PRUDENCE of PEGGY

By Ethel Barrington

Peggy dwelt with her maiden aunt. She had been brought up so irreproachably that her prudence passed into a proverb among her friends.

Peggy walked circumspectly through a careless world. So correct was she that her mere presence was the stamp of propriety, and had she been a little older she could have sidetracked all the young matrons as chaperons. Peggy represented the phenomenon of an old head on young shoulders. She looked ahead and was never taken at a disadvantage.

Old maids' children are proverbially flawless. Her aunt expected Peggy to love with discrimination and marry wisely, a fitting crown to so exemplary a girlhood, but the appearance of James Dunbar proved a stumbling

"READ," SUGGESTED HER LOVER AS HE HELD THE COPY BEFORE HER.

block. Peggy lost her heart completely. Only her head saved her from its weak promptings.

"What you ask is impossible, Jim. On what should we live?"

"I've a hundred a month and am promised a raise."

"Which you can't spend until you earn. No, Jim, I'm not extravagant, but how could we live and save for a rainy day?"

"Not much to save at first. Surely you care for me, Peggy? Why, I worship you, so nothing else matters. I won't let you want, and we can wait for luxuries."

Peggy shook her head. The struggle was so great she dared not trust her voice.

"Well, be engaged—promise to wait for me."

"Oh, Jim, you tear at my"—

"Your prudence." Dunbar's voice grew a little hard.

"I meant heartstrings, but that does not matter. You are going to Cheltmore in charge of the telegraph office. The conditions will be new. We are both young. Aunt Margaret says we can afford to wait. When you get your raise come and ask"—

"Encouraging!" cried Dunbar, with scorn. "Work and plan for a girl who for 'prudent reasons' may be married before my aim is accomplished! If you are afraid to marry now, all right, but at least give me your promise or it all ends here."

"If you talk to me like this now, what will you do when we are married?"

Peggy in her anger still looked ahead. They were walking, and now they instinctively turned toward home.

Aunt Margaret was pleased with her niece's decision.

"You acted prudently, as always."

Great praise, yet somehow it failed to comfort Peggy. James Dunbar went to his new post without a word, and life became a dull, spiritless affair to Peggy. She lost her appetite and forgot how to laugh. Aunt Margaret, growing anxious, dosed her with old fashioned remedies, but neither referred to Peggy's decision.

At length came a break in the monotony. Stella Moss, recently married, wrote Peggy of her happiness and begged her company for a week. Peggy read, with amazement, that she lived at Cheltmore. James Dunbar had been appointed telegraph operator at Cheltmore. The opportunity could not be resisted. Peggy in a delirium of hopefulness accepted with her aunt's permission. Neither spoke of the possibilities of the visit up to the last day; then Aunt Margaret cleared her throat.

"My dear, your decision about Mr. Dunbar was prudent, but"—

"I don't suppose I shall see him," ventured Peggy hypocritically.

"He may reopen the—er—subject. Do not be hasty. I have been peculiarly blessed. I have the comfort of a daughter without the drawback of a husband. Every one is not so fortunate."

Peggy kissed her aunt, then, gathering her baggage, entered the cab. As she bought her ticket the agent inquired whether she wished Cheltmore in Pennsylvania or New York.

"Pennsylvania," said Peggy.

It seemed more expensive and a longer trip than she had anticipated, but it was not until late in the afternoon that she suspected a mistake. The conductor informed her that the train was due at 7. Peggy remembered Stella's writing that if she took the 3 o'clock train she would arrive in ample time for dinner.

The train had pulled out at 3:15, and Peggy had charged the discrepancy to her watch. Now she grew anxious. Her preparations had not been made with her usual forethought. She had cared only for the fact that she was going to Cheltmore and that Jim was there.

On reaching her destination the worst was soon known. There was no such address as Stella had given, and the directory proved that she did not reside in Cheltmore, Pa. Peggy, a little frightened, retraced her steps to the station to inquire for the next train for Philadelphia. The first person she ran into was Dunbar.

"Peggy—why, Peggy!"

Then, remembering their difference, he thrust his hands into his pockets and turned silent.

"Jim—I—I've done a stupid thing. I've come to the wrong Cheltmore." Peggy sank crestfallen into the nearest seat and strove to force back her tears. Dunbar's heart softened. "Explain, dear."

"I'm to visit Stella at Cheltmore. I—I thought there was only one. When is the next train back?"

"To Philadelphia?" inquired Dunbar slowly.

"Of course. How soon?"

He evaded the question.

"Peggy, is cold reason so satisfactory? Didn't you miss me just a little?"

"Oh, Jim, but the train. It will be so late. What will aunt say?"

"I'll satisfy all questions if you answer one of mine. Do you love me enough to share my struggles?"

Peggy tried to take her eyes from him, but he held her with the strength of love that shone in his. She smiled a little mistily. "It's not wisdom perhaps, but"—

"You trust me absolutely?" demanded Dunbar.

"For all time," murmured Peggy.

"Then come, dear!" He hurried her to the telegraph office, which was empty, and began rapidly ticking off a message. Then he scrawled a few words on a blank form.

"Sweetheart, prepare to be brave. Your reputation for prudence is shattered beyond repair. But as it brought you to me I have no complaint. There is no train to Philadelphia before noon tomorrow."

"No train"—she faltered.

"I hated to tell you. That's why I secured your promise first. I'll take you now to a friend of mine, Mrs. Davis. She's a monument of propriety."

"What will Aunt Margaret say?" repeated Peggy dismally.

"I'm not sure, but she rather likes me," said Dunbar, smiling. "Anyhow, we shall know when we get her answer to my telegram."

"Yours—what did you say?"

"Read," suggested her lover as he held the copy before her and slipped one arm about her. "Peggy arrived—wedding tomorrow—come"—

"Oh, oh!" gasped Peggy in confusion. Then surrendering herself to his arms she whispered, "I love you."

"You love me, and I've earned promotion. We begin life with one hundred and fifty, so even 'prudence' may be appeased."

"But, Jim—tomorrow—I'm not ready—what will people say?"

"That 'Prudent Peggy' is only human after all, but as you change your name, what does it matter?"

Shy at Answering.

"Why is it that some men will not give a direct and unequivocal answer to even the simplest and most inconsequential questions put to them?" asked a thoughtful citizen. "It is a curious thing that you will find a great many men who simply will not give you a direct answer to the question, though there may exist absolutely no reason in the world for quibbling or for hesitating to answer without equivocation. I was just reading a story of a well known lawyer who is so in the habit of qualifying his answers that he will not tell a friend the time of day without in some way putting in a 'saving clause,' a remark that his watch is probably a little slow or a little fast or something of that sort. One of the presidents, I think it was Van Buren, was of this type and on one occasion refused to say whether the sun rose in the east or the west, remarking that east and west were purely relative terms and what might be east to one man might be west to another. Personally I have known many men who dropped into this habit, and, singularly, some of them have been the most positive and most aggressive characters I have ever known. They would assert things and back them up ignorantly. But ask them a question, and forthwith they would deal you out a qualified answer or often what would amount to no answer at all."—New Orleans Times-Democrat.

Special Prices For Undesirables.

New York restaurants that decline certain classes of trade have a special menu card that is placed in the hands of undesirable guests. The prices are marked away up to six or seven times the standard charges. A small steak costs from $1.50 to $3, three boiled eggs $1, an oyster stew 85 cents and a cup of tea or coffee half a dollar.

In one of these restaurants the other night two orientals who insisted on being served paid $3 for steaks that cost other customers not more than half a dollar. A colored couple dropped in for breakfast and read the special bill of fare with increasing astonishment.

"They don't charge 50 cents for a cup of coffee!" remarked the man incredulously, not understanding the situation.

"Le's gwine right away out o' yere," said the woman, showing her white teeth. "This ain't no fit place for decent cullud folks."—New York Press.

Answering the Critics.

Some members of the congregation of the late Dr. Joseph Brown of Glasgow objected to his frequent absence from home and complained of it—some of them to him personally and more of them behind his back. When he thought he had heard enough of it, he addressed his congregation one Sunday thus:

"With regard to objection concerning my absence, I have to say, first, when I am out of the pulpit I am usually in some other body's pulpit. When you are not in your own pew, are you in some other body's pew? Second, when I am out of my pulpit I put some other body into it. When you are out of your pew, do you put some other body into it? Third, when I am out of my pulpit I sometimes get better men than myself to fill it, and you have a chance of hearing the leading preachers in the church, and sometimes I get worse men than myself to fill it, and the chance of hearing them ought to make you thankful for your mercies."

The Wisdom of Being Big.

Why do I carry my lunch in a bag? Because if I satisfy my modest hunger at a hotel there is not a man in the room who is not eating at my cost. Two shillings' worth of cold beef is eaten, sixpenny worth by me and eighteen penny worth by him, and we each pay a shilling.

When I meet some grenadier of a woman on my dressmaker's staircase I know that whole yards of her dress are down on my bill. Her gloves and her boots cost her no more than mine cost me.

An overgrown creature sits in front of me at the theater. He sees the piece, and I see him. And we pay the same. It is a great injustice. In the day of fixed prices it is well to be big. The necessaries of life are pooled and the value averaged per head of the population.—Lady Theo in "Helen of Troy, N. Y."

They Got No Bread.

Antoinette de Bourbon, the mother of the Guises, had in addition to her other fine qualities great good sense. One example of the discipline to which she subjected the young Guises indicates that had there been more mothers like her in her class there would have been less of ruthless extravagance on the part of the royalty and nobility of France.

The young nobles were out hunting and rode through fields which had been sown with corn. The duchess heard of it. That evening, according to the tradition preserved at Joinville, there was no bread on the table.

The princes at once asked for bread, astonished at such negligence in this well ordered household.

"My children," replied Antoinette, "it is necessary to economize flour since you have destroyed the future harvest."