

## **A Wodehouse Miscellany      Articles & Stories**

*P. G. Wodehouse*

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# A WODEHOUSE MISCELLANY

Articles & Stories

By P. G. WODEHOUSE

[Transcriber's note: This collection of early Wodehouse writings was assembled for Project Gutenberg. Original publication dates for the stories are shown in square brackets in the Table of Contents.

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## ARTICLES

### SOME ASPECTS OF GAME-CAPTAINCY

To the Game-Captain (of the football variety) the world is peopled by three classes, firstly the keen and regular player, next the partial slacker, thirdly, and lastly, the entire, abject and absolute slacker.

Of the first class, the keen and regular player, little need be said. A keen player is a gem of purest rays serene, and when to his keenness he adds regularity and punctuality, life ceases to become the mere hollow blank that it would otherwise become, and joy reigns supreme.

The absolute slacker (to take the worst at once, and have done with it) needs the pen of a Swift before adequate justice can be done to his enormities. He is a blot, an excrescence. All those moments which are not spent in avoiding games (by means of that leave which is unanimously considered the peculiar property of the French nation) he uses in concocting ingenious excuses. Armed with these, he faces with calmness the disgusting curiosity of the Game-Captain, who officiously desires to know the reason of his non-appearance on the preceding day. These excuses are of the "had-to-go-and-see-a-man-about-a-dog" type, and rarely meet with that success for which their author hopes. In the end he discovers that his chest is weak, or his heart is subject to palpitations, and he forthwith produces a document to this effect, signed by a doctor. This has the desirable result of muzzling the tyrannical Game-Captain, whose sole solace is a look of intense and withering scorn. But this is seldom fatal, and generally, we rejoice to say, ineffectual.

The next type is the partial slacker. He differs from the absolute slacker in that at rare intervals he actually turns up, changed withal into the garb of the game, and thirsting for the fray. At this point begins the time of trouble for the Game-Captain. To begin with, he is forced by stress of ignorance to ask the newcomer his name. This is, of course, an insult of the worst kind. "A being who does not know my name," argues the partial slacker, "must be something not far from a criminal lunatic." The name is, however, extracted, and the partial slacker strides to the arena. Now arises insult No. 2. He is wearing his cap. A hint as to the advisability of removing this piece de resistance not being taken, he is ordered to assume a capless state, and by these means a coolness springs up between him and the G. C. Of this the Game-Captain is made aware when the game commences. The

partial slacker, scorning to insert his head in the scrum, assumes a commanding position outside and from this point criticises the Game-Captain's decisions with severity and pith. The last end of the partial slacker is generally a sad one. Stung by some pungent home-thrust, the Game-Captain is fain to try chastisement, and by these means silences the enemy's battery.

Sometimes the classes overlap. As for instance, a keen and regular player may, by some more than usually gross bit of bungling on the part of the G.-C., be moved to a fervour and eloquence worthy of Juvenal. Or, again, even the absolute slacker may for a time emulate the keen player, provided an opponent plant a shrewd kick on a tender spot. But, broadly speaking, there are only three classes.

## AN UNFINISHED COLLECTION

A silence had fallen upon the smoking room. The warrior just back from the front had enquired after George Vanderpoop, and we, who knew that George's gentle spirit had, to use a metaphor after his own heart, long since been withdrawn from circulation, were feeling uncomfortable and wondering how to break the news.

Smithson is our specialist in tact, and we looked to him to be spokesman.

"George," said Smithson at last, "the late George Vanderpoop----"

"Late!" exclaimed the warrior; "is he dead?"

"As a doornail," replied Smithson sadly. "Perhaps you would care to hear the story. It is sad, but interesting. You may recollect that, when you sailed, he was starting his journalistic career. For a young writer he had done remarkably well. The Daily Telephone had printed two of his contributions to their correspondence column, and a bright pen picture of his, describing how Lee's Lozenges for the Liver had snatched him from almost certain death, had quite a vogue. Lee, I believe, actually commissioned him to do a series on the subject."

"Well?" said the warrior.

"Well, he was, as I say, prospering very fairly, when in an unlucky moment he began to make a collection of editorial rejection forms. He had always been a somewhat easy prey to scourges of that description. But when he had passed safely through a sharp attack of Philatelistism and a rather nasty bout of Autographomania, everyone hoped and believed that he had turned the corner. The progress of his last illness was very rapid. Within a year he wanted but one specimen to make the complete set. This was the one published from the offices of the Scrutinizer. All the rest he had obtained with the greatest ease. I remember his telling me that a single short story of his, called 'The Vengeance of Vera Dalrymple,' had been instrumental in securing no less than thirty perfect specimens. Poor George! I was with him when he made his first attempt on the Scrutinizer. He had baited his hook with an essay on Evolution. He read me one or two passages from it. I stopped him at the third paragraph, and

congratulated him in advance, little thinking that it was sympathy rather than congratulations that he needed. When I saw him a week afterwards he was looking haggard. I questioned him, and by slow degrees drew out the story. The article on Evolution had been printed.

"Never say die, George," I said. 'Send them "Vera Dalrymple." No paper can take that.'

"He sent it. The \_Scrutinizer\_, which had been running for nearly a century without publishing a line of fiction, took it and asked for more. It was as if there were an editorial conspiracy against him."

"Well?" said the man of war.

"Then," said Smithson, "George pulled himself together. He wrote a parody of 'The Minstrel Boy.' I have seen a good many parodies, but never such a parody as that. By return of post came a long envelope bearing the crest of the \_Scrutinizer\_. 'At last,' he said, as he tore it open.

"George, old man," I said, 'your hand.'

"He looked at me a full minute. Then with a horrible, mirthless laugh he fell to the ground, and expired almost instantly. You will readily guess what killed him. The poem had been returned, \_but without a rejection form!\_"

## THE NEW ADVERTISING

"In Denmark," said the man of ideas, coming into the smoking room, "I see that they have original ideas on the subject of advertising. According to the usually well-informed Daily Lyre, all 'bombastic' advertising is punished with a fine. The advertiser is expected to describe his wares in restrained, modest language. In case this idea should be introduced into England, I have drawn up a few specimen advertisements which, in my opinion, combine attractiveness with a shrinking modesty at which no censor could cavil."

And in spite of our protests, he began to read us his first effort, descriptive of a patent medicine.

"It runs like this," he said:

Timson's Tonic for Distracted Deadbeats  
Has been known to cure  
We Hate to Seem to Boast,  
but  
Many Who have Tried It Are Still  
Alive

\* \* \* \* \*

Take a Dose or Two in Your Spare Time  
It's Not Bad Stuff

\* \* \* \* \*

Read what an outside stockbroker says:  
"Sir--After three months' steady absorption of your Tonic  
I was no worse."

\* \* \* \* \*

We do not wish to thrust ourselves forward in any way. If  
you prefer other medicines, by all means take them. Only we  
just thought we'd mention it--casually, as it were--that TIMSON'S  
is PRETTY GOOD.

"How's that?" inquired the man of ideas. "Attractive, I fancy, without  
being bombastic. Now, one about a new novel. Ready?"

#### MR. LUCIEN LOGROLLER'S LATEST

The Dyspepsia of the Soul  
The Dyspepsia of the Soul  
The Dyspepsia of the Soul

Don't buy it if you don't want to, but just  
listen to a few of the criticisms.

#### THE DYSPEPSIA OF THE SOUL

"Rather ... rubbish."--\_Spectator\_

"We advise all insomniacs to read Mr. Logroller's soporific  
pages."--\_Outlook\_

"Rot."--\_Pelican\_

THE DYSPEPSIA OF THE SOUL  
Already in its first edition.

"What do you think of that?" asked the man of ideas.

We told him.

#### THE SECRET PLEASURES OF REGINALD

I found Reggie in the club one Saturday afternoon. He was reclining in  
a long chair, motionless, his eyes fixed glassily on the ceiling. He  
frowned a little when I spoke. "You don't seem to be doing anything,"  
I said.

"It's not what I'm doing, it's what I am \_not\_ doing that  
matters."

It sounded like an epigram, but epigrams are so little associated with  
Reggie that I ventured to ask what he meant.

He sighed. "Ah well," he said. "I suppose the sooner I tell you, the

sooner you'll go. Do you know Bodfish?"

I shuddered. "Wilkinson Bodfish? I do."

"Have you ever spent a weekend at Bodfish's place in the country?"

I shuddered again. "I have."

"Well, I'm not spending the weekend at Bodfish's place in the country."

"I see you're not. But----"

"You don't understand. I do not mean that I am simply absent from Bodfish's place in the country. I mean that I am deliberately not spending the weekend there. When you interrupted me just now, I was not strolling down to Bodfish's garage, listening to his prattle about his new car."

I glanced around uneasily.

"Reggie, old man, you're--you're not--This hot weather----"

"I am perfectly well, and in possession of all my faculties. Now tell me. Can you imagine anything more awful than to spend a weekend with Bodfish?"

On the spur of the moment I could not.

"Can you imagine anything more delightful, then, than not spending a weekend with Bodfish? Well, that's what I'm doing now. Soon, when you have gone--if you have any other engagements, please don't let me keep you--I shall not go into the house and not listen to Mrs. Bodfish on the subject of young Willie Bodfish's premature intelligence."

I got his true meaning. "I see. You mean that you will be thanking your stars that you aren't with Bodfish."

"That is it, put crudely. But I go further. I don't indulge in a mere momentary self-congratulation, I do the thing thoroughly. If I were weekending at Bodfish's, I should have arrived there just half an hour ago. I therefore selected that moment for beginning not to weekend with Bodfish. I settled myself in this chair and I did not have my back slapped at the station. A few minutes later I was not whirling along the country roads, trying to balance the car with my legs and an elbow. Time passed, and I was not shaking hands with Mrs. Bodfish. I have just had the most corking half-hour, and shortly--when you have remembered an appointment--I shall go on having it. What I am really looking forward to is the happy time after dinner. I shall pass it in not playing bridge with Bodfish, Mrs. Bodfish, and a neighbor. Sunday morning is the best part of the whole weekend, though. That is when I shall most enjoy myself. Do you know a man named Pringle? Next Saturday I am not going to stay with Pringle. I forget who is not to be my host the Saturday after that. I have so many engagements of this kind that I lose track of them."

"But, Reggie, this is genius. You have hit on the greatest idea of the age. You might extend this system of yours."

"I do. Some of the jolliest evenings I have spent have been not at the theatre."

"I have often wondered what it was that made you look so fit and happy."

"Yes. These little non-visits of mine pick me up and put life into me for the coming week. I get up on Monday morning feeling like a lion. The reason I selected Bodfish this week, though I was practically engaged to a man named Stevenson who lives out in Connecticut, was that I felt rundown and needed a real rest. I shall be all right on Monday."

"And so shall I," I said, sinking into the chair beside him.

"You're not going to the country?" he asked regretfully.

"I am not. I, too, need a tonic. I shall join you at Bodfish's. I really feel a lot better already."

I closed my eyes, and relaxed, and a great peace settled upon me.

## MY BATTLE WITH DRINK

I could tell my story in two words--the two words "I drank." But I was not always a drinker. This is the story of my downfall--and of my rise--for through the influence of a good woman, I have, thank Heaven, risen from the depths.

The thing stole upon me gradually, as it does upon so many young men. As a boy, I remember taking a glass of root beer, but it did not grip me then. I can recall that I even disliked the taste. I was a young man before temptation really came upon me. My downfall began when I joined the Yonkers Shorthand and Typewriting College.

It was then that I first made acquaintance with the awful power of ridicule. They were a hard-living set at college--reckless youths. They frequented movie palaces. They thought nothing of winding up an evening with a couple of egg-phosphates and a chocolate fudge. They laughed at me when I refused to join them. I was only twenty. My character was undeveloped. I could not endure their scorn. The next time I was offered a drink I accepted. They were pleased, I remember. They called me "Good old Plum!" and a good sport and other complimentary names. I was intoxicated with sudden popularity.

How vividly I can recall that day! The shining counter, the placards advertising strange mixtures with ice cream as their basis, the busy men behind the counter, the half-cynical, half-pitying eyes of the girl in the cage where you bought the soda checks. She had seen so many happy, healthy boys through that little hole in the wire netting, so many thoughtless boys all eager for their first soda, clamoring to set their foot on the primrose path that leads to destruction.

It was an apple marshmallow sundae, I recollect. I dug my spoon into

it with an assumption of gaiety which I was far from feeling. The first mouthful almost nauseated me. It was like cold hair-oil. But I stuck to it. I could not break down now. I could not bear to forfeit the newly-won esteem of my comrades. They were gulping their sundaes down with the speed and enjoyment of old hands. I set my teeth, and persevered, and by degrees a strange exhilaration began to steal over me. I felt that I had burnt my boats and bridges; that I had crossed the Rubicon. I was reckless. I ordered another round. I was the life and soul of that party.

The next morning brought remorse. I did not feel well. I had pains, physical and mental. But I could not go back now. I was too weak to dispense with my popularity. I was only a boy, and on the previous evening the captain of the Checkers Club, to whom I looked up with an almost worshipping reverence, had slapped me on the back and told me that I was a corker. I felt that nothing could be excessive payment for such an honor. That night I gave a party at which orange phosphate flowed like water. It was the turning point.

I had got the habit!

I will pass briefly over the next few years. I continued to sink deeper and deeper into the slough. I knew all the drugstore clerks in New York by their first names, and they called me by mine. I no longer even had to specify the abomination I desired. I simply handed the man my ten cent check and said: "The usual, Jimmy," and he understood.

At first, considerations of health did not trouble me. I was young and strong, and my constitution quickly threw off the effects of my dissipation. Then, gradually, I began to feel worse. I was losing my grip. I found a difficulty in concentrating my attention on my work. I had dizzy spells. I became nervous and distraught. Eventually I went to a doctor. He examined me thoroughly, and shook his head.

"If I am to do you any good," he said, "you must tell me all. You must hold no secrets from me."

"Doctor," I said, covering my face with my hands, "I am a confirmed soda-fiend."

He gave me a long lecture and a longer list of instructions. I must take air and exercise and I must become a total abstainer from sundaes of all descriptions. I must avoid limeade like the plague, and if anybody offered me a Bulgarzoon I was to knock him down and shout for the nearest policeman.

I learned then for the first time what a bitterly hard thing it is for a man in a large and wicked city to keep from soda when once he has got the habit. Everything was against me. The old convivial circle began to shun me. I could not join in their revels and they began to look on me as a grouch. In the end, I fell, and in one wild orgy undid all the good of a month's abstinence. I was desperate then. I felt that nothing could save me, and I might as well give up the struggle. I drank two pin-ap-o-lades, three grapefruit-olas and an egg-zoolak, before pausing to take breath.

And then, the next day, I met May, the girl who effected my reformation. She was a clergyman's daughter who, to support her widowed mother, had accepted a non-speaking part in a musical comedy

production entitled "Oh Joy! Oh Pep!" Our acquaintance ripened, and one night I asked her out to supper.

I look on that moment as the happiest of my life. I met her at the stage door, and conducted her to the nearest soda-fountain. We were inside and I was buying the checks before she realized where she was, and I shall never forget her look of mingled pain and horror.

"And I thought you were a live one!" she murmured.

It seemed that she had been looking forward to a little lobster and champagne. The idea was absolutely new to me. She quickly convinced me, however, that such was the only refreshment which she would consider, and she recoiled with unconcealed aversion from my suggestion of a Mocha Malted and an Eva Tanguay. That night I tasted wine for the first time, and my reformation began.

It was hard at first, desperately hard. Something inside me was trying to pull me back to the sundaes for which I craved, but I resisted the impulse. Always with her divinely sympathetic encouragement, I gradually acquired a taste for alcohol. And suddenly, one evening, like a flash it came upon me that I had shaken off the cursed yoke that held me down: that I never wanted to see the inside of a drugstore again. Cocktails, at first repellent, have at last become palatable to me. I drink highballs for breakfast. I am saved.

## IN DEFENSE OF ASTIGMATISM

This is peculiarly an age where novelists pride themselves on the breadth of their outlook and the courage with which they refuse to ignore the realities of life; and never before have authors had such scope in the matter of the selection of heroes. In the days of the old-fashioned novel, when the hero was automatically Lord Blank or Sir Ralph Asterisk, there were, of course, certain rules that had to be observed, but today--why, you can hardly hear yourself think for the uproar of earnest young novelists proclaiming how free and unfettered they are. And yet, no writer has had the pluck to make his hero wear glasses.

In the old days, as I say, this was all very well. The hero was a young lordling, sprung from a line of ancestors who had never done anything with their eyes except wear a piercing glance before which lesser men quailed. But now novelists go into every class of society for their heroes, and surely, at least an occasional one of them must have been astigmatic. Kipps undoubtedly wore glasses; so did Bunker Bean; so did Mr. Polly, Clayhanger, Bibbs, Sheridan, and a score of others. Then why not say so?

Novelists are moving with the times in every other direction. Why not in this?

It is futile to advance the argument that glasses are unromantic. They are not. I know, because I wear them myself, and I am a singularly romantic figure, whether in my rimless, my Oxford gold-bordered, or the plain gent's spectacles which I wear in the privacy of my study.

Besides, everybody wears glasses nowadays. That is the point I wish to make. For commercial reasons, if for no others, authors ought to think seriously of this matter of goggling their heroes. It is an admitted fact that the reader of a novel likes to put himself in the hero's place--to imagine, while reading, that he is the hero. What an audience the writer of the first romance to star a spectacled hero will have. All over the country thousands of short-sighted men will polish their glasses and plunge into his pages. It is absurd to go on writing in these days for a normal-sighted public. The growing tenseness of life, with its small print, its newspapers read by artificial light, and its flickering motion pictures, is whittling down the section of the populace which has perfect sight to a mere handful.

I seem to see that romance. In fact, I think I shall write it myself. "Evadne,' murmured Clarence, removing his pince-nez and polishing them tenderly...." "See,' cried Clarence, 'how clearly every leaf of yonder tree is mirrored in the still water of the lake. I can't see myself, unfortunately, for I have left my glasses on the parlor piano, but don't worry about me: go ahead and see!" ... "Clarence adjusted his tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles with a careless gesture, and faced the assassins without a tremor." Hot stuff? Got the punch? I should say so. Do you imagine that there will be a single man in this country with the price of the book in his pocket and a pair of pince-nez on his face who will not scream and kick like an angry child if you withhold my novel from him?

And just pause for a moment to think of the serial and dramatic rights of the story. All editors wear glasses, so do all theatrical managers. My appeal will be irresistible. All I shall have to do will be to see that the check is for the right figure and to supervise the placing of the electric sign

## SPECTACLES OF FATE

BY P. G. WODEHOUSE

over the doors of whichever theatre I happen to select for the production of the play.

Have you ever considered the latent possibilities for dramatic situations in short sight? You know how your glasses cloud over when you come into a warm room out of the cold? Well, imagine your hero in such a position. He has been waiting outside the murderer's den preparatory to dashing in and saving the heroine. He dashes in. "Hands up, you scoundrels," he cries. And then his glasses get all misty, and there he is, temporarily blind, with a full-size desperado backing away and measuring the distance in order to hand him one with a pickaxe.

Or would you prefer something less sensational, something more in the romantic line? Very well. Hero, on his way to the Dowager Duchess's ball, slips on a banana-peel and smashes his only pair of spectacles. He dare not fail to attend the ball, for the dear Duchess would never forgive him; so he goes in and proposes to a girl he particularly dislikes because she is dressed in pink, and the heroine told him that she was going to wear pink. But the heroine's pink dress was late in coming home from the modiste's and she had to turn up in blue. The

heroine comes in just as the other girl is accepting him, and there you have a nice, live, peppy, kick-off for your tale of passion and human interest.

But I have said enough to show that the time has come when novelists, if they do not wish to be left behind in the race, must adapt themselves to modern conditions. One does not wish to threaten, but, as I say, we astigmatics are in a large minority and can, if we get together, make our presence felt. Roused by this article to a sense of the injustice of their treatment, the great army of glass-wearing citizens could very easily make novelists see reason. A boycott of non-spectacled heroes would soon achieve the necessary reform. Perhaps there will be no need to let matters go as far as that. I hope not. But, if this warning should be neglected, if we have any more of these novels about men with keen gray eyes or snapping black eyes or cheerful blue eyes--any sort of eyes, in fact, lacking some muscular affliction, we shall know what to do.

## PHOTOGRAPHERS AND ME

I look in my glass, dear reader, and what do I see? Nothing so frightfully hot, believe me. The face is slablike, the ears are large and fastened on at right-angles. Above the eyebrows comes a stagnant sea of bald forehead, stretching away into the distance with nothing to relieve it but a few wisps of lonely hair. The nose is blobby, the eyes dull, like those of a fish not in the best of health. A face, in short, taking it for all in all, which should be reserved for the gaze of my nearest and dearest who, through long habit, have got used to it and can see through to the pure white soul beneath. At any rate, a face not to be scattered about at random and come upon suddenly by nervous people and invalids.

And yet, just because I am an author, I have to keep on being photographed. It is the fault of publishers and editors, of course, really, but it is the photographer who comes in for the author's hate.

Something has got to be done about this practice of publishing authors' photographs. We have to submit to it, because editors and publishers insist. They have an extraordinary superstition that it helps an author's sales. The idea is that the public sees the photograph, pauses spell-bound for an instant, and then with a cry of ecstasy rushes off to the book-shop and buys copy after copy of the gargoyles' latest novel.

Of course, in practice, it works out just the other way. People read a review of an author's book and are told that it throbs with a passion so intense as almost to be painful, and are on the point of digging seven-and-sixpence out of their child's money-box to secure a copy, when their eyes fall on the man's photograph at the side of the review, and they find that he has a face like a rabbit and wears spectacles and a low collar. And this man is the man who is said to have laid bare the soul of a woman as with a scalpel.

Naturally their faith is shaken. They feel that a man like that cannot possibly know anything about Woman or any other subject except where

to go for a vegetarian lunch, and the next moment they have put down the hair-pin and the child is seven-and-six in hand and the author his ten per cent., or whatever it is, to the bad. And all because of a photograph.

For the ordinary man, the recent introduction of high-art methods into photography has done much to diminish the unpleasantness of the operation. In the old days of crude and direct posing, there was no escape for the sitter. He had to stand up, backed by a rustic stile and a flabby canvas sheet covered with exotic trees, glaring straight into the camera. To prevent any eleventh-hour retreat, a sort of spiky thing was shoved firmly into the back of his head leaving him with the choice of being taken as he stood or having an inch of steel jabbed into his skull. Modern methods have changed all that.

There are no photographs nowadays. Only "camera portraits" and "lens impressions." The full face has been abolished. The ideal of the present-day photographer is to eliminate the sitter as far as possible and concentrate on a general cloudy effect. I have in my possession two studies of my Uncle Theodore--one taken in the early 'nineties, the other in the present year. The first shows him, evidently in pain, staring before him with a fixed expression. In his right hand he grasps a scroll. His left rests on a moss-covered wall. Two sea-gulls are flying against a stormy sky.

As a likeness, it is almost brutally exact. My uncle stands forever condemned as the wearer of a made-up tie.

The second is different in every respect. Not only has the sitter been taken in the popular modern "one-twentieth face," showing only the back of the head, the left ear and what is either a pimple or a flaw in the print, but the whole thing is plunged in the deepest shadow. It is as if my uncle had been surprised by the camera while chasing a black cat in his coal-cellar on a moonlight night. There is no question as to which of the two makes the more attractive picture. My family resemble me in that respect. The less you see of us, the better we look.

## A PLEA FOR INDOOR GOLF

Indoor golf is that which is played in the home. Whether you live in a palace or a hovel, an indoor golf-course, be it only of nine holes, is well within your reach. A house offers greater facilities than an apartment, and I have found my game greatly improved since I went to live in the country. I can, perhaps, scarcely do better than give a brief description of the sporting nine-hole course which I have recently laid out in my present residence.

All authorities agree that the first hole on every links should be moderately easy, in order to give the nervous player a temporary and fictitious confidence.

At Wodehouse Manor, therefore, we drive off from the front door--in order to get the benefit of the door-mat--down an entry fairway, carpeted with rugs and without traps. The hole--a loving-cup--is just

under the stairs; and a good player ought to have no difficulty in doing it in two.

The second hole, a short and simple one, takes you into the telephone booth. Trouble begins with the third, a long dog-leg hole through the kitchen into the dining-room. This hole is well trapped with table-legs, kitchen utensils, and a moving hazard in the person of Clarence the cat, who is generally wandering about the fairway. The hole is under the glass-and-china cupboard, where you are liable to be bunkered if you loft your approach-shot excessively.

The fourth and fifth holes call for no comment. They are without traps, the only danger being that you may lose a stroke through hitting the maid if she happens to be coming down the back stairs while you are taking a mashie-shot. This is a penalty under the local rule.

The sixth is the indispensable water-hole. It is short, but tricky. Teeing off from just outside the bathroom door, you have to loft the ball over the side of the bath, holing out in the little vent pipe, at the end where the water runs out.

The seventh is the longest hole on the course. Starting at the entrance of the best bedroom, a full drive takes you to the head of the stairs, whence you will need at least two more strokes to put you dead on the pin in the drawing-room. In the drawing-room the fairway is trapped with photograph frames--with glass, complete--these serving as casual water: and anyone who can hole out on the piano in five or under is a player of class. Bogey is six, and I have known even such a capable exponent of the game as my Uncle Reginald, who is plus two on his home links on Park Avenue, to take twenty-seven at the hole. But on that occasion he had the misfortune to be bunkered in a photograph of my Aunt Clara and took no fewer than eleven strokes with his niblick to extricate himself from it.

The eighth and ninth holes are straightforward, and can be done in two and three respectively, provided you swing easily and avoid the canary's cage. Once trapped there, it is better to give up the hole without further effort. It is almost impossible to get out in less than fifty-six, and after you have taken about thirty the bird gets visibly annoyed.

## THE ALARMING SPREAD OF POETRY

To the thinking man there are few things more disturbing than the realization that we are becoming a nation of minor poets. In the good old days poets were for the most part confined to garrets, which they left only for the purpose of being ejected from the offices of magazines and papers to which they attempted to sell their wares. Nobody ever thought of reading a book of poems unless accompanied by a guarantee from the publisher that the author had been dead at least a hundred years. Poetry, like wine, certain brands of cheese, and public buildings, was rightly considered to improve with age; and no connoisseur could have dreamed of filling himself with raw, indigestible verse, warm from the maker.

Today, however, editors are paying real money for poetry; publishers are making a profit on books of verse; and many a young man who, had he been born earlier, would have sustained life on a crust of bread, is now sending for the manager to find out how the restaurant dares try to sell a fellow champagne like this as genuine Pommery Brut. Naturally this is having a marked effect on the life of the community. Our children grow to adolescence with the feeling that they can become poets instead of working. Many an embryo bill clerk has been ruined by the heady knowledge that poems are paid for at the rate of a dollar a line. All over the country promising young plasterers and rising young motormen are throwing up steady jobs in order to devote themselves to the new profession. On a sunny afternoon down in Washington Square one's progress is positively impeded by the swarms of young poets brought out by the warm weather. It is a horrible sight to see those unfortunate youths, who ought to be sitting happily at desks writing "Dear Sir, Your favor of the tenth inst. duly received and contents noted. In reply we beg to state...." wandering about with their fingers in their hair and their features distorted with the agony of composition, as they try to find rhymes to "cosmic" and "symbolism."

And, as if matters were not bad enough already, along comes Mr. Edgar Lee Masters and invents *\_vers libre\_*. It is too early yet to judge the full effects of this man's horrid discovery, but there is no doubt that he has taken the lid off and unleashed forces over which none can have any control. All those decent restrictions which used to check poets have vanished, and who shall say what will be the outcome?

Until Mr. Masters came on the scene there was just one thing which, like a salient fortress in the midst of an enemy's advancing army, acted as a barrier to the youth of the country. When one's son came to one and said, "Father, I shall not be able to fulfill your dearest wish and start work in the fertilizer department. I have decided to become a poet," although one could no longer frighten him from his purpose by talking of garrets and starvation, there was still one weapon left. "What about the rhymes, Willie?" you replied, and the eager light died out of the boy's face, as he perceived the catch in what he had taken for a good thing. You pressed your advantage. "Think of having to spend your life making one line rhyme with another! Think of the bleak future, when you have used up 'moon' and 'June,' 'love' and 'dove,' 'May' and 'gay!' Think of the moment when you have ended the last line but one of your poem with 'windows' or 'warmth' and have to buckle to, trying to make the thing couple up in accordance with the rules! What then, Willie?"

Next day a new hand had signed on in the fertilizer department.

But now all that has changed. Not only are rhymes no longer necessary, but editors positively prefer them left out. If Longfellow had been writing today he would have had to revise "The Village Blacksmith" if he wanted to pull in that dollar a line. No editor would print stuff like:

Under the spreading chestnut tree  
The village smithy stands.  
The smith a brawny man is he  
With large and sinewy hands.

If Longfellow were living in these hyphenated, free and versy days, he

would find himself compelled to take his pen in hand and dictate as follows:

In life I was the village smith,  
I worked all day  
But  
I retained the delicacy of my complexion  
Because  
I worked in the shade of the chestnut tree  
Instead of in the sun  
Like Nicholas Blodgett, the expressman.  
I was large and strong  
Because  
I went in for physical culture  
And deep breathing  
And all those stunts.  
I had the biggest biceps in Spoon River.

Who can say where this thing will end? *Vers libre* is within the reach of all. A sleeping nation has wakened to the realization that there is money to be made out of chopping its prose into bits. Something must be done shortly if the nation is to be saved from this menace. But what? It is no good shooting Edgar Lee Masters, for the mischief has been done, and even making an example of him could not undo it. Probably the only hope lies in the fact that poets never buy other poets' stuff. When once we have all become poets, the sale of verse will cease or be limited to the few copies which individual poets will buy to give to their friends.

## MY LIFE AS A DRAMATIC CRITIC

I had always wanted to be a dramatic critic. A taste for sitting back and watching other people work, so essential to the make-up of this sub-species of humanity, has always been one of the leading traits in my character.

I have seldom missed a first night. No sooner has one periodical got rid of me than another has had the misfortune to engage me, with the result that I am now the foremost critic of the day, read assiduously by millions, fawned upon by managers, courted by stagehands. My lightest word can make or mar a new production. If I say a piece is bad, it dies. It may not die instantly. Generally it takes forty weeks in New York and a couple of seasons on the road to do it, but it cannot escape its fate. Sooner or later it perishes. That is the sort of man I am.

Whatever else may be charged against me, I have never deviated from the standard which I set myself at the beginning of my career. If I am called upon to review a play produced by a manager who is considering one of my own works, I do not hesitate. I praise that play.

If an actor has given me a lunch, I refuse to bite the hand that has fed me. I praise that actor's performance. I can only recall one instance of my departing from my principles. That was when the champagne was corked, and the man refused to buy me another bottle.











felt like it. (I allude to that song in "The Grand Duke.")

And yet the modern lyricist, to look on the bright side, has advantages that Gilbert never had. Gilbert never realised the possibilities of Hawaii, with its admirably named beaches, shores, and musical instruments. Hawaii--capable as it is of being rhymed with "higher"--has done much to sweeten the lot--and increase the annual income of an industrious and highly respectable but down-trodden class of the community.

## THE PAST THEATRICAL SEASON

### And the Six Best Performances by Unstarred Actors

What lessons do we draw from the past theatrical season?

In the first place, the success of *The Wanderer* proves that the day of the small and intimate production is over and that what the public wants is the large spectacle. In the second place, the success of *Oh, Boy!* (I hate to refer to it, as I am one of the trio who perpetrated it; but, honestly, we're simply turning them away in droves, and Rockefeller has to touch Morgan for a bit if he wants to buy a ticket from the speculators)--proves that the day of the large spectacle is over and that what the public wants is the small and intimate production.

Then, the capacity business done by *The Thirteenth Chair* shows clearly that what the proletariat demands nowadays, is the plotty piece and that the sun of the bright dialogue comedy has set; while the capacity business done by *A Successful Calamity* shows clearly that the number of the plotty piece is up.

You will all feel better and more able to enjoy yourselves now that a trained critical mind has put you right on this subtle point.

No review of a theatrical season would be complete without a tabulated list--or even an untabulated one--of the six best performances by unstarred actors during the past season.

The present past season--that is to say, the past season which at present is the last season--has been peculiarly rich in hot efforts by all sorts of performers. My own choice would be: 1. Anna Wheaton, in *Oh, Boy!* 2. Marie Carroll, in the piece at the Princess Theatre. 3. Edna May Oliver, in Comstock and Elliott's new musical comedy. 4. Tom Powers, in the show on the south side of 39th Street. 5. Hal Forde, in the successor to *Very Good, Eddie*. 6. Stephen Maley, in *Oh, Boy!*

You would hardly credit the agony it gives me to allude, even in passing, to the above musical melange, but one must be honest to one's public. In case there may be any who dissent from my opinion, I append a supplementary list of those entitled to honorable mention: 1. The third sheep from the O. P. side in *The Wanderer*. 2. The trick lamp in *Magic*. 3. The pink pajamas in *You're in Love*. 4.

The knife in The Thirteenth Chair. 5. The Confused Noise Without in The Great Divide. 6. Jack Merritt's hair in Oh, Boy!

There were few discoveries among the dramatists. Of the older playwrights, Barrie produced a new one and an ancient one, but the Shakespeare boom, so strong last year, petered out. There seems no doubt that the man, in spite of a flashy start, had not the stuff. I understand that some of his things are doing fairly well on the road. Clare Kummer, whose "Dearie" I have so frequently sung in my bath, to the annoyance of all, suddenly turned right round, dropped song-writing, and ripped a couple of hot ones right over the plate. Mr. Somerset Maugham succeeded in shocking Broadway so that the sidewalks were filled with blushing ticket-speculators.

Most of the critics have done good work during this season. As for myself, I have guided the public mind in this magazine soundly and with few errors. If it were not for the fact that nearly all the plays I praised died before my review appeared, while the ones I said would not run a week are still packing them in, I could look back to a flawless season.

As you can see, I have had a very pleasant theatrical season. The weather was uniformly fine on the nights when I went to the theatre. I was particularly fortunate in having neighbors at most of the plays who were not afflicted with coughs or a desire to explain the plot to their wives. I have shaken hands with A. L. Erlanger and been nodded to on the street by Lee Shubert. I have broadened my mind by travel on the road with a theatrical company, with the result that, if you want to get me out of New York, you will have to use dynamite.

Take it for all in all, a most satisfactory season, full of pregnant possibilities--and all that sort of thing.

## POEMS

### DAMON AND PYTHIAS A Romance

Since Earth was first created,  
    Since Time began to fly,  
No friends were e'er so mated,  
    So firm as JONES and I.  
Since primal Man was fashioned  
    To people ice and stones,  
No pair, I ween, had ever been  
    Such chums as I and JONES.

In fair and foulest weather,  
    Beginning when but boys,  
We faced our woes together,

We shared each other's joys.  
Together, sad or merry,  
We acted hand in glove,  
Until--'twas careless, very--  
I chanced to fall in love.

The lady's points to touch on,  
Her name was JULIA WHITE,  
Her lineage high, her scutcheon  
Untarnished; manners, bright;  
Complexion, soft and creamy;  
Her hair, of golden hue;  
Her eyes, in aspect, dreamy,  
In colour, greyish blue.

For her I sighed, I panted;  
I saw her in my dreams;  
I vowed, protested, ranted;  
I sent her chocolate creams.  
Until methought one morning  
I seemed to hear a voice,  
A still, small voice of warning.  
"Does JONES approve your choice?"

To JONES of my affection  
I spoke that very night.  
If he had no objection,  
I said I'd wed Miss WHITE.  
I asked him for his blessing,  
But, turning rather blue,  
He said: "It's most distressing,  
But \_I\_ adore her, too."

"Then, JONES," I answered, sobbing,  
"My wooing's at an end,  
I couldn't think of robbing  
My best, my only friend.  
The notion makes me furious--  
I'd much prefer to die."  
"Perhaps you'll think it curious,"  
Said JONES, "but so should I."

Nor he nor I would falter  
In our resolve one jot.  
I bade him seek the altar,  
He vowed that he would not.  
"She's yours, old fellow. Make her  
As happy as you can."  
"Not so," said I, "you take her--  
You are the lucky man."

At length--the situation  
Had lasted now a year--  
I had an inspiration,  
Which seemed to make things clear.  
"Supposing," I suggested,  
"We ask Miss WHITE to choose?  
I should be interested  
To hear her private views.

"Perhaps she has a preference--  
I own it sounds absurd--  
But I submit, with deference,  
That she might well be heard.  
In clear, commercial diction  
The case in point we'll state,  
Disclose the cause of friction,  
And leave the rest to Fate."

We did, and on the morrow  
The postman brought us news.  
Miss WHITE expressed her sorrow  
At having to refuse.  
Of all her many reasons  
This seemed to me the pith:  
Six months before (or rather more)  
She'd married Mr. SMITH.

## THE HAUNTED TRAM

Ghosts of The Towers, The Grange, The Court,  
Ghosts of the Castle Keep.  
Ghosts of the finicking, "high-life" sort  
Are growing a trifle cheap.  
But here is a spook of another stamp,  
No thin, theatrical sham,  
But a spectre who fears not dirt nor damp:  
He rides on a London tram.

By the curious glance of a mortal eye  
He is not seen. He's heard.  
His steps go a-creeping, creeping by,

He speaks but a single word.  
You may hear his feet: you may hear them plain,  
For--it's odd in a ghost--they crunch.  
You may hear the whirr of his rattling chain,  
And the ting of his ringing punch.

The gathering shadows of night fall fast;  
The lamps in the street are lit;  
To the roof have the eerie footsteps passed,  
Where the outside passengers sit.  
To the passenger's side has the spectre paced;  
For a moment he halts, they say,  
Then a ring from the punch at the unseen waist,  
And the footsteps pass away.

That is the tale of the haunted car;  
And if on that car you ride  
You won't, believe me, have journeyed far  
Ere the spectre seeks your side.  
Ay, all unseen by your seat he'll stand,

And (unless it's a wig) your hair  
Will rise at the touch of his icy hand,  
And the sound of his whispered "Fare!"

At the end of the trip, when you're getting down  
(And you'll probably simply fly!)  
Just give the conductor half-a-crown,  
Ask who is the ghost and why.  
And the man will explain with bated breath  
(And point you a moral) thus:  
"E's a pore young bloke wot was crushed to death  
By people as fought  
As they didn't ought  
For seats on a crowded bus."

## STORIES

### WHEN PAPA SWORE IN HINDUSTANI

"Sylvia!"

"Yes, papa."

"That infernal dog of yours----"

"Oh, papa!"

"Yes, that infernal dog of yours has been at my carnations again!"

Colonel Reynolds, V.C., glared sternly across the table at Miss Sylvia Reynolds, and Miss Sylvia Reynolds looked in a deprecatory manner back at Colonel Reynolds, V.C.; while the dog in question--a foppish pug--happening to meet the colonel's eye in transit, crawled unostentatiously under the sideboard, and began to wrestle with a bad conscience.

"Oh, naughty Tommy!" said Miss Reynolds mildly, in the direction of the sideboard.

"Yes, my dear," assented the colonel; "and if you could convey to him the information that if he does it once more--yes, just once more!--I shall shoot him on the spot you would be doing him a kindness." And the colonel bit a large crescent out of his toast, with all the energy and conviction of a man who has thoroughly made up his mind. "At six o'clock this morning," continued he, in a voice of gentle melancholy, "I happened to look out of my bedroom window, and saw him. He had then destroyed two of my best plants, and was commencing on a third, with every appearance of self-satisfaction. I threw two large brushes and a boot at him."

"Oh, papa! They didn't hit him?"

"No, my dear, they did not. The brushes missed him by several yards, and the boot smashed a fourth carnation. However, I was so fortunate as to attract his attention, and he left off."

"I can't think what makes him do it. I suppose it's bones. He's got bones buried all over the garden."

"Well, if he does it again, you'll find that there will be a few more bones buried in the garden!" said the colonel grimly; and he subsided into his paper.

Sylvia loved the dog partly for its own sake, but principally for that of the giver, one Reginald Dallas, whom it had struck at an early period of their acquaintance that he and Miss Sylvia Reynolds were made for one another. On communicating this discovery to Sylvia herself he had found that her views upon the subject were identical with his own; and all would have gone well had it not been for a melancholy accident.

One day while out shooting with the colonel, with whom he was doing his best to ingratiate himself, with a view to obtaining his consent to the match, he had allowed his sporting instincts to carry him away to such a degree that, in sporting parlance, he wiped his eye badly. Now, the colonel prided himself with justice on his powers as a shot; but on this particular day he had a touch of liver, which resulted in his shooting over the birds, and under the birds, and on each side of the birds, but very rarely at the birds. Dallas being in especially good form, it was found, when the bag came to be counted, that, while he had shot seventy brace, the colonel had only managed to secure five and a half!

His bad marksmanship destroyed the last remnant of his temper. He swore for half an hour in Hindustani, and for another half-hour in English. After that he felt better. And when, at the end of dinner, Sylvia came to him with the absurd request that she might marry Mr. Reginald Dallas he did not have a fit, but merely signified in fairly moderate terms his entire and absolute refusal to think of such a thing.

This had happened a month before, and the pug, which had changed hands in the earlier days of the friendship, still remained, at the imminent risk of its life, to soothe Sylvia and madden her father.

It was generally felt that the way to find favour in the eyes of Sylvia--which were a charming blue, and well worth finding favour in--was to show an intelligent and affectionate interest in her dog. This was so up to a certain point; but no farther, for the mournful recollection of Mr. Dallas prevented her from meeting their advances in quite the spirit they could have wished.

However, they persevered, and scarcely a week went by in which Thomas was not rescued from an artfully arranged horrible fate by somebody.

But all their energy was in reality wasted, for Sylvia remembered her faithful Reggie, who corresponded vigorously every day, and refused to be put off with worthless imitations. The lovesick swains, however, could not be expected to know of this, and the rescuing of Tommy proceeded briskly, now one, now another, playing the role of hero.





"It was a pug, you know. It ought to have arrived by this time."

"Yes. I am inclined to think it has. Had it any special characteristics?"

"No, I don't think so. Just an ordinary pug."

"Well, young man, if you will go to my coachhouse, you will find nineteen ordinary pugs; and if you would kindly select your beast, and shoot it, I should be much obliged."

"Nineteen?" said the other, in astonishment. "Why, are you setting up as a dog-fancier in your old age, colonel?"

This was too much for the colonel. He exploded.

"Old age! Confound your impudence! Dog-fancier! No, sir! I have not become a dog-fancier in what you are pleased to call my old age! But while there is no law to prevent a lot of dashed young puppies like yourself, sir--like yourself--sending your confounded pug-dogs to my daughter, who ought to have known better than to have let them out of their dashed hampers, I have no defence.

"Dog-fancier! Gad! Unless those dogs are removed by this time to-morrow, sir, they will go straight to the Battersea Home, where I devoutly trust they will poison them. Here are the cards of the other gentlemen who were kind enough to think that I might wish to set up for a dog-fancier in my old age. Perhaps you will kindly return them to their owners, and tell them what I have just said." And he strode off, leaving the young man in a species of trance.

"Sylvia!" said the colonel, on arriving home.

"Yes, papa."

"Do you still want to marry that Dallas fellow? Now, for Heaven's sake, don't start crying! Goodness knows I've been worried enough this morning without that. Please answer a plain question in a fairly sane manner. Do you, or do you not?"

"Of course I do, papa."

"Then you may. He's the furthest from being a fool of any of the young puppies who live about here, and he knows one end of a gun from the other. I'll write to him now."

"Dear Dallas" (wrote the colonel),--"I find, on consideration, that you are the only sensible person in the neighbourhood. I hope you will come to lunch to-day. And if you still want to marry my daughter, you may."

To which Dallas replied by return of messenger:

"Thanks for both invitations. I will."

An hour later he arrived in person, and the course of true love pulled itself together, and began to run smooth again.































"No; it has not been typed. He is sending the manuscript just as he wrote it."

"But he could write it over again."

"As if he would have the energy!"

"But----"

"If you are going to do nothing but make absurd objections, Bertie----"

"I was only pointing things out."

"Well, don't! Once and for all, will you do me this quite simple act of kindness?"

The way she put it gave me an idea.

"Why not get Edwin to do it? Keep it in the family, kind of, don't you know. Besides, it would be a boon to the kid."

A jolly bright idea it seemed to me. Edwin was her young brother, who was spending his holidays at Easeby. He was a ferret-faced kid, whom I had disliked since birth. As a matter of fact, talking of Recollections and Memories, it was young blighted Edwin who, nine years before, had led his father to where I was smoking his cigar and caused all of the unpleasantness. He was fourteen now and had just joined the Boy Scouts. He was one of those thorough kids, and took his responsibilities pretty seriously. He was always in a sort of fever because he was dropping behind schedule with his daily acts of kindness. However hard he tried, he'd fall behind; and then you would find him prowling about the house, setting such a clip to try and catch up with himself that Easeby was rapidly becoming a perfect hell for man and beast.

The idea didn't seem to strike Florence.

"I shall do nothing of the kind, Bertie. I wonder you can't appreciate the compliment I am paying you--trusting you like this."

"Oh, I see that all right, but what I mean is, Edwin would do it so much better than I would. These Boy Scouts are up to all sorts of dodges. They spoor, don't you know, and take cover and creep about, and what not."

"Bertie, will you or will you not do this perfectly trivial thing for me? If not, say so now, and let us end this farce of pretending that you care a snap of the fingers for me."

"Dear old soul, I love you devotedly!"

"Then will you or will you not----"

"Oh, all right," I said. "All right! All right! All right!"

And then I tottered forth to think it over. I met Jeeves in the passage just outside.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I was endeavouring to find you."

"What's the matter?"

"I felt that I should tell you, sir, that somebody has been putting black polish on our brown walking shoes."

"What! Who? Why?"

"I could not say, sir."

"Can anything be done with them?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Damn!"

"Very good, sir."

\* \* \* \* \*

I've often wondered since then how these murderer fellows manage to keep in shape while they're contemplating their next effort. I had a much simpler sort of job on hand, and the thought of it rattled me to such an extent in the night watches that I was a perfect wreck next day. Dark circles under the eyes--I give you my word! I had to call on Jeeves to rally round with one of those life-savers of his.

From breakfast on I felt like a bag-snatcher at a railway station. I had to hang about waiting for the parcel to be put on the hall table, and it wasn't put. Uncle Willoughby was a fixture in the library, adding the finishing touches to the great work, I supposed, and the more I thought the thing over the less I liked it. The chances against my pulling it off seemed about three to two, and the thought of what would happen if I didn't gave me cold shivers down the spine. Uncle Willoughby was a pretty mild sort of old boy, as a rule, but I've known him to cut up rough, and, by Jove, he was scheduled to extend himself if he caught me trying to get away with his life work.

It wasn't till nearly four that he toddled out of the library with the parcel under his arm, put it on the table, and toddled off again. I was hiding a bit to the south-east at the moment, behind a suit of armour. I bounded out and legged it for the table. Then I nipped upstairs to hide the swag. I charged in like a mustang and nearly stubbed my toe on young blighted Edwin, the Boy Scout. He was standing at the chest of drawers, confound him, messing about with my ties.

"Hallo!" he said.

"What are you doing here?"

"I'm tidying your room. It's my last Saturday's act of kindness."

"Last Saturday's?"

"I'm five days behind. I was six till last night, but I polished your shoes."

"Was it you----"

"Yes. Did you see them? I just happened to think of it. I was in here, looking round. Mr. Berkeley had this room while you were away. He left this morning. I thought perhaps he might have left something in it that I could have sent on. I've often done acts of kindness that way."

"You must be a comfort to one and all!"

It became more and more apparent to me that this infernal kid must somehow be turned out eftsoons or right speedily. I had hidden the parcel behind my back, and I didn't think he had seen it; but I wanted to get at that chest of drawers quick, before anyone else came along.

"I shouldn't bother about tidying the room," I said.

"I like tidying it. It's not a bit of trouble--really."

"But it's quite tidy now."

"Not so tidy as I shall make it."

This was getting perfectly rotten. I didn't want to murder the kid, and yet there didn't seem any other way of shifting him. I pressed down the mental accelerator. The old lemon throbbled fiercely. I got an idea.

"There's something much kinder than that which you could do," I said. "You see that box of cigars? Take it down to the smoking-room and snip off the ends for me. That would save me no end of trouble. Stagger along, laddie."

He seemed a bit doubtful; but he staggered. I shoved the parcel into a drawer, locked it, trousered the key, and felt better. I might be a chump, but, dash it, I could out-general a mere kid with a face like a ferret. I went downstairs again. Just as I was passing the smoking-room door, out curveted Edwin. It seemed to me that if he wanted to do a real act of kindness he would commit suicide.

"I'm snipping them," he said.

"Snip on! Snip on!"

"Do you like them snipped much, or only a bit?"

"Medium."

"All right. I'll be getting on, then."

"I should."

And we parted.

Fellows who know all about that sort of thing--detectives, and so on--will tell you that the most difficult thing in the world is to get rid of the body. I remember, as a kid, having to learn by heart a poem about a bird by the name of Eugene Aram, who had the deuce of a job in this respect. All I can recall of the actual poetry is the bit that goes:

\_Tum-tum, tum-tum, tum-tumty-tum,  
I slew him, tum-tum-tum!\_

But I recollect that the poor blighter spent much of his valuable time dumping the corpse into ponds and burying it, and what not, only to have it pop out at him again. It was about an hour after I had shoved the parcel into the drawer when I realised that I had let myself in for just the same sort of thing.

Florence had talked in an airy sort of way about destroying the manuscript; but when one came down to it, how the deuce can a chap destroy a great chunky mass of paper in somebody else's house in the middle of summer? I couldn't ask to have a fire in my bedroom, with the thermometer in the eighties. And if I didn't burn the thing, how else could I get rid of it? Fellows on the battle-field eat dispatches to keep them from falling into the hands of the enemy, but it would have taken me a year to eat Uncle Willoughby's Recollections.

I'm bound to say the problem absolutely baffled me. The only thing seemed to be to leave the parcel in the drawer and hope for the best.

I don't know whether you have ever experienced it, but it's a dashed unpleasant thing having a crime on one's conscience. Towards the end of the day the mere sight of the drawer began to depress me. I found myself getting all on edge; and once when Uncle Willoughby trickled silently into the smoking-room when I was alone there and spoke to me before I knew he was there, I broke the record for the sitting high jump.

I was wondering all the time when Uncle Willoughby would sit up and take notice. I didn't think he would have time to suspect that anything had gone wrong till Saturday morning, when he would be expecting, of course, to get the acknowledgment of the manuscript from the publishers. But early on Friday evening he came out of the library as I was passing and asked me to step in. He was looking considerably rattled.

"Bertie," he said--he always spoke in a precise sort of pompous kind of way--"an exceedingly disturbing thing has happened. As you know, I dispatched the manuscript of my book to Messrs. Riggs and Ballinger, the publishers, yesterday afternoon. It should have reached them by the first post this morning. Why I should have been uneasy I cannot say, but my mind was not altogether at rest respecting the safety of the parcel. I therefore telephoned to Messrs. Riggs and Ballinger a few moments back to make enquiries. To my consternation they informed me that they were not yet in receipt of my manuscript."

"Very rum!"

"I recollect distinctly placing it myself on the hall table in good time to be taken to the village. But here is a sinister thing. I have spoken to Oakshott, who took the rest of the letters to the post office, and he cannot recall seeing it there. He is, indeed, unswerving in his assertions that when he went to the hall to collect the letters there was no parcel among them."

"Sounds funny!"

"Bertie, shall I tell you what I suspect?"

"What's that?"

"The suspicion will no doubt sound to you incredible, but it alone seems to fit the facts as we know them. I incline to the belief that the parcel has been stolen."

"Oh, I say! Surely not!"

"Wait! Hear me out. Though I have said nothing to you before, or to anyone else, concerning the matter, the fact remains that during the past few weeks a number of objects--some valuable, others not--have disappeared in this house. The conclusion to which one is irresistibly impelled is that we have a kleptomaniac in our midst. It is a peculiarity of kleptomania, as you are no doubt aware, that the subject is unable to differentiate between the intrinsic values of objects. He will purloin an old coat as readily as a diamond ring, or a tobacco pipe costing but a few shillings with the same eagerness as a purse of gold. The fact that this manuscript of mine could be of no possible value to any outside person convinces me that----"

"But, uncle, one moment; I know all about those things that were stolen. It was Meadowes, my man, who pinched them. I caught him snaffling my silk socks. Right in the act, by Jove!"

He was tremendously impressed.

"You amaze me, Bertie! Send for the man at once and question him."

"But he isn't here. You see, directly I found that he was a sock-sneaker I gave him the boot. That's why I went to London--to get a new man."

"Then, if the man Meadowes is no longer in the house it could not be he who purloined my manuscript. The whole thing is inexplicable."

After which we brooded for a bit. Uncle Willoughby potted about the room, registering baffledness, while I sat sucking at a cigarette, feeling rather like a chappie I'd once read about in a book, who murdered another cove and hid the body under the dining-room table, and then had to be the life and soul of a dinner party, with it there all the time. My guilty secret oppressed me to such an extent that after a while I couldn't stick it any longer. I lit another cigarette and started for a stroll in the grounds, by way of cooling off.

It was one of those still evenings you get in the summer, when you can hear a snail clear its throat a mile away. The sun was sinking over the hills and the gnats were fooling about all over the place, and everything smelled rather topping--what with the falling dew and so on--and I was just beginning to feel a little soothed by the peace of it all when suddenly I heard my name spoken.

"It's about Bertie."

It was the loathsome voice of young blighted Edwin! For a moment I couldn't locate it. Then I realised that it came from the library. My stroll had taken me within a few yards of the open window.

I had often wondered how those Johnnies in books did it--I mean the

fellows with whom it was the work of a moment to do about a dozen things that ought to have taken them about ten minutes. But, as a matter of fact, it was the work of a moment with me to chuck away my cigarette, swear a bit, leap about ten yards, dive into a bush that stood near the library window, and stand there with my ears flapping. I was as certain as I've ever been of anything that all sorts of rotten things were in the offing.

"About Bertie?" I heard Uncle Willoughby say.

"About Bertie and your parcel. I heard you talking to him just now. I believe he's got it."

When I tell you that just as I heard these frightful words a fairly substantial beetle of sorts dropped from the bush down the back of my neck, and I couldn't even stir to squash the same, you will understand that I felt pretty rotten. Everything seemed against me.

"What do you mean, boy? I was discussing the disappearance of my manuscript with Bertie only a moment back, and he professed himself as perplexed by the mystery as myself."

"Well, I was in his room yesterday afternoon, doing him an act of kindness, and he came in with a parcel. I could see it, though he tried to keep it behind his back. And then he asked me to go to the smoking-room and snip some cigars for him; and about two minutes afterwards he came down--and he wasn't carrying anything. So it must be in his room."

I understand they deliberately teach these dashed Boy Scouts to cultivate their powers of observation and deduction and what not. Devilish thoughtless and inconsiderate of them, I call it. Look at the trouble it causes.

"It sounds incredible," said Uncle Willoughby, thereby bucking me up a trifle.

"Shall I go and look in his room?" asked young blighted Edwin. "I'm sure the parcel's there."

"But what could be his motive for perpetrating this extraordinary theft?"

"Perhaps he's a--what you said just now."

"A kleptomaniac? Impossible!"

"It might have been Bertie who took all those things from the very start," suggested the little brute hopefully. "He may be like Raffles."

"Raffles?"

"He's a chap in a book who went about pinching things."

"I cannot believe that Bertie would--ah--go about pinching things."

"Well, I'm sure he's got the parcel. I'll tell you what you might do. You might say that Mr. Berkeley wired that he had left something here.

He had Bertie's room, you know. You might say you wanted to look for it."

"That would be possible. I----"

I didn't wait to hear any more. Things were getting too hot. I sneaked softly out of my bush and raced for the front door. I sprinted up to my room and made for the drawer where I had put the parcel. And then I found I hadn't the key. It wasn't for the deuce of a time that I recollected I had shifted it to my evening trousers the night before and must have forgotten to take it out again.

Where the dickens were my evening things? I had looked all over the place before I remembered that Jeeves must have taken them away to brush. To leap at the bell and ring it was, with me, the work of a moment. I had just rung it when there was a footstep outside, and in came Uncle Willoughby.

"Oh, Bertie," he said, without a blush, "I have--ah--received a telegram from Berkeley, who occupied this room in your absence, asking me to forward him his--er--his cigarette-case, which, it would appear, he inadvertently omitted to take with him when he left the house. I cannot find it downstairs; and it has, therefore, occurred to me that he may have left it in this room. I will--er--just take a look around."

It was one of the most disgusting spectacles I've ever seen--this white-haired old man, who should have been thinking of the hereafter, standing there lying like an actor.

"I haven't seen it anywhere," I said.

"Nevertheless, I will search. I must--ah--spare no effort."

"I should have seen it if it had been here--what?"

"It may have escaped your notice. It is--er--possibly in one of the drawers."

He began to nose about. He pulled out drawer after drawer, pottering around like an old bloodhound, and babbling from time to time about Berkeley and his cigarette-case in a way that struck me as perfectly ghastly. I just stood there, losing weight every moment.

Then he came to the drawer where the parcel was.

"This appears to be locked," he said, rattling the handle.

"Yes; I shouldn't bother about that one. It--it's--er--locked, and all that sort of thing."

"You have not the key?"

A soft, respectful voice spoke behind me.

"I fancy, sir, that this must be the key you require. It was in the pocket of your evening trousers."

It was Jeeves. He had shimmered in, carrying my evening things, and

was standing there holding out the key. I could have massacred the man.

"Thank you," said my uncle.

"Not at all, sir."

The next moment Uncle Willoughby had opened the drawer. I shut my eyes.

"No," said Uncle Willoughby, "there is nothing here. The drawer is empty. Thank you, Bertie. I hope I have not disturbed you. I fancy--er--Berkeley must have taken his case with him after all."

When he had gone I shut the door carefully. Then I turned to Jeeves. The man was putting my evening things out on a chair.

"Er--Jeeves!"

"Sir?"

"Oh, nothing."

It was deuced difficult to know how to begin.

"Er--Jeeves!"

"Sir?"

"Did you--Was there--Have you by chance----"

"I removed the parcel this morning, sir."

"Oh--ah--why?"

"I considered it more prudent, sir."

I mused for a while.

"Of course, I suppose all this seems tolerably rummy to you, Jeeves?"

"Not at all, sir. I chanced to overhear you and Lady Florence speaking of the matter the other evening, sir."

"Did you, by Jove?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well--er--Jeeves, I think that, on the whole, if you were to--as it were--freeze on to that parcel until we get back to London----"

"Exactly, sir."

"And then we might--er--so to speak--chuck it away somewhere--what?"

"Precisely, sir."

"I'll leave it in your hands."

"Entirely, sir."

"You know, Jeeves, you're by way of being rather a topper."

"I endeavour to give satisfaction, sir."

"One in a million, by Jove!"

"It is very kind of you to say so, sir."

"Well, that's about all, then, I think."

"Very good, sir."

Florence came back on Monday. I didn't see her till we were all having tea in the hall. It wasn't till the crowd had cleared away a bit that we got a chance of having a word together.

"Well, Bertie?" she said.

"It's all right."

"You have destroyed the manuscript?"

"Not exactly; but----"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I haven't absolutely----"

"Bertie, your manner is furtive!"

"It's all right. It's this way----"

And I was just going to explain how things stood when out of the library came leaping Uncle Willoughby looking as braced as a two-year-old. The old boy was a changed man.

"A most remarkable thing, Bertie! I have just been speaking with Mr. Riggs on the telephone, and he tells me he received my manuscript by the first post this morning. I cannot imagine what can have caused the delay. Our postal facilities are extremely inadequate in the rural districts. I shall write to headquarters about it. It is insufferable if valuable parcels are to be delayed in this fashion."

I happened to be looking at Florence's profile at the moment, and at this juncture she swung round and gave me a look that went right through me like a knife. Uncle Willoughby meandered back to the library, and there was a silence that you could have dug bits out of with a spoon.

"I can't understand it," I said at last. "I can't understand it, by Jove!"

"I can. I can understand it perfectly, Bertie. Your heart failed you. Rather than risk offending your uncle you----"

"No, no! Absolutely!"













"I'll tell you what I should do if I were you," I said. "I'm not sure I didn't read some book or see some play somewhere or other where they tried it on, and it worked all right. Fellow got engaged to a girl, and the family didn't like it, but, instead of kicking, they pretended to be tickled to pieces, and had the fellow and the girl down to visit them. And then, after the fellow had seen the girl with the home circle as a background, don't you know, he came to the conclusion that it wouldn't do, and broke off the engagement."

It seemed to strike her.

"I hardly expected so sensible a suggestion from you, Reginald," she said. "It is a very good plan. It shows that you really have a definite substratum of intelligence; and it is all the more deplorable that you should idle your way through the world as you do, when you might be performing some really useful work."

That was Florence all over. Even when she patted you on the head, she had to do it with her knuckles.

"I will invite them down next week," she went on. "You had better come, too."

"It's awfully kind of you, but the fact is----"

"Next Wednesday. Take the three-forty-seven."

I met Duggie next day. He was looking happy, but puzzled, like a man who has found a dime on the street and is wondering if there's a string tied to it. I congratulated him on his engagement.

"Reggie," he said, "a queer thing has happened. I feel as if I'd trodden on the last step when it wasn't there. I've just had a letter from my sister Florence asking me to bring Dorothy home on Wednesday. Florence doesn't seem to object to the idea of the engagement at all; and I'd expected that I'd have to call out the police reserves when she heard of it. I believe there's a catch somewhere."

I tapped him on the breastbone.

"There is, Dug," I said, "and I'll tell you what it is. I saw her yesterday, and I can put you next to the game. She thinks that if you see Mrs. Darrell mingling with the home circle, you'll see flaws in her which you don't see when you don't see her mingling with the home circle, don't you see? Do you see now?"

He laughed--heroically, don't you know.

"I'm afraid she'll be disappointed. Love like mine is not dependent on environment."

Which wasn't bad, I thought, if it was his own.

I said good-by to him, and toddled along rather pleased with myself. It seemed to me that I had handled his affairs in a pretty masterly manner for a chap who's supposed to be one of the biggest chumps in New York.

Well, of course, the thing was an absolute fliver, as I ought to have guessed it would be. Whatever could have induced me to think that a fellow like poor old Dug stood a dog's chance against a determined female like his sister Florence, I can't imagine. It was like expecting a rabbit to put up a show with a python. From the very start there was only one possible end to the thing. To a woman like Florence, who had trained herself as tough as whalebone by years of scrapping with her father and occasional by-battles with aunts, it was as easy as killing rats with a stick.

I was sorry for Mrs. Darrell. She was a really good sort and, as a matter of fact, just the kind of wife who would have done old Duggie a bit of good. And on her own ground I shouldn't wonder if she might not have made a fight for it. But now she hadn't a chance. Poor old Duggie was just like so much putty in Florence's hands when he couldn't get away from her. You could see the sawdust trickling out of Love's Young Dream in a steady flow.

I took Mrs. Darrell for a walk one afternoon, to see if I couldn't cheer her up a bit, but it wasn't much good. She hardly spoke a word till we were on our way home. Then she said with a sort of jerk: "I'm going back to New York tomorrow, Mr. Pepper."

I suppose I ought to have pretended to be surprised, but I couldn't work it.

"I'm afraid you've had a bad time," I said. "I'm very sorry."

She laughed.

"Thank you," she said. "It's nice of you to be sympathetic instead of tactful. You're rather a dear, Mr. Pepper."

I hadn't any remarks to make. I whacked at a nettle with my stick.

"I shall break off my engagement after dinner, so that Douglas can have a good night's rest. I'm afraid he has been brooding on the future a good deal. It will be a great relief to him."

"Oh, no," I said.

"Oh, yes. I know exactly how he feels. He thought he could carry me off, but he finds he overestimated his powers. He has remembered that he is a Craye. I imagine that the fact has been pointed out to him."

"If you ask my opinion," I said--I was feeling pretty sore about it--"that woman Florence is an absolute cat."

"My dear Mr. Pepper, I wouldn't have dreamed of asking your opinion on such a delicate subject. But I'm glad to have it. Thank you very much. Do I strike you as a vindictive woman, Mr. Pepper?"

"I don't think you do," I said.

"By nature I don't think I am. But I'm feeling a little vindictive just at present."

She stopped suddenly.



along came the usual telegram from Florence, telling me to come to Madison Avenue.

The mere idea of Madison Avenue was beginning to give me that tired feeling, and I made up my mind I wouldn't go near the place. But of course I did. When it came to the point, I simply hadn't the common manly courage to keep away.

Florence was there as before.

"Reginald," she said, "I think I shall go raving mad."

This struck me as a mighty happy solution of everybody's troubles, but I felt it was too good to be true.

"Over a week ago," she went on, "my brother Edwin came up to New York to consult a book at the library. I anticipated that this would occupy perhaps an afternoon, and was expecting him back by an early train next day. He did not arrive. He sent an incoherent telegram. But even then I suspected nothing." She paused. "Yesterday morning," she said, "I had a letter from my aunt Augusta."

She paused again. She seemed to think I ought to be impressed.

Her eyes tied a bowknot in my spine.

"Let me read you her letter. No, I will tell you its contents. Aunt Augusta had seen Edwin lunching at the Waldorf with a creature."

"A what?"

"My aunt described her. Her hair was of a curious dull bronze tint."

"Your aunt's?"

"The woman's. It was then that I began to suspect. How many women with dull bronze hair does Edwin know?"

"Great Scott! Why ask me?"

I had got used to being treated as a sort of "Hey, Bill!" by Florence, but I was darned if I was going to be expected to be an encyclopedia as well.

"One," she said. "That appalling Darrell woman."

She drew a deep breath.

"Yesterday evening," she said, "I saw them together in a taximeter cab. They were obviously on their way to some theatre."

She fixed me with her eye.

"Reginald," she said, "you must go and see her the first thing to-morrow."

"What!" I cried. "Me? Why? Why me?"

"Because you are responsible for the whole affair. You introduced

Douglas to her. You suggested that he should bring her home. Go to her to-morrow and ascertain her intentions."

"But----"

"The very first thing."

"But wouldn't it be better to have a talk with Edwin?"

"I have made every endeavour to see Edwin, but he deliberately avoids me. His answers to my telegrams are willfully evasive."

There was no doubt that Edwin had effected a thorough bolt. He was having quite a pleasant little vacation: Two Weeks in Sunny New York. And from what I'd seen of him, he seemed to be thriving on it. I didn't wonder Florence had got rather anxious. She'd have been more anxious if she had seen him when I did. He'd got a sort of "New-York-is-so-bracing" look about him, which meant a whole heap of trouble before he trotted back to the fold.

Well, I started off to interview Mrs. Darrell, and, believe me, I didn't like the prospect. I think they ought to train A. D. T. messengers to do this sort of thing. I found her alone. The rush hour of clients hadn't begun.

"How do you do, Mr. Pepper?" she said. "How nice of you to call."

Very friendly, and all that. It made the situation darned difficult for a fellow, if you see what I mean.

"Say," I said. "What about it, don't you know?"

"I certainly don't," she said. "What ought I to know about what?"

"Well, about Edwin--Edwin Craye," I said.

She smiled.

"Oh! So you're an ambassador, Mr. Pepper?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I did come to see if I could find out how things were running. What's going to happen?"

"Are you consulting me professionally? If so, you must show me your hand. Or perhaps you would rather I showed you mine?"

It was subtle, but I got on to it after a bit.

"Yes," I said, "I wish you would."

"Very well. Do you remember a conversation we had, Mr. Pepper, my last afternoon at the Crayes'? We came to the conclusion that I was rather a vindictive woman."

"By George! You're stringing old Edwin so as to put one over on Florence?"

She flushed a little.

"How very direct you are, Mr. Pepper! How do you know I'm not very fond of Mr. Craye? At any rate, I'm very sorry for him."

"He's such a chump."

"But he's improving every day. Have you seen him? You must notice the difference?"

"There is a difference."

"He only wanted taking out of himself. I think he found his sister Florence's influence a little oppressive sometimes."

"No, but see here," I said, "are you going to marry him?"

"I'm only a palmist. I don't pretend to be a clairvoyant. A marriage may be indicated in Mr. Craye's hand, but I couldn't say without looking at it."

"But I shall have to tell her something definite, or she won't give me a moment's peace."

"Tell her her brother is of age. Surely that's definite enough?"

And I couldn't get any more out of her. I went back to Florence and reported. She got pretty excited about it.

"Oh, if I were a man!" she said.

I didn't see how that would have helped. I said so.

"I'd go straight to Edwin and drag him away. He is staying at his club. If I were a man I could go in and find him----"

"Not if you weren't a member," I said.

"--And tell him what I thought of his conduct. As I'm only a woman, I have to wait in the hall while a deceitful small boy pretends to go and look for him."

It had never struck me before what a splendid institution a club was. Only a few days back I'd been thinking that the subscription to mine was a bit steep. But now I saw that the place earned every cent of the money.

"Have you no influence with him, Reginald?"

I said I didn't think I had. She called me something. Invertebrate, or something. I didn't catch it.

"Then there's only one thing to do. You must find my father and tell him all. Perhaps you may rouse him to a sense of what is right. You may make him remember that he has duties as a parent."

I thought it far more likely that I should make him remember that he had a foot. I hadn't a very vivid recollection of old man Craye. I was quite a kid when he made his great speech on the Egg Question and beat it for Europe--but what I did recollect didn't encourage me to go and chat with him about the duties of a parent.

As I remember him, he was a rather large man with elephantiasis of the temper. I distinctly recalled one occasion when I was spending a school vacation at his home, and he found me trying to shave old Duggie, then a kid of fourteen, with his razor.

"I shouldn't be able to find him," I said.

"You can get his address from his lawyers."

"He may be at the North Pole."

"Then you must go to the North Pole."

"But say----!"

"Reginald!"

"Oh, all right."

I knew just what would happen. Parbury and Stevens, the lawyers, simply looked at me as if I had been caught snatching bags. At least, Stevens did. And Parbury would have done it, too, only he had been dead a good time. Finally, after drinking me in for about a quarter of an hour, Stevens said that if I desired to address a communication to his client, care of this office, it would be duly forwarded. Good morning. Good morning. Anything further? No, thanks. Good morning. Good morning.

I handed the glad news on to Florence and left her to do what she liked about it. She went down and interviewed Stevens. I suppose he'd had experience of her. At any rate, he didn't argue. He yielded up the address in level time. Old man Craye was living in Paris, but was to arrive in New York that night, and would doubtless be at his club.

It was the same club where Edwin was hiding from Florence. I pointed this out to her.

"There's no need for me to butt in after all," I said. "He'll meet Edwin there, and they can fight it out in the smoking room. You've only to drop him a line explaining the facts."

"I shall certainly communicate with him in writing, but, nevertheless, you must see him. I cannot explain everything in a letter."

"But doesn't it strike you that he may think it pretty bad gall-impertinence, don't you know, for a comparative stranger like me to be tackling a delicate family affair like this?"

"You will explain that you are acting for me."

"It wouldn't be better if old Duggie went along instead?"

"I wish you to go, Reginald."

Well, of course, it was all right, don't you know, but I was losing several pounds a day over the business. I was getting so light that I felt that, when the old man kicked me, I should just soar up to the ceiling like an air balloon.

The club was one of those large clubs that look like prisons. I used to go there to lunch with my uncle, the one who left me his money, and I always hated the place. It was one of those clubs that are all red leather and hushed whispers.

I'm bound to say, though, there wasn't much hushed whispering when I started my interview with old man Craye. His voice was one of my childhood's recollections.

He was most extraordinarily like Florence. He had just the same eyes. I felt boneless from the start.

"Good morning," I said.

"What?" he said. "Speak up. Don't mumble."

I hadn't known he was deaf. The last time we'd had any conversation--on the subject of razors--he had done all the talking. This seemed to me to put the lid on it.

"I only said 'Good morning,'" I shouted.

"Good what? Speak up. I believe you're sucking candy. Oh, good morning? I remember you now. You're the boy who spoiled my razor."

I didn't half like this reopening of old wounds. I hurried on.

"I came about Edwin," I said.

"Who?"

"Edwin. Your son."

"What about him?"

"Florence told me to see you."

"Who?"

"Florence. Your daughter."

"What about her?"

All this vaudeville team business, mind you, as if we were bellowing at each other across the street. All round the room you could see old gentlemen shooting out of their chairs like rockets and dashing off at a gallop to write to the governing board about it. Thousands of waiters had appeared from nowhere, and were hanging about, dusting table legs. If ever a business wanted to be discussed privately, this seemed to me to be it. And it was just about as private as a conversation through megaphones in Longacre Square.

"Didn't she write to you?"

"I got a letter from her. I tore it up. I didn't read it."

Pleasant, was it not? It was not. I began to understand what a shipwrecked sailor must feel when he finds there's something gone

wrong with the life belt.

I thought I might as well get to the point and get it over.

"Edwin's going to marry a palmist," I said.

"Who the devil's Harry?"

"Not Harry. Marry. He's going to marry a palmist."

About four hundred waiters noticed a speck of dust on an ash tray at the table next to ours, and swooped down on it.

"Edwin is going to marry a palmist?"

"Yes."

"She must be mad. Hasn't she seen Edwin?"

And just then who should stroll in but Edwin himself. I sighted him and gave him a hail.

He curveted up to us. It was amazing the way the fellow had altered. He looked like a two-year-old. Flower in his button-hole and a six-inch grin, and all that. The old man seemed surprised, too. I didn't wonder. The Edwin he remembered was a pretty different kind of a fellow.

"Hullo, dad," he said. "Fancy meeting you here. Have a cigarette?"

He shoved out his case. Old man Craye helped himself in a sort of dazed way.

"You \_are\_ Edwin?" he said slowly.

I began to sidle out. They didn't notice me. They had moved to a settee, and Edwin seemed to be telling his father a funny story.

At least, he was talking and grinning, and the old man was making a noise like distant thunder, which I supposed was his way of chuckling. I slid out and left them.

Some days later Duggie called on me. The old boy was looking scared.

"Reggie," he said, "what do doctors call it when you think you see things when you don't? Hal-something. I've got it, whatever it is. It's sometimes caused by overwork. But it can't be that with me, because I've not been doing any work. You don't think my brain's going or anything like that, do you?"

"What do you mean? What's been happening?"

"It's like being haunted. I read a story somewhere of a fellow who kept thinking he saw a battleship bearing down on him. I've got it, too. Four times in the last three days I could have sworn I saw my father and Edwin. I saw them as plainly as I see you. And, of course, Edwin's at home and father's in Europe somewhere. Do you think it's some sort of a warning? Do you think I'm going to die?"

"It's all right, old top," I said. "As a matter of fact, they are both in New York just now."

"You don't mean that? Great Scot, what a relief! But, Reggie, old fox, it couldn't have been them really. The last time was at Louis Martin's, and the fellow I mistook for Edwin was dancing all by himself in the middle of the floor."

I admitted it was pretty queer.

I was away for a few days after that in the country. When I got back I found a pile of telegrams waiting for me. They were all from Florence, and they all wanted me to go to Madison Avenue. The last of the batch, which had arrived that morning, was so peremptory that I felt as if something had bitten me when I read it.

For a moment I admit I hung back. Then I rallied. There are times in a man's life when he has got to show a flash of the old bulldog pluck, don't you know, if he wants to preserve his self-respect. I did then. My grip was still unpacked. I told my man to put it on a cab. And in about two ticks I was bowling off to the club. I left for England next day by the Lusitania.

About three weeks later I fetched up at Nice. You can't walk far at Nice without bumping into a casino. The one I hit my first evening was the Casino Municipale in the Place Massena. It looked more or less of a Home From Home, so I strolled in.

There was quite a crowd round the boule tables, and I squashed in. And when I'd worked through into the front rank I happened to look down the table, and there was Edwin, with a green Tyrolese hat hanging over one ear, clutching out for a lot of five-franc pieces which the croupier was steering toward him at the end of a rake.

I was feeling lonesome, for I knew no one in the place, so I edged round in his direction.

Halfway there I heard my name called, and there was Mrs. Darrell.

I saw the whole thing in a flash. Old man Craye hadn't done a thing to prevent it--apart from being eccentric, he was probably glad that Edwin had had the sense to pick out anybody half as good a sort--and the marriage had taken place. And here they were on their honeymoon.

I wondered what Florence was thinking of it.

"Well, well, well, here we all are," I said. "I've just seen Edwin. He seems to be winning."

"Dear boy!" she said. "He does enjoy it so. I think he gets so much more out of life than he used to, don't you?"

"Sure thing. May I wish you happiness? Why didn't you let me know and collect the silver fish-slice?"

"Thank you so much, Mr. Pepper. I did write to you, but I suppose you never got the letter."

"Mr. Craye didn't make any objections, then?"

"On the contrary. He was more in favor of the marriage than anyone."

"And I'll tell you why," I said. "I'm rather a chump, you know, but I observe things. I bet he was most frightfully grateful to you for taking Edwin in hand and making him human."

"Why, you're wonderful, Mr. Pepper. That is exactly what he said himself. It was that that first made us friends."

"And--er--Florence?"

She sighed.

"I'm afraid Florence has taken the thing a little badly. But I hope to win her over in time. I want all my children to love me."

"All your what?"

"I think of them as my children, you see, Mr. Pepper. I adopted them as my own when I married their father. Did you think I had married Edwin? What a funny mistake. I am very fond of Edwin, but not in that way. No, I married Mr. Craye. We left him at our villa tonight, as he had some letters to get off. You must come and see us, Mr. Pepper. I always feel that it was you who brought us together, you know. I wonder if you will be seeing Florence when you get back? Will you give her my very best love?"

End of Project Gutenberg's A Wodehouse Miscellany, by P. G. Wodehouse

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