

The Way to Mrs. Morpont's

By Harrison Rhodes.

WHEATOATLETTE" is manufactured, as most people know, in an Ohio city. It competes, not unsatisfactorily, with the great army of other American breakfast foods, and it has placed the Fairchild family in a position, both financially and socially, which is all that the most vaulting local ambitions could desire. It brought Johnny Fairchild on to the Eastern office. He was glad to come. In New York, as he well knew, the important money of our great country. There, too, was Broadway for the evenings. He talked freely to his father about the money and the business opportunity, and to his younger friends about the horse-show, the theatres, and Martin's restaurant. And on his arrival Johnny looked upon the town contentedly and found it good.

It would not have been surprising if, left to himself, he had continued to be satisfied with the simple pleasures and the comparative obscurity of the Western rich, and had never been roused to a proper realisation of the fact that, though Mrs. William Fairchild led fashion in Akron, her son John was not even the shadow of a name to the high-life of New York. The town is full of such young men. They are well-looking and well-mannered. They wear their clothes with an air of smartness. They have the shiniest top hats, in which they go nightly to the play, and they possess, many of them, evening waist-coats that are the latest cry of fashion in the most expensive shop windows in Fifth Avenue. They consort with one another, and they often make pleasant acquaintances in the West Seventies and Eighties. But so out of touch are they with the people in the society columns of the Sunday supplements that they are not even embittered in their seclusion.

The best that can be done for Mrs. Fairchild is to let her shine somewhat in the glory reflected from her children. Yet it is only justice to her to say that her rather commonplace and unimposing ambitions in a way started Johnny. But for his mother the boy might have faded unobserved along the Great White Way, and talents that his later career has permitted us to admire might have withered upon their stalk.

About the time that he came East, there were uneasy stirrings in the "Breakfast Food World." "Wheat-oat-kibble" cast a hungry eye upon "Cornine" and "Crispanuts," and Mr. William Fairchild prepared in his small way to be-

weeks with her son. The very first day they lunched at Sherry's and passed the evening at the Metropolitan Opera House. At these places Mrs. Fairchild, who had an excellent memory for faces, and who had read New York newspapers and illustrated magazines to some effect, was able to point out a great many fashionable people.

Among them was Mrs. Morpont, hung above their heads as the loveliest gem in that splendid, inaccessible circle of boxes. Johnny viewed her with complete approval, as indeed must any of his sex have done. The reader, if he is worth writing for, knows perfectly who Mrs. Morpont is; knows also what little chance most of us have of ever knowing her; knows, moreover, that she is in herself a beautiful and a satisfactory excuse and explanation for any social ambitions that Johnny Fairchild or anyone else may have. He will be able to appreciate Mrs. Fairchild's final talk with her son on the eve of her departure for Akron.

She confided to him her most secret hopes: that the family might ultimately settle in New York, that his mother might come to know people, and that his sister Cornelia, when the moment arrived for her debut, might emerge from her seclusion hand in with all the young Vanderbilts and Astors.

To Johnny, who had a sense of humour, and who was never in his career the least bit of a snob, this seemed just funny. He laughed; but as he was fond of his mother he did not laugh too much.

"But I can't get your father to come yet, Johnny, and I can't come without him," Mrs. Fairchild went on. "Now you're here, and can make friends, you know how much easier it is for a young man alone to get acquainted."

Johnny laughed again a little, and said he knew no one to make a beginning with.

"No one!" exclaimed his mother. "You know Mrs Morpont!"

To the startled reader some explanation of this speech must be quickly offered. There had been in West Thirty-seventh Street an opening of the Creche for Blind Children. It was not essentially a social function, but the ladies of the Board of Managers were to "receive," and some friend of Mrs. Fairchild's had sent her an invitation. She had dragged Johnny at her heels, with his ears laid back, as the expression is. When they arrived, he saw

Her friend had not deceived her. In the centre stood Mrs Morpont. She may have been as bored as a fish is out water, but she was there; and her eyes brightened suddenly as our hero came into view. This is perhaps as good a place as another to state, for the benefit of those who do not already know it, that Mrs Morpont, though some people do call her eccentric, is one of the liveliest and most agreeable, as well as one of the most fashionable, women in the world.

seemed closed forever. Indeed, closed forever it would have remained, had not Johnny, as most people know now, been a genius.

It would be pleasant to be able to say that his genius was for the truth. Yet perhaps it is not too difficult to understand and to pardon the first deviation. Johnny sat with a twinkling eye writing home, and thought that nothing could make his mother in far-off Akron happier than to receive details of his social progress. The first step was so easy!



"So far as I know, your name has never appeared once in the Society columns of the 'New Yorker.'"

"A young man!" she exclaimed in perfectly audible tones, and smiled in a wholly unembarrassed way as he approached.

"My son," explained Mrs Fairchild, in real agitation. "He has come to New York to live."

"I'm sure I'm glad," said the lady, still smiling.

Johnny flushed a nice pink. "I'm even glad I came here," he ventured.

The speech was well received, but behind him a throng of the charitable was gathering. He glanced over his shoulder.

"I guess I'm caught in the rapids," he said.

"Well, if you find you can swim back against the current—" began Mrs. Morpont; then her attention was called to the next arriving lady.

Later, Johnny "swam back," but the close air had given Mrs Morpont a headache and she had gone.

"Yes, Johnny, you know her," Mrs Fairchild repeated. "I certainly think that you might go to call. That will be the beginning, and if you take any pains, you'll soon know everybody."

This had been his mother's final word. The next Sunday, beautifully dressed, but perhaps a trifle embarrassed, he had gone to the big house in Fifth Avenue by the park. It was true that he had been passing there, in any case. It was true that the lady who lived there had appeared to him, on his two inspections, exceptionally attractive. But it was true also—and this one must understand to appreciate Johnny and his career—that it was the fantastic and ridiculous in this act that tempted him to it. Just "getting into society" would have seemed a dull, laborious, and rather unworthy job. But the moment that it appeared a joke, or a whimsical adventure, he was ready for it. However, more of this later; for the moment, Mrs Morpont was not at home. He left a card. Then nothing happened, and this gateway

"Cuffed again at Mrs Morpont's, yesterday," he wrote. "She seems a nice woman."

This brought on affectionate and enthusiastic response, and even a generous cheque. Mrs. Fairchild remembered Johnny's saying that he needed a fur coat. "Going out in this evening dress" constantly as he will be, my boy must be warmly wrapped up," she wrote. The second step was taken as lightly as the first, and then, almost before he realized, he had embarked on a lovely sea of lies.

It was so easy, and it was only necessary to read the morning papers to do it. "With the Reggie Giffords at the opera last night." Or, "To-night I shall look in at Mrs Halling's. She has a dance on." Or, "Saw Mrs Morpont at Mrs Jack Walter's for a moment, yesterday." Imagination stirred in our hero, as he mapped out for himself a fashionable and amusing life. Sometimes he almost believed in it himself. You had only to see some one and take a fancy to her, to be in the twinkling of an eye at her side, whispering fond and flattering words. Mrs Morpont for example, on Monday nights, still hung, the loveliest gem in that inaccessible crown of opera boxes, and looked upon Johnny in the stalls with no apparent remembrance of that meeting at the Creche reception. Yet in his letters home he was often with her, and though Ned Morpont was very alive, there can have been no harm in Johnny's little flirtation with his wife, for the young man's mother herself seemed to take only pleasure in it. Everything conspired to lead the boy on to the crisis where danger threatened and his genius waked.

There was what he perhaps ought to have recognized as a preliminary rumble of thunder when Mrs Fairchild proposed coming on for a visit in the spring. He full of bright hopes was she that she was almost ready to migrate with the whole family to the metropolis and push the unhappy Cornelia's debut ahead two years. Johnny was forced to sign a



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come a trust. Now, when Western magazines dream of consolidations, their wived eyes grow softer with thoughts of the metropolis. In December, a month or two after Johnny's arrival, Mrs. Fairchild came on to spend two

a horrid crowd of women, and three aged men with beards. The smiling and weary line of lady managers stood ready. For a moment even Mrs. Fairchild could have felt the tediousness of the occasion. But only for a moment.