

RISE AND FALL OF THE MUSTACHE

BY ROBERT J. BURDETTE.

any other man of his size. That his boots are a trifle snug, like a house with four rooms for a family of thirty-seven.

But he can't sing. Which is a pity; he can. Did she go to the World's Fair? "No," "Such a pity"—he begins but stops in terror, lest she may consider his condolence a reflection upon her financial standing.

There is a dejected droop to the mustache that night, when in the solitude of his own room Tom releases his hands from the despotic gloves, and tenderly soothes two of the reddest, puffiest feet that ever crept out of boots not half their own size.

But alas, when Tom reaches the gate all these well ordered ideas display evident symptoms of breaking up; as he crosses the yard he is dismayed to know that they are in the convulsions of a panic, and when he touches the bell knob, every, each, all and several of the ideas, original and compiled, that he has had on any subject during the past ten years, forsake him and return no more that evening.

old-fashioned furniture but himself and Laura and the furniture. When, almost without knowing how or why, they talk about life and its realities instead of the last concert or the next lecture; when they talk of their plans, and their day dreams and aspirations, and their ideals of real men and women; when they talk about the heroes and heroines of days long gone by, gray and dim in the ages that are ever made young and new by the lives of noble men and noble women who lived, and did, and never died in those grand old days, but lived and live on, as imperishable and fadeless in their glory as the glittering stars that sang at creation's dawn.

But there is no rose without a thorn. Although, I suppose, on an inside computation, there is, in this weary old world as much as, say a peck, or a peck and a half possibly, of thorns without their attendant roses. Just the raw, bare thorns. In the highest heaven of his new found bliss, Tom is suddenly recalled to earth and his miseries by a question from Laura which falls like a plummet into the unrippled sea of the young man's happiness, and fathoms its depths in the shallowest place.

Somehow or other he had a rose-colored idea that the thing was going to go right along in this way forever. Tom had an idea that the programme was all arranged, printed and distributed, rose-colored, gilt-edged, and perfumed. He was going to sit and hold Laura's hands, and pa was to stay down at the office, and ma was to make her visits to the parlor as much like angels, for their rarity and brevity, as possible. But he sees, now that the matter has been referred to, that it is a grim necessity. Laura doesn't like to see such a spasm of terror pass over Tom's face; and her coral lips quiver a little as she hides her flushed face out of sight on Tom's shoulder, and tells him how kind and tender pa has always been with her, until she feels positively jealous of pa. She tells him he must not dread going to see him, for pa will be oh so glad to know how happy, happy he can make his little girl. And as she talks to him, the hard working, old-fashioned, tender-hearted old man, who loves his girl as though she were yet only a big toy, her heart grows tenderer, and she speaks so earnestly and eloquently that Tom, at first savagely jealous of him, is persuaded to fall in love with the old gentleman—he calls him "Pa," too, now—himself.

But by the following afternoon this feeling is very faint. When he enters the counting-room of Tare & Tret, and stands before pa, oh, land of love, how could Laura ever talk so with a fringe of the most obstinate and wiry gray hair standing all around his bald head; the wiriest, grizzliest mustache bristling under his nose; a tuft of tangled beard under the sharp chin, and a raspy undergrowth of a week's run on the thin jaws; business, business, business, in every line of the hard, seamed face, and profit and loss, barter and trade, dieker and bargain, in every movement of the nervous

hands, pa; on business, he puts down the newspaper a little way, and looks over the top of it as Tom announces himself, glancing at the young man with a pair of blue eyes that peer through old-fashioned iron-bowed spectacles, that look as though they had known these eyes and done business with them ever since they went over their A.B.C.'s or peeped into the tall stone jar Sunday afternoon to look for the doughnuts.

Tom, who had felt all along there could be no inspiration on his part in this scene, has come prepared. At least he had his last true statement at his tongue's end when he entered the counting-room. But now, it seems to him that if he had been brought up in a circus, and cradled inside of a sawdust ring, and all his life trained to twirl his hat, he couldn't do it better, nor faster, nor be more utterly incapable of doing anything else. At last he swallows a lump in his throat as big as a ballot box, and faintly gasps, "Good morning." Mr. Tret hastens to recognize him. "Eh? Oh, yes; yes, I see, young Botwick, from Pope & Middleburgh. Oh, yes, Well—?" "I have come, sir," gasps Tom, thinking all around the world from Cook's explorations to "Captain Riley's Narrative," for the first time of that speech that Tare & Tret have just scented out of him so completely that he doesn't believe he ever knew a word of it. "I have come—" and he thinks if his lips didn't get so dry and hot, they make his teeth ache, that he could get along with it; "I have, sir—come, Mr. Tret; Mr. Tret, sir—I have come—I am come—" "Yes, ye-es," says Mr. Tret, in the wildest bewilderment, but in no very encouraging tones, thinking the young man probably wants to borrow money; "Ye-es; I see you've come. Well; that's all right; glad to see you. Yes, you've come!" Tom's hat is now making about nine hundred and eighty revolutions per minute, and apparently not running up to half its full capacity. "Sir; Mr. Tret," he resumes, "I have come, sir; Mr. Tret—I am here—to sue—to sue, Mr. Tret—I am here to sue—" "Sue, eh?" the old man echoes sharply, with a belligerent rustle of the newspaper; "Sue Tare & Tret, eh? Well, that's right, young man; that's right. Sue, and get damages. We'll give you all the law you want." Tom's head is so hot and his heart is so cold, that he thinks they must be about a thousand miles apart. "Sir," he explains, "that isn't it. It isn't that. I only want to ask—I have long known—sir," he adds, as the opening lines of his speech comes to him like a message from heaven, "Sir, you have a flower, a tender lovely blossom; chaste as the snow that crowns the mountain's brow; fresh as the breath of morn; lovelier than the rose-fingered hours that fly before Aurora's car; pure as the lily kissed by dew. This precious blossom, watched by your paternal eyes, the object of your tender care and solicitude, I ask of you. I would wear it in my heart, and guard and cherish it—and in the—" "Oh, yes, yes, yes," the old man says soothingly, beginning to see that Tom is only drunk. "Oh, yes, yes, I don't know much about them myself; my wife and the girls generally keep half the windows in the house littered up with them, winter and summer, every window so full of house plants the sun can't shine in. Come up to the house, they'll give you all you can carry away, give you a hat full of 'em." "No, no, no; you don't understand," says poor Tom, and old Mr. Tret now observes that Tom is very drunk indeed. "It isn't that, sir. Sir, that isn't it. I—I—I want to marry your daughter." There it is at last, as bluntly as though Tom had wadded it into a gun and shot it at the old man. Mr. Tret does not say anything for twenty seconds. Tom tells Laura that evening that it was two hours and a half before her father opened his head. Then he says, "Oh, yes, yes; to be sure; to be—sure." And then the long pause is dreadful. "Yes, yes, Well, I don't know. I don't know about that, young man. Said anything to Jennie about it?" "It isn't Jennie," Tom gasps, seeing a new rubicon to cross; "it's—" "Oh, Julie? Well, I don't—" "No, sir," interjects the despairing Tom, "it isn't Julie, it's—" "Sophie, eh? Oh, well Sophie—" "Sir," says Tom, "if you please, sir, it is just Sophie, it's—" "Not Minnie, surely? Why, Minnie is hardly—well, I don't know. Young folks get along faster than—" "Dear Mr. Tret," breaks in the distracted lover. "It's Laura."

(To be Continued.)

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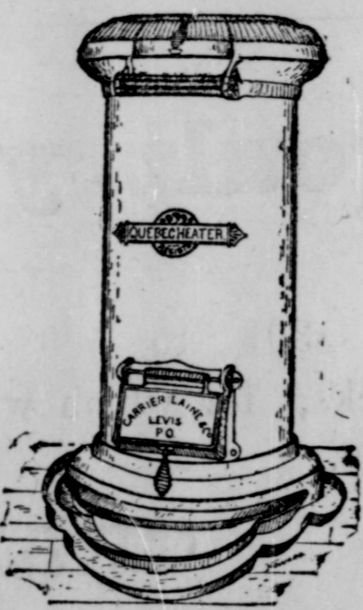
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And he stands there a fidgety statue of the door holder. He mentions, for not more than the twentieth time that evening that he is passionately fond of music