

THE ANNUAL PUZZLE, BY GORDON HOLMES

Author of "A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE."

(Continued.) "Well that would be less cowardly than marrying Miss Holt, just for the sake of her money," retorted May, setting a little, nevertheless, at the horrid picture of her lover stretched stark with a bullet in his brain. "But why need you marry Miss Holt, even if you are in difficulties? I am sure," with a laughing look, "I would be willing to share a crust with you."

Warren's ideas did not incline toward the staid or rather the dinner of herbs, and he received this last suggestion without any marked enthusiasm. "You don't understand, dear," he said. "It is not that I have any idea of actually marrying Miss Holt. But, if it could be announced that I was engaged to her, I might secure time to find some way out of my troubles, and then it would be easy enough to break the whole thing off. You surely don't think I would give up my little roadstead for all the Edith Holt in the world?"

The little roadstead did not seem to be entirely convinced, though she was half ready to be fooled again. "I don't care what reports you spread, provided they do your difficulties. But mark my words, Harry, if you don't act honorably by me, you will live to regret it."

Despite repeated rebuffs, Warren even yet regarded marriage with Edith as a matter which required only a little skillful engineering for its accomplishment. The various village beauties had encouraged so easily to his fascinations, he could hardly see the possibility that he should prove anything but irresistible to Edith. He was incapable of appreciating the refinement of a wretched woman, and he attributed Edith's coolness partly to maiden timidity, but in the main to pique on account of his various flirtations in the past, and he failed to realize how utterly he had disgusted her of late. If she gave May Manning's arm a squeeze, telling himself the while that let him once come to an understanding with the heiress, all his ruinous fancies, May included, might go hang.

"Oh, Harry, dear," whispered the girl coaxingly, "why don't you give up this horrid betting? I am sure it is the cause of all your troubles." "What do you mean?" he demanded impatiently. His tone was so harsh that May drew back in alarm. She had introduced another specter, and a more affrighting one than liquor. "Why," she faltered, "Wilson said that Higgs the bookmaker—"

Warren turned upon her with a burst of uncontrollable fury. He could be brave with a woman, and had regained much of his wonted turbulence since Angier's recovery became assured. "So you have been discussing me with your friend the groom, have you? Be shouted, 'blotting' to rain me. He pointed forth a volley of abuse. His intent was now so clear that the girl shrank away aghast, with her hands in her ears.

"Oh, Harry!" she gasped, "oh, Harry!" "Now, listen to me, my fine lady," he went on, his voice taking a feminine note of sheer passion. "I have told you that unless I make up to Edith Holt I am ruined, and—"

The girl laid her hand over his mouth and dragged him quickly into the street. Not far away, on the side of the road, the red glow of a cigar shone out from the dusk, wavering with each forward movement of the smoker. "Warren stepped back still farther into the shrubbery. He gripped his companion's arm to enjoin silence, and was reviving the sudden passion which had betrayed him into the indiscretion of raising his voice.

CHAPTER XII. HOBSON BECOMES VERY ANGRY. George Lester sat at his bedroom window, smoking a peaceful pipe and idly watching the life of the village. He looked out on a scene with hundreds of dupes who in England: A patch of green whereon a few urchins, their coats set up for wrinkles, were playing the national game and playing it rather well; the quaint inn, given a fictitious importance by its detached sign-post and wide carriage way, relics of the old posting days; three or four shops, whose owners, judged by the drawing of the latticed windows, derived their support solely from the sale of balls of string and those delectable confections known as bull-eyes, of colossal memory; for the cost, a double row of cottages, with

here and there women knitting and gossiping at their doors; and, a little in the distance, an old-fashioned house of worship, whose doorway, with its time-worn leaden door, gave a soothing touch of solemn dignity to the scene.

One of the string and sweetstuff emporia stood out more prominently than the rest. It was the post-office, and its front was resplendent with the glory of a red-painted letter-box. This shop was a little to the left of the "Edith's Room" and on the opposite side. From Lester's room he obtained an oblique view of it when his glance wandered in that direction.

To a man whose recollections of swamp and jungle were yet vivid, the rustic picture was delightful. The scene attracted Lester's attention, and he was struck by the character associated with spring time and youthful fancy. "Lester's tone was dry, and the detective had some imaginings as to whether his companion was, or put it colloquially, 'getting at him.' Under the circumstances, he thought it wiser to change the subject.

"Have you learnt anything fresh, sir?" he inquired. "Things have come to a bit of a standstill, and I should be glad to hear a little news from you."

"As a matter of fact," replied Lester, "that is the very reason I wanted to consult you. I have made a very important discovery, indeed."

"I am glad to hear it, sir. May I ask you what the news is? It's good to hear you are alone here. We can chat without fear of prying ears."

"I quite agree with you," said Lester. "It is an excellent thing that we are alone. But you might, perhaps, be disappointed to hear that my discovery has nothing to do with the death of Lord Arcliffe."

"No, Mr. Hobson. What I have found out is a very ingenious method of robbing his majesty's mails!"

"Still, the postal authorities are always very glad to hear about any new dodge of that sort."

"Oh, I do not think there will be any necessity to approach the post-office on this matter. Just hand me over Miss Holt's letter, and, as I wish that lady to be spared annoyance as far as possible, we will say no more about it."

"Miss Holt's letter?" exclaimed the other, assuming an expression of wooden surprise. "I don't—"

"Don't waste your finesse on me, my man, if you please!" said Lester, sharply. "I've watched the whole business from my window from the time you fixed up your contrivance in the mail-box until you went back and fetched it away, and with Miss Holt's letter in it. You are now carrying in your breast pocket."

Hobson, finding himself cornered, tried bluster. "Look here," he began in the pompous tone of the policeman, "you must not interfere with me in the execution of my duty! I have authority for all I do, and I am a serious matter to attempt to defeat the ends of justice."

"Don't talk nonsense," said Lester, contemptuously. "You have no authority to rob a letter-box. You know as well as I do that it is an offence which might send you to penal servitude. However, I am just going to expose the point to you. Give me that letter, please!"

The detective tried another trick. "It's all very well for you to accuse me of taking letters from the box, but I am not to be bluffed by you or anyone else. You may accuse me; your accusation will take an hour before it reaches any business how important. He had dealt with native bearers who pronounced with a fervor almost religious. And he had waited hours in a malarious jungle for a specimen or a photograph, rarely missing his aim in the end, whether the shot was with rifle or with camera. One thing which determined him to see the thing through was that Hobson had not quit the inn. Evidently he, too, was awaiting developments, and Lester did not like that.

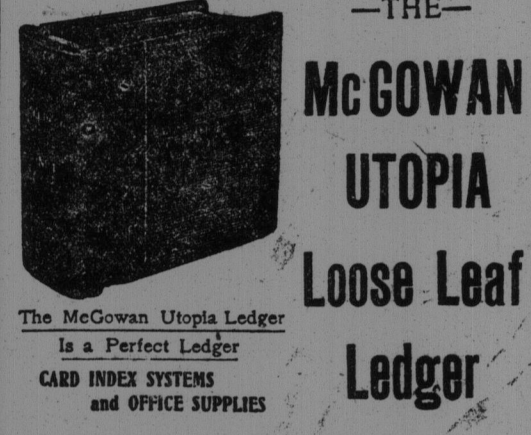
Travellers Guide

TRAINS DEPART FROM ST. JOHN. 6.00 a. m.—Express for Pt. du Chene, Halifax, Sydney, etc. 6.25 a. m.—Express for Moncton, Fredericton, Quebec, Montreal, (Connections with Great Lakes Limited).

TRAINS ARRIVE AT ST. JOHN. 6.15 a. m.—Express from Sydney and Halifax, etc. 7.45 a. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 8.00 a. m.—Express from Fredericton, etc. 8.15 a. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 8.30 a. m.—Express from Montreal, Fredericton, etc. 8.45 a. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 9.00 a. m.—Express from Fredericton, etc. 9.15 a. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 9.30 a. m.—Express from Montreal, Fredericton, etc. 9.45 a. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 10.00 a. m.—Express from Fredericton, etc. 10.15 a. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 10.30 a. m.—Express from Montreal, Fredericton, etc. 10.45 a. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 11.00 a. m.—Express from Fredericton, etc. 11.15 a. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 11.30 a. m.—Express from Montreal, Fredericton, etc. 11.45 a. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 12.00 p. m.—Express from Fredericton, etc. 12.15 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 12.30 p. m.—Express from Montreal, Fredericton, etc. 12.45 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 1.00 p. m.—Express from Fredericton, etc. 1.15 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 1.30 p. m.—Express from Montreal, Fredericton, etc. 1.45 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 2.00 p. m.—Express from Fredericton, etc. 2.15 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 2.30 p. m.—Express from Montreal, Fredericton, etc. 2.45 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 3.00 p. m.—Express from Fredericton, etc. 3.15 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 3.30 p. m.—Express from Montreal, Fredericton, etc. 3.45 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 4.00 p. m.—Express from Fredericton, etc. 4.15 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 4.30 p. m.—Express from Montreal, Fredericton, etc. 4.45 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 5.00 p. m.—Express from Fredericton, etc. 5.15 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 5.30 p. m.—Express from Montreal, Fredericton, etc. 5.45 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 6.00 p. m.—Express from Fredericton, etc. 6.15 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 6.30 p. m.—Express from Montreal, Fredericton, etc. 6.45 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 7.00 p. m.—Express from Fredericton, etc. 7.15 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 7.30 p. m.—Express from Montreal, Fredericton, etc. 7.45 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 8.00 p. m.—Express from Fredericton, etc. 8.15 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 8.30 p. m.—Express from Montreal, Fredericton, etc. 8.45 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 9.00 p. m.—Express from Fredericton, etc. 9.15 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 9.30 p. m.—Express from Montreal, Fredericton, etc. 9.45 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 10.00 p. m.—Express from Fredericton, etc. 10.15 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 10.30 p. m.—Express from Montreal, Fredericton, etc. 10.45 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 11.00 p. m.—Express from Fredericton, etc. 11.15 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 11.30 p. m.—Express from Montreal, Fredericton, etc. 11.45 p. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 12.00 a. m.—Express from Fredericton, etc. 12.15 a. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc. 12.30 a. m.—Express from Montreal, Fredericton, etc. 12.45 a. m.—Suburban from Moncton, etc.

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