

Copyright Story.

## Cupid's Wig and Gown.

By TOM GALLON.

Author of "Tatterley," Etc.

Unless you are absolutely certain as to the result, do not approach a lady on the question most vital to your future before dinner; it is a mistake, and may place you in that position—should she refuse you—which will make you wish that the dinner was never to happen at all.

That was exactly what John Medlow did; and you shall hear the result. Not that one must imagine for a moment that John was certain as to the result; in the first place, his conceit of himself, as our Scotch neighbours would say, was not sufficiently great—and, in the second place, it seemed such a daring thing for any man to approach such a dainty little lady as Miss Phyllis Holt. But when one bears in mind the fact that, for many months, John Medlow had been making up his mind to speak on that vital matter, and had never yet found courage; and when one remembers also the fact that man is but mortal, and woman entrancing; he must be forgiven.

It was all the fault of Miss Taplin. Miss Taplin was most anxious, for many reasons, that John Medlow should marry Phyllis; it would be a good match, and John was just one of those steady plodding sort of fellows, who could be trusted to have his slippered feet on the fender for something more than three hundred evenings in the year. Phyllis being what Miss Taplin termed "a little flighty," all this was just as it should be. More than that, John was rich; so was Phyllis—very rich indeed. Miss Taplin, being a worldly woman, saw in this again the fitness of things; and thus it was that John Medlow went to dinner.

He had been to dinner on a great many other occasions; and the very servants, with an eye to romantic things, were careful of his hat and coat, and knew just into which room to usher him. Going steadily and somewhat heavily across the hall on this particular occasion, John Medlow made up his mind that he would postpone the matter for another evening; he really felt too nervous, and too little sure of himself, to speak then.

That, of course, was all very well from John's point of view; when Phyllis presently fitted into the room, John changed his mind. For if ever that particularly dainty little lady had looked entrancing, she looked entrancing that night; if ever she had appeared small and frail, and in need of some strong man's arms about her, she appeared so then. The very crown and summit of her bright hair reached not quite to John Medlow's white tie; he felt bigger than ever, as he looked down at her. She, for her part, was as cool and calm as anyone well could be, and apparently utterly oblivious of the storm raging within John Medlow's breast.

Then, before John quite knew what was happening, he was holding a hand which seemed absurdly small, and was blurring out, in a torrent of tempestuous words, all that had been hidden in his heart so long. He was going to do this, and he was going to do that; there was no one in all the wide world like her, and the heaven from whence she had sprung had resolutely decided never again to make anybody on the same model; it simply couldn't be done. More than that, he was going to be very good to her; and he didn't mind how long he waited, if she required time in which to make up her mind.

She said "No." Not exactly in that word, perhaps; she glided the bitter pill a little; said that he was her best friend (oh—the dear old abominable word, that has been used so often, and under such sad circumstances); and that there never would be anyone like him, in that sense; but she couldn't marry him. She was a little sorry, perhaps, that he had broken down that she complete confidence there had been

between them; wouldn't it be better if he made an excuse, and went away, and forgot all about it? A little helplessly, he reminded her that he was to stay to dinner; and that Miss Taplin might say unkind and undeserved things.

"And I suppose you'll sit opposite to me—and look glum and horrid—and make me miserable!" she said, tapping her foot a little petulantly on the floor.

"I'm sorry you should think that," he said. "I've no right to ask it, I know—but I suppose there's someone else—someone who fills your heart more than your—your friend could do—eh?"

"Yes. You have a right to ask it, and I don't mind telling you."

"Does he know his luck?" asked John. "No—and he never will," she replied.

"I see; he doesn't appreciate you. Who is the brute?"

"He's not a brute, and you've no right to say so. He's a mistaken, silly fellow—and he doesn't understand; but I shall never love anyone else."

"Can't I—do anything?" Then, as she looked at him in perplexity, he went on blunderingly, "You see—I'm so very fond of you, that if I could—could put things straight a bit, you know—I'd be glad. Do I know him?"

She seemed to nod her head slowly, as Miss Taplin bustled into the room. Miss Taplin was a little woman of pinched aspect—very bright and eager, and occasionally very much in the way. She welcomed John Medlow effusively; and was quite certain, in her own mind, that that gentleman had at last brought things to a crisis, and that her dearest wishes had been realised. So they went in to dinner; Miss Taplin to take the head of the table, and Phyllis to face John Medlow.

Miss Taplin had been quite convinced, in her own mind, that the young people had settled things to their own satisfaction; she was somewhat surprised, therefore, to find that they had nothing to say to each other; she determined to encourage them. She plunged, with much giggling and many blushes, into a highly ingenious account of a flirtation she had had—far away back in the eyes—with a gentleman of property in Derby County; she was proceeding to enlarge upon the way in which he had first addressed her, and the feelings he had inspired within her, when John Medlow, who had been watching Phyllis for some time, and trying to make up his mind as to a certain theory that had occurred to him, broke in with a careless remark.

"By the way, Miss Holt,"—and Miss Taplin glanced up quickly, in some wonderment that there should be no more familiar form of address—"I saw a friend of yours to-day."

"Of mine?" She looked up at him quickly.

"Yes—a very old friend," said John, twisting his wine glass round and round, and looking at it as he spoke—"Gilbert Kenshaw."

He looked up just in time to see a bright wave of colour spread over her face and neck; she did not meet his eyes, and he sighed to think that his shot had gone home, and that he knew the man.

"Indeed?" she said, when she had mastered her voice. "Is—is Gilbert well?"

"I don't like to hear you speak even of friends by their Christian names, my love," said Miss Taplin, a little sharply. "It was all very well, of course, when you were in a different position—but now—"

"Now—I am entitled to do as I like," broke in Phyllis, flashing a glance at her. "Gilbert Kenshaw is a very old friend of mine—and, although his profession does keep him so very much occupied, that doesn't make any difference."

"Gilbert is quite well—at least—what am I talking about? I'm sorry, to say

that he has knocked up completely; I called on him, just to make inquiries, you know. Been working too hard, I expect; it's rather hard lines, having to grind for guineas."

Miss Holt rose abruptly from the table. "This room is ridiculously hot," she said; "perhaps you'll entertain Mr Medlow, Auntie, while he finishes his dessert."

Some ten minutes later, John Medlow was seated beside Phyllis Holt, talking quietly to her; Miss Taplin, still with that amazing idea in her mind, had absented herself, on some pretext or other.

"Why didn't you tell me his name?—it would have saved a great deal of trouble," he said.

"Is he really ill?" she asked, in a low voice, and without looking at him.

"Pretty bad. Something seems to have worried him; he almost gives one the idea that he has given up hope—doesn't seem to care, you know."

She was silent for a moment or two, and then, turning suddenly toward him, she spoke. John Medlow noticed that her face had again that curious flush upon it. Something in the kindly glance of the man, however, must have inspired her with confidence; for she spoke as she had never spoken to a man in all her life before.

"John—it's deplorable, I know; but I'm desperately fond of him. It's an atrocious thing to say to you—after what you've said to me; but I'd rather tell you than anyone else. You don't mind?"

"Oh, yes—I mind a great deal," said John. "And yet I like it; because it shows by what a very little I have missed you. Go on—tell me about it."

So she told him about it; she reminded him of what he knew already: that this Gilbert Kenshaw had been her greatest friend, when he was little more than a school boy, and she a girl in short frocks; that they had both been equally poor, and equally friendless. She told him what he had not known: that she and Gilbert Kenshaw had made a boy-and-girl vow to be faithful to each other; and that the man had broken it.

"Ever since I came into all this ridiculous money, he has studiously avoided me. He calls me 'Miss Holt'; he buries himself in those musty chambers of his, and never lets anyone see him."

"Why don't you go and rout him out—and tell him his luck! Take him by the shoulders and shake it into him."

"John—you're perfectly horrid! Don't you understand that I would rather die

than let him think for a moment—"

"I'm sorry; I never thought of that," said John Medlow. "Only, you see, the case is rather serious; Gilbert has been burning the midnight oil to such an extent—probably with the vague hope of making a fortune in about a couple of days, sufficient to lay besides yours—that he is literally off his head; I don't mind telling you that I've been with him nearly all day (I don't in the least see what you've got to squeeze my hand about)—and he's really very ill. More than that, he's losing the chance of a lifetime."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Oh—he'll get over the illness with rest and care; but the other business he won't. I suppose you know what a brief is; well, he's had his first one sent to him, by rather an important firm of solicitors, too. It promises to be a big case; and it meant a bigger chance that I've had in all my life. I don't need it, of course, because I'm rich enough already; but I've sat in those Courts, day in and day out, in wig and gown, and scarcely ever spoken a dozen words on behalf of anybody. And here is a lucky youngster, with a fat brief, and a chance to take a big leap up the ladder; and he can't do it. He may wait five years for another."

"And what will happen if he doesn't appear?" she asked.

"Oh, they'll simply mention that he is unable to appear; and in all probability some smart junior will snap it up—and snap up the others to follow. They won't give it to me; I'm too big a fool. And they won't trouble Mr Gilbert Kenshaw again, for a long time to come."

For the whole of one long night Miss Phyllis Holt lay awake. She was a girl of rare singleness of purpose; she saw only the sick man, and saw one of the chances of life slipping away from him. The possession of money had taught her its power; the possession of beauty had taught her that she held a greater power still. More than that, she wanted to do something which should raise her above all other women in the eyes of Gilbert Kenshaw; and she thought she saw the way.

"Oh, if only I can show him that I want to help him—that I'd risk anything for his sake!" she said to herself, as she dressed hurriedly that morning. "There ought to be some way; I might even manage to speak nicely to a Judge or two, and put things right. One

## A Weak Stomach

Indigestion, No Appetite, Exhaustion, General Weakness,—All Due to a Sluggish Liver and Impure Blood.



Mr. G. A. Borall, of Prahran, Victoria, sends us his photograph and says:

"I wish to tell every one the great help I received from Ayer's Sarsaparilla. I suffered terribly from weakness of the stomach, indigestion, and biliousness, and I had no appetite. I felt tired all the time. Sometimes it seemed almost impossible for me to keep about. But after using Ayer's Sarsaparilla for a short time for my blood and as a general tonic to my nervous system, and with an occasional use of the Pills to keep my bowels in good condition, I rapidly improved, and am now enjoying better health than I have in a long time. I now keep those medicines near at hand and take just a little whenever I begin to feel badly, for, you know, 'a stitch in time saves nine.'"

"The World's Greatest Family Medicine."

Of course you cannot enjoy good health if your stomach gives out. You must have an appetite, must digest your food, and must keep your liver active. Muscular strength, nervous strength, desire to be active, and a feeling of general good health may be yours by keeping your liver active and your blood pure. It takes just two medicines for this: Ayer's Pills for the liver, and Ayer's Sarsaparilla for the blood.

It's Ayer's Sarsaparilla you want. Insist upon getting "Ayer's," for it's stronger, contains more ingredients, and cures quicker than any other kind.

## AYER'S Sarsaparilla

Strengthens the Stomach and Aids Digestion

Ayer's Pills keep the liver in a healthy condition.

Prepared by DR. J. C. AYER & CO., Lowell, Mass., U.S.A.