she needed more'n anything else 'cept more hair, it was a hair brush. That sounds funny; but there's no hairs in the one she has now, 'cept her own."

This was surely a strong appeal on behalf of the hair



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"Eh? What?" exclaimed Mr. Dinglebury, truly aghast, and forgetting the *sang froid* he always assumed in times of trouble. Even he could appreciate such a calamity. "Er—where did you lose it, Dorothy?"

"I—I—don't know!" stuttered the little lady. Her tears breaking out afresh. "I wish I did! I've looked all over where I was, and walked all the wa-way back to the ma-ma-market with Silas and Thomas Theodore, and I didn't find it!"

"Um!" he said, rubbing a stubby chin. He had little consolation to offer. Sympathy is a poor substitute for a lost purse. "Well, it's too bad," he remarked after a little. "Yes, it's too bad. Too bad. But it can't be helped—can it? It may turn up. And I suppose we must make the best of it. Eh? What?" The twins, exchanged glances, full of meaning in regard to the heroic unselfishness of the paternal "we."

"Have—have you any money, Tom?" inquired his wife, a forlorn hope in her voice.

"Well—er—no, as a matter of fact, I haven't—to-night," said Mr. Dinglebury. "I expected some to-day, particularly as it was—er—Christmas time, but the—er—fellow didn't turn up." It was a disagreeable topic, and Mr. Dinglebury sat down and helped himself to bread and butter.

"Don't cry, Mother," said Silas, brushing his crummy little mouth. "We'll go out and have another look after you've had your tea, an' I guess we'll find it this time." "We'll all go," said Thomas Theodore. "You an' Silas an' me, an' maybe Annie too, when she gets home." Mr. Dinglebury thought the omission of himself was intentional, and it stung; but Thomas Theodore's gaze was guileless. Mr. Dinglebury concluded he had lost his appetite. So he sought a corner and his pipe. There is much more than the uninitiated know in a good smoke.

Presently Annie came in, and the story had to be retold. The girl sat down on the old sofa and put her arm around the little mother.

"How much was there, Mother?" she asked. "Thur-thuh-thirty-three dollars and sixty-eight cents, and four car tickets—blue ones!" sobbed Mrs. Dinglebury.

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