

FICTION

Ellis Parker Butler

The Adventures Of A Suburbanite

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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THE ADVENTURES OF A SUBURBANITE

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titlepage



CONTENTS

[I. THE PRAWLEYS](#)

[II. MR. PRAWLEY'S GARDEN](#)

[III. THE EQUINE PALACE](#)

[IV. "BOB"](#)

[V. THE NEW MR. PRAWLEY](#)

[VI. THE SPECKLED HEN](#)

[VII. CHESTERFIELD WHITING](#)

[VIII. SALTED ALMONDS](#)

[IX. THE ROYAL GAME OR SEVERAL DAYS AFTER THE PIG EPISODE](#)

[X. ADVANCED GOLF](#)

[XI. MY DOMESTICATED AUTOMOBILE](#)

[XII. MR. PRAWLEY RETURNS](#)

[XIII. MILLINGTON'S MOTOR MYSTERY](#)

I. THE PRAWLEYS

ISOBEL was born in a flat, and that was no fault of her own; but she was born in a flat, and reared in a flat, and married from a flat, and, for two years after we were married, we lived in a flat; but I am not a born flat-dweller myself, and as soon as possible I proposed that we move to the country. Isobel hesitated, but she hesitated so weakly that on the first of May we had bought the place at Westcote and moved into it.

The very day I moved into my house Millington came over and said he was glad some one had moved in, because the last man that had lived in the house was afraid of automobiles, and would never take a spin with him. He said he hoped I was not afraid; and when I said I was not, he immediately proposed that we take a little spin out to Port Lafayette as soon as I had my furniture straightened around. I thought it was very nice and neighbourly and unusual for a man with an automobile to begin an acquaintance that way; but I did not know Millington's automobile so well then as I grew to know it afterward.

I liked Millington. He was a short, Napoleon-looking man, with bulldog jaws and not very much hair, and I was glad to have him for a neighbour, particularly as my neighbour on the other side was a tall, haughty-looking man. He leaned on the division fence and stared all the while our furniture was being moved in. I spoke to Millington about him, and all Millington said was: "Rolf's? Oh, he's no good! He won't ride in an automobile."

At first, while we were really getting settled in our house, Isobel was bright and cheerful and seemed to have forgotten flats entirely but on the tenth of May I saw a change coming over her, and when I spoke of it she opened her heart to me.

"John," she said, "I am afraid I cannot stand it. I shall try to, for your sake, but I do not think I can. I am so lonely! I feel like an atom floating in space."

"Isobel!" I said kindly but reprovingly. "With the Millingtons on one side and the Rolfs on the other?"

"I know," she admitted contritely enough; "but you can't understand. Always and always, since I was born, some one has lived overhead, and some one has lived underneath. Sometimes only the janitor lived underneath--"

"Isobel," I said, "if you will try to explain what you mean--"

"I mean flats," she said dolefully. "I always lived in a flat, John, and there was always a family above and a family below, and it frightens me to think I am in a house where there is no family above me, and not even a janitor's family below me. It makes me feel naked, or suspended in air, or as if there was no ground under my feet. It makes me gasp!"

"That is nonsense!" I said. "That is the beauty of having a house. We have it all to ourselves. Now, in a flat--"

"We had our flat all to ourselves, John," she reminded me; "but a flat isn't so unbounded as a house. Just think; there is nothing between us and the top of the sky! Not a single family! It makes me nervous. And there is nothing beneath us!"

"Now, my dear," I said soothingly, "China is beneath us, and no doubt a very respectable family is keeping house directly below."

Isobel sighed contentedly.

"I am so glad you thought of that!" she cried. "Now, when I feel lonely, I can imagine I feel the house jar as the Chinese family move their piano, or I can imagine that I hear their phonograph."

"Very good," I said; "and if you can imagine all that, why cannot you imagine a family overhead, too? The whole attic is there. Very well; I give up the entire attic to your imagination."

Then I kissed her and went into the back garden. My opinion is that the man that laid out that back garden was oversanguine. I am passionately fond of gardening, and believe in back gardens; but at the present price of seed and the present hardness of hoe handles, I think that back garden is too large. This is not a mere flash opinion, either; it is a matter of study. The first day I stuck spade into that garden I had given little thought to its size, but by the time I had spaded all day I began to have a pretty well-defined opinion of gardens and how large they should be, and by the end of the third day of spading I believe I may say I was well equipped to testify as an expert on garden sizes. That was the day the blisters on my hands became raw.

The day after my little conversation with Isobel I returned home from business to find her awaiting me at the gate. She wore a bright smile, and she put her hand through my arm and hopped into step with me.

"John," she said cheerfully, "the Prawleys moved in to-day."

"The Prawleys? Who are the Prawleys, and what did they move into?" I asked.

"Why, how do I know who they are, John?" she said. "I suppose we will know all about them soon enough, but you can't expect me to learn all about a family the day they move in. And as for what they moved into, of course there was only one vacant flat."

"Flat? One vacant flat? What flat?" I asked. I was afraid Isobel was not entirely herself.

"The one above us," she said, and then as she saw the blank look on my face she said: "The--the--oh, John, *don't* you understand? The attic!"

"Hum!" I said suspiciously, looking at Isobel; but her face was so bright, and she looked so thoroughly contented that I did not tell her what I thought of this sort of pretending. Too much of it is not good for a person. "Very well," I said; "I only hope they will not be too noisy."

"I don't think they will," said Isobel, smiling. "At least not while you are home." She helped me off with my light coat, and when we were seated at the table she said: "By the way, Mr. Millington leaned over the fence this afternoon, and said he hoped you would take a little ride to Port Lafayette with him soon. He says his automobile is in almost perfect shape now."

II. MR. PRAWLEY'S GARDEN

ISOBEL was brighter at dinner than she had been for some days. She seemed quite contented, now that the imaginary Prawleys had moved into the attic. She said no more about them, and when I had finished my dinner I put on my gardening togs and went out to garden awhile before dark. Blisters are certainly most painful after a day of rest, and I did not work long. I was almost in despair about the garden. Fully half had not been touched, and what I had already done looked ragged and as if it needed doing over again. The more I dug, the more great chunks of sod I found buried in it, and it seemed as if my garden, when I had dug out all the chunks of sod, would be a pit instead of a level. It threatened to be a sunken garden.

"Isobel," I said angrily, when the sun had set and I was once more sitting in the chair on my veranda, with my hands wrapped in wet handkerchiefs, "you know how passionately fond of gardening I am, and how I longed and pined for a garden for two full years, and you know, therefore, that it takes a great deal of gardening to satisfy me; but I must say that the man who laid out that garden must have been a man of shameful leisure. He laid out a garden twice as large as any garden should be."

"Then why do you try to work it all?" she asked.

"Oh, work it!" I exclaimed with some irritation. "I can't let half a garden go to weeds! That would look nice, wouldn't it! I'll work it all right! You don't care how I suffer and struggle. You sit here--"

The next evening when I reached home

I did not feel particularly happy. My hands were quite raw, and my back had sharp pains and was stiff, and I spoke gruffly to Millington when he suggested an automobile ride to Port Lafayette for that evening.

"No!" I said shortly. "You ought to know I can't go. I've got to kill myself in that garden!"

But I was resolved Isobel should never see me conquered by a patch of ground, and after dinner I went out with my spade and hoe. When my glance fell on the garden I stopped short. I was very angry.

"Isobel?" I called sharply.

She came tripping around the house and to my side.

"Who did that?" I asked severely. I was in no mood for nonsense.

She looked at the garden. One half of it--not the half I had struggled with, but the other half--had been spaded, crushed, ridged, planted, and left in perfect condition. The small cabbage plants had been carefully watered. Not a grain of earth was larger than a pin head. Not a blade of grass stuck up anywhere. Isobel looked at the garden, and then at me.

"I warned him!" she said. "I warned him you would be angry when you came home! I told him you wanted to garden that half of the garden, too, and that you would probably go right up and give him a piece of your mind, but he insisted that he had a right to half the garden, and--"

"Who insisted that he had a right to half my garden?" I demanded.

"Why," said Isobel, as if surprised at the question, "Mr. Prawley did."

"Prawley? Prawley? I don't know any Prawley!"

"Don't you know the Prawleys that moved into the flat above us?" said Isobel. "And he is a very nice man, too," she continued. "He was not at all rude. He merely insisted, in a quiet way, that as he was a tenant and as there was only one back garden, and two families in the house, he was entitled to half the garden."

She did not give me a chance to speak, but ran on in that vein, while I stood and looked at the garden and, among other things, thought of my blistered hands and my lame back.

"Well and good, Isobel," I said at length. "I do not wish to have anything to say to the Prawleys, nor do I wish to quarrel with them, and since he demands half the garden you may tell him he is welcome to it. I cannot conceal that in taking half of it away from me he has robbed me of just that much passionate happiness, and you may tell him I do not like the way he gardens, but I will say no more about it!"

"Oh, you dear old John!" said Isobel. "And now you shall not touch that miserable garden with your poor sore hands. You shall just sit on the veranda with me and let me bathe your palms with witch hazel." Although I assumed an air of sternness in speaking to Isobel of Mr. Prawley I was glad to be able to humour her, for she seemed so much happier after beginning to pretend that the Prawley family occupied the attic of our house. Giving in to these harmless little whims of our wives does much to make life pleasanter for them--and for us--and as long as Mr. Prawley left me my own half of the garden I could not be discontented. One half of that garden was really all a man should attempt to garden, no matter how passionately fond of gardening he might be.

It is fine to be the owner of a bit of soil and to feel the joy of possession, but it is still more delightful to be able to see one's own garden truck springing into life after one has dug and planted and weeded and cultivated with one's own hands. I had no greater desire in life than to devote all my spare time to my garden, but a man must give his health some attention, and Isobel pointed out that if I gardened but one half of the garden I would have time to ride to Port

Lafayette with Millington in his automobile now and then, and as Port Lafayette is on the salt water the air would be good for me.

Port Lafayette is about eleven miles from Westcote, and I had often wished to go to Port Lafayette, but Millington is absurdly jealous. Of course, I could have taken Isobel by train in about one half hour, or I could walk it in two or three hours, or drive there in an hour; but I knew that would hurt Millington's feelings. He would take it as an insult to his automobile.

But now I told Isobel that as soon as my garden got into reasonable shape we would go to Port Lafayette with Millington. Isobel told me that my health was more important than radishes, and reasoned that a few weeds in a garden were not a bad thing. Weeds, she said, grow rapidly, while vegetables are modest and retiring things, and she considered that a few weeds in my half of the garden might set a good example to the vegetables.

Mr. Prawley evidently held a different view, for he did not allow a single weed to raise its head in his half of the garden, and I told Isobel, rather sharply, that his idea was the right one, and that I should weed my garden every evening until there was not a weed in it.

"But, John," she said, "I have never ridden in an automobile, and it would be a great treat for me."

"No doubt," I groaned--I was weeding in my garden at the moment--"but, treat or no treat, I am not going to have this half of the garden look like a forest."

"I know you enjoy it," she began, but I silenced her.

"I am passionately fond of gardening," I said, "and I have told you so a million times. Now will you leave me alone to enjoy it, or won't you?"

She went into the house and left me enjoying it alone.

The very next evening, when I looked into my half of the garden, I found it weeded and put into the best of shape, and when I hunted up Isobel, angry indeed at having so much pleasure taken from me, she did not dare look me in the eye.

"Isobel," I said sharply, "what is the meaning of this?"

"John," she said meekly, "I am afraid I am to blame. You know Mr. Prawley does not like automobile riding--"

"I know nothing of the kind, Isobel," I said. "I know I am passionately fond of gardening, and that some one has robbed me of the pleasure I have looked forward to for years: the joy of weeding my own garden on my own land."

"Mr. Prawley does not like automobile riding," continued Isobel, "and he came to me this morning and told me his health was so poor that his doctor had told him nothing but gardening could save his life. When he showed the garden to his doctor, the doctor told him he was not getting half enough gardening--that he must garden twice as much. I told Mr. Prawley he could not have your half of the garden, because you were passionately fond of it--"

"True, Isobel!" I said, rubbing my back at the lamest spot.

"But he begged on his knees, saying that while it was only a pleasure for you, it was life and health for him, and when his wife wept, I had not the heart to refuse. He said he would make a fair exchange, and that as he was an anti-vegetarian you could have all the vegetables that grew in your own half, and all that grew in his, too."

"Isobel," I said, taking her hand, "this is a great, great disappointment to me. It robs me of a pleasure of which I may say I am passionately fond, but I cannot disown a contract made by my little wife. Mr. Prawley may garden my half of the garden."

I must admit that the Prawleys were ideal tenants. Not a sound came from his floor of the house. Indeed, I did not see him nor his family at all. But during my days in town he and Isobel seemed to have many conversations, and she was so tender-hearted and easily moved that one by one she let Mr. Prawley take all the outdoor work of which I may rightly claim to be passionately fond.

Mowing the lawn is one of the things in which I delight. I ardently love pushing the lawn mower, and if, occasionally, I allowed the grass to grow rather long, it was only because I was saving the pleasure of cutting it, as a child saves the icing of its cake for the last sweet bite. I remember remarking, quite in joke, one morning, that the confounded lawn needed mowing again, and that the grass seemed to do nothing but grow, and that I'd probably have to break my back over it when I got home that evening. But when I reached home that evening I suspected that Isobel must have taken my little joke as earnest, for the lawn was nicely mown and the edges trimmed. It seemed, when I questioned Isobel, that Mr. Prawley's doctor was not satisfied with his progress and had assured him that lawn mowing was necessary for his complete recovery. Thus Isobel allowed Mr. Prawley to usurp another of my pleasures.

So, one by one, the outdoor tasks of which I am so passionately fond were wrested from me. I allowed them to go because I thought it necessary to humour Isobel in her pretence that some family occupied a flat above us, and all seemed well; and we were ready to go to Port Lafayette in Mr. Millington's automobile whenever it was ready to take us, when one day in June I happened to notice that our grass was getting unusually long and untidy.

"Isobel," I said, "I have humoured Mr. Prawley, abandoning to him all the outdoor chores of which I am so

passionately fond, but if he is to do this lawn I want him to do it, and not neglect it shamefully. I will not have it looking like this!"

"But, John--" she began.

"I tell you, Isobel," I said, with rising anger, "I won't have it! I'll stand a good deal, but when I have robbed myself of my greatest pleasure, and then see the other man neglecting it, I rebel. If this goes on I'll forget that Mr. Prawley has bad health. I'll enjoy cutting the lawn myself!"

"John," said Isobel, throwing her arms about my neck, "you will be so glad! I have good news to tell you! The Prawleys have moved away! Now you can do all your own hoeing and mowing."

"The Prawleys have moved away?" I gasped.

"Yes," she said cheerfully, "and now you can garden all the garden, and cut all the lawn and rake all the walks, and weed, and do all the things you are so fond of doing."

"Isobel," I said sternly, "if I thought only of myself I would indeed be glad. But I cannot have my little wife fearing the empty flat above her. You must immediately hire another--er--get another family."

"But I shall not be nervous any more, John," she said; "and it is a shame to deprive you of the outdoor work."

I looked out upon the large lawn and the large garden.

"No, Isobel," I said, "you must take no chances. You may not think you will be nervous, but the feeling may return. If you do not get a family to move in, I shall!"

I rubbed the palms of my hands where the blisters had been, and thought of the middle of my back where the pains and aches had congregated. I was ready to sacrifice my passionate longing for outdoor work once more for Isobel's sake.

"Well," she said thoughtfully, "I know of an excellent coloured man in Lower Westcote, that we can hire by the day-- I mean that we can get to move into the flat--but I can hardly afford, with my present allowance, to pay his wages--that

is, I mean--"

"For some time, Isobel," I said hastily, "I have been thinking your allowance was too small. You must have a--a great many household expenses of which I know nothing."

"I have," she said simply.

That evening when I returned from the city I saw that the lawn grass had been cut so closely that it looked as if the lawn had been shaved. Isobel ran to meet me.

"John!" she cried; "John! Who do you think has moved into the flat overhead?"

"Dear me!" I exclaimed. "How should I know?"

"The Prawleys!" she cried. "The Prawleys have moved back again. Are you not glad?"

I concealed my chagrin. I hid the sorrow with which I saw my passionate fondness for outdoor work once more defeated of its object.

"Isobel," I said, "I wish you would tell Mr. Prawley's doctor to tell Mr. Prawley that it is imperative for Mr. Prawley's best health that Mr. Prawley dig the grass out of the gravel walks to-morrow. Tell him--"

"I told him this evening to do the walks the first thing in the morning," said Isobel innocently, "and when he has done them I am going to have him help Mary wash the windows."

III. THE EQUINE PALACE

NOW that Mr. Prawley is back," I told Isobel, "we can take that trip to Port Lafayette with Millington," and it was then Isobel mentioned the advisability of keeping a horse; but Millington and I, not being afraid of automobiles, began to go to Port Lafayette in his automobile. As a rule we began to go every day, and sometimes twice a day, and I must say for Millington's automobile that it was one of the most patient I have ever seen. Patient and willing are the very words. It would start for Port Lafayette as willingly as anything, and go along as patiently as possible. It was a very patient goer. Haste had no charms for it.

Millington used to come over bright and early and say cheerfully, "Well, how would you like to take a little run out to Port Lafayette to-day?" and I would get my cap, and we would go over to his garage and get into the machine. Then Millington would pull a lever or two, and begin to listen for noises indicative of internal disorders. As a rule, they began immediately, but sometimes he would not hear anything that could be called really serious until we reached the corner of the block. Once, I remember, and I shall never forget the date, we went three miles before Millington stopped the car and got out his wrenches and antiseptic bandages and other surgical tools; but usually the noises began inside of the block. Then we would push it home, and postpone the trip for that day, while Millington laboured over the automobile.

"We will get to Port Lafayette yet," he would say hopefully.

As soon as Isobel mentioned keeping a horse I knew she was beginning to like suburban life, and I was delighted. Having lived all her life in a flat, her mind naturally ran to theatres and roof gardens, rather than to the delights of the suburbs, and her reading still consisted more of department store bargain sales and advertisements of new plays than of seed catalogues and ready mixed paints, as a good suburban wife's reading should; but as soon as she mentioned that it would be nice to have a horse I knew she was at length falling a victim to the allurements of our semi-country existence. In order to add fuel to the flame I took up the suggestion with enthusiasm.

"Isobel," I said warmly, "that is a splendid idea! A horse is just what we need to add the finishing touch to our happiness! With these splendid, tree-bordered roads--"

"A horse that is not afraid of Mr. Millington's automobile," interposed Isobel.

"Certainly," I said, "a horse that you can drive without fear--"

"But not a pokey old thing," said Isobel.

"By no means," I agreed; "what we want is a young, fresh horse that can get over the road--"

"And gentle," said Isobel. "And strong. And he must be a good-looking horse. One with a glossy skin. Reddish brown, with a long tail. I would like a great, big, strong-looking horse, like the Donelleys', but faster, like the Smiths'."

"Exactly," I said. "That's the sort of horse I had in mind. And we will get the horse immediately. I shall stay at home

tomorrow and select the kind of horse we want, unless Mr. Millington takes me to Port Lafayette--"

"Now, John," said Isobel, "you must not be too hasty. You must be careful. I think the right way to buy a horse is to shop a little first, and see what people have in stock, and not take the first thing that is offered, the way you do when you buy shirts. You know how hideous some of those last shirts are, and the arms far too long, and we don't want anything like that to happen when you are buying a horse. I have been talking to Mrs. Rolfs, and she says it is mere folly to buy the first horse that is offered. Mrs. Rolfs says it stands to reason that a man who wants to get rid of a horse would be the first man to offer it. As soon as he learned we wanted a horse he would rush to us with the horse, so as not to lose the chance of getting rid of it. And Mrs. Millington says it is worse than foolish to wait until the very last horse is offered and then buy that one, for the man that hung back in that way would undoubtedly be the man that did not particularly care to part with his horse, and would feel that he was doing us a favour, and would ask a perfectly unreasonable price. The thing to do, John, is to buy, as nearly as possible, the middle horse that is offered. If twenty-one horses were offered the thing to do would be to buy the eleventh horse, and in that way we would be sure to get a good horse at a reasonable price."

I told Isobel that what she said was perfectly logical, and that I would get right to work and frame up an advertisement for the local paper, saying we wanted a horse and would be glad to examine twenty-one of them.

"Now, wait a minute," she said, when I had started for my desk, "and don't be in too great a hurry. You know the mistake you made in those last socks you bought, by going into the first store you came to, and the very first time you put on those socks they wore full of holes. We don't want a horse that will wear like that. Mrs. Rolfs says we must be very particular what sort of man we buy our horse from. She says it is like suicide to buy a horse from a dealer, because a dealer knows so much more about horses than we do, and is up to so many tricks, that he would have no trouble at all in fooling us, and we would probably get a horse that was worth nothing at all. And Mrs. Millington says it is the greatest mistake in the world to buy a horse from an ordinary suburban commuter. She says commuters know nothing at all about horses and just buy them blindfold, and that, if we buy a horse from a commuter, we are sure to get a worthless horse that the commuter has had foisted upon him and is anxious to get rid of. The person to buy a horse of, John, is a person that knows all about horses, but who is not a dealer."

"My idea exactly," I told Isobel, and started for my desk again.

"John, dear," said Isobel, before I had taken two steps, "why are you always so impetuous? Of course I want a horse, and I would like to have it as soon as possible, but I believe in exercising a little common sense. Where, may I ask, are you going to keep the horse when you have got him?"

Now, this had not occurred to me, but I answered promptly.

"I shall put him out to board," I said unhesitatingly, and there was really nothing else I could say, for there was no stable on my place. I know plenty of suburbanites who keep horses and have them boarded at the livery stables. But this did not please Isobel.

"You must do nothing of the kind!" said Isobel firmly. "Mrs. Rolfs and Mrs. Millington both say there is nothing worse for a good horse than to put it out to board. Mrs. Rolfs says it is much cheaper to keep your horse in your own bam, and Mrs. Millington says she would have a very low opinion of any man who would trust his horse to a liveryman. She says the horse is man's most faithful servant, and should be treated as such, and that she has not the least doubt that the liveryman would underfeed our horse, and then let it out to hire to some young harum-scarum, who would whip it into a gallop until it got overheated, and then water it when it was so hot the water would sizzle in its stomach, creating steam and giving it a bad case of colic. And Mrs. Rolfs says the liveryman would be pleased with this, rather than sorry, for then he would have to call in the veterinary, who would divide his fee with the liveryman. So, you see, we must keep our horse in our own stable."

"But, my dear," I protested, "we have no stable."

"Then we must build one," said Isobel with decision. "Mrs. Rolfs, as soon as she heard we were going to keep a horse, lent me a magazine with a picture of a very nice stable, and Mrs. Millington lent me another magazine with some excellent hints on how a modern stable should be arranged, and I think, with all the modern methods of doing things rapidly, we might have our stable all complete in a week, or ten days at the most."



When I looked at Mrs. Rolfs's picture of a stable I felt immediately that it would not suit my purse. I admitted to Isobel that it was a handsome stable, and that the cupola with the weather vane looked very well indeed, and that the idea of having two wings extended from the main building to form a sort of court was a good one; but I told her it would inconvenience the traffic on the street before our house if we moved our house far enough into the street to permit putting a stable of that size in our back-yard. I also told her, as gently as I could, that the style of architecture did not suit our house, for while our house is a plain house, the stable recommended by Mrs. Rolfs was pressed brick and stained shingles, with a slate roof. I also pointed out to Isobel that one horse hardly needed a stable of that size, and that even a very large horse would feel lonely in the main building.

I remarked jocosely that it would be well enough, if we could keep two or three grooms with nothing to do but hunt through the stable, trying to find the horse. If we could afford to do that, it would be a pleasure to awaken in the morning and have one of the grooms come running to us with the light of joy on his face, saying, "What do you think, sir?"

"But I told her it would inconvenience the traffic on the street before our house if we moved our house far enough into the street to permit putting a stable of that size in our backyard."

Isobel smiled in a wan, sad way at this, so I did not say, as I had intended saying if she had received my joke well, that the only horse requiring wings was Pegasus, and that he furnished his own.

Instead, I took up Mrs. Millington's article on the modern stable. It was a masterly article, indeed, and it spoke highly of the gravity stable. No hay forks, no pitching up forage, no elevating feed, no loading of manure from a heap into a wagon. No, indeed! Everything must go down; the natural law of gravitation must do the work. Three stories, with the rear of the stable against the side of the hill. Drive your feed into the top story and unload it. Slide it down into the second story to the horse. Through a trap in the stall the manure falls into a wagon waiting to receive it.

There were other details--electric lights, silver-mounted chains, and other little things--but I did not pay much attention to them. I explained to Isobel that it would be difficult to build a firm, solid hill, large enough to back a three-story stable against, in our backyard. Of course, there were plenty of hills in our part of Long Island that were lying idle and might be had at low cost, but it costs a great deal to move a hill, and all of them were so large they would overlap our property and bury the homes of Mr. Rolfs and Mr. Millington. This did not greatly impress Isobel, however, and I

had to come out firmly and tell her it would be impossible to build a stable three stories high, with two wings, pressed brick, shingle walls, slate roof, and a weather vane, and at the same time erect a nice hill and buy a horse and rig, all with one thousand dollars, which was all the money I could afford to spend.

When I put it that way, and gave her her choice of one thousand dollars' worth of hill, or one thousand dollars' worth of stable, or one thousand dollars' worth of assorted horse, stable, and rig, she chose the last, and only remarked that she would insist on the weather vane and the manure pit. She said that Mrs. Rolfs had taken such an interest, bringing over the magazine, that it was only right to have the weather vane, at least; and that Mrs. Millington had been so interested and kind that the very least we could do was to have the manure pit.

"And another thing," said Isobel, "Mr. Prawley is going to move out of the flat overhead."

"Great Caesar!" I exclaimed. "Is that man quitting again? Isn't he getting enough wages?"

"Wages?" said Isobel. "Nothing has been said about wages. But this Mr. Prawley will not stay if we buy a horse. He says he does not mind gardening your garden and mowing your lawn and taking all your other outdoor exercise for you, but that a horse once reached over the side of the stall and bit him, and he doesn't want to work--to live in a place where horses are liable to bite him at any time without a minute's notice."

"Tell that fellow," I said, "that we will get a horse that doesn't bite, or that we will muzzle the horse, or--"

"It would be easier," said Isobel, "to--to have a Prawley move in who was not afraid of horses. I know of a man in East Westcote, and he has had experience with horses--"

"Very well," I said. "I suppose you will wish your allowance increased?"

"Yes," said Isobel, "if the new Mr. Prawley moves into the flat overhead, I will need about five dollars a month more than you have been allowing me."

IV. "BOB"

THE next morning I stayed at home to see about getting the stable built in a hurry, but before I had finished breakfast Millington came over and said it was an ideal day for a little spin up to Port Lafayette in his automobile. He said the whole machine was in perfect order and we would dash out to Port Lafayette, have a bath in the salt water, and come spinning back, and he told Isobel and me to get on our hats, and he would have the car before the door in a minute.

Isobel and I hastily finished our coffee and put on our hats and went out to the gate, for, although we were very eager to build the stable, we did not like to offend Millington by refusing his invitation, when he had asked us so often to go to Port Lafayette. In half an hour he arrived at the gate, and we climbed in.

Our usual custom, on these trips to Port Lafayette, was for Millington and me to sit in front, while Isobel and Mrs. Millington sat in the rear. There was a nice little gate in the rear by which they could enter.

You see, Millington's automobile was just a little old. I should not go so far as to say it was the first automobile ever made. It was probably the thirteenth, and Millington was probably the thirteenth owner. I know it had four cylinders, because Millington was constantly remarking that only three were working. Sometimes only one worked, and sometimes that one did not.

When we were all comfortably arranged in our seats, and all snugly tucked in, Millington cranked the machine for half an hour, and then remarked regretfully that this was one of the days none of the cylinders was working, and we got out again.

Mr. Rolfs had come out to see us start, and he helped Millington and me push the automobile back to the Millington garage; and as I walked homeward he said he had heard I was going to buy a horse, and he wanted to give me a little advice.

"Probably you have not given much attention to the subject of deforestation," he said, "but I have, and it is the great crime of our age."

I told him I did not see what that had to do with my purchasing a horse, but he said it had everything to do with it.

"When you buy a horse, you have to erect a stable," he said, "and when you erect a stable, you have to buy lumber, and when you have to buy lumber, you suffer in your purse because the forests have been ruthlessly destroyed. As a friend and neighbour I would not have you go and purchase poor lumber, and with it build a stable that will rot to

pieces in a few years. You must buy the best lumber, and that is too expensive to use recklessly. I want to warn you particularly about wire nails. Do not let your builder use them. They loosen in a short time and allow the boards to warp and crack. Personally, if I were building a stable I should have the ends of the boards dovetailed, and instead of nails I should use ash pegs, but I understand you do not wish to go to great expense, so screws will do. Let it be part of your contract that not a nail shall be used in your stable--nothing but screws, and if you can afford brass screws, so much the better. But remember, no nails!"

I thanked Rolfs, and when Millington came over to invite me to take a little run up to Port Lafayette the next morning I told him what Mr. Rolfs had said.

"Now that is just like Rolfs," he said, "impractical as the day is long. Screws would not do at all. The carpenters would drive the screws with a hammer, and the screws would crack the wood. Take my advice and let it be part of your contract that not a screw is to be used in your stable; nothing but wire nails. *But* stipulate long wire nails; wire nails so long that they will go clear through and clinch on the other side, and then see that each and every nail is clinched. If you do this you will have no trouble with split lumber and not a board will work loose."

When I spoke to the builder about the probable cost of the stable, I was sorry I had been so lenient with Isobel, and that I had not put my foot down on the weather vane at once. A weather vane does not add to the comfort of a family horse, and the longer I spoke with the builder the surer I became that what I needed was not a lot of gimcracks, but a plain, simple, story-and-a-half affair, with the chaste architectural lines of a dry-goods box. I mentioned, casually, the hints Mr. Rolfs and Mr. Millington had given me, but the builder did not seem very enthusiastic about them. He snorted in a peculiar way and then said that if I was going in for that sort of thing I could get better results by having no nails or screws at all. He said I could have holes bored in the boards with a gimlet, and have the stable laced together with rawhide thongs, but that when I got ready to talk business in a sensible way, I could let him know. He said this was his busy day, and that his office was not a lunatic asylum.

I managed to calm him in less than half an hour, and he remained quite docile until I mentioned Isobel and said she hoped he would have the stable ready for the horse within a week. It took me much longer to calm him that time. For a few moments I feared for his reason. But he quieted down.

Then I showed him a plan I had drawn, showing the working of the manure dump, and this had quite a different effect on him. It pleased him immensely, as I could see by his face. I explained how it operated; how throwing a catch allowed one end of the stall floor to drop, while the other end of the stall floor was held in place by hinges, and he said it was certainly a new idea. He asked me whether it was Mr. Rolfs's idea or Mr. Millington's, and when I told him I had worked out the plan myself, he said he had rather thought so.

"It is just such a plan as I should expect a man of your intelligence to work out," he said.

Then he asked to see my bank-book, and when I had shown him just how much money I had, he said the best way to build the stable was by the day. If it was built by the job, he explained, a builder naturally had to hurry the job, and things were not done as carefully as I wished them done; but if it was done by the day, every hammer stroke would be carefully made, and I could pay every evening for the work done that day.

About the third week of the building operations those careful hammer strokes began to get on my nerves. I never knew hammer strokes so carefully considered and so cautiously delivered. The carpenters were most careful about them, and several times I spoke to the builder and suggested that if shorter nails were used perhaps it would not take so many strokes of the hammer to drive them in. I told him, if he was willing, I was willing to have the rest of the stable done by the job, but he said it had gone too far for that.

There were two men working on my stable--"two souls with but a single thought," Isobel called them--and they were hard thinkers. The two of them would take hold of a board, one at either end, and hold it in their hands, and look at it, and think. I do not know what they thought about--deforestation, probably--but they would think for ten minutes and then put the board gently to one side and think about another board. They did their thinking, as they did their work, by the day.



We had plenty of time in which to select our horse while our stable was building. My advertisement in the local paper brought a horse to my door the morning after it appeared, and no horse could have suited me quite so well as that one, but I was resolute and firm. I told the man—he was not a dealer nor yet a commuter, and my conversation with him showed me that he knew just enough, and not too much, about horses—that I liked his horse very well indeed, but that I could not purchase it.. At this he seemed downcast, and I did not blame him. He seemed to take my refusal as some sort of personal insult, for the horse was young, large, strong, gentle, and speedy, and the price was right; but every time I began to weaken Isobel said, "John, remember number eleven!" and I refrained from purchasing that horse. I finally sent the man away with warm expressions of my esteem for him as a man, but that did not seem to cheer him much.

An hour later another man brought another horse, and I sent him away also, as was my duty, for he was only number two; but he was hardly gone when horse number one appeared again. I saw at once that I was going to have trouble with that man. He was so sure he had the horse I wanted that he would not go away and stay away. He kept coming back, and each time he went away sadder than before. He was a sad-looking man, anyway, and he would sit in his buggy and talk to me until another horse was driven up, and then he would sigh and drive down to the corner, and sit and look at me reproachfully until the other man drove away again. Then he would drive back and reproach me, with tears in his eyes, for not buying his horse. By lunch time I was almost worn out, and I told Isobel as much when I looked out of the window and saw that handsome horse and his sad driver waiting patiently at my gate. I told her I was tempted to take that horse, Mrs. Rolfs or no Mrs. Rolfs.

"Take that horse?" said Isobel, as if my words surprised her. "Why, of course we are going to take that horse!"

"But, my dear," I said, "after what you told me about taking the eleventh horse?"

"Certainly," said Isobel. "What is this but the eleventh horse? It came first, and then another horse came, and then this one came third, and then some other horse came, and then this one came fifth, and so on, and now it is standing there at the gate, the eleventh horse. Certainly we will buy this horse."

"Isobel," I said, "we might quite as well have bought it the first time it was driven to our gate as this time."

"Not at all," she said; "that would have been an altogether different thing. If we had taken the first horse that was offered we would have regretted it all our lives; but now we can take this horse and feel perfectly safe."

Bob--that was the name of the horse--fitted into our stable pretty well. He had to bend rather sharply in the middle to get out of his stall, but he was quite limber for a horse of his age and size, so he managed it very well. A stiffer horse might have broken in two or have been permanently bent. The stall was so economically built that a large, long horse like Bob stuck out of it like a long ship in a short dock; he stuck out so far that we had to go around through the carriage room to get on the other side of him. Our new Mr. Prawley did not mind this. He was willing to spend all the time necessary going from one bit of work to another.

There was one advantage in having the stable and everything about it on a small scale--it lessened the depth of the manure pit. The very first night we put Bob in his stall we heard a loud noise in the stable. Isobel suggested that we had overfed Bob, and that he had swelled out and pressed out the sides of the stable, but I thought it more likely that the weather-boarding had slipped loose. I had seen the thoughtful carpenters putting that weather-boarding on the stable. But Isobel and I were both wrong. Bob had merely dropped into the manure pit.

I was glad then that I had chosen a strong horse, for he did not seem to mind the drop in the least. He stood there with his front feet in the basement, as you might say, and with his rear feet upstairs, quite as if that was his usual way of standing. After that he often fell into the manure pit, and he always took it good-naturedly. He got so he expected it, after awhile, and if his stall floor did not drop once a day, he became restless and took no interest in his food. Usually, during the day, Bob and Mr. Prawley dropped into the basement together while Mr. Prawley was currying Bob, but at night, when we heard Bob calling us in the homesick, whinnying tone, and kicking his heels against the side of the stable, we knew what he wanted, and to prevent him kicking the stable to ruins, we--Isobel and I--would go out and drop him into the basement a couple of times. Then he would be satisfied.

There was but one thing we feared: Bob might become so fond of having his forefeet in the basement and his rear feet upstairs, that he would stand no other way, and in course of time his front legs would have to lengthen enough to let his head reach his manger, or his neck would have to stretch. Either would give him the general appearance of a giraffe. While this would be neat for show purposes, it would attract almost too much attention in a family horse. I have no doubt this is the way the giraffe acquired its peculiar construction, but we were able to avoid it, for we awoke one night when Bob made an unaided descent into the manure pit, and when we went to aid him we found he had descended at both ends, on account of the economical hinges used on the drop floor of the stall of our equine palace. Bob showed in every way that he had enjoyed that drop more than any drop he had ever taken, but I drew the line there. I had other things to do more important than conducting a private Coney Island for a horse. If Bob had been a colt I might not have been so stern about it, but I will not pamper a staid old family horse by operating shoot-the-chutes and loop-the-loops for him at two o'clock in the morning.

"Isobel," I said, "if that horse is to continue in my stable you may tell Mr. Prawley that it is necessary for his health that he sleep in the stable-loft hereafter. It will be good exercise for him to get up at midnight and pull Bob out of the manure pit."

"This present Mr. Prawley will not do it," said Isobel. "He has a wife and family at East Westcote, and he--"

"Very well," I said, "then get another Mr. Prawley!"

Of the new Mr. Prawley it is necessary to speak a few words.

V. THE NEW MR. PRAWLEY

THE new Mr. Prawley (by this time a family, but we still clung to the name Prawley, just as all coloured waiters are called "George") was a most unusual man.

For a month before we hired him he had been trying to undermine Isobel's faith in the Mr. Prawley from East Westcote. He had called at the house two or three times a week. At first he merely asked for the job of man-of-all-work, as any applicant might have asked for it, but he soon began speaking of our Prawley in the most damaging terms. I believe there was hardly a crime or misdemeanour that he did not lay at the door of our Mr. Prawley, and so insistent was he that Isobel and I had ceased to speak of him as living in our attic.

Isobel decided the two men must be deadly enemies, and that this fellow was set on hounding our Mr. Prawley from pillar to post, like an avenging angel. She concluded that this man must have been frightfully wronged by our Mr. Prawley, and that he had sworn to dog his footsteps to the grave.

But when she let our Mr. Prawley go and hired this new Mr. Prawley, his interest in his predecessor ceased entirely.

In place of the eager, longing look his face had worn, he now wore a thin, satisfied look, which I can best describe as that of a hungry jackal licking his chops. Mr. Prawley--his name, he told us, was Duggs, Alonzo Duggs, but we called him Mr. Prawley--was a tall, lean, villanous-looking fellow, with a red, pointed beard, and at times when he leaned on the division fence and looked into Mr. Millington's yard I could see his fingers opening and shutting like the claws of a bird of prey. He seemed to hate Mr. Millington With a deep but hidden hatred, and often, when Mr. Millington was preparing to take Isobel and me to Port Lafayette, Mr. Prawley would stand and grit his teeth in the most unpleasant manner. When I spoke to Mr. Prawley about it he said, "It isn't Mr. Millington. It is the automobile. I hate automobiles!"

For that matter, I was beginning to hate them myself. Many a pleasant ride behind Bob did I have to sacrifice because Millington insisted that we take a little run up to Port Lafayette with him and Mrs. Millington. We would all get into his car, and Millington would pull his cap down tight, and begin to frown and cock his head on one side to hear signs of asthma or heart throbs or whatever the automobile might take a notion to have that day. And off we would go!

I tell you, it was exhilarating. After all there is nothing like motoring. We would roll smoothly down the street, with Millington frowning like a pirate all the way, and then suddenly he would hear the noise he was listening for, and he would stop frowning, and jerk a lever that stopped the car, and hop out with a satisfied expression, and begin to whistle, and open the car in eight places, and take out an assorted hardware store, and adhesive tape, and blankets, and oil cans, and hatchets, and axes, and get to work on the car as happy as a babe; and Mrs. Millington and Isobel and I would walk home.

The sight of an automobile seemed to madden Mr. Prawley, but otherwise he was the meekest of men, and a good example of this was the manner in which he behaved at our Christmas party.

The idea of having a good, old-fashioned Christmas house party for our city friends was Isobel's idea, but the moment she mentioned it I adopted it, and told her we would have Jimmy Dunn out. Jimmy Dunn is one of those rare men that have acquired the suburban-visit habit. Usually when we suburbanites invite a city friend to spend the week-end with us, the city friend balks.

Into his frank eyes comes a furtive, shifty look as he tries to think of an adequate lie to serve as an excuse for not coming, but Jimmy was taken in hand when he was young and flexible, and he has become meek and docile under adversity, as I might say. When any one invites Jimmy to the suburbs he hardly makes a struggle. I suppose it is because of the gradual weakening of his will power.

"Good!" I said. "We will have Jimmy Dunn out over Christmas."

"Oh! Jimmy Dunn!" scoffed Isobel gently. "Of course we will have Jimmy, but what I mean is to have a lot of people-- ten at least--and we must have at least two lovers, because they will look so well in that little alcove room off the parlour, and we can go in and surprise them once in a while. And we will have a Santa Claus, and lots of holly and mistletoe, and a tree with all sorts of foolish presents on it for every one, and--"

"Splendid!" I cried less enthusiastically.

"Now as for the ten--"

"Well," said Isobel, "we will have Jimmy Dunn--"

"That is what I suggested," I said meekly. "We will have Jimmy Dunn," repeated Isobel, "and then we will have--we will have--I wonder who we could get to come out. Mary might come, if she wasn't in Europe."

"That would make two," I said cheerfully, "if she wasn't in Europe." "And we must have a Yule-log!" exclaimed Isobel. "A big, blazing Yule-log, to drink wassail in front of, and to sing carols around." I told Isobel that, as nearly as I could judge, the fireplaces in our house had not been constructed for big, blazing Yule-logs. I reminded her that when I had spoken to the last owner about having a grate fire he had advised us, with great excitement, not to attempt anything so rash. He had said that if we were careful we might have a gas-log, provided it was a small one and we did not turn on the gas full force, and were sure our insurance was placed in a good, reliable company. He had said that if we were careful about those few things, and kept a pail of water on the roof in case of emergency, we might use a gas-log, provided we extinguished it as soon as we felt any heat coming from it. I had not, at the time, thought of mentioning a Yule-log to him, but I told Isobel now that perhaps we might be able to find a small, gas-burning Yule-log at the gas company's office. Isobel scoffed at the idea. She said we might as well put a hot-water bottle in the grate and try to be merry around that.

"I don't see," she said, "why people build chimneys in houses if it is going to be dangerous to have a fire in the fireplace."

"They improve the ventilation, I suppose," I said, "and then, what would Santa Claus come down if there were no chimneys?"

I frequently drop these half-joking remarks into my conversations with Isobel, and not infrequently she smiles at them in a faraway manner, but this time she jumped at the remark and seized it with both hands.

"John!" she cried, "that is the very, very thing! We will have Santa Claus come down the chimney! And you will be Santa Claus!" I remained calm. Some men would have immediately remembered they had prior engagements for

Christmas. Some men would have instantly declared that Santa Claus was an unworthy myth. But not I! I dropped upon my hands and knees and gazed up the chimney. When I withdrew my head, I stood up and grasped Isobel's hand.

"Fine!" I cried with well-simulated enthusiasm. "I'll get an automobile coat from Millington, and sleigh bells and a mask with a long white beard--"

"And a wig with long white hair," Isobel added joyously.

"And while our guests are all at dinner," I cried, "I will steal away from the table--"

"John!" exclaimed Isobel. "You can't be Santa Claus! Can't you see that it would never, never do for you to leave the table when your guests were all there? You cannot be Santa Claus, John!"

"Oh, Isobel!"

"No," she said firmly, "you cannot be Santa Claus. Jimmy Dunn must be Santa Claus!"

We had Jimmy Dunn out the next Sunday and broke it to him as gently as we could, and explained what a lot of fun it would be for him, and how I envied him the chance. For some reason he did not become wildly enthusiastic. Instead he kneeled down, as I had done, and put his head into the fireplace, in his usual slow-going manner, and looked up to where the small oblong of blue sky glowed far, far above him.

When he withdrew his head, he began some maundering talk about, an uncle of his in Baltimore who was far from well, and who was likely to be extremely dead or sick or married about Christmas time, but I had had too much experience with such excuses to pay any attention to him. Isobel and I gathered about him and talked as fast as we could, with merry little laughs, and presently Jimmy seemed more resigned, and said he supposed if he had to be Santa Claus there was no way out of it if he wanted to keep our friendship. So when he suggested getting an automobile coat to wear, we hailed it as a splendidly original idea, and patted him on the back, and he went away in a rather good humour, particularly when we told him he need not come all the way down from the top of the chimney, but could get into the chimney from the room above the parlour. I told him it would be no trouble at all to take out the iron back of the fireplace, for it was almost falling out, and that we would have a ladder in the chimney for him to come down.

It was Mrs. Rolfs who changed our plans.

As soon as she heard we were going to have a Santa Claus, she brought over a magazine and showed Isobel an article that said Santa Claus was lacking in originality, and that it was much better to have two little girls dressed as snow fairies distribute the presents from the tree, and Mrs. Rolfs said she was willing to lend us her two daughters, if we insisted. So we had to insist.



By the merest oversight, such as might occur in any family excited over the preparations for a Christmas party, Isobel forgot to tell Jimmy Dunn that the plan was changed. She had enough to think of without thinking of that, for she found, at the last moment, that she could not pick up a regularly constituted pair of lovers for the little alcove room, and she had to patch up a temporary pair of lovers by inviting Miss Seiler, depending on Jimmy Dunn to do the best he could as the other half of the pair. Of course Jimmy Dunn does not talk much, and it was apt to be a surprise to him to learn he was scheduled to make love, but Miss Seiler talks enough for two. When Jimmy arrived, about four o'clock Christmas eve, Isobel let him know he was to be a lover, but he was then in the house, and it was too late for him to get away.

Isobel had done nobly in securing guests. Jimmy and Miss Seiler were the only guests from the city, but she had captured some suburbanites. Ten of us made merry at the table--that is, all ten except Jimmy. I was positively ashamed of Jimmy. There we were at the culminating hours of the merry Yule-tide, gathered at the festive board itself, with a bowl of first-rate home-made wassail with ice in it, and Jimmy was expected to smile lovingly, and blush, and all that sort of thing, and what did he do? He sat as mute as a clam, and started uneasily every time a new course appeared. Before dessert arrived he actually arose and asked to be excused.

Now, if *you* intended making a fool of yourself in a friend's house by impersonating Santa Claus and coming down a chimney in a fur automobile coat, and nonsense like that, *you* would have sense enough to remember which room upstairs had the chimney that led down into the parlour fireplace, wouldn't you? So I blame Jimmy entirely, and so does Isobel. Jimmy says--of course he had to have some excuse--that we might have told him we had given up the idea of having Santa Claus come down the chimney, and that if we had wanted him to come down any particular chimney we should have put a label on it. "Santa Claus enter here," I suppose.

Jimmy said he did the best he could; that he knew he did not have much time between the threatened appearance of the dessert and the time he was supposed to issue from the fireplace--and so on! He was quite excited about it. Quite bitter, I may say.

It seems--or so Jimmy says--that, when he left the table, Jimmy went upstairs and got into his automobile coat of fur, and his felt boots, and his mask, and his fur gloves, and his long white hair, and his stocking hat, and that about the time we were sipping coffee he was ready. He says it was no joke to be done up in all those things in an overheated

house, and he thought if he got into the chimney he might be in a cool draught, so he poked about until he found a fireplace and backed carefully into it, and pawed with his left foot for the top rung of the ladder. That was about the time we arose from the table with merry laughs, as nearly as Isobel and I can judge.

No one missed Jimmy, except Miss Seiler, and she was so unused to being made love to as Jimmy made love that she thought nothing of a temporary absence. It was not until I took Jimmy's present from the tree and sent one of the Rolfs fairies to hand it to Jimmy that we realized he was not in the parlour, and then Isobel and I both felt hurt to think that Jimmy had selfishly withdrawn from among us when we had gone to all the trouble of getting the other half of a pair of lovers especially on his account. It was not fair to Miss Seiler, and I told Jimmy so the next time I saw him.

When the Rolfs fairy had looked in all the rooms, upstairs and down, and had not found Jimmy, she came back and told Isobel, and that was when Isobel remembered she had forgotten to tell Jimmy we had given up the idea of having a Santa Claus. Isobel looked up the parlour chimney, but he was not there, and then we all started merrily looking up chimneys. We found Santa Claus up the library chimney almost immediately. He was still kicking, but not with much vim--more like a man that is kicking because he has nothing else to do than like a man that enjoys it.

I think we must have been gathering around the Christmas tree to the cheery music of a carol when Santa Claus put his foot on a loose brick in the fireplace and slipped. I claim that if Santa Claus had instantly thrown his body forward he would have been safe enough, but Santa Claus says he did not have time--that he slid down the chimney immediately, as far as his arms would let him. He says that when he caught the edge of the hearth with his hands he did yell; that he yelled as loud as any man could who was wrapped in a fur coat and had his mouth full of white horse-hair whiskers and his face covered by a mask. I say that proves he yelled just as we were singing the carol. He should have yelled a moment sooner, or should have waited half an hour, until the noise in the parlour abated. Santa Claus says he tried to stay there half an hour, but the two bricks he had grasped did not want to wait. They wanted to hurry down the chimney without further delay, and they had their own way about it. So Santa Claus went on down with them.

I tell Santa Claus that even if we were singing carols we would have heard him if he had fallen to the library floor with a bump, and that it was his fault if he did not fall heavily, but he blames the architect. He says that if the chimney had been built large enough he would have done his part and would have fallen hard, but that when he reached the narrow part of the chimney he wedged there. I said that was the fault of wearing an automobile coat that padded him out so he could not fall through an ordinary chimney, and I asked him if he thought any man who meant to fall down chimneys had ever before put on an automobile coat to fall in.

Certainly I, the host, could not be expected to stop the laughter and merriment when I was taking presents from the tree, and bid every one be silent and listen for the muffled tones of a Santa Claus in the library chimney. I do not say Santa Claus did not yell as loudly as he could. Doubtless he did. And I do not say he did not try to get out of the chimney. He says he did, but that with his arms crowded above his head he could do nothing but reach. He says he also kicked, but there was nothing to kick. He says the most fruitless task in the world is to kick when wedged in a chimney with a whole fur automobile coat crowded up under the arms and nothing below to kick but air.

Luckily I was able to send for Mr. Rolfs and Mr. Millington, whose advice is always valuable, since when I know what they advise I know what not to do. Mr. Rolfs rushed in and was of the opinion that we must get a chisel and chisel a hole in the library wall as near as possible to where Santa Claus was reposing, but when Mr. Millington arrived, breathless, he said this would be simple murder, for as likely as not the chisel would enter between two bricks and perforate Santa Claus beyond repair. Mr. Millington said the thing to do was to get a clothesline and attach it to Santa Claus's feet and pull him down. He said it was logical to pull him downward, because we would then be aided by the law of gravitation. Mr. Rolfs said this was nonsense, and that it would only wedge Santa Claus in the chimney more tightly, and that we would, in all probability, pull him in two, or at least stretch him out so long that he would never be very useful again.

Mr. Rolfs and Mr. Millington became quite heated in their argument. Mr. Rolfs said that if a rope was to be used it should be used to pull Santa Claus upward, but they compromised by agreeing to cut the clothesline in two, choose up sides, and let one side pull Santa Claus upward, while the other pulled him downward. Then Santa Claus would move in the direction of least resistance. So they got the clothesline, and Mr. Rolfs was about to cut it, when Miss Seiler screamed.

I was doubly glad she screamed just at that juncture, for we had all become so interested in the Rolfs-Millington controversy that we had forgotten how perishable a human being is, and, with two such stubborn men as Rolfs and Millington urging us on, we might have pulled Santa Claus in two while our sporting instincts were aroused by the tug-of-war. That was one reason I was glad Miss Seiler screamed. The other reason was that it showed she was doing her share of representing one half of a pair of lovers. She had done rather poorly up to that time, but she saw that when her lover was about to be pulled asunder was the time to scream, if she was ever going to scream, so she screamed. So we all went upstairs and let the rope down to Santa Claus, and the entire merry Christmas house party pulled, and after we had jerked a few times up came Santa Claus with a sudden bump.

At that moment Miss Seiler screamed again, and when we turned we saw the reason, for the glass door to the little

upper porch had opened and Jimmy Dunn was entering the room.

We laid Santa Claus on the floor and let him kick, for he seemed to have acquired the habit, but after awhile he slowed down and only jerked his legs spasmodically. Mr. Millington explained that it was only the reflex action of the muscles, and that probably Santa Claus would kick like that for several months, whenever he lay down. He said if we had followed his advice and pulled downward we would have yanked all the reflex action out of the legs.

As soon as I pulled the mask from his face I recognized Mr. Prawley. Jimmy slipped out of the room and walked all the way to the station, and Miss Seiler stood around, not knowing whether she was to be half of a pair of lovers with Mr. Prawley as the other half, or stop being a lover, or weep because Jimmy had gone. I felt sorry for her, because Mr. Prawley was not a good specimen of a Christmas lover just then. When we stood him on his feet his trousers were still pushed up around his knees, and his fur coat was around his neck. He was so weak we had to hold him up.

"What I want to know," said Mr. Millington, "is what you were doing in that chimney in my automobile coat?"

"Doing?" said Mr. Prawley. "Why, I'm jolly old Santa Claus. I come down chimneys."

"Well, my advice to you, Mr. Prawley," I said, "is to stop it. You don't do it at all right. Don't try it again. I've had enough of this jolly old Santa Claus business. Who told you to do it?"

"The little gentleman with the scared look," said Mr. Prawley, looking around for Jimmy Dunn. "He isn't here."

"And what did he give you for doing it?" I asked.

"Nothing!" said Mr. Prawley. "He just--"

"Just what?" I asked when he hesitated. Mr. Prawley drew me to one side and whispered.

"He said I might wear an automobile coat. And I couldn't resist the temptation," said Mr. Prawley. "I've been hankering to get inside an automobile coat for weeks and weeks, sir. I couldn't resist."

Of course, I could make nothing of this at the time, so I merely said a few words of good advice, and ordered Mr. Prawley never to try the Santa Claus impersonation again.

"Of course, I'm only an amateur at it," said Mr. Prawley apologetically, and then he brightened, "but I made good speed as far as I got. I'll bet I broke the world's speed record for jolly old Santa Clauses!"

VI. THE SPECKLED HEN

IN order to relieve the reader's suspense, I may as well say here that Jimmy Dunn did not marry Miss Seiler. It is too bad to have to sacrifice what promised to be a first-class love interest, but the truth is that there is less chance of Jimmy ever marrying Miss Seiler than there seemed likelihood of Isobel and me reaching Port Lafayette in Mr. Millington's automobile.

Usually when we started for Port Lafayette, my wife and Millington's wife would dress for the matinee or church, or wherever they intended going that day, and when Millington heard the knocking sound in his engine and began to get out his tools, they would excuse themselves politely and go and spend the day in the city. They usually returned in time to get into the car and ride back to the garage. But I stuck to Millington. You never can tell when a car of that kind will be ready to start up, and I was really very anxious to go to Port Lafayette. I spent some very delightful days with Millington that way, for when he was mending his car he was always in a charming humour, and as gay and playful as a kitten.

I began to fear that one, if not the only, reason why Mr. Millington was always in such a good humour when his car was in a bad one, was because I had told him that I had heard of a man in Port Lafayette who had a fine farm of White Wyandotte chickens, and that I thought I might buy some for my place. Millington does not believe in Wyandottes. He is all for Orpingtons.

It is remarkable how many wives object to chickens. I do not blame Isobel for not liking chickens, for she was born in a flat, and I am willing to make allowances for her lack of education; but why Mrs. Rolfs and Mrs. Millington should dislike chickens was beyond my comprehension. Both were born in the suburbs, and grew up in a real chickenish atmosphere, and still they do not keep chickens. I must say, however, that Mr. Rolfs and Mr. Millington are persons of greater intelligence. Almost the first day I moved into the suburb of Westcote, Mr. Rolfs leaned over the division fence and complimented me on my foresight in purchasing such an admirable place on which to raise chickens. He told me that if I needed any advice about chickens he would be glad to supply me with all I wished, just as a neighbourly

matter. He seemed to take it as a matter of course that I would arrange for a lot of chickens as soon as I was fairly settled on the place, and in this he was seconded by Mr. Millington.

When Mr. Millington saw Mr. Rolfs talking to me, he came right over and said that, while he hated to boast, he had studied chickens from A to Gizzard, and that when I was ready to get my chickens he could give me some suggestions that would be simply invaluable. We talked the chicken matter over very thoroughly, and I soon saw that they were men of knowledge and deep experience in chicken matters, and when they had decided that I would keep chickens, and what kind of chickens, and where I should build the coop, and what kind of coop I should build, we all shook hands warmly, and I went around front to tell Isobel. I was very enthusiastic about chickens when I went.

After I had interviewed Isobel for three minutes I learned, definitely, that I was not going to keep chickens. There were a great many things Mr. Rolfs and Mr. Millington had not said about chickens, and those were the very things Isobel told me, and they were all reasons for not having chickens on the place at all. She also threw in an opinion of Mr. Rolfs and Mr. Millington. It seemed that they were two villains of the most depraved sort, who did not dare keep chickens themselves because they were afraid of their wives, and who were trying to steal a vicarious joy by bossing my chickens when I got them, but that I was not going to get any. Absolutely!

Of course, I always do what Isobel tells me, and when she told me I was not going to have chickens, I obeyed. But I merely told Mr. Rolfs and Mr. Millington when they came over the next day, that I had been thinking the matter over and that I was doubtful whether the south corner or the north corner would be the best place for the coop. So we three went and looked over the ground again. Both favoured the north corner, so I hung back and seemed undecided and doubtful, and finally, in a week or two, they agreed with me.

123

I never saw two men so anxious to have a neighbour keep chickens. They were willing to let me have almost everything my own way. It was quite a strain on me, for I had to think of a new objection to their plans every day or so, but I could see the suspense was harder on Mr. Rolfs and Mr. Millington. Every morning they came and hung over my fence wistfully, and every evening they came over and talked chickens, and on the train to town they spoke freely of

the chickens they were going to keep. In a month they were talking of the chickens they *were* keeping, and bragging about them; and old-seasoned chicken raisers used to hunt them up and sit with them and ask for information on knotty points.

Toward fall Mr. Rolfs and Mr. Millington were beginning to talk about the large sums of money they were making out of their chickens, and promising settings of their White Orpington and White Wyandotte eggs to the commuters, and they began to be really annoying. They would stand at the fence, hollow-eyed and hungry-looking, staring into my yard, and when I passed they would make slighting remarks about me and the lack of decision in my character. They said sneeringly that they did not believe I would ever get any chickens.

"You, Millington, and you, Rolfs," I said firmly, "should remember one thing: I am the man who is getting these chickens, and the main thing in raising chickens is to start right. I do not want to go into this thing hastily and then regret it all my life. If you do not like my way, all you have to do is to build coops yourselves and buy chickens and raise them yourselves. Be patient. Every day I am learning more about chickens from your conversations on the train, and when I do get my chickens you will find I have profited by your suggestions."

Millington and Rolfs had to be satisfied with that, so far as I was concerned, for although I spoke to Isobel frequently on the subject of chickens she had not changed. I silenced Millington by telling him I would have chickens long before he ever succeeded in taking Isobel and me to Port Lafayette in his automobile.

"If that is all you are waiting for," he said, "we will start to-morrow," and so we did; but that was all.

Millington and Rolfs, during the winter, worked off some of their surplus chicken energy writing letters to the poultry periodicals. My friends in town began asking me why I did not keep chickens when I lived near to such chicken experts as Rolfs and Millington, by whose experience I could profit; but the worst came one day on the train when Rolfs actually had the assurance to offer me a setting of his White Wyandotte eggs. I blame Rolfs and Millington for acting in this way. No man should brag about chickens he has not; I only bragged about those I meant to get.

By the time spring put forth her tender leaves, Rolfs and Millington were so deep in their imaginary chicken business that they talked nothing else, and all their spare time was spent in my yard, urging me to hurry a little and get the chickens.

"I wish you would hurry a bit in getting those chickens of mine," Millington would say; "I ought to have at least ten hens sitting by this time." And then Rolfs would say: "He is right about that. Unless you get my White Wyandottes soon, the chicks will not be hatched out before cold weather. I ought to have the hens on the eggs now." Occasionally I mentioned chickens in an off-hand way to Isobel, but she had not changed her views.

"Now, Isobel," I would say, "about chickens--"

At the word "chickens" Isobel would look at me reproachfully, and I would end meekly: "About chickens, as I was saying. Don't you think we could have a pair of broilers to-morrow?"

As a matter of fact, this happened so often that I began to hate the sight of a broiled chicken, and was forced to mention roast chicken once in a while. It was after one of these times that the event happened that stirred all Westcote.

I had reached a point where I dodged Mr. Rolfs and Mr. Millington when I saw them, in order to avoid their insistent clamour for chickens, when one evening Isobel met me at the door with a smile.

"John!" she cried. "What do you think! Our chicken laid an egg!"

"Chicken?" I asked anxiously. "Did you say chicken?"

"And I am going to give you the egg for dinner," cried Isobel joyfully. "Just think, John! Our own egg, laid by our own chicken! Do you want it fried, or boiled, or scrambled?"

"Isobel," I demanded, "what is the meaning of all this?"

"I just could not kill the hen," Isobel ran on, "after it had been so--so friendly. Could I? I felt as if I would be killing one of the family."

"People do get to feeling that way about chickens when they keep them," I said insinuatingly. "Why, Isobel, I have known wives to love chickens so warmly--wives that had never cared a snap for chickens before--wives that hated chickens--and they grew to love chickens so well that as soon as the coop was made--of course it was a nice, clean, airy coop, Isobel--and the dear little fluffy chicks began to peep about--"

Isobel stiffened.

"John," she said finally "you are not going to keep chickens!"

"Certainly not!" I agreed hastily.

"But of course we can't kill Spotty," said Isobel. "I call her Spotty because that seems such a perfect name for her. I telephoned for a roaster this morning, because you suggested having a roaster for dinner, John, and when the roaster came it was a *live* chicken! Imagine!"

"Horrors!" I exclaimed.

"I should think so!" agreed Isobel. "So there was nothing to do but 'phone the grocer to come and get the live roaster, but when I 'phoned, his grandmother was much worse, and the store was closed until she got better--or worse--and I couldn't bear to see the poor thing in the basket with its legs tied all that time, for there is no telling how long an old person like a grandmother will remain in the same condition, so I loosened the roaster in the cellar, and at a quarter past four I heard it cluck. It had laid an egg. I knew that the moment I heard it cluck."

"Isobel," I said, "you were born to be the wife of a chicken fancier! You shall eat that egg!"

"No, John," she said, "you shall eat it. It is our first real egg, laid by our dear little Spotty, and you shall eat it."

"No, Isobel," I began, and then, as I saw how determined she was, I compromised. "Let us have the egg scrambled," I said, "and each of us eat a part."

"Very well," said Isobel, "if you will promise not to kill Spotty. We will keep her forever and forever!"

I agreed. Isobel kissed me for that.

After we had eaten the egg--and both Isobel and I agreed that it was really a superior egg--we went down cellar and looked at Spotty. I should say she was a very intelligent-looking hen, but homely. There was nothing flashy about her. She was the kind of hen a man might enter in the Sweepstakes class, and not get a prize, and then enter in the Consolation class and not get a prize, and then enter for the Booby prize and still be outclassed, and then enter in the Plain Old Barnyard Fowl class and not get within ten miles of a prize, and then be taken to the butcher as a Boarding House Broiler, and be refused on account of age, tough looks, and emaciation.

She was no pampered darling of the hen house, but a plain old Survival-of-the-Fittest Squawker; the kind of hen that along about the first of May begins clucking in a vexed tone of voice, flies over the top of a two-story bam, and wanders off somewhere into the tall grass back of the cow pasture, to appear some weeks later with twelve chicks of twelve assorted patterns, ranging from Shanghai-bantam to plain yellow nondescript. She was a good, durable hen of the old school, with a wary, startled eye, an extra loud squawk, and a brain the size of a grain of salt.

Spotty was the sort of hen that could go right along day after day without steam heat or elevators in her coop and manage to make a living. As soon as I saw her, my heart swelled with pride, for I knew I had secured a very rare variety of hen. Since every man that can tell a chicken from an ostrich--and some that can't--has become a chicken fancier, the aristocratic, raised-by-hand, pedigree fowl has become as common as dirt, and it is indeed difficult to secure a genuine mongrel hen. I was elated. As nearly as I could judge by first appearances, I was the owner of one of the most mongrel hens that ever laid a plain, omelette-quality egg.

When I had made a coop by nailing a few slats across the front of a soap box, and had nailed Spotty in, I took the coop under my arm and went into the back yard. Mr. Millington was there, and Mr. Rolfs was there, and they were arguing angrily about the respective merits of White Wyandottes and White Orpingtons, but when they saw me they uttered two loud cries of joy and ran to meet me. I tried to cling to the coop, but they wrested it from me and together carried it in triumph to the north corner and set it on the grass. Mr. Millington pulled his compass from his pocket and set the coop exactly as advised by "The Complete Poultry Guide," with the bars facing the morning sun, and Rolfs hurried into the back lot and hunted up a piece of bone, which he crushed with a brick and placed in the coop, as advised by "The Gentleman Poultry Fancier." He told us that a supply of bone was most necessary if he expected his hen to lay eggs, and that he knew this hen of his was going to be a great layer. He said he had given the egg question years of study, and that he could tell a good egger when he saw one.

Millington told me his coop was not as he had meant it to be, but said it would do until he could get one built according to scientific poultry principles. He pointed out that the poultry coop should be heated by steam, and showed me that there was no room in the soap box for a steam heating plant. He said he would not trust his flock of chickens through the winter unless there was steam heating installed.

Then Rolfs and Millington said they guessed the first thing to do, as it was so late in the season, was to set their hen immediately, and as it would probably take Spotty thirteen days to lay enough eggs, they told me to run down to the delicatessen store and buy thirteen eggs, while they arranged a scientific nest in the corner of their coop, for sitting purposes. When I suggested that perhaps Spotty was not ready to set, they laughed at me. They said they could see I would never make a prosperous chicken farmer if I put off until to-morrow what the hen ought to do to-day, and that a hen that ought to set, and would not set, must be made to set. Millington said that he did not mind if Spotty wanted to lay. If she felt so, she could go ahead and lay while she was taking her little rests between sets. He said that in that way she would be doubly useful and that, judging by appearances, she was the kind of hen that could do two or three things at the same time.

Mr. Prawley, when he saw we were going to keep our hen, came out and spoke to Mr. Millington, Mr. Rolfs, and me. He said he had an aversion to hens, but that if I insisted he would devote some of his time to the hen, but Mr. Millington, Mr. Rolfs, and I assured him we would not need his help. We felt that the three of us, with occasional aid from Isobel, could manage that hen.

The next day Mr. Millington and Mr. Rolfs were so swelled with pride that they would not speak to me on the train. Millington did not ask me, that entire day, to take a little run up to Port Lafayette in his automobile. I heard him tell one man on the train to town that he had just set his eighteen prize White Orpingtons, and I heard Rolfs tell another man, at the same time, about a coop he had just had made for his White Wyandottes. He drew a sketch of it on the back of an envelope, showing the location of the heating plant, the location of the gasoline brooders, and the battery of eight electric incubators. He said he saw but one mistake he had made, which was that he had had a gravel roof put on. It should have been slate. He was afraid the hens would fly up onto the roof and eat the gravel for digestive purposes, and if a lot of tarry gravel got in their craws and stuck together in a lump, his hens would suffer from indigestion. But he said he meant to have the gravel roof taken off at once, regardless of cost, but he had not quite decided on a slate

roof. One of the slates might become loosened and fall and kill one of his prize White Wyandottes, which he held at seventy-five dollars each. If he could avoid the tar trouble, Rolfs said, he ought to have twelve hundred laying hens by the end of the summer, besides the broilers he would sell. He said he was going straight to a distinguished chemist when he reached town to learn if there was any dissolvent that would dissolve tar in a chicken's craw, without harming the craw.

Then Millington drew a sketch of the automatic heat regulator he was having made to attach to his heating apparatus. He said that ever since he had been keeping poultry he had made a study of coop heating, and that the trouble with most coops was that they were either too hot or too cold. He said a cold coop meant that the chickens got chilly and exhausted their vitality growing thick feathers when all their strength should have been used in egg-laying, and that a hot coop meant that the chickens felt lax and indolent. A hot coop enervated a chicken and made it too lazy to lay eggs, Millington said, but this regulator he was having made would keep the heat at an even temperature, summer and winter, and render the hens bright and cheerful and inclined to do their best. Millington explained that this was especially necessary with White Orpingtons, which are great eaters and consequently more inclined toward nervous dyspepsia, which makes a hen moody. He was going on in this way, and every one was hanging on his words, when he happened to say that one thing he always attended to most particularly was the state of his hens' teeth. He said he had, so far, avoided dyspepsia in his hens, by keeping their teeth in good condition. Every one knew poor teeth caused stomach troubles.

That was the end of Millington. Rolfs had been green with jealousy because so many commuters were listening to Millington, and the moment Millington mentioned teeth Rolfs sneered.

"How many teeth do White Orpingtons have, Millington?" he asked.

"I did not know they had any."

Then Millington saw his mistake, and did his best to explain that as a rule chickens had no teeth, but that he had, by a process of selection, created a strain that had eighteen teeth, nine above and nine below, but no one believed him, and Rolfs was crowing over him when he made his mistake. He was bragging that he never made a mistake of that kind, because he knew hens never got indigestion in any such way. All that was necessary he said, was to let them have plenty of exercise, and to let them out once in a while for a good fly. He said he let his hens out once every three days, so they could fly from tree to tree.

Then Millington asked, sneeringly, how high his hens could fly, and Rolfs said they were in such good condition they thought nothing of flying to the top of a forty-foot elm tree, and Millington sneered and said any one could guess what kind of White Wyandottes Rolfs had, when a common White Wyandotte is so heavy it cannot fly over a rake handle. That was the end of Rolfs, and I was glad of it, for the two of them had been getting enough reputation on the strength of my chickens. They sneaked out of the smoking car, and at last I had a chance to say a few words, modestly of course, about my splendid group of six hundred Buff Leghorns. I did not brag, as Millington and Rolfs had bragged, but stated facts coldly and calmly, and my words met the attention they deserved, for I was not speaking without knowledge, as Millington and Rolfs had spoken, but as a man who owns a hen can speak.

I reached home that evening in a pleasant state of mind, for I knew how kind hearted Isobel is, and I knew she would see, if I placed it before her, that it was extremely cruel to keep a hen in solitary confinement, when the hen had probably been accustomed to a great deal of society. I felt sure that in a few days Isobel would order me to purchase enough more poultry to allow Spotty to lead a pleasant and sociable life. But when Isobel met me at the gate she disheartened me.

She said the grocer's grandmother had not been seriously ill, after all; she had been in a mere comatose condition, and had come to, and the grocer had come back, and he had called and taken Spotty. He offered to kill her--Spotty, not Isobel or his grandmother--but Isobel could not bear to eat Spotty so soon after she had been a member of our family, so the grocer took Spotty away and sent up another roaster. At least he said it was another, but after I had carved it I had my doubts. In general strength and durability the roaster and Spotty were one.

The next morning, when I went out to see if Mr. Prawley had hoed the garden properly, I found Mr. Rolfs and Mr. Millington leaning over my fence. They were unabashed.

"I have just been looking over your place," said Rolfs, "and I must say it is a most admirably located place on which to keep a cow. And if you want any suggestions on cow-keeping, you may call on me at any time. I have studied the cow, in all her moods and tempers, for years."

"Nonsense!" said Millington. "A man is foolish to try to keep live stock. Live stock is subject to all the ills--"

"Such as toothache!" sneered Rolfs.

"All the ills of man and beast," continued Millington. "What you want is an automobile. Now I will sell mine--"

"No!" I said positively.

"You only say that because you do not know my automobile as I know it," said Millington. "It is a wonder, that machine is. Now, I propose that to-morrow you and your wife take a little run up to Port Lafayette with me and my wife."

After the cares of chicken raising--"

"Very well, Millington," I said, "we will go to Port Lafayette!"

VII. CHESTERFIELD WHITING

THE next morning Millington came over bright and early, and his face was aglow with joy.

"Get ready as quickly as you can," he said, "for I will be ready to start for Port Lafayette in a few minutes. The automobile is in perfect order, and we should have a splendid trip. She isn't knocking at all." This knocking, which was located in the motor-case, or hood, was one of the most reliable noises of all those for which Millington listened when he started the engine of his automobile. He was very fond of it, and it was one of the heartiest knockings I ever heard in an automobile. It was like the hiccoughs, only more strenuous. It was as if a giant had been shut in the motor by mistake and was trying to knock the whole affair to pieces. The knock came about every eight seconds, lightly at first, getting stronger and stronger until it made the fore-end of the automobile bounce up a foot or eighteen inches at each knock.

Millington loved all the sounds of trouble, but this knocking gave him the most pleasure and put him in his pleasantest mood, for he could never quite discover the cause of it. When everything else was in perfect order the knock remained. He would do everything any man could think of to cure it, but the machine would continue to knock. I remember he even went so far as to put a new inner tube in a tire once, to see if that would have any effect, but it did not. But there were plenty of other noises, too. Millington once told me he had classified and scheduled four hundred and eighteen separate noises of disorder that he had heard in that one automobile, and that did not include any that might be another noise for the same disorders. And some days he would hear the whole four hundred and eighteen before we had gone a block. Those were his happy days.

But this morning Millington came over bright and early. Isobel was just putting a cake in the oven, and she only took time to tell Jane, or Sophie, or whoever happened to be our maid that week, that she would be back in time to take the cake out, and then we went over to Millington's garage.

Mrs. Millington, was already in the automobile, and Isobel and I got in, and Millington opened the throttle and the machine ran down the road to the street as lightly and skimmingly as a swallow. It glided into the street noiselessly and headed for Port Lafayette like a thing alive. I noticed that Millington looked anxious, but I thought nothing of it at the time. His brow was drawn into a frown, and from moment to moment he pulled his cap farther and farther down over his eyes. He leaned far over the side of the car. He listened so closely that his ears twitched.

Mrs. Millington and Isobel were chatting merrily on the rear seat, and I was just turning to cast them a word, when the car came to a stop. I turned to Millington instantly, ready to catch the pleasant bit of humour he usually let fall when he began to dig out his wrenches and pliers, but his face wore a glare of anger. His jaws were set, and he was muttering low, intense curses. I have seldom seen a man more demoniacal than Millington was at that moment. I asked him, merrily, what was the matter with the old junk shop this time, but instead of his usual chipper repartee, that "the old tea kettle has the epizootic," he gave me one ferocious glance in which murder was plainly to be seen.

Without a word he began walking around the automobile, eyeing it maliciously, and every time he passed a tire he kicked it as hard as he could. Then he began opening all the opening parts, and when he had opened them all and had peered into them long and angrily he went over to the curb and sat down and swore. Isobel and Mrs. Millington politely stuffed their handkerchiefs in their ears, but I went over to Millington and spoke to him as man to man.

"Millington," I said severely, "calm down! I am surprised. Time and again I have started for Port Lafayette with you, and time and again we have paused all day while you repaired the automobile. Much as I have wished to go to Port Lafayette I have never complained, because you have always been better company while repairing the machine than at any other time. But this I cannot stand. If you continue to act this way I shall never again go toward Port Lafayette with you. Brace up, and repair the machine."

Millington's only answer was a curse.

I was about to take him by the throat and teach him a little better manners when he arose and walked over to the machine again. He got in and started the motor, and listened intently while I ran alongside. Then, with a great effort he controlled his feelings and spoke.

"Ladies," he said between his teeth, "we shall have to postpone going to Port Lafayette. I am afraid to drive this car

any farther. There is something very, very serious the matter with it."

Then, when the women had disappeared, my wife walking rapidly so as to arrive at home before her cake was scorched, Millington turned to me.

"John," he said with emotion, "you must excuse the feeling I showed. I was upset; I admit that I was overcome. I have owned this car four years, but in all that time, although I have started for Port Lafayette nearly every day, the car has never behaved as it has just behaved. I am a brave man, John, and I have never been afraid of a motor-car before, but when my car acts as this car has just acted, I *am* afraid!"

I could see he was speaking the truth. His face was white about the mouth, and the tense lines showed he was nerving himself to do his duty. His voice trembled with the intensity of his self-control.

"John," he said, taking my hand, "were you listening to the car?"

"No," I had to admit. "No, Millington, I was not. I am ashamed to say it, but at the moment my mind was elsewhere. But," I added, as if in self defence, "I am pretty sure I did not hear that knocking. I remember quite distinctly that I was not holding on to anything, and when the engine knocks--But what did you hear?"

A shiver of involuntary fear passed over Millington, and he lowered his voice to a frightened whisper. He glanced fearfully at the automobile.

"Nothing!" he said.

"What?" I cried. I could not hide my astonishment and, I am afraid, my disbelief. I would not, for the world, have had Millington think I thought he was prevaricating.

"Not a thing!" he repeated firmly. "Not a sound; not one bad symptom. Every--everything was running just as it should--just as they do in other automobiles."

"Millington!" I said reproachfully.

"It is the truth!" he declared. "I swear it is the truth. Nothing seemed broken or about to break. I could not hear a sound of distress, or a symptom of disorder. Do you wonder I was overcome?"

"Millington," I said seriously, "this is no light matter. I shall not accuse you of wilfully lying to me, but I know your automobile, and I cannot believe your automobile could proceed four hundred feet without making noises of internal disorder. It is evident to me that your hearing is growing weak; you may be threatened with deafness." At this Millington seemed to cheer up considerably, for deafness was something he could understand. I proposed that we both get into the automobile again, and I, too, would listen. So we did. It was almost pathetic, it was most pathetic, to see the way Millington looked up into my face to see what verdict I would give when he started the motor.

My verdict was the very worst possible. We ran a block at low speed and I could hear no trouble. We ran a block at second speed, and no distressful noise did I hear. We ran two blocks at high speed, with no noise but the soft purring of motors and machinery. As Millington brought the automobile to a stop we looked at each other aghast. It was true, too true, *nothing was the matter with the automobile!* It sparked, it ignited, it did everything a perfect automobile should do, just as a perfect automobile should do it. We got out and stared at the automobile silently.

"John," said Millington at length, "you can easily see that I would not dare to start on a long trip like that to Port Lafayette when my automobile is acting in this unaccountable manner. It would be the most foolhardy recklessness. When this machine is running in an absolutely perfect manner, almost anything may be the matter with it. My own opinion is that a spell has been cast over it, and that it is bewitched."

"I never knew it to come as far as this without stopping," I said, "and to come this far without a single annoying noise makes me sure we should not attempt Port Lafayette to-day in this car. I shall take a little jaunt into the country behind my horse, and--"

"But don't go to Port Lafayette," pleaded Millington. "Perhaps the automobile will be worse to-morrow. If she only develops some of the noises I am familiar with I shall not be afraid of her."

One of the pleasures of being a suburbanite is that you can have a horse, and one of the pleasures of having a horse is that you keep off the main roads when you go driving, lest the automobiles get you and your horse into an awful mess. In driving up cross roads and down back roads you often run across things you would like to own--things the automobilist never sees--and Isobel and I had heard of a genuine Windsor chair of ancient lineage. I imagine the chair may have been almost as old as our horse. When Mr. Millington told me we could not go to Port Lafayette in his automobile that day, I hurried home and had Mr. Prawley harness Bob, and it was that day, when we were hunting the Windsor chair, that we ran across Chesterfield Whiting. Since Isobel had begun to like suburban life, she liked it as only a convert could, and the moment she saw Chesterfield Whiting she declared we must, by all means, keep a pig, and that Chesterfield Whiting was the pig we must keep.

Personally I was not much in favour of keeping a pig. I like things that pay dividends more frequently. I would not give much for a vegetable garden that had to be planted in the spring, worked all summer, tended all fall, and that only yielded its product in the winter. I prefer a garden that gives a vegetable once in awhile. Mine does that--it gives a

vegetable every once in awhile. But a pig is a slow dividend payer.

I had noticed that Mr. Rolfs and Mr. Millington had never urged me to get a pig. Whenever I mentioned pig they mentioned various deadly and popular pig diseases. They had urged me to garden, and to keep chickens, and a horse, and a cow, and even an automobile--Millington urged me to keep his--but never a pig! I would not hint that Rolfs and Millington were selfish, or that they hoped to receive, now and then, milk from my cow, eggs from my chickens, or radishes from my garden, but a neighbour may profit in that way. On the other hand, the neighbour never profits from the suburban pig. I believe now, however, that Rolfs and Millington wished me to have things that would pay as they went.

But the moment Isobel saw the pig she said we must have him, because he was so cute. I had never thought of buying a pig because it was cute any more than I would have thought of buying a spring bonnet because it would fatten well for winter killing, but I yielded to Isobel.

Isobel said the idea of a pig being a nuisance was all nonsense, for she had been reading a magazine that was largely devoted to pigs and similar objects loved by country gentlemen, and that modern science proved beyond a doubt that the cleaner the pig the happier it was. She said a pig could not be too clean, and that if a pig was kept perfectly tidy no one could object to it.

"John," she said, "there is no reason in the world why a pig should not be as clean as a new pin. The magazine says that if a pig is usually of a coarse, disgruntled nature, it is only because it is kept in coarse, brutalizing surroundings, and treated like a pig. If a pig is put amidst sweetness and light, the pig's nature will be sweet and light, and the pig will be sweet and light."

I suggested gently that a pig, all things considered, was usually counted a failure if it was a light pig, and that experts had decided in favour of the pig that became heavy and soggy.

"What I mean," said Isobel, "is light in spirit, not light in weight."

We were looking over the fence of a farm when we held this little conversation, and Chesterfield Whiting was sporting on the clean, green clover, amidst his brothers, quite unconscious that he was so soon to be separated from them and lose their companionship. We had been attracted to him by a very hand-made sign that announced "Pigs for Sale." Chesterfield was an extremely clean pig, and I must admit that I was rather taken by his looks myself, and when we drove around to the farm house I was surprised to learn how inexpensive a pig of tender years is, and I bought the pig. It is hard for me to deny Isobel these little pleasures.

On our way home Isobel and I talked of the future of Chesterfield, and we resolved that his life should be one grand, sweet song, as the poet says, and we had hardly started homeward than it appeared as if Chesterfield meant to attend to the song feature of his life himself. I never imagined a pig would feel his separation from his native place so keenly. He began to mourn in a keen treble key the moment the farmer grabbed him, uttering long, sharp wails of sorrow, and he kept it up. Automobiles with siren horns stopped in the road as we passed, and the chauffeurs took off their goggles and stared at us. It was very hard for Isobel to sit up straight in the carriage and look dignified and cool with Chesterfield wailing out his little soul sorrows under the seat.

As we neared the outskirts of Westcote, I began to keep an eye out for pig houses. It seemed to me that in these days of uplift the pig keepers of a suburb such as ours, peopled by intelligent men and women, would have the most modern improvements in pig dwellings, and I desired to make a few mental notes of them as I passed by. If I saw a very modern pig palace I meant to get out of the carriage and examine minutely the conveniences installed for the pig's comfort, so that I might reproduce them.

Isobel had mentioned casually that a pig dwelling with tile floors and walls and a shower bath would be quite sanitary, provided the tiles of the wall met the tiles of the floor in a concave curve, leaving no sharp angles; but as we journeyed into the village we saw no pig houses of this kind. In fact we saw no pig houses of any kind. At first this only annoyed me, then it surprised me, and by the time we were well into the village it worried me.

"Isobel," I said, "I don't like this absence of pigs in this village. I am afraid there is something wrong here. I don't know what to make of it. It may be that hog-cholera is epidemic here the year 'round, just as San Jose scale kills all the apple trees. Have you seen a single pig?"

"Not one," she admitted. "It looks as if there was a law against pigs."

I stopped Bob, and looked at Isobel in amazement.

"Isobel!" I exclaimed. "You must be right! There must be a law against pigs! I do wish Chesterfield would stop yelling!"

"John," said Isobel, "now that I come to think of it I do not believe I ever saw a pig in all Westcote. I wonder if we couldn't gag Chesterfield some way? If he howls like that every one will know we have a pig."

I gagged the pig. I took Isobel's pink veil and wrapped it firmly around Chesterfield's nose, and brought the ends around his neck and tied them. Then I stuck his head into the sleeve of my rain coat and wrapped him in the coat, and tied it all in the linen dust robe. He was well gagged.

"Isobel," I said, as I took up the reins again, "this is a serious matter. We will have to get rid of this pig, and we will have to do it quickly. I do not want to get into difficulties with the City of New York. Keeping a pig in the suburbs is evidently a crime, and it is a difficult crime to conceal. If I committed a murder and used ordinary precautions there might be no danger of detection, but a pig speaks for itself."

"Chesterfield does," said Isobel. "Do you suppose they will put you in jail?"

"Me in jail?" I ejaculated. "He is your pig, Isobel."

"John," she said generously, "I give Chesterfield to you."

"Isobel," I said, "I cannot accept the sacrifice. He is your pig."

"Well," she said, "we will go to prison together."

VIII. SALTED ALMONDS

As we approached our house, Mr. Millington, who was in his garage, and Mr. Rolfs, who was on his porch, came to meet us. They looked at the carriage with suspicion, but I assumed a careless, innocent look, well calculated to deceive them. They came down to the carriage, and laid their hands on it, and glanced into it. Mr. Rolfs, with ill-assumed absent-mindedness, lifted the leather cover of the rear of the carriage box and glanced in. I was glad we had put Chesterfield Whiting under the seat.

"Shall I take in the--" Isobel began, but I cut her words short.

"No, I will take in your *wraps*," I said meaningly, and then added: "Well, good night, Millington; good night, Rolfs."

They did not take the hint. They walked beside the carriage as I drove to the stable, and although Mr. Prawley was able to do the work alone, and I made some excuse to help him, Rolfs and Millington seemed eager to help us.

"I worked two hours over my automobile," said Millington, "and she is knocking again as usual. To-morrow, I propose you and I and our wives will take a little pig up to Port Lafayette--"

"Pig?" I said. "What do you mean by pig, Millington?"

"Did I say pig?" said Millington in great confusion. "I meant to say: 'take a little spin.'"

"John will think you think he is thinking of keeping a pig," said Rolfs accusingly to Millington. "He will think you are doubting his sanity. John would no more keep a pig on this place--"

"Certainly not!" I cried. "The idea! Keep a pig!"

"Well, you know," said Millington, and then stopped. "What is that squeak?" he asked.

I knew only too well what that squeak was. It was Chesterfield.

"That?" I said carelessly. "Oh, that is nothing. My carriage springs need oiling. Mr. Prawley, don't forget to oil the carriage springs to-morrow."

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Prawley, "but if I might suggest feeding the--"

"Ahem!" I said loudly. "Oil the springs, Prawley. To-morrow."

"When I said 'take a little pig,'" said Millington, "I meant--"

"Millington," I said, "I forgive you! Men will make mistakes--slip of the tongue--Well, good night!"

"See here," said Millington, "I know you feel some resentment."

"No I don't! Good night!" I said angrily.

"Yes you do!" said Millington. "And I'll tell you why. You remember you mentioned, some time ago, that you thought you would keep a pig? Personally I would be delighted to have you keep a pig or even a lot of pigs. You could make an infernal stock yard of your place if you wanted to. I love pigs. If I could have my way I would have a pig pen immediately under my window, so that when I awakened in the morning I could glance down at the happy, contented creatures. Nothing starts the day so well as to see contented creatures, and there is nothing so contented as a pig. If I could have my own way I would beg you to build your pig pen immediately under my window. But I am not a selfish man."

"I know you are not, Millington," I said; "but I am not considering the purchase of a pig. Good night!"

"Of course you are not," said Rolfs, "and I only want to say that if you do keep a pig you can gratify Millington, for

every law of pig culture demands that you build your pig house against the western fence, and not against my fence. The pig is a delicate creature, and his pen should be where the invigorating rays of the morning sun can strike him. Now my fence is the eastern fence--"

"And this man Rolfs pretends to be your friend!" exclaimed Millington sneeringly.

"Why every one knows that unless a pig has sweet dreams he becomes moody and listless, and loses interest in life. A pig's place of residence should always be where the last rays of the sun can strike him--against the eastern fence. You want to put that pen against Rolfs fence."

At this Mr. Rolfs became greatly agitated. He glared at Mr. Millington, and shook his fist at me.

"You'll put no pig pen on my side of your yard!" he said threateningly.

"And you keep your pig pen away from my fence," said Mr. Millington hotly. "I am your friend, and I start to Port Lafayette with you day after day--"

"Millington," said Rolfs, calming himself, "we will not have a pig in this neighbourhood at all. If this fellow attempts to keep a pig we will have the law on him. That is what we will do!"

"That is what we will do, Rolfs," said Millington, "at the first evidence of a pig we will set the police on him. We won't stand it!" "Gentlemen," I said calmly, "I have no intention of keeping a pig. Such an idea never entered my mind. And as for you, Millington, I know you now. You have shown yourself as you are. Never again, Millington, shall I start to Port Lafayette in your automobile. That is final! Good night, gentlemen!"

Millington and Rolfs went off arm in arm, and when they were out of sight I hurriedly rescued Chesterfield Whiting, in all his wrappings, from under the seat, and rushed him into the house. I let Mr. Prawley continue to unharness the horse. I told Isobel what my neighbours had said. Chesterfield, in his gags, lay at my feet.

"To-morrow, Isobel," I said, "we must get rid of Chesterfield Whiting. In the meantime we must keep him a dark secret. We must keep him silent, or we are lost."

Suddenly the dust-robe bundle at our feet began to palpitate violently. It bounced like a fish out of water, and I made a grab for it. Chesterfield screamed. I threw myself hastily upon him and wrapped him in my arms and muzzled the bunch of veil that was his nose with my hand. As I stood erect again I chanced to glance out of the window, and I saw Mr. Rolfs and Mr. Millington in deep conversation with a policeman. From time to time they turned and glanced at my house. Motioning Isobel to follow me, I bore Chesterfield to the attic. We closed the windows of the trunk room in the attic, and locked the door. Then I opened a trunk, unwrapped Chesterfield and dropped him into the trunk, and shut the lid. And sat on it.



Isobel peeked out of the window, and told me that the policeman and Mr. Rolfs and Mr. Millington were staring at our attic windows.

An ordinary pig would have been glad to be unwrapped and dropped into a cozy, roomy trunk, but Chesterfield was no ordinary pig. He was a weeper. First he wailed for his lost home. Then he screamed for his mother. Then he shrieked for each of his dear little brothers and sisters individually. Then he opened his lungs and squealed for all of them at once, and the policeman took out his note-book and wrote down the number of our house. I realized then that keeping a pig in the suburbs is attended by difficulties. The theory of keeping your pigs cheerful and happy is all right in a book, but it is hard to live up to when the pig is homesick and a policeman with a note-book is on your front walk. It is well enough for an agricultural writer to sit in his hall bedroom in the city and scribble about uplifting the pig, and spiritualizing it, and bathing it, but did he ever try to soothe a homesick pig in an attic? Did he ever try to bathe a pig in a trunk? Did he ever try to scatter sunshine in a pig's life when the pig has firmly made up its mind to mourn? Did he ever try to reason with the pig when the pig is full of squeal, and has no desire in life but to pour forth eons and leagues of it?

When a pig feels like that, it is useless to read it chapters from Hamilton Wright Mabie's "Essays on Nature and Culture." Occasionally I opened the lid of the trunk and looked in to assure myself that there was but one pig, and not three or four. When a pig reaches the stage where its eyes become set and stary, and it gives forth long, soul-piercing wails, it does not want a bath. It does not want sunshine, nor Bible classes, nor uplift, nor simple life. It wants food.

The more I studied Chesterfield the more certain I became that if a man wants to win the affection of a pig he can best do so, not by lifting the pig over the edge of a porcelain bath tub every few hours to give it a rub-down, but by standing by with a couple of tons of feed and shovelling it down the pig with a scoop-shovel. The pig's squawker and its swallower are one and the same instrument, and the only way to keep the squawker quiet is to keep the swallower plugged with food. In its idle hours the pig may long for sweetness and light, but it wants meals at all hours of the day and night.

We found that Chesterfield preferred salted almonds to affection. He began eating salted almonds immediately after we had fed him everything else in the house that was edible, and by feeding him one almond at a time Isobel was able to keep him interested. By this means she kept his mind off his sorrows. He could not weep and chew.

Time and again, as the hours slipped by, Isobel tested Chesterfield, to see if he was satisfied, but at each test his sorrow broke forth afresh. I never knew a pig was so full of sorrows. I would not have believed that so small a pig, so full of salted almonds, could have room for one small sorrow. And yet, the moment Isobel ceased feeding him, he would run around inside the trunk, nosing it and wailing for--I don't know what he was wailing for!

About midnight, when Isobel was worn out, I took her place and let her go to bed. I told her I would feed salted almonds until three, and then call her, and she could feed until six, while I got a little sleep. About two o'clock in the morning I gave Chesterfield his eighteenth drink of water, and when I offered him another salted almond he seemed languid. He eyed it covetously, opened his mouth, sighed once, and fell over sideways. His regular breathing told me he had fallen into a deep, sweet sleep, and I removed my shoes and stole softly downstairs.

"He has fallen asleep," I told Isobel, "and I think he will probably take a good nap. He has had a hard day. I left him quite comfortable and--"

"Drink! Almonds! Mother! I'm lone-lee-ee-wee-wee-wee!" wailed Chesterfield at that instant, and I hurried up to the attic. I threw open the lid of the trunk, and found him standing on his feet. He was still asleep, his white-lashed eyes firmly closed in slumber, but his squealer was working as if he were awake, and when I fed him a salted almond he munched and swallowed it without awakening, and squealed for another. He was so sound asleep that he could not even reach out for the almonds; I had to poke them into his mouth. When I missed his mouth and dropped the almond on the floor of the trunk he squealed. At last he lay down comfortably and slept and ate almonds.

I had one great fear. I was running out of almonds. So I tried him with wads of newspaper, and found they satisfied him quite as well. I fed him a complete Sunday newspaper, including the coloured supplement and the "want" advertisements, before sunrise. I imagine the newspaper was not very nourishing, for Chesterfield awakened at sunrise with a tremendous appetite, and let us know, plainly, that he was starving to death. I fed him my breakfast and Isobel's while Mr. Prawley was digging up what remained in our vegetable garden, and when Chesterfield had eaten that I gagged him with the pink veil, and stuffed his head in the sleeve of my rain coat once more.

"Isobel," I said, "the time has at last come when we must cease keeping pigs. I love to be surrounded by affection, but I believe we have kept this pig long enough. An attic is no place in which to run a modern swine industry. It is too far from the nearest bath tub. Bathe him now, if you would bathe him at all, for he is going back to the farm."

"If we packed him in a trunk," said Isobel thoughtfully, paying no attention to the bath suggestion, "we might send him back to the farmer by express, and Mr. Rolfs and Mr. Millington would never know we had--"

"That is a good idea," I said, "except that we do not know the name of the farmer, and that the Interurban does not deliver express parcels twelve miles from Westcote--"

"We might pack him in a suit case," suggested Isobel. "If we packed him in the suit case and pretended we were going on a picnic and that the suit case was our lunch--I suppose Chesterfield will be some one's lunch some day?"

"Fine!" I said, and we began pretending we were going on a picnic. I packed Chesterfield Whiting in the suit case, and then went down and had Mr. Prawley harness the horse. I noticed that the policeman was still hanging near our house, and that Mr. Millington was eyeing me from his porch.

"Ah! Millington!" I called cheerfully. "Fine day for a picnic! Isobel and I are just off for one."

He came running over immediately. "Admirable!" he cried. "I was just coming over to suggest that very thing. The automobile is running beautifully this morning, and we four can run up to Port Lafayette--"

Port Lafayette!

"Millington," I said, assuming an angry tone, "last evening you insulted me, and you seem to think I will forgive you thus easily. No indeed! I am not that sort of man, Millington. I will not take Isobel to Port Lafayette, for I have promised to let you take us there, but we will go on this picnic behind Bob. And if you see Rolfs just tell him what a silly ass he made of himself, thinking I would be crazy enough to keep a pig. I may be some kinds of a fool, Millington, but I am not that kind!"

I think Millington blushed. He should have blushed. Saying I would keep a pig, indeed!

When I returned for Isobel and carried the suit case downstairs I felt as light-hearted as a boy. Chesterfield was so well muzzled and gagged that he made no sound whatever, and when I stepped from my door, with Isobel by my side, I was pleased to see Rolfs stepping from his front door, and I hailed him. He stopped, but he looked annoyed.

"If you want to say anything ugly, say it quick," he said, "for I'm in a rush to catch a train, and if I just catch it, I can just catch the ferry, to catch a train for Chicago. I can't stop now--"

"Get in the buggy," I said heartily, "we will drive you to the station. Isobel and I are going on a little picnic. Put your suit case in the back, with ours. We always carry our lunch in a suit case when we go picnicing. Hop in!"

"Well, it is kind of you," said Rolfs rather sheepishly. "I hope you did not feel hurt by what I said last night about pigs. I feel rather strongly about pigs."

"Rolfs," I said as I gathered up the reins, "I am not a man to nurse hard feelings, but I must say--"

"Look here!" said Rolfs, "I did not get into this buggy to listen to--"

"You can get out again," I said inhospitably, "any time you do not like straight, honest talk. I mean nothing unneighbourly but when a man accuses--"

Without another word Rolfs jumped out, and grabbing his suit case, walked haughtily away. I could not forbear giving him a little dig.

"*Bon voyage*, Rolfs," I called. "Don't get pigs on the brain to-night again!" and Isobel and I laughed as we drove away.

When the farmer saw us drive into his yard he seemed surprised, but he was nice about it. He said he was willing to pay us back half what we had paid him for Chesterfield Whiting, but we would not hear of it.

"No," I said firmly, "we have had our money's worth of pig!"

Then I opened the suit case.

It contained, among other things, a suit of pajamas, a tooth brush, four shirts, six pair of socks, underwear, handkerchiefs, a book entitled "The Complete Rights of the Citizen," and twelve collars. But no pig.

All the articles were of good quality, and most had Rolfs' initials on them. I must say the suit case contained a nice assortment of haberdashery. But no pig. Not that I blamed Rolfs for not packing a pig in his suit case, for he was going to Chicago where there are stock yards full of pigs, if he should happen to want one. And a suit case is no place for a pig, anyway. Imagine the feelings of a man in a sleeping car when he has buckled the curtains of his berth around him, and has partly undressed behind them. And then imagine him reaching down and opening his suit case, expecting to find a suit of pajamas, and finding, instead, a pig. Imagine him when the pig--a Chesterfield Whiting pig--springs lightly forth and gives voice to his homesickness!

IX. THE ROYAL GAME OR SEVERAL DAYS AFTER THE PIG EPISODE

I refused to start for Port Lafayette in Millington's automobile, although he used to lean over the fence and beg me almost tearfully, but one fine morning he came over, and he looked so haggard and careworn that I took pity on him.

"John," he said, as he led me to his garage, which was on the back of his lot, "I am sure this automobile of mine is bewitched. I cannot think of anything else that would make it behave as an automobile in good health should, and I give you my word of honour that it is acting in perfect rhythm, never slipping a cog nor missing fire. Of course, with the machine behaving in that unaccountable manner, I would not dare to start for Port Lafayette, but I want to run you around to the Country Club. You ought to be in our Country Club, and I want you to see it, and I want you to tell me what you think about this automobile of mine. I can't understand it!"

I have often noticed three things: I have noticed that a boy is never really happy until he owns a dog; I have noticed that a flat-dweller is never content until he owns a phonograph; but above all I have noticed that the commuter--the man that lives in the sweet-scented, tree-embowered suburbs--is restless and uneasy until he joins the Country Club. So I accepted Millington's invitation.

We ran out of his yard and half a block up the street, Millington listening carefully all the while, and we could not hear a sound of distress in any part of the automobile. Millington stopped the car and got out.

"I am going to walk to the Club," he said. "I won't trust myself in that car. As for you, as it was entirely for your sake I proposed this little run to the Club, I am going to put the machine in your charge, and you are to run it around the block until it resumes its normal bad condition. From what I know of you and the remarks you have made while I have tried to repair the engine, I believe you will soon have it making all sorts of noises, and," he added, "perhaps it will be making a noise it never made before."

Then he showed me how to start, and what to touch if a tree or telephone post got in my way, and then he went on to the Country Club.

I was much touched by this evidence of Millington's faith in my ability to bring out the bad points of his automobile, and as soon as he disappeared I set to work, and I had hardly gone twice around the block before I had it knocking more loudly than ever I had heard it knock. But I was resolved to show Millington that his trust was not misplaced, and I ran the nose of the machine into a tree, threw on the high speed suddenly until I heard a grinding noise that told me the gears were stripped. Then I left the car there and walked on to the Country Club.

A Country Club is an institution conducted for the purpose of securing as many new members as possible, in order that their initiation fees may pay for the upkeep of the golf green. Aside from this, the object of the club is to enable the men that mow the grass to make an honest living by selling the golf balls they find while mowing the grass.

The Membership Committee, on which Millington served, is a small body of men whose duty it is to learn, as soon as possible, who that new man is that moved into Billing's house, and to get twenty dollars in initiation fees from him, before he has spent all his money for mosquito screens.

When Millington said to me, in the way members of Country Clubs have, "*You* ought to be in our Country Club," I was tickled. I did not know then that Millington was on the membership committee, and his willingness to admit me to fellowship seemed to show that I had been promptly recognized as a desirable citizen of Westcote; a man worth knowing; one of the inner circle of desirables. What more fully convinced me was the eagerness of Mr. Rolfs.

"We *must* have you in," said Rolfs. "I have been speaking to several of the members about you, and they are all enthusiastic about taking you in. Of course, our green is a little ragged just now, but when we get your mon--when--of course, the green is a little ragged just now, but we expect to have it trimmed soon, very soon."

Isobel was delighted when I told her I contemplated joining the Country Club. She said it would do me all the good in the world to play a game of golf now and then, and when I mentioned that I thought of taking family membership, which would admit her to all the club privileges, she was more than pleased. So were Mr. Rolfs and Mr. Millington. I forget how many more dollars a family membership cost. They shook hands with me warmly, and Millington said something to Rolfs about their now being able to dump another load or two of sand on the bunker at the sixth hole. They also said the ladies would be delighted. Many, they said, had asked them why Isobel had not joined.

Then they mentioned earnestly that the initiation fee and the first year's dues were payable immediately. They even offered to send in my check for the amount with my membership application.

I had never played golf, but Millington said he would lend me an excellent book on the game, written by one of the great players, and Rolfs offered to pick me out a set of clubs. He was enthusiastic when we went to the shop where clubs were sold, and I must say he did not allow the clerk to foist off on me any old-fashioned, shopworn clubs. He said with pride, as we left the shop, that, so far as he knew, every club I had secured was absolutely new in model, and that not one club in the lot was of a kind ever seen on the Westcote course before. Some he said, he was sure had never been seen on any course anywhere.

He said my putter would create great excitement when it appeared on the course. I must give him credit for being right. The putter was, perhaps, too much like a brass sledge-hammer to be graceful, and I found later that it worked much better as a croquet mallet than as a tool for putting a golf ball into a hole, but it was fine advertisement for a new member. Members who might never have noticed me at all began to speak of me immediately. They referred to me as "that fellow that Rolfs got to buy the idiotic putter."

The golf course at our Westcote Country Club is one of the best I have ever seen. It is almost free from those irregularities of ground that make so many golf courses fretful. In selecting the ground the Committee had in mind, I think, a billiard table, but as it was impossible to secure a sufficiently large plot of ground as level as that near Westcote, they secured the most level they could and then went over it with a steam grader. The envious members of the Oakland Club speak of it as the Westcote Croquet Grounds.

The first day I appeared at the club I saw that golf was indeed a difficult game, particularly after Mr. Millington had explained how it was worked. He began by remarking that, of course, I could not expect to do much with "that bunch of crazy scrap iron"--that being the manner in which he referred to the up-to-date clubs Rolfs had selected for me--and that no man who knew anything about golf ever used the red-white-and-pink polka-dot balls, which were the kind Rolfs had advised me to buy. Then he looked through my clubs scornfully and selected my putter.

"Usually," he said ironically, "we begin with a driver, and drive the ball as far as we can from this place, which is called the driving green, but I think this tool, in your hands, will do as well as anything else in your collection of kitchen cutlery. What do you call this tool, anyway?"

I looked at the label on the handle and read it. I told Millington it was a putter, but he would not believe me. I showed him the label, which said quite plainly "putter," but he was still skeptical. He did not deny positively that it was a putter; he merely said, "Well, if this instrument of torture is a putter, I'll eat it."



Mr. Millington then made a little mound of sand which he took from the green sandbox, and set one of my golf balls on top of the mound. This, I soon learned, is called "teeing" the ball.

"Now," said Mr. Millington, "I will explain the game. When the ball is teed as you see it here, you take the club and hit the ball so it will travel low and straight through the air as far as possible toward that red flag you see yonder. The ball will alight on the fair green. You follow it, and hit it again, and it should then alight fairly and squarely on the putting-green. You then follow it, take the pole that bears the flag out of the hole you will find there, and gently knock your ball into the hole. That is all there is to the game."

"But what shall I do," I asked, "if my first knock at the ball carries it beyond the flag?"

Mr. Millington glanced at the patent putter I held in my hand, and sighed.

"Excuse me," he said, "but the rules of the game permit one to grasp the club with both hands."

"I guess," I said airily, "until I get the swing of it I will grasp the club with one hand. I only use one hand in playing croquet."

"In that case," said Mr. Millington, "if you knock the ball past the flag I will eat the flag. I will also eat the ball. Also the thing you call a putter. If you knock the ball half way to the flag, I will eat all the grass on this golf course."

"Be careful, Millington," I warned him. "You may have to eat that grass. Now, stand back and let me have a fair whack at the ball."

With that I swung the putter around my head two or three times, to gather the necessary impetus, and then hit the ball a terrible whack. I put my full strength into the blow, for I wanted to show Millington that I had the making of a golfer in me; but when my putter ceased revolving around me Millington seemed unimpressed. I put my hand above my eyes and gazed into the far distance, hoping to catch sight of the ball when it alighted. But I did not see it.



"Millington," I said, "did you see where that ball went?"

"I did," he said, turning to the left. "It went over there, into that tall grass. It is a lost ball. Every ball that goes into that tall grass is gone forever. I have never known any one to recover a ball that fell in that tall grass."

Then he stepped proudly to the sand-box and made another tee.

"Hand me a ball," he said, "and I will show you the proper way to hit it."

I gave him a ball and he placed it carefully on the tee. Then he grasped his driver in both hands, snuggled the head of it up to the ball lovingly, drew back the club and struck the ball. I was not quick enough to see the ball go, but Millington was.

"Fine!" he exclaimed. "I sliced it a little, but I must have got good distance. I must have driven that ball two hundred yards."

"But where did it go?" I asked.

"Well," said Millington, "I did slice it a little. It went off there to the right, into that tall grass. It is a lost ball. I have never known any one to recover a ball that fell in that tall grass. But let me have another ball and I will show you--"

I told Millington I guessed I would lose a couple of balls myself while I had a few left, if it was not against the rules. He said no, a player could lose as many as he wished; in fact many players lost more than they wished.

I found this to be so. We played around the nine holes and I made a score of 114, and Millington was delighted. He said it was a splendid score to turn in to the handicapping committee, and that he wished he could make a large, safe score like that. He said no one in the club had ever made more than 110 and that the average was about 45. Then he said I need not lose hope, for at any rate I had not lost a ball at every stroke. He said he had imagined when he saw me play that I would lose a ball at every stroke, for my style of playing--my "form" he called it--was the sort that ought to lose me one ball for every stroke.

When I reached home I found Isobel awaiting me, and, without thinking, I blurted out that I had lost thirty-eight golf balls. Her mouth hardened.

"John," she said, "I have been talking with Mrs. Rolfs and Mrs. Millington about this game of golf, and what they say has given me an entirely different opinion of it. When I advised you to take it up I had no idea it was a gambling

game, but they both tell me the matches are often played for a stake of balls. Mrs. Rolfs says her husband has accumulated eighty balls in this way, and Mrs. Millington says her husband has laid up a store of over fifty. And now, when you come home and tell me you have lost, in one afternoon, thirty-eight golf balls, at a cost of fifty cents each, I feel that golf is a wicked, sinful game. I do not want to seem severe, but I do not approve of gambling, and if you continue to lose so many golf balls you will have to give up the game."

X. ADVANCED GOLF

THAT evening Millington dropped over to chat for a few minutes, and he was in good spirits. He told me he had found the automobile where I had left it with its nose against the tree, and that it had been necessary to hire a team to pull it home. Isobel said she would never forget the pleased expression on Millington's face as he saw the helpless machine being towed into his yard, and between what both of them said I felt rightly proud at having lifted such a load from his mind.

"Now," said Millington cheerfully, "we can all start for Port Lafayette in the morning. I will get up at four to-morrow morning and tinker at the motor, and by nine, or ten at the latest, we will be ready to start."

At ten the next morning, therefore, Isobel and I went over to Millington's garage, but our first glimpse of him told us all was not well. He was sitting on the garage step with his head buried in his arms, while his wife was sitting beside him, vainly endeavouring to console him. For awhile he made no response to my queries, and then he only raised his mournful face and pointed at the automobile. He was too overcome for words, and his wife had to give us the awful facts.

"This morning at four," she said, "Edward came out and prepared to do what he could to repair the motor you had so kindly put to the bad. He was then his usual, cheerful self. He leaped lightly into the chauffeur's seat, touched the starting lever, and, to his utter distress, the automobile moved smoothly out of the garage and down the driveway, without a single misplaced throb or sign of disorder. There was nothing the matter with the automobile at all. Not a thing to repair. It was as if it had just come from the factory. Of course he immediately gave up all idea of the little run to Port Lafayette. Now, there is only one thing to be done. You must take the machine and run it around the block until it is in a fit condition to be repaired. I am afraid you did not do a good job yesterday."

Although I felt rather hurt by the last words, I was not a man to desert Millington in his need, and without a word I jumped into the automobile and started. That morning I put in some hard work. It seemed that the automobile had repaired itself so well that nothing would ever be the matter with it again, but by persistent efforts and by doing everything an amateur could possibly do to ruin an automobile, I succeeded in developing its weak spots. Not until noon was I satisfied, but when the horses at last pulled the automobile into Millington's garage I felt I had done my duty. I had mashed the hood and cracked a cylinder, dished the left front wheel and absolutely ruined all the battery connections. I would have defied any man to make that automobile run one inch. It had been hard work, but I was amply repaid when Millington threw his arms around me and wept for joy on my shoulder. He was not usually a demonstrative man.

"Next week, or the week after, John," he said cheerfully, as he took off his coat, "I may have the machine patched up a little, and we will take that little run out to Port Lafayette. I feel that the trip has been delayed too long already, and I shall get to work at once."

"If you wish," I said, "I will lend you Mr. Prawley to hold things while you work on them."

"Prawley?" said Millington. "Prawley? That man of yours? No, thank you, John. That man Prawley is so fearful of automobiles that he trembles at the sight of a pair of goggles. He would die of fear if we forced him into this garage."

I left Millington whistling over his work, and that afternoon I took my putter and went to the golf grounds alone, for I had spent half the night reading the golf book Mr. Rolfs had lent me, and I saw I had not gone at the game in the right way. I knew now that I should have held my club with my right hand more to the right--or to the left--and my right foot nearer the ball--or not so near it--and with the head of my club heeled up more--or not so much. The directions given by the book were very explicit. They said a player must invariably lay his thumb along the shaft of the club, unless he wrapped it around the shaft, or let it stick up like a sore toe, or cut it off and got along without it, or did something else with it. The book seemed to imply that the proper way for a beginner to learn golf was to lock himself in a dark closet and indulge in silent meditation until he became an expert player, but the closets in my house were so narrow and shallow I felt I could not meditate broadly in them. So I went to the Country Club.

I met young Weldorf there, and as soon as he saw me he immediately proposed a round. He said he had wanted to play a round with me ever since he had heard of my clubs. He said he hoped I would not mind his dog being along, for the dog took a lively interest in the game of golf.

So I told Weldorf I loved dogs and that I thought a dog or two scattered around the links added greatly to the picturesqueness of the game. Weldorf's dog was a rather thin dog, of the white terrier kind, with black spots, and Weldorf explained that the reason there were bare, flesh-coloured spots on the dog was because he was just recovering from an attack of mange.

Weldorf drove first, and a beautiful drive it was, and with a gay bark the dog darted after the ball, but Weldorf spoke to him sternly, and he stopped short, although he still gazed after the ball yearningly. Then I drove. I exerted the whole of my enormous strength in that drive, and I think I surprised Weldorf. I know I surprised the dog. If I had been that dog, I, too, would have been surprised. There stood the dog, looking at Weldorf's ball, wagging his tail and thinking of nothing, and here came my ball with terrific speed. Suddenly the ball hit the dog on the hip with a splashy sort of smack, and immediately the dog was impelled forward and upward, giving voice, as we dog-fanciers say. He gave voice three times while in the air, and when he alighted he put his tail between his legs and dashed madly away.

219

We were not able to retrieve the dog until we reached the third teeing ground, and then I apologized to him. He did not accept my apology. He looked upon my most friendly advances with unjust suspicion. He seemed to have no faith in my game, and kept well to the rear of me, but when Weldorf addressed him in a few well-chosen words he unlooped his tail and wagged it in a halfhearted sort of way. I decided to ignore the dog. I raised the hinged lid of the sandbox and took out a large handful of sand to form my tee, and letting the lid fall took a step forward.

Immediately the dog gave voice! Weldorf had to raise the lid of the sand-box before the dog was able to get his tail out, but as soon as he had reassumed full control of his tail he placed it firmly between his legs and dashed madly away. It is nonsense to have a golf dog with a long tail.

By the time we reached the sixth putting-green the dog had begun to get lonely, and assumed a cheerful demeanour.

He returned to us with ingratiating poses, mainly sliding along the ground on his stomach as he approached, and I was glad to see him happy again, for I love dogs and I like to have them happy. He stood afar off, however, until he saw our balls on the putting-green. He knew that golfers do not "putt" as strenuously as they "drive." Then he came nearer. I took the flag-pole from the hole and let it fall gracefully to the ground. Without an instant of hesitation the dog gave voice! It was a long flag-pole, made of a plump bamboo fish-rod, and when it fell it seemed to strike directly on the eighth dorsal vertebra of the dog, at a spot where he was not recovering very well from the mange.

Weldorf said he had no doubt the dog would find his way home, and we stood and listened until the voice the dog was giving died away in the far distance, and then we holed out. It is nonsense for a dog to have dorsal vertebrae.

When we reached the seventh hole I found that the grounds committee was already using my initiation fee, for the grass mowers were at work there, and a man with a rake immediately stepped up to me, and said in the most friendly manner that he would be willing to part with some golf balls for money, if I would say nothing about it to the Board of Governors. He had sixteen, nine of which I recognized as some of those I had lost the day before, and he very generously offered to let me have the lot at fifteen cents each. I purchased them eagerly, and the man who was driving the mower at once descended and offered me twelve more at the same price. Between there and the ninth hole numerous caddies appeared from behind trees and bunkers and offered me balls at ridiculously low prices, and I, quite naturally, took advantage of their offers.

When I reached home Isobel asked me how I was progressing with my game. "Well," I said, "I return with forty-two more golf balls than I had when I went out."

Instantly her face brightened. She congratulated me warmly and said she was sure Mrs. Rolfs and Mrs. Millington had overstated the evils of the game. She said she thought she could see an improvement in my health already. She advised me to keep at the game until my health was beyond compare.

I now know that the book Mr. Rolfs lent me is mere piffle and that, for a man who takes his golf in the right way, a broom or a hairpin is as good as any other tool. I enjoy the game immensely, and find it great sport. Often I come home with fifty golf balls, and my low record is eighteen--but that was a legal holiday and the grass mowers were on vacation. I have so many golf balls in the house already that Isobel talks of having an addition built over the kitchen for storage purposes. As my game has improved I have acquired such dexterity that I can buy balls from the caddies at the rate of four for twenty-five cents. If I practise regularly I believe I shall in time reach a point where I can buy balls for five cents each. By holes, my best score is thirty-eight balls, made at the eighth hole on July 6th, from the red-headed caddy and the fat mowing man. My low score is one ball, made August 16th, at the first hole. I never make a large score there, as it is near the club house and the caddies are afraid of the Board of Governors.

When golf is taken rightly it arouses the instincts of the chase in a man, and I now feel the same joy in running down a caddy and bargaining for found balls that others feel in hunting wild animals. Golf, taken thus, is a splendid game.

And I have found that if I use my putter only, and knock the ball but a few yards each stroke, there is no need of losing a ball from one end of the year to the other. But even then one must remember the cardinal rule of all golfers--"Keep the eye on the ball."

XI. MY DOMESTICATED AUTOMOBILE

I HAVE said that I left Millington happily working over his automobile when I went to the Country Club that afternoon. When I returned he was still working away, and so well had I wrecked his car that all his repairing seemed to have made not the slightest impression on it.

"John," he said brightly, "you certainly did a good job. It will be months before I have this car in any shape at all, I am sure. It is going to take all my spare time, too. I mean to set my alarm clock for three, and get up at that time every morning."

It is always a pleasure for me to see another man happy, and at half-past two the next morning I was waiting for Millington at his garage door. He came out of his house promptly at three, and joked merrily as he unlocked the garage door, but the moment he threw open the door his face fell. And well it might! The dished wheel had been trued, the crushed hood had been straightened and painted, a new cylinder had replaced the cracked one, and when Millington tried the engine it ran without a sound except that of a perfectly working piece of well-adjusted machinery. Millington got out of the car and stood staring at the motor, and suddenly, with a low cry of anguish, he fell over backward as stiff

as a log. Mrs. Millington and I managed to carry him to bed, and then I returned to the garage. I was not going to desert Millington in his adversity.

After the doctor had visited the house, Mrs. Millington came out and told me that her husband was still in a comatose state, due to brain-shock, but that he kept repeating "Sell it! Sell it!" over and over, and she was sure he must mean the car. She said that while she would hate to part with the car, and give up all the pleasure of starting for Port Lafayette, she feared for her husband's reason if he continued to receive such shocks, and she was willing to sacrifice the car at a very low price, if I insisted. She said I had not, like Millington, become habituated to hearing a knocking in the engine, so' the lack of it would not bother me, and that owning a car that repaired itself over night was what most automobile owners would call a golden opportunity.

I suppose if I had come home and said to Isobel: "My dear, I have bought an Asiatic hyena," she would have been less shocked and surprised than she was when I entered the house and said: "Well, my dear, I have bought an automobile."

Isobel is of a rather nervous disposition, and driving behind Bob, our horse, had tended to eliminate any latent speed mania she may have ever had, for Bob is not a rapid horse. Of course, Isobel drove the horse at a trot occasionally, but that was when she wanted to go slower than a walk, for Bob was what may be called an upright trotter--one of those horses that trot like a grasshopper: the harder they trot the higher they rise in the air, and the less ground they cover. When Bob was in fine fettle, as we horsemen say, he could trot for hours with a perpendicular motion, like a sewing machine needle, and remain in one identical spot the whole time. He could trot tied to a post. Sometimes when he was feeling his oats he could trot backward.

I suppose that when I mentioned automobile Isobel had a vision of a bright-red car about twenty-five feet long, with a tonnage like an ocean steamer, and a speed of one hundred and ten miles an hour--one of the machines that flash by with a wail of agony and kill a couple of men just around the next corner. But Millington's automobile was not that kind. It was a tried and tested affair. It had been in a Christian family for five years, and was well broken. Nor was it a long automobile; it was one of the shortest automobiles I have ever seen; indeed, I do not think I ever saw such a short automobile. "Short and high" seemed to have been the maker's motto, and he had lived up to it. He couldn't have made the automobile any shorter without having cogs on the tires, so they could overlap. If the automobile had been much shorter the rear wheels would have been in front of the fore wheels. But what it lacked in length it made up in altitude. It averaged pretty well, multiplying the height by the length. It was the type known in the profession as the "camel type." When in action it had a motion somewhat like a camel, too, but more like a small boat on a wintry, wind-tossed sea. But, ah! the engine! There was a noble heart in that weak body! When the engine was in average knocking condition, one knew when it started. In two minutes after the engine started the driver was on the ground; if he did not become dizzy, sitting at such a height, and fall off, the engine shook him off.

But, if Isobel did not take kindly to the idea of owning Millington's automobile, Rolfs seemed glad I was going to buy it.

"You won't be everlastingly asking me to take a little run up to Port Lafayette," he said. "For years before you moved out here Millington bothered the life out of me, and I cannot bear riding in automobiles. I hate them worse than that hired man of yours does. How does he like the idea?"

I told him, rather haughtily, that I did not usually consult Mr. Prawley when I bought automobiles. Then Rolfs said he thought, usually, it was just as well for an ignorant man to consult some one, but that he knew Millington's automobile was a good one. He said he knew the man that had owned the machine ten or twelve years before Millington bought it. He said that every one knew that machines of that make that were made in 1895 were extremely durable. He said he remembered about this one particularly, because it was the period when milk shakes were the popular drink, and his friend used to make his own. He said his friend would put the ingredients in a bottle, and tie the bottle to the automobile seat, and then start the engine for a minute or two, and the milk would be completely shaken. So would his friend.

Rolfs asked me to let him know when I brought the automobile over from Millington's. I had no difficulty in doing so. When I ran that automobile the only difficulty was in concealing the fact that it was arriving anywhere and in getting it to arrive. Often it preferred not to arrive at all, but when it did arrive, it gave every one notice. Isobel never had to wonder whether I was arriving in my machine, or whether it was some visitor in another machine. Under my regime my machine had a sweet, purring sound like a road-roller loaded with scrap iron crossing a cobblestone bridge. When the engine was going and the car was not, it sounded like giant fire-crackers exploding under a dish pan.

The very day I purchased the car and brought it into my yard Mr. Prawley came to me and told me he had a very important communication to make. He said his poor old mother was sick, and he would like a month's vacation. He added that he imagined the automobile would last about twenty-nine days. As he said this his lean, villainous face wore a look of fear, and when I told him he could have the vacation, he departed, walking backward, keeping one eye on the automobile all the while.

But the automobile did not behave in the bewitched manner for me that it had for Millington. It did not repair itself

over night at all. If anything it deteriorated.

Oddly enough, now that the automobile was quite tame, Isobel, who usually has perfect confidence in me, declined to ride in it. But frequently we took rides together, driving side by side, she in her buggy behind Bob, and I in my automobile, and, occasionally, when the road was rough and the engine working well, I would drop in on her unexpectedly. But not always. Sometimes I fell off on the other side.

I found these little trips very pleasant and exceedingly good for a torpid liver--if I had had one--and I enjoyed having Isobel with me, especially when we came to bits of sandy road where the rear wheels of my automobile would revolve uselessly, as if for the mere pleasure of revolving.

Then I would unhitch Bob from the buggy and hitch him to the automobile, and he would tow me over the sandy stretch, aided by the engine. It was a pretty picture to see this helpfulness, one to the other, especially when my engine was palpitating in its wild, vibratory manner, and Bob was trotting at full speed, while I fell out of the automobile, first on one side and then on the other.

Isobel enjoyed these little moments exceedingly and often I had to go back to her, after I had passed the sandy spot, and pat her on the back until she could get her breath again. She had to admit that she had never imagined she could get so much pleasure out of an automobile. But it was that kind of an automobile--any one could get more pleasure out of it than in it.

I myself found that after the first novelty wore off automobiling became a bore. As a method of securing pleasure the cost per gallon to each unit of joy was too high, in that machine. Riding in my machine was not what is called "joy riding." It was more like a malady.

Of course we never attempted a long tour, like that to Port Lafayette, which is eleven miles from Westcote, and it was about the time my tire troubles began that I thought of domesticating my automobile. I remember with what pride I discovered my first puncture. Every automobile owner of my acquaintance had tire troubles, and I had never had any, and I felt slighted. Sometimes I felt tempted to take an awl and puncture a tire myself, so I, too, could talk about my tire

troubles, but I had a feeling that that would be unprofessional. I had never heard of any real sporty automobilist punching holes in his tires with awls; in fact they seemed to consider there was no particular pleasure in punctured tires. That was the way they talked--as if a puncture was a misfortune--but I knew better. I could hear the undercurrent of pride in their voices as they announced: "Well, I had three punctures and two blow-outs yesterday. I was running along slowly, about fifty-five miles an hour, between Oyster Bay and Huntington, when--" And then the next man would pipe up and say: "Yes? Well, I beat that. I was speeding a little--not much, but about sixty miles an hour--on the Jericho Turnpike last night, and all four tires--" And through it all I had to sit silent. I longed to be able to say: "I was speeding along yesterday at about half a mile an hour, the machine going better than usual, when suddenly I jumped out and stuck my penknife into the forward, left-hand tire--" I had never had a puncture. I was not in their class.

But my turn came. I was speeding a little--about one city block every five minutes--on Thirteenth Street, when my sparker stopped sparking. When your engine misses fire there are six hundred and forty-two things that may be the matter, and after you have tested the six hundred and forty-two, it may be an entirely new six hundred and forty-third trouble. I have known a man to try the full six hundred and forty-two remedies unavailingly, and then sigh and wipe his goggles, and the engine began working beautifully. And it was only by chance--pure chance--that he happened to wipe his goggles. Probably he had not wiped them for years. But after that the first thing he did when his engine did not fire was to wipe them. And never, never again did it have the least effect on the engine. That is one of the peculiar things about an automobile. And there are nine hundred and ninety-nine other peculiar things, each of which is more peculiar than all the rest.

243

I had just taken my automobile apart to discover why the engine did not work, and the various pieces of its anatomy were scattered up and down the street for a block or more, and I was hunting up another piece to take out, when I noticed that one of my tires was flat. I had a puncture! I suppose I would have thrilled with joy at any other time, but just after a man has dissected his automobile is no time for him to thrill. He has other things to amuse him. I have even known a man who had just discovered that his last battery had gone dead to swear a little when he discovered that two

tires had also gone flat.

It was when I was pumping up that new inner tube that I decided to domesticate my automobile. It seemed to be a shame to take such a delicate piece of machinery out on the rough, unfeeling road, and I remembered that Rolfs had told me of a Philadelphia friend of his who had half domesticated his automobile. Rolfs said that once, when he was foolish, he had ridden half an hour, out to his friend's farm, and there the automobile was jacked up and a belt attached to one of the rear wheels, and in less than five minutes the car was doing duty as a piece of farm machinery, running a feed cutter. Rolfs said it was great. He said it was the only time he ever felt satisfied that an automobile was getting what it deserved. He said that all the men had to do was to keep the fodder-cutter fed with fodder, and that it kept two farm hands busy. He said I ought to get some fodder and cut it that way and stop being an obstruction in the public highways. He suggested that I get some wood and saw wood with the automobile, or get some apples and make cider. He suggested a thousand things I could do with the automobile, and not one of them was riding in it.

I had tried riding in it myself, and after owning it a week or two I decided it was just the kind of automobile that was meant to do general household work. So I domesticated it.

XII. MR. PRAWLEY RETURNS

MARY was one of the most faithful servants a family ever had. Her faithfulness deserves this monument. She was a Pole and she could not pronounce her own name. She tried to pronounce it the first day she came to us, but along toward the sixth or seventh syllable she became confused and had to give it up. She said it was Schneider in English. Perhaps the reason she remained with us so long was because she had brought her Polish name with her, and it was too much trouble to move it from place to place. When she once got in a place, she liked to stay there. But "Schneider" was about the only English word she knew, and this made it a little difficult to explain to her that I had domesticated the automobile and would allow her to use it on wash day. I had to make a picture of it, and even then she seemed rather doubtful about it.

As a matter of fact it was all very simple, but Mary Schneider was stupid. We already had the washing machine, and we had the automobile, and it was only necessary to connect the rear wheel of the automobile with the drive wheel of the washing machine by means of a belt, jack up the rear axle of the automobile, and start the engine. I hoped in time to go further than this and hitch up the coffee mill, the carpet-sweeper, the ice-cream freezer, and all our other household machinery, and then Mary Schneider would have a very easy time of it. She could have sat in the automobile with her hands on the speed levers and the work would have done itself. But Mary would not sit in the automobile. She tried to explain that she had seen me sit in it and that the Schneiders, as a family, had very brittle bones and could not afford to fall out of automobiles of such height, but I could not understand what she was saying. I only understood that she said she would give notice immediately if she had to sit in that automobile while the palpitator was jiggering.

I had a feeling that all this was mere diffidence on her part, and that when she once saw how easy it all was she would be delighted with it. So I jacked up the rear axle of the car in my backyard, and attached the clothesline as a belt to the rear wheel and to the drive wheel of the washing machine. I remained at home one Monday morning especially to do this, and Isobel thought it was very kind of me. She said she was sure Mary could do it, and would be glad to, after she had once seen how it was done.

Mary put the soap in the washing machine, and the hot water, and the clothes, and I started the automobile engine. It was all I had hoped. Never, never had I seen clothes washed so rapidly. Luckily I had thought to nail the legs of the washing machine to the floor of the back porch. This steadied the washing machine and kept it from jumping more than it did. Of course, some vibration was conveyed along the rope belt from the automobile, and Mary had to hasten to and fro bringing more hot water to refill the washing machine. It was like a storm at sea, or a geyser, or a large hot fountain. When we had the automobile going at full speed the water hardly entered the washing machine before it dashed madly out again.

Isobel had to help by putting more clothes in the washing machine. It used up clothes as rapidly as Rolf's friend's fodder-cutter used up fodder, but I think it cut the clothes into smaller pieces. We discovered this when we hunted up the clothes later. We did not notice it at the time. All was excitement.

It was a proud moment for me. The engine was running as well as it ever did, the dasher of the washing machine was dashing to and fro with hot water, and Mrs. Rolfs and Mrs. Millington were cheering us on. I began to believe we would break all records for clothes washing if Mary and Isobel could only keep water and clothes in the washing

machine. Just then I fell out of the automobile.

Possibly the sudden removal of my weight had an effect. It may have been that my head in striking one of the rear wheels moved the axle. Of this I can never be sure. The rear axle unjacked itself, and as the rear wheels touched the ground the automobile darted away. I was just able to touch the washing machine as it hurried by, but it did not wait for me to secure a firm hold, and it went on its way. But Mary was faithful to the last. She--ignorant though she was--knew that the weekly wash should not dash off in this manner. She--although but a Pole, knew her duty and did it. Mary hung onto the washing machine. Whither the wash went she was going. And so she did. Rapidly, too.

The rear porch was not badly damaged. Only those boards to which the washing machine had been nailed went with it, but where the automobile went through the back fence we had to make extensive repairs. But it was all for the best. If the automobile had not made a hole in the fence Mary could not have gone through. Of course, she could have gone around by the gate, but she would have lost time, and she was not losing any time. Neither was the washing machine. The automobile did not gain an inch on it, and sometimes when the washing machine made a good jump it overtook the automobile. So did Mary.

I saw then that I had not thoroughly domesticated the automobile. As we stood and watched the automobile and the washing machine and Mary dashing rapidly away in the distance, we felt that the automobile was still a little too wild for household use, but I fully believed the automobile would be tame enough before it reached home again. A young, strong automobile may be able to take cross country runs without ill effects, but an elderly automobile, like the one I bought of Millington, cannot dash across country towing a washing machine and a Polish servant, whose name is Schneider in English, without danger to its constitution. I do not blame the washing machine--it could not let go, it was belted on--but if Mary had had presence of mind she would have released her grasp when she found the strain was too much for the automobile. But it is strange how differently the minds of male and female run. As I watched the automobile disappear over the edge of the hill I said:

"Isobel, I guess that ends that automobile," But Isobel said:

"John, I am afraid we have lost Mary." And yet that automobile and that Pole were the last two in the world I should ever have suspected of running away with each other. She came back later in the day, but she did not say much. She packed her trunk and took her wages, and remarked a remark that sounded like the English word Schneider translated into Polish. The washing machine did not return.

When Millington came out to the fence that evening I told him that I was done with automobiling, and that the automobile was probably mashed to flinders. He had been looking bad, but he brightened at the words.

"John," he said, "if that automobile is wrecked as badly as it should be after running wild with a tail of washing machines and Schneiders-in-English, I'll buy it back. I'll give--I'll give you five dollars for it."

He must have seen the eagerness in my eyes, for he remarked quickly:

"I'll give you two dollars and forty-five cents for it!"

"I'll take it!" I said instantly.

"It is mine!" said Millington, and he handed over the money.

As soon as it was in my pocket I heard a rustling in the currant bushes at my left, and Mr. Prawley raised his head above them.

"Mother's well again," he said. "I've come back!"

XIII. MILLINGTON'S MOTOR MYSTERY

MILLINGTON and I hunted up the automobile the next day, and it was in worse condition than I had imagined. The only way the car could be got back to his garage was on a truck, but we got it there, and unloaded it, and Millington hunted up all his tools and got them ready to use the next day. It was late by that time, and we locked the garage and went to bed.

All night I worried over having taken two dollars and forty-five cents from Millington for that collection of old metal that had been a motor-car, and as early as possible the next morning I took the money and went over to Millington's. I found him just going out to the garage, and he positively refused to take back the money. He said the car was in just the condition he wanted it, and that if I hadn't knocked the witchery out of it no one could. He said he hoped--and just

then he opened the garage door.

There stood the automobile, on the very spot where we had left it, but there was not a scratch on it. Except that it was an ancient model, it might have been a brand new car. Even the brasswork had been polished, and at the first glance the tires seemed new, but we found they had only been carefully repaired and painted drab.

Millington stood looking at the automobile a few minutes and then laughed. He turned to me with a strangely contorted face and said: "Uncle Tom, you are invited to take a ride with Cleopatra in my air-ship to-night at midnight."

Millington said this in a very calm voice, but he immediately followed it by asking me to have a piece of strawberry pie, and instead of pie he offered me the can of gear grease. I managed to coax him into the house, and when the doctor arrived he advised absolute rest. He said Millington's brain was not yet permanently affected, but that another such shock would be too much for him. He said that for the present we must humour him, and try to make him believe that the automobile was damaged beyond recovery. It seemed to have a soothing effect, and to aid his recovery I got into the car, ran it into the street, aimed it at a stone wall opposite Millington's window, threw on the high speed, and jumped to one side. One minute later the machine was afire, and half an hour later little was left of it but the metal parts, and they were badly warped.

Mr. Prawley came out when he saw the fire, and a look of the most fiendish joy glittered in his eyes. Never have I seen a man show such pleasure over the destruction of an automobile. His hatred of automobiles seemed to be endless and bottomless.

When I told Millington that his automobile was now in about as bad condition as man could put it into, he sat up in bed, and the light of sanity came into his eyes. He walked to the window and looked out at the car, and became his old cheerful self again. He said that there was no doubt now that the devils in the car had been exorcised, and that with a few weeks work he could get it back into such shape that the engine would be working properly, and we would then, he said take that little run up to Port Lafayette. He then took a little nourishment, and by night he was quite himself again. When he had had his dinner I went home and had mine, and went to bed at once, for I knew Millington would be at work soon after sun-up.

I had hardly got into bed, however, when I began to fear that Millington's eagerness would get the best of him, and at ten o'clock I went over to his house. I found him in bed and awake and cheerful, but he said he did not mean to get up. He said it was against his policy to get up the day before in order to be up the next day, so I sat by his bed and read chapters from a dear little work of fiction entitled "Easy Remedies for Ignition Troubles," until the clock struck twelve, and then Millington hopped out of bed and threw on his clothes.

The moment we stepped from the back door the same thing struck us both with surprise. There was a light in the garage!

My first thought was that some rascal was in the garage trying to ruin Millington's automobile, but a second thought assured me this was impossible. Ruin could be carried no farther than I had carried it. Bidding Millington be silent, I crept cautiously toward the garage, with Millington at my heels, and without a sound we peered in at the window. The sight was one that would have shaken the strongest man.

Bending over the motor, with his face made unearthly by the artificial light that fell upon it obliquely, casting deep shadows, was that villain, Mr. Prawley! I have never seen anything so devilish as that wretch as he worked with inhuman agility and haste. His long, claw-like fingers danced from one part of the machine to another fiendishly, and a hideous grin distorted his features. He was humming some weird tune, and I noted that he was ambidextrous, for he was varnishing the hood with one hand while with the other he was putting in a new spark plug. A tremor of horror passed over Millington and over me at the same moment. A few whispered words, a few stealthy steps, and we burst in and seized Mr. Prawley by the arms. In a moment we had him on the floor of the garage, bound hand and foot.

Millington was for wreaking immediate vengeance on him, but I stood firmly for a more lawful course, and the next day we handed him over to the authorities, and his whole miserable story came out. His name was not Mr. Prawley at all. Neither was it Alonzo Duggs, which was the name he had given us when Isobel and I hired him. His name was William Alexander Vandergribbin. He came of good family, but mania for speeding automobiles had brought him to ruin, and the third time he was arrested for over-speeding a sentence of thirty years in the penitentiary had been pronounced by the judge. The judge, however, had suspended the sentence provided that William Alexander Vandergribbin never again touched an automobile.

For several years Vandergribbin fought down his appetite. Then he fell. He changed his name to Flossy Zozo, and secured a job as the death-defying loop-the-gappist with the big show. For a time the speeding down the runway in the fake automobile, with the somersault at the bottom of the run, appeased his cravings, but the rules of the show prohibited him from tinkering with the fake automobile, which was strictly in charge of the property man, and Vandergribbin left the show, changed his name to Alonzo Duggs, and seeking our quiet town, chose work in the house nearest the man owning the oldest automobile. For weeks he had watched his opportunity--you know the rest. He is now in Sing Sing.

I am sorry to end this story so abruptly, but Millington has just come over to ask if I would not like to take a little run out to Port Lafayette. I have always wanted to go to Port Lafayette, which is about eleven miles from here; so, if you will excuse me, I will go and button Isobel's matinee gown, and we will be off.

END