

# GOING AGAINST The AUCTION SALES



By Will Scarlet

ONE evening last week Cousin Kate called me up on the phone and asked me over for dinner. Now, whenever Cousin Kate asks me to dinner, I know that Cousin Kate—or else Cousin Kate's husband—wants me for something else. One time it was to learn the ins and outs of the International copyright law, again it was to bring my influence to bear on the officials of the city pound and thereby secure the liberation of the mongrel Spot, and on this occasion it was to show me a new library table and a new bookcase.



Income, for Cousin Kate has no box-stalls rented in Emeryville and no gold lined stockings upstairs. No wonder, then, that I impertinently asked, "How did you do it?"

Well, they were only too glad to tell me—they got the furniture at auction. "To buy stuff at auction," Cousin Kate's husband assured me, "is the modern way to get good goods at rock bottom prices." And Cousin Kate chimed

in with, "Yes, and it's such excitement and such fun!" Of course, we masculine brutes ignored Cousin Kate's remark—we are so superior to excitement and fun; but Cousin Kate's husband reiterated his assertion that at auction you can get good goods cheap. I must have looked my incredulity, for he asked me, hot off the bat: "How much do you think I paid for that table and that bookcase?"

"About \$30 for the table and for the bookcase something like \$24." I thought I knew something about the price of furniture as it is sold, and gave a conservative estimate. Cousin Kate gurgled joyously and Cousin Kate's husband slapped his thigh. "Not on your life!" he exclaimed rapturously. "Kate and I aren't millionaires. The table cost \$11.50 and the bookcase was knocked

down to me for \$6.25. What do you know about that?" I protested ignorance, and then Cousin Kate and her husband told me all about the weekly auction sales held in several big stores downtown. It was all a distinct revelation to me. Auction sales I had always associated with bankrupt clothiers and wornout farming implements and fake jewelry and antiquated holiday toys. To learn that you can pick up anything worth while at an auction sale was news indeed, and so greatly was I impressed that on the following Tuesday—which happened to be the very next day—I attended a red flag barter to see for myself.

**Why the Ding Dong Bell?** They always ring a hideously jangling bell before the auction sale begins. This is obviously the survival of an effete custom, for it serves no purpose from the viewpoint of either utility or art. You don't have to call the people to the modern auction. Many prospective buyers are on hand an hour or more before the sale starts and everybody is in readiness when the auctioneer mounts his stepladder rostrum and the sale is on.

On this particular morning the first "lots" disposed of consisted of second hand shovels, washboards, frying pans, and sausage machines, and while a coterie of bargain hunters were fighting about the auctioneer's step ladder I took occasion to look over the crowd of assembled buyers. They represented all sorts and conditions of men—and women. The poorly clad housewife from south of Fifth street shouldered the stylishly gowned lady from the boulevard, whose automobile was awaiting her pleasure across the street. Among the men were half a dozen col-

lege boys, a sprinkling of businessmen, one prominent physician, three lawyers and two clergymen, besides a formidable group of workmen who just now were bidding for a bundle of second hand tools. Conspicuous by reason of their alert eyes and preoccupied air were several retail furniture dealers, who attended the sale to pick up folding beds and Morris chairs, which they might afterward sell to their patrons and reap a snug profit from the transaction. A sudden bustle and crowding among the assembled buyers warned me that something more important than washboards and fire shovels was now under the hammer. "Under the hammer," by the way, is no longer anything but a figurative expression. The auctioneer wields nothing more formidable than a lead pencil with which he checks off on a typed list the "lots" or articles

A STORY WHICH SHOWS THAT PLUNGERS ARE PLENTIFUL WHEN HOUSEHOLD HAS-BEENS ARE OFFERED TO BIDDERS BY THE MAN WITH THE HYPNOTIZING SPELL.



asks for a volunteer skilled in the musical art to demonstrate the marvelous qualities of the violin. A long haired youth with a pair of sad eyes shining behind bulging toric lenses accepts the invitation. He makes a few swift passes with the antiquated bow across the three strings and then hands the instrument back.

**A Superior Violin** "You can just bet your boots it isn't," declares the auctioneer enthusiastically. "You bet it's no—no Stadd. It's a first class fiddle, that's what it is. Now, what am I bid? No price is too high when there's a chance to get a grand old instrument like this. Ah! Seventy-five? Dollars? Oh, cents! Seventy-five cents! Well, you'll double that? Seventy-five I'm bid, seventy-five. For this grand old fiddle, seventy-five. Thank you, one dollar. One dollar, one dollar, one dollar—ah, dollar ten, dollar ten, dollar ten—dollar twenty-five—thirty, thirty, thirty. One dollar thirty. Make it a dollar and a half!"

The young musician complies with this request and the bidding goes steadily on until one of the clergymen captures the "grand old instrument" for \$2.25. Next up is a flat topped desk which one of the retail furniture dealers secures after a hot competition with a bearded gentleman and one of the college boys. A bundle of bedding, which the obliging and indispensable



THIS PLATE WILL MAKE A SPLENDID WEDDING PRESENT

Bill unfolds that all may see, is knocked down to a Mrs. L. A soiled bearskin rug—"Perhaps," says the auctioneer, "that bear was killed by Teddy Roosevelt or, maybe, Buffalo Bill"—is snapped up by a Mrs. X., who proves to be none other than Cousin Kate. She sees me for the first time and squirms over to me after paying her deposit.

"Kate," I said, in reproachful tones, "you'll disgrace the family, bring your poor husband into the bankruptcy court and break up your happy home. What on earth do you want of a bearskin rug?" "I want it to set off that new library table, you silly boy. Bearskins are all the rage." "Then why don't you make Tom shoot a bear and bring home the skin?" You know he can lie beautifully and—" "Oh, you don't understand," interrupted Cousin Kate. "You never do. Why should I send Tom bear hunting when this rug is so cheap? Just think of it—\$3.20!"

I started to reply, but Cousin Kate squirmed up nearer the auctioneer's stepladder. She rather liked the looks of a six drawer filing cabinet and bid 60 cents. Somebody went her one better and she came back to me looking very disappointed.

"Kate," I declared, "you shouldn't be let out alone; you need a guardian. You have no use for a filing cabinet." "Maybe not," was the irrespressible lady's retort. "But just think, Bill! There was a chance to get it so very, very cheap!"

**An Auction Dissipation** Cousin Kate is a type of a large percentage of faithful attendants at local auction sales. She is a genuine plunger who takes big chances and likes the excitement of bidding for something she doesn't want and certainly doesn't need. It may be said of her with perfect propriety that she is "going the pace." Incidentally, she is getting untold fun out of the experience and Tom is too good natured to mind. Besides, he is a fairly expert auction sale plunger himself. Plungers, I used to think, are born, not made. I know better now. That gaudy sofa cushion is an anomaly in my severely ordered bachelor rooms. My friends all offer their sympathy and discreetly ask who on earth made me a present of that cushion; they can't conceive that I was such an unmitigated ass as to pay good money for it. Alas, I spent 45 cents—count 'em, 45—for that cushion when laboring under the excitement that only plungers know. I realized then, as I realize now, that a cushion was the last thing in the world I ought to have; but the auctioneer seemed so enthusiastic about the article that I snapped it up just because I was afraid somebody else might get hold of it. Goodness knows how many other things—including sewing machines and work baskets—I might have snapped up in the same way and under the influence of the same excitement had it not been for the fact that a deposit had to be paid on every purchase. Tuesday isn't my pay day. At auction sales there are plungers and plungers. Cousin Kate is a type of the radical plungers, the sort who bid for everything on the principle that it is bad business to let any opportunity slip by. But there are likewise conservative plungers, like Mr. Hurley across the way, who pick out in advance the things they think they want and determine definitely and in cold blood just how much they intend

to pay. Hurley is fish-eyed and calculating and never allows his enthusiasm to run away with his pocket-book. Let us suppose, for instance, that a polished oak chair takes his fancy. He examines that chair in detail, sits in it and squirms in it to make sure that it is perfectly sound and convinces himself that it is the sort of chair for which the average retailer would ask \$6. "I'll be willing to pay \$3.50 for it," declares Mr. Hurley to himself. So when the bidding starts, say at \$1, know what I'm about. Maybe I can't Mr. Hurley takes a hand in the game until the \$2.50 mark is reached. There he draws out. Often it is possible that by shouting "Three seventy-five" in case one of my daughters should the right psychological moment he marry a man by the name of Dudley P. Simpkins."

ened to add, are practically as good as new, as is the case with Cousin Kate's library table. The articles are entrusted to the auctioneer by persons who need the money or who are frankly tired of certain of their possessions and who are willing to take whatever they can get for them. And they always get what the highest bidder offers, minus the auctioneer's well earned commission. I ventured to remark that it looked as though a fair proportion of the auction sale plungers bought things they had absolutely no use for. He glanced at my sofa cushion and frankly agreed with me.

"Yes," said the auctioneer, as he drained his coffee cup and handed it to the factotum, "many people, especially the women, buy things they didn't think of buying when they started out; and sometimes, as you say, they buy things that ain't of any use to them. The best case of the kind I ever heard of was when I put up a brass door-plate with the name Dudley P. Simpkins engraved on it. I jollied the crowd a bit, and the bidding got to be quite brisk, starting out with a dime and going up a nickel at a time. Finally the old doorplate went to a middle aged lady for 35 cents. Somebody asked her wasn't she a bit foolish to spend so much for a doorplate for which the average retailer would ask \$6. 'I'll be willing to pay \$3.50 for it,'" declares Mr. Hurley to himself. "Look here," says she, "I know what I'm about. Maybe I can't Mr. Hurley takes a hand in the game until the \$2.50 mark is reached. There he draws out. Often it is possible that by shouting "Three seventy-five" in case one of my daughters should the right psychological moment he marry a man by the name of Dudley P. Simpkins."



BIDDING FOR A BUNDLE OF SECOND-HAND TOOLS

will never, never shout it. That would be going beyond his foreordained limit. But how can the auctioneer afford to let the goods go so very cheap? This is the question that bothered me on that memorable Tuesday when, with the sofa cushion which I didn't want clasped to my breast, I saw a \$30 roll top desk sold for \$17.50, and a \$22 wardrobe disposed of for a paltry \$9. And it is the question I propounded to the auctioneer himself while he sipped a cup of coffee during a brief recess. The auctioneer was good natured and told me all about it. The articles offered at the auction sales, he said, are mostly second hand; whereupon I recalled that "magnificent green plush riding habit" and grinned. Yet the greater part of the articles, he hast-

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**For the Housekeeper** Cookies and little cakes placed in an earthen jar with a few pieces of orange or lemon will be found to be deliciously flavored when eaten. A child's broom, purchasable for a small amount at any department store, is an excellent article for cleaning behind the radiators. Powdered arrowroot is preferable to cornstarch for thickening fruit juices, for it keeps the juice transparent and prevents lumping. For cleaning down stairs, a stiff plain brush is better than a whisk broom.