

A BROAD HINT.

From The King.

It was an early summer evening, too warm to walk, and just comfortable for talking. So Captain Bill and his brother Jack sat contentedly on the shaded bench in the captain's garden, overlooking ten miles of sea, from Sheppey cliffs to Southend. They smoked two pipes apiece over the situation in China, and two more over the decay of the mercantile marine. During the fifth pipe after tea, the ancient female who "did" for the captain shuffled by with a grunt, and toiled slowly across the fields to her home in the village of Minster. The captain followed her retreating figure with a shake of his head.

"Gits more contrary every day, she do," he remarked, feelingly. "Wus an' wus!"

"Wot you want," said Brother Jack, "is a wife."

The captain relit his pipe, and looked thoughtfully at a trail of smoke struggling between sky and sea.

"Lady of Lorne five minutes late," he observed, casually.

"I s'pose now," inquired Jack persistently, "you've some one in your eye?"

"I won't say," admitted Bill, "but I might 'ave."

"Keeps a baccy shop?"

"You don't mean to say as people 'as been talkin'?"

"Talkin'!" retorted his brother. "Wen you gives me a couple o' pound o' baccy, orl in 'arf-ounce bits! Wot's the need o' talkin'?"

The captain sighed as one confronted with an insoluble problem.

"You goes in," continued Jack, wagging the stem of his long clay pipe in admonition, "in the mornin', an' 'as 'alf an ounce." The captain nodded. "An' in the afternoon an' 'as another." The captain growled assent. "An' in the evenin' an' 'as one more."

"Sometimes two," he said, solemnly.

"That 'ere big chest wot came off the Saucy Jane is 'most full already. You'll 'ave to set up a shop yourself soon if you don't stop it."

The captain refilled his pipe slowly.

"Ow am I goin' to stop it? That's the pint." Jack smiled the superior smile of twice married wisdom.

"Harsk 'er wen she'll 'ave the chest moved up to the shop?"

"S'pose she won't?"

"Then she won't. There's others."

"S'pose," asked the captain as one who puts an abstract argument, "as I was set on 'er?"

"More reason to settle it."

"Ay; but not all at onst," said the captain, artfully. "I've bin leadin' up to it."

"Ow long?"

"A matter o' two year." Jack laughed scornfully.

"Some men," he stated, "would 'ave married a dozen gals in two year."

"Ay," said the captain, enviously, "dessay they would. 'Praps I might give 'er a 'int, if I knowed 'ow."

"Wy don't you send 'er somethink out of the garden? A few flowers?"

"Ain't got none; only vegetables."

"Well," said Jack, "vegetables is—nourishin'."

"Ay, with a bit o' pork. If I 'ad a pig now—"

"But you ain't."

"No." He sighed. "That's where it is." They smoked another couple of pipes in silence.

"Well, mate," said Jack, "I must be goin'. So long."

"So long, Jack."

Bill watched his brother till he had gone over the hill. Then he walked indoors with an air of resolution. "Marrers an' peas," he muttered, "it shall be."

Then he brushed himself carefully, and set out with a jaunty air to the village, where the widow Riley kept a smart little shop in which tobacco, sweetstuffs and penny novelettes predominated. After a few remarks upon the weather, he invested in his usual half ounce, and repaired to the Waterloo for his usual whole pint. Then he returned for another half ounce. "Just for the mornin'," he explained.

"Lor, captain, you don't love nothink like your smoke!" said the widow, archly. She was a nice looking, round faced widow, and she had a very pleasant smile.

"Don't you think that, Mrs. Riley," said the captain, with sudden boldness. "If I was to tell you wot I liked best, you'd never believe me."

"Oh, go on, captain!" said the widow with a laugh. But the captain's courage fled and took him with it.

"Might 'most think," he muttered with awesome delight, "as she knowed wot was in my mind to say!"

Next morning, when the ancient Mrs. Grummidge had gone down to the coastguards' houses for a gossip, the captain cut a couple of vegetable marrow and picked a few pecks of peas. He added a gallon of potatoes, and packed them carefully in a big basket. Then he hailed daft Tommy, who was busy frightening the crows from Farmer Jackson's field.

"Hi, Tom, my man!" he called. "Like to earn a pint?"

"Yus," said Tom, grinning.

"Then take this 'ere to Mrs. Riley at the shop, with my compliments, d'you see." Tom looked doubtful.

"Who'll scare the birds?" he asked.

"Oh—er—I will," said the captain. "Look sharp."

"Yus," Tom gazed lovingly at the vegetables. "Wot be they worth?" he inquired, touching the marrow.

"A matter o' ninepence," said the captain, boldly.

"And 'others?"

"The peas be better'n they're sellin' at sixpence in the town," stated the captain, proudly, "an' taters, too."

"Lor!" said crazy Tom; and off he ran, leaving the captain waving his red handkerchief wildly at the marauding crows.

Tom was a long time gone, and the captain found the scarecrow rather warm work. He had an uncomfortable feeling that the occasional passers by were laughing at him, and Mrs. Grummidge told him frankly that he was "hactin' like a born hijot!" He had muttered several nautical prayers to himself before Tom returned with an empty basket.

"You ain't let none on 'em settle?" he asked, anxiously. Tom was an artist in his profession.

"No, no! What did she say?"

"Too dear," said Tom, briefly. "An' so they all said; but—"

"What?" roared the captain.

"Too dear. Did best Oi could for 'ee. Two and thruppence the lot; an' spent my tuppence; an' 'ere's the rest." The captain grabbed the handful of coppers and rushed into his dwelling like a whirlwind.

"Cap'n be crazier than Oi!" said Tom with a chuckle. "An' if 'e knowed Oi got two-an'-six, and kept rest! Ho, ho, ho!"

That afternoon the captain bought four half ounces before he completed his explanation to the widow. She was so good tempered about it that he felt he must do something. Moreover her hand touched his for nearly two seconds when he took the last half ounce.

"The question," he reasoned with himself, "is wot does a woman expeck a man to say. If Jack 'adn't gone back to Lunnon, I'd 'ave arst 'im." Then he had an inspiration. Why not ask Mrs. Grummidge?

Mrs. Grummidge was very tall, very angular, very plain, and very deaf. "But," argued the captain, "she must 'ave 'ad experience in 'er time, an' I've 'eard as fashions in these things doesn't alter much." So he strolled out into the kitchen for a box of matches, when the widow Grummidge was washing up the tea things. The captain had been half an hour late for tea, so the good lady was not in the best of humors. On such occasions her infirmity of hearing was apt to increase.

"Hi!" he shouted in her ear, "Mrs. Grummidge!"

"I hain't deaf," she replied, irritably.

"Of course you hain't," he agreed, with a view of propitiation. "You hain't 'arf sharp, neither."

"Lor, cap'n!" she said with a smirk.

"I'd like your opinion on somethink—on goin' courtin'."

"Caught wot?"

"No, no; courtin'."

"Caught 'im? Who?"

"Courtin' a gal," he roared.

"Wen you was at sea?"

"Not a gale; a gal—a woman." She dropped a plate with a crash.

"More fool you!" she said, severely.

"Ow ought I to tell 'er?" he inquired, ignoring the protest.

"Tell 'er wot?"

"I want to marry!"

"Eh?" she cried, with sudden interest.

"I—want—to—marry," he shouted.

"Marry!" cried Mrs. Grummidge, with a gasp. "Oh, cap'n! I never thought of such a thing! But as it's you as harsks me!"— She flung herself upon the captain's manly breast, with one bony arm tight round his collar. She still held the wet dishcloth in her hand, and in her excitement she squeezed it so hard that a perfect torrent ran down the back of his neck.

The rest of the scene was too painful to dwell upon. Within twenty minutes Mrs. Grummidge was richer by a couple of sovereigns and the captain was poorer by a housekeeper.

"I'd write an' harsk Jack," ruminated the good man, mournfully, "but I wasn't never no 'and at writin'." Then he had another bright idea. "The very thing!" he told himself; and off he rushed to the widow's.

"Good evening, Mrs. Riley," he said.

"Good evening, captain." She commenced to get out the half ounce.

"I—I didn't come for 'baccy," he said. "The fact is, Mrs. Riley, I came for—er—advice." She laughed even more pleasantly than usual.

"Fancy you comin' to me," she said, archly. "I s'pose it's about—tobacco?"

"No—o," he confessed, "er—not exactly. It—er—well, the fact is, it's about courtin'."

"Courtin'! Lor, captain! As if I knew anythink about it!"

"It's like this 'ere," he explained. "A friend of mine— He coughed deprecatingly. "A pertikler friend o' mine wants to go courtin' a lady."

"Then," said the widow, "wy doesn't he?"

"E don't know exactly 'ow to give 'er a 'int."

A youthful customer appeared at this juncture and was served with an ounce of acid drops. Then the widow returned to the tobacco end of the counter.

"Are you sure she doesn't know?" she inquired.

"E—er—asn't told 'er." The captain mopped his brow with the red handkerchief which had put the crows to flight.

"She might guess," she suggested. "Does 'e go an' see her often?"

"'Bout four times a day," he confessed.

"Wy doesn't 'e arsk 'er right out?"

"E don't know egzactly 'ow to do it," said the captain in a muffled voice.

"There's lots of ways," said the widow, leaning her elbows on the counter and resting her chin upon her hands. "Can't you think of a way, captain?" There was a provoking gleam in her black eyes.

"Wot," he asked doubtfully, "wud be the usual 'ing?"

"Lor, captain, I 'aven't been through it a 'undred times." She shrugged her plump shoulders.

"E thinks a horful deal of 'er," he said, solemnly. "E might tell her that, mightn't 'e?"

"Yes," she agreed. "Certainly 'e might."

Mr. Brown, the sexton, came in and twaddled about the crops and the parson's new pony. After waiting five minutes the captain bowed and took his departure.

"I'll never 'ave the 'art to say it," he muttered to himself. "I'll 'ave to give it up."

All next day he kept away from the village and smoked from his store. "I'll never go there no more," he vowed. "It ain't no manner of use." But in the afternoon he went.

"Wy, captain," said Mrs. Riley, "I wondered wot ever 'ad 'appened to you."

"Did you, now?" he said with delight, "did you?"

"I was wantin' to ask you for somethink, too."

"Marrers?" he replied, promptly, "or peas?"

"No, no!" She laughed. "Advice."

"Ay!" His knees trembled, and he looked round for the shop chair.

"It's gone—to be mended," she told him, with a suppressed smile. "Won't you come inside, captain?"

"You're werry kind, ma'am," he said, nervously. She lifted the counter-flap, and he followed her into the cosy little parlor. He felt, he told Brother Jack afterward, as if he was riding on a lee shore in a gale, with a weak bow anchor.

"Anybody could be werry comferable 'ere," he remarked, when he had sat for a minute or two on the sofa.

"If they got on with me," suggested the widow.

"Nobody couldn't 'elp that," stated the captain, with conviction. "I don't believe you wasn't never out of temper in your life."

"Nonsense, captain!" She sat down on the other end of the sofa. "I'm out of temper now."

"Ah!" said her admirer, uneasily.

"It's about a friend of mine, an' a gentleman."

"E ought to be ashamed o' 'issel," said the captain, ferociously. "Wot's 'e bin an' done?"

"E don't do nothink," said Mrs. Riley, "only 'angs about. That's w'ere it is." The captain dropped his cap suddenly and picked it up again.

"Asn't 'e given 'er no 'ints?" he demanded.

"It depends on what you call 'ints."

"Sent her marrers, say, an' suchlike?"

"Ye—es," she admitted. "I believe 'e 'as."

"Come to see 'er reglar?"

"Sev'ral times a day; but still!"— She shook her head over unnamed deficiencies.

"Maybe," said the captain, tremulously, "e'd like to make 'issel a bit clearer, if 'e knowed 'er mind."

"Ow," said she, innocently, "is 'e to know if 'e wont arsk 'er?"

"Couldn't she give 'im a 'int?"

"Not," the widow said firmly, "unless she was quite certain that 'e wanted one."

"She might reckon on that," asserted the captain, with unmistakable emotion.

Mrs. Riley studied the floorcloth intently. Then her gaze wandered up the opposite wall, until it rested upon a bright colored calendar, with a picture at the top, professing to represent the balcony scene from "Romeo and Juliet." As Romeo had only the tip of one toe upon the ladder, there were obvious reasons why he should put his arms round the almanac Juliet's neck.

"That is a—very pretty picture," said the widow, with a becoming blush. The captain dropped his cap again and edged along the sofa.

"Mrs. Riley," he said, "if you was on a balcony, an' I was on a ladder—"

"No, you wouldn't!" The captain edged quite close.

Mrs. Riley," he whispered, "if you'll go an' look out o' the top window—I'll take the liberty o' borrein' your steps!"

UNCLE ALLEN'S PHILOSOPHY.

From The Chicago Tribune.

"It is true," affirmed Uncle Allen Sparks, "that it is never too late to mend, but it is sometimes too late to do a good job."



ACTRESS (angrily)—IF YOU DON'T HAVE THE MICE CAUGHT, I'LL LEAVE THE HOUSE. LANDLADY—OH, FOR SHAME! YOU PLAY JOAN OF ARC IN THE THEATRE AND ARE AFRAID OF A MOUSE AT HOME.—(Meggendorfer Bistec.)

"I threw out the box all right enough," Sam was saying, with great unction, "but it was my old fake box. The right one was on behind, tied up in a roll of blankets. The fellow was just about the build of Pancho there!"

Pancho passed on as if he had not heard, but a knowing smile of satisfaction played about his lips.

The delightfully monotonous summer days of blue sky and yellow sun came and departed before the town was again awakened from its languorous sleep of satisfied tranquillity. In the vicinity of Los Alamos Sam Smith was held up once more. The lone highwayman compelled the doughty and shrewd Samuel to descend from his seat and produce the express box from a roll of blankets. This being accomplished, the luckless passengers were lined up on one side of the road and the man with the gunny-sack over his head and the Winchester in his hand relieved them of their valuables in turn.

The following day the broken express box and a piece of the gunny sack were found in the bushes near the scene of the robbery. Pancho was suspected on Sam's report and his house searched. There the rest of the gunny sack was found. Pancho had already taken to the hills, and a large reward was offered for his capture.

Sympathy, sincere and universal, went out to the old man's daughter, but with the blow a change came over her. Every glance of pity was met by a look of suppressed indignation and scorn, for pity implied a belief in her father's guilt. In her eye a new fire kindled—a fire that burned in Pancho's eyes when he was young. Except her own, no roof knew her now but that of the Mission. But all this was only the brave exterior. In a little while it was known she was ill. Within two months she was dead. The wise doctors gave the cause as quick consumption.

Two days afterward two men moved cautiously down the slope of the cone shaped mountain, at the foot of which stood the Mission. Both were armed, and both crept crouchingly from boulder to boulder and from bush to bush, as if they feared detection. As they did so the bells of the Mission began to toll. The sweet toned sound from the little bronze bells—cast in old Spain—came up the mountain, and the two men stopped and looked down at a funeral procession passing slowly along the country road to the graveyard a short distance away. For one of them that funeral was a magnet. Following the hearse came a wagon in which sat a number of young girls clothed in white, and behind it many buggies, wagons, and a motley description of vehicles filled with people.

The man in the rear gazed intently at the moving spectacle for a time, and then his eyes wandered searchingly over the mountain slope. Suddenly he stood erect and brought his gun to his shoulder; for the first time he had discovered the other man, leaning against a slanting rock, not twenty feet away.

"Hands up, quick!" he shouted, "or I'll fire."

"Carajo!" burst from Pancho's lips, as he made a movement to seize his gun.

"Don't! I'll kill you."

Slowly Pancho's hands went up. Howard advanced to disarm him. It was Pancho's turn; "You no come!" he cried. "Dios! You not take me alive!"

Howard stopped. The two looked at each other steadily. The Mission bells still tolled, and the funeral procession wended its way along the country road.

"You must go with me, Pancho. I'm sorry, but I must do my duty."

"I say I no go!" cried Pancho, his eyes blazing with excitement. "You think a Parco go to jail?"

"It'll be all right, Pancho, old man. If you're not guilty you can easily prove it."

"Geelty? You mean I no hold up stage? You want me say that? I no say it. I did hold him up, but I not geelty. How is it when the damned gringos take all Pancho got? The gringos geelty, eh? What you say? Pancho no bandolero. Pancho only take a little of what is take from him. But no uses talk. Every one say Pancho geelty. I no care. Nifa mia, dead. You see down there? They take Helena to the grave. I no want leaf, I no 'fraid death. When they put Helena mia in the grave, Pancho die too. You watch, señor—you see!"

The procession was entering the graveyard.

"But I won't allow you to kill yourself."

"You not allow?" Pancho laughed derisively.

"But you make me mistake. Pancho no keel himself. Helena mia say that is wrong—say es malo. I not do what Helena mia say not do. You keel me, señor."

"I kill you?"

"Si, señor, you keel me, or—I keel you. I got right to do that."

"But, Pancho, Pancho," Howard almost screamed, as he saw in the other's face the sudden resolve and the plan to effect it, "you must not make me do it. No, you will not, Pancho. Think of Helena. Helena would not want you to do that. She would want you to live and be a Parco." As he pleaded for the other man's life he became fearful of his own nerves.

Pancho had turned his face in the direction of the little cemetery and the people standing around the open grave. Even at that distance his eyes were fixed upon the coffin which was being gradually lowered. To him came the cadence of the last notes of the bells. Suddenly he wheeled about and his hands dropped from the rock above his head upon which they had been resting. "Now!" he cried, as he made a motion to seize his gun.

The Mission bells were still, but the shot from Howard's gun reverberated through the hills.