

## A ROMANCE OF THREE FOOLS



IT was the year when Marie Barrone sang for a season at the "Folly," never to be forgotten by those who heard her; when London, or the idler part of it, was very much in love with her, and her spirit of waywardness and all mischief. It was a year of romances; and of them all, that in which Marie played the part of amused heroine and our famous three were the heroes, was quite the most entertaining.

At this time, the leader of the three, Jack Barry, or as most of us knew him, "Jack Momus," that being the name under which he wrote the little comedies and lyrical burlesques chiefly associated with him,—was at the height of his singular career. The success of his latest work, "Sweet Cinderella," at the "Folly," thanks to Marie's delightful singing and dancing, had for once filled his pockets to overflowing; and it must be said they overflowed excessively. He was reckless in his extravagance of good-luck now, as he had been reckless before from ill-luck; and he showed his quality in nothing more than in the choice of his two companions, who did not tend, on the whole, to restrain him.

Young Pavier—the Hon. Tom Pavier—was certainly not the kind of young man to be an economical factor in anybody's equation. A thrice mortgaged peer's third son, who has been disowned by his noble father, who has compromised more than his purse because of his infatuation for the turf, and who has taken, half out of bravado, to driving a hansom for a living before he is thirty, is not likely to be over much in love with respectability, and the social virtues, for their own sake. His name, in truth, was by this become something of a byword with the latest incarnation of Mrs. Grundy—Lady Kyo: "Like young Pavier!" she would say, and close her eyes. As for the third of the three, "Sinister" Smith,—him we know better now as John Smith, R.A.; but at this time he chiefly drew comic pictures for that short-lived paper, the "Babbler," besides occasionally painting extraordinary portraits of modern people in a mediæval manner.

A more excellent trio for the amusement of a spirited heroine could not

well be imagined. All three were of accord in their devotion to Miss Marie. Almost every other night, for Jack Momus, to call him so, was never tired of hearing his jokes in their histrionic setting, they arrived, sooner or later, at the theatre. They usually came in the hansom which Momus had purchased in the exuberance of his pockets, and had leased to Tom Pavier on very un-business-like terms. This remarkable vehicle was suggested by that which appeared nightly on the stage in "Sweet Cinderella," and like that, was always at Marie's service; she greatly appreciated it, and often drove home in it to her lodgings in Westminster, after theatre. It was not, indeed, until she had twice running experienced the sensation of a street collision, under Tom Pavier's reckless driving, that she showed any hesitation about it. Thereafter, one night, when Tom drove Barry to the stage-door to meet her, they found a suspicious private brougham waiting there. When Miss Marie at length tripped out, she gave an odd little glance at the two vehicles, and at Barry bowing at her elbow; and then turning towards the brougham, she stammered out a naïve explanation that she felt it was not at all right, "you know, to be always taking your hansom; though, to be sure, a hansom was better fun than anything!"

This was the beginning of disaster. She had always been rather mysterious in her comings and goings; but after this she became more and more elusive, while the attentions of other admirers were nightly more obvious. The brougham itself did not long remain a mystery: it was only one of many attentions from the same admirer, Lord Merthen; while the bouquets of Captain Jolywell made it like a *pot-pourri* on wheels. So time went, and the pleasant early summer began to lose its greenness in London, while Marie Barrone still drew tears by her song of the country flowers which, in a state of nature, her audience might have cared for much less. One evening, late in June, Momus, who grew more dejected as Marie grew more elusive, made a desperate effort to get her to come to a little supper at Fantochetti's. But no! not even that; though as she said "No!" her voice had the sympathetic thrill which was so effective in "Sweet Cinderella," and her eyes looked sorrowfully at him where he stood, hat off, his cherubic visage absurdly wrinkled in his wistful anxiety. However, on the following Saturday, after performance, when Sinister was present, she seemed to relent. Momus and Sinister had been driven up by Tom, and stood at the brougham step a moment, while Tom looked on from his driver's perch, a few yards off.

"I'm going to have two days' holiday," said Marie. "I'm rather tired; my voice was like a crow's to-night. Didn't you notice in my

primrose song? My doctor says I may have to give up singing, if I don't take care!"

"You never sang better, I swear!" responded Momus, and Sinister corroborated with his lips. But she went on gaily:

"I'm so sorry I can't come to Fantochetti's! Ah, you've been so kind, all of you,"—here her voice had that little quiver again. "Well, I suppose Thomas,—my Thomas I mean, not yours," she explained, with a mischievous smile at Tom Pavier,—“is impatient, and wants to be off. You know, I never like to say good-bye, even only for a day or two. *Au revoir* is better!"

"*À Demain* is better still," ingeniously interposed Momus. She shook her pretty head.

"No, I'm afraid it will have to be good-bye London to-morrow, for a while at least."

"And Olva's fête?" asked Momus. The fête was a fancy dress ball, at Count Olva's, which among certain less particular sections of frivolous society was to be a great event in its way.

"Ah, Olva's fête," said Marie, adjusting her flowers, "I had forgotten: it will be fun to meet there. But in case ——;" she hesitated, putting the flowers to her face, as it might be to hide a furtive smile, "in case my voice is still hoarse?"

"No, no," interposed Momus, "you must come! *So au revoir!*"

"*Au revoir!*" she echoed. And the brougham drove off.

Some days later Momus heard from Mrs. Harriet at the Folly—Mrs. Harriet being Miss Marie's tire-woman—that Marie was likely to resume her part on the very evening of the fête, and was having a new frock, very pretty and fantastic, in white and blue and gold, no doubt for the Olva occasion. At this, he decided to give her a bouquet, simple and costly; which he ordered forthwith at Centifiori's. His plans were, to see the last act of "Cinderella" that evening, present Marie with the bouquet as she left the theatre, humbly begging her to bear it to Count Olva's; then don his own fancy-dress—a clown's motley, very carefully copied from an old Italian print—and so meet Marie at the fête at midnight. The chief lion of the occasion, it should be explained, was an African one,—the black Prince of Xula. It struck him as an ingenious idea, which Marie would appreciate, that they should make the Prince himself the point of assignation in the crowd at Olva's.

"The Prince at midnight!" He was so pleased with the idea, that he kept repeating the words to himself in his excitement.

Finding on reflection that he would barely have time to prepare for the fête after theatre, he decided, when the evening in question came, to attire himself in advance, hide his Italian motley under his great-coat, hear a little of Marie's singing from the back of the first circle, and then go round and intercept her with his bouquet. At a little after ten-thirty, Tom Pavier drove him to the "Folly"—a box containing the precious bouquet by his side—through a slow downpour of rain. The hansom drew up at the main entrance with a characteristic dash, just as Sinister was alighting from another cab. It was the hour of Marie's best song, and Momus, in his haste and excitement, after briefly exchanging a friendly word with Sinister, ran upstairs eagerly. From within, the familiar noise of the violins and oboe, playing the opening strains of Marie's song, reached his ears seductively. Another second, and to this boyish access of expectancy there ensued a cold thrill of dismay. On the corridor wall, a square placard, red-lettered, was fastened, which ran thus :

*"In consequence of continued indisposition, Miss Marie Barrone is again unable to appear this evening. Miss Nelly Cavotte has consented to take the part of Cinderella in her unavoidable absence."*

He did not wait to see more, not having the heart to look at the stage itself, where Marie's pretty figure and bright eyes usually faced him. He pointed out the placard to Sinister (who had followed), with a grotesque grimace and an indescribable air of disappointment.

"I wish I may die!" he began, with an hysterical little laugh. But Sinister, whose emotions never showed on his colourless, expressionless face, interposed gently :

"If I were you, I'd go behind and see Mrs. Harriet, my boy! It's only a cold she has got. You will hear her sing on many a night to come!" Sinister further consoled him by seizing his arm and conducting him round the house until they found Mrs. Harriet, who was hastily putting on a black bonnet over her black curls with the aid of a cracked looking-glass, as she stood at the door of Miss Barrone's dressing room. She told them that Marie had arrived at the theatre half an hour before performance, and had had an interview with the stage-manager, who had been in a rage ever since.

"Too bad to sing; not too bad to dance at that what-d'ye-call it to-night, I know!" said Mrs. Harriet, shaking her curls. "I daresay she has a cold; but cold or not, she cares for nobody—not she, when she takes it into her head!" This was all Mrs. Harriet had to say.

They did not wait to see the angry manager, or inquire further. Momus

took the wild resolution of driving off straightway to her rooms, to make sure of her. So he resumed the hansom, parting with Sinister, who did not like these undignified flights. By this time there were other reasons for haste than the fact of their being late. A heavy rain began to come down with great determination. They careered through Palace Yard in a perfect deluge, and Tom turned into the narrow street where Marie lived, half-blinded by the storm. But here his sense of vision might well be quickened. Under the rainy gas-light, one thing he saw clearly : Marie's familiar brougham ! which was being driven rapidly out of the turning at the other end of the street, an ominous brace of trunks on top. He drew up, and cried through the slit to Momus :

"There she goes—her blessed brougham's just turned the corner."

"Nonsense, man!" screamed Momus. "It's not—it can't be! Drive on to the door!"

Tom drove on, and stopped at Marie's door. Momus leapt out, and knocked furiously. After a delay, that seemed hours, a grimy little housemaid opened the door.

"Miss Barrone?" he cried.

The maid blinked her eyes at him, and drew back: "She've gone aw'y, sir!"

Momus could have wept. "Why, she said she would be in ;—has she just gone?" He fumbled out half-a-crown.

The child, who knew him of old, smiled sagaciously. She probably thought him an actor from the "Folly." "Miss Berewn didn't be at the theeayer to-night——" she was beginning to explain.

"The devil!" ejaculated he, "I know that,—but see ;" he put the coin in her dirty little hand : "Was —that—her—carriage?"

She nodded reluctantly, and Momus turned and leapt back into the hansom. "You're right—'twas the brougham," he cried to Tom. "After it man! Go it, Peg!"

The hansom whirled off furiously in the direction of Whitehall, causing consternation there in the stream of buses and cabs. At the top of Whitehall Tom thought he caught a glimpse at last of the vanished brougham, and whipped up Peg to a still hotter pace. So following along Pall Mall, at the foot of the Haymarket he made it out distinctly, half way up that thoroughfare. At Piccadilly Circus he was almost within hail, and Momus was chuckling as he saw ; when, lo ! another hansom, crossing at right angles, was surprised by Tom's wild and irresponsible irruption, so that the two vehicles cannoned

with astonishing effect. Peg went down as if she was shot, while the other horse pawed the footboard for a moment in front of Momus, and then, recoiling, went down in turn. Momus, for his part leapt out, slipped, pitched headlong; while his hat flew one way, the precious box with the flowers another, where it was hurled under Peg's lively heels, as she lay a-kicking, and there speedily yielded up its little golden orchids and other rare blossoms to a muddy doom. It was a cruel stroke, which might have upset the quest of a less devoted, or a less mercurial, knight errant. But not so Momus. He still, in all this wreck, had his eye on the brougham, now rapidly disappearing down Piccadilly, all unconscious of the confusions it had wrought behind it. Mopping hastily the mud off his coat and doublet, picking up his volatile crush-hat, he hailed another hansom, and retook the pursuit, leaving Tom to his fate. As he was now whirled along Piccadilly, to add to his misfortunes, a drop that fell from somewhere on his nose, suddenly connected itself with a peculiar sensation in his head and hair, which, he remembered, he had first noticed after his fall. Putting his hand up, he found his well-arranged locks disturbed by a very pretty stream of crimson, which had been all this while slowly trickling through them, and was now combining with the mud to add a new and original adornment to his piebald doublet. But little he cared in his mad pre-occupation, so long as he did not lose Marie too. Once, at the foot of Bond Street, a block of carriages cost him a profane expense of breath, but he had again come within hailing distance of the fugitives by the time they had reached the top and emerged in Oxford Street. So the pursuit was maintained along Oxford Street, and up Edgware Road, until the brougham turned towards Paddington Station. Here another small delay, caused by two passing omnibuses, allowed the gap between the two to widen again. However, in the end, Momus dashed up, just as Marie, having dismounted, was seen disappearing through the portico of the station, a dark blue travelling dress and a veil proving a very transparent disguise. Momus hurled himself, in his mud and motley, a startling figure enough, out of his hansom, and was rushing through after her, intent only on overtaking her, when a strong hand caught his arm, and stopped him violently. He wriggled and turned as if on a pivot, and as he did so, in turning, saw the impassive good-natured face of a Herculean railway policeman.

"Pardon, sir!" said this amiable, irresistible giant. "Afraid you are hurt, sir! Not so fast!"

"Now, by all that's wicked," screamed his captive, "let me go! See—wait—wait! That lady, see! O Lord!"

With this, Momus fainted.

Next day, about noon, Sinister was roused from a profound sleep, proper to a man who had been up till four that morning, by a loud knocking at his door. This door, it should be said, gave entrance to two small rooms and a large studio at the top of a house in Lincoln's Inn Fields. The knocking proved to be from the vigorous fist of Tom Pavier, who explained last night's pursuit, the upset, and the disappearance of our hero-in-chief after it. Finally, as Tom discovered at Paddington, poor Momus had been conveyed from the station in a state of collapse to a hospital near by. There, suffering from the effects of his accident in Piccadilly Circus, and the excitement of Miss Marie's disappearance under his very eyes, he had spent the night in a fine fever. Sinister lost no time now in getting into his clothes, and making his way there.

He found his friend sitting up in bed in an accident ward, between two much more seriously damaged fellow-patients. When Momus saw him, he held out his hand with a deprecatory gesture.

"We lost her after all, old chap!" he cried, with a half-sob, "A damned railway bobby collared me in the station. I must have been a pretty sight. I don't know how I came here!"

After a little comforting philosophy from Sinister, he grew calmer; and that evening they were allowed to take him home, with one arm in bandages, and some sticking-plaster on his head. Indeed, his condition was not serious, his excitement growing less feverish. Half that night, however, Sinister sat by his bedside, and humoured him when he talked, still half-deliriously, of following Marie—to the world's end if need be.

This idea was still dominant when Momus had recovered sufficiently to resume his usual ways. The very first thing he did was to set out in quest of Miss Marie's address, which at last he was lucky enough to procure from her landlady in Westminster, in consideration of a certain bribe. The address ran:

"Aberduly Arms,  
Aberduly,  
North Wales."

Procuring next a guide to North Wales, he discovered that Aberduly was a rising seaside place. He discovered, moreover, what he thought significant, that Marie's friend, Lord Merthen, had a seat in the same county. Revolving these things in his inventive mind, he presently evolved a delightful scheme;

nothing more nor less than a driving tour across country, and in the hansom itself, into Wales (*à la* Jack Mytton, who was one of Momus's favourite heroes), ending with a descent upon Aberduly and Miss Marie.

It was in pursuance of this scheme, that three days later, at the impossible hour of seven in the morning, the early milkmen in Chelsea were startled by an unusual spectacle. This was the arrival at Mr. Barry's door of the hansom, resplendent in black and yellow, drawn tandem by Tom Pavier's mare "Peg," and a well-matched bay horse, while Tom himself, in an amazing suit of light check, a red rose in his button-hole, handled the reins to masterly effect. All this Momus, already up and in the act of shaving his pink cheeks, saw from his window; and he found the sight inspiring. Meanwhile Tom might have been observed dismounting, when, having found two delighted loafers to hold his horses, he made his way into the house, humming the familiar hunting ditty from "Jack Straw":

" I hear the horn a blowin',  
And off they'll soon be throwin',  
But first of all I'm goin'  
    To taste the hunting cup :  
A cup 'tis, well compounded,  
As I have always found it,  
That many a care have drowned—  
    But Yoicks ! the hunt is up !"

On arriving upstairs, he found a breakfast table laid for three in Barry's room, but as that hero did not at once appear, he threw up the window, and lighting a pipe, sat himself down on the window-sill. From this point of vantage he regarded with great satisfaction the inspiring sight below, where Peg and her leader stood pawing and fretting to be off, their bright harness and bay coats a gleam in the early sun. He was still absorbed in this satisfying contemplation, when Momus, descending, found him there; whereupon, as Sinister delayed to appear, they proceeded to breakfast. Ere they finished, another hansom rattled up, and their party was complete; and as the clock struck eight, they started on their journey, the hansom and its team deploying gracefully on the embankment, ere it went off at a smart pace westward. How their journey thereafter startled Oxford one day, Leamington another, and Shrewsbury on a third, may be better imagined than described. On the fourth day, however, when they had crossed the Welsh border, there befell a climacteric adventure which is essential to their history.

On that afternoon, it was a Saturday, the last in July, Tom was whipping up his dusty horses with every intention of reaching the village of Croeslwyd

in time for dinner. There had been a great fair in the village on the day before, and various waggons of roundabouts, and other such rural amusements, met our adventurers from time to time. They had successfully passed several of these vehicles—a matter of some difficulty in a narrow country by-road—when, turning a corner, Tom found before him a steep descent of a quarter of a mile or less, ending at a narrow bridge over a small stream in the hollow. Down this Tom drove, with an insufficient brake, at a somewhat exciting pace, and about half-way down the hill, he and his two companions were startled by a rattle of wheels on the opposite bank, where the road turned sharply and disappeared amid some trees in the middle distance. At this turn now suddenly appeared a descending vehicle, which in colour far outshone the hansom, and in reckless speed quite equalled it. An ungainly chariot, with tarnished gold and green and red decorations, and of fantastic shape—evidently some part of a travelling show! Drawn by a wildly galloping white horse, of a gaunt appearance, it was driven by a little rubicund man, in a grey overcoat, with another smaller man, in the grotesque attire and white paint of a circus clown, and an immense negro, clad in irreproachable black, at his side. Thus accoutred, the chariot-in-advance of Mr. Hopkins' "Combination Zoological Circus and Panopticon," dawned on our three heroes in its ungainly descent as a very doubtful apparition indeed. For, obviously, something had gone wrong. The clown was distorting his white paint by his cries, while the grey man tugged desperately at the reins as the caravan charged the bridge. Tom Pavier, for his part, as the hansom, too, neared the bottom of the hill, and the bridge grew imminent, waved them aside with wild gestures. All in vain. He might as well have waved the wayside trees out of the way.

In another second, as the two vehicles made desperate assay together of the narrow bridge, there was a frightful crash, and circus-chariot and hansom, men and horses, were chaos under a cloud of dust. At the collision, Tom's leader had swerved, broken the traces, and leapt into the stream below. Peg had gone down heavily, and the hansom, after a wild twirl, had fallen over on its side against the parapet. As for the chariot, it fell into a grotesque rattling ruin of plank and pasteboard, wheel and shaft, amid which the grey, white, and black figures of the unfortunate Mr. Hopkins, the clown, and the gentleman of colour, sprawled disastrously. It was not a dignified catastrophe; as Sinister felt when, rescuing himself, and feeling his left arm ruefully, he looked round. Except the clown, however, everybody was good-humoured; he alone fell to a furious vituperation of Tom Pavier, who took no notice as he first liberated

his hapless mare from the ruins, and got her on to her feet, and then ran to his other horse, which lay half in the stream below with a broken leg.

“What’s to be done?” he cried out to the party above.

Whereupon the gentleman of colour, who had been bandaging a damaged knee with a great unconcern, limped down from the bridge, and drew a Colt’s revolver from his breast-pocket. This he discharged, on a nod from Tom, into the poor beast’s brain. In other ways, and in spite of his bandaged and seriously damaged leg, he proved the most capable man of the six. He directed the operation of drawing the cracked shell of the hansom, which was an irretrievable ruin, off the bridge, and then set to, to throw the ruins of the circus chariot over the parapet on to the grass below. He, too, it was who intervened when the dispute over the rights and wrongs of the catastrophe had made Momus all but hysterical, and the little grey man irreligious; and arranged a small transaction by which Momus paid out five yellow coins to the credit of the “Combination Zoological Circus and Panopticon.” When, within an hour, Momus and Sinister were setting off as a relief party for Croeslwyd, to further arrange for the disposition of the wreckage, he presented a card to Momus with some ceremony. This card Momus carefully treasured up for possible future use, in case he might come to require such a functionary some day in some spectacular way. It was inscribed :

PROFESSOR CHARLIE JONSON,  
LION-KING.

[*Hopkins’ Circus.*]

Momus and Sinister made a sorry-looking couple enough as they limped up painfully at last to the Castle Inn. When they had repaired their costumes and their nerves a little under its hospitable roof, they must needs, with returning energy, fall to quarrelling over their predicament. Sinister, long-suffering as he was, felt mortified for once. Like other humorists, used to serving up other people in a comic dish, he disliked extremely to be made comic himself. A hundred times he confounded himself for having given the fates that make for ridicule such an absurd opportunity. As it was, his precious top-hat, smashed out of all dignity, that had barely served to cover his head on the way from the scene of accident, might well serve as a symbol of his state of mind

Momus was unfeeling enough to chuckle over it as he played a dusty tattoo with his fingers on its indented crown. This was the finishing stroke. When now Momus went on to carol forth, with provoking light-heartedness, a favourite stave from "Cinderella":

"The world is full of girls, I know,  
But only one's the perfect girl,  
To set the sorry world aglow  
With a laughing eye and a golden curl—  
Ah, Cinderella!"

Sinister lost patience altogether.

"Damn Cinderella!" he exclaimed, and announced with some spleen that he did not mean to go on any further with the adventure; in fact, he proposed to go back to town forthwith. Momus scorned the idea. The late catastrophe had only served to excite him, and his blood was up.

"Do as you like!" he said, with a certain impudence of tone, and a characteristic grimace and roll of the head, "I'm going on!" And he sang again, turning Sinister's unfortunate hat over contemptuously on the table:

"With a laughing eye and a golden curl—  
Ah, Cinderella!"

When Tom arrived at the Castle Inn, a couple of hours later, conveyed thither, together with sundry relics of the hansom, in an old chaise which had been sent after him, behind which the hapless Peg painfully limped, it was to find Sinister alone. Momus had disappeared, incontinently gone on to Aberduly, without a doubt. Sinister was still sulky; for the idea of a Sunday alone with Tom in this uninspiring inn did not tend to restore his equanimity. As for the rest of the actors lately figuring on the highway—the circus proprietor and his two collaborateurs—they had gone off in an opposite direction, to appear no more in these pages.

Sunday broke dull and wet, to add to Sinister's disgust and ennui, and his bruised shoulder had grown painful. But there was no possible escape, and his only solace lay in an old punch-bowl, which Tom had discovered and filled. But even this proved unsatisfying, and both were in the depths of a profound boredom, listening to the melancholy drip of the rain, when as the clock struck ten, the sound of a horse's hoofs without announced a late arrival.

A few seconds more, and in walked Momus, streaming from the rain. His usual jaunty step was stiff, and his face, beneath its round comic lines, had an expression of utter weariness.

"You'd be tired if you were me!" he said, as they exclaimed at his plight. "I've ridden fifty miles in the rain, on a beast bewitched, since breakfast!"

Since his knowledge of the horse as a beast of burden had been confined hitherto to that gained inside a London hansom, this ride of Momus might, in fact, be considered a remarkable performance.

"Oh, poor Momus! Give him some punch!" cried Sinister.

Tom administered a rousing tumbler, and they set the exhausted hero to steam by the fire.

The ride was, in truth, only one of many singular incidents through which fate had been educating him since he left this room and Sinister yesterday. While he sat there, with the consciousness that his two companions were waiting to hear his story, these incidents revived themselves, and formed a fantastic jumble in his head. As he had gone out singing, with "Ah Cinderella!" for refrain, unabashed by accident, still following fast on the heels of romance; so he had kept his way to the end, though the fates declared against him at every turn. He had taken train, the train was blocked for an hour. That delay over, he had hired a pony for the next stage of his journey, although he did not know how to ride. The pony, in turn, proved an incorrigible malingerer, and deceived its perplexed rider by pretending to go dead lame. Then, hating walking, Momus had walked ten miles, along mountain roads and through mountain solitudes, which, sublime as they really were, seemed to him only dreary. Thus that fate which, he had been used to say, had learnt something of humour at last from observing his antics, had played pranks with him all the way, without breaking for a moment his romantic spirit of adventure. He went through with his romance, it must be owned, in a more than comic heroism. It came to an end at last, however, when he reached on the previous evening the "Aberduly Arms," a huge and preposterous modern erection on the seashore at Aberduly, once one of the shyest watering-places on the Welsh coast. At the "Aberduly Arms," you may find, if you will, the famous, the lyrical and loquacious, Mr. John Jones, proprietor of the establishment, formerly, as everyone knows, the leading tenor in the "Imperial English Comic Opera Company," in which, as Momus could not fail to remember, Miss Marie Barrone had made her *début* in the provinces some years before the time of our story.

The first thing that caught Momus's eye, in fact, in the entrance-hall of the hotel, was a great red-and-blue placard, announcing "A Grand Concert," in the Aberduly Assembly Rooms, on the following evening. On this poster, the name of the distinguished Mr. John Jones figured conspicuously in large

red capitals. In still larger blue letters, betokening an even greater musical fame, was blazoned forth a name that gave Momus a thrill,—the name of MISS MARIE BARRONE: *The Celebrated London Soprano, from the Folly Theatre!!*

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It was a copy of this poster which Momus, recollecting himself as he sipped his punch, while Sinister and Tom Pavier looked on inquiringly, drew from his pocket. As he unfolded it, he smiled ruefully.

“I’ve got a little tale to tell you!” he said; “but first of all I want you to drink the health of ——”

“Mrs. Momus!” promptly interrupted Tom Pavier, rising and preparing to drink the toast with unselfish fervour.

But Momus shook his head, and smiled a significant smile.

“Lady Merthen!” said Sinister, then, in his turn, with an accent of inevitable conviction, as he caught up his glass.

“No!” said Momus with a grimace, “Mrs. John Jones!”

ERNEST RHYS.