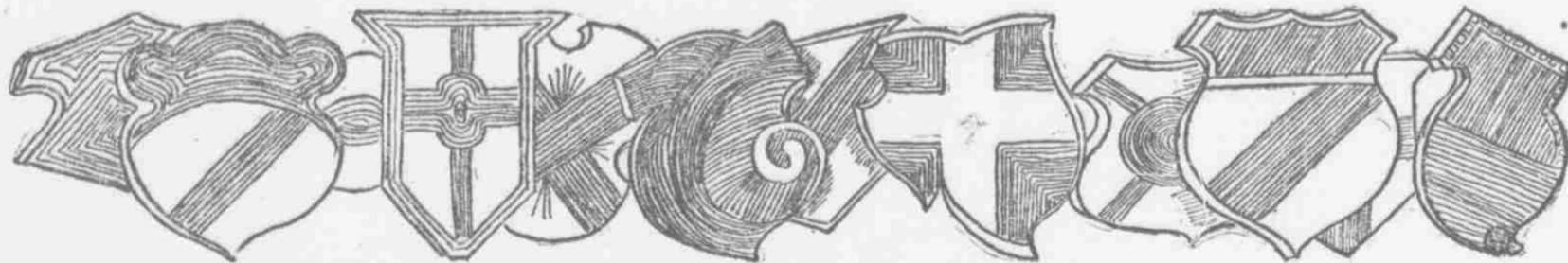


O'Keefe, Akoond of Swat: A Tale of Modern



Methods and Luck of a Lucky Man---By Wm. H. Osborne

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CHAPTER X.—Continued.

SMITH went. He reached No. 17 Southern avenue the evening after John Lorimer had said to Miss Margaret Robeson good-bye forever and a day. He paused before he rang the bell.

"This," he acknowledged to himself, "is the toughest proposition that ever I was up against, for sure." And then he rang. A white-faced girl met him at the door—a girl whose beauty, he said to himself, was inferior to her picture. But he did not, could not know that this girl had spent night after night, wide-eyed and despairing, and all on his account. He could not know all this.

Miss Peggy Robeson welcomed him with a smile. She was a fair-minded girl. She recognized the fact that the unfortunate situation was in no sense due to the fault of the man who stood before her. And beyond that, she entertained considerable respect for Mr. Billington O'Keefe.

Mrs. Patricia Jelliffe Robeson did not at this juncture make her appearance. A slight breach of the proprieties, perhaps, and with a more high-toned caller, she would have done otherwise. But she knew that Billington O'Keefe was there to see her daughter, and that nothing would please him more than to be alone with her. Mrs. Robeson knew a thing or two. Miss Robeson intimated to the caller that her mother would make her appearance later.

And so Constitutional Smith, impersonating rough and ready, genial, honest Billington O'Keefe, sat in the small room just off the hall and listened to all that the low voiced girl who faced him had to say. And she had much to say.

"Mr. O'Keefe," she began, in a clear voice in which there was hardly a note of hesitation, "there are some things that I want to say to you, and when I have said them I hope you will understand me thoroughly. If you do, I know that you will forgive me thoroughly. I am going to ask your pardon first, Mr. O'Keefe, for my rudeness of the other night. Mother was shocked, but I was overwrought. I never meant to say those things. I don't know why I said them. I never stop to think. Will you pardon me for once?"

Mr. Smith, realizing the fact that it was an easy task, immediately nodded his head and begged her to go on.

"Mr. O'Keefe," she went on, "you—you have asked me a good many times to marry you. I know that I have refused you many times. But I don't want you to think that I do not appreciate the honor—yes, honor—which you confer upon me. I know that there are lots of girls here in town who would give anything almost to—to marry you—"

Mr. Smith blushed. "No, no," he insisted, "don't say that." The girl smiled in spite of herself. "I ought to be very grateful to you myself. I understand that. And I am grateful. But before I say any more I want to tell you now, that I accept your offer, Mr. O'Keefe, and that I will marry you, if you will have me after what I am going to say."

Mr. Smith carefully repressed any sentiments of joy that might have arisen to his lips. Instead he pulled out his pocket handkerchief and wiped his brow.

"Yes, miss," was all he deigned to say, "go on."

"You know already," said Miss Peggy, "that I really do not love you. I know that I respect you and that I—yes, that I admire you. I know that you are congenial and good-hearted and gentle, and that you would always be a good husband to any girl. I know, too, that I would try to make you a good wife. It is possible, Mr. O'Keefe, that some day I would really love you."

"Exactly," answered Constitutional Smith, feeling as he might if he were in the custody of several officers of the law, "to be sure. Some day. No doubt." Again he wiped his brow.

"But," went on the girl, "it is but right that you should know the whole truth. It is your right. You have always been honest and open-hearted with me, and now, before any mistake is made, I want to be very honest with you. I have told you that I do not love you. There's more reason for that than you may think. It is because I am in love with—somebody else."

"Is—is he in—love with you," gasped Mr. Smith, seeing a possible opening.

The girl flushed slightly. "He—he is,"

she answered. "I am going to tell you everything. It's John Lorimer, the chemist—"

Smith slightly started. "Lorimer," he exclaimed, putting his hand to his head, "Lorimer, the chemist. John Lorimer. Oh, to be sure. Yes, yes. John Lorimer. Oh, yes." He had remembered. "He's a young man with a fine voice. I know him."

"Of course you know him," answered the girl, looking at him with a queer expression of countenance. Mr. Smith straightened up.

"And then—" he prompted.

The girl smiled sadly and shook her head. "That's all—that's the whole story," she returned. "I've told you everything. I've been honest with you. You know just what to expect. But I promise you that I will do my best—I will be a good

wary. He knew that the woman whom he had to deal with was not this woman, but another—a woman of the name of Patricia Jelliffe Robeson.

Finally he bowed somewhat stiffly to the girl. "I—if I could only see your mother," he announced, "I—I want to do whatever is customary. I—I want to talk to her. She comes first, I suppose," he added tentatively.

"Yes," assented the girl, "she comes first—first and last."

The girl left him alone and sent her mother in. Constitutional Smith picked from the table a book that he had laid there.

"Mrs. Robeson, madam," he gravely said, "I have followed your directions. I have brought you this new book, 'The Chilled Soul.' May you enjoy it."

know about before we settle things. Though, I suppose," he added with a sort of leer, "that we can consider that they're settled."

"Settled," echoed Mrs. Robeson, dwelling upon the word with a sort of delight. "Settled. Well, if you and Peggy have settled things I suppose they must be considered settled. I'm sure that it will be useless for me to interfere. But what a sly couple you have been."

"Exactly," drily answered Mr. Smith, "and so you are willing that I should be your daughter's—that I should be your son-in-law, then, Mrs. Robeson."

"Delighted," answered Mrs. Robeson, "delighted, Mr. O'Keefe. I am more delighted, even, than I am surprised."

"I believe you," said Mr. Smith gravely.

"And now, ma'am," he said, "there's one



"I KNOW THERE ARE LOTS OF GIRLS HERE IN TOWN WHO WOULD GIVE ANYTHING ALMOST TO—TO MARRY YOU."

wife—not so good as others might be, but I'll do my best, Mr. O'Keefe. And I've made up my mind. And I shall be glad to marry you if you will have me under those conditions and after hearing what I have said. I cannot justify my position—I cannot explain it. Many people might think I was playing a queer part. I cannot help it—they do not understand. All that I know is that you have asked me to marry you, and I have told you everything there is to tell. And I shall marry you, if you will have me. I cannot say anything more."

She sat silent for an instant. Mr. Smith was embarrassed and she knew it. She misconstrued his embarrassment. She rose and went to him and held out her hand. He took it, and released it almost immediately. He was thinking the thing out. Now he knew the facts. He read easily between the sentences. This was easier than he had anticipated. Yet he must be

"Be seated, Mr. O'Keefe," insisted Mrs. Robeson with an air, "be seated." Mr. Smith complied with the request.

"Mrs. Robeson," he continued, "I'm a business man, a plain, blunt sort of business man." This was a saying of Billington O'Keefe's. "It's only right to you to say that I have proposed marriage to your daughter and that she has, in a sort of qualified way, accepted me—"

"Accepted you?" exclaimed Mrs. Robeson, with an astonished air. "Dear me, you surprise me, Mr. O'Keefe. Why, how long has this been going on? The sly girl. She never told me a word of all this. And you, too, of all men. Why didn't you tell me before? Dear me."

"Yes, ma'am," said Constitutional Smith. ("Gee, she's a flim-flammer," he commented inwardly.) "And so it seemed to me just as well to come to you and tell you all about it. Because there's something that you and your daughter ought to

thing that I want to be sure of, because there are always rumors about. I want to know for sure whether Miss Peggy accepts me just for myself or—I know you will excuse me when I say this—or whether she—might like me just—just for my money's sake."

Mrs. Robeson rose from her seat and assumed a white, shocked countenance.

"My dear Mr. O'Keefe," she answered, "you shock me. Evidently you do not understand the delicate nature of Peggy, or of myself either, for that matter." It may be remarked that Peggy's mother was quite ignorant of Peggy's recent conversation.

"The Jelliffes and the Robesons have never worshiped the golden calf. You may rest assured that if you did not enjoy the personal regard of both myself and Peggy—regard for you alone—that you never could have obtained either her acceptance or my approval to your suit. But money? No,