'VARSITY TALES.

By Max Pemberton.

Illustrated by T. S. C. Crowther.

V.—IN THE MAY TERM.

IT has always seemed to me that the merry month of May is the one in which the undergraduate is tempted to repeat the servant girl's aspiration that heaven may be a sphere wherein you do nothing for ever and ever. There are men, I suppose, who have attended a lecture in May. It is impossible to forget that the summer term is one whose delights are broken for scholars by the thought of tripos es. But a tripos is a necessary evil occurring but once in a man's life—unless he be a phenomenon; and three Mays of the four he passes at Cambridge will be his own to possess in the full delight of idleness. During these happy terms no phantom of examination, no devils of learning will stalk his path. He will become in his way a king of the month; he will find queens a-many to share his kingdom by-and-by when the race week opens and garden parties perfect the gentler arts, and the "lesser man" comes up, and sunlight is warm in the gloomy courts. Easy to persuade him at such a time to light the fires of spring and cast off the winter garment of repentance. He can work in the "Long," in the October term, in the winter of his discontent, but not in May. That would be a sacrilege indeed.

"Garden parties perfect the gentler arts."

This is the spirit in which the typical man goes up to Cambridge when the Easter vacation is done. He has spent his holiday, it may be, in a Welsh farmhouse, which he rented with three others of like energy, under the delusion that he would do some reading. But the party broke up at the Métropole in Brighton; and the sea air having stimulated our friend, he arrives at his college with the impulses of youth high strung and expectant. It is only a month since he went down, yet what a change has come over Cambridge! Winter sits no longer in the lap of Spring. Fog and darkness, damp and gloom—these have gone with the afore-mentioned garment which the Persian poet so wisely advises his children to burn. The old courts are transformed. They were dungeons in Lent; they are like fairy palaces now when their spires catch the sunbeams, and flowers give gaudy colour, and the great avenues are rich in leaf and blossom. Nor has Spring ceased her work when she awakened the elms and gilded the steeples and touched the river with her transforming hand. She is reflected in the faces, the clothes of every man you meet. She has come down to the Market Place to set the old women's tongues wagging merrily, to fill their booths with odorous blossoms and fresh young fruits; she lurks in the tailors' shops,

where checks of appalling shades and beauty await you; she has warmed the heart even of deans, so that they lag as they go to the schools and remember the days when even they stole precious hours of May and repented in long vigils afterwards. And she will reign now for nine long weeks, weeks when even the cynic may forget that the leaves of life are dropping one by one.

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A traveller who returned recently from the Rocky Mountains reminded us that in hotels there you see the intimation, "Square meal, twenty-five cents; regular gorge, fifty cents." There is no such intimation that I remember in any college at Cambridge, but if an American were asked to describe the May of the average student he might answer that it was a "regular gorge," so far as its festivities are concerned. From that hour when the porter carries your trunk up to your rooms until that less pleasant hour, eight or nine weeks later, when he carries it down again, it is impossible that a proper minded man should know a moment's *ennui*. The merriment and the brightness about him cannot fail to stimulate him or to influence him. Possibly an anxious tutor may suggest that he should attend at least three lectures a week, but this need not disturb him. There are always the wretched tripos men driven by the spurs of ambition to listen to obvious propositions expounded in stuffy lecture-rooms. These men, being good fellows, will take your card and leave it in the lecturer's hat each morning. You, lying in your bed and reflecting whether your breakfast shall be soles *à la maître* or devilled kidneys, may assume that some subtle influence is working upon you so that you are really imbibing, through the medium of the lecturer's hat, an amazing amount of knowledge. Your conscience is easy at any rate; and when you stroll into your keeping-room presently you are in that happy state of mind which tolerates even a tailor's dun. And why should you not be? Are not your windows open to the sweet breezes of the day? is there not a sparkle and glitter of morning light upon the painted windows of the chapel opposite? do not flowers greet you with dainty odours? is not the cloth very white and the coffee very hot and the dish done to perfection? And you can read, be it remembered, propping up your paper with Justinian, or sharing a review and alternate slices of an excellent devil. And when breakfast is done how pleasant to sit at your window and watch the men who have been to lecture and ask them if they have enjoyed themselves. This will pass the hour before you don that startling suit of checks and saunter forth towards King's, to see what the morning has brought from London; possibly to do a little shopping with tradesmen whose terms—no longer "any time," as they were when you first came up—have become "three days, or immediate proceedings will be taken."

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The streets of Cambridge in the mornings of May term are a study worth the making. Here a Girton girl on her way to lecture; there a don heavily gowned returning from an exposition of the new Aristotle; yonder two undergrads, whose clothes hurt the eyes as an Indian sun, whose flowers are immaculate. Elsewhere we find half a dozen cricketers, whose blazers strike the gamut of the colours; "cousins," fresh from London, to giggle and to wonder; doctors, whose learning has put chains upon their feet; "freshers," rampant and devouring; even, it may be, the vice-chancellor himself, heralded by the chained Bibles and the silver pokers, whipped in by bulldogs, who glare at all youths with savage eyes, and seem to say, "I know ye." As the day grows, and the bells cease to ring, and the sunbeams are left in possession of the lecture-rooms, the whole town seems to fill with beflannelled men—some with rackets, some with tennis bats, many with the "cricketer's carpet," a few with golfer's tools—they pass to the playing-fields, and all life is hushed in the streets. Cambridge nods then; she will awake again when the chapel bell rings for evensong and the butlers flock to halls and butteries. Our typical man, meanwhile, will have lunched right well; possibly have entertained his best friend's sister. The afternoon for him will have been one all too swift in its passing. There is shade, he will tell you, beneath the elms of the cricket ground. It is good to play a set of tennis, or to lie and watch your best bowler at a moment when a tenth man has scored seventy-two and is not out. And then the after hours, the delicious moments of evening when you take your cigar to the "backs" and the hush of evening is on the gardens, and the elms sleep and the water is still! The very essence of life is squeezed into those days; content has no finer gift!

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Mr. Barry Pain has laid it down that the

"An impossible boat and an impossible novel."

equipment for the "backs," and their proper enjoyment, should consist of two pipes—one to cool while the other is heating—a canoe, and an impossible novel. He, however, was speaking of the sunny afternoon when you float beneath the shade of fellows' trees, and dream past Queen's, and reflect that Erasmus, after all, must have been an unhappy man, since goldflake was not a thing he could deny himself. If I may amend Mr. Pain's statement so far as to make it a law for the after dinner hour, I would suggest the canoe, but substitute a cigar for the pipes. Should there be more than two of you, an impossible boat rowed with one oar is a good barter for the impossible novel. But beware of the man who has information to impart. This is not the hour for good talk. You may suffer a banjo or even the strange scriptural history embodied in the ballad known as "Rolly up the Old Coat," but the talking man is an abomination. I can recall one of "ours" who could never take ship upon the "backs" without giving us the full and particular history of the Queen's bridges, or commenting upon the meditations of Chaucer, or the reflections of Tennyson seeking Hallam in his rooms. One night we avenged ourselves on this bore and paid him many a score. We put him on the ledge of the Queen's wall, which faces the river, and left him there. As there is no escape from this ledge except by water, and as our friend could not swim, he enjoyed possibilities for examining the bridges of Queen's of quite a unique order. It was midnight before his shouts and appeals touched the heart of a drunken bargeman, who carried him to the opposite shore for the ridiculous sum of five shillings. Such a man is worse than a snowstorm on the "backs." Be your illusion perfect, he will break it. When you are asking to be left alone with the moonlight, and the black shadows, and the silhouetted shape of spire and tower, and the peace of the gardens, and the harvest of night, his tongue is like a saw upon your nerves. Seek rather the man of reserved reflection, the man whose thought is deep and silent, whose only exclamation between the Bridge of Sighs and the Mill is the profound and serious demand that you will heave him the tobacco.

"Twenty-four, sixteen, three."

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I have endeavoured to give a picture of an average day at Cambridge in the May term. It would be unfair, at the same time, to cover up the shadows which sometimes gather upon such a scene. For the most part they are the shadows of duns. If a man be in his third year, he will have lived long enough to have made a complete and accurate study of the tailor's heart. Does he find the needle and thread civilising, begetting brotherly charity and gentleness of heart? I fear not. Where

once the ninth part of a man rubbed his hands when the freshman entered his shop, he now talks of cheques and overdue accounts. No longer does a placid smile of welcome hover upon the tailor's anxious face. He knows that his man may go down for good at the end of the May term, and then where shall he seek that "twenty-four, sixteen, three" he has waited for so patiently? Now is the time for him to be up and doing. He must hunt his man with human dogs every day, send hourly to his rooms, pursue him, harass him, threaten him. I knew one man at Paul's who could not live in his own rooms during his last May. He used to take up a place at a friend's window, wherefrom he could watch his own staircase, and there scrutinise the features of the various duns who sought audience. He would greet them, too, with friendly and sympathetic words, as they came down from his sported oak.

"Hi, my good man! did you want Mr. Johnson?"

"Certainly, sir; I should be much obliged if you could tell me ——"

"Oh yes, with pleasure. You will find him in the rooms of Mr. King over there."

Now the Mr. King in question happened to be a notorious boxer—he is a member of the National Sporting Club to-day and breeds bulldogs. It is to be imagined how he treated the various duns who sneaked in to ask timidly if Mr. Johnson was there! You would often see them gathering up the pieces, so to speak, after they had come down two flights of stairs at the speed of an express engine. King got so infuriated with Johnson's tricks at last that he used to take a flying kick at every stranger who showed his nose round his oak. The strangers never understood the laws of dynamics in their entirety until they flew down King's stairs, five at a time.

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He who would study human nature must study also the face of the dun under the varying emotions to which the pursuit of the overdue account gives birth. I was in the rooms of an excellent bachelor of Caius some little time ago when a dun entered to collect an account for furniture which, oddly enough, was owed by the bachelor's brother, then a fellow of the college and a great light of science. The afternoon was growing late when the dun came; shadows were stealing into the oak-pannelled chamber; the kettle was singing on the fire; a man was playing the "Geisha" regardless of the laws of bass or of the fitness of an occasional *piano*. Presently we heard three unmistakable knocks upon the oak—knocks like the measured devil-rappings which disturbed Luther in his prison at Wurtemberg. One, two, three! A dozen voices bawled "Come in!" We knew that fun was on the mat. We were not disappointed.

Anon the door opened slowly, inch by inch, timidly; we discerned the crown of a worn hat, the tremendous fingers of a black gloved hand, the top of an historic umbrella. Presently the whole figure stood before us—the figure of a man whose hair was streaked by the silver he had pursued so many weary years, whose eyes were shotted red with the "cold unsweetened" which had ministered to his necessities so often. The shred of a man, in truth, black garbed, black cravatted, down at heel, yet smiling sweetly, an angel's smile of anticipation.

"Does Mr. Jaffray live here?" he asked, washing his hands in the air and beaming upon the company.

Our host swung round in his chair and faced the dun.

"Yes," said he; "I'm Mr. Jaffray; what do you want?"

"One hundred and forty-three, sixteen, four," answered the dun eagerly, "in account with Sticks and Snooks"—and then more gently—"for furniture supplied."

Jaffray rested the back of his head upon the ample cushion and recited the first verse of the "Lavabor."

"Look here," he said in a minute, "that's my brother's bill."

The smile left the dun's face; the evening light fell upon it through the latticed window—a gaunt, haggard face now, with the tragedy of a life written upon it.

"Your brother's bill!" exclaimed the dun, repeating the words, "your brother's bill! Then perhaps you can kindly give me his address, sir!"

"Of course I will; nothing more simple!"

The smile comes again upon this. The tragedy is forgotten. Down goes the worn black hat, down goes the umbrella; the man's hands tremble while they turn over the leaves of the pocket-book he produces. We on our part fall to an expectant silence. What can Jaffray be doing?

"Yes, sir?" says the dun again, implying that he is ready.

"W. H. Jaffray," says our friend, speaking very slowly.

The dun writes it, nibbling often at his pencil to make it mark.

"W. H. Jaffray," he repeats, his head wagging with pleasure.

"The Globe Hotel."

"The Globe Hotel."

Jaffray pauses a moment. The dun looks over the top of the book.

"Yes, sir?" he says, again implying that he is ready.

"Sydney," cries Jaffray sharply.

The dun's mouth opens, his face betrays anger, rage, then cold steelly hate.

"S-S-Sydney?" he stammers.

"Exactly," replies Jaffray; "Sydney, Australia. My brother is there two or three times a year, but you will generally find him three hundred miles up the bush!"

The dun sighs, looks at the cake hungrily, shakes his head, picks up his hat and umbrella, descends the stairs. There is age in his footstep; but you lose the sound of that quickly in the shout of laughter which follows him to the gate!

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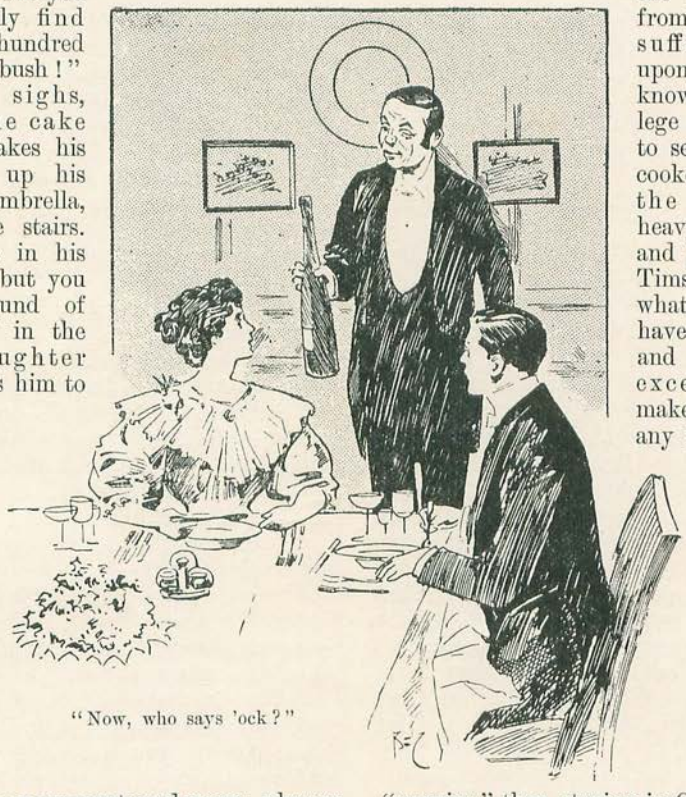
If May be a term of duns, it is also a term of dinners. There is something delightful in entertaining the many pretty girls who give such welcome colour to your courts and rooms, who are so easily pleased, who make heroes so readily. Then is the time to fill your fireplace with the choicest blossoms; then the time to put away all blue paper and the cup which is cracked; then the time to hide your rowing pots, as modesty dictates, in a place where it is possible for everyone to see them; then the time to garnish the house regardless of the devils of disorder who will return to it by-and-by. Have you not your reward in the admiration bestowed so unstintingly? Watch your guests as they run from this picture to that, as they read the titles of your books, as they ferret out your cups and cry, "Did you *really* win this?" The confession is dragged from you, not by wild horses but by wild maidens. You simper some reflection upon your own shortcomings, while you turn the vessel round so that they can see the college arms, and your own name cunningly graven and set out with flourishes. You confess that it is nothing, though you are perfectly well aware that it cost five guineas, and that you had to row like the deuce to win it. By-and-by you turn the subject and entertain these generous admirers to dinner in your rooms. You have hired the plate and linen from the butler, and suffer no anxiety upon that score; you know that the college cook will stoop to send you a well-cooked repast; but the waiting lies heavy on your soul and you fear for it. Tims, your man—what a night he will have with your wine and cigars! That excellent old bed-maker—will she make any mistake? Bed-makers are the devil at private dinners. They are so very ready to oblige.



"Now, who says 'ock?"

Mr. Robinson, of Jesus, told me a good story recently of a dinner he gave in his college to a select party of the "cousins" then staying in Cambridge. The cook, he admitted, proved a true friend; the flowers were superb and the linen spotless. But the *entrée* it was that did it. Somehow or other there was a tremendous pause between the fish and the *entrée*; and when the pretty guests were tired of babbling, a woeful silence fell upon the company. At this trying moment Mr. Robinson's bed-maker was heard bawling at the top of her lungs—she had left the oak open so that the company might not miss anything of her speech—an instruction to the cook.

"D'ye 'ear! Where is that auntery?

Here's Robinson a-cussin' and a-swearin' like anythink!"

This was the lady who, discovering at a later stage a box of matches spilled upon the floor, remarked in a delicate crescendo, "It ain't Robinson, it's his cussed friends!"

It is rather hard on a man to be told before a number of pretty girls that he is cussing and swearing like anything, especially when an *entrée*, which ought to lie upon his chest, is still warming in the college kitchens. But then the servants who wait at your table in the May term are altogether a lottery. I remember on one occasion being compelled to get in a man from outside to assist at a little dinner I gave in college. My regular gyp was dancing attendance upon the dons, but he sent me a waiter who, he assured me, was "a capital 'and, sir." The capital "'and" certainly had an originality in his method which should have served him in life. The first thing he did after handing round the soup was to stand at the head of the table with a bottle of wine in his hand and to cry, "Now, who says 'ock?"

Subsequently, when serving coffee, this good fellow entered into a brisk conversation with my guests. "A fine day for the time of year, ma'am." "I hope that you find yourself as well as you was, Miss." "Were you a-going to the party to-night, sir?"—and so on and so on. When he left me at midnight I had not the heart to rebuke him, for his eyes were full of tears—he had the keys of my spirit-case—and his pockets were full of my cigars. May his shadow never grow less!

Fortunately for the reputation of Cambridge there are other entertainments to be added to the dinners which the unhooded give in the privacy of their rooms. During the last week of the term even the scholars join in the fray of garden parties and concerts and masonic balls. Triposes are forgotten then. Men who were much concerned a week ago about the Fathers have eyes at this time only for the daughters. *Mousseline de soie* and the mode de Paris contrive that pink and blue and scarlet and heliotrope shall be added to the colours of the great court of Trinity. There are functions for dons to attend in the doctor's state; there is the great procession of flower-bedecked boats on the river; there are organ recitals and flower shows; the rattle of plates is incessant; corks fall like a shower of hail. Now is the time too for the latent devilry of man to be released. Authority seems blown to the winds; even deans may crack a joke and laugh at it; but woe betide that undergraduate who oversteps the unbeaten bounds. A leading Q.C. of the present day—one of the most brilliant and humorous and popular—had his career cut short at Cambridge by a momentary forgetfulness of this simple law—that so far shall you go and no further. It chanced that there was a great function in Trinity to which only masters of arts were admitted. Possibly—I suggest it with deference—this justly famous counsel desired particularly to see some maiden aunt or other elderly female relative at this brilliant gathering. Be that as it may, although he was only an undergraduate, he made up his mind to go, and he borrowed the gown of a master of arts from his tailor for the purpose. This secured him admission to the chapel of Trinity, and he enjoyed himself heartily for a time in the dignified company of the learned seniors. Had not a strange fate been working against him he might have played the jest to the end. Unhappily, just before the ceremony closed, the order came that the dons should form pairs and walk in procession from the chapel. This was a hit between wind and water, so to speak, but the merry youth, in nothing abashed, rose from his seat and paired off with the elderly don apportioned to him. Eheu! It was the master of his own college. We may assume that as he walked the master often put to himself the question, who the—why the—what the ——? Where had he seen that impudent face before? What was the name of the rascal?

> Cut—let me see—Cutbeard; no, Cuthbert, egad!
> St. Cuthbert of Bolton; I'm right, he's the lad.

And he was the lad too. The master's blood froze in his veins at the audacity of the thing. A mere freshman, to walk with *him* arm in arm through the hallowed courts of Trinity! A mere freshman, with a master's gown hanging jauntily from his shoulders!

> O turpissime, vir nequissime,
> Sceleratissime, quissime, issime. . . .
> Go fetch me a book, go fetch me a bell,
> As big as a dustman's, and a candle as well,
> I'll send him where good manners won't let me tell.

The master's manners were good we may be sure—and he did not aspire to the papal powers. There is no record that he sent for a book or even for a bell, but certainly he did send for the undergraduate directly he returned to college. Within twenty-four hours the youthful jester had joined his friends. To-day that same youth is big in law, a man respected of men, a bountiful

humorist, an excellent fellow. When it falls to him to go up to his old college and there be toasted at a banquet, he is apt to address the same master who sent him down so many years ago, and to refer touchingly to those old days when "Doctor X and I went arm in arm in procession through the court of Trinity." How the dons chuckle, how their eyes twinkle at a picture so grotesque!

A man needs to have left the 'Varsity some years if dons are to laugh at his exploits. The May term does not always breed smiles and boyish laughter and mutual toleration. I have in my mind a scene at the end of one May term when a daring youth of my own college danced all night in Hall—the occasion was the college ball—and then, instead of going soberly to breakfast when dawn came, took it into his head to climb a famous gate and to sit astride the top of it. This gate is very old and very high and very formidable. It possesses for its summit a cupola surmounted by a cross of stone, resembling nothing so much as those crosses and pulpits which our forefathers erected in market-places and at the doors of cathedral churches How a man ever managed to climb such a gate, heaven only knows; but our youth, with a few vine leaves in his hair and a great deal of devilry in his nature, swarmed up the thirty feet of wall, then shinned over the dome of the cupola and finally reached the summit, where he sat in his shirt sleeves, for all the world to pay him homage. It was not long before our excellent junior tutor came running across the court, hot with fear that the man would break his neck. In vain he cajoled, threatened, beseeched the one upon the tower. The only answer vouchsafed was the request for a brandy and soda and a cigarette. The tutor danced with rage at last, performing a good imitation of the "Washington Post" on the college green.

This went on for the best part of an hour, until, indeed, someone brought a ladder and the climber was alternately threatened and bribed to the descending point. But not a yard would he budge before the tutor had promised to say nothing about it. That the rascal escaped with a sound neck is regarded to this day with wonder in Cambridge. No longer do they point to the famous gate as a landmark of history. It has become "the place which Black climbed." And I remember that is not far from that famous tree consecrated by time to the old story of the youth who, having dined well, found this historic tree a fatal barrier between himself and his rooms. It is the only tree in that particular court, but do what he would, the over-merry undergraduate could not circumvent it. First he cannoned it on this side, then upon the other; he put his arms round it, he approached it warily, but in vain. Wine had magnified it for him until, try as he might, that tree was before him.

"Losht!" he cried desperately, sinking to the ground in tearful dismay, "losht in a beashly forest!"

These are the follies of May. How many a golden book could be filled with the names of their perpetrators. For the most part harmless frolics, lacking any shame of vice, they are to be reckoned with as an item in a term of which gaiety is the note and enjoyment the spirit. Nor is it possible to conceive an age when two thousand boys shall be gathered together and such jests shall be unknown. Indeed one may question whether the recreative element is not as useful as the intellectual in the curriculum of a university. A man who has danced all the May week, who has rowed in his college boat, who has processed and dined and flirted, will read none the less in the Long Vacation because of these things. May to him will remain the perfect month. He will speak of her always with affectionate thoughts for the old term and its glories.