

"I'm afraid, Mr. Lawrence, that you are getting sentimental."

"Will you but say yes or no, and put me out of misery? Believe me, I am in earnest. Say yes, Ada, and make me the happiest man alive."

"That's what I should so like to do, but really I must say no."

"Ada, I can't take that for an answer."

"Then you really must go without one, Mr. Lawrence, I'm afraid. Now be a good fellow, look bright again, stop calling me Ada, and let us go and find the others; and, oh dear, we haven't got any sticks for the fire. Please, Mr. Lawrence, do find some sticks."

So Harry got sticks, and got angry (and who can blame him?). Miss Fanchler watched him at work for some time, and as he returned, looking glum and sorrowful, she asked him to try and look happier.

"Miss Fanchler, I cannot."

"Oh, I'm so sorry." Then after a pause she continued softly: "Are you really then in earnest?"

"Dearest Ada," said Harry, letting fall his sticks excitedly as hope revived again, "I swear—"

"No, no, Mr. Lawrence, don't swear—remember what Juliet said to Romeo, 'At lovers' perjuries, they say, Jove laughs.' Still, you see, if I put your sincerity on trial and you turned out all right, I should still have to say no, and then you would say dreadful things of me, and call me a flirt, and accuse me of giving you encouragement, so perhaps it had better go no further; and now pray let us be friends again."

"Ada, if you will test my sincerity, and give me another chance, I am not so mean as ever to utter a word that would make you regret it. Try me any way you will, and believe no man enough not to insult you for acceding to my request."

"Well," said Ada, "then I will put you to the test, and if you are in earnest you will obey my commands."

"Dearest Ada," said Harry tenderly, making an abortive effort to obtain possession of her hand, "your slightest wish shall bind me like an adamant chair."

"That's very pretty, but apparently it hasn't had any such effect yet. My commands are, first, that you entirely give up smoking, and second, that you publicly retract, at the first opportunity, all you have said concerning the folly of married men. Do you promise?"

"Indeed I do," said Harry warmly, "but what is to be the period of my probation, and what my reward?"

"Your reward, Mr. Lawrence, will be an approving conscience, and your period of probation will expire one week after you have made the public recantation I enjoined, at the end of which time I will answer any enquiries you may wish to put to me in a manner satisfactory to myself, though I fear not equally so to you; and now let us join the others."

On arriving at the Smuggler's Cave, the common rendezvous, they were greeted with a burst of laughing abuse, and the ironical enquiries of "where on earth did you get such a jolly lot of sticks?" first reminded Harry that he had forgotten to pick up the sticks he had dropped. But the raillery soon ceased, after Ada and Harry had taken their seats (a phrase to be taken in a picnician sense), for a very important question was then before the House, and Harry was at once claimed as a welcome ally by the opposition, who was in the mi-

nority. So, Mr. Lawrence, to make everything fair, exclaimed:—

"Ah, Harry, my boy, here's a discussion going on that will suit you exactly, eh? Here we have Mr. Dawes upholding celibacy on the one hand, and Mr. Paton and Mr. Gidley upholding matrimony on the other. Now do you join in with Mr. Dawes, whose views we all know will coincide with yours, and then we'll have a fair fight."

"No! we can't though," said Mr. Paton, a jolly looking and somewhat corpulent man of forty, who was "something in the Dockyard," "there can be nothing fair in their fighting, for all the 'fair' are on our side."

"Mr. Paton," replied the bachelor's champion, indignantly, "the argument is on a serious subject and should not be treated lightly. Now I hold—"

"Thank you," interposed Mr. Gidley, "if you hold, that will give our friend Lawrence a chance."

"Ah-h-h! Don't give Lawrence a chance to speak," came anxiously from Mr. Paton, in a stage whisper, "he sticks at nothing."

"I appeal against this repetition of stale jokes," objected Mr. Dawes. "Mr. Paton may talk lightly—"

"I rise to a point of order," said Mr. Paton. "I maintain that a man weighing fourteen stone, or thereabouts, as I do, cannot be said to talk lightly."

Here a shout of laughter interrupted the discussion, and even the corners of Mr. Dawes' mouth began to twitch, but it soon subsided, as Harry Lawrence was observed to be pulling himself together, and preparing to speak. That Harry was a general favorite, was shown by the applause which greeted him, but the ladies, while they welcomed the speaker, reproached with their eyes the champion of a cause they had scant sympathy for.

"Ladies and gentlemen," commenced our hero, "I have been called upon to champion a cause which—which—(hear, hear) which is dear to the bachelor, and well supported. (No.) But although I have been a warm supporter of single blessedness, and of the greater usefulness and capabilities for work of a bachelor (a voice—late for lunch, and no sticks.), I am so no longer. (Intense surprise of audience at this point.) I have thought a good deal on this subject lately, and have come to the conclusion that a married life is the holiest, the happiest and the best."

This gallant speech created such enthusiasm that Mr. Dawes gave up the contest, and the conversation became less general.

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At last the picnic was over, and the party from the Hall were soon at home again. Before long an interesting conference was taking place between Kate and Ada in the secret recess of the latter's room. What passed between them history tells not, but the next morning Kate called her brother the "dearest boy alive," and never teased him a bit on his matrimonial turncoatedness. *Verb says* The next week passed rapidly away in a round of drives, rides, picnics and yatching, and the day arrived when Harry was to get his final answer. As soon as breakfast was over, Fate (query, for Fate read Kate) gave him the opportunity he wanted, and he found himself alone in the drawing-room with Ada. Never had she looked so handsome, but never had she appeared so cold and ceremonious as on the present occasion. Harry was a brave fellow enough ordinarily, but now he