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S. E. B. H. A STORY OF A SECRET SOCIETY.

BY J. A. PHILLIPS.

I MAY as well introduce myself to you before I begin. My name is James Bumpus, retired merchant, living quietly and peaceably in the bosom of my family, which consists, at present, of my wife Seraphina Angelina, and two young lumps, (as they are sometimes affectionately called), named Seraphinus Angelina, Jr., and Nestor Angelina. I have a strong antipathy to secret societies, and from an adventure which I had in New York a few years ago when I resided there, and which I am about to relate to you, I think you will agree with me that I have some ground for my dislike.

I had noticed for some time that Mrs. Bumpus was keeping secret from me. Several times I had come upon her suddenly, when she had been seated wrapped in thought, and she had started and looked at me in a manner which made me fear she was "non compos mentis." Then at night she groaned wearily in her sleep, and once or twice she muttered a few words, apparently part of some mystic spell—the only intelligible one of which was "Extinguish." All day she wore a troubled, pre-occupied expression, and would frequently look strangely at me; and then, drawing a huge roll of manuscript from her pocket, read it over carefully and make pencil corrections on the margin. Two weeks passed thus and it was getting very unpleasant. I feared Mrs. B. was becoming a hypochondriac, and consulted our physician; but he assured me she was only suffering from the effects of trying to keep a secret, a feat so difficult for a lady to perform that it invariably makes her ill. One evening, about that time, Seraphina Angelina absent herself from home and remained away until a very late hour. I endeavoured to draw from her where she had been, but she gave me a withering look, and muttering, "Bellegent," in solemn, warning accents, shook her finger at me and got into bed. The following morning the mystery was solved. Mrs. B. came to breakfast with a huge star, formed of red, white, and blue ribbon, conspicuously displaying on her left shoulder, which she appeared particularly desirous of my seeing, for she attentively placed her right arm around my neck, so as to bring the left shoulder well under my eye, and kissed me with an air of tender solicitude which was very affecting.

"Seraphina, my love," said I, smoothing her Auburn locks and noting the star, "what is this badge?"

"The symbol of liberty!" she said, in such tragic tones, that I involuntarily started back.

"Symbol of what?"

"Liberty! Glorious liberty!" she continued, raising her arm and striking the attitude which the "Godless of the red cap" is generally supposed to assume when she perches on top of the world to harangue the nations. "Yes, James, this badge is the emblem of freedom, the token that we are bound together to struggle and fight against slavery, drudgery, and the thousand ills to which women are subjected by men."

"Good gracious, Seraphina, you don't mean to say you are getting up a revolution?"

"I do! A grand social and political revolution to reform mankind. We will shed no blood—at least we hope not—unless we are opposed; if we are, then 'Extinguish!'"

"But, my love, what terrible enterprises are you engaged in? I have noticed that your conduct has been very strange of late, and I hope you have not been joining in any projects which will involve you in difficulties hereafter."

"Our enterprise is glorious, and our society will be the one to inaugurate the grand movement." Here she touched the star.

"Your society? My love, I was not aware that you cared for any other society than that of your dear James." I was endeavouring to be conciliatory, for I began to fear my good little woman was slightly crazed on some point to me unknown.

"Of course you don't know anything about it," she said, bristling up with the consciousness of having kept a secret for nearly three months. "Of course you haven't heard of it. We mean to keep it a secret until the time for action comes and then—"

"Then what?" she asked, and gave me another of those terrible looks.

"What is the name of your society?" I asked.

"That is a secret."

"What is the object of your society?"

"That is a secret."

"Where do you meet?"

"That is a secret."

"How often do you meet?"

"That is a secret."

"And what do you do when you meet?"

"That is a secret."

"My love," I said, getting wrathful, "I am sorry to find you have joined a society which is ashamed to show its actions to the world. Where women have reason to resent, there is cause for shame. Secret societies? I continue, throwing myself into the two oratorical postures, the thumb of my right hand placed between the first and second buttons of my vest, while the left gracefully supported my coat-tails, and my spectacles rested on my forehead, so as to permit my piercing eye to exercise its influence undimmed—"

"Secret societies, my dear, are a drawback and hindrance to civilization; they hamper enlightenment and clog the wheels of progress. From them emanate all the evils which distress and annoy the body politic. All revolutions, rebellions, and seditious conspiracies against the established governments and ruling powers of the earth are first conceived in secret societies. Here the viper treason lays its egg and here it is nurtured, fed, and nourished until it becomes a huge reptile and rushes out into the world to destroy life and deluge the streets with blood. It was in secret that the French Revolution was conceived, it was in secret that the Southern Rebellion was planned, and it is in secret that almost all of the evil in the world is commenced."



POINTING THEIR PISTOLS AT THE BOOK WITH THE MARGES IN IT.

"Oh! Rather that," she said, "ours is a secret society, because we please it to be; and if revolutions do come—here she assumed the tragic again—and blood does run like water through the streets, you, you, James Bumpus, and others like you, will be responsible for it, and not me," saying which she swept out of the room in a manner which would have done credit to Miss Bateman in her great character of Lady Macbeth. All attempts at renewing the conversation were in vain. Mrs. B. had let me know that she had a secret and had told me just enough to raise my curiosity, and she was satisfied. The next month passed without any great explosion in the social world, and I was beginning to forget the whole matter, when one evening the postman brought a large official-looking letter addressed to Mrs. Bumpus. In a strong, bold, reckless kind of female hand, and bearing in the corner of the envelope the mystical letters S. E. B. H. Of course I might have opened it, but I would not; I preferred to give it to Seraphina and demand an explanation. This she coolly refused to give me, and tearing the letter to atoms she threw it into the fire. This was past all endurance. I had intended to be calm, but her coolness made me wild.

"Angelina," I said, "this must be put a stop to. That letter has something to do with your information, and I demand to know its contents."

"Which demand I refuse to obey. Oh! James, do believe like a sane man, or you will drive me to do something desperate."

"Desperate! My love, what do you mean?"

"Our society meets to-morrow night, when we are to consider the advisability of—"

"Of what, my dear?"

"Nothing," she said, sharply checking herself, "nothing that concerns you," and she walked out, leaving me as much in the dark as ever.

I knew one thing now, however, which was that this society, which had such dangerous tendencies, met on the following evening; and I felt it was a duty I owed to the peace and welfare of myself alone, but of the whole State, that I should be present. I offered to accompany Mrs. B., but she smiled broadly and said that she could do without me, and that her meetings were secret and no gentleman admitted. I made up my mind that I would make one of that party, whether they liked it or not. I did not much like the idea of playing the spy on my wife's actions, but as my little woman might be getting into bad habits, I considered it my duty to watch her and find out something more of this secret association.

About five o'clock on the following evening I entered myself behind the glass window of Jones, the grocer's man, and patiently awaited Mrs. Bumpus. At fifteen minutes past six she appeared, and walking down to the corner entered a Fourth Avenue car. I followed in the next car. At the depot she got out and purchased a ticket. After waiting until she was seated in the car, I also secured a ticket, but not knowing for what place she had taken one, I thought it safest to purchase one for William's Bridge, as I did not think Mrs. B. would go further than that alone. Accordingly, I invested, and securing a seat in the smoking car, sat smoking a cigar and wondering how my adventure would terminate. At the first station past Harlem Mrs. B. alighted and started at a rapid pace down a by-street. I followed, at a long distance, and a pretty class she led me of nearly two miles, over some of the roughest and muddiest roads that I have ever been my misfortune to travel on. At last she turned up a wild, desolate-looking road, with a superfluity of mud and very few houses, and entered a medium-sized house, standing a little back from the road on a slight rise. After giving her time to enter, I cautiously approached and

began to reconnoitre. The house was a three-story brick building, with a piazza on two sides and the parlours apparently on the second floor. On approaching, however, I noticed a small shingling-room, the windows of which opened under the piazza, and one look into which filled me with astonishment and convinced me that that was the apartment in which the meeting was to be held. The room was small, but neatly furnished for general use. A piano stood on one side, a sofa and half a dozen chairs on the other and placed about the room. Near the centre stood a small table, on which was placed a large book—apparently a Bible—with a pair of drawn swords, crossed, on it. On one side of this lay a roll of manuscript, and on the other a smaller book with a dagger driven through it. Over the piano was a gilt frame holding a silk banner, bearing the mystical letters S. E. B. H. Above the door, leading to an inner apartment, was suspended a pair of fencing foils, crossed, and standing in each corner was a musket. On the piazza, which was closed, lay two or three pairs of boxing gloves, and a pair of Kebo's clubs were on the floor. Altogether the room presented a most warlike appearance, looking more like the apartment of a gay young bachelor than the meeting room of half a dozen gentle females!

For nearly an hour I stood watching the chairs, muskets, etc., without any new discovery. When my patience was almost exhausted, the inner door opened, and a troop of young ladies marched gravely in. They were all armed with seven shooters, and each bore on her shoulder the red, white, and blue badge. Mrs. Bumpus led the way, and I was surprised to see several young ladies with whom I was acquainted following her. There was Miss Downarrow, Miss Bouchwood, Miss Knocks-offly, and two others whom I did not know. They entered in single file and marched round the room three times, pointing

their pistols at the book with the dagger in it, and chanting a low dirge,—after which the tallest of the party mounted on a chair and with great exertion pulled out the dagger. Three more girls then went to her assistance, and each one taking a corner, the book was carried to the fireplace and laid on the flames. As the fire blazed up and crackled they all smiled grimly and clapped their hands with glee. When the book was entirely consumed, they gravely seated themselves around the tall girl, who sat at a small table and appeared to act as President. I then noticed that Miss Knocks-offly had not taken a seat, but was standing guard before one door, armed with a sword, while another young lady performed the same office at the other door.

I do like anything mysterious. Nothing gives me so much delight as unravelling an apparently impenetrable mystery. I know I may be called curious, but still I will confess to taking the greatest pleasure in finding out anything that has an air of grand, important concealment. I had, so far, only seen; but now I determined to hear. The evening was warm and pleasant; so I thought a little fresh air would do the girls no harm. I therefore raised the window enough to allow the air to pass in and the sound of the voices to pass out. The first sound that reached my ears perfectly astounded me. The tall girl who acted as presiding officer rose and said, "The Society for Extinguishing Bellegent Husbands will please come to order!" Good gracious! What bloody-minded females! I now understood what Mrs. Bumpus meant when she muttered "Extinguish," and remembered the impressive manner in which she had begged me not to force her to do something desperate.

And I evidently had forced her to desperation; for there she sat, with glittering feet and meekly separated from me by circumstantiality and a pair of glasses. The strange, fierce look was on her face, and I could see that she was debating within herself the advisability of recognizing my rights as a "bellegent" at once, and no doubt contemplating the most favourable opportunity for "extinguishing" me. I felt a cold chill down the back, and a shivering sensation all over the body, when I recollected that I was standing very close to these six females, banded together to "extinguish bellegent husbands," and that each of them was armed with a sword-dagger, not to mention the muskets, Kebo's clubs, boxing-gloves, etc., which were lying around loose. I felt convinced that the whole party were taking aim at me through the window, and it was only after a long while that I ventured again to apply my eye to the glass, taking care, however, to profit by the darkness; and I believe I forever thanked the moon for not shining, and was never so glad to lose the sight of the stars.

When I peeped in again, a very pretty, modest-looking young lady was speaking; and as she raised her full, dark eyes, filled with lovely womanly tenderness, and a slight blush suffused her blooming cheeks, I wondered that one so young and fair could harbor such sanguinary thoughts in her pure bosom against a prospective husband; for, judging from appearances, Mrs. Bumpus seemed to be the only married lady in the room. As well as I can remember, the young lady said that she would like to recommend to the Society the propriety of adopting a motto, as well as a badge, and so forth, as it were, a coat of arms, which could be executed on black velvet, worked with colored silks, and the letters done with gold thread. Miss Knocks-offly brought her sword down with a sharp snap on an unassuming chair, and asked if any one had thought of a motto. The young lady replied that she had. A gentleman of her acquaintance had been teasing her to tell him the name of the Society, and, among other guesses, and said that he thought the initials meant "Short Engagements Benefit Humanity," which she considered would be an excellent motto for them to assume. Miss Knocks-offly said she did not think there was any necessity for the Society to have a motto. For her part, she objected to mottoes, unless they were presented by a young gentleman, and accompanied by a kiss.

Miss Downarrow shot in a remark which was partly unheeded by me; but it appeared to be somewhat provocative, as it referred more to the benefit of short engagements in the abstract, than the adoption of the sentence as a motto, and showed that young lady's predilection for the short and quick road to matrimony in pretty conspicuous colours. A mild, gentle-looking female rose, and replied in a stirring speech in favour of long engagements. She depicted, with heartfelt earnestness, the misery of bounding into wedlock before sufficient time had been allowed to form a just estimate of the man's character. She argued that men are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, and that their true natures were concealed during courtship or a short engagement, and it was only after marriage, or during the trial of a three or four year engagement, that the real character showed itself; and that many a girl—here she sighed—had been saved from a life of misery by refusing to consent to hasty nuptials. Miss Knocks-offly leaped up against the door she was protecting, and, bringing her sword down again with a sharp bang, declared she was in favour of short engagements. She said that when she told a fellow she would have him, she meant it, and didn't want to give him an opportunity to back out. Many a girl—here she sighed—had lost a good match by not taking a fellow when he was in the humour, and she thought it all nonsense in girls to have a fellow tugging after them for years, when they could just as well be married at once. After this the debate became somewhat confused. Every one tried to speak at once, and the uproar was so great that I could distinguish nothing.

How the affair would have ended it is impossible to say, for war seemed inevitable, had not a fortunate interruption occurred, in the shape of a low, long wall, apparently proceeding from