

cedure of county-courts and the law as affecting the safety of the individual when the said individual had contracted a debt that he could not pay.

"If you had appeared to the summons," Mitchell said, administering what looked like very late comfort, "he might have let you off your bargain. At any rate, he would have made an order for payment at a few shillings a month, or something like that. As it is, you must pay at once. Of course, you have been the victim of a book-agent's dodge, but that doesn't help you much."

Gipsy groaned, and the flavour faded from his tobacco.

"An' all this for books!" he said scornfully—"books! Things I can't understand. I've puzzled over the things yonder till I've got a 'ead like Sunday morning. If it 'ad been for something as 'ad done me good! What shall I do about it, matey?"

Mitchell shook his head gravely. He looked deeply sympathetic. It was lucky for him that he could enjoy comedy without outward evidence of the fact. He could only suggest flight to some town. But Gipsy had cogent reasons for the peaceful seclusion of the country. He'd wait till the police came—

"They're not police," Mitchell explained. "They are county-court bailiffs—probably there will be two of them, and they'll come from Rhayader. If I were you, I should go to a place where the air was more suited to your peculiar complaint."

But Gipsy declined to listen to any such temptations. His popularity counted for something. He would take a day off to-morrow and borrow the money, levying a small rate for the purpose. But, despite the measure of his popularity, Gipsy met with a cool response. The Compendium gave no play to the imagination. If Gipsy had lost a wife, for instance, or if he had assaulted a gamekeeper and was seeking to make up a fine, it would have been a different matter. A man who wasted on classic literature hard money, that might have been spent on beer and tobacco, deserved no sympathy.

A long morning's toil produced something under twenty shillings, most of it gleaned with the point of the bayonet, so to speak. In a lofty spirit, Gipsy had set out with the amiable intention of taking no more than a shilling from each man. Early in the day he had refused sevenpence in coppers with lurid language, by dinner-time he accepted a three-penny-bit from a despised teetotaller, with a wan smile. Literature is ever a thorny path.

"To think that I had come to this!" he said bitterly to Dandy in the dinner-hour. "This 'ere Joey I got from 'Anks, what's a rabid teetotaller. An' glad to get it. Well, mates?"

A gleam of the old geniality lighted Gipsy's eye as two strangers lounged up to them. There was a hard look about them; there was no sympathy in the eye of either. The taller of the two produced a paper.

"Looking for a party over a little matter of business," he said. "Name of Hercules Gipsy."

Dandy started and opened his mouth widely. Gipsy turned pale. If Dandy spoke, he was lost.

"Herkules Gipsy," the little man said thoughtfully. "Why, that's my old pal, dash my wig if 'e ain't—"

Gipsy's thoughts were full of murder. His tea was hot—he thoughtfully poured about half a pint over Dandy's legs.

"What you make all that row about?" he growled. "I know who you mean, matey. It's a chap 'ere what bought a Compendium from a little bloke with a shiny 'at. If I'd got 'im 'ere—least-ways, I—well, there! Gipsy told me all about it last night."

"Are you come to arrest 'im?" Dandy asked, with sudden inspiration.

"For debt," the big stranger explained curtly. "Non-payment of a debt on county-court judgment."

"Seen 'im lately?" Gipsy asked carelessly and perspiringly.

"Seen 'im this morning," Dandy replied. "Got all his best on, and his other things done up in a 'andkerchief. 'Goin' to North Pole?" I says. "'Ookin' it,' says he. 'What for?' says I. 'Got into a bit of a mess,' says 'e. So I let 'im go, and there's an end on it."

"Unpopular, surly sort o' bloke, he was," Gipsy said thoughtfully. "Never did nothing but poke about in readin' books or that kind o' thing. Bet a tanner 'e's gone to Rhayader to look after 'is wife."

Dandy volunteered further details. Hercules Gipsy owed him a lot of money—he owed money all round, in fact. Dandy was glad that he had got into trouble. The strangers moved on presently and were lost to sight down the valley. Gipsy sat on a stone and wiped his beaded forehead.

"I owe you one for that, mate," he said. "But those chaps 'll come back again. It mayn't be to-day, or yet to-morrow, but they'll come. And what's the good o' this?"

Gipsy displayed a big fist with some pounds-worth of dingy silver in the centre of the hard palm and snarled at it with bitter contempt. Dandy smiled. For the middle of the week this was wealth.

"I pulled you out of that, old 'un," he said. "An' a man don't think fast on a 'ot day like this. Might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb."

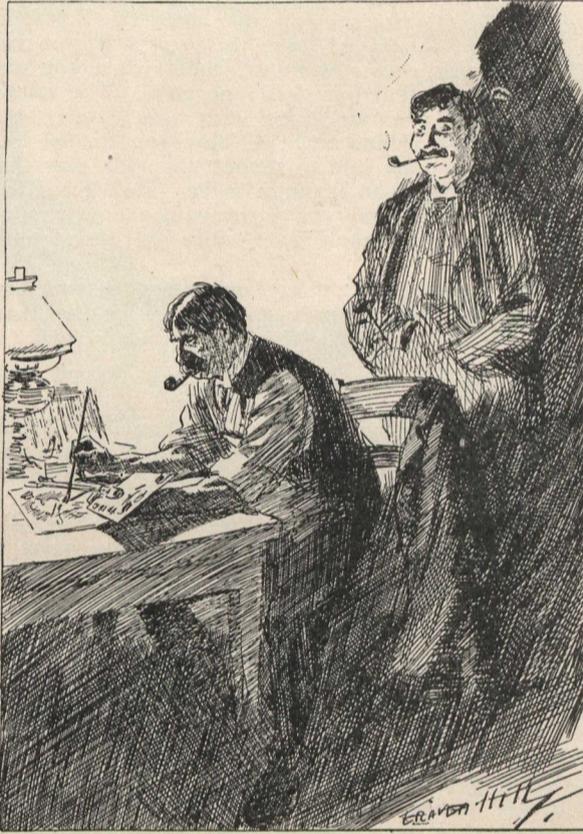
"Righto," Gipsy said recklessly. "Come on. This way to the waxworks. It's going to be sixes."

The canteen stood invitingly open, the day was hot. The full measure of the canteen allowance was partaken of, and then the pair slipped out of the settlement to the inviting shade of a public-house opposite. As Gipsy's pockets grew lighter, his spirits rose.

"I'll go and lie down," he said hazily. "I've got a plan, Dandy. I've got a plan, if I could only think of it. It's a very good plan, mate. I'll raise the money and pay off the little bloke in the glossy 'at. No, I won't, I'll keep the brass and see him further first!"

He pulled his cap fiercely over his eyes and strode resolutely in the direction of his hut. Dandy sighed into his empty mug and followed with discreet silence.

For the time being the philosophical side of Gipsy's nature was submerged. He had expected better things of his fellow-men. Also there was the blow to his pride. He had yet to learn that



"Mitchell waded in accordingly."

when popularity pulls against pocket, the struggle is a terribly unequal one. Anyway, this money must be found. Gipsy had tried to raise the rate openly and upon the strength of his individuality, and he had failed. He had no intention of going to gaol—his Romany blood turned cold at the mere suggestion; he would resort to strategy.

The man was a born dramatist and a maker of stories, only a beneficent legislation had not caught him early enough to teach him the proper equipment. He approached the matter now from the point of view of the novelist who has got his hero in a tight place and is bound to get him out of it again.

As Gipsy sat over his pipe, illumination came to him. He must impose upon a credulous public. A wide grin expanded over his face. He took down the volumes of the Compendium and selected a dozen or more of the engravings therein, and then by the aid of his knife he detached them neatly from the bindings. The plan of campaign was perfect. Gipsy waited now to see Mitchell, the painter, who took his evening stroll about this time. Presently the artist lounged along.

"'Arf a mo'," Gipsy drawled. "Want to earn a quid?"

Mitchell shook his head doubtfully. As a rule, his elderly housekeeper drew his pay and allowed him a certain modicum for tobacco money. It was the only way in which the artist could possibly wrestle successfully with the drink craze. Give him a sovereign, and he would do nothing till it was gone.

"How long have you been a capitalist?" he asked. "Left over from the library, eh?"

Gipsy said something forcible on the subject of tabloid education. He pointed to the selected engravings taken by him from the Compendium.

"What a fool thing to do!" Mitchell expostulated. "Poor as the volumes were before, they are worth nothing now. You have utterly spoilt them."

Gipsy winked solemnly. There was all the air of a successful dramatist about him.

"I'm going to get you to help me," he said. "You just go and get those paints of yours—the oils. Bring all the pretty 'uns. I've got to get out of this mess; and if I ain't just a bloomin' Bobs at this game, strike me pink! Look at this bloke."

At arm's length Gipsy held up a counterfeit presentment of Hercules in a boxing attitude. He stood on a pedestal and was obviously "after" some celebrated statue of another. Gipsy eyed the muscular form admiringly.

"That's a model of physical development," Gipsy remarked. "The blighted Compendium says so. Also it's a work of art. Just so. An' if I took and tried to raise a bob on old 'Erkules in the canteen, I couldn't do it. But nobody's seen 'Erkules, which is a good thing. He's no good now, but you'll see when we've done with 'im. Go and get your paints."

There was comedy here somewhere, as Mitchell recognised. He had a profound admiration for Gipsy and his many "slim" expedients. He came from the class of men who know how to jest with a straight face. Mitchell came back presently with his oils and brushes, and Gipsy carefully locked the door before lighting the lamp.

"Now look 'ere," he said. "You've got to 'elp me over this job, matey. We've got to raise the spondulix from the dellooded public. You just tackle old 'Erkules as I tell you. Take and paint 'im in tights, and a championship belt around his middle, shove them bunches of fives of 'isn into four-ounce gloves."

"Make him a boxer and a bruiser up to date?" Mitchell asked with a grin.

"That's the time o' day," Gipsy said drily. "Up to date. Turn that ere butcher's block what he's standing on into a platform, and a rope round it. Wade in."

Mitchell waded in accordingly. At the end of half-an-hour the classic engraving of the famous athlete was transformed into a glaring oil presentment of a modern boxer of the approved type. Mitchell had been purposely prodigal of his colouring, and Gipsy was loudly enthusiastic. The flagrant vulgarity of it appealed to him strongly.

"Spiffin'!" he said. "Just the ticket for soup. All it wants now is a nice 'omely flavour of the pub about it. Just stick a red triangle with 'Bass's Beer Only' underneath, just behind old 'Erkules' 'ead, and there you are. What O!"

Gipsy stood back and surveyed the work critically. Its crude colouring and flaring vulgarity touched him to the soul. No British "navvy" with a grain of sport in him could look upon that picture without the longing for possession.

"How long before it's dry?" he asked.

"Dry now," Mitchell explained. "That porous paper soaks up the oil directly. This is my masterpiece, Gipsy. I never hoped to paint anything like that."

Gipsy nodded approvingly. He was in the presence of genius. He took the picture up and rolled it with the greatest care. He was going out, he explained, as far as the canteen. If the painter possessed the fund of humour that Gipsy credited him with, that virtue would be gratified if Mitchell would look into the canteen a little later.

The canteen was pretty full as Gipsy entered. He took up his place at an empty table and spread out his work of art before him; he appeared to be in rapt and admiring contemplation. Presently one or two of his own gang lounged across, to see the cause of this thoughtful silence. They fell under the spell of Mitchell's genius.

"What is it, Gipsy?" asked one in an awed voice. "Where did you get 'im from?"

"Won 'im," Gipsy said carelessly, "in a raffle. A bob a share—last time I was in Cardiff. O' course you know who that is?"

"Bloke just trained ready for a mill, I reckon."

"Bloke ready for a mill!" Gipsy said, with bitter scorn. "Where do you come from? Was it four or five years you got? That there's Tom Flannigan, the Irish Terror, just before his successful scrap last March with Long Coffin, the American Champion. Knocked 'is man out after thirty-two rounds, lasting two hours."

The others gasped. The famous fight was still fresh in the recollection of most of them. It was impossible to look upon that form and those colours unmoved. Gipsy pinned the picture to the match-