



By JOHN OXENHAM.

Author of "God's Prisoner," etc., etc.

MR. CHARLES CHERRITON was a gentleman of independent means, and—until he bought that cabinet—of unlimited leisure. But when once he possessed that cabinet—or the cabinet possessed him—it took up a considerable amount of his time.

For forty years Mr. Cherriton had been something in the City, and had gone in and out and done his many duties with the regularity of an American timepiece. Then, having laid by a certain sum during many years of modest living, he claimed his pension from the bank and retired with Mrs. Cherriton to the tranquil delights of suburbandom.

There one of his peculiar pleasures was to stroll about of a morning in slippers, with a pipe, reading his newspaper and watching his neighbours play havoc with their internal machinery by rushing frantically for their trains, with their little handbags in their hands, and the fag-ends of their breakfasts still in their throats, and their hastily-lighted cigars or cigarettes wasting fruitlessly in the wind of their going. Then Mr. Cherriton would saunter into the house and sit down opposite Mrs. Cherriton and enjoy his breakfast as he never had done during those forty

years in which he himself went to the City. Not that he had ever been in the habit of racing for his train in that fashion. He was far too methodical for that. But to thoroughly enjoy one's breakfast one must have a mind absolutely at peace with the world and free from care, and he is a lucky business man who has that nowadays.

As he sauntered down the road one morning he stopped to read once more a bill elevated on a board in his next-door neighbour's garden, which announced the sale of the furniture of the house, and, as he read, his neighbour came out hastily on his way to the City.

"Morning, Cherry!" he cried, jovially.

Mr. Cherriton was always "Cherry" to everyone, and always had been. The name so obviously fitted the cheerful little round red and white face, and the little round button of a nose. He was Cherry to the life, and nobody ever thought of calling him anything else.

"Morning, Cherry! You and Mrs. Cherry coming in to-day to look over things?" He was or had been something in or about Throgmorton Street, but had somehow made a mess of things, and was selling off his household goods preparatory to a fresh start. He was jovial in manner and irregular in his

habits, going down at any time of day and coming home at any hour of the night or morning.

"Say, old man! there's a thing you might do for me," he said, confidentially, pointing to one big line in the bill: "that buhl cabinet was my wife's father's. It's a real beauty—worth £40 if it's worth a penny. The auctioneer was in last night, just to get an idea of things, don't you know, and he said he'd rarely come across a handsomer piece. He said the last one he sold wasn't in half as good condition, and he got £35 for it. Some of the Jew dealers have got wind of this. They've been asking him about it, and you know how those fellows do—make their own price and get all the plunder. Now, it'd be a mighty neighbourly thing of you, Cherry, if you'd look in to-morrow when the sale's on, and just put a spoke in their wheels if they're up to any tricks."

"How do you mean?" asked Mr. Cherriton.

"Why, if you see they're trying to get it for £5 or so, just bid it up a bit. They'll not let it slip, never you fear. But if you should get left on it, why, I'll take it off your hands and sell it again, and if there's any loss, of course I'll make it good to you. I'd hate to see it go for less than £15 or £20."

"Well, maybe we'll look in during the day," said Mr. Cherriton, and went in to enjoy his breakfast.

"Jane," he said to his wife, "we'll go in next door during the day and just take a look at their things. Clemow says that cabinet named in the advertisement is worth £40."

"Really," said Mrs. Cherriton; "I shouldn't have thought they had anything worth £40. But we don't want a £40 cabinet, Charles."

"No, my dear,

we certainly don't, and we're not going to buy one. Clemow's afraid the Jews may get it at a break-up price, £5 or so. He was just asking me to bear a hand to-morrow, and poke them up if they're up to any tricks."

Mrs. Cherriton shook her head doubtfully. "If you don't take care you'll find you've bought it."

"Oh, I'll see to that all right. I feel a bit sorry for Clemow. He's a bright, smart fellow, but he's got left somehow."

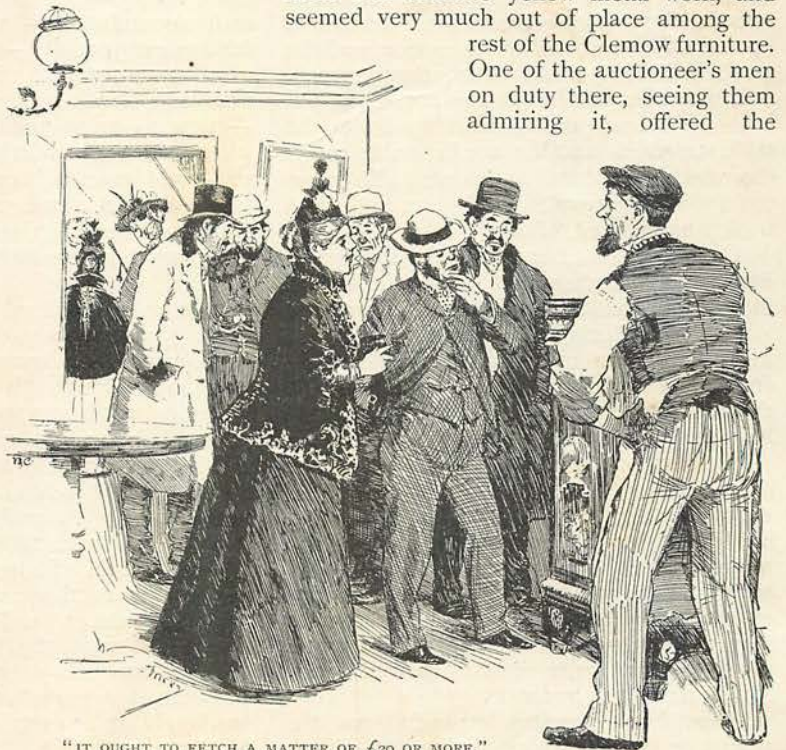
Mrs. Cherriton's wise head shook again. "I wish he would remember that decent people are generally asleep at three o'clock in the morning, and if he must drive home all the way from town, I wish he wouldn't quarrel with the cabman just outside our gate. I'm sure the neighbours thought it was you."

"He'd been to a smoker at the Holborn and missed his train, and the man thought he was drunk and wanted to overcharge him."

"I don't suppose the man was very far wrong," said Mrs. Cherriton.

During the day Mr. and Mrs. Cherriton went in next door, and they were surprised at the beauty of the buhl cabinet. It was a massive ebony affair, inlaid with red tortoiseshell and delicate yellow metal work, and seemed very much out of place among the rest of the Clemow furniture.

One of the auctioneer's men on duty there, seeing them admiring it, offered the



"IT OUGHT TO FETCH A MATTER OF £20 OR MORE."

remark that that was as handsome a piece as he'd seen for many a day, and it ought to fetch a matter of £20 or more. Several greasy individuals who were shuffling about sniffed disparagingly when they heard this, and Mr. Cherriton's instinct told him they were Jew dealers in search of plunder.

The sale was to commence at twelve o'clock precisely, and a quarter of an hour before that time found Mr. and Mrs. Cherriton seated in the room where the selling was to take place, waiting for it to begin, Mrs. Cherriton having come, of course, to see that Mr. Cherriton did not make a fool of himself. There were more people there than they had expected to find, and they mostly sat in gloomy silence, eyeing one another askance, and wondering how much any of the others would be likely to give for the particular article they themselves were after. The professional element, however, amused itself in its own way with many reminiscences of bygone auctions, and much pointed and personal chaff, and with spasmodic jokes whose humour was hidden from the world.

The time dragged slowly on, and the auctioneer did not come. The atmosphere of desecration, the general gloom, the jarring, incomprehensible jokes, all reminded Mr. Cherriton of an inquest he had once had to attend. The auctioneer's men went out to look up and down the road for his coming, and the gloom inside deepened each time they returned.

It was after one before the auctioneer put in an appearance and climbed up on to the table, on which another smaller table and a chair had been placed for his use. He began rapidly handing out catalogues, and then briskly announced "Lot 1."

The cabinet was Lot 99, but the auctioneer, having once made a start, proved himself a man of parts and rattled away at a great rate.

By two o'clock, however, both Mr. and Mrs. Cherriton were beginning to feel hungry, and at last Mr. Cherriton insisted on his wife slipping out to get something to eat, while he stayed to keep an eye on the sale.

The room was so full that she had some difficulty in getting out, and it was only the knowledge that her husband must be starving inside that made her force her way back to where he sat. The other people got somewhat annoyed at these comings and goings, and grumblingly asked if they knew whether they wanted to be there or not, and urged them to keep to the right if they must use that room as a promenade.

When Mr. Cherriton struggled out the auctioneer was vaunting the merits of Lot

No. 55—"Massive mahogany sideboard; wood alone worth £10; you don't see much work like that nowadays, gentlemen; anything over two pounds? Two pounds only bid for the massive," etc., etc.—and it seemed to Mr. Cherriton that he would have ample time to supply the void which was painfully apparent inside of him, and to get back long before Lot 99 was reached.

When he did get back, however, the auctioneer's foreman was shouting at the front door, "Lot 99 now selling, gentlemen. Eb'ny bull cabinet now selling," and when he saw Mr. Cherriton he said, "You're agoin' to miss that there cabinet unless you look sharp, sir. There's them inside as wants it and knows its value. Here y'are. Stand there. He can see you here all right.—Lot 99 now selling, gentlemen. Massive bull eb'ny cabinet now selling."

"Five pounds is all I am offered for this unique piece of furniture. Is there any advance on £5?" said the auctioneer, whom Cherriton could just see over the heads of the crowd. "Come, gentlemen, we wish to sell; but to mention £5—guineas, thank you! Five guineas—any advance on five guineas?—to mention such a sum as five guineas in connection with such a piece of furniture as this is simply—five-ten! five-ten! any advance on five pounds ten?—five-fifteen—six pounds. It's against you, sir!—six-ten, thank you!—worth twenty pounds of any man's money—six-fifteen—seven pounds—seven pounds—guineas—seven guineas—any advance on seven guineas?—and a half—seven-seventeen—six—eight pounds," and so on, bit by bit, till the cabinet stood at £12, and Cherry glowed with satisfaction at the way he had poked up those rascally dealers and benefited his friend Clemow.

He was half inclined to go on and run it up to £20, for it was evident that the value of the cabinet was known, and if it was worth a dealer's while to give £12 for it, it was probably worth anybody else's to do the same. Cherry got quite excited over it. He was not used to auctions, and this one had got into his head. There couldn't be much risk in it, anyhow—especially since Clemow had undertaken to relieve him of it if he got stuck. So he flung out an intrepid nod at the auctioneer, and the auctioneer made it guineas, and then, somewhat to Cherry's dismay, the hammer fell and the cabinet was his—"and absolutely given away at the price," said the auctioneer, soothingly, as he gave in his name and paid his deposit.

Mr. Cherriton lost interest in the sale after that, and wandered outside to wonder, somewhat tardily, if Clemow were to be relied upon to keep his promise.

When the sale was over he felt inclined to take a walk rather than meet Mrs. C. He knew exactly the kind of told-you-so look of gentle reproach with which she would meet him. And she did. She was very quiet during tea, and it was not until his first feeling of discomfort was beginning to wear off under the soothing influence of his second pipe, that she said:—

"Charles, do you know I'm very much afraid you and I were bidding against one another all the time? I couldn't see who it was. Where were you?"

"I was just inside the door, towards the right. It was at £5 when I got back. How did he get through so quick?"

"Some of the lots were struck out, whatever that means, and there were some numbers with nothing to them. Then I'm pretty sure it was you. How very silly!"

"Oh, never mind, my dear. Clemow will take it off our hands, and after all we were trying to do him a good turn."

But Mrs. Cherriton shook her head somewhat dubiously, as though she did not pin much faith to the promise of a man who drove home from town at three o'clock in the morning and roused the neighbours by wrangling with the cabman at somebody else's front gate.

The following day Mr. Cherriton had to pay the balance of the purchase-money and remove the cabinet, and as it would not fit in with the rest of the furniture in the Cherriton drawing-room, and as moreover it was likely—they sincerely hoped so, at all events—to be taken away at a moment's notice by Mr. Clemow, according to promise, they decided to send it to a local furniture dealer's to be stored.

But day after day passed, and no word

came from Clemow. Cherry wrote to his office address. The letter came back in due course, marked "Gone—no address."

In desperation Cherry consulted with the local furniture man.

"I'll manage it for you, Mr. Cherriton. I've a sale on myself at the 'Elms,' next week—you know, that big house corner of the Avenue. It'll sell there, you bet. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if you got £20 for it. It's a very fine piece indeed—a very fine piece. It's been much admired since I've had it here. I've got a first-rate man coming down from London to do the selling, and there'll be a lot of good-class people there."

Cherry went home in high spirits. If he could get £20 for the cabinet that would



"I'VE GOT A FIRST-RATE MAN COMING DOWN FROM LONDON."

be a turning of the tables on the faithless Clemow, and even on Mrs. Cherriton, who could not forget that it was Cherry himself who ran the price up, and got caught at the top, quite forgetting that if he had not been caught she herself must have been.

He decided to say nothing about the possibility of getting £20 for it, but simply mentioned that he had arranged with Newton to include it in the forthcoming sale at the "Elms."

"And I sincerely hope that'll be the last of it," said Mrs. Cherriton.

The sale at the "Elms" attracted a large crowd, and Cherry's hopes ran high. That £20 and the pleasure of announcing it were

his in anticipation before even the auctioneer climbed up on to his table.

The cabinet was described in large type, and when he came to it the auctioneer emphasized all that had been said, and added to it, and Cherry glowed with satisfaction and expectation.

"Now, gentlemen," said the auctioneer, "what shall we start at? That cabinet is worth every penny of £40. Shall we say twenty to start with? Twenty pounds—any advance on twenty? Oh, well, anything you like, only please make a start. Ten pounds—thank you, sir!—quarter of its value, as no one knows better than yourself; still, it's a start. Ten pounds, gentlemen, for this splendid piece of furniture—any advance on ten pounds?—guineas, thank you—ten—eleven pounds—in two places—guineas—thank you—eleven guineas I am offered—any advance on eleven guineas?—twelve pounds—it is against you, sir—shall I make it guineas?—yes? Thank you—twelve guineas—twelve guineas only offered for this unique cabinet—come, gentlemen—it was never made for several times that amount—well, one can't spend the whole day on it. Is there any advance on twelve guineas?—going for twelve guineas—thirteen—thirteen—thirteen—ten—fourteen—ten—fourteen pounds and ten shillings—fifteen—fifteen—fifteen—ten—"

Mr. Cherriton was bursting with excitement. That £20 was as good as in his pocket. These people evidently knew the

proper value of the cabinet—his cabinet—he was proud of his connection with it—it couldn't do any harm to help it on a bit.

"Sixteen pounds," said the auctioneer, in answer to his nod.

He was hot all over at his own temerity in taking the plunge—but he was not going to let that twenty pounds run away for the lack of a little assistance.

"Sixteen—ten—seventeen—seventeen—seventeen pounds only bid—any advance on seventeen pounds?—seventeen—ten, thank you!—seventeen—ten—eighteen—eighteen pounds—eighteen—ten—nineteen—nineteen—nineteen—nineteen—ten—twenty pounds! any advance on twenty pounds?—twenty pounds only bid for this most beautiful cabinet—any advance on twenty pounds?—going for twenty pounds—going if no advance on twenty pounds—gone! Name, sir, if you please?"

"Cherriton," said that gentleman, feebly, feeling as if he would like to lie down and die.

"Cherrystones?" asked the auctioneer, doubtfully; "perhaps you will be so good as to hand your card to the clerk, sir, and he will take the deposit."

Mr. Cherriton crept into his own house and was met by his hopeful wife. "Well, Charles, is the horrid thing sold?"

"Yes—it's sold!" he said, sinking dejectedly into a chair. "Give me a cup of tea, Jane."

"And it only fetched about £5," said his



"NAME, SIR, IF YOU PLEASE?"

wife, sympathizingly. "Well, never mind, dear, it's off your mind, anyhow, and I know it's been worrying you dreadfully, and if ever you catch that horrid Mr. Clemow, you must make him pay the difference."

"It sold for £20!" said Cherry, making a bolt of it.

"Oh, Charles!" and Mrs. Cherriton clasped her hands in delight. "And who bought it? And will he ever pay for it? Could anybody be so foolish as to actually pay £20 for it? Who was it?"

"It was me," said Cherry, grimly.

"Oh, Charles!" cried Mrs. Cherriton.

"Yes," said Cherry, anticipatively, "there are a great many fools in the world, but I'm about the biggest."

Mrs. Cherriton said nothing.

The cabinet returned to its retreat at Newton's.

Then there came another first-rate chance in Arling itself, and, by arrangement, Cherry had the cabinet inserted in the usual big type in the catalogue, and in the advertisements of the sale.

He attended it in person, and to his huge delight the bidding was brisk without any assistance from him, and at last the hammer fell at £15.

"Thank Heaven! it's gone at last," he announced in answer to his wife's apprehensive look as he came into the house. "Fifteen pounds, my dear, so we shall come out about clear after all; not quite, perhaps, but not far off, and we've had all the fun and excitement of the thing."

"Fun!" said Mrs. Cherriton. "It's not been my idea of fun at all. But I'm very thankful it's gone at last."

"So'm I," said Cherry. "Clever man, that auctioneer. He just fairly talked their heads off. But, you see, I was right after all, and the cabinet was well worth what I gave for it."

Next day, however, when he called round at the shop of the man who had the sale in hand, he was stupefied at being told:—

"I'm real sorry about that cabinet, Mr. Cherriton. You see, auctioneers have to do that kind of thing sometimes. They have to pretend they get bids, you see, and sometimes they get left."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"It was his own bid, don't you see, and so it's left on our hands. They do it for the good of the sale, and you can't say anything against it. Sometimes it comes off, sometimes it don't."

"I call it a swindle," said Cherry, with vehemence.

"Just one of the tricks of the trade," said the man.

"That's only another name for a swindle. Well, what's to be done?"

"He told me to tell you he'd got a good sale on down in West Kensington next week, and if you cared to send it there he was pretty sure he could get a matter of £20 for it. He says it's well worth forty."

"Yes, I've heard all that before," said Cherry. "I'm getting tired of hearing it. Well," after some sulky consideration, "you'd better send it, and tell him I want it sold."

He determined to go and see the last of the cabinet, and as he started:—

"Now, Charles, dear, let me beg of you—don't bid yourself, let somebody else have it."

"I won't open my mouth till I get back," said Cherry.

It was a very fine house, and the auctioneer was not the same one who had been out to Arling. This was the head of the firm, a man of eminence in his profession, who only handled the hammer on special occasions. He was sharp and dictatorial in his ways, and stood no nonsense. Cherry heard him knock off the various lots at what seemed to him very high prices, and his spirits rose.

He reached the cabinet at last, and described it in the usual eulogistic terms, which Cherry had all off by heart, and was thoroughly sick of hearing.

"Now, gentlemen, what shall we say? Start it somebody, please. I value this piece at £40. Shall we say twenty to begin with?" Cherry's spirits went up into his head. "There's rather a run on these buhl cabinets just now, and this is as handsome a one as I've come across for a long time. The last one we sold brought—how much was it, James?" to his clerk. "Ah, yes, £15, and it wasn't a patch on this one. Come, gentlemen, make a start! I can't sit here all day while you make up your minds you don't want any bargains. Fifteen for a start—very well—fifteen—fifteen—any advance on fifteen?—fifteen—ten—sixteen—sixteen—ten—seventeen—and a half—seventeen—ten—eighteen—eighteen—ten——" and so on, and so on, just as it was in the habit of ringing through Cherry's head in the wakeful early mornings, till he couldn't lie still for it all.

The cabinet was skilfully manipulated up to £25, and Cherry's eyes were fairly hanging out with satisfaction. Why didn't the man

knock it down and make sure of it? Twenty-five pounds! Why, there would be a clear ten pounds' profit after leaving a fair margin for all the annoyance and worry. Why couldn't he drop that hammer and end it?

The auctioneer looked inquiringly at him. The auctioneer simply couldn't help it, he seemed so excited and interested.

"He wants to know if he shall let it go at the price," said Cherry to himself. "Yes, man, yes, sell it and be d—done with it!" and he nodded vigorously in his excitement.

"Twenty-five-ten!" said the auctioneer, inflexibly, "any advance on twenty-five pounds ten?—for the last time—twenty-five pounds ten—going—going—gone!"

"Name, sir, if you please?" he said, pointing his hammer at Cherry and almost knocking him over by that simple action.

"I—I—I——" said the amazed Cherry.

"Your name, sir!—if—you—please. My clerk will take your deposit. Now, sir, come, you are retarding the sale."

"Damnation!" said Cherry, in lieu of bursting. "Cherriton."

"Cherrystones, Sam, it sounded like," said the auctioneer to his clerk. "Perhaps you will send up your card, sir. Next lot!"

"Why," said a stout lady standing by the door, just as Cherry made his miserable way out, "that's the same Mr. Cherrystones as bought a buhl cabinet at Arling the other day. I've seen him myself buy at least half-a-dozen. He must be in a big way, for they're not things that sell quick. Who is he?"

Cherry almost feared to go home. He felt much more inclined to wander away into the desert and bury himself in the mud and pass away and be forgotten.

"Killed by a buhl cabinet," would be the inscription on his tombstone, if ever they found his body, and he smiled grimly to himself to think how it would excite the wondering comment of future generations. And so, having come to himself, he went home and told Mrs. Cherriton that the cabinet was still unsold.

When he opened the daily paper next morning his horror-stricken eye fell on this paragraph, and he read it at least a dozen times in a dazed kind of way:—

"We all of us have young friends who collect postage-stamps—we have probably all been guilty of the offence, if it be one, in our youth. We most of us know—to our cost, maybe—people who collect autographs, or coins, or crests. We hear of individuals whose chief gratification in

life is the acquisition of fans—or pipes, or medals, or similar easily-stowed-away articles. But there is an eccentric person down Arling way, who possesses the eccentric name of Cherrystones, and whose little hobby is the collection of—buhl cabinets! The acquisition of these massive and costly articles of furniture is a positive monomania with the eccentric Cherrystones. He buys everyone that is offered, and is said to have now the finest and largest collection in this country, and he is still constantly adding to it. Is the eccentric Mr. Cherrystones simply a collector from motives of pleasure, we wonder, or is he an extremely far-sighted individual looking forward to the time—probably not so very far distant—when buhl cabinets will be in again, and good specimens will reach fancy prices, and Mr. Cherrystones' acumen will be rewarded?" (Then followed a learned dissertation on buhl cabinets.) "Meanwhile the prices of buhl cabinets are stiffening—the one at the Burton sale in West Kensington yesterday went for over £25—to Mr. Cherrystones—and if any one of our readers happens to be the possessor of an unusually fine specimen, we advise him to stick to it till the eccentric Mr. Cherrystones comes along with his bottomless purse in his hand and makes an adequate offer for it."

Cherry folded up the paper when he had thoroughly assimilated that hideous paragraph, and placed it inside his waistcoat and went up to the City, and called on his lawyer, who was a very old friend of his. He showed him the objectionable paragraph, and stated his intention of issuing a writ for libel against the paper for holding him up to scorn, ridicule, and contempt.

"But what's it all about?" asked his friend.

"It's all a lie," said Cherry.

"But have you been buying buhl cabinets?"

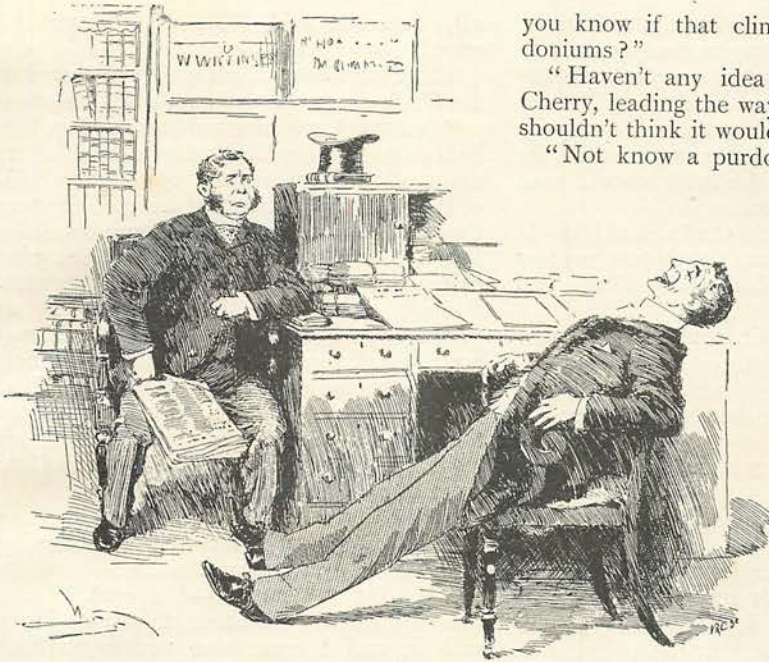
"Yes, I have"—and then he told the whole story from beginning to end, and, before he was through, his friend, who had humorous points about him, lay down flat in his chair to laugh, and felt like lying down on the hearth-rug.

"Well, have I a case?" asked Cherry, when his friend was in a condition to be spoken to again.

"Oh, yes, you've got any amount of a case, Cherry. But you can't possibly fight it. Your defence is infinitely funnier than the original libel."

"I don't see any fun in the original libel."

"The whole thing's too funny to speak of."



"HIS FRIEND LAY DOWN FLAT IN HIS CHAIR TO LAUGH."

My advice, old man, is to get rid of that collection of cabinets, and retire into private life."

The following day an elderly gentleman of mild and benevolent appearance called at Mr. Cherriton's house and asked to see Mr. Cherriton. Cherry walked into the drawing-room, where he was waiting.

"Mr. Cherrystones?" asked the visitor, blandly.

"Cherriton, sir, Cherriton," said Cherry, irritably.

"Ah! but, all the same, the gentleman who is collecting buhl cabinets. I have called, Mr. Cherryst—Cherriton, to ask if you will accord me the favour of a sight of those famous cabinets—"

"I do not collect cabinets, sir. You have been misinformed."

"I know, I know—I quite understand, Mr. Cherrysto—Cherriton. I know just how you feel. I, too, am a collector in a more humble sphere. My speciality is purdoniums. If at any time—"

"My dear sir, I tell you it is all a mistake. I have no buhl cabinets—at least—"

"At least?"

"None I can show you," said Cherry, getting angry at his persistence. "I ship them all to Central America for safety as soon as I buy them."

"Really! How very extraordinary! Do

you know if that climate is good for purdoniums?"

"Haven't any idea what they are," said Cherry, leading the way to the door; "but I shouldn't think it would be."

"Not know a purdonium!" said the old gentleman, and then Cherry closed the door.

Ten different visitors came that day to see the collection of buhl cabinets, and were all sent empty away. The servant who had been with them twenty-seven years threatened to leave if this kind of thing went on, for the callers, all being collectors of one thing or another, were extremely pertinacious, and

would not take "No" for an answer.

Next day Cherry wrote out a neat notice and pinned it under the knocker:—

"Mr. Cherriton is away from home. His collections are not on view."

Then he and Mrs. Cherriton went away to Richmond for the day, leaving old Margaret to repel the enemy. They returned in some trepidation as to what might have happened in their absence, and had to go round to the back before they could get in.

"Thought you were some more of them cranks," said Margaret; "that knocker's been going all day like a blacksmith's shop, and never once have I opened the door to any one of them. When they got tired they went away."

For several days visitors kept coming to ask if they could see the famous collection, and then Cherry hired a cart and went with it to the furniture shop where the cabinet was enjoying a well-earned rest, and had it loaded on to the cart.

There was murder in his eye.

"I've a sale on next week, Mr. Cherriton," said the furniture man, "out at Banwell. If you like to try that cabinet—"

"It's not a cabinet," snapped Cherry, "it's a nightmare, and I'm going to dispose of it myself."

He had it carried down to the bottom of his back garden, and then he got the wood-chopper.

He was eyeing the nightmare with malevolent regret, preparatory to planting the first blow, when a man came hastily down the path with Margaret at his heels.

Margaret was expostulating at the way he had slipped past her and gone through the house, "as if you was the landlord or a man in possession," said she.

"Yesh, my tear, yesh, thad's all ridght. Is dthis Misder Gherrystones? Shtop, my tear sir, shtop! Holy Moshesh! Whad you going to do?"

"I'm going to chop it in pieces and burn it with fire."

"Whad for?"

"Because—because there's a curse on it," said Cherry.

"I'd take id away, gurse an' all, if you bay the garrriage."

"No, you won't. I'm going to burn it."

"Shtop! shtop!" cried the visitor again, as Cherry selected his spot and raised his chopper. "Shtop! I gif you one pound, and bay the garrriage myself."

"I wouldn't let you have it for ten pounds," said Cherry, excitedly. "I tell you I'm going to smash it and burn it."

"I gif you eleven," moaned the other, wringing his hands as the chopper rose again. "Twelf!" he cried; "I gif you twelf and bay the garrriage, and dtake it ridght away, gurse an' all."

"Make it guineas!" said Cherry.

"Moshesh and Aaron! All right—guineas!"

"Let's see your money," said Cherry.

The visitor counted out twelve sovereigns and twelve shillings on to the top of the cabinet, and Cherry threw down the chopper.

"Take it away!" he said, with an "Off-with-his-head" tone and manner.

He laid out the twelve sovereigns and the twelve shillings in a row in front of his

wife, and she said, "Thank goodness, it's gone!"

Three days later a paragraph appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* to the following effect:—

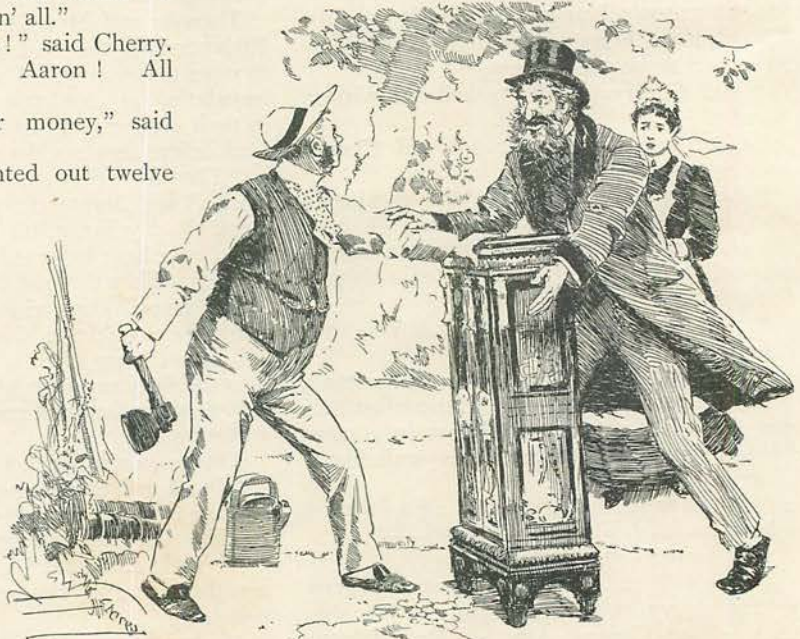
"Last week we informed our readers that buhl cabinets were likely soon to be in vogue again. Mr. Bernstein, the well-known dealer of Wardour Street, has just effected the purchase of an unusually fine specimen for Baron Louis de Beaumont. The price paid, we understand, was fifty guineas. Possibly our friend Mr. Cherrystones, to whom we referred in our previous article, was not so eccentric in his views on buhl cabinets as some people were inclined to think him. The cabinet in question, we believe, passed through Mr. Cherrystones' hands, and was regarded by that expert judge as one of the gems of his collection."

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Cherry.

A few days later he received the following from his late neighbour, Clemow:—

"MY DEAR CHERRY,—I offered to take that cabinet off your hands if you got stuck with it, and I have been waiting to hear from you on the subject. I understand you have now disposed of it at a good profit, and so will be glad if you will remit my half share of same to above address.—Yours truly, A. G. D. CLEMOW."

"Well, I *am* blowed!" said Cherry.



"MAKE IT GUINEAS!" SAID CHERRY.