

The Vanishing Extract.

By Edgar Franklin.



WHEN the thermometer really buckles down to business and tries its best to push the top out of the tube, and mankind swelters and gasps and mops its forehead with its handkerchief, and the newspapers rub it in by running "Heat Wave" scare heads in seven-inch type—then the folks who manufacture ice-cream by the ton go to buying gallons upon gallons of flavoring extracts.

That is, if the extracts are the right sort.

Johnson & Walling, in addition to their sugar and molasses trade, made just the right sort of extracts. It was their business and their pride. What they called "Rex Vanilla" sold for twenty dollars a gallon, and couldn't be beaten at ten times the price. They made an extremely fancy extract of lemon, too, and a twenty-dollar-a-gallon pistachio that drove competitors into green fury.

It may be surmised, then, that Johnson & Walling were prosperous. Part of their prosperity they owed to the intolerable heat, which during that summer broiled on without cessation for ten mortal weeks. Another part they owed to Scovill.

Scovill was the energetic young man who had charge of their flavoring extract laboratory. Single-handed, he manufactured the deliciously odoriferous fluids, bottled them and handed them out all ready for shipment; and Johnson & Walling felt that if ever a man belonged in the "perfect treasure" class, that man was Scovill.

He had come to them from a large Chicago house in the same line; he knew his business thoroughly; he worked like a trooper; and the extracts which he turned out were distinctly "it."

The heat—heartily blessed by Johnson & Walling and fluently cursed by the general public—had been continuing for a month or more on that particular Monday morning.

Johnson, perspiring but joyful, was out among the ice-cream people, taking orders as fast as his fountain pen could jot them down. Walling sat in the office on the ground floor, prodded the shipping clerk to higher speed, goaded the bookkeeper to greater exertions, and himself wrote receipts for the drivers.

It was hot—"hotter'n thunder," as Walling chuckled. The sun-baked street was deserted and still, and in the quiet the junior partner's voice hummed aloud, as he read from a sheaf of orders in his hand to the shipping clerk.

"Ready, Jones? All right. J. F. Brown, two gallons Rex; Brightman, three gallons; Samson Brothers, ten gallons. Gee whizz! What an order!" purred Walling. "Well, that makes fifteen gallons of Rex Vanilla to go, beside what's ready now."

"Samson Brothers, ten gallons Rex Vanilla," intoned the shipping clerk.

"Correct. Ah, Scovill, are you here?" Scovill had just come down from the laboratory. "Got fifteen gallons Rex ready to go?"

"Fifteen?" Scovill echoed. "Why, no, Of course not."

"Why not?" asked the junior partner, somewhat astonished. "You had twenty gallons bottled last night."

"Yes, but you took seven of them before I arrived this morning."

"I did what?"

"You—or somebody else—took seven gallons of Rex Vanilla Extract out of the stock."

Say, Scovill, is the heat getting into your head?" Walling asked ironically. "Nobody but yourself has touched that stock."

"What!" Scovill's eyes opened. "Certainly not. It's just as you left it."

"It is nothing of the sort!" said Scovill warmly. "When I left last night there were twenty one-gallon bottles

filled and on the shelf. This morning I found seven of them on the floor—empty. I supposed that you had used them."

"You mean to tell me that seven gallons of that expensive stuff have disappeared over night?"

"They are gone—that's certain. Possibly Mr. Johnson had them emptied in a keg for somebody."

"He couldn't have. Johnson left before I did last night, and he hasn't been in yet this morning. Scovill, are you certain that the stuff is gone?"

"Come and see for yourself," the young man suggested.

Walling frowned in perplexity.

"Why, it's ridiculous!" he said. "You must have put it into other bottles—or something, Scovill. I'll go up with you."

Now, the building of Johnson & Walling was a little more than two floors, with a cellar underground. This latter apartment contained innumerable sugar and molasses barrels, and the big furnace which in winter sent grateful volumes of hot air through the heaters.

The ground floor held the offices and a considerable space for storage, while in a corner of the loft above was built the laboratory where Johnson & Walling's flavoring extracts were manufactured by Scovill.

The latter led the way up-stairs.

Together they entered the laboratory. Scovill pointed silently to the seven big bottles on the floor.

There was no mistaking the fact—they all bore the Rex label, and every one of them was as empty as the day it left the glass-works.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" ejaculated Walling. "The stuff's been stolen!"

"But how?"

"Gad! I give that up! Was this door to the stairway locked?"

"Certainly. I have the one key—you keep the duplicate in the safe."

"And how about the door leading to the loft?"

Scovill tried it.

"Humph! This has been unfastened!" he announced.

"Then that must be where the stuff went," Walling sighed. "What a blamed shame—seven gallons of Rex Vanilla!"

"Who do you suppose could have taken it?"

"Don't ask me. It must have been one of those confounded drivers," said the junior partner. "In all probability he sneaked up the back way, emptied the extract into a keg, and carried it off through the loft. But he couldn't get it out of the place. They all have to pass through the office when they leave at night."

"He got it out of here without much trouble," Scovill observed dryly.

"Yes—that's pretty evident. Well, he won't do it again. I'll fix that door so that it will retire from business permanently. Tell the boy to bring me up the hammer and some big nails, Scovill, please."

The boy arrived within a moment or two, and with a grim smile Walling set to work to nail the door to the casing. In a very few minutes he had put that portal beyond hope of being opened with anything short of a battering-ram.

"There! I'd like to bet that no more Rex Vanilla goes out through that door!" he puffed.

Under the surface, the theft created a considerable sensation. It was not discussed openly; but between Johnson and Walling and Scovill the matter was argued at length, and they arrived at various hypotheses.

It seemed indisputable that the extract had been carried off through the loft door of the laboratory—but what had been done with it thereafter? A keg that contains seven gallons of liquid cannot be shoved into a man's vest-pocket, and assuredly nothing of the sort had been carried out by any of the workmen.

Consequently, the stuff must still be

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