

"Ah, friend Van Elberg!" he cried in despair. "What shall I do?" The fishermen are bringing in my herring, and I cannot find a single cask to pack them in. They will all be spoiled.

"Ah," returned Van Elberg coldly. "You bought up all the herring and I have bought up all the casks. I could sell them to you at an exorbitant price, but as I wish to keep my word about giving my daughter her dowry of 4,000 ducats, I will only charge you the amount you so skillfully made out of me in the other matter. You are very cunning, you merchants of Amsterdam; but we of Broek have positive genius, you see."

"But you got the idea from me," replied Master Woerden, proudly.



Four-in-hand Novelists.

The following is a word puzzle. It narrates the adventures of a four-in-hand novelist while trying to lose his reputation. Competitors do not require to be told that a four-in-hand novelist is a writer of fiction who keeps four serial tales running abreast in the magazines. The names of specimen four-in-hand novelists will recur readily every one. The puzzle is to discover who this particular novelist is; the description, as will be observed, answering to quite a number of them.

A few years ago, if any one in Fleet street had said that the day would come when I would devote my time to trying to lose my reputation, I would have smiled incredulously. That was before I had a reputation. To be as statistical as time will allow—for before I go to bed I have seven and a half yards of fiction to write—it took me fifteen years' hard work to acquire a reputation. For two years after that I worked as diligently to retain it, not being quite certain whether it was really there, and for the last five years I have done my best to get rid of it. Mr. R. L. Stevenson has a story of a dynamiter who tried in vain to leave an infernal machine anywhere. It was always returned to him as soon as he dropped it, or just as he was making off. My reputation is as difficult to lose. I have not given up the attempt yet, but I am already of opinion that it is even harder to lose a reputation in letters than to make one. My colleagues will bear me out in this.

If I recollect aright—for I have published so much that my works are now rather mixed up in my mind, and I have no time to verify anything—the first place I thought to leave my reputation in was a volume of pot-boilers, which I wrote many years ago for an obscure publication. At that time I was working hard for a reputation elsewhere, and these

short stories were only scribbled off for a livelihood. My publisher heard of them recently, and offered me a hundred pounds for liberty to re-publish them in book form. I pointed out to him that they were very poor stuff, but he said, that that had nothing to do with it; I had a reputation now, and they would sell. With certain misgivings—for I was not hardened yet—I accepted my publisher's terms, and the book was soon out. The first book I published, which was much the best thing I ever wrote, was only reviewed by three journals, of which two were provincial weeklies. They said it showed signs of haste, though every sentence in it was a labor. I sent copies of it to six or seven distinguished literary men—some of whom are four-in-hand now—and two of them acknowledged receipt of it, though neither said he had read it. My pot-boilers, however, had not been out many weeks before the first edition was exhausted. The book was reviewed everywhere, and, in nine cases out of ten, enthusiastically lauded. It showed a distinct advance on all my previous efforts. They were model stories of their kind. They showed a mature hand. The wit was sparkling. There were pages in the book that no one could read without emotion. In the old days I was paid for these stories at the rate of five shillings the thousand words; but they would make a reputation in themselves now. It has been thus all along. I drop my reputation into every book I write now, but there is no getting rid of it. The critics and the public return it to me, remarking that it grows bigger.

I tried to lose my reputation in several other books of the same kind, and always with the same result. Barnacles are nothing to a literary reputation. Then I tried driving four-in-hand. There are only five or six of us who are four-in-hand novelists, but there are also four-in-hand essayists, four-in-hand critics, etc., and we all work on the same principle. Every one of us is trying to shake himself free of his reputation. We novelists have, perhaps, the best chance, for there are so few writers of fiction who have a reputation to lose that all the magazine editors call to us for a serial tale. Next year I expect to be six-in-hand, for the provincial weeklies want me as well as the magazines. Any mere outsider would say I was safe to get rid of my reputation this year, for I am almost beating the record in the effort. A novelist of repute, who did not want to lose his reputation, would not think of writing more than one story at a time, and he would take twelve months, at least, to do it. That is not my way. Hitherto, though I have been a member of the literary four-in-hand club, I have always

been some way ahead with at least two of my tales before they begin to appear in serial form. You may give up the attempt to lose your reputation, however, if you do not set about it more thoroughly than that; and the four novels which I began in January in two English magazines, one American magazine, and an illustrated paper, were all commenced in the second week of December. (I had finished two novels in the last week of November.) My original plan was to take them day about, doing about four chapters of each a month; but to give my reputation a still better chance, of absconding, I now write them at any time. Now-a-days I would never think of working out my plot beforehand. My thinking begins when I take up my pen to write, and ends when I lay it down, or even before that. In one of my stories this year I made my hero save the heroine from a burning house. Had I done that in the old days they would have ridiculed me, but now they say I reveal fresh talent in the delightful way in which I re-tell a story that has no doubt been told before. The beaten tracks, it is remarked, are the best to tread when the public has such a charming guide as myself. My second novel opens with a shipwreck, and I am nearly three chapters in getting my principal characters into the boats. In my first books I used to guard carefully against the introduction of material that did not advance the story, yet at that time I was charged with "padding." In this story of the shipwreck there is so much padding that I could blush—if I had not given all that up—to think of it. Instead of confining myself to my own characters, I describe all the passengers in the vessel—telling what they were like in appearance, and what was their occupation, and what they were doing there. Then, when the shipwreck comes, I drown them one by one. By one means or another, I contrive to get six chapters out of that shipwreck, which is followed by two chapters of agony in an open boat, which I treat as if it were a novelty in fiction, and that, again, leads up to a chapter on the uncertainty of life. Most flagrant padding of all is the conversation. It always takes my characters at least two pages to say anything. They approach the point in this fashion:

Tom walked excitedly into the room, in which Peter was awaiting him. The two men looked at each other.

"You wanted to see me," Tom said at last.

"Yes," said Peter slowly, "I wanted to see you."

Tom looked at the other uneasily.

"Why did you want to see me?" he asked after a pause.