

THE PREED GARDEN

A Storiette in the Interests of Every Man His Own Gardener

By JAMES A. BYRNE

NO such consideration as the prospective wastage of the world at war seemed likely to remove Preed's distaste for gardening.

"Why should everybody cut in on the gardener's game?" he demanded, controversially, of Hoestetter, his nearest neighbour. "Give him a show. If every Tom, Dick and Harry started makin' pianos I'd soon have a great job, wouldn't I? Well, just the same, why should everybody monkey with gardens? Tell you, friend, if I owned this place, instead of rentin', this back yard would go into grass as quick as Jerry wrote the note!"

Preed's was one of the few choice garden plots in Canada that were left out of the reckoning in the spring of 1916.

"I'm a mechanic, not a mangle," boasted Preed, hitting himself proudly on the chest. "My tool's a hammer, not a hoe."

"Stirring the worms," as Preed called digging in the garden, became so general in all directions roundabout as spring wore on that Mrs. Preed, largely for appearance sake, suggested that Preed dig up the garden.

"Enough stirring for worms when the fishing begins," declared Preed, evasively. "All the neighbours' bait will be gone to the robins, and I'll have a monopoly on worms."

Johnny Preed, being a born fisherman, began the stirring. A creek named the Avalon ran through the town of St. George, and Johnny, freed from such restrictions as he had suffered in the city, broke out on the first fine day with fishing fever. His hard searches for bait of the particular size and colour he liked caused queer gashes to appear in the Preed garden, which had come out of the severe ordeal of winter with a hardened, seamed countenance.

Seeing this, one evening Hoestetter, resting after a second sowing of radishes and lettuce, came to the intervening board fence.

"So you're startin' at last, old man," he remarked, tentatively, with a satirical gratification. "We got rhubarb, sparrow-grass, and green onions fit to use already. We'll soon have radishes and lettuce galore."

Preed curtly fenced off the rallery by a grieved grimace and inattention. He had almost been minded to put the whole garden in tillage, but now, in irritation at Hoestetter's meddling ways, he instantly turned his back on both neighbour and job.

Meanwhile the undug back lot began to give Mrs. Preed more and more annoyance, not only because ambitious, healthy weeds made it an eyesore esthetically compared to the regular neat plots of the neighbours, but because the Hoestetters kept

sending in repeated offerings of vegetables, and forced her to order more and more stuff from the grocery.

Preed, be it remembered, prided himself, justly enough in a way, on his skill as a cabinet man. But 1915 soon saw established a demand for instruments of pain rather than instruments of pleasure. The St. George piano plant, like its city sister, ran short of orders, and faced the alternative of adapting itself in part to the manufacture of munitions of war, or running short time.

Preed's pride as a cabinet man kept him from seeking a job at the new work until it was too late. The result was that he found himself reduced to half time at his regular work.

This change occurred early in July, by which time the undug half of the Preed garden had become resplendent with a luxuriant crop of ragweed, sow thistles, lamb's quarters, mallow, and various other ensigns of neglect.

Mrs. Preed was the first to reveal signs of the diminished pay-envelope. The regular purchase of vegetables from the grocery soon showed interruptions of days at a time.

"I'll buy nothing I can't pay for, that's one thing," she told Preed repeatedly, when he suggested running a store account. "They say no one knows when the war will be over," she added, mollifyingly. Mrs. Hoestetter's proffers of a liberal share of their excess of fresh, delicious vegetables and small fruits were reviewed within a few days.

THE first morning such generosity took Mrs. Preed unawares, and she found herself accepting the gift. At noon when Preed came home to dinner, he stormed angrily against his wife's weakness, and would eat none of the vegetables.

"Well, here's some lamb's quarters," said Mrs. Preed. "This came out of our own garden." As she spoke she handed him a dish of boiled greens, somewhat resembling spinach in the mass.

Preed opened his eyes. "Out of our garden?" he demanded.

"Yes, where you dug it," she affirmed. "Mrs. Hoestetter showed me the stuff. It's thick as anything where you did the digging. She says it's a weed, but it likes cultivation where there's so much ragweed as there is here to choke things out."

Preed tried the dish, and relished it.

"By thunder, who'd a thought!" he cried. "This stuff beats spinach all holler. These people are on

to lots o' tricks in the garden line."

"We might just as well've been independent in vegetables, like all the neighbours," sighed Mrs. Preed.

"We'll know better another time," philosophized Preed.

That evening Preed was out in his weed wilderness surveying his stock of the delicious lamb's quarters. Hoestetter, desirous of re-establishing the neighbourly relations of early spring, asked him to step over and see the garden.

Preed complied, covering his renunciation of former ungraciousness by remarking, "Lamb's quarters, by thunder. That's a new one on me."

For the first time he climbed the close-board fence and was regularly introduced to the wonder of Hoestetter's plant demesne. The array and variety of plants, vines, and bushes bewildered Preed as a skyscraper bewilders a child.

Hoestetter, like many another, was excessively deprecatory and modest, now that his far-traveled and high-strung neighbour was on the ground investigating the actual basis for so much previous boasting.

"Nothing like what it might be if I had the time," Hoestetter disclaimed, in reply to Preed's high praise.

"If I hadn't figured on some decent fishing," declared Preed, "I believe I'd a gone in for some truck myself. Time, you say! That's my long suit nowadays. I don't know what to do with myself on idle days. And livin' costs like the dickens."

He saw Hoestetter start to gather a mess of cabbages, beans, and peas, saying, "I know it."

"D'you sell stuff?" asked Preed, in preparatory self-defence against Hoestetter's contemplated gift.

"I do—sometimes—said Hoestetter. But—this lot goes in trade, if you'll have it that way. Tell you what. You're too proud to take this stuff for nothing. I'll trade it for leave to cut those ragweeds in your back lot."

"What's your little game?" demanded Preed.

"Just this," said Hoestetter, barely refraining from a sneeze. "This is August, the ragweed and hay-fever month. I have it. They say the ragweed's the cause of hay-fever. Is it a bargain?"

"So that's been your game since spring," laughed Preed, shaking Hoestetter's hand on the bargain. "Say, forgive me for imposin' on you as a neighbour, won't you. And don't worry. I'll chase every weed off that lot, except the lamb's quarters. And next year, if I'm here, look out I don't beat you in gard'nin'."

STRICTLY BUSINESS

By O. HENRY

IN his latest book, Stephen Leacock has a chapter on The Amazing Genius of O. Henry. He ranks the late American popularist as one of the literary geniuses of his day. O. Henry's books have reached a total sale of more than 1,000,000 in America alone. People are still reading O. Henry—and they will be reading him fifty years hence. If O. Henry ever wrote a poor story nobody seems to remember it. The fact that "Strictly Business" was not written last week, and that it was once published in a Canadian periodical, then of small circulation years ago, makes no difference to its value now to those who like a rattling good story.

I SUPPOSE you know all about the stage and stage people. You've been touched with and by actors, and you read the newspaper criticisms and the jokes in the weeklies about the Rialto and the chorus girls and the long-haired tragedians. And I suppose that a condensed list of your ideas about the mysterious stageland would boil down to something like this:

Leading ladies have five husbands, paste diamonds, and figures no better than your own (madam) if they weren't padded. Chorus girls are inseparable from peroxide, Panhards, and Pittsburg. All shows walk back to New York on tan oxford and railroad ties. Irreproachable actresses reserve the comic-landlady part for their mothers on Broadway and their step-aunts on the road. Kyrle Bellew's real name is Boyle O'Kelley. The ravings of John McCullough in the phonograph were stolen from the first sale of the Ellen Terry memoirs. Joe Weber is funnier than E. H. Sothern; but Henry Miller is getting older than he was.

All theatrical people on leaving the theatre at night drink champagne and eat lobsters until noon the next day. After all, the moving pictures have got the whole bunch pounded to a pulp.

Now, few of us know the real life of the stage people. If we did, the profession might be more overcrowded than it is. We look askance at the

players with an eye full of patronizing superiority—and we go home and practice all sorts of elocution and gestures in front of our looking-glasses.

Latterly there has been much talk of the actor people in a new light. It seems to have been divulged that instead of being motoring bacchanalians and diamond-hungry loreleis they are businesslike folk, students and ascetics with childer and homes and libraries, owning real estate, and conducting their private affairs in as orderly and unsensational a manner as any of us good citizens who are bound to the chariot wheels of the gas, rent, coal, ice, and wardmen.

Whether the old or the new report of the sock-and-buskiners be the true one is a surmise that has no place here. I offer you merely this little story of two strollers; and for proof of its truth I can show you only the dark patch above the cast-iron handle of the stage entrance door of Keetor's old vaudeville theatre made there by the petulant push

of gloved hands too impatient to finger the clumsy thumb latch—and where I last saw Cherry whisking through like a swallow into her nest, on time to the minute, as usual, to dress for her act.

The vaudeville team of Hart & Cherry was an inspiration. Bob Hart had been roaming through the Eastern and Western circuits for four years with a mixed-up act comprising a monologue, three lightening changes with songs, a couple of imitations of celebrated imitators, and a buck and wing dance that had drawn a glance of approval from the bass-viol player in more than one house—than which no performer ever received more satisfactory evidence of good work.

THE greatest treat an actor can have is to witness the pitiful performance with which all other actors desecrate the stage. In order to give himself this pleasure he will often forsake the sunniest Broadway corner between Thirty-fourth and Forty-fourth to attend a matinee offering by his less gifted brothers. Once during the lifetime of a minstrel joke one comes to scoff and remains to go through with that most difficult exercise of Thespian muscles—the audible contact of the palm of one hand against the palm of the other.

One afternoon Bob Hart presented his solvent, serious, well-known vaudevillian face at the box-office window of a rival attraction and got his d. h. coupon for an orchestra seat.

A, B, C, and D glowed successively on the announcement spaces and passed into oblivion, each plunging Mr. Hart deeper into gloom. Others of the audience shrieked, squirmed, whistled, and applauded; but Bob Hart, "All the Mustard and a Whole Show in Himself," sat with his face as long and his hands as far apart as a boy holding a hank