THE SUICIDE CLUB

NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS TALE OF MYSTERY AND ADVENTURE

By ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

THE STORY OF THE YOUNG MAN WITH THE CREAM TARTS.

DURING his residence in London, the accomplished Prince Florizel of Bohemia gained the affection of all classes by the seduction of his manner and by a well considered generosity. He was a remarkable man even by what was known of him; and that was but a small part of what he actually did. Although of a placid temper in ordinary circumstances, and accustomed to take the world with as much philosophy as any plowman, the Prince of Bohemia was not without a taste for ways of life more adventurous and eccentric than that to which he was destined by birth. Now and then, when he fell into a low humor, when there was no laughable play to witness in any of the London theatres, and when the season of the year was unsuitable to those field sports in which he excelled all competitors, he would summon his confidant and Master of Horse, Col. Geraldine, and bid him prepare himself against an evening ramble.

The Master of the Horse was a young officer of a brave and even temerarious disposition. He greeted the news with delight, and hastened to make ready. Long practice and a varied acquaintance of life had given him a singular facility in disguise; he could adapt not only his face and bearing, but his voice and almost his thoughts, to those of any rank, character, or nation; and in this way he diverted attention from the prince, and sometimes gained admission for the pair into strange societies. The civil authorities were never taken into the secret of those adventures; the imperturbable courage of the one and the ready invention and chivalrous devotion of the other had brought them through a score of dangerous passes; and they grew in confidence as time went on.

One evening in March they were driven by a sharp fall of sleet into an oyster bar in the immediate neighborhood of Leicester Square. Colonel Geraldine was dressed and painted to represent a person connected with the press in reduced circumstances, while the prince had, as usual, travestied his appearance by the addition of false whiskers and a pair of large adhesive eyebrows. These lent him a shaggy and weather-beaten air, which, for one of his urbanity, formed the most impenetrable disguise. Thus equipped, the commander and his satellite sipped their brandy and soda in security.

The bar was full of guests, male and female; but though more than one of these offered to fall into talk with our adventurers, none of them promised to grow interesting upon a nearer acquaintance. There was nothing present but the lees of London and the commonplace of disrespectability; and the prince had already fallen to yawning and was beginning to grow weary of the whole excursion, when the swing doors were pushed violently open and a young man, followed by a couple of commissionaires, entered the bar.

Each of the commissionaires carried a large dish of cream tarts under a cover, which they at once removed; and the young man made the round of the company and pressed these confections upon every one's acceptance with an exaggerated courtesy. Sometimes his offer was laughingly accepted; sometimes it was firmly, even harshly, rejected. In these latter cases the new-comer always ate the tart himself, with some more or less humorous commentary.

At last he accosted Prince Florizel.

"Sir," said he, with a profound obeisance, proffering the tart at the same time between his thumb and forefinger, "will you so far honor an entire stranger? I can answer for the quality of the pastry, having eaten two dozen and three of them myself since 5 o'clock.

"I am in the habit," replied the Prince, "of looking not so much to the nature of a gift as to the spirit in which it is offered."

"The spirit, sir," returned the young man, with another bow, "is one of mockery."

"Mockery?" repeated Florizel. "And whom do you propose to mock?"

"I am not here to expound my philosophy," replied the other, "but to distribute these cream tarts. If I mention that I heartily include myself in the ridicule of the transaction, I hope you will consider honor satisfied and condescend. If not, you will constrain me to eat my twenty-eighth and I own to being weary of the exercise."

"You touch me," said the Prince, "and I have all the will in the world to rescue you from this dilemma, but upon one condition. If my friend and I eat your cakes—for which we have neither of us any natural inclination—we shall expect you to join us at supper by way of recompense."

The young man seemed to reflect.

"I have still several dozen upon hand," he said at last; "and that will make it necessary for me to visit several more bars before my great affair is concluded. This will take some time; and if you are hungry"——

The Prince interrupted him with a polite gesture.

"My friend and I will accompany you," he said; "for we have already a deep interest in your very agreeable mode of passing an evening. And now that the preliminaries of peace are settled, allow me to sign the treaty for both."

And the Prince swallowed the tart with the best grace imaginable.

"It is delicious," said he.

"I perceive you are a connoisseur," replied the young man.

Col. Geraldine likewise did honor to the pastry; and every one in that bar having now either accepted or refused his delicacies, the young man with the cream tarts led the way to another and similar establishment. The two commissionaires, who seemed to have grown accustomed to their absurd enjoyment, followed immediately after; and the Prince and the Colonel brought up the rear, arm in arm, and smiling to each other as they went. In this order the company visited two other taverns, where scenes were enacted of a like nature to that already described—some refusing, some accepting the favors of this vagabond hospitality, and the young man himself eating each rejected tart.

On leaving the third saloon the young man counted his store. There lay and six in the other.

"Gentlemen," said he, addressing himself to his two new followers, "I am unwilling to delay your supper. I am positively sure you must be hungry. I feel that I owe you a special consideration. And on this great day for me, when I am closing a career of folly by my most conspicuously silly action, I wish to behave handsomely to all who give me countenance. Gentlemen, you shall wait no longer. Although my constitution is shattered by previous excesses, at the risk of my life I liquidate the suspensory condition."

With these words he crushed the nine remaining tarts into his mouth and swallowed them at a single movement each. Then, turning to the commissionaires, he gave them a couple of sovereigns.

"I have to thank you," said he, "for your extraordinary patience."

And he dismissed them with a bow apiece. For some seconds he stood looking at the purse from which he had just paid his assistants, then, with a laugh, he tossed it into the middle of the street, and signified his readiness for supper.

The Young Man's Story.

IN a small French restaurant in Soho, which had enjoyed an exaggerated reputation for some little while, but had already begun to be forgotten, and in a private room up two pairs of stairs, the three companions made a very elegant supper, and drank three or four bottles of champagne, talking the while upon indifferent subjects. The young man was fluent and gay, but he laughed louder than was natural in a person of polite breeding; his hands trembled violently, and his voice took sudden and surprising inflections, which seemed to be independent of his will. The dessert had been cleared away, and all three had lighted their cigars, when the prince addressed him in these words:

"You will, I am sure, pardon my curiosity. What I have seen of you has greatly pleased but even more puzzled me. And though I should be loath to seem indiscreet, I must tell you that my friend and I are persons very well worthy to be intrusted in a secret. We have many of our own, which we are continually revealing to improper ears. And if, as I suppose, your story is a silly one, you need have no delicacy with us, who are two of the silliest men in England. My name is Godall, Theophilus Godall; my friend is Major Alfred Hammersmith — or at least, such is the name by which he chooses to be known. We pass our lives entirely in search of extravagant adventures, and there is no extravagance with which we are not capable of sympathy."

"I like you, Mr. Godall," returned the young man; "you inspire me with a natural confidence and I have not the slightest objection to your friend, the Major, whom I take to be a nobleman in masquerade. At least, I am sure he is no soldier."

The Colonel smiled at this compliment to the perfection of his art, and the young man went on in a more animated manner.

"There is every reason why I should not tell you my story. Perhaps that is just the reason why I am going to do so. At least, you seem so well prepared to hear a tale of silliness that I cannot find it in my heart to disappoint you. My name, in spite of your example, I shall keep to myself. My age is not essential to the narrative. I am descended from my ancestors by ordinary generation, and from them I inherited the very eligible human tenement which I still occupy and a fortune of three hundred pounds a year. I suppose they also handed on to me a harebrain humor, which it has been my chief delight to indulge. I received a good education. I can play the violin nearly well enough to earn money in the orchestra of a penny gaff, but not quite. The same remark applies to the flute and the French horn. I learned enough of whist to lose about a hundred a year at that scientific game.

"My acquaintance with French was sufficient to enable me to squander money in Paris with almost the same facility as in London. In short, I am a person full of manly accomplishments. I have had every sort of adventure, including a duel about nothing. Only two months ago I met a young lady exactly suited to my taste in mind and body; I found my heart melt; I saw that I had come upon my fate at last and was in the way to fall in love. But when I came to reckon up what remained to me of my capital I found it amounted to something less than four hundred pounds! I ask you fairly—can a man who respects himself fall in love on four hundred pounds? I concluded, certainly not; left the presence of my charmer and slightly accelerating my usual rate of expenditure, came this morning to my last eighty pounds.

"This I divided into two equal parts; forty I reserved for a particular purpose; the remaining forty I was to dissipate before night. I have passed a very entertaining day and played many farces besides that of the cream tarts which procured me the advantage of your acquaintance, for I was determined, as I told you, to bring a foolish career to a still more foolish conclusion, and when you saw me throw my purse into the street the forty pounds were at an end. Now you know me as well as I know myself—a fool, but consistent in his folly and, as I will ask you to believe, neither a whimperer nor a coward."

From the whole tone of the young man's statement it was plain that he harbored very bitter and contemptuous thoughts about himself. His auditors were led to imagine that his love affair was nearer to his heart than he admitted and that he had a design on his own life. The farce of the cream tarts began to have very much the air of a tragedy in disguise.

"Why, is this not odd," broke in Geraldine, giving a look to Prince Florizel, "that we three fellows should have met by the merest accident in so large a wilderness as London and should be so nearly in the same condition?"

"How?" cried the young man. "Are you, too, ruined? Is this supper a folly like my cream tarts? Has the devil brought three of his own together for a last carouse?"

"The devil, depend upon it, can sometimes do a very gentlemanly thing," returned Prince Florizel, "and I am so much touched by this coincidence that, although we are not entirely in the same state, I am going to put an end to the disparity. Let your heroic treatment of the last cream tarts be my example."

So saying, the Prince drew out his purse and took from it a small bundle of banknotes.

"You see, I was a week or so behind you, but I mean to catch you up and come neck and neck into the winning post," he continued. "This," laying one of the notes upon the table, "will suffice for the bill. As for the rest"——

He tossed them into the fire, and they went up the chimney in a single blaze.

The young man tried to catch his arm, but as the table was between them his interference came too late.

"Unhappy man!" he cried. "You should not have burned them all! You should have kept £40!"

"Forty pounds!" repeated the Prince. "Why, in heaven's name, £40!"

"Why not eighty?" cried the Colonel. "For to my certain knowledge there must have been a hundred in the bundle."

"It was only £40 he needed," said the young man, gloomily. "But without them there is no admission. The rule is strict. Forty pounds for each. Accursed life, where a man can not even die without money!"

The Prince and the Colonel exchanged glances.

"Explain yourself," said the latter. "I have still a pocketbook tolerably well lined, and I need not say how readily I should share my wealth with Godall. But I must know to what end; you must certainly tell us what you mean."

The young man seemed to awaken; he looked uneasily from one to the other and his face flushed deeply.

"You are not fooling me?" he asked. "You are indeed ruined men like me?"

"Indeed I am, for my part," replied the Colonel.

"And for mine," said the Prince. "I have given you proof. Who but a ruined man would throw his notes into the fire? The action speaks for itself."

"A ruined man—yes," returned the other, suspiciously, "or else a millionaire."

"Enough, sir," said the Prince; "I have said so and I am not accustomed to have my word remain in doubt."

"Ruined?" said the young man. "Are you ruined, like me? Are you, after a life of indulgence, come to such a pass that you can only indulge yourself in one thing more? Are you going to avoid the consequences of your folly by the one infallible and easy path? Are you going to give the slip to the Sheriff's officers of conscience by the one open door?"

Suddenly he broke off and attempted to laugh.

"Here is your health!" he cried, emptying his glass, "and good-night to you, my merry, ruined men."

Col. Geraldine caught him by the arm as he was about to rise.

"You lack confidence in us," he said, "and you are wrong. To all your questions I make answer in the affirmative. But I am not so timid and can speak the Queen's English plainly. We, too, like yourself, have had enough of life and are determined to die. Sooner or later, alone or together, we meant to seek out Death and beard him where he lies ready. Since we have met you and your case is more pressing, let it be to-night—and at once—and, if you will, all three together. Such a penniless trio," he cried, "should go arm in arm into the halls of Pluto and give each other some countenance among the shades!"

The Pact Is Made.

GERALDINE had hit exactly on the manners and intonations that became the part he was playing. The Prince himself was disturbed and looked over at his confidant with a shade of doubt. As for the young man, the flush came back darkly into his cheek and his eyes threw out a spark of light.

"You are the men for me!" he cried, with an almost terrible gayety. "Shake hands upon the bargain!" (His hand was cold and wet.) "You little know in what company you will begin the march! You little know in what a happy moment for yourselves you partook of my cream tarts. I am only a unit, but I am a unit in an army. I know Death's private door. I am one of his familiars, and can show you into eternity without ceremony and yet without scandal."

They called upon him eagerly to explain his meaning.

"Can you muster eighty pounds between you?" he demanded.

Geraldine ostentatiously consulted his pocketbook and replied in the affirmative.

"Fortunate beings!" cried the young man. "Forty pounds is the entry money of the Suicide Club."

"The Suicide Club," said the prince, "why, what the devil is that?"

"Listen," said the young man. "This is the age of conveniences, and I have to tell you of the last perfection of the sort. We have affairs in different places, and hence railways were invented. Railways separated us infallibly from our friends, and so telegraphs were made that we might communicate speedily at great distances. Even in hotels we have lifts to spare us a climb of some hundred steps. Now, we know that life is only a stage to play the fool upon as long as the part amuses us. There was one more convenience lacking to modern comfort; a decent, easy way to quit that stage; the back stairs to liberty; or, as I said this moment, Death's private door. This, my two fellow-rebels, is supplied by the Suicide Club. Do not suppose that you are I are alone, or even exceptional, in the highly reasonable desire that we express. A large number of our fellow men, who have grown heartily sick of the performance in which they are expected to join daily and all their lives long, are only kept from flight by one or two considerations. Some have families who would be shocked, or even blamed, if the matter became public; others have a weakness at heart and recoil from the circumstances of death. That is, to some extent, my own experience. I cannot put a pistol to my head and draw the trigger; for something stronger than myself withholds the act, and although I loathe life, I have not strength enough in my body to take hold of death and be done with it. For such as I, and for all who desire to be out of the coil without posthumous scandal, the Suicide Club has been inaugurated. How this has been managed, what is its history, or what may be its ramifications in other lands, I am myself uninformed, and what I know of its constitution I am not at liberty to communicate to you. To this extent, however, I am at your service. If you are truly tired of life I will introduce you to-night to a meeting; and if not to-night, at least some time within the week, you will be easily relieved of your existence. It is now (consulting his watch) 11; by 11.30 at latest we must leave this place, so that you have half an hour before you to consider my proposal. It is more serious than a cream tart," he added, with a smile, "and I suspect more palatable."

"More serious, certainly," returned Colonel Geraldine; "and as it is so much more so, will you allow me five minutes' speech in private with my friend, Mr. Godall?"

"It is only fair," answered the young man. "If you will permit, I will retire."

"You will be very obliging," said the Colonel.

As soon as the two were alone:

"What," said Prince Florizel, "is the use of this confabulation, Geraldine? I see you are flurried, whereas my mind is very tranquilly made up. I will see the end of this."

"Your Highness," said the Colonel, turning pale, "let me ask you to consider the importance of your life, not only to your friends, but to the public interest. 'If not to-night,' said this madman; but supposing that to-night some irreparable disaster were to overtake Your Highness's person, what, let me ask you, what would be my despair, and what the concern and disaster of a great nation?"

"I will see the end of this," repeated the Prince in his most deliberate tones; "and have the kindness, Colonel Geraldine, to remember and respect your word of honor as a gentleman. Under no circumstances, recollect, nor without my special authority, are you to betray the incognito under which I choose to go abroad. These are my commands, which I now reiterate. And now," he added, "let me ask you to call for the bill."

Colonel Geraldine bowed in submission; but he had a very white face as he summoned the young man of the cream tarts and issued his directions to the waiter. The Prince preserved his undisturbed demeanor and described a Palais Royal farce to the young suicide with great humor and gusto. He avoided the Colonel's appealing looks without ostentation, and selected another cheroot with more than usual care. Indeed, he was now the only man of the party who kept any command over his nerves.

The bill was discharged, the Prince giving the whole change of the note to the astonished waiter, and the three drove off in a four-wheeler. They were not long upon the way before the cab stopped at the entrance to a rather dark court. Here all descended.

After Geraldine had paid the fare the young man turned and addressed Prince Florizel as follows:

"It is still time, Mr. Godall, to make good your escape into thraldom. And for you, too, Major Hammersmith. Reflect well before you take another step, and if your hearts say no—there are the cross roads."

"Lead me on, sir," said the Prince. "I am not the man to go back from a thing once said."

"Your coolness does me good," replied their guide. "I have never seen any one so unmoved at this conjuncture, and yet you are not the first whom I have escorted to this door. More than one of my friends has preceded me where I knew I must shortly follow. But this is of no interest to you. Wait me here for only a few moments; I shall return as soon as I have arranged the preliminaries of your introduction."

And with that the young man, waving his hand to his companions, turned into the court, entered a doorway and disappeared.

"Of all our follies," said Col. Geraldine, in a low voice, "this is the wildest and most dangerous."

"I perfectly believe so," returned the Prince.

"We have still," pursued the colonel, "a moment to ourselves. Let me beseech your highness to profit by the opportunity and retire. The consequences of this step are so dark, and may be so grave, that I feel myself justified in pushing a little further than usual the liberty which your highness is so condescending as to allow me in private."

"Am I to understand that Colonel Geraldine is afraid?" asked his highness, taking his cheroot from his lips and looking keenly into the other's face.

"My fear is certainly not personal," replied the other, proudly; "of that your highness may well rest assured."

"I had supposed as much," returned the prince, with undisturbed good humor, "but I was unwilling to remind you of the difference in our stations. No more—no more," he added, seeing Geraldine about to apologize, "you stand excused."

And he smoked placidly, leaning against a railing, until the young man returned.

"Well," he asked, "has our reception been arranged?"

"Follow me," was the reply. "The president will see you in the cabinet. And let me warn you to be frank in your answers. I have stood your guarantee, but the club requires a searching inquiry before admission, for the indiscretion of a single member would lead to the dispersion of the whole society forever."

The prince and Geraldine put their heads together for a moment.

"Bear me out in this," said the one; "bear me out in that," said the other, and by boldly taking up the characters of men with whom both were acquainted they had come to an agreement in a twinkling and were ready to follow their guide into the President's cabinet.

There were no formidable obstacles to pass. The outer door stood open, the door of the cabinet was ajar, and there, in a small but very high apartment, the young man left them once more.

"He will be here immediately," he said, with a nod as he disappeared.

Voices were audible in the cabinet through the folding doors which formed one end, and now and then the noise of a champagne cork, followed by a burst of laughter, intervened among the sounds of conversation. A single tall window looked out upon the river and the embankment, and by the disposition of the lights they judged themselves not far from Charing Cross Station. The furniture was scanty and the coverings worn to a thread, and there was nothing movable except a hand bell in the centre of a round table and the bats and coats of a considerable party hung round the wall on pegs.

"What sort of den is this?" said Geraldine.

"That is what I have come to see," replied the Prince. "If they keep live devils on the premises the thing may grow amusing."

Meeting the President.

JUST than the folding door was opened no more than was necessary for the passage of a human body, and there entered at the same moment a louder buzz of talk, and the redoubtable President of the Suicide Club. The President was a man of fifty or upward; large and rambling in his gait, with shaggy side whiskers, a bald top to his head, and a veiled gray eye, which now and then emitted a twinkle. His mouth embraced a large cigar, which he kept continually screwing round and round, and from side to side, as he looked sagaciously and coldly at the strangers. He was dressed in light tweeds with his neck very open in a striped shirt collar and carried a minute book under one arm.

"Good evening," said he, after he had closed the door behind him. "I am told you wish to speak with me."

"We have a desire, sir, to join the Suicide Club," replied the colonel.

The president rolled his cigar about in his mouth.

"What is that?" he said abruptly.

"Pardon me," returned the colonel, "but I believe you are the person best qualified to give us information on that point."

"I?" cried the president. "A Suicide Club? Come, come! this is a frolic for All Fools' Day. I can make allowances for gentlemen who get merry in their liquor; but let there be an end to this."

"Call your club what you will," said the colonel, "you have some company behind these doors, and we insist on joining it."

"Sir," returned the president, curtly, "you have made a mistake. This is a private house, and you must leave it instantly."

The prince had remained quietly in his seat throughout this little colloquy, but now, when the colonel looked over to him, as much as to say, "Take your answer and come away, for God's sake!" he drew his cheroot from his mouth and spoke:

"I have come here," said he, "upon the invitation of a friend of yours. He has doubtless informed you of my intention in thus intruding on your party. Let me remind you that a person in my circumstances has exceedingly little to bind him, and is not at all likely to tolerate much rudeness. I am a very quiet man, as a usual thing; but, my dear sir, you are either going to oblige me in the little matter of which you are aware, or you shall very bitterly repent that you ever admitted me to your ante-chamber."

The president laughed aloud.

"That is the way to speak," said he. "You are a man who is a man. You know the way to my heart and can do what you like with me. Will you," he continued, addressing Geraldine, "will you step aside for a few minutes? I shall finish first with your companion, and some of the club's formalities required to be fulfilled in private."

With these words, he opened the door of a small closet, into which he shut the Colonel.

"I believe in you," he said to Florizel, as soon as they were alone; "but are you sure of your friend?"

"Not so sure as I am of myself, though he has more cogent reasons," answered Florizel, "but sure enough to bring him here without alarm. He has had enough to cure the most tenacious man of life. He was cashiered the other day for cheating at cards."

"A good reason, I dare say," replied the President; at least, we have another in the same case, and I feel sure of him. Have you been also in the service, may I ask?"

"I have," was the reply; "but I was too lazy; I left it early."

"What is your reason for being tired of life?" pursued the President.

"The same, as near as I can make it out," answered the Prince, "unadulterated laziness."

The President started.

"D——n it!" said he, "you must have something better than that."

"I have no more money," added Florizel. "That is also a vexation, without doubt. It brings my sense of idleness to an acute point."

The president rolled his cigar round in his mouth for some seconds, directing his gaze straight into the eyes of this unusual neophyte; but the prince supported his scrutiny with unabashed good temper.

"If I had not a deal of experience," said the president at last, "I should turn you off. But I know the world; and this much, any way, that the most frivolous excuses for a suicide are often the toughest to stand by. And when I downright like a man, as I do you, sir, I would rather strain the regulation than deny him."

The prince and the colonel, one after the other, were subjected to a long and particular interrogatory, the prince alone, but Geraldine in the presence of the prince, so that the president might observe the countenance of the one while the other was being warmly cross-examined. The result was satisfactory, and the president, after having booked a few details of each case, produced a form of oath to be accepted. Nothing could be conceived more passive than the obedience promised, or more stringent than the terms by which the juror bound himself. The man who forfeited a pledge so awful could scarcely have a rag of honor or any of the consolations of religion left to him. Florizel signed the document, but not without a shudder, the colonel followed his example with an air of great depression. Then the president received the entry money, and without more ado introduced the two friends into the smoking room of the Suicide Club.

The smoking-room of the Suicide Club was the same height as the cabinet into which it opened, but much larger, and papered from top to bottom with an imitation of oak wainscot. A large and cheerful fire and a number of gas jets illuminated the company. The prince and his follower made the number up to eighteen. Most of the party were smoking, and drinking champagne; a feverish hilarity reigned, with sudden and rather ghastly pauses.

"Is this a full meeting?" asked the prince.

"Middling," said the president. "By the way," he added, "if you have any money it is usual to offer some champagne. It keeps up a good spirit, and is one of my own little perquisites."

"Hammersmith," said Florizel, "I may leave the champagne to you."

The Club Members.

AND with that he turned away and began to go round among the guests. Accustomed to play the host in the highest circles, he charmed, and dominated all whom he approached; there was something at once winning and authoritative in his address, and his extraordinary coolness gave him yet another distinction in this half-maniacal society. As he went from one to another he kept both his eyes and ears open, and soon began to gain a general idea of the people among whom he found himself. As in all other places of resort, one type predominated: people in the prime of youth, with every show of intelligence and sensibility in their appearance, but with little promise of strength or the quality that makes success. Few were much above thirty, and not a few were still in their teens.

They stood, leaning on tables and shifting on their feet; sometimes they smoked extraordinarily fast, and sometimes they let their cigars go out; some talked well, but the conversation of others was plainly the result of nervous tension, and was equally without wit or purport. As each new bottle of champagne was opened there was a manifest improvement in gayety. Only two were seated—one in a chair in the recess of the window, with his head hanging and his hands plunged deep into his trousers pockets, pale, visibly with perspiration, saying never a word, a very wreck of soul and body; the other sat on the divan close by the chimney and attracted notice by a trenchant dissimilarity from all the rest.

He was probably upward of forty, but he looked fully ten years older, and Florizel thought he had never seen a man more naturally hideous, nor one more ravaged by disease and ruinous excitements. He was no more than skin and bone, was partly paralyzed, and wore spectacles of such unusual power that his eyes appeared through the glasses greatly magnified and distorted in shape. Except, the prince and president, he was the only person in the room who preserved the composure of ordinary life.

There was little decency among the members of the club. Some boasted of the disgraceful actions the consequences of which had reduced them to seek refuge in death, and the others listened without disapproval. There was a tacit understanding against moral judgments, and whoever passed the club doors enjoyed already some of the immunities of the tomb. They drank to each other's memories, and to those of notable suicides in the past. They compared and developed their different views of death—some declaring that it was no more than blackness and cessation; others full of a hope that that very night they should be scaling the stars and commercing with the mighty dead.

"To the eternal memory of Baron Trenck, the type of suicides!" cried one. "He went out of a small cell into a smaller, that he might come forth again into freedom."

"For my part," said a second, "I wish no more than a bandage for my eyes and cotton for my ears. Only they have no cotton thick enough in this world."

A third was for reading the mysteries of life in a future state and a fourth professed that he would never have joined the club if he had not been induced to believe in Mr. Darwin.

"I could not bear," said this remarkable suicide, "to be descended from an ape."

Altogether the Prince was disappointed by the bearing and conversation of the members.

"It does not seem to me," he thought, "a matter for so much disturbance. If a man has made up his mind to kill himself, let him do it, in God's name, like a gentleman. This flutter and big talk is out of place."

In the meanwhile, Col. Geraldine was a prey to the blackest apprehensions; the club and its rules were still a mystery, and he looked around the room for some one who should be able to set his mind at rest. In this survey his eye lighted on the paralytic person with the strong spectacles, and seeing him so exceedingly tranquil, he besought the President, who was going in and out of the room under a pressure of business, so present him to the gentleman on the divan.

The functionary explained the needlessness of all such formalities within the club, but nevertheless presented Mr. Hammersmith to Mr. Malthus.

Mr. Malthus looked at the colonel curiously, and then requested him to take a seat upon his right.

"You are a new comer," he said, "and wish information? You have come to the proper source. It is two years since I first visited this charming club."

(To Be Continued.)

The Day of Rest

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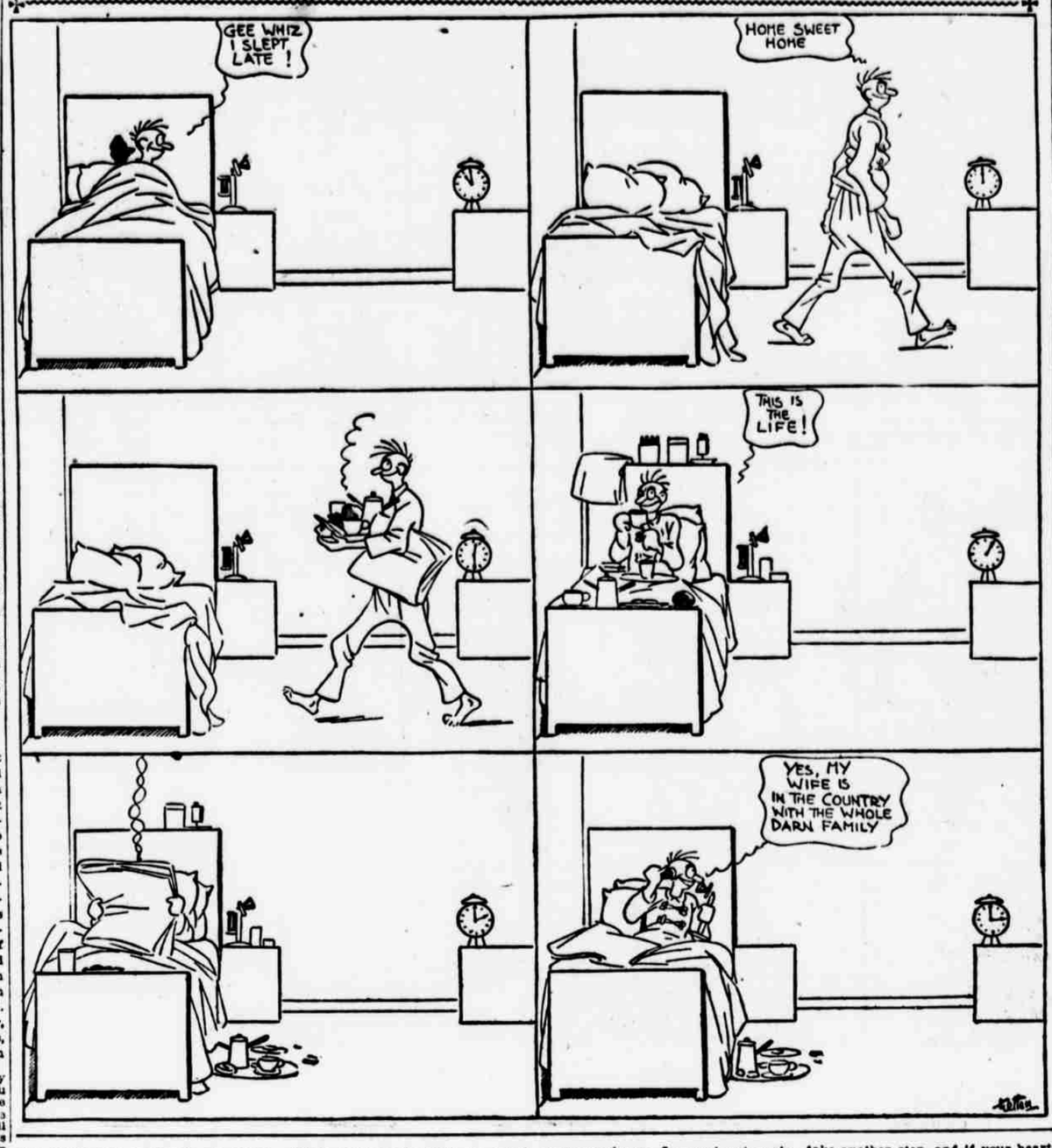
By Maurice Ketten



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