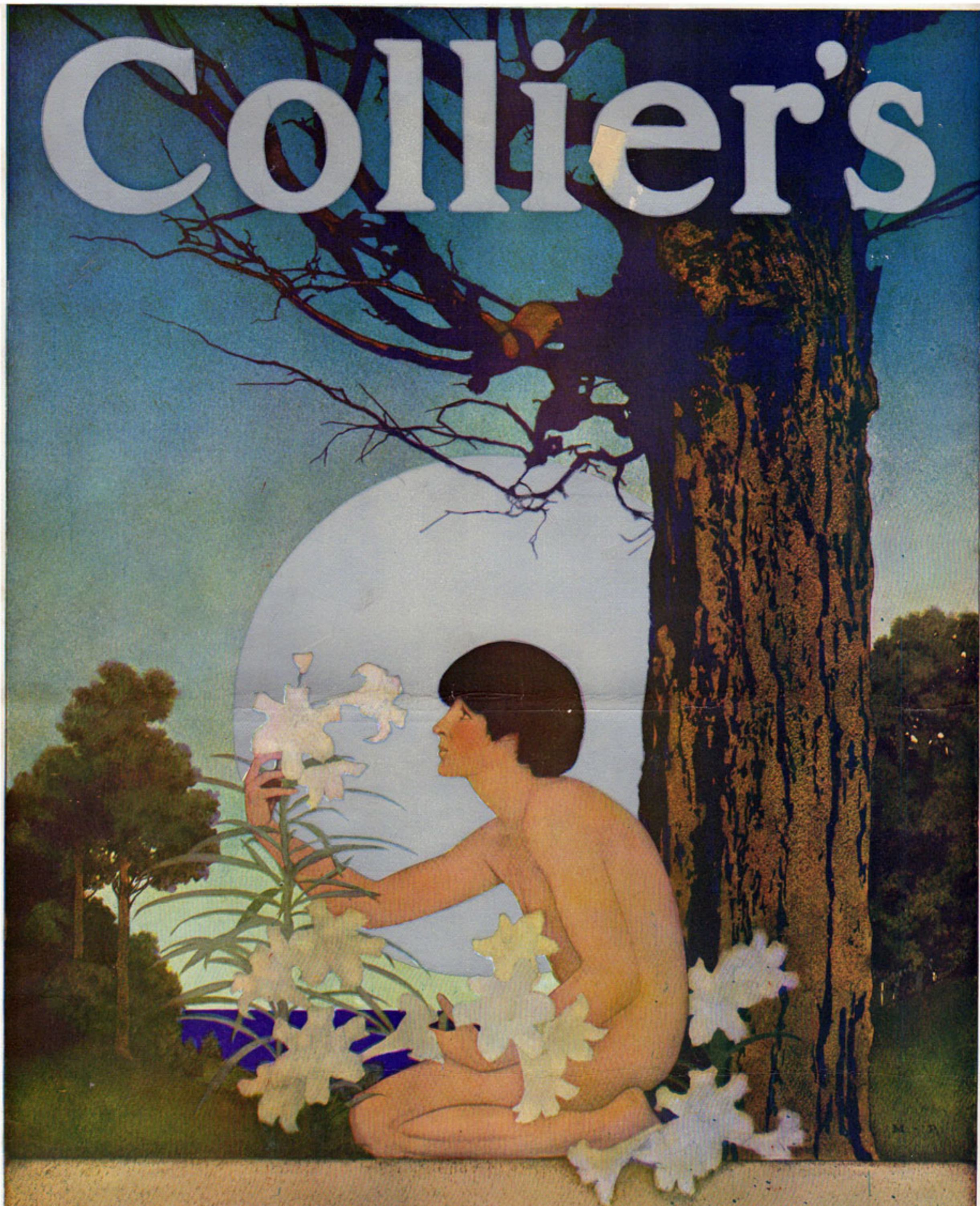


Collier's



E A S T E R

THE RHYME TO PORRINGER

IN WHICH A DASHING YOUNG JACOBITE RESCUES HIS LADY, AND LOVE PROVES SUPERIOR TO POLITICS

BY

JAMES BRANCH CABELL

"Ken ye the rhyme to porringer?
Ken ye the rhyme to porringer?
King James the Seventh had a daughter,
And he gave her to an Oranger."

ILLUSTRATED BY A. I. KELLER



T WAS hard upon ten in the evening when I left Lady Culcheth's, and I protest that at that hour there was not a happier man in all Tunbridge than Francis Audaine.

"You haven't the king?" Miss Allonby was saying, as I made my adieu to the company. "Then, I play queen, knave, and ten, which gives me the game, Lord Humphrey." And afterward she shuffled the cards and flashed a glance at me across the room whose brilliance shamed the tawdry candles about her, and, as you can readily conceive, roused a prodigious trepidation in my adoring breast.

"Dorothy! O Dorothy!" I said, over and over again, when I had reached the street, and so went homeward with constant repetitions of her dear name. I dare say 'twas an idiotic piece of business, but you are to remember that I loved her with an entire heart, and that, as yet, I could scarcely believe that the confession of a reciprocal attachment I had wrung from her earlier in the evening was more than an unusually delectable and audacious dream on the part of Frank Audaine.

I found it a heady joy to ponder on her loveliness as I went homeward that night. Oh, the wonder of her voice, that is a love song! cried my heart. Oh, the candid eyes of her, more beautiful than the June heavens, more blue than the very bluest speedwell flower! Oh, the tilt of her tiny chin and the incredible gold of her hair, and the quite unbelievable pink-and-white of her little flower-soft face! And oh, that scrap of crimson that is her mouth! In a word, my pulses throbbed with a sort of divine insanity, and Frank Audaine was as much out of his senses as any madman now in Bedlam, and as deliciously perturbed as any lover usually is when he meditates upon the object of his affections.

But there was other work than sonneting afoot that night, which shortly I set about. Yet such was my felicity that I found myself singing over it. Yes, it rang in my ears, somehow, that silly old Scotch song, and under my breath I hummed odd snatches of it as I went about the business. Sang I:

"Ken ye the rhyme to porringer?
Ken ye the rhyme to porringer?
King James the Seventh had a daughter,
And he gave her to an Oranger."

"Ken ye how he requited him?
Ken ye how he requited him?
The dog has into England come,
And ta'en the crown in spite of him!"

"The rogue he sal na keep it lang,
To budge we'll make him fain again;
We'll hang him high upon a tree,
King James shall hae his ain again!"

II

WELL! matters went smoothly enough at the start. With a diamond, Vanringham dexterously cut out a pane of glass, so that we had little difficulty in opening the window, and presently I climbed into a room black as a pocket, leaving him on the watch outside. As far as I could ascertain, the house was, for the present, untenanted.

But some twenty minutes later, just as I had finally succeeded in forcing the escritoire I found in the back room on the second story, I heard the street door open softly. You can conceive that 'twas with no pleasurable anticipations that I peered into the hall, for I was fairly trapped. There I saw some five or six men of an ugly aspect, who carried a burden among them, whose nature I could not determine in the uncertain light. But I heaved a sigh of relief as they bore it past me to the front room, opening into the one I occupied apparently without being aware of my presence.

"Now," thinks I, "is the time for my departure." And selecting such papers as I had need of from the rifled desk, I was about to run for it, when I heard a well-known voice.

"Rat the parson!" it cried, "he should have been here an hour ago. Here's the door left open for him, endangering the whole venture, and whey-face hain't

plucked up heart to come! Do some of you rogues fetch him without delay, and do all of you meet me here to-morrow to be paid in full."

"Here," thinks I, "is beyond doubt a romance." And as the men tumbled downstairs and into the street I resolved to see it through.

I waited for perhaps ten minutes, during which time I heard some one moving about in the next room, and judging that in my case there was but one man's anger to be apprehended, I crept gently toward the intervening door and found it luckily a trifle ajar.

So I peered through the crack into the next room, and there, as I had anticipated, I discovered Lord Humphrey Degge, whom I had last seen at Lady Culcheth's wrangling over a game of *écarté* with the fairest antagonist the universe could afford—to wit, Miss Dorothy Allonby. Just now my lord was in a state of considerable agitation, and the reason of this was evident when I saw that his ruffians had borne into the house a swooning lady, whom merciful unconsciousness had happily rendered oblivious of her present surroundings, and whose wrists his lordship was now slapping vigorously as he applied a flask of sal volatile to her nostrils.

The situation was awkward, for I had no desire to announce my whereabouts, my business in the house being of a nature that necessitated secrecy. On the other hand, I could not but think that Lord Humphrey's intentions toward the unknown fair-one were of a discreditable sort, such as a gentleman might not countenance. Accordingly, I availed myself of the few moments during which the lady was recovering from her swoon, and devoted them to serious reflection concerning the course I should preferably adopt.

Finally Miss came to, and, as is the custom of all

conduct toward her, and depicted the horrors of her present predicament in terms that were both just and elegant. From their disjointed talk I soon ascertained that, Lord Humphrey's suit being rejected by my angel, he had laid a trap for her (by bribing her coachman, as I subsequently learned), and had so far succeeded in his nefarious scheme that she, after leaving Lady Culcheth's, had been driven to this house and not homeward, as she had anticipated; and this course my lord endeavored to justify with a certain eloquence, attributing the irregularity of his behavior solely to the great vehemence of his love. His oratory, however, was of little avail; for Dorothy told him plainly that she had rather hear the protestations of a toad than listen to his more nauseous flattery, and bade him at once restore her to her natural guardians.

"*Ma charmante*," said he, "to-morrow your good stepmother will undoubtedly have the pleasure of saluting Lady Dorothy Degge, but as for Miss Dorothy Allonby, I doubt if her acquaintances are likely to see much of her in the future."

"You mean—?" cries she.

"That the parson will be here directly," says he.

"Infamous!" cries she. "Do you intend to marry me, then, by force?"

"What else?" says my lord, grinning.

Whereupon Dorothy began to scream at the top of her voice.

I question if any gentleman was ever placed in a more delicate position. Yonder was the object of my devotion exposed to all the diabolical machinations of a heartless villain, and here was I concealed in my lord's library, his desk broken open and his papers in my pocket. To remain quiet was to expose her to a fate worse than death, but to reveal myself was to confess Frank Audaine a thief, to lose her perhaps irretrievably.



HE WRITHED FOR A MOMENT, MUCH IN THE MANNER OF A COCKCHAFER

females similarly situated, rubbed her eyes and said, "Where am I?"

And when she rose from the divan I saw that 'twas my adored Dorothy.

"In the presence of your infatuated slave," says my lord. "Ah, divine Miss Allonby—"

But, being now fully aware of her deplorable surroundings, she began to weep, and in spite of the amorous rhetoric with which his lordship was prompt to comfort her, rebuked him vigorously for his unmanly

Then I thought of the mask I had brought in case of emergency, and, clapping it on, resolved to brazen the matter out. There was a chance—the barest chance—that in the half-light of the room neither would recognize me.

Meanwhile, I saw all notions of gallantry turned topsy-turvy, for my lord was laughing quietly, while my adored Dorothy called aloud upon the name of her Maker.

"The neighborhood is not unaccustomed to such

sounds," says he, "and I hardly think we need fear any interruption. I must tell you, my dear creature, you have by an evil chance arrived in a most evil locality, for this quarter of the town is the Devil's own country, and he is scarcely like to make you free of it."

"My dear sir," said I, pushing open the door, "surely you forget that the Devil is a gentleman?"

III

IF I had dropped a hand-grenade into the apartment, the astonishment of its occupants could not have been greater. My lord's face as he clapped his hand to his sword was neither tranquil nor altogether agreeable to contemplate. As for Dorothy, she gave a frightened little cry and ran toward the masked intruder with a piteous confidence that wrung my heart.

"The Devil!" says my lord.
"Not precisely," I amended, bowing in my best manner—"though 'tis true that I came to act as his representative."

"Indeed?" his lordship sneered.
"Dear sir," said I courteously, "as you with perfect justice have stated, this is the Devil's stronghold, and hereabout his will is paramount, and, as I have had the honor to add, the Devil is a gentleman. Surely, as such, he can not be expected to countenance your present behavior? Still, Lucifer, already up to the ears in the affairs of this mundane sphere, can scarcely express his disapproval in person. He tenders his apologies, sir, and sends in his stead your servant, with whose merits he is indifferently acquainted."

"To drop this mummery," says Lord Humphrey, "what are you doing in my lodgings?"

"Sir," I responded, "I came hither, I confess, without invitation. And with equal candor, I will admit that my present need is rather of your lordship's tableware, jewels, and such like trifles than of—will you force me to say it?—than of your company."

So saying, I drew and placed myself on guard, while my lord gasped.

"You're the most impudent rogue," says he, after he had recovered himself a little, "that I ever had the pleasure of meeting—"

"Your lordship is all kindness," I protested.

"—but your impudence is worth the price of whatever you may have pilfered. Go, my good man—or devil, if you so prefer to style yourself! Tell Lucifer that he is well served, and depart to the infernal regions with all speed. For, as you have doubtless learned, Miss and I have many private matters to discuss. And, gad, Mr. Moloch, pleasant as is your conversation, you must see I can not allow evil spirits about the house without getting it an ill reputation. So pardon me if I exorcise you with this."

He spoke boldly and as he ended tossed me a purse. I let it lay where it fell, for I had by no means ended my argument.

"Sir," said I, "my errand, which began with the acquisition of goblets, studs, and such, now reaches to that of a treasure yet more precious."

"Enough!" he cried impatiently. "Begone, and be thankful that my present business is of such an urgent nature as to prevent my furnishing the rope that will one day adorn your neck."

"That's as may be," quoth I, "and, indeed, I doubt if I could abide drowning, for 'tis a damp, unwholesome death. But my fixed purpose, to cut short all debate, is to escort Miss Allonby hence."

"Truly?" sneers my lord. "Mr. Moloch, I have borne with your insolence for a quarter of an hour—"

"Twenty minutes," said I, after consulting my watch.

"—but I'll put up with it no longer, and I take the liberty of suggesting that this is none of your affair."

"After all," I conceded, "your lordship speaks with some justice, and we must in common decency leave the final decision to Miss here."

I bowed to her. There was a curious bewilderment in her face that made me fear lest, for all my mask, for all my feigned voice, Dorothy at least suspected my identity. The apprehension turned me sick as I spoke.

"Miss Allonby," said I, in a voice that trembled, "as I am unknown to you, may I trust that you will permit me to present myself? My name—though, indeed, I have many names—is for the present Frederick Thomasson; with my father's name and estates I can not accommodate you, inasmuch as a certain mystery attaches to his identity; as for my mother, suffice it to say that she was a vivacious brunette of a large acquaintance, and generally known to the public as Miss Mary Waters. I began life as a pickpocket; since then I have so far improved my natural gifts that the police are kind enough to value my person at several hundred pounds. My rank in society, as you perceive, is not exalted; yet, if you choose to lodge information, I do not doubt that I shall on some subsequent Friday move in far higher circles than any nobleman who chances to be on Tyburn Hill at the time. But to dispense with my poor self. My lord is

master of two castles in England and an estate in Ireland, that I know of; he is a gentleman of breeding and is well known at court; he is accounted a fairly good match. Incidentally, he is a scoundrel. But since Lady Allonby doubtless grows impatient by this late hour, let us have done with further exposition, and remember that 'tis time you selected an escort to her residence. May I ask that you choose between my lord and myself, who chance to be the only persons available?"

She looked us over, first one, then the other. Then she laughed—and if I had never seen her before, I could have found it in my heart to love her for the sweet insolence of her mirth alone.

"After all," said my adored Dorothy, "I prefer the rogue who has at least the decency to wear a mask when he goes about his knaveries."

"That, my lord," said I, "is fairly conclusive, and so we will be gone."

"Over my dead body!" says he.

"Dear sir," I protested, "we are quite indifferent as to the road."

This stung him to the quick, and with an oath he drew, as I was heartily glad to observe, for I can not help thinking that, when it comes to the last, steel is the only true arbiter between gentlemen. So we crossed blades, and, pursuing my usual tactics, I began upon a flow of words, which course I have learned by

put upon her; then, with a ferocity which surprised me in one of such gentle aspect, hissed, "Kill him!"

"My adorable Miss Allonby," said I, "do not, I pray you, thus slander the canine species! And, meanwhile, permit me to remind you that 'tis scarcely safe to remain here. The parson will arrive ere long, and if it be to bury rather than to marry Lord Humphrey—well, after all, the House of Lords is a large body."

"Come!" said she, and took my arm. And so we went downstairs and into the street.

IV

SHE spoke not a word on the way homeward. Vanringham had taken to his heels when my lord's people came, so we saw nothing of him. But when we had come safely to Lady Allonby's villa, on a sudden Dorothy began to laugh, though not very mirthfully.

"Captain Audaine," says she, in a wearied, scornful voice, "I know that the hour is very late, yet there are certain matters to be settled between us that I think will scarcely admit of delay. I pray you, then, grant me ten minutes' conversation."

She had known me all along, you see; trust the dullest woman to play *Cædipus* when Love sets the riddle. So there was nothing for me to do save clap my mask into my pocket and follow her, sheepishly enough, to one of the salons, where a gaping footman made a light for us at Dorothy's solicitation.

She left me there to kick my heels to and fro in a solitude of some moments' duration. But presently my dear mistress came into the room, her arms full of trinkets and knick-knacks, which she flung upon a table.

"Here's your ring, Captain Audaine," says she, drawing it from her finger. "I did not wear it long, did I? And here's the miniature you gave me, too. I—I used to kiss it every night, you know. And here's a flower you dropped at Lady Pevensey's. I picked it up—oh, very secretly—because you had worn it, you understand. And here's—" But at this point she fairly broke down and cast her round white arms about the heap of trinkets and strained them close to her, and bowed her imperious golden head above them in anguish. "Oh, how I loved you! how I loved you!" she sobbed. "And all the while you were only a common thief!"

"Dorothy—!" I pleaded.
"Oh, you shame me, you shame me past utterance!" she cried, in a storm of mingled tears and laughter. "Here's this bold Captain Audaine, who comes to Tunbridge from God knows where, and wins a maid's love and proves in the end but a beggarly housebreaker! Mr. Congreve might make a mirthful comedy of this, might he not?" Then she rose to her feet stiffly. "Take your gifts, Mr. Thief," says she, pointing. "Take them, and for God's sake let me not see you again."

So I was forced to make a clean breast of it.

"Dorothy," said I, "ken ye the rhyme to porringer?"

But she only stared at me blankly through unshed tears. Presently, though, I hummed over the old song:

*"Ken ye the rhyme to porringer?
Ken ye the rhyme to porringer?
King James the Seventh had
ae daughter,
And he gave her to an Oranger."*

"And the Oranger filched his crown," said I, "and drove King James—God bless him!—out of his kingdom. That was a long time ago, my dear, but Dutch William left the stolen crown to Anne, and Anne, in turn,

left it to German George. So that now the Elector of Hanover reigns at St. James's, while the true king's son skulks in France yonder, with never a roof to shelter him. And there are certain gentlemen, Dorothy, who do not consider that this is right."

"You are a Jacobite?" says she. "Well, what has that to do with the matter?"

"Simply that Lord Humphrey is not of my way of thinking, my dear. Lord Humphrey!—pah, Degge is Walpole's paid spy, I tell you. He followed Vanringham to Tunbridge on account of this business. And to-day, when Vanringham set out for Avignon, he was stopped a mile from the Wells by a couple of Lord Humphrey's fellows, disguised as highwaymen, and all his papers stolen. To-morrow they would have been in Walpole's hands. And then—" I paused to allow myself a whistle.

She came a little toward me, in the prettiest possible glow of bewilderment. "I—I do not understand," she murmured. "Oh, Frank, Frank! then are you not a thief after all? Are you really not named Thomasson?"

"I am most assuredly not Frederick Thomasson," said I, "nor do I know if any such person exists, for I never heard the name before to-night. Yet for all that, I am a most unmitigated thief. Why, do you not understand? What Vanringham carried was a petition from some two hundred Scotch and English gentlemen that our gracious Prince Charlie be pleased to come over and take back his own from the Elector. 'Twas rebellion, flat rebellion, and the very highest treason, I tell you! Had Walpole seen the paper, within a month all our heads had been blackening over Temple Bar. (Continued on p. 28.)



THE MADCAP SPRANG UPON A FOOTSTOOL AND WAVED HER FAN

experience frequently disconcerts an adversary far more than any trick of the sword can do. I pressed him sorely, and he continued to give way, but clearly for tactical purposes, and without permitting the bright flash of steel that shielded his heart to swerve an instant from the line.

"Miss Allonby," said I, growing impatient, "have you never seen a venomous insect pinned to the wall? In that case, I pray you to attend more closely. For one has only to parry—thus! And thrust—in this fashion! And behold, the thing is done!"

In fact, my lord, having by this time been run through the chest, was safely affixed to the paneling at the extreme end of the apartment; where he writhed for a moment, much in the manner of a cockchafer whom mischievous urchins have pinned to a card, his mien and gesticulation being very suggestive of the torments of the damned as they are so strikingly depicted by the Italian Dante. He tumbled down in a heap, though, now that I sheathed my sword and bowed toward my charmer.

"Miss Allonby," said I, "it may be that you are expected?"

She had watched the combat with wide, frightened eyes. Now she drew nearer and looked curiously at my lord where he had fallen.

"Have you killed him?" she asked, in a hushed voice.

"Dear me, no!" I protested. "The life of a peer's son is too valuable a matter; he will be little the worse for it in a week."

"The dog!" cried she, overcome with pardonable indignation at the affront the misguided nobleman had

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THE RHYME TO PORRINGER

(Continued from page 20)

So I stole it—I, Francis Audaine, stole it in the King's cause. God bless him! 'Twas burglary no less, but it saved two hundred lives, my own included, and I look to be a deal older than I am before I regret it."

Afterward I showed her the papers and then burned them one by one over a candle. She said nothing. So presently I turned toward her with a little bow.

"Madam," said I, "you have forced my secret from me. I know that your family is stanch on the Whig side, and yet—ere the thief goes—may he not trust that you will not betray him?"

And now she came to me, all penitence and dimples. "But you said you were a thief," my dear mistress pointed out.

"Faith," said I, "'twas very necessary that Lord Humphrey should think me so. A housebreaker they would have only hanged, but a Jacobite they would have hanged and quartered afterward."

"Oh, forgive me, forgive me!" she wailed, and I was just about to do so in what I considered the most agreeable and appropriate manner, when the madcap broke away from me and sprang upon a footstool and waved her fan defiantly.

"Down with the Elector!" she cried in her high, sweet voice. "Long live King James!" And then, with a most lovely wildness of mien, she began to sing:

*"Ken ye the rhyme to porringer?
Ken ye the rhyme to porringer?
King James the Seventh had ae daughter—"*

But I stopped her. "Dorothy, Dorothy!" I pleaded, as plainly as my laughter would permit; "you will rouse the house."

"I don't care! I will be a Jacobite if you are one!"

"Eh, well!" said I, "Frank Audaine is not the man to coerce his wife in a political matter. Nevertheless, I know of a certain Jacobite who is not unlikely to have a bad time of it if by any chance Lord Humphrey recognized him to-night. You may live to be a widow yet, dear lady."

"But he didn't recognize you. And if he did"—she snapped her fingers. "Why, we'll fight him again—you and I, Frank—won't we, my dear? He stole our secret, you know. And he stole me, too. Very pretty behavior, wasn't it?" And here Miss Allonby stamped the tiniest, the most infinitesimal of red-heeled slippers.

*"The rogue he did na keep me lang,
To budge we made him fain again—"*

"That's you, Frank, and your great long sword. Aud now—"

*"We'll hang him high upon a tree,
And King Frank shall hae his ain again!"*

Afterward my adored Dorothy jumped down from the footstool and came toward me, lifting up that crimson trifle that she calls her mouth. "Take your own, my king," she breathed, with a wonderful little gesture of surrender.

And a gentleman could do no less.

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THE TWO-GUN MAN

(Continued from page 14)

And when night fell, and the topaz and violet and saffron and amethyst and mauve and lilac had faded suddenly from the Chiracahuas like a veil that has been rent, and the ramparts had become slate gray and then black, the soft-breathed night wandered here and there over the desert, and the land fell under an enchantment even stranger than the day's.

So the days went by, wonderful, fashioning the ways and the character of men. Seven passed! Buck Johnson and his foreman began to look for the stranger. Eight; they began to speculate. Nine; they doubted. On the tenth they gave him up, and he came. They knew him first by the soft lowing of cattle. Jed Parker, dazzled by the lamp, peered from the door and made him out dimly, turning the animals into the corral. A moment later his pony's hoofs impacted softly on the baked earth, he dropped from the saddle and entered the room.

"I'm late," said he, briefly glancing at the clock which indicated ten. "But I'm here."

His manner was quick and sharp, almost breathless, as though he had been running. "Your cattle are in the corral, all of them. Have you the money?"

"I have the money here," replied Buck Johnson, laying his hand against a drawer, "and it's ready for you when you've earned it. I don't care so much for the cattle. What I wanted is the man who stole them. Did you bring him?"

"Yes, I brought him," said the stranger. "Let's see that money."

Buck Johnson threw open the drawer and drew out the heavy canvas sack.

"It's here. Now bring in your prisoner."

The two-gun man seemed suddenly to loom large in the doorway. The muzzles of his revolvers covered the two before him. His speech came short and sharp.

"I told you I'd bring back the cows and the one who rustled them," he snapped, "I've never lied to a man yet. Your stock is in the corral. I'll trouble you for that five thousand. I'm the man who stole your cattle!"


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