

The Hotel Clerk's Story

"That was an all-right narrative in the Sunday Sun about the snags that the hotel manager runs into in the course of a day's work. But the day of the hotel manager is one long dream of hammock-swinging, hours and jugs beneath the bough, compared with the diurnal whizz of the average man behind the desk," said a New York hotel clerk who is famed over the land for his patience and shrewdness.

"The hotel manager can get away. The man behind the desk can't. When things begin to get a little too swift for the manager, he can point both hands to the zenith, and mentally declare everything off, clap on his hat and rush out into the air to cool off. But the man behind the desk has got to stay right there and fight 'em until the end of his watch.

"If there's any known job that's calculated to cause the man holding it down to long hundreds of times over to be sitting alongside some little old creek a-fishin', that job's the hotel clerk's.

"Come up to my flat some day and I'll give you a copy of my little brochure entitled 'Eighteen Thousand Immemorial Kicks of Hotel Guests.' For the next edition I'm going to amplify the treatise and make it 80,000 kicks. I'm taking over-doses of nerve tonic right now for the purpose of hauling myself together from the effects of a kick that spread all over the house only yesterday.

"It all fell on me. The manager saw the impending doom, and he passed me the vindictive smile and went out for a drive on the Speedway until he knew it would be all over. It was about the water.

"Every drop of water used in this house is filtered. Yesterday morning the filtering apparatus curled up on us and had to be taken apart for repairs. It just happened that coincidentally with the temporary suspension of business of the filtering layout the water was turned off on us for an hour owing to a break in the pipe caused by a subway blast.

"Well, for about an hour after the water was turned on again the fluid was of about the color of a passe blood orange and the consistency of maple syrup—and, of course, this had to happen when our filtering plant was being tinkered with in sections by tired plumbers.

"You ought to have heard them pile into me. They came flocking from all over the house, and they all but accused me of maliciously making my way to the reservoir and hurling half a ton of ochre or shellac into it. They wouldn't listen to any explanation of any kind. The manager, as I say, foreseeing the wrath to come, had ducked, and I got it all. One old Englishman yelled at me that he was going to write to the Times—Lunnon Times, y'know—about the infamy, and so I've got a first-rate, even money chance of being held up to odium in the pages of the Thunder before the gaze of my friends of the American colony in London.

"There's an amiable little fiction, universally current, that commercial travellers are a jolly, happy-go-lucky lot, and as easy to get on with as shaking the jelly of a piece of lemon meringue pie with a fork. There are few dreamer notions than this. The drummers have got a kick coming for every hour on the dial, and few of them ever permit a chance to make a kick to get away from them.

"Most of them possess a rooted idea, amounting to an obsession, that they've got perpetual and perennial mortgages on certain rooms in the hotels they patronize on their rounds. They wire ahead a couple of days, as a rule, for 'my room,' and when the drummer who does this arrives at his hotel and finds that 'his' room is occupied he invariably puts up a snort that would make anything of that kind in a Mexican bull ring sound like the sneeze of a snail.

"He isn't mollified a little bit when the clerk tells him that the individual occupying 'his' room is going to give it up in a few hours and he mumbles dark forecastings as to what would probably happen to the hotel supposing that he (the drummer) should take it into his head to pack his grip across the way 'to the other house.'

"Then, the drummers are nearly always in a state of grouch about their mail and telegrams. If, when they arrive, they don't find waiting for them in the rack a stack of letters and despatches from their firms they give you the meaningful gaze which plainly hints their suspicion that you've withheld these communications from them for designing, if not criminal, purposes of your own.

"Then, the superstitions about

numbers gives us many a bad quarter of an hour per annum. There's no No. 13 room in this house. The room that formerly had that number was re-numbered years ago because everybody side-stepped it and would not have it on any consideration. And yet, every once in a while, some crank drifts along and demands that he be given room 13 — says that that's his lucky, win-out number.

"When we tell him that we haven't any room 13 on the chart he asks us why we don't sell out and start a tavern up in Skagway, where the conditions would suit us better.

"A few years ago the number idiots sprang a new one. They wouldn't have any room the number of which was divisible by 13. It didn't take this bunch long to increase so largely that now we haven't any 26, 39, 52, 65, 78, 91, 104, 117, or 130 rooms. Whenever a man walks in now and hands me that list of numbers, all written out on a little card like a policy slip, and tells me that he can't under any circumstances accept a room with any one of those numbers tacked on the door, it's pleasant to be able to smile cheerfully in his teeth and tell him that we ain't got no such numbers on the chart of the house. And some of 'em dislike having the wind taken out of their sails in this fashion.

"Then there is the tribe of men who have prejudices against certain numbers for individual reasons. There is one man who always comes to this house—he's postmaster of a big western city now—who has a violent detestation for the number 17. Last time he was here the only room that suited his requirements—front, second floor, with bath—was 17. He came near falling down when we handed him the key, and he took another room that didn't at all suit his requirements. When he went away the cashier cooked up a little job on him and made his bill an even \$17 — the bill really amounted to \$17.25.

"When the postmaster saw the bill he turned white and gave a clutch at his forehead, he spent half an hour with the cashier trying to figure the bill either over or under \$17, but the thing couldn't be done, and so he missed his train by going into the dining room and eating another dinner, which made his bill \$18.50. But he went away with a contented smile.

"Back in the '80s we had a suicide in this house. It happened in one of the best rooms. The room was completely refurnished, but people who stop at hotels read the newspaper despatches about these affairs, and they had us pat about that room until we abandoned the number. But there still remain about a dozen old-time guests of the house who remember that suicide and you couldn't drive one of 'em into that room with a pack of mastiffs.

"Many of the elderly ladies who come here make it a practice to turn down the bed coverings when they are shown a room. They want to make sure that the bed linen is bleached, I suppose. If it doesn't measure up to their idea of whiteness, the man behind the desk is the boy who hears from them. It always makes the bellboy very tired to see the fussy old persons turning over the bed coverings. We were compelled to fire, on complaint, one bellboy who when an old lady did this, said to her, 'D'ye t'ink them sheets has been used as tarpaulins, lady?'

"On the subject of beds, here's another one touchin' on an' appertainin' thereto. About eight years ago the proprietor of this house fitted up about half of the rooms in the hotel with fine folding beds, at an average cost of about \$125 per bed. He was a strong advocate of the folding bed idea, and he wanted to be up to date.

"Now, after the beds were nicely installed, there began an epidemic of folding-bed accidents throughout the country, and the newspapers made a great deal of these accidents. That virtually sealed the doom of the hotel folding bed, about five years ago. Our proprietor had to have 'em carted down to the auction room, and he was out about \$20,000 on his little folding-bed transaction.

"The women guests who are not out-and-out kickists have other little peculiarities that keep the man behind the desk busy being sad with himself, on account of the other kicks that these peculiarities produce. For example, we've got an iron-clad rule in this house against dogs of all degrees, high or low, coarse or refined, but the women guests smuggle the dogs in on us, all the same.

"Once the dogs are got in, they can't be got out by any means short of ordering the women guests out.

and this is not often practicable or possible. The mutts are all right in the rooms while their mistresses are with them, but when they are deserted for shopping tours or the like they set up their plaintive wailing and yowling. Then the man behind the desk has to stand for hot moans from guests located in rooms within half a block of the room containing the querulous canine.

"Then there's the piano. From the day it is installed in her room she drums on it incessantly, using it as an aid to her vocal lessons. Then the man behind the desk has to listen to the wails of anguish that the guests situated around the pianist's room fetch to him.

"The clerk also has to deal with the cranks who don't want running water in their rooms, for fear of sewer gas. Likewise the folks who wouldn't think of taking rooms that weren't right alongside the fire escapes. These people are all from Missouri obviously, and they want the man behind the desk to show 'em the fire escapes—the bellboy won't serve.

"The jealousies of the ladies who take rooms for the season have also to be assuaged by the clerk. A couple of weeks ago a dressy old lady, who has been with us for the season for a number of years, visited the room of a young married woman. In the latter's room she saw a chiffonier that had a side glass reaching to the floor. The old lady came to me with an instant demand for one of those chiffoniers. I told her that the one in the young married woman's room was the only one in the house.

"Very well, you may give me that one," she said, tossing her nice old white ringlets, and I spent half an hour trying to convince her that we couldn't take furniture out of one guest's room to give it to another. I couldn't get away with it, though, and she had moved over the way to the rival hotel before sunset that evening.

"Um, ye-es," wound up the hotel clerk with the reputation for patience and suavity, "the house manager rams into a partially-submerged rock or two in the course of his day but if you want to see the hotel official who's all the time on the lee shoals in a typhoon, and no chance to scud away even under a jury rig, all you've got to do is to take a look at the man behind the desk." — New York Sun.

Peace Articles Signed.

London, June 2.—In the house of commons today the Hon. A. J. Balfour announced the terms of peace in South Africa as follows:

"His Excellency Lord Milner, in behalf of the British Government, His Excellency Mr. Steyn, General Brenner and General De Wet and Judge Hertzog, acting in behalf of the Orange Free State, and General Schalkburger, General Reitz, General Louis Botha and General Delarey, acting in behalf of their respective burghers, desiring to terminate the present hostilities, agree to the following terms:

"The Boer forces in the field will forthwith lay down their arms and hand over all their guns, rifles and ammunition of war in their possession or under their control and desist from further resistance and acknowledge King Edward VII. as their lawful sovereign.

"The manner and details of this surrender will be arranged between Lord Kitchener and Commandant General Botha, assisted by General Delarey and Chief Commandant De Wet.

"Second—All burghers outside the limits of the Transvaal and Orange River Colony and all prisoners of war at present outside South Africa who are burghers, will, on duly declaring their acceptance of the position of subjects of His Majesty, be brought back to their homes as soon as means of transportation be provided and means of subsistence assured.

"Third—The burghers so returning will not be deprived of their personal liberty or property.

"Fourth—No proceedings, civil or criminal, will be taken against burghers surrendering, or so returning, for any acts in connection with the prosecution of the war. The benefits of this clause do not extend to certain acts contrary to the usage of war which had been notified by the commander in chief to the generals and which shall be tried by court martial after the close of hostilities.

"Fifth—The Dutch language will be taught in the public schools of the Transvaal and Orange River Colony where the parents desire it, and will be allowed in the courts of law for the better and more effectual administration of justice.

"Sixth—Possession of rifles will be allowed in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony to persons requiring them for their protection on taking a license according to law.

"Seventh—The military adminis-

tration of the Transvaal and Orange River Colony will at the earliest possible date be succeeded by civil government, and as soon as circumstances permit representative institutions leading up to self-government will be introduced.

"Eighth—The question of granting the franchise to natives will not be decided until after the introduction of self-government.

"Ninth—No special tax will be imposed on landed property in the Transvaal or Orange River Colony to defray the expenses of the war.

"Tenth—So soon as the conditions permit a committee, on which the local inhabitants will be represented, will be appointed in each district of the Transvaal and Orange River Colony under the presidency of a magistrate or other official for the purpose of assisting in the restoration of the people to their homes and supplying those who, owing to war loss, are unable to provide for themselves, with food, shelter and the necessary amount of seed, stock and implements, etc., indispensable to the resumption of their normal occupations.

"His Majesty's government will place at the disposal of these commissions the sum of £3,000,000 (£15,000,000), and will allow the notes issued under the law of 1900 of the South African republic and all receipts given up to officers in the field of the late republics or under their orders to be presented to a judicial commission, which will be appointed by the government, and if such notes and receipts are found by this commission to have been duly issued in return for valuable considerations, they will be received by the first named commissions as evidence of war losses suffered by the persons to which they were originally given.

"In addition to the above named free grant of £3,000,000, His Majesty's government will be prepared to make advances on loans for the same purposes free of interest for two years, and afterwards repayable, with 3 per cent. interest. No foreigner or rebel will be entitled to benefit under this clause.

After he had concluded reading the peace agreements, Mr. Balfour proceeded: "There are certain important points not dealt with in the document I have just read and which was signed Saturday night. Therefore, it may be convenient if I read a dispatch from Lord Kitchener to the secretary of state for war, which reads as follows:

"His Majesty's government must place on record that the treatment of the Cape and Natal governments, who have been in rebellion and who now surrender, will return to their colonies will be determined by the colonial courts and in accordance with the laws of the colonies, and any British subjects who have joined the enemy will be liable to trial under the law of that part of the British empire to which they belong.

"His Majesty's government is informed by the Cape governments that their views regarding the terms to be granted to British subjects in Cape Colony now in the field or who have been captured or surrendered since April 12, 1902, are as follows:

"With regard to the rank and file, they should all, after surrender and giving up their arms, sign a document before the resident magistrate of the district in which they surrender, acknowledging themselves guilty of high treason and the punishment to be accorded them, provided they are not guilty of murder or acts contrary to the usages of civilized warfare, shall be that they are not entitled for life to be registered as voters or vote in any parliamentary or provincial council or municipal election.

"With reference to the justices of the peace, field cornets and all others who had official positions under the government of Cape Colony or who have been occupying positions of authority or who have held commands in rebel or burgher forces, they shall be tried for high treason before the ordinary courts of the country or such special courts as may hereafter be constituted, their punishment to be left to the discretion of such court, with the proviso that in no case shall the penalty of death be inflicted.

"The Natal government is of the opinion that the rebel should be dealt with according to the law of that colony.

"These arrangements," concluded Mr. Balfour, "the government has approved."

The following message from King Edward to the people was issued after midnight Sunday:

"The king received the welcome news of the cessation of hostilities in South Africa with infinite satisfaction, and trusts peace will be speedily followed by a restoration of prosperity in his new domains, and the feeling necessarily engendered by war will give place to earnest co-operation on the part of His Majesty's South African subjects in promoting the progress of the country."

How greatly the king's insistence that peace be secured prior to the coronation influenced the present agreement will probably never be known until the private memoirs of the present regime are given to the public.

An Editor Trowned.

Sausalito, Cal., May 8. — Edmond D. Sparrow, editor of the Sausalito Advocate, has filed an action in the Superior Court of Marin county against Thomas G. Frost, a saloon-keeper, for damages in the sum of \$13,100. The complaint alleges an assault upon the editor on March 31 last, when he was beaten by Frost until he became insensible.

Editor Sparrow has been particularly active in the local campaign against the pool-room element of the town. Frost took exception to an article in Sparrow's paper and the complaint says that a week ago Mon-

day he lay in wait for the editor on Water street and, seizing the latter by the throat, struck him in the face and battered his head against a concrete wall. Sparrow fell to the sidewalk, but Frost did not desist. The complaint filed yesterday states that he then searched the editor's pockets to ascertain if he were armed. The saloon-keeper then, as the complaint goes on to say, placed his knees upon Sparrow's arms, pinning him to the pavement, and continued to pummel him until he became senseless.

Sparrow alleges that his teeth were loosened, his lips, tongue and inside of his mouth badly cut, eyes blackened and both ears swollen. In addition to all this the editor sets forth that he has had a continuous headache from the time of the assault until the present.

The defendant is a muscular man, weighing 200 pounds, while the plaintiff is of slight physique.

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