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# The Age of Indiscretion

By Stephen Morehouse Avery

*If old lovers had more dignity and young lovers  
had better sense, this delightful comedy  
would never have been written*

THE trouble with parents and guardians," said Mr. Kirby Roberts as he closed a ponderous volume called *Modes and Manners with the Great Victorians*, "is their lack of dignity. They have no sense of code. Think of Gladstone, or Disraeli, or even Bismarck running around the world having love affairs in their old age. They had something better to do. They were men and gentlemen."

Mr. Kirby Roberts rose with considerable dignity to considerable height, smoothed his maroon-brocaded dressing-gown, and shook his beautifully brushed, distinguished head sagely and sadly. "And then think of Uncle George," he concluded, as if nothing in the way of contrast could be more complete.

It was all a matter of very real concern to Mr. Roberts; for, although it was absurd for a man mature in mind, body and experience to be burdened with a guardian at all, Uncle George was nevertheless his legal guardian until next November, when he himself would be twenty-one. And if one must have a guardian, even technically, one might at least expect him to provide an example of conduct, to guide, instruct, and restrain in those matters of decency and decorum proper to a gentleman. Did Uncle George do that? On the contrary, all the guiding, instructing and restraint exercised since this expedition to Europe to improve Mr. Roberts' cultural background had begun, this fruitless frittering of time on a gaudy, frivolous continent, had been exercised by Mr. Roberts himself. "It is sad," he commented, "when a man does not acknowledge the obligation and feel the propriety of his years."

HE GAZED thoughtfully from the front window of their suite in the dignified Hotel Grand. Uncle George had preferred the Carleton, where there seemed to be more what he called "zip," but Mr. Roberts had for once prevailed. Down beyond the ordered lawn, solemn with its formal walks and spaced palms, was the Bay of Cannes, and Mr. Roberts sniffed at that myth about the blue Mediterranean. Blue? Well, if one cared to be romantic, yes. Of course all seas were at times more or less blue. But Mr. Roberts was thinking of the crashed ideal of his Uncle George and not about the imaginary colors of seas.

Off the pier of the *Cercle Nautique* a trim white steam yacht was anchored, and Mr. Kirby Roberts noticed that yacht. In fact he'd noticed her several times before during their wanderings, at Corfu, at Agadir, and had wondered at the coincidence. This time he noticed something more; for a young lady in an apple-green, one-piece bathing suit

was swimming from the deck of that yacht, diving like a bird, running up the ladder and diving again. At least Mr. Roberts supposed she was a young lady, although she might not be a lady and she might be forty. Old women were doing all sorts of juvenile tricks these days. Some of them still danced.

He went into his own room and brought back his very powerful marine glasses to determine the point of the lady's age and after several minutes' inspection he had determined not only that, but several other points. The lady was indeed fairly young, perhaps nineteen. She was also, although her white bathing cap concealed her hair, which might after all be bobbed, she was also personable. He supposed Uncle George would have called her a "wow," or something equally zoological and undignified.

It was of even greater interest to Mr. Roberts that the reasonably young and personable lady was apparently in some distress. Each time she gained the deck she paused, buried her face in her arms, and seemed to shake with sobs. She dived, swam, climbed, sobbed and dived again, interminably and appealingly.

"Arthur," suggested Mr. Roberts to his uncle's man, "see if you can find my swimming suit. I think it's quite warm enough for a dip."

There was a seaplane landing float at the end of the pier and he made his efficient if not spectacular plunge from there. He swam leisurely and meditatively toward Africa, paying no attention whatever to such intervening objects as yachts. He demonstrated his indifference to yachts by swimming far beyond one of them and approaching it only casually on his return, not from Africa precisely but at least impressively from the south.

Once or twice he rested, granting a critical glance inland to the, in his personal opinion, somewhat overdone, rococo beauty of Cannes, the purple loom of the Esterel headland, the blunt square tower dominating the Old Town, half-hidden villas studding the green background of Alpes-Maritimes foot-



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Mr. Roberts lost his hold on the ladder and plunged them both into the cold water of reality, otherwise the Bay of Cannes



hills, the white and bright line of hotels and smart shops on the Croisette, pinned at one end by the great architectural calamity known as the Municipal Casino. Uncle George, no doubt, would be able to describe all this later as fluently as a guide, although he would have actually observed no more than the mural decorations of the Majestic Bar and a seascape glimpsed now and then through the windows of the Baccara Room.

THESE reflections upon his guardian's insincerity and frivolity, however, were terminated by his own proximity to that yacht and his own obligations in the matter of young ladies in distress. He was aware that the dive, climb, sob, dive process was still continuing and, in fact, quite before he was, in a sense, ready, a white-capped little head and a button-round face made up chiefly of, as he decided, lilac-colored eyes, bobbed up out of the depths right in front of his nose. "Oh!" said the face. "Oh!" said the face again. "Please excuse me for getting in your way."

"But, my dear lady," said Mr. Roberts, treading water, "you're not in my way at all." His dignity was equal to that test too. "In fact I was coming, if you will permit me, to offer you possible assistance. You seemed to be in distress."

"Distress?" The very and entirely personable young lady—for one dubious instant he had feared she might not be sufficiently mature in mind, body and experience to be a—worthy object of a man of the world's chivalrous ministrations—did a few dolphin plunges and an expert roll. "Distress? I'm more at home in water than on land. Oh, you mean the tears."

"Yes, I mean the tears." He followed her up the boarding ladder to that yacht's deck. "You see, the Mediterranean is salty enough as it is," he said and was secretly pleased with the remark. A gentleman should have the right word at the proper moment. Secretly he was also pleased with the young lady in distress about whose slender maturity he was now quite reassured. "You'll pardon my addressing you without an introduction, I hope. I'm Mr. Kirby Roberts as a matter of fact."

"Oh, really! I'm Miss Scripps," she said and offered him a cane deck chair with a pretty dignity. "Do you know, something urges me to confide in you, Mr. Roberts. I feel as though we'd known each other for a long time. Don't you? Isn't it a curious fate that we should happen to meet like that—just when I most needed help, or at least a confidant? Do you believe in fate, Mr. Roberts?"

Mr. Roberts admitted his fatalism. The truth was that he hardly knew what he was talking about because of a sort of apple-green dizziness which was upon him. The light beach robe which Miss Scripps had thrown over her slip of a bathing suit did not amount to much and the sun-filled hair which tumbled upon her shoulders when she pulled off her bathing cap amounted to quite a bit. "Yes, one realizes as he gets older," said Mr. Roberts, "that what will be will be."

"That's so true," agreed Miss Scripps. Perhaps she wasn't as calm as she looked either; for Mr. Roberts' oarsman's shoulders and firm straight features might be calculated to have an effect upon a young lady. "Of course," she went on, "you must not think I'm quite as old as I look, Mr. Roberts. I'm so often taken for twenty-two or three. I'm really nineteen. I think experience, and especially unhappy experience, inevitably leaves its mark. But I hate people with just empty pretty faces. Don't you? You seem cold, Mr.

Roberts. Perhaps you'd like a stimulant."

While she sent a sailor for the steward, Mr. Roberts cursed his tendency to shiver when he came out of the water. Shivering was a strain upon one's dignity and he accepted a neat whisky from an impudently smirking steward rather gladly.

"I only hope," he then said solemnly, "that I can in some manner lighten the burden of your unhappy experience, Miss Scripps."

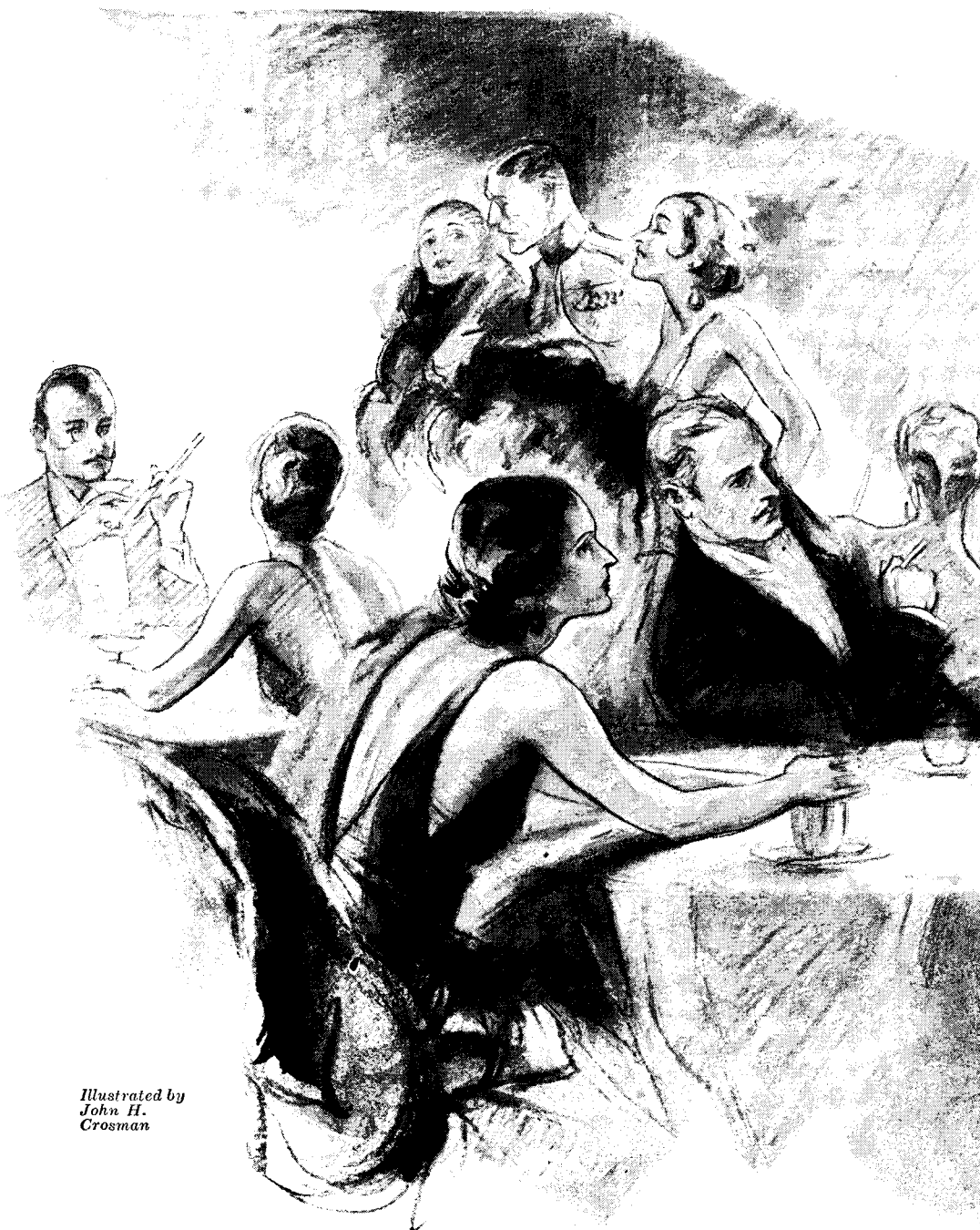
The lilac-colored eyes gleamed with new tears. "If I only—had someone to confide in," she said. "Someone who would sympathize and not condemn. You see, Mr. Roberts, it's about my—mother." She covered her face, and Mr. Roberts feared for the moment that she could only recover her poise by more diving. But she fought it out bravely alone. "It's so terrible, Mr. Roberts, to have a mother whom you love but of whom you can't approve. Do you realize, Mr. Roberts,"—Miss Scripps' pretty white throat was full of husky tragic throbs—"that this is not even our yacht?"

Mr. Roberts hadn't realized it but he was more interested in what she'd said about mothers. He leaned forward intently. "Miss Scripps, I know I can help you. I feel for you about your mother. I know exactly what you mean. I shall give you confidence and help and perhaps—perhaps you also can strengthen me. I too"—his gaze fell in the shame of admission—"I too—have an Uncle George—"

MISS SCRIPPS' nice fingers touched his bare arm with impulsive sympathy. "We must be friends. At least I hope your Uncle George does not go on yacht parties and make love right and left before your very eyes. That's what the men on this yacht do. Even Mr. Dixon, who owns it. And not only the men on board but any old man in any old port. And the ladies of the party, even my dear mother at her time of life, permits it. She not only permits it, but, I regret to say, she apparently enjoys it. It's not, of course, that I do not believe in love. I think that love—the purple of the Esterel deepened the lilac tints of Miss Scripps' eyes and Nature with celestial sledges rang an anvil chorus in Mr. Roberts' breast—"I think that love," continued Miss Scripps, "must be the most wonderful thing in the world."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Roberts thickly, "it is. But not for mothers and guardians. Perhaps together we can lead them to understand that. Shall we try? Will you shake hands on that, Miss Scripps?"

By the time Mr. Roberts stood at the bottom of the boarding ladder, however, bowing adieu to his collaborator in reform, whose hair as she leaned at the rail seemed to have snagged most of the



Illustrated by  
John H.  
Crossman

remaining overdone sunlight, it occurred to him that a mere handshake was almost too casual a gesture with which to seal so important a compact. She had listened to his account of Uncle George's shortcomings as a sister might and she had held back nothing with regard to her mother. It would seem more mature in a way if they exchanged an embrace of some sort. "I think, Miss Scripps," he suggested, "that this purpose of ours would remain more permanently in our minds if we sealed it with a kiss."

Miss Scripps apparently had something of the same idea; for it did not take her very long to get down that ladder and put up her serious little button of a face. Mr. Roberts had in mind nothing more than a formal touching of lips and he could never afterward understand just where and how his intention became confused. He had had no idea of kissing either Miss Scripps' right eye or her left ear and who knows what might have happened if he hadn't lost his hold on the ladder and plunged them both into the cold water of reality, otherwise the Bay of Cannes. But Mr. Roberts recovered himself, bowed while he trod water, and struck out for the pier. His dignity was equal to much more than that.

In justice to Uncle George it should be said that Mr. Roberts' poor opinion of him was not quite a unanimous verdict. Several days later as he waited, dressed for evening, in the sitting-room of their suite for the return of his nephew, ward, heir and severest critic, several points might be mentioned. He

carried his forty-nine years, if not with the dignity of the "Great Victorians," at least with an iron-gray distinction which impressed a few men and affected an occasional lady. His resemblance to Mr. William Faversham had been noted without causing either of them anguish. His record in the Great War was bloody and proud. He had converted an inherited quarter into a complete and comfortable million. His bachelorhood, in name only alas, was the result of a true romance faithful to its bereaved end. There were pleasant deep lines in his face and a lurking gray twinkle in his eye which not everybody understood.

Perhaps Mr. Roberts himself didn't always understand that twinkle. He put it down to Uncle George's innate frivolity, but nevertheless at moments it made him uncomfortable. For example, when he returned tousled and puffing from his what had come to be customary dip in the Bay of Cannes, his guardian said flippantly, "Well, Kirby, old boy, did you catch any mermaids?"

In other words he could never be sure exactly how much Uncle George knew or precisely what he meant to imply, except that it was certain to be silly and undignified.

"I ENJOYED a bit of healthy male exercise, if that's what you mean," he said, glancing suspiciously at the window sill where the marine glasses remained reassuringly as he had left them. "I dare say, sir, that all the mermaids at Cannes had been lured to the Ambassadeurs by the hope of danc-





"Look, Marion—what beautiful youth. There is no poem or picture of youth like youth itself"

ing a tango with my distinguished guardian."

Uncle George laughed. "Perhaps," he said. "I'm pretty hot stuff at it."

"HOT stuff!" Mr. Roberts shuddered at Uncle George's vulgarisms. What could be hoped for from a man who was "hot stuff" and had a predilection for "wows"? From the doorway into his own room he remarked: "Are you aware, sir, that the Phocians who settled on this coast something over four thousand years ago had a rhythmical music quite as primitive as jazz and danced very expertly to it? Of course some men," he added, "some men have advanced a bit beyond those things in the brief interval."

"I'm afraid you are too optimistic for the human race, Kirby," replied Uncle George.

"Whatever that means," muttered Mr. Roberts, banging the door. In response to his uncle's call, however, he opened it again.

"By the way, Kirby," said his guardian, "you got me so excited about Phocian jazz that I forgot to tell you we're dining at the Ambassadeurs this

evening. It's a gala night but you need not look at the entertainment. I want to talk to you about something important and we can do that over cocktails before we join the ladies."

Mr. Roberts paused. Ladies? He was very dubious about Uncle George's ladies. "I shall be glad," he said, "very glad, sir, to talk to you for a change about something important. Perhaps I'll leave the ladies to you. I've some reading to do."

"No," said Uncle George—that confounded glint of insincerity in his eye, "that won't do. I especially want you to meet these ladies, a mother and her daughter. The daughter, I hear, is serious-minded enough for you and the mother's childish prattle amuses imbeciles like me."

They had cocktails at the Majestic Bar, which is a matter of colorful liqueurs, dark wood paneling and deep comfortable chairs. Their martinis were pleasantly cold and yellow. The potato chips were crisp. They were rather a handsome pair, for one day, provided that things happen to Mr. Roberts which in due course happen to most men, he would resemble Mr. Fa-

versham himself, or Mr. Faversham's favorite photograph. Perhaps he would have an edge on Mr. Faversham in the matter of dignity. "This matter of importance, sir?" he suggested hopefully.

Uncle George sat up straight. He seemed to his nephew, who had never seen him so under any circumstances before, to be almost ill at ease. "Well, you see, Kirby, old boy," he began, paused, and then plunged on—"you see, this business of getting married is a very important matter. In fact, I'm embarrassed to do so but I think it only fair to discuss it with you."

"You needn't be embarrassed, Uncle George," Mr. Roberts sat forward himself. It was a subject which he recognized as both important and interesting and he was pleasantly surprised that his guardian was considering his future sufficiently to bring it up for discussion. "Why should you be embarrassed, sir?" he continued. "The truth is I was going to inquire of you about certain phases of the problem myself. For instance, Uncle George, just how much is my income and do you consider it sufficient for a couple to begin with? Simple, of course. The matter of children could be decided later, I suppose."

MR. ROBERTS was glad to see that Uncle George was relaxed and at ease again, although the bitter of his cocktail had evidently made his face look for the moment a trifle drawn. Uncle George was sunk—how "sunk" Mr. Roberts would never guess—back into his comfortable chair again. He

murmured some figure or other. "I'm really surprised to find you so interested, Kirby. What I wanted specifically to find out was your view as to older men—well, I might even say old men—marrying—"

Mr. Roberts met that with a gesture of broad disdain. "Oh, of course that," he said. "You hear of it now and then, some old idiot who has lost his sense of propriety allowing an equally light-minded woman to fool him out of his money."

"You think it would be impossible for the light-minded woman to love the old idiot perhaps?"

Mr. Roberts felt that his guardian was indulging in obscurities again. In a way, it was rather surprising, he thought, that Uncle George himself had not become irresponsibly entangled in some belated attachment. It would be no worse than he expected of Uncle George. "I'm afraid I agree with Mussolini," he said, "as quoted to the effect that for a man, a real man, the deadline for love should be forty. Thirty-eight might be better but forty will do. By the way, Uncle George, how old are you now?"

"Nine years beyond the deadline," replied his uncle with some acidity. "Let's talk about something else."

"Well, if you'll permit, I'd like to talk to you about something which has concerned me greatly—your running around dancing and going to night clubs with all these miscellaneous women—Uncle George, it isn't dignified. Oh, I don't mind this once, this evening, I mean. I'll try to be polite to your friends. But lately you seem to be getting worse, sir."

THE gray gleam was once more in the corner of Uncle George's eye. "To be honest, Kirby," he said, "I expect you're right. You see, the rôle of your guardian is almost too much for me. I think someone like Mr. Pilley would be perhaps more satisfactory."

Mr. Roberts, now that he'd taken the plunge, expanded his theme with the enthusiasm of a true reformer. "Of course, I don't presume to criticize, Uncle George. You're no worse than most of the older people. There's very little dignity anywhere. I've met a young lady here, in fact inadvertently I've seen her frequently and tried to relieve her distress. Her mother, it seems—they're on board a yacht—has been pursued from one port to another by some blackguardly old Romeo whose conception of life is a phantasmagoria of tea dancing, baccara, cocktail bars, night clubs and insipid love-making. The poor young lady feels disgraced, and quite rightly, with her father's memory only eight years old and her mother acting like a chorus girl on the loose. Yet what can one do for her? What would you suggest, sir?"

Uncle George sighed. "I'd suggest that all the blackguardly old Romeos go home to America and realize that they are only fit to be bank presidents and play eighteen-handicap golf."

At the entrance to the Ambassadeurs, the fashionable restaurant which forms so important a part of the Municipal Casino and its gay life, their guests awaited them, seated upon a small lounge in the waiting-room which was already a center of attention. Uncle George felt rather obviously proud as he led his nephew, ward and severest critic forward to be introduced. Mr. Roberts met an undoubtedly beautiful lady who had tightly coiffed brown hair and black-lashed, cobalt-blue eyes which had laughed at and wept over things of which Mr. Roberts had never dreamed. And then in a white-bodied Poiret robe de style which left much to a stimulated imagination and made one's arms feel dangling and (Continued on page 34)



# "The Gobble-uns 'll Git You" By

Old Pop Jacob of York County, Pennsylvania, was chagrined but not amazed when, one sundown, he discovered that his best Guernsey wouldn't milk. Pop Jacob knew exactly what had happened. The cow had been hexed—by one of his enemies of course.

He hurried to Mom Gartenweiler, the pow-wow woman up Pigeon Hills, and she spoke the words and made the passes—and told Pop Jacob to wait a day. Next evening the Guernsey let down. The hex was off her. And Pop Jacob gave Mom Gartenweiler a sheep for pay.

Collier's sent Mr. White into the Pennsylvania Dutch counties to talk to the bewitched and the bewitching and here is the result.

IT WAS a dark, dark night. A fine one, I thought, for a nice murder, and, as we blimped along through the ghostly hollows of Pennsylvania's Pigeon Hills, I couldn't help wondering if it hadn't been on such a night as this, only a week before, that Rehmer had been beaten to death with chunks of stove-wood.

And why? Witchcraft!

Merely because an alleged pow-wower said it was necessary to clip the old man's back hair and bury some of it in a hole eight feet deep back of Hess' barn, in order to release the Hess household from the curse of a black magic, the harmless old farmer had been brutally killed.

It was all very gruesome; and yet here I was on my way to a meeting with one of the mysterious cult; a pow-wower, a man who could shackle witches, lay ghosts, dispel charms, and cure by the spoken word or the laying-on of hands.

The farther we drove the darker it got, and the rougher my personal goose-flesh, until finally, when I was least expecting to see one, we came suddenly to a house.

It was a very gloomy-looking house, and it was a cold night too. But none the less when we stepped up on the porch three shadowy figures arose and greeted us—with grunts.

"Is Rudolph here?"

Illustrated by  
Kurt Wiese



"Right away the driver knew the horses were hexed. But he knew what to do. He took an ax and hit the wagon tongue a terrible blow. The strange fellow dropped dead!"

"Uh-huh. Go in," answered the shadows. They were Rudolph's sons.

We pushed the door open and instantly the aspect of the whole world was changed. Outside it might be that the air was charged with witchcraft and was heavy with the odor of gore and goblins.

But inside there was plenty of light, plenty of laughter and plenty of gay music coming in direct from one of the civilized jazz palaces of New York. A couple of healthy, happy children were playing at a table, and as we entered we were greeted by a huge, gray-headed old man with a pleasant, booming voice. He was every inch a Pennsylvania Dutchman. He looked it, and talked it. I'll not try to record his dialect.

"Come on in," he said. He cut off the radio and led us to a little parlor. One of the children lighted another lamp.

"Well," said the old man, "I know what you want. It's to hear something about pow-wowing. Is that right?"

"Yes," I replied, "that's it."

## Back to the Dark Ages

"Well, the pow-wow then, like I use the pow-wow, is always for something that is good, never for anything that is wicked. It all comes from the Bible. The words I say when I cure they all come from the Book and so there can't ever, ever be any harm in them."

"But how do you go about it to cure people?" I asked. "And what kind of ailments do you work on?"



"The suspender buttons would all come off every time he dressed"

The old man pondered for a minute.

"I don't cure for everything," he said.

"I just cure mostly for the taking-off, for the stomach fever, for the liver-groin, for the weeds and for burns and for the stopping of the blood. My mother taught me the way and I do like this: For the stomach-fever I take a string and I measure the person from the cowlick on the back of the head to the middle of the bottom of the left heel.

"Then I take another string and I measure the right foot, and if the long string is not exactly seven times as long as the short string then I know the sick person has the stomach fever and I cure for it. I make the two strings into a trap. Three times I put the sick person through this trap, every time I say the words from the Bible, and in a few days he is well.

"For the cure of the liver-groin it is almost the same way. With the string I take the measure around the stomach and I say the words. But they are not the same words. And then I wrap the string around an egg and I put the egg in the fire. Sometimes the egg busts and the string burns up, and then I have

to do it all over again. I do this every day until the day comes when the string will not burn and then the sick person is cured."

Thus for two hours Rudolph told me of the wonders of pow-wow. It even works when applied to live stock, although at first he said that he couldn't cure for horses and cattle. Then he bethought himself.

"Yes, yes," he exclaimed, "I can cure for the sweeny in horses. Old Jenny Schwann taught me that. I do it like this: The first Friday in the time when the moon is taking on I get up before day.

"I speak to no one. I dress and I go to where the horse is and I rub the sweeny and I say the words, and then I come back. And all the time I must not speak to anybody—not a single word. Then on Sunday I go again to the horse, and then again on Tuesday. On Sunday when I come back if I meet someone I can talk, but on Tuesday no. On Tuesday I cannot talk but after Tuesday the horse is cured."

## How to Bring Up Your Children

I inquired regarding certain other remarkable things about which I had been hearing a good deal of talk. I asked, for example, about pig troughs, mill hoppers, brier bushes, four-legged tables, and the best time to clip toenails. Rudolph knew all about all of them.

If you rub children against a pig trough they will not have the mumps; place them for a time in a mill hopper and they become immune to scarlet fever. Drag them backwards, three times, through a bramble bush and you needn't worry thereafter about whooping cough hitting the family. Pass them from hand to hand under a four-legged table, and around each leg, and it will cure the liver-groin. And above all things don't manicure your feet when the moon is taking on. If you do you will surely acquire a set of ingrowing nails.

Don't laugh. Don't laugh at the pow-wow; and above all don't laugh at Rudolph as a practitioner of the art, because if you do you will be laughing at the honest beliefs of about seven tenths of the people who live in one of the most prosperous and thickly settled semi-rural sections of the United States.

It is astounding, but it is a fact, that in five counties adjoining, and including, York County in Pennsylvania the vast majority of the people, probably a million of them, no matter whether they live on farms and speak with an accent, work in factories, practice law, hold political jobs, bootleg, or run banks and handle big business, are addicted to pow-wow. They are not ashamed of it either. They are strong in the faith and therein, as Rudolph explained to me, lies the secret of the whole thing.

The honest pow-wow, he said, works always for good, and never for evil. But for it to be efficacious both parties to the transaction