

A Tale of Decorative Art.

Mr. PETER SMITHERS was one evening seated in his bachelor apartment before a pile of books in which he had been assiduously reading. A slight air of bewilderment pervaded his honest countenance, and he gave utterance to hasty expressions as he threw upon the others the last volume of the collection. His impatient movement laid open the book at the fly-leaf, disclosing the name, in feminine penmanship, of the lady whom he had distinguished by choosing as the future Mrs. SMITHERS. "JANE TEMPLE" ran the magic of the inscription, and as his eye caught the inspiration of the syllables it kindled, but hardly cleared.

"Decorative art, humph!" he remarked to himself audibly. "Decorative stuff and nonsense! I don't wonder JANE has lost her bearings and been talking wild lately, after poring over this kind of literature; a course of it is enough to upset the strongest reason. And what in thunder does it all amount to, anyway? Isn't one chair as good as another, provided it suits the way a fellow's made? Ha! ha! I'll be told next that the marble-topped sideboard I bought to-day is 'incorrect,' and then something's the matter with the carpet I picked up for a song. 'The most natural roses and tulips I ever saw in my life,' the auctioneer said, but I have a fearful foreboding that DRESSER doesn't approve of natural roses. Yet, pshaw! who cares what DRESSER says? I'll go and get JANE's opinion. Dear JANE!"

PETER's voice was growing tender and dreamy. Taking out his watch, he started to find it much later than the hour at which he was accustomed to present himself at the house of JANE's parents. Hastily putting on his hat, he was soon ringing the door-bell whose music was so sweetly familiar to his ears.

"Miss MURIEL is in her stoojo, sir!" said the maid, recognizing him with a solemn nod, as she admitted him.

"MURIEL?" repeated PETER to himself. "Studio? What does she mean? Am I dreaming?" But here was certainly his prospective father-in-law's hall oil-cloth, with its floriated diamonds, and the yellow sheepskin mats at the doors. Incorrect they might be, but he felt that he loved them all, as ELIZA led the way, not into the drawing-room where he had spent so many blissful evenings, but quite to the end of the hall.

"Why, ELIZA," he remonstrated, "are you taking me into the pantry?"

ELIZA made no reply, but drawing aside the folds of a curtain, with a sad wave of the hand she bade him enter. Thus encouraged, he stepped within, and found himself in the queerest little place he had ever been in, in his life. At first sight it looked to him like the upright tomb of an ancient Egyptian. Curious devices were wrought upon the narrow walls in strange browns and yellows, much as he had seen on mummy cases; the sacred ibis obtruded himself in the most unexpected places, and queer pots and lamps and vessels such as used to be placed in tombs, were scattered about in ghastly profusion. But these things, he soon perceived, were mixed up with furniture, if furniture it could be called, of a later date. There were tea-pots and fire-irons, and brass candlesticks, and ginger-jars, and Japanese fans, and extraordinary chairs and a real china closet. In the middle of the tiny apartment, moreover, stood a tall screen, from the upper left hand corner of which a pensive stork was flying down towards a group of remarkably dignified cat-tails in the lower right. And beside this screen there stood, no brown, unsavory mummy, but a fair and very pretty girl who blushed and appeared somewhat

embarrassed as she saw our friend.

"Oh, PETER!" she exclaimed, slightly advancing, "is it really you? How long you have been away!"

"These are rum arrangements, JANE," said Mr. SMITHERS, looking critically about him. "What do they mean?"

"Oh! PETER, do not call me JANE!" exclaimed his betrothed, with sudden petulance. "We've discarded JANE as too awfully unæsthetic. You must learn to call me MURIEL."

"JANE will always be more real to me," said PETER, quickly. "See it? Ha! ha!"

The lady turned disdainfully away, while PETER resumed his examination. "Well it beats me," he said, finally. "Excuse me—ahem! MURIEL—but what in the name of MOSES does it mean? Let us go into the parlor and sit down, and you'll tell me all about it, eh!"

"What it means, PETER? Oh! how can you ask? Where are all the books I lent you? Why, it's EASTLAKE, you know; it's MORRIS & Co., and DRESSER, and CLARENCE COOK, and Mrs. LOFTIE, and the Miss GARRETTs, and the Art Amateur! It is the modern idea of art applied to home-decoration. It is the culture that teaches the recognition of the pure lines and coloring, the—the motif, the feeling, as it were, of a bit of Baccarat crystal, of a Japanese fan, or even of a ginger-jar."

"The motif of a ginger-jar," observed PETER, "is, I should say, ginger. And as to those monstrous oblique-eyed—"

"Oh, you! Yes, I suppose so!" returned the late JANE, with not a little scorn, "you have a good deal to learn, I assure you."

"Perhaps," said PETER. "But I suppose EASTLAKE doesn't object to a fellow sitting down?"

"Oh, oh! not there! Oh! how stupid! That's a table—a table after the Miss GARRETT's!" and the lady flew to the rescue of what appeared to PETER's uncultured eye a little three-legged stool. "There's a chair—a Cromwell chair. I myself furnished the carpenter with the design—an exact copy from KNOWLE."

"And who is KNOWLE?" asked PETER jealously.

"Why! a house!"

"Oh!—Well! if I may be allowed to criticize the feeling of a Cromwell chair, I should say it was doosed uncomfortable. And if the rest of CROMWELL's furniture resembles this, I assure you I wouldn't exchange the whole kit for your mother's old Magenta sofa. I should think not, indeed! Why upon it you pledged me this little hand, dear JANE," exclaimed PETER, tenderly seizing it.

"Rep is not admitted by MORRIS," said the lady, coldly, and drawing the member away. "And Magenta is an aniline dye. Oh, PETER, how much you have to unlearn! Don't you know that the aniline dyes are becoming the ruin of art? These cheap colorings are being sent to Persia and Japan and are ruining the manufacture of the Turkish rugs!"

"Well, we don't care. We can't afford Turkish rugs just yet, JANE! I bought a carpet to-day!"

"You!" JANE turned pale, and began to tremble.

"Yes, a tapestry—all poppies and peonies, like the dear old thing in your mother's parlor. And a side-board, JANE—with a marble-top and rounded drawers. What, are they unæsthetic, too?"

"Unæsthetic?" exclaimed JANE, in a terrible voice. "They are immoral! SABRETACHE will tell you. It is impossible to recognize them."

"Is SABRETACHE a house, likewise!"

"No—that is—he is a man, PETER—that is—he is a distinguished exponent of modern art. I am his disciple!"

"Oh, indeed! Well, I shall take my leave for the present as I seem to be detaining you. Mr. SABRETACHE is perhaps occupying the drawing-room this evening."

The sarcasm of Mr. SMITHERS' voice was extreme. But there was a fine sneer in JANE's tones, as she replied, "He is! allow me to present him to you!" And she flung open a side door that led into the precincts so dear to PETER's memories. Instead of the cherished objects, however, which had seemed so admirable to him, an utterly empty apartment met his sight. It was empty, that is, but for a step ladder, and certain painters' utensils, and the extraordinary figure of Mr. SABRETACHE. This modern genius reminded PETER of nothing so much as the cat-tails he had left behind in JANE's "stoojo," and which were reproduced upon the walls here in amazing profusion. The gentleman swayed forward in acknowledgement of the introduction; and at once stalked back to his employment of painting storks (painfully conventionalized) on the dado.

"What do you admire in him?" whispered PETER to his betrothed. "His elegant stork, I suppose. Stalk, I mean,—see it?" PETER's good humor was quite restored and he began affably to converse with the artist. "What is there beautiful in a cat-tail, I should like to know," he inquired, "or a stork? If it is disproportioned limbs that attract in the latter, why not choose the Kangaroo or the Giraffe?"

"This is blasphemy," murmured SABRETACHE.

"My idea of blasphemy," said PETER, loudly, "is dismantling a comfortable home around which a thousand associations had grown, and filling it with weak-kneed cranes that everybody will abominate fast enough in a year or two when they've gone out of fashion. Where are your parents, JANE? Do they know of this desecration?"

"My parents have at last emancipated themselves from the false art of the last generation," exclaimed JANE proudly.

"And dragged back the ugly old side-board from the hen-coop, eh? and rescued the coarse old willow-platters from the kitchen to worship them on the family hearth? And torn down the marble mantle before which they and their children have sat in joy and sorrow, and set it up in the graveyard, eh? You see I've read your books to some purpose, JANE!"

But JANE appeared no longer to hear him. With a fascination which she seemed totally unable to resist, she had taken up a paint-brush, at SABRETACHE's nod, and was engaged upon the dado. SABRETACHE likewise vouchsafed no word to PETER, but began in a drowsy, murmuring tone, a monologue on household art. The greater part of it was an incomprehensible jargon to PETER, though he recognized in it scraps from the utterances of those great lights of modern art which JANE had so urgently pressed upon him. That she seemed to enjoy it was maddening to PETER. She listened and painted, and painted and listened, and drew nearer to SABRETACHE, who looked queerer and more weird every moment.

"JANE!" roared PETER at last, unable to endure the scene another instant, "go and call your mother!" and as he uttered these words, to his horror and anguish, his dear, though misguided girl shrank and changed before his eyes into a slender reed, and went sailing through the window and out into the night. SABRETACHE had already disappeared.

FLORENCE GRAY.