

bridge of Schildwach gave a man of Salzburg threepence, with these words: 'It is not our Lord God, but only the priests, who occasion your misery.' And now, Barbara, I must conclude my letter; my heart is well-nigh breaking both with joy and melancholy. Come to me speedily. Thou canst not miss the way; any child will show thee the road we have hitherto taken and are still to take. Salute mother Catherine, and kiss my son for me. May the Lord preserve thee safe in body and in soul! Amen.

"Thy rejoicing, and, at the same time, sorrowing

"HANS."

### "SOMETHING WRONG WITH THE GAS!"

THERE are very few housekeepers, who, burning gas in their dwellings, are not startled at times with the conviction that something or other in connection with it is not as it should be. For our household gas, whatever may be the cause, indulges in strange vagaries in the course of a year. Now it sings like the kettle on the hob, now it is heard purring like the cat on the rug, and anon it blows a very small trumpet with a wheezy kind of note. At other times it takes to winking and blinking in a most disagreeable manner, as though the several burners were exchanging signals and concocting some mischief together. If it goes out gradually, like a candle burning down in the socket, we know what that means, though we don't like it. When this happens it is always on a Saturday night, and the reason is that the gas at the factory runs short, owing to the immense consumption that takes place in the Saturday night shops and markets, especially in winter, when days are foggy and lights are kindled early.

We had just got to sleep the other night, when we were woken up by a hasty tapping at the door. "Who's there? what's the matter?" we bawl out, only half aroused. "Oh, sir," responds the terrified damsel, "please sir, there's something wrong with the gas, I smell it so plain in my room." We leap out of bed, of course, seizing the night-light, and in another minute are travelling down-stairs, sufficiently alarmed to be wide awake. We sniff and sniff at every step, endeavouring yet fearing to detect the vile odour. Whew! there it is, sure enough!—the girl is right, there *is* something wrong with the gas. What and where can it be? As we descend, the odour grows almost overpowering, and we have only to follow the information of our nose to be well aware that the kitchen is the centre of the grievance. We are not so foolish as to carry the light into the kitchen; so blowing that out, we grope our way in spite of the nuisance, and, throwing open the windows and garden-door, get a brisk draught through the place. A few minutes suffice to expel the mass of the gas, and then rekindling the light we discover at once the cause of the alarm. The kitchen burner, though looped up against the low ceiling, is turned full on, and the gas has been escaping for the last three or four hours; but for the hateful yet admonitory odour, there would certainly have been a blow up. Jemima, who by this time has dressed herself and come down, declares positively that she turned off her gas before going to bed: and so doubtless she did, but in looping up the pipe she *must* have inadvertently turned it on again.

One evening lately, as we stood at the window, the young lady next door rushed suddenly out, and made a frantic rush at our knocker with a series of irregular and convulsive bangs. Seeing that something was amiss,

we opened the door before the performance was half finished. "Oh! Mr. —," gasps out the fair apparition, "there is something wrong with our gas, and mamma is ill, and the servant is out on messages, will you step in kindly and see what's the matter?" Such a request must be obeyed, and we of course return with the young lady. We smell the gas the moment we enter. The escape is from the hall light, which is turned on and off by a tap placed low down, to save the trouble of mounting to the lamp. Some one in reaching hat, stick, or umbrella from the clothes-pegs on the wall, has accidentally turned it on, and hence the fright of the ladies. The invalid mamma, who is in a low nervous state, can hardly be reassured when the mischief is repaired, and is hardly prevented from sending for a policeman, who, she has a vague idea, can alone set the matter perfectly right.

Not very long since, we formed one of a convivial party assembled to welcome the return of a young midshipman after an absence of several years. Dinner came off at half-past seven, and a most hospitable spread there was, under the brilliant light of a huge cut-glass gasalier. About sixteen of us had encircled the table, and were engaged in the deliberate discussion of the first course, flavoured at intervals by a gentle semi-witticism from friend Bolter, when I saw by an accidental glance at Miss Spinster, my *vis-à-vis*, that something was not quite as it should be; she had laid down her knife and fork and thrown back her head; the next moment other ladies were following her example, and I was wondering what it could mean, when a gush of that unmistakable odour from the gaspipe invaded the savour of the viands, and at that precise instant the hostess, with a face of terror, screamed out, "Oh dear! there's something wrong with the gas!" Bolter, who is up to everything, and whose presence of mind is marvellous, was on his legs in a moment, and with an "Allow me, madam," had left the room, and was plunging down towards the nether regions. We heard the squall of cook as he dashed into the kitchen, followed by the guttural tones of Biggins the greengrocer, who had been enlisted for the nonce to wait at table; and then, as we shrank in disgust from the increasing mal-odour, we could hear a lumbering in the cellar beneath us, and the solemn voice of Bolter, like that of the Ghost in "Hamlet," burrowing its way, as it were, beneath the ground. The situation grew tragic, the lights began to burn blue, and as we held our breath and our noses, suddenly went out, and we were left in total darkness, only that a few red rays gleamed from the fire at the end of the room. While the ladies, quitting their seats, huddled together in a corner, the gentlemen threw open the window-shutters and the windows, and as the air rushed in and the gas rushed out, we got a little welcome relief. Then Bolter came in with a candle—an awful figure he presented, with his hands, face, and shirt-front black as soot; but we hailed him as a benefactor, knowing that by turning off the gas at the meter, as he had done, he had saved us from a blow up. When the cause of the mischief came to be investigated, it was found that cook, in her haste, had crushed one of the service pipes in the cellar, causing a rent in it several inches in length. We need not dwell on the sequences of that unfortunate mishap, but it shows how the pipes should always be protected from such accidents.

Some time ago, when sleeping at the house of a friend in the city, we were shaken out of sleep and almost out of bed, shortly after five o'clock of a winter's morning, by a crash like that of a twelve-inch shell, which seemed to shatter everything around. Several



of the window-panes flew in fragments into the room, and of the rest not one remained unbroken. Venturing at length to the window to see what has happened, we can discern through the semi-darkness (for most of the street lamps have been extinguished by the shock) a crowd gathering around the front of the "Star and Banner," some forty paces down the street on the opposite side of the way. It is no use getting into bed again, with the cold air and fog for bed-fellows; so we dress; and in a few minutes mingle with the policemen, cabmen, and early birds, who make up the crowd. It is a scene of fearful violence that we have come to witness. The entire basement-front of the "Star and Banner" is blown out—plate-glass, wainscoting, ponderous shutters, pediment at top, and a good part of the brickwork at bottom—and all hurled, like a shot from a gun, clean across the wide road against the opposite houses. The dwellings on either side are in a condition about as bad, their shop-fronts and shutters being smashed to ruin, while of the tall houses opposite there is not one for forty yards in either direction that can show a whole pane of glass—the sashes of those fronting the shock presenting the appearance of having never been glazed at all. The roadway, meanwhile, for some distance, is covered with a species of glass gravel, every blown-out pane being crushed into minute particles. The worst part of the spectacle is poor "Boots," of the "Star," who has been sent flying across the road, with the rest of the wreck, and whom, as he lies stunned and bleeding, the policemen are preparing to carry on a stretcher to the hospital. The damage in this case amounted to several thousand pounds, and the cause of it all was the drunken recklessness of a gang of London "lambs." They were carousing at the bar up to twelve o'clock the night before, and would not go away when the landlord bade them. To get rid of them he turned off the gas; in revenge, the scamps, ere they groped their way out, turned it on again in half-a-dozen places. The bar, shut off from the house, became filled with gas in the course of the night, and when poor "Boots" came down with his candle in the morning, to light the fire and clean up, he must have been blown into the street before he was aware of his danger.

Escape of gas often happens from children playing with the jets. We have known a country servant, on her first introduction to a gas-lit bedroom, get rid of the light by blowing it out. Another turned the hand round, but turned it back again after the light was out. If the main pipe is turned off at night, there is always risk of some jet in the rooms being forgotten, and the gas escaping when the main is turned on next evening.

We have known various explosions, the source of which could never be traced. Once the contents of a whole conservatory, flowers, pots, plants, shrubs, and a miniature waterfall under the patronage of a plaster Psyche, all came tumbling into the street in the middle of the day, propelled by a blast of ignited gas, no one knew how or why. Some years ago, while rusticated in a western county, we were ourselves nearly knocked down by the contents of a barber's shop window: blocks, fronts, wigs, pomatum, soap, scent-bottles, together with a couple of wax figures, all came out with a sudden flash and bang, depositing themselves in the mud of the road, to the intense amazement and chagrin of the proprietor, who declared that he had not the slightest conception of the cause.

Perhaps there is no better illustration of the old maxim, "Familiarity breeds contempt," than is afforded by the frequency of domestic gas explosions, and the little importance the public attaches to them. If we

had been told when the use of gas in dwellings was first proposed, that there would be hundreds of explosions annually in London alone, and had believed what was told us, it is questionable whether housekeepers would not have risen in a body against it, and kept it outside their walls; but now, having grown up, hand to hand as it were with the combustible element, we take it for granted that it is completely under our control, and trust ourselves without misgivings to the chapter of accidents. When any serious case occurs in our immediate neighbourhood, we are apt to fortify ourselves with the determination to be on our guard, and for a time, perhaps, we don't go to bed until we have shut the gas out of the house; but we soon relax our vigilance and cease to think about it. It would be but common prudence, seeing the real danger that is run, to revise our gas fittings at regular intervals, without waiting for the warning odour that attends an escape, and which may come, as we have shown above, at the most inopportune moment. It is advisable also, on moving into a house where gas has been burned, to have the whole apparatus first examined and certified by a practical gasfitter. Out-going tenants are apt to quarrel with the landlord on the subject of piping they have been to the expense of laying; the landlord will not buy it of them, but will force them to make good any damage occasioned in removing it—so it happens that out of revenge they will often render the pipes useless by cutting or piercing them, to the annoyance and peril of the incoming tenant.

There is one fact noticeable in connection with gas, that shows there is something always wrong somewhere. We allude to the prodigious waste that takes place. Of all the gas made at the factory, and passing through the factory meter, very little over one-half is ultimately paid for by consumers. It is known that an enormous waste takes place from the large underground pipes, the junctions of which, on the English system, are rarely, if ever, perfectly gas-tight. The extent of loss from this source can only be guessed; but one needs only to pause a moment at any excavation in the streets where the gas mains are laid bare, to be convinced that it must be very large, looking to the hundreds of miles of large iron pipes laid down in London streets. Much is also lost by destructive fires, when the service pipes are melted, and quantities burned to waste before it can be turned off. Again, persons who do not burn by meter, but by contract, are apt to have their timepieces at fault, and keep their lights going long after they should be extinguished—though this offence is not so common as it was, the practice of burning by meter being now enforced in London, and common in other places. The last and most disgraceful source of loss that occurs to us is that arising from the tricks of dishonest consumers: every now and then some mean-souled knave will exercise his ingenuity by inserting a small pipe into the branch pipe from the main, *on the wrong side of the meter*, thus drawing off a half, or it may be more, of his supply before it enters the meter, so that it escapes being registered and set down in the quarterly account. We have known tradesmen in thriving circumstances, and apparently respectable, to be guilty of this roguery—and have known them, also, to come down with a swingeing solatium to the gas company to prevent their ingenuity from being made public.

In conclusion, let us remind our friends who burn gas, that since its introduction into dwellings, which dates about forty-five years back, the number of destructive fires in London, in proportion to the population, has more than doubled. This consideration



ought to be an inducement to constant watchfulness and precaution, and should urge us to instant investigation whenever the alarm is sounded of, "Something wrong with the gas!"

## THE EXPLORER'S CHRISTMAS IN AUSTRALIA.

BY T. BAINES, F.R.G.S.

It would be superfluous to inform the readers of the "Leisure Hour" that Christmas in the southern hemisphere is a season of warmth, of sunshine, and of open-air enjoyment. Of course, throughout all Christendom the occasion is the same. I have heard the magnificent hymn of the nativity sung in the churches of South Africa as it is at home, and I have heard also, in the island of Timor, two hundred Malay children mingling their voices with those of the Dutch colonists in the Angels' Song. But in the terrestrial festivities of the season in such regions the fireside enjoyments of England have no place. Friends and relatives interchange short visits to say a few words of kindly greeting, and picnic parties, in the lightest costume, escape from the heated town to spend the rest of the day in the coolest and shadiest groves.

My own reminiscences of Christmas-day recall many a wild scene from the stormy coasts of England to the populous towns and solitary deserts of Africa or Australia, in peace or war, in plenty or in starvation. Of these I have selected the Christmas of 1855 as the subject of my present sketch. In the early part of that year I had been appointed artist to an expedition to explore the north-west parts of Australia, and had proceeded to Sydney to join Mr. Augustus Charles Gregory, the commander. Two vessels were engaged: the barque *Monarch*, which took on board 50 horses and 150 or 200 sheep at Moreton Bay, and left us at the mouth of the Victoria River, and the *Tom Tough* schooner, which carried the sheep up the river, while Mr. Gregory crossed the country with the horses to the spot chosen as our main camp. Our little schooner took the ground in going up, and nearly became a wreck; but after twenty-seven days' beating about on the sandbanks was brought up to the main camp, and was there substantially, though only partially, repaired by the skill and industry of Captain Gourlay. A wharf was built alongside her of her iron pig ballast, and the remains of this will for many years to come indicate the locality of our camp.

It was in truth a pretty little spot, about eighty miles from the river mouth, beyond the rise and fall of the tide, although the water was brackish several miles higher, except in the rainy season, when the floods poured down as if to dispute the empire of the ocean. The mangroves which fringe the borders of the salt rivers, and which, in fact, perform an important part in the reclamation of land from the sea, by converting newly-formed shoals into soil fit to bear a higher class of vegetation, had not yet entirely ceased, but seemed mingling with and giving place to trees more proper to a fresh-water stream. Gum-trees of various kinds formed park-like groves upon the higher banks—some with that peculiar smooth white bark and graceful turn of limb, that caused our excellent doctor, the late J. R. Elsey, to think it so like a beautiful and well-turned arm, that he always experienced a desire to feel its pulse.

A small but clear and permanent spring, under a couple of gouty-stem trees—a kind of Baobab, named after our commander *Adansonia Gregorii*—supplied water enough for our own use. The surviving horses were driven further afield to graze and drink, and our

sheep, by the disaster of the river voyage, had been reduced to about forty. Rough poles with forks left on them, for the support of roof-trees or rafters, were cut as we cleared the ground, and a substantial store and dwelling-house was formed. The roof was stoutly thatched, and the walls were in a great measure formed of the bottoms, the sides, and wheels of our drays, most of the draught horses being unfortunately in the list of those that had perished. The oven was built under the large trees near the spring, and the forge under a similar group at a little distance. The dense foliage gave abundant shade, while the numerous white blossoms relieved its verdure; and the acid pulp of the succeeding fruit, boiled with sugar, formed a grateful medicine to the poor seamen when, from the destruction of their provisions, scurvy began to attack them. The young shoots of the wild vine also were gathered, and the negro who served as cook gave us them under the title of rhubarb pies.

The officers and men built houses, huts, or bowers, according to their taste, covering them with sheets of bark or thatch, or with cool, fresh leafy branches, gathered every two or three days. The three sides not protected by the river were surrounded by a mound and trench, within which it was a standing order that no native was to be admitted. For though, as my sketch shows, we had occasional friendly intercourse with them, adding to the snakes or rats, or other small animals they cooked for themselves, gifts of bread or fat pork from our own stores, they were exceedingly capricious, and Mr. Gregory wisely judged it best to reduce the chance of any quarrel with our men as much as possible.

Alligators and fish of various kinds abounded in the river; lizards up to six feet long, cranes and storks, pigeons, parrots, and cockatoos, black, white, and rose-coloured, abounded in the woods, all serving as welcome additions to our fare. On an adjoining tributary, which I visited when searching for horses, and which Mr. Gregory named after me "The Baines River," I found the trees so thickly crowded with perching ducks as to convey the idea of the densest possible foliage. The rainy season commenced in November, and consequently at Christmas the country was covered with its richest verdure.

The labours of an explorer are neither few nor light. Even though he bears the rank of a scientific officer, he must not only mingle in the various occupations of the men, but in cases of emergency must take upon himself the most laborious part, teaching the unskilful, encouraging the industrious, and shaming the indolent or desponding by his example. There are times when even the rest of the Sabbath is disturbed by accidents unknown at home. But this is rather the exception than the rule, and most travellers, so far as I have seen, keep it, not merely as a day of rest, but also set apart a portion of it for some form of religious observance.

It was remarked by Leichardt, as well as others, that it was a good thing to let the men look forward to holidays, say on the principal festivals of the Church, or on the birthday of the sovereign, and to make whatever addition is possible to the usual fare. I believe he celebrated the birthday of the King of Prussia by mixing a little fat in his damper. And I have given a handful of raisins to an honest, hardworking fellow who was desirous of doing nothing all day in memory of St. Patrick.

On Christmas-day, 1855, although our meal was frugal, it was still not scanty. The regulation plum-pudding graced our board; the remnant of our little