

THE MARRIAGE MERCHANT

By Maud Stepney Rawson

“WHAT is that nasty green stuff you are giving me, Quip?” asked her grace of Dittisham, suspiciously, amid the roar of voices in Mrs. Ben Imray’s supper-rooms.

“Innocent vegetation, duchess,” said Jack Quipstaffe, man of Mayfair.

“It isn’t down on the card, Quip,” said her grace, pouncing merrily on a little cluster of *alouettes à la Périgord* in the dish before her.

“Yes; it is ‘larks in a mist’—free translation of Bonne Bouche’s French. This salad is the mist.” And he helped her gallantly. His companion gave a gasp and a little gurgle.

“Don’t look at me, Quip; hide your nice Japanesy blue eyes for a moment. There! that’s all right. But for a whole ten seconds I felt like the man in the magic-lantern, who never stops swallowing rats. I’m sure I’ve been eating a continuous laurel-wreath, or some part of the table decoration. It must be a new idea.”

“Possibly.” Quip arranged his monocle and lifted up to it a fragment of the salad in his white kid fingers, as he stood by the duchess’s chair.

“It is cress,” he announced, solemnly; “it is the sort of thing that you plant when you’re in a sailor suit. You plant it in patterns, and it generally comes up wrong. It grows in pleasant places. It is always very fresh and tender and young—and full of associations. It makes me long to lay my head on a bank,” he concluded, with a sigh of excessive weariness.

“Oh, yes,” returned his portly

friend, with one of her big laughs; “I know the kind of bank you’d like to rest on, Quip. Don’t pretend you’re jaded already, when it’s only the beginning of June and everyone is still in a good temper. Country joys, indeed! I don’t pretend I’m under fifty, my dear boy, and you don’t hear me grumbling of tiredness. London in Summer is delightful, and I am going to turn up every season till I die. I should like to die in my box at Covent Garden. No creeping away into a hole for me! As it is, you may be sure my beloved step-son and heir won’t give me much chance to rest.”

“When Dittisham is married,” said Quip, “you will be more independent, duchess.”

“That depends,” responded her grace, grimly. “Directly I find a woman who won’t mind the trouble of managing him, I shall begin life over again, like a school-girl. I’m a widow without any of the privileges of widowhood, Quip. If he were my very own son I should have a freer hand. As it is, I have to tolerate all sorts of things, with the knowledge that I can’t do what I like with my own money when I die. I always hope for the best. But if Dit proves too much for any woman, then my responsibilities will last forever.”

“Cheer up, duchess!” said Quip.

“I’m serious,” she answered. “Dear Quip, get me some iced champagne at once. The bare notion of not getting Dittisham undertaken by someone else reduces me to hysteria.”

Just then the crowd, drifting to and from the pretty, fruit-laden tables,

parted, and through a gap the duchess caught in vignette a corner table, the occupants of which faced her—the man tall, pale and narrow-chested, with dark smooth thin hair, a small mustache, faint eyebrows and long eyes tilted at the corners; the girl, shy yet frank, with deep, serious eyes, and beautifully but simply dressed in white and silver, a wreath of tiny white cluster roses in her soft brown hair.

Then the duchess forgot the larks in a mist, and deliberately stared through her formidable glasses.

"Humph!" she ejaculated, after a whole minute's inspection; "very pretty, very good style and good physique; but no character. Too good for Dittisham; too gentle; too little pepper. Blushes under a dragon's gaze instead of boldly preening herself like a hardened young person. Who is she, Quip?"

"Miss Patience Chenies," said Quip, glibly; "eldest daughter of the Rev. Sir Edward Chenies, Bart., vicar of St. Una's, Crowfoot-on-the-Marshes, near Oxford, and distinguished authority on undecipherable Lydian inscriptions. No heir; baronetcy goes to distant cousin."

"It's a judgment. That always happens when a man with a title will go into Orders," remarked the lady, flippantly.

"Duchess," said Quip, reprovingly, "yesterday you attended two religious bazaars, and you spoke feelingly on three platforms."

"Yes, dear Quip. I am a little hysterical to-night. Who is chaperoning that girl?"

"Her father's first cousin, your old friend, Lady Mary Mant."

"Oho! Mary will ruin the girl," was the smiling answer; "and the girl won't have the strength of mind to revenge herself. Quip, why does Dittisham always look as if he had just recovered from German measles?"

"It was very windy at Sandown to-day," conceded the discreet Jack Quipstaffe, "and the sun was frightful. If only his Majesty would set

the fashion of wearing a cabbage leaf under his hat! As for the dust——"

"Gold-dust, I suppose. Looks as if it had got into Dit's eyes," said the lady, ironically. "If little Miss Muffet, or whoever she is over there, would take him down to Crowfoot-on-the-Marshes and help him to live on twopence, and grow rosy and bigger in the chest, I should love her forever. But the experiment might be dangerous. Her people might get their talons into poor Dit, and the two would be married at nine o'clock one morning in their traveling tweeds, and walk away through the village over squashed marigolds and china asters. I can see it all."

The block at the door near them suddenly dissolved, and a graceful woman in mauve, with prematurely gray hair, cold, fine features and a perfect figure, rustled past them. The jolly duchess flourished a large white fan at her.

"Hullo, Mary! Aren't you goin' to ask after my gout? Look at the little yellow lumps just above both my eyes, either side of my beautiful nose! Don't see them? My dear Mary, they're landmarks. Come, come, surely you need not try to flatter an old friend. I'm proud of them. Lord Dulke and I had a great time at Harrogate comparing notes; he is lamer than I, but I've the bigger lumps on my lids."

"Nonsense, Elizabeth," said Lady Mary Mant; "I envy you your good health. You never show wrinkles, dear."

"We are not all so beautiful as your little cousin, Mary." The white fan indicated the table where little Patience reverently listened to the young duke's views on betting—which, he told her, was not wicked, as she had been taught to believe, but a fine art, in which courage and philosophy were the prime qualities. Just then she happened to look up, and her red lips broke into a merry smile.

"Who is that extraordinary old lady with a crown of sham red and white

stones?" she asked her companion, eagerly.

He blinked. Patience had gone nearer the mark than she knew. The real tiara had reposed at the Bank of England ever since he had suggested to its present owner the use of the stones as a security. But the imitation was good, and he answered Patience with a clear conscience.

"Rippin' stones!" he said; "been in the family ever since Philippa of Hainault came over; the largest rubies on record outside the regalia."

"Oh," said Patience, blushing with embarrassment, "how stupid of me! You see they are such a wonderful size, and I have never seen a regular tiara before. Aunt Mary only wears a diamond dagger in her hair, because she says you see the most dreadful people with fences on their heads now. But who is that lady?"

"My step-mother," said Dittisham, in a matter-of-fact tone, as he filled up his glass.

"Oh!" gasped poor Patience, dropping her fan, her sandwich and her Brussels kerchief all together.

"Don't worry," said the duke. "Have some cup. She's a good sort, you know, but eccentric. She's one of those people who can afford to wear anything and do anything. She is a great trial to me—" he looked mournfully at the topaz froth in his glass. "We've just made it up, you know. I put up with a good deal for the sake of appearances." And he sighed again, and looked into Patty Chenies's soft, clear eyes.

"What a charming bundle of muslin!" murmured the duchess, still staring at the corner table through her glasses. "But it won't do. Quip, go and separate them in your nice, tactful way."

"Quip," said Lady Mary, swooping down on him at the same moment, "do find me a seat. My cavalier is a noodle. Just look at him wandering round! And I am dying with hunger! I simply won't go back to the ball-room till I have eaten."

So Lady Mary pinned Quip into a

corner, and the duchess, in a huff, knowing that she could never get upstairs alone, gnashed her teeth, snarled at the waiters, and finally climbed, grumbling, into her carriage before Quip could make his way back.

Lady Mary felt herself a success. The "bundle of muslin" went down splendidly, and she had a bachelor duke in tow. That, for a début, was not despicable. She reëntered the ball-room with Jack Quipstaffe, and introduced him to her niece. And little Patience Chenies, glancing up shyly, beheld a tall, well-made man of thirty, with the air of a prince and china-blue eyes that looked straight through her and beyond.

II

A WEEK later paragraphs in *The Linkman* spoke of the beauty and attractions of Miss Patience Chenies, the youngest débutante of the season. A stress was laid on the adjectives, to the delight of Lady Mary and the fury of other match-makers.

"You see, she hasn't a manner yet, so we must make something of her youth," her ladyship said to Quip, who, twinkling, repeated it to his friend and colleague, the editor of *The Linkman*. The women's papers took the cue, and Patty's very simple gowns were described everywhere.

When Jack Quipstaffe's trusty man grew confidential and reckless below stairs, he was wont to inform his fellows that "we"—he had caught the editorial pronoun from overlooking his master's correspondence—"we 'old society in the 'ollow of our 'and." And Quip undoubtedly did.

The profession of augur is not to be lightly undertaken. But a fertile imagination and just that spice of bounce which surely carried Delphi through many an awkward moment were part also of the stock-in-trade of Mr. Quipstaffe in his rôle of matrimonial gossip and reporter to Mayfair in general and to *The Linkman* in particular.

The marriages of the future belonged to those mysteries of which he only seemed to have the key; in the marriages of the present he played a smiling and principal part as fashionable recorder *par excellence*; and over the marriages of the past he exercised a benign scrutiny, amassing dainty bits of gossip for purposes of future prognostication as busily as any honey-bee. He had it in his power to make or mar the marriage plots of every chap-eron in London. He was the arch-priest of Hymen. He was regarded as a genius, having created a demand that only he could supply without loss of prestige. He grew so busy that he almost ruled the ladies' papers, and he was forced to employ a small army of typewriters in his rooms, the very smartest in St. James's. His mantelpiece was one great stack of invitations and photographs, and his coffers grew full. And when the duchess—the only duchess worth knowing, in his opinion—took him up, Quip's future was assured. He was positively overworked, though he still found time to spend long hours in the den of *The Linkman's* editor, when the two, irreproachably dressed and smoking the most exquisite cigars, would call each other "my dear f'la" while the scandals of the week rolled trippingly from their tongues. Certainly Quip was overstrained; so many matrimonial canards were afloat that it was impossible to steer quite clear of errors. Twice he almost made bad enemies of good friends, but his luck carried him through.

By the time people were crowding into St. George's to see a maid of honor marry the man who made the best sausages in England, Quip was himself again and almost reckless. Royalty was present, and the gathering was representative. Pretty young Mrs. Raleigh, a friend of the bride, took Patience. As usual, the place of honor was Quip's. Once or twice and with admirable stealthiness, he used a turquoise-enameled pocket-pencil and ivory tablets hinged with silver. Patience pulled her dragon's sleeve.

"Why is Mr. Quipstaffe there?" she asked; "he is just behind the princess."

"Taking notes," whispered Mrs. Raleigh; "that's part of his interesting work. No one can describe a gown like Quip. He and Modus, the English Worth, you know, dear, had a terrible scene the other day about a *ruche* and a *bouillonnée*, and they got Madame Parnasse to arbitrate; and Modus proved to be in error. Quip is a darling. He wrote such nice things about my wedding last season. If one could only be married several times! Good Brussels lace is so perfect, and that wedding march so upsetting and lovely! I cried tremendously when it was all over. You must have Quip at your wedding, dear. And don't be married from a parsonage. My cousin was, and the place was so small her train was ruined and she couldn't wear it at court."

"Here they are!" she murmured, as the pair came down the aisle. "Poor lamb! She is really sacrificed at last to that cheesemonger;" and she hunted for the sort of lace handkerchief that accentuates tears.

"He seems as much of a gentleman as half the men here," said Patience, rather indignantly; "and at any rate, he looks good and——"

But the crowd swept her with it over the crimson carpet in the wake of princesses and into Mrs. Raleigh's victoria, before the sentence was finished.

While the great Quip, glad of a lift to the house of bridal festival and nothing loath to sharpen his wit against Mrs. Raleigh's, sat perched on the back seat in his best mood, Patience stared at him in cold pity. So this was the great Mr. Quipstaffe of whom her aunt made so much, the brilliant, intellectual creature who was an honored guest at great houses, the companion of the sons of cabinet ministers, the man for whose acquaintance people quarreled and struggled! And he spent his life within a two-mile radius of the Achilles statue, describing orange blossoms and fur-

belows, or pitchforking people together with a stroke of his pen. She listened to his raillery with scorn. The desire seized her to retort in his own tongue. Tears of anger lay close at hand for her sheer inability to find words crisp enough to express her feelings and extort attention from him. The underlying irony in his deferent appeals to her unbiased opinion as a young, untutored creature maddened her.

She knew no one at the crowded wedding, and stole gladly away into a tiny boudoir set apart for the Royal gifts. She assumed an air of preternatural absorption over the jewel-cases, when a jaunty voice spoke her name.

"Miss Chenies," cried Quip, very proud of having received an unexpected recognition from a great personage, "what makes you so solemn? What is in your mind?"

Patience waited, then she said, with what appeared to her deadly malice, but was in reality demure sweetness: "I was thinking that you looked just now as if you were made to ride through life on the back seat of a victoria, Mr. Quipstaffe."

"What have I done?" said Quip, with an agonized air. "I entreat you, be explicit, Miss Chenies. Please wait a minute. Let me take you down to tea, and then you can trample on me at your sweet leisure."

So the rogue disarmed poor Patience, and when they were solemnly settled in a corner, with strawberries and cream, she felt herself to be a fool.

"I have annoyed you," said Quip, earnestly. His china-blue eyes were irresistible, his mouth drooped slightly at the corners; there was a slight nervousness in his voice; he had not misjudged its effect.

"I—that is—you," stammered poor Patience, blushing and trembling. "Oh, Mr. Quipstaffe, it seems so rude of me, but it was such a shock to find that a man like you could make a profession out of writing about frocks and weddings and rubbish.

It seems so dreadful. My father says a man's sphere of work is the service of his country, whether it is making horseshoes or Acts of Parliament."

Here a large spoonful of pink cream splashed down on her pretty dress, and Quip relieved her of her plate with tender sympathy.

"Oh, please forgive me for saying this," faltered Patience once more, "for I know you are years older than I am—" Quip winced gloomily and shot a quick glance at the flushed face before she raised it and opened inspiring, idealistic eyes full on him—"but it is so unmanly—what you are doing. You look so strong and so determined. And the duke told me you got your 'blue' at Oxford for cricket, and Aunt Mary says all your ancestors were splendid fighting men. I believe you could do anything, if you chose. You have such square shoulders, so different from the poor duke's." The sudden and awkward comparison made her stumble on still more awkwardly. "The duke simply worships you. I asked him all about you, and he says it is a crying shame you aren't a landowner and a——"

"I couldn't make a horseshoe," said Quip, shaking his head sadly.

"I believe you could," cried Patience. "How I should like to see you, with the sparks flying all round! I actually tried it once at the forge near our house, but it was hard work."

"Miss Patience," said Quip, gravely, "what you say is very wonderful and splendid. I hope you will never think otherwise. I hope you will keep unsullied your pure standards of life through all the twisted paths of this howling wilderness people call society." And with this platitude he looked down on her half in pity, half in curiosity to see how she would take his patronage. He could not credit her with any real interest in him, but merely attributed to her the sententiousness of a parsonage education. To his surprise she drew herself up and said, sharply:

"Do you know it is the rudest thing

in the world for a man to patronize a woman, under any circumstances?"

"But then I am so much older, you know," murmured Quip, highly pleased at her spirit.

"I simply detest you when you talk down to people," went on Patience, with angry irrelevance. "It's just what very old people do, and that is why old people are so often avoided by their friends." She felt it was time to conclude the interview, and started to go. But a table of roses and the magnificent figure of Quip hemmed her in.

"Miss Chenies," responded her mentor, "Acts of Parliament do not pay for the making, and horseshoes are very little better as regards a living wage for a gentleman. Only millionaires can afford to construct either of these commodities for nothing. Tell me, is it more honest to pay your bills or to run into debt? The first? Very good. Now, you see, my father, who did nothing for his wealth, brought me up with men of money and position. When I came of age he married again, and just as I was going into the army he plumped me into business, with an allowance of fifty pounds a year and a salary of a hundred. I bore it as long as I could. I found it possible to hire an evening suit occasionally and belong to a third-rate club, with no prospect of any future whatsoever. It is unfortunate that an aptitude for cricket does not assist one to a living in this hard, unpoetical world. I fell back on the best opportunity that offered of helping myself to a life less pitifully sordid and unbeautiful. I think that you, of all people, with all your ideals, would agree that every opportunity that broadens life must be grasped. I grasped the only chance I saw of a certainty, and long experience has taught me to use the capital with which nature or life provides a man."

"I don't see where a man's strength comes in there," said Patience, obstinately.

"But I had a knowledge of the ins and outs of things in London. That

was all my capital. I have now a steady income of a size that a flourishing barrister would not despise, an independent life, and a circle of friends on whose hospitality and comradeship I can always depend. I have no enemies for long. You disdain to call my work a profession, but even your father, Miss Chenies, would agree that a gentleman serves England well by keeping off the rates and by paying his butcher and haberdasher—" wicked Quip, who tore up his tailor's bills regularly—"and though it is not work that you approve, it is more honest labor than the various forms of gambling in which nine-tenths of the men indulge west of the Griffin. I will not disguise from you—" Quip's mouth drooped again, and he threw a cleverly savage ring into his voice—"that it is distasteful to me. There are moments when I would give worlds to hurl society from me. But you see that I cannot help myself. You must never judge people hastily. And now that I have confessed so much, and proved how right your instinct is, I hope you will be kinder to me than to anyone else." He smiled a little, pathetically.

The girl's eyes filled; she did not dare raise them. "I am extremely sorry," she answered, gently, "and I quite see. I was very stupid and rash. What a horrid place London is! Good-bye; I must go. Cousin Mary wants me."

"We shall meet at Dit's place in Surrey, I hope, after next week?"

"Oh, I don't think so," said Patience, hurriedly, with rising color.

Then Quip discovered the tears in her eyes, and a sudden and unaccountable shock passed through him.

"But you must!" he persisted. "Dittisham bullied his mamma to collect a house-party—and all in your honor—because you want to see the famous roses in blossom at Freynesham Court."

"I d-don't know," stammered Patience, remembering with misery her

chaperon's solemn assertion that she must be prepared to receive a formal declaration from the owner of Freynesham.

"I think the duchess hates me," she said, solemnly. "Cousin Mary says so."

"No one could hate you," said Quip, energetically.

"But she does," persisted Patience. "Cousin Mary says she hates all the duke's friends. But she is very kind to me, all the same."

Then Lady Mary pounced on her charge, and Quip was left to stroll gently through Stanhope Gate and by the Row back to his rooms, wondering why he had taken the trouble to impart his criticism of life to little Patience.

But as the week went on he grew more contemptuous of society, and, he believed, much incensed at what he called the impertinence of Miss Chenies. A spirit of mischief, prompted, though he knew it not, by absolute pique, mastered him. The amorous and ejaculatory Dittisham found him for once a most ready confidant. And Quip assured himself that there were not many green and tender first-season maidens over whose matrimonial future he would have so concerned himself as he did in the case of Lady Mary Mant's young cousin.

III

THE visit to Freynesham proved more exhausting to certain of the house-party than two at least had anticipated. One of these was Jack Quipstaffe. He found the rôle of a double go-between—on the one hand between his friend and Patience, on the other between Dittisham and the duchess—very hard labor indeed. Lady Mary also grew worn and anxious.

"I don't like Emily's sugary manner to me," she confided to Quip, as she drew him aside into one of the side walks, the morning after a croquet tournament; "it always means she has something up her sleeve. We have

been here nearly three days; we leave to-morrow—and Dittisham never gets near Patty; something always crops up. I've kept her in her room this morning, poor child; she is getting so nervous. It really is very trying. Why didn't you help me more yesterday, Quip? Instead of letting the two have a quiet half-hour in the Summer-house while the crowd was on the terrace, you marched her off to see a lavender hedge. I never knew you so tactless and stupid before. Dittisham was perfectly furious."

"Yes," said Quip, blandly, selecting a very large carnation to put in his buttonhole; "anger makes him look quite decent, doesn't it?"

"Why did you?"

"Because Patience—I mean her future grace of Dittisham—begged me not to leave them alone."

"You could have made some excuse."

"Not without being unkind," said Quip. He suddenly reveled in the memory of that frantic appeal in Patty's eyes, and her imperious yet terrified *sotto voce*, "Quick! Come with us."

The whole attitude of this child was deliciously unconventional, magnificently trustful. He was amazed at it, but far more amazed at himself. Here he was, in mid-season, relegating his duties to an unworthy sub, and idling in gardens while missing all the latest gossip before Ascot in the Parks, in order that he might watch a process very much akin to the hunting of a butterfly, a poor creature destined to be caught in the long run. He, the great Quip of Mayfair, was actually troubling his head sorely as to the morality of a marriage with love on one side only, and he had, after years of cynicism, swallowed the stupendous fact that, in the eyes of a girl, a dukedom does not condone every sort of idiocy in an effete youth.

"Go on being kind, Quip, dear," said Lady Mary, laying a lovely hand on his arm; "go and lure Dittisham

here, and keep him till I send Patience out, and then vanish."

Mr. Quipstaffe did not promise to vanish, but he departed on his friendly errand, cursing himself.

Outside the duchess's morning-room he paused. The French window was open, and he heard her rich contralto in scorn and entreaty.

"Stand in the furthest corner and go back to the second point of the speech: 'The history of the English constitution is the history of the development of a national character, second to none in its magnificence.'"

"Magnificence," bleated the duke, from the other end of the room.

"Speak up, Dit!" shouted the duchess. "What is the good of my slaving to write your speeches, if you can't use your penny trumpet better than that?"

"I'll rehearse him in the garden, duchess," volunteered Quip, looking in.

"I don't trust you, Quip," she answered, with a meaning look. "Keep that sweet Chenies girl away from him," she murmured, out of the window.

"I swear," said Quip, wildly. A certain paragraph in that morning's *Linkman* was slowly burning a hole in his pocket. His head was spinning.

"I must give some orders in the stables," called Dittisham, "and then I'll come."

Quip wandered slowly back to the Summer-house below the terraced garden, asking himself whether he should take the next train to town, or insist that Patience accept the duke in his presence. He tried to imagine his satisfaction at this result. Oddly enough, the anticipation presented a most unpleasant irritation, culminating in utter blankness. He began to detest his life, himself, his calling. All the pleasant bribes he had accepted rose and stalked past him in the sunshine like ghouls. True, he had never extorted them, but his flip-pant tongue had been his greatest temptation as well as his trusty staff

of life. There were sundry transactions in which— Well, it was of no use to look back. These gifts, even under their ugliest name of bribes, hurt no one but the recipient. At any rate, there was no pocket interest in this case. He left the little kiosk and walked out into the sun, to escape the ghouls. And there, flying across the lawn to him with the fragrance of morning, was Patience.

"Oh, I am so glad it is you! I have been wanting to see you all the morning," she cried. Her lids were tinged with faint purple, there were spots of fire in her cheeks. She dived into a silken pocket, and brought out a newspaper cutting.

"Look at that! Read it! It's shameful! I am *not* engaged to anyone. I won't marry the duke. How dare people put these things in? It's actually in our local paper. Surely it ought to be contradicted by—by my people."

"You must bear the burdens of renown," muttered Quip, searching for words.

"I hate you!" said Patience, stamping her foot. "If I thought you had anything to do with putting this nonsense in the papers I would never speak to you or any man again. But as you know how I dislike Dittisham you can scarcely have gone so far as that." She turned coldly on her heel, but started back.

"He is coming," she said. "I can't—I won't see him. This Summer-house is a perfect trap. I'll hide, and then you can get him away."

Dittisham strolled into the Summer-house a moment after Patience had fled behind it.

"I'm hard hit, old chap," he began.

"You generally are," said Quip. "What's the tune? Come away to bowls and tell me; I want some exercise."

"I wish you wouldn't make vulgar retorts," snapped Dittisham.

"Oh, come along," said Quip, peevishly, trying to draw him out of the Summer-house.

"Why can't you leave me alone?"

asked his grace, strolling gently to the door. He took his stand in the shade of the roof and rolled a cigarette, mournfully. "Look here," he continued, aggressively, "we've been overdoing those little hints in the papers, Quip. The girl is furious. Lady Mary has been rowing me—all the same, she says Patience is tremendously in love with me. Of course, girls are full of ideals, you know."

"Shut up!" said Quip, rudely, with a suppressed imprecation.

"All right," said his friend, in mild surprise; "all I mean is that we've overdone the paragraphs, and that my photo and the girl's will be in the papers unless we stop it. We'll contradict all statements emphatically, for a week or two. I've made a sort of draft; it will put her 'stepship' off the scent till Ascot is over."

"You great fool, you—" jerked Quip.

There was a scuffle, and the duke was forcibly dragged through the gate, just as a girl in white, with burning face, shot past them.

Quip gave chase, and his grace, gaping, rearranged his collar and made his way back to the house.

IV

NEXT morning, in Mayfair, Quip's clerks were busy, and barterings for the portraits of engaged couples went on busily as usual between his myrmidons and the weekly papers. But Quip himself was not to be seen. He paced his own den ceaselessly, and Patience's look of blue-eyed misery and distrust, as she waved him angrily back after the Summer-house episode, burned steadily into his very soul. Presently, Dittisham, in riding-dress, plunged up the stairs and burst in, hilarious and aggressive.

"Look here," he began, cheerfully. Quip took no notice.

"Got a liver?" queried his friend. "So have I. I'll have a whiskey and soda." Quip tugged at the bell and resumed his walk.

"Quip," continued Dittisham, grave-

ly, "my revered mamma has been at me again; but I'm not going to give in. Lady Mary took Patience back to town yesterday after you left; so I came up by the last train. It is much easier to speak to Patience in her cousin's house, and better form. The duchess has someone in her eye for me. She is coming up this morning. That's why I got up so early. I know the sort of woman her stepship generally gets hold of, someone with heaps of money and some awful drawback, hereditary deafness or fits. Fits are awful things! If a girl doesn't have them herself, they can descend through her brother to the children. And how the dickens am I to find out if the brother has fits?"

"If she had a brother, would he have fits?" murmured Quip, deliriously.

"What our family wants is building up; we want fresh blood, a healthy strain. I want my son—" he thumped the table melodramatically—"to be a man first, and a peer of England after. I want my children to be men and women, Quip, proud of—of—"

"Their father," suggested Quip, daggers in his eyes.

"—and of their position," continued the other, "jolly, straight-limbed boys and girls." He sipped his whiskey, lovingly. "That little Chenies girl is the wife for me; a true woman, Quip, sweet and womanly. I want her—" his voice grew husky with emotion—"to be the mother of my son, Quip. And Quip, old chap, marriage won't make a bit of difference between old friends, I promise you. By the way, I should like to make that hundred, which I want to give you in honor of many a kind act, into two. It's a bargain, old chap. And she's an angel, and she loves me!" He helped himself to more whiskey, and sighed.

"You'll make no more bargains with me as long as I live!" thundered Quip, turning on his visitor. "I'll not help you any longer to screen your escapades and smooth over

things with the duchess. Now go!" he said. "I've done with you!"

"How dare you!" screamed Dittisham.

"I dare very well," said Quip, contemptuously. "You know what your life has been till now. How about that yachting scandal, and Miss Pussie Pinks, and that little matter down at the 'Pav,' which costs you an annuity of several hundreds? And what will Miss Chenies say to Miss Pussie Pinks if they meet?"

"What's that to you?" said the duke, hitting at Quip.

"Everything," said Quip, with zest, parrying the blow.

"How about your own life?" said Dittisham, plunging at him. "How do you make your money, Quip? A nice sort of profession, loafing about boudoirs and ferreting out society secrets to sell, isn't it? You would better hang out a sign, 'Married while you wait,' eh, Quip? And commissions on successful alliances—what about those, Quip? Oh, fie!"

But Quip's hand held Dittisham by the collar, and the piping voice died away in gasps as the grip tightened, both men falling heavily forward on the table.

"When I have quite finished with you," roared Quip, "my man will see you home. Don't be afraid; your nose isn't broken, only enlarged."

When Dittisham had been tenderly helped into a hansom, Quip breathed deeply, ordered luncheon, and dressed to fulfil certain engagements. He wanted time to think, before he presented himself at Hill street in the afternoon to inquire for Patience. On the way there he absently bought an evening paper, without noticing that it was a fifth-rate rag. In heavy type there burst on him the details of the scene that morning in Jermyn street. Round the corner swung a coarse-mouthed newsmonger trumpeting the headline: "Well-known duke and society wit come to loggerheads over a lady!" He stared at the paragraph. "Miss Chenies, the cause of this romantic contest, is the daughter of——"

Quip reeled, the railings of the Park waltzed before him in a black mist. One of his own underlings had been at work here. He laughed, feebly. It was all such a bad dream that he ceased to be surprised at anything, but found himself vaguely wondering whether the man who sold this garbled information had made a good bargain. He hurried to Hill street and demanded Lady Mary. The footman had orders to admit no one.

"Then I must see Miss Chenies," said Quip, firmly.

But Miss Chenies had left for the country by the four o'clock train from Paddington.

When he crawled home he found a telegram from the duchess.

"Come and see me to-morrow," it ran.

"Another scene!" groaned Quip, as he allowed himself to be put into a smoking-suit. Then he wrote his solicitors. After that he sat, tired and sleepless, and thought of Patience till the clocks of St. James's chimed four and the sun rose.

Later that morning he faced the situation, manfully.

The duchess received him in her breakfast gown. Her shoulders were shaking behind the morning paper. She was too convulsed to rise, but motioned him to a chair, and shook her finger at him.

"Oh, Quip, Quip, you really are too naughty! Why did you spoil the shape of Dit's nose?"

"Regrettable, but necessary," said Quip, shortly.

"Don't snap, dear boy, it doesn't suit you. You're a dear! I knew you would keep that girl away from him, though I didn't think violence would be necessary. In future, I shall look after Dit's nuptial arrangements myself. I am most to blame. I really liked the girl, and I gave up the idea of sacrificing her to Dit with a struggle. And now I should like to know what I can do for you. Of course, this silly business is in the papers, and I am sending Dit to some quiet corner in the Black Forest for

baths, where the women are hideous and there are no tables. But you, Quip, must face society."

"I have done with society."

"Oh, don't make me laugh any more. Why should you worry? The girl has left town; you can make it right with Lady Mary."

"It is my intention to follow Miss Chenies."

"A little drive in the Park will soothe you, I think," said her grace, ringing for her maid.

And so they drove, and Quip poured out his soul—that is to say, the very best part of his curiously simple and apparently complex nature—to his shrewd old friend; and Society, seeing them together, exclaimed, and was silenced.

"I wish you would go and look after my Yorkshire property, Quip," said the duchess, affectionately. "You know I'm not mean, and I want a gentleman agent badly. Come and have a talk with me when—when you get back to town."

Then by some subtle understanding the horses' heads were set for Paddington.

"Good luck, Quip!" said his friend, bending from her big barouche, her eyes full of a kindly moisture.

He traveled down to Oxfordshire in a dream, and stumbled out of the train amid a bewildering scent of lilies, gilliflowers and white pinks that made the little country station like a

bower. He walked steadily for three miles, with increasing elation, and came at last to a turnpike. Beyond that was a hill, on which old red-brick houses clustered and looked down on the lush green stretches of water meadows. At the foot of the hill was a forge. He stopped there, remembering his conversation with Patience at the wedding. Suddenly he threw off his coat, and stepped into the smithy.

"Let me have a try, too," he said, laughing.

The sweat poured down his face and the sparks flew, and he laughed at his want of dexterity. He laid down the hammer when he had had enough, and turned to fetch his coat and wipe his forehead.

And there, not ten paces away, on the garden steps of one of her cottager friends, stood Patience, very pale, and speechless.

"Miss Chenies," said Quip, "I want to make horseshoes—or their equivalent. Will you cheer me on? I'm such a beginner."

He went up to her, and took both her hands.

"Life isn't long enough for explanations," he said. "I want to begin the horseshoes at once, and then—Patience!"

She drew her hands away and fiddled nervously with her hair, then abruptly turned. But in turning she looked over her shoulder, in such a way that Quip rejoiced forever and ever.



SAD INDEED!

"POOR Cholly met with a terrible accident."

"What was it?"

"Concussion of the brain. A piece of advice someone gave him went in one ear and was blockaded."



IF those who are good had more of the sinners' activity, and sinners had more of the inertia of the former, it wouldn't be half so bad to be either.

BALLADE OF THE OUTWARD-BOUND

HO! for the Summer trip, and ho!
 For far resorts the other side!
 The vast ships fear no winds that blow,
 And only wait the turn of tide.
 Dame Fashion cons her season's guide,
 And, safe-bestowed and well-begowned,
 Writes débutante and blushing bride
 First on the list of outward-bound.

The world's away. Its brilliant show
 To-day fares over oceans wide.
 The season points the hour, and so
 Straightway a thousand leagues divide.
 And Gossip, still the Argus-eyed,
 Utters, with no uncertain sound,
 The news that may not be denied—
 First on the list of outward-bound.

My lady, too. The blinds are low,
 Dark curtains hall and boudoir hide;
 For, when the mandate came, "Let's go,"
 Could she, true Fashion's belle, abide?
 Hither and yon Dan Cupid hied,
 The town and countryside around,
 Till at the slip her name he spied—
 First on the list of outward-bound.

ENVOY

Oh, there are landsmen multiplied
 Who would their happy lot were found
 On the brave ships that seaward glide—
 First on the list of outward-bound!

FRANK WALCOTT HUTT.



HER OPINION

HE—It must be embarrassing to meet a girl after she has refused to marry you.

SHE—Oh, you won't—er—you might not mind it so much as you think.



AS a general rule, I do not like saints; they are eternally peeping into spiritual mirrors to see if their halos are on straight.