

TRAINING A WIFE

Julius Bagley was an Australian by birth, and was too aggressively British for any spot on this continent west of Canada. It will be readily seen, therefore, what a mistake fate made in assigning him to San Francisco.

Why he was not a popular man in an English colony is a subject which, to his enemies, for he was well read, clever, and hospitable to excess.

He was a clean man, too—wonderfully particular about his appearance. When it is announced that he was a trifle below five feet five in height, it is unnecessary to add that in order to make the most of his inches, he stood as upright as a battle chicken, and habitually wore a top hat in preference to anything lower.

In happy moments, he cited history to prove that intellect lodged from choice in an undernourished man. Napoleon was a favorite with him.

He belonged to the proper club down town, and played cards admirably, but possessed such a vicious knowledge of what was correct play that never an acquaintance of his breathed who would be Bagley's partner of his own volition. He was unpleasant when he lost, to be sure, but he was so particularly disagreeable when he won that those whom fate provided to be his partners invariably succumbed to a reprehensible desire of losing the game for him.

Nor did he get on well with women. He was too prone to construe every remark of theirs into something personal and derogatory to his dignity, and to answer it accordingly. It was not that he and they had ill times of it together. He tried to be amiable and associating, I know. I sometimes felt sorry for him. When he had some particularly hard dig, he would ease his tension by blowing to us about the bad training of American women. They didn't know their side of the matter, he said. They were allowed to be impudent from their youth up. Their parents were to blame and their husbands, too.

"For heaven's sake, Bag, why don't you marry, and show us what ought to be done?" growled young Grosvenor one night.

"I intend to," answered Bagley. "I intend to marry a woman with no dashed notions of independence, if I can find such a one in this free (dashed free) soil of yours. If she can't read nor write, so much the better. I want a woman who has the chance of her waiting her time and getting herself into trouble. All a woman wants to know is how to cook well and how to mind her own business, and to keep things tidy."

"Fine qualifications for a housekeeper; but say, Bag, would you find such a woman the brightest of companions?"

"Companions—stuff! A man's companions should be men," he announced blithely, rearing his pompadour. He wore it extra long, so as not to depend entirely upon his look-ho-ho for additional inches.

"Who drives fat oxen should himself be fat," spat Grosvenor, puffing himself out.

"We were uneasy lest this might provoke a squall, but Julius Bagley had a grasp on a subject that interested him, and he was loath to let it go for the common occupation of taking office."

"When a man provides a woman with a home, and food and clothes, he has a right to expect perfect obedience from her," he resumed sternly. "But if she allows several years' fling as your girls are he won't get it from her. Worse than all, a man really never can be sure of what he has married, so schooled are women from infancy in keeping their heads in from cropping out. The safest thing to do is to pick out some neglected, modest girl, and train her. Teach her your ways, so that there will be no clashing of wills, no family jars. My wife shall have had no 'experiences' before I married her."

"But you'll keep her boundlessly supplied afterwards, eh?" drawled Grosvenor impudently.

"What do you mean?" demanded Bagley, fiercely, of us all, whom he surprised grinning covertly at each other.

We hastened to explain that nobody meant anything in the least and stuck to the lie till it saved us; but nevertheless we held privately to the opinion that Bagley was just the man to vent upon a wife and family all those petty brutalities of temper and speech that good manners obliged him to vent in society.

That summer he spent a month in the mountains at a third-rate hotel kept by a miserly little Frenchman. We couldn't discover any attractions about the place, but Bagley assured us that the fishing was good. In the fall he went up there again; and on his return to the city he announced that he was married. He married the inn-keeper's daughter, brought her to the city, and went promptly to house-keeping.

If I confess that we were wild to see what sort of a woman he had married, I only state the case mildly. Our fever of expectation was aggravated by a fear that she might be such an ignorant dowdy that her pride would keep him from inviting us to his house. But we didn't know him. Matrimony, the first month of it, brought all his good points to the surface, and he one day invited Grosvenor and me up to dinner, with such hospitality and enjoyment that very shame prompted us to refuse. But we went.

The house was a cozy little box, prettily furnished (Bagley was thrifty), and Mrs. Bagley fairly captivated us. Not that she was very sweet looking, and slim and shy and appealingly young; she couldn't have been over 17. She hardly spoke a word of English, either, but she did the honors of her house so charmingly, and showed herself so interested with everything Julius said, as if she did, or thought, that we went away that night actually pleased with Julius ourselves.

Of course, we called again and again; but by his bit, as always happens, we began to see behind the scenes a great deal. As the newness of his situation wore off, traces of Julius' real self showed through, and began to make affairs lively.

For one thing he shamefully took advantage of her ignorance of English to badger her into making exciting mistakes, and when he would roar loudly, and the poor little thing would laugh too, pretending to be pleased as pigs, he would in spite of the tall-tale flood of color that would rise to her hair-roots.

Her name was Desirée, but he said it too big a mouthful, and called her Sarah, "for short." She smilingly begged him to call her Daisy, if he objected to Desirée; but Sarah he stuck to, and Sarah it was except when an excess of bad temper provoked him to "Sally."

Now this matter of a name may seem a slight thing; but after a woman gives up her surname, if she can't keep her Christian name, what rights has she?

Desirée (for so we got to calling her in defiance of Bagley) was indeed ignorant—she scarcely could do more than sign her own name—but her ignorance had been

forced upon her, for she was the most intelligent little lady I ever met. The way she began to pick up information from the papers, and the quickness with which she mastered the language, were simply marvelous.

We used to play cards at Bagley's until 12 and 1 o'clock, and little Desirée would get so sleepy that she would almost tumble out of her chair, but Bagley would not let her go to bed. He must have represented to her that it would be an insult to her guests, or so we judged from a chance remark of the little woman's, and we made up our minds to leave at 10. We did it once; but on our following visit, she begged us to stay so pathetically, and cast such imploring glances towards her husband, that we felt sure he had blown her up for driving us away. So of course we stayed.

After a few months, Bagley got tired of showing off his wife, and began to train her. The first public exhibition of his method occurred on Independence Day. Grosvenor and I had gone up to Bagley's to take him and Mrs. Bagley to an officers' dinner at the Presidio.

Desirée came into the room all smiles and blushes. She brought a brand-new dress, and her hair, which was ordinarily combed straight, back from her forehead, was banded, and banded profusely. She looked radiantly pretty, and knew it, and turned her glowing face to Bagley for approbation. He smiled, and then replied:

"The next time you saw off your hair, consult me. When you have gone into your room and brushed that fuzz off your face, I'll take you out with me, not before."

It was her first act of independence, in honor of the day, perchance, and he resolved to nip it at once.

The color that deserted Desirée's face must have crept into mine, for I felt it sting me.

"Don't you like it, Julius?" asked she, with a catch in her voice, but smiling bravely at us, as if she enjoyed her husband's little eccentricities.

"No! I don't like it. Let me see if you are going to do as I ask or not, because time presses."

"I am afraid it will look very funny combed back, it does so short. Just say to Julius, please."

She looked at him anxiously, with a nervous dread of her refusal, which made Grosvenor and I want to kick ourselves for seeing.

Bagley hung up his hat, sat down ostentatiously and opened a paper. The courageous little woman stood nervously in the middle of the floor and tried to wig out, but she was too young to wig out unless I comb my hair back, Julius, dear."

"Either do as I tell you, or don't do it!" answered he, angrily, turning upon her fiercely, "but not a too do you go looking as you do!"

A look of outraged dignity displaced the entreaty on her face, and I was filled for a moment with unalloyed joy, expecting that she would proceed to a really pleasant conclusion. But he was simply dumbstruck with surprise. The conversation, as might be expected, was formal, and I did most of which we also to be expected.

Bagley was aware that by going into the grocery business herself his wife had spiked his biggest gun. The man was dazed.

Desirée had a blazing color in her face, and looked dangerous; but she invited us into the parlor, after dessert, with the suavity of a duchess, and never weakened once, sitting by her husband's side, and listening to how he was going to bring up his son.

"My boy shall run in the street as soon as he can stand. I won't have any woman as his mother. Or, if my son is going to be a man, I won't have him fall into the clutches of the Catholic Church, or the Episcopal Church, either. One party or another about the house is enough. And the poor woman would murmur 'Yes, Julius,' or 'No, Julius,' and grow pale and nervous, and smile all the time feebly, to show what a perfect loving understanding existed between her husband and herself.

Once her baby cried, and she started up to go to it, but Bagley made her sit still, and held forth on a subject in the world to take a child up the minute it cries! It puts a premium on fuss and disturbance. Let it cry."

"Just stay where you are. No baby is too young to learn obedience. If you begin to pumper it, you'll never leave off. I tell you."

So Desirée sat and listened to the walls, and dug her hands into each other, and kept her strained face turned towards the door, until the feeble little voice trailed off into a melancholy silence.

If ever a woman was tortured in this nineteenth century of progress and enlightenment, that woman was little Sarah Bagley, and we friends of hers respected her as we did a martyr. Her courage was superb. Here was no fool's submission. She had temper enough flashing in her dark eyes to give way if she felt it right to do so; but, you see she was very young, and conscious of a certain inferiority of her husband, and I suppose Bagley was the first man that ever paid her any attention; so many causes combined prompted her to a plan of submission and obedience as heroic as anything I have ever seen.

If he had only treated her with actual violence, we could have knocked him down and had it out with him, but as matters went we were powerless to interfere.

Bagley was fond of his wife, and proud of her, especially of her cleverness—a quality that he formerly under-rated in women—but he was treating her like a dog, actually breaking her in, as one would an animal. Heaven knows how she stood it. He went his strongest when any of us were around, just to demonstrate that he lived up to his precepts. Perhaps he felt safer when we were by, for a wife will put up with loads for appearances' sake.

We would have cut the man at the very start, had we not felt that we showed ourselves true friends of Desirée's by sticking to him.

He was proud of his methods, and he never tired of holding forth on what he would have done in such and such circumstances.

"Hubbard's a fool!" he said, one evening at the club, when he was telling him the last retort of Hubbard's high-stepping better half. "A fool! I wouldn't

put up with a thing like that for a moment."

"No!" I asked. Tell me what you would do.

"I'd smash something. There's nothing like hurling a cologne bottle through a looking-glass for stopping any woman's tongue. I've done it, and I know it."

Poor little Desirée! We didn't doubt it, not one of us.

"Come home to dinner with me," he continued affably. "Sarah has been wondering where you have been hiding lately. Come."

The truth is, I was fairly sick of the scenes up at Bagley's, and half angry with Desirée for putting up with him, and I had kept away for nearly three months.

"Come along," urged Bagley. "But, man, see, I've kept dinner for you all this time!"

"Won't they? Come and see!" and Bagley laughed an ill-natured laugh which told me that his wife had been trained in many unsuspected directions.

It was after eight o'clock when we arrived at his house, and Desirée looked as nearly angry as I ever saw her. She looked very pretty, too, and was carefully dressed.

"Most singular time to come home for dinner," she remarked, promptly. "We were going to the theater, too; did you forget it, tell me?"

"No! I don't see, we are not going, after all," he answered sourly, for he was particularly taken back at her reception of him, since he had invited me up especially to show me that "dinner-time" was simply whenever he chose to dine, not before nor after.

She honored me with a laughing welcome when she saw me and then gave an order to the Chinese servant to bring in the dinner.

Bagley was in an evil temper, and carped at the position of every spoon on the table. Failing to draw tears or apologies from his wife, he began in an over-bearing way to make fun of her appearance, sneered at her theater flimsy, donned for nothing, and objected to some wares in her dress. She ignored him with her usual gentle tact, and tried to keep up a spirited banter with me, although her breath heaved and her color deepened at his downright insults.

Her calmness merely irritated Julius to a frenzy. When the soup came on, it was naturally only lukewarm, and little circles of grease floated on the surface of each plate. The plates were of fine china, and hand-painted by Desirée. She had evidently had them brought on for my benefit.

"Bah!" ejaculated Bagley in a fury. "I have told you again and again that I won't drink swill, and I won't! Now will you remember it?"

Crash! At the question he had swept the plate off the table to the floor, where it lay in twenty pieces, in a pool of greasy soup that soaked rapidly into the rich carpets.

I held my breath. Desirée held hers, also, and looked for one wild, dismayed moment into her husband's fiery eyes. Then she recovered herself.

"You are r-r-r-r-r," she said, with at least three r's. "Perfectly right. It is swill. Bah!" And without the quiver of an eyelash she swept her plate superbly into the middle of the room, and the two greasy pools crept amicably toward each other. Then she rang the bell and calmly ordered the joint to be brought on.

I must say for Bagley that he knows when he has gone far enough; he took his cue from his wife, ignored the chaotic messes on the carpet, and allowed the maid to proceed to a really pleasant conclusion. But he was simply dumbstruck with surprise. The conversation, as might be expected, was formal, and I did most of which we also to be expected.

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FOR BOYS AND GIRLS.

LETTER BOX.

(Under this heading we will insert letters on any subject from boys and girls. The letters must be brief and written on one side of the paper. The name and address must be given, to appear with the letter. Address: "LONDON ADVERTISER," ADVERTISER'S OFFICE, LONDON, ONT.)

DEAR AUNT PRUDENCE: I have read the ADVERTISER and I saw some very interesting letters, and as I did not see any from here I thought I would write. I am 10 years old. I go to school every day and read in the Bible book. I live on a farm and there is a cheese factory on it. I was with my brother in a cheese factory about eight miles away and enjoyed it very much. I guess I will stop now, as my letter is long enough. From your niece, ALICE ELLIS.

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