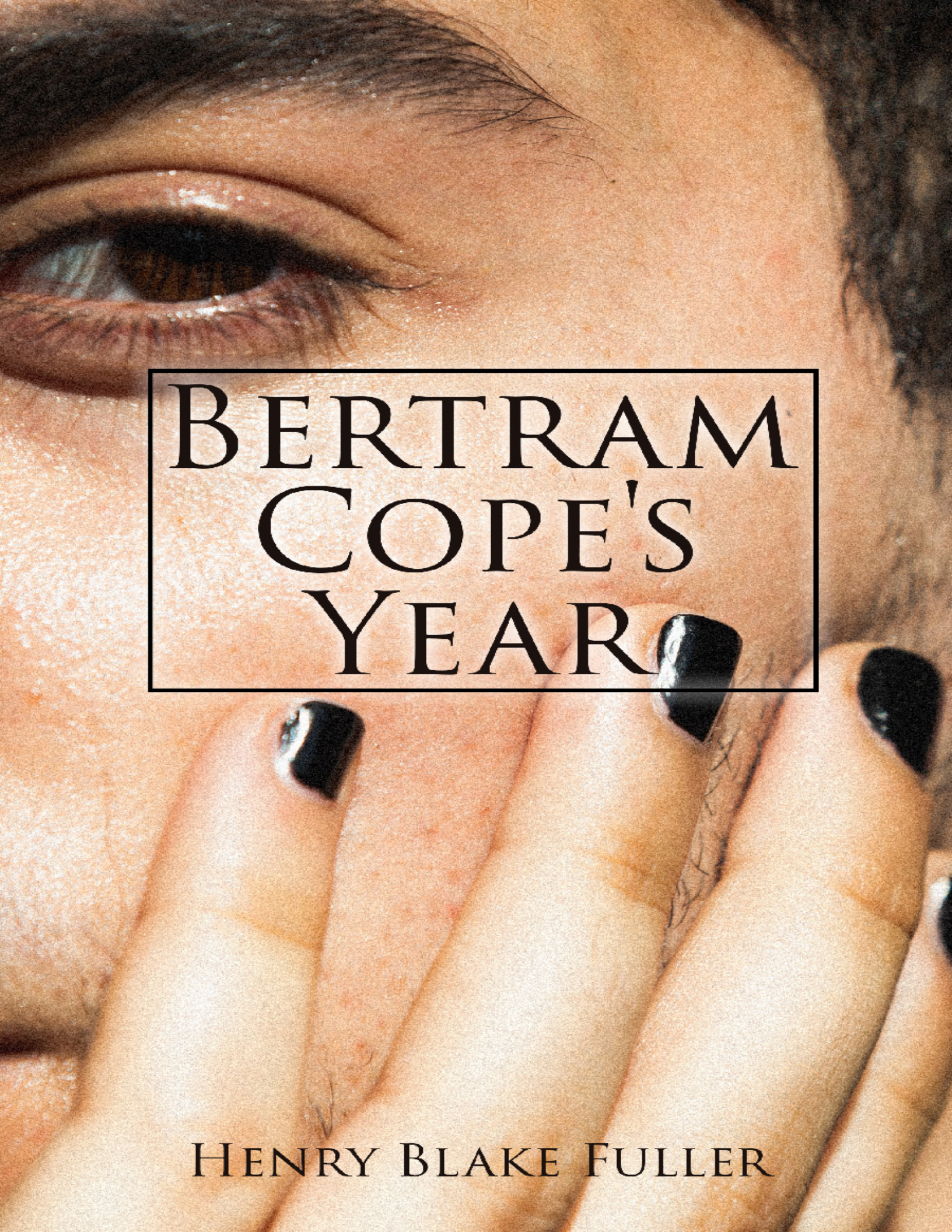

Bertram Cope's Year

Henry Blake Fuller

Henry Blake Fuller

Bertram Cope's Year

e-artnow, 2021
Contact: info@e-artnow.org

EAN: 4064066499594

Table of Contents

1. COPE AT A COLLEGE TEA

Table of Contents

What is a man's best age? Peter Ibbetson, entering dreamland with complete freedom to choose, chose twenty-eight, and kept there. But twenty-eight, for our present purpose, has a drawback: a man of that age, if endowed with ordinary gifts and responsive to ordinary opportunities, is undeniably—a man; whereas what we require here is something just a little short of that. Wanted, in fact, a young male who shall seem fully adult to those who are younger still, and who may even appear the accomplished flower of virility to an idealizing maid or so, yet who shall elicit from the middle-aged the kindly indulgence due a boy. Perhaps you will say that even a man of twenty-eight may seem only a boy to a man of seventy. However, no septuagenarian is to figure in these pages. Our elders will be but in the middle forties and the earlier fifties; and we must find for them an age which may evoke their friendly interest, and yet be likely to call forth, besides that, their sympathy and their longing admiration, and later their tolerance, their patience, and even their forgiveness.

I think, then, that Bertram Cope, when he began to intrigue the little group which dwelt among the quadruple avenues of elms that led to the campus in Churchton, was but about twenty-four,—certainly not a day more than twenty-five. If twenty-eight is the ideal age, the best is all the better for being just a little ahead.

Of course Cope was not an undergraduate—a species upon which many of the Churchtonians languidly refused to bestow their regard. "They come, and they go," said these

prosperous and comfortable burghers; "and, after all, they're more or less alike, and more or less unrewarding." Besides, the Bigger Town, with all its rich resources and all its varied opportunities, lay but an hour away. Churchton lived much of its real life beyond its own limits, and the student who came to be entertained socially within them was the exception indeed.

No, Bertram Cope was not an undergraduate. He was an instructor; and he was working along, in a leisurely way, to a degree. He expected to be an M.A., or even a Ph.D. Possibly a Litt.D. might be within the gift of later years. But, anyhow, nothing was finer than "writing"—except lecturing about it.

"Why haven't we known you before?" Medora T. Phillips asked him at a small reception. Mrs. Phillips spoke out loudly and boldly, and held his hand as long as she liked. No, not as long as she liked, but longer than most women would have felt at liberty to do. And besides speaking loudly and boldly, she looked loudly and boldly; and she employed a determined smile which seemed to say, "I'm old enough to do as I please." Her brusque informality was expected to carry itself off—and much else besides. "Of course I simply *can't* be half so intrepid as I seem!" it said. "Everybody about us understands that, and I must ask your recognition too for an ascertained fact."

"Known me?" returned Cope, promptly enough. "Why, you haven't known me because I haven't been here to *be* known." He spoke in a ringing, resonant voice, returning her unabashed pressure with a hearty good will and blazing down upon her through his clear blue eyes with a high degree of self-possession, even of insouciance. And he explained, with a liberal exhibition of perfect teeth, that for the two years following his graduation he had been teaching literature at a small college in Wisconsin and that he had

lately come back to Alma Mater for another bout: "I'm after that degree," he concluded.

"Haven't been here?" she returned. "But you *have* been here; you must have been here for years—for four, anyhow. So why haven't we...?" she began again.

"Here as an undergraduate, yes," he acknowledged. "Unregarded dust.
Dirt beneath your feet. In rainy weather, mud."

"Mud!" echoed Medora Phillips loudly, with an increased pressure on his long, narrow hand. "Why, Babylon was built of mud—of mud bricks, anyway. And the Hanging Gardens...!" She still clung, looking up his slopes terrace by terrace.

Cope kept his self-possession and smiled brilliantly.

"Gracious!" he said, no less resonant than before. "Am I a landscape garden? Am I a stage-setting? Am I a——?"

Medora Phillips finally dropped his hand. "You're a wicked, unappreciative boy," she declared. "I don't know whether to ask you to my house or not. But you may make yourself useful in *this* house, at least. Run along over to that corner and see if you can't get me a cup of tea."

Cope bowed and smiled and stepped toward the tea-table. His head once turned, the smile took on a wry twist. He was no squire of dames, no frequenter of afternoon receptions. Why the deuce had he come to this one? Why had he yielded so readily to the urgings of the professor of mathematics?—himself urged in turn, perhaps, by a wife for whose little affair one extra man at the opening of the fall season counted, and counted hugely. Why must he now expose himself to the boundless aplomb and momentum of this woman of forty-odd who was finding amusement in treating him as a "college boy"? "Boy" indeed she had actually called him: well, perhaps his present position made

all this possible. He was not yet out in the world on his own. In the background of "down state" was a father with a purse in his pocket and a hand to open the purse. Though the purse was small and the hand reluctant, he must partly depend on both for another year. If he were only in business—if he were only a broker or even a salesman—he should not find himself treated with such blunt informality and condescension as a youth. If, within the University itself, he were but a real member of the faculty, with an assured position and an assured salary, he should not have to lie open to the unceremonious hectorings of the socially confident, the "placed."

He regained his smile on the way across the room, and the young creature behind the samovar, who had had a moment's fear that she must deal with Severity, found that a beaming Affability—though personally unticketed in her memory—was, after all, her happier allotment. In her reaction she took it all as a personal compliment. She could not know, of course, that it was but a piece of calculated expressiveness, fitted to a 'particular social function and doubly overdone as the wearer's own reaction from the sprouting indignation of the moment before. She hoped that her hair, under his sweeping advance, was blowing across her forehead as lightly and carelessly as it ought to, and that his taste in marquise rings might be substantially the same as hers. She faced the Quite Unknown, and asked it sweetly, "One lump or two?"

"The dickens! How do *I* know?" he thought. "An extra one on the saucer, please," he said aloud, with his natural resonance but slightly hushed. And his blue eyes, clear and rather cold and hard, blazed down, in turn, on her.

"Why, what a nice, friendly fellow!" exclaimed Mrs. Phillips, on receiving her refreshment. "Both kinds of

sandwiches," she continued, peering round her cup. "Were there three?" she asked with sudden shrewdness.

"There were macaroons," he replied; "and there was some sort of layer-cake. It was too sticky. These are more sensible."

"Never mind sense. If there is cake, I want it. Tell Amy to put it on a plate."

"Amy?"

"Yes, Amy. *My* Amy."

"Your Amy?"

"Off with you,—parrot! And bring a fork too."

Cope lapsed back into his frown and recrossed the room. The girl behind the samovar felt that her hair was unbecoming, after all, and that her ring, borrowed for the occasion, was in bad taste. Cope turned back with his plate of cake and his fork. Well, he had been promoted from a "boy" to a "fellow"; but must he continue a kind of methodical dog-trot through a sublimated butler's pantry?

"That's right," declared Mrs. Phillips, on his return, as she looked lingeringly at his shapely thumb above the edge of the plate. "Come, we will sit down together on this sofa, and you shall tell me all about yourself." She looked admiringly at his blue serge knees as he settled down into place. They were slightly bony, perhaps; "but then," as she told herself, "he is still quite young. Who would want him anything but slender?—even spare, if need be."

As they sat there together,—she plying him with questions and he, restored to good humor, replying or parrying with an unembarrassed exuberance,—a man who stood just within the curtained doorway and flicked a small graying moustache with the point of his forefinger took in the scene with a studious regard. Every small educational community has its scholar *manqué*—its haunter of academic

shades or its intermittent dabbler in their charms; and Basil Randolph held that role in Churchton. No alumnus himself, he viewed, year after year, the passing procession of undergraduates who possessed in their young present so much that he had left behind or had never had at all, and who were walking, potentially, toward a promising future in which he could take no share. Most of these had been commonplace young fellows enough—noisy, philistine, glaringly cursory and inconsiderate toward their elders; but a few of them—one now and then, at long intervals—he would have enjoyed knowing, and knowing intimately. On these infrequent occasions would come a union of frankness, comeliness and *élan*, and the rudiments of good manners. But no one in all the long-drawn procession had stopped to look at him a second time. And now he was turning gray; he was tragically threatened with what might in time become a paunch. His kind heart, his forthreaching nature, went for naught; and the young men let him, walk under the elms and the scrub-oaks neglected. If they had any interest beyond their egos, their fraternities, and (conceivably) their studies, that interest dribbled away on the quadrangle that housed the girl students. "If they only realized how much a friendly hand, extended to them from middle life, might do for their futures…!" he would sometimes sigh. But the youthful egoists, ignoring him still, faced their respective futures, however uncertain, with much more confidence than he, backed by whatever assurances and accumulations he enjoyed, could face his own.

"To be young!" he said. "To be young!"

Do you figure Basil Randolph, alongside his portière, as but the observer, the *raisonneur*, in this narrative? If so, you

err. What!—you may ask,—a rival, a competitor? That more nearly.

It was Medora Phillips herself who, within a moment or two, inducted him into this role.

A gap had come in her chat with Cope. He had told her all he had been asked to tell—or all he meant to tell: at any rate he had been given abundant opportunity to expatiate upon a young man's darling subject—himself. Either she now had enough fixed points for securing the periphery of his circle or else she preferred to leave some portion of his area (now ascertained approximately) within a poetic penumbra. Or perhaps she wished some other middle-aged connoisseur to share her admiration and confirm her judgment. At all events——

"Oh, Mr. Randolph," she cried, "come here."

Randolph left his doorway and stepped across.

"Now you are going to be rewarded," said the lady, broadly generous. "You are going to meet Mr. Cope. You are going to meet Mr.——" She paused. "Do you know,"—turning to the young man,—"I haven't your first name?"

"Why, is that necessary?"

"You're not ashamed of it? Theodosius? Philander? Hieronymus?"

"Stop!—please. My name is Bertram."

"Never!"

"Bertram. Why not?"

"Because that would be too exactly right. I might have guessed and guessed——!"

"Right or wrong, Bertram's my name."

"You hear, Mr. Randolph? You are to meet Mr. Bertram Cope."

Cope, who had risen and had left any embarrassment consequent upon the short delay to Basil Randolph himself,

shot out a hand and summoned a ready smile. Within his cuff was a hint for the construction of his fore-arm: it was lean and sinewy, clear-skinned, and with strong power for emphasis on the other's rather short, well-fleshed fingers. And as he gripped, he beamed; beamed just as warmly, or just as coldly—at all events, just as speciously—as he had beamed before: for on a social occasion one must slightly heighten good will,—all the more so if one be somewhat unaccustomed and even somewhat reluctant.

Mrs. Phillips caught Cope's glance as it fell in all its glacial geniality.

"He looks down on us!" she declared.

"How down?" Cope asked.

"Well, you're taller than either of us."

"I don't consider myself tall," he replied. "Five foot nine and a half," he proceeded ingenuously, "is hardly tall."

"It is we who are short," said Randolph.

"But really, sir," rejoined Cope kindly, "I shouldn't call you short.
What is an inch or two?"

"But how about me?" demanded Mrs. Phillips.

"Why, a woman may be anything—except too tall," responded Cope candidly.

"But if she wants to be stately?"

"Well, there was Queen Victoria."

"You incorrigible! I hope I'm not so short as that! Sit down, again; we must be more on a level. And you, Mr. Randolph, may stand and look down on us both. I'm sure you have been doing so, anyway, for the past ten minutes!"

"By no means, I assure you," returned Randolph soberly.

Soberly. For the young man had slipped in that "sir." And he had been so kindly about Randolph's five foot seven and a bit over. And he had shown himself so damnably tender

toward a man fairly advanced within the shadow of the fifties—a man who, if not an acknowledged outcast from the joys of life, would soon be lagging superfluous on their rim.

Randolph stood before them, looking, no doubt, a bit vacant and inexpressive. "Please go and get Amy," Mrs. Phillips said to him. "I see she's preparing to give way to some one else."

Amy—who was a blonde girl of twenty or more—came back with him pleasantly and amiably enough; and her aunt—or whatever she should turn out to be—was soon able to lay her tongue again to the syllables of the interesting name of Bertram.

Cope, thus finally introduced, repeated the facial expressions which he had employed already beside the tea-table. But he added no new one; and he found fewer words than the occasion prompted, and even required. He continued talking with Mrs. Phillips, and he threw an occasional remark toward Randolph; but now that all obstacles were removed from free converse with the divinity of the samovar he had less to say to her than before. Presently the elder woman, herself no whit offended, began to figure the younger one as a bit nonplused.

"Never mind, Amy," she said. "Don't pity him, and don't scorn him. He's really quite self-possessed and quite chatty. Or"—suddenly to Cope himself—"have you shown us already your whole box of tricks?"

"That must be it," he returned.

"Well, no matter. Mr. Randolph can be nice to a nice girl."

"Oh, come now,——"

"Well, shall I ask you to my house, after this?"

"No. Don't. Forbid it. Banish me."

"Give one more chance," suggested Randolph sedately.

"Why, what's all this about?" said the questioning glance of Amy. If there was any offense at all, on anybody's part, it lay in making too much of too little.

"Take back my plate, somebody," said Mrs. Phillips.

Randolph put out his hand for it.

"This sandwich," said Amy, reaching for an untouched square of wheat bread and pimento. "I've been so busy with other people…."

"I'll take it myself," declared Mrs. Phillips, reaching out in turn.

"Mr. Randolph, bring her a nibble of something."

"*I* might——" began Cope.

"You don't deserve the privilege."

"Oh, very well," he returned, lapsing into an easy passivity.

"Never mind, anyway," said Amy, still without cognomen and connections; "I can starve with perfect convenience. Or I can find a mouthful somewhere, later."

"Let us starve sitting," said Randolph, "Here are chairs."

The hostess herself came bustling up brightly.

"Has everybody…?"

And she bustled away.

"Yes; everybody—almost," said Mrs. Phillips to her associates, behind their entertainer's back. "If you're hungry, Amy, it's your own fault. Sit down."

And there let us leave them—our little group, our cast of characters: "everybody—almost," save one. Or two. Or three.

2. COPE MAKES A SUNDAY AFTERNOON CALL

Table of Contents

Medora Phillips was the widow of a picture-dealer, now three years dead. In his younger days he had been something of a painter, and later in life as much a collector as a merchandizer. Since his death he had been translated gradually from the lower region proper to mere traffickers on toward the loftier plane which harbored the more select company of art-patrons and art-amateurs. Some of his choicer ventures were still held together as a "gallery," with a few of his own canvases included; and his surviving partner felt this collection gave her good reason for holding up her head among the arts, and the sciences, and humane letters too.

Mrs. Phillips occupied a huge, amorphous house some three-quarters of a mile to the west of the campus. It was a construction in wood, with manifold "features" suggestive of the villa, the bungalow, the chateau, the palace; it united all tastes and contravened all conventions. In its upper story was the commodious apartment which was known in quiet times as the picture-gallery and in livelier times as the ball-room. It was the mistress' ambition to have the lively times as numerous as possible—to dance with great frequency among the pictures. Six or eight couples could gyrate here at once. There was young blood under her roof, and there was young blood to summon from outside; and to set this blood seething before the eyes of visiting celebrities in the arts and letters was her dearest wish. She had more than one spare bedroom, of course; and the Eminent and the

Queer were always welcome for a sojourn of a week or so, whether they came to read papers and deliver lectures or not. She was quite as well satisfied when they didn't. If they would but sit upon her wide veranda in spring or autumn, or before her big open fireplace in winter and "just talk," she would be as open-eyed and open-eared as you pleased.

"This is much nicer," she would say. Nicer than what, she did not always make clear.

Yes, the house was nearly three-quarters of a mile to the west of the campus, but it was twice as far as if it had been north or south. Trains and trolleys, intent on serving the interests of the great majority, took their own courses and gave her guests no aid. If the evening turned cold or blustery or brought a driving rain she would say:

"You can't go out in this. You must stay all night. We have room and to spare."

If she wanted anybody to stay very much, she would even add: "I can't think of your walking toward the lake with such a gale in your face,"—regardless of the fact that the lake wind was the rarest of them all and that in nine cases out of ten the rain or snow would be not in people's faces but at their backs.

If she didn't want anybody to stay, she simply ordered out the car and bundled him off. The delay in the offer of the car sometimes induced a young man to remain. Tasteful pajamas and the promise of a suitably early breakfast assured him that he had made no mistake.

Cope's first call was made, not on a tempestuous evening in the winter time, but on a quiet Sunday afternoon toward the end of September. The day was sunny and the streets were full of strollers moving along decorously beneath the elms, maples and catalpas.

"Drop in some Sunday about five," Medora Phillips had said to him, "and have tea. The girls will be glad to meet you."

"The girls"? Who were they, and how many? He supposed he could account for one of them, at least; but the others?

"You find me alone, after all," was her greeting. "The girls are out walking—with each other, or their beaux, or whatever. Come in here."

She led him into a spacious room cluttered with lambrequins, stringy portieres, grilles, scroll-work, bric-a-brac....

"The fine weather has been too much for them," she proceeded. "I was relying on them to entertain you."

"Dear me! Am I to be entertained?"

"Of course you are." Her expression and inflection indicated to him that he had been caught up in the cogs of a sizable machine, and that he was to be put through it. Everybody who came was entertained—or helped entertain others. Entertainment, in fact, was the one object of the establishment.

"Well, can't you entertain me yourself?"

"Perhaps I can." And it almost seemed as if he had been secured and isolated for the express purpose of undergoing a particular course of treatment.

"——in the interval," she amended. "They'll be back by sunset. They're clever girls and I know you'll enjoy them."

She uttered this belief emphatically—so emphatically, in truth, that it came to mean: "I wonder if you will indeed." And there was even an overtone: "After all, it's not the least necessary that you should."

"I suppose I have met one of them already."

"You have met Amy. But there are Hortense and Carolyn."

"What can they all be?" He wondered to himself: "daughters, nieces, cousins, co-eds, boarders…?"

"Amy plays. Hortense paints. Carolyn is a poet."

"Amy plays? Pardon me for calling her Amy, but you have never given me the rest of her name."

"I certainly presented you."

"To 'Amy'."

"Well, that was careless, if true. Her name is Amy Leffingwell; and
Hortense's name is——"

"Stop, please. Pay it out gradually. My poor head can hold only what it can. Names without people to attach them to…."

"The people will be here presently," Medora Phillips said, rather shortly. Surely this young man was taking his own tone. It was not quite the tone usually taken by college boys on their first call. Her position and her imposing surroundings—yes, her kindliness in noticing him at all—might surely save her from informalities that almost shaped into impertinences. Yet, on the other hand, nothing bored one more than a young man who openly showed himself intimidated. What was there behind this one? More than she had thought? Well, if so, none the worse. Time might tell.

"So Miss Leffingwell plays?" He flared out his blue-white smile. "Let me learn my lesson page by page."

"Yes, she plays," returned Medora Phillips briefly. "Guess what," she continued presently, half placated.

They were again side by side on a sofa, each with an elbow on its back and the elbows near together. Nor was Medora Phillips, though plump, at all the graceless, dumpy little body she sometimes taxed herself with being.

"What? Oh, piano, I suppose."

"Piano!"

"What's wrong?"

"The piano is common: it's assumed."

"Oh, she performs on something unusual? Xylophone?"

"Be serious."

"Trombone? I've seen wonders done on that in a 'lady orchestra'."

"Don't be grotesque." She drew her dark eyebrows into protest. "What a sight!—a delicate young girl playing a trombone!"

"Well, then,—a harp. That's sometimes a pleasant sight."

"A harp needs an express wagon. Though of course it is pretty for the arms."

"Arms? Let me see. The violin?"

"Of course. And that's probably the very first thing you thought of.
Why not have mentioned it?"

"I suppose I've been taught the duty of making conversation."

"The duty? Not the pleasure?"

"That remains to be...." He paused. "So she has arms," he pretended to muse. "I confess I hadn't quite noticed."

"She passed you a cup of tea, didn't she?"

"Oh, surely. And a sandwich. And another. And a slice of layer cake, with a fork. And another cup of tea. And a macaroon or two——"

"Am I a glutton?"

"Am I? Some of all that provender was for me, as I recall."

They were still side by side on the sofa. Both were cross—kneed, and the tip of her russet boot almost grazed that of his Oxford tie. He did not notice: he was already arranging the first paragraph of a letter to a friend in Winnebago, Wisconsin. "Dear Arthur: I called,—as I said I was going to.

She is a scrapper. She goes at you hammer and tongs—pretending to quarrel as a means of entertaining you…"

Medora Phillips removed her elbow from the back of the sofa, and began to prod up her cushions. "How about your work?" she asked. "What are you doing?"

He came back. "Oh, I'm boning. Some things still to make up. I'm digging in the poetry of Gower—the 'moral Gower'."

"Well, I see no reason why poetry shouldn't be moral. Has he been publishing anything lately that I ought to see?"

"Not—lately."

"I presume I can look into some of his older things."

"They are all old—five hundred years and more. He was a pal of
Chaucer's."

She gave him an indignant glance. "So that's it? You're laying traps for me? You don't like me! You don't respect me!"

One of the recalcitrant cushions fell to the floor. They bumped heads in trying to pick it up.

"Traps!" he said. "Never in the world! Don't think it! Why, Gower is just a necessary old bore. Nobody's supposed to know much about him—except instructors and their hapless students."

He added one more sentence to his letter to "Arthur": "She pushes you pretty hard. A little of it goes a good way…"

"Oh, if *that's* the case…" she said. "How about your thesis?" she went on swiftly. "What are you going to write about?"

"I was thinking of Shakespeare."

"Shakespeare! There you go again! Ridiculing me to my very face!"

"Not at all. There's lots to say about him—or them."

"Oh, you believe in Bacon!"

"Not at all—once more. I should like to take a year and spend it among the manor-houses of Warwickshire. But I suppose nobody would stake me to that."

"I don't know what you have in mind; some wild goose chase, probably. I expect your friends would like it better if you spent your time right here."

"Probably. I presume I shall end by doing a thesis on the 'color-words' in Keats and Shelley. A penniless devil was no luck."

"Anybody has luck who can form the right circle. Stay where you are. A circle formed here would do you much more good than a temporary one four thousand miles away."

Voices were heard in the front yard. "There they come, now," Mrs. Phillips said. She rose, and one more of the wayward cushions went to the floor. It lay there unregarded, —a sign that a promising tête-à-tête was, for the time being, over.

3. COPE IS "ENTERTAINED"

Table of Contents

Mrs. Phillips stepped to the front door to meet the half dozen young people who were cheerily coming up the walk. Cope, looking at the fallen cushions with an unseeing eye, remained within the drawing-room door to compose a further paragraph for the behoof of his correspondent in Wisconsin:

"Several girls helped entertain me. They came on as thick as spatter. One played a few things on the violin. Another set up her easel and painted a picture for us. A third wrote a poem and read it to us. And a few sophomores hung about in the background. It was all rather too much. I found myself preferring those hours together in dear old Winnebago...."

Only one of the sophomores—if the young men were really of that objectionable tribe—came indoors with the young ladies. The others—either engaged elsewhere or consciously unworthy—went away after a moment or two on the front steps. Perhaps they did not feel "encouraged." And in fact Mrs. Phillips looked back toward Cope with the effect of communicating the idea that she had enough men for to-day. She even conveyed to him the notion that he had made the others superfluous. But—

"Hum!" he thought; "if there's to be a lot of 'entertaining,' the more there are to be entertained the better it might turn out."

He met Hortense and Carolyn—with due stress laid on their respective patronymics—and he made an early acquaintance with Amy's violin.

And further on Mrs. Phillips said:

"Now, Amy, before you really stop, do play that last little thing. The dear child," she said to Cope in a lower tone, "composed it herself and dedicated it to me."

The last little thing was a kind of "meditation," written very simply and performed quite seriously and unaffectedly. And it gave, of course, a good chance for the arms.

"There!" said Mrs. Phillips, at its close. "Isn't it too sweet? And it inspired Carolyn too. She wrote a poem after hearing it."

"A copy of verses," corrected Carolyn, with a modest catch in her breath. She was a quiet, sedate girl, with brown eyes and hair. Her eyes were shy, and her hair was plainly dressed.

"Oh, you're so sweet, so old-fashioned!" protested Mrs. Phillips, slightly rolling her eyes. "It's a poem,—of course it's a poem. I leave it to Mr. Cope, if it isn't!"

"Oh, I beg—" began Cope, in trepidation.

"Well, listen, anyway," said Medora.

The poem consisted of some six or seven brief stanzas. Its title was read, formally, by the writer; and, quite as formally, the dedication which intervened between title and first stanza,—a dedication to "Medora Townsend Phillips."

"Of course," said Cope to himself. And as the reading went on, he ran his eyes over the dusky, darkening walls. He knew what he expected to find.

Just as he found it the sophomore standing between the big padded chair and the book-case spatted his hands three times. The poem was over, the patroness duly celebrated. Cope spatted a little too, but kept his eye on one of the walls.

"You're looking at my portrait!" declared Mrs. Phillips, as the poetess sank deeper into the big chair. "Hortense did it."

"Of course she did," said Cope under his breath. He transferred an obligatory glance from the canvas to the expectant artist. But—

"It's getting almost too dark to see it," said his hostess, and suddenly pressed a button. This brought into play a row of electric bulbs near the top edge of the frame and into full prominence the dark plumpness of the subject. He looked back again from the painter (who also had black hair and eyes) to her work.

"I am on Parnassus!" Cope declared, in one general sweeping compliment, as he looked toward the sofa where Medora Phillips sat with the three girls now grouped behind her. But he made it a boreal Parnassus—one set in relief by the cold flare and flicker of northern lights.

"Isn't he the dear, comical chap!" exclaimed Mrs. Phillips, with unction, glancing upward and backward at the girls. They smiled discreetly, as if indulging in a silent evaluation of the sincerity of the compliment. Yet one of them—Hortense—formed her black brows into a frown, and might have spoken resentfully, save for a look from their general patroness.

"Meanwhile, how about a drop of tea?" asked Mrs. Phillips suddenly.

"Roddy"—to the sophomore—"if you will help clear that table...."

The youth hastened to get into action. Cope went on with his letter to

"Arthur":

"It was an afternoon in Lesbos—with Sappho and her band of appreciative maidens. Phaon, a poor lad of nineteen, swept some pamphlets and paper-cutters off the center-table, and we all plunged into the ocean of Oolong—the best thing we do on this island...."

He was lingering in a smiling abstractedness on his fancy, when—

"Bertram Cope!" a voice suddenly said, "do you do nothing—nothing?"

He suddenly came to. Perhaps he had really deserved his hostess' rebuke. He had not offered to help with the tea-service; he had preferred no appropriate remark, of an individual nature, to any of the three *ancillae*....

"I mean," proceeded Mrs. Phillips, "can you do nothing whatever to entertain?"

Cope gained another stage on the way to self-consciousness and self-control. Entertainment was doubtless the basic curse of this household.

"I sing," he said, with naïf suddenness and simplicity.

"Then, sing—do. There's the open piano. Can you play your own accompaniments?"

"Some of the simpler ones."

"Some of the simpler ones! Do you hear that, girls? He is quite prepared to wipe us all out. Shall we let him?"

"That's unfair," Cope protested. "Is it my fault if composers *will* write hard accompaniments to easy airs?"

"Will you sing before your tea, or after it?"

"I'm ready to sing this instant,—during it, or before it."

"Very well."

The room was now in dusk, save for the bulbs which made the portrait shine forth like a wayside shrine. Roddy, the possible sophomore, helped a maid find places for the cups and saucers; and the three girls, still formed in a careful group about the sofa, silently waited.

"Of course you realize that this is not such a very large room," said
Mrs. Phillips.

"Meaning....?"

"Well, your speaking voice *is* resonant, you know."

"Meaning, then, that I am not to raise the roof nor jar the china. I'll try not to."

Nor did he. He sang with care rather than with volume, with discretion rather than with abandon. The "simple accompaniments" went off with but a slight hitch or two, yet the "resonant voice" was somehow, somewhere lost. Possibly Cope gave too great heed to his hostess' caution; but it seemed as if a voice essentially promising had slipped through some teacher's none too competent hands, or—what was quite as serious—as if some temperamental brake were operating to prevent the complete expression of the singer's nature. Lassen, Grieg, Rubinstein—all these were carried through rather cautiously, perhaps a little mechanically; and there was a silence. Hortense broke it.

"Parnassus, yes. And finally comes Apollo." She reached over and murmured to Mrs. Phillips: "None too skillful on the lyre, and none too strong in the lungs…."

Medora spoke up loudly and promptly.

"Do you know, I think I've heard you sing before."

"Possibly," Cope said, turning his back on the keyboard. "I sang in the
University choir for a year or two."

"In gown and mortar-board? 'Come, Holy Spirit,' and all that?"

"Yes; I sang solos now and then."

"Of course," she said. "I remember now. But I never saw you before without your mortar-board. That changes the forehead. Yes, you're yourself," she went on, adding to her previous pleasure the further pleasure of recognition. "You've earned your tea," she added. "Hortense," she said over her shoulder to the dark girl behind the sofa, "will you —? No; I'll pour, myself."