ANGELA.

By CLINTON ROSS.

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The scandal mongers of the wheel are confined mostly to those who cannot or do not wheel. Not so long ago women were likely to make mental faces at other women who rode, but as soon as they themselves were spinning along with a freedom they never had fancied they straightway wondered at all these allegations. And how indeed does a brisk turn under the sky and between the fields drive away cobwebby notions! In the old days a canter might do it, but a horse is a luxury, and, even if you can afford it, it is ever getting out of condition and to be fit must have a modicum of constant exercise. But now all go a-spinning, the horseman as well as the one time long distance walkers, the sinners and those who strive to regain this old world from the curse.

Among these latter no one is better equipped for the ancient fight than the rector of St. Matthew in the Park, the Rev. Lemuel Springer. With body and mind attuned to a fine healthfulness at 30, he believes strongly and preaches and acts his belief, and in these days, when clergymen sometimes forget that their duty is but to heal the heart's wounds and to preach the reward of simple honesty and cleanly living, it is a delight to sit of a morning in a pew of St. Matthew in the Park and listen to the direct and human religion its athletic young rector expounds. I myself remember him when he was No. 3 on the varsity crew and a very great man. He still could pull that third oar as strongly, but the only sport his duties now permit him is wheeling, and if you go to the park of a morning you may see him going up and down hill and doubtless meditating those words for the soul cheer afforded by his bits of sermonizing, put always in English tersely strong.

And yet he has had his troubles, his experiences, his questionings, his sin, his falsity, and if you will follow my story you will see how it all was due to the wheel that once he forgot himself.

Of a May day the Rev. Lemuel was coasting down the long hill into the straggling village of Roundbush, Westchester. It was his day of outing, and now at noon he was hungry after a 30 miles' exhilarating spin, and the world had put its care away, and his blood was tingling, and his heart singing like the birds in the fields and the tree tops and through the windy, blue spaces of that sunny spring day sky. The old tavern at Roundbush, which bears on a creaking sign a distorted likeness of our first great president, after long years of desuetude again has found usefulness through the revival of the road, and flaunts a near placard, "Lunches For Bicyclers." Yet this afternoon Rev. Lemuel thought he had it quite to himself, as the fat landlord pushed his shirt sleeves further above his brawny elbows and said he guessed he could give his visitor "somethin that was fit eatin." And Lemuel—I will drop his title—thought the broiled chicken delicious and sauntered into the parlor, dark after the sunshine, with its haircloth chairs and its colored prints of "Washington Crossing the Delaware" and "John Brown's Capture" and certain photographs of prim, rural folk.

Now, usually Lemuel was most observing. Yet he had been in that room fully five minutes before he noticed a figure stretched out on a couch—at the dark side, to be sure, so that it may not have been so strange that he had not seen her at first. Her face sunk in

"I need a clergyman," said she.

a pillow, she seemed to be sobbing. Lemuel at once made for the door, when he heard a sweet and strangely plaintive voice.

"I'm such a fool! Oh, I beg your pardon!" she added, with such evident confusion that Lemuel turned about hastily to see what he held after the prettiest figure of a woman in a witching bicycle costume, and what she was like I'll leave you to fancy, just fancy—that is, the very nicest girl of your acquaintance—and you will see her as Lemuel saw her much more easily than from any description of mine.

"Oh!" she said, hastily rubbing her eyes.

"I beg your pardon," said Lemuel.

"It was my fault," said she, looking him over demurely. "I forgot this was a public room."

"I am sure it was mine," said Lemuel hastily. It was all rather strange and sudden, and yet he decided at once she was a well bred young person.

"Oh, I am glad!" she exclaimed.

"I don't see why," he blurted out in astonishment.

"Because you are Mr. Springer of St. Matthew in the Park."

He bowed, remembering, with a bit of conceit, that a lot of people doubtless knew him whom he didn't know from Adam or Eve.

"I need a clergyman," said she.

Now, at this astounding statement Lemuel stared his utter astonishment. Did she need spiritual advice? She looked a bit worldly.

"That's rather a surprising statement," she added.

"I don't know," said he hopelessly.

"I mean," she said, "I want an escort to Greenwich, and with a clergyman there can be no question."

"I don't know," said Lemuel again.

"You must think me strange."

He looked at her for a moment keenly and made a very worldly reply.

"I think you delightful."

"You will let me go with you, then?"

"Why, of course, if you ask me," he said. And why in the world did he say exactly that?

"I do, and we must be started before him."

"Him? I don't understand."

"I will explain later. We must be started now. We have no time."

"Oh! No time?"

"Can you oblige me, Mr. Springer?"

And with those eyes on him he could and did, and, having paid his reckoning, he was in the saddle, this graceful young person beside him, again and again looking over her shoulder. She kept up a brisk pace, neither saying a word, although you may believe he was wondering at the impulse which had brought him to such sudden complaisance. What if any of his parishioners should see him as he was now, tearing madly up and down hill with this undeniably very pretty young woman and running madly from him? Who the dence was "him?"—only, of course, Lemuel didn't say "who the deuce."

"Oh, oh!" she cried suddenly.

"Ah! What's the matter?" said he slowly.

"If he should appear and attempt to speak to me, you must knock him down."

"That would be rather unclerical, wouldn't it?" said Lemuel.

"You must," said she.

"Oh, if I must," said he, looking at her and knowing he certainly would.

The road forks a half mile farther with, at the point, a bit of wood and thicket. As you near the wood you have the stretch of the road to the left, and now as they came into that view Lemuel's companion cried out:

"Oh, I saw him!"

"Who?"

"No matter. We must hide. I don't believe he could have seen me," she added quickly.

And, dismounting, she dragged her wheel after her into the bushes.

"You stay there," she called. "If he asks if you have seen me, you must say you haven't." And she disappeared.

"That would be a lie, wouldn't it?"

"I have no patience with a man who can't lie when it's necessary," came back the answer. And all was still, save for the rural noises of the sunny May day. But at last about a turn came a wheelman. He was young and well groomed by the hand of Hanover street, London, W. Seeing Lemuel, he paused.

"Have you passed a young lady, sir?"

"What sort of a young lady?" said Lemuel, avoiding the lie direct.

"Wheeling."

"A half dozen, I think," said Lemuel truly, breathing a sigh of relief.

For our young gentleman was in his saddle and tearing on.

Five minutes passed. But presently a face appeared in a leafy frame—a laughing, tantalizing face—when she followed, dragging the wheel.

"He didn't see me."

"Now, what does this mean?" Lemuel asked rather angrily.

"Is your patience worn out?" said she demurely.

"Yes, I think it is. What's your name?"

"Angela."

"Angela what?"

"I am not going to tell you."

"But you know mine."

"Everybody does," said she, with gentle flattery.

"Oh, I don't know! But what does it mean?"

"Now, please don't be angry—please." And she added, "You've been so good."

"Have I?" said he.

"Yes; I don't know what I should have done if you hadn't appeared just then. You make me able to say if any one should see me, 'Why, I am out with Mr. Springer, and he is a clergyman!'"

"Oh, dear!" said Lemuel.

"Now, don't bother, please! We'd better be on the road."

And she mounted.

"Come on!" she cried.

And when he was by her side she began again:

"I'll explain, as I ought. There was a girl, and she thought she loved a man."

"Yes, I have heard of girls like that."

"But she didn't really."

"Yes, I know."

"How do you?"

"Hum! I have a parish."

"So you have. Well, to go on, when she hears that man is engaged to another girl, she tries to 'cut' the other girl 'out'—out of pique—not love for the man, you understand."

"No, I don't."

"Well, you are not so clever as I thought. But to return to this girl"—

"Angela?"

"Yes, she was Angela, if you will. Angela encourages the man"—

"The man who just passed?"

"Tom we'll call him."

"Yes, Angela encourages Tom, and Tom succumbs"—

"Do you think so?" she said, looking at him mischievously. "Yes, he did. I must be frank with you, a clergyman. And it goes on—in a country house in Westchester in May. But there's small chance in a house party, you know."

"Yes, I know," said he.

"Of course you know, because you are a young clergyman of a modish church. Now, to go on with the story, Angela agrees to meet Tom on the wheel. She wheels for a long time before the appointed hour, and, getting tired, stops, as you know, and, being tired, her conscience pricks her."

"I know of such cases," said Lemuel laconically.

"And she thinks of the other girl, and remembers how wicked she has been, because she has been encouraging Tom just for fun."

"She should have felt wicked," said Lemuel severely.

"Just then she sees a very prominent young clergyman."

"Oh, no!" said Lemuel becomingly.

"Well, at once she snatches the chance. She will appear to Tom when he meets her to be out with the clergyman. If he speaks, she will ignore him. Should he persist the clergyman, who is the stronger, will knock him down."

"Will he?"

"Yes, he promised."

"Did he?"

"Yes, because Angela wished it."

"Well, perhaps. But when Tom appears why does Angela run into the bushes?"

"Don't you think it were better to avoid the meeting?"

"Possibly."

"And now," she said, dismounting and extending a hand, "goodby."

"You're going to leave me?"

"I live over there."

"There are a lot of houses. Greenwich, isn't it?"

"Yes, Greenwich, but no matter which house. You are going back to town. I am ever so much obliged to you. You have been ever so good."

"Angela," he said, "must it be goodby?"

"Yes."

"And you won't flirt any more?"

"I never do."

"But you have confessed to it—with Tom."

"I never will again. Now, goodby, Mr. Springer."

And she was in her saddle and smiling back at him and vanishing over the slope, leaving him rubbing his eyes.

At first he thought he would follow, but then in Greenwich he likely would meet some one who knew him, and he could not afford to appear ridiculous, particularly after such an escapade.

Yet, as he wheeled, he regretted his resolution, and he envied Tom, and he couldn't think of his sermon, and he really was on that ride simply to clarify his mind that he might make his next discourse a fitting one.

And back at his desk it was the same, and his sermon was singularly poor that next Sabbath morning.

And he strove with himself and tried to put her out of his mind and to think of how scandalous it all would seem to any of his parishioners who should hear of it. Yet he yielded so far as to find himself looking about furtively for Angela. He even, with some self deception, wheeled several times over the same roads.

"I never will again. Now, goodby, Mr. Springer."

But when he understood how impulse was carrying him he lashed himself mentally as a hermit of old did his flesh, and he wrote a mighty sermon, which quite astonished his congregation, and after he had delivered it he was compelled out of consistency to give up his one indulgence, surviving from a great career as a college athlete.

And he plunged deeper into his work, and "God's poor" and suffering never had more attention in that parish.

But he couldn't give up dinners and souls altogether, as a certain attendance on these functions is plainly a clergyman's duty. And at one of these he saw Angela and was promised, and under her eyes he forgot himself, as, heaven knows, clergymen are as the rest of us.

"Angela," he began. "I have been looking for you."

"Have you?" said she.

"And Tom?" he asked fearfully.

"Oh, he's married!"

"To whom? I didn't catch your name. Was it Mrs. ——?"

"No, it isn't. It was—the other girl."

"I hope you have followed my advice," he said after a moment.

"Not to— I told you I never did."

"I wish—I really wish you would make me the exception," said Rev. Lemuel.

And the parish gossips—save, to be sure, certain dowagers and prim acidulous virgins—declare that Angela, the rector's lady, shows the rule—*if* an outrageously lively young woman turning sedate, if her fancy and faith may be caught and held, all of which, of course, is fitting the curtain fall on a comedy.

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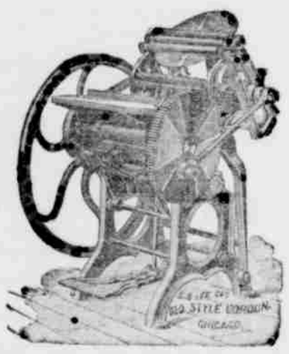

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