

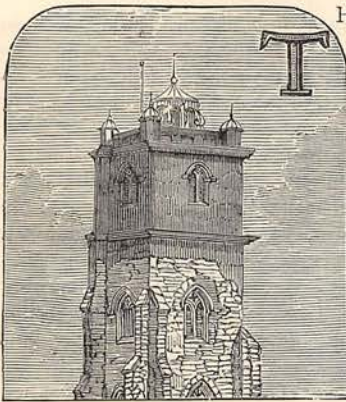
bankruptcy. He is now rich and famous, and it is said Continental princesses invite him to dinner."

She didn't think, she said, snipping out the threads of the botched sleeve with her blunt scissors, that any princess would ever invite her to dinner; and the grimmest silence on my part gave the most cordial consent and corroboration to her views on this head.

And so endeth the Song of the Skirt. But I have a few generalisations to make. My costume has been altered so that it is now a passable fit; but I have not heard of any one being struck with amazement at it, and I am sure it has never been reported in any fashionable chronicle. I shall continue to bestow a portion of my patronage upon the needy young person. Other ladies must judge whether or no it is their duty to do the

same towards some impecunious needleworker of their acquaintance. But the real lesson this story conveys is for the workers themselves. We hear a great deal in these days about the injustice done to women as a sex, how they are kept down and prevented from rising merely because they are women and not men. Such talk is idle. What the world wants is EXCELLENCE, and whenever excellence in any branch of endeavour is achieved by a woman, she receives the highest guerdon of reward for it, just the same as if she were a man. Miss Thompson paints pictures, and the man-milliner makes dresses, and both command the market in their respective ways, not because one is a man and the other is a woman, but because each has aimed at excellence, and achieved it. OLIVE LOGAN.

### THE BURIAL OF A BUBBLE.



THE clock of the ancient City church of St. Hans-by-the-Wall was sonorously announcing the hour of one p.m. Hans Court, of which the church formed one whole side, appeared comparatively silent and deserted; all the morning its well-worn flags

had resounded with the footsteps of business men, as they hurried in and out of the court from the main thoroughfare, entering into and emerging from the old-fashioned houses now occupied as offices, in ceaseless succession. But at present there was a lull. Some were engaged at luncheon, others had recently finished that repast, and a few moments' relief from the turmoil of money-making seemed to be the order of the day.

In one of the queer tumble-down tenements that faced the entrance to the busy street, a solemn ceremony was about to take place. A Bubble was to be buried!

The mourners, of whom I unfortunately formed one, had been summoned to assemble at half-past one. Not being a business man myself, I had time to stroll quietly up the court, and found myself entering the fusty-looking blue baize doors some twenty minutes before the appointed time. Walking through the dingy little office, I was stopped by a depressed-looking red-haired clerk, who slowly and sadly placed a quill pen in my hand, and, pointing to a sheet of foolscap, whispered his desire that I should inscribe my name thereon, and also the extent to which I was interested in the poor defunct Bubble. Having performed this mysterious rite, I was forthwith ushered into a room of good size, where several benches had

been placed for the reception of the mourners. At the further end of the apartment I remarked a small sinister-looking door, possibly for the entrance of the chief undertaker and his assistants. Round the dust-begrimed walls were hung maps and notices of strange import, suggesting to a fanciful and sombre imagination the marble scrolls and epitaphs of the village church of our youth. Doubtless these were the memories of other departed Bubbles.

The place, at the time I entered, was anything but crowded; in fact, one solitary old gentleman in a corner seemed to be the sole occupant, and he appeared to be devoting all his energies to sucking the ivory knob of his lettuce-shaped umbrella, and counting the holes in the old oilcloth that decorated the chamber of woe. Observing more narrowly, however, I discovered another human being in a small species of open cupboard, something akin to the mantlet at a rifle range, where the marker sits shot-proof, ready to count the shots and score the damage. In this box was a desk with writing materials, behind which sat a fat, smooth, beautifully dressed little man. He paid not the slightest attention to my fellow-mourner or myself, but continued to scribble monotonously till the ceremony began. In a short time people commenced to drop in, and a low hum of converse relative to the demerits of the dead Bubble made itself heard. Just as I had assured myself that there were exactly fifteen of us, all told, the clock struck sharply the half-hour, the fat man's pen stopped, the door at the opposite end was flung open, and five gentlemen faultlessly arrayed crept softly into the room, seating themselves behind the large table that happily intervened between them and the small but dangerous-looking posse of Bubble-holders.

The chairman was a tall, lean man, with a cold blue eye that shone out of a ferret-like face, which in its turn was fastened on to the body in the same manner that nature has thought proper to fashion the cranium of the puff-headed adder or the cobra-di-capello. The others seemed to be ordinary-looking business men, whose rôle consisted in silently assenting to the



utterances of their chief. After a preliminary gurgle, the chairman arose and, with a soft deprecatory smile, called upon the fat man in the cupboard, whom we found was the secretary, to commence the funeral service, which, to drop our gloomy metaphor, consisted in placing before the shareholders the proposal to wind up voluntarily the Great Nogo Gold Mining Company, Limited—£10 shares, fully paid—present market price, half-a-crown!

Here an unexpected hitch occurred. "Can't do it, sir," exclaims the secretary, "not enough shares present; and" (twisting round to us) "you know, gentlemen, we must be perfectly legal."

"How many do you want, Bentham?"

"Six hundred more, sir, but I'll see what I can do if the meeting will wait five minutes."

Out rushes Mr. Bentham, and we hear a kind of stampede in the office, as he and his two clerks dart out into the neighbourhood, with the hope of inducing more unfortunate proprietors to come in like ducks and be killed.

We all look at our watches, and wait. In a few moments an old gentleman, caught in his office in the act of packing up to go quietly homewards, and a wretched bank clerk, the proud possessor of fifty shares in the Great Nogo, swell the number of the doomed, and presently the secretary himself bustles in again, holding in his hand a proxy paper for a few hundred shares. "All right now, sir," gasps he to the chairman, who forthwith rises, and with the same gurgle commences his address.

"Well, gentlemen," he begins in a decently subdued voice befitting the mournful occasion, "our circular will have informed you of the object of our meeting; it is to wind up our unfortunate property." At the word "property" the little bank clerk draws himself up with some importance, and looks every inch the proprietor. "Gentlemen, I will read you our last report."

And then from a long paper he dilates upon the changes and chances that have befallen this truly magnificent mine since he last had the pleasure of meeting the shareholders: how that lately there has been no water to wash the gold, and what he knowingly terms the side-dirt; how the tunnels, the flumes, and the bottoms have come to grief in an extraordinary and unprecedented way. He then recounts in a mournful and impressive manner the loss of capital in repairing the expensive machinery, and last of all hints in a casual way at the decrease in the find of gold—"which, gentlemen, is worn out—in point of fact, has come to an end, as" (with a grimly jocose smile) "we must all do some day. Gentlemen, you have assets" (here all ears are pricked up)—"you have assets sufficient to pay two shillings per share" (gloom again) "to every proprietor."

Looking round inquiringly at his co-directors, who all solemnly nod assent, he sinks back resignedly in the chair of office. Most of those present are men of business, and accustomed to take things coolly; but I had remarked a red-faced, angry-looking man among the audience, who had been twitching and muttering during the gentle speech of Mr. Chairman, whose glib

talk of phlanges and flumes and side-dirt had the effect of intensely irritating him, as he knew and cared for none of these things, conscious only of the patent fact that he had lost his money. Upon his legs the moment Mr. Foxfield had finished his discourse, he gave vent to the gall of bitterness.

"It was monstrous—most shameful! He didn't believe the gold had run out. Wasn't he told distinctly it would last for ever? He had no confidence in the board of directors and (whisking round to us) he didn't suppose that that body of sensible men would be satisfied with the plausible and one-sided statement they had just heard."

Here Mr. Foxfield turned his cold blue eye full on the infuriated shareholder, and as few people can stand much of Mr. Foxfield's eye, the speaker soon became embarrassed and involved in his utterances, and finally sat down without proposing any remedy for the unhappy condition of the Great Nogo. Just then I heard a quiet chuckle near the door behind me, and through the wide crack where the green baize had been fretted away, I perceived a substance uncommonly like the large ear of the red-headed clerk afore-mentioned.

All the directors had put on an air of injured virtue and innocence, evoked by the fierce attack on their probity and fair dealing, which so impressed the simple bank clerk who sat next to me, that he timidly rose and said he thought the directors were scarcely to blame for the dearth of gold in Patagonia. Emboldened by the approving nods and smiles of all the board, he was preparing to enter into his own little experiences of the circumstances that induced him to invest in Nogo shares, &c.; but this being somewhat irrelevant to the matter in hand, he was poohed and pished and shrugged down by the impatient men of business, who were yearning to get back to their counting-houses, to make up for their latest *faux pas* by extra hard work.

Now came the pertinent commercial queries that shot straight to the mark *sans détours*. Like file-firing on a review day, the short prompt questions rattled about the devoted heads of the board, replies to which the spokesman endeavoured in vain to evade.

Accepting the undoubted fact of the cessation of the small yield of gold that had put one tiny dividend only into the pockets of the eager shareholders, a gentleman proceeded to ask when the money in hand would be doled out to the deceived victims.

Mr. Foxfield, after some whispering with his colleagues: "Well, gentlemen, say in six months at latest."

A chorus of "Nonsense!" "Humbug!" "Bosh!" echoes through the room.

However a liquidator is appointed, and we wind ourselves decently up. The business then terminates, and a hurried vote of thanks to the board is proposed and carried. The directors bow their acknowledgments and vanish as silently as they entered, and then with one accord we all make for the door. For a brief moment Hans Court is noisy with the sound of retreating footsteps, and then the Bubble is buried!

T. S. G.