

BERT'S BEANO

I

WE all have our little weaknesses of the flesh and spirit ; and these affect—disastrously sometimes—the sanctities of the home. Herbert Donner's wife, for instance, practised cheese-paring which, camouflaged at first as thrift, was regarded by Bert as a business asset when he led the young lady to the altar. The happy pair had married for love during the last year of the Great War. Bert had "done his bit." Amy realized that. She swore to herself that she would "do her bit" for a wounded hero. Spiritually, mentally, and physically these two simple persons were "affinities." Amy had never heard of Mr. John Masefield, but she might have quoted him as setting forth her considered opinions upon holy matrimony.

"It isn't lockets, dear, nor pairs of gloves ;
It isn't marriage bells nor wedding cake."

Amy, in fine, being a sensible little woman, knew that Bert and she must be co-workers and hard workers. Marriage exacted personal sacrifices from each. Bert was a clerk in a stockbroker's office with prospects of a steady rise in salary if he "made good." He determined to make good. Amy could and did turn sixpences into shillings ; and Bert looked at family life from the "tizzy" point of view. As he put it—*he had to*. Everybody told him, particularly his mother-in-law, that he was lucky in the possession of such a "managing" helpmeet. And so he was.

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For the first year, Amy, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, "did" Bert fairly well. When the first baby came Bert had a horrid suspicion that his pretty wife was turning into a "pincher"; when the second baby appeared he was quite sure of it. The extenuating fact that he loved her and that she loved him made him hold his tongue. Finally, after four years of silence, he presented Amy with Mr. Arnold Bennett's novel—*Riceyman Steps*. Amy read the book from cover to cover, and then complained that it lacked love interest. Bert pounced:

"You are wrong, dear. Love is there. That is the point rubbed in by the author. Love was—er—profaned, that's the word, *profaned* because two fools saved their money instead of spending it."

Amy blinked at him.

"I like real love stories," she said.

"And I tell you," he persisted, "that this would have been a great love story, if—if, old girl, the habit of pinching had not wrecked two lives."

Amy shook her head, still pretty and not shingled. She retorted sharply:

"Why, Bert, there would be no story at all if you cut out the pinching."

Bert accepted this as final. But he decided to re-read the novel. He couldn't find it. Finally, Amy confessed that she had sold it to a friend.

"Miss Latter wanted it. I let her have it at half the published price. It was still in its cover and as good as new. I have never sold any present of yours before, but I disliked the book."

"Sorry," said Bert.

He felt annoyed and helpless, synonymous terms. The book had been presented upon the eve of the 1924 summer holiday after a rise in salary sufficient to justify mild celebration. Bert had his own ideas about holidays, gleaned from a perusal of newspaper articles dealing

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seasonably and seriously with such jaunts and jollities. But Amy had her way with him. For five years the Donners had spent three weeks at Boxtton-on-Sea in the cheapest (and cleanest) lodgings that Amy could find. She was plump ; Bert was thin. Bert turned blue after bathing ; Amy turned pink. She believed that Bert liked to see her frisking about in the sad sea waves. He had told her so when they first married. Bert contended that a holiday should be a charge upon the economies of the working year ; Amy refused to accept this contention. Bert craved rich, stimulating food ; Amy was terrified of growing fat. To save money over food was not only prudent but, in her case, wise. The same argument applied to seaside entertainments, or anything that exacted the disbursement of cash. Amy quoted Bert against himself :

“ They are very cheap shows, but we don't get value received.”

It may be inferred that Bert had ceased to look forward to his summer trip, because, as he jestingly remarked to a brother clerk, it “ tripped ” him up. The August holiday of 1924 made the long-suffering little man savage. It rained most of the time—another excuse for saving hard-earned money. Bert returned to the office wondering how worms turned. It was humiliating to regard oneself as a worm, but he had the courage of his convictions. He could see Mr. Herbert Donner under Amy's thumb, wriggling and squirming.

And then, at a moment when he told himself that his stock was slumping, the fickle goddess took pity on him.

An uncle died from whom he had no expectations whatever. He had not seen the old gentleman for many years. Amy was hardly aware of his existence. A firm of solicitors in the north wrote to Bert and informed him that their late client had left him five hundred pounds free of legacy duty. Bert read the letter ; trembling fingers

conveyed it to his breast pocket. During the luncheon interval, he bought a bottle of sherry. The letter reached him at the office. He could have despatched a "wire" to Amy, but he resisted the temptation, simply because Amy would reproach him for wasting a shilling. However, he was in such a reckless mood that he didn't pause to consider what she would say about the bottle of sherry till it was wrapped up in brown paper. She was capable of confiscating the noble liquor and keeping it till Christmas. At this disintegrating thought a brain wave overwhelmed him.

Why tell Amy about the legacy?

II

To tell somebody of his stroke of luck was an overmastering impulse. He told his friend and fellow-clerk, George Parkinson. George happened to be a bachelor. He had met Amy, but Amy disapproved of George.

"Your wife doesn't like me," said George.

"Whatever put such an idea as that into your head?"

"She did. She thinks that I lure you away from her."

"What nonsense!"

However, nothing more was said at the time, but, obviously, George had been slightly huffed.

George, bold bad man, advised Bert to lie "doggo."

"She'll never find out, old man. She has her nest-egg, eh? Why shouldn't you have yours, what?"

Together, they drank the bottle of sherry. Bert needed just such a tonic.

"I—I won't tell her, I'll bung the money into some sound Industrial."

George had a word to say about this. The firm the two friends worked for specialized in tea, coffee, and rubber. George was knowledgeable about rubber.

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"You bung it into rubber. The firm objects to our taking 'flyers,' but this isn't a flyer. The world's market is short of rubber. This is a 'sitter.' Do it openly. Consult the senior partner, if you like."

Bert saw the great man that afternoon, a memorable interview; although brief. Rubber was commended as a gilt-edged investment. An expert said curtly: "If you leave the matter to me, Donner, I will pick out some likely shares; and I'll advise you when to sell. As soon as your little legacy is paid, let me know."

His *little* legacy——!

It was an enormous sum of money to Bert. It meant nearly everything in life that he had never "tasted," all that he longed to taste.

The legacy was paid soon afterwards. Bert, to the astonishment of Amy, sang in his bath. She made certain that he had achieved another rise in salary. When he assured her that this was not the case, she remarked alertly:

"Something has happened to you."

"Yes; my liver has got over our summer holiday."

"It did the children such good."

"Possibly; but it nearly did me in."

Rubber rose steadily. Bert had another memorable and longer interview with the senior partner. We must assume that a Triton was interested in a Minnow.

"Your shares, Donner, have touched five shillings. We bought at half a crown."

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me — did you save that five hundred pounds?"

"No, sir. I told you it was an unexpected legacy, a windfall."

"So you did. A favouring breeze has doubled your small capital. Incidentally, you have received a good dividend."

Bert smiled respectfully. Incidentally, he had spent an

"interim" dividend upon luncheons. Amy had allowed him an insufficient sum for luncheon. When he sang in his bath, he was agreeably conscious that more flesh covered his bones. He was what hunting men term,—
"Furnishing up."

The Chief stared hard at Bert.

"You have served us faithfully, Donner. Perhaps you ought to take the profit that is in sight. Suppose, for an instant, that the breeze had not been favouring. The loss of your legacy might have affected your wife and children."

"No," said Bert earnestly. "The wife has a nest-egg of her own, saved," he added ingenuously, "out of my earnings. Mrs. Donner is a wonderful manager. I—I did not tell the wife of this—er—windfall."

The senior partner may have understood; he was a married man; his eyes twinkled; his nose detected romance in this affair—and comedy.

"I see. Well, well, I am tempted to advise you against my considered principles. You have no gambling instincts?"

"God forbid!" exclaimed Bert.

"Um! God, I believe, does forbid it to fathers of families in your position. However——"

He went on staring at Bert's shabby clothes and thin face. Then he spoke tersely:

"Take your profit. Sell."

"Oh-h!" said Bert mournfully.

"Wait. I am selling my own shares in this company. I advise you to reinvest the original five hundred pounds in some absolutely safe Preferred Stock. Leave it there. Regard it as your nest-egg. Regard the other five hundred as working capital. I know of another company, which has not sold its rubber in advance. I am putting some of my profits into that. I anticipate a substantial rise within a few months."

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"I shall do exactly what you say, sir."

"It's a responsibility advising a clerk to touch these counters. Still—I'm watching the market."

After that, Bert was graciously dismissed.

III

Each evening he returned to his own mean little house in the suburbs; each evening he eyed it with ever-increasing rancour. He eyed, too, the kiddies and Amy with smouldering resentment. Amy made their clothes and her own. The family looked dowdy. Walking with them on Sunday afternoons became a penance. A neighbour's wife said tartly: "Your little girl, Mr. Donner, needs cod-liver oil." Bert nearly replied: "That's none of your business." But it was his business. *If Amy underfed the kiddies*—He dared not supplement their meagre bill of fare. That meant—questions. Amy knew to a shilling what he earned. He didn't know what she had saved.

Protest was futile. Amy said crossly:

"What more can I do for you and the children?"

"You overdo."

"You know that I haven't an idle bone in my body."

Idleness, to Amy, was the root of all evil, and meant, nine times out of ten, expenditure. If you sat up late at night making underclothes you didn't have to buy them. With such platitudes she vanquished Bert.

He was sorely harassed in mind and conscience. The new investment had again doubled itself. He was now—*incredible thought*—worth £1500! Apart from what he added to his daily luncheons, Bert saved every penny of "interim" dividends. Now and again he entertained a fellow-clerk, some hungry junior. George, fully in his friend's confidence, was perturbed by the situation brought about by himself. He knew that Bert "funkt"

telling the truth to Amy. All the same, as Bert's pile waxed bigger, George chuckled. Pussy must jump out of her bag some day, and what would happen then? He noted, too, in Bert a growing sense of importance. In the office Bert carried a higher head, squaring his thin shoulders, thrusting out an indeterminate chin.

"You're a bloated capitalist," said George.

IV

July, 1925, ushered in a series of cloudless days. Amy glanced maternally at the pale faces of the "kiddies."

"I shall take the same rooms as last year," she told Bert.

"Damn!"

"Herbert——!"

"Pardon! I'm fully aware, Amy, that a gentleman doesn't swear in the presence of his wife except under extreme provocation. I—I hate those rooms; I hate that shingly beach; I loathe the filthy food."

"But, Bert dear, the charges are so reasonable."

Rubber was now at the highest point it had touched in years; all rubber shares were booming. The senior partner predicted a reaction, but he contended that dividends would go on increasing, even if the shares suffered a temporary set-back. Amy said archly:

"I'm making such pretty bathing dresses for myself and the children. You will enjoy paddling with them."

"Nothing of the sort. I'm fed up. What have you saved?"

Amy compressed her lips and looked down her nose.

"Not much."

"How much? Out with it. I've never asked the question before."

Amy murmured reluctantly:

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"I've saved two hundred and forty-three pounds and seventeen shillings. All we have against a rainy day."

"Well, this isn't a rainy day, thank the Lord."

"You know what I mean. Mother has sent me ten pounds; that's included."

"You never told me—why?"

Amy, although a pincher, was not a liar.

"Because, well, because Mother wished me to spend it on—on our holiday."

"Just so. And you—you couldn't bring yourself to do that."

Amy flushed and remained silent.

"Your mother is a sensible old lady, although I don't see eye to eye with her about everything. She gave you this tenner for a—a specific—that's the word—purpose. Someway, you don't seem to accept gifts in—in the spirit with which they're offered."

"Well, I never——! What next?"

"I gave you *Riceyman Steps*. A fat lot of good it did you."

Bert, it may be noted, was warming to his work. His eyes sparkled angrily. Amy hardly recognized her hubby. Reproof informed her voice as she confronted him.

"Really, Bert, you are——"

"I know what I am—a worm. And worms turn. You are a pincher, like Mrs. What's-her-name—Earl-forward."

Amy burst into tears.

This was the moment for full confession, but Amy's tears washed from Bert further initiative. She seldom wept; he regarded her, almost reverentially, as a woman of courage and fortitude. He tried to kiss her, but was repulsed.

"To call me a pincher," she sobbed. "Haven't I slaved for you and the children? Haven't I?"

"You have slaved. I admit that."

Amy dabbed at her eyes with a not spotless "hanky." She pinched over the washing.

"That you—you—should be so cruel."

The unhappy Bert felt cruel. Presently Amy accepted a kiss of reconciliation, pecking back at Bert's cheek. And then, out of sheer weakness, she made a mistake of which Bert took advantage :

"If you think that you can do better than I have about making suitable arrangements for our holiday, why, you do it."

"Look you here, Mother, I will. It's my turn, as you say."

The dominant partner sniffed a little, and then left a repentant husband to his thoughts.

v

They were of a mixed and variegated complexion. He felt triumphant and yet abashed—red-faced and shame-faced. Grabbing one opportunity he had missed another. Amy was putting the children to bed. Aimlessly Bert wandered from the dining-room into the sitting-room. The small house had been furnished out of income, on the instalment plan. Seven years' wear and tear were painfully evident.

"Rotten lot of stuff," said Bert, apostrophizing the "parlour suite." "*Rubbish!*"

Wild thoughts entered his head, *stimuli* from the works of Mr. Bennett and Mr. Wells. Bert recalled Mr. Polly, and the deliberate burning of his hateful abode. Mr. Polly upset a lamp. How easy! How simple!

Bert looked wistfully at a box of matches, and—lit his pipe. He envied Mr. Polly, but he dared not commit arson. Ultimately, his thoughts focussed themselves upon the summer holiday. George was going to France.

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George said that a man got more for his money in France, bearing in mind the present rate of exchange. George had spoken of French food, tasty food, and wine—sound wine. Indeed, he had conjured up a vision splendid which appealed alluringly to Bert's imagination. That had expanded together with the legacy. Bert, after making sure that Amy was not likely to interrupt him, hunted up an atlas, and surveyed the coast line of Normandy and Brittany. He closed the atlas with a bang.

"Why not France?" he asked himself. With George's help matters could be arranged, tickets bought and so forth. Then it would be too late for Amy to raise objections. Fancy dwelt upon Dieppe, because it was easy to pronounce.

"One beano," murmured Bert, "just one."

Later, he found Amy in bed but not asleep. She, too, had been thinking of ways and means. She made sure, with feminine instinct, that Bert was contemplating ways beyond means, a sustained assault upon her savings. Nevertheless pangs of conscience assailed her. She knew in her heart that she had pinched, but remained obstinately of the opinion that nothing else was possible.

"You will go to the sea, Bert?" she asked anxiously.

"Of course."

"If you insist upon making the arrangements——"

"I do, dearie. What did our holiday cost last year?"

She mentioned an absurdly small sum.

"I can count on you for that? Fine! I can. You leave the rest to me. I'm a business man; I know what I'm doing."

Amy kissed him. She had made sure that Bert would ask for her mother's ten pounds as a further grant-in-aid. Anyway, long before July was over, a man who had to attend to his own business from ten to five would ask her, humbly and contritely, to attend to what she regarded as her business.

"We have had a tiff and turn," said Bert magnanimously. "Forgive and forget."

Next day, during the luncheon interval, Bert put himself unreservedly into the hands of George. That gay bachelor rose to the occasion. He was about to start on his holiday, which preceded Bert's.

"I'm going to Dieppe. I'll find you the real right thing, old bean. Money no object, eh?"

"None," said Bert firmly. "I've never had a real beano. I want to do this in tip-top style. Bedrooms, bathroom, and a sitting-room *ong suite*. The best of grub. It's going to be a surprise party for Amy. I shall buy myself a smart kit, white ducks, yachting cap—and all that.* Family ticket for the Casino—boating, fishing, listen to the band. The kiddies will have a go at French. Amy can buy a frock or two over there."

"She has no suspicion of what you are up to?"

"How could she suspect? She'll know where we're going when we roll up to Victoria. I've snaps of her and the kiddies if you want them for our passports. We shall travel first-class. In the carriage, on the way to Folkestone, Amy will be enlightened—that's the word."

George said admiringly:

"Bert, I didn't think you had this in you."

"That's what I said to myself when I joined up, before I married. I'm going over the top again—and no blinking error."

"You are," said George, who knew Amy.

VI

In moments of depression, Bert had compared himself to a worm and a mouse. All such self-depreciation passed from him as August approached. Amy looked in vain for signs of humility and contrition. When she touched delicately upon the holiday, Bert assured her that all was

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well. Suitable arrangements had been made. She had to hand over a cheque, which Bert never cashed—a blunder. On the eve of departure, a careful housewife cast up her accounts. Her bank book showed a balance just twenty pounds more than it ought to be. Further enquiry at the bank elicited the information that the cheque to Bert had not been presented. When asked to explain this, Bert dissembled :

“That’s not my business or yours. If people don’t choose to cash a properly endorsed cheque, that’s their affair.”

Amy supposed that the cheque had been sent to a landlady singularly lacking in business instincts. She said in a dazed voice :

“You will need money to buy the tickets.”

“The tickets are bought—and a carriage—I mean seats—is reserved. Suppose, suppose, I say, that I have a little money-box of my own.”

“It must be very little.”

“Now, Amy, I’m running this show, not you.”

“And I hope you’re not running away with yourself ; that’s all.”

She was beginning to be vaguely alarmed. That same afternoon she opened a handbox addressed to Bert. It contained a blue cloth yachting-cap, with three white linen covers. Amy reeled when she lifted it out and gazed at it.

“What’s this ?” she asked querulously, when Bert appeared five minutes later.

Bert had no lie ready.

“Part of my seaside kit. Why do you open my parcels ?”

Amy ignored this absurd question.

“This cap must have cost money.”

“Oh, no. In the City they give ’em away with a pound of tobacco.”

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"Bert——! Are you going crazy?"

"Pardon?"

"You must be dotty to spend money on yourself like this. I can't tell you what I feel about it. I—I daren't."

"You have my permission to buy yourself a new hat. You need one."

Amy retired in dignified silence. Bert whistled as he placed the cap jauntily upon his pate. He admired himself in the looking-glass.

"It gives tone," he thought. "I should not be ashamed of the Chief seeing me in this. Dash it! Amy oughtn't to tamper with my parcels. It's not done in genteel circles. Do I open her parcels? Never!"

He was feeling oddly elated, master, for the first time in his life, of a dramatic situation. On the morrow they would roll up to Victoria. He had reserved a first-class carriage to Folkestone, because, being delicately minded, he was sensible that explanations would not be in order before strangers. Eyeing himself proudly, he murmured: "Victory is in sight."

Victory meant recognition, on the part of Amy, that he was master in his own house and out of it. Upstairs, Amy was bathing Edwina, aged five. Bert, still wearing his yachting cap, appeared upon the scene. Edwina cooed at the little man: "Oh, Daddy, have you buyed a car?" Bert surveyed his daughter blandly. "Not yet," he replied. Amy became even more bewildered, when he added jocularly: "Thanks for the hint, Missy."

The child was certainly on the thin side. Bert looked at her ribs and shanks, and then his eyes lingered upon Amy's tired face.

"You go and lie down," he commanded. "I'll attend to Edwina, and pop her into bed."

Meekly Amy did as she was told. Bert dried his daughter. As he did so, she demanded bread and butter.

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"I'm hungry, Daddy. Mummy says I'm greedy, but I'm not."

Eating bread and butter in bed was strictly forbidden, but Bert sneaked downstairs, had a word with the "general," who was dishing up supper, and sneaked upstairs again carrying a large slice of very plain cake. Edwina wolfed it. At supper, alone with Amy, Bert said decisively: "Edwina hasn't enough to eat."

This provoked a scene. Bert said: "Now, Mother, don't you go off the deep end." But Amy did. A too hot June and July had sucked restraint from her. She flung down knife and fork, and burst into vehement speech.

"There you go again. I'm a pincher. I grudge my own flesh and blood proper food. Why don't you have me up before the Bench? No—I won't shush. I've held my tongue long enough. We were very poor when we married. I *had* to buy inferior cuts. Thanks to me we don't owe a penny to any tradesman. Thanks to me we've something laid by. Edwina *is* thin. I hate fat children. But both our little ones are healthy. Have we been crippled by doctors' bills? There's been plain living and plain thinking in this house. Till lately, I thought that you appreciated the sacrifices I've made. Do I spend money on myself? Do I? Answer me."

Bert assured her that she didn't.

"You said the other day you were fed up. So am I. There!"

"A figure of speech, dear. It is a sad fact that we're not fed up, none of us. Let's be perfectly calm. In this beastly semi-detached house, our neighbours can hear us bickering."

Amy continued, raising her voice to annoy a thankless husband.

"You used to think that what I did was right. I say that you encouraged me to make sixpence go as far as a shilling. And now——" her voice broke.

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Bert was conscious of deflation. He muttered something that rhymes with ham, inaudible to an excited woman.

"If we had money," Amy went on, "if we had a little more than what I've scraped together, we shouldn't live like this. We just have to—and that's all there is about it. You gave me that nasty book. Those people had money; they were rich; they pinched when there was no good reason to pinch. That was wicked and silly, if you like. We aren't rich; we never shall be rich."

She jumped from her chair and ran out of the room. Thoughtfully, Bert helped himself to some Bird's custard. If Amy was in the right of it, he, not she, had defrauded his family of the prime "cuts." He had been rich for nearly a year. He had basely hid his riches from a self-sacrificing wife.

"I'm up against it," he thought, as he despatched the custard. "This beano of mine may provoke beastly ructions."

He got up, walked to the foot of a flight of stairs, not constructed with a view of carrying coffins down it, and assumed a cheerful voice:

"Amy—Amy."

There was no answer. Bert told the "general" she might clear away, went into the sitting-room and smoked two pipes. He was rationed with his tobacco. When he retired to rest Amy, who was wideawake, pretended to be fast asleep.

VII

The boat train leaves Victoria at eleven in the morning; so Amy and Bert had to be up and doing soon after cock-crow. A truce was patched up between them. Bert said once more: "Forgive and forget." To this Amy replied tartly: "I'm a Christian woman, I hope, but some things can't be forgotten, except by a fool." Bert left it

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at that, wondering whether "the wife" reckoned him to be a fool. A better breakfast than usual "brisked up" the family. Bert, carrying what he called a joke much too far, had not divulged their destination. But it was understood that they would arrive "latish" at lodgings already engaged. A solid breakfast, according to Amy, would sustain the travellers *en route* without wasting money upon "snacks" at railway restaurants. She packed a basket with milk, gingerbread nuts, bread and butter, and cheese. Cheese, she pointed out, was a meal in itself. Bert was not convinced, but he acquiesced. His mind dwelt uneasily upon the Channel crossing. Acting upon George's advice, he had bought "Mothersill."

At Victoria the station was seething with holiday-makers, a cheering spectacle. Bert saw to it that the luggage was properly labelled. Amy mounted guard over the hand-baggage and the children. Finally Bert appeared with a porter, an unnecessary extravagance.

"Come on," he shouted gaily.

As they pushed through the gate, Amy said, not crossly :

"Oh! It's Folkestone, is it? Now, why couldn't you say so before?"

Bert made no reply. An instant later speech deserted Amy, as she and the children were bundled into a first-class carriage by the smiling Bert. She could see that he had a shilling ready for the porter; she believed, poor innocent soul, that Bert had secured an empty first-class carriage with a—*bribe*. Bert, she decided, was a man of business, a man of surprising resource. A card in one of the windows apprised her that the carriage was reserved. As the porter hurried away, after touching his cap to Bert, she gasped out :

"We shall be turned out. This carriage is 'engaged.'"

"Engaged," replied Bert superbly, "by ME for US."

Amy fell back into the luxuriously cushioned seat.

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She was helplessly befogged. Mental mists deepened to a pea-soup consistency, when Bert handed her a slip of paper. She glanced at it mechanically. It was the missing cheque.

"Yours," said Bert. "Better tear it up, if—if you don't want to frame it."

Careful habits constrained Amy to slip the cheque into her hand-bag. She closed it with an ominous snap. Then she gazed piteously at a man whom she sincerely believed to be insane.

"I—I d-don't k-know where I am," she stammered.

Bert answered courteously :

"You are in a first-class carriage on your way to Dieppe. Keep cool! This is my affair, my—my beano."

"Your beano?"

"My first beano, dear. To be paid for by me."

"Out of what?"

"Out of fifteen hundred pounds more or less. I think it's more. I haven't had time to squint at the current market prices. Sit tight!"

"Did you say—Dieppe?"

"Yes; our destination is Dieppe. I have engaged rooms at a first-class hotel. We go on, dear, as we have begun. This is my treat. There are smart shops in Dieppe. We shall go a-shopping to-morrow, or this afternoon, before we show up on the prom. or in the Casino. English is spoken in the best shops."

"Bert, are you stark, staring mad?"

"Full explanations will be in order after the train starts."

He smiled at her reassuringly.

VIII

Long before they reached Folkestone Harbour, Amy had grasped the essential facts. A few "oh's" escaped

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her from time to time, but to Bert's satisfaction and relief she seemed to accept great riches in the right spirit. When he finished, she murmured :

“ You must give me time to let all this sink in.”

“ I'm going to give you, Amy, everything you want. It will be, the time of your life—and mine.”

She nodded, as good obedient little wives nod. Bert—can we blame him?—jumped, hot-foot, to the too hasty conclusion that the victory was won. His Amy had surrendered unconditionally.

For the moment she had to attend to the children. Bert read the money article in *The Times*. Doing so, he smoked a large expensive cigar. . . .

They reached their hotel without misadventure. The Channel exacted no tribute ; they passed triumphantly through the Custom House. Bert, however, felt piqued when Amy looked at the handsome rooms engaged by George.

“ I'm sure they're very nice, but they don't face the sea,” she observed.

“ Don't face the sea——! Do you know what I'm paying for these rooms ? ”

“ That's your affair, Bert ; you said so. I merely passed the remark that they don't face the sea. Shall we have a look at the shops, dear ? I'm not a bit tired. The kiddies can rest.”

“ I'll ring for the chambermaid, give her five francs, and tell her to keep an eye on 'em.”

“ Better give her ten,” suggested Amy.

Bert stared at her, opened his mouth, and closed it.

The chambermaid accepted ten francs with an air that indicated a sense of merely receiving something on account.

“ Not too grateful—that baggage,” observed Bert.

“ Two shillings isn't much,” replied Amy.

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Husband and wife entered several shops before dinner. Bert said magnificently :

"Now, Amy, you buy what you want. I pay for it. I have bought my own kit—*three* kits. Morning, afternoon, and night. You do the same."

"Rightie-O," replied Amy.

For some years Bert had not gone shopping with Amy. She attended sales; she priced everything, haggled, pulled money out of her purse as if she were extracting her own back teeth, and took hours where a self-respecting man takes minutes.

Was it the exhilarating air of Dieppe that produced in a staid little pincher all the signs of intoxication? Amy bought, without haggling, three frocks—Paris "models." She bought three hats. A mere male dares not set down what else she bought. Bert became slightly restive, but he paid up valiantly. As he glanced at his watch, Amy whispered :

"Dear Bert, have we time to pop into a first-class jewellery establishment?"

"Jewellery?" gasped Bert.

"Why, yes. I need a few little things. Cheap beads don't go with Paris frocks."

"True enough," said Bert desperately. "Come on."

Amy emerged, blushing, from the jeweller's shop, the proud owner of a string of lapis lazuli beads and a paste ornament for the hair. Bert carried a parcel. In it were an evening frock, a pair of real silk stockings, satin shoes, and a dainty cloak.

They dressed for dinner. Bert dressed in the bathroom. He was slipping into a new dinner jacket, when the door opened and an apparition appeared.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Bert.

"Do I look nice?" asked Amy coquettishly.

Bert was human. He had arrayed himself in his new kit sorrowfully, because the beano was not "panning

Dew of the Sea

out" according to plan. Obviously, extremes met in his amazing wife. She had developed without warning a mad extravagance that made a city clerk shiver with apprehension.

"Amy! You look a perfect duck."

He embraced her rapturously.

"Oh, Bert—how sweet you are!"

They left the kiddies slumbering peacefully in their twin bedlets, and descended to a gorgeous dining-room. A personage piloted monsieur and madame to a small round table reserved for two. With a Napoleonic gesture, he handed monsieur the wine list.

"What gargle would you fancy, darling?"

"Champagne, of course."

Bert winced. The personage kindly indicated a long list of different brands. Mistaking Bert's hesitation, he said in English:

"The Pol Roger, *très sec*, 1915, is much liked by our English clients."

"Good enough," said Bert.

"Monsieur Parkinson instructed me to see to it that monsieur and madame receive every attention."

"Fine!" said Bert nervously.

They enjoyed their dinner; they danced together afterwards; they *lost*, hilariously, two hundred francs at "petits chevaux!"

Long after midnight, they returned, slightly chastened but happy, to the rooms that did not look on the sea. Amy glanced at Bert's face. It was rejuvenated; it was the face of a lover. She moved slowly towards him, placed her bare arms round his neck, and kissed him tenderly.

"Have you any regrets?" she asked.

"Me? None. But it has been an eye-opener."

"For both of us—yes."

"Amy, how queerly you say that."

Bert's Beano

"Well, Bert, you—you wanted to surprise me, and I—I played up. And I didn't quite play the game. Oh, Bert, I *am* a pincher, but don't call me Mrs. Earlforward. I'm not as bad as she was. And you, you dear, you're not really extravagant. But you were right and I was wrong about our holiday. That ought to be a charge on the economies of the year. I hated to spend your money, Bert, but I love these pretty things. And we *are* going to have a real beano."

They had it.