

Papa on Proposals.

WHAT HE THOUGHT OF YOUNG MEN IN GENERAL AND LEONORA'S "FIASCO" IN PARTICULAR.

"Young men don't know how to make love, nowadays!" growled papa—"they don't lay their hearts at the ladies' feet as we used to do. They don't send 'em valentines as we used to! And," continued papa, warning to his subject, "pon my word, sir, it's the girls' own fault. They spoil the men by running after them!"

"Oh, what a story, papa!" exclaimed Jenny. Jenny is papa's seventh daughter, and is shortly expecting a proposal from a very shy young man.

"It's perfectly true, my dear!" persisted papa. "The girls of to-day are entirely different from their mothers—"

"Good job, too!" rebelliously muttered Leonora, papa's fourth daughter, to her fiancé—she calls him her "fiasco." "I don't know where we should all be if we were like mamma. It has taken mamma thirty years to make up her mind to use a gas-stove!" she explained to the company generally.

"Girls didn't want gas-stoves in my day!" vociferated papa. "They didn't want bicycles or motor-cars, or ping-pong sets! They didn't want to go racing round the Continent for a month or six weeks every year! They didn't want new dresses every week! They didn't want to go to the theatre three times a week. They didn't—" "Good gracious, papa!" interrupted the eldest of papa's eight daughters, "whatever were the girls like in your day?"

"Frumps!" ejaculated Leonora. "They used to sit all day working samplers in the parlour!" cried papa's eighth daughter.

"They were charming!" protested papa, with a courtly bow to mamma, "and they knew they were charming, too, which made them more charming than ever. I can tell you, girls, in my day we did not propose to a lady as though we were proposing a game of ping-pong. The girls in my days knew their value better. They used to keep the young men at arm's length until they had reduced them to the borders of insanity. Then, perhaps, if they thought that things were getting serious, they would accept a copy of verses—"

"Written on pink, gilt-edged note-paper, my love!" interrupted mamma, looking up from her knitting.

"Just so, my love, with a little bunch of dried forget-me-nots tied in the corner," answered papa, with a slight flush of self-consciousness. "That was sufficient encouragement to send a young man off any day into the seventh heaven of delight."

"Nice lot of mugs they must have been in those days," whispered Leonora's "fiasco," disrespectfully.

Fortunately papa did not hear this comment.

"When I was young," he continued, "we thought nothing of sitting up till daybreak composing a copy of verses to the eyebrows of the lady we happened to admire at the time. In those days every young lady had at least six lovers, so she used to get quite a number of verses."

"How nice!" murmured papa's sixth daughter, who has not as yet had a proposal.

"A proposal was a serious thing in those days," said papa, "for when two or three young men of spirit were paying their addresses to some young lady who could not make up her mind as to which of her suitors she liked best, they generally settled the matter between themselves."

"Pistols and coffee for two, at six s.m., sir, I suppose!" suggested Leonora's "fiasco."

"Exactly, sir!" answered papa, rather severely—"in my day a young man would get up at four, wing his man, and be home to breakfast at an

hour when the modern young man has barely begun to think of calling for his shaving water."

"Bloodthirsty lot of ruffians they must have been," murmured Leonora's "fiasco" under his breath.

"What did the girl do when all her suitors were shooting one another papa?" asked Jenny.

"She married the survivor, lucky dog!" answered papa, grimly. "I remember"—he continued—"when we were quartered in Bengal in '43, our general's daughter, Lady Linda Bellairs, was the cause of so many duels that the Commander-in-Chief came down from headquarters to try and persuade her to marry one of her lovers. Half the officers in our garrison were in hospital, and the other half were hopping about with two or three bullets in them, and he saw that if Lady Linda stayed in the garrison much longer there would be no officers left in the garrison at all. The Chief remonstrated with Lady Linda, and urged her to marry the officer with most bullets in him, or to go home to England, where officers were more plentiful. Then Lady Linda wept, and said that the officers in our garrison were so nice that she couldn't help loving the whole lot of them, and as she couldn't marry the whole lot, artillery, infantry, and cavalry—not forgetting the engineers—she would have to go home.

"The Chief said it would be a great pity for her to leave India before she had seen the country properly, and he added that the absence of her bright eyes would leave the world dark for one, at least, of her admirers. Then he dropped on one knee before her and laid his heart, his sword, and his fortune at her feet, and she accepted him.

"Did you propose to her, papa?" asked papa's eldest daughter.

"I dare say I should have done so," answered papa gallantly, "but unfortunately I was away up country at the time of Lady Linda's visit, and I did not return until her engagement had been announced. It would have been mutiny to have proposed then."

"Young men were far more courteous in those days," said mamma, taking up the running with rather a severe glance in the direction of Leonora's "fiasco." "They would never dream of letting a lady open the door of a railway-carriage for herself, as they will nowadays."

"And I suppose they used to go out and ride on the roof amongst the luggage if there was not room for the lady," interposed papa's fourth daughter, mischievously.

"Or used to watch Geordie Stephenson knocking the cows off the line with his new-fangled engine!" added papa's second daughter.

"It is not so long ago as that," rejoined mamma, rather indignantly. "One would think that papa and I belonged to the early Victorian era to hear you dreadful children talk."

"And one would think that you and papa came out of the ark to hear you talking of duels and valentines and all that sort of nonsense," added Leonora with some heat. "Young men are just as gallant as they ever were," she continued, glancing at the "fiasco," who was using her best pair of small scissors to dig up the plug of his pipe. "They are just as thoughtful—just as considerate—just as—"

Here Leonora paused. "Harry," she remarked sharply to the "fiasco," "I don't mind you using my scissors to scrape your horrid pipe out, but I really draw the line at your using my d'oyleys to dust your boots with. What is the use of my defending your sex if you give them away in that fashion?" "No young man would ever have

dared to smoke in the presence of a lady when I was a girl," said mamma severely, "and as for using her embroidery scissors for a pipe-stopper—"

"Leave my Harry alone, mamma!" said Leonora, who strongly objects to any other than herself training the "fiasco" in the ways he should follow—"leave my Harry alone! He's my funeral, and I won't have him bullied!"

Mamma raised her eyes mutely in appeal against this latter-day definition of a betrothal.

"Now, look at Harry!" said papa, selecting the "fiasco" as the text of his sermon. "I don't believe he ever proposed to Leonora at all. He didn't fall on one knee as we used to in my young days, and lay his heart at Leonora's feet! He didn't write her verses by the mill, and sonnets by the yard."

"That he did not!" chimed in papa's eldest daughter. "Harry is far too lazy to write verses, or even love-letters. He just sends horrid post-cards or, worse still, sixpenny telegrams. 'Hope you are well,' 'Will be down at six,' 'Pump up the tyres of my bicycle,' 'Cook, Charing Cross, seven-dress-dinner—bring my cigar-case.' Those are Harry's love-letters."

"Come now, Harry," said papa, "and you ever make a formal proposal to Leonora?"

"Don't remember, governor," answered the "fiasco," lighting his pipe in leisurely fashion; "to tell you the truth, I was in such a fright that I don't know what I did say. I know I'd got a fine speech all ready, wrote it out and learnt it by heart. It was a fine speech," he added, waxing unwontedly enthusiastic. "I cribbed half of it from one of Bulwer Lytton's novels, and wrote the rest out of my own head; but by the time I had led the conversation into the right quarter I forgot every word of it, dried clean up, and couldn't say a word to save my life."

"Oh, what a story, Harry!" gasped Leonora indignantly; "you did propose!"

"I didn't!" answered the "fiasco" stoutly. "I just drifted into it, just as every other fellow does. Don't care for fellows who are so keen on spouting a lot of lovey-dovey rot myself," he added judiciously. "The sort of chap who'll keep his head and make a fine speech when he proposes is the sort of chap who can mash half a dozen girls at the same time. Take my tip, and don't trust a fellow with too much to say for himself. They're generally gasbags, lady-killers, mashers!"

Here the "fiasco's" voice died away in a rumble of condemnation, and he subsided into his natural silence.

"You did propose, Harry! You know you did!" interposed Leonora indignantly. "I remember exactly what you said. You started off by calling me the star of your life. Then you went all to pieces, and said that you would punch any fellow's head who looked at me; and that if I didn't want you, you didn't want yourself; and that you'd go away and join the Cape Mounted Police; and that you'd never care for another girl as long as ever you lived; and that you worshipped the very ground I walked upon; and—"

"Now he digs up his pipe with your embroidery scissors!" interposed papa. "I used to use your mamma's little finger for a tobacco-stopper. Heigh-ho! the young men have not altered so very much since my day, after all. Don't go to sleep, Harry. Come and have a game of billiards."

Weak Nerves

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