THE STURGIS WAGER

A DETECTIVE STORY.

By EDGAR MORETTE.

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—Scene of story is in New York city. Time, early evening, last day of year. Cable train collides with cab, throwing to ground cabman and passenger also seated outside. Latter disappears; then, inside the cab, body of man shot dead is discovered. Sturgis, reporter, examines cab and surroundings.

CHAPTER II—Later that evening, at stag dinner party, Sturgis, in impromptu discussion, maintains reliability of circumstantial evidence. Dr. Murdock, famous chemist, wagers in reply $5,000 to $100 that from any daily paper he can select an unsolvable riddle. Sturgis takes bet.

CHAPTER III—Case selected is of two mysterious shots fired that afternoon in or near Knickerbocker bank. Man had been seen running from bank with valise, and arrested. Man said he stole valise from bank steps and was shot at. Valise contained nothing of interest.

CHAPTER IV—Sturgis secures appointment with Dunlap, president of bank, to visit scene of shooting early next morning, then induces his friend Dr. Thurston to come to his rooms while he arranges data of the two strange cases.

CHAPTER V—From observations made thus far and inductive reasoning thereon reporter has concluded: (1) dead man in cab was bookkeeper about 50 years old receiving good salary; (2) wound caused by bullet fired at close quarters; (3) might have shot himself; (4) shooting had not occurred in cab; (5) right arm broken by heavy instrument; and (6) cabman was drugged, and young man who escaped involved in some way in crime. Cab mystery also noted as possible sequel to bank mystery.

CHAPTER VI—Sturgis calls for Sprague, artist friend, to get his company during investigation at bank, but artist has appointment with some fair sitter whose portrait he is making.

CHAPTER VII — Agnes Murdock (in charge of her father's household since her mother's death) finds her father in his study. She, in reply to a question concerning attentions of a Thomas Chatham, shows her dislike of the persistent suitor. Her father intimates she shall not be further bothered.

CHAPTER VIII—Miss Murdock's final sitting for portrait induces artist to ask privilege of calling at her home, which she readily grants. Bellboy brings note for Agnes. This is read with evident annoyance, and she drops it. It remains forgotten when she leaves studio.

CHAPTER IX—Promptly at time agreed Dunlap meets Sturgis. Reporter begins long and careful examination in bank. Revolver in bookkeeper's desk shows two empty cartridges.

CHAPTER X—Examination completed. Sturgis questions banker regarding reliability of Arbogast, head bookkeeper, then announces Arbogast to be a defaulter with Chatham, accountant who has frequently examined condition of books, as accomplice. Message Arbogast sent Chatham deciphered from marks on a blotter.

CHAPTER XI—Reporter has now completed diagram showing movements of Arbogast and Chatham and one other whose identity is as yet completely veiled. Arbogast at last moment had found a note which caused him to suspect his accomplice. He fired wounding him in hand and was about to fire again when unknown conspirator rushed in and struck his arm. This action resulted in turning weapon and making Arbogast shoot himself. Dunlap is incredulous, but verifies story in part by later identifying body of Arbogast at morgue.

"The Knickerbocker Bank,
New York, Dec. 31, 1896.

"My Darling Wife: When you receive this letter I shall be far away—a disgraced criminal—and you will be worse than a widow.

"I dare not ask your forgiveness for the trouble I am bringing upon you; for I realize all too clearly the extent of the wrong I have done you. But I feel irresistibly impelled to lay before you in all their nakedness, as I do before my own conscience, the circumstances which have led to my downfall. A knowledge of these may perhaps enable you to understand, in a measure, the temptation to which I have succumbed; although I find it hard myself, now that all is over, to realize how I came to yield to it.

"Perhaps you may remember the celebration of my fiftieth anniversary. We were having a most enjoyable evening in the company of the friends whom you had invited to participate in the festivities, when a caller was announced. I was obliged to leave our guests in order to receive him in the library. This man lost no time in stating the nature of his business with me. His name was Thomas Chatham; he was an expert accountant, who had been employed at the Knickerbocker bank to examine the books, and he coolly informed me that he had just discovered a serious error in my books—one that had enabled a depositor to overdraw his account by a large amount. At first I refused to believe him, although he submitted copies from the books showing exactly how the blunder had been made. When he intimated that it only rested with me whether the error should be reported to the bank, I indignantly refused to listen to him. He remained perfectly unruffled during our interview and left me at last with the statement that he would wait 24 hours before handing in his report to the president.

"My first step on reaching the bank the next day was to verify Chatham's statements. Alas! they were only too true. There was the terrible blunder staring me in the face. I could not understand how I had come to make it; but there it was, and nothing could explain it away. I had hoped against hope up to this time; now I saw clearly that I was a ruined man.

"There was only one honorable course open to me—to frankly confess my responsibility for the blunder and take the consequences, whatever they might be. I hesitated, and I was lost.

"I hesitated because I felt that my position was at stake. Would not my error appear inexcusable to the officers of the bank, since I could find no palliation for it in my own eyes? I was 50 years old. I shrank from the necessity of beginning again at the foot of the ladder which I had so laboriously climbed after a lifetime of conscientious plodding. It would be no easy matter for me to find another position.

"The more I thought the matter over, the more I became convinced that there might be another way out of my trouble. Was it not probable that the depositor who had profited by my mistake had done so innocently? If so, would he not be willing to repay the amount overdrawn? At the worst, if he should refuse to do this, might it not be possible for me to scrape together and borrow enough to make good the deficiency? In this way I could correct the blunder and no one would be the wiser for it. But what of that man Chatham? Would not his report betray me? I recalled his intimation that the nature of his report depended upon myself. What did he mean by that? Probably he would set a price upon his silence. This would add considerably to the amount I should have to raise; but would not this be better, after all, than the loss of my position? At any rate, I should not be any the worse off for listening to his proposal, whatever it might be.

"That afternoon, as soon as the bank had closed, I called at the address Chatham had given me. He evidently expected me. With him was a man whom he introduced as James Withers, the depositor in whose favor my blunder had been made. Had I not been laboring under great excitement, it is likely that my suspicions would have been aroused by the strangeness of Withers' presence in Chatham's room. The two men received me pleasantly, and the alleged Withers, even before I could broach the subject, expressed his regret at hearing of the error which had been committed, and assured me of his willingness to reimburse the bank; but—ah! there was an ominous 'but.' He was short of ready money just then; everything he had was tied up in a promising enterprise which was bound to bring in a magnificent profit in the course of a few days if only he could raise a few paltry hundreds to enable him to hold out a little longer. If he failed to scrape together this small amount, all would be lost. Insidiously and relentlessly they drove me toward the trap they had prepared, and I was weak enough to fall into it. Before the interview was over, I had consented to allow Withers to still further overdraw his account, and I had received his solemn promise to refund, before the end of the week, the entire amount he owed the bank. Then Chatham suggested that it would be wiser to let the second overdraft come from another account. Withers agreed with him and stated that the check could be made in the name of Henry Seymour, a relative of his, who had recently opened a small account with the Knickerbocker bank. I strongly objected to sharing the secret of my infamy with any others; but I finally allowed myself to be overruled by the plausible scoundrels into whose clutches I had fallen.

"The next day I took my first step in crime, by making such entries as would insure the honoring of Seymour's check. After that I was completely in the power of these two men. It was not long before I discovered that I had been their dupe. Chatham's accomplice was not the true Withers; for this man, a few days later, made a large deposit, which more than covered his previous overdraft. The false Withers was Henry Seymour himself.

"As soon as I had committed a felony, it became unnecessary for Seymour to keep up any further pretense of a desire to refund the money I had helped him to steal. I was now in the meshes of crime as deeply as my accomplices; and, from that time to this they have forced me to act as their cat's-paw. During this period of two years the bank has been robbed in this way of over $250,000, every cent of which has gone to Chatham and Seymour.

"You can perhaps imagine what a hell my life has been during that time. With prison and disgrace staring me in the face; and with the absolute conviction that exposure must inevitably come sooner or later, I have suffered the torture of the damned. At the bank, I have been in a perpetual state of suspense. I have started at every word spoken to me; I have seen suspicion in every glance which has met mine; I have trembled and paled at every approach of one of the officers of the bank. And yet I have not dared to absent myself from my desk for an hour, lest an examination of my books during my absence should reveal my crime. I have been the first to reach the bank in the morning, and the last to leave it at night; I have not even taken the few minutes during the day which would have been required to enable me to obtain a hurried meal. On one pretext or another, during the last two years, I have had to forego my annual vacation. I have dragged myself to my post when I was so ill that I could hardly stand, because I could not afford to have anyone take charge of my books for even an hour. And all that time, with a full realization of my degradation and infamy, I have been forced to continue my frauds, knowing that each one brought me nearer to the inevitable final exposure; but knowing equally well that a refusal on my part to continue my stealing would result in an instant betrayal by my accomplices.

"At last further concealment became impossible. A week ago the yearly examination of the books took place. The expert accountant employed was, as usual, Thomas Chatham, and of course, as usual, his report was entirely satisfactory. It seemed, therefore, as though discovery could be postponed a little longer; when suddenly, this morning, we were informed that a change in the system of bookkeeping would be adopted after the 1st of January. I saw at once that all was over. The discovery of my crime is now a matter of hours. I must be out of the way before the crash comes or I am doomed. I can already see the felon's stripes upon my back; the clang of the prison gates ring in my ears.

"I am too dazed to think; but I feel that my only escape is in death. And yet I cling to life. I know that the happy days of the past are gone forever; and yet I feel a sort of numb relief at the thought that the worst is now certain to come, and to come at once.

"I have carefully prepared my flight, so that I shall have plenty of time to reach a place of safety. Once there, I shall be free from pursuit; but I shall be an exile, and I shall carry with me to the grave the burden of my sin.

"The most bitter pang in my remorse is caused by the thought of the great wrong I have done you, dear wife. You will now be forced to face the world not only unprotected by the one whose duty and whose desire it was to smooth the way for you; but, what is worse, oppressed by the burden of his sin.

"What little money I have left in the savings bank I have transferred to your name. You may use it all with a clear conscience; for every dollar of it was honestly mine. I swear I have never had a single cent of the money I have stolen. It has all been drawn by Henry Seymour, and used I know not how.

"As soon as I am settled in the place to which I am going I shall try, as far as lies in my power, to redeem my past by a life of honest labor; and I hope to be able to contribute to your support in the near future.

"Oh! my wife! my darling wife! Would that the past could be blotted out, and that I could once more place my hand in yours, an honest man. Though you may find it hard to forgive me now, perhaps in time you may be able to think gently of him who through all his crime and degradation has remained

"Your devoted husband,
"JOHN W. ARBOGAST.

"My safety depends upon your keeping the contents of this letter secret for at least three days. After that time, please send to Mr. Dunlap, president of the Knickerbocker bank, the inclosed papers, which will reveal to him the full extent of my defalcations.

"I do not hesitate to betray Chatham and Seymour; they did not scruple to ruin me. I have sent for Chatham, and I shall give him warning of my intended flight. If he sees fit, he can take such steps as he may choose to escape his own richly deserved punishment."

While Sturgis was reading Arbogast's letter, Dunlap, restlessly pacing the room, had observed him furtively.

"Well?" he now inquired, stopping before the reporter, "what do you think of that?"

"Poor woman!" exclaimed Sturgis, feelingly; "it is terrible to think of the suffering brought upon her by her husband's guilt. I ought to be hardened to a situation like this; for it is the inevitable sequel of almost every crime that is ever committed. But I am moved every time by the pathetic explation of the innocent for the guilty."

"Yes, yes; I know," said Dunlap, indifferently; "that it not what I meant. Did you note the amount which this scoundrel confesses he and his accomplices have stolen from the bank?"

"Yes; it is a large sum."

"Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars! Why, man, if that is true, it is enough to cripple the bank—No, no; I don't mean that, of course; the bank is rich and could stand the loss of four times that amount. But a quarter of a million is a round sum, for all of that. It does not seem possible that, in spite of all our care, they can have succeeded in making away with so much money. But they did. There can be no doubt about that; for in the papers which Arbogast inclosed for me in his letter to his wife he explains just how the thing was done. It is simple enough when you know the trick; but it took fiendish cunning to devise it. I never would have thought that rascally bookkeeper intelligent enough to concoct such a scheme."

"If the scheme is a work of genius," said Sturgis, "you may rest assured that 'X'—who may very well be Henry Seymour—was the author of it."

"Well, at any rate," observed Dunlap, "there is one thing that must be done at once; and that is to find both Chatham and Seymour. It is not possible that in two years these men have spent a quarter of a million dollars between them."

"It is at all events possible that they may not have done so," replied Sturgis, "for my investigations show that both Arbogast and Chatham have been men of regular and exemplary habits in their private lives. They do not appear to have been living much, if at all, beyond their means. There does not seem to have been, in the case of either man, any room for a double existence, which might otherwise have explained the situation. Neither was a spendthrift or a gambler, and neither was dissipated."

"Then you have not the faintest idea of the present whereabouts of Chatham or of his mysterious accomplice?"

"Let me tell you exactly what I have done up to the present time; and then you will be able to judge for yourself. And I, too, shall see more clearly where we stand; for the necessity of putting one's thoughts into words is an aid to clear thinking."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LOST TRAIL.

So saying, Sturgis settled himself in his chair and began his narrative.

"After leaving you this morning, my first step was to gain admission to the Tombs—"

"To the Tombs?" interrupted Dunlap.

"Yes; the cabman has been remanded to the Tombs to await trial for complicity in the murder of the unknown man whose body was found in his cab."

"Arbogast's?"

"Yes, Arbogast's. But of course the police do not know that."

"Were you allowed to see the cabman?"

"Yes. As reporter of the Tempest, I was able to obtain an interview with him. When first arrested, the man, whose name, by the way, is Reilly, was incapable of making a connected statement; the lawyer assigned to defend him laughed in his face when he heard his story, and advised him to leave the romancing to a trained lawyer as his only chance of escaping the electric chair. Naturally, under the circumstances, the poor fellow hesitated to unbosom himself to a stranger. But I finally managed to gain his confidence by showing him that I believed his story, and that I was trying to find the men whose scapegoat he now is. It seems that yesterday afternoon, at about three o'clock, he was stationed at the cab-stand in front of Madison square, where he was accosted by a man, answering Chatham's description, who engaged him to drive him to the Fulton street ferry. On reaching the ferry, the man ordered Reilly to proceed to a low grogshop on South street. Here he entered, returning in a few minutes to invite the cabman to take a drink with him. The men seated themselves at a table upon which a bottle and two filled glasses were already placed. Chatham handed one of these glasses to Reilly, who drank it and probably many more. At any events, he remembers nothing further until he was rudely shaken by Chatham, who led him out into the street. Here the cold air revived him, and he remembers noticing several things to which he did not pay much attention at the time, but which seem significant now as he recalls them:

"Firstly—It was now quite dark.

"Secondly—The cab, which had been facing south when he entered the barroom, was now facing north.

"Thirdly—Chatham persistently carried his left hand in the bosom of his coat; he was very pale and seemed weak and ill.

"He with difficulty climbed upon the box beside Reilly and ordered him to drive uptown. Presently the cabman became drowsy again. The next thing he remembers is coming to himself after the overturning of the cab by the cable car. That the man was drugged there can be no doubt. It is probable that while he sat apparently drunk in the barroom, Chatham took the cab to the Knickerbocker bank, expecting to smuggle Arbogast into it without Reilly's knowledge — a deep move, since it would effectually cover up the trail, if they wanted to make away with the bookkeeper, as they evidently did. Seymour may have met him at the bank by appointment; but I am more inclined to believe that he was there unknown to Chatham, and possibly for the purpose of spying upon the latter, to see if his instructions were carried out. He lent his accomplice a hand in the nick of time; and then, like a prudent general, he retired to a safe position, thence to direct further operations. What I cannot yet understand is, why Chatham should have taken the enormous risk he did in conveying Arbogast's body from the bank, since Seymour's intention was plainly to make away with the bookkeeper in any event. I can explain this only on the supposition that Seymour thought he could conceal the body in some way and prevent it from falling into the hands of the police. On the part of any ordinary criminal this would have been rank folly; but the resources of such a man as Seymour are such that I do not feel disposed to criticise his generalship in this particular without first understanding his ultimate object. From what I have seen of his work thus far, I have derived a profound admiration for the man's genius and cunning devilitry. Fortunately fate was against him this time. Its instrument was the cable car which overturned the cab, thus delivering Arbogast's body into the hands of the police and furnishing the key without which, it is quite likely, Seymour might have remained forever undiscovered."

"You think, then, you will succeed in unearthing this villain?" asked Dunlap, eagerly.

"While there's life, there's hope," said Sturgis, with grim determination; "but I must confess that the outlook at present is not exactly brilliant. However, let me finish my report. During the excitement that followed the overturning of the cab, Chatham managed to escape, as you know, and he has thus far succeeded in avoiding arrest, although the police have kept a sharp lookout for him. Every steamship that sails, every train that leaves New York, is watched, but thus far without result. For my part, I am convinced that Chatham has not yet attempted to leave the city."

"Isn't it probable, on the contrary, that he fled from New York immediately after running away from the overturned cab?" asked Dunlap.

"I do not think so," replied Sturgis; "with his wounded hand he is a marked man; he would be easily recognized in a strange city. His safest hiding-place is here in New York, where he doubtless has friends ready to conceal him. Be that as it may, he remains for the present under cover and the scent is lost. The police are groping in the dark just now, and—and so am I."

The banker looked sorely disappointed.

"And so that is all you have been able to discover? Not a trace of the money? It does not seem possible that a quarter of a million dollars can disappear so completely without leaving the slightest trace."

"If we can ever find Seymour," replied Sturgis, "I make no doubt we shall be able to locate the lion's share of the money.

"Yes," he added, thoughtfully, "that is all I have been able to discover up to the present time; or, at least, all that seems to be of any immediate importance. Of course, I called on both Mr. Murray and Mr. Scott; but, beyond the fact that Chatham, like Arbogast, was a model employe, all I got from them was the address of Chatham's boarding-house; there I was informed that the accountant had moved on New Year's eve without leaving his new address. There is one other link in the chain of evidence which I have investigated; but I cannot tell yet whether it will lead to anything or not. It may be immaterial; but who knows? Possibly it may prove to be the key to the entire problem."

"And what is this promising link?" asked Dunlap, eagerly.

"There is not much to tell on this score," answered Sturgis. "You will recall that according to the evidence which we have thus far collected, Chatham was attacked by Arbogast while he was in the act of using the telephone."

"Yes; I remember how minutely you reconstructed that scene."

"Well," continued the reporter, "I saw at once that the telephone might possibly prove to be an important witness for the prosecution, if I could only discover the name of the person with whom Chatham was talking when he was shot. I therefore called at the central office to make inquiries. As I was able to specify almost the exact minute at which this call was sent, it was an easy matter to find the young woman who had answered it; but the chances were that she would not remember the number called for. She did, however, for it had been fixed in her memory by some unusual circumstances. It seems that after giving Chatham the connection he wanted, the operator rang him up. While she was listening for a reply, she heard a sharp report, followed by a scream; then a sound of confused voices, and presently another sharp report. After that came complete silence, and she was unable to obtain any reply to her repeated calls."

"You have here corroborative evidence of the scene between Chatham and Arbogast," said Dunlap.

"Yes; but I did not need that. What I wished to know was the name of the person with whom Chatham wanted to converse."

"Did you discover it?"

"The number of the telephone he gave is that of the Manhattan Chemical company."

"And what is the Manhattan Chemical company?"

"That is the question I asked people connected with the commercial agencies. They replied that they knew very little concerning this firm; because, although it has been in existence for a couple of years, it apparently never asks anyone for credit, preferring to pay cash for all the goods delivered to it. I called at the office of the Manhattan Chemical company to investigate on my own account. The office and store occupy the basement of an old ramshackle building, whose upper stories are rented out as business offices. The laboratory and manufacturing department are downstairs in the cellar. The store contains only a few chairs and a long counter behind which rise shelves containing rows of bottles with brilliantly colored labels. A few painted signs upon the walls vaunt the merits of Dr. Henderson's Cough Cure and Dr. Henderson's Liver Specific. I did not expect to find anyone in on New Year's day. I was, therefore, surprised to see a solitary clerk sitting with his feet upon a desk and apparently absorbed in the reading of a newspaper—a pale young man of the washed-out blond type, with watery green-blue eyes and a scant mustache which fails to conceal a weak mouth. He rose to greet me with an air of surprise which does not speak well for the briskness of trade in the establishment. Indeed, if we are to judge by the aspect of things in the office of the Manhattan Chemical company, business in patent medicines does not appear to be flourishing just at present. By the way, did you ever hear of Dr. Henderson's remedies?"

"No; I cannot say that I have," answered Dunlap.

"That is the curious part of it," said Sturgis. "I have been unable to discover any advertisement published by this firm; and it is only by profuse advertising that such a concern can live."

"Yes, of course," exclaimed Dunlap, somewhat impatiently; "but what has all this to do with Chatham?"

"I don't know," replied Sturgis; "possibly nothing; perhaps a great deal.

"I asked to see Dr. Henderson," he continued, "at which the sleepy clerk stared at me in open-mouthed amazement. Dr. Henderson was not in; it was quite uncertain when he would be in. Indeed, as far as I was able to judge, Dr. Henderson appears to be a rather mysterious personage. No one knows much about him. Even his clerk admits that he has seen him only once or twice in the 18 months during which he has had charge of the office. The doctor attends to the manufacturing part of the business himself; his laboratory, which is down in the cellar, is a most jealously guarded place. No one is ever admitted to it under any pretext. He is evidently afraid that some one may discover the secret of his valuable remedies."

"You say that as if your words were meant to convey some unexpressed meaning," said Dunlap, studying the reporter's face.

[To be continued.]

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The regular subscription price of the two papers is $2.50. 21tf

Farm for Sale.

The Clark farm, consisting of 200 acres of cultivated land and 20 acres of timber is for sale. It is located about 6 miles south east of Manchester on the Delhi road. For particulars address or call on Bronson & Carr, Manchester, Iowa.

The large and increasing circulation of The Iowa Homestead in this county is a matter for congratulation to the publishers and to good farming, for, of all the papers of its class in the country, it is easily the best and most helpful. Its Special Farmers' Institute editions, issued with the regular edition the first week in each month, have been for years the admiration of all practical farmers. Written wholly by farmers, they are full of actual experience, and smell of the soil. We have been fortunate enough this season to secure terms for The Homestead and its Special Farmers' Institute Editions, together with The Poultry Farmer and The Farmers' Mutual Insurance Journal, four of the most valuable farm publications in the country, that enable us to offer the four in connection with our own paper for $1.90 for the entire five, one year. This is emphatically a good thing, and no farmer in this county should fail to take advantage of this offer. For a large line of thoroughly practical farm reading nothing has ever been offered before that equals it. A county paper, a farm paper, a poultry paper, a farm insurance paper and the Special Farmers' Institute, all for $1.90. Come in and order them.

120 Acre Farm For Sale.

We are agents for the sale of the O. A. Underwood farm of 120 acres, situated about 5 miles north east of Manchester. There is a bargain for some purchaser in this property. If not sold soon the place will befor rent. BRONSON & CARR.

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SOUTH! The Illinois Central will run Homeseekers excursions to certain points in the South on the lines of the Illinois Central and Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Railroads from all points west of and including Tara and from points on the Lyle, Cedar Rapids, Onawa and Sioux Falls branches on the first and third Monday of each month, during the year 1900, and from all points east of and including Fort Dodge on the first and third Tuesday of each month.

The new "Southern Homeseeker's Guide" describes in detail the agricultural advantages, the soil and products of all points south of the Ohio River on the lines of the above mentioned roads. For a copy address the undersigned.

For information concerning Railroad Lands in the fertile Yazoo Valley of Mississippi address E. P. Skene, Land Commissioner I. C. R. R., at Chicago.

WEST! Homeseekers' Excursion tickets will also be sold from stations in Iowa east of and including Cedar Falls and from points on the Lyle and Cedar Rapids branches, the first and third Tuesdays of each month, to points on the Illinois Central Railroad to which the one rate is $7.00 or over in South Dakota, Minnesota and in Iowa to points west of Ackley inclusive, except points west of Lemars.

Homeseekers Excursions to Points on Other Lines of Railroad.

The Illinois Central will also sell on the first and third Tuesdays in June, July, August, September, October, November and December, 1900 Homeseeker's Excursion Tickets to points on foreign lines of railroads in many Western, Southwestern and southern States.

For rates, routes, etc inquire of your nearest Illinois Central Ticket Agent.

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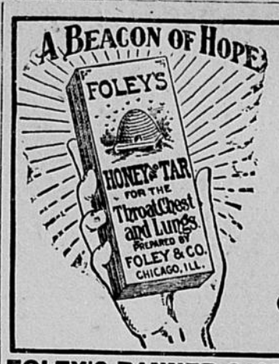

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there are many little things that can be improved in appearance. Furniture can be polished, dingy spots painted, stained or varnished. We have paints, stains, etc., all ready for the brush and put up in handy little cans. Everything made bright and new by the use of these little things that cost so little.

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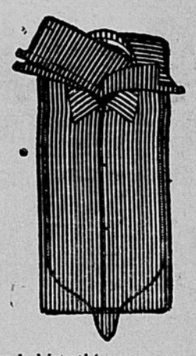

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