

# THE TURNING OF THE WORM

By Ruth Kimball Gardiner

IT was not until Champe Merivale had tried several other things that Mrs. Beauchamp's suggestion led her to open a shop. Champe belonged to permanent Washington on her mother's side—her grandmother had been a bridesmaid to Miss Williams, who married the Russian Minister—and to temporary Washington on her father's side. Senator Merivale had been so great a man that for a full fortnight after his death editors eagerly accepted the most patently apocryphal anecdotes concerning him. Crowned heads sent messages of sympathy to his daughter, and nearly half the Senate gathered to hear his eulogies read. Then his successor was seated, and the world went on without him. At the end of a year, if you had said the name Merivale, the inevitable query would have been, "What Merivale?"

Champe at twenty was left alone in the world, with a position in old Washington which she had inherited from her mother, and a house in F street, west of the War Department, which she had inherited from her father, and not a penny to support either position or house. Old Washington said she owed it to herself to marry, but unimportant as the bridegroom is at a wedding, it is nevertheless impossible to go on with one without him, and old Washington confessed itself nonplussed. The First Secretary of the Arabian Embassy had shown her marked attention, but even old Washington did not expect a miracle, and Champe had no *dot*. Henry Denby, her father's secretary, plucked up courage to raise his eyes to her, but Champe would not

entertain the idea of accepting in her need the man she had snubbed in her days of plenty. Furthermore, she was full of fine sentiments and high courage, which is only another way of saying that she was twenty and did not know the world.

The afterglow of her father's influence obtained for her a place in one of the Government departments. She was "in office," and for five years, daily, from nine till four, she wrote names, more or less correctly, on cards in the Census Office. Then Mrs. Beauchamp, who was a very great lady by instinct, by inheritance and by virtue of her husband's real estate transactions, suddenly awoke to the fact that Western millionaires should not be allowed to foregather with the elect without paying tribute. Champe was installed as social secretary to Mrs. Yarnell, whose husband had struck oil, or gold, or Government contracts, and for three seasons she did her best to persuade the lady to leave off referring to her husband by his surname alone. At the end of that time, Mrs. Yarnell still considered the iron dog on her front lawn an addition to the landscape, and Mrs. Beauchamp thought of trade as a last resort.

"If you'll only make your shop small enough and your prices large enough," Mrs. Beauchamp remarked, "you'll succeed. I sha'n't bow to anybody who doesn't wear your hats, and I won't be patroness for any bazaar where at least two booths are not furnished by you. Mrs. Yarnell shall buy what she calls 'lingerings' from you—I'm going to tell people she said it—and I'll invite the society reporters to

luncheon the day you hang out your sign. I suppose," Mrs. Beauchamp added, as an afterthought, "you haven't heard from Henry Denby lately?"

Champe blushed.

"Yes, I have," she said.

"Somebody told me he was coming back here," Mrs. Beauchamp went on, thoughtfully. "Isn't he going to be a Senator or a Representative, or whatever it is they begin with?"

"He's been elected to Congress," said Champe.

"One really meets congressmen everywhere these days," said Mrs. Beauchamp. "I think I shall ask him to dinner. I used to know his uncle—the one that bought up something or stole a railroad, or whatever it was he did. It's almost respectable for a man with Henry Denby's money to be in Congress. Is Congress in session now?"

"You dear, absurd thing!" Champe laughed. "Of course it isn't. It never is in October, and don't you worry about Henry Denby. He can take care of himself, and so can I."

"I know you can," Mrs. Beauchamp replied, "and I wish you couldn't. In my day it wasn't considered at all commendable in a girl. I don't like it, but if you don't succeed with that shop, it won't be my fault."

Mrs. Beauchamp was quite as good as her word. At first, people smiled at her persistent touting, but when Mrs. Yarnell ventured to remark that Champe's prices were sheer robbery, and Mrs. Beauchamp, addressing her a moment later, pointedly called her Mrs. Sanders, it was immediately understood that Mrs. Beauchamp was in earnest. The way to her favor thenceforth lay through the white-and-gold doors of the "Trinket Box" in Connecticut avenue. People began to display cards of invitation to a "Trinket Box" opening with the same elaborate carelessness with which they would an invitation to the British Embassy. Society reporters diligently advertised the exclusiveness of the establishment, and before the small capital which was

Champe's from the sale of the Merivale house had been seriously impaired, the "Trinket Box" was a financial success.

Champe was overjoyed; Mrs. Beauchamp was delighted, and Henry Denby was frankly disgusted. He had proposed to Champe semi-annually for five years, and now that his uncle's money made it possible for him to afford a hobby, proposing to Champe had become not a habit, but a violent fad. Refusing him had become a habit with Champe. She had never admitted even to herself that she expected to marry him some day, but she was sure that if she ever did marry him it would not be till she had made an incontestable success. Henry Denby should never be able to say that she married him because there was nothing else for her to do. Henry Denby would never have said it, or even have thought it, but nobody could persuade Champe to believe that, and nobody but Mrs. Beauchamp ever tried to persuade her.

It was all in vain that Mrs. Beauchamp asked Champe to dinner. Champe refused to come when there was any chance that Henry Denby might be there. She was not to be caught by any such palpable device. She lived with a maid in four tiny rooms over the shop, and she pointed out that it would be manifestly improper to receive any visitors when she could not afford a chaperon.

Henry Denby never received any delicately engraved intimations that the "Trinket Box" had something new and unique in handkerchiefs and stocks, but he was finally driven to present himself at the shop. Champe received him with businesslike directness.

"Can I show you anything to-day?" she asked, maliciously.

Henry Denby was a man of resources.

"Yes, you can," he answered. "I want to buy a bonnet for my sister."

"You never had a sister," Champe remarked.

"Did I say sister?" the member of Congress inquired. "How stupid of

me! I meant my ward. I've got dozens of wards, and they are all crying for hats. Show me something suitable for a ward."

"How old is she?" asked Champe, politely.

"I don't think that matters at all," Denby replied. "I should never think of asking the question myself, but commercialism has its blunting effect on the sensibilities. She's an average aged ward, and she wears a medium sized hat."

"How would this do?" Champe asked, displaying a dainty flower toque.

"Is it a bouquet?" Denby inquired.

"No, it's a hat. This is the way it goes on," and Champe perched the airy trifle on her red-brown hair.

"I never saw anything so lovely," said the congressman. "Send me half a dozen of it."

"We never duplicate a model," said Champe, sternly. "It's the only one of its kind in existence."

"Well, there are other kinds," said Denby, cheerfully. "How much is it?"

"Forty-five dollars."

"I call it dirt cheap," said Denby, not a whit disturbed. "I suppose it's made on solid bullion wires, and warranted fast colors. Haven't you something really elegant for about nine hundred dollars?"

Champe laid the hat down.

"Miss May," she called to an assistant, "please wait on this gentleman."

And without another word she marched into the work-room.

Henry Denby was not easily to be discouraged. For two months he visited the "Trinket Box" persistently. Champe was equally determined. Come he might, and buy he might, but not once would she wait on him.

Early in Lent he entered the "Trinket Box" determined to have speech with her in spite of herself. No, Miss May would not do. It was absolutely necessary that he consult the head of the establishment. Champe appeared, armed with her most business-like manner.

"I've come about a very serious

matter—" he began. "How long will it take you to get a trousseau ready?"

"What on earth do you mean?" Champe gasped.

"I understood that you furnished trousseaux when required," Denby went on, gravely. "I want to buy one, that's all."

Champe stared, bewildered.

"Is it for your ward?" she asked, feebly.

"No, it isn't," Denby answered. "Your lovely hats are now household words in every family in my district, but the trousseau is not for my ward. It's for the lady I expect to marry on Wednesday of Easter week at St. John's Church. I shall not attempt to conceal from you the fact that at one time I had other plans for myself, but a love of sordid gain in a lady whom I shall always admire——"

"You're trying to be funny," Champe interrupted.

"I was never more serious in my life," Denby assured her. "I have at last become convinced that for years I've been making a fool of myself, and I'm going to stop. I am engaged to Miss Ivy Gaillard, of my native State, and I am sure you will be the first to congratulate me."

Champe's world whirled before her. She had never dreamed that Henry had it in him to revolt.

"I do congratulate you—with all my heart," she stammered.

"Thank you," said Denby. "I felt sure you would. You see now for whom I want the trousseau. It's a delicate matter, but I feel that I may confide in you. Miss Gaillard is an orphan in reduced circumstances, and following the custom which prevails in certain European countries, I am to provide the trousseau."

"I wonder she accepts it," Champe flashed.

"She doesn't know I am doing it," Denby explained. "She believes that her great-aunt is providing it. Her great-aunt is named Jenks, *née* Smithers, and lives in Brooklyn. She will accompany Miss Gaillard to Washington. We shall be married very quietly,

owing to the recent death of Mrs. Smithers's—I should say Mrs. Jenks's—husband. If you will kindly assist me in the matter of the trousseau, I shall be deeply grateful."

"But if you buy the things here," Champe objected, "they won't fit. Have you Miss Gaillard's measurements?"

"It is necessary to have her measurements?" Denby asked, rather blankly.

"Absolutely," Champe insisted. "We don't provide gowns, but the—the other things have to fit, you know."

Denby looked thoughtful.

"I shall have to ask Mrs. Jenks to obtain them for me at once," he said. "How would you go about getting a young lady measured without her knowledge?"

"I'd find out who her tailor is, or her dressmaker," said Champe. "He'd be sure to have them."

"Thank you," said Denby. "I shall attend to it at once, and since I am entirely at sea in the matter of things you don't provide, can I not persuade you to take the commission of attending to the gowns as well?"

"I did it for one bride," Champe said, reflectively. "I dare say I might, but suppose I chose things that wouldn't be becoming to her?"

"Everything is becoming to her," was Denby's reply. "Without possessing your striking air of self-reliance and independence, Miss Gaillard resembles you greatly. She has very much your coloring, and is about your height. Anything you select will be becoming to her."

Denby went away a little later, leaving Champe more disturbed than she had ever been before in all her life. The incredible had happened. She was as astonished as if the Monument had suddenly begun to do a cake-walk. Henry had actually given her up at last. There could be no mistake about that. He was positively going to marry somebody else, a somebody with the impossible name of Ivy; a somebody who looked like her. That was

the crowning ignominy of it. She said bitter things to herself about the fickleness of men, assured herself that she didn't care the least bit what Henry Denby chose to do, and cried herself to sleep to prove it.

Miss Gaillard's measurements, which her betrothed produced a week later, proved to be Champe's exactly, but Miss Gaillard's photograph, which Denby showed proudly, made Champe so angry that she longed to slap him. She was not vain, but to be told that she looked like that simpering, dowdy picture, was too much to endure. She felt sure Henry was throwing himself away, and she was equally sure it served him right. She set her teeth firmly, and resolved to provide a trousseau that should bewilder the country-bred Mrs. Henry. It would be a subtle revenge, and she assured herself that she did not feel at all revengeful. She wished Henry all manner of happiness, and if he was determined to marry a girl who wouldn't know a coffee-coat from a dressing-sack, it was not her fault.

Denby watched the trousseau develop with delight. He never failed to call daily to ask how it was progressing, and he made a few extra visits to ask Champe's advice about a suitable wedding present for his bride. Long before the outfit was completed, Champe became positively difficult. Miss May declared that one couldn't open one's head to her without having it snapped off short. Champe worked feverishly, and felt that she would give ten years of her life to have the thing over and done with.

Denby's wedding was to be very quiet, indeed. There were no cards, and he had asked less than twenty people to witness the ceremony. The Iberian Minister was to be best man. Miss Gaillard had written that she did not wish a bridesmaid, and as she had no available kinsman, Mr. Beauchamp had been persuaded to give the bride away. Beyond a brief, "Well, it serves you both right," Mrs. Beauchamp had refrained from comment.

Champe thought of a thousand rea-

sons for staying away from the wedding, but her thousand-and-first thought determined her to be present, if it was the last thing she did on earth. Henry Denby should not have the pleasure of thinking she cared a rap how many girls he married. He might marry his entire constituency, for all it mattered to her.

Mrs. Beauchamp sent her carriage bright and early on the day of the wedding, and Champe, in a gown and hat that shamed the treasures of the trousseau, stepped into it, with a high color and a slightly set smile. Mrs. Beauchamp was not yet visible when Champe arrived at her house, and the girl had scarcely seated herself in the library when the bell rang violently. Henry Denby came in, frock-coated, a white flower in his coat, but none of the joy of the expectant bridegroom in his face. He sank into a chair without a word.

"What in the world has happened?" Champe cried.

Denby raised his head, and looked at her despairingly.

"I don't know how to say it," he said. "She—she has jilted me!"

"What!" exclaimed Champe, horror-stricken.

"Jilted me!" Denby went on, brokenly. "It's incredible, but it's true. You don't know what this means to me, Champe. Jilted at the very church door—a laughing-stock for all my enemies—a joke for my whole world! It's the end of me. I can never hold up my head again. I won't pretend that my heart is broken. It's more

than that. It's my very life. I didn't love her. A man can't love twice in his life, and I never even tried. I—I can't see my way out of this. It isn't only that my pride is hurt. My whole career is ruined. I might as well die now and be done with it."

Champe took a step forward. Her eyes flashed.

"Nonsense, Henry Denby!" she said. "Be a man! Don't let her get the best of you like this—the hateful little cat! Don't give in!"

Denby merely groaned.

"Get even with her," Champe went on, furiously. "I'll marry you myself, just to spite her."

"When?" Denby shouted, springing to his feet.

"This very minute!" Champe cried. "I'll go right off and do it now, just to show her."

Champe never quite remembered the swift drive to the church, and the walk up the narrow aisle of St. John's. She had a dim fancy that neither the Iberian Minister nor Mr. Beauchamp cast so much as a glance at her. She found herself, still upborne by her indignation, repeating the responses firmly. Then she walked down the aisle, seeing nobody, and stepped into the waiting carriage.

Henry held her hand fast for a few moments, in silence. Then he remarked, casually.

"I may as well confess, Champe Denby, there never was any Miss Gaillard. The whole thing was entirely my own idea."



## LIFE

IN youth, when met with golden hours, we cry:  
 "God! Let us live to gather every rose!"  
 Grown older, if we chance on joy, we sigh:  
 "God! Let us die before the vision goes!"

ANNA ALICE CHAPIN.