

A QUESTION OF SALARY.

WE three had been occupied for almost half a minute in attempting to probe with a straw the inner meaning of that phenomenon of modern civilization—the ice-cream soda. Of course, there were three straws and three sodas; and Joel, who was not showing much scientific curiosity about his, suddenly stopped to propound a problem which seemed to be on his mind.

"Say, Jack," he drawled (I get nothing but Jack, although I lay claim to the Russian form of the cognomen, Ivan), "if you were going to draw a salary—" (suppressed excitement and enthusiastic murmurings of "Hear, hear," from Sis, who is the third in our trio, and who sometimes confesses to Euphemia).

"If you were going to draw a salary," repeated Joel, "would you rather take an increase of \$100 per year than one of \$25 every six months?"

"Well, I just guess I would," said Sis, appropriating the question to herself. I agreed without protest.

"You could have it," said Joel, "for I'd take the other, and I'd have the best of the bargain all the time."

The electric fans stirred the heated air, but did not seem to alleviate the torrid state of things in the sumptuously-furnished parlors in which we were seated. The hot weather inertia was upon me. I signed for Joel to expound.

"Well, you see," he began, quite briskly for him, "if each of us were to be paid at the rate of \$400 per year—the amount makes no difference—I should have \$425 at the end of the first year, in accordance with the agreement that I receive an increase of \$25 every six months; and you, me bucko, would only have \$400."

"I'll grant you that," I said, with an awakening interest, "but where would you be at the end of the second year, my hearty?"

"He'd be where his hands are now," triumphantly exclaimed Sis, "out o' pocket, that's where."

"No, I wouldn't neither, my lady," said Joel, calmly. "I'd be again \$25 better off than Jack, and I can prove it, too."

"Well," I said, getting heated—not physically, for more were impossible—"you can't make me believe that \$25 every six months is as good as, let alone better than, \$100 a year. There must be a joke in it, I suppose. Erect your finger-post, Joel. Your witticisms always need one."

Now, don't get new," said Joel, slowly bridling up, "or I'll not put you wise about it."

Sis was nearing the bottom of her soda, and she gurgled derisively and impolitely through the straw at us.

Joel is one of these slow-going creatures who draw out everything in the most solemn fashion. Sis and I are rather mercurial in temperament, and Joel always announces himself as the golden mean between our masculine and feminine extremes of irresponsibility. Sis says she feels comforted in thinking that, at any rate, he has the grace to acknowledge that there is something mean about him. I always encourage Sis in a very unelder brother-like way when she stoops to this form of levity, for it helps to arouse Joel from his solemn-choly condition to at least one of indignation.

He was indignant now and anxious to prove his point, as he said: "It's the truth, anyway, that one of the fellows belonging to our office tried for an hour of figuring to make your side of the case good, but he couldn't do it, all the same."

"That," I said, with a virtuous air, "was because he was utilizing his employer's time, and that was nothing more or less than a straight steal from the firm."

"And, as for the employer," broke in Sis, "I suppose

In holy anger and pious grief
He solemnly cursed that rascally thief.

Eh, Joel?"

"Not much," said Joel, "for I was the thief, and it was my own dinner hour I stole, and the pain that I had in my tummy all afternoon after it made me feel like the very de'il, I can tell you."

"Well," said I, "'who sups with the devil should have a long spoon,' so, here goes, Joel," and I disposed of my straw and began to ladle up the ice-cream in the bottom of my glass. Sis followed suit, and Joel, whose concoction had still its collar of froth, began, silently scornful of my last remark, to catch up in the race to irrigate himself.

He sighed contentedly after draining his glass and finishing the last mouthful of ice cream, and, looking at us with his usual complacent smile, he drew from his pocket a slip of paper, displaying it with the air of easy triumph, as he said:

"There you are; it's all in black and white, and you can't get away from the figgers."

"Fig-yures, Joel, dear," said Sis, with sweet emphasis, and then, with a pretence at tearful entreaty, "Don't try to get away from the English language; and never forget you are a British subject my lad."

Joel saluted in true military style, and then returned to his paper. I craned my neck to look at it.

"But Joel, upon my soul—" I began.

"No poetry," he broke in, sternly.

I suppose I shall never hear the end of the fact that I once wrote an elaborate imitation of "The Lay of the Last Minstrel." Joel, who had been reading "The Jackdaw of Rheims," and others of the "Ingoldsby Legends" at the time, said that my emulation of Scott should entitle me to be termed no longer plain Jack, but the Jackdaw of Rhymes. This is the only pun we have on record for Joel, but it saved him from the dark suspicion of being a foster-child in our family.

"Now, Joel, never mind Jack, he can't help it," said Sis, in a conciliatory tone, and looking at me pityingly. So Joel displayed the paper on which he had stated the case neatly and convincingly. It read as follows:

"If two workmen are to be paid at the rate of \$400 per year, the one to receive an increase of \$25 at the end of every six months successive to the first six, and the other to receive an increase of \$100 at the end of every year successive to the first year, the result is as follows: At the end of the first year A gets \$200 + \$225 = \$425, while B gets \$400. At the end of the second year A gets \$250 + \$275 = \$525, while B gets \$500. At the end of the third year A gets \$300 + \$325 = \$625, while B gets \$600." And so on, ad infinitum.

Sis looked at it hard and long, and then got up and walked thoughtfully out to the curbstone, where our wheels stood. We joined her after Joel had given the drink-mixing artist his honorarium, and together spun home over the inky shadows of the foliage made by the electric light on the asphalt.

"Well," exclaimed Sis, when we back-pedalled before the door of the paternal homestead, "anyway, I think I could buy more with the \$100 a year," and she jumped lightly from her wheel, and told me I might have the privilege of taking it inside for her if I would be careful not to get it scratched. I was too busy working mental arithmetic to reply with any spirit, so I meekly obeyed, and then followed the others into the dining-room for prayers. We had a visiting divine with us that night, and all through his lengthy petition my thoughts struggled but feebly, I am afraid, to follow his eloquence.

Now, dear reader, let me leave you to have a go at the problem yourself; for, although acknowledging that the figures seem plain enough, I confess that, with my unmathematical mind, I cannot for the life of me understand why in the world the thing should be so.

E. H. ΔΥ
J. Hardy on