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BECAUSE OF LOVE, A NEPHEW OF SIR

MICHAEL HICKS-BEACH IS A SCENE-SHIFTER IN A BAKERSFIELD THEATRE



CAPT. WM. HICKS-BEACH

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INJURED WHILE FOXHUNTING



FIGHTING THE BOERS

A NEPHEW of the Right Hon. Sir Michael Edward Hicks-Beach, Bart., M. P., D. C. L., Chancellor of the Exchequer, is driving a hack in Bakersfield—olty, dusty Bakersfield.

That might not be so much, either, for rich uncles are given to delight in the sight of poverty stricken nephews, with their noses on the grindstone; but it happens that this particular nephew is heir to a 15,000-acre estate in the shire of Gloucester, England.

Not only does he drive a hack, but he puts in part of his time as a handy man around the theater, shifting scenery and making himself useful in the many endless ways that are expected of assistants behind the scenes. Yet he is no more of the place than a hermit would be. His body is there, but his heart is far away. Across the sea, not far from the banks of the Severn, there is a girl that is waiting.

More than that—there are two queenly, beautiful English girls in Gloucester who would marry him.

Still he drives the hack in Bakersfield.

The Right Hon. Sir Michael Edward is not to be blamed in this case, either, though he is an uncle, for William Hicks-Beach of olty Bakersfield has letters of pleasant temper from the august member of the British Cabinet and from his wife, the Lady Lucy Catherine, daughter of Earl Portesque, whose crest is a tiger "stavant."

And speaking of tigers, not irrelevantly in this case, brings in the idea that the question of the lady or the tiger is dead easy, but when it comes to two ladies, foolish is the man who does not rather risk the tiger.

The Chinese character which means trouble is a composite of the characters meaning a man and two women.

That's trouble for you.

Trouble, too, for William Hicks-Beach, not always of Bakersfield.

He wanted to marry one; his mother would that he married the other. Of one he will not speak—the one that he would marry. Her name is sacred with him. Of the other he will only say that, while wealthy and of high social position, she had no charms for him, as no woman should have for the true lover of another.

William Hicks-Beach, for the present of Bakersfield, is the eldest son of William Frederick Hicks-Beach of Gloucester, England, from whom he will inherit upon that gentleman's death 15,000 acres of land, with the shorthorns and cots-wolds on the downs and the red deer that run through park and forest.

Think you that his mouth sometimes waters for the famous double Gloucester cheese, the saddles of mutton and haunches of venison that load the paternal board at home, while he subsists on the standard California diet of pork and pancakes in olty Bakersfield?

Not so, friend, for he is one of those strange animals, a lover, and, like the whole tribe of them, enjoys doing the queerest of things to make men yawn.

After all, is it so bad to ride around on a hack and think that back there in Merrie England—good, green, healthy, wealthy England—there is waiting for you a girl and a fortune?

Would that we were all as lucky!

Hicks-Beach is 33 years old, a graduate of the Charterhouse School, Surrey, a captain in the English army and was a member of one of Rhodes' irregular companies which did so much skirmish fighting with the Boers before the present war broke out.

He is a man of talent and culture, and he is here. Why? Simply to be at the end of the world.

He cannot have the girl that he loves,

and if he cannot do that he will do the next best thing, which is to get as far away from her as possible. That is a way that lovers have. They are a trifle repouy and inclined to make things as hard for themselves as they know how if they cannot have all their own way.

There is another reason perhaps for some of his slight eccentricities.

Shortly after leaving school he was indulging in the national sport of fox hunt-

ing, and while racing across the wold he met the young lady who was his fate (nameless here forevermore), but his mother had other plans for him.

Sir Michael Edward, his uncle, had married the daughter of a hundred earls, it is true but the daughter of three earls, and why should not he make a match which would more closely cement the wealthy Hicks-Beaches of Gloucester to England's nobility?

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and more.

There is the wonderful power of love working at its strongest. Is it a disease? Almost would we believe that the cynic who said so was right, for it is a strange malady of the mind that drives one so far from the path of reason and natural human tendency.

The desire to become a recluse as far as concerned the life he had known led the lover to studying accounts of far-away lands. In a newspaper advertisement of a land company he saw a description of

Bakersfield which appealed to him, and there he went.

Let's his lands, left his family, left his lady love. Arriving at Bakersfield, he became acquainted with the proprietor of an opera-house in course of construction. A fancy struck him that nothing could be more of a change and diversion than life around the stage. He asked for the position of watchman that he might always have the entrance of the place, and of all lonely places for a lone lover a deserted theater is the loneliest. A dead tree in a forest is a wild enough setting for the scene of Merlin and Vivien, but a stage scenery tree, stowed away in the wings, with the auditorium stretching away in the darkness dim and vast, is far more weird.

No owls hoot in the mimic forest, but as the rope hung scenery swings in the winds that always will pervade a stage the tackle gives strange creaks and swishes that make the eyes bulge and the heart halt as do children's when the ghost is about to appear in a thrilling story.

Under the stage is a room which answers well for the hermit's cave, and here he can muse upon what has been and wonder what is yet to be. Waiting, waiting for death to steal to Merrie England. Waiting for the wires to flash their message over mountain and under sea to tell him that a cold, stiff form has been laid in state in the family chapel and no longer bars his way to love and fortune.

This gloomy room beneath the dusty boards is what he calls home—if it is permissible for a wanderer to call any place such. His meals he takes where he happens to fancy. At times he lends a hand with the scene-shifting, and chuckles to think that if the audience knew what and who he was they would have more eyes for him than for the well-filled pink tights that fit and twinkle before the footlights.

But the living, wakeful moments of even a metropolitan theater are few enough and far enough between to allow much just to settle, and the opera-house at Bakersfield is a grand place for a man who would withdraw from the world and think. Love likes to live in the past, and so it is that some one has laughingly said of the poets that their feet were turned backward, their toes pointing out behind them as though they would stray back into times gone by, of which they write. Thus, too, the lover is never less alone than when alone, for then he can in thought be all with her who fills his mind.

And of the girl herself.

Does she write?

Is she waiting for him all these long years when he is so far away?

And the misanthrope will ask, is it all worth the while? The years of privation, of heart-hunger, that even wears the body thin and ages it before its time. Is the fever worth the having? Is it not better to be a fat, comfortable, well-fed somebody than a lvelorn, listless waiting nobody, shot through again and again each day by the arrows of the blind archer, who never has the courage to kill his victims, but plans his mercies as the kind-hearted surgeon who amputated the patient's limb an inch at a time.

Is love worth while? is a question that William Hicks-Beach must be better able to answer than most, for he is a man who can feel keenly and live without forgetting. He has seen himself rapidly aging; his mother has been laid in her grave unseen by him. He has never heard words of forgiveness from her lips—never can. He is waiting for a father to die—a father who will be all the more to him when he is gone. He is dying himself. All his youth is dying away from him, leaving him a shell—mentally and physically a shell. And what for? For the difference between one girl and another. A difference that the scales would not tell. A difference that the keenest analyst in chemical research could not observe. A difference that the camera, which holds the fleeting shadows, might show to be in favor of a thousand, ten thousand others, who would be glad to have this man of wealth and family.

Yet for the difference between that one girl and the others he will hold time, family and even the best part of himself well lost if she is won.

And so would any of us.



MEHRZIEL