

JAMES HENRY was the sole remaining son of his mother, and she was a widow. His father, some twelve months previously, had inadvertently encountered a motor-car travelling at great speed, and had forthwith been laid to rest. His sisters—whom James Henry affected to despise—had long since left the parental roof and gone to seek their fortunes in the great world ; while his brothers had in all cases died violent deaths, following in the steps of their lamented father. In fact, as I said, James Henry was alone in the world saving only for his mother : and as she'd married again since his father's death he felt that his responsibility so far as she was concerned was at an end. In fact, he frequently cut her when he met her about the house.

Relations had become particularly strained after this second matrimonial venture. An aristocrat of the most unbending description

himself, he had been away during the period of her courtship—otherwise, no doubt, he would have protected his father's stainless escutcheon. As it was, he never quite recovered from the shock.

It was at breakfast one morning that he heard the news. Lady Monica told him as she handed him his tea. "James Henry," she remarked reproachfully, "your mother is a naughty woman." True to his aristocratic principle of stoical calm, he continued to consume his morning beverage. There were times when the mention of his mother bored him to extinction. "A very naughty woman," she continued. "Dad"—she addressed a man who had just come into the room—"it's occurred."

"What—have they come?"

"Yes—last night. Five."

"Are they good ones?"

Lady Alice laughed. "I was just telling James Henry what I thought of his Family when you came in. I'm afraid Harriet Emily is incorrigible."

"Look at James!" exclaimed the Earl—"he's spilled his tea all over the carpet."

He was inspecting the dishes on the side-board as he spoke.

"He always does. His whiskers dribble. Jervis tells me that he thinks Harriet Emily must have—er—flirted with a most undesirable acquaintance."

"Oh, has she?" Her father opened the morning paper and started to enjoy his breakfast. "We must drown 'em, my dear, drown—— Hullo! the Russians have crossed the——" It sounded like an explosion in a soda-water factory, and James Henry protested.

"Quite right, Henry. He oughtn't to do it at breakfast. It doesn't really make one any happier. Did *you* know about your mother? Now don't gobble your food." Lady Monica held up an admonishing finger. "Four of your brothers and sisters are more or less respectable, James, but there's *one*—there's one that is distinctly reminiscent of a dachshund. Oh! 'Arriet, Arriet—I'm ashamed of you."

James Henry sneezed heavily and got down from the table. Always a perfect gentleman, he picked up the crumbs round his chair, and

even went so far as to salvage a large piece of sausage skin which had slipped on to the floor. Then, full of rectitude and outwardly unconcerned, he retired to a corner behind a cupboard and earnestly contemplated a little hole in the floor.

Outwardly calm—yes: that at least was due to the memory of his blue-blooded father. But inwardly he seethed. With his head on one side he alternately sniffed and blew as he had done regularly every morning for the past two months. His father's wife the mother of a sausage-dog! Incredible! It must have been that miserable fat beast who lived at the "Pig and Whistle." The insolence—the inconceivable impertinence of such an unsightly corpulent traducer daring to ally himself with One of the Fox Terriers. He growled slightly in his disgust, and three mice inside the wall laughed gently. But—still, the girls are ever frail. He blushed slightly at some recollection, and realised that he must make allowances. But a sausage dog! Great heavens!

"James—*avançons, mon brave.*" Lady Monica was standing in the window. "We

will hie us to the village. Dad, don't forget that our branch of the Federated Association of Women War Workers are drilling here this afternoon."

"Good heavens! my dear girl—is it?" Her father gazed at her in alarm. "I think—er—I think I shall have to—er—run up to Town—er—this afternoon."

"I thought you'd have to, old dear. In fact, I've ordered the car for you. Come along, Henry—we must go and get a boy scout to be bandaged."

James Henry gave one last violently facial contortion at the entrance of the mouse's lair, and rose majestically to his feet. If she wanted to go out, he fully realised that he must go with her: Emily would have to wait. He would go round later and see his poor misguided mother and reason with her; but just at present the girl was his principal duty. She generally asked his advice on various things when they went for a walk, and the least he could do was to pretend to be interested at any rate.

Apparently this morning she was in need of much counsel and help. Having arrived

at a clearing in the wood, on the way to the village, she sat down on the fallen trunk of a tree, and addressed him.

“ James—what am I to do? Derek is coming this afternoon before he goes back to France. What shall I tell him, Henry—what *shall* I tell him? Because I know he’ll ask me again. Thank you, old man, but you’re not very helpful, and I’d much sooner you kept it yourself.”

Disgustedly James Henry removed the carcass of a field mouse he had just procured, and resigned himself to the inevitable.

“ I’m fond of him; I like him—in fact at times more than like him. But is it the *real* thing? Now what do you think, James Henry?—tell me all that is in your mind. Ought I——”

It was then that he gave his celebrated rendering of a young typhoon, owing to the presence of a foreign substance—to wit, a fly—in a ticklish spot on his nose.

“ You think that, do you? Well, perhaps you’re right. Come on, my lad, we must obtain the victim for this afternoon. I wonder if those little boys like it? To do

some good and kindly action each day—that's their motto, James. And as one person to another you must admit that to be revived from drowning, resuscitated from fainting, brought-to from an epileptic fit, and have two knees, an ankle, and a collar-bone set at the same time is some good action even for a boy scout."

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It was not until after lunch that James Henry paid his promised call on his mother. Maturer considerations had but strengthened his resolve to make allowances. After all, these things do happen in the best families. He was, indeed, prepared to be magnanimous and forgive; he was even prepared to be interested; the only thing he wasn't prepared for was the nasty bite he got on his ear. That settled it. It was then that he finally washed his hands of his undutiful parent. As he told her, he felt more sorrow than anger; he should have realised that anyone who could have dealings with a sausage-hound must be dead to all sense of decency—and that the only thing he asked was that in

the future she would conceal the fact that they were related.

Then he left her—and trotting round to the front of the house, found great activity in progress on the lawn.

“ Good heavens ! James Henry, do they often do this ? ” With a shout of joy he recognised the speaker. And having told him about Harriet, and blown heavily at a passing spider and then trodden on it, he sat down beside the soldier on the steps. The game on the lawn at first sight looked dull ; and he only favoured it with a perfunctory glance. In fact, what on earth there was in it to make the soldier beside him shake and shake while the tears periodically rolled down his face was quite beyond Henry.

The principal player seemed to be a large man—also in khaki—with a loud voice. Up to date he had said nothing but “ Now then, ladies,” at intervals and in a rising crescendo. Then it all became complicated.

“ Now then, ladies, when I says Number—you numbers from right to left in an heven tone of voice. The third lady from the left ’as no lady behind ’er—seeing as we’re a hodd

number. She forms the blank file. Yes, you, mum—you, I means.”

“What are you pointing at me for, my good man?” The Vicar’s wife suddenly realised she was being spoken to. “Am I doing anything wrong?”

“No, mum, no. Not this time. I was only saying as you ’ave no one behind you.”

“Oh! I’ll go there at once—I’m so sorry.” She retired to the rear rank. “Dear Mrs. Goodenough, *did* I tread upon your foot?—so clumsy of me! Oh, what is that man saying now? But you’ve just told me to come here. You did nothing of the sort? How rude!”

But as I said, the game did not interest James Henry, so he wandered away and played in some bushes. There were distinct traces of a recently moving mole, which was far more to the point. Then having found—after a diligent search and much delight in pungent odours—that the mole was a has-been, our Henry disappeared for a space. And far be it from me to disclose where he went: his intentions were always strictly honourable.

When he appeared again the Earl had just returned from London, and was talking to the tall soldier-man. The Women War Workers had departed, and, as James Henry approached, his mistress came out and joined the two men.

“Have those dreadful women gone, my dear?” asked the Earl as he saw her.

“You’re very rude, Dad. The Federated Association of the W.W.W. is a very fine body of patriotic women. What did you think of our drill, Derek?”

“Wonderful, Monica. Quite the most wonderful thing I’ve ever seen.” The soldier solemnly offered her a cigarette.

“You men are all jealous. We’re coming out to France as V.A.D.s soon.”

“Good Lord, Derek—you ought to have seen their first drill. In one corner of the lawn that poor devil of a sergeant with his face a shiny purple alternately sobbed and bellowed like a bull—while twenty-seven W.W.W.’s tied themselves into a knot like a Rugby football scrum, and told one another how they’d done it. It was the most heart-rending sight I’ve ever seen.”

"Dear old Dad!" The girl blew a cloud of smoke. "You told it better last time."

"Don't interrupt, Monica. The final tableau——"

"Which one are you going to tell him, dear? The one where James Henry bit the Vicar's wife in the leg, or the one where the sergeant with a choking cry of 'Double, damn you!' fell fainting into the rhododendron bush?"

"I think the second is the better," remarked the soldier pensively. "Dogs always bite the Vicar's wife's leg. Not a hobby I should personally take up, but——"

They all laughed. "Now run indoors, old 'un, and tell John to get you a mixed vermouth—I want to talk to Derek." The girl gently pushed her father towards the open window.

It was at that particular moment in James Henry's career that, having snapped at a wasp and partially killed it, he inadvertently sat on the carcass by mistake. As he explained to Harriet Emily afterwards, it wasn't so much the discomfort of the proceeding

which annoyed him, as the unfeeling laughter of the spectators. And it was only when she'd bitten him in the other ear that he remembered he had disowned her that very afternoon.

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But elsewhere, though he was quite unaware of the fact, momentous decisions as to his future were being taken. The Earl had gone in to get his mixed vermouth, and outside his daughter and the soldier-man sat and talked. It was fragmentary, disjointed—the talk of old friends with much in common. Only in the man's voice there was that suppressed note which indicates things more than any mere words. Monica heard it and sighed—she'd heard it so often before in his voice. James Henry had heard it too during a previous talk—one which he had graced with his presence—and had gone to the extent of discussing it with a friend. On this occasion he had been gently dozing on the man's knee, when suddenly he had been rudely awakened. In his dreams he had heard her say, "Dear old Derek—I'm afraid it's No. You see, I'm

not sure"; which didn't seem much to make a disturbance about.

"Would you believe it," he remarked later, "but as she spoke the soldier-man's grip tightened on my neck till I was almost choked!"

"What did you do?" asked his friend, a disreputable "long-dog." "Did you bite him?"

"I did not." James Henry sniffed. "It was not a biting moment. Tact was required. I just gave a little cough, and instantly he took his hand away. 'Old man,' he whispered to me—she'd left us—'I'm sorry. I didn't mean to—I wasn't thinking.' So I licked his hand to show him I understood."

"I know what you mean. I'm generally there when my bloke comes out of prison, and he always kicks me. But it's meant kindly."

"As a matter of fact, that is not what I mean—though I dare say your experiences on such matters are profound." James was becoming blue-blooded. "The person who owns you, and who is in the habit of

going to—er—prison, no doubt shows his affection for you in that way. And very suitable too. But the affair to which I alluded is quite different. The soldier-man is almost as much in my care as the girl. And so I know his feelings. At the time, he was suffering, though why I don't understand; and therefore it was up to me to suffer with him. It helped him."

"H'm," the lurcher grunted. "Dare say you're right. What about a trip to the gorse? I haven't seen a rabbit for some time."

And if Henry had not sat on the wasp his neck might again have been squeezed that evening. As it was, the danger period was over by the time he reappeared and jumped into the girl's lap. Not only had the sixth proposal been gently turned down—but James's plans for the near future had been settled for him in a most arbitrary manner.

"Well, old man, how's the tail?" laughed the soldier. James Henry yawned—the subject seemed a trifle personal even amongst old friends. "Have you heard you're coming with me to France?"

"And you must bring him to me as soon as I get over," cried the girl.

"At once, dear lady. I'll ask for special leave, and if necessary an armistice."

"Won't you bark at the Huns, my cherub?" She laughed and got up. "Go to your uncle—I'm going to dress."

What happened then was almost more than even the most long-suffering terrier could stand. He was unceremoniously bundled into his uncle's arms by his mistress, and at the same moment she bent down. A strange noise was heard such as he had frequently noted, coming from the top of his own head, when his mistress was in an affectionate mood—a peculiar form of exercise, he deduced, which apparently amused some people. But the effect on the soldier was electrical. He sprang out of his chair with a shout—"Monica—you little devil—come back," and James Henry fell winded to the floor. But a flutter of white disappearing indoors was the only answer. . . .

"She's not sure, James, my son—she's not sure." The man pulled out his cigarette-case and contemplated him thoughtfully.

“And how the deuce are we to make her sure? I want it, and her father wants it, and so does she if she only knew it. They’re the devil, James Henry—they’re the devil.”

But his hearer did not want philosophy; he wanted his tummy rubbed. He lay with one eye closed, his four paws turned up limply towards the sky, and sighed gently. Never before had the suggestion failed; enthusiastic admirers had always taken the hint gladly, and he had graciously allowed them the pleasure. But this time—horror upon horror—not only was there no result, but in a dreamy, contemplative manner the soldier actually deposited his used and still warm match carefully on the spot where James Henry’s wind had been. Naturally there was only one possible course open to him. He rose quietly and left. It was only when he was thinking the matter over later that it struck him that his exit would have been more dignified if he hadn’t sat down half-way across the lawn to scratch his right ear. It was more than likely that a completely false construction would be put on

that simple action by anyone who didn't know he'd had words with Harriet Emily.

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Thus James Henry—gentleman, at his country seat in England. I have gone out of my way to describe what may be taken as an average day in his life, in order to show him as he was before he went to France to be banished from the country—cashiered in disgrace a few weeks after his arrival. Which only goes to prove the change that war causes in even the most polished and courtly.

I am told that the alteration for the worse started shortly after his arrival at the front. What did it I don't know—but he lost one whisker and a portion of an ear, thus giving him a somewhat lopsided appearance ; though rakish withal. It may have been a detonator which went off as he ate it—it may have been foolish curiosity over a maxim—it may even have been due to the fact that he found a motor-bicycle standing still, what time it made strange provocative noises, and failed to notice that the back wheel was off the ground and rotating at a great pace.

Whatever it was, it altered James Henry. Not that it soured his temper—not at all; but it made him more reckless, less careful of appearances. He forgot the repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere, and a series of incidents occurred which tended to strain relations all round.

There was the question of the three dead chickens, for instance. Had they disappeared decently and in order much might have been thought but nothing would have been known. But when they were deposited on their owner's doorstep, with James Henry mounting guard over the corpses himself, it was a little difficult to explain the matter away. That was the trouble—his sense of humour seemed to have become distorted.

The pastime of hunting for rats in the sewers of Ypres cannot be too highly commended; but having got thoroughly wet in the process, James Henry's practice of depositing the rat and himself on the Adjutant's bed was open to grave criticism.

But enough: these two instances were, I am sorry to state, but types of countless

other regrettable episodes which caused the popularity of James Henry to wane.

The final decree of death or banishment came when James had been in the country some seven weeks.

On the day in question a dreadful shout was heard, followed by a flood of language which I will refrain from committing to print. And then the Colonel appeared in the door of his dug-out.

“Where is that accursed idiot, Murgatroyd? Pass the word along for the damn’ fool.”

“’Urry up, Conky. The ole man’s a-twittering for you.” Murgatroyd emerged from a recess.

“What’s ’e want?”

“I’d go and find out, cully. I think ’e’s going to mention you in ’is will.” At that moment a fresh outburst floated through the stillness.

“Great ’Eavens!” Murgatroyd reluctantly rose to his feet. “So long, boys. Tell me mother she was in me thoughts ’ip to the end.” He paused outside the dug-out and then went manfully in. “You wanted me, sir.”

"Look at this, you blithering ass, look at this." The Colonel was searching through his Fortnum and Mason packing-case on the floor. "Great heavens! and the caviare too—embedded in the butter. Five defunct rodents in the brawn"—he threw each in turn at his servant, who dodged round the dug-out like a pea in a drum—"The marmalade and the pâté de fois gras inseparably mixed together, and the whole covered with a thick layer of disintegrating cigar."

"It wasn't me, sir." Murgatroyd spoke in an aggrieved tone.

"I didn't suppose it was, you fool." The Colonel straightened himself and glared at his hapless minion. "Great heavens! there's another rat on my hair-brush."

"One of the same five, sir. It ricocheted off my face." With a magnificent nonchalance his servant threw it out of the door. "I think, sir, it must be James 'Enry."

"Who the devil is James Henry?"

"Sir Derek Temple's little dawg, sir."

"Indeed." The Colonel's tone was ominous. "Go round and ask Sir Derek

Temple to be good enough to come and see me at once."

What happened exactly at that interview I cannot say; though I understand that James Henry considered an absurd fuss had been made about a trifle. In fact he found it so difficult to lie down with any comfort that night that he missed much of his master's conversation with him.

"You've topped it, James, you've put the brass hat on. The old man threatens to turn out a firing party if he ever sees you again."

James feigned sleep: this continual harping on what was over and done with he considered the very worst of form. Even if he had put the caviare in the butter and his foot in the marmalade—well, hang it all—what then? He'd presented the old buster with five dead rats, which was more than he'd do for a lot of people.

"In fact, James, you are not popular, my boy—and I shudder to think what Monica will do with you when she gets you. She's come over, you may be pleased to hear, Henry. She is V.A.D.-ing at a charming

hospital that overlooks the sea. James, why can't I go sick—and live for a space at that charming hospital that overlooks the sea? Think of it: here am I, panting to have my face washed by her, panting——” For a moment he rhapsodised in silence. “Breakfast in bed, poached egg in the bed: oh! James, my boy, and she probably never even thinks of me.”

He took a letter out of his pocket and held it under the light of the candle. “‘Not much to do at present, but delightful weather. The hospital is nearly empty, though there's one perfect dear who is almost fit—a Major in some Highland regiment.’

“Listen to that, James. Some great raw-boned, red-kneed Scotchman, and she calls him a perfect dear!” His listener blew resignedly and again composed himself to slumber.

“‘How is James behaving? I'd love to see the sweet pet again.’ Sweet pet: yes—my boy—you look it. ‘Do you remember how annoyed he was when I put him in your arms that afternoon at home?’ Do you hear that, James?—do I remember? Monica,

you adorable soul . . .” He relapsed into moody thought.

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At what moment during that restless night the idea actually came I know not. Possibly a diabolical chuckle on the part of James Henry, who was hunting in his dreams, goaded him to desperation. But it is an undoubted fact that when Sir Derek Temple rose the next morning he had definitely determined to embark on the adventure which culminated in the tragedy of the cat, the General, and James. The latter is reputed to regard the affair as quite trifling and unworthy of the fierce glare of publicity that beat upon it. The cat has, or rather had, different views.

Now, be it known to those who live in England that it is one thing to say in an airy manner, as Derek had said to Lady Monica, that he would come and see her when she landed in France; it is another to do it. But to a determined and unprincipled man nothing is impossible; and though it would be the height of indiscretion for me to hint

even at the methods he used to attain his ends, it is a certain fact that in the afternoon of the second day following the episode of the five rodents he found himself at a certain seaport town with James Henry as the other member of the party. And having had his hair cut, and extricated his companion from a street brawl, he hired a motor and drove into the country.

Now, Derek Temple's knowledge of hospitals and their ways was not profound. He had a hazy idea that on arriving at the portals he would send in his name, and that in due course he would consume a *tête-à-tête* tea with Monica in her private boudoir. He rehearsed the scene in his mind: the quiet, cutting reference to Highlanders who failed to understand the official position of nurses—the certainty that this particular one was a scoundrel: the fact that, on receiving her letter, he had at once rushed off to protect her. And as he got to this point the car turned into the gates of a palatial hotel and stopped by the door. James Henry jumped through the open window, and his master followed him up the steps.

"Is Lady Monica Travers at home: I mean—er—is she in the hospital?" He addressed an R.A.M.C. sergeant in the entrance.

"No dawgs allowed in the 'ospital, sir." The scandalised N.C.O. glared at James Henry, who was furiously growling at a hot-air grating in the floor. "You must get 'im out at once, sir: we're being inspected to-day."

"Heel, James, heel. He'll be quite all right, Sergeant. Just find out, will you, about Lady Monica Travers?"

"Beg pardon, sir, but are you a patient?"

"Patient—of course I'm not a patient. Do I look like a patient?"

"Well, sir, there ain't no visiting allowed when the sisters is on duty."

"What? But it's preposterous. Do you mean to say I can't see her unless I'm a patient? Why, man, I've got to go back in an hour."

"Very sorry, sir—but no visiting allowed. Very strict 'ere, and as I says we're full of brass 'ats to-day."

For a moment Derek was nonplussed; this

was a complication on which he had not reckoned.

"But look here, sergeant, you know . . ."
and even as he spoke he looked upstairs and beheld Lady Monica. Unfortunately she had not seen him, and the situation was desperate. Forcing James Henry into the arms of the outraged N.C.O., he rushed up the stairs and followed her.

"Derek!" The girl stopped in amazement.
"What in the world are you doing here?"

"Monica, my dear, I've come to see you. Tell me that you don't really love that damn Scotchman."

An adorable smile spread over her face.
"You idiot! I don't love anyone. My work fills my life."

"Rot! You said in your letter you had nothing to do at present. Monica, take me somewhere where I can make love to you."

"I shall do nothing of the sort. In the first place you aren't allowed here at all; and in the second I don't want to be made love to."

"And in the third," said Derek grimly, as the sound of a procession advancing down a

corridor came from round the corner, "you're being inspected to-day, and that—if I mistake not—is the great pan-jam-drum himself."

"Oh! good Heavens, Derek, I'd forgotten. Do go, for goodness' sake. Run—I shall be sacked."

"I shall not go. As the great man himself rounds that corner I shall kiss you with a loud trumpeting noise."

"You brute! Oh! what shall I do?—there they are. Come in here." She grabbed him by the wrist and dragged him into a small deserted sitting-room close by.

"You darling," he remarked and promptly kissed her. "Monica, dear, you must listen——"

"Sit down, you idiot. I'm sure they saw me. You must pretend you're a patient just come in. I know I shall be sacked. The General is dreadfully particular. Put this thermometer in your mouth. Quick, give me your hand—I must take your pulse."

"I think," said a voice outside the door, "that I saw—er—a patient being brought into one of these rooms."

"Surely not, sir. These rooms are all

empty." The door opened and the cavalcade paused. "Er—Lady Monica . . . really."

"A new patient, Colonel," she remarked. "I am just taking his temperature." Derek, his eyes partially closed, lay back in a chair, occasionally uttering a slight groan.

"The case looks most interesting." The General came and stood beside him. "Most interesting. Have you—er—diagnosed the symptoms, sister?" His lips were twitching suspiciously.

"Not yet, General. The pulse is normal—and the temperature"—she looked at the thermometer—"is—good gracious me! have you kept it properly under your tongue?" She turned to Derek, who nodded feebly. "The temperature is only 93." She looked at the group in an awestruck manner.

"Most remarkable," murmured the General. "One feels compelled to wonder what it would have been if he'd had the right end in his mouth." Derek emitted a hollow groan. "And where do you feel it worst, my dear boy?" continued the great man, gazing at him through his eyeglass.

“Dyspepsia, sir,” he whispered feebly. “Dreadful dyspepsia. I can’t sleep, I—er—Good Lord!” His eyes opened, his voice rose, and with a fixed stare of horror he gazed at the door. Through it with due solemnity came James Henry holding in his mouth a furless and very dead cat. He advanced to the centre of the group—laid it at the General’s feet—and having sneezed twice, sat down and contemplated his handiwork: his tail thumping the floor feverishly in anticipation of well-merited applause.

It was possibly foolish, but, as Derek explained afterwards to Monica, the situation had passed beyond him. He arose and confronted the General, who was surveying the scene coldly, and with a courtly explanation of “Your cat, I believe, sir,” he passed from the room.

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The conclusion of this dreadful drama may be given in three short sentences.

The first was spoken by the General. “Let it be buried.” And it was so.

The second was whispered by Lady Monica

—later. “Darling, I had to *say* we were engaged; it looked so peculiar.” And it was even more so.

The third was snorted by James Henry. “First I’m beaten and then I’m kissed. Damn all cats!”