POOR DOCUMENT

MC 2033

THE MESHES OF MISCHANCE

BY GILBERT WINTLE

A Great Human Interest Serial Filled With Action Now Published for the First Time

CHAPTER XIX—(Continued.)

"I don't know what he has done, dear," Ruth said, "but I am sure he has lots of good in him yet. It would be so terrible, just as he is beginning a new life, perhaps getting on well, and liked by everyone, as he was on board, to have some old thing raked up against him. Try and stop this letter of Mr. Smith's, do, Horace, dear."

"I am sure I wish I could, darling," said Horace, with a sign, "but it's impossible. To begin with, one has one's duty as a citizen; to go on with, the letter must have gone by now."

"Do what you can, Horace."

Horace looked perplexed.

"To please me."

Horace yielded.

Before he went to bed that night he wrote and posted two letters. One to Theberton Farm, asking Mr. Smith, if not too late, to hold back his letter to Scotland Yard, he had some difficulty in composing, in fact, tore it up once or twice before he was satisfied; even then, it was but lame at best. This is the letter:

"Dear Mr. Smith,—I have been talking to Miss Aylmer, my fiancee, who came out in the Aracca, and who consequently will be remembered by Mr. Arthur and Doctor Smith. Knowing her, they will understand how it is that I cannot refuse anything that she asks. She has asked me—and I have promised—to write to beg you to re-consider your idea, or rather our idea, for, if you remember, we threshed the matter out together, to communicate our suspicions about James Carey, whom we think we can identify with the Mr. Martin picked up at sea in your son's ship. It must seem rather strange to you that I, after agreeing with you at first, and indeed rather laying stress on the view that it was our duty not to keep what we suspected to ourselves, should now write to you in a sense exactly contrary. However, quite apart from the reason which I have given at the beginning of this letter, it does really seem to me that we might well let this poor devil alone. Of course, there is good citizenship and all that sort of thing to be considered; but if, as seems to be the case, Carey is really trying to break with his old life, I almost question whether it is any part of our duty to Society to pull him down to imprisonment, or, in this case, I am afraid it would be the gallows. After all is said and done, we are not officers of the law. Against this, you and I, at the time, certainly were officers of the bank. Yes, I know; be we are not so any longer. All things considered is it necessary to stir up the affair again? You see it is not as if there were any innocent person in danger. If there were, there could be no hesitation. But, as things are, if the letter has not gone, think it over, and oblige

"Yours very truly,
"HORACE WYNDHAM.

"P. S.—Kindest remembrances to Mrs. Smith and to all at Theberton Farm."

The second letter was easier. It was undated, and ran as follows:

"My Dear Carey,—If the above is the correct way to address Mr. Martin, who was picked up at sea by the Aracca, no more is necessary to warn him that, by an unusual chain of chances, he was recognised, and, if such is necessary for him, that he should immediately once more take steps to change his identity. If a mistake has been made, it is only necessary to beg him to tear up this letter and think no more about it.

"H. W. (The friend who once had a rather unusual interview with Mr. M.—that is, if Mr. M. is Mr. C.—at a house in Westminster.)"

He addressed the letter—

"—MARTIN, Esq.,
"Care of JOHN BUGGINS, Esq.,
Singapore,
"Straits Settlements."

"There!" he said to himself, as he came in from posting them. "It is all wrong, and most uncitizenlike, and so on; but I feel better all the same."

And he banged the hall door behind him and went up to bed. Whereon the respectable Irish lady who kept the boarding house, wondered what sort of quiet, respectable young men they bred on the prairies to come in slamming doors at two o'clock in the morning. Ned, who slept through the letter writing, was snoring placidly, and Horace, in his new-found lightness of heart, tweaked his toe, whereupon he woke up and swore.

"Decidedly," thought the ladlady, "they will never do for a quiet house like mine."

Tht next day came Ned's presen ation to the Aylmers. At the last minute he relented sufficiently to borrow a white shirt from Horace; but that was the farthest he would go. However, Mrs. Aylmer was not so shocked as he feared. She understood that he was going to "mine," though she had the vaguest idea of what that meant, and quite agreed that he must be dressed "so as to be able to look after his men." It would have been quite useless to try to explain to Mrs. Aylmer that a young Englishman in Canada is not generally made manager, either of a ranch or mine, straight away.

The result of Mr. Roots' letter had been to secure Sandy a well-paid billet as an engine-man, for which he was qualified, at a mine up the Fraser. Ned was to go with him, with a letter from the office at Vancouver to the manager, to give him any work that he could. Horace, for the present, was going to bask in civilization at Vancouver.

But, it turning out that the Aylmers had a friend living in Victoria, they all moved there, where M s. Aylmer, who was in the happy position of being very rich, and with no cares except her daughter, took a house, and declared her intention of remaining for the winter.

However, Horace was not going to waste his winter; he loved Ruth too well for that, and, after a delightful fortnight, he once more packed up his Bond Street outfit, till he should return for a visit on his way back to Manitoba in the spring, and appeared one morning in big boots, thick trousers, flannel shirt, and pea-jacket, for his last civilised breakfast before starting to join Ned and Sandy up the Fraser.

He had received a reply from Mr. Smith, to the effect, as he had feared, that his letter had come too late. Lord Netheravon had already been communicated with.

However, Horace did not think it necessary to spoil his farewell interview with Ruth by telling her of this; he relied on his other letter, gone to the Straits Settlements, to counteract that of Mr. Smith to Lord Netheravon.

"Good-bye, darling," he said gaily, as he started off for the wharf, whence the steamer would convey him to the mainland. "My holiday has been splendid. I shall look forward to another short one, some time in April; then, while you are back in England, will come the hardest and happiest summer's work in my life. After that (D.V.) I shall go to England myself to fetch you; then we will start a whole existence of honeymoon. One more kiss, dear, and I must be off. Ned will be laughing at me, when we meet, my hands have got so soft."

So with a last farewell he was gone, and, though it did seem strange at first to be jostling with the more or less "tough" crowd, in the second-class part of the boat; and he was a little inclined, for the moment, to look haughty, when a jovial cowboy slapped him on the back, with a—

"Say, pard, ain't I seed you over to oldman Root's, up to Winnipeg, a piece back?"

It was for a moment only. The next minute he was swapping tobacco and lies with him, as gaily as any old-timer.

British Columbia is one of the most promising provinces of the whole Dominion; but locomotion there, except on a few beaten tracks, is, to put it mildly, still a little primitive. It took six days, from the time that Horace kissed Ruth goodbye, before, after a marvellous journey by train, and sleigh, and a couple of gorges crossed by cableway, which gave him the sensation of flying, in advance of present invention, he came in sight of the engine-house, and collection, of frame shacks, and big crushing mill, which made up the above-ground part of the soon-to-be-celebrated Nos-duhd-na-Omoc Mine, which looks like a Gaelic name, but is real Canuck for all that.

Sandy was not in view at first; but soon appeared, when called by Ned, grimy and oily as a good engine-man should be. Ned, shovel in hand, was helping at the crusher.

"Come to do a job of work at last?" said the latter. "There's no doubt about the boss being ready for you. We've had two men left sick lately, and we are all working double tides. There he is, Mr. Mackenzie. He's seen you, so you'd better go; but you'd better have had your dinner first."

And under the orders of Mr. Mackenzie, Horace was soon to find out how absolutely true had been Mr. Root's words, "There ain't no room for romance in working a mine."

Romance! There were long hours, and hard work, and lots of drilling and blasting, and shovelling ore, till your back was breaking; and all on a most unromantic diet of pork and beans and muddy coffee. But romance! there was none, either about the mine, or about Mr. Mackenzie.

Not that the latter was a bad man, but he was a conscientious Scotchman, bent on doing his best for his employers. On the other hand, he was a man of high principles in very way. There was never a stroke of Sunday work done at the old Omoc—not though the hands should volunteer for it. If it had not been for these Sunday rests, Horace, Ned, and Sandy would have left the mine without seeing any of the country that is outside a radius of a mile or so.

As it was, they used to organize Sunday excursions, hunts they called them, though they had only one old sporting Winchester for firearms, which a man, who left sick, swapped with Ned for a supply of pain-killer and tobacco.

It was on one of these Sunday excursions that the three friends made the discovery which was to bring their names into the British Columbia papers, and, incidentally, to bring about many other results, of which more anon.

They had been climbing peaks and scrambling down valleys all day, with the result of one fox shot and another shot at. As the fox shot was a common red, of which the fur was hardly worth anything, and the one that had escaped, as far as they could judge, was a valuable silver fox, this was not very satisfactory. However, if their hunt had done nothing else, it had at all events made them hungry. So, while Ned cut wood, Sandy and Horace cleared away the snow from a sheltered ledge of rock and got ready the eternal pork and beans. They generally looked forward to their Sunday hunting to give them a taste of something a little more appetising than pork and beans; but one cannot eat fox!

So the fire was built between two boulders, and so hungry were they that even pork and beans were enjoyed; then more wood was piled on, tea made, and pipes lit.

"It's beastly cold," said Ned, when the pot had been taken off the fire. "I'm going to pile on the wood all I can. I cut too much, and we must be off in an hour or so, so we may as well have a good blaze."

Ned had certainly cut a good deal too much of the crisp Canadian birch, which generally forms the staple of the camp-fire on these occasions; so now he amused himself in making a regular well-packed fire with it, and, as the boulders formed a sort of natural fireplace, and there was a crevice which served as a chimney, it was soon roaring away like a foundry. However, Ned was not satisfied, and pressed it down, and piled on more, and stoked it generally, till it was so hot that the others had to shift their position and move farther away. But as it amused Ned and kept them all warm, they did not mind.

"Eh! mon!" said Sandy, "but I like tae see ye do it; I do that same worrk myself all t'week, and it comes quite restful like to superintend a bit."

"Stick a bit of flat rock on, on top," said Horace, "then it'll roar up fine."

As it happened there was a slab of rock, too heavy though for Ned to manage alone, standing by; and, of course, as the suggestion came from Horace, he had to help. Together, they got it across, from one flat boulder to another, and, as might be anticipated, the fire became fiercer than ever.

"Now then, Sandy, you're the expert," said Horace. "Haven't you any suggestions to make?"

"R-r-ake oot th' clinkers," said Sandy.

But this was not so easy, as they had nothing to do it with, the gun being the only piece of metal besides their knives that they had with them. However, the gun had an iron cleaning-rod, and with this, though it was hot work with such a short thing, Sandy began to rake and stir about the bottom layer of the fire.

"Why, look at Sandy, Ned!" said Horace. "What's up, Sandy? You look just like a chap that's lost a dollar and picked up five cents, sort of wondering kind of expression—what is it, man?"

"It canna be meltin', 'tis hot; but 'tis no hot eno' tae melt a bit o' ir-r-ron."

"Hang it all, man, you're not Carlyle, your words are not so precious as all that; speak out, and tell us what's up."

"'Tis sticky like," pursued Sandy, still speaking, as it were, more to himself than to his auditors, "yet it canna be th' rod, an' it canna be th' rock, leastways onless—"

"Oh, bless us! What it is to be a Scotchman!" cried Horace. "Why don't you pull it out, especially as I expect it must be getting pretty hot even at your end?"

This advice was too good not to be acted up, and out came the improvised poker, with a blob of something on the end, but so blurred up with adhering wood ashes that neither Ned nor Horace could make out what the substance was. But Sandy either saw or had an inkling, for he immediately plunged the cleaning-rod into a snow-drift, where he worked it about, this way and that, till the hissing ceased, and it was cool enough to be handled without inconvenience. Then with his pocket-knife he shaved a portion of the stuff attached to the end, looked at it one moment, and the next threw up his cap and yelled—

"Scotland for ever! Mon, 'tis a mountain o' goold!"

It was not a mountain of gold; but one of the boulders which had formed the fireplace turned out to be the largest nugget ever found in British Columbia.

CHAPTER XX.

Inspector MacKay Crosses the Atlantic.

Little Mrs. Mackay was all in a flutter of excitement, and the young Mackays no less so; for a district messenger had just arrived at their suburban home with a hasty note, as follows:

"Dear Peggy,—Pack me a portmanteau, and have dinner ready at 1 o'clock, I shall have to leave England on duty this afternoon.

"Your affectionate husband,
"IAN MACKAY.

"P.S.—Put in anything thick I have, as I am going to a very cold place"

However, excited or not, she was practical, and her two little girls were forthwith set to finish darning a couple of pairs of the inspector's thickest socks; while she herself divided her time between running into the kitchen, to make certain that the general servant was not letting the dinner burn, and brushing and folding clothes in the bed-room.

Into the little house erupted the inspector, like a keen official whirlwind—and, if that is mixed metaphor, it nevertheless describes the situation better than any other.

"I've lots of time, Peggy," he said. "Train don't leave till a quarter to four. Now I'll tell you a bit what's happened. Do you remember the Anglo-Ruritanian affair?"

"Yes."

"Well, we're on the track of the other fellow, the fellow that worked with Hocking."

"Oh! I knew you'd find him at last," said little Mrs. Mackay, delightfully, for she worshipped her big, clever husband, and took as keen a delight in his success as a thief-catcher, as ever did warrior's wife in her husband's deeds of prowess on the battlefield.

"I'm afraid the Yard can't claim much credit for this, Peggy," said the inspector honestly. "It's just a case of 'information received,' this time."

"Who found him, then? But I'm going to dish up, and you shall tell me all about it while we are having dinner. And where are you going. Remember I don't know anything yet."

"As for the information," said the inspector, with a piece of beef-steak pie on his fork, "it is about the funniest thing in that line that I have ever come across."

"How?"

"Why, in this way; in a manner of speaking, it is the chap who has informed on himself."

"Confessed?"

"No-o, not that exactly, either. However, as he have lots of time, you shall hear how everything happened. I was at the Yard today, when I was sent for by the chief of the C. I. D., and ordered to go off at once to the Anglo-Ruritanian Bank. I give you my word that the very last thing I expected was to hear that there was any news of the old affair. However, the manager took me right into the board room, and, though some of them must have finished their breakfasts pretty quick to be there at that time, they had quite a pretty fair little informal meeting of directors there. 'Here is Inspector Mackay, my lord,' said the manager, 'the officer who had charge of the matter before'. Then you may think I pricked up my ears a bit. The long and the short of it was that they gave me a letter to read, a letter arrived this morning from Canada"

"Yes! and this was a confession?"

"No, it was not a confession; it doesn't come from our man at all, it comes from an old chap called Smith, who used to be in this bank, got sacked, and went to Canada. Well—it tells like a sort o' fairy tale—there he meets Wyndham, who's the fellow we're after."

"And writes to tell the directors? Why didn't he have him arrested then and there?"

"Bless you, Peg, if you keep on interrupting like that, we shall never get to the end of it. He writes to the doctors because Wyndham makes him, if you please! Old Smith didn't have a notion, seemingly, that Wyndham had anything to do with the robbery, and Wyndham, too, by what I can put together, don't seem to catch on to the fact that anyone is after him. Either that, or he was drunk, because, listen now, he goes talking to this old Smith about the robbery, and then volunteers a mad sort o' cock-and-bull story about some old friend of his whom he suspects, and then Smith has a couple of sons, who chip in, if you please, and say yes, it must be so, and that they helped him to leave England themselves—and—oh! a lot more stuff. Tells like a regular fairy tale, I said; but it tells worse than that, it tells like a sort of bad dream."

Inspector Mackay mused a few minutes, and presently said, between munches—

"If—it — wasn't—so — very — improbable—I'd almost believe—that—old—Smith was—in—it—himself."

"You are sure that this Wyndham is really the man who did it?"

"Sure! Why, Peggy, suppose you came in from a walk and found half a pot of jam gone, and Johnnie's pinafore and a couple of his toys left in the cupboard, and Johnnie himself run away to hide; that would be what we call a pretty fair prima facie case, wouldn't it? Well, it's worse than that against Wyndham."

"If these crooks only knew when they were well off," he continued. "But no, they must always go and do some silly thing, to call attention to themselves. Wyndham might have stayed there till all was blue. And yet—in a manner o' speaking—it seems almost too silly. Wish I knew what was back of it all, and that's a fact."

And this sentence was repeated mentally, if not aloud, a good many times by Inspector Mackay during the next fortnight. However, being able to do nothing until his arrival, and this being such a holiday as he did not often get, he was sensible enough to settle down to enjoy the voyage, and, even in winter, the Atlantic crossing is an exhilarating week for anyone who is fortunate enough not to be sea-sick.

The landing was made at Halifax, as, of course, in winter the St. Lawrence is no longer available; and the inspector's first care was to proceed to the police station, where he hoped that news would be waiting for him. Nor was he disappointed. New Scotland Yard had wired to have a watch kept on the Smiths, and to have Wyndham arrested. Now came the reply.

"Smith family new comers—" "I could have told 'em that myself," grunted Inspector Mackay—"very good reputation in the neighborhood. Wyndham left suddenly—traced to Victoria, British Columbia, left there—trace lost."

The reply was a long document; but the above words, muttered by the inspector as he scanned it over, serve to give the gist.

"The idiots!" he said. "Why, the chap was just playing with us, that and nothing else. But, by God! he'll find it a dangerous game, before he's finished." Nothing so irritates a policeman—or, for the matter of that, anyone else—as to be made a fool of.

And now the inspector was rather in a quandary as to what to do. With the local police at fault, had he any business to go spending government money on a trip across the Canadian continent, on a chase for this Wyndham, who by now was as likely as not well on his way to Australia?

It was hardly a course which he could take without reference to his superiors, and he did not quite see what he could urge in favor of pursuing it; and yet he would dearly like to. The matter seemed to be becoming almost personal, between the inspector and this Wyndham, whom he had never seen. However, on re-reading the report, and especially the part relating to Vancouver, he did find one circumstance, which, as far as his experience went, really bid far to furnish, sooner or later, a clue. It was that Wyndham, staying at Victoria, on Vancouver Island, was reported to be engaged to a young lady named Aylmer.

"Swell thief or wipe stealer," he muttered, "they are always to be heard of at their donah's—provided you wait long enough. I think I can conscientiously cable them at the Yard that, though not yet arrested, there is still a good chance of getting this Wyndham."

Accordingly he did so.

To his great joy he received a reply authorizing him to proceed, and to draw the necessary funds from the Bank of Montreal. So Inspector Mackay made his arrangements, and trained off, over snow-clad Canada, for Winnipeg.

A police officer is human, of course, and has sentiments of admiration for Nature and her grandness; but, notwithstanding the fact that there is one exceptional constable, who is at the same time a Royal Academy exhibitor, it is hardly a disparagement of the Force to say that its members do not generally possess very highly developed artistic faculties. It is to be feared that Inspector Mackay's chief comment on the miles and miles of snowclad forest region through which he passed previously to reaching the prairies, was that it was the kind of country in which it would be very hard to run down a determined criminal who knew woodcraft.

Arrived at Winnipeg, he put up at the Leland House, and then made some careful inquiries respecting the Smiths. The result of these was that they were all at home still, that nothing suspicious had taken place, and, in short, that they seemed very quiet worthy people. Ultimately the inspector, though it would have been simpler to go by rail, hired a sledge, driver and team, for three days, to take him to Theberton Farm and bring him back. He hoped, by this means not to set local gossip going, as he would have done by getting off the train at their little country station. However, with one person to about three square miles, he need not have been so particular!

On the way, he had to decide how to act; and, ultimately, made up his mind that he had better let it appear that he and the Yard had really been gulled by this story about a wonderful, mysterious criminal, who arranges midnight surprises for old college friends, burgles banks, and turns up swimming alone in the middle of the English Channel, just at the right moment to get picked up by an outward-bound P. and O.

"Whatever the Smiths may think," said the inspector to himself, "there can be no doubt from all I have heard, that they really like this Wyndham"—in Winnipeg General Hospital he had got hold of a girl who had been servant at Theberton Farm, when Horace and Ned paid their call, and had just turned her inside out, as the saying is; but all so gently and nicely, that the nurse said that his visit had been worth more to her patient than a dozen visits from the doctor.

"Yes, it is clear enough that they all like this Wyndham," he continued to himself, as the sleigh skimmed over the snow, and the bells tinkled as only sleigh-bells can. "So that, even though I believe that they are all right and square, it would never do to begin by telling them that this story is all bunkum, and that if they want to help justice, what they have to do is to put me on Wyndham's track. I don't say that they would keep back any definite information that they had—though one can't be certain. But the conversation wouldn't run free. No, no, what I have to do is to let on to believe it all, and think it very clever, and then gradually bring the talk round to Wyndham himself; if they know anything; I'll get it all that way."

Prairie hospitality is proverbial, and when his sleigh at last drew up at the door of Theberton Farm, Inspector Mackay was soon made at home. Perhaps it was the only time in his life when he really objected to certain phases of his own profession. However, his work had to be done, and he pumped for all he was worth in the kitchen; but to little purpose. They really seemed to know no more about Wyndham than he had learned at Halifax. Nor did it take the inspector long to understand that, though they liked Wyndham, it was chiefly in this Mr. Gascoigne, his friend, that the Smith family were interested.

There seemed to be nothing more to learn, and the following morning, anathematising himself for having lost a day, he had the sleigh got ready; and prepared to set off, first to Church Farm, to see if he would have any better success with Mr. Root, and, if not, then he would go on back to Winnipeg.

"By the way, Mr. Mackay," said Arthur Smith, during breakfast, "if you would like to get hold of Wyndham to get his evidence or anything, it might be worth while waiting till noon today, we shall get our mail then"

"Yes, that would be sound," said the doctor. "We are so far from the post office that we don't send very regularly for our letters, and this will be a whole week's mail, due by my brother Chester, who had an early breakfast and was off by half-past seven."

Having come so far, the inspector agreed that it would be best not to risk losing any possible news which, by remaining a few hours longer, he might obtain. So he countermanded his sleigh till 12 o'clock, and spent the intervening time very pleasantly seeing the farm buildings and dairy.

And more than once—though a day before he would have laughed at the bare idea—he caught himself wondering whether, after all, in spite of all probabilities, in spite of the verdict of all his experience, there might not be something in this strange story which, as embodied in old Mr. Smith's letter to Lord Netheravon, had set him laughing so heartily in the Anglo-Ruritanian boardroom in London. One thing was certain, and that was that these two young Smiths were thoroughly level-headed, honest young men; and their part of the story was probably—almost certainly correct.

"It's funny, it's certainly funny," he muttered. "I hope I'm not getting soft and fanciful in my old age! But there is something about this case different from anything I have ever handled before."

Yet, seriously, as a matter of cold, hard, deductive reasoning, how could he doubt this Wyndham's guilt? The one piece of news which he had been able to gather at Theberton Farm was so convincingly corroborative, that doubt was really no longer possible. This was the mention of Wyndham's letter from Victoria begging Mr. Smith, if not too late, to let sleeping dogs lie, and not to write to Lord Netheravon. To the inspector's mind it was all as clear as a book. Wyndham, a jaunty, dare-devil criminal, had thought it fine fun to play a joke on New Scotland Yard; the idea was quite in the style of a rollicking Claude Duval. Then had come his visit to Victoria, where he meets his girl. Thereupon plans for a quiet settled life, fears that he has been a little too foolhardy, and, in the hope that there may yet be time, the letter to Mr. Smith. Clear! Why, the inspector could follow the workings of the chap's mind like one follows foot-prints in damp ground!

Just then a war-whoop was heard, announcing Master Chester's return. He looked a fine specimen of an Anglo-Canadian boy as he rode in on a not-any-too-remote-y-broken broncho, rosy-cheeked and bright-eyed, after his fifteen mile journey over the snow. A few months previously he had been holding out his hand to the usher of a Highgate "Academy," with a prospect of perhaps being a London clerk all his life. Now he was a prairie boy, with the almost certainty of a successful career as a rich farmer before him. The Anglo-Ruritanian bank robbery had brought him good, at all events.

"Got a good fat mail?" yelled his brother Arthur.

"Better," he replied, waving a yellow envelope over his head. "I've got a telegram."

"Whew! this is an event in the annals of the Smiths. Hand it over, youngster, and don't show off your horsemanship so much, or I shall tell Mr. Mackay how many falls you got last week."

"That's good, a sailor turned riding-master. Who said the telegram was for you? It's for Maude."

Maude was called, and appeared with her sleeves tucked up and her hands covered with flour. However, she did not wait to make any preparations, but opened the telegram then and there, standing on the stoop, stared like a girl struck foolish; then, apparently finding mere words inadequate to the situation, embraced her brother Arthur, flour and all, and went dancing into the house, tossing the telegram, however, to Arthur as she did so. The latter, divided between curiosity, astonishment, and a desire to go and brush his coat, decided in favor of the former, and picked it up. When he had read it, he too looked like a man too amazed to speak. However, after a preliminary vent to his feelings in a long whistle, he ejaculated—

"Here's a go! No wonder Maudie's off her head. Listen to this:

"'Just found the biggest nugget ever seen in this country. There are three to share, but my share will be big enough to build the best house in Manitoba; not writing because I'm coming just as quick as a letter could. Hooray! Ned.'"

Leaving the Smiths to their excitement, Inspector Mackay drove off to Church Farm, where, however, he learend but little; thence, without returning to Winnipeg, to the nearest station, and was soon being whirled away West.

If, as was probable, his man was one of the three to share in the nugget, he would be going to Victoria to see his young lady, so it was for Victoria that the inspector took his ticket.

(To be continued.)

Philip Nolan, of Haverhill, shod thirty-seven horses unassisted one day last week.

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CONSERVATIVES CRITICIZE BRITISH PREFERENCE

Claim That Great Quantities of Foreign Goods Come to Canada Through That Channel—German Surtax $550,000—House to Take Recess from December 20 to January 9--Insurance Report Ready After the Holidays.

Ottawa, Dec. 14.—Sir Wilfrid Laurier stated when the house met today that the insurance report would be ready when the house met after Christmas.

The motion providing for the adjournment for the Christmas and New Year's holidays from Dec. 20 to Jan. 8, was changed so as to meet on Jan. 9. This additional day was granted at the request of Mr. Johnston (Cape Breton), who pointed out that it would permit the maritime province men to leave home on Monday instead of Sunday.

The house then went into committee of ways and means on the tariff resolutions. Mr. Crocket (York), proceeded to discuss the preferential and intermediate tariffs, stating that the government was taking the power not only to reduce but to increase duties. For instance, the government could withdraw the preferential tariff from a colony by order in council as well as extend it to another. This was a power which ought not to be given to any government. It was a repudiation of Liberalism.

Mr. Fielding said that the questions raised by Mr. Crocket were all discussed and answered already. The point that the power taken would have the effect of increasing as well as reducing duties, to a certain extent, was correct. The power to give implied the power to take. He cited the case of granting the preference to New South Wales, and then taking it away when New South Wales was absorbed in the commonwealth.

In answer to Mr. Borden Mr. Fielding said that there were precedents in the past for the government taking such powers. In the present tariff it was made clear that Canada could withdraw the preference from any colony at any time it was thought desirable to do so. There was some doubt about the government having this power and it was now made clear. There was no power taken to withdraw the preference to Great Britain. That could only be done by parliament.

In answer to R. L. Borden, Mr. Fielding said that the amount collected as surtax, exclusive of the ordinary tariff on goods of German origin was $550,000.

Mr. Henderson (Halton) complained that the cheap labor countries of Europe were getting the benefit of the preferential tariff. He was not sure that this could be avoided so long as the preference was continued. While British goods containing 25 per cent labor got the preference the other 75 per cent from Continental Europe, being the raw material of the British manufacturer also got the benefit of the preference.

Mr. Bennett (Simcoe) said that 25 per cent British labor should be exclusive of the cost of the packages. The package represented, in some instances, a large portion of the 25 per cent British labor.

Mr. Armstrong (Lambton) wanted to know whether Canada had an officer in Britain to see that preference was not given where it ought not to go.

George Taylor (the Conservative whip) supported Henderson and Bennett in their attacks on the preference. He said that 25 per cent of British labor was too small a proportion of value to obtain the benefit of the preference, at the same time 75 per cent would shut out British manufacturers because they had to import their raw material. He suggested 50 per cent.

Mr. Fielding—It will stop British goods too.

R. L. Borden said that there was a great temptation, in face of the surtax, for German manufacturers to seek to evade its penalties by taking an undue advantage of the British preference. The government should prevent the abuse of the preference.

Mr. Fielding said that the question of proportion of British labor on an article before it got the preference had occupied the attention of the government. The language of the order was that it should contain 25 per cent of bonafide British labor. The proposal to make it 75 would practically destroy the preference altogether because Britain is not a country that produces raw material for her manufactures. The interpretation of what constituted 25 per cent was too broad and it was proposed that it must be 25 per cent of labor outside of the merchant's profit.

Where package was included in the price it would also be included in the calculation of British labor but where a separate charge for package was made it would be decided on its merits. The way that the 25 per cent requirement worked out was that really one-third in value of the manufacturing must be done in Great Britain. If the raw material or partly finished article cost the British manufacturer $3, he must add $1 or one-third to its value in order to be able to certify that one-fourth of $4 at which he sold it to the Canadian purchaser was represented by British labor. There was less trouble in getting information from the British manufacturer than the Canadian. As to the surtax, it was Germany that suffered and not Canada. Canada had been too patient with Germany and only after months of representation and protest had imposed the surtax.

All the clauses of the resolution which precede the schedules were passed except some which were held over for further consideration.

There will be only Tuesday next to discuss the tariff before the adjournment for the Christmas halidays, and it is not likely that any of the items in the schedule will be dealt with before the holidays.

A delegation from the civil service waited on Sir Wilfrid Laurier today and asked for an increase in salaries.

THIRTY-SIX BELOW ZERO AT GRAND FALLS

Grand Falls, Dec. 14—Thursday morning was the coldest yet, the thermometer registering 36 degress below zero at daylight. The cold snap still continues.

Word has reached here of the death in California of Miss Flora Graham, formerly of Grand Falls, sister of John R. Graham. The deceased, who was aged 50 years, had resided here until sixteen years ago, when she went to the Pacific coast.

Miss Annie Rainsford departed on Monday for Boston, where she will pass the winter months.

S. Miller, Intervale, New Hampshire, is spending his holidays with his relatives, Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Curless at the Curless Hotel.

Miss Emma Pelletier is visiting relatives in St. Leonards this week.

Walter Grimmer, of Salmon River Mills, departed on Monday for St. Stephen where he will visit relatives for some weeks.

Charles Watters, Riley Brook, while working at a threshing machine a few days ago, was caught in the running machinery and received injuries, besides having nearly all his clothing torn from his body.

John Mahoney, Rock Brook, fell from a high scaffolding in his barn on Wednesday and received serious injuries.

Eggs are selling for 25 cents per dozen, butter at 25 cents per pound and all farm produce is proportionably high. Hotel-keepers here have sent to the Montreal market for their Christmas turkey, paying 12 cents per pound. As high as 30 cents a pound is being asked for turkeys here.

Pennsylvania Coal for Sydney.

Sydney, N. S., Dec. 16—(Special)—The steamer Trebia sailed at noon Saturday from Philadelphia with a cargo of 5,000 tons of coal for the Dominion Iron and Steel Company.