THE AMAZING MR. BUNN

A WOMAN, GAGGED AND BOUND, LAY ON THE FLOOR. HER EYES APPEALED TO HIM OVER THE GAG.

(p. 248.)

Frontispiece.

THE AMAZING MR. BUNN

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THE AMAZING MR. BUNN

CHAPTER I.

THE ADVENTURE OF "THE BRAIN."

"I SHALL now proceed to give my celebrated imitation of a gentleman pinching a blood-orange," mused Mr. "Smiler" Bunn, the gifted pickpocket of Garraty Street, King's Cross, to himself, as he stood thoughtfully before a fruiterer's shop in a small street off Oxford Street. "A real gent hooking of the biggest blood-orange in the bunch!"

With this laudable intention he turned his gaze upon a fine pineapple that reposed aristocratically upon pink paper behind the plate-glass window, as the shopman came out and stood for a moment near the door, leaning against

the shop-front extension, which was piled with fruit—chiefly oranges, "blood" and otherwise. This part of the shop was in front of the window, and was unprotected save by the watchful care of the shopman.

"Nice little pineapple, that," said Mr. Bunn, casually.

"Pretty fair for the time of year," replied the shopman. "Will you take it?"

"Well, 'ow much is it?"

"Half a guinea," said the shopman.

Mr. Bunn shook his head. His resources at the moment totalled sevenpence only.

"Too dear," he decided, both hands plunged deep into his coat-pockets. "What's that little black-looking thing that keeps on running round the pineapple? Not a mouse, is it?"

The shopman plunged inside suddenly, with a frightful threat against all mice, and—Mr. Bunn's right hand flickered. Only flickered. Few people watching him would have cared to wager that his hand had left his pocket at all. Then he moved tranquilly away, and the biggest

blood-orange on the shop-front went with him. The celebrated imitation was over, and the performer had strolled calmly round an adjacent corner before the shopman had given up his search for the mouse.

"Very well done, old man," muttered Mr. Bunn. "I ain't sure but what you ain't improving. Your 'and has not lost its cunning, nor your heye its quickness."

He turned into Oxford Street, feeling distinctly encouraged by this small success, and mingled unobtrusively with the crowd of women who were looking at the shop windows and wondering why their husbands did not earn as much as other women's husbands.

Mr. Bunn had skilfully worked his way through the thickest of the crowd for over a hundred yards before he marked a lady who seemed sufficiently careless in the handling of her bag to call for his closer attention. He moved quickly to her. She was a handsome woman of middle age, with a determined face, and rather too strong a chin. She was exceedingly

well-dressed, and carried her bag in the bend of two fingers. At first she did not appear to be interested in the shops, but a hat dashingly displayed in a corner window suddenly caught her attention, and she stopped to look at it. Mr. Bunn paused for the fraction of a second immediately behind her. Then he went quietly on—round the corner (corners were a speciality of Smiler Bunn's). He did not look behind—he knew better. He simply lounged very slowly on, hoping the bag did not make too pronounced a bulge in his pocket. He looked quite the most unconcerned man in London, until he heard a sudden rustle of skirts behind him and felt a quick, firm grip on his arm.

"You are very unintelligent," said a sharp voice, and he turned to see the well-dressed woman who had been carrying her bag carelessly.

"Give me what you have in your right-hand coat-pocket at once," she requested him coldly.

"I dunno what you mean. I don't know *you*. What d'you mean?" asked Smiler, rather nervously.

"Do not let us have any nonsense, please," was her chilly comment. "Give it me at once."

Smiler put his hand in his pocket with desperate calmness and drew out—a remarkably fine blood-orange.

"It's the only one I got, but you can have it——" he began; but she interrupted.

"Do you want me to call the police?" she said. "Give me the bag instantly."

Smiler gave a sickly smile, put his hand into the other pocket, and, with a badly-feigned start of surprise, produced the bag.

"Why, what's this? However did this get there? This ain't mine—it don't belong to me!" he began, making the poor best of a very bad job.

But she cut him short. She took the bag, her quick grey eyes playing over him in a singularly comprehensive glance. She saw a clean-shaven, rather stout, butlerish-looking man of about thirty-eight, with a good-humoured mouth and a solid chin. He was extremely shabby, but neat, and obviously was in a state of considerable

embarrassment. She was about to speak, when Mr. Bunn pushed back his hat and passed his hand across his brow—a gesture evidently unconscious, and born of the mental stress of the moment. But her eyes brightened suddenly as they lighted upon his forehead, and her lips relaxed a little. For it was unquestionably a fine frontal development—a Brow among Brows. Assisted somewhat by a slight premature baldness, the forehead of Mr. Bunn was a feature of which its owner was acutely conscious. There was too much of it, in his opinion. It had never been of much use to him, and he was in the habit of considering its vast expanse a deformity rather than a sign of intellect. He was quite aware that it saved his features from being commonplace—he fancied it made them ridiculous instead. But evidently the lady of the bag did not think so. She was actually smiling to him.

"I should like to ask you a few questions," she said, "if you have no objection."

Mr. Bunn did not answer.

"*Have* you any objection?" she inquired sweetly, glancing across the road, where a dozen policemen were solemnly walking in Indian file towards their beats. Smiler regarded them for a moment—a most unpleasant sight, he considered.

Then, "No, no objection—not at all—not by no means," he said.

"Be good enough to accompany me, then," continued the woman, in a singularly business-like way. She moved slowly on, and Mr. Bunn walked by her side.

"Why are you a pickpocket?" she said curtly.

Mr. Bunn muttered something to the effect that he was not—strike him lucky if he was. But the woman ignored his denial.

"It is so foolish," she said. "So obviously unsuitable a profession for a man with your intellect. Why, with your forehead you should be carving out a great future, a career, a reputation."

Smiler stared suspiciously at her.

"You leave my forrid alone," he requested her. "I can't help having a thing more like a balloon than a 'eadpiece on my shoulders, can I?"

"But, my good person, don't you see what a great thing it is to have such a brain, and what a terrible thing it is for such an intellect to lie dormant? If all men had such intellect as your forehead tells me plainly you possess, you do not think we women would ever have asked for votes? Certainly not. It is because not one man in a hundred thousand possesses such a brain as yours that we have decided to fight for our rights. And when I think of the possibilities of yours, when I think of the latent power in your glorious head, that only needs training and shaping to the Idea. When I think, Here I have in its practically fallow state a Brain of Brains which belongs to me, and is my own to mould as I like—unless its owner wishes to be sent to prison for six months in the third division with hard labour — can you wonder that my whole spirit takes fire,

and I cry aloud, yet again — 'VOTES FOR WOMEN!'"

It was a truly lusty yell, and it gave Mr. Bunn an unpleasant shock. Every one within hearing turned to stare at the woman, but she seemed blandly unconscious of their scrutiny. She gripped the unnerved Smiler's arm and became business-like again.

"Understand me," she said. "I consider you a Find, and I propose to keep you—unless, of course, you prefer to be handed over to the police. I can see that you are a man with immense possibilities, and those possibilities I intend to develop with the ultimate aim of devoting them to the Cause. Do you understand me? I propose to educate you. You shall become a lecturer, a champion of women's rights, a pursuer of the Vote. You shall be paid while you are being taught — and paid well — and when, in the course of time, I have stirred that great Brain out of its present inaction, it shall be devoted to our service and rewarded in proportion. No —

not a word. Come with me. I am Lilian Carroway."

Mr. Bunn felt dazed. Lilian Carroway! He knew now with whom he had to deal. The Suffragette who knew more about jiu-jitsu than any European and most Japanese. The woman who a few months previously had wrestled her way into the House of Commons over the bodies of many half-stunned and wholly astonished policemen, and had threatened to put a strangulation lock on the Prime Minister himself if he did not promise to answer a plain question. Taken by surprise, he had promised, and Lilian, rather flurried, had put the following question to him:

"VOTES FOR WOMEN?"

"I must have notice of that question," had been the suave, non-committal reply of the Prime Minister, and before the Suffragette had quite thought it out, the police had taken her by storm and removed her.

Smiler Bunn remembered the incident well

and congratulated himself on not having annoyed her.

She called a taxi-cab, and commanded him to get in. She gave the driver the address of the headquarters of the particular branch of the movement to which she belonged, and sat down beside the dazed pickpocket.

"Your fortune is made," she said briefly.

Mr. Bunn muttered "Certainly," in a very uncertain voice, and relapsed into a gloomy silence.

"I have no doubt that you consider yourself to be in a singularly unfortunate position, Mr.—er—what is your name?"

"Connaught," said Smiler, absently reading the first name he saw over a shop window. "Louisy Connaught."

"Louise Connaught! What an extraordinary name! How do you spell it? Louise is a woman's name."

"Well, some spell it one way and some another. I don't mind much."

"But it is a woman's name."

"Well, I was one of a twin," lied Mr. Bunn, uncomfortably, wishing he had taken a name from some other shop window. "We was mixed a little at the christenin', and me sister's name is Thomas."

"I see. How unfortunate!" said the Suffragette. Then she spoke the name over to herself several times: "Louise Connaught—*Louis* Connaught. Why, it's a splendid name—Louis Connaught. It has a royal sort of ring. Mr. Louis Connaught, I really congratulate you upon your name."

"Louis" smiled uneasily and avoided meeting her eye.

Then the "taxi" turned suddenly into a courtyard at the side of a big block of flats near Whitehall, and pulled up.

"Here we are, Mr. Connaught," said the Suffragette, and paying the driver she gently impelled her captive into the building. He was not quite so anxious to bolt as he had been. That mention of payment had interested him, and, in any case, there seemed to be an

uncomfortably large number of police in the neighbourhood. Mr. Bunn had recognised two plainclothes men at the entrance to the side court.

He passively followed Mrs. Carroway into the lift, and from the lift into a large room on the second floor. This apartment was furnished like the board-room of a big company, but its business appearance was made slightly less severe by one or two little feminine touches here and there—a few flowers, a mirror or so, and some rather tasteful pictures. There were a dozen women of different ages scattered about the room.

Mrs. Carroway greeted them impulsively.

"My dears, I have discovered a Brain!" she cried.

The Brain blushed as he removed his hat, for he knew what was coming.

"Look at his forehead," said the enthusiastic Lilian. "Isn't it beautiful?"

"Wall, it's all right as regards quantity—there's a good square foot of it—if the quality is there," answered a rather obvious spinster of

uncertain age, with a Scotch face and a New England accent. "What's the Brain's name?"

"Louis Connaught," announced Mrs. Carroway, importantly, and several of the younger and less angular of the Suffragettes looked interested. It was certainly a high-sounding name.

"Wall, Louis, I'm glad you're here," said the American lady, "and the vurry fact of your being here shows that there's *something* behind that frontal freeboard of yours. Most men avoid this place as though it was a place of worship. You mustn't mind my candour; this strenuous pursuit of the Vote makes a girl candid."

The Brain bowed awkwardly. It was one of his few assets that he was not afraid of women. He was not even nervous with them, except when they were in a position, and looked likely, to hand him over to the police. Some instinct deeply buried behind what the "girl" was pleased to term his "frontal freeboard" told him that Mrs. Carroway would not explain to the others the circumstances in which she had made his unwilling acquaintance.

A young and pretty girl came forward, smiling, offering her hand. It was hard to believe that such a lovely slip of feminine daintiness had done, to use the popular expression, "her two months in the second division" with the best of them. She was Lady Mary de Vott.

"We are very glad to have you fighting in our Cause, Mr. Connaught," she said, charmingly.

Smiler shook hands as though he meant never to leave off.

"Glad—proud!" he said heavily. "Glad to oblige. Any little thing like that — any time."

Mrs. Carroway broke in.

"There is rather a curious little story to tell about Mr. Connaught," she said, "and, in case any one should notice and misconstrue any little mannerisms he may possess, I should like to tell his story, which explains them. Mr. Connaught probably will prefer not to be present. If so"—she turned to Smiler—"will you go to the waiting-room?"

She touched a bell, and a trim typist appeared.

"Show this gentleman into the waiting-room," ordered Lilian, and Smiler went out, feeling that, on the whole, he was travelling in the direction of a rich streak of luck. He dropped into a big, luxurious lounge, and gracefully lying at full length, proceeded, with many sounds of enjoyment, to utterly demolish the blood-orange he had so deftly acquired an hour before. He then took a little nap, and woke, thoroughly refreshed, to find Mrs. Carroway by the side of the lounge, staring with a rapt and wondering expression at his towering forehead.

"Ah, this is splendid!" she said. "I see that in common with many other great brains you have the knack of snatching an hour's rest at odd moments. Napoleon possessed it also, I believe."

"Napoleon who?" inquired Mr. Bunn, who could have beaten any brain in the world at the gentle art of resting.

"Bonaparte, my dear man!" said Mrs.

Carroway, good-humouredly. "Haven't you ever heard of Napoleon Bonaparte?"

Mr. Bunn thought.

"Heard the name somewhere or other. Hasn't he got a shop down by the Holborn end of Shaftesbury Avenue—fried fish and chips? Little dark man?"

Mrs. Carroway stared.

"I do not think so," she answered.

"Ah, some relation of his, I expect!" said Smiler, airily, and dismissed the matter. He stood up. After his reception in the big committee-room he had lost much of his trepidation as to the result of his unfortunate little *contretemps* with the Suffragette leader's hand-bag.

"Well, how about this little lot?" He tapped his forehead significantly. "Was any offer made?"

"Ah, that is quite settled. We have agreed unanimously that—after a cursory examination by a skilled phrenologist—you shall be entered at once as a Special Organiser. Why, are you disappointed, Mr. Connaught?"

She had noticed his face fall.

"No; only I don't know a note of music. I can't tell one tune from another. I admit it don't want much thinking about, just turning a handle; but even a organ-grinder——"

Mrs. Carroway laughed.

"Oh, I see!" she smiled. "I said 'Organiser.'"

"Oh!" said Smiler, with an air of intense relief, wondering what an organiser was.

"Of course," the suffragette continued, "I shall not expect big things from you at first. I think you had better begin by reading up the question of Women's Suffrage. Every morning you shall report to me at, say, ten, and we will talk over the chapters you have read. You will be able to tell me what conclusions you have come to, and what opinions you have formed on the subject, and I shall be able to correct any false impressions made upon you, and, no doubt, your intellect, as it becomes familiar with the question, will soon be discovering new and valuable interpretations of the old ideas, and giving new ideas and plans for the advancement

of the Cause. After a few weeks of careful reading you will have to begin practising public speaking, and we all expect that by that time your own great natural gifts will assert themselves, and from being a—novice, let us say—you will become a leader both in thought and in action. During the first few weeks your remuneration will be three pounds a week—the League has funds in plenty—if that is agreeable to you."

She seemed to expect an answer, and Smiler managed to get his breath back in time to say that he thought three pounds a week would do "for a start."

"Well, that being settled, let us go into the committee-room. We've sent for a phrenologist, and he is waiting there for you; and, by the way, I've explained to our comrades that I was introduced to you by an old friend, who told me that you were of almost noble birth, but, owing to a series of misfortunes, your education—both socially and—er—scholastically, has been slightly neglected. And now, Mr. Connaught,

before we join the others, let me say that I believe in you, and I think you will prove a tremendous acquisition to the Cause. I do not see how one with so noble a forehead as yours can prove otherwise."

Mr. Bunn was almost touched.

"Lady," he said, with a singular emphasis, "you do me proud, strike me pink all over, if you don't. You're a *lady*, that's what you are, and I know when I'm dealing with a lady and I treat her *as* a lady. You'll see. Don't you worry about me. I shall be all right, once I get started. When I'm just joggin' along in my own quiet way, kids can play with me; but once I get started, I'm a rum 'un, and don't you forget it, lady. I only want to get started." He extended his hand. "Put it *there*, Mrs. Carroway!"

The Suffragette leader put her hand in his, and they shook in silence.

There were about thirty Suffragettes in the committee-room when the two re-entered, and a lean man in a worn frock-coat and a flannel shirt, who was delivering a sort of lecture on

phrenology. Smiler, with the instinct of one "crook" for another, glanced at his sharp, famished eyes and summed him up instantly as a charlatan—only "charlatan" was not the exact word which occurred to the new Organiser.

Mrs. Carroway introduced the two men, and the phrenologist indicated a chair, which Smiler took. In five minutes' talk with the ladies the phrenologist had gleaned precisely what they wanted for their money, and he proceeded to give it to them unstintingly.

He took Smiler's head in his hungry-looking hands and pressed it. He said—

"This is indeed a brain—a most unusual, indeed, an amazing brain. I have not often 'andled a brain of this description. This head which I hold in my 'and is an astonishing head!" He slid a clammy palm across the gratified Mr. Bunn's forehead. "I should term this head a phenomenal head. It is perplexing—it is what we call an Unexpected Head. It has every indication of being wholly undeveloped, while its natural force is stupendous. I consider it

puzzling; it is a very difficult cranium!" He frowned, looked thoughtful, and finally dropped his hands suddenly. "Ladies," he said glibly, "I really couldn't afford to read this head for a guinea. This is as good a three-guinea head as ever I see under my 'and. This head should be charted properly; usually I charge a guinea extra for a No. 1 chart, but if you'll take a three-guinea readin' of this head, I'll throw in the chart, marked out in two colours, and framed in black oak, with pale green mount, with signed certificate and seal at the back, complete, with half-hour's verbal readin', any questions answered, for three pounds ten, cash, usual charge five guineas. Crowned heads twenty guineas and expenses. And that's a bargain."

Naturally, it being a bargain, every lady in the room agreed on the "three-pounds-ten readin'," and considered it cheap.

And then, to his intense astonishment and profound gratification, Mr. Bunn learnt among other things that he would, with a little practice, develop into an orator of a brilliance surpassing

that of the late Mr. W. E. Gladstone, and rivalling that of Mark Antony, a statesman whose statecraft would be as iron-handed as that of Bismarck, as subtle as that of Abdul the Damned, as fearless as that of Nero, and as dazzling as that of the German Emperor; a lawgiver as unbiassed and careful as Moses, a diplomat as finished as Talleyrand, a thinker as profound as Isaac Walton (the phrenologist probably meant Isaac Newton), a champion of rights as persuasive as Oliver Cromwell, and, finally, a politician as honest as"—here the phrenologist faltered for a moment—"as honest a politician as—as—the best of them." A great deal of useful and equally valuable information having been imparted, the phrenologist announced that the sitting was at an end, drew his cheque, promised to send on the chart and certificate, volunteered to read the palms of any ladies present for five shillings per palm, offered to throw himself into a trance and communicate with the spirit of any dead relative of any one present for two guineas per spirit, deal round a pack of

his business cards with the air of a pretty good poker-player, and finally took his departure.

The curious thing was that every woman—and there were many intelligent women there—seemed to believe in this shabby, flannel-shirted liar, and to respect him. Their congratulations as they surrounded the Brain were unmistakably genuine. Then, suddenly, the telephone-bell rang shrilly, and a message was received to the effect that the Prime Minister had been seen motoring in the direction of Walton Heath with a bag of golf clubs in the car. Mrs. Carroway gave a few swift instructions, and the room emptied like magic. In ten minutes Mr. Bunn was alone again with the Suffragette leader. Smiler was a little dazed.

"Where've they all gone?" he asked.

"To Walton Heath, in taxi-cabs."

"Why?"

"To ask the Prime Minister when he's going to give Votes for Women, of course."

"Well, but that American woman took a darn

great axe," said Smiler. "Surely she ain't going to ask with that!"

"One never knows," replied Mrs. Carroway, darkly.

Mr. Bunn looked grieved.

"Pore bloke," he said, with extraordinary earnestness. "Pore, *pore* bloke. It ain't all beer and skittles being Prime Minister, is it?"

"We do our best to see that it isn't!" said Mrs. Carroway, modestly. "And now about our books. I've looked out a few to begin with. Here they are."

She indicated a pile of massive volumes on the floor at the foot of a big bookcase. Smiler's jaw fell.

"Well," he said, without enthusiasm, "brain or no brain, that little lot'll give me a thundering headache before I'm through 'em. They'd better be sent by Carter Paterson or Pickford, hadn't they?"

Mrs. Carroway thought a cab would be better, and sent for one. Then she produced her purse, and Smiler became more interested.

"You must not mind my mentioning it, Mr. Connaught, but it has just occurred to me that possibly you may be short of ready money. Are you?"

"Yes," replied Smiler, with manly simplicity. "I am, somethink astonishin'."

"In that case, then"—Mrs. Carroway opened the purse—"you may like to take two pounds of your first week's salary in advance. Would you?"

"I would," answered Smiler, straightforwardly, and without false pride.

"Very well, then"—she handed him two sovereigns. "Will you write your address on this envelope, and I will enter your name in the book of the League?"

Smiler did so.

"Garraty Street. What a quaint old name!" commented the lady as she read the address.

"Yes, ain't it?" said Smiler. "And it's a quaint, old-fashioned sort of street, too," he went on, "where everybody lives on fried fish, and the landlord got to chain down the window

sills to stop 'em from using 'em for firewood. I shall be leaving there pretty soon, directly I've developed me brain a little bit. And now I'll sling me hook. What time will you be expecting me to-morrow?"

"I think at two o'clock. You had better begin on this book. She handed him a somewhat massive volume, entitled, "The Vote: What it Means and Why We Want It," by Lilian Carroway. "You must make notes as you read, and we can discuss your notes to-morrow."

Smiler took the book and weighed it in his hand.

"Ye—es," he said, rather feebly, and turned to help the cabman carry the remaining books to the cab.

So Mr. Smiler Bunn, *alias* Louis Connaught, *alias* The Brain, became a Suffragette, and only the phrenologist seemed to know that he could never be more than a suffrajest at most.

He shook hands with Mrs. Carroway and went down to the cab. Waiting on the kerb near the entrance to the mansion was a man whose

appearance seemed familiar to Mr. Bunn. This man stepped forward as Smiler entered the cab. It was the phrenologist.

"Excuse me, Brain," he said jauntily. "I'll give you a lift," and followed Smiler into the cab, closing the door behind him.

Smiler stared, then recollected the illuminated address the man had given him half an hour before, and grinned.

"All right," he said.

The phrenologist surveyed him with alert, black eyes that played over him like search-lights. He was a young man, painfully thin, hawk-nosed, and his movements were curiously deft and swift. He drew two long, thin, black, leathery-looking cigars from his breast-pocket, and handed one to Mr. Bunn.

"Hide behind that," he said, "if you like flavour and bite to a cigar."

Smiler did so, and waited for his companion to speak. The phrenologist lost no time.

"This has got to be worked properly, Mr. Connaught," he said. "There's lots of lovely

money back there,"—he jerked his thumb over his shoulder, indicating the Suffragettes' headquarters—"and you and me's got to magnetise it before any of the other grafters in this town gets on to it. Now, I'm going to play fair with you, Mr. Connaught. You got a pull with that bunch somehow; thanks to me, they reckon you'll be able to put King Solomon and all his wisdom in your ticket pocket after a week or two's study. On account of the shape of your head, I make it. Well, you and me's men of the world, and we can be frank where others fall out, and as a man of the world, I can tell you right away, Mr. Connaught, that the Brain idea is a dream. Why, say, the minute I feels your head under my 'and I found myself saying, 'Well, this is a High Brow all right, but it's hollow behind. There's nothin' to it—nix—vacant.' I mean nothing special. Of course, there's brain there—about the average. Very near up to the average, say. But you ain't no Homer, any more than me or them daffy-down-dillies back to the mansions. The old girl seems to fancy herself

at physiognomy, but she's trod on a banana-skin all right if she's risking real money on your dial. Well, now, I want to be friendly with you, Mr. Connaught. This town owes us both a living, and the only rule in the game is that we got to collect it. Well, now, let's put our cards on the table. I'm a palm-reader and phrenologist just now, but I'm going solid for bigger business bimeby. Now, what's your lay?"

"Well, the old girl *thought* I been picking her pocket," said Smiler, grinning, and the other scoundrel's eyes glittered with satisfaction.

"Why, that's great! Oh, you're a sure enough gun; you got a gun's hand, all right. Say, shake. I knew you was a crook first glimp, and when I see your hands I wondered whether it was forgin' or picking pockets. Well now, that's settled. Now, I got a little place just off the Strand, here. You send this cab on with your books, and come to this office of mine, and we'll have a talk."

Smiler was willing; he was fascinated with his new acquaintance, and within five minutes the

pair were closeted in the phrenologist's den in a back street off the Strand.

It took the "palm-reader" precisely ten minutes to outline the idea of a *coup* which he and Smiler could work together as partners.

"Now, brother," he began, "what you got to understand is that you ain't going to last with that bunch of vote-sharps longer than about a fortnight—if that. They got a lot of brains among 'em, and the old girl, she's got the brightest. But she's just happened to get hung up on your forrid, and her own idea of her physiognomy skill. But by the time you've read one or two of them books she'll have lost her interest. You'll give yourself away, sure, and then it'll be the street for yours, and the salary'll fold its tent and silently steal away—see? You see that, don't you?"

Smiler nodded. He had known that all along.

"Well, so what you get, you got to get quick. And now, listen to me——"

The palm-reader's voice dropped to a dry and rapid whisper.

"Now, my name's Mesmer La Touche, and my title's Perfessor, and I'm a man you can trust," he began, and straightway unfolded his scheme.

* * * * * *

Precisely a week later the Suffragette cohort, under command of Mrs. Carroway, gave a greatly-boomed demonstration at King James's Hall. This demonstration had been enormously advertised. Entrance was free to all people of reasonably respectable appearance, and promised to be successful, if only because of the fact that the proceedings were not to consist of speeches but chiefly of a series of limelight illuminated tableaux. The idea of the tableaux was to re-enact on the platform various scenes which had marked the progress of the Women's Suffrage Movement, and with which scenes the Suffragettes were associated in the mind's eyes of the public.

For instance, Tableau No. 1 on the programme was to consist of about thirty Suffragettes clothed in prison raiment with feeding-bottles being held to their mouths by savage-looking men, their

arms being held by brutal wardresses. The curtain would go up, revealing the "atrocity" in full swing against a back curtain painted to resemble masonry and prison bars. Tableau No. 2 again depicted the devoted thirty, chained and padlocked to a row of iron railings, staring defiantly at a back curtain painted like a Cabinet Minister's house, while, rapidly approaching, the heavy sound of the feet of a large body of reckless police could be heard—thanks to the energy of a shirt-sleeved scene-shifter in the wings, who was to manipulate various wood and drum contrivances built for the purpose of imitating the march of many men. And so on, through a series of about twenty similar tableaux. The first item on the programme was to be the singing of the famous Suffragette song—

> Women of England, arise in your might,
> For the tyrant has nigh burnt his boats;
> Man has done wrong too long, let him now do aright
> And give women votes.

by the thirty Suffragettes, who would, in this scene, wear their choicest evening toilettes and

all their jewels, in order to let the public see that, despite their desperate deeds, they were women of consequence, wealth and position.

It was a well-conceived plan of entertainment, and advertisement, and the deadheads of London —and London is practically populated by deadheads—flocked to this free evening with a unanimity beyond either praise or blame. The doors opened at seven o'clock, and at 7.15 there was not even standing-room left. The curtain was due to go up at 7.30.

Behind the scenes there was a rushing sound of many silk skirts, wafts of expensive perfumes, the odour of flowers, excited whisperings of feminine tongues, the flash and flicker of diamonds, giggles and squirks and bubblings of mirth. The place was alive with women. Here and there a scene-shifter slouched in and out of dark angles and nooks, concerned with ropes and canvas frames. In a big dressing-room at the back was an uncomfortable-looking man in evening dress—Mr. Smiler Bunn. He seemed to be the only man in the place.

It may be explained that The Brain had not been fruitful of results during the previous week of study, and the development of his intellect appeared to be less than the improvement in his manners and speech. His ideas about Women's Suffrage were about where they were before he became The Brain; if anything, they were rather more confused on the subject than otherwise. He had disappointed Mrs. Carroway a little, but, thanks to a few points praising her book, which had been taught him by the phrenologist, she continued to expect big things from him.

But Smiler knew perfectly well that it was only a question of a week or two before his association with the Suffragettes would cease. He was a good pickpocket, but he was no political organiser, and he knew it. "Professor" La Touche had explained that to him too frequently for him to forget it. But Smiler did not care; he and the phrenologist had made their arrangements, and long before the tableaux were ended that night they would be carried out.

Mr. Bunn's duty that evening was to act as a sort of stage attendant to the thirty Suffragettes. He was to chain them to the railings, for instance, to help arrange the prison feeding scene, and so on. Mrs. Carroway had drilled him well, and she had no doubt he would do the thing thoroughly.

Now, there are about four back entrances to King James's Hall, three of which are in different streets, and as half-past seven drew near there rolled unobtrusively up to one of these entrances a neat one-horse brougham. Nobody got out of the brougham, nor did the coachman descend. He just pulled up and waited. A policeman strolled up and remarked that it was a " perishin' cold night." The coachman, in a voice curiously resembling that of Mesmer La Touche, palm reader and phrenologist, agreed with him, and volunteered the information that presently he had to take away a big dress-basket of costumes belonging to a titled Suffragette who was inside the hall. The intelligent constable gathered that if anybody happened to be about to lend a hand when the basket came down there would probably

be a "dollar" floating about (Mesmer believed in boldness). The policeman decided to remain and lend a hand. This was one of the reasons why neither that efficient officer nor Mesmer La Touche saw a laundry-van—driven by a small and curiously unimportant-looking man pull up at one of the back entrances further round the building, and wait there in very much the same way as the brougham was waiting.

Inside the hall the opening song had been sung, and the Suffragettes were now posing in the prison scene, much to the appreciation of a sympathetic audience. Smiler Bunn, with an armful of short chains, was waiting in the wings with a group of scene-shifters bearing sections of strong iron railings. The curtain went down on the first tableau, and the women came pouring off the stage, hurrying to their dressing-rooms to change for the great "Chains" scene. In three minutes the railings were fixed, and Smiler Bunn was chaining the Suffragettes to the bars. And it was noticeable that while all the evening he had been wearing a distinctly worried look,

now, as one by one the padlocks clicked, that worried look was replaced by a gradually widening smile. Mrs. Carroway noticed it, and wondered why The Brain was smiling.

The last Suffragette chained up, Mr. Bunn made a bolt for the back. He had about three minutes to work in, and a lot to do in that three minutes. He ran in and out of the dressing-rooms, exactly like a weasel working a rabbit warren. Each time he came out of a room he brought an armful of furs. In a minute and a half he had run through all the dressing-rooms, and was literally staggering under his bundle of furs. He dropped them all into a big dress-basket at the end of the corridor, jammed down the lid, and whistled softly. Instantly a man—the driver of the laundry-van—appeared, running silently to him, took one end of the basket, and Smiler taking the other end, the pair of them vanished. In twenty seconds the basket was in the laundry-van.

"Hurry up, for pity's sake!" sobbed Mr. Bunn, as he scrambled up beside his confederate.

"Nearly half of 'em had left their diamonds on their dressing-tables"—his voice cracked with excitement — "and *by Gawd! I've got 'em all!*"

The van rolled down the back street and round a corner—corners, it has been explained, were a speciality of Mr. Smiler Bunn. He peered back as the van swung round, and caught a fleeting glimpse of a one-horse brougham waiting patiently outside another back door. And he grinned.

"Poor old Mesmer!" he chuckled. "He's a clever man, is Mesmer, but if he don't get off out of it, 'im and his brougham, he'll stand a darn good chance of getting copped. He's a good man at ideas, Mesmer is, but he's no good at carryin' of 'em out. Ah, well—round the corner, mate. The sooner we get this lot to Israelstein's the better I shall be pleased. I wonder what Lilian will say? It'll take 'em a good twenty minutes to file them chains!"

There was a sudden sound of galloping hoofs. Smiler turned, looking back just in time to see the brougham tear down the street they had just

left, and a few yards behind it half a dozen policemen running like hares.

"There goes Mesmer—poor chap! The town certainly owes him a living, same as he said, but I don't reckon he'll be collecting any of it to-night—*not* to-night, I don't reckon," muttered The Brain.

And the laundry-van rumbled comfortably on towards the business-place of that genial receiver of stolen goods, Mr. Israelstein.

CHAPTER II.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE TURNCOATS.

Mr. Bunn was ever a man who was particular about his meals. Some weeks after his adventure with the Suffragettes, he decided to give himself a really good lunch. Entering a restaurant and seating himself, he took the menu in his hand and subjected it to so profound and lengthy a study that the waiter's off-hand manner put on, as it were, a heavy overcoat of respect. Evidently he was about to serve an epicure.

At last Smiler looked up.

"I'll 'ave," he said, "a bit of the pullet of a turkey."

"Pardon, sir?" queried the waiter, politely.

"A double portion of the pullet of a turkey," said Mr. Bunn, irritably.

The waiter looked perplexed.

"Some of this here!"

Mr. Bunn pointed to the menu, and the perplexity vanished from the face of the waiter, together with his air of respect.

"*Poulet a la Turque*—yes, sir."

"Wait a minute," said Smiler. "I don't like the sound of it. You don't say it the same way as I do, and it don't sound very savoury the way you say it. I want something with some stuffin' in it."

"Stuffin', sir?" repeated the waiter.

"That's it, stuffin'—sage and onion——" Mr. Bunn began to lose patience. "Look here," he went on, "'ave you got any duck on?"

"Wild duck, sir? Yes. *Only* wild duck to-day, sir. Or some snipe. We have got some nice snipe, sir."

"Ah, well; let's have one or two—see? And some mashed potatoes and some turnip-tops and a few parsnips. And some beer—and don't forget the vinegar."

The waiter looked a little dazed, and hurried off, muttering something unlovely about the English. He was French himself.

Mr. Bunn had never tasted snipe, and he sat back, looking forward to a very pleasant lunch.

During the previous three months, business had been exceedingly brisk with him; he had moved into new apartments in Cherry Blossom Street, Tottenham Court Road, and he was hoping henceforward to live on a slightly more elaborate scale than hitherto he had been able to afford.

His sale of the Suffragettes' jewellery and furs for some three hundred pounds to Lazarus Israelstein, the receiver, seemed to have ushered in a series of much smaller but equally successful little *coups*. It is true that had the venerable Israelstein paid him only a fifth of the value of the goods he could have retired from the pocket-picking profession without fear regarding his financial future, but his acquaintance with diamonds and furs had been previously so limited that he was quite content with his price.

He sat thinking as he awaited his snipe.

"Yes," he said presently. "I'll do it. I'll have a fur coat this winter. It's warm and classy. And a bit of class about his clothes does no man

no 'arm. I can see as a man's got to be in the swell mob to make big money, and so I'll be one of 'em. I can always pawn a fur coat, anyhow, if I don't fancy it."

His soliloquy was interrupted by the waiter, who placed two snipe and their formidable convoy of vegetables before him, and departed to fetch the beer. Smiler's eyes glistened a little and his lips twitched as he surveyed the repast that was spread for him. He sniffed—and his nostrils twitched and his eyes ceased to glisten.

"Gameyish—very," he said doubtfully, assisting himself liberally to vegetables. "Still, it's a great luxury, I've always heard—snipe is."

He took one on to his plate, cut it in two, hesitated as the piquant odour of the bird assailed him, then placed it in his mouth and bit on it. For the fraction of a second it was difficult to distinguish whether he had broken a tooth or had been suddenly paralysed. He stood up hastily, looking round for the waiter. That unfortunate individual was approaching quickly with the beer. But he put the brake

on when he observed the expression on his patron's face, slowed more and more, and finally halted.

Smiler deliberately took a snipe in each hand, "hefting" them for a comfortable grip, as a man about to throw a brick does, and then, even as the waiter turned to run, he threw them in rapid succession at the man.

"These snipes is rotten!" yelled Mr. Bunn, furiously, as he threw them. "They've been bad for months!"

One took the waiter on the ear, and the other closed the right eye of the restaurant manager for three clear days. And by the time the confusion had abated, Mr. Bunn was gone, swearing never again to enter any restaurant which sold anything more *recherché* than a cut off the joint. He went into a bar close by and took three peppermints one after the other to get the taste of the snipe out of his mouth, and then proceeded to the nearest Lockhart's to get a really eatable lunch. But, nevertheless, it was in a very bad temper that, half an hour later, he entered the

establishment of one Lewis Hyams, secondhand-clothes dealer, of Dutch Street, Paddington.

"I want a fur-lined coat—a good 'un!" demanded Smiler of the black-bearded individual with the dull green and old gold complexion and heavy flexible nose, who stood behind the counter cleaning an old pair of trousers with benzine.

The dealer ran his eye over Smiler and gave an excellent imitation of a congratulatory smile.

"Vell, you've come to the right shop. Ve ave 'em all qualities except dem cheap vons vit de moths in dem," he informed the prospective customer, smiling like a famished vulture. "Vhat vhas your price?"

"Let's have a look at the coat first," parried Smiler, who had bought a suit from Hyams before.

The dealer crossed the shop to a dim corner, and presently came back with a big overcoat—lined with fur. Rat fur, it looked like.

"Dere's a peautiful ghoat—try it on, mister. It's put aside for a Court gentleman, but he ain't very well—see? You've got it a beautiful

figure, mister—try de ghoat on. Give it a chance, mister—'ere, I'll help yer off."

Smiler felt the fur, and a pinch of it came away between his finger and thumb, leaving a bald spot. Hyams angrily snatched the coat away.

"What you doin' it?" he said sourly. "Ain't you know no better for to 'andle a fur ghoat like dat? Talk about de moths. Vhat sort of ghoat yer want, say it?" he said feverishly.

"Well, I don't want no coat in a moultin' condition," replied Mr. Bunn, with ponderous humour. "You put your dogskin away and let me see a *coat*. Somethink about five pounds or more."

The dealer raised his hands.

"Vell, vhy didn't yer *say* it? Dis ghoat's goin' for twenty-five bob! It'll 'ave to be a k'vid now you've spoiled it," he added sadly.

He hung up the "spoiled" coat and looked round the shop doubtfully. There is not much business done in fur coats in Dutch Street, Paddington. Corduroy is too popular there.

There was a momentary pause. Then Mr. Hyams suddenly brightened up.

"Vhait a mo'—vhait 'alf a mo'." He clutched Smiler's arm anxiously. "Yer von't go, mister. You'll be it a gentleman, mister, for 'alf a mo'. I've got the very thing."

He darted into a room at the back of the shop, and almost instantly reappeared with a better-looking overcoat, the fur of which was a really excellent imitation of kangaroo, which it is said can sometimes be made into a sort of imitation of inferior sable.

"Real sable, mister," he said reverently. He put his hand to his mouth and whispered, "Brought to dis country by poachers vhat get it from de Czar's own private preserviss at Siberia."

"That's better!" said Smiler. "Let's put it on."

He slipped his arms into it and buttoned it.

"Mister, that's nobby! S'velp me, dat ghoat vhas made for you." He stood back, admiring

the really quite reasonable fit of the garment. Then he suddenly raised his voice.

"Izzy!" he cried, and a sleek young vulture of about twenty years came into the shop.

"Look at yer pore grandvater's fur ghoat on de gentleman, Izzy, my poy. Why, it fits him better as it fitted de old man, ain't it—no!"

The younger man walked completely round Smiler and agreed.

"My vord, it's vorth a k'vid more to dis gentleman dan anybody else, ain't it?" he said, and having thrown out his valuable suggestion, thrust out his hands, palms upwards, to indicate overwhelming admiration, and went and stood in the doorway, quite artlessly blocking the only exit. Evidently he mistrusted the customer.

Smiler regarded himself in a glass which Hyams produced, approved of the fit, and carefully removed the coat, much to the disappointment of a typical British working-man who had just come in.

"Don't like it," said Smiler. "How much is it?"

"Fifteen pound?" said the dealer, in a questioning tone.

"Give you two pound ten," said Smiler. "Take it or leave it."

Hyams' eyes glistened, and he braced up like a war-horse sniffing the fray from afar off. Here was a foeman worthy of him.

"God of Israel!" he said piously, and shook his clenched fists in the air, looking up at the ceiling with fevered eyes. "Vhat ruin!"

He gasped for breath a moment, and, having slightly recovered, quoted fourteen pounds.

Smiler offered two pounds twelve shillings and sixpence, and Mr. Hyams unbottoned his collar and asked his son to stand aside from the doorway in order to admit more air.

The working-man, whose time did not appear valuable, swore admiringly under his breath as Mr. Hyams metaphorically spat on his hands and fell to work. It was a grim struggle. Smiler advanced his bid by half-crowns, and Hyams reduced his price by crowns. Throughout twenty long minutes the dealer wailed and

moaned and urged and wept and implored; and Smiler stood starkly still, determined and implacable as the Day of Judgment; and Izzy, the youth, wrung his hair and his hands for pride at his father's business talents; and the working-man rocked to and fro, swearing softly with emotion. Then suddenly a girl appeared at the door behind the counter, presumably attracted by the noise of the conflict. She stood on the threshold looking into the shop, and Smiler's quick eye — a successful pickpocket requires an eye like a condor—instantly took in her remarkable beauty.

It was the face of a beautiful Jewess whose family might have lived three generations in America, and there is no more beautiful type of face in all the world. Serious, mysterious, alluring, of the East. Dark, with no more than the remotest hint of the Christian girl's pink, perfectly-shaped, with fine teeth and superb eyes. There was a suspicion of hardness on the face—but that may have been the shadow.

Smiler drew his breath in suddenly and paused.

Then the girl was gone. But she had completely "jacked up" Smiler's side of the bargain, as he expressed it later. He did not want such a girl to hear him haggling in half-crowns for a fur coat.

"Look here, mister," he said with an unmistakable air of finality. "I'll give six quid for the coat, take it or blooming-well leave it."

This was a jump of seventeen and sixpence. Hyams was smitten dumb for a second. Then recognising that Mr. Smiler had said the last word, he swiftly agreed.

"And I'll take a receipt for it, too," said Mr. Bunn, rather sourly. "It'll be useful, perhaps, when I want to pawn the coat."

"Vill you promise to pawn it 'ere vhen you pawn it?" demanded Hyams, always ready to do business.

"I will—'urry up!" said Smiler easily, and began counting out the money.

Mr. Hyams wrote the receipt, took the six pounds, at Smiler's request gave the coat a brush, and handed it over the counter.

Then an astonishing thing befell. It was now quite silent in the shop, and as Smiler seized the coat just below the collar all present heard the crisp and almost unmistakable crackle of bank-notes seemingly right under Smiler's hand.

Hyams grabbed for the coat like lightning, but in a fraction of time Smiler had it rolled up under his arm and in a grip like the grip of the law. Hyam's face had turned a delicate green.

"Ah! Vhat ruin!" he groaned.

Smiler took a step towards the door. But Hyams put out his hands desperately.

"I ain't vhant to sell it de coat, mister. For God's sake don't go avay!" he cried.

"Oh, rats to that!" replied Mr. Bunn politely. "It's mine—linin' and all," he continued meaningly. "Ain't it mine, sport? Ain't I paid for it, and got a receipt for it?"

He applied to the working-man, who spoke like a true Briton.

"'Course it's yours, mate," he said warmly. "I never 'eard of such a thing. Whoddyer

mean?" he continued in a tone of ferocity to Hyams. "Whoddyer tryin' on? Tryin' to get my mate's coat away from 'im? You let 'im alone—see—or I'll put it acrost you. You can't sell a thing and then take it back. It's agin the lor. You'll get into trouble, you will. That's what you'll get into." He turned to Mr. Bunn. "Come on mate," he said. "We'll get off out of it. This place ain't any too honest."

Hyams leaned across the counter, trembling.

"I'll give fifty k'vid down for de ghoat, mister," he said.

"Not for *this* coat," replied Smiler, and turned to the shop-door.

If it was worth fifty pounds to Hyams it was worth it to him.

"If dere's money in de lining of de ghoat it's mine!" said Hyams. "Izzy, go and fetch it a policeman."

"That's it, Izzy, fetch two—fetch a sergeant while you're at it," said Smiler facetiously, "and he'll tell you that what a man buys and

pays for and gets a receipt for in the presence of a witness, belongs to the man. 'Ere, out of the way!"

He strode suddenly to the door and into the street, and Hyams followed him, muttering a few words to Izzy as he went.

It was now about three o'clock. They fell into line, Smiler walking first with the coat under his arm, the workman slightly behind Mr. Bunn, and Mr. Hyams about a yard behind the workman, his eyes fastened on the coat in a keen and hungry stare. It was perfectly plain to Smiler that Hyams did not intend to let the coat or its new owner out of his sight until he was convinced that it contained nothing more precious than its fur lining. He just dogged the trail of the pickpocket like an elderly and extremely hungry wolf.

Half-way down the street they passed an antique furniture shop, at the door of which was standing the proprietor—a gentleman named Abraham Cohenstein. He was polishing a gimlet (of a size suitable for making worm-holes), but

at sight of Hyams he paused a second to regard the little procession.

Without taking his eyes off Smiler Bunn, Mr. Hyams said a few rapid words in Yiddish, and, shouting to some one at the back of the shop, Mr. Cohenstein tripped forth and joined Hyams on his money trail. Cohenstein's air was that of a fasting hyæna. He and Hyams muttered swiftly together as they followed in the steps of Smiler Bunn.

At the end of the street the blood-hounds were reinforced by another—one Moses Morris—who at a few words from Hyams cheerfully left a small jewellery establishment in charge of a boy, and took up the trail, with something in his appearance reminiscent of a starving raven attracted by a dead sheep.

Something peculiar about the three Jews seemed to strike another of the race who was looking into a shop-window round the corner, and he came running across the street and joined them.

At this point Smiler turned to the working-man.

"You keep with me, mate, and it'll be worth a five quid to you when I've shook 'em off. They'll be accusing me of stealing the coat if I don't keep a witness, and in case we get parted, give us your name and address."

"Me name's Bill Welch, and I lives in Paradise Court, Bishop's Mews, Paddington," said the man; "and I'll stick to you as long as you've got the price of a pint."

"That's the talk!" said Smiler, and they ambled steadily on—and the bloodhounds ambled steadily after them.

* * * * *

It is necessary to explain here that the coat which Smiler Bunn had just purchased from the amiable Hyams had originally belonged to Hyams' father, a patriarchal old Israelite, who was reputed to be wealthy. Some three months before he had died, and to the extreme grief of his son, he had left nothing behind him worth inheriting but the secondhand-clothing establishment. Hyams the younger had searched everywhere and inquired everywhere, but he

had not been able to find that the old man had left anything at all resembling real money behind him. But he could not have taken it with him. And Hyams knew that he had possessed at least eight hundred pounds. But he had not been able to find more than the few pounds which had been in his father's pocket at the time of his decease, and he had almost resigned himself to go through life with a broken heart, when he had heard, too late, that musical crackle of bank-notes in the fur coat which had belonged to his father. And then, with stunning force, it had occurred to him that the only thing he had not searched was the fur coat. It was then that he lost his head and grabbed for the coat, and, worse than that, had offered fifty pounds for it.

He could have wept with rage as he followed Mr. Bunn—indeed, he wanted to, but dared not get his eyes blurred. Smiler might dodge them at any moment. Mr. Hyams had good eyesight, and just then he was requiring all of it.

He was afraid to call the police, for he was not

quite clear as to the law dealing with money found in fur coats. Did it belong to the vendor, the purchaser, or was it appropriated by the Government? He did not know—nor did his friends. And he was proposing to take no risks beyond offering to pay a small percentage on the profits of the expedition. But all his friends had known of the money which Hyams the elder had been said to possess, and they were only too glad to participate—at a percentage.

Curiously enough, Smiler Bunn was refraining from calling the police in to protect him and his property for precisely the same reason as Hyams. Smiler wanted what he termed "the lot," and he was taking what, in his opinion, were the necessary steps to obtain it. As for Bill Welch, he wanted anything he could get—and was, he flattered himself, on the way to getting it.

* * * * *

The chase began at about three o'clock. After about twenty minutes' quick walking Smiler Bunn began to weary, and hailed a hansom. Bill

Welch, who climbed in after him, announced that the blood-hounds had hailed a taxi-cab. Smiler peered through the little window at the back of the hansom and saw for himself that a taxi was following the cab so closely that the bonnet of the motor almost touched the back of the cabman's seat. Eight hungry eyes were staring at him from the taxi.

"Why don't you rip the darn coat open here?" said the well-intentioned William. But Smiler shook his head.

"No fear," he replied. "As long as the notes are in the coat they're mine, and I've got a receipt for them. Once they're out of the coat I've got to account for where and how I got 'em if them Yiddisher gents call in the police. And I ain't popular with the police. No police would believe I found 'em in a fur coat if them Yids said I pinched 'em out of their pockets. And if they knew who I was, no police would accept any explanation of mine anyhow. I don't mean to say I ain't honest—I'm as straight as a gun-barrel—but what I mean is, it ain't

convenient for me to go about offering explanations for being in possession of a lot of bank-notes just now. See?" (Smiler was thinking of the proceeds of several little hauls he had made recently, for which he was still "wanted.")

"What we got to do," continued Smiler, "is to make a good get-away with the coat and open her up nice and quiet when we're alone in my room."

He looked out of the window again.

"It ain't no good tryin' to get away from a taxi-cab in this hansom. Let's go and have a drink and a snack of something." He lifted the little trap-door in the roof. "Pull up at the first eatin' house," he instructed the cabman.

They were in Oxford Street, and a few doors further on the cab stopped at a small Italian restaurant. Smiler paid the cabman, and they went inside, Hyams and Co. not three yards behind them.

Smiler stood in the middle of the hot, stuffy restaurant and deliberately put on the fur coat,

turned up the collar, carefully put the flaps down over the pockets, and buttoned himself up.

"Now they'll only get rags off me if they get anything at all," he announced, and ordered some chops.

The Jews held a whispered conference, at the end of which Hyams got up and approached the couple with the chops.

"If you lay as much as a finger on me or my coat, Hyams," said Smiler swiftly, "I'll punch your face round under your left earhole, and Bill Welch here'll punch it on round down the back of your neck, so as your collar-band'll choke you."

But the dealer only gave a ghastly smile.

"Vill you do business?" he said. "What you want cash down for de ghoat?"

"What'll you give?"

"Seventy k'vid."

Smiler grinned and shook his head. Hyams, who knew that Smiler could not have any idea as to why the coat was likely to contain anything

approaching that sum, groaned and spread out his hands in a kind of despair.

"Vell, eighty k'vid—and two per cent. of what I find it in de linin'."

"Oh, cheese it!" said Mr. Bunn vulgarly, and Hyams sat down. There was another excited conference, which ended in Hyams getting up and leaving the restaurant.

"'Ullo!" said Bill Welch. "Gone for the police."

"Don't you believe it," remarked Smiler cheerfully. "Gone to fetch a few more of the tribe more likely."

But, as a matter of fact, Hyams had gone to the nearest telephone to call up reinforcements of a kind which would appeal to Mr. Bunn more than all the Jews in London ranged in battle-array.

Smiler decided to counter the move.

He called the manager of the restaurant and the three waiters.

"Gents all," he said loudly. "I 'ave reason to believe I'm being followed by a gang of sharps.

I don't know for certain, but I have me suspicions. Now I want you gents to understand that when you're dealing with me you're dealing with a gent, and if I should be set upon in your cafy I consider it to be your duty to protect your customers."

He put on the table three half-sovereigns and a sovereign, and the waiters pouched the smaller coins with an expertness which was only equalled by that of the manager as he pouched the sovereign. Then, obviously restraining with difficulty from cheering Mr. Bunn, they retreated to their various positions to scowl at the occupants of the other table.

The manager himself attended to the requirements of Smiler and his friend, gritting his teeth at the Jews, who had ordered coffee only.

In about ten minutes Hyams returned—alone, but with a slightly more animated expression. He rejoined his companions, and they all sat on silently, patiently, at the table next to Smiler's—exactly like four birds of prey sitting by a dying koodoo on an African plain.

Smiler and Bill Welch were just lighting two pallid cigars which the manager had recommended, when the door of the restaurant swung open and a woman came in.

She was well, but rather flashily, dressed, and was unusually good-looking in a dark, brilliant, Eastern fashion. Her age might have been about thirty. She was rouged considerably, and the pencil had obviously assisted Nature in the regions of her eyebrows and lashes. She had fine eyes, very bright.

"Bit Jewish, I reckon," muttered Smiler to himself as she swept past, apparently without seeing the waiters or Hyams and Co., and took the table next to Mr. Bunn's. Rather to Smiler's astonishment she flashed a glance in his direction, which she repeated immediately she was seated at her table.

Smiler hesitated a moment, then, for he was not and never had been diffident with fair unknowns, risked a half smile.

The lady bowed, and with her bold expressive eyes indicated the vacant chair at her table.

Smiler rose. Neither he nor Mr. Welch noticed the faint gleam of triumph that suddenly lit up the eyes of Hyams and Co.

"Bill," said Mr. Bunn, "order what you fancy, and wait at this table for us. I've got an appointment meself."

The working-man nodded, and Smiler took the chair next to the unknown.

"Excuse me," she said, with a slight American accent. "But aren't you Captain Wilkinson Laker? We met at Monte Carlo last year, I think."

"No, lady, that was me brother," lied Smiler readily. "I'm Major Luke Laker—retired."

"Ah, I thought I saw the resemblance!" She paused to order coffee. "You have served with your regiment in India, have you not?"

"How did you know that?" questioned Mr. Bunn, temporising.

She laughed quite naturally.

"Why, by your wearing a heavy fur coat indoors on a moist close day like this. Officers who have served in India take a long time to

become accustomed to the climate of England again."

It was skilfully done. Put as she had put it, the bringing of the coat into the conversation was entirely natural. Indeed, any one but a person of almost ultra-refined taste would on such a day have remarked upon the wearing of a heavy fur coat indoors.

But just then Smiler Bunn was electric with suspicion, and some vague instinct of self-protection stirred in his heart like a little live thing waking from sleep.

He stared rudely into the woman's eyes, and even as he stared saw a strange and menacing change come into them. They grew suddenly hard and cold and threatening, and Smiler drew back.

"Ah, I know who *you* are, all right!" he said. "You were in Hyam's shop when I bought the coat—only you've altered yourself a bit since then—paint and stuff. But it's all right, Gertie. Don't waste no time trying to come no confidence trick on me. *Your* pals is sitting at

the other table. Hadn't you better kite across to 'em and tell 'em it's no go ? "

He started to rise.

" Sit down ! " she whispered sibilantly, and there was that in her voice which caused Mr. Bunn to resume his chair. If her eyes had been hard before, they were like black diamonds now. She looked dangerous and snakish. Smiler was not afraid, but he was a little—superstitious.

" What do you want ? " he said sourly.

" I want to make a trade with you—and we've got to do it quick. Listen here ! "

" I'm listenin'," said Smiler.

" Last week you were pointed out to me by a man named Israelstein."

Smiler winced. Israelstein was a receiver with whom he did business.

" Israelstein told me you were a gun—a pickpocket. And Israelstein knows."

" Never heard of the man—— " began Smiler, but she broke in swiftly.

" Ah, cut it out ! " she snapped. " What's the good ? I'm telling you what you are. I'm

not shooting off a sermon at you. Well now,—see here! Have you ever heard tell of the Chicago Kitten—a woman pickpocket across the water? Some folk call her Kate the Gun."

Smiler opened his eyes. In common with most pickpockets he had heard of her—and he knew that she was considered to be at the very top of her criminal profession. And apart from her extraordinary skill, he also knew that she was said to be a desperate enemy, but a fine friend. That she was desperate enough, Smiler, like the Chicago and New York police, knew. That she was a useful friend was knowledge that he had yet to acquire.

"I've heard of her," he said sullenly.

"She's me—I'm Kate the Gun!" said the woman simply. "And, say, don't make me lose my temper. They call me the Kitten at home, but I ain't feeling very kittenish just now. Say, keep friendly."

Smiler remembered hearing of two dead men in the States, the manner of whose deaths had never yet been accounted for, although Kate

the Gun had twice been asked the question—by the Law. Twice she had proven her lack of knowledge concerning the deaths—but there was a grim and sinister significance attaching to the fact that they had gone to *her* for explanation of the murders, and had put her on trial for them, that gave Mr. Bunn an uneasy thrill. His glance wavered for a second. Then he pulled himself together.

"All right—I'll make a note of it," he said jauntily. "What do you want?"

She favoured him with a hard little smile.

"That's better," she murmured. "Well, now, I don't like butting into the business of a brother gun, I want you to understand, but this business is different. Now, you've just bought a coat from Hyams, and he wants to buy it back—see? He reckons there's something in the lining. Well, in the ordinary way, if any grafter came to me and asked me to get away with what a brother gun had bought or even hooked, it would be the stony stare for his, and rapid, too. Hyams is a useful man to me and my gang—

never mind why. He is, and I want to oblige him. You get that, don't you? Well, I don't go much on coat linings, and, for all I know, Hyams is hunting for trouble. Anyway, he's willing to give you ninety pounds for the coat, and, *say*,"—she fixed him with an eye like a stiletto—" unless you're crazy you'll take it. Now don't you say 'No.' Remember who I am—and add to that the little fact that I've got over here with me two Chicago plug-uglies that'd sandbag you like a dog the first time you went out alone at night and drifted more than a dozen yards from the nearest cop. They're what I call my guard of honour, and they're the two toughest propositions that ever came out of the States. Now, don't think this is a dream nor a vaudeville act either. It's cold business, in London, in the year one nine one nit, and if you think it's safe, why, go right ahead and keep the coat. But you'll be plugged, sure. I'm doing this to oblige Hyams, you understand, not because I want to knock you. If you'll sell the coat you'll oblige me, and you're not the man

to refuse to oblige a lady anyway. Are you?" she concluded sardonically.

"Not under the circumstances," said Smiler, rather gracefully, he thought.

"No, I had a kind of idea you were a polite sport when you were really up against it. Well, then, it's a trade? And if any one was to drive up in a chariot and ask my opinion I should say you've got a wad of easy money, and that Hyams is on a gold brick that'll break his heart like a camel's back. But that's *his* funeral anyway."

She rose and went across to the expectant quartet at the other table. Bill Welch stolidly continued to order and swallow Benedictine—a liqueur he had never encountered before, and with which he had fallen in love at first sight.

After another bout of whispering, Smiler saw the Jews search themselves with very serious faces, and finally pool a number of bank-notes, which Kate the Gun took and counted. Evidently Hyams' heart had failed him, and instead of taking the whole risk, he had formed, as it

were, a miniature limited liability company with his three friends, so that each put up a share of the purchase money and would receive a proportionate share of the concealed bank-notes.

Kate the Gun brought over the money to Mr. Bunn, and, having counted it, that gentleman slipped off the fur coat and surrendered it to the Jews. Then he joined Bill Welch, and the pair of them went down the restaurant and paid the bill. They lingered a moment at the door to see what Hyams Ltd. would do with the coat. They were not left long in doubt.

Hyams had borrowed a penknife from Cohenstein, and very carefully was opening the seams. They were all standing round, craning over. In a few minutes Hyams took out the fur lining—he was not the sort of man to waste it—and they all leaned eagerly forward.

There were no bank-notes there—not even a postal-order.

Cohenstein fainted on the spot. With a howl of despair Hyams tore a fistful of hair from his head. Mr. Morris silently laid his head upon

the table and cried like a child. The remaining Jew frantically re-examined the coat.

"But de notes vhas dere," moaned Hyams. "I heard 'em kerackle when de man took de ghoat. Like it as if der vhas dozens and dozens of notes."

He grasped himself at the back of the neck with both hands and lamented.

Kate the Gun, who was looking on with an air of disdain—she would have made less outcry over the loss of ten times the total loss of the four—suddenly gave a hard little enlightened laugh.

"Say that again, Hyams!" she said sharply. "Did you say you heard a rustle like dozens of notes when that skate took the coat?"

"Yes—like a fortune of notes," lamented Hyams, gripping himself like a man wringing his own neck.

The Chicago Kitten laughed again, opened her bag, and turned her back.

"Listen, you clams!" she said politely.

Her hands moved quickly, and into the sudden

silence of the restaurant stole a quick, dry, crackling rustle—unmistakable, electric, alluring, and altogether lovely—the rustle of "fivers" and "tenners," and "fifties."

From where they stood Messieurs Smiler Bunn and William Welch could see what she was doing—merely rapidly counting a rather thick packet of notes.

If you hold a number of notes in your left hand without resting it on a table or support, and, wetting the tips of the right-hand fingers, count the notes, you will create a quite noisy rustling.

Kate the Gun wheeled round on Hyams.

"Why, you muttonhead," she said cheerfully, "that rustling you heard in the shop was made by *this* mother's pet. I was counting my wad when you were selling that coat. The sound never came out of the coat; it came out of the room behind the coat. The door was open—I left it open myself."

A thought struck her, and her eyes narrowed like those of a wild cat.

"Say, yeh don't think *these* notes are yours, do yeh?" she said in terrific American.

But they hastily shook their heads and spread out their palms.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" she demanded, obviously more from curiosity than because she cared whether the quartet got back their losses.

Instinctively they turned towards Smiler Bunn.

But Mr. Bunn had turned also instinctively, half a minute before—turned out of the restaurant door, round the nearest corner, and into a taxi.

That was a happy, happy day for Smiler Bunn. Also William Welch.