

A Proposal Under Difficulties

The Girl Did Not Help Him Any
By F. A. MITCHEL

Lucile Warren, being an independent American girl, went abroad alone to travel and to study art. Most Americans who go to Europe for that purpose seek Italy, but there is a good deal to be learned in Paris, and Miss Warren preferred Paris because she had friends there. She was an orphan, with an income sufficient to live comfortably, and her Parisian friends introduced her to others. This led to an acquaintance with a number of French residents of Paris. Besides these, she met artists everywhere, and she was not a girl to decline an acquaintance for want of the conventional forms of introduction.

At that time American girls led their sex among all nations for having broken away from the cramped position of women. Frenchmen were perhaps growing tired of their women being hedged about by all manner of precautions and consequently resembling so many dolls. At any rate, there was something so novel to them in Miss Warren that they were captivated by her.

Among those who fell in love with her was Gaston de Touche, a bachelor of thirty, whose parents lived on the family estates in the south of France. The father and mother were old persons and had never been out of the province in which they were born. Their son was of an age to be independent and lived in Paris. In America men not engaged in some regular occupation have always been like fish out of water. In Europe there are men of fortune who have found plenty to do to keep them from stagnation. Gaston de Touche was an art critic, litterateur and at times legislator, besides taking care of his estate, which he was always increasing. But he was a Frenchman of the old school, and conventional forms were as natural to him as the air he breathed.

M. de Touche became acquainted with Miss Warren, having been called upon to criticize one of her pictures. He rated the picture very low, but rated the painter very high. Perhaps had he known at the time he made the criticism that she was the artist who painted it he might have been tempted to speak more favorably of it. She learned his views of its merits, or, rather, demerits, and when later she became acquainted with him felt a certain antagonism to him on this account. This she knew was wrong, but confessed she could not help it. It did not at all interfere with her appreciation of the critic's worthiness.

When Gaston de Touche made up his mind that Lucile Warren was necessary to his happiness, indeed that without her the bottom would drop out of his universe, he resolved to propose for her hand. And here he met the problem of his life.

The only method he knew of making such a proposal was the French method, which he had been brought up to consider the only one existent. It would be proper for his father to propose to Miss Warren's father for her hand. If the proposition was accepted the two fathers would agree upon the settlements, the parties to the contract would be betrothed and then married. Neither would have anything to say about whether they were pleased or displeased with the other. If they happened to fall in love with each other, which was not likely, well and good; if not, it made no difference so far as their marriage was concerned.

But Gaston's father was too old and infirm to come to Paris, and had he been equal to the task Lucile had no father to receive his proposition. Therefore this plan was impossible. Gaston saw that he must make the proposition himself, but there must be some member of her family of whom he should ask her hand. He inquired about her relatives and found to his dismay that she had no relative nearer than a third cousin whom she had never seen.

"Mon Dieu!" he exclaimed. "What shall I do?" There was nothing for him to do but "face the music" and make his application direct. Could he have done so in his native tongue one source of his dismay would have been eliminated, but Miss Warren had no aptitude for languages and had not sufficiently mastered the French that he could be sure she should understand what he was talking about. The proposal must be made by French idioms expressed in English terms.

"Mademoiselle," he began, "I have great concern that your father does not live."

"I mourn my father, monsieur," was the reply, "though he died when I was a little girl."

"My father lives in the country and is troubled with ze rheumatism."

"Too bad!" replied the lady sympathetically.

"Very bad, for I have especial need for him to come to Paris."

"I, too, often have need for a father. However, I have been obliged to get on without one."

"This is impossible in my case."

"What! Impossible? Cannot you, a man, do what I, a woman, have doubtless often done?"

"You do not understand me, monsieur. I have no father; I have no one to whom I can speak of a matter of love to you."

Miss Warren's eyes expressed amazement. There was no other reply for a few moments, when she said:

"I fear, monsieur, that if your father wishes to make love to my father he will have to go to paradise to do so."

"Mon Dieu, that is not what I meant! I wish my father to speak of affairs to your father. The love has to do with others."

By this time Lucile began to get an inkling of what he was driving at. Was it a natural feminine inclination to throw off a man who was bent on a proposal, or had the opportunity to get even with one who had made an adverse criticism on her painting something to do with it? At any rate, she was bent on assisting her proposer in entangling himself.

"What in the world have two old men, one of whom is dead, to do with a love that exists in some one else?" she asked.

"It makes for a great much. If a man loves—"

"It isn't his father that loves a man in heaven, is it?"

"My father—not! He loves a woman."

"Who loves a woman, the live man or the dead one?"

"Why you not understand? The father of the man who loves, he visits the father of the woman he loves—"

"What has he to do with it?"

"Everything. He says, 'I desire that you honor my son by giving him your daughter for a wife.'"

"What's the son doing all this time, playing marbles or mumble-the-peg or hopscotch?"

It was now M. de Touche's turn to look astonished. He had never heard of such games as mumble-the-peg and hopscotch. But with his astonishment there was distress.

"I see what you mean," said Lucile sympathetically. "This friend of yours is in love with a girl whose father is dead. He wants to ask the father for the daughter, but can't get at him."

"Not my friend. No, no; not my friend, but—"

"Is he your enemy?"

"He is myself!" shouted Gaston in desperation.

"Oh, it is you who are in love? Well, why do you need a father to tell the lady's father who is in heaven that you love his daughter? He can't be expected to take an interest in affairs on this little globe, whereas if you have a proposition to make to a girl quite likely she would be very glad to hear it."

"And she would not think ze gentleman—how you call it—too fresh?"

"If he were a Frenchman she would think all the more of him for cutting the stupid red tape that the French people have used for centuries."

"What have ze red tape to do with a matter of love?"

"You're paying me off in my own coin, aren't you?" replied Lucile.

"It is ze coin—ze funds—ze settlements that I want for my father. I wish for him to arrange all that. Then I tell you that I love you, Mees Warren, and my life, if I do not have you, is one ver' big wilderness."

Miss Warren, though disposed to smile at the only two real American words "ver' big" in the declaration, was touched by the man's offer of his love and ceased to torment him by pretending not to understand him. She encouraged him to discard the conventional and take up sentiment by placing her hand in his.

"If you will not be my wife," he said, encouraged by this, "I will throw myself in the Seine."

Unfortunately there came at this moment to Miss Warren a remembrance that the proposer had turned down her picture with the single expressive word "execrable."

"How can you expect one whose work which cost her months of toil, you called execrable, to marry you?"

"Work? In English you have a saying, 'All work and no play'— If you had been making a great picture it would have been the opposite, 'All play and no work.'"

Lucile laughed. "You are right," she said. "I struggled over that picture. Genius, according to my interpretation of genius, doesn't struggle. What it does seems very easy."

Then she became serious and told the man who had proposed to her that in America usually, if a man loved a woman he told her so, and if she wished to marry him she referred him to her parent or brother, but this was in most cases meaningless—a dead letter that had been inherited from European ancestors. She took his proposition under consideration, but he did not get an affirmative answer for many months and after many repetitions of his proposal. Then she said to him:

"Monsieur, I dreamed last night that I died and went to heaven, where I saw my father. He told me that your father had also died and on joining him had asked him for my hand for his son. My father told me that he had said to your father that he had no objection to my marrying you; for, being in heaven while I was on earth, my mundane career did not interest him. Papa said that your father spoke of the settlements; but, since Americans who marry become one, he didn't think settlements were necessary. Then I woke up."

"Ah, mademoiselle, you make me ver' happy. I, too, go to heaven since I have won you."

Such were the proposal and acceptance of Lucile Warren. It is impossible to imagine an English or a French girl playing such a part. But there is no part of which an American girl is incapable if she is inclined to play it.

APRIL ROD AND GUN

Rod and Gun for April is on the news-stands, and its table of contents reveals much of interest to the devotees of rod and gun. Bonnycastle Dale writes in this issue of "Laddie the Boy Trapper"; A. H. Haines contributes a story "The Big Buck of Bald Knolls," descriptive of a deer hunt under unusual circumstances in B.C.; and there are other tales of hunting, fishing and canoeing equally interesting to the lover of the out of doors. Fishing notes edited by Robert Page Lincoln, is replete with up-to-date articles for the disciple of the immortal Izaak while such well-known writers as Lieut. Townsend Whelan and Chas. Askins contribute splendid articles to the Guns and Ammunition department of this issue. W. J. Taylor, Ltd., Woodstock, Ont., is the publisher.

PURVIS STREET

April 16.—Miss Beatrice Dickey spent Sunday at her home at Caintown.

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Chick went to Brockville on Saturday.

The farmers are very busy just now in their sugar bushes. There was a very good run the last of the week.

Mrs. Wellington Earl and Miss Percival spent a day, guests at Mr. Richard Ferguson's, Ballycanoe.

Miss Nellie Pottinger spent a day last week at her home here.

Mr. and Mrs. B. B. Graham and Miss Velma spent Sunday visiting friends at Temperance Lake.

Messrs. Taylor and Everett Franklin, Junetown, were guests on Friday last of Miss Velma Graham.

JUNIOR FARMERS' DANCE

The Junior Farmers' Association held a patriotic assembly in the Athens Town Hall Friday night that surpassed any previous gathering of the kind held here in many years. It was attended by young people from various outside points in the county in spite of disagreeably cold weather. Music rendered by the Hulme family orchestra, of Prescott, contributed largely to the success of the evening.

Real Estate

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Confer with your District Representative of the Department of Agriculture, or write or visit Ontario Government Employment Bureau, 15 Queen's Park, Toronto.

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