

SHADOW OF A THOUGHT.

BY HARRY LANDER.

Fred Seltton was melancholy, apparently without any just cause. He had spent a very pleasant day in the execution of his duties in the shelving department of the home office, where he had read the morning paper, washed his hands three times, chaffed Bertie Gapes and heard the latest gossip from Tommy Townie. Then Tommy had taken him to the Junior Getherium to recuperate, and his journey down to Ealing had been most comfortable. It was a pleasant afternoon in the early summer, his little villa looked particularly bright and comfortable, and he still had an hour to lounge away before dinner, which was the most cherished aim of his daily life. Yet he sighed as he opened the door and entered his home.

Kate had taken the baby to see her mother, but would be back to dinner. This was not unusual, but upon this occasion it struck him as being very inconsiderate of her. Having performed his toilet he wandered mournfully about the garden. Then retiring to his study—a misnomer, for he was guiltless of such folly—he lit a cigarette and flung himself into an easy-chair with the air of a man weary of existence. Had his wife been present she would have wondered anxiously what calamity had overtaken him, but the fact was nothing more alarming than that her lord and master was suffering from what is technically termed "the hump."

The other men in his room had been discussing holidays. Gapes was saving himself for a month's salmon fishing in Sunderlandshire, Townie contemplated billeting himself upon his cousin, who was attached to the embassy at Vienna. Williamson was engaged for a yachting cruise to Norway, and Elliot had raved of the green golf links at Eastbourne. He had yawned dismally and mentioned Herne bay, with the wife and family, in tones which quite justified Townie in holding him up as an awful example of premature matrimony.

Now, in his heart he called himself a fool, for in these days a man of thirty is too young for such responsibilities and—well, privations. Of course, he had been quite infatuated with Kitty, as were several better men. The first year of their married life had been as charming as the last chapter of a three-volume novel, and he had never enjoyed anything so much as that delightful scamper about the continent they had together. Now, there was the baby, a jolly little chap, but a responsibility, and a somewhat costly one. After all, there was sound wisdom in Townie's cynicism. There are two aspects of the marriage question, usually considered before and after. He was just realizing the unpleasant one.

He had never seen the club look more cozy than it did that afternoon. He had been welcomed by a crowd of men, the pleasant associates of a past life, who seemed genuinely nappy to meet him again. He had been a very popular man, and some of them still remembered his little evenings in Gray's inn. What pleasant rooms they were, to be sure. At one time he used to think that Kitty had sacrificed a great deal when she married him, but perhaps the renunciation was not so one-sided as he had imagined. For instance, there was the club. He could no longer afford to go there, and with it he had renounced all intellectual society. Kitty's people and their neighbors were rich and respectable. Most admirable of their kind, they ate, drank, slept, and made money; withal, most worthy creatures, but particularly unentertaining. Mr. Turner, her father, was a type—a kindly, honorable man, but without the slightest artistic or literary culture; he could talk for hours of his business, and knew more about tallow than any other man in England. Fortunately, his pride of this distinction was slightly mitigated by the fact that he was also a connoisseur of wines. His sons wore riding breeches on Sunday mornings and read "The Lunar Month" in their bedrooms. His eldest daughter was gifted with sufficient religious enthusiasm for ten such families, while Mrs. Turner was motherly in the extreme.

His thoughts wandered to Georgie de Vaux, his old college chum, who had shared those Gray's inn chambers. He was always bright and witty, he could dance all night and work all day, pull a good oar, sail a half-ratier against the best, walk fifty miles, ride like a centaur, sing, drink and gambled, with never a headache or a touch of repentance. Then the gay assemblage of actors, artists and literary men, who would there fore-gather to talk of any and everything, more especially of the great things they were going to do. And by no means the least were those jolly holidays upon the river, the sea, and the continent. Faith! it was awful to contemplate; a whole month at a seaside boarding house. Yawn over the newspaper all the morning, or make the acquaintance of those objectionable persons who, adorned with yachting caps, grace the esplanade and indulge in many "morning bitters." Lunch, boredom, dinner, boredom intensified by a drawing-room filled with old spinsters, giggling girls, and youths who persist in singing, with the mistaken idea of amusing the sufferers.

The shadows deepened in the corners of the room as the twilight died away. The house was perfectly still, the garden looked cold and gloomy. It was the silence and gloom of mourning, for his home was a house of sorrow. Crossing the room wearily, he peeped into the garden of dim shadows, pressing his feverish face against the cool glass; his dry eyes were heavy with anguish. Only two years ago they had planted those shrubs and flowers. She with her little hands encased in huge leather gloves, he in his flannels, wielding a spade like a true son of Adam. And the flowers still bloomed in their Eden, but he must pace its paths alone. Other hands would pluck those flowers,

and other lovers sit in the arbor where they had so often watched the moonlight silver the rustling leaves. He had lounged there with his pipe, careless and happy, as she nestled at his side, often in silence, sometimes whispering sweet confidences.

By one whirl of the wheel of life it was in the past, but still unburred. Sinking into his chair he rested his head upon his hands. It was very, very dark. So swift and sudden had the trouble come upon him that it still seemed like the haunting memories of a terrible dream. But a few months ago he was happy in the sweet companionship of his wife; now he was alone.

Happiness in this world depends largely upon ability to forget. It was not without a feeling of pleasure that he had accepted De Vaux's invitation to rejoin him in Gray's Inn. The rooms seemed more comfortable than before, and the freedom was delightful. As the band upon his hat became narrower, the restraint, prompted by sympathy, with which men regarded him, died away. He drifted back to the old life with a feeling of pleasant expectancy, but to find the world had changed. It surprised him to discover how selfish De Vaux had become, while the manners of their "set" pained him. Their brilliancy seemed to have given place to flash-gasousness, originality to carping contentedness; wit was now insolent abuse, and humor positive vulgarity. Yet they were the same actors without a "shop," authors without a publisher, and less extraordinary imbeciles without an object in life. With indolent interest he used to expect great things from some of them, but they were still squatting in the mire. The Junior Getherium had been refurnished, and the cooking was excellent, but the same decline was noticeable among the members. The tales old Badboy narrated in his corner of the smoking-room were, to say the least, unfit for publication, yet the old fellow was his most cherished acquaintance in the bygone days. The place abounded in loud-voiced boys of a new and, to him, most objectionable species. The past belongs to the past; a man cannot live his life again.

"Poor old fellow, I don't care to say disagreeable things about him, but, really, he had become a most selfish beggar," said De Vaux, leaning against the mantelpiece.

"Marriage spoils a man utterly," said his friend as he knocked the ashes from his pipe on to the carpet. "You ought to get married again, he's no good for anything else."

"He used to be such a jolly, easy-going fellow, now he growls at everything. The way he bullies our unfortunate laundress is shocking. When he wakes up, he'll make you sweep those ashes from the floor."

"The side the man puts on, his assumption of virtue, and the way he sneers at us really annoys me. He is a skeleton at every feast, looks as shocked as a curate if a man tells a raucous tale, and actually called old Soaker a cad because he could not walk downstairs. I remember bringing him home in a cab two or three years ago, and he yelled comic songs all the way."

"It's awful," said De Vaux, with a laugh; "last Sunday he came in while I was having afternoon tea with some ladies, and simply turned upon his heel, and slammed the door as he went out."

"Well, I'm afraid you can't poison him and put him out of his misery."

"He is not our old Seltton, theaters bore him, the halls are disgusting. He won't dance, does not drink enough to enliven a healthy child, smokes in a corner and growls. At the club no one can understand him. He has tried the river, golf, the Solent, the card room, and Paris, all in vain. I don't know what to do with him. You remember our last little supper party here. Well, he got it up, and was perfectly disgusted with everything and everybody, yet all the boys were old friends."

"Yes, I'm afraid he is incurable—" "Yes, I am," cried Seltton, springing from the sofa upon which he had been sleeping. "I'm a nuisance to myself and all of you. I can't forget the two happy years of my life, and I can never live them again. I'll go into some corner and wait patiently for the future, since I cannot go back to the past."

"Isn't he a lazy dadda, snoring like big bow-wow when baby wants to see him?"

"Why, Kitty," he said, dreamily, awaking with a start, "is it really you?" "Really me, silly boy. Whom else did you expect, sir?" she asked, waving the baby before him.

"Come to me, sonnie," he cried, laughing playfully. "See how eager the little chappie is, Kate."

Then, as Philly nestled on his shoulder, clutching vainly at his mustache, he drew her down onto his knee, and said, softly: "By Jove, darling, how I have missed you."

"Poor boy, it is too bad of me to run home to my mother so often, isn't it? But I've such news for you. Father is going to launch out awfully. He is actually going to buy a yacht."

"A yacht?" "Yes; the boys are becoming so horsey. You know how he detests that sort of thing. So this is to cure them. You are to be captain, and he is coming over after dinner to consult you. Isn't it charming?"

"Rather; we won't go to Herne bay for our vacation, eh, little girl?"

"Herne bay, indeed! What ever made you think of such a place?"—Black and White.

A Ship.

Dr. Thirdly—I wish you would hold the missionary box until after Christmas; I may want to send some things. Elder Berry—I know what you are thinking of; but they don't wear slippers in Alaska.—Puck.

A Crucial Test.

Mrs. Winthrop—Do you think Jack Desmond is really in love with Mabel? Mr. Winthrop—Great goodness!—yes; why, he plays dominoes with her by the hour!—Puck.

SOMETHING WONDERFUL.

The New Experience of an American Traveler Abroad.

He Actually Runs Across a Man in a Barber Shop Who Willingly Yields His "Next" Privilege to Another.

A New Yorker who recently returned to the city after a foreign tour says that he enjoyed one experience while abroad the like of which he never before heard of, says the Sun of that city. "During my life in New York, for forty years," he said, "I have met plenty of nice people and seen more acts of courtesy and deeds of kindness than would fill a book. I have known of a skintight giving money to the needy, and of a passenger in an elevated car resigning his seat to a woman, and of a Wall street man with Christian symptoms, and of a smoker handing his lighted cigar right end foremost to a stranger who asked a light, and of a human being who always had a match when anybody needed one, and of a woman who would dote on the beauty of another without jealousy, and of an entertainer who would cut for his guest a better piece of porterhouse steak than he kept for himself, and even of a curmudgeon who would, upon occasion, give proof that there was a streak of virtue in him. All such things one can safely expect at times in the world."

"But, though I have been a customer at barbers' shops in New York for twenty years, I never saw and never heard of a case in which a man who, when it came his turn to get in the chair for a shave, and when the barber cried 'Next!' would resign his place to any other man in waiting. He will stick up for his rights there against the world. I have seen many a quarrel, and two or three fights, between men waiting to get shaved, when there was a crowd, as to which one came in first. I was angry myself one day when a fellow who had been getting his boots blacked in the rear of the barber shop, and whom I had not seen, stepped up to a chair which I was about to take, and said he had come in before me. No matter if another man is in a hurry, or if he must catch a train, or if his wife is anxious about him because he is too late for dinner, you won't give up your turn in the barber's chair on his account. There is one of his rights a man will stand up for, and you can see it at the barber's."

"When I went abroad I found the same thing in England and France. In London once I asked a barber if he could not put me ahead, and he answered sharply that he would not do it for the bank of England. The Parisians are polite everywhere except in the barber's shop when their turn comes, and you would have to fight a duel if you asked one of them to let you get shaved before him because your soap was growing cold."

"It was in my programme, after seeing the French and English, to take a trip through the highlands of Scotland. I saw plenty of historic spots as I made my way far up on the Grampian hills, where the frugal swains feed their flocks, and further yet, where the fishermen breast the waves; but I would give them all away for an experience I had when I reached an ancient town beyond the Grampians one Saturday afternoon. At the inn I asked for a barber, as I wanted to go to church the next day, and must be shaved. When I got to the barber's place his only chair was filled, and four or five customers were waiting their turn. In a few moments the chair was emptied, and I expected that one of the men would spring into it. Not a man moved. The barber looked at me, smiled, and told me he was ready for me. I said to him in a low voice that several others had been there before me. 'I dinna mind that,' he replied. 'You're a stranger up here, maybe an American, and the stranger always comes first wi' us.' I glanced at the other men as if to apologize or to secure their assent. 'Aye,' said one of them, 'the stranger must always be first here; we can wait.' I took the chair with thanks, and the price of a shave was two-pence."

"The seven wonders of the world, all put together, and with the addition of Cleopatra's Needle in the Central park, would not have impressed