JENNIE BAXTER: JOURNALIST.

BY ROBERT BARR.

I.—THE DAILY BUGLE MISSES A HIT.

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Miss Jennie Baxter, with several final and dainty touches that set to rights her hat and dress—a little pull here and a pat there—regarded herself with some complacency in the large mirror that was set before her, as indeed she had every right to do, for she was an exceedingly pretty girl.

On this occasion Miss Jennie had paid more than usual attention to her toilet, for she was about to set out to capture a man, and the man was no other than Radnor Hardwick, the capable editor of The Daily Bugle, which was considered at that moment to be the most enterprising morning journal in the great metropolis. Miss Baxter had done work for some of the evening papers, several of the weeklies and a number of the monthlies, and the income she made was reasonably good, but hazardously fitful. There was an uncertainty about her mode of life which was displeasing to her, and she resolved, if possible, to capture an editor on one of the morning papers, and get a salary that was fixed and certain.

She stepped lightly into the hansom that was waiting for her and said to the cabman, "Office of The Daily Bugle, please; side entrance."

The careful toilet made its first impression upon the surly looking Irish porter who, like a gruff and faithful watchdog, guarded the entrance to the editorial rooms of The Bugle. When he caught a glimpse of Miss Baxter, he slid off the stool and came out of the door to her, which was an extraordinary concession to a visitor, for Pat Ryan contented himself, as a usual thing, by saying curtly that the editor was busy and could see no one.

"What did ye wish, miss? To see the editor? That's Mr. Hardwick. Have ye an appointment with him? Ye haven't. Then I very much doubt if ye'll see him this day, mum. It's far better to write to him; thin ye can state what ye want, an if he makes an appointment there'll be no throuble at all, at all."

"But surely," said Miss Jennie, in her most coaxing tone, "there must be some way to see even such a great man as the editor, and if there is you know the way."

"Indade, miss, an I'm not so sure there is a way unless you met him in the strate, which is unlikely. There's 12 men now waitin for him in the big room. Beyont that room there's another one, an beyont that again is Mr. Hardwick's office. Now, it's as much as my place is worth, mum, to put ye in that room beyont the one where the men are waitin; but, to tell ye the truth, miss," said the Irishman, lowering his voice, as if he were divulging office secrets, "Mr. Hardwick, who is a difficult man to deal with, sometimes comes through the shmall room an out into the passage whin he doesn't want to see any one at all, at all, an goes out into the strate, leavin everybody waitin for him. Now, I'll put ye into this room, an if the editor tries to slip out, thin ye can speak with him, but if he asks ye how ye got there, for the sake of hiven don't tell him that I sint ye, because that's not my duty at all, at all."

"Indeed I won't tell him how I got there, or, rather, I'll tell him I came there by myself; so all you need to do is to show me the door, and there won't need to be any lies told."

They went up the stairs together, at the head of which the porter stood while Miss Baxter went down the long passage and stopped at the right door. Ryan nodded and disappeared.

Miss Baxter opened the door softly, entered and sat down near the door by which she had entered from the passage, ready to intercept the flying editor should he attempt to escape.

In the editor's room some one was walking up and down with heavy footfall and growling in a deep voice that was plainly audible where Miss Jennie sat.

"You see, Alder, it's like this," said the voice. "Any paper may have a sensation every day if it wishes. But what I want is accuracy; otherwise our sheet has no real influence. When an article appears in The Bugle, I want our readers to understand that that article is true from beginning to end. I want not only sensation, but definiteness, and not only definiteness, but absolute truth."

"Well, Mr. Hardwick," interrupted another voice, "what Hazel is afraid of is that when this blows over he will lose his situation"—

"But," interrupted the editor, "no one can tell that he gave the information. No one knows anything about this but you and I, and we will certainly keep our mouths shut."

"What Hazel fears is that the moment we print the account the board of public construction will know he gave away the figures because of their accuracy. He says that if we permit him to make one or two blunders, which will not matter in the least in so far as the general account goes, it will turn suspicion from him. It will be supposed that some one had access to the books and in the hurry of transcribing figures had made the blunders, which they know he would not do, for he has a reputation for accuracy in figures."

"Quite so," said the editor, "and it is just that reputation for accuracy that I want to gain for The Daily Bugle. Don't you think the truth of it is that the man wants more money?"

"Who? Hazel?"

"Certainly. Does he imagine that he could get more than £50 elsewhere?"

"Oh, no! I'm sure the money doesn't come into the matter at all."

"Where do you meet this man? At his own house or in his office at the board?"

"Oh, in his own house, of course!"

"You haven't seen the books, then?"

"No, but he has the accounts all made out, tabulated beautifully, and has written a very clear statement of the whole transaction. You understand, of course, that there has been no embezzlement. The accounts as a whole balance perfectly, and there isn't a penny of the public funds wrongly appropriated. All the board has done is to juggle with figures so that each department seems to have come out all right, whereas the truth is that some departments have been carried on at a great profit, while with others there has been a loss."

"I am sorry money hasn't been stolen," said the editor generously; "then we would have them on the hip. But, even as it is, The Bugle will make a great sensation. What I fear is that the opposition press will seize on those very inaccuracies, and thus try to throw doubt on the whole affair. Don't you think you can persuade this person to let us have the information intact without the inclusion of those blunders he seems to insist on? I wouldn't mind paying him a little more money, if that is what he is after."

"I don't think that is his object. The truth is, the man is frightened and grows more and more so as the day for publication approaches. He is so anxious about his position that he insisted he was not to be paid by check, but that I should collect the money and hand it over to him in sovereigns."

"Well, I'll tell you what to do, Alder. We mustn't seem too eager. Let the matter rest where it is until Monday. I suppose he expects you to call upon him again today?"

"Yes; I told him I should be there at 7."

"Don't go, and don't write any explanation. Let him transfer a little of his anxiety to fear of losing the £50. I want, if possible, to publish this information with absolute accuracy."

"Is there any danger, Mr. Hardwick, that some of the other papers may get on the track of this?"

"No, I don't think so; not for three days anyway. If we appear too eager, this man Hazel may refuse us altogether."

"Very good, sir."

Miss Baxter heard the editor stop in his walk, and she heard the rustling of paper, as if the subordinate were gathering up some documents on which he had been consulting his chief. She was panic stricken to think that either of the men might come out and find her in the position of an eavesdropper, so with great quietness she opened the door and slipped out into the hall, going from there to the entrance of the ordinary waiting room, in which she found, not the 12 men that the porter had expatiated upon, but five. Evidently the other seven had existed only in the porter's imagination or had become tired of waiting and had withdrawn. The five looked up at her as she entered and sat down on a chair near the door. A moment later the door communicating with the room she had quitted opened, and a clerk came in. He held two or three slips of paper in his hand and quickly dismissed all five of the waiting men. The he turned to her.

"Has your name been sent in, madam?" the young man said to Miss Baxter as she rose.

"I think not," answered the girl. "Would you take my card to Mr. Hardwick and tell him I will detain him but a few moments?"

In a short time the secretary reappeared and held the door open for her.

Mr. Hardwick was a determined looking young man of about 35, with a bullet head and closely cropped black hair. He looked like a stubborn, strong willed man, and Miss Baxter's summing up of him was that he had not the appearance of one who could be coaxed or wheedled into doing anything he did not wish to do. He held her card between his fingers and glanced from it to her, then down to the card again.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Hardwick!" began Miss Baxter. "I don't know that you have seen any of my work, but I have written a good deal for some of the evening papers and for some of the magazines."

"Yes," said Hardwick, who was standing up preparatory to leaving his office and who had not asked the young woman to sit down. "Your name is familiar to me. You wrote some months ago an account of a personal visit to the German emperor. I forget now where it appeared."

"Oh, yes!" said Miss Baxter. "That was written for The Summer Magazine and was illustrated by photographs."

"It struck me," continued Hardwick without looking at her, "that it was an article written by a person who had never seen the German emperor, but who had collected and assimilated material from whatever source presented itself."

The young woman, in nowise abashed, laughed, but still the editor did not look up.

"Yes," she admitted, "that is precisely how it was written. I never have had the pleasure of meeting William II myself."

"What I have always insisted upon in work submitted to me," growled the editor in a deep voice, "is absolute accuracy. I take it that you have called to see me because you wish to do some work for this paper."

"You are quite right in that surmise also," answered Miss Jennie. "Still, if I may say so, there was nothing inaccurate in my article about the German emperor. My compilation was from thoroughly authentic sources. So I maintain it was as truthfully accurate as anything that has ever appeared in The Bugle."

"Perhaps our definitions of truth might not quite coincide. However, if you will write your address on his card I will wire you if I have any work—that is, any outside work—which I think a woman can do. The woman's column of The Bugle, as you are probably aware, is already in good hands."

Miss Jennie seemed annoyed that all her elaborate preparations were thrown away on this man, who never raised his eyes or glanced at her, except once, during their conversation.

"I do not aspire," she said, rather shortly, "to the position of editor of a woman's column. I never read a woman's column myself, and, unlike Mr. Grant Allen, I never met a woman who did."

She succeeded in making the editor lift his eyes toward her for the second time.

"Neither do I intend to leave you my address so that you may send a wire to me if you think you have anything that you think I can do. What I wish is a salaried position on your staff."

"My good woman," said the editor briskly, "that is utterly impossible. I may tell you frankly that I don't believe in woman journalists. The articles we publish by women are sent to this office from their own homes. Anything that a woman can do for a newspaper I have men who will do quite as well, if not better, and there are many things that women can't do at all which men must do. I am perfectly satisfied with my staff as it stands, Miss Baxter."

For the third time he looked up at her, and there was dismissal in his glance.

Miss Baxter said indignantly to herself, "This brute of a man hasn't the slightest idea that I am one of the best trained women he has ever met."

But there was no trace of indignation in her voice when she said to him sweetly: "We will take that as settled. But if for some other paper, Mr. Hardwick, I should show evidence of being as good a newspaper reporter as any member of your staff, may I come up here, and, without being kept waiting too long, tell you of my triumph?"

"You would not shake my decision," he said. "But I will see you again if you call."

"Thank you! And good afternoon, Mr. Hardwick. I am so much obliged to you for consenting to see me. I shall call upon you at this hour tomorrow afternoon."

(To be continued next Thursday.)

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