

THE "OLD  
SOMERSET" DEAL

At the back of Pitt Street, in Sydney, New South Wales, there once stood a large block of business offices, which for these purposes we will call Grenville House, though that is not the correct name. A few years back they were demolished in the course of some public improvements.

One doorway in Grenville House was completely surrounded by brass plates containing such legends as "The Blue Point Diamond Co., Ltd."; "The Never Never Concessions, Ltd."; "The Tintaroo Exploration Co., Ltd." Altogether there must have been nearly twenty of these brass plates, and in a corner of each were the words, "Sydney Agent—Mr. B. Wenter."

To put it plainly, Mr. B. Wenter was the spider and these brass plates were portions of his web. This gentleman managed to make an excellent income by fraud and trickery, and yet always to evade the clutches of the law. His favorite occupation was to get hold of miners just down for a spree from "up country," with their pockets full of gold, and show them how to enjoy themselves. Much of their wealth was transferred to the pockets of their astute guide, and amongst those miners who knew him he possessed a gaudy name.

In those days the gold fever was at its height, and raw hands flocked into the Colony thinking that all they had to do was to buy a shovel and scoop up gold into heaps. These gentlemen were the joy of Mr. Wenter's heart; they were so trusting and so eager to make money that on Mr. Wenter's advice they spent it like water—water that flowed like a waterfall into Mr. Wenter's banking account.

Now it chanced one morning that an elderly man, who looked very ill at ease in a frock-coat suit, and who had plainly stamped on him that he was from up country—it chanced that this gentleman paused outside Grenville House, and began to study the names of the various business men who rented offices therein.

He meandered slowly along until he came to Mr. Wenter's door. He read through all the names on the brass plates with a certain amount of trouble, and appeared to be profoundly impressed. From a corner of his office, like the spider in a corner of his web, Mr. Wenter lurked, and surveyed his prospective victim with approval.

For some moments the new-comer hesitated, and then pushed open the office door. By now Mr. Wenter was at his table, scribbling away for dear life.

"Good morning, sir," said the client.

Mr. Wenter continued to write—evidently he was so engrossed that he did not hear the salutation.

"Good morning, sir," repeated the stranger, this time in a louder key. "I hope I am not troubling you." He made as though to withdraw, which brought Mr. Wenter very quickly to his feet.

"Good morning, good morning!" he cried. "Have you been waiting? I am exceedingly sorry, but I have got a big Government contract in hand, and it has kept me very busy."

"I've got a little property for sale," said Mr. Wenter's client. "It's a mine up beyond Limbula Creek. I've stuck at it for many years and saved a few thousand, and now I want to go to the old country to spend them. There's plenty of gold up at Old Somerset—that's the name of the mine, but it wants new machinery and capital, and I don't feel equal to the strain either on myself or my pocket. My name is Gregory—John Gregory. Here's the title-deeds and a map of the country." He pushed over a roll of papers to Wenter.

"H'm!" remarked Mr. Wenter. "I dare say I can find you a customer if the mine is worth anything—I must see it first, of course. My terms would be 2½ per cent. commission on the sale, and expenses. Have you any figure in mind?"

"I reckon the mine is worth twenty thousand," replied Mr. Gregory. "When it is worked properly it will be worth five times that sum."

"Well, I'll see what I can do, Mr. Gregory. But, as I said, I must go and see the mine."

"I am at your service any time this week," replied the mine-owner. "Shall we say the day after tomorrow, then?"

"That will suit me," said Mr. Gregory. "There's a train to Limbula at nine o'clock. We shall get to the mine then at about twelve. Will that suit you?"

"Yes, I think I can manage," replied Wenter, thoughtfully though he knew he had no other engagement.

"Then I'll meet you under station clock at ten minutes past nine," remarked Mr. Gregory, took his leave.

"I wonder if there's anything to be made out of the deal?" muttered Wenter. "Anyway, I shall lose anything by a trip to Limbula even if I do nothing."

So at the appointed hour he and Mr. Gregory, and the two travelled to Limbula. Here Gregory hired a rough cart and drove across to the Old Somerset Mine.

"Come along," he said, leading Wenter to the shaft.

"Lower away, Lily," he remarked to a black boy in charge of the windlass.

"Yes, boss," answered the boy, and presently the two men were down in the bowels of the mine.

Mr. Gregory led Wenter through various galleries, and the latter speedily saw that, as his client said, the mine was full of valuable ore. He broke off lumps here and there, going well in, in order to see whether the ground had been worked. But it was very evident that the gold was in true vein and there was nothing whatever suspicious about it.

"What does it pan out to be, Mr. Gregory?" he asked.

"Roughly speaking, an ounce and a half to two ounces a ton, so it is a good paying mine. Even now I've gone so far," Mr. Gregory paused and looked thoughtfully—"even now I'm inclined to buy the machinery to work the mine for another year."

"I wish I had your chance," Wenter said.

"You'd work it, would you?" "Not me. If I had the money this will sell for I'd go straight across to the old country and enjoy myself for the rest of my life."

"Perhaps you're right," Mr. Gregory said. "I've roughed it considerably all my life so far, and about time I had a little of it. Shall we go up now, or would you like to go round again?"

"No, thanks," Wenter said. "I am quite satisfied. I'll best to make a deal for you."

"Right; I hope you will," Mr. Gregory remarked. Then he led up the shaft, "Hoist up."

"You seem to have a good hands on your mine," Mr. Gregory remarked, as they drove.

"Oh, bless you, they're mine. There isn't enough of me to keep many," Mr. Gregory answered.

When Wenter arrived at his office again he pondered considerably over the matter in question. It was a mine teeming with gold which only required capital to buy it at a good figure. It was every prospect of his a heavy profit over the transaction.

"Let me see," he muttered. "Gregory wants twenty thousand for it. Supposing I get it for it. Supposing I get it for twenty-five or thirty thousand for it, and then tell I can't find a customer, I'm willing to buy it myself. I'll hold it until I can sell it at a dare say he would take a thousand if I offered to work it on commission and expense."

"By gum!" he rubbed his hands. "That would be ten or twelve hundred pounds or more in my pocket for less than ten hours of my time."

He picked up the morning paper and saw that the next morning was due to arrive three days later. "Good!" he muttered.

He drew up a catchy advertisement. He proceeded to write a graph pointing out the desirability of all people anxious to purchase mining properties coming to the country. Then he strolled down to the paper office and made arrangements for it to appear for the first time of the week.

On Thursday the liner came and on Friday a gentleman called on Mr. Wenter. He was an aristocratic-looking man, fairly dressed in the latest London fashion.

"Aw—I saw your advertisement," he said, speaking that peculiar drawl which is associated with blue blood. "My name is Craven. I came over on the high Castle. I—aw—want to buy one of these mines."

He handed Mr. Wenter a card. "Yes, sir," said the agent. "I dare say I can fit you up with a number of desirable mining properties on hand." As a matter of fact he had only got the Somerset Mine.

"You see—aw—I don't want to make a beastly splash. My money is—aw—somewhat limited, I know. Now just trot out some of these chaps. First of all, I don't—aw—want to be far from Sydney. Not—aw—more than a hundred miles."

"Ah, that limits me," said

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