

# The Bath Comedy

By AGNES and EGERTON CASTLE  
Authors of "The Pride of Jennico"

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"Ha, ha," said Sir Jasper, with a malicious laugh. "No, sir; I have no doubt you were not prepared for this. Pure, ha!—unsuspecting—this is pleasant! Be silent, madam; these groans, these crocodile tears, have no effect upon me. Come, my lord bishop; your sanctimonious 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 majestically, "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 meshes.

"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 retaining 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 episcopal 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 flying 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 wistfully 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 refusing 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—" she began to murmur once again, when his mistress' little hand, twitching 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 engulfed 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, "tis 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 leaved 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."

Love and spring danced in Mistress Kitty's light heart and light heels as she tripped forth. And love and spring gathered and strove and sought outlet in Verney's soul as inevitably and irresistibly and almost as unconsciously as the sap in the young shoots that swayed under the caress of the breeze and amorously unfurled themselves to the sunlight.

The pump room was cool and dim after the gray stone street upon which the young year's sunshine beat as fierce as its youth knew how. The water dripped its little song as it welled up, faintly steaming.

"Listen to it," quoth Mistress Kitty. "How innocent it sounds, how clear it looks!"

With a smile she took the glass transferred to her by Verney, and "Ugh!" she said, "how monstrous horrid it tastes, to be sure! 'Tis, I fear," she said, again casting a glance of some anxiety at her new lover's countenance, "a symbol of life."

"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 bewildered way.

"There are social obligations," said she sententially. "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 mocking 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! Heaven preserve us—why, it runs!" she cried suddenly, with a little chirp, as the unfortunate veteran of Dettingen, escaping from the guiding hands of his chairman, started for the door with the uncontrolled trot of semipalmated snail.

"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.

"Fie, sir!" cried the widow. "My cockatoo. I referred to my cockatoo." She sighed profoundly. "I loved him," she said.

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—persuaded 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 net of Widow Bellairs!"

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

CHAPTER XIII.  
THERE must have been a curious magic in the words, "My future wife," for no sooner had he pronounced them than than Lord Verney became several inches taller, a distinct span broader and quite unreasonably older. In fact, from boyhood he had stepped to man's estate. He looked down protectively at the little woman hanging on his arm. The seriousness of responsibility settled upon his brow.

"Ah, Verney," quoth Mr. Stafford, flicking a lot brow as he dashed in out of the sunshine, powdered with white dust from his walk and still bubbling with laughter. "Ah, Verney, playing butterfly in the golden hours while other fellows toil in the sweat of their brow! Jinga, lad, but you've lit on the very rose of the garden. Mistress Kitty Bellairs, I kiss your hand."

At this Mistress Kitty felt her future lord's arm press her fingers to his ribs, while he straightened his youthful back.

"Mr. Stafford," began he in solemn tones, "this lady—"

But she, knowing what was coming, interrupted rapturously.

"And pray, Mr. Stafford," quoth she, cocking her head at him with those birdlike airs and graces that were as natural to her as to any mincing dove—

"—Mistress Kitty being of those that begin by making eyes in their nurses' arms before they can speak and end in a modish face nightcap for the benefit of the doctor—"and whence may you come so late and thus heated?"

"Whence?" cried Mr. Stafford, and overcome by the humor of his recollection roused the solemn echoes of the pump room by his jovial laugh. "Ah, you may well ask! From the merriest meeting it has ever been my fate to attend. Oh, the face of him in his chair, between his girth and his temper! And fire eating Jasper all for bullets, and old Poult's teeth ready to drop out of his head at the indecency!"

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 vile 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 illumined 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.

"Pray, Mistress Bellairs," said my Lord Verney—he spoke loudly and, to her surprise, with perfect facility, even dignity—"will you allow me to introduce you to my aunt, Lady Maria Pridoux? Aunt Maria," said he, and his voice rang out finely, imposing a general silence, "let me present Mistress Bellairs. This lady has graciously condescended to accept me as her future husband. I am the happiest and most honored of men."

The last sentence he cried out still more emphatically than the rest and then repeated it with his eye on Kitty's suddenly flushed cheek, almost in a whisper and with a quiver of strong emotion.

The astounded Mistress Kitty rose from her deep courtesy with a swelling heart.

"The dear lad," she said to herself. "The dear, innocent, chivalrous lad!"

There was almost a dimness in her brilliant black eye. Her emotion was of a kind she had never known before; it was almost maternal.

Under stress of sudden genuine emotion the wit of intrigue in the cleverest woman falls in abeyance. Mistress Bellairs found no word out of the new situation.

Lady Maria's deafness had increased to an alarming extent.

"Gratified, I'm sure," she mumbled, stuck out her dry hand and withdrew it before Mistress Bellairs had had time to touch it.

"My future wife!" bawled the budding peer in his aged relative's ear.

It was curious to note how old Lady Maria seemed suddenly to have become. Huddled in herself, she nodded vacantly at her nephew.

"Thank ye for asking, child," said she, "but the waters try me a good deal."

Lord Verney attempted another shout in vain.

"So Sir George says," remarked my lady.

"'Tis the very eye of my poor dear Toto," thought Mistress Bellairs. Lord Verney looked round in despair. Miss Selina thought him monstrous handsome and gallant, and her poor old nose's heart warmed to the

lover in the same proportion. Lady Maria and gently lifted her trumpet.

Lady Maria, glad enough of a diversion, applied it to her ear with unwonted affability.

"What is it, my dear? Any sign of the duchess?"

"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."

Miss Selina blushed behind the mouthpiece as she made this announcement. Then she cried "Oh!" with an accent of suffering, for Lady Maria had rapped her over the knuckles with the instrument.

"Matrimonial fiddlesticks!" said Lord Verney's aunt. "Selina, you're a perfect fool! Madam," remarked the wrath of the departed cockatoo, inclining her crest with much dignity toward the bleeding Kitty, "I wish you good morning."

(To Be Continued.)

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Letter List.

Ladies' List.

Mrs. Clara Aring, Mrs. T. A. Brand, Mrs. Geo. M. Brown, Mrs. Daisy Durham, Miss Joy Johnson, Mrs. Will Lohman, Hattie Parker, Mrs. Gertrude Taylor, Mrs. Mary Tomtrup.

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. Elmer Vincent, Rev. E. Winter, J. S. Wendell.

Drops.

Mrs. F. O. Hulbert.

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.

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Hicks Didn't Appear.

Sandy J. Hicks, a colored boy who is charged with petit larceny and who was to have faced the juvenile court yesterday did not appear for trial. It is thought that the boy has left the city.

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Architects Selected.

At a recent meeting of the building committee for the new Carnegie Library at Earlham, Patton & Miller of Chicago were selected as the architects for the structure. They are probably the best library architects in the country as they have planned hundreds of city and college library buildings over the United States.



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