

VOL. 7 NO. 4

AUGUST

1902

PRICE 25 cts

THE SMART SET

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ISSUED
MONTHLY
ON THE 15TH

ESS ESS PUBLISHING COMPANY

NEW YORK

452 Fifth Ave.

LONDON

PARIS

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IN THE SUMMER OF SAINT MARTIN

By James Branch Cabell

MR. ERWYN sighed profoundly as he ended his recital—half for pity of the misguided folk who had afforded Tunbridge its latest scandal, half for relief that, in spite of many difficulties, the story had been clearly set forth in discreet language that veiled, if it did not quite conceal, certain unsavory details.

"And so," said he, "poor Harry is run through the lungs, and Mrs. Anstruther is to be allowed a separate maintenance."

"'Tis shocking!" said Lady Allonby.

"'Tis incredible," said Mr. Erwyn, "to my mind, at least, that the bonds of matrimony should be slipped thus lightly. But the age is somewhat lax and the world now views with complaisance the mad antics of half-grown lads and wenches, who trip to the altar as carelessly as to a country-dance."

Lady Allonby stirred her tea reflectively and said nothing. Her own marriage had been notoriously unhappy, and two years of widowhood since the seizure, brought on by an inherited tendency to apoplexy and French brandy, which carried off Sir Stephen Allonby, of Allonby Shaw, had not, to all appearances, tempered her aversion to the matrimonial state. Certain it was that she had refused many advantageous offers during that time, for her jointure was considerable and, though in candid moments she confessed to thirty-five, her dearest friends could not question her beauty. Her exculpation was that she desired to devote herself to her stepdaughter, but, as gossip had it at Tunbridge, she was like to be soon deprived of this subterfuge; for Miss Allonby had

reached her twentieth year and the two ladies were rarely seen in public save in the company of Mr. Erwyn, who, it was generally conceded, stood high in their favor and was desirous of mounting yet further.

For these reasons Lady Allonby heard with interest his feeling allusion to the laxity of the age, and pondered thereon for a moment, not doubting that he had lingered after the departure of her other guests in order to make the disclosure that she had been long expecting.

"I had not thought," said she, at length, "that you, of all men, would ever cast a serious eye toward marriage. Indeed, Mr. Erwyn, you have loved women so long that I must question your ability to love a woman, and your amours have been a by-word these twenty years."

"Dear lady," said Mr. Erwyn, "surely you would not confound amour with love? Believe me, the translation is inadequate. Amour is but the Summer wave that lifts and glitters and laughs in the sunlight for a moment, and disappears; but love is the unfathomed, eternal sea itself. Amour is a general under whom youth must serve for a little, and it is well to fight under his colors; for it is against ennui that he marshals his forces. 'Tis a glorious conflict, and young blood cannot but stir and exult as paradoxes, marching and countermarching at his command, make way for one another in iridescent squadrons, while through the steady musketry of epigrams one hears the clash of contending repartees, the cry of a wailing sonnet. But he may

be served by the young alone, and the veteran, grown old in service, is glad to relinquish the glory and splendor of the battle for some quiet ingle-nook, where, with love to make a third, he prattles of past days and deeds with one that goes hand in hand with him toward the tomb."

Lady Allonby accorded this conceit the tribute of a sigh; then glanced toward her four impassive footmen to make sure they were out of earshot.

"And so—?" said she.

"Faith," said Mr. Erwyn, "I thought you had known it long since."

"Indeed," said she, reflectively, "I dare say it is quite time."

"I am not," said Mr. Erwyn, "in the heyday of my youth, I grant you; but I am not for that reason necessarily unmoved by the attractions of an advantageous person, a fine sensibility and all the graces."

He sipped his tea with an air of partial resentment, and Lady Allonby, remembering the disparity of age that existed between Mr. Erwyn and her stepdaughter, felt that she had awkwardly blundered upon forbidden ground and awaited with contrition the proposal she did not doubt he was about to broach to her, as the head of the family.

"Who is she?" said Lady Allonby.

"An angel," said Mr. Erwyn, fencing.

"Beware," said Lady Allonby, "lest she prove a recording angel; a wife who takes too deep an interest in your movements will scarcely suit you."

"I trust," said Mr. Erwyn, smiling, "that she will allow me the usual half-holiday on Saturday."

Lady Allonby, rebuffed, sought consolation among the conserves.

"And yet," said Mr. Erwyn, "I do not seek a wife who will take her morning chocolate with me and sup with heaven knows whom. I have seen too much of *mariage à la mode*; and I come to her, if not with the transports of an Amadis, at least with an entire adoration and respect."

"Then," said Lady Allonby, "you love her?"

"Very tenderly," said Mr. Erwyn; "and, indeed, I would, for her sake, that the errors of my past life were not so numerous, nor the frailty of my aspiring resolutions rendered apparent—ah, so many times!—to a gaping and censorious world. For, as you know, I cannot offer her an untried heart; 'tis somewhat worn by many barterings. But I know that it beats very strongly in her presence, and when I come to her some day and clasp her in my arms, as I mean to do, I trust that her lips may not turn away from mine and that she may be glad that I am there and that her heart may sound an echoing chime. For, indeed, I love her as I have loved no other woman; and that, I think, you cannot doubt."

"I?" said Lady Allonby, innocently. "How should I know?"

"Unless you are blind," said Mr. Erwyn—"and I know those great eyes to be more keen than the tongue of a dowager—you must have seen of late that I have dared to hope—to think—that she whom I love so tenderly might deign to be that affectionate, that condescending friend who will assist me to retrieve the indiscretions of my youth—and who——"

The confusion of his utterance, that went far toward attesting his emotion, moved Lady Allonby. "It is true," said she, "that I——"

"Anastasia," said Mr. Erwyn, with feeling, "is not our friendship of an age that warrants sincerity?"

Lady Allonby was stirred to dispel his evident embarrassment. "Indeed," said she, frankly, "I have not been blind, and I do not object—and I do not think that Dorothy will prove obdurate."

"You render me the happiest of men," said Mr. Erwyn, rapturously. Then he asked: "You have, then, already discussed this matter with Miss Allonby?"

"Not precisely," said she, laughing; "I had thought it was apparent to the most timid lover that the first

announcement came with best grace from him."

"Is her consent, then, absolutely necessary?" said Mr. Erwyn, laughing likewise.

"Surely," said she.

"As you will," said he; then asked: "You have no reason to fear her proposal?"

"No," replied Lady Allonby. "Still——"

"I shall be a veritable Demosthenes," said Mr. Erwyn, "and I am sure that she will consent."

"Your conceit," said Lady Allonby, "is appalling."

"'Tis fearful," admitted Mr. Erwyn, "but I propose to try marriage as a remedy. I have heard it is an excellent one."

"Not always," said she, lightly, "for——"

"It is true," said he, "that you have been married——"

"George!" cried Lady Allonby.

"Pardon me," said Mr. Erwyn; "but, indeed, I find that perfect felicity is more potent than wine. Were it not for the footmen there," said he, joyously, "I do not know to what lengths I might go."

"In that case," laughed Lady Allonby, "I shall fetch Dorothy to you, that the crown may be set upon your happiness. And previously I shall dismiss the footmen." She did so with a sign.

"Believe me," said Mr. Erwyn, "'tis what I have long desired. And when Miss Allonby honors me with her attention I shall, since my life's happiness depends on the issue, plead with all the eloquence of a starveling barrister, big with the import of his first case. May I, indeed, rest assured that my triumph over her possible objections may not be viewed with unfavorable eyes?"

"Dear George," said Lady Allonby, "believe me, there is nothing I desire more earnestly than that you may obtain all that is necessary for your happiness, even though—I will fetch Dorothy."

"Hexcuse me, sir," said the largest footman but one, "'ave you done with your cup?"

II

MR. ERWYN, left alone, smiled at his own reflection in the mirror; rearranged his ruffles with a deft and shapely hand; consulted his watch; seated himself and hummed a merry air, in meditative wise; took counsel with his watch once more, and smiled.

Then the bright hangings that shielded the hall door quivered, broke into tumultuous waves and yielded up Miss Allonby, who cried, with an emphasis that dowagers found hoydenish and young men adorable:

"Heavens! What can it be, Mr. Erwyn, that has cast mother into such an unprecedented state of excitement?"

"What, indeed?" said he, bowing over her proffered hand.

"For, like a hurricane, she burst into my room and cried, 'Mr. Erwyn has something of importance to declare to you—why did you put on that gown?—bless you, my child—' all in one eager breath; then kissed me, powdered my nose and despatched me to you without explanation. And why?" said Miss Allonby.

"Why, indeed?" said Mr. Erwyn.

"'Tis very annoying," said she, decisively.

"Sending you to me?" said Mr. Erwyn, a world of reproach in his voice.

"That," said Miss Allonby, "I can pardon—very easily. But I dislike all mysteries, and being termed a child, and——"

"Yes?" said Mr. Erwyn.

"—being powdered on the nose," said Miss Allonby, with firmness. Then she went to the mirror and, standing on the tips of her toes, peered anxiously into its depths. She rubbed her nose disapprovingly and frowned, involuntarily, perhaps, pursing up her lips. Mr. Erwyn regarded her intently for a moment and wandered to the extreme end of the apartment, where he evinced a sudden interest in bric-à-brac.

"Is there any powder on my nose?" said Miss Allonby.

"I fail to perceive any," said Mr. Erwyn.

"Come closer," said she.

"I dare not," said he.

Miss Allonby wheeled about. "Fie!" she cried; "one that has served against the French, and afraid of powder!"

"It is not," said Mr. Erwyn, uncertainly, "the powder that I fear."

"What then?" said she, sinking on the divan beside the disordered tea-table.

"There are two of them," said Mr. Erwyn, "and they are so red——"

"Nonsense!" cried Miss Allonby, with heightened color.

"'Tis best to avoid temptation," said Mr. Erwyn, virtuously.

"Undoubtedly," said she, "'tis best to avoid having your ears boxed."

Mr. Erwyn sighed despondently. Miss Allonby moved to the end of the divan.

"What was it," said she, "that you had to tell me?"

"'Tis a matter of some importance," said Mr. Erwyn.

"Heavens!" said Miss Allonby, absent-mindedly drawing aside her skirts; "one would think you about to make a declaration."

Mr. Erwyn sat down beside her. "I have been known," said he, "to do such things."

The divan was strewn with cushions in the Oriental fashion. Miss Allonby, with some adroitness, slipped one between her person and that of her neighbor. "Oh!" said Miss Allonby.

"Yes," said he, peering over the barrier; "I admit that I am even now shuddering upon the verge of matrimony."

"Indeed?" said she, secure in her fortress. "Have you selected an accomplice?"

"Faith, yes!" said Mr. Erwyn.

"Have I the honor of her acquaintance?" said Miss Allonby.

"Indeed," said Mr. Erwyn, "no woman knows her better."

Miss Allonby smiled. "Dear Mr. Erwyn," said she, "this is a disclosure I have looked for this past six months."

"Oh!" said Mr. Erwyn.

"Heavens, yes!" said she. "You have been a most dilatory lover."

"I am truly sorry," said Mr. Erwyn, "to have kept you waiting."

"In fact," said she, "I had frequently thought of reproaching you for your tardiness."

"In that case," said Mr. Erwyn, "the matter could, no doubt, have been arranged more quickly."

"For your intentions have been most apparent."

Mr. Erwyn removed the cushion. "You do not, then, disapprove?" said he.

"Indeed, no," said Miss Allonby; "I think you will make an excellent step-father."

The cushion fell to the floor. Mr. Erwyn replaced it and smiled.

"And so," said Miss Allonby, "mother, thinking me in ignorance, has deputed you to inform me of this most transparent secret? How strange is the blindness of lovers! But, I dare say," sighed Miss Allonby, "we are much alike."

"We?" said Mr. Erwyn, softly.

"I meant——" said Miss Allonby, flushing somewhat.

"Yes?" said Mr. Erwyn. His voice sank to a pleading cadence. "Dear child, am I not worthy of trust?"

There was a pause.

"I am going to the Pantiles this afternoon," declared Miss Allonby, at length, "to feed the swans."

"Ah," said Mr. Erwyn, comprehendingly; "surely, he is somewhat tardy."

"Oh," said she, "then, you know?"

"I know," said he, "that there is a tasteful and secluded Summer-house near the Fountain of Neptune."

"I was never allowed," said Miss Allonby, unconvincingly, "to sit in secluded Summer-houses with——with any one; besides, the gardeners leave their lunch-baskets there."

Mr. Erwyn beamed upon her, paternally. "I was not previously aware," said he, "that Monsieur de Marigny was interested in ornithology. But suppose——"

"Oh, he will," said Miss Allonby, with confidence; then added, reflectively: "I shall be greatly and painfully surprised by his declaration."

"Doubtless," said Mr. Erwyn.

"I shall be deeply grieved that he has so utterly misunderstood my friendly interest in his welfare; I shall be highly indignant after he has—has——"

"Not until afterward?" said Mr. Erwyn, holding up a reproving forefinger.

"—after he has astounded me by his avowal. And I shall behave in the same manner the second time he recurs to the painful subject; but——"

"The third time?" said Mr. Erwyn.

"He has remarkably expressive eyes," said Miss Allonby, with a fine irrelevance.

"Ah, youth, youth!" sighed Mr. Erwyn. "Dear child, I pray you, do not trifle with the happiness that is within your grasp! *Si jeunesse savait*—the proverb is somewhat musty. But we that have attained the Saint Martin's Summer of our lives and have grown capable of but a calm and tempered affection at the utmost—we cannot but look wistfully on the wondrous happiness and ignorance of youth; and we would warn you, were it possible, of the many dangers whereby you are encompassed. For love is a deity that must not be trifled with; his voice may chant the requiem of all that is bravest in our mingled natures, or sound a stave of such nobility as heartens us through life. He is kindly, but implacable; and I that speak to you have seen my life made desolate by this flippant jesting with his terrors, and that ere the edge of my first razor had been dulled. 'Tis true, I have lived since in indifferent comfort; yet 'tis but a dreary banquet where there is no platter laid for love, and he has gone unfed in my heart these fifteen years or more."

"Dear Mr. Erwyn!" sighed Miss Allonby, moved by the earnestness of his speech. "And so," she queried, "you have loved mother all this time?"

"Faith——" said Mr. Erwyn.

"Pardon me," spoke the voice of Lady Allonby; "I trust you young people have adjusted matters to your satisfaction?"

III

"DEAR mother!" cried Miss Allonby, "I am delighted!" then kissed her vigorously and left the room, casting an arch glance at Mr. Erwyn as she went.

"Heavens!" said Lady Allonby, recovering her somewhat ruffled dignity, "the dear child is frightfully hoydenish! But, I suppose, we may regard the matter as settled?"

"Yes," said Mr. Erwyn; "I think, dear lady, we may safely regard the matter as settled."

"She is of an excitable nature," said she, seating herself on the divan; "and you, dear Mr. Erwyn, who know women so well, will doubtless pardon the agitation of a young girl placed in such an unaccustomed position. I myself was greatly affected by my first declaration."

"Doubtless," said Mr. Erwyn, sinking beside her, "Sir Stephen was very moving."

"I assure you," said she, smiling, "that he was not the first."

"Indeed," said he, "I remember very well——"

"You do not!" said Lady Allonby, flushing.

"You wore a blue gown," said he.

"Indeed?" said she.

"And——"

"If I did," said Lady Allonby, "I have quite forgotten it; and it is your duty to do likewise."

"I cannot," said Mr. Erwyn, sighing.

"There is nothing less well bred," said she, "than a good memory. I should decline to remain in the same room with one, were it not that Dorothy has deserted you in this strange fashion. Whither, pray, has she gone?"

Mr. Erwyn smiled in a knowing manner. "Her tender heart," said he, "is much affected by the pathetic and moving spectacle of the poor hungry swans, pining for their native land and made a raree-show for visitors in the Pantiles; and she has gone to stay them with biscuit and comfort them with cakes."

"Really?" said Lady Allonby.

"And," said Mr. Erwyn, "to defend her from the possible insolence of the unformed rustics and the—the ferocious goldfish, Monsieur de Marigny has obligingly offered his services as an escort."

"Oh!" said Lady Allonby; then added, disapprovingly: "Under the circumstances she might permissibly have broken the engagement."

"There is no engagement," said Mr. Erwyn—"as yet."

"Indeed?" said she.

"Faith," said he, "should he make a declaration this afternoon she will refuse him."

"Naturally," said she.

"And the second time," said he.

"Undoubtedly," said she.

"But the third time——"

"Well?"

Mr. Erwyn allowed himself a noiseless chuckle. "After the third time," said Mr. Erwyn, "there will be an engagement."

"Mr. Erwyn!" cried Lady Allonby, with widened eyes, "I understood that Dorothy had looked favorably upon your suit."

"Anastasia!" cried he; then passed his hand lightly over his brow. "'Tis the first I had heard of it," said Mr. Erwyn.

"Surely——" said she.

"Surely," said he, "in consideration of the fact that, not an hour since, you deigned to bestow upon me your hand——"

"George!" cried Lady Allonby; and, recovering herself, smiled, courteously. "'Tis the first I had heard of it."

They stared at each other for a moment in utter bewilderment. Then Lady Allonby burst into almost hysterical laughter.

"You mean——?" said she.

"Indeed," said Mr. Erwyn, "so far was I from aspiring to Miss Allonby's hand that my whole soul was set upon possessing both the heart and person of a lady, in my humble opinion, far more desirable."

"I did not know——" said she.

"Behold," said Mr. Erwyn, bitterly, "how rightly is my presumption punished. For I, with a fop's audacity, had thought my love for you of sufficient moment to have been long since observed, and strong in my conceit had scorned a pleasing declaration made up of faint phrases and whining ballad-endings. I spoke as my heart prompted me, but the heart has proven a poor counselor, dear lady, and now am I rewarded. For you had not even known of my passion, and that which my presumption had taken as a reciprocal affection now proves but a kindly desire to further my marriage with another."

"You love me?" said Lady Allonby, softly.

"Indeed," said Mr. Erwyn, "I have loved you all my life—first with a boy's love that I scarce knew was love, and, after your marriage with an honorable man had severed us, as I thought, irrevocably, with such love as an honest man may bear a woman whom both circumstance and the respect in which he holds her have placed beyond his reach—a love that might not be spoken, but of which I had thought you could scarce be ignorant."

"Mr. Erwyn!" said she.

"Ah, madam, grant a losing gamester the right to rail at adverse fate! Since your widowhood I have pursued you with attentions which I now perceive must at many times have proved distasteful. But my love had blinded me; I shall trouble you no more. I did not know 'twas but a comedy of the eternal duel 'twixt man and woman, nor am I sorry that you have conquered, dear opponent. Ah, how valorously you fought! Even without the magic of that voice which stirs my blood so strangely or the witchery of those swift, doubtful glances, I had succumbed, I think, to the least of those sweet sentences which died in still sweeter laughter—the verbal thrust and stanch parrying of my veiled assault—were it but for admiration of their perfect, rounded art. You have conquered, dear lady, and I

yield a beaten and saddened heart to the victor."

"Dear George," said Lady Allonby, "you know that once——"

"Indeed," said Mr. Erwyn, "'twas the sand on which I builded. But I am wiser now and I perceive that the feeling you entertain toward me is but the pale shadow of a youthful inclination. I shall not presume upon it. I am somewhat proud, dear Anastasia; I have given you my heart, such as it is; were you minded to accept it even now, through friendship or pity, I should refuse. For my love of you has been the one pure and quite unselfish emotion of my life; I would not barter it for one less either in kind or degree. And so, farewell!"

"George," said Lady Allonby.

"I am at your service," said Mr.

Erwyn, pausing on his way to the door.

"This—this may——"

"'Tis a handkerchief," said Mr. Erwyn, "but somewhat moist."

"And—my eyes?"

"Red," said Mr. Erwyn.

"I—I have been weeping."

"Why?" said Mr. Erwyn.

"I—I thought you were to wed Dorothy."

Mr. Erwyn resumed his seat, precipitately. "You—objected?" said he.

"I think," said Lady Allonby, "I should entertain the same objection toward any woman——"

"Well?" said Mr. Erwyn.

"—except——"

"Incomparable Anastasia!" said Mr. Erwyn.



AT THE DAY'S END

ALL day among the anxious crowd I pressed,
All day I strove and bartered with the best,
All day my feet were busy in the mart—
Have I not earned my little hour of rest?

*Oh, my beloved, the shelter of your heart!
Oh, my beloved, the quiet of your breast!*

Ere the morn broke Toil called us to arise;
When the noon fell she drove us tyrant-wise;
Slow in the twilight died her loud alarms—
Fain would I turn me where the silence lies.

*Oh, my beloved, the comfort of your arms!
Oh, my beloved, the healing of your eyes!*

As footworn travelers a little space
Kneel in the shadow of some holy place,
Too wearied to lament or to rejoice,
So in your love receive me of your grace.

*Oh, my beloved, the soothing of your voice!
Oh, my beloved, the pity of your face!*

MCCREA PICKERING.