THE SCARLET RUNNER--STORY BY C. N. AND A. M. WILLIAMSON

Dramatized and produced by the Vitagraph Company from the popular novel of the same name by C. N. and A. M. Williamson. Everything you read here today you can see this week at leading motion-picture theaters in vivid motion pictures, with Earle Williams as Christopher Race and Miss Zena Keefe as Sidney Chester. Next week another story and new pictures.

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CHAPTER V.
THE JACOBEAN HOUSE.

IN the pile of letters awaiting him on his table Christopher found a queer telegram. It said: "Please come at once with your car and try solve mystery at old house now used as hotel patronized by motorists. Same rate paid per day for necessary time as for automobile tour.—Sidney Chester, Wood House, New Forest. References, London and Scottish Bank." And the message was dated two days back.

Christopher did not see why he should be applied to as a solver of mysteries. However, the telegram sounded interesting.

"Just back from journey. Found telegram," he wired. "Am I still wanted? If so, can come."

When an answer arrived he had Scarlet Runner ready for another start.

"Yes, urgently wanted," ran the reply. "Hope you can start this afternoon. But don't come to Wood House. Will meet you at the Sandboy and Owl, within mile of Ringhurst, as you come from London. Please let me knew probable hour of arrival.—Chester."

Christopher wired again: "Hope to reach you about seven." And his hope was justified, as it usually was when he had to depend upon Scarlet Runner.

The landlord opened a door at the end of a dim corridor, and said respectfully to someone out of sight, "The gentleman with the motor has arrived." Then he backed out of the way, and Christopher stepped over the threshold. He saw a girl rise up from a chair, crumpling a telegram which she had been reading by the light of a shaded lamp.

She wore a riding habit, and a neat hat on sleek hair the color of ripening wheat. She was charmingly pretty, in a flowerlike way. Her great eyes, which now appeared black, would be blue by daylight, and her figure was perfect in the well-cut habit; but she was either pale and anxious-looking, or else the lamplight gave that effect.

"I beg your pardon," exclaimed Christopher. "I've come from London to see a Mr. Sidney Chester, and was told I should find him here, but—t"

"I'm Sidney Chester," said the girl. "It was I who telegraphed for you to come and help us."

Christopher was surprised, but he kept his countenance, and pretended to take this revelation as a matter of course.

"Sidney is a woman's name as well as a man's," she went on, "and there was no use explaining in a telegram. Please sit down, and I'll—no, I can't promise to make you understand, for the thing's beyond understanding; but I'll tell you about it. First, though, I'd better explain why I sent for you. I don't mean to flatter you, but if there's any chance of the mystery being solved, it can only be done by a man of your sort—clever and quick of resource, as well as an accomplished motorist. That's my reason; now for my story. But perhaps you've heard of Wood House and the strange happenings there? We've tried to keep the talk out of the papers, but it was impossible; and there've been paragraphs in most of them for the last fortnight."

Christopher had to admit ignorance, though he guessed from the girl's tone that the place must be famous, apart from its mysterious reputation.

"It's a beautiful old house," she went on, the harassed expression of her face softening into tenderness. "There are pictures and accounts of it in books about the country. We've got the loveliest oak panelling in nearly all the rooms, and wonderful furniture. Of course, we love it dearly—my mother and I, the only ones of the family who are left—but we're disgustingly poor; our branch of the Chesters have been growing poorer for generations. We had to see everything going to pieces, and there was no money for repairs. There were other troubles, too—oh, I may as well tell you, since you ought to know everything concerning us if you're going to do anything. I was silly enough to fall in love with a man who ought to marry an heiress, for he's poor, too, and has a title, which makes poverty harder and more grinding. He's let his house—a show place—and because he won't give me up to look for a rich girl (he wouldn't have to look far or long), he's trying to get a fortune out of a ranch in Colorado. That made me feel as if I must do something, and we couldn't let Wood House, because there's a clause in father's will against our doing so. We're obliged to live there, or forfeit it to the person who would have inherited it if the place had been entailed and had had to go to a male heir.

"But no such thought came to poor father as that mother and I would dream of making the house into an hotel, so it didn't occur to him to provide against such a contingency. It was I who had the idea—because I was desperate for money; and I heard how people like old houses in these days—Americans and others who aren't used to things that are antique. At last I summoned up courage to propose to mother that we should advertise to entertain motorists and other travelers.

"Every penny we could spare, and a lot we couldn't, we spent on advertising, when she'd consented, and two months ago we opened the house as a hotel. Our old servants were good about helping, and we got in several new ones. We began to make the most astonishing success, and I was delighted. I thought if all went on well I need have nothing to do with managing the place after this year. I might marry if I liked, and there would be the income rolling in; so you see, after these dreams, what it is to find ruin staring us in the face.

"This thing that is happening to us is preposterous," said Miss Chester. "People come to our house, perhaps for dinner or lunch, or perhaps for several days. But whichever it may be, during one of the meals—always the last if they're having more than one—every piece of jewelry they may be wearing, and all the money in their pockets and purses—except small silver and copper—disappear mysteriously."

"Perhaps not mysteriously," suggested Christopher. "You mentioned having engaged new servants. One of them may be an expert thief."

"Of course that was our first idea," said the girl. "But it would be impossible for the most expert thief, even a conjurer, to pull ladies' rings from their fingers, unfasten clasps of pearl dog-collars, take off brooches or bracelets or belts with gold buckles, and remove studs from shirt-fronts or sleeve-links from cuffs, without the knowledge of the persons wearing the things."

"Yes, that would be impossible," Christopher admitted.

"Well, that is what happens at Wood House every day, and has been happening for the last fortnight. People sit at the table, and apparently everything goes on in the most orderly way; yet at the end of the meal their valuables are gone. I want you to watch, to set your wits to work to find out the mystery. Of course, you must leave your valuables in care of the landlord here. You'll motor over this evening, won't you, and say you wish to have a room?"

"With pleasure," said Christopher. "And I'll do my best to help."

"Thanks for taking an interest. Then I'll go now. I shall just be able to ride home in time for dinner."

"But there are questions which I'd better ask you," said Christopher, "as we're not to have any private communication at Wood House. How many indoor servants have you?"

"Three housemaids, one dear old thing who has been with us for years, and two young girls lately got in—one from London, one from our own neighborhood; a butler we've had since I can remember, two new footmen from London, and an old cook-housekeeper, who has had two assistants since we opened as a hotel. That's all, except a stray creature or two about the kitchen. I must tell you, too, that with the new servants we had the best of references."

"And the thefts always occur at meals?" asked Christopher.

"Always at meals and, therefore, it could happen only in three rooms," said Sidney Chester; "the big dining-hall and two small rooms which we've set apart as private sitting-rooms. Sometimes those who stay with us like to eat there, if they come in parties of three or four, but the dining-hall is the most beautiful room in the house, and people admire it so much that they often prefer it to any other place."

"Something will have to be done," said Christopher—puzzled, but anxious to be encouraging. "Have you no guest who has been with you for several weeks?"

"One," the girl returned, half reluctantly, as if she guessed his reason for putting this question. "It's—a man."

"A young man?"

"Yes, a young man."

"How long has he been in the house?"

"Several weeks. He's painting a picture, using the King's room, as we call it, for a background—the room Charles II. had when an ancestor of ours was hiding him, and would dart down into a secret place underneath whenever a dangerous visitor arrived."

"Oh, an artist?"

"Not a professional. He—"

"Can't you remember how long he has been with you?"

"Between three weeks and a fortnight." The girl blushed, her white face lovely in its sudden flush of color. "I see what's in your mind. But there's nothing in that, I assure you. The merest coincidence. You don't look as if you were ready to believe me, but you will when I tell you it's Sir Walter Raven, the man I'm engaged to marry."

"He hasn't been able to throw any light on the problem?"

"No, though he's tried in every way."

"Does he know you've sent for me?"

"I haven't told him, because it would seem as if I couldn't trust him to get to the bottom of the mystery. You see, thought he's tremendously clever, he isn't that sort of man. Now, have you asked me everything?"

"Not yet," answered Christopher, selfishly less sorry to detain her than he would have been had she been middle-aged and plain. "I want to know what servants are in the rooms where these robberies occur?"

"The butler, Nelson, in the dining-hall, or one of the footmen if the meal is being served in a private sitting-room."

"Only those, except the guests?"

"Since the mystery began I've sometimes been there to watch and superintend, and one of my cousins, either Morley or his wife. And in the dining-hall Sir Walter Raven is kind enough to keep an eye on what goes on, while appearing to be engaged with his luncheon or dinner."

"Yet the robberies take place just the same under your very eyes?"

"Yes. That is the mysterious part. The whole thing is like a dream. But you will see for yourself. Only, as I said, take care not to have anything about you which they—whoever, whatever they are—can steal."

She give him her hand, and he shook it reassuringly; then it being understood that as it was late, he would dine at the inn and arrive at Wood House after nine, she left him. Five minutes later, standing at the window, he saw her ride off on fine hunter.

As he ate chops and drank a glass of ale, Christopher considered what he had heard of the mystery, and did not know what to think of it.

The road from the Sandboy and Owl, through Ringhurst and on to Wood House, was beautiful. Christopher had passed over it before, and, coming to the gateway and lodge of the place he sought, he remembered having remarked both, though he had not then known the name of the estate.

He steered Scarlet Runner between tall stone gateposts topped with stone lions supporting shields, acknowledged a salutation from an elderly man at the door of the old black and white lodge, and drove up a winding avenue under beeches and oaks.

Suddenly, rounding a turn, he came in sight of the house, standing in the midst of a lawn, cleared of trees in a forest-like park.

It was a long, low building of irregular shape, the many windows with tiny lozenge panes brightly lit behind their curtains. In the moonlight the projecting upper stories with gabled roofs and ivy-draped chimneys, the walls checkered in black and white, with wondrous diapering of trefoils, quatrefoils and chevrons, were clearly defined against a wooded background. The house could have few peers in picturesqueness if one searched all England.

His name was announced as if he had been an invited guest arriving at a country house, and from a group near the fireplace came forward to welcome him a young man with a delightful face. Glancing past him for an instant, as he advanced, Christopher saw Sidney Chester, in evening dress; a dainty old lady whom he took to be her mother; a rather timid-looking little woman, whose pretty features seemed almost plain in contrast with Miss Chester's; a handsome, darkly sunburnt young man, with a soldierly, somewhat arrogant air; also seven or eight strangers, divided into different parties scattered about the room.

"How do you do? Is it possible we're to have the pleasure of entertaining the famous Mr. Race?" said the young man who came to greet Christopher. "My name is Morley Chester, and I play host for my cousins, Mrs. Chester and her daughter."

Then Mr. Chester introduced him to the two cousins, mother and daughter (he meeting the girl as if for the first time), to the pretty quiet young woman who was, it appeared, Mrs. Morley Chester, and added an informal word or two which made Sir Walter Raven and Mr. Christopher Race known to each other.

Sidney Chester's fiance was, after all, very pleasant and frank in manner, his haughty air being the effect, perhaps, of a kind of proud reserve. Christopher could not help feeling slightly drawn to the young man, as he usually was to handsome people; but there was no doubt in his mind that Mr. Morley Chester was an agreeable person. He was not fine-looking, but his way of speaking was so individual and engaging that Christopher did not wonder at Miss Chester for referring to him as her dear cousin.

Before Mr. Chester and Sir Walter Raven no one mentioned the trouble in the house; but next morning, sitting in the hall, which was the favorite gathering place, he caught scraps of gossip. No one present had yet been robbed, but everyone had heard something queer from others who had left the place, and as a rich brewer, lately knighted, intended to go away in his motor after luncheon that day, he was being chaffed by his acquaintances.

"I suppose you'll give your watch and money to your chauffeur before you sit down for the last meal?" laughed an American girl who had arrived some days before in her motor-car.

"No, I shan't," replied Sir Henry Smithson, valiantly. "I don't believe in this nonsense. I'll show you what I have got on me, and as I am now so shall I be when I go into the dining-hall."

With this he displayed a gorgeous repeater, with his monogram and crest in brilliants; indicated a black pearl scarf pin, turned a sapphire and diamond ring set in aluminum on a fat finger, and jingled a store of coins in his pocket, which he announced to be gold, amounting to 50 pounds. "I've a few notes, too," said he, "and I expect to have them just the same when I finish my lunch as when I go in."

"Well, we shall all lunch at the same time, and watch," remarked the American girl.

Christopher had a table to himself at the end of the long room, and Sir Henry Smithson sat at a larger one not far away. He had invited the American girl, her chaperon and Sir Walter Raven to share with him his farewell meal, and much champagne flowed. There was a good deal of talk and laughter at that and other tables, but the luncheon was served by the butler and two footmen in ceremonious style, Morley Chester unostentatiously superintending behind a screen, which hid the door used by the servants. Not one of the three ladies of the Chester family was in the room.

All went on in the most orderly manner, and the food was good, as well as nicely served, though it struck Christopher that it was rather long between courses. Suddenly, as Christopher was beginning upon biscuits and cheese, Sir Henry Smithson sprang up in his chair, exclaiming, "By Jove!"

Then came a clatter of voices at his table, both ladies there crying out in consternation.

"What has happened?" asked Morley Chester, coming out from behind the screen, while Sir Walter Raven sat looking pale and concerned, and the mild-faced butler saved himself from dropping a bottle of port.

"Everything has gone!" ejaculated Miss Reese, the American. "His watch and chain—his ring—his scarf pin—and—"

"And my money," finished Sir Henry Smithson.

"I'm dreadfully sorry," stammered Mr. Chester. "I begged you to be careful."

"Oh, I've got myself to blame, I suppose," broke in the brewer. He gave a rough laugh, but it did not sound genuine. "Who on earth would have thought such thing could be? Well, seeing's believing. This is the queerest house I was ever in. It's bewitched."

"So we are beginning to think," said Chester, deeply mortified. "I can't begin to express my regret—"

"My own fault," said Sir Henry. "I'll say no more about it—for the present. But I wouldn't be sorry to see that repeater of mine again. If you don't mind I'll send a detective down on this business."

Presently, after the dining-hall had been searched in vain for trace of the lost treasurers, Sir Henry Smithson went off in his motor, a sadder and a wiser man.

Race had almost abandoned his suspicions of Sir Walter Raven, whom he liked more and more, when, on his eighth night at Wood House, a sound startled him from a dream of linen fold patterned paneling. Usually, when he waked thus, it was to find all silent, and he would turn over and fall asleep once more, telling himself that the noise had been part of his dream. But this time it continued. There was a queer creaking behind the wainscot.

In the morning Christopher asked the servant who brought his morning tea who occupied the adjoining room. "Sir Walter Raven," was the answer. Race was angry with himself for not having learned earlier who his neighbor was, but during the day, as he passed and saw the door of the next room ajar, he glanced in. It seemed to him that there was an inexplicable distance between this door and his. The rooms were supposed to adjoin each other. His own door was near the dividing wall, and so was Sir Walter's, yet there was a wide space between.

Through the open door of Sir Walter Raven's room he could see a low window with a cushioned seat in the embrasure. In his room there was one of the same size and shape. To prevent mistake he propped a book against the lozengepanes of his own window and went to walk round the rambling house and reconnoiter.

Yes, there was the book, and there was Sir Walter's window farther on toward the left. But there was something between which did not puzzle Christopher as much as it would had he not noticed the distance separating the doors of the two adjoining rooms. Halfway between the two low windows was a tiny one, so overgrown with ivy that it was all but invisible, even to an observant eye.

"Sir Walter Raven must have a cupboard in his wall, lit by that little window," Christopher decided, "or else there's a secret 'hidie hole' between his room and mine."

To begin with, he tapped the wainscoting in his own room, and was interested to discover that his knock gave out a hollow sound. He believed that there was but the one thickness of oak between him and the secret, whatever it might be, which lay beyond.

The paneling here was simple, without any elaboration of carving. The wainscot, which reached from floor to ceiling, was divided into large squares framed in a kind of fluting. Having examined each of these squares on the wall nearest Sir Walter Raven's, he gave up the hope that there was any hidden door or sliding panel.

"I could saw out a square, though," he thought, "and look at what's on the other side; or I could squeeze through if it seemed worth while. A panel behind the curtain of my bed would do; and I could stick it in again so that if anybody suspected there was something up they would hardly be able to see what I'd been doing."

Apparently no one ever entered the hiding place except in the night, about 2 o'clock. The noises behind the wainscoting continued for a few minutes only, and after that all was silence.

In the afternoon Christopher motored into Ringhurst to buy a small saw and a bullseye lantern, such as policemen use. On the way back he overtook Sir Walter with Sidney, and they accepted his offer to give them a lift back to Wood House.

They talked about the robberies as Christopher drove the car home, Sidney sitting beside him, Sir Walter leaning forward in the tonneau. "After all, it will end in our going away from the dear old place," sighed Sidney, with tears in her eyes. "The strain is wearing mother out; and, you know, if neither of us continues living in the house, it will go, as I told you, to the man who would have been the heir had the entail not been broken."

"You'll both come with me to Colorado and forget your troubles. Let the chap have the place, and be thankful it's off your hands," said Raven.

He spoke with the sincerity of a lover, not like a schemer who would force a woman to his will by foul means if fair ones proved not strong enough.

"I feel a beast spying on him and working against him," thought Christopher. "Suppose he knows nothing about the secret place next his room? Suppose the noises are made by rats? And what if, after all, the people who think they have been robbed never have been robbed? I'll give Raven the benefit of the doubt until I've tried one more experiment."

Tea was going on in the hall when Scarlet Runner arrived at Wood House. There were letters for Christopher, and he announced in the hearing of everyone, including the servants, that unless he should get a telegram advising him to the contrary he must leave Wood House, where he had spent such an enjoyable fortnight, immediately after breakfast the next morning.

Christopher took longer over dressing for dinner that night than usual. He hesitated whether to wear the studs and sleeve-links he liked best, or others which he did not care about. Also he was half minded to lock his watch up in his suitcase. Finally, however, he resolved to make his experiment bravely. "I'm not hysterical," he said to himself, "though I might get to be if I stopped here much longer. I shan't steal my own things and hide them, if that's what's other people do."

Throughout his stay at Wood House he had taken his meals at the same small table, except once or twice when he had been asked to join new-made acquaintances for dinner. But tonight he invited Sir Walter Raven to dine with him, "as it was his last evening." The young man accepted, and they talked of Colorado. Sir Walter was inviting him to come out to his ranch some day, when suddenly the expression of the once healthy, sunburnt, now slightly haggard face changed.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Raven, the blood mounting to his forehead.

"What's the matter?" asked Christopher.

"I'm not a particularly observant chap, but I suppose I would have noticed if you'd come in without your shirt studs. You didn't by any chance forget to put them in, did you?"

"No; I had them in, right enough," said Race. Looking down he saw that the white expanse of his evening shirt lacked the finish of the two pearl studs he had worn when he came into the room. His cuffs hung loose, empty of his favorite pair of links. Hastily touching his watch-pocket, he found it limp and flat.

"Well, yes, it is 'By Jove,'" he remarked, grimly.

"Shall we call Morley Chester and tell him what's happened?" asked Raven.

"No," said Christopher, who sat with his back turned toward the other occupants of the room, his table being at the end by a window, and he having given his usual seat to his guest; "I'd rather not make a fuss. I shall sit till the others have gone, and no one will be the wiser. I'm sick of sensations, and don't want to pose as the hero of one if I can help it."

It was a relief when the rest of the diners left the room and he was free to slip away without making statements or answering questions. He went to his room, locked the door, and, having listened with his ear to the wainscoting, presently began as noiselessly as possible to saw out a selected square from the oak paneling behind his curtained four-poster bed. The saw was sharp, and he worked as energetically as if he had an injury to avenge. In an hour he had the panel out of its frame.

It was difficult to wriggle through the square hole in the wainscoting, but he did it, after ridding himself of coat and waistcoat. Now he stood in a long, narrow space between the walls of his own room and Sir Walter Raven's. He had slipped off his pumps, and in stockinged feet began cautious explorations, the lantern making a pathway of light. The thing he had seen at the far end was not a beam. It was a box—two boxes—three boxes—of common wood, such as come into every household from the stores. They had lids, but the lids were not nailed down. Christopher lifted one. The box was filled with jewelry, heaped up in neat piles, according to its kind, on some dark garment folded underneath. There were a pile of bracelets, a pile of brooches, a pile of rings, and a collection of watches like glittering gold eggs in a nest. The second box had the same description of contents, though there were more miscellaneous articles—gold or jeweled belt-buckles, hatpins, a diamond collar or two, and several strings of pearls. In the third box much smaller than the other two, were purses, some of leather, some of gold or silver netting; cigaret cases with jeweled monograms; and, weighted down by a lump of gold chains, lay a quantity of bank notes.

Behind the row of wooden boxes was a square hole, black as the heart of night. Christopher's lantern showed him that from the top of this opening descended a narrow staircase, winding round upon itself like a corkscrew. He set his foot on the first step, and it squeaked. Then he knew what it was that had waked him every night—a foot treading upon that stair—perhaps other stairs below.

"I'll see what's at the bottom," thought Christopher; and was in the act of stepping over the low barrier of boxes when he heard a distant sound.

It was faint, yet it made Christopher pause. He withdrew his foot from the top step of the stairway, and, covering the light, lay on his side behind the boxes, which would, until a person advancing had risen to a level higher than the wooden lids, form a screen to hide him.

The sound continued, growing gradually more distinct. Someone was tip-toeing toward the stairs. Someone was on the stairs. Someone was coming up. There was a wavering glimmer of light, a little light, like that of a candle.

Christopher lay very still. He hardly even breathed.

The light was moving up the dark hall, and throwing a strange black shadow, which might be the shadow of a head. The stair creaked. Another stair. That clock must have been slow, or else the ghost was before its time. Now there was a long-drawn, tired breath, like a sigh, and in the advancing light gleamed something white and small. For a moment it hung in the midst of shadow, then it descended on the lid of the middle box. It was a woman's hand.

Quick as thought Christopher seized and held it tightly, at the same instant rising up and flashing his lantern.

There was a stifled gasp; the hand struggled vainly; he pulled it toward him, though its owner stumbled and nearly fell, and Christopher found himself face to face with Mrs. Morley Chester.

"Let me go!" she panted. "Oh, I implore you!"

"I'll not let you go," said Christopher, in a voice as low as hers, but mercilessly determined. "This game is up. You shall tell me everything, or I swear I'll alarm the house, send for the police, and have you arrested, you and your husband!"

"If you wish to save him you know what to do," the young man said.

"You won't send us to prison if I tell you the whole story?"

"I'll do my best for you, if you make a clean breast of it; but the contents of these boxes must be restored to their owners, for your cousin's sake if nothing else. I promise to shut my eyes to your escaping with your husband, before any public revelation is made, provided I'm satisfied that you tell me the whole truth now."

"I will, oh, I will! You know, Morley would have had this place if common justice had been done—if the entail hadn't been broken."

"Ah, he is the heir of whom Miss Chester spoke!"

"Of course; who else could be? He's the only one left in the male line. And think what it was for him to find out through an expert, whose word he couldn't doubt, that there's coal enough under the park to make him an immensely rich man, if only he hadn't been robbed of his rights."

"He didn't tell Miss Chester of this discovery?"

"Naturally not. If she or her mother gave up living here the estate would come to him after all. He hoped for that. And when he heard of her plan to open a kind of hotel he helped her to get a license and offered to manage the business. That was because he had an idea, which he hoped he could work. His father, who died when Morley was a boy, was a professor of chemistry, and made some clever inventions and discoveries, but they never brought in money. There was one thing he found after spending a year in Persia for his health. He discovered that out of a plant there—a plant no one had ever thought of importance before—an extract could be produced which would make people unconscious, at the same time causing their muscles to remain so rigid that if they were standing they would remain on their feet, or would not drop what they might be holding in their hands. When they came to themselves again they would not feel ill, would not even know they had lost consciousness for a moment.

"Morley's father was much excited about this preparation, and hoped it would be as important as curare, if not chloroform. He named the stuff arenoform, as nearly as possible after the plant, and published his discovery to the medical profession. But then came a dreadful blow. After many experiments to change and improve it, nothing could be done to prolong unconsciousness enough to make arenoform really useful to doctors and surgeons. The effect wouldn't last longer than five or six minutes, and the patients were terribly exhausted next day, so that the stuff would not do even for dentists in extracting teeth, as it was more depressing than gas. One of the most wonderful things about it was that a lot of people could be made unconscious at once, even in a big room, by a spray of arenoform floating in the air. But though that was curious and interesting, it was not of practical use, so arenoform was a failure.

"The disappointment was so great that Morley's father was never the same again. He always hoped that some experiment would make the thing a success, and, instead of gaining the fortune he expected, he spent more money than he could spare from his family in importing quantities of the plant from Persia, and manufacturing the extract in his own laboratory. Then he died, and there were hundreds and hundreds of the bottles in the house, of no use to anybody; but Morley had promised his dying father not to let them be destroyed. Everyone forgot the discovery of arenoform, for you see Dr. Chester has been dead 20 years. Only Morley didn't forget; and it was the existence of that quantity of arenoform in the house left him by his father which put the idea of coming here into his head. He experimented with the stuff on a dog, and found it was as powerful as on the day it was made. Then he told me, and I promised to help in any way I could.

"Next to the dining-hall on one side, and separating it from the two rooms used as private sitting-rooms for guests, is a long, rather ugly room which Morley asked Sidney to give him as a private office. Night after night he worked there before the house was opened to the public, and afterward, too, perfecting his scheme. He perforated the walls, so that, by means of a little movable machine which I could work, a spray of arenoform could be showered through the oak wainscoting either into the dining-hall on one side or the two sitting-rooms on the other. Then he had the tables arranged along the wall; and as one peculiarity of arenoform is that it smells like wood—wonderfully like old oak—no detective could have suspected anything by coming to sniff about the place afterward. Besides, the perforations in the wainscoting are so small that they seem no different from the wormholes which are slowly spoiling the old oak.

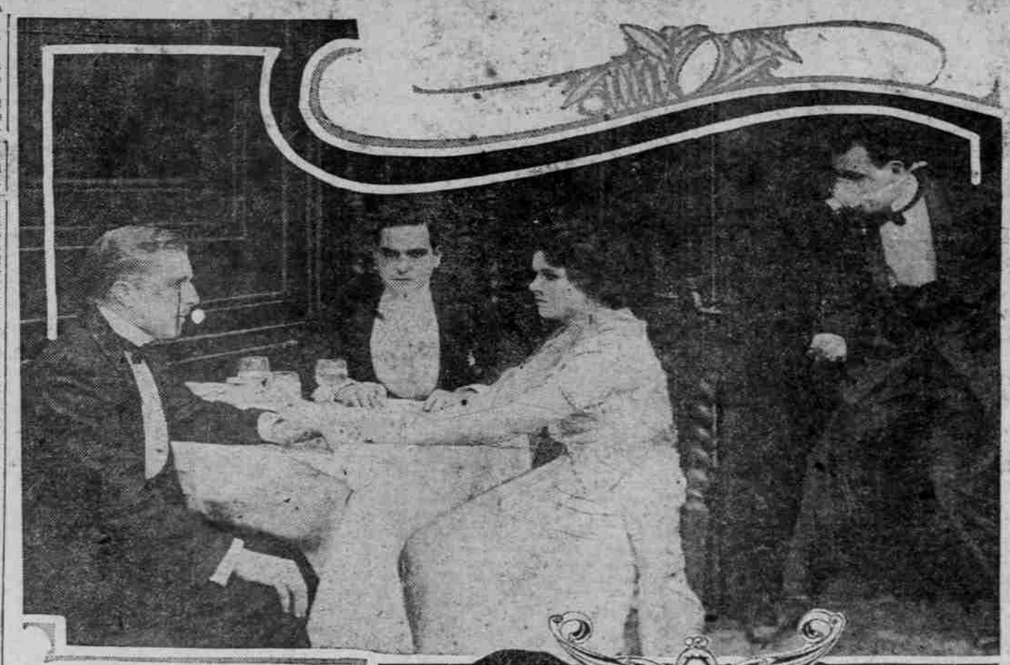
"When Morley was in the dining-hall or one of the sitting-rooms—whichever place we planned to have something happen—I would be in the locked office, and at a signal which he would give me when most of the servants were out of the room waiting to bring in a new course, I would turn on the spray. He always kept at the very farthest end of the room, behind the screen, and put his face to an open window there. Then, when everybody in the room was under the influence, which they were in a minute or two, he would take whatever he wanted from some unconscious man or woman, or even several persons, before anyone woke up. We've had no one to help us except an assistant of the cook, whom I bribed to make it as long between courses as possible. When I was ready to have the servants go in with the next dish I would touch a little electric bell in the office which Morley had arranged to communicate with the kitchen. The cook's assistant knows nothing, though, except that for some reason it was convenient to me not to have meals hurried to be able to regulate exactly the moment when the different courses should go in.

"Of course, the horrid stuff has affected our health—Morely's and mine—as well as that of everybody else who has been near when the machine was worked, or lived in the house for any length of time. But we hoped that Sidney and her mother would soon give up. Then the place would be Morley's, and we would be repaid for everything. While if they held on we should at least have the jewels.

"When Morley was working at the walls he discovered the way into the secret place out of our office—not the only 'hidie hole' in the house—but neither Sidney nor her mother knows of its existence. We thought it would be useful to get things out of the way, for fear of detectives searching our boxes, and so it has been. Morley has always sent me up because I am so light and small. Now you have the whole story. And if you have any sense of justice you'll admit that Morley isn't to blame when the place should have been his, and not Sidney's or her mother's."

Long before dawn Mr. and Mrs. Morley Chester left Wood House. Next day Christpoher told Sidney and Sir Walter Raven the tale as it had been told to him. Advertisements were put in the papers informing victims of the strange thefts where they could recover their property. Christopher would not accept any payment from Sidney Chester—only a piece of her wedding cake to "dream on."

(A New Adventure Next Week.)



Under the Unconscious Spell of Arenoform.

Christopher Found Himself Face to Face With Mrs Morley Chester.

WOMEN STORE HOUSEHOLD IN ANTICIPATION OF SEVERE COLD

Several Discuss Preparation, Including Large Supplies of Fuel, Food, Lights, Vegetables and Eggs—Water Pipes Wrapped for Long Siege.

BY MRS. PORTLAND.

"I SAW in the paper a few weeks ago," said Aunt Stacy, "that an Indian up at Hood River was saying we were going to have another cold Winter this year."

"Let it come," said Aunt Harriet complacently. "I am ready for it. We had such a time about fuel last Winter in the snowy weather—just couldn't get it delivered when we were clear out—that Henry actually was obliged to take a sled and go and haul home several loads himself; that taught us our lesson, so this year we have put in an extra ton of coal and two more cords of wood than usual. Fuel won't spoil on your hands; if it is cold again we have it ready, and if it isn't cold, we can keep it until it is used up."

"Our greatest difficulty in the cold weather last Winter," said Paul's mother, "was having to sit in the dark all one evening when our wires went down. The lights went out while I was getting supper. I knew I had a piece of candle somewhere, but I didn't know just where, and I had to strike matches and grope around quite a while before I found it, then it was only long enough to burn a little while and we sat all evening in the light of the fire in the fireplace.

Supply of Candles Stored.

I am not going to be caught that way again, for I have two dozen long candles in the house now. There's one on a little shelf just above the matches by the kitchen stove and one in the bathroom and one in our bedroom. Then we got a couple of small oil lamps and a lantern and two gallons of kerosene oil, and with Philip's flashlight I think we will do very well as far as lighting is concerned. We have plenty of matches laid in, too."

"We have been making some Winter preparations, too," put in Aunt Stacy. "Silas broke his snow shovel last Winter, so he got a new one the other day, and I have been fixing up some warmer woolen clothes for him this Fall. He had such a siege of the grip and rheumatism after getting up early and building fires and working in the snow in all that 'blizzardy' weather—I am sure that's what gave it to him. I have knit him two pairs of woolen socks and made him a pair of soft warm house shoes of some elderdown I had, with leather soles on them, and crocheted a nigh collar for the neck of his sweater and made him a new heavy woolen bathrobe."

Eggs Preserved for Winter.

"We did not have enough quilts," said Mother Portland, "to keep all the people warm that we had with us part of the time during the unusual cold. I've made two log cabin quilts out of small pieces of woolen goods I had on hand and I got some wool batting and made a couple of comforters, covering them with heavy cotton flannel."

"And didn't the price of eggs soar during that bad weather? I've put down six dozen eggs in water glass to use when they get up to the highest price. I bought them when they were 30 cents a dozen. And I did something else I haven't done in years; I made some sausage myself and put it down in lard. I've canned more vegetables, too. I have 40 pint jars each of corn, green beans, peas and tomatoes, so if canned goods go still higher in price, as it looks now they would, we will not need to buy any canned vegetables. We raised our own beans and I have enough dry beans to last us quite awhile."

"Then I tried drying some fruit this year. We used to do that a great deal years and years ago, but after fresh fruit got so plentiful women quit drying fruit. Then, too, you could buy the ready dried fruit so cheap, but dried fruit, like everything else, has been steadily advancing in price, and with sugar so expensive, it will pay Oregon women to dry their own fruit, as no sugar is required for the drying. I dried prunes, currants and red grapes, dried them in the oven when I was getting breakfast; of course they need only a moderate heat."

"And what have you been doing, child, to get ready for Winter?" asked Aunt Stacy of me.

Bread Making Undertaken.

"Lots of things," answered I, not wishing to be too far outdone by these, my older and so much more experienced housekeeper relatives. "I've got one big bed each of carrots, parsnips and onions in my garden and about a dozen heads of late cabbage I am going to put away in boxes of earth pretty soon, and some salsify and some chard and lettuce—"

"Good!" interrupted Aunt Stacy, who thinks everybody in Portland should have a vegetable garden.

"And I've found out how to make my own yeast and I'm getting in practice in making my own bread."

"That's fine!" exclaimed Mother Portland. She knows how fond my husband is of home-made bread. For one day last Winter we could not get bread of any kind in our part of the city, so we lived on biscuits.

"And we've raked up and burned all the dry thistles on the vacant lot next us so they won't spread so bad next year in our lot. The aphis were so bad on most of our trees and shrubs we're raking the leaves up as they fall and burning them and spraying the bushes and trees, and piling up lots of dirt and manure around the roots of our peach trees so they won't partly Winter kill, as they did last year.

Water Pipes Wrapped.

"Last Saturday afternoon we wrapped part of our water pipe. Where our bathroom pipes come up to the tub they froze two or three times last Winter. That's on the east side, you know, and we found a knot hole in the wall that let the cold wind right up against them, so we nailed it up. Then we took newspapers and cut them in strips and wrapped them round and round the pipe till they were several layers thick; so I think we won't have any trouble there with freezing again."

"Well, after all our extra preparation," said Aunt Harriet, "we may have a very mild Winter."

"Which does not argue against the preparation," replied Mother Portland, "because we will not lose by any of our preparations, even if it is a warm Winter, but we will lose a good deal without them if it is cold again; and it is always best to be on the safe side."