

# Silence is Gold.

By KEITH BOYCE.

**D**EARLY all the people asked to Mrs Peyton's dinner and bridge knew that the Grahams and Mr Archibald Eyver Yorke-Webster were to meet there. The Grahams knew it, and were as much amused as the rest. Mrs Peyton, of course, was ignorant of the previous encounter between them and Yorke-Webster, for she had been away two months; and besides unless Mrs Graham told her, no one would do it, for Yorke-Webster was her protégé; she had introduced him into the Park. It seems she had known him, or his family, in England; and when he came over, in some sort of well-connected business capacity, she first asked him to stay at her house, and then got him to take a little furnished cottage near her in the Park. He had the Englishman's preference for the country, and the Park boasts good golf, tennis and other exercises. Then Mrs Peyton went to Canada, first asking several people to call on Yorke-Webster. Mrs Peyton had a genius for blunders. It could never have been guessed from her account of him that the Englishman considered his neighbours a lot of meddlesome suburbanities, and that he was far from wanting any of them to call.

The Grahams were the first to go. Mrs Graham told the story with quiet amusement to a few people, and it had gone the rounds. "Billy and I dropped in one afternoon after a walk; I suppose it might have been half-past six or so. We were shown into the dining-room. In the dining-room sat Mr Yorke-Webster. His valet-butler gave him our cards. He rose, came forward holding the cards, bowed, murmured something about dinner and hoping to have the pleasure of calling on us soon—and in two minutes we found ourselves outside the door. He hasn't called."

The two months had passed and Yorke-Webster had not called on the Grahams. Other people were a little shy of visiting him. Only two or three had met him. Now about thirty had been asked to Mrs Peyton's dinner, and the Englishman's debut was awaited with much interest.

He was a tall, thin man, between thirty and forty, with rather stooping shoulders, eyeglasses, a drooping moustache, bald temples, and a general look of refined decay. Mrs Peyton, a big breezy woman with a gift for trampling over people's small peculiarities, presented him cheerily to one person after another. One after another tried to talk to him. There were a number of very amusing women, too—clever ones, used to making themselves agreeable, used also to some recognition of their ability and good will. None of them

got any recognition from Yorke-Webster, as they found on comparing notes afterward, or indeed, as it was easy to see at the time. He would stand, stooping a little, but without any attention or deference in the stoop, looking at them through his eyeglasses, touching the ends of his moustache with a delicate forefinger and thumb—unslinging, monosyllabic. "Yes? Really? Can't say, I'm sure." That sort of thing was all he said—at least in the moments before dinner. The Grahams were twenty minutes late, as Mrs Graham's sister, Mary Allison, had missed the train. When they finally came in and Yorke-Webster was presented, he bowed gravely, as though he had never seen them before.

There was curiosity as to his placing at table—rather, as to the persons who were to have the doubtful honour of sitting next him. It would have been just like Mrs Peyton to give him Alice Graham to take in. But no, another young married woman, selected for her peculiar vivacity and glibness, received his elbow; and on his other side sat Mary Allison.

This was, for the rest of the party, as entertaining a combination as could have been devised. Fortunately there was nothing to obstruct the view. Mrs Peyton believed in every one talking at once to every one else. The room was lighted from the cornice, and the only decoration of the table was a thing in majolica which she called her "Italian garden," and which held flowers in a formal flat design. In the babble of tongues led by the hostess it was impossible to hear what was said across the table. But Mrs Leary's spirited attack on the Rock of Gibraltar was to be observed of all. She was known as the most constant and amusing talker in the Park. She opened with a broadside from her sparkling black eyes, accompanied by a running fire of witty inconsequences. Gradually her heavy guns, one by one, were brought into action—her profile, her eyelashes, her very lovely jewelled hands, her gift of flattery, her best stories. It was even known when she brought up the reserves, and as a forlorn hope used all her sharpness—and she had an intuitive aim for a weak spot. And through it all the Rock stood, or sat, there apparently unconscious of the assault, calmly eating his dinner, replying most briefly, with the coolest of glances. Mrs Leary did not even get a foothold. Her cheeks mounted flaming colours, but not of triumph. Finally, she confessed her rout, retreated, horse, foot, and artillery, in confusion, and at the roast turned to the man on her other side, showing the white flag of surrender, a sudden pallor of intense irritation.

This left Gibraltar quite solitary, for

Mary Allison's white shoulder had been steadily turned to him, and continued to be. It might have been, of course, that she disliked his behaviour to her sister, and meant to snub him; but she was so much given to putting people off unintentionally that it was a problem whether she ever meant it or not. Mary Allison never talked. At most she list-

and he did the same. They sat side by side without exchanging a word for some fifteen minutes.

Mary looked calmly absent-minded. Her large blue eyes roved slowly over the table, and the animated crowd. Sometimes these eyes expressed a slight curiosity, or wonder. They were never sharp. Often, as now, they were a lim-



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ened, with a greater or lesser interest, the real degree of which was always frankly indicated. She had been listening now to Latham, who usually talked horse or dog, and who knew what he was talking about. Mary sometimes drove her brother-in-law's four-in-hand. She could manage the Grahams' big touring-car, too. She was physically very active, but danced badly, and was awkward though effective at tennis. She played a very good game of bridge, and not a bad one of billiards. She was not unpopular, though she had no social small change. She was not supposed to be "deep." She never said clever things. When there was nothing to do, she simply sat in a silence that was sometimes dull and sometimes luminous, and looked with her large, rather vague eyes at the people about her or at nothing.

Putting Mary next to Yorke-Webster meant probably a charitable intention on the part of Mrs. Peyton, who was full of misdirected zeal. She was capable even of representing to Yorke-Webster that he ought to marry Mary, who was "such a nice girl, and had not a penny." For several years Mary, who was now twenty-seven, had been on Mrs. Peyton's mind. She felt there was no reason why Mary should not marry well, except that she would take no interest in it. Mrs. Peyton was one of the people who admired Mary's looks, her ample style, which generally was somewhat disparaged as "not exactly girlish."

Girlish Mary was not. She was big—a big frame, an effect of solidity, almost stolidity. It was reproachfully said of her that she had no nerves. If she had a soul or a heart, some casual efforts had failed to locate them. She had a robust inexpressive affection for her family and for a few people who "did not bother" her. She had some very good friends among men. Coquetry she had none, and probably never had wished to marry or she would have done so—being a very practical person, in spite of her vague eyes.

On the evening of the dinner she was looking unusually handsome in an old black velvet dress which showed white at the seams, but set off her colouring of "barbaric pearl and gold." As she sat and as Yorke-Webster stooped she was half a head taller than he. The talk shifting from left to right, she did not turn to him, but merely presented her rather remarkable profile, something like that of the commercial Liberty; and she sat placidly eating her roast bird,

pid blank. What she was thinking of when she looked like this no one could tell. If she were asked, she said "Nothing." Probably it was the truth.

Yorke-Webster also seemed calm and contented. The food was uncommonly good, and he was enjoying it, but he did not touch the wine, which was only fair in quality. Assuredly he had the respect of a person trained in taste, able to select the best and resolved not to put up with anything less. As to manners—well, he was known to have said to Mrs. Peyton, "Of course, you know, you Americans are not civilised," and she had cheerfully agreed with him. If he had said, and he probably had—"Of course, you know, all women are fools," she would have agreed with him none the less. She could give up her entire race, or sex, to scorn and contumely, without minding it a bit, and would even include herself. Certainly no person with small vanities or susceptibilities could have got on for a moment with Yorke-Webster, and she got on with him beautifully. She admired his manner, even. And in a way she was right. He had distinction, and the sort of smoothness of surface which much friction imparts to a naturally hard substance. Evidence of his taste, of course, was his liking Mrs. Peyton. He said of her that she "had style." He was to say almost the same thing of Mary Allison. What he did say, cautiously, was: "Really, she isn't bad style."

It was possible almost to know the exact moment when this impression was made upon Yorke-Webster. After Mary's ruminating silence had endured for a quarter of an hour and gave no sign of ending, he looked at her, looked again, and finally addressed a question to her. "Er—do you live here?"

"Oh, no," she said, turning her head and looking down on him inquiringly. "Ah—visiting?"

"Yes. My sister over there." And she indicated Mrs. Graham, who was caught watching them gleefully.

"Ah, yes. Nice little place, this," he said.

"Very."

Mary helped herself liberally to salad—she was eating her way steadily through the menu. Yorke-Webster took a spoonful.

"Invariable American custom," he observed. "Salad after meat—and everything under heaven, even sugar, I believe, in the salad. Only thing I don't like in this house—except the wine."



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