

## A Round-Up.

by H.C. Bunner

I.

When Rhodora Boyd—Rhodora Pennington that was—died in her little house, with no one near her but one old maid who loved her, the best society of the little city of Trega Falls indulged in more or less complacent reminiscence.

Except to Miss Wimple, the old maid, Rhodora had been of no importance at all in Trega for ten long years, and yet she had once given Trega society the liveliest year it had ever known. (I should tell you that Trega people never mentioned the Falls in connection with Trega. Trega was too old to admit any indebtedness to the Falls.)

Rhodora Pennington came to Trega with her invalid mother as the guest of her uncle, the Commandant at the Fort—for Trega was a garrison town. She was a beautiful girl. I do not mean a pretty girl: there were pretty girls in Trega—several of them. She was beautiful as the Queen of Sheba was beautiful—grand, perfect, radiantly tawny of complexion, without a flaw or a failing in her pulchritude—almost too fine a being for family use, except that she had plenty of hot woman's blood in her veins, and was an accomplished, delightful, impartial flirt.

All the men turned to her with such prompt unanimity that all the girls of Trega's best society joined hands in one grand battle for their prospective altars and hearths. From the June day when Rhodora came, to the Ash Wednesday of the next year when her engagement was announced, there was one grand battle, a dozen girls with wealth and social position and knowledge of the ground to help them, all pitted against one garrison girl, with not so much as a mother to back her—Mrs. Pennington being hopelessly and permanently on the sick-list.

Trega girls who had never thought of doing more than wait at their leisure for the local young men to marry them at *their* leisure now went in for accomplishments of every sort. They rode, they drove, they danced new dances, they read Browning and Herbert Spencer, they sang, they worked hard at archery and lawn-tennis, they rowed

and sailed and fished, and some of the more desperate even went shooting in the Fall, and in the Winter played billiards and—penny ante. Thus did they, in the language of a somewhat cynical male observer, back Accomplishments against Beauty.

The Shakspeare Club and the Lake Picnic, which had hitherto divided the year between them, were submerged in the flood of social entertainments. Balls and parties followed one another. Trega's square stone houses were lit up night after night, and the broad moss-grown gardens about them were made trim and presentable, and Chinese lanterns turned them into a fairy-land for young lovers.

It was a great year for Trega! The city had been dead, commercially, ever since the New York Central Railroad had opened up the great West; but the unprecedented flow of champagne and Apollinaris actually started a little business boom, based on the inferable wealth of Trega, and two or three of Trega's remaining firms went into bankruptcy because of the boom. And Rhodora Pennington did it all.

Have you ever seen the end of a sham-fight? You have been shouting and applauding, and wasting enough enthusiasm for a foot-ball match. And now it is all finished, and nothing has been done, and you go home somewhat ashamed of yourself, and glad only that the blue-coated participants must feel more ashamed of themselves; and the smell of the villainous saltpetre, that waked the Berserker in your heart an hour ago, is now noisome and disgusting, and makes you cough and sneeze.

Even so did the girls of Trega's best society look each in the face of the other, when Ash Wednesday ended that nine months of riot, and ask of each other, "What has it all been about?"

True, there were nine girls engaged to be married, and engagement meant marriage in Trega. Alma Lyle was engaged to Dexter Townsend, Mary Waite to John Lang, Winifred Peters to McCullom McIntosh, Ellen Humphreys to George Lister, Laura Visscher to William Jans, (Oranje boven!—Dutch blood stays Dutch,) Millicent Smith to Milo Smith, her cousin, Olive Cregier to Aleck Sloan, Aloha Jones, (niece of a Sandwich Islands missionary,) to Parker Hall, and Rhodora Pennington to Charley Boyd.

But all of these matches, save the last, would have been made in the ordinary course of things. The predestination of propinquity would have settled that. And even if Ellen Humphreys had married John Lang instead of George Lister, and George Lister had wedded Mary Waite—why, there would have been no great difference to admire or to deplore. The only union of the nine which came as a surprise to the community was the engagement of Rhodora to Charley Boyd. The beauty of the season had picked up the one crooked stick in the town—a dissolute, ne'er-do-well hanger-on of Trega's best society, who would never have seen a dinner-card if he had not been a genius at amateur theatricals, an artist on the banjo, and a half-bred Adonis.

There the agony ended for the other girls, and there it began for Rhodora Boyd. In less than a year, Boyd had deserted her. The Commandant was transferred to the Pacific Coast. Rhodora moved, with her mother, bed-ridden now, into a little house in the unfashionable outskirts of Trega. There she nursed the mother until the poor bed-ridden old lady died. Rhodora supported them both by teaching music and French at the Trega Seminary, down by the Falls. Morning and evening she went out and back on that weary, jingling horse-car line. She received the annual visits that her friends paid her, inspired by something between courtesy and charity, with her old stately simplicity and imperturbable calm; and no one of them could feel sure that she was conscious of their triumph or of her degradation. And she kept the best part of her stately beauty to the very last. In any other town she would have been taught what divorce-courts were made for; but Trega society was Episcopalian, and that communion is healthily and conservatively monogamous.

And so Rhodora Boyd, that once was Rhodora Pennington, died in her little house, and her pet old maid closed her eyes. And there was an end of Rhodora. Not quite an end, though.

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II.

SCENE.—*The Public Library of Trega.* MRS. GEORGE LISTER and MRS. JOHN LANG are seated in the Rotunda. MR. LIBRIVER, the Librarian, advances to them with books in his hands.

MRS. LISTER.—Ah, here comes Mr. Libriver, with my “Intellectual Life.” Thank you, Mr. Libriver—you are always so kind!

MRS. LANG.—And Mr. Libriver has brought me my “Status of Woman.” Oh, thank you, Mr. Libriver.

MR. LIBRIVER, *a thin young man in a linen duster, retires, blushing.*

MRS. LISTER.—Mr. Libriver does *so* appreciate women who are free from the bondage of the novel. Did you hear about poor Rhodora’s funeral?

MRS. LANG (*with a sweeping grasp at the intellectual side of the conversation*).—Oh, I *despise* love-stories. In the church? Oh, yes, I heard. (*Sweetly*). Dr. Homly told me. Doesn’t it seem just a little—ostentatious?

MRS. LISTER.—Ostentatious—but, do you know, my dear, there are to be eight pall-bearers!

MRS. LANG (*turning defeat into victory*).—No, I did *not* know. I don’t suppose that ridiculous old maid, that Miss Wimple, who seems to be conducting the affair, *dared* to tell *that* to Dr. Homly. And who are they?

MRS. LISTER (*with exceeding sweetness*).—Oh, I don’t know, dear. Only I met Mr. Townsend, and he told me that Dr. Homly had just told *him* that he was one of the eight.

MRS. LISTER.—Dexter Townsend! Why, it’s scandalous. Everybody knows that he proposed to her three times and that she threw him over. It’s an insult to—to—

MRS. LANG.—To poor dear Alma Townsend. I quite agree with you. I should like to know how she feels—if she understands what it means.

MRS. LISTER.—Well, if I were in her place—

*Enter* MRS. DEXTER TOWNSEND.

MRS. LANG. } MRS. LISTER. } Why, Alma!

MRS. TOWNSEND.—Why, Ellen! Why, Mary! Oh, I'm so glad to meet you both. I want you to lunch with me to-morrow at one o'clock. I do so *hate* to be left alone. And poor Rhodora Pennington—Mrs. Boyd, I mean—her funeral is at noon, and our three male protectors will have to go to the cemetery, and Mr. Townsend is just going to take a cold bite before he goes, and so I'm left to lunch—

MRS. LANG (*coldly*).—I don't think Mr. Lang will go to the cemetery—

MRS. LISTER.—There is no reason why Mr. Lister—

MRS. TOWNSEND.—But, don't you know?—They're all to be pall-bearers! They can't refuse, of course.

MRS. LANG (*icily*).—Oh, no, certainly not.

MRS. LISTER (*below zero*).—I suppose it is an unavoidable duty.

MRS. LANG.—Alma, is that your *old* Surah? What *did* you do to it?

MRS. LISTER.—They *do* dye things so wonderfully nowadays!

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SCENE.—A *Verandah in front of* MR. MCCULLOM MCINTOSH'S *house*. MRS. MCCULLOM MCINTOSH *seated, with fancy work*. *To her, enter* MR. WILLIAM JANS *and* MR. MILO SMITH.

MRS. MCINTOSH (*with effusion*).—Oh, Mr. Jans, I'm so delighted to see you! And Mr. Smith, too! I never expect to see you busy men at this time in the afternoon. And how is Laura?—and Millicent? Now *don't* tell me that you've come to say that you can't go fishing with Mr. McIntosh to-morrow! He'll be *so* disappointed!

MR. JANS.—Well, the fact is—

MRS. MCINTOSH.—You haven't been invited to be one of poor Rhodora Boyd's pall-bearers, have you? That would be *too* absurd. They say she's asked a regular party of her old conquests. Mr.

Libriver just passed here and told me—Mr. Lister and John Lang and Dexter Townsend—

MR. JANS.—Yes, and me.

MRS. MCINTOSH.—Oh, *Mr.* Jans! And they do say—at least Mr. Libriver says—that she hasn't asked a man who hadn't proposed to her.

MR. JANS (*Dutchily*).—I d'no. But I'm asked, and—

MRS. MCINTOSH.—You don't mean to tell me that Mr. Smith is asked, too? Oh, that would be *too* impossible. You don't mean to tell me, Mr. Smith, that you furnished one of Rhodora's scalps ten years ago?

MR. SMITH.—You ought to know, Mrs. McIntosh. Or—no—perhaps not. You and Mac were to windward of the centre-board on Townsend's boat when *I* got the mitten. I suppose you couldn't hear us. But we were to leeward, and Miss Pennington said she hoped *all* proposals didn't echo.

MRS. MCINTOSH.—The wretched c—— but she's dead. Well, I'm thankful Mac—Mr. McIntosh never *could* abide that girl. He always said she was horribly bad form—poor thing, I oughtn't to speak so, I suppose. She's been punished enough.

MR. SMITH.—I'm glad you think so, Mrs. McIntosh. I hope you won't feel it necessary to advise Mac to refuse her last dying request.

MRS. MCINTOSH.—What—

MR. SMITH.—Oh, well, the fact is, Mrs. McIntosh, we only stopped in to say that as McIntosh and all the rest of us are asked to be pallbearers at Mrs. Boyd's funeral, you might ask Mac if it wouldn't be just as well to postpone the fishing party for a week or so. If you remember—will you be so kind? Thank you, good afternoon.

MR. JANS.—Good afternoon, Mrs. McIntosh.

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SCENE.—*The Linen Closet, at the end of a sunny corridor in MR. ALEXANDER SLOAN'S house. MRS. SLOAN inspecting her sheets and pillow-cases. To her, enter BRIDGET, her housemaid, with a basket full of linen, the Trega Evening Eagle on the top, folded.*

MRS. SLOAN.—Why, that surely isn't one of the new napkins!—oh, it's the evening paper. Dear me! how near-sighted I am getting! (*Takes it and opens it.*) You may put those linen sheets on the top shelf, Bridget. We'll hardly need them again this Fall. Oh, Bridget—here's poor Mrs. Boyd's obituary. You used to live at Colonel Pennington's before she was married, didn't you?

BRIDGET.—I did that, Mum.

MRS. SLOAN (*reading*).—“Mrs. Boyd's pall-bearers are fitly chosen from the most distinguished and prominent citizens of Trega.” I'm sure I don't see why they should be. (*Reads.*) “Those invited to render the last honors to the deceased are Mr. George Lister—“

BRIDGET.—'Tis he was foriver at the house.

MRS. SLOAN (*reads*).—“Mr. John Lang—“

BRIDGET.—And him.

MRS. SLOAN (*reads*).—“Mr Dexter Townsend—“

BRIDGET.—And him, too.

MRS. SLOAN (*reads*).—“Mr. McIntosh, Mr. William Jans, Mr. Milo Smith—“

BRIDGET.—And *thim*. Mr. Smith was her siventh.

MRS. SLOAN.—Her *what*?

BRIDGET.—Her sivinth. There was eight of thim proposed to her in the wan week.

MRS SLOAN.—Why, Bridget! How can you possibly know *that*?

BRIDGET.—Sure, what does it mean whin a gintleman calls twice in th' wake an' thin stops like he was shot. An' who is the eight' gintleman to walk wid the corpse, Mum?

MRS. SLOAN.—That is all, Bridget. And those pillow-cases look shockingly! I never *saw* such ironing! (*Exit, hastily and sternly.*)

BRIDGET (*sola*).—Only siven of thim. Saints bless us! The pore lady'll go wan-sided to her grave!

SCENE.—*The Private Office of MR. PARKER HALL. MR. HALL writing. To him, enter MR. ALECK SLOAN.*

MR. SLOAN.—Ah, there, Parker!

MR. HALL.—Ah, there, Aleck! What brings *you* around so late in the day?

MR. SLOAN.—I just thought you might like to hear the names of the fellows Rhodora Pennington chose for her pall-bearers. (*Produces list.*)

MR. HALL (*sighs*).—Poor Rhodora! Too bad! Fire ahead.

MR. SLOAN (*reads list*).—“George Lister.”

MR. HALL.—*Ah!*

MR. SLOAN (*reads*).—“John Lang.”

MR. HALL.—Oh!

MR. SLOAN (*reads*).—“Dexter Townsend.”

MR. HALL.—Well!

MR. SLOAN (*reads*).—“McCullom McIntosh.”

MR. HALL.—Say!—

MR. SLOAN (*reads*).—“William Jans.”

MR. HALL.—The Deuce!

MR. SLOAN (*reads*).—“Milo Smith.”

MR. HALL.—Great Cæsar’s ghost! This is getting very personal!

MR. SLOAN—Yes. (*Reads, nervously.*) “Alexander Sloan.”

MR. HALL.—Whoo—o—o—o—up! You too?

MR. SLOAN (*reads*).—“*Parker Hall.*”

(*A long silence.*)

MR. HALL (*faintly*).—Oh, lord, she rounded us up, didn’t she? Say, Parker, can’t this thing be suppressed, somehow?

MR. SLOAN.—It’s in the evening paper.

(*Another long silence.*)

MR. HALL (*desperately*).—Come out and have a bottle with me?

MR. SLOAN.—I can’t. I’m going down to Bitts’s stable to buy that pony that Mrs. Sloan took such a shine to a month or so ago.

MR. HALL.—If *I* could get out of this for a pony—Oh, lord!