

ON STRIKE,
OR
Where do the Girls come in?

BY
EDRIC GLENFIELD.

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Reginald Oofbourne was born with the proverbial silver spoon in his mouth. It is not necessary for the purpose of this work to say how his family acquired their wealth, but at the age of twenty-one he was approximately worth six million pounds sterling. He was deeply in love with a young lady who was born in a village adjoining his own property.

His love was no sudden infatuation. He had carried Edith Marton in his arms as a baby, he had worshipped the sweet child of twelve, and when she reached the age of eighteen he was madly in love with her. They were about to be married, when one afternoon Edith, who was riding on the banks of the Thames, near Slangbourne, with her great friend, Mrs. Croolbred, met with a serious and, as after events proved, a fatal accident. Her horse shyed at an amateur photographer, and she was thrown violently on the road. Assistance was at once obtained, and she was carried home insensible. Reginald Oofbourne was at once sent for, but only arrived in time to see his darling girl expire in his arms.

Before she died she was able only to say a few words, and her last request to her devoted lover was—"Promise me, Reggy, that you will devote your enormous wealth to benefit any of my sex who

require assistance throughout the world.” “I promise, darling,” replied the distracted lover, and Edith fell back dead.

I will draw a blank over the next few days. Our hero was struck down with an attack of brain fever, and his life was despaired of. He, however, was rescued when on the brink of the grave by the careful nursing of a few devoted friends. When he became convalescent he was a broken-hearted man, but by his promise his life and wealth were devoted to the benefit of the female sex throughout the world.

For some twenty years Reginald travelled about, totally unsettled, doing good to womankind whenever opportunity occurred. On one occasion he fed twenty thousand starving Chinese school-girls on Bath buns, which he imported from England by a special steamer for the occasion.

However, no opportunity had occurred for our hero to do any great thing to prove himself the champion of womankind until he took an idea into his head to visit Australia. He arrived in Sydney by the Orient steamer “Cuzco” in September, 1890, and, on landing, found the city in a state of ferment owing to the great maritime strike.

Though he had no sympathy with the unionists, he naturally came in contact with some of them, and could not help discussing the question, as nobody talked about anything else. Federation, the great hobby of the Australians, was forgotten for a time. Reginald could not see that the men who were on strike had any particular grievance, but he realised that the children were suffering on account of their fathers being out of work, and so he spent most of his time driving about in cabs loaded with fruit and food of all

descriptions, which he distributed to the children about Miller's Point and Sussex Street.

One day he happened to go into the establishment of Cordons, the great drapers, to buy a pair of gloves, and he was served by a young woman whom he noticed looked very pale and careworn. He got into conversation with her, in spite of the frowns of the shop-walker. In a short time he found out exactly how the respectable working girls, who were trying to earn an honest living in Sydney, are treated, and he found that they had three particular grievances, viz.:—

Too long hours,
Too little wages,
And not allowed chairs

—that is, not allowed to sit down when not serving customers.

He went further into the question, and he found out that Messrs. Cordon and Co. treated their girls well in comparison to another firm of the name of Paul Pry, who keep open at night, whereas Cordon's always close at six o'clock.

There are some mercantile establishments in Sydney which it is advisable for the public convenience should be kept open till a late hour, as their customers are principally men who are working all day, and can only get away after six o'clock to purchase any articles they may require. I allude to such a business as that of Ringbourne, of George Street, the bootmaker, whose business is done amongst seafaring men, and Ringbourne, by keeping open, is benefitting the public as well as himself, but the people who deal with the drapers' shops are mostly women, who can do their shopping in the afternoon, and have no need to do it at night.

It must be remembered that the class of young women I am alluding to, on account of the way in which they behave, have as much right to be treated with proper respect as the Governor's wife has. But are they treated as they ought to be? Yes, by the gentlemen who go in on business, but not by the shop-walkers and other men who are in authority over them.

It is generally known that barmaids are looked down upon on account of the position they hold. I myself should not wish to see my sister behind a bar; but if my sister was in Australia, and had to work for a living, I would sooner see her behind some of the bars in Sydney than in a situation in a firm of the description of Lazy, Bones and Co., Cordon, or Paul Pry. Of course, as everybody knows, there are bars *and* bars, barmaids and barmaids; but in the respectable hotels a girl who behaves herself is treated better and leads a better life and gets higher pay than the female employees in firms of the description of those I have mentioned.

I might refer to a hotel in Sydney which is well-known by the name of Nodoubts. In this hotel the young women are treated as well and with as much respect as it is possible to treat a woman who has to work for her livelihood, but at the same time the barmaids in Nodoubts would sooner be behind a counter in the employment of one of the leading drapers in Sydney, if they got proper pay and treatment, than behind any bar.

The Hero, having ascertained that the women in Sydney had some real grievances, at once set about to rectify them. He consulted with some friends in Sydney whose sympathy was on the side of the working girls, and they organised a system of campaign for the girls' strike. Every respectable girl earning her own living was called out on strike, and received a pound a week out of Reginald's

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