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DEAF UNCLE JEFFRY, And the Little Old Maid.

BY ABBOTT LEE.

Never was such a commotion known in the annals of domestic merriment and broomery and scrubbery and dustery.—All good house-wives know how to turn a house upside down, and the dwelling into which we are about to introduce our readers was just in this agreeable predicament. The curtains were down and the carpets were up; the fires were out and the sweeps were in; the floors were wet and the cisterns were dry; every thing was out of its place in the endeavor to put every thing into it; and the whole household was in disorder while being put in order; and all because an old uncle was coming.

All the little and the great Pokenhams were mustered, and marshalled and drilled. Mrs. Pokenham took upon herself the office of drill sergeant.

"Now girls, no quarrelling, nor contradiction, no belling, no scowling, no scuffling—your uncle's coming. Now, boys, no fighting, and frolicking, and game-making—mind and put the best side out, and behave decently—your old uncle's coming. And now, where's Fanny Carr? She is always out of the way when she ought to be in it, and in it when she ought to be out of it. Can't any of you find Fanny Carr? I want to give her some hints and orders, because my old uncle's coming."

A little, plain under-sized old maid, some where about four feet four inches and a half in height, about six stone six ounces in weight, and a complexion something between saffron and stone-blue, and dressed in a garb of forgotten date, was presently poked out of a corner by the young Pokenhams.

"Fanny Carr," said Mrs. Pokenham, "have you done those few trifling things that I desired? Have you seen fresh linen put upon the best bed?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And have you cured the chimney board of its rattling?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And the windows from shaking?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And did you see that the boot-jack and the slippers were placed ready to his foot?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And Mr. Pokenham's last new dressing-gown into his hands?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And did you see that the coffee was properly cleared?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And the chicken and the bottle of wine all ready to be brought up?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"You know my uncle's coming?"

"Has any body told any body that my uncle's coming?" asked Mrs. Pokenham.

"Not a soul of us!" exclaimed *omnes*.

"That's right. Why, if it were once known, we should have all the world and his wife here in less than no time—the Scudamores would be ricketing and frolicking here, and Christopher and Cato mining, and carneying, and blarneying, and they'd try with a witness, to get my old uncle from me."

"They'd get a troublesome customer," said Miss Pokenham the first.

"Yes, but one that I hope will pay well. Now, girls, if you dare to show any of your quizzings and huffings, and black looks, you'll spoil all, and we shall lose all my old uncle's share in the Bank of England. As for you Jane, if you fall into that old trick you have got of turning up your nose at every body—and you, Margaret, of curling up your lip at every thing—and you, boys, of badgering, and bantering, and worrying, why, we shall just be throwing away all uncle Jeff's Bank stock and landed estates; and we may as well have them, for we have as much right to them as any body else."

"I wish you may get them," said Master Daniel.

"Most rare Daniel!" said Master Humphrey; "I wish I may."

Thanks to the little sister of the primitive old maids, Fanny Carr, every thing was at length in perfect readiness; the carpets were all down, and the curtains were all up, the floors were dry, and the fires were lit, the covers were stripped from the best chairs, the sofa wheeled to the best place, the fire was blazing in all the beauty of concavity, convexity, and contiguity, and every face arranged so as to look delighted at the arrival of tiresome, troublesome, some, cross, snappish uncle Jeff. There came a sound of very brilliant blowing of horns; every body strained their eyes; the Royal Blue flew past in grand style, the horses prancing and capering, and the guard making melody with a bugle horn; on it whirled and whirled, never stopping for any body, and of course no uncle Jeff could be there, and so two tedious hours were spent in fidgettings and guessings; and then the slow-coach was heard coming

lumbering and trailing along, and it stopped at the steps of the respectable house where had been all the dustings, and mopping, and brushing, and brooming, and a great masculine head, with thick, heavy features and bushy eye-brows, and large lips, poked itself out of the window, and looked up to the house in question, surveying its well hearth-stoned step, and its clean windows, and the scarlet morose curtains through them, and the bright blaze of the cheerful fire glowing and flickering over the window frames, with a morose, unpleasant look; whereupon Mrs. Pokenham, and all the tribe of Pokenhams, little and big, rushed out of the parlor into the hall, and out of the hall on to the door steps; and Mrs. Pokenham began to delight her own benevolent heart by assuring herself upon the information, that her dear, kind, good uncle Jeffrey was really looking full twenty years younger than when she last saw him.

"Dear uncle Jeffrey! how kind of you to come and see us! how delighted I am to receive you in the bosom of my affectionate family! My dear Mr. Pokenham will be as much rejoiced to find you among us, and all my darling children have been so anxious to welcome you, that they could neither eat, drink nor sleep, for thinking and talking about you. But pray take care of the steps—they are so slanting, and slippery, and dangerous—see that you are in the least hurt, but I myself had an awkward slip from them one day. Why, how well you are looking! you must be growing younger every day. I declare you look more juvenile than any of us.—Daniel—Humphrey—call the servant to take your uncle's luggage. My dear uncle, I cannot think of such a thing as your carrying your own luggage. Daniel! Humphrey! call somebody. There, can't you take it yourself? My dear uncle Jeffrey, pray wait till a servant can come. Daniel! Humphrey! why don't you move?"

Daniel and Humphrey stood with their hands in their pockets, staring very contemptuously at the cross-grained old gentleman took up a small hair trunk and hat-box in his hands, and under the running cannonade of Mrs. Pokenham's speech, proceeded to ascend the flight of steps, taking as little notice of the lady proprietress of the mansion as though he heard her not, which suppositious ease appeared to be pretty nearly the true one, as on their entrance into the parlor, the morose old gentleman, laying his luggage very deliberately on the floor, proceeded to draw from the depths of his capacious pocket a very serious-looking ear horn which having adjusted to his ear he turned a sour look upon Mrs. Pokenham, and for the first time opened his lips.

"Well ma'am, I told you I'd come some time or other, and I'm here."

Had all Mrs. Pokenham's energy and eloquence gone for nothing? Had it all been wasted on a deaf old man, who had not been able to hear a syllable of her melodious accents? was it all to do over again, and that too to the detriment of her lungs, at the top of her breath? Yes, seemingly so, and accordingly the poor hard-worked lady began again shouting as loud as possible.

"My dear uncle Jeffrey, we are all delighted to see you, and looking so well—*younger than ever!*"

"Hey! what?"

"We are all so glad to see you! You are looking so well!" shouted Mrs. Pokenham, growing very red in the face.

"Do you think I look well, then?" said the old gentleman.

"Oh charmingly! Twenty years younger than when I last saw you."

"Hey! What?"

"You are looking so much better than you did some time back. Nobody would believe that you were the same person. I am sorry however, to see that you are rather dull of hearing."

"Dull of what?" asked uncle Jeff.

"A little deaf," shouted Mrs. Pokenham.

"Deaf! who says I'm deaf? a set of stupid people. I should like to know who told you I was deaf! a parcel of ignorant people!"

"Oh, I see that it was all a mistake! only I thought that perhaps you had got a little cold—nothing more, nothing more," shouted Mrs. Pokenham.

"I'm no more deaf than you are!" said the old gentleman.

"No, no, uncle, I see that you are not. I don't know what I could be thinking of," said poor Mrs. Pokenham, whose lungs began to complain at being put into such severe requisition. "But now, uncle, take the easy chair—it is such an easy one—we got it on purpose for you."

"I don't want your easy chairs! any chair is easy to a healthy man like me. What! I suppose you think I'm getting old!"

"O no, dear uncle Jeffrey; you look full 20 years younger than when I saw you last. Here, Fanny Carr, do take these slippers and this dressing-gown away. I don't know who could have thought of treating my dear uncle Jeffrey as if he were old or an invalid. Pray, Fanny, do move this foot stool, and wheel this great unwieldy chair away."

The little old maid drew near much as if she had been a mouse approaching a lion, and proceeded to do as she was bid with one of the most frightened airs in the world. The great cross man looked down like a colossal statue on the diminutive little thing

who was thus called upon to wait upon his high mightiness.

"Won't you go near the fire, uncle Jeffrey? it was made on purpose for you: you thought you might be cold," shouted Mrs. Pokenham.

"Cold!" sneered uncle Jeff, unbuttoning his coat.

"Do open the window, Fanny Carr, my uncle Jeffrey will be suffocated."

"I wish you'd let the window be—and me too," growled uncle Jeff.

"And now, uncle Jeffrey, will you take tea or coffee? we have them both ready."

"Do you think I'm a tee totaller? I hate slops!"

"Uncle Jeffrey shall have a rump steak and oyster sauce. Would you like that?" shrieked Mrs. Pokenham.

"I don't like to be plagued," growled uncle Jeff.

Poor Mrs. Pokenham sat down in her chair, pretty considerably exhausted with shouting, and proceeded to lament herself and console herself in a low voice, perfectly comfortable in uncle Jeff's not being able to hear her, in spite of his assurance that he was by no manner of means deaf.

"Well, and so he's deaf! and how in the world I am to go on making myself agreeable, I don't know—I shall soon be perfectly exhausted. And yet there is one little comfort in it—we need not be so very particular what we say. One may be able to express our sentiments without being constantly in danger of stumbling over some affront or another."

"Mamma," said Miss Pokenham the eldest, "I suppose we may speak, too, as uncle Jeff is too deaf to hear a word we can say."

"Say what you will, only don't look toward him, lest he suspect that we are speaking of him."

"I was only going to give you my opinion of this new relation of ours; why, mamma, he is amazingly ugly."

"What of that?" said Mrs. Pokenham, "he is as rich as a Jew."

"Did you ever see such thick lips—such a thick nose—and such a thick head?" said Miss Pokenham the second.

"Don't make me laugh," said Miss Pokenham the first, "or else our deaf uncle Jeff will think I am laughing at him."

"What are you talking about?" asked uncle Jeff, placing his ear horn readily for the answer.

"They were talking girl-like, uncle Jeffrey," shouted poor Mrs. Pokenham, "of you. You know that it is so natural; and they were saying—but you must excuse them—what a fine looking man you are."

"La, ma, how can you say; I never saw any body much uglier in my life, and then for expression! why, he would certainly make vinegar with a look."

"Hey! what?" said uncle Jeff.

"Margaret was only saying that you have such a powerful expression. Now, boys, if you begin to titter I'll turn you out of the room."

"How mamma is sweetening up deaf uncle Jeff! Mamma, I had better help you to a little more, since it answers so well. Look how he is staring at us with his goggle eyes."

"Hey! what!" said uncle Jeff turning again to Mrs. Pokenham.

"Jane was only saying that you had such peculiarly fine eyes. *Girls will you have done.*"

"No, mamma, it is too good fun—we must have a little more of it. Don't you see how deaf uncle Jeff is looking at us, and how red he is getting in the face? His complexion and visage would do very well for a sign-post at some village inn."

"Hey! what!" interrogated uncle Jeff.

"Margaret was observing how fresh complexioned you are, uncle Jeffrey, and what a fine portrait you would make. *Humphrey go out of the room. Daniel be quiet. Girls, girls! how dare you say such things before his face! I declare, I sit in fear and trembling.*"

"La, mamma, one may say what he likes—it's all safe enough. Uncle Jeff is too deaf to hear, never fear. Besides, it does him good to hear you interpret for us. You turn our sour into sweet, and he seems to like the flavor. Better give him a little more."

"Feeding time is not over. Give him a little more," said Humphrey.

"How can I keep my countenance, if you go on? Boys, be quiet."

"It is so amusing to see ma obliged to look pleasant when she is in such a passion. Dear ma wouldn't you like to box our ears?"

"Hey! what?" said uncle Jeff.

"The girls were saying, that they never saw me look half so delighted as I am now doing, for the pleasure of seeing you here. *Girls, if you will provoke me—boys, I will punish you for this.—You behave shamefully.*"

"O, mamma, it is so amusing to see you trying to look sweet and calm and pleasant at cross, deaf uncle Jeff, and yet all the while in such a passion with us."

"Mamma, they would be such a nice couple—our deaf uncle Jeff, and little minkin finikin Fanny Carr. Such an overgrown giant and such an undergrown doll. It's of no use blushing so, Fanny Carr—you make uncle Jeff look at you, your face is so on fire. He'll wonder what in the world you are blushing about. Don't you see how he is staring?"

Little Fanny Carr lifted up her eyes and saw those of their formidable visitor fixed full upon her face, whereupon she rose from her seat and got out of the room as quick as possible.

"Pray who is that little old thing?" asked uncle Jeffrey of Mrs. Pokenham, as they were left together one evening—"pray who is that little thing who has just gone out of the room?"

"Do you mean Fanny Carr? O, she is a little creature that has seen better days, and we let her be here because my feelings won't let me send her away. She is so shopping, and so attached to us, poor thing, and she just makes herself useful by doing any trifle that falls in her way. She keeps the keys of the store room, and the tea caddy, and the wine cellar, and the beer, and the cellars, and she has the girls, and she has the care of the linen, and she makes all the pastry, and does the preserving—but what I most prize Fanny Carr for is, that she is such a good nurse—she nursed the children through all their maladies, and never left them when we had the scarlet fever; every body said that she would catch it, but she never did though she was with them day and night. Yes, Fanny Carr is a most excellent nurse."

"So she is your housekeeper, and your cook, and your plain sewer, and your nurse?"

"O no, uncle, I don't give her any wages."

"A servant without wages?"

"Uncle, I see that you don't like to have Fanny Carr sitting at the same table with you. I am sure I beg your pardon, but I did not think of it. I don't much think that she would like to eat with the servants, but I'll see. At all events, I can send her her dinner up to her own room."

"Let the little thing stay!" said uncle Jeff.

"But, my dear uncle, I confess it was very thoughtless of me to seat her at the same table with you, and I can very well make her go."

"Then I shall go too," said deaf uncle Jeff.

Mrs. Pokenham of course immediately withdrew her proffer. She could only regret that she had been so inadvertent as to place her highly respectable, and highly endowed, and fortunately rich uncle Jeffrey, at the same table with a poor little minkin finikin old maid. Fanny Carr was still tolerated, and uncle Jeffrey seemed so still to overcome his aversion to her as to permit various little offices which she was constantly performing for him in character of general usefulness. She arranged the cushion in his easy chair—for, after the first fit of sullenness, uncle Jeffrey permitted himself to be installed into its comfortable seat—she fetched him his slippers, and reached him his foot stool, and got him the newspapers, and handed him his hat and his stick when he went out, and took them from him when he came in, and always met him with a smile; and, some way or another, deaf uncle Jeff could hear Fanny Carr's gentle voice almost without the help of his ear horn, better than he could understand other people with it.

"I wish I had deaf uncle Jeff's money," said Master Daniel. "How I would make it fly! He has not the heart to do any thing with it but keep it to get moth eaten and rusty."

"There he is under the window," said Humphrey.

"No matter what one says, he can't hear us. It is such fun to look him in the face and coax him—telling him what an old curmudgeon he is, and all the while making him think that you are paying the greatest compliments. Mamma does that in fine style. Now I'll show you her honey, milk, and sugar-why."

And so saying, Master Daniel walked up to his deaf uncle Jeff, and with an insinuating look and a soft smile, said, "it gives me the greatest pleasure to assure you that I think you have not sense enough to enjoy either your life or your money."

"Hey! What do you say?" said deaf uncle Jeff, applying his ear-horn.

"O fie!" exclaimed the little old maid, turning very red—"how can you mock his infirmities in that manner?"

"I'll tell you what," said Master Daniel, turning sharply round upon the poor dependent—"I'll tell you what—mamma ordered you to make the amiable to old deaf uncle Jeff here for our sake, but she begins to think you are doing it for your own."

"O master Daniel!" exclaimed little Fanny Carr, "you know that I try to be kind to every body—indeed I ought, for I feel what it is to wish for kindness myself; and when I see how you all play upon this poor gentleman, because he happened to be deaf, I can't help feeling the more pitiful over him; but it would be just the same if he were poor."

"Hey! hey! What does she say?" asked uncle Jeffrey.

"She says that she is quite exhausted with the trouble of speaking to you, sir, you are so very deaf."

"Deaf! deaf!" exclaimed the old gentleman—"I am not deaf—I told you all before that I was not deaf."

"O Daniel!" exclaimed Fanny Carr, with tears in her eyes—"how can you misrepresent me?"

"Hey! hey! What does she say?" asked uncle Jeffrey.

"She says, sir, that she is quite worn out with the trouble of shouting and running errands."

"O Daniel!" ejaculated the little old maid. "And she says that if you don't go away very soon, she must. But mamma is very angry with her for grumbling, and I should not wonder if she were to show her the way to the door."

The little old maid burst into tears.

"Hey! hey! What's all this?" ejaculated the deaf gentleman.

"O mamma, you are here, and it's high time," said Master Daniel, as Mrs. Pokenham entered. "If I had not been here to meddle, Fanny Carr was managing deaf uncle Jeff in fine style."

"Fanny Carr," said Mrs. Pokenham, "your conduct has been more and more extraordinary every day."

"What have I done?" exclaimed the little old maid.

"You have been trying to manage my poor uncle—that has been plain enough in my eyes for a long time. You tattle after him, and go about fetching, and carrying, and coaxing, and looking like a lamb, and you know that you have your own private ends in it all."

"What ends can I have?" exclaimed Fanny.

"Why, Miss Carr, if I must speak the plain truth—and I am a plain spoken person, you know, not much given to flattery—I must say, that I see clearly enough what you are aiming at. When one party is foolish and the other is artful, it does not need much discernment to see what is in the wind."

"What do you mean, ma'am?" exclaimed the little old maid in agony.

"Why, I mean, Miss Carr, just this: you see that my uncle is a silly old man, and rich, and you being clever and poor, you think that you may be able to catch him in a match. You think that it would be a better thing to be Mrs. Jeffrey, and keep your carriage, than even to live the idle life which you are now doing."

"The idle life which I now lead!" exclaimed the little old maid. "I, who toil in labor which have no end, through all the weary days, without either thanks or wages—and now to be accused of this!"

"You see that my uncle is half a fool, and you think that you can juggle him into marrying you. But I tell you once more that I will not stand by and see such things done in my house; so just have the goodness to tie up your things, and take your departure in half an hour—and very glad shall I be when you are fairly gone, for I see how artful you are, and there is no knowing where the mischief may end."

Fanny Carr burst into an agony of tears.

"Mr. Jeffrey is not the weak man you take him, but clear-headed and strong-minded enough to detect me, if I were the artful creature you accuse me of being. But I will go. I will not stay to be accused of eating the bread of idleness, or practising subtleties—no, I will go and beg my bread rather than that!—any thing is better than that; only—only—don't laugh at him any more, poor gentleman, for if he were to find it out he would feel it, for he is not so simple as you think, dear, poor gentleman."

"Hey! hey! what does she say?" asked uncle Jeff.

"O, my dear uncle Jeffrey, don't mind her. She is an ungrateful creature, after all the kindness which we have shown her, to be weary of paying you a few little attentions which I had enjoined upon her. But, my dear uncle, I have sent her away. Nobody shall slight you in my house, so I have sent her away."

"Humph!" said uncle Jeff.

The little old maid's eyes were almost drowned with tears—and, whatever poets may say in rhyme, on the superlativeness of the beauty of bloodshot eyes, and their red curtains, and all that, we have always been accustomed to consider those sort of things amazingly unbecoming. But it happened that our little heroine forgot to consult her looking glass upon the occasion, and consequently her eyes became something like the red sea. The poor little body however, proceeded as expeditiously as might be to lay her scanty wardrobe as straightly as possible in a wooden box, which was both small enough and large enough; to collect her needles and her knitting; a few letters, carefully tied up with a piece of faded blue ribbon, the dates of which proved chronologically that the paper had been made full twenty years ago out of them written in a neat masculine hand, like that of a school usher, and dated as many years back; to look very particularly at and sigh over a little morsel of sandy hair; to stroke her favorite pussy for the last time; and then to take her clogs, her reticule, and her umbrella; to look at an old summer house; to gather two or three leaves from an old tree; and to pass through those inhospitable doors into the wide, bleak cold world, alone—alone.

There are some hearts like some vegetables—they take root any where, no matter how unfavorable the soil, or how blighting the atmosphere. Thus it was with the little old maid. In spite of derision and scorn, and buffeting her feelings had grown to the inanimate stone walls that surrounded her simply because they had nothing else to cling to; and if the more impulses of a lov-

ing nature could thus attach her to repelling and repulsive objects, how tenderly might she have loved what was really lovely!

Poor Fanny Carr, with the liberal, large and inexhaustible sum of somewhere about five shillings in her pocket, looked mentally round for a shelter for her head, and having bethought herself of one of Mrs. Pokenham's discarded servants, who had married and settled, determined upon seeking shelter there.

In a little cottage by the road side, as clean as those dear cottages of England ever are, with a neatly trimmed garden without, luxuriant in summer blossoms, and with the whitest of white curtains within, and the reddest of red floors, and the brightest of round tables, and the most resplendent of fire-places, sat the little old maid, dressed as neatly as if fairy hand had been her tire-woman, and working at her needle as lithely as birds perform their daily task of singing. What though her five shillings were nearly exhausted, she could earn almost sixpence a day, and that was independence, and independence was happiness.

There came a great dust whilst the little old maid was thus delving for happiness and sixpence a day, and a noise of carriage wheels; and looking up to see what might be coming, she saw a plain, respectable, grave steady, brown-visaged carriage and pair, with a coachman in a brown livery before, and a servant in a brown livery seated in the box behind, and to behold it stopped at the very cottage door where she was working; and so the little old maid jumped up, and threw down her cotton and her scissors, and hastened to tell them that it was all a mistake, deaf to her particular astonishment, she saw deaf uncle Jeffrey, getting down the steps, and walking across the cottage garden, and coming in at the door. And having gone thus far, the deaf gentleman took hold of her diminutive hand in his great gigantic paw, and gave it a squeeze, which almost made the little old maid cry out, which, however, she did not do, for ladies of all sizes very seldom cry out at a squeeze of the hand, generally bearing that sort of pain very philosophically, and then uncle Jeffrey proceeded to draw one of the bright rubbed wooden bottom chairs to himself, for his own particular use and to sit down upon it close to the little old maid.

"I hope you are well, Mr. Jeffrey," shouted the little old maid; "it is very kind of you to come and see me. I hope you are well."

"Quite well, thank you," replied uncle Jeffrey, "and now tell me what you think has brought me to see you?"

"Perhaps, said the little old maid, coloring slightly with the remains of a well whiped, well-worn down well subdued pride, perhaps you wanted me to do some plain work for Mr. Jeffrey. I am taking in plain work."

"You need not speak so loud, my dear," said deaf uncle Jeff; "you know you will tire yourself, you will exhaust yourself."

"Oh, Mr. Jeffrey!" said the little old maid, the tears rushing in her eyes. "O Mr. Jeffrey, pray believe that I never complained nor even felt it a trouble to talk to you. Indeed, I did not! I don't know how soon I may be afflicted myself."

Uncle Jeffrey took Fanny's hand, and gave it another squeeze that almost threatened it with compression. "I know you did not. Yet nevertheless, you must not speak so loud."

"But you have not your ear-horn," said Fanny Carr, persisting in shouting, lest her visitor should think that she grudged the trouble; "but you have not your ear-horn."

"But you know that I always told you that I was not deaf."

The little old maid looked perplexed.

"But you never believed me—was that it?"

The little old maid colored crimson, but she could not deny it.

"Well then if I was deaf I am better."

"I am glad of it with all my heart," said the little old maid, "for it must be a miserable thing not to hear a word that is said to us."

"Yet sometimes it is better not to hear what is said of us," replied uncle Jeffrey.

The little old maid colored deeply. She remembered too well all that had been said of him, before him.

"But did you know that I had, even when I was at the worst, quite hearing enough to know how kind you were to me, and how amiable to every body else."

"Oh, you are too good to think so," said the little old maid with a blush.

"And now tell me your plans, and if there is any thing I can help you in, and really you need not speak so loud. You know I could always understand you, even when I was very hard of hearing. Now tell me your plans."

"Oh," said the little old maid, "they are soon told. The people who live here were Mrs. Pokenham's servants and they are very kind to me, and I have got plenty of money, and I am quite happy and contented. Only if you want any shirts made—"

"I certainly would not let you do them."

"Oh!" exclaimed poor Fanny Carr.

"No, that I would not; for your gentleness, your kindness, your simplicity, your disinterestedness of character deserve something better. Now you have told me your plans, shall I tell you mine?"

"Yes, if you please," said the little old maid.

"Well, then, to begin with myself," said uncle Jeffrey, "I have a few thousand a year, I have a carriage and horses, and servants, and a very good house, and gardens