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WAR SHOPPING

ERMENTRUDE arrived from town with a multitude of parcels. "I went to the stores," she explained, "and got everything we wanted; it was no good trusting them to send them anything, so I put them all in a taxi and took them off, so here is everything. There is the note-paper and the soap and the dish cloths and—heaps of things, I can't remember half of them."

"And what about the go-cart?" I asked. (We are going to give Charlie a go-cart for his birthday.)

"Oh," said Ermentrude, "they promised faithfully to send it to the station to meet me in time to catch the 5.15, but, of course, it never came, although I waited about until the last moment."

"And the bill?"

"The bill! Oh, I suppose they will send that, won't they? I didn't pay anything, if that is what you mean."

Being a very methodical man, I immediately wrote off the following letter to the manager of the Circus Stores:

"DEAR SIR,—My wife purchased some things from you on the 12th inst. As she is not quite sure what the account came to, I should be glad if you would send me a detailed statement of the various items, on receipt of which I will forward you a cheque.—Yours truly,
"C. MANLEY."

"P.S.—The go-cart which my wife said you promised faithfully to send to Euston to meet her did not turn up.—C. M."

To this the Circus Stores Ltd. replied briefly:

"To account rendered....£4. 15s. 11d."

I wrote again, and asked if they would kindly oblige by sending a detailed ac-

count, so that I might know for what I was paying. I also asked again what had happened to the go-cart.

This elicited a reply, still brief, but a little fuller than the last. It ran thus:

"To account rendered....£4. 15s. 11d.

"A cheque will oblige."

I wrote a third time, asking for a detailed account and also concerning the fate of the go-cart. I had not long to wait for the reply. It ran as follows:

"DEAR SIR,—I beg to call your attention to the attached long-overdue account. I would respectfully call your attention to the fact that our terms are cash, and we are not able to give these long credits. It is only by strict attention to business methods that we are enabled to sell at the prices we do.—Yours faithfully,

"(HIEROGLYPHICS),
"For Circus Stores Ltd."

I turned over and found that "attached" was my old friend: "To account rendered, a cheque will oblige."

To this communication I replied:

"DEAR SIR,—As you seem so hurt about it, I send you herewith a cheque for £4. 15s. 11d. in payment of the attached account, although I do not know for what I am paying. I might add that if you had answered any one of my three former letters by sending the detailed account I asked for, you would have received this cheque earlier.

"I have also asked you three times what happened to the go-cart my wife ordered. Possibly it is included in this bill. I am too tired to ask you again.—Yours truly,

"C. MANLEY."

The Circus Stores replied most courteously to the above, namely:

"DEAR SIR,—Your esteemed note of 3rd to hand, with cheque enclosed, for which we are much obliged. We very much regret that we were unable to obtain the go-cart ordered. We tried a number of makers, but none of them could supply this article. The fact is that just at present they are positively not to be had.

"We await your further commands before again moving in the matter, and meanwhile we forward you attached the detailed statement you ask for. We very much regret that you have not received it before now.

"Trusting for the favour of your further esteemed commands.—Believe me, my dear sir, yours faithfully,

"(HIEROGLYPHICS),
"For Circus Stores Ltd."

I turned over and found my old friend, "To account rendered," but this time receipted. I turned over again and found: "To 1 box toilet soap.....1s. 9d."

This was, I supposed, what they called the detailed account. It was useless to worry further, so I gave up trying to find out what Ermentrude had bought, consoling myself with the idea that it all came out in war work somewhere.

A month or two later I received another communication from the Circus Stores. It ran as follows:

"To account rendered.....£2. 5s. 3d."

To this I replied:

"DEAR SIR,—I have already paid one bill of £4. 15s. 11d. without knowing what I was paying for, as my four letters asking for a detailed account failed to extract that document from you. I refuse to pay a second account of the details of which I am ignorant.—Yours truly,

"C. MANLEY."

To this I received a reply:

"DEAR SIR,—We much regret that you have not yet received the detailed account you ask for. We hasten to send it herewith.

"We beg to draw your attention to the attached long-overdue account, which is for go-cart and carriage.—Believe me, yours faithfully,

"(HIEROGLYPHICS),
"For Circus Stores Ltd."

I turned over, and there actually was the long-lost detailed account for £4. 15s. 11d. I turned over again, and found another old friend, "To account rendered, £2. 5s. 3d."; across this had been scribbled in pencil, "Go-cart and carriage." The word "carriage" puzzled me; if "conveyance" had been meant it surely would have figured as a separate item, and it would have stated to where and by what means it was conveyed.

After much thought I answered as follows:

"DEAR SIR,—We certainly ordered a go-cart, but not a go-carriage. With regard to the former, I would refer you to your former letter attached.—Yours truly,

"C. MANLEY."

To this I attached the letter from the stores to the effect that "Go-carts were positively not to be had." (We had, by the way, purchased one for Charlie elsewhere long since.)

The Circus Stores made the *amende honorable*. Their reply, which was too long to quote, contained such phrases as "accept apologies," "have now adjusted account," "trust will not militate against further valued orders." I still deal with the Circus Stores. I imagine that they have been patriotic enough to send all their best brains to the war.

C. H. S.

From *The Queen*, London.