

my love and your honor out into bushes. Good night."

There was a great deal of talk in the village, and at one time it appeared that the mite society, for whose benefit Polly had so ardently begged a nickel here and there, would issue an edict against her; but the tide was finally turned by the president of the association, a widow with a business eye. She saw that to cut off the newspaper was to throw away a valuable adjunct, and so it was agreed that Polly might remain in the society and rest simply under a mild degree of suspicion. The question was discussed in the church, but the preacher, strong in his belief that church notices and abstracts of sermons should be printed, called a determined halt.

How much longer the affair might have been discussed, and into what remote and executive corners of affrighted virtue it might have been dragged, it would be difficult to say; but the arising of a new topic put it all aside. And this new topic was one of real excitement. Not far away in the hills lived a gang of desperate men, the Abe Peters boys, they were called. It was known, or at least it was strongly suspected, that they had robbed railway trains. Determined efforts on the part of the law had failed to bring them to justice. It was believed that they had formed an alliance with the Dalton gang, but this their leader denied, and offered, on condition of a pardon for himself and friends, to help the officers bring the Daltons into court or to kill them. This offer was accepted. The Daltons were killed or so badly crippled that nothing further was to be feared from them. Well, after this the Peters gang fought off the temptation to rob trains, but could not forego the pleasurable recreation of riding into a village now and then and shooting out the lights. So, just about the time the talk concerning Polly and the three men was sinking to a mere whisper of dying scandal, the Peters brothers rode into Broomfield, shot the town cow, wounded the prowling hog and shattered a lamp in the meeting house. This was the greatest outrage that had ever been put upon that part of the country, and old man Aimes, with his shirt unbuttoned, puffed up and down the street and swore that if anyone would go with him he would ride after the scoundrels. But everybody was busy. The sheriff was behind with his

els to the acre. And you know that I told you that you might even spend fifteen dollars. Of course you recollect it, for how could a woman and as brave a woman as you ever forget it. Well, I have been thinkin' the matter over since then and I have come to the conclusion that you may spend twenty dollars at a snort. Now what do you think of it?"

"But you don't owe me anything," she replied.

"No, but I want to give it to you, don't you see—give it to you to spend at a snort, hah? I want to marry you, don't you understand?"

"Mr. Aimes, you are too brave a man to throw yourself away."

"Now look here, don't come a twittin' of me," he said. "I was goin' to help you shoot them fellers, but, hah, he Nell took the gun and slipped away with it before I could get to the house. I can't run as fast as I could at one time."

"But I saw you running through the street and a deer couldn't have been faster."

"You are right, and I was runnin' for the gun."

"But you were not running toward your house."

"No, of course not, for I knew that Nell had tucked my gun and I was goin' after another one. And it's a good thing for them that I didn't get it. But let us get down to business. I have been thinkin' the matter over and I have come to the conclusion that I can't get along very well without you and I know Nell can't. Why, look here, you ought to be a mother to that girl, hah? Didn't she risk her life to help you? And ain't such courage as that deservin' of a mother? It's easy enough to be a mother to her."

"Yes, but I can't very well be a mother to both of you."

"The horn spoon! I don't want you to be a mother to me; want you to be a wife to me."

"I think a great deal of you, Mr. Aimes."

"Bleeged to you, I gad."

"And I will break my engagement to those three men and engage myself to you for one year."

"Cut it down and I'm with you."

"All right, we'll say three months."

"And will you swear you won't fool me?"

"I'll swear that I will not break the engagement unless you are willing."

would take off that fool thing and throw it away."

"Throw away my betrothal pledge, hah? Not much. You go on into the house and Polly and I will walk down and look at that bottom field of corn by moonlight."

"I don't care to walk this evening," Polly replied. "I'm tired."

"All right, we'll wait till some other time; but say, you might let me kiss you once just for luck."

"No, you've had luck enough. By the way, there is a clause that I must insert in our contract, and that is this: If you speak to me again or to anyone about our compact the engagement shall be instantly broken. There, not a word or I'll break it right now."

To observe the new clause required on the old man's part a strong exertion of will; and sometimes, in babbling about his bottom field of corn, he approached near the danger line. News of the engagement got out, but the old fellow swore that he had told no one; but he had been seen talking to the president of the mite society, and it was known that she had spread the report. And she said many things that were not complimentary to Polly; said that she had come to Broomfield merely to catch a husband. She even stopped Polly in the street and asked her when the marriage was to take place.

"It seems of deep concern to you," Polly replied.

"Oh, not at all, I'm sure. I just merely happened to think of it. I don't care if you marry him to-day, I'm sure. He's nothing to me, goodness knows. And so far as that's concerned, I could have married him long ago. I suppose the match will be very suitable. He's getting old and you're not so very young yourself. Those city women have a knack of hiding their age, too. Oh, yes, I should think that you are very well suited. It's nothing to me, I'm sure."

"Good, and I hope that you will accept an invitation to my wedding."

"Oh, I am the last person in the world to go to weddings. Of course if it's a romantic affair I don't mind going, but a cut and dried marriage never did catch me. Oh, by the way, what will those three strange men think?"

"I don't know, but I have invited them to the wedding."

"Miss, I must say that you are about the curiousest critter I ever saw, and it strikes me that the less a body has to do with you the better it will be for 'em."

Several months passed, and the expiration of the lease was approaching. And so was the time set for Polly's marriage. The bottom field had yielded lavishly and the old man wore a new homespun suit. "You know we had a sort of a contract," he said to Polly one evening.

"Yes, but if you speak of the engagement I'll break it."

"I gad, you've got me wound up in a close place. I'd like to ask you if it ain't about time you was gettin' your dress ready, and all that sort of thing."

"Look out now, Mr. Aimes."

The old man ducked his head as though a stone had been thrown at him. "All right, miss, but don't forget to blow the horn when you are ready."

It was morning, and Polly and Nell were sitting in the parlor at home. Polly had said that as the lease was about to expire there was no need of going to the office. "We will wait," she said, "and let the owner of the paper come here if he wants to see us."

"Do you think of taking it again?" Nell asked, with a touch of sadness in her voice.

"No, I think not."

"So then you are in earnest about marrying father?"

"No, I think not."

"You think not? Don't you know?"

"Yes, I think I do."

"Polly, you have one of your mysterious fits to-day. What's the use in keeping up this foolishness? Tell him that you can't marry him. You have let it run on so long already that he has gone to the expense of getting a new suit of clothes."

"Yes, but he hasn't any more clothes now than he needs."

Nell sighed and Polly looked dreamily out into the garden. "Your coming and your stay has been a romance to me, Polly, and now it must end." She sat with her elbow on a table and meditatively and deftly was touching her hair. The sunlight, streaming through the high window, fell upon her, illumined her, and the sad glow of a wish-dream was in her eyes. Out in the road, dodging about, stalked a young man, a smitten clown, dying to catch a glimpse of her. "Yes, your coming was so strange a romance, bringing to me a mind that I could admire, and now the music must end in a dry crackle."

Polly went to her, leaned over her, kissed her. "Your romance may not end," she said. "But suppose that I should tell you that your romance had been brought by a circus woman."

"You a circus woman? I didn't know that they were so noble and brave."

"I did not say that I was a circus woman, but suppose I were one; and suppose those three men came to persuade me to go back into the ring."

is that out there that keeps gazing in here?"

"Some fellow desperately gone on you. Shall I go out and knock him down?"

"Goodness, no; he is doing no particular harm. But I wish he would go away."

"You don't like admirers, do you?"

"The right sort of admirers, yes; but to be admired by ignorance is a cheap victory."

In Polly's eyes was the light of strong admiration as she looked at the girl. "You surprise me nearly every day," she said. "I did not expect to find so bright a creature in this dingy place."

"Oh," Nell laughed, "you think I am bright just because the place is dingy. It doesn't take much of a butterfly to look pretty when it settles in the mud."

Polly was silent, meditative; and when she spoke again there was in her voice a new tone, a tremulous sadness. "I am one of the shrewd children of the world," she said, "and you are a clover-scented child of the meadow, but, simple as you are, yours is a wisdom that I could never reach. There's that idle fellow leaning on the fence. Shall I drive him away?"

"I wish you would tell him that he is annoying me. No, it might hurt his feelings."

This made Polly laugh so loudly that the fellow, thinking that the women were making fun of him, strode away. "One to contemplate your tenderness," said the woman of the world, "would scarcely think that you had ever turned loose a double-barrel shotgun amid a lot of men."

"Oh, I did that for you, and if I had thought that the fellow out there was annoying you, I should have driven him away long ago."

"My dear, I might take that as a rebuke," Polly replied, "but I won't," she quickly added.

Nell got up, brushing the sunbeams out of her eyes, and walked about the room. "I feel so strange to-day," she said. "Something must surely be going to happen. I wish that editor would come over here and beg you to take his paper for another year."

"Perhaps he couldn't induce me to take it."

"Oh, but you are not thinking of going with the circus again, are you?"

"You shall soon see what I intend to do."

"But don't do anything to separate us," Polly had begun to read a newspaper. "Did you hear what I said? Now what can be in that paper to interest you so?"

"I was just reading about a peculiar organization that I happen to know something about. Some time ago an old man, a crank, died in Chicago, having willed his money to a club, or rather to several trustees who were to form such a club as he should name. It was to be called the Test club and was to have but thirty members. When a candidate should apply for membership, a test was to be imposed upon him, and, if he carried it out faithfully, he was to be admitted as a member and thereafter share in the dividends arising from certain investments; and as the dividends were large there was a rush for membership. And I see by this article that a woman demands the right to apply for membership, vowing that she is willing to undergo any test that may be imposed upon her."

"What nonsense," was the girl's comment. "A woman ought to know that so soon as she gets out of her real sphere she is robbed of her force, the power that she should wield over men."

"I don't know much about the power that women wield," Polly replied, "but I don't think that a woman would make a good ringmaster."

"A ringmaster, Polly? What do you mean?"

"Why, a ringmaster in a circus."

"Oh. But why should you so frequently refer to the circus? I just believe that you intend to run away and leave us."

"I think not. By the way, what time does the stage come in?"

"The first one comes at a little after eleven. Why do you want to know?"

"Oh, I just happened to think about it."

"But why didn't you happen to think about it before?"

"And for that matter," Polly quickly replied, "why don't we happen to think about everything before?"

They laughed at each other, and Nell, seizing her friend, pretended that she was going to put her out of the house, but Polly, taking hold of her arms, gave her an easy upward swing and stood her on a chair. "Gracious alive," Nell cried, springing down; "how strong you are. Did riding a horse in a circus make you so muscular?"

"Perhaps riding a horse was not all I did. I might have handled cannon balls."

"No? All right, then. I thought she was. Don't know very much about women myself, but I thought she was a little coarse."

"I should think, sir, that you would strive to be more of a gentleman than to call her coarse. She is the noblest and bravest creature in the world."

"That so? Never saw her tried. Is that her stamping around upstairs?"

Nell made no answer, and they sat in silence. After awhile they heard Polly coming down the stairs. The stair door opened and out stepped—a man. Nell uttered a sharp cry and covered her face with her hands. The man approached her, and bending over her said: "I was a candidate for admis-



THE DOOR OPENED AND OUT STEPPED A MAN.

sion into that club and the test was that I should be a woman for one year."

"Oh!" she sobbed, "and I have told you things that I should not have told anyone."

"Yes," he replied, still bending over her; "and you have shown me the purest mind and the noblest heart that man has ever found." He leaned further over and whispered to her, and the face that she turned up to his was radiant with a confused happiness. Just at this moment old Aimes stalked in. "Where's Polly?" he asked. "Why, what's the meaning of all this? Hah? You don't mean—"

"I have been Polly," a man said, bowing to him; "but now I am George Hadley, and this daughter of yours, the sweetest woman that lives, is to be my wife."

"A man, hah? A man from fust to last? Well, say, now young feller, I knowed it all the time, and I was jest waitin' to see how long you could keep it up. I've been mayor of this town too long to be fooled, I tell you, hah?"

THE END.

BEFORE THE WEDDING.

The Ecstatic Visions of the Young Lady on the Eve of the Nuptial Day.

The invitations have been sent out and in a few days the bride-elect is to be led to the altar. The ushers and bridesmaids have been selected, the tuxedo is well under way and the presents begin to pour in.

Each girl is just what she wanted. She fairly revels in the sight of the best man's card lying loose in the delicate satin-lined case.

But not less lovely to her seems the little set of fruit knives, the gift of a friend whose family has met reverses of fortune since they were in the young ladies' school together, whilst she goes into transports over the Japanese vase a near neighbor has presented in person.

The mail brings a letter from the fiancée's cousin, a captain in the regular army stationed at a remote post in Arizona. In the letter is a check for fifty dollars with which the captain hopes she will purchase some trifle for her own personal adornment. Quite overcome by this evidence of generosity she sings his praises in extravagant terms for half an hour.

She is bothered a little when a "duplicate" present arrives, but consoles herself by hoping that it can be exchanged for something of equivalent value.

Another ring at the door. This time it is the dressmaker with the bridal gown. Again it is tried on and one or two minor alterations are suggested. The dressmaker leaves a deep sigh of relief as the fiancée struts up and down her boudoir voicing her satisfaction. Then all the members of the household are summoned to survey her in her finery.

Papa is so nervous over it all. Every morning and evening he is obliged to walk the length of the drawing-room and back, with his daughter on his arm, keeping in step to the spirited strains of the "Wedding March," rather jerkily rendered on the piano by an older sister, who has determined to live a life of single blessedness.

Papa is not a very apt pupil, and the more he practices the stately step the less certain he feels of being able to master it in time for the momentous event—only a few days off.

On the day before the event rehearsals takes place in the church. With the sonorous organ to guide him, papa really does splendidly. He is to carry his high hat in his left hand, and dispensed now are all his fears as to what he shall do with his right hand, which he has been instructed to tuck gracefully in the breast of his frock coat.

The afternoon rehearsal affords considerable enjoyment, for the minister is witty and keeps the bridal party in a merry mood.

Night comes and mamma is anxious for the fiancée to retire early, so she will be sure not to miss her beauty sleep. But the latter protests that going to bed so timely—on this the last night of her maidenhood—is quite out of the question.

It is close on to midnight when she at last withdraws to her downy couch. But for hours sleep eludes her. She thinks of the dear home she is leaving and tears fill her eyes.

But Jack is so good and kind. And ere the silver shafts of morn penetrate the chamber the fiancée lies in the arms of Morpheus, dreaming affectionately of Jack, who is coming to-morrow to bear her away to Hymen's land.—Leon Mead, in Truth.

The Natural Reason.

Robbins—I don't see why they wear railroad stock.

Higbee—To form a pool, of course.—Rogerville (Tenn.) Review.

The Death of Finland.

Finland has virtually been wiped off the map. What is called the Russification of that country means the extinction of its autonomy and its absorption into the autocratic system. The original guarantee that it should have its own ruler in the Grand Duke of Finland is abolished. Its very language is not to be taught. Its distinctive flag and currency disappear. Finland is dead as a nation. Russian schools in Finland are released from the control of the Finnish authorities, and rules are laid down for the establishment of schools under the supervision of the governor general. The issue in Finland of postage stamps differing in any way from those in use in Russia is prohibited. The conditions of military service are to be made uniform with the rest of the empire, the oath administered to conscripts or recruits containing an expression acknowledging the absolute power of Nicholas II. The people of this aggrieved country have gone into mourning. They closed their theaters and fasted. But that expression of grief will in no way alter the course of events.

A great deal more progress has been made in the study of serpentology during the past year than in all the years that preceded it. Men writhed the snake for centuries and then killed it for centuries without knowing anything about it. The purpose of the reptile in animated nature was a dark mystery at which man shuddered and its coils wound around some of our most sacred traditions. Its poison fangs were inexplicable and apparently a useless contrivance and no one undertook to explain the universal animosity with which the snake is treated by men and animals. Now science in France and Germany has taken him into the laboratory and lived with him. This intimacy has thrown some straggling beams of light upon the old mystery. The reptile is found to be an animated spinal system and very little else. In some inscrutable way its venom is secreted by that system. What perhaps is the most interesting fact that has been elicited is that men and animals can be made immune to snake bite by injections of snake serum, and still more interesting is it to learn that while science waited till the end of the nineteenth century to discover this fact some of the rudest savages on earth knew of it hundreds of years ago and inoculated themselves with snake serum in a clumsy way as a protection against the virus of the serpent's bite.

Playwriting in France has reached a condition of indeterminate seasaw between materialism of the baldest kind and mysticism of the flimsiest texture. In raking the heavens and the earth for themes the dramatists have succeeded in putting religion and science into the same receptacle to be pounded up together by the stage manager. The latest play by M. Francois de Carel is called "The New Idol." The hero is a doctor who in his scientific zeal inoculates his patients with cancer in order to study the fatal results. But one of his patients, a virtuous girl, defies his virus with holy water from Lourdes. This man's wife, being a religious woman, leaves him in horror. But as the man she goes off with is a more condign miscreant than the husband poetic justice has to follow her. This play is said by the Paris critics to be charmingly written, and, that being the case, the theme is of no consequence.

The English critic, Mr. William Archer, who is studying the American theaters, might with much propriety turn his limelight upon Mr. Pinero, who is at this moment the most conspicuous as well as the cleverest of English playwrights and who owes no small share of his vogue to Mr. William Archer himself, for it was Mr. Archer who hailed him as another Dumas upon the production of "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray." The latest play of Mr. Pinero's, produced during the month with much eclat in London, has for its principal and most exciting scene an eavesdropping maid in her nightdress locked in a bedroom in the middle of the night with a reformed rake. Mr. Pinero's resemblance to Dumas consists principally in not being able to get above this sort of thing. But one would suppose that the robust good taste of the Saxon would in time grow tired of it.

Bad management keeps more people in poor circumstances than any other one cause. To be successful one must look ahead and plan ahead so that when a favorable opportunity presents itself he is ready to take advantage of it. A little forethought will also save much expense and valuable time. A prudent and careful man will keep a bottle of Chamberlain's Colic, Cholera and Diarrhoea Remedy in the house, the shiftless fellow will wait until necessity compels it and then ruin his best horse going for a doctor and have a big doctor bill to pay besides; one pays out 25 cents, the other is out a hundred dollars and then wonders why his neighbor is getting richer while he is getting poorer. For sale by C. A. Jack, Druggist.

Cured When Others Failed.

S. A. Ingalls, Crown Point, N. Y., writes: My wife suffered from kidney trouble for years. She consulted several physicians and tried a number of kidney cures without getting relief. She was induced to try Fetter's Kidney Cure and in less than a week after she began using it, she was greatly improved and three bottles cured her. C. A. Jack, Druggist.



"I WANT TO MARRY YOU, DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?"

"But here, you won't put up no caper in the meantime that will cause me to draw off, hah? All right now, it's a go, and I'll tell that old woman to weave another rag carpet." He stopped at the door, turned about and remarked: "Ain't quite as chilly as it was yistidy."

And before she could reply he had lunged out into the street and was hastening to tell his daughter of his happiness. When Polly reached home, just as twilight was tangling itself amid the dead vines in the garden, she found Nell standing at the gate, waiting for her. The girl was nervous, and she opened the gate with a jerk.

"What have you told father?" she asked, when Polly passed through the gate. "Don't go into the house just



"POLLY, WHAT HAVE YOU TOLD FATHER?"

yet; wait here a moment. What have you told father?" she repeated.

Polly stood there, laughing at her, but she grew more nervous. "It is nothing to laugh at," she said. "You told me, or that is you agreed, that we should never marry and that we should live together."

"Don't be worried; I was only joking with him."

"But, Polly, that was no way to joke with an old man. He is one of the best men in the world, and all that, but you don't want to marry even the best man."

"It will work out all right, Nell; don't worry over it."

"But how can it work out all right?" "Wait, and you shall see."

"Yes, and that's what you said about those three men, and that hasn't worked out all right yet. I have tried so hard to understand you, Polly, but sometimes I just can't. Why do you wish to mystify me? Haven't I always been frank with you?"

"Yes, too frank, perhaps."

tax list, the constable wasn't feeling well; and while the citizens were discussing their inability to avenge themselves, Polly came up and said that she would go with Mr. Aimes.

"I gad," said the old fellow, looking upon her with admiration, "you'll drive me to the shop to get another horseshoe nail, but I think too much of you to see you put yourself in such danger. Let's wait awhile."

In the next number of her paper Polly scored the rascals, and this produced a scare. The people said that the Peters brothers would surely come back and riddle the town. And within a week afterward they did come back, shouting, galloping through the streets. In fright the people sought their homes. The marauders dashed about, firing. They galloped up to the printing office and fired at the windows. And then from the inside came a puff of smoke and one of the Peters fell out of his saddle. Then there arose a furious melee, firing right and left, but the steady hand within the office fired again and out of a saddle dropped another man. Suddenly there was a new excitement among the marauders, and from behind a goods box came the double roar of a shotgun. The Peters brothers, those not on the ground, ducked their heads and dashed away, and when Polly stepped out, Nell, with a gun in her hand, came from behind the box. "I was watching," she said, "and I thought you needed me."

Three men had been dangerously wounded, and the law, now brave enough, took charge of them. Polly and Nell were heroines. The president of the mite society called a special meeting in their honor, and old man Aimes made a speech, with his shirt collar buttoned almost tight enough to choke him. Now it was declared that Polly should never leave the village; and it was also avowed that if she wanted to be acquainted with three men from away off somewhere it was her right, and that it was nobody's business if she had chosen to engage herself to them.

One afternoon Aimes called at the office and told Nell to go home. "Go right on now and wait there till I come," he said, thinking to whisper to her, but speaking loudly enough to be heard out in the street. "Yes, right now, and when I do come I may have a mighty interestin' piece of news for you."

Nell went out and Polly knew what was coming. The old man sat down. "A little cooler than it was yesterday," he said.

"Yes," she replied. "Cooler than it was day before yesterday."

"Gad, I reckon you are right. Say, do you recollect that some time ago I told you about my field of corn down the creek? Well, you ought to see it now. Seventy-five or a hundred bush-

els to the acre. And you know that I told you that you might even spend fifteen dollars. Of course you recollect it, for how could a woman and as brave a woman as you ever forget it. Well, I have been thinkin' the matter over since then and I have come to the conclusion that you may spend twenty dollars at a snort. Now what do you think of it?"

"But you don't owe me anything," she replied.

"No, but I want to give it to you, don't you see—give it to you to spend at a snort, hah? I want to marry you, don't you understand?"

"Mr. Aimes, you are too brave a man to throw yourself away."

"Now look here, don't come a twittin' of me," he said. "I was goin' to help you shoot them fellers, but, hah, he Nell took the gun and slipped away with it before I could get to the house. I can't run as fast as I could at one time."

"But I saw you running through the street and a deer couldn't have been faster."

"You are right, and I was runnin' for the gun."