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The Parson and "Ping-Pong."

(Concluded from page 4)

Then came a knock at the door. "Come in," said Rachel. Jane, the upper housemaid, entered. "Anything more as I can do for you to-night, miss? The master's sent word as we can all go to bed."

"No, nothing, thank you, Jane." Jane withdrew.

The two sisters disrobed in a leisurely manner and got into bed. The clock had struck eleven. They were just dropping off to sleep when a strange, a curious, sound came up from the dining room beneath.

Rachel sat up and listened. "Ping-pong! Ping-pong! Ping-pong!" "Ruth," she cried. "Ruth."

"What's matter?" murmured Ruth's drowsy voice from under the bedclothes. "Listen! Don't you hear? Papa and Canon Battersby are actually playing ping-pong!"

"Never!" exclaimed Ruth, starting up. "I say, so they are. How funny! I should like to see them at it, shouldn't you?—these two stout, staid, pompous old gentlemen. I've half a mind to steal downstairs and take a peep through the key-hole."

"Shall we?" ejaculated Rachel, always on for a bit of fun or mischief. "Yes; let us."

The two girls lit the gas, donned their dressing-gowns and slippers, and stole cautiously out on to the landing. "Sh!" whispered Rachel. "Look! The dining-room door is a chink open. Can't you see the light?"

"Yes," murmured Ruth. "How lucky! We shall be able to get a splendid peep. Just hark to papa's voice! I'm sure he's winning. It sounds so jibant. Come along, Rachel, I wouldn't miss this for toffee."

(Ruth had been at a High School, where, in addition to book learning, she had picked up all the latest phrases of up-to-date slang.)

They crept downstairs on tiptoe, and peeped cautiously through the chink of the unlatched door—a narrow aperture, barely an inch wide, but affording a commanding view of the room within. The sight that there met their gaze was well worth getting out of bed for—yes, well worth the risk of chill that they both ran by standing, on a cold night in a draughty hall, clad only in their nightdresses and dressing-gowns.

And this was the sight. The tall, stout septuagenarian Dean and the short, stout septuagenarian Canon, minus their coats (whose absence emphasized their fleshy figures), and with their shirtsleeves turned up to the elbow, were waging a tremendous duel with those little battledores and tiny balls across that diminutive green gauze net. That both players were lost in the game was abundantly clear. Their solemnly eager faces, their strained eyes, their parted lips, showed it. Either's brow was moist with sweat, either's complexion purplish, either's hair suggestive of the proverbial mop. They puffed and blew like a pair of grampuses. Hither and thither they skipped, ponderously nimble, solidly active, the floor and all the furniture shaking and trembling beneath their elephantine gambols.

Now and then, indeed, came a pause in the game; but not for rest. Not only to retrieve a truant ball from some well-nigh impregnable fastness into which it had retreated. Once, when their father was lying on the floor on his stomach, vainly trying to wriggle his arm and shoulder under

ly seated round a small table, their attention evidently taken up with a strange-looking instrument that stood between them.

"Ping-pong! Ping-pong! Ping-pong! Ping-pong. Forty—love."

The dean literally jumped. That was his own stentorian voice to the life. He now took in the situation. The instrument with which they were so entirely engrossed was Charles Battersby's gramophone.

"Ping-pong! Ping-pong! Ping-pong! Forty—fifteen."

This time it was Canon Battersby's turn to jump. The faithful reproduction of his own rich, well-fed tones was simply amazing.

"Ping-pong! Ping-pong! Game to me!" That was the Dean again—the jubilant Dean.

He looked at the Canon. The Canon looked at him. Mingled wrath and dismay were evident in both their faces.

In the meantime the little group at the other end of the room, evidently unconscious of observation, were passing their delighted and hilarious remarks upon the wonderful instrument.

"Isn't it lifelike?"

"That's papa to a T."

"Hark! Do you hear that scuffling, wriggling sort of noise. One of them grovelling on the floor after a ball, I'll be bound."

"Ping-pong! Ping-pong!"

Than a repetition of that scrambling, scuffling sound.

"Your father on the floor after a ball again," said Charles Battersby.

"How do you know it's papa," cried Ruth.

"You'll see, or rather hear, in a minute," Charles sniggered. "Listen."

A tremendous bump!

"That's the Dean knocking his head against the table."

"D—!"

"And that is his extremely opposite remark upon the occurrence," laughed young Battersby.

The Dean seized the Canon by the arm and drew him silently from the room. The wrath in his expression had now given way to unqualified alarm. Apprehension was writ large on his every feature. The Canon's face was almost equally discomposed.

"What are we to do?" gasped the Dean. "That impudent son of yours has evidently been playing a trick upon us with that devil's invention of his. How are we to stop it going any further? I—I wouldn't have this get about for all I am worth."

"Nor I," assented the pale-visaged Canon. "Well, what are we to do? What are we to do, I say?"

"I suppose we must make terms with him," answered the other, nervously. "I—I'd rather anything should happen than that he should exhibit that gramophone of his outside the family."

The Dean looked at the Canon. The Canon looked at the Dean.

Each saw what was passing in the other's mind.

"I know what you mean," said the Dean of Larchester. "You are thinking of that affair between Charles and Rachel. Is it possible, do you suppose, that the impertinent fellow has dared to play this trick with us on purpose?"

"Charles is quite capable of it," replied Canon Battersby, uneasily.

Several minutes silence.

Then the Dean: "It is a matter of principle. We ought not to give way. Still, boys will be boys, Battersby—"

"And girls will be girls," murmured the Canon.

"And we've been boys and girls—ahem boys—ourselves," added the Dean magnanimously. "But if we do give way, Battersby—"

"Yes, if we do," said the Canon.

"We must see," continued the Dean, "that further power for mischief is taken out of the lad's hands. We must, in fact, get that gramophone into our possession."

"Just so," nodded the Canon.

"Let us, then, go into the drawing-room and settle the matter at once," said the Dean, hurriedly. "Else Simmons will be bringing in the tea and overhearing that infernal thing, which I wouldn't have happen on any account."

They went.

The Dean said: "Charles, we have overheard everything. You have played a most ungentlemanly trick upon us. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, and I think you will be, when I tell you that your father and I have, this afternoon, been laying plans for your and Rachel's happiness. We have come to the conclusion that we were too hasty in forbidding your engagement and have decided to withdraw our opposition. I must say, however, that when we overheard what took place just now, we were strongly inclined to reconsider in toto our newly-formed determination. Only

as your father here reminded me, boys will be boys—"

"And girls will be girls," repeated the Canon.

"And love is a sublime thing, and marriages are made in heaven, and—God bless you both, my children," said the generous and forgiving Dean.

He kissed Rachel and held out his hand to Charles.

Then he added: "Just to show that there is no ill-feeling, if you young people will go and rig up the ping-pong net in the dining-room, we will all have a friendly little tournament among ourselves after tea."

Charles smiled, nodded, and withdrew with the two girls. He guessed why the Dean and the Canon wished to be left alone just then.

When he returned after a few minutes, he found that an unfortunate accident had happened to his gramophone. The Dean had inadvertently upset the little occasional table on which it was standing, and the instrument had been practically smashed to pieces by its fall.

That was the official version. I dare say it was true—as official versions, of course, always are. The following fact, however, should just be mentioned. Mary, the head housemaid, while polishing the drawing-room fire-irons next morning, remarked, with much perplexity and vexation, upon the bent and scratched condition of "her best poker."—London Truth.

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