

MR. PARKER'S DIPLOMACY

Mr. Robert Tiffin, landlord of the Cat and Cradle, Little Potlow, was evidently in trouble. He stood looking out of the window of the bar-parlor, drumming his fingers on the wire blind and sighing furiously.

"Dunn, what's amiss with you lately, Bob," came the remark from a customer who, with a friend, was engaged in a game of dominoes. "Time was when you used to take a hand and make yourself sociable, but since you began to take an interest in post-office work you've been a regular wet blanket."

"And time was," rejoined Mr. Tiffin, "when people minded their own business and kep' silly remarks to themselves."

The retort on the tongue-tip of the gentleman thus reprimanded was interrupted by the appearance in the doorway of a chubby-faced, horsey-looking man, who made the company a merry good evening.

"Tiffin about?" he asked. One of the domino-players jerked his thumb in the direction of the landlord, who appeared to be so engrossed with thoughts of weighty matters as to be unconscious of the chubby man's arrival.

"Why, Robert, old fellow," said the stranger, heartily, as he walked across the room and slapped the landlord on the back, "ain't you got a welcome for an old friend, eh?"

"Blest if it ain't Jim Barker!" gasped Mr. Tiffin, turning round and holding out his hand. "Been thinkin' o' you this last hour, Jim, 'anged if I ain't. I'd just made up my mind to drop you a line and ask you to run down for a day or two."

"And since I've saved you the postage, and it's a stiffish walk from the station—" Mr. Barker observed, glancing at the shining beer-engine pulls.

"Don't mention it, Jim," interrupted Tiffin, brightly; "some as it used to be, I s'pose?"

Mr. Barker nodded. "Don't 'old the glass too far off the spout, Robert," he laughed. "Too much froth don't suit my complexion. And 'ow are things goin'?"

Tiffin's face clouded. "That's what I wanted to see you about, Jim," he replied; "trade ain't to be grumbled at, and my 'ealth's all right, but—"

"Old 'ard a minute, Robert, 'old 'ard," and the chubby man held up his hand. "I guessed there was somethin' wrong the moment I saw you, and if you was to ask me I should say you'd come to the conclusion that it's time you was married. Ain't I right, now?"

The landlord lifted up the powder bar-flap and invited Mr. Barker into his private room at the back. "You ain't goin' away to-night, of course?" he asked.

"And not to-morrow, if you can put up with me. Why, it must be close on two years since I've seen you. Wasn't I right about what was the matter, Robert?"

Mr. Tiffin sighed. "Never knew such a fellow as you, Jim," he declared. "You've guessed right first time."

"So you've made up your mind to marry Lizzie after all?" smiled his friend. "You'd look proper silly if, after waitin' all this time, she fancied someone else, wouldn't you?"

The landlord plucked nervously at the fringe of his white apron. "It don't 'appen to be Lizzie," he admitted, rather shamefacedly.

A whistle came from Mr. Barker. "When there's two 'oneysuckles to one bee," he remarked, "it's apt to lead to trouble. I can well understand you not feeling partic'lar comfortable, Robert; but, 'ang it all, it ain't 'ardly fair to the girl, is it, now?"

"I don't think Lizzie'd fret much," replied Mr. Tiffin. "My idea is that she's just as 'appy keepin' 'ouse for 'er uncle at Barstaple as she would be 'elpin' me keep the Cat and Cradle. We've never been really engaged, as you may say, and I reckon if she'd 'ad the pick between, say, fifty pounds and me she'd go for the cash quick. It ain't 'er I'm worried about, it's the other party. She's a widdler woman, you see, Jim."

Mr. Barker shook his head. "Funny cattle, widders," he observed.

"You wouldn't call 'er funny if you was to see 'er," declared the landlord, waxing enthusiastic. "She's all what a woman ought to be, only she's got the idea into 'er 'ead that widders ain't got any right to marry bachelors, and it's that what keeps me from askin' 'er to change 'er name to Tiffin. If I 'appened to be a widdler, same as yourself, I'd go straight up to 'er 'ouse to-night, and it'd be twenty pounds to a bad ha'penny she'd say 'yes,' but as it is I ain't got 'alf a chance unless you can 'elp me to work it some'ow."

"Want me to go and see 'er and try to convince the lady that 'er idea's wrong, eh?"

"You might jest as well try to sink a battleship with a pea-shooter, Jim," replied Tiffin, mournfully. "Talk to 'er about anything else and she's open to argument, but

she's took up this 'ere marriage question as a kind of pet 'obby, and she ain't to be shook off it."

"If that's the case, the only thing I can think of is to dig up a wife," announced Mr. Barker. "Start bein' confidential like, and talk with a tremble in your voice about an early marriage and a bereavement, what upset you so that you 'aven't 'ad the 'eart to mention it before. 'Ow would that do?"

The landlord appeared to be somewhat doubtful on the point. "I've thought o' something o' the sort myself," he said, "but I don't reckon on anything short of a death certificate and a photograph o' the tombstone'd satisfy 'er. You see, women are a bit suspicious, and knowin' this one gettin' on for twelve months without sayin' anything about 'avin' lost a wife, she might fancy that I wasn't altogether certain about it."

"Well, Robert," smiled Mr. Barker, "that's a matter what ought to be easy to get over. While you're inventin' a wife you may jest as well pitch a tale of a sea-voyage for the benefit of 'er 'ealth, and a ship what went down with all 'ands and every passenger, your late lamented bein' among 'em. There couldn't be no inquiries for a tombstone and so on then."

Tiffin puffed away vigorously at his pipe for a minute or two, then he rose from his chair and shook his friend solemnly by the hand. "I thought if anybody could find out a way it'd be you, Jim," he said. "First thing to-morro' I'll run up and see 'er."

And long after eleven o'clock had struck and the lights were turned out in the bar, Tiffin and his fellow-conspirator sat making inroads into the Cat and Cradle's stock of cigars and concocting a plausible story of a former Mrs. Tiffin, who went down in the good ship Bustard off the Canaries, leaving a sorrowing husband to mourn her loss and eventually to seek consolation at the hands of the one woman capable of giving it, in the person of the postmistress of Little Potlow.

Robert Tiffin appeared at breakfast next morning with a clean-shaven face, a white rose in his button-hole, and some signs of nervousness.

"I've been thinkin'," observed Mr. Barker, as he helped himself to a second ham rasher, which his friend, in face of the ordeal before him, found too much for his appetite—"I've been thinkin', if you 'ad the likeness of any young girl by you, you might slip it in your pocket. As you said last night, women are a trifle suspicious, and anything like that'll 'elp you if she gets askin' questions. But whatever you do, don't hum and ha about the shipwreck. You've got it all pat, ain't you?"

"You drilled it into me last night so," was the reply, "that I reckon I could tell the tale backwards. It's a good idea about the likeness; you can't be too careful," and when the agitated Tiffin was ready to set out for the post-office his friend noticed that a portrait of the widow-supplanted Lizzie was missing from the mantel-shelf. "Now I'm off, Jim," announced the landlord, holding out his hand. "Wish me luck, mate."

Mr. Barker made a comical attempt to invest his ruddy features with a serious expression. "Good luck, old chap," he said, grasping the outstretched hand; "but don't your conscience smite you a bit to go and stuff a poor widdler woman up with tales o' things what never 'appened, eh, Robert?"

"All's fair in love, Jim, you know," replied Tiffin, gaily, as he set off down the street of Little Potlow, leaving his friend and adviser pulling away at the red-waxed mouthpiece of a church-warden pipe on the front steps of the Cat and Cradle, prepared to attend to the wants of any early morning customers who should chance to honor the house with a call.

Exactly an hour later Mr. Robert Tiffin, with a broad smile on his face, walked briskly up the street, and, humming snatches of "Annie Laurie," stepped into the bar and invited the local postman and a stranger, who were being greatly entertained by his deputy with a horsey story, to call for just whatever they fancied. "Mornin's like this always give me a fit o' generosity," he remarked, with a wink at his friends.

"Well?" inquired that worthy, when the two customers, having availed themselves of the landlord's invitation, had departed.

"Right as rain, Jim," answered Mr. Tiffin. "A 'ungry perch couldn't 'a' swallowed a worm more ready than she did that tale. And what's more, she's promised to be Mrs. Robert Tiffin. You should 'ave 'eard me describe that there shipwreck, Jim, you should, really; I reckon you'd a-been jolly proud o' your pupil."

"Portrait come in 'andy?" asked Mr. Barker.

"Left 'er cryin' over it, Jim, she was that touched. You shall see 'er to-night. She's a regular stunner. I don't believe there's a 'appier man in all the country than me."

Jim Barker held up a finger warningly. "Speakin' for myself," he declared, "I always wait till I'm certain I've finished a job before I feel properly 'appy. You're only 'alf-way through yet. 'Ow are you goin' on about Lizzie?"

"Well, Jim," replied the landlord, "you've 'elped me so far, and I was thinkin' p'raps you wouldn't mind runnin' over to Barstaple and gettin' 'er to give me my discharge, as you might say. I'm willin' to pay anything up to fifty pounds for it, and, as I told you before, it don't strike me there'll be much difficulty. What do you say? You could catch the twelve o'clock train and get back 'ere to-night easy. I sha'n't get a wink o' sleep till I know everything's settled satisfactory."

"Don't you 'esitate about makin' use of me now I 'ave come to see you," laughed Mr. Barker. "If there's anybody you 'appen to want shot or p'isoned I shall only be too 'appy to oblige. If 'twas anyone, but you, Robert, I should jib at the job, and that's the fact; but as it ain't, I suppose I must see it through."

"You'll 'ave plenty o' time to look in the post-office on your way to the station," said Tiffin, glancing at the clock. "A sight o' the future Mrs. Tiffin make the journey seem all the shorter; but no tryin' to cut me out, mind, Jim. 'Ere's the fifty pounds to mend Lizzie's broken 'eart with, and if you can arrange things for anything less I should like you to buy a keepsake with what's left over in memory o' the first Mrs. Tiffin who went down in the Bustard off the Canaries"; and the landlord with a hearty laugh, pushed his friend over the step with a final remark to the effect that Mr. Barker was not to suppose the purchase of a penny stamp entitled him to squeeze the hand of the lady behind the counter.

There was no need for the obliging Barker to expend even a halfpenny to obtain a sight of his friend's promised wife, for the lady in question happened to be taking advantage of a slack ten minutes to sun herself on the doorstep.

"It's never you, James?" she gasped, when the gentleman on his way to Barstaple stopped in mute surprise as he caught sight of her.

"Amelia!" exclaimed Mr. Barker, recovering his speech. "Well, I never! Fancy me meetin' you in Little Potlow after 'untin' for you everywhere this last two years!"

"Hunting for me, James! Why?"

"Can't you guess why, Amelia?" was the reply. "Weren't we sweethearts from the time we went to school together till we 'ad a silly quarrel about nothin', and I married in a fit o' temper, and you made another man 'appy? I started lookin' for you when I found myself free again and 'eard you'd lost your 'usband, thinkin' and opinin'—"

"You're too late, James," said the lady, with the suspicion of a sigh.

"Don't tell me you've taken another 'usband, Amelia," pleaded Mr. Barker.

"No, James; not yet," the lady replied, blushing becomingly. "Why, you never mean to say that you're the Little Potlow postmistress?" groaned her old sweetheart, as the thought struck him that his zeal on his friend's behalf had proved his own undoing.

"I'm sending in my resignation to-night," answered the lady. "I've promised to get married in two months' time."

"But you'll change your mind, Amelia," urged Mr. Barker. "Say you've made a mistake; say—"

"No, James," interrupted the postmistress. "I won't deny that if I'd seen you yesterday things might have been different; but, as it is, I've given my word, and I must keep it."

The business Mr. Barker had in hand was suddenly called to mind. "I'm off to Barstaple now," he said, looking at his watch, "but I shall be back again to-night. I ain't takin' your answer as final, Amelia. P'raps by to-morrow something'll crop up to make you think different."

It was a very quiet and thoughtful Mr. Barker who journeyed from Little Potlow to Barstaple. As he sat in a corner seat, filling the carriage with tobacco smoke, his loyalty to Robert Tiffin and his love for his old sweetheart held a battle royal for mastery; and it was not until his destination was reached that loyalty finally went under, and a scheme of compromise was evolved as a slave to a conscience which insisted on pricking, despite the frequent application of Mr. Tiffin's own dictum that "All's fair in love."

"It's rough on Robert, I'll own," he told himself, "but 'e'll admit when it's over and done with that I let 'im down as gentle as I could." And when the return journey was embarked upon he was accompanied by the young lady whose portrait had that morning been left by his friend Tiffin in possession of the Little Potlow postmistress.

"Now, be careful, Lizzie," enjoined her escort, when, the journey over, they came in sight of the post-office. "In you go, and while you're bein' served you must take partic'lar care that the lady be'ind the counter gets a good view of your face. If I ain't mistaken, she'll start askin' no end o' funny questions, but your mind's got to be a perfect blank up to the time you found yourself the one and only survivor from the wreck o' the Bustard, off the Canaries. You mustn't remember your name even. She'll fit you up with one that'll surprise you, you see if she don't. You'll be savin' Robert fifty pounds if everything

goes right, but mum's the word when you see 'im, mind you."

The postmistress was engaged in making up the day's accounts when the young lady walked in and asked for a shillingworth of halfpenny stamps. One glance at the stranger's features was sufficient to bring a look of amazement to her own face, and to cause her to clutch at the counter for support.

"A shillingworth— Oh! Excuse me," she gasped, "but your face! It's very rude of me, I know, but you didn't have a sister by the name of Tiffin—Mrs. Robert Tiffin—did you?"

Lizzie shook her head, and in a style that did credit to pupil and master alike repeated the story with which Mr. Barker had made her letter-perfect during the ride from Barstaple.

"My dear, it's providential, and nothing short of it!" exclaimed the postmistress when the narration was ended. "Why, do you know, your husband is living within two hundred yards of this very house, and—"

"Husband!" cried the genuinely-perplexed Lizzie.

"Husband, dear," declared the flustered little woman, with a shiver at the thought of her narrow escape; "and if you'll wait just two minutes I'll slip on my bonnet and take you to him. Only fancy, the poor man has been looking on himself as a widower this last three years!"

Mr. Barker in the meantime had walked up the street chuckling hugely. He found the landlord of the Cat and Cradle eagerly awaiting his return.

"Managed it A1, Robert!" he declared. "Wanted a little bit o' smoothin' down at first, of course; but the fifty pounds did it. She'll set your mind at rest 'erself in a minute or so. Nothin' would satisfy 'er but that she must come back with me and 'ave a look at the future Mrs. T. Must be a wonderful woman that'd make Robert anxious to get married," she says, 'and I'm goin' to treat myself to a sight o' 'er.' So she's just called in the post-office while I come straight on to prepare you, like."

"What!" shouted Tiffin. "Lizzie here? And in the post-office, of all places!"

"Where's the 'arm, Robert? Where's the 'arm?" asked Mr. Barker.

"'Arm!" came the answer, with a groan. "I ain't blamin' you, Jim, mind, but I reckon by this time the fat's in the fire. It was Lizzie's likeness I left down there this mornin'; it was Lizzie's face she was cryin' over. It was Lizzie who's supposed to 'a' gone down in the Bustard and left me broken-'earted; that's where the 'arm comes in!"

Jim Barker's expression was indicative of profound sorrow. "If that's the case, and the postmistress 'appens to 'ave recognized 'er," he observed, "it seems to me, Robert, that you've come across a 'urdle what you can't jump. You're cornered, anyway. If you own up that you're a single man the widdler'll cry out, and if you stick to the lost wife tale there's Lizzie and 'er likeness to upset it. It's Fate, Robert, depend upon it, and who knows but what it's best after all, eh?"

"Fate!" began Tiffin savagely. A whistle from his friend interrupted him. Mr. Barker, looking down the street, had caught sight of Lizzie and the postmistress hurrying towards the Cat and Cradle. "It's all up!" he exclaimed. "Here they come! I shall never forgive myself, old man, never. It's my blunderin' ways what's led up to it. I shall always kick myself to think I've robbed an old friend of a couple o' sweethearts, to say nothing o' the fifty pounds Lizzie got. I'm off, Robert; I daren't face 'em, and that's the truth."

"W—what am I to do?" gasped Tiffin. "Don't leave me in a 'ole, Jim, there's a good fellow."

"'Ang it! I'll see you through, Robert," declared Mr. Barker, in a sudden access of bravery. "If you'll be guided by me you'll slip into the back parlor there and I'll send Lizzie in to you. Make it up with 'er, Robert, and save your money. I'll talk over the widdler if I 'ave to sacrifice myself to do it. It'll be a tough job, but you won't be able to say later on that your friend didn't do what 'e could for you. 'Ere they are! Quick!"

For one second the landlord hesitated. "It's your only chance, Robert," urged Mr. Barker, hurriedly. "You can't pick and choose. In the eyes of the law widders are the same as goods, and it's a stiffish penalty for tryin' to obtain 'em by false pretences." Then, as the click of the latch was heard, Robert Tiffin dived under the counter, leaving his self-sacrificing friend Barker to meet the ladies.

Two months later there was a double wedding in Little Potlow. "Fancy Mr. and Mrs. Tiffin going through the ceremony a second time," remarked Mrs. Amelia Barker to her husband.

"Tis a little bit funny," replied Mr. Barker, with a smile, "but Robert and Lizzie both thought it'd be better. You see, Lizzie ain't got the slightest recollection o' the first."—London Tit-Bits.

To make a single wineglassful of port 5½ ounces of grapes are required.

HEALTH

SICK-ROOM MEALS.

Although it is the function of the physician to indicate the general nature of the nourishment to be given to his patient, the responsibility for the proper feeding of the sick person devolves almost entirely on the nurse, and on her tact and judgment the success of the treatment will depend. Even when the food is correctly prepared, much attention to the manner of service is requisite in order to make it tempting to the invalid.

During illness the things that naturally stimulate the appetite, such as fresh air and exercise, are entirely lacking, so that every possible means must be used to render the idea of food as agreeable as possible. Chief among these is the care of the mouth and tongue. Unless these are kept scrupulously clean by the use of cleansing lotions, particles of fermenting food are retained, and give rise to much discomfort. This is especially true of milk, the administration of which should always be followed by a cleansing of the tongue with some such preparation as a mixture of equal parts of glycerin, lemon-juice and water applied with a cotton swab.

Before bringing in the meal the room should have been put in order as much as possible, the patient's hands and face sponged off, and the bedclothes and pillows freshly arranged. The tray itself should be decked with the prettiest china, the whitest and freshest linen and the brightest silver the household boasts. Very small portions only should be set before a sick person, for in this way a greater amount is likely to be eaten than if the weak appetite is appalled by the sight of well-filled plates.

In giving liquids to patients unable to sit up, the head should be raised by slipping the hand under the pillow, instead of directly under the head, as in this way the position is less constrained and swallowing is easier. The conventional sick-feeders with nozzles are usually disliked by patients, and in most cases fluids can be taken without much effort through a bent glass tube or from a tumbler only a third full. Here again the patient should not be presented with more than he is likely to drink, as a sick person feels a certain satisfaction in completely emptying his glass.

It is often a difficult question to decide whether or not to waken a sleeping patient for food. In most cases it is better to wait, but often a sufferer may be roused sufficiently to take a few swallows, and yet be able to drop off again and sleep all the more soundly for having received the nourishment.

THE WAY TO KEEP YOUNG.

Keep in the sunlight; nothing beautiful or sweet grows or ripens in the darkness.

Avoid fear of all its varied forms of expression. It is the greatest enemy of the human race.

Avoid excesses of all kinds; they are injurious. The long life must be a temperate, regular life.

Don't live to eat, but eat to live. Many of our ills are due to over-eating, to eating the wrong things, and to irregular eating.

Don't allow yourself to think on your birthday that you are a year older and so much nearer the end.

Never look on the dark side; take sunny views of everything. A sunny thought drives away the shadows.

Be a child; live simply and naturally, and keep clear of entangling alliances and complications of all kinds.

Cultivate the spirit of contentment; all discontent and dissatisfaction bring age furrows prematurely to the face.

Form a habit of throwing off before going to bed at night, all the cares and anxieties of the day—everything which can possibly cause mental wear and tear or deprive you of rest.

HEALTH IS A HABIT.

Health is really a habit—that of living right. If we get into the right habit of living we shall have little trouble in keeping ourselves in good condition, physically and mentally.

Once good habits are established the benefits derived from them will prove so delightful that there will be no temptation to fall back into the old habits. Get into the habit of breathing properly. It is just as easy to breathe deeply as not. Expand the lungs and fill them full of air as often during the day as you think of it.

But good physical habits are not all. The mental habits must be regulated. If you are in the habit of talking about every little ill, pain or ache, stop it at once, and talk health instead. Speak kindly of your body, think that every organ is in perfect order, doing its work naturally. Don't think that you have to tell somebody every time your head aches, or your heart palpitates, or your stomach refuses to digest some horrid food you have forced upon it. There are so many other things to talk about.