

THE GREATEST GIFT

UPON a certain page in an album of autographs are three entries. The sweetest singer of our day writes :

"A beautiful voice is the gift of God."

Beneath this, in very different handwriting, the Queen of the Paris cabarets tells us that :

"An ugly voice may be a gift of God."

An actor, even more famous as a wit, observes :

"God's greatest gift may be—SILENCE."

Miss Daphne Corlyn was walking with Captain Vicary in the paddock at Goodwood. The gallant warrior, now on the retired list, was at his best. He had backed three winners in succession.

"Will you do me a favour?" asked the young lady.

"You ask it and see."

"I want you to propose a very nice boy at your club."

"Which club, Miss Corlyn?"

"The Yorick."

"But—we don't have boys at the Yorick. There are one or two, sons of distinguished members. Who is your boy?"

"He isn't mine. He is in Daddy's office."

Captain Vicary winced. The Committee at the Yorick drew the line just east of Temple Bar. Daddy was a prosperous stockbroker. Daphne continued sweetly :

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"His name is Jock McAlpine. He got his rigger 'blue' at Oxford. He's the quietest, most unassuming boy I know. Everybody likes him. Can't you do this to please me?"

"A 'blue,' eh? Of course, it's no disgrace for a young fellow to be pilled at the Yorick. I'll talk to my old pal, Maidment. We might pull it off. I remember the boy. Maidment and I met him at your father's house. He didn't cut into the talk. Our waiting list is diminishing."

No more was said at the time. But Daphne saw Jock when she returned to London and told him what she had done on his behalf. Words were not his strong suit, so he said nothing. Raised eyebrows expressed astonishment.

"At the Yorick you will meet the right men, the rising and the risen. They ought to be useful to you."

"How?"

"I don't know. Daddy says that a good club is a great asset to any young man. You may be pilled, but Captain Vicary can pull strings. To please me he will. That's that."

Jock left it at that. But he reflected with conviction: "They are sure to pill a mug like me."

He wasn't pilled. In all clubs you will find men who do nothing and do it incomparably well. They are accepted by fellow-members as agreeable chatterboxes. They touch lightly upon themes of current interest; they acquire by constant practice a knack of imparting knowledge without seeming to do so; they are never didactic or argumentative. No club could carry on in the right (and occasionally tight) clubbable spirit without them.

At the Yorick, Vicary and Maidment were familiarly accosted as Tom and Jerry. They had an "air." Each had inherited money enough to live at ease. They belonged to what some people stigmatise as the thoroughly comfortable class. Why it should be wicked to be

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thoroughly comfortable in this very uncomfortable world only a Socialist can explain.

Tom and Jerry told Jock McAlpine that he had been elected. Tom said, genially :

"I give you this advice which my dear old Governor gave to me. He got me into the Yorick when, like you, I was on the young side : Don't tell a story to any member of the club, because it's a thousand to three that he has heard it before. And don't give information on any subject whatever to your seniors, because probably they have forgotten more about that subject than you ever knew."

Jock accepted this advice humbly. When he entered the club for the first time as a member, Tom and Jerry entertained him at luncheon. After luncheon they introduced their young friend to their old friends after fashion which Jock found disconcerting.

"This," said Tom, "is the Duke of Whitstable. Men have joined the club merely to look at him."

"And this," said Jerry, "is a sporting peer who has won the Derby. And the kindly gentleman on his left is our hanging judge. He doesn't look like it, does he?"

The three members nodded most affably to Jock.

Tom pointed out another member, whose classical features have been reproduced on picture postcards.

"That is our actor-manager. He asked us lately what was wrong with the British stage ; and we told him that it would recover tone after he was knighted. Knighting actors, as you may not know, automatically puts 'em to bed."

Unhappily Jock was shy. Tom and Jerry ought to have urged him to lunch at the Yorick every day for at least a fortnight. Perhaps they took it for granted that he would do so. Necessity constrained him to lunch instead at Pym's, in the City. When he did sneak into the club, at tea time, nobody noticed him, which is, perhaps, a

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privilege in first-rate clubs. If you want to sit in a corner, or read a paper at meals, you can. Tom and Jerry beheld the new member in corners.

"A dull dog, I fear," said Tom.

"Very silent cove," replied Jerry.

Probably Jock would have left the Yorick and forfeited a large entrance fee had it not been for happy Chance. He was leaving Mr. Corlyn's office, not far from the Stock Exchange, when two magnates whom he knew by sight and reputation collided violently. Each apologized to the other. One asked carelessly :

"Know anything ?"

The other replied as carelessly :

"Buy tins."

That was all. Jock reached the Yorick and ordered the best and cheapest tea in London. Before it was served, Tom came into the lounge. Tom greeted his candidate.

"Hullo, McAlpine, know anything ?"

Jock, hardly aware of what he was saying, replied promptly :

"Buy tins."

Tom's attention was arrested. He remembered that Jock was in George Corlyn's office. Jock had been pitchforked into that office by his guardian. He drew a very modest salary, and he was entitled to a small commission if he introduced new clients to an old-established firm. He had not drawn any commission yet. Because his guardian was a friend of Corlyn's, Jock had been invited to his Chief's house in Lancaster Gate, where he had met Daphne and her two sisters, Iris and Daisy. All three had seen him play football. Jock could go through a scrum with half a dozen stalwarts on his back, but the Yorick scrum terrified him. He didn't know—how could he?—that Tom and Jerry indulged in mild flutters when information was gilt-edged.

"Do you mean it ?" asked Tom.

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Jock nodded.

"A rise in tins is about due," murmured Tom.

Jock nodded again, and poured himself out a cup of tea. Tom ordered a whisky and soda. He was thinking to himself: "This chap knows a bit." They were alone in the lounge, but Tom lowered his voice.

"Sure of your information, what?"

Jock nodded for the third time. He was perfectly sure, not of his information but of his informants. And then Vicary asked a natural question which led, as will be seen, to remarkable results.

"Got this tip from George Corlyn, eh?"

"No. It's mine. I—I picked it up. Now and again one does pick up tips in the City. This is a bit of all right."

"I shall tell Jerry Maidment. Do you mind?"

"Why should I?" asked Jock. He was reflecting that chance had thrust into his hand an opportunity of doing a good turn to his proposer and seconder. In the tube he had considered and dismissed sorrowfully the possibility of buying tins on his own account. His balance at his bankers forbade that.

"I shall buy tins," said Captain Vicary, with decision. "What tins?"

Jock hesitated, and was not lost. Hesitation marked him in Tom's alert eyes as a man of caution. After a pause, he said modestly:

"I cannot answer your question off-hand. But, tomorrow, at five, I will submit a list of likely tins."

"Right. If Jerry goes in with me, we'll do business through your people."

"Thank you," said Jock.

Business was transacted through Jock's people, and a young man earned his first small commission.

Tins rose steadily.

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In the right company men are not too reticent about the favours which Fortune may bestow upon them. Upon their losses they maintain silence. Jock became conscious that fellow members were looking at him with interest. Tom and Jerry spoke of him handsomely behind his broad back.

“Do you know McAlpine?”

“No. Who is he?”

“*Who is he?* He played rugger for Oxford. That’s nothing. You ask any fellow in the City who he is. He made a parcel for me in tins.”

“Looks rather young.”

“Young be damned. How old was Napoleon at the Bridge of Lodi? Jock McAlpine, one of these fine days, will make Capel Court sit up and howl.”

Thus easily is earned the bubble reputation.

The earning of his second commission was almost as easy. A distinguished novelist played a game of billiards with Jock. Somehow, Jock’s command of the cue inspired respect. And the novelist, a shrewd observer, noticed that a youthful amateur played for safety when it served his purpose. After the game, the talk wandered eastward.

“Vicary is a friend of yours.”

Jock replied with some enthusiasm:

“He and Maidment got me into this club.”

“You’re a broker, so Vicary tells me.”

Jock let this pass. He wasn’t a full-fledged broker.

The novelist continued:

“Vicary says nice things about you. It’s easier to make money than invest it. At least, that’s my unhappy experience.”

Jock nodded. He was honoured, so he felt, by this touching mark of confidence, but he remembered Tom’s advice. He told himself that on any subject of importance the novelist had forgotten more than a youthful member

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had ever known. At the same moment, the novelist was reflecting : " This young fellow must be Somebody in the City or he wouldn't belong to this club."

" Can you recommend a sound Industrial ? "

The modest Jock replied as before :

" I'll submit a list to-morrow."

" Do."

Upon this occasion Jock sought his Chief. Being a football player, he went straight for the goal.

" I was asked yesterday for a sound list of Industrials by a man who has not been too lucky in his investments."

" Um."

" His name is in the *Daily Mail Year Book*, amongst the celebrities."

" Are you at liberty to mention his name ? "

Jock mentioned it. George Corlyn smote the desk in front of him.

" I like his books immensely. *I buy them*. You say he's a friend of yours ? "

Jock was sensible that friendship with a distinguished novelist was regarded by his Chief with approving eyes. He replied regretfully :

" Oh, no ; just a club acquaintance."

" What club ? "

" The Yorick."

" Really ! I congratulate you, McAlpine. I had no idea you belonged to the Yorick."

" Thanks to Miss Daphne, I do."

" What can you mean ? "

Jock explained. Miss Daphne had spoken to Captain Vicary. George Corlyn listened attentively, but he made no comment. When Jock finished, he said briskly :

" Well, well, we must put our heads together over this. Um ! Industrials—— ? What's the use of submitting a list ? I wish I could find a reliable list. There are one

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or two——” He frowned, rubbing an ample chin. “I owe your friend something. I’d like to do him well. You leave this to me.”

Jock carried only one Industrial to the Yorick. He spoke, for so young a man, portentously :

“You can put your shirt on it.”

“I shall put more than that. I’m much obliged to you.”

“I have reason to believe,” said Jock, earnestly, “that this particular Industrial is being quietly bought by the best people. I can’t say any more.”

He couldn’t. He was quoting his Chief. But he added, diffidently, speaking for himself :

“If you care to buy through my firm——”

“Why, of course, my dear fellow.”

A much larger second commission was earned.

Some weeks later, the novelist quietly thanked Tom for mentioning to him McAlpine.

“He put me into a very sound concern.”

“What did I tell you ?”

“Do you think I could ask McAlpine to look through my investments ?”

“That’s a brain wave,” declared Tom. “Why not ? It’s his business. I shall do the same.”

Fortune, it will be remarked, was smiling upon Jock. The fickle jade went on smiling. Two lists of investments were submitted to Jock’s Chief. He glanced at them, made no comment, and said to Jock :

“I should like to meet your distinguished friend.”

And again Jock replied humbly :

“I cannot call him my friend.”

“Tosh ! He has submitted the list of his investments to you. If that is not a proof of friendship, what is ?”

Jock held his tongue. He was beginning to learn that holding one’s tongue may be a source of profit.

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"Bring him to dine, McAlpine."

Jock nodded. Next day, George Corlyn slipped into his hand three sheets of typed script.

"I have given these investments careful attention, my boy. Some are good; some are not. I have suggested certain changes. You will oblige me by not mentioning my name. I want to make the acquaintance of a man whose work I admire. You must manage that. But I don't want him, or anybody else, to think that I am bribing him to come to my house. Twig?"

Jock nodded.

Tom Vicary accepted his list, and Jock earned more commissions. The novelist, more cautious, marked time. He intended to show his revised list to a member of the Yorick, Sir Claude Vansittart, a financial magnate of pre-war days, retired from active business, but one who kept a shrewd eye upon his own investments. He, too, was anxious to serve a distinguished friend. When he saw Jock's list, he expressed astonishment.

"You say that this list was revised by a member of the club."

"A nice boy. He put me into that Industrial."

"Did he?"

"And then I asked him to look over all my investments."

Sir Claude delivered judgment.

"I can only say this: I am frankly astounded. This boy, young McAlpine, you say, has sniffed out some of the best things in the market. Accept his suggestions. I have no comments to offer."

"Thank you very much."

Sir Claude, as has been said, had retired from active business, but he retained an interest in his old firm and occasionally wandered into the City, where he was sure of a welcome from his former partner. It happened, by mere luck, that he paid one of these periodical visits the

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day after he had seen Jock's revisions of the novelist's investments. That would have dropped from his mind in forty-eight hours. But his partner, now the head of the firm, complained of the scarcity of competent clerks.

"I haven't a fellow who isn't a machine, good up to a point, useless beyond that point."

Sir Claude said sharply :

"I have found the lad you are looking for."

That was enough, from such a source.

"Have you? Then please send him along."

Vansittart went back to the Yorick, and found Jock having his tea.

"You know who I am?"

Jock nodded.

"And I know something about you. Possibly you are tied up. If not, I should like you to see the head of my old firm. He may make you an offer worth consideration."

"I'm not tied up," replied Jock, "but I'm doing fairly well with Corlyn & Co."

"What do you call fairly well?"

Jock mentioned what he had earned, salary and commissions, during the past month. Sir Claude looked surprised.

"Chicken-food!" he muttered.

"No complaints."

"Really? From what I hear of you, you ought to be earning more than that. Have a talk with my old partner."

Jock blushed. Hesitatingly, he blurted out the truth :

"You are most awfully kind. I think I must stick to my own people. You see, I knew nothing when they took me in. But I'm learning—slowly. And Mr. Corlyn has been very decent. I'm not such an ass as to think

that they need me, but they might think me ungrateful if I left them."

Sir Claude was pleased with this speech. He decided that Jock was a young man out of the common. And he decided, as swiftly, that such an altruist must be secured. Probably a civil word with young McAlpine's Chief would do the trick.

He couldn't possibly appraise his clerk at his true value if he paid him such a miserable salary. Accordingly he rang up Lancaster Gate at seven that evening. Corlyn and he were acquaintances. Within five minutes Corlyn grasped the essential fact. A firm of brokers was willing to pay McAlpine three times his present salary to secure his services. What about it?

Jock's Chief replied curtly that he would speak to Jock next day. At dinner, alone with his wife and daughters, he said, carelessly :

"Do any of you think young McAlpine clever?"

Mrs. Corlyn, a perfectly honest woman, replied promptly :

"I think him remarkably honest."

"He is clever," said Daphne.

Iris and Daisy remained silent. Mr. Corlyn looked puzzled.

"I must admit, my dears, that our young friend's cleverness has escaped me. Lately he has brought some good business to us. I was surprised to hear that he belonged to the Yorick——"

As he spoke, he looked sharply at Daphne. That young lady murmured innocently :

"Does he?"

"Just before dinner Sir Claude Vansittart rang me up. He, too, belongs to the Yorick. He asked me, very civilly, if I could let hira have young McAlpine. He is prepared to pay him a salary which I consider preposterous. But this is the amazing thing. McAlpine hasn't

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jumped at the offer. He told Vansittart that he preferred to remain with us. But, really, he is under no obligation at all to remain with us."

Daphne smiled.

"He must be clever, Daddy, to have hidden his cleverness from you."

Jock's Chief was delicately flattered. He reflected that little Daphne had inherited sharp wits, not from her mother.

"I shall have a word with him."

"You won't let him go?"

"I'm in a bit of a hole. Vansittart is a shrewd judge of men. Why does he want this boy?"

"Boy——"

"Hardly five and twenty. However—there it is."

Daphne said brightly :

"If you keep him, you must raise his salary."

Mr. Corlyn grunted. Later, alone with his wife, he touched upon the same subject, approaching it from a different angle.

"It seems, Mummy, that our Daphne persuaded Captain Vicary to propose young McAlpine at the Yorick. At dinner the little baggage pretended that she knew nothing about it. But she thinks the boy clever. Now, where are we? You don't know. Nor do I. Daffy has brains."

"I'm sure that dear Iris and Daisy——"

"Tchah! Iris is hardly more than a flapper. Daisy, poor dear, is a sort of Alice-sit-by-the-fire. Nobody ever gets a word out of her. What——? Sweet——? I never said she wasn't. Well, I must get to the bottom of this."

On the morrow, Mr. Corlyn sent for Jack. Jock surprised him, inasmuch as he refused flatly to leave Corlyn & Co. Daffy's father may or may not have surprised Jock. In the end compromise was achieved.

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A small salary was raised and a higher commission offered and accepted. Jock assigned all credit to the Goddess Fortune. He said to himself, wonderingly :

“ My stock seems to be booming.”

It went on booming. Jock's Chief knew what was paid to Jock, over and above a salary, in commissions. And he wondered how Jock “ worked ” this remunerative outside business. Of course, Tom and Jerry did the working with their voluble tongues. Jock made no attempt, direct or indirect, to secure new clients for his people. New clients came to him. They fell upon his honest head like dew from Heaven. Amongst a certain lively set at the Yorick it became known that young McAlpine had a nose. Metaphorically, he never blew it. He never—to vary the metaphor—tooted his own little horn. He refused to talk business. His formula never varied. He promised to submit a list. Tom Vicary said with a cheerful grin :

“ You must think an awful lot, Jock.”

Everybody called him Jock, no surer index of popularity in a club.

Meanwhile Daphne was having her way with him. She had seen him play football. That accounted for much. But inherited commercial instincts counted for more. Daphne adored success. Success to her included a Rolls-Royce car, jewels, and constant change of scene and frocks. Jock accompanied Daphne to select night clubs. He danced well, and he didn't chatter when he danced. Jock's Chief and Mummy began to smell orange blossom.

“ Does Daffy want this young fellow ? ”

Mummy was of opinion that she did. Knowing her daughter, she ventured to affirm that if Daffy “ wanted ” him, she would get him. Jock's Chief pursed up dubious lips.

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“ I can't size him up, my dear. He's honest as the day, a clean boy, and he seems to know the right people, but he won't talk. I'm told he's good at games, tennis and all that. He doesn't, strictly between ourselves, earn his increased salary, but, damn it! he does earn his commissions. That is indisputable. Leaving Daffy out——”

“ You can't leave Daffy out, if she means to be in——”

“ Leaving Daffy out, it might pay me to secure young McAlpine——”

“ Secure him—— ? ”

“ Let me finish. We might offer this boy a small junior partnership, if he can plank down a few thousands. In that case, I should be inclined to do without him in the office. He could work, as he has worked, outside. God knows how he does it. But, I'll say this for him, he inspires confidence. Daffy scares me at times.”

“ Daffy knows what she is doing.”

“ Daffy, my dear, is the last young woman I should commend as wife of a poor man.”

“ But, if he is going to be rich—— ? ”

Jock's Chief grunted, and went his way. At the first convenient moment he said lightly to Jock: “ Could you lay your hands on a few thousands, my boy, if we offered you a very junior partnership ? ”

Jock was stunned. He had five thousand pounds invested long ago by his guardian, before Jock came of age. It represented two hundred and fifty a year.

When he mentioned, hesitatingly, this modest capital, Jock's Chief said curtly:

“ If it were ten instead of five we might talk business.”

Jock left the august presence dazed. But he had made unwittingly a “ hit ” with Daffy's father. Young McAlpine was apparently satisfied to leave his small capital in a gilt-edged security. Obviously, he was no gambler, and the head of an old-fashioned firm of brokers

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who had built up a fine business by disregarding the more speculative "counters" appreciated, perhaps inordinately, the bump of caution.

"There really is something in the boy," he reflected. He had two sons. The sons, educated, perhaps, at the wrong schools, were not in the City. One was in a cavalry regiment; the other had married a rich woman. Jock's Chief wasted valuable time regretting that Jock was not his son. At the same time, he had misgivings about Daffy— If it had been Little Iris, his third daughter—or even Daisy, the Sit-by-the-fire—!

A week later, Mummy said decisively:

"I'm sure that Daffy has made up her mind. Have we made up ours?"

They hadn't. Being sensible people they confronted facts philosophically. It came really to this: Daffy might do worse.

"Has he spoken to her?" asked an anxious father.

"I don't think so. Daffy understands him. He is a gentleman."

"Certainly. He belongs to the right McAlpines, but they are impoverished. He has five thousand pounds, his wits, and apparently no prospects."

Mummy smiled. She told herself that Father must have been making inquiries—quietly. She continued with greater confidence:

"I like him, George."

"Same here."

"Can't you *do* something?"

He replied irritably:

"What the devil can I do?"

"You spoke of a junior partnership."

"And you cackled about that to Daffy—? You women—! However— You are asking me to weigh in with a cheque for five thousand pounds."

"I'm doing nothing of the sort. Ridiculous!"

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"Let us be perfectly calm. My partners must be considered. I can wangle a junior partnership for a prospective son-in-law, but the irreducible minimum is ten thou. Jock has five. If he was tempted to turn it into ten I—I should wash my hands of him."

"You will do as you think best, George."

Jock, in blissful ignorance, went on popping in and out of Lancaster Gate. He had acquired the habit. Daffy commandeered him. He took her to a fancy-ball and wore the kilt. That did the trick—for Daffy.

"You ought to be the chief of your tribe."

"Clan—clan."

"Can you toss the—the—what is it called?"

"The caber? I daresay I could, if I tried."

"I believe you could do anything, *if you tried*. Daddy believes in you."

"He can't."

"He does, and so do I. Perhaps Daddy, poor dear, doesn't really understand you, as—as I do. Your silence, for instance, is far more eloquent to me than speech. I respect your silence, I do indeed. So does Mummy. All the same, silence, after, well, after a reasonable time is, how shall I put it?—yes, *unreasonable*."

Her laughter tinkled deliciously. Jock stared at her piquant face, not entirely innocent of make-up. Words, long suppressed, came to him slowly.

"I—I think I catch on."

"I'm quite sure you do."

"All you people have been most awfully jolly and—er—friendly."

"Exactly. If you were not so modest, you might sum up Daddy's attitude towards you as—as encouraging."

"It is," admitted Jock earnestly. "And that is what boils me. He doesn't ask the other fellows to his house, good chaps, too."

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"They are not *quite* in your class, are they?"

"But your father—I had a knock-out the other day. Without any sort of suggestion from me, he—he hinted at a junior partnership. Why?"

"You can't guess why?"

"I'm damned if I can. I beg your pardon——"

"Not at all. You can take this from me, Daddy always knows where he's at. Daddy wants you as a junior partner. Mind you, he wouldn't want you unless you had made good. You have made good. Now—you ought to go ahead, full speed."

'She gazed at him beguilingly. Jock blushed. His pleasant voice sank to a whisper:

"I say, you tell me what to do, and I'll do it. I'm a mug. But I know what I want. And I want it—desperately. It never occurred to me that your father had spotted something that, honestly, I hardly dared to think about except in—in my wildest dreams."

Daffy glanced about her. The Albert Hall is not exactly a backwater of the Thames. Couples were all about them. Being a true daughter of Eve, she considered Time and Place. But she was not blushing as he whispered:

"I will tell you what to do. Be as frank with Daddy as you have been with me. See him, if you can, after luncheon. He's at his best then. I predict confidently that all will be well. *Toujours de l'audace!*"

"*Toujours de l'audace,*" repeated a youth whose face was wreathed with smiles.

The fateful interview did take place, next day, after luncheon, in the Chief's sacrosanct office. Jock soaped the ways by introducing a new client who asked for a sound "lock-up."

"He doesn't consider dividends, sir. He is making a big income. He fancies, so he tells me, land schemes.

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He's just laid down a bin of 1920 port. He's that sort of chap."

The Chief smiled encouragingly.

"Well, McAlpine, we must find something which will mature with the port. Is that all, to-day?"

"No, sir, if you could spare me five minutes on—on a very private matter——?"

"Certainly. Try that cigar. Carry on."

This was a counsel of perfection. Jock lit a cigar, and thought of Tom Vicary's powers of speech.

He began, for a novice, not too badly:

"You have been very kind to me, sir——"

A busy man reflected that cackle might be judiciously cut. He knew what Jock wanted, and thought the better of him because he rode slow at a formidable fence. Accordingly, he said, genially:

"We like you, my boy. I can make some sort of guess at this very private matter. It concerns you," Jock nodded solemnly, "and somebody belonging, temporarily, to me?"

"Yes, sir. But I shouldn't have had the cheek to——"

"No, no, but let us take it that you have received encouragement from *me* and—*her*."

"It's quite astounding, but it's true. And yet, if—if you ask me bang out can I support a wife, a wife—er—accustomed to—Lancaster Gate, the answer is a—lemon."

Daffy's father lay back in his chair and laughed Homerically. Jock's candour, his puzzled face, his use of his mother tongue, were irresistibly comic. But he was expecting a magnate, who couldn't be allowed to cool his heels.

"My dear boy, to allay all these natural misgivings of yours, I think we must take you into partnership. You have a 'way' with you. I can't help being personal, but

Nature seems to have inscribed upon your face unmistakable credentials. Pass, friend! I take you as I find you. Has *she* taken you?"

"Bless her! She has."

"Blessings in this case seem to be in order. You had better have an afternoon off, unless you prefer to use the telephone."

"Ever so many thanks, sir. She—she will be quite as surprised as I am."

This was too much for Daffy's father. He sat up in his chair, staring at Jock. Then he said slowly:

"Ought I to warn you?"

"Warn me?"

"Obviously, I ought. You have chosen a young woman much more wide awake than I am. She can give me seven pounds over any course, outside the City, and romp home. I have never bossed my girls. I have always hoped that they would choose the right sort when the right sort came along. But this young woman is never surprised at anything. She picked you before the flag dropped. She meant to have you from the word 'go.' My one fear is this—can you stay her course?"

"What course?" asked Jock.

Daffy's father replied testily:

"You've been over it. Embassy Club, Grafton Galleries, Albert Hall. Keep a-moving! She may settle down. Some of 'em don't."

"We've talked all that over."

"You have, eh?"

"Again and again. We thought of a very small house at Woking, near the golf course. We shall start with a brace of servants. She'll make her own frocks."

"What? You tell me, her father, that Daffy is going to make her own frocks?"

"Good Lord, no! Daffy is a flyer! There seems to be some extraordinary mistake. I want to marry—Daisy."

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“ Daisy—— ? ”

Daffy's father looked apoplectic. His chin and cheeks above too tight a collar grew purple. But joy seldom kills. It was so exactly right that Jock should marry Daisy. And yet, Daffy, his masterful child, seemed to forbid the banns. As Jock said nothing, Daffy's father was forced into ill-considered speech :

“ Never have I seen you making up to Daisy, never ! ”

“ We were jolly careful,” mumbled Jock.

“ Young man, you have made the running, hot and hot, with Daphne. You will have to settle with Daphne. I don't envy you. You will need a week off to make your peace with her. I tell you the situation is appalling. You appear to have won my eldest daughter by making love to her sister.”

Jock said helplessly :

“ Daffy was in the know from the first.”

A pert office boy appeared :

“ Sir Claude Vansittart, sir, by appointment.”

“ Certainly. Show Sir Claude up in one minute.”

Daisy's father shook Jock's hand.

“ You will have to attend to the outside business, Jock. Your silent methods are utterly beyond me, but somehow you get there. Sir Claude is here through you. It may lead to a lot of underwriting. Now, hop it.”

Jock hopped it.