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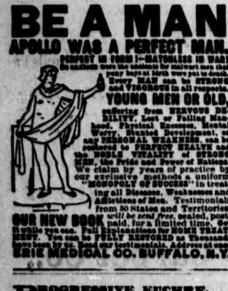
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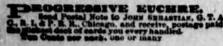


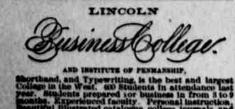
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JOHN MARSTON'S RETURN

A STORY FOR THE NEW YEAR BY V. J.

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LASI how easily things go wrong. A word too much, or a kiss too long. And there cometh a mist and a and life is never the same again. So wrote the

poet, with regretful tears in every word, and so have hearts moaned, when quivering lips could not put into meter

and rhyme the thoughts which lay heavy upon them. It has been true always, and the poet wrote of no new discovery; he merely put words to the old. old chords in a minor key, which have beaten upon the sounding boards of men's and women's hearts since men and women were.

If one who had been interested in them had asked John Marston and Mary Palvey why they were no longer friends, as they had been since childhood, neither she in her quiet home in New England, nor he in the active, thriving western town could have given a definite answer.

They would have made the attempt, of course, each according to the light possessed, for who has ever known lovers who quarreled to be unable to give a most explicit and satisfactory explanation-to themselves-of the course of their estrangement, carefully omitting

none of the factors making the integer

of their alienation? Marston was quite positive in his own mind that Mary had been entirely too whimsical for any saue man to tolerate for a moment, much less a lifetime, and Mary was quite as sure in her mind that John Marston was the most perfectly outrageous man she had ever met in the whole course of her existence.

Observe, gentle reader, that these two people were sure "in their minds" of this thing. What degree of certainty was registered in their hearts will appear

Be it as it may, the years had crept along slowly enough, until as many as three lay between the New Year's day when John had turned his back on the east and Mary and the one which, God willing, was to find him once more under the old roof where he had known all our pun mon of upner our pun that the world seemed to have for him. until this unkindly parting had suddenly flung him into such a chaos of unknown things that at first he wandered about among them as one bewildered and

blinded by a great shock.

In it all, however, and through it all, the spirit of the girl he had left behind him shone as a soft light in a misty atmosphere, and do what he would, her face came ever between him and the faces of all other women.

He flirted with the pretty maidens of T would obnow or opnous seed the west, of course; he would scarcely have been a man if he had not, but he was proof against all their womanly wiles and willingness, and they had him disted as "heartless," but he only smiled at that and went on his way untouched, out not unfeeling.

> Now, when he was on the point of returning to the place of beginning, they saw a bit of newer sunlight in his face a tenderer look from his eyes than any of them had ever won from him, and some said that it might be Mr. Marston was not such an emotional Gibraltar as they had fancied him to be.

> He got away at last, and in the rattle of the train and the whirr of the wheels the west began to fall away backward along the straight lines of steel stretching across the prairie, and Marston dreamed of the east.

The east, where the sun rose-would it ever rise again?

In the little New England town among the hills, up to its knees in the snow, there was the usual holiday hilarity, not unmixed with that intangible sadness which ever falls about and infolds the days of the dying year. Christmas had come and gone, and the children were as happy as children only are at Christmas, and the older grown were drawing their dividends of enjoyment as well from Santa Claus and the season.

New Year's was following fast upon the crispy heels of the departing Santa Claus, and as a fitting tribute to the time it was decided to have a "watch

Not an ordinary watch meeting, but a big one—a union meeting in which the congregations of the four churches of the village were to unite and wait in prayer for the going out of the old year and hail with praise the coming in of

John Marston, the village's leading representative abroad, was expected to be there, and on New Year's night he was to have a grand party at the Mars-ton home, where all might welcome him

back again. In the preliminary preparations Mary Palvey was unusually active, if it was unusual for the busy little woman to be active on any occasion of this kind, and there was a cheery light in her face which made her very presence warm, albeit a flecking cloud fell athwart it at

intervals and left a shadow there. For Mary's head and her heart had not been harmonious during the three years gone, and more than one disagreement had arisen between them over this same Marston-Palvey matter, and she was at this very moment trying to settle

their last contention. Watch night came, and everybody was

there except John Marston.
"Train delayed," they said at the railway station, and you know how much further information is always obtainable under such circumstances from railway officials.

As the night wore on and the watchers grew more silent, the solemnity of the hour seeming to descend upon the place as a great weight. Mary could endure it no longer. Quietly and unobserved she slipped out into the open air.

It was a relief to her, and she walked

away into the stillness under the voice less stars, over the crisp and crystal snow, until she came to the little chapel at the edge of the town where on Sundays she played the organ for the choir. Unconsciously she turned into the churchyard.

She knew where the sexton kept the key under a corner of the step, and opening the door, she passed in and down the aisle to her accustomed place,

The chapel was not cold, for services had been held there earlier in the evening, but she drew her heavy cloak about her shoulders with a little shiver and sat down on the organ stool.

But not with music or song in her beart.

She had waited for John and he had not come. She had longed for him and there was

no response. She had wept for him, down there among the watchers, and she was angry

with herself. But here, alone in the silent darkness. she bowed her head upon her hands and

Prayed that he might come safely home; prayed for him and for her. Evidently Mary's heart was triumph-

ing over her head, but the end was not It lacked but a few minutes until mid



"OH, JOHN!" SHE CRIED. to the meeting, so that her absence might not be observed and commented upon st the conclusion of the services, when she heard a man's footfall on the steps out-

Her heart beat quick at first, for Mary had read novels, and she knew that lovers sometimes came to their sweethearts thus; but this was not the fearless tread of a hero.

It was stealthy, so stealthy that if her ear had not been accustomed to every noise about the familiar old building she might not have noted it.

It was a burglar, she was certain, after that first, heart thump, for it was known the communion plate was of silver and worth at least enough to tempt a rural robber, and everybody knew the strong box of the chapel was a strong box only in name.

She was frightened nearly out of her senses, but enough remained to warn her that her only safety lay in hiding behind the organ and giving the thief the right of way to everything in his Slowly, she heard that dreadful step

slipping along the aisle, creaking as it came. She had to exert every energy of her will to keep from screaming, and the slip-slip-creak-creak came nearer and

At the end of the sisle it stopped, as if in doubt which way to turn, and her heart beat slower; then it passed, still slipping, over to the other corner, and

she gave a faint sigh of relief. She couldn't have prevented it if she had died for it, she was certain. On the instant the sickening, awful,

invisible stepping ceased; then it seemed to turn toward her.

Nearer and nearer it came, until she could hear the breathing, until the hands cautiously groping in the dark slid along the organ top and touched

She shrank away, but there was a quick start and two great hands clutched her, and their fingers crawled up to her

throat. She tried to scream then, but she could not.

It was as if she was in a frightful nightmare.

"Hold on! I've got you, you darned thief!" came a voice, suppressed and ter-rible, and with it came the last remaining vestige of poor Mary's wits.

"Oh, John!" she gasped. Then she fainted dead away.

"Well, if this don't beat all!" exclaimed the marauder out of the darkess. Then: "Mary, Mary!" he called, shaking her vigorously. "Scared the poor girl to death, I'll bet a corner lot," "Scared the ne soliloquized in a ludicrously frightened voice, with the vernacular of the east and the west contending for mastery in his words.

He picked her up, now almost as nervous as she had been only a few moments before, and carried her outside.

He looked down upon the still, white face as the light from the snow shone upon it, and with a great bound in his heart he stooped and kissed her.

Then how all the little stars did twinkle, twinkle, and Mary opened her

The next moment she was on her feet and mad.

Mary's head was triumphing now. "Come," she said, "there's a watch meeting at the ball, Mr. Marston, and I should be there; not here.

"With your hand in mine, Mary," he answered her, standing fast. She put her hand in his then, and thus they walked back, and as the watchers

rose from their knees with a song of rejoicing and praise, John and Mary, hand in hand, came in with the new year. "It's funny," said Mrs. Marston a

month later on the local train west, "that John should have noticed the chapel door ajar on his way from the denot that night, and thinking a thief tilv.

was inside had come in and caught me there, wasn't it?"

"Yes'm," responded the conductor, who had known her from childhood, "and if I hadn't been late that night there's no telling what wouldn't have happened either, is there?" And there isn't.

HER DAY.

You mustn't ask me for a kiss, You really mustn't, dear; Just give me time," she murmured, "for, You know it's now leap year."

LEAP YEAR RHYMES.

THE WAY OF A BASHFUL YOUTH. He was a very bashful youth, Who always was afraid; So when he called on New Year's eve,

He simply staid and staid; And waited till the hands flew round The clock upon the shelf; And when the midnight hour was

She did the rest herself. THE PROPER THING FOR LEAP YEAR. She asked him if he would be hers; He laugued a loud, ba! ba! And then he blushed and softly cried, "You'd better see papa."

reached

SHE WAS ALL RIGHT. He did not think she cared for him, But when the leap year came He noticed, to his great surprise, She got there just the same. GOT THERE TOO LATE.

On New Year's morn he quickly rose, And to her house he ran. To find that when he reached her door At half past twelve the night before She'd asked some other man.

The spinster met, one leap year morn, A man she held most dear, And asked him if he'd call. Said he, "I cannot come this year."

HAPPY MAN. "Tis leap year, and from morn till night We hear him gladly sing: For when he said he'd marry her She bought herself the ring.

OUT OF DANGER. He feels quite safe when leap year come For time has so abused him That all the girls he's ever known

A Peanut Boom in the World's Fair City The Fulton street merchant who sells four green gumdrops for a cent was feel-ing rather despondent yesterday.

"I ought to have went away long ago," he remarked reflectively to a Tribune reporter. "Fac' is, business on Fulton street ain't wot it used to be. Time was when I sold five or six hunderd of them gumdrops any clear evening, but now if I work off a hunderd in a whole day I'm doin' well, I tell you.'

"What's the trouble," inquired the re porter. "Is it the tariff?" "The wot?"

"The tariff."

"Do you mean them cokernut cake el

The reporter explained. "No, 'tain't politics; it's bunannas," said the dealer emphatically. "Bunannas has killed the gumdrop business dead. There aint no show at all wid Eyetalians working off cut rate ounannas on each side of yer and them grape and peanut fellers hovering 'round to get in too. I tell yer, the gum

drop trade is dead."

"What are you going to do?" inquired
the reporter sympathetically.

"Shercawgo," said the dealer, winking

"What?" "Shercawgo: I'm up to a thing or two, and I'm goin out there this week. A friend of mine has went out there and

struck it rich. "Candy trade?" "Yep.

"Gumdrops?" "Not much. He's workin off sugar coased peanuts for California almonds, and I want to get in before the peanut boom is busted."-New York Tribune.

If He Had Never Smoked.

He was a pretty old man, that was ap-parent. His hair was white and his beard was white. He walked with a cane, but he was able to look out for himself and get

around reasonably well.

"Most eighty-one," he said, as he took a
big black pipe out of his mouth. "And you've smoked all your life?" asked the young man who had stopped to speak

"Pretty much all," he replied: "I've smoked some sixty odd years.

"And it hasn't hurt you?"
"Well, I don't know, young man; I don't
quite know about that. My wife has al ways told me that it hurt me, and my fa

ther when he was alive used to say it was bad for my health." "But it doesn't seem to have hurt you." "Now don't be too hasty. I ain't just sure about that. I set great store by what my wife and my father say, and I don't ad-

vise any young man to begin smokin.' "Yes, of course. But you've smoked and you've lived to a good old age." "Yes, that's all right; but there's no tell n, young man, how old I'd 'a' been now if I hadn't smoked. It's a bad habit that I sort of worked into before I knew it."-Chicago Tribune.

Went Prepared.

"In order to save your time and mine," said the reporter to the theatrical mana ger, "I have written out an interview with you which I think you will find expresses your views on current events in the amuse ment world in a clear, thoughtful and

scholarly style. The theatrical manager read the manuscript and replied:
"It is a highly creditable production.
You may print it just as it is. It saits me

"By the way," observed the reporter "if you have five or six tickets to spare for 'Hamlet' I should like to use them tomor

row evening."
"I should be glad to accomodate you," said the manager somewhat coldly, "but every tick I for tomorrow evening is sold." "In anticipation of that," rejoined the reporter, taking the manuscript back and putting it in his pocket, "I have prepared another interview in which your views are not expressed in quite so clear and scholar

"Hold on!" the manager exclaimed, has v. "Here's a dozen!"—Chicago Tribune.

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