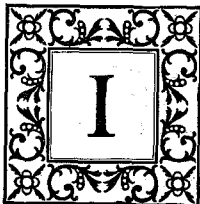


# At Mrs. Hopkins' Elbow

BY EDWARD L. STRATER

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALICE HARVEY



It was one of the large suburbs of a small town, exactly, as every one knows, the kind of place to live.

The town was really quite small; neither the butcher nor the

grocer moved in the best society.

The chairwoman of the Reception Committee and the Distinguished Visitor had just found each other in the crowd at the station.

"We thought of having the band down to meet you—" the lady paused for effect.

The visitor looked around apprehensively.

"But we haven't got one," concluded her husband, holding the brim of his hat against his chest with both chubby hands, which is exactly the right way to hold a hat on such occasions.

The lady looked at the visitor far differently from the way in which she had just looked at her husband.

"Nevertheless," she resumed, "we are very pleased to welcome you."

All the ladies of the committee included in the "we" smiled and nodded in agreement.

Presently the assistant chairwoman came up breathlessly from the far end of the platform where she had been posted in case the visitor should have come through the wrong gate.

She had a handful of broad white ribbons, each stencilled with a name, and these she proceeded to pin on the shirt-waists of the ladies, near where several of them carried their little gold watches.

Finally she had only one ribbon left in her hand and one pin in her mouth.

"Allow me," the visitor stepped up gallantly, and pinned the last banneret on her gray silk waist.

It was a very pretty sight to see him

do this. The assistant chairwoman blushed like a bride, though she had really never been one, and should have known better at her age.

She looked around anxiously. "Has every one her own name?"

Everyone nodded. She appeared relieved.

"Now, then," she smiled at the visitor, "everybody knows everybody else, and we can all act just like home-folks."

She had thought of this little speech just before going to sleep the night before, long after eleven o'clock.

"First," announced the chairwoman, adjusting her glasses and consulting the schedule she carried, "we will take a little drive around the park."

As if by prearranged signal the group fell back, opening a passageway to the curb where there were two big touring-cars, each with little cheese-cloth flags at either side of the wind-shield.

The chairwoman led the visitor to the first car, while the assistant chairwoman and the ladies of the committee climbed into the second.

The first was a Cadillac, while the second was of inferior make.

There was a moment of hesitation about the order of getting in, but the lady asked the visitor to step right in and sit in the middle of the back seat.

While he was doing this, she turned to her husband, who was fortunately right at her elbow.

"Henry, just take another look at the tires; and Henry, ask the boy if he's sure there's enough gasoline."

Henry then got into the front seat.

As soon as Mrs. Hopkins (we must now begin calling the lady by her name) saw that the visitor was comfortably seated, she asked him to allow her to introduce Miss Jones, who was going to ride on the back seat with them.

Every one knew Miss Jones could have



From a drawing by Alice Harvey.

"We thought of having the band down to meet you."—Page 276.



The minister called all the way across the table to ask the

had the position of school-teacher, but they all agreed that it was much nicer she had decided to keep her time free to devote to civic welfare. She was not awfully old either, and she possessed a certain seriousness which must have been very appealing to men.

The visitor, as soon as he saw her, would have gotten right out of the car to shake hands with her, but she asked him please to keep his seat.

In a few moments they were all seated, and Mrs. Hopkins, after a hasty look around at the other car, told Henry to tell the boy to start.

The car proceeded down the main street. Many of the merchants had hung big flags over their little shops, so the street had quite a holiday appearance.

Every one but Mr. Hopkins sat up very straight at first, because every one on the sidewalks was looking at them. Poor Mr. Hopkins was not accustomed to

public occasions; however, no one seemed to mind that.

The boy had been given very strict orders to drive as slowly as possible down this street, and Mr. Hopkins bent down beneath the side of the car to watch the speedometer, as he knew he would please his wife by seeing that her orders were carried out. Only once, when the needle for a moment got as low as six miles an hour, did he give the boy a look of protest.

At first Mrs. Hopkins was kept busy bowing to all the people of her acquaintance, but eventually the car turned into the side street that led to the park.

Mrs. Hopkins told the visitor it was a very nice park they were approaching. This started the general conversation.

Miss Jones was very well informed on parkology, and of course the visitor had seen many of the leading parks of the country.





visitor how he felt on the subject of prohibition.—Page 282.

In fact, Miss Jones happened at that very time to be urging on the town council the need of a children's playground in the park.

The visitor thought the idea a very sound one, and promised to indorse it in his speech that afternoon.

Miss Jones was terribly pleased; even Mr. Hopkins turned around to smile knowingly at the word "indorse."

When they reached the circle in the middle of the park, Mrs. Hopkins told her husband to tell the boy to stop for a moment so that they could admire the fountain.

The inscription around the base announced that the fountain had been donated by a certain Mr. Barnes to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of something or other on the far side that they could not see.

The great man said it was a very touching proof of civic pride. He would

have gotten right out of the car to read the rest of it, but Miss Jones stopped him.

Just then the other car pulled up for a moment alongside of the Cadillac, and all the ladies leaned out to ask the visitor if he did not think it was a pretty park.

As soon as they were under way again, Miss Jones and the great man resumed the subject of civic pride, about which each of them could give many little examples. Miss Jones said she could talk on the subject for hours.

"So could I! Ah, yes, so could I!"

Almost before every one but Mr. Hopkins knew it they were driving down the residential street. Presently they passed the house in which Mrs. Hopkins said Miss Jones lived.

Miss Jones never in the world would have pointed out her own house, so she blushed quite red.

However, the visitor thought it was a very nice house, consequently Miss Jones was secretly pleased.

She could not make up her mind whether or not she ought to do the same for Mrs. Hopkins when they passed the chairwoman's home. Just at the last moment, when she was about to reach a decision, Henry turned around and said in a loud voice: "That's our little nest!"

Thus the time passed pleasantly until they reached the hotel.

Mrs. Hopkins adjusted her glasses: "We will now have luncheon at the New York Hotel."

Henry grinned confidently, like a boy that has peeped into the kitchen.

"More like a banquet, I call it!"

Mrs. Hopkins turned to her guest.

"I hate that word, don't you?" He hastened to agree. "Of course the New York Hotel—" she paused for the exact shade.

"But it's the only hotel in town," Henry concluded helpfully, trying to make amends for his last remark.

As they drew up at the curb they found the mayor standing on the steps as if he had just arrived.

Both the visitor and the mayor were very glad to meet each other, as each had

been following the career of the other with interest. They were soon so absorbed in talking about themselves that Mrs. Hopkins had great difficulty in getting between them to lead the way upstairs.

The private reception-room was very crowded and noisy, but as soon as the little group entered, a profound hush fell upon the room.

It was so quiet that if a pin had dropped—but fortunately all the ladies' dresses held together.

For a moment it seemed that the assemblage fell back in awe, but Mrs. Hopkins, with admirable presence of mind, sent Henry, who was fortunately right at her elbow, to tell the people to come up to be introduced.

Immediately, the banker, the lawyer, the editor of *The Weekly Courier*, the doctor, the minister, the professor, in fact everybody was lining up. As soon as the mayor realized a receiving line was being formed, he took his place at its head.

When the introductions were over, the banker put his hands, palms out, under his coat tails and ambled up to the visitor.

"Well, how's money in your part of the country—tight?"

This was just the banker's little way of beginning a conversation.

"Tight!" The word was as milk and honey, fermented, to the visitor's ears.

"A little tightness is sometimes appropriate and desirable, don't you think?" the visitor suggested hopefully.

The banker took him by the arm.

"Suppose we look up a quiet corner and talk things over."

"Now," continued the banker, "as you say, a slight degree is sometimes desirable, but what I want to know is what those fellows down in Washington are tinkering with the tariff for."

"Oh!" The light of interest faded from his eyes.

There is no telling what he would have said next, for just then the minister came up to claim his attention.

His manner changed immediately when confronted by a divine.

"Sir," the minister began, "I am facing a peculiar problem of conflicting duty. I would value your wider range of ex-

perience. May I suggest that we seek an unfrequented corner?"

There is no telling what the great man would have said next, for he suddenly became aware of a young lady who was trying to speak to him.

"Might I ask the opinion of such an awfully important man on a silly little question?"

He looked at her severely. "No quiet corners; they're drafty!"

She smiled sweetly. "You see, all my life I have wanted to be a great actress. Oh, you can't imagine how I've longed to—always."

He nodded gravely.

"But lately, I've been taking a course in acting, and the book says that one should have coarse features and a large nose for the movies. I'm so afraid I won't film well!"

"Have you thought of a false nose?"

Fortunately he noticed a portly gentleman trying to attract his attention.

"I'm the doctor," the gentleman announced.

"Oh, doctor," the visitor groaned, "I'm afraid I'm catching a terrible cold!"

The doctor grinned. "Come right over to the corner. I'll give you a prescription that will fix you up in a jiffy."

"Make it a quart, doctor," the great man whispered.

"Quart? Tommy-rot, sir. Four years of prohibition have completely exploded the belief in the medicinal properties of whiskey. What you need is pills."

There is no telling what the visitor would have said next, for just then little Henry Hopkins approached him.

The visitor prepared himself to converse with Mrs. Hopkins.

"Hot day, eh?" said Mrs. Hopkins' husband.

"Very; ah, yes, very."

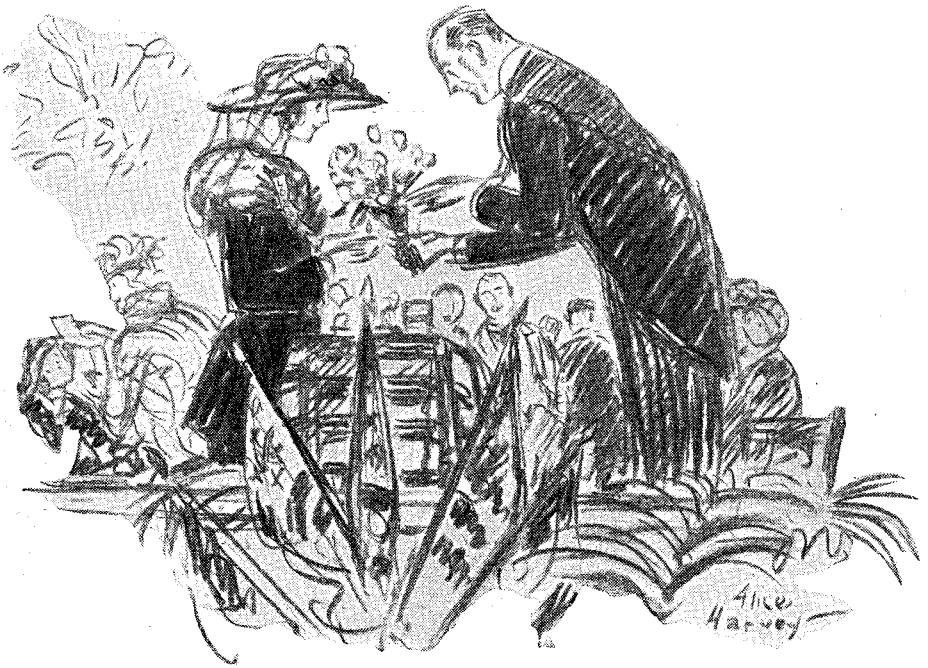
"Nothing like a quiet corner and a little—" wink.

The great man was too amazed for words. Henry misunderstood the silence.

"Perhaps you don't—" wink.

Several moments later the two gentlemen found themselves in the dressing-room.

Henry was engaged in the art of pouring when the door opened stealthily and the mayor's head appeared in the crack.



"They are for you," he said graciously, giving her the bunch.—Page 283.

"Ah, gentlemen, I fear I'm intruding." The mayor, however, made no sign of withdrawing.

Henry did not seem surprised. "Did you bring a glass, Bill?"

"Why, Henery, you do me an injustice. Purely a chance discovery, purely chance."

The mayor entered, took the glass that was offered him, and held it aloft.

"There are subjects of national importance above mere party."

The visitor gulped to the toast.

"A man must have his little drink." Henry raised the neck of the bottle.

"Especially when he's going to make a speech, as you would realize, Henery, were you a public servant."

"Especially when his wife's going to make a speech, as you would realize if you were a married—er—man."

So the time passed pleasantly until Henry decided to reassume his marital obligations. Preparatory to doing this he smelled the mayor's breath and the mayor returned the courtesy. But neither of them could detect anything on the other.

However, to make assurance doubly

sure, the visitor produced a package of mints.

"I always carry them for my—er—voice."

The mayor looked at him in admiration.

"Observe, Henery, that foresight is the true mark of greatness."

Toward the close of the above events Mrs. Hopkins and the assistant chairwoman were making a last minute inspection in the private dining-room.

Finding everything correct, even to the cherries in the grapefruit, each of the ladies drew a long breath and turned to the other.

Then Mrs. Hopkins turned to Henry, who was fortunately right at her elbow.

"Why, what are you eating, Henry?"

Henry swallowed hastily. "Just a mint, Maria."

"Indeed! Well, then, tell the head waiter to announce luncheon."

The waiter opened the dark-brown folding doors with a flourish.

"Banquet's ready."

There was an immediate hush in the room, broken only by a hysterical laugh from Henry.

Mrs. Hopkins turned to the visitor. "Shall we lead the way? Luncheon is served."

It was a very nice luncheon. During the course of the conversation the minister called all the way across the table to ask the visitor how he felt on the subject of prohibition.

The latter looked slowly around the table to find all eyes turned upon him.

"Why, very strongly, sir."

This answer pleased the ladies very much, but the minister asked the visitor to be more explicit.

The great man considered carefully.

"There are some questions above mere legislation. The final tribunal in such matters is the individual's own conscience."

"Ha," burst out the mayor, "I indorse that!" He hurriedly made a note of the reply in his campaign note-book for future use, should he ever be confronted by such an emergency.

The parson reflected. "I believe I understand you, sir. You mean that because of legislation the individual loses the opportunity of practising voluntary restraint, and so, of winning a moral victory. Ladies and gentlemen, I consider that a very fine position to take."

Every one was pleased, especially the visitor, as people like to have others agree with them one way or another.

When the charlotte russe had been cleared away Mrs. Hopkins looked at her watch, and rose from the table, whereupon the other ladies looked at their watches, and rose likewise.

"Oh, I think he's just wonderful," Miss Jones whispered on the way to the dressing-room.

"Do you, dear? I knew you would find each other interesting."

When the ladies emerged again, Mrs. Hopkins looked up and down the room for the visitor. At last she spied him with her husband and the mayor in a far corner.

Advancing toward them she adjusted her glasses to read.

"We will now lay the corner-stone."

"Perhaps you would rather unveil a monument," Henry suggested.

Even Miss Jones could not help laughing at the idea, for of course every one

knew there were no monuments to be unveiled.

So they all went outside, the original little party plus the mayor who had decided to join them, and climbed into the Cadillac.

As both the visitor and Mrs. Hopkins were saving their voices for their speeches, Miss Jones kept up the conversation. The mayor was very quiet, too, as if he were going to make a speech, so Miss Jones talked about the playground, knowing that the visitor was interested in the subject; though, of course, she did not want to appear to be reminding him of his promise.

When they arrived at the lot where the corner-stone was to be laid, they found a large crowd already there.

As the clapping grew in volume at the sight of the great man, the mayor followed Mrs. Hopkins onto the platform and bowed again and again to the audience.

In the meantime Mrs. Hopkins counted the chairs, and finding there was one too few, asked Henry to hand up a chair for the mayor. Then, with admirable presence of mind, she requested the mayor to make a few prefatory remarks, for, as every one knows, whenever mayors mount public platforms they are expected to have something to say.

After much hesitation he consented, if it should be clearly understood that his remarks were entirely extemporaneous.

By this time, the seats all having been filled, the conviction rapidly spread among the audience that it was time to begin. So Mrs. Hopkins stepped up to the rostrum and rapped for order.

Order was so profound that poor Henry felt he would hear his heart beat—if it would only resume operations.

The chairwoman announced that the mayor had condescended to make a few extemporaneous remarks. His name did not appear on the printed programme because it was uncertain until the last moment whether his official duties would permit his presence, and therefore the committee had not wanted to arouse perhaps false hopes in the audience.

Whereupon the mayor rose, and on that day made a lifelong reputation as an extemporaneous speaker.



As it was now Mrs. Hopkins' turn to make a few remarks, Henry closed his eyes very tight, and sank down as low as possible in the little front-row chair that had been reserved for him. Indeed, he stayed in that position until the last echoes of his wife's utterances had died away, whereupon he sprang excitedly to his feet and said "hooray," dropping back again even more quickly, as he realized the enormity of his conduct.

Every one, however, thought this such a fine example of connubial concern that they applauded as much for him, had he only known it, as they did for Mrs. Hopkins.

The great man now rose momentarily to his feet to acknowledge the storm of cheers that greeted him.

It is impossible here to give anything but the gist of the visitor's speech, but any one who is interested further in the matter will find the full text in the following number of *The Weekly Courier*.

Poor Miss Jones was all in a flutter lest the great man should forget his promise. But such gentlemen never forget, so even before she was aware that he was leading up to the subject at all, he was paving the way for a stirring appeal by recounting how, as a boy, he had perhaps laid the foundations of his future greatness by the hours he had spent in public playgrounds.

Of course, he had done a lot of other things, as a boy, to lay the foundations, such as selling newspapers, doing the chores on a farm, all excellent training, as any farmer present would realize. However, he happened to be talking about this particular phase of his boyhood at present.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, there is a lady present, a most charming lady," he said, turning toward Miss Jones, who suddenly became red but happy, "who is, I understand, a firm advocate of a children's playground."

He became aware of an expression of frowning anxiety on the faces of several gentlemen, all sitting in a row. They might be the town councillors, he thought.

"Of course," he continued, "there are sometimes considerations that make it impossible for the councillors to follow their natural inclinations in the matter,

and grant every request made of them. Sometimes even, I speak as a practical politician, they are not even able to disclose the principles of policy that dictate their decisions. But should such considerations not exist in this case, I wish to say that I give the idea my most emphatic indorsement."

It would be difficult to say whether Miss Jones or the councillors clapped harder after this indorsement.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen," he said in conclusion, "do you know what impresses me most about this wonderful city of yours?" He repeated the words again for emphasis.

The audience hung breathlessly on his words.

"That this city has ahead of it a great future."

During his tenth bow to the applause, a little boy came running up to the platform with a bunch of posies, which he presented to the visitor.

The great man patted the boy on the head, asked kindly after his mother and father, and read the card attached, which he hastily put in his pocket.

It said: "Compliments of the councillors."

Through the crowd that was coming onto the platform to congratulate him, he sought out Miss Jones.

"Oh, what pretty flowers!"

"They are for you," he said graciously, giving her the bunch.

"And now," said Mrs. Hopkins, looking at her watch, "if you don't want to miss your train you must say your farewells."

The visitor said that he could not afford to miss his train, so he would "waive" his farewells. Great men have been known to linger in a company almost indefinitely waiting for an opportunity to make just such a witty exit.

In a few minutes more the original little party was back at the station. On the platform they found a tall youth, who said he was the reporter for *The Courier*.

By some higher faculty not possessed by humbler men, the great man knew this already. So he waited until the reporter had opened his note-book and poised his pencil, and then remarked, turning his back on the youth, as if he had completely



forgotten him: "I am carrying away with me a singularly pleasant recollection of the charming people of your city."

Miss Jones blushed prettily.

"You will come back some time," Mrs. Hopkins asked.

"Some time, ah, yes!"

Miss Jones looked at him anxiously.

"Perhaps to dedicate the playground?"

"Yes," he agreed gravely.

She became bolder. "Will you promise?"

There flashed into his mind the picture of several fat councillors frowning at the word "playground!"

"Yes; ah, yes, I promise."

She looked at him gratefully. For a

moment their eyes met, and for her, in that fleeting encounter, was a long eternity.

"All aboard!"

The little group watched the great man framed in the doorway of the last car until the train was quite lost around the bend. Then Miss Jones turned aside and hid somewhere in the folds of her dress, one of the flowers from her little bunch of posies.

Mrs. Hopkins folded the programme carefully in the middle, took off her glasses, snapped them in the case, and turned to her elbow.

"Henry, I want to talk to you!"

Henry was nowhere in sight.

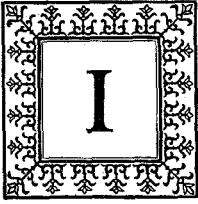


# Frank Bacon

AS SEEN BY HIS SECRETARY

BY FLORENCE FOSTER

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS



It was Monday, July 5, 1920, when "Lightnin'" was ending its second year on Broadway, that I took my letter of introduction in one hand and my courage in both hands, and went down to the Gaiety Theatre to present myself to Frank Bacon.

I knew that famous stars were not easy to approach, and I feared that I would be told Mr. Bacon was too busy or too tired, or too something or other, to see me.

"Lightnin's" first act was not quite over when I reached the stage door. At the end of the act the doorman waylaid Mr. Bacon as he left the stage and handed him the letter and my card. Mr. Bacon squinted in my direction and told me to follow him. We went into his dressing-room, and Mr. Bacon nodded toward a chair, and then he sank into an enormous black-leather one beside the make-up shelf. I sat down without a word while Mr. Bacon put on his glasses and opened the letter.

He read it through and sat gazing at the floor, thinking. The letter simply asked him to do what he could for me, and he, of course, surmised that it was the same old story—I wanted to go on the stage and had come to him for help and advice. After he had glanced through the letter once more, he smiled at me across the room, and, fixing me with that steady gaze of his, he said: "Well, I suppose you want to act."

"Yes," I replied, "but that's only half of what I want. I want to be your secretary, too." Mr. Bacon sat up a little at that and cocked his head to one side and raised his bushy eyebrows.

"That isn't a bad idea," he said. "I really ought to have some one to help me

with my mail. I read the letters and put them aside. I pick up a few from time to time and answer them, but most of them are left so long that they get cold, and there's nothing to do but put them in the scrap-basket. It isn't fair; it hurts people's feelings. I really should answer every one of them. I tell you what; come in and see me again in a few days—say, after Wednesday's matinée. I haven't time to talk about it now. It's almost time to go on again."

The following Wednesday I sent my card in to Mr. Bacon after the matinée. He called down the long hall which led from his dressing-room, "Come on down," and then when I reached his room he said: "You know, I never thought of you once after you left the other day. Come in after the matinée Saturday and I'll bring some letters from home and we'll go over them."

I went the next Saturday, but again I was told, in that gentle Frank Bacon voice, and with an apologetic smile, that I had passed out of his mind the moment I had passed out of his dressing-room the Wednesday before. So at his invitation I paid him regular Saturday and Wednesday visits until August 1st arrived. That day I went down during the evening performance. In one of his moments off stage Mr. Bacon saw me waiting and beckoned to me.

I started to go to him, but the doorman stopped me, saying that no one but the performers could stand in the wings during a performance. I explained that Mr. Bacon had beckoned to me. "Oh, that's all right then"—and I had the thrill of walking right up to the "Calivada" dining-room door (back-stage side).

Mr. Bacon was beaming with self-approval as he said: "Aren't I bright? I remembered to bring the letters!" Then