

IN THE FAMILY



BY

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HE oldest inhabitant of Claybury sat beneath the sign of the Cauliflower and gazed with affectionate, but dim, old eyes in the direction of the village street.

"No; Claybury men ain't never been much of ones for emigrating," he said, turning to the youthful traveller who was resting in the shade with a mug of ale and a cigarette. "They know they'd 'ave to go a long way afore they'd find a place as 'ud come up to this."

He finished the tablespoonful of beer in his mug and sat for so long with his head back and the inverted vessel on his face that the traveller, who at first thought it was the beginning of a conjuring trick, coloured furiously, and asked permission to refill it.

Now and then a Claybury man has gone to foreign parts, said the old man, drinking from the replenished mug, and placing it where the traveller could mark progress without undue strain; but they've, gen'rally speaking, come back and wished as they'd never gone.

The on'y man as I ever heard of that made his fortune by emigrating was Henery Walker's great-uncle, Josiah Walker by name, and he wasn't a Claybury man at all. He made his fortune out o' sheep in Australey, and he was so rich and well-to-do that he could never find time to answer the letters that Henery Walker used to send him when he was hard up.

Henery Walker used to hear of 'im through a relation of his up in London, and tell us all about 'im and his money up at this here Cauliflower public-house. And he used to sit and drink his beer and wonder who would 'ave the old man's money arter he was dead.

When the relation in London died Henery Walker left off hearing about his uncle, and he got so worried over thinking that the old man might die and leave his money to strangers that he got quite thin. He talked of emigrating to Australey 'imself, and then, acting on the advice of Bill Chambers—who said it was a cheaper thing to do—he wrote to his uncle instead, and, arter reminding 'im that 'e was an old man living in a strange country, he asked 'im to come to Claybury

and make his 'ome with 'is loving grand-nephew.

It was a good letter, because more than one gave 'im a hand with it, and there was little bits o' Scripture in it to make it more solemn-like. It was wrote on pink paper with pie-crust edges and put in a green envelope, and Bill Chambers said a man must 'ave a 'art of stone if that didn't touch it.

Four months arterwards Henery Walker got an answer to 'is letter from 'is great-uncle. It was a nice letter, and, arter thanking Henery Walker for all his kindness, 'is uncle said that he was getting an old man, and p'r'aps he should come and lay 'is bones in England arter all, and if he did 'e should certainly come and see his grand-nephew, Henery Walker.

Most of us thought Henery Walker's fortune was as good as made, but Bob Pretty, a nasty low, poaching chap that has done wot he could to give Claybury a bad name, turned up his nose at it.

"I'll believe he's coming 'ome when I see him," he ses. "It's my belief he went to Australey to get out o' your way, Henery."

"As it 'appened he went there afore I was born," ses Henery Walker, firing up.

"He knew your father," ses Bob Pretty, "and he didn't want to take no risks."

They 'ad words then, and arter that every time Bob Pretty met 'im he asked arter his great-uncle's 'ealth, and used to pretend to think 'e was living with 'im.

"You ought to get the old gentleman out a bit more, Henery," he would say; "it can't be good for 'im to be shut up in the 'ouse so much—especially your 'ouse."

Henery Walker used to get that riled he didn't know wot to do with 'imself, and as time went on, and he began to be afraid that 'is uncle never would come back to England, he used to get quite nasty if anybody on'y so much as used the word "uncle" in 'is company.

It was over six months since he 'ad had the letter from 'is uncle, and 'e was up here at the Cauliflower with some more of us one night, when Dicky Weed, the tailor, turns to Bob Pretty and he ses, "Who's the old gentleman that's staying with you, Bob?"

Bob Pretty puts down 'is beer very careful and turns round on 'im.

"Old gentleman?" he ses, very slow. "Wot are you talking about?"

"I mean the little old gentleman with white whiskers and a squeaky voice," ses Dicky Weed.

Vol. xxxiii.—8.

"You've been dreamin'," ses Bob, taking up 'is beer ag'in.

"I see 'im too, Bob," ses Bill Chambers.

"Ho, you did, did you?" ses Bob Pretty, putting down 'is mug with a bang. "Wot d'ye mean by coming spying round my place, eh? Wot d'ye mean by it?"

"Spying?" ses Bill Chambers, gaping at 'im with 'is mouth open; "I wasn't spying. Anyone 'ud think you 'ad done something you was ashamed of."

"You mind your business and I'll mind mine," ses Bob, very fierce.

"I was passing the 'ouse," ses Bill Chambers, looking round at us, "and I see an old man's face at the bedroom winder, and while I was wondering who 'e was a 'and come and drawed 'im away. I see 'im as plain as ever I see anything in my life, and the 'and, too. Big and dirty it was."

"And he's got a cough," ses Dicky Weed—"a churchyard cough—I 'eard it."

"It ain't much you don't hear, Dicky," ses Bob Pretty, turning on 'im; "the on'y thing you never did 'ear, and never will 'ear, is any good of yourself."

He kicked over a chair wot was in 'is way and went off in such a temper as we'd never seen 'im in afore, and, wot was more surprising still, but I know it's true, 'cos I drunk it up myself, he'd left over arf a pint o' beer in 'is mug."

"He's up to something," ses Sam Jones, staring arter him; "mark my words."

We couldn't make head nor tail out of it, but for some days arterward you'd ha' thought that Bob Pretty's 'ouse was a peep-show. Everybody stared at the winders as they went by, and the children played in front of the 'ouse and stared in all day long. Then the old gentleman was seen one day as bold as brass sitting at the winder, and it came to be known that it was a pore old tramp Bob Pretty 'ad met on the road and given a home to, and he didn't like 'is good-'artedness to be known for fear he should be made fun of.

Nobody believed that, o' course, and things got more puzzling than ever. Once or twice the old gentleman went out for a walk, but Bob Pretty or 'is missis was always with 'im, and if anybody tried to speak to him they always said 'e was deaf and took 'im off as fast as they could. Then one night up at the Cauliflower here Dicky Weed came rushing in with a bit o' news that took everybody's breath away.

"I've just come from the post-office," he ses, "and there's a letter for Bob Pretty's old gentleman! Wot d'ye think o' that?"

"If you could tell us wot's inside it you might 'ave something to brag about," ses Henery Walker.

"I don't want to see the inside," ses Dicky Weed; "the name on the outside was enough for me. I couldn't hardly believe my own eyes, but there it was: 'Mr. Josiah Walker,' as plain as the nose on your face."

O' course, we see it all then, and wondered why we hadn't thought of it afore; and we stood quiet listening to the things that Henery Walker said about a man that would go and steal another man's great-uncle from 'im. Three times Smith, the landlord, said, "*Hush!*" and the fourth time he put Henery Walker outside and told 'im to stay there till he 'ad lost his voice.

Henery Walker stayed outside five minutes, and then 'e come back in ag'in to ask for advice. His idea seemed to be that, as the old gentleman was deaf, Bob Pretty was passing 'isself off as Henery Walker, and the disgrace was a'most more than 'e could bear. He began to get excited ag'in, and Smith 'ad just said "*Hush!*" once more when we 'eard somebody whistling outside, and in come Bob Pretty.

He 'ad hardly got 'is face in at the door afore Henery Walker started on 'im, and Bob Pretty stood there, struck all of a heap,

and staring at 'im as though he couldn't believe his ears.

"'Ave you gone mad, Henery?" he ses, at last.

"Give me back my great-uncle," ses Henery Walker, at the top of 'is voice.

Bob Pretty shook his 'ead at him. "I haven't got your great-uncle, Henery," he ses, very gentle. "I know the name is the same, but wot of it? There's more than one Josiah Walker in the world. This one is no relation to you at all; he's a very respectable old gentleman."

"I'll go and ask 'im," ses Henery Walker, getting up, "and I'll tell 'im wot sort o' man you are, Bob Pretty."

"He's gone to bed now, Henery," ses Bob Pretty.

"I'll come in the fust thing to-morrow morning, then," ses Henery Walker.

"Not in my 'ouse, Henery," ses Bob Pretty; "not arter the things you've been sayin' about me. I'm a pore man, but I've got my pride. Besides, I tell you he ain't your uncle. He's a pore old man I'm giving a 'ome to, and I won't 'ave 'im worried."

"'Ow much does 'e pay you a week, Bob?" ses Bill Chambers.

Bob Pretty pretended not to hear 'im.

"Where did your wife get the money to buy that bonnet she 'ad on on Sunday?" ses Bill Chambers. "My wife ses it's the fust new bonnet she has 'ad since she was married."

"And where did the new winder curtains come from?" ses Peter Gubbins.

Bob Pretty drank up 'is beer and stood looking at them very thoughtful; then he opened the door and went out without saying a word.

"He's got your great-uncle a prisoner in his 'ouse, Henery," ses Bill Chambers; "it's easy for to see that the pore old gentle-



"GIVE ME BACK MY GREAT-UNCLE," SES HENERY WALKER.

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man is getting past things, and I shouldn't wonder if Bob Pretty don't make 'im leave all 'is money to 'im."

Henery Walker started raving ag'in, and for the next few days he tried his 'ardest to get a few words with 'is great-uncle, but Bob Pretty was too much for 'im. Everybody in Claybury said wot a shame it was, but it was all no good, and Henery Walker used to leave 'is work and stand outside Bob Pretty's for hours at a time in the 'opes of getting a word with the old man.

He got 'is chance at last, in quite a unexpected way. We was up 'ere at the Cauliflower one evening, and, as it 'appened, we was talking about Henery Walker's great-uncle, when the door opened, and who should walk in but the old gentleman 'imself. Everybody left off talking and stared at 'im, but he walked up to the bar and ordered a glass o' gin and beer as comfortable as you please.

Bill Chambers was the fust to get 'is presence of mind back, and he set off arter Henery Walker as fast as 'is legs could carry 'im, and in a winnerful short time, considering, he came back with Henery, both of 'em puffing and blowing their 'ardest.

"There — he — is!" ses Bill Chambers, pointing to the old gentleman.

Henery Walker gave one look, and then 'e slipped over to the old man and stood all of a tremble, smiling at 'im. "Good evening," he ses.

"Wot?" ses the old gentleman.

"Good evening!" ses Henery Walker ag'in.

"I'm a bit deaf," ses the old gentleman, putting his 'and to his ear.

"GOOD EVENING!" ses Henery Walker ag'in, shouting. "I'm your grand-nephew, Henery Walker!"

"Ho, are you?" ses the old gentleman, not at all surprised. "Bob Pretty was telling me all about you."

"I 'ope you didn't listen to 'im," ses Henery Walker, all of a tremble. "Bob- Pretty'd say anything except his prayers."

"He ses you're arter my money," ses the old gentleman, looking at 'im.

"He's a liar, then," ses Henery Walker; "he's arter it 'imself. And it ain't a respectable place for you to stay at. Anybody'll tell you wot a rascal Bob Pretty is. Why, he's a byword."

"Everybody is arter my money," ses the old gentleman, looking round.

"I 'ope you'll know me better afore you've done with me, uncle," ses Henery Walker, taking a seat alongside of 'im. "Will you 'ave another mug o' beer?"

"Gin and beer," ses the old gentleman, cocking his eye up very fierce at Smith, the



"'THERE—HE—IS!' SES BILL CHAMBERS."

landlord; "and mind the gin don't get out ag'in, same as it did in the last."

Smith asked 'im wot he meant, but 'is deafness come on ag'in. Henery Walker 'ad an extra dose o' gin put in, and arter he 'ad tasted it the old gentleman seemed to get more amiable-like, and 'im and Henery Walker sat by theirselves talking quite comfortable.

"Why not come and stay with me?" ses Henery Walker, at last. "You can do as you please and have the best of everything."

"Bob Pretty ses you're arter my money," ses the old gentleman, shaking his 'ead. "I couldn't trust you."

"He ses that to put you ag'in me," ses Henery Walker, pleading-like.

"Well, wot do you want me to come and live with you for, then?" ses old Mr. Walker.

"Because you're my great-uncle," ses Henery Walker, "and my 'ouse is the proper place for you. Blood is thicker than water."

"And you don't want my money?" ses the old man, looking at 'im very sharp.

"Certainly not," ses Henery Walker.

"And 'ow much 'ave I got to pay a week?" ses old Mr. Walker. "That's the question?"

"Pay?" ses Henry Walker, speaking afore he 'ad time to think. "Pay? Why, I don't want you to pay anything."

The old gentleman said as 'ow he'd think it over, and Henery started to talk to 'im about his father and an old aunt named Maria, but 'e stopped 'im sharp, and said he was sick and tired of the whole Walker family, and didn't want to 'ear their names ag'in as long as he lived. Henery Walker began to talk about Australey then, and asked 'im 'ow many sheep he'd got, and the words was 'ardly out of 'is mouth afore the old gentleman stood up and said he was arter his money ag'in.

Henery Walker at once gave 'im some more gin and beer, and arter he 'ad drunk it the old gentleman said that he'd go and live with 'im for a little while to see 'ow he liked it.

"But I sha'n't pay anything," he ses, very sharp; "mind that."

"I wouldn't take it if you offered it to me," ses Henery Walker. "You'll come straight 'ome with me to-night, won't you?"

Afore old Mr.

Walker could answer the door opened and in came Bob Pretty. He gave one look at Henery Walker and then he walked straight over to the old gentleman and put his 'and on his shoulder.

"I've been looking for you everywhere, Mr. Walker," he ses. "I couldn't think wot had 'appened to you."

"You needn't worry yourself, Bob," ses Henery Walker; "he is coming to live with me now."

"Don't you believe it," ses Bob Pretty, taking hold of old Mr. Walker by the arm; "he's my lodger, and he's coming with me."

He began to lead the old gentleman towards the door, but Henery Walker, wot was still sitting down, threw 'is arms round his legs and held 'im tight. Bob Pretty pulled one way and Henery Walker pulled the other, and both of 'em shouted to each other to leave go. The row they made was awful, but old Mr. Walker made more noise than the two of 'em put together.

"You leave go o' my lodger," ses Bob Pretty.

"You leave go o' my great-uncle—my dear great-uncle," ses Henery Walker, as the old gentleman called 'im a bad name and asked 'im whether he thought he was made of iron.



"YOU LEAVE GO O' MY LODGER,"
SES BOB PRETTY."

I believe they'd ha' been at it till closing-time, on'y Smith, the landlord, came running in from the back and told them to go outside. He 'ad to shout to make 'imself heard, and all four of 'em seemed to be trying which could make the most noise.

"He's my lodger," ses Bob Pretty, "and he can't go without giving me proper notice ; that's the lor—a week's notice."

They all shouted ag'in then, and at last the old gentleman told Henery Walker to give Bob Pretty ten shillings for the week's notice and ha' done with 'im. Henery Walker 'ad only got four shillings with 'im, but 'e borrowed the rest from Smith, and arter he 'ad told Bob Pretty wot he thought of 'im he took old Mr. Walker by the arm and led him 'ome a'most dancing for joy.

Mrs. Walker was nearly as pleased as wot 'e was, and the fuss they made of the old gentleman was sinful a'most. He 'ad to speak about it 'imself at last, and he told 'em plain that when 'e wanted arf-a-dozen sore-eyed children to be brought down in their night-gowns to kiss 'im while he was eating sausages, he'd say so.

Arter that Mrs. Walker was afraid that 'e might object when her and her 'usband gave up their bedroom to 'im ; but he didn't. He took it all as 'is right, and when Henery Walker, who was sleeping in the next room with three of 'is boys, fell out o' bed for the second time, he got up and rapped on the wall.

Bob Pretty came round the next morning with a tin box that belonged to the old man, and 'e was so perlite and nice to 'im that Henery Walker could see that he 'ad 'opes of getting 'im back ag'in. The box was carried upstairs and put under old Mr. Walker's bed, and 'e was so partikler about its being locked, and about nobody being about when 'e opened it, that Mrs. Walker went arf out of her mind with curiosity.

"I s'pose you've looked to see that Bob Pretty didn't take anything out of it?" ses Henery Walker.

"He didn't 'ave the chance," ses the old gentleman. "It's always kep' locked."

"It's a box that looks as though it might 'ave been made in Australey," ses Henery Walker, who was longing to talk about them parts.

"If you say another word about Australey to me," ses old Mr. Walker, firing up, "off I go. Mind that! You're arter my money, and if you're not careful you sha'n't 'ave a farthing of it."

That was the last time the word

"Australey" passed Henery Walker's lips, and even when 'e saw his great-uncle writing letters there he didn't say anything. And the old man was so suspicious of Mrs. Walker's curiosity that all the letters that was wrote to 'im he 'ad sent to Bob Pretty's. He used to call there pretty near every morning to see whether any 'ad come for 'im.

In three months Henery Walker 'adn't seen the colour of 'is money, and, wot was worse still, he took to giving Henery's things away. Mrs. Walker 'ad been complaining for some time of 'ow bad the hens 'ad been laying, and one morning at breakfast-time she told her 'usband that, besides missing eggs, two of 'er best hens 'ad been stolen in the night.

"They wasn't stolen," ses old Mr. Walker, putting down 'is teacup. "I took 'em round this morning and give 'em to Bob Pretty."

"Give 'em to Bob Pretty?" ses Henery Walker, arf choking. "Wot for?"

"'Cos he asked me for 'em," ses the old gentleman. "Wot are you looking like that for?"

Henery couldn't answer 'im, and the old gentleman, looking very fierce, got up from the table and told Mrs. Walker to give 'im his hat. Henery Walker clung to 'im with tears in his eyes a'most and begged 'im not to go, and arter a lot of talk old Mr. Walker said he'd look over it this time, but it mustn't occur ag'in.

Arter that 'e did as 'e liked with Henery Walker's things, and Henery dursen't say a word to 'im. Bob Pretty used to come up and flatter 'im and beg 'im to go back and lodge with 'im, and Henery was so afraid he'd go that he didn't say a word when old Mr. Walker used to give Bob Pretty things to make up for 'is disappointment. He 'eard on the quiet from Bill Chambers, who said that the old man 'ad told it to Bob Pretty as a dead secret, that 'e 'ad left 'im all his money, and he was ready to put up with anything.

The old man must ha' been living with Henery Walker for over eighteen months when one night he passed away in 'is sleep. Henery knew that his 'art was wrong, because he 'ad just paid Dr. Green 'is bill for saying that 'e couldn't do anything for 'im, but it was a surprise to 'im all the same. He blew his nose 'ard and Mrs. Walker kept rubbing 'er eyes with her apron while they talked in whispers and wondered 'ow much money they 'ad come in for.

In less than ten minutes the news was all over Claybury, and arf the people in the place hanging round in front of the 'ouse

waiting to hear 'ow much the Walkers 'ad come in for. Henery Walker pulled the blind on one side for a moment and shook his 'ead at them to go away. Some of them did go back a yard or two, and then they stood staring at Bob Pretty, wot come up as bold as brass and knocked at the door.

"Wot's this I 'ear?" he ses, when Henery Walker opened it. "You don't mean to tell me that the pore old gentleman has really gone? I told 'im wot would happen if 'e came to lodge with you."

"You be off," ses Henery Walker; "he hasn't left you anything."

"I know that," ses Bob Pretty, shaking his 'ead. "You're welcome to it, Henery, if there is anything. I never bore any malice to you for taking of 'im away from us. I could see you'd took a fancy to 'im from the fust. The way you pretended 'e was your great-uncle showed me that."

"Wot are you talking about?" ses Henery Walker. "He *was* my great-uncle!"

"Have it your own way, Henery," ses Bob Pretty; "on'y, if you asked me, I should say that he was my wife's grandfather."

"*Your wife's grandfather?*" ses Henery Walker, in a choking voice.

He stood staring at 'im, stupid-like, for a minute or two, but he couldn't get out another word. In a flash 'e saw 'ow he'd been done, and how Bob Pretty 'ad been deceiving 'im all along, and the idea that he 'ad arf ruined himself keeping Mrs. Pretty's grandfather for 'em pretty near sent 'im out of his mind.

"But how is it 'is name was Josiah Walker, same as Henery's great-uncle?" ses Bill Chambers, who 'ad been crowding round with the others. "Tell me that!"

"He 'ad a fancy for it," ses Bob Pretty, "and being a 'armless amusement we let him 'ave his own way. I told Henery Walker over and over ag'in that it wasn't his uncle, but he wouldn't believe me. I've got witnesses to it. Wot did you say, Henery?"

Henery Walker drew 'imself up as tall as he could and stared at him. Twice he opened 'is mouth to speak but couldn't, and then he made a odd sort o' choking noise in his throat, and slammed the door in Bob Pretty's face.



"HE SLAMMED THE DOOR IN BOB PRETTY'S FACE."