

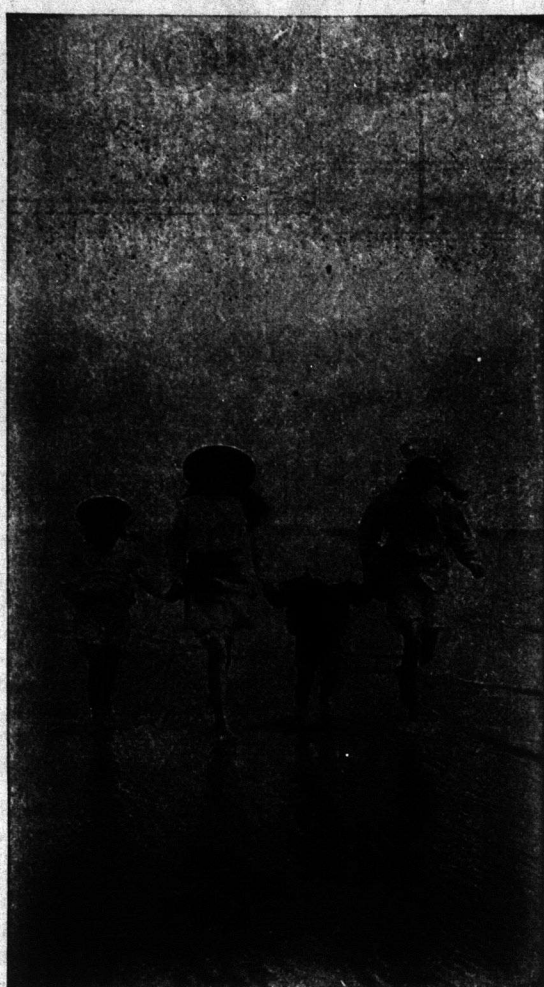
"Nymphs of the
Ocean."

Negative taken on

"Wellington"

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DIRECT FROM THE LOOM TO THE CONSUMER

The Man in the Chest.

By KATHARINE TYNAN.



HE clock over the
stables at Idlethorpe
Hall had just struck
one o'clock. The
whole household
might have been sup-
posed to be asleep.
But there was a
light in the great
hall, which the person who placed it
there had not troubled to hood over.

The person was Bill Nixey, a London
cracksman. He had been prospecting in
the neighborhood, and, through a casual
acquaintance with a pretty and frivol-
ous housemaid, he had discovered that
Idlethorpe contained a deal of desirable
treasure—gold plate and silver plate,
things easily broken up and dropped
into the melting pot.

More, the job was made so easy to
his hand that it would have been a sin
to have brought anyone else into it.
It was the very last crib he was going
to crack. After this he was going to
lead a respectable life. Of all things, a
little farm was the thing he desired.
He was going to marry Sarah Jane
Evans, with whom he had walked out
these three months back. Sarah Jane
was a respectable, chapel-going girl.
Perhaps it was she who had turned
Bill's heart to the desire of honest liv-
ing. She had no idea that Bill, who
was known to her as William Jones, was
anything but the locksmith's young man
he represented himself to be. And to
do Bill justice he had not been tempted
to burgle Sarah Jane's mistress, a rich
and timid old lady who left her valu-
ables on the hall-table every night with
a pathetic appeal to burglars to help
themselves so long as they did not dis-
turb the sleeping inmates of the house.

As Bill put his loot together in con-
venient bundles for transportation, al-
though that was a word he would have
scorned to make use of—he had dis-
covered some beautiful hollow trees in
Idlethorpe Wood where the heavy
things might lie safe till the hue and
cry was over—he thought with indigna-
tion of Hannah, the pretty housemaid,
and the rest of the staff of servants at
Idlethorpe Hall.

"Sarah Jane 'ud never ha' done it,"
he said to himself. "Ere's the master
and missus gone to Monty Carlo to see
the last of a sick old gent wot's the
master's uncle. An' 'ere's these 'ere
old crusted family servants left in
charge of the 'ouse an' the two little
girl kids that's the apple of their
parents' eye. An' 'ere's those bloomin'
servants gone off to a dawnee at the
Ring o' Bells, a-leavin' of an empty
'ouse to the two little girl kids. There
might be chaps 'ud frighten 'em out o'
their pretty wits. It's well for you,
my dears, sieepin' so sound in your
pretty nighties, that Bill Nixey's known
in the perfession as the Polite Burglar.
Sickenin' thing human nater is when
you come to think on it!"

He had thought of what a pity it
was he could not tell Sarah Jane about
the untrustworthiness of those servants
and listen to her honest denunciations
of them. He might tell it to her, of
course, as something he'd read in the
newspapers. Still, once Sarah Jane had
made an honest man of him, he was
going to keep the conversation off
burglars and burglary till such time as
he could trust himself not to be nervous.

He was doing his packing-up leisurely.
He had inspected the ballroom and
supper-room at the Ring o' Bells. The
festivities there would not break up
before five o'clock, at which hour he
intended to board the night mail at
Foulsby Junction; so there was no
great hurry.

But suddenly his heart gave a jump,
or perhaps it was Sarah Jane's heart
which he had exchanged for his own.
He had heard a sound of whispering,
the pattering of slippers, on a
distant stair.

He looked about him frantically. The
first thing he did was to blow out the

light. He had not much time to think
of a hiding place. If he had had time,
one of the suits of armour would have
been excellent. But there was no time.
No time either to put the bundles out
of sight.

Beside his hand was an old oak chest.
He had looked into it and seen that it
was empty; had noticed, too, that the
lock had been removed, leaving a hole
about the size of a penny where it had
been. Bill was a small man. He lifted
the lid of the chest, got inside, and let
the lid down gently upon him.

"Pretty dears," he said to himself,
as he lay doubled up uncomfortably on
his hands and knees; "I don't want to
scare 'em. Drat 'em; why couldn't they
have gone on sleepin'?"

The twin daughters and co-heiresses
of Sir John Vivash, of Idlethorpe Hall,
had appeared in the doorway that led
from the great staircase into the hall.
They stood a moment in the doorway,
while their candle burnt up and threw
a light on the darkness.

There was something in the position
which appealed to Bill's not naturally
hard heart. By twisting himself round
a little bit he was able to put his eye



"He looked about him frantically."

to that hole where the lock had been.
"Pretty dears!" was his thought.
"What man that was a man could go
for to hurt them?"

The Misses Vivash were indeed ex-
tremely pretty. They were just six-
teen years old, and had yet an alluring
air of childhood about them. Their
rounded cheeks and black silken curls,
their beautiful blue eyes and red lips,
made them look a little like very
pretty French dolls. At this moment
they were dressed in pink quilted-silk
dressing gown and their little
bare feet were thrust into pink
slippers. Below the dressing-gowns
their white night-attire trailed on the
ground. They had the dewiness and
roundness and softness of children
new-waked from sleep, although at the
moment they were looking disturbed.

"Where do you suppose they can be,
Iris?" asked Dahlia, as they stood
peering into the hall, dimly lit by the
candle Iris was holding over her head.

"I don't know," answered Iris, in a
determined voice. "All I know is that
they have left us alone in the house
and that they shall find themselves
locked out when they return. They
may have gone this way, the wretches."

Her spirit made Bill smile to him-
self in the chest.

She advanced towards the square
glass enclosure beyond which was the
hall-door, and had almost passed the
hurdles which Bill had been making up
so carefully when her foot knocked up
against one. She bent down to look.

"Why, Dahlia," she cried, "look here!