

sary; she seemed to sink more rapidly than ever in the chill and damp of the fens. Certainly the visitors were disappointed; for she never referred in any way to her treasures, of which the jade Rumor had whispered a good deal more than was prudent. For though the vicar had loyally and sensibly held his tongue, he could hardly conceal his exultation, and in that suspicious population any manifestation of life appears eccentric, and due to some great matter. Now as in Lincolnshire there is nothing to do, the minds of the people ponder incessantly and unfathomably, though with sobriety and even bradytudinity, so that before Miss Horniman had been home more than two months a connection had been established in the public mind between three things; her residence in South Africa, the diamond industry of that country, and her precautions against burglars. A genius for generalizations, named Abraham Perry, at last crystallized the sentiment of the public in one sparkling phrase: "The old girl's house is chock-a-block o' di' man's," he stated solemnly before closing time, one Saturday night, at the old "Bull and Bush."

As a matter of fact, the syllogism in question had been concluded several days before by crows and eavesdroppers from London; for on that very night certain knights of the Jimmy, moving in the very best burglarious circles in London, made the first recorded attempt to rob Miss Horniman.

Only one of them was caught, for the Spalding police have to use motor-cycles to pursue a snail; but that one, having a .45 soft-nosed bullet in his hip-joint, was not able even to emulate the humblest creatures of Miss Horniman's garden.

It was expected that further attempts would be few, but this was not the case, though none were attended with quite such disaster as the first. However, Miss Horniman victoriously expelled all assaults without loss. But there are two ways of reducing a fortress. One is to batter down its defences; the other is to induce the garrison to surrender by fair words.

Now the attention of a certain Mr. Gordon Leigh of Spalding was attracted by the fame of the adventure. He would have paid little heed to the gossip of the Lincolnshire peasants; but when the stocks of the railways serving Spalding bounded almost daily, owing to the popularity of the excursion in the Underworld of London, he concluded, as many a wiser man, that so much smoke indicated the presence of fire; and he began to angle for an introduction to Miss Horniman.

Mr. Gordon Leigh was a person of portly presence. He had amassed a considerable fortune in thirty years of pawnbroking in Conduit Street, London; and a great deal more in his secret trade as usurer. Once, however, he had lost a great deal of money; and that was by the failure of a bank. He had further observed, in common with many others, that those who had disregarded the plain warning of Holy Scripture, and put their faith in princes by investing in British Consols, had lost half their capital in about ten years, for no visible reason. But he had never heard of anybody losing money by keeping it, except the trifle of interest, two or three per cent, which seemed little enough to him who had made his fortune by lending at as many hundreds. So he took the good old way; he built a strong room in his house at Spalding, on his retirement from business, and kept all his money there in gold. It may well be asked: why Spalding? The worthy man had a second passion in his life, almost rivaling his love of money; and the name of that passion was tulips. Now, outside Holland, there is but one soil in the world which will grow tulips to perfection; and Spalding is the centre of that well-

dowered district.

Gordon Leigh had not spared money in the building of his strong room; there was none safer, no, not in London or New York; and he did not spare money on his hobby. Also, there is money in tulips.

But when it came to diamonds! He could smell a diamond across three counties when the wind was in the right direction. But he always took his profit at once when a diamond came into his hands; for he never knew whether de Beers might not suddenly unload and put a hole in the bottom of the market.

Such was the amiable and farseeing individual who was warily and adroitly approaching Miss Horniman. When the introduction was at last effected, through the good offices of the vicar, Miss Horniman proved unexpectedly cordial. Leigh had never been to South Africa, but many of his friends had been in the I. D. B. business, and he had a wealth of stories to exchange with the old lady. Their passion for tulips, too, was a bond. In short, the heir of all the Leighs (poll-deed, ten pounds, and well worth it) got on much better with her than he had any just reason to expect. For in temperament they were decidedly opposite. Mr. Gordon Leigh was a gross and florid person, thick-set and heavy-jowled, with a nose as fleshy and protuberant as Miss Horniman's was delicate, aristocratic, and tip-tilted. However, as the novelists assure us, it is between two just such opposites that the spark of love frequently springs up. But let us not insist too closely upon electrical or chemical analogies.

Mr. Gordon Leigh pursued his suit with extreme tact. He brought rare tulip bulbs; he read aloud to the old lady by the hour; he often made her simple meals brighter by his presence; and he never referred by so much as a wink to the rumors about treasure, save in the jocular way which had made the affair the staple jest of the district. It had become proverbial to announce the non-success of an enterprise by saying, "I've been robbing Miss Horniman!" It even became a catch-word in London itself. But one dark afternoon in December, after a peculiarly determined attempt on the previous night, the lady broached the subject herself. "I don't see why I shouldn't treat you as a friend, Mr. Leigh. You must be curious to see what it is that they are after." And she wheeled over to the little safe and opened it. Nonchalantly she drew out tray after tray, and closed them again. "This," she said suddenly, picking out the central stone from the lowest drawer, "is the best in the little collection." She put it in his hands. "Wonderful!" he exclaimed, and asked permission, readily accorded, to take it to the light. It was indeed a diamond! Mr. Leigh looked at it with keen professional eyes; he even whipped out a glass which he had brought with him every day on the chance of this occasion. It was of the first water; cut in an unusual and most effective shape, it was the finest stone of its size he had ever seen. He would have been glad to lend a thousand pounds on it in his pawnbroking days. And it was only one of many! With many murmurs of congratulation, he returned the stone, and delicately transferred the conversation to tulips.

It was on the following afternoon that Miss Horniman fainted in her chair from weakness. Leigh saw his opportunity, and took it. When she recovered, she could doubt neither the refinement and respect of his conduct, nor the generous warmth of his affection. He did not press the advantage, and her maidenly spirit thanked him also for that courtesy. But on the Sunday following, after church, whither Mr. Leigh had accompanied her, she asked him to stay for lunch, and after lunch, the day being bright