

The Passionate Elopement

new buff suit of unparagoned cut with very full trimming round the skirts.

The Exquisite Mob buzzed around the Beau's pedestal with a scarcely contained curiosity. Mr. Oboe, the Physician, was almost more subservient than usual, and not a single person inquired after his neighbour's health or expatiated upon his own. Gog and Magog exposed their ivory teeth in a permanent smile of welcome, and in the kitchen of the Great House, Mrs. Binn, the Beau's intelligent cook, prepared a breakfast of the most savoury character. His ascent to the rostrum produced an expectant silence.

"My lords, ladies and gentlemen," he began, "I owe you a profound apology. You will, of course, understand that in my capacity as Master of the Ceremonies of Curtain Wells, I am under no obligation to any one, but as Horace Ripple, I feel that my conduct in deserting you yesterday morning without any notice of my intention deserves an explanation. When I inform you that a domestick difficulty not entirely unconnected with my censorious office called for hasty adjustment, you will, I am sure, pardon me for not divulging the details of a very unfortunate affair. If I may trespass to such an extent upon your good nature, I should like to make my late adventure the subject of a short admonition. As you are aware, I am not accustomed to mingle with the practical politicks of my matutinal oration any allusion to your moral welfare: I should esteem it highly impertinent on my part, were I to usurp in such a way the prerogative of our friend the Rector. Nevertheless I am inclined to make an exception to my rule this morning, the more so as I feel it my duty to inform you of my impending resignation."

The Beau raised his monocle in order to regard the consternation of the Exquisite Mob.

"That event may not occur yet a while; at any rate I shall remain in my present position during this season. Next October, however, I hope to present you with a younger, I will not say worthier, successor. Naturally I shall still spend the greater part of my time in Curtain Wells, but with the
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