

the time-piece on the velvet counter mat, "take this miserable ailing watch. You may keep it or give it away, just as you please. It hasn't a whole wheel in it. The main-spring is broken, the escapement is out of sorts, it wasn't half cleaned, and it is entirely ruined. It will cost me a small fortune to have it repaired. I don't want it any more. It makes me tired to see it around. I'll buy a new dollar-and-a-half watch that I can take some comfort in."

The jeweler took the time-piece and retired into the workshop. In a few minutes he returned with a broad smile on his face.

"Here it is, in perfect order. There is nothing the matter with it. You forgot to wind it up last night."

A MYSTERIOUS JEWEL ROBBERY.

Mr. Hengist Skidmore is the younger son of a junior offshoot of an ancient family. The blood that flows in his veins is heraldically very blue, but his fortune when he came of age was exceedingly limited, and was soon spent. A Skidmore cannot condescend to commerce, and therefore Hengist, by a contract of marriage bartered his ancient blood for new riches.

Heraldically Miss Maria Binns never had a grandfather. Her Pa, the late Mr. Thomas Binns, began his career as a miner, but being a clever and plucky man he left the coal pit and the country to seek a fortune. When he was abroad his hand seemed to have a Midas touch. He found gold in Australia, struck oil in America, smuggled opium into China, returned to his natieland, worth full £8,000 a year, became a member of Parliament, was venerated as a distinguished philanthropist, lived on the fat of many lands, died in the odour of sanctity, and his daughter Maria inherited his property. The Skidmore blue blood and the Binns new riches met and married. Before being Binns no more the lady insisted upon a settlement, excluding her proposed twain flesh from any share in the control of the property; and the bridegroom-elect being pecuniarily not only off his last legs but also off his last crutch, assented to the hard conditions. Mrs. Skidmore allowed her husband £400 a year, paid quarterly for his personal expenditure, and affectionately congratulated him on her marvellous generosity.

Mr. Skidmore owed a few debts, and

his habits were not strictly economical. Unfortunately for him the terms of the marriage settlement were not generally known, and consequently, as the consort of an eight-thousand-per-annum lady, he readily obtained credit from tradesmen, and loans from the accommodating gentleman who never pay the least regard to the Bank of England *minimum*. Within two years from the auspicious day when he had leased himself for life to the prudent Maria, he was deeply in debt and dreadfully dunned. His courage being spurred by necessity, he ventured to ask his wife for a loan. Her reply proved that although she might love him much, she was still fonder of her property.

"Hengist, I am not a fool, and I would rather put on weeds to-morrow than give you a sixpence more than your liberal allowance."

Mr. Skidmore applied to his friend Captain Kiddell. The name of Arthur Kiddell is not in the Army List or in the Navy List, but he is supposed to have attained military rank in foreign service. In chess he has invented a new gambit. He has, he says, played whist with Imperial Chancellors. Professional billiard players applaud his side stroke. He has, so he avers, won money on the turf. He asserts that he has an infallible system for winning money on the Stock Exchange.

He would be delighted to help Mr. Skidmore. He was at that moment engineering a Stock-Exchange rig that must be a fortune to those who were lucky enough to "be in the swim." If Mr. Skidmore put in £4000 he would take £14,000 of the spoil in less than six weeks. But where, oh where, was the £4,000? Captain Kiddell would have been charmed to lend the money, but he had already overdrawn his account to oblige a noble friend. The Captain claims to be a Napoleon in finance.

"My dear fellow, you say you have nothing, and so can get nothing, but *ex nihilo nihil fit*, is a maxim only fit for greenhorns. You shall borrow the money."

Mr. Chapeau, who lends money on securities that are not negotiable in Lombard Street, agreed to give £4,000 for a £8,000 promissory note, at two months' date.

"Chapeau and his tribe have a tremendous swallow. But, my dear fellow,

you will not £10,000 at least, and when you have paid the £2,000, you will be £8000 in pocket."

Mr. Chapeau was somewhat fastidious, for a hundreds per cent. per annum lender. He insisted upon Mrs. Skidmore joining in the promissory note. Mr. Skidmore could not even ask her to do so. Captain Kiddell held that a husband had authority to sign his wife's name. Besides, Mrs. Skidmore would not hear of the affair. Chapeau would not part with the note, and it could be paid and burnt in six weeks, a full fortnight before it was due.

Mr. Skidmore had £500 for his immediate wants; Captain Kiddell kindly advancing £500 to make up the £4000 for the infallible rig. Alas! even a Kiddell is not infallible, and for once the 'cute Captain was mistaken. The rig totally failed, and all the invested money was lost.

"My dear fellow," said the Captain, "I have dropt ten thousand, but I shall win on the double-fold venture; for I never go in for mere double or quits. But your fix with the Chapeau note is confoundedly awkward. If your wife won't lend you the money, why not borrow her jewels? Being so cruelly cornered, it is your duty to help yourself."

"The jewels are in the settlement. Kiddell, I am utterly ruined. She will not part with a penny to save me from penal servitude."

"If she had done Arthur Kiddell the honour to take his name in wedlock, she would have been made to part. But, my boy, don't talk about being dry dooked. We must weather the storm."

"Chapeau won't wait, and the moment he applies to her, my prosecution will begin."

"The most cruel fix I ever heard of! Oh, the vanity and vexatiousness of women! I suppose the jewels of your wife would pay Chapeau's bill twice over?"

"The jewels are worth over £20,000. But it is no use of talking about her property. In a few weeks a Skidmore will be a convict."

"I will rescue you, my dear fellow. Let us dine, and while we wine discuss my stratagem."

When Mr. Skidmore reached home he was so pale that his wife thought he was ill, and said—

"Hengist, you must see the doctor,