

MR. JACK DEVERWELL.

(A Decided Man of Indecision.)

New York is bounded on the north by Long Acre square, on the south by Union square, and on the east and west by outer darkness, which has a wavering locus somewhere about Third avenue on one hand and Eighth on the other. In summer the city limits include Coney Island and Newport; of the two, Newport is the livelier, but Coney Island is the more respectable.

Mr. Jack-Deverwell was well known and popular in both of these suburbs, being a good-humored and taciturn young man, with practically unlimited money. Normally he was quite well pleased with himself, and, consequently, with all the world. But one morning, at Newport, he awoke feeling distinctly ragged.

Mrs. Deverwell and he had been at a little dinner dance the night before, and he was entirely unable to recall whether Ellen had left before or after he and Mr. Bob Hetherington had set off a pack of firecrackers in the conservatory. It was very funny, of course, but Ellen never cared for that sort of thing. So Mr. Jack felt disturbed as he reflected on the events of the previous night. It was early, and Ellen was not yet awake, so Mr. Deverwell, with just a suspicion of panic, decided to ride up through Middletown for a fresh air tonic. The morning was crisp and sparkling, all sharp, green and blue, as Newport mornings are made, and he idled on as far as the Stone Bridge, where, to the surprise of the populace, he put up for breakfast at a little bar-room, which any one but a man of Jack's varied tastes and experiences would have passed on a trot. After a plain but soothing repast of eggs and bacon and a brisk canter back by way of Purgatory and Easton's Beach, he felt better able to meet his spouse, and met her, bravely enough, in her own sunny room. She was passing the time, while waiting for her wagon, in reading—a bad habit which had clung to her from childhood. If any grievance against Jack remained, it was forgotten in the interest aroused by the book.

"Jack," she said, as he came in, her eyes snapping with excitement, "have you read this 'Physical Elements of Mental Weakness?' It's given me some fine hints for my home for Feeble Minded Children."

He took the book out of politeness, saying, "Oh, yes, it's the newest thing; very philosophical—same as 'Degeneration' and 'Outre Mer,' I suppose. I don't have time for much of that kind of thing, you know. By the bye, what do you think of that horse your brother brought from Long Island? It looked to me to be all right."

Do you know, Ellen glared at him, if it be possible for such a nice girl to glare. "I don't believe you've read anything better than a racing index for a year," she answered, indignantly. "If you keep on you'll be a—a—, well, you'll forget how to spell. Jack, it's almost wicked for any one as clever as you are to think about nothing but horses."

"Oh, come now," said Jack; "that's hardly fair. I like boats, too, and as for society, I've been in every event on the card this summer. It's a matter of taste, that's all, I know horses and like 'em, and you know the book business, at which I admit I'm an early quitter; but you don't know such a jolly lot about horses."

This philosophical discussion was very opportunely interrupted by the arrival of Mrs. Deverwell's trap, and the spanking bays in front of it being in no humor for waiting, Ellen was obliged to leave, and Jack would have forgotten their chat altogether had he not been forcibly reminded of it later.

As he rode out again that afternoon,

he was caught in the ruck of people on Bellevue right beside a caleche in which were two ladies, one of whom held a big, fluffy white parasol between Jack and herself so that the ladies could not see him. The parasol, being of lace, did not prevent sound from passing, and both Jack and the caleche moved very slowly for just a minute.

"Mrs. Deverwell doesn't go in for horses very much," came a high, rasping voice from behind the parasol. "Very literary and philanthropic and that kind of thing. All he thinks of is horse, I fancy, and possibly rum. It was an odd match enough."

"Yes, 'twas hardly made in heaven," answered the other woman—she had a still, small voice; you heard her distinctly, yet she spoke in a sort of insidious whisper. "I think of late she's wearied of him, too—of him and his stupidity. She shows it rather, it seems to me. She'll be miserable enough before—"

The caleche whipped up. Jack was positively bright at dinner that night, quoted a bit of poetry which Ellen recognized as Keat's, never spoke of a horse for an hour on end, and, indeed, behaved so singularly that old Mr. Everden—Ellen's father—said to his wife: "The idiot must be sick." Besides, Jack hardly touched his wine, and more than once before he had drunk more than is good among decent people.

Ellen, who had felt a strange quietude for some time, brightened up and watched him admiringly; he was a splendid fellow. She found a chance to chat with him for a minute and praised him for a thoughtful comment on some passing bit of news.

"Oh, I'm on good behavior after what you said this afternoon," laughed her husband.

"Good boy," she answered, as they came upon Miss Maddas and Bob Hetherington. "Won't you try to keep it up, though?"

Jack turned in early, slept the sleep of the just and of the very tired, and awoke next morning feeling particularly well. He lay thinking for a minute.

"Won't I try to keep it up?" he mused; then his brows knit. "I suppose Ellen would starve herself to build libraries and Sunday schools for the feeble-minded orphans and tommy-rot like that," he thought.

"That man's left the water running again," said Jack as he went to his bath; "I must speak to him about it." Then he laughed, shortly, as if it were a huge joke that he should warn his man. He shaved in front of an old French mirror in quaint ormolu-encrusted frame, which Ellen had picked up somewhere. It was a handsome face that the mirror reflected—brave, frank eyes, a good forehead and a clean-cut jaw. But the mouth was absolutely undefined; it was made to smile indolently, weakly, whimsically. When he had finished shaving he went back through his room and the bathroom beyond to Ellen's room. But he turned hastily and shut the door softly after only half a glance at the bright, flushed face so sharply contrasted against the blue and gold bed. He shut the other door into his room, then took his old shaving mirror and set it in a strong light in the room beyond.

He would not use the mirror she had given him.

There was a morocco box on the table from which he took a long-barrelled French pistol. Probably it was the first time in his life that the whimsical mouth had ever been set in a straight, determined line. Certainly, it was the last; for, standing before the old mirror, he put the barrel carefully to his temple; there was a red flash from the steel that the sun did not lend, and he fell, sidelong, crushing, in his fall, the mirror which she had given him.

And all the world talked of this for nearly a day a half. Some laughed and said "rum;" some raised their brows and said "very bad form;" others looked wise and said naught; but Ellen, widowed and weeping, is free.—The Coroner.

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