

# Mr Piggin's Plan of Campaign

By JOHN K. LEYS

Wherein the quick and dead meet again, somewhat to the latter's discomfiture

**M**R. SAMUEL PIGGIN was a substantial man in both senses of the word.

His portly form and his rubicund face surmounted by coarse reddish hair without a tinge of gray, and adorned by short square-cut whiskers, suggested the John Bull rather than the Brother Jonathan type of Anglo-Saxon. He owned a large grazing farm in the vicinity of Boville, Pennsylvania, and raised a large quantity of excellent stock. His farm was in admirable condition, and free from encumbrances.

So was he himself. He was a bachelor.

For well-nigh fifty years he had resisted the blandishments of the female sex, but Fate at last overtook him in the person of Miss Barbara Nuttall Robins, head saleslady in the mantle and jacket department of Messrs. Stuart and Bussell's dry-goods emporium.

Miss Robins had obtained that responsible position chiefly in virtue of her figure, which, without being absolutely stout, was admirably adapted to the display of the garments which it was her business to sell.

And Mr. Piggin, having a professional's eye for excellence in physical development, fell in love, not so much with Miss Robins' qualities of heart and mind (about which, indeed, he knew but little) as with her red cheeks, her bold dark eyes, and her handsome figure.

Miss Robins was at first not at all attracted by the farmer's personality, but he was what people call "a fine figure of a man" in spite of his bulk; he had no objectionable relatives; he seemed good-natured; and above all, he had "aces o' charms." So she accepted him, and they were married.

Many an old maid in Boville, when the wedding was announced, pursed up her lips, shook her head, and prophesied disaster. The jovial spirits of the neighbourhood grinned when Mr. Piggin's name was mentioned. Some said he was a bold man. Some said he was a fool. Nearly every man Jack of them envied him.

For the first few months all went well. Mrs. Piggin, sitting erect and handsome in her husband's buggy, seemed emphatically the right woman in the right place. But before long the ineradicable difference, engendered by a quarter of a century's disparity in years began to show themselves.

Mrs. Piggin was fond of gadding about, of music and dancing, and was not averse to a little mild flirtation. Mr. Piggin was addicted to none of these things. Hence came remonstrances on the one side and scornful laughter on the other,

angry threats which were received with cold defiance, sullenness, suspicion, and all the rest of it.

In a short time Mr. Piggin's jealous imaginings centred themselves upon a certain Captain Trevor, an Englishman who had inherited a small estate in the district, and had settled down on it. He was a tall, good-looking man, a favourite with women, and an open admirer of Mrs. Piggin. He was often heard to say that she had thrown herself away.

Mrs. Piggin, who was as fond of admiration as the rest of her sex, received the captain's homage with a heightened colour and a beaming eye, signs of gratification so highly displeasing to her husband that he went so far as to tell Captain Trevor that if he found him talking to his wife again he would make a surgical case of him.

Mrs. Piggin not unnaturally resented this, and she took her revenge by treating her husband with a high, sniffling disdain and a frigid politeness which he found it very hard to bear.

So unpleasant had life become for him that he was glad when business called him away to the town of Durham, in Ohio. Part of this business was to collect the interest due upon a mortgage which he held on the residence of a physician named Macready.

Dr. Macready, who hailed from the city of Aberdeen, in the kingdom of Scotland, was an elderly man. He had not been a success in life. His practice was not large, and was far from lucrative. Rival practitioners sneered at him among themselves as an old woman, half a century behind the times.

Unfortunately, Dr. Macready was not prepared to pay up the arrears of interest on his mortgage, and he hoped to induce a forbearing frame of mind in his creditor by the primitive method of inviting him to dinner.

The invitation was accepted; the dinner was good, and of so tongue-loussing a quality that Mr. Piggin felt impelled to speak of that which was nearest his heart; to wit, his matrimonial difficulties.

The Scotch doctor, thin and bright-eyed and wiry as an old gray rat, smiled in an aggravating, thin-lipped way. He was unharmed.

"I see you're laughing at me," began the farmer angrily, but the Scotchman raised his hand to interrupt, and said, in the precise manner of the old school:

"Not laughing at you, Mr. Piggin. Don't think it for a moment. Nor at your matrimonial experiences, which are not exactly fruitful in their character, but at a story I remember once reading.

Have you ever come across a sma' volum entitled 'Passages from the Notebook of Nathaniel Hawthorne?'"

"No. Who's he, anyway?"

"Man, I wonder at ye. He's one American author you may be proud of, though he is seldom read now, I believe, except by the select few."

"Well, I was saying I minded a bit story in that book about a gentleman situated somewhat in the way you are as regarded his conjugal relations. He became so anxious to know for certain what his wife's conduct would be if her were left entirely to the freedom of her own will, that he gave out that he was dead, and remained as one dead, if my memory serves me right, for a period of over twenty years."

"And in order that he might the better observe his widow's behaviour, he actually took the house opposite to his own, and lived there during the twenty years entirely unknown to her. It strikes me he must have exercised considerable discretion in his outgoings and incomings."

"That's a magnificent idea!" broke in Mr. Piggin, bringing his ponderous fist down upon the mahogany. "A first-prize notion, I call it. And what's more, I'll do it!"

The doctor stared across the table, saying nothing.

"You must help me through with it, doctor."

"Me? No fear! Man, you're daft!"

"I'm as sane as you are," retorted Mr. Piggin, "and you must help me, for you can fix it all up about burial certificates and so on. I mean to do it. I want to know how long my wife would remain a widow if she thought I had quitted for good. I want to know—oh, a lot of things I shall never feel sure about, so long as I remain alive. So I must be dead, not for twenty years, but long enough for my purpose. See?"

"No, I don't see. I don't see anything except that you bid fair to make a thunderin' big fool of yourself. As if nature hadn't done enough in that line already," he added under his breath.

"What's that yer sayin'?"

"I'm sayin' that such plans are not that easy carried out."

"Well, you've got to find a way to get them carried out."

"But, besides bein' very difficult, owing to the strictness of the burial regulations, it's clean impossible."

"It's not impossible, and it's got to be done. And it's up to you to do it."

"And get two years in the State penitentiary? Not likely!"

"Oh, stuff! Look here, doc. I be-

lieve you can help me if you choose, without running any great risk. But I don't want you to do it for nothing. I'm not unreasonable. I'll tell you what I'll do.

"If you put this thing slick through, see me decently dead and buried, so that my wife may come and weep over my tomb, I'll put your mortgage in the fire. There! Is it a bargain?"

The Scotchman's keen eyes glared hungrily. He opened his lips to refuse, but no sound came. That mortgage had been the curse of his existence. He had felt he could never pay it off, and it was a perpetual struggle to meet the interest. To have the incubus removed would be like having the shackles knocked off, after having worn them for years.

He got up, his face twitching with excitement, and nervously fell to pacing the room. The farmer stuck his thumb in the armpole of his waistcoat—a habit which was specially repugnant to the feelings of Mrs. Piggin, puffed his cigar, and watched the doctor's struggles with a callous eye.

"It would be gross cruelty to your wife," cried the doctor, stopping short in his premeditations.

Mr. Piggin laughed bitterly.

"Much she'd care," he said coarsely, "as long as the will is all right."

"You don't mind, then, what amount of pain you give her?" asked the doctor, regarding him with something like contempt.

"She won't mind, I tell yer. Not a skooter."

"And what about your property? Suppose your executor takes it into his head to sell your farm?"

"Oh, I'll provide for that. I'll leave instructions that my will is not to be proved for three months from the date of my death. Three months I'll do. My wife will want to marry again before three months are over, or I'm a Dutchman."

"Now, what do you say? Can you fix it for me, right away?"

"Well, maybe I could select a patient from the poorhouse, one that had not long to live, and had no near relatives."

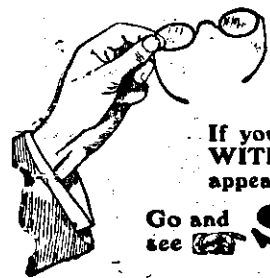
"Yes?"

"I might have him removed to private lodgings, under the pretence that he had a curious disease that I wanted to study at my leisure. Then I might get him to change his name."

"I don't see what all that has to do with me," said the farmer, knitting his brows.

The doctor's lip curled contemptuously.

"He might, for example, take the



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