

WITH THE WITS

BETTER OR WORSE?

Mistress—"I'm sorry you are going to leave, Marie. Are you going to better yourself?" Marie—"No, ma'am, I'm going to get married."

BREAKING IT GENTLY.

"Did you make those biscuits, my dear?" asked the young husband. "Yes, darling." "Well, I'd rather you would not make any more, sweetheart." "Why not, my love?" "Because, angel mine, you are too light for such heavy work."

THE CURE.

"You know that fellow, Jim M'Groarty, the lad that's always comin' up an' thumpin' ye on th' chest and yellin' 'How are ye?' " "I know him." "I'll bet he's smashed twenty cigars for me—some of them clear Havannays—but I'll get even with him now." "How will ye do it?" "I'll tell ye. Jim always hits me over the vest pocket where I carry my cigars. He'll hit me there just once more. There's no cigars in me vest pocket this mornin'. Instead of it there's a stick of dynamite, d'ye moind'?"

A NAUTICAL SUGGESTION.

A young woman who had not particularly enjoyed her first trip across the ocean was of a party discussing the names chosen by the different steamship companies for their boats. "They try to get something distinctive, you see," said one, "so that one can tell from the name what line it belongs to. For instance, the names of the boats of one line all end in ic, like 'Teutonic' and 'Majestic.' They have really reached the end of the list, I have heard, and are at a loss what to name the next one that they build." "That ought not to be hard," commented the young woman reminiscingly, "why don't they try 'Cesic'?"

WILLIE WAS AHEAD.

A young man was walking in the garden with his sweetheart, when she asked him if he would have a glass of lemonade. On going indoors she found there was only one lemon, so she told her little brother to make some lemonade, but to put water into her glass and squeeze all the lemon into her young man's glass. The young man also became aware that there was only one lemon, so he told little Willie to put the water into his glass and to squeeze all the lemon into his sister's glass. Five minutes afterwards Willie was to be seen drinking lemonade outside the door, while inside the room the lovers were sipping water and asking each other if theirs was strong enough!

LITERAL OBEDIENCE.

Two men, staying in a boarding-house were, on their first night, disturbed by a great noise in the room above them. It was as if someone was running about with hob-nailed boots on. They did not interfere, thinking it would not occur again. However, on the second night it was quite as bad. On the third night it was varied, being a series of heavy bumps. In terror of their lives they went upstairs and asked the inmate of the room what was the reason of the row. "It's only medicine," he said. "And it's a deal harder on me than on you." "Your medicine? But surely its not so bad to take as that!" "Yes. The doctor ordered me to take it two nights running and to skip the third night, and that's what I'm trying to do."

THE TALLEST STORY.

An Irishman and a Scotchman once went travelling through a Western prairie. It happened that one afternoon they shot a single quail, which would do for breakfast for one of them the following morning. Knowing that the bird was not enough for two, they agreed to have it eaten by the one who should have the best dream during the night. When they woke early in the morning the Irishman said to the Scotchman. "An' phwat did you dream, Sandy?" "Well," answered the Scot, "I dreamed that I saw a beautiful basket descend from heaven, and then I got into it and was borne up to paradise." "An' I dreamt," said the Irishman, "that I saw you goin' up, an' I thought you wouldn't come back, an' so I got up and ate the quail."

IN THE MINORITY.

A physician came across a patient while strolling through the grounds of a hospital for the insane, and, stopping, spoke to him. After a brief conversation on conventional topics, the physician said: "Why are you here?" "Simply a difference of opinion," replied the patient. "I said all men were mad, and all men said I was mad, and the majority won."

THE SECRET.

He was reading his weekly paper, the *Local Advertiser*, when his eye rested on the following advertisement: "A new and novel method for catching squirrels. Send postal order for 2s 6d to Sharp & Smart, Trickster Street, London, E.C." He decided to send, and duly forwarded his 2s 6d. A few days later he got a reply: "Dear Sir,—Go into a wood, climb a tree, conceal yourself under a leaf, and then make a noise like a nut."

AFRAID IT WOULD BE MISSED.

Tommy learned to swim in a cove, an arm of the sea. Consequently when he went to the private swimming pond of his father's city club he felt cramped somehow, and afraid of getting in the way. After a while that feeling wore off. He began splashing about and doing a few tricks that he thought his father might not know. Suddenly his head and shoulders emerged from the water. "Oh, Daddy," he said in an anxious whisper, "I've swallowed some of the water. Do you think they'll mind?"

SURE, IF SLOW.

A steam-heating plant had been installed in the house of the new president of a small, conservative college. The president, startled by a break in the steam pipes, went in search of the college janitor. Being unfamiliar with his new surroundings he entered the library. "Dr. So-and-So," he inquired, his breath coming in gasps, "how can I find the janitor?" "Well," the librarian replied in a slow drawl, "I find the surest way is to send him a postal card."

THE WORST HAD HAPPENED.

Mr. Jerome K. Jerome objects to be labelled as a humorist pure and simple, but it was, of course, as a humorous writer and lecturer that he first attracted public attention. One of his lecturing tours was in the United States, and on his arrival on this side he was met by the usual group of reporters. "Aren't you rather nervous," asked one, "about submitting your particular brand of humor to American audiences?" "Young man," was the solemn reply, "I have faced a Scotch audience on a damp night, and now I fear no foe!"

HIS ONLY FEAR.

Sir Arthur Collins tells a good story about a certain well-known member of Parliament who is a personal friend of his. "This M.P.," he says, "on one occasion when instructing his chauffeur on the importance of driving carefully, remarked—'You need not keep quite such a watchful eye on grown-up people, as they can look after themselves, but, whatever you do, mind you exercise the greatest care when you see children and babies in the road.' Whereupon the chauffeur replied nonchalantly—'Yes, then feeding-bottles do cut up the tires dreadful!'"

ONLY ONE FAULT.

"Let me engage the cook," said the meddlesome man to his wife. "Show the applicants in to me and I will see that you are properly suited." "Do you attend church?" he inquired of the first applicant. "Yes, sir. Regularly every Sunday," replied the prospective cook. "How long were you at your last place?" "Two years." "I would pay you twelve shillings a week. Would that do?" "Yes, sir." "Have you any followers?" "No, sir." "Right! I'll engage you." The next evening the meddlesome man asked his wife how the new cook had got on. "She's gone, Frank," replied his wife. "You omitted one question when you engaged her." "Nonsense. What was that?" "You forgot to ask her if she could cook. She couldn't."

WHAT HE DID KNOW.

The examiner's face was fierce. His voice was fiercer. His whiskers were fiercest of all. But the laddies and lassies of the Highland school, who were having their historical knowledge tested, stood up to him bravely, and answered his questions in clear, firm voices. One little boy, however, found himself nonplussed by one of the examiner's questions. He puckered his brows, and racked his brain in vain. "What!" exclaimed the examiner. "Haven't you ever heard of the Battle of Flodden?" The little boy shook his head. "Come, sir—come! Don't you know anything about the battle in which the English beat the Scotch?" The little boy found his voice at last. "Well," he exclaimed warmly, "I ken it must have been verra exceptional!"

FAVORITE FICTION.

"Twenty Minutes for Refreshments."
* * * * *
"Yes, I Posted It on My Way Down-town, Maria."
* * * * *
"And Now, my Friends, a Word in Conclusion."
* * * * *
"You Will Find Our Prices the Cheapest in the City."
* * * * *
"No; That Story is New to Me; Go Ahead and Tell It."
* * * * *
"Your Honor, All My Client Asks in This Case is Justice."
* * * * *
"With Sentiments of the Highest Esteem I Remain, as Ever."
* * * * *
"I Cordially Recommended the Bearer to Your Favorable Consideration."
* * * * *
"I'm Glad She Didn't Invite Me to Her Party; I Should Have Had to Go."

Balaam's Baby

(Continued from page 22)

was lit she uttered a startled exclamation. "Oh!" she cried. "How old you look! And your hair is gray!"

"Oh, I am quite suitable for a father," he attempted to say, lightly, though he had winced at the careless words. "But let me look at you. Ah!" It was no wonder he broke off with an exclamation, for Pixie had more than fulfilled the promise of her lovely childhood.

"I am glad you like my frock," she said, demurely. "It was made in Vienna, and cost—oh, you poor Balaam!—lots. And I kept it for our meeting."

"It's not altogether the frock, child," he said, smiling. "You have grown up quite terribly lovely, my dear. You will be a shocking responsibility, and I fear I shan't remain in undisputed possession very long."

"Why not?" she cried, growing very pink.

He only smiled and sighed in answer. Then she went round the flat and scolded Balaam about the dust and disorder she found everywhere. "It really is time you had some one to look after you, you helpless old bachelor!" she exclaimed. "We will look for the ideal flat or house at once, and say good-bye to Mrs. Burt and whisky. Do you hear?"

"I hear and obey," returned Balaam, radiant. He determined to live in the present; he would not think of that third parting which must come some day.

She got the meal, though he insisted on helping, and a more delicious tea, in spite of stale bread and salt butter, neither had ever tasted. Then she unpacked some of her possessions to make him admire her frocks and the useless presents she had bought for him. After that, she went into his room and brought out an armful of garments sadly in need of repair, and while she plied a humble needle and chatted gaily, Balaam sat smoking in contented silence by her side.

When at length she rose to go to her own room, she did not kiss him as in the old days, but shyly offered her hand, and Balaam's face unmistakably fell. He held her fingers tightly for a moment, only too conscious of what had happened—he had fallen in love with his ward and adopted daughter. Was there ever anything more ridiculous? He dropped her hand and turned away with a sharp sigh.

"Good-night," said Pixie radiant, dropping him a demure curtsy.

A few days later they were established in a furnished flat, while Pixie sought and found the ideal home and furniture. At the end of a month they were settled in a delightful home, and people began to call and ask the lovely orphan to numerous entertainments. Most of them took it for granted that Balaam, who never



had gone out, did not care for society. "He is quite past that sort of thing—a regular old fogey," they said. At first they had looked upon the *ménage* as a queer one, till they remembered that Balaam had always been so old for his age, and had never seemed like other young men.

"Fifteen years between such a pair is equivalent to a lifetime," they said. "Besides, she's his adopted daughter." And so the matter dropped.

As time went on Balaam grew even quieter, and was seldom at home. He pleaded an excess of business. There were days when he could not trust himself alone with Pixie without betraying some of the great love surging in his heart, and to let her guess was to end everything. It was his wish that she accepted all the invitations, showed off her brilliant accomplishments, was courted and fêted and admired. Once or twice she had made him accompany her, and he stood aside while men thronged round her, pride and agony in his heart. Some day, soon, one of them would claim her, and everything would be over. Yet because her happiness must come first he told himself he wished her to find it early, and he was prepared to make large settlements upon her. At last the blow fell; he knew it was coming when he saw her face, and braced himself up to meet it, though he had felt the color leave his very lips.

"Come and tell me all about it," he said with a smile, trying to put her at her ease. "I know he is a good sort, or you would not care for him. Who is it?"

She sat on the arm of his chair, her eyes downcast, her cheeks bright pink.

"He is the best man in all the world," she said fervently.

"Of course," agreed poor Balaam cheerfully.

"And the handsomest," she went on defiantly.

"He ought to be."

"And the bravest and cleverest, and most unselfish and devoted," she insisted. He also agreed to that.

"You see, I've got tired of always going out alone," she explained shyly, "and I thought a—husband would be the nicest sort of companion and chaperone—"

"But you are not marrying just because of that, dear?" he asked very anxiously. "You love this man, Pixie?"

"I could not help it," she returned; "no one could. I love him awfully."

"You have not told me his name."

"Well, you see, he has not asked me—yet." And she laughed nervously.

Balaam looked his amazement.

"But he's only waiting for encouragement, of course?"

"I hope so," she assented; "that's why I'm giving it him. Oh, Balaam, how dull you are!"

He turned to her trembling.

"You cannot mean—?" he gasped, trying to look into her eyes.

She met his gaze bravely for a moment, then she had slipped into his arms and nestled contentedly against his shoulder.

"At last!" she sighed. "How backward you have been, sir! I have practically had to ask you, and you fell badly in love with me when I came back—you know you did! I've always meant to marry you, Balaam. That was why I let you send me away for such ages; I wanted to improve myself, to be worthy. Sometimes I got frightened in case someone might take you away; that's why I hurried back without any notice, and so—"

Balaam was too happy for words, but as he drew her closer and kissed her, the sunshine came back into the room, never to desert it again.

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There is someone else now, a Very Great Personage, with the true right to the title of "Balaam's Baby," and Balaam is no longer an old fogey.