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VIVETTE

OR

*The Memoirs of the
Romance Association*

By

GELETT BURGESS

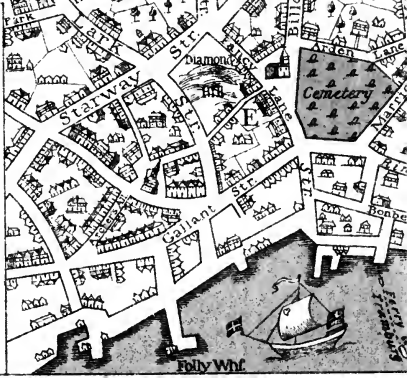




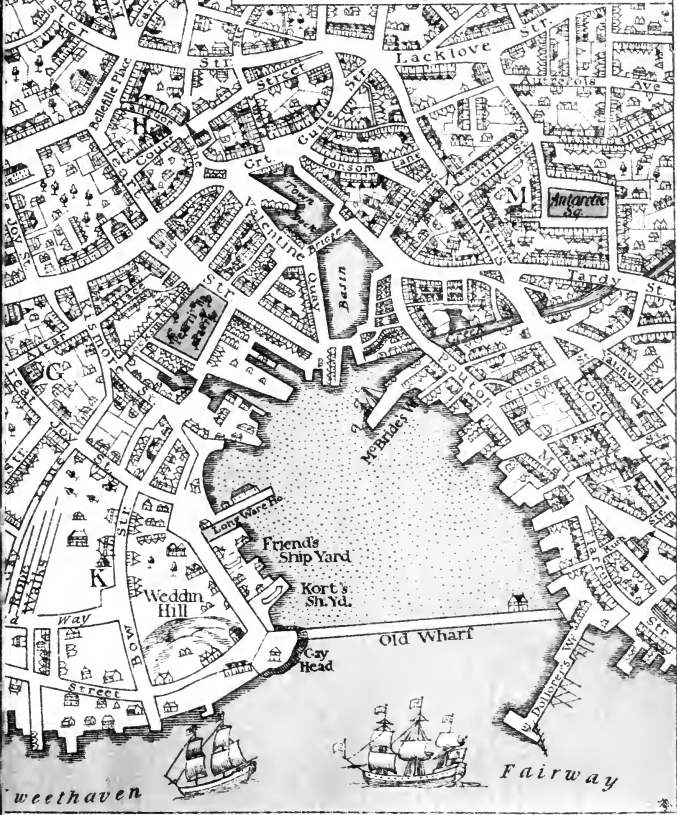
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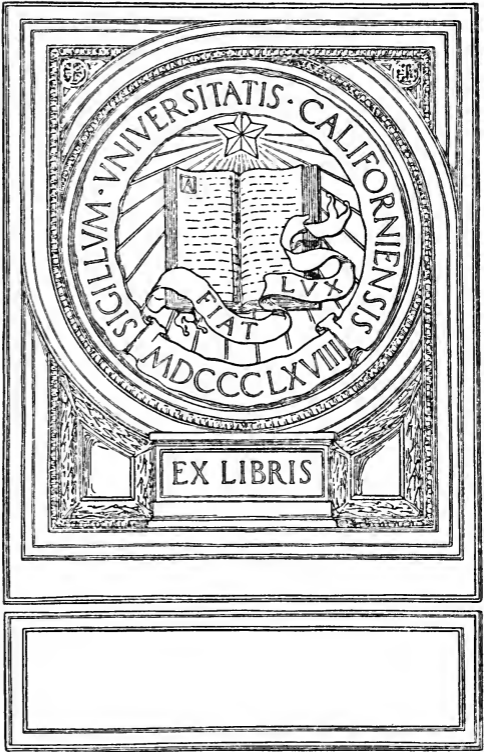
- A *Office of the Romance* Also
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- H *Revue Jeune Salon.*
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- M *Site of Vivette's Banquet.*



MAP OF
THE TOWN OF
MILLAMOURS
Surveyed for Vivette & Co
by Gelett Burgess S.B.



75 net



VIVETTE



VIVETTE

OR

The Memoirs of the Romance Association

Setting forth the diverting *Adventures* of one RICHARD REDFORTH in the very pleasant City of MILLAMOURS: how he took *Service* in the *Association*: how he met and wooed the gay VIVETTE: how they sped their *Honeymoon* and played the *Town*: how they spread a mad *Banquet*, of them that came thereto and the *Tales* they told: of the *Exploits* of the principal *Characters*, and especially of the *Disappearance* of VIVETTE

By

GELETT BURGESS



BOSTON

COPELAND AND DAY

M DCCC XCVII

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M DCCC XCVII



TO THE TAMAITAI
High-Chief Lady of the Five Waters :
AOLELE
Flying Cloud of Samoa :
FAFINE
Witch Woman of the Mountain :
FROM THE LUPE

M129041 ..

F. V. de G. S.

Madam:

Between the ocean of Impossibility and the shifting sands of the Improbable, lying naked to the wind and warm in the sun, is a Romantic shore. There are a few left, thank God, that dare be children still, and love to explore, gleefully, the limits of this narrow strand, venturing down the furthest reaches of the ebb to hazard the recession of the undertow, or briskly dodging the wash of the surges at the upper margin of the flood. Here, forgetting for a while the sober country beyond the dunes, have I played my morning out upon the lonely shingle, and a mad breeze has blown its laughter into my wits. So, while the waves sang for me, and tossed their lacy whitecaps from the deep, I have built a little city among the sands, whose outer moat is fed by the waters of the wonderful sea. I diligently laid it out with fantastic

streets, I tricked it up with cockles and samphire, I paved it with a rainbow of pebbles, till, alone with my fancy, and lulled by the tune of the rising tide, I fell asleep in this toy city of a thousand loves.

A little LARK, singing overseas, has told you some of my dreams ere this, but other things have befallen since, so now, before the breakers besiege and storm the town, I would lead you to this place, that your high-chief protection may rest for a proud while upon its walls.

Madam, I would I might do aught to honour the jubilee of your long-regnant youth, the empire of your undying beauty, and the glorious wealth of your royal love! But alas, I wield how weakly a mighty weapon that has been swung right valourously in your sight, and with most worship that ever in the whole world was! Yet, since I have seen you smile graciously on page as well as knight, — Madam, on my knee I dare tender you, loyally, this poor fief of MILLAMOURS.

G. B.

Boston, October 1st, 1897.

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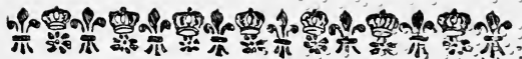
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BOOK I

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION



THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

Alone in the City of a Thousand Loves!

NO. 23 Forest street was a large, two-story house that had once been in the very thick of the fashionable quarter of Millamours. I had seen it often before in my wanderings through the town, but now I looked at it with a new interest, for "one who combined in his person the qualities of tact, spirit, originality, and polite address," said the advertisement, "might find there regular and remunerative employment."

† † † † † † † † † †
CHAPTER
I. THE
ANONY-
MOUS
CORRE-
SPOND-
ENT
† † † † † † † † † †

Its adjacent grounds had been so filched by the city's growth, that there now remained free only the yard that kept the street off directly in front of the house, and whose ancient funereal cypresses shaded the windows of the mansion. The gravel walk that led up to the old-fashioned doorway was hedged in, and trimmed in a way to prepare one for anachronisms; the brass knocker assisted the hint; and the aspect of the interior — for the door stood open — told me that here mysteries and nocturnal secrets might well feel at home. I entered the hall, however, without hesitation, and rapped at the first door on the right.

"Come in!" cried a thick voice, and I turned the handle, to find myself in the presence of a

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

Richard Redforth.

Author of "Saturday's Child."

bald-headed and exceedingly red-faced man of probably sixty years of age, who was sitting in his shirt-sleeves, eating brown troches out of a red box. He looked up at me over his shoulder.

"I have called," said I, "to find regular and remunerative employment."

"Ah-ha," said the old man reflectively, with a rising inflection, "and upon what do you found your expectation of success?"

"In my time I have been both actor and author," said I, "and I conceive that what the one experience has failed in supplying me the other may complement, to make me the man of parts, withal, whom your advertisement proclaims you need."

"Very prettily spoken, sir," the old man replied, swinging around in his chair to scrutinize me at right angles. "I suppose you can show documentary evidence of all this? We sometimes go slow in this office."

I took out a few programmes and newspaper puffs and handed them to him, wondering if he would be childish enough to take them seriously. With them, I passed over a copy of "Saturday's Child," by Richard Redforth. All these he rather too carefully examined.

"So far, so good," he said, returning my references. "I have hopes you are the man I am looking for. Both novelist and player have limitations hampering their usefulness, but I am

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

Weighed and Found Vaunting.

A Sinecure?

gratified to become acquainted with one who combines the faculties, as it were of artist and artisan. And another question: who are your favorite writers?"

"I am devoted to the immortal Tusitala," I said; "not that I consider myself an analyst of his technique, so much as a medium through which his sentences vibrate with an extraordinary sympathy. His stories so inflame my interest that I push the hero aside and plunge into the tale in my own person. Poe's works, also, have a dominant fascination for me, and by these two I regulate my fancies and gauge my emotions."

"You are a strange young man, and singularly fitted to my service," said the old man, waddling up and down the room as he talked, and peering at me over his spectacles. "I must certainly give you a trial — so let us proceed to business. Here is the address of a young woman whom it will be your duty — and I may say pleasure — to engage in an anonymous correspondence; to this task I commend whatever originality and finesse you may possess. You are to make life interesting to that young woman, by any romantic, mysterious, or whimsical manner your wit may suggest, and you will be very well paid, I assure you, if you succeed. You shall use sentiment, however, without sentimentality, and personalities without familiarity, taking your cue from your replies. For the rest, I trust to your tact and facility."

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

War Declared.

The Battles of Butterflies.

He turned back to his box of troches, and as it seemed that the interview was over, I left the house with no small wonder as to the fortune that had met me. The prospect was certainly alluring, and the task, I thought with a good deal of confidence, easy. I commenced the correspondence the next morning, mailing my letters to a distant town, and receiving my first answers in a numbered box at the Forest street headquarters, being, as yet, entirely ignorant of the character of the enterprises there conducted.

I threw myself into the new occupation with an abandon that I felt sure could not help inspiring responses baited to keep alive my enthusiasm. Nor was I disappointed; the girl was absolutely unclassified amongst her sex; she herself said that after she was printed the type had been distributed. The interchange of missives waxed and waned in frequency, harmoniously with our moods; now a perfect hailstorm of letters, twice a day, three at a time, or by fours and sixes, — and then ceasing for days, to be renewed at unexpected intervals. Keyed in every pitch of the diapason, — wise, witty, grave, impertinent, and proud, — my astonishing correspondent ranged earth and air and outer space with her entrancing commentaries, and we collaborated the libretto of the most adventurous flirtation unpublished. She was so marvellously quick at feint and lunge, so inconsequent and artistic, that the agility of my defence — for I

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

A Student of Belles-Lettres.

Versiflage.

was soon reduced to that posture — was maintained but at the cost of the most exhausting lucubrations.

She was extraordinarily versatile and masqueraded in a thousand sailing fancies, uncaging a new and swift sensation by every mail. It was only by an almost infinite extension of my own conceit that I could keep up the game, and to her every essay in frolic, I answered in audacity and impudence, sailing very close to the wind, however, and nicely gauging her complaisance. I rushed on, madcap chasing with dizzy wit, flying over the thin ice and forbidden ground, but she was ever a half-length ahead. She had a very clever Muse, and she put me through my French forms till my Pegasus had shown all his prettiest paces.

I was, as my patron had promised, well paid for my services, though he gave me little encouragement in my work, seeming to have forgotten, in fact, all about my affair. My correspondence was, however, like virtue, its own chief reward, and it was not long before I was on fire with the excitement. Yet at last her breakneck pace began to tell on me, and I began to go off a little. And then she redoubled the fury of the epistolary duel, and brought up reinforcements of still sprightlier sallies, fantastic humours, and adroit wiles of her magic imagination. I was speedily going to wreck, but I held on, for I did not then know my antagonist — that I was matching my talents against the very Goddess of Versatility. Every hundred

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

Out of the Frying-pan.

Buttered by the Director.

letters I had bound into book-form, and I gained no little inspiration from the perusal of the crowded shelves full of the little volumes of my fair Anonyma.

But at last the attack became still sharper; she had evidently determined to finish me. She waylaid me on the street with her messengers, insisting upon an immediate reply; I was rung up at all hours of the night to answer some telegraphic conceit; my meals were disturbed and my rest invaded. Human endurance could not stand such a mental strain as this, for, the first time I failed to answer her mockery, the mortification of not being able to hold my own overcame me, and I collapsed like a wet paper bag.

† † † † †
† CHAPTER †
† II. ENTER †
† VIVETTE †
† † † † †
WHEN I was able to sit up again, after several weeks' illness, I was visited by no less a person than my important employer himself, in a soiled piqué waistcoat that held my eyes like a loadstone, I being still weak and childishly amused at trifles.

“My dear boy,” began this puffy personage, “allow me to congratulate you on the marvels you have accomplished. If you will sign a contract to stay with us for five years, I will confess that I myself, to test your powers, answered your first letters, but your overwhelming versatility so baffled me, that I was soon forced to call one after another of my most experienced assistants to aid me, and

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

Seduction.

Abduction.

Production.

I ended by enlisting the entire force to cope with your prodigious genius! We had no idea that you would be able to defend yourself for more than a week. Believe me, sir," he continued in a whisper, "you were vanquished *only by Vivette herself!* Such a feat has never been recorded in the annals of the Association. You are a Luminary, sir, a Luminary; and I congratulate myself upon the alliance!"

"Now then," he continued, "you must recoup as speedily as possible, for at last I have an enterprise worthy of your capacity. We are recommended to a fabulously rich old gentleman, who is, as yet, sceptical of our powers of diversion. I strongly advise you to conceal yourself in his house and sandbag him in his own studio — but of course I shall leave the details to your sagacity."

I flew into a bubbling rage at this. "Sir," I exclaimed, "I am neither a detective nor a felon! How dare you offer me so infamous a proposition!"

"Softly, softly," cooed the old man, spreading his fat fingers. "I had entirely forgotten that you were still unfamiliar with the character of our business at number 23 Forest street. Let me introduce myself, then, as the director of the Romance Association, whose abilities, by the way, many hundreds of clients will be pleased to affirm. We are, in a way, in the enterprise of retailing romance — or wholesaling it, for that matter — we force Fate; we

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

Marionettes wired to a Fat Fool's Finger.

make interesting things happen. And what, after all, is our Association but the true *Theatre Libre*? Instead of set scenes and painted flats, we perform on the picturesque stage of Life. The gaslit town, abounding with movement and colour, with supernumeraries unpaid, it is true, but admirable in dialect, well trained, yet naive, — or the broader openings of the country, Nature's own construction, with real trees in the foreground, — why should these properties revolt you? As a player, you might be unable to appreciate these unconventionalities, but I rely upon the artistic sentiments of the author to enjoy our dramatic unities. Here we have, then," he continued, with elaborate gestures, "a gentleman of parts, into whose life no adventure has ever entered. Around him we weave our web of Romance, and he himself, as hero, plays his part in the drama, a hand-to-hand conflict with a picturesque fate, where I have become the regent of his destiny. The gentleman is prepared for surprises and will pay handsomely for an eventful life. Come, now, shall we disappoint him? Shall he be allowed to moulder?"

I need not say that I was seduced by such allurements, and entered with all willingness into a scheme that promised as much pleasure as profit. The anticipation of such congenial employment hastened my convalescence, and the news brought by the director, at a subsequent visit, that Vivette had been detailed to coöperate with me, was all

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

“A Damosell clad in white Samite, richly Beseene.”

that was needed to perfect my recovery. I was at the office the next day.

I was waiting in the room that had been assigned me, when she first appeared — from I knew not where. She came of a sudden, like a rainbow, and though there was a soft click, as from a secret door, yet the panelled wainscoting of the old room showed blank and formal. I knew it must be Vivette, for, had it not been for the exquisite old-fashion of her face, — the features of an antique miniature, most like Lady Jane Grey, a rare beauty, demure but fey in modern costume, — the witchery of her manner would have told me that here was a lady unique. She was not of the mode, not millinery made, nor homespun either, but quite apart from all estimate of dress and the accessories of demeanour that define most women. She seemed, indeed, not so much a woman as Woman herself, in a finer essence doubly distilled, and far too strong for most men's nerves. For mine at least, for, what with a feeling of all this, and the mystery of her entrance, I gasped a little when I saw her. But when I realized that it was toward this wonderful creature that I had held such bold franchise of correspondence, — that I had rondeaued her and renamed her and bepetted her with all the foolish lacy and vermeil of our flirtation, — and when I swam in the smile of her, my opinion of myself bounced up to one hundred and twenty-eight, and I set the whole goal of my life at the winning of an

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

Love's Language. Follysyllabic, Agglutinative, or Affected?

expression of which I knew those hazel eyes were capable. But meanwhile she was fusillading me merrily with little dancing glances of amusement, and as she could not wait for me to come out of my trance, she said :

“ And so you have nothing to say, now you see me ? Fie ! I heard you had been an actor ! ”

“ The best romances have little dialogue,” said I, and I quoted a saucy line, apropos, from Henri Murger.

“ I believe you are right,” she said ; “ the libretto is slight enough in the opera of Love, but it's a less ravishing drama we're in for ; and I must talk, if I'm to get through my chapters, and you must learn too, or you'll be discharged from the Association.”

“ I've managed it so far without talking,” I said pointedly ; “ have you any complaints to make at headquarters ? ”

“ Divil a wan,” said the maid, for she was one-sixteenth Irish of the best flavour, that gave to her conversation what the balls are to the Roman candle.

But it is not our colloquy in that room that is here to be told, not even that first one (and there were many others far more exciting, after I learned her talk) ; no, it is with Solomon Hopp that my next chapter is to be loaded.

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

We toast our Cheese and bait our Traps.

SOLOMON HOPP confessed to having lived five and forty years without having been rejuvenated by anything worth being called an adventure, and he had called on the Romance Association as a last resort. So over Vivette and I held consultation and concocted his desperate remedy. A confidential report showed that his library was stocked to a plethora with the novels of Gaboriau, Anna Katharine Green, and less subtle disciples of Poe, and it needed but this hint to decide that in his case, the detective *motif* was the most likely to be successful.

I blocked out the main features of the plot and left the details to Vivette's imagination. In a few hours the whole thing was arranged, the routes and stations selected, and typewritten instructions sent out to the main actors. As our rates were high, — there being little competition, — Hopp had paid for but one month's entertainment, so we had but little time to turn around in; yet if we made a success of, it he would doubtless prove a permanent and profitable customer.

We were all ready by six o'clock that night, and as soon as dark fell Vivette and I were standing, off and on, up and down the block opposite his house, like yachts waiting for the racing gun. At eight Hopp emerged from his doorway, and looked up at the weather.

† † † † † † † † † † † † †
† CHAPTER †
† III. THE †
† AMATEUR †
† DETEC- †
† TIVE †
† † † † † † † † † † † † †

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

Hopp Harkens.

Hopp Horrified.

Hopp Happy.

“That’s a roof-garden costume,” said I, and we tacked off down town, luffing up at alternate corners to make sure of his progress. In this way we ran him down to the rendezvous, as I had thought, and after a few necessary manœuvres we anchored in the seat in front of his.

He was a very well old man, pleasantly wrinkled, and his eyes were those of a child who plays with his food and uses imagination to sauce his realities. With such an one the game promised to be easy. So Vivette began, for his benefit, a brisk and suggestive dialogue, with the key words flung sidewise over our shoulders at him. It was not long before he had bitten, and was following our hyperboles with the zest of a hound on the scent. And then we plied him with the embroideries of a fiction that would have justified a warrant for our arrest.

From the patches of the talk, he was to suspect us of foulest conspiracy against the laws, of confederate assignation and nocturnal embassy. So at last, seeing him well twisted in the snare, I pulled out an envelope and scrawled it with an address for Vivette, and then, with an elaborately smothered rehearsal of our formulæ, I left her. What she did after that I can only suspect, for it was her chance for fine shading and half tone. There was more story in the poise of her head than in some women’s oral confession. I know one thing, she had neither to speak nor to look at him. Enough, that she too, after a brace of numbers,

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

Deep-dyed Villany guaranteed not to Crock.

rose hurriedly, and, craftily dropping the envelope from between her gloves, escaped before Mr. Hopp had time to assist it to her.

“Will he look up the address, do you think?” I said, as we waited in the drug store opposite the entrance to the theatre.

“You left me there alone by him, did you not? He’ll come,” said Vivette, and as she spoke, old Hopp entered the street from the swing doors as one might come on a stage, L. U. E. He hailed a cab and drove off up town.

“You may take me home now, for the men will do the rest,” Vivette commanded, and I saw her safely to her door. But I was not quite so sure of our hero as she, in spite of her charms, and so I made back to the rendezvous, a little old cottage on Lark street.

As I approached it, I saw a small swarm of persons making an unsteady progress down the walk. The street was deserted else. The knot of men wobbled, struggling, toward a cab that waited by the curb; its door suddenly opened and the vehicle swallowed all the men but one; the door smacked, the driver lashed at his horses and was off with percussion. The survivor came up to me and touched his cap.

“He was a little scared, sir, but he fought pretty well. I let him hit me all he wanted, as you said, sir, and he seemed to enjoy knocking me down, sir, but I was well padded, all right.”

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

For further Information see Dime Novels.

The schedule was being carried out to the letter, and I slept happily that night.

What need to trace Hopp's adventures that month? You, who have read Gaboriau and wondered at the multiplicity of the incident, may imagine the activities that surrounded our hero. What racy and suggestive conversations did we not allow to be overheard in restaurants and street cars, by this emulator of Lecoq and Pinkerton! What letters did we not drop before his watchful eyes, with very broad hints of mysterious plots and mention of middle-aged lame men with white hats — who were sure to be encountered at the next corner, and take up the game as we had planned, spattering the clew wide-cast like a game of hare-and-hounds!

Hopp was soon absorbed in the sport and devoted his whole time to the ramifications of the plot. The climax was set for the 18th, and when he at last tracked the principals to Sly Park and there hazarded an entrance, his excitement was a raree show — for us, concealed in the garret. One of the band of pseudo-counterfeiters that had used the house interviewed him the day before, and had betrayed the mythical gang. The entrance to the den was supposed to be beset with dangers lying hugger-mugger at every hand. A horrible oath of secrecy was required, and Hopp's soul would have been hardly worth saving, had he informed the police.

We had spared neither imagination, trouble, nor

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

A \$287.00 Climax.

The Assassination.

expense upon the equipment of that house, and in the cellar was an elaborate arrangement of properties, — furnaces, melting pots, dies, and metal pigs, — whose establishment I considered a work of art. The paraphernalia were completed by two hundred and eighty-seven newly minted dollars, in a starch-box.

When Solomon Hopp left the house his pockets bulged humourously ; he had a strained, nervous expression, as of one discovered in quarter-dress and anxious to escape scrutiny. Vivette, experienced as she was in the ludicrous aspects of the Association's business, marvelled at the seriousness of Hopp's interest. The next day, however, revealed the calibre of his innocence.

It was early in the morning that he called to see the director. "I wish to cancel my subscription," said Sol. Hopp.

"Why so?" scowled the director. "Are you dissatisfied with the services of the Association?"

"The fact is," said Hopp, "that I have had such surprising adventures with a gang of criminals, this month, that I hardly need to make use of the company's assistance."

The director murdered him with a glance of contempt. "Has anything of as like exciting nature happened *to happen* to happen before you patronized my Association?" he sneered ferociously.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Solomon Hopp.

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

Hopp Haggles.

A Double Star.

“Then the Association stands unstultified, seeing it guaranteed only that the month for which you subscribed would prove eventful.”

Hopp seemed a little disappointed at this. “But at least I can get the thirty-five and two-fifths per cent. rebate due at the end of the month?” he insisted.

“We have already rebated two hundred and eighty-seven dollars,” said the director, taking down my vouchers. Hopp opened his eyes at mention of the figure.

“Perhaps you thought the dollars were counterfeit,” continued the director; “I assure you they will pass.”

Then Solomon awoke from his happy dream. “See here,” he said, and he pounded on the counter with his fist, “put me down for an annual subscription, please!”

† † † † † † † † † †
† CHAPTER † VIVETTE and I played
† IV. THE † with such success in this
† BURIED † and subsequent engagements that
† TREASURE † we endeared ourselves more and
† † † † † † † † † † more to the director, whose con-
fidence in me increased daily. Vivette’s hold over him was long since made sure, but from this time on her authority was well-nigh absolute, and the old man, already nearly in his dotage, became a mere figurehead to the Association, willing enough to leave to either one of us the decision of the most important affairs of the office.

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

Oh, fie! Saving Seed for a Sequel?

Our adventures during this year would fill many volumes. I should say *do* fill many volumes, for the Memoirs of the Association, that have been kept in cipher for many years, and from which I am now refreshing my memory, fill several shelves in the director's private office. But the key to the records of all before two years after Vivette joined the staff has been lost, and I have not as yet had time to decipher them. That is, however, the work of my life, and I cannot help hoping that I shall find there some clew to her mystery and perhaps be able to trace her in the past as well as the future. But as I was saying, our own adventures this year were far too numerous to be described. Suffice it to say, however, my own devices were not always the least ingenious, and speaking of ciphers, I may be forgiven if I relate something a little out of the running of most of our successes.

I found on my desk, one morning (beside the single carnation that Vivette had left there), a memorandum in the director's crawling fist, from which I learned that James F. Merioneth (the chief had carefully put an accented and diacritical long "i"), a retired tea-taster of Millamours, had enlisted the services of the Association to the air of five thousand dollars per month, offering a still larger investment rebate. The latter alternative referred to our custom of employing a more generous sum of money than our subscribers could afford to lose, allowing them to recoup at certain stages of the game, as if by acci-

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

Portrait of a Scholar.

@ — \$TH((D5X + *

dental good fortune, as did Solomon Hopp afore-said. In this way we were enabled to undertake operations on a much more interesting scale, and generally to the greater satisfaction of the subscriber.

Now the liberality of Mr. Merioneth's offer kindled my hopes that he might be induced to play a still heavier game than had been often run with the office, and so, with no more definite scheme of operations in my mind, I went up to feel of him and see of what stuff he was made. I found him in his library, a weazened, sallow, near-sighted man, of an incredible thinness, goggled with enormous convex lenses. I wondered to myself who had whispered to this mummy that there was such a thing as romance!

He was poring over a sort of chart that was spread out on a huge table, flanked and surrounded by maps and heavy volumes. I looked again and saw it was the pictograph of the Aztec migration. He looked up toward, though hardly at me, as I entered, and bade me sit down.

"You are aware of my mania, I suppose?" began Mr. Merioneth.

I was forced to confess ignorance, as I had had no report beyond the few notes the director had given me.

"I am devoted to the art of cryptography," he then went on, "and I have begun to flatter myself that I am an expert, if, indeed, not an

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

James Frederick Merioneth, his Library.

authority. If you will take the pains to look over these shelves, you will find, I think, all that is worth reading in the literature of the subject, from Trithemius down to the last word on the subject." He took down an old book bound in vellum. "There is a copy of the first edition of Blaise de Vigenère, 1587, which was the last work necessary to make my collection complete. I have reclassified all the various cryptograms, and have laid down a system of qualitative and quantitative analysis which I consider embodies the only truly scientific procedure. You may not believe it, sir, but I have succeeded in discovering an entirely new species of cipher, hitherto unknown, working by direct deduction from the principles of my classification!"

I showed a decent surprise at his astuteness. I was, in fact, not a little afraid of him, for, as the scientific intellect leaves little room in the mind for the vagaries and mists of pure romance, I feared he would be a hard customer. His library was a veritable museum, hung with casts and photographs of all the most famous hieroglyphs and esoteric inscriptions, from every quarter of the globe. There were models of cipher typewriters and mechanical combiners of characters by which he had been verifying the chances computed by the laws of permutation. I knew very little of all this, and I wondered how I should be able to fool him. But I put on the bold face.

"You see," continued the old man, "I have

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

Fools rush in where Angels fear to Tread.

come to about the end of my rope, and there is little else to be done but to seek for those accidents in calculation which the best of us are likely to make. There *may* be cryptograms so cleverly constructed that they cannot be deciphered by my method, but I very much doubt it, for the system is scientific and logical. I have heard a good deal of your work at the Romance Association, and if you are as clever as they say it should interest you, this problem. Come, I will pit my wits against yours, young man, I will stake any sum you may mention upon my ability to read any manuscript you may prepare !”

He chuckled vainly as he spoke, and I feared he had sent for me only to flatter his own conceit at the expense of my discomfiture. It needed but this to put me on my mettle, and I made up in audacity what I lacked in experience, having found that, nine times out of ten, I could achieve what at first had seemed impossible.

“Very well,” I said. “It is possible that we may be able to provide amusement for even such an epicure as you. If you will allow me a day to look up a subject on which I confess I am a little tarnished, I will then be very glad to complete with you the arrangements for your sport.”

“Take a month — take a year,” snickered Mr. Merioneth. “I can wait, and you’ll need it.”

I walked home, doleful enough over the prospect, for I had no doubt that the old tea-taster was

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

I teach a Grandfather to suck Eggs.

shrewd, and well up in the science of his hobby. I worried a good deal over the thing, and it was a long time before I could see light at all. And yet I could not afford to fail, if for no other reason than that I should be disgraced in the eyes of Vivette, for whom I had begun to conceive a very lively fancy. I had been much with her of late, and I knew not whether to respect more the agility of her brain or the kindness of her heart. Yet she was successively fire and ice and quicksilver. One never knew where to find her, save that it would be in a position impregnable and unique. But I had determined to please her, and felt the necessity of displaying my prowess in the lines where she herself excelled.

In time my mind cleared, and I saw plainly what was the only thing to be done in the Merioneth affair, and the only way in which my subtlety could hope to defeat his years of training. The plan could not be carried out without risk, but I was willing to stake my reputation on the hazard of the throw.

I called again upon the tea-taster the next day, and by an egregious exaggeration of my own powers and a half-concealed deprecation of his old-fashioned methods, I drew him on to a most reckless offer of contest. He proposed, in short, to make over to me his entire fortune, a cool million, to be hidden at my own discretion, and the secret of its location to be given him in a description of

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

"If this Young Man expresses himself in Terms too Deep for me,
which I alone held the key. This he proposed to decipher and with its instructions to regain his money.

"I shall withhold one week's expenses," he said, "and if I have not, at the end of that time, succeeded in reading the manuscript, I shall entertain a very great respect for your powers, and I shall consider my patronage of your Association a very happy fortune."

The manuscript was prepared, and I presented it to him with my heart in my mouth. "Ah-ha, I see you are deep," he said; "there is at least one of Bacon's 'virtues' which your cipher possesses, for the manuscript certainly would create no suspicion, in the average week-day intellect, that it contained a secret message. But it cannot escape me, and I shall be around in a day or so to show you how it might be improved."

He was indeed around in a few days, but it was to receive assurance from the director that there actually was a significance to the writing, and that it did correctly describe the location of the treasure. Time passed. The week elapsed without his having solved the riddle, and I called to see if he desired any hint or clew as to the translation. The old man drew himself up proudly and looked at me squarely: "Young man, I must confess you are entitled to have the satisfaction of knowing that you have succeeded in puzzling James F. Merioneth! For myself, I assure you I am having the happiest

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

What a singularly Deep Young Man this D. Y. M. must be!"

time of my life, and I propose to enjoy it, if I am forced to live on one meal a day."

I bethought myself then of that condition of his offer. "If you have indeed been reckless enough to literally surrender all your fortune, except that ridiculous sum," I said, "I trust you will allow me to advance you your living expenses at least."

"I beg you never to mention the subject again," he insisted haughtily; "you may see me in a ragged coat, but you will never hear me confess myself beaten!"

He was as good as his word. After a few weeks, his money having entirely gone, he was forced to seek a temporary employment, to support himself until the puzzle should be solved. He went back, therefore, to his old occupation of tea-tasting, but as he soon found that the mental fatigue incident to his nightly calculations over the manuscript had affected his nerves, he sought a berth as book-keeper. But here again he found that the ardour of his intellectual struggle, that had now become a grand passion, unfitted him for continuous and intense thought on any other subject during the day. And so, retrogressing through the trades, he at last took a common labourer's situation, and dug with an iron shovel upon the county road. There was indeed a fable in the happiness of the old millionaire toiling assiduously with his mind as with his hands, faithful to his conception of the ideal pleasure, and in the pauses of work, or when the foreman's eye

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

With his Spec's upon his Forehead all the Time!

wandered, stealing a furtive glance at the mysterious scroll !

Again and again I went to him and offered to disclose the secret, but he refused to entertain the idea. He was, however, exceedingly desirous of knowing where and how I became acquainted with the intricacies of the cryptogram. But here I took my turn at obduracy.

However at last, one day, seeing that the hard toil had somewhat worn him, I mentioned the genius of Poe in connection with feats of induction and deduction. He stopped his work to think, reviewing the writer, maybe, and only the harsh oath of the boss ordering him to quit his loafing recalled him to the present.

But the next day Mr. Merioneth was not in the ditch. I was hardly prepared for such a sudden enlightenment, but I hastily convened my supernumeraries and properties and shipped them with all haste to the fallow cache where I had buried the million. I was determined that whether to his taste or not, he should have the most melodramatic accessories to the disinterment. For now he was the victim of the baldest prose ; I had taken a leaf from the book of the " Purloined Letter " of Poe, and the description of the location of the treasure was legibly written down, as plain as Holy Writ, and as true. I had taken the chance that James F. Merioneth would never regard the perfectly obvious and simple directions of the letter,

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A Listener hears Ill of Himself.

but that his intellect was of that astute degree that would read into the words some occult significance.

And so amid the hoarse groans of supposititious spooks and the wild call of owls and hobgoblins he regained his fortune and learned, forbye, a never-to-be-forgotten lesson in finesse. . . .

THE adventuresses had left, the disguised dukes had left, the highwaymen had left; all these were specialists belonging to the regular office force, and had no need to linger. It was late, I had begun to think the house was empty, and hurried over my report, hoping to catch Vivette on her way home, when her voice sought me out by way of a half-shut door. Its course was errant, though; I was not meant to hear. "You must hand it over to him — I insist upon it!" it said.

Now who was this with whom Vivette must need insist? It was by no means her habit, surely; her favours were used to come to her on the hand-gallop. But hush! — it was the director himself! — to wit:

"I consider him utterly incompetent for the part. This affair needs delicate handling and the most tender balance of tact and coolness. Indeed, I would hardly dare touch it myself! Pshaw, my dear, he's a mere boy! What does a lad know of women, at twenty-four!"

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

Attributes of a Wooer.

O Tempora !

“Listen here,” said Vivette, — I blush to confess that I was still listening, — “he has had two sisters, and that is a good foundation for any man, and saves him a great many mistakes at the start, so that all he finds out afterward is clear gain. Besides, I can tell by the shape of his chin ! I’m sorry he has such a strong sense of humour, but he’ll have to forget that — and anyway, if he doesn’t know how, we can afford to break him in.”

“How’s that ?” rasped the director. “It won’t break him in, it will break him up — more likely !”

“Well,” said Vivette, “it is decided, then, that we’ll assign him, and you will tell him in the morning ?” Her tone was definitive.

Something told me not to confess my eavesdropping too soon, and I held my tongue, though I had no doubt that the talk was anent me. The next morning there was an order slip on my desk from the director, and I went up. “It’s a queer job,” said he. “I confess I can’t make much out of it. Times have changed since I was young ; you get into the way, though, of thinking women are mostly all, and mostly always, alike. Probably you’ll have no trouble at all, however, with your runaway wits. Here’s the address, 3 Dove court ; you’d best run right up there.”

I knew more than to ask any questions of the old incompetent, but took a cab to Miss Florizel’s at once. She was in, said the maid, and I was

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

A Mystery.

A History.

taken down the hall to an inner room. As I passed, I caught a glimpse of something on a table under the stairs that stuck in my eye sillily, like a mote that one feels, but does not see. There was something queerly familiar about it, but I could not remember what the object was, a moment after, though I knew that something had puzzled me. While I was still wondering, Miss Florizel, a bewitching customer of nearly thirty years of age, flowed into the room. I needed no introduction, and she needed no apology, but testified directly of her malady.

“Mr. Redforth,” she began, “behold in me the type of a myriad lacklove spinsters! I am not physically impossible, am I, now? and I am not too ancient, perhaps, but in this town and county I have fallen into a scorn of all would-be lovers. They have come up to me by the double dozen, and back again by the same road. There is not a gallant equipped for my society in the parish. Here I am at the turn of my youth, with a fit fortune and—God help me—with an imagination! I must marry, I suppose, in accordance with my instinct, but before I go I have a wild mind to be made love to for once, and in some safe way, as a lady of spirit and taste deserves, and with no flavour of the alleged equality of the sexes. Tell me, is that so very strange? Am I mattoid?”

“My dear Miss Florizel,” I said, with a smile,

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A Damsel Desirous, voting Friends a Bore.

“you are an anachronism. Nevertheless, I feel for you. But have you no friendships with men, at all?”

“Oh, bless me, yes!” she replied; “you mistake my complaint. Many a good man have I known, really well and deeply too, even for these extreme days. Oh! I am *assez bon camarade!* Here’s the best of the lot, and a dear boy too. Look—is it not a fine face? I shall marry with him some day. I have refused him four times already, but he has the patience of an ox. But that’s just it. I hate to be besieged, and hate to be starved out. I want to be carried by storm. Can you carry me by storm? Not every swash-buckler can do that, either. I hope you swing a keen blade, Mr. Redforth, if you attempt the capture!”

“Miss Florizel,” I answered, “I am not, at times, over modest, but the very first canon of this code is, that in loving, of all games, a man must neither show his hand nor name his play.”

“Hurrah!” she laughed; “you are the man for me. The second rule, quick! I have great faith in you, indeed,—but the second, the second!”

“I have made a lucky hit,” said I, “and I fear to go on. But pshaw! the second is ready-made at my hand: what one discovers by accident one must claim by right.”

“You extemporize, Mr. Redforth, but I see you steer nimbly enough in the current of my

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

Of Languid Lovers she had known a Score.

tastes. Yet since, as you say, the lady should never know what is known from what is guessed by her swain, it were folly to catechize you. Alas, we are very modern !”

“I hope you will not accuse me of humouring you,” I said, “for in good faith I shall do what I can, according to my own lights. But I am very much ashamed to say that I have always done my love-making to suit myself, and have gone on riding my own moods. It will be a new experience to attempt to frame my follies to fit the fancy of the girl.”

“But may it not be, after all, that your own way will please me ?” said Miss Florizel.

I blushed at the compliment.

“I have played a good deal, in my time,” said I, “and I have, perhaps, played pretty hard. But it has been my chance to meet few types ; nor many of any one class ; indeed, they were all exceptions. May it not be true, then, that what is true of these should be true of all women ?”

“It would be true, perhaps, if all women were not exceptions. Or, alas, what is the same thing, if all women were not alike,” said she hopelessly. “At any rate, for heaven’s sake let us not discuss it. That’s what they all do, discuss it till we grow familiar. They gain the tertiary thrill, the joy of scientific analysis, — but they miss the primitive impulse. The secret of the charm is in the process of getting acquainted. Why murder curi-

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

Analysis of a Binary Compound.

osity? We get acquainted nowadays in six sentences. There's a whole language made especially to that purpose, for the Cognoscenti. Can't you remain a foreigner for a long, long while, so that we'll constantly be getting acquainted? I'd love to revert to type!" . . .

And so I was to volley and thunder, to assault, retreat, charge, outflank, as the campaign flurried, and capture her banners if I might. Indeed, it was lucky for me that I had seen women before, and was master of the arts of outfall, onfall, advance, sortie, and leaguer!

It may seem strange to you, to think of such a cold-blooded treaty being thus made between us, but though I confess it was so to me, — being the first time, — the sight of the table below the stairs, when at last I left, sent a stranger fact a-flying. It was Vivette's hat that lay there!

Now, what did this mean? Why had Vivette been there, and why had she insisted that I be detailed to make love to Miss Florizel? Look at it as I might, I could read no compliment into it, and what subtle mischief there might be floating was as hard to say. But no, surely it was not the latter; for some reason Vivette wished me to show my paces. Could it be that she would see or hear, and if so, why? A great hope sprang up, as on a mountain top, and beckoned wildly. Vivette herself was an epicure — connoisseur in things like these; there were ultra-violet lines in her spec-

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

I go a-Lovering.

Puss-in-the-Corner.

trum ; she had micrometric distinctions. Perhaps — who knows? — she had seen some good in me after all, and had reserved some test like this. It was a *crux* determinate. Could I qualify?

I embarked, then, upon the amour, with this thought inspiring me. What Miss Florizel's unaided charms would have won for her I cannot say, and what her unaided wit would have done to baffle me with new and newer situations I know as little. To be candid, I think she would have conceded my election within the week, but she was obviously coached to repel me, and I tripped her up in many a half-learned feint. It was certainly no part of her game to be lightly won, for she would and she wouldn't, she blew hot and blew cold, and I soon found I must cast aside every attempt to obey her and take the rein in the good old style. It was easy enough after that. When she shied or balked, I let her have her own way, robbing the victory of any material advantages, however, and leaving her the rest. I never mentioned another girl in her presence ; I never made myself, or her, ridiculous ; I never discussed myself. All this you may think might go without saying, they should be rules as familiar as that which makes a gentleman uncover his head to ladies, but, alas, it is not so ; pray try it yourself if you do not believe me.

She led me a life, that month, what with bringing her a different and always an appropriate gift each morning, with the verses, and the refinement

THE ROMANCE ASSOCIATION

“Two and Five are Four, but Five and Two are Six !”

of my flatteries. I could not have stood it unless I had felt Vivette around the corner, so to speak, at every stage of the proceedings. The worst of it was, that I had no way of knowing how well I suited her. Whether Miss Florizel was pleased or not had now become a minor consideration with me. She had once said, laughingly, that perhaps I was getting too dangerous, after all, and she might lose her heart. I should have been prepared, for I have seen such things happen before ; but I was shocked, one day, to see the look in her eyes as if a star had risen. She was swaying, all willing to be won. She anticipated my moves, and made it very easy for me to take her tricks. I saw that she had lost her heart — and her head.

I resented it a little, for she had expressly desired the services of our Association that she might not break anyone on the rack of her flirtation, and I went home that night in a dismal temper. I was met by my office boy with a letter. It was signed by the director, but it was evidently written by Vivette.

“ Take 9.32 train to Maldivers to-night. New business ; instructions waiting there. Very important. Will finish Florizel affair.”

I was much perplexed. Had Vivette been displeased by my efforts, or, oh ! had I qualified ?

BOOK II

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP





A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

Attempted Burglary of a Castle in the Air.

IN this wise I passed many pleasant months. My intimate association with the sprightly Vivette had laid the foundation for an emotion that I had the greatest difficulty in concealing, and yet her elusive manner, when I dared to approach her in a more personal way, utterly disheartened me. Our numerous interviews had given me the chance of seeing many sides of her character, but there had not been one not altogether entrancing; whatever facet was turned toward me, there was ever the flash of the diamond, revealing the true Vivette. She seemed fond of me, too, in a way, but held off a little, as if waiting for something to happen by which she should be guided. I chafed under the restraint, knowing well enough that it was because I cared too much that I had lost my confidence.

† † † † †
† CHAPTER †
† I. †
† SCHEHE- †
† REZADE'S †
† METHOD †
† † † † †

But when I first discovered that the thick old director had his own designs upon Vivette, it was all I could do to restrain myself. I felt sure enough that she would not tolerate any attentions he might be fool enough to offer, but the very thought of its possibility made me a little uncomfortable with her.

In such a mood I was one day summoned to the director's office. How well I remember it!

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

Birthday Presence.

I become Poacher.

It was my twenty-fifth birthday. The demeanour of the old man offended me hugely, and his insinuations that I had been using the machinery of the Association to further my designs upon the fortune of one of his most trusted and valued agents aroused me to a fury. It was plain to see that he had begun his dotage, and his insufferable conceit in thinking that his position could prepossess Vivette in his favour disgusted me. He soon began to realize his mistake in angering me, however, and the fear of losing my invaluable services swerved him toward a fawning propitiation that was far more loathsome than his reproofs. I had made several attempts to break off the interview, and shut out the sight of his bald head and disrespectable grey hairs, when he caught me by my conceit, — I cannot deny he had a certain shrewdness, — telling me of an extraordinarily delicate commission he had that day received from an unknown client. I pricked up my ears at this, and swallowed my pride, for business had become monotonous of late, secret society initiations being then in vogue amongst our clients.

“I have just received a letter from a lady,” said the old man, with a fat smile at my unwilling complaisance, “enlisting our services to divert the attention of her sister from a lover who is very objectionable to the rest of the family. We are given *carte blanche* to the point of marrying the girl to one of our agents. The case is not unin-

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

An Instrument that makes all Men Handsome.

teresting — what do you say to it ?” And he twiddled his thumbs with a satisfied smirk, knowing well enough he had hooked me.

I had had no opportunity for a really exciting pastime for so long that I resolved to lay myself out on this commission, and I discussed elaborately on my pillow that night the proper ways and means. I reviewed my past successes, and contrived innumerable patchwork combinations of my various inventions, but I was unsatisfied with their efficiency. The work, I thought to myself, must be done cleanly and swiftly if the girl were to be saved — any uncertainty or weakness in the first move would ruin everything. I must use modern methods, sharp tools, and act with absolute conviction. I slept badly that night, but as I lay in the morning, planning my campaign like D’Artagnan, the thing swam clearly out of my mind. The Arabian Nights by telephone ! And the rest, to one of my capacity, was easy.

Yet it was not without some trepidation that I rang her up that day. I could scarce dictate the number, and as I heard her answer “ Well ? ” my voice was rare and faint. I plucked up a spirit, however, and began the conversation that I had planned, leading her gradually on, as might a gallant skater escort a novice upon the ice.

“ *Might I speak to Miss Celestine ?* ” Indeed, I was speaking to her, and who was it, please ?
“ *Would she forgive me if I didn’t give my name*

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

Love Laughs at Locksmiths.

A Siege Perilous.

for a few minutes?" Certainly not! — she should hang up the telephone immediately! But she didn't. "*But I had a great favour to ask of her.*" She thought I had asked a great deal already. "*But, indeed, I had hesitated a long while before I had made up my mind to call her up!*" No, she must leave the wire instantly. "*But she might possibly hear something very interesting.*" She knew it was all a hoax by some of her friends, who would only laugh at her. "*I should have to ask her to take that risk, then, and trust that she could tell a gentleman by the sound of his voice. But, after all, it was only necessary for her to listen, and I would do all the talking, so that she need not commit herself at all.*" Then I had been relying on her curiosity, had I? "*Not at all—upon her common sense.*" Then what was the favour? "*But would she grant it? It was very audacious!*" How could she tell, if she didn't know what it was, nor who I was! "*But my name wouldn't help her at all; she had never even heard of me, although I assured her I was well worth knowing, as she would find if she didn't hang up.*" But she must hang up if I didn't tell her what I wanted pretty soon.

"*Well, I was rather surprised at my own audacity, and I assured her it was just as exciting to me as it was to her; but I simply wanted to know if I could talk to her—every day.*" In-

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

The Fish on the Hook, I begin to Reel.

deed, she didn't call that *simple* at all! "I didn't see why it wasn't simple. Of course it was an extraordinary proposition, but she certainly wasn't the girl to refuse it on that ground, seeing it wasn't morally wrong. It all depended upon whether it was safe for her to trust that I was a gentleman, and whether I promised to be interesting enough."

And so on. It was much easier than I had hoped, and I was well into the story before she realized the situation. I forget now how I introduced the subject of Mami, but it was on some such plan as Scheherezade's, so that she could not but help asking for the tale. And so this is the first story I told her. As I went on, I heard come over the wire her little subdued chuckles of appreciation, punctuating my narrative with applause, and I warmed to the recital, unconsciously gesticulating at the black, expressionless face of the receiver, as to some indulgent go-between. . . .

THE whole world was open, and we walked in, smiling. There was no one at home but a squirrel, so we sat down to wait. At last the people began to come back. First there was a lame old man with his foot gone.

— "Poor old man!" said Mami. "I feel so sorry for you. Won't you take my foot?"

— He was such a droll man with Mami's little foot on him — but he wouldn't stay, and ran off

† CHAPTER †
II.
† MAMI'S †
† TRICK †

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

Prehistoric Farce-comedy.

Chapitre Inédite.

shouting. Then along came a boy, with his arm in a sling.

—“Can’t you get a good arm?” said Mami; “here, take mine!” So off went Mami’s right arm — and how I laughed at her!

—“Faith, I’m all one-sided, and you’ll have to hold me up!” said Mami.

—A little later and they came two by two, and thick as spatters, and by noon there was nothing left of good little Mami but Mami’s voice.

—“Put me in your ear, so you’ll not lose me,” said Mami.

—Then all the rest came too, for a cripple man had told them, — and “*Ob! where’s Mami?*” they said.

—“Tell them I’m up the tree,” whispered Mami’s voice.

—“She’s gone up the tree, after more limbs,” said I.

—So they all went up the tree after her.

—“Is the whole world up there?” said Mami.

—“They’re all up there,” said I, “and three old men besides.”

—“Then call them down,” said Mami, “one by one.”

—So first a little girl came.

—“Do you like black eyes?” said Mami.

—“Brown eyes,” said I, “like yours.”

—“Then let her go,” said Mami.

—After a while another came down.

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

A Fair Exchange is no Robbery.

— “She has eyes like yours,” said I.

— “They’re prettier,” said Mami, “or you’d never have said that ; so take them !” So I took them away from her as she came down the tree, but I kissed her first, for Mami couldn’t see.

— “Now I’ll have a mouth next,” said Mami. How she could have suspected I don’t know, but she watched me with her two brown eyes, after that. It was a rosy mouth, with pretty milk teeth, that I got for her. There was nothing else in the whole world like it.

— “Now you’re safe,” said Mami.

— “Do you like light hair or dark ?” said Mami.

— “Gold hair,” said I, “with a spark in it,” said I, and they came down the tree by dozens and ran away across the earth like ants before I got any to suit her.

— By this time Mami was too pretty, almost. I kept turning my head to look at her. “Hurry up,” said Mami, “we must let them all go before night, and it is four o’clock already.”

— So Mami grew and grew. The folk were selfish at first, and stingy, when I stopped them ; but when they saw Mami they were proud of her, and they’d say, “Oh, indeed, my hands are pretty enough, Teddy always said so !” But at first Mami would refuse them, and turn up her nose. Then, “Oh, *please* take them, do !” they’d say. “Well, perhaps they’ll do,” said Mami.

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

Apotheosis.

Moralysis.

Exodus.

—The very last thing was a little pink toe, and Mami was so particular that they were all out of the tree but the three old men, before we knew.

—“The sun is setting,” said Mami. “I don’t want their old toes — let them go !”

—So, when the whole world was empty again, I was alone with a beautiful, *beautiful* Mami.

—“I’m afraid I shall limp a little, but I’m perfectly happy,” said Mami.

“Well, she had a kind heart,” said the voice at the other end of the telephone.

“She had a good head,” said I.

“I can’t say as much for your hero,” said the voice.

“Yes, he was a little promiscuous,” said I, “but he comes to grief in the next chapter.”

“And when do I hear that?” the voice inquired a little wistfully.

“I’ll ring you up to-morrow, at the same time,” said I.

So the next day I found her ready at the telephone, and after an four-minute *bors-d’œuvre* flirtation, I began :

† † † † †
† CHAPTER †
† III. THE †
† LOSING †
† OF MAMI †
† † † † †

AFTER a while, we came to a very absurd country, where all the land was water, and all the ocean was as hard as the rocks of Dundee. When we had climbed and stumbled till we were intensely weary, we sate down.

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

A Fable with a Meaning for Self-conceit O'erweening.

—“This is indeed a very miserable establishment of topographical peculiarities,” said Mami.

—Then all the fishes said, “Oh, help us, for we are tired of burrowing through this solid sea!” and the birds said, “Oh, help us, for we are a-wearied with roosting on these sliding, slippery foam-trees!” But —

—“Go away with you! I have troubles of my own,” said Mami.

—Then Mami called down the stars from their sockets in thin space, and piled them three and three, in a great heap by the shore-side, and lit them with blazing comets so that they flamed up in a huge, hot fire. Then the ocean began to coagulate and became as a sticky mud, and the mountains melted, and when the whole mass ran together then Mami said :

—“Would you rather a whole lot of little islands in a very blue sea, or a large continent with rivers and lakes and plains, and high mountains running up and down the edges?”

—“Make me a beautiful ocean, with a big island in the centre,” said I, “and all around set a circle of little islands, not too far away. And you and I shall live on the big island forevermore, until I am tired, and then I will go and play with the girls on the little islands, one after another, until I have gone wholly around, and then I will come back and live on the big island again with Mami.”

—Then Mami smiled with one eye.

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

Cf. the Monkey and the Olives.

—And she pulled the gum apart and watered it with her tears, and taking lumps of world-stuff in her hands she fashioned them into tiny balls, and kissed them and tossed them up into the heavens, where they shone so brightly that no one has discovered to this day that they are not the very stars.

—But where Mami stood became a big island, while between us rolled a great sea, and I was left alone on one of the little islands with a pretty girl, but not so pretty as Mami.

—And I travel around from island to island playing with the girls on the little islands, but I can never get back to the big island, and that is where Mami is.

—For though I send many messages by the birds and the fishes, no word comes back to me from Mami, on the big island.

“Now that is a very interesting bit of modern folk-lore,” said the voice over the wire. “I know of many a man, and one in especial, who might profit by your hero’s experience.”

“And who is that same?” I inquired, “for I have still another sermon for him.”

“Pray does the hero come to grief?” asked the voice.

“He does that,” said I.

“Then tell it me, for I like that kind,” said the unknown.

So this was my Wednesday tale :

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

A Lady's Favour; How Easily it may be Lost!

ONCE there were three goblins that lived under a rock in the meadow. Heavens! but they were little wrinkled, dimpled, green-gray, capering knots of men — tiny valetudinarians, who spent their whole time tickling each other's toes and spying at the goatherd in the fields. He was a sight too handsome, and a very valiant lad; he had killed many a wolf with one whack of his staff. No one knows how many love affairs he had on at one time. The mannikins feared him, for they were mischievous little coward brats, and when the goatherd whistled through his teeth and pointed his ten fingers at them, they would scamper away like roaches and hide under the rock. — The youngest goblin was a thousand years old. “It must be that knot of green riband in his cap that makes him so brave,” he said. — So that evening, when the goatherd was homing his goats, the three goblins snipped out and followed him. Two of them made awful faces at him, and danced around among the kids till he jumped at them, bawling, while the other snatched the green riband away, and ran miles with it before he dared to stop. — But the goblins could find nothing in the talisman, after all. They tried it in their own caps, each in turn, but not a man Jack of them dared venture into the field by daylight.

† CHAPTER †
† IV. †
† THREE †
† GOBLINS †
† AND A †
† MYSTERY †

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

The Complicated Career of a Chameleon.

—The goatherd spent two afternoons and a morning hunting for the riband, but he really didn't seem as worried about it as the goblins had expected, and one day he appeared with a *blue* favour in his cap — just the shade that should go with chestnut hair and a white neck.

—The second goblin was five thousand years old. And he said to the others, “He'll surely be as strong as a lion and swift as a deer, now. It won't be safe for us till after midnight, and I shall put the green riband back under the oak, or he'll come after us, sure !”

—Now the next week, if you'll believe me, there was a still different one in the goatherd's cap. A red lutestring, upon my word ! And the silly boy would take it off, and smile at it, and pull the blue bow out of his scrip, and grin at that, too, — but when he found the green knot on the grass he laughed right out loud, and kept the peeking goblins wondering at him all the rest of the week.

—Now one day, while the goats were a-nibbling, and the goatherd was whittling out a willow pipe down by the lily pool, three sweet little maidens strolled into the field, each by a different path : one from the fir wood, one through the reeds by the brookside, and one down the slope of the hill, over beyond the sweet-fern. One was fair, with light brown curls, one was dark (not at all *too* dark), with sparky eyes, and one was a saucy little red-haired witch, with *such* a pretty skin and snow teeth.

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

The Problem of the Eggs and the Baskets.

—But when the bold goatherd saw them coming, all three at once, he up and ran with very pink cheeks, and hid behind the rock; and he didn't get his wits quite back till he saw three youths come peacocking into the field, and pair off, two, and two, and two, with the maidlets.

—The third goblin was ten thousand years old. “It does seem enormous strange,” he said, “that this courageous goatherd should be more afraid of three wee, weak, witty women-folk than yonder strong, strapping striplings he has just gone forth to meet!” . . .

“And the moral of which is” — asked the voice in the transmitter.

“It is well to be off with the old love, I suppose,” I replied.

“Or, don't have too many strings to your beau,” suggested she.

“But wouldn't you like one with a happier ending?” said I.

“I must say, I sympathize most with your heroines,” the voice whispered. “But I suppose the men do accomplish something even in your stories — but they are awfully slow!”

And so the next day I told her:

THERE was a princess
once, with long brown hair
like Celestine's, and eyes like
Celestine's, though she was very
different from Celestine, as you

† † † † †
CHAPTER †
† V. THE AM- †
† BITIOUS †
† SHEPHERD †
† † † † †

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

A Princess used to Being much Admired,

shall see. So she went a-galloping over the West Hills with her maid and the old jester, every morning before embroidery lesson time, and she was a fair rider and good to stare at, and that's what the shepherd thought as he whittled his stick and looked out of his eyes sidewise.

—“She's just the age for me, and I'll have her!” said the shepherd, and it was a good strong vaunt, for she had more lovers already than she could find errands for. But his old mother had told him what women-folk were like, and he had a little idea the size of a nut that he cuddled all day, and this is what came out of it.

—The next day he went down by the road, when he saw the dust coming, and as the princess pounded by, he was sitting on the stone with his *back* to the road, mind you! The next day it was the same story, except that he gave her half his left ear to look at, and they went past on a little jig-trot. The third day the princess walked her pony, and there he sat, moping at the hillside, with a princess every bit as pretty as Celestine behind him. She saw a profile, though, this time.

—“What *is* that object?” she said. That day she dropped two stitches in her tapestry, right where a king's eye should have been. The next day all three pulled up at the stile, and the jester screamed out, “Hullo, thee!” just like that. But the shepherd had pulled a little tabor out of his pocket, and was playing through the holes of it,

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

On being Scorned, with Ardour is Inspired.

and besides, his legs were walking off, right up hill with him. "He's in love," said the maid-of-honour, and the princess whipped up so hard that she had to use a different horse next day; but then, when she rode up, she saw two persons — *two!*

—There was the shepherd, facing the road this time, piping away merrily to this chit in a yellow frock with pink bows. The poor princess! That day she ate but one plate of soup for dinner, but she studied her irregular verbs, oh, so hard! *My!* —But she rode out over the West Hills the next day, did the princess, and a giggling maid after her, and a grinning jester behind *her*, all stringing up-hill after breakfast. The yellow gown was sitting on the fence as bold as brass, and her hair flying.

—"Who are you?" said the princess.

—"I'm going to marry the shepherd, and that's who I am," says the hussy gruffly, "and don't you go for to be a-makin' eyes at him neither, you bad lady; I seen him a-lookin' at you!"

—The princess rode slowly on. "What a horrid face she has, really," said the maid-of-honour, "and that shepherd was so Very Interesting."

—What was the shepherd doing? Getting off the fence and taking off his yellow frock, to be sure, and dressing up his two meal sacks in them, all ready for Monday morning, when he sat opposite them and laughed at nothing at all, unless it was at the princess when she cantered by,

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

She seeks to Clear a Rival from her Path,

and slyly waved her lace handkerchief at him as she passed.

—After that he jumped into the gown again, and sat on the fence, chewing a sassafras stick and swinging his legs. Sure enough, she came back the same way this time, and “When are you to be married?” she said.

—“Oh, in about a week now,” said the disguised shepherd, for he wanted to finish and be done with it. The princess grew white, then red.

—“I’ll tell you what you do,” she said. “You come and be a cook in the palace.”

—“Can the shepherd come?”

—“N-no,” said the princess, for she wished to see him alone on the hills, — “at least, he may occasionally, on fish days.”

—So the jester pulled the object up behind him on his saddle, where it held on tight, the fool chuckling it under the chin every time he looked around to see if it was safe, and the disguised shepherd whacking him well when the old man got too familiar.

—But there was no shepherd the next day on the West Hills, nor the next, nor the next. Now the princess got awfully worried, for the old king had got tired of her gallivanting around, and swore he’d marry her off next Friday. “Let ’em fight it out,” he said, “and the best man wins her.”

—Then the princess runs her down to the kitchen

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

But Disappointment kindleth her Wrath.

where the new cook was frying honey-jumbles.

“When are you to be married?” says the princess.

— “On Friday, same as yourself,” says cook.

— “I don’t know about that,” says the princess.

“If nobody I like wins the tournament I’ll fix it.”

— “How’ll you do it?” says cook.

— “Never you mind that,” snapped out the princess. “I’d like to know where that shepherd of yours is, that’s all!”

— “Oh, you’ll see him at my wedding, all right,” says the cook, but her batch of jumbles was that shockingly burned the hens wouldn’t so much as peck at them.

— Every one went to the tourney.

— The princess was in the front row.

— Seven men went down in the first charge, then five, then three.

— “It must be the green one who is the shepherd, he fights so badly,” said the princess. “No,” whispered the maid-of-honour, “it’s the yellow one.”

— But the princess did not believe her; so, when the yellow one killed the green man, she kicked and screamed, “It’s *no fair!* I won’t marry him!” and ran to the king, bawling.

— “But you *must!*” said the king.

— “Very well, then,” says she. “If he’ll give each of my bridesmaids a wedding gift that each shall say is lovely, I’ll marry him; but all the

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

A Cheap and Obvious Solution.

Padding.

presents must be precisely alike." And she danced away, with her nose turned up.

—The yellow knight rode sadly away. When he got home, he took off his helmet and scratched his head. "Oh — yes!" he said at last.

—The next day was Friday, and the king, the princess, and all the eighteen bridesmaids waited in the castle hall from 12 till 2 P.M.

—At last in rushed the yellowy man with eighteen parcels done up in strawberry string. And when the bridesmaids opened and looked at the bundles, each one exclaimed, "How *perfectly* lovely!"

—And when the princess saw that it was the shepherd, she folded him in her arms, lengthwise, and married him up as fast as ever she could, having previously dismissed the cunning maid-of-honour who had recognized him in the arena. . . .

"And the presents?" said the voice in the telephone. "Were *mirrors*, of course!" said I.

"You can hardly consider this realism," the voice went on, "for you certainly have pursued a quite different policy with me."

"There is more than one way of killing a cat than asphyxiating it in hypofenyltrybrompropionic acid," I remarked.

"According to the pussy to be removed?" inquired the voice demurely.

"Check!" said I.

"But aren't all cats gray in the dark? How do you know?"

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

An Artless Allegory of Little Apples.

“Indeed, I can describe you piecemeal,” I asserted.

“Proceed,” said the voice.

“I’ll begin with your eyes,” I said, “to-morrow.”

And as the next day she reminded me of my promise, I proceeded with

ALL was disorder in the

	†	†	†	†	†
	†	CHAPTER	†	†	†
	†	VI. THE	†	†	†
	†	PRINCESS	†	†	†
	†	PITTI-	†	†	†
	†	PUMS	†	†	†
	†	†	†	†	†

 Abouidoir of the Princess Pittipums. Pittipums herself was in tears. It wasn’t so much that the doll builder had taken advantage of her, — she could forgive that, perhaps, if she tried very hard, — but β Orion and *Polaris* were missing, and however should she find them before night?

— For it was the dainty duty of Pittipums to polish up the stars every month. So, at the full of the moon, when there was a silver screen before the sky, she stood on the top of Mount Olympus, and carefully took them down from their places, and, wrapping each in a little woolly cloud, bore them to the seashore and washed them clean and bright. — It was while she was there on tip-toe in her green high-heeled shoes that that bad doll builder had come up behind and kissed her on her pretty pink cheeks. To be sure, she had heard him coming, but she was so startled that she had dropped her apronful of stars tinkling on the floor, and when she had returned from that corner of the deep sea,

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

A Chef d' Œuvre.

Double Entente.

and had spread all the wet and slippery planets, asteroids, and crawling comets upon her carpet, two were gone! She dared not tell — how *could* she explain?

— So she frisked a sparkling sunlet from its place away back in the sky, in an old system so far away men had never seen it, — it was just the size of β *Orion*. And she found two others, that, tied together with a small red meteor, she put back for bright *Polaris*.

— But the artful doll builder took the two lost stars from his pocket next day, and snapped them into a little foolish head he had just made; then, with a smile, he set the darling doll upon the earth, and it went walking off towards the West — and me. . . .

“I didn’t think that even one of your stories could make my eyes as big as that,” said the voice.

“Have I made them any brighter than they were?” I hazarded.

“A little, perhaps,” she confessed. “And now for my lips — do you think you can make them smile as well?”

“To-morrow I will try it,” I promised.

The next morning, as the intrigue was approaching a consummation, the director came to me, and informed me that he was obliged to leave town for a month, and that the affairs of the Association were to be left in my hands meanwhile. “And how does your last business progress?” he asked soapily.

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

By-play.

Stabbed with a Wooden Sword.

“Oh, so-so,” I replied blandly. “I think I shall bring it off.”

“I am sure of it, my dear boy,” said he; “but have you discovered who she is?”

I did not tell him of my unsuccessful endeavours to arrange a meeting—of how I had applied to Vivette to investigate the case in secret, and her reports of failure. I had seen her effect an entrance into the residence, in the guise of an applicant for the position of parlour-maid, but she had, she said, been refused as too handsome to suit the mistress of the house.

“Well,” he concluded, “good-by, old man.” Then by some chance his glance fell on a daguerreotype of Vivette, and his flabby yellow cheeks fell in. “See here, now,” he grunted, “no fooling in this office while I’m gone! Business before pleasure, sir! I may be back in a few days, anyway.” Bah! — I could scarce keep my hands off the old fool.

His insult, however, set me off on new hopes toward Vivette, and I resolved to take advantage of his absence and make the most of my freedom. Yet, when I inquired, I found she had not been seen in the office for several days, and had said she was to be off on important affairs. Could this have to do with the absence of the director? I wondered, and fell sick at the suspicion.

I feared I should make sad work of the entertainment that day, being out of spirits and morbid

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

Too many Broths spoil the Cook.

with the worry. It was the day for the flattery of Celestine's lips, you remember, and I had resolved to be audacious. I would indeed have opened the conceit with an effort and half-heartedly enough, had not my mysterious respondent herself put a heart into me with her guile. For as I plied her curiosity, her reserve broke down and the Eternal Feminine asserted herself; she took up the personal aspect of the affair and made overhand bids for my friendship, keeping, however, her own personality discreetly concealed. I was, I confess, somewhat embarrassed at first to satisfy her inquisitions, but I limned myself boldly with strong colours on a broad canvas, with high lights of romantic characteristic; the figure of a Raleigh reincarnate, captivated by her spirit.

Whether she had seen, or felt, rather, that something had gone wrong and had set me a-bragging to kindle my daring, or whether she herself had come to the reckless state, and was resolved to bring things to a climax (for, extraordinary as was the episode, it should not flow on this way forever), I don't know. But her tilting and my own *blague* fired me up, and I steamed into my fantasy. . . .

† † † † †
† CHAPTER †
† VII. THE †
† MASQUE †
† OF CUPID †
† † † † †

“ LIKE a herald I announce my little mime — as tiny, nippity, whimsical a bit of gossamer as ever fairy wove from hoarfrost; 'tis a butterfly's dream, my dear, and shall weigh no more than green moon-

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

I Juggle with Feathers.

Biography of a Kiss.

shine. It has a plot as thick as a spider web, so I beg you breathe not too hard; yet it has taken the heart out of me, for it is a drama to enamour a yokel withal, so delicious and so fantastic. 'Tis as elusive as a spirit, surely, and evades language like the rainbow. But watch and listen to the tinkling overture.

— “Now see! the stage is set — a delicate, rosy, dimpling, playground paradise, still distracted by some recent naughtiness. A wee and evanescent wonder has been working; the weather is a bit awry; there is a small commotion afloat — what is it, do you know, Celestine? And first on tip-toe tripples in the littlest of little frowns that ever was, a tricky imp, a very midget madcap, a tiny knave of mischief, ruffling, blustering his dapperling mimicries across the stage. And lo! he scarce has time to dance across and he is gone, like the cat's-paw ripple of the breeze upon the lake; his baby frenzy is vanished, and behold, it was but a smile in masquerade!

— “And now this roguish actorling plays his airs and captivating graces in his own sweet guise. The stage twinkles madly with his follies. It is a soap-bubble charm he practises, and the spell of his frivolity has a magical mystery. But oh! and oh! the place fills; a chorus of laughter has sought him out; escape is hopeless — and now he's captured and he's lost in the music of their shouts as a snowflake melts in the foam.

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

A Surprise for the G. R., of course.

—“ Ah, now it grows exciting! — the climax approaches — watch closely, Celestine; do you know what is to happen? Many flashing lights, and a wild, delirious symphony — look, look! Bend a little nearer, dear, for the final rhapsody!”

There was a gay, mellifluous, rippling crescendo chime of laughter at the other end of the wire, and there was a flashing wave of astonished enlightenment at this; the distance between us dissolved; instinctively I put out my hand to touch her — for it was, it had been, and it always would be Vivette! She had, indeed, a marvellous control over her speaking voice, but there was only one person in the whole world who could laugh like Vivette!

What a revelation it was, and what it meant to me, — for I could not but take it as an encouragement of my too languid suit — you may imagine. For she said things during this dialogue that are a little too precious for me to repeat, and which, as I reviewed them, made my heart jump faster.

Before I had come to my senses, however, she had hung up her telephone, and to my furious appeals for her number came the monotonous whine from the Central Office: “ *Subscriber called for does not reply — Subscriber called for does not reply — Subscriber called for does not reply — Subscriber* ” —

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

“Who Time trots withal.”

SO now the best part of the story of my loving is told. I had wooed her in the dark, and to win her by daylight I set myself in that next two weeks, letting the business of the Association go to the pups, hunting her high and low over town and over the countryside, up hill and down dale, north, south, west, north-east-by-east, hither and yon, to the border and back again, a wild chase, tempted here and there by the little vagrom whiffs of suspicion she prolonged towards me. She was here and she wasn't ; she had gone ; she would be at Maldivers cross-roads at four ; she had been seen on Echo street ; a thousand clews I traced, and I seemed to see the wave of her handkerchief disappearing around each corner ahead. I found a mischievous note in my box on Wednesday, and was beckoned away for believing it. I reached the station as the train pulled out, and behold Vivette (who should have been in my lap that same instant) prim and cool at the window of the third coach ! Elevator doors would snap between us, and one would be shot upward, the other left to take root on the ground floor. I cross-tagged her, and she Bo-Peeped me, and we puss-ed-in-the-corner together ; there was a hot week's hide-and-seek, I tell you, for the baggage knew the town like a ferret ! It was no wild-goose chase. She played with me as a highly intelligent mouse might with a cat ; she

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

“I thought I saw a Garden Door that opened with a Key; was nimble, she was spry, she was acute, — but so was I.

Nearer and nearer; she could not long evade me, for I pursued her relentlessly. So it was at last a marriage by capture, as in the prehistoric days.

I cornered her in the old grove back of the Fellside burying ground. She fluttered up the path toward the church, just as I hurried betwixt the tombstones. She dropped her handkerchief as she darted off, but I left that till later. And so it was in the old Moonlight inn that I caught her at last, by a corner of the bow-window, in a rubient glow, panting with her run, with one hand on her heart and her eyes shining. Ah, she was a temptation that morning, and I was soaring at a fine altitude by this time! Every nerve in me was singing to inform me of the power of her presence, for I was love-daft.

The Moonlight inn, you must understand, at that time belonged to the Romance Association; the Romance Association practically belonged to Vivette; and by that evening Vivette belonged to me. . . .

As we came out of the Fellside chapel and received the congratulations of the sexton and the organist, the rector came hurriedly back to us.

“I beg your pardon, sir, but I infer that this ceremony should not be allowed to transpire any sooner than is officially necessary?”

“I should, indeed, prefer announcing it myself,” I answered.

A TELEPHONE COURTSHIP

I looked again and saw it was the Double Rule of Three."

"Very well, then," he said, "I will give no information."

"Have you been catechised?" I inquired.

"The fact is," said he, "there has been an old gentleman at the rectory inquiring for a lady whose description, I must confess, tallies very closely with the appearance of this — that is, of Mrs. Richard Redforth."

"Has he a bald head?" I asked.

"And a very mauve face?" asked Vivette.

"Does he wear spectacles?" I asked.

"And waddle?" asked Vivette.

"Yes, yes, yes, yes," assented the rector. "It must be your friend."

* * * * *

It was a hot June morning when the director returned; bad weather for the like of him, for he had travelled far in the sun, and the last tug up the hill left him steaming, a violent violet in colour. He could hardly believe his sense when he saw me in his throne with my feet on his desk. He opened his mouth to speak, but, having no chance, by reason of my interruption, stood there so, like a silly wax-work.

"Your return is most unfortunate," said I, smiling at his attitude. "Allow me to inform you that your services are no longer needed by the Romance Association. I am now the director of the firm of Vivette & Company." And I winked at him, then arose and sent him twirling downstairs.



BOOK III
LES JEUNES



LES JEUNES

A Tedious Homily of Love, for Wearing Parishioners.

AN intelligent office boy had been left in charge of the Association, and we were off on our vacation, living the life of tame gold-fishes in the little town of Maldivers ; for Vivette, having declared that the most commonplace Realism would be the only correct diversion for such a romantic couple as we, had upset all my plans by collecting her properties at the first uninteresting station on the road, and ended our wedding trip in forty minutes.

† CHAPTER †
† I. RACH- †
† ET AND †
† FEATHER- †
† BONE †

A week after the elopement she drifted into the breakfast-room with clean, clean cheeks and a rose in her hair, shimmering cap-à-pie in a June-morning beauty such that no susceptible man could look at her with impunity. She had excited eyes, and the anticipation of a smile coaxing a corner of her mouth, and a gleeful tilt to her head that showed the wind had veered and here she was already off on another reach.

“Do you know,” she said, after returning from my side of the table, “I haven’t had a letter for seven days ! Such a thing hasn’t happened since I left boarding-school. We must have been having a ridiculously good time.”

“I thought you wanted a change, or I should have written you,” said I.

LES JEUNES

Epistolary Heresies. When True. If not, Why not.

“ Oh, don't! ” she cried. “ None of your one hundred and eighteen degree whirlwind letters this month — please. You couldn't possibly amuse me now, anyway, unless you sent a nice old ‘*Mother's-better-we're-expecting-Jim-on-Friday-do-tell-me-all-about-yourself*’ kind. People complain so of their letters. I'm sure I never got a stupid one in my life. I suppose romance is only subjective after all, but really, Robin, I've been fairly suffocated with adventure ever since I was born.”

“ True,” said I; “ you were a foundling.”

“ To this day,” she continued, “ I can't go down the street without seeing a runaway horse or a Chinese funeral; it's Fate, Robin.”

“ And yet you want letters, which, while unopened, are the most exciting things in life — if you're sure they are not bills.”

“ But if they were from real people,” said Vivette, musing. “ If I could get at their real selves, not see them through this picturesque haze that surrounds me, but know their true thoughts and ambitions, read them in the original and not translated into the dialect of my own foolish heart, — ah, what delightful Realism that would be!”

“ Why not advertise for correspondents in a matrimonial agency?” I suggested.

Her pensive mood passed like the shadow of a cloud from a sunny hillside. Before the words were past my teeth she had sprung for a telegraph

LES JEUNES

A Study from Life.

Ideal Head.

blank, and had begun to scribble a description of her charms. I am never quite so much in love with Vivette as when she is writing. The absurd manner in which she holds her pen, that seems to guide rather than be driven by her queerly bent forefinger — their little journeys together to the ink-well, and hurried scrambles to overtake her thoughts — the bewitching attempts of her pursed lips to spell unmanageable words — the shy recourse to *variorum* trials upon the pad — her impatient scuffles with the pen-wiper — her flirtations with the blotter, and a hundred and thirty other tiny tricks and gestures, make Vivette's efforts in penmanship a captivating performance. I ran over and kissed the top of her head for her.

“ I don't quite know how to describe myself,” she said, readjusting a little flirt of brown hair that had once been her bang. “ Of course, my forehead is nice, and my eyes are all right, except they're not the same colour, and I'm not altogether ashamed of my nose,” and she felt of it with a straight finger thoughtfully. “ What do you think of my mouth ? ”

“ It's a deal too pretty,” said I, trying it.

“ Would you say anything about my ears ? ” said Vivette, trying to stretch them a little.

I began a little simile, but she interrupted me.

“ Of course, I can't put *that* in! I think it will have to go as it is” — and she read it over, beginning : “ A sparkling, gracile brunette of twenty-three,

LES JEUNES

As Ithers see Us.

A Game of Old Maids.

who might be the daughter of D'Artagnan and Little Dorrit;" and ending: "Object, matrimony. Address Box 16, Maldivers P. O."

This, with my own advertisement, which she did very prettily too (writing me down a slashing hero of the Ouida sort), appeared in the next number of the "Matrimonial Times," and we gambled wildly over the issue of the exploit. In three days the returns began to arrive, and by the end of the week I had received forty-three replies to her fifty-one, but, by a curious coincidence, we each received twenty-seven photographs as enclosures. This pleased Vivette hugely, and she spread her whole gallery on the floor over against mine, and contemplated them very seriously. She was sitting behind me, with her chin on my shoulder, so that her jaw danced with delicious little jumps on my clavicle as she chattered.

"Aren't they amiable?" she said. "Aren't they easy to get along with, though? Every one has a recommendation, like a servant girl's references. Such an aggregation — all stars, too. Poor things! I can't marry them all, can I, Robin? It's too bad they can't be paired off, somehow. Here's one who is 'middle-aged, not rich, but plays the oboe — prefers lady with independent fortune, but would be glad to meet intelligent saleslady, if good-looking.'"

"I have just the thing in my collection," I cried. "Here — 'beautiful as the solar spectrum

LES JEUNES

Where Hearts were Trumps.

Venus and Adonis.

(see photo), able to earn her own living, and adores music.' ”

“That match will be made in Maldivers, if not in heaven ; try the next one,” and Vivette set the two together.

All that night we wrangled over our puppets, casting up their temperaments, qualities, and moral assets, and balancing one characteristic and another with a minuteness and intimacy that kept us a-shriek with gayety, till twenty-six amorous couples had been paired off, and their letters appropriately re-addressed. Thus were the loose strings of destiny tied up in Maldivers that night, by Robin Redforth and a very mad and pink young lady, with her hair careering around her and hands not quite too clean, by six o'clock.

There remained two photographs, however, at the end of the game, that neither of us was content to assign together. Mine, the sender claimed, was a presentment of the features of Miss Alicia Featherbone, and this, with the verbal description of her mental attributes, was so bewildering a revelation of feminine transcendence that I could by no means feel that Mr. Ratchet was worthy of her.

Arthur Ragelsburg Ratchet, Vivette's pet correspondent, had what she approvingly called a “stunning head ;” and, though I had my own reasons for not being jealous, yet her barefaced worship of this pseudo Adonis aroused me to retalia-

LES JEUNES

Rachet.

Rachet.

Rachet.

Rachet.

tion, and I embarked in a reckless eulogy of Miss Featherbone. Before long, we were in a fair way to quarrel over the *mésalliance*. I say “quarrel;” but, of course, no one can really quarrel with Vivette — one is too much interested in tempting the bewitching smile that flickers in her eyes and catches her lips, when the current of humour swirls; and if her mood falls into a demure quietude, that registers the minimum degree of *vitesse* consistent with her temperament; and, though I have seen her serious, it has never been my provoking, I assure you. But what was I saying? We played at cross-purposes, for the novelty of the thing (what would we not do for a new sensation!), and with Rachet as a war-cry, she whirled into a fantastic sortie upon my pretended jealousy.

I fell fairly ill of the name of Rachet, which she flung at me edgewise through the open door as she left me and twittered through the keyhole before she entered. She sang, “Thou art my Rachet, *believe* me; promise thou ne’er wilt *deceive* me” — with superlative variations. She named the cat “Rachet,” and she bribed the waitress to ask every morning, “Will you have Rachet and eggs, or beefsteak?” She gave remarkable imitations of the name with a huge watchman’s rattle. She wrote RACHET on the mirror with soap.

I bore it all meekly, being more amused than I pretended. It is one of our rules that you mustn’t

LES JEUNES

We move into Glass Houses and throw Stones.

return pie in the same dish, so I was unable to retort similarly; but I was indefatigable in my visible adoration of Miss Featherbone's portrait, and her name lending itself to symbolical representation, I adorned my hat with chicken feathers and wishbones, and flaunted the tokens before her rival.

After several days of the farce, Vivette proposed a return to the city. I was awaiting this, and had my traps set and baited with Ratchet's address.

We were in town forthwith, and at our luncheon in the Lark café, Vivette, around a corner of the table, in a wicked little bonnet of her own fabrication, manœvered the conversation in an overt attempt to incite my curiosity.

“Where is Fancy lane?” she asked.

43 Fancy lane was the alleged residence of Mr. Ratchet.

“It's out by the Conservatory of Music,” I replied; “a small house on the corner opposite the cemetery.”

“Why, how do you know?” said Vivette.

“I've known Arthur Ratchet all my life,” said I.

“You're a horrid thing — you and your old Featherbone!” said Vivette. “I don't believe you.”

“She is not old,” I exclaimed. “She is only ‘nineteen, has the complexion of an infant, and can speak French.’ I hope she has better manners than yours. I shall call and see this very afternoon.”

LES JEUNES

I discover my Doll to be stuffed with Sawdust.

“Go along! — I shall be busy myself” — said Vivette, out of the side of her mouth.

“Where are you going?” I asked.

“Confess you’re jealous!” she pouted.

“Indeed I am,” I said, and Vivette was herself again. She gave me a comfortable demonstration, and left me, saying: “Farewell! I shall see you at dinner time.”

I was so sure of it that I had ordered it prepared at 43 Fancy lane, which, it is time to confess, had long been a property of mine — a haunt in the old days when I was beginning to make my reputation in the Romance Association and had many an out-of-the-way rendezvous.

I must confess, too, that I had spent several hours in an ineffectual search for Miss Featherbone, who had, it seemed, sent me a false address, — and though I shouldn’t have minded describing the visit to Vivette if it had been successful, yet I felt very young at the prospect of telling her how I had been swindled, though I had no suspicion of her hand in the game.

I got to my house none too soon; for, as I pulled up the front shades, and gave my instructions to Jacob, I saw a familiar little figure coming up the walk, and curiously reconnoitering the porch for the number.

Jacob met her at the door, and, from my coign, I heard an elaborate colloquy in the hall. After a few moments he came to me, and said:

LES JEUNES

Four can Play at that Game.

Next Day.

“It can't be the lady you're expecting at all, sir. She wants to see Mr. Ratchet all right, and made out she wanted to sell him some scented soap, sir. But here's the name, sir; and what shall I say?”

And Jacob handed me a card, on which was engraved :

MISS FEATHERBONE,

43 FANCY LANE.

And Vivette, dimpling gayly, entered and completed the *partie carrée*, giving me a quartette of kisses : one for herself and one for Miss Featherbone to me, and two from the same vivacious pair for Arthur Ragelsburg Ratchet.

BELLBIRD'S Ferrotyping
GALLERY was down on the
lower part of Echo street, oppo-
site the Plaza, which then, as now,
was the headquarters of the float-
ing brotherhood of the town, —
loungers of all nationalities, — flotsam of the sea
of fortune cast up high and dry upon the shores
of Vagabondia. Bellbird's parlours were at the
top of a steep and dusky staircase where one was
ambuscaded by the likenesses of a half-thousand

† † † †
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† II. SUC- †
† CESSORS †
† TO BELL- †
† BIRD †
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LES JEUNES

We make Faces at the Town.

whilom patrons of the shop, and on the third floor was the gallery proper, with its skylight and all the appointments of a fifth-class studio. Here Vivette and I spent as much of our time as was not lent to the waiting customers of the place.

It was a queer honeymoon we were playing at, but Vivette was as happy as a four-year-old, from the day the tintypes in the doorway first invited us inside. We had passed the place the second day up from Maldivers, and had returned to it, swung back like a pendulum, attracted by the quiet and shadowy countenance of the shop front. It was the place of a million places to lie incognito, hid in the bigness of the town, and Vivette and I caught hands, hopped upstairs, and bargained old Bellbird out of his domicile post-haste. To be sure I knew none too much of photography with wet plates, — though old Bellbird wrote it all down for me when we rented the place, — but our patients were complaisant, and as long as they could wear the old plug hats in the studio and make fools of themselves in boats and cottage windows according to the traditions of the craft, they were happy; and with Vivette in the room below, to paint their cheeks pink and compliment their expressions, they went away satisfied.

As Vivette said she had never found a photographer she could bully till now, I spent the most of my spare time focusing her and developing her

LES JEUNES

Vivette Poses. Vivette Reposes. Vivette Supposes.

and printing her, for her appetite for ferrotypes was gluttonous. She was taken like the genie emerging from the barrel, rapidly changing her position every ten seconds, so that she appeared in the result like an elongated Goop; she sat in state and managed herself so that she had six arms in the picture, like Vishnu. She held up one foot to simulate one-leggedness; she solicited alms with an "*I am blind*" sign (which we found had to be printed backwards); she passed like a ghost across the plate; she accomplished a Bluebeard sensation with a decapitated head effect; she fashioned *outré* wall-paper costumes for Beardsley poses; she attempted double and treble exposures; she melted and distorted films; and indulged in an hundred caprices that I have now forgotten.

After her ardour cooled, and two show-cases were filled with the Vivettographs, we spent the hours of the day when business was slack sitting in the window that gave on the Plaza, watching the loungers on the benches opposite. Before the week was dead, Vivette had given them all fanciful names, and had created their histories from their tatters and poses, prattling the gossip of the square every evening at dinner. There were two whom she had been wont to call Dot and Period, whose affairs interested us most, and our curiosity grew daily, fed by the seeming unreasonableness of their existence. At last, having made over their story so often to fit their eccentric conduct that the tale

LES JEUNES

Two Bad!

was worn to rags, Vivette announced that she was going to invite them into the parlour and hear the truth from their own lips, and she was downstairs and into the Plaza forthwith.

She easily seduced them with a promise of a dinner to the best story, and in they shambled after her, two as rakish birds as one could catch of a Saturday afternoon. Yet there was a difference, as I saw from afar, — for Dot was vagabond born, a seedling type, while there was a trace of good stock in Period, to which his disrepute had been grafted. He had a knowing air, too, and in his flabbed cheeks something remained of an expression that puzzled me. I saw Vivette's brows pucker also, and she pinched my hand furtively as if some scandal were up, but she bade them proceed, and settled herself to enjoy the narrative. Poor Dot contented himself with the professional mendicantion — a fiction of sick wives and starving children, no work and hard luck, to suit the taste of the listener; for all of this, Vivette marked him a “3” on a card.

Not so Period! As soon as he cleared his throat I jumped, and Vivette dropped her pencil, for before he had spoken we knew it was our old director! He was a very caricature of his former self; mischance had rioted with his features, but he was a wad of vanity still — though, as he plunged into his recital, a touch of the old manner graced him. It was a clever tale he gave us, but

LES JEUNES

Little Tommy Tucker.

A Rhetorical Period.

it was not his own, as Vivette knew well, for he was but a figure-head to the Romance Association in the old days, and she had been a gold mine to him, with her contagious wit and her inexhaustible imagination. We let him tell the story with his own poor embroideries to the last word, for it was a stiff situation between us, neither caring to be the first to revive our quondam fellowship. His eyes quested the room as he talked, with an indecent inquisition—it was evident he could not quite fathom our game, though he was victim to a mighty curiosity anent our rôles. He finished at last rather sillily, — it was trying for all but Dot, who was clean over his head in mysteries, and out of a good dinner into the bargain (had not Vivette stealthily comforted his pique), — and the two wrecks drifted out at last, much to our relief.

And before we could recover ourselves from the shock, the door sprang open again, and who should enter but Leander, the office-boy, with his alderliest sweetheart! He was gagged with confusion when he saw us, for he had no ken of our whereabouts, but he mastered himself with an effort, and fell at once to business, with never a word to show he knew us. He was something to wonder at, in his Saturday afternoon attire; there was not a spot on him anywhere — he didn't even toe in, and his proprietorship of that young lady was evident even in the tintype he secured. And she was a thing of curves, and curls, and dimples, put up

LES JEUNES

Not "the Hard-boiled Poses of Photograph."

without regard to man's susceptibility. Ohé! She was point-de-vise: — beautiful as a rich orphan, and scarce turned eighteen. If I had not been girl-proof at last, I would have made a meal of the boy and kidnapped her before the clock struck.

I was a little afraid he would weaken when we were alone, while the girl made a few unnecessary changes in her hair under Vivette's gay chaperonage, but he stood by his guns and treated me cavalierly enough, criticising the scenery and furniture. He would have no pitchforks in his hair, not he, — a plain background and a natural pose, — he would do the grouping himself. And he did it, too, while I was in the dark room, though his best poses I never developed. I never caught him at it, though he was in such a mad-mannered mood that I knew something was happening; but Vivette, who had crept upstairs to see the fun, retired in confusion when she discovered how intimate they were. She said afterward that she thought he was a nice enough young man, but he was more dangerous when aroused than she had given him credit for.

They left us at last, the boy with a smile, for he saw his tact in not recognizing us had pleased our fancy, the girl with her eyes too full of him to realize the situation, and we heard her foolishness echoing down the stair. It was but the reflection of our own beatitude!

And then Vivette fell a-musing over the day's adventures, and we talked over the appearance of the

LES JEUNES

The End of the Honeymoon.

The Minor Chord.

old director. "'Tis bad luck, Robin," she said; "he owes us a grudge, and now that he knows we are away from the office, I am a little afraid of him. What if he knew all the other stories in the Memoirs! Now he knows how to use them, none of our secrets are safe. Robin, our honeymoon is over!" And so, hatting herself as she spoke, she threw a kiss at her own pictures in the showcase, then hurried me down-stairs and into a cab on the corner.

It was, indeed, none too soon! As we reached the Romance Building the girl came scrambling down the stairs, all but disjointed with her haste. Every hairpin was gone, but she was still beautiful. "Hurry! — the director!" she gasped. And when I arrived, there he was, scuffling, with the office-boy at his throat, for the fifth volume of our Memoirs.

NOTWITHSTANDING the absorbing interest Vivette took in the management of the Romance Association, she had often urged to me the necessity of combining with the major course of action, an avocation in which we could refresh our minds after the fatiguing demands of our profession. For, varied and exciting as were our adventures, there was at times a disagreeable sense of routine in the affairs of the office that forced our minds toward the most vulgar and commonplace realism for a brief relaxation.

† † † † † †
† CHAPTER †
† III. PHYL- †
† LIDA, OR †
† THE MILK- †
† MAID †
† † † † † †

LES JEUNES

The Editor's Regrets.

Mental Chemistry.

I had, indeed, long suspected Vivette of clandestine correspondence with the dynasty of magazine editors that then held sway in the world of letters, and more than once I had noticed, amidst the unopened mail upon her table, some particularly corpulent envelope transversely creased, that I was sure contained disagreeable news. I was of course too discreet to mention these unfortunate episodes. I had known, myself, in my sanguine youth, the strangling shame that these replies must bring, the crushing shock to one's vanity, the haggard endeavor to conceal the knowledge of the defeat even from one's self; the effort to forget, and the slow retreat of memory, ever turning back to charge and trap one's conscious blushes once more before it disappeared.

And so one day, while we were looking over an old book of Elizabethan songs, a stanza smote us from the page with an idea that made us gasp.

*“ Now all ye Gallants of the Towne
What would ye care for Wine,
If you could hear my Milkmaide browne
A-singing by the kyne ! ”*

The literary ambitions we had both held in solution, growing stronger every day, now at this hint precipitated an idea that crystallized into a definite plan almost before we spoke: “Phyllida, or the Milkmaid,” — a new magazine published by Vivette & Company! Like a storm the scheme in all

LES JEUNES

Laugh, and the World laughs at You.

was the disposition of "The Milkmaid." I was put to it to devise some graceful exit for the paper, but it was accomplished with *éclat* by marrying her to "The Ego," one of her most prosperous rivals, and the editor of that magazine was laden with our good-will and "The Milkmaid's" accepted manuscripts.

"WE must start it with a jounce," said Vivette. "We must show them how! Oh, my dear, I haven't half finished with this town yet — they're only partly awake. Now, how shall we introduce the 'Revue Jeune'? Shall we try the square balloons?" Vivette was an advertiser for blood. Her idea was to anchor to roof-tops, all over the city, huge cubical balloons painted with appropriate mottoes and legends. She had written many nonsense verses calling attention to the paper, in an amusing, if not an especially dignified way.

"I never read the 'Revue Jeune,'
I never care to read it;
But if I live its wit to learn,
Then, Lord, how I shall need it!"

"Well," said Vivette, "if that is too raw, suppose we try the college-yell system." She had often wanted to try this pet scheme. But I had been a college man myself, and the idea of paying long-haired youths to yell,

LES JEUNES

Going.

Going.

Gone !

“ *Re-vue Jeune ! — Re-vue Jeune !*
Try it ! — Buy it ! — Wit to burn ! ”

on every street corner, set my teeth on edge.

So at last we compromised on what was not only a more radical but a more artistic and dramatic method, and, the details and accessories arranged, we adventured jocosely into town.

There was not the least doubt in my mind that Vivette's scheme would succeed if she essayed it, though I knew she needed my incredulity to goad her into the verve necessary to carry it off — for I knew my Millamours, loved it and feared it.

We got to Swain street corner early in the afternoon, and by Vivette's own luck there was a knot of newsboys by the church steps, all ready for what sport fate or the Old Boy himself should offer. There was a Marrion avenue car there, hanging fire, awaiting the starter's whistle, with the conductor astern, nursing his watch. I held the valise ready, and just as the two-bells rang we boarded clumsily, delaying the car as much as possible to get a clear track ahead for the race.

“ *Now !* ” whispered Vivette excitedly, and she flung a handful of coppers fair and straight at the boys on the curb. There was a jolly jingle of falling coins on the bricks, a shrill echo of ecstatic voices, and a vicious scramble of intermingled limbs. As the car pulled away with a jerk, Vivette, clinging to the rail, aimed a bunch of nickels at the

LES JEUNES

Dime flies.

After me, the Deluge!

group waiting for the depot cars, and the crowd closed around the largess. A few on the outside caught view of the mad pair of us on the rear platform; there was a yell from some of the men-folk, and a few started after us, but wavered, fearful of a hoax.

“Quick!” cried Vivette; “the silver, or I can’t hold them!” I passed out the small rolls, and she sent dimes and quarters wide-cast into the passers-by. Then the crowd broke and ran; men’s pride fell off them with their hats; the hunt was up. I conjured the conductor and trolley-man with seductive silver, while Vivette hung there reeling by the brake-crank, her cheeks aglow and her hat tilted, baiting the mob that closed in after the car, streaming from the sidewalk and the mall in a long V: men, women, children, boys, girls, and yellow dogs. There arose a murmur among the throng of wayfarers, the outside strugglers took up the note, and the riotous in-fighters, crawling, sprawling, mob-tossed and abandoned, swelled the babel to a yelping falsetto.

Conspicuous amongst the agonists there was one maniac that was hurtled forth and back, frenzied and yelping mad in that human deluge. His red face was cast like a spark to and fro in the ruck of the charge, and at last, swung up against the dashboard of the car, we saw his goggling eyes and writhing mouth expostulating with an infinite hopelessness against the riot. It was the director! If you

LES JEUNES

The Hysterical Hegira of a Maiden Mirth-inspirer.

have ever sat on the rocks by the seashore and watched the breakers romp in upon the beach, the foaming lines piling over each other's heads like wolf packs, swept back, swirling, by the undertow, charging, tumbling, roaring in and in again, you may, perhaps, imagine the fury and insane excitement of that mob. If at the same shore you have seen a bottle, harried and chivied by the white-capped rollers, surge-twirled, shot along the crests and floundering in the trough of the waves, you may be able to imagine the man-handling the poor ex-director received. And as he was expressed up from the horde to an hearable propinquity, his voice hovered like a raucous bark over the spume of the chaos. "It's a *fake!*" he yelled. "It's a *fake!*" and he grabbed wildly for the sailing coins that still spattered the air behind us like a silvern wake.

By this time we were well down by the turn, and the side streets poured armies of jumping volunteers into the rout in our wake. There was a bobbling river of heads as far as the eye could stretch; the park was swept with a lively flank movement of battalions trying to cut around ahead of the flying car; staid citizens were leaping from second-story windows; Millamours was emptying her population into Old Runway road like an ebb-tide in a racing channel. It was silver-dollar time by Vivette's clock, and she flew them right and left, and up into the air.

LES JEUNES

The Mania of a Multitude is swallowed up in Stultitude.

As we swung into Lark street, we saw the hordes of gallopers swarming through the deer-park and burying-ground to head us off, and so at last we were fairly hemmed in at the depot, and became the still centre of a circling human cyclone. And then we attacked them with the "Revue Jeune" greenbacks, and fed that mob with decadent advertising matter till the edition was exhausted; an hundred thousand notes were pocketed in that silly city before the crowd smelled our game. But before the fire-bells had ceased ringing, and by the time the patrol wagons, engines, and ladder companies defiled into Marrion avenue, the four hundred thousand beggars had faded away like an August snow, yet not one of them but had discovered that a new journal had been started in Millamours.

The coast thus cleared, "La Revue Jeune" gathered itself together for a leap into popularity. It was a cunning sheet, coffee-dyed with age, adorned with Bewick cuts. Such *causerie*! — such reviews! lithe and sinewy comment — gossipy chatter; there was meat on the bones of "La Revue Jeune." It was ushered into the company of the select, too, by many new-made friends — stars of the first magnitude they, who had praised "The Milkmaid," and vouched for the new essay with the pride of the discoverers of youthful genius.

With Vivette as hostess of the salon we held at the editorial rooms in after weeks, we held our-

LES JEUNES

A Makeless Sweven that Miswent.

selves well balanced on the perch of prominence, and a card to a "Jeune Sunday" has made many a minor poet. Now, what ill wind blew Vivette away from these giddy successes I can't remember, but the Association claimed her services imperatively soon after the "Revue" was well under way, and she disappeared for a month. The intelligent office-boy took her place. He was a demon on circulation, and rushed the "Revue" into the trades-world, damning it in an afternoon.

"One really didn't enjoy seeing one's 'Revue' in one's kitchen," said a contributor to me. "If one's cook could enjoy one's articles, and that sort of thing, — one really — you know!"

Interest in the "Revue" had dropped out of sight when Vivette returned, and she was indignant at the management. "To think we should fail like that, after 'The Milkmaid,'" she said. "There is but one thing to do to retrieve our reputation. Robin — I have the very idea."

"A new paper?" said I, growing old.

"What else?" she replied. "'The Milkmaid' and the 'Revue Jeune' were mere toys to this. Listen to the announcement: *The firm of Vivette & Company will shortly bring out a new periodical that will be to the flood of banal imitations of their famous 'MILKMAID' as chess is to tit-tat-toe. This new venture — 'THE ANTHROPOPHAGIAN' — will be printed on real sheepskin rolls set from types cut to the faces of the eighth century Irish miniscules*" —

LES JEUNES

The Power behind the Thrown.

Here we were interrupted by the entrance of the office-boy. "I am sorry to say we are short six hundred and seventy-two dollars, sir, and the force must be paid off to-night; the adventuresses are quite impatient."

"Is the Association insolvent," I asked fiercely, "that you come to me for a paltry six hundred and seventy-two dollars?"

"We cleared more than that in 'The Milkmaid,' " interposed Vivette kindly.

"And sank it in the 'Young Review'!" said I.

The office-boy drew himself up with a touch of pride. "It is precisely the amount I spent buying up first copies of 'The Milkmaid,' while I was acting manager of the Romance Association. Forgive me, sir; in that capacity I felt justified in furthering your game at trade rates, but now I have the honour of informing you that I have by the investment, owing to the advance in price of 'Milkmaids' No. 1, made a profit of four hundred per cent. for the Association."

Vivette burst into tears of laughter: "You shall be made 27th Assistant Deputy Sub-Manager," she said, "but you have killed 'The Anthropophagian'!"

BYOND the Plaza, on a little thoroughfare that, crossing Echo street, traverses the Latin Quarter and climbs the hill, stands the Apollo Theatre, a

† † † † †
† CHAPTER †
† V. VI. †
† VETTE'S †
† DÉBUT †
† † † † †

LES JEUNES

A little Experiment in Sociology.

queer little hall, where we went often in search of amusement ; and here, one night, Vivette satisfied a stage-stroke that had long affected her spirits.

We happened in, this time, to learn of the ticket man at the door that the house was impatiently awaiting the arrival of a troupe that had been delayed on the road ; he was, in fact, almost ready to announce the fact, and to refund the entrance fees. Vivette, who had taken a hasty look at the audience, came back, with her two eyes dancing.

“Get around behind, Robin,” she said swiftly, “for I am going to make my first appearance !” In thirty seconds she had colloqued the manager, and within the minute she had met me on the stage, and while the change of programme was being announced, reconnoitred the house through the curtain peep-hole. She dragged me to the green-room, where the properties and costumes had already arrived, and began a ravishing toilet, as she explained the plot and wheedled me out of my last objection.

“Listen here,” she said, with her mouth full of pins ; “it is a perfectly lovely audience to try the game on ! — the cream of the upper lower classes, ready for anything we can give them. If they were a grade higher, it wouldn’t do at all, but they’re a very human sort, and good work won’t be lost on them, either. Now you can tell a beautiful story, Robin, such as you used to tell

LES JEUNES

Idyl of Alice Rainbird.

Dramatic Unities.

me, and you must go on first, and make them laugh till I finish dressing, and then — well, I'll tell you about that later. Hurry up, now, for the orchestra has stopped playing !”

Well, I went on, in an outrageous rig, the only suit that fitted me. It was not for nothing that I was director of the Romance Association, and I did my prettiest for Vivette's sake first, and then for the hungry folk in front of me, for I soon realized that there's not much difference between children and grown-ups, when it comes to telling a story. I had often wondered why this amusement couldn't be done here as well as in the East, where professional story-tellers go from town to town and divert the street-farers, and I worked in somewhat that way, quite naturally, and with so little manner that I wondered at their interest. It was the “Holiday Romance” that I told them ; their big eyes followed me like dogs, and they shouted like infants when the drop fell.

Vivette met me at the wings, and hugged me. “It was blessed !” she sighed ; “but wait till I bedevil them !” She had got herself up in a bewilderingly fetching costume, but it was impossible to say just what she had on, for over her was laid a charm and a starry beauty that was so strange as almost to trouble one, yet it drew one, too, like a loadstone. Her presence filled that dingy stage as might a goddess. “It was the people that did it, they made me give the best of myself, that was

LES JEUNES

Impromptu Mime of "*la Jeune Fille à marier.*"

all," she said afterward. I held my breath, and wondered what was coming. There were so many things she might have done, yet who but Vivette would have dared to be so simple — who else could have trusted and touched an audience like this? Yet I believe that not until she had come down the stage, and kissed her hands to the house, had she decided what was to happen. There was a hush like a prayer when they saw her, and, after the first rustle, not a sound for fifteen minutes. You would not believe me if I told you all the magic of that pantomime. The tears came to my eyes as I wondered if I had ever half known her before. It was the simple story, told in the most delicious gesture, of a young girl in love, alone in her boudoir. Her entrancing raptures over the love-letter hidden in her frock, the ecstasy of her reply, and the affection with which she sealed her note — her reverie with the photograph beside the fire — the little dances of joy with which she hailed the hurrying hands of the clock — the very way her hair came down and went up again — her coquetries with the mirror and the rose; with such trifles as these she wove a bewitching drama without words. And then she rehearsed the expected interview with a serious grace, and pretended to disguise her regard: she became shy and reserved, — he might kiss her hand, but that was all, — and then, when the bell sounded, she gave herself up to her emotion, and flew to the door

LES JEUNES

What one can do with a good Rehearsal.

and out, with a happy little laugh that promised much for the loved one outside. Ah, I know how much ! for that young man was I, waiting for her there in the shadow.

There was not a man silent, no, nor a woman either, when she left the stage ; and after the encore, while the orchestra tried to drown the tumult, she came down to me like an angel out of heaven. “ How is this for a first night ? ” she sang ; “ are you ready for the finale ? ” “ Ah, I’m ready for *you*,” I said, trembling. “ Then do you really love me, Robin ? ” she whispered — so softly. “ I’ll show you,” I cried wildly. But she held me at arm’s length. “ No, you must show *them*,” she said. “ Don’t be shocked, Robin ; don’t think I don’t honour it and you, dear ; but we must show them what love is. Authors write themselves into their books, why shouldn’t we act it for these poor souls ? They will *feel* it. But no one will know it is real, and we will be safe. You must propose to me, Robin ; indeed, you must do it all over again ! Have you forgotten ? ” And she smiled the heart out of me, as I hesitated. “ Not a word ! ” I cried, for all the madness of my first love for her swept back to me. She gave me the cue, and, while we were still burning, she rang up the drop.

If it had been before any other audience I could never have done it. If we had been alone, I never would have been keyed up to the pitch to which

LES JEUNES

Art for Heart's sake.

those hundreds of hungry eyes inspired me ; but then and there we went over that day of days, from the moment I found her at the window, to the end. Every word came back to me as I looked into her eyes. We did not act, we lived it again ; the encore set my soul afloat, I soared into dream and the heart of me grew young.

“Robin,” said Vivette, after it was all over and we had left the darkened hall, “forgive me if it was not right, and if it has hurt the memory of that first time, but now I know how much you love me — and I'd like to do it all over again !”

BOOK IV
THE BANQUET



THE BANQUET

Six Months are supposed to have Elapsed.

“**H**OW little we know about the city, after all,” said Vivette, after a hot half-hour over the map. “Only two pins east of Echo street, and as for the Fellside, and out that way, we just don’t know anybody!” She had been sticking pins into the map, as I finally discovered, to locate her acquaintances — black pins for the men and white ones for the women.

† † † † †
† CHAPTER †
† I. THE †
† TEN PINS †
† † † † †

“Robin,” she said, “if we are to succeed in our enterprise we must widen our acquaintance. Here are blocks and blocks of arable, pinless land; we need these streets, Robin. I tell you we must plant pins!”

“But how widen our acquaintance?” said I. “How use these streets? How plant pins?”

“And you the director of the Romance Association!” she said sadly; and then, taking a piece of chalk, she ruled the map into half-mile squares, and stuck a pin into the centre of each.

“I suppose you will admit that some one lives at each pin,” she said.

“For the sake of the argument, and barring vacant houses, — yes,” said I.

“The argument is that we must know these pin-people. Here are — let me see — ten : five

THE BANQUET

A little Journey in search of a Sensation.

for you and five for me. Think of the possibilities, Robin ; the chance of new and picturesque adventures with untried types, each one the hero of a fresh romance ! Really, I grudge you your five pins, Robin.”

“ Shall you call ? ” I interrupted.

“ We must prospect,” she said seriously, puckering her brow as she struggled with the plot. “ This is no mere detecting ; no, I shall give a dinner ! ”

Now at this time the Association was in funds, and, as Vivette persuaded me of the importance of the investment, I fell in with the project and gave her *carte blanche*, which, with Vivette, was taken literally, as I afterwards saw by the stubs in her cheque book. Yet it pays to make Vivette happy. We were keeping up several establishments at that time in several different parts of the city ; but Vivette would have none of them, and she insisted, besides, on my not knowing any of the details she had arranged for the banquet, so that until the evening I did not even know the rendezvous. My part was to provide five guests to represent the five squares she had blocked out for me, and to see them safely to the dinner.

We parted gayly on Echo street, she going north and I south. My territory lay in the meaner parts of the city, among the tenements and factories, not an unlikely ground for interesting plots — Romance, despite the claims of the family

THE BANQUET

Some Travellers take Cameras, some take Eyes.

story papers, usually shunning your upper middle classes.

On my first visit I ran point-blank into a mystery that put me into a good humour for the rest of the day. It was in a ruffianly little barber shop that I found the phenomenon, for if it is not strange to be shaved south of Echo street for seven cents with a gold-handled razor, then I haven't mastered my trade. The owner of the incongruous tool was amenable to my advances, and indeed, we became so intimate before I was dried that I barely saved the story hot for the dinner. He was little enough loath to decline my invitation, and I left him, early in the forenoon, putting up his shutters, already beginning his preparations for the fête.

I achieved all degrees of success in the other explorations, from being warmly invited to mind my own proper affairs, to being proposed to, out of hand, by female tenants, but no subsequent adventure was patently melodramatic, and I spare you the recital. But I plunged into one affair after another, picking and stealing my picturesque guests and leading them captive to the feast. Amongst the freaks of Fortuity was the event that discovered Solomon Hopp to be the human symbol of Pin No. 9; he was entranced at the *rencontre*, and accompanied me on my rounds with a school-boy zeal for the mission.

Vivette's experiences, also, must be left untold for the present, since I shall fill my hundred and

THE BANQUET

The Mobilization.

Hors d'Œuvre.

fifty-two pages without. Marry, she brewed a gay turmoil in Millamours, and from the storm it fairly rained Romance on her that day! She came and went through the quarter, and gathered her company, as did the Caliph Haroun-al-Raschid in Bagdad.

It was in the Latin Quarter of the town that Vivette's address finally led me, with my retinue following in five cabs, charged with five hilarious drivers in no funeral humour, ready for any emergency. And behold, as we turned into Antarctic place, here was another procession making a clattering headway up the street, in as gay a mood as ours. We met fair and square in the middle of the block, to the giant interest of the small fry of the place, not to speak of half an hundred goggling heads out of window. I jumped out and found Vivette in a state of acute hysterium in the Cab No. 1 of the opposing force. Together we engineered an armistice, to the great disappointment of the drivers; the cabs vomited forth our victims, and we proceeded, two and two, up a little court. If there had been a brass band it would then have struck up a stirring air. Very happily for us, we encountered a force of police at the end of the alley, for we were becoming sadly popular in that neighborhood, and there was a lively jostle in our rear, encouraged, no doubt, by the discharged cabmen.

Once within the cordon, we found ourselves before a large frame structure, blazing with lights,

THE BANQUET

Life in a Geode.

Satinalia.

not only from the doors and windows, but from many extraordinary apertures, for it was a ramshackle edifice, in a very interesting state of decrepitude. This building we entered, agog with apprehension, — Gerrish, Hopp, the burglar's wife, and the two corner-grocerymen in my tow, and Vivette, with her contingent, treading on our heels.

We were ambuscaded in the antechamber by two dense black slaves, who fell upon us and blindfolded the whole company with great despatch, and we were led prisoners to the interior, through a darkness alive with strange sounds and odours. But when we at last opened our eyes and stared at the apparition of that house, its whole inside scooped out like a Halloween pumpkin, — at the groves of blooming orange trees, the darting humming birds and riband-betrimmed paroquets rustling through the enchanted half-light, the plashing cascades, the parading monkeys, costumed with fantastic conceit, rattling their silver chains, and, under a huge silk umbrella, the round table, piled with a heaving sea of violets navigated by fleets of fruit-laden galleys, the crawling glow-worms that spangled the leaves; when we heard the sounds of soft-voiced viols and the plaints of nightingales in the shrubbery, and breathed the perfume of the censers swinging from the rafters — as these impressions came one after another, shocking us into a hushed surprise, we sat there for a while like mutes.

THE BANQUET

Circumstances alter Cases.

Verisimilitudinarianism.

bewitched. And Vivette, so gay before, so sparkling and so kind, seeing our emotion, cast down her eyes, and I saw them glisten in the candle-light.

And lo ! though we had brought in the rag ends of humanity as our guests, sordid, hopeless men and women, the exhilaration of this extravagance worked a miracle before our eyes. Our company rose to the occasion as souls emerge from dead bodies, and, as the play went on, they assumed the parts consistent with the feast ; the wines untied reserve—the table responded to the bounding spirits of Vivette, and we dined that night like princes and princesses of the blood royal of Romance. It was an apotheosis that not even our hostess had expected.

Of the thousand diversions of that dinner, I have no time now to tell, even were you sufficiently credulous ; not at any rate of the shower that fell softly around us, and the hoarse fluting of frogs as the *entrée* was served — not of the huntsmen's chorus that brought in the game — not of the snow-storm that fluttered from the roof, and changed to a rattling downfall of rice-hail as the ices were handed around — not certainly of the sudden darkness, the thunder, the red fire, and the terrifying entrance through the floor of the devil with cognac-flaming coffee ; for these were mere insignificant details of Vivette's plan. The talk was the main thing, and when the candles flared and the drift-

THE BANQUET

A Tale told by an Idiot, signifying Nothing.

wood fire glowed iridescent, she plied the company with her craft, and set them chattering like a family reunited at Thanksgiving-time.

It was to Gerrish the barber that Vivette first turned, after the talk stagnated and the time had come for a more definite topic. "I must confess," said she, "that of all the stories that are to be told at this table to-night, I am most anxious to hear the one that shall explain how it came to pass that you have to-day shaved my husband with a gold razor. It was assuredly solid gold?" she asked tentatively.

The barber snorted. "Sixteen carrots fine!" said Gerrish.

And he continued with the following incredible story; or, at least, I never believed it:

"I AM, as you know, a barber at No. 865 Bow street. I am too poor to keep more than one chair, at which I operate myself.

† † † † †
† CHAPTER †
† II. THE †
† GOLD †
† RAZOR †
† † † † †

"One day last December, a lady, heavily veiled, entered my shop, and requested me to shave a straight stripe down the back of a tortoise-shell kitkin which she had fetched in a basket. I was, of course, somewhat astonished at so strange a request, but as she paid me well I did what she asked. Every week after that she appeared early Monday morning for the same purpose, until a week before last, when, saying she had no money

THE BANQUET

An Arabian Nights Entertainment.

to pay for the work, she left me the gold-handled razor you saw, sir, and felt, as security for the payment. I have not seen her since. I think she was a dodecaroon.

“And,” concluded the barber whose name was Gerrish, with a touch of sensitiveness at sight of the faces that fell before him, “if I cannot explain the meaning of this mysterious occurrence, and have not the wit to fabricate a reasonable sequel, I trust I shall not be held responsible for your manifest disappointment.”

“And yet,” said Vivette, “’tis a poor story that has no ending!”

“Or a long one,” said I.

The barber blushed. “In real life stories do not end,” he asserted, “and (outside the exigencies of my profession) I am in no mood to attempt to improve on Nature. I regret, indeed, that I am forced into this book at all,” he added, raising his voice disagreeably, “for my tale is not of a quality to be tolerated by the ordinary, or gentle, reader, acclimated to or with an acquired taste for or by the grotesque improbability hight ‘Dramatic Quality.’ I am sorry to shock you by closing with a rising inflection, yet I have the satisfaction of being loyal to the Higher Realism.”

Gerrish sat down, and the company murmured a little uneasily. Vivette, anxious to relieve the tension of the barber’s extravagant sophistries, turned to the first corner-groceryman, a dour and

THE BANQUET

“ Butter wouldn't help the Works.”

sombre man, who had retreated into a melancholic demeanour after the flush of the conversation had died out in him.

“ And you, sir,” she said, “ what do you know of the Great Adventure ? ”

“ Nothing,” said the man. “ I am a corner-groceryman.”

“ But does nothing ever happen in your store ? ” she asked.

“ Oh, yes,” replied he, “ the same thing happens every day, except Sundays.”

“ How peaceful a life is yours ! ” mused Vivette. “ And yet not a pickle keg in your shop but is a potential romance. Not a biscuit behind the counter but may assist at a tragedy, and the adventures possible to the meanest bar of soap in your establishment will, perhaps, furnish forth an epode.”

“ Hunh ? ” said the grocer.

“ Excuse me,” suddenly interrupted a wild-eyed stripling at Vivette's right hand ; “ if there are tales to be told, I pray hear mine, for I have kept still till I can no longer stand it, and these theories give me little chance for an interpolation apropos. Yet stories have been told before at dinner parties more inapt than mine, and often enough with success.”

“ Do not apologize, I beg of you, for the symposium is certainly going slowly enough,” said Vivette. “ Pray burst the bonds of your discretion, for if we get nowhere after this start, I shall faint away ! ”

THE BANQUET

No Matter how stupid a Caption I write,

So, in a *forte* voice, and with a terrible, terrible earnestness, the young man began :

†—†—†—†—†—†—†
†CHAPTER † I WAS boisterous and turbulent
† III. THE † as a youth — a loud-mouthed,
† YELLSTER † impossible sort of a boy ; one
†—†—†—†—†—†—† to be kept out of doors as long
as possible, and to be suppressed at night by every
means in a mother's power. I was sent to
boarding-school, but was speedily expelled for my
noise. I managed to get into college at last, and
there I was perfectly happy, rooting on the campus
and on the foot-ball field at all hours with the more
enthusiastic of my mates. Where there was a yell,
there was I, the king-pin of the hullabaloo ; a
shouting mania possessed me, and I was the leader
in all the celebrations of the University. I invented
new cries and captained that vocal patriotism by
which classes triumph, and battles are supposed to
be won upon the gridiron. I had a large chest-
expansion, and was known far and wide as a man
of mighty lungs.

— After I was graduated, I obtained a clerkship in
a wholesale house, and attempted to gain a mastery
over my madness, but the effort was terrible. After
every day of silence, I sought the unfrequented
suburban districts, and screamed to the moon and
all the planets, to relieve the tension of my desire.
How I envied the retail-counter clerks, who were
privileged to vociferate “ Cash ! ” till the windows
rattled ! I often woke myself and all the neighbours

THE BANQUET

Someone will think that it's awfully Bright !

by my midnight shrieks, breaking through dreams, happy dreams, where I trumpeted at fires or on ship-board, whooped with wild Apaches, or bawled with frenzied negroid Voodoos.

— So things went from bad to worse. I dared not trust myself in society, lest I should explode with my pent-up feelings and breed a scandal amongst my respectable friends. But at last the climax came, on a Sunday when I made a final attempt to calm myself in the odour of sanctity at a neighbouring church. The dim light of the edifice and the peaceful serenity of the congregation sobered me when I entered, and I thanked God that I was, for once, like other men. When I had begun to tire of the stillness, the harsh blare of the organ and the raucous notes of the tenor soothed me again ; I delighted in the cacophony, for it was an ill-paid choir, and I settled myself in content. But alas, I had not calculated upon the agony of that rector's voice ! His first low and solemn words began the torture, and at each succeeding droning sentence the barb of annoyance sunk deeper into my spirit. I itched all over with the monotony of his whining modulations. I held up first one foot and then the other, to distract my mind from the drawling moan of the voice ; I counted the windows and the nodding heads of the worshippers ; I began to wonder what would happen if I should give way under the strain, and the temptation grew suddenly like a cyclone, blowing down every barrier of decency. I

THE BANQUET

One Touch of Nature makes the whole World grin.

held my breath in terror of the demon that possessed me, while the congregation swayed before my eyes in a dull blur. Still the rector's voice squirmed unceasingly, and like an ear-ache that grows more and more intense, at last my desire boiled up and overflowed my soul. I rose to my feet and yelled aloud!—one mad, hoarse shriek, that echoed back from the chancel, raced up and down the aisles, leaped to the vaulted roof, and swept down upon the drowsy audience. An hundred heads swung round to me; an hundred white faces confronted me with staring eyes. The preacher stopped suddenly; there was a crescendo of astonished exclamations; a woman screamed; two grey, shaved deacons hurried toward me; and I reeled into the arms of a verger.

* * * * *

— I am happy now, thanks to the wise services of the physician that attended me; and all day long I have the blessed right to yell, "*Fresh mack-er-el!*" upon the highways and byways of the town. No one stares at me as I pass, scream loudly as I may; and at night, after a day of indescribable ecstasy, I retire to my little garden and practise upon my trombone. And when I go to sleep, my dreams are full of peace. . . .

"Bravo!" cried the company, and "Bravo!" cried Vivette, for he had galloped through his narrative with verve, and had awakened us from the depression the grocer had produced, as a tempest clears a sultry afternoon.

THE BANQUET

Cupid and the Stop-watch.

“It lacks only the Grand Passion to make it a romance,” I said.

“It is perfect without,” said Vivette. “Who ever heard of a short love-story?”

“Indeed, you’ve cut many an one short,” said I.

“But seriously, what is the shortest possible time in which an amour may begin and be finished?” she asked gravely.

“Two minutes!” said one of Vivette’s own guests at her left hand, beside the deaf and dumb tag-stringer. He also was young, ardent, impetuous, foolhardy, gallant, — all this I knew, for this much his face confessed. “Ah, I have loved — and lost!” he cried.

“The story! The story!” mercilessly urged the company.

“It happened but yesterday,” began the lover.

“Had it ever happened before?” I inquired.

“Silence!” Vivette commanded, and to him she said, “Begin at the commencement of the two minutes now: we’ll have the sentiment neat.” . .

WITH my wonted impetuosity, I had barely time to dash, breathless, into the elevator cage as the door snapped. I am ready enough for an adventure at any time, but Romance had me by the ear, that day, and pitched me flat into the very climax of my life; for, as I brushed in, my sleeve-link caught in some one’s gown, and tied us together.

† † † †
† CHAPTER †
† IV. IN †
† THE ELE- †
† VATOR †
† † † †

THE BANQUET

Oh, now we go Up, Up, Up-py !

Turning to apologize and release myself, I looked up and caught her fair in the eye. She was smiling, but when she saw me she trembled visibly.

—The car sprang up the shaft, and our eyes clung together like drowning men. We seemed as if alone in the world. As the car rose and stopped and soared again, my soul flickered like a dying candle, and then seemed lifted to indescribable altitudes. My brain reeled with the exhilaration of her presence like a drunken giant. The glory of her unknown, well-known face, the absolute satisfaction of her being, the surety that her heart understood and answered mine, kept me trepid with excitement.

—As we ascended, seconds had revealed us to each other ; in the minute we were lovers ; a whole existence was being lived. Years could have done no more.

—When the glow died out of her face, leaving it rose-white, my mind cleared, and I felt the strange self-control of one who flies in dream, and, still gazing in her eyes, I saw her the woman of ten thousand, the goddess of my destiny. Yet, with the thought, the fear of losing the hope of my life arose in me like a phantom. Could it all end — a love that seemed immortal ?

—The car stopped at the eleventh story. The boy, wondering at our delay, called out the floor ; then, grinning, stepped outside to pick a paper from the corridor.

THE BANQUET

And now we go Down, Down, Down-y!

— While we were still chained by each other's gaze, a swift resolve knifed me. I leaned to her and shot the question — and her whispered “*Yes!*” flew back like an echo.

— The boy stepped back, slammed the gate, and started the car downward with an oath. Passengers hailed us and crowded in, a jostling company, yet remote as the horizon. So the car sank, and stopped, and fell again, and we stood motionless, as one might stand in the centre of the universe, while creation swung around him. At last, the cage swept down to the ground floor and stopped with a sickening lurch that threw her to her knees.

— As I stooped to raise her, I heard an inarticulate moan, and glancing down on the instant, I saw at my feet what sent the blackness of hell into my soul. God knows my mind never faltered, no more than my great, glorying love did, — though I dared not look her in the face. The only noble course lay plain and straight before me. Yet love against honour battled within me — the one, like a beast tearing at my heart, dragging me back to the heaven at her side, the other counselling me to spare her from disgrace in this horrid hour, even at the sacrifice of all that I had miraculously won. I have the quicksilver temperament, and all the chivalry of my nature bade me gallantly refrain to notice what had happened. I would have died for her sake; could I not do even this, and toss the jewel of my hopes aside to spare her shame?

THE BANQUET

A topsy-turvy Sky-climber that could not Talk.

— Haggard and icy cold, I stepped over the sixteen ivory relics of her smile, and flung myself out into the street — alone !

Vivette told me afterward, in confidence, that she didn't care very much for the story, and she thought the point of view was as false as — well, the teeth, perhaps ; but she clapped her hands and applauded as a hostess should. For my part, I saw much to be admired in the young man's spirit, and I branded him, mentally, as one on whom the Association should keep an eye.

Between Gerrish and the yellster sat a Human Fly whom Vivette had caught in the web of the quarter. We had set great hopes on her tales of strange head-downward travels across the ceilings of mighty circus-tents, preposterous promenades, and scant skirts ribbed with steel like umbrellas, to unflinchingly envelop her form, while her hair hung down like a paint-brush. But whether from a habit of looking down on the company or not, she had no marvel for us and we had to pass her and class her with the second corner-groceryman.

“There are too many blanks in this lottery,” cried Vivette. “Believe me, my friends, it isn't so much the tale one tells, as the teller's way of telling !”

“If I could believe that,” began a wry and withered widowette at my left.

“Mrs. Silk ! Mrs. Silk !” whooped a neuvain of diners, shrilly.

THE BANQUET

Mrs. Silk asserts her Rights.

She coughed a little imitation cough into her hand and bridled coyly — shy old girl! “Yes, mim,” she mimbled, “my history is very awful! Speaking of them vacuum shoes that the Human Fly wore has brought back to me the horrible curst that is onto me.”

And Mrs. Silk with many gasps and gurglings thrilled us with the story of her Nemeses:

LIKKERY had but one leg when I married him. It was a left leg, mim. I didn't realize what this meant until he died. It meant forty-one new right-foot shoes in his dressing closet, mim, for he was a extravagant man and I was a economical wife. It did seem to me that he bought a pair of new shoes each week. How to get rid of them forty-one I didn't know. I couldn't bear to throw 'em away. I tried to return 'em to the shoe shops and get a rabate, but the clerks asserted me that almost all one-legged men was left-legged, and all their right-legged customers wore large sizes. Likkery wore number fours. It was just like his unaccommodativeness. I began to rake and scrape to get invitations to weddings, so I might throw them shoes after the bride's carriage. They do say it needs an old shoe, but what did I care so long as the shoes was used up? But Lord! there wasn't half weddings enough, and heaven knows I ain't no matchmaker. It was a horrid

† † † † † †
† CHAPTER †
† V. THE †
† UNIPED †
† HUSBANDS †
† † † † † †

THE BANQUET

The Soles of the Unfortunates.

legacy I was left with, mim, forty-one new shoes. They grew and grew on me till finally it seemed to me some nights that there must be a hundred in that closet, and I'd get up and light a candle and get down on my knees and count 'em all over to make sure they wa'n't no more.

— My second marriage promised to be very happy, but a week after the ceremony Mr. Box (I used to have my mail come “Mrs. J. J. d'Likkery-Box”) he met with a most distressing accident of a bicycle. When they brought him home on a door I grew that white they threw a washpan of water at me. “Don't tell me Box has broke his leg?” I says. But sure enough he had. “Not his right leg?” says I, but I knew it was, for it was just my luck. It *was* his right leg, too, and off it come before night, and them shoes just seemed to me they grinned and stuck out their tongues at me. And so that collection grew and grew.

— In spite of all I could do, Mr. Box's shoes would sometimes be left pointing towards the bed. You know how that gives you bad dreams, mim. But oftener Likkery's would, too. Imagine!— fifty-odd bad dreams all at the onct. Often and often I woke up at the dead hours of the night and see them shoes a-pointing at me, like I was a female shoe charmer, or like that. I tried to keep 'em in a trunk all together, but like as not I'd get in a few left-foot boots, and Box would swear he'd have 'em around where he could find 'em or he'd

THE BANQUET

The Mobilization.

Gules, a Pedal Dexter.

know why, and he all the time buying new pairs of shoes, because he couldn't get single lefts at the store. I asked him for heaven's sake get 'em made to order, but you might just as well talk to a goat.

— At last Mr. Box died, and the thought seemed to console me that at least there wouldn't be no more single shoes in the closet. The day after the funeral I made a procession of all the shoes — patent-leathers, brogans, bluchers small and bluchers big, tans, congresses, pumps, slippers, and rubber-boots. Sixty-six right-foot shoes, toe to heel, they reached from my back bedroom bay to the head of the stairs.

— I was in despair at the idea of living with all this foot-gear, as if I was the relic of a half a centipede, when a small-footed man named Silk proposed to me. I looked at his feet and I accepted him. I was sure the shoes should fit him, and I was determined that them shoes should be wore out. I suppose I'm a wicked widow woman, but I just couldn't stand it. But wait till I tell you !

— As soon as he was asleep, I approached his prostate form. My axe was sharp — I had ground it myself. My mind was set. Sixty-six soles inspired me.

— I struck the blow. Then the horror of the deed seized me.

— The rest is too awful !

— I had cut off the wrong foot !

THE BANQUET

Morgan le Fay, the Manner of her Craft.

“There is something very Greek about the tragedy,” said Vivette, at a loss for a more enthusiastic comment.

“Yes, mim,” said Mrs. Silk.

Now at my right sat the burglar’s bride, whom I had discovered in one of the most aristocratic residences on the Fellway. I had signalled Vivette to keep her tale for the last, feeling sure that it would be the best of them all. I had found her disconsolate upon the floor of what had evidently been a magnificently furnished parlour in a house on the Fen side of the Fellway, in tears and alone. It had needed, however, but my expression of surprise at her situation to re-arouse her own merriment at the incongruity of the attitude, for she had a keen sense of humour and a very nimble wit; a woman, withal, one could suspect of having been at one time some sort of great-grandniece to all the Muses — a black-eyed jade, and a sad flirt, too; she had an acute way with her that quite vanquished my appetite: she whispered things at me, and she smiled when there was no joke at all, out of pure mad-headedness. Indeed, she was very much alive, I assure you, and she could model enchanting little angels out of bread.

So now, as we had been around the table, with the exception of Solomon Hopp’s tale, which you have heard, and the second corner-groceryman, twelve degrees more obtuse than the first, and the female tag-stringer, who was dumb and deaf, and

THE BANQUET

The Definition of a Thoroughbred.

the Human Fly, who wouldn't talk, — I turned to the fascinating creature on my right, and, disentangling with difficulty my glance from her dimples, I entreated of her the story of her life, and especially the secret of a misfortune that installed her as mistress of an absolutely unfurnished house.

The recollection of her reverses reduced the altitude of her spirits for a moment, and with a small sigh she began :

I WAS once rich, and was bred to a taste few acquire in after life, having that perfect sense of the relative importance of trifles that birthmarks the lady. But my father's fortune was ambuscaded on the Exchange, and before he could reinforce we were cut off without quarter. There was nothing for it but to earn my own living ; and at an art store, where I had spent appalling sums, I drew a slight interest on my past generosity in the degrading position of bookkeeper.

— It is a harsh fall from possession to poverty, and I, who had been keenly swayed by the tension of things that were my own, felt a continuous tide of envy scour my veins in sight and touch of the treasures at my hand. There was little enjoyment for me in their presence. I regarded them as a Kimberly slave might a new-found diamond — they were not mine ; and their beauties but

† † † †
† CHAPTER †
† VI. THE †
† BURG- †
† LAR'S †
† WIFE †
† † † †

THE BANQUET

God helps those that help Themselves.

vexed my spirit. The pictures were for the greater part bought by the newly rich, and as I charged them up, I could imagine the environment to which they were doomed. Those which I approved I relinquished with a cynical farewell, and the others (and there were many, for we catered to all castes) I slapped unconscionably upon their faces, and bade them good-riddance. My employer stood in some fear of my discrimination, and I was at times unwillingly forced into the shop to advise some favoured customer; and occasionally I made dignified visits to their homes, and assisted at the hanging.

—Such delicate nerves as mine could not long endure such a life; the situation chafed me, and I determined to free myself at any cost. I had at first some obscure thought of forging signatures to etchings, and by buying them naked, and selling so adorned, to eke my wages; but I was unsatisfied with the temporary respites such hazards would afford, and I set my mind to work. At about this time I happened upon an invitation to the Burglars' Ball, and in a wink I caught sight of the avenue of escape; so casting aside my pride, I resolved to attend the function, and prepared myself to appear as charming as I might.

—It was a fortunate enterprise, and I have never regretted my part in it; yet the story of my wooing must go without the telling, since my heart followed my wits; for I am too much the gentle-

THE BANQUET

Poverty makes strange Bed-fellows.

woman to discuss my own love affairs with the shameless verisimilitude shown by some of my sex. My lover was bold and accomplished, the soul of honour among his profession, and handsome as the Man with the Glove. He had the feeling of the artist with the skill of the craftsman, and took a degree of pride in his calling that made him exceedingly popular among his patients.

— In bearing and conversation Leopold was nicely fitted to deserve my favours. He was strict in regard to dress for evening visits on his clients, and always left his card in the hall on departing, no matter what pressing urgency might excuse a neglect of the formality. In all respects, he seemed *au fait*; yet I must confess upon the first night of his operations after our honeymoon I was somewhat nervous. I sat in bed, pretending to read, but anxiously eying the clock, and wondering what he would bring as the first offering to his little wife. I tried to imagine him pausing to decide, electing at last some elegant *bijou*, and hastening back to gayly present the token, with some audacious compliment studied beneath the stars.

— But alas! though I was not deceived in his kind heart, his taste was of a meaner sort, and as I kissed him affectionately on his return, I saw that I must begin at the beginning with him and teach him all. They were Lakeside spoons, of the crane-and-pagoda pattern, and I silently brought out the melting-pot and set it on the fire. He was

THE BANQUET

“The Best is none too Good for me, Dear!”

brave — he took it beautifully ; and we had a little quiet talk, in which I laid the foundations of his education.

— Queerly enough I had that day overheard a very amusing conversation at a jeweller's that Leopold's unfortunate selection brought humourously to my mind. It was between a violent old lady with a purple veil, who wished to return some lovely old Queen Anne spoons, because they were not marked “STERLING,” and a salesman who finally induced her to keep them. Now I had known her of old, in my picture-hanging days, and I drew a little plan of her house, on the back of an envelope, for Leopold. “Why, if you care for such things, you shall have them, my dear !” he replied gallantly, and he kept his word before sunrise.

— Well, time passed, and under such tutelage my husband became a *connoisseur*. One of my hobbies was old china ; and knowing pretty well what families would be likely to possess the desired specimens I would drive around their way of a Sunday afternoon with Leopold, and point out the houses, whose gems he would next day bring back in a little padded portmanteau of my own manufacture. Our rooms became gradually furnished in the most refined taste, with rare odd pieces of antique furniture, exquisite laces, bibelots, and paintings of every description.

— Having so much, I must needs long for the moon

THE BANQUET

The Studio.

Modern Art.

The House Beautiful.

at last, and having heard of a Corot that had been purchased abroad by one of my whilom patrons, I was out of my head to get it for my collection. For the first time, however, my husband refused my wish. The undertaking, he said, was too hazardous for the whim; the picture was well known and heavily insured, and, at the news of its loss, the town would get too hot for us. I cajoled him with every wile I could bring to bear, but he was firm. — I burst into tears at this brutality, at which he softened, and, after a bit, agreed to compromise the matter by permitting me to visit the house and at least see the masterpiece. With what trepidation I set out, I leave you to imagine. I became conscious of an alarm for my own safety that it had never crossed my mind to feel for Leopold. My husband smiled at my fears, and, with a little more braggadocio than I thought necessary, opened the house for my inspection. We made our way to the library (so-called), and Leopold turned the rays of his lantern (a gift of mine, made from a Louis XIV. chiselled silver sword-hilt) upon the Corot. I gave a little gasp of contentment, and sat down to enjoy its beauties, while my husband proceeded with his work. The room was filled with a marvellous selection of ornaments; there was scarce space to turn about in, and, surrounding the Corot in its impossible frame, were Cupids and Psyches, Spring-times of Love, Grandfather's Darlings, painted photographs, and the full regalia of the Artistic

THE BANQUET

A Burglar of Arts from Robbers' University.

Home. The Shearaton chair in which I sat was richly upholstered in little triangular wads, and ornamented with a heavy woollen fringe; there were wonderful Cloisonné mustache cups in glass cases, and the apartment, in the fantastic light, was an equine dream.

— With a languid delight I watched my husband as he flitted to and fro among the shadows. How beautifully he burgled! How subtle the play of his slim fingers, and the absolute precision of his movement! I saw that I had never before seen him at his best, and all the resentment I had felt at our difference fled from me, and love resumed full sway.

— That night was the beginning of a series of nocturnal excursions that filled my life with new interests. My husband's genius, coupled with my tact and adaptability, carried us through the most remarkable adventures. I chaperoned his visits to ladies' apartments, and calmed the fears of those who awakened, by polite compliments. We were received everywhere, but in our own especial set were acknowledged leaders. We entertained gay, though silent companies at select lunches in the most aristocratic homes, and our fame bulged in the quarter.

— There were in town few residences, however, which I could approve, and the knowledge that priceless works of art should be cast into such jungles of poor taste was a continual reproach to my

THE BANQUET

Honour among Thieves.

The Fairyland of Science.

susceptibilities. I began again to think meanly of Leopold's originality at hesitating to attempt the conquest of the gems I valued, and began, little by little, to supplement his work by careful study.

— The first fruit of my endeavours was the acquisition of a copy of Koster's "Speculum," one of the ten, as I thought, in existence. I removed it from its binding, and substituted a block of wood between the covers, where it remained dusty and undisturbed in its glass case, until I discovered my find was but an imitation, after all, when I conscientiously returned it to its ignorant owner.

— This experience indicated a wider field of operation, and my thoughts dwelt continually on the Corot, till at last I broached my scheme to Leopold. Together we revisited the house, and, as good fortune would have it, found the place deserted, and the furniture and picture covered with overalls of blue denim. The painting was removed, and we made off in haste, stopping in ecstasy under alternate lamp-posts, to gloat over the *chef d'œuvre*. The family, we found, were away for a month, and, in that time, I set myself to copy the picture. My husband suggested photography, but I scorned such methods, and traced as well as I could the outlines, and had it drawn in, in a single evening. The colouring was more difficult; but I was bold and energetic, and though we were much amused at the result, I could not help feeling there was a certain spirit in the thing that would be much more

THE BANQUET

The Biter bit.

Assorted Cynicisms.

satisfactory to its owner than the original. We were both a little nervous until the household had returned; but as the days passed, and nothing appeared in the papers, our confidence increased. — So the town lay before us, ripe for the harvest, and we went through it with the confidence of children picking berries. My facility increased with practice, and I found a welcome remedy for the tedium of my idle days. With my poorer efforts I made bold to call upon their rich possessors in the guise of a rejuvenator of pictures, and by lime-juice, varnish, and a hint that *genuine* Millets were always signed in the left-hand corner, I laid a confusion that would baulk any future investigations.

— Yet the burglar's life is not a happy one, after all; and one evening we returned hilariously, hand in hand, Leopold with a new Mura and I with a wonderful Moffat-Lindner, to find our rooms gutted to the last frame. To the infamy of a handsome young second-story man, of whom Leopold asserts I have been over-fond, I lay the wreck of my lovely home, and whether I shall murder or marry him I must decide before the next chapter of this autobiography is written!

“Truly, it is only the luxuries that are necessary,” mused Vivette.

“And necessity knows no law,” replied the burglar's bride. “’Tis strange.”

“The gods give nuts to those that have no teeth,” said I.

THE BANQUET

Dianeme's Tale brings down the House.

“Then they should get false ones!” said the burglar's wife defiantly.

At this the gallant elevator boy looked up with an excited face. We feared a conflagration, for these two were as flint and steel, and the sparks were flying.

So at last, by a secret signal, Vivette warned me that the end had come—we rose, and, walking on air, retreated to the vestibule. There was a sound of mallet-strokes as we reached the street, a flight of birds from the opened windows, a battalion of screaming monkeys galloped by us, and then, with a long rip and a crash, the roof fell in; the walls trembled and bowed, then threw themselves, with a roar, upon the débris.

“My friends,” said Vivette, “no one shall ever give a dinner just like this again!”

BOOK V
AT THE OLD STAND



AT THE OLD STAND

A Model Monthly.

A Beggar's Circumstanding.

WE were looking over the "Twocenter Magazine" one morning, amusing ourselves chiefly with the advertisements, for the "Twocenter" catered to rural readers, and was bulky with "general ad's," skilfully phrased to wheedle the yops. Its advertising pages were far more interesting than its legitimate attempts at literature. We were grinning at the catch-penny seductions of some cheap-John haberdasher or other, when the intelligent office-boy entered with a wide smile.

"There's a beggar outside, sir," said he.

"A beggar?" cried Vivette. "What does he want, pray? a half-portion of Romance free?"

"That's just exactly what he *does* want," said the boy. "I tried to get rid of him with a half-dollar, for I didn't want him to bother you, but he insisted on seeing you, and said he was a charity patient by every right of circumstance."

"What in the world did he mean by that?" I exclaimed.

"Perhaps if you should see him, sir, you'd understand," said the boy, with a certain expression.

"Then let him in by all means," said I.

It was, indeed, easy enough to understand when the poor tramp was admitted. He had not fooled

AT THE OLD STAND

Romance: what it is.

What it is what?

our boy for an eighth of a minute, and how he had ever seriously expected to deceive us, who knew his every way and gesture by heart, I cannot imagine. He was pitifully tricked out in a red wig and the grotesque habiliments of a mongrel, mouse-eaten hurdy-gurdy man. His most coat-like garment was silly with a broidery of last summer's rags; he was tied together with strings like a gunny sack — a very caricature; but altogether and patently disguised with a malice prepense. But it was the ex-director; any fly that had ever lit on him would have recognized him.

I think now that madness had already laid a little finger on him, he was so satisfied and cock-sure of his masquerade. We said nothing, however, of our incredulity, and let him alone to see what was his mission, for he was a pitiful spectacle of disgrace and degeneration, and I saw Vivette's mouth mutiny at the sight.

“My dear sir,” he began, with a dignity that consorted incongruously with the decay of his aspect, — though he always loved to verbalize, — “Mr. Redforth, you see before you one who has been the hero of adventures impossible for a sane man to credit. I do not, in point of fact, expect you to be credent of my marvels, for, as you will no doubt admit, there is a subjective province of Romance far wider reaching than the objective or literal assemblage of mere extraordinary circumstance in which it is your business to deal; and of

AT THE OLD STAND

An Apologist of the Decadence.

this habit or pose of the imagination, I rely upon my word alone to convince you that I am possessive."

"This proposition has frequently been demonstrated, and your presentation of it certainly brands you of the *illuminati*," I answered with interest, "but I fail to see how one so subtle — too subtle for our enterprise, in fact — can solicit as alms the grosser and more material episodes we peddle as romance."

"I confess I am somewhat apostate from the faith," the old man said, attitudinizing with a semi-maudlin majesty. "I have backslidden. I know there is a romantic aspect to the most commonplace realities if one has the eye to see; that a charm and glamour may be made to surround drudgery and squalour; that one may go through life guarded from vulgarity by the mailed coat of idealism; but I have fallen, I have become sensual, I crave the spur of the stinging, brutal fact. I grow myopic, and the delicate half-tone is lost on me — I thirst for the revelry of the strong primary colours."

"Your life must, indeed, have been highly flavoured," I ventured.

"Listen!" the ancient rascal continued, hurrying at the bait. "In my youth I was rich beyond the wildest modern improbability; I fell insanely enamoured of a girl of humble birth; I was entrapped by my guardian and imprisoned on

AT THE OLD STAND

We give an Eleemosynary Aid.

the steam yacht 'Wraith;' we were captured by pirates in the bay of Lemark; there was murder galore before I escaped; there were subterranean passages, slaves with their tongues cut out, ghosts, and dire, blood-curdling vendettas, rapine and witchery; the girl, meanwhile, had married an earl; a stroke of lightning freed her; we met at midnight to plight our troth; conspirators embroiled me in their treasons; I languished for months under false suspicion; the time was set for my execution; remorse and suicide exonerated me; I married, my sainted wife died, I married again, and again, and again, and again,"—

I had to stop him here, for fear of the prolixity of his verisimilitude. "But what can we do for one who has been such a prodigal?" I said.

"Can you imagine my degradation—can you picture to yourself what it means to be a hurdy-gurdy man? I have been fairly boiled in excitement from my youth up, I have been pickled in mysteries; for the love of her there, for I see you beatified,"—and he posed at Vivette,— "grant me a cold handful of sensation!"

"Enough of this!" I cried, for his personalities shocked me, and I began to suspect his motives. "Leave the room, if you please, for we can do nothing for your sort."

Vivette had been a curious listener at the colloquy, nodding and patronizing his periods. Her heart winced at his suffering and at the memory

AT THE OLD STAND

And start him in a fascinating Trade.

of his past establishment, his very quondam state, that is, not this furious fib-work.

“Oh, Robin,” she pleaded, “don’t refuse him alms!—let me offer a dole to test his sincerity. Here, old man, I give you an acorn from which a giant bole shall emerge!” and she handed him the copy of the “Twocenter.”

“Madam,” replied the ex-director, saluting her with an elaborate salaam, “be my thanks of the immensity of that oak, which you shall teach me to cultivate.” Indeed, he was not so dense, after all, — he who had been a director!

I had seen many a game of blarney played in that office, *moi*, but I ran aground on this half-tide of nonsense, and gaped at her.

“Look at the advertising pages,” said Vivette; “there’s more fun there than in a county fair! Listen here — I’ll present you with a capital of one dollar, that you are to invest as the ‘Twocenter’ bids you. Do you see the free samples that are to be had for the asking? Do you see the illustrated catalogues? Do you see the agency offers? Here’s work to keep your mail-carrier running for a year! Now this is what you are to do: you’re to answer every blessed one of those advertisements and you’ll have amusement enough.”

She knew what she was talking about when she mentioned the mail that he would receive, for it had been his chief function in the old days to open the letters, and he was as pleased as a child at the

AT THE OLD STAND

A Word to the Wise.

A Sport for the Silly Season.

prospect of being favoured by the postman. He thanked her with tears in his eyes, and hobbled out.

“Well, we got rid of him cheaply enough,” I said, after he had left.

“Don’t you believe it, the fun has only begun,” said Vivette with a wise look. “I gave him a bargain-sale bonanza.”

We heard no more of him for several months, when the office-boy told us he had seen the old man driving a pedlar’s cart in the suburbs of Millamours. “What does this mean?” I asked Vivette.

“He’s realizing on his samples,” she replied.

“But you gave him only a dollar,” I said.

“Did you never enliven the tedium of a summer vacation, when every one except you was getting letters, by answering advertisements?”

“Why, no!” said I; “have you?”

“Didn’t you ever write to the men who promise ‘*Eighteen Dollars a Week, Easy*,’ by taking the agency or canvassing for hitching-posts? You know when you once get started you can’t leave off if you want to; you get put into advertisers’ directories, and you don’t have to write any more, but they just send and send and *send* you things, — all sorts of things, all sorts of people do, — and you get samples of cologne and soap and rubber-stamp outfits and pins and coffee, in fact ‘everything that begins with R,’ as the March hare would say. And you can have the exclusive

AT THE OLD STAND

Cf. the Fable of the Peasant and the Viper.

territorial agency for as many things as you want. Indeed, it's very exciting !”

“ Then the ex-director is selling his samples ! ”

“ Undoubtedly,” said Vivette ; “ and I have no doubt he's getting rich.”

I was a little sorry for this, for I had considered him dangerous ever since his attempt to steal the Memoirs, and I feared his money would enable him to plot more successfully. But Vivette did not share my fears, for she said he would never dare, and that she knew things about him that put him in her power. What they were she would never tell very definitely, but I could not help feeling that they had to do with the volumes of the Association's Memoirs that she had kept in cipher, before I knew her.

It was not long after this that the old director had the confidence to call again, ostensibly to thank Vivette for her kind offices. He had, as she had anticipated, made large use of the hint she had given him, and had progressed through the various stages of peddling and huckstering, with basket, barrow, and van, till, as his mail was still bulky with samples, he had taken a little shop in Maldivers, where he was agent for as many as sixty-four several novelties.

It was Vivette told me this, for I had been away and she had seen him. Had she left him alone at all ? Only once, for a few minutes.

I went up to the cabinet over the desk, and my

AT THE OLD STAND

Rape of the File.

The Beatitude of the Boy.

heart sank as I saw the vacant space on the second shelf. Three volumes of the Memoirs were missing ! Vivette was strangely disturbed.

† † † †
† CHAPTER †
† II. THE †
† ELOPE- †
† MENT †
† † † †

THE office-boy was to be married. He offered me a shy half-confidence anent the high power of his happiness, but to Vivette he gave freely, and she was pleased and touched to a very grateful degree by his trust and his manliness. She was never tired of listening to the story of his passion, and he was never wearied of discussing the wonders of the Girl. But while he favoured her so partially with his sentiment, it was to me he came at last for advice. I had seen for some time that there was something on his mind that he wished to launch, and I was not surprised, though I own I was somewhat curious, when one day he came to me and asked for a private interview.

“ Mr. Redforth,” he began, “ you know, of course, that I am betrothed to the Dearest Girl in the World,” and he looked up with a little bravado, as if he had expected me to deny it. I nodded gravely. “ I am a poor boy, you know, also, Mr. Redforth ; I have only my salary from the Association.”

“ Rest easy on that score, Leander,” I said ; “ your salary is to be doubled after the wedding, and if you would like an advance ” —

“ Oh, Mr. Redforth ! ” he protested, with tears

AT THE OLD STAND

An Illustrated Catalogue of Charms and Tokens.

in his eyes, "it isn't that; surely you don't think so badly of me! There is nothing I could buy, if I had money to buy it with, that's good enough for the Girl, and I am not fool enough to give her a bought-and-paid-for present. I know how it would make her feel; there are so many things so much more precious, sir, — why, all she has to wear for our troth-plight is a little carnelian ring I had when I was a boy, and it made her cry when I gave it to her, Mr. Redforth! But it was not because it was cheap and poor!"

"She is a noble-hearted girl, Leander," I said, and I meant it with all my heart, I am sure. "Pure and simple and true, besides all the rest she is that one can tell at a glance."

"Thank you, sir," the boy said, and he choked a little as he spoke; "there's another woman that's all of that, too, and I hope you are sure of how much I feel it, and know it, for it's partly because of her that I want to ask you the favour. You see, sir, the Girl has never had much fun in her life; she's had a rather dreary time of it, staying at home with her mother, and all like that. I don't think she really understands what real romance is, hardly, sir."

"Ah, yes, she does, my boy, if I can read her eyes; she has the very highest in her life now, and she knows it, too!"

"Of course, that way," the boy admitted, "but she hasn't been excited in the way some people

AT THE OLD STAND

A Wedding Present taken out in Trade.

have been ; she has always known pretty well what was going to happen to-morrow, and all like that. Now it seems to me that if a man and a girl are ever going to have a romantic time it ought to be when they're getting married ; but it's all going so smooth and easy now that we're not having half the fun out of it that we should. It isn't for myself I'm speaking, for I couldn't be happier ; but don't you think it would be fine if it could be so dramatic that she'd always look back at it with a thrill, and tell about how it happened, and all like that ?”

“What in the world are you driving at ?” I asked him.

“I want to elope with her,” said the boy, a little bashfully.

“Then why not do it ?” I queried.

“Why, any way I could propose it would be absurd, for she's an orphan and there's no one in the world to object so as to make any reason for running away.”

“Well, what do you want me to do about it ?”

“I really don't care, as long as we have a romantic marriage,” he said ; and then, being a boy with a great deal of tact, he left the room.

It was assuredly a tale for Vivette, and to her I took it and told it, to her great interest. “The poor younket !” she said, laughing. “He shall have his kitten's eyes opened, so he shall. Indeed, she's a nice Girl, and I'm glad he asked us, for we can

AT THE OLD STAND

Prospiracy.

A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing.

give her the time of her life ! It will all come out of my pocket, though, for she'll hate me for it for a good while."

"And how shall we manage it, then?" said I.

"Listen here," said Vivette ; "you know she's an orphan, and I believe that there has been no guardian appointed since her mother died, last year ; there's been no one closely enough interested to see that it has been done. Now there's the only chance. Have me appointed guardian for the few months left of her minority, and then I will refuse my consent to the marriage, and they'll be the happiest couple alive. I'll do the hard-hearted parent till she consents to elope with him, for she's a nice girl, and it will take a great deal to persuade her. But Robin ! won't it be fun?"

The thing was easily managed, as Vivette had proposed, with the connivance of the boy, who was overjoyed at the prospect. The Girl had, indeed, long been a favourite of Vivette, and the new role of *protégée* was not a strange one. Vivette was endeared to her ward, besides, by many a little kindness and confidence, so that the new association was a delight to both, and the Girl fell into the life at our Sister-street house as if she had always been with us as an adopted daughter. All this made it rather hard for Vivette to break the thread of the harmony that bound us all together ; it seemed, sometimes, a cruel thing to do, and yet we both knew, as the boy knew, that it was far better

AT THE OLD STAND

I love.

You love.

He loves.

for the Girl to be aroused from the peaceful lethargy of her content, that she might feel the quickening spirit of rapture that was her right.

The Girl had grown to love Vivette as an elder sister. It was now to be seen whether her love for the boy would stand the test of a rupture with her guardian. So Vivette at last summoned her resolution, for she felt as if she were about to perform an operation ; and as gently as possible, yet firmly, as was necessary, she told the Girl that the boy was no fit husband for her, that she thought the match ill-advised, and that it would be far better were the wedding indefinitely postponed. The Girl listened with big eyes and choking breath, and at the end she broke into sobs. "But I've promised to marry him!" she said. Vivette shut her eyes and drove the stroke home. "Then you must break off the engagement," she said, without daring to look at the Girl, "for I shall never give my consent."

"Oh, Vivette!" gasped the Girl, in an agony of consternation and despair, "think of what you're saying, and what it means to me! Oh, I should think you'd do as you'd want to be done by!"

"Indeed, that's just what I *am* doing!" said Vivette, looking away. Then when she had composed herself, she said, "It's for your own good, dear; you don't know when you're well off."

"But we were to have had such a happy marriage," sobbed the Girl.

AT THE OLD STAND

We love.

You love.

They love.

“Indeed, I intend that you shall have a happier one!” Vivette said, smiling.

“I shall never marry any one else!” cried the Girl, with a fine action.

“Shall you marry without my consent?” asked Vivette, anxious as to what she would answer.

“Indeed I shall, if Leander will marry me!” said the Girl proudly.

The strain was too much for Vivette, and she ran away upstairs and came to me weeping a little hysterically. “Oh, it was *awful!*” she cried. “I wouldn’t do it for any one else in the world again, not even for you, Robin,—my heart is almost broken! But she stood up to me, though, and I’m proud of my ward, and you and Leander will have to do the rest.”

Leander was tremendously set up when he heard of the Girl’s challenge, and he set about the arrangements for the escapade with a pride and confidence in the lady of his choice lovely to see. I had joined my protest to Vivette’s remonstrance, but the Girl had refused to discuss the subject with us. Her one fear was that the boy would lose his situation in the Association if he defied us, but the boy swore bravely that he could bring us around, or, failing that, that he could succeed as well elsewhere.

He had a great to-do with her, however, when it came to the pinch of an actual runaway. She blew hot and blew cold, and her devotion to us

AT THE OLD STAND

Uncertainties in the Use of damp Fireworks.

for our past friendship fought with her love for the boy and his intense desire to carry her away in spite of our refusal. We had begun to be more and more strict with her, and to finish it, for it wore on Vivette harshly, we had refused to allow the Girl to receive letters from her lover. If she hadn't been the Dearest Girl in the World, she would have suspected such an absurd interference, but she had at last begun to taste the delight of a true love that did not run smooth, and I fancy her first dip into clandestine correspondence went to her head. Love had taught cunning even to Innocence, and after that Innocence took the game into her own hands.

We were now ready for the consummation. The boy was in the eighth heaven of delight, and the Girl was demure, but constrained. It was arranged between them, we found, that they were to meet at the Moonlight inn on Tuesday morning; the boy was to be there with horses waiting, and they were to gallop across country to Joyeuse. All that evening she kept her room, writing, but she came down at ten to bid us good-night. She had more than forgiven us by this time, though she didn't know it, for she was up to her ears in mystery, and her eyes were well lighted. She gave us a sweet good-night; but a blind man could have told by her manner there was something burning, and we could scarce forbear smiling. Nor could we help sniffing a little at the note she

AT THE OLD STAND

The Anise-hunt.

The Bushment.

left for us in the morning, for at nine we found the bird had flown, and a note, confessing everything, on her table.

Up and abroad were the boy and Girl, and up and abroad were we. We tracked her first to the general delivery window at the post-office, where she was getting her last word, and we had hard work to keep from colliding her, so deep she was in the boy's letter. (He *could* write, for Vivette and I had taught him!) When she did see us, she was off like a mad kite—the hunt was up. She ran down and hailed a cab, and we chartered a four-wheeler and steamed off to hold her in sight. There was a white face at the window of her carriage as she skived the first corner; her heart was at work! What would we not have given to taste her suspense! We trailed her at a sharp trot to the Moonlight inn, and lay in wait behind the transept of Fellside chapel to give her time. I had my own horses ready for the last dash, and before long she came cantering out of the yard, with a led horse, much to our surprise. We found afterwards that the boy had had a breakdown, and he joined the game, as it was, only by a hard cross-cut through the Fells. As her bad (or was it good?) luck would have it, some dolt of a stable-boy had put men's saddles on both horses, and in terror lest we should overtake her she had climbed up and was off with the boy's horse in tow to head him off. She was about a block away when she dis-

AT THE OLD STAND

A Foursome.

A Play for the Gallery.

covered the ambuscade, sitting her strawberry roan like an Amazon, astride of course, but with her skirts beautifully managed. As she whirled around with her mounts I swung Vivette up to the top of her chestnut and vaulted aboard myself. And then, at this crisis, as if it had been rehearsed like a church wedding, the boy appeared in a glade of the Fells, and gave a shout at her.

He was at the apex of a triangle, of which the Girl and we marked the ends of the base. She had a clean race at him, but Vivette and I had a stiff wall to take, which was just what was wanted to handicap us prettily. So the three of us started, pell-mell, the Girl thrashing at the roan and kicking the boy's horse like a circus rider. She charged up to him and was piled up on her horse's neck with the impetus, but before she reached him I had pulled a revolver and banged, I won't say *at* him, but *forbye*. The Girl screamed and Vivette screamed, for she always balked at firearms; but the boy had insisted upon this point.

By this time he had mounted, and he shook his fist at me, full of a fine impudence, and we a-dying with laughter.

“Come back, you young ruffian!” I yelled at him. “Come back with my ward, you kidnapper, or I'll shoot straighter!”

He threw a kiss at Vivette, a little out of his head with the whirl of the drama, and they pelted down the bridlepath at a hard run, singing together

AT THE OLD STAND

The Hare chases the Hounds.

Reveille.

like blackbirds ; hatless, both of them, before this. We closed in after them, galloping hand in hand as we had practised many a time in Maldivers, yelping like puppies on an afternoon chase.

Now we had the misfortune to have the best horses of the party, and we began to overhaul them hand over hand. "Faith, we'll ride them down in another minute," said Vivette ; "I'm going to accomplish an accident !" and she gave a scream, and, I don't know how, fell on the off side of her roan. It was a little too candid for me, and I dropped off in a lump to pick her up. "They're safe now, and we've done our share," she said, as I brushed her off. But then she cried, "Did you *ever*! The dear, blessed Chinaman! She's coming back!"

It was, indeed, too much for the Dearest Girl in the World. She had caught sight of the fall, over shoulder, and here she came back with a white face, on foot, running like a deer to Vivette's assistance. Vivette caught her in her arms, and then whether they were crying or laughing together, I couldn't tell. The boy looked at the Girl as though he couldn't look hard enough, and I looked at the boy. I don't think either of us ever came quite as near to tears for many a day after.

"Go away, bad boys, and leave us ; I want to talk to the Dearest Girl in the World !" said Vivette, with a radiant look at her ward.

So, in a half an hour, four rollicking riders swung

AT THE OLD STAND

A Child of Nature who takes after her Mother.

up to the rectory at Joyeuse, though only two had been expected.

† † † † † † † † † † † † †
† CHAPTER † THE anniversary of our
† III. EXIT † wedding was at hand, and
† VIVETTE † to renew our youth we resolved
† † † † † † † † † † † † †
to play truant, and brew a little
June gladness together.

How strange it seemed to be back in Maldivers at last ! It tasted bitter-sweet, as revisitations use, for here was the sovereignty of our honeymoon achieved, and though it showed now as beautiful, it was subtly changed in colour as by the turn of a season.

We pattered down the old lane, gay as larks, with the same old-time delight of existence in us, — ah, Vivette still had fuel to feed my fire, and will have, please God, forever ! I was a very story-book hero that day for the steady glow of love that warmed me ; the spring wind captured my mood, and she had but to catch my hand as we walked and it set me a-crowing like a game-cock. She walked bareheaded, smelling at the pine-breeze, and I did not notice that she was quieter than usual, or, if I did, I set it down to the open air and the voices of mother earth that often dominated her as nothing in town ever could.

We found the tavern, and after we had heard the gossip of the village we made a long evening of it before the fire, she browning her bare toes at the andirons, and I watching the flames over her

AT THE OLD STAND

Law of Compensation.

Fête or Fate?

shoulder. She was very still. The past year flickered like a spectre in the fire, and our thoughts crossed and recrossed each other, as a chance word tied them together with a common recollection, whence they diverged again, in chase of our erring fancies.

Suddenly I felt Vivette clasp my hands. "It will storm," she said, trembling; "I can't bear it to-night!"

She was not mistaken, for, as it is often enough the case, she felt the approach of a thunder-storm, and suffered pitifully while it lasted. She was a foundling, you remember, and it was her belief that she had been born on such a night. She was troubled by the vague imagining as to her unknown parents that came over her at these times, and she seemed so far away from me that I could not comfort her. There was an hour of torture for us both, but she met it bravely.

The next day was pure June — clear and mild, with a promise of summer to be joyously fulfilled, and we were out at daybreak and romped till the dew dried. It was at breakfast that we first heard of the fair that was on, and Vivette was in a high tension of excitement at the merry-making, for it was to be the event of the season in Maldivers, and not to be missed. So there we went straightway to renew our youth with the country-folk — to pat prize babies, and to see the side shows.

Vivette played fast and loose with one revel after

AT THE OLD STAND

Pink Lemonade. Aspirations. Tricks in all Trades.

another, tasting one primitive bliss, then passing on to the next, and returning to the most satisfactory. She was a master-hand at the ring-tossing, despoiling the proprietor of a full dozen Japanese parasols, with which booty she laded me. We interviewed the monstrosities, and ate all those things that one ought to eat at a county fair. Where went her pink sun-bonnet, there was a bunch of laddies to chorus her laughter—had there been a Maypole I would have been a king, no doubt, for the sun shone that day and she bloomed like a rose. And so by degrees we rollicked on with the rest of the innocents till we came to the balloon enclosure, for there was to be an ascension at four o'clock, and behind the canvas screen the big globe was rocking like a fat pippin in a tub of soft water.

Needs must but she should go inside and speculate upon the air-ship, and we found the bird tied in its cage moaning for its freedom. "Oh, for a sail in that chariot!" sighed Vivette; "it would be like dreaming, sure!" She climbed into the basket with her parasols, and then looked up. "We might climb up just to that first cloud," she said, with a far-away look, and very seriously.

"I've a mind to try it with you," said I.

"Oh, no, Robin!" she cried, a little wildly, I thought. But I had begun loosing the ropes.

"Do you see that toe?" she said, forcing her foot through a hole in the wicker. I kissed the point of it obediently. She had a way of putting

AT THE OLD STAND

A Problem with Two unknown Quantities.

a little shoe between the balusters as I went downstairs of a morning; and "Come here, while I whisper," she said. I held my head very close. "*Do you love me?*" she whispered, very small indeed. I didn't say no. "Always?" she insisted, with a demisemiquaver. I looked at her fearfully, for she was sobered. "Forever, Vivette!" I said, with a little gulp. She had grown pale. "I wonder who was my mother?" she said to herself, but half aloud. "*Forever*, then, Robin, — 'tis a long time!"

I forced a smile, and ran back to the gate and up the lane a way, to see that the watchman had not returned. As I turned, I saw a figure drop from the platform of the tent opposite the entrance, and hurriedly cross the street. There was something queerly familiar about his appearance, and I hesitated, dazed by the uncertainty of the resemblance. Who was it? In a flash it came back to me. It was the old ex-director of the Romance Association! A fearful presentiment came over me, and I jumped forward in a run. But it was too late. There was a yell from the crowd around me that sung in my ears like a tempest. Even then I was too bewildered to think. A man pointed upward. There, in mid-air, was the balloon, climbing toward the nearest cloud, and over the ledge of the basket a small face, and an arm outstretched. It rose higher and higher, and when it was a marble's size there fluttered out a shower of tiny parachutes. A

AT THE OLD STAND

A Case of suspended Animation.

westerly wind bore the balloon up into the blue ; it became a dot—then disappeared. I had broken into the enclosure, but no one was there.

A Japanese parasol fell at my feet — upon it was scrawled in a wild hand the word “ *Forever!* ”



And so O Tamaitai ends the sprightly History of the gay Vivette her merry Adventures with the Romance Association which was in the very pleasant City of Millamours done into five Books by the Lupe chaptered and imprinted for Copeland and Day in Boston Massachusetts by Rockwell and Churchill finished this First Day of November A.D.

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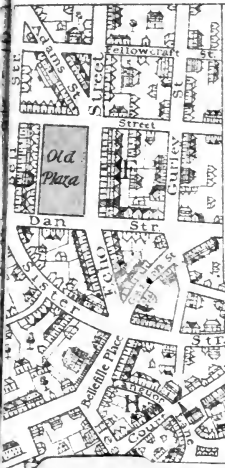
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