



Now Polly Proposed.

"Hi! Hi! All right! Now we sha'n't be long!" said the gray parrot.

I regret to say that the irrepressible young man that brings the daily milk is the tutor of my parrot in the latest up-to-date slang of the day.

I am an old sea captain—at least, not old, perhaps the word slipped out unawares. I am on the right side of 50, anyhow; but being in receipt of a pension and a small private income to boot, I have cast anchor in my present abode in the expectation of weathering many a winter's storm yet.

Being without a known relation in the world, I willingly fell in with the suggestion that I should pick up my moorings alongside my old friend and mesmate, Capt. Travers, late R. N., who, having left one of his legs on the west coast of Africa while capturing a slaver, was pensioned off at an even earlier age than myself, and now lived with his sister—a most comfortable party, fat, fair, and 40, or thereabouts—in the adjoining house to mine in the neighborhood of London. We had always got on well together, our tastes and dispositions were similar, and we had often met during our naval careers. His sister I had not previously been acquainted with, but, being in many respects like her brother, we were soon firm friends.

Capt. Travers and myself had each a favorite parrot—his the common African gray, with a red-tipped tail, and mine the purer variety, without a trace of color, but otherwise similar.

I had not long settled down in my new quarters, and got everything shipshape, or what seemed so to me—a very important difference, as I know to-day—when, almost unconsciously at first, I began to feel what a lonely old bachelor I was and what a set-off to all my other belongings the figure of Miss Rachel Travers would be by my fire-side. But just here the course of my life began to make itself felt. Inherent shyness in the presence of the opposite sex had dogged my footsteps from my earliest recollections. Give me a gale of wind in the bay of Biscay, a tornado in the tropics, or twenty hours' duty on deck, wet through to the skin, and Capt. Manley, late of the P. and O. service, will thank you for it, and consider life well worth living; but as dispenser of delicate attentions to the fair sex, intensely as he inwardly admires their pretty ways, Capt. Manley does not, no, he certainly does not, show up to advantage.

Although fond of pets generally, I have an antipathy to cats, especially at night. I am not aware that our neighborhood was particularly beneficial in its aspect or other qualifications to feline constitution, but I know that until I was inhuman enough to start an air-gun cannonade on my numerous nocturnal visitors, I was frequently unable to get a respectable night's rest. One infernal black and white Tom defied my finest efforts. If average cats have nine lives, I am sure this one must have had nineteen, and I began to wonder what sort of uncanny being this was that had no objection to letting my bullets pass apparently through its body without suffering any inconvenience. But after all it must have been my bad marksmanship, for one afternoon I saw my enemy quietly walking up the low fence that divided my back garden from Capt. Travers'.

The opportunity was too good to be lost, and quietly getting my air-gun I took a steady aim and fired. There was no mistake this time, and without a sound poor puss dropped on to my tower bed as dead as the proverbial door nail.

My exultation, however, was of short duration, for to my horror and dismay, on proceeding to pick up his unfortunate carcass and give it decent burial, I saw that my shot had passed right through the unlucky animal and killed my neighbor's parrot, which had been put out to sun itself in a little summer-house that stood at the bottom of the garden.

I was staggered at my position; I knew the parrot was a supreme favorite with Miss Travers, and how I could ever explain my carelessness I could not imagine. Suddenly a way out of my dilemma presented itself to my mind, and I hastened to put it into execution. I knew that the Traverses were out, and would not be back for some little time, so hurrying indoors and taking my own parrot from its cage I carefully painted the end of its tail with red ink in imitation of its deceased comrade, and finding no one was about I stepped lightly over the fence and substituted the living for the dead bird, which I buried, together with the cat, in my own garden. I knew that my parrot would not readily talk before strangers, and I hoped that by the time it had got used to its new surroundings it would have forgotten its former accomplishments; at any rate, I must risk it.

Alas! "Uneasy lies the head that

wears a crown," sang some poet, who, I expect, never wore anything harder than a nightcap, but, true as it may be, compared to the torture of my mind, now launched on a course of duplicity, it would be a bed of roses.

It was toward the end of the following week that I happened to be out in the garden and saw my old friend come stumping down the path of his own garden in his dot-and-carry-one style, and, seeing me on the fence, cried:

"Hollo! Captain, you're quite a stranger! What's been up? Rachel has been talking about coming in to inquire about your health, as she was afraid something must be wrong."

"Yes, I have been a bit poorly," said I. Oh, how easily the words slipped out, although I had been as right as ninepence—why that particular sum should be endowed with more rectitude than its fellows I have never been able to discover—this by the way.

"A bit of cold, perhaps," said Capt. Travers. "Well, come over the fence and have a dish of tea in the summer house, and Rachel shall come in afterward and make you a good glass of something stiff for a nightcap."

Punctually at 5 o'clock I donned my sprucest attire, and with a smart dower in my buttonhole—gay dog that I was—slipped over the fence. Miss Rachel was there, looking as fresh as a spring cabbage with the dew on it, which I consider a very pretty smile, and she bade me welcome with one of her beaming smiles. There, too, was the unlucky parrot in its cage, and standing just outside the summer house. I had noticed that it had been set out to sun itself as usual on all fine days, and as far as I could see nothing had transpired to make me think they had any cause to suspect my imposition.

I purposely sat with my back to it, and avoided taking notice of it in any way whatever.

Tea went off all right; my old friend was very cheery and Miss Rachel showed me great attention. I could hear Polly rubbing her beak up and



"I MEAN—THAT IS TO SAY—YOU, SIR."

down the wires of the cage, and swinging backwards and forwards in the metal ring.

After the meal Capt. Travers went indoors to get his supply of necessities for the evening, and, turning to me, Miss Travers commented:

"By-the-by, Capt. Manley, how is your parrot? I have not seen it out in the garden lately."

I felt my heart beating a bit faster, but with every semblance of outward calm I said:

"No; the fact is, it's not been at all well; in fact, it is dead."

"Dead!" she exclaimed. "Well, I never. What did it die of?"

"I really don't know," I replied. "It died quite suddenly about a week ago."

"I hope our Polly isn't going to follow suit," she continued. "She has been very dull and quiet the last few days, but seems a bit more lively this evening. I don't think she has spoken a word all the week."

"Thank goodness!" I inwardly ejaculated.

Things were beginning to look a bit awkward, and I cast about for something to change the course of conversation. I am not a quick thinker, however, and before I could collect my wits Miss Travers continued:

"Dear, dear, to think your poor Polly's dead! Well, I am sorry! I should be sorry to lose you, Polly, dear," she said, addressing the parrot. "But, really, Capt. Manley," looking me straight in the face, "I can't make our Polly out. Sometimes I could almost believe she was a different bird. She hasn't once seemed pleased to see me all the week."

I felt the blood rapidly rising to my cheeks and forehead, but I trusted to my tanned complexion for it not to show. I feebly replied: "Perhaps she's moulting."

It was an unlucky slip. "Well, now I come to think," said Miss Travers, "I noticed that its tail looked much paler after its bath the other morning, and the water was quite red. Is that a sign of moulting?"

"Yes, I often used to notice it about my own parrot."

"But I thought your bird had no red about it," she pursued.

"Confound the woman's persistence," I thought, but I stammered; "I mean—that is to say—you see—I've noticed it in all red parrots I have ever come across. They shouldn't be bathed at all; it injures their constitution."

"Oh! I thought you recommended it," she said.

So I had, dozens of times. "Only for the gray ones," I said, forming a convenient distinction on the spur of the moment.

Miss Travers didn't seem inclined to pursue the subject further, much to my satisfaction, and then there was a dead pause.

During the whole of our conversation the subject of it had not ceased to continue its antics in the wire cage. Whether it was the sound of my voice that caused it to be thus excited I do not know, but at this opportunity it burst in with "Hi, hi!"

I was getting desperate, and could think of nothing to change the subject; and yet if I didn't say something I was terribly afraid the parrot would.

A bicycle bell sounded down the road.

"Are you thinking of getting a bicycle, Miss Travers?" I said.

"No, certainly not," she replied; "how can you ask such a question?"

Another awful pause, during which I mopped the perspiration from my brow.

"Ra—Ra—Rachel, I love you!" came in clear tones from behind my back. The wretched bird had caught the exact tone of my voice.

"Capt. Manley! Sir!" said Miss Travers, raising herself to her full five feet one and one-half inches. "Did you address that remark to me, sir?"

I had, however, utterly collapsed, and, burying my head in my hands, I leaned down on the little round table. Whether the sight of the poor old ship in distress touched her tender heart, I don't know, but she added, in softer tones:

"This is very unexpected, Capt. Manley."

I could hold out no longer.

"Miss Rachel," I cried, "I'm a thundering old hypocrite. My parrot isn't dead at all; there it is in that cage; it's yours that's dead—I shot it. I didn't mean to. Can you forgive me for all the lies I told you?"

"All right! All right!" said the solemn voice of the parrot behind me.

"It was Polly that made that remark just now, not I. Believe me, she speaks the truth, if I don't. Rachel, I do really love you."

I ventured to look up. Tears were standing in her eyes, and the expression on her face made me hope that I did not look quite such a big booby in her eyes as I felt I did in my own.

Moving nearer, I clasped her hand, and, as it was not withdrawn, I put one arm gently round her ample waist.

"Now, we sha'n't be long," said the gray parrot.—*Tit-Bits.*

A Chinese New Year's.

Chinatown of San Francisco was keeping holiday, and all was gaiety and bustle.

The narrow, picturesque streets were decorated with brightly-colored lanterns, while overhead above the rooftops, the yellow dragon-flags floated against a blue California sky.

It was a sunny day in February; and the streets were swarming with a multitude of Chinese—men, women and children—all arrayed in their richest holiday attire. The children especially, with their bright faces and black eyes, and in their pretty costumes, formed a most pleasing and interesting feature of this living Oriental picture.

Everybody seemed to be happy and good-natured; and ever and anon, as a group of friends met, they stopped and amid much ceremonious bowing exchanged the compliments of the season; for this festive occasion was nothing more nor less than the celebration of the Chinese New Year.

The idea of celebrating New Year's Day in February may strike some of my readers as odd. But, since this has been the Chinese custom from time immemorial, and is older, by several thousand years, than our acceptance of the first of January as the proper time, the Chinese, perhaps, are not far wrong in supposing themselves to be at least as much in the right as ourselves. This question, however, was of no concern to this merry holiday throng. They were quite satisfied with the arrangement; and, with the utmost belief in their own superiority, they felt at heart an inborn contempt—common to all Chinese—for "outside barbarians." This term embraces all nations not living within the sacred boundaries of "The Flowery Kingdom," and includes the inhabitants of all the world; and these unfortunate outsiders are broadly divided into classes—Eastern and Western barbarians.—*St. Nicholas.*

Mule Indispensable in War.

A Persian regiment on the march is a strange spectacle. Every three soldiers have a donkey, for there is neither baggage train nor commissariat. On this donkey is placed the worldly wealth of its proprietors and their muskets. Occasionally the veiled wife of a soldier bestrides the beast.

The hedgehog is 10 inches in length.

TRAMPS OF SIBERIA.

FUGITIVES FROM JUSTICE IN A BARREN LAND.

May Be Shot Down Without Compassion Like Beasts, but They Have Their Revenge on a Helpless People—Outgrowth of the Exile System.

World's Worst Vagrants.

The very worst tramps in the world are the outcome of the penal system of Siberia. They are the runaway convicts, and woe betide the unfortunate stranger who falls into their hands. The very manner of their life causes them to be greatly feared.

The Siberian runaway convict, writes a correspondent, does not so much seek permanent liberty from his hard-earned forced labor as to obtain a momentary respite. And what a fearful freedom it is! A never ending struggle in a murderous climate, with the tortures of hunger and a constant hiding from pursuit, to end in finally being caught, put into irons and sent back to the mines from which he has escaped. Such is the career of the "bradlaga." Sometimes a whole life is thus spent in tramping, being caught, brought back and running away again, and so on until death liberates the unfortunate one from the burden of life and society from a dangerous pariah.

To discourage these frequent attempts at escape the government has granted the lawful privilege to any one of either capturing or shooting down the bradlaga on sight; and, in

fact, the Mongolian burials in the Irkutsk province make a regular business of hunting them just as they do for the fur animals, as, according to their calculation, the clothes of these unfortunate wretches, however bad, are worth more than five kopecks (2½ cents), the price they obtain for the "American" squirrel. While crossing these burial settlements the bradlaga is afraid to reveal himself, even for obtaining food, and is invariably forced through hunger to commit theft.

Their mode of attack is simple. Travelers are never molested in the daytime. It is only at night that these blackguards attempt their nefarious work. The most dangerous hours are between 3 and 6 a. m., when travelers who have been on the qui vive all night somewhat relax their vigilance. A couple of the thieves are told off to cut the traces of the tarantass, two more to seize and bind the yemstchik (accomplice or not), and three or four others at the same moment to climb over the back of the vehicle, and, falling suddenly in front of the hood, to dispatch the passengers with a blow from a heavy bludgeon.

In Yeneseisk and Tobolsk provinces there is a sort of understanding between the villagers and the runaways. The peasants not only do not hunt the bradlaga, but give them food and other necessities. The tramps, on their side, even when in superior numbers, never attack the inhabitants except in cases where it is absolutely necessary to insure their own safety. Such mutual concessions arise not only from habit, but from mutual interest.

When on a dark night (for the tramps traverse villages only at night) a peasant is roused from his slumbers by a loud knocking at the door and his question is answered, "The unfortunate ones," he runs to his storeroom, and, getting food, throws it over the wall as quickly as possible, without opening the gates or asking any explanation. The recipients thank him and as quickly withdraw.

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A SIBERIAN PRISON.

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astonishes one most is the combination of the most hardened crime with some religious ideas, and also a certain degree of humility, born of severe discipline of hard labor of the mines, which produces a show of pity toward the victim they are destroying in the most cold-blooded manner.

Misfortune—and the bradlaga is one of the most unfortunate of beings—consciously turns their thoughts toward religion. In justification of their crimes they invariably say, "we poor sinners, but also most unfortunate, and therefore God will forgive us all our sins." Whenever they see a cross they always take off their caps and cross themselves.

When a defenseless traveler is met by a band of these desperadoes he is attacked and robbed, and then he is killed for the purpose of preventing him telling the police of the circumstances. After the body has been stripped of its clothing it is hidden and the tramps make themselves scarce.

COUNTESS WALDERSEE.

One American Woman Happily Wedded to a Foreign Nobleman.

Few American women have been as successful in their alliance with foreign noblemen as the Countess Waldersee, who was Miss Mary Esther Lee, of New York. The Countess' husband is the director of the German army—the successor of Von Moltke, in fact, and the Countess herself is the personal friend and adviser of the German emperor and his wife. Her influence in imperial politics is therefore as great as that of any one person other than the Emperor himself. Even Bismarck helped himself out of power by being hostile to the American woman and her plans. The father of the Countess was a New York grocer, who retired, and left only a small fortune to his widow. Mrs. Lee went to Stuttgart to live and educate her children. There she met and married a German diplomat, Baron Waechter, afterward ambassador to France. In 1864 her daughter, Mary Esther, married Prince Frederick of Schleswig-Holstein, who saw her by accident in a hotel. The prince was immensely rich and 70. Miss Lee was poor and 27. On the wedding trip to Palestine she persuaded him to make over to her his entire fortune. He did so and died six months later. Not long afterward the widowed princess was married to Count Waldersee, then a rising soldier. Prince William married a grand niece of Prince Frederick, Augusta Victoria. That young woman was ungainly and awkward, but under the spell of the fair and tactful American she soon became one of the most polished women in Europe. The title given her by the Countess, and a quick result, charmed the prince, who was soon to become Emperor. When William ascended to the throne, when



COUNTESS WALDERSEE.

Bismarck fell, and when the young warlord was his own master, he heaped honor after honor on the Waldersees. The Countess is now 56 years old. The husband, in case of a German war would be the master of the German army.

Tree Splits a Rock.

A California laurel has split a large boulder into three pieces. The tree is of the type common in many parts of California, but there are several queer things about it and its surroundings. The place where this one grows is most unusual one for its species, which naturally requires considerable moisture. The fact of a tree being rooted in a barren rock is also unusual in California, on account of the long, dry summers, during which young sprouts usually perish unless there is considerable moisture in the soil. The location of this botanical curiosity is a few hundred feet east of the trail to the top of Tamalpais. The general appearance of the tree is unusual, and it is undoubtedly very old.

The Danger-Sign Up.

He—Ah, a veritable "Spirit of the Storm!" She—You will surely find a "so" you make a mistake while you're talking with me to-day. My dearest enemy is over there with my brother's class from Harvard.—*New York Times.*