

OUR SOPPY CHIEF

AN AMBIGUOUS ANSWER

LADY LESTER was at her wits' end. That was the way she put it in her colloquial dialect. Also, she did not know which way to turn, but this was owing to the lack of routes rather than any indecision in selection.

The fact was that she had adopted the popular proverbial method of risking all on a single throw of the dice, and it had turned up aces. Reduced to prose, this meant that she had strained (and indeed overstressed) every nerve in order to present a thoroughly smart appearance and give her daughter a complete London season, in hope that that damsel would make a good catch, settle herself comfortably in life, and be off her mother's hands for the future. Alice Lester had insisted on this till her mother, with much misgiving, consented. In consequence Lady Lester had spent the greater part of her yearly income in two months, and run into debt as well. The end of the season was approaching and the catch had not been secured. It seemed that the effort had been fruitless, and the consequences would have to be faced.

Lady Lester knew as well as possible that the only way to pay her debts was to sell capital. This would reduce her already slender income. Besides, how she and Alice were going to live and preserve a decent appearance on the small amount of income left for the remaining five months or so of the year was a question which made her inclined to scream whenever she thought of it.

She was a handsome woman, tall, stately, fortunate in the possession of a figure that did not age, clever and discreet in the ravages of time. She usually wore black, partly because it was intensely becoming to her, partly for economy's sake. She presented a marked contrast to her daughter, who was pretty, plump, dainty, with retrousse features. Taking the pair together, they were as attractive a mother and daughter as one could hope to see, if it had not been for the eternal discontent written on their features.

Her troubles had not improved Lady Lester's temper.

"If you had only," she said peevishly to her daughter, "given half the encouragement to Lord Wimberley that you have to that wretched Anderson, you might be Lady Wimberley, off my hands, and able to help me a little out of this scrape."

"It's no fault of mine," said Alice, sullenly. "I did all I could to encourage the stick, wasted no end of dances on him, wore myself out with endeavoring to talk to him and make him take me next to asked him for his box seat at the meet of the Coaching Club—"

"Well, you got it," interposed her mother.

"Yes, and everybody, of course, thought that it meant something, but I knew better. I am quite sure that he never intended to offer it to me, and that my offering myself was not agreeable—"

"Then why didn't he say that he had given it away already?"

"That's a mystery to me. But I know perfectly well that he did not give it to me for love of me, and also that he obviously thought before taking my very plain hint—"

"I am sure that he was most nice—" "Nice!" cried the girl shrilly. "He always is nice—in a kind, aggravating, brotherly way. Hope you are enjoying yourself like a good little girl! Can I help? Don't mind me if you don't want me! That's what he always seems to be saying. Could anyone make anything out of that?"

"But he comes here a good deal—"

"Yes, and is just as pleased to talk to any of your old tramps as to me. Why, I believe he is just as pleased to talk to you as to me."

"Then why does he come?" said Lady Lester, who was too much accustomed to her daughter's rudeness to notice it.

"Oh, I don't know. Why does anyone do anything? One must do something. He is not a man of deep reasons. He finds us pleasant; he meets pleasant people here; we are kinder to him than many. But there is one thing that is quite certain—that I have tried to give him every kind of opportunity, and he has never taken advantage of one of them. On the contrary, his one desire has always seemed to get away."

"Your foolish encouragement of Anderson—"

"It's no good going on like that, mamma," said the girl, blushing suddenly red. "I stuck to Wimberley as long as there was a ghost of a chance, and when I saw there was none, and no other man came forward—well, I suppose I love George Anderson as much as a girl like me can—I know we can't marry—but what's the good of going to dances and dancing with useless sticks after useless sticks all the time?"

"Lord Wimberley is not a useless stick," said Lady Lester, with sudden warmth, which brought a tinge of color to her cheeks and made her look much younger and unusually handsome. "It is you who are such a foolish and frivolous girl that you are incapable of appreciating his talents. His speeches in the House of Lords have been much admired—"

"Ob, why don't you have a go-in for him yourself, if you admire him so much? I will make you a present of my chance, for it isn't worth a straw."

"Alice, how dare you speak to me like that? Remember that I am your mother."

Alice had not seen her mother angry for years. She was amazed and a trifle

"He is not such a young man," replied Alice gravely. "He is a good deal older than many men of more age. Besides, he is serious, devoted to politics, much admired as a speaker—as you yourself said. And he certainly knows his own mind. He practically—and very tactfully—offered me a place for George, with seven hundred a year, so that we may be able to marry—and be out of the way—if I could help him, and a man doesn't do that unless he means business."

"He told me that he thought you would marry," murmured the widow, "and spoke very generously about you."

"He is very rich," pursued Alice. "It would be a mere fleabite to him. Wimberley is a lovely place, and there is the coach, and no doubt there would be a house in town, and carriages and every luxury, and no more worry and trouble, and you know, darling, that when you really take trouble you don't look more than half—quite young, in fact, especially to people who are a little shortsighted, as he is."

"And I should be free from your tongue," interposed the widow, sharply, by no means grateful for these compliments. "Yes, you are right. Lord Wimberley proposed to me this afternoon. I told him it was sudden and I would give him an answer to-morrow. I have thought it over, and I shall say 'Yes.' He swears that he loves me and has never loved anyone else—"

"And you must love him, too, mother, dear," observed Alice, with catlike softness, "or you wouldn't marry him."

"Of course I love him—devotedly—from the first. There is no other reason why I should marry him, is there?"

But, reviewing the circumstances of the case, Alice felt that this answer might mean anything.—London World.

HOW SHE GAINED CONSENT.

Tactical Girl Obtains Her Father's Approval of Her Marital Choices.

Being an independent, straightforward American girl, she boldly entered the library where her father was trying to keep awake, took his lap in preference to an easy chair, got him by a half-Nelson hold about the neck and promptly told him that she had engaged herself to that young Johnson on Second avenue.

"What?" whooped the old gentleman, and he attempted to get his feet that he might express himself with more action and impressiveness. But it is a quick shift from the Half-Nelson to the strangle hold and she made the shift while she talked rapidly on the cheek with her free hand and vigorously worked the strangle.

"Lucy!" he yelled, "break away," showing that he was not so unsophisticated as he looked. "you're throttling me."

"He had a nice position and good prospects and no bad habits, and never made love to any girl before, and his family is all right and mamma said she was willing if you were and Uncle Dick says there are lots of worse fellows than Mr. Johnson and Aunt Kate says she always did like him and our minister—"

"For heaven's sake, girl," gurgled the old gentleman, who was purple and gasping, "do you know what you're doing?" and he made a desperate effort to break the hold, with the result that he tightened it.

"Don't get excited, papa dear, bless old heart. I knew you wouldn't be cruel enough to break my heart," and she put on the pressure. "As I was saying, the minister said—"

"Minister was blown!" and papa's eyes were bulging. "All of 'em be blown. Marry him. Marry the whole Johnson family, but let me get a breath." Then she kissed him enthusiastically, called him an angel and was proclaiming her engagement in the parlor, while the old gentleman was coughing, wheezing, swearing and assuring himself how he'd hate to be thrown out. Well, now, what Mr. Anderson wants is that a woman should find out some comfortable berth vacant and never rest until she has pushed him into it."

"But how does a woman begin?" said Alice, with deepening interest, for there was something fascinating in the picture which Wimberley drew so lightly.

"Oh, she talks to people and finds out. Now it happens, oddly enough, that I know of a post worth seven hundred a year, which is practically in my gift, and which any gentleman who was also a man of the world and disposed to stick to his work could fill—"

"Why don't you give it to Mr. Anderson?"

"Well, you see, I don't know him, and I am not a general philanthropist. If a friend of mine, whom I wished to oblige were to ask me—but none has, apropos, I want you to do me a favor."

Alice's heart beat at this abrupt announcement. Was it possible that he could mean to propose after this extraordinary beginning? If so, would she be glad? Would she be?

He made his request in plain, straightforward language, and she gazed at him at first mystified, then a prey mixed emotion, anon aware of a rose-colored future before her. Her face wreathed in smiles as she gave her consent.

"Well, now, is there anything that you want from me, little girl?"

Whereupon Alice, smiling and blushing, told him what she wanted most.

In the following afternoon Lord Wimberley called on the Lesters and found them at home. Soon after his arrival Alice left the room on some excuse. Then she put on her hat and went out for the afternoon, telling the servant to say "Not at home" to any callers.

When she returned she found her mother sitting in the drawing room, musing profoundly. As Lady Lester's hour for dressing was past—and her toilet was a long and important function—Alice felt that something had happened. She was a trifle anxious, but she did not dare question her mother.

The latter opened the ball.

"Don't you think, Alice, it was rather rude of you to go away when Lord Wimberley was here?"

"No," replied Alice, boldly. "He asked me to. It was arranged last night that I should."

Mother and daughter looked fixedly at one another.

"He is such a young man," observed the former, vaguely. "He cannot know his mind."

Alice had not seen her mother angry for years. She was amazed and a trifle

Censorship in China.

The censorship is a very real thing in China. There any one who writes an immoral book is punished with 100 pounds of the heavy bamboo and banishment for life. Any one reads it is also punished.

Elastic Substances.

"Rubber, spun-glass, steel, and ivory are the most elastic substances." The writer of this seems to have forgotten the human conscience.—Boston Transcript.

When a man first begins to feel the need of a cane, he carries an umbrella with him which he never opens, and thinks he is fooling people.

One Instance.

"Thomas," said the teacher of the class in physiology, "can you give a familiar instance of the power of the human system to adapt itself to changed conditions?"

"Yes'm," responded Tommy Tucker.

"My Aunt Aggie gained hundred

pounds in flesh in less'n a year, an' her skin didn't crack a particle."—Chicago Tribune.

How We'd Stop the Crying.

Suggestion of a Man Whose Peace Was Disturbed by a Fretful Baby.

The woman and the baby in the westbound venue car kept the car lively. The baby had the unquenchable yell from the peace monument to the war department and beyond. The baby kicked and tossed and beat its mother in the face with its fists and tried to poke holes in the car window and gasped and snorted and choked.

"What is it mamma's pity it sing wants?" the baby's mother would inquire.

"Wow-wow—Blub-wo-eo!"

"Baby hurts its poor itty mamma punching her. Does baby want the nice itty horse?"

"Smith—How so?"

Jones—Slobb was running for Congress and Jobb was playing the races.

"Puck."

Plain Evidence.

Wife—What shall we name the baby, John?

Husband—I have decided to leave that entirely to you, my dear.

"John, you've been drinking again!"—Philadelphia Bulletin.

Which He Never Got.

Customer—I want to get a ton of coal.

Dealer—What size?

Customer—The legal 2,240-pound size, if you please.—Philadelphia Press.

Just Think of It.

Men's Opinions.

"You can't tell some women anything."

"Of course not; they won't stop talking themselves long enough to let you in."

—Philadelphia Bulletin.

Running Expenses.

Jones—They say the running expenses of Slobb, Jobb & Co. eat up all the profits.

Smith—How so?

Jones—Slobb was running for Congress and Jobb was playing the races.

Puck.

How to Keep in the Swim.

Mrs. Fotheringay Jibbs came to my reception without an invitation.

"You don't mean it?"

"Yes; she explained to me that she felt sure my omission of her was an oversight!"—Indianapolis Journal.

How to Stop the Crying.

Review of Trade.

Activity is Becoming More Pronounced in the Wool Markets.

R. G. Dun & Co. says: Business in the East and particularly along the North Atlantic coast has been catching up with the rest of the country a little this week, so that in the lines where complaint has been heard of late the tone is better. This comes from the working off of retail stocks which the owners feared would have to be carried over to next season. In builders' hardware the buying has been notably better, and the distribution in the grocery jobbing trade has been given a considerable stimulus. Even the lagard dry goods market has shown a good measure of improvement, though in cotton goods there is still much to be desired, for the larger buying has not brought any improvement in the general tone, and in some directions the market is slower than a week ago.

Footwear is firmly held at unchanged prices, with good buying of spring lines in the Boston market. Western trade is less active and some orders have been countermanded.

No diminution appears in the movement of iron and steel products. Mills are rushed with orders and new contracts are taken at full prices. Pig iron is freely bought and prices tend upward. Billets and other partially manufactured forms are firmer, and finished goods would command higher prices if immediate delivery could be secured.

Grain markets are devoid of wide fluctuations, although many reports are circulate regarding the condition of winter wheat, but it is too early to secure definite information. News from India and Australia indicate a larger crop than last year.

Failures for the week in the United States were 258 against 201 last year. In Canada for the same period they were 39 against 33 last year.

Pacific Coast Trade.

Seattle Market.

Onions, new yellow, \$2.50@3.

Lettuce, hot house, \$1.60 per case.

Potatoes, new, \$18.

Beets, per sack, \$1.

Turnips, per sack, 75c.

Squash—2c.

Carrots, per sack, 75c.

Parsnips, per sack, \$1.25@1.50.

Celery—60c doz.

Cabbage, native and California, 2c per pounds.

Butter—Creamery, 25c; dairy, 15@18c; ranch, 16c@18c pound.

Cheese—14c.

Eggs—Ranch, 20c; Eastern 20c.

Poultry—13c; dressed, native