

THE SNOOPOPATHS

Or Fifty Stories in One

BY STEPHEN LEACOCK

THIS is not so much a story as a sort of essay. The average reader will therefore turn from it with a shudder. The condition of the average reader's mind is such that he can take in nothing but fiction. And it must be thin fiction at that—thin as gravel. Nothing else will "sit on his stomach."

Everything must come to the present day reader in this form. If you wish to talk to him about religion, you must dress it up as a story and label it *Bath-sheba*, or *The Curse of David*; if you want to improve the reader's morals, you must write him a little thing in dialogue called *Mrs. Potiphar Dines Out*. If you wish to expostulate with him about drink you must do so through a narrative called *Red Rum*—short enough and easy enough for him to read it, without overstraining his mind, while he drinks cocktails.

BUT whatever the story is about it has got to deal—in order to be read by the average reader—with *A MAN* and *A WOMAN*. I put these words in capitals to indicate that they have got to stick out of the story with the crudity of a drawing done by a child with a burnt stick. In other words, the story has got to be snoopopathic. This is a word derived from the Greek "snoopo"—or if there never was a Greek verb snoopo, at least there ought to have been one—and it means just what it seems to mean. Nine out of ten short stories written in America are snoopopathic.

In snoopopathic literature, in order to get its full effect, the writer generally introduces his characters simply as "the man" and "the woman." He hates to admit that they have names. He opens out with them something after this fashion:—"The Man lifted his head. He looked about him at the gaily-bedazzled crowd that bespotted the midnight cabaret with riotous patches of color. He crushed his cigar against the brass of an Egyptian tray—"Bah!" he murmured, "Is it worth it?" Then he let his head sink again."

You notice it? He lifted his head all the

way up and let it sink all the way down, and you still don't know who he is.

FOR The Woman the beginning is done like this:—"The Woman clenched her white hands till the diamonds that glittered upon her fingers were buried in the soft flesh. 'The shame of it,' she murmured. Then she took from the table the telegram that lay crumpled upon it and tore it into a hundred pieces. 'He dare not!' she muttered through her closed teeth. She looked about the hotel room with its garish furniture. 'He has no right to follow me here,' she gasped."

All of which the reader has to take in without knowing who the woman is, or which hotel she is staying at, or who dare not follow her and why. But the modern reader loves to get this sort of shadowy incomplete effect. If he were told straight out that the woman's name was Mrs. Edward Dangerfield of Brick City, Montana, and that she had left her husband three days ago and that the telegram told her that he had discovered her address and was following her, the reader would refuse to go on. This method of introducing the characters is bad enough. But the new snoopopathic way of describing them is still worse. The Man is always detailed as if he were a horse. He is said to be "tall, well set up, with straight legs."

GREAT stress is always laid on his straight legs. No magazine story is acceptable now unless The Man's legs are absolutely straight. Why this is, I don't know. All my friends have straight legs—and yet I never hear them make it a subject of comment or boasting. I don't believe I have, at present, a single friend with crooked legs.

But this is not the only requirement. Not only must The Man's legs be straight, but he must be "clean-limbed," whatever that is, and of course he must have a "well-tubbed look about him." How this look is acquired, and whether it can be got with an ordinary bath

and water, are things on which I have no opinion.

The Man is of course "clean shaven." This allows him to do such necessary things as "turning his clean-shaven face towards the speaker," "laying his clean-shaven cheek in his hand," and so on. But every one is familiar with the face of the up-to-date clean-shaven snoopopathic man. There are pictures of him by the million on magazine covers and book-jackets, looking into the eyes of The Woman—he does it from a distance of about six inches—with that snoopy earnest expression of brainlessness that he always wears. How one would enjoy seeing a man—a real one with Nevada whiskers and long boots—land him one solid kick from behind.

THEN comes The Woman of the snoopopathic story. She is always "beautifully groomed" (who these grooms are that do it, and where they can be hired, I don't know), and she is said to be "exquisitely gowned."

It is peculiar about The Woman that she never seems to wear a dress—always a "gown." Why this is, I cannot tell. In the good old stories that I used to read, when I could still read for the pleasure of it, the heroines—that was what they used to be called—always wore dresses. But now there is no heroine; only a woman in a "gown." I wear a gown myself—at night. It is made of flannel and reaches to my feet, and when I take my candle and go out to the balcony where I sleep, the effect of it on the whole, is not bad. But as to its "revealing every line of my figure"—as THE WOMAN'S gown is always said to—and as to its "suggesting even more than it reveals"—well, it simply does not. So when I talk of "gowns" I speak of something that I know all about.

Yet whatever THE WOMAN does, her "gown" is said to "cling" to her. Whether on the street or in a cabaret or in the drawing-room, it "clings." If by any happy chance she (Continued on page 112)

TO A BRUNETTE

Addressed to His Beloved, after a short absence

BY ALEISTER CROWLEY

WHEN first your raven beauty made me fond,

Your soul was pure and hard as diamond.
All books on "how to love" I nightly conned;
All suits I thought might please I daily donned;

It stirred not of your soul one lily-fragrance.
I offered you the rubies of Golconda,
Heaped at your feet the gold of Trebizond:—
But could not bring you to the bridal bond.

Darling, I do not utterly despond—
Now that you are a blonde!



Sketches by Reginald Birch