

Philip and His Joie-de-Vivre.

By W. R. Gilbert, Calgary. Specially Written for The Western Home Monthly.



YOU said the clairvoyant, with icy indifference, "will shortly be knocked down by a brown horse in a hansom cab."

"Thank you," replied Philip, endeavoring to emulate her Arctic serenity. "Shall I—er—shall I get up again?"

"That the crystal does not show me. I only see you upon the road prostrate, senseless. A policeman is near at hand. The brown horse wears a bonnet, so it must be summer weather. The bonnet is of yellow straw, with a red ribbon. That is all I can tell you. Next, please."

"Choice entertainment for an afternoon party," said Philip five minutes later, as he passed down the steps of Mrs. Scott-Smyth's town house, with Bertie Haig for companion. "What did she tell you, Bertie? Something jolly?"

Bertie Haig looked solemnly at the cigarette he was lighting.

"Told me I'd marry a Jewess," he answered. "If there's one thing in the world I detest it's a Jewess."

"Let's enter upon a defensive and offensive alliance. You shall protect me from hansomers, and I'll shelter you from Jewesses, eh?"

"Oh, it's all rot! Silly rot! I don't know why women want to have her at their parties, do you?"

Philip twitched his eyebrows rather nervously. He kept a careful corner of his eye for the hansomers that poured themselves from north, south, east and west upon his vision.

"Her prophecies have a hideous knack of coming true, you know," he said presently. "That's what has made her the fashion."

Bertie gave a mirthless laugh, and was silent. Rather dreading the two young men proceeded down Piccadilly.

By-and-by Philip spoke again.

"Come into my rooms," he said, "and have a whisky and soda."

"I'll come into your rooms, but I won't have a whisky and soda; I have an idea that this indiscriminate whiskies and sodas may have something to do with the discomposure that arises from the crazy sooth saying of a fashionable clairvoyant," said Bertie, following him into his bachelor flat.

"Nerves, you mean?"

"Just so; nerves. What else do you expect?"

Philip was silent. He sat down opposite Bertie and looked thoughtfully at him through a mesh of cigarette smoke.

Presently he asked a question.

"Bertie do you know the meaning of the word joie-de-vivre?"

"I did once."

"Ah! You've lost it?"

"Quite."

"So have I."

"You? The successful artist—the man who is pointed out as the future president of the Royal Academy?"

"It's a fact. I get up tired; I go to bed tired. Life is one interminable weariness and emptiness, intersected by an occasional terror of death. Bertie—"

"Well?"

"Were you afraid of the small-pox?"

"Stark, staring terrified."

"So was I. Do you ever eat oysters?"

"Wouldn't touch 'em with a toasting fork."

"No, more would I. Have you a pet disinfectant?"

"Three; I use 'em all at once. So that if one fails, another will succeed."

"Exactly. Do you always look for the emergency exit the moment you get into a theatre?"

"Never miss."

"And, last of all, do you believe the clairvoyant?"

"Every word she says."

Philip was silent for five minutes.

"Are we really men?" he demanded at last.

"No," answered Bertie; "we're worms."

Philip rose and went to his desk, from which he took a letter. "From my brother on the West Coast of Africa," he explained. "He's making railways among the cannibals, I think. But listen."

He spread the letter out and began to read:

"The worst of it is one doesn't know what to do for a horse. I have managed to pick up a large mare that, if she were a human being, would certainly be in a padded room of a lunatic asylum. She bolted with me yesterday, right away through the settlement, leaving a trail of dead fowls behind. I let her rip for a bit, but when it seemed as if she meant going clean over the side of the cliff into the sea, I thought I'd better get off. I twisted the reins round my arms, held on to the saddle bow for a minute, and then leapt for my life. Being a bit flurried, however, I forgot about my reins and brought myself down, and the mare clean over on top of me. She polka'd on me for a few minutes, and knocked the wind sheer out of my body. When I came to myself, my head was buried in the sand and she was biting pieces out of my left boot. I can tell you I laughed."

"Laughed!" ejaculated Bertie. "Great Scott, would you have laughed?"

"I? The whole story has put me in a cold perspiration."

Philip folded the letter deliberately. "Bertie," he said. "I have made a discovery; a man who can laugh after he has been polka'd upon by a crazy mare has got the whole secret of joie-de-vivre."

"I believe you," emphasized Bertie.

And Philip proceeded: "Here are we—two painters—successful or non-successful, matters little. We have, I suppose, some slight sense of the beautiful, some little feeling for the glamour of the life that is about us. But we cannot enjoy it. We are reduced to two pups by a mere clairvoyant. I tell you I will put up with it no longer, Bertie. I intend to cease being a worm, and to insist upon being a man. If I am to be slain by a hansom I'll get all my fun out of life first. I will taste something of the old forgotten wonders of joie-de-vivre."

Philip paused and shut his mouth with a little snap. Bertie eyed him curiously.

"What do you mean to do?" he asked. "To go down into the country and—"

"And what?"

"And there seek for the manhood I have lost."

They were both silent. Presently Bertie shook his head.

"Will you come with me?" Philip asked him. But Bertie rose and reached for his hat.

"I? No; it's too late. You've got a bit of sporting ancestry behind you, Phil, that may shove you through. For me—my people were townsmen, born and bred; I shall go existing on."

He went out half smiling. Philip sat and mused until the summer twilight dimmed the corners of the room. He dressed and went round to the Carlton to dine. When he came home again a note from Bertie Haig was upon his table.

"Congratulations, old fellow; I am engaged to Miss Besso—she's a Jewess. The clairvoyant knew all about it, you see."

Philip held the note to the flame of a candle, and his brows contracted heavily over his eyes. Had it really come to this with Bertie Haig? Could he feel that it was useless to defy the prophecy of a fashionable clairvoyant in a smart woman's drawing room? Was he content to be a mere derelict on the waters of life, a being without pluck, without initiative, without laughter, without defiance. Philip found himself striking a sudden melodramatic fist upon the table at the thought of it; on

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