The Opal Stud

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By HERBERT COMPTON

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"Hang the key! Why does it always stick when I'm in a hurry?"

The speaker was a girl about twenty-two, struggling to unlock a portmanteau. The exigencies of the situation take her at a disadvantage, and prohibit a description of her costume. On a chair hung a dripping coat and skirt, and a pair of neat boots set upside down within the fender suggested water draining out. Miss Clare West, whilst sight-seeing at Quebec, had been caught and drenched in a storm of rain, and was now returned to the Hotel Chateau Frontenac to dress for dinner, due in twenty minutes.

As she stood petulantly fumbling with the keys, and uttering impatient masculine imprecations, she might almost have been mistaken for a boy, with her tall athletic figure and short curly hair.

"The confounded thing!" she spluttered, and tried another key. This time it turned and she flung the lid back.

"Great Scott! what's this? Who put this here?" she demanded, drawing out an embroglio of bands and button-holes and holding it up gingerly between her finger and thumb.

"Stocking suspenders? No! By Jupiter, it's braces or I'm a Dutchwoman!"

The next shock was a pair of trousers!

"It's not mine at all," she cried, in indignant dismay, "it's some beastly man's trunk."

Slamming down the lid angrily she examined the surface. Sure enough there were her initials, "C. W."

"That's me. And so is the trunk to look at. But the contents aren't," she declared, with a wholesale massacre of grammar. "And now how the mischief am I to scuttle down to table d'hote in seventeen minutes?"

She strode towards the bell to summon the chambermaid, when a vagrant fancy brought her to a halt, with a merry but daring expression in her handsome Irish blue eyes.

"By Jupiter! What fun it would be!" broke from her lips irresistibly. "What an ecstatic lark! Not a soul knows me here, and this time to-morrow I shall be a hundred miles on my way home by the 'Dominion.' Why should I not chance it? Who's to find out? And oh! what copy it would make!"

* * * * * *

The great function of dinner was in full progress in the magnificent table d'hote salon of the Chateau Frontenac, as a handsome but foppish-looking boy entered and stood vaguely gazing round the crowded tables with a cool self-assurance. He gave the impression of being one of those smooth-shaved stiff-starched, ultra-conceited masher youths, whom the average man of the world feels inclined to kick at sight. Fastidiously stuffing his silk handkerchief into his sleeve, and with his chin very high in the air, he strolled towards a vacant seat, and was about to appropriate it, when the head waiter interposed with the notification it was engaged, and conducted him to a small remote table, where, to his obvious disgust, he was placed next to the only occupant, an individual in a tweed traveling suit, who looked like a sparrow amidst swallows.

The boy frowned, flicked out his coat tails, drew his chair under him, and leisurely proceeded to unfold his serviette, craning his head as he did so to survey the visitors. Then he ran his hand daintily through his hair, cast a haughty glance at his neighbor, elevated his eyebrows in marked disapproval of his unconventional costume, and applied himself, with an ineffable expression, to a study of the menu card.

"Aw—any sort of soup," was his order, "and—aw—bottle champagne."

The man in tweed glanced at him, and resumed the section of his mullet with that freezing air of insularity Englishmen affect amongst strangers.

The bumptious boy absorbed his soup, with exaggerated precaution against soiling his immaculate and expansive shirt front, and ostentatious applications of his serviette to his upper lip—a quite superfluous ceremony. Then he revived himself with a critical sip at his champagne, scowled, filled up his glass, and, turning to the man in tweed, so far descended from his pedestal of conceit as to observe:

"Beastly day."

"Froggy," was the laconic reply. He was a good-looking man, with a large mustache and pleasant gray eyes.

"Stopping long?" drawled the boy.

"Can't say."

"Shocking bad cooking I call it," complained the boy, pushing his plate away peevishly.

"Do you? I call it uncommonly good," contradicted the man, with imperturbable calm.

The boy elevated his chin stiffly over his cut-throat collar, turned his head like an automaton, and regarded the man with supercilious surprise. "By jove, you're jolly easy to please. It's the worst I've tasted in my voyage around the world."

The man looked up, a rebuke evidently hovering on his lips. But it dissolved as his glance fell on the conceited youngster, who, apparently unconscious of his impertinence, was picking at an imaginary moustache and spoiling his good looks with his abominable affectation. There was nothing to be gained by breaking this butterfly on a wheel, and the man contented himself with a survey of contemptuous pity, until his eyes happened to be arrested by the boy's opal shirt stud.

"Wine rank gooseberry," criticised the boy, choking over a too hasty gulp of his champagne.

"Did you get a better brand at school?" asked the man with quiet sarcasm.

"I do not follow the drift of your observation," replied the boy haughtily, presenting the full and overpowering expanse of his shirt front to crush his neighbor.

The man was not intimidated. "No drift in it" he said, coolly, as he bent forward and stared critically into the white field of linen, which caused the boy to repeat the ceremony of using his serviette.

There was a pause, and the boy leaned languidly back, his hands buried deep in his pockets, and on his face a blase air of being profoundly bored.

A couple of courses passed without remark. The boy sipped constantly at his champagne, and investigated all the people within view. At last he spoke.

"Not a bad-looking girl over there. The one in pink crepon. Next to the old ruin in gray."

The man glanced in the direction and grunted.

"Pity mothers are such fools as to parade daughters themselves. Ought to hire decent-looking women to show them off. Such a handicap to girl when a fellow can tot up what she is likely to total. Puts a fellow off, don't you know. Now that girl by herself——"

"Yes?"

"Well—she's tolerably decent. Crumby, I call her. But I bet my boots she'll bake into crust, like the old mother.'

"Supposing the elder lady is not her mother."

"Suppose rubbish. Look at the faces."

"Look at the facts."

"Hullo! Do you know them?"

"Slightly."

"Oh, I say, sorry I spoke. Awfully mortified, old chap. Hope I said nothing to wound your feelings."

"Don't distress yourself."

The boy puckered his handsome face. "But I really am awfully sorry. Wouldn't have done it for worlds. Makes a man feel such an accidental cad, don't you know."

Beneath the surface of conceit he was genuinely distressed.

"The best way to avoid that unenviable misfortune," hinted the man gravely, "is to treat every strange lady with the respect due to her sex—as if she were your mother or sister."

"Or your fiancee," sniggered the incorrigible youth.

"Or your—" the man stopped suddenly, his eyes focussed on the boy's shirt front, which was again presented with an air of patronizing condescension.

The scrutiny seemed to disconcert the boy, who lifted his glass of champagne hurriedly and drained it at a gulp. By the way it made his cheeks flush and his eyes wink he seemed susceptible to the influence of what he had so disparagingly condemned as "rank gooseberry." With a sort of bravado he turned boldly round to the man and laughed out:

"Well, luck to the ladies, anyhow! 'Pon my word, this fizz is a better tipple than I gave it credit for at first."

"I see you're a judge of champagne," said the man, with an amused twinkle.

"So, so," admitted the boy, falling back into his languid conceit. "Every fellow knows what suits him best. The best judge is the man who judges best—for himself. Let me choose my own wine, my own weed and my own woman—wife, I mean—and, by Jupiter, I won't go far wrong. But, I say," he branched off a little hilariously, "if you know that pretty girl, why the dickens didn't you get planted next to her at dinner? Hang me, if I only had such a chance—" and he shot his cuff and fondled his chin with the self-satisfied air of a coxcomb.

"I'm not exactly dressed to dine with ladies."

"No, by gad—no more you are! Rather wondered how you could face the music in that slump," assented the boy, impudently. "Makes a fellow feel so beastly out of it."

"No one notices a traveler," said the man, "and I hope to be off by the 'Dominion' to-morrow."

The boy paused, hastily poured himself out another glass of champagne, gulped it down, and pushed his chair back.

"Confound it, I can't stand these long dull dinners," he ejaculated, with unabashed effrontery. "So insipid and slow! I'm off to whiff a cigarette. Ta, ta!" and with a cool nod of his head he rose and sauntered out.

No sooner had he reached the hall than he quickened his pace, when, to his surprise, an arm was slipped through his.

It was the man in tweed.

"I think I'll join you, my young friend," and without more ado he gently but firmly guided the boy into the smoking room. "Try one of my cigars," he added, as he closed the door.

"Oh, thanks. You're awfully kind. But I never whiff anything except a cigarette after dinner. Where's my case, I wonder?" He was diving awkwardly into his tail pocket with a single hand. "Hang it! I must have left it in my room. I'll go and fetch it."

"No, no," interposed the man. "I insist upon your trying one of my cigars. I should like to have your opinion. 'Wine, weeds and a wife'—wasn't it?—you don't go wrong about?" and with a good-natured perseverance the man forced a cigar into the boy's unwilling hand and held a lighted match for him.

"Come, there's a comfortable lounge over there," went on the man, linking his arm in the boy's again and leading him to one of the big bay windows; "ah—and here's the coffee."

"What number, sir?" asked the waiter.

"What number? Oh, I say. I never remember numbers, you know," declared the boy.

"What name, sir?"

The boy blew a hasty cloud of smoke from his cigar, and, plunging his hand in his pocket, drew out—a lady's purse.

"I'll pay for the coffee," he said, handing the waiter a dollar. "Never mind the change," and he flurriedly crammed the purse back into his pocket.

The incident was not lost on the man in tweed, whose gray eyes were fixed curiously on the boy, in whom conceit had given way to a certain air of confusion.

"So you never remember numbers?" observed the man.

"Never could—except, ha, ha!—Number One," answered the boy, with a sickly grin.

"Ever find yourself in the wrong box?" asked the man.

The boy had no reply for this, but fidgeting about, crossing and recrossing his legs nervously, and continually shifting his position. To add to his discomfiture his socks had wrinkled down over his shoes, and he had to stoop and pull them up, displaying a rather uncommon orange and grey pattern. The man in tweed took deliberate observation of them, and then bent forward, fixing his gaze on the boy's shirt front, asked him casually,

"How do you find the cigar?"

"Oh, uncommonly good," declared the boy, his pale cheeks contradicting his commendation, as he held it out at arm's length and pretended to admire the ash. "But it's a little too strong for me. In fact, I think I'll run up and fetch my own cigarette case. I'll be back directly." And he rose rather unsteadily to his feet.

The man rose, too, with a purpose in his features.

"Pardon me, but that's an unusually fine opal stud you are wearing," and he suddenly hooked his finger into the boy's shirt front to better expose the stone.

The boy sprang back, his face aflame.

"I only want to examine the stud," said the man quietly.

"Oh. All right. But hold on half a minute, old fellow. Fact is, the strong cigar you pressed on me has rather upset me. I can't wait. Feel queer and foggy. I'll send you down the stud to examine at your leisure. Sorry to have to leave you so unceremoniously, but—but——"

"Enough," said the man, in a low meaning voice. "No more of this acting. Follow me."

"Follow you?" cried the boy, indignantly, drawing back and raising his voice. "I'll—I'll see you hung first." And he quickly whipped round for the door.

"Don't make a scene," whispered the man, catching him up. "It's no good. You are fairly caught. Be sensible and come along quietly."

"You brute!" hissed the boy between his teeth, "you must be drunk to behave like this. Hands off! I'll call the manager if you attempt to molest me."

"Excellent. We'll both call for the manager," said the man, as without further ceremony he gripped the boy's arm and marched him to the office.

"Where are you taking me to?" faltered the boy.

"To be searched."

"Searched, you scoundrel! How can you suggest such an awful thing?" choked the boy, struggling to free himself.

"Nothing awful about it—except your cheek. Come—in you go."

The manager jumped up from the table, where he was writing. "Major Wargrave! Anything wrong, sir?"

"Yes," said the major sternly; "I've tracked the thief. With a lady's purse in his pocket into the bargain. Search him and you'll see for yourself."

"Oh, you brute!" burst out the boy, blushing scarlet and retreating into a corner. "You cowardly, ungentlemanly cad to suggest such a thing."

"See here, you rogue," said the manager curtly. "Better own up, and shell out, and go off quietly to the police station. We don't want any fuss in the hotel."

"What have I done?" demanded the boy. "How dare you treat me like this? Let me go at once!" and he made a frantic dash for the door.

"What have you done? Well, I never," cried the manager, and he slipped in front of the door and bolted it.

"The lady's purse," observed Major Wargrave, "is in his right-hand trousers' pocket."

The manager approached the boy with the evident intention of abstracting it, when a blow delivered with excellent aim and considerable force sent him back.

Major Wargrave closed with the boy. "Is that how the cock fights? Well, you've only yourself to blame, you young cub, if you get roughly handled." And, seizing one of the boy's wrists, he twisted the arm behind his back. "Now, Mr. Moore, get the purse from his pocket and slip the opal stud out of his shirt front."

The boy gave a shriek. "Don't touch me—don't touch me!" he implored, piteously. "There is a mistake. I'll confess all!" The ring of abject terror and horror in his voice induced the major to loosen his hold.

"Well, then—confess," he said, briefly. "And be quick about it."

The boy turned to bay, pale and panting. When at last he did speak his whole manner had changed, and with it his character.

"And you call yourself a gentleman to take advantage of a girl like this?"

"A girl!" cried the major, falling back confounded.

"As if you didn't know!"

"I never dreamed of such a thing."

"You staring brute! You did know, or you would not have stared at me as you did."

"Stared at you!" protested the major, blushing now as badly as the quondam boy. "I was not staring at you. I was staring at my opal stud. It was in my portmanteau, which is missing. I saw you wearing it. You wouldn't give your number. You wouldn't give your name. You grew white and uncomfortable—"

"White and uncomfortable," cried the quondam boy with a stamp of his foot. "Were not your eyes enough to make me so? Not to mention that vile cigar. But I wasn't going to be out-tricked by you."

"Oh—ah—yes—the cigar. Of course. But the socks. I recognized them. Indeed, I seem to recognize the whole fit out now. That was why I asked you to let me examine the stud—a trinket I value very much."

"There! Take your stud! Do you think I wanted to steal it? Do I look like a thief?"

A pair of handsome eyes flashed sparks of fire at the major as, with agitated fingers, the stud was torn out, and flung down on the table. "And now, sir, be pleased to make way for me."

"Oh, no. Not just yet," interposed the manager. "I've come across many hotel sharps, but this is something quite new in hotel sniping. We must have an explanation. Why are you dressed in man's clothes? Are they Major Wargrave's?"

The quondam boy shrank back, with face hidden.

"Who are you? How came you to sneak into the hotel?"

"Sneak into the hotel, you wretch! I am staying here. I am Miss West. Your porter brought the wrong trunk to my room and left it there in my absence. A black one, with the initials 'C. W.' on it—the facsimile of mine. And one of the keys fitted it."

The manager glanced at the ledger. "Yes. There's a Clare West in No. 46. Are you Clare West?"

"Brute! I'm Miss West. Haven't I told you so?"

"Telling is not enough. You must explain this extraordinary conduct. And, if your story is satisfactory, leave the hotel instantly. We can't have women masquerading in men's clothes in the Chateau Frontenac."

Clare West gave a shudder. "I am not humiliated enough, but you must insult me. Oh, sir" (to the major) 'you are very chivalrous, who preached chivalry to me at dinner!" Then a sudden resolution stormed and animated her features. Drawing herself erect she faced the two men. "You shall have your explanation. I only arrived this afternoon, late. There was an hour to spare, and I went out, but was caught in the storm and soaked through. When I returned to my room there was a trunk there exactly like mine. I opened it in the belief it was. When I found out the mistake that had been made I was going to ring for the chambermaid, when a—a mad freak entered my head to go down to table d'hote as a man, and get copy for a letter. I am the round-the-world correspondent of the 'Go-Ahead Girl,' and I thought—I thought it would make such a—a striking and o-original article, and be such—such fun!" At which juncture, to illustrate the humour of the situation, Clare West broke down and abandoned herself to tears.

The manager whistled incredulously, but a grim look from Major Wargrave silenced him.

"Miss West," said the major, in a grave kind voice, "I beg your pardon. Believe me, I labored under an entire misapprehension. You acted your part so cleverly I mistook you for a boy. And now, if you'll slip quietly back to your room, I will cover your return if—if you will let me."

* * * *

It was inevitable they should meet on the Royal mail steamer "Dominion" in which they had both booked passages. Most girls would have forfeited theirs a thousand times rather than subjected themselves to such a meeting, but Clare West (except, perhaps, for one swift glance of gratitude from her tear-washed eyes on the stairs) had not thanked Major Wargrave, and she persuaded herself that to sail in the same steamer, much as she dreaded it, would be a proper act of penance on her part.

He had no suspicion she was to be a fellow-passenger, and when, as the ship was passing the island of Anticosti, a lady addressed him by name, he was at a loss for a moment to recognize her.

"I am Miss West," she said, "and I want to apologize and say how sorry I am, and—and to thank you for your chivalry."

"Don't—please don't," he said, with a pained look in his face. "I haven't forgiven myself yet for being such a brute as to twist your arm."

"And so I really took you in?" she returned, with a little gleam of satisfaction.

"You took Mr. Moore in, who is as sharp as I'm stupid."

"And as cruel as you are kind," added Clare emphatically.

Somehow that audaciously conceived letter "At Table d'Hote in Trousers" never made its appearance in the "Go-Ahead Girl." In point of fact it was not even written, although there was an abundance of crisp material for copy. The article that took its place was headed "Nearing Home." It was voted sickly sentimental by the more robust readers of the journal, who wondered what had happened to "C. W."—generally so smart and cynical with her pen.

When it appeared in print, however, the familiar initials no longer stood for Clare West, and Major Wargrave's opal guarded a wedding ring on her finger.

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LOVE, COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

By The REV. E. J. HARDY

[Author of "How to Be Happy Though Married," etc.]

IV.—Proposing.

Our ancestors used to make quite a study of how to propose to their future wives in a graceful way: it was with them a fine art. "Look here, Fanny," said a mother to her daughter, "you must make haste and marry one of your suitors, for the carpet is getting quite worn by men going on their knees to propose to you." I am afraid that this sort of thing is going out of fashion in the unromantic days: indeed, I live in terror of hearing some wretch proposing by typewriter. A typewritten proposal would be dreadful: it would look as if it had gone round like a circular. It is not impossible, however, to send romance and poetry over the telegraph wires. A military officer known to the writer was sailing for India. He became not sea-sick but love-sick as he though of the charms of the girl he had left behind him, so when the troop-ship stopped at Malta he wired: "Will you marry me? Yes or no!" "Yes," was the answer which the current of love and electricity returned, and he came back from India as soon as he could get leave and married her. And yet animal magnetism, rather than telegraphy, was the medium of the great electrician Edison's proposing. One day, as he stood behind the chair of a Miss Stillwell, a telegraph operator in his employ, he was not a little surprised when she suddenly turned round and said: "Mr. Edison, I can always tell when you are behind or near me." It was now Miss Stillwell's turn to be surprised, for, with characteristic bluntness and ardor, Edison confronted the young lady, and, looking her full in the face, said: "I've been thinking considerably about you of late, and if you are willing to marry me I would like to marry you." They were married a month afterwards.

"DUES OF COURTING."

Rapid communications corrupt good manners. In this age of steam and electricity there is not time for the graceful, if long-winded, proposals of our forefathers.

We are becoming as short, prosaic and to the point as was the celebrated physician, Abernethy. He wrote to the lady of his choice, Miss Anna Threlfall, that he would like to marry her, but as he was too busy to make love she must entertain his proposal without preliminaries, and let him know her decision by the end of the week. Still, however busy he may be, a certain amount of time spent in wooing is owed by every man to the girl whom he thinks worth asking. And a wise woman will insist on this, as did a Scotch girl to whom her lover proposed too abruptly. She answered: "Yes, Jamie, I'll marry you; but you must give me my dues of courting for all that."

Proposals of marriage have been sent much oftener by post than by telegraph, for, as an acquaintance of mine said, when dropping one into a letter box, "It's only a penny—hit or miss!" A man should have his mind well made up, however, before sending a proposal in a letter, either registered or unregistered. It is not always an advantage to be able to see both sides of the question. A clever man, known to the writer, had got into the habit of arguing for and against different courses of action at every crisis or turning point of his life until he became almost mad. When he began to think of matrimony he was perplexed in the extreme—should he marry or should he not? At last, not being able to bear the painful state of uncertainty, he proposed by letter to a lady and dropped it into a pillar letter box. No sooner had he done this than all the arguments which he thought were dispelled forever returned with new force, and the wretched man tried to fish the letter out with a walking stick. Unable to do this he went round and round the pillar in agony of mind. Fortunately for him, but more fortunately, I should say, for herself, the lady refused his tempting offer. Another irresolute lover who condded a proposal to paper was the once celebrated Horne Tooke. A servant posted the letter for him, but the writer, suddenly repenting, went to the postoffie, and, proving the letter to be his, had it returned.

SHOULD WOMEN PROPOSE?

Should women propose, or even give as much help over the stile as these ladies did? Even in other years than leap year we think that they may when men would be too shy to carry the effort through without them. Queens have to propose, and very prettily did our late gracious sovereign do this. Take the case of a woman who happens to be wealthy, and who not only loves, but is loved by a man who is poor, and who for fear of being considered a fortune-hunter will never ask her.

It might be thought that when time, place, circumstances and the lady are all favorable, a man could hardly help proposing, but men have been silenced by shyness at the supreme moment. Professor Haldane, of St. Andrews, was one of these. He had reached middle age without marrying. Suddenly he refurnished his house, and frequently visited the home of a certain lady. At last he paid a state visit, more carefully dressed, and even more bashful than usual. The lady, quite innocent of any occult intent, as, tried to help out the conversation by talking about his new household arrangements. "Have you got through the papering yet? I hear your new carpets are beautiful. Everyone says that your house is just perfect." "Here's my opportunity," thought the professor. "Na, na, Miss Jane," he stammered, "it's not perfect. It canna be that while there's one thing wanting." "What is that?" asked the lady. The professor caught up his hat and sought the door, saying as he did so, "Eh, dear me—it's not perfect. It canna be—till it's got a—a sideboard!" Another Scotchman, who was far less cultivated than the professor, was, perhaps, for that reason, less shy and hesitating. He casually remarked to a Galloway girl, "I think I'll marry thee, Jean." Not at all offended at this uncouthness, she replied, "Man Jock, I would be muckle obliged to ye if ye would!" Augustus Hare tells how a friend of his, Lord Tankerville, proposed to Lady Olivia Montagu when they were playing a game in an ante-room at an evening party. At first she would not face the question. By and by she suggested that it was time they should return to the rest of the company in the drawing room. The lover pleaded: "But what am I to think? What may I say?" "Say," was the reply, "that we have played our game and that you have won."

CURIOUS PROPOSALS.

Even the harmless necessary cat may be made the medium of a proposal. A modest swain went one evening to the cottage of his lady love and found her seated by the fire knitting stockings, a large cat at her feet. After sitting for some time in silence, he took the cat on his knee and said or rather stammered out: "Pussy, ask Lizzie if she'll marry me." Lizzie blushed and said: "Pussie, you can tell Jamie that I'll tak him."

Another bashful lover presented a prayer-book to the object of his preference, with the words, "Wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded huseband?" underlined. The book was returned with the momentous words "I will," underlined.

Dr. Thomas Dawson, who was celebrated in the last century, did not propose himself by a book, but was proposed to in this way. One day he found an admiring patient alone, sitting with the family Bible before her. The physician read the words to which her forefinger pointed—the words of Nathan to David, "Thou art the man." He took the hint, and married the lady. The great preacher, Spurgeon, asked the girl who became his wife by means of a book. He was reading one day, as he sat by her side, Tupper's "Proverbial Philosophy." Coming to the lines:

"If thou art to have a wife of thy youth she
is now living on the earth;
Therefore think of her, and pray for her
weal."

He pointed them out to her, and asked, "Do you pray for him who is to be your husband?"

To go back now to some less modern divines. The old method of proposing on one's knees which went out with the wearing of swords and silk stockings, must have been physically uncomfortable for all but the very young, and in one historical instance at least, it was in other ways inconvenient. We allude to the case of the Rev. Jerry White. He was caught by Oliver Cromwell himself kneeling at the feet of his daughter. The ambitious parson pretended that he was suing for the hand of the lady's maid, and, taken at his word, had to marry her instead of her mistress!

It certainly could not have been said of Richard Hooker that his only books were women's looks, for he was so taken up with his studies that he had no time to look or propose to a wife. Accordingly, when the woman with whom he lodged suggested, after he had been ill, that he ought to get a wife to take care of him, he commissioned her to find such an one. She appointed her daughter to the situation, and Hooker had cause to regret that he did not choose for himself.

The only one whom Dean Swift appears to have proposed marriage to was a Miss Waring, and he did this in an imperious way, like a victor imposing terms on a vanquished foe. He began by asking: "Are you in a condition to manage domestic affairs with an income of less than £300 a year? Have you such an inclination to my person and honor as to comply with my desires and way of living, and endeavor to make us both as happy as you can? Will you be ready to engage in those methods I shall direct for the improvement of your mind, so as to make us entertaining company for each other, without being miserable when we are neither visiting or visited? Can you bend your love, esteem and indifference to others the same way as I do mine? Have you so much good nature as to endeavor by soft words to smooth any rugged humor occasioned by the cross accidents of life? Shall the place where your husband is thrown be more welcome than courts and cities without him?" If Jane Waring could answer these questions in the affirmative, Jonathan Swift said: "I shall be blessed to have you in my arms, without regarding whether your person be beautiful or your fortune large. Cleanliness in the first, and competency in the second, is all I look for. * * * I singled you out at first from the rest of women, and I expect not to be used like a common lover." This was certainly not a common way of proposing marriage.

Rowland Hill was as abject when proposing as Swift was imperious. He asked the lady (a Miss Tudway) to accept "a poor worm in the character of a minister of Christ."

What a difference there is between the proposals made by Swift and Hill and that of Richard Steele! He wrote: "I have not a minute's quiet out of your sight, and when I am with you you use me with so much distance that I am still in a state of absence, heightened with a view of the charms which I am denied to approach. In a word, you must give me either a fan, a mask, or a glove you have worn, or I cannot live; otherwise you must expect I will kiss your hand, or when I next sit by you steal your handkerchief. You yourself are too great a bounty to be received at once; therefore I must be prepared by degrees, lest the mighty gift distract me with joy. Dear Mrs. Scurlock, I am tired of calling you by that name; therefore say the day in which you will take that of, madam, your most obedient, most devoted, humble servant."

PROPOSING IN CHINA.

Methods of proposing by dumb show have been invented in all countries to save shy lovers from having to "pop the question" in words. Amongst the Chinese boat population intentions are signified in the following pretty way. In harvest time any man of their class who wishes to marry goes into the next field and gathers a little sheaf of rice, which he fastens to one of his oars. Then, when he is in presence of the girl of his choice he puts his oar into the water and goes several times around the boat belonging to the object of his affections. The next day, if the latter accepts his homage, she, in her turn, fastens a bunch of flowers to her oar and comes rowing about near her betrothed. The rice in the above case is emblematic of the support promised by the man; the flowers, of the happiness offered by the woman.

Before going to a certain ball a friend of mine discovered that three heiresses were to be present. He determined that very evening to get the consent of one of them to marriage. To effect this he bought three beautiful bouquets and ordered them to be sent to the place where the ball was to take place. His intention was to present a bouquet to each of the heiresses and propose to all if necessary. The first to whom he made an overture refused him and his flowers. Nothing daunted, he approached the second heiress with a floral offering and offered himself. The flowers were accepted, but not the giver. He had not a faint heart, however, and so he asked the third heiress and won her. Persevering audacity like this seems almost incredible, by my friend vouches for the truth of the story.

Many proposals have been made in ballrooms, but surely some other place should be chosen for the settlement of a business which, though sweet, is also very serious. Knowing how easily excitement and favoring circumstances may put a man off his guard in this matter and make him do what he really does not mean to do, a wise woman known to the writer refused two men who proposed to her in a ballroom. This is the way Daniel Webster proposed: One day, when kneling before his lady love, he suddenly dropped the skein of silk she was winding off his hands, and made with a piece of tape half a true lover's knot. The lady (a Miss Fletcher) completed it and a kiss sealed the bargain. Sir Alexander Duff Gordon had been paying attention to the beautiful Lucy Austin, and the customary gossip resulted. One day he said to the young lady: "Do you know people say that we are going to be married?" and before she could reply he added: "Shall we make it true?"

A handsome and witty widow was admired by a staid but amorous Quaker. One day he said to her: "Mary Smith, people in —— say thee and me are going to be married." "Ah," replied the widow without any hesitation, "but thee and me know different."

"DON'T MAKE IT PUBLIC."

Widowers have no excuse for not proposing properly. We do not know whether our readers will think that the following, which I learned from a clergyman, is in good form. It was sent in December, 1875, to a widow in his parish by a man to whom she had never spoken:

"Dear Friend—I am a widower with two little girls, and I want someone to take care of them. I think we could live very comfortably together in this world, and afterwards we could rejoin those we have loved who have gone before. If you accept this, please write and say so on the other side of this sheet. If not, please return this letter, and don't make it public."

A man of whom I have heard who was a widower for a second time, proposed in this lugubrious way. Bringing to the lady a bundle of papers tied up with black ribbon, he asked her to read them, as they were the letters written to him by his dear wives, and would prove that he was capable of being a good husband. "Perhaps, after going through them, you may look with favor on my suit, but don't be in a hurry or answer now, I can wait."

If there is an art in proposing there is one also in refusing, and in gracefully taking a refusal. The "I shall be a sister to you" formula has served so long that it should retire and give place to something more original.

That was a nice way an Irishman took his refusal. The lady had just engaged herself to another, so he said: "Shure, I wish that ye had been twins so that I could have had half of ye." Another man, certainly not Irish, was so philosophical that when he died, several years after, he left the lady a handsome legacy as a trifling acknowledgment of her great kindness in refusing him.

Next Week: "Engaged."

OUT OF THE ORDINARY.

Only 70,000 British reside on the continent, while 200,000 continentals live in England.

The Democrats have carried Ohio six times in thirty years—in 1873, 1874, 1877, 1882, 1883 and 1889.

The early inhabitants of the Nile valley had excellent roads, paved somewhat in the macadem style of the present day.

There are twenty-eight pounds of blood in the body of an average grown-up person, and at each pulsation the heart moves ten pounds.

Our ostrich farms are profitable. Birds are worth $100 apiece, and a good specimen yields about $25 worth of feathers at a plucking.

In 1896 the people paid $146,000,000 for interest on the public debt. The amount now is $29,000,000, and the rate has declined from 7.30 per cent. to 2 per cent.

Sheep with a green fleece are a novelty, but they are to be seen in Germany near some copper works. They live in the dust and fumes, and drink water contaminated by copper.

In France the interest charge on the public debt is $200,000,000 a year, a per capita of over $5. In the United States the interest charge is less than $30,000,000 a year, a per capita of 39 cents.

The greatest bay on the face of the earth is that of Bengal. Measured in a straight line from the two inclosing peninsulas its extent is about 420,000 square miles, or nearly double that of Texas.

A French deputy has announced his intention to bring in a bill during the present session of Parliament making it not only admissible, but legally obligatory, for women to sit as jurors. He proposes that all juries shall be required to consist of six good men and true and six women similarly qualified.

Manila is to have an American fire department. It will be under an American chief and the stations will be commanded by American captains. The lieutenants and firemen will be natives. The apparatus will be American.

One of the curiosities of the Bank of England is to be seen in the printing room. A man sits at a desk, and every three seconds a machine delivers to him two complete £5 notes. If he sits there six hours he receives over $350,000.

Canada is now the only country in the world offering free land to home seekers of limited means. Fifty thousand immigrants are each year entering her ports, and 75 per cent. of these people go at once to the Northwest Territories.

There are some 6,000,000 Portestants in Russia who enjoy religious liberty with the stipulation that they must be born of Protestant parents and must not proselyte. Preaching in nine languages is heard every Sunday in St. Petersburg in the Protestant churches.

The French tax on street signs "varies with the size of the offense." Last year it added over $700,000 to the public treasury. In the United States vast street signs can shut out the air and the view and overwhelm everything in sight without paying a cent in taxation.

It is said to be only a question of time before the Bermuda islands will sink under the ocean. The geological theory is that the islands are merely the remnant of one large island. The subsidence within a comparatively recent period has been from eighty to one hundred feet.

The British officers engaged in shipping mules and horses from New Orleans to South Africa, after trying all kinds of labor, have concluded to employ American negroes to care for the animals. The negroes will be taken to Africa under pay and will have their way paid back to America if they wish to return.

In a recent lecture at Gresham College, Dr. Symes Thompson, in speaking of the effects of climate, remarked that it had become necessary to sublet English government work in Egypt because it was found that the natives would only work when chastised, and it was a rule that a British officer must not strike a native.

The number of retail liquor dealers in the United States at the close of last year was 206,000. The total vote of the Prohibition party in the same year was 229,000. New York has the largest number of liquor dealers, Illinois is second and Ohio third. Pennsylvania has the largest number of Prohibitionists, New York is second and Illinois third.

The biennial report of the Kansas Board of Agriculture shows that in twenty years the State has produced 712,487,558 bushels of wheat—a yearly average of 35,624,378 bushels. The crop last year reached 77,239,091 bushels, and this year's crop will not fall below 70,000,000 bushels. The total value of the twenty years' productions of wheat was $428,088,186.

Oklahoma is increasing rapidly in population. Four years ago it cast 52,000 votes. Last year the total vote cast was 72,000, a gain at the rate of 5,000 votes a year. Mississippi, which cast 70,000 votes at the election of 1896, cast only 50,000 at last year's presidential election. It is estimated that Oklahoma will have a voting population of at least 100,000 by 1904.

The roar of a lion can be heard farther than the sound of any other living creature. Next comes the cry of a hyena, and then the hoot of the owl; after these the panther and the jackal. The donkey can be heard fifty times farther than the horse, and the cat ten times farther than the dog. Strange as it may seem, the cry of a hare can be heard farther than that of either the cat or the dog.

At the United States mints 66,938,700 bronze cents were coined last year—a larger number than was produced during any previous twelve-month. The mintage of these coins, however, has been very large, indeed, in other years, ranging from 35,000,000 in 1895 to 49,000,000 in 1898. Few are presented for redemption, and an answer to the question, What becomes of the cents? would be as difficult as that to the inquiry as to the ultimate fate of pins.

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And light dressings with CUTICURA, purest of emollients and greatest of skin cures. This treatment at once stops falling hair, removes crusts, scales, and dandruff, soothes irritated, itching surfaces, stimulates the hair follicles, supplies the roots with energy and nourishment, and makes the hair grow upon a sweet, wholesome, healthy scalp when all else fails.

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