

Smith Senior and Smith Junior

By G. M. L. BROWN

WHEN Gilford Smith wore a beard he passed for a man of forty, when he went clean shaven he was taken for a youth not more than twenty. His real age lay between these extremes—he was exactly thirty. His manner, so his friends asserted, were even more misleading. When bearded, he carried himself with an air of dignity that commanded instant respect. He was regarded as a person of importance, a man, evidently, that stood high in the business world, or in his particular profession. Beardless, on the contrary, Smith was a mere office boy, a green stripling from the back woods, or perhaps an undergraduate—in any case a rare subject for snubs and jests on the part of his assumed elders. If in his other character he might be likened to Dr. Jekyll, in this he was at best a juvenile Jekyll. Strive as he would, he could not alter his dual personality, nor could he, for the life of him, determine upon either the continuous use or the omission of his razor.

It was Smith Senior who had met Miss Burdette of Winnipeg, a charming young lady of nearly his own age—about twelve years his junior she thought at the time. Their acquaintance had been limited to a few brief interviews in Smith's Toronto office; but the correspondence that ensued soon drifted from legal formalities—to which, indeed, it had been but insecurely moored—out upon the broad, misty expanse of love. Before long, in short, they knew each other as Maud and Gilford, and were prepared to have their engagement announced upon Smith's first visit to Winnipeg.

Smith practised law, in partnership with his twin brother Charles, his senior or junior according to Gilford's facial aspect. For the latter wore an honest moustache which neither added to, nor lessened, his actual age, a point in his favour not duly considered by his detractors to whom Charles, so they stated, was the very personification of duplicity.

"Sometimes I'm taken for Gilford's father, sometimes for his son," he used to remark; "almost never for his brother—I believe they would take me for his grandson first."

"Grandfather, you mean," interrupted Gilford one day as he bounded into the office, fresh from the barber, his ruddy, boyish cheeks glowing from the operation to which he had just submitted.

"Yes, or great-grandfather, if you like, you blamed idiot," growled Charles, highly displeased to note another lightning transformation in his mercurial partner. "Thank heaven, you aren't to represent us in Winnipeg—or yourself, either, for that matter!"

Now by an odd coincidence Charles was scheduled to leave for Winnipeg to appear in an important trial the very week of Gilford's new-found joy. The latter, though deeply grieved to find that he could not go himself, thereby attending to two pending cases instead of one, had manfully faced the situation and written Maud that she might expect to meet his brother in a few days, but that his own visit was indefinitely postponed. At the last moment, however, despite legal complications and tonsorial objections (on the part of Charles, of course), the brothers succeeded in rearranging their plans, and not Charles, but Gilford, unboundedly happy, boarded the Western Express.

"It's a clear dispensation of Providence," he panted gleefully as he fixed his dress-suit case for a foot-stool and leaned back in the cushions to wave good-bye to his paternal twin.

Thus began the blissful journey—a journey that was to seal his everlasting happiness, broaden and inspire his whole life, eradicate the commonplace and sordid, eliminate all worry and discord and ill-will. "God bless the C.P.R.," he found himself saying, "for verily it leadeth to Paradise."

And so, perhaps, it did, and does yet to some, but alas for poor Gilford!

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"Is Miss Burdette in?" asked a boyish looking caller.

"She may be," the maid replied evasively.

"I should like to see her."

"Your card, please," demanded the maid with apparent suspicion.

"I fear I have forgotten to bring my cards," muttered the caller, fumbling nervously in his pocketbook. "Say Mr. Smith."

"Oh, Maud, I'm so glad to see you," he exclaimed as his sweetheart entered the hall where Smith had unceremoniously been kept standing.

"Ah, Mr. Smith, I presume!" said Miss Burdette, with no little dignity.

"Yes dear—er—Maud; I have relieved my brother of a trip West, you see."

"Indeed!" The tone was decidedly forbidding.

"Why, Maud—"

"Pardon me—I didn't expect this liberty."

"Liberty, dear!" gasped Smith.

"Yes liberty, since you force me to repeat the word. I think you have taken a distinct liberty."

"But darling, I'm sure I don't understand you."

"Well, Mr. Smith, if you will pardon my not returning your endearing epithets, I don't know what you may consider good form in Toronto, but here you have considerable to learn. Personally, I should not permit this familiarity even in—Hong Kong."

"Well," groaned Smith, dejectedly, "I'm sure I'm only desirous of pleasing you. Aren't you glad I was able to come instead of —"

Miss Burdette's face flushed a deep, ominous red. "Mr. Smith," she replied in ill-concealed wrath, "I consider such a question more than impertinent—it's insulting. Since you have referred to your brother twice, I promise you that I shall write him at once and let him know of your disgraceful conduct."

"Perhaps it won't be the first time you have written to him," retorted Smith, at last thoroughly aroused.

"I see no reason why I should deny it," replied Miss Burdette with fire glaring from her eyes.

"Good heavens!" groaned Smith. "But Maud dear, do I understand—?" His anger was fast changing to despair as he grasped the import of her reply.

"I wish you good evening, Sir," responded Miss Burdette, and she actually left him alone.

How long he was in taking his departure Smith cannot recall; but he faintly remembers hearing the maid call sarcastic messages after him as he stumbled down the front steps. Then he recollects crawling into a cab which took him to the depot. It was a most ignominious flight, and the memory of it brings a flush of shame to his cheek even to the present day.

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In just forty-eight hours from the time of his departure, Smith was back again in Toronto forty-seven hours, however, behind a telegram that he had dispatched to his brother. The cost of the telegram, he remembers, was five dollars, and he had some difficulty in persuading the receiving clerk that he was not a dangerous anarchist. Charles duly received the telegram, but instead of complying with the command to meet Gilford at the station, he sent the office boy with the following message:

Dear Gilford: I don't care to meet you while you are so unreasonable. I may say, however, that I never met your lady love, nor have I ever written a line to her nor received any message whatsoever from her. Would suggest that if you grow you beard again, and keep it, you may succeed in cutting out the other fellow, whoever he may be. You are certainly on the wrong trail now.

Charles.

P. S. Your language, I hear, has demoralized the entire local staff of telegraph operators.

For a time Smith was dumbfounded. Then, as he re-read the brief note before the mirror in an adjacent barber shop, a sudden light dawned upon him. Like a child that had been playing blind man's buff with eyes bound, he stared with amazement as his vision returned. But the effect, so far as his temper was concerned, was painfully disquieting.

"Excuse me boss," interrupted the barber, who happened to be a member in good standing of the First Baptist Coloured Church, "did you take this here chair to practice profanity in or to have a shave?"

"Shave, you old Jack of Spades!" roared Smith;