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THE MISSING BILLS: AN UNSOLVED MYSTERY.

(From Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine.)

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 utilize, or possibly to explain them.

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 elation 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.

to inquire closely about people's connections and antecedents out there,—he had been happy in his short married life, in his children, and in his business; and now, long a widower, but hearty and healthy, he was facing life's downhill with complacency.

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.

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

"No, father—nothing is the matter; but I thought—I thought, I should like to speak with you."

"Speak with me? Well, come and talk away then, Probity; but we generally manage our little business 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, eh, 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 was 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.

"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 mean time the young man may be much straitened for want of the money. There is a packet to sail to-morrow. Wouldn't it be possible to 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; eh, Miss?"

"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 don'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 means of sending the third. That will do; won't it?"

"Yes, thank you, father; I'm glad now that I spoke," said Probity, breathing freely again.

lised now why it was that her look made him feel a pang. It was the same look which her mother's face wore long years ago; and her mother never again made a return towards health or strength after he first observed that look. The girl made some confused remark in answer to her father's question, of which he did not take particular heed.

"I would," said he, "that Robert Lathom, or some equally respectable young man, would come and take you to the old country, where you might learn to look stout and saucy again. I don't half like these puny looks, and these pantings all about nothing at all. I can never go to England again, and I don't know that there's anybody there extremely anxious to receive any member of my family; but if now you could go home with a husband of your own (which means with another name, you know), that would be an excellent arrangement."

These words were not altogether displeasing to Probity's ear, but they were rather plainer than she liked to listen to; so she beat a retreat 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 sent 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.

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 to proceed to England by the mail, en route to Frankfurt, 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 with him the duplicates, and promised Probity that on his arrival he would himself write to Lathom, with a view of ascertaining whether 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.

she was sure that something terrible had happened or was about to happen to Robert, for the dream was not like ordinary dreams.—Zeke Burdon did all he could to combat this imagination, but he confessed that the awe which had overcome his daughter in some sort affected him also, strong old fellow as he was, and that he looked quite nervously to the time when he should get advices of the packet having arrived safely in England.

Robert Lathom, then, was no other than a son of that very Jessie Manders whom Zeke Burdon remembered as his old sweetheart.—Her feelings had been cruelly wrong when Ezekiel's good name was forfeited. In misfortune, in sickness, even in death she would not have turned from him to another; but in his disgrace she had shown a spirit, and said she wished never to hear his name again. Not long after Zeke had gone abroad she married a young surgeon of the name of Lathom, making a match which all her peers considered a very exalted one, but which brought its troubles nevertheless, for her husband had some difficulty in struggling into practice.

"All the same, I shall pay," said the Jew, "you see."

A voyage to New Holland was a serious business in those days, and, as a matter of course, both Lathom and his wife hesitated before giving consent to their son's going to the other side of the world.

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

"No, he is sure; 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 brosher. I know it for certain."

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

And the old fellow stroked his white beard and looked at Lathom as if he would look through him. Beards were far less common in those days than they are now, and the surgeon felt a thrill as if a magician were exercising his art upon him.

mercantile, a combination not likely to be found except in a community of early settlers: it yielded him a good maintenance before long. This, however, was but the beginning of success. After he had made some acquaintance with his profession, business threw him into the way of Zeke Burdon, one of the leading men of the colony, who, knowing the name which his lost Jessie now bore, soon made out that this was her son. Thereupon the favour of Ezekiel was extended to Robert Lathom, and brought in its train the favor of many another colonist. The encouragement which the young man enjoyed could not be exceeded, and he showed himself to be entirely worthy of it, for he improved all his opportunities, worked hard, and became noted as very able and likely to grow wealthy.

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 Behrens's *suppléant* 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.