

PENLEY'S PRIZE.

BY ERNEST A. WATTS,
in the Grocers' Assistant, London.

CHAPTER I.

THE green shop blinds had been hauled down, the window lights switched off, and the register reset for the next day, and the junior assistants had gone home, as Edwin Payne stood, hat in hand, preparatory to leaving the well stocked store of his employer. It was known to Penley & Co. to the thronging crowds who passed along a busy North London marketing street, and the number of its patrons increased each week. But his brisk "Good night, sir," was answered by an unusual request to stay for a chat.

"What shall we discuss?" queried Edwin; "the offer of a new shop and stock as a prize just announced or the plans for our Christmas show?"

"Neither!" replied his employer, as he came from behind the counter to take a seat near his most trusted assistant; "but your first suggestion, strangely enough, leads me up to that of which I wish to speak. You will be surprised to hear me say that this shop, with stock, fittings and good will, came into my possession within a fortnight after I first entered it, though at that time I had scarcely ten pounds to call my own."

Edwin looked up with a start of surprise, but his comments were suppressed by Mr. Penley's upraised hand, as he proceeded:

"Yes, it is true. Only a few have heard the story, but it is essential and fitting for me to tell it to you, in view of your proposed partnership with me. I will try to describe the occurrences of those eventful weeks just as they happened. So listen carefully, and reserve any questions until I have concluded."

Edwin lit a cigarette, crossed his legs, and saying, "All right, sir, fire away. I am all attention!" he listened to the following narrative.

CHAPTER II.

"Just seven years ago I was perusing the advertisements in a trade paper one Saturday at midday, in the hope of securing a better situation than the one I was then about to leave. One advertisement in particular attracted me by its generous terms. Here is the cutting. I have saved it ever since. I will read it out:

"Wanted at once, a smart assistant (single or married) to take complete charge of a grocery and provision business, cash trade, live out; good wages.—Apply X. and Y., 10, office of—"

"I applied for the post without delay, and received a reply on the following Monday, in which I was asked to call on a Mr. Maurice at a private city hotel. With all possible speed I hastened to answer the request in person. On arrival at the address given, I was shown into a much mirrored room, the only occupants being two bearded gentlemen with a facial resemblance to each other, apparently about thirty-five and forty years of age, respectively, faultlessly attired, smoking fragrant cigars.

"One of them rose to greet me, saying, 'Well, young man, you are Mr. Penley, I presume? This is my brother, Mr. Yexley Maurice. We have scanned closely all replies to our advertisement in the —, and have decided to give you the post without further prelude. If this interview is satisfactory. Please be seated, and I will explain our requirements.'

"Somewhat surprised at the affability of my prospective employer, I drew toward the table on a velvet need chair, and with a nod intended to express mingled gratification and interest, I listened attentively as Mr. Maurice proceeded:

"This week we have taken a grocery store in a North London main thoroughfare. It has only recently been opened, so we bought it cheap. We know nothing of the trade ourselves, and our purchase has been effected for reasons into which we need not now enter. We wish to give a smart young man a chance to show his ability rather than have any responsibility ourselves. Two of the hands are kept. We should wish you to lock up the shop each night, bring the keys round to us at once, and call for them again on your way to the shop in the morning. That arrangement is also for reasons of our own. The rooms above the shop are used for store rooms."

"After settling smaller details, the interview was concluded by my agreeing to call at the hotel at nine o'clock on the following evening. My new duties were to commence on the Monday week. As I had the rest of the day free I went to meet Minnie (who is now Mrs. Penley). At that time she was a telegraphist in a sub-post-office in this district. She was elated

at the news, especially as it involved my moving nearer to her abode, and the hours I should work in the evening were to be less than in the previous situation. That evening we went round to look at the store. The proprietor was at the counter, and the stock showed signs of preparation for stock-taking. After I had introduced myself, the elderly and genial grocer told me why he was leaving the premises.

"Said he: 'Some weeks ago two gents drove up in a smart trap accompanied by a chap who looked like an accountant I met once at a trade sale. After much preamble, he asked me point blank if I would let the business to him. I was astounded at the offer, but when I heard his proposed price I became willing to contemplate it. Trade had been getting less owing to company competition. I had a lease on the premises, but my eyesight was failing, so I came to terms. This has been a grocer's shop eight years. I took it over empty. The previous tenant was a diamond merchant. He was drowned at sea, and the assets found in this house, then used as his office, were only just sufficient to pay his local debts. But he had never married, and apparently no one was left to lament the loss of his life.'

"Minnie looked extremely interested in the narration, but I let it all slip from my mind as I stopped his volubility to enquire into the regime of the business and the extent of its operations, which were of chief interest to me, in view of my prospective management.

CHAPTER III.

"After the week of waiting had passed, I entered the store with my mind full of plans for the future development of the business. Mr. Maurice (the younger one this time) took me over the premises, but on reaching the door which led to the basement below the shop, he stopped short, and said:

"This door I shall retain the key of. The stock has been removed upstairs, and we do not intend to utilize the place. It is very damp down here. The door I will now lock, and it will remain so for the present. All goods that you order pay for or delivery. We have placed sufficient petty cash in the safe to commence with. I shall call in each morning with my brother to inspect the books."

"After he had left, I commenced to clear up, with the help of my two assistants, the traces of stock-taking during the previous week. After closing at 8 p. m., I took the keys around in accordance with instructions, and called for them on Tuesday morning. On entering the shop I was surprised to see on the sawdust floor faint marks of muddy footsteps. Surely no one could have entered during the night. I thought, Everything was in order as I had left it, so I soon dismissed the matter as a mistake on my part. But that night I resorted to the time-worn but effective device of tying white cotton across the space I imagined had been tramped over during Monday night. On Wednesday morning it was broken. I spoke of it to my employers, who said I was suffering from a hallucination probably, as no burglar would enter without disturbing the goods, and that as long as the imagined intruder confined his attentions to sawdust he did not mind such surreptitious visits in the least. But during that day I found a key to fit the door leading below the shop, and also procured a duplicate key locking the front entrance of the shop. Until the evening arrived I suppressed my curiosity to utilize the key I had found and inspect the mysterious basement below the shop, because of the presence of my assistants. We all left at 8 p. m., as usual, and I delivered up the keys, but retained the duplicates. I told Minnie an hour after that I felt certain intruders had nightly visited the shop. I was in charge of, and that in my employers' interests my determination to stay in it all night to await developments must be put into immediate action. She protested, but I was firm, and left her with instructions to go to her office the next morning via the street in which the store was situated. If it was not open, she was to go back and ask her father to procure a key and go down to the basement. Into that dull and dreary cellar I crept about 11 p. m., after carefully closing and locking all other doors behind me. I glanced around with the aid of the glistering light afforded by a pocket electric lamp. It apparently contained nothing but empty cases, lidless tins, and broken confectionery bottles. But to my astonishment the red tie which had constituted the floor had been levered up and heaped together in the corners, in one of which I could distinguish, as my eyes became used to

the lack of light, a set of gardening implements. Their presence probably accounted for the evidences of digging apparent. While standing there ruminating, I heard the front door of the shop open and close, and subdued voices on the floor above. In a few seconds I had hidden myself in an empty barrel, and pulled a sack, which had been carelessly thrown over the barrel, into a better position. Scarcely had this been arranged when two men came into the cellar with an oil burning cycle lamp alight. Through a convenient hole in the barrel, I perceived them to be Mr. Maurice senior and his brother. Pulling a paper from his pocket the elder one read out quietly, as if to himself:

"I, Edward Maurice, have this day buried beneath the basement of my offices at — gold coin and diamonds to the value of £20,000. If I never return from South Africa alive, which colony I am now going to visit, the said specie shall become the property of whoever is tenant in this house ten years from above date—"

"Now put that paper away. Charles," said Yexley (the younger of the two). "You have read that aloud to me a hundred times during the month it has been in our possession. Let's start digging."

"All right, Mr. Gardener, so we will. All blessings on the servant who knocked that little box of uncle's on to the floor and revealed that secret partition containing this message. She could have spared us her apologies that time."

"As they raked up the earth, conversation was continued in subdued tones, and from the sentences which were audible to me, I could deduce the history of the exciting testament I had just heard. It appeared that the two gents were nephews of a Mr. Edward Maurice, the diamond merchant who had rented the premises years ago. Their father had stolen the heart of a young lady who was once engaged to their uncle, and married her. A vow of revenge had been taken by Edward Maurice, and the estrangement had continued even after the birth of his brother's sons, whom he evidently intended should never benefit by him financially, either during his life or after. But his sudden death by drowning at sea came to pass before he had made any other will than the paper locating his hidden possessions, which had passed into the nephews' hands in the box referred to. All these details I rapidly pieced together mentally, until my reflections were suddenly stopped by an exultant cry from Mr. Yexley, as his fork sent forth a sound as if it had struck metal. A few moments after, and the brothers lifted out of the mould an iron box with a rusty padlock that was easily wrenched off. The glitter of gold was before them a few seconds after the lid was thro-n back.

"At last! This lot is worth nearer £40,000 than £20,000!" exclaimed Yexley, exultantly, as he changed from one hand to the other (as a connoisseur does coffee beans) both cut and uncut diamonds.

They almost danced in exultation, and I with great difficulty restrained a cry of astonishment. I had reason to regret their jubilant capers, for Charles kicked over a keg that had at one time contained pepper. The potent powder, some of which had adhered to the paper lining, filtered through the staves of my barrel where-in my cramped position was becoming unbearable. All my efforts to ignore its influence proved futile, and I soon joined involuntarily in the chorus of sneezes. In a trice the sack was snatched off, and a small silver pistol pointed at my quaking countenance. I commenced to make profuse apologies for my presence, but they were stopped by a curt 'Say nothing, sir!' from Yexley, and I was obliged to passively submit to being bound to a bench with a cord belonging to a biscuit case; a kerchief was tied over my lips, so that shouting was impossible. I then listened in sullen silence, as Charles commenced to address me, thus:

"How do you get in here to-night we can only guess. Why you came we can do no more than guess at, for we know of your anxiety to protect our interests. We cannot stop to explain our present, except to tell you that this gold is yours by right, and also because we have fulfilled conditions at a bequest by becoming legal tenants of the premises. But English law is too ponderous in operation for us, and fortunes have been lost over trivial clauses. To avoid all risk, we have taken this course. We are now going abroad. This business, with its stock and fittings, we will present you with—partly in appreciation of your short, but strenuous services, and partly because we do not wish to wait while a sale is effected. We shall send a message to your sweetheart asking her to call at our hotel for the key of this store. By that time we shall be near Southampton. Maintain a strict silence on this matter, or our loss will be yours. I'm going out now."

"Within an hour, during which Yexley stayed in the cellar, I heard a trap drive to the side entrance. Charles came down again. After dividing the contents of the box into two parcels, saw them stagger towards the steps with the weight of

the specie, and then the door closed leaving me in total darkness. A tumult of thoughts tore at a mad pace through my excited brain. What course should I adopt on the morrow? Was it all a dream? were among the first. But my chilled limbs enforced the reality of the situation; and as I lay there bound, even the prospect of a sudden step into comparative affluence failed to comfort my fears that my release would fail to follow. How I realized during that long night what it was to 'watch for the morning' with eyes that sleep refused to close. But, of course, it came, and with it my dear Minnie. Never shall I forget the look of mingled anguish, love and fear which the grey light coming in from a pavement grating revealed upon her lovely features. Sharp scissors soon cut away the cords, and Minnie almost sobbed out:

"What does it all mean?"

"It means happiness," I replied. "But tell me how you found out, and came to my relief so soon before I explain."

"Minnie then informed me that anxiety of mind had caused her to prepare to go out early in the morning, and cycle round to the store to investigate. Underneath the door of her domicile a noise had been passed during the night asking her to call for the key, as Mr. Maurice had planned. During these mutual explanations the hour for opening shop came round. By the time my assistants arrived, the basement was locked up, and all traces of my adventure removed. No one but Minnie's parents heard of it; and, after considering all points, we came to the conclusion that it was quite legitimate for us to co-operate with the plans of the brothers, and accept with gratitude their generous gift. We discovered that they had been dealing in diamonds for some years in London, had acquired a good reputation for straightforward transactions, and owed nothing. No other relations could be traced by us to the deceased Edward Maurice, and all information collected ratified the right of my employers to retain the treasure. Thus I entered into possession without compunction, and with the aid of a timely loan for initial operations, built up this business to its present dimensions. Every Christmas I receive an anonymous registered letter bearing the African postmark containing five Victorian sovereigns. That I always devote to some charitable purpose with as little ostentation as possible.

"But here is my dear Minnie coming to call me in to supper. I told her of my intention to tell you to-night, but she evidently wishes me to 'wind up.' So, good night, Mr. Payne. May your energies and capital find a fitting sphere in, and share the success of—"

"PENLEY'S PRIZE."

Our Trade With Germany.

Twenty-one articles, or group of articles, having each a total value of \$1,000,000 or over, were imported into the United States from Germany during the past fiscal year, and twenty articles, having a total value of \$1,000,000 or over each, were exported to Germany during the same period. Manufactured articles, chiefly iron and steel, silk manufactures, chemicals, cotton goods, earthenware, furs and furskins, and toys comprise the principal importations into the United States from Germany. Of our exportations to Germany raw cotton contributes more than one-half of the total, its share in 1905 being \$109,000,000 out of a total export of \$215,000,000. But few manufactured articles appear in the list of our principal exportations to Germany.—Harper's Weekly.

Not a Question of Money.

There are many strange ideas of business. The young woman whose application is recorded in the Kansas City Times may have been a sister of the wife who applied for admission to the New York Medical College on the plea that she wanted to do something to occupy her spare moments.

"This morning a young lady came in here," said the man in charge of the book department of a large store, "and asked for a position to sell books. I explained I had nothing to give her, and then I said pleasantly, 'I'm awfully sorry.'

"Oh, she said, turning to go, 'you needn't be sorry. I really don't need the money. I simply wanted to work here so I could read the books.'"

—Youth's Companion.

Experiment With Native Ferns.

The deciduous nature of many of our native ferns renders them valueless for indoor cultivation in winter. Nevertheless the genuine fern lover who gathers a wild garden outside his door is sure to take ferns inside, for the summer months at least. A proper selection of species for indoor cultivation can only be determined by experience. Many beautiful ferns fail to adapt themselves to a life indoors. Certain species are physically unable to stand the transition from the bracing atmosphere of the great outdoors to the dry air and dewless nights indoors, consequently they wither and die when other ferns flourish with tolerable grace.—G. A. Woolson, in the Garden Magazine.

Slavery still exists in British East Africa, the English Government having refused to abolish its legal status.

SOUTHERN FARM NOTES.

TOPICS OF INTEREST TO THE PLANTER, STOCKMAN AND TRUCK GROWER.

The Place of Cotton.

At the present time the cotton growers of America have a practical monopoly in production of the most generally useful and widely used of vegetable fibers. Hitherto all attempts to grow cotton on a commercial scale in Africa and other subtropical lands have proven financial failures. A syndicate of British cotton manufacturers, backed by unlimited capital, have conducted experimental plantations in various African colonies, but in every case the cotton so produced could not be laid down in any English port except at prices of about two cents per pound above the average price of American cotton. The quality of the African cotton was also much inferior to the American fiber.

The world's consumption and demand for raw cotton are yearly increasing at a much faster rate than the world's population. It is certain then that the demand for the product of American cottonfields will continue to increase, and with the increased demand must come an increase in price.

Cotton is almost an ideal "money" or surplus crop. Under intelligent care and good management, cotton is a safe and sure money-maker. But "good management" does not consist in "single crop" planting. Single crop farming of whatever kind is a species of gambling in which the odds are all against the player.

Cotton "planting," by which is meant the exclusive and continuous cultivation of cotton on the same land as long as the crop will yield enough to pick, has ruined thousands of acres of once fertile land, and disfigured the cotton region with torn and gullied old fields. This type of cotton-growing has been an unmitigated curse to the Southern States.

The most profitable satisfactory system of farming in the cotton region is one in which cotton comes on the land not oftener than once every three years. Four and five year rotations are better still. The crops to be included in the rotation must differ with soils, localities and the tastes of the farmer. The chief endeavor should be to make the farm self-sustaining without counting the area in cotton. Cotton should be the surplus, or "savings bank" account. In such a system, when the market is too low the farmer simply stores and holds his crop until prices rise. In arranging a good rotation for upland sections of the cotton belt, the following crops are all available: Corn, winter oats, winter wheat, sorghums (sweet and non-saccharine), sweet potatoes, peanuts and cowpeas. As a rule, it will be more profitable to depend upon leguminous crops for hay and pasture, or a mixture of such with winter oats, than to lay down cotton fields in temporary or short-term grasses.

In the cotton region the soil should be kept at work all the year round. Care must be taken that the soil does not become acid. To insure this, powdery, watery slaked lime, at the rate of 1000 or 2000 pounds per acre, should be applied, and smaller doses after a crop of green manure was turned down.

The intelligent farmer should, on small areas of his fields, vary the amount of fertilizer applied to his crop and use every endeavor to determine the maximum feeding capacity of the soil and crops. He should then feed up to the limit with the three important mineral plant foods, to wit: Potash, phosphoric acid and lime.

The following are formulas for corn and cotton which have been found satisfactory by farmers in North Carolina:

First—
Acid phosphate, 14 per cent..... 900 lbs.
Nitrate of soda..... 200 lbs.
Kainit..... 900 lbs.

2,000 lbs.
Mix and apply from 900 to 1200 pounds per acre.

Second—
Acid phosphate, 14 per cent..... 850 lbs.
Cottonseed meal..... 850 lbs.
Murate of potash..... 200 lbs.

2,000 lbs.
Mix and apply from 1200 to 2000 pounds per acre.—Gerald McCarthy.

tion whether the use of salt is to be considered essential in the culture of asparagus.

The Arkansas Station has given considerable attention to this question, and the results indicate that while the field culture of asparagus salt may not be especially useful, in the small garden patch, where intensive cultivation is practiced, and where large amounts of stable manure are applied each year, it may answer a very useful purpose, especially in keeping down weeds.

As to the question of the effect of fertilizers on merchantable shoots of the same season, the Delaware Station reports results of asparagus fertilizer with nitrate of soda, in which the use of nitrate alone is not recommended, but at Rhode Island, on limed soils, the nitrate has proven of value.

At the New Jersey Station, on extensive trials covering several years, it has been found that as against twenty tons of stable manure per acre, the most valuable increase per unit of cost was obtained from the use of a commercial fertilizer analyzing 4.15 per cent of nitrogen, 7.7 per cent of available phosphoric acid, and 13.3 per cent of potash, used at the rate of 500 pounds per acre; but an increase of any of the ingredients did not increase the returns.

To summarize the work of the stations, the work indicated that salt may be used to advantage on small beds, that the use of nitrate is unprofitable for giving an increased cut of stalks, the same season; that commercial fertilizer with a high potash content, if the land is in good condition, is probably superior to barnyard manure.—Geo. Wright.

Proper Way of Drenching.

To drench a horse put a good halter upon him—not a bridle, for the bit in the mouth will be in the way of the bottle in giving the medicine; take a plover line or a piece of rope of the clothes line size and make a stationary loop in one end about one foot long; this loop under the nose of the halter and around the upper jaw—that is, the mouth; back the horse in a stall or in a corner and put the free end of the rope over a beam or through a ring or pulley, and raise the head so that the mouth is just a little higher than the throat. This rope should never be made fast, but held so that the head may be promptly lowered if the horse shows any tendency to cough or strangle. There should be no exception to this rule, no matter how much medicine there may be in the mouth—additional medicine can be supplied more easily than a horse or mule dead of strangulation can be replaced. Almost any sort of a bottle may be used. One made of metal, leather or horn is good, because unbreakable, but an ordinary pint bottle will serve the purpose well. A small quantity of medicine—two to four tablespoonfuls—should be poured on the tongue by inserting the neck of the bottle in the side of the mouth where there are no teeth to break it, and then the bottle removed from the mouth until the horse swallows. To make him swallow it is not necessary to pull his tongue violently, pinch his throat, pour water in his nose nor close his nostrils in any way. It can usually be accomplished with ease and safety by rubbing the roof of his mouth with the finger or the neck of the bottle. This causes the horse to move his tongue, which carries the medicine back into the throat and swallowing takes place.—Tait Butler, North Carolina Department of Agriculture, Raleigh.

Nests For Early Sitters.

The nests for the early sitters—those which take to brooding in the winter time, should be made deep and broad, with the nesting material well up at the sides, so as to keep the eggs from getting out from under the sitter and getting chilled.

The chief reason why a sitter breaks her eggs is because the nest is so small that the eggs lie too close together, and then if she be a heavy hen, she will sometimes break them in coming back on them after feeding.

The early sitter will hatch more chickens from eleven or thirteen eggs than she will from fifteen or more, because she can cover them more securely, and so none of them will be exposed or chilled.

Hens that will have the deep, broad nests suggested, will hatch all fertile eggs even in the very coldest weather. The chickens will thrive, too, in a snug, warm coop, and bear close confinement much better than those which are hatched in more mild, or warmer weather. But, at hatching time, they should not be removed from the nest until the very last one to hatch has been from the shell fully twenty-four hours. Let them get very lively, and quite hungry before they get anything to eat, or removed to the coop.—H. B. Geer.