

Average Jones

by SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS

PIN-PRICKS

"The thing is a fake," declared Bertram. He slumped heavily into a chair, and scowled at Average Jones' well-lit desk, whereon he had just tossed a sheet of paper.

"A fake," he reiterated. "I've spent a night of pseudo-intellectual riot and ruin over it."

"You would have it," returned Average Jones with a smile. "And I seem to recall a lofty intimation on your part that there never was a cipher so tough but you could rope and tie in record time."

"Cipher, yes," returned the other bitterly. "That thing isn't a cipher. It's an alphabetical riot. Maybe," he added hopefully, "there was some mistake in my copy."

"Look for yourself," said Average Jones, handing him the original.

It was a singular document, this problem in letters which had come to light up the gloom of a November day for Average Jones; a stiffish sheet of paper, ornamented on one side with color prints of alluring "spinnings," and on the other inscribed with an appeal, in print. Its original vehicle was an envelope, bearing a one-cent stamp, and addressed in typewriting:

Mr. William H. Robinson,
The Caronia,
Broadway and Eveside Ave.,
New York City.

The advertisement on the reverse of the sheet ran as follows:

ANGLERS—WHEN YOU ARE LOOKING for "Baits That Catch Fish," do you see these spinners in the store where you buy tackle? You will find here twelve baits, every one of which has a record and has literally caught tons of fish. We call them "The 12 Surety Baits." We want you to try them for casting and trolling these next two months, because all varieties of bass are particularly savage in striking these baits late in the season.

DEALERS—YOU WANT YOUR CUSTOMERS to have these 12 "Surety Baits" that catch fish? This case will sell itself empty and over again, for every bait is a record-breaker and they catch fish. We want you to put in one of these cases so that the anglers will not be disappointed and have to wait for baits to be ordered. It will be furnished FREE, charges postpaid, with your order for the dozen baits it contains.

The peculiar feature of the communication was that it was profusely bespangled with tiny perforations, evidently made by thrusting a pin through, from the side which bore the illustrations. These perforations were liberally scattered.

"Yes, the copy's all right," growled Bertram. "Tell me again how you came by it."

"Robinson came here twice and missed me. Yesterday I got the note from him which you've seen, with the inclosure which has so threatened your reason. You know the rest. Perhaps you'd have done well to study the note for clues to the other documents."

Something in his friend's tone made Bertram glance up suspiciously. "Let me see the note," he demanded.

Average Jones handed it to him. Bertram read the message. "Of course the man is rattled. That's obvious in his handwriting. Also, he has inverted one sentence in his haste and said 'read through it,' instead of 'read it through.' Otherwise, it's ordinary enough."

"It must be vanity that keeps you from eye-glasses, Bert," Average Jones observed with a sigh. "Well, I'm afraid I set you on the wrong track, myself!"

Bertram lifted an eyebrow with an effort. "Meaning, I suppose, that you're on the right one and have solved the cipher?"

"Cipher be jiggered. There isn't any cipher. If you'd had the advantage of working on the original of the bait advertisement as I have, you'd undoubtedly have noticed at once—"

"Thank you," murmured Bertram.

"—that fully one-third of the pin-pricks don't touch any letters at all."

"Then we should have taken the letters which lie between the holes?"

"No. The letters don't count. It's the punctures. Force your eyes to consider those alone, and you will see that the holes themselves form letters and words. Read through it carefully, as Robinson directed."

He held the paper up to the light. Bertram made out in straggling characters, formed in skeleton by the perforations, this legend:

ALL POINTS TO YOU TAKE THE SHORT CUT. DEATH IS EASIER THAN SOME THINGS.

"Whew! That's a cheery little greeting," remarked Bertram. "But why didn't friend Robinson point it out definitely in his letter?"

"Wanted to test my capacity perhaps. Or, it may have been simply that he was too frightened and rattled to know just what he was writing."

"Know anything of him?"

"Only what the directory tells, and directories don't deal in really intimate details of biography, you know. There's quite an assortment of William H. Robinsons, but the one who lives at the Caronia appears to be a commission merchant on Pearl street. As the Caronia is one of the most elegant and quite the most enormous of those small cities within themselves which we call apartment houses, I take it that Mr. Robinson is well-to-do, and probably married. You can ask him, yourself, if you like. He's due any moment, now."

man, Mr. William H. Robinson arrived on the stroke of twelve. He was a well-made, well-dressed citizen of forty-five, who would have been wholly ordinary save for one peculiarity. In a room more than temperately cool he was sweating profusely, and that, despite the fact that his light overcoat was on his arm. He darted a glance at Bertram, then turned to Average Jones.

"I had hoped for a private interview," he said in a high piping voice. "Mr. Bertram is my friend and business confidant."

"Very good. You—you have read it?"

"Yes."

"Then—then—then—" The visitor fumbled, with nerveless fingers, at his tightly buttoned cutaway coat and, after a moment's effort, drew a paper from his inner pocket which he placed on the desk. It was a certified check for one hundred dollars, made payable to A. Jones.

"There's the rest of a thousand ready, if you can help me," he said.

"We'll talk of that later," said the prospective beneficiary. "Sit tight until you're able to answer questions."

"Able now," piped the other in his shrill voice. "I'm ashamed of myself, gentlemen, but the strain I've been under— When you've heard my story—"

"Just a moment, please," interrupted Average Jones. "let me get at this by my own way. What are the 'some things' that are worse than death?"

Mr. Robinson shook his head. "I haven't the slightest notion in the world."

"Nor of the 'short cut' which you are advised to take?"

"I suppose it means suicide." He paused for a moment. "They can't drive me to that—unless they drive me crazy first." He wiped the sweat from under his eyes, breathing hard.

"What are they?"

Mr. Robinson shook his head. "Mr. Jones, I give you my word of honor, as I hope to be saved from this persecution, I don't know any more than yourself what it means."

"Then—er—I am—er—to believe," replied Jones, drawing, as he always did when interest, in his mind, was verging on excitement, "that a simple blind threat like this—er—without any backing from your own conscience—er—could shake you—er—as this has done? Why, Mr. Robinson, the thing—er—may be—er—only a raw practical joke."

"But the others!" cried the visitor. His face changed and fell. "I believe I am going crazy," he groaned. "I didn't tell you about the others."

Diving into his overcoat pocket he drew out a packet of letters which he placed on the desk with a sort of dismal flourish.

"Read those!" he cried.

"Presently," Average Jones ran rapidly over the eight envelopes. With one exception, each bore the imprint of some firm name made familiar by extensive advertising. All the envelopes were of softish manila paper varying in grade and hue, under one-cent stamps.

"Which is the first of the series?" he asked.

"It isn't among those. Unfortunately it was lost, by a stupid servant's mistake, pin and all."

"Pin?"

"Yes. Where I cut open the envelope—"

"Wait a moment. You say you cut it open. All these, being one-cent postage, must have come unsealed. Was the first different?"

"Yes. It had a two-cent stamp. It was a circular announcement of the Swift-Reading Encyclopedia, in a sealed envelope. There was a pin bent over the fold of the letter so you couldn't help but notice it. Its head was stuck through the blank part of the circular. Leading from it were three very small pins arranged as a pointer to the message."

"Do you remember the message?"

"Could I forget it! It was pricked out quite small on the blank fold of the paper. It said: 'Make the most of your freedom. Your time is short. Call at General Delivery, Main P. O., for your warning.'

"You went there?"

"The next day."

"And found—"

"An ordinary sealed envelope, addressed in pen-pricks connected by pencil lines. The address was scrawly, but quite plain."

"Well, what did it contain?"

"A commitment blank to an insane asylum."

Average Jones absently drew out his handkerchief, elaborately whisked from his coat sleeve an imaginary speck of dust, and smiled benignly where the dust was supposed to have been.

"Insane asylum," he murmured. "Was—er—the blank—er—filled in?"

"Only partly. My name was pricked in, and there was a specification of dementia from drug habit, with suicidal tendencies."

With a quick signal, unseen by the visitor, Average Jones opened the way to Bertram, who, in a wide range of experience and study had once specialized upon abnormal mental phenomena.

"Pardon me," that gentleman put in gently, "has there ever been any dementia in your family?"

"Not as far as I know."

"Or suicidal mania?"

"All my people have died respectably in their beds," declared the visitor with some vehemence.

"Once more, if I may venture. Have you ever been addicted to any drug?"

"Never, sir."

"Now," Average Jones took up the examination, "will you tell me of any enemy who would have reason to persecute you?"

"I haven't an enemy in the world."

"You're fortunate," returned the other smiling, "but surely, some time in your career—business rivalry—family alienation—any one of a thousand causes?"

"No," answered the harassed man. "Not for me. My business runs smoothly. My relations are mostly dead. I have no friends and no enemies. My wife and I live alone, and all we ask," he added in a sudden outburst of almost childish resentment, "is to be left alone."

the packet of letters. "You haven't complained to the post-office authorities?"

"And risk the publicity?" returned Robinson with a shudder.

"Well, give me over night with 'ese. Oh! and I may want to 'phone you presently. You'll be at home? Thank you. Good day."

"Now," said Average Jones to Bertram, as their caller's plump back disappeared, "this looks pretty queer to me. What did you think of our friend?"

"Scared but straight," was Bertram's verdict.

Average Jones pushed the collection of advertisements aside and returned to the opening phase of the problem, the fish-bait circular which Robinson had mailed him. So long after, that Bertram hardly recognized it as a response to his last remark, the investigator drew out:

"Not such—er—impenetrable darkness. In fact—er—Eureka, or words to that effect. Bert, when does the bass season end?"

"November 1, hereabouts, I believe."

"The postmark on the envelope that carried this advertisement to our friend advises the use of the baits for 'less than two months.' Queer time to be using bass-lures, after the season is closed. Debt, it's a pity I can't waggle my ears."

"Waggle your ears! For heaven's sake, why?"

"Because then I'd be such a perfect jacksack that I could win medals at a show. I ought to have guessed it at first glance, from the fact that the advertisement wouldn't well have been mailed to Robinson originally, anyhow."

"Why not?"

"Because he's not in the sporting goods business, and the advertisement is obviously addressed to the retail dealer. Don't you remember; it offers a showcase, free. What does a man living in an apartment want of a show-

smiling indulgently at the end of his own nose.

"Dare say you're right—er—in part, Bert. But I've also a hunch that our man Robinson is himself the deceiver as well as the object."

"I wish you wouldn't be cryptic, Average," said his friend pathetically. "There's been enough of that without your gratuitously adding to the sum of human bewilderment."

Average Jones scribbled a few words on a pad, considered, amended, and handed the result over to Bertram, who read:

"WANTED—Professional envelope eraser to remove marks from used envelopes. Experience essential. Apply at once—A. Jones, Ad-Visor, Astor Court Temple."

"Would it enlighten your gloom to see that in every New York and Brooklyn paper tomorrow?" inquired its inventor.

"Not a glimmer."

"We'll give this ad a week's repetition if necessary, before trying more roundabout measures. As soon as I have heard from it I'll drop in at the club and we'll write—that is to say, compose a letter."

"To whom?"

"Oh, that I don't know yet. When I do, you'll see me."

Three days later Average Jones entered the Cosmic club, with that twinkling upturn of the mouth corners which, with him, indicated satisfactory accomplishment.

"Really, Bert," he remarked, seeking out his languid friend, in the laziest corner of the large divan. "You'd be surprised to know how few experienced envelope erasers there are in four millions of population. Only seven people answered that advertisement, and they were mostly tyros."

"Then you didn't get your man?"

"It was a woman. The fifth applicant. Got a pin about you?"

the pin-prick letters which, had they reached their goal, would probably have produced the desired effect."

"If they drove a sane man nearly crazy, what wouldn't they have done to one whose mind wasn't quite right?" cried the wronged Robinson.

"But since Mr. Honeywell is blind," said Bertram, "how could he see to erase the cancellations?"

"Ah! That's what I asked myself. Obviously, he couldn't. He'd have to get that done for him. Presumably he'd get some stranger to do it. That's why I advertised for a professional eraser who was experienced, judging that it would fetch the person who had done Honeywell's work."

"Is there any such thing as a professional envelope eraser?" asked Bertram.

"No. So a person of experience in this line would be almost unique. I was sure to find the right one, if he or she saw my advertisement. As a matter of fact, it turned out to be an unimaginative young woman who has told me all about her former employment with Mr. Honeywell, apparently with no thought that there was anything strange in erasing cancellations from hundreds of envelopes—for Honeywell was cautious enough not to confine her to the Robinson mail alone—and then pasting on stamps to remail them."

"You appear to have followed out my moves with some degree of acumen, Mr.—er—Jones," said the blind schemer suavely.

"I might not have solved your processes so easily if you had not made one rather—if you will pardon me—stupid mistake."

"For the first time, the man's bleated lips shook. His evil pride of intellectual superiority was stung.

"You lie!" he said hastily. "I do not make mistakes."

"No? Well, have it as you will. The point is that you are to sign here a statement, which I shall read to you before these witnesses, announcing for publication the withdrawal of your contest for the Honeywell millions."

"And if I decline?"

"The painful necessity will be mine of turning over these instructive documents to the United States postal authorities. But not before giving them to the newspapers. How would you look in court, in view of this attempt to murder a fellowman's reason?"

Mr. Honeywell had now gained his composure. "You are right," he assented. "You seem to have a singular faculty for being right. Be careful it does not fail you—sometimes."

"Thank you," returned Average Jones. "Now you will listen, please, all of you."

He read the brief document, placed it before the blind man, and set a pin between his finger and thumb. "Sign there," he said.

Honeywell smiled as he pricked in his name.

"For identification, I suppose," he said. "Am I to assign no cause to the newspapers for my sudden action?"

A twinkle of malice appeared in Average Jones' eye.

"I would suggest waning mental acumen," he said.

The blind man winced palpably as he rose to his feet. "That is the second time you have taunted me on that. Kindly tell me my mistake."

Average Jones led him to the door and opened it.

"Your mistake," he drawled as he sped his parting guest into the grasp of a waiting attendant, "was—er—in not remembering that—er—you mustn't fish for bass in November."

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case to keep artificial bait in? What we—er—need here is—er—steam."

A moment's manipulation of the radiator produced a small jet. In this Average Jones held the envelope. The stamp curled up and dropped off. Beneath it were the remains of a small portion of a former postmark.

"I thought so," murmured Average Jones.

"Remailed," exclaimed Bertram. "Remailed," corroborated his friend. "I expect we'll find the others the same."

One by one he submitted the envelopes to the steam bath. Each of them, as the stamp was peeled off, exhibited more or less fragmentary signs of a previous cancellation.

"Careless work!" criticized Average Jones. "Every bit of the mark should have been removed, instead of trusting to the second stamp to cover what little was left, by shifting it a bit toward the center of the envelope. Look; you can see on this one where the original stamp was peeled off. On this the traces of erasure are plain enough. That's why manila paper was selected; it's easier to erase from."

"Is Robinson faking?" asked Bertram. "Oh has someone been rifling his waste basket?"

"That would mean an accomplice in the house, which would be dangerous. I think it was done at longer range."

Drawing the telephone to him, he called the Caronia apartments.

"Hello! Mr. Robinson? This is Mr. A. Jones. You hear me?"

"Yes, Mr. Jones. What is it?"

"Is there, in all your acquaintance, any person who never goes out without an attendant? Take time to think, now."

"Why—why—why," stuttered Robinson, and fell into silence. From the depths of the silence he presently exclaimed the following: "I did have a paralytic cousin who always went out in a wheeled chair. But she's dead."

"And there's no one else?"

"No. I'm quite sure."

"That's all. Good-by."

"What was that about an attendant?" inquired Bertram, as his friend replaced the receiver.

"Oh, I've just a hunch that the sender of those messages doesn't go out unaccompanied."

"Insane? Or semi-insane? It does rather look like delusional paranoia. As nearly as imperfect humanity

Parts of New Zealand Particularly Rich in Deposits Which Have More Material Value Than Coal or Gold.

It appears that the recovery and use of buried timber is no new thing. For hundreds of years the wood of buried and submerged trees has been recovered and worked among the Swiss Alps, and many an English farmer of the western counties can point with pride to an old cabinet or carved four-poster of black bog oak. But, according to Prof. D. W. Fagan, who has given much study to the subject, it is doubtful if anywhere else in the world there is so vast an area of buried timber of immense size as in the Papakura valley, near Auckland, New Zealand.

Beneath the surface of peat, where the soil has shrunk in drying or has been blown away, the trunks of innumerable kauri trees lie exposed to view. For centuries they have been covered by the semiliquid peat until the solid heartwood of the mighty trunks remains, and these lie in orderly swaths almost as regular as wheat stalks in a newly reaped field. The thousand heads all point in one direction, as if the forest had fallen under the sickle of some giant reaper.

Like the branches and crowns, the soft sapwood that once surrounded the solid heartwood of the living trees has long since disappeared; so in estimating the original size there must be made a considerable addition to the present measurements. Many of the logs today show a girth of over sixty feet and a length of eighty or ninety feet of straight timber free from knot or branch.

Everywhere about the swamp there are excavations where workmen are uncovering the timber. They scoop pits in the peat on each side of the trunk for the sawyers to work in. The men wield huge cross saws and cut the tree into shorter lengths for the mill. Then the grips of a "forest devil" are attached to one of the sections. There is a rattle and clank of machinery, a groan and strain of pulleys, a roar of steam and the great log is torn from its bed of centuries, swung on a trolley and hauled away on its last journey to



"Am I Right, Mr. Honeywell?"

Need of the Hour.

It is because the organization of national life is so eminently important, because its absence is one of the main sources of our peril, that we should be interested primarily in the development of a national consciousness and a discipline, which are good for peace, and which can be forwarded now by the peril of war if statesmen of vision can be found to give the movement leadership. Any reaction of opinion which tends to retard or frustrate that development is a national peril. The lack of just that kind of leadership today is conspicuous. The time is ripe for the development of a discipline adapted to and expressive of the philosophy of democracy for a definite and concrete program. Instead of such statesmanship, we have nothing as yet which is constructive, unless a propaganda for large expenditures on purely military and naval matters deserves the name.—George W. Alger, in the Atlantic.

Two Kinds of Emulsions.

Milk and butter are both emulsions. Prof. F. G. Donnan of University college, London, defines an emulsion as a distribution of one liquid in another. A little oil shaken with much water gives an emulsion in which the particles of oil have a diameter of about a thousandth of a millimeter; such an emulsion is milk. A little water in much oil gives particles of water even smaller; such an emulsion is butter.

Helpful Information.

"I want a pair of pants for my sick husband," exclaimed the woman.

"What size?" asked the clerk.

"I don't know, but I think he wears a 14 1/2 collar."

Early Japanese Metalwork.

The earliest examples of Japanese metalwork are two-edged bronze weapons

WORKED TO SUCCESS

REMARKABLE ACHIEVEMENTS OF "SELF-MADE" MEN.

Some of Those Who Have Pursued the Way to Riches and High Position Without Envy or Ill-Treating Others.

Newspapers of every great city constantly are telling the stories of self-made men. We find presidents of railroads who began as switchmen, presidents of banks who began as messenger boys, publishers of prosperous newspapers who began as printers, heads of great enterprises in every direction whose beginnings were in the humble walks of poverty. Yet ranting demagogues on soap boxes at street corners are preaching the gospel of envy, dissatisfaction, unreason, unrest, "Jasper" writes in Leslie's.

The head of one of the successful banking institutions in New York city gave a dinner to a few of his associates the other evening. He is a man of large wealth and of commanding influence in his line of enterprise. Courteous and cultivated, he bore the air of one who had begun life under advantageous circumstances. Yet, during the course of the evening, it was revealed that this man of great wealth had been a poor immigrant boy, who got his start in life by selling trifles from a peddler's pack under the burden of which he trudged through country towns, seeking his customers along the highways and byways. His industry and ambition made him so successful as a pack peddler that in due time he was able to hire a young man to go with him and carry a pack. Next he began to make his circuit with a horse and wagon, then with a team of two horses, and finally with an outfit of two wagons, and thus, having accumulated the necessary capital, he was able to open a store, and from that to get into the manufacturing line. Step by step, he laid the foundation of his fortune, not envying the success of others, not seeking to pull anyone down, not interfering with any competitor's progress, but persistently and patiently following out his own plans and carrying them to the fruition of success. What an inspiration there is in this example to the young men with no other capital but character, good health, industry and ambition. It is still a world of opportunity.

An orphan boy in 1890 was brought to the secretary of state's office in Albany, N. Y., by the head of that department as his messenger. With a change wrought by politics, the office boy lost his job, but he did not lose his grit. On the morning of his dismissal he said to one of his associates: "I got my blue envelope today." The friend inquired: "What are you going to do?" He received the quick response: "I am going to work." In a few hours the lad had found a place as messenger in the five-and-ten-cent store in Albany. He did the other day, leaving a large fortune, and at his death was vice-president and treasurer of the corporation which he began to serve in the humblest capacity.

Sixty years ago John D. Rockefeller went to work in Cleveland as an assistant bookkeeper, and for the first three months received only \$50 as his wages. The same story might be told of nearly all the eminently successful business men of this country. It is the story of achievement, of pluck, of independence, courage and self-reliance. Let any one of my readers look about in his own community and he will find illustrations in a large or small way, and perhaps he will find one in his own career.

While so many envy the rich, too few bear in mind that there is no royal road to wealth, that an ounce of pluck is worth a ton of luck, and that no other country in the world offers greater opportunities than our own for a boy to rise from poverty to wealth.

Let everyone attend to his own knitting; let everyone believe in himself and be the architect of his own fortune.

Miners Celebrate Lamp Invention.

Miners of the north of England this year celebrate the centenary of the introduction of the Davy safety lamp. It was on January 10, 1816, that the "miners' guardian angel" was first introduced into any pit.

Sir Humphrey Davy's invention was really the outcome of the terrible calamity at Felling colliery, County Durham, on May 25, 1812, when 92 miners were killed and many injured. Davy began his experiments in the autumn of 1815, with fine wire gauze as an "explosive sieve," and on January 10, 1816, the first lamp was tried by a hardy band of pioneers in the workings of Hebburn-on-Tyne colliery.

The actual lamp is now a treasure in the Geological museum in Jermyn street, London.

Served Morphine With Potatoes.

The unusual popularity of a San Francisco restaurant was accounted for when Detective Nelson Matheson discovered that the proprietor served morphine with mashed potatoes. Men and women were seen sinking in, hands trembling, lips quivering, their eyes dull. When patrons emerged their step was buoyant, their lips wreathed in smiles and their eyes a-sparkle.

Matheson paid for a meal and plunged a fork into the center of the dish of mashed potatoes and penetrated the secret. The proprietor was arrested charged with violating the state poison law.

Daily Thought.

A man of sense takes the time necessary for doing well the thing he is about; and his haste to dispatch a business only appears by the continuity of his application to it. He pursues it by cool steadiness and finishes it before he begins any other.—Chesbertfield.

Thinking Not Necessary.

The average wife doesn't have to think very hard when she is telling her

TREASURE IN EARTH

Buried Timber a Source of Immense Revenue.

The cut timber is perfectly sound and of excellent quality. It differs from the kauri timber that is cut from the living tree only in its color, which is a dark reddish brown, like mahogany.

The peat is full of fossil gum shed through countless centuries by the trees that are now being dug out. The value of resin makes another industry profitable—the recovery of fossil gum. In some parts of the swamp area as many as five successive layers of gum have been found.

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