

London's "Bridge of Sighs."

WHERE ROMANCE MINGLES WITH TRAGEDY.

Close to Waterloo Bridge, on the south side of the Thames, there has stood for more than forty years a little coffee-stall, which, if it could speak, could tell of many a heart-breaking tragedy which has had its setting in the neighbourhood of London's melancholy "Bridge of Sighs," with its terrible toll of suicides.

Its occupant, Mr. George Jacoby, who now intends to retire to the more peaceful seclusion of an East-end shop, has been relating his reminiscences.

"Romance," he echoed, "Why, the whole street is full of romance."

"I remember one instance where a meeting at this stall was the means of setting a young fellow on the right road, after he had 'kicked over the traces a bit.' Of course, there was a girl in it—one of the sweetest, most natural young women who ever came out of Hampshire.

Love Finds a Way.

"Her boy, who was serving in the Hampshire Regiment, had quarrelled with his parents, and so bitter did he feel that he would not even spend his precious furloughs in the little country district to which he belonged.

"He tramped about the streets of London, and as he was staying at a soldier's home in Waterloo Road, naturally enough he used to stop at my stall almost every night for a cup of coffee.

"One night a pretty girl approached the stall. She asked me if I knew anything of a young soldier in the Hampshire, and described our young fellow exactly. Blushingly, she told me that she was his sweetheart, and had come to London to find him. He did not tell me all this right away, but, as soon as she gathered that I knew the man, and I had told her that probably he would be along shortly, she related these facts in shy little jerks.

"Then came the meeting. A well-built figure in khaki swung over the bridge and stepped into my stall's circle of light. There was a stifled cry of 'Jim!' an astonished and glad ejaculation of 'Doris!' and next minute they were in each other's arms. Two years later the same couple brought me a piece of wedding cake.

"There is the other side of the picture, of course. I would not like to say how many poor wretches, men and women, boys and girls, have passed by my stall on their way to take that horrible last plunge into eternity. My saddest thought is that perhaps, if they had stopped, and I could have helped them a little by taking away the gnawing pangs of hunger, there would have been no fatal, frenzied leap into the last, chill embrace of the dark, rushing waters.

"Another happy marriage I had a hand in arranging," he continued, "had nothing to do with love's young dreams. The parties were both getting on in years, and they came to know each other through the medium of an egg—yes, a common hen's egg. It happened this way.

Egg as Matrimonial Agent.

"One of my regular customers was a young fellow from Kensington. For years he used to have what he called his supper at my place, and I could have timed my watch by the regularity of his appearance. We used to have a chat over the racing prospects—he liked his little flutter—and often I looked forward to his coming to break the monotony of the long night. Well, for once, he decided to have a hard-boiled egg with his coffee.

"I handed over the egg, and suddenly he said, 'Here, George, there's some writing on this egg.' It was very dimly marked in pencil, and for some time neither of us could make out what it was. Then we discovered it to be a short message, saying something about—'If you're single, write to me; if you're married, pass it on.'"

"There was an address of a farm in Devonshire, and a name as well. My customer looked at it long and thoughtfully. 'I've a good mind to chance this, George,' he said. 'I'm getting old enough now, and a wife wouldn't be a bad speculation.'"

"I heard no more of the matter until a month later, when one night he said to me: 'I wrote to the egg address, George, and she's a widow with two children. Are you going to keep on writing?' I asked him, and he said he thought he would.

"He told me later that he had asked her for her photograph, but the reply was that if he wanted to see her at all, he must come to Devonshire. Well, the correspondence went on for about six months, when my customer made up his mind.

"He wrote asking if she could guarantee him a job, and promptly she told him that she could. Next day he packed up, took the train for the west, and the next I heard of him, he was a married man. The job she promised him was on her own farm, and now he is the happiest husband and the proudest stepfather in Devon."

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Tuning a Bell.

To the casual listener a bell has only one note—that produced by the actual contact of the hammer with the lip of the bell, or "bow."

But in addition to this predominant "strike note" every bell has other notes distinctly audible to the trained ear, and before a bell can be said to be in tune each of these must be strictly true.

Produced by different sections of the bell—the nearer the crown the higher the note—are three notes, a fifth, and an octave above the strike note; and below the strike note is the "hum note"—a grave note, representing the sum total of all the notes produced by the mass of metal.

The notes of a bell depend on diameter at various points between the sound bow and the crown. The larger the diameter the lower the note, and it is by varying these diameters that a bell is brought in tune.

The tuner's first task when he arrives at the foundry is to get away all traces of corrosion, though it does not put a bell out of tune, dulls its tone.

When cleaned the bell is placed resting on its crown, on a special vertical lathe consisting of a rotating platform with an arm with a sharp cutting tool, so angled as to cut the tool hangs from the inverted bell.

The tool is placed in position against the bell, the platform set rotating, and the diameter of any of the bell can thus be altered, scraping away the metal.

Careful adjustment and manipulation of the cutting tool is necessary to ensure the removal of exactly the right quantity of metal, as in a weighing four or five hundredths the removal of even four or five pounds of metal produces a detectable difference in the note.

To test the notes the tuner uses tuning-forks which vibrate at a known number of vibrations per second. Given the rate of vibration of the strike note, it is a simple calculation to arrive at the rates of vibration of the other notes, and he selects tuning-forks accordingly.

Having set the fork vibrating, he places the pointed end against the bell, which, if correctly tuned, will respond by producing the required note. In this way each note is tuned in turn.

Tuning usually consists of flattening the notes. A peal of bells, since there is no need of harmonising with other instruments, need not be tuned, like piano, to a standard pitch. The lowest bell is first tuned and the others brought into harmony with it, so that to sharpen a note is necessary.

Sharpening, however, is possible in certain cases by cutting away the edge of the sound-bow, and thus shortening the note.

Once a bell has been tuned it never gets out of tune, and the tuner's bell-timer owes much of his reputation to the fact that in bygone days the bells were hung the bell-tower had not the implements to tune them with perfect accuracy.

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