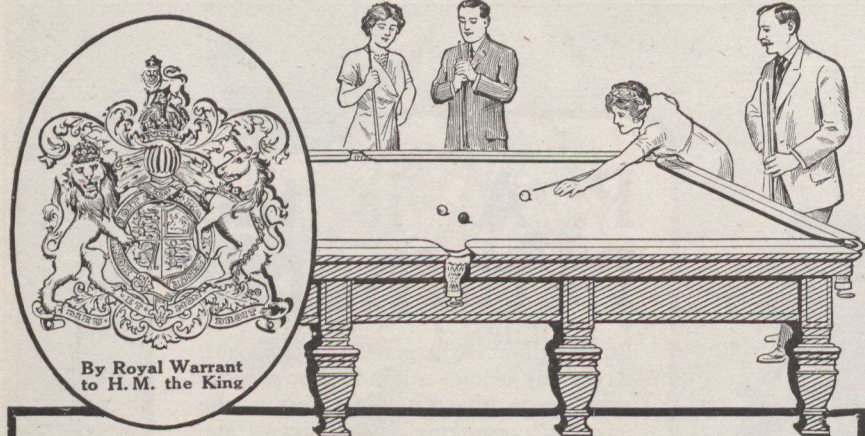




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THE clever housewife, who considers the pleasure and welfare of her family, takes particular pride in the coffee she serves.

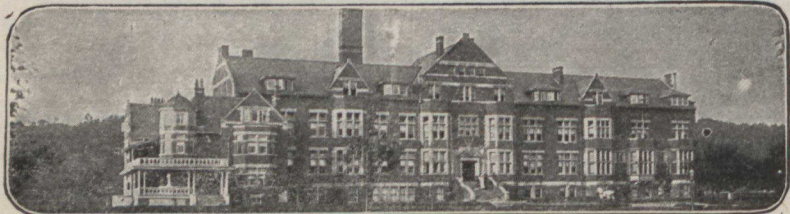
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permit yourself," he answered gently. "I have a habit of looking after myself."

"But you have only one arm," she protested.

"But I have a couple of eyes to see danger with, and a couple of legs to run away from it with."

"Somehow," broke in Phoebe Perowne, "I don't seem to see you running away very readily, Mr. Saunders."

"My dear lady, I assure you I have no scruples on the point; but my experience teaches me that it is generally wiser to stand one's ground."

"Oh, don't argue with him, Miss Perowne," laughed Mrs. Saunders. "He would never admit doing anything that was not the height of wisdom. He has the conceit of a turkey-cock and the complacency of a Pharisee; and the worst of it is, he is always justified by events."

"I should be proud of such a husband," said Phoebe, with kindling eyes.

"I AM," said Mrs. Saunders, kissing her husband. "Robert, have you been in danger?"

"There is danger everywhere," he replied, "and I have been in more places than one. But tell me, to what do we owe the honour of a visit from Mrs. and Miss Perowne?"

"To-day we were to have started for Weissheim," said Mrs. Perowne. "My plans, for reasons with which I need not trouble you, were hurriedly made. We chartered a sleigh and drove to the station. There we found the strangest condition of affairs. There were lots of soldiers but no porters. The trains were all empty and the carriages locked. None of the engines had steam up. I asked an officer if we could possibly get to Weissheim to-night, and he said that it would be comparatively simple if we had an aeroplane, but otherwise a physical impossibility."

"Then," said Phoebe, taking up the tale, "we tried to return to the Concordia, but half-way down the Bahnhofstrasse a cordon of troops was drawn across the street. We were turned back, and tried to get round by the side streets, but there were soldiers everywhere and firing and cavalry charges, and horrible things happening. Naturally mother got frightened, and finding ourselves at length near the Neptunburg, we asked if we could come in and see you, and we were instantly admitted."

"You did wisely," said Saunders. "This is probably the safest place in Weidenbruck. We are in the throes of martial law, and that means a condition of affairs only one degree preferable to mob law."

"What has happened?" asked Mrs. Saunders.

"A number of unpleasant things," replied Saunders; "chief among them, the fact that the Arch-duke Cyril has obtained possession of young Karl's person and also of Fritz of Friedrichsheim."

"Fritz of Friedrichsheim!" ejaculated Phoebe in consternation.

"That seems to upset you," said Saunders.

"Fritz of Friedrichsheim," repeated Phoebe, "the popular hero, the dauntless spy, the splendid young noble who sets patriotism and loyalty above personal safety."

"Quite so," said Saunders, "that describes him accurately. That is why I am not pleased at his abduction."

"But he must be rescued at once," cried Phoebe.

Saunders shrugged his shoulders.

"When a man-eating tiger has his paw on the hunter's breast," he said, "it is no good trying to drag the poor man away. You must shoot the tiger."

"Then we must shoot the Arch-duke," said Phoebe excitedly.

Saunders laughed softly.

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure," he said.

"A gentleman to see you, Excellency."

Saunders' man-servant had entered. "Is it the doctor—about poor Roeder?" inquired Saunders.

"No, Excellency."

"Then who is it?"

"He would not give his name,"

"Did you show him into my study?"

"Yes, Excellency."

"Excuse me," said Saunders to the ladies, "I suppose I had better see this person."

"Be careful," pleaded Mrs. Saunders.

Saunders laughed lightly and left the room. He found a small, shabbily clothed man awaiting him, an individual of pendulous cheeks, semi-bald head, and dirty finger nails.

"Herr Neumann!" he ejaculated.

It was the brewer right enough, but robbed even of the air of commercial prosperity that had shed a faint dignity on his plebeian person. He was not merely exceedingly dirty, but he looked ill and thin, and his obsequious manner had degenerated to a palsied humility.

"Your Excellency," he began quaveringly, "be merciful. I have suffered much."

"So I see."

"You have a kind heart."

"On the contrary, I have no heart at all. What do you want?"

"You look upon a broken man. My brewery is destroyed. My name stinks in the nostrils of the citizens. I dare not show myself abroad. I live in a cellar, eating such food as my wife and daughter can obtain for me. Live, did I say? I exist—"

"Yes," interrupted Saunders, "and if I had not telephoned you last night you would not do that."

"That is why I said you had a kind heart," returned the wretched brewer, who still retained a sense of logic.

"My dear Neumann, you have lost your sense of proportion as well as your brewery. It is I who am mainly responsible for your loss of position. It was I who incited the mob to wreck your factory."

"I know, I know," quavered the miserable Mayor, "it was most just. I deceived you. I feared the Arch-duke and the ex-Queen. I feared you too, but not so much. Then there was the money—"

"Exactly," interrupted Saunders sternly, "there was the money. You took pay with both hands. That sort of thing may do in business, but it does not do in politics. You should have served me or the Arch-duke."

"I should have served you, Excellency."

"I think perhaps it would have been wiser," said Saunders dryly.

"Oh, Excellency," cried Neumann, sinking to his knees and throwing out both hands in an imploring gesture, "is it too late? Can I be permitted to serve you now? Can you trust me?"

"I DON'T know," said Saunders.

"Why don't you stick to the Arch-duke, and see what he can do for you?"

"I have discovered the mistake of not giving you whole-hearted support, Excellency. I have learned my lesson. The Arch-duke is a terrible person, but he is not so quick with his rewards and penalties as you."

"That is sheer truth," assented Saunders, well pleased at what he considered a high compliment. "Tell me how you think you can serve me, be faithful, and I will see how we can mend your broken fortunes. And don't grovel—get up."

"My brewery—if you could rebuild my brewery," pleaded the unhappy man, rising to his feet.

"The State might give you sufficient compensation to rebuild," mused Saunders, "but we should want a lot of service first."

"Excellency, when I got your telephone message I fled in haste."

"So I gathered."

"I took my wife and daughter with me to the house of a friend opposite. There we watched the mob perform its work of destruction. At first I was angry; then when I considered their numbers and ferocity I was appalled. All classes seemed to combine to wreak vengeance on my property. Finally a host of Jews from the—"

"Yes, I know all about it," interjected Saunders. "I stage-managed the whole affair. Get on to business."

"It was a terrible night. My friend, who had at first given me shelter willingly enough, grew alarmed pre-