



"Perhaps You'd Like to Hire the Whole Shebang?" Says I, Sarcastic.

Mr. Pratt.
By Joseph C. Lincoln
Author of "CAPN' ERI" "PARTNERS OF THE TIDE"
Copyright 1907 A. S. Barnes & Co. Company
Illustrations by T. D. Melvill

CHAPTER I.
The Masters.

I heard about the pair first from Emeline Eldredge, "Emmie T." we always call her. She was first mate to the cook at the Old Summer Home house that summer. She came down to the landing one morning before breakfast and have alongside of where I was settling in the stern of my sloop, the Dora Bassett, untangling fish lines. She had a tin pail in her fist, indicating that her sailing orders was to go after milk. But she saw me and run down in ballast to swap yarns.

"My sakes! Mr. Pratt," says she; "have you heard about Nate Scudder?"

"Yes," I says. "Ever since I come to Wellmouth."

"I mean about what him and his wife has just done," says she. "It's the queerest thing! You'll never guess it in the world."

"Ain't been giving his money to the poor, has he?" says I, for, generally speaking, it takes a strong man and a cold chisel to separate Nate Scudder from a cent.

"Oh! ain't you the funniest thing!" she squeals. "No indeed! He's let his house to some city folks, and—"

"Ain't that the cook calling you?" I asks. I'm a homceoph when it comes to Emmie T.; I like to take her in small doses—she agrees with me better that way.

It was the cook, and Emeline kited off after the milk, only stopping long enough to yell back: "Folks says they're dreadful rich and stylish. I'll tell you next time I see you."

Well, I cal'lated she wouldn't—not if I saw her first—and didn't pay no more attention to the yarn, except to think that June was pretty early for city folks to be renting houses. There was only three or four boarders at the Old Home so far, and I was to take a couple of 'em over to Trumet in the sloop that very day.

So there it was on the way over, one of the couple—sort of a high-toned edition of Emmie T. she was—she turns to her messmate, another pullet from the same coop, and says she: "Oh! say!" she says. "Have you heard about the two young fellers from New York who've rented that Scudder house on the—what do they call it? Oh, yes! the Neck road. I heard Nettie Brown say they were too dear for anything. Let's drive past there to-morrow; shall we?"

So there it was again, and I begun to wonder what sort of critters Nate had hooked. I judged that they must be a kind of goldfish or he wouldn't have baited for 'em. Nate ain't the man to be satisfied with a mess of sculpins.

I landed the boarders at Trumet and they went up to the village to do some shopping. Then I headed across the harbor to shake hands with the Trumet light keeper, who is a friend of mine. His wife told me he'd gone over to town, too, so I come about and back to the landing again. And I'm blessed if there wasn't Nate Scudder himself, setting on a mackerel keg at the end of the wharf and looking worried.

I hadn't hoisted the jib on the way down, and now I let the mainsail drop and went forward.

"Hello, Nate!" I hailed, as the Dora Bassett slid up to the wharf.

He kind of jumped, and looked at me as if he'd just woke up.

"Hello, Sol!" he says, sort of mournful. Then he turned his eyes toward

the bay again and appeared to be starting in on another nap.

"Hear you got some boarders over to your home," I says, heaving him a line as a hint for him to come out of his trance and make me fast.

"Yes," says he, paying no attention to the line.

"Come early in the season, ain't they?" says I, grabbing hold of one of the wharf spiles and bringing my boat alongside easy as I could.

"Ya-as," says he, again. Then he fetched a long breath and opened his mouth as if he was going to go on. But he didn't; all that comes out of the month afore it shut up was another "Yes."

I made the Dora Bassett fast myself and climbed on to the wharf.

"Are they call'ating to stay long?" I asks. He'd got me interested. Seemed to have the "yes" disease bad.

"Hey?" says he. "Oh—er—yes."

I was a little mite provoked. Not that I was hankering to have Nate Scudder heave his arms around my neck and tell me he loved me, but I didn't know any reason why my pumps should suck dry every time I tried 'em.

"Humph!" I grunted, starting to walk off. "Well, be careful of yourself; look out it don't develop into nothing worse."

"What do you mean?" he sings out, seeming to be waked up for good, at last.

"Oh," says I; "I judged by the way you kept your mouth shut that you had sore throat and was afraid of getting cold. Good day."

Would you believe it, he got up off that mackerel keg and chased after me.

"Hold on, Sol!" he says, kind of pleading. "Don't be in such a hurry. I wanted to talk to you."

I had to laugh; couldn't help it. "Yes," says I, "I kind of suspected that you did, from your chatty remarks. If you'd said 'yes' nine or ten times more I'd have been sure of it."

"Well, I did," he says. "I wanted to ask you—I thought I'd see what you thought—you see—"

Here he kind of faded away again, and stood still and wiped his forehead.

"Look here, Nate Scudder," I says, "for a man that wants to talk you make the poorest fist at it of anybody ever I see. Why don't you try singing or making signs? I wouldn't wonder if you got ahead faster."

He grinned, a feeble sort of lopsided grin, and tried another tack.

"You were speaking of them boarders of mine," he says.

"Yes; I was," I says.

"They come day afore yesterday—early," say he.

"Um-hum. So I heard," I says.

He fidgeted a minute or so more. Then he took me by the arm and led me back to the keg.

"Sol," he says, "set down. I want to ask you something. By gum! I got to ask somebody. I'm—I'm worried."

"Yes?" I said, giving him a little of his own medicine.

"Yes. Them boarders—they worry me. Me and Huldy set up till half 11 o'clock last night talking about 'em. She thinks maybe they stole the money, and I don't know but they're crazy, ran away from an asylum or something. You've seen more city folks than I have, being around the hotel so. See what you think."

"'Twas this way," he went on; "I got a letter from the feller in New

York that I sell cranberries to. He said a couple of friends of his wanted to come to a place in the country where 'twas quiet. Did I know of such a place round here? Well, course I wrote back that 'twas nice and quiet right at our house. There wasn't no lie in that, was there, Sol?"

"No," I says. "I should say 'twouldn't be shaving the truth too close if you'd said there was more quietness than anything else down on the Neck road."

"Well," he goes on, not noticing the sarcasm, "I wrote and never got a word back. Me and Huldy had given up hearing. And then, yesterday morning, they come—both of 'em. Nice lookin' young fellers as ever you see, they are; dressed just like the chaps in the clothes advertisements in the back of the magazines. The biggest one—'twere both half as tall as that mast, seems so—he took up his hat and says, kind of lazy and grand, like a steamboat capt'n:

"'Mr. Scudder?' he says.

"'That's my name,' says I. I was kind of suspicious; there's been so many sewing-machine agents and such round town this spring. And yet I'd ought to have known he wa'n't no sewing-machine agent.

"'Ah!' he says. 'You've been expecting us, then. Has the luggage come?'"

"'What in time did I know about his luggage,' as he called it?"

"'No,' says I. 'Tain't.'

"'Oh, well, never mind,' he says, just as if a ton or two of baggage didn't count anyway. 'Can you give us two sleeping rooms, two baths, a setting room, and a room for my man?'"

"'Two baths?' says I. 'Can't you take a bath by yourself? You seem to be having lots of funny jokes with me. Would you mind saying what your name is and what you want?'"

"'He looked me over sort of odd. 'Beg pardon,' he said. 'I thought you were expecting us. Here's my card.'"

"'I looked at it, and there was the name 'Edward Van Brunt,' printed on it. Then I begun to get my bearings, as you might say.

"'Oh!' I says. 'I see.'

"'So glad, I'm sure,' he says. 'Now can you give us the sleeping rooms, the baths, and the room for my man?'"

"'Humph!' says I, lookin' back at the house behind me; 'if me and Huldy bunked in the henhouse and the chore boy in the cellar, maybe we could accommodate you, that is, all but the baths. You'd have to take turns with the washtub for them,' I says.

"'He laughed. He was so everlasting cool about things that it sort of riled me up.

"'Perhaps you'd like to hire the whole shebang?' says I, sarcastic, pointing to the house.

"'He looked at it. It looked sort of cheerful, with the syringa over the door and the morning-glories hiding where the whitewash was off.

"'Good idea!' he says. 'I would.'

"'Well, that was too many for me! I went into the house and fetched out Huldy Ann—she's my wife. There ain't many women in this town can beat her when it comes to managing and business, if I do say it.

"'How long would you want the house for?' says Huldy, when I told her what was going on.

"'A month,' says Van Brunt, turning to the other city feller. 'Hey, Martin? T'other chap nodded.

"'All right,' says Van Brunt. 'How much?'"

"'Thinks I, I'll scare you, my fine feller. And so I says, 'A month? Well, I don't know. Maybe, to accommodate, I might let you have it for two hundred.' I sort of edged off then, thinking sure he'd be mad; but he wa'n't—not him. 'Two hundred it is,' he says, and fished out a little blank book and one of them pocket pens.

"'Name's Scudder?' he asks.

"'Yes,' says I. 'Nathan Scudder. One T in Nathan.'

"'And I don't know as you'll believe it, Sol,' says Nate, finishing up, 'but that feller made out a check for two hundred and passed it over to me like 'twas a postage stamp. What do you think of that?'"

I didn't know what to think of it. On general principles I'd say that a man who wanted to board with Nate and Huldy Ann Scudder was crazy anyhow; but of course these fellers didn't know.

"'It beats me, Nate,' I says. 'What do you think?'"

"'Blessed if I know!' says Scudder, with another of them long breaths. 'All I'm sure of is that they're up home, with the parlor blinds open and the carpet fading, and me and Huldy's living in the barn. She's doing the cookin' for 'em till this 'man' of theirs comes. Land knows what kind of a man he is, too. And that check was on a New York bank, and I've just been up to Trumet here with it and the cashier says 'twill be a week afore I know whether it's good or not. And I can't make out whether them two are thieves, or lunatics, or what. And Huldy can't neither. I never was so worried in my life.'

I kind of chuckled down inside. The idea of anybody's skinning Nate Scudder was the nearest to the bitter's being bit of anything I ever come across. And just then I see my two passengers coming.

"'Well, cheer up, Nate,' I says. 'Maybe you'll get the reward, whether it's lunatics or thieves. Only you want to look out and not be took up for an accomplice.'

He fairly shivered up when I said that, and I laughed to myself all the way out of Trumet harbor. One thing I was sure of: Them two New Yorkers must be queer birds and I wanted to see 'em.

And the very next afternoon I did see 'em. They come down the Old

Home pier together, walking as if they didn't care a whole continental whether they ever got anywhere or not. One of 'em, the smallest one—he wa'n't more'n six foot one and a half—looked sort of sick to me. He had a white face, and that kind of tired, don't-care look in his eye; and the bigger one sort of 'tended to things for him.

"'Good morning,' says the big one—the Van Brunt one, I judged—cheerful enough. T'other chap said, "Good morning," too.

"'Morning,' says I.

"'Can you take us out sailing?'"

"'Why—er—I guess so,' I says. "I don't know why I can't, if you feel like going. Course—"

I hadn't finished what I was going to say afore they were in the boat. Now, generally speaking, there's some bargaining to be done afore you take folks out for a three-dollar sail. You naturally expect it, you know—not so much from boarders as from towners, but still, some. But not for these two—no, sir! It was this powerful suddenness of theirs that hit me betwixt wind and water, same as it had Nate. Made me feel sort of like I'd missed the train. Stirred up my suspicions again, too.

'Twas a nice day; one of them clear blue and green days that you get early in June. The water wa'n't ruffled, but just choppy enough to be pretty, and the breeze was about no'theast, givin' us a fair run down the bay.

"'This is grand!' says the big fellow, as the Dora Bassett began to feel her oats and lay down to her work.

"'Caesar! Van,' said the other one; "why do you bring me down to earth like that? Grand! Bleecker next!" He hollered out this last part in a kind of screechy sing-song. Then they both laughed.

I looked at 'em. There wa'n't nothing to laugh at, so far as I could see, and the "Bleecker" business didn't appear to have no sense in it, either. They made two or three other speeches that sounded just as foolish. Thinks I: "I wonder if Scudder's right?" They didn't look like lunatics, but you can't always tell. Old man Ebenezer Doane went to church of a Sunday morning just as sensible acting as a Second Adventer could be; but when he got home he fired the bean-pot at his wife, chased his children out door with a clam hoe, and they found him settin' a-straddle of the henhouse singing "Beulah Land" to the chickens. These fellers might be harmless loons that had been farmed out, as you might say, by the asylum folks. There was that "man" that Nate said was coming. He might be their keeper.

"I understand you've got a friend coming," says I, by way of ground bait.

"'Friend?' says the big one.

"'Friend? I don't understand.'

"'Scudder said you had another man coming to his house,' says I.

He smiled. "Oh, I see." Then he smiled again, a queer lazy kind of a smile, like as if he was amused at himself or his thoughts.

"I don't know that I should call him a friend, Mr.—"

"'Pratt,' says I. "Solomon Pratt."

"'Thanks. No, I wouldn't go so far as to call him a friend; and yet he's not an enemy—not openly.' He smiled again, and the other chap—whose name I found out was Hartley—Martin Hartley—smiled too.

"'He's the man Van here belongs to,' explained the Hartley one. They both smiled again.

I kind of jumped, I guess, when he said that. It began to look as if the asylum idea was the right one, and this feller that was coming was the keeper.

"'Hum,' says I, and nodded my head just as if the whole business was as plain as A B C. "Do you belong to anybody?" I says to Hartley.

"'I did,' says he, "but he's doing time."

"'Doing time?' says I.

"'Yes,' says he, explaining, kind of impatient like. "Up the river, you know."

I chewed over this for a minute, and all I could think of was that the feller must be in a clock factory or a watch-maker's or something.

"'Watches?' I asks.

Hartley seemed to be too tired of life to want to answer, but his chum did it for him.

"'No,' says he. "I believe it was pearl studs on the showdown."

Well, this was crazy talk enough for anybody. I didn't want to stir 'em up none—I've always heard that you had to be gentle with lunatics—so I went on, encouraging 'em like.

"'Studs, hey?' says I.

"'Yes,' says he. "He was a British beast, and Martin was all balled up in the street at the time—away from his apartments a good deal—and the B. B. annexed everything in sight."

"'Go long!' says I, for the sake of saying something.

"'Beg pardon,' says he.

"'Nothing,' says I; and we stopped talking.

They seemed to enjoy the sail first rate, and acted as rational as could be, generally speaking. They didn't know a topping lift from a center-board, so far as boat went, but that wa'n't strange; I'd seen plenty of boarders like that. But never afore had I seen two that acted or talked like them.

We got back to the wharf along about dusk, and I walked with 'em a piece on their way to Nate's. I was keeping a sort of old back hall just outside the village and so it wa'n't much out of my way. They had me guessing and I wanted more time to work on the riddle.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

David Grieves for Absalom
Sunday School Lesson for Nov. 8, 1908
Specially Arranged for This Paper

LESSON TEXT.—2 Samuel 18:24-33.
Memory verse, 32.
GOLDEN TEXT.—"A foolish son is a grief to his father."—Prov. 17:25.
TIME.—Three months after our last lesson.

PLACE.—Jerusalem and Mahanaim, a fortified town east of the Jordan, near the Jabbok, memorable for Jacob's wrestling in prayer. Sea of Galilee, the battlefield was in the Wood of Ephraim in Gilead, east of the Jordan, within one day of Mahanaim.

Comment and Suggestive Thought.

The day that David left saw Absalom taking possession of the throne. Rejecting the shrewd advice of Ahithophel, he waited till he could gather a great army with which to attack and overcome his father.

This was fatal. David and his two generals, the greatest in all Israel, planned and organized their forces for defense only, so far as David was concerned.

Absalom reigned three months, and during that time not one good thing is recorded concerning him.

He was as great a failure as a king as he was as a man; and for the same reason—he was selfish. He wanted to be king for his own pleasure. He had no kingly aims or ideals.

Apparently self-conceit was the reason why he followed Hushai's advice, for that wily enemy of his put before him a picture of himself at the head of an immense army, like a world-conqueror, and all the nations, as it were, singing "Hail to the Chief."

Among many other significant devices, some beyond the seas have a picture of a man, with a full-blown bladder on his shoulders, another standing by and pricking the bladder with a pin; the motto: "How suddenly!" hinting thereby the sudden downfall of all worldly greatness.—Spencer.

A man selfish in his inmost soul can never attain true success. Selfishness ruins health, ruins conscience, ruins judgment.

"Amidst the scattered fight Absalom was separated from his men, and as he fled from a party of the enemy, the mule on which he rode carried him beneath the low branches of a spreading terebinth and left him hanging by the head, probably in a forked bough. Perhaps, also, his long, thick hair got entangled, but there is nothing to support the common idea that he was suspended merely by the hair." Josephus says distinctly that Absalom's hair was entangled. "The first soldier who came up spared his life because of the king's command, and went to tell Joab. The unscrupulous chief hurried to the spot and thrust three javelins into Absalom's heart. There was probably a true regard for the king and kingdom in this act of Joab. He knew that Absalom could not with safety be suffered to live, and that it would be difficult to rid the state of so foul a member at any other time than now, when a just right to slay him had been earned in open battle."—Kitto.

Absalom's body was cast into a great pit, and a great heap of stones was cast upon him, either in detestation of his memory or as a monument to distinguish the place.

V. 33. "Went up to the chamber." To be alone in his sorrow. The deepest sorrow "treads the wine-press alone." "And wept." "Tears are the safety-valves of the heart." "O my son Absalom!" "There is not in the whole of the Old Testament a passage of deeper pathos than this. The simple beauty of the narrative is exquisite; we are irresistibly reminded of him who, while he beheld the rebellious city of Jerusalem and thought of the destruction it was bringing upon itself, wept over it (Luke 19:41).—"Cook. "Would God I had died for thee." "So Moses (Ex. 32:32), and so St. Paul (Rom. 9:3), would have sacrificed themselves, had it been possible, to save others. His wish to die in Absalom's stead was no mere extravagance of grief."

Absalom and His Sin.—He was young; he sinned with his whole nature; he kept on sinning to the end, with no hint of repentance, with no alleviation of character. He did not repent even as much as Esau, who regretted the consequences of his action with strong crying and tears.

David's sin was an incident—a very terrible incident—in a very great and useful life. It was a dangerous eddy, like the whirlpool below the Niagara falls; but it was brief, it was not the main current of his life. He repented, and all his after life showed sinners the way of repentance and restoration. It has been a sermon for almost 3,000 years on the tender mercies and forgiving love of our Father in heaven.

Absalom from out the far-off past is still pointing our modern youth to certain great lessons his career teaches us:

- (1) "The way of transgressors is hard."
- (2) The success of the wicked is short, and then he is like chaff which the wind bloweth away. "Not considering that the successes of the foolish and wicked form the first rod of their chastisement."
- (3) Sin is sometimes attractive at first, but at last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder.
- (4) The way to true success is not through disobedience to parents.
- (5) No failure is so terrible as the failure of a life; no ruin like the ruin of a soul.
- (6) The death of the wicked is lighted by no ray of hope.
- (7) They that sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind.

I AM A MOTHER

How many American women in lonely homes to-day long for this blessing to come into their lives, and to be able to utter these words, but because of some organic derangement this happiness is denied them. Every woman interested in this subject should know that preparation for healthy maternity is accomplished by the use of **LYDIA E. PINKHAM'S VEGETABLE COMPOUND**. Mrs. Maggie Gilmer, of West Union, S. C., writes to Mrs. Pinkham: "I was greatly run-down in health from a weakness peculiar to my sex, when Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound was recommended to me. It not only restored me to perfect health, but to my delight I am a mother."

Mrs. Josephine Hall, of Bardstow, Ky., writes: "I was a very great sufferer from female troubles, and my physician failed to help me. Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound not only restored me to perfect health, but I am now a proud mother."

FACTS FOR SICK WOMEN. For thirty years Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, made from roots and herbs, has been the standard remedy for female ills, and has positively cured thousands of women who have been troubled with displacements, inflammation, ulceration, fibroid tumors, irregularities, periodic pains, backache, that bearing-down feeling, flatulency, indigestion, dizziness or nervous prostration. Why don't you try it?

Mrs. Pinkham invites all sick women to write her for advice. She has guided thousands to health. Address, Lynn, Mass.

LOCATED.

"Goodness, sonny, are you in pain?"
"Naw, the pain's in me—boo-hoo!"

No man can seek honestly or helpfully to be delivered from temptation unless he has himself honestly and firmly determined to do the best he can to keep out of it.—Ruskin.

Lewis' Single Binder—the famous straight 5c cigar, always best quality. Your dealer or Lewis' Factory, Peoria, Ill.

The wind frequently turns an umbrella, but a borrower seldom returns it.

DODD'S KIDNEY PILLS
FOR ALL KIDNEY DISEASE
OR RHEUMATISM
BRIGHT'S DISEASE
DIABETES BACKACHE
75 "Guaranteed"

W. L. DOUGLAS
\$300 SHOES \$350

W. L. Douglas makes and sells more men's \$3.00 and \$3.50 shoes than any other manufacturer in the world, because they hold their shape, fit better, and wear longer than any other make.

Shoes at All Prices, for Every Member of the Family, Men, Boys, Women, Misses & Children.

W. L. Douglas \$4.00 and \$5.00 Gaiter Shoes are made at our prices. W. L. Douglas \$5.00 and \$6.00 shoes are the best in the world.

First Color Eyelets Used Exclusively.

Buy "Take No Substitutes." W. L. Douglas name and price is stamped on bottom. Sold everywhere. Shoes mailed from factory to any part of the world. Catalogue free.

W. L. DOUGLAS, 137 State St., Brockton, Mass.

W. L. DOUGLAS
CURE FOR ALL EYE FAILS
Best Cough Syrup, Tastes Good.
Use in Time. Sold by Druggists.

CURE

Asparagus an Old Vegetable.
One of the oldest known food plants is asparagus.