Du Maurier at the "Punch" Table.

BY HENRY W. LUCY.

HE *Punch* Dinner Table is one of the closest corporations in the world. The door of the room where the weekly feast is held is as jealously "tiled" as if the business of the evening were connected with Freemasonry. In my time, men finally honoured with invitation to sit "round the mahogany tree" went through a sort of probationary term. Once or twice a year there were jaunts up the river or four-in-hand drives to famous country taverns. Here dinner was served in bountiful fashion. But it was not at *the* Table, and it was therefore permissible for the editor to include in the invitation specially favoured outside contributors.

There was a memorable occasion when, in 1881, Frank Burnand succeeding to the editorship, the principle of extending the borders of companionship was liberally interpreted. All the regular outside contributors, whether with pen or pencil, were bidden to a feast spread at the Albion, a famous City inn.

After dinner we played at "Wednesday night in Bouverie Street." The waiters were sent out of the room, the attention of the company concentrated, and the signal given, "Now, gentlemen, the big cartoon, if you please."

The big cartoon is still, as it has been for many years, the work of that *preux chevalier*, John Tenniel. The second cut--the undercut it is more familiarly called — grows under the graceful pencil of Linley Sambourne. The big cartoon looks, as a work of consummate art should look, easy to do when it is finished and laid out on the bookstalls. The general impression in the minds of nine-tenths of the ladies and gentlemen who buy *Punch* on Wednesday is that Sir John Tenniel knocked off the cartoon on Tuesday afternoon, probably between lunch and dinner time. That idea, whilst belittling the thought and labour involved, is, really, a compliment to the work. The *Punch* cartoon, necessarily dealing with the subtlest developments of intricate political events, often of international concern, comes out on a Wednesday so pat to the actual situation of the hour, that it is natural to suppose it was achieved, as leading articles in the morning paper are, on the latest intelligence of the night before publication.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Punch's young men, sitting in council on one Wednesday night, must needs see a week ahead, the cartoon illustrating the position not as it is on Wednesday the first of the month, but as it will be on Wednesday the eighth. This is skating over very thin ice, a practice rendered possible only by the exercise of intimate knowledge of political affairs, combined with sound judgment. Only once in recent times has *Punch* stumbled, and the accident is so rare that everyone remembers it. When the relief column was advancing to the deliverance of Gordon, cooped up in Khartoum, a point was reached whereat the final triumph seemed a matter of a clearly defined number of days. Viewing the situation, as usual, a week ahead, the cartoon was devised showing Gordon out of the thicket. On Wednesday morning, when the triumphant cartoon was opened on all the bookstalls, there came news that Gordon was slain.

The outsiders, guests at the Albion dinner party in 1881, knew nothing of all this. Each in turn set himself with a light heart to devising a cartoon, and probably no room of the same size encompassed an equal amount of impracticable rubbish.

I have no recollection of meeting du Maurier at this my first *Punch* dinner. It was later in the same year that I came into close companionship with him, beginning a friendship that only death chilled. It was on the occasion of one of the trips up the river, engineered and personally conducted by bluff-mannered, generous-hearted William Bradbury, the representative of the proprietors of *Punch*, who for more than a generation sat in the vice-chair at the Wednesday dinner, with du Maurier on his left hand.

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From a Photo. by Linley Sambourne.

A famous outing of this kind has its memory preserved by a set of photographs taken on the spot. We drove to Dorking in a four-in-hand, du Maurier to our regret being unable to join the party. It was in mid-July, but the weather turned out more appropriate to mid-winter. However, we made the best of it, and Linley Sambourne (known to his brethren at the table by the affectionate diminutive "Sammy") undertook to picture the scene. Three times, under slightly varying circumstances of weather, we formed a group. In the first photograph, hatted and hooded, with coats buttoned up and umbrellas ready (F. C. B., careful of a precious life, has, it will be observed, placed a newspaper between

From a Photo. by Linley Sambourne.

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the soles of his boots and the sodden turf), we enjoyed the July weather of the so-called nineteenth century.

A little later came a gleam of sunshine. Off went the coats, down were flung the umbrellas, heads were uncovered, and we made believe it was a summer day. (Observe Sir John Tenniel mopping his brow, wet with honest sweat of a sultry day.) Scene III. Presto! The sun has fled, dark clouds are gathered again, and we, once more coated and hatted, enjoy July weather. In this last scene the figure on the extreme right is altered, Harry Furniss going off to work the camera, so that Sammy's manly form might adorn the picture.

From a Photo. by Harry Furniss.

On the occasion ever stored in memory as that on which I made du Maurier's acquaintance, we were to join the steam launch at a point on the river some two miles distant from the railway station. On leaving the train I found there was only one fly at the door, and that already engaged by two gentlemen. By strange good fortune I gathered from direction given to the cabman that they were going to the very place whither I was bound. I ventured to ask to be allowed to share the expense of the fly, a request courteously granted. We jogged along, talking of the weather and other non-committal topics, till we arrived at the inn yard, where I found my editor standing amid a cheerful little group of otherwise unfamiliar faces. This, I found, was the *Punch* staff, and lo! my companions in the fly were two of its oldest members.

In later years it chanced that I sat every Wednesday night between Gil à Beckett and The Professor, as Percival Leigh was called. We sometimes talked about that drive, and they told me how they had wondered who the deuce I was that I should want to be driving to the very inn where Mr. Punch and his young men foregathered with designs on dinner. I fancy they thought it was exceedingly presumptuous conduct.

Before dinner we went for a spin up the river in the launch. Du Maurier in his boyish fashion was lying full length in the bow of the boat, smoking his eternal cigarette. I timidly approached, planted myself in his neighbourhood, and he, in his unvaried simple, unaffected manner, forthwith began to talk as if we had been friends since schooldays. He was a charming talker, and enjoyed the exercise of his gift. But in this respect, as in all others, he was absolutely free from anything like assumption or self-assertion. His talk was as unpremeditated, frequently as joyous, as the singing of the lark.

At the weekly council he rarely contributed suggestions to the cartoon. He had no care for, and very little knowledge of, politics, with which the work was chiefly concerned.

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Sometimes when the design and its treatment were settled in every detail, and there came the consideration of the title, he would flash forth a happy suggestion that settled a knotty point. (I have known the discussion over the title of the cartoon exceed in length debate on design of the picture.) It was after work was done, fresh cigars lit, tumblers filled, and the flood of hilarity, temporarily dammed by the obstacle of serious work, once more surging, that du Maurier developed into Kicky, and became, as someone effusive to the point of a misplaced plural said, "the life and souls of the party." On summer nights he liked to take his coat off, borrow an additional chair, and, reclining on the two, open out the founts of his fancy and his humour.

It happened that, everyone seated in his appointed place at the table, I was through the dinner separated by the length of the board from du Maurier. Often, when William Bradbury had gone off to catch an early train for his suburban home, I migrated to the empty seat next to du Maurier, occasions when I did not get home very early. As for du Maurier, once he had got his coat off, with two chairs to loll upon, a box of cigarettes at hand, and a bottle of claret on the table, he did not want to go home at all. Nor was there any need suggested by the well of his brilliant conversation running dry.

Perhaps one influence that made him shrink from starting for home was the length of the journey, and the inevitable trouble with the cabman. During the greater part of his connection with *Punch* he lived on the verge of Hampstead Heath. It was a charming place—when you got there. But, as du Maurier used to say, parodying a line from a music-hall refrain then popular, "You've got to get there fust." The bloated London cabman, on the look-out for fat fares for short distances, shrank with honest indignation from the prospect of receiving a shilling over the regulation fare for a journey to the extreme edge of the four-mile radius, including ascent of one of the slopes of Hampstead Hill.

When Major O'Gorman was still with us in the House of Commons—

> Our portly and ponderous Major,
> Our mighty, magnificent Major:
> The Councils of State
> Have no man of such weight
> Or such girth as our bould Irish Major

--it was told in the smoking-room how, when he appeared in Palace Yard with evident design of being driven home, all the drivers of four-wheelers lashed their horses into a gallop and dashed out of the Yard, fearful lest one or other should be selected to convey this more than nineteen stone of humanity. Du Maurier told me, and here the conception was even more fanciful, that as soon as he emerged from Bouverie Street into Fleet Street, after the Wednesday night dinner, the hansom cabmen right and left whipped up their horses and fled.

"They knew I wanted to go to Hampstead," he gravely insisted.

In later years he overcame this difficulty in the happiest fashion. As he admitted, his house, "when you got there," was what agents call extremely "eligible." It stood in a quiet, old-fashioned street, with a view of the Heath, over which du Maurier frequently trudged and communed with himself. It was during one of these morning walks, on this occasion accompanied by a friend, that he first told the story of Peter Ibbetsen, suggesting it as the framework of a novel.

"Why don't you write it yourself?" asked his companion.

Du Maurier laughed at the idea. He was a poor artist in black and white. It was not for him to take up the pen to compete with the ready writer. Still, he was fascinated by the plot his fancy had evolved, and urgently pressed it on the acceptance of his friend, to make his own book withal. The generous offer was declined, and so it came to pass that, as no one else would do it, du Maurier wrote "Peter Ibbetsen."

Some years before his death there came an offer to rent New Grove House, furnished for the summer season. Du Maurier jumped at this opportunity of a change of residence nearer to the centre of things in town. Thereafter he generally let his Hampstead house, and, with the rent received, took a furnished house in a more accessible region. When the success of his novels made him rich beyond his modest dreams of avarice he finally quitted Hampstead, taking the lease of a roomy corner house in Oxford Square. Last of all, he finally went back to Hampstead, carried through a crowd that lined the old familiar ways, housed and homed in a corner of the churchyard whose walls he had often skirted on his way to and from the *Punch* dinner-table.

During the weeks of his residence in town he seized the opportunity of giving a succession of dinner parties. Whether as host or guest, he was a charming man to meet in Bouverie Street or elsewhere. Here

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is one of his little notes about a dinner he missed, interesting chiefly for the sketch of Burnand as *Mephistopheles* and himself as *Faust.*

New Grove House,
Hampstead Heath.
Sunday

Dear Lucy,
Here's a pretty go! My editor writes to me to be engaged on Tuesday!— and disengaged on Monday!— So of course I got myself engaged on Tuesday, & wrote & told [illegible] so!!!!......
I can't go & disengage myself!
Yours ever
G du Maurier

two whom possibly I never met before, may never see again, whose company I certainly did not select. They may be moderately bright; in which case one has a pleasant dinner. Ten to one they are duffers, and like a starling you may have read about, I can't get out. At least not until the long, unlovely dinner is over."

An incident in connection with this last dinner party at Oxford Square dwells in my mind as revealing a certain stage of hypochondria that marked the approach to the end. Amongst the guests were Mrs. Humphry Ward, Sir George Trevelyan, and Mr. Andrew Lang. Everything went brightly, only the host sitting strangely silent with a rare look of moodiness on his face. He told me afterwards in tone of bitter disappointment that he had taken special pains to make up the party, and it had proved a dismal failure. Andrew Lang is a very old friend of mine. For more than twenty years we were colleagues on the same morning journal. He arrived in the drawing-room some few minutes later than I. By some sudden freak, instead of shaking hands as others did, we with mock courtesy made each other a profound bow. Du Maurier observed this, and straightway drew the most lugubrious conclusions.

"Of course I know," he said. "It often happens that fellows living together on a paper fall out. But I'd no idea you and Lang weren't on speaking terms."

It was with the greatest difficulty I eased his mind on this point. On the general question of the success of the brilliant little party he would not be comforted.

I happened to be present at what was, I believe, the last of a delightful series of home dinners interrupted by his illness. As usual, it was a small party, the number designed to meet what du Maurier properly regarded as an essential to a successful dinner, the opportunity of occasional lapses into general conversation.

"When I go out to an ordinary dinner party," he used to say, "I often feel that I might as well be dining at a *table d'hôte.* I have a neighbour on my right and another on my left to whom I talk in turn. For all practical purposes I am dining with these

Success in a new field, the magnitude of which comes to but one man in a generation, had no effect in the direction of turning du Maurier's head. Whilst the new world and the old were ringing with praise of "Trilby," whilst the Haymarket was blocked with a crowd patiently waiting their turn to gain admission to the theatre where it had been

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placed on the stage, the author was in his relations with his family and at the Punch Table the same simple-mannered, delightful companion known to them before, as he said, he "struck ile." Nevertheless, there was a palpable change in him, the result of fading health. His blood chilled with premonitory touch of the hand of death, he fell into moods of depression, plaining that success had come too late. A week or two after the dinner in Oxford Square he dined with us on what turned out to be the last time I saw him. He was in much better spirits, talking hopefully about another novel he had in his mind in succession to "The Martians."

"And what will you call it?" his old friend Lord Wolseley asked.

"'Soured by Success,'" du Maurier quickly answered.

At the *Punch* Table du Maurier was always Kicky, as the late Percival Leigh was The Professor, as Sir John Tenniel still is Jack Ides, and as Linley Sambourne is reduced to the proportions of Sammy. The difference is that whereas these last three names were conferred at the Table, du Maurier brought his with him from his nursery. When he was a child in Brussels, just sixty-three years ago, there was of the household a Flemish servant named Francis. Between the burly Flamande and the baby boy there existed a strong affection. In his latest days du Maurier recalled how Francis used to take him in his arms and carry him off to show him some birds painted on window-panes. The child thought they were real, and wondered they didn't fly away. Francis called his little pet "*Le manniken.*" Infant lips attempting to pronounce the phrase produced "Kicky." Thus it came to pass that in the family circle and in the brotherhood of the *Punch* Table he was Kicky to the end.

His real name was, in its full length, far more imposing: George Louis Palmella Busson du Maurier! It sounds like the style of one of Ivanhoe's companions. As a matter of fact, it is of modern origin. The family name was Busson. Du Maurier is a territorial appellation derived from a château built in the fifteenth century, situated either in Anjou or Maine, du Maurier was not certain which.

"Anyhow," he said, on the only occasion he referred to the matter, "it's a brewery now."

Du Maurier, though he did not often talk of it, was proud of his family descent, and was well acquainted with the ramifications of the family tree. In "Peter Ibbetsen," all unsuspected, lurk names that grow upon it, transferred to characters in the novel. His mother was an Englishwoman; his father, though a Frenchman, was born in England. Their famous son was born in Paris on the 6th of March, 1834. He did not come into large inheritance of the world's goods. The household income was drawn chiefly from the family glass works in Anjou. The father, from whom du Maurier inherited his love of music and his beautiful voice, was a somewhat impracticable man. He was ever hitting upon inventions that were, some day, to make the family fortune, and meanwhile ate up the monthly remittances from the prosaic glass works. He moved about from Paris to Brussels, from Belgium to London, from No. 1, Devonshire Terrace (later the home of Charles Dickens), to Boulogne, from Boulogne back to Paris, and once more to London, where young du Maurier was sent to the Birkbeck laboratory with instructions from his father to become a great chemist.

This design was pursued to the extent that, in his twentieth year, George Louis Palmella was set up in business on his own account in a chemical laboratory, under the shadow of the Mansion House. But business did not come. Two years later du Maurier *père* died, leaving but small provision for his family. Kicky accompanied his widowed mother to Paris, straightway striding upon the true pathway of his career. He entered as a student at Gleyre's, a studio of which, with its charming companionship, all the world has read in "Trilby." A year later he went to Antwerp, working hard in the Academy.

This is the episode in his life that furnished material for several chapters in "The Martians." Here befell the great disaster minutely described in the novel. Drawing one day from a model, the sight of his left eye suddenly failed him, it being, indeed, closed for ever. The student was long depressed by apprehension of total blindness. Happily his right eye was preserved, and with it he accomplished the varied delicate work turned out through the next forty years. A year or two before his death he had fresh anxiety about his eye, and for a while had to lay down his pencil. He wrote to me from Hampstead on the 20th of January, 1892:—

"Thanks awfully for Baron de Bookworms. "Yours ever,

"G. du Maurier."

A facsimile of this is given at the top of the next page.

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Thanks awfully for
Baron de Bookworms
yours ever
G du Maurier

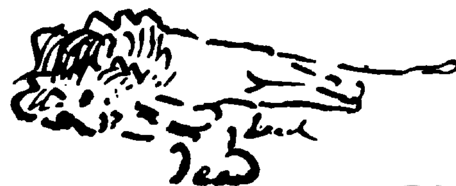
In 1860 du Maurier again set up in London, henceforward his home and workshop. He had lodgings in Newman Street, sharing them with Whistler, then, like himself, an obscure young man exceedingly anxious to earn a guinea. He early gained a footing on *Once a Week*, for which he drew regularly. His first drawing appeared in *Punch* in 1860, and, as he used laughingly to say, it was all due to Whistler. One day the chums looked in at the studio of a photographer. Whistler was smoking a cigarette, and continued to puff away in the very Presence. The photographer, who du Maurier professed to believe was "a Deacon on Sundays," was extremely wrath.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I would have you understand that this is not an ordinary painter's studio where you can smoke and be otherwise disorderly."

The scene greatly tickled the fancy of the light-hearted couple. Du Maurier made a sketch of the pompous photographer, Whistler, and himself, and sent it in to *Punch*. It was accepted, "and from that day," du Maurier said, "I have never lacked bread and cheese. Indeed, sometimes I have found my bread buttered on both sides."

In a letter, undated, probably written in 1891 or '92, du Maurier enters upon a subtle appreciation of his own position and scope as an artist, compared with those of Leech. The moral is shown in the little sketch at the foot where Leech appears as a dead lion, du Maurier representing himself as the living donkey.

What a long letter! and not
very clear after all. At all events
I am much obliged to you for
the sympathetic touch with which
you have treated
yours ever
G du Maurier
[illegible]



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It has been told how the man who had long established a reputation as an artist in black and white happed upon the more immediately successful, infinitely more lucrative, work of the novelist. Possibly renewed trouble with his eyesight crystallized intention in the matter. If he lost his remaining eye he could no longer continue his beloved work in *Punch*, but he might, even if as blind as Milton, write books. His method of composition necessitated by the state of his eyesight was peculiar. He sat by the fireside with paper on his knee and pencil in hand writing rapidly, without attempt to follow with dim sight the formation of words or sentences. It was a labour of love for his wife or one of his daughters to make of the pathetically blurred MS. a fair copy for the press.

He did not care much about "Trilby," round which the world went mad. Probably this was in part due to resentment of the world's neglect of what he held to be the greater work, "Peter Ibbetsen." Therein I agreed with him, but was not able to follow him in his further conviction that greatest of all was "The Martians." He often talked to me about that book whilst the story was growing under his hand. He felt he must satisfy the expectation created by the phenomenal success of "Trilby." To that task he set himself laboriously and hopefully, dying in the sure and certain hope that he had achieved his aim. I read "Trilby" whilst it was running in *Harper's*, and seem to have written to say how much I enjoyed its freshness and vigour. I find this note in reply :—

"New Grove House,
"Hampstead Heath,
"June, 3, '91.

"My Dear Lucy, — Many thanks for your kind letter (which I shall ever value) about 'Trilby,' the daughter of my old age. I am indeed proud to think she beguiled your weariness instead of sending you to sleep—and that you are not insensible to 'the charms of my literary style.' I hope she will go on pleasing you, till she departs this life, which she will do in the August number of *Harper's Magazine*, and that Mrs. Lucy will drop a tear! With kind regards to you both,

"Yours ever,
"G. du Maurier."

One of his vain regrets was that he had not hit upon his real vocation before a time of life when he would not have opportunity to work out the abundance of plots and fancies with which his mind was stored. Early in 1896, "The Martians" just out of hand, he told me he had in his mind the full plot of a fourth novel. "Too late, too late," he murmured, speaking rather to himself than to me. The announcement of what proved to be his fatal illness appeared in the newspapers side by side with bold advertisement that so great was the rush for the number of *Harper's Magazine* containing the opening chapters of "The Martians," that on the day after publication a second edition went to press. "Too late, too late!" Probably one of du Maurier's bitterest reflections as he lay on his deathbed was that he was dying with nearly all his music in him.

In his study at New Grove House there hung one of his few water-colours, a portrait of his friend, Canon Ainger. I think of another picture in which Canon Ainger last figured near his old friend. He stood, white-surpliced, reading in broken voice passages from the Burial Service, the sunshine of an October afternoon overhead; beneath, the grave in which we laid all that was left of the form that was Kicky's.

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