

Serving Cuthbert Right!



by Leonard Merrick

Leonard Merrick is regarded by many of the world's leading critics as the best narrator living. J. M. Barrie says that to him a new novel by this author is one of the events of the year.

Copyright, 1912, by Mitchell Kennerly. THE financier was cracking walnuts when the curate arrived.

"Hallo, boy!" he said. "Why didn't you come to dinner?"

"How do you do, Uncle Murray? Oh, it was impossible to come in time for dinner. I had a meeting at 6 o'clock—and it's a long way from Plaistow to Park Lane. Are you quite well?"

"Pretty fit," said Murray Pybus. "Glad to see you again. I was going to drop you a line. I go to New York next month. Help yourself to port."

"Thank you, I don't drink wine," said Cuthbert, a shade reproachfully. "I forgot," said Pybus. "Cigar? But you don't smoke, either! Well, take an armchair; make yourself comfortable. How's Plaistow?"

The curate cleared his throat. "I was anxious to have a talk with you, Uncle Murray, on a very important subject."

"So you wrote me. Well, I know your important subjects; you needn't go into details; of course it's a bona fide case. How much do you want?"

"Frankly, I am nervous," faltered his nephew.

"Better try the port," counselled Pybus. "No? All right; stick to your colors, even if they're a blue ribbon."

"You have always been so generous,—more than generous. Your subscriptions, and—and your proposals as regards myself, though I couldn't

"I thought—at least I hoped"—said Cuthbert stiffly, "that I had made my principles clear to you long ago. I have no desire for a 'snug berth,' I told you so when the call came to me. My object in taking orders was never to attain material comforts; if I had sought worldly advantages I should have embraced a commercial career instead. I choose to labor among those who need my poor help the most; and I choose to be in truth their brother—not to hold myself aloof from them, a preceptor in a pleasure."

"Oh, very proper, very high minded!" said the financier hurriedly; "a reputation for conscientiousness, of course, is a valuable asset. Have it your own way, my lad. If I'm not to do anything for you in my lifetime well say no more about it."

"As a matter of fact," he stammered, "my reason for wishing to see you was to beg you to do something for me. My principles are quite unchanged; I still mean to work among the poor; I'm still resolved to abstain from living among them luxuriously, but—well, circumstances have arisen which—er—Perhaps I had better tell you everything as it happened."

"Best way," said Pybus, repressing a groan.

"I was rather seriously unwell some weeks ago and my vicar induced me to take a brief holiday. He is always most considerate."

"Any family at the vicarage?"

"Family? There are his three daughters."

"Ah," murmured the millionaire. "Yes, he would consider you attentively. Go on."

"Some quiet seaside place was preferable, and I went to Eastbourne."

"Eastbourne isn't quiet, it's only depressing—swarms with dogs and steamrollers."

"Well, my lodgings were not cheerful and the weather was unpropitious, so altogether—"

"You got the hump?"

"I was—er—rather—yes. One evening, as it was too wet to take a walk, I attended a performance of 'A Crown of Thorns.' Of course, I had heard about it—I knew that it had been approved by organs of the press that don't mention such things as a rule—but I confess that it amazed me. I found its religious teaching quite as admirable as the historical instruction it afforded—the insight into the life of ancient Rome. It was practically my first visit to a theatre and a most memorable experience. Perhaps you know the play?"

"Girl holds up a cross in the limelight and the lions are afraid to eat her?"

"No, sir, there are no lions. There are lions in the pictorial advertisements of the play, but they're not actually visible on the stage. It isn't too much to say that I was overwhelmed. I was ashamed of the unreasoning prejudice I had always entertained against theatrical performances."

"You haven't come to ask me to endorse a theatre, I hope?" put in the millionaire genially.

"Oh, indeed, not at all, sir—the idea had not presented itself to me. Hear me out. The part of the heroine was

taken by a lady who possessed such spiritual fervor that, at first, I regretted her choice of a career. How true it is that prejudice dies hard! I grieved—it was narrow of me—that she was not devoting herself to the propagation of faith among the heathen of our own time, instead of to the mimic—er—I mean that it seemed to me she was wasting her precious gifts, that she ought to have been a missionary."

"I quite follow you," said Pybus dryly.

"I did not recognize the truth at once; but then it came to me—I understood! As I looked around at the eyes wet with tears I saw that the stage may make for good as powerfully as the pulpit; I saw that this beautiful girl, uttering the grace that was in her to hundreds nightly—I don't know if I mentioned that she has been favored with remarkable beauty—was stirring the minds of mere pleasure-seekers to the contemplation of higher things; I saw that she was working in the same cause as myself."

"Great Scott, boy, you've fallen in love with an actress!" exclaimed Pybus.

"So that's it?"

"Later I certainly learned to love her," replied the curate with dignity, "though I don't perceive by what process you have arrived at the fact. I had the happiness to meet her the next afternoon—in the waiting-room at a dentist's—and the passing of a magazine led to conversation."

"Did you tell her that you thought she ought to have been a missionary?"

"I believe I did say something of my earlier regret, and she agreed with me that she was doing equally exalted work on the stage. Perhaps my enlightenment may be partly due to that conversation; her thoughts on the subject were very beautiful. One answer that she made impressed me deeply. 'Religion and art,' she said, 'are in reality the same thing.' . . . Without the context it is not so forcible, but when she said it, it was a perfect expression of what we meant, it was most illuminative!"

"How much have you been muddling yourself up with this girl?" asked the financier curtly.

"I say how far has it gone? What happened after she illuminated the dentist's?"

"I saw no reason for reticence. I trust you have not formed a poor opinion of a lady whom you have never seen?"

"Not at all; I should have a poor opinion of her if she'd refuse you under the circumstances. But you're making yourself ridiculous. You've lost your head over an actress; you've taken a queer, clerical way about it, but you've lost your head over an actress. It won't do, Cuthbert, the thing's absurd!"

Cuthbert had turned very pale. "I'm sorry to find you so unjust," he groaned. "I had hoped, in view of the many offers you have so kindly made me, that you'd be willing to—to further my happiness. Marriage upon my stipend is impossible, as you know. I trusted to your affection to—to—Why, you've pressed me to take an allowance over and over again!"

"Look here, boy, exclaimed Pybus, "I'm going to talk straight to you! You're the nearest relative I've got, and though you were never the sort I was keen on leaving a million to, I knew you'd waste it in a creditable and conscientious kind of way. Also

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"We met often after the dentist's—on the Parade. We used to listen to the town crier together; she found a towns crier so quaint; anything that savors of a bygone age appeals to her strongly. Fortunately, too, the company was going to London—to various theatres in the suburbs—so I was able to see her when I returned, and—and she has consented to be my wife."

"You told her you were my nephew, eh—my heir?"

"I cannot lose you," he cried. "I cannot! We might—no, it's out of the question. What's to be done? Angela, I almost lose faith!"

"Hush," she murmured, looking upward; "it may be all for the best, dear—it must be—though it is hard for us to understand it. . . . Do you think he would relent when we were married?"

"I fear not—he would never know you. If he'd let me take you to him we should succeed. I'm sure—your intelligence and beauty would win him over, though he wouldn't appreciate your soul—but he declined to see you."

"It's a pity I can't be introduced to him as somebody else—go there as a hospital nurse or something. Then when I'd got around him and he was very grateful to me I could say, 'My name is Angela Noble—I love your nephew!'"

"It is a sweet idea. But his health is robust, and, besides, he goes abroad very soon."

"That's what I shall have to do," she said moodily.

"You?"

"If we don't marry I must take the engagement for New York; you know I have the offer open—I shall have to close with it."

"New York!" cried Cuthbert. "I hoped you had dismissed the notion. He was meditative. 'Angela, I have a daring thought! I will not fail!'"

Pybus was considerably surprised a day or two later at receiving a pleasant letter from the young man wishing him an agreeable voyage and inquiring by what boat he was to cross; he was considerably irritated at receiving a second letter reminding him of his permission to ask reasonable favors. A lady of the curate's acquaintance was "departing for America, unprotected, by that very vessel." Any act of courtesy that Mr. Pybus would kindly show to the friendless lady his affectionate nephew would much appreciate. It was added tactfully that, her means precluding speculation, no fear need be entertained of her angling for tips.

Pybus swore and dictated a gracious note.

And the boat sailed.

Miss Noble unpacked her cabin trunk with the painful consciousness that steamers travelled fast. When she had made the chance remark that inspired her love, she had been thinking vaguely of a sickroom and plenty of time for womanly gentleness to be admired. "Between Acts II. and III. a month elapses." An Atlantic racer was alarmingly different.

And the uncle was more discouraging still. Every uncle that she had ever known refusing his consent had a white mustache and side whiskers and was slightly bowed with age and cynicism. Here was a hale and hearty uncle, carelessly good-humored. Such a person seemed less likely to break up into slushy sentiment than the icest cynic that ever sneered. The report that reached Plaistow from Queenstown was not a sanguine one. "There's just this in our favor," she had scribbled; "he has no suspicion who I am and he can't escape me without jumping overboard. You may bet—bet" had been imperfectly erased—"feel sure I shall do as much in the time as I can. Dear"—Cuthbert kissed the ship's stationery with enthusiasm.

She was a bright girl—she hasn't been seen to advantage with the curate—and she was working for by far the most profitable engagement of her career; before the play sweepstake on the run she began to play her part in



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Angela Noble, Actress.

accept them, were"—

"Natural enough! You'll have to leave the lot one day—I've nobody else to leave it to, and I'm not the man to marry again." He laughed. "It'll be a funny position, eh—an East End curate, blooming into a millionaire? You're a queer fish, Cuthbert! I don't say any more about your not coming into the city—you weren't cut out for it—but what do you want to starve in the slums for? If the church was the only thing to suit you, you might as well have had a snug berth in it."

"I am prepared," said the curate resignedly, "to suffer humiliation if need be."

"Oh, well, I don't want to hurt your feelings. But—er—well, she would! I know what actresses are like."

"But you don't know her. If you would talk to her once she would convert you; you would own you were wrong. My life's happiness is at stake. Before you decide, let me bring her to see you. Surely it is no more than fair?"

Pybus picked up the evening papers. "It's no good going on with it; that's all I've got to say!"

He opened the Pall Mall.

"Good night, sir," quavered the curate, extending a hopeless hand.

"Good night, boy," said the financier cordially. "Whenever you want anything in reason let me know."

Cuthbert took a bus to Victoria and arrived at the Shakespeare, Clapham, in ample time. It was still embarrassing to him to loiter at a stage door; but a man is justified in meeting his fiancée anywhere. He endeavored to assert this by his bearing when loafers stared at him. Nobody was ever quite so high-minded as Cuthbert tried to look when he waited at stage doors.

"My own, I have failed," he told her as they walked to Clapham Junction.

The hand on his arm trembled. "What did he say?"

"He was obtuse; he refused point blank. Why should I pain you by repeating the insults I had to bear?"

"Just because I am an actress!" exclaimed the girl pathetically. "Oh, what we have to put up with, we artists; how uncharitable they are to us! . . . Then it's all over between you and me?"

He winced. But tears were swimming in her lovely eyes; it would have been heartless to mention grammar.

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quite another manner than the one she had mentally rehearsed. The spiritual note that Cuthbert had expected of her—to go on being the heroine of "A Crown of Thorns" after the curtain was down—wouldn't catch on here at all, she decided; there was no hit to be made on those lines. Admiration, a wide-eyed homage of the financier's cleverness? Probably all the women he met looked at him like that—it had been played out long ago. The smartest thing would be to treat the middle-aged magnate as if he were an amusing young man.

She did it. It was much easier than being soulful, much less fatiguing. She laughed, she chaffed, she even flirted with him a little. Pybus, who had been prepared to find her a consummate nuisance, hadn't been on such good terms with himself for years.

The day before they sighted Sandy Hook he said: "I hope I shall see something of you after we land? Are you staying in New York long?"

"I—hardly know," she answered. "It depends." It depended how he took it when she sprung the truth on him directly; she felt less self-possessed than usual.

"Anyhow, there's my address. If there's anything I can do I shall be glad."

"That's very kind of you! I wonder how much you mean it?" She flashed a glance. "I might ask for something big."

"Ah, I didn't pledge myself to do anything you asked; I said I'd be glad to do anything I could."

"Cautious person!" They were pacing the deck and they walked in silence for a minute. She was wondering if it would be discreet to delay her confession till they had arrived.

"You're nery to-day," said Pybus. "You look as if you were going to say you had a headache. It's just the moment for a glass of champagne and a cracker. Let's go below, and get them."

"I don't think I care about it, thanks; but you're quite right—I'm nery. I want to tell you something. Shall we sit down?"

They sat down and again there was silence.

"Well?" he questioned.

"I don't know how to begin."

"Let me help you," suggested Pybus. "Pull me up if I'm wrong. You are an actress; my nephew Cuthbert thinks he is in love with you; and you came aboard in the hope of persuading me to agree to your marriage. Whether you were going to New York anyhow, I don't know; I trust you were, for I should be sorry to have put you to so much inconvenience. Now the beginning is over—proceed!"

Miss Noble had uttered a faint exclamation of astonishment; she stared blankly at the sea.

"You seem surprised," he said. "That isn't flattering to my intelligence. Cuthbert's circle of pretty women is strictly limited, I take it—any doubt that I had of your identity when I got his letter was removed the moment I saw you."

"Oh, then you do think I'm pretty?" faltered Miss Noble.

"You are not a beauty, but your face is pleasing. I say you threw yourself in my way with the intention of convincing me that you were a much nicer girl than I supposed you to be. Am I correct?"

"Quite correct," said Miss Noble in



"Cuthbert," the Curate.

a low voice. "It was an innocent plot."

"It is the favorite one—it has been in the English magazines every month since I was a child. Well, I am convinced. Don't misunderstand me. I find you brainier, wittier and nicer in every respect; in fact, you are even more calculated than I assumed to spoil his life."

"Mr. Pybus!"

"Keep your temper—it's a reflection on him, not on you. I'll explain. Cuthbert is my heir faute de mieux—which may be translated as 'because I haven't a son, much as I should like one'—and though I've never pretended he was the apple of my eye, I should regret to

see him come to grief. If you were the flabby, photographic sort of young woman to echo his sentiments and make him happy I'd say, 'Take him, with my sympathy—his yours!' You're a hundred per cent. too charming for the marriage to be a success. You've come down to his standard very effectively so far, I admit—it must have given you a lot of trouble—but you couldn't hope to impose on him always; before he had discovered half your attractions they'd break his heart."

"I don't know what to say to you. Then—then you refuse?"

"It's a novelty to see you at a loss. Yes, I refuse unhesitatingly. Among the few certainties of life we may count the fact that you'll never marry Cuthbert with any help from me!"

"For the reason that you've given me?"

"Among others. If I may say so, for the further reason that I don't wish you to be unhappy, either. You'd find him a pill, naturally, and you'd have been bored to death."

"You are despising me!" she exclaimed; "you think I'm a mercenary creature without a heart, who?"

"Don't talk to me as if I were Cuthbert. I don't despise you in the least. You are in a very precarious and overcrowded calling, and you'd have married him for position—as hundreds and thousands of fashionable and wealthy girls would be willing to marry him if I smiled approval—but I know you'd have found him dear at the price. And I have a third reason, though I can assert quite truthfully that the first alone would prevent my consenting. I'd like to marry you myself."

"You?" she gasped.

"Why not? Of course you're not in love with me, but you like me much better than you like him, you can't dispute it. Professionally you are nineteen, I suppose; that's to say you are really about twenty-eight; so I'm two and twenty years older than you are. It's a lump, but I'm lively for my age, and if you go on flirting with me you'll make me feel considerably younger. It'll be rough on Cuthbert, I own—my marrying you will cost him about a million. Still, he won't have you in any case, and a hundred and fifty a year would be a great deal more appropriate. Besides, it's entirely his own fault; he should have taken 'no' for an answer when he came to see me, and then I should never have met you. Think it over. If you regard me as a fairly young man, you needn't hesitate; and if you don't, remember that there's no fool like an old one—that you'll have a very good time."

"You couldn't respect me," murmured Miss Noble. "You'd feel that I was only marrying the money—that the man didn't matter."

"I am not without some natural vanity, I assure you. Come, which do you feel more at home with, him or me?"

"You," admitted Miss Noble softly.

"That settles it!" said Pybus. "We'll get Tiffany's to send around some engagement rings in the morning."

A Tragedy of the Alps.

THERE is a regrettable modern tendency to disrespect the difficulties of some of the great Alps, especially those whose ascents have appealed to popular favor. The Wetterhorn, or Storm Peak, that huge rock-embattlemented sentinel of the Grindelwald giants, is the most notorious example of this," writes Mr. George D. Abraham in the Pall Mall Magazine; "truly even on mountains 'familiarity breeds contempt.' It has been lightly named 'The Ladies' Peak,' but with far too terrible frequency a fearful revenge has been extorted; its death roll is equalled by few of the Alps."

"The following tragedy of 1908 is typical of many others. A young English lady, aided by the best of guides, made one of the earliest ascents of the season, and innocently left a silken handkerchief fluttering in the summit breezes. This was noticed through the large telescope at Grindelwald, and a Swiss workman, roused by the sight, waded forthwith that he would bring down the trophy single handed. He won the wager, but lost his life in the winning. Common sense prevailed to the extent of his taking a companion as inexperienced as himself, and Fortune smiled upon them until they almost reached the foot of the Great Couloir on their return. There the young workman untied from the rope and, waving the trophy of success in his hand, started to glissade direct down the snow slope to the glacier."

"The friend's example and advice to follow the usual descent by the rocks at the side of the couloir were utterly disregarded. At express speed he rushed downward until suddenly he saw the end of the couloir overhanging nothingness, and the glacier some hundreds of feet below. It was too late. With a shriek of warning to his friend he dashed outwards over the edge into space and eternity. In his right hand the unfortunate victim of his own folly clutched the handkerchief; he brought it down to Grindelwald."