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HAD Miss Bugbird's novel been published, the reader, supposing him to be abreast of the tide of contemporary and through the currents of less recent fiction, might have traced, in the fashion of a geologist, the sequences of her private reading. He would have met, layer by layer, with the brisk acidity of Miss Macaulay, the generous but rather woolly and suburban flavours of Mr. Hugh Walpole, a bizarre flourish in homage to the late Mr. Firbank would tread on the heels of a scathing, atrabilious comment in Aldous Huxley's earlier manner; while a tract of limpidly gracious narrative would scarcely have recalled *Go She Must* before the style would harden into the severer Gibbonisms of *Eminent Victorians*. Over all brooded intermittently the sexual hebetude of books like *Women in Love*. Such was the mosaic that, tinged more faintly than the originals from which its tessellae were chipped, the fluffy little beauty was laying, quite unconsciously, in the most remarkable patterns. She found it impossible to extract, despite her conscientious pursuit of experience, anything from life at first hand that looked satisfactory on paper. Inspiration only deigned to visit her during the first hour after which she had put down one of the novels which, after a careful perusal of the *Calendar*, *The Times Literary Supplement* and the *Nation & Athenaeum*, she decided were the products of genuine intellectuals. Mr. McGonigle's library proved invaluable to her, especially since it needed the stimulus of at least two novels to complete a

chapter ; besides, there was satisfaction in the idea of paying visits to and sitting *tête-à-tête* with a single man.

McGonigle had just moved into a house at the neighbouring sea village of Tomioka, near enough to Totsuka for daily attendance, but well out of its harsh and dusty air. Malvina liked the place and would often flop herself down on his bamboo settee and inhale book-mould and pipe-smoke in the philistine surroundings of a room that smelt of and suggested man, with its typewriter, roll-top desk and untidy litter of papers and pipe-cleaners.

Then there was the pleasure of bringing him gradually round to the subject of style in modern fiction, whence it was easy to lead on to her own creations. McGonigle would pronounce some piece of obviousness with northern solemnity : ' These people are trying to be too chaste and austere ; we want a touch of Dizzy and Wilde to save literature from starvation—something a bit florid '.

She would jump to it. ' Ah, that's the very thing I'm aiming at in my novel. One oughtn't to be afraid of a little opulence, a little rococo unchastity '. A bold phrase, that last.

' Aye, Miss Bugbird, and don't be afraid of sentimentality. This merciless stunt's being played out : brimstone's all the better for a spoonful of treacle. But they're all so desperately afraid of it in these days. Anyway, th'eighteenth century boom's giving way ; there's a feeling in th'airr of a new romanticism. So there's a chance for you, Miss Bugbird, as you're a romantic in spite of yourself '.

Malvina was terribly shocked at this aspersion ; it was quite insulting to be called romantic—almost worse than being called ' a really nice girl '.

‘ Oh, bunkum, McGonigle ! You defend sentimentality because, like all Scotsmen, you’re sentimental yourself. You don’t really think literature that counts is going to cheapen itself with Dickensian sob-stuff, do you ? ’

‘ I should think it’s highly probable, my little lassie. And don’t be rude about Scotchmen, or I might kiss you ’.

Now was the time to pulverise him. She had always wanted to score off him because she believed that he was smitten by her, but had refused to ‘ come on ’ as he despised her intellect, at which he was always poking fun.

‘ I wouldn’t do that if I were you ; you might get into trouble with Pullborough ’. Now it was coming : ‘ We’re engaged, you know ’.

Try as she might, she could not quite achieve the offhand tone she needed, nor exclude a little crow of triumph ; McGonigle’s laughter made that very clear.

‘ Oh ? Well, I’m not surprised. You were angling for him hard enough at Undine’s ‘ drunk ’. But that wouldn’t stop me, dear young thing ; I’ve kissed engaged girls before now. No, there’s something else. I’m engaged myself ; have been for a year. Going home to get married in March.

‘ Oh, really ? ’

‘ Yes ; and that’s the reason why I wouldn’t flirt with you when you wanted me to. Little Willie’s a faithful little Willie ; not to be seduced by beautiful maidens ’.

‘ Flirt with *you* ? I like your cheek ! I don’t think you’re very nice, McGonigle, talking about seducing people in the way you do. You’re much too bourgeois and respectable for *me* to flirt with—you’re hopelessly bourgeois, poor man. I like dangerous people ’.

‘ Don’t be too sorry for me ; I can bear it if I try hard. Of course I’m bourgeois ; we both are ; can’t help it.

Only you're afraid of it and I'm not. Bourgeoisie isn't a class, it's a phase of civilisation; the whole world's got to pass through it. Aristocracy's dying out, and the red revolutions settle down once more into capitalist bourgeoisie. Marxianism hasn't a chance for five hundred years at least'.

It was impossible to be annoyed with McGonigle, whose face, like that of a made-up music-hall comedian, was a joke in itself.

'All right then; that's that. Now you can lend me some more books; something not too naturalistic. Normal life and normal psychology have no significant message. I hate the primrose by the river's brink and I hate all your novels about ordinary people, whether they're Bloom or Kipps or Rebecca West's deadly folk in *The Judge*. No one's worth putting on paper who hasn't a strange kink to his character. We can take the normal psychology for granted; the interest begins as soon as the abnormal does'.

'Oh! this quest for strangeness. . . .'

'It's not that, so don't try to nail me down as a romantic. I don't mind telling you I've no use for the nursery weirdness of De la Mare or the Poe element—rightly so-called—in literature. But the whole beauty of the heroic dramas, say, is that they aren't ordinary; they're extraordinary from start to finish; they deal calmly with the Astounding. The romantic deals with strangeness strangely. I'm going to deal with it in a cool, formal sort of way. I'm not going to let myself be carried away with it. Keeping my balance and the detachment of the artist. . . .'

'You'll avoid the exaggerations and weirdnesses of expressionism. I seem to have heard something like that. When did you last talk to Sheepshanks?'

'You're insufferable, McGonigle. No one can have

an original idea but yourself ; of course we all know that. As a matter of fact, I haven't spoken to him for some time. He's not going about these days. I did see him—when was it? Oh, at Undine's show, and he looked as though he was having the hump pretty badly. Alba must be a trial with her boozing ; but I think that's not all the trouble. I think she treats him badly, and if I was him I'd divorce her. They're obviously not suited to each other'.

'Talking about divorce, and you just engaged ! Poor Pullborough ; the marriage bake-meats will coldly furnish forth the plaintiff's counsel. I'm sorry for Alba too, though, because I think she's drinking herself under the daisies, so to speak. Can't last long at this rate, and Japan's bad for women'.

A servant entered with the mail.

'Now he's happy', said Malvina, 'he's got a letter from 'is gurl'.

'No, he hasn't, so be less funny. Hullo ! here's my *Criticaster* come at last. What's delayed it, I wonder? You ought to take it in, teeming with new ideas, essence of super-highbrowism—just the thing for you. Table of contents ; Psychology and Metre, by Egbert Grass ; The Deserted Wyvern, a poem by Richard Alderman ; Extracts from Dostoievsky's note-book ; Morand and Dekobra—a study of extroversional tendencies in . . . well, I'm jiggered ! Where have I been hearing about that lately?—Cokkesbody, I have it . . . of course !'

He charged out of the room, soon returning with a crumpled sheet out of a back number of the *Argus*.

'Aha, Ditchling my boyee ! Caught in the act : of thy audacyte

What shall I wryte, or why lewde unkyndness ?

Something hot and strong, what? Come on, Miss

Bugbird ; help me to unravel the mystery and right the wrong '.

Smoothing out the page, he disclosed an article by Miss Walker, including copious quotations from Mr. Ditchling's lecture, the MSS. of which he had confided to her. Allowing for a vast number of misprints, Mr. Ditchling's views were seen to be expressed, word for word, in the *Criticaster's* article.

' Now, I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll send this copy to the silly oaf, with the *Argus* cutting pasted on, and a polite little note which you'll kindly compose. Considering that I've reliable information—that's to say, the words of your pals the Mileses—that he tried to get me fired out of Taisho on a trumped-up charge of carnal backsliding, if you'll forgive the expression, I think I'm letting the rotter down darned lightly '.

' Oh, this is simply splendid ! I always thought those Ditchlings were all window-dressing. What was it they said about you ? '

' You would like to know, ducky, wouldn't you ? But it's not for young ears. Ask Pullborough about it when you've got his head safe in the nuptial bag, if you want to know about my lurid past. Now, what shall we say ? " Dear Ditchling—" go on, think of something '.

Mr. Ditchling, quite unaware of the rod that was preparing for his back, went whole-heartedly to work in the cause of bread-and-butter and the expenses of a lying-in. He called at tactfully-spaced intervals on Mr. Kobayashi, in whose house he met one or two students of the Normal School, ingratiating himself by means of flattery and little flashes of learning, carefully prepared beforehand. He read hastily Mr. Benson's *Life of Pater* and the poems of Arthur Symons, which he found he admired, so ' faisandé ' were they, yet so fragrant, in each a sigh of faintly decomposing lilies. For the average

Japanese student English literature begins with Pater, those who boldly refer the origin to Matthew Arnold being in minority. Ditchling so equipped himself that the few youths of the Normal School who hovered round Mr. Kobayashi came to regard him with that awe which the specious arouses in most persons of their class and age. But none of these little triumphs were of the slightest use in dislodging the Rev. Schieberman, who continued to hold grammar classes in his official and bible classes in his unofficial hours, and would do so, it seemed probable, until America became atheistical and the godly millionaires took to buying by way of transition the works of Renan instead of 'donating' motors and villas at climatic stations to their missionaries abroad.

