

# Beasley's Christmas Party

By BOOTH TARKINGTON



## SYNOPSIS

**PART I**—Newcomer in a small town, a young newspaper man, who tells the story, is amazed by the unaccountable actions of a man who, from the window of a fine house, apparently has conversations with invisible personages, particularly mentioning one "Simpledoria." The young man goes to his boarding house, the home of Mrs. Apperthwaite, next door to the scene of the strange proceedings, bewildered.

**PART II**—Next morning he discovers his strange neighbor is the Hon. Dave Beasley, prominent politician, and universally respected. Telling of his last night's experience, he is markedly interrupted by a fellow boarder, a Mr. George Dowden. Later, with Miss Apperthwaite he is an unseen witness of a purely imaginary jumping contest between Beasley and a "Bill Hammersey." Miss Apperthwaite appears deeply concerned, there apparently being no possible explanation of the strange proceedings.

**PART III**—The reporter learns that Beasley and Miss Apperthwaite had at one time been engaged, and that the young lady had broken the engagement because of Beasley's "lack of imagination."

"They are!" And, in answer to her look of surprise, I explained that I had begun to speak of Beasley at Mrs. Apperthwaite's, and described the abruptness with which Dowden had changed the subject.

"I see," my cousin nodded, comprehendingly. "That's simple enough. George Dowden didn't want you to talk of Beasley there, I suppose it may have been a little embarrassing for everybody—especially if Ann Apperthwaite heard you."

"Ann? That's Miss Apperthwaite? Yes! I was speaking directly to her. Why shouldn't she have heard me? She talked of him herself a little later—and at some length, too."

"She did?" My cousin stopped rocking and fixed me with her glittering eye.

"Well, of all!"

"Is it so surprising?"

The lady gave her head to the waxes again. "Ann Apperthwaite thinks about him still!" she said, with something like vindictiveness. "I've always suspected it. She thought you were new to the place and didn't know anything about it all, or anybody to mention it to. That's it!"

"I'm still new to the place," I urged, "and still don't know anything about it all!"

"They need to be engaged," was her succinct and emphatic answer.

I found it but too illuminating. "Oh, oh!" I cried. "I was an innocent, wasn't I?"

"I'm glad she does think of him," said my cousin. "It serves her right. I only hope he won't find it out, because he's a poor, faithful creature; he'd jump at the chance to take her back—and she doesn't deserve him."

"How long has it been," I asked, "since they need to be engaged?"

"Oh, a good while—five or six weeks ago. I think—maybe more; time skips along. Ann Apperthwaite's no chicken, you know." (Such was the lady's expression.) "They got engaged just after she came home from college, and of all the idiotically romantic girls—"

"But she's a teacher," I interrupted, "of mathematics."

"Yes," she nodded wisely. "I always thought that explained it: the romance is a reaction from the algebra. I never knew a person connected with mathematics or astronomy or statistics, or any of those exact things, who didn't have a crazy streak in 'em somewhere. They've got to blow off steam and be foolish to make up for putting in so much of their time at hard sense. But don't you think that I dislike Ann Apperthwaite? She's always been one of my best friends; that's why I feel at liberty to abuse her—and I always will abuse her when I think how she treated poor David Beasley."

"How did she treat him?"

"Threw him over out of a clear sky one night, that's all. Just sent him home and broke his heart; that is, it would have been broken if he'd had any kind of disposition except the one the Lord blessed him with—just all optimism and cheerfulness and make-the-best-of-it-ness! He's never cared for anybody else, and I guess he never will."

"What did she do it for?"

"Nothing!" My cousin shot the indignant word from her lips. "Nothing in the wide world!"

"But there must have been—"

"Listen to me," she interrupted, "and tell me if you ever heard anything queerer in your life. They'd been engaged—Heaven knows how long—over two years; probably nearer three—and always she kept putting it off; wouldn't begin to get ready, wouldn't set a day for the wedding. Then Mr. Apperthwaite died, and left her and her mother stranded high and dry with nothing to live on. David had everything in the world to give her—and still she wouldn't! And then one day, she came up here and told me she'd broken it off. Said she

couldn't stand it to be engaged to David Beasley another minute!"

"But why?"

"Because—my cousin's tone was shrill with her despair of expressing the satire she would have put into it—because, she said he was a man of no imagination!"

"She still says so," I remarked, thoughtfully.

"Then it's time she got a little imagination herself!" snapped my companion. "David Beasley's the quietest man God has made, but everybody knows what he is! There are some rare people in this world that aren't all talk; there are some still rarer ones that scarcely ever talk at all—and David Beasley's one of them. I don't know whether it's because he can't talk, or if he can and hates to; I only thank the Lord he's put a few like that into this talky world! David Beasley's smile is better than acres of other people's talk. My Providence! Wouldn't anybody just to look at him, know that he does better than talk? He thinks! The trouble with Ann Apperthwaite was that she was too young to see it. She was so full of novels and poetry and dreaminess and highfalutin nonsense she couldn't see anything as it really was. She'd study her mirror, and see such a heroine of romance there that she just couldn't bear to have a fiancé who hadn't the chance of turning out to be the crown-prince of Koenigs in disguise! At the very least, to suit her he'd have had to wear a 'well-trimmed Vandyke' and coo sonnets in the gloaming, or read 'On a Balcony' to her by a red lamp."

"Poor David! Outside of his law-books, I don't believe he's ever read anything but 'Robinson Crusoe' and the Bible and Mark Twain. Oh, you should have heard her talk about it!—'I couldn't bear it another day,' she said, 'I couldn't stand it! In all the time I've known him I don't believe he's ever asked me a single question—except when he asked me if I'd marry him. He never says anything—never speaks at all!' she said. 'You don't know a blessing when you see it. I told her, 'Blessing!' she said. 'There's nothing in the man! He has no depths! He hasn't any more imagination than the chair he sits and sits and sits in! Half the time he answers what I say to him by nodding and saying 'um-hum,' with that same old foolish, contented smile of his. I'd have gone mad if it had lasted any longer! I asked her if she thought married life consisted very largely of conversations between husband and wife; and she answered that even married life ought to have some poetry in it. 'Some romance,' she said, 'some soul! And he just comes and sits, and sits, and sits and sits and sits and sits! And I can't bear it any longer, and I've told him so.'"

"Poor Mr. Beasley," I said.

"I think, 'Poor Ann Apperthwaite!'" retorted my cousin. "I'd like to know if there's anything nicer than just to

heard Mr. Beasley think."

"Why, of course he talks," she returned, "when there's any real use in it. And he talks to children; he's that kind of a man."

"I want a particular instance," I began; meaning to see if she could give me any clue to Bill Hammersey and Simpledoria, but at that moment the gate clicked under the hand of another caller. My cousin rose to greet him, and presently I took my leave without having been able to get back upon the subject of Beasley.

Thus, once more baffled, I returned to Mrs. Apperthwaite—and within the hour came into full possession of the very heart of that dark and subtle mystery which overhung the house next door and so perplexed my soul.

IV.

Finding that I had still some leisure before me, I got a book from my room and repaired to the bench in the garden. But I did not read; I had but opened the book when my attention was arrested by sounds from the other side of the high fence—low and tremulous croonings of distinctly African derivation:

"Ah mat mah steh in a-mawwin', she 'us a-waggin' up de hill so slow! 'Stah, you mus' git a-rastle in doo time, B'fo de hevumly do's close-at!"

It was the voice of an aged negro; and the simultaneous slight creaking of a small hub and axle seemed to indicate that he was pushing or pulling a child's wagon or perambulator up and down the walk from the kitchen door to the stable. Whiles, he professed soothing music; over and over he repeated the chant, though with variations; en-counter in turn his brother, his daughter, each of his parents, his uncle, his cousin, and his second-cousin, one after the other ascending the same slope with the same piteous leisure.

"Lay still, honey," he interrupted his inflections to the second-cousin, "Des keep on a-nappin' an' a-breavin' de flesh air. Duss whin's go' mek you good an' well agin'!"

Then there spoke the strangest voice that ever fell upon my ear: it was not like a child's, neither was it like a very old person's voice; it might have been a grass-hopper's, it was so thin and little, and made of such tiny wyes as quavers and crackles.

"I want—" said this elfin voice, "I want—Bill—Hammersey!"

The shabby car which had passed my cousin's house was drawing up to the curb near Beasley's gate. Evidently the old negro saw it.

"Hi dar!" he exclaimed, "Look at dat! Hain't Bill a-comin' yonah dos edzady on de dot an' to de vey spot an' instink when you 'quah fo' 'im, honey? Dar come Miss' Dav, right on de minute, an' you kin bet yo' has hundred dollars he got dat Bill Hammersey wif 'im! Come along, honey-child! Ah's go' to pull you 'roun in de side yod fo' to meet 'em."

The small wagon creaked away, the chant resuming as it went.

Mr. Dowden jumped out of the car with a wave of his hand to the driver, Beasley himself, who drove through his open carriage-gates and down the drive on the other side of the house, where he was lost to my view.

Dowden, entering our own gate, nodded in a friendly fashion to me, and I advanced to meet him.

"Some day I want to take you over next door," he said cordially, as I came up. "You ought to know Beasley, especially as I hear you're doing some political reporting. Dave Beasley's going to be the next governor of his state, you know." He laughed, offered me a cigar, and we sat down together on the front steps.

"From all I hear," I rejoined, "you ought to know who'll get it." (It was said in town that Dowden would come pretty near having the nomination in his pocket.)

"I expect you thought I shifted the subject pretty briskly the other day?" he glanced at me quizzically from under the brim of his black felt hat. "I meant to tell you about that, but the opportunity didn't occur. You see—"

"Understand," I interrupted, "I've heard the story. You thought it might be embarrassing to Miss Apperthwaite."

"I expect I was pretty clumsy about it," said Dowden, cheerfully. "Well, well—" he flicked his cigar with a mothered ejaculation that was half a sigh and half a laugh; "it's a mighty strange case. Here they keep on living next door to each other, year after year, each going on alone when they

slight just as well—" He left the sentence unfinished, save for a vocal click of compassion. "They how when they happen to meet, but they haven't exchanged a word since the night she sent him away, long ago." He shook his head, then his countenance cleared and he chuckled. "Well, sir, Dave's got something at home to keep him busy—nough, these days, I expect!"

"Do you mind telling me?" I inquired. "Is his name 'Simpledoria'?"

Mr. Dowden threw back his head and laughed loudly. "Lord, no! What on earth made you think that?"

I told him. It was my second success with this narrative; however, there was a difference; my former auditor listened with flushed and breathless excitement, whereas the present one laughed consumedly throughout. Especially he laughed with a great laughter at the picture of Beasley's coming down at four in the morning to open the door for nothing on sea or land or in the waters under the earth. I gave account, also, of the miraculous jumping contest (though I did not mention Miss Apperthwaite's having been with me), and of the elfin voice I had just now overheard demanding "Bill Hammersey."

"So I expect you must have decided," he chuckled, when I concluded, "that David Beasley has gone just plain insane."

"Not a bit of it. Nobody could look at him and not know better than that."

"You're right there!" said Dowden, heartily. "And now I'll tell you all there is to it. You see, Dave grew up with a cousin of his named Hamilton Swift; they were boys together; went to the same school, and then to college. I don't believe there was ever a high word spoken between them. Nobody in this life ever got a quarrel out of Dave Beasley, and Hamilton Swift was a mighty good sort of a fellow, too. He went East to live, after they got out of college, yet they always managed to get together once a year, generally about Christmas time. You couldn't pass them on the street without hearing their laughter ringing out louder than the sleigh-bells, maybe over some old joke between them, or some fool thing they did, perhaps, when they were boys. But finally Hamilton Swift's business took him over to the other side of the water to live; and he married an English girl,



"Simpledoria is supposed to be Hamilton Swift, Jr.'s, St. Bernard Dog." an orphan without any kin. That was about seven years ago. Well, sir, this last summer he and his wife were taking a trip down in Switzerland, and they were both drowned—tipped over out of a rowboat in Lake Lucerne—and word came that Hamilton Swift's will appointed Dave guardian of the one child they had, a little boy—Hamilton Swift, Junior's, his name. He was sent across the ocean in charge of a doctor, and Dave went on to New York to meet him. He brought him home here the very day before you passed the house and saw poor Dave setting up at four in the morning to let that ghost in. An' a mighty funny ghost Simpledoria is!"

"I begin to understand," I said, "and

feel pretty silly, too." "Not at all," he rejoined, heartily. "That little chap's freaks would mystify anybody, especially with Dave hammering 'em the ridiculous way he does. Hamilton Swift, Junior, is the curious child I ever saw—and the good Lord knows He made all children powerful mysterious! This poor little cuss has a complication of infirmities that have kept him on his back most of his life, never knowing other children, never playing, or anything; and he's got ideas and ways that I never saw the beat of! He was born sick, as I understand it—his bones and nerves and insides are all wrong, somehow—but it's supposed he gets a little better from year to year. He wears a pretty elaborate set of braces, and he's subject to attacks, too—I don't know the name for 'em—and loses what little voice he has sometimes, all but a whisper. He had one, I know, the day after Beasley brought him home, and that was probably the reason you thought Dave was carrying on all to himself about that bumping-match out in the back-yard. The boy must have been lying there in the little wagon they have for him, while Dave cut up shins with 'Bill Hammersey.' Of course, most children make-believe friends and companions, especially if they haven't any brothers or sisters, but this lonely little feller's got his people worked out in his mind and materialized he send any I ever heard of. Dave's well acquainted with 'em on the train on the way home, and they certainly are giving him a lively time. Ho, ho! Getting him up at four in the morning—"

Mr. Dowden's mirth overcame him for a moment; when he had mastered it, he continued: "Simpledoria—now where do you suppose he got that name?—well, anyway, Simpledoria is supposed to be Hamilton Swift, Junior's, St. Bernard dog. Beasley had to bathe him the other day, he told me. And Bill Hammersey is supposed to be a boy of Hamilton Swift, Junior's own age, but very big and strong; he has rory cheeks, and he can do more in athletics than a whole college track team. That's the reason he out-jumped Dave so far, you see."

(Continued Next Week)

### ENOUGH FOR ORGANIZATION

Idaho senator's thoughts are on the subject of international relations. As it is, Senator Borah after March 4 next will be the second ranking member of this great committee.

When Senator Harry S. New of Indiana retires from office next March the Republicans will find it necessary to name a new chairman for the committee on territories and insular possessions. This committee has to do with Hawaii, Alaska, Porto Rico and the Philippine islands. The importance of its duties therefore can be well understood.

It is said today that the Republicans probably will choose Nicholas Longworth of Cincinnati as the leader in the next house to succeed Representative Mondell of Wyoming, but this matter has not yet been settled.

**Claims of Wets and Drys.**

Naturally enough the so-called wets claim that the so-called drys lost prestige as a result of the election. Naturally enough, also, the drys hold that the same thing is true in reverse. The sale of intoxicating liquor is forbidden by the Constitution of the United States. To some minds that settles things absolutely until the day, if it ever shall come, when the constitutional amendment shall be repealed.

Now it should be noted that the eighteenth amendment to the Constitution provides this: "The manufacture, sale or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States and all territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof for beverage purposes is hereby prohibited."

The whole thing, therefore, seemingly hangs on the answer to the question of what are intoxicating liquors. Several congressmen have expressed a determination to introduce bills providing for modifications of the Volstead act which fixed the alcoholic content of liquors which may be sold at an exceedingly low percentage, one that almost reaches the vanishing point.

**Question for Supreme Court.**

It is held by a great many men that congress by a statute can define just what intoxicating liquors are, and thereby if congress should say that wine containing 14 per cent of alcohol is not intoxicating, a beverage of that alcoholic content can be sold notwithstanding the provision of the eighteenth amendment.

As a matter of fact, the Supreme Court of the United States probably would have to decide the question. The prohibitionists know this, and some of them say they do not in any way fear the result of an act of congress which, for instance, might say that 5 per cent beer and 10 per cent wine are not intoxicating. They say the best possible exhibit for a court which has to pass on the matter would be the attested case of some man who had been drinking 5 per cent beer, and 10 per cent wine, and who had been picked up incapacitated.

The advocates of light wine and beer say judges, like other people, are human, and will take a human view, and they add that the human view is liberal. Therefore they say they are not afraid of any decision, which the Supreme court might render concerning an act of congress which fixed what they call a moderate measure of

liquor.

There has been a great amount of misunderstanding concerning this wet and dry question. It seems to be perfectly true that a great many American citizens, men of supposed intelligence, believe that congress of its own act can set aside a constitutional amendment. Speeches which came pretty close to being a specific statement to this effect were made in places during the recent campaign. It is said that in certain parts of the country some of the voters actually believed that if they elected a representative or a senator known to be "wet," on the day following the election all the saloons in the district or in the state would be opened and no one could deny their right to sell liquor.

**Power of Congress Limited.**

Of course this is a statement of one of the extremes in the case, but it is generally believed in some places that the two houses of congress by a joint vote can set aside a constitutional amendment. All that congress can do, of course, is to have the matter of repeal of an amendment to the Constitution submitted to the states of the Union for action. If congress shall modify the present law so as to permit the manufacture of light beer and light wines, and the United States Supreme court shall declare the law unconstitutional, the only way of bringing back light wines and beers to the bars of the country will be through a repeal of the amendment which today forbids their appearance on bar or table.

The attempt here has been made to set forth without prejudice the situation in this wet and dry case. It seemingly is true that the wets gained a number in the next congress, but it also is true that nine states of the Union can prevent a repeal of the eighteenth amendment. If the amendment is to be changed, it will take a long time to do it. It is certain, however, that when the new congress meets attempts will be made to define just what intoxicating liquors are and an attempt also will be made to raise the present amount of alcohol which beverages may contain. It is likely, also, that the attempt may be made in the present congress, but the general feeling seems to be that such a law will have a better chance next year than it will have at the present.

**Signs of Breeding.**

She was very superior and very haughty, and the Woman listened to her conversation rather absorbedly, as she was fascinated by the things Ann then she spoke of clothes.

"But, my dear," she said to her friend, "I was amazed to find out that Lulu wears domestic underwear. Fancy wearing cheap lace and ribbons shoddy and vivid. It just shows how common she really was. I think more than anything else, true breeding shows in underwear. I wouldn't dream of getting anything but the finest quality of the French t-n-m-ude lingerie."

But what puzzles the Woman is—how is one going to know who is well bred?—Exchange.

**No Avenue of Escape.**

Visitor—You have really beautiful avenues in the prison grounds.

Convict—True, sir; but there's no avenue of escape.

In all Spain there are fewer than 5,000 children in the Sunday schools.



"I think, 'Poor Ann Apperthwaite!'" retorted my cousin.

ait and sit and sit and sit with as lovely a man as that—a man who understands things, and thinks and listens and smiles—instead of everlasting talking!"

"As I..." marked, "I've

## How Fresh It Is!

It is a pleasure to go to your cake-box when you have baked with ROYAL Baking Powder because it is in the nature of a pure Cream of Tartar Baking Powder to keep baked foods fresh.

This means a real economy and is just one of a hundred reasons why careful housekeepers insist upon Royal Baking Powder. Some others are: It Contains No Alum Leaves No Bitter Taste