

HOW I LOST A BRAND-NEW FROCK COAT.

"AN OWER TRUX TALL."

Every schoolboy (I am not referring to Macaulay's hypothetical schoolboy), but, I say, every schoolboy has heard of the Seven Wise Men of Greece, and has, doubtless, like myself, wondered on what possible ground each of these sages obtained his high reputation for wisdom. I am not, I believe, vain of my own aphoristic ability, nor have I thought it worth while to cultivate it to any great extent; but, I do really think that at times I have uttered maxims quite as distinguished for their political sagacity, as some of the sayings attributed to the famous Seven Greeks of the Sixth Century, B. C. The name of Bias, for instance, has floated down to posterity on the strength of his oracular dictum that "most men are bad." King David had long before "said in his heart, all men are liars," and in the nineteenth century Carlyle has ventured to assert that England contains so many millions of inhabitants, "maistly iules." I appreciate these remarks at their full value, but it is not high.

Chilo, again, another of the Seven, is known to us by a solitary apophthegm, "Consider the End." Now, it seems to me that the amount of intelligence and intellect required for the elaboration of similar saws, mottoes, adages, or whatever else we may choose to call them, is by no means exorbitant; and that the most common-place individual, even in these "fin de siècle" days, could dictate kindred reflections by the word to a stenographer or type-writer. I doubt, however, whether he would amass a fortune by subsequently publishing his Tupperisms.

These crude thoughts occurred to me, when, a few days ago, a friend mentioned the name of the man who (like William Gerard Hamilton, immortalized by a "single speech," delivered in 1776) became an object of public interest after his declaration that "nothing succeeds like success." Alas! for the emptiness of earthly fame! I have clean forgotten the author of this axiom, and have in vain tried to recall it. I will, in default, favor the readers of "The Antidote" with a counterpart to the thread-bare maxim. It is as follows: "Nothing is so unsuccessful as want of success." I will, however, do more than hand over to the public this gem of "Proverbial Philosophy." I will illustrate its truth by relating a brief episode in my somewhat uneventful life.

I am by profession what is called a "representative of the press," and I have always taken a great pride in my calling. In order to attain eminence in my craft I have toiled assiduously at almost every branch of newspaper work, and flatter

myself, that though, as a journalist, I am not an absolute genius like the late Geo. T. Lanigan, few Canadian reporters can describe more graphically than myself a fire or a shipwreck, a cricket match or a horse race, a parliamentary field-day or a public execution. My services, therefore, have always been in request; the situations that I have held have been lucrative; and either in Canada or in the States I can rely on making a comfortable income, so long as my good health lasts. These remarks may seem, and perhaps are, egotistical; but I wish to show that I have always done my utmost to please my employees, and have neglected no opportunity of serving their interests. Nay, more. On certain occasions, contrary to the advice of Talleyrand, I have exhibited too much zeal in attempting to distinguish myself, and it is with one of these luckless occasions that my present truthful narrative is concerned. The confession of my weakness will perhaps lay the ghost of a painful reminiscence; at any rate, it will serve as a warning to others, and point the moral of Pliny's anecdote, "ne sutor supra crepidam," or as the English proverb has it, "A cobbler should stick to his last."

Some years ago there was a strike in Montreal, among the laborers on the wharves. I forget the particulars, and they are of no importance. The only point which interested me was that a respectable man named Brown, who, during the winter, had been employed about our office in some capacity, had been brutally beaten by a gang of strikers because he refused to join them. The assault took place at night near the custom house, and the police had, as usual, failed to arrest any one of his cowardly assailants. Now, it is a notorious fact, that countless numbers of our frail humanity believe that we possess in a phenomenal degree, talents that we positively lack. Consequently, though Heaven has bestowed on us merely a napkin destitute of talents, we go about in society, flourishing our empty napkins complacently in the face of mankind, as though they contained samples of all imaginable talents. This, to a limited extent, was the case with me. My "fad" was a peculiar one. For some occult reason, I had long cherished the notion that I was an Edgar Allan Poe at solving mysteries, and that nature had originally moulded for a clear-headed, far-sighted, and nimble-witted detective. In no longer hold this opinion. I am content to recant with unfeigned humility, and, metaphorically, to draw in my horns. My belief that I was a Vidocq is what Lord Denman once called "a delusion, a mockery and a snare;" and I swallow the leek publicly as an act of penance, to atone for my imbecile self-complacency.

I proceed now to detail the modus oper-

andi by which my unwarrantable vanity was crushed. The beating that poor Brown had received on the wharf was much talked of in our office. We raised a subscription in aid of his wife and children, and blamed the police and detectives for failing to unearth the ruffians who had nearly murdered him. An insane ambition, like some evil spirit, now suddenly seized upon me, and goaded me on, at all hazards, "to pluck out the heart of the mystery." I even went so far as to rehearse privately the triumphant tone in which, when I had succeeded in my self-appointed mission, I should be able to exclaim "Eureka;" and my easily tickled fancy listened with rapture to the loud congratulations of my fellow-journalists. I was almost too excited to sleep, and a great part of the night was passed in mapping out the plan of my campaign. To a cunning strategist like myself failure seemed out of the question. The word "impossible" was for the time blotted out of my dictionary. I was as "cock-sure" of success as Macaulay was said by Sydney Smith to be "of everything."

Accordingly, the morning after I had drawn up my programme, I determined to execute my coup d'état without any delay. Knowing, as Hamlet said, that "the apparel oft proclaims the man," I took pains that my dress should not be "expressed in fancy," but should be eminently respectable. I, therefore, unhooked from my wardrobe a new black cloth frock coat, and when my toilet had been carefully completed, I looked into the glass, and noted with satisfaction that there was nothing in my personal appearance to attract attention, or arouse suspicion. I was simply an ordinary gentleman, wearing a dignified black frock-coat that had lately cost a considerable number of dollars.

I will now briefly explain my plan of action. The assault on poor Brown had been committed near Joe Beel's Estaminet, then the "Windsor" of Common street. Most of the men on strike were, of course, frequenters of his canteen; many of them, no doubt, boarded and lodged with him. It was from that community, that, in my role of amateur detective, I was to glean the needed information. Skillfully allured by my serpent tongue, they should be forced unconsciously to furnish the clue which would enable me to unravel the tangled skein of the mystery. At about 11 o'clock on a bright summer day I entered the notorious canteen, where my victory was to be won. I nodded carelessly to the proprietor, and bade him "Good-day." There were two or three stools in front of the counter, and on one of these I seated myself, and, pulling out my pipe, began to smoke. The huge Boniface behind the bar gruffly asked me what I would take, so I asked for a glass of