

**The Tuscan
Mystery Again.**

In September last we told in these columns the story of Herr Possel. We gave the story as an illustration of the part played by life insurance in the world of to-day, with all its melodramatic possibilities, and as a medium for showing that extreme vigilance on the part of insurance companies is the only way of meeting a comparatively new menace to the safety of policy-holders. Let us outline this story again. Herr Possel married an English girl, Miss Becket. On their honeymoon, the couple went to Italy. En route, they stayed in Paris sufficiently long for Possel to insure his wife's life for \$30,000 in the Urbaine Insurance Company. A few weeks later, Possel returned from a drive along the cliff road of Sorrento, in Tuscany, and reported that Mrs. Possel had tumbled over a precipice. Her husband seems to have displayed feverish if not indelicate haste in applying to the French insurance company for money in respect of the policy on his English wife's life; his demeanor after the discovery of his wife's body on the beach at Pontanello was distinctly callous; Mrs. Possel was often seen by the hotel servants at Florence weeping bitterly; and Possel had been known to throw an ink bottle at his wife, and to chase her with a bread knife. Yet, some whim, caprice, or one of those unaccountable fancies which seems to establish the right of woman to follow a course irreconcilable in conception, and not in accordance with any known precedent, led Miss Becket to marry Herr Possel—despite knowledge of his evil ways and violent temper obtained during days of courtship, when he boarded in her mother's house.

However, the tragedy excited so much curiosity and wonderment that people pestered poor Possel with enquiries, and, unable to submit to the accusations of which he was the object, he killed himself in a Paris café. Now the Urbaine Insurance Company is seeking to have the policy annulled on the ground that Mrs. Possel's death was not accidental, and her relatives are claiming the insurance money. It has been held that the murder of an assured person, in default of a specific contract excluding murder as a cause of death, will not protect the company. This is English and American law, e.g., the Maybrick and Goss-Udderzook cases. But a criminal may not profit by the results of his crime. If, therefore, Possel had even been tried and executed for murder, the company would have to pay his heirs-at-law. Of course, if false representations were made, or if there was any personation, it would be a different matter. And French insurance law may be different from English in insurance, as in marriage laws. Under French law Miss Beckett was not married.

As the company's action is now said to be the result of careful enquiries made at Sorrento, and as poor Possel is charged among other crimes with having passed off another woman as his wife to the medical officer, when arranging for the policy of insurance, the heirs of this interesting foreigner and his

wife are not likely to benefit by Mrs. Possel's fall from a cliff on the coast of far-away Tuscany.

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And this in *When the bell goes ting-a-ling-ling,*
London. *And somebody shouts, "Hcl-lo!"*

(The Telephone Girl.)

We have been made familiar by a recent comic opera with much of the confusion caused by the telephone; but, until the report of a meeting of the Automatic Telephone Company in London, we had no knowledge that the disorder, tumult, worry and vexation inseparable from crossed wires, mixed numbers and imperfect hearing, sometimes extends to the business meetings of those interested in the business of supplying us with telephonic communication with people at a distance. However, "The Financial News," of London, England, furnishes some racy particulars of a meeting held on the 1st inst., in the leading city of the world, calculated to make one think that the telephone is not only capable of destroying a reputation, but is equal to the task of blasting the character of the business men of the British metropolis for eminent respectability. In some editorial comments upon the meeting, the "News" says:

"We like a live company; therefore, we feel a considerable interest in the affairs of the Automatic Telephone, founded, as the chairman exclaimed during a comparatively lucid interval at yesterday's meeting, to carry on a business by which persons all over the country might just turn a handle, and they would be able to speak to anyone in London. But there is no provision for enabling the shareholders of the company to speak to each other at their meetings—the rule on those occasions, if yesterday's meeting is a specimen, being that everyone should speak at once, and see to it that no one else is heard, the chairman in particular. One enthusiastic shareholder managed to vociferate audibly that the company was a "one-horse company." We should prefer to compare it to a wonderfully active mule. The methods of carrying on business are distinctly original—as, for example, the motion that the chairman 'be removed by force.' After the exchange of much libellous comment on each other's characters, the meeting resolved not to adopt the report and accounts, but to call upon the chairman to resign." It then dispersed until the first of April—which somehow sounds appropriate.

It is simply delicious to be assured that the shareholders in an English company sometimes condescend to an exchange of pleasantries and libellous comments on each other's characters. It makes men of colonial extraction feel more human. But it is to be hoped that the comments were not those of Bret Harte's vulgar little boy upon the driver of a passing vehicle. His single sentence of choice invective, we are told, conveyed "a reflection on the legitimacy of the driver's birth; it hinted a suspicion of his father's integrity, and impugned the fair fame of his mother; it suggested incompetency in his present position, personal uncleanness, and evinced a sceptical doubt of his future salvation."