

Bangs John Kendrick

Half-Hours with the Idiot



John Bangs
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I

AS TO AMBASSADORS'

RESIDENCES

"I am glad to see that the government is beginning to think seriously of providing Ambassadors' residences at the various foreign capitals to which our Ambassadors are accredited," said the Idiot, stirring his coffee with a small pocket thermometer, and entering the recorded temperature of 58 degrees Fahrenheit in his little memorandum book. "That's a thing we have needed for a long time. It has always seemed a humiliating thing to me to note the differences between the houses of our government officials of equal rank, but of unequal fortune, abroad. To leave the home of an Ambassador to Great Britain, a massive sixteen-story mausoleum, looking like a collision between a Carnegie Library and a State Penitentiary, with seven baths and four grand pianos on every floor, with guides always on duty to show you the way from your bedchamber to the breakfast room, and a special valet for each garment you wear, from sock to collar, and go over to Rome and find your Ambassador heating his coffee over a gas-

jet in a hall bedroom on the top floor of some dusty old Palazzo, overlooking the garage of the Spanish Minister, is disconcerting, to say the least. It may be a symptom of American fraternity, but it does not speak volumes for Western Hemispherical equality, and the whole business ought to be standardized. An American Embassy architecturally should not be either a twin brother to a Renaissance lunatic asylum, or a replica of a four thousand dollar Ladies' Home Journal bungalow that can be built by the owner himself working Sunday afternoons for eight hundred dollars, exclusive of the plumbing."

"You are right for once, Mr. Idiot," said the Bibliomaniac approvingly. "The last time I was abroad traveling with one of those Through Europe in Ten Days parties, I could not make up my mind which was the more humiliating to me as an American citizen, the lavish ostentation of one embassy, or the niggardly squalor of another; and it occurred to me then that here was a first-class opportunity for some patriot to come along and do his country's dignity some good by pruning a little in one place, and fattening things up a bit in another."

"Quite so," said the Idiot, inhaling a waffle.

"And I have been hoping," continued the Bibliomaniac, "that Congress would authorize the purchase of suitable houses in foreign capitals for the purpose of correcting the evil."

"That's where we diverge, sir," said the Idiot, "as the lady said to her husband, when they got their first glimpse of the courthouse at Reno. We don't want to purchase. We want to

build. The home of an American Ambassador should express America, not the country to which he is sent to Ambass. There's nothing to my mind less appropriate than to find a diplomat from Oklahoma named, let us say, Dinkelspiel, housed in a Louis Fourteenth chateau on the Champs Eliza; or a gentleman from Indiana dwelling in the palace of some noble but defunct homicidal Duck of the Sforza strain in Rome; or a leading Presbyterian representing us at Constantinople receiving his American visitors in a collection of bargain-counter minarets formerly occupied by the secondary harem of the Sublime Porte. There is an incongruity about that sort of thing that, while it may add to the gaiety of nations, leaves Uncle Sam at the wrong end of the joke. When the thing is done it ought to be done from the ground up. Uncle Sam should always feel at home in his own house, and I contend that he couldn't really feel that way in an ex-harem, or in one of those cold-storage Roman Palazzos where the Borgias used to dispense cyanide of potassium *frappé* to their friends and neighbors. He doesn't fit into that sort of thing any more than he fits into those pink satin knee-breeches, and the blue cocked hat with rooster feathers that diplomatic usage requires him to wear when he goes to make a party call on the Czar. So I am hoping that when Congress takes the matter up it will consider only the purchase of suitable sites, and then go on to adopt a standardized residence which from cellar to roof, from state salon to kitchen, shall express the American idea."

"You talk as if there were an American idea in architecture,"

said the Doctor. "If there is such a thing to be found anywhere under the canopy, let's have it."

"Oh, it hasn't been evolved, yet," said the Idiot. "But it soon would be if we were to put our minds on it. We can be just as strong on evolution as we always have been on revolution if we only try. The first thing would be for us to recognize that in his fullest development up to date the real American is a composite of everything that is best in all other nations. Take my humble self for instance."

"What, again?" groaned the Bibliomaniac. "Really, Mr. Idiot, you are worse than the measles. You can take that only once, but you – why, we've had you so often that it sometimes seems as if life were just one idiotic thing after another."

"Oh, all right," said the Idiot. "In that case, let's take you for a dreadful example. What are you, anyhow, Mr. Bib, but the ultimate result of a highly variegated international complication in the matter of ancestry? Your father was English; your mother was German. Your grandparents were Scotch, Irish, and Manx, with a touch of French on one side, and a mixture of Hungarian, Danish, and Russian on the other. It is just possible that without knowing it you also contain traces of Italian and Spanish. Your love of classic literature suggests that somewhere back in the ages one of your forbears swarmed about Athens as a member of that famous clan, the Hoi Polloi. The touch of melancholy in your nature may be attributed to overindulgence in waffles, but it suggests also that Scandinavia had a hand in the evolution of

your Ego. In other words, sir, you are a sort of human *pousse-café*, a mighty agreeable concoction, Mr. Bib, though a trifle dangerous to tackle at breakfast. Now, as I wanted to say in the beginning, when you intimated that I was in danger of becoming chronic, I am out of the same box of ancestral odds and ends that you are. I am a mixture of Dutch, French, English, and Manx, with an undoubted strain of either Ciceronian Roman or Demosthenesian Greek thrown in – I'm not certain which – as is evidenced by my overwhelming predilection for the sound of my own voice."

"That much is perfectly clear," interjected the Bibliomaniac, "though the too-easy and overcontinuous flow of your speech indicates that your veins contain some of the torrential qualities of the Ganges."

"Say rather the Mississippi, Mr. Bib," suggested Mr. Brief. "The Mississippi has the biggest mouth."

"Well, anyhow," continued the Idiot, unabashed, "whether my speech suggests the unearthly, mystic beauty of the Ganges, or the placid fructifying flow of the Mississippi, the fact remains that the best American type is a composite of all the best that human experience has been able to produce in the way of a featherless biped since Doctor Darwin's friend, Simian, got rid of his tail, preferring to sleep quietly on his back in bed rather than spend his nights swinging nervously to and fro from the limb of a tree. Since we can't deny this, let's make a virtue of it, and act accordingly. What is more simple, then,

than that a composite people should go in for a composite architecture to express themselves in marble, stone, and brick? Acting on this principle let our architecture express the glory that was Greece, the grandeur that was Rome, the utility that was England, the economy that was Scotch, the *espièglerie* that was France, the simplicity that was Holland, and the efficiency that was Germany, not to mention the philandery that was Constantinople. The problem will be how to combine all these various strains and qualities in one composite building, and that, of course, will have to be solved by architects. It isn't a thing like banking that under the theories of modern Statesmanship can be settled by chauffeurs, tobacconists, and undertakers, but will require expert handling. I don't know very much about architecture myself, but off-hand I should say that the exterior of the building might be a combination of late Victorian Queen Anne, softened somewhat with Elizabethan suggestions of neo-Gothic Graeco-Roman Classicism; with a Byzantine fullness about the eaves, relieved with a touch of Hebridean French Renaissance manifested in the rococo quality of the pergola effect at the front, the whole building welded into a less inchoate mass by a very pronounced feeling of Georgian decadence, emphasized with a gambrel roof, and the façade decorated with flamboyant Dutch fire escapes, bringing irresistibly to mind the predominance in all American art of the Teutonic-Doric, as shown in our tendency to gables supported by moorish pilasters done in Hudson River brick. Not being an architect myself I don't

know that a building of that kind could be made to stand up, but we might experiment on the proposition by erecting a Pan-European building in Washington, and see whether it would stand or not. If it could stand through one extra session of Congress without cracking, I don't see why it couldn't be put up anywhere abroad with perfect confidence that it would stay up through one administration, anyhow."

"A nightmare of that kind erected in the capital city of a friendly power would be just cause for war to the knife!" said Mr. Brief.

"Well, I have an alternative proposition," said the Idiot, "and I am not sure that it isn't far better than the other. Why not erect a Statue of Liberty in every capital abroad, an exact reproduction of that monumental affair in New York Harbor, and let our Ambassadors live in them? They tell me there's as much room inside Liberty's skirts as there is in any ordinary ten-story apartment house, and there is no reason why it should not be utilized. My suggestion would be to have all the offices of the Embassies in the pedestals, and let the Ambassador and his family live in the overskirt. There'd be plenty of room left higher up in the torso for guest chambers, and in the uplifted arm for nurseries for the ambassadorial children, and the whole could be capped with a magnificent banquet hall on the rim of the torch, at the base of the brazen flame."

"A plan worthy of the gigantic intellect that conceived it," smiled the Doctor. "But how would you have this thing furnished,

Mr. Idiot? Would that be done by the Ambassadors themselves, or would the President have to call a special session of Congress to tackle the job?"

"I was coming to that," said the Idiot. "It has occurred to me that it would be a fine thing to have forty-eight rooms in the statue, each named after one of our American States, and then leave it to each State to furnish its own room. This would lend a pleasing variety to the inside of the building that could hardly fail to interest the visitor, and would give the foreigners a very clear insight into our resources along lines of interior decorations. Think of the Massachusetts Room, for example – a fine old horse-hair mahogany sofa in one corner; a rosewood highboy off in another; an old-fashioned four-poster bed projecting out into the middle of the room, and a blue china wash-bowl and pitcher on a spindle-legged washstand near by; and on the wall three steel engravings, one showing John Hancock signing the Declaration of Independence, another of Charles Sumner preaching emancipation, and a third showing Billy Sunday trying to sweep back the waves of a damp Boston from the sand dunes of a gradually drying Commonwealth. Then the Michigan room would be a corker, lavishly filled with antique furniture fresh from Grand Rapids, and a bronze statuette of Henry Ford at each end of the mantelpiece for symmetry's sake, the ceiling given over to a symbolical painting entitled The Confusion of Bacchus, reproducing scenes in Detroit when announcement was made that the good old State had voted for grape-juice as the official

trifle. Missouri's room could be made a thing of beauty and a joy forever, with its lovely wall paper showing her favorite sons, Dave Francis and Champ Clark alternately, separated by embossed hound-dogs, rampant, done in gilt bronze, and the State motto, Show Me, in red, white, and blue tiles over the fireplace. Really I can't imagine anything more expressive of all-America than that would be. Florida could take the Palm Room; New York the rather frigid and formal white and gold reception room; Maine as the leading cold-water State of the Union could furnish the bathrooms; California could provide a little cafeteria affair for a quick lunch in mission style, and owing to her pre-eminence in literature, the library could be turned over to Indiana with every assurance that if there were not books enough to go round, any one of her deservedly favorite sons, from George Ade to George McCutcheon, would write a five-foot shelfful at any time to supply the deficiency.

"Murally speaking, a plan of this sort could be made historically edifying also. Florida could supply a handsome canvas showing Ponce de Leon discovering Palm Beach. In the New Jersey room the Battle of Trenton could be shown, depicting the retreat of Jim Smith, and the final surrender of Democracy to General Wilson. Ohio could emphasize in an appropriate medium the Discovery of the Oil Fields by Mr. Rockefeller. Pennsylvania could herald her glories with a mural painting apotheosizing William Penn and Andrew Carnegie in the act of forging her heart of steel in the fires of immortality,

kept burning by a never-ending stream of bonds poured forth from the end of a cornucopia by Fortune herself. An heroic figure of Governor Blease defying the lightning would come gracefully from South Carolina, and Rhode Island, always a most aristocratic little State, could emphasize the descent of some of her favorite sons from Darwin's original inspiration by a frieze depicting a modern tango party at Newport, in which the preservation of the type, and a possible complete reversion thereto, should be made imperishably obvious to all beholders.

"Then, to make the thing consistent throughout, the homes of Ambassadors having been standardized, Congress should order a standard uniform for her representatives abroad. This would settle once and for all the vexed question as to what an Ambassador shall wear when presented to King This, or Emperor That, or the Ponkapog of Thingumbob. I think it ought to be a definitely established principle that every nation should be permitted to choose its own official dud, but not the duds of others. There is no reason in the world why the King of England should be permitted to dictate the style of garments an American Ambassador shall wear. Suppose he ordered him to attend a five o'clock tea clad in yellow pajamas trimmed with red-plush fringe and gold tassels emerging from green rosettes? It would be enough to set the eagle screaming and to justify the sending of a Commission of Protest headed by Mr. Bryan over to London to slap Mr. Lloyd George on the wrist. Nor should the Kaiser be permitted to say how an American representative shall dress

when calling upon him, compelling him to appear perhaps in a garb entirely unsuited to his style of beauty – something like the uniform of a glorified White Wing, for instance, decorated with peacock feathers, and wearing an alpine hat with a stuffed parrot lying flat on its back on the peak, on his head. That sort of thing does not gee with our pretensions. We are a free and independent nation, and it is time to assert our independence of the sartorial shackles those foreign potentates would fasten upon us. Let the fiat go forth that hereafter all American Ambassadors wheresoever accredited shall wear a long blue swallow-tail coat with brass buttons, and forty-eight stars, lit by electricity from a small battery concealed in the pistol pocket, appliquéd on the tails; red and white-striped doeskin trousers, skin tight, held down by straps under the boots; and an embroidered waist-coat, showing a couple of American eagles standing on their hind legs and facing the world with the defiant cry of We Pluribus Us; the whole topped off with a bell-crowned, fuzzy beaver hat, made of silver-gray plush, which shall never be removed in the presence of anybody, potentate or peasant, plutocrat or Cook tourist. If in addition to these items the Ambassador were compelled to wear a long, yellow chin whisker, it would be just the liveriest livery that ever came down the pike of Brummelian splendor. It would emphasize the presence of the American Ambassador wherever he went, and make the effete nations of Europe, Asia, Africa, and Pan America sit up and take notice."

"Doubtless," said the Bibliomaniac, rising impatiently. "And

do you suppose the President could find any self-respecting American in or out of jail who would be willing to wear such a costume as that?"

"Well," said the Idiot, "of course some of 'em might object, but I'll bet you four dollars and eighty-seven cents' worth of doughnuts against a Chautauqua rain check that any man who offered you seventeen thousand five hundred dollars a year for wearing those duds without having the money to back the offer up would find your name at the head of the list of his preferred creditors in less than three shakes of a lamb's tail!"

II

AS TO THE FAIR SEX

"I observe with pain," said the Idiot, as he placed the Bibliomaniac's pat of butter under his top waffle, "that there is a more or less acrimonious dispute going on as to the propriety of admitting women to the Hall of Fame. The Immortals already in seem to think that immortality belongs exclusively to the male order of human beings, and that the word is really 'Himmortality', and decline to provide even a strap for the ladies to hang on in the cars leading to the everlasting heights, all of which causes me to rejoice that I am not an Immortal myself. If the one durable joy in life, the joy that neither crocks nor fades, association with the fair sex, a diversion which age cannot wither nor custom stale its infinite variety, is something an Immortal must get along without, it's me for the tall timbers of fameless existence. I rejoice that I am but a plain, common-garden, everyday mortal thing, ready for shipment, f. o. b., for the last terminal station on the road to that well-known Irish settlement, O'Blivion."

"I didn't know that you were such an admirer of the fair sex, Mr. Idiot," said the Doctor. "Many years' residence in a refined home for single gentlemen like this would seem to indicate that the allurements of feminine society were not for you."

"Quite the contrary," said the Idiot. "It proves rather my interest in the fair sex as a whole. If I had specialized sufficiently upon one single blessed damozel with pink cheeks, snappy brown eyes, and a pompadour that might strike a soaring lark as the most desirable nest in the world, to ask her to share my lot, and go halves with me in an investment in the bonds of matrimony, it might have been said – I even hope it would have been said – that the allurements of feminine society were not for me. Marriage, my dear Doctor, is no symptom that a man is interested in women. It is merely evidence of the irresistible attraction of one person for another. It's like sampling a box of candy – you may find the sample extremely pleasing and gobble it up ferociously, but if you were to gobble up the whole box with equal voracity it might prove hateful to you. In my case, I confess that I am so deeply interested in the whole box of tricks that it is the sample I fight shy of, and I have remained single all these years because my heart is no miserable little one-horse-power affair that beats only for one single individual, but a ninety-million horse-power dynamo that whirls madly around day and night, on time and overtime, on behalf of all. I could not possibly bring myself to love only one pair of blue eyes to the utter exclusion of black, brown, or gray; nor can I be sure that if in some moment of weakness I were to tie up irrevocably to a pair of black eyes, somewhere, some day, with the moon just right, and certain psychological conditions wholly propitious, a pair of coruscating brown beads, set beneath two roguish eyebrows, would labor in

vain to win a curve of interest from my ascetic upper lip. To put it in the brief form of a cable dispatch, rather than in magazine language at fifteen cents a word, I love 'em all! Blonde, brunette, or in between, in every maid I see a queen, as Shakespeare would have said if he had thought of it."

"That's rather promiscuous, isn't it?" asked the Bibliomaniac.

"No, it's just playing safe, Mr. Bib," said the Idiot. "It's like a man with a million dollars to invest. It isn't considered quite prudent for him to put every red cent of that million into one single stock. If he put his whole million into U. S. Hot Air Preferred, at 97-7/8, for instance, and some day Hot Air became so cheap that the bottom dropped out of the market, and the stock fell to 8-3/8 that man would practically be a busted community. But if like a true sage he divided his little million up into twenty fifty-thousand dollar lots, and put each lot into some separate stock or bond, the general average would probably maintain itself somewhere around par whether the tariff on lyonnaise potatoes was removed or not. So it is with my affections. If I could invest them in some such way as that I might have to move out of here, and seek some pleasant little domestic Eden where matrimony is not frowned upon."

"I rather guess you would have to move out of here," sniffed Mrs. Pedagogy the Landlady. "I might be willing to forego my rules and take somebody in here with one wife, but when a man talks about having twenty – why, I am almost disposed to give you notice now, Mr. Idiot."

"Don't you worry your kindly soul about me on that score, Mrs. Pedagog," smiled the Idiot. "With ostrich feathers at seventy-five dollars a plume, and real Connecticut sealskin coats made of angora plush going at ninety-eight dollars, and any old kind of a falal selling in the open market at a hundred and fifty per frill, there is no danger of my startling this company by bringing home one bride, much less twenty. I was only speculating upon a theoretical ideal of matrimony, a sort of *e pluribus unum* arrangement which holds much speculative charm, but which in practice would undoubtedly land a man in jail."

"I had no idea that any of my boarders could ever bring themselves to advance a single word in favor of polygamy," said the Landlady sternly.

"Nor I," said the Idiot. "I don't believe even Mr. Bib here would advocate anything of the sort. I was merely trying to make clear to the Doctor, my dear lady, why I have never attempted to make some woman happy for a week and a martyr for the rest of time. It is due to my deep admiration for the whole feminine sex, and not, as he seemed to think, to a dislike of feminine society. The trace of polygamy which you seem to find in my discourse is purely academic, and it is clear to me that you have quite misunderstood my scheme. A true marriage, one of those absolutely indestructible companionships that we read about in poetry, involves so many more things than any ordinary human being is really capable of, that one who thinks about the matter at

all cannot resist the temptation to speculate on how things might be if they were different. The active man of affairs these busy times needs many diverse things in the way of companionship. He needs a helpmate along so many different lines that no single daughter of Eve can reasonably hope to supply them all. For example, if a man marries a woman who is deeply interested in Ibsen and Bernard Shaw abroad, and deep thinkers like William J. Bryan and Thomas Riley Marshall at home, she no doubt makes him ecstatically happy in those solemn moments when his mind wishes to grapple understandingly with the infinite. But suppose that poor chap comes home some night worn to a frazzle with the worries and complications of his business affairs, his spirit fairly yearning for something fluffy and intellectually completely restful, do you suppose for a moment that he is going to be lifted out of the morass of his woe by a conversation with that lady of his on the subject of the Inestimable Infinitude of the Protoplasmic Suffragette as outlined by Professor Sophocles J. Plato in the latest issue of the *South American Review*? Not he, my dear Mrs. Pedagog. What he wants on that occasion is somebody to sit alongside of him while he pulls away on his old briarwood pipe, holding his tired little paddy in her soft right hand, while she twitters forth George Ade's latest Fable on 'The Flipper that Flapped', or something else equally diverting. The reverse of the picture is equally true. If there is anything in the world that drives a man to despair it is to have to listen to five o'clock tea gabble when he happens to be in a mood

for the Alexander Hamilton, or Vice-President Marshall style of discourse. The facts are the same in both cases. The Bernard Shaw lady is a delight to the heart and soul in his Bernard Shaw moods. The George Ade lady is a source of unalloyed bliss in a George Ade mood, but they don't reverse readily, and in most cases they can't reverse at all. Then there are other equally baffling complications along other lines. A man may be crazy about poetry, and he falls in love, as he supposes, with a dainty little creature in gold-rimmed eyeglasses, who writes the most exquisite lyrics, simply because he thinks at the moment that those lyrics are going to make his life just one sweet song after another. He marries the little songbird, and then what happens?"

"Never having married a canary, I don't know," said the Landlady, with a glance at her husband.

"Well, I'll tell you," said the Idiot. "He has a honeymoon of lovely images. He feels like a colt put out to pasture on the slopes of Parnassus. Life runs along with the lilt of a patter song – and then, to indulge in a joke worthy of the palmiest days of London Punch, he comes out of Patter-Song! There dawns a day when he is full chock-a-block up to his neck with poetry, and the inner man craves the re-enforcement of the kind of flapjacks his mother used to make. One good waffle would please him more than sixty-seven sonnets on the subject of 'Aspiration.' Nothing short of a lustrous, smoking, gleaming stack of fresh buckwheats can hold him on the pinnacle of joy, and the lovely little lyrist, to whom he has committed himself, his destinies, and all that he has

under a vow for life, hies herself singing to the kitchen, mixes the necessary amount of concrete, serves the resulting dishes at the breakfast table, and gloom, gloom unmitigated, falls upon that house. After eating two of her cakes poor old hubby begins to feel as if he had swallowed the corner stone of a Carnegie library. That lyric touch that Herrick might have envied and Tennyson have viewed with professional alarm has produced a buckwheat cake of such impenetrable density that the Navy Department, if it only knew about it, would joyously grant her the contract for furnishing the armor plate for the new superdreadnoughts we are about to build so as to be prepared for Peace after Germany gets through with us. While eating those cakes the victim speculates on that old problem, Is Suicide a Sin? A cloud rises upon the horizon of his joy, and without intending any harm whatsoever, his mind involuntarily reverts to another little lady he once knew, who, while she couldn't tell the difference between a sonnet and a cabriolet, and had a dim notion when she heard people speaking of Keats that keats were some sort of a shellfish found on the rocks of the Hebrides at low tide, and much relished by the natives, could yet put together a tea biscuit so delicately tenuous of character that it melted in the mouth like a flake of snow on the smokestack of a Pittsburgh blast furnace. Thus an apparently secured joy loses its keen edge, and without anybody being really to blame, life becomes thenceforward, very gradually, but none the less surely, a mere test of endurance – a domestic marathon which must be run to the end, unless the runners collapse before

reaching the finish."

"For both parties!" snapped the Landlady, pursing her lips severely. "You needn't think that the men are the only ones to suffer – don't you fool yourself on that point."

"Oh, indeed I don't, Mrs. Pedagog," said the Idiot. "It's just as bad for the woman as for the man – sometimes a little worse, for there is no denying that women are after all more chameleonic, capable of a greater variety of emotions than men are. A man may find several women in one – in fact, he generally does. It is her frequent unlikeness to herself that constitutes the chief charm of some women. Take my friend Spinks' wife, for instance. She's the most exacting Puritan at home that you ever met. Poor Spinksy has to toe a straight mark for at least sixteen hours out of every twenty-four. Mrs. Spinks rules him with a rod of iron, but when that little Puritan goes to a club dance – well, believe me, she is the snappiest eyed, most flirtatious little tangoer in ninety-seven counties. Sundays in church she is the demurest bit of sartorial impressiveness in sight, but at the bridge table you want to keep your eyes wide open all the time lest your comfortable little balance at the bank be suddenly transformed into a howling overdraft. I should say that on general principles Mrs. Spinks is not less than nine or ten women, all rolled into one – Joan of Arc, Desdemona, Lucrezia Borgia, Cleopatra, Nantippe, Juliet, Mrs. Pankhurst, Eve, and the late Carrie Nation. But Spinks – poor old Spinksy – there's no infinite variety about him. At most Spinks is only two men – Mr. Henpeck at home and Mr. Overworked

when he gets out."

"I suppose from all of this nonsense," said the Landlady, "that your matrimonial ideal would be found in a household where a man rejoiced in the possession of a dozen wives – one frivolous little Hebe for his joyous moods; one Junoesque thundercloud for serious emergencies; one capable seamstress to keep his buttons sewed on; one first-class housekeeper to look after his domestic arrangements; one suffragette to talk politics to; one blue-stockings for literary companionship; one highly-recommended cook to preside over his kitchen; one musical wife to bang on the piano all day; one athletic girl for outdoor consumption, and a plain, common-garden giggler to laugh at his jokes."

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