

Laughing at Life

(Continued from page 8.)

ranging upwards to prices doubling their limit. He knows full well that no ring is half so beautiful as the love it is designed to symbolize, and he also knows Angel Face, with a far away expression will pick the best and even if it breaks Archibald, he will pay, though he may have to square his landlady to carry his overdue account for board another month.

Given a ring, the engaged girl goes to a new world with all the enthusiasm of a crusader equipped in a new outfit of shining armour. For two weeks she is content to show the ring. For this purpose she chooses all the girls who do not possess engagement rings—friends who once thought she was a nice girl. The campaign is opened the moment the engaged girl enters the room. She pulls off her glove, self-consciously, and, if no one exclaims with admiration at the mere sight of the ring, she sinks into a chair, clasps her slim white fingers—with the ring finger outwards—and spreads them in pensive attitude over her lap. The cat!—the other girls whisper. Of course, some one has to see the ring then. Indeed, this method accounts for fifty per cent. of the victims marked out by the engaged girl and she gets the desired opportunity of telling all about Archibald. In some cases she implies by her manner that being bespoke rather than displayed goods, she is luckier than all other women.

Poor Archibald.

Poor Archibald. He only learns by easy stages just what is coming to him. By easy stages too, he begins to wonder why he broke into the fatal, incoherent proposal and got 'yes' for an answer, when he might have kept safely to his account of the way he did a bogie six hole in five, on the local golf course. Even the most determined girl cannot introduce a man to mamma who keeps us a safe line of golf babble. Poor Archibald—he may have gained the whole world with his acquisition of Angel Face but he makes the tangible gain at the loss of his own soul. After the engagement ring has been seen by everyone, the time comes to show off Archibald. Archibald loses life, individuality, possession of his own identity and destiny and becomes a mere appendage of the engaged girl. High teas with her relations; whist drives; church dances; small at-homes; innumerable visits to church and a round of social clubs, are events following each other as doggedly as a line of sandwichmen. And every two minutes, following in the wake of Angel Face's skirts, happy in his mien but as abject as a worm in the eyes of other men. Archibald sees her stop, suddenly catch someone, smile with a delight that never exhausts itself, and look over her shoulder to make sure of the presence of the appendage. "This is Archibald," she says, with joyous pride, for the twentieth time in one hour, and Archibald, for the twentieth time in that hour, comes forward, smiles meekly into the grim, appraising faces of a matron with two marriageable daughters who are lingering on the market, and sees plainly, when they say how charmed they are to meet him, what an ass they really think he is.

Poor Archibald—let us draw a veil over this phase of his humiliation. Nor need we follow him through the dark days following the display of himself and the ring—the day when Angel Face, who has long ceased to sit trance-like and a prey to far-away glances, begins to take an interest in his balance at the bank, which, however justifiable, comes to him as a fresh element of surprise. Only the engaged man knows the hideous humiliation of seeing a spare five pounds, just enough for four uproarious bachelor days by the sea, turned by a feminine will, sedulously building the perfect home, into "the attractive occasional table," in rosewood or mahogany. Only the bachelor knows the torment of his soul when a sovereign bet at five to one, instead of becoming a merry night

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