

EXCUSE ME!

RUPERT HUGHES

NOVELIZED FROM THE COMEDY OF THE SAME NAME.

ILLUSTRATED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE PLAY AS PRODUCED BY HENRY W. SAVAGE.

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And by this time the train-robbers had hastily worked their way through the other passengers, and reached the frantic inhabitants of the sleeper, "Snowdrop."

"Hands up! Higher!! Hands up!!" With a true sense of the dramatic, the robbers sent ahead of them the most hair-raising yells. They arrived simultaneously at each end of the aisle, and with a few short sharp commands, straightened the disorderly rabble into a beautiful line, with all palms aloft and all eyes wide and wild.

One robber drove ahead of him the conductor and the other drove in Mr. Manning, whom he had found trying to crawl between the shelves of the linen-closet.

The marauders were apparently cattlemen, from their general get-up. Their hats were pulled low, and just beneath their eyes they had drawn big black silk handkerchiefs, tied behind the ears and hanging to the breast.

Over their shoulders they had slung the feed-bags of their horses, to serve as receptacles for their swag. Their shirts were chalky with alkali dust. Their legs were encased in heavy chaparejos, and they carried each a pair of well-used Colt's revolvers that looked as big as artillery.

When the passengers had shoved and jostled into line, one of the men jabbed the conductor in the back with the muzzle of his gun, and snarled: "Now speak your little piece, like I learned it to you."

The conductor, like an awkward schoolboy, grinned sheepishly, and spoke, his hands in the air the while: "Ladies and gents, these here parties in the black tidies says they want everybody to hold his or her hands as high as possible till you get permission to lower 'em; they advise you not to resist, because they hate the sight of blood, but prefer it to argument."

The impatient robbers, themselves the prey of fearful anxieties, broke in, barking like a pair of coyotes in a jumble of commands: "Now, line up with your backs that way, and no back talk. These guns shoot awful easy. And remember, as each party is finished with, they are to turn round and keep their hands up, on penalty of gettin' 'em shot off. Line up! Hands up! Give over there!"

Mrs. Jimmie Wellington took her time about moving into position, and her deliberation brought a howl of wrath from the robber: "Get into that line, you!"

Mrs. Wellington whirled on him: "How dare you, you brute!" And she turned up her nose at the gun.

The anxious conductor intervened: "Better obey, madame; he's an ugly lad."

"I don't mind being robbed," said Mrs. Jimmie, "but I won't endure rudeness."

The robber shook his head in despair, and he tried to whisper her with sarcasm: "Pardone, mamself, would you be so kind and condescendin' as to step into that there car before I blow your husband's go-blame head off."

This brought her to terms. She hastened to her place, but put out a restraining hand on Jimmie, who needed no restraint. "Certainly, to save my dear husband. Don't strike him, Jimmie!"

Then each man stuck one revolver into its convenient holster, and, covering the passengers with the other, proceeded to frisk away valuables with a speed and agility that would have looked prettier if those impatient-looking muzzles had not pointed here, there and everywhere with such venomous threats.

And so they worked from each end of the car toward the middle. Their hands ran swiftly over bodies with a loathsome familiarity that could only be resented, not forgiven. Their hands dived into pockets, and up sleeves, and into women's hair, everywhere that a jewel or a bill might be secreted. And always a rough growl or a swing of the revolver silenced any protest.

Their heinous fingers had hardly begun to ply, when the solemn stillness was broken by a chuckle and low hoot of laughter, a darkey's unctuous laughter. At such a place it was more shocking than at a funeral.

"What ails you?" was the nearest robber's demand.

The porter tried to wipe his streaming eyes without lowering his hands, as he chuckled on: "I—I—just thought of sumpum funny."

"Funny!" was the universal groan. "I was just thinking," the porter snickered, "what mighty poor pickings you-all are goin' to git out of me. Whist! if you had 'a' waited till I got to 'Frisco, I'd jest natchely been 'savin' money."

other end of the car Wedgewood's indignant complaint: "I say, this is an outrage!"

"Ah, close your trap and turn round, or I'll—"

The porter's smile died away. "Good Lawd," he sighed, "they're goin' to skin that British lion! And I just wore myself out on him."

The far-reaching effect of the whole procedure was just beginning to dawn on the porter. This little run on the bank meant a period of financial stringency for him. He watched the hurrying hands a moment or two, then his wrath rose to terrible proportions:

"Look here, man," he shouted at the robber, "ain't you-all goin' to leave these passengers nothin' a tall?"

"Not on purpose, nigger."

"No small change, or nothin'?"

"Nary a red."

"Then, passengers," the porter proclaimed, while the robber watched him in amazement; "then, passengers, I want to give you-all fair warnin' beah and now: No tips, no whisk-broom!"

Perhaps because their hearts were already overflowing with distress, the passengers endured this appalling threat without comment, and when there was a commotion at the other end of the line, all eyes rolled that way.

Mr. Baumann was making an effort to take his leave, with great politeness.

"Excuse, please. I want to get by, please!"

"Get by!" the other robber gasped.

"Why, you—"

"But I'm not a passenger," Mr. Baumann urged, with a confidential smile, "I've been going through the train myself."

"Much obliged! Hand over!" And a rude hand rummaged his pockets. It was a heart-rending sight.

"Oh, oh!" he wailed, "don't you allow no courtesies to the profession!" And when the inexorable thief continued to pluck his money, his watch, his scarf-pin, he grew wroth indeed. "Stop, stop, I refuse to pay. I'll go into bankruptcy foist." But still the larceny continued; fingers even lifted three cigars from his pockets, two for himself and a good one for a customer.

This loss was grievous, but his wildest protest was: "Oh, here, my friend, you don't want my business carts."

"Keep 'em!" growled the thief, and then, glancing up, he saw on the tender inwards of Mr. Baumann's upheld palms two huge glisteners, which their owner had turned that way in a misguided effort to conceal the stones. The robber reached up for them.

"Take 'em. You're welcome!" said Mr. Baumann, with rare presence of mind. "Those Nevada nearlies looks almost like real."

"Keep 'em," said the robber, as he passed on, and Mr. Baumann almost swooned with joy, for, as he whispered to Wedgewood a moment later: "They're really real!"

Now the eye-chain rolled the other way, for Little Jimmie Wellington was puffing with rage. The other robber, having massaged him thoroughly, but without success, for his pocketbook, noticed that Jimmie's left heel was protruding from his left shoe, and made Jimmie perform the almost incredible feat of standing on one foot, while he unshod him and took out the hidden wealth.

"There goes our honeymoon, Lucretia," he moaned. But she whispered proudly: "Never mind, I have my rings to pawn."

"Oh, you have, have you? Well, I'll be your little uncle," the kneeling robber laughed, as he overheard, and he continued his outrageous search till he found them, knotted in a handkerchief, under her hat.

She protested: "You wouldn't leave me in Reno without a diamond, would you?"

"I wouldn't, eh?" he grunted. "Do you think I'm in this business for my health?"

And he snatched off two earrings she had forgotten to remove. Fortunately, they were affixed to her lobes with fasteners.

Mrs. Jimmie was thoroughbred enough not to wince. She simply commented: "You brutes are almost as bad as the customs officers at New York."

And now another touch of light relieved the gloom. Kathleen was next in line, and she had been forcing her lips into their most attractive smile, and keeping her eyes winsomely mellow, for the robber's benefit. Marjorie could not see the smile; she could only see that Kathleen was next. She whispered to Marjorie:

"They'll get the bracelet! They'll get the bracelet!"

And Marjorie could have danced with glee. But Kathleen leaned coquetishly toward the masked stranger, and threw all her art into her tone as she murmured:

"I'm sure you're too brave to take my things. I've always admired men

with the cour. of Claude Duval." The robber was taken a trifle aback, but he growled: "I don't know the party you speak of—but cough up!"

"Listen to her," Marjorie whispered in horror; "she's flirting with the train-robber."

"What won't some women flirt with!" Marjorie exclaimed.

The robber studied Kathleen a little more attentively, as he whipped off her necklace and her rings. She looked good to him, and so willing, that he muttered: "Say, lady, if you'll give me a kiss, I'll give you that diamond ring you got on."

"All right!" laughed Kathleen, with triumphant complacency.

"My God!" Marjorie groaned, "what won't some women do for a diamond!"

The robber bent close, and was just raising his mask to collect his ransom, when his confederate glanced his way, and knowing his susceptible nature, foresaw his intention, and shouted: "Stop it, Jake. You tend strictly to business, or I'll blow your nose off."

"Oh, all right," grumbled the reluctant gallant, as he drew the ring from her finger. "Sorry, miss, but I can't make the trade, and he added with an unwonted gentleness: "You can turn round now."

Kathleen was glad to hide the blushes of defeat, but Marjorie was still more bitterly disappointed. She whispered to Marjorie: "He didn't get the bracelet, after all."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Wolves in the Fold. Marjorie's heart sank to its usual depth, but Marjorie had another of her inspirations. She startled everybody by suddenly beckoning and calling: "Excuse me, Mr. Robber. Come here, please."

The curious gallant edged her way, keeping a sharp watch along the line: "What do you want?"

Marjorie leaned nearer, and spoke in a low tone with an amiable smile: "That lady who wanted to kiss you has a bracelet up her sleeve."

The robber stared across his mask, and wondered, but laughed, and grunted: "Much obliged." Then he went back, and tapped Kathleen on the shoulder. When she turned round, in the hope that he had reconsidered his refusal to make the trade, he infuriated her by growling: "Excuse me, miss, I overlooked a bet."

He ran his hand along her arm, and found her bracelet, and accomplished what Marjorie had failed in, its removal.

"Don't, don't," cried Kathleen, "it's wished on."

"I wish it off," the villain laughed, and it joined the growing heap in the feed-bag.

Kathleen, doubly enraged, broke out viciously: "You're a common, sneaking—"

"Ah, turn round!" the man roared, and she obeyed in silence.

Then he explored Mrs. Whitcomb, but with such small reward that he said: "Say, you'd oughter have a pocketbook somewhere. Where's it at?"

Mrs. Whitcomb blushed furiously: "None of your business, you low brute."

"Perdooce, madame," the scoundrel snorted, "perdooce the purse, or I'll hunt for it myself."

Mrs. Whitcomb turned away, and after some management of her skirts, slapped her handbag into the eager palm with a wrathful: "You're no gentleman, sir!"

"If I was, I'd be in Wall street," he laughed. "Now you can turn round."

And when she turned, he saw a bit of chain depending from her back hair. He tugged, and brought away the locket, and then proceeded to sound Ashton for hidden wealth.

And now Mrs. Temple began to sob, as she parted with an old-fashioned brooch and two old-fashioned rings that had been her little vanities for the quarter of a century and more. The old clergyman could have wept with her at the vandalism. He turned on the wretch with a heart-sick appeal:

"Can't you spare those? Didn't you ever have a mother?"

The robber started, his fierce eyes softened, his voice choked, and he gulped hard as he drew the back of his hand across his eyes.

"Aw, hell," he whimpered, "that ain't fair. If you're goin' to remind me of me poor old mo-mo-mother—"

But the one called Jake—the Claude Duval who had been prevented from a display of human sentiment, did not intend to be cheated. He thundered: "Stop it, Bill. You tend strictly to business, or I'll blow your mush-bowl off. You know your Maw died before you was born."

This reminder sobered the weeping thief at once, and he went back to work ruthlessly. "Oh, all right, Jake. Sorry, ma'am, but business is business." And he dumped Mrs. Temple's trinkets into the satchel. It was too much for the little old lady's little old husband. He fairly shrieked:

"Young man, you're a damned scoundrel, and the best argument I ever saw for hell-fire!"

Mrs. Temple's grief changed to horror at such a brief from the blue: "Walter!" she gasped, "such language!"

But her husband answered in self-defense: "Even a minister has a right to swear once in his lifetime."

Marjorie almost dropped in his tracks, and Marjorie keeled over on him, as he gasped: "Good Lord, Dr. Temple, you are a— a minister?"

"Yes, my boy," the old man confessed, glad that the robbers had relieved him of his guilty secret along with the rest of his private properties. Marjorie looked at the collapsing Marjorie and groaned: "And he was in the next ber!" this time!

The usmas... of the old fraud made a second sensation. Mrs. Fuedick called from far down the aisle: "Dr. Temple, you're not a detective?"

Mrs. Temple shouted back furiously: "How dare you?"

But Mrs. Fuedick was crying to her luscious-eyed mate: "Oh, Arthur, he's not a detective. Embrace me!"

And they embraced, while the robbers looked on aghast at the sudden oblivion they had fallen into. They focused the attention on themselves again, however, with a ferocious: "Here, hands up!" But they did not see Mr. and Mrs. Fuedick steal a kiss behind their upraised arms, for the robber to whose lot Marjorie fell was gloating over his well-filled wallet.

Marjorie saw it go with fortitude, but noting a piece of legal paper, he said: "Say, old man, you don't want that marriage license, do you?"

The robber handled it as if it were hot—as if he had burned his fingers on some such document once before, and he stuffed it back in Marjorie's pocket. "I should say not. Keep it. Turn round."

Meanwhile the other felon turned up another beautiful pile of bills in Dr. Temple's pocket. "Not so worse for a parson," he grinned. "You must be one of them Fifth avenue sky-shaftures."

And now Mrs. Temple's gentle eyes and voice filled with tears again: "Oh, don't take that. That's the money for his vacation—after thirty long years. Please don't touch that."

Continued next week.

TUNIS QUICKER THAN RENO

Divorce Is Granted in Less Than an Hour and Costs \$1.20 in African City.

The next time you happen to be in Tunis, don't fail to pay a visit to the divorce court. It is the most Haroun-al-Raschidic institution this side of Samarkand. A great hall of justice, vaulted and floored with marble and strewn with eastern carpets, forms the setting, while husbands in turbans and lawyers and green robed, gray bearded judges complete a scene which might have been taken straight from the Arabian Nights.

The women, closely veiled and hooded, are herded like so many cattle within an iron grill, take no part in the proceedings which so intimately affect their futures, their interests being left in the hands of a voluble and gesticulative avocet. In each of the four sides of the great hall is an alcove, and in each alcove, seated cross legged on a many cushioned divan, is a green robed, gold turbaned cad. To him the husband stated his case, the wife, through her avocet, putting in her defense—if she has any. The judge considers the facts in silence, gravely stroking his long gray beard the while, and then delivers his decision—in nine cases out of ten, so it was told, in favor of the husband.

Should either person be dissatisfied with the finding he or she can take an appeal by the simple process of walking cross the hall laying their case before one of the other judges, whose decision is final. A case, even if appealed, is generally disposed of well under an hour and at a total cost of \$1.20, which proves conclusively that the record for quick and easy divorces is not held by Reno.—Metropolitan Magazine.

Dream Yourself to Sleep. When you retire to bed, go there to sleep. And sleep. Don't think, don't plan, don't worry. Shut the door firmly upon all thinking. Open the mind to fancies, never mind how vague and fantastic, if they are but pleasing; and let yourself drift about in this sea of fancies until sleep comes—you know not when. So by acquiring the power of dreaming while awake you gain the ability of dreaming yourself into sleep.—Health Culture.

Blackguard. The board of green cloth is responsible for inventing "blackguard," a word that has strangely altered in meaning. In early time its was by no means a term of reproach, but referred to the lowly but honorable calling of carrying coal in the King's household. Is there any other bad word in the English language that can boast of such a royal origin?—London Chronicle.

Invigorating Bath. A salt rub is most beneficial to the health, and can be obtained by procuring a bowl of moistened salt with which the body should be rubbed. Another invigorating plan is to buy the rock salt, draw a tub of water and let tin cups full of salt dissolve in it before taking the morning plunge.

Power of Radium. Suppose that the energy of a ton of radium could be utilized in 30 years, instead of being evolved at its invariable slow rate of 1,760 years for half disintegration, it would suffice to propel a ship of 15,000 tons, with engines of 15,000 horsepower, at the rate of 15 knots an hour for 30 years—practically the lifetime of the ship. To do this actually requires one and one-half million tons of coal.—New York World.

Famous Musician. Arrigo Boito, who has just been nominated by King Victor Immanuel of Italy as one of the new senators, is famous as a musician, and well-known as a composer and writer. He is a native of Padua, but Milan is his home by adoption. There he won his first successes in 1863. His "Mephistopheles" is the work by which he is best known to the general public.

In the Second Row Back

The ominous tinkle of the little clock striking the hour made them both look up. He was first to speak. As he drew from his pocket two slips of pasteboard, his words came in dull even tones.

"Here are the theater tickets I bought last week. If you care to go, we may as well pass the time there as in any other way."

Before answering she closed her book and placed it carefully upon the table. She gave no hint of haste nor of the response that passed through her at his words.

"Since you have the tickets, yes."

Just as she feared, he caught her wrist as she passed and held her in a firm grasp.

"Marian, what sense is there in this stubbornness? You know that I do not care so much for the reason of your going as I do your not telling me."

She tried to free herself. "That is not true," she gasped. "You want to know why I went there. I'd have told you, some time, if you'd trusted me."

"But, Marian, I hear you've been going there for a month, and I've known nothing of it. You knew I'd hate a thing like that."

"Your informant ought to have found out more. Why not have him try again? I'll never tell you, never. No matter what happens, I'll—never—tell you."

He dropped her hand at that, and she went on into the other room. When she returned she had all her emotions well in control.

They reached their seats in the theater just as the curtain went up. In the half light Marian removed her hat and coat, and tried to settle herself to gather the threads thrown out in the first act.

Suddenly into the strained silence of the audience came a voice. "She says she doesn't love him but she'll marry him."

It was a girl's voice, and there was a familiar ring in it to Marian. "Did she say she'd marry him?" This time it was an older, more cautious voice.

"Yes, but she does not love him."

There was a stir and a wavering titter among those within hearing. Marian sighed and wondered if ever again she should feel so much interest in anything as one could hear in that girl's voice. The play held nothing for her. She wondered how it was with James. To her the pretense of enjoyment was becoming a burden and she wished that they had not come.

"She says she does not love him, but he'll never know. Oh, it's awfully exciting!" Again Marian felt the stir in the audience, again she longed to see the play with the heart and eyes of the girl. If she could keep her thoughts upon the actors she must forget, for a little while, her heartache.

"He says he's a butinski. Oh, he's the funniest."

The curtain fell, the lights flashed up. Marian found herself in a state of painful bewilderment. Sometimes when she and James talked it over between the acts, they could come to a better understanding of the play. She took a cautious glance at her husband. He was sitting severely straight and still.

Marian gave up all thought of following the play. An unexpected tragedy had come into her own life, and nothing could blot it from her mind. Each moment she was becoming more frightened at the outcome of her quarrel. They could not go on like this.

"Hector says he'll stand by her to the end, if he dies for it." It was the girl's voice again in explanation.

Marian felt a relaxation of her tense nerves. Oh, what a time she should have had to keep James quiet if— She was back at the old worry again. It pressed harder. She began to believe that she could not bear it much longer. She would have to tell James, but things could never be the same again. He had doubted her and he had been so cruel about it that he had forced her to tell.

Marian glanced at her husband. He cleared his throat and changed his position. The voice in continued conversation was tantalizingly familiar. Cautiously Marian moved her head. Just a little way, and then—

"Oh, mamma, there's the lady that comes to Helen's to give us the dancing lessons. Yes, the one right here in the silk dress, the shepherd's check. Oh, she is just lovely!"

"That's her husband; Helen showed him to me yesterday. He is awfully good looking."

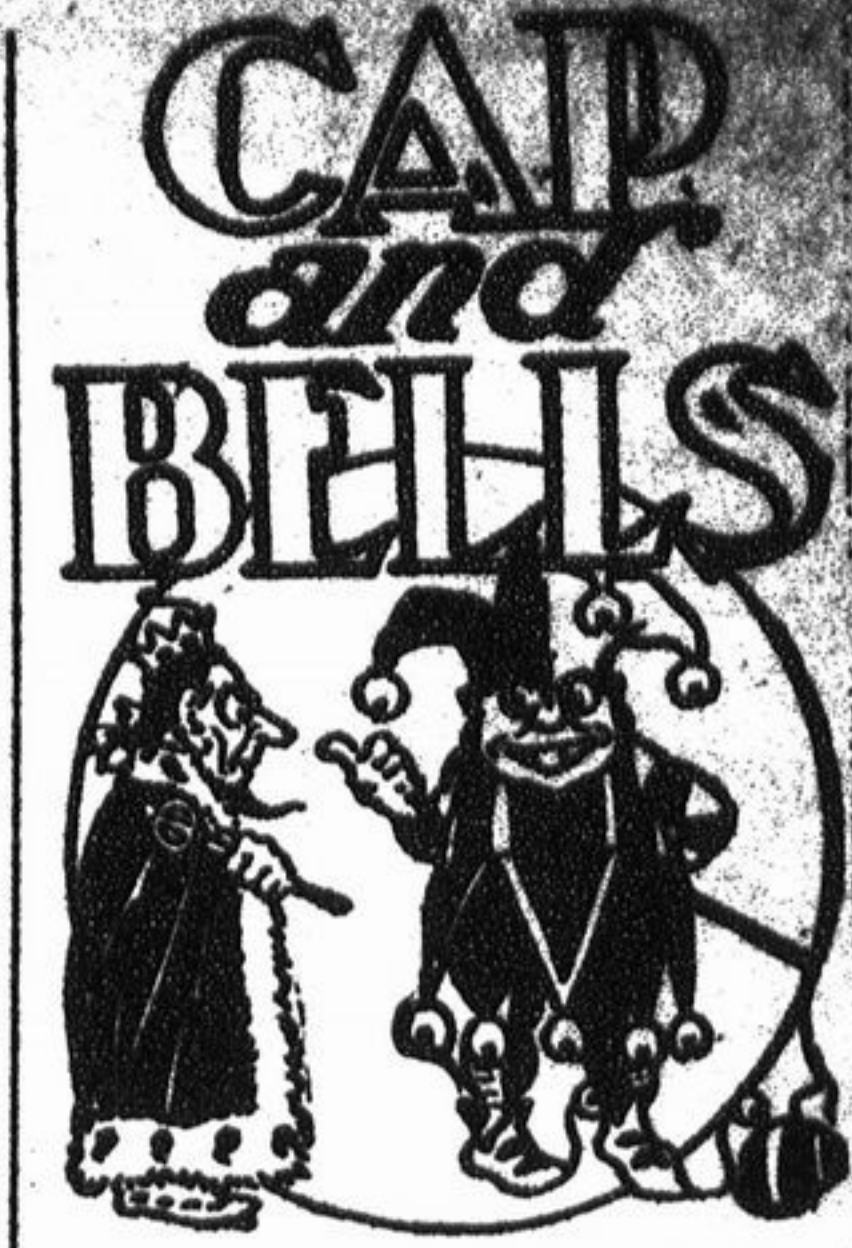
Marian moved closer to the chair next the aisle and whispered:

"I—I wanted to buy that Gibbons for your birthday, James, with my own money. I knew you wouldn't like my doing—"

"Don't, dear," murmured James.

He kept a firm hold of her hand, pressing it gently now and again. She knew that he was ruining her glove but she was content. And while the last act held little more for her than the first and second, she could guess that it ended happily. And it gave a pretty glow to the reconciliation that had, in the past 15 minutes, changed things for her so materially.

Good in Discontent. Discontent, if there is a reason for it, is a powerful and useful sign.



ULTIMATE ROAD TO SUCCESS

Clever Feet, With Beautiful Style and Nice Touch, Makes Fortune Out of Baseball Dope.

"What's become of Kimberley?" "Kimberley? I don't remember any such chap."

"Oh, yes, you do. He used to be regarded as the ablest literary man in this town. Wrote essays, poems, historical monographs and that sort of thing."

"Oh, yes, yes. I remember him—Algernon Kimberley. Why, he's rich and famous now. The fact that you didn't know all about him was what made me suppose you must be referring to some other Kimberley. Yes, Kimberley's struck it rich."

"Indeed? I'm mighty glad to hear that. A very clever chap—beautiful style, nice touch and all that sort of thing. I'm surprised that I have not heard of his success before. But I always had an idea that his greatness would be recognized. What line has he succeeded in? I hope it's poetry. I think he has the true poetic spirit, and his expression is rather original. We need a great poet just at this time."

"Poetry? I should say not. After he had nearly starved writing poetry and essays and historical monographs he went to writing baseball dope and syndicated it. It went great, and I understand he's making over \$500 a week."

Fatal Mistake. "I hear that the Softleighs have separated."

"Yes, and it was her fault." "What was the trouble?"

"In a woman's magazine she read that singing old love songs was a sure way to cure one's husband of grouchiness."

"Well?"

"She made a mistake and read her husband's old love letters to him instead."

THE TRUTH OF IT.

Mr. Asketh—Is it true, doctor, that physicians won't take their own medicine?

Dr. Emdee—About as true as that other people won't take their own advice.

Departed Hair. "A lock of Napoleon's hair recently sold for \$50 at auction. Pretty high for a lock of hair, eh?"

"Oh, I don't know," responded the bald-headed man. "I think I'd be willing to pay at that rate for my own hair, if I could get it back."

Selfish. "I see Jack Hanson was married the other day to Miss Richley."

"Yes, and I was very sorry to see it."

"Sorry? For her sake or his?"

"For mine; I wanted her."—Catholic Standard and Times.

Probably One of the Orators. "This," said Mrs. Lapsing, who was exhibiting the photograph album to the caller, "is a picture of a second cousin of mine who has a government position in the Philippines. He belongs to what they call the confabulary."

Seldom Found. "All aphorisms are not true. For instance, that loving words can medicine most ill."

"Can't they?"

"How can they when they are anything but a drug in the market?"

Barred From Baseball. "So you want your wife to be a politician