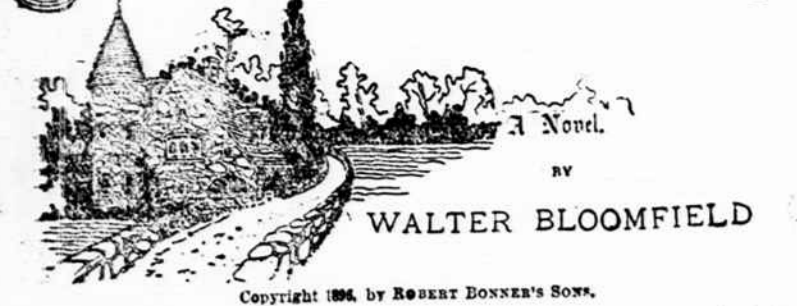


Holdenhurst Hall



WALTER BLOOMFIELD

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CHAPTER XXXI.

Continued.

"So I thought," said uncle Sam; "but"—breaking off suddenly and pursuing another line of thought—"marriage is the most discussed yet least understood of human institutions. Though women so greatly outnumber men, good wives are as scarce as good husbands. Of course nothing can counterbalance the want of good personal qualities in either husband or wife, but there can be no matrimonial paragon who is unfurnished with dollars. I remember in my salad days, soon after I settled in this country, Van Rensselaer and I once amused ourselves by making some investigations as to the condition of the marriage market."

"What do you mean, Sam?" asked aunt Gertrude, looking up from her work.

"About twenty years ago," continued my uncle, "there lived in Rivington street, New York, a matrimonial agent who used to advertise in the daily papers that he was prepared to supply wives of every desirable quality to gentlemen of unblemished honor and respectable means, while of course his refusal to ladies weary of single blessedness was equally great. To this professor's office Van Rensselaer and I one day betook ourselves, and each plunked down a fee of \$5, which the agent, with a grateful smile, made haste to appropriate."

"What induced you to be so foolish?" asked my aunt.

"Sport, my dear Gertrude, sport; nothing more, I assure you," said uncle Sam.

"Well, what sport could you find in giving your money to a cheat?"

"Very much; my \$5 were well invested. Admission to the agent's office alone was worth the fee. Ha! ha! I remember the place to this day," and uncle Sam reclined his head on the back of his chair and chuckled.

"What was the place like?" I inquired.

"It was a fairly well-furnished office," said uncle Sam. "The walls were covered with shelves, on which stood letter cases and japanned tin boxes. In a corner of the office, on an elevated platform, a bald-headed old fellow of about sixty, the proprietor of the place, sat at a desk plentifully spread with ledgers. Packets of letters, held together by rubber bands, and piles of photographs, lay about in confusion, while close to the door stood a large table strewn with writing materials and printed forms whereon clients might concisely state their qualifications and requirements."

"Did the agent show you any of the photographs?" asked Constance.

"Dozens of them. One lady in particular I remember he recommended as a very suitable wife for me, his recommendation being based chiefly on the fact that she was an English woman, who, having passed the first blush of her youth (a statement which nobody who glanced at her photograph would for a moment question), was free of the frivolities which usually accompany girlhood, and having been for some years a member of the London music-hall profession, she was an accomplished vocalist, who could divert my leisure with charming songs of an amusing character, many of them unknown to the best musicians. These qualities, the agent argued, more than compensated for the lady's lack of property."

"Was that all the old man told you about her?" I inquired.

"I think it was," replied uncle Sam. "But I wrote to her the next day under the assumed name of Holdenhurst, and a day or so afterwards received her reply, dated from the Bowery, couched in orthography which I had not previously met with. One of her statements—that her dear pa had been killed some years before by a fall from a scaffold in the Old Bailey—impressed me as a very pleasant way of describing an unpleasant fact."

"At this point I interrupted uncle Sam with my immoderate laughter, much to the surprise of aunt Gertrude and Constance, who, being imperfectly acquainted with London, perceived nothing to laugh at."

"How about Mr. Van Rensselaer?" asked Constance, when my paroxysm of laughter had subsided sufficiently for her voice to be heard. "Did the agent recommend any of his clients as a suitable wife for that ugly old Dutchman?"

"Gently, Connie, please. Martin Van Rensselaer was a capital fellow, as good a judge of a railroad as was the Great Commodore himself; and his advice was always sound in matters where he was not personally interested. Poor old Martin is now beyond the veil against which I have been bidding beating."

"Yes, I know," persisted Constance; "but you have not answered my question. Did the agent recommend a wife for your friend as he did for you? If so, I would like to hear about her."

"I'm afraid I can't oblige you in that, Con; but of course the agent made no recommendation. It was his business to do so to everybody who consulted him."

"Mr. Van Rensselaer didn't wish his

wife by any such means as that, I am sure," said aunt Gertrude.

"So am I," added uncle Sam. "Do you think, Sam, any marriage was ever brought about by such horrid methods?" my aunt inquired.

"Without doubt, abundance of them," replied uncle Sam, unhesitatingly. "Nothing that was ever said is more true than that humankind are mostly fools. And it is well that such is the case. Were it otherwise—then probably, though no one would starve, nobody would be able to live well. It is in the follies of his fellow-creatures that a sharp man finds his chances of aggrandizement. The matrimonial agent of Rivington street transgressed no law that I know of, or that I would enact were I invested with the attributes of Solon. He merely preyed upon fools—a perfectly legitimate process, sanctioned by the doctrine of the survival of the fittest. Pass me the cigar-case, Gertrude, dear."

"Were you and your friends fools when you visited that office in Rivington street?" inquired Connie, with a mischievous smile.

"Unquestionably we were," admitted Uncle Sam, with charming frankness, "and on many other occasions besides."

"Nothing can ever induce me to believe that it is right to use superior natural gifts or knowledge to entrap the inexperienced and unwary," said my aunt.

"Power is its own justification. That which a man can do he may do."

"That is not right," asserted aunt Gertrude boldly.

"Nothing is right, nor likely to be," agreed uncle Sam.

CHAPTER XXXII.

EUREKA.

What is time? The past has gone and cannot be recalled; the present is here, but imperfectly under our control; the future no man knows. Is there another subject which mankind regards in ways so numerous and diverse as time, the most generic and indefinite of terms? Only for the miserable wretch condemned to die on an appointed day do the fleeting hours expire with maddening rapidity; to the sufferer from any other form of torture they drag their course with most exasperating slowness. It is the privilege of the perfectly happy (if indeed there be any such) and the perfectly foolish (of whom everyone must surely know abundant examples) to disregard time.

The week which elapsed between our return to New York and my marriage to Constance seemed to me of supernaturally long duration. Love is impatient, and dressmakers and milliners monopolizing. Though living in the same house as my affianced wife, I now saw very little of her; she was nearly always engaged in being measured, or fitted, or experimented upon in some way by a contingent of French modistes, who came every day to the house and disorganized all its customary arrangements. Of the numerous dresses being prepared for my wife, though I had heard a good deal about them, I was not for the present permitted to see one; but I would have endured that privation without murmuring if the companionship of my dear Constance had been spared to me.

However, all things come to those who wait—unless death comes first and captures the waiters, in which case the latter escape from their wants. Man's comfort is not more dependent upon events than upon their convenient sequence, a course often difficult to secure.

At last the wedding morning came and I was almost happy. Ah, that word almost! Has the man yet lived of whom it can be truthfully said that he was quite happy? Long and varied experience makes me doubt it. With health, youth and strength; \$100,000 to my credit at Drexel's; and a beautiful girl, magnificently dowered, for my wife; for what more could I wish, you ask. Why, for my father's presence this day, and his approval of the life-long contract I was about to make. Somehow I could not keep from thinking of my father on this my wedding morning; and as I waited with uncle Sam and a small party of his friends in the Presbyterian Church on Fifth avenue, where the ceremony was to take place, the old church at Holdenhurst, its unlikeness to the sacred building wherein I was, my father's lonely life now that I had left him, and the probable effect of the recent tragedy upon him and my grandfather Wolsey, largely engaged my mind, despite all efforts I could make to disregard them: until the organ, pealing forth the soul-stirring strains of Mendelssohn's Wedding March, announced the arrival of the bridal party, and my dear Constance, almost completely hidden in white gossamer-like habiliments and attended by six maids, passed slowly up the church.

Of the events between that moment and the conclusion of the ceremony, when we all left the church, I for a long time retained only a confused and general recollection; but finally the particulars of the ceremony took shape in my mind, and now I can clearly recall the tall, commanding form and the clear, impressive voice

of the grand old Ulsterman, the officiating minister of the church; and my uneasy glances at uncle Sam (whom I had never seen in such a place before), and my fear lest he should create a diversion by some eccentric conduct.

Not until after the wedding party was assembled at breakfast did uncle Sam give rein to his usual pleasantry, and then to no very great extent. I remember he inquired, across the table, what my wife and I thought of the reverend gentleman's boots.

"Think of the reverend gentleman's boots!" I echoed in surprise. "Really I didn't observe them. Did you, Connie, dear?"

"Not very particularly," stammered my wife, ineffectually endeavoring to suppress a laugh.

"Why, how can you say that?" asked uncle Sam. "The reverend doctor wears the largest boots in New York, as many rash wagers know to their cost; and I observed you both intently contemplating their dimensions while he was exhorting you to be mindful of your new duties. I assure you I am very glad if I am mistaken, for there could be no better proof of your attention to his precepts."

There was a suppressed titter at this; but aunt Gertrude came to the rescue and protested against remarks of a personal nature generally, and particularly in the case of a gentleman highly esteemed by all who had the privilege of his acquaintance. Uncle Sam agreed, and declared that he had not only complimented the minister by asserting, in other words, that he had a larger understanding than any other man in New York.

Several of my uncle's friends tendered their congratulations in the time-honored platitudes which have served on innumerable similar occasions, after which uncle Sam rose, and glass in hand, invited all present to drink to the health, prosperity and long life of the bride and bridegroom. "For the happy pair opposite, who with all the courage of inexperience and in defiance of sages and satirists have given those hostages to Fortune which so many of us would like to redeem, I entertain a very special and real affection," said uncle Sam. "The bride is the only sister of my dear wife, and a daughter of my friend and benefactor. I have known her all her life, and I say of her, that no truer or more amiable lady can be found between Maine and California. She was my ward; and my duty to her has also been my pleasure from the day I became her guardian until you saw me surrender her to her husband—and with her all that I held in trust for her, with something over and above. The bridegroom is the only son of one, who, in my youthful days in England before I entertained a thought of setting foot on this continent, had promised to become my wife—a promise she was forced to break—and of my only brother, whom I do not expect to see again. It is for these reasons chiefly that I am prejudiced in favor of the bridegroom—for he is no genius, and I don't suppose his unaided efforts would ever have burdened him with much property; he is a trifle sentimental, and lacks resolution and fixity of purpose. Nevertheless he has proved himself a faithful friend and a pupil of at least average aptitude. It is with much pleasure and confidence that I ask you to join me in wishing health, prosperity and long life to Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Truman."

The toast was drunk with enthusiasm, everybody standing. In my brief reply I unreservedly admitted the accuracy of my uncle's estimate of my powers, and congratulated myself on having won not only his good will but a wife the equal of his own in fortune and every personal grace, notwithstanding the natural defects to which he had called attention; a retort which, obvious as it was, seemed to put the company into great good humor.

By this the hour was reached when it was necessary that my wife should prepare for our departure to Saratoga, and the party left the tables to inspect the wedding gifts, which were exhibited in a large room devoted exclusively to that purpose—a valuable collection of jewels and fancy articles, at which I could not look without the painful thought that nothing from Holdenhurst was among them.

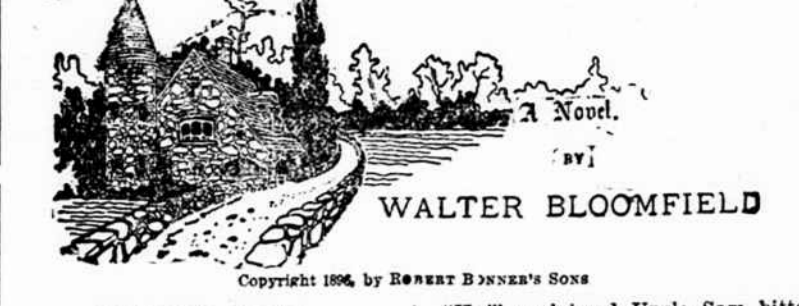
It wanted not more than half an hour of the time fixed for our departure when uncle Sam, with an air of mystery, beckoned me to follow him. I did so, wondering what his purpose could be. He led the way to his study, where aunt Gertrude and my wife awaited us, the latter now in a plain, tightly-fitting traveling dress, ready to depart. My uncle closed the door in a cautious way as soon as we had entered the room, which circumstance, as well as the serious looks of aunt Gertrude and my wife, filled me with alarm.

I was about to inquire the meaning of all this when uncle Sam spoke, my wife meanwhile observing me closely to note the effect of his words upon me. "A letter from England arrived for you this morning," he said, "and by good fortune it fell into my hands. I have kept it from you until now, for your benefit; for you would not have liked your marriage to have been again postponed. I don't know how it may prove, but I greatly fear that it contains bad news. However that may be, take courage for your wife's sake as well as your own. Remember my recent experience, and never let it be said that the old man was braver than the young one." And having spoken thus my uncle handed me a black-bordered letter bearing an English stamp and the postmark of Bury St. Edmund's.

To be continued.

The sweetest music to the egotist is when he blows his own horn.

Holdenhurst Hall



WALTER BLOOMFIELD

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CHAPTER XXXII.

Continued.

A deadly faintness came over me, and a sudden dimness of sight prevented me from properly examining the letter. Without doubt my dear father was dead, and my one remaining wish could never be realized upon earth. I handed the letter to my wife, who stood at my side, her little hand affectionately laid upon my shoulder, and motioned to her to read it, which she at once proceeded to do; and she had not read many words before our mutual fears vanished like a mist in presence of the morning sun.

Holdenhurst Hall.

Bury St. Edmund's, April 23, 18—.

My Dear Boy—Come home. I shall know no rest until I see you here, and learn from your own lips that you are willing to forgive my errors of judgment. Consideration of the strange circumstances in which those errors were made, if not of the fact that you are my son whose welfare I have never ceased to desire, should induce you to afford me this gratification.

The treasure for which you so industriously sought in face of so much discouragement has been accidentally discovered by your grandfather, minus only the three sequins you used to carry in your pocket; and not only this, but also a quantity of peculiar Turkish jewelry and precious stones of great value. Your grandfather and I have together carefully examined the whole of the vast treasure and have placed it in safe keeping, secure from further accident, to await your return; for I have determined that if you will but come home to me, the disposal of the treasure shall rest entirely with you. You deserve it, and I declare it to be yours, and yours only, subject to the one condition, of your coming to Holdenhurst to take possession of it.

Some time ago your grandfather proposed that the old gabled granary at the back of the stables should be pulled down, and a more commodious granary built in another place. I agreed to the proposal, and last week the work of demolition was begun. At the north end of the loft, separated by a wooden partition from where the winter fodder has usually been stored, the treasure was discovered. That it was stolen from the crypt and secreted in the granary by Adams there can be no doubt, for the Venetian coins were in the black chests which you found empty in the crypt one memorable night. Believing, as I then did, that the treasure had been quite otherwise abstracted, I ordered Adams to remove the empty chests from the crypt and use them for firewood, but instead of obeying me, he appears to have conveyed them to his hiding-place in the granary, and refilled them with the coins, which he must have taken from them not long before. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the man with the lamp whom you saw in the crypt was Adams, and that the occasion was his visit for removing therefrom the last of the coins. Amongst our discoveries in the granary is a leather bag containing six hundred pounds odd in modern English money, which I am unable to account for except by supposing that it represents the lifelong savings of the extraordinary miset who was my servant.

I address this letter to your uncle's house, not knowing certainly that it will find you there. Let me beg of you to take the first opportunity to acquaint my brother with the discovery of the sequins. If you can conveniently do so perhaps you had better show him this letter. And in any case be sure to impress upon him my very great regret for what transpired when he was last here, and what happiness it would be for me if that incident could be buried in oblivion. Your grandfather, who on the very day of his daughter's rash act received from her a long letter taking upon herself great part of the blame of her past life, and entire responsibility for her tragic death, has no longer any cause for contention with you, uncle, who, were he to come here, would be received with unrestrained friendship. Each member of our small family has been wronged by some other member; no one of us stands blameless—not even yourself. Shall recrimination end only with our lives? Is it presumptuous to hope for peace, or must existing divisions be permitted to widen with the lapse of years? O Ernest, my boy, if only you could bring about the termination of feuds for which all concerned are the worse, and no one the better, you would then have found a greater treasure than that which awaits you at Holdenhurst!

I have heard that you are about to be married to Miss Marsh, but the information reaches me very indirectly, and I am not assured of its truth. Should such happily be the case (for I have long perceived the disposition of your heart), I congratulate you, and wish you and your intended bride all possible human happiness.

Your affectionate father,

ROBERT TRUMAN.

"Ha!" exclaimed Uncle Sam bitterly, as my wife replaced the letter in my hands, "if only these two men had developed their present senses a year ago!"

"Oh, Sam, dear," cried aunt Gertrude, throwing her arms around her husband's neck, "what better news could you have than is contained in that letter?"

"None, now," uncle Sam answered quietly.

"You will respond to your brother's message in the spirit in which it is sent, will you not, dear?" pleaded aunt Gertrude, looking earnestly in her husband's eyes. "A vow of enmity made in anger is always better broken than observed, and this manly apology comes from your brother, father of Connie's husband. Remember, Sam, what I have forgiven, and if only to gratify me, send your brother a telegram which I will write."

My uncle remained silent for a few moments, his gaze fixed upon the floor. Presently he looked up and said, "Write what message you will to those two men, Gertrude, dear, and it shall be sent to them. My enmity is dead."

For this generous declaration aunt Gertrude rewarded uncle Sam with a kiss, my wife followed suit, and I wrung his hand in silent gratitude, almost overcome by the completeness of my good fortune.

The telegram indited by aunt Gertrude I have not seen, but its healing effect is my constant daily experience, contributing—I cannot estimate how largely—to the happiness of our reunited family. The telegram which my wife and I despatched to Holdenhurst was a long one, consisting of no fewer than a hundred words. It acquainted my father with our marriage, and promised that we would proceed to England after we had stayed at Saratoga one week, or a sixth part of the time which we had arranged to remain there.

"You are a tardy bridegroom, Ernest," said uncle Sam, consulting his watch, "and you have lost your train. It is now two o'clock, so you will no further delay your arrival at Saratoga by returning to the company for an hour"—a suggestion at once adopted, to the satisfaction of everybody except my wife's maid, who marvelled greatly at being bidden to remove her mistress's hat, which had not long before been adjusted with infinite care and precision.

The hour which the kindly fates had so unexpectedly placed at our disposal quickly passed, our assembled friends being infected with the great increase of good humor apparent in host and hostess, bride and bridegroom. Indeed, the universal jollity was so spontaneous and natural, and my satisfaction so unqualified, that I was astonished when the carriage which was to convey my wife and me to the depot was announced, so pleasantly and fleetly had the time sped.

Our departure took place amid a chorus of good wishes and a shower of rice, whereof a certain handful was thrown by uncle Sam with such unerring dexterity that the greater part of it found its way down the back of my collar, and tickled me horribly in the region of the vertebrae until after we reached Saratoga.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CONCLUSION.

It is the quality of happiness to present little or nothing to chronicle. My full, perfect, and complete contentment—in so far as such a desirable condition is ever permitted to a mortal—began with the events described in the last chapter, and continues to this day. Here, therefore, am I constrained to bring these memoirs to a close; and I do so with feelings at once a relief and regret—relief at the accomplishment of a task which, though at first undertaken with no more serious intent than the beguilement of a leisure hour, soon assumed proportions too large for such desultory treatment, and regret (incidental, alas, to all humanity!) at my departing youth, in recalling the incidents of which I have in some sort lived again.

Uncle Sam has built for himself a palatial house in London, at Queen's Gate, Hyde Park, where he spends about six months of each year, broken by frequent though brief visits to Suffolk, for he and his brother are now closer friends than at any former period of their lives. On such occasions he stays with my father, or with Constance and me—for the fine estate of Heronsmere, adjoining Holdenhurst, for centuries the home of the Jarvis family, is now mine, bankrupt tenants and derelict farms having forced Sir Thomas Jarvis to sell his ancestral hall and acres. I am afraid very little of the purchase-money remained for the use of the unfortunate baronet after he had cleared off the mortgages with which his property was encumbered, but with the remainder, whatever it was, he has betaken himself to South Africa to repair his shattered fortunes. Uncle Sam, who conducted my purchase of Heronsmere, has predicted that Sir Thomas will

be in England again in three years, "returned empty," like a merchant's packing case.

His resolution not to further engage in business has been strictly adhered to by uncle Sam, but his conduct is very erratic, and he crosses and recrosses the Atlantic at the most unexpected times, and has lost none of his old interest in government loans, treasury bills, and company promotion. Less rough in his allusions to subjects which many people regard with reverence—a change which some attribute to a more serious view of life induced by the tragedy with which he was so nearly concerned, and yet others to his natural urbanity being improved by a larger acquaintance with English society—uncle Sam is a great favorite, his company being at all times in great request, though hardly more so than that of the gentle lady his wife, whose amiability, large-hearted charity, and noble protection of the brilliant young imp known as "the cardinal" (to whom whatever of mischief in or around Holdenhurst is usually attributed), is the admiration of all who know her.

About three months after my marriage, my wife and I and aunt Gertrude and uncle Sam were enjoying a post-prandial stroll on the lawn at the rear of my house, speculating as to the day and hour of arrival at Liverpool of the Majestic, which steamer was to bring to England a party of our American friends en route for Heronsmere, when my father unexpectedly appeared upon the scene, flushed by rapid walking, and with an amused smile upon his face.

"Have you heard the news?" asked my father unceremoniously, without even waiting to greet the ladies present.

"Yes," said uncle Sam, although the inquiry was not particularly addressed to him. "I sent specially to Bury this afternoon for to-day's Times (I couldn't wait for it till to-morrow), and have read it through, advertisements not excepted. The English people have certainly gone mad, and the House of Commons differs only from other asylums for the insane in respect of the ravings of its members being reported. Do you allude to the second reading of the Bill for the Abolition of the Navy, or to the proposed national endowment of a Professorship of Anarchism at the University of Oxford?"

"No, no," said my father, "the Rev. Mr. Price is married."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed uncle Sam, turning on his heel.

"Who is the lady?" asked aunt Gertrude.

"Mrs. Butterwell."

The cigar I was smoking fell from my lips, and I indulged in a loud and prolonged laugh.

"Isn't Mrs. Price much older than her husband?" Constance inquired.

"Only forty-seven years," replied my father. "Major Armstrong has just told me all about it. Everybody is full of the news. Mr. Price is now one of the richest men in the country."

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed uncle Sam, "he deserves to be! Let no man trouble to revenge himself upon his enemies; leave them to their own devices, and they will themselves do all that is necessary."

After some harmless pleasantry at the expense of the Rev. Mr. Price and his bride, we leisurely re-entered the house.

"Come, dear," I whispered, as we crossed the threshold of our new home, "I have often heard that love in a cottage is a failure, and I can well appreciate love's difficulties in that state, but although you possessed not the worth of a dollar and I not the worth of a sequin, still I could be happy with you for my wife, labor for my portion, and one of those cottages in the lane for our home. In no circumstances could I have done what Price has done. It is too horrible even to contemplate."

"No, dear, I don't think you could," answered my faithful Connie; "but don't be too hard in your judgments. I have heard that money is a terrible temptation to those who possess none, and it has been your fate to acquire much of it in unusual ways. Only a few men marry millionaire girls; and fewer still, I fear, discover sequins in Suffolk."

(The End.)

Demand For Chicken Farms.

Inspired by the high prices of eggs, a widow, who has been struggling for years to maintain an establishment in the city and to keep her son in boarding school, has decided to go to chicken farming. "I believe all the world is seized with the same fancy," she asserts. "Such a time as I have had to find a suitable place. All of the real estate men told me the demand for chicken farms far exceeds the supply. However, I have hired a ten-acre place in a Jersey town, convenient to New York. I am going to take my boy from the boarding school, send him to the high school and have him help me between times. My ardor has been slightly cooled by the discovery that most persons engaged in the business on a small scale think they are having great success if they get a net profit of \$500 a year. I have been making half that in a month in the city, but I am not discouraged. I believe I can do better than \$500 a year, and in any case it will be some satisfaction to make other persons pay the high price I have been giving for eggs."—New York Press.

"My" exclaimed the good-natured housekeeper as she watched Wessy Wraggles devour the food, "you certainly do act as if you were hungry." "Act!" he cried, between bites. "Gee whizz, lady, don't you know de difference between actin' an' de real ting?"—Philadelphia Press.