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The Taming of the Shrew

By W. R. Gilbert

TO see Mr. Peter Martin come hurrying out of his cottage door, with hands raised in a gesture of helplessness, and eyes upturned to the heavens, was a spectacle with which the village was familiar.

So well did they understand the significance of Mr. Martin's attitude that, without waiting to listen for the sounds of his daughter's voice pursuing him, they were wont at once to exclaim, "Aggie's at it again!"

Whence Miss Agnes Martin derived her temper it is difficult to say.

Mr. Martin, in moments of depression declared that it was a puzzle to him, calling friends to witness the sweetness of his own temper, and reminding them of the angelic disposition of the late Mrs. Martin.

Moreover, as he pointed out, his other sons and daughters didn't go about like packets of gun-powder, liable to explode at any moment. Granting that Aggie was the eldest, he argued that

quit the Martin cottage hurriedly, staring stonily straight before them, although their lips moved excitedly.

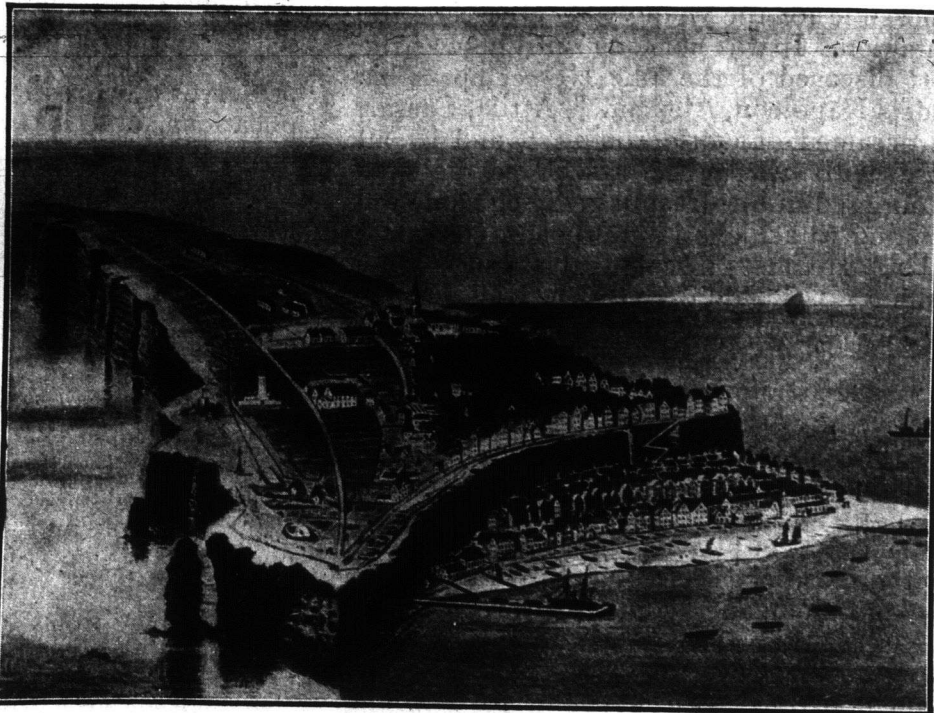
Over many and many a teacup were heads shaken at the disposition of Miss Aggie Martin. Humorous youths affected to be frightened when passing her in the lanes; friends of the smaller Martins always kept close to the door when she came into the room.

And feminine contemporaries of Miss Martin spoke with a stimulated pity of "Poor Aggie's temper," and secretly congratulated themselves that here was one woman the less to be feared in the matrimonial lists.

Such, then, was the position when Miss Aggie Martin was twenty-two, and Mr. Joseph Dapp arrived, as a thunderbolt, in the village.

He was young and single, a coincidence hailed with acclamation among daughters and parents alike.

Also, he was a city man, and this was a circumstance which would provide his



The fortifications of the Island of Heligoland. German Territory

that was no reason why she should think she had the right to go ordering everyone about, including her sire, just as she liked.

The fact remains that Miss Agnes Martin was an extremely masterful young woman. Her imperiousness was an unexpected quality, which had suddenly sprung into being when she left school to assume the management of her father's cottage and its turbulent contents. She had at once begun to rule with a rod of iron, and any behaviour that ran counter to her wishes was met by a forceful display of temper on her part, which was the cause of many secret indignation meetings.

At first folks were optimistic enough to ascribe her behaviour to the theory that her new position of authority had turned her head. Confidently they predicted that, within a month's time, her autocratic bearing would have reverted to a more normal standard.

But at the end of a month Miss Martin's high-handed rule was rather more assertive than it had ever been, and at the end of two months her malcontent relatives sorrowfully realised that they were under the sway of a tyrant who, whatever benevolent intentions she might have towards law and order, intended her behests to be obeyed unquestioningly.

Sympathy ran high with her harassed father. Old cronies suggested fanciful schemes for the humbling of his daughter, but he, with strong good-sense, declined to provoke her further.

Privileged female relatives pointed out to her that a girl whose temper was notorious for several miles around could never hope to entice a swain to her garden wall. The answers she made to these hints were direct, and such as cause the privileged female relatives to

future wife with good reason to look down on the other village girls as country people.

He moved into a cottage, covenanted with old Martha Gunn to superintend his domestic arrangements, and, nailing over his door a board with the legend, "J. Dapp, Watchmaker," settled down quietly to business.

Apparently he was quite oblivious to the excitement his advent had created. Laura Stebbings broke her watch-glass no less than three times in a fortnight; May Custance broke the mainspring of the kitchen clock twice within the same period; Annie Northcott, conceiving tardy suspicions of the reliability of her timepiece, had the satisfaction of taking it every day for ten days to the young watchmaker for purposes of regulation.

But Mr. Dapp, obtruse to the significance of these things, went on working steadily. By degrees he began to draw together the threads of a connection; three times a week he set forth on his bicycle to scour the country, and succour the chronometers of distant patrons.

And then one day a diminutive Martin entered his shop, bearing an aged clock.

Explaining that when the clock struck seven, and the hands pointed to twenty-three minutes past two, the actual time was then ten minutes to eleven, the youthful messenger requested that these discrepancies should be corrected.

"E wants cleaning pretty badly," said Mr. Dapp, glancing up from an examination of the works. "Did your father say I was to do whatever was wanted?"

"Fawther?" scoffed the small Martin. "Why, 'e don't say nothing about nothing up at 'ome. It was Aggie what sent me."