My Lady Peggy Goes to Town

By

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CHAPTER IX.

SHE herself falls into such an immediate flood of tears as shakes her well, and then up she rises from her depths, and with all the courage of her race and blood she vows that, come another sunset, she will quit Peter's Court as if for a walk and never return; that in small clothes, since it must be, she will journey back to Kennaston castle and risk all the discomfiture and disgrace her doing so may bring upon her.

In point of fact, my Lady Peggy was at that state of mind when it seemed to her no degradation or humiliation, no sorrow that could be visited upon her, would be too much punishment or enough for the sins without number she had committed since the luckless day she took the coach for town.

When she emerged from her room for dinner, 'twas to learn that Mr. Brummel had been summoned hastily to St. James' on so important an affair as to initiate his royal highness into the mysteries of the new tie of Sir Robin's own invention, and that he trusted in this audience to obtain permission to fetch Sir Robin to the palace and present him within a few days to several august personages, etc.

Her ladyship therefore dined alone, scantily too. Food choked her, wine burned her throat, and, to speak truth, she was heartily glad not to have to drink it, for her ladyship was an abstemious young lady and believed milk, Bohea and Pekoe the beverages for her sex, to the exclusion of any stronger.

At twilight, having made her duds and her tresses up into a reputable enough parcel, Lady Peggy, in a suit of claret velvet, leaving all the rest of her man's attire hanging in the presses, sauntered carelessly out of the house, declining the footman's offer of a chair or even a hackney chaise or a page to carry her parcel, and set off at a swinging pace across the square and toward the river. It was her intention, by way of frustrating any attempts at tracing her which might be set afoot, the discovery of her flight once made, to so double on her own tracks and to seek out such unimagined and unlikely streets to traverse as must puzzle both bellman, watch and redbird alike as well as her acquaintances.

She swaggered along toward St. Stephen's, where a coach containing quality was occasionally met even now, then down Horseferry road almost to the river's banks; then along Jacksnapes row, with little idea of the cut-throat locality she was haunting; back again toward better neighborhoods, then a lurch to the Thames making into Farthing alley and Little Boy yard, at the end of which she found herself at the old Dove pier.

Peg stood still, her heart beating both with her quick walk and at the strangeness of all that surrounded her. She had no fear, because her arm was stout, her ala[illegible] pistols at her belt and a good sword at her side, and she was perfectly ignorant of any harm here to be found greater than at the door of Beau Brummel's house.

The dark dwellings of the yard frowned at one another, with not an ell of sky to share between 'em at their roofs; the sign of the Three Cups swung and creaked in the slow breeze; the river, black and grewsome, lapped at the foot of the stone pile against which she leaned. On the river the tired bargemen rested at their oars, and the dip of the water bird was the only sound that struck upon her ear.

Peggy was casting about in her mind whether to enter the inn and inquire her road to the King's Arms in the Strand and has just turned to do so when in the cavernous doorway of one of the gaunt looking tenements she beheld three figures. The faces of two were toward her, and by the light of the fish oil lamp swinging at the next door tavern she beheld them, so sinister and forbidding as to cause her to halt for a space and then, overcoming her dread, to pursue her path, but slowly and by crossing the yard.

As she did so her weapon caught in her heel, and as she bent to disengage it a voice speaking in low, muffled tones arrested her gait.

It was the voice of Sir Robin McTart, saying:

"If I make it 10 guineas apiece on the spot, you swear to leave him cold on the pier yonder come Sunday night or to tie a stone about his throat and throw him into the river?"

"Aye, aye," grunts one of the two companions of this most valorous gentleman. "'E's halways 'ulkin' 'ereabouts o' Sunday nights."

Lady Peggy, with such a pull string of terror at her heart as she never had before, draws closer to the wall of the tenement before which she has halted and creeps nearer to the portal wherein these cavaliers are quartered.

"Let it be 5 guineas apiece tonight," squeaks the baronet, "and the remainder when the business is done?"

"The deuce take you with your 'when the business is done!'" mutters the other. "We's doin' your job for you for little enough. 'Tain't every one as 'd hundertake the funeral of a hearl's heir like Sir Percy de Bohun."

Her ladyship's like now to fall in a swoon, but not she; only leans she a bit against the bricks, her bosom heaving, her eyes dilating, her lips bitten in until they are almost bleeding.

"Hush-h-h! No names, you varlets!" interrupts Sir Robin.

"Hey?" responds the other. "The walls ain't got no hears, and if they 'ad wot I'm sayin's the cussid truth, eh, Bloksey?"

Bloksey grunts.

"The town 'll be afire when it's out that a gallant like 'im that's heir to Lord Gower's been done fer, and then, my fine gentleman, who's to pay for't if we's caught and if we 'appens to be seen by any one when we're a-doin' of your job? No; money all down now or Sir Percy lives as long as 'e likes, for us!"

Peg's hand is upon the hilt of her sword.

Shall she spring and run Sir Robin through?

Shall she hide and buy the rascals out at a higher price than he has paid?

But no sooner do these thoughts rush through her brain than the utter impossibility of compassing the one or of performing the other undetected, if even with her life, and she so at the mercy of these cutthroats, comes to steady her, and she realizes that her only part is to get away as fast as she may and unseen if she can.

Meantime Sir Robin concludes his bargain with the two desperadoes, and as they withdraw into their haunt and he turns on his heel he espies Lady Peggy rounding the corner with her bundle under her arm. The little baronet with a sidelong glance at the hallway to make sure his men are out of sight darts to the opposite side of the court on tiptoe and then, putting hands to mouth, calls across softly but clearly in a tone half of joy, half anger:

"Mr. Incognito! Mr. Incognito! Ho! I say, Incognito!"

Peg stops short. 'Twere wiser perhaps to try to discover what had put Sir Robin McTart up to the murder.

"By gad, sir," cries this one, making a dash now over to Peg's side of the way, "here have I scoured the town for day and night, and no trace of you anywhere! 'Incognito' me no more, sir! Who are you, sir? I'll stand no more such nonsense!" Sir Robin's valor's thoroughly based on the knowledge that were blade to be unsheathed to his hurt he could and would shout for his hirelings to the rescue.

'Twas the first and only time in his life that he was ever known to urge or even hint a quarrel in propria persona.

"I'll 'incognito' you to the end of the chapter, Sir Robin McTart," answers Lady Peggy, clapping hand to hilt.

"Very well, sir; very well," says the baronet, reflecting that another corpse might cost him 10 guineas more ere he were done with it, and besides yearning for the news of his lady which he thinks he may glean. "I've small stomach for fighting any man. Religion doesn't teach us that lesson, but 'tis a scurvy trick you've played me, sir."

"In what way, sir? Out with it!" replies Peggy.

"You, sir, sent me to Kennaston a-seeking Lady Peggy Burgoyne, sir. She was from home, and not a word else could I buy or wring out of her servant's cursed mouth. Then I hied to Kent, believing, from your fine messages to me from her ladyship, that she must be there at her godmother's. No, sir, she was not, nor could any one tell but that she was at Kennaston castle for all they knew. Back in town posthaste I seek Lark lane, where her brother lodges, so I had heard, only to learn that he has gone to stop with Sir Percy de Bohun in Charlotte street."

"Well, you sought him there?" inquires Peg, quivering with suppressed excitement.

"I did not, sir!" replies Sir Robin, with emphasis.

"Thank heaven!" says his companion fervently, an exclamation which may do double duty and is well taken by the little gentleman from Kent.

"No, sir. You do not suppose, sir, that I'm a-going to risk a life that's dear to Lady Peggy at the hands of a ripping brawler and sure kill like Sir Percy, do you?"

"Ah, Sir Robin!" quoth her ladyship. "If you knew what a consolation it would be to Lady Peggy to hear of your unwillingness to hazard your precious person in such company 'twould ease your mind and heart."

"Look you!" whispers Sir Robin, plucking at Peg's sleeve. "But tell me where she is. This mystery's killing me. How fares she? Does she pine for me? And is this true?" With shaking hands Sir Robin takes from his pocket a copy of a print of the day previous and, unfolding, reads to the astonished Peg the following paragraphs:

"'Town's talk is all for the very pretty quarrel betwixt Sir P—y de B—n and the [illegible] and hand[illegible] R—n McT—t of Kent. 'Tis all over Mayfair and far beyond that the cause of the dispute is the lovely but mysterious Lady P—y B—e!'"

"'Slife!" interrupts Peg, catching at straws. "You now perceive, Sir Robin, why 'tis that her ladyship must keep her whereabouts a secret, even," she adds with sentimental deflection, "from you. Trust me, sir, as you would trust her and be guided by my counsel!"

Sir Robin nods vigorously, fluttering his sheet with anxious fingers. "Listen, sir, listen to this further." He reads on: "'Sir P—y de B—n has sworn by all that's sacred, so 'tis said, to stick at R—n McT—t to the death, and serious consequences are feared.'"

"Ah!" cries Lady Peggy, overjoyed to hear anything that may serve to keep the little baronet and Sir Percy from meeting. "'Tis a gentleman of his word, I promise you. Better get back at once to Robinswold and let London and Sir Percy gallop to the devil an they see fit!"

"Nay," replies the one addressed. "Not I, Sir Incognito. It is not for a McTart to turn his back on danger, but the rather," and here by the fish oil gleam the little gentleman's squint eyes leer cunningly up into her ladyship's face, "the rather," continues he, glancing cautiously around, "take measures to protect myself."

"Very commendable of you, Sir Robin, by my faith," cries Peggy, although she shudders, now linking her arm in her companion's and assuming an air of easy confidence, by the which she hopes to ensnare him into a complete revelation of his plans.

"Since you go armed and are, I doubt not, a master in the art of self defense, what have you to fear from Sir Percy de Bohun?"

"True," responds the baronet, with a reservation to himself and no mind at all to proceed any further with his revelations. "Gad, sir! A fellow like that," clutching at the newspaper stuck among his ruffles, "ain't to be trusted as long as he's above the ground. I swear, sir, I fear to walk abroad, and hold myself housed at my inn in Pimlico close, not daring to show my face. A ruffian that's publicly printed as seekin' life 'd stick me in the back in the dark an he got the chance."

"Nay, nay, Sir Robin," says Peg, up for her sweetheart; "he's not that sort of a gentleman. But, look you, keep close; frequent neither club, coffee nor chocolate house nor rout nor drum; eschew Vauxhall, Richmond and the playhouse or any likely place where bucks gather, for, trust me, sir, an you do meet Sir Percy, there 'll be the deuce to pay, and this blade's his obedient slave."

Poor Peg! She has not only to protect Percy of his life, but, as before, to prevent any discovery of her usurpation of the little baronet's name.

"Curse him! I fear him not!" responds this one, his itching fingers twisting about the empty purse in his pocket.

"But of her ladyship, Sir Go-between?" adds he presently as they emerge upon the broader and better lighted road. "'Pon my life, but to so find myself the hero of a romantic passion with the lady secluded in a mystery, a nobleman thirsting for my blood, a nameless gentleman playing Mercury betwixt me and my fair, 'tis amazing, sir, prodigious amazing!" Sir Robin struts and takes snuff very comfortably since he has got out of a very dangerous environment.

Peg's soul sickens within her as she listens to him.

"Tell me now, how fares she?"

"Not so well," answers she.

"You've seen her?"

"Not I."

"Are like to?"

"No, sir."

"You can convey messages to her by some fond way she's planned to get her news of me, eh?"

"I can, Sir Robin."

"Sir, whoever you are, for pity's sake tell me where is she!"

"Not far, sir."

"Gad, sir, to touch her hand, her cheek! You're in her sure confidence? She does favor me? She will not give me hopes, sir, to turn around and break my heart by marrying of another?"

"Lady Peggy 'll never marry any man, Sir Robin, I'm of the opinion, so I'd not give that for your chances!" answers she.

"Think you she ever cared for Sir Percy?" asks he.

"Sir, who can fathom a woman's heart? 'Tis deeper than the sea—so deep, methinks, ofttimes she herself holds not that plummet than can sound it. Sir Robin, I take my leave of you."

"Hold, hold, sir; not so fast! Where next may I encounter you?"

"That must be as her ladyship says," answers Peggy. "Your inn's in Pimlico?"

"Yes, the Puffled Hen; not far off Battersea bridge."

"Farewell, sir, and look you keep close indoors and risk no quarrel with Sir Percy de Bohun."

"Farewell, sir," watching her ladyship turn down the street as he turns up. "Gad's life! 'Twas well he happened when he did and not earlier to eavesdrop my bargain with the wharf rats! 'Sdeath! Risk no quarrel with Sir Percy! Not so long as there's guineas left to buy corpses with!" And the little gentleman trots over to Pimlico, tolerably well pleased with his evening's work, there, however, to be greeted with the reading of more newspapers, including that one which had earlier in the day so entertained Beau Brummel and his familiars.

Not for a moment did the baronet mistrust or have a suspicion other than that his fame had caused him to be made the subject of such a pack of pretty stories as was then the custom of the press, as now, regarding any gentleman of position and gallantry. Sir Robin's vanity easily swallowed the dose, and he even slapped his thigh and laughed his little dice-rattle laugh as he reflected how safe he really was with never a challenge or a brawl to his cowardly credit since he got his first flogging at Eton.

He actually mouthed over his prospective wooing and assured winning of Lady Peggy and felt a calm satisfaction in the knowledge that the one rival he feared would so soon be beyond the reach of ladies' smiles or tears. No qualms came to disturb his genial enjoyment of purposed assassination. In those days to kill was nearer men's tempers than it is today. 'Twas with blackguard and man of honor alike the first redress for even the pettiest sort of a dispute; with the difference of method only that the gallant blade fought out his quarrel on the open field, while the craven bought a hireling's dagger to do it in the dark.

Meantime my lady, by as direct a route as she can fathom out of the labyrinth of her ignorance and her distracted state of mind, makes back to Peter's Court with her parcel of duds still under her arm.

She enters, mounts the staircase, seeks her room, closes the door and sits down.

"'Tis now not to be doubted," she says to herself—"but that the devil's at the helm of my ship and that I am to be a man for the rest of my life. 'Sdeath! as dad says. I'll stop over till Sunday night's o'er past, and as surely as my name's Peggy Burgoyne I'll foil that little dastardly groat of a baronet's plot to murder him that I once l-loved. Bah!" cries she half aloud. "What's the use of mincing matters that's true? Him that I love! Even if he's dying for Lady Diana and going to be her husband instead of mine! 'Consents!'" murmurs she, flinging herself on the bed in a flood of tempestuous tears.

In vain regretting she now too fully realized that her own willful words, her jealousy, her falsehoods, her deceits, were the sole causes for Sir Robin's terror and therefore for the abominable scheme which he had just concocted.

Presently she arose, tossed the bundle once more back into its hiding place and set to pacing up and down the floor as she'd seen her twin do at home when he was looking high and low for a rhyme.

'Twas weightier matters kept Peg moving for an hour or more, and, quick spinning as were her heart and temper, her brain bore a more even balance.

First she had thought to warn Percy by a letter unsigned, the which she knew he'd pitch into the fire and think no more about. Then that she'd write one to Kennaston imploring him to keep Percy from the pier Sunday night or any other. This she soon recognized would have the fate of t'other. Then 'twas to contrive some plan to fetch him to Richmond, Windsor, any place else for Sunday; but to this arose the objection that the blackguards cheated of one day or place would not fail to wait upon their prey some other. At the last her ladyship's shrewd common sense and indomitable pluck plainly showed her there was but one safe plan out of the danger, and this must be to go herself to the river Sunday night and there concealed, armed, await the coming of the cutthroats from their den, and from the rear put a shot into each at one and the same moment.

Could she do it?

Her ladyship had muscles of steel, no nerves, as the fine ladies of her day comprehended them; as brave and loyal a heart as ever beat in any breast, good faith in God, for all her frowardness, and that species of love burning within her for Sir Percy de Bohun which has not a few times in the world's history made frailest woman into man's equal for courage.

To Lady Peggy there seemed a divine compensation in the fact that it had come to her to save the very one whom by her lies and willfulness she alone had been the means of endangering.

CHAPTER X.

THIS young gentleman now stood looking from a window of his uncle's house upon all the dewy leafing beauty of the park at May. His brow was knit, his lips tight shut, his hand amid his ruffles clinched.

At the table sat Kennaston, inky fingered, scribbling; eyes now rolling to the ceiling, now roving hither and yon.

"Ah!" sighs this one. "If the critics do not find this canto to their taste may I be hanged!"

"You're like to go to court to the devil, I'm thinking, then, dear lad," speaks De Bohun over his shoulder.

"Fame! Fame!" cries the young poet, pushing back in his chair, wig awry and quill poised in air. "I'll hunt thee to my dying hour, and if thou escap'st me then 'twill all be Lady Diana's fault."

"How's that?" asks Percy, with, however, but small ring of interest in his voice.

"Oh!" exclaimed Peg's twin. "The minx mocks me! 'Tis Monday, kindness and all smiles, to wake on Tuesday for indifference; pouts on Wednesday; lure-me-ons o' Thursday; forgetfulness for Friday; radiance for Saturday, and all a-jumble, sweets and frowns, showers, sunshine, what you will—and will not—for my Sunday fare."

Percy sighs and smiles.

"Percy, sometimes I think Diana does love you."

The two men's hands meet.

"No, sir, never! We're like brother and sister, nothing else, save my uncle's absurd, obstinate (now cured) whim since childhood to match his heir with Brookwood's heiress. Odzooks! Ken, you're like every other swain that ever sighed—always looking for a rival to be jealous of. Lady Di cares for you. An you doubted it before, 'tis time to take up hope, since you are asked to Brookwood for a visit, and go popping off tonight, with me left home to think alone on Peggy."

"Zounds, sir, 'tis not you only that's thinking of her!" cries the young man, rising and crossing to the fire. "But what would you? If I call out the bellman, publish her disappearance in the newspapers, get word to my father and my mother—what comes o't all but scandal and like as not dad an apoplexy and my lady mother a set of fits and a deathbed!"

"Ken, I'm a fool ever to stop inside of doors or to cease pacing streets, haunting inns, shadowing Sir Robin McTart until I find her."

"Fie, sir, if she's gone off with Sir Robin McTart, 'tis, I promise you, with a wedding ring on her finger and not else. An she loves him, what's to be said or done if he's her lawful lord?"

"Naught. I myself went down to Kennaston yesterday. I said nothing to you Ken," he adds, noting the other's surprised and reproachful start, with a hand upon his junior's shoulder.

"I thought I'd not interrupt the epic and your frenzies about Lady Di with my troubles."

"Well, what news of Peg? Any?" asks her twin anxiously.

"None. I saw Chockey and only got from her what Grigson had—the [illegible] tive assurance that her mis[illegible] gone up to London. 'Of [illegible] she. 'Alone?' I inquired. 'No, Sir Percy,' was her answer, nor could I force, frighten or buy the baggage into any further confidence. She did beg of me, however, seek out her ladyship, if I could, and find how she fared."

"Gad's life, sir! She has eloped. 'Tis clear as crystal."

"One thing more I asked Chock: Had her ladyship money in her purse? 'Lawk, Sir Percy,' cried she, '£200 I know of.'"

"Two hundred pounds!" repeats Peg's twin in amazement. "'Tis sure more'n she ever saw before in our lives put together. Oh, the girl's safely wedded, sir, beyond a doubt!"

"Sir," says Percy, sitting at the table, with his head low in his hands, "the blackguard's won her from me."

"I fear so, sir." The two men's hands meet and grasp in the silent fashion of their sex, ofttimes more eloquent than any words e'er speeched.

"Would I had made a hole in his heart that night in Lark lane!" cried Sir Percy next.

"Sir Robin's nimble, sir, and knows a trick or two with steel as well as dice."

"Aye, a gallant every inch. 'Tis for that I hate him all the more, and yet, Ken, sometimes, lad, when I've been a-staring at him from afar, I've caught something in his countenance resembling Peg, and it's made me halt like a chit at provoking of him further."

Kennaston nods. "Aye, I've remarked it, but held my peace, Percy, for 'tis said man and wife often grow to look alike, and I doubt not sometimes begin after the same pattern."

Sir Percy sighs again, turns up the room with drooped lids, in silence getting that grip upon his soul which noblest natures insist on with themselves even in crises like this. 'Tis a bitter battle.

"Kennaston," says he, very quiet and offhand, "I'm thinking I'll go to the colonies—to Virginia."

Kennaston turns off, with tears in his eyes.

"Mostly," says he brokenly, "were not Peggy my twin I'd be in ripe mood for a cursing of her! When, Percy?" asks he after a pause.

"As soon as may be," is the reply. "I've the promise of a commission by my uncle's influence. Come, come, lad o' my heart," laughs he through his own misty eyes. "The wind's not in my ship's sails yet. I promised Mr. Brummel for his expedition to Ivy Dene for the morrow, and I'll hardly be ready in all points to get under way before you're back in town from your visit to Brookwood, whence I foresee you'll fly with Diana's 'yes' betwixt her kiss on your cheek."

'Twas now Mr. Brummel's famous and long talked about party to Ivy Dene this very next day that dawned.

Now, her ladyship had vowed to herself that, come what might, she would avoid this, even did fate keep her in London. 'Twas no part of her programme, although she could do it as well as any sporting squire, to make for her future any such memory as riding a horse astride for thirty miles out and back in the company a half score of gentlemen must furnish, yet so is each of us rather the creature of circumstance than will that the hour appointed found Peg mounted on a gray with blood in his veins and a-pacing down Piccadilly to the White Horse beside Beau Brummel's bay.

She could not, with Sir Robin's murderous pact in her perpetual view, make up her mind to omit a company that should include Sir Percy.

It seemed to her that any day spent by him out of her sight might prove fatal; that Sir Robin's hirelings might conceive it better to their purpose to put an end to their intended victim before the Sunday. So, aching with an insane but not unnatural impulse to pull rein and confess all; burning with shame to remember 'twas of Lady Diana's sweetheart she was thinking; mortified beyond belief every time her saddle grazed her breeches; intent lest an unsuspected sword should flash from the hedgerows, the sheepcots or the shadows of Epstowe forest, which they traversed on their way, my Lady Peggy, wishing amidst all this that she had never come to town, yet contrived to display a very cheerful mien, to laugh as loud as she dared, keeping her high notes cautiously to herself, as she had in her speech ever since the night, as Sir Robin, she had made her first appearance in Lark lane—to join in jest, quip, prank, such as a gay cavalcade of jovial gentlemen were then wont to indulge in.

Such were some of the strange vicissitudes incident to being that most amazingly delicious compound, a willful and withal true hearted woman.

As Mr. Brummel had planned, they halted for refreshment at the Merry Rabbit at Market Ossory and left, after a game of bowls on the green, to pursue their way. Percy lingered a bit in the rear. Truth to tell, his reflections were none of the gayest, and the presence of the supposed Sir Robin McTart and the conclusion, which, together with Ken, he had been forced to reach, that Lady Peggy had run off with the baronet, did not by any means conspire to the lightening of his spirits. As he watched his presumed rival, heard the ringing laugh, the brilliant jest, noted the careless air and thought of this cavalier as Lady Peggy's lord his choler knew no bounds, and it appeared to him that, come what might, he must invent cause of quarrel and one or the other of 'em be left cold on the field.

"Why," a thousand times he asked himself, "this mystery regarding her marriage? Why not have wedded Sir Robin from her father's home and with her father's blessing, since," Sir Percy reluctantly admitted, "no fault could be found with so fine a young gentleman, and his fortune he knew to be considerable."

He was aware that her ladyship was romantic to a degree, and he could but decide that this predilection had caused her to elope and to preserve the matter in a wrapping of secrecy for a time; no doubt even now from her retirement looking forward to the hour when she should emerge as Lady McTart!

Sir Percy grated his teeth together and struck his spurs so deep that his horse gave a plunge which brought him up neck and neck with the gray of the supposed baronet and the black of Mr. Chalmers.

"To the rescue, Sir Percy!" cried this one jocularly. "Your assistance I beg, and the loan of your wits in our argument."

"With all my heart!" answers Percy, scenting a possible chance to worst his rival even in a battle of words. "What's the subject?"

"A truce to 't!" exclaims the Beau, with an expressive shake of his head at Mr. Chalmers, who, however, seldom notes any obstacle to the pleasure of his present moment.

"No truce at all, Mr. Brummel," answers he gayly. "'Tis"—

"'Tis nothing whatever, Sir Percy," [illegible]rupts Lord Escombe, putting his [illegible]almers' rein, and adding in [illegible]ooks, man, hold [illegible] tow and tinder betw[illegible] Tart!"

"'Pon my soul, s[illegible] now cries Percy, "I insist upon Jack's being [illegible]lowed to proceed with his remarks. If he wants my counsels, they're his. Come, sir, speak."

"'Tis but this," says Mr. Chalmers, "I say to Sir Robin that since the world's busy with rumors of his secret marriage to Lady Peggy Burgoyne, since as I learn by my man, who had it at the gate of the very best authority—gad, sirs, 'tis a fact, even if we don't relish it, the gist of our gossip comes from below stairs, up—that Lady Peggy is from home, her father believing her in Kent at her godmother's"—Mr. Chalmers smiles—"her mother being in York, believing her safe at Kennaston, I say, my lords and gentlemen, it behooves Sir Robin confide the matter to his best friends and give them chances to congratulate him and the lady. Have I the right o't, Percy—yes or no?"

Percy is silent for a moment. It seems to him a desecration of the sweet, modest and womanly girl he has so long adored thus to hear even her name, much less a discussion of her most private matters, made into mirthful subject on a morning's ride.

His anger, too, is great that the man whose name is coupled with hers has not already put a stop to such a conversation, even were it at the point of the sword.

Shall he here and now so reply to Mr. Chalmers as shall breed an instant retort from Sir Robin and a challenge on the spot? The wild thought even flashes through his brain that Sir Robin might be left dead on the ground and that some time in the dim future he might win Peggy back to himself.

But, with a tightening rein, he checks himself as well as his horse as he answers:

"Mr. Chalmers, the lady you name is one whom I honor most deeply, and it seems to me if she has seen fit to go into seclusion or to marry secretly that, while I may wish it had been in open church, I must continue to respect her preferences until she elects to change them," with which, breaking the little pause of silence which follows, Sir Percy gallops ahead, joining Mr. Brummel, who has put himself quickly out of the commotion he had foreseen as likely to arrive.

Meantime it may be correctly imagined that her ladyship, with all her sex's exquisite ingenuity at plaguing itself whenever it possibly can, had seized upon those words of Sir Percy's most easily twisted into a means of self torture.

"I wish it had been in open church!" instantly stuck itself in her thoughts beside "consents," the two forming just that species of flagellation which ladies so situated in mind are wont to inflict upon themselves.

The supposed Sir Robin from this on until the arrival of the party at Ivy Dene became taciturn, even morose, and not a syllable could be got from him in answer to the wildest gibes.

Her eyes intent upon Sir Percy, who now kept to the fore with his host, my Lady Peggy, on the keen lookout for the possible assassin, and to the tune of "consents" and its running mate, "I would it had been in open church!" put in a very dolorous twenty miles, but on dismounting at Mr. Brummel's doorstep she endeavored to infuse a little joyousness into her looks and speech.

The afternoon was spent as had been planned. The country cook's dinner was voted a perfect success. A game of cards was in order after the repast, a tilt at politics, a wager on the question of tea in the colonies, Lady Peggy and Sir Percy keeping, by the grace of each, well apart in all these encounters, and at 12 o'clock, just as the moon was rising behind a bank of splendid star fringed clouds, Mr. Brummel and his guests set forth on their homeward road.

The beauty of the night was such as soothes and casts its own mantle of peace over even those unquiet spirits which may be abroad.

The cavalcade had left the highway some distance behind; the moon was fast being overtaken by the clouds whence she had an hour or more ago emerged; the dews fell thick, and the scent of the hawthorn was sweet in the air as they plunged into Epstowe forest.

"Ah, gentlemen," cried out Mr. Brummel, snapping his whip, "what a night for Tom Kidde and his merry men! The skies dark, the moon playing hide and seek, fifteen watches and purses and as many rings, pins and seals between us as you left not at Ivy Dene with my cook Elizabeth!"

"Ha, ha, ha! No fears of Tom Kidde, an he knows our caliber, jumping out upon us!" laughs Lord Wootton.

"'Slife, sir, he's the sort of highwayman to jump out on the best in the title that strikes horseflesh or carries gold. The young devil's afraid of nothing that breathes, and has been the terror of travelers now these three or four years gone," says Vane.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Basis.

"But, after all, is not good digestion the basis of beauty?"

"Aye, what else may change the grub into the butterfly?" exclaimed Beatrice, attacking the sirloin zestfully.—Detroit Free Press.

Homeseekers and Settlers.

On the first and third Tuesdays of each month round trip excursion tickets are on sale to points in the west, south and southwest at one fare plus two dollars; return limit 21 days from date of sale; stopovers allowed.

On the same dates special one-way settlers tickets are on sale at a trifle more than half the regular fares.

The Iowa Central operates through sleeping cars and free reclining chair cars.

Call on agents for full particulars or address A. B. Cutts, G. P. & T. A., Minneapolis, Minn. 3w6

Low Excursion Rates to Denver, Colorado Springs and Pueblo, Via. the M. & O.

Jan. 5 & 19, 1903, Feb. 2 & 16, 1904. | March 1 & 15, 1904 April 5 & 19, 1904.

The Manchester & Oneida Railway will sell one way tickets to Denver, Colorado Springs, and Pueblo, Colorado at $17.50.

For further information call on, or write,

J. L. KELSEY, Traffic Mgr.

49 5m

ANNOUNCEMENTS!

ILLINOIS CENTRAL R R.

Direct to Havana

Via Illinois Central R. R. to New Orleans and the weekly Southern Pacific S. S. "Louisiana" to Havana. Leaves Chicago and Cincinnati Friday morning, leave St. Louis and Louisville Friday noon, arriving New Orleans Saturday 10:00 a. m. leave Saturday 2:00 p. m., arriving at Havana, Monday morning. Round trip and one-way through tickets at unusually low rates. Free Illinois Central R. R. Illustrated Folder on Cuba giving all particulars, on application.

OCEAN STEAMSHIPS

FROM NEW ORLEANS

Ocean steamship sailings from New Orleans for Mexico, Panama, Central and South America, West Indies and Europe concisely set forth in a special folder issued by the Illinois Central R. R. Send for a copy.

MEXICO Tour of all Mexico via Illinois Central R. R., under escort of

CALIFORNIA Real Campbell, General Manager of the American Tourist Association, Quincy Building 113 Adams St., Chicago, leaves Chicago January 28. Select clientele. Limited. All exclusive privileges, independent travel, special Pullman Vestibule Train, Drawing-Rooms, Compartments, Library and Music Room, with the largest Dining Car in the world, and the famous Open Top Observation Car, Chililili. Special Baggage Car. Tickets include all expenses everywhere.

Special tours of Mexico and California via the Illinois Central and New Orleans under the auspices of Raymond & Whitcomb, will leave Chicago Feb. 2, Feb. 12, and St. Louis Saturday, Feb. 13, 1904, for Mexico and California via New Orleans, including a stop-over for the Mardi Gras; also from Chicago Friday, March 4 th, and St. Louis Saturday, March 5th, for California, via the Illinois Central and New Orleans. Entire trips made in special private vestibule trains of finest Pullmans, with dining car service. Fascinating trips, complete in every detail.

Illinois Central Weekly Excursions to California. Excursion Cars through to Los Angeles and San Francisco as follows; Via New Orleans and the Southern Route every Wednesday from Chicago; every Tuesday from Cincinnati. Via Omaha and the Scenic Route every Wednesday from Chicago.

MARDI GRAS This occurs at New Orleans on February 16, 1904. For it excursion rate will be in effect to New Orleans on specific dates when your local ticket agent will be able to advise you.

NEW ORLEANS A delightfully unique city for the tourist to visit. Winter tourist rates now in effect. Double daily service and fast steam-heated vestibule trains with through sleeping cars, buffet-library-smoking car service and all meals enroute in dining cars. Ask for an illustrated book on New Orleans.

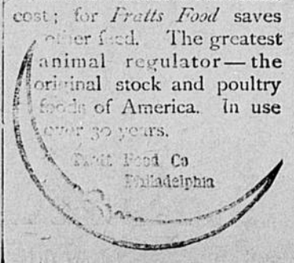
GULFPORT, MISS. The Great Southern Hotel at Gulfport, Miss., on the Mexican Gulf Coast, has 250 rooms single or en suite, with or without bath. Steam heat, electric light, hot and cold running water and telephone in every room. Reached via Memphis and the Illinois Central's fast morning trains, carrying sleeping and buffet-library cars, with a single change, on same train en route at Memphis, into through sleeping car at Gulfport. Send for illustrated folder describing Gulfport and hotel.

FLORIDA Through "Dixie Flyer" Sleeping Car Lines St. Louis to Jacksonville and Chicago to Nashville, the latter connecting en route with through Jacksonville car from St. Louis. Route via Nashville, Chattanooga and Atlanta.

HOT SPRINS, ARK. Through Sleeping Car between Chicago and Hot Springs carried on the Central's fast Pullman vestibule "Limited" train. Send for book describing his most interesting of health and pleasure resorts.

Full Particulars concerning all of the above can be had of agents of the Illinois Central, or by addressing the nearest of the undersigned representatives of the "Central."

A. H. HANSON, G. P. A., Chicago, Ill.
J. F. MERRY, A. G. P. A., Dubuque Iowa.
April 1 1904.



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Through to California Without Change of Cars.

The Iowa Central operates a through tourist car to California without change on each Wednesday leaving Albert Lea 1:30 P. M., Mason City 2:40 P. M., Hampton 3:50 Eldora 5:01 P. M., Grinnell 7:10 P. M., Oskaloosa 8:50 P. M., etc, running by the way of Kansas City and the popular Santa Fe System through New Mexico and Arizona, arriving at Los Angeles 8:00 A. M., following Sunday morning. Rate for double lower berth is $6.75 from Albert Lea and $6.25 from Marshalltown.

This car runs through a most delightful climate at this season of the year, where snow blockades are unknown and the passenger is not inconvenienced on account of cold.

Before you make your trip call on agents for particulars or address A. B. Cutts G. P. & T. A., Minneapolis, Minn 3w5.

Homeseeker's Excursions Via. the M. & O.

Jan. 5 & 19, 1904. Feb. 2 & 16, 1904, | March 1 & 15, 1904, April 5 & 19, 1904,

The Manchester & Oneida Railway will sell round trip Homeseeker's Tickets at one fare plus $2.00 for the round trip except rates to Denver, Colorado Springs, Pueblo and Trinidad, Col., and Cheyenne, Wyo., will be made one fare plus $5.50 for the round trip. No ticket to be sold for less than $9.00.

For children of five and under twelve years of age, tickets will be sold at half of the gross rate.

Tickets will be sold to points in Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Indian Territory, Western Iowa, Kansas and Nebraska, 100 miles west of the Missouri River, Louisiana, except New Orleans and Hammond, Minnesota, Missouri, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Salt Lake City, and Ogden only, Wisconsin and Northern Michigan and Wyoming.

For further particulars enquire of, or address, the undersigned at Manchester Iowa.

J. L. KELSEY, Traffic Manager.

M. & O. Homeseeker's Excursions.

February 2 and 16, March 1 and 15, and April 5 and 19 the Manchester and Oneida Railway Company will sell Homeseeker's Excursion tickets, good to return in 21 days, at one fare plus $2.00 for the round trip.

To Mason City and points in Iowa west on Iowa and Dakota division of the C. M. & St. P. Ry.

To Albert Lea, Taopa and Dexter, Minn, and points west on Hastings and Dakota Division of the C. M. & St. P. Ry.

To all points in North and South Dakota on the C. M. & St. P. Ry. except McCook and Jefferson.

To Storm Lake and Fonda and points north. To Hesford Junction, and Pembia, Wis. and points north in Wisconsin and Michigan. To nearly all points in Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado to Rocky Ford, Ordway, Calahan, Byers, Fort Morgan, and points east in Colorado, Indian Territory all points, Iowa, to points on Iowa Central Ry Albion to Northwood inclusive and Algona. On Chicago Rock Island and Pacific Ry [B. C. R. & N. Ry.] to points north and west of Mason City. To Kansas and Nebraska, all points west of stations 100 miles west of the Missouri river. Kentucky, Louisiana, Mexico, Michigan, Mississippi, Minnesota, points in southwest Missouri, all points in New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas.

For further information, call on or address, the undersigned at Manchester Iowa. J. L. KELSEY

3w14 Traffic Manager

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Low Homeseekers Excursions South via the M. & O.

The Manchester and Oneida Ry, will sell Homeseekers Excursion tickets to points in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia on Jan 5, 19; Feb 2, 16; March 1, 15; April 5, 19, 1904; at one fare plus $2.00 for the round trips good for going pass