THE WORLD DOES MOVE

XXVI

By Booth Tarkington

ILLUSTRATED BY RICHARD VINCENT CULTER

THAT was what most upset my neighbor, Judge Olds. He has always been what is called a prominent and public-spirited citizen; he was a captain in the war with Spain, and by virtue of his ancestry belongs to several patriotic societies. He is a church member, though not an inveterate attendant at services; moreover he has never been thought narrow or bigoted in any of his views—at least not until recently, his daughter being the first to bring such a charge against him.

It was just after she brought it that I happened to drop in on him, in his library, and his face was still pink.

"I've been going to the same barber shop for fourteen years," he said harshly, as I sat down. "I went to it for the last time today. I took off my coat and necktie the way I always do, and then I noticed there were three women sitting there in the waiting chairs and looking at me as if I'd committed a crime. Mad at me for taking off my coat and collar in a place where they had no right to be themselves! I thought probably they were there to solicit for a charity or something; but just then old George called 'Next!' And my soul, if one of those women didn't get right up and march to the chair and sit down in it!

"That wasn't the worst of it. The person that had just got out of the chair was wearing boots and breeches, but it wasn't a man. It was a girl—one that had been a nice-looking girl, too, until she sat down in that chair and had three feet of beautiful thick brown hair cut off. She was my own daughter, Julie, nineteen years old. I didn't say a word to her—not then; I just looked at her. Then I told old George I guessed his shop was getting to be too co-educational for me and I put on my things and went out. I'll never set foot in the place again!"

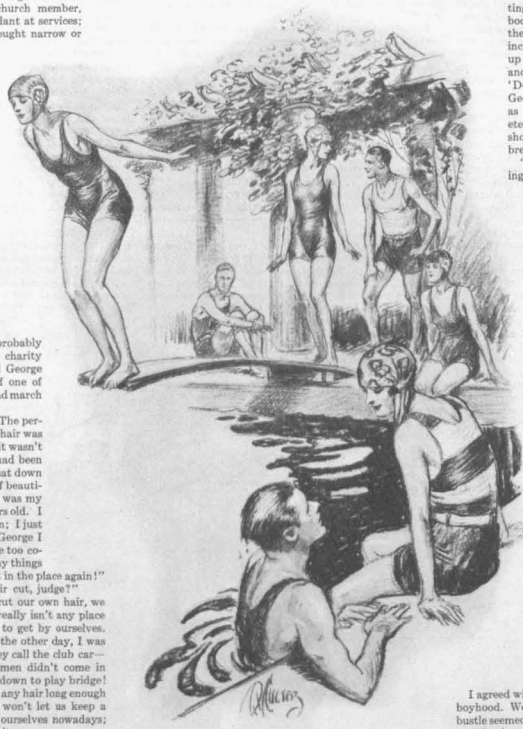
"Where will you get your hair cut, judge?"

"I guess we'd better learn to cut our own hair, we men," he said bitterly. "There really isn't any place left nowadays where we can go to get by ourselves. Coming home from Washington the other day, I was in the Pullman smoker—what they call the club car—and I'll eat my shirt if four women didn't come in there and light cigarettes and sit down to play bridge! Never turned a hair—didn't have any hair long enough to turn, for that matter. They won't let us keep a club car, or any kind of club, to ourselves nowadays; they got to have anyway half of it.

"I said when we let 'em into the polling booth they'd never be contented with that, and I was right. Remember all the fuss they made about their right to vote? Well, they've proved they didn't care about that at all, because more than half the very women that made the fuss don't bother to vote, now they know they can. They just wanted to show us we couldn't have anything on earth to ourselves. They haven't left us one single refuge.

"It used to be a man could at least go hang around a livery stable when he felt lonesome for his kind; but now there aren't any more livery stables. He can't go to a saloon; there aren't any more saloons. Once he could go sit in a hotel lobby, because that was a he place; nowadays hotel lobbies are full of women sitting there all day. When I studied law there weren't three women in all the offices downtown; now you can't find an office without a bob-haired stenographer in it, and there are dozens of women got their own offices—every kind of offices.

"That's another thing I've been having it out with Julie about. She's not only cut off her hair; she wants to go into business as soon as she finds out what kind she'd enjoy most. She's like the rest—the one thing that gives her the horrors is the idea of staying home.



"If My Father Had Lived to See a Granddaughter of His Not Wearing All She Wasn't Wearing, and With Young Men Present, I Think He'd Have Gone Right Down There to Her and Fiat Prayed for Her and Then Drowned Her!"

"What's become of the old home life in this country anyhow? Everybody seems to have to be going somewhere every minute. There's the car in the garage; it'll take us anywhere—let's go! 'Let's go' is the unceasing national cry. I understand there's a great deal of what they've now invented a horrible new word for—'necking'—while they're on the road between parties and movies and end-of-the-night breakfasts. But it's always, 'Let's go—let's go anywhere except home!'"

He paused for a moment, while his bushy gray eyebrows were contorted in a frown of distressed perplexity; then he looked at me almost with pathos, and speaking slowly, asked a question evidently sincere: "Does it ever seem to you, nowadays, that maybe we're all—all of us, young people and old people both—that maybe we're all crazy?"

"No, I hadn't thought of it that way. Why?"

"Well, for one thing, a while ago I was remembering back to when I was a young fellow about Julie's age, or a little older perhaps, and what I'd have thought then if somebody'd told me I was some day going to have a daughter like her. We used to talk about the eternal feminine, you remember. Think of that and then think of walking into a barber shop—a barber shop!—and seeing a creature sitting in the chair with its legs crossed—legs in boots and breeches—getting its hair cut, reading the paper and smoking a cigarette in a holder six inches long! Then think of this creature getting up and sticking its hand in its breeches pocket and handing out a fifteen-cent tip and saying, 'Don't let all this money make you snooty, George!' Then think of recognizing the creature as your daughter! Think of seeing your own eternal feminine swaggering around a barber shop, smoking, getting its hair cut and wearing breeches!"

"But they've been wearing that kind of riding clothes ever since ——"

"Ever since McKinley, or about then—yes; but not just casually anywhere. At first they'd change back to skirts as soon as they came in from riding; then, at a resort hotel maybe, they'd lounge around and have tea before they changed; but now it's all off—like their hair. They wear breeches into your own barber shop and drive you out of it!

"Breeches! Why, the other afternoon one of Julie's young men had been riding with her and she came home laughing her head off over how funny he looked because, she said, his brother had taken his riding breeches and he'd had to borrow Shorty's. Shorty isn't a boy; Shorty's a girl; she lives next door to the young man that borrowed her breeches. And when I told Julie it was horrible to me that she could laugh over such a performance, she said I was crazy, and it seemed to me that either I was or she was.

"It seems more so to me today, when she's deliberately destroyed what was the prettiest thing she had. She says she feels better without her hair, and that she looks better too. You could see she was earnest about that; she honestly and serenely thinks that amputation a great success. Of course that's because it's the fashion—anything that makes them look more in the fashion makes them prettier, they think. If it were the fashion now to wear a big hump on their backs they'd all think a humpless girl lacked beauty."

I agreed with him there. "Yes, we saw that in our own boyhood. We can easily remember when a woman without a bustle seemed to be of a meager and unnatural appearance."

"Yes, but a woman's hair is a natural ornament. Julie was a lovely girl this morning, and this evening she looks like a debilitated kind of scrawny boy. Either somebody's crazy or the devil's got into what we used to think of as our best people—especially into our best young people. It strikes me as an important question, because a good deal of what happens at the top is likely to filter all the way down through the whole body of society. But just now it often looks to me as though what used to happen at the bottom of society, when we were young, had filtered up, so to speak, till at last it's contaminated the top. Every ideal we had when we were young—every one of our old rules of conduct, of good manners, of womanhood, of modesty and of morals—is shattered. You can't find the remnants of any of 'em among these young people of today—not a remnant!"

"All because Julie had her hair cut?" I asked.

At that he looked at me fiercely. "My goodness!" he said. "Do you mean to say you find any excuse for the way they're behaving?"

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THE judge did most of the arguing, so to call it; he leaned forward and spoke with emphasis and severity: "Look here, you surely aren't going to sit there and tell me this younger generation today is anything like what

our generation was in its twenties, or the generation of our fathers and mothers when they were that age. You know better than that, don't you?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"When we were the younger generation," he said, "most of us went to church with our fathers and mothers pretty regularly. What proportion of these young people do you suppose do that now?"

"I don't know. I don't know the proportion of the fathers and mothers that go to church nowadays, judge. The young people can't go to church with their parents if the parents don't go, can they?"

"That doesn't bear on the point I'm making," he said. "What I say is that in our day we maintained a conformance with the behavior of the older generation. I admit that youth always is and must be a little wilder and more indiscreet than middle age. I don't deny that when we were young men we were too lively sometimes—when we were out of sight of the girls we knew. Of course a good many of us did things we shouldn't have done. But when we were young, no matter how lively we were sometimes, we didn't just tear loose and raise Cain all over the place, girls and boys together, drinking poisonous illegal liquor, gambling, dancing entwined, to sensual and savage music, reading disgusting books, going to outrageous shows, chattering indiscriminately about unmentionable things, and in our conduct as well as our talk, really scoffing at the ideals of our parents. Our generation didn't do any of those things."

"Whereas a great many of the generation now middle-aged do all those things, don't they, judge?"

"They do indeed," he said, and his frowning brow grew darker. "I'm disfounding and disheartening to see how many have broken away from the ideals of our youth."

"Then these present young people of whom you complain are really doing what you've just said we ourselves did. They're maintaining a conformance with the behavior of the older generation. In that, then, they're doing not only what we did but what all younger generations do. This present one shocks us with its reflection of our own conduct, though, as you say, the reflection is livelier and more indiscreet than the original. If we are to place the blame, it must be upon the originals, mustn't it?"

"I don't care where you place the blame," he returned irascibly, and with some inconsistency, I thought. "It's the spirit of the age, and that spirit is either a crazy one or a bad one. There's never been such gross materialism let loose on earth! Who cares about anything but money and pleasure? What proportion of our people ever talk about anything except dollars and pleasure? Everything's been speeded up and has to go on being speeded up. Making money has to be speeded up; having fun has to be speeded up; life has to be speeded up to keep pace with the automobile and all it brought with it. A bricklayer, or even a college professor can have luxuries now that a multimillionaire of the nineteenth century couldn't have, and can move faster.

"People lived at seven miles an hour thirty years ago; now they live at forty and seventy. No wonder their music has to be fast and noisy! All you've got to do to understand this age is to listen to a jazz band doing what they call pepping it up. Only people made of metal could stand it, and human beings actually are more metallic than they used to be; they're harder and brassier; but they still have nervous systems—that's why you hear of so many more nervous breakdowns than you used to. Even ordinary talk has been speeded up; nobody listens unless you talk fast and yell; and I suggest you might notice some of the language our most prosperous classes are pleased not only to use nowadays but to listen to from the stage and to read in books. You haven't anything to say for this age's attitude toward what we used to speak of as refinement of speech, have you? I suppose you know that's what the bulk of the younger generation seems to hate most, of all the old things they've cast aside, don't you?"

"It seems so sometimes—yes. They got to distrusting refinement, I believe, because it appeared to them a way of covering up facts."

He took me up quickly: "What facts did our former refinement of speech cover up?"

"None, of course; but the young revolutionists didn't realize that it's a question of manner not of matter. Refinement of speech avoids—though not at the cost of necessary accuracy—details that may have any physical effect, except laughter or tears, upon a reasonably sensitive listener. Refinement may find it useful to mention a garbage barrel, but will not detail its contents except of necessity. The contents are sufficiently sketched in the imagination of the listener by the mention of the barrel; to detail them would perhaps sicken him a little. But the young generation and the new age, overturning the old in everything, clamored that the contents must be brought into the open and spoken of frankly. This is partly because it was the habit of many of the older generation once to shirk some uncomfortable subjects almost entirely. The young people and some of their elderly leaders confused this shirking with refinement; they also confused refinement with hypocrisy."

"No matter how it happened, you can't deny that their speech is coarser, can you?"

"No; and that's a loss; yet along with this loss there is a gain—the attack on refinement was an attack on the inoffensive bystander, the wrong party; but in the general mêlée the shirked subjects did get pulled out to where they can't very well go on being shirked."

"Yes! 'Pulled out into the open,' Julie calls it," he said indignantly. "They could always be spoken of with decent reserve and caution; but this pulling them out into the open means pulling them into the foreground where they don't belong."

"But that always happens at first to subjects that have been kept in the dark."

"I don't care," he said. "It isn't wholesome. You don't argue that this present craze for sex stories and sex shows and sex discussion—yes, and sex jokes—you don't argue that it's wholesome, do you?"

"No, not while it's a craze or fashion. When the new age has got accustomed to what it still rather defiantly feels is its new privilege of open discussion, the subject will probably subside to its proper proportions."

"It's not possible to make that subject a wholesome one for general discussion," he said. "That's what shocks and depresses me about this new age—its unwholesomeness. You can't go out on the street without seeing it."

"No?" I said. "It seems to me that I can."

"You can't!" he returned sharply. "If you pass a movie theater you'll see the titles on the billboards in front, won't you? Among others, you'll see Red-Hot Stockings, Harem Love, Passions of the Night, Oriental Lulu, Fires of Innocence ——"

"Don't go on, judge; the list is long; but I understand that most of the titles of that kind are misleading and the films themselves have passed the censors."

"Nevertheless, you'd hardly say that its being profitable to use such titles as a lure is a token of wholesomeness, would you? You said you could go out on the street without seeing any signs that there's unwholesomeness in the new age. Well, I'll ask you to take note not only of the clothes but of the complexions of the women on any of the crowded blocks downtown. What about it? Suppose you'd seen as many painted faces twenty years ago, what would you have thought?"

"I suppose I'd have been startled."

"Startled?" he cried. "You'd have thought it was Babylon! What would you have thought, a few years ago, if you'd seen a woman in a street car or a restaurant take out a little box with a mirror in it and powder her nose when she knew a lot of men were looking at her? You'd have thought she was either pretty unpleasantly common or pretty ludicrously vulgar, and she would have been. And if in addition to powdering her nose she went on to smear red on her lips or her cheeks, you'd have thought she was bad, and again she would have been. But nowadays it's so much the fashion that half the older women and a lot more than half the younger ones are at it. They smear themselves with cosmetics and they do it right in your face! You can't tell which of 'em are good and which bad, because, according to the old standards, some look worse than others but they pretty nearly all look bad. They seem to want to look that way!

"Julie got me to go with her to a movie the other night, and during the intermission she got out her vanity case and

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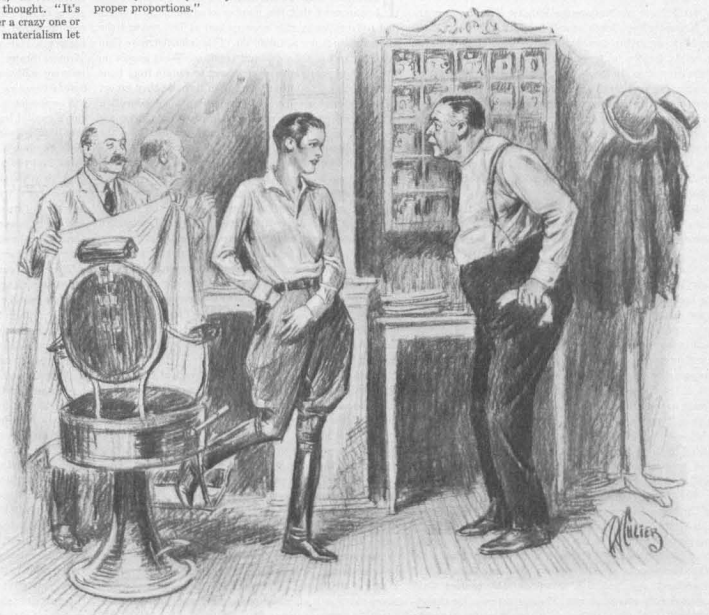

"The Person That Had Just Got Out of the Chair Was Wearing Boots and Breeches, But it Wasn't a Man. It Was a Girl"

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began to redecorate her lips. I said to her, 'You put that box away or I'll take you home and do my best to whip you, no matter if you are nineteen years old!'

"She just laughed and went on with her art work. 'My heavens!' I said. 'Can't you see the craziness of what you're doing?'

"'How's that, pops?' she asked me, and went right on using her lipstick all the time I was talking.

"'You're trying to make people think that red smear is the natural color of your lips,' I told her. 'In the name of conscience, if you can't see in the first place that it's cheap and deceitful, and if you can't see in the second place that besides being cheap and deceitful, it's an intimate detail of your toilet and therefore hasn't any business to be performed in public, then anyhow, in the third place, can't you see that doing it in public defeats its own object?'

"'How's it defeat the object, pops?' she asked me.

"'My heavens!' I told her. 'The object is to make people think the smear is your own color, and here you're deliberately proving to 'em that it isn't!'

"She never stopped looking in her little mirror; she just went on smearing; but she gave a little absent-minded laugh, as if an unimportant and rather imbecile person had said something a little amusing. 'Yes,' she told me, 'we're all aboveboard with it nowadays. Our generation is so much franker and honester than yours was, pops.'

"That's the way she is! That's the way they nearly all are! And what can parents do about it? We can't whip 'em; they'd probably have the law on us if we did. When we try to reason with 'em, they talk the way Julie did to me that I've just been telling you about. If we threaten to cut off their allowances, they laugh, 'All right, I've been wanting to get a job anyhow!' There's no discipline left, and no obedience. If you quote the Bible to them, the way our parents did to us when we were a little refractory, they tell you that ancient tribal ideas don't apply!

"The rule of the churches over the general people has almost disappeared, and except with a relatively decreased proportion of religious-minded young people, means very little to the new generation. I remember how my father talked once to my younger sister when she'd let an out-of-town beau of hers call after nine o'clock and stay until eleven.

"'What would our pastor say if he knew?' my father asked her, and Mary began to cry. I tried it with Julie. 'What would Doctor Halloway think of you?' I said.

"'I wish you'd get him to tell me,' was what she answered. 'I think he's a cutie!'

"You can't reach their minds; you can't do anything; you're helpless. And yet Julie's as considerate and sweet and thoughtful in many things as any child could be. She'd be a lovely thing except for the times we live in and the crazy ideas she's caught like a contagion.

"Lord knows where it all came from. New-rich people with no background of training; immigrants getting rich and sending their children to school with ours and ours taking up with 'em; socialist writers upsetting the old morals in the minds of the young; the automobile getting young people miles out of reach in five minutes; natural youthful Smart-Aleckism and native cussedness—anyhow, it's happened and we're in for it! Julie doesn't lipstick and rouge as much as some of her friends do, but she does more than others. A few of them don't use cosmetics at all, and when I hold them up as examples, she only says, 'Oh, that's their affair; it's the age of freedom.' Freedom! I should say so! Even the girls that don't use lipstick wear the brazen clothes they're all so pleased with."

"Brazen clothes, judge?"

He stared at me. "Good heavens! Modern immodesty in dress is so glaring I shouldn't have thought it need even be mentioned."

"But what are your views upon dress, judge? You've been upset by Julie's getting her hair cut; and I suppose, as that involves her appearance and the question of headdressing, it's part of the general question of dress. You don't think it was immodest of her to shed her hair, do you?"

"As a relinquishment of her womanhood, I believe it to be bordering on that. Certainly you don't think it makes her appear more feminine, do you?"

"No; much less so."

"You see that it's ruined her looks?"

"It's certainly detracted from them."

"Well, it's a woman's business to look as pretty and feminine as she can, isn't it? She's supposed to make herself as attractive in those ways as she can, isn't she?"

"Well, that formerly seemed to be the idea, but ——"

"Formerly? Isn't it the idea now? If not, why are they so determined to show their legs? That's what I tried to shame Julie with. 'You've cut off your skirt at the knee,' I said, 'and you've cut off your hair pretty near at the roots. Your hair was so lovely, and you could use it to frame your face so charmingly, that while you had it people naturally looked at you above the shoulders. You must have been afraid they wouldn't pay enough attention to the way you've been showing your legs.' I thought it would shrivel her up. In fact I was ashamed to be saying such a thing to her, even though it seemed to be the wicked truth. If my father had ever said that to my sister, Mary would have died, I think; I truly don't believe she could have lived after such a thing had been said to her. Julie didn't even blush—she wasn't even angry!

"'My legs?' she said. 'What do I care whether anybody pays attention to my legs—or my face or my arms or my hands? It's their affair, not mine.'"

"That seems reasonable, doesn't it, judge?"

"Reasonable?" he repeated angrily. "Do you remember when any respectable woman would have been sick with shame at the thought anyone could call her bold? Along in the earlier days of the active period of the equal-rights movement, I remember seeing two apostles of that creed wearing what were then called short skirts—almost to the tops of their buttoned shoes and probably five inches from the ground. Women wore three or four petticoats under their overskirts in those days, and that made the two suffragettes look like two self-important little hens; but they were self-conscious, too, because everybody on the street was bursting with laughter at them, and I don't believe they ever publicly tried that form of feminism again. It wasn't immodest—there wasn't the slightest glimpse of their stockings—it was merely ridiculous; and not until years afterward, about 1912 or 1913, I think it was, did the first symptoms of this wholesale modern immodesty appear. Women had got their skirts so tight, to be in the fashion of that time, that they'd begun to leave off petticoats and underskirts altogether. Finally they got 'em so tight, especially as the skirts tapered down to bind the ankles, they could hardly walk. Then some French hussy got the idea of splitting the tight skirt almost up to the knee. People said it wasn't an uncommon sight in Paris; and one day, downtown, in my own city, I saw a flashy-looking girl wearing one of those split skirts. She had on black stockings and a black skirt; but the whole ankle and calf of her leg was exposed in the opening and I could scarcely believe my eyes."

"Why not, judge?"

"Good heavens!" he said. "You know as well as I do that self-respecting women never did such things! Managers made fortunes out of leg shows; they didn't need to have any plot or any acting or any music except jingle; even the dancing didn't amount to anything. Look at the Black Crook and the extravaganzas that followed it. All they had to have were some plumpish girls that were willing to wear tights for a salary; and some of the shows didn't need to go so far as tights—knee dresses were considered show enough for the gate money. An old-fashioned leg show couldn't do much business on that basis now—not in competition with any block downtown in the shopping district!"

"But for that matter," I suggested, "there were always the seashore beaches. Even in our youth, knee-length skirts were thought proper there."

"They aren't now!" he returned grimly. "I must be getting really old, because I can remember when Ouida's Moths was considered a wicked book. One of the reasons was the description of a woman in a bare-legged bathing suit. There's a new swimming pool at the country club I belong to, and one afternoon last summer I happened to drive out there. Some young people were diving from a board, and when I first looked I thought they were all boys. Then I recognized Julie. If my father had lived to see a granddaughter of his not wearing all she wasn't wearing, and with young men present, I think he'd have gone right down there to her and first prayed for her and then drowned her! But I suppose you'll be reminding me of the old platitude that other times have other customs."

"It seems to be true," I said. "You were proving to me that I couldn't go outdoors without perceiving the unwholesomeness of these times."

"I'm going back to that," he returned. "The split skirt didn't stay long and not many dared to wear it—in some places women who wore it got arrested, and I think, myself, they should have been—it wasn't a fashion this country would stand for until the new jazz age got really under weigh. The split skirt disappeared; but the ice was broken, and it wasn't long before dresses got shorter and stockings began to be shown above the instep; the old windy-corner joke was already obsolete by then. Girls began to leave off their corsets, too—especially for dancing; and if the mothers found it out, the daughters explained that they couldn't dance the new dances with all that incasing interference; and, besides, they weren't 'popular' unless they left it off! Then, after the war, the skirts, instead of splitting up and down, began to split cross-ways, and the lower half dropped off altogether. That's how they've got 'em now, just about at the knee, and when they sit down the exposure is whatever it happens to be.

"I said you couldn't step outdoors without seeing the unwholesomeness of these immodest painted women and full-grown girls in dresses we wouldn't have allowed a child of thirteen to be seen in when we were still a respectable people—but, my goodness, you don't have to go outdoors: I tell you when Julie's girl friends sit around here in the house sometimes, when I'm home, I'm embarrassed!"

"Why are you embarrassed, judge?" I asked him.

"Why? My soul! They don't care how they sit; they cross their legs and waggle their feet; they slide down on the small of their backs till their knees are as high as their heads; a passel of five-year-old children would show as much dignity and as much self-respect about exposure. Exposure! That's what they like! They flaunt it in your face!"

"No," I said; "no more than do the five-year-old children you mentioned. Exposure isn't exposure to the children, and it isn't to Julie and her friends, either. Exposure is an idea not in Julie's friends' minds unless someone else puts it there, and

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Julie and her friends are determined not to be hampered by having it put there."

"Hampered!" he exclaimed angrily. "They're determined not to be hampered by any womanly shame!"

"No," I returned; "no more than your great-great-grandfather was hampered by manly shame when he stopped wearing a wig and lace ruffles."

"What on earth are you talking about?" he asked.

"You'll have to get used to short skirts and to short hair, judge. The skirts will be longer sometimes and shorter sometimes, in passing fashions, and so will the hair; but the skirt to the ground will never prevail again as a necessity of morals. You've got to change your whole conception of what you think is immodesty."

"Why will I?"

"Because women have changed theirs—and, as Julie intimated to you, it's really their affair."

"What?" he cried. "Don't their fathers and their brothers and their husbands——"

"No," I said. "The ladies don't belong to us any more—and they don't all live for us and to manage us—not quite in the sense they used to. They've decided to live more for themselves. They're not abiding as they did by the rules we made for them as part of our possessions; they don't placidly accept our various kinds of double standards, judge. In fact, they seem about to lay aside something of both their guile and their meekness; they're doing a great deal of laying aside these days. Those stays you spoke of—the stays of the hourglass girl—and the long impeding skirts won't do for the new outdoor life that the automobile brought when it made open country a convenient playground for everybody. But the hourglass stays and the long skirt had another reason, too, for disappearing just at the time when the new athletic life required their removal. For they were really, in spirit, the bound and warped tiny feet of the Chinese women."

"How were they?" he asked sharply. "The old-fashioned stays of whalebone and steel might offer you some ground to stand on there, but the long skirt ——"

"Wearing a long skirt was originally a woman's way of keeping warm, judge, but in time it gradually became the means of making her legs an interesting secret. That is to say, the long skirt became one of her weapons of coquetry, or her diplomacy, if you like, just as her hair was; and like the crippled Chinese feet, so beautiful to the eyes of Chinese gentlemen, the stays, the long hair and long skirt were flattering signs of the dependence and inferiority of what was valuable—to be protected by us and partly displayed, partly kept secret—because it could be possessed.

"The relinquishment of the long skirt and of long hair is startling not because of any moral question being involved, as you think, but because it means that women are beginning to feel independent of us. They can afford to abandon some of their means of managing us, they begin to believe—because they can get what they want not by making us get it for them but by going after it themselves, in spite of us—that is, in competition with us. If they should ever go back, generally and permanently, to long skirts and long hair, it would mean that they were defeated and had given up their hope of doing anything better than first competing with one another to get hold of men to manage and then keeping—and, of course, helping and cherishing—what they thus secure. So far they show no signs of apprehending any such defeat."

"No," Judge Olds said dryly. "So far as I can see, they're worse every day. I think you mentioned something irrelevant about my great-great-grandfather's wig and lace ruffles—or did it actually bear upon what you seem to feel is the significance of your discourse?"

"I think it's relevant," I ventured to reply. "I don't mean to say that Julie and her friends are conscious of the obscure things underlying the great difference between them and the girls of our youth, judge. Probably Julie just feels young, independent and in the fashion, and instinctively objects to your ideas as tyrannical, rather low-minded and hypocritical nonsense."

"Yes, that describes her daughterly attitude quite accurately. What about my great-great-grandfather's wig?"

"Marshal Bassompierre paid what would be in money of today more than ten thousand dollars," I said, "for a coat to wear at a party. Pepys paid fifty pounds, I think I recall, for a periwig. We men used to be greater peacocks than the women. When we wore our own long hair, we sat for hours while a *perruquier* dressed it. We wore diamonds, pearls, rubies, emeralds—we covered our hands with rings, wore jeweled chains about our necks, wore earrings, covered our hats with ostrich feathers, hid our hands and sometimes our meager calves under showers of lace; we drenched ourselves with scent and stuck decorative black patches upon our faces; rouge was not wholly unknown to us. Until the *fin de siècle* that brought the French Revolution, the women never surpassed us in the expense and exquisite care we devoted to our persons. A new period in dress began for us then."

"Indeed?" the judge said ominously. "We began exposing ourselves then, I suppose."

"Yes, we did. We began to dispense with our plumage and all our coquettish aids to the conquest of ladies. In our wars with one another, weapons had been improved and the science of war had changed; our plumage had become more and more inconvenient. Taxes reduced our luxury at the same time that republican ideas of simplicity began to prevail. But what really ended our splendid peacockery was the beginning of the mechanical age after the close of the Napoleonic Wars. We'd cut our long hair and given up the wigs that imitated it; then we cut off our ruffles. Lace isn't useful around machinery and it's inappropriate on a cindery railroad train. The women didn't adopt the utilitarian costume when we did; they weren't in so close contact with the mechanical age as we were. They waited almost a hundred years, and it's only now that they're doing what we did so long ahead of them."

"You mean that's all they're doing—just following our utilitarian example a hundred years later?"

"No, I don't mean that's all they're doing; but it's certainly one of the things they're doing."

"Then just because a girl can't hop in and out of an automobile in a long skirt, you mean that Julie ——"

"She belongs to an age that has discarded your ideas, judge, and she'll never adjust herself to them. She couldn't, even if she wanted to."

"Well, I'll certainly never adjust myself to hers," he said gloomily. "The ideas of the new age won't last. The pendulum will swing back."

"What's to swing it back?"

He was unable to tell me, and after I had left him, I thought that his figure of the pendulum was not an accurate one. There are actions and reactions in the life of mankind, but a pendulum swings from a fixed point. In Nature, all is change, and so there is no such thing as a fixed point, which can be only an abstract conception. Looking forth upon the examples apparently set by the rest of the universe, we are encouraged to surmise that the world moves not as a pendulum but in an ascending spiral.

XXVIII

LATELY, in 1928, I motored home from New York to the midland city. There was no need to take a ferry across the Hudson; automobiles beyond counting were humming incessantly, speeding east, speeding west, beneath those deep broad waters; we had no sight of the new Titans' sky line growing mistier behind us. Little more

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than an hour later, we looked down upon the Delaware from a high bridge, and one of us said:

"Down there, not far, Washington forced his way across this river through the ice. What a strange sight that would be if we could see it now!"

"How much stranger a sight we'd be to Washington!" the other returned. "The bridge alone would dumfound him, but he could understand it. The automobile shooting across it would stagger him, and most of his half-frozen Revolutionary soldiers would take it to be either illusion or witchcraft." Then, as an airplane rose buzzing in the nearer skies—"But the plane," he went on, "I think they could hardly have borne. They'd have thought they were getting too much of the supernatural to be endured. I think there'd have been desertions when they reached the other shore—poor souls hurrying home to meet the Judgment Day with their families about them. Yet it's only a century and a half ago that the Father of Our Country crossed here, and what would we think if we could see now what we should see from this spot a century and a half in the future? Would we, too, scurry home to prepare for the last trump?"

Probably not, we thought. We should be able to endure at least a glimpse of full-blown prodigies not even to be in bud during our lifetime. For we were children of the mechanical age, inured to miracles; we had seen men doing almost everything that in previous ages they had been able to imagine themselves as doing. To do more, they would need to imagine more; but already they had imagined interplanetary communication, the prolongation of human life, the end of war and even the end of poverty. Some day, perhaps, they would imagine the end of ignorance—even the end of our ignorance of the meaning of life; and when that meaning is known we shall no longer be tragically ignorant of the meaning of death. For a hundred and fifty years is not long in the life of the Delaware River, and men will still be imagining when the river is gone.

But already our silent, ready, hurrying slave, the automobile, had borne us far from the bridge; the great, hard, smooth highways built for that slave stretched before us in their thousands of miles—west, south, north, as we chose to go. There was company, too, in all directions—overland traffic of freight in thunderous motor trucks; motor vans moving all the furniture and household goods of families from one town to another; automobiles built like cottages and with families living in them ever itinerant; long, swift omnibuses running on schedules and growing weeds in the interurban trolley tracks; bootleggers' cars with mud-caked license plates and dusty windows; youthful speed cars, peddlers' coupés, workmen's cars, farmers' cars, rich men's cars, poor men's cars, beggar men's cars and thieves' cars. Tractors plowed the fields beside the road; love letters, business letters, letters from anxious mothers, shot through the sky over our heads; and on all our journey, in the remotest mountain and woodland spot we reached, messages, lectures, readings, recitations, weather prognostications and incessant music continually passed through the ether about us and through our very bodies.

We moved at a speed for which nobody is arrested nowadays and came home in only two more hours of running than we should have spent on an express train. But we had been away from the midland city for seven months, and so we came into it sooner than we expected, because it was still growing. Far, far ahead of us, when we entered the ever-extending streets, new colossi loomed in the smoke—more skyscrapers were building.

I walked at twilight through a street of new houses where long, long ago—yet how short a time ago it seemed, too!—I had driven a red-wheeled runabout and a startled farm hand told me of lightning that came shattering out of a clear sunny sky. The houses upon this new street—all built within little more than a year—were of the newest fashions, yet not many were of the same fashion. They were of shapes and colors we once should have thought fanciful; indeed, many of them suggested stage settings, and their picturesqueness was so extreme as to give them almost the unsubstantial air of picture-book houses. They were adaptations of such themes as the Normandy farmhouse, the Italian villa, the Spanish cottage, the Tudor house, the Georgian manor, the Southern Colonial house, the New England Colonial house, and even the donjon keep. It was obvious that every architect or every owner had planned without thought to what would neighbor the new house. We were going ahead with our building in our old, naïve individual way; and so this new street looked like a masquerade party wearing the costumes of all nations and all periods. Yet no doubt every house was beautiful to the family that lived in it. Probably when they looked at it they saw nothing else, being happily able to exclude from their consciousness all that they had not proudly built themselves.

Some of the new houses had been put up by builders to sell—possibly with the aid of the new installment-financing plan that enables anybody to buy anything. Painted signs suggested alluring merit: This Artistic Modern Home, This Superbly Equipped Home, This Beautiful New Modern Home—for, of course, these empty houses were all "homes"; and an apprentice in the new commercial publicity would probably be reprimanded if he were ever so indiscreet as to speak or write of even an unfinished house or cottage as anything except a "home." But what I wondered, as I walked along in the twilight, staring at these whimsical houses, was whether or not they were really an improvement upon the other kinds of houses that had preceded them in the midland town; and, of course, the people who lived in the new houses and the architects who designed them and the decorators concerned with the interiors would all have thought this an absurd thing to be wondering.

Twilight having deepened as I walked, lights began to appear, and before one of the brightened windows I paused for a moment. The shade was up, no curtains impeded the view, and there was revealed a living-room interior in the modernist manner. A modernist painting hung upon the wall over a severe oblong hole, the fireplace; and the furniture was of a shaping unfamiliar in chairs, tables, stools and bookcases, and usually associated with engineering works of one kind and another. The painting was of a woman with a green head and no spinal column to hold it in place. She seemed about to enter a building smaller than she was, and she carried in one hand, at the end of her shorter arm, a pottery bowl that must have surprised the potter, when he took it from the kiln, and made him resolve to live thenceforth more temperately.

Then, looking at this picture and at the furniture, I was reminded of earlier manifestations of modernism upon the banks of the Seine, in the first years of the century; and I remembered how tactful visitors to the Salon des Indépendants forbore to laugh, because the artists might be standing near the works of art. They had not all perished of neglect, those early modernists; some of them had lived to see their pictures hung on the walls of dwelling houses by people able to bear that daily association. Those who thus survived were the few who "knew how to put paint on canvas"; at least they were craftsmen; but whether or not their effort to "get back to the primitive" had brought any new beauty into the world was still a question. They were consciously primitive, which is certainly never a way to be primitive; and if they had, indeed, brought new beauty into the world, they had certainly brought with it a lot of other things, including the pretentiousness of their apologists and the nightmares of their imitators. And upon the point of pretentiousness I remembered a comparison made by a good painter I knew.

"All this modernist art," he said, "was founded upon a shrewd knowledge of the hypnotic power of a vacuum. To understand that, we must recall the old story of the three weavers and the king's coronation robes. The thievish weavers kept all the money they were supposed to spend for materials and said the robes they were making for the king were beyond compare the richest and most beautiful ever woven, and also had a magic quality—whoever was not virtuous and good could not see these beautiful robes at all; they were visible to virtuous people only. So when the courtiers came to look at the robes, no one dared to say he did not see them; and the king himself, when the weavers went through the motions of putting them upon him, expressed the greatest admiration and delight. Then he rode forth to the coronation naked, and all the people, afraid of giving it away that they couldn't see his beautiful robes, began to shout: 'What splendor! How superb! What wonderfulness in weaving!' Well, that's the wonderfulness of most of modernist art. The people who praise it are afraid of letting anyone find out that they don't see it."

Yet whether they really see it or not, some of those who praise it think they see it; for the hypnotic power of a vacuum is that strong, if vacuums become the fashion. Fashion is the true hypnotic master of the eye; for fashion is mob vision, difficult to resist. The owner of the modernist painting that I saw through the lighted window surely thought his picture beautiful, and was pleased to possess it and the new shapes of furniture, and to be, himself, as he would doubtless believe, a forefront slave of a lovely fashion.

So, before him, had the followers of all the dead fashions felt. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, before the *fin de siècle*, we had gone through what the fashion, with one of its inexplicable sophistications, called a Queen Anne period in building, accompanied by the æsthetic movement indoors. Wooden houses were built with little turrets and weatherboarded towers boiling out all over them; jig-saw work enriched gables, and at least one oval window of colored glass seemed to be necessary somewhere. Within, there was Eastlake furniture, and pure decoration offered effects from the æsthetic revolution: Cattails, sumac, sunflowers, formerly plain old chairs newly gilded, peacock feathers, fans tacked upon the walls, embroidered owls, wooden bread rollers painted in floral designs, pansies painted on tambourines and marble-topped rococo tables. Nowadays, everybody thought all that bad enough to

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be funny; but it had seemed charming when it was the fashion—at least, it was charming to the people who built the Queen Anne houses and did the æsthetic decorating.

So I wondered, as I walked on, if some day, not far in the future, these fanciful new houses, so charming now to the owners, the architects, the builders and the decorators, and undeniably excellent in pictorial composition, wouldn't nevertheless in their turn appear to be as funny and as bad taste as the preposterous Queen Anne cottages and jig-saw work and cat-tails seem to all of us now.

Nevertheless, the amount of happiness in the world must be greatly enriched by the belief of every period that in matters of taste, at least, it alone has come to perfection and is the final authority.

In this, the new age was like the age before it, like the *fin de siècle* and all other ages; but it was not like the *fin de siècle* in many things. Nature itself does not recognize a revolution; it works through evolution only, we are told; yet since the *fin de siècle* there had been an overturning thorough enough to bear the aspect of revolution to middle-aged and elderly people. They had seen their youthful conceptions of such vital things as time and distance disappear into nothing; and what was painful to those who, like Judge Olds, found themselves bewildered in a new world, they had also seen, at the same time and as if through some dire synchronism, their most rigid conceptions of morals and of proprieties and of manners, first questioned, then challenged, then apparently tossed aside. Fetters had been broken; a great deal that was useless, impending and even evil had been swept away; startling new tolerances were beginning to prevail, and, contradictorily enough, there were new intolerances like the intolerance of refinement, for instance. But this was, of all, probably the special intolerance most characteristic of the new age, for refinement in large part seems to be a quality of leisure. And in this swiftest moving and most restless time the world has known, leisure is for the dead, though not immediately—even the hearses are automobiles now.

I walked on deeper into the town, with the sky growing darker and the city avenues brighter as the white globes of the street lamps became luminous, upon the movement of an engineer's hand miles away. So I came at last to where the old destroyed town had stood; and I paused again, looking up at the sparkling front of a tall apartment house. There had been an iron gateway here once which I had often entered long ago, and beyond it, a fountain had tinkled in the midst of a green lawn. In the ample house lived an hourglass girl with a charming voice and a piano kept in tune, and about her, at that piano, boys and girls in their early twenties and late teens were wont to gather of an evening and sing with her, while older people listened amiably in the library beyond. And by a coincidence, as I stopped there now, a song was coming from the window of a first-floor apartment of the building that stood where the green lawn and the fountain and the ample house had been.

But this song came out of a box. The words were distinguishable:

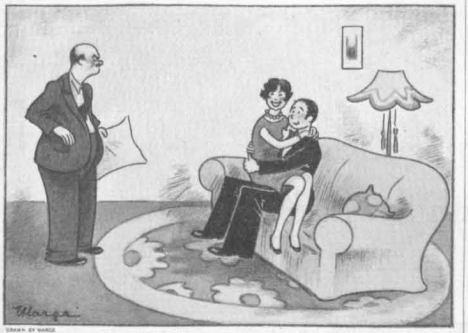
He's my boy friend, I'm his sweetie.
When we dance my heart gets leapy.
He's so amorous
He gets me glamorous!
Oh, my!
I
Wanta die
With my
Boy friend,
Right then!

There was, of course, an accompaniment of wire-strung banjos, saxophones and drums.

I passed on, going still deeper into the town; and presently stood before a vast and solemn shape that rose into the highest reaches of the electric light from the streets. It was the new war memorial, a monumental shrine, unfinished and still building. Of white stone, it would have had a better appearance if it could have remained clean; but of course that wasn't to be hoped—not now; even our homage to the men who fought for us in the Great War must be soiled with the grime that was the mark of our prosperity. Nevertheless, the day would yet come when the great edifice would be cleaned and kept clean, to rise in the clear whiteness that would make it as beautiful as it should be. Some day, I thought, the chamber of commerce and the Rotarians and the Kiwanis Club and the Lions Club and the Junior Rotarians would do that work—for if they didn't, nobody else would; and some day they would understand the importance of doing it.

The monument was finer than anything we had ever built before, I was sure, and yet it was of modern design. Something original and powerful had been added to a majestic old thought that at its base was Greek; and here, I felt, the design had done what an enlightened new age might do. For every new age has at its disposal everything that was fine in all past ages, and its greatness depends upon how well it recognizes and preserves and brings to the aid of its own enlightenment whatever worthy and true things the dead have left on earth behind them. And it seemed to me that the unfinished memorial, for all its smoke stains and the incongruous huddle of buildings about it, was already magnificent.

Editor's Note—This is the seventh and last of a series of articles by Mr. Tarkington.



DRAWN BY MARGE

"Clarissa! What is the Meaning of This?"
"Tee Hee, Daddy! What a Silly Question!"