The Shipwreck

Miss Benham looked impatiently at the clock. Her last and most favored admirer was twenty minutes late; and being a belle, and somewhat spoilt, she was both irritated and astonished. It was her first winter in New York, and although she had found that Northern men did not take fire as spontaneously as those of the still chivalrous and romantic South, out of which she had emerged for the first time four months since, still they had acknowledged her claims upon the admiration of their sex in general, and she had been the belle of the winter. The women liked her, but criticised her accent; assented unanimously that she was provincial, "in a way," despite the colossal height of her family tree; and confessed themselves quite unable to understand her charm for men. "She is neither beautiful nor amusing, nor has she any style to speak of," they asserted, with some choler. "She dresses well enough, but she would never be taken for a New Yorker—never! And then—why, she is not even larky!"

The men made no attempt to analyze her charm; they merely succumbed, slowly and steadily. When cross-examined they answered somewhat pettishly that of course she was beautiful. Did she not have eyes, and did she not dance like an angel? And was she not the most—well, remarkably interesting to talk to? And her manners—could anything be more perfect than a Southern girl's manners? What if she was thin? Was she not the more graceful and fairy-like to dance with on that account? What more could a man ask? And what if her complexion was rather dark and colorless, and there was a faint black line on the upper lip of a mouth none too small? Men didn't notice those things when a woman was as charming as Cora Benham, and were not particularly grateful for having them pointed out.

If Miss Benham had heard these tart conversations she would have smiled. She was thoroughly acquainted with the secret of her fascination: it was the determination to please. Her father, who had lost only two-thirds of his fortune during the civil war, had gone on keeping open house, and she had seen something of the world from the time she was old enough to toddle about the big parlors. Before she was out of pinafores her mother had said to her more times than she could count: "Forget yourself the moment you are with our guests, and think only of what will please them. And when you are talking to one forget all about the others. Be impersonal, my dear; be impersonal." This is common enough advice in the South, where hospitality is regarded as one of the arts, and it accounts for much of the charm of its women; but Miss Benham was successful to the point of local fame; not only had she that sort of magnetism which emanates from an intense and vivid spirit, but she was at painst to accentuate the racial characteristics. She managed to discover something about every man she expected to meet, and gratified him to the verge of tears during the first ten minutes of their acquaintance. Her eyes when talked into had an expression of rapt concentration that no man had ever seen equaled. She rarely spoke of herself: when pressed she succumbed, but in a manner both reserved and confidential. She had learned to divine what a man most wished to talk about, and she led him straight into those pleasant pastures with a gentle insistence which never degenerated into eagerness. Her mood was ever responsive, which, the fortunate man was made to understand, was the result of his overwhelming personality. She threw back her head and laughed with mellow delight at the feeblest of witticisms and the most flagrant of puns. She flattered deliberately and broadly, but with a separateness that amounted to genius; each donee felt that the man did not live for whom his portion could be duplicated. And yet, so naturally did her gifts and acquirements sit upon her, she was not too insincere; she was, indeed, capable of strong emotion, and of swift indignation at the more contemptible manifestations of human nature; which was, perhaps, no small part of her charm. And as she honestly loved society, and had been born with the desire for the respectful and companionable homage of men, she saw no reason why she should not make a success of her life.

She had met Maynard Bridges toward the end of the winter; he was a very busy man, and went little into society. In spite of strong family connections he was, indeed, more or less of an outsider; for he was the editor of a daily newspaper, and had made his own income since the year he left college. His rise, after the usual apprenticeship in the city room, had been rapid, and for the past ten years he had occupied important editorial positions. He was a club man and reported to be somewhat fast, but he was one of the hardest working and most enthusiastic journalists in New York, nevertheless. He used to say frankly that he was ashamed of the sensational newspaper which paid him the largest salary received by any editor in the metropolis, but he had made a stupendous success of that newspaper on its own lines, and would doubtless have thought anyone mad who suggested that he address a protest to its proprietor; he was philosophical, and, moreover, he was used to it. An intimate friend, who would not have the "Eye" in his house, told him once that if he were induced to accept the editorship of a highly respectable newspaper he would take to drink through sheer ennui in less than a month; and he replied with a laugh that doubtless he should.

He had met Cora Benham at the house of a woman who was not only faithful to her old friends whether they poured riches at the feet of New York society or not, but was grateful for the opportunity of talking, once in a while, to a man of brains. Since the night he had taken the Southern belle in to dinner he had called on her daily, and although she had too much tact to show, in the presence of her other adorers, her decided preference for his society, she managed to be alone when he called. Tonight she had given up a ball for his sake, and she sat opposite the empty doorway with an expression of haughty enquiry.

But when Bridges entered he made no apology. His handsome pallid face was brilliant with eagerness, and even his big frame, made for repose, was manifestly under the control of his nerves. He was often restless, but tonight something seemed on the point of bursting through him. Miss Benham was interested and self-forgetful at once.

"I was afraid something had happened to you," she murmured in her sympathetic voice, which Bridges had told her would soothe a man who had been trying to decide two questions at once all day long. "Take that chair—it is so comfortable. I see that something extraordinary has happened. Do tell me about it—that is, of course, if you care to, and if I could understand it——"

"What couldn't a man talk to you about? and what couldn't you understand? By the way, there is a telephone in this house, isn't there?"

"Aunt has one in the upper hall."

"I was sure of it, or I shouldn't have ventured to come, even to you."

He had thrown himself into the deep chair, but risen again almost immediately, and was rapidly walking up and down the room. His eyes, which usually kindled whenever they met hers, were now fired from within, and barely wandered in her direction; although she showed an abundance of grace and comfort in her low chair by the fire, her sarlet shawl illuminating her dark eager face.

"What is it? I wish I could even guess. Have you had right good news about something? Are you going to be sent abroad as Ambassador? You ought to be——"

"Oh, dear, dear, it is nothing so personal as that; but it is magnificent all the same. That is, if it is true; and our men are pretty reliable. A report has come over the wire that the Blue Star Liner Superbus has gone to pieces just off the Irish coast in a thick snowstorm, and that the few people saved—mostly women—are climbing hand over hand up a perpendicular cliff in their night clothes——"

Miss Benham had sprung to her feet.

"How awful!" she gasped. "How awful! Is there any one on board you know? No wonder you are excited. Oh, I wish I could do something. Delicate women climbing a perpendicular cliff in a storm and at this very moment! How strange and terrible to know of things going on at such a long way off! Do you suppose some one has gone to their assistance—is helping them now"

He strode over to the door, lifted aside the portiere, and listened intently.

"I thought I heard the telephone," he said.

Her brow, which had been puckered with distress, cleared suddenly.

"You said there was just a hope that it might not be true!" she exclaimed.

"Don't suggest such a thing!" cried Bridges. "We haven't had a story like that for months. It's magnificent. What a scene! Cannot you picture it? The wild Irish coast, boats fighting their way through the roaring breakers, those women in their night clothes in a driving snowstorm clinging to that steep bristling cliff—why, there were half a dozen fashionable New York women on board, and one woman of the English peerage that I know of. My God!—forgive me, but it is one of the most striking things we have had for months and months——"

He caught her eye and paused. Her face was white. She was staring at him, and the customary generous measure of sympathy and approval had fled from her expanded eyes.

"Do you mean to say," she said—her breath was labored—"that you are glad, that you exult in that terrible accident, in the agony of those poor delicate women?"

"Of course not, of course not! I would not step on a worm; but so long as it has to be—is actually happening—can't you see? It is all magnificently dramatic. It leaps straight to my news sense and grips it. I am an old warhorse, you know. The scent of big news makes my very nostrils quiver." He laughed. "I believe you are really shocked, you exquisite little Southern girl. You've been brought up on daily editions of weekly papers. Just try to look at it from my point of view."

"I am shocked," she said. She turned her back upon him, and walked over to the fire. "I have neither the ability nor the desire to put myself at your point of view. You seem to have imagination; do you realize that those women are in terrible agony of mind and body, that they are freezing in a snowstorm, and expecting every moment to be their last? You are a heartless brute!"

She brought out her last words with such vehemence that he was at her side in an instant, and the excitement having quite left his face, it looked apprehensive and careworn.

"I am not a brute," he said. "I swear that I am not. If I could hasten those women into safety, I would; and make them forget what they'd gone through, in the bargain; but newspaper men have a sixth sense, which for the time being——"

"You would hurry them to the end of the scene, but you would simply hate to hear that the whole story was a hoax, and that the ship was safely out at sea. Is not that true?"

"Well, yes." He laughed. "I believe it it. I am afraid I am quite demoralized; exciting episodes, which mean big news, are the very breath of life to me. Remember, we are all the result of our conditions. Fate drove me into journalism, and the mere fact that I am the most successful journalist in New York proves that I have developed my news sense a degree higher than any of my rivals. If I were not on fire over this episode I should be second-rate. This is the only defence I can make. I did not anticipate making any. You are so sympathetic—you understand a man by intuition. I have never, in all my forty years of my life, seen anything like it. But of course this is a new world to you, this world of journalism in its extreme modern phase, and you will have to study it out a little. When you have I am sure you will exonerate me; especially when I tell you that I hate it myself as much as I love it; hate it because it is antagonistic to every inherited instinct, and love it, because it has become second nature. And remember that there is one thing better than being supremely good, and that is to be supremely natural. I may not approach the ideal you have cherished in your old-fashioned high-toned South, but at least I am myself. I make no pretensions. Let that plead for me. Remember, also, that the true philosophy of life is to take people as you find them, and not to insist upon their being like somebody else."

He had touched her in a vulnerable spot, and she looked at him with less of resentment. But she shook her head.

"My sympathies may be quick," she said. "I think they are; and I have had only admiration for you heretofore; but, as you say, I must study this out. And I cannot begin my course until I know that the poor creatures hanging to that cliff are safe."

"I'll return to the office at once, and telephone you as the news comes in. There is no use for me to say any more now, and—I shall not come here again until you send for me. I simply cannot face that change in your eyes. They look like flint, and usually * * * Well, you have succeeded in blunting my news sense for once; I have practically forgotten the office for the last ten minutes. I must go now. Good-night."

"Good-night." But she did not turn her head again, nor hold out her hand.

II.

The messages which traveled between the editorial rooms of the "New York Eye" and Murray Hill that night were very unsatisfactory, and the startling headlines of the great daily merely asserted next morning that the ladies were still climbing the cliff. However, at 10 o'clock, Mr. Bridges' deputy was able to assure Miss Benham that all who had escaped from the ship had reached level ground and were being properly cared for.

When Cora recovered from the shock and the suspense, she unlocked her top drawer, and took out a miniature bookcase containing some twenty tiny volumes. Each volume was inscribed with the name of an ornament to the sex which did her homage, and the leaves were covered with written characters. She removed the one inscribed Maynard Bridges, and wrote in it as follows:

"Journalism has developed a sixth sense (yclept news sense) which is undermining civilization while apparently developing it; for its votaries when off guard are neither more nor less than savages. Query: Should a journalist be considered as a serious subject for matrimony, or merely as a specimen, a novelty, interesting pour le temps? I must dispose of this point before I can make up my mind whether I shall see Maynard Bridges again. He both attracted and repelled me from the first, but until last night all my efforts to analyze his peculiar personality were futile. Now, however, I understand; he is simply an abnormal development, a helpless victim of this modern monster, Northern journalism, so unlike all men I have known that I felt his peculiar individuality at once, although outwardly he resembles other men-of-the-world.

"If I had not had this truly hideous revelation, should I have loved and married him? After referring to previous entries I have come to the conclusion that I should; for, despite the repellent force, I was fascinated by his brains, his magnetism, and his delightful manners—which he owes to his Southern blood; his mother was a Maynard. Am I safe now? That is the question. If not, I must go straight home, instead of going to Bar Harbor—for we are to visit at the same houses there! The more I think of it the more I feel sure that I could not marry a man who is dominated by an artificial and revolting instinct; I should feel as if I were living with a sort of modern Frankenstein. Talk about the danger of the international marriage! I feel far more in tune with the many Englishmen I have met than with this specimen of perverted Americanism. There are centuries between the South and the North in its extreme development; instead of the few generations which separate the Old World from the New."

A few dayes later she wrote again:

"I have decided to let matters take their course. As we are leaving town at once I should not see him here again in any case. We shall meet at Bar Harbor, but I am now quite positive that hereafter he will merely interest me as a curiosity."

III.

They met at Bar Harbor in July; and, as both were people of the world, there was nothing in their manner, even when alone, to suggest that a few weeks before they had been on the brink of matrimony. They made no allusion to their former acquaintance, beyond the vague generalities of people possessing common friends; and, although the bay with its bristling porcupines glistened below the terrace, and the roar of the Atlantic rose high on windy nights, the subjects of shipwrecks was avoided by mutual consent. Nevertheless, for Miss Benham to resist flirting with an interesting man would have been as easy as to pinch to death the joie de vivre, and Maynard Bridges was as interesting as ever. In fact he was distinctly the most interesting man at Bar Harbor, particularly—she made this discovery suddenly, a week after his arrival—as he seemed to have forgotten the existence of journalism; she never even caught him reading a newspaper. He talked alone with her in that happy land of liberty, took her in his smart traps for drives along the foot of the mountain and out into the country, and punted her for hours about the bay in a canoe. He smoked on the veranda during dancing hours, but he invariably took her in to supper. He sent to New York for the new books and magazines, beribboned baskets of bonbons, and the choicest flowers of exorbitant hothouses; all of which were offered at the shrine of the Southern belle in the nonchalant manner of the American swain, who knows his duty and has no desire to shirk it. But he never gave her so much as a glance of sentiment.

"I cannot make him out," she announced to the little book inscribed Maynard Bridges. "When I knew him before, he let me see almost at once that he loved me. Now his air is simply: 'You are the most charming girl here, and, moreover, a belle who commands the temporary devotion of any discriminating man.' Or is he playing a deep game? Trying to pique me? Doubtless, as he is giving his 'news sense' a rest, he can concentrate on certain other faculties the more effectually. If he would tear it up by the roots I would marry him tomorrow—at least I think I would; I'm not right positive how I do feel to him. But he said it was second nature, and I am sure he was correct. He is merely taking a much-needed rest, and when he goes back to his work that monster will be fairly gluttonous. He stated the truth; we must take people as we find them—and leave them at the right moment."

One morning they ran their canoe into the cove of a small island and wandered about in the shade. They were quite alone. Mount Desert, which had bustled with gay mroning life when they left it, showed only at this distance the staccato movement of an occasional trap. Sullivan, on their right, with its long solitary street and rugged background, might have been an abandoned village awaiting its poet.

"Just think!" exclaimed Cora, as they sat down in the heavy shade of a tree, "Sullivan is two hundred years old, and has never had a church—a New England village at that!"

"I am going to marry you," said Bridges, by way of reply. He was smoking, his tones were unimpassioned, and he was looking at her with eyes in which there was no trace of timid tentativeness.

But if he had wished to take her by surprise he succeeded. She started, changed her position abruptly, and colored. But she answered vehemently:

"Indeed you are not! Do not fancy I am a chit of a girl to be captured offhand by a 'masterful' man. I am twenty-four, and I long since learned to use my reason, and to balance it against my —wishes. I would not marry you—not if I never married."

"Then you will never marry," he replied coolly. "For you love me. You belong to the old-fashioned Southern type that would go through life cherishing an unfortunate attachment rather than seek distraction and compensation in a brilliant match. Of course you could go on being a belle—but I doubt if you'd care about it. Do you like the prospect of the alternative?"

"Anything would be better than marrying a man I could not possibly be happy with."

She was so accustomed to dealing with men in their proposing moods that she was quite herself again.

"You jump very nimbly to the conclusion that you could not be happy with me."

"I have given weeks to thinking it all out; of course, I knew you would propose sooner or later; they always do." She gave a little sigh of resignation. It was time, she thought, to drop her subtle flatteries and give this too assertive Northern person a lesson. At the moment his magnetism did not appeal to her in the least. "There is a terrible lack in you, and the original human instinct which should be there is replaced by a horrid faculty which you call 'news sense,' and which certainly dwarfs all others. I could never understand you, and I should never want to. Sympathy between us would be impossible. I should stifle."

"But you love me."

"I do not know," she replied meditatively. "You attract me more—satisfy, in an elusive way, something in me—but it is only temporary. As soon as I am at home this experience will seem quite like a dream."

"It will loom up and haunt you as the real experience of your life. I promise you that." He flung away his cigar, and before she could guess his intention, caught her in a close embrace and kissed her repeatedly. He had dismissed his cool deliberation of manner with his cigar, and was scarcely less agitated than herself as she struggled out of his arms and sprang to her feet.

"Take me home this instant," she gasped. "How dared you! Have you no respect for women up here? I hate you. You are a disgrace to your mother's blood. If you had been brought up in the South——"

"Hang the South!" cried Bridges, who was on his feet, with blazing eyes. "I am going to marry you—do you understand? I'm not the sort of man to be pulled round by the nose, and when I make up my mind to a thing I do it. I haven't half a dozen failures to my account in all the forty years of my life—and those are too insignificant to remember. What is more, I never wanted anything that journalism could give me as much as I want you—and that is saying more than you can appreciate now. Journalism in New York is like a concert of Europe; a combination of superficial resemblances in thought and motives and of watchful hatred. Come. Let us go back."

IV.

She kept her room for two days. Her first instinct had been for precipitate flight, for she was terrified. Her only reason for dismissing the idea was the assurance that Bridges would follow her. There was no getting the best of a man like that except by standing up to him. Her uncle had told her that he was the greatest tyrant in American journalism, that the "Eye" reporters held him in terror, although they appreciated the advantage of working for a master mind that saved them much thinking. He loved her, of course; but she was no queen to him; he was too hard and practical, too self-centred and ambitious, to spend his life on the steps of a throne. She resented this attitude with all the accumulated arrogance of long years of easy conquests. Then she reflected that, by all the laws of romance, she should be madly in love with this masterful being, whom she could not dominate, who had not even taken the trouble to propose to her, and who loomed before her six feet one and as sure as fate. But she was a woman of high and rather romantic ideals. Not only did the distorted modernism of Bridges horrify her judgment, but he was no romantic, gloomy, stalking hero of a German novel; he was a spick-and-span New York journalist, as unpicturesque as he was brilliant. He did not appeal to her imagination in the least. She knew by this time exactly in what his fascination consisted; his virile brain and his physical magnetism. Did she marry him she must deteriorate, for before the ceremony she would have cast out her ideals for ever; and in time she would accustom herself imperceptibly to a revised, depleted, and cold-blooded edition of human nature. Doubtless she would also develop a "news sense," and rejoice in the tragedies that arranged themselves for the benefit of the insatiable press; no woman could live with a man like that and not come to resemble him. Still, life with him would indubitably be interesting. She had far more brain than she had ever permitted her adorers to discover, and to experiment with life possessed its charms, despite her ideals.

She kept her room because she wished to consider the question in all its aspects, and arrive at a definite conclusion before she met him again; and if she did make up her mind to let him go he would find that her will was as strong as his.

During these two days she received no message from him, neither did she see him on the adjoining terrace of the house where he was now a guest. At the close of the second day her eyes had ceased to long for a sight of him, and she fervently hoped that he had been called to New York. She wrote as follows in the little volume which bore his name:

"I am sure now that it is a pure question of personal magnetism. His influence on my mind invariably recedes with the accumulation of hours between us. That means that I have no sentiment for him, for if I had I should love him more when we were parted. Intellectual attraction and passion do not make up the whole of love. I have now decided once for all. I will not marry him. I have a premonition that the wrench will be harder than I anticipate at present—my brain feels worn out just now—and that I shall be on the point of sending for him again and again; if I don't love him I am closer to love than I've been before, because he has awakened fully two-thirds of me. But I should be worse than a fool if I deliberately put out the light that has steadily grown in my brain, and which I have so carefully tended. If I wait long enough I shall find everything; or if I do not, better a thousand times to live alone with one's ideals."

When she closed the book she felt calmer than she had for months. She was sad and discouraged, and longed to be at home; but at least her mind was at rest.

There was a ball that night, and she was engaged for every dance. It would be cowardly to excuse herself further, although she would have been glad to go to bed; she was worn out with the nervous tumult of the past two days, and she had eaten little and been in the open air not at all. She would have slipped out late in the afternoon for a walk, but the wind was blowing a gale and the skies threatened rain every moment. The house where the ball was to be was on a cliff some distance from her aunt's house, and during the drive there she managed to be certain that Maynard Bridges was still in Bar Harbor.

She was surrounded as soon as she entered the room, but she saw at once that Bridges was not present, nor did he appear later. The ballroom overlooked the water, and although the widows were closed to keep out the wind and rain, she could hear the roar of the ocean high above the music. It suggested the fatal shipwreck to her mind, and at the same time she wished she were in a ship out there in the vast darkness and close to the tremendous music of the waters. Her partners found her far less fascinating than usual, and wondered if she were going to be ill. It would not have occurred to them to take any one of her flirtations seriously.

Toward midnight the room became insufferably hot and her head was dizzy with fatigue. She commanded her partner of the moment to take her to the dressing-room; then slipped out to the balcony. The rain had ceased, the moon was out; the bay was convulsed, and the Atlantic seemed hurling itself over the bar. She turned her back on the whirling figures behind the windows, and determined to remain there until it was time to go home, or until Maynard Bridges found her.

As she stood under a lantern and wore a white gown and shawl and a number of diamonds, she sprang out from the darkness in fine relief, and she faced a man who lay in a long chair just beyond the next pillar. He rose in a moment and came forward.

"You are very pale," he said.

"I have been thinking for two days, and I have decided once for all. I shall not marry you."

Her voice, her manner, her profile, were convincing.

"Very well," he said, politely.

She stole a swift glance, through her eyelashes. He had his hands in his pockets and was gazing out upon the tossing bay. He looked as if he, too, had been thinking and was tired of it.

"I wish you'd take me out in a boat," she said, abruptly.

"Are you quite mad?"

"If I am not afraid I do not know why you should be. You are as strong as a lion, and you can manage anything on the water. I heard that you took off all the honors for that sort of thing at Harvard."

"I did not take a course in midnight storms," he began; then added abruptly, "Very well. Come along."

She followed him down the steps of the cliff to the boathouse.

"Will you punt?" he asked, dryly. "Or do you think a sail would be safer?"

"I want the rowboat, of course," she said, thrilling with the wildest sense of freedom she had ever known, for the great wind was in her hair and lungs.

He launched the boat without difficulty in the sheltered little cove and rowed with swift, long strokes out to sea.

"Of course I did not mean to leave the bay," she cried.

"I am going out," he replied shortly.

She shrugged her shoulders. Ten minutes later she went through the various stages of terror, resignation, and exaltation. The huge waves seemed climbing over each other in their efforts to engulf the boat. At times it struggled between the crushing wall of the great canons of the sea, only to climb up to the dizzy eminence of a wave, whose height in that roaring moonlit darkness recalled the terrible tidal waves that have done such good service in letters; then shot down once more into the void. More than once the boat was twisted about as if it had been a stick in a whirlpool; but Bridges righted it and guided it on with no apparent effort.

Suddenly he leaned forward and shouted to her:

"Do you know why I brought you here? Yesterday I should have said that I was too modern for this sort of thing; but I am a savage in the wilderness at the present moment. Will you marry me?"

"What shall you do if I say no?"

"Tip you over. And leave you. I can swim back."

He did not mean a word of it. A man had said of him once that he owed at least half of his success to his supreme skill in the great national game of bluff. And he did not feel in the least like a savage, of the historic type at least. He had seen his opportunity and grasped it with his usual nerve and nimbleness of thought. If he had not he would have thought himself a fool.

But in the cold moonlight, against those black hissing walls, his voice torn by the wind, his eyes hard as iron in his white face, he defied analysis, and she accepted his words as final. She swayed from side to side with a hard sob, and he, thinking she had yielded, glanced about for a chance to turn the boat. But in another moment she was sitting erect with her arms held rigidly before her.

"Do your worst," she said. "That is as good a solution as any."

"Then you do not deny any longer that you love me?"

"I hate you."

"Take care. You are a religious woman. You do not wish to die with a lie on your lips."

"Very well, then," she said. "I love you."

"Take care!" he cried again, but in a shrill voice. But she had overturned the boat with a wild lurch. He struggled toward her. She thrust out her hands as if to warn him away from her, but caught him about the neck instead.

"Let go!" he gasped, as they were flung upon the back of another wave, and another came roaring toward them out of the battalions behind. "Let go, if——" But although he struggled to free himself he knew that no swimmer could live in that sea, and before the wave struck and engulfed them he put his arms closely about her.

When the thousand-and-one conjectures had run their course people gradually settled down to the belief that Bridges, for reasons best known to himself, had persuaded Cora Benham to elope with him, and had taken her straight to some out-of-the-way place in Europe. But as the weeks grew into months, and the months rounded out the year, and no word came from the fugitives, not even to Bridges' bankers, people reverted to the first startling theory, induced by the drifting overturned boat; and today the people of Mount Desert point to various spots in the bay and assure you that beneath lie the Southern belle in her white frock and her diamonds, and the man whose dominant will had mastered fate so often that other men had brought themselves reluctantly to believe in his death.—Gertrude Atherton in the Pall Mall Magazine.

THE THEATRICAL SUPER.

He Often Has a Specialty and Is a Man of Importance.

New York claims to have the only "supers'" agency in this country—the only theatrical agency that books the "extras" of the stage and makes engagements for them. In other cities the "super" is a hanger-on of the theatre who has an hour's rehearsal of his role on the day the play arrives in town; here he is a member of the "profession," who rehearses at least a week with the company, knows how to handle his grease paint and discusses affairs of the theatre like a member of the Players' Club.

This difference has been wrought by a theatrical agent who confesses that twenty years ago he was a "super" with an ambition to become a star in tragedy. When he finally decided that he would never shine as an actor he began in his present line of business, and developed it so successfully that now he practically supplies all the New York theatres with supernumeraries whom he and his agents train, superintend and pay. He draws them from all classes, but chiefly from the ranks of the unemployed, and he reaches these by advertisements in the want columns of the daily papers

"All supers," he says, "may be divided into four classes. First, there's the young man or the young girl who's stage-struck. If he has a couple of hundred dollars to spend he pays it over to a dramatic school. If he hasn't he comes to us. Maybe he's been looking at himself in the glass, and wants to get out on the boards and pose; or maybe he thinks he's another Booth. Anyway, he's crazy to get on the stage, and we start him at $3.50 or $4 a week, and he tries to work his way up. Sometimes he does it—gets high enough to make a comfortable living, anyway—but I don't believe there's any profession where he'd have to serve a longer apprenticeship than he does in this. Sometimes he leaves the ranks to be a stage hand, but more often he gets cured of the stage fever and goes to work at something else.

"Then there's the young fellow who comes to town looking for work and sees one of the advertisements we put in the papers when we have a call for a lot of extras for a big production. He puts in his evenings with us behind the lights and hunts about for work all day. You'd be surprised to know how many boys go on the stage for a few weeks that way. The pay isn't much, but it helps to meet their board bills, and they're the sort of men we want—sober, quiet, decent looking fellows—and we do the best we can for them. And sometimes they get a chance to go on the road, and just naturally drift into theatrical work and get along in it.

"We don't ask any questions, but you can tell college men when you see them, and when we're rehearsing in September we get a flood of them that've been up against it here all summer. It's a profession that opens up to brains all right, and I guess there's a lot of those boys stick in it.

"And when these unemployed get work they still stay with us—some of them. They lose an afternoon's pay on Wednesday to go on for the matinees, but they add $4 a week to their salaries, and it's just money found for them. Besides it keeps them off the streets at night, and if they're alone in town it makes them acquainted with a lot of boys, and its fun for them, after a day's work in an office, to put on their war paint and get in front of the calcium.

"Well, the last sort is the old-time super—the street loafer, the city tramp. We have to have him for plays where the manager wants a husky lot for the mob. You see the actor can make up for his part, but the super can't. He has to be born to fit it. Take the war plays now. We have to have fifty men, say, that can go on and look as if they'd just been through a hard campaign. We just pick up fifty rough ones and tell them not to clean up, nor shave at all, and then we put muskets in their hands, and they troop across the stage like a regiment that's just been through the Wilderness campaign and hasn't seen soap or shoe polish since the war broke out.

"There's where our work comes in. We have about a thousand men on our books, and sometimes we have as many as that at work in different theatres in the city. We have to know all these men, and the sort of work they can do, because the super who shoulders the musket isn't the same one who goes into a dress suit. You have to have a man for that who will look like a gentleman, and we have scores of them all the time. We have a couple of dozen men, too, that went through the Cuban war and know the manual, and we need them all the time. It's quite a trick keeping trace of all our men, but we manage to do it, and we believe that the New York stage has a better line of supers now than any other city in the world."

The agency has latterly established branches in Boston and other cities and is making an attempt to improve the service of the "extras" who act with the road companies. These have always been a cause of complaint with the audiences of such towns. It is impossible to say, as yet, whether the attempt will be successful.—New York Commercial-Advertiser.

THE WORLD'S OLDEST BOOK.

Expositions of Early Religious Thought in Egypt.

A new translation of various archaic Egyptian writings, including those contained in the celebrated "Prisse Papyrus"—called the most ancient book in the world—has lately been made by an American scholar, Isaac Myer, author of "The Tabalah" and "Scarabs." This new anthology throws much light on the early standards of religious thought in Egypt, as well as upon the ethical and social characteristics of the old Egyptians. Mr. Myer is a believer in the theory, advanced many times before, that a large part of Christian system of ethics and symbolism was derived from the Egyptian religion, and that Jesus, in the interval between his twelfth and and thirtieth years, of which little is known, spent some time in Egypt. His theory thus differs from that of the Rev. Robert Taylor, author of those extraordinary books, "The Devil's Pulpit" and "The Diagesis," who held that the Old and New Testament writings were based wholly upon a combination of early Egyptian religion and later theosophy, and were written by Alexandrine Gnostics, of the fourth century after Christ, to embody, under a pseudo-historical form, certain astrological myths relating to the Sun God (Christ), the twelve signs of the zodiac (the twelve Apostles), and the four seasons (the four evangelists.) Mr. Myer, however, accepts the historic basis of the New Testament, but regards its ethics as based upon those of the books contained in the Prisse Papyrus. Of these books he says:

"They inculcate the study of wisdom, the duty to parents and superiors, respect for property, the advantages of charitableness, peaceableness, and content; of liberality, humility, chastity, and sobriety; of truthfulness and justice; and they show the wickedness and folly of disobedience, strife, arrogance, and pride; of slothfulness, intemperance, unchastity, and other vices. A reading of such teachings seems to go far to show that a fine ethical, if not a Christian, morality might be based upon its teachings, as, for instance, the following from the "Book of Kagronna, a treatise on good manners, 3998-3969 B. C.:

"'As a man without good breeding, to whom all that one can say is without any effect, makes a surly face to the advances of him of a gracious heart, he is an affliction to his mother and his relatives.'

"In the book of Ptah-Hotep will be found the following:

"'Be not haughty because of thy knowledge; converse thou with the ignorant as with the scholar, for the barriers of art are never closed; no artist ever possessing that perfection to which he should aspire.

"'If thou hast to do with a disputant when he is hot, act as one who cannot be moved. Thou hast the advantage over him, if only in keeping silent when he is using evil speech.

"'If thou humblest thyself in obeying a superior, thy conduct is wholly good before God. Knowing who ought to obey and who ought to command, lift not thy heart against the latter.

"'If thou art a wise man, train up a son who will be pleasing to God. If he adjusts his discipline to thy way, and occupies himself with thy affairs as he should, do him all the good that thou art able.

"'If thou hast the position of a leader, making plans go forth at thy will, do perfect things which posterity will remember, not letting prevail words which multiply flatterers, raise pride and produce vanity.

"'If thou desirest thy conduct to be good and preserved from evil, keep thyself from attacks of bad temper. Be not of an irritable temper as to what is happening around thee; scold only as to thine own affairs.' * * * of better value is a compliment for what displeases thee than rudeness. It is wrong to fly into a passion with one's neighbor to the point of not knowing how to manage one's words.

"'If thou aimest at having polished manners, do not question him whom thou dost accost. Converse with him in private in such a way as not to embarrass him. Do not argue with him, and after letting him have time to impregnate his mind with the subject of the conversation. If he shows his ignorance, and if he giveth thee an opportunity of making him ashamed, * * * treat him with respect, * * * do not reply in a crushing manner.'"

"The Psychostasia, or Judgment of the Soul of the Dead," is a section of "The Books of the Dead," and is of especial interest to us because of the light it throws upon early Egyptian escnatology. Mr. Myers says of it: "It shows the existence with them of a belief in a judgment after death of the soul or conscience, for man's actions while in life upon this earth; that his good and evil deeds were thought to originate and reside in his heart; that man had while on earth free will in his actions; that his heart, emblem of his conscience, was after death, mystically weighed by Thoth, symbol of the intellectual part of his spiritual nature; * * * that the principal desire of the ancient Egyptian was for his spiritual resurection fom the dead and an eternal than heaven."—The Literary Digest.

OLD NEW YORK NEWSPAPERS.

How an Editor Escaped a Drubbing From Ethan Allen.

I have before me as I write a number of the "New York Weekly Journal" for Monday, Jaanuary 28, 1734. It has written on its margin the name of "John Henry Lydius, Albany, N. Y.," to whom, as a subscriber, this particular copy was sent. This Lydius, by the way, was the one after whom Fort Lydius was named after Sir William Johnson's victory over Baron Dieskau in 1755—its name was changed just before the Revolution to Fort Edward, by which it is still known. This paper was edited and published by John Peter Zenger, a veteran editor of that day, and his place of business was at the corner of Wall and Pearl Streets, New York. Among its various items is a letter from Boston, dated December 23, 1733, indicating that it took at least a month and three days for a letter to reach New York from Boston.

But that which gives chief interest to this number of the "New York Weekly Journal" is the comparison which it enables us to institute between the commerce of the port of New York at that time and our own day. For example—the Collector of the Port of New York being Archibald Kennedy, and the surveyor and naval officer (which offices, or functions, were at that period combined), James Alexander—the record in this journal for the week ending January 26, 1734, is as follows:

CUSTOM HOUSE, NEW YORK.
INWARD ENTRIES.

None.

OUTWARD ENTRIES.

Sloop Swallow, Jacob Bufferie (master), for North Carolina.

CLEARED FOR DEPARTURE.

Brig Hope, John Bedford (master), to Jamaica. Sloop James and Henry, Thomas Thache (master), to Madeira. Ship Anne, Jacob Savly (master), to Barcelona.

Now, by way of comparison, Frederick Cooke, present department survey of the port, has found for me the record for January 26, this year. It is as follows:

Outward entries, foreign and domestic, 102.

Clearance, foreign and domestic, 129.

And on April 28, this year, we have of outward and inward entries the immense number of 307, an increase of 231.

Again, while on the subject of old newspapers, I have another one, viz., "Rivington's New York Gazette and Universal Advertiser," the editor and publisher of which was the celebrated James Rivington, the Macchiavelli of the newspaper press of that day, before and during the American Revolution, and who is thought to have been employed as a spy by Washington while seemingly espousing the British cause.

In this paper he tells an amusing story of an interview he had had a week before with Ethan Allen, the hero of Ticonderoga, who had paid him a visit for the purpose of administering—as Allen termed it—a good "licking." Rivington, in his editorial ,thus writes:

I was sitting alone, after a good dinner, with a bottle of Madeira before me, when I heard an unusual noise in the street (Hanover) and a hurrah from the boys. I was in the second story, and, stepping to the window, saw a tall figure in tarnished regimentals, with an enormous long sword, followed by a crowd of boys who occasionally cheered him with hurrahs, of which he seemed insensible. He came up to my house and stopped. I could see no more. My heart told me it was Ethan Allen. I shut my window and retired behind my table and my bottle. I was certain the hour of reckoning had come. There was no retreat. Mr. Staples, my clerk, came in, paler than ever, and, clasping his hands, said:

"Master, he has come! He entered the store and asked if James Rivington lived here. I answered, 'Yes, sir.' 'Is he at home?' 'I will go and see, sir.' I said; and now, master, what is to be done? There he is in the store, and the boys are peeping at him from the street."

I had made up my mind. I looked at the Madeira—possibly took a glass.

"Show him up," said I; "and if such Madeira cannot mollify him, he must be harder than adamant.

There was a fearful moment of suspense. I heard him on the stairs, his long sword clanking at every step. In he stalked.

"Is your name James Rivington?"

"It is, sir; and no man could be more happy to see Colonel Ethan Allen."

"Sir! I have come——"

"Not another word, my dear sir, until you have taken a seat and a glass of old Madeira."

"But, sir, I don't think it proper——"

"Not another word, colonel; taste this wine; I have had it in cask ten years; old wine, you know, unless it is originally sound, never improves by age."

He took the glass, swallowed the wine, smacked his lips, and shook his head approvingly.

"Sir, I come——"

"Not another word until you have taken another glass; and then, my dear colonel, we will talk of the old affairs; and I have some queer events to detail."

In short, we finished two bottle of Madeira, and parted as good friends as if we had never cause to be otherwise.—William L. Stone, in New York Evening Post.

CURRENT HUMOR.

The Objector.

(From the Philadelphia Press.)

The lesson had been about the prodigal son, and the entire Sunday school had been properly impressed. The superintendent rose at the close and, with a view of inculcating a highly moral lesson, asked: "Now, my little friends, who stood by objecting to this proposed banquet to the prodigal?" And a voice in a far corner answered: "The calf."

Our Language.

(From the Pittsburg Chronicle-Telegraph.)

"What did you say the sinking fund was for?" asked the new director of the treasurer.

"To meet the floating debt," replied the latter.

In Society.

(From the Detroit Journal.)

Mrs. Wadburner entertained a box party at the opera last evening.

It was a charming affair.

The time was passed most pleasantly with bridge whist and dancing.

The Misses Wadburner served frappe.

The party did not break up until the middle of the last act.

The Worst.

(From the San Francisco Argonaut.)

Out at the city library you will ask in vain for the dramas of Oscar Wilde. The modest little lady who sits at the desk is embarrassed when you ask for them, and would lecture you, I feel sure, if she knew you well enough.

"The worst that I can do for you," she said to me, cleverly, but rebukingly, "is to give you Mr. Pinero."

Gold-Bricked.

(From the Baltimore American.)

"Your hair is rarest gold," he cried,
"You are the maid I've picked;"
But after she became his bride
He found he'd been gold-bricked.

The Modern Way.

(From the Philadelphia Press.)

"Mr. Fitz-Jeffries," said the reporter, "a cable message from Paris says the champion heavyweight of France wants to fight you."