

Devil-Puzzlers

By Frederick Beecher Perkins

It will not do at all to disbelieve in the existence of a personal devil. It is not so many years ago that one of our profoundest divines remarked with indignation upon such disbelief. "No such person?" cried the doctor with energy. "Don't tell me! I can hear his tail snap and crack about amongst the churches any day!"

And if the enemy is, in truth, still as vigorously active among the sons of God as he was in the days of Job (that is to say, in the time of Solomon, when, as the critics have found out, the Book of Job was written), then surely still more is he vigilant and sly in his tricks for foreclosing his mortgages upon the souls of the wicked.

And once more: still more than ever is his personal appearance probable in these latter days. The everlasting tooting of the wordy Cumming has proclaimed the end of all things for a quarter of a century; and he will surely see his prophecy fulfilled if he can only keep it up long enough. But, though we discredit the sapient Second-Adventist as to the precise occasion of the diabolic avatar, has there not been a strange coincidence between his noisy declarations, and other evidences of an approximation of the spiritual to the bodily sphere of life? Is not this same quarter of a century that of the Spiritists? Has it not witnessed the development of Od? And of clairvoyance? And have not the doctrines of ghosts, and re-appearances of the dead, and of messages from them, risen into a prominence entirely new, and into a coherence and semblance at least of fact and fixed law such as was never known before? Yea, verily. Of all times in the world's history, to reject out of one's beliefs either good spirits or bad, angelology or diabolology, chief good being, or chief bad being, this is the most improper.

Dr. Hicok was trebly liable to the awful temptation, under which he had assuredly fallen, over and above the fact that he was a prig, which makes one feel the more glad that he was so handsomely come up with in the end; such a prig that everybody who knew him, invariably called him (when he wasn't by) Hicokalorum. This charming surname had been conferred on him by a crazy old fellow with whom he once got into a dispute. Lunatics have the most awfully tricky ways of dodging out of pinches in reasoning; but Hicok knew too much to know that; and so he acquired his fine title to teach him one thing more.

Trebly liable, we said. The three reasons are,—

1. He was foreign-born.
2. He was a Scotchman.
3. He was a physician and surgeon.

The way in which these causes operated was as follows (I wish it were allowable to use Artemas Ward's curiously satisfactory vocable "thusly:" like Mrs. Wiggle's soothing syrup, it "supplies a real want"):—

Being foreign-born, Dr. Hicok had not the unfailing moral stamina of a native American, and therefore was comparatively easily beset by sin. Being, secondly, a Scotchman, he was not only thoroughly conceited, with a conceit as immovable as the Bass Rock, just as other folks sometimes are, but, in particular, he was perfectly sure of his utter mastery of metaphysics, logic and dialectics, or, as he used to call it, with a

snobbish Teutonicalization, *dialektik*. Now, in the latter two, the Scotch can do something, but in metaphysics they are simply imbecile; which quality, in the inscrutable providence of God, has been joined with an equally complete conviction of the exact opposite. Let not man, therefore, put those traits asunder—not so much by reason of any divine ordinance, as because no man in his senses would try to convince a Scotchman—or anybody else, for that matter.

Thirdly, he was a physician and surgeon; and gentle men of this profession are prone to become either thoroughgoing materialists, or else implicit and extreme Calvinistic Presbyterians, “of the large blue kind.” And they are, moreover, positive, hard-headed, bold, and self-confident. So they have good need to be. Did not Majendie say to his students, “Gentlemen, disease is a subject which physicians know nothing about”?

So the doctor both believed in the existence of a personal devil, and believed in his own ability to get the upper band of that individual in a tournament of the wits. Ah, he learned better by terrible experience! The doctor was a dry-looking little chap, with sandy hair, a freckled face, small grey eyes, and absurd white eye-brows and eyelashes, which made him look as if he had finished off his toilet with just a light flourish from the dredging-box. He was erect of carriage, and of a prompt, ridiculous alertness of step and motion, very much like that of Major Wellington De Boots. And his face commonly wore a kind of complacent serenity such as the Hindoos ascribe to Buddha. I know a little snappish dentist's-goods dealer up town, who might be mistaken for Hicok-alorum any day.

Well, well—what had the doctor done? Why—it will sound absurd, probably, to some unbelieving people—but really Dr. Hicok confessed the whole story to me himself: he had made a bargain with the Evil One! And indeed he was such an uncommonly disagreeable-looking fellow, that, unless on some such hypothesis, it is impossible to imagine how he could have prospered as he did. He gained patients, and cured them too; made money; invested successfully; bought a brown-stone front—a house, not a wiglet—then bought other real estate; began to put his name on charity subscription lists, and to be made vice-president of various things.

Chiefest of all,—it must have been by some superhuman aid that Dr. Hicok married his wife, the then and present Mrs. Hicok. Dear me! I have described the doctor easily enough. But how infinitely more difficult it is to delineate Beauty than the Beast: did you ever think of it? All I can say is, that she is a very lovely woman now; and she must have been, when the doctor married her, one of the loveliest creatures that ever lived—a lively, graceful, bright-eyed brunette, with thick fine long black hair, pencilled delicate eyebrows, little pink ears, thin high nose, great astonished brown eyes, perfect teeth, a little rosebud of a mouth, and a figure so extremely beautiful that nobody believed she did not pad—hardly even the artists who—those of them at least who work faithfully in the life-school—are the very best judges extant of truth in costume and personal beauty. But, furthermore, she was good, with the innocent unconscious goodness of a sweet little child; and of all feminine charms—even beyond her supreme grace of motion—she possessed the sweetest, the most resistless—a lovely voice; whose tones, whether in speech or song, were perfect in sweetness, and with a strange penetrating sympathetic quality and at the same time with the most wonderful half-delaying completeness of articulation and modulation, as if she enjoyed the sound of her own music. No doubt she did; but it was unconsciously, like a bird. The voice was so sweet, the great loveliness

and kindness of soul it expressed were so deep, that, like every exquisite beauty, it rayed forth a certain sadness within the pleasure it gave. It awakened infinite, indistinct emotions of beauty and perfection—infinite longings.

It's of no use to tell me that such a spirit—she really ought not to be noted so low down as amongst human beings—that such a spirit could have been made glad by becoming the yoke-fellow of Hicok-alorum, by influences exclusively human. No!—I don't believe it—I won't believe it—it can't be believed. I can't convince you, of course, for you don't know her; but if you did, along with the rest of the evidence, and if your knowledge was like mine, that from the testimony of my own eyes and ears and judgment—you would know, just as I do, that the doctor's possession of his wife was the keystone of the arch of completed proof on which I found my absolute assertion that he had made that bargain.

He certainly had! A most characteristic transaction too; for while, after the usual fashion, it was agreed by the “party of the first part,”—viz., Old Scratch—that Dr. Hicok should succeed in whatever he undertook during twenty years, and by the party of the second part, that at the end of that time the D should fetch him in manner and form as is ordinarily provided, yet there was added a peculiar clause. This was, that, when the time came for the doctor to depart, he should be left entirely whole and unharmed, in mind, body, and estate, provided he could put to the Devil three consecutive questions, of which either one should be such that that cunning spirit could not solve it on the spot.

So for twenty years Dr. Hicok lived and prospered, and waxed very great. He did not gain one single pound avoirdupois however, which may perchance seem strange, but is the most natural thing in the world. Who ever saw a little, dry, wiry, sandy, freckled man, with white eyebrows, that did grow fat? And besides, the doctor spent all his leisure time in hunting up his saving trinity of questions; and hard study, above all for such a purpose, is as sure an anti-fattener as Banting.

He knew the Scotch metaphysicians by heart already, *ex-officio* as it were; but he very early gave up the idea of trying to fool the Devil with such mud-pie as that. Yet be it understood, that he found cause to except Sir William Hamilton from the muddle-headed crew. He chewed a good while, and pretty hopefully, upon the Quantification of the Predicate; but he had to give that up too, when he found out how small and how dry a meat rattled within the big, noisy nut-shell. He read Saint Thomas Aquinas, and Peter Dens, and a cartload more of old casuists, Romanist and Protestant.

He exhausted the learning of the Development Theory. He studied and experimented up to the existing limits of knowledge on the question of the Origin of Life, and then poked out alone, as much farther as he could, into the ineffable black darkness that is close at the end of our noses on that, as well as most other questions. He hammered his way through the whole controversy on the Freedom of the Will. He mastered the whole works of Mrs. Henry C. Carey on one side, and of two hundred and fifty English capitalists and American college professors on the other, on the question of Protection or Free Trade. He made, with vast pains, an extensive collection of the questions proposed at debating societies and college-students' societies with long Greek names. The last effort was a failure. Dr. Hicok had got the idea, that, from the spontaneous activity of so many free young geniuses, many wondrous and suggestive thoughts would be born. Having, however, tabulated his collection, he found, that, among all these innumerable gymnasia of intellect, there were only seventeen questions debated! The doctor read me a curious little

memorandum of his conclusions on this unexpected fact, which will perhaps be printed some day.

He investigated many other things too; for a sharp-witted little Presbyterian Scotch doctor, working to cheat the Devil out of his soul, can accomplish an amazing deal in twenty years. He even went so far as to take into consideration mere humbugs; for, if he could cheat the enemy with a humbug, why not? The only pain in that case, would be the mortification of having stooped to an inadequate adversary—a foeman unworthy of his steel. So he weighed such queries as the old scholastic *brocard*, *An chimoera bombinans in vacuo devorat secundas intentiones?* and that beautiful moot point wherewith Sir Thomas More silenced the challenging school-men of Bruges, *An averia carrucae capta in vetito nomio sint irreplegibilia?*

He glanced a little at the subject of conundrums; and among the chips from his workshop is a really clever theory of conundrums. He has a classification and discussion of them, all his own, and quite ingenious and satisfactory, which divides them into answerable and unanswerable, and, under each of these, into resemblant and differential.

For instance: let the four classes be distinguished with the initials of those four terms, A. R., A. D., U. R., and U. D.; you will find that the Infinite Possible Conundrum (so to speak) can always be reduced under one of those four heads. Using symbols, as they do in discussing syllogism—indeed, by the way, a conundrum is only a jocular variation in the syllogism, an intentional fallacy for fun (read Whately's *Logic*, Book III., and see if it isn't so)—using symbols, I say, you have these four “figures:”—

I. (A. R.) Why is A like B? (answerable): as, Why is a gentleman who gives a young lady a young dog, like a person who rides rapidly up hill? A. Because he gives a gallop up (gal-a-pup).

Sub-variety; depending upon a violation of something like the “principle of excluded middle,” a very fallacy of a fallacy; such as the ancient “nigger-minstrel!” case, Why is an elephant like a brick? A. Because neither of them can climb a tree.

II. (A. D.) Why is A *unlike* B? (answerable) usually put thus: What is the difference between A and B? (Figure I., if worded in the same style, would become: “What is the similarity between A and B?): as, What is the difference between the old United-States Bank and the Fulton Ferry-boat signals in thick weather? A. One is a fog whistle, and the other is a Whig fossil.

III. (U. R.) Why is A like B? (unanswerable): as Charles Lamb's well-known question, Is that your own hare, or a wig?

IV. (U. D.) Why is A *unlike* B? (unanswerable): i. e., What is the difference, &c., as, What is the difference between a fac simile and a sick family; or between hydraulics and raw-hide licks?

But let me not diverge too far into frivolity. All the hopefully difficult questions Dr. Hicok set down and classified. He compiled a set of rules on the subject, and indeed developed a whole philosophy of it, by which he struck off, as soluble, questions or classes of them. Some he thought out himself; others were now and then answered in some learned book, that led the way through the very heart of one or another of his biggest mill-stones.

So it was really none too much time that he had; and, in truth, he did not actually decide upon his three questions, until just a week before the fearful day when he was to put them.

It came at last, as every day of reckoning surely comes; and Dr. Hicok, memorandum in hand, sat in his comfortable library about three o'clock on one beautiful warm summer afternoon, as pale as a sheet, his heart thumping away like Mr. Krupp's biggest steam-hammer at Essen, his mouth and tongue parched and feverish, a pitcher of cold water at hand from which he sipped and sipped, though it seemed as if his throat repelled it into "the globular state," or dispersed it into steam, as red-hot iron does. Around him were the records of the vast army of doubters and quibblers in whose works he had been hunting, as a traveller labours through a jungle, for the deepest doubts, the most remote inquiries.

Sometimes, with that sort of hardihood, rather than reason, which makes a desperate man try to believe by his will what he longs to know to be true, Dr. Hicok would say to himself, "I know I've got him!" And then his heart would seem to fall out of him, it sank so suddenly, and with so deadly a faintness, as the other side of his awful case loomed before him, and he thought, "But if—?" He would not finish *that* question; he could not. The furthest point to which he could bring himself was that of a sort of icy outer stiffening of acquiescence in the inevitable.

There was a ring at the street-door. The servant brought in a card, on a silver salver.

MR. APOLLO LYON

"Show the gentleman in," said the doctor. He spoke with difficulty; for the effort to control his own nervous excitement was so immense an exertion, that he hardly had the self-command and muscular energy even to articulate.

The servant returned, and ushered into the library a handsome, youngish, middle-aged and middle-sized gentleman, pale, with large melancholy black eyes, and dressed in the most perfect and quiet style.

The doctor arose, and greeted his visitor with a degree of steadiness and politeness that did him the greatest credit.

"How do you do, sir?" he said: "I am happy"—but it struck him that he wasn't, and he stopped short.

"Very right, my dear sir," replied the guest, in a voice that was musical but perceptibly sad, or rather patient in tone. "Very right; how hollow those formulas are! I hate all forms and ceremonies! But I am glad to see *you*, doctor. Now, that is really the fact."

No doubt! "Divil doubt him!" as an Irishman would say. So is a cat glad to see a mouse in its paw. Something like these thoughts arose in the doctor's mind; he smiled as affably as he could, and requested the visitor to be seated.

"Thanks!" replied he, and took the chair which the doctor moved up to the table for him. He placed his hat and gloves on the table. There was a brief pause, as might happen if any two friends sat down at their ease for a chat on matters and things in general. The visitor turned over a volume or two that lay on the table.

"The Devil," he read from one of them; "His Origin, Greatness, and Decadence. By the Rev. A. Réville, D.D."

"Ah!" he commented quietly. "A Frenchman, I observe. If it had been an Englishman, I should fancy he wrote the book for the sake of the rhyme in the title. Do you know, doctor, I fancy that incredulity of his will substitute one dash for the two periods in the reverend gentleman's degree! I know no one greater condition of success in some lines of operation, than to have one's existence thoroughly disbelieved in."

The doctor forced himself to reply: "I hardly know how I came to have the book here. Yet he does make out a pretty strong case. I confess I would like to be certified that he is right. Suppose you allow yourself to be convinced?" And the poor fellow grinned: it couldn't be called a smile.

"Why, really, I'll look into it. I've considered the point though, not that I'm sure I could choose. And you know, as the late J. Milton very neatly observed, one would hardly like to lose one's intellectual being, 'though full of pain;'" and he smiled, not unkindly but sadly, and then resumed: "A Bible too. Very good edition. I remember seeing it stated that a professional person made it his business to find errors of the press in one of the Bible Society's editions—this very one, I think; and the only one he could discover was a single 'wrong font.' Very accurate work—very!"

He had been turning over the leaves indifferently as he spoke, and laid the volume easily back. "Curious old superstition that," he remarked, "that certain personages were made uncomfortable by this work! And he gave the doctor a glance, as much as to ask, in the most delicate manner in the world, "Did you put that there to scare me with?"

I think the doctor blushed a little. He had not really expected, you know,—still, in case there should be any prophylactic influence—? No harm done, in any event; and that was precisely the observation made by the guest.

"No harm done, my dear fellow!" he said, in his calm, quiet, musical voice. No good, either, I imagine they both of them added to themselves.

There is an often repeated observation, that people under the pressure of an immeasurable misery or agony seem to take on a preternaturally sharp vision for minute details, such as spots in the carpet, and sprigs in the wall-paper, threads on a sleeve, and the like. Probably the doctor felt this influence. He had dallied a little, too, with the crisis; and so did his visitor—from different motives, no doubt; and, as he sat there, his eye fell on the card that had just been brought to him.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "but might I ask a question about your card?"

"Most certainly, doctor: what is it?"

"Why—it's always a liberty to ask questions about a gentleman's name, and we Scotchmen are particularly sensitive on the point; but I have always been interested in the general subject of patronomatology."

The other, by a friendly smile and a deprecating wave of the hand, renewed his welcome to the doctor's question.

"Well, it's this: How did you come to decide upon that form of name—Mr. Apollo Lyon?"

"Oh! just a little fancy of mine. It's a newly-invented variable card, I believe they call it. There's a temporary ink arrangement. It struck me it was liable to abuse in case of an assumption of *aliases*; but perhaps that's none of my business. You can easily take off the upper name, and another one comes out underneath. I'm always interested in inventions. See."

And as the text, "But they have sought out many inventions," passed through Dr. Hicok's mind, the other drew forth a white handkerchief, and, rubbing the card in a careless sort of way, laid it down before the doctor. Perhaps the strain on the poor doctor's nerves was unsteady him by this time: he may not have seen right; but he seemed to see only one name, as if compounded from the former two.

APOLLYON

And it seemed to be in red ink instead of black; and the lines seemed to creep and throb and glow, as if the red were the red of fire, instead of vermilion. But red is an extremely trying colour to the eyes. However, the doctor, startled as he was, thought best not to raise any further queries, and only said, perhaps with some difficulty, "Very curious, I'm sure!"

"Well, doctor," said Mr. Lyon, or whatever his name was, "I don't want to hurry you, but I suppose we might as well have our little business over?"

"Why, yes. I suppose you wouldn't care to consider any question of compromises or substitutes?"

"I fear it's out of the question, really," was the reply, most kindly in tone, but with perfect distinctness.

There was a moment's silence. It seemed to Dr. Hicok as if the beating of his heart must fill the room, it struck so heavily, and the blood seemed to surge with so loud a rush through the carotids up past his ears. "Shall I be found to have gone off with a rush of blood to the head?" he thought to himself. But—it can very often be done by a resolute effort—he gathered himself together as it were, and with one powerful exertion mastered his disordered nerves. Then he lifted his memorandum, gave one glance at the sad, calm face opposite him, and spoke.

"You know they're every once in a while explaining a vote, as they call it, in Congress. It don't make any difference, I know; but it seems to me as if I should put you more fully in possession of my meaning, if I should just say a word or two, about the reasons for my selection."

The visitor bowed with his usual air of pleasant acquiescence.

"I am aware," said Dr. Hicok, "that my selection would seem thoroughly commonplace to most people. Yet nobody knows better than you do, my dear sir, that the oldest questions are the newest. The same vitality which is so strong in them, as to raise them as soon as thought begins, is infinite, and maintains them as long as thought endures. Indeed, I may say to you frankly, that it is by no means on novelty, but rather on antiquity, that I rely."

The doctor's hearer bowed with an air of approving interest. "Very justly reasoned," he observed. The doctor went on—

"I have, I may say—and under the circumstances I shall not be suspected of conceit—made pretty much the complete circuit of unsolved problems. They class exactly as those questions do which we habitually reckon as solved: under the three subjects to which they relate— God, the intelligent creation, the unintelligent creation. Now, I have selected my questions accordingly—one for each of those divisions. Whether I have succeeded in satisfying the conditions necessary will appear quickly. But you see that I have not stooped to any quibbling, or begging either. I have sought to protect myself by the honourable use of a masculine reason."

"Your observations interest me greatly," remarked the audience. "Not the less so, that they are so accurately coincident with my own habitual lines of thought—at least, so far as I can judge from what you have said. Indeed, suppose you had called upon me to help you prepare insoluble problems. I was bound, I suppose, to comply to the best of my ability; and, if I had done so, those statements of yours are thus far the very preface I

supplied—I beg your pardon—should have supplied—you with. I fancy I could almost state the questions. Well?”—

All this was most kind and complimentary; but somehow it did not encourage the doctor in the least. He even fancied that he detected a sneer, as if his interlocutor had been saying, “Flutter away, old bird! That was *my bait* that you have been feeding on: you’re safe enough; it is my net that holds you.

“*First Question,*” said Dr. Hicok, with steadiness: “Reconcile the foreknowledge and the fore-ordination of God with the free will of man?”

“I thought so, of course,” remarked the other. Then he looked straight into the doctor’s keen little grey eyes with his deep melancholy black ones, and raised his slender forefinger. “Most readily. The reconciliation is *your own conscience*, doctor! Do what you know to be right, and you will find that there is nothing to reconcile—that you and your Maker have no debates to settle!”

The words were spoken with a weighty solemnity and conviction that were even awful. The doctor had a conscience, though he had found himself practically forced, for the sake of success, to use a good deal of constraint with it—in fact, to lock it up, as it were, in a private mad-house, on an unfounded charge of lunacy. But the obstinate thing would not die, and would not lose its wits; and now all of a sudden, and from the very last quarter where it was to be expected, came a summons before whose intensity of just requirement no bolts could stand. The doctor’s conscience walked out of her prison, and came straight up to the field of battle, and said—

“Give up the first question.”

And he obeyed.

“I confess it,” he said. “But how could I have expected a great basic truth both religiously and psychologically so, from—from *you?*”

“Ah! my dear sir,” was the reply, “you have erred in *that* line of thought, exactly as many others have. The truth is one and the same, to God, man, and devil.”

“*Second Question,*” said Dr. Hicok. “Reconcile the development theory, connection of natural selection and sexual relation, with the responsible immortality of the soul.”

“Unquestionably,” assented the other, as if to say, “Just as I expected.”

“No theory of creation has any logical connection with any doctrine of immortality. What was the motive of creation?—that would be a question! If you had asked me *that!* But the question, ‘Where did men come from?’ has no bearing on the question, ‘Have they any duties now that they are here?’ The two are reconciled, because they do not differ. You can’t state any inconsistency between a yard measure and a fifty-six pound weight.”

The doctor nodded; he sat down; he took a glass of water, and pressed his hand to his heart. “Now, then,” he said to himself, “once more! If I have to stand this fifteen minutes I shall be in *some* other world!”

The door from the inner room opened; and Mrs. Hicok came singing in, carrying balanced upon her pretty pink fore-finger something or other of an airy bouquet-like fabric. Upon this she was looking with much delight.

“See, dear!” she said: “how perfectly lovely!”

Both gentlemen started, and the lady started too. She had not known of the visit; and she had not, until 2, this instant, seen that her husband was not alone.

Dr. Hicok, of course, had never given her the key to his skeleton-closet; for he was a shrewd man. He loved her too; and he thought he had provided for her absence during the ordeal. She had executed her shopping with unprecedented speed.

Why the visitor started, would be difficult to say. Perhaps her voice startled him. The happy music in it was enough like a beautified duplicate of his own thrilling sweet tones, to have made him acknowledge her for a sister—from heaven. He started, at any rate.

“Mr. Lyon, my wife,” said the doctor, somewhat at a loss. Mr. Lyon bowed, and so did the lady.

“I beg your pardon, gentlemen, I am sure,” she said. “I did not know you were busy, dear. There is a thundershower coming up. I drove home just in season.”

“Oh!—only a little wager, about some conundrums,” said the doctor. Perhaps he may be excused for his fib. He did not want to annoy her unnecessarily.

“Oh, do let me know!” she said, with much eagerness. “You know how I enjoy them!”

“Well,” said the doctor, “not exactly the ordinary kind. I was to puzzle my friend here with one out of three questions; and he has beaten me in two of them already. I’ve but one more chance.”

“Only one?” she asked, with a smile. “What a bright man your friend must be! I thought nobody could puzzle you, dear. Stay; let *me* ask the other question.”

Both the gentlemen started again: it was quite a surprise.

“But are you a married man, Mr. Lyon?” she asked, with a blush.

“No, madam,” was the reply, with a very graceful bow—“I have a mother, but no wife. Permit me to say, that, if I could believe there was a duplicate of yourself in existence, I would be as soon as possible.”

“Oh, what a gallant speech!” said the lady. “Thank you, sir, very much;” and she made him a pretty little curtsy. Then I am quite sure of my question, sir. Shall I, dear?”

The doctor quickly decided. “I am done for, any. how,” he reflected. “I begin to see that the old villain put those questions into my head himself. He hinted as much. I don’t know but I’d rather she would ask it. It’s better to have her kill me, I guess, than to hold out the carving-knife to him myself.”

“With all my heart, my dear,” said the doctor, “if Mr. Lyon consents.”

Mr. Lyon looked a little disturbed; but his manner was perfect, as he replied that he regretted to seem to disoblige, but that he feared the conditions of their little bet would not allow it.

“Beg your pardon, I’m sure, for being so uncivil,” said the lively little beauty, as she whispered a few words in her husband’s ear.

This is what she said—

“What’s mine’s yours, dear. Take it. Ask him—buz, buzz, buzz.”

The doctor nodded. Mrs. Hicok stood by him and smiled, still holding in her pretty pink fore-finger the frail shimmering thing just mentioned; and she gave it a twirl, so that it swung quite round. “Isn’t it a love of a bonnet?” she said.

“Yes,” the doctor said aloud. “I adopt the question.”

“*Third Question. Which is the front side of this?*”

And he pointed to the bonnet. It must have been a bonnet, because Mrs. Hicok called it so. I shouldn’t have known it from the collection of things in a kaleidoscope, bunched up together.

The lady stood before him, and twirled the wondrous fabric round and round, with the prettiest possible unconscious roguish look of defiance. The doctor's very heart stood still.

"Put it on, please," said Mr. Lyon, in the most innocent way in the world.

"Oh, no!" laughed she. "I know I'm only a woman, but I'm not *quite* so silly! But I'll tell you what: you men put it on, if you think that will help you!" And she held out the mystery to him.

Confident in his powers of discrimination, Mr. Lyon took hold of the fairy-like combination of sparkles and threads and feathers and flowers, touching it with that sort of timid apprehension that bachelors use with a baby. He stood before the glass over the mantelpiece. First he put it across his head with one side in front, and then with the other. Then he put it lengthways of his head, and tried the effect of tying one of the two couples of strings under each of his ears. Then he put it on, the other side up; so that it swam on his head like a boat, with a high mounted bow and stern. More than once he did all this, with obvious care and thoughtfulness.

Then he came slowly back, and resumed his seat. It was growing very dark, though they had not noticed it; for the thunder-shower had been hurrying on, and already its advanced guard of wind, heavy laden with the smell of the rain, could be heard, and a few large drops splashed on the window.

The beautiful wife of the doctor laughed merrily to watch the growing discomposure of the visitor, who returned the bonnet, with undiminished courtesy, but with obvious constraint of manner.

He looked down; he drummed on the table; he looked up; and both the doctor and the doctor's wife were startled at the intense sudden anger in the dark, handsome face. Then he sprang up, and went to the window. He looked out a moment, and then said— "Upon my word, that is going to be a very sharp squall! The clouds are *very* heavy. If I'm any judge, something will be struck. I can feel the electricity in the air.

While he still spoke, the first thunder-bolt crashed overhead. It was one of those close, sudden, overpoweringly awful explosions from clouds very heavy and very near, where the lightning and the thunder leap together out of the very air close about you, even as if you were in them. It was an unendurable burst of sound, and of the intense white sheety light of very near lightning. Dreadfully frightened, the poor little lady clung close to her husband. He, poor man, if possible yet more frightened, exhausted as he was by what he had been enduring, fainted dead away. Don't blame him: a cast-iron bull-dog might have fainted.

Mrs. Hicok, thinking that her husband was struck dead by the lightning, screamed terribly. Then she touched him; and, seeing what was really the matter, administered cold water from the pitcher on the table. Shortly he revived.

"Where is he?" he said.

"I don't know, love. I thought you were dead. He must have gone away. Did it strike the house?"

"Gone away? Thank God! Thank *you*, dear!" cried out the doctor.

Not knowing any adequate cause for so much emotion, she answered him—

"Now, love, don't you ever say women are not practical again. That was a practical question, you see. But didn't it strike the house? What a queer smell. Ozone: isn't that what you were telling me about? How funny, that lightning should have a smell!"

“I believe there’s no doubt of it,” observed Dr. Hicok.

Mr. Apollo Lyon had really gone, though just how or when, nobody could say.

“My dear,” said Dr. Hicok, “I do so like that bonnet of yours! I don’t wonder it puzzled him. It would puzzle the Devil himself. I firmly believe I shall call it your Devil-puzzler.”

But he never told her what the puzzle had been.