

## A GLANCE DOWN THE "AGONY COLUMN."



NO longer is *The Times* the sole medium of communication between people to whom, for various reasons, the Post Office is not available. Most of our other dailies have their "agony columns," or at least a column in which "agonising" advertisements occasionally appear. As an exercise for the imaginative faculties, the study of these announcements is not without attractiveness.

In this one, for instance, there is condensed in a line ample material for a three-volume novel of a not unfamiliar type:—"X. Y. Z.—Pray let your wife hear something of you." Here is a brief text of secret domestic sorrow. Our fancy can readily fill in the details that culminate in this touching appeal. A happy boyhood and girlhood, courtship, and all the pleasant joys and equally pleasant pains that make youth a bright spring season. Then marriage, bridal feasts, bridal wreaths, the bridal tour, and the honeymoon; the new home; and then the gradual revelation of the skeleton that lay hid in the closet. Domestic troubles, diminished love, quarrels, "incompatibilities," poverty—perhaps crime. Then separation and flight; and, last, the evidence of woman's clinging affection in every change of fortune—"let your wife hear something of you."

The other side of conjugal infelicity is seen in another advertisement; for husbands are not always the errant ones, or wives the victims:—"Minnie—Pray return to your disconsolate husband, and all will be well, but never until. He has every confidence in you; will do anything for you. He is extremely ill in bed. Will you not return to comfort him? do!" The wife in this case may be very wicked or very foolish—the latter for choice. She is doubtless very young; her husband not *so* young. He is very fond; she not *quite* so exactly affectionate—and there is again "incompatibility," but not much. There has been a "scene" over something or other of no particular consequence; she leaves the house vowing never, never to return, and takes refuge in a friend's dwelling, leaving her spouse disconsolate and ignorant of her whereabouts. Or they are both young—"Minnie" and her deserted husband—and, though married, lovers still. She has chosen to be revengeful, doubtless without cause; there has been a quarrel, and she hides herself away in a huff, waiting the confidently-expected invitation to return through the newspapers. In either case let us hope that "Minnie" was not obdurate.

Lovers' agonies indeed find frequent expression in the agony column. This is thrilling:—"CHARLIE—A terrible presentiment oppresses me that we shall never meet again. I forgive all but your silence. A letter awaits you at the old place, Long Acre." Charlie is really very much to blame. Why did he not write,

and so prevent such terrible apprehension? These young people, no doubt, have been "carrying on" without the knowledge, and possibly against the wishes, of the old people on both sides. Charlie has perhaps been hit hard over the Derby, and is temporarily under a cloud—or something or other has happened that caused him to forget for the moment his languishing *innamorata*. By-and-by, however, all will come right again, the lovers will meet, make up their quarrel, marry, and mayhap in a few years' time come to think that, after all, it would be a good thing if they *had* never met again.

What can this mean?—"Y. Z.—Can there be happiness without confidence? Alas! I see you doubt. It can never be received. It would be entire ruin. Can you sign it? In a month death or victory." As a mere abstract proposition the first query is interesting. "Have you sufficient confidence in me," asked one rather out-at-elbows Bohemian to another, "to lend me a sovereign?" "I have the confidence," was the reply, "but I haven't the sovereign." In this case the possession of confidence did not bring happiness either to the expected lender or the expectant receiver. The former was possibly not happy that he had not the money to lend, and the other was most certainly unhappy at not getting it. Circumstances, however, alter cases, and it is quite conceivable that under certain conditions happiness and confidence can only co-exist and not endure in partition. But what is "it" that can never be received, that involves "entire ruin," and that is asked to be signed? Is it a bill? As thus: "Y. Z." is wanted to sign a bill. He doubts, and suggests that the needful could be had from another. That can't be, pleads Y. Z.; it can never be received in time, and ruin must ensue. Have confidence and sign. Then in only a month victory; that is, the bill will be paid; or death, should it be unpaid. This doesn't quite hit off the thing, but perhaps it does. "It" certainly appears to be a "promise to pay" a month "after date." It is, however, a perplexing puzzle.

The following displays the possession by an individual of an amount of trusting confidence in the self-sacrificing spirit of London nineteenth-century human nature that is not a little surprising:—"Should this meet the eye of the gentleman who was riding in a brougham, with a grey horse, coachman wearing drab coat, and who knocked down an old woman at the corner of Goodge Street, Tottenham Court Road, on the morning of the 29th inst., he is requested to send his address to Mr. R—, chemist, Tottenham Court Road." Knocked down an old woman—send his address in order that compensation may be sought from him! Catch him at it!

But what is this which appeared in the *Standard* not so very long ago?—

"Isdvtvthlyjywgswfwfn."



It is a cipher, but not difficult to unravel to those who have had any experience of such things. The table below gives the solution. It consists of a square divided into 676 spaces, within each of which is a letter of the alphabet, arranged in such a way that each line of letters—whether taken across or vertically—contains exactly the whole alphabet. The key-word, of course, is only known to the advertiser and his cor-

members of secret societies in Ireland, to the writer's knowledge, in troubled times, and it is believed the authorities were unable to decipher announcements written with its aid.

The diagram will convey a more accurate idea of the *modus operandi*.

To make use of the cipher, any word or collection of letters agreed upon may be used as the key. The

1	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	3
	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	
	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	
	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	
	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	
	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	
	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	
	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	
	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	
	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	
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	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	
	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	
	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	
	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	
	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	
	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	
	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	
	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	
	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	
	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	
	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	
	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	
	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	
2	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	

A CIPHER-KEY.

respondent. In this instance it is "perfect," a word of seven letters. The first letter of the key-word is P. We look for the letter P in the upper horizontal column of the table (1-3), and run it down till we come to I, the first letter of the sentence to be deciphered. Opposite to that letter I in the vertical column (1-2) stands the letter T—the first letter of the first word of the sentence. And in this way, using each letter of the key-word to find the corresponding letter in the table, we proceed till the seven letters of the key-word "perfect" are exhausted. We then commence the word again, and proceed until we have got through all the letters in the cipher, and we find we have arrived at the solution, which is—"To-morrow the funds fall."

This method of cipher writing has been used by

word selected should be one of at least six letters, as it is just possible to decipher the writing when the key contains less than that number. To write with this cipher—Find the first letter of the first word of your message in the vertical column (1-2) and run along the horizontal line until you are under the first letter of the key-word in the first line (1-3), and write down the letter in the square thus reached. For instance suppose you want to write "sell," and that your key-word is "perfect"—find the letter S in the vertical column (1-2), and run along the horizontal line starting from that letter until you are under the first letter of your key-word in the first horizontal column (1-3), P, and you will find the letter H. Proceed in this way until you have written down the first three letters. The fourth letter being the same as the third it must



not be represented by the mere repetition of the letter C. You should take the letter in the square you will find by following out the horizontal line, beginning with L in the column (1—2) until you come under the fourth letter of your key-word, F. That letter is Q. You will now find that "sell" will stand as "hicq," and your correspondent can read it in the same way, with the aid of his table and his key-word, as explained above.

In the same paper the other day appeared this indignant dismissal by a lover of his faithless mistress;—"Dolly—I think it is time to put an end to all this foolery; it has been going on too long; therefore I shall feel thankful if you cease to take any more trouble on my account." There—poor Dolly has got her *congé*; but she should not have fooled the poor fellow to so painful a pitch of exasperation as to induce him to give vent to his wrath in print at a shilling a line.

"Would the lady who, wearing a seal-skin mantle and hat of the same material, was assisted by a gentleman in settling a dispute with an insolent cabman in Regent's Street yesterday, favour advertiser with a line, addressed to A. B. at the office of this paper, to say where a letter would reach her, as he is most eager for another interview." Advertisements of this character used to be plenty as blackberries in the autumn in

the agony column; but of late, we believe, the leading papers refuse to insert them, for obvious reasons.

But what mystery is here?—"Why are you silent? This suspense is killing me! How cruel and heartless you are! I will lose my wits if I don't see you or hear from you soon.—E." This is clearly the wail of yet another love-stricken deserted one—male or female. Indeed, if we could read aright most of these singular announcements, we might find much real suffering and many a sad scene of guilt or remorse. It is even possible that in some of them could be found a clue to many a dark tragedy, as yet undiscovered, in this huge metropolis where human misery, crime, and every possible abomination of guilt find an impenetrable lurking-place.

But there is endless material for speculation, aerial castle-building, romance-creating, and even far more serious exercise of the reflective and imaginative faculties, in the agony column. Our extracts, indeed, convey but a faint notion of the many pregnant commentaries on human life and human society to be found by diligent students of the announcements it contains. At all events, an exhaustive collection of them would furnish what may be called "stock in trade" sufficient to set up in business quite an unlimited number of novelists and story-tellers in general.

RICHARD PIGOTT.

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## DEAR MR. MORTON.

BY KATHARINE ROCHE.



OM'S widow is coming to tea this evening."

"My dear, don't speak of her in that way. Tom's widow! there is something ghastly in the very sound."

"You needn't be afraid, mother; she never shall be my widow."

"I thought you admired her, Tom," said Hilda.

"So I do, immensely; she's the jolliest little woman I know, but I mean to leave a different sort of widow."

"One whose appearance will be better adapted to weeds?"

"One who will show a little more feeling when I am gone," said Tom. "Mrs. Morton's husband can scarcely be a year dead, and yet she is the gayest and merriest of you all."

"Rose, just imagine Tom's ideal widow! A heart-broken creature, all crape and pocket-handkerchief, who will be for ever talking about her lost darling."

"My dear!" said my mother again.

"The mater thinks it unlucky to talk about my widow. How do you know that it is not I who am to be the bereaved one, bewailing the loss of my sainted

wife, and expecting sympathy and consolation from my sisters?"

"Well," said Hilda after a few minutes' reverie, "I admit it does surprise me to see Freda Morton, loving and warm-hearted as she certainly is, appearing to feel the loss of her husband so little."

"Perhaps she disliked him."

"Rose! disliked 'dear Mr. Morton'!"

"Oh, that is merely a little conventional way of speaking of him; she evidently considers it the correct phrase. It is quite compatible with indifference, if not dislike."

"I think she was fond of him," said Hilda. "She avoids speaking of him, as if it pained her to do so; sometimes even her voice seems to choke when she mentions him."

"And at other times she makes the most flippant remarks about him and his tastes and habits. She certainly is a puzzle to me."

"I am sorry you do not care for her, Tom; I often thought how pleasant it would be to have her as a sister-in-law."

"Your visions may be realised without victimising me."

"Do you mean Edmund?"