

THE SECOND RESURRECTION OF QUIX

I

CAFFYN walked shyly into his club, the Buskin, which, as all the world knows, includes amongst its members men famous in many fields of human endeavour. The somewhat gloomy portals of the club give no indication of the good-fellowship and joy in life that reign gloriously within. Caffyn had not entered the club for five years. He had been living in the country. The hall porter greeted him pleasantly :

“ Glad to see you again, sir. No letters.”

Caffyn ascended the marble steps that lead to the hall. Upon the top step a fellow-member slapped him hard on the back.

“ My dear old Quix, I thought you were dead.”

Caffyn replied in the same hearty voice :

“ What ! For the second time, Jim ? ”

Together they passed from the main hall into the Lounge, profaned by no stranger, however distinguished. A chorus of voices rent the air.

“ Why—it’s Quix—Quix it is, b’ Jove !—The old bird looks joyful—Quix, don’t break our hearts by telling us that you are not lunching here ? ”

Everybody insisted on shaking hands with Caffyn. He eyed his old friends hungrily. He spoke with emotion :

“ You fellows have missed me, eh ? ”

“ Missed you— ? What a modest rabbit it is ! ”

Jim Steele-Murdoch, the K.C., said solemnly :

Dew of the Sea

"This is the second resurrection of Quix. He admits it."

"I do. I say, I want some of you fellows to lunch with me. Is it too hot for Burgundy?"

"Not in this club?"

"Have you drunk up all the '99 Chambertin?"

"If not, we will—at your expense."

There was no mistake about this boisterous welcome. Caffyn blushed with pleasure.

"By the way," he observed genially, "my invitation to luncheon is limited to bachelors."

Steele-Murdoch protested.

"Is a blameless widower barred?"

"No," said Caffyn. "But I'm not asking married men to-day."

A professional humorist, a much married man, said scathingly:

"I understand. You selfish single beasts mean to have an orgy."

"We can get two or three small tables and join them together," said the hospitable Caffyn. "Waiter——!"

Instantly, a well-trained servant appeared. Even upon his impassive countenance lurked a welcoming smile.

"Why, it's George," said Caffyn. "How are you, George?"

"I am very well, sir, thank you."

"Have you married since I last saw you?"

"No, sir."

Caffyn surveyed his guests.

"I won't order cocktails, if we are going to tackle that Chambertin. George, bring a bottle of the oldest dry sherry in the club. One moment. Tell the wine-waiter to come here, and tell the Steward in the dining-room that a dozen members will be lunching with me. Let him serve a luncheon worthy of the best Burgundy. We shall begin with plovers' eggs."

The Second Resurrection of Quix

“Very good, sir.”

George retired, smiling discreetly. An actor-manager, married but divorced (and therefore eligible as a guest), exclaimed dramatically :

“We know now where our Quix has been. During his too long absence from the club, he has inherited wealth beyond the dreams of avarice.”

“No,” said Caffyn, “no. But I have enough to entertain my friends handsomely.”

A second later the Steward appeared. He too greeted the long-lost member graciously.

“Did I understand, sir, that you have invited a dozen guests to luncheon ?”

“I have. I mean I shall. Just a round dozen.”

“Pardon me, sir ; but with you, their host, that makes thirteen.”

“What a head you have for lightning calculation ! Yes ; it makes thirteen ; and this is the thirteenth day of April. Also, it is my birthday. I regard thirteen as my lucky number.” He glanced at the faces about him. “Any objections ?”

Nobody, apparently, objected to sitting down thirteen at table. To allay possible misgivings, Caffyn said lightly :

“If there is anything in that obsolete superstition that one of the thirteen dies within the year, well, I, as your host, shall claim the privilege of preceding you to what is, I hope, a less mad world than this.”

He spoke gravely, but everybody laughed.

Half an hour later, Caffyn and his twelve guests went in to a gala luncheon.

II

It may be recorded here that Caffyn had the great quality which justifies membership in a club reckoned to be the most “pilling” institution in the world. He

Dew of the Sea

was quintessentially clubbable, an excellent *raconteur* (not a purveyor of chestnuts), an alert listener to the talk of others, and a man of many facets. He had a dry but not a bitter wit, and he enjoyed unreservedly the good things of life. In his day, he had been acclaimed as the most popular member of the Buskin. More, he remained as popular after serving faithfully for five years on the Committee—no mean achievement, as Steele-Murdoch remarked at the time.

Whilst Caffyn was colloguing with the Steward, Jim Steele-Murdoch enlightened one of Caffyn's younger guests. Jim wondered why Caffyn had asked a comparatively new member to be his guest. But he happened to be a son of Moberley-Fish, long dead, who had waged an exterminating war against whiskers. M.F. had been a great friend of Caffyn's. Young Fish asked Steele-Murdoch what Caffyn had *done*. The most eloquent advocate in England answered portentously, as if he were delivering a funeral oration :

"Charles Caffyn," he said, "might have done anything. He had the art of doing nothing more gracefully than any man of his generation. He came up from Cambridge with the reputation of writing verses which are still, I believe, quoted."

"Forgive my interrupting you," said Tom Bagster, the editor of the *Daily Banner*, "but Quix did not come up from Cambridge, he was sent down."

"Why do you call him Quix?" asked young Fish.

"Short for Don Quixote. He was called Quix at Harrow. He tilted at windmills as soon as he was breeched. Yes; Quix was sent down from Cambridge. He impersonated the Sultan of Burrahbugpore. Authority kowtowed to Quix. Quix conferred a decoration upon the Head of his college. He played his part so well that Authority might have remained in ignorance of how it had been spoofed. But Quix, in a thoughtless moment,

The Second Resurrection of Quix

hung his robes and sham jewels upon a sacrosanct statue, and crowned it with a turban, So down he went. When I first knew him he was taking life as one vast joke."

"You are right for once. Yes; Quix was sent down—He had no belief in our institutions. I account for that easily—he was the son of a stipendiary magistrate. He drifted into journalism, but he refused, very properly, to affiliate himself to any political party. He came to the conclusion—as we all have—that politicians serve their own interests, not the interests of the public. He never quarrelled with his editors; they quarrelled with him. For a time he was one of the ablest dramatic critics, but in the end the theatre bored him. For many years he lived at this club. He cracked jests and bottles of sound wine."

"Did he crack hearts?" asked young Fish.

"I don't know. You can ask him, when the port comes round. Shush-h-h! Here he is."

Caffyn rushed in.

"The chef can give us Zabaglione."

"Nothing better," observed Tom Bagster.

"What is Zabaglione?" asked young Fish. Caffyn answered him compassionately and enviously:

"My dear boy, what rosy hours lie ahead of you! Zabaglione is a soufflé flavoured with rum. It does not vitiate the palate for port. I can't get snails."

"Snails——!"

"They are the food, *par excellence*, to bring out the subtler essences and ethers of Burgundy. We shall have *foie gras* instead."

"Thank God!" murmured the actor-manager.

Caffyn rushed away. Tom Bagster said a few more words about his host.

"Quix did good work for me; he brightened our literary column; unfortunately delicate irony is wasted upon the public." He turned to young Fish. "You

Dew of the Sea

asked what he had done. From intimate knowledge of the man I can say that he 'did' innumerable kindnesses to many under-dogs. He has come back to us, and what is his first action? He entertains us. *We* ought to be entertaining him."

"We will," said the K.C. emphatically. "We'll give Quix a dinner that will knock spots out of his luncheon."

There was a chorus of "Hear—hear!"

But young Fish, of a too-enquiring turn of mind, was not satisfied.

"From what you tell me, Mr. Caffyn seems to have been nobody's enemy but his own."

Steele-Murdoch rebuked paternally a very young member.

"*Cliché*, Johnnie, is only used in this club by aged jurists, who can't be broken of a lamentable habit. And a *cliché*, I would point out to you, is generally tosh. Caffyn has been his own best friend. He has wallowed in his generous instincts; he has warmed himself at his own fires lit to warm others."

Young Fish justified membership of the Buskin by saying sincerely:

"I am proud to be the guest of such a man."

A distinguished novelist, always seeking "copy," led Steele-Murdoch aside.

"Why," he whispered, "did Caffyn disappear?"

"I cannot explain his disappearance. He dropped out. Somebody said that he was living in the country."

"I smell mystery."

"Perhaps he married against his instincts of self-preservation. Anyway, he has come back much the same as he went away. That is really all that concerns us."

The novelist nodded, not quite satisfied.

"Why did you say this was his second resurrection?"

"Ah! you were in America at the time. Quix, as I need hardly remind you, was an accomplished writer of

The Second Resurrection of Quix

obituary notices. Every editor in Fleet Street knew that Quix could be trusted to do his subject justice without slopping over. One day, in the Lounge here, Quix observed to Tom Bagster and me that it must be great fun reading one's own obituary notices. In an unguarded moment he admitted that he looked forward to reading what some of us would surely write about him. That inspired Tom. Shortly afterwards, Quix went away, to fish in Norway. A "par" appeared—between ourselves old Tom worded it—to the effect that Quix, wading in some rapid river, had lost his footing, and was drowned. I wrote the obituary notice which Tom published in the *Daily Banner*. A dozen papers followed suit. Quix *did* read a lot of stuff that must have brought the blush to his cheeks, because delightful things were told about him. And, finally, he laughed over it as much as we did. Of course, Tom and I had covered our tracks. Quix never found us out. All responsibility rested ultimately upon the jade, Rumour."

The novelist laughed.

"And now we are going to celebrate his second return from the dead."

"We are."

III

They did.

It was agreed afterwards that this was a memorable luncheon given by an incomparable host. Quix beamed upon his guests and led the talk into the right channels. He extracted the best from each. Indeed, from the plovers' eggs to the Zabaglione, the luncheon satisfied in every sense of the word the bodily and mental expectations of twelve good men and true. Not one failed to do his duty, whether as trencherman or talker. Controversial topics, for instance, were avoided. Two of Caffyn's guests—eminent journalists—were not on speaking terms

Dew of the Sea

when they found themselves next to each other at this hospitable board. Before the baby lamb came hissing from the spit, they had become warm friends again. . . .

After the Zabaglione, the port circulated, the noblest wine in the club, a '90, shipped by one of the great benefactors of the human race. All glasses—dock glasses—were filled. By this time, the big dining-room held no members other than Caffyn's guests. Lunch had been served at one-forty-five. It was nearly three when the port circulated.

Caffyn stood up.

"My dear friends, I give you one toast—FREEDOM."

The toast was drunk in silence. But, as Caffyn sat down, Steele-Murdoch challenged it.

"We have drunk your toast, Quix, with all the honours due to you, but personally speaking I am of the opinion that there is no such thing as freedom. None of us is free."

"I am free," said Caffyn.

"My congratulations."

"Yes; I am free," went on Caffyn, in a grave voice. "It has been well said that liberty must be earned to be enjoyed. I have earned my liberty. And I have risen from the dead. That is why I am trying to entertain you to-day."

"You are doing it superbly."

"Thank you. I affirm that one hour of such liberty is worth a century of peace within the tomb."

"Hear, hear!"

The novelist inclined an attentive ear. The editor of the *Daily Banner* nodded with Olympian majesty. The K.C. sipped his port in silence. It was in the ambient air that Caffyn had something to say, something *arresting*. But, as a playwright of promise, who had written a brace of one-act plays, which whetted the public palate for more, he well knew the virtue of suspense.

The Second Resurrection of Quix

"With our coffee and cigars," he said solemnly, "I propose to tell you *why* I am here to-day, and *why* I reckon this past hour to be the happiest of my life."

Then he laughed heartily, but the others did not laugh so heartily. The K.C., comparing notes next day with the novelist, expressed, perhaps, the sense and *non-sense* of the jury. We must admit that no man was more competent to do so.

"I was sensible that Quix was absolutely sincere, and yet I was insensible, or non-sensible, to the issues involved. That laugh of his rang true; my own laugh was forced. I felt that really Caffyn's freedom had been attained, earned, as he told us. We, all of us, even young Fish, were thinking that a price, a heavy price, had been exacted."

"My own impression."

This was said after the event, and K.C.'s have a clever trick of dovetailing cause and effect when these inseparable twins take the high road together.

Coffee was served, old brandy, and the biggest and best cigars. The club servants left the dining-room.

IV

Caffyn waited till the cigars were drawing properly; then he addressed the novelist.

"You're an Old Wykehamist, say grace."

An Old Wykehamist looked astonished.

"Say grace—and don't mumble it."

The Old Wykehamist, greatly to his credit, repeated articulately a Latin benediction.

"Many thanks," said Caffyn. "Grace before meat is a sentimental absurdity, because the meat may be damnably tough. But grace, *after* a satisfying luncheon, can be said honestly and piously. I lay emphasis on this,

Dew of the Sea

because we may not meet again for some considerable time."

A full-throated chorus of protest greeted this statement.

"You are going to dine with us, Quix. It's settled. We accept no excuse. You must name the Ambrosian night here and now."

"I am sorry," said Caffyn slowly. "In a few minutes you will understand why I must decline, very regretfully, your charming invitation."

He lay back in his chair, half-closing his eyes. Nobody spoke. The novelist, taking mental notes, observed that his host glanced round the room before he spoke again.

"I love this room and this club. In it I found for many years rest and—refreshment. I suppose I was born slightly tired. At any rate, I tired easily whenever I attempted to work hard, as all of you fellows work. Having independent means, the virtue of abstention was, perhaps, forced on me. Old Tom here," he indicated the editor of the *Daily Banner*, "may remember my reasons for leaving his staff."

He paused, smiling. Bagster spoke up briskly :

"I can give the reason which he did *not* give. Another man, without independent means, wanted Caffyn's billet. He got it."

"Rot," exclaimed Quix. "I had lost grip of my job. I knew the other fellow was more prehensile. I'll bet he has it still."

"He has."

"Just so. I'm delighted to hear it. 'Hold Fast' is the motto for all you strivers. I am not a striver. This funny world amused me ; it never stimulated me ; I have been an onlooker at the game of life ; I regarded it—I regard it still—as a game." He paused again, as if speech had tired him ; he sipped his old brandy with evident appreciation. Then he sat bolt upright, cocking his chin

The Second Resurrection of Quix

at a defiant angle. For the first time a tincture of acidity escaped him.

"Kill-joys might indict me. They did; they do; they will. Kill-joys I regard as puritanical humbugs. To the Tiber with them! Kill-joys, however, can say truthfully that I was suitably punished—I married one of them."

The actor-manager, who (in defiance of the King's Proctor) had left undefended the case for divorce which his wife brought against him, gulped down (he was too agitated to sip it) what was left of his old brandy.

"I married for ignoble reasons," continued Caffyn, "a woman of the positive type, with strongly developed reproductive instincts. I had spent—squandered, so she said afterwards—most of my small capital. If I had not married, I should have been constrained to resign from this blessed club. To remain a member of this club was, in me, an obsession."

Young Fish, not a seasoned toper, exclaimed loudly:

"I say, sir, that your reasons in favour of marriage were not ignoble. I should do the same under similar circumstances."

Caffyn bowed courteously.

"A lost cause, my boy, needs no champion. You are the youngest member present. Forget that I have been your host. Look upon me, I beg you, as an Awful Warning."

"And hold your tongue," growled the K.C.

"I married this kill-joy, gentlemen, in happy ignorance of her murderous propensities. But on the honeymoon, within three days of marriage, I discovered that I was marooned. I tremble to think how many men have made the same discovery."

"Marooned?" repeated the novelist, with a lift of his dark eyebrows.

"I found myself high and dry—and dry—upon a

Dew of the Sea

desert island, with a wallflower at the pump making grimaces at me. I had noticed, of course, that my fiancée drank water with her dinner, but I supposed that she did it, having the same instincts as the beasts of the field, from choice not from principle. I thought, too, that she had shown a certain sparkle as my fiancée, because she laughed at my quips. I had no idea that she did so designedly. During the honeymoon I found out that she had no more real sparkle than a horse-trough. I used the word—*marooned*. My wife had inherited from her mother a small property in a remote rural district. On our honeymoon I learned that we were to live there."

"You protested?" asked the K.C., in a distressed voice.

"Ah! You would have protested and successfully. But I am I. And I lost the 'I' in my identity when I made this marriage of disastrous inconvenience. In my Helen's considered opinion clubs are a stronghold of Satan. Also, she made me realize, coolingly—she cooed like a dove—what an astounding and confounding sense she had of property. She set an inordinate value upon her own possessions. At the moment—don't laugh!—she set an inordinate value on me, because she thought that I belonged, body and soul, to her. I had not the heart, nor the pluck, to undeceive her. So I dissembled. It is a mournful pleasure to reflect that as mouse, not man, I played my part passably well. Her father, a Rural Dean, said that Helen returned from her honeymoon radiant with happiness—"

"Well, we settled down. I knew that I was settled, and tried to make the best of it. If we had had children—"

He paused again to sip the sunshine of the Charente slopes, but the novelist noticed that his hand trembled.

"There were no children, and she found her reproductive instincts, so strong in positive women, unsatisfied. And so, she set to work to make a child of me."

The Second Resurrection of Quix

The K.C. nodded ; he understood.

“ I was so sorry for her that I submitted. Will oozed out of me because her will was so much stronger. In rainy weather I had to change my socks about three times a day. She insisted on flannel next the skin ! She fussed over me, night and day, poor soul ! She rationed me. I was allowed beer or cider for luncheon and one whisky and soda for dinner. She had inherited with her property a small cellar of sound port. Upon high days and holidays I was allowed one glass. Finding myself alone with the vicar of the parish, also a henpecked man, we shared a decanter between us. Next day, Helen removed the port from the cellar and—and ” his voice quavered, “ poured it down the sink ! ”

Expressions of horror broke from all of Caffyn's guests.

“ I dissembled my indignation. It was her port not mine. That night she asked me if I loved her, and—God forgive me !—I said I did. That idiotic question was my daily and nightly penance. *Did I love her ?* Worse and worse followed. She gave away my old clothes, my beloved hartogs. She refused to meet any of you fellows. And she refused prettily. I want to do her justice, mind you. I had to meet her friends, all of them cut to her pattern. They did not eye me too kindly. Helen wished me to become a J.P. But, I ask you, could I assume the functions of a Justice of the Peace, when peace had abandoned me ? And besides, as I pointed out to Helen, these squireens of the Bench have always seemed to me injustices, hard-hearted fellows. My sympathies are with sinners, like you. Of course it is fatuous to argue with a kill-joy. I—I thought that I might write. I did put together a synopsis of a novel. But I can't work if I am disturbed. When I began the novel, she would pop in, perch herself on my unresponsive knee, and invite me to kiss her. I did, feeling like Iscariot. The Vicar and I had something, not much, in common. We could talk

Dew of the Sea

together. Helen never listened to our talk. She had the trick of interruption, a terrible weapon in the hands of an unscrupulous female. When the Vicar and I were sharpening our wits—and fondly believing that we were sharpening hers—she would butt in with some such tosh as this: “My love, I saw the dear Duchess this afternoon. I have promised to help her with her bazaar. You might write to some of your literary friends and ask for autographed copies of their books.” When I refused to pester my literary friends, I had to take, so to speak, my meals at a side-table. I say—meals. We had a cook sent expressly by the devil to mortify my flesh. Helen believed in the mortification of the flesh. . . .”

“There are thousands of such women in Merrie England,” observed the K.C.

“I come now,” said Caffyn, “to my climax. And I approach it gingerly. Helen’s kill-joy attitude towards life reacted cruelly upon her. She became unhappy, and she made others unhappy. Our servants refused to stay with us, because she imposed absurd restrictions, abusing her power over them. I came to the conclusion that a lust for power informed all her activities. She took everybody seriously. I said to her one day: ‘It is impossible to take me seriously.’ She replied sadly: ‘But, I have.’ Her good works—for so she regarded them—were the capital which she expected to carry to Heaven. I can only assure you that some dear old gaffers and gammers in our village bolted like rabbits when they saw her coming. Now comes the awful thing: she told me that she wanted to die. She rubbed it into me that life was not worth living. *And it wasn’t.*”

“A common complex,” murmured the novelist.

“Unhappily, her doctor assured her that she was likely to live till she was eighty. Being an ordinary G.P. he knew nothing of psycho-analysis.”

“Nobody does,” asserted the editor of the *Daily*

The Second Resurrection of Quix

Banner. He spoke trenchantly and angrily, glaring at the novelist. He added viciously: "I don't want to hurt your feelings, Quix, but you ought to have treated this monomania with a rattan cane. I am not a married man——"

Caffyn held up his hand.

"That is why you are my guest. In extenuation of a crime—it is a crime to marry for convenience—I have set myself up as a sign-post. Let none of you travel my road. Now let me finish. I am free."

All present recalled the toast. None spoke. Caffyn concluded gravely:

"I tried hard to humour a woman born without humour. Possibly I have humour in excess. She wanted to die. Gentlemen—I killed her after family prayers this morning."

V

Twelve law-abiding men gazed in horror-stricken silence at their host. For half a minute nobody spoke. Then young Fish said in a stage whisper:

"My God! He's mad."

Quix laughed.

"Sane as you are, my boy. Now, which of you will be good enough to 'phone the police? Meanwhile, I'll light another cigar."

Some present stared intently at Jim Steele-Murdoch, who might be called upon, for all they knew to the contrary, to prosecute for the Crown. The great K.C. looked white and haggard. So did old Tom Bagster, of a ripe and rosy countenance. These two, in particular, had told their friend time and time again that he *was*—mad. Such words, even when spoken in jest, come back to us with confounding violence. Quix remarked quietly:

"These cigars are made of well-matured baccy."

One man jumped up, exclaiming thickly:

Dew of the Sea

“ I can't stick this.”

“ Sit down,” roared Quix. Then, with a quick change of tone, he added : “ Obviously, I must 'phone for the police myself. Tom, old friend, this is a scoop for you, isn't it ? ”

“ A scoop—— ! ” repeated Bagster quaveringly.

Quix glanced at the novelist.

“ Good copy for you, too. I have presented you with cause, effect, a climax, and a moral.”

The man, who had jumped up, sank back into his chair. Quix stood up :

“ Gentlemen, some years ago, two men here took an unwarrantable liberty with my person. They deliberately drowned me. They then wrote obituary notices. I forgive them. Much can be forgiven to him who raises a laugh. And so, please forgive me, for killing a lady who never existed, except in my too lively imagination. I have remained single, because I feared that she might exist. I told you just now that I tired too easily. That is lamentably true. Five years ago, I tired of London. And so, I buried myself in the country. Now, I have tired again of the country, and I have come back to town. During my time in the country, I had leisure to reflect how I could return a fitting ‘ Oliver ’ for the ‘ Roland ’ so cleverly introduced to me. Have I succeeded ? ”

A roar of applause, cheers, cat-calls, disturbed the peace of members snoozing overhead in the Silence Room. The Steward, followed by two waiters, rushed in. They beheld Quix borne in triumph on the shoulders of his guests from the dining-room into the Lounge. A policeman outside the Buskin lifted his head and stood still. He wondered if he would be hastily summoned by the hall porter.

He wasn't.