

### The Sale of an Autograph

It Brought a Fortune to a Family That It Had Impoverished

By ARTHUR TURNER BEALE  
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When I went into my new house I desired to have one room in it as snug as possible. That room is my library. Among the furniture I desired was a desk. I looked about everywhere for one that I could be sure was very old and at last found one that fitted my wishes. Upon getting it into my library I unlocked every drawer and after dusting it wiped it with a damp cloth. I noticed that every bit of space in the desk was converted into use except a rectangular area which seemed to have been omitted. A bit of veneering as large as the tip of my finger had become loosened. In pressing on it I released a secret drawer. There was only one piece of paper in the drawer, but it



**VECHI HEARD HIS DOOM.**  
was important. It was addressed on the back to Peter Driscoll and was dated April 5, 1895. It read:

Send the balance of the property at once or take the consequences.

**NEMO.**  
I am endowed with a fair amount of curiosity and, fortunately for me, have the means to gratify it. I telephoned a prominent detective agency to send me a good man. It sent me Ewan Hunt. Showing him my desk, I told him where I had bought it and directed him to trace its ownership. The next day he reported that the storekeeper from whom I had purchased it had obtained it from the estate of Peter Driscoll, a man who had been found murdered one morning in his bed.

I was very much moved by the news. I saw at once that the discovery of the paper placed upon me an obligation to turn the letter over to the authorities. But as I am of a retiring disposition I did not relish being mixed up in a murder case. I concluded to prosecute any investigations further before making the matter public. Pledging my detective to secrecy, I showed him the paper I had taken from the desk and directed him to find the writer. The signature "Nemo" was undoubtedly assumed. But the detective believed the handwriting was that of the person who levied blackmail and is not likely to impart a knowledge of what they are doing to any one else.

It was fully a month before he reported that he had found a man whom he believed to be the writer of the letter. No clew had ever been found to lead the police to the murderer of Peter Driscoll. Hunt had secured an acquaintance with Driscoll's family. They had been rich, but discovered at the death of their father that the property, which had consisted of interest bearing stocks and bonds, had disappeared. They had concluded that he had been speculating and lost it. They had been obliged to give up the handsome house in which they lived and had sold their furniture at auction. Hunt questioned them to discover if they suspected their father's property had passed to the man who had written the letter, but found they had never heard of him.

A great many discoveries are stumbled on. Hunt stumbled on the man who wrote the letter. He talked with every one who had known Driscoll and learned incidentally from one of Driscoll's acquaintances, a banker, that Driscoll had kept an account with him. Hunt succeeded in inducing the man to let him have a peep at Driscoll's account. One man, an Italian named Vechi, had received large amounts for which there was no explanation. Hunt then asked Driscoll's widow to permit him to look over her husband's papers. Among them he found a letter the handwriting of which corresponded with that of the note I had discovered. In the note it was disclosed, but not so successfully, but that Hunt suspected it was the same as in the letter he had compared it with. An expert proved that he was right. Vechi lived as a poor man, keeping a shop in which he dealt in odds and ends, curiosities, and did something in the way of autographs of prominent persons.

When we had laid our plans I went with Hunt to Vechi's shop. The Italian had as disagreeable a face as any

man I ever knew. I shuddered at the knowing we possessed his secret lest he murder us to prevent our giving it to the authorities. Hunt said to him: "Do you buy autographs here?" "Sometimes." "I have one I would like to sell you." "Whose autograph is it?" "Not a very distinguished person. Nevertheless we ask a large price for it."

"I don't wish to buy any autograph for a large price." "You will pay a fortune for this one, I am sure, when you know whose it is."

"Whose is it?" "Your own."

The man gave an involuntary start. Up to this time he did not suspect we had any other motive than to sell a bona fide autograph. Hunt's words "Your own" and the way the detective looked at him assured him that we had come on a very different errand.

"Let me see it," said the autograph dealer in a low voice.

"I will read you the note to which it is signed," said Hunt.

I had arranged with Hunt that when he drew the note I was to put my hand in my side pocket and grasp a revolver. I did so, and Hunt, standing well away from the Italian that he might not snatch the paper, read what was written, ending with the word "Nemo." Vechi heard his doom in the words and turned ghastly white. Hunt waited for him to speak, keeping his eyes riveted on him the while.

"How much do you ask for it?" finally Vechi asked.

"My friend here," replied the detective, pointing to me, "is its owner. He intends to give the proceeds of its sale to the family of the man to whom this note was addressed and who was—"

Vechi staggered. Hunt continued: "The price is certain stocks and bonds that passed to this man Nemo. If they are all returned the note will be returned to the writer to do what he likes with it and no steps will be taken in the case. If every security is not given up Nemo will be arrested before he can leave his shop."

Vechi seemed to be thinking for a few moments, after which he asked: "Tell me the amount."

We did not know the amount, but had provided for this.

"You alone know the amount at present, but since we know that this property has passed into the possession of Nemo we can at any time discover the exact amount. If we discover that he has withheld any of it we may reopen the case."

Vechi stood wavering. Whether he was hesitating as to the amount he would return or whether to defy us I don't know. Presently he said: "I will buy your autograph, gentlemen, but I have not the price here. You must go with me to my house."

We went with him, as he suggested, I walking on one side of him, Hunt on the other, and I each having a hand on a revolver concealed. When we reached the house Vechi took us into a room, locked the door and said: "What guarantee have I that you will keep your word?"

"None whatever," said Hunt. "You must rely on the promise of a gentleman."

Making a virtue of necessity, he opened a closet door, exposing a safe imbedded in the wall. The safe being painted like the wall, only its keyhole was perceptible. Introducing the key, he opened the safe door and took out a large bundle of securities. I looked them over and knew the value of most of them. I judged they were worth between \$350,000 and \$400,000. They were mostly coupon bonds, not the same property that had been transferred by Driscoll to Vechi.

"Is this all?" asked Hunt.

"Everything," replied Vechi. "I have no desire to leave anything amiss that will reopen this matter."

"Perhaps my friend," said Hunt, "may wish to know the hold you had on Driscoll?"

"I have no such desire," I said. "The property is returned, and that is sufficient. The secret of blackmail I told him might bring distress on an innocent family. Goodbye, Mr. Nemo. So far as this matter is in my possession you may consider it closed."

We went from the shop to the Driscolls', where Mrs. Driscoll answered my card in person. I said to her: "Madam, I have an important announcement to make to you, and I desire that you call into the room your sons and daughters to hear it."

Surprised, she complied with my request, and her children, mostly grown, were summoned. When they were all assembled I told the story of my purchase of the desk and the finding of the paper in the secret drawer. Then I entered upon Hunt's investigations some of them recognized him and astutely told of our visit to Vechi's shop. It was interesting to watch their features during my recital of our interview with the blackmailer, they growing more and more intent till the delivery of the property. When the recital was finished I took the securities from my pocket and handed them to Mrs. Driscoll, saying:

"These are securities affording an annual income of \$20,000, in consideration of which we have taken the liberty of giving indemnity against prosecution for blackmail and—"

### COST OF CENSUS WAS \$5,855,500

#### About 37 1-2 Per Cent More Than in 1900.

#### 71,100 ENUMERATORS USED.

Earlier Legislation Recommended by Director Durand—Salaries and Expenses Paid Counters of Uncle Sam's Population Aggregated \$4,870,000, or 5.3 Cent Per Capita.

Director E. Dana Durand has submitted his annual report concerning the operations of the bureau of the census during the year 1909-10. It is shown that the entire cost of the work on population and agriculture in continental United States for the thirteenth census was about \$5,855,500. In 1900 the cost was \$4,267,394. The 1910 cost was about 37½ per cent more than in 1900.

The original estimate of \$14,117,000 as the total cost of the decennial census, including the other work of the bureau during the census period, the director now believes too low, and he thinks, in view of the additional work required by congress and for other reasons, it will reach fully \$14,500,000.

**Delayed Legislation Is Deplored.**  
The director urges that if new legislation is required for taking the census of 1920 it should be passed much earlier than was done for the present census. Were it not for the fact that the bureau is now a permanent organization it would have been practically impossible in the nine months which elapsed from the passage of the census act to the date of the 1910 enumeration to arrange properly for the taking of the census. The three preceding censuses had preparatory periods fifteen months long.

The census act authorized not to exceed 330 supervisors. The number actually appointed was 329 in continental United States and one in Porto Rico. They were residents of the districts from which appointed.

The number of enumeration districts finally established in continental United States was 69,925. The districts had on an average, therefore, about 1,200 inhabitants. The average population per district in cities of over 5,000 inhabitants was about 1,485 and in smaller towns and rural districts about 1,245.

In general there was one enumerator for each enumeration district, but in a considerable number of districts in the south a white enumerator was appointed to canvass the white population and a colored enumerator to canvass the negro population, so that the total number of enumerators employed in continental United States was about 71,100.

**Amount Paid Enumerators.**  
The total payment to enumerators in continental United States as compensation for their services and traveling expenses aggregated about \$4,870,000. The corresponding expenditure at the census of 1900 was about \$3,540,000. The increase was thus 37 per cent as compared with an increase in the population of 21 per cent.

While a considerable part of the cost of enumeration, estimated at about one-third, is attributable to the agricultural statistics, nevertheless a broadly significant comparison may be made by dividing the cost of the enumeration at each census by the number of inhabitants. This division shows the composition of the enumerators as equal to 4.7 cents per capita in 1900 and 5.3 cents in 1910, an increase of about 13 per cent.

In discussing the field work of the census of manufactures, mines and quarries the director states that it was practically completed last fall and that the aggregate cost was about \$751,000. The average per establishment, there being 371,444 of these, including slaughter houses, was \$2.02, substantially the same as in the census of 1905.

The office force of the bureau was on Aug. 31 last at its maximum point, there being 3,738 persons on the pay-roll. The largest number of emergency appointees on the roll at any one time was 342, last July. All such were dropped in December last.

### OREGON HAS QUEER ROCK.

**Salences to a Notion Despite Lack of Prosperity.**  
One of the most remarkable rocks in the world is that known as the balancing rock, which stands on the bank of the Willamette river a short distance above the city of Portland, Ore.

Rising from a broad base is a small column, roughly round in shape. Just above this is a huge mass of rock, bearing a tree on the summit, the total height of rock and column being about 100 feet.

Although a great deal larger and heavier than the pillar on which it stands, the big rock is very accurately balanced.

The entire rock is of a volcanic nature, and the most singular thing about it is the fact that the knob and pillar are entirely disjointed from one another.

**Quicksilver Production Decreases.**  
Less quicksilver was mined in the United States last year than in 1909, and, according to a government statement, the tendency is toward a decrease in the production.

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### A GOOD ONE ON CONNIE MACK.

Hugh Fullerton tells a story on Connie Mack, manager of the world's championship Philadelphia American club. During the celebration in Philadelphia of the Athletics' victory in the world's championship series the entire city was given over to the affair and honors were being heaped upon Connie Mack was the biggest man in Philadelphia at that time, and every man of wealth and prominence in every line counted it an honor to sit with him. He was at one of the swell Philadelphia clubs as a guest of a member when a stranger, who also was a visitor at the club, was led forward and introduced.

"This is Mr. Mack," said the host to the stranger.

"I'm pleased," said the stranger, shaking the extended hand. "I've seen your play and enjoyed it immensely."

"Indeed," said Mack politely. "You must be an old time fan."

"I am," answered the stranger. "I especially enjoy the romantic Irish melodramas; but, Mr. Mack, it seems to me that on the stage you seem much heavier."

### GRAY, BILLIARD STAR.

**Australian Champion, Now in London.**  
Astounding English Billiard World.  
Fancy a billiard player monopolizing the table from Wednesday until Friday! This is what the English experts have to put up with just now during the tour of George Gray, the young Australian phenomenon, who thinks nothing of running up over a thousand points at a time. The English game differs from the style of play here. The pockets are brought into requisition in addition to the carrom balls. There are probably a half dozen better all round exponents

of the art in England at the present time, but nevertheless through devoting six hours a day of the past ten years to practice the young antipodean has mastered a particular shot that he is now making all his opponents look silly.

His favorite stroke is what is termed a "red loser." This consists in nursing the red ball down from the end rail to the middle pocket and glancing "in off." Once in this position it is dollars to doughnuts the run will go into the hundreds. Already Gray has made eight strings of over a thousand points, and from the way he is shaping, it will not surprise any one if he yet runs the two thousands. It is quite a new experience for the spectators to sit through a whole session and sometimes two or three and watch one man go on raising his break. To the opponent it must be aggravating in the extreme.



GEORGE GRAY, AUSTRALIAN BILLIARD CHAMPION.

**HOLBEIN WILL TRY AGAIN.**  
**Famous Swimmer to Make Last Effort to Cross English Channel.**  
Montague Holbein, who has several times almost accomplished the swimming of the English channel, will make one last effort next summer. He has learned a new leg stroke by which he not only hopes to increase his pace, but also to lessen the strain on his stamina. It is called the "northern kick" and offers an absolute minimum of resistance to the water when the legs are being drawn into a position for a kicking. Its motion increases the speed, and there is not nearly the same fatigue resulting.

**Australian Oarsmen May Coach in U.S.**  
Information from Australia says that two of the world's greatest professional scullers—Richard Armet, present world's champion, and Harry Pearce—are likely to become connected with the rowing departments of two of the foremost universities in the United States—one in the east and the other in the middle west.

**Syracuse and Columbia to Meet.**  
Columbia college of New York, after eight years, has resumed track relations with Syracuse, and on May 8 the athletes of these colleges will meet at Syracuse.

**Crippled Beggar Turned Loose.**  
The crippled fruit purveyor who when arrested Wednesday fought the officer, and who refused to tell his name when in court, was sent to jail for 20 days. After 36 hours he begged piteously to be turned loose and to save expense this was done. He is not likely to return with a 15 day sentence hanging over his head.

**Auto Speeding Must Stop.**  
The Mayor objects to the reckless speed with which autos are often operated on the streets of the city and has asked Chief Shaw to put a time test on a few of them and if running too fast take them before the Recorder for a reminder.

### THE GRASS WIDOW

By M. QUAD  
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When a widow is not a widow, but has a husband hiking around the country somewhere, they call her a grass widow. The term might as well be a hay widow or straw widow, but it is always given as grass.

Miss Minerva Saunders was a grass widow. She should have called herself Mrs., but the report had come to her that her missing husband, Abel, had been seen to drown himself in a millpond. She waited a year and then called herself Miss and removed to Perkinsville. She had not been there three months when Moses Drew, farmer, saw her at church and admired her and began courting. He should have been told straightaway that Abel was a deceiving husband and that that drowning business might have been one of his little tricks, but he wasn't. He went right ahead and courted under the idea that he was in love with a miss. About eight months after meeting the woman he asked her to be his wife. It was then nearly two years since the absconding Abel was supposed to have gone to the bottom of the pond, and Miss Saunders blushed and stammered and said she guessed so.

That was enough for one night. On the next the wedding day was set. On the second the wedding day was planned. On the third as the happy couple sat holding hands the absconder walked into the house. He had not been drowned. He had not come anywhere near it. Of course there was excitement, more of it than as if a circus elephant had broken loose. Abel apologized for his advent. He was sorry he came. He realized what a worthless critter he was and he could never forgive himself for having broken up a happy marriage. He would go right away and commit suicide and let the matrimonial event take place. He asked for a dollar and got it and then disappeared. Mr. Drew had to be talked to in a soothing way for a long time, but he finally sat himself down to wait until the grass widow became a real widow.

In about three months a stranger called on Mrs. Saunders to say that he lived twenty miles away and was a carpenter. He had a man named Abel Saunders up on the scaffold with him one day when it fell to the ground and Abel was a dead man. He only had time to tell his name and express the hope that his dear Minerva would now go ahead and marry Moses.

In five days more the preacher would have tied the knot, but Abel walked into the house again. It was some one else that had fallen from the scaffold and been buried by the town. If provided with a cheap suit of clothes he would make an end of himself this time.

Three months went by and nothing from Abel. During this interval there was no talk about the wedding day. There must be no more surprises. It was lucky that the couple had gone slow. Mrs. Saunders received by mail from a town fifty miles away five affidavits that a man who had been found frozen to death in a snow bank was the lamented Abel. As the frozen legs had broken short off in carting the body around there was no doubt of death.

"Please excuse me for saying these look good to me," said Mr. Drew as he looked up after reading the affidavits.

"Yes, Abel is sure gone this time," sighed the wife.

An hour later Abel Saunders walked in and held his toes to the fire to toast. Minerva succeeded in fainting away, but Moses Drew arose in his anger and shouted out:

"Then you were not frozen stiff?"  
"Me? Oh, no!"  
"And they didn't break the legs off your carcass?"  
"Legs? Oh, my legs are all right."  
"And you've come back?"  
"Come back? Yes, but I'm not going to stay long. I thought I'd go out skating tomorrow and skate into an air hole. You can both come along and see me do it, and then there won't be any more false alarms."  
"You go to grass, sir, and I'll go home! This is a pretty muss for a respectable man to get into!"

Mr. Drew stamped out of the house, and Minerva got chilly on the floor and returned to consciousness to fall to weeping and to wail out:  
"Oh, Abel, I couldn't have believed it of you!"

"No, of course not. I orter got frozen, but I didn't. I'll be all right tomorrow, though. Don't cry, Nerva; don't cry."  
"But Moses!"  
"Oh, he'll be all right in a day or two. Just feels hurt at my coming back. Thinks I don't mean to skate into an air hole, but he shall see. Yes, skate right in, and that will be the last of me. Cheer right up, girl."

It is a matter of record that Abel Saunders went out on the millpond next morning and kept his promise. More than twenty persons saw him deliberately skate into an air hole and his body shoot over the high dam. They looked for it, and though it was not recovered there was no doubt about the death. Three months later the long delayed marriage took place. It was a sure thing about Abel this time. But was it? Six months after the marriage a man was killed almost in front of the Drew house by a wagon running over him. Sure as you live it was Abel Saunders. He was coming home to say that he was still alive, but would shuffle off in a day or two to oblige. He had shuffed!

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