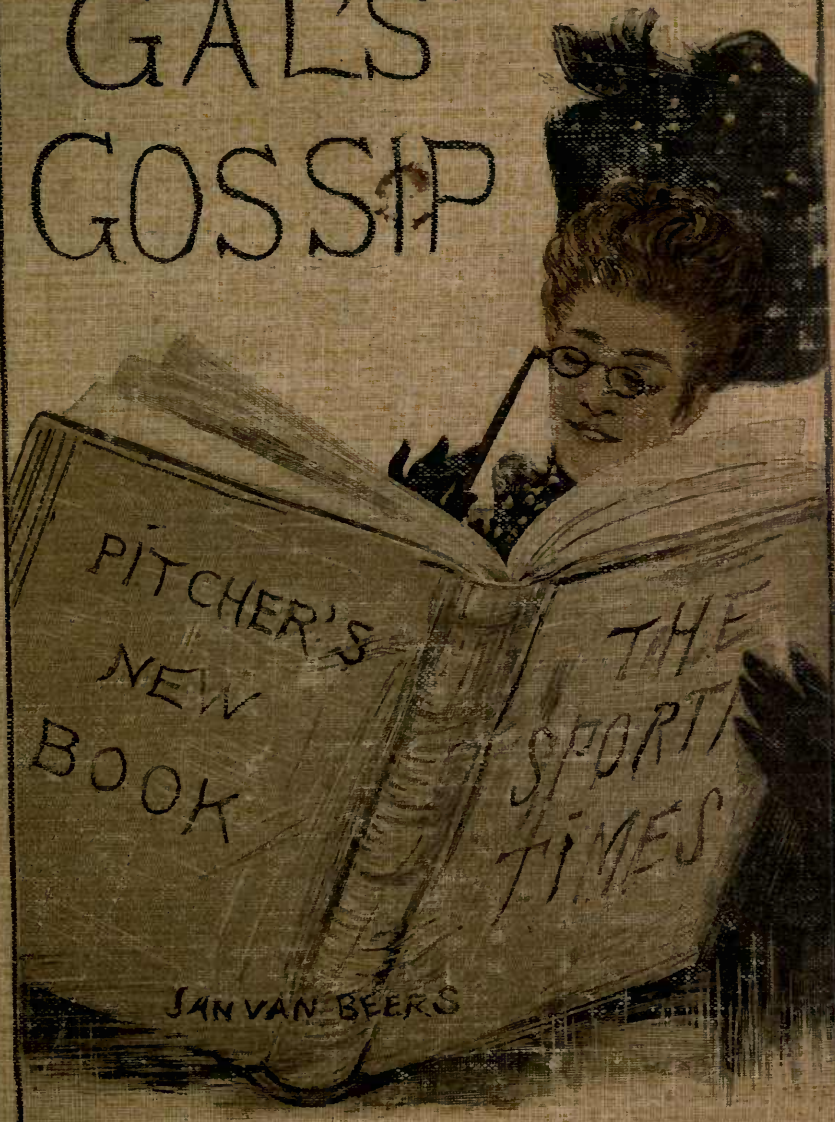
GAL'S GOSSIP



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GAL'S
GOSSIP

GAL'S GOSSIP

BY

ARTHUR M. BINSTEAD

Otherwise known as the Pink 'Un's "PITCHER"

LONDON

SANDS & COMPANY

MDCCCXCIX

GAL'S GOSSIP

"If I were you, I would certainly turn the mauve and pea-puce reseda, and re-trim it with heliotrope ribbons for evening wear. A jaunty hat of some bright colour would go well with it. Your bump of amativeness may be rendered more prominent by a few vigorous welts with an ordinary rolling-pin. The recipe for making lincrusta wall-decorations from cold chitterlings was given in No. 1227."—*The Lady's Letter in the Fashion Paper.*

BY THE WAY

Up to now, the hundreds—aye, thousands—of columns of epistolary literature which the ladies of the furbelow press have from time to time indited to "Dearest Maude," have elicited no response from that young lady. How wisely has somebody said that there is no day like Sunday for writing letters, nor Monday for——forgetting to post them! Still, rescued from the oblivion of various ridiculous reticules and writing-cases, here they are, and not the less welcome "Maude" hopes for arriving all together.

A. M. B.

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GAL'S GOSSIP

JANVIER

HALF MOON STREET,
NEW YEAR'S DAY.

BON JOUR, PETITE MADGE!

So many thanks, dearest, for your pretty New Year's card, and for the seasonable enquiries inscribed upon it. Do you know, dear, it has quite cheered me up. I am essentially a creature of the sunshine. I yearn for the warmth and fragrance of June, for the garden parties, and the water picnics and the races. Alas! this is *la morte saison;* the garden lies beneath the stodgy snow, the river is frozen over, whilst as for the racehorses, even the sporting papers do not mention them, but fill

up their columns instead with such items as this :—

"CODDAM

"RETURN OF THE LAMBETH CHAMPION.

"A well-deserved testimonial breakfast was tendered at the early hour of 8 A.M., on Wednesday morning last, by a few old friends and admirers, to Mr 'Blower' Bannister, to celebrate his re-joining society. The *déjeuner* took place at the Warders' Arms Coffee Tavern, Caledonian Road, N., each guest ordering what he liked, and paying for it. The *bénéficiaire*, well-known in Coddam circles, seemed in excellent spirits, and was nothing loth to tackle a 'bowl o' brown, two steps and a boiled nest 'un.' During the meal he spoke in very feeling terms of the Governor of Her Majesty's Prison opposite, and alluded to the little entertainment he would like to tender that gentleman were he able to do so. Mr Bannister will play, *on dit*, in the coming match for the championship to be held on Saturday next at the 'Shah and Stomach-Warmer,' Upper Ground Street, S.E. Motto : Fair Play, Civility, and Sparkling Ales."

As I say, dear, out-door sport is quite at a stand-still, and in these deplorable circumstances, and the concomitant absence of "exes," many a gentleman-jockey is—I was going to write "on the verge of starvation," but as that term would be singularly inapplicable to the case I am going to relate, I will say instead—"reduced to desperation."

It happened on Christmas Eve that Charlie was giving me supper at the Saveloy, where they have the most wonderful *chef* in town.

Though the regular diners call him, with unbecoming familiarity, "Joe," Charlie tells me he is a *cordon bleu*, and indeed sports the blue ribbon in his button-hole whenever he appears in his coat. Well, at a near-by table was seated "Bobbie" Armstrong, who used to train his own jumpers at Lewes, and on the opposite side of the room was a well-known beauty of the season before last from Redcliffe Gardens. Between these two a furious flirtation of shy looks and subtle glances had been going on all through supper, and the celebrated horseman only waited judiciously until the young lady from Redcliffe Gardens had paid her bill, to step across the room, and ask Charlie to give him an introduction to her. This Charlie was fortunately able to do. As it subsequently transpired that we were all driving the same way, "Bobbie" invited the young lady to share his hansom, and when her door was reached he joyfully fell in with her suggestion to step inside and take a "binder," at which he declared he felt as happy as a buck-rat in an old sink.

She showed him her pretty boudoir, with its Louis the XVth furniture all upholstered in amber satin so as not to "clash" with her corsets,

her Salon Japonais, all decorated—even to the lid of the coal-hod—with gold-braided, reversible-necked storks, and the steps leading to the attic-chamber, where the distressed gentlewoman, who acted as her *mère de théâtre*, morosed her days away. Then she took "Bobbie" into a delightful little Oriental apartment on the ground floor, in the centre of which stood a red-legged, brass-topped Benares table, on which was a huge earthenware pan, containing about half a hundred weight of the sticky mahogany-coloured dough, of which the festive season makes a leading article.

"Now, then," she said, "this is where you have to stir my Christmas pudding," and with that, she grabbed the long wooden spoon that was sticking out of the dough, and joggled it about. "Everybody who stirs it has to drop a piece of gold into it," she continued, handing him the spoon, and "Bobbie's" countenance fell like July quotations for coal. All the money he had got in his trousers (which included every other part of the known world) consisted of one half-sovereign, one sixpenny-bit and a half-penny; yet he well knew that to disobey the lady meant instant investiture in the order of the street—to even hesitate was to risk her displeasure, but to

comply meant a foodless, drinkless Christmas Day.

His heart well-nigh stopped beating, and his breath came in short, quick gulps as he dragged the half-jimmy—his little ewe-lamb!—out of his jeans, and chucked it, with an assumed air of recklessness, into the sickly compound.

"Aha!" he laughed with ill-simulated gaiety, as he gave the stuff a vicious stir; then, realising his penurious state, he said: "I s'pose you couldn't give me such a thing as a cigarette, could you, little woman?" Oh yes, she could; she had some upstairs, and would go and fetch them.

The instant she left the room, a strange, weird light shone in the horseman's eyes: the expression on his face was one composed of mad hope mixed with dauntless determination. It was a time for action, not for thought, and, with a muffled cry of joy, he bent over the big pan and buried his face in the pudding! Once!—twice!—thrice!—he withdrew it, his jaws chewing vigorously. Now and again his teeth closed on an unseen something that gave a metallic chink, whereupon he would hurriedly expectorate that "something" into his right palm, and again duck his features into the un-

boiled, indigestible mass, for all the world like a well-trained hound rooting for truffles.

Thanks to the time it took his delightful hostess to find the cigarettes, and thanks also to the number and the liberality of her previous pudding-stirrers, "Bobbie" found, when the sound of "Mrs Redcliffe's" returning footsteps on the stairs warned him that it was time to "cease firing," and clean up his features on the cardinal silk lining of the heavy tapestry *portière*, that he was no less than four pounds ten ahead of the game!

But, reverting to the smart people we saw at the Saveloy, who do you think came in late? Guess, dear? But, there, you never could, so I will tell you: Captain "Algy" Boundah, positively! He can't be a day less than fifty, and is as bald as a Radical election lie, but he's got *another* mash for all that. It's not a chorister this time, Madge—choristers are not *fin de siècle*—but a "living picture"; all the gilt-edged old chappies in the really best sets now run a "living picture." I had to be coldly polite to her, as Charlie and Algy are such very old chums; but though all her talk was about what "we" did "in Society," it was precious little that *she* knew of the habits of the monkeys in *that* tree!

Algy told Charlie that he'd made up his mind to have a go for a divorce against the woman he foolishly led to the altar of St George's, eleven years ago, but found she'd found out all about the "living picture," and thus spiked his battery.

Did you go to the ball at Covent Garden on Monday? Maggie Rutter did, and enjoyed it immensely. The character she chose to represent was Diane de Poicters, the "favourite" of Henry II., which was hardly an appropriate character, I thought, seeing that Maggie has been the "favourite" of three or four thousand people, rather than of one, during the last quarter of a century! Ethel Walters, who went as Bessie Wentworth in the pickaninny costume, scored a distinct success, although her "get-up" cost her next door to nothing. As she did not wish to go to great expense, we went over together on the morning of the ball to borrow the flannel things of a male cousin of hers, who has a bachelor flat in Pall Mall Place. He most good-naturedly handed them out at once, and then gazed out of the window at the kitchen-maids at the Marlborough while Ethel tried them on. She looked so nicely in them, although I had to give her an inch or two

in the back seam. Another striking "divided" costume was worn by Doris Bainbridge, who went as a *débardeuse*, a sort of Parisian female bargee, although her picture hat, smothered with humming-birds and pink crysanthemums, was a trifle out of character. Still she always carries herself well in male costume, which may be accounted for by the fact that she has almost always "got 'em on," being a perfectly indefatigable cyclist. Which reminds me that she was out on her bicycle in a fearfully out-of-the-way part of Derbyshire the other day when she noticed that, by a landslip, a great quantity of rock had fallen across the metals of the railway. She rode forward with all her might, hoping to reach the signalman's box in time to avert an accident; but ere she had covered a mile, she espied an on-coming train. Thinking of nothing but saving life, she literally tore off her red satin knickers and waved them before the approaching locomotive. The engine rocked from side to side for a moment, then fell over on the tender, rolled down an embankment, and buried itself in a ditch, killing the fireman and seriously injuring the stoker.

Included in the hosts of smart people I noticed were Mr "Roddy" Menzies, who came as "A

Fried Whiting," a recent bride from Lupus Street looking awfully well in amber and vermilion, the irrepressible "Tommy" Small as "An American Kitchener," whilst the blonde beauty from Upper Gloucester Place, looking very *chic* in emerald green and gold, with salmon *chiffon* bows, came on from the Empire. But quite the success of the night in the way of toilettes was a robin's-egg satin, with alternate rows of violet and silver pompoms round the corsage. I saw this on a tall girl, who wore tiger-lilies in her auburn hair. I fancy the back of the bodice was finished *à la Watteau*, but could hardly make out distinctly, as it was somewhat disarranged where Mr Neil Forsyth and a constable were grabbing it as they hurried its wearer outside.

So much time did I spend in jotting down all these things for your edification, Madge, that we were quite late for supper, and encountered a fearful crush in the feeding-room—so much so, indeed, that all I could get was a hot plate and an orange, and as I had previously had fourteen sherries and bitters to cultivate an appetite, this was not very satisfying. I was consoled, however, by meeting Harold Osborne, that tall, good-looking boy, who went out to Old Calabar

just about the time that I left Somerset Street. He had changed greatly, dear, and had, moreover, a "secret sorrow," all about which he insisted on telling me.

"It is nearly two years ago now," he began, "and we were camped many miles above Sapele, on the Benin River, in a place called Alligator Creek. To a little woman like yourself, who has not spent much time in the tropics, it is hard to convey an accurate idea of the awful climate out there. From sunrise to sunset the blistering heat bakes and shrivels up every living thing, and there's no getting away from it. Exertion of any kind is quite out of the question in that stifling, weakening, humid——"

"But your nights were cool?" I interrupted.

He took the well-meant hint, scarcely with the good grace of one who would become a successful *raconteur* in noisy or crowded places, and proceeded in a practised manner, that told me he had already unbosomed himself to somebody before I came along —

"Our nights *were* cool," said he; "and then it was that I reflected on the *motif*, as it were, of the second chapter of Genesis—'It is not good that man should be alone.' Now, amongst the friendly tribes that fattened on our flour in

consideration of leading our blue-jackets in circles in the surrounding dense forests, was the seventeen-year-old daughter of a great chief. They called her Ym, which means, in the native dialect, 'Can-take-as-much-cuddling-as-a-wooden-leg-'ll-stand poulticing." To see her was to love her, and I will admit that, in more than one sense, I saw a good deal of her."

Here he paused for a moment, as though to let the sunshine of the recollection disperse some of his present civilised gloom. Presently he continued—

"I went and saw her father, who might have picked up the art of trading in Middlesex Street itself; he was a real bit of hard shell! Finally I got her for two cows, a suit of light thread pyjamas that needed dry-docking, an old bezique-marker (now a valued ju-ju and much sacrificed over), the latchkey of a *maisonnette*, Pelham Crescent way, and a blue glass soda-water syphon. And she was mine—all mine!"

Again he pulled up and hugged himself. Then he went on—

"My joy for a year was more than I could find words to describe; at last it became obvious that my little Ym was about to become a mother. There was no concealment about it; in that land

of brilliant sunshine coming events threw large shadows before. In her own savage fashion she prayed that it might be a boy, in which case the child would grow up to be a great chief, as her father was. Out there, a woman who has given birth to a son feels her dignity considerably, nor does her male partner consider her overbearing if she weighs in with twins, so long as they are of the right sex. Girl babies, on the other hand, have an odd knack of disappearing suddenly."

Here he gave a deep sigh, and I felt that the worst was coming.

"When little Ym's affair became imminent, she disappeared mysteriously, as a duck that wishes to lay vanishes into a bed of rhubarb, and many days went by before I encountered a warrior of her tribe, and learned that the interesting event was over. I feared somehow to ask him about the sex of the child, but when I did, the redskin rolled up his eyes and put moist clay upon his head. In a frenzy of apprehension I started for the savage encampment. Can you imagine for one moment the sight that met my gaze?"

"Not by a sight," said I.

"My little daughter — my first born — was roasting on a spit, and little Ym was basting it!"

Shocking, dear, was it not? And now to

answer your many queries. The dull neck pain which you "find it so hard to describe" tells me very plainly that you did not take to your flannelettes at the time that I advised you to. It is sheer waste of time for me to give advice if you do not act upon it. Remember, Madge, I am older than you, and — *seniores priores*, as the ploughed young 'un from Oxford said, when his irate parent told him to go to Hades. You had better try the following :—

> Take a pound and a half of unsalted lard, put it in a small saucepan, and let it gently simmer. Add three or four good Spanish olives—you can drop some into your reticule first time you are in the Glasshouse Street Bodega—some nutmeg, two tablespoonfuls of the liquor out of a piccalilli bottle, a gill of brown sherry, two teaspoonfuls of Nepaul pepper, a plate of grated Parmesan cheese, half a pint of rum, and a gill of salad dressing. Flavour to taste, and serve hot.

Until you told me that it was so, I was not aware that the bath-rooms of the flats in Ridgemount Gardens were overlooked by the back windows of the houses in Gower Street, but your cousin Belle should certainly provide her apartment with a curtain. Her contention that it does not matter, as the rude young fellows at

the opposite windows are "only medical students," is very flimsy.

As regards the other matter, much as I dislike doing it, I cannot help saying that you must place no reliance whatever in your father. The young person you met him with is no more your cousin than the man in the moon is; but she lives in Woronzow Road, and if he doesn't buy you the set of furs that you want, drop me a line, and I'll write you out a list of the latest names she has been going under. The little *coiffeur* from South Audley Street has just come round to do my hair, so, for the present, dear, believe me,—Ever your loving cousin,

MAUDE.

FEVRIER

THE FLAT,
HALF MOON STREET.

MY DARLING MADGE,—

Isn't this weather quite too awful for words? I fancy I can hear you reply "Oh, jigger it!" as a sweet girl friend of mine, who is too lady-like to swear, and yet felt too wicked to let it alone, remarked on Wednesday afternoon, when she stepped on a loose paving-stone outside the Blue Posts, and jerked about three pints of rain-water up her pink silk stockings. And how you can endure it in Hampshire I can't think, though, as you say, there's some rough fun to be got out of putting clean blotting-paper in the bachelors' bedrooms over night, and reading what they've been writing to their best girls in town by the aid of a looking-glass in the morning.

Charlie Culpepper, the celebrated cattle-painter,

of whom I think I have told you, dropped in on me last evening, and insisted on taking me out to dinner. We strolled as far as Piccadilly Circus, uncertain where to dine. A long series of dinners at the most fashionable restaurants had worn him out, both physically and financially, he said.

"A fig for fashion and dalliance with many dishes!" cried he, "let us eat at a place where it is not considered singular, or even vulgar, to enjoy one's food."

"And where may that be?" I asked, a little nervously I may confess.

The hoarse voice of a man in a shabby suit of tweed and a broken billycock hissed in our ears as he brushed past: "Harris's, the sausage shop!"

So strange and sudden was this reply that it momentarily startled us both.

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated Culpepper, "it's Joskin—Joskin who came to grief in the Ninety-Sixth!" and without another word we went after him.

"Ah, Charlie! ah, Maude! I didn't think you'd have recognised me. I must pull this old bowler further over my eyes in future, or it'll be Katie-bar-the-door for Augustus Joskin!" he said when we caught him up and laid friendly hands on him.

Odd as we thought his words, we did not press him for an explanation there and then, but, deeming the excellent Sausageries too far, bore him, not unwillingly, across the busy roadway, through the asphalted courtyard, and into the grand salon of the Café Monico.

I had not set eyes on the place in ten long years, and still all seemed the same. The pier-glasses reaching to the ceiling, with the film of a humid evening still upon them, the familiar click-click of many dominoes being mixed up on the marble tables, the obese old gentleman smoking the elongated cigarro with the spinal column of straw—how intimate I was with all of it!

A waiter, who would have looked well in gold ear-bobs, accepted our order, which was, to begin with, *hors d'œuvres*, one portion consisting of many capers and a fillet of the gregarious and social anchovy between three; and while, with seeming unconcern, he dismissed our contemplated meal from his memory, in order to make out the "addition" of a beautiful lady who had been outside, presumably to see what had won the first race, and was now pulling on her dainty suéde gloves, Joskin gave us an explanation of his mysterious conduct.

"Ah, incomparable Côte d'Or at three bob!" he soliloquised, replenishing his glass from the bottle I had ordered as a sample. "Oh, insidious tipple of the Bourgogne, it is on thy account that I pull my hat across mine eyes as I traverse the narrow boulevard called Sherwood and the Rue Denman!"

We watched him raise the goblet to his lips and drain it to the dregs.

"Mine is a hard case," he went on, "far more indurate and flinty than any that Tommy Bowles' readers have been called upon to solve. It happened like this—"

But at this juncture our Swiss *garçon* returned with one of our three plates in his left hand, and the other two spread up his left arm. On each was a delicious gas-heated and glazed chop, nestling amongst eighteen or twenty brunette chips of oil-fried potatoes, and Joskin, who is fairly quiet save when partaking of meals, fell to with a will. I don't know that I don't like Joskin's style of eating; it dissipates the silence and renders the poverty of the conversation less apparent. In these days a dinner may often be remembered, not for its *bon mots* or the tooth-someness of the *appétissant* and *luisant* salad, but because Smith or Jones had a style of eating, or

a new way of whistling up waiters with the fingers, that attracted attention.

"As I was telling you," said Joskin presently, bolting his last chip of potato and wiping up the superfluous Worcester sauce on his plate with a fragment of roll, "I was making my way to my unfashionable lodging in Bloomsbury in the darkness the other morning, when a feminine voice hailed me with: 'Shar-lee! Shar-lee!' and though, as you may know, my front names are Augustus Havelock Simperson, I felt impelled to stop. I cannot truthfully say I was acquainted with the lady in pink and pearl-grey satin who then appeared, but she seemed a hospitable soul, suggested that a glass of the *bon vin* — you remember the old chant" — and Joskin sang softly:

"'Venez, venez, sages et fous,
Venez, venez, boire avec nous
Le bon vin a quat' sous——'"

'Oh yes," we asserted, "but go on."

"Well," continued Joskin, "we ascended a dark staircase hard by, and entered an elegant apartment on the first floor. I will not attempt to describe the artistic arrangement of the furniture, but there were two elegant, long-necked, China vases, that stood on either side

of a doubtless costly shade of wax flowers on the plush mantel, that particularly attracted my attention. My amiable hostess produced a bottle of the *bon vin* from a curious pedestal cupboard, and we sat down to talk of Montmartre, and I even recalled stray bits of Béranger and other authors. Now the *bon vin* was strong, the room was very warm, and I am not quite clear as to what happened, but I do know that I dozed in an armchair, and, that whilst so dozing, my hostess dipped the lily fingers of her right hand into the watch-pocket of my waistcoat, where reposed three half-sovereigns — my very last. For some inexplicable reason I did not resent this, didn't even open my half-closed eyes till she turned her back, crossed the salon more than ever on the pointed toes of her varnished *bottes*, and dropped my gold down the neck of one of the queer vases that mounted sentinel over the wax flowers. Oho! thought I, this is an emergency that calls for strategy. I awoke, drowsily, lazily. I apologised to my charming hostess for going to sleep—the *bon vin* never did agree with me. I ought not to have touched it, for my grandfather was gouty, and I begged the favour of a glass of water. Aha! She left the room! Hastily grabbing the long-necked

vase from the mantel, I inserted its mouth into my trousers' pocket and inverted it. A merry jingle followed; then I replaced the vessel, and fell back into the armchair, just as the charming mademoiselle returned with a little water in a breakfast-cup."

"So you recovered your thirty bob?" the cattle-painter and I enquired in one breath.

"That's just the point," responded Joskin sadly; "I recovered *twenty-seven pounds ten*, the poor girl's savings of a lifetime, maybe!"

There was a pained pause, rendered all the more so by the appearance of the *garçon* with his tablet of accounts.

"What should *I* do?" asked Joskin, as though he were *Vanity Fair* itself.

"Endeavour to meet the lady again," said I.

"Return twenty-six pounds by *some* means at once," said the cattle-painter decisively.

"Alas!" cried the unhappy Joskin, "I took it to Sandown on Saturday."

"All togezzer?" asked the waiter. Charlie replied in the affirmative, and this, as "Autolycus" says in the *Pall Mall*, was the bill:

"*Hors d'œuvres*, 6*d.*; *three chop au pommes frit*, 3*s.*; *one bottle côte d'or*, 3*s.*; *three rolls and butters*, 6*d.*; *total*, 7*s.*"

Ethel Kingsford and Johnny Branson are friends again, which I am sure you will be delighted to hear, for, as Johnny doesn't drop his h's, and certainly isn't a teetotaler, there is always the chance that he may turn out to be a gentleman when we get to know him better. Curiously enough, the reunion was effected through the unconscious instrumentality of the Salvation Army. Johnny learned at the Continental that Ethel had moved to the Avenue Road, but nobody knew her number; also he discovered when he got there that the Avenue Road was a very long road, and to knock up the inhabitants one by one was out of the question. So, mindful of having encountered the Salvation Army as he came along, he borrowed a tin tea-tray of a waiter at the Swiss Cottage, and started down the thoroughfare that held his lost darling with a "Bang! Bang!! Biff!! Bang!! — Hally-looyer! Hally-looyer!!" Every individual female in that road came flying to the window to see what the ruction was, and in less than two minutes Johnny had spotted the object of his visit, looking charming in a tea-gown of purple *crêpe de chine*, with an orange plush butterfly caught in her auburn hair, and

had resigned his commission in the Army and the tea-tray most cheerfully.

I know, dear, how an absolutely exclusive item of Court Intelligence always delights you, and I have saved you one. Let me tell you that during the service of dinner at Windsor Castle the band of the Coldstreams plays on the terrace, just outside the dining-room window, and Her Majesty has remarked that the cornet solos are frequently slurred. It transpires that the side-table from which the courses are served is directly in the line of sight of the cornet-bandsman, and as he avers that he can't help his mouth watering, he has been given the option of playing in blinkers or handing in his band-parts.

How beautiful a thing is sympathy, and how blessed it is to be able to tender it to one in distress! Even a man's sympathy for other men is goodly and helpful at times, but, of course, what men really need is women's sympathy—sympathy in their work, sympathy in their bereavements, sympathy in their physical ailments, sympathy when they are too late in the betting-market, sympathy in their spiritual anxieties, sympathy in their baldness, sympathy in their amorous eccentricities,

sympathy in the time of senile decay—wide, deep, enduring, womanly sympathy. Oh! there is something beautiful in sympathy—in manly sympathy, in motherly sympathy, in wifely sympathy! Let him tell the story who, when all his fortunes were gone and all the world was against him, came home and found in that home a wife who, in his absence, had dressed up as a widow, and raised a bill of sale on the furnished apartments, in order that "her boy" should have an evening meal of lamb's heads and brain sauce. Who will put that weary head upon the clean, white pillow, and wonder—wonder, through the long, long night, why a man who has partaken of raw onions in a Russian salad should imagine that he can remove all traces of the same by the free use of the Pollok Blend—who, who, I ask, but a sweet, sympathetic wife?

But let us not rest at being mere theorists in the matter; the greatest crime in the criminal code of Heaven, brethren, is a man living unto self.

I have just had a visit from a very nice boy, whom you have not yet met, I think, for he has only recently left Oxford. He came to see me dressed in the deepest of mourning, and looking—oh, *so* sad! He seemed fearfully depressed, and

I secretly admired him for it, as it is not often nowadays that a boy shows so much grief at the death of his grandmother.

"It is very terrible indeed," I said, "very, very sad."

"It is," he replied, and a greater feeling of admiration for him arose within me, which would have lasted had he not continued: "For I can't go to the Empire to-night, nor the Tivoli, but I shall have to take my cabman out to the Star, Bermondsey, or the Washington, Battersea, where nobody'll know me!"

His grandmother died quite peacefully and comfortably, he told me, being crushed to death by blacklegs against the corner of a tramcar at the Parliament Hill terminus, in trying to take a penny ride, during the first day of the Strike. I was overjoyed to hear that her end was tranquil and undisturbed, because the circumstance enabled me to tell him of quite a different sort of passing-away I remembered seeing when quite a girl. The person being scurried over the bar was a poor gentleman who got what religion he needed at a Hall of Science. For years he had made it a practice to go out on a Saturday night with, let me say, a comparatively virgin mind and a jug, and bringing home with him enough

doctrine to enable him to hold out till the following Saturday, and all the bitter beer he was likely to want till the public-houses opened at mid-day on Sunday. Finally a chill or something laid him by the heels, and, whilst lying in hospital, he got his call. And he didn't want to go a little bit. I never saw a more reluctant man in my life; the earnest way in which he tried to think of *any* excuse to wriggle out of his last appointment was distressing. There was more eloquence in the light-hearted way in which he referred in his last moments, the while he tore up his bedclothes, to some of the leading lights of Atheism than in a hundred modern sermons; and I fancy that his brother, who—with the bank and building societies' books, belonging to the gentleman who was sustaining the principal *rôle*, in his pocket—stood by, formed a hurried resolution to have another look at the book form ere he went on as an Amalgamated Acrostic, or whatever the name of the sect was.

You ask very kindly after Ursula. I am afraid, poor girl, she is in a very bad way. They discharged her as cured from the private "pay" hospital, after she had coughed down three sixteen-and-sixpenny iron bedsteads, but she has developed sad symptoms since she has been at

Ventnor. Every time she sneezes she fills her boots with sand, and I am greatly afraid she is going to "chuck in her knife and fork," as Charlie says. It is very dreadful when one looks back and recalls her in her best days—tall, brunette, commanding, with that delicate tracery of dark hair on her upper lip, although I never quite thought she was justified in removing her boot in the Café Monico to take a swat at a foreign waiter because he inadvertently brought her chocolate in a moustache-cup.

—*Toujours a toi*, darling.

MAUDE.

MARS

HOTEL METROPOLE, BRIGHTON.

SWEET COUSIN,—

It is wicked, no doubt, for me, still in the bloom and fluff of life's young morn, to find fault with the weather, but I freely confess that the present sample is a trifle *too* "brass-monkey." As one result of slipping down the beach steps here after treading on an icicle, I am nursing a bruised knee-pan and a nasty bump as nearly as possible over the organ of firmness. Still, there is plenty of cheery company here. Aubrey Plantagenet has only just gone out. What a delightful man he is! Language is to him a gift, and he spoke so correctly, so fluently, and so grammatically, that it was almost a relief to hear the plumber's man, who is at work just outside my chamber window, violate one or other of Lindley Murray's rules with a coarse but refreshing oath, as he spilled a gill or so of white hot solder into his shoe-top.

After dinner last evening Charlie and I and four or five other guests, who could find nothing in Brighton worth the trouble of going out to see, sat in the big wicker chairs on the hotel steps and chatted. Two great characters we have here are a certain Doctor Foxton (a little bantam of a medico, who retired a few years back on a fortune left him by a grateful spinster who had been a patient), and a fine old salt, a Captain Stripp, on the half-pay list.

Little Doctor Foxton had been describing, with daring but delightful minuteness, some handsome Algerian women he had seen in a dancing-hall in Tunis, and just as he wound up by declaring that they were the finest women in the world, old Captain Stripp jumped in and punctuated the exordium with the bluff monosyllable: "Rats!"

The captain is not as a rule a rude man, so we attributed his vehemence to the probability of his having a good case of his own to state; nor were we wrong, as it turned out.

"Out in the Bahamas only two years ago," he said, "I came across a group of the loveliest women I have ever seen, an' they didn't have no muslins, nor silks, nor, indeed, a cool stitch of anything to set them off, for they were just bathin' in a creek. I went out there as an expert in

fibres. The woods of the Bahamas yield just the varieties of fibres required by electrical engineers, and I'd got a nailin' good payin' appointment to go out there and make a complete collection an' report on 'em. You see, with fibres——"

"We'll take the fibres as read," interrupted little Doctor Foxton, who began to show unmistakable signs of getting deeply interested.

"Oh, you will? All right; then we'll give the pannerammer another twist. The Bahamas, you may know, have been almost depopulated by the Spanish buccaneers under Don Ricardo Colorado y Maduro, but I was forcin' my way well up into the wooded districts, where the giant gums wave to and fro, and you hardly ever hear a sound save when a bird cries out to its mate in the great canebrake, or the plash of a birch canoe being rowed through the clear water. When I say *clear* water, I'm not speakin' strictly by the chart, for it's tinted slightly by the roots of juniper and cypress——"

"Just so, just so," interrupted the doctor, rather sharply, "but—er—get on to the story."

"You can hardly call it a story," quibbled old Stripp; "it would be more appropriate to call it an incident."

"Call it an incident, then," grunted the doctor "dammit, call it an incident!"

"Very well, we will. These Bahama people have a sort of natural odour about 'em. I dunno whether it's from bathin' in the water impregnated with the juniper——"

"They don't bathe at all!" declared Charlie, starting in and dropping his eyeglass from its orbit; "nobody ever heard of a Bahaman takin' a bath, but he rubs himself with oil all over, till he stinks worse than a burning boot!"

"I didn't say a Bahaman," cried the captain, "but the Bahama *maidens*, girls of eighteen or so——"

"That's right—or, at least, it's probable," chipped in Billie Winn. "Sir Edwin Arnold has written of the delicious natural odour of the Japanese girls; don't you remember the rhyme somebody wrote:—

"'Oh, the Tokio maid is in sweetness arrayed
From her little pink toe to her cranium,
With eyes black as sloes, and a breath like a rose,
And a——'

——er—oh, dammit——"

"'And a cough like a lemon geranium.'"

Charlie suggested.

"Yes, yes—or words to that effect," assented Billy. "Pardon these interruptions, Captain."

"Oh, that's all right," said old Stripp good-naturedly; "if you've quite done, I'll go on. One day I was out fibrein', when, at a sudden turn in the path, I beheld such a bevy of beautiful girls as I'd never seen before—they were simply copper-coloured angels! I heard subsequently that they were a renowned band of Amazons, whose mothers had got up a little sort o' smokin' concert one night for Colorado-Maduro's buccaneers. They were walking along at a smartish pace, which caused quite a rustle, for you must know that their only clothes—a sort of loose jacket and short drawers—are made of a sort of manilla paper, as fine, and bleached as white, as a bishop's lawn sleeves. I skirts along at the side o' the wood——"

"Yes, go on," said the little doctor, giving his chair a hitch.

"Till they comes to a little creek," continued the captain, "and here, amidst a good deal o' laughin', they begins to undress. Their jackets only appeared to have one button, just on the left shoulder, whilst the—er—that is the other things——"

"What things?" said the little doctor peevishly.

"Why, what I told you before, were off in a jiffey. Smoly Hoke! thinks I——"

"Never mind what you thought," said the doctor. "Go on."

"Right. Well, never had I seen girls so perfectly formed, and I was just speculatin' as to what I ought to do——"

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated the doctor impetuously.

"When," went on old Stripp, unheeding the excited medico, "when they caught sight o' me! Led by the tallest girl o' the lot—b'gosh, she *was* a picture!—they came running up to me, puttin' their arms, some round me neck, some round me legs, an' kissin' me for all they were worth. They were literally on all sides o' me——"

"Well?" demanded the impatient doctor.

"With a desperate effort," cried the old captain, throwing his arms about dramatically as though struggling with an unseen foe, "I disengaged myself, and, throwing the hoydens right and left, took to my hee——"

"It's a lie!" fairly shouted the excited doctor, jumping up and kicking over his chair. "It's a foul, contemptible, mean, despicable lie!" and he bounced into the hotel. Strangely enough, when Charlie went inside a few minutes later to get my

sables, he overheard one of the hotel clerks, who held a *Bradshaw* in his hand, replying to some query of Doctor Foxton's.

"There appear to be two or three routes, sir," said the clerk, "*via* Cuba or Puerto Rico, and the fares are about the same. When do you wish to start?"

But just then the fiery little disciple of Æsculapius caught sight of Charlie.

"I—I—I—I'll think it over," he said to the clerk, and, without stopping at the flower-stall for his customary buttonhole, he hurried out.

Brighton seems very full, if not exactly of smart people, certainly of children and dogs. November and December babies, each attended by two nurses and a boy in buttons, are extremely fashionable, whilst slightly older children look awfully well when wearing sun-bonnets hanging down their backs. The dogs, largely attracted I presume, by the laxity of the muzzling laws down here, could well be dispensed with on the beach, where they have amply demonstrated themselves to be cake-and-bun-stealers, child-biters, feeding-bottle suckers, and everything else that is abominable.

Mrs Switchley-Danvers is here, being pulled about on the front—(this reads curiously, some-

how)—in a bath-chair, as she says, for "acute nervous prostration." Nonsense! How could the wife of a mere ex-fire insurance agent have such a disease? It is a plain bilious attack. Another visitor, looking *really* ill, poor girl, is Henrietta Treadwater. She has been endeavouring to support herself and her aged mother, who is about to celebrate her golden wedding by becoming a barmaid at the Criterion, by writing bright little poems for the papers. She sought to submit this one—

"What is the use of breaking a heart,
If you don't intend to tarry?
What is the use of wooing a 'tart'
If you never intend to marry?
What is the use of a novelette
If you don't intend to read it?
What is the use of a bassinette
If you never intend to need it?"

—to the cultured editor of *The Gentlewoman*, but was told at his office that he had gone to Coomassie to arrange about some new composition for the printing-ink rollers. She still has good friends who will help her, however; and if a girl can retain her friends during her periods of prolonged poetical thought, she need not fear of losing them should she

contract scarlet fever or the small-pox. She only regrets, now that she seems likely to be temporarily prostrated on a bed of sickness, that she so rashly tore up her pretty old-rose silk night-dresses and hemmed them into handkerchief squares for "that bounder" (as she expresses herself) with whom she was pleased to consider herself in love last summer. It is somewhat consoling to her to know that whenever he blew his nose he was so filled with distracting emotions, that he generally ran amuck, and was, in consequence, eventually dispensed with by the Frost-bitten Race-course and Postponed Irish-Stew Syndicate, of which he was to have had the managing directorship when it "came out."

It would be odd, indeed, if Brighton had not a little scandal of some sort afoot, and just now the ultra-respectable residents in Cavendish Place are greatly exercised in their minds by the conduct of a young lady visitor who has no blind to her bedroom window. *The Sussex Evening Nark* has devoted several columns to it, so the other night Charlie and I walked round to the locality shortly after 11.30, and got into conversation with an intelligent Brighton police-constable, who was leaning languidly against the iron railings of a house opposite to "the show." "Oh yes, sir,"

he replied to Charlie's enquiry, "it's just precisely the same every night, but I don't see much harm in it. She always douses the glim before it gets too sensational." Raising our eyes to the second floor front window we gazed in horror at the shadow of the young lady, evidently unbuttoning her outer garments. She next removed her hat and feathers, and discarded her hair-net. We plainly discerned her in the act of hanging a scarlet cotton "improver" over the bust of General Booth, which stood upon the mantelpiece, and heard her throw her corsets into the coal-scuttle. At this juncture she approached the window, and, with a merry, decisive laugh, blew out the rushlight. Candidly, I think too much fuss is being made about the matter, especially by the railway people, who contemplate, if the young lady intends stopping here another fortnight, putting on a late train to Hassocks, Burgess Hill, Preston Park, and Bramber.

Poor Mrs and Miss Smith, with whom I used to stay in German Place, are, I observe, to be sold up under the bill-of-sale, on the proceeds of which they started. Frail little Mrs Smith, with her widow's bands and her gentle, ingenuous ways, ought never to have started a "board-and-residence" menagerie, and that, too, with such a

tiny capital, raised at such a ruinous rate. Not hers the power to cope with the wily milk-pudding-fattened boarder, and wring from him the hard-held scudi with which to appease a clamorous sixty-per-center.

One of the first prospective patrons to pull their visitors' bell was a Mr Solomon Hyams, and it was on a dire day, one on which Mrs Smith's little cherub had left off sitting up aloft, and gone to see his arrows-maker, for Mr Hyams was so well pleased with the "board and residence," that he forthwith installed himself for the full course at forty shillings a week. Now, it appears that as he came downstairs on the second evening after his arrival, in all the glory of evening dress, he encountered the graceful daughter of the house, and in a studied tone of indifference to expense, which jarred somewhat with the surroundings, asked:

"Oh—er—Mith Thmith—I'm—er—dinin' out to-night. I forgot to athk vhen I come 'ere, but—er—vhat deducthion d'yer make vhen a guetht thtays out?"

Miss Smith was, for a second, embarrassed. Neither she nor her mamma had anticipated the raising of such a point. However, she would ask, and she ran downstairs to do so, the while

Mr Myer Solomon Hymans dreamily dipped his fingers into the ticket-pockets of the other boarders' overcoats for loose coppers, for, as he said, "it alvayth gitth put down to the dithonethty o' th' thervanth."

When Miss Smith returned she said, quite with a blush, poor girl, that her mamma thought it was unusual to make such allowances, nevertheless, if Mr Hyams wished it, she would deduct two shillings for each meal missed, and two shillings for each night's lodging.

From that night forward the seventeen other nincompoops, who ate to repletion at seven, and burnt the gas till one, in their endeavours to raise the "Parlour Game" of "Tiddleywinks," or jerking the cardboard to the level of the sciences, saw rather less than usual of Mr Myer Hyams, though, to do them justice, they filed no objections on that head. And when three whole weeks had passed, Miss Smith made out a little bill and left it on Mr Hyams' dressing-table—"Three weeks' board and residence, as arranged, £6."

It was then that Mr Hyams, who must have been the gold-medal mathematician of the Ghetto, weighed in with his little contra-account. Out of a possible eighty-four meals he had eaten only

fourteen, whilst on eleven nights he had slept out; thus seventy meals at 2s. represented £7, and eleven lodgings at a similar rate £1, 2s., which left a balance in his favour of two guineas!

To say that the widow and her daughter were somewhat flummuxed when the lodger sent down *his* bill would be to put the matter very mildly, and if they did not say a great deal, it was principally because, being ladies, and used to nothing stronger than the Commination Service, they had not the flow of language on hand that would have done justice to the subject. And, after all, as Mr Hyams very truly put it, a business arrangement is a business arrangement, though he magnanimously added:

"Seein' that it'th unpertected vimin I've got to deal vith, I don't vish to preth yer for the balanth in money; *I'll take it out in board!*"

Charlie has just come round from the livery stable in Cannon Place with such a spirited pony in such a beautiful yellow Ralli cart, and declares I am to drive him to Rottingdean and back. Where's the old brandy?—*Au revoir, cherie.*

MAUDE.

AVRIL

THE FLAT, TUESDAY.

MY DARLING MADGE,—

You have to thank a pair of cerise and primrose garters—neither more nor less—for this *billet.* They caught my eye this afternoon as I wandered through the Burlington, and the ticket affixed to them, "For the Epsom Week," awakened quite a train of delightful old memories in my head, dear, as it certainly should do in yours, too.

Gazing critically at the silk lingerie displayed in the self-same window, was that Aldershot fellow, Jocelyn-Johnson, I think they call him—we remarked, you may remember, that he parted both his hair and his name in the middle—and he carried me off to the dear old "Blue Posts" to tell me the latest bit of news. He's going to marry — positively *marry* — Minnie Godden! Certain things happened, it appears, after which she found out all about his guv'nor and his

people, and, as he cannot stand an *exposé* at home, he is taking the unpleasant alternative. As he very tersely put it, gazing sadly into his tumbler the while, she's "got him where his hair's short." Poor devil! Yet Dolly Dixon, who used to share the same dressing-room at the Gaiety as Minnie, tells me he's a very poor catch—which I'm sorry to hear, for they say that Minnie used to throw rolling-pins, crockery, or anything that came to hand, at her first mash.

What will a girl *not* take on in order to get hitched to a man in the regulation way? Will she stop at *anything?* Let me give you an instance. The youngest daughter of the wife of a very—very—dear friend of mine, received a proposal of marriage the other day, but before giving her answer, determined to visit her four married sisters. The eldest, who had been the belle of her year at home, she found in a garret in Lisson Grove, slaving at dressmaking to support herself and an anonymous baby, which slept blissfully upon some straw bottle-envelopes in an otherwise empty champagne case in a corner; the second, who had made a bad match for one who gets married altogether without display, would have been up the river with her husband and a portable cottage piano, but that he was wearing a chunk of

fresh rump-steak over one eye, as the result of an argument with a gentleman, who played on a harp, as to a right of pitch outside Tagg's Hotel at Molesey; the third (whose husband had gone to Doncaster with a white hat turned up with green, a satchel, a book and an ashplant) was taking iron for her blood at a French Laundresses in Shaftesbury Avenue; and the fourth was hanging about the Law Courts waiting till her decree *nisi* was done.

Upon this she wired to the young fellow to say that she'd be ready by the 1st of May!

I daresay you remember me telling you that Lenore Lennox had taken a sweetly pretty villa —one in a terrace of about twenty—at South Hampstead. She has a regular allowance now; and her little boy—such a darling little fellow! —being just six years old, she passes as the wife of a cavalry officer who is away with his regiment. He is such a delightful little cherub, too, with long golden curls clustering round his baby brow. Oh, how hateful the thought that he may grow up and some day become, perhaps, a bookmaker! How sickening the reflection that, say twenty years hence, his baby legs may be employed in taking him across Ascot Heath at a 4.12¾ gait and a lead of about fifteen yards of an angry

Jaquemart mob, on whom he has tried to ring a Knight of the Thistle argument in lieu of settlement!

However, I called on poor Lenore the other afternoon, and called at a most unfortunate moment, as it happened, for I found her in a swoon, with her fair head in an ormolu coal-vase, and her two maids busily unlacing her *corset parfait* and applying restoratives. It appears that in one of his baby excursions all over the house, little Hector found a packet of mamma's old letters tied round with a cherry ribbon, and an ingenious idea entered his infant mind that he would play at "postman." This consisted in stealing outdoors with the packet, giving double knocks at the neighbours' doors, and delivering the letters with "Tuppence to pay, p'ease." Of course the letters were old, old ones of Charlie Throatlash's, and if you knew anything of Charlie's breezy style of correspondence with a woman he loves, you'd agree with me that none who paid "tuppence" for a *billet-doux* will want any more ripe fruit this year. Charlie, in writing, generally let the tail go with the hide, and, when he was much smitten, illustrated!

Periodically one hears an impassioned feminine wail about the dearth of good domestic servants

—or even of unclassified domestics—and I must say that I do not wonder at it when one hears of mistresses like Mrs Hynton-Budbrooke. She has a weakness, you must know, dear, for taking criminals by the hand—"giving them another chance"—she calls it, and is never so happy as when she discovers a parlour-maid at a lying-in hospital or a footman at a thieves' supper. She has just taken one of the last-named into her house, and her coachman came here in tears yesterday—poor man!—to see if I could recommend him for a vacancy anywhere. It appears that the terrible creature Mrs Budbrooke has just put into livery was some sort of racecourse microbe, and hadn't been in the house two hours before he was thumping the butler in his own pantry—(the Hynton-Budbrookes were out at dinner)—because he wouldn't "find the lady." Nor did Mrs Budbrooke turn him instantly from the doors when she came in. Certainly she spoke seriously to him, but begged the butler to assist her in reforming the "social outcast"—a thankless task to a man who has already incurred a bump on the temple of the size of a roc's egg, and a splodge of colour like a Lotofen sunset under the left eye. The very next day the creature "gamdiddled" (that was the coachman's word)

the stableman out of his corn money, and wound up on the Saturday by taking the page-boy's few shillings off him, teaching him how to play a game called "Crusoe." Is not such a fad deplorable?

Speaking of servants, by the way, I called on dear Mrs Mortimer-Toddpush the other day in her charming suite at the Hotel Lofty at Brighton, and while I was there her bell was answered by one of the most diminutive and cherub-like page-boys I think I have ever seen. He was new to Mrs Mortimer-Toddpush, too, for she asked him, as she passed her jewelled left hand over his smooth golden hair, how old he was.

"Thirteen, ma'am," said the boy.

"And what is your name?"

"Joseph, ma'am."

"*What*?" she asked again.

"Joseph, ma'am."

"Oh, nonsense!" she cried, "I shall call you William; you are entirely too young at present for a Joseph!" Then she drew the little fellow to her and imprinted on his lips one of those hot, passionate, blistering kisses she knows so well how to give.

And what an art kissing is, dear Madge,

and how many volumes of meaning may be crowded into what Oliver Wendell Holmes called a "lisping consonant." It was with a kiss that, hundreds of years ago, Cleopatra won Marc Antony; it was with a kiss that, only the other day, King Prempeh resigned his kingdom. And though somebody in Parliament observed, with regard to the submission of poor Prempeh, that there was a difference of opinion between the two front benches as to the portion of Sir F. Scott's person which the monarch kissed, the fact remains that a kiss it was. Perhaps it is just as well that modern men rarely take the trouble to become proficient, for as soon as a man shows that he knows how to kiss, a woman begins to think he has a lurid "past."

And yet we have a whole day annually devoted to the pastime, for it fell on Tuesday last. I must tell you that I had just settled down for my post-breakfast read, and was rapidly becoming absorbed in that chaste and beautiful hotel story of a young man who ascended in his stockinged feet a:d the dead of night to the head barmaid's bedroom, in order to discuss with her the spiritual advantages to be gained by adopting a purely vegetable diet as an aid to leading

the higher life, all so artlessly related in "A Pink 'Un and a Pelican," when that pretty boy I told you I met in Piccadilly on St Valentine's day—as a matter of fact our bodies did meet, physically, and with a positive crash that started my nose bleeding, for he was looking behind him, and I was admiring the set of my new grey and *pervenche* blue costume reflected in a shop window—dropped in and begged me to go with him to the "Hocktide" kissing ceremonies at Hungerford, where a couple of middle-aged "tutty-men," decked out in ribbons and laurels like Ritualistic churches at Christmas, go all round the town demanding kisses from the wives and daughters of the burgesses.

Revolting! But he is one of those simple, free-trade-in-everything sort of boys that see no harm in anything, and he even told me in confidence—as he might have done a slightly elder sister—that he jolly well knew that his girl at the Gaiety was being mashed by another Johnnie, but he didn't mind, because the other fellow was "such an *awfully* decent old chappie, don't you know, and the joke of it is, that we are both getting our chips from the same money-lender!"

Between doing the society gossip for *The*

Hostess At Home and dashing off short, impassioned stories for one or other of the ladies' magazines, Mrs Mortimer-Toddpush gets along very nicely, although having no family of her own causes her to write odd paragraphs in her "home" notes occasionally. For instance, she said the other day in *The Hostess:* "Little boys' suits now consist of three pieces instead of two, as formerly, which is an excellent arrangement, as it enables the parent to get at the little boy more readily whenever occasion requires."

Her short stories, however, are above all criticism, as I think you will admit after reading one of her latest, which she calls—

"A Brighton Arch.

"'Only five minutes more,' soliloquised the beautiful brunette in the purple velvet and silver fox-fur toilette, as she replaced her tiny gold and diamond-encrusted watch in its clasp, and gazed out over the purring indigo waves, 'and my Adolphus will be with me.'

"From the bosom of her dress she drew a crumpled envelope—an envelope addressed to her own initials, care of a wily circulating librarian in

the Western Road, and, drawing a sheet of note-paper from within, read :—

"'To My Queen.

"'Oh! how I miss your sweet kisses, and your fond caressing,
Which somehow seem to set *my* soul athirst to drink from *your* soul,
From that bubbling fountain of love which seems to be squirting its blessing
Into my life's Sahara, my life, my whole!'
—'From Sylvia's Sabreur.'

"As she thrust the note back into its hallowed receptacle she walked uneasily to the railing of the roof-terrace of the Pier Pavilion, muttering passionately to herself:

"'Oh, optimistic fool that I am, to go on with this! It is not possible for two persons of our passionate and artistic temperament to maintain a platonic correspondence, and, though my husband is not strict with me, should one of Adolphus's *billets*—but some one approaches.'

"There appeared as she spoke at the top of the iron staircase a tall, aristocratic man of soldierly bearing, not the blustering trooper of the camp, but the romantic subaltern who loves to accompany a girl to her *corsetière's*, or her boot-makers, to tell her how her things should fit her.

He was in evening dress, save for the snuff-brown deerstalker which Brighton allows. He stepped quickly across to Sylvia,and slipped his right arm round her waist."

"'My own!'

"'My Dolphy!'

During the next three minutes they kissed but twice—two long-drawn kisses that died away with a sound like the tearing off of a porous plaister. Then he said:

"'And the Ogre, where is he to-night, little one?'

"'The creature,' she said, her beautiful nostrils dilating with disgust, "wires me that in celebration of the rise in Chilians, whatever they may be, a "lot of fellows in the House" are dining together at Romano's, and going on to "The Belle of New York," so that he'll sleep in town.'

"'Then my angel is my own till——'

"'Ten, dearest, not a moment after. The brougham will be at the Dome at ten—the *Elisha* concert is on to-night—but we can walk there leisurely, lovingly, partly by way of the beach, but you may not kiss me at parting.'

"His countenance fell a little at these words. After all, it was prudence and not indifference that prompted them.

"Still, wise and necessary as they were, they only served to remind him of the hopelessness of their joint love. He had a little to live on, enough to support them in comfort, but there was the insurmountable object of her wretched stock-broking husband; it was a stile that there seemed no prospect of getting over.

"'Sylvia, my darling,' he said sadly, 'only *you* know how much I love you, and yet it is impossible for me to go on pouring out my very soul to you, either under the eyes and noses of the natives and their visitors, or through the medium of the post. I cannot go on writing to you for ever about the desert, the fountains, and the meteorological outlook; moreover, this love is making our lives one continual yearn. If we only had some nook, some bower where, unseen by vulgar eyes——'

"'Why not take an arch?' said she.

. . . . . .

"An arch—one of the cosy little nooks beneath the unrivalled asphalt promenade—is well nigh indispensable to a single man's outfit in Brighton. It is a warm, cosy, and secluded little stronghold, to which he can retire when the attractions of the Old Ship pall and his acquaintances in the smoking-room at the Metropole become a bore.

"So it fell that my Strephon took an arch, and furnished, decorated, and lighted it after the fashion of these archers; and every afternoon through that mellow October did his Phyllis come down there to brew tea in a little Wedgwood pot, and sit by his side the while he wrote verses to her eyes, her lips, her hair—verses which would have made a sick elephant leave his buns. Then, as twilight came on, he would draw her a little closer, and, with his right arm around her waist, he would tell her passionately, earnestly of his great and inconquerable love for her, until the quicksilver mounted to the top of the thermometer and rattled at its glass roof to be let out.

"How all this sort of thing might have balled up, as dear old Socrates says, it is difficult to conjecture, but one day a great thing happened. Chilians fell—fell with the dull, sickening thud of the young gentleman who leaned too far over the Whispering Gallery. The sharp, authentic report of a pistol rang through Throgmorton Avenue, E.C., and—Sylvia Isabel Eugenie Butterworth was a widow!

. . . . . .

"Some said she might have waited till the headstone was up; others smiled meaningly and shook their heads. Sylvia only remained a widow

for a week—or just long enough to have a new frock and tear up a clandestine correspondence she'd been carrying on with a cycle company promoter. For the rest, let the old registry-office attendant, where, by special license, Sylvia and Adolphus 'did the rest,' speak.

"'I never see sich a go, sir,' said he. 'No sooner 'ad they got out on to the front step than she turns to 'im, an' she says: "Adolphus, now that we are one I want the key o' that arch." "The devil you do!" says he. "And what do *you* want with it?" "Nothink," says she. "But I don't mean for *you* to have it. Now we're married," she says, "we don't want any funny business." "Well," says he, "fair play is good sport; *neither* of us shall have it. Theo Wade, the house agent, shall sell the lease and the fittings, and the whole bag of tricks. Will *that* suit you?" And then, sir, she kissed him, an' the first place they stopped at on their 'oneymoon was at the 'ouse agent's!'"

Quite romantic, is it not?

Whom do suppose I met coming out of the little oyster-shop this morning? Guess? But there, you never would — Mabel Morrison, positively! She really couldn't stand Westgate she told me, there were too many invalids there.

Every one you meet, she says, asks you what *you* are "down here for." The poor creatures, she added, stand and shrug their shoulders, not so much from discontent at the fare at their respective boarding-houses, as from all-prevailing affection of the cuticle. As the hansom cabman remarked to poor Bettina de Bellevodini, when, at the end of the journey, she struggled vainly to find the hidden pocket which her dressmaker had put in some impossible back width: "When you're done scratchin' yerself, I'll thank you for my fare." Mabel seemed very despondent—although the poor little baby only lived three days—and she said as true as Heaven made little apples, if she could only steer up against some sordid but straightforward Johnnie, hanged if she wouldn't be taken to church and turn respectable, even though the bridegroom was only marrying to save money.

A pretty new boot-tree, the name of which I may possibly tell you next week, was amongst the novelties I saw in East Street this afternoon. The patentee explained to me that it entirely filled out the boots without unduly stretching them in parts, which is, I think, better than wearing the boots all night for the same purpose, and spending the price of the trees on other

things, a policy which is advocated, I see, in "How to be Happy though Poor," now selling in thousands. By the way, dearest, talking about books, be sure and get "The Sin of the Strawberry Blonde," which is just out. Oh, I do assure you, it's *real!* The chapter where Madeleine, an orphan and penniless, walks from Powick to London, and, just in sight of the lights of the metropolis, secretly divests herself of her brocaded bodice to offer it in pledge, and where the sordid pawn-broker thrusts it back across the counter with the brutal remark, "Don't take things in hot," is alone worth the six shillings at which it is published.

Though the weather is not all that could be wished, there are still many smart people to be encountered on "the Front." I noticed one well-known Supper Club *blonde* this morning, who would have looked distinguished in a skirt of *toile de Jouey*, had she not been reduced to hitching herself up against Reuben Sassoon's railings while an obliging boatman hunted round for a pearly button that had left its moorings; whilst another charming *mondaine* looked awfully well in a bright-coloured surah, made in the early Victorian style, with a hem of half-dried macadam round the full skirt. Unwilling to

give credence to the rumour circulated by a rival that one of her buckles had "gone back on her," she inclines to the *fin de siècle* fad of wearing a yellow satin garter over the left boot-heel. But, taken altogether, it was a damp, poor morning for finery.—*Toujours*, Madge darling, yours devotedly, MAUDE.

MAI

THE GABLES, BOTTOMBARLEY.

SWEET LITTLE COZ,

That your last letter has remained so long unanswered I very much regret, but I have been idling away a fortnight in a country house, dear, and heartily glad am I to be back in town again. Breeding establishments, and village schools, and pattern cottages—with pattern cottagers inside them, including the tedious old granny, who wears a sunbonnet and an iron-grey moustache, who walked all the way to London in the Jubilee week, and takes quite a personal interest in the Queen, because "Her Ted an' my Willie was born the same day, miss" —soon pall on one. It may be perfectly true that no place so fully realises the idea of home as a country mansion, but little Mrs Merridew is not an ideal hostess by a jugful. She lacks repose. Then, too, everybody's comfort is sacri-

ficed to the well-being of her precious children ; she is like the Belgravian mother who was always sacking her nursery governesses. "You do not pay proper attention to the dear mites, you seem utterly incapable of looking after them," she cried pettishly, as she proceeded to invest the thirteenth nursery-maid of the season with the ancient order and insignia of the boot ; "here's Master Alexander gone and bitten his tongue again!"

The guest should be intuitively aware, I think, that the hostess keeps a watchful eye over her comfort, without in the least degree trying to circumscribe her liberty of action, and somehow I quite failed to realise this, when Mrs Merridew asked me if I would object to having little Dorothy in my bed, as the house was so full. I do declare that child passed the night in thirty-three different positions, for I counted them—eighteen on the bed, and fifteen on the floor! It was positively awful—indeed I only dozed off from the sheer exhaustion of being kept awake, just as Saint Peter was blowing out the last little star and day was breaking. And yet the whole country-side literally swarms with the little pests ; the whole village was kept awake on the night of my arrival by the latest "event" in the curate's

family, which took the form of twins. This cut the sixteenth and seventeenth notches in his little quiver, thirteen of which represent children still living, and the poor man—whose stipend is only eighty pounds a year—was quite distracted about it, especially as he had backed a bill, or cashed a snide cheque, or done something equally horrible and commercial, in the very reasonable expectation of his wife receiving the Queen's Bounty.

Poor fellow! the steady unchecked growth of his family bids fair to become the ultimate ruin of him. He spoke quite pathetically of his early married days, when he had but two little "olive-branches," called respectively "Alpha" and "Omega." But, unfortunately, they did not end there, so, with a heavy heart and many misgivings, he christened his third by the somewhat odd cognomen, "Errata." One could not help feeling pity—anyway *I* could not—when sitting listening to him preaching so beautifully about the immortals reposing on high, on beds of amaranth and of moly, and knowing all the time that nothing but the charitable pulpit concealed the fact that his poor, dear broadcloth trousers had been more than once patched in the postern gate.

Have you ever noticed, Madge, how lamentably poor is the library of the average country

house? All that the bookcases at Seven Beeches contained were *Baily's Magazine* up to 1874, Vol. II. of "Veterinary Remedies," a dog-eared "Ought We to Visit Her," and some permanganate crystals for making sheep-dip. Newspapers there were — well, scarcely any, though the one that I did come across interested me hugely, as I had never seen anything like it before. Its literary matter was contributed almost entirely by persons who desired to swap articles for which they had no further use for others of which they stood in need.

Here are a few examples :—

MOURNING.—Young widow offers handsome black silk and crêpe walking dress, Directoire style, waist 18, only worn once, and slightly soiled by clay round bottom of skirt, for pair glacé kid 10-button boots, high heels, small 3's, or imitation Crown Derby five o'clock tea-set; or would exchange lease of cheerful vault, Abney Park, room for seven, for sapphire and diamond engaged ring; or would swap late lamented's P.G.M. masonic jewels and a recipe for banana fritters, for crushed strawberry, box-cloth Empire cape.— Letters only "Poppets," Jelly's Library, Shaftesbury Avenue.

ARTISTIC.—Advertiser offers a drum of boiled oil in exchange for litho., "Meeting of Wellington and Blucher," or would give a firkin of treacle for engraving, "Magdalene."—"Artisticus," Box 67.

LITERARY.—Two vols. "Secrets of Courtship," one vol. "Dame aux Camelias," one vol. "Nana's Daughter," offered by attractive young person (twenty-two, blonde) for loan of double perambulator three afternoons per week.—Reply, "Blighted Emma," office of this paper.

FREEHOLD.—Cemetery allotment, airy situation, one minute's walk from the catacombs. Will be exchanged for brass door-plate, "Goods Removed," or small hand-truck, owner having recovered.—"Bill," 179A, Seymour Place, Stingo Lane, Marylebone.

MEDICAL.—"Medicus" offers eight-ounce bottle Hydrochlorate of Hyoscin, Dr Kelly's "Notes on a Case of a Button-Hook in the Intestines," and a "Treatise on Erythro-Melalgia," for a she-goat in milk and six pairs of socks; or would give a Casella's Clinical Thermometer and a tame wallaby for a forequarter of lamb.—"W. A. M.," London Hospital Coffee House, E.

BICYCLE.—Humber racer, all latest improvements, but hind wheel off. Will exchange for week's rest at a farmhouse.—Letters to J. B., care of Bob Watson, *Sporting Life*.

SECRETS.—Octavo copy of "Mysteries Unravelled" offered for address of respectable woman who would adopt a child.—Address in first instance "Peter Simple," Poste Restante, Charing Cross.

Mental pabulum of this vintage doubtless satisfies the peaceful, simple mind that can

tolerate existence in a country house, where the news of the outer world is taken down in weekly dozes like brimstone and treacle, and the narration of the most commonplace events never fail to create surprise and evoke rustic comment, but it makes a town mouse extremely tired. For instance, one evening over the dinner-table the conversation had gradually turned to matters dramatic, and from thence to disturbances during a performance. Then simple little Mrs Merridew recalled an interruption to "The Bells," goodness knows how many years before. "Do you know," said she, "I think children at the theatre are a great nuisance. I was at the Lyceum one evening, and a woman had a baby in the pit——"

And the simple old Master of Foxhounds, who was the honoured guest that evening, was so overcome that the stud-groom, who was waiting at the table, had to lead him outside and bathe his temples with vinegar.

One great regret I experienced in leaving the country was that my coming to town temporarily broke off an acquaintance I had formed with the village postmistress, a very dear and delightful girl, who let me read all the telegrams and postal cards that came through the office,

and in many other ways afforded me endless amusement. She had a *naïf* unofficial way of dealing with the customers, too, that often made me laugh till the tears ran down my cheeks and I had to hold my sides to save my stay-busk breaking. On the very day that I came away, for instance, one of the village maidens who had only recently become engaged, came into the little post-office to send off her first *billet-doux* to her bumpkin sweetheart, who had gone "oop to Lunnon" on some agricultural errand.

"An' please, miss," she asked, as she rolled her long and deliciously healthy pink tongue all over the little adhesive stamp, "hoo long will it be afoor I get a aa'nswer to this?"

"Well, you see, Maggie, it all depends," said the facetious little postmistress; "if, as is not unlikely, he's doing 'time,' they only let 'em write once a week, while, if he's been red-ochring the metropolis, as most young rustics do, and is dead broke, he'll have to wait until he earns, or gonophs, the price of a stamp; whilst, if he's caught the small-pox, which is very much about, they won't let him write at all. Then, of course, there's always the risk of his having picked up a fresh tart——"

But here the simple girl burst out crying and

went out, without waiting for my little friend to complete her catalogue of contingencies.

But this, after all, was hardly as rich as a certain post-card we got hold of, on which a local gentleman-farmer, who had lately left his wife——All men are vagrants by nature, and have, as they seem to suppose, a prescriptive right to wander abroad, sipping the honey from every opening flower——charged her with all sorts of roguish things hitherto undreamt of even in *my* philosophy. So anxious was my little friend to see what the addressee—who was a truly splendid specimen of intellectual womanhood, and as captivating as Aphrodite herself—just the sort of woman who could apparently hold her own either in a beauty contest, a political debate, or a scrape—would say in reply, that she sent a special messenger on horseback to deliver the card.

And what do you think the mean thing did? Positively replied *by letter!*—a big, fat letter, all sealing-waxed down, and absolutely unopenable! Wasn't it *horrid* of her? I can tell you, Madge, my little friend and I sat down together and positively *howled* with sheer vexation and disappointment.

Dear Lenore Fisher, who is "on" at the

Alhampire, came to see me to-day. She had on a hat she bought in Paris, and she looked so nicely in it. Yellow straw, with four green birds of Paradise in front, and six smaller ones to hitch up the back, and as she wears her hair in one long pigtail down her back, it's very becoming. I forgot to mention it had yellow, blue, green, and red streamers reaching to the end of her dress-improver, which was designed by Le Comte de Tochas. She always dresses in such good taste. With this *chapeau* she wears red silk gloves, and a diamond ring over them on the forefinger of her left hand. Poor Lenore! Like many another trusting girl, she has her "secret sorrow." She has never entirely got over the cruel blow that was dealt her, when that young scapegrace, Blackforde-de-Blurtonne, threw over her affections, and took his patronage elsewhere. And though he has now fallen from his former high estate, and gets but a precarious living soliciting orders for a snide firm of photographers, still she cannot steel her heart against him. Only the other night she saw him. She was supping with the worthy president of the Little Sisters' Rescue Home, at Greciano's, when he staggered in and recognised her. "Henry," she exclaimed, "come and see me to-morrow

night." He braced himself up and said in a stage whisper, which might have been distinctly heard at Saffron Walden: "I shou'd ha' done before, puss, but I've f'got yer number." "Cad!" she ejaculated, as, for the sake of impressing the president, who occasionally advances small sums to prospective "Little Sisters" whose relations with their landladies are strained, she with one hand flung the *crout au pôt* all over him, whilst, with the other, she pressed a pass for the balcony lounge at the Alhampire into his fist. "I mean I'm in the front row of the second ballet!"

I am so sorry, dear, to learn that you suffer so from insomnia; it is very dreadful. But make up and try the following:—One gill of Hottentot brandy, two glasses of Kümmel, three or four capsicums, a splash of Lea and Perrin, and a tablespoonful of pain-killer. It should be taken at bedtime. The last dear girl I recommended to try this lived at Newmarket, and she slept slick through the Second Spring Meeting, as calmly and almost as unruffled as though she had been in the morgue. As to the other matter: unless there is a great change in the weather, your primrose satin dress, that you had new for the clown's benefit, will hardly do for Alexandra Park Races on Saturday. Still, as you "look so well"

in it, you might wear it driving down, and swap it for something more durable at the last decent pub on the road. Try the Alexandra Park Tavern; there is a quiet private bar down the tradesman's entrance, and Gilbert, the cabman, being a married man, might be trusted to hook or button anything for you. You need not be afraid to meet your friend's friend, the owner of Gluefoot, of whom you speak, as the expression, "the owner has nothing on," does not refer to his clothing.

Rosie, who is up from the old vicarage for a few days, has just dropped in to ask me to take her to look at the *hautes nouveautés*, some of which I may describe to you in my next letter.—Till then, dearest, your loving cousin,

MAUDE.

JUIN

THE SPROUTS, BELLAGGIO.

SWEET LITTLE MADGE,

The month of roses finds me installed in new diggings; I have flown down into Surrey, utterly worn out with the countless vexations that beset one who lives in a residential flat. When I reflect upon what I went through during the last quarter of my tenancy, I recall dear Yvette Gilbert's remarks, which were included in the preface she wrote to a certain merry book which was "*le tout Paris de tout Paris*" in its Frenchiness, and came out a few years ago.

"'My dear,' one of my comrades said to me one day, 'I often ask myself, for what do they take us? I had been looking for an apartment in a respectable house, well kept, orderly—in fact, what I want. At last I found it; I wanted to rent it, but here I ran against a snag. When the *concierge* learned that I was an actress he did

not want to rent to me. Finally, after hesitating a long time, and parleying for days, the owner deigned to accept me as a tenant for the temple, saying: "I can count on you, can I not, to live *bourgeoisement?*"

"'I moved in, but had hardly settled when the life of the house became infernal. My neighbour below led the life of a dog until three o'clock in the morning; the lady above me tried to get my lover from me, and the widow opposite me received so much company, that there was a veritable cab standing in front of the door day and night. It became scandalous. I gave up the apartment.'"

And London landladies are every bit as fussy as the absurd *concierge* of Yvette's little friend. I well remember how dear Lena Frith trudged about St John's Wood the whole of one day, looking over a suite here and an upper part there, until finally she thought she had hit on just the place to suit her—quiet, bright, clean, and nicely furnished. It was then that the sedate old landlady who had shown her over the rooms remarked, somewhat severely: "I—er—might mention—er—that I never let rooms to ladies who are alone." "Oh, you needn't worry on *that* score," answered Lena artlessly, "I am hardly ever alone,

auntie!" and, would you believe it, the frumpish old thing caught Lena by the back of the neck and the dress-improver, and ran her out into the street, as though she had been a verminous person or a fever case!

I must tell you that Charlie and I have taken the delightful semi-detached bungalow between Horley and Crawley that I told you about in my last; indeed we have been living in it for the past fortnight. I think it exquisitely rural. We are over a mile from a house of any sort, and nearly two from a tavern. Charlie has hit upon such a pretty name for it, "Dryazell." Is it not charmingly sylvan? As far as I can judge, our next door neighbours are particularly quiet people, but it may be that they are only keeping so (as the walls are very, very thin) in order to overhear what we say.

How fortunate you are in keeping your servants, dear. I must tell you that the last girl we had from the registry office has given us no end of trouble. It being her "day out" last Monday, she went to the Crystal Palace, and, whilst there, ate or drank something that disagreed with her. In the middle of the night she was doubled up with pain, and groaned in a most awful way.

Poor Charlie scoured the surrounding country for miles for a doctor, but could only find a veterinary surgeon, who, as nearly as I could catch, said the foolish girl had "overloaded her gastric reticule." He mixed a few ounces of linseed oil, rum, and a fluid resembling shellac varnish, after swallowing which Jane Ann fell into a deep sleep, and the veterinary took his departure. His manner was, I thought, very odd, and as he went away he said, either from forgetfulness or force of habit, that for a few days we were to "bruise her oats and keep her stall dry."

I was awfully concerned for the poor thing, and hunted high and low for a most useful book I have, called "What to Do while Waiting for the Doctor," and when at last I found it, I was all the more agitated, because the only remedy suggested in cases where the symptoms corresponded to Jane Ann's was, "Induce the sufferer to make his (or her) will."

Up to the present I have not found country life nearly so dull as I thought it would be, and it is quite a mistake to suppose that only town people (and, of course, the criminal classes) are versed in the act of making things hum. For instance, there is a sweet young girl, living in a *maisonette* only just over the hill, who went to the last race-

meeting at Gatwick, fell in love, married, settled down, broke up housekeeping, lost her husband, and resumed her maiden name, all within the last month. Her husband, during the same time, "took the knock" in the Ring, met and married the girl, gave a bill-of-sale on her furniture, was hammered on the Stock Exchange, altered his name twice, and then disappeared mysteriously, unseen by anybody—like the beautiful maiden in the play, whose father, coming to look for her on the following morning, exclaims: "Alas! alas her little bed has not been slept in, her chamber is empty!"

I saw Bertie Hobson the other day at the railway station at Three Bridges. Do you know, I never gaze upon his bronzed and sunburnt visage without thinking of that little *contretemps* at Mrs de Curzon Brown's dinner table. I think you were there, and consequently may remember how she was gushing about his having been hand to hand with those blood-thirsty Egyptians, fighting gallantly for his country, etc.; and then she wound up with: "And that terrible but honourable scar, right across your cheek, Captain Hobson, where did you get that—at Kassassin or Tel-el-Kebir?" "Oh lor! neither," he blurted out, forgetting himself in his blunt, frank, fashion.

"That was a girl I was standing a drink to at Victoria Station. I put down a sovereign, and she said it had gone down behind the bottles, but I knew devilish well it hadn't, and I told her so, and then she ups with a decanter——" But as by this time even the servants were giggling, Mrs de Curzon Brown dropped a plate and smashed it, purposely decimating her best service to save the dignity of the situation.

Although we did not come down here with the idea of entertaining company, we have had an old Oxford friend of Charlie's staying with us. We call him "The Reverend Peter." He really is one of Nature's gentlemen, though he is as free from money as a frog is from feathers, and has no home ties. If he has any relatives, they do not correspond with him; he is not the brand of hairpin they require. He was unfortunate enough to get plucked at the University, and now, instead of piloting souls to the upper blue himself, he is reduced to frogging out sermons at half-a-guinea a pair for old comrades who were more fortunate. Not that he ever indulges in vain regrets about it, for, as he says, he plays such a dashed bad game at baccarat that he never could have held his own against the

churchwardens in the vestry after the taking-up of the offertory.

All his after-dinner stories are permeated by a certain moral tone which is distinctly refreshing, as, for instance, the adventure of a clerical brother of his, who took some rooms in Southampton Street, Strand, which had only just been vacated by a music-hall and variety agent. In the bustle and confusion of moving out this person seems to have forgotten to write to the telephone company to come and take their instrument down. So when, only two days later, the Reverend Septimus Judd, who had taken the flat principally on account of its handy proximity to Exeter Hall, moved in, the vulcanite receiver still hung listlessly by its cord, and the little mahogany desk, though thick with dust, was still affixed to the wall.

It happened on the new tenant's first evening, as he stood unpacking bundles of good and moral books, and arranging them on the newly-erected shelves, that the telephone bell rang violently. The suddenness and loudness of the ringing caused him to start for an instant from his task; the next he was smiling good-naturedly at the train of queer thoughts it had awakened. He walked over to the machine, took down the bell,

applied it to his ear, and called into the glass receiver:

"Hello! Who are you?"

"Clocker, 'Ackney Varieties! Why ain't yer sent on the contrac's for the Human Grass-'opper?"

A large, beaming, plethoric smile of gratification suffused the honest countenance of the Reverend Septimus. Oft as he had longed to reach the outside degenerates of the music-halls, he had never had such a chance as this; clearly it was Providence that had placed this telephone in his hands! It was immensely rich, but nothing was too rich for the blood of Septimus, and he answered, with something akin to a chuckle:

"'Because,' as sayeth Ecclesiastes, 'the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail; because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.'"

There was an unusually long wait before the reply came through:

"Who *are* you?"

"Reverend Septimus Judd, Exeter Hall, next Sunday afternoon; come round, all are wel——"

A bang and a sort of ringing told the Reverend Septimus that he was no longer "connected,"

wherefore he returned to the arranging of his books, smiling almost audibly. In another little while there was a second tintinnabulary agitation, and again the good man who believed in seizing opportunities went over to the machine.

"Hello?"

"Hello. You there?"

"Yes. Who are you?"

"Sisters Hawkitt. What's our time?"

The broadest smile of the evening meandered over the features of Mr Judd, as he replied in a serious tone:

"'*Now* is the accepted time.'"

Full of asperity came the answer:

"*Now?* What's eatin' yer? Why, they ain't played the overtoor yet."

"The overture is *always* playing," answered the good man with enthusiasm. "'He sayeth among the trumpets, Ha, ha! and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.'"

A considerable pause followed this statement. The Reverend Septimus almost fancied that the charming sisters had gone, but eventually one replied, in a weary tone:

"We'll go on as soon as we're dressed, anyhow, and call on you to-morrow. Meantime, get

a jag that fits you; the one you're wearing's too big!"

He tried to ring them up again to give them a verbal invite to his Women's Wednesday Evenings, but failed to make the connection.

Next morning the Reverend Septimus had several callers, and the last of all was the most unwelcome, for it was an operator from the Universal Telephone Syndicate, and his taking the machine away seriously hampered the good work so recently started. For who knows, as the Reverend Septimus remarked, but *some* of the good seed sown by the wayside might have sprung up?

What do you think Priscilla Poynter is going to do? Guess! Get married? No; men are fools, but they draw the line somewhere. Go on the stage? My dear, don't you remember the spindleshanks we used to see when bathing at Trouville? Padding will do a lot, but it won't do everything. Well, not to keep you any longer in suspense, she has turned religious, and is going to become a nurse and attend to the dirty poor in the slums. Nobody can dissuade her from it. Her Aunt Meredith pointed out that she would be taking all sorts of horrible diseases home to her family, and she replied

that was exactly what she wanted to do. Then her Uncle Robbins urged that the class of people she would be called upon to nurse would, under the surgeon's saw and lancet, or in great bodily pain, use language which it would be totally impossible for her to hear. She, however, answered that, having stood her brother Lionel's language for twenty years, nothing that the most drunken coalheaver, having his leg cut off, could say would in any way astonish her. And here I think she was right. Her still most devoted admirer—and how faithful he is!—Percy Whiffitt, in order to be nursed by her, is sowing the seeds for a luxuriant harvest of *delirium tremens*. Is it not touching? Leander got to his Hero by swimming through the salt sea, but I think he is totally eclipsed by Percy swimming to his Priscilla through an ocean of music-hall brandy!

I could have wished that you had not asked me how Millie likes married life. Marrying a middle-aged man is often like biting into a public-house pork pie—you do not know what you have got till it is too late to throw it up; and everybody but Millie herself could see beforehand that she and the major were not suited to one another. It is an old saying with the

Portuguese that no man can be a good husband who does not eat a good breakfast (and, as a matter of fact, the Major is always fearfully ill from five minutes until two hours after waking); but Millie must have thought him very, very simple when she expected him to believe that the mark on her shoulder was where she had been bitten by a llama at the Zoo. All of which goes to prove that Millie's old dodge of attracting the notice of seemingly wealthy men by enquiring if she has to change at Clapham Junction for Billericay does not answer when applied to a permanency. By latest accounts they have made it up together for the—goodness knows how many-th time, Millie having signed a paper that she will never see D—— again. She would have faced the Divorce Court undaunted, she told me, had the "Co-" been all one colour, which, with his inflamed nose, yellow skin, and invariable black eye, D—— seldom is.

I daresay you have noticed, Madge, that no man ever can remember what he did a year ago on a certain day, although, if he appeals to his women-folks, they can invariably tell him. It was after reminding Charlie of one or two merry little incidents of *last* Derby Day that I suggested he should take me to Epsom next Wednesday.

He has, to use his own words, "got a book-maker on the bow"; so, if we can get a dog-cart "on the nod," and a luncheon-basket "on the curtesy," we shall certainly see the Derby—that is, if the man Hawke and the Social Gimlet Society do not get it interdicted.

Have you changed your underclothes yet? The question might sound strange if asked "in Society," as dear Lady Colin was wont to say in the ever-memorable suit, but it is all right between girl cousins. Dame Fashion's latest decree—that our silk underskirts should be lined with nun's veiling—is simply hateful. They absolutely refuse to rustle. On the other hand, there are compensations. It is no longer necessary for ladies to be in full dress when called down by the night constable at three in the morning to deny all knowledge of the maid-servant, who has been found asleep in the beer-cellar in the area, with a trooper of the Royal Horse Guards.

In reply to your question, I should not boil the sky-blue *reseda* which you say you spilt the black draught over; so few of these fabrics are dyed fast colours nowadays. Can't you put a *plastron* of some bright material, or plush, over it, so that even if it did not do for the wedding

you think of going to, it would surely come in later on for the Promenade Concerts?

Oh, I knew I had another item of news for you, dear! Marjorie Markwell has been staying with us, though she has suffered much this spring from a suppressed cold and shock to the nervous system. I think I told you she was standing over a grating, looking into a shop window in Oxford Street, whilst a wretched, mischievous errand boy was monkeying with a garden-hose in the area below. Boys will be boys, I know; but a sudden jet of ice-cold water is fearfully and dangerously startling, and Marjorie's nerves were never really strong.

Fifine has just entered to tell me that tea is ready, so, dear, with the old wish "everything you want, and just when you want it," I am, your loving cousin, MAUDE.

JUILLET

THE LADY AUTHORS' CLUB
Tuesday.

MY POOR LITTLE MADGE!

Beyond remarking, dear, that once again you seem to have been putting up the wrong matrimonial badger, I do not see what I can say in answer to your very doleful letter of this morning, save that you have my very fullest sympathy. At the same time, I cannot help thinking that it must have been due to some very great indiscretion of your own that the young gentleman made the discovery that you wore an artificial limb. However, buck up! Men are so fond of agreeable places to loaf—(and you tell me that your new flat is a perfect little paradise. By the way, Madge, you are not the experienced housekeeper I thought you. The trouble in your kitchen is that you have mice—mice of opposite sexes—there)—that good-natured, easy-going men of thirteen stone and upwards soon find themselves

engaged. Keep a good heart, little one, your silk stockings are as good as new, and the Big Wheel at Earl's Court will not stop running till October. It is your present harassed state of mind, combined with the restricted ventilation of your rooms, I think, that depresses you. Whenever this dejection comes on, relief may be had by letting the sink tap run for fifteen minutes, and then pouring down about a pint of carbolic fluid or a teacupful of permanganate of potash.

And now for a little adventure of my own. I daresay you remember how Mr Pickwick discovered the manuscript of "The True Legend of Prince Bladud," tucked away in an inkstand drawer in his apartment at Mrs Craddock's, in the Royal Crescent, at Bath; well, *I*, too, have discovered an old manuscript. I came across it in the secret drawer of a small second-hand writing-table, which Charlie picked up for a mere song at an auction-room the other day. It is evidently the *bonâ fide* and voluntary confession of one John Smith, and I give it word for word :—

"MONDAY, *Nov.* 18, 1895.

"Seated calmly and soberly by my own fire-

side—my wife being gone with her sister to the pit stalls of the Grand, late Philharmonic, the children being in bed, and our only maid-servant (probably) in the gallery at Sam Collins' Music-Hall, with the morning postman's arm about her neck—I, John Newminster Smith, of 367A, Liberia Road, Highbury Barn, in the county of Middlesex, do solemnly and sincerely declare that:

"When first I heard on Friday afternoon that Laodamia had won, I thought I should go fairly off my burner for very joy!

"I am the only child living of poor but honest parents. My lamented mother was the daughter of a Southsea pork-butcher; my still surviving father was a pilot until the night that he blew the boat's whistle to pass a star, which he took to be a steam-boat signal, an unfortunate affair, which cost him his certificate. My mother was a good, long-suffering soul, and often and often, when my male parent, who was a free and frequent librator, came home tanked up, she would beg of me, as we took it in turns to sit by father until his visions subsided, to choose some more genteel occupation. This I subsequently did by entering the counting-house of Messrs Van Hier and Glew, the eminent cabinet-makers of Curtain

Road, E.C., in whose employ I am—(by the unconscious grace of old Harry Hall and the luck of Laodamia)—to this day.

"(Pardon me one moment. Let me mix myself another whisky and turn the key in the door. That's it.)

"For years I have been ringing the petty cash-book on Messrs V. H. & G.

"It began only in a small way, but *Facilis descensus Averni!* which in classic English means, that a willing attendant, who is forbidden to accept gratuities on pain of instant dismissal, is kept constantly on the premises to grease the trousers'-seats of gentlemen desirous of patronising the down chutes.

"I find, upon searching my conscience, that it is only after a man has kept up with the procession by falsifying the paying-in book to the tune of seventy or eighty sovereigns, that the great truth that by sin death came into the world strikes him as an old 'market horse,' but still in the handicap.

"But it is then too late for him to pull up. He has every desire to do so, principally in order to prevent his personal sorrows becoming enjoyment for the coarse, brutal, Sunday afternoon readers of *Lloyd's* or *Reynolds's*, but the

game has started, as it were, and, having looked at his hand, he sees no way out of it save by drawing more cards. His children need their winter outfits, and his wife has set her mind upon a furred velvet mantle that shall fill the hearts of the neighbours with bitterness. Another mantle and a sapphire bangle are wanted, too, in another quarter, and the presence of a flock of seagulls at Blackfriars only serves to remind him that his coal-cellar wants fortifying.

"I did not give my mind, as some would have done, to the 'Special' that populates the grave, but Barry Pain afforded me some solace. 'I don't care about intense virtue in real life,' says Barry, taking a trick, 'because there it is always accompanied by bad temper—and bad temper is unpardonable. The man who is mildly and persistently disagreeable all his life is a much worse enemy to society than a man who is, as a rule, cheerful and unselfish, but commits a murder in a momentary lapse.'

"On Friday, the 8th, whilst Van Hier was at the Surrey Commercial Docks looking over a parcel of mahogany, and Glew was rubbing it into an unfortunate tradesman before Mr Registrar Giffard, I quietly totted up my defaultings to the firm.

"One hundred and eighty-seven pounds sixteen and tenpence half-penny!

"To raise that sum by any honest means and put it back was out of the question. *Per contra:* Who would pay my family's board and washing bill while I sate in a high-backed pew only two from the warder and repented?

"I had three gins and angosturas, and filched another tenner. Ten pounds and twopence half-penny, to be correct, for the postage to Holland is equivalent to twenty-five centimes.

"I'd always fancied the mare—thought she'd have won in a trot at Kempton—so, I am told, did Harry Hall; but perhaps not. Anyway, Messrs Topps, Carraway, & Bottom returned me £250 to £10.

. . . . . .

"My wife's latchkey in the street door. Down, Ponto, down! It's only the missis. Good dog, good dog!

"That heavenly win has made me another man. My wife has ordered her mantle, my children dream of forthcoming Christmas productions as they slumber between the heaviest Witneys that Heal's could supply, and—after to-morrow night—I shall bestow no more sapphire bangles in any quarter.

"I felt so good on Sunday that I went to church twice, and in the evening read three chapters of the Second Book of Proverbs to a reformed cab-driver from Queen's Head Mews. *He*, too, used to bet in the old days; indeed, we both agreed that, if it wasn't for the sin of having another accursed bet, there's seldom been seen such a pinch on paper as Count Sch——

"But here is my wife!

"(Signed) JOHN NEWMINSTER SMITH."

There, dear, what do you think of my "find"?

I have always held, dear Madge, that there is a great deal more fascination about somebody else's life's partner than about one's own. I suppose it is because limited possession accords better with the frailties of poor humanity. Anyway, it is on this circumstance in human nature that half the modern plays and all the successful six-shilling novels of the present day are based. You have heard me speak of pretty little Mrs Terence Wortonhunt, whose shockingly fast husband ran away with Letty Bunn from the Gaiety? Well, when she definitely adopted the theatrical profession, as she did six months ago, she decided to whack up a sort of contra-account to her erring husband, so she first made violent

love to, and then publicly horse-whipped her acting manager—although she told her dearest friends that she only did it for the "splendid advertising." It caused her box-office receipts to go up by big jumps, anyhow, and her fickle husband, coming to the conclusion about the same time that absolute possession of the Bunn was slowly but surely blunting his appetite for pastry, wrote a most penitent letter home, in which he asked on what terms he could come back. Hilda replied to him just three weeks ago. "If you care to combine the *rôle* of the foully-wronged husband with that of man-in-front," she wrote, "I am prepared to offer you four pounds a week, a new dress suit, Abyssinian gold watch-chain, and three imitation diamond shirt studs; but you are not required in any other capacity. Address your reply to Mr H. de Bellevere, No. 1 *Bar of Soap* Company, *en route* (see *Era* for address)."

He has come back, and the little scheme seems to be working fairly well, but she is evidently much afraid of him. He is, of course, still her lawful lord and master, and this fact leads her to invest all her earnings in diamond ornaments. "If I don't either carry my salary stuck into my body," she said, as she showed me a pair of bewildering new eardrops, "or swallow the

cheques as I receive them, he may take it into his head to go off again with something in the chorus, or one of the programme hussies!"

Philosophic women with flighty husbands—women who take in the anonymous babies left at their partners' front-door, and charitably call them *step*-children—belong, unfortunately, to all ages, but very few have accepted the inevitable with a cheerier grace than dear Lady D——, certainly the most delightful hostess in Belgravia.

"Do you know, I think your husband is such a fascinating man," said a budding beauty to her ladyship, with every desire to be complimentary.

"Hullo—*you, too?*" was her ladyship's reply, as her lips formed a pitying smile.

What is coming over our young men of the middle class—the sort that turn counter-jumpers in their giddy youth? I really do think, dear, that a free distribution of Doctor Boutall's Buck-Up Drops amongst them would be a beneficial move for the charitable to undertake. I was coming through the Burlington this afternoon, wearing a smart starched shirt and collar, with a tailor-made skirt and steel belt, and I chanced to see such a pretty new necktie in a shop window. It was made to tie in a sailor's knot, and I went in and purchased it. "I want you to put it on

for me, please," I said to one of the grinning assistants; "boys always tie knots so much better than girls." With the three other young fellows watching him, he proceeded to adjust the tie, tittering like a typhoid idiot, till I felt half inclined to fetch him a swipe across the mouth with the volume I was carrying—such an up-to-date, startling romance, dear, called "The Sleeping Signalman, or, You'll all be Angels By and By;" you must get it. Well, when the thing was tied, and after I had ducked my tuppenny to allow him to slip the neckband under my rear stud, the ends seemed a bit long, and he asked: "Er—a—how do you fasten these, miss?" "Tuck them inside," said I, when he went as crimson as a tray-ripened early Bottombarley tomato, and stuttered: "B—b—b—b—but I'm not married!" Idiot! Now *some* women positively court ridicule of this kind by their thoughtless procedure, but I do not. I refer, for instance, to dear Laura, who so seldom gets a tenner from her hubby, that whenever she does so she treasures it—not exactly next her heart—but next the garment that is next her heart. Being the happy possessor of a "bit of paper" the other day, she carried off her three little nieces to Buszard's, where the dear children proceeded to freeze the

mucous membranes and bung up the follicles of their *svelte* little stomachs with lemon ices and childish promptitude. It was only when they had jointly incurred a liability of seven-and-sixpence that dear Laura, blushing furiously, observed in an audible whisper to the young man behind the counter: "Will you kindly turn your head the other way whilst I — er — unfasten my corsets?"

With a great deal of regret have I read the kindly letter of a correspondent who signs herself "Full to Overflowing," a metaphorical reference, I take it, to her cup of sorrow, or her husband— or both. She wrote to me a fortnight back for a face-wash, and, misreading her letter, by some sad mischance I sent her a recipe for curing hams. Although the skin is still extremely painful, she says it is a mere fleabite to the great sorrow that is gnawing at her heart. She was taken by her husband the other day on a shopping expedition to the Stores, where he is very well known, but she is not, and she distinctly overheard the fool of a shopman, after receiving a more than ordinarily extravagant order for soups, *glacés* and sweetmeats, ask her lawful partner the terrible but significant question:

"And where are *these* to be sent to, sir—

Gunnersbury, or—er (with a meaning wink)—Claverton Street?"

I hardly know what to advise her to do, unless it is to endeavour to balance the unhappy business by having a little fun on her own account.

Sympathising with you in your own little affair, dear,—Yours always, MAUDE.

AOÛT

OFF COWES, I.W.

SWEET MADGE,

If ever you should pine for an entirely novel and delightful experience, inveigle some Johnnie into taking a sailing yacht for you, and then go cruising about the South Coast and the Solent in it. It is quite the most exquisite thing I can think of—that is, when once you have got your sea legs and learned to re-swallow. Do you remember dear Arthur Roberts, with a very white face, coming up the companion-way of the *Saucy Puss* when she was caught in the gale? Holding tightly to the brass hand-rail on either side of him, he swayed backwards and forwards, and then remarked, in gulps:

"They tell me—apples 're a goo' thing for it. I could—*do with an orchard!*"

Dear Algy Ronalds, whose guests we are here, lives entirely aboard his yacht, so as to be permanently beyond the reach of his importunate

creditors, and oh! the life is so deliciously primitive! Whatever we want from the shops ashore has to be fetched in the dinghy by a brick-red sailor, who is also the ship's carpenter, chamber-maid, sail-mender, and general utility man. Last night he cut the captain's hair, and a more perfect piece of weather-boarding I have never seen. He is a typical British tar, and, though I heard Algy say that he regularly spends all his wages on the women he meets in the taverns in Portsmouth, he always goes home to his lawful Poll, who lives in some northern port —Stornoway, I think—in the winter. Blood, after all, is thicker than alcohol—or, perhaps, I should say *some* alcohol, since Charlie, who went in the boat with the mariner last evening, ostensibly to replenish the ship's larder with onions, is said to be still sleeping peacefully on the Hampshire foreshore, somewhere below Netley.

Altogether we are a very cheery party, which includes several nice men and a certain Dolly Dreifoogle, who, Algy says, is a very good and virtuous girl—though he did not tell me how he discovered the fact—and if only the winds would blow in the directions we desire to travel, we should have really nothing left to wish for.

Which reminds me that yesterday, in a futile attempt to "make" Cherbourg, we had to turn back when half-way across the Channel and run into Brighton. It was all the more provoking, because Brighton in August is simply *impossible.* A "parade" in aid of the local dispensaries was taking place, and it chiefly consisted of two triumphal cars, illustrative, I presume, of the daily increasing demand for drugs. The first represented a brigand's cave, and showed three sickly-looking brigands pretending to be playing at cards, while their beautiful female captive stood in a corner unembraced by anything save a fixed clothes-prop, to which she was bound by chains and thongs. Probably it was meant to show that beautiful girls had nothing to fear from brigands who did not possess outdoor letters for the Brighton dispensaries, since they were far too debilitated to go in for love-making even when they had the chance, which was while their lovely captives were awaiting the receipt of a remittance from their, possibly, agonised friends.

The other *tableau* represented a little girl in bed, attended by her mother, her father, and her little brother, and they were supposed to have just promised her that, if she took her medicine

like a good child, she should get a large, hideous doll, which the man danced up and down idiotically. This group was called "The Bribe," and it must have filled judicious parents with a poignant grief. For, nowadays, a well-regulated child no sooner knows enough to grow hair than it is on terms of personal familiarity with its Keppler and its Parrish, lies on its right side when sleeping, breathes through its nostrils, and never sits down to meals without inflating its little lungs three times; and only hopelessly illiterate and imbecile parents, more fit to raise rabbits or silkworms than children, would dream of presenting a child with a "bribe." How much more nicely and appropriately the title of the *tableau* could have been realised by—say, an old man of thirty, who has been metaphorically dancing on the steps of the Keeley Institute since he came of age, and who has now to undergo a possibly fatal operation, giving the trained nurse of his choice—Sister Flossie—a snappy little supper in a private room at dear old Kettner's?

Henrietta Pondwithers once went in for a probationary course as a trained nurse, don't you remember?

It was during her novitiate that she abruptly

broke off her engagement with that entertaining young *littérateur*, of whom she once thought so very, very much, until she one day picked up and secretly perused a letter, which he accidentally dropped from his pocket. Not that it incriminated him with any woman or anything of that sort, but it ran :

"℞
Spts. Ammon. Arom., ℥j.
Spts. Æther. Chlor., ♏xv.
Tinct. Capsici., ♏x.
Syrupi Aurantii, ℥ij.
Acid. Hydrocyanic. dil. (B.P.), ♏ij (2).
Aquæ Flor. Aurantii, ℥ss.
Aquæ ad ℥ij. M. ft. haust."

And Henrietta said she really didn't feel experienced enough to tackle such an advanced case of "James-marmalades" as his was. A few days later, rendered desperate by Hetty's refusal and whatever it was that he had taken to drown his sorrow, he mated with a person—very rich, it was said, but quite old enough to be his mother—with whom he quarrelled on his wedding night. It seems that, overawed in his fuddled condition by her veteran appearance, he no sooner got his nighty's on than he went down on his knees at her feet, and, closing his eyes and

putting his hands together, as he used to in his nursery days, he inadvertently began with—

"Now I lay me down to sleep!"

It may have been thoughtlessness, or he may have considered it facetious, but the dear old soul was inexpressibly shocked, and the bright young *littérateur* is once again fighting for the smaller plums of Fleet Street, as the result of his idiotic conduct. It has been said that a pair of large blue eyes, a tiny waist, a tapering ankle in a brown silk stocking, and a tailor-made frock will often make a man feel as if there was only a thin sheet of tissue paper between Heaven and himself, but it is the elderly female with the slight, iron-grey moustache and six figures in her bank balance who can make the intelligent young man, possessed of only ordinary tact, supremely comfortable for the "rest of his natch," as Charlie says.

I heard a little story, by the way, of a *previous* occasion on which this excellent wife-in-name-only—then known as Miss Priscilla Molloy-Minns—received a severe shock to her maidenly sensibilities; it is a story of blighted hopes and an india-rubber plant. The plant was only of the common order, but its stem was five feet high,

and each of its two-and-twenty leaves stood out as straight as a royal flush in poker.

And when the sun shone of a morning on the back gardens—some of them very pretty and well-kept back gardens—of Tranquilla Terrace, N.W., a neat maid-servant carried this plant in its majolica pot out on to the grass plot in the rear of the villa, in which it had reared its head from mere babyhood—the plant, not the grass plot—that it might take the sun and air.

It was a very ordinary action for the maid-servant to be guilty of—so ordinary indeed that I should feel ashamed of mentioning it so prominently but for the fact that, thus exposed to view, the majestic plant attracted the attention and excited unchristian envy in the breast of an ordinarily dispassionate female fellow atom, no less a person, dear, than the dear old soul who, later in life, fell in love with the bibulous young *littérateur*. Miss Minns, who then lived in a pretty villa at the other end of the terrace, saw that india-rubber plant from a back window, and sighed.

She sighed because she herself had spent many weary years in futile endeavours to bring the india-rubber plant to perfection. She had taken them from the nest, as it were, and failed to rear

them. She had nursed the young offshoot from the parent stem or tap-root, had sponged and fondled it, pruned and trained it, and, when she saw it withering, had wept over it—all to no purpose. Perhaps the last unusual method of irrigation disagreed with it; anyway, her plants never lived. Little wonder, then, that discouragement and covetousness filled her virgin bosom as she gazed out of her back windows. To whom did the plant belong? Who in that lengthy row of "eligible desirables" carried the secret of rubber-plant rearing in his or her hand?

Counting the garden walls as best she could, she at length arrived at the conclusion that the admirable evergreen belonged to "Number Twenty," and being subsequently interrogated upon the matter, the dealer in horseflesh, who supplies the felines of that district with their daily lunch (and who has just assured his patrons and the public generally by circular that, anxious to merit a continuation of their favours, he has already made His Grace the Duke of Westminster a tempting offer for Batt), added a link to the chain of evidence in the information that "Number Twenty was a party by the name o' 'Arris, an' somethink to do with sausages."

Miss Priscilla Molloy-Minns resolved to be bold. She would lay maidenly reserve on one side and hew to the line. Summoning Dutch courage to her aid by swallowing a whole liqueur glass of Mother Somebody's Stomach Bitters, she wrote :—

"Sir,—Bold and unconventional as it may seem for a perfect stranger thus to address you, I have decided to take the liberty, inasmuch as I am sure you can assist me.

"Tell me—I implore you as a gentleman—(*a*) Ought I to prune my india-rubber plant thus late in the season? (*b*) how far down the stem? (*c*) what will be the result?

"Thanking you in anticipation.

"Priscilla Molloy-Minns."

When "the party at Number Twenty" got that note he was sorter puzzled, so to speak—on the horn of a dilemma. He knew no more of Miss Molloy-Minns than did the Man in the Iron Mask, nor was he much better posted on india-rubber plants, but he was a man of gallantry, and one who fostered and encouraged both advanced action and thought in others, and certainly he was not to blame if the elderly but well-regulated spinster had counted the garden walls —I won't say carelessly, but anyway—inaccurately. So, after laughing within himself until he had to

take off his spectacles no less than five times to wipe them, he replied :—

"DEAR MISS OR MADAM,—Don't mention it. It is no liberty whatever—real or imaginary. I think (*a*) that it might have been pruned sooner, but it's never too late to mend; (*b*) that if you don't overdo it, (*c*) you may reasonably expect a crop of india-rubber balls sufficient to set you up in a village toy-shop in due season.—Yours truly, W. HARRIS."

It was after this that Miss Minns gave up plant culture in favour of making flannel underwear for —if one may judge by the shape of the articles— the deformed poor of her parish.

Speaking of the matrimonial vagaries of the elderly, who in the wide world should we encounter coming down the steps of the Métropole but old Mr Wrigley, who recently celebrated his seventy-third birthday by running away with a widow. She is well on the wrong side of sixty, too, and I hear that their respective grandchildren, thinking it unwise to be too obdurate, as there is money on both sides of the house, have been literally falling over one another to wire to the elderly couple to say that, if they will return to their sorrowing grandchildren, "all will be forgiven."

I had quite a long letter yesterday from dear Laura, who begins by saying : "We are moving

our chattels and our movables again—for the seventeenth time in twelve years. Is not it jolly?" Personally, I do not wax wildly hilarious over stick-shifting. However, I suspect that the only credit they have left is with the household removals people, and they feel bound to avail themselves of it. They lead a nomadic life, and appear to sleep as soundly in a pantechnicon van as they do anywhere. She continues: "Our new landlord said he'd 'do up the drawing-rooms to suit us,' so I am having them redecorated something similar to the dining-room at the Carlos at one end, and Alfred de Rothschild's Wouvermann Gallery at the other, with a painted ceiling of water-nymphs and cupids playing at 'Widdy-Widdy-Way!' in the ornamental waters at Kensington Gardens. This will please the children, who have spent a good deal of time round the bathing-machines since we have been at Folkestone."

I fear poor Laura has a deal to put up with in Arthur. She told me not long ago, with tears in her eyes, how a cabman, who drove them home to their last new house, appeared to know Arthur quite well, and, on pulling up at the door, asked him in a stage-whisper, which might have been faintly audible at a mile and a

half, "Shall I wait?" This kind of thing must be very disheartening — but then I fear that remark would apply to nearly everything that he does. He took her to Norway quite recently, only to find out when he got there that a law existed which prohibited any person from spending more than twopence-halfpenny for liquor at one visit to a public-house. As dear Laura says, "This kept us running the whole time, until at last I dropped from sheer exhaustion."

The remainder of her letter partakes rather of the nature of a curtain lecture, which I am afraid I deserve. I fear that I sent her a wrong recipe the other day. She asked me for a sponge trifle *à la* Arthur Roberts; but after following my directions, the dish turned out a dentist's rubber dam, such as is held in the mouth while the imperfections in one's "upper plate" are removed by the lathe. She is the more annoyed, too, because the deaconess of a place of worship hard by called upon her on the following day, to say that if in future she would tell them whenever she intended cooking, special services should be held in the chapel till she was through with it. I can only regret my carelessness, which I sincerely do.

Fanny Frear has, curiously enough, asked me

the very same question as yourself—what to wear at the first dance of the season at the Blue Mountains' Supper Club. Why not go as Grace Darling, one of you? It is a pretty and an inexpensive costume, consisting of a short canvas skirt, red flannel shirt, no corsets, boots to the hips, and a six-three-farthing sou'-wester of some bright shade. As attractive accessories you may introduce a few fathoms of cable, a life-buoy, or a white china basin. But, to carry the thing through successfully, play light with the "sherbet" at supper, and keep your fore and aft canvas well storm-reefed.

My brick-red, nautical errand boy has just presented himself to say he's going ashore to the post-office, so, dearest, I conclude as ever.—Your affectionate cousin, MAUDE.

SEPTEMBRE

GRAND HOTEL, PARIS.

DEAR LITTLE MADGE,—

As you will see by the lithographed heading to my notepaper, I am writing this from the dear, delightful Grand in Paris, and Paris is literally packed. I am on the seventeenth floor here, and whatever I should do if the place caught fire I really do not know. In case of an outbreak in the middle of the night, however, I make it a rule to keep a duck of a transparent *crêpe de chine* night-gown, and—er, things—tastily punctuated by heliotrope satin bows, on a chair at my bedside. One never knows *what* happens, clattering down those escapes!

I must tell you, dear, that, with his customary idiotic carelessness, Charlie had neglected to write from London to secure a suite of rooms here, so that we had to sit out the whole of the night of our arrival in the big room on the first

floor of the Café Americaine. I should positively have died if anybody had recognised me, but I saw some striking frocks, and I also noticed that, despite the fact that the nights are still beautifully fine, the drawing-in of the evenings has led to a general resumption of underclothing by all save the most impoverished. Blues appeared to be all the rage, the most noticeable toilettes being carried out in a shade that was something between the colours of a rook's egg and a bill-stamp. They are making up nothing else in the Rue de la Paix, and were good enough to let me have a peep at a frock they are "building" for Mdlle. Grille d'Egout, to be worn with amber *lingerie*, which is to turn the heads of all the men in Paris when, as the song says, she "gets 'em on." Scarlet hair is certainly coming into fashion. Worn in conjunction with a cornflower blue *toque*, the effect is very remarkable, and excites almost as much attention as a flirtation at the graveside. But the sweetest thing in millinery was, I think, the hat named after Madame de Pompadour, who, if I remember rightly, got herself much talked about in connection with Louis XV. Did not the gay and alcoholic relic of old Bourbonism persuade her to give Old Man

Pompadour the shake, and come and be a sort of "side-show" or matrimonial *annexe* at his court? Anyway, the hat I wish to tell you of was of emerald green straw, bordered with half-blown sunflowers, with half a bushel of bulrushes frappe'd over the crown, and a huge rosette of some soft clinging material about three points to starboard. It was to be worn abroad, and would go awfully well, I thought, with a costume of cocoa-nut oil and an apron of antelope tails. It is to be a "feather-and-fluff" winter season, I hear, though the shapeless box-coats of last year will, doubtless, hold their own with those who have abandoned the corset.

You will be quite as sorry to hear as I am to tell you that sweet little Florrie Oldaker is to be sent by her absurdly prim parents into a French convent. And yet Florrie is, as Cornille sings, "as seem-ple as a maide should be," and wouldn't give in on a point of modesty to anything that wears hair. But the other afternoon, on entering an omnibus in the Strand, Florrie sat down flat in the lap of an Episcopal Bishop, and so travelled for a little way, though, as she has since declared, her action was quite unpremeditated and entirely due to the jerk with which the omnibus restarted. Poor Florrie!

my heart simply stops beating when I think of her being immured in one of those Continental old-world fastnesses, of which, as a schoolgirl, I read in the *éditions de luxe* supplied post-paid and packed free from observation by the publishers of Holywell Street. How many beautiful and guileless maidens, I wonder, have been kept in these dungeons and compelled to sew on suspender buttons for the lay-brothers in the very darkest of dark cells? It is, indeed, tough for Florrie.

And, speaking of these weird romances, dear, leads me to utter a vehement protest against the shameful log-rolling indulged in by certain authors who cater for the readers of short stories in the present day. I will give you an instance. Just before leaving England I invested two shillings in a volume of tales which I found on a railway book-stall, and I composed myself on the blue cloth cushions to enjoy a couple of hours' desultory reading on the journey from town to the coast. How did I fare? Well, judge for yourself from the appended "sample" story, which is called—

"The Mystery of Hampton Maze."

"It happened many moons ago, before the

leaves of the June roses fell, but the gossips and other extemporaneous speakers of East Molesey still tell of it, among other things too humorous to mention.

"In a little white cottage, that in summer was nearly covered in sweet-scented clematis, lived Waterhouse Wilkins and his delightful young bride. Tall, manly, handsome, and the best-groomed man on the Surrey side, Waterhouse won every heart in Molesey, nor relinquished them between his going up to town by the 9.23 A.M. from Hampton Court, and returning by the 4.33 from Waterloo, or the 5.7 at latest. For he was a stockbroker, representing a red-hot firm—Messrs Gettup & Howell—in 'the house,' and you may take it from the author that no fresh green lawn grew under the feet of Waterhouse Wilkins.

"If Waterhouse was an ideal man, his young wife, Delicia, was a dream. She had those large, liquid brown eyes, that seem to chuckle with a mischievous smile, that you can almost hear out of their profound depths. The glow of perfect health tinted her skin, and even her hair had that rich sheen that nothing on earth but good digestion and real bears' grease can produce. It was with difficulty that the warm-blooded looker-

on could restrain himself from running his fingers through those rippling tresses, or chucking their owner under her shapely chin. Her presence was like a summer morning in a fairy garden, with a suggestion of violets embracing the leaves of an oak geranium that had been bowed by a passing breeze, and the sight of her *petite* figure crossing Hampton Bridge in the sunshine, caused the masculine heart to swell up like a pan of Spratt's biscuits that have been well wetted because the old dog's teeth are indifferent.

"Ere the first brown leaf of autumn fell, however, Waterhouse was called away. Something had gone wrong in South Africa. The head mining engineer, in all probability, had failed to divvy up amicably with the assayer who inspired the prospectus, for the wrong kind of geological output was being sent over, and Gettup and Howell wanted something better than chunks of long-time-dead megalosaur to put before the board meeting.

"With many a tear, and a serious caution to avoid paving the way for hostile criticism, did Wilkins literally break away from his fair young wife. He even halted his fly at the minister's, which was in his way to the station, to ask the

man of prayers and parables to 'keep an eye on her' during his absence.

"And then he was gone.

"The good people of Molesey did not set eyes upon Delicia for many days, for she had shut herself up in the cottage. Her aged parents, who dropped down to pay her a surprise visit one day, were well-nigh eaten up by the mastiff on guard in the front garden, while they were trying to get to the electric button, but were rescued by Dick Dunn's coachman, and a potboy from Harry Tagg's. Delicia's blinds remained drawn, and Delicia was never seen.

"It may be neither a wise nor a humane thing for a husband to leave a sweet young wife alone in a Thames-side bungalow whilst he proceeds to South Africa to irrigate his company's stock, and Waterhouse may have been a bit verdant to go for to do it.

"Now it fell upon an afternoon about a month after the exodus of Waterhouse, that the reverend gentleman, hoeing in his front garden, saw Delicia pass quickly by and walk in the direction of the bridge. She looked pale and agitated, and the tiller in the vineyard and the small front plot hastily donned his coat, celluloid cuffs, and cloth hat, with the intention of following the evidently

erring wife. By the time he got on the road, however, she had disappeared over the bridge, and (the dignity of his cloth forbidding him to run) by the time he reached the bridge, Delicia was out of sight altogether. In an agitated way he interrogated an old beldame with a basket, but her only reply was a stern reprimand that sent the red blood to the very roots of his hair. 'Fie! fie!' cried she, 'ye should ha' done wi' courtin' when ye took that blessed livery! Shame on ye! Read o' what the dogs did to Jezebel, an'——'

"But, tingling with indignation, he was half way to the Mitre only to find that he had missed the quarry altogether.

"For many subsequent afternoons he posted sentinel, bright and ready as a new steel-trap, and, at last, his vigilance was rewarded.

"Pretty Mrs Waterhouse Wilkins shot by one dull, foggy afternoon, with a delightful new tailor-made frock and a good gait on. The sky-pilot was on the alert this time, and he had no trouble in discovering that Mrs Wilkins carried in her left hand a small brown-paper parcel, and she took the route across the bridge as before.

"On, on she went, the guide to the pellucid upper blue following at a distance. Over the

bridge she strode as usual, turned sharp to the right, and eventually entered—

"The Maze at Hampton Court!

"The parson knew his maze, too, and in and out of the shrubbery passages he assiduously dogged the footsteps of Delicia. What would be the sequel to this extraordinary pilgrimage? What were the contents of the mysterious brown-paper package?

"He traced her to the very centre of the maze, where she sat down for a moment and removed the string from the parcel.

"'At all hazards I must learn what it contains,' said the parsonic Paul Pry to himself, and, as if the fates had willed it, the fair grass widow left her seat and the bundle on it, and went to investigate one of the avenues.

"The parson flew forward and possessed himself of the packet on the seat.

"Was it the proof of a guilty woman's dishonour? Was it the damning evidence of her shame and duplicity?

"Not at all.

"It was a two-and-ninepenny bottle of Newriggle's Curative Compound, the Great Vegetable Remedy, which acts directly on the blood, and therefore is invaluable in all cases of anæmia,

rheumatism, scrofula, chronic erysipelas, also a splendid nerve and spinal tonic, recommended by the medical faculty in cases of paralysis, locomotor ataxy, St Vitus's dance, and nervous headache. Read what Mrs T. W. Bungit, whose life was a burden to her, whose legs and feet were swollen to twice their usual size, and whom seventeen doctors had given up, told the reporter of the *Wigan Headlight*——"

But there! I will not inflict any more of it upon you, though three-quarters of a column of shameless nonpareil advertising matter are unloaded on the unwary reader under the guise of entertaining fiction!

Coming across the Channel we witnessed quite a pretty little international quarrel aboard the boat. A man friend of Charlie's, called Tommy Sprat (whom you, doubtless, remember seeing at Ascot), chanced to occupy the next berth in the principal cabin to a fiery little Frenchman, a Capitaine Pipeau. Now the Captain came aboard the boat first, and having got out his basin, swallowed a few bars of *chocolat de voyage*, and pulled on a nightcap, rolled himself up, and went to sleep. When Sprat came down the companion-way some ten minutes later, the only thing he seemed to have on his mind (barring

his hat) was a desire to reach a berth and a basin simultaneously. His berth he'd secured beforehand, but he took Capitaine Pipeau's basin, so that when, ten minutes later, a S.S.W. wind wafted the smell of the engines down the companion-way, and the Captain woke up suddenly——

But let me draw a veil.

Of course, there was a most awful fuss, the pair of them struggling and clinching all over the cabin, until friends on both sides interposed. And all, dear, over a rubbishing basin! Why, as a distinguished military officer, who was present—a Captain Kelly—suggested, if they were so short of china, didn't they stay behind and have three rounds in the old style on Folkestone sands for a complete bedroom set?

Something was said about a duel, and cards were exchanged, it being left for the French Captain, as challenger, to send his seconds to Sprat. As, however, I don't think Sprat gives the name of his only club—The Supper, in Percy Street—on his card, the matter may die a natural death. There are many curious traits in the French character. In the Avenue de la Grande Armee last night, a young and delightful married lady hopped out of bed,

flung her dainty arms round a gentlemanly burglar, and hugged him deliriously, while her simple husband ran half way to Batignolles for a *gendarme*. Twenty minutes later, when the husband returned with an *agent*, the polished ruffian had escaped, and madame was lying exhausted on the bed coverlet. She only rallied a little and smiled faintly upon being assured by her frightened spouse that the intruder had taken nothing—all of which goes to show that the average Parisian husband does not possess the inordinately jealous disposition with which he is accredited.

Whilst "doing" the Passages this morning, we encountered poor Lord Billericay, who has been living in the gay city ever since he left his cattle-ranche in Southern Carolina, from whence he caused to be sent to his countess a cleverly contrived photograph of himself dangling from the outstretching limb of a gaunt oak-tree by a rope noose, with a howling mob in the background. He admits it may have been a rather base subterfuge, but it was cheaper than paying his debts, and easier, on the whole, than getting a divorce, with the Queen's Proctor in his present state of activity. He alluded with great bitterness to his matrimonial affairs, and

spoke of the morning on which his confidential valet came to him in his bedroom, and said that he wished to leave his service. "Good gracious!—why?" asked his lordship. "Have you any reason?" "Your lordship has been kindness itself," replied the servant quietly, "but her ladyship has lately made advances towards me which it is impossible to misunderstand, and I believe that in leaving I am acting as a friend towards your lordship." "A friend!" cried the peer, struggling with his emotion; "nay, far, far more than a friend—a friend would have prolonged his visit!"

Though Mdlle Demi-Syphon is doing big things at the Moulin Rouge, and on the night of our visit her pretty feet twinkled in the atmosphere, her lively legs twisted through space till the little ring formed by the onlookers seemed full of snowy laces and silk stockings, and though, finally imagining that she was an acrobat, she upended herself, and walked around on her hands in an attitude calculated to keep her memory green in the minds of the spectators for many moons to come, I was impatient to see Otéro at the Folies-Bergères, and last night Charlie took me there. She is a seductive little puss, but—oh, the *pied de* Otéro; it is a very liberal tootsie, indeed. It was

very kind of some Johnnie of hers to send her a horseshoe, I thought, but why not a *pair?* But perhaps she's got a wooden leg. Had she worn her corsage one wee bit lower, I would have known for certain.

I have been thinking of submitting to *Vanity Fair* the "Hard Case" of young Lord Gordonhurst, who is staying here with his pretty wife, and who, while showing a decided liking for French male society, is either too stupidly jealous of his little treasure, or too mistrustful of her to get on at all smoothly with his guests. Of course, dear, you know what Frenchmen are. They have hands which are ever ready to give a warm response to an unintentionally tender clasp, and toes which, when touched quite accidentally beneath the table, search out and return a soft pressure on the dainty *bottine* of their hostess. Now, Lady Gordonhurst may be rather given to innocent flirtations of this kind, and her husband may have good grounds for his lack of confidence in her, but, though it must be admitted that truth is less terrible than uncertainty, Gordonhurst's invariable act of suddenly shouting "Hullo there!" and at the same instant overthrowing the entire table and peering beneath it, is highly reprehensible, and calcu-

lated to involve him in serious trouble before long.

And now, dear, to answer your queries. I am afraid you will find it rather difficult to alter your beaded mantle into a couple of pretty *camisoles* and an autumn *toque;* still, there is no Act of Parliament to prevent you from trying. I think you should certainly accept the seat in the nobleman's box at the Promenade Concerts, and your sky-blue satin, slashed with orange, will look very well. Under the circumstances you mention, however, I should send for one of Madame Aurélie's celebrated self-heaving chests, about which I have already told you. They have been the making of many a poor girl. I am more than delighted to hear that your pretty little friend, the *modiste*, has got over her little affair; it is indeed a case of the survival of the "fittist." Certainly, she will have to make a personal application to the sitting magistrate at Bow Street — a Mr Lushington, I believe.—Adios, dearest little Madge, your loving cousin,

MAUDE.

OCTOBRE

HALF MOON STREET.

DEAREST LITTLE MADGE,—

You may very well upbraid me for keeping you so long without a letter, but all my time, dear, during the past fortnight, has been taken up in flitting about from one girl's wedding to another's—in all, I went to five!—until at last I became such an enthusiast on the subject that I really didn't dare trust myself to walk down Regent Street Quadrant alone; the mere sight of the trousers in the tailors' shop-windows filled me with such indescribable longings to flirt! And yet Lady Cook says that "The affections are freer and fuller and altogether more natural among the lower and middle classes than in the best society." Clearly she does not know *our* "push," as the belles of New York say.

Why, only yesterday I was looking over some of the entries in the dainty little green morocco diary that the dear Duke left behind him at my

cottage ornée at Datchet last summer, and I think these two neat, but simple, extracts alone will suffice to refute Lady Cook's absurd statement :—

TUESDAY, JULY 21. — Awoke feeling devilish seedy. Cleaned my teeth and took an anti-pyrin powder. Better. Ordered the Ralli cart and drove down to dear little Mrs Leslie-Biffins's, at Richmond. Her matrimonial incubus not being expected till evening, took her for a long drive round Surbiton, Ditton and Esher. Had tea in an arbour at the "Rollicking Bookmaker," most select rural tavern, with tea gardens, near Sandown Park. As sweet little woman was just finishing her second cup, a beastly daddy-longlegs (*Paterfamilias longicrus*) emerged gracefully from teapot, and "winked his other eye," as it were. Delightful little woman fearfully shocked. Fainted. Nothing for it but to cut her staylace, and —er—other strings. As she came to, begged me to summon waiter for the sake of propriety. Got her back to her place in time for dinner, buying her, at a little bookseller's shop on the way through Kingston, two pretty texts, framed and glazed, for the wall of her beast of a husband's dressing-room: "Perfect love casteth out fear."—*John* iv. 18, and "I escaped with the skin of my teeth."—*Job* xix. 20. So, thank goodness, *that* was all toodley-oodley.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 22.—Called on the dear little soul again this morning, but a bit too early. Thought Biffins would have been in town, but he hadn't started. As he saw me drive up to the house, had to say I'd called to inspect the gas-meter! Wondered whether gas-meter inspectors *usually* called round in yellow Ralli carts with page-boys behind. Thought it improbable. The Biffins cad said the meter was "all wrong to blazes." He turned the gas off, and insisted on my disconnecting meter and taking it away with me. Devilish risky thing to do, but had to do it. The Biffins bounder said he'd

a great mind to accompany me back to Gas Company's office to give the "infernal thieves" a bit of his mind. I forced a smile — don't remember how — said I should have been delighted, but had to go and disconnect *another* meter at— couldn't remember where, but my "mate" (the page-boy) knew. Don't recollect what he said to *that*, but felt glad to get away. Subsequently met dear little woman at trysting-place on towing-path. Said she feared her hubby "sniffed a rodent," so bought a present for her to give to him—a pink necktie with orange cherries growing on mauve stems and blue leaves. Feel, somehow, that he and I are quits.

But this is not telling you my news. I think that the very first intimation I had of Florrie's approaching nuptials was by way of a cheery paragraph in *Society Small Talk.* It ran:

> Dame Rumour hath it that Mr "Willie" Mack-Giffin Mooner and Miss "Florrie" Effingham, both well known on the Turf and in smart society, will shortly join hands and occupy the same flat. It has been noticed that "Willie" has been decidedly attentive of late, and we trust he intends to "part" his £2 : 2 : 6 to the Vicar-General in Doctor's Commons in the usual way, and that the charming bride will not allow herself to be linked to the man of her choice according to the customs of his family, by which she may find herself, all too late, stranded on the shoals of a too-exclusive civilisation. The breakfast will be at the Monte Carlo Hotel, and covers will be laid for two.

It turned out that the insinuation contained

in the *Small Talk* paragraph was only too well founded; when the crucial time arrived, it was found that the bridegroom was "shy" (as they say in poker), by nearly fourteen shillings, so the whole thing had to be put off, for, though Florrie was fearfully disappointed, we all urged her to be firm, and insist upon a ceremony. She stood there, poor girl! biting her lips and with great salt tears filling her eyes, whilst "Willie" went through his jeans, but all that she said was: "Well, well, this *is* a bit o' box-fruit if you like."

Now Veneta Withers' wedding, which was on the following day to Florrie's, was a very much nicer affair altogether, although the bridegroom's "best man" was a hopeless duffer who, in his fearful anxiety to coruscate, was constantly doing or saying something foolish. I am unreservedly of opinion that no bachelor should ever be entrusted to perform the duties of "best man"—a married man is so much more likely to act sensibly and considerately. Just fancy, you know, at St Pancras Station, where, in his inexperience, this noodle had got the railway people to spread red carpet down the platform, and had positively had a saloon carriage reserved and labelled—I should have told you before, that they were going

to spend the honeymoon in Scotland—he came bursting through the crowd, with a huge bundle of newspapers and magazines in his two arms, and blurted out to the happy pair, already in possession of the carriage—

"Here you are! It's a precious long journey, and you're sure to want—*plenty to read!*"

Never, never shall I forget how everybody giggled: even the Scotch guard bit half-way through the stick of his green flag in his attempts to preserve a respectful demeanour.

Weddings and rumours of weddings fill the air. (This sounds like a honeymoon on the Big Wheel; but of course I don't mean anything of the kind.) I must admit, dear Madge, that I am always delighted to hear of a wedding, for it means, if nothing else, that at least *one* of my unfortunate sex has got on new clothes all through, perhaps for the only time in her life. And here let me utter a mild protest at the intrepidity of some trousseau reporters in a certain ladies' newspapers. The other week one of them (who I know is masculine, and I hope is married), after describing acres of the "charming bride's" silks, satins, poplins, and grenadines, fairly took a header into her *lingerie*. "The combinations," he wrote, "have finely pleated frills edged with lace. The

frills are open on the outer side, this arrangement taking away the pressure of the seam and preventing the tearing that so often results in the old style." Then he passes on to silk-lined night-dresses with blouse bodices, and many other things, till one cannot help feeling how proud and happy the bridegroom must be to feel that the public knows, as it were, every tuck in his wife's *jupon*, and just to a crease how neatly her nighties fit her!

Speaking of weddings, Edie Abbot, whom I daresay you will remember—tall, brunette girl, who was chucked out of the Stephanotis one night, on the ground that she wasn't a fit associate for the company, and whose subsequent action at law was met by the club committee's explanation that they meant it for a compliment—goes into double harness on Wednesday, the 18th. Save that at Edie's age a girl could hardly make a mistake if she tried, I should not call it a wonderful match, there being a deal of mystery about the bridegroom-elect, who is described as the President of a Home for Disabled Thought Readers. Edie, I suppose, would call herself an authoress. Like a wild duck that steals off and lays an egg in the oil-box of a once threshing machine, Edie conceives little "gems of poetic

thought," as she calls them, and goes and leaves them on the tables of obscure editors, with stamps for their return. The editors, being mostly poor, confiscate the stamps, and then are obliged to print the verses. Here is one of her "gems of poetic thought" :—

> "Oh, woman is an open book,
> And should be read, 'tis stated.
> She also should be 'bound' and 'pressed,'
> And properly punctuated."

This seems to show that one sure road to literary fame is to keep some needy editor in beer. I am sending you quite a collection of her "gems of thought," in a large sack; also an erotic play of hers, in imitation of the style of that ancient poet, the Markee de Bovrille. You may like it; but *I* think that as an erotic playwright Edie couldn't draw a corporal's guard from a canteen counter. Also I am sending you the programme and list of stall-holders at the Bazaar we gave in aid of the funds of the Housemaids' Knee Hospital; it was *such* a delightful function! Pretty Mrs Meltyng-M'Glew came as the picture of the lady on the posters, and was a huge success. Pretty women can make almost any costume popular. It is perfectly marvellous to notice how little, if any, clothing an attractive

woman may wear to become the cynosure of all eyes, and this she certainly was, although Charlie, in his brutal way, said she could have "done with a little more *chiffon* round the cuttle-bone." At my stall we took—just think, dear—twenty-one pounds. It would have been twenty-three, but two of the coins the honorary secretary said were "Jacks," which some doubtless vulgar person had rung in on us. Such meanness, when the cry was for charity, was despicable, though it did not warrant Ethel Fraser in alluding to the unknown cad as a "sanguinary glyptodon."

Adversity should make us tolerant, not profane. But you will be dying to hear about the stalls. One article, which I sold to a well-known racing duke, was a pretty and novel *portière*, made out of old oil-cake sacks, edged with torchon lace. This (and a kiss) fetched four guineas; meantime Ethel had "locked horns," as they say in the deerstalking hielands, with a wealthy sporting baronet, and stuck him with a sawn-down petroleum barrel, stained and mounted on legs to form a smoking chair. The impulsive girl remembered when the thing had been sent home that she had omitted to remove the four small wrought nails from the tub, but she declined to wire to him about it. He would probably never

sit in it, she argued, and even should he do so suddenly, his language would be no surprise to his lady mother and sisters who live with him.

On each evening, in aid of the same good cause, a theatrical performance was given in our pretty new hall at Cricklewood by a Mrs Rokeby-Bangers, a society amateur who aims to elevate the stage, but appears to me to find the plums too high for her pole. She is fearfully subject, I am told, to nervous hysteria, and when this attacks her she has recourse to stimulants to brace herself; still the "criticism," penned by the reporter of the *Hendon Headlight and Welsh Harp Courant*, the only representative of the Press who was present, was undeservedly scathing. "What a *Rosalind*, what a *Lady Teazle*, what a *Paula Tanqueray* is here, if she would only let the 'sherbet' alone!" he wrote. I have since heard that personal and petty spite was at the bottom of this disgraceful attack, the editor of the Hendon paper having called and sent up his card about tea-time on the previous Sunday afternoon, just as if there was a press Free-List for everything!

Certainly Mrs Rokeby-Bangers' *Portia* was, as Charlie expresses it, "a bit of Nelson's old flagship"—pretty rotten—and its reception by a

coarse galleryite led to an unfortunate *contretemps*. I must tell you that Mrs Bangers came on, dressed as a Venetian doctor of laws, and scarcely had she spoken the impressive sentence :—

"It droppeth as the gentle rain from Heaven" . . .

—when a loud and offensive noise, like the rending of glazed calico, made by obtruding the wet tongue between the closed lips, and by low cabmen and persons of that class, called a "raspberry," came from the gallery. So loud and resonant was it that it was quite impossible for Mrs Rokeby-Bangers to pass it over unnoticed; but, still, it was certainly very bad policy on her part to pause in the delivery of Portia's speech, and, addressing herself to the horrid brute who was still making the noise, reply in tones of cynical banter :—

"All right, don't tear it; I'll take the piece!"

A man friend of Charlie's, whose name I have forgotten, but who supped with us in the East Room on Wednesday, endeavoured to impress on me how well some women look to what others do in evening dress, and he raved over a "lovely creature" who was sitting with an Aldershot man, whom I seem to know, at another table. And who do you think the "lovely creature" was,

Madge? Minnie Cameron—positively! The poor man was awfully smitten. He declared she was "born to be loved," and I might have told him, only I didn't like to, that she's been in pretty constant employment all the years I've known her. She wore a bodice of tea-rose yellow that left very little to the imagination, whilst her hair was caught back in a sort of burnished penny roll. She wore little else save that perennial look of disdain and those astonishing paste earrings.

I went to Newmarket last week, despite the inclemency of the weather. I have always persisted in saying that a macintosh on Newmarket Heath in October is like a dose of croton-oil. You may not want it often, but when you *do* want it, you want it badly. I'm sure when I got back to St Pancras after seeing the Cesarewitch the only dry spot about me was the roof of my larynx. You must know that I went down with a new admirer, a literary one this time, dear. He is the sporting editor of a new trade organ called *Wool*, and is a nice enough boy when he keeps himself in hand. This was not the case to-day, I am sorry to say—sorry because a girl needs a better chaperon coming home from a race-meeting than a man who, after reserving a compart-

ment in the train, brings in a nigger minstrel and a man who juggles with guinea-pigs, and entertains them with lobsters. I should have given him the cold and final shake after he'd paid my cabman, but that he has been very good up to this, and really these trade papers seem to bring in a deal of money.

What new songs and music can I recommend you to get? My dear child, how very fortunate I must say it is, that you should ask me that question on the very day on which a perfect cartload of new pieces has reached me from Messrs Hoopiron & Screw. Although it may be some time before Belgravian mammas meet with a ballad so suitable to their daughters as the late Mdlle. Bellvodini's, "It's ten to one on the striker, the striker!" most of the following should be warmly welcomed by our singing sisters :

The Little Pigeon (Fairlamb), is a bold, fearless narrative in song of the glories achieved by a squad of Her Majesty's favourite regiment of Lumberers. It goes :—

"We found a mug from the country
We took him in to the Pav.,
He stood at the bar with a big cigar,
We asked him what he would have;

We collared his cash, his pin, and his watch,
He seemed a regular beery 'un ;
And then we went, and the money we spent
In boozing at the Criterion."

Loved Voices is capable of touching the most hardened heart :

"'Tis sweet to hear the blithe cashier
Who tells you that you've over-drawn,
'Tis sweeter far to hear the jar
Of soda-water cork at morn ;
But, oh ! more sweet it is to meet
The girl with whom last night you dined,
And hear her tell how she was—well—
Run in at Marlbro' Street, and fined."

The Last Milestone is perhaps more suited for the rural Vicarage than the urban drawing-room, describing, as it does very prettily, the return of an honest farmer from the fair, when the old fellow is, as they say in Gloucestershire, "market-peart." It is full of opportunities for the singer who can simulate an alcoholic wobble :

" I staggered over the meadow,
I scraped my face in the wood,
Where the hawthorn grows I tore my clothes,
And I fell wherever I could.
I felt unsteady upon my pins,
I'd a perfectly imbecile smile,
But the place where I ended by barking my shins
Was the stone of the final mile."

Parted will readily commend itself to every one who ever owed money to a bookmaker and intended to continue doing so :

"To make some cash I reckoned,
On backing horses,
Of course I backed the second,
Oh crumbs! My losses!
I did not feel downhearted,
But fancy free;
Perhaps you think I parted?
Not me."

Love is Blind is just the sort of piece to suit the young songstress who is considered to be a sort of Arthur Roberts in petticoats, and could do a bit of "mugging" :

"We met by chance—a ball at Covent Garden
Where one sees things both wonderful and strange
My dress was plain—a simple Dolly Varden
He was enclosed within a Kitchen Range,
He spoke of love, this saltatorious toiler,
And asked one favour—well I recollect—
Oh, would I 'pour a drink into his boiler,'
He was *so* dry—or words to that effect."

Chorus—

"Since Love is Blind, one has a mind
To make a slight allowance of some kind
But no rule on earth is breachless
And when love is——simply speechless,
Got strabismus—alcoholic—Love *is* Blind!"

Perhaps you would like to see the second verse :

"We met by chance—'twas on a coach at Sandown
He stood below, whilst I was on the box
He spoke of lunch, and offered me his hand down
Then turned his head, lest I should show my socks.
Alas !—one slip ! My skirts flew like a feather ;
Caught on some hook or iron that did project,
And down I came—well, in 'the altogether'—
Or words, some words to that effect."

To which this is the chorus :

"But Love was blind—completely blind
And fortune to this little maid was kind,
For the wind was very gusty
And the course was beastly dusty
And he—couldn't see for powder ! Love *was* blind !"

By the way, that fellow De Daubigny, or whatever his name was, who used to give such jolly suppers in Sackville Street, was married yesterday at St George's to one of the homeliest girls I have ever seen. Money, of course, for it's notorious that he couldn't get a kite to rise in Cork Street, even though he took the tail off and got every pal he knew to come and shoo for it. Poor Belle ! She *would* go and see the ceremony, much as I begged her not to. The brute caught sight of us (for I should have added that I went

with her) as he passed up the aisle, but I smiled as though the impending tragedy was a matter of not the least importance. Belle tried hard to, too, but the hot tears of disappointed love stood in her eyes, and she bit into the covers of the hymnal the pew-opener had given her till three of those wonderful anti-corrosive teeth burst from their gold settings! Poor Belle! one may well wonder whether she ever will go off. It is hard to teach an old dog new tricks, they say, and she, after leading every suit in the pack, as it were, in order to keep up with the procession, has failed to land her fish! Is not this a trifle tough? Still, "'tis not in mortals to command success," as the defeated co-respondent remarked as he clasped the fair respondent in his arms in the dark corridor in which the two D. Courts are situated; "but we'll do more, Sempronia, we'll——"

But that is another story, as Mr Kipling says. Sincerely yours, sweet coz. MAUDE.

NOVEMBRE

STILL AT THE FLAT.

DEAREST MADGE—

As Charlie was saying only this morning, Winter seems suddenly to have burst upon us like the unexpected return of the husband who said that important business at Stockton-on-Tees would keep him away all night; and with the advent of the "parky," or more than merely chilly mornings, a Stiffy-Smith fruit-salad will be found a popular dish at the breakfast table. They are quite worthy the name they bear, that of the great genius who invented them. Slice into a salad bowl three or four mellow William pears, a tomato, a quince, and half a pine-apple. Pour over all this two bottles of old brown brandy and bottle of curacoa. Drop in, here and there, a red chili, and mix.

Aunt Parker, who is staying with us for "nerves," took three tumblers of it, and then fell

into the fender with a crash, that Charlie said recalled nothing so forcibly as the devastation of Hell Gate. The poor old dear struggled and got up, but almost immediately sat down with such great suddenness that she involuntarily raised her right hand to her head to see if her spine had pierced the crown of her best cap. Her second attempt to rise, this time by the aid of the polished coal-box, might have been more successful had she not forgotten that the receptacle was on castors, so that it carried her swiftly across the carpet and caused her to butt a large hole with her head in the centre door of the sideboard. By the way, she has already taken to her jaegers, and is also wearing a red-brown lisle-thread hose, with embroidered potato-plants up the sides, finished off with a yellow Colorado tuber-bug on the inside head of the tibia, with a plain, carpet-list garter.

Garters, by the way, are more ornate than ever this autumn, although I can fancy I hear you ask, "Yes, but who is to see them?" My dear, I answer you as a girl friend of mine was once answered. She went to an artist in the Rue de la Paix for her trousseau, and on being shown something quite startling in nightgowns, asked timorously, "But—er—do you really think it is

good form?" "Oh, mam'selle," was the gushing answer, "*everybody* will be in *r-r-raptures!*" At any rate, dear, there is your intended husband, to begin with, and you certainly told me that he thought of taking you ballooning. "If a man is irresponsive to a lace petticoat, it proves that he has no refinement of mind," I remember having read in a book called "The Ascent of Woman," but I think a nicely adjusted brown silk stocking with a turquoise garter is much more likely to achieve a bull's eye. "She who is really proficient in the science of sorcery," said the same writer, "will never commit the artistic crime of beginning her bodice too late, for she has realised the truth that men are not attracted so much by revelation as by suggestion."

Walking home from the Aquarium the other night (or it may have been the early A.M., for I paused for a final peg of such awfully good gin at the last licenced house in Queen Ann's Gate) across the Parc St Jamais, whom should I fall across, literally as well as figuratively, at the foot of the Duke of York steps, but Millie Madderson. I had not seen her since—oh, ever so many years ago—she was expelled the High School. She is *so* altered! The remnant of what had once been a smart straw hat, sat

jauntily upon her head, the hair close cropped behind, with a "fringe," hanging over her classic forehead like a bunch of timothy over the door of an unlet house. She sat upon the lowest step, gazing sadly at her feet, which were encased in a pair of men's cast-off sidesprings, and, as I fell over her, she ejaculated :—

"J'yer, you incandescent gillie, where are ye steering to ?"

Making myself known to her she told me her life's story. The old, *old* chestnut, with a long white beard on it. And she told it all with the bitter air of the cynic who has seen the whole of the elephant, has tasted every pleasure, and now only wanders about seeking a suitably dramatic death. "I've seen what I've seen. Oh my lost youth!" she exclaimed, not knowing, of course, that Mr Henery Arthur Jones had used up that speech in *The Tempter*. And only to think that a few years ago, more particularly on the night of Foxhall's Grand Prix, she was caressed as the idol of the most noble *roués* in the most elaborately gilded saloons of the gay city, when the ridiculously wealthy Baron Stoomvaart filled the grand piano at Bignon's with priceless Steinberg cabinet, and the Marquis Mahoney steeped his unmatchable pearl shirt-stud in

Kummel, and then swallowed it. And she, the companion of Ducs, and the Saturday-to-Monday ruler of princes, should come down to positive penury! Poor Millicent! How utterly wretched is her lot; and yet, in the great human hive we must all be, or do, something.

Which reminds me, dear, of an old school-fellow of mine who has recently turned her attention to — what *do* you think? — burglary! nothing less, I assure you.

Her name is Minnie Pettifer; she comes of a really good family, and received an expensive education on the Continent. She had thoughts at one time of becoming a lady dentist, and in fact took the L.D.S. of the College of Surgeons, but found, on attempting to practice, that public prejudice was against her. She tried in various ways to earn her own living—painted terra-cotta plaques, became amanuensis to a dermatologist, canvassed the City offices with fountain pens, made a small "silver" book in a ladies' tea-and-crumpet club — but, bless you, the poor girl couldn't get bread and butter at any of them, and then it was that she conceived the idea of taking up burglary in an æsthetic and artistic way. She adopted the rational costume, and, as far as she could regulate it, "worked" only

bachelors' flats. As you may easily imagine, it came near being racy once or twice, but Minnie generally got away in time, or she says she did. One of the "tightest places" she was in was a medical students' flat, somewhere in Bloomsbury, which she broke into one moonlight night. The poor young medico, it appears, had changed his last half sovereign much earlier in the day, and had only gone to bed because he couldn't afford to go anywhere else. Halfway through his beauty sleep Minnie came in through the window and disturbed him by falling over something on the bedroom floor—a mortar probably. The budding Æsculapius opened first one eye and then the other, and gazed with unmixed satisfaction on Minnie, who is a takingly handsome brunette, and must have looked prettily in her natty get-up, poising her electro-plated jimmy. "Hullo, my little Tootsie," cried the awakened sawbones, "what is it you are looking for?" Minnie glared at him with her dark eyes as though she would freeze the very marrow in his bones, and hissed: "Your money and your valuables!" "The first," said the young man sadly, "is absolutely tee-totally tuckered out; as for the valuables—well, there's a silver buttonhook and a gun-metal ticker, and a new Balls-Headley's

'Diseases of Women,' and my onyx sleeve-links, and my chum's new aseptic instruments, and all sorts of chattels lying about somewhere. Pack up everything that takes your fancy, and then give me a kiss. I haven't had a kiss for a fortnight!" What did she do? Why, just as the merry young medico started to get up she jumped out of the window—it was on the first floor, too! —and if those young students are at all sentimental, they are still keeping as a cherished memento the back width of Minnie's petunia cloth pyjamas, which caught on a nail as she went down.

The outdoor billing and cooing season being now well over, poor old Mr Billinger-Jenkins—the Sad Old Man with the Six Fair Daughters, as we always call him—has had the big umbrella-tent in his back garden taken down and put away till next year. The carpenter who was employed to do the job found, round and about the spot where the tent stood, thirteen pearl shirt-buttons, twenty-nine half-smoked cigarettes, eleven tooth-picks, one Cromwellian shoe-buckle, three Hinde's curlers, a packet of "buck-up cachous," twenty-eight hairpins, a season-ticket for the *Marguerite*, three chocolate-creams, a shave check, a pencil-case, and an artificial tooth, but none of the girls

are yet married, nor even engaged. Suitors were at one time as easy to accumulate as empty sardine-tins on the Kew foreshore, but none of them stayed in, as they say in poker. And this sets me thinking of sweet little Miriam Isaacs, than whom no Hebrew maiden ever angled harder to land a mate. Poor girl! I heard from her only yesterday. She and her husband, who was once a Christian of some loosely organised denomination, are living on a fifth floor in Marylebone and a distant relative. He promised, it appears, at his con- (or per-) version to become a devout Jew and "keep" everything. "Everything," according to his present notion, consists of late hours and a hutched badger, for baiting. Poor girl! when I called upon her this afternoon she was keeping some fast or other, during which she was not allowed to eat, wash, comb, or scratch, and the only article in her apartment, exclusive of a Kosher lard-tub she was seated upon, was a large bull spider reclining in a natural cobweb on the wall.

Had a delightful long letter from dear Wilhelmina this morning; she is staying with her marital incubus at Hastings. He has been up in Scotland shooting, it appears, and wherever it was that he stayed, they put him into a bed

that already had occupants, and, as Wilhelmina says, the horrid things must have been on the verge of starvation to judge by the appearance of Samuel's back. It looked, for all the world, like the fortifications and raised earthworks round Santiago de Cuba. Even now, she says, he sometimes leaves the table in the middle of a meal to agitate his punctuated body against the sharp corners of the sideboard. Terrible, is it not? She tells me, too, that there has been little or no sport this autumn over the Earl of Joceline's once estate, unless a harmless occasional game of "shove-halfpenny" between the men-in-possession can be so termed. Owing, unfortunately, to the earl's heavy losses on the turf, it is even said that the costly piano-organ, with which he is at present elevating the musical profession, is also heavily encumbered, and some gossips go as far as to hint that a first-charge has also been given on the monkey. Still, this may be the "darkest hour that comes before the dawn," for his lordship, as all the world knows, has marked literary abilities, and also possesses influence in the right quarter to secure him the much-sought-after post of dramatic critic to *Perry's Weekly Gazette*. Thus "Hope tells a flatterin' tale," as the

aquatic young butterman remarked when the cheap hosiers told him they could rig him out in boating flannels to look like a puffick gentleman for seventeen and nine.

"Hettie" asks me if I can recommend her some cheery songs and books, now that the long evenings are commencing, and I am only too pleased to be able to do so. The back-end crop of ballads is somewhat disappointing, though Signor Herberto Campobello's "You've brought yer tea-things with yer," deserves mention: also the rondel which runs:—

Strolling last evenin' I chanced to meet
Disy, Disy,
She lives with her mother in Stamford Street,
Sweet little Disy Bell.
We 'ad a stroll and some drops of "Scotch;"
'Ow many I'm sure I can't tell.
Early this morning I missed me watch,
An' the young lidy as well—
Oh—

CHORUS

Disy, Disy, send me th' tombstone *do*.
I'm 'arf crisy—besides it's no use to you.
My missis will raise a beano
Sich as York Road's not yet seen o,
And I'll wait hard by while the fun runs high
With a funeril car for two!

With regard to the books, she should certainly

get "Not in Stock, or the Suicide of the Shopwalker," a very thrilling work; also "Shocked! or the Dead Policeman at the Drinking Fountain." Another one is "Gone Away, or the Whipper-In and the Banker's Daughter," although it is rather "advanced," perhaps, for a girl who has seen so little of the seamy side of life. The characters are drawn with a lack of force, too. I would particularise the passage where the hero is discharged from Millbank after serving seven years for a copper coal-scuttle. His penitence and determination to lead a decent, Christian life, is drawn with the pen of a Hall Caine or a Grant Allen, but when, with the view of carrying this intention into effect, he advertises in *Gale's Mirror* for a situation as *a billiard marker*, the effect upon the sympathetic reader is somewhat marred.

How often is it seen, dear, that the very persons who are the first to spike the domestic batteries of others, are themselves absurdly "touchy" on the question of their own conjugal rights? This is not a conundrum, but a philosophical reflection bid for by the earliest and latest evidences of Mabel Macmunro's versatility. I daresay you remember her at the High School at Bourneminster? She used to relieve the

tedium of term time, and sink half her pocket-money by writing notes on scented, lace-edged paper to all the good-looking curates in the town, in each of which billets she used the single sentence, couched in an apparently agitated feminine hand——

"*All is discovered—fly!*"

She used to send off three or four of these every Saturday, and then turn up at the corresponding churches on the Sunday, to gloat over the spectacle of the assembled sheep, all a-wondering what had become of the shepherd. Well, she's married now, and, after leading the poor, inoffensive young fellow whom she succeeded in literally *roping* in, a perfect dog's life for nearly a twelvemonth, she is applying for a divorce, making a former parlourmaid of their's, who slept in the top attic of their little West Hampstead bungalow, the co-respondent. She reminds me somewhat of the idiotic young doll-wife who was unusually morose at the breakfast-table one morning, and who, on being interrogated about it by her fool of a husband, pouted out, "It's because I had a nasty dream about you, Doady, and if I dream once more that you have kissed another woman, I will never, never

speak to you again, as long as I live;" because Mabel is relying entirely upon a single "admission of unfaithfulness" (as she calls it) of her husband's making. He was rather given to astrology, it appears, and she met him one evening going upstairs with a new fifteen-and-sixpenny telescope he had just purchased. Asking imperiously why he ascended towards the parlourmaid's private apartments, he replied that he would be "Nearer to Heaven in Jane's room!" Of course, Mabel's decree will depend largely on what construction a common jury will put upon this sentence.

He is a perfect martyr to insomnia, according to Mabel's account, but many young wives bring this on their husbands. I have known young men who, before marriage, would sweetly and placidly sleep in a boiler foundry within range of five-score of steam hammers, yet, after six months of matrimony, these same young fellows have started up in bed like frightened fawns at hearing the tinkle of a few coppers being abstracted from their trousers pockets.

In a letter I had from Clare Duff this morning, I observe that she uses a fresh surname, "Stanley," and frequently refers to "the captain and I." Well! well! Let me see—this is the

sixth. From the contents of her letter, however, I fear she has bitten off more than she can masticate. It appears that "the captain and I" went on a visit to the country place of some recently-made, but distinctly high-toned, friends. Upon the Sunday morning, at the breakfast table, their host, whose blue china teapot to be lived up to, was "Burke's Landed Gentry," remarked grandiloquently:

"Now, Captain, I don't know what your custom of a Sunday morning is, but I propose that we join the ladies at church. We've a delightful old church here, and I think you'll appreciate it."

"My dear lad," blurted the captain, kindly enough, "if you wish to make me feel like a stray cat in a strange garret, rope me into a church! Why, Great Spurgeon! I haven't seen the inside of a church since I was christened!" There was a painful silence, Clare says, in which one might have heard one's hair growing, and their visit came to an end the same evening. Now, dear, in the language of *Vanity Fair*, what should Vere do? I fear she has an adult pachyderm, of the order *elephas africanus*, on her hands.—I remain, dearest, yours always, MAUDE.

DECEMBRE

My Darling Madge,—

I had a great mind to be very, very cross with you after keeping me so long without a letter, but as you tell me you are going to get married, I suppose I must forgive you. Only fancy, dear! I am positively dying to know *who* he is and *what* he is like, for the only detail you vouchsafe me is that he has an income of £400 a year.

According to an old Japanese custom, of which you probably are aware, a bride's play-things are all burned on her wedding-day, typifying the end of her frivolous childhood, but as it is not usual in this country to cremate living toys, I suppose your old friend, the middle-aged widower will, like the red-skin, "lie low" — temporarily, anyway. Of course you would be simply mad to give him the irrevoc-

able mitten, for, with an assured income of only £400, how can you live up to the rate of £2000 a year if you frighten away Monsieur Juggins the J?

In affairs of this kind some women are apt to be criminally thoughtless—indeed it makes me quite hot and irritable to even relate to you an example of this carelessness. It is only twenty months ago since Fanny Bobitwell's "elderly stick-in-the-mud," as she invariably calls her hubby, allowed her to let out a floor in her pretty new house in Redcliffe Gardens, and her tenant, a Colonel Moppit, died of an overdose of bi-chloride of gold last week. Of course it is very sad, but, at the same time, Fanny's excessive and hysterical grief, and the fact that she has put her youngest baby into deep mourning, is causing no end of unfavourable comment. As that horribly horsey woman, Mrs Blew-Blunt, remarked, coming back from Gatwick Steeplechases: "If the odds were ten to one on the lodger, what was a fair price about the two coupled?"

Of course, dear, I am always rejoiced to be of the least service to you, and will certainly tell you "what is the swagger wear for a December bride"; but, though much depends upon local

customs, I wouldn't ask the "dear fellow" any more rhyming riddles such as—

When is Mrs Colonel Gilbert
Like a walnut or a filbert?

if I were you, for, though, as you say, he laughed aloud during the sermon, and was reprimanded by the vicar, he will think of it afterwards, and it may shake his childish confidence in you.

As regards the colour of your dress, you can hardly make a mistake this winter. Colours—bright, loud, resonant colours—and the more hideous the combination the better. Bloomers are not much worn; but then, dear, they are cut so full that the wear rarely shows. A well-known November bride went away in emerald-green accordion-pleated bloomers of *mousseline-de-soie*, cut *en tablier*, and came back with a piece of fresh, raw beef-steak over the left eye.

Pray, dear, banish altogether your fearfully antique idea of giving a wedding breakfast. *Fin de siècle* people give *receptions*, which consist of *petits fours*, claret cup (Castle U P is good enough), tinned pineapple, and cigarettes (which they bring with them). But wedding guests—especially rustic wedding guests—will eat and drink anything and everything you set before

them; indeed, I have known them, where the glasses were filled too full, to inhale priceless Perrier Jonet through the nostrils, so that they had to be pounded on the back by an equerry, groom, or best man.

It really is nonsensical of you, Madge, to pretend to be offended because we didn't invite you up for Fridoline's wedding: not a soul was there at the registry office save Pa, Ernest's parents (of course), Charlie, and myself. Ernest's parents, no doubt, had done all they could to dissuade him from the match at the last moment, but Charlie, as the bride's favourite brother, took the groom in hand, and showed him, out of the registrar's window, four of the "Panton Street gang" (I think they are called) who were to "put him through" in the event of his hesitating.

It was very pathetic at the last moment when the father of the bridegroom-elect called Pa aside, and, in a voice broken by emotion, said, that he thought it only right, before cementing such a close relationship, to mention that he had once had a little unpleasantness, which involved the loss of his liberty for seven years; that during that time his wife had been guilty of more than one indiscretion; that his youngest daughter

had been deeply wronged by the man he once called friend; and that his only other son had to get out of the 27th Hussars and the country in a bit of a hurry for writing his colonel's and lieutenant-colonel's names on an eighteen-penny bill-stamp. But, as Pa said, in his cheery, inimitable way: "Don't mention it, cully, don't mention it; you should see *our* family record!"

Ernest's behaviour at the altar reminded me of the young and bibulous undergraduate, who, having to read the lessons after a very late night, was observed to be holding on to the lectern for dear life, and who subsequently explained that he would have fallen head over heels "if it hadn't been for the blessed duck"! He was certainly well "oiled." Now they're married they get on together much better than I expected they would, although he has once or twice said that he hates—positively *hates*—sitting up and trying to keep awake through the long vigils of the night waiting for Fridoline to come home.

Already there has been one outcome of the wedding breakfast—(Not yet settled for, by the way, which is all the more hard on the contractor, since he told me that he had cut down his estimate to an almost profitless figure on the strength of Pa's assurance that the wedding

guests were mostly strangers to each other, in which case about forty per cent. less is eaten than where all are well acquainted)—in the shape of a betrothal between young Conrad Comeoff, of the Bays, and the still youthful widow of the late Lieutenant Lashins, who is still reported to be lost in the Soudan. It is rumoured that the charming bride-elect will leave Aldershot for town as soon as a few outstanding matters are settled with her landlady, whilst the gallant captain is overwhelmed with offers from his brother officers, who wish to have the honour of giving the lady away. So far, however, nothing has been settled—including the landlady. The interesting little widow claims to be an old Girton girl, though I should hardly have thought it after hearing her render the familiar old ballad as "What are the wild waves a-saying of." One of the guests, who was a young doctor with a very small practice, did hardly right, I thought, in distributing his business cards, but he gave an interesting scientific production to the effect that 1899 would be a great year for babies. He did not say how he arrived at that conclusion, but he probably felt it in the atmosphere; science is full of marvellous manifestations.

By the way, Clare Fraser has just got a baby,

and I went yesterday to see it. It is quite too droll for anything, dressed in its little Scotch clothes, with a kilt and a horn for snuff. It is to be christened to-morrow, being two days old, and I, being chosen its godmother, had to give it a present. I bought it a charming little spittoon at Mortlock's, and a manicure set. The beautiful mother looked exceedingly interesting in a transparent white lace *chemise de nuit*, but I thought perhaps it was a little early to have the Brothers Griffiths, Tom Costello, and Bessie Wentworth giving a music-hall entertainment in the bedroom.

No prettier picture of domesticity can be found, I think, than a sweet young mother lying in bed with her first-born; its quiet beauty, its mute pathos, must appeal even to those who have dropped in morals to the level of the poultry yard. And Clare Fraser has at least one sister who may be included in this category. The wretched girl—for she is only nineteen—left her husband in order to go glimmering with her "soul's affinity," as she called a large, coarse, alcoholic corporal-of-horse in the Life Guards, with whom she now shares a single furnished apartment over a Danish butter shop in Albany Street. Her poor young husband was positively

distracted about it, and he wrote her a most pathetic letter, begging her to return to him, concluding with: "This separation is absolutely insupportable, and death seems the only alternative. O Irené, Irené, I cannot live without you!" "You cannot live *with* me, that's a dead cert," the heartless creature wrote back, "for my only apartment at above address is so very small that, after the corporal and I are in it—as we generally are when he's not on view at Whitehall in his tin waistcoat—there positively wouldn't be room for you!"

Charlie generally starts his Christmassing about the Cattle Show week, by putting on his most rustic clothes, some old leather leggings, mixing hayseed in his hair, carrying a carter's whip in one hand, and going up to High Street, Islington, to be "picked up" by thieves and sharpers. He says it is really great fun. Men who have suddenly come into huge fortunes, which they wish to place at the disposal of some utter stranger with an honest face to do good with, seafaring persons who have "just picked up this ring, cap'en," and don't know what it is worth or what to do with it, and many other cunning creatures who simulate simplicity, whereas they are quite familiar with every wrinkle in the old

pachyderm, as poor dear Socrates used to say, are deceived by Charlie's make-up into taking him in tow and buying beer for him. They drag him into tavern bars, stick large rolls of the paper obligations of the *Bank of Enjoyment* into his hand, and then go out into the crowd for five minutes, during which Charlie generally goes out also, but by another door, and again lingers in the street waiting for some *other* crook to come along, pump-handle his arm, and recognise him as honest Farmer Thongleathers. He wished me to go with him, but I have always found the odour of the Agricultural Hall on these occasions a trifle omnipotent—which reminds me of a pretty idea they showed me yesterday afternoon at Thorndale's. It is a charming little silver clothes-pin, to be worn on the nose at the cattle shows and other crowded assemblies where the atmosphere is liable to become too demonstrative.

Just as Charlie was ready to start, dear little Emmeline Kettlewell, who used to live just above me in Ridgmount Gardens, dropped in, looking so very *chic* in a vermilion serge skirt and a Liberty tea-gown, the pattern on which represented the growth and development of the vegetable-marrow plant upon a sky-blue background, and as she seemed very anxious to go with Charlie, and I

was half expecting a visit from Freddie Fitzgibbet, I raised no objection. At the same time, I was not prepared for them making such a very alcoholic outing of it, that they should be detained all night at the Upper Street Police Station where, Charlie assures me, they divide the sexes.

And now, dear, comes the season when the pretty little Robin Riding Hoods, or whatever it is they call them, hop about in the snow—the season when it should be our earnest endeavour to gladden the hearts of our fellow-creatures less favourably circumstanced than ourselves. Charlie has hit upon a splendid plan. In his clubs, and his restaurants, and divers other places, he remarks in a loud tone of voice: "Shortly before Christmas, I shall give tips to all those who have waited on me well and carefully during the year." And no one seems to get better service than he after uttering this generous statement. Waiters bring him the best dishes; wine stewards neglect other customers to attend to him; managers say pleasantly one day is as good for paying his bill as another; uniformed outside-porters not only call him the smartest cabs, but carefully put him into them and tell the drivers his address—all this until the time comes for the disbursement of his tips, when it transpires, that one is Hermiston

for the Lincoln Handicap and the other Flying Fox for the Derby. This sort of prudence clearly comes from his mother's side—indeed direct from his maternal uncle, who regularly starts his Christmas preparations proper somewhere about the middle of October by roundly and vehemently abusing the parcels post, the carting delivery people, and railway companies and carriers generally. Nobody quite understands why, but everybody concludes that the old boy has just cause. On Christmas Eve there comes a wire from him :—

"Have sent you turkey and a dozen, with my heartiest good wishes for Merry Christmas.—UNCLE CHARLIE."

And when subsequently informed that the package has not been seen, he only replies in a burst of indignation : "There, what did I tell you?" In this way he acquires a record reputation for liberality and open-handedness at the cost of an eightpenny-halfpenny telegram.

My own preparations for Christmas are of a most simple character. As Captain Jack Swisher, who was my first flame in the long, long ago, has put in an appearance in town, and persists in giving his little drawing-room entertainment of the Warrior's Return—(which con-

sists in his being struck with joyous, alcoholic astonishment whenever he sees me, and exclaiming: "WHAT, my little braided Jane!" in allusion to the way I then wore my hair, "Oh! COME TO ME ARMS!" etc., etc.) — in the East Room, the Trocadero, Romano's, and, in fact, anywhere and everywhere when he feels in the humour, my preparations entirely consist of a determination to get out of town—anywhere, in fact, where the captain is not. But just as intoxication is loathsome, so is total sobriety a terrible curse, especially in the society of women. Every little blemish in the belle of the evening is easily beheld by sober eyes, so that no ambitious girl can afford to forget that an ounce of old brandy will do more than a pound of pearl powder.

And now, dear little cousin, I charge my glass to you. Here's the old toast. — Ever yours affectionately, MAUDE.

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