

Mars and Minerva.

By ARABELLA KENEALY.



BY Jove!" the Squire said, drumming a big fist on the table, "I shall have to take to drink, you know."

There was none save himself in the room; but man is of dual constitution, and it may have been to another self this threat was addressed. The other self was evidently a person of principle, possibly of temperance principle to judge by the gloom suffusing the Squire's countenance during the ensuing several minutes.

"You draft a chap away from a rattling busy life, knocking about in the East, quashing nigger risings, potting big game, and otherwise enjoying himself—shoot his arm off, and force him to settle down in a God-forsaken hole like this to squire a set of rustics he hasn't a notion what to say to and without a decent family within a ten-mile drive—why, he's bound to take to drink. I've put on half a stone already the last three months, sitting an hour longer over dinner than I should. There's actually nothing to get up for in the mornings. Vic would miss her mid-day run, perhaps; nothing worse would happen, would it, old girl?"

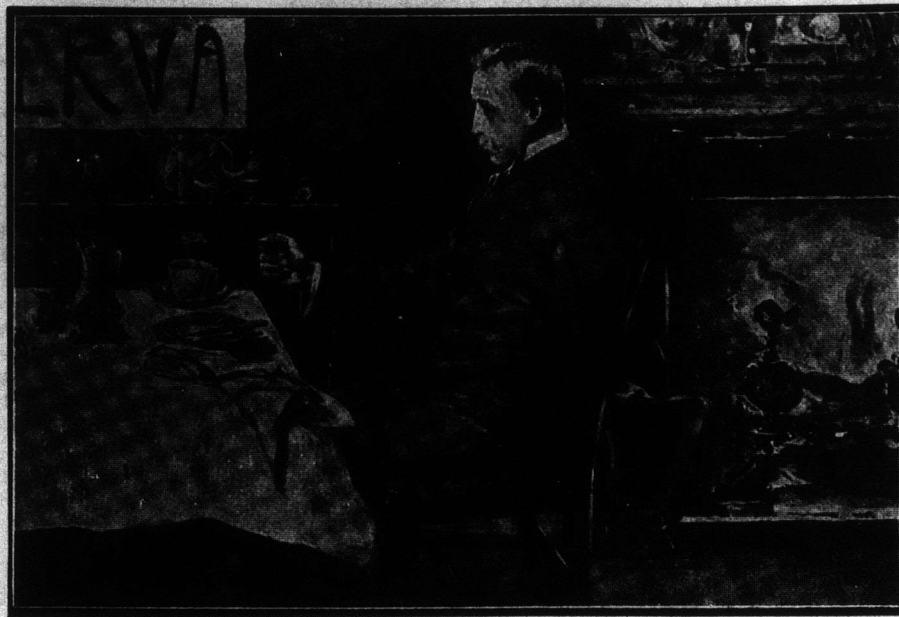
Vic, lying at his feet, looked grave. She did not approve her master's tone. So long as her master sat within sight and hearing she could not understand one speaking as though a funeral were in the house. Then her master's voice got a note of cheerfulness.

"Thank Heaven, the post-bag," he exclaimed, pushing his chair back from the breakfast-table.

A minute later he was looking through a batch of letters.

"Chiefly receipted bills," he said, tossing half a dozen open envelopes aside. "Is used to be jollier in the old days when the bills ran no earthly risk of being paid." He was silent for some minutes. Then he burst into a laugh.

"Something to do with a vengeance! I say, you're a pretty cool hand at



giving orders, Miss Ramsay. I'd better make a note of it. Now then I'm to have an iron bedstead, and not too wide a one at that, with bolster, and pillows, and mattresses, all nicely made up and placed to one side of the platform. I'm to have a nice clean little boy in a clean little shirt in attendance; a boy of sufficient age to be intelligent, yet light enough to lift, a boy who will submit to being put to bed and poulticed, got up again and bandaged, dressed and undressed publicly, tossed in a blanket, carried in a sheet, scalded and burned and splinted, and otherwise experimented on before a gaping crowd. Now where the deuce, Miss Ramsay, Lecturer on Nursing and First Aid, Member of the Sanitary Institute and late of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, am I to unearth such a youngster as you demand? I am to have a kettle boiling on the fire a bag of linseed meal, basins and spoons bandages and lint, and goodness knows what else she may need to illustrate her remarks. I am to have the room well lighted in order that her audience

—great Scott! Hodge, and Dodge, and Podge—may distinguish her diagrams. I am to have a nice white freshly-ironed sheet to serve as a screen for her magic-lantern. I am to find somebody to help her work that magic-lantern. I am to have her met at the station, and—I think I had best start out and get a few of my duties in tow before noon. A Field-Marshal couldn't hold a candle to her in the matter of issuing orders."

* * * * *

"How do you do?" she said, extending a well-gloved hand.

He had decided that a person so evidently accustomed to be obeyed might take it amiss did anybody less than the Squire himself meet her at the station. So he drove the dog-cart round. She was very charming looking, young and golden-haired, and chestnut-eyed, with most bewildering airs of self-possession and decision.

"You got my letter, Major Roberts?" she submitted presently as they left the

station at a fine pace and went skimming down the road.

Got her letter! Why he actually ached with the burden of carrying out its injunctions. He had been at it ever since. Lunch was a mere fiction snatched between intervals of parleyings with clean little boys in clean little shirts, and hunting after bedsteads.

"I've got two boys," he informed her triumphantly; "the second to act as understudy to the first, in case the first one howled, or deserted, or anything of that kind."

She shook her head. "They don't howl; they rather like it. It's a kind of social distinction."

"I promised the poulter shouldn't be too hot," he urged scrupulously.

"I only hope it may be," she mused; "with the appliances usually at hand it errs too often on the other side of temperature."

He glanced at the straight firm profile, with its white, decided chin and mobile mouth. This was a smart sort of young woman. No kind of nonsense about her. The evening promised to be lively. She pointed to a neat tin case packed in the back of the cart.

"Will there be somebody to help me with the lantern?" she inquired.

"I have worked a lantern. I got one down for Christmas. We gave the youngsters a sort of entertainment."

"You are interested in your people?" She swept her brown eyes over his good-looking profile.

The Major smiled beneath his moustache. But he felt relieved that truth did not force him to an absolute negative. She so plainly demanded him to be interested.

"The term is rather strong. You can scarcely call Hodge a person to whom interest attaches."

"I do," she insisted. "He is a very good sort when you take the trouble to understand him. Personally, I am very fond of him."

"Or you would not lecture to him, I suppose?"

"Oh," she responded candidly, "I lecture to him because I get a guinea for it. The first duty of every man and woman is to be self-supporting. Don't you think so?"

"Why, certainly," the Major assented as heartily as though this had been an

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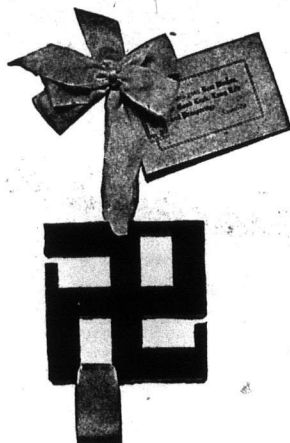
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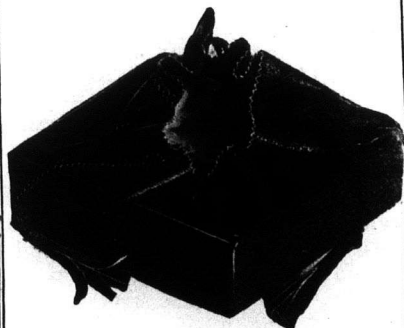
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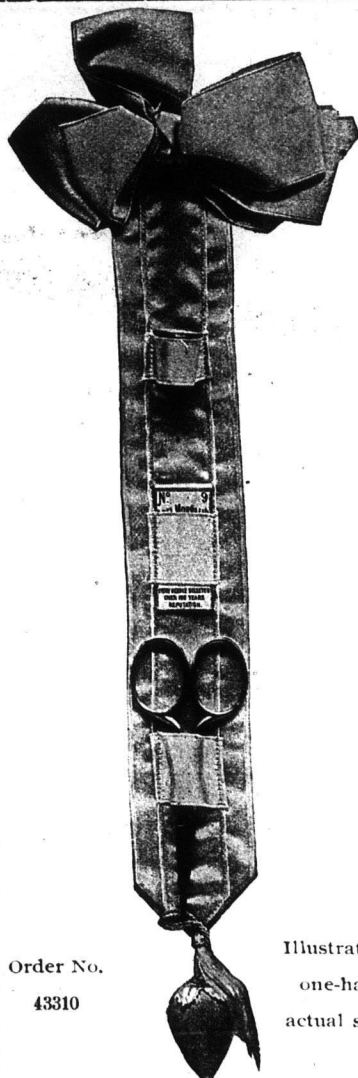


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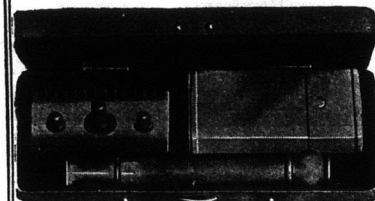


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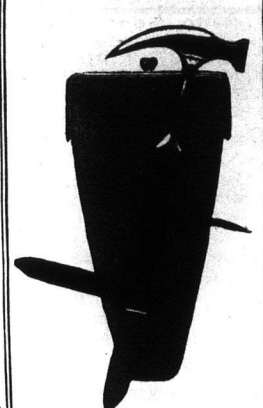
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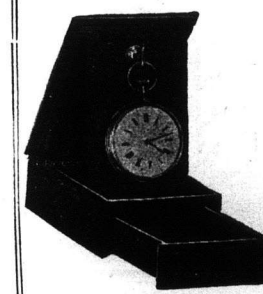


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