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"THE FIRST FOOT."

By ROBERT BARR.

THE house was chaos. One lamp burned, a cheap made in Germany affair, which gave but sufficient light to show the hopeless disorder of the room. The furniture stood about at all impossible angles; pictures, instead of being neatly arranged upon the walls, rested on the floor, leaning their faces against the wainscot, as things in grief; books, loosely tied with coarse string, were flung here, a bundle of firelogs huddled there. Chaos indescribable.

But Stuart Brazier was a methodical, philosophic soul, the very type of the satisfied and satisfactory suburban dweller. He had glanced at the disheartening scramble of furniture and ornaments without the least little discouragement. To-morrow, not to-night, he would begin to set things to rights. The June night closed in, and Stuart Brazier sat in his comfortable chair, smoking and turning matters over in his mind. He was glad to be at length in the first detached house he had ever possessed; he thought of its spacious lawns, spacious for a London suburb, and of the grounds well bushed in from spying neighbors. He was glad, too, that he had sent his wife and little girl to Margate, where, in bracing air, they would know nothing of the discomforts of a moving day. The dust and the turmoil of the morning, the heavy boots trampling on uncarpeted stairs, the sight of men straining in their determination not to injure heavy furniture, the sounds of hammers and falling things, the whole picture of turning out of one house and going into another had got upon his nerves just a little, and now that he sat at rest he felt disinclined to stir himself. But write to Margate he must. His wife would look to receive a letter from him the first thing in the morning, telling her all about it; assuring her that no precious family good had been broken, and that her jewelry box was quite safe. After their little girl, the chief care of the Braziers was that small tin box which contained the wife's valuables. Its contents were richer than are usually found in a suburban villa, for both Stuart Brazier and his wife were connected with people who could well afford to remember in a pleasant and substantial way birthdays, and did remember them.

At length Stuart Brazier stirred himself. He refilled and lighted his huge, homely pipe, gathered a miscellaneous collection of bric-a-brac off the round table, and sat down to write. He wrote cheerfully, telling all about the small events that make up a moving, and, strangely enough, had just finished these words: "Like a tinker, I am happy in my squalor; all I yearn for is company, and I wonder who will 'first foot' our new house?" when his ear caught the sound of footsteps coming boldly up the gravel path, which led to the front door. Brazier listened, and then quickly glanced at his watch. "Ten o'clock," he muttered to himself. "Too late to be the last post. Now, who the deuce is coming, and what does he want? Perhaps one of the movers has left something behind."

As the crunching sounds grew nearer, Brazier made out that there must be more than one person approaching his door. The windows of the room in which he sat were wide open, allowing him to hear with great distinctness. Outside, the night was pitch dark, occasionally illuminated by heat lightning, which blotted out moon and stars, the whole world seeming to pant in the clammy heat of threatening rain. Within a few yards of the front door the visitors paused, and the next instant Brazier heard the high-pitched voice of a woman say:

"I'm sure there's robbers in; I feel it in my bones."

"Be quiet, dear; do shut up," roughly commanded the voice of a man.

"How can I be quiet, if burglars and housebreakers are rumpling and tearing my—"

"Oh, shut up. You'll be in hysterics first thing, you know. You'd better stay out of 'arm's way. Go back there, to them bushes, and keep still."

"I wouldn't leave you for worlds; indeed and indeed I wouldn't. I would die of fright, I know I would."

"Well, then, keep your 'ead shut, and let me and the constable do the talking or anything else."

Brazier grinned, and started for the door, taking the miserable light with

him. Before he had picked his way through the furniture to the hall, the front bell was rung violently. He placed the lamp on the hall table, and, flinging open the door, asked:

"Well, what's up?"

"What's up, indeed! How have you got into this house?" demanded some one, he could not well see who.

"By promising to pay rent, principally," Brazier replied, good naturedly, realizing that a mistake had been made, a mistake that would turn out all right for him in the end. Peering into the darkness, he saw that the party numbered three, a man, a woman and a constable. The man had in his hand a large Gladstone bag, which, before replying to Brazier's little witticism, he proceeded to place upon the grass.

"Well, by heavens, you're a cool customer, you are. What are you doing in my 'ouse?"

"I'm not in your house."

"It's a lie; you are!" exclaimed the man, in passion. "You thought to 'ave the place all night for a quiet search, I suppose, but you've been found out, you 'ave. You're trapped, you are."

"Be calm, sir, and don't talk nonsense, if you can help it," Brazier replied. "This is my house, and it is filled with my furniture. I moved in to-day."

"I know jolly well you moved in to-day, and I know jolly well you'll move out to-night. Policeman, I give this man in charge."

The policeman looked at Brazier, but made no move.

"Constable," said Brazier, now thoroughly amused, "there is a ludicrous mistake here somewhere. The irate gentleman, perhaps, has taken a house near by, and moved into it, as I have into this to-day. He has made a mistake in the number of his house." Turning to the stranger, he continued: "If your good lady and you will step in and glance at the furniture, you will find out that you are in the wrong. I'm sorry there is not a better light for you, but you will, perhaps, make that do." Without a word, the two stepped into the hall.

Turning to address a pleasant remark to the policeman, Brazier suddenly found himself sprawling on the gravel path, and at the same instant heard the door shut to with a bang. The policeman hastened forward to assist the astonished man to his feet. Before astonishment and anger allowed him to open his mouth, Brazier heard the voice of the woman sing out: "Go away, you wicked housebreaker, or the policeman will take you in charge," and next the front windows were shut down in great haste.

"What possesses these two people? Surely they are out of their minds," Brazier at length said to the attentive policeman. "That's my house; I have valuables in there. I can't have strangers in possession, and unwatched. I don't care who they are, or how mistaken they may be. I must ask you to get them out without delay."

"I have no right to break into a house, sir," answered the constable. "To speak plain, I don't know either of you, so I can't tell whose house it is. You may be right, or you know, sir, he may be right. How am I to know which is which?"

"I had possession, you saw that," hotly replied Brazier. "You saw me installed in the house. Isn't that enough for you?"

"Certainly not, sir. You had possession, then I was on your side; they have possession now, and I am on their side—that is, in a way. Bless if I know what's up, though, between you all. I would not have taken you out, nor can I take them out."

"You're partly responsible, you know. If you had not been here with them, I would not have given them any chance to break in."

"They didn't break in; you showed them in. I wouldn't have let them break in, no fear. But you asked them in as polite as a preacher, and you see they've accepted."

"You allowed them to assault me, and to evict me—"

"Me? How could I help what they did? It was done in the twinklin' of an eye. I didn't know the man was going to give you his shoulder."

"You have seen him do an illegal thing—"

"There's no use your talking to me. You'd better see the sergeant at the station. Between you and me, I think this is a summons job; it will take you a day or two to get them out, even if they don't belong here, if they sit tight."

"Summons to get, heaven knows who, out of my house, just because they have the daring impudence to get in in the way they did! They'll suffer for this, if there is any law in the land. They're impostors; the chances are they're worse; they're thieves."

Out of the first floor window a head was thrust, and a man's voice asked: "Asn't he gone yet? Let 'im go, policeman. We've no further use fer 'im."

"Are you people staying in?" asked the policeman.

"Of course we are; it's our 'ouse, and I suppose we 'ave a right to stay 'ere for the night, ain't we?"

"What am I to do, constable?" asked Brazier, for the first time realizing that the matter of getting two stubborn people out of his house was likely to be a much more tedious business than getting them in. "What do you advise?"

"Now that your temper has left you, and you ask advice I'll give it. To tell the truth, I don't like the looks of things here, and so I'll stay and keep a sharp watch on what goes on. You cut off as fast as you can to the station, and explain everything to the sergeant in charge. Tell him P. C. Foster sent you. You know the station?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, outside your gate, turn to the left and keep straight on to the end of the street; you'll find it a goodish step, you will, so you may as well make haste. I'll watch these gentry. I will."

Stuart Brazier, hatless and slippers on feet, darted down the gravel walk, and at his best pace made off in the direction indicated to him by the policeman. He thought of his wife's jewels, and could not keep from grinning ruefully at his words regarding the "first foot." Here was a pleasing first foot indeed. How his wife would laugh, and enjoy the plight—providing always that nothing happened to her treasures. But he solaced himself the couple must be crazy, and crazy people do not steal, however much they may delight in destroying.

He had gone but a few hundred yards before good fortune came to him. At the corner of a street he came within an ace of running full tilt against two mounted policemen, who, having met, were passing the time of night with each other. All breathless, Stuart Brazier explained matters to them. When they had heard, they quickly swung off their horses. One constable led the animals to a lamp-post, to which he secured them; the other closely questioned Brazier.

"What did you say the constable's name is?"

"Foster."

"Yes, and did Foster tell you this was the way to the station?"

"Yes, he said, 'Turn to the left when you get out of your gate.' I turned to the left."

"I'm afraid, in your anxiety, you have mistaken what he said. You should have turned to your right."

"He said 'left,' I'm sure."

"It does not matter, now that you have met us. Come on, and we'll see what's to do. Please make no noise; you can't tell what's up or who's about."

All three scaled the railings at the corner of Brazier's garden, and, keeping in the shadow of the bushes, as noiselessly and as quickly as ferrets they made their way to a spot that commanded a view of the hall door.

"I don't see Foster," one whispered.

"He may be at the back of the house," the other answered, "or he may not be here at all."

"You're right," replied the first.

"You slip up under the shadow and take your stand against the front door." Turning to Brazier, he whispered, "Now you stick by me and don't funk, you know. Is the back door locked?"

"It was when I left the house."

"All right; be as silent as a ghost now, and when I shove in the door with my shoulder, you float this light in ahead of me. We'll rush right in pell-mell. I may as well tell you there is no policeman named Foster in this district. But I know who Foster is, I think; he's Jim Cumming, the cunningest—but no talk now; come on, and be steady."

The door went in with a crash to the might of the constable's great shoulders, and two seconds later Brazier stood in his dining-room. Before him, in various attitudes of surprise and vicious terror, were three

men dressed in ordinary clothes. The bogus policeman grasped a chair by the back, and swung it to strike, but the real constable's voice rang out:

"Jim, don't do that. You should know better. It will go hard enough with you as matters stand. Don't make a fool of yourself. Don't earn more time."

The ruffian put down the chair without a word and seated himself upon it.

"You have me fair and square, you have, and no mistake. Who's with you?"

"Ronald; he's at the front door."

Turning to Brazier, the policeman said, "Let my chum in, please."

"You have to be doing something always, Jim. This is a new wheeze you've struck."

"Yes, and a good one, only I'm out of luck of late. Think of the bareheaded fool running against you two! I counted on him looking for the station for a bit yet."

The constable ran his eye over the other two, he that so lately was a woman and the other who had the Gladstone bag.

"These are new friends?" queried the policeman.

"Yes, and good 'uns, too; they played the game well. Claude here made a fetching gal—but there, where's the use of talking now it's all over. You haven't such a thing as a cup of tea or a little to eat in the house?" Brazier had to admit that he hadn't.

"No apology, mister," said Jim. "I know you've just moved in. Luck is down on us with both feet to-night."

"Where's your togs?" asked the policeman.

"You'll find my policeman's uniform in the front room. Claude, you left your petticoats upstairs, didn't you?"

An hour later Stuart Brazier, back from the police station, picked up the thread of his letter, and told of his company and the "first foot."—The King.

The Little Toe Going.

The latest discovery of medical science finds expression in the assertion of an eminent authority that the small toe of the human foot will be crowded out of existence by the end of the present century. Such is the view of chiropodists generally, and of physicians who have given the matter more than passing consideration, says the Philadelphia Press.

Just as, according to Darwin, the tail was crowded out of the human bony skeleton many ages back because it had no useful functions to perform; just as the vermiform appendix, the only apparent function of which is to necessitate dangerous and expensive operations, will eventually find no place in human anatomy, so, according to present indications, the little toe must ultimately disappear altogether.

Whether or not the big toe is all that is needed in walking and running is a question which has not yet been satisfactorily answered, but the fact remains that athletic instructors and coaches have universally striven to develop the big toe at the expense of the others in the training of fast runners and football players, and to that end the shoes have been made so narrow that any possibility of using the little toe has been precluded.

Between the modern method of walking and the wearing of tight-fitting shoes, the little toe is doomed to an early end.

A Ferocious Animal.

The usually voracious Philadelphia Record recently printed an account of a thrilling combat between a muskrat and a man. It occurred in Minersville, Pa., which is near Pottsville. William Lewis was putting on his skates when a large, lean muskrat came out of his hole and attacked him. Time and again the man beat the monster off with his skates, and each time the monster returned. Finally Lewis succeeded in killing him, but not until he had been bitten severely. Naturally the report ends with the remark that "it was the largest species of muskrat ever seen in these parts."

Wall Street Safe.

A trio consisting of father, mother and precocious young daughter were craning their necks to see the top of the skyscrapers in Wall and Broad street, when the father exclaimed: "What a calamity would be witnessed if an earthquake visited the vicinity!"

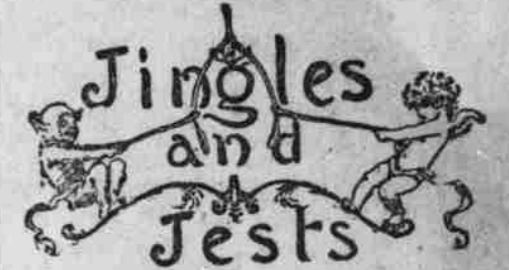
The precocious child quickly quieted the parent's fears by remarking: "Wall Street is safe in such an event, as there isn't room for those buildings to fall any where."—New York Times.

A QUARTER FOR HENRY.

Mrs. Henrietta whispers in her husband's henpecked ear: "Here's a quarter for you, Henry; it will be a plenty, dear."

When poor Henry tries to argue: "Fifty cents, my dear, to-day." Henrietta points her finger: "Henry, not a word, I say!"

And the people say: "He's awful! All he thinks of in this life is his money—money—money! How I'd hate to be his wife!" —Indianapolis Sun.



Maud—"Who was that friend I saw you with last night?" Ellen—"He's not a friend; I am engaged to him." —Tit-Bits.

"Oh, I'm sure she isn't as old as she looks." "Perhaps not, but I'm sure she's older than she thinks she looks." —Philadelphia Press.

She—"Why, I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on earth." He—"Quite so. I could get a handsome wife then." —Philadelphia Press.

"Who is that aristocratic person over there?" "That! Why, that's the lucky fellow who invented the wormless chestnut." —Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Ere long the school boy will return His lessons to review. For every year he has to learn Geography anew. —Washington Star.

Hiller—"What do you think of a man who will marry a girl for the sake of her money?" Kent—"I think he wants the money pretty badly." —Boston Transcript.

Tenant—"I say, the cellar of my house is half full of water." Landlord—"Is that so? Well, it's all right. You're water tax won't be raised." —Boston Transcript.

"Yes, he has an incurable heart trouble. He's fallen in love." "Oh, that's not incurable." "Not ordinarily, but I'm afraid his age is against him. He's over sixty." —Philadelphia Press.

"Man wants but little here below"— So runs the good refrain. Alas! That little always is What's hardest to obtain. —New York Herald.

"Do you keep late hours, young man?" asked the blue-nosed woman of the clerk in the music store. "We've got 'The Clock in the Steeple Strikes One,' ma'am, if that's what you want?" —Yonkers Statesman.

"Let it be understood," said Miss Passay, "that I want a genuine likeness; a natural reproduction of my features that—" "In that case, ma'am," replied the photographer, "I must ask you to pay in advance." —Philadelphia Press.

"Please, ma'am, won't you give me ten cents to buy a loaf of bread?" "Why, bread is only five cents a loaf." "Yes, ma'am. But I allus has to eat a nickel's worth o' chocate drops to git up an appetite." —Cleveland Plain Dealer.

"I tell you," asserted the strong-minded woman, "women can do men's work as well as men do it." "That may be so," said the philosophical man, "and it only proves men's mental superiority. He never tries to do woman's work as well as woman can." —Brooklyn Life.

"Wha-a-t's the matter, John?" gasped Mrs. Torque; "don't you like the new dishes I've cooked?" "Where did you get the recipe?" "Out of the cookbook, of course. Why?" "Don't you think that you happened to get the cookbook mixed with some dialect story?—this dish tastes like it." —Baltimore Herald.

Special Courses For Boys.

"In planning special courses of work suitable for our public schools some account ought to be taken of the boy's interest in the home," said one of a committee on modernizing the curriculum. "The girls are taught how to make a room look cozy and homelike; why should not the boy know how to do his share in the work of keeping it so? On the boy ought to fall the responsibility of attending to the odd little jobs for which his sisters are never supposed to have any liking or training. Among these jobs may be mentioned the keeping in repair of doorknobs, locks and hinges; the putting up of shelves, hooks and fixtures; the oiling, staining and waxing of the floors. He can usurp the function of the glazier, the painter, the carpenter and the locksmith." —New York Times.