

# THE CASE OF MACINTYRE

By Louis Dodge

ILLUSTRATIONS BY WILSON C. DEXTER



WHEN Judge Blevins came over of an evening to sit on old Doctor Madden's front porch he did not cross the lawn which separated the two houses. Not by any means. Instead, he walked rather pompously down his own front walk and turned at right angles and marched over to the doctor's front walk, where he turned at right angles again; and then he approached the doctor's porch with much dignity. When he began that simple act of transit you might have supposed he was setting forth into a far country. It was his chief characteristic—to be excessively punctilious.

The doctor rather approved of this formal approach. The two men were a good deal alike, at least superficially, and during the thirty years they had resided side by side they had never taken the slightest liberty with each other, though—or perhaps I should say and therefore—they were on the friendliest and pleasantest terms possible.

They liked to look out upon their quiet and sheltered street of a summer evening; and each knew very well that the other regarded it as a thoroughly suitable and appropriate fact that he owned a beautiful home and had come, toward the latter decade or so of his life, to be beyond the reach of insecurity or financial stress. Barring something bordering on national bankruptcy neither need ever deny himself anything suitable or quietly luxurious as long as he lived.

They kept few secrets from each other. Each enjoyed the sound of his own voice and was quietly proud of what he conceived to be his correct and even elegant diction. And so in the course of thirty years they had had a good deal to say to each other, including not a little purely personal detail.

And yet Judge Blevins had never confided in Doctor Madden the somewhat

humiliating story of MacIntyre. He had often thought that he should do so, because he considered it a singularly good story; but it had been a painful matter for reflection for a long while—and it was a story which would keep. Indeed, it might be all the better for not being told until the indubitable sting of it had been lessened by time and meditation.

It was the day after one of the local organizations, returned from service in France, had paraded through the streets that the judge finally told the story of MacIntyre. It came out almost unawares at last. Something in the air seemed to suggest it and to release it.

Both men had been extraordinarily moved by the spectacle of the soldiers marching through the streets, where triumphal arches and much bunting and long tiers of seats had been arranged. The spectacle had been one to cast out sobriety of thought and selfish predilections. For the moment there was a strong feeling of democracy in the air and it was easy for the judge and the doctor to forget that, after all, life's rewards must be earned by unremitting application rather than by fortuitous merits, and that they were not to be distributed indiscriminately.

"Have you come back to earth again?" asked the judge, as he came up the doctor's walk and mounted the front steps. He was smiling rather grimly, if not a bit shamefacedly.

"Not altogether," replied the doctor. "It was really wonderful—didn't you think?"

"Yes. Yes, it certainly was."

"And somewhat unique, too; the mingling of our very best with—with the others. Of course the boys looked all alike—of an even quality, I mean. That is, if you hadn't the chance to look too closely. But it was the crowd, and—and the colonel's lady ranged alongside of Judy O'Grady, and all that sort of thing.

I've never seen an occasion when the customary social lines were so entirely obliterated."

The judge had seated himself by this time, and after permitting the doctor's asseveration to pass with no comment save a thoughtful silence, he remarked: "And yet I'm not so sure of this—this universal brotherhood idea being a sound one. At least, about its coming all of a sudden. Great reforms—or perhaps I should say transformations—must come by evolutionary processes and not because we've all been thrown together for the time being by a common cause. I was considering at dinner this evening—indeed, Mrs. Blevins and I were discussing—the—the case of MacIntyre."

The doctor's mind had taken hold of that expression, a common cause, and he had begun to frame a good sentence in which he meant to suggest to the judge that perhaps the time had come for men to look upon all causes as common causes, when he was disturbed by hearing the name which meant nothing to him—the name of MacIntyre.

"MacIntyre?" he echoed politely.

"A man I've met only a time or two. I think I'll tell you about him. The matter is—is illuminating. I met him the first time summer before last, when Mrs. Blevins and I were down in the country visiting the Maplesons."

The doctor's anchor caught again instantly. He knew the Maplesons quite well. The very name suggested impressive things—elegance, position, leisure, independence. The Maplesons owned a beautiful—even a famous—country estate, where they entertained many guests from the city every spring.

"Ah—the Maplesons," said the doctor.

The judge pondered a moment and then, rather surprisingly, he looked up and inquired: "You remember those great privet hedges which separate the grounds from the road?"

"Of course! A feature of the place, one might say. Very wonderful!"

The judge frowned faintly. "I suppose so," he said. "At least that formerly was my own impression. I admit that more recently I've wondered if they weren't slightly overdone. You know

they scarcely suggest nature. When a row of bushes has been made to assume the aspects of pillars and spheres and pyramids and such things, one may fairly inquire if a natural intention or destiny hasn't been too much interfered with."

The doctor considered this not very sympathetically, and before he had formulated an opinion he let the matter go, for the judge was continuing:

"At any rate, it was through those fantastic hedges of Mapleson's that I made the acquaintance of MacIntyre."

From next door floated the strains of a sonata played on a mechanical piano, and the judge's eyes confessed that he had postponed for a moment the story of MacIntyre to consider Mrs. Blevins's recently formed habit of operating her new player. He smiled apologetically. "Yes," he said, looking back to his own front porch, "Mrs. Blevins has become—er—addicted to the player-piano."

The doctor nodded cordially. "It sounds very nice," he said.

The judge was plainly relieved. He went back to his story. "You see," he resumed, "I was visiting the Maplesons just at the time when the hedges required trimming. And one day MacIntyre appeared on the scene. He had come down from Chicago. He had come all the way just to trim the Maplesons' hedges. And he began his work one forenoon—I remember it was a Saturday—when I was sitting on the front veranda reading the newspaper."

"I'd like to have seen him at it," declared the doctor, his eyes widening a little as he revisualized the marvels of the Mapleson hedges.

"You would indeed! You see, he was—or seemed—a truly remarkable man. An artist. The word really seems justified. He worked without taking measurements, without any aids to his eye and hand. And with a sort of quiet ecstasy, as if he were doing the thing he loved to do, and as if all the conditions were ideal. But that isn't all. I'd like to give you a correct impression of the man's appearance. You'd have taken him for a—a gentleman. He made a very fine figure, out there in the sun. He was perhaps fifty or so, with really noble lines: profile, head, shoulders. He



*Drawn by Wilson C. Dexter.*

Before I realized it . . . I was sitting beside him and he was telling me about his work.—Page 542.

was a well-groomed man. Handsome, I should have said. And there was something finely simple and unaffected in his manner—at least, while he moved about at his work.”

“Why not?” inquired the doctor, when the judge paused.

“Oh, no reason why he shouldn’t have been. Though you understand he was at Mapleson’s in the capacity of a—*a*—servitor. He had his quarters among the servants: ate with them, and so on. This in spite of the fact that by his appearance you’d have taken him for a governor or something of the sort who happened also to be an amateur gardener.”

“I see,” said the doctor musingly.

“While I watched him Mapleson joined me on the veranda. I called his attention to the man out on the lawn. And Mapleson brightened in a rather marked way. He told me the man’s name. He referred to him as a treasure, a discovery. He didn’t know anything about him at all save that he had been recommended by a friend as an expert at landscape gardening. He had come down from Chicago five consecutive springs to shape the hedge. He was a quiet, likable chap, and his charges were not at all unreasonable. That was Mapleson’s account of MacIntyre—and that was all.

“That would have been the end of the matter but for the fact that I didn’t feel like going to church the next day, which was a Sunday, and I was left practically alone about the house. The Maplesons and their other guests, including Mrs. Blevins, drove away to church soon after ten o’clock, leaving me to hold the fort, as Mapleson called back to me. And after they were gone I went rambling about the grounds—and came upon MacIntyre, sitting on a bench under an elm, around on the side lawn.

“I can’t say why it seemed rather difficult to retreat without speaking to him. As a matter of fact I found it impracticable. I bade him good-morning and stood a moment to exchange a word or two with him. And before I realized it—the man’s manner was really so courteous—I was sitting beside him and he was telling me about his work.

“He talked about his work very well indeed, and I didn’t realize until after-

ward that he didn’t say a word about himself. And presently we were talking about things in general. And I want to emphasize this: he talked well. I mean in a physical as well as a mental sense. His voice was peculiarly agreeable and his speech . . . there was a faint inflection of some sort, as if his parents had been Scotch, or perhaps Irish—or possibly Southern, here in America. His enunciation was most delicate and distinct. However, I don’t hope to convey an adequate impression of the fellow’s vocal charm. I wasn’t able to analyze it myself. And it began to develop presently that he was a very well-informed man—that his mind was stocked with rather ornamental things. He knew history and politics and—and even poetry. And these things cropped out not at all like exhibits, but rather as if you came upon them at their sources. You see, the man’s manner was so uncommonly pleasing. I haven’t said that he was wearing a fresh Palm Beach suit and a very fine Panama straw. But really you’d have said he was a gentleman. On the whole it was a relief to talk to him after two or three days of Mapleson. You know, Mapleson individually. . . . After all, if it weren’t for his money and the family name. . . .”

The doctor nodded.

“The upshot of it all was that I introduced myself formally when I got up, and said something—perhaps in a very general way—about wishing to meet him again. I must have said—yes, I did say—that if he ever happened to be in St. Louis I’d be glad if he’d drop in at my office. After all, I needn’t explain to you how those chance acquaintanceships in the country affect you.”

He uttered the last words so much in the manner of a confession of folly that the doctor put out a supporting hand, figuratively, by saying, “Quite natural, I’m sure!”

“Perhaps so. But, you see, about a year later he *did* drop in at my office.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed the doctor, as if he meant to imply that MacIntyre had certainly taken advantage of a wholly conventional and empty courtesy.

“Yes, he dropped in on me, just as I had invited him to do.”



The fellow's manner was a study in quiet elegance.—Page 544.

“And you found him—less prepossessing than he had seemed in the country?”

“Unfortunately—as it turned out—I did not. No, he stood the test of a new and rather disillusioning setting quite admirably. He was extraordinarily quiet, and you know quietude covers a multitude of defects. He was pleasantly deferential without being really—er—umble, as Uriah Heep would have said. Most intriguing of all, he was glad. It seemed to give him a deep-down pleasure to meet me again. And you know there's a fatal quality of flattery in an attitude like that. Beyond everything else, there was a hidden melancholy in his manner. As I recall our meeting it seems to me that this quality—which I had to guess at—was what prompted me to commit the foolish blunder of which I was almost immediately guilty.”

“You cashed a check for him, or signed a note—or something of the sort?”

The judge almost jumped with the

vigor of his negation. “No!” he exclaimed. “I see I'm not depicting the fellow well at all. There was no danger of anything like that. You see, I asked him if he had many acquaintances in St. Louis, and he told me he had none. But I got the impression from his reply that he was not only a stranger in St. Louis, but that he was a stranger on the face of the earth—a man doomed to walk alone all his days. I don't know why I should have felt a sort of responsibility; but—well, the upshot of it was that I suggested his coming out to the house for dinner. It seemed that he was leaving town the next morning, and Mrs. Blevins has always been very nice about my bringing persons home unexpectedly. Yes, I invited him out for dinner. For the moment it seemed a very slight courtesy to extend to him. I am now inclined to think there may have been something a bit hypnotic in his manner. I believe there are such things?”

"Undoubtedly," said the doctor.

"And at any rate—" The judge paused as if he were still trying to comprehend how he could have done anything so indiscreet.

"And he went home to dinner with you?" prompted the doctor.

The judge aroused himself. "He came out later, alone. I had a matter or two to look after before I went home. Yes, he came out: a faultless figure of a man in evening clothes, and with just the proper augmentation of elegance in his manner which the dinner hour justifies."

"But look here!" exclaimed the doctor, his patience beginning to fail him, "when are you going to reach the—the exposure? Surely you've described his perfections fully enough. We'll take them for granted."

The judge's eyelids flickered faintly with uneasiness, as if, perhaps, he were questioning whether the doctor would receive the dénouement of his tale sympathetically. But he continued, with slowly returning confidence: "The fact is I must still dwell a moment longer on his—er—perfections. Though looking back I can see that they were not, perhaps, genuine perfections. You see, the fellow's manner was a study in quiet elegance. It was *too* elegant. That's the truth. He really got on our nerves a bit. Whether he sat or arose or walked or spoke, no matter what he did, he never exceeded exact bounds by a hair's breadth. And before long a curious sensation began to afflict Mrs. Blevins and myself. It was as if the atmosphere had become more and more rarefied. I think we both began to fear our guest, in a way: I mean, to fear that we might violate some of the proprieties of conduct or speech. We began to despair of proving a match for—for MacIntyre. We discussed the matter afterward."

"And the dinner wasn't what you'd call a success then, after all?"

"For ourselves it wasn't. For MacIntyre I should say it was. He was admirable throughout. He struck precisely the right note in his praise, in his gratitude, in his corroboration of our beliefs, in his pleasant dissent from our confessed prejudices. He went away at what we concluded must have been the correct

time. We had to admit to each other that we didn't know just how long a dinner guest ought to remain after dinner, under the circumstances; but we had no doubt that MacIntyre knew exactly.

"And, by the way, I don't want to create the impression that he was stiff or manikin-like, or anything of that sort. He was—well, he was just perfect. There's no other word.

"And after he had been gone a day or so I had a note from him. He had reached the Maplesons' and he wrote, he said, to thank me for my courtesy to him when he was among strangers."

"Ah!" exclaimed the doctor, his interest reviving. "His letter revealed the real man, did it? That would have been a real test."

But the judge shook his head. "A letter usually does, I admit," he said. "But MacIntyre's letter was—was peculiar. In a way I may say that his note afforded me the first real clew I had to his character."

"You mean it betrayed some sort of illiteracy?"

"Well, you may judge for yourself. Certainly MacIntyre didn't write in a manner which our public schools would characterize as illiterate. On the contrary. He wrote too well. I've never seen such penmanship. Every character was a work of art, and the flourishes with which he embellished the ends of certain words were wonderful. I've never seen such meticulousness in shading and slanting. In short, it was the most perfect penmanship I had ever seen. I must say I thought he used punctuation marks somewhat in excess of common usage; but that, I suppose, is a matter of taste."

The doctor moved his chair in a manner bordering upon violence. "Look here, Blevins," he said, "is the point of your story simply that things can be too perfect?"

"Unfortunately, no," replied the judge. He smiled rather uncomfortably now as he marshalled his concluding facts and impressions in his mind. "You'll see almost immediately that I'm arriving at a far different conclusion. I'll cut it short. I didn't hear from MacIntyre again. I did see Mapleson once. He was up to see me last winter. He informed me that



It was worth going to Chicago to get such a shave.—Page 546.

MacIntyre had been to his place during the spring to put the hedges in condition, but that he had remained only a week. I asked him if he could tell me anything about the man and he replied that he couldn't, 'except that he could make any-

thing under the sun out of a flourishing privet-bush.' And then he changed the subject.

"But I was destined to see MacIntyre once more. I had to go to Chicago on a matter of business early this year—in

January. And I ran into him when he was the last man in the world I was thinking about. I had set out to call on a client in one of the financial institutions in the loop district, and on my way I dropped into a barber shop to get a shave.

"MacIntyre was there. He was the barber who presided over the third chair. He had on a smart white jacket which set off his fine shoulders admirably. He was just exclaiming 'Next!' when I entered the shop."

The judge paused and glanced at the doctor with a curious suggestion of being ready to laugh heartily, if the doctor considered the story a ridiculous one, or to be dramatically indignant, if the doctor felt that MacIntyre had behaved badly. But the doctor was holding his glance out on the deepening dusk and he did not stir. After an almost uncomfortable silence he asked dryly, "And what did you do?"

"What could I do? There was no empty chair save MacIntyre's, and there was no one ahead of me to take that one. I simply hung up my coat and prepared to get into MacIntyre's chair."

"And what did MacIntyre do?"

"He stood beside his chair, gazing rather musingly out into the street. I could see his reflection in the glass as I took my collar off."

"And you didn't say anything to him?"

"No. He didn't quite seem to give me an opportunity to do so. He went to work quietly when I had taken my seat, and didn't seem to recognize me."

"A perfect manner to the last," said the doctor.

"Yes, even to the shave he gave me. It was worth going to Chicago to get such a shave."

"Well, well!" said the doctor, in a tone which held a certain enigmatic quality.

"There's no doubt it was MacIntyre," added the judge. "You see, as I was putting my collar on afterward the fel-

low slipped out of his jacket and left the shop. It was just lunch-time. He didn't even wait for his tip."

"Ah—a flaw at last!" remarked the doctor.

"And I spoke to the head barber after he was gone. I took occasion to say that the man in the third chair was a very good barber. And the head man agreed. He said there wasn't a better man in the business than MacIntyre, barring a certain fault he had."

"Another fault?" asked the doctor.

"The man couldn't be held to his post during the spring months, the head barber said. He would just walk out of the shop when a fine day came and wouldn't report again until early summer. But otherwise he was a perfectly reliable man."

Just as the story ended the attention of both men was attracted by the sound of Mrs. Blevins's player-piano next door. She had begun a new roll, which proved to be a version of "The Star-Spangled Banner," with rather naïve and enlivening ornamentation. "It's really pretty, isn't it?" remarked the judge.

"Yes," responded the doctor. The dusk hid a furtive gleam of humor in his eyes.

"And so," concluded the judge, "you can understand why I can't see this universal brotherhood idea clear through to the end. Except for purposes of public enthusiasm, and such things, it seems rather—er—impracticable. There would be too many complications. For this MacIntyre . . . you see he had made the most prepossessing impression at Mapleson's, and even in my own house."

The doctor continued to smile. "However," he said, "there was that handwriting with too many flourishes. You mustn't forget that."

The judge nodded diplomatically. It seemed to him that the doctor had received the matter very tactfully, after all. "Yes, that's true," he admitted, laughing pleasantly. "Still, we mustn't forget that no man can be wholly perfect."

# HABAKKUK

BY KATHARINE FULLERTON GEROULD



WHEN they carried Kathleen Somers up into the hills to die where her ancestors had had the habit of dying—they didn't gad about, those early Somerses: they dropped in their tracks, and the long grass that they had mowed and stacked and trodden under their living feet flourished mightily over their graves—it was held to be only a question of time. I say "to die," not because her case was absolutely hopeless, but because no one saw how, with her spent vitality, she could survive her exile. Everything had come at once, and she had gone under. She had lost her kin, she had lost her money, she had lost her health. Even the people who make their meat of tragedy—and there are a great many of them in all enlightened centres of thought—shook their heads and were sorry. They thought she couldn't live; and they also thought it much, much better that she shouldn't. For there was nothing left in life for that sophisticated creature but a narrow cottage in a stony field, with Nature to look at.

Does it sound neurotic and silly? It wasn't. Conceive her if you can—Kathleen Somers, whom probably you never knew. From childhood she had nourished short hopes and straitened thoughts. At least: hopes that depend on the æsthetic passion are short; and the long perspectives of civilized history are very narrow. Kathleen Somers had been fed with the Old World: that is to say, her adolescent feet had exercised themselves in picture-galleries and cathedrals and palaces; she had seen all the right views, all the right ceremonies, and all the censored picturesqueness. Don't get any Cook's tourist idea, please, about Miss Somers. Her mother had died young, and her gifted father had taken her to a hundred places that the school-teacher on a holiday never gets to and thinks of only in connection with geography lessons. She had followed the Great Wall of China,

she had stood before the tomb of Tam-burlaine, she had shaded her eyes from the glare of Kairouan the Holy, she had chaffered in Tiflis and in Trebizond. All this before she was twenty-five. At that time her father's health broke, and they proceeded to live permanently in New York. Her wandering life had steeped her in delights, but kept her innocent of love-affairs. When you have fed on historic beauty, on the great plots of the past, the best tenor voices in the world, it is pretty hard to find a man who doesn't, in his own person, leave out something essential to romance. She had herself no particular beauty, and therefore the male sex could get on without her. A few fell in love with her, but she was too enchanted and amused with the world in general to set to work at the painful process of making a hero out of any one of them. She was a sweet-tempered creature; her mental snobbishness was not a pose, but perfectly inevitable; she had a great many friends. As she had a quick wit and the historic imagination, you can imagine—remembering her bringing up—that she was an entertaining person when she entered upon middle age: when, that is, she was proceeding from the earlier to the later thirties.

It was natural that Kathleen Somers and her father—who was a bit precious and pompous, in spite of his ironies—should gather about them a homogeneous group. The house was pleasant and comfortable—they were too sophisticated to be "periodic"—and there was always good talk going, if you happened to be the kind that could stand good talk. Of course you had to pass an examination first. You had at least to show that you "caught on." They were high-brow enough to permit themselves sudden enthusiasms that would have damned a low-brow. You mustn't like "Peter Pan," but you might go three nights running to see some really perfect clog-dancing at a