

ground. As he did so he was conscious of a faint hissing sound, then he jumped back with a queer sensation running up and down his spine and a funny creeping of the few remaining hairs at the back of his scalp.

Mr. Tunncliffe was a clean living man, and he did not for a moment doubt the evidence of his senses. There amongst the flowers was a shining, black, wriggling thing some two feet in length, with a wicked flat head, a pair of beady eyes, and a set of slim yellow fangs which evidently meant mischief. Tunncliffe knew something of natural history, and he had no difficulty now in recognising the venomous little reptile as the deadly black adder whose bite is quite as poisonous as that of the rattlesnake or cobra.

Tunncliffe stood there a little nonplussed as to know how to act. Doubtless the snake had been imported there amongst the moss and packing of one of the tropical flowers, and doubtless Mrs. McDougall had had an exceedingly narrow escape when she was picking those gorgeous blossoms just now. Tunncliffe fairly shuddered when he thought of it, as it occurred to him how he escaped a like catastrophe. He might have taken up some weapon and bashed that reptile out of shape and existence, but he could not bring himself to sacrifice the flowers. Whilst he was still standing there and wondering how to act for the best, the big Empire clock over the mantelpiece struck five.

The sound of the gong brought Tunncliffe to his senses. He could not hesitate to believe any longer that there was something utterly wrong here. He was a business man once again. He shut his eyes firmly and resolutely to anything but the business side of his visit. He laid his hand upon the bell. He could hear it rippling and pealing somewhere down in the basement. But no reply came. There was no suggestion of answering footsteps. The whole place was still and silent as the grave. With half his fortune at stake, even the horror of the black snake began to fall before the anxious eyes of the jeweller. Gently and by degrees he managed to coax the cloth off the table until the shining mahogany became bare. Then to Tunncliffe's astonishment he saw that the table was flat and desolate as the Sahara itself. Not one sign of the jewel cases remained. They appeared to have vanished like a conjuring trick, and nothing remained behind to give the slightest clue save a square hole in the floor, just about large enough to admit a man's body. As Tunncliffe bent over the table he saw that a square had been neatly sawn away and that a section of the middle of the mahogany worked on hinges and fastened with a spring bolt. The whole mystery was plain enough now, and Tunncliffe darted for the door.

It was locked firmly enough, and though he beat frantically upon the panels, it was of little avail. Then, as the full desolation and cruelty of the situation burst upon Mr. Tunncliffe, something seemed to snap in his head, and he sank to the ground with nothing about him but darkness and unconsciousness.

"I am afraid we shall not be able to give you any assistance," the superintendent from Scotland Yard said, in subsequently discussing the subject with the unfortunate jeweller. "You see, the thieves had too long a start altogether. As a matter of fact, it was the best part of two days before we found out your whereabouts, and even then we might have been unsuccessful if those people hadn't posted the keys to the house agent."

"And the real McDougall?" Tunncliffe asked feebly.

"My dear sir, the real McDougall is still in New York. The whole thing was a clever plan, a very clever plan, indeed. No doubt these people have been working it for the last two or three years. I can hold out very little hopes of your ever seeing your diamonds again. You will have to put up with it."

"But it was so real," Tunncliffe protested. And where on earth did he get those flowers from? That they were tropical blooms I am prepared to swear. And that snake, too. I shall never forget the horror of it. You don't mean to tell me that that was part of the plan, too?"

"Well, you see," the chief said thoughtfully, "some of these people are quite artists in their way. When I tell you that the black adder was carefully attached to a rope of flowers by a silk cord, and that his poison fangs had been carefully extracted first, you will appreciate how thoroughly these people went in for their work. You see, there was always a chance of you getting suspicious and beginning to make a fuss before our friends got clear of the house. To get away they were bound to employ cabmen and people of that sort, and if you discovered your loss and made a great disturbance before they were ready, things might have proved awkward. That is why

they set the black adder as a kind of sentinel to guard the jewels. As to the hole in the floor and the hinges in the table, that was an easy matter. You may depend upon it that your diamonds had vanished almost before the so-called McDougall left the dining-room. No, you will never see your gems again."

And the astute detective was correct.

Good Talk About Talk

At a recent meeting of the Canadian Club of Halifax, Mr. Justice Russell addressed the members most happily on "The real, substantial and abiding utility of preaching." Under the last term Judge Russell included not only the preaching from the pulpit, but the sermons that are preached to us by the newspaper press during six days of the week, the articles in our magazines, the lectures before various societies, the political appeal and all the various methods by which through vocal or written speech an effort is made to produce conviction on the topics that must engage public attention. The speaker verily chose a broad subject with which he dealt in a style both practical and scholarly.

"We all remember," said Judge Russell, "Carlyle's noisy laudations of the beauty and blessedness of silence and his ponderous sarcasms about the babbledom of our parliamentary institutions. There are superior persons every here and there who, without a particle of Carlyle's genius, feel entitled to share Carlyle's contempt for the whole apparatus of controversy by which the affairs of self-governing communities are debated and settled. . . . These lofty and superb spirits, noting the conflicts of opinion by which lesser people are stirred and the agitating controversies in which they are engaged, vote the whole thing a bore and betake themselves to the seclusion of their club and the strenuous and edifying intellectual competitions of bridge and poker."

Judge Russell referred humorously to the great amount of modern talk, but showed by historic reference to the passing of certain superstitions and errors that "there can be no doubt that it is talk, somebody's, anybody's, everybody's talk by which these changes are wrought. None ever talks freely about anything without contributing something, let it be ever so little, to the unseen forces which carry the race on to its final destiny." The speaker also showed that neither the clergyman nor the politician could discuss certain matters of general public import in the independent fashion, which is the ideal of the Canadian Club. He indicated briefly and suggestively some of the provincial and national problems which may properly be discussed by the members of such an organisation.

One of the most discriminating features of this stirring address was the reference to the chaotic ideas of the average Canadian regarding the Dominion's place in the British Empire. "Our position is illogical and untenable. We hold the mother country responsible in every difference, we may have with our neighbours. She must be ready to fight the United States if they encroach upon our Atlantic fisheries or treat us unfairly about the Behring Sea seals, or deal sharply with us in the matter of the duty on lobster cans, or seek to get the better of us in such controversies as that of the Alaskan boundary. But when it comes to the question of a contribution to the support of the fleet that protects our commerce in every part of the habitable globe, it is utterly impossible for us to discover any way of handing over a single cent for its maintenance."

The lecturer closed his address with an eloquent expression of his belief that in any great imperial danger, Canada would respond to the need of the Mother Country. "If this is really at bottom the feeling of the people of this country, all that the sane imperialist contends is simply that, now in a season of calm weather, we should expend a little forethought upon the means by which in such an emergency our help may be made effective."

Unmerited Vilification

Great Britain is described by foreign critics as at once the most greedy and the most stolid of nations. It lacks both imagination and chivalry. Its policy is mere selfishness, qualified by stupidity. Yet what other nation than the British would be capable of giving back to a conquered land its independence, and entrusting its administration to the general of the defeated race! Imagine Germany doing this is Alsace.—"Life," Melbourne.