

know what you have to say for yourself."

Punchey sat tight and said nothing, while his wife clattered with cups and plates and kept up a running comment on her husband's short-comings. When she had stowed the crockery in the cupboard, she gave him her undivided attention.

"Are you going to sit there all day like a boggart in a field? Why don't you speak up like a man, and make a clean breast of it?"

Punchey persisted in obstinate silence for a long while, though his wife plied him with the heaviest calibre of her vocal artillery. At last he got up and put on his hat. Then, facing his wife with a bear-eyed grimace, he vouchsafed a few remarks:

"Look here, Mary, it ain't no use your palaverin'; it don't take no more effect than rain on a tomb-stone; and if you jaw till night you won't get another word out of me than what I tell you now."

He paused a moment to give full force to that assurance, and then he added:

"I've got into a hole, and I've got to get out of it, and that's what I'm going to do. And that's all you'll get by way of information on the subjick, so you'd better spare your breath."

With this final pronouncement, Punchey passed out of the cottage, and slammed the door behind him.

CHAPTER V.

Now whether that fracas at the "Bird in Hand" had anything to do with a certain incident that followed close in its wake, was never actually determined at the time. It caused flutter enough at the moment, but it soon faded into ancient history, passed away, and was forgotten.

If Sherlock Holmes had been about in those days, and the matter had happened to engage his attention, no doubt he would have sifted the details in such convincing style as to make all clear to the meanest intelligence. But there was no very efficient expert in the detective craft to piece together the scraps of evidence, and so the rights (or rather wrongs) of the matter were only shadowed in a murky twilight, which blurred the outlines beyond the discrimination of local insight.

But the editor's blue pencil will be wanted if we heat about the bush. "Straight to the point" is the rule with B.O.P. writers, and we must not break the rule.

One night, in the week after that disturbance at the "Bird in Hand," Tim Simpkins, who slept in Dawson's dormitory, was roused from sleep by the cries of the sea-gulls down below. Dawson had given strict orders that, if ever the birds were heard to give tongue while he was asleep, he was to be awakened immediately. He never felt entirely comfortable about that green-eyed black cat. The solemn darkness magnified the cat's

strength and ferocity into appalling proportions, while it caused the fir-poles and wire to dwindle into match-wood and brittle thread. If the beast were to make a determined onslaught upon Gull Castle it would surely effect a breach, and Harry shuddered at the thought of the result.

Simpkins listened a minute. The cries were repeated in snarling tones, betokening fear. He called in a loud whisper:

"Dawson! Dawson!" Then a little louder: "Harry! Harry! I say, Harry!"

"What is it?" asked a muffled, sleepy voice.

"The gulls are barking!"

"Eh? What? The gulls?" Harry sprang up, wide awake in a moment. He went to the window and cautiously opened it. The gulls were still uttering their cries of alarm.

"I do believe it's that beast of a cat!" said Harry, as he drew back. "I'll wake up Hercules. We must go down."

Hercules was a sound sleeper, and needed a deal of shoving before a weary growl could be extorted from him.

"Wake up, old snorer!" said Harry. "Wake up! The cat's after the gulls! We must go down!"

"Hang the cat!"

"That's what I want you to come and do!"

Hercules, ready for an adventure even when half asleep, rose up like a small earthquake.

"Fetch the lamp in the passage, Simpkins," said Harry. "We must put on a rag or two."

The lamp was fetched, and the two defenders hurriedly prepared.

Their felt slippers made no noise as they went downstairs.

"How shall we get out?" whispered Harry.

"Through the window of the dining-hall. Let us get a couple of stumps."

The boys slipped quickly along the passage to get the stumps, and then scudded for the dining-hall. While passing the pantry, Hercules suddenly pulled Harry's sleeve, and brought him to a halt. The pantry-door was ajar, and a light shone through the chink.

"Hush!" Hercules whispered. "There's some one in there. I believe it's a burglar!"

"Oh!" shuddered Harry. "What shall we do?"

"H'sh! Don't move! He sure to have a revolver!"

They listened breathlessly. They heard the faintest tinkle of silver.

"He's getting at the plate!"

"Ah! I daren't go in — do you?"

"No. Wait. Hark!"

Then Hercules pointed to the door of the dining-hall, a few paces down the passage. They tip-toed to it, and went in, leaving the door open, and screening the light of their lamp. Then in low whispers they debated over the next move.

"I think we ought to go and wake up Mr. Fields," said Hercules. "He's brave