



By

WILFRED
WEMLEY.

“ WAS sitting upon my doorstep endeavouring to get dust out of my latch-key with the root of a geranium, when the man upon the beat turned his bull’s-eye upon me.

“ Fine night, sir,” said he.

“ It’s nothing of the sort,” said I ; “ it’s a detestable night, as cold as a foot-warmer, and colder.”

“ Ah,” said he as he fixed his lantern upon my key, “ you gents ain’t used to it, perhaps ; and stone ain’t particler warm to sit upon at any time. Got something in your key, ain’t you ?”

“ Do you suppose I would be trying to get it out with this walking stick if there were not ?” cried I testily.

“ No, I suppose not,” said he philosophically, “ but it’s bad, though. Gent down the road got something in his key the other night, and when I knocked the folks up, he found he’d come to the wrong house. It’s astonishing how they took on. You wouldn’t think it, would you ? but there’s scarce a night goes by as I don’t knock up some family or other. Always the same thing, too ; window open, back or front, kitchen or parlour, but window open. Why, last Sunday, the folks at twenty-two went to bed with the kitchen window right slap up ; and when I rung ’em out, what d’you think, the gentleman swore at me from the landing.

“ Can’t you see that there’s bars ?” says he. ‘ You must be a fool.’

“ ‘ Fool or not,’ says I, ‘ I’m doin’ me duty, and I don’t let go o’ this bell until you come down.’

“ Well, he did come down, and next day he wrote up to the station. That’s all the thanks I got.”

“ You’re a public martyr,” said I, whistling half a sonata into the key to dislodge the dust ; “ do they always treat you like that ?”

“ Well,” he replied, shooting his light up to my attics as though he hoped to see a burglar looking out of the window, “ not all of ’em ; sometimes I get a drop of whiskey. I’m a public servant, you see, and the other day, the Colonel over the road there give me half-a-crown for moving a drunken cook he’d got in the place.”

“ You moved a cook on !” said I, aghast. “ Why, every dead policeman must have turned in his grave ; I wonder you like to walk at night.”

He laughed in a sickly sort of way at the satire, and then went on with it.

“ Fact was,” he continued, “ the Colonel came to me and said,

“ ‘ My cook’s drunk, and I want her turned out of my ’all.’

“ And I says, ‘ It can’t be done, Colonel, not even for you. If she’s to be put out, some party inside that house must do it ; but you get her on the pavement, and me and my mates will look after her sharp enough.’”

“ And what then ?” I asked.

“ Why, he run her out himself ; but not

first time, though. It was a windy night, you must know, and just as he got her to the hall door, which was propped open, it went bang in his face, and he had to begin again. Then her dress split down the back, and he couldn't get a purchase on her—quite an amateur job altogether."



"IT'S ALL THE WAY YOU CATCH HOLD OF 'EM, COLONEL."

"And you moved her on when she was upon the pavement?"

"You've got it exactly; she was then under my jurisdiction, and the law permitted me to preserve the public peace. As I said to the Colonel after I'd done it, 'It's all the way you catch hold of 'em, Colonel,' and so it is."

"Well," said I, "if you could catch hold of the dust in this key, we might get into that dining-room, and find a decanter; I suppose you wouldn't mind a little whiskey."

He made no answer to this; but almost before the words were out of my mouth, he had opened the garden gate, and was at my side. Then unbuckling his great coat and taking the key as one about to perform a surgical operation, he turned the light

of his lantern upon it and in two minutes he had done what the root of a geranium would not do in twenty.

My next question concerned himself alone.

"Water?" I asked him; but he made such a wry face at the suggestion that I handed him the decanter, and when he had taken some in a mug, he thought he would stand upon the door-step again, fearing that an inspector might pass by.

"Tell me," I asked, as I gave him a cigarette, "what would happen if you were seen drinking in here?"

"Ah," said he, "that depends whether you asked the inspector to drink too. If you did, he wouldn't make a note of it—otherwise you'd be like to get degraded—or second time, the sack."

"And for smoking?"

"Fined half-a-crown."

"How long are you on this beat to-night?"

"I came on at ten, and I sha'n't go back to the station until six. Ten at night to six in the morning is the usual night spell; but when the weather's very cold, we sometimes get off at four."

"And what about day work?"

"Why, that's divided into two spells. The man who goes on at six in the morning comes

off at ten, but he's on again from two till six. The relief man works from ten till two, and again from six till ten. Then there's fixed-point duty either from five at night until one next morning, or from nine in the morning until five at night. We work alternate months night and day duty—and precious hard work it is."

"How about the pay?" said I.

"You begin with twenty-four shillings a week if married, and twenty-three shillings if single; but there's forty pounds of coal for you every week in

winter, and twenty pounds in summer. The single men live at the station, and that's comfortable enough so far as this division is concerned. There's two of us share a bedroom, and a cook on the premises prepares us a dinner, for which the men club together; but you've got to cook your own breakfast and tea, and you buy all your own food."

"And in your spare time?"

"There's a billiard-room in the station, and books; but I ain't much of a reader myself. Mostly, though, you're glad to lie down a spell, particlerly if you've been out all night. What's the good of 'The Pilgrim's Progress' to a man with his feet nipped by the snow; it ain't no good at all."

He was very decisive in this, so I gave him another cigarette, and turned the subject.

and he must pass the doctor. When I went up, I thought the gentleman was going to get inside me. Punch, bless yer 'art; he lay into me with his fist just the same as if I was a carpet, and then he made me jump off a table. After that I had to pass an examination in the first four rules of summing, and they made me read and write. Stiff examination it is too, if you ain't a scholar."

"Then I suppose you became a policeman at once?"

"Oh, no, it wasn't as easy as that. When I'd passed, and accepted the conditions to pay all my debts, and give my whole time to the police-service, I had to supply the names of my last two employers, and to get them to make a declaration that I'd served them faithfully. This form is sent to the local station for the inspector there to make inquiries, and if



"WHAT'S THE GOOD OF THE 'PILGRIM'S PROGRESS' TO A MAN WITH HIS FEET NIPPED BY THE SNOW!"

"Tell me," I asked, "how does a man get into the police-force?"

"Ah," said he, "that's a long business. When I was sworn, I wrote to 22, Whitehall Place, and they sent me a bundle of papers setting out the qualifications. You see, a man who wants to be in the police mustn't be more than twenty-seven years of age; he must stand clear 5 ft. 7 in., he mustn't have too much flesh,

folks speak well for you, you may sit down and wait until there is a vacancy. I waited three weeks, but some of them are kept a month or two before there's work ready for them."

"What sort of a kit did you get?" I inquired, interested in the business; but he rattled off the answer as one to whom the subject was clear.

"Two greatcoats, two dress tunics,

one cape, two pair of trousers, two pair of boots, two helmets, one armet, one whistle, one lantern guard, one belt, one truncheon and case"—and all this he said in a breath.

"And you like the work?"

walk then? No, sir, the instinct when to hit a man with your truncheon, and when to fall back on the frog's march, is as much a part of you as your nose. As I said to a chap playing the cornet outside the 'Princess' last night, 'I was born a



"I'D SOONER HAVE A MOUTHFUL OF COLD MUTTON SITTING ON A CHAIR, THAN A WHOLE YORKSHIRE PIE IN A COAL-HOLE."

"Oh, I like it well enough—but then a man's born a policeman or he ain't. It's true that they drilled us at the Wellington Barracks for three weeks before we were taken on, but what's the good of the Goose Step when you've got a 'drunk' on the floor, and three of you can't hold him. Is it on one leg that you want to

policeman, and you was born to be moved on, so horf you get."

"But about your beat—do you always work the same streets?"

"Generally for some months. I've got this road, and the two next with the cross turnings joining them—and I go just where I like. If there's anything sus-

picious, I may work one street for a couple of hours; but whether I begin on the right hand or the left at the start, that depends entirely on the sergeant in charge."

"Is it a dangerous beat?"

"Well, I don't know as it is. A few 'drunks' on Saturday, and occasionally a gent who wants some assistance. They're rum uns, too, are some 'drunks.' Last Saturday now, there was a man on his back in the High Street, just like an umbrella with the stick broke; and when I picked him up, he went like a lamb. I walked him near half a mile without his saying a word, when all of a sudden he stopped, and cried out, 'Constable, I've a present for you;' and with that he hit me a bang atween the eyes, and sent me down clean off my legs. I've got the mark here now."

"He wasn't let off with a fine, was he?"

"No, they give him six weeks without the option. And quite right too, or there wouldn't be many policemen for the work. If you was thinking of giving a purty, I'd say to you, 'Do what you like, but don't lay hands upon the police?' It costs money, and magistrates don't take fines easy when the force has been kicked. Otherwise, if a chap goes to the station in a gentlemanlike sort of way, we often let him out when he's sober, and there's an end of it."

"You don't charge him at all?"

"Not necessarily, if we don't know him, and he's gone quiet. It's in the discretion of the inspector."

"And you never took a burglar?"

"I can't say that I did—not the real thing. I had a man a year ago who was coming out of an empty house with a bundle of coats and boots as big as a hay-rick, and I nearly lost him too. What do you think he did? Why, he chucked the bundle at me saying, 'Alright, I'll go quiet,' and while I was trying to get the coats and things off my chest, he bolted up the road. It was lucky for me that

I'd blown my whistle, for he went straight round the corner into the arms of my mate."

At this point in the interesting dialogue, I had begun to shiver with the cold of the raw night; and he, I thought, being a public servant, would not be the better for any more strong drink. So I asked him the question that had been long upon my lips—and asked it timidly.

"Is it true," said I, "that every policeman is the friend of all the cooks in his neighbourhood?"

"Well," said he, "I'll tell you straight—every man expects to have a house or so where he's sure of a welcome."

"A very natural feeling," said I, "and I suppose the welcome is hearty sometimes."

"Depends on the way the family lives," said he; "but, bless you, there's not much in it. For my part, I'd sooner have a mouthful of cold mutton sitting on a chair, than a whole Yorkshire pie in a coal-hole. It's against your respect, if you've got any, to have to stoop to that sort of thing."

"And a man would have to stoop in a coal-hole," I suggested.

He roared with laughter at the sally.

"Yes," he cried, "I could put up with it three years ago, but now I find it best to promise to marry 'em—providing you haven't more than one in each division. What's it all come to? A bit of string on the pavement, and something cold at the end of it—and while you're opening the parcel, a sergeant on the top of you. No, give me a nice warm kitchen, and the cook able to introduce me."

"Well," said I, "that's praiseworthy—but don't you hear a step on the pavement? It sounds like one of your men."

"Blazes!" cried he, "it's my sergeant," and with that he cast a sidelong glance at the whiskey decanter; but seeing it empty, he was off like a shot. As he said to me on the following evening, he knew the time of day—but I never doubted it.