

GREAT GRANDMAMA.

It isn't every man of twenty-one who can boast of a great-grandmother. But the mater married at eighteen, and her mother at seventeen, and this, so to speak, matrimonial precocity has dowered me with quite a respectable set of living ancestors.

Naturally, you would picture great-grandmothers as withered and antique, with a cracked voice and a perpetual bath-chair, probably even an ear-trumpet!

Not a bit of it. She's elderly, of course, but far from decrepit. Her back is still straight and her eye bright, and, as for hearing, she can certainly give me points, which is saying a good deal.

In short, she happens to be the raciest old lady in the country, with a heart of gold, and an immense reputation for saying smart things.

She manages the Priory and a pack of domestics with as much ease as if the "servant problem" never even existed, and when the various generations for which she is responsible take it in turns to look her up, she wants neither advice nor assistance.

I am the only son of her pet granddaughter and in consequence a supreme favorite with the old lady.

So it came to pass that before my marriage I was found at the Priory more frequently than any other member of my family.

I may as well confess that there was another reason besides mere ancestral devotion which drew me constantly to the place.

Five miles off stood Radcombe Hall, and Radcombe Hall was owned by Colonel Anstruther-Blyth a sturdy octogenarian whose orphaned niece chanced to be the sweetest and best girl in Christendom.

I'd been in love with Aldine Anstruther-Blyth ever since I was seven. At eight I applied to the Colonel for her hand and was refused.

I have been refused at decent intervals ever since, until—But as old-fashioned writers say "We anticlinate."

I have never been very clear as to the reason of the Colonel's obstinacy in this respect. I don't think he ever exactly disliked me. I can't (pardon me) see how he could, I'm so loof-feensive, passably good-looking, and more than passably rich.

Aldine has a theory (based on the discovery of a miniature in her uncle's desk) that once in prehistoric ages, he proposed to great-grandmother and was refused.

It may be so. The miniature was certainly as much like great-grandmother as anybody else, but, at all events, it was very paltry of him to cling to revenge after half a century or more.

Certainly the relations between my ancient relative and the gallant Colonel were peculiar not to say bewildering. They sought each other's company with great persistence yet they quarreled unrelentingly when they were together and tried to scare off one another in the most astonishing way.

Certainly great-grandmother accomplished the scoring and went off on my arm, saving the Colonel spluttering and purple to be calmed down by Aldine.

I spoke seriously to Aldine about it once or twice.

"It must be such a strain on them," I said.

"My dear Dick," she answered, soothingly you don't understand it's a kind of antediluvian flirtation. Dead old things! They both really enjoy it, you know!"

It was early one Spring I had run down from town for a visit to the Priory on my new three-horse power Simplex motor-car.

Great-grandmother, being essentially up-to-date, was deeply interested in it, and made me take her for a drive that very afternoon, and explain all the mechanism.

"It seems very easy," she remarked, as I gave her a demonstration of the different speeds.

"Easy!" I exclaimed thoughtlessly, for I was full of the enthusiast's pride in this new toy "I should just think it was!"

And then I quoted from the catalogue that a mere baby could drive it," and endeavored to point out its superiority over every other car on the market. Great-grandmother was duly impressed, and listened with quite flattering attention.

Her affection for the Simplex increased. I stayed three weeks, and she left her carriage in the coach house and her horses to the groom to exercise, and abandoned herself to motoring as if she'd been eighteen instead of eighty.

If I couldn't take her myself she went for a run with my chauffeur, and always came back declaring that she felt ten times more invigorated than after any amount of drives behind her high-stepping greys.

The Colonel and Aldine were away from home the first half of my visit. The day after they came back I met Aldine by chance in the small county town that lay between our respective places of abode.

She was cycling, and I was on horse-back, riding one of great-grandmother's neglected steeds.

"How's the Colonel?" I asked rather savagely when I'd greeted her. I couldn't help feeling resentful about his absurd doggedness.

"Rather pleased with himself," said Aldine, leaning on her bicycle and looking up at me with a smile that made my head swim. "He thinks

he's contrived to see Mrs. Foyle in her proper place for once."

I whistled.

"Another sparring match?" I inquired.

Aldine nodded.

"And I've never seen either of them more excited."

"What was the bone of contention this time?"

"Motors."

I whistled again.

Aldine proceeded.

"We dined at the Priory just before we went away," she said. "The conversation veered round to modern pastimes, and uncle, who's never by any chance moderate, observed that turning young men into fatty, despicable ninnyes."

"Yes?"

"Well, that set Mrs. Foyle off. She'd had a letter from you that very morning about your new car, and she stood up for them right and left. Said they needed as much coolness and nerve as any other form of sport."

"And the Colonel?"

Aldine giggled and then looked grave.

"He was horribly unpleasant, Dick, and begged to know what was to become of the hard cross-country rider if young fools were to be content to tiddle themselves about in overgrown perambulators. At last the whole thing turned into a hot dispute on the rival merits of young men past and present."

"Who got the best of it?" I asked with interest.

"Well, it was a sort of a dead-heat. Uncle said some abominably rude things about this generation, and Mrs. Foyle capped them with a few clever cuts concerning the last, and, finally, I was obliged to intervene and smooth them both down. Uncle thumped the table, and finished off by saying,

"Well, madam, when you can give me a run on one of your infernal motors that makes my heart leap and the blood course through my veins as it used to do, begad! with a hot scent and a piece of mottle between my knees, you may consider that I'm in your hands once and for all, and you can make any terms with me you like."

We both laughed then I flicked a fly off Rattler's left ear.

Aldine, I remarked, your uncle's the most self-opinionated pig-headed old martinet in the kingdom. When you're twenty-one you'll marry me, whether he likes it or not, won't you, dear?" and I bent down to read her face.

She bent down also, and twisted her handle-bars this way and that.

"I don't know, Dick," she said. "Of course, I'd just love to, but after all he's been awfully—"

And then she broke off suddenly, because some wretched interloping acquaintance rushed up and interrupted us.

The Colonel had asked us to lunch—great-grandmother and me. The two old people never omitted these little civilities while or the state of affairs between them might be.

Great-grandmother insisted that we should run over in the Simplex. I demurred, knowing that it isn't always wise to wave a red flag before a bull, but she was adamant, and as I could not afford to throw away an opportunity of seeing Aldine I was obliged to give up.

We covered the distance in no time, and arrived very early, glided up the drive and stood throbbing and panting before the front door. The Colonel emerged to greet us, rubbing his hands. He was evidently an excellent terms with himself, but when he saw our mode of conveyance he stood stock-still and snorted.

"Now look at that!" he growled to Aldine, who was peering over his shoulder. "Call that manly! Call that sensible! Parcel of tomfoolery, I say!"

Then he came out with a very red face to assist great-grandmother to alight.

I jumped down, and ran up the steps to greet Aldine, leaving great-grandmother to smile amiably into the old gentleman's indignant face. She appeared to be really enjoying herself.

"Don't condemn it unheard, Colonel," she said, with dangerous sweetness. "Everything ought to be given a fair trial. Let Dick take you for a turn around the park. It's really very exhilarating!"

At this point I presume—my back was turned, so I couldn't see—she moved into the driver's place, as if to make room for the Colonel.

"Saving your presence, madam," he grunted, with unnecessary energy; "but I'd be jiggered before I'd make such a miserable puppet of myself!"

There was a short and pregnant silence. The Simplex puffed and fizzed lazily, and I, oblivious of all else, gazed longingly into Aldine's speed-well eyes, and whispered—well, the kind of things infatuated young men do whisper at such times.

Then did the spirit of devilry enter into the bosom of great-grandmother.

"Why, Colonel," she murmured, softly, "if you're so violent about it I shall really begin to think that you're afraid!"

The Colonel started, as if he had been shot, breathed heavily, gave her a look calculated to freeze the blood in the veins of a boa-constrictor, and bounded suddenly into the empty seat, with a force quite miraculous in a man of his age, and sat with his hands on his knees glaring at vacancy.

Hearing a scuffle I glanced round, and was just in time to catch a look of reckless mischief in great-grandmother's aged eye, and to see that her thin, but still capable fingers were

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