

Dodging the Interviewers

The liner had cleared New York harbor, and was heading out to sea for her five days' trip across the Atlantic when Taption Flutterby, the popular novelist, came on deck. He had been shut up in his stateroom for four solid hours, during which time he had successfully "sporting the oak" against pushing interviewers innumerable. Now that they had all most assuredly ceased from troubling he sought the fresh air and resumed his wonted interest in his kind.

For Taption Flutterby was not the enemy of man in general, but only of that particular section of the human species known as interviewers. He had suffered at their hands, as popular heroes will if they happen to be in the slightest degree modest and retiring, and in his case suffering had bred resentment, and resentment had developed into positive hatred. With the growth of his popularity as an author the dodging of interviewers had come to be a daily cross with him, although one must admit that he took a sort of grim delight in hearing it, since he managed so warily and consistently to elude and rebuff his tormentors of the press. It was his proud boast that for five years past not a single authentic interview with him had been published for the very good reason that never an interview had been granted.

Taption Flutterby now stood on deck at peace with the world, and drank in the vision of a glorious sunset, which was also absorbing the attention of many of his fellow passengers. At last the orb of day sank below the horizon, the bright panorama of the sunset glow faded imperceptibly away, and the stars came out to keep their nightly vigil. Taption Flutterby was awe-struck and silent at this familiar yet ever-wondrous display of nature's handiwork. But a young man who stood near him—a man of about his own age and build—was moved to put the scene into words. The author overheard him recite in low soft tones the lines:

"Come, Evening, once again, season of peace,
Return, sweet Evening, and continue long!
Methinks I see thee in the streaky west,
With matron step slow moving, while the night
Treads on thy sweeping train."
Taption Flutterby, who was given to poetry himself, scented here a congenial spirit, and was fain to make his acquaintance. "A poet, sir?" he ventured aloud, with an ingratiating smile.

The stranger gave a start, as if one caught unawares. "Oh, no, sir," he replied, with a slight flush. "I am merely thinking aloud from Cowper."

"A real poet, that," said Taption Flutterby, "and one too little read nowadays, I am afraid."

"Oh, nowadays," responded the stranger, with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders, "people make the mistake of reading only books that are fresh from the press. They waste their days in seeking for new geniuses, and quite neglect all the grand old classics that have stood the test of time."

"There is a great deal of justice in what you say," agreed Taption Flutterby. "Far be it from me, however, to condemn the reading of modern works entirely, since by reason of that practice I live and move and have my being. That is my card, sir. You may have heard the name before?"

The author waited expectantly for the stranger's recognition of the magic name, Taption Flutterby, which the peoples of two hemispheres delighted to honor. But he waited in vain. The stranger spelt out the name, as it were, and gave no sign of recognition. "Taption Flutterby," he said, meditatively, and then added: "May I ask, sir, what is your particular line as an author?"

This was indeed something fresh. Taption Flutterby felt his amour propre just a little wounded. He hardly knew at first whether to resent the ignorance of his new friend or to dispel it. After a moment's hesitation, he chose the latter course.

"I am a novelist," he said, "and a short story writer. Some people honor me too much, I confess—by declaring that my verses are poetry."

"No doubt, no doubt," said the stranger, a little ambiguously. "I am honored by your acquaintance, Mr. Flutterby. This is my card, sir."

Taption Flutterby took it, and read the simple announcement, "Clarence Hedway, New York."

"I cannot claim to belong, like yourself, to the world of letters, Mr. Flutterby, and one too little read nowadays. I just make my living as a paper-stainer, but my work, like yours, goes into many homes, and resembles it, I hope, in one respect, at any rate—by giving satisfaction."

This little joke served to place the

two men still more in rapport. Presently the talk drifted into purely literary channels. Taption Flutterby was charmed by the extent and variety of his companion's reading, but was amazed to find that it stopped short of the present generation of writers. Even their names appeared unknown to him.

"I figure it out in this way, Mr. Flutterby," explained his fellow-traveler. "Although I do a good deal of reading, there are so many hundreds, or thousands, of acknowledged classics which I have not read yet. Why should I leave the substance for the shadow by neglecting them in favor of the works of living authors, who may or may not hand their names down to posterity?"

Taption Flutterby admitted that there was something in this argument, but he avowed his gratification that it was not universally adopted. To which Clarence Hedway replied, with a laugh, that he supposed it was just as well for present day writers that everyone did not abstain from reading their works until they had attained to undisputed classic rank.

This was not the only such conversation the two men had in the course of the voyage. Taption Flutterby, like the generality of writers, was fond of talking "shop" when he could do so without fear of his talk being reported in the press. In Clarence Hedway he found a truly congenial spirit—one who could listen attentively and intelligently, and who limited his own share in the conversation to throwing out suggestions as to pegs on which his companion could hang fresh discourses.

"I am afraid I bore you with my views," Taption Flutterby said on the third day of the voyage. "You know at least as much as I do about these old authors. Now, it is my weakness to talk on literary matters at lib, whenever I can get anybody to listen. But I should like to say something that is new to you. Suppose we talk about living authors?"

"As you please," replied Clarence Hedway. "I like to hear you talk, anyway, because you throw fresh light on things. But if you turn yourself on to living writers it must be a case of master and pupil between us, and you must not expect me to have any views of my own to offer."

Nothing daunted, Taption Flutterby plunged into the exhaustive subject of modern literature, explaining and quoting as he went. He felt he was doing a service to society in opening up a new world of thought to a man of Clarence Hedway's intelligence. He spoke fully and critically of modern literature in general, and of his contemporaries in particular. In a burst of confidence he even went so far as to indicate his own true status as an author. The rank he assigned himself was sensibly lower than the one he held according to the popular voice.

"You have a masterly and convincing way of putting these things, Mr. Flutterby," said his pupil at the end of one of these long and interesting monologues. "You lecture on modern literature, I suppose?"

"Lecture! No, indeed," Taption Flutterby replied. "My platform experiences are confined to the occasions on which I read extracts from my own works."

"But at least you give the world the benefit of your views in magazine articles?"

"No."

"In interviews, then?"

"Interviews! Don't mention the word, man! It sets my teeth on edge. Do you know, for the last five years I have never granted a single interview!"

"On principle?"

"Well, in a sense, yes. Properly conducted, the interview might be made a very useful medium. At present it is almost wholly mischievous. It deals with accidents rather than essentials, partly because that policy suits the demand of the average newspaper reader, and partly because the mental grasp of the interviewer is by no means equal, as a rule, to his assurance. Your modern newspaper man is as often as not an unpleasant compound of impudence and incompetence. He is therefore a man to be avoided, and I avoid him."

"But he is often a clever man," said Clarence Hedway. "clever, I mean, in getting what he wants. You will find yourself interviewed one of these days, depend upon it."

"One can never guard against the manufactured interview," said the author, sententially.

"But I am not speaking of the manufactured interview at all. I am ready to bet you—well, say fifty pounds—that before long you will have unburdened your soul to an interviewer."

"Never!" exclaimed Taption Flutterby, with warmth. "It would be robbing you to take such a bet."

"Oh, rob away!" retorted Clarence Hedway, lightly. "I make a little money in my paper-staining business, and the loss of fifty pounds would not mean bankruptcy to me. Come, I will tempt you by betting that what I predict will happen before I start for America again next week."

"Done!" said the author, quickly. "Remember you have only yourself to blame for this."

"Or to congratulate!"

And so the bet was made in due form.

The rest of the voyage passed pleasantly for the two men in constant exchanges of knowledge and confidences. It must be admitted, however, that Taption Flutterby parted with more of both than did his companion. The author's nature was the more communicative.

"Your enemies are waiting for you to land, I see," remarked Clarence Hedway to the author as the vessel drew alongside the dock wall at Southampton.

"What do you mean?" asked Taption Flutterby.

"Why, the interviewers are mustered, or I'm a Dutchman," Hedway replied. "That knot of men on the quayside bears the fleet street stamp or I know nothing like so much of London as I pride myself on."

"I believe you are right," said the author, turning pale with vexation. "How on earth am I to avoid them?"

"I dodged the New York interviewers by locking myself in my stateroom hours before the ship started, but I can't stay on board hours after she lands. Confound the interviewers!"

"Right! Let us confound them. Where do you put up when you get to town?"

"At the Hotel Cecil."

"And you mean to reserve a compartment to yourself in the train from Southampton, I think you said?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then, the thing is quite simple. We will change names for an hour or two. You, the rich but unknown Mr. Hedway, land first with your luggage, see it past the customs people and go on into your reserved compartment. Then I, the great Taption Flutterby, follow with my luggage, and of course gather all the interviewers about me. Some of them will no doubt accompany me to town in the unreserved compartment in which I shall travel. That will not matter in the least. I have no rooted objection to the presence of interviewers, and they will be welcome to all they can get out of me. On reaching Waterloo, you drive with the luggage to my hotel, the Metropole, and then take yourself on to the Cecil, while I drive your luggage to the Cecil, and then betake myself to the Metropole. We thereupon resume our own names, and all ends happily, with the interviewers neatly dished. I shall quite enjoy carrying out the little plot. How does it strike you?"

"Excellent, and very generous of your part."

"Not at all generous. Or if you insist that it is, when it isn't, remember that I am your debtor still for your admirable lessons in modern literature. Alons, then. Here we are alongside. You lead the way, Mr. Hedway."

The plot worked admirably, favored by the close general resemblance of the two men. As Clarence Hedway had expected, the waiting journalists attached themselves to him, and some of them traveled with him in the same compartment to London, fully under the impression that they had Taption Flutterby at bay. Their wiles, however, were of but little avail. The great author appeared dead to their entreaties, literally as well as metaphorically. All they could get out of him, after superhuman shouting, was the repeated assurance that they would see all they wanted to know soon in the New York Daily Boom. Beyond imparting this precious piece of information, which, of course, only exasperated his tormentors, the great man would be neither cajoled nor threatened.

"Well, Mr. Flutterby," said the real Simon Pure, as he greeted his late fellow-traveler on the latter's arrival with the luggage at the Hotel Metropole; "what is it like to be an author pestered by interviewers, eh?"

"Oh, jolly! And how do you find the privacy of Mr. Hedway, the paper-stainer, when he travels?"

"Jolly, indeed! Well, thank you very much for your services. Come and dine with me tomorrow at the Cecil. I shall expect you without fail."

"Thanks, I will come."

Clarence Hedway kept his word, but his welcome at the Hotel Cecil the next evening was not of the warmest. His host had two newspapers in his hand, and looked mystified and resentful.

"Ah, Mr. Hedway," he said, when his guest was announced, "I am puzzled and annoyed. Can you throw

any light on these newspaper stories? Read this one first."

Clarence Hedway took the London morning paper that was thrust into his hand, and read the marked report. It told of the landing of Mr. Taption Flutterby, the distinguished author, at Southampton on the previous day, and of how he had journeyed to London in an ordinary carriage, and not in a reserved compartment, as had been expected. "The great novelist was as taciturn as usual in his bearing toward the representatives of the press," the report went on, "and was suffering from real or assumed deafness. He declined to answer any questions but advised the interviewers to keep an eye on The New York Daily Boom. The meaning of this advice is understood to be that an enterprising representative of the journal named had obtained an exclusive interview with Mr. Flutterby."

Clarence Hedway looked up from the reading of this paragraph with an amused smile.

"Oh, yes, you will say, perhaps, that this idea about The Daily Boom was part of your fun with the interviewers," burst out Taption Flutterby, with more than a suspicion of wrath in his voice. "But now read this, and then explain the two things together if you can."

"This" was an evening paper, in which a New York telegram was marked. In this despatch the vigilant Reuter told how The Daily Boom at that morning had published a cablegram from its special correspondent in London, giving the substance of an interview he had had with Taption Flutterby on the author's return to England. The interview related to modern literature, and the novelist had indicated what he considered to be his own place among the contemporary writers. What he had said on this point was given in summarized form, and a full report of the interview was promised by the next mail. The successful enterprise of The Daily Boom, added Reuter, in thus securing what was, if authentic, the first actual interview with the great writer for some five years past, had created quite a sensation in journalistic circles.

Clarence Hedway looked up again, still smiling.

"Will you answer me one question, sir?" thundered Taption Flutterby.

"With pleasure, if it is a reasonable one."

"Were you the sender of that message to The Daily Boom?"

"I was."

"Well, I'm —! Then who on earth are you, sir?"

"Clarence Hedway of New York, paper-stainer—that is to say, interviewer for The Daily Boom."

"Upon my word, sir, you are cool, even for an American journalist. And you have dared to look me in the face—to accept my invitation to dinner—after abusing my confidence in this way! Pray, sir, do you call yourself a gentleman, sir?"

"I will answer you seriatim, Mr. Flutterby. I see no reason why I should not dare to look you in the face, for I am conscious of no terrible breach of confidence. You told me yourself that it was not the interview you objected to so much as the average interviewer. As to your confidences, you will do me the justice, perhaps, to recall the fact that it was not I who invited them, but you who bestowed them unasked. Was I not justified in assuming, therefore, that my personality was not distasteful to you, and that in consequence your objection to being interviewed did not apply in this case?"

"But the subject-matter, sir—the subject matter! Was it right and honorable to draw me out on such a question as the relative literary merits of my contemporaries and myself without any warning that you meant to print what I said?"

"Excuse me, Mr. Flutterby, if I take exception to the imputation that I 'drew' you on the subject. You volunteered your views, and naturally I was glad to listen to them. As to whether I ought to print them in full without your consent, I confess that I have had my qualms. You will notice that all I have done so far is to record in my cablegram your own estimate of your literary worth—an estimate which does credit to your modesty, inasmuch as it falls short of the verdict of the whole English-speaking race."

"Then am I to understand," asked Taption Flutterby, in a somewhat mollified tone, "that you are prepared to withhold the full report of the so-called interview from publication?"

"Not quite that," answered the journalist. "I owe a duty to my editor, who had confidence enough in me to send me at some expense on a mission from which so many distinguished interviewers have returned baffled. But I came here this evening prepared to do for you, Mr. Flutterby, what I would have done for no one else. I have conceived a real respect—you would perhaps object to my use of the word 'liking'—for you

in the course of our few days together on shipboard. The mail for the States leaves tomorrow. I have brought the copy of the interview in my pocket, intending to submit it for your inspection on one condition. But I find you are in a bad mood to make terms. For that I am sorry. The copy must be posted tomorrow, and so it will go as it is. I will not inflict my company upon you at dinner; that would be a sorry farce. Good evening, Mr. Flutterby."

And Clarence Hedway took up his hat to go.

"Stop! Stop! Mr. Hedway," said Taption Flutterby, with renewed agitation. "If you are prepared to let me see the copy and revise it, that alters the situation very materially. Will you name your conditions?"

"The condition is that if you strike out any of the copy you shall introduce fresh matter equivalent in bulk, and shall empower me to say in the introduction that the interview is an authorized one."

Taption Flutterby pondered a moment or two.

"You are a hard bargainer, Mr. Hedway," he said, at last, "but—there, I accept your offer and the condition attached to it. Come in to dinner, man, and we will go through the copy afterwards. Hang me, but I admire your straightforward business capacity almost as much as your truly Yankee impudence!"

It was a cheerful little dinner party of two, after all. Under the genial influence of the champagne the author took a more generous view of the situation, and quite renewed the familiar manner he had assumed towards the journalist on the voyage over.

"Thank you," said Clarence Hedway, with real gratitude, when they had spent an hour over his MS. together, and Taption Flutterby had made sundry emendations, followed by additions to match, according to

contract. "Thank you. The story is ever so much more readable than it was before, besides having the advantage of being authorized. And now, with your permission, I will be going."

"Is there nothing else you want?" asked Taption Flutterby, jocosely.

"Oh, never mind about that. It can wait."

"What on earth do you mean, man? What can wait?"

"Why, that little matter of the fifty-pound bet. You can let the story appear in print first, if you like, and send the check on to me at The Daily Boom office, New York."

"Well, I'm —!" For the second time that evening Taption Flutterby nearly committed himself. "The bet—I had forgotten all about it! Why of course, I have lost it!"

He insisted on making out a check there and then, and forced it on Clarence Hedway's acceptance.

"Good-bye," said the author. "Look me up when next you are in London, but if ever you want an interview, mind you don't come to me!"

"Good-bye," returned Clarence Hedway, laughing. "And by the way, if you should ever want to dodge the interviewers again, mind you don't—"

"What?"

"Come to me!"—Walter E. Pines in Toronto Globe.

The authorities of Axi-la-Chapelle recently sentenced to two years imprisonment a man who carelessly threw away a lighted match in a forest near that city, although no damage was caused by the act.

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TUESDAY, JULY 8, 1902

Stroll

By the last mail the Strollers have received two letters of introduction from the heads of municipal government in the other from the Strollers. Both had been furnished information about the Strollers by the Strollers themselves. The Strollers will not be going to Babylon's Strollers. The Strollers must be devised to explain the revenue for city improvement they have just completed. Third avenue at some side streets must be repaired the latter of the value of

Present Condition

his letter says that the city council in improvement is to put log-walk on it which will be used in providing for the sacred cat's information regarding the heaviest tax roll around and it is shamed to parade council is charged with a macaroni and passed its second order for licensing tomato vendors. He says the appeal opens it how

Yours in Official/Tr Antonio Hottamolo Mayor

The letter from the Strollers was very much as that of the Strollers. It was brief and to the point. The Strollers' life toll for honor official structure. I want some information on der tow greater ash our resident income at bre meat markets from suspender ped Jerusalem had a rail in der Jerkwater Chalmers Central. At strip der conductor working down fares. of our population ish. You I want you to get money for. We nod care to but we want to salaries. We had long ago alrett score. We had rich discounts Jordan. We spoiled ground hogs. Any informations y municipal economy will be tankfully reasonable sellaf. Moses Fiddle Mayor the Strollers to the above letter

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