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THE MISSING BILLS: AN UNSOLVED MYS-

TERY.

(From Blackwood's Edinburgh Mayazine.)

The death, last autumn, of a distant relation of the writer, leaves him free to publish the curious facts which are noted below. He has known them long, and often wished that, in these days when phenomena which were formerly termed supernatural are submitted to scientific and patient investigation, instead of being superciliously dismissed or weakly shuddered at, they might receive the attention of persons qualified to weigh and utilise, or pospossibly to explain them. But the witnesses felt a great—it ought, perhaps, to be said, a morbid-objection to the discussion of the story outside the family circle, and thus it has been kept comparatively secret for more than half a century. Care was, however, taken to procure their written testimony, so that the narrative is supported by evidence as clear and positive as purely documentary evidence can be. The writer has frequently heard from the

lips of the actors their accounts of what happened to them, and has no hesitation of putting forward what follows as entirely credible.

Mr. Ezekiel Burdon-locally known as Mr. Zeke Burdon-was one day seated in his counting-house in Sydney, New South Wales. He had been looking over the office book, which told him a very satisfactory tale; and after a little indulgence of clation at his success in life, he subsided into moralising, and was trying to pick out some of the proofs that men's fortunes are the natural and legitimate consequences of their actions. And this was by no means an investigation to be simply and readily made. Mr. Burdon was now, and had been for many years, an honest, fair-dealing, liberal for many years, an honest, fair-dealing, liberal man, as men went; nay, he was generous. But this had not always been with his character .-The circumstances connected long ago with his coming to New South Wales were not such as, according to the rules of poetical justice, would have insured prosperity. But prosperity had come, and glad as he was of her presence, he would have been glad also to justify it by the discovery of some conspicuous desert of his own. Sometimes he would think of the patriarch Joseph, and say to himself that possibly he, Ezekiel Burdon, had been allowed to fall into error chiefly as a means of bringing him to wealth and ease; that he had been sold to be a bond-servant, not principally for any moral obliquity in himself, but in order that good might be done to him at the latter end. If only (he was thinking now) he had gone along in the humdrum way, as his pastors and masters would have had him, what a different lot his would have been. He would for a cer-tainty have married Jessie Manders; they would, in respectable poverty-or, more likely, penury-have dragged up a destitute, uneducated family, and, worn out by want and care, have died or gone to the workhouse in middle age. But it had been ordained that Jessie should give him up and should marry comparatively well. She had been induced to discard him by the only cause which could have been effectual-namely, by the knowledge that he had disgraced himself: and she had afterwards married a well-to-do man, with whom she lived happily, who prospered in his calling, and who was a good husband and father. Ezekiel himself had, by force of circumstances, been guided things besides farming and commerce while he money from thence. She descended into the unexpectedly, and by a leading which was still was here. What has the lad been saying to hardly intelligible, to wealth and considera- you, Probity?"

and antecedents out there, -he had been happy in his short married life, in his children, and hearty and healthy, he was facing life's down-Burdon in a cynical, dare-devil spirit; he did not in his heart of hearts say that religion and morality were names wherewith to amuse children and drivellers, and that the wise were they only who had the courage to set both at restore her. defiance; he saw plainly how, if things had where he was wholly unable to influence them, his fate would have been most miserable; he would have preferred to discover some relation between his desert and his let; he was a puzzle to himself.

But when a man's own prosperity constitutes the puzzle, his mind can exercise itself thereon patiently enough; it is when things have gone crossly that he feels the wear and tear of working out the problem. And so, although Mr. Burdon never entirely saw how his fortunes harmonised with the eternal fitness of things, he did not tire of the subject, but than she liked to listen to; so she beat a rewould return to it again an again, whenever he might be disposed to contemplation. He was thinking over how the twelve months last past had been the most fortunate year that he had ever known, and wondering how it was that things prospered with him as they did, when he was aroused from his reverie by the opening of the door. A very pretty but very delicate-looking young woman stood on the threshold, apparently hesitating about advancing far-

"Oh, Probity, is that you? Come in, my child. Is anything the matter?"

"No, father-nothing is the matter; but I though-I thought, I should like to speak with

"Speak with me? Well, come and talk away then, Probity; but we generally manage our little businesess in the house. What is it _a bonnet ?''

" Nothing of that kind, father; and that is why I have come into the office to talk to you. It's something about business."

"Business, ch, you little puss? Why, what can you possibly have to say about business? Well, come then, let's have it."

Probity had seated herself by the time this as said. The excitement of going to her father at his desk, and of having to say to him something which she would rather not have been forced to say, evidently distressed her: her breathing was very agitated, and her color came and went. Ezekiel looked tenderly at her, and was conscious of a painful sensation at some association of ideas which he did not then pause to ascertain; for Probity, who wished to get her errand told, began to speak.

"Father," she said, "I heard you say this morning that you would send his money home to Robert Lathom when Mr. Waddington goes in the Kangaroo. Now the Kangaroo is a very slow vessel, as is well known. She may not get to England for many months, and in the send his money by that?"

"Why, what the deuce," said Zeke Burdon, with some astonishment, but not unkindly what have you to do with young men and their money, and the packets, and all that; ch, Lathom, with a view of ascertaining whether and setting forth the advantages of the plan,

"Only that, as I know it never makes any difference to you having to wait a little longer or shorter for your money, I feared you might forget that it isn't the same with Robert; and that by making him wait for Mr. Waddington,

you might cause him inconvenience or loss." "Well, that is not badly thought on, lass. Your little head has been more thoughtful than the old man's in this. We ought not to wait, and we won't. But look ye, Probity, we den't commonly send money home in coin. There's a better way than that. I shall draw bills on some English merchant who will give Lathom money for them; and to make the risk as small as possible, I can send duplicates, or even triplicates, by later ships, so that if a mischance should befall the first copy, it will be hard if the second or third does not turn up. However, what you say about delay is all right. I think I will send first copies by to-morrow's mail; Mr. Waddington may take the second; and, by the time he is ready, we shall find some that she could not get near him to ask the means of sending the third. That will do;

"Yes, thank you, father; I'm glad now that I spoke," said Probity, breathing freely again.
"Robert Lathom," observed Ezekiel, "is a

good, industrious young man, but I have some suspicion that he employed himself in other him by plunging into the sea, and bringing him

"I would," said he, "that Robert Lathom. come and take you to the old country, where you might learn to look stout and saucy again, thom, so often named. I don't half like these puny looks, and these pantings all about nothing at all. I can never there's anybody there extremely anxious to receive any member of my family; but if now (which means with another name, you know), that would be an excellent arrangement.'

These words were not altogether unpleasing to Probity's ear, but they were rather plainer treat from her father's presence, leaving that old gentleman rather less serene than she had found him. He repeated, as she went out, that the bills should be seen to at once, and said very reassuringly that there was nobody living whom he would more heartily welcome to his hearth than Robert Lathom, if ever he should come back again. And if words would have done it, for she knew that Lathom meditated a return to Sydney some day when he should have thriven a little, and she had doubted till know better than her father, and had been conscious for some time, that health and strength were deserting her. Her bitter thought now was, that when Robert should return, as he

surely would, she might be in her grave. As soon as his daughter had left the office, Mr. Burdon set about preparing the bills. He then wrote three copies of a letter to Mr. Lathom, and ordered that letters of advice in triplicate should be written to the firms on whom he had drawn his bills. When this was done his clerk was ordered to put up the three sets of despatches ready for transmission; and the clerk in a short time produced three packets with a strong family likeness, each of them addressed, of course, to Mr. Robert Lathom, and each having in the left-hand lower corner the words By favor of, then a blank, and then, Esq. The cause of this last endorsement was that Ezekiel, for some reason or other-probably some prejudice of his early days-had a dislike to, and distrust of, the mail-bags: where he possibly could do so, he sent his letters by private hands. So his envelopes were always prepared for that mode of transmission. Now an acquaintance of his named Muller was about Frankfort, where his friends resided; and Mr. Burdon hoped that he would take charge of a letter, and post it in England before proceeding to the Continent. Muller did take charge of one copy: and Mr. Waddington, when he a week or two after sailed in the Kangaroo, took that on his arrival he would himself write to the remittance was soon enough for his requirements. The young girl was evidently much troubled in mind about the transmission of this money; and her father, after wondering much why she fretted so, concluded that some passing fear or fancy had presented itself to her mind, and in her present low condition she had not strength to banish it. He therefore, with the hope of comforting her, would frequently calculate the progress which the packet and the Kangaroo must have made, and the probable date of the arrival of each, showing that the latter ship even must reach England before Lathom could be in need of more money. And it was one of these kind computations and assurances which one day drew from Probity the confession that she had a dream which had greatly impressed her and raised the alarm .-She said she fancied she had made a long passage through the air to some house where she saw Robert sorely troubled and in danger, but cause of his grief, and that she was consequently in great agony, when an old man with a white beard appeared to her, and in foreign ac- in those days than they are now, and the surcents told her that Robert's distress was caused by his having been disappointed of expected remittances of money, but that she could help waters accordingly, and as she did so, awoke

lised now why it was that her look made him the beard haunted her still, he was so life-like; mercantile, a combination not likely to be

measure came about. Mr. Lathom, who for pool, was one evening called to attend an ec-

you zee." for he sent Lathom notices from time to time of some excellent way of employing money, and though the latter had not much to invest, the little that he had was very profitably placed. profession, but for his "zecond zon, Robert." the Jew proposed emigration to New Holland, where, he said, he had relations and friends

siness in those days, and, as a matter of course, plainly before them, disposing of all difficulties, had always liked the thoughts of the adventure, was duly despatched to the antipodes.

"He shall be reesh man, I bromise," said

"Well, I daresay he may," answered Lathom; "but of course he must abide his fortune as well as another."

"No, he is zure; I have bromised," repeated the Jew.

"As far as you can help him, I feel that he is sure," answered the father. "Don't imagine that I doubt your goodwill. I have had too many proofs of it for that."

"Well, believe what I tell you; he will brosber. I know it for zertain."

"How can you know it?" asked Lathom, smiling; "can you see into futurity?"

"Zertainly I can," answered Behrens, with the utmost coolness. "How does any one read the zecrets of the future, and know what iz to

And the old fellow stroked his white beard and looked at Lathom as if he would look through him. Beards were far less common ing his art upon him. It did, however, certainly happen that things went well with Rotion. He had married well as far as his wife

Again Probity showed signs of agitation, and dream as plainly as she ever saw him in her one of this firm who sailed in the packet, as they called a wizard's den. It was a one and her means were concerned—it was absurd again her color came and went. Burdon realife: the face and voice of the old man with has been said.) His employment was partly storied building, standing a little way out of

feel a pang. It was the same look which her she was sure that something terrible had hap-found except in a community of early settlers: mother's face wore long years ago; and her pened or was about to happen to Robert, fo it yielded him a good maintenance before long. in his business; and now, long a widower, but mother never again made a return towards the dream was not like ordinary dreams.— This, however, was but the beginning of suchealth or strength after he arst observed that Zeke Burdon did all he could to combat this cess. After he had made some acquaintance hill with complacency. Though these facts look. The girl made some confused remark in imagination, but he confessed that the awe with his profession, business threw him into the were so, they were not reflected on by Zeke answer to her father's question, of which he which had overcome his daughter in some sort way of Zeke Burdon, one of the leading men did not take particular heed. He was shocked affected him also, strong old fellow as he was, of the colony, who, knowing the name which by the thought just presented to his mind of and that he looked quite nervously to the time his lost Jessie now bore, soon made out that Probity's health giving way, and thinking that a change of climate and scene might possibly restore her.

When he should get advices of the packet have this was her son. Thereupon the favour of ing arrived safely in England. That packet Ezekiel was extended to Robert Lathom, never did reach England, but the Kangaroo and brought in its train the favor of many did: it will be best, however, that, before the another colonist. The encouragement which taken a different and more usual turn at a point or some equally respectable young man, would circumstances of her arrival are mentioned, a the young man enjoyed could not be exceeded, few words should be said about Robert La- and he showed himself to be entirely worthy of it, for he improved all his opportunities. Robert Lathom, then, was no other than a worked hard, and became noted as very able son of that very Jessie Manders whom Zeke and likely to grow wealthy. It need scarcely go to England again, and I don't know that Burdon remembered as his old sweetheart .- be added that his relations with Burdon led to Her feelings had been eruelly wrung when Eze- the affection between him and Burdon's daughkiel's good name was forfeited. In misfortune, ter which has been more than hinted at in the you could go home with a husband of your own in sickness, even in death she would not have course of the story. It existed for many months turned from him to another; but in his dis- before Robert went home again, and was, ingrace she had shown a spirit, and said she deed, to a great extent, the cause of his leaving. wished never to hear his name again. Not but it was a matter about which very little had long after Zeke had gone abroad she married a been said. Probity, who was a sort of princess young surgeon of the name of Lathom, making out there, could hardly without presumption. a match which all her peers considered a very or with a chance of success, he sought by a exalted one, but which brought its troubles young adventurer lately come out to try his nevertheless, for her husband had some difficul- fortune (for Lathom knew nothing of Ezekiel's ty in struggling into practice. Their whole former acquaintance with his mother); and history, however, we are not concerned with, both Probity and Robert, though their strongbut only so much of it as relates to the sending est wish was to live for one another somewhere. of Robert, their second son, to New South thought they would prefer that that somewhere Wales, and this is the way in which that should not be in New South Wales. Now Mr. Burdon, although he did not know how many years practised his profession in Liver- things stood between the young people, had not overlooked the possibility of this attractive pair now as to the reception that he might meet centric old man, a German Jew, who, though becoming attached. Callous and placid as he with. If it was a relief to know that her fa- suffering from a violent attack of illness, had for the most part was, nature had thought prother would not frown on Robert, that relief made no move toward summoning assistance, per to interweave with the tough fibre one only intensified another affliction. Probity until an acquaintance, having accidentally dis-siken thread of romance. The idea of Jessie's covered his condition, brought the surgeon to son and his daughter being united was not altohis bedside. The patient seemed poverty-gether unpleasing to him, and he often and stricken, and almost friendless; but he managed often turned the matter in his mind when he somehow to rouse the benevolence of Lathom's indulged himself with a reverie. But he, too, nature, who not only carefully prescribed for would have preferred that Probity should sethim, but furnished him with a nurse, and the in England; he thought that Robert should many comforts which he required. When the acquire both experience and property before old man recovered, Lathon refused all com- trying matrimony, and he desired that the pensation, and persisted in doing so after the Jew assured him that he was not so poor as he appeared to be.

| Journal of the desired that the lovers—if indeed they were lovers—should be parted for a season. "If," thought Zeke to himself, "he is fond of the girl, he will come "All the zame, I shall pay," said the Jew, for her when he is able to keep her; if not, it may be as well to separate them before she be-And somehow or other he did pay very well, comes too deeply attached. True, the separation may be the means of putting an end to a fancy which would otherwise ripen into love .--What if it be? There is no great scheme sacrificed nor great opportunity lost; time It was not, however, until Luthom had moved shall settle it." And so Zeke set himself to to a practice in Cheshire, and his family had realising a plan which had long been sketched grown up, that he began to feel how thorough- in his mind. He would establish at home a y the Jew was keeping his word about paying correspondent and agent who, though he should him. His eldest son was to follow his own be in business on his own account, should nevertheless trade principally if not solely with New South Wales, and should, by his knowledge both of the colonial and the home marto proceed to England by the mail, en route to who would put him in the way of making a kets, greatly assist the business at both ends. and produce a reciprocity of advantages. And A voyage to New Holland was a serious bu- thus it was that Robert found himself bound once more for England, to be settled at Liverboth Lathom and his wife hesitated before pool, his father's old place of residence, indeed giving consent to their son's going to the other his own birthplace. The latter meetings and side of the world. Behrens, however (that was the last parting of the lovers were tender and with him the duplicates, and promised Probity the Jew's name) put the whole arrangement so sad in the extreme, but they both saw in this arrangement a way to the hitherto unhoped-for fulfilment of their dearest wishes. Each felt the bills had reached him by packet, and that that the parents gave way, and Robert, who sure of the others constancy, and so, full of hope in their direct distress, they separated; and Lathom, when he could collect his thoughts, found himself on the bosom of the great Pacific's the waves gently smiting the good ship's sides, and New Holland only a dark line on the

The voyage was prosperous, as most things had been with the young man. He reached Liverpool in due time, and found (what he did not expect) a house ready to receive him there; for the Jew, who had heard of his movements. had written to tell his father to tell him that he was going to the Continent for some time, it might be for several years, and while he was absent Robert might reside in his house, and have the use of all that it contained at a very low rent. This offer had been accepted; his father had added to Behren's supelles what was wanted to make the place comfortable for a single man; and so, when Robert landed, he found that, instead of having to spend his time in looking out for a residence, he was able to stay a week with his parents. This visit over, he took to his business in good carnest, and did in no sort disappoint the good opinion which old geon felt a thrill as if a magician were exercis- Burdon had formed of him. Shrewd, diligent, and devoted, he soon found that he could give a great fillip to Zcke Burdon's business and bert Lathom. He made a quick and pleasant at the same time set himself trading in a movoyage out, and was received with much kind- dest but profitable way. After he became a ness by the Messrs. Muller, the relatives to little intimate with men of his own age, his with a cold shudder. She saw Robert in the whom Behrens had consigned him. (It was friends use to joke him about his house, which