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Illustration for "In the Second April"

"WHO IS THE LUCKY MISS, MY LITTLE VILLAIN?"

In the Second April

BY JAMES BRANCH CABELL

A STORY IN TWO PARTS

I

IT was on the thirteenth day of April that they signed the Second Treaty of Dover, which not only confirmed its predecessor of Aix-la-Chapelle, but in addition, with the brevity of lightning, demolished the last Stuarts' hope of any further aid from France. And the French ambassador subscribed it with a chuckle.

"For on this occasion, Jean," he observed, as he pushed the paper from him, "I think that honors are fairly even. You obtain peace at home, and in India we obtain assistance for Dupleix; good, the benefit is quite mutual; and accordingly, my friend, I must still owe you one for that Bavarian business."

Ormskirk was silent until he had the churchwarden he had just ignited aglow. "That was the evening I had you robbed and beaten by footpads, was it not? Faith, Gaston, I think you should rather be obliged to me, since it taught you never to carry important papers in your pocket what time you go about your affairs of gallantry."

"That beating with great sticks," the Duc de Puyange considered, "was the height of unnecessary."

And the Duke of Ormskirk shrugged. "A mere touch of verisimilitude, Gaston; footpads invariably beat their victims. Besides, you had attempted to murder me at Aix, you may remember."

De Puyange was horrified. "My dear friend! when I set Villaneuve upon you it was with express orders only to run you through the shoulder. Figure to yourself, that abominable St. Severin had bribed your *chef* to feed you powdered glass in a ragout. But I dissented. And, you conceive, Villaneuve was in price exorbitant. I snap my fingers. 'For a comrade so dear,' I remark, 'I gladly employ the most expensive of assassins.' Yet before the face of such mag-

nanimity you grumble." The Duc de Puyange spread out his shapely hands. "I murder you! My adored Jean, I had as lief make love to my wife!"

Ormskirk struck his finger-tips upon the table. "Faith, I knew there was something I intended to ask of you. I want you to get me a wife, Gaston."

"In fact," de Puyange observed, "warfare being now at an end, it is only natural that you should resort to matrimony. I can assure you it is an admirable substitute. But who is the lucky miss, my little villain?"

"Why, that is for you to settle," Ormskirk said. "I had hoped you might know of some suitable person."

"*Ma foi!* my friend, if I were arbiter and any wife would suit you, I would cordially desire you to take mine, for when a woman so incessantly resembles an angel in conduct, her husband inevitably desires to see her one in reality."

"You misinterpret me, Gaston. This is not a jest. I had always intended to marry so soon as I could spare the time, and now that this treaty is disposed of, my opportunity has beyond doubt arrived. I am practically at leisure until the autumn. At latest, though, I must marry by August, in order to get the honeymoon off my hands before the convocation of Parliament. For there will have to be a honeymoon, I suppose?"

"It is customary," de Puyange said. He appeared to deliberate something entirely alien to his reply, however, and now sat silent for a matter of four seconds, his countenance profoundly grave. He was a hideous man,* with black bee-

* For a consideration of the vexed and delicate question whether or no King Charles II. of England was his grandfather, the reader is referred to the third chapter of la Vrillière's *De Puyange et Son Temps*. The resemblance in person to that monarch was undeniable.

ting eyebrows, an enormous nose, and an under lip excessively full; his face had all the calculated ill proportion of a gargoyle, an ugliness so consummate and merry that in ultimate effect it captivated.

At last de Puyange began: "I think I follow you. It is quite proper that you should marry. It is quite proper that a man who has done so much for England should leave descendants to perpetuate his name and with perhaps some portion of his ability—no, Jean, I do not flatter—serve the England which is to his heart so dear. As a Frenchman I cannot but deplore that our next generation will have to face another Ormskirk; as your friend who loves you I say that this marriage will appropriately round a successful and honorable and intelligent life. Eh, we are only men, you and I, and it is advisable that all men should marry, since otherwise they might be so happy in this colorful world that getting to heaven would not particularly tempt them. Thus is matrimony a bulwark of religion."

"You are growing scurrilous," Ormskirk complained, "whereas I am in perfect earnest."

"I, too, speak to the foot of the letter, Jean, as you will presently ascertain. I comprehend that you cannot with agreeability marry an Englishwoman. You are too much of a personage. Possessing, as you are notoriously known to do, your pick among the women of your degree—for none of them dare refuse the great Duke of Ormskirk—any choice must therefore be a too robustious affront to all the others. If you select a Howard, the Skirlaws will be offended; if a Beaufort, you lose Umfraville's support,—and so on. Hey, I know, my dear Jean; your affair with the Earl of Brudenel's daughter cost you seven seats in Parliament, you may remember. How am I aware of this?—why, because I habitually have your mail intercepted. You intercept mine, do you not? Naturally; you would be a very gross and intolerable scion of the pig if you did otherwise. *Eh bien!* let us get on. You might, of course, play King Cophetua, but I doubt if it would amuse you, since Penelophons are rare; it follows in logic that your wife must come from abroad. And whence? Without question, from France, the land of adorable women. The thing is plainly

demonstrated; and in France, my dear, I have to an eyelash the proper person for you."

"Then we may consider the affair as settled," Ormskirk replied, "and should you arrange to have the marriage take place upon the first of August—if possible, a trifle earlier—I would be trebly your debtor."

De Puyange retorted: "Beyond doubt I can adjust these matters. And yet, my dear Jean, I must submit that it is not quite the act of a gentleman to plunge into matrimony without even inquiring as to the dowry of your future bride."

"It is true," said Ormskirk, with a grimace; "I had not thought of her portion. You must remember that my attention is at present preempted by that idiotic Ferrers business. How much am I to marry, then, Gaston?"

"I had in mind," said the other, "my sister—the Demoiselle Claire de Puyange—"

It was a day of courtesy when the minor graces were paramount. Ormskirk rose and accorded him a salutation fitted to an emperor. "I entreat your pardon, sir, for any *gaucherie* of which I may have been guilty, and desire to extend to you herewith my appreciation of the honor you have done me."

"It is sufficient, monsieur," de Puyange replied. And the two gravely bowed to one another.

Then the Frenchman resumed in conversational tones: "I have but one unmarried sister—already nineteen, beautiful as an angel (in the eyes at least of fraternal affection), and undoubtedly as headstrong as any devil at present stoking the eternal fires below. You can conceive that the disposal of such a person is a delicate matter. In Poictesme there is no suitable match, and upon the other hand I grievously apprehend her presentation at our court, where, as Arouet de Voltaire once observed to me, the men are lured into matrimony by the memories of their past sins, and the women by the immunity it promises for future ones. In England, where custom will permit a woman to be both handsome and respectable, I estimate she would be admirably placed. Accordingly, my dear Jean, behold a fact accomplished. And now let us embrace, my brother."

This was done. The next day they settled the matter of dowry, jointure, the widow's portion, and so on, and de Puy-sange returned to render his report at Marly. The wedding had been fixed by the Frenchman for St. Anne's day, and by Ormskirk, as an uncompromising churchman, for the 26th of the following July.

That evening the Duke of Ormskirk sat alone in his lodgings. His Grace was very splendid in black and gold, wearing his two stars of the Garter and the Thistle, for there was a ball that night at Lady Sandwich's, and royalty was to embellish it. In consequence, he meant to show his plump face there for a quarter of an hour; and the rooms would be too hot (he peevishly reflected), and the light would tire his eyes, and Lavenstrophe would buttonhole him again about that appointment for Lavenstrophe's son, and the King would give vent to some especially fat-witted jest, and he would apishly grin and applaud. And afterward he would come home with a headache, and all night long ghostly fiddles would vex him with their thin incessancy.

"Accordingly," the Duke decided, "I shall not stir a step until eleven o'clock. The King, in the ultimate, is only a tipsy, ignorant old Dutchman, and I have half a mind to tell him so. Meantime, he can wait."

He sat down to consider this curious lassitude, this indefinite vexation, which had possessed him.

"For I appear to have taken a sudden dislike to the universe. It is probably my liver.

"In any event I have come now to the end of my resources. For some twenty-five years it has amused me to make a great man of John Bulmer. That's done now, and, like the Moorish fellow in the play, 'my occupation's gone.' I am at the very top of the ladder, and I find it the dreariest place in the world. There is nothing left to scheme for, and besides, I am tired.

"The tiniest nerve in my body, the innermost cell of my brain, is tired to-night.

"I wonder if getting married will divert me? I doubt it. Of course I ought to marry, but then it must be rather terrible to have a woman loitering around you for the rest of your life.

She will probably expect me to talk to her; she will probably come into my rooms and sit there whenever the inclination prompts her,—in a sentence, she will probably worry me to death. Eh well!—that die is cast.

"'Beautiful as an angel, and headstrong as a devil.' And what's her name? Oh yes, Claire. That is a very silly name, and I suppose she is a vixenish little idiot. However, the alliance is a sensible one. De Puy-sange has had it in mind for some six months, I think. Yesterday he knew from the start that I was leading up to a proposal for his sister,—and yet there we sat, two solemn fools, and played our tedious comedy to a finish. *Eh bien!* as he says, it is necessary to keep one's hand in.

"'Beautiful as an angel, and headstrong as a devil'—Alison was not headstrong."

He rose suddenly and approached an open window. It was a starless night, temperately cool, with no air stirring. Below was a garden of some sort, and a flat roof which would be that of the stables, and beyond, abrupt as a painted scene, a black wall of houses stood against a steel-colored vacant sky, reaching precisely to the middle of the vista. Only a solitary poplar, to the rear of the garden, qualified this sombre monotony of right angles. Ormskirk saw the world as an ugly mechanical drawing, fashioned for utility, meticulously outlined with a ruler. Yet there was a scent of growing things to stir the senses.

"No, Alison was different. And Alison has been dead these twenty years. And God help me! I no longer regret even Alison.

"The real tragedy of life is to learn that it is not really tragic. To learn that the world is gross, that it lacks nobility, that to considerate persons it must be in effect quite unimportant—here are commonplaces, sweepings from the tub of the immaturest cynic. But to learn that you yourself were thoughtfully constructed in harmony with the world you were to live in, that you yourself are incapable of any great passion,—eh, this is an athletic blow to human vanity. Well! I acknowledge it. My love for Alison Pleydell was the one sincere thing in my life. And it is dead. I don't think of

her once a month. I don't regret her except when I am tipsy or bored or listening to music and wish to fancy myself a picturesque sufferer in an unfeeling world. Which is a romantic lie; I am only a man of cardboard in a cardboard world. If I have any personality at all, I am not aware of it; I am a mechanism that eats and sleeps and clumsily perambulates a ball that spins around a larger ball that revolves about another, and so on *ad infinitum*. Some day the mechanism will be broken. Or it will slowly wear out, perhaps. And then it will go to the dust-heap. And that will be the absolute end of the great Duke of Ormskirk.

"John Bulmer did not think so. It is true that John Bulmer was a magnanimous fool,— Upon the other hand, John Bulmer would never have stared out of an ugly window at an uglier landscape and have talked yet uglier nonsense to it. He would have been off post-haste after the young person who is 'beautiful as an angel and headstrong as a devil.' And afterward he would have been very happy or else very miserable. I begin to think that John Bulmer was more sensible than the great Duke of Ormskirk. I would—I would that he were still alive."

His Grace slapped one palm against his thigh with unwonted vigor. "Behold, what I am longing for! I am longing for John Bulmer."

Presently he sounded the gong upon his desk. And presently he said: "My adorable Pawsey, the great Duke of Ormskirk is now going to pay his respects to George Guelph, King of Britain, France, and Ireland, defender of the faith, Duke of Brunswick and Lunenburg, and supreme head of the Anglican and Hibernian Church. And to-morrow Mr. John Bulmer will set forth upon a little journey into Poictesme. You will obligingly pack a valise. No, I shall not require you,—for John Bulmer was entirely capable of dressing and shaving himself. So kindly go to the devil, Pawsey, and stop staring at me."

Thus it came about that five days later there arrived at Bellegarde Mr. John Bulmer, poor kinsman and accredited emissary of the great Duke of Ormskirk.

He brought with him and in due course delivered a casket of jewels and a letter from the Duke to his betrothed. The diamonds were magnificent and the letter polite.

He found the château in charge of the Marquis de Soyecourt, distant cousin to de Puyssange; with him were the Duchess, a gentle and beautiful lady, her two children, and the Demoiselle Claire. The Duke himself was still at Marly, with most of his people, but at Bellegarde momentarily they looked for his return. Meanwhile de Soyecourt, an exquisite and sociable and immoral young gentleman of forty-one, was lonely and would not hear of Mr. Bulmer's leaving them; and after a little protestation the latter proved persuadable.

"Mr. Bulmer," the Duke's letter of introduction informed the Marquis, "is my kinsman and may be regarded as discreet. The evanishment of his tiny patrimony, spirited away some years ago by divers overfriendly ladies, hath taught the man humility and procured for me the privilege of supporting him ever since; but I find him more valuable than his cost. He is tolerably honest, not too often tipsy, makes an excellent salad, and will transmit a letter or a necklace with fidelity and despatch. Employ his services, monsieur, if you have need of them; I place him at your command."

In fine, they at Bellegarde judged Mr. Bulmer to rank somewhere between lackeyship and gentility, and treated him in accordance. It was an age of parasitism, and John Bulmer, if a parasite, was the Phormio of a very great man; when his patron expressed a desire he fulfilled it without boggling over inconvenient scruples, perhaps; and there was the worst that could with equity be said of him. An impoverished gentleman must live somehow, and, deuce take it! there must be rather pretty pickings among the broken meats of an Ormskirk. To this effect de Soyecourt moralized one evening as the two sat over their wine.

John Bulmer candidly assented. "I live as best I may," he said. "In a word, 'I am his Highness' dog at Kew—' But mark you, I do not complete the quotation, monsieur."

"You need not," said the Marquis; "for each of us wards his own kennel

somewhere, whether it be in a king's court or in a woman's heart, and it is necessary that he pay the rent of it in such coin as the owner may demand. Beggars cannot be choosers, Mr. Bulmer." He went away moodily, and John Bulmer poured out another glass.

"Were I Gaston, you would not kennel here, my friend. The Duchess is a beautiful woman—for undoubtedly people do go about unchained who can admire a blonde," he meditated, in scornful tolerance of such depravity of taste—"and always your eyes follow her. I noticed it a week ago."

And during this week he had seen a deal of Claire de Puyange, with results that you will presently ascertain. It was natural she should desire to learn something of the man she was so soon to marry and of whose personality she was so ignorant; she had not even seen a picture of him, by example. Was he handsome?

John Bulmer considered him to be quite otherwise. He may have had his occult purposes, this poor cousin, but of Ormskirk he undoubtedly spoke with an engaging candor. Here was no parasite cringingly praising his patron to the skies. The Duke's career was touched on, and its grimy passages no whit extenuated: before Dettingen he had, it must be confessed, taken a bribe from de Noailles, and in return had seen to it that the English did not follow up that empty victory; and 'twas well known he got his dukedom through the Countess of Yarmouth, to whom the King could deny nothing. His relations with this liberal lady?—a shrug rendered the ensuing avowal of ignorance tolerably explicit. Then, too, Mr. Bulmer readily conceded, the Duke's atrocities after Culloden were somewhat too notorious for denial: all the prisoners were shot out-of-hand; seventy-two of them were driven into an inn-yard and massacred *en masse*. Yes, there were women among them, but not over a half-dozen children at most. She was not to class his noble patron with Herod, understand,—only a few brats of no particular importance.

In fine, he told her every highly colored tale that envy and malice and ignorance had been able to concoct concerning the great Duke. Many of them he knew to

be false; nevertheless, he had a large mythology to choose from, he picked his instances with care, he narrated them with gusto and discretion; and in the end he got his reward.

For the girl rose, flame-faced, and burlesqued a curtsy in his direction. "Monsieur Bulmer, I make you my compliments. You have very fully explained what manner of man is this to whom my brother has sold me."

"And wherefore this sudden adulation?" said John Bulmer.

"Because in France we have learned that lackeys are always powerful. Le Bel is here omnipotent, Monsieur Bulmer; but he is lackey to a satyr only: and therefore I felicitate you, monsieur, who are lackey to a fiend."

John Bulmer sat down composedly.

"Lackey!" she flung over her shoulder.

John Bulmer began to whistle an air then popular across the Channel. But anon his melody was stilled.

"Beautiful as an angel, and headstrong as a devil!" said John Bulmer. "You have an eye, Gaston!"

That evening came a letter from Gaston to de Soyecourt, which the latter read aloud at supper. Gossip of the court it was mostly, garrulous, and peppered with deductions of a caustic and diverting sort, but containing no word of a return to Bellegarde, as this vocal rendering delivered it. For in the reading one paragraph was elided.

"I arrive," the Duke had written, "within three or at most four days after this will be received. You are to breathe not a syllable of my coming, dear Louis, for I do not come alone. Achille Cazaio has intimidated Poictesme long enough; I consider it is not desirable that a peer of France should be at the mercy of a chicken-thief, particularly when Fortune whispers, as the lady now does:

Viens punir le coupable;
Les oracles, les dieux, tout nous est
favorable.

"Understand, in fine, that Madame de Pompadour has graciously obtained for me the loan of the dragoons of Entréchat for an entire fortnight, so that I return not in submission, but like Cæsar and Coriolanus and other exiled captains

of antiquity, at the head of a glorious army. We will harry the Taunenfels, we will hang the vile bandit more high than Haman of old, we will, in a word, enjoy the supreme pleasure of the chase, but enhanced by the knowledge that we pursue a quarry far more splendid. For homicide is, after all, the most delightful recreation life affords us, since man alone knows how thoroughly man deserves to be slaughtered. A tiger, now, has his deficiencies, perhaps, viewed as a roommate; yet a tiger is at the very least acceptable to the eye, pleasantly suggestive, say, of buttered toast: whereas our fellow creatures, my dear Louis—" and in this strain de Puyssange continued, with intolerably scandalous examples as parapets for his argument.

That night de Soyecourt reread this paragraph. "So the Pompadour has kindly tendered him the loan of certain dragoons? She is very fond of Gaston, is la petite Etoiles, beyond doubt. And accordingly her dragoons are to garrison Bellegarde for a whole fortnight. Good, good!" said the Marquis; "I think that all goes well."

He sat for a long while, smiling, preoccupied with his imaginings, and far adrift in the future.

Next day John Bulmer rode through the Forest of Acaire, and sang as he went. Yet he disapproved of the country.

"For I am of the opinion," John Bulmer meditated, "that France just now is too much like a flower-garden situate upon the slope of a volcano. The eye is pleasantly titillated, but the ear catches eloquent rumblings."

However, it was no affair of his, so he put the matter out of mind, and as he rode through the forest, carolled blithely. The diminishing trees were marshalled on each side with an effect of colonnades; everywhere there was a sniff of the cathedral, of a cheery cathedral all green and gold and full-bodied browns, where the industrious motes swam, like the fishes fairies angle for, in every long and rigid shaft of sunlight,—or as though Time had just been by with a broom, intent to garnish the least nook of Acaire against Spring's occupancy of it. Then there were tiny white butterflies, frail as dream-stuff.

There were anemones; and John Bulmer sighed at their insolent perfection. Theirs was a frank allure; in the solemn forest they alone of growing things were wanton, for they coquetted with the wind, and their pink was the pink of flesh.

He recollected that he was corpulent—and forty-five. "And yet, praise Heaven," said John Bulmer, "something stirs in this sleepy skull of mine."

Sang John Bulmer:

"April wakes, and her gifts are good,
For April ruleth the stately wood
And the wistful sounds of its solitude,
Whose immemorial murmuring
Is the voice of Spring
And murmurs the burden of burgeoning.

"April wakes, and her heart is high,
For the Bassarids and the Fauns are nigh,
And comforting leaves make melody
O'er woodland brakes, whence the breezes
bring
Vext twittering
To swell the burden of burgeoning.

"April wakes, and afield, astray,
She calls to whom at the end I say,
Heart o' my heart, I am thine alway,—
And I follow, follow her carolling,
For I hear her sing
Above the burden of burgeoning.

"April wakes;—it were good to live,
(Yet April dieth), though April give
No other gift for our pleasuring
Than the old, old burden of burgeoning."

He paused here. Not far ahead a woman's voice had given a sudden scream, followed by continuous and redoubling calls for aid.

"Now, if I choose, will probably begin the first fytte of John Bulmer's adventures," he meditated, leisurely. "The woman is in trouble. If I go to her assistance, I shall undoubtedly involve myself in a most unattractive mess, and eventually be arrested by the constable—if they have any constables in this operatic domain, the which I doubt. I shall accordingly emulate the example of the long-headed Levite, and sensibly pass by on the other side. Halt! I there recognize the voice of the Duke of Ormskirk. I came into this country to find John Bulmer, and John Bulmer would most certainly have spurred his gallant charger upon the craven who is just now

molesting yonder female. In consequence, my gallant charger, we will at once proceed to confound the dastardly villain, as per romance and John Bulmer."

He came presently into an open glade, which the keen sunlight lit without obstruction. Obviously arranged, was his first appraisal of the tableau there presented. A woman in blue half knelt, half lay, upon the young grass, while a man bending over fettered her hands behind her back. A swarthy and exuberantly bearded fellow, attired in green and russet, stood beside them, showing magnificent teeth as he grinned. Yet farther off a Dominican Friar sat upon a stone and displayed his more unctuous amusement. Three horses and a mule diversified the background. All in all, a thought larger than life, a shade too obviously posed, a sign-painter's notion of a heroic picture, was John Bulmer's verdict. From his holster he drew a pistol.

The lesser rascal rose from the prostrate woman. "Finished, my captain—" he began. Against the forest verdure he made an excellent mark. John Bulmer shot him neatly through the head.

Startled by the detonation, the Friar and the man in green and russet wheeled about, to find him with his most excellent bearing negligently replacing the discharged pistol. The woman lay absolutely still, face downward in a clump of fern.

"Gentlemen," said John Bulmer, "I lament that your sylvan diversions should be thus interrupted by the fact that an elderly person like myself, quite old enough to know better, has seen fit to adopt the pursuit of knight-errantry. You need not trouble yourselves about your companion, for I have blown out most of the substance nature intended him to think with. One of you, I regret to observe, is rendered immune by the garb of an order which I consider misguided, indeed, but with which I have no quarrel. With the other I beg leave to request the honor of exchanging a few passes."

"Sacred blue!" remarked the bearded man; "you intend, then, to oppose *me!* Fool, I am Achille Cazaio!"

"I deplore the circumstance that I am not quite overwhelmed by the revelation," John Bulmer said, as he dismounted, "and entreat you to bear in mind, friend Achille, that in Poictesme I am a

stranger. And, unhappily, the names of many estimable persons have not an international celebrity." Thus speaking, he drew and placed himself on guard.

With a shrug the Friar turned and re-seated himself upon the stone. He appeared a sensible man. But Cazaio flashed out a long sword and hurled himself upon John Bulmer.

He got in consequence a butcherly thrust through the shoulder. "Friend Achille," said John Bulmer, "that was tolerably severe for a first hit. Does it content you?"

The hairy man raged. "Eh, my God!" Cazaio shrieked, "do you mock me, you misbegotten one! Before you can give me such another I shall have settled you outright. Already hell gapes for you. Fool, I am Achille Cazaio!"

"Yes, you had mentioned that, I think," said his opponent. "And in return allow me to present Mr. John Bulmer, thoroughly enjoying himself for the first time in a quarter of a century. Angelo taught me this thrust. Can you parry it, friend Achille?" He cut open the other's forehead.

"Well done!" Cazaio grunted. He attacked with renewed fury, but now the blood was streaming down his face and into his eyes, in such a manner that he was momentarily compelled to carry his hand toward his countenance in order to wipe away the heavy trickle. Presently John Bulmer lowered his point.

"Friend Achille, it is not reasonable that I should continue our engagement to its dénouement, since by that boastful parade of skill I have inadvertently turned you into a blind man. Can you not stanch your wound sufficiently to make possible a renewal of our exercise on somewhat more equal terms?"

"Not now," the other sobbed,— "not now, Monsieur Bulmaire. You have conquered, and the woman is yours. Yet lend me my life for a little till I may meet you more equitably. I will not fail you—I swear it—I, Achille Cazaio."

"Why, God bless my soul!" said John Bulmer, "do you imagine that I am forming a collection of vagrant females? Permit me, pray, to assist you to your horse. And if you would so far honor me as to accept the temporary loan of my handkerchief—"

Solicitously he bound up his opponent's head and more lately aided him to mount one of the grazing horses. Cazaio was pleased to say:

"You are a gallant enemy, Monsieur Bulmaire. I shall have the pleasure of cutting your throat on Thursday next, if it be convenient to you."

"Believe me," said John Bulmer, "I am always at your disposal. Let this spot, then, be our rendezvous, since I am wofully ignorant concerning your local geography. And meantime, my friend, if I may be so bold, I would suggest a little practice in parrying. You are of Boisrobert's school, I note, and in attack undeniably brilliant, whereas your defence—unvarying defect of Boisrobert's followers!—is lamentably weak."

"I perceive that monsieur is a connoisseur in these matters," said Cazaio; "I am the more highly honored. Till Thursday, then." And with an inclination of his bandaged head—and a furtive glance toward the insensate woman—he rode away singing.

Sang Achille Cazaio:

"For, O, the world is wide, dear lass,
That I must wander through!
And many a wind and tide, dear lass,
Must flow 'twixt me and you,
Ere love that may not be denied
Shall bring me back to you,
Dear lass!—
Shall bring me back to you!"

Thus singing, he disappeared; meantime John Bulmer had turned toward the woman. The Dominican sat upon the stone, placidly grinning.

"And now," said John Bulmer, "we revert to the origin of all this tomfoolery,—who, true to every instinct of her sex, has caused as much trouble as lay within her power and then composedly fainted. A little water from the brook, if you will be so good, Master Friar. Hey!—why, you damned rascal!"

As he bent over the woman, the Friar had viciously stabbed him between the shoulders. The dagger broke like glass.

"Oh, the devil!" said the churchman, "what sort of duelist is this who fights in a shirt of Milanese armor!" He stood for a moment, silent, in sincere horror. "I lack words," he said; "oh, vile coward, I lack words to arraign this hideous reve-

lation! There is a code of honor that obtains all over the world, and any duelist who descends to secret armor is, as you are perfectly aware, guilty of supersticery. He is no fit associate for gentlemen, he is rather the appropriate companion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram in their fiery pit. Faugh, you sneak-thief!"

John Bulmer was a thought abashed, and showed it; but anon: "Permit me," he equably replied, "to point out that I did not come hither with any belligerent intent. My undershirt, therefore, I was entitled to regard as a purely natural advantage,—as much so as a greater length of arm would have been, which, you conceive, does not obligate a gentleman to cut off his fingers before he fights."

"I scent the casuist," said the Friar, shaking his head. "Frankly, you had hoodwinked me: I was admiring you as a second Palmerin; and all the while you were letting off those gasconades, adopting those heroic postures, and exhibiting such romantic magnanimity, you were actually as safe from poor Cazaio as though you had been in Crim Tartary rather than Acaire!"

"But the pose was magnificent," John Bulmer pleaded, "and I have a leaning that way when one loses nothing by it. And besides, I consider secret armor permissible in a country where even the clergy are notoriously addicted to casual assassination."

"It is human to err," the Friar retorted, "and Cazaio would have given me a thousand crowns for your head. Believe me, the man is meditating some horrible mischief against you, for otherwise he would not have been so damnably polite."

"The information is distressing," said John Bulmer; and added, "This Cazaio appears to be a personage?"

"I retort," said the Friar, "that your ignorance is even more remarkable than my news. Achille Cazaio is the bugbear of all Poictesme. He roosts in the Taunenfels yonder, with some hundreds of brigands at his beck. Poictesme is, in effect, his pocketbook, from which he takes whatever he has need of, and the Duc de Puyssange, our nominal lord, pays him an annual tribute to respect Bellegarde."

"This appears to be an interesting country," quoth John Bulmer; "where

a brigand rules, and the forests are infested by homicidal clergymen and harassed females. Which reminds me that I have been guilty of an act of ungallantry,—and faith! while you and I have been chatting, the lady, with a rare discretion, has peacefully come back to her senses.”

“She has regained nothing very valuable,” said the Friar, with a shrug. “Alone in Acaire!”

But John Bulmer had assisted the woman to her feet, and had given a little cry at sight of her face, and presently stood quite motionless, holding both her unfettered hands.

“You!” he said. And when speech returned to him, after a lengthy interval, he spoke with an odd irrelevance. “Now I understand,” he said,—“now I understand why God created me.”

And yet, though vaguely, he was puzzled. For there had come to him unheralded and quite simply a sense of something infinitely greater than his mind could conceive: analysis might only pluck at it, impotently, as a wearied swimmer might pluck at the sides of a well. Ormskirk and Ormskirk’s powers dwindled from the zone of serious consideration, as did the radiant world, and even the woman who stood before him; trifles, these: and his contentment spurned the stars to know, though cloudily, that somehow this woman and he were but a part, an infinitesimal part, of a scheme that was ineffably vast and perfect.

She was tall, just as tall as he; it was a blunt-witted devil who whispered John Bulmer in the high-tide of rapture that, inch paralleling inch, the woman is taller than the man and subtly renders him absurd; and that in a decade this woman would be stout. There was no meaning now in any whispering save hers. John Bulmer perceived, with a blurred thrill, as of memory, that the girl was tall and deep-bosomed and that her hair was dark, all crinkles but (he somehow knew) very soft to the touch. The full oval of her face had throughout the rich tint of cream, so that he now understood the blowsiness of pink cheeks; but her mouth was vivid. It was not repulsive, he estimated. And her eyes, candid and appraising, he found to be the color that blue is in Paradise; it was odd their

lower lids should be straight lines so that when she laughed they turned to right-angled triangles; and it was odder still that when you gazed into them your reach of vision should be extended so that you saw without effort for miles and miles.

As for her nose, it managed to be reasonably Roman without overdoing it. All in all, decision was here, and a certain indolence, and an instinct for companionship that would have mollified an ogre, and a stately moving mind that to the very obtuse might appear dull. This much John Bulmer perceived, and knew that his perceptions were correct, for the reason that at a remote period, before the world was thought of probably, he remembered her to have been precisely such a woman.

She returned his scrutiny without any trace of embarrassment, and whatever her thoughts may have been, she gave them no expression. But presently the girl glanced down toward the dead man.

“It was you who killed him?” she said. “You!”

“I had that privilege,” John Bulmer admitted. “And on Thursday afternoon, God willing, I shall kill the other.”

“You are kind, Monsieur Bulmer. And I am not ungrateful. And for that which happened yesterday I entreat your pardon.”

“Granted, mademoiselle, on condition that you permit me to be your escort for the remainder of your jaunt. Poictesme appears a somewhat too romantic country for unaccompanied women to traverse in any comfort.”

“My thought to a comma,” the Dominican put in—“unaccompanied ladies do not ordinarily drop from the forest oaks like acorns. I said as much to Cazaio a half-hour ago. Look you, we two and Michault—who formerly incited this carcass and, from what I know of him, is by this occupying hell’s hottest gridiron—were riding peacefully toward Beauséant. Then this lady pops out of nowhere, and Cazaio promptly expresses an extreme admiration for her person.”

“The rest,” John Bulmer said, “I can imagine. Oh, believe me, I look forward to next Thursday!”

“But for you,” the girl said, “I would now be the prisoner of that devil upon the

Taunenfels! Three to one you fought—and you conquered! I have misjudged you, Monsieur Bulmer. I had thought you only an indolent old gentleman, not very brave,—because—”

“Because otherwise I would not have been the devil’s lackey?” said John Bulmer. “Eh, mademoiselle, I have been inspecting the world for more years than I care to confess, and you may take it from me that even those of us who are in honor wholly shipwrecked will yet cling desperately to some stray spar of virtue. Meanwhile, we waste daylight. You were journeying—?”

“To Manneville,” Claire answered. Suddenly she drew nearer to him and laid one hand upon his arm. “You are a gallant man, Monsieur Bulmer. Surely you understand. A week ago my brother affianced me to the Duke of Ormskirk. Ormskirk!—ah, I know that he is your kinsman,—your patron,—but you yourself could not deny to me that the world reeks with his infamy.”

“Good, good!” he cried, in his soul. “For, it appears my eloquence of yesterday was greater than I knew of!”

Claire resumed with a lapse, quite characteristic, into the matter of course: “But you cannot argue with Gaston—he merely shrugs. So I decided to go over to Manneville and marry Gérard des Roches. He has wanted to marry me for a long while, but Gaston said he was too poor. And, oh, Monsieur Bulmer, Gérard is so very, very stupid!—but he was the only person available, and in any event,” she concluded, with a sigh of resignation, “he is better than that terrible Ormskirk.”

John Bulmer gazed on her considerately. “‘Beautiful as an angel, and headstrong as a devil,’” was his thought. “You have an eye, Gaston!” Aloud he said: “Your remedy against your brother’s tyranny, mademoiselle, is quite masterly, though perhaps a trifle Draconic. Yet if on his return he find you already married, he undoubtedly cannot hand you over to this wicked Ormskirk. Marry, therefore, by all means,—but not with this stupid Gérard.”

“Whom, then?” she wondered. But she knew.

“Fate has planned it,” he laughed; “here are you and I, and yonder is the

clergyman whom Madam Destiny has thoughtfully thrown in our way.”

“Not you,” she answered, gravely. “I am too deeply in your debt, Monsieur Bulmer, to think of marrying you.”

“You refuse,” he said, in a queer voice, “because you have known for some days past that I loved you. Yet it is precisely this fact that constitutes my claim to become your husband. You have need of a man to do you this trivial service. I know of at least one person whose happiness it would be to die if thereby he might save you a toothache. This man you cannot deny,—you have not the right to deny this man his single opportunity of serving you.”

“I like you very much,” she faltered; and then with disheartening hastiness, “Of course I like you very much; but I am not in love with you.”

He shook his head at her. “I would think the worse of your intellect if you were. I adore you. Granted: but that constitutes no cutthroat mortgage. It is merely a state of mind I have somehow blundered into, and with my allegedly mental processes you have absolutely no concern. I ask nothing of you save to marry me. You may if you like look upon me as insane; personally, that is the view toward which I myself incline. However, mine is a domesticated mania and vexes no one save myself; and even I can at times derive no little amusement from its manifestations. Eh, Monsieur Jourdain may laugh at me for a puling lover!” cried John Bulmer; “but, heavens! if only he could see the unplumbed depths of ludicrousness I discover in my own soul! The mirth of Atlas could not do it justice.”

Claire meditated for a while, her deep eyes inscrutable and yet not unkindly. “It shall be as you will,” she said at last.

“O Mother of God!” said the Dominican, in profound disgust; “I cannot marry two maniacs.” But in view of John Bulmer’s sword and pistol he subsequently did.

And something embryonic in John Bulmer came, with the knave’s benediction, into flowerage. He saw, as upon a sudden, how fine she was; all the gracious and friendly youth of her: and he deliberated, dizzily, the awe of her spirited and alert eyes; why, the woman was

afraid! He understood that life is, by right, an anthem. Unutterably he understood the meaning of this woman, so grave and so upright and so young, and of her nearness, more than bodily, and of their isolation in that sunny and vivid circle; and the glade was, to him, an island about which past happenings lapped like a fretted sea.

She gazed shyly at her husband. "We will go back to Bellegarde," Claire began, "and inform Louis de Soyecourt that I cannot marry the Duke of Ormskirk, because I have married you, Jean Bulmer—"

"I would follow you," said John Bulmer, "though hell yawned between us. I employ the particular expression as customary in all these cases of romantic infatuation."

"Yet I," the Friar observed, "would, to the contrary, advise removal from Poictesme as soon as may be possible. For I warn you that if you return to Bellegarde, Monsieur de Soyecourt will have you hanged."

"Reverend sir," John Bulmer replied, "do you actually believe that this consideration would be to me of any moment?"

The Friar inspected his countenance. By and by he said: "I emphatically do not. And to think that at the beginning of our acquaintanceship I took you for a sensible person!" Afterward he mounted his mule and left them.

Then silently John Bulmer assisted her to the back of one of the horses, and silently they turned eastward into the Forest of Acaire. The man's thoughts are not here recorded, since Tom o' Bedlam would have spurned them as insane; yet always his countenance was politely interested, and always he chatted pleasantly till they had ridden to Bellegarde. Then Claire led the way toward the western façade, where her apartments were, and they came to a postern-door, very narrow and with a grating.

"Help me down," the girl said. And immediately this was done. And afterward Claire remained quite still, her cheeks smouldering and her left hand lying inert in John Bulmer's broader palm.

"Wait," she said, hurriedly, "and let me go in first. Some one may be on watch. There is perhaps danger—"

"My dear," said John Bulmer, "I perfectly realize that you are about to

enter that postern, and close it in my face, and afterward hold some trivial discourse with me through that little wicket. I assent, because I love you so much that I am capable not merely of tearing the world asunder like paper at your command, but even of leaving you if you bid me do so."

"Your suspicions," said she, "are positively marital. I am trying to protect you, and you—you!—are the first to accuse me of underhand dealing. I will prove to you how unjust are your notions." She entered the postern, and slammed it behind her, and presently appeared at the wicket.

"The Friar was intelligent," said Claire de Puyange, "and beyond doubt the most sensible thing you can do is to get out of Poictesme as soon as possible. You have been serviceable to me, and for that I thank you; but the master of Bellegarde has the right of the low, the middle, and the high justice, and if my husband show his face at Bellegarde, he will infallibly be hanged; and if you claim me in England, Ormskirk will have you knifed in some dark alleyway, just as he did Traquidir and Captain Dungelt. I am sorry, because I like you, even though you *are fat*."

"You bid me leave you?" said John Bulmer. He was by this comfortably seated upon the turf.

"For your own good," said she, "I advise you to." And she closed the wicket.

"The acceptance of advice," said John Bulmer, "is luckily optional. I shall therefore go down into the village, purchase a lute, have supper, and be here at sunrise to greet you with an *Aubade* according to the ancient custom of Poictesme."

The wicket remained closed.

"I will go to Marly, inform Gaston of the entire matter, and then my wife is mine. I have tricked her neatly.

"I will do nothing of the sort. Gaston can give me the woman's body only. I will accordingly buy me a lute."

Achille Cazaio on the Taunenfels did not sleep that night; desires were astir and consciousness of his own power was tempting him. He had never troubled Poictesme much; the Taunenfels were

accessible on that side, and so long as he confined his depredations to the German frontier, the Duc de Puyssange merely shrugged and cheerfully rendered his annual tribute; it was not a great sum, and the Duke preferred to pay it rather than forsake his international squabbles to quash a purely parochial nuisance like a bandit.

Meanwhile Cazaio had grown stronger than de Puyssange knew. It was a time of disaffection: the people were starving and in consequence growing dissatisfied; already they were posting placards in the Paris boulevards—"Shave the King for a monk, hang the Pompadour, and break Machault on the wheel"—and already a boy of twelve, one Joseph Guillotin, was running about the streets of Saintes yonder. So the commoners flocked to Cazaio in the Taunenfels, until little by little he had gathered an army about him.

And, at Bellegarde, de Soyecourt had only a handful of men, Cazaio meditated to-night. And the woman was there—the woman whose eyes were blue and incurious, whose face was always scornful.

In history they liken Achille Cazaio to Simon de Montfort and the Gracchi, and other graspers at fruit as yet unripe; or if the perfervid word of d'Avranches be accepted, you may regard him as "*le Saint-Jean de la Révolution glorieuse*"; but you may with greater safety regard

him as a man of strong passions, any one of which for the time being possessed him utterly.

Now he struck his palm upon the table.

"I have never seen a woman one-half so beautiful, Dom Michel. I am in love with her."

"In that event," the Friar considered, "it is, of course, unfortunate that she should have a husband. Husbands are always thought much of when they are a novelty."

"You bungled matters, you fat, mouse-hearted rascal. You could quite easily have killed him."

The Dominican spread out his hands, and afterward reached for the bottle. "Milanese armor!" said Dom Michel Frégose.

"Yet I am master of Poictesme," Cazaio thundered. "I have ten men to de Soyecourt's one. Am I, then, lightly to be thwarted?"

"Undoubtedly you could take Bellegarde—and the woman with it—if you decided so to do," the Friar assented. "Yet there is that trifling matter of your understanding with de Puyssange,—and besides, de Puyssange will be here in two days."

Cazaio snapped his fingers. "He will arrive after the fair." He uncorked the ink-bottle with an august gesture.

"Write!" said Achille Cazaio.

[TO BE CONCLUDED.]

Deprecation

BY JOHN B. TABB

LOW I listen in my grave
For the silence soon to be
When—a slow-receding wave—
Hushed is Memory.

Now the falling of a tear,
Or the breathing, half-suppressed,
Of a sigh, reechoed here,
Holds me from my rest.

O ye breakers of the past
From the never-resting deep
On the coast of Slumber cast,
Cease, and let me sleep!



Painting by Howard Pyle

THE DU'EL BETWEEN JOHN BULMER AND CAZAI0