

The Bath Comedy

By AGNES and EGERTON CASTLE

Authors of "The Pride of Jennico"

COPYRIGHT, 1906, BY EGERTON CASTLE

"Ha, ha," said Sir Jasper, with a mirthless laugh. "No, sir; I have no doubt you were not prepared for this. Pure, ha!—unconscious—this is pleasant! Be silent, madam; these groans, these crocodile tears, have no effect upon me. Come, my lord bishop; your benevolent airs cannot take me in. Have I not read your letter? Oh, you have got a very fine head of hair, but I know—there is a curl missing. Ha, Julia, you should take better care of your love tokens!"

"I vow," said Dr. Thurlow majesticly, "that your behavior, your words, are quite beyond my poor comprehension. Madam, I pity you from my heart! Sir Jasper, sir," folding his arms fiercely, "your servant. I wish you good morning." He strode to the door, his fine legs quivering with indignation beneath their purple silk stockings.

"No!" said Sir Jasper, and seized him roughly by the skirts. "No, you do not escape me thus!"

"How now?" cried the bishop, the veins on his forehead swelling, and the nostrils of his handsome Roman nose dilating. "Would you lay hands upon the Lord's anointed? Let go my coat, Sir Jasper!"

He struck at Sir Jasper's retarding hand with his own plump fist clinched in a fashion suggestive of pulpit eloquence.

"Ha! You would, would you?" exclaimed Sir Jasper, and leaped at the episodic throat.

The next instant, to his intense astonishment, Sir Jasper found himself in an iron grip, lifted into the air with an ease against which all his resistance was as that of a puppet, shaken till his teeth rattled and deposited on the flat of his back upon the floor.

"Oh, help, help, help!" screamed Lady Standish.

"Really," said the bishop, "I don't know when I have been so insulted in my life. 'Tis the whole church, sir, the Church of England, the state itself, that you have assaulted in my person!"

He stood glaring down on the prostrate foe, breathing heavy rebuke through his high, dignified nose.

"You have committed blasphemy simony, sacrilege, rank sacrilege," thundered Dr. Thurlow.

Sir Jasper gathered himself together like a panther and sprang to his feet, like a panther, too, he took two or three stealthy steps and, half crouching, measured the muscular bishop with bloodshot eyes, selecting the most vulnerable portion of anatomy. He panted and foamed. The air was thick with dying powder.

Lady Standish flung herself between them.

"In mercy, my lord," she cried, "leave us, leave us!"

Here the door opened and butler and delighted footmen burst into the room.

The bishop turned slowly. The grace of his vocation prevailed over the mere man.

"May heaven pardon you," he said. "May heaven pardon you, sir, and help you to chasten this gross violence of temper. And you, madam," said he, turning witheringly upon the unfortunate and long suffering lady, "may you learn womanly decorum and circumspection!"

"You shall hear from me again," growled Sir Jasper murderously. "Toombs," cried he to the butler, with a snarl, "show the bishop the door!"

The bishop smiled. He wheeled upon them all a stately back, and with short deliberate steps withdrew, taking his cane from the footman with a glassy look that petrified Thomas and refused Mr. Toombs' proffered ministrations as he might have waved aside a cup of poison. "Vade retro Satanas," he seemed to say; and so departed, leaving his pastoral curse voicelessly behind him.

CHAPTER XII.

"How beautiful you are!" said Lord Verney.

He was sitting on a stool at Mistress Bellairs' feet. She had abandoned to him one plump taper fingered hand. The gay little parlor of the Queen square house was full of sunshine and of the screeching ecstasy of Mistress Kitty's canary bird.

"How beautiful you are!" said he. It was for the fourth time within the half hour. Conversation between them had languished somehow.

Kitty Bellairs flung a sidelong wistful glance upon her lover's countenance. His eyes, gazing upon her, devoured her beauty with the selfsame expression that she had found so entrancing earlier in the day. "Deep wells of passion" she had told herself then. Now a chill shade of misgiving crept upon her.

"His eyes are like a calf's," she said to herself suddenly.

"How beautiful!" The fact began to murmur once again, when his mistress' little hand, twisting impatiently from his grasp, surprised him into silence.

"Oh, dear! A calf in very truth," thought she. "Baah, baah, ooh! What can I have seen in him? 'Twas a sudden pastoral yearning!"

"May I not hold your hand?" said he, shifting himself to his silken knees and pressing against her.

Yet he was a pretty boy and there was a charm undoubted in the freshness of this innocence and youth awakening to a first glimmer of man's passion.

"Delightful task"—she quoted under her breath, and once more vouchsafed him, with a sweep like the poise of a dove, her gentle hand.

As it lay in his brown fingers she contemplated it with artistic satisfaction and played her little digits up and down, admiring the shape and color of the nails, the delicate dimples at the knuckles. But Lord Verney's

great boy's paw enguished them all too quickly, and his brown eyes never wavered from their devout contemplation of her countenance.

"How!"

Mistress Kitty sprang to her feet. "I vow," she cried, "it is my hour for the waters, and I had clean forgot them!"

She called upon her maid:

"Lydia, child, my hat! Lord Verney, if it please you, sir, your arm as far as the pump room." (At least,) she thought to herself, "all Bath shall know of my latest conquest!"

She tied her hat ribbons under her chin.

"How like you the mode?" said she. And, charmed into smiles again by the rosy vision under the black plumes, she flashed round upon him from the mirror. "Is it not, perhaps, a thought flyaway? Yet 'tis the latest. What says my Verney?"

The poor youth vainly endeavored to discriminate and criticize.

"It is indeed a very fine hat," said he, "and there seems to be a vast number of feathers upon it." He hesitated, stammered. "Oh, what care I for modes! 'Tis you, you!"

"What are you staring at, girl?" cried Mistress Bellairs sharply to her abigail. "Out with you!"

"Well, my Verney?" said she. "Mercy, how you look, man! Is anything wrong with my face?"

She tilted that lovely little piece of perishable bloom innocently toward him as she spoke. And the kiss she had read in his eyes landed with unprecedented success upon her lips.

"Why, who knows?" thought she, with a little satisfied smile as she straightened her modish hat. "There may be stuff in the lad, after all!"

She took his arm. Dazed by his own audacity, he suffered her to lead him from the room. They jostled together down the narrow stairs.

"How beautiful you are!" said he, and kissed her again as they reached the somber dark paneled vestibule.

"Fie!" said she, with a shade of testiness and pushed him back as her little black page ran to open the door.

The kiss, like his talk, lacked any heightening of tone—and what of a lover's kiss that shows no new ardor, what of a vow of love that has no new color, no fresh imagery? But the trees in Queen square were lightly leafed with pale, golden green. The sunshine was white gold, the breeze fresh and laughing; the old gray town was decked as with garlands of young love. "He is but new to it," she argued against her fleeting doubts, "and he is, sure, the prettiest youth in all Bath."

"And when did you see death?" my lord.

His sentiments and terror of her patroness, took two steps upon her grand and halted fluttering. Lord Verney had flushed darkly purple.

Mistress Kitty hung with yet more affectionate weight upon his arm and smiled with sweet unconsciousness. For the moment she was as deaf as Lady Maria.

The latter's clawlike hand had now disengaged a long stemmed eyeglass from her laces.

"'Tis indeed," she pronounced in her commanding bass, "my nevy Verney with that will Bellairs! Nevy! Here, I say! Selina, fool, have you gone to sleep?"

An echo as of titters began to circle round the pump room. The painted face of Lady Flyte was wreathed into a smile of peculiar significance as she whispered over her glass to her particular friend of the moment, Captain Spicer. This gentleman's pallid visage was illuminated with a radiance of gratified spite. His lips were pursed as though upon a plum of superdelicious gossip. He began to whisper and mouth. Young Squire Green approached the couple with an eager ear and an innocent noddy face that strove to look vastly wise.

"I assure you," mouthed the captain. "Was I not there?"

"In his bedroom?" cried Lady Flyte, with a shrill laugh.

Lady Maria's cockatoo crest rose more fiercely. It seemed to Kitty Bellairs as if she heard the old lady's jaws rattle. It was certain that in her wrath she squawked louder than even the late lamented Toto. Then Mistress Kitty, who, to say the truth, began to find the scene a little beyond enjoyment, felt the young arm upon which she leaned stiffen, the young figure beside her rear itself with a new manliness.

"Wholesome!" cried Mistress Kitty, slipping again and again curling her nose upward and the corners of her lips downward in an irresistibly fascinating grimace. "Wholesome, my lord! Heaven defend us! And what is that but the last drop to complete their odiousness? Wholesome, sir? I would have you know 'tis not for wholesomeness I drink." She put down her glass, undiminished save by the value of a bird's draft. "Do I look like a woman who needs to drink waters for 'wholesomeness'?"

"Yet," said he, "these waters are said to be vastly wholesome."

"Wholesome!" cried Mistress Kitty, slipping again and again curling her nose upward and the corners of her lips downward in an irresistibly fascinating grimace. "Wholesome, my lord! Heaven defend us! And what is that but the last drop to complete their odiousness? Wholesome, sir? I would have you know 'tis not for wholesomeness I drink." She put down her glass, undiminished save by the value of a bird's draft. "Do I look like a woman who needs to drink waters for 'wholesomeness'?"

"Indeed, no," floundered he in his bewilderment.

"There are social obligations," said he sententiously. "A widow, sir, alone and unprotected, must conform to common usage. And, then, I have another reason, one of pure sentiment."

She cocked her head and fixed her knowing eye upon him.

"My poor Bellairs!" said she. "How oft has it not been my pleasure and my duty to fill such a glass as this and convey it to his lips! In his last years, poor angel, he had quite lost the use of his limbs."

Lord Verney had no answer appropriate to these tender reminiscences, and Mistress Kitty, having, it seemed, sufficiently conformed to the usage of Bath as well as sacrificed to the manes of the departed, turned briskly round and, leaning against a pilaster, began to survey the room.

"La, how empty!" quoth she. "Tis your fault if I am so late, my lord. Nobody, I swear, but that Flyte woman, your odious Spicer, sir—ha, and old General Tilney. Verily, I believe these dreadful springs have the power of keeping such mummies in life long after their proper time. 'Tis hardly fair on the rest of the world. Why, the poor thing has scarce a sense or a wit left, and yet it walks!" she cried suddenly, with a little chirp, as the unfortunate veteran of Dettington, escaping from the guiding hands of his chairman, started for the door with the uncontrollable trot of semiparalytic senility.

"As it lay in his brown fingers she contemplated it with artistic satisfaction and played her little digits up and down, admiring the shape and color of the nails, the delicate dimples at the knuckles. But Lord Verney's

"And that reminds me," said Mistress Kitty, "that Sir George is most particular that I should walk five minutes between every glass. Here comes your estimable aunt, Lady Maria, and her ear trumpet, and the unfortunate Miss Selina. I protest, with that yellow feather she is more like my dear dead Toto than ever."

"Was that your pet name for your husband?" murmured Lord Verney in a strangled whisper.

"Mistress Kitty sprang to her feet. "I vow," she cried, "it is my hour for the waters, and I had clean forgot them!"

He looked at her, uncertain to which of the lamented bipeds she referred.

"Selina," cried Lady Maria in the strident tones of the deaf woman, "Selina of her own consequence—the voice of your shy deaf one loses all sound in her terror of being loud."

"Selina, how often must I tell you that you must dip in my glass yourself? Who's that over there? Where are my eyeglasses? Who's that, did you say? Mistress Bellairs? Humph! And who's she got with her in tow now? Who did you say? Louder, child! Louder! What makes you mumble so? Who's Verney? Lord Verney? Why, that's my nevy. Tell him to come to me this minute. Do you hear, Selina? This minute! I won't have him fall into the hands of Widow Bellairs!"

The cockatoo topknob nodded vehemently. Poor Miss Selina, agitated by the consciousness that the whole pump room was echoing to Lady Maria's words.

"Selina, you're a perfect fool. Madam, I remark the wrath of the departed cockatoo, inclining her crest with much dignity toward the blooming Kitty. 'I wish you good morning."

CHAPTER XIII.

Miss Selina blushed behind the mouthpiece as she made this announcement.

"Your nephew," said Miss Selina in modest accents, "your nephew, my Lord Verney, wishes to inform you that he is about to contract a matrimonial alliance with the lady he has just introduced to you."

"Indeed," cried Mistress Kitty plunging in again, as it became evident to her that Lord Verney, with the gentle obstinacy that was part of his character, was once more preparing to make his nuptial statement.

"Mr. Staff," said Lord Verney, "please speak, then, for in so far it seems to me a vastly long time since I have laughed."

"Indeed," cried Mistress Kitty, "in Mr. Staff's prop."

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" sighed Mr. Staff in a fresh fit. "Ha, ha! By the way, Verney, weren't you also to have walked with the jealous husband this morning? Ah, by the same token, and you too, Spicer? I'm glad you didn't, for if either of you had strolled lead in him I'd have missed the best joke of the season. Ha, ha, ha-ha, ho, ho!"

(To Be Continued.)

Artificial gas, the 20th Century fuel.

10-ft

Letter List.

Ladies' List.

Mrs. Clara Arling, Mrs. T. A. Brand,

Mrs. Geo. M. Brown, Mrs. Daisy Durham, Miss Joy Johnson, Mrs. Will Lohman, Hattie Parker, Mrs. Gertie Taylor 2, Mrs. Mary Tontrup.

Gentlemen's List.

Frank Archibald, Paul Arbenz, R. L.

Beatty, Wilmer Brown, Harry E. Bailey, Russell Cave, Dr. A. B. Collins, R.

L. Gaines, J. S. Grubbs, J. H. Handy,

M. Hudson, Lawrence, 102 N. 9th, C.

M. Miller, William Molley, James

Overton, John Richardson, C. S.

Rolph, Erle Threlkeld, S. Stone, Harry

Tidrick, Lee Townsend, Mr. Trylone

Dr. Elmert Vincent, Rev. E. Winter, J.

S. Wendell.

Drops.

Mrs. F. O. Hubert.

J. A. SPEKENHIER, P. M.

"Phone or write a card to the Palladium of the little piece of news your neighbor told you and get your name in the news 'tip' contest for this week."

Miss Tizard of Muncie will spend Sunday with Miss Ada Ebenbach, of South 12th street.

CONSULTATION and One Month's Treatment Free.

HE TREATS SUCCESSFULLY

all forms of Chronic Diseases that are curable. Diseases of the Throat,

Lungs, Kidneys, Liver and Bladder, Rheumatism, Dyspepsia and all Diseases of the blood, Epilepsy (or falling fits), Cancer, Scrofula, Private and Nervous Diseases, Female Diseases, Night Loss, Loss of Vitality from indiscretions in youth or mature years, Fibles, Fistula, Fissure, and Ulceration of the Rectum, without

detention from business.

Rupture Positively Cured and Guaranteed.

Office, No. 21 South Tenth St., RICHMON