Of This Generation

By Henry Seton Merriman.

The Grand hotel at Zell-am-Zee has, as many know, a garden bordered by the lake, where in the very necessary shade of lilac trees complative Austrians sit at small tables and consume the deep-colored beer, so-called, of Munich.

Among these, and within sound of their sober exclamations of wonderment at the beauty of the prospect, sat a young Englishman, gracefully idle, and wearing with a becoming indifference a most trying head covering at the time fashionable and still known at Cambridge as a "beast" hat. He was watching the approach of a countrywoman—young, wholesome, sunburnt and energetic—who had just emerged from the door of the hotel.

The Englishman was startlingly clean—with thin, soft hair carefully brushed back from a bland forehead. His face was narrow, with a prominent nose, suggesting the frequent use of soap and water. The countenance was expressive of one dominant quality, as nearly all countenaces are if studied with understanding, and that nothing less than the desire to be instantly and persistently agreeable. Ladies given to the exercise of that species of hospitality which has for its aim the bringing together of young people and for its end the hope that some of these may elect to remain together till death do them release invariably secured Algernon Augustus Passavant. Algernon, it appeared, made things go. Some very young girls thought him stupid, and did not always understand his humor. They thought that he lacked poetry and was uninteresting. His hair, in fact, was too thin and too short. The more elderly sirens engaged in the pursuit of eligible junior attaches kept an eye on Passavant as a sheepdog keeps an eye upon the shepherd. A few mistaken mammas set little traps for him, and he made himself invariably agreeable to the bait without being hooked.

Passavant had seen two ambassadors come and go from Vienna, where he held office. And a third—a power in Europe—in bed in the best bedroom of the Grand hotel of Zell-am-Zee, seemed at this time about to receive a call to a higher court whence no dispatches are delivered.

On the nearer approach of his countrywoman Passavant stood up, raised his hat, and drew forward an iron chair.

"Those flowers," he said, gravely pointing to some fronds in the girl's hand, "do not grow wild in this part of the world. But so long as you were not observed——"

"I gathered them right up there," answered Miss Britten, with all the careless confidence of her generation, pointing toward the mountains with her parasol.

"As a nation we are inclined to think that, if we only climb high enough, we rise above the law. There is a villa just above the spot where you—stole those flowers."

"I never saw it."

"No—but it was there."

The girl laughed. She was no longer quite youthful, and had the air of capability which is a charactertistic of the day. She had obviously tried most things—except love, bien entendu. The universal young person has usually missed that, and fills up the blank with the current amusements in their due course, prosecuting them with a skill worthy of a higher object than the mere killing of time.

"As I came down," she continued, "a queer thing happened to me."

Passavant looked gravely at her. The modern knight errant is a young woman, and she seeks adventures, for the most part, in continental hotels or on board the great steamers. Passavant thought that Miss Britten was too good for that sort of adventure, and his face, being eminently guileless, did not express that thought.

"I was mistaken for some one else," she said; 'for Miss Burdon, the ambassador's daughter."

"Ah, I have twice been mistaken for some one else. Once it was for a bookstall man, when with great presence of mind I sold a penny newspaper. The second time I was mistaken for Mr. Lincoln or Mr. Bennett. I never ascertained which, while I was standing bareheaded in the shop waiting for my hat to be ironed. I took it as a compliment. They make excellent hats. By whom were you mistaken for Miss Burdon?"

"By a German gentleman who must have followed me up the hill. I met him when I turned back. He asked me the way out; then asked me whether he was mistaken in supposing that I was Miss Burdon. I thought I told him he was, but he seems to have understood me to say that I was Miss Burdon."

Passavant's attention, which had been centered on a free-hand design executed in gravel with a walking-stick, was suddenly aroused.

"Ah," he said; "and this German gentleman is still under the impression that you are Miss Burdon?"

"Yes," answered Miss Britten.

Passavant reflected, with his light blue eyes fixed on a small girl half concealed behind a huge mug of beer.

"Ah! Your boxes are marked with a large B. I noticed it myself. Miss Burdon was expected yesterday, but did not come. She sent a telegram to say that she was detained at Vienna by the illness of her mother."

"Then you know the ambassador?" suggested Miss Britten, who had an exalted idea of the diplomatic service.

"I am his domestic chaplain," returned Algernon Augustus Passavant with solemnity. "It is my privilege to comfort his last moments."

Miss Britten laughed, and then looked grave again.

"Is he so very ill?"

"Very," answered Passavant, abstractedly.

"But why is his health so important?" inquired Miss Britten, who was intelligent and, therefore, inquisitive. "No one speaks of anything else—all Europe seems to have its attention fixed on Zell-am-Zee."

"Ah, that is a long story. But who has displayed this enormous interest in Lord Burdon's life—your German friend, I suppose."

"Well, yes; he made inquiries."

"Hm—yes. A man with a mild gray eye and a beautiful crop of hair—speaks English well?"

"Yes, that describes him."

Passavant nodded his head with an air of abstraction which had frequently been accounted to him for foolishness. Miss Britten looked at him with shrewd, calculating eyes, such as one would expect in a girl who is cleverer than her parents and kindly tolerant of their ignorance of the world.

"Do you know this Miss Burdon—but, of course, you do?" she said.

"She is my cousin."

"Then Lord Burdon is your uncle?"

"Precisely, and my badge of respectability. He has made me—well, what you see—irreproachable. He sort of adopted me years ago, when I was a youth—in the mahogany age, early Victorian, you know."

In a Moment the German Gentleman Who Had Been So Affable on Every Occasion Came Stumbling Out Into the Brilliantly Lighted Room.

He sighed, and dusted the toe of his narrow boot with his glove.

"Is Lord Burdon such a very important person?" asked Miss Britten.

"Next to myself, he is at once the hope and despair of Europe. He knows so much to the discredit of his neighbor—the surest means to success."

Passavant rose.

"We are observed," he said, "by the lady who travels wtih you. What is her name—Smale, is it not? I hope she is not a relation. She has been watching us from her bedroom window for some time, and now, having pinned her veil around her hat—ought she not to wear bonnets at her time of life?—she is coming down to interrupt. She thinks I am not respectable—probably because I wear patent leather shoes. Will you tell her I do it in order to save the expense of rewarding the hotel boots? Tell her I have a real lord for an uncle, and teach in the Sunday school attached to the British embassy at Vienna. Tell her I am respectable, Miss Britten. And if you will allow me to suggest it, you might let the German gentleman continue to think you are Miss Burdon. It may be amusing, and don't let him get into conversation with Miss Smale. Here she comes. She is surprised and hurt to see you talking to a young man—she belongs to that period."

"What is Miss Burdon's Christian name, and what are her tastes?" asked Miss Britten, with her energetic laugh.

"Alice; musical," he answered, and wandered away beneath the lilac trees.

During the next two days Europe continued, as Miss Britten had jestingly said, to watch Zell-am-Zee. Lord Burdon's illness was, in fact, most ill-timed. A conference of the powers had been summoned to meet at Vienna for the purpose of amicably dividing a territory as large as the British isles.

"It is to be a raffle," explained Passavant to Miss Britten in a moment of expansion—"a sort of lucky bag; but Lord Burdon tied up the packages, so they want to keep his hand out of the bag if possible."

The representatives of certain other countries were at this time endeavoring to exclude Lord Burdon from the conference by the simple means of refusing to delay their sitting any longer. They were so kind as to name another noble lord as a suitable substitute for the sick man—said noble lord being well known for the length of his descent and the shortness of his comprehension. In the meantime the representatives exchanged formal calls at Vienna and displayed an astonishing amount of brotherly love. A German newspaper, however, with singularly little tact, suddenly blurted out its opinion that Lord Burdon's illness was a ruse to gain time, and that England expected important dispatches by a certain steamer which could not reach Southampton before the end of the week. The writer of the article thought it likely that his lordship would be better on Monday.

Passavant smiled as he read this journal, and then wrote out a bulletin which he posted to Vienna. There are crossroads in a man's career where it is woefully easy to take the wrong turning, and Passavant had awaited his promotion through long, uneventful years. He had improved upon his slight acquaintance with Miss Britten and sat next to her at table d'hote. Miss Smale, whose watchfulness over her neighbor's morals were frequently interrupted by a poignant anxiety respecting her own health, was fortunately stung by a wasp at this time, and retired to her own apartment. The wasp, it appears, stung her on the nose while she was eating its peach.

"It was certain to happen sooner or later," commented Passavant; "she eats peaches all day."

There were, however, other ladies who were duly scandalized at this time by the behavior of Mr. Passavant and Miss Britten.

"He is only amusing himself with her," said some.

"She is making a fool of him," laughed the rest. And the German gentleman, who was always endeavoring to get speech with Miss Britten, and was invariably frustrated just in time by Passavant, scowled over his soup spoon with such ardor that he spilt more potage-a-la-jardiniere than usual.

"Tell them," said Passavant to Miss Britten one evening, "that Lord Burdon is better and probably will take the air in a bathchair tomorrow. His lordship would like you to walk by the side of the chair."

The next day Passavant's servant and Lord Burdon's confidential valet took Lord Burdon out for a solemn promenade in the sun, with the hood of the lined chair drawn over him to protect his ancient head from the heat of the day. Miss Britten walked by the side of the chair and stooped to arrange the patient's cushions from time to time with a most touching filial devotion.

The newspapers of Europe, and more especially those of Germany, took due note of these facts. They reported that Lord Burdon, attended by his devoted daughter, Miss Alice Burdon, was now convalescent at Zell-am-Zee. His lordship had, however, been forbidden to attend to his official duties, and did not even receive his usual correspondence. Under these circumstances it was now certain that England would not be represented at the international conference by her ambassador to the court of Austria. And the joy of the journals was but ill concealed.

The affable gentleman who had accosted Miss Britten continued to enjoy the incomparable views obtained on the surrounding mountains, and in order to lose nothing of their beauty carried a pair of field glasses slung across his shoulders with all the dash of a city clerk at a suburban race meeting. He was in the habit of sitting for hours on the vineclad slopes above the village, looking down through his binoculars at the Grand hotel and its shady garden. Passavant, from his window in the bedroom adjoining Lord Burdon's private salon, looked up frequently and saw the German gentleman concealed like that small man Zaccheus among the treetops.

Thus the week drew toward its close, and the great and good journals contradicted each other daily, while a certain steamer pounded up the channel, and a brown-faced little man sat in one of its deck cabins writing out vast reports on colonial office stationery, and cursing between times the slowness of the engines. Then it was decided by the powers that the conference could no longer be delayed, but must take place on the following Monday, Lord Burdon or no Lord Burdon. And "Ignotus" and "Paterfamilias" and "True Briton" wrote to the Times, naming substitutes who were either impossible, absent or dead. And Algernon Passavant sat gravely and wrote bulletins for the newspapers.

"All lies," comments Miss Britten one day. They had grown singularly familiar, as people do who possess in common some knowledge desired of others.

"Jeux de mots, we call them," replied Passavant, with his boyish smile.

It was on the Saturday night that the small comedy for the moment threatened to turn to drama. It was, in fact, after 10 o'clock that Miss Britten sought Passavant where he sat under the lilac trees smoking. For a moment he looked surprised, then noted that her face was white.

"What is it?" he asked, curtly.

"There is some one unscrewing the lock on the door of communication between my room and the next," answered she unsteadily. However modern, however energetic and practical and scornful of mother and grandmother the twentieth-century young persons may be, they will still be hampered by a wholesome feminine fear of something or other—of a burglar, for instance, or a mouse, or the hereafter.

"But there is a bolt," said Passavant, with apparent heartlessness.

"It has been drawn back."

"And you did not dare to push it forward again?"

"No," confessed Miss Britten.

"I am glad of that. I feared that you were afraid of nothing. Have you the key of your salon?"

She looked at him. The moonlight filtering through the trees showed his face to be as bland and pleasant as usual. She handed him the key.

"If I may suggest that you go to Miss Smale's room for a moment," he said, as they walked toward the house together, "just to see how the sting on her nose is progressing. Give me ten minutes."

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"The room next to yours is Lord Burdon's salon. Some one has got locked in there by mistake, Miss Britten. A man of resource—he is unscrewing the lock in order to effect his escape through the neighboring salon, which he can see through the keyhole is deserted. You probably never go in there at night?"

"Never. I forgot something this evening and went to get it. What are you going to do?"

She repeated the question rather anxiously, and Passavant, noting the tone of her voice, paused for a moment, looking up to the moon with a mildly speculative eye.

"Mine are the ways of peace," he said.

"But it is useless to run risks," said Miss Britten, angrily. 'Send the hotel porter."

"No; this is a delicate matter."

And Passavant laughed softly.

"Theft," muttered Miss Britten, with a deep scorn.

"They call it journalism," explained Passavant. He ran swiftly and silently upstairs, and Miss Britten followed him.

She saw Passavant take the key of Lord Burdon's private salon from his pocket and open the door of that mystic apartment. She heard the click of the electric light button, and was on the threshold of the room before the light leaped into life. She saw a dark form vanish into the room beyond—her own private salon, where Passavant immediately followed into the darkness, unarmed. She had time to think that he was brave, at all events, as she closed the door behind her and stood with her back against it. There came from the room the sound of hurrying feet and owerthrown furniture. In a moment the German gentleman who had been so affable on every occasion came stumbling out into the brilliantly lighted room. His face fell when he saw the closed door with Lilian Britten standing before it. He turned on his heel—another closed door with Passavant in front of it. For a moment there was a distressed, ratlike look behind the gold eyeglasses.

"Ah," said the journalist.

"Yes," answered Passavant, "caught."

The man looked from one to the other and bit his lip. The cruel electric light shone down on his twitching gray face.

"But I will let you go," said Passavant, almost kindly, "because it suits my purpose. You have suited my purpost most excellently all along."

"Ah, yes," said the journalist, with a sickly smile. "You think yourself very clever—you and Miss Burdon."

"There is no Miss Burdon in this hotel. There never has been," said Passavant.

The German shrugged his shoulders and looked at Miss Britten, who had flushed suddenly. He was about to say something, and had a spiteful air.

"Be careful," said Passavant, sharply, and the other changed his mind.

"However," the German said, carelessly, "Lord Burdon is ill in that room, so your purpose is frustrated."

"Pardon me. Lord Burdon is now traveling from Southampton to Vienna, where he will arrive on Monday morning, in time to attend the international conference."

"But I saw him taking the air in his bathchair."

"Myself," explained Passavant, suavely; "I am not strong." He paused and gave the conventional chest cough. "And Miss Britten was kind enough to speak to me in my—perambulator. You cannot have seen very plainly through your field glasses from the hillside."

"And the conference was delayed——"

"By me," explained Passavant, blandly.

"I only issued bulletins of his lordship's health on receipt of my daily telegram from him in England. You supposed the rest—the local color, I think you call it. Burdon was really very unwell—but not too ill to travel, you understand."

"You are very clever," muttered the journalist, sarcastically.

Passavant bowed.

"Considering that these rifled drawers and disheveled bureaus do not look well, I would suggest that you take from your room such light luggage as you may require, and—er—are called suddenly away. I will put this room tidy before the hotel servants see it."

He went toward the door, from which Miss Britten now stood aside, and opened it. The German passed out, and Passavant followed him.

"By the way," he said, at the head of the stairs, with his sudden smile, "shall we agree to forget this little affair? After all, it was with both of us merely a matter of business. He held out his hand. The German looked at it, and then took the thin fingers in his great grasp, swallowing some obstruction in his throat the while. They both turned at the rustle of a dress and saw Miss Britten pass upstairs to her room.

It being Sunday, the beer garden was fuller than usual the next day, and Miss Smale read at her open window a book which could only have been devotional, so stiff was her attitude. She was obviously conscious of putting to shame the whole beer-drinking Austrian nation. Miss Britten, with the intelligent and inquiring enterprise of her generation, attended a Roman Catholic service in the little church near the lake. It was glaringly hot, and there are few warmer spots in Europe than Zell-am-Zee. Miss Britten retired to her own room after luncheon, and Algernon Augustus Passavant smoked cigarettes gloominly on the venanda.

After the table d'hote, which Miss Smale attended under visible compulsion and with a protestant appetite, the visitors sought the garden. Passavant took a walking-stick, called his dog, and set off rather ostentationsly for a walk. He turned back, however, before he had been gone ten minutes, and rather neatly caught Miss Britten in her favorite chair under the lilac tree nearest to the lake. Night was just falling, and a full moon sailing amid fleecy clouds cast a silver shaft across the lake to the very wall of the hotel garden. Passavant brought a chair, picked up in passing, and sat quietly down beside Miss Britten, which set more than one head to wag. Miss Britten had a book in her hand, but it was now too dark to read. She, however, after a side glance at her companion, opened the volume and fixed her eyes upon the page.

"Miss Britten."

"Yes," answered that young lady, without any encouragement in her voice. If Passavant had made a jest then—even a mild one—she would have hated him. But Passavant was not inclined to be humorous at that moment.

"I go to Vienna tomorrow morning," he said.

"Oh!"

"At five-thirty."

"Indeed!"

"And I am glad to have this opportunity of thanking you for your assistance. We—we tricked Europe, and that is not so easily done as one would imagine. This success may make a difference to my unimportant career."

She was sitting a little in front of him, and was conscious of his steady gaze. He spoke lightly, but there was a ring of anxiety in his voice.

"I was honest with you at any rate," he added, bluntly. "And I have done something that I have never done before."

"Indeed!"

"Yes—I have fallen in love, Miss Britten," and Passavant caught his breath Miss Britten liked him for it. She looked over her book acros sthe moonlit water shimmering at their feet. Not only did she detect the little catch of breath, but also a note in Passavant's voice which suddenly opened up a new world to her—a world which had hitherto been shut off, and around which she had bicycled, and ridden, and danced, and otherwise traveled vainly all her life.

"I am 31," he went on, "and too old to change my mind now. But I am deadly poor, Miss Britten."

She turned, looked at him slowly, and gave a queer little laugh which suddenly threw open the gates of Eden for Algernon Augustus Passavant.

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EVERYTHING ELSE.

(Chicago Tribune.)

The vessel rolled and pitched in the rough sea.

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