

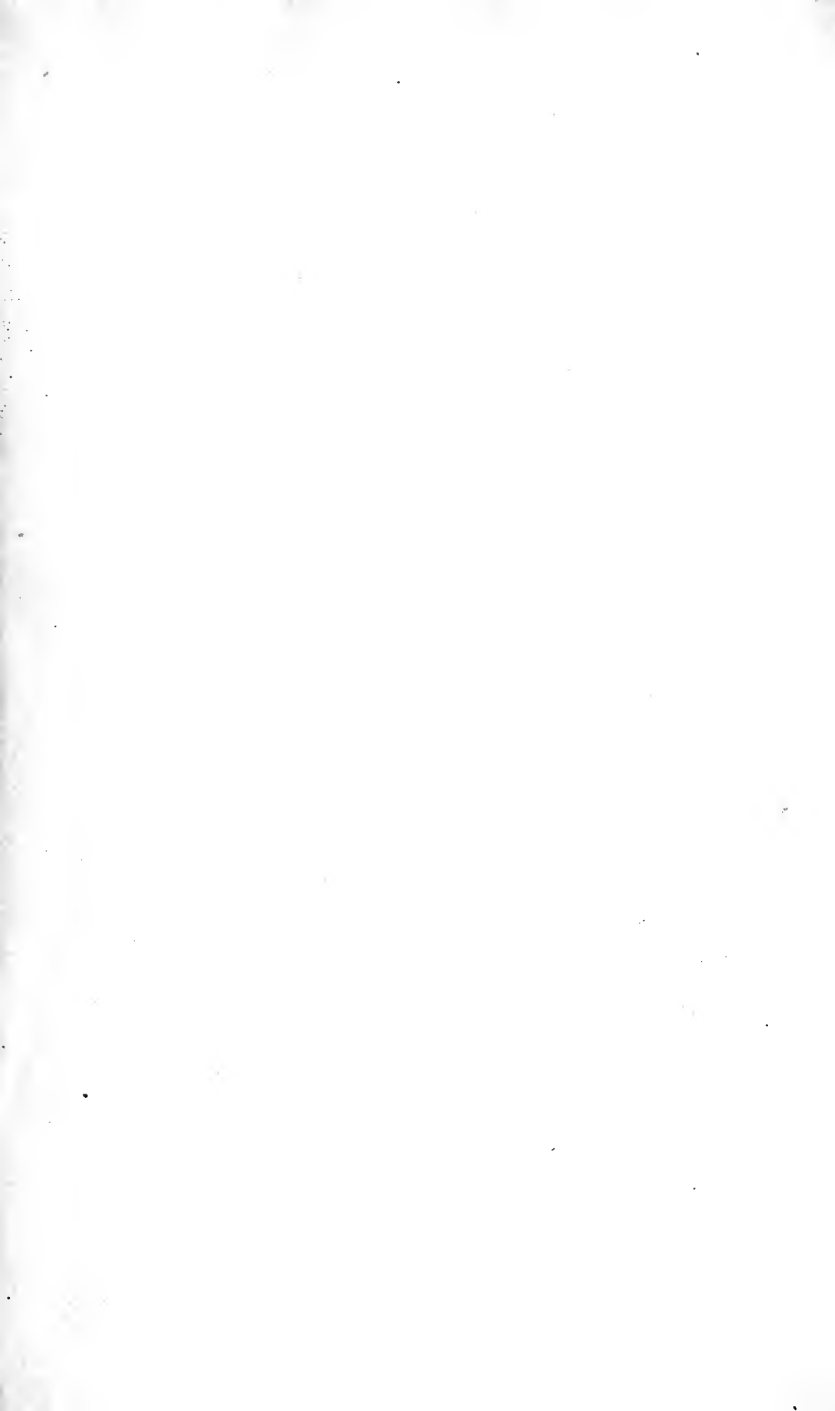
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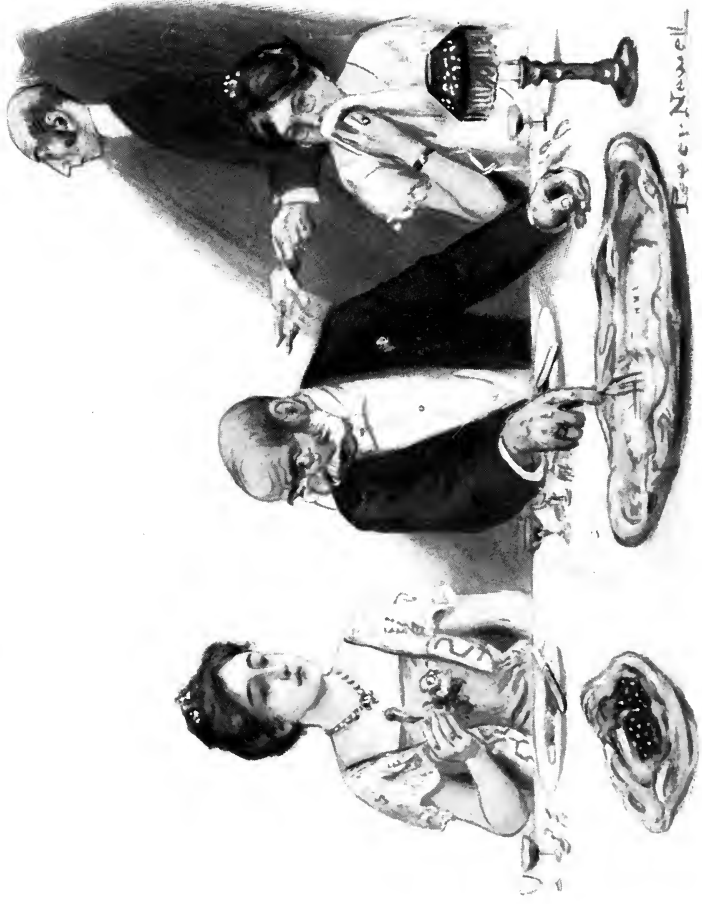


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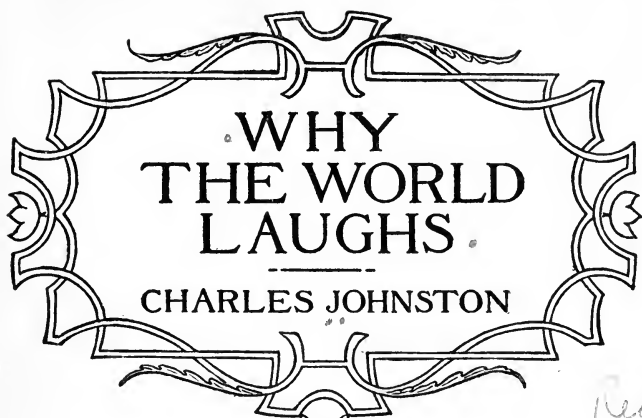


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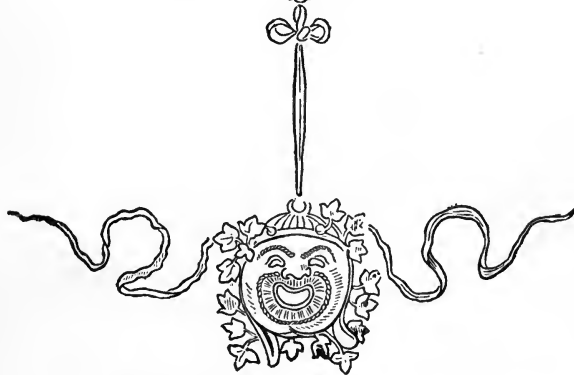


"CONFOUND YE, WILL YE HAVE ANY FISH?"

[See page 345]



*Red*



ILLUSTRATED BY  
J. H. M. S. P. S.

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WHY THE WORLD LAUGHS



# WHY THE WORLD LAUGHS

## I

### THE GRIMLY HUMOR OF JOHN CHINAMAN

ONE of the funniest stories about Chinamen is not really Chinese. It was told by a British Consul at one of the Treaty Ports. He arrested nine delinquent Chinese, intending to turn them over to the tender mercies of the native magistrate next morning. Meanwhile he gave them into the custody of a native policeman, telling him to lock them up, though there was no gaol at the consulate. But the policeman was equal to the emergency. He solemnly saluted, saying "I obey!" and marched his men off. Soon he returned and announced that they were safely caged.

The Consul was curious to see how and where. He followed his policeman to the yard. There he saw the nine prisoners dancing round the

## WHY THE WORLD LAUGHS

consulate flagstaff, lugubriously chanting the Chinese equivalent of "Ring-around-a-rosy!" Whenever the dance showed signs of flagging, the policeman stirred them up with a long pole. They seemed at first sight to be holding one another's hands; but looking closer, the Consul saw that they were handcuffed together.

"Well!" said the Consul, "if they are chained in a ring around the flagstaff, they can certainly not get away! But why do you make them dance?"

"Ah!" answered the Chinese policeman, with infinite cunning, "so that they cannot climb up the pole and get away!"

The Consul broke out into a loud British laugh, and tried to explain to the Chinaman that the nine prisoners could certainly not all climb up the pole at once; but the Chinaman had his idea, and held to it. So the dance went on.

A more genuinely Chinese jest, and one grim as anything in all literature, is the saying of the Chinese executioner to the condemned victim, "Stick your head out, or tuck it in! off it goes, just the same!"

In somewhat the same strain of "gallows humor" is the tale of the Chinese magistrate. One of his subordinates had a shrewish wife, who used to make his life miserable, and, on occasion, to inflict on him bodily chastisement. On a certain occasion, when he had come home singing and rather the worse for wear, in the cool of the dawn, the worthy lady expressed her resentment by scratching his face with vigor and precision.

## THE GRIMLY HUMOR OF JOHN CHINAMAN

He made his appearance at the magistrate's house, and was asked for explanations. "Your Honor," he said, "it is—oh, it is really nothing at all! I was—I was in my garden, working, and my vine trellis fell down and scratched me! That is all, your Honor!"

The magistrate looked at him keenly, and then gradually broke into a voiceless Chinese laugh. He had been there himself, had marital troubles of his own, and recognized the signs. Then he began to get angry, remembering his own sorrows.

"Why deceive me?" he cried. "Wretched man, I know the true origin of your sufferings! It is your wife, sinful woman that she is, that inflicted on you these scars! Oh, shameless and incorrigible race of women! How many are the sins that must be laid at your doors! Crafty deceivers of men, you lacerate our hearts with a thousand thorns! Like vampires, you come close to us, only to suck our blood! Like serpents—"

At this point the magistrate looked up. Just behind the door he saw the threatening figure of his own wife grasping a cudgel and, tucking up her sleeve, preparing for an onslaught.

"Go, my good man! Go!" he said, suddenly, turning to his subordinate. "Never mind your wife, but go! My vine trellis is about to fall too!"

Somewhat in the same vein is the Chinese saying, "A man thinks he knows, but a woman knows better." And the Chinese have altered a uni-

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versal proverb into the saying, "Man proposes, woman disposes!"

There is a grim touch, genuinely Chinese, in the proverb, "A red-nosed man may be a teetotaler, but no one will believe it." And even better is the saying, ("It is not the wine that makes a man drunk; it is the man himself.") Equally good is this, "Don't pull up your shoe in your neighbor's melon-patch; don't fix your hat under your neighbor's plum-tree." There is fine practical wisdom in that, and in truth this kind of practical good sense is a religion with the Chinese. Confucius himself is credited with the saying, "If you suspect a man, don't employ him; if you employ him, don't suspect him!" There are a good many sayings about money, in the same worldly-wise vein. For example, "With money you can move the gods; without money you cannot move a man"; or this, "If a man has money, he will find plenty of people with scales to weigh it." Even more cynical is the saw, "No image-maker worships the gods. He knows what they are made of"; or this, "We love our own compositions, but other men's wives." There is the same rather dry and bitter wit in the proverb, "He who rides a tiger cannot dismount," none the less true in general, though we have just disproved it in the particular. This suggests another Chinese saying, "The faults that a man condemns when out of office, he commits when in.")

But there is a gentler and kindlier touch in some Chinese sayings, as for instance, "If you



## THE GRIMLY HUMOR OF JOHN CHINAMAN

cannot draw a tiger, draw a dog!" though even here one suspects that the application is often sardonic. More sincerely moral is the saying, "Cleanse your heart as you would cleanse a plate"; and Mencius put deep wisdom into his sentence, "Life feeds upon adversity and sorrow. Death comes amid pleasure and repose."

The philosopher Chwang was a disciple of Lao-Tse and the mystic Way. It is related that he was unfortunate in his matrimonial ventures. His first wife died young. His second wife ran away with one of his students, leaving a satirical verse to inform the philosopher that she also was in quest of a way, and thought she had found it. His third wife he married several years later, a veritable match of the scented iris of spring with the chrysanthemum of autumn. Yet she protested that she was devoted to her philosopher.

One day the worshipful Chwang was out walking up on the hillside, communing with nature in solitude, when he happened to stroll into the cemetery. There, beside a new-made grave, he beheld a young and lovely lady clad in sad vestments, diligently fanning the little mound of fresh-heaped earth.

With courteous sympathy the philosopher asked her why she did this.

"Because of my foolish husband!" she answered. "He is here. And just before he died he made me promise not to marry again until the earth on his grave was quite dry. I have been watching it for days, and, oh, it is so slow!" And she

## WHY THE WORLD LAUGHS

looked up archly, with sweet, pathetic eyes, at our good Chwang.

“But your wrists are not strong enough for such toil!” he said, his eyes drawn and held by hers; “let me relieve your labor for a time.”

“By all means!” cried the lady, brightening. “Here is the fan, and I shall owe you a lasting debt of gratitude, if you fan it dry as quick as possible.”

Straightway good Chwang set to work, and, being the possessor of certain magic powers, as all philosophers should be, he quickly drew forth every drop of moisture from the grave and then, with a smile, returned the fan to the fair lady.

Smiling joyfully, she cried, “How can I ever thank you enough for your kind help! As a little token of my gratitude, let me present you with this second fan, which I had in reserve, and also pray accept one of my silver hair-pins.”

Daintily she drew forth the cut silver hair-pin from her shining tresses, and tendered it to the embarrassed philosopher. Mindful of his gentle spouse, the Lady Tien, he thought better not to accept it, but was willing to take the fan.

When he came home, sate him in his hall, and pondered over the happening on the hillside, he sighed deeply, thinking on the lightness of women.

“Why does my august lord sigh?” asked the Lady Tien—“and what is that fan in your hand?”

Chwang told her what had befallen in the cemetery, making, however, no mention of the hair-pin, and saying, at the end, that, alas, all womankind were so!

## THE GRIMLY HUMOR OF JOHN CHINAMAN

The Lady Tien was indignant. Why condemn all for the vice of one? she said; were there not multitudes of faithful ladies in the Middle Kingdom, even from of old unto the present day? Shame and grief came on her, she said, for her lord's censure; and, for her part, she would rather die a thousand deaths than follow in the footsteps of that too hasty widow!

The venerable Chwang raised his eyebrows with a deprecating smile, waved his hand gently, as who should say So be it, and let the matter drop. But the very next day his countenance was altered, and he began to peak and pine. To be brief, in spite of the Lady Tien's ministrations and laments, the good philosopher's body was soon in a fine coffin of lacquered wood, while his soul had started on the wild journey to the Yellow Springs.

Many days the Lady Tien wept and grieved, pondering on the high excellences of her departed philosopher; and her neighbors came and lamented with her. Among the comers was a youth, fair of face and demure of mien, discreet of speech, and elegantly appareled, with a man-servant, who announced that his master was a prince of the kingdom of Tsu, come to enroll himself as a pupil of the excellent and venerable Chwang.

These words made the tears of the Lady Tien to gush forth afresh as she told the youth that never, never could he hear wisdom from those sainted lips, for that Chwang himself was even now listening to the decrees of the great Assessor.

The youth, profoundly distressed, exchanged

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his silk attire for mourning vestments, begging only that the Lady Tien would permit him to remain and mourn for a hundred days, thus to show his reverent sorrow for the departed Chwang. So he began diligently to water the earth with his tears.

The tears of the Lady Tien mingled with the tears of the Prince of Tsu, and their sighs merged together amid the first airs of dawn and the zephyrs of evening. Ere ten of the hundred days were spent, sweet sympathy had been born in their eyes and had stolen into their hearts. Yet the young prince protested that never, never could a pupil wed the relict of his revered preceptor; there he would die unwed.

“But,” said the Lady Tien, “you were not really the pupil of the aged Chwang! You only hoped to be, and that, you know, is altogether different!”

When the Lady Tien said she had compunctions, and yet, and yet... Had not the hard-hearted Chwang driven his first wife to an early grave? and his cruelty had compelled the second wife to flee for refuge to her parents—so the Lady Tien told the tale—while she herself, poor saint, had endured much from his jealousy and faithlessness; and she knew that he had secret meetings in cemeteries and on desert hillsides.

The Prince of Tsu assented and demurred by turns. How could they wed, he said, while the coffin of the late Chwang lay in state in the chief room of the house?

## THE GRIMLY HUMOR OF JOHN CHINAMAN

That, said the Lady Tien, could be arranged; for she would have the coffin carried out to the woodshed behind the house. But, said the Prince of Tsu, he had not wherewithal to provide fit gifts, nor yet marriage robes and trappings for the festive day.

Nay, said the lady, this need be no obstacle. She herself would see to the presents, and from the store of the lamented Chwang she would provide the wedding robes.

So day, by day, the hundred days sped by, and the day agreed on for the wedding came. With it came the ceremony, and the Lady Tien's cup of joy seemed full. But fate was ripening against her, for her faithlessness and her protestations against the lady of the cemetery. For, lo and behold, no sooner was the ceremony over than the Prince of Tsu was taken with sudden spasms and convulsions and grievous fits, so that he fell to the ground, beating his breast with his hands. Then, with a shudder, he closed his eyes.

The Lady Tien was terrified. She asked the old man-servant of the prince if this had ever befallen hitherto, and what they did for it. He answered that it had, and that there was but one remedy: to pour into his lips soup made from the brains of a man.

The Lady Tien was first horrified, then doubting, then resolute. "There is the late Chwang!" she said. "I myself will go, and bring his brains to make soup for my prince!"

So she took an ax whose haft was lacquered red,

## WHY THE WORLD LAUGHS

and went with firm step and beating heart to the shed where the coffin lay. Without a moment's delay, she raised the ax, aimed well at the coffin lid, and struck valiantly, and struck again.

At the tenth blow the lid parted, cleft down its length; and the philosopher Chwang, with a resonant sneeze, sat up in his coffin.

The Lady Tien shrieked in terror, and dropped the ax.

"My beloved spouse," quietly said the philosopher, "I am somewhat cramped; pray aid me to rise!" Leaning on her arm, he made his way to the inner chamber, and with each step her heart sank deeper, for she knew that the young Prince of Tsu was still lying there.

To her infinite relief, not a sign of the prince or of his old man-servant was to be seen. They had vanished into thin air, as it seemed.

Eagerly the Lady Tien began: "Oh, worshipful spouse! Ever since your soul departed for the Yellow Springs, you have been in my heart, day and night. Even now, as I was watching by you, hearing a slight stirring within your coffin, I broke it open with a hatchet, thinking that haply you might be alive! Thanks be to august Heaven for my renewed felicity."

"Sincere thanks, madam," courteously replied the wise Chwang. "But may I ask why this gay apparel?"

The lady was stumped for an instant. Then she made reply: "Venerable spouse! I had a presentiment of my good-fortune, and so donned

THE PHILOSOPHER CHWANG SAT UP IN HIS COFFIN



THE PHILOSOPHER CHWANG SAT UP IN HIS COFFIN

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## THE GRIMLY HUMOR OF JOHN CHINAMAN

these bright robes, not willing to receive you back to life in mourning vestments!"

"And why," again asked the sage, "was my coffin set in the shed?"

The Lady Tien could find no answer. And before them were the wine-cups, standing there from the wedding feast. The sage made no comment on them, save only to ask the Lady Tien for a cup of warm wine. Then, suddenly growing stern, he pointed over her shoulder.

"Look," he said, "at those two men behind you!"

The Lady Tien turned with dread certitude that she would see the Prince of Tsu and his man; and so it was. But Chwang was vanished. Then the two men vanished, and Chwang as suddenly reappeared.

The Lady Tien at last saw the truth: the Prince of Tsu was but an apparition of old Chwang himself, the whole matter was contrived to try her, and the full measure of her infidelity was known. So in despair she unwound her girdle from her slender waist, tied one end over a beam, and straightway hanged herself by the neck till she was dead. Thus ends the pleasant and most excellently conceited comedy of the philosopher Chwang and his third wife, amusingly illustrating the fickleness of women.

So there we have the spirit of the Chinese jest, with a sting in it as bitter as the merry-making of the wise Solomon, king over Israel, a sharpness of edge only equaled among modern people, per-

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haps, by the spiced jests of Caledonia. I am inclined to blame the great Confucius for this grimness of Chinese wit. How could a people joke freely in the straight-laced primness which he fixed upon the Middle Kingdom? Just as the formalism of the ancient Jew or the religious bigotry of the Scotch Presbyterian killed gentle humor, so did the prodigiously priggish mood of Confucius's "superior man." It took the roystering jollity of Harun al Rashid's Bagdad, or our own Western border, once more to release from her bonds fair Humor, tenth of the nine Muses.

Lest it be thought that the Chinese spirit is altogether grim, I quote a little parable of another Chwang, or, it may be, the very sage who wedded the Lady Tien; but this charming fragment is quite authentic.

"Once on a time," he said, "I dreamed I was a butterfly flitting from flower to flower in the sunshine. Butterfly-like, I followed every fancy, forgetting altogether that I was a man. Suddenly I awoke, and there I lay, a man once more. And now I know not whether I then dreamed I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming myself a man."

## II

### A MONGOLIAN MUSIC COMEDY

A WITTY person has recorded the belief that there have never been but two stories on the stage: the first, two men and one woman, which is essentially tragic; the second, two women and one man, which makes for inevitable comedy. Without making the point that, in these feminist days, we may have to reverse this conclusion, one may admit that, while all comedy situations can hardly be reduced to one, yet they are few in number—as few, perhaps, as the original jokes. One finds these essentially comic situations in all lands, throughout all times. I have just been reading a Turkish play from the frosty Caucasus with a swashbuckling hero very like Falstaff, a group of Armenian knaves resembling closely Bardolf and the Ancient Pistol—in a word, the whole atmosphere of the Prince Hal comedies. In one of his rollicking, boisterous satires Aristophanes has anticipated the whole New Woman movement; and in a Mongolian comedy I find a somewhat rowdy humor playing with the very themes of Chaucer and Boccaccio.

The central figure of the play, half villain, half

## WHY THE WORLD LAUGHS

hero, is a worthless old rascal, Ah Lan by name, who, like his cousin Ah Sin, is a good deal of a gambler; but, unlike Ah Sin, he does not know how to stack the cards. He is always losing his last cent, or his last cash, at Fan-Tan, and is sober only through the necessity of his losses and the leanness of his credit. Set against Ah Lan is his worthy wife, a vigorous, shrill-tongued shrew, who exerts her feminine influence on her spouse through the medium of a rod no thicker than her thumb; nay, she does not hesitate to square up at her husband with her fists, and on occasion to give him a knock-out blow. A notable woman, truly, and able to take care of herself, yet in her own crude, jolly way genuinely loving her worthless spouse. A third figure in the comedy is a Buddhist monk; and here one is vividly reminded of Chaucer's knavish Pardoner and certain riotous incidents in the *Decameron*. For the monk is a shameless scamp who has taken vows only to break them; a sworn vegetarian whose mind runs on roast pork, or, to be more literal, tenderly cooked puppy; a pledged celibate, always in quest of adventures among the fair sex, and, in particular, somewhat swiftly smitten by the primitive charms of Ah Lan's wife. To add a Chaucerian touch, the knavish monk is a hump-back, with a hump in his nature, too, as our philosopher says. Add two street rowdies, gamblers, and knockabout men, and you have the precious personnel complete; complete, that is, but for Ah Lan's pig, which gives the title to the

## A MONGOLIAN MUSIC COMEDY

play. But the wearer of the title rôle in this case has but a thinking part. This Mongolian porker is no barnyard Romeo full of eloquence.

With such figures of essential comedy the play opens. There is the banging of gongs, the shrilling and screeching of weird instruments, the thumping of empty barrels, and all the other elements of Chinese stage music, which have found modern echo in Berlin. Seated on the stage is the good mistress Ah Lan, a rowdy, ragged figure of a woman in faded, frowzy garb, who sings of her woes in a high nasal treble. As is inevitable in a Mongolian play, she announces her name and address. "My name is Mistress Wong," she says, "and I am wedded to the ne'er-do-weel Ah Lan. I have sent him to the market with a strip of cloth to sell, of my own weaving; why does the knave not come back?" Then she drops into song again, enlarging on the utter depravity of mere man in general, and of her own spouse in particular, and ending with the announcement that, as he is so long in coming, she will lie in wait for him with a club, which she twirls skilfully in her hand, swishing it through the air in a fashion which promises much for Ah Lan.

Meanwhile that unpresentable but withal cheerful hero is making his way home, disconsolate and quaking with apprehension. He has taken the strip of cloth to the market, it is true; he has even got a fair price for it; but—and here lies the tragedy of the piece—he thereupon found his disreputable feet carrying him, as long wont had accustomed

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them, to a Fan-Tan joint, where a greasy and pigtailed croupier invited his guests to "make their bets while the ball was in motion," or, rather, to preserve the unities of the game, to bet on the number of counters that would remain in his hand when, taking a big handful at haphazard from the pile, he counted them out of his hand by fours, thus leaving either one, two, three, or four in the last handful. For so goes the game of Fan-Tan. His guests, among them the hapless, undeserving Ah Lan, laid their copper cash, at ten to the cent, on squares of painted cloth marked with the numbers up to four; and when they guessed right the croupier paid them, and when they guessed wrong they paid him. Thus does the heathen risk his money.

All this, of course, takes place behind the scenes of our play. Ah Lan loses his last cent, in this case the price for Mistress Wong's strip of cloth. And he comes home lamenting the fickleness of the Mongolian Goddess Fortune and reciting the story, after duly naming himself to the audience, in their primitive Eastern fashion. He realizes, too, that his spouse is in all probability waiting for him at home with a stick; though an Oriental, she is a club-woman. He is not disappointed. As in western lands, the lady is first at the rendezvous. She greets him ironically, as he comes in, and asks, very pointedly, whether he has sold the strip of cloth. Ah Lan cannot tell a lie; at least in this case he does not. Yes, he has sold the cloth. Where is it? In the hands of the Fan-Tan man.

## A MONGOLIAN MUSIC COMEDY

He had beastly luck; whenever he put his money on the four, the croupier held three chips; if he bet on three, the croupier had two, or one, or four, but never by any chance just three. At this point Mistress Wong begins to warm up. The club comes forward, and at each incriminating answer Ah Lan gets a rap over the knuckles, not metaphorically, but in very deed. He abuses the croupier, calling him a tortoise-egg, where we should say a lobster; and declares that the black tortoise of Fortune withdrew its head, for Ah Lan thinks in tortoises. At this, wronged womanhood flares up, and, after a warning song in which she eloquently declares her intention, she begins to beat him in earnest.

Ah Lan finally stops her by pleading contrition, and saying that he is going to reform, reform and go into Big Business; in fact, open a pawnshop. But his wife pointedly replies that he has not enough money to pay for the pawn-tickets, which seems a very unwifely retort. Ah Lan admits it, and says that, if he cannot have a pawnshop, he will at least start a big trading junk, and get rich by merchandise. But his ruthless and clubbable spouse administers another crushing rebuff. She tells him that he has not the price of a piece of cord, much less the cost of a ship. He thinks it over, admits that it is true, and says that he will at least start a stall for the vending of bean porridge, which, if it brings little, at least costs little. But the hard-hearted lady says he has not even capital for that. Then Ah Lan has an idea:

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there is the pig, his wife's beloved pigling, which will fetch, in open market, nearly two thousand cash, or, as we might say, two dollars. And with that you can buy the makings of much bean porridge.

Now comes a touch of unverisimilitude. That oft-deceived and ill-treated lady, Mistress Wong, in spite of all her bitter experience, turns over to him the pigling, darling of her heart, and sends him off to sell it in the market. Any one with even a small experience of story-reading could have told her that the pig would go the way of the strip of cloth; but she is confiding, and does not think of accompanying her untrustworthy broker, who hales the pig forth to the market. One thing the lady has done as a kind of precaution. She has made Ah Lan swear, by the divinity of Sun, Moon, and Stars, that he will not misuse the cash nor turn it into the byway of Fan-Tan; and the scene of the swearing is funny enough. For, in spite of his recent beating, Ah Lan is a comic rogue, and his oath first takes this form: "Sun, Moon, and Stars, ye lights of the firmaments, if Ah Lan goes a-gambling, I pray you do to death the daughter of my mother-in-law!" But his wife very naturally objects that this won't do. He must say it again. So he swears thus: "Sun, Moon, Stars, if Ah Lan goes gambling, may he have no toes on his heels, no corns on his skull, no boils on his hair!" But the goodwife will not pass that, so he at last swears that if Ah Lan goes a-gambling, he may never have a coffin when he is dead. When



## A MONGOLIAN MUSIC COMEDY

a Mongolian says that, he is in earnest. His wife thinks so, too, and produces the pig, at which he grunts, to encourage it, and off they go to market with a song.

To him chanting the virtues of the pigling, enter two Ruffians just as Shakespeare would say, Enter: two Murderers. These are only gamblers and bruisers, however, so much as we see of them at least; but the experienced reader knows, the instant they appear, that the pigling is done for. But before inexorable fate overtakes it, there is an amusing bit of comedy in the style of Lord Dunderbary. Mistress Wong has given him leave to sell the pig for a thousand cash—that is, a dollar—but has ordered him on no account to accept eighty cents. So, when the Ruffians, with no true intention of paying, ask him the price of his pig, his fuddled mind wavers between two prices: the thousand cash, which he may take, and the eight hundred, which he must refuse. He tries again and again to do the arithmetic of it; finally he holds up one finger for the thousand, and eight for the eight hundred; the latter is obviously more, so he tells the robbers that he will take eight hundred, because a thousand isn't enough. In fact, it is just like selling Adirondack lands to the State; you pay half as much again as the seller is willing to take. But in the Mongolian play the poor purchaser doesn't get even the lower price, for one of the Ruffians promptly goes off with the pig, while the other avers that he must go seek a grass to string the cash on.

## WHY THE WORLD LAUGHS

Ah Lan sees himself once more swindled, and with sound judgment foresees another hiding from his wife. This gives him an idea. He calls back the Ruffian, and tells him he may have the pig and welcome, if he will only show Ah Lan some good knock-out blows for the benefit of his wife. He means to be forehanded with the lady this time. So he stands up, and the Ruffian obligingly punches him and knocks him over, telling him in each case the name of the blow; and then, having apparently something of a conscience, though he is a heathen, he lets Ah Lan practise the blows on him and knock him over. So Ah Lan returns to his home, pigless yet rejoicing. The unexpected once more occurs. For when he returns, confident in his new accomplishment, and boasts that he has spent the money learning to box, his wife tells him to come on, and lands him one on the solar plexus; which is not bad for the Land of Golden Lilies. She gives him, indeed, such a thorough drubbing that he is presently helpless; and, throwing a cloth over his head, she ties him to the door-post and goes off stage, telling him that she is going to have something succulent to eat, and will then come back and punch him some more; which is heartless, if you remember that he has had nothing to eat since the day before.

Thereupon enters the Chaucerian figure, a Buddhist monk, dirty, humpbacked, greedy-eyed, for all the world like the Pardoner of *The Canterbury Tales*. This Buddhist monk, for all his vow to eat no meat, is thinking audibly of a

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juicy puppy stew he had the week before, and another he hopes for in the week to come; and as he thinks aloud he licks his lips, and presently espies Ah Lan, or, at least, as much as can be seen of the old scamp, with his head in the bag. Not sure whether he has to deal with man or demon, he approaches cautiously and accosts Ah Lan. The old rascal, from the depths of his bag, assures him that he is a man, and the monk releases him; whereupon Ah Lan mocks him aside, for a shaveling knave, which, in truth, he is. But Ah Lan goes further than mere mockery; pretending gratitude for his release, he declares that he can cure the hump on the monk's back. But at first the monk declares he has nothing to pay with. Finally he bethinks him to give Ah Lan the subscription-list, whereon he is gathering cash to buy temple oil, and the old rascal assents, and takes the list. Here is another touch of Chaucer's Pardoner, for the list, like the monk, is a fraud. Yet Ah Lan sees its possibilities and agrees to begin the cure. And first, he says, the monk must put his head in the bag and be tied up to the door-post. The which is forthwith done.

In Horace's *Art of Poetry* there is an injunction that nothing too terrible should be done on the stage. Perhaps through an instinctive feeling after this law, the dramatist of our Mongolian comedy leaves to our imagination the scene which immediately follows, wherein a number of good Chinamen are terribly done by Ah Lan and his fraudulent subscription-list. For, rendered con-

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fident by the official temple seals on his long strip of paper, he sallies forth, as we must infer, and touches first one and then another for oil for imaginary temple lamps. And we can imagine the wheezing whine with which he solicited subscriptions, in ways that were childlike and bland. Doubtless he met with many refusals, receiving, as the old proverb said, more kicks than half-pence; doubtless also certain fat and greasy citizens were importuned into parting with small quantities of cash, with squeaks and grunts of discontentment. But the temple plea availed; these good Celestials had some thought of their souls, and of what might happen to them among the Yellow Hills of the Dead, if they refused to subscribe for that temple oil. So they paid; and Ah Lan grinned, promising himself many games of Fan-Tan, in which, of course, he was going to break the bank.

The result at least we know. Ah Lan came back with a well-filled list and much cash, though the details of the gaining of it were too dreadful for representation. But while he was gone, much had been happening in his home. The wicked humpbacked monk, we must remember, had been left, with a sack tied over his head and tied up to the door-post, awaiting a magical cure. Ah Lan, indeed, with a fine touch of humor, had promised him that, if he waited patiently, a fairy with a wand would presently appear and proceed to straighten him out. Which, in truth, happened, yet with a difference. For the fairy did veritably

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appear, in the grimy and exasperated person of Mistress Wong; and she held a wand—that is to say, a club—with which she did proceed to straighten out the monk, fondly believing him to be the husband of her bosom. When her wrist grew tired, she let him down and untied the sack from his graceless head. Whereupon follows a scene frankly anticlerical, or at least antimonastic. For, heedless of the rule of his order, that shaveling eater of stewed puppy straightway fell to making eyes at the old shrew, vowing that she was beautiful, lovely as the fair maid in whose name Don Quixote challenged an unbelieving world. As he is ogling and bowing, begging the lady for a kiss, which, with vigorous and decorative speech, she continues to refuse; as they dodge hither and thither about the stage, giving an impersonation of threatened virtue, Ah Lan returns with his long subscription-list and his strings of cash. Thereupon, seeing his wrinkled old wife in the role of distressed damozel, he flies to her rescue, soundly thrashes the rascally Buddhist, and at last drives him from the scene. The further adventures of that greedy monk would furnish good matter for some Chinese Flaubert or Zola, who might follow him through unsavory streets into unmentionable dens, where pipes of opium might soothe his sorrows and inspire new schemes; but this again is left to our imagination.

Left on the stage are the old rascal Ah Lan and his hardly more presentable old wife. First Ah Lan, with a fine assumption at once of courage

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and virtue, berates her soundly for flirting with the man of the tonsure, adding many Darwinian epithets. But things finally quiet down; he explains how the monk came to be tied up, and she explains how he came to be loosed again. Domestic contentment being thus restored, Ah Lan suddenly remembers his good luck. He is not exactly wealthy, but he has coin, the strings of cash collected for the temple, and he and his wife with glee agree that at last they have the needed capital to start the stall for the dispensation of bean porridge, and the curtain descends on a scene of genuine comedy, as the graceless old couple sing a shrill duo of domestic felicity and sweet content.

### III

#### HUMOR IN THE JAPANESE STYLE

JAPAN contributes to the mirth of the world one of the rarest of all things, a lady humorist. I know not where we might find another, unless it be the charming and nimble-witted writer of *The Rubaiyat of Bridge*, and even then I suspect the Japanese lady of incarnating anew in New Jersey.

Be this as it may, the authoress of the *Pillow Sketches*, who bears the imposing name of Sei Shonagon, has a humorous charm that is all her own, and there is something essentially modern in the best sense in everything she wrote, though nine long centuries have passed since she graced the Mikado's court at Kyoto. One of the charming things about her is the way she jests with the august personage, half ruler and half demigod, who stood at the summit of Japanese life. What, for example, could be more winning than this cat-and-dog story as she indites it?

"The august Cat-in-waiting on the Mikado," she tells us, "was a very delightful animal, and a great favorite with his Majesty, who conferred on her the fifth rank of nobility and the title of

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Chief Superintendent of the Ladies - in - waiting of the Palace. One day the Cat-in-waiting had gone out on the bridge between two of the buildings of the Palace, when the nurse in charge of her called out, 'How indecorous! Come in at once!' But the Cat-in-waiting paid no attention, but basked sleepily in the sunshine. So, in order to frighten her, the nurse cried: 'Where is Okinamaro? Come, Okinamaro! Bite the Chief Superintendent!' The foolish dog, thinking she was in earnest, flew at the cat, who in her fright and consternation took refuge behind the screen of the breakfast-room, where His Majesty then was. The Mikado was greatly shocked. He took the cat into his august bosom, and, summoning the Lord Chamberlain, gave orders that Okinamaro should have a good thrashing and be banished to Dog Island at once. Alas, poor dog! How he used to swagger at his ease. When he was led along with a willow wreath upon his head, and adorned with flowers of peach and cherry, did he ever think it would come to this?"

The good lady of the *Pillow Sketches* is full of shrewd observation and graceful expression. For instance, she makes a list of detestable things. "People who ride in a creaking carriage," she says, "are very detestable, and must be deaf as well. When you ride in such a carriage yourself, it is the owner who is detestable." Again, "People who interrupt your stories to show off their own cleverness are detestable. All interrupters, young or old, are very detestable. People who, when



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you are telling a story, break in with, 'Oh, I know,' and give quite a different version from your own, are detestable." There is even more salt in this: "Very detestable is the snoring of a man whom you are trying to conceal and who has gone to sleep in a place where he has no business." And the universal voice of humanity will bear out Sei Shonagon, when she says that fleas are detestable, especially when they get under your clothing and jump about. And there is a certain fine satiric note in the saying that people who mumble a prayer when they sneeze are detestable, with the added *nota bene*, "Loud sneezing is detestable, except in the case of the gentlemen of the house."

One sees that, like the more modern author of "The Mikado," the lady of the *Pillow Sketches* had got "a little list"; and on that list she puts the preacher, thus: "A preacher ought to be a good-looking man. It is then easier to keep your eyes fixed on his face, without which it is impossible to benefit by the sermon; otherwise your eyes wander and you forget to listen. Ugly preachers have, therefore, a grave responsibility. But no more of this!" Then, as an afterthought: "If preachers were of a more suitable age, I should have pleasure in giving a more favorable judgment. As matters actually stand, their sins are fearful to think of!"

The peculiar delicacy of touch which is everywhere in Japanese art comes out in every line of the *Pillow Sketches*. They are indeed of the land of pink cherry blossoms. There is a racier note in some of the proverbs of the Japanese, as, for

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instance, in the saying, "Spanking him with a pie"; of some one who does a real kindness in a truculent way. In somewhat the same spirit is the saying, "To spank a cat with a sledge-hammer," where, instead of the cat, our own proverb puts a walnut.

Wittily irreverent is the saw, "We call on the gods—when we are in a fix"; and there is the same touch of irony in the saying, "Pray in faith even to a sardine, and your prayer will be granted!" Somewhat in the spirit of a Japanese water-color is the quaint little proverb, "While the tears are still wet, a bee stings you"—the equivalent for the saying that troubles never come singly. Again, there is the parallel of our "Too many cooks" in the declaration that "Too many sailors make the ship go up the mountain." And even in these latter days of plutocracy, I do not remember to have seen anything so daring as the Japanese saw, "Money makes you comfortable even in hell." This should bring solace to "the criminal multi-millionaires of our day."

"He that praises himself is a kind of fool," is sound wisdom as well as wit; and there is a flash of fancy in the saying that an obsequious flunkey "dusts the whiskers" of the great man he is flattering. Very sententious is this advice to children, from a book more than a thousand years old, "The mouth is the gate of misfortune; the tongue is the root of misfortune; if the mouth were like the nose, a man would have no trouble till the end of his days." And one might offer to

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Lord Rosebery, as a clinching argument for the Peers, this saying from the same antique book, "No man is worthy of honor by reason of his birth alone. It is the garnering of knowledge that bringeth wisdom and virtue."

In these days of devil-cars, one can find a very pointed application for the saying, "To see the chariot that is in front overturned is a warning to the chariot that is behind." And our good neighbor Governor Wilson might well adopt, as a warning to motorists from New York and Pennsylvania, this old Japanese saw, "When thou crossest a frontier, inquire what is forbidden within it."

About the time when Alfred the Great got a scolding for letting the old lady's cakes get burned, a tale was written in Japan, called the "Narrative of the Bamboo-cutter." Therein stands narrated that the grim, gentle old man and his gray old wife were childless till one day, while chopping a bamboo in the woods, he discovered within the stem a fairy maiden bright as moon-beams. And this moon-white maid abode with them and grew, till the grim old man and his gray old wife saw that she was of age to marry.

The fame of the moon-white maid had gone abroad, and there came many suitors seeking to wed her. But the maid was obdurate, weeping in her chamber, till at last she bethought her to lay on them impossible tasks. To one of her suitors, who was a lord of high degree, she spoke thus:

"In far-distant Ind was born our Lord, Buddha the Compassionate. In the days of his discipline,

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he begged food by the wayside, seeking alms in a poor bowl of stone. Let my lordly suitor bring me the bowl as a marriage-gift!"

Full of wrath, that lord returned to his mansion, thinking that the maid had flouted him. But his anger passed and the image of the maid white as moonbeams remained, so that his heart was sick with longing, and he found no rest. Then he questioned with himself whether indeed he should go forth to seek the Buddha's bowl in far-off Ind, so that he might win his heart's beloved. Yet he bethought him not less of the perils of the deep, and, presently pondering, he discerned a more excellent way.

Sending word to the grim old man and his moon-white daughter that he was set forth for Ind, he betook him to the sea-coast, and then turned back secretly by night, and came and hid himself until many days were passed. Then in pilgrim garb he set forth to a famed monastery on Mount Ohara. Seeking throughout the temple, he found at last, behind the altar in a shrine, a stone begging-bowl, very old and venerable, thickly coated with dust and black with age, such a bowl as might in very truth have belonged to the Lord Buddha.

Wrapping it in a rich brocade and binding with it a spray of pink cherry blossoms artfully wrought of paper, he set forth, richly dight, to the house of the old bamboo-cutter and the moon-white maid. And the maid was full of awe and wonder when she saw the rareness of the gift. Unwrapping the

## HUMOR IN THE JAPANESE STYLE

folds of silk she found within the bowl a strip of paper, with these words written on it:

Oh the rock-riven mountains,  
Oh the storm-driven fountains;  
Oh the vigils I've kept,  
Bowls of tears I have wept  
In the quest of the bowl!

The moon-white maid, being indeed of gentle heart, was herself moved to tears by this sad recital; yet, being a wise maid withal, she be-thought her: "If this be indeed the begging-bowl of our Lord Buddha, then in the darkness of night will it shimmer with pearly radiance!" So very reverently she bade them set down the bowl and darken the chamber. And they did so, but the bowl shone not, were it even the faint glimmer of a firefly! When they lit the paper lanterns, the courtier had fled, and the moon-white maiden was glad within her heart, for she would fain flee from wedlock. Therefore, smiling to herself, she wrapped the bowl again in the brocade of silk, and sent it to the lordly suitor, with such verses as these:

Not a glint of light  
As a dew-drop bright  
Lurked within the bowl!  
Nay, how could it shine  
Hid in that dark shrine?

The courtly man, when he received the bowl and read the verses, strove at first in his wrath to break the bowl. But it was hard, and brake not,

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therefore he cast it from him. Yet, as he was a learned man and a courtier though sick at heart, he sent to the moon-white maid such verses as these:

At thy radiance, maid!  
Did the bowl's light fade,  
Its sheen outshone!  
It would glow with light  
Were thy eyes less bright!

But the maid answered him not, and he hied him homeward, full of sorrow and despite and bitterly blaming the heartless maiden. Not more fortunate was a prince who likewise came to woo her, for of him she asked a golden branch of the tree of life. He too fared him forth to the sea-shore, taking certain warriors of choice with him. Boarding a vessel bound for far lands, he sent these homeward, and they departed weeping. But when dark night had come, he bade the shipmaster turn the prow homeward, and so came secretly to Kyoto. There he had contrived a certain subtle and crafty deed, for he was a politic prince. He built, in the loneliness of the forest, a secret house set about with triple thorns, so that none might enter. Thither he had assembled six of those that wrought in silver very subtly, and had laid before them silver and gems and gold, bidding them prepare such a branch as might grow on the tree of life.

And they did so. And when the bough was made, all glistening with silver and gems, after many moons, he betook him again stealthily to

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the sea-shore and aboard a boat, whence he sent word to his warriors of choice that he was come home again; and they met him, greatly rejoiced at the prince's coming.

News of it came to the moon-white maid, and she wept, thinking that Fate was indeed adverse, and she must wed. But the fame of the bough went abroad, and the prince came, bearing that glistening treasure, with sandalwood and rich silks wrapped about it. And with his warriors of choice he came, knocking at the chamber door. But the maid hid in an inner chamber, bitterly weeping. The old grim bamboo-cutter rejoiced at the sight of the prince, for he was indeed a most princely suitor; therefore, bidding the prince be of good heart, he himself came in to the maid, bearing the bough, and with it verses like these:

Through perils dire  
Of flood and fire  
I return and bring  
To the maiden's whiteness  
This bough of brightness!

Reading these verses, the maiden wept, as she well might, not at the verses, nor at the perils they depicted, but at her own danger, for she would fain escape the sorrows of wedlock. But the old man, at last losing patience with the foolishness of girls, reproached and exhorted her, saying, "Is not this, indeed, the very bough of the tree of life, glistening with jewels, that thou didst bid bring? How then shalt thou not wed him,

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for he is, indeed, a princely suitor! Has he not come straight from the shore, and from the ship, lingering not even to change his raiment nor to rub off the stain that travel and distant skies have put upon him? How then, O maiden daughter mine, canst thou say no to such a one?"

But she, indeed pensive, her chin resting on her palm as the tears slid down her cheeks, would not make answer but by those her tears. The prince waited impatiently amid his warriors, and the old man, who, indeed, had received princely gifts, exhorted her again, saying:

"Is he not a prince of princes, O my daughter? And is not this the branch of the tree of life?"

Then, sighing and weeping, she replied that she had thought the quest hard and impossible, yet the prince had accomplished it and brought the silver bough. So the old bamboo-cutter was rejoiced, and brought in the prince that he might plead for himself and tell the tale of the quest of the bough. Therefore the prince came, and, deeply sighing at the sight of the maiden in her whiteness, began thus to relate the quest:

"In the month of pink cherry blossoms we set sail, turning the bow of our ship to the wild, whirling welter of the waves on the strange, wild ocean of the sunrise. But its dangers were naught to me, for that I so loved this maiden, and could not live without her. Storm-spirits screamed about us, and wide-eyed hunger haunted us, and strange sickness fell upon us in the trough of the weltering deep. Then, after many moons had waned, we



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came to a magical mountain, and a river of rainbow water flowed over a sapphire cliff. There grew the tree of life, and thence with my arm of might I plucked this bough, and now I have brought it, to lay it at the foot of my beloved!"

Then indeed was heard without a noise of certain men crying and shouting, and one of the men came forward and said:

"The chief of the silversmith makes this humble petition—namely, that he and his fellows have toiled many days in a house by Kyoto, making a certain silver bough. They have not received their wages. Therefore the chief of the silversmiths begs that payment be not delayed, so that they may buy victuals for their starving families!"

The tears on the cheek of that moon-white maiden dried when she heard it, but the liver of the prince melted within him and was as water, for he knew that his guile was discovered, and he fled away into the night.

## IV

### THE HUMOR OF INDIA

Who could live, who could breathe,  
If the heart of Being were not Joy?  
—*Taittiriya Upanishad.*

I HAD a Brahman friend, a man of intuitive spirit, of good birth and high personal distinction. We were talking of American literature, and one of us repeated a story of Artemus Ward's, an extravagant bit of nonsense concerning the Shakers. "Ah yes," said my friend the Brahman: "it is very amusing; but that is not the kind of story we tell each other under the banyan-trees, in the long evenings in India!" Then he went on to describe a humor at once wise and courtly, mirthful and subtle, where no mockery obscured reverence, where the note of humanity was never lost.

Often remembering that description, I have thought that nowhere, perhaps, in the age-long story of India could one find a finer example of that urbane, courtly humor than the tale of Damayanti's "Maiden's Choosing," whose moral is that one may be a god without ceasing to be a gentleman.

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The story was told in the great Indian forest by a homeless sage to the elder brother of that Arjuna whom Krishna's teaching made immortal. Nala is the hero, who is to win the heroine's hand and life-long devotion. Nala the stalwart, a masterful horseman, is like to the love-god in beauty, bright as the twin stars, truthful, but a gambler. He ruled over the Nishadas, northward from the Vindhya mountains. Princess Damayanti, the King of Vidarbha's daughter, was a pearl of maidens, bright as the summer lightning, long-eyed like goddess Fortune, setting athrob the hearts of men and immortals.

Praise waited ever on the names of both, Nala hearing only of Damayanti, Damayanti only of Nala. Therefore love, not at first sight, but outstripping sight, filled the heart of each. Swans with gold-decked wings were their messengers; their love grew till it became invincible. Damayanti, no longer her own, was altogether Nala's, whom she had never beheld. She grew thin and pale, full of imaginings and sighs; love so possessed her heart that rest came not nigh her, night nor day. The King of Vidarbha saw the signs as old as the world, knew that his child should be wedded; the time was come for her Maiden's Choosing. He sent summons to the princes, shepherds of nations. The princes drew near Vidarbha, filling the world with the sound of their chariots and elephants and horses; mighty, adorned with garlands and jewels, seeking to win the pearl of the world.

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The gods, the immortals, visiting Indra, their king, god Agni, and the shepherds of the world, heard from Narada of the coming Choosing. The gods, the immortals, said, "Let us also go!"

King Nala, hearing of the assembling princes, went forth to the Maiden's Choosing, not down-hearted. The gods saw Nala, as he journeyed, bright as the sun; even the gods were dismayed at his beauty.

Coming forth from the white of the sky, the gods, immortals, spoke to Nala: "Hail, king of the Nishadas! Thou standest ever firm in truth. Help us, becoming our ambassador!"

Nala, assenting, promised, his palms joined in reverence, then asked who they might be who addressed him, and what message he should carry. To him Indra, mighty one, answered: "I am Indra; this, Agni, the fire-lord; this, Varuna, lord of the waters; fourth is Lord Yama, who brings an ending to mortals. Hear the message: Go thou to Damayanti, saying to her that gods Indra, Agni, Varuna, and Yama, best of immortals, are coming to seek her in wedlock. One of these four shall she choose and take for her husband!"

Thus Lord Indra. Nala made answer, palms reverently pressed together: "Ask not this of me, who am on the same errand! How can he who has lost his heart to a maiden ask her hand for another? Therefore, gods, spare me this embassage!"

The gods answered: "Thou hast promised;

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shalt thou not perform? Go, therefore, king of the Nishadas!"

Nala withstood them: "How can I enter," said he, "the well-guarded gates?" "Thou shalt enter!" said Indra, lord of immortals.

So Nala went to the Vidarbha palace, entering, by Indra's grace, the bower of Damayanti. He saw her there among her companions, brighter than the moon's radiance; at her sweet smile his love grew greater. But he held love in check, keeping faith with the gods as their ambassador.

The maidens, seeing him, rose, startled by his beauty; shyly they praised him to one another, wondering if he were a god or one of the seraphs. Damayanti first found words, with a charming smile addressing Nala: "Who art thou, faultless of form, increasing my heart's love, that art come hither as a god? How didst thou enter, for the palace doors are well guarded?"

Nala named himself, king of the Nishadas; coming now as the gods' messenger, by whose grace he had entered: Lord Indra; Agni, the fire-lord; Yama, lord of death; Varuna, lord of the waters. These sought her in marriage, he said; one she should choose as her husband, as her heart bade her.

At the naming of the gods, Damayanti reverently bowed, laughing gently as she answered, "Thou thyself must love me, King, as I love thee! What can I do, for all I am or have is thine?"

Nala, faithful in his embassy, counseled her to choose the gods, praising Indra, the king, whose

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scepter is Law, Agni, the fire-lord, Varuna, and Yama, the lord of death. Damayanti's eyes were tear-dim as she answered: "The gods I worship, but I would wed thee! Let all come to the Choosing. Thee will I choose, with my maiden garland!"

Nala returned to the gods, and reported his embassy: "I have carried your message, gods, to Princess Damayanti. To you she pays reverence, but would wed me! Therefore, let all come together to the Choosing!"

Came the day of the Maiden's Choosing. The princes, shepherds of nations, thronged the arena, with its pillars and arch of gold, splendid as lions on the mountains. Their garlands were fragrant, their jewels bright, their weapons gleaming, their faces like the stars.

Damayanti, too, entered the arena, bearing a garland, stealing the eyes and hearts of the princes. Their names and titles were heralded before her. And Damayanti, beholding, saw five princes alike in form, with no whit of difference between them. Among them, in her confusion, she could not distinguish Nala, the king. Whichever she looked at, that one she thought was Nala. Then, full of doubt, perplexed, she wondered: "How shall I know the gods? How shall I know Nala, the king?" So in her grief she bethought her of the divine signs and marks of the gods. But not one mark could she discern as the five stood there kingly upon the sand.

Then Damayanti, grieving, knew that the

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hour had come to appeal to the gods on their honor. So she prayed to the gods, with palms reverently joined, telling of her love for Nala, of her heart that was all his, and beseeching the gods to help her with discernment. Damayanti prayed, pitiful, steadfast. And the gods listened, wondering at her firm faith and love.

As Damayanti prayed, behold the gods revealed, standing there in their divinity. She beheld them sweatless, steady-eyed, their garlands unfading, shadowless, not touching the earth. But he, doubled by his shadow, his garland faded, stained with dust and sweat, his eyelids tremulous, his feet set upon the earth. So Damayanti, beholding the gods there, and the king of the Nishadas with them, chose there Nala, the king, shyly touching his garment and laying her bright flower-wreath on his shoulders. The gods blessed them with gifts, the princes praised them, and Nala worshipfully loved Damayanti, who had chosen him, a mortal, rivaled by the immortals.

Here, it seems to me, is a bit of courtly humor hard to equal. It would not be easy to find, among the scriptures of the world, a passage which so charmingly depicts the gods as perfect gentlemen, touched with love, yet ruled by chivalrous honor. And this tale of Nala and his princess has delighted India ever since the dim, Vedic days of long ago. For the gods in this story are Vedic gods, not the later divinities of the thousand sects.

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About the Buddha's time, five and twenty centuries ago, there arose in western India a new faith, or a revival of faith, closely akin to Buddhism yet with much of the Hindu love of caste and ceremony, which the Buddha laid aside. This was the cult of the Jainas, followers of Mahavira. The Jainas, too, have their version of the tale of Nala and Damayanti, and they have added, or preserved, certain touches of humor not found in the epic version I have summarized.

Damayanti, in the Jaina story, comes to the Maiden's Choosing with her old nurse, who, perhaps with bribed enthusiasm, praises the various suitors in the arena. Damayanti hits off the suitors, very much as Portia was to criticize yet other suitors, in her boudoir talk with her maid. The nurse bade Damayanti admire the lord of Benares, King Bala, of mighty arm: "If thou wouldst see the River Ganges with its tossing waves, choose him!"

But Damayanti answered: "Good nurse, the people of Benares have the bad habit of cheating their neighbors; therefore my heart likes him not!"

The nurse then commends King Lion, the lord of Kunkuna: "In the hot season, thou wilt enjoy thyself in the cool plantain gardens!"

"The people of Kunkuna," answered Damayanti, "grow angry without reason. I could not please him at all times; therefore name another king!"

"There is King Mahendra," said the nurse, "of the vale of Kashmir, where the saffron grows!"



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“My body,” said Damayanti, “shrinks from so much snow!”

The nurse then bade her choose King Jayakosha; but Damayanti seemed not to hear, busied with her garland.

Then the nurse bade her throw the garland round the neck of King Jaya, the lord of Kalinga in the south, whose sword eclipsed the moonlight of his foes.

But Damayanti answered: “My respects to him, who is as old as my father!”

The nurse commended the lord of Gaura, like the sun in the heavens, whose army of elephants, roaring, shook the world.

“Mother,” said Damayanti, “the color of the man is black and horrible as his elephants. Let us pass quickly on!”

So they came to the lord of Ujjayini. “If thou wouldst play among the trees growing by the river Sipra, choose him!”

“I am weary,” said Damayanti, “with so much walking round the arena!”

Then the nurse pointed out King Nala, lord of the Nishadas, like the god of Love in beauty. And Damayanti, without speaking, threw the garland of choice round Nala’s neck.

Here is more of the same rich, urbane, somewhat stately humor. But the Jaina tale is rather prolix and tends to follow the immemorial plan of the nest of boxes, a tale within a tale, like the famous stories of Bagdad. Prolix, indeed, are many of the Indian stories; but for fine brevity

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and precision, I think the following little Jaina parable is hard to beat:

“In the city of Kunala,” says the narrator, “two recluses, seated in the statute posture, were meditating, with breathing restrained. It was the season of the rains. Everywhere the clouds were pouring. Some herdsmen blamed the holy men, saying, ‘These recluses will stop the rain!’ The recluses, hearing it, were furious. The first recluse said, ‘Rain, cloud, on Kunala!’ The second added, ‘For full fifteen days!’ The first continued, ‘With raindrops like clubs!’ The second added, ‘Night and day!’ Through the curse of the two recluses, the cloud rained for fifteen days, and the city was flooded. The recluses also were drowned and went to hell. Therefore wrath is to be avoided!”

One hardly associates humor with Buddhism. Indeed, it may truly be said that most of the books and teachings of Buddhism are pitched in a minor key, somewhat “sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought.” Yet some of the most rollicking and boisterous Indian stories found their way, in company with Buddhism, to lofty Tibet, whence they have come back to us.

One of these is concerned with young Mahashadha, the proverbial “Smart Aleck” of Indian tales, and one can discern in him, agreeably to the spirit of the Buddhist tales, a former incarnation of Tom Sawyer.

This precocious boy was sent by King Janaka to a hill village, to be brought up in seclusion;

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and the time came when the king wished to test the boy's growing wit. Therefore he sent to the village head-man an order for a rope of sand, a hundred ells long. So far there is nothing novel about the story; but I think young Mahaushadha's answer is all his own. Mahaushadha sent this answer to the king: "O King! The people of this hill village are slow-witted and stupid! Therefore, may it please your Majesty to send one ell of that kind of rope as a pattern, and we will twine a hundred ells, or a thousand like it, to send to the king!"

The king, well pleased, devised another test. He sent to the hill village an order for some rice, not crushed with a pestle, yet not uncrushed, cooked neither in the house nor out of the house, neither with fire nor without fire, which was to be sent from him neither along the road nor away from the road, neither by daylight nor in the shade, brought neither by a woman nor a man, by one not riding nor yet on foot.

Mahaushadha solved all these puzzles. Then the king ordered a park to be sent him, with gardens, fruit-trees, and tanks. Mahaushadha, repeating himself, asked the king to send one of his parks as a pattern, since no one in the mountains knew anything about parks.

Then came a final test, and here the story-teller lets himself go. The king sent a messenger to the hill village with a mule, and with orders to Purna, the father of Mahaushadha, to keep watch over it without tying it up, and to feed it without placing

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it under a roof. The messenger brought the mule to Purna, and warned him that he would forfeit his life and limbs if the mule escaped. When Purna heard it, he was terrified, but Mahaushadha cheered him up, saying that he would see him through. So he ordered that by day the mule should graze at its free will, but by night it should be guarded by twenty men, five of whom should guard it through the first night-watch, five through the second, and so on to the fourth. One should sit on its back, the other four should each hold a leg of the mule. So it would be watched without being tied up, and fed without being placed under a roof.

Time passed. Janaka, the king, bethought him to send a messenger to see how it fared with the mule. The messenger made his report, and the king understood that the mule could never escape while thus guarded. So the king thought out a plan and sent for one of the men, he who rode on the mule's back, and bade him ride off with the mule while the others were asleep.

On the morrow Purna saw that the mule was gone, and knew that he had forfeited life and limbs. Mahaushadha saw Purna's misery, and bethought him that hitherto he had found a way of escape, but now there was none. He said nothing, though greatly alarmed, but set his wits to work on a plan.

Mahaushadha then told his father, Purna, that there was but one way, and that it could be tried only if Purna could bear mockery. The old man

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thought mockery more endurable than death, and so consented. Then Mahaushadha clipped his father's hair in seven strips and daubed his head with paint, red, black, brown, and white. Then he and his father mounted an ass, and hied them to the capital of King Janaka. Report outran them, and the king and his ministers came forth to see if the fame of them were true. The ministers upraided him, saying: "Wherefore is Mahaushadha praised for his judgment, intelligence, and wisdom? For how unseemly is his action!"

The king asked Mahaushadha why he had thus dishonored his father. But Mahaushadha replied: "I have not dishonored him, but honored him. As I stand much higher than my father by my great wisdom, this deed of mine confers honor upon him!"

The king, scandalized, said, "Art thou better, or thy father?"

Mahaushadha answered: "Assuredly, I am better; my father is worse!"

The king rebuked him, saying: "Never had I seen or heard that the son is better than the father. Through the father, the son receives his name, while the mother feeds and rears him. The father is, therefore, altogether the better of the two!"

The ministers supported the saying of the king, and affirmed that it was true. Then Mahausadha, falling at the king's feet, said: "O King, this being so, the father being always better than the son, do thou, instead of the mule which

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is gone, accept his father, this ass, who is in all ways his superior?"

The climax is almost as much of a surprise to the reader as it must have been to King Janaka and his ministers in the days of long ago. One finds in old Purna, with his painted pate, a kind of foreshadowing of the Royal Nonesuch, which fetched the Arkinsaw lunkheads, in the days of Huckleberry Finn.

There are many caustic things about women in the Hindu books, as bitter, some of them, as the Proverbs of Solomon. I think the truth is that these uxorious Orientals, feeling themselves all too weak and prone to be beguiled, took their revenge on women by calling them the root of all evil.

The best of the Indian proverbs is this:

"Two things you see once in a lifetime: a perfectly straight cocoanut-tree, and a woman who does not want the last word."

I find also the prototype of that wicked French saying, "Man is the tow, woman the flame; the devil comes and blows!" The Sanskrit proverb is practically the same:

"Woman is, as it were, a jar of clarified butter, and man is like a lighted coal. Therefore, it is wise to keep the jar and the fire in different corners."

But all this is wit rather than humor, while in humor of the true kind India is exceedingly rich. And it is curious and characteristic that the best of this humor is interwoven with divine worship

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or teaching concerning holy things. There is, of course, that famous hymn in the Veda, where the Brahmans uttering their prayers are likened to frogs croaking in a pond when the rains begin:

“After lying still for a year, these rite-fulfilling Brahmans, the frogs, have uttered their voices, inspired by the rain-god!” and so on. And in the like vein is the Upanishad, which compares these self-same Brahmans, who circle round the holy fire, each holding the long white robe of him who walks before him, to a row of white puppies running round, each holding in his mouth his predecessor’s tail. Surely this is slighted majesty.

But the most splendid instance of a humor, seemingly sacrilegious yet wholly reverent, is that passage in the Bhagavad Gita, in the great transfiguration, where the warrior Krishna has flamed out, before awe-struck Arjuna, as the World-soul, the Ancient of Days. Arjuna’s spirit is burdened with awkward memories of former familiarities. He has, as it were, clapped the World-soul on the back. He feels he must apologize. Therefore he says, in effect: “August one, high Divinity! If, all unknowing, I have taken liberties, at the banquet or in the chase, nudging thee, who art the World-soul, or calling thee by thy first name, be not offended, august one, let it be pardoned to me, who sinned in ignorance!”

And the famed scripture loses nothing by this portentous pleasantry.

A fine example of this reverent playing with high and lofty matters is the Tale of a Tiger, in

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dear old Hitopadesha, where the striped marauder again and again quotes the Bhagavad Gita itself. Thus runs the tale:

“Once upon a time,” quoth the King of the Pigeons, “as I passed through the Deckan forest, I beheld: An old tiger, who had taken a bath, covering his shining claws with grass, spoke thus:

“‘Hail, wayfarers, hail! Let this golden bracelet be accepted!’

“Thereupon a wayfarer, led on by greed, spoke thus:

“‘This also befalls through Heaven’s grace; yet, in times of doubt as to one’s aim, it is not right to hurry. For it is written:

‘Even the wished from the unwished receiving,  
The end and outcome is not always fair;  
Where there is poison craftily admixed,  
Even the heavenly nectar makes for death!’

“‘Yet in all gaining of wealth, there is cause for doubt. As it is written:

‘Till he o’ercomes his doubts, no man  
Attains to wealth.  
O’ercoming doubt, he may attain,—  
If he survives!’

“‘Thus far, I consider the matter.’” He says aloud:

“‘Where is your bracelet?’

“‘The tiger, pushing his shining claws forward, shows them.



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“The wayfarer said:

“How can I have confidence in thee?”

“The tiger said:

“Now I, even I, practise ablutions and am a giver; I am old, and have lost my nails and teeth; how shall not confidence be placed in me? As it is written:

‘Sacrifice, study, penance, gifts,  
Truth, firmness, patience, lack of lust;  
This is the Way, long handed down,  
The Noble Eightfold Path of Right.

‘The first four Virtues of the Path  
The hypocrite may practise too;  
The last four Virtues ever dwell  
In the Magnanimous alone.

“And such is my freedom from greed, that I am willing to give a golden bracelet, that is even now in my paw, to any one at all, even to thee, wayfarer. All the same, the popular saying—to wit, “Tiger eats Man,”—is hard to overcome. As it is written:

‘The world, that ever follows where ’tis led,  
May take as its instructor in right life  
A dame of weakest reputation,—or  
Even a Brahman who has killed a cow!

“For I too have read the holy books. Hearken!

‘As thou dost love the life of thine own self,  
All other beings love their own lives too;  
By self-similitude, the perfect Wise  
Show to all beings pity equally.

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“ ‘And again:

‘Ever in all refusing and all giving,  
In pleasure, pain; in what he loves or hates,  
By self-similitude a man should act,  
And follow thus the perfect Rule of Right.

“ ‘Again it is written:

‘Oh, son of Kunti, succor well the poor!  
Give not thy wealth to one already rich!  
They that are sick alone need healing herbs;  
What use are healing herbs to one in health?

“ ‘And again:

‘What gift is given, thinking “one should give,”  
To him who cannot render it again,  
At the right place and time, to the right man,  
Such is a gift of Goodness. This they know.

“ ‘Therefore, after bathing here in the lake, accept this shining golden bracelet!’

“ ‘Thereupon the Wayfarer, as he enters into the lake, sinking down in the deep mud, is unable to escape.

“ ‘I,’ said the Tiger, ‘will come and lift thee up!’

“ ‘Thus declaring, and by little and by little approaching, the Tiger held the Wayfarer in his claws. The Wayfarer meditated:

“ ‘Tis not enough to say: He reads the holy Law!  
And studies well the Vedas; if his heart be bad,  
His evil nature will come out at last,  
As surely as, by nature, milk is sweet!

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“For:

‘Whose senses and whose heart are uncontrolled  
Is like the bathing of an elephant;  
And like adornments to an ugly face,  
A useless load is Wisdom without Works.

“‘This was not wisely done by me, that I put  
confidence in one whose very soul is murder! As  
it is written:

‘Of every one, the inborn Nature shows,  
In trial, and not other qualities.  
Ever outstripping other qualities,  
The inborn nature triumphs at their head!’

“Thus meditating, verily, he by the Tiger was  
slain and consumed.”

Here again we have that reverent playing with  
holy things, which is so distinctive of the humor  
of India. It has been well and truly said that  
the Hindu lives religiously, eats religiously, sleeps  
religiously, and dies religiously. So full of reve-  
rence is he that he pays devotion even to symbols,  
carved of wood and stone, which render visible  
to him the unseen invisible things; and this reve-  
rence of his we misname idolatry.

It is at once singular and in a sense deeply right  
and fitting that this same Hindu, whose every  
moment is full of the intuition and pressure of  
divine things, should be the one among all the  
peoples and faiths to wreath the gods in garlands  
of humor. Perhaps this light and joyous treat-

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ment of holy things—a treatment consistent with perfect reverence—is part of the contribution which the mind of India has to offer to the world. Perhaps its true cause is the recognition, so finely expressed in the Upanishad verse which I have taken as the text of this essay: that the heart of being is Joy; and it is something of this joy and cheerfulness, breaking through, even in the consideration of the holiest things, which gives such a distinctive quality to the humor of India.

I have one more story, again centering in that ancient city of Ujjayini among the Mahratta hills, whose prince was among the suitors of Damayanti, which also makes gentle sport of the people of heaven.

The story says that, in the city of Ujjayini, there dwelt a gambler, a ruffian—the Terror, by name. He always lost, but the others, who won, gave him a few cownie shells, that he might continue in the game.

Being destitute, the Terror could buy only a little wheat-flour in the evening; and, going to the Temple of Death outside the city, he stole palm-oil from the temple lamps to knead his flour, and cooked him a cake on the funeral pyre; then, resting his head on the knee of the image of Death, he drowsed and snored the night away.

One night, as he slept thus, dissolute, uncaring, he suddenly awoke. And behold! the Mothers, whose images were ranged along the temple, were watching him. The Terror bethought him: “Were it not well to have a game with them? Haply I

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may win great wealth!" So he challenged the Mothers to a game, saying: "What ho! ye Divinities! Come and play a game with me!" And it is the law among gamblers that he who refuses not accepts; so he began to play.

Being well skilled, he won much gold from them, and at the end of the game he said: "What ho! Divinities! As ye have lost to me, come, pay up your losses!" But they made no reply. Then the Terror cried out: "This is the old gambler's trick, who, when he has lost, makes himself rigid, feigning a swoon, so that he may not pay! But ye cannot escape me thus! If ye pay not, and that quickly, behold I will take a saw, and saw your limbs asunder; for my saw is as sharp as the teeth of this fellow, Death, and I care for naught!"

Fiercely he ran toward them; but they, being terrified, paid him their losses from the offerings which had been laid on their altars. So, replenished with much gold, he returned to the gambling-house and played again lustily, but always lost.

Returning again to the temple, making him a cake with flour and stolen temple oil, and grilling it on the pyre, he once more challenged the deities, and once more won much gold, the divinities paying as before. But the Mothers and the other divinities, seeing their offerings dwindling, were discouraged, and took counsel among themselves as to what they should do. Then one of the goddesses said: "Is there not a rule

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among gamblers that if one shall say, 'I pass!' such a one may not be forced to play? This is, indeed, the rule; therefore let us do so and elude this Terror." And the divinities all assented, clapping their hands in joy.

So when the Terror had baked his grimly cake upon the coals of the pyre, and had eaten it with relish, he, as before, proposed to them a game. But the goddess who had made the proposal said, "I pass!" and the others, echoing, said, "We also pass!"

But the Terror, in no wise disconcerted, turned to Lord Death himself, and challenged him to a game. Lord Death, seeing that the man was bold and ruffianly, was apprehensive, and made answer, "I also pass!"

The Terror, seeing himself thus baffled, had recourse to guile. Laying hold of the feet of Lord Death and bowing low, he said:

"O thou of matted locks, adorned only with a skull, and smeared with ashes, am I not in the same case with thee? As thou drawest near to the pyre for thy food, so I! As thou respectest neither high nor low, so I! As thou bringest loss, so I! Therefore be thou propitious to me!"

Lord Death, well pleased, made answer to him: "O Terror! As thou art well pleasing to me, so will I befriend thee! Listen, therefore, to my word! In the temple garden there is a sacred pool adorned with lotuses, blue, white, and red. Thither, by moonlight, come heavenly nymphs to bathe, laying aside their glistening robes and disporting

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them in the water. Do thou, therefore, go thither: and when the heavenly nymphs doff their bright robes and enter the pool adorned with lotuses, do thou seize their robes! And when they demand them back of thee, thou shalt say: 'Behold, I will in no wise render them up, unless ye pay ransom!' And as ransom thou shalt ask the heavenly nymph named Crescent, because she wears a silver crescent on her brow."

The Terror did so, for he feared naught and was a ruffian. And the nymphs, unwilling to linger in the water lest dawn should come upon them, delivered up to him the nymph named Crescent. For the lord of paradise had laid this punishment upon her, that she should wed a mortal, because she had spoken carelessly of paradise, saying that the joys of mortal men were better far.

Crescent, being taken by that Terror, straightway loved him, for that he was bold and ruffianly and regarded naught, whether great or small. So they two dwelt in happiness. And on a day the nymph said to him: "My lord Terror, this day they are making merry in the celestial realm, celebrating a feast. I, too, must be there to wait upon the king of the immortals. Do thou, therefore, abide here until my return."

But the Terror said: "Far from it! For I also will go with thee." For he was ruffianly and feared naught. So she hid him, and carried him with her to the celestial abode. And there, when one of the actors of the gods danced ill, the Terror waxed wroth at him, and, crying out

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on him for his ill acting, smote him over the head with a club. So the gods discovered his presence and drove him forth. And as punishment for Crescent, who had brought him thither, they laid this curse upon her: That she should be inclosed in the pillar of a new-built temple which the King of Ujjayini had built, and that she should abide there until the temple came down in ruins.

So it befell, for it was the command of the gods. She, very sad, for that she was parted from her Terror, whom she so dearly loved, wailed there, within the temple pillar. But the Terror said: "Behold! It is naught! For I will have recourse to guile, and outdo the gods!" And so he bethought him, for he regarded naught.

So, donning the dress of a religious devotee with matted locks and a dappled fawn-skin, he went into the city of the king. There, having taken with him the jewels that had belonged to his wife Crescent, he divided them in five earthen pots, and one earthen pot he buried at each side of the city, north, south, east, and west, and one pot he buried in the center of the market-place.

Then, building him a hut of bark, as devotees are wont, he dwelt by the river-bank, feigning himself a saint, for he feared naught, neither regarded high nor low. And the fame of his devotion went abroad, and the King of Ujjayini himself sought him out and visited him. And as the king in his splendor stood there by the bark hut of the false devotee, it happened that a she-



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jackal howled in the forest, calling to her mate that she had found a meal.

When the she-jackal howled with long and wailful cry, the Terror pricked his ears, his head aslant as one who listens; and then slowly he began to smile. When the she-jackal howled again, the Terror muttered, "Well, let it remain there!"

The King of Ujjayini, burning to know the meaning of it, asked him what it was. But the Terror would not tell. Then, being importuned by the king, as though unwilling he at last made answer:

"Hear! O King, by the force of my ascetic devotion, I know all secrets, even the speech of birds and beasts! And this she-jackal that howled in the forest was saying something of a treasure of jewels. But I answered, 'Let it there remain.'"

But the king was the more importunate, and at last the Terror, as though reluctantly yielding, answered: "Be it according to the king's command. Behold, the treasure is on the north side of the city, under a clump of bamboos!" But this he said through guile, himself having there bestowed the treasure of jewels. But the King of Ujjayini, unknowing of this, was astonished, and went, and sought, and took the treasure and brought it to his palace. And the renown of the devotee went abroad.

It was not long till the king came again to the bark hut of that false devotee; and as once more the she-jackal howled, the Terror would once more say: "Nay; let it remain!" But when the

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king importuned him, he told of a treasure buried to the east of the city, and so to the west, and so to the south, and so in the center of the market-place.

On the day of the great festival, that false devotee went to the temple, where his loved wife Crescent was, still imprisoned in the pillar for her sin in taking him secretly to the heavenly abode. And the king in his splendor was there with all his retinue. When Crescent, who was, as it were, carved in stone upon the pillar, beheld her Terror, for love of whom she was suffering this dire punishment, she was at once joyed and grieved, and began weeping pitifully.

The king saw it, and wondered, and was afraid. Then, being full of confidence in that false devotee, he asked what it might portend that a stone image should so weep and wail.

But the Terror, guileful, would not answer till the king importuned him, with growing fear. At last he said to the king: "O King! Of a truth, a fearful and terrible thing has been revealed to me by my ascetic power. If the King's Majesty will promise me full pardon, then will I reveal it, but if not, not."

The king promised, being now greatly afraid. And the Terror said: "O King, it was on an evil day and in an evil hour that thou didst build this shrine, and truly the spot whereon it is built is evil! Therefore a dire and fearsome doom hangs over the King."

The king besought him, saying: "But haply the doom may be averted."



"A DIRE DOOM HANGS OVER THE KING"

TO THE  
ASSOCIATES

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But that devotee shook his head, saying: "There is, indeed, a way. But the King's Majesty would not take it. Therefore in three days must the doom fall."

Again the king besought him, promising him much gold, till at last the Terror replied: "O King, it has been revealed to me, through my ascetic power, that there is, indeed, a way! For this spot is unholy, and the temple was built in an evil hour. But if the temple be pulled down, and set up again within three days upon a holy spot which I shall reveal to the King, then the doom may be averted, but if not, not."

The king, with fear upon him, commanded that it should be done. Ere night the temple was pulled down, so that not a stone stood, but all was in ruins. So Crescent went rejoicing to the Terror, her lord, and they two lived in much delight, having abundant gold from the king.

Lord Indra, the ruler of the gods, heard of it on a festival day when Crescent came to paradise to pay her respects. And Indra was astonished at the guile of the Terror, and laughed long at the tale, for that the Terror had cheated even the lord of paradise, being ruffianly and fearing naught.

## V

### THE GENTLE GALES OF PERSIAN JESTS

THE prettiest piece of Persian humor I have yet found is this little love-poem of a boy and a girl: "I went upon the mountain-top to tend the herd," the boy declares; "and there I saw a girl; her charm bewildered me. To her I said, 'Lass, give me a kiss!' But she replied, 'Lad, give me first some money!' I answered, 'But the money's in the purse; the purse is in the satchel, and the satchel's on the camel's back; and, woe is me! the camel's in Kirman.' She answered me, 'Thou wishest for a kiss from my soft lips! Truly, the kiss rests there upon my lips; but these my lips are closed by lock and key; the key is in my mother's keeping; she, alas! is, like thy camel, in Kirman.' "

From some study of Persian love-songs, I am inclined to think that, in due time, the camel and the key returned from Kirman. Somewhat in the same vein is this fragment of a song, "In our bill of love, which is still unsettled, there are a number of outstanding kisses to be given and received." And, in this one line from the reed-pen of a Persian bard who died centuries ago, there

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is evidence of the eternal sameness of the human heart, for did not that bard write of his swarth beloved, "Amid the fruits of beauty, thou art my peach."

There is a touch of satire, too, in the saying, also from a Persian love-song, "A love-sick poet will find inspiration even in a gallows-tree!" In general, however, the genius of Persian humor lies in quickness of reply and repartee, and this quality is charmingly illustrated in a book from which I have ventured to borrow my title. It is the work of one Abdur Rahman—that is, "The Slave of the Compassionate God," who was born at Jam, near Herat, a few years after Dan Chaucer died. From the town of his birth, he is called Jami, which signifies The Man of Jam. The title of his book in full is this, "The Blowing of the Gentle Gales of Jests and Fragrant Airs of Jokes, which cause the Rosebud of the Lips to Smile, and make the Blossom of the Heart Expand"—a title sufficiently delicious in itself.

The Man of Jam begins his jest-book daringly, by undertaking to prove that Mohammed himself was a humorist. It is related, he writes, that His Eminence the Prophet (God bless and preserve him!) spoke thus: "The believer is jocular and sweet-tempered; the infidel is sour-faced and morose." Further, the Prophet (God bless and preserve him!) once said to an old woman, "Old women cannot enter paradise." When the old woman began to weep, the Prophet said, "Because Most High Allah will renew their youth,

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and crown them once again with beauty. Then will He admit them to His heaven." Again, the Prophet said once to the wife of one of his companions, "Ask thy husband how his health fares, for I perceive that there is white in his eye." With great celerity and agitation the good dame hastened to her husband, who asked the cause of her distress. When she had repeated what Mohammed had told her, the husband said, "His Eminence spoke truth; there is, indeed, white in my eye, and black also; yet not of a dangerous sort."

Whereupon the Man of Jam, having established the orthodoxy of jesting, proceeds with his tale. There was once, he says, a learned man who sat writing a letter to one of the friends of his heart. He was disturbed and greatly annoyed by the conduct of a rude person who, seated at his elbow, kept glancing at the letter out of the corner of his eye. So the wise man wrote, "Had not a hireling thief been seated at my side, busily reading this letter over my shoulder, I should have written thee of a certain secret matter." Whereupon the other cried out, "By Allah, my lord, I have not read nor even looked at thy letter!"

A blind man was passing along the roadway in the darkness of the night, with a jar on his shoulder and a lit lamp in his hand. A meddlesome fellow met him, who cried out, "O fool, since day and night are alike to thee, since darkness and light are as one to thy blind eyes, what use hast thou for this thy lamp?" But the blind man



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laughed, and answered him, "This lamp is not for me, nor to guide these blind eyes of mine. It is for ignorant fools like thee, that they may not knock against me and break my jar."

This is what I mean by the genius of Persian humor being repartee. Somewhat caustic, too, is this story, told against himself by a wise man who had an uncommon lack of personal beauty.

He related that once, while he was passing through the bazar, or, as we should say, the market-place, an elderly woman took him by the hand and led him to the house of a brass-founder. Entering, she said to the founder, "Make it like this!" and then, presently, bade the wise man good day and departed. Greatly astonished, he asked the brass-worker what this might mean.

"She ordered an image of Satan," answered he, "but I knew not how to fashion it. Therefore she brought thee here."

The same wise man declared that once, when he was standing in the street conversing with a friend, a woman came and, standing opposite him, gazed long in his face. When her staring had exceeded all bounds, he said to his slave, "Go to that woman, and ask her what she seeks." The slave, returning to him, reported her answer thus: "'I wished,' said she, 'to inflict some punishment on my eyes, which had committed a great sin.'"

An exceedingly ugly man, says Jami, was once in the mosque, asking pardon of Allah for his sins and praying to be delivered from the fires

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of hell. One who overheard his prayer said to him, "Wherefore, O friend, wouldst thou cheat hell of such a countenance? Art thou reluctant to burn up a face like that?"

Once again the story-writer tells us that a certain person with a hideous nose was once on a time wooing a woman. Describing himself to her and trying to make an attractive picture, he said, "I am a man devoid of lightness and frivolity, and I am patient in bearing afflictions."

"Ay!" said the woman. "Wert thou not patient in bearing afflictions, thou hadst never endured thy nose these forty years."

All of which is more witty than kind. Hardly less sharp is this next tale. Bahlul, we are told, once came into the presence of the famed Caliph of Bagdad, the good Harun al Rashid. One of the Viziers accosted him, saying, "Rejoice, O Bahlul, at these good tidings! The Prince of the Faithful has made thee ruler over apes and swine!"

"Take my orders, then," quickly retorted Bahlul, "for surely thou art of my subjects."

Again, there is a spice of national hatred in such a tale as this: A Turk, says Jami, being asked which he would prefer, plunder in this world or paradise hereafter, made answer thus, "Let me to-day engage in pillage, and carry off all that I can find; to-morrow I shall be willing to enter hell-fire with Pharaoh the persecutor!"

For some reason or other, the Man of Jam seems to have a deep detestation of school-teachers, if



“WERT THOU NOT PATIENT IN BEARING AFFLICTIONS, THOU HADST NEVER  
ENDURED THY NOSE THESE FORTY YEARS”



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one may judge from the many sharp jests he directs against them. For example, this: A teacher, he says, whose son had fallen ill and was at the point of death, bade them send for the washer of corpses to wash his son. "But," they objected, "he is not dead yet!"

"Never mind," said the teacher, "he will be dead by the time they have finished washing him."

Again, they said to the son of another teacher, "What a pity thou art such a fool!"

"Else were I no true son of my father," he replied.

A certain person, after going through the stated prayers in the mosque, began to make a special petition, begging that he might enter heaven and be delivered from the fires of hell. An old woman was standing behind him, and overheard his eloquent prayer. "O Allah!" she cried. "Let me be a partner in that which he desires!"

The man, hearing these words, continued, "O Allah, let me be hanged, or die under the lash!"

"O Allah!" exclaimed the old woman. "Be compassionate, and preserve me from that which this man seeks!"

When he heard her, the man turned his face round toward her, and said, "What an unjust arrangement is this, and what unfair distribution! In comfort and ease thou wouldst be my partner, but wouldst let me suffer pain and trouble alone!"

A Bedouin once lost a camel; and, after seeking

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it long in vain, made an oath that, if he found it, he would sell it for a silver diram, which is as who should say a dime. But when he did find it, he repented of his oath. Therefore he tied a cat to the camel's neck, and went through the bazar calling out, "Who will buy a camel for one diram, and a cat for a thousand dirams? They must be sold together, for I will not separate them!"

Yet another Bedouin who had lost a camel made proclamation thus: "Whoever brings back the camel I have lost shall have two camels as a reward!"

"Out on thee, man!" they said to him. "What kind of business is this? Is the half worth more than the whole, or one than two?"

"Ah," replied he, "it is evident that you have never tasted the joy of finding, or the pleasure of recovering what was lost!"

Here is a jest five centuries old, yet it has a certain point to-day. A doctor, says Abdur Rahman Jami, was observed, whenever he approached the cemetery, to draw his cloak over his head, and hide his face. When he was asked why he did this, he replied, "I am ashamed, because so many of the inhabitants of the cemetery suffered at my hands!"

Jami puts the following tale into the mouth of a too thrifty friend. "One day, in the season of spring," says he, "I went out with a party of friends to ramble and survey the pleasant plains and fields. When we were resting in a

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charming spot and had spread our cloth to eat, a dog perceived it and hurried up to the place from afar. One of the party took up a stone, and, as if he were throwing it some bread, cast it to the dog. The dog sniffed at it, and then turned and ran back whence it had come without a moment's delay, paying no heed to all our calling. While my friends were wondering at the actions of the dog, one of them said, 'Do you know what this dog is saying to himself? He is saying, "These poor wretches are so stingy and hungry that they are eating stones. What hope can their tray afford me, and what enjoyment their cloth?"'"

There is something almost ferocious in such a tale as this. A youth, says the Man of Jam, was asked, "Dost thou wish thy father to die, that thou mayest enjoy the inheritance?"

"Not so!" he replied. "I wish rather that they would kill him, that I might take not only the inheritance, but also the fine exacted for his death."

Less sardonic, yet sharp enough, is this joke at the expense of the bards. A poet, he says, went one day to a physician, and complained to him, saying, "I have something sticking in my heart which makes me very uncomfortable and sends a numbness through all my limbs, while my hair stands on end."

The physician, who was a man of wit and tact, said to him, "Hast thou of late composed any verse which thou hast not yet read to any one?"

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“Yes,” replied the poet, “I have.”

“Repeat it to me,” said the physician.

When this was done, he said, “Repeat it again!”

After hearing it a second time, he said, “Rise and go forth! Thou art saved. It was this verse of thine which stuck in thy heart, spreading its dryness through thy system. Now that thou hast freed thy heart of it, thy health will return.”

So far the book of Jami the Persian, illustrating well enough the nimbleness of his wit, with the sharp and cutting quality of Persian jests. There is something of the same knavish sharpness in the ensuing tale, which comes from the Persian book of Sindibad, whose plot, indeed, deals with a most knavish intrigue and involves many of the wiles of women and the wiles of men. Of the latter I have chosen one which relates that there was once a young man, a merchant, who wandered about the world like a zephyr, and who, like the sun and the moon, was on his travels every month in the year. He was now at Khata, now at Khutan, now in Aleppo, and now in Yaman. He carried the products of Khorassan to Kharazm; he conveyed the stuffs of Ispahan to the Emperor of China; he sold in Bokhara the products of Abyssinia; and so made a profit of ten on each one of outlay.

One day they told him that at Kashgar sandalwood was of equal value with gold and was sold for its weight of the yellow, shining metal. Therefore he resolved to proceed thither, and, having converted all his capital into sandalwood, he set



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out on his journey. When he had come near to Kashgar, a person of the country, hearing that he had a large supply of sandalwood, in which he himself dealt, and fearing that that commodity would be depreciated by its abundance, devised the following stratagem: Going two stages out of the city, he halted at the spot where the foreign merchant was, and, having pitched his tent and opened his bales, he lit a fire and piled sandalwood on it for fuel. When the merchant smelt the odor of the sandalwood, he rushed from his tent in amazement and vexation; the man from the city saluted him, saying, "Thou art welcome. May Allah protect thee from evil! Say from what country comest thou, and what merchandise hast thou brought?"

The merchant informed him.

"Thou hast made a sad blunder," declared the man of the city. "Why hast thou brought cumin seed to Kirman? For the whole timber of this country is sandalwood; every casement, roof, and door is made of it. If one were to bring common wood here, it would be far better than sandalwood. Who has been so cruel as to suggest to thee this ill-advised scheme? Does any bring musk to Chinese Tartary, where dwells the musk-deer?"

"Alas!" said the young merchant to himself. "I have thrown away my capital! Verily, covetousness is an unblest passion. Alas for my long journey and the hardships I have endured! What have they availed? He who is not content with what God allots him, prospereth not."

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The man of the city, seeing that the young merchant was now ready for his purpose, said to him, "The world is never free from profit and loss. Give then thy sandalwood to me, and I will give thee in exchange a measure of gold or silver or of aught else thou desirest!" To this the young merchant consented, and two witnesses were called and the bargain struck. The merchant considered that the sum he should receive was so much pure gain, and was rejoiced to be rid of so worthless an article as he had brought. He thence proceeded to the city of Kashgar, and, entering that delightful spot, a very model of paradise, took up his abode in the lodgings of a virtuous old woman.

Of her the merchant asked a question, the reply to which brought him much grief and pain. For he inquired of her what was the value of sandalwood in that city and kingdom. And she informed him that in that city was it worth its weight in gold. "For in the city," she said, "headache is common; and hence sandalwood is in demand."

At this intelligence the young merchant became distracted, for he saw that he had been duped. He related his adventure outside the city to the old woman, who cautioned him never to trust the inhabitants of that city, by whose cunning many had been undone.

When morning came, he washed his eyes from sleep, and inquired the way to the bazar. Thither he bent his course, and wandered through market,

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street, and field, solitary, without friend or companion. He was sick at heart, for his enterprise was entirely at a stand. Suddenly he observed a person playing at checkers in the street. He stopped, and thought to himself, "I will play with this wight to dispel my grief"; and so sate him down beside the player, quite forgetting the caution the virtuous old woman with whom he lodged had given him. The other agreed to play a game with him, on condition that whichever lost should be bound to do whatever the winner required of him, or forfeit all he possessed. The young merchant was soon beaten by his crafty opponent, who was a noted sharper of that city of sharpers; and the winner required as the forfeit that he should drink up the waters of the sea. The young merchant made an outcry, and the people ran together in an uproar.

"He has stolen my eye!" cried another sharper, a one-eyed man, whose one blue eye was the same color as the merchant's two. And a third sharper cried, "I will save thee, if thou make me a pair of breeches of this piece of stone."

The story soon spread through all Kashgar. The virtuous old woman, hearing of it, hastened from her house and found her lodger in much distress. She went with him to the Cadi, and became surety for him, that she would deliver him up on the day of trial.

When they reached her house, she reproached him, saying, "When a man listens not to advice, fresh calamities constantly overtake him. Did I

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not tell thee to have no dealings with the inhabitants of this city?"

"It is no fault of thine," replied the young merchant; "but there is no remedy against the decree of destiny."

He was greatly dispirited, but she consoled him, saying, "Be not downcast, for joy ever succeeds to grief; there can be no cure till there is a complaint. In this city there is a blind old man with neither power in his feet nor strength in his hands, but a man of great intelligence and acuteness. The sharpers of the town assemble nightly at his house, and are directed by him how to act. Do thou therefore dress thyself this night like one of them, and, repairing to his house, sit silent among them. When thine adversaries shall enter and relate their adventures of the day, mark well his answer and his questions. Be thou all ear, like the rose. Like the narcissus, be thou all eye."

The young man did as she counseled him, and, repairing thither at night, quietly seated himself in a corner. The first who entered to take counsel of the blind man was he who had bought the sandalwood. He related his adventure, saying, "I have bought a cargo of sandalwood, for which I am to give one measure of whatever the seller may choose."

"O simpleton!" exclaimed the old man. "Thou hast thrown thyself into the net. My son, this crafty merchant has overreached thee. For if he should demand of thee neither gold nor silver,

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but a bushel of male fleas with silken trappings and jeweled bridles and all linked together with chains of gold, say, how wilt thou be able to extricate thyself from this difficulty?"

"How," replied the sharper, "could that brainless merchant ever think of such a thing as this?"

"Be that as it may," answered the blind man, "I have given thee thy answer."

Next entered the checker-player, who related the adventure of the game.

"I have beaten the young merchant at checkers," said he, "and have bound him to this condition, and there are witnesses to our agreement that he shall drink up the waters of the sea."

"Thou hast blundered," said the blind man, "and thou art ensnared, while thou thinkest that thou hast him in a snare. Suppose that he should say, 'I will drink up the waters of the sea, but do thou first stop all the streams and rivers that are running into it, that I may indeed drink it dry! What answer canst thou give to this?'"

"Nay," replied the knave; "in his whole life, that simpleton could never think of this."

Then came the third sharper, a knave more shameless than the other two.

"That youth," said he, "has blue eyes. I said to him, 'This is my eye; it is evident to every one that you have stolen it; restore it to me, that my eye may have its fellow.'"

"O thou ignorant of the wiles of the age!" replied the old man. "Thy fortune is more adverse than these. For if he should say, 'Pluck out thine

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eye, and I will pluck out one of mine, that we may put them both in scales and judge by their weight whether they are a pair, and therefore thine! That young merchant will then have one left, while thou wilt be quite blind!"

"Never," said the rogue, "will he think of such a trick as that!"

Then came the last sharper, who said, "I charged him to make a pair of breeches of this slab of stone!"

But the crafty old man replied, "Thou hast managed even worse than these. For if thy opponent should say, 'Nay, but do thou first prepare me thread of a piece of iron to sew them with!' what canst thou say in reply to him?"

"How should a simpleton like he conceive of such a thing?" the knave answered.

Meanwhile, the young man listened unobserved, and when they had ended, he hastened home and gave the good woman a thousand thanks for showing him a plan whereby he might foil his adversaries. And so he passed the night in calmness and tranquillity.

Next morning, when the parties appeared before the Cadi, the first sharper, who had bought the sandalwood, seized the merchant by the collar, saying, "Produce thy measure, that I may fill it, and give thee what is thy due!"

But when the young merchant gave him his reply concerning the fleas, the sharper sat down there confounded in presence of the Cadi. In like manner he proceeded with the others, mak-

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ing to each the reply of the old man. At length, after making a thousand difficulties and objections, he agreed to take back his sandalwood and several bags of gold as compensation; then, having sold it to good profit, he rewarded the good woman, and straightway departed from that wicked city of crafty men.

## VI

### THE JESTS THEY MADE IN BAGDAD

For it was in the golden time  
Of good Harun al Rashid!

THEY used to say in Bagdad, "A wise thief does not steal in his own quarter of the city"—sage advice followed by the Kurd, in this authentic tale. It befell that the Commander of the Faithful, the Caliph Harun al Rashid, one night being restless and ill at ease, sent for his Vizier and said, "O Jaafar son of Barmek, I am sore wakeful and heavy-hearted this night, and I desire what may solace my spirit and cause my breast to broaden with amusement!"

Said Jaafar, "O Commander of the Faithful, I have a friend, by name Ali the Persian, who hath store of tales and pleasant stories, such as lighten the heart and make care depart!"

Ali the Persian was summoned to the presence. Said Ali:

"I left my native city of Bagdad on a journey, having with me a lad who carried a leathern bag. Presently we came to a certain city, where, as I was buying and selling, behold! a rascally Kurd



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fell on me and seized my bag by force, saying, 'This is my bag and all that is in it is mine!'

"Thereupon I cried aloud, 'Ho Moslems, one and all! Deliver me from the hand of the vilest of oppressors!'

"But the people said, 'Come both of you before the Cadi, and abide ye by his arbitrament!'

"So I agreed to submit myself to such decision, and we both presented ourselves before the Cadi, who said, 'What bringeth you here, and what is your case and your quarrel?'

"Said I, 'We are men at a difference, who appeal to thee and make complaint and submit ourselves to thy judgment!'

"Said the Cadi, 'Which of you is the complainant?'

"The Kurd stepped forward and said, 'Allah preserve our lord the Cadi! Verily, this bag is my bag, and all that is in it is my swag. It was lost from me, and I found it with this man my enemy!'

"Said the Cadi, 'When didst thou lose it?'

"And the Kurd answered, 'But yesterday, and I passed a sleepless night by reason of its loss.'

"'If it be thy bag,' said the Cadi, 'what is in it?'

"Said the Kurd, 'There were in my bag two silver styles for eye-powder and antimony, and a kerchief wherein I had wrapped two gilt cups and two candlesticks. Moreover, it contained two tents and two platters and two spoons and a cushion and two leather rugs and two ewers and a

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brass tray and two basins and a cooking-pot and two water-jars and a ladle and a sacking-needle and a she-cat and two dogs and a wooden bench and two sacks and two saddles and a gown and four pelisses and a cow and two calves and a she-goat and two sheep and a ewe and two lambs and two green pavilions and a camel and two she-camels and a lioness and two lions and a she-bear and two jackals and a mattress and two sofas and an upper room and two halls and a portico and two sitting-rooms and a kitchen with two doors and a company of Kurds who will bear witness that the bag is my bag!

“Then said the Cadi to me, ‘And thou, sir, what sayest thou?’

“So I came forward (and indeed the Kurd’s speech had bewildered me) and I said, ‘Allah advance our lord the Cadi! Verily, there was naught in this bag save a little ruined dwelling and another without a door and a dog-kennel and a boys’ school and youths playing dice and tents and tent-ropes and the cities of Bassorah and Bagdad and the palace of Shaddad bin Ad and a blacksmith’s forge and a fishing-net and cudgels and pickets and girls and boys and a thousand thieves who will testify that the bag is my bag!’

“Now when the Kurd heard my words, he wept and wailed, and said:

“ ‘Oh my lord the Cadi, this my bag is known, and what is in it is matter of renown, for in this bag there be castles and citadels and cranes and

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beasts of prey and men playing chess and draughts. Furthermore, in this my bag be a brood mare and two colts and a stallion and two thoroughbred steeds and two long lances, and it containeth likewise a lion and two hares and a city and two villages and a woman and two rogues and an image and two gallows-birds and a blind man and two wights with good sight and a limping cripple and two monks and a Cadi and two assessors who will bear evidence that the bag is my bag!

“Said the Cadi to me, ‘And what sayest thou, O Ali?’

“Being filled with rage I came forward and said, ‘Allah keep our lord the Cadi! I had in this my bag a coat of mail and a broadsword and armories and a thousand fighting rams and a sheepfold with its pasturage and a thousand barking dogs and gardens and vines and flowers and sweet-smelling herbs and figs and apples and statues and pictures and flagons and goblets and fair-faced slave-girls and singing women and marriage feasts and tumult and clamor and great tracts of land and robbers and a company of raiders with swords and spears and bows and arrows and true friends and lovers and intimates and comrades and men imprisoned for crime and cup-companions and a drum and flutes and flags and banners and boys and girls and brides in their wedding bravery and singing girls and five Abyssinian women and three maidens of Ind and four damsels of Medina and a score of Greek girls and eighty Kurdish dames and seventy Georgian ladies

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and the Tigris and the Euphrates and a fowling-net and a flint and steel and many-columned Iran and a thousand rogues and race-courses and stables and mosques and baths and builders and a carpenter and a plank and nails and a black slave with his flageolet and a captain and a caravan-leader and towns and cities and a hundred thousand pieces of gold and Kufa and Anbar and twenty chests full of stuffs and twenty storehouses and Gaza and Askalon and all Egypt from Damietta to Assuan, and the palace of Kisra Anushirwan and the kingdom of Solomon and from Wadi Nuuman to Khorassan, and Balkh and Ispahan, and from Ind to the Soudan. Therein also (may Allah prolong the life of our lord the Kadi!) are doublets and cloths and a thousand sharp razors to shave off the Cadi's beard, except he fear my resentment and adjudge the bag to be my bag!

“Now when the Cadi heard what we avouched, he was confounded and said:

“‘I see ye twain be none other than two pestilent fellows, atheistical villains who make sport of Cadis and stand not in fear of reproach. For never did tongue tell nor ear hear aught more wonderful than that which ye pretend. By Allah, from China to Shajarat, nor from Persia to the Soudan, nor from Wadi Nuuman to Khorassan, was ever heard the like of what ye vouch, or credited the like of what ye affirm! Say, fellows, be this bag a bottomless sea, or the day of resurrection that shall gather together the just and the unjust?’

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“Then the Cadi bade me open the bag, and I opened it, and behold! there were in it bread and a lemon and cheese and olives. So I threw the bag down before the Kurd and went my way.”

We are told that the heart of the Commander of the Faithful was lightened, and that his breast expanded with laughter so that he fell flat on his back. And he bade them bestow rich gifts on Ali the Persian.

Perhaps the Kurd at first determined to enumerate everything that might possibly be in the bag and then to identify some of the things and claim them as his own; and, intoxicated by the exuberance of his own verbosity, burst out into a wild flow of exaggeration. Ali the Persian, dazed by the Kurd's whirlwind talk, fell into the same strain, and even raised the limit. The Kurd came back, and Ali again followed them with a list like the day of resurrection. Or perhaps the subtle Ali made the story up on the spur of the moment, to gladden the heart of the downcast Caliph.

One may contrast with this mountain of words the brevity of the following, “A saint outside, a devil inside, like the archbishop's donkey!” For, if there be a story, it is left to the imagination. In somewhat the same vein is this, “They came to shoe the Pasha's horses, and the beetle stuck out its foot.” Some little man at court had butted in, taking to himself the compliments and honors meant for his betters. “The Amir's dog is himself an Amir,” is the Arab version of “Like master, like man”; but it makes allusion also to the inso-

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lence of office, or of the office-boy. So does this, "He who needs the dog says to him, 'Good morning, my lord!'" And there is something which comes home to us in the description of "March weather, seven big snow-storms, besides the small ones." We ourselves know of a city which might be adumbrated thus, "Aleppo—sociability, chatter, and a drink of water."

There is another quaint saying among the Arabs, which suggests its own story: "It is a goat, even if it does fly." The obstinate man, it seems, had seen a black speck on the hillside, and had declared it was a goat. It rose in the air, and he persisted, in the words of the proverb. "Throw him into the river, and he will come up with a fish in his mouth" needs no comment; and there is equal wit in the saying, "The night has turned out to suit the thief." It would be difficult to better the saying, "The bug is a beauty to its mother"; and there is caustic wisdom in the proverb, "A miser's money belongs to the devil." Curiously enough, there is a genuinely Hibernian note in this saying of the Cairo slums: "God bless his mother. She was even worse than his father." But most modern of all is the phrase, "The tongue is the neck's enemy"; for, it would seem, the Arabs long ago evolved the saying, to "get it in the neck!"

There is a fine and humorous tale that illustrates the menace of the neck by the tongue—the tale of the Silent Barber. It is told with admirable reticence, and with an ascending climax

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like the tale of the bag, but it has, further, an admirably funny and well-developed plot. This tale of the Silent Barber came out on that famous occasion when six good men and true confessed to murdering the hunchback, who was not dead at all.

The tailor, whose jest-loving wife had been the cause of all the trouble, related how the men of the scissors had that very morning given a breakfast, at which the barber was present, an old man, past his ninetieth year, of dark countenance, with white beard and eyebrows, with a long nose, and of haughty aspect. To the assembled guests the host brought in a strange and handsome youth of the inhabitants of Bagdad. He was attired in clothes of the handsomest description, but was lame of one leg. He bowed, smiling, to the company, who rose to greet him; but when he saw the barber, he turned furiously and would have left the hall.

“Wherefore thy wrath?” asked the host.

“This barber!” answered the youth. “A pestilent fellow! ’Twas he that caused the injury to my leg.”

“Nay,” protested the barber, “but I saved him from much evil.”

Said the host, “We conjure thee by Allah, relate the adventure!” But the barber grew pale when he heard it.

Said the youth, “Good sirs, my sire was a merchant of Bagdad. He was admitted to the mercy of Allah, and left me much wealth. Then

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I began to attire myself in clothes of the handsomest description and to feed on the most delicious meats. Now Allah, whose perfection be extolled, had made me a hater of women. One day it befell that I was walking through the streets of Bagdad. A party of merry maidens, coming toward me, blocked my way, and I, being a woman-hater, fled from before them, down a by-street, and sate me on a stone bench. A window across the by-street opened, and there looked forth a moon-bright damsel with Babylonian eyes. She watered the flowers in the window-box and withdrew. Fire transformed my heart. From woman-hater I became lover, and sate there distraught till sunset, when the Cadi came riding from the law-court with slaves before him and serfs behind him, and entered that same house. Then I knew she was the Cadi's daughter and beyond my reach!

"I gat me home grieving, and fell on my couch distraught, and swooned away. My slaves wept, but I answered them not, and my state waxed worse. An ancient woman of my neighbors came, who divined my plight, so I told her the tale. 'Though she be the Cadi's daughter,' said the old dame, 'yet can I bring thee to her. Therefore brace up thy heart!' So I rose, heartened and glad of face. And the old dame went in to the Cadi's daughter and wept, and told her how I was dying of love for her; and the Cadi's daughter at first was wroth, then she too wept for my love, and at last bade the old dame bring me, that she



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might talk with me. After three days the old woman came and bade me make ready, for the fair one would see me at her home on Friday, at the hour of prayer, when her father, the Cadi, and all the men were at the mosque. So I rejoiced, and bade call a barber, and they brought this fellow to me.

“Entering, he said, ‘May Allah dispel thy grief!’

“I answered, ‘May Allah hear thy prayer!’

“Said the barber, ‘Let my lord rejoice, for health hath returned to thee! Wilt thou be shaved or wilt thou be bled? For it hath been handed down on the authority of Ibn Abbas that the Prophet, on whom be blessing, hath said, “Whoso shaveth his head on a Friday, Allah will avert from him seventy calamities.” And on like authority it is said, “Whoso is bled on a Friday, misfortune will follow after him!”’

“I said, ‘Cease from too much speaking, and shave my head!’

“So he arose and took from his sleeve a kerchief, which he opened, and lo! in it was a quadrant, wherewith, going out to the court, he began to take the sun. After pondering long, he returned and said, ‘Know, sir, that there have sped of this our day, which is Friday the tenth of the month Safar, of the year two hundred and three score and three of the Flight of the Prophet, upon whom be blessing and peace, and the ascendant planet of which, according to the rules of astrology, is the planet Mars—of this day,

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I say, there have sped seven degrees and six minutes, and it happeneth that Mercury hath come into conjunction with Mars; therefore the shaving of the head is now a most auspicious undertaking. It hath been indicated to me also that thou wouldst confer a benefit; happy is the receiver! But it hath also been revealed to me that a certain matter portendeth, whereof I would not speak.'

" 'In the name of Allah!' I cried. 'Thou weariest me, and dissipatest my wits, and augurest against me, when I desired thee only to shave my head! Arise, then, and shave it, and cut short thy words!'

" 'In the name of Allah!' said he. 'Didst thou comprehend the matter, thou wouldst ask me to speak more. I counsel thee to do this day as I admonish thee, according to the secrets of the stars. Thou shouldst acclaim Allah, and not withstand me. I give thee good counsel, and regard thee compassionately. Would that I were in thy service a year, that thou mightest learn my worth, nor would I seek for pay!'

"I replied, 'Thou slayest me with thy tongue! Is there no escape?—for my heart burned to visit the damsel, and I feared lest ere my coming the Cadi would return, and all be lost.'

"Said the barber, 'O my master! I am he whom they call The Silent, for the fewness of my words, for it is this that distinguisheth me from my brothers; for my eldest brother is named Bakbuk, and the second Heddar, and the third Bakbak, and the fourth Alkuz, and the fifth Anashar, and

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the sixth is named Shakabak, and the seventh is named Al Samit, The Silent, and he is myself!

“I felt as if my liver had burst, and said to my slave, ‘Give him a quarter of a piece of gold, and let him go in the name of Allah! I no longer wish to shave my head!’ For the time was speeding, and my heart was hot.

“But the silent one answered, ‘What saith my lord? Nay, can I serve thee not, how can I take thy gold? For I must serve thee, for such is my duty and my need, and I dare not if I receive no reward. For if thou knowest not my worth, I know thine; and thy father, on whom may Allah show grace, treated us beneficently, for he was a generous man. By Allah, thy father sent for me on a day—nay, even such a day as this—and I came to him in the midst of his friends, and he addressed me, saying, “Take some blood from me!” So I took the astrolabe and observed the sun’s altitude, and found the ascendant of the hour to be of evil omen, and that the letting of blood would be fraught with peril, wherefore I so informed him, and he hearkened to me, and had patience, waiting until the auspicious time, when I took blood from him. He, indeed, withstood me not, but thanked me, and in like manner all the company thanked me, and thy father gave me a hundred pieces of gold.’

“Said I, ‘May Allah show no mercy to my father for knowing such a man as thou!’ For the damsel was awaiting me, and I bethought me of her Babylonian eyes.

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“But the barber made answer, ‘There is none great but Allah, and Mohammed is the Prophet of Allah! Praised be the majesty of Him who changeth others, but He changeth not! I esteemed thee to be not other than a person of wisdom, but thou speakest unwisdom because of thy sickness. In the most excellent Koran, Allah hath mentioned those who abstain from anger and those who forgive—but thou art excused. I am unacquainted, however, with the cause of thy haste. Thou knowest that thy father did naught without taking counsel with me, and it hath been said also that he whose counsel is sought should be trusted. Am I not a man skilled in the ways of the world and ready to serve thee? I am not displeased with thee. How, then, art thou displeased with me? But I forgive thee because of the favors thy father bestowed on me. Thou art but a youth, and thy sense is weak. It is not long since I carried thee on my shoulder, and took thee to school.’

“Then said I, bethinking me of her who waited, ‘In the name of Allah depart, that I may discharge my business!’ and I rent my garment in anger.

“When the silent one saw it, he laid hold on his razor, and set him to sharpening it. And this he continued, till methought my soul had fled from my body. Then, approaching my head, he shaved a small part of it. Then, raising his hand from me, he spoke thus, ‘O my master! Haste is of the Devil! I think that

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thou knowest not my condition, for this hand of mine resteth upon the heads of kings and amirs and sages.'

"'Leave what concerneth thee not!' I cried. 'Thou contractest my heart!'

"'I have a fancy,' said he, 'that thou art in haste?'

"'Yea, yea, yea, by Allah, I am!' said I.

"'Haste not!' said he, 'for haste is of the Evil One, and is the begetter of grief and repentance. The Prophet, on whom be blessing, hath said, "Happy is the matter that beginneth deliberately!" And, before Allah, I am in doubt as to this affair whereto thou hastest! Thou wouldst do well, therefore, to make it known to me.'

"He threw the razor from his hand in anger, and, taking the quadrant, went again to observe the sun. After he had waited a long time he returned and said, 'There remaineth now until the hour of prayer.' . . .

"'In the name of Allah,' I cried, 'be silent, for thou causest my liver to burst!'

"And thereupon he took the razor, and sharpened it as he had done before, and shaved another portion of my head. Then, stopping again, he said, 'I am in anxiety on account of thy hurry. If thou wouldst acquaint me with its cause, it would be better for thee, for thou knowest that thy father did naught without consulting me.'

"I perceived now that I could not escape his importunity, and said within myself, 'The time of prayer is almost come, and I must go before

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they come forth from the mosque. If he delay me a little longer, I know not how I shall gain admission to her.' Therefore I said to him, 'Hasten, O barber, and cease from thy talk, for I desire to go to an entertainment with my friends!'

"But when he heard of the entertainment, he said, 'This day is a blessed day for me. For yesterday I invited my intimate friends to come and feast with me, and lo! I have forgotten to prepare the repast! But now thou recallest it to me. On account of my negligence I shall suffer disgrace and confusion!'

"Therefore I said to him, 'Be not concerned about this, for I have told thee that I go forth; therefore all that is in my house is thine, for thy entertainment, if thou wilt use haste in my matter and quickly shave my head.'

"'May Allah reward thee with all blessings!' he cried. 'Tell me, therefore, what is in thy house for my guests?'

"'Five dishes of meat,' said I, 'and ten fowls, and a roast lamb!'

"'Let them be brought,' said he, 'that I may see them!'

"So I had them brought, and the barber, rejoicing exceedingly, cried out, 'Heaven hath been gracious unto thee! How generous is thy heart! But the incense and the perfumes are lacking!'

"Therefore I bade bring a box of perfumes, aloe and ambergris and musk, worthy fifty finars. The time was now shrunk, like my heart, so I said to him, 'Take these gifts; and finish the

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shaving of my head, by the life of the Prophet, whom may Allah preserve!

“But he answered, ‘Nay, I will not until I see what be in the box!’

“I therefore bade the slave open the box before him. Whereupon, throwing down the quadrant from his hand, he sate him on the ground and, taking the box, turned over the aloe and musk and ambergris in his hand, till my soul well nigh parted from my body.

“Then, rising, the barber once more took his razor, and shaved yet another portion of my head. After a while he fell a-pondering, and said, ‘By Allah, O my son, I know not whether I should thank thee or thy father; for my feast to-day is wholly of thy bounty, and none of my guests is worthy of it, for I have among my guests Zaitun, the keeper of the baths, and Salia, the wheat-seller, and Ukal, the bean merchant, and Akrasha, the grocer, and Homayd, the dustman, and Akarish, the milk-seller, and each of these hath a dance which he danceth, and each of them knoweth verses which he reciteth, and I, thy servant, know neither garrulousness nor forwardness. And each of them hath a jest that the other hath not; but the telling is not equal to the seeing. Therefore, if thou wilt, leave thy friends for this day, and be of our company, for doubtless thy friends are persons of much talk that will weary thee, with thy sickness yet on thee.’

“‘If it be Allah’s will,’ I answered, ‘that shall be on another day.’

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“But he answered, ‘Nay, better is it thou join my friends first, and find pleasure in them.’

“I laughed from a heart laden with anger, and said to him, ‘Do thou what I require of thee, that I may go in the care of Allah, whose name be exalted; and go thou to thy friends, for they await thee!’

“‘Nay,’ said he, ‘but I must bring thee to my friends, for they be all men of wit and worth.’

“‘May Allah give thee joy with them,’ I answered, ‘and indeed I must bring them to my house that I may know them!’

“‘If that be thy wish,’ said the barber, ‘I will hasten to my house with these gifts, and then, returning hither, go with thee to thy friends, and then shalt thou come with me to my friends.’

“Thereupon I cried out, ‘There is no strength nor majesty save in Allah, the High and Mighty! Go thou to thy companions and make merry with them, and let me go to mine!’

“‘Nay, but,’ he replied, ‘I will not leave thee!’

“‘Nay, none can go with me whither I am going!’ I answered.

“Then said he, pondering sorrowfully, ‘Nay, I fear thou hast a meeting with some fair one; else wouldst thou take me with thee! Beware, therefore, lest danger overtake thee!’

“‘Woe upon thee, shameless old man!’ I answered. ‘What words are these?’

“Thereupon he shaved me in silence, and the hour of prayer drew ever nigher. When he had made an end of shaving me, I said, ‘Go now, make



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merry with thy friends, and return hither! I will await thee, and thou shalt go with me!

“But he replied, ‘Nay, thou seekest to deceive me and to bring calamity upon thyself. In the name of Allah, quit not this place till I return!’

“‘Come quickly, then!’ I answered. So he departed, taking with him the largess of dainties for the feast. But he went not to his home, but, delivering the dainties to a porter, he returned, and hid himself in a by-street near my house, though I saw it not.

“When he was departed from me, I arose quickly. The muezzins on the minarets had already chanted the call to prayer. I donned fair raiment and went forth alone, betaking me to the by-street of the Cadi’s house, and I went toward the door where I had beheld the damsel. And my heart was hot, for I knew that she awaited me. But, lo! the barber had come forth, and was close behind me, and I knew it not! So, finding the door open, I entered and went into the inner hall.

“But at that very time the Cadi returned, coming from the mosque, and entered the hall, and closed the door; and my heart grew cold with fear. And it befell that, fulfilling the purpose of Allah to rend the veil of protection before me, a slave-girl committed a fault, and the Cadi struck her. She made outcry, and one of the men slaves came running, and him too the Cadi struck in his wrath. The man slave cried out; and the barber, standing without the door, thought that the cry

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was mine, and that I was wounded by the Cadi. So he rent his garment, and threw dust on his head, and howled for help. A crowd gathered, and the barber cried aloud:

“‘My master is in that house, and the Cadi hath slain him!’ Then, running to my house with the crowd following him, he alarmed my household. They too came running, crying out, ‘Alas for our master! Alas for our master!’

“‘The barber ran before them, his clothes torn, making a pitiable howling, and the folk of the city followed them.

“‘The barber wailed aloud, and all with him, ‘Alas for our slain!’ So they came to the house. When the Cadi heard it, he was troubled, and went and opened the door. ‘What tumult is this, O people?’ said the Cadi.

“‘Thou hast slain our master!’ they answered.

“‘What hath your master done that I should slay him?’ said the Cadi. ‘And wherefore is this barber come?’

“‘I heard him cry out!’ said the barber. ‘Thou hast beaten him with rods!’

“Said the Cadi, wondering, ‘Why should I slay thy master? Whence came he, and whither would he go?’

“‘Evil-hearted old man!’ cried the barber. ‘Wherefore dost thou make concealment? For I know the truth and the reason of his coming! Thy daughter loveth him, and he her, and would come to her. Thou hast found him in thy house, and thou hast slain him! In the name of Allah,

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let the Caliph decide the matter! Bring forth the body of my master ere I enter thy house!

“The Cadi was abashed before the people, and ceased speaking. But presently he said, ‘Nay, if thou sayest truly, enter thyself, and bring him forth!’

“So the barber stepped forward and entered the house. And when I saw him coming, I sought a way to escape, and saw a chest there, and entered it, drawing down the lid, holding my breath.

“The barber came to the inner hall, and, seeking not elsewhere, came straight to the chest. He felt the weight of it, and hefted it, and set it on his shoulder, crying out, ‘The body of my master is here! I have found my master’s body!’ And my reason went from me in wrath and fear.

“Seeing no escape, I lifted the lid, and leaped to the ground, thus doing hurt to my leg. When I saw the people at the door, I scattered gold among them to divert them, and fled along the street. And the barber followed me.

“Wherever I ran, he pursued me, crying aloud, ‘Woe is me for my master! Praise be to Allah, who hath prevailed against them and saved my master! Thou didst hasten toward evil, O master, till thou broughtest this calamity upon thee! Had not Allah blessed thee with me, thou hadst not escaped. Pray Allah, therefore, that I may live long to watch over thee and guard thee from calamity! By Allah, thou hast well nigh brought

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me too into destruction. Yet I am not angered, but I pardon thy ignorance, for thou hast little wit and art overhasty.'

" 'Art thou not satisfied with what thou hast done,' I cried, 'that thou must follow me through the streets?' And I prayed for death to liberate me from him, yet found it not. So I ran from him in despite and wrath, and entered a shop in the market-place, and besought the master of the shop to protect me against the barber. So he drove him away.

"Therefore I said within myself, 'I cannot rid me of this pestilent fellow, but he will follow me night and day, and I cannot bear to look upon him!'

"So I summoned witnesses, and made a writing, dividing my wealth to my family, and appointing a warden, whom I bade sell my house, and I set forth on a journey, and came hither. And now, behold, he is here! How then can I abide among you?"

But the barber said, "In the name of Allah! Through my wisdom did I act thus, and Allah hurt thy leg to spare thy life. Were I a man of many words, I had not done this; but hearken, I will relate a happening that befell, that ye may know me for a man of little speech and scanty—"

The tailor here interrupted him:

"What passed between the Cadi and his daughter, Allah knoweth."





## VII

### THE WIT AND SATIRE OF THE HEBREWS

THE Chief Rabbi of England once pointed out, in a spirit of perfect reverence, that there were many passages of intentional wit in the Old Testament, and that many more passages had been the cause of rich rabbinical humor. One need not be more royalist than the king; therefore I may venture, in an equally reverent spirit, to follow in the good rabbi's footsteps.

No story, perhaps, has been the source of more mental ingenuity throughout the ages than the legend of Adam's rib. Centuries ago the Jews wove many tales and fancies out of the ancient theme. They said, for instance, that the great Rabbi Gamaliel had once brought the Scriptures of his nation to the Roman Emperor Hadrian, who, after a study of the Sacred Books, rashly retorted to the rabbi that, in the story of Genesis, the Creator was little better than a thief, because he had stolen one of Adam's ribs. Gamaliel was bewildered and perplexed, but his fair daughter arose to the occasion.

"Let me answer the emperor!" she begged, "and I will vindicate our holy writings!"

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So on the next day she presented herself before Hadrian. "O Emperor of the Romans!" she cried. "Truly a terrible thing has happened, wherefore we invoke thy aid!"

Hadrian was greatly concerned, and asked what it was. The Hebrew maiden replied that, at the dead and darkling hour of midnight, a thief had subtly and stealthily entered their abode, and had stolen away a silver flagon, though it was true, she added, that he had left a golden flagon in its place.

"Why," cried the Roman emperor, "that was no robber, but a benefactor! Would that such a one might rob me too!"

The Hebrew maiden smiled a subtle Oriental smile. "Ah!" she said, looking down and blushing sweetly; "then why do you blame the Creator and accuse him of theft, seeing that, if he took one rib from Adam, he left him Eve instead?"

The rabbis went on to embroider on this same story, making Hadrian ask why the rib was taken, and not the eye or the ear.

"The Creator would not take the head," replied the daughter of Gamaliel, "lest Eve might be too proud. He would not take the eye, lest she might be wanton; nor the tongue, lest she might talk too much; nor the ear, lest she might be a gossip, listening to vain words and tales; nor the hand, lest she might be avaricious; nor the foot, lest she might go astray. So he chose the rib, and from the left side, which is less worthy, so that Eve might be full of humility."



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Then follows a reply which seems to be grim enough in its humor to have come from a Scotchman or a Chinaman. Hadrian finally asked why the Creator had taken Adam's rib at dead of night.

"Because," said the maiden, "he wished Eve to be well pleasing to Adam. If you see the raw meat before it is cooked, it takes your appetite away. Therefore the Creator took the rib at night, when it was dark."

Another excellent rabbinical tale concerns King Solomon. Once that thrice-wise sage was sitting at the window of his palace, looking out over his garden, when he heard a swallow twittering. Having from the Creator the gift of understanding the speech of beasts and birds, the great and all-wise Solomon gave ear to the swallow's words.

"I," said the swallow, "am the strongest of all living things. Even King Solomon could not stand against me!"

"How so?" said the lady swallow, his spouse. "Is not Solomon invincible?"

"Nay," answered her mate, "if I were to enter his palace, by the mere beating of my wings I could slay King Solomon and reduce his palace to ruins."

Solomon was not greatly pleased at this disrespectful boast; therefore, exercising his power, he called the swallow into his room, and asked him what was the meaning of that high saying.

"Hush!" said the swallow, winking irreverently

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at the great king. "I only said that to humbug my wife! She believes everything I tell her, and thinks I am the greatest thing on earth! Honor among husbands! Don't give me away!"

They say also that, once on a time, the great and wise King Solomon was playing at chess with his general Benaiah. King Solomon, to whom even the invention of the game is attributed by the rabbis, always won, and thought not a little of his skill. The game had progressed to a certain point, and King Solomon was decidedly getting the best of it, when a sudden commotion in the street attracted him, and, intent king-like on the order and quiet of the city, he went to the window to learn what was taking place. While the wise king's back was turned, Benaiah purloined and alienated one of the king's knights, and, when the game was set going again, the general's advantage was so great that he checkmated the king and won the game.

Solomon the all-wise was at first astounded, and then, coming to himself, he pondered on the cause, went over the game again, and in mind repeated move after move. Thus proceeding, he presently discerned the trick of the missing knight and the guile of the general Benaiah. So he set himself to drive the warrior to voluntary confession. And this he did after this wise. Disguising himself as a street robber, he left the palace, and shortly came on two others of like profession. They accosting, he declared that he had the key of the treasury of the great king, and that, if



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they would aid him, he would gain admittance for them to the vaults. So at the dim, dead hour of night, what time the sheeted dead did squeak and gibber in the streets, the three found their dark and felonious way to the treasure-vaults where was stored the gold of Ophir, with vessels of gold and silver and precious jewels innumerable. But no sooner were they well within the vaults than the crafty king backed out again, leaving his two pals in the treasure-house and straightway locking the door on them. Solomon summoned the watch, and in a few minutes his two fellow-thieves were loaded with chains and cast into a vile dungeon. Then Solomon, once more donning his robes of state, entered his council-chamber, and summoned the general Benaiah. When the general came, Solomon fixed him with his eagle eye and demanded:

“What should be done to him who robs his king?”

Benaiah was smitten with the remorse which comes from the fear of being speedily found out; and, like many a modern culprit, he made up his mind that a somewhat tardy confession might lighten punishment. So he fell on his knees, confessed that he had wrongfully abstracted the king's knight, and promised that he never would do it again. Solomon benignly raised him and declared that he was forgiven, in virtue of his voluntary confession; and then he went on to tell the disgusted general that he had really had in mind a quite different matter—the robbing, namely,

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of his royal treasure. At this point the narrator remembers that the two robbers were left in a most uncomfortable and gloomy dungeon. So he tells us that they were promptly summoned forth, and that their worthless heads were stricken off before the king.

To be quite in the fashion, there is a flying-machine story of King Solomon well worth repeating. That uxorious king, it seems, was so beguiled by Pharaoh's daughter, who was one of his innumerable loves, that he learned from her the pagan chants of the Egyptian gods, and, moreover, was so charmed with them that he used to sing them until he forgot the true Creator. At this point he determined on a jaunt in his flying-machine, which was evidently a monoplane, for the ancient historian describes it as being like a flat, square carpet, on which many soldiers were supported, besides their king. Suddenly, as they were whirling through the air, the winds dropped away from them, so that the carpet sagged and the soldiers all fell off, leaving Solomon alone. He called to the winds to come back again, and bear him up. But the winds, evidently instructed beforehand, replied:

“First return thou to the true Creator!”

That the doubt as to the motor-power of that flying-machine may not arise, we hasten to quote another story of Solomon—that, namely, in which he is represented as answering the riddles of the Queen of Sheba. One of these riddles was: “What is it that wails before the wind, bends in the path

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of the storm, chokes the transgressor, clothes the wealthy, kills the fish, and gives food to the bird?"

The Queen of Sheba thought she had King Solomon stumped completely, but after a moment's thought the all-wise one smiled and answered: "Flax! For it bends before the wind, makes ropes to hang the knave, clothes the rich man in fine linen, makes the fishing-line, and, with its seed, nourishes the bird."

The Queen of Sheba tried again.

"What is it," she said, "that springs up out of the earth, licks up the dust, and illumines the darkness of night?"

King Solomon had answered, "Naphtha!" almost before the question was finished, so we see that he was, in all probability, familiar with gasolene also.

We all remember the famed occasion on which the all-wise king "tried to settle a 'spute about a baby with a half a baby," but there is in the rabbinical books another judgment of Solomon even more romantic and touching.

A certain man, it seems, had sold his house and received payment. The purchaser, exploring the floor of the cellar, discovered a buried treasure and promptly brought it to the former owner of the house. But the latter as promptly refused to touch it, saying that the house was sold and the price paid, so that he had no longer the slightest claim to anything in it. The dispute between the generous purchaser and the even more generous

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seller waxed hot, until at last they decided to lay the matter before the great king. Solomon heard them out, and then gave judgment. "The buyer," he said, "has a son; the seller has a daughter, winsome and of suitable age. Go to, let the son of the one marry the daughter, and the treasure shall assuredly belong to their offspring." And it was so. There is no scriptural warranty for this story, but surely only Solomon could have so decided.

Another of the Queen of Sheba stories anticipates or parallels the tale of Appelles and the pictured grapes and the birds, but shows nature's instinct to better advantage. The Queen of Sheba, who seems to have had a Parisian milliner, brought to the king two wreaths, and, as a test of his wisdom, asked him to say which was real and which was false. King Solomon smiled one of those wise smiles of his, opened the window, and let in a bee. The bee promptly went for the real wreath, and so the king passed his test.

Even more legally refined is the following tale of the doings of a dog. A certain man, it is said, set a cake to cook on his fire; a dog runs in, snatches away the cake in his mouth and escapes, taking the cake to the barn of a neighbor to eat it in peace. But a hot ember has stuck to the cake, and this sets fire to the barn, which burns until all is consumed. The legal question now arises, who is to be blamed for the fire? The owner of the dog, or the owner of the oven whence came the coal? Some, relying on the legal principle,



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*quod facit per alium*, lay all blame on the dog, and therefore on his owner; others maintain that the baker was at fault, because he allowed the dog to obtain access to his fire; yet others, who have caught some spark of Solomon's wisdom, say the damages should be paid equally by both. So the rabbis go at it, as one may say, hammer and tongs; but it does not occur to any of them to ask whether that barn was insured. But perhaps this is an anachronism.

There is a tale in the Talmud of a stranger who came to a certain city bringing rich merchandise. Arriving at an inn, he asked for lodging.

"Come to my house as a guest," said one of the wicked citizens, "and no payment shall be charged you."

The stranger accepted this unwonted hospitality, but in the morning his most valuable merchandise had disappeared. On his asking the good man of the house what had become of his merchandise, his host declared that it was all an evil dream, which he forthwith proceeded to expound.

"It is no dream," cried the indignant merchant; "I brought such and such goods to your house, and you have stolen them! Come before the judge."

The judge heard the story of the merchant, and then said: "You have evidently had a dream, the meaning of which your host has interpreted to you. Pay him the fee for interpreting and be gone!"

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Which things are a parable of what befalls those who go to law. Concerning the fair sex, there are many quaint things in the Talmud, but none, perhaps, more quaint than this: Some of the rabbis contend that, in addition to the relatives of Abraham whose names are given in the Bible, Abraham must have had a daughter also, because it is written, "God blessed him in all things," and surely a daughter is among blessings. But other rabbis contend that the true blessing of Abraham was precisely that he had no daughter, for so many evils may befall the father of a girl. She may fall sick in childhood; she may never marry; or, escaping the reproach of a spinster, she may be childless; or, finally, if she pass all other dangers safely by, she may be a witch in her old age. Hence a daughter is said to be a false treasure.

There is one more legend in the Talmud concerning Adam, which is worthy of citation. The Adversary of mankind, the Serpent, it is said, once saw Adam reclining at his ease in the Garden of Paradise, with angels to wait on him, and with the fair mother of all future men resting in her loveliness by his side. The Adversary at once became furiously jealous of Adam and determined to kill him and marry Eve. (One is tempted to ask, in parentheses, whether it is not possible that he succeeded.) But to return to the Talmudic legend. Adam, it seems, had somewhat exceeded his mandate and had told Eve that not only must she not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge

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of good and evil, but that she must not even touch the fruit or even a branch of the tree. Here the Adversary saw his opportunity. He set himself to persuade Eve to eat of the fruit of the tree, whereupon she told him that she was afraid, knowing that if she so much as touched it she was doomed to instant death. So the Adversary bumped her up against the tree (as he has done at intervals ever since) and it seemed (as it has since seemed) that no evil befell. Eve was first terror-stricken, then astonished, then curious. So the Adversary easily persuaded her to taste the fruit, with what results we know.

Eve, it is said, saw the Angel of Death standing beside the tree, and said to herself, "Perhaps now I am going to die, and the Creator will give Adam another wife: I will give Adam of the fruit, and then if we die we shall die together; but if we live, we shall live together." After he was driven forth from Eden, Adam was given a garment made of the skin of the serpent, and set to toil as a tiller of the earth.

It is said that a certain Rabbi Joshua was once out walking when he saw a little girl carrying a basket with a cover. Humanlike, he went over to her and said, "My good child, what is in the basket?"

But the small person was up to date.

"If mother had wanted every one to know what was in the basket, do you think she would have put a cover on it?" she replied.

Doubtless the rabbi murmured, "Stung!" But

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here, perhaps, we have the kernel of that inimitable yarn, the story of the "imaginary mongoose."

Somewhat similar in spirit is the tale told of Moses Mendelssohn when he was caught regaling himself on sweets in a manner more befitting a small boy than a sage.

Said one to him: "Rabbi, only fools are fond of sweets!"

The wise old man smiled a cunning smile, licked his fingers, and replied, "My son, that is a saying made by the wise so that they may keep the sweets for themselves."

To come now to more modern wit. Heine, it is said, once declared that his watch was a better Hebrew than himself, for in its numerous sojourns with pawnbrokers it had quite outstripped him in learning the Hebrew tongue, and, moreover, it always stopped on Saturdays.

Another wit and man of letters, the famous Saphir, was once guilty of some verbal misdemeanor which caused him to be banished from the territory of a German princelet.

Saphir retorted by saying: "If his Highness will deign to look out of his window, he will see me cross the frontier of his dominions."

That same Saphir was later commanded to depart from the realm of Bavaria without a moment's delay, because he had ventured to say that the King of Bavaria wrote very bad poems.

"I shall go," he said, "and if my own feet will not carry me quick enough, I shall borrow some of the superfluous feet from his Majesty's verses."

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To this same wit one remarked that making debts was the cause of ruin.

“Not at all,” said Saphir; “the true cause of ruin is paying debts.”

But the wittiest thing attributed to this man of pointed words is this criticism of a bad comedian: “Joking apart, he is a fair actor.”

Here are two verbal witticisms at the expense of great Hebrews, by men who heartily respected them. The first was directed at the late Sir Moses Montefiore, the munificent distributor of charity. When he died, *The Spectator* closed a rightly laudatory notice of his life by saying that Sir Moses was too great a man for his works to be summarized in an epigram; no one could sum him up in a bon mot. To this *Punch* replied, “Perfectly possible: Bon Moe!”

The same frivolous journal, when the head of the Rothschild family took the oath in the House of Lords with head reverently covered, ventured to suggest that a most fitting title for him would be Baron Hatton.

Let me balance these two epigrams with one by the great Hertzfel, the Zionist leader. When some one was indulging in witticisms at the expense of the Zionist, bantering him and suggesting that so good a man as he should be converted, Hertzfel, it is said, replied by saying that he was kept back by the example of a good friend of his who had died and gone as far as St. Peter's gate. There he was stopped; but, as he was such a good man, he was not sent forthwith to the

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nether regions, but was kept as a kind of go-between, running errands and carrying messages, and thus in constant touch with Peter and his assistants. He was so good a messenger that the general opinion of the gate finally demanded that he should be admitted. Peter was quite willing, said Hertzel, but his friend never got in; for they searched the pearly realm in vain for any one to baptize him. So did Hertzel pay old scores.

## VIII

### HUMOR IN THE DAYS OF THE PHARAOHS

**M**OST of us make the acquaintance of Egypt in the splendidly dramatic story of Joseph and his brethren, and so come to look on Pharaoh and his people as gloomy and malign persecutors fit only to be swallowed up in the Red Sea waves. Or we read of the grave and sober monuments of the Nile Valley, with their perpetual reminders of death and the kingdom of Night; with the result that we are hardly prepared to realize the gay and lightsome side of ancient Egyptian life, or to credit the thought that these tomb-builders could ever break into a smile. But there was a side of gaiety and of charm, and, just as we are finding that so many of our deeper and more philosophical thoughts go back to the people of the Delta, so we are beginning to discover the originals of all our jokes in the buried cities of the Nile. What, for instance, could be more slyly humorous than this love-song, recovered from a fragment of papyrus dug up in a city dead for ages?

“The kisses of my beloved,” sings the lover of old Nile, “are on the farther bank of the

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river; an arm of the stream flows between us, and a crocodile lurks on the sand-bank. But I step down into the water and plunge into the flood. My courage is high, and the waves are as firm ground beneath my feet. Love of her sends me strength. She has given me a spell against the waters. When I kiss her half-open lips, I need no ale to inspire me. Would that I were the servant who waits on her, that I might ever behold her. Her love pervades me, as wine in water, as the fragrance in incense, as the sap in the tree. Never shall I be severed from my beloved, though they seek to drive me to Syria with a club, to Nubia with a cudgel, to the mountains with whips, to the plains with switches. I lay me down sick and sorrowful, and my neighbors gather sorrowing round me. Then comes my beloved and puts the physician to scorn, for she knows my malady, and how to cure it."

That ladies were not unduly oppressed in the land of the Pharaohs, we may gather from this marriage contract from a fourth-century demotic manuscript, but dating in form to far older times:

"I," says the Lady Isis, "take thee as my husband. Thou makest me thy wife, and givest me, in token of dower, five tenths of silver. If I discharge thee as my husband, hating thee and loving another more than thee, I shall give and return to thee two and a half tenths of silver of what thou gavest me as my dower; and I cede unto thee, of all and everything that I shall ac-



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quire with thee, one third part, as long as thou art married unto me."

Not even Chicago or Reno can boast of a franker marriage contract than that; and there is something wonderfully naïve in the idea of the good Lady Isis "discharging" her lord, on the ground that she hates him and loves another better. The sum she returns him, as part of her now canceled dower, is about equal to a silver dollar. So we have still something to learn in marital levity and feminine imperiousness.

There is a curious little Egyptian fable, of the Cat and the Jackal, wherein is debated the question of evil and an overruling Providence who shapes all things well. The Cat, oddly enough, is on the side of the angels, being, it would seem, the symbol of the benevolent goddess Bast. The Cat, first speaking, declares that this world is ruled by the gods, that good triumphs, and all evil-doers are punished. The sky, says the pious Cat, may be o'erclouded, thunder-storms may blot out the light, clouds may veil the sunrise. But the sun will rise anon and scatter the darkness, bringing light and joy with his returning beams.

The Jackal, as devil's advocate, makes answer like any Darwinian. Look, he says, how it befalls in the world. The lizard eats the insect, the bat eats the lizard, the snake eats the bat, the hawk eats the snake, and so on, ad infinitum. Who truly knows that vengeance overtakes the sinner?

The manuscript is defective at this point, Time, with devouring tooth, having eaten a frag-

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ment of papyrus; but it is evident that, when the Jackal seemed to be getting the better of the argument, the Cat turned the scale in favor of Providence by jumping at the Jackal and scratching his irreligious face. So that we have advanced not a whit even in our method of conducting transcendental controversy.

Another fable of antique Egypt is the immortal dispute between the Belly and the Head, as to which in truth does most for the welfare of the body of man. The case is tried before the supreme tribunal of Egypt, in the High Court of the Thirty; and during the trial the presiding judge weeps bitterly.

The Head opens the case for the plaintiff by saying, "Mine is the eye that sees, mine the nose that breathes, mine the mouth that speaks; I govern and direct all." The answer of the digestive organ is missing, but we cannot doubt that the argument is much the same as that so skillfully used by the antique Roman, Menenius Agrippa, on the Sacred Mount, some five hundred years later. So do all things go back to Mother Egypt.

Very characteristic of that land of monuments is the proverb, "Do not build your tomb higher than your betters." But of quite universal aptness and application is the saying, "Go not walking with a fool." There is a deeper note in such an admonition as this: "If thou art an intelligent man, bring up thy son in the love of God. If he is courageous and active, reward him. But if he

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is a fool, turn not thy heart against him." And in somewhat the same vein of serious piety is this, "If, after having been humble, thou hast grown powerful, the first man of thy city in wealth, let not riches make thee arrogant, for the prime author of thy good things is God."

We can see a certain present application of the saying: "The hunter who goeth forth into a strange land bequeaths his goods to his children. He fears lions and barbarous men." And we might almost believe that there was deliberate intent, and allusion to our time, in the excellent tale of *The Insurgent of Joppa and Pharaoh's Big Stick*.

There was once, says the tale, in the time of the Pharaoh Men-kheper-ra, a revolt of the servants of his Majesty who were in Joppa, and his Majesty said, "Let Tahutia go with his footmen and destroy these wicked Insurgents."

And Pharaoh called one of his servants, and said, "Hide thou my Big Stick which worketh wonders in the baggage of Tahutia, that my power may go with him."

Now when Tahutia came nigh to Joppa, with all the footmen of Pharaoh, he sent to the chief Insurgent of Joppa, and said, "Behold, his Majesty King Men-kheper-ra has sent this great army against thee; but what is that if my heart is as thy heart? Do thou come, and let us talk in the field, and see each other face to face."

So Tahutia, with certain of his men, met with the chief Insurgent of Joppa, and they

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spoke with one another in the great tent. But Tahutia had made ready two hundred sacks with cords and fetters and had hid them in his tent.

Then said the chief Insurgent of Joppa: "My heart is set on examining the Big Stick of Menkheper-ra. By the soul of Pharaoh, let it be in my hands this day! Do thou well, and bring it to me!"

And Tahutia, the general of Pharaoh, did so, and brought the Big Stick of King Menkheper-ra, and he laid hold on the garment of the Insurgent of Joppa, and he arose and stood up, and Tahutia said, "O Insurgent of Joppa, here is the Big Stick of Pharaoh, that terrible lion to whom Amen his father has given power and strength!"

And as the Insurgent of Joppa bent forward to touch the Big Stick, Tahutia raised it on high and struck the Insurgent of Joppa upon the poll, so that he fell helpless before him. And Tahutia put him in a sack, with gyves on his hands and fetters on his feet. The tale goes on to tell how Tahutia, by strategy, smuggled two hundred of his best men into Joppa done up in sacks and labeled "Baggage," and how they seized the city, so that Joppa fell; but what became of the Insurgent in the sack and the Big Stick of Pharaoh the chronicler sayeth not.

There is another quaint little tale, of the Doomed Prince, which has elements both of humor and of pathos. It is obviously a fairy-tale rather than a veritable history. The tale relates that,

BROUGHT UP UNDER WARD AND WATCH, SO THAT HIS THREE DOOMS MIGHT NOT COME NIGH HIM



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on the birth of a certain prince of Egypt, the Seven Hathors, declarers of destiny, announced that the prince was fated to perish through three things—a crocodile, a serpent, and a dog. So the king sent the prince away to a desert place, to be brought up under ward and watch, so that his three dooms might not come nigh him.

One day, being well grown, the prince was on the house-top when he saw a man walking, with a dog trotting after him. And the heart of the prince moved in sympathy, and he cried out that he, too, wanted a playmate like that. So his Majesty said, "Let there be brought to him a little pet dog, lest his heart be sad!" And it was so, and the prince grew, and the dog grew with him.

Then, after many days, the heart of the prince grew restless, and he said, "Inasmuch as I am fated to three evil fates, let me follow my desire; let God do to me what is in His heart!"

So he went forth, taking his dog with him, and betook him northward across the desert, and his little dog went with him. And they came to the land of the chief of Naharaina. There was there a tower seventy cubits high and with seventy windows, and in the topmost chamber of this tower the chief of Naharaina had put his daughter, and had made proclamation that whoever of the princes should climb to her window should have her hand in marriage. So they all clomb, but none could reach her window.

But the Doomed Prince, seeing them climbing, asked what it might mean, and when they had

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answered, he too clomb, and in due time reached the window of the princess. And her heart went out to him utterly, and was as water within her breast. But the chief of Naharaina was wroth, and would not give her to a wanderer.

But the maiden made answer, "By the being of Ra, and thou give him not to me, I will straightway die!"

So he gave her to him, and her heart was well content. And as he was sleeping one day, there came the first of his dooms, a poisonous serpent, and would have bitten him. But the princess, his spouse, brought a bowl of milk and set it before the serpent; and when it was filled with milk and turned over, she smote it with a dagger, so the first doom was stayed. Then came a great crocodile and pursued him, but a strong man of the city bound it, and so the second doom was stayed. But one day the prince went out to walk, taking his little dog with him—and there the papyrus is broken, so that we shall never know, perchance, how it befell with the pup, and how the doom descended upon them.

There are many tales of the magicians of Egypt, like Jannes and Jambres, who withstood Moses, and of their contests with the evil magicians of Ethiopia, the land of darkness. One of these relates that there was once a powerful magician of Ethiopia who molded of wax a litter and four bearers, and said charms over them so that they came to life. Then he sent them down the Nile to Memphis, and they kidnapped Pharaoh



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and brought him to the magician of Ethiopia. The magician gave him five hundred blows of a cudgel and sent him home again. Then Horus, the magician of Egypt, with whom was the magic book of Thoth, wrought a more potent charm, and kidnapped the magician of Ethiopia, and gave him a thousand blows. So the heart of Pharaoh was glad, and he rewarded Horus the magician, and they bound over the magician of Ethiopia to keep the peace for two hundred years.

But the most serious effort in humorous tales of magic is one most venerable, which goes back to the time before the great pyramid was built, and is, indeed, concerned with that Pharaoh whom the Greeks later called Cheops, who built the pyramid. One day, says the tale, when King Khufu reigned over all the land of Egypt, over the Upper Land and over the Delta, he said to his minister who stood before him, "Go, call my sons and my councilors, that I may ask of them a certain thing!" And the sons and councilors of King Khufu stood before him, and he said to them, "Know ye a man who can tell me tales of the deeds of the magicians?"

Then the royal son Khafra stood forth, the same whom the Greeks were to call Cephren, who later built the second pyramid, and he spoke to King Khufu, saying, "I will relate to thy Majesty a tale of thy forefather Nebka the blessed; and of what came to pass when he went into the temple of Ptah of Ankhtaul."

Then the prince narrated how his Majesty

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Nebka was walking in the temple of Ptah and how he went into the house of Uba-aner, the chief reciter of magic charms, with his train of servants. And it befell that the wife of the chief reciter Uba-aner looked upon one of the pages who stood behind the king, and her heart went out to him. So she sent for the page at a convenient hour, and they caroused together in the garden-house. But Uba-aner, chief reciter of charms, knew it, and he made a crocodile of wax, and breathed upon it, and it became alive and grew to seven cubits in length, and came forth upon that carousing page, and carried him off to a deep lake in the garden, and he was seen no more. But Uba-aner burned up his faithless spouse with fire, and strewed her ashes upon the lake.

His Majesty Khufu, the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, then said, "Let offering be made to King Nebka the blessed—namely, a thousand loaves and a hundred draughts of beer, an ox and two jars of incense; and let an offering be made to the chief reciter Uba-aner—namely, a loaf, a draught of beer, a jar of incense, and a piece of meat. For I have seen the token of his learning." And they did all things as his Majesty Khufu commanded.

Then the royal son Bau-f-ra stood forth and spake, saying, "I will tell thy Majesty of a wonder which came to pass in the days of thy father Senefru the blessed, and of the deeds of the chief reciter of charms, Zazamankh. One day, O King! thy father King Senefru, being weary,

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went throughout his palace seeking for a pleasure to lighten his heart, but he found none. And he said, 'Haste and bring before me the chief reciter of charms, the scribe of the rolls, Zazamankh.' And they straightway brought him, and the king said, 'I have sought in my palace for some delight, but I have found none.'

"Then said Zazamankh to him, 'Let thy Majesty go upon the lake of the palace, and let there be made ready a boat, with fair maidens of the palace to row, and the heart of thy Majesty shall be glad at the sight of them, and thou shalt be refreshed in seeing them row up and down upon the water, and in seeing the birds upon the lake, and beholding the sweet fields and grassy shores. Thus will thy heart be delighted and made glad!'

"So they brought a boat, with twenty oars of ebony inlaid with gold, and twenty maidens fair of form to row it, and all was done according to his Majesty's commands.

"They rowed down the stream and up the stream, and the heart of his Majesty was glad at the sight of their rowing. But one of the maidens at the steering oar struck her hair with the end of the oar, so that her jewel of new malachite fell into the water. So she ceased her song, and rowed not. And her companions likewise ceased, and rowed not. Then his Majesty Senefru said:

"'Row you not farther?'

"And they answered, 'Our little steerer here steers no longer; therefore we row not!'

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“So his Majesty said, ‘Wherefore rowest thou not?’

“And she replied, ‘Because of my jewel of new malachite, which is fallen in the water!’

“And his Majesty said, ‘Row on, for behold, I will replace it.’

“But she answered, ‘I want my own jewel back again!’

“His Majesty sought to persuade her, saying he would make it good for her, but she was firm and would not. So Zazamankh, chief reciter of charms, stood up, and spake a mighty charm from the book of Thoth, and behold! the waters of the lake were divided in two, and one half lay on the other half, so that what was before twelve cubits deep was now four and twenty cubits, and the other half of the lake was dry. And behold! they found the jewel of malachite lying in a shell, and the maid got it back again, and her heart was glad. And the heart of his Majesty Senefru was glad also. So the reciter spake a reverse charm, and the waters came back again into place, and all was well.”

When his Majesty Khufu had commended the tale and bade make offering for King Senefru and for Zazamankh the reciter, the royal son Hordedef stood forth and spake, “O King, and my most august father! Hitherto hast thou heard only tales of those who have gone before and of which no man knoweth the truth. But I will show thy Majesty a man of thy own days.”

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And his Majesty Khufu said, "Who is he, O my son Hordedef?"

And the royal son Hordedef answered, "It is a certain man named Dedi, who dwells at Dedsneferu. He is a man one hundred and ten years old, and he eats each day five hundred loaves of bread and a side of beef, and drinks each day a hundred draughts of beer, even unto this day. He knows how to restore the head that is smitten off; he knows how to make the roaring lion follow him; he knows the designs of the dwelling of Thoth. The Majesty of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Khufu the blessed, has long sought for the designs of the dwelling of Thoth, that he may make the like of them in his pyramid!"

And his Majesty the King said, "Let him be brought!"

Then were ships made ready, and they went up the Nile to Dedsneferu, bearing the prince Hordedef; and the ships were moored by the bank of the Nile, and Hordedef went forth, borne in a litter of ebony, whose pole was of cedar wood inlaid with gold, and he drew near to Dedi, the magician. Leaving the litter, Hordedef went forth to greet Dedi, and found him lying on a couch of palm wood at the door of his house; one servant held his head and rubbed him, and another rubbed his feet, for he was very old. So the king's son persuaded him, and brought him in his ships to Khufu's royal palace.

And his Majesty asked him whether he could

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indeed unite the head that was severed from the body, and he said, "Even so, O King!"

So King Khufu would have had a slave brought and beheaded, but Dedi said that it was not right to deal thus with a man. So they brought instead a duck. And they cut its head off, and laid the head at one side of the palace and the body at the other side. And Dedi spake a charm of great potency and might, and the head and the body waggled toward each other and came together, fitting well. And the duck shook its head and quacked right pleasantly, and the King was glad and commended Dedi.

They did likewise with a goose and with a bullock; and the bullock came together again and went to Dedi, trailing his halter behind him.

So King Khufu commanded that Dedi be rewarded; and they gave him a thousand loaves and a thousand sides of meat and a thousand measures of beer and a hundred bunches of onions. And Dedi consumed them, and his heart was glad.

## IX

### THE HUMOR OF THE OLD TURKS

ONE of the quaintest and most amusing tales I have read in many a day, I have just found in a delightful little old leather-bound volume of Turkish stories; a volume, indeed, so old that its leaves are brown with many autumns, while on an extra page at the end the publisher announces an edition of the works of "the late famous Mr. John Dryden," in four folio volumes, as well as a new poem by Mr. Addison dedicated to "her Grace the Dutchess of Marlborough," entitled "The Campaign." The author of this little book is at great pains to assure us that it is authentically Turkish, and not the bare invention of some Frenchman; since it was written by his tutor for the young Amurath, whose son Mohammed conquered Constantinople and turned Saint Sophia into a Moslem mosque. The good tutor's purpose was edification; and, more specifically, he sought to arm the young Amurath against woman-kind, to whom he already perceived the prince too much addicted. It is no wonder, therefore, that the good tutor chose one of those plots of the immemorial East which opens the way for all

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the pros and cons of the wicked sex; a plot wherein the Sultan's seventh wife falls in love with the young prince her stepson and mirthfully proposes to him to murder the old man and reign in his stead, always, be it understood, with the help and close companionship of the lady. This is, indeed, matter to instruct the too addicted Amurath; and the occasion is improved by the recital, on the part of the lady and of the viziers, of many sententious stories showing the high virtue or else the utter depravity of womankind. I forget which party tells the tale that particularly struck my fancy, but here it is.

It seems that one of the Sultans was gathering taxes from his Christian provinces, and that a clever monk, anticipating our own malefactors of great wealth, declared that he had thought out a way to swear off the tax, and begged the Christians to send him to the Sultan. Which they accordingly did. When the monk came to the monarch, he made him a profound obeisance, and said:

“Sir, we consent to pay your tax, on condition that your Majesty, your viziers, or your doctors will answer one question which I shall propose; but if none answer it, I entreat that you will not be displeased that I return without paying it.”

Replied the Sultan:

“I am content. I have very learned men in my court, and your question must be very difficult if none of them can answer it.”

The king, after having summoned all his



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viziers and doctors, said to the monk: "Christian, what is thy question?"

The monk then, opening the five fingers of his right hand, showed its palm; and then, inclining his fingers to the ground, "Tell me," says he, "what this signifies. That is my question."

"As for me," saith the king, "I quit all thoughts of it, and own that I can't guess at it; and to speak freely, it doth not seem easy to be answered."

The thoughts of all the viziers and doctors were employed with utmost intention; but, though they had recollected the substance of the Commentaries of the Alkoran as well as the traditions of Mohammed, they could not answer the monk. They all continued shamefully silent, when at last one among them, enraged to see so many great men confounded by an infidel, stepped forward and said to the king:

"Sir, it was needless to summon so many persons for such a mean trifle; let the monk propose his question to me, and I will answer it."

The monk at the same time showed his open hand with his finger tending upward to the Mohammedan doctor, who showed him his right hand closed; the monk then turned his fingers downward, and the doctor opened his hand and turned his fingers upward. The monk, satisfied with the gestures of the Mussulman doctor, drew from under his robe the purse in which was the tribute, gave it to the king, and retired.

The monarch was curious to know of the

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doctor what all these actions of the hand signified.

“O King,” answered the doctor, “when the monk showed his hand open it was to signify these words: ‘I will give you a slap on the face.’ I then immediately shut my hand, to give him to understand that if he struck me I would give him a blow with my fist. He then lowered his hand and turned the ends of his fingers downward, to express these words: ‘Well, if you strike me with your fist, I will lay you at my feet and tread upon you like a worm.’ I then instantly turned the ends of my fingers up, to answer him that if he used me thus, I would throw him up so high that the birds should eat him before he fell to the ground. And it was by this means,” continued he, “that the Christian and I perfectly understood each other.”

The doctor had scarce left speaking when an approving hum arose in the assembly, very much to his applause. All the viziers admired his penetration; and all the doctors, though soured at their own inability to explain the monk’s gestures, owned aloud that their brother was more able than themselves. But the king, more charmed than the rest, could not recover his surprise; he looked upon the doctor as a very extraordinary person, and did not content himself with bestowing large praises upon him, but, opening the purse which the monk had presented to him, he took out five hundred sequins and clapped them into his hands, saying:

“Take them, Doctor. Since you are the cause

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of the Christians paying me this tax, it is just that you should be sensible of my gratitude."

After this the king, wholly taken up with his adventure, went to the queen his wife, and told her of it. That lady, who abounded with good sense and judgment, heard the king with great attention, but as soon as he had done, burst out into such a laughter that she fell down on a sofa, holding her sides.

"I find," says the king, "the story very much diverts you."

"What is most comical in it," replies the queen, "is that you are your doctor's bubble."

"What you tell me, madam, is impossible," replied the monarch.

"My lord," returned the lady, "send immediately for the monk. I say no more."

The king instantly sent his officers to search whether he was yet in the city, and he was found just ready to return home. He was brought to the king and queen.

"Christian," said the lady, "our doctor hath discovered the sense of your riddle, but we desire that you would yourself expound it."

"O Queen," said the monk, "when I showed my five fingers opened, I meant these words: 'I ask you, Mussulmans, whether those five prayers which you make are appointed by the order of God?' Then your doctor showed me his fist to express that they were, and he was ready to maintain the assertion. I then, by turning my fingers to the ground, asked him, 'Wherefore doth the

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rain fall upon the earth?' To which he answered, very judiciously, but turning his fingers upward, that it rained to draw up the grass and make all plants grow. And this answer is in your books."

The monk, after this explication, being gone, the queen renewed her excessive laughter; and the king, convinced that she was not in the wrong, protested that for the future he would always distrust his doctors and never suffer himself to be bubbled by their false merit.

So far, the reflection of the king; but I have a feeling that I should like to see a game of draw-poker between the monk who originally thought up that artful scheme to swear off his taxes, the doctor who bluffed him into paying them, and the lady queen who called the bluff. Hardly less quaint than the tale itself is the use of the word "bubble" for a swindle or a dupe; but those were the days of the South Sea Scheme and the Mississippi Company, both of which proved themselves to be "bubbles," in the swindling sense. I have a notion that the word might be revived and sent down to Wall Street.

That tale is not genuinely Turkish, even though it comes out of a book of Turkish tales; it is rather Arabic or Persian in flavor. It lacks the characteristic tang of the Ottomans, for a genuine Turkish jest, like the philosophizing of the late David Harum, must have something about horse in it; otherwise it is counterfeit. For it was as a tribe of horsemen that the Turks first galloped into history; and their coming was some-

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thing of a jest. It happened that one of the princes of Asia Minor, who rejoiced in the title of Aladdin Kaikobad, was warring against invading Mongols, and was getting the worst of the encounter. A band of Turkish tribesmen on their steeds were passing that way, and stopped to watch the pretty fight. Then, seeing that one side was getting licked, they promptly pitched in and fought for them without the least knowing who they or their opponents might be. They fought so well for their unknown friends that the Mongols were driven off the field, and Kaikobad, in ill-advised gratitude, granted to the Turkish leader a principality, with the pasturages of Mount Tumani for his herds. That settled it. The Turks, once they had gained a footing, never rested till they had won the empire of the East and pushed their armies up the Danube to Vienna. Even the method of their conquest had something of humor in it, for, to fight the Christians, they formed a regiment of youths, kidnapped as children from Christian homes, and "turned Turk," before they were wise enough to know better. These were the first of the famous Janizaries, whose name was once a terror to all Christendom.

There was something humorous—if, indeed, the jest was not too grim to be called humor—in that dispute of the Sultan Mohammed the Second with the graceful Italian painter, Gentile Bellini. The artist had depicted a dissevered head, probably that which Salome carried on a dish; and the Sultan said the muscles of the neck were all

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wrong, and that a dissevered head should not have a neck. I suppose the picture, like the head on the "Mikado," was standing on its neck and so outraged the Sultan's sense of artistic verisimilitude. At any rate, the Sultan picked out a slave with an attractive neck, and had him beheaded on the spot. Then he turned with a winning smile to Gentile Bellini and said, "I told you so!" Which things happened some twenty-five or thirty years after the fall of Constantinople.

But your true Turkish joke, as I said, must have something about horse in it. Indeed, there are countless wise and witty saws that turn on horses, and they are one of the most characteristic things in Ottoman literature. Take, for instance, this, "Place no trust in horse or woman." Or this, "Tend your horse as a friend; mount him as an enemy." Very graphic is this symbolism for misfortune, "He has dismounted from his horse and mounted a donkey." And somewhat in the same vein, though more sardonic, is the saying, "For him who has fallen from a horse, medicine; for him who has fallen from a camel, a pickax and spade"; meaning that he is a case, not for the surgeon, but for the undertaker. To express the contrast between things temporal and things eternal the Turks say, "The horse dies, the race-course remains." And to depict the complete incongruity and perversity of things they have this proverb, "The horse is here, but there is no race-course; the race-course is here, but there is no

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horse." Perhaps the little word-picture which follows might be adapted to our own political needs; at any rate here it is, "The horse kicks, the mule kicks, in the space between them the donkey is killed." It is said that the proverbs about looking the gift-horse in the mouth and shutting the stable-door after the steed is stolen are both originally Turkish; so also is this suggestion, "A wolf on horseback," taking the place of the proverbial beggar. There is a fine martial Ottoman ring about the saying, "The sword is for him who wears it, the bridge for him who crosses it, the horse for him who mounts it." And there is a touch of pathetic allusion to the old order so swiftly vanishing in Turkey in the proverb, "A dying thoroughbred is better than a living donkey." By amending the resolution, substituting the word "elephant" for the word "thoroughbred," this might, perhaps, be made available for some of our stalwart standpaters.

There are other good Turkish proverbs besides these horsy ones. We all know that pretty and wise French saying, "*On ne badine pas avec l'amour*"; or its variant, "Man is flax, woman is fire, the devil comes and blows." These two are thus blended by the Turk, "Cotton cannot play with fire." Very quaint, too, is the saying, "A hungry dog has no hydrophobia." Of a youth lacking experience they say, "He needs the bread of nine ovens to make him a man." This for a talkative man, "His mouth has stretched

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to his ears"; and for a lucky man, "He opens his mouth, and a pear falls into it." Of one who meekly suffers wrong, they say, "Even if they take the bread from his mouth, no sound escapes." Perhaps a recent conference of dark-complected business men might adopt this Turkish saying as their motto, "Regard not the black face of the man who is white as to his money." For their savings department they might add this, "White coin for a black day." There is a quaint saying, "The name is white, the taste is black." Which reminds me of the charmingly poetical Turkish way of expressing "the morning after the night before": "From the night's rejoicing comes the morning's sorrow." For our malefactors of great wealth I offer the following: "Even the mountains fear the rich man," and "The face of money is warm." Instead of saying "A word to the wise is enough," your Ottoman says, more poetically, "To the understanding man the voice of the mosquito is an orchestra." This might well be adopted as the device of the State west of the Hudson. Again, for the wicked rich, "The knife cuts not the hand of gold"; and this expression for an unsuccessful business man, "He bought, he sold, he is drowned." In the case of an American, we should have to add, "He is resuscitated, and starts in again." Here is a Turkish prototype of a joke which recently went the rounds of our comic papers, "Look at the mother, take the daughter." For a gentleman who has been to headquarters and need no longer square the ward politician,



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they say, "He has seen the moon, and is under no obligation to the stars."

Here is a fine device for one of our savings banks (perhaps it is not too late to embody it in the Postal Savings Banks Law):

They said to the little, "Whither goest thou?"

"To the side of the much!" it replied.

That, by the way, has a scriptural flavor; and there is a like suggestion in this expression of the impossible: "He views Hindustan through the eye of a needle." Even closer is the saying of like import, "A camel's head does not pass through the eye of a needle"—drawn, very likely, from the immemorial life of the desert. Another horse saying, by the way, is this, and one cannot fail to be struck by its wit and wisdom: "A fall from a donkey hurts more than a fall from a horse." Concerning the humbler animal there is also this, "Tie up your donkey; do not make your neighbor a thief." Rudyard Kipling might have found the motive for one of his songs in this Turkish saying, "If I mourn, my mother mourns; the rest mourn falsely." Distinctly to be reprobated, as an incitement to agitation, is the proverb, "They give the breast only when the infants yell." In a graver mood, if anything can be more serious than a howling infant, is their way of expressing the inexorable justice of the Most High: "Allah does not take at eight what he gave at nine." And I like the fine and primal philosophy of the saying, "You cannot argue with God."

There is another horse story, with an amusing

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termination, which concerns a certain man who, for his extreme veracity, was named the Truthful; the Sultan, recognizing, perhaps, where inveracity is most rife, promptly made him master of the horse and loaded him with many honors and gorgeous robes. This suggests, by the way, that one would like to have a contract to supply appropriate and expressive robes of honor for some of our own great men, which, after Oriental custom, they should wear when they went abroad through the streets. But to return to Truthful. All the other personages at court, who, one infers, had been in the habit of selling horses to the royal stables, naturally hated him yet the more and lay in wait for to destroy him. But Truthful was one of those of whom it is said, "He opens his mouth, and a fruit falls into it." He escaped all snares. At last the fair and subtle daughter of the Grand Vizier took the matter in hand, and, promising her father that she would bring the honest one to destruction, bade her slave-girls adorn her in rich apparel. This done, she set forth in the dim hours of night, and, coming to the pavilion where Truthful dwelt, she found admittance to his presence. Thereupon, with languishing eyes,—and here, by the way, the good Turkish historian does himself and the lady justice; but I must content myself by summarizing. Suffice it that the lady said that the price of her heart was nothing less than a stew made of the heart of the Sultan's favorite black steed. Protestations from Truthful. Tears from

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Zobeide. Result: Horse-heart stew for two, served within the hour.

The morning, as the proverb says, brought sorrow. Truthful, torn with remorse for the coal-black steed, debated with his conscience whether he might tell the Sultan that he had found the horse sick and had killed it to save its life. But when he came before his lord, the natural honesty of him triumphed, and with tears and lamentations he told the truth, and bade the Sultan order in the executioner and behead him.

But the Sultan was a kind old person with a pretty wit, so he said, "Call the lady."

When he had seen her, he chuckled deeply in his throat and said, "You were perfectly right. If I had been in your place, I would have cooked the whole stable for her. My favor is restored, and more is added to it."

## X

### AN OTTOMAN LEAP-YEAR GIRL

WHY should a lady's love-making be an irresistibly comic theme, vying in popularity among the mirth-makers with the mistaken-identity joke, which began before the pyramids and is going still? What, indeed, could be more touching, more sentimentally attractive, than a fair maiden who has found the mate of her heart gently intimating to him that such is his relation to her? Yet the comedians have taken just this theme to poke fun at, beginning long ages before Shakespeare's "All's Well that Ends Well," and coming down to the "Man and Superman" of Mr. Bernard Shaw. It is true that, in many Oriental lands, this motive had less vogue, because young ladies were supposed to have less choice, to be disposed of according to their horoscopes, or the wishes of their parents, or, at the best, because some eligible suitor "sought their hand in marriage." So it was, for the most part, in classical times; and it is not till one comes to the early legends of Ireland that one finds the genuine leap-year girl who does her own proposing. Such a one is the famed and ill-starred Deirdre, a drama about

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whom seems to be the graduation thesis of all the poets of the Celtic Revival. So it was with the lovely Grania, who carried her Diarmid through the five kingdoms of Ireland, so that, wherever they camped, one finds a cromlech, called, to this day, a bed of Grania. So it was with that golden-haired, not to say red-headed, Irish lass, Isolde, who has had the greatest vogue of them all, starring it through medieval song, and finally conquering the Fatherland. They were all leap-year girls, doing their own wooing and proposing, and carrying off their somewhat reluctant hearts'-mates to all kinds of adventures. Ireland may claim, indeed, to have given to romance the maiden heroine, in contrast with the wedded Helens and Andromaches of antiquity.

Nevertheless, if we except the Rajputs, it remains true that the girl who does her own love-making is held to be fit matter of comedy, now as of old. In Rajputana it was always the maiden's part to woo, and she did it charmingly, summoning all the fine young princes and chieftains when she felt herself to be in the humor for marrying. They, in a flower-decked arena, did all kinds of martial feats, disporting themselves with sword and steed and bow, while the lady watched them from a garland-encircled booth. Then came the march past, and as the elect of her heart passed before the lady, she swung a great wreath of scented flowers around his shoulders and carried him off a captive to her love. That would be a fine custom to introduce, now

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that we are running so deeply in debt to Oriental thought, at the same time that we are advancing in the great movement of emancipation. It would make far prettier play than Bernard Shaw's comedy, and would be just as practical in the end.

These reflections anent maidens' choosing are inspired by a very delightful little comedy I have come across, whose author was, some fifty years ago, one of the lights of literary Islam. He has set his plot on the far side of the frosty Caucasus, where meet the realms of Turkey and Persia and the Tsar; and he filled his scenes with gorgeously picturesque rascals of the mountains, be they Ottomans or wily Armenians or Georgians of ancient race and princely names. Fine people and excellent matter of comedy, they are as strange to us as their names sound outlandish. The manner in which the good author sets his play a-going is charming, sly, and naïve at the same time. He presents to us his hero, a fine young Turk, rejoicing in the name of Haider Bey, who calls his Creator to witness that the age is degenerate and the times are out of joint, because a likely young man can no longer make an honorable living in the good old way. No more gallant riding, no more shooting; time was, when not a week passed but there was a caravan to plunder, a camp to overhaul. What has become of the fights with the Kizil-bashes and the Ottomans, that used to silver and gild the hillsides of Karabagh?

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Just the other day the commandant of the town had summoned him, and said:

“Haider Bey, you must be good! No more brigandage, no more holding-up of travelers, no more robberies!”

To which our young hero sadly made answer:

“Commandant, we approve your decision; but how are we to make a living?”

And, imagine it, he said:

“Haider Bey, sow seed in the earth, till your garden, go into trade!”

Just as if our hero had been an Armenian, to plow and reap, or a rearer of silk-worms or a village peddler!

To him Haider Bey made answer:

“Commandant, who ever heard of a young brave guiding a plow or tilling the soil? My father, Kurban Bey, never did; I, his son, will not do it either!”

But the commandant only frowned, and passed on. Were ever such degenerate days? To his gentlemanly young friends, who gather round him, Haider Bey makes this lament. And there is worse behind it, for, it seems, he has exchanged hearts with a fair Turkish maiden, Sona Hanum by name, and he can neither pay the needed dower money to her parents nor safely carry her off, for fear of their complaints. So what, under the circumstances, can a gallant young gentleman do? How would it sound to have folk say:

“Kurban Bey’s son had not the money to marry on, so he ran away with his girl!”

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Could heart of man endure it? And, to add the final sting, did not some of his gentlemanly young companions, to whom he alleged these reasons, even suggest that he was afraid? So young Haider had well nigh made up his mind to carry the maiden off, cost what it might. But young Asker Bey pleaded with him for prudence. Give him a couple of weeks, he said, and he would find the money for a proper wedding, with all due ceremony and style, such as befitted the son of Kurban Bey. So they worked out a perfectly peaceable and lawful scheme. They would borrow money from the rich merchant, Hadji Kara, go across the frontier, buy goods, run the gauntlet of the custom-house, and sell the goods again at home, at a tremendous gain.

So far so good. But Haider Bey has to inform his fair young lady-love of the plan about to be adventured in her behoof, and the Turkish dramatist rises to the occasion in a charming scene. He shows us an Oriental tent, shrouded in the shadows of evening, near which, concealed behind the bushes, is the sweet maiden Sona Hanum. She is, it seems, very much in earnest, for she wears a charming traveling costume under her wide silk shawl, and is walking up and down impatiently or stopping to look for her expected lover.

“O Allah, be kind to us!” she cries—and it is curious that all young persons about to run away seem to count on the sympathies of Allah—“what can have happened to him? Half the night is



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gone, and he has not come. Dawn is almost breaking, morning is nigh; and I know not what to do. I can only wait a little while longer; then, if he does not come, I must go back to the tent!"

All of which shows a substantial unity in the young feminine heart without regard to race or clime. Walking restlessly a few paces, Miss Sona continues:

"No, he is not come. It is certain that he is not coming. He has probably met some crazy fellow who has taken him off on a horse-stealing expedition. Or perhaps he has been detained. I cannot break my promise to him. If our plan has been discovered, he will have to flee again; what a sad day that will be for me! I shall be kept a prisoner at home for two years more. By Allah, I will not wait for him any longer! Marry some one else. He means to let me wither in my father's house."

She stops; then, a moment later, begins again:

"What a wicked thought was that! Suppose he had overheard me saying, 'Marry some one else'? and if he had believed it? No, he could not believe it. He would know I was only telling stories. I am sure he is coming!"

And she was quite right; for young Haider forthwith arrived on horseback, a right gallant cavalier, and swung himself out of the saddle, calling her:

"Sona Hanum!"

To which the maiden answered: "Haider? It is thou?"

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Haider admitted that it was, indeed, he, whereupon Sona Hanum assured herself that he was alone. Thus assured, she began to reproach him:

“Why hast thou come alone? My father and my brothers are sleeping in the tent; you are late in coming, and morning is at hand; when they do not find me, my father and my brothers will understand all, they will pursue me, they will follow the footsteps of thy horse, and will tear me from thee, so that I shall see thee never more until the day of the resurrection!”

To which Haider Bey replies, reassuring her, that she need fear nothing, for he is not going to carry her off. Then—O inscrutable heart of woman—Sona Hanum replies:

“What? You are not going to carry me off? What say you?”

And Haider Bey, somewhat abashed, replies that there is a better plan in the wind, to which he bids her listen. But Sona Hanum will have none of it.

“There is no better plan” she insists: “bring your horse forward, and let us go at once. I cannot go back to the tent!”

Haider, still somewhat abashed, insists that he is in earnest. Sona Hanum seeks promptly to prove that so is she; seizing his bridle, she says:

“I will not listen! Come, give me your stirrup. You will tell me all as we are going!”

But Haider remains prudent. “My dear,” he begs, “be not impatient. Listen to me. This is what I have to say . . .”

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But Sona Hanum impatiently answers: "Dawn is at hand; this is no time for delay. You can tell me the whole story afterward!"

Haider, still holding her by the arm, continues to expostulate.

"My dear," he says, "I have found the money. I shall marry you in seemly and formal style. Why, then, should we run away, when no one can take you away from me?"

To which Sona Hanum answers briefly and to the point:

"Thou liest! If the money were forthcoming, it might have come any time these two years past. I don't want to be married in formal style. I want to run away. And I won't be the first to do it, either! Every day a hundred maidens run away in just this fashion. Where is the harm?"

All of which, though very subversive, shows a distinct modernity, unless indeed, we are face to face with the most ancient institution in the world.

But Haider continues to reason with her. "My dear," he says, "the girls who get themselves carried off are those whom their fathers and mothers refuse to give in marriage; so there is nothing for it but to run away. But your father and mother have given you to me. Would they not say, 'Shame on thee! What hast thou done? Thou hast dishonored us!' What could I answer to that?"

Sona Hanum reflects for a while, and then asks: "Where did you get the money?"

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Haider sees that he has gained a point. "Stay here," he says, "and I will tell you all about it!"

And Sona, staying for the moment, bids him speak. He begins, in explanatory vein, by reminding her of the big profits that can be made on smuggled goods. But she at once takes him up:

"What have you to do with smuggled goods? You are no trader. Tell me, how much money did you get?"

Haider Bey continues to explain. "Listen to what I have to tell you. Russia has forbidden the export of muslins made in Europe, and no one dares to go after them. But a brave man, who had the energy, might go after them and get a few bales."

To which Sona Hanum, who is evidently unwilling to renounce the fine adventure of being carried off, makes skeptical reply: "My friend, what does it matter that Russia has forbidden the export of European stuffs? If Allah would only forbid people to wear them altogether! Come, tell me who gave you the money."

Haider Bey tries once more to straighten matters out in a persuasive way. "My dear, you do not give me a chance to finish what I have to say. People here are so eager for European muslins that as soon as they have a chance to get them they turn up their noses at silk. Asker Bey says that they are cheap and lovely. The colors are fixed, and all the women are so crazy for them that they won't look at Russian stuffs."

But Sona Hanum interrupts again. "What

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have you to do with European muslins? The devil take them! Tell me what you have to tell!"

Haider tries again. "They even say that the commandant's wife, unbeknown to her husband, always wears European stuffs. Hadi Aziz has recently sold her twenty tomans' worth."

"Let him sell them to the devil's wife!" says the sweet Turkish maiden, who is evidently losing her temper. "Let him sell them for grave-clothes! I can't imagine how this muslin plan got into your head. Haider, you are quite crazy. What are you talking about?"

All of which sheds light on the difficulties in the way of the Young Turk movement of later years.

Haider, still keeping an admirable control, replies to her sally: "All the same, have you not heard how eagerly the European muslins are sought after?"

"What has that to do with me?" answers Sona. "I am not a trader in European muslins!"

"Very true," says the sturdy Haider; "but listen. I shall make a trip, I shall get several bales of European muslins, I shall bring them to the merchants, and I shall get twice the money needed for our marriage."

Sona Hanum, with delicious feminine unreasonableness, replies: "That is all you have found to say in all this time! Enough! Enough! God bless us! It is my turn to tell you that a child would have found the money long ago. One would think that European muslins were scattered

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broadcast and that you only had to pick them up. Come, mount, and let us go! Morn is at hand!"

Then Haider tries a last desperate expedient of reasonableness. "I have the money," he says; "I was telling lies!"

Sona replies, quick as lightning: "If you have the money, marry me. Why need we trouble about European muslins?"

Haider temporizes. "I was able at last to borrow it," he says, "but on condition that I should go after the bales of European muslin. Half the profit will be mine, and then I will marry you."

Sona at last seems to admit that the plan is practicable. But Haider's difficulties are by no means ended, for she continues:

"I don't want to get married through any such scheme! Mount, and let us flee! If there is so much profit in European stuffs, why should the merchant who is lending you the money share the profits with you? What is to hinder his going himself to get the stuffs?"

Haider defends his plan bravely. "He is a Persian, and he will go with me. Without me, how could he cross the Aras? The Cossacks would seize him by the hair!"

"And you," cries the fair Sona—"won't the Cossacks seize you by the hair, too?"

Haider now begins to boast. "I have been on marauding expeditions before," he says, and we can feel him thrusting out his chest. "I have as

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many tricks as a fox. Do you think I shall let the Cossacks seize me by the hair?"

But Sona Hanum is not appeased. "You say that, as you have been a marauder before, you won't be seen or found out. But you will, and you will have to flee and go into hiding, and it will be two years more before you can come home again. And now you want to go away, and leave me in despair. No, I won't consent! Come, let us flee! I don't want to get married."

Haider Bey temporizes once again. "Very well; you do not want a formal marriage. But are we to give up a good piece of business? You don't want us to have bread to eat?"

"Allah is generous!" piously replies Sona Hanum. "He will not let us starve!"

"How can we help starving?" asks the good, perplexed Haider, still delightfully and chivalrously patient. "You tell me to give up brigandage, and you won't let me trade in smuggled goods. Then where are we going to get bread from?"

With quite exasperating femininity Sona Hanum harks back to her starting-point: "Dawn is breaking! Up, let us start! Take me away with you! After two weeks, you shall go, if you wish, and get your smuggled goods."

"Since you agree to that," says Haider, "stay two weeks in your father's tent. If I do not come for you then, you may consider me the vilest of men."

But Sona Hanum answers: "I won't! I won't! I am going, and now. Mount, let us flee!"

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And she stamps with her pretty foot upon the ground, just as though she were one of ourselves!

Haider pleads eloquently with her, prays that her account of sins may be transferred to him in the angelic ledgers, offers to kiss her feet, and begs for two weeks' grace, after which he will come and marry her. To take her without a formal wedding seems to him worse than death, and he is wholly unwilling to incur the contempt of her good parents. Sona, the eternal feminine, replies:

"To wait two weeks seems to me worse than the pains of hell. I cannot wait any longer! Up, let us go!"

She begins to weep, and says Haider does not love her any more. Haider at last gives in, and bids her mount; but, just as her foot is in the stirrup, her mother comes from the tent and calls her. Sona, with true feminine inconsistency, declares that she cannot flee, now her mother has called her, begs him to go smuggling, and promises to wed him as soon as he returns.

Which, indeed, befalls after many blood-curdling and portentous adventures, altogether delightful in the telling, but too long to relate here. Suffice it that Sona Hanum and her gallant Haider wed and live happy ever after.



## XI

### THE HUMOR OF THE GREEKS

I KNOW nothing more delicious, more charmingly humorous in all literature than that Grecian idyl of Moschus wherein he depicts the foam-born goddess Venus advertising for her baby Cupid, who, it would seem, was lost, stolen, or strayed. In her announcement of her loss, the mother's tender infatuation for her little son wars with the obligation of the goddess to tell the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth. As loving mother, Venus describes her baby's curls and dimples. Then, constrained by the word of honor of an Olympian, she warns the finder of his bow, his barbed arrows, his dangerous kisses. But let the lady Venus speak for herself.

"Who," she asks, "has seen Love wandering? He is my runaway; whosoever has aught to tell of him shall have his reward, and his prize is the kiss of Aphrodite. The child is most notable; thou couldst tell him among twenty together; his skin is not white, but flame-colored, his eyes keen and burning; an evil spirit and a sweet tongue has he, for his speech and his tongue are at variance. Like honey is his voice, but his heart of gall; all

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shameless is he, and deceitful; the truth is not in him, a wily brat, and cruel in his pastime. The locks of his hair are lovely, but his brow is impudent; and tiny are his little hands, yet far he shoots his arrows—shoots even to Acheron, and to the King of Hades. The body of Love is naked, but well is his spirit hidden; and, winged like a bird, he flits and descends, now here, now there, upon men and women, and nestles in their inmost hearts. He hath a little bow and an arrow always on the string; tiny is the shaft, but it carries as high as heaven. A golden quiver on his back he bears, and within it his bitter arrows, wherewith full many a time he wounds even me. Cruel are all those instruments of his, but more cruel by far the little torch, his very own, wherewith he lights up the Sun himself. And if thou catch Love, bind him, and bring him, and have no pity; and if thou see him weeping, take heed lest he give thee the slip; and if he laugh, hale him along. Yea, and if he wish to kiss thee, beware, for evil is his kiss, and his lips are enchanted. And should he say, 'Take these, I give thee in free gift all my armory,' touch not at all his treacherous gifts, for they all are dipped in fire."

Yes; the description of the strayed child is vivid and truthful. The mother-love speaks true; but so does the goddess, with her sense of honor. She had, indeed, suffered many things from the arrows of the boy, as witness that time old white-haired Homer tells of. For the Sun,

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being ever something of a spy, informed club-footed Hephæstus, lawful lord of Aphrodite, that she, fickle-hearted, was carrying on a flirtation with Ares, of the golden armor. And Hephæstus, being subtle-minded and jealous withal, set a snare in his home—a net, as it were the web of a spider,—and made as though he would go to Lemnos. Ares saw him depart, and went to Hephæstus's dwelling to await golden Aphrodite, the foam-born goddess whom the Romans called Venus. And Aphrodite presently coming, Ares greeted her. So they two, touched by the little love-god's arrows, were caught in the web of the snare; and the Sun, still spying on them, bade Hephæstus come back again. He, indeed, returning swiftly, stood at the door of his dwelling watching the culprits struggle in the snare, and then called aloud to all the gods to come to look at them.

They came, those lords of Olympus: Zeus, the son of Kronos; and Poseidon, lord of the earthquake; and swift Hermes; and King Apollo, lord of the silver bow. And they stood there at the door, and laughter unquenchable arose among the happy immortals. Presently, at the bidding of Poseidon, the jealous Hephæstus loosed the snare, and his captives departed, Aphrodite, the foam-born, departing to Cyprus, where she had her temple at leafy Paphos.

One of the gods made an epigram, saying that the slow outstrip the swift, for slow-footed Hephæstus had overtaken Ares, swiftest of the immortals. Apollo laughed, and asked Hermes

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whether he, too, would be willing to be caught in a net, for golden Aphrodite's kisses. Hermes answered that he would; nay, that for her he would brave threefold chains.

Thus, according to grandsire Homer, did the little love-god play spiteful tricks even on his mother; and I suppose it was some such frivolous fancy as this that led wise Plato to ban the whole race of poets, saying that they were very well-springs of wickedness. But we must return to the foam-born goddess and her advertisement for the lost boy with the bow. I find two claimants for the reward.

First is Julian, sometime prefect of Egypt, who writes thus: "Once, while wreathing a garland, I found Love among the roses. Laying hold of him by the wings, I dipt him in the wine, and, taking it, I drank it. And now within my veins he tickles me with his feathers."

Yet another claimant to have found the flame-colored boy is Anacreon. "Once at the hour of midnight," he says, "when the Great Bear was turning at the hand of Bootes, and all the tribes of voice-dividing men were lying subdued by toil, then did Cupid stand and knock at my door. 'Who,' said I, 'is battering the door? You will drive my dreams away.' And Love says, 'Open; I am a little child; be not alarmed; I have been wandering in the moonless night, and I am wet through!' On hearing this I pitied him and straightway opened the door. And I beheld a child with wings, bearing a bow and quiver.

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Placing him on the hearth, I warmed his hands in mine and squeezed the water from his wet hair. But he, when the cold had left him, turned to me and said, 'Come, let us try the bow, whether the string is at all injured by the wet.' So he let fly an arrow at my heart, sharp as the sting of a gadfly. Then he leaped up laughing, and said, 'Rejoice with me, for the bow-tip is uninjured; but I fear you will have a pain in your heart.' "

Truly a graceless boy; but Theocritus tells a little story that may go far to console us. Once on a time, he says, Dan Cupid was gathering roses, and in the heart of one of the roses, all unseen, was hid a bee. Cupid caught it unknowing, and it straightway stung his finger. He ran crying to his mother, the golden lady of Cythera.

"I am undone, mother!" he cried. "I am undone and dying, for a little winged creature that the farmers call a bee has wounded me!"

But foam-born Aphrodite answered, "Thou, too, art a little thing and winged, but what pain goes with the sting of thy arrows!"

One instance more, and we must leave the worst of all bad boys and his too tender-hearted mamma. Here is an epigram which I quote not so much for its humor as its grace. When Praxiteles molded that lovely statue of Venus which is to this day the type and model of all loveliness, a poet, seeking a fitting inscription for the statue, imagined Venus speaking thus:

"Paris beheld me unveiled at the judgment of

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the three goddesses; and Anchises, father of my Æneas; but when did Praxiteles see me?"

One of the funniest Greek stories is this tale of the deaf litigants before a deaf judge, told by Nicarchus. A deaf man, he relates, had a lawsuit with another deaf man; and the judge was even more deaf than either plaintiff or defendant. For the plaintiff declared that the defendant owed him five months' rent for his house; but the defendant replied that he had been working at the mill all night; and the judge said, "Why are you contending? You have a mother. Both of you must contribute to her support!"

I have seen this, too, quoted as from the Greek. A certain man was blessed with a wife quarrelsome as Socrates's Xantippe. They came running to him and told him that his wife was fallen into the river; and he at once set off up-stream to rescue her.

"Fool," they said, "the current will carry her down-stream, not up!"

"Ah," he replied, "you do not know my wife!"

There are scores of these Greek jokes of only a line or two, and yet full of Attic salt. Thus the same Nicarchus whom I have already quoted tells us that Pheido the miser wept, not because he must die, but because the price of coffins had gone up. There are, indeed, many of these jests at death, and one distinctive element of humor in Greece is the comic epitaph, the joke written even on the tombstone. Take this for example—again from the sharp pen of Nicarchus:

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“Pheido the physician neither dosed me nor handled me; but, being ill of a fever, I remembered his name, and died.”

Though not an epitaph, this is an equally keen thrust at the good doctors:

“Rhodon takes away leprosy and scrofula with his medicines; he takes away everything else without medicines.”

Once more, from Nicarchus: “When the night-owl sings, other things die. When Demophilus sings, the night-owl dies.”

An equally keen, artistic criticism is this, this time not of a musician but of a sculptor: “Diodorus carved the image of Menodotus and set it up, very like everybody—except Menodotus.”

In a more gracious spirit is this compliment to a pretty girl, Dercylis by name, “There are now two Venuses, ten Muses, and four Graces; for Dercylis is a Muse, a Venus, and a Grace.”

It was left for a latter-day barbarian to write the contrary epigram in the album of a disagreeable young lady:

There were three Graces. Thee thy mother bore.  
The Graces still are three, not four.

That is written by a Scythian, and it is worthy of a Scythian. Worthy of a Scythian is this epigram of the Greek Automedon:

“Yesterday mine host gave me for dinner a goat’s foot and a dish of hemp sprouts. I dare not mention his name, for he is quick-tempered,

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and I dread lest in revenge he might invite me again."

Here is a very pretty Grecian riddle: "If you look at me, I look at you; you look at me with your eyes but I do not behold you with eyes, for I have none. And if you speak, I answer you without a voice; for the voice is yours, though I open my lips." The answer to the riddle is, of course, a looking-glass.

Almost too biting to deserve the name of humor is this epigram to an unknown lady, who, no doubt, had properly snubbed the poet: "You have bought hair, paint, honey, wax, teeth; at the same cost, you might have bought a face."

Equally sharp is this, which we may number with the comic epitaphs: "I, Timocrates of Rhodes, lie here, having eaten much, drunk much, and spoken much evil of men."

Here is another epitaph, rather pathetic than comic, yet still in the vein of humor: "I, Dionysius of Tarsus, lie here, sixty years old; I never married; I wish my father had not."

Some very witty things were said of Bacchus, god of the clustering vine, and of the red juice pressed from the grape. One poet writes of him thus:

"I am armed against the love-god with firm reasons in my breast; nor shall he conquer while it is one against one. I, a mortal, will stand against an immortal. But if Bacchus comes to his help, what can I do, single-handed, against two?"

Yet more humorous is this epigram on Anacreon.



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the poet of wine and philandering: "Behold old Anacreon on a marble bench, well soaked with wine, and with a garland of flowers on his head. The old fellow leers with moist eyes, and has drawn his robe down to his heels. But, like a tipsy man, he has lost one of his slippers; the other clings to his wrinkled foot. He is singing love-songs to his lyre. But do thou, lord Bacchus, guard him. For it is not seemly that a servant of Bacchus should come to grief through worship of Bacchus."

Also concerned with Bacchus and his devotees is the following, which is to be added to our collection of comic epigrams: "This is the tomb of the hoary-headed woman Maronis; on her monument you behold a cup sculptured in stone. The old woman, fond of strong wine, and an everlasting talker, mourns not for her children nor for the father of her children; even in the grave she laments one thing alone: that the stone wine-cup on her tomb is empty."

In a hardly less satirical spirit is this epigram and epitaph on Diogenes the Cynic, which means in Greek "the dog-like": "A staff, a scrip, and a twice-folded garment are the light load of the wise Diogenes. All these I am carrying to Charon, ferryman of the Styx, for I have left nothing above ground. And may you, dog Cerberus, guardian of Hades, welcome me, the Dog!"

Here is another epigram on a tipsy old lady: "Bacchylis, when she was sore afflicted with sick-

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ness, made a vow to goddess Ceres, saying, 'If, O goddess, I escape from this destructive fever, I will drink in honor of thee water unmixed with wine, while I behold a hundred suns!' But as soon as she was cured of her fever she hit on this plan to fulfil her vow: she held a sieve up to the sun, and, looking through it, beheld a hundred suns. So on that day she drank water, and on the next was back at her wine."

We all remember the verses concerning the dog which went mad and bit the man, and which tell us that "the dog it was that died." The original is Greek, and far sharper in point than its modern copy: "A poisonous viper stung a Cappadocian. The viper died!"

But let us relieve the bitterness of this too satiric humor by a charming epitaph on two ancient twins: "We were of one blood, two old women of the same age, Anaxo and Cleino, twin daughters of Epicrates. Cleino was priestess of the Graces; Anaxo all her life long a handmaiden of Demeter. We lacked nine days of eighty years, but of years there is no grudging to those, to whom they were holy. We loved our husbands and children. But we, old women, first reached Hades, kind to us!"

One may add that the richer theological meaning imported into the name Hades gives an added touch of humor to some of these Greek epigrams; as, for instance, this: "Three maidens sat on a roof, and drew lots to see which of them should die first. Thrice the lot fell to one of them, and



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even while they were laughing, she fell off the roof, and went to Hades!"

It would be impossible to write of Hellenic humor without saying something of the greatest humorist of them all, of whom the poet sang:

"The Graces, seeking an everlasting shrine, built it for themselves in the heart of Aristophanes."

Aristophanes was, of course, a great deal more than a humorist, a writer of successful comedies. He was a satirist with a mission, up to his neck in politics and religious controversies, writing every play to carry a point or to drive home some political doctrine. He was a pamphleteer as well as a playwright; indeed, his plays are often political pamphlets; or, since he was of the older party, very aristocratic and an enemy of the radicals, one might compare him to Butler, and his plays to Hudibras. But we have nothing quite like him, as he pours forth his torrents of humor, laughing, mocking, satirizing, tremendously earnest with his jests, fighting the battles of the state with his eloquent puppets of the stage. Perhaps the best of his plays, for our purpose, and the most illustrative of the quality of his humor is that which he directed against the too eloquent, too tearful poet Euripides, whom he accused of maligning the whole race of women. The plot of the play is in the highest degree humorous, for Aristophanes depicts the women of Athens gathering to celebrate the Mysteries of Ceres, dark goddess of the fertile earth—those

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mysteries at which no man might be present on pain of death.

And on the mid fast of the festival they are to hold a woman's parliament and to impeach Euripides. The poet, hearing of this, is terrified, and tells his old cousin Mnesilochus that he will try to persuade the effeminate poet Agathon to put on woman's weeds, mingle with the women, and try to change their opinion to one more kindly to Euripides. But Agathon refuses in a very funny scene, and old Mnesilochus is presently entrapped into promising to go himself in disguise. Then follows a scene of roaring farce, in which the old fellow is shaved and singed and dressed in woman's garments, and in the middle of the scene begins to howl and tries to escape with one cheek still unshaven. In due time we see him mingling with the women, when the assembled angry dames are bringing a railing accusation against Euripides, full of quotations from his own honied verse:

Upon my word, we can't do anything  
We used to do; he has made the men so silly.  
Suppose I'm hard at work upon a chaplet,  
*Hey, she's in love with somebody; suppose*  
I chance to drop a pitcher on the floor,  
And straightway 'tis, *For whom was this intended?*  
*I warrant now, for our Corinthian friend . . .*

The rich old men

Who used to marry us are grown so shy  
We never catch them now; and all because  
Euripides declares, the scandal-monger,  
*An old man weds a Tyrant, not a wife!*

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Very quotable is the eloquent chorus of women, who come forward in defense of the fair sex which Euripides has so poetically traduced, as they aver:

Now let us turn to the people, our own panegyric to render.  
Men never speak a good word, never one, for the feminine  
gender,

Every one says we're a Plague, the source of all evils to man,  
War, dissension, and strife. Come, answer me this, if you  
can;

Why, if we're *really* a Plague, you're so anxious to have us for  
wives;

And charge us not to be gadding, nor to stir out-of-doors for  
our lives?

Isn't it silly to guard a Plague with such scrupulous care?  
Lord! how you rave, coming home, if your poor little wife  
isn't there.

Should you not rather be glad, and rejoice all the days of  
your life,

Rid of a *Plague*, you know, the source of dissension and strife?  
If on a visit we sport, and sleep when the sporting is over,  
Oh, how you rummage about; what a fuss, your lost Plague  
to discover!

Every one stares at your Plague if she happens to look on the  
street:

Stares all the more if your Plague thinks proper to blush and  
retreat.

We cannot carry this world-old controversy further, nor follow the detection of Mnesilochus, or his recourse to the famous stage-trick: "Hit me now, with a child in me arms!" where the child turns out to be a dummy, and no authentic infant at all; nor can we linger over his arrest by the Scythian policeman, his screamingly funny

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allusions to Euripides's plays for plans of escape, where he imagines himself to be fair Andromeda chained to the rock, awaiting Perseus, or Helen, loveliest of all, fleeing from Egypt, the whole ending in boisterous, roistering farce. We get nothing so good again in literature, until we come to the comedies of Shakespeare.



## XII

### ARISTOPHANES AND THE LADIES

ONE of the most entertaining things, and one of the most wonderful, in the literature of the world is the way in which Aristophanes has foreseen by three and twenty centuries so many sides of the great modern movement for the liberation of women.

What a genius, what splendid creative power, what turbulent force, what uproarious laughter and mirth, and, through it all, how keen a sense of beauty and grace!

I doubt if the prim Grecians who write of Attic literature do him justice. We see Greece and Athens too much through their eyes: the gloom of the great tragedies, the death of Socrates, the rigors of war, the high seriousness of Plato, the severe beauty of the Acropolis. Then comes the raging, roaring mirth-maker Aristophanes, with furious delight parodying the fine tragedies of Euripides, turning Socrates to the uses of farce, making the white beauty of the Acropolis the scene of a feminist demonstration, and burlesquing the "Republic" of Plato. But for his volcanic naturalism, he would be one of the most read authors in the world.

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Like Euripides, whom he so ferociously mocks, he is always girding at women, a thing more intelligible, perhaps, when we remember that his plays were played by men for audiences of men, and so tend to have a "smoking-room" flavor. But underneath this mockery, and penetrating it with light, is the prophetic vision of things to come. Yet even in the midst of his vision, such is his uncontrollable genius for comedy, Aristophanes bursts out into shouts and gales of laughter. He beholds the future, and then he surrounds it with a golden vapor of humor.

Two of his comedies—music dramas, perhaps, they ought to be called—deal especially with movements of upheaval among the women; and it is significant that, even when his fun is fast and furious, Aristophanes pierces through to the heart of the matter and foresees certain vital truths that have been hidden until our own day. Foremost among these is a realization that the enfranchisement of women would make for world peace. That is the motive of one of his plays.

I remember how, at the graduation day exercises of a famed college for women, the speech of the day was made by the distinguished president of a Western university. A convinced advocate of universal peace, he appealed to the girl students before him on behalf of world amity; and he put his appeal on this ground: In all ages of the world, he said, the finest of the young men, and the most manly, have gone to war; and the bones of these possible bridegrooms lie whiten-

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ing on every battle-field. Would it not be vastly more profitable for the girls, if, instead of tying ribbons on their heroes' arms, and sending them forth to die, they kept them at home and married them, instead of accepting merely the leavings, the weak and one-eyed, who cannot go to war? Would not this make for the uplift of the race?

A most practical appeal to make to marriageable maidens, and one which they listened to, with demure faces and well-suppressed smiles. Well, this modern plea is practically the motive of one of the best of Aristophanes's music comedies. The play was written and produced at Athens, after the great war with Sparta had been raging for more than twenty years, the women of all Hellas meanwhile suffering bereavement and all the terrors and sorrows of those whose husbands and brothers are in the midst of death. Aristophanes takes this situation and makes uproarious comedy of it.

Lysistrata, the leading lady of the play, keenly sensible of this bereavement, has summoned a meeting of the wives and maids of Greece, from Sparta, from Thebes, from Corinth; and slowly and stragglingly they assemble in all the grace and charm that Grecian art has made imperishable. Lysistrata upbraids them for their tardiness in coming, and tells them that, had it been a rendezvous instead of a solemn assembly, their feet would have had wings. Then she enumerates, and they all indorse, their many sorrows and privations because of the war, and, when all have been

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won to equal enthusiasm and assent, she sets forth her plan of peace.

That plan is twofold. The more vital part is a marriage-strike, in which all swear to join; to cut themselves off from all sweet domesticities, from love-making and honeyed words, from all secret meetings and caresses, from everything that delights the heart of man and brings it joy, until such time as peace, universal throughout all Hellas, the north and the southern peninsula alike, is signed, sealed and sworn.

The ladies are recalcitrant. Tender hearts cannot resolve on such hard measures. Creatures so made for amiability and sweetness cannot easily make themselves hard and morose. Yet the greater good prevails, and they swear to join in universal boycott of all that gives delight to their lords and lovers, barring their hearts against every festive humor and gladsome hour.

Then, in the scene of swearing, the uproarious humor of Aristophanes breaks forth. The question arises, by what they are to swear. Lysistrata, who throughout holds the tone of high seriousness, bids them lay a shield on the ground, the hollow side up, to catch the blood of the slaughtered victim, while they swear, like the Seven against Thebes of Aeschylus, by the sacred shield.

But the others object. How swear on a weapon of war, in the cause of peace, even over the blood of an innocent sheep? Then a white horse is suggested as the victim, but this is voted down. Finally Lysistrata suggests, instead of a shield,

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a goblet, and to replace the blood of the victim a generous portion of Thasian wine. They all assent with alacrity, and there begins an eager rivalry as to who shall drink first. Lysistrata administers the oath, and they promise solemnly to abjure matrimony and all love-making, to hold themselves in gloomy solitude; if embraced, to yield themselves log-like, without sympathy or response; to put all sweetness and gentleness from their hearts; and, as they shall keep this true oath, they shall drink from the Thasian goblet, but, if they forswear themselves, may the wine turn to water on their lips!

Meanwhile the minor part of the plan is going forward. While the younger women have been abjuring Hymen, the elder have had a sterner task. Realizing that war cannot be carried on by mere fighting, but needs great outlay of treasure, they have determined to enter the Acropolis, under guise of worship, and seize the sacred treasure in the great temple of Athene, barring the white, lovely shrine against rude and combative man. So the scene changes to the wonderful Acropolis, the marvel of the world and of all later times, and round this matchless shrine Aristophanes gathers his mirth-makers in the wildest spirit of uproarious comedy. The victory of the women, the culminating scene in which the warriors find their hearts succumb to the longing for domestic love, are supremely splendid comedy, in spite of the turbulent naturalism of the poet. And the drama ends on a high note of

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serenity illumined by humor, in the eloquent speech of the Spartan ambassador, and the closing words of Lysistrata: "Let us go, since all has ended happily; lead forth your wives, Laconians, and, Athenians, lead forth yours; the husband beside the wife, the wife beside the husband. To celebrate this happy peace, let us form choruses in honor of the gods, and in the future let us abstain from sin!"

The other great music comedy in which Aristophanes sings of the revolt of the women belongs to a period two decades later, when Athens had been thoroughly beaten by Sparta, and when, to repair her shattered fortunes, she had sought an alliance with her fierce old enemy, Thebes. This had turned out disastrously, and Aristophanes, the stubborn old conservative, came forth with a railing accusation against the politicians, an attack which took the form of high comedy, where the women, disgusted at the men's puttering incompetence and misrule, determined to take matters into their own hands and rule in their stead.

Here again the serious thought and purpose of Aristophanes is hidden under a mask of broad burlesque. He imagines a ridiculous expedient, eminently fitting in musical comedy: that the women shall seize power by capturing a hurry vote in the assembly, and that they shall do this by going disguised to the meeting-place and voting, as men, for the rule of women.

So we are confronted, in the first act, by a slender gathering of women, wearing false beards,

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awkwardly draped in their husbands' cloaks, wearing large masculine shoes, and bracing their courage for an attack on the assembly. Incidentally, we learn that, to make sure of a majority of votes, they have sought to keep their husbands away from the morning session by giving them too much supper the evening before. And there is a scene of true music comedy, in which the women describe the preparation of their disguises and fill their mouths with large, masculine oaths. One of the ladies causes consternation by declaring that she has brought her spinning and hopes to do a little peaceful work while she listens to the others' speeches. Much of this excellent fooling reminds us of Rosalind's disguise in the Forest of Arden.

When the women are properly fitted out, Praxagora, their leader, makes an eloquent little speech which announces their principles:

"Friends," she says, "I have an equal stake with you in this land of ours. And my heart grows heavy when I behold the misgovernment of the state. For I see the city ever employing rogues. If any of them governs well for a day, he makes up for it by ten days of misrule. You turn to another; he is far worse. It is no easy thing to give counsel to headstrong men, who always mistrust those who love you best, and lend your ear to those who love you not. Not so long ago we did not come at all to the assemblies; we knew well that Agyrrius, the leader, was a rascal. Now we come, and he who gets the silver praises

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him, but he who gets nothing swears that he who gets it ought to die."

Then one of the ladies, won by so much eloquence, cries out: "By Aphrodite, it is well said!" Only to be reprimanded for using such effeminate oaths.

Praxagora proceeds with her oration, reproaching the Athenians with their fickleness. First they sought the league with the enemies of Sparta; now they reprehend it. First they loved the Corinthians; now they cannot endure them. Here one of the lady auditors, well coached, breaks in with: "The man speaks well!" And the lady orator warmly acknowledges what is now a fitting tribute. Praxagora then sums up: The light-minded Athenians receive from the public purse a wage for voting, yet each of them is intent only on his private gain. So the state reels like a drunkard. Still there is one possibility of salvation: let the city be given over to the rule of the women, who show such powers of government in their own houses.

Then breaks forth a genuine expression of the spirit of Aristophanes. He, a conservative, praises women for a conservatism that is all his own. They dye their wool in the ancient fashion, he says, and try no new plans. Might not Athens have been safe if she, too, had dyed her wool, in the old way, and left new plans alone? Women are right conservatives:

They bake their honied cheese-cakes, as of old;  
They victimize their husbands, as of old;



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They still secrete their lovers, as of old;  
They buy themselves sly dainties, as of old;  
They love their wine unwatered, as of old:  
Then let us, gentlemen, give up to them  
The helm of state, and not concern ourselves,  
Nor pry, nor question what they mean to do;  
But let them really govern, knowing this,  
The statesman-mothers never will neglect  
Their soldier-sons. And then a soldier's rations,  
Who will supply as well as she who bare him?

This is but the rehearsal. The women settle their disguises, see that their beards are on straight, tuck up their tunics, and set out for the assembly, where, we learn, their plans are perfectly successful. The motion of Praxagora is put and carried, and the Athenians, partly persuaded to by the votes of the temporarily bearded ladies, hand over to the women the governance of the state.

That is the first part of the play, but at this point Aristophanes suddenly succumbs to temptation, and his music comedy breaks in two across the middle. The temptation was a tremendous one, so great that we are almost driven to call it, not a snare, but a superb opportunity. Yet we are constrained to add that to the height of his opportunity Aristophanes failed to rise.

It was no less than this: Plato had just published his "Republic," and it was superlatively open to parody. The dramatist who had made such fun of Socrates could not resist such an opportunity as this; and it is only in the light of Plato's growing splendor through twenty-three centuries that we may realize what an opportunity it was.

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A new work of Plato's; one of his greatest, as theme for a new music comedy. What gift of the god of chance was ever equal to that?

Yet we are constrained to say that Aristophanes fozzles. He seizes the wrong point, or treats it wrongly. Plato had said something concerning domestic affections and the danger that they might narrow the heart to a "selfishness of two." Therefore he suggested that, in certain high cases, wives might be elected or co-opted; that they might be functionaries rather than property, so that this narrowing passion might not grow.

Aristophanes seizes on this new notion, the antecedent of our modern eugenics, and distorts it into a human emulation of the sparrows, a sort of matrimonial go-as-you-please. And he builds the second part of his plot on the idea that the women of Athens, having gained command of the state, shall use their power to institute this conjugal lucky-bag, and inaugurate a millennium of promiscuity.

We can in part forgive the great comedian. His grudge is against Plato and all innovators,—and he spoils his play by using it to vent his spleen against Plato's high and unassailable serenity. He fails, but he fails splendidly, and there is no grain of malice in his uproarious laughter.

## XIII

### LUCIAN'S AVIATION STORY

IT is time for us to build a monument to Jules Verne. He is the true prophet of this miraculous year. The journey to the North Pole, the submarine boat of Captain Nemo, the coming of the Comet, the men-birds flying thousands of miles through the air: all are in his books; all were in his books thirty years ago. In the submarines, such details as the motors and the air replenished by oxygen from chlorate of potash were foretold by him; in the flying-machines he used pure hydrogen, and wove a balloon within a balloon, as did the latest aspirant for transatlantic honors. Well did his good wife say of him that Jules Verne was not a novelist, but a prophet. Let us build him a monument, since he foretold this marvelous time.

Two of his stories we have not yet caught up on: the voyage to the moon, and the journey to the center of the earth; but no doubt we shall; the more so, because in these two marvels he was not the pioneer, for Lucian, the witty Greek-speaking Syrian of the Roman Empire, had made both trips before him, had journeyed as far as the

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moon, and even to the center of the earth, if so be that Hades is at the center of the earth.

Jules Verne clothed scientific prophecy in the cloak of a story, and thereby enraptured a myriad of boys who had faith enough to believe in him while they read. Lucian clothes satire in the form of veridical history, and thereby delights all who have any enjoyment of pretty writing, any sympathy for his keen and graceful, or, indeed, often graceless satire. Why did they not make us read Lucian when we were studying Greek? Was it because he was too entertaining, or because he is faintly naughty? I know not; but I regret that so delicious a writer should not find his way into the hands of boys. One may almost call him the writer of French novels in Greek, for the times of Marcus Aurelius; for the spirit of the French novel of the better sort, and of some of the other sorts too, is in his books, and the form itself is a triumph of gentle satire: the matter of the light comedies of Menander, poured into the molds of Plato; frivolity in graceful dialogue, with the spirit of honest and truth-loving skepticism through it all.

So we come to that journey to the moon. Lucian did not make the trip in his proper person, but foists it upon a certain imaginary person, Icaromenippus, a cross between Menippus, the cynic philosopher of Gadara, and that Icarus, son of Dædalus, who fled, or rather flew, from the realm of Minos, King of Crete, toward Italy and, like one of our own bird-men, came toppling down

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into the water, not because his engine stopped, but because, rashly flying too close to the sun, the wax which held his wings on got melted.

Icaromenippus was equipped, as we should now say, with a monoplane which he himself somewhat inadequately describes as made of the right wing of an eagle and the left wing of a vulture, these two alone having wings fit to bear aloft sovereign man. Incidentally, he had neither equilibrator nor wing feathers; perhaps that is why he safely reached the moon. He began cautiously with safe experiments, first jumping up and helping the jump by flapping his hands, or imitating the way a goose raises itself without leaving the ground and combines running with flight. Anyone who has attended an aviation meet will recognize the accuracy of this. Then, finding the machine obedient, he next made a bolder venture, went up to the Acropolis of Athens, and launched himself from the cliff, right over the theater. Getting safely to the bottom that time, his aspirations shot up aloft. He took to starting from the hilltop of Parnes or Hymettus, flying to Geranea, thence to the pinnacle of Corinth, and over Pholoe and Erymanthus to Taygetus. The training for his venture was now complete; his powers were developed and equal to lofty flight; he had tuned up his plane, in the language of a later day. So he went to Mount Olympus, provisioning himself as lightly as possible, and soared skyward, giddy at first with that great void below, but soon conquering this difficulty.

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When he approached the moon, long after parting from the clouds, he was conscious of fatigue, especially in the left or vulture's wing, so he alighted and sat down to rest, having a bird's-eye view of the earth, like the Homeric Zeus,

Surveying now the Thrasian horseman's land,  
Now, Mysia,

and again, as the fancy took him, Greece or Persia or India. From all of which he drew a manifold delight. Imagine yourself, he says, first descrying a tiny earth, far smaller than the moon looks; on turning his eyes down, he could not think for some time what had become of the mighty mountains and the vast sea. If he had not caught sight of the Colossus of Rhodes and the Pharos tower at Alexandria, he might never have identified the earth at all. But their height and projection, with the faint shimmer of the ocean in the sun, showed him that it must be the earth he was looking at. Then, when once he had got his sight properly focused, the whole human race became clear to him, not merely in the shape of nations and cities, but the simple, separate persons sailing, fighting, plowing, going to law; the women, the beasts, and, in short, every breed "that feedeth on earth's foison."

Here the friend to whom Icaromenippus tells the tale breaks in.

"Most unconvincing and contradictory," he says. "First, the earth was so diminished by distance that you could only identify it by the

## LUCIAN'S AVIATION STORY

Colossus of Rhodes, and then you suddenly develop such vision as had that first lynx-eyed Argonaut, who could distinguish things nine miles off."

Icaromenippus defends himself by saying that, on the advice of Empedocles, the physicist, or rather his ghost, whom he found inhabiting the lunar vales, and who came up most opportunely at the moment, he borrowed an eagle's eye, and could then see splendidly. Of course, it is obvious that he means a telescope. Racy, indeed, and full of brilliant satire is his account of what he saw, looking thus downward from his high point of vantage upon the children of men, the host of "burglars, litigants, usurers, duns"; glancing at Getica, he saw the Getæ at war; at Scythia, there were the Scythians wandering about on their wagons; half a turn in another direction gave him Egypt, with the sons of the Pharaohs at the plow, or Phoenicians chaffering, Silician pirates, Spartan flagellants, Athenians at law. But he seems to have missed the United States.

He was especially amused, he tells his friend, by those who dispute about boundaries or pride themselves on cultivating the plain of Sicyon or a thousand acres at Acharnæ. For the whole of Greece as he saw it might measure some four inches; how much smaller, then, was Athens on the same scale! Then he looked at the Peloponnesus, and his eyes fell on the Cynurian district, and the thought occurred to him that it was for this little plot, no broader than an Egyptian

## WHY THE WORLD LAUGHS

lentil, that so many Argives and Spartans fell in a single day. Or if he saw a man puffed up by the possession of seven or eight gold rings and half as many gold cups, his lungs began to crow, for Mount Pangæus, with all its mines, was about the size of a grain of millet. Men and cities suggested to him so many ant-hills.

When he had laughed to his heart's content, Icaromenippus once more spread his wings and soared, but he had only flown a couple of hundred yards when he heard the shrill voice of Selene, the moon-goddess, herself. She had a grievance. The astronomers, it would seem, had been paying her too many attentions, inquiring about her size, her waist measurement, her waxing and waning, and the like; and she felt affronted, as a maiden lady naturally would. Therefore she begged the bird-man to betake him to great Zeus, father of gods and men, carrying thither her plaint and begging his corrective intercession. Moreover, said good lady Moon, the things she saw on moonlit nights—well, she simply had to hide her face in the cloud-veils.

So Icaromenippus promised to bear the message to high Zeus. Soon the moon was but a small object in the sky, as he soared through the farther empyrean, and the earth was completely hidden behind it.

Three days' flight through the stars with the sun on his right hand brought him to heaven; and his first idea was to go straight in, trusting his eagle's wing to pass muster before Zeus;



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but, on second thoughts remembering that the left wing had come from a vulture, he had misgivings, and, humbly knocking at the door, gave his name to Hermes, he of the winged hat and sandals. Hermes went off to announce him to Zeus, and after a brief wait he was asked to step in.

Trembling with apprehension, he went forward and found the gods, all seated together and, as it seemed to him, not quite easy among themselves. The unexpected nature of the visit was slightly disturbing to them, and they had visions of all mankind arriving at his heels by the same conveyance. It was an earlier version of *An Englishman's Home*.

But Zeus bent upon him a Titanic glance, awful, penetrating, and spoke:

“Who art thou? Where thy city? Who thy kin?”

At the sound, Icaromenippus nearly died with fright, but he remained upright, though mute and paralyzed by that thunderous voice. Gradually recovering, he began at the beginning and gave a clear account of himself: how he had been possessed with curiosity about the heavens, had gone to the philosophers, found their accounts conflicting, and grown tired of being logically rent in twain; so he came to his great idea of wings, and ultimately to heaven. He added the message of the maiden lady Moon, whereat great Zeus smiled. The king of the gods bade him make himself at home, spite of his soaring presumption,

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outdoing that of the two giants, Otus and Ephialtes, who piled Ossa on Olympus, and Pelion on Ossa, in their attempt to climb to heaven.

“For to-day,” said Zeus, “consider yourself our guest. To-morrow we will treat with you of your business and send you on your way.” And therewith he rose and walked to the acoustic center of heaven, it being prayer-time.

And here we come upon the most essential spirit of this quick-witted Syrian Greek, his keen skepticism, demolishing alike the old Homeric fables of the gods of Olympus and the new systems of the philosophers, whether they followed Plato or Aristotle or Zeno the Stoic. His disbelief is all-embracing, his destructive wit touches everything alike; yet one feels that honesty is at the bottom of it all. It is the fables of the poets, the pretensions of the philosophers that have turned his gorge; and at heart he is far more religious than they, even while mocking at their semblance of religion. So we may follow him, in the person of his bird-man Icaromenippus, to “the acoustic center of heaven,” at the time of prayer.

As Zeus and the flying philosopher went thither together, the god put questions to the man concerning earthly affairs; asking, to begin with, how much was wheat a quarter in Greece? Had the Athenians suffered much from cold last winter? Did the vegetable gardens need more rain? Then Zeus wished to know whether any of the kin of Pheidias were still alive, why his festival had not been celebrated at Athens for ever so many years,

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whether his Olympieum was ever going to be completed, and had the men who robbed his temple at Dodona been caught? The bird-man answered all these inquiries, and Zeus began again:

“Tell me, Menippus, what are men’s feelings toward me?”

“What should they be, lord,” answered the daring philosopher, “but those of absolute reverence, as to the king of all gods?”

“Now, now!” said Zeus, chaffing as usual. “I know their fickleness very well, for all your dissimulation. There was a time when I was their prophet, their healer, and their all,

And Zeus filled every street and gathering-place.

In those days Dodona and Pisa were glorious and far-famed, and I could not get a view for the clouds of sacrificial steam. But now Apollo has set up his altar at Delphi, Asclepius his temple of health at Pergamum, Bendis and Anubis and Artemis their shrines in Thrace, Egypt, Ephesus; and to these all run; theirs the festal gatherings and the hecatombs. As for me, I am superannuated; they think themselves very generous if they offer me a victim at Olympia every four years. My altars are chilly as Plato’s laws or Chrysippus’s syllogisms!”

Thus did this oddly assorted couple, aviator and Olympian, gossip, until they reached the spot where Zeus was to sit and listen to the prayers. There was a row of openings with lids like well-

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covers, and a chair of gold by each. Zeus took his seat at the first, lifted off the lid, and inclined his ear. From every quarter of earth were coming the most various and contradictory petitions; for Icaromenippus, too, bent down his head and listened, so that he was able later to make this authentic report.

“O Zeus,” prayed one, “that I might be king!”

“O Zeus, that my onions and garlic might thrive!”

“Ye gods, a speedy death to my father!”

Or again:

“Would that I might succeed to my wife’s property!”

“Grant that my plot against my brother be not detected!”

“Let me win my suit!”

“Give me a garland at the Olympic games!”

Of those at sea, one prayed for a north, another for a south wind; the farmer asked for rain, the fuller for sun. Zeus listened, and gave each prayer careful consideration, but without promising to grant them all; righteous prayers he allowed to come up through the hole, received them and laid them down at his right, while he sent the unholy ones packing with a downward puff of breath, that heaven might not be defiled by their entrance. In one case the aviator saw that he was puzzled; two men praying for opposite things and promising the same sacrifice, he could not tell which of them to favor, and experienced a truly Platonic suspense, show-

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ing a reserve and equilibrium worthy of Pyrrho, father of all skeptics.

When the prayers of mortal men had thus been dealt with, Zeus went on to the next of the golden chairs and attended to oaths and those who were making them. These done with, he proceeded to the next chair to deal with omens, prophetic voices, and auguries. Then came the lid of sacrifice, which he duly lifted; and the smoke, coming up through the aperture, communicated to him the name of the sacrificer. After that, says Icaromenippus, he was free to give his wind and weather orders: rain for Scythia to-day, a thunder-storm for Lydia, snow for Greece. The north wind he instructed to blow in Lydia, the west to raise up a storm in the Adriatic, the south to take a rest; a thousand bushels of hail were measured out, to be distributed over Cappadocia.

As the day's work of the father of gods and men was now pretty well completed, and as it was just dinner-time, he led Icaromenippus to the banquet-hall. Hermes received the new-comer, and assigned him a seat next to a group of gods whose alien origin left them in rather a doubtful position—Pan, he of the melodious pipes, the whirling Corybantes, Attis and Sabazius. Icaromenippus was supplied with bread by Demeter, with wine by Bacchus, meat by Heracles, myrtle-blossoms by Aphrodite, and fish by Poseidon. But he also got a sly taste of ambrosia, the undying food of the gods, and nectar, their beverage; good-natured Ganymede, the boy whom Zeus's eagle

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had carried to heaven to be cup-bearer of the immortals, as often as he saw that Zeus's attention was directed elsewhere, brought round the nectar and gave the visitor a cupful. During the dinner Apollo harped, Silenus danced, and the Muses sang selections of Greek verse.

What befell thereafter, and how great Zeus settled the matter of the maiden Moon's plaint against the two inquisitive philosophers, were long to tell, though excellent in the telling. Suffice it that Icaromenippus, shorn of his wings lest he might rashly come again, was carried safely back to earth by Hermes, who lifted him cautiously by the right ear and bore him through the ether, depositing him safe in Athens. Whereupon he hurried forth to warn the philosophers of the impending thunderbolt which Zeus had in pickle for them. Whether they heeded him and reformed or heeded not and met their glittering doom, deponent sayeth not. And so ends the tale.

## XIV

### A SCOFFER ON MOUNT OLYMPUS

WITH what joy we would have studied our Greek in bygone days if "flogging Orbilius" had but given us Lucian's Dialogues of the Gods instead of prosily boastful Xenophon or long-winded Demosthenes! Irreverent he is, no doubt, this Scoffer on Mount Olympus, but how deliciously funny! Caustic at times, too, as, for example, in the scene where Hermes and Hephæstus are sent to crucify Prometheus on the cliff of Caucasus for stealing divine fire and creating men.

"This," says Hermes, "is the Caucasus, to which it is our painful duty to nail our companion. We have now to select a suitable crag, free from snow, on which the chains will have a good hold and where the prisoner will hang in all publicity."

"True," replies Hephæstus. "It will not do to fix him too low down, or these men he has created might come to their maker's assistance; nor at the top, where he would be invisible from the earth. What do you say to a middle course? Let him hang over this precipice, with his arms stretched across from crag to crag."

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“The very thing,” rejoins Hermes. “Steep rocks, slightly overhanging, inaccessible on every side; no foothold but a mere ledge, with scarcely room for the tips of one’s toes; altogether a sweet spot for a crucifixion. Now, Prometheus, come and be nailed up; there is no time to lose.”

Prometheus here raises his voice in protestation: “Nay, hear me, Hephæstus! Hermes! I suffer injustice: have compassion on my woes!”

“In other words,” breaks in Hermes, “disobey orders, and promptly be gibbeted in your stead! Do you suppose there is no room on the Caucasus to peg out a couple of us? Come, your right hand! Clamp it down, Hephæstus, and in with the nails; bring down the hammer with a will. Now the left; make sure work of that too. So! The eagle will shortly be here, to trim your liver!”

Having nailed up the great benefactor, however, they agree to listen to his plea on his own behalf, while they are waiting for Zeus’s eagle to arrive. Prometheus pleads. He declares that the craft he was guilty of in deceiving Zeus was but an after-dinner jest, while the making of men was sheer benefit. For, while there were no mortals, the immortals only half enjoyed their royal state, having no wretches to compare with their own happy lot; nor had they any one to build them temples or altars or to till the rude, inhospitable earth.

“But,” he continues, “you will complain that we have so much trouble looking after them. At



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that rate, a shepherd ought to object to the possession of a flock. Besides, a certain show of occupation is rather gratifying than otherwise; the responsibility is not unwelcome—it helps to pass the time. What should we do if we had not mankind to think of? There would be nothing to live for; we should sit about drinking nectar and gorging ourselves with ambrosia. But what fairly takes my breath away is your assurance in finding fault with my women in particular, when all the time you are in love with them: our bulls and satyrs and swans are never tired of making descents upon the earth; women, they find, are good enough to be made mothers of gods! And now, with your permission, I will approach the subject of that stolen fire, of which we hear so much. I have a question to ask, which I beg you will answer frankly. Has there been one spark less fire in heaven since men shared it with us? Of course not. It is the nature of fire that it does not become less by being imparted to others. A fire is not put out by kindling another from it. No, this is sheer envy: you cannot bear that men should have a share of this necessary, though you have suffered no harm thereby. For shame! Gods should be beneficent, ‘givers of good’; they should be above all envy. Had I taken away fire altogether and left not a spark behind, it would have been no great loss. You have no use for it. You are never cold; you need no artificial light; nor is ambrosia improved by boiling.”

Equally humorous, and with less of a sting

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in it, is the talk between Zeus and Eros, or, as the Latins would have said, Jove and Cupid. Zeus is getting ready to administer a well-earned spanking to the little love-god with the quiver, and Eros pleads:

“You might let me off, Zeus! I suppose it was rather too bad of me; but there—I am but a child, a wayward child.”

Zeus replies, with indignation: “A child, and born before Iapetus was ever thought of? You bad old man! Just because you have no beard and no white hairs, are you going to pass yourself off for a child?”

“Well,” retorts the little love-god, “and what such mighty harm has the old man ever done you, that you should talk of chains?”

“Ask your own guilty conscience!” replies mighty Zeus. “The pranks you have played me! Satyr, bull, swan, eagle, shower of gold—I have been everything in my time; and I have you to thank for it. You never by any chance make the women in love with me; no one is ever smitten with my charms, that I have noticed. No, there must be magic in it always; I must be kept well out of sight. They like the bull or the swan well enough; but once let them set eyes on me, and they are frightened out of their lives.”

“Of course,” says Eros. “They are but mortals; the sight of Zeus is too much for them. Now, shall I tell you the way to win hearts? Keep that ægis of yours quiet, and leave your thunderbolt at home; make yourself as smart as you can;

## A SCOFFER ON MOUNT OLYMPUS

curl your hair and tie it up with a bit of ribbon; get a purple cloak and gold-bespangled shoes, and march forth to the music of flute and drum: and see if you don't get a finer following than Dionysus, for all his mænads."

"Pooh!" says the father of gods and men. "I'll win no hearts on such terms."

"Oh, in that case," pertly replies Eros, "don't fall in love. Nothing could be simpler."

"I dare say," answers mighty Zeus; "but I like being in love, only I don't like all this fuss. Now mind; if I let you off, it is on this understanding."

So, unfortunately for fallen humanity, Cupid was neither muzzled nor chained up; he was not even well spanked.

Very amusing is the conversation about newborn Hermes, whom the Romans called Mercury, which takes place between Hephæstus and Apollo.

"Have you seen Maia's baby, Apollo?" asks Hephæstus. "Such a pretty little thing, with a smile for everybody; you can see it is going to be a treasure."

"That baby a treasure?" retorts Apollo. "Well, in mischief, Iapetus is young beside it."

"Why," asks Hephæstus, "what harm can it do, only just born?"

"Ask Poseidon," replies Apollo. "It stole his trident. Ask Ares; he was surprised to find his sword gone out of the scabbard. Not to mention myself, disarmed of bow and arrows."

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“Never! That infant? He has hardly found his legs yet; he is not out of his baby linen.”

“Ah, you will find out, Hephæstus, if he gets within reach of you.”

“He has been,” answers over-confident Hephæstus.

“Well,” queries Apollo, “all your tools safe? None missing?”

“Of course not.”

“I advise you to make sure.”

“Zeus!” cries Hephæstus. “Where are my pincers?”

“Ah,” replies Apollo, with a golden smile, “you will find them among the baby linen!”

And so it was. Which is why, among other reasons, Hermes, or Mercury, was made the god of thieves and other light-fingered gentry.

Would that I had space to reproduce the sovereign comedy of Lucian’s “Dialogue of the Judgment of Paris,” when the three lovely goddesses came to the Phrygian shepherd to decide which of them was entitled to the beauty prize of the golden apple. Lucian boldly suggests that the decision in favor of Aphrodite was a matter, not of superior beauty, but of superior graft; Athene, afterward patroness of Athenes and the Acropolis, a kind of Grecian Walküre, promises that, if the prize goes to her, she will make Paris a mighty warrior and conqueror; Hera promises him the lordship of Asia; but never-dying, artful Aphrodite, as poetess Sappho calls her, speaks thus:

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“Here I am; take your time, and examine carefully; let nothing escape your vigilance. And I have something else to say to you, handsome Paris. Yes, you handsome boy, I have long had an eye on you; I think you must be the handsomest young fellow in all Phrygia. But it is such a pity that you don’t leave those rocks and crags and live in a town: you will lose all your beauty in this desert. What have you to do with mountains? What satisfaction can your beauty give to a lot of cows? You ought to have been married long ago; not to any of these dowdy women hereabouts, but to some Greek girl; an Argive, perhaps, or a Corinthian, or a Spartan; Helen, now, is a Spartan, and such a pretty girl—quite as pretty as I am—and so susceptible! Why, if she once caught sight of you, she would give up everything, I am sure, to go with you; and a most devoted wife she would be. But you have heard of Helen, of course?—such a lithe, graceful figure; and only think, she is so much admired that there was a war because Theseus ran away with her; and she was a mere child then,—” and so forth and so on till Paris was beguiled and fell, as what man would not, if the goddess of beauty called him handsome? So Aphrodite got the golden apple of discord, Paris got Argive Helen, and the avenging Greeks burned Troy about old Priam’s ears.

As funny as the Dialogues of the Gods, and even more caustic, are the Dialogues of the Dead, which are the model for all later comic treatment of hell.

## WHY THE WORLD LAUGHS

The best of these, perhaps, is that in which Hermes and Charon and various shades take part, Charon beginning thus:

"I'll tell you how things stand. Our craft, as you see, is small and leaky and three parts rotten; a single lurch, and she will capsize without more ado. And here are all you passengers, each with his luggage. If you come on board like that, I am afraid you may have cause to repent it, especially those who have not learned to swim."

"I'll tell you," optimistically replies the boatman of the dead. "They must leave all this nonsense behind them on shore and come aboard in their skins. As it is, there will be no room to spare. And in future, Hermes, mind you, admit no one till he has cleared himself of encumbrances, as I say. Stand by the gangway, and keep an eye on them, and make them strip before you let them pass."

"Very well," agrees Hermes. "Well, Number One, who are you?"

"Menippus, the Cynic. Here are my wallet and staff; overboard with them. I had the sense not to bring my cloak."

"Pass on, Menippus; you're a good fellow; you shall have the seat of honor, up by the pilot, where you can see every one. Here is a handsome person; who is he?"

"Charmoleos of Megara, the irresistible, whose kiss was worth a thousand pounds," answers Charon.



NO. 100  
ANNEXED



## A SCOFFER ON MOUNT OLYMPUS

"That beauty must come off," Hermes insists—"lips, kisses, all; the flowing locks, the blushing cheeks, the skin entire. That's right. Now we're in better trim. You may pass on. And who is the stunning gentleman in the purple and diadem?"

"I am Lampichus, tyrant of Gela," replies the haughty shade.

"And what is all this splendor doing here, Lampichus?" asks Hermes.

"How!" angrily retorts Lampichus. "Would you have a tyrant come hither stripped?"

"A tyrant!" sarcastically answers Hermes. "That would be too much to expect. But with a spook, we must insist. Off with these things!"

"There, then," resignedly replies the dead tyrant; "away goes my wealth!"

"Pomp must go, too," answers Hermes, remorseless; "and pride; we shall be over-freighted else."

"At least let me keep my diadem and robes," begs the tyrant.

"No, no; off they come!"

"Well?" asks Lampichus. "That is all, as you see for yourself."

"There is something more yet," sternly answers Hermes—"cruelty, folly, insolence, hatred."

"There, then," answers the unhappy tyrant; "now I am stripped bare . . ."

This, indeed, is satire rather than comedy; and satire in which we can see foreshadowed scenes

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like the grave-diggers in Hamlet or the door-keeper in Macbeth.

But, in general, Lucian mocks most good-naturedly at the gods of great Olympus, turning them into fun and genial ridicule. Yet all this has a graver side, for we can well see that this graceful, witty undermining of the old religion appreciably helped to clear the way for the new, which was even then struggling for a foothold in the Roman world.

## XV

### THE JESTS OF CICERO'S COUNTRYMEN

IN the days when we were plodding through the four conjugations we hardly thought of the Romans as a race of humorists; there was nothing irresistibly funny about an ablative absolute. And we were not far from the truth; for Julius Cæsar is a dry dog, even in the Irish translation: "All Gaul is quartered into three halves." There is some humor, perhaps, in that famous despatch sent from Paul's city of Tarsus and communicating the victory over the King of Pontus: "I came, saw, overcame." But as likely as not its brevity was mere thriftiness in words, not wit. In Vergil, too, there is hardly a smile. Would it not have lightened our days if that tedious and priggish person, the pious Æneas, had been represented by the Mantuan with a sense of humor? Tradition had it that Æneas was the son of goddess Venus and Anchises of Troy, but it is hard to see where he takes after his winsome and frivolous mamma.

But in Horace there is excellent fooling. Take that gay satire which tells how he was going by chance on the Sacred Way, tremendously intent

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on some trifle or other, when a bore overtook him, and, running up to him, wrung him warmly by the hand.

“How do you do, dearest friend?” said the bore.

“Passably well,” replied Horace, who barely knew his tormentor by sight—“passably well, as the times go; and I wish you everything you can desire.”

When the bore still followed him, Horace asked him whether he wanted anything.

“But you know me well,” answered the bore, evidently hurt; “am I not a man of learning?”

“In that case,” said Horace, “I tender you my respect.”

Then he tried to escape, now walking rapidly, now lagging, now pretending to stop and talk to his boy. But the bore held on, till Horace felt the sweat running down to his ankles, while the bore droned on, praising the town and the streets. Finally the bore became suspicious.

“I think,” he said, “you are trying to get away? But you will not escape me. I shall stick by you. Whither are you going now?”

Horace, with desperate politeness, said that his worthy friend must not think of putting himself out so; that he had a long walk before him; was going, in fact, across the Tiber to visit a sick friend, one who dwelt by Cæsar’s gardens, and whom his worthy friend did not even know by name. Horace does not say so, but we suspect that he invented this sick friend beyond the Tiber on the spur of the moment.

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But the bore stood his ground. "I have nothing particular to do this morning," he said, "and I am a good walker. I will go with you."

Horace gave up in despair. He humorously describes himself hanging down his ears like an over-laden donkey and plodding gloomily on his perfectly useless journey, while the bore began again, praising himself and saying what a desirable friend he would be, better than Viscus or Varius, for he could write more verses than they, and quicker too, and he could dance, too, and sing in a way to make Hermogenes envious.

Meanwhile Horace had gathered himself together for a final break for liberty. Interrupting his wearisome friend, he asked:

"Have you a mother or any relations who are interested in your welfare?"

"No," replied the bore; "I have buried them all."

"Lucky for them!" answered the desperate Horace. "But I still remain. Despatch me, too, for the fatal hour has arrived. A Sabine witch told my fortune when I was a boy, drawing the fateful words from her urn; 'This child,' she said, 'must die neither by poison nor by the sword; nor will pleurisy or gout remove him. He will fall victim to a bore. Therefore, if he is wise, let him avoid talkative people when he comes to man's estate.'"

What the bore said in reply, and how the poor poet finally got rid of him, he who would know may read, for the book is extant and writ in choice Italian.

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There is another little bit of Horace that has an equal charm: an ode addressed to the fair and too accessible Lady Lydia. It would seem that she and Horace had had their romance; but time's snows had cooled them, and both had drifted away after other loves. The ode begins with a pensive reflection which Horace addresses to fair, fickle Lydia: So long, he tells her, as she loved him, and no other youth more favored might clasp his arms around her snowy neck, he lived happier than the King of Persia. To which fair Lydia replies that none was happier than she until Horace began to make love to the enchanting Chloe. Horace breaks forth in praises of his new love; Chloe, he says, draws his heart by her lovely music and winsome voice, so that he would fain die for her, if thereby she might live. Lydia, not to be outdone, sings the praises of her new lover: Calais and Lydia, she says, burn with mutual fire; for Calais she would die, not once, but twice, if hard Fate would turn aside from him. Then, slyly sentimental, Horace wonders aloud what would happen if he and Lydia fell in love with each other again and were once more united under the yoke of Venus. What if golden-haired Chloe were turned down, and the door of his house once more opened to slighted Lydia? To which Lydia, not less sly nor less sentimental, makes reply: Though Horace is light as a cork and fitful as the gusty Adriatic, yet for his sake she would even dismiss the star-like Calais; for with Horace, her only true love, she

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would fain live; for him she would gladly die.

Full of genuine humor, too, is Horace's account of the millionaire's banquet, at which, in every element of magnificence, Horace manages to find some touch of vulgarity. Thus, when it was found that the boar's head had been kept too long, because the host had bought it a bargain earlier, he suggests that it has some vague excellence because it was killed while the south wind blew, having, therefore, a breath of Africa about it. The servants who waited at the table were clothed in purple, and one of the guests, Nomentanus, was invited in order that he might point out any excellent thing in danger of passing unobserved. The tapestry suspended under the ceiling gave way, and came down amid a cloud of dust, whereat Nomentanus the flatterer bewailed, while Varius smothered a laugh in his napkin. And so on, throughout the whole portentous feast.

Juvenal followed in the footsteps of Horace, writing satires on the life about him with a keen and bitter wit. "What can I do at Rome?" he asks, in his famous third satire. "I cannot lie; I cannot praise a bad book and beg a copy; I cannot cast horoscopes; I cannot promise a father's death to his heir." Again he says, "Dire poverty has no sharper sting than this, that it makes a man ridiculous." But in another satire he paints the contrasted picture of the traveler with empty pockets laughing in the bandit's face. There is a contemporary touch in

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his saying, "He who wishes to get rich, wishes to get rich quick"; and he says elsewhere that lost riches are lamented with true tears. Juvenal has a sharp word-picture of the Greeks, whom he seems to have respected as little as did Shakespeare, for he calls them "a race of comedians. If you smile, your Greek friend shakes with laughter. If he sees a tear in your eye, he weeps, though he is indifferent. If you ask for a little fire in winter, he pulls his cloak about him. If you complain of the heat, he sweats."

Yet Roman literature is tremendously indebted to the Greeks from its very beginning, and especially in the matter of humor. For both Plautus and Terence, who bear between them the burden of Latin comedy, are wholly under Greek influence, though they write in more rugged Latin. Their people are Greek, their names are Greek, their plots are Greek and, for the most part, laid in Greece. But it is a Greece of degenerate days, and, with much genuine humor, there is much that is harsh and crude in their comedies. Plautus has the more ingenious plots, and some witty sayings, such as this, "Never in any age was there such a wonder found as a taciturn woman"; or this, "Man is a wolf to man." With which one may contrast the German, "*Ein Mensch ist des andern Teufel.*" Plautus has the sayings, "The flame is near the smoke"; "Man proposes and God disposes"; "A friend in need is a friend indeed"; and the suggestive image, "to whiten ivory with ink." And from Terence one



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may quote the immortal saw, "Lovers' quarrels are a renewal of love." Terence also makes one of his characters shrewdly say, "As usual, it happens that my ills reach your ears before your joys reach mine"; and another says, "Thou knowest the way of women; while they are drinking a year passes." To Terence also must be accredited this, "An old saying, and a true, 'Of all mankind, each loves himself the best.'" He also says, "A word to the wise is enough"; "Where there is life, there is hope"; and uses the simile, "to harp on the same string." Terence, too, tells us that Venus grows cold without banquets and wine, which is the old way of saying that, "When poverty comes in at the door, love goes out by the window."

So did these two old comedians write in Latin, while they thought in Greek. For Latin was always something too stolid and stiff for jesting; and the days of Rome's decline have begun before we find a return to genuine humor. I might venture to suggest that something of the same kind is true of the waning of Puritanism in this country, and that the humorist and the malefactor of great wealth appeared about the same time, were it not that I fear to trespass on Signor Ferrero's preserves.

So it happens, very naturally, that when the later Romans allow themselves to jest they very often jest in Greek, as Shakespeare so acutely remarked of Cicero. And among these Greek-jesting Latins there is none so amusing as Lucillius,

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who is, indeed, one of the wittiest of mankind. Of his life not very much seems to be known, though, happily, a great many of his jests are still among the living. Rather mocking the great epic poets, Lucillius says, "‘Of the Muses of Helicon let us sing,’ thus wrote Hesiod, while he tended his sheep. ‘Goddess, sing the anger of Achilles,’ and ‘Sing, Muse, the man,’ thus Homer began his poems. I too must write a prelude. What shall I write to begin my second book? ‘Muses of Olympus, ye daughters of Zeus, I should have been lost, had not Nero, a descendant of Cæsar, put up the cash.’" So Lucillius, the jester, was a debtor to Nero, the sentimental firelight fiddler of Rome, the same who crucified Peter and beheaded Paul.

Now to give a taste of Lucillius's quality. "Slanderers say, O Nicylla," he writes to a fashionable though faded beauty, "that you dye your hair black. It is false. It was black when you bought it!"

To another lady he writes, "Demosthenis, your mirror is false; if it were not, you would not be willing to look into it."

Of a certain professional athlete Lucillius said, "Eutychedes was a slow runner on the course, but if you invited him to dinner he sprinted."

Lucillius seems to have had a particular aversion to a certain poor painter, Menestratus by name. He is never tired of girding at him. "You painted Deucalion, of the flood, and Phæthon, who was scorched by the sun. Now you ask their

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"I SHOULD HAVE BEEN LOST, HAD NOT NERO, A DESCENDANT OF CAESAR, PUT UP THE CASH"

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value. Well, Phæthon deserves fire, and Deucalion water."

Hardly less sharp is this, "Asclepiades, the miser, once saw a mouse in his house, and said, 'What art thou doing, dearest mouse, in my house?' And the mouse, sweetly smiling, replied, 'Fear not, friend. We seek from you, not food, but lodging.'"

Here is an epigram even more personal, "As you have such a face, Olympicus, go not near a fountain nor any clear water; for, like Narcissus, you will die if you see your reflection in the water."

Here is another pitiless little character sketch in the same vein: "Hermocrates, the money-lover, as he lay dying, put his own name in his will as heir. Then he began to reckon up how much it would cost him, if he at length recovered and had to reward the physician, and if he died at once. He found that, in the latter case, he would save a drachma. 'It is cheaper to die!' he said, and straightway gave up the ghost."

But Lucillius is not always so friendly to the physicians. "Not the flood of Deucalion," he tells us, "nor Phæthon, who, driving the horses of the sun too near, burned up the earth, have destroyed so many as Potamo, the poet, and Hermogenes, the surgeon. So that for each age there has been its calamity: Deucalion, Phæthon, Potamo, Hermogenes."

Lucillius thus taunts a cowardly warrior: "If an army is to be raised, to fight against grasshoppers, or dog-flies, or the cavalry of fleas or

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frogs, then, Caius, thou art in danger of being enrolled; but not if an army of brave men is needed. The Romans are not going to fight against cranes."

Lucillius, who has already peppered the doctors, now pays his respects to his lawyer, who seems to have dragged all the great names of antiquity into his pleading in a petty theft. "I lost a little pig," says Lucillius, "and an ox and a she goat, on account of which you, Menecles, received a lawyer's fee. But neither has anything happened in common to me and Othryades, nor do I lead away any as thieves from Thermopylæ; but we have a case against Eutychemes; so what has Xerxes to do here, and what the Lacedæmonians? But keep my case in mind, or I will cry out, 'Menecles says some things; the little pigs say other things!'"

Once more, a slap at the doctors; this time a certain Doctor Dionysius, who, being invited to a banquet, found one of his patients there, whom he was treating for dyspepsia, and promptly devoured all the good things to keep his patient out of danger.

We have recently had an epidemic of dancers who have presented to us, by their art, all kinds of wonderful things. It would seem that in this, too, to corroborate Signor Ferrero, modern America but repeats ancient Rome. And if we feel inclined to satirize them, we have a model ready to hand in Lucillius, who wrote of a dancer of his day: "Although dancing entirely according to

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history, you have, by neglecting one thing of the greatest moment, given me great pain. For, in dancing the part of Niobe, you stood like a rock; and again, while you were Capaneus, you fell down on a sudden; but on the part of Canace, you acted unnaturally, for, though there was a sword beside you, you went off the stage alive. This was quite contrary to the story. For Canace had at least killed herself."

And here is a bitter enough word-picture of a bad orator: "Pluto, god of the underworld, will not receive Marcus, the orator, when he dies, for he will say that Cerberus, the dog of Hades, is enough for him; or perhaps he will say to Marcus, 'Go, make orations before the chiefest sinners like Ixion and Meliot, the lyric poet, and Tityus. For I have no evil greater than you to punish them with, until Rufus, the grammarian, arrives.'"

It would be hard to find in all literature anything more bitterly witty than that.

In somewhat the same vein is Lucian, though perhaps he is a shade more humane. Of his own books, he says: "I, Lucian, wrote these, acquainted with things old and foolish; for foolish, indeed, are the things thought wise by mankind. There is no wit in man to judge between them. What fills you with wonder is for others something to laugh at."

It is easy enough, indeed, to laugh with Lucian. What, for instance, could be more apt than this: "Antiochus once saw the purse of Lysimachus. Lysimachus never saw it again"?

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Again he says, somewhat in the spirit of old Horace: "That poet is truly best who gives his audience a supper. But if he merely reads his poems and sends them home hungry, may he turn his poetic frenzy against himself!"

Very witty, too, is this little anecdote which Lucian tells, "Amongst all who were drunk, Acindunus remained sober; therefore it was thought that he got drunk when he was alone."

Here is an epigram of Lucian's which is as good as anything in literature. Strictly speaking, perhaps it is a conundrum: "O goddess, who hatest the poor and art the sole subduer of wealth, who knowest rich living at all times, who delightest to be supported on strange feet and wearest slippers of felt and carest much for ointments! Thee too a garland delights, and the liquor of Ausonian Bacchus! But these things are never within the reach of the poor. Therefore thou fliest from the threshold of poverty and comest with delight to the feet of the rich!"

The name of the goddess to which these praises are addressed is Podagra, which, being interpreted, is the Gout. For it is true that gout forsakes the threshold of the poor and comes gladly to the feet of the rich. We saw how Lucillius played on the first lines of the Iliad and the Odyssey. Here is something similar, and perhaps even wittier, from Lucian. It is once more a dig at the doctors.

"A certain physician," says Lucian, "sent his son to me to learn Greek grammar. He first learned, 'Sing, O Muse, the wrath of Achilles!'



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and then, 'He caused ten thousand sorrows to the Greeks'; but after I had taught him, 'And he sent untimely many souls to Hades,' his father took him away, saying to me, 'Many thanks, my friend, but my child can learn that at home. For I myself send many souls untimely to Hades, so I need no tutor for that!'

But perhaps the funniest thing Lucian ever said is this: "A fool was bitten by many fleas. He put out the light and said, 'Now you no longer see me!'"

## XVI

### HOW LUCIUS MADE AN ASS OF HIMSELF

FIRST, metaphorically, then most literally. As to the first mishap, Lucius, a likely young man born in the Roman colony in Africa, had traveled through classic Greece to Thessaly, famed, as you must know, for witches. And, armed with a letter of introduction, he had, on coming to a certain Thessalian city, presented himself at the home of one Milo, a considerable citizen, yet held in contempt by his fellow Thessalians because he was a notable usurer and a miser, to boot. The grim, inhospitable spirit of Pamphile, Milo's unattractive spouse, was, however, made up for, in the mind of our young friend Lucius, by the gentle charms of her young handmaiden Photis; and here it was that Lucius came to grief.

But first let me relate another adventure that befell him, in that same city of Thessaly, an adventure at once tragical and ludicrous. As he was walking in the market-place he observed a fair and noble lady attended by many servants and accompanied by her worthy and distinguished husband. This good lady, it seems, was an old friend of his mother's, a kinswoman, and, presently

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recognizing young Lucius, bade him come with her to her house. There, in the garden before the dwelling, he saw many beautiful things, statues of fair Parian marble, winged victories tiptoe upon globes surmounting pillars; rockwork adorned with trailing vines, and many lovely things besides. And inside the fair dame's mansion he was delighted with choice banquets and costly viands, which brought great solace to his heart.

Now it happened that, during the time of his sojourn there, the people of that city held their annual festival; one, indeed, that every city would do well to imitate, for it was the festival of the gods of laughter. To the celebration of which, with due rites and ceremonies, Lucius all unwillingly contributed. For, as he was wending homeward his unsteady way from a too heady banquet at his kindly kinswoman's mansion, attended only by a single body-servant, it befell that his lamp was blown out; and, the Thessalian streets being in those days unlighted, he stumbled along in the dark, striking his feet against stones; and, being in great fear of robbers, of whom there were many in the city and more in the hills, he held his dagger in his hand, now and then brandishing it, and so approached the house of Milo, the usurer.

His heart stood still, as, crowded against the door of the house, he saw three figures, evidently the forms of robbers bent on making an entry; and, crying out at them, he ran bravely toward them, dagger in hand. So valiantly, indeed, did

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he smite that soon three lifeless bodies lay in the dust before the house; and, the door being opened to him by the tender and gentle handmaiden Photis, he was soon wrapped in happy dreams.

Judge, then, his dismay when, rosy-fingered Aurora having scarce left the chamber of Tithonus, to tinge with light the eastern sky, he heard a fierce knocking at the door, seconded with stern and official-sounding shouts, and presently the prefect's men burst in, and, having soundly pummeled him in token of his arrest, hailed him off bound to the theater, there to stand trial for murder before the eyes of all. Terrified, trembling in every limb, Lucius was dragged to the arena, and, to his horror, saw that the benches were well filled with a holiday throng gathered to make a mock of his sufferings and death. And, to add to this, there, on a broad bier, lay three forms outlined under a mantle of black, which unhappy Lucius divined to be the bodies of his three victims of the night before. And no sooner had the lictors of the prefect dragged him into a prominent place before the assembled multitude than the public prosecutor appeared and began a harangue as eloquent as it was merciless, calling on the judges to strike at this foreigner who had taken the lives of three young and noble citizens.

Then Lucius, feeling, as it were, that the hand of justice was upraised to strike him, addressed the assembly on his own behalf. He declared that he had seen the three men, palpably robbers, making a concerted and fierce attack on the house

LUCIUS ADDRESSED THE ASSEMBLY ON HIS OWN BEHALF





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of Milo, his host; that he had ordered them to be gone; and that they had refused, barbarous, blood-thirsty villains that they were, but, on the contrary, had made bold resistance.

“Their leader,” he continued, pathetically, “made at me with all his strength, caught me by the hair with both hands, bent my body backward, and would have smashed my skull with a stone, which he called to his companions to give him, had I not had the good-fortune to make a sure thrust at him and overthrow him. Presently, by a well-aimed blow at another, piercing through his shoulder-blade, I killed him clinging to my legs and biting my feet; and finally, as the third was all abroad and rushing wildly upon me, I ran him through the chest. And now, having labored for the welfare of the public, having vindicated the cause of peace, and having protected the house of my host, I should have imagined myself deserving of public approbation rather than punishment. Nor am I able to comprehend why, because I was excited by a justifiable feeling of vengeance against three terrible villains, I am thus summoned to this place at all to clear myself of the accusation. For nobody can prove I had a motive to commit the crime I stand charged with, either through the desire of booty or from animosity to the deceased robbers, none of whose faces did I ever see before this encounter.”

But the more eloquently Lucius pleaded, the more uncontrollably did the heartless Thessalians laugh, till a new diversion against him was un-

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expectedly created. Two women robed in funeral black, and one of them carrying an infant in her arms, came forward. The elder, weeping, declared that she was the mother of the three youths thus heartlessly murdered as they were returning home through the streets; the other, saying she was the widow of one of them, held up her infant to the people and, her face streaming with tears, begged them to avenge the loss of her husband, the father of her child.

Then the judge, declaring that Lucius must be put to the torture, to disclose the motive of his most heinous crime and the names of his fellow-criminals, ordered the rack to be brought, with pincers and cruel machines for eliciting confession.

While Lucius was terrified and horror-struck at these formidable appearances and his fears were doubled at the sad idea of leaving the world with a mutilated body, the elder of the two women, who all the time had been disturbing the proceedings of the court with her loud wailings, thus addressed the spectators:

“Most worthy citizens,” said she, “I pray you permit the dead bodies of my wretched sons to be uncovered, in order that the contemplation of their youth and beauty may instigate a just feeling of indignation and stir up the people’s rage in due proportion to the crime, before you nail to the cross that villain, their murderer.”

The spectators assented to the proposal of the old woman by acclamation, and the magistrate accordingly ordered the dead bodies that lay on



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the bier to be uncovered and the coverings to be removed by Lucius himself, with his own hands. In obedience to the commands, the lictors, without more ado, compelled him to comply. Unwilling to revive, as it were, his crime of the day before by a fresh display, he resisted and struggled a good deal, till at last they dragged from his side by force the hand to be used for his destruction. But when that hand, against his will overcome by stern necessity and yielded reluctantly, was extended over the corpses and withdrew the pall that concealed them, what a wonderful sight did ill-starred Lucius behold! For the corpses of the three murdered men were nothing but three inflated wine-skins pierced with the wounds he had inflicted in that terrible battle of the night before. The audience roared again with laughter, and at last Lucius recognized that he had been made a sacrifice, albeit involuntary, to the god of laughter on his festal day.

Well had it been for Lucius if he had straightway departed from that hilarious city, turning his back forever on its gates. But he was drawn once more to the house of Milo, not so much by the bonds of hospitality as by his fatal weakness for Photis, the pretty, pink-armed handmaiden. Photis, indeed, while she was cooking dainties for him on the stove, was very bewitching; yet, not content with this, she began presently to tell him of other witchery, and Lucius listened avid, never dreaming that he was destined once more

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to make an ass of himself, this time in woeful reality.

For Photis, as the terrifying shades of evening fell about them, drew nearer to him, and, with eyes big with fear, related to him that her mistress, Pamphile, was the most skilful of Thessalian witches; that she could darken the stars and put a mist about the sun; and, worst of all, that she could take on her strange forms of beasts or birds to work her wicked will. And nay, that tender and gentle handmaiden Photis assured young Lucius that that very night, that very hour, her ominous mistress Pamphile would doff humanity and indue the plumage of a bird, that she might fly forth from grim Milo's house and join a waiting lover in the hills.

The eyes of young Lucius were big with fear, big as Thessalian saucers, when, duly posted by sweet Photis at a crevice in the wall, he saw Pamphile enter on her necromantic rite. And, since the wings of a dove would have ill befitted such a one, he should have been the less surprised when, shaking from her the habiliments of womanhood, she took from a coffer a small box of ointment, one among many, and began to rub herself therewith from head to foot. Presently she was overtaken with tremblings and quiverings; and there came forth on her diminished form the members and plumage, not of a dove, but of an owl, the very dress of stealth and piracy for such a one as she. And, in a final wriggle having completed her metamorphosis, she beat her wings

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upon the air, and, straightway rising, fluttered forth, noiseless and menacing, from the open window.

Lucius turned to gentle Photis, who had seen all that he had seen, and not for the first time, yet who was horror-struck at the gruesome spectacle, and, such is the insatiable folly of youth, his one desire, instantly expressed, was to go and do the like. So, with such blandishments as pass current among the young, he beguiled sweet Photis to enter the chamber of her dread mistress and thence to purloin for him the needed ointment, so that he, too, on feathered pinions might fly forth into the night seeking adventures.

Whether because her mind was confused and fluttered by reason of his blandishments or of malice prepense, for such is oft the feminine heart, Photis, entering the magical chamber, seems to have suffered some confusion in her choice; for, when she returned to youthful Lucius bearing the box of ointment, and he, too, doffing human coverings, began to anoint himself, lo and behold, a terrible misfortune! For there came forth upon him no feathers of swift-gliding owl nor of any bird, but, instead, coarse hair of grayish brown; no wings appeared, but rather forelegs with small, hard hoofs; and where there should have been the tufted horn-feathers of the owl there were tufts, indeed, but steadily elongated, till they were as large as a man's hand; and where should have been the tail-feathers of an owl there appeared a tail, indeed, yet the tail of an ass.

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Whether this dire result was brought about by Photis, through treacherous intent, cannot surely be proven, for man has often suffered like metamorphosis at the hands of a maid; but sweet Photis, for the love she bore young Lucius and for the blandishments that had passed between them, did hasten to make such amends as might be, and whispered into one long and bristled ear that, when he wished once more to take on human likeness, the remedy was simple; he need only make a diet, not of accustomed thistles, but of roses, and hey, presto! the change would be accomplished.

While she was in the act of caressing his soft and velvety muzzle, shouts and the beating of doors resounded without, and, perhaps incited thereto by what had passed that morning in the theater, in burst a band of veritable robbers in search of the spoil of Milo, the usurer. Photis vanished, but Lucius, the ass, remained, only too conveniently for the robbers, for they presently loaded him with the plunder of his host's house and drove him forth with kicks and blows, seeking to make eloquent protest in correctest Latinity, yet getting no further than "hee-haw!"

That was, indeed, for him the beginning of painful trials and sad, illuminating experiences and pathetic failures. For, mindful of the secret that fair Photis had whispered into his asinine ear, he sought everywhere for a mouthful of roses and could never take kindly to thistles or barley straw. Once, while the robbers were on their way

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back to their cave, he came almost within touch of liberation; for the bandits drew up for rest and incidental plunder at the cottage of a farmer who in his garden had not only cabbages, but roses. Lucius, for whom anything resembling the food of his recent humanity was irresistible, went avidly toward the cabbages, intending first to appease imperative hunger and then to betake him to the rose-tree and renew his manly form. But he hesitated and shrank back, constrained by two reasons; first fear, because, while the robbers might spare, though they belabored a four-legged ass, they would assuredly fall unmercifully upon a sudden-appearing biped; then bashfulness, because, while sweet Photis had promised that the roses would restore his form, she had said nothing at all concerning clothes, and Lucius dreaded to find himself there, stark and unclad in broad sunlight.

The robbers took him to their cave, where, waited on by a horribly hilarious old hag, they banqueted on rich viands and counted their plunder. Presently they were rejoined by another section of the band, who haled to the cavern a fair princess in bonds, whom they were holding for ransom, having, most inhumanly, carried her off from her very nuptials, from the expectant arms of her young bridegroom. Here Lucius, although, or perhaps, because he was an ass, sought romantic glory, and, the robbers being gone upon a new foray, burst his leathern bridle, kicked the old hag into insensibility, induced the captive

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princess to mount his gray back, and made off down the road for liberty.

Lucius, being truthful even though an ass, fails not to record that, while they thus romantically proceeded in a donkey's gallop down the roadway, he often turned his tender muzzle, and, under pretext of nozzling his own gray ribs, furtively kissed the maiden's pretty feet. So they proceeded, happily enough, till they came to the high-road and to a place where two ways met. There discord arose between them, for the maiden, naturally enough, wished to go to the right, toward her home and the arms of her bridegroom, while Lucius, though now an ass, having overheard the robbers say that they were going that way, dreaded their return and pulled violently in the other direction. The maiden's pink heels were unavailing to deflect him, nor were his best efforts effectual to give her warning, for presently the robbers came homeward, and, with dire threats of punishment, bore both captives back to durance, or, rather, forced the one to bear the other.

Later, both escaped; and Lucius had many adventures, dire or droll, in search of a breakfast of roses, which, at last, he did attain at a certain festival of goddess Isis, at the fair city of Cenchræ, six miles from Corinth. Nay, the goddess herself appeared almost graciously to her asinine worshiper, and not only promised him deliverance, but made the way easy for him, even by a dream directing her priest to hold out to the imprisoned Lucius a garland of red roses, which

## HOW LUCIUS MADE AN ASS OF HIMSELF

straightway worked his release. Another priest handed him a linen tunic so swiftly that the multitude scarce discerned the marvelous transmigration.

Such is the tale Apuleius tells, and I think it is not so much a jest as an allegory of what befalls many, instigated thereto by such as Photis, the handmaiden, until such time as they find release through Isis, lady of wisdom. Be this as it may, such is the famed tale known to antiquity as "The Golden Ass."

## XVII

### BOCCACCIO AND HIS KIN

THERE are many amusing things in Boccaccio, so that one may say that he was the first of modern men who heartily laughed. Yet I find him somewhat difficult to quote. The truth is, that many of his stories, while very funny in their way, have something of a smoking-room flavor; they are as broad as they are long, very much broader even, sometimes.

But here is one, quite presentable, and, in its way, funny enough. The tale is told by Fiametta, who was, in truth, no "little flame," but the great flame who kindled conflagration in Giovanni Boccaccio's by no means asbestos heart. He instructs us in much detail concerning their loves, so that we have even an inventory of caresses; but that is beside the point. The gold-tressed lady relates that there was, in the fair city of Florence, a youth called Michael Scalza, who was the merriest and most agreeable fellow in the world and had still the rarest stories in hand, wherefore the young Florentines were exceedingly glad to have his company whenever they made a pleasure party among themselves. It



## BOCCACCIO AND HIS KIN

chanced one day, he being with certain folk at Monte Ughi, that the question was started among them of which was the best and noblest family of Florence. Some said the Uberti, others the Lamberti, and one this family, and another that, according as it occurred to his mind; which Scalza hearing, he fell a-laughing and said:

“Go to, what geese you are! You know not what you say. The best gentlemen and the oldest, not only of Florence, but of all the world or the Maremma, are the great Hobo family, a matter on which all the philosophers and every one who knows them agree!”

When the young men who had looked for quite another answer heard this, they jeered at him and said, “Thou mockest us, as if we knew not the Hoboes, even as thou dost.”

“By the Writ,” answered Scalza, “I mock you not; nay, I speak the truth, and if there be any here who will wage a supper on it, to be given to the winner and half a dozen companions of his choosing, I will willingly hold the wager; and I will do yet more for you, for I will abide by the judgment of whomsoever you will.”

Said one of them, called Neri Mannini, “I am ready to try to win the supper.”

Whereupon, having agreed together to take Piero di Fiorentino, in whose house they were, to judge, they betook themselves to him, followed by all the rest, who looked to see Scalza lose and to make merry over his confusion; and they recounted to Piero all that had passed.

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Piero, who was a discreet young man, having first heard Neri's argument, turned to Scalza and said to him, "And thou, how canst thou prove this which thou affirmest?"

"How, sayest thou?" answered Scalza. "Nay, I will prove it by such reasoning that not only thou, but my opponent also will acknowledge that I speak the truth! You know that the ancients are, the nobler they are; and so it was said but now among these. Now the Hoboes are more ancient than any one else, so that they are nobler; and if I can demonstrate that they are the most ancient, I shall undoubtedly have won my wager. You must know, then, that the Hoboes were made by the Almighty Creator in the days when He first began to draw; but the rest of mankind were made after He knew how to draw. And to assure yourselves that in this I say the truth, do but consider the Hoboes in comparison with other folk. Whereas you see all the rest of mankind with faces well composed and duly proportioned, you may see the Hoboes, this one with a countenance very long and narrow, and that with a face out of all measure broad; one has too long and another too short a nose, and the third has a chin jutting out and turned upward, and huge jaw-bones that show, as though they were those of an ass, while some there be who have one eye bigger than the other, and yet some who have one eye set lower than the other, like the faces that children are accustomed to make when first they begin to learn to draw. Wherefore, as I

## BOCCACCIO AND HIS KIN

have already said, it is abundantly apparent that the Almighty made them while He was learning to draw; so that they are more ancient, and consequently nobler, than the rest of mankind."

At this, both Piero, who was the judge, and Neri, who had wagered the supper, and all the rest, hearing Scalza's comical argument and bethinking themselves of the Hoboes, fell a-laughing and affirmed that he was right, for that the Hoboes were assuredly the noblest and most ancient gentlemen that were to be found, not in Florence alone, but in the whole world and the Maremma.

So much for the Decameron. Here is a tale from the life of its author. It seems, says Boccaccio's biographer, that during the time he was writing it he found himself taken by a very beautiful woman, a widow, who pretended to encourage him, perhaps because of his fame, provoked his advances, allured him to write to her, and then, laughing at this middle-aged and obese lover, gave his letters to her young favorite, who scattered them about Florence. Boccaccio had already been hurt by the criticisms some had offered on his work. This deception by the widow exasperated him, his love for women turned to loathing, and he now composed a sort of invective against them, which was called the "Corbaccio," which seems to mean "the rap." The story is as follows: A lover finds himself lost in the forest of love, and is delivered by a spirit. The lover is Boccaccio; the spirit is the husband of the widow,

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who has returned from hell, where his avarice and complaisance have brought him. In setting Boccaccio in the right way, the spirit of the husband reveals to him all the imperfections, artifices, and defects, and the hidden vices and weaknesses of his wife. "Had you seen her first thing in the morning with her night-cap on," and so forth, which suggests why Boccaccio is hard to quote. But the jest is a bitter one, rather satire than humor, and so somewhat wide of our mark.

In one of the stories of the Decameron Boccaccio introduces Giotto, the painter, who, he says, "had so excellent a genius that there was nothing of all which Nature, mother and mover of all things, presents unto us by the ceaseless revolution of the heavens, but he with pencil and pen and brush depicted it, and that so closely that not like, nay, but rather the thing itself it seemed, insomuch that men's visual sense is found to have been oftentimes deceived, taking for real that which was but feigned. Wherefore, he, having brought back to the light this art, may deservedly be called one of the chief glories of Florence."

The author of the Decameron was also the warm life-long friend of Petrarca and the biographer of Dante, so that he binds together the great men of a great age. One of the contemporaries of Boccaccio has recorded this tale of Dante, which is, perhaps, the closest approach the great poet of the *Divina Commedia* ever made to a practical joke.

One day, while Dante was passing the Gate of

## BOCCACCIO AND HIS KIN

Saint Peter he heard a blacksmith beating iron upon the anvil, and singing some of Dante's verses like a song, jumbling the lines together and confusing them, so that it seemed to Dante he was receiving a great injury. He said nothing, but, going into the blacksmith's shop, he took up his hammer and pincers and scales and many other things, and threw them out into the road.

The blacksmith, turning around upon him, cried out, "What the deuce are you doing? Are you mad?"

"What are *you* doing?" said Dante.

"I am working at my proper business," said the blacksmith, "and you are spoiling my work, throwing it out into the road."

Said Dante, "If you do not like me to spoil your things, do not spoil mine."

"What things of yours am I spoiling?" said the man.

And Dante replied, "You are singing something of mine, but not as I made it. I have no other trade but this, and you spoil it for me."

The blacksmith, too proud to acknowledge his fault, but not knowing how to reply, gathered up his things and returned to his work; and when he sang again, sang "Tristram and Launcelot," and let Dante alone.

Which is at least mildly funny. So much for the thirteen hundreds in Italy. In the early fifteen hundreds Vasari was born, and in due time began to write his stories of the great Italian artists, who are still Italy's glory. He records

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some humorous things, for instance this, of Michael Angelo. A certain painter, says Vasari, had a picture wherein was an ox which looked better than the rest. Michael Angelo Buonarotti, being asked why the painter had made it more life-like than the rest, replied, "Every painter succeeds best in a portrait of himself."

Another painter, Vasari continues, had executed a historical picture in which every figure was copied from some other artist, insomuch that no part of the picture was his own. It was shown to Michael Angelo Buonarotti, who, when he had seen it, was asked by a very intimate friend of his what he thought of it.

He replied, "He has done well, but at the Day of Judgment, when all bodies will resume their own limbs again, I do not know what will become of that historical picture, for there will be nothing left of it."

Baldassarre Castiglione, a generation earlier, has some good things, such as this. The Bishop of Corvia, he says, in order to find out the intentions of the Pope, one day said to him: "Holy father, it is commonly reported in all Rome, and even in the palace, that your Holiness is about to make me governor."

The Pope replied, "Never mind what they say: they are nothing but low-tongued rascals."

The same writer records that a certain pleader, to whom his adversary said, "What art thou barking for?" replied, "Because I see a thief."

Again, he says, as Duke Frederic of Urbina

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was one day talking of what was to be done with a large quantity of earth which had been dug up in order to lay the foundation of his palace, an abbot who was present said:

“My lord, I have been thinking where it should be put, and I have a good idea: order a great ditch to be dug, and you may there dispose of the earth without further hindrance.”

The duke replied, not without a smile, “What are we to do with the earth which will be dug from this new ditch?”

The abbot answered, “Let it be made big enough to hold both.”

And thus, although the duke tried to show him that the larger the ditch the more earth would be dug out of it, he could not understand that it could not be made large enough to contain both heaps, but only replied, “Make it so much the larger.”

Here is a little fable, somewhat in Lucian's vein. Jove having one day drunk more nectar than usual and being in a pleasant humor, the fancy took him to make some present to mankind. And, having called Momus, the god of laughter, he gave him what he had decided upon, packed in a portmanteau, and sent him down to the earth.

“Oh!” cried Momus, when he arrived in a chariot, to the human race, “Oh, truly blessed generation! Behold how Jove, liberal of his benefits toward you, opens his generous hand! Come, hasten, receive! Never complain again that he has made you short-sighted. His gift quite compensates you for this defect.”

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So saying, he unfastened the portmanteau and emptied out of it an enormous heap of pairs of spectacles. Behold, then, the whole of mankind busy picking them up; every man has his pair—all are content, and thank Jove for having acquired so excellent an aid to their eyesight. But the spectacles caused them to see things under a deceitful appearance. To one man a thing seems blue, while another sees it yellow, one thinks it is white, and another black; so that to every one it appears different.

But what of that? Every individual was delighted with his pair and quite taken up with it, and insisted on its being the best. My dear friends, we are the heirs of these people, and the spectacles have come to us as our heritage. Some see things one way, and some another, and every one thinks he is right.

Yet another tale of Dante, to end the record of the great time. The author of the *Divina Commedia*, meditating apart one day in the church of Santa Maria Novella, was accosted by a bore, who asked him many foolish questions. After vainly endeavoring to get rid of him, Dante at last said, "Before I reply to thee do thou tell me the answer to a certain question," and then asked him, "*Which is the greatest of all beasts?*"

The gentleman replied that, on the authority of Pliny, he believed it to be the elephant.

Then said Dante, "O elephant, leave me in peace!" and, so saying, he turned and left him.



## XVIII ✓

### THE MUSICAL LAUGHTER OF ITALY

A FLORENTINE writer of children's stories is responsible for this little tale.

"Do tell me, mamma, what is the difference between 'authentic news' and 'various news'?"

"'Authentic,' " replies his mother, "is what really happens, and 'various' is what the journalists make up to fill the paper. Be very careful to tell the truth; if you don't, you will go to purgatory for seventy years, and in this world every one will take you for a journalist!"

An industrious gentleman, to whom all lovers of Italian humor are indebted, has made a collection of the little things which the journalists of the land of Dante invent "to fill the paper," and from these I venture to cull a wreath of flowers.

Take, for instance, this tale of a fond father, whose little son was begging him to buy him a tin trumpet.

"No, I won't," cried his father; "I don't want to have my head split by your noise!"

"Oh no, papa! I should only blow it when you were asleep!"

A customer at a Neapolitan restaurant, osten-

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tatiously sniffing at his plate, addressed the waiter:

"I say, waiter, this fish isn't fresh!"

"Oh yes, it is, sir!"

"What? I assure you it smells high."

The waiter replied confidentially, "No, sir, you're mistaken; it's that other gentleman's cutlet."

At a Roman café some one asked, "Excuse me, sir; does the *Daily* appear every day?"

The grave man thus interrogated replied, in a solemn and professional manner, not without a sting of bitter irony:

"Of course, sir. You might have seen that by the very title of the paper."

"Then, sir, on your principle the *Century* should only appear once every hundred years."

Said Amico to Beluomo: "The intelligence of animals is something extraordinary. For example, my dog, Fido, is a wonderfully clever fellow. When I am staying in the country I send him to the nearest village, and he executes all the commissions I give him better than any servant."

Said Beluomo in reply: "Well, I have seen stranger things than that in India. I knew an old elephant to whom every evening they used to give orders for the next day's purchases; and, as his memory was not quite what it used to be, the intelligent animal always tied a knot in his trunk, so as to be sure not to forget."

Gennaro, of Naples, said one day to a friend, "I receive an immense number of anonymous

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letters which are quite insulting; I despise them too much to let it vex me. When I lower myself so far as to write anonymous letters, I always sign them."

X / Said a Venetian recruit to his corporal, "If I told you you were an ass, what would you do, sir?"

Said the corporal, "I should put you under arrest."

"And if I only thought it?"

"Then, of course, I could do nothing. For thoughts are invisible, and cannot be brought in evidence."

"Well, I *am* thinking it!"

A person who had made a large fortune by converting best Virginia peanuts into pure olive-oil, in giving an invitation to dinner to a celebrated violinist, who had just given a concert at the house of a banker, said to him with intentional carelessness:

"Oh, by the by, you will bring your violin, won't you?"

"Thank you," replied the artist, "but my violin never dines out."

A brave captain, at the manœuvres in Tuscany, said, "I want all the corporals to give the word of command together!"

A moment later there was a general and vigorous shout of "Shoulder arms!"

X The captain cried out furiously, "I hear several corporals saying nothing at all!"

A well-known artist in Milan suffers horribly

## WHY THE WORLD LAUGHS

from corns. His toes are so sensitive that he cries out when they are hardly touched. It has gone so far that, when he steps on his own boots which he has just put out to be cleaned, he imagines that his feet are inside, and yells, like one possessed:

“Ah-h-h! Rhinoceros! Look where you are stepping!”

In the Naples police court, a witness was once asked where he lived.

“With Gennaro,” he replied.

“And where does Gennaro live?”

“With me.”

“But where do you and Gennaro live?”

“Together.”

An elegant young Florentine had been spending money right and left, so that he found himself unable to pay his hotel bill. Knowing that his father was perfectly hopeless, he determined to apply to his uncle, a blood relative, be it understood, not a Lombard. So he wrote as follows:

“Dear Uncle,—If you could see how I blush with shame while I am writing, you would pity me. For I have to ask you for a hundred francs, and do not know how to overcome my unwillingness. . . . No, it is impossible. . . . I prefer to die! . . . I send you this by a messenger, who will await your answer. Believe me, my dearest uncle, your most obedient nephew.

“P.S.—Overcome with shame for what I have written, I have been running after the messenger to take my letter back, but I could not catch

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him. Heaven grant that something may happen to stop him, or that the letter may be lost!"

The uncle was a man of heart. After pondering the letter he replied:

"My beloved Nephew,—Console yourself, and blush no longer. Providence has heard your prayers. The messenger lost your letter. Your affectionate uncle."

Which is why, perhaps, a certain wise man has said that Italian humor is Irish humor pitched in the minor key. There is, indeed, something Hibernian in the following popular tale.

Tesetto was very angry with Zerbo, the physician, when Zerbo said to him: "Hold your tongue, you scoundrel! Don't I know your father was a bricklayer?"

Tesetto immediately replied, "No one could have told you that but your own father, who carried the bricks and mortar for him."

This little story also somehow suggests an Irish handmaiden.

Said her mistress, "Rosa, did you count the silver last night?"

"Yes'm; there's a fork and a spoon short!"

"Do you know where they are?"

"Yes'm; under the kitchen table."

It is right that Italy, which gives us the vocabulary of music, and so many gifted musicians, should contribute the best jests at their expense. In this sort nothing is funnier than what has been written by Antonio Ghislanzoni, the librettist of Verdi's "Aida," himself a musician of excellent

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parts. For certain passages thereof, I am indebted to Werner's admirable volume.

Writing of music-makers, and transforming the ancient proverb, "Tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are," into "Tell me what instrument you blow into or scrape on, and I will tell you your fortune," he begins:

"The clarinet consists of a severe cold in the head, contained in a tube of yellow wood. A chiropodist may be produced by study and hard work, but the clarinet-player is born, not made. The citizen predestined to the clarinet has an intelligence which is almost obtuse up to the age of eighteen, an epoch of incubation, when he begins to feel in his nose the first thrills of his fatal vocation. Then his intellect, limited even then, ceases its development altogether; but his nasal organ, by compensation, assumes colossal proportions. At twenty he buys his first clarinet for fourteen francs; and three months later his landlord gives him notice. At twenty-five he is admitted into the band of the National Guard. He dies of a broken heart on finding that not one of his three sons shows the slightest inclination for the instruments into which he has blown all his wits.

"The man who plays the trombone," pursues our wit, "is always one who seeks oblivion in its society, oblivion of domestic troubles, or consolation for love betrayed. The man who has held a metal tube in his mouth for six months finds himself proof against every disillusion. At the age of

## THE MUSICAL LAUGHTER OF ITALY

fifty he finds that, of all human passions, nothing is left him but an insatiable thirst. Later on, if he wishes to obtain the position of porter in a gentleman's house or aspires to the hand of a woman with a delicate ear, he tries to lay aside his instrument, but the taste for loud notes and strong liquors only leaves him with life. Finally, after a harmonious career of seventy-eight years, he is likely to die of grief because the saloon-keeper will not give him a glass of wine on credit.

“The accordeon is the first instrument of youth and innocent hearts. He who is fated thereto begins playing it in the back room of his father's shop, the latter, as a rule, being a chemist by profession, and continues it up to the age of fifteen. At this period, if he does not die, he deserts the accordeon for the harmonium. This instrument, by reasons of its monotonous sounds and its tremendous plaintiveness, acts on the nerves of those who hear, and predisposes those who play it to melancholy. The harmonium-player is usually tender and lymphatic of constitution, with blue eyes, and eats only white meats and farinaceous foods. If a man, he is called Oscar; if of the fairer sex, she is named Adelaide. At home he or she is in the habit of playing after dinner, the spirits of the family being, therefore, more or less cheerfully disposed, and will entertain the family with the ‘Miserere’ or ‘Il Trovatore,’ or some similar melody. The harmonium-player weeps easily. After practising on the instrument

## WHY THE WORLD LAUGHS

for fifteen years or so, he or she dissolves altogether, and is converted into a rivulet.

“The organ is a complicated and majestic instrument of a clerical character, and is destined, by its great volume of sound, to drown the flat singing of the clergy and the congregation in church. The organist is usually a person sent into the world with the vocation for making a great noise without undue expenditures of strength; one who wants to blow harder than others without wearing out his own bellows. He makes a kind and good-tempered husband. At the age of sixty he becomes deaf, and then begins to think his own playing perfection. At seventy he usually dies of a broken heart, because a new priest, who knows not Joseph, instead of asking him to dine at the principal table with the ecclesiastics and other church authorities, has relegated him to an inferior place with the sacristan and the grave-digger.

“The unhappy man who succumbs to the fascinations of the flute is never one who has attained the full development of his intellectual faculties. He always has a pointed nose, marries a short-sighted woman, and dies run over by an omnibus. The man who plays the flute frequently adds to his other infirmities a mania for keeping tame weasels, turtle-doves, or guinea-pigs.

“To play the 'cello, you require to have long, thin fingers; but it is still more indispensable to have very long hair falling over a greasy coat-collar. In case of fire, the 'cellist will save his 'cello first, and then his wife. His greatest satis-





HE CAN EXPRESS ALL POSSIBLE GRIEFS AND SORROWS

TO THE  
MEMBERS OF THE  
COMMISSION ON  
THE STATUS OF WOMEN

## THE MUSICAL LAUGHTER OF ITALY

faction is that of 'making the strings weep.' Sometimes he makes his wife and family do the same, because of the leanness of the larder. He can express through his loftily attuned strings all possible griefs and sorrows except those of his audience and his creditors."

This gifted gentleman, half barytone, half journalist, had a pretty wit; and we can find present application in the saying, "How many old phrases are required to make a new electoral programme!"

There is grace, too, in the little story of the sausage-maker, whose boy came weeping home from school.

"As usual," exclaimed the parent, "I suppose you did not know your lessons, and the teacher called you an ass, as you deserved!"

"Ye-yes!" replied the sobbing child, "he did call me an ass, and then—"

"Well, what then?"

"He said, 'Well, after all it is no wonder; *like father, like child!*' "

## XIX

### DON QUIXOTE AND THE HUMOR OF SPAIN

IS Don Quixote funny? I have been putting the question to my friends. Some of them say that, while the lean knight appeals irresistibly to them, they never wish to laugh at him; they laugh with him, perhaps, but, even more, they respect and love him. One friend tells me that he finds the by-play genuine comedy; the talks between the worthy Don and the plump Sancho Panza arouse in him the inclination to laugh, though he may get no farther than a gentle smile. Another friend, who has loved Cervantes's hero for years, touched my heart by saying that the nobility and pathos of Don Quixote bring tears rather than laughter; yet I do not think this would debar the book from a claim to genuine humor.

One may with good reason doubt whether the knight-errant of La Mancha was at first intended to be matter of laughter; one may go farther, and doubt whether Cervantes, for all his protestations, had any defined purpose at all in creating him, his genius leaning over his shoulder and guiding the pen; and one may be deeply convinced that Don Quixote was all the better for

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that. But let us test the matter. Let us take, for example, the most famous incident in the whole history, the episode of the windmills.

Don Quixote in his rusty armor, with patched helmet and borrowed buckler, is mounted on the lean and whimsical Rosinante. Sancho Panza, fat, talkative, timorous, follows, with saddle-bag and wine-skins, on the back of the amiable Dapple. In the oblique rays of the dawn, they are going southward toward the Sierra Morena, crossing the famous Campo de Montiel. The talk turns on the rewards of knight-errants and their squires, and the possible promotion of Sancho's good, rustic spouse when her husband, from squire to the knight, shall have become governor of the promised island.

At this point they came in sight of thirty or forty windmills that there are on that plain, and as soon as Don Quixote saw them, he said to his squire:

"Fortune is arranging matters better than we could have shaped our desires ourselves, for look here, friend Sancho Panza, where thirty or more monstrous giants present themselves, all of whom I mean to engage in battle and slay, and with whose spoils we shall begin to make our fortunes; for this is righteous warfare, and it is God's good service to sweep so evil a brood from off the face of the earth."

"What giants?" said Sancho Panza.

"Those thou seest there," answered his master—"with the long arms, and some have them nearly two leagues long."

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“Look, your Worship,” said Sancho; “what we see there are not giants, but windmills; and what seem to be their arms are the sails turned by the wind that make the millstone go.”

“It is easy to see,” replied Don Quixote, “that thou art not used to this business of adventures; those are giants; and if thou art afraid, away with thee out of this, and betake thyself to prayer while I engage them in fierce and unequal combat.”

So saying, he gave the spur to his steed Rosinante, heedless of the cries his squire Sancho sent after him, warning him that most certainly they were windmills, and not giants, he was going to attack. He, however, was so positive they were giants that he neither heard the cry of Sancho nor perceived, near as he was, what they were, but made at them shouting, “Fly not, cowards and vile beings, for it is a single knight that attacks you.”

A slight breeze at this moment sprang up, and the great sails began to move, seeing which Don Quixote exclaimed, “Though ye flourish more arms than the giant Briareus, ye have to reckon with me.”

So saying and commending himself with all his heart to his Lady Dulcinea, imploring her to support him in such a peril, with lance in rest and covered with his buckler, he charged at Rosinante’s fullest gallop and fell upon the first mill that stood in front of him; but as he drove his lance-point into the sail the wind whirled it round with such

## DON QUIXOTE AND THE HUMOR OF SPAIN

force that it shivered the lance to pieces, sweeping with it horse and rider, who went rolling over on the plain in a sorry condition. Sancho hastened to his assistance as fast as his ass could go, and when he came up found him unable to move, with such a shock had Rosinante fallen with him.

“God bless me!” said Sancho. “Did I not tell your Worship to mind what you were about, for they were only windmills? And no one could have made any mistake about it but one who had something of the same kind in his head.”

“Hush, friend Sancho!” replied Don Quixote. “The fortunes of war, more than any other, are liable to frequent fluctuations; and, moreover, I think, and it is the truth, that that same sage Friston, who carried off my study and books, has turned these giants into windmills in order to rob me of the glory of vanquishing them, such is the enmity he bears me; but in the end his wicked arts will avail but little against my good sword.”

“God order it as He may,” said Sancho Panza; and, helping him to rise, got him up again on Rosinante, whose shoulder was half out; and then, discussing the late adventure, they followed the road to Puerto Lapice, for there, said Don Quixote, they could not fail to find adventures in abundance and variety.

Well, gentle reader, how is it with you? Have you been moved to laughter by the famed adventure of the windmills? But I think there is a far more humorous episode a little farther on in this eventful history.

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The lean knight and the fat squire, mounted on the inseparable Rosinante and Dapple, fared forth on the great sunlit highway of the south, and in due time encountered the strange adventures of the battle with the Biscayan, the inn which the Don took to be an enchanted castle, where Sancho was tossed in the blanket and many other wonders befell. After the fierce battle of the funeral cortège, when the tumult and the shouting had died away, Sancho said to one of the company:

“If by chance these gentlemen should want to know who was the hero that served them so, your Worship may tell them that he is the famous Don Quixote of La Mancha, otherwise called the Knight of the Rueful Countenance.”

Don Quixote presently asked Sancho what had induced him to call him the “Knight of the Rueful Countenance” more then than at any other time.

“I will tell you,” answered Sancho; “it was because I have been looking at you for some time by the light of the torch held by that unfortunate, and verily your Worship has got of late the most ill-favored countenance I ever saw: it must be either owing to the fatigue of this combat or else to the loss of your teeth.”

“It is not that,” replied Don Quixote, “but because the sage whose duty it will be to write the history of my achievements must have thought it proper that I should take some distinctive name, as all knights of yore did; one being ‘He of the Burning Sword,’ another ‘He of the Unicorn,’ this one ‘He of the Damsels,’ that ‘He of the



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Phoenix,' another 'The Knight of the Griffin,' and another 'He of the Death,' and by these names and designations they were known all the world round; and so I say that the sage aforementioned must have put it in your mouth and mind just now to call me 'The Knight of the Rueful Countenance,' as I intend to call myself from this day forward; and that the same name may fit me better—I mean, when the opportunity offers—to have a very rueful countenance painted on my shield."

"There is no occasion, Senor, for wasting time or money on that countenance," said Sancho, "for all that need be done is for your Worship to show your own, face to face, to those who look at you, and without anything more, either image or shield, they will call you 'Him of the Rueful Countenance': and believe me I am telling the truth, for I assure, Senor (and in good part be it said), hunger and the loss of your grinders have given you such an ill-favored face that, as I say, the rueful picture may be very well spared."

Don Quixote laughed at Sancho's pleasantry; nevertheless he resolved to call himself by that name and have his shield or buckler painted as he had devised. They made their way toward the mountains; and, after proceeding some little distance between two hills, they found themselves in a wide and retired valley, where they alighted, and Sancho unloaded his beast and stretched upon the green grass; with hunger for sauce, they breakfasted, dined, lunched, and supped all at once,

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satisfying their appetites with more than one store of cold meat which the dead man's clerical gentlemen (who seldom put themselves on short allowance) had brought with them on their sumpter mule.

But another piece of ill luck befell them, which Sancho held the worst of all, and that was that they had no wine to drink, nor even water to moisten their lips; and as thirst tormented them, Sancho, observing that the meadow where they were was full of green and tender grass, said:

“It cannot be, Senor, but that this grass is a proof that there must be hard by some spring or brook to give it moisture, so it would be well done to move a little farther on, that we may find some place where we may quench this terrible thirst that plagues us, which, beyond a doubt, is more distressing than hunger.”

The advice seemed good to Don Quixote, and, he leading Rosinante by the bridle and Sancho, the ass, by the halter, after he had packed away upon him the remains of the supper, they advanced up the meadow feeling their way, for the darkness of the night made it impossible to see anything; but they had not gone two hundred paces when a loud noise of water, as if falling from great, high rocks, struck their ears. The sound cheered them greatly; but, halting to make out by listening from what quarter it came, they heard unseasonably another noise which marred the satisfaction the sound of the water gave them, especially for Sancho, who was by nature timid and

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faint-hearted; they heard, I say, strokes falling with a measured beat and a certain rattling of iron and chains that, together with the furious din of the water, would have struck terror into any heart but Don Quixote's. The night was, as has been said, dark, and they had happened to reach a spot among some tall trees, whose leaves, stirred by a gentle breeze, made a low, ominous sound; so that, what with the loneliness, the place, the darkness, the noise of the water, and the rustling of the leaves, everything inspired awe and dread; more especially as they perceived that the strokes did not cease, nor the wind lull, nor morning approach; to all which might be added their ignorance as to where they were. But Don Quixote, supported by his intrepid heart, leaped on Rosinante, and, bracing his buckler on his arm, brought his pike to the slope, and said:

“Friend Sancho, know that I, by Heaven's will, have been born in this our iron age to revive in it the age of gold. Thou dost mark well, faithful and trusty squire, the gloom of this night, its strange silence, the dull, confused murmur of those trees, the awful sound of that water, in quest of which we came, that seems as though it were dashing itself down from the mountains of the moon, and that incessant hammering that wounds and pains our ears; which things, all together and each of itself, are enough to instil fear, dread, and dismay into the breast of Mars himself. Well, then, all this I put before thee is but an incentive and stimulant to my spirit, making my heart burst

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in my bosom through eagerness to engage in this adventure, arduous as it promises to be; therefore tighten Rosinante's girths a little, and God be with thee! Wait for me here three days, and no more, and if in that time I come not back, thou canst return to our village, and thence, to do me a favor and a service, thou wilt go to El Toboso, where thou shalt say to my incomparable Lady Dulcinea that her captive knight hath died in attempting things that might make him worthy of being called hers!"

But timorous, sly Sancho would by no means tighten the girths or allow his master to leave him in the dread dark; indeed, by guile, he hobbled the foreleg of Rosinante, and then, when the gaunt beast could not move, persuaded the Don that witchcraft and the might of his enemies, the enchanters, were the cause of it; and so they awaited the dawn, the one dauntless, the other shivering.

Dawn brought the climax to a night of horrors, and they began to move toward that quarter whence the sound of the water and of the strokes seemed to come. Advancing some distance through the shady chestnut-trees, they came upon a little meadow at the foot of some high rocks, down which a mighty rush of water flung itself. They went, it might be, a hundred paces farther, when, on turning a corner, the true cause, beyond the possibility of any mistake, of that dread-sounding and to them awe-inspiring noise that had kept them all the night in such fear and perplexity, appeared plain and obvious; and it

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was (if, reader, thou art not disgusted and disappointed) six fulling hammers which, by their alternate strokes, made all the din.

When Don Quixote perceived what it was, he was struck dumb and rigid from head to foot. Sancho glanced at him and saw him with his head bent down upon his breast in manifest mortification; and Don Quixote glanced at Sancho and saw him with his cheeks puffed out and his mouth full of laughter, and evidently ready to explode with it, and in spite of his vexation he could not help laughing at the sight of him; and when Sancho saw his master begin, he let go so heartily that he had to hold his sides with both hands to keep himself from bursting with laughter. Four times he stopped, and as many times did his laughter break out afresh with the same violence as at first, above all when he heard him say mockingly, "Thou must know, friend Sancho, that of Heaven's will I was born in this our iron age to revive in it the age of gold."

To me, gentle reader, the whole of this episode, from which I have but gathered purple patches, is the funniest thing in the book; I like it best because it shows the beloved Don possessed not only of knightly valor and gentleness, but also of a sense of humor. Here we laugh with him, rather than at him, which is the essence of true humor. Therefore, I hold that this is one of the best incidents in the whole literature of humor, one of the most laughable, and at the same time one of the most humane.

## XX

### AN ASININE STORY

A LEADING metropolitan daily has recently, in all seriousness, discussed the question why all Chinamen are funny. I have heard it debated among smug and stiff-necked Saxons, why the mere presence of an Irishman is an incentive to mirth. May I, without peril from the association of ideas and names, venture to pose a problem of far more ancient date: Why is it that the harmless, necessary ass, who is the very embodiment of long-suffering wisdom, should for ages have been deemed a comic personage? I venture to say that the mere appearance of his name in the title of this tale has already made you smile; indeed, I counted on that when I chose the title. But at the same time I am convinced that neither you nor I could tell the reason why. Be that as it may, I must lay philosophizing aside and come to the story, which runs thus:

“You must know,” said the narrator, “that in a village four and a half leagues from this inn it so happened that one of the village treasurers, by the tricks and roguery of a servant-girl of his (it’s too long a tale to tell), lost an ass: and though

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he did all he possibly could to find it, it was all to no purpose.

“A fortnight might have gone by,” so the story goes, “since the ass had been missing, when, as the treasurer who had lost it was standing in the plaza, another treasurer of the same town said to him:

“‘Pay me for good news, friend; your ass has turned up.’

“‘That I will, and well, friend,’ said the other. ‘But tell us, where has he turned up?’

“‘In the forest,’ said the finder; ‘I saw him this morning without pack-saddle or harness of any sort, and so lean that it went to one’s heart to see him. I tried to drive him before me and bring him to you, but he is already so wild and shy that when I went near him he made off into the thickest part of the forest. If you have a mind that we two should go back and look for him, let me put up this she ass at my house and I’ll be back at once.’

“‘You will be doing me a great kindness,’ said the owner of the ass, ‘and I’ll try to pay it back in the same coin.’

“It is with all these circumstances, and in the very same way I am telling it now, that those who know all about the matter tell the story.

“Well, then, the two treasurers set off on foot, arm in arm, for the forest; and, coming to the place where they hoped to find the ass, they could not find him, nor was he to be seen anywhere about, search as they might. Seeing, then, that there

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was no sign of him, the treasurer who had seen him said to the other:

“Look here, friend; a plan has occurred to me by which, beyond a doubt, we shall manage to discover the animal, even if he is stowed away in the bowels of the earth, not to say the forest. Here it is. I can bray to perfection, and if you can ever so little, the thing’s as good as done.’

“Ever so little did you say, friend?” said the other. ‘By heaven, I’ll not yield to anybody, not even to the asses themselves.’

“We’ll soon see,’ said the second treasurer, ‘for my plan is that you should go one side of the forest, and I the other, so as to go all round about it; and every now and then you will bray, and I will bray; and it cannot be but the ass will hear us and answer us if he is in the forest.’

“To which the owner of the ass replied, ‘It’s an excellent plan, I declare, friend, and worthy of your great genius’; and, the two separating as agreed, it so fell out that they brayed almost at the same moment, and each, deceived by the braying of the other, ran to look, fancying the ass had turned up at last. When they came in sight of one another, said the loser:

“Is it possible, friend, that it was not my ass that brayed?”

“No, it was I,’ said the other.

“Well, then, I can tell you, friend,’ said the ass’s owner, ‘that between you and an ass there’s not an atom of difference as far as braying goes,



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for I never in all my life saw or heard anything more natural.'

"'Those praises and compliments belong to you more justly than to me, friend,' said the inventor of the plan; 'for, by the Creator who made me, you might give a couple of brays odds to the best and most finished brayer in the world; the tone you have got is deep, your voice is well kept up as to time and pitch, and your finishing notes come thick and fast; in fact, I own myself beaten, and yield the palm to you, and give in to you in this rare accomplishment.'

"'Well then,' said the owner, 'I'll set a higher value on myself for the future, and consider that I know something, as I have an excellence of some sort; for though I always thought I brayed well, I never supposed I came up to the pitch of perfection you say.'

"'And I say, too,' said the second, 'that there are rare gifts going to loss in the world, and that they are ill bestowed upon those who don't know how to make use of them.'

"'Ours,' said the owner of the ass, 'unless it be in cases like this we now have in hand, cannot be of any service to us, and, even in this, Heaven grant they may be of some use!'

"So saying, they separated and took to their braying once more; but every instant they were deceiving each other and coming to meet each other again, until they arranged by way of countersign, so as to know it was they and not the ass, to give two brays, one after the other.

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In this way, doubling the brays at every step, they made the complete circuit of the forest, but the lost ass never gave them an answer or even the sign of one. How could the poor, ill-starred brute have answered when, in the thickest part of the forest, they found him devoured by wolves? As soon as he saw him his owner said:

“‘I was wondering he did not answer, for if he wasn’t dead he’d have brayed when he heard us, or he’d have been no ass; but for the sake of having heard you bray to such perfection, friend, I count the trouble I have taken to look for him well bestowed, even though I have found him dead.’

“‘It’s in a good hand, friend,’ said the other; ‘if the abbot sings well the acolyte is not much behind him.’

“So they returned disconsolate and hoarse to their village, where they told their friends, neighbors, and acquaintances what had befallen them in their search for the ass, each crying up the other’s perfection in braying. The whole story came to be known and spread abroad through the villages of the neighborhood; and the evil one, who never sleeps, with his love for sowing dissensions and scattering discord everywhere, blowing mischief about and making quarrels out of nothing, contrived to make the people of the other towns fall to braying whenever they saw any one from our village, as if to throw the braying of our treasurers in their teeth. Then the boys took to it, which was the same thing for it as getting into the hands and mouths of all the devils of hell; and braying

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spread from one town to another in such a way that the men of the braying town are as easy to be known as blacks are to be known from whites; and the unlucky joke has gone so far that several times the scoffed at have come out in arms and in a body to do battle with the scoffers, and neither king nor bishop, fear nor shame, can mend matters. To-morrow or the day after, I believe, the men of my town—that is, the braying town—are going to take the field against another village two leagues away from ours, one of those that persecute us most; and that we may turn out well prepared I have bought these lances and halberds you have seen. These are the curious things I told you I had to tell, and if you don't think them so, I have got no others." And with this the worthy fellow brought the story to a close.

The place of the telling of this asinine tale was in the stable of an inn, in the heart of the province of La Mancha, southward from Madrid. The teller was a man of lances and halberds, who was stabling his mule. Chief among the hearers was a certain gaunt knight of La Mancha, who, that he might hear the tale the sooner, with his own hands helped the sifting of the barley and the cleaning-out of the manger; a knight who, from some quaint fancy of knight-errantry, bred of the reading of monstrous tales of chivalry, had chosen to call himself Don Quixote of La Mancha, true lover and servant of Dona Dulcinea del Toboso.

Here is a wicked little story, from the same golden clime and golden time. An old man,

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jealous of his pretty young wife and a certain friend of his, a merchant and a widower, fell ill of a mortal disease. Knowing his case was hopeless, he said to his wife:

“You know, my dear, that I cannot escape this deadly sickness; what I beg of you is, if you care to please me, that you will not marry that friend of mine, who often comes to the house, and of whom I have been somewhat jealous.”

“Dear husband,” replied she, “I could not if I would, for I am already engaged to somebody else!”

Juan de Timoneda, who tells the tale, contributes also this:

A village maiden, driving before her an ass, which, as it was returning to its foal, went quicker than the girl, met a courtier.

“Where do you live, my pretty maiden?” asked he.

“At Getafe, sir,” she replied.

“Tell me, do you know the innkeeper’s daughter there?”

“Very well, sir,” said she.

“Then be so kind as to take her a kiss from me!”

“Give it to my donkey, sir: he will get there first.”

Two friends, says the same genial narrator, a weaver and a tailor, became in time enemies, so much so that the tailor spoke much evil of the weaver, though the weaver always spoke well of the tailor.\* A lady asked the weaver why he

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always spoke so well of the tailor, who always spoke so ill of him, and he replied:

“Madam, we are both liars.”

A prince, he also tells us, had a jester who kept a book of fools, in which he put everybody deserving that title. One day at table the prince asked the jester to bring him the book, and opening it saw his own name, and below, “His Highness, on such a day, gave fifty ducats to an alchemist with which to go to Italy and bring back materials for making gold and silver.”

“And what if he returns?” said the prince.

“Oh, then I will scratch out your Highness and put him in.”

A blind man hid some money at the foot of a tree in a field belonging to a farmer. Visiting it one day, he found it gone, and, suspecting the farmer, went to him and said:

“Sir, as you seem an honest man, I have come to ask your advice. I have a sum of money in a very safe place, and now I have just as much more, and do not know if I should hide it where the first money is or somewhere else.”

The farmer replied, “Truly, if I were you, I would not change the place, it being as safe as you say.”

“That’s just what I thought,” said the blind man, and took his leave. The farmer hurriedly put back the money, hoping to get it doubled, and the blind man in his turn dug it up, greatly rejoicing at recovering what he had lost.

One tale more, from this festive Spaniard, this time rather a malicious one. A certain Biscayan,

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he tells us, had just finished working on the belfry in a small town where there chanced to be a man condemned to death; he was told by the authorities that, as they had no executioner, they would give him a ducat and the condemned man's clothes, to do the job, with which the Biscayan was well content.

A few months later, finding himself penniless and remembering how much he had gained by so light a task, he climbed the belfry, and when the townsfolk hurried up, at the ringing of the bells, he looked down at them, saying:

“Gentlemen, it is I who have called your Worships together. You must know that I have not a farthing to bless myself with, and you remember that you gave me a ducat some time back for hanging a man. Now I have been considering that, from the least to the biggest of your Worships, I am willing to hang the whole town at half a ducat each.”

Here is a little Spanish folk tale, as a dainty morsel at the end:

A certain pasha, says the tale, had a daughter who had three suitors. When her father asked her which of the three she would marry, she replied that she wanted all three. To this he replied that it was impossible, as no woman ever had three husbands; but the girl, who was wilful and spoiled, persisted; and at last the good pasha, in despair, called the three suitors before him and told them he would give his daughter to whichever returned with the most wonderful thing within a year's time. The three suitors set out on their

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quest, and after vainly wandering about the world for many months, one of them met a witch, who showed him a looking-glass in which you saw whatever you wished to see. This he bought from her. The second suitor also met this witch, who sold him a strip of carpet which carried you wherever you wished to go when you sat upon it. The third suitor bought from her a salve which would bring a newly dead corpse back to life again if rubbed upon its lips.

The three suitors met and showed one another their respective finds.

“Let us wish to see our fair mistress!” said one; so they looked into the magic mirror and wished, when, lo and behold, they saw her lying dead, laid out in her coffin, ready for burial!

They were overwhelmed with grief.

“My salve will restore her to life,” said the third suitor, “but by the time that we get there she will have been long buried and the worms will have eaten her.”

“But my magic carpet will take me to her at once,” cried the second suitor; and so they all sat down on it and wished to be taken to her.

In an instant they found themselves in the pasha’s palace, and the salve was applied to the dead girl’s lips. She immediately came to life again, sat up, and looking at the pasha, said:

“I was right, you see, father, when I wanted all three!”

Doubtless the story has a moral, but I am in some doubt as to what it is.

## THE MERRY JESTS OF RABELAIS

RABELAIS wrote in the early fifteen hundreds. A generation later, little Willie Shakespeare might have read him in the nursery had he happened to be translated and imported into Stratford; and one can imagine how the future swan of Avon would have reveled in him. Michael Angelo, had he known French as well as Rabelais knew Italian, might have read the horrific adventures of Pantagrue in the serene, large days of his old age; he would have enjoyed the gigantic element, though he might have missed some of the humor. At any rate, there we have Rabelais placed and dated between two giants.

The huge and genial Gargantua was no invention of his; he was a national Titan, something like Finn McCool of Ireland or that giant of our childhood, Robin A-bobin A-bilberry Ben, who "ate more victuals than threescore men, a cow and a calf, and an ox and a half, a church and a steeple and all the good people; and then he declared that he hadn't enough!" All-consuming giants fill a long-felt want in the human heart. The taste for them survives in our own time and



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land, though with less urbanity, as you may learn if you will read a socialist's description of Mr. Rockefeller.

I think one of the most humorous things in the wild, raging, uproarious history of Gargantua is this description of his childhood:

“Gargantua, from three years upward unto five, was brought up and instructed in all convenient discipline, by the commandment of his father; and spent that time like the other little children of the country—that is, in drinking, eating, and sleeping; in eating, sleeping, and drinking; and in sleeping, drinking, and eating. Still he wallowed and rolled up and down in the mire; he blurred and sullied his nose with dirt; he blotted and smutched his face with any kind of nasty stuff; he trod down his shoes in the heel; at the flies he did oftentimes yawn, and ran very heartily after the butterflies, the empire whereof belonged to his father. He wiped his nose on his sleeve and dabbled, paddled, and slobbered everywhere. He would drink from his slipper, sharpened his teeth with a top, washed his hands in his broth, and combed his head with a bowl. He would sit down betwixt two stools, cover himself with a wet sack, and drink in eating of his soup. He did eat his cake sometimes without bread, would bite in laughing, and laugh in biting. He would hide himself in the water for fear of rain. He would strike before the iron was hot, would blow in the dust till it filled his eyes; be often in the dumps. He would flay the fox, say the Ape's Paternoster,

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return to his sheep, and turn the hogs to the hay. He would beat the dogs before the lion, put the plow before the oxen, and claw where it did not itch. By gripping all, he would hold fast nothing, and always ate his white bread first. He shod the geese, tickled himself to make himself laugh, would scrape paper, blur parchment, then run away as hard as he could. He would reckon without his host. He would beat the bushes without catching the birds, and thought that the moon was made of green cheese. He always looked a gift-horse in the mouth. By robbing Peter he paid Paul; he kept the moon from the wolves, and was ready to catch larks if ever the heavens should fall. He did make of necessity virtue, of such bread such pottage, and cared as little for the peeled as the shaven. His father's little dogs ate out of the dish with him, and he with them. And that he might play and sport himself, after the manner of the other little children of the country, they made him a fair weather-jack of the wings of the windmill of Myrebalais."

That is, indeed, universal boy, and the same fine, prolific skill depicts Gargantua growing up into a symbol of universal man; much better natured, be it said, than the common run of mortality. I should like to descant upon young Gargantua at the ancient University of Paris as the prototype of the American college boy, and draw therefrom wise conclusions, pro and contra, as to the secular amelioration of our race. For instance, this:

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“They tied a cable-rope to the top of a high tower, by one end whereof hanging near the ground he wrought himself with his hands to the very top; then upon the same tract came down so sturdily and firm that you could not on a plain meadow have run with more assurance. They set up a great pole fixed upon two trees. There would he hang by his hands, and with them alone, his feet touching at nothing, would go back and fore along the aforesaid rope with so great swiftness that hardly could one overtake him with running; and then, to exercise his breast and lungs, he would shout like all the devils in hell.”

Gentle reader, does this, perchance, suggest to you some young football hero of your acquaintance doing stunts for the delectation of some fair creature in petticoats, and then, no longer able to subdue the pent-up fires, suddenly breaking into a college yell? Which, by the way, rhymes with what Rabelais said. This is the very naturalism of that great and genial soul; his caricature is of universal validity, and his spirit is invariably honest and benign. Take the episode of Gargantua stealing the bells of Notre Dame; what college student, worth his salt, but has wanted to do that; has, indeed, done something as like it as might be? I knew a group of studious young university persons who stole the city flag from the mayor's official home, and pelted his successor, who happened to be in the bakery business, with samples of his own buns. I knew a

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medical student who had gathered in scores of the golden balls which denote that money may be loaned; I knew another who collected gold boots from shoe-shops; I knew yet another—but, as Maître Pathelin says, in an old French farce, let us return to our muttons and Gargantua.

Excellent, and of universal import, is the story of the great war which arose between Picrocholla's men and the people of Grangousier, Gargantua's honored father, over the stealing of the cakes. The Italians should have read that before they laid hold of Tripoli. The Young Turks seem to have studied it, as they refuse to make restitution of the property stolen from them.

After doing deeds of valor in the fight, young Gargantua, feeling himself somewhat dry, asked whether they could get him a lettuce salad. Now it happened that six pilgrims, who were coming from Sebastian near Nantes, being afraid of the enemy, had hid themselves in the garden among the cabbages and lettuces. Gargantua, hearing that there were good lettuces there, went forth himself, and brought in his hand what he thought good, and withal carried away the six pilgrims, who were in so great fear that they did not dare to speak or cough. As he was washing them, therefore, first at the fountain, the pilgrims said one to another softly:

“What shall we do? We are almost drowned here among those lettuces. Shall we speak? But if we speak he will kill us for spies.”

And as they were thus deliberating what to do,

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Gargantua put them with the lettuce into a platter of the house, as large as the huge tun of the White Friars of the Cistercian Order; which done, with oil, vinegar, and salt, he ate them up, to refresh himself a little before supper, and had already taken in five of the pilgrims, the sixth being in the platter, totally hid under a lettuce, except his palmer's staff that appeared, and nothing else.

Which Grangousier seeing, said to Gargantua, "I think that is the horn of a snail; do not eat it."

"Why not?" said Gargantua, "they are good all this month"; which he no sooner said, but, drawing up the staff, and therewith taking up the pilgrim, he ate him very well, then drank a terrible draught of excellent white wine.

The pilgrims, thus gobbled up, made shift to save themselves as well as they could by drawing their bodies out of the reach of the grinders of his teeth, but thought they had been thrown into the lowest dungeons of a prison. And when Gargantua gulped the great draught, they thought to have drowned in his mouth, and the flood of wine had almost carried them away into the gulf of his stomach. Nevertheless, skipping with their staffs, as St. Michael's palmers used to do, they sheltered themselves from the danger of that inundation under the banks of his teeth. But one of them, by chance, grooping or sounding the country with his staff, to try whether they were in safety or no, struck hard against the

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cleft of a hollow tooth, and hit the mandibulary nerve, which put Gargantua to very great pain, so that he began to cry in the rage that he felt. To ease himself, therefore, of his smarting ache, he called for his toothpick, and, rubbing a walnut-tree toward where they lay skulking, unnestled you, my gentlemen pilgrims.

The six pilgrims, being thus miraculously escaped from imminent death, and that night lying in a lodge near unto Coudray, were greatly comforted in their miseries by one of their company, who showed them that this adventure had been foretold by the prophet David in the Psalms:

“Then they had swallowed us up alive, when their wrath was kindled against us: then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul. Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us a prey to their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler.”

Which bit of genial irreverence brings us to another side of Rabelais, his courageous and outspoken protests against every form of religious bigotry, narrowness, intolerance, persecution, hypocrisy. The great battle between the followers of Luther and of Rome was raging fiercely, and each side was lighting the fagots for the other. To speak plainly was dangerous, and to keep silent was cowardly. Therefore Rabelais again and again breaks forth in wild, copious, humorous, outrageous denunciation, which shows that he was in reality a brave soldier in the war of liberation of humanity. But he covers up his attack in

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such a whirlwind of burlesque buffoonery that no churchman could venture to prosecute him without drowning himself in a deluge of ridicule, even as those pilgrims were almost drowned in Gargantua's prodigious draught of wine. But these attacks on intrenched bigotry and hypocrisy are not the motive of Rabelais's books; they are mere incidents of the time and of his big, honest nature. He was really disburdening himself of a jolly, genial, sincere gospel of humane urbanity, embodied, according to the hilarious abundance and whimsicality of his spirit, in wildly grotesque fables and buffoonery; and it was simply because his genial soul came into concussion against intolerance that he turned aside from his main purpose of jovial fun-making to attack the sneaks and knaves. For a sample:

“If you conceive,” says Gargantua, “how an ape in a family is always mocked, and provokingly incensed, you shall easily apprehend how monks are shunned of all men, both young and old. The ape keeps not the house as a dog doth; he draws not in the plow as the ox; he yields neither milk nor wool as the sheep; he carrieth no burden as a horse doth. That which he doth is only to spoil and defile all, which is the cause wherefore he hath of men mocks, frumperies, bastinadoes. After the same manner a monk—I mean those lither, idle, lazy monks—doth not labor and work, as do the peasant and artificer; doth not ward and defend the country, as doth the man of war; cureth not the sick and diseased, as the physician

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doth; doth neither preach nor teach, as do the evangelical doctors and schoolmasters; doth not import commodities and things necessary for the commonwealth, as the merchant doth. Therefore is it that by and of all men they are hooted at, hated, and abhorred."

Yet another example. "Why," quoth Friar John, "do we not rather remove our humanities into some good, warm, holy kitchen, that noble laboratory, and there admire the turning of spits, the harmonious rattling of the jacks and fenders, criticize the position of the lard, the temperature of the soup, the preparation for the desserts, and the order of the wine service? Beati immaculati in via. Matter of breviary, my masters."

Whereto the follower of Gargantua answers, "This is spoken like a true monk: I mean like a right monking monk, not a bemonked monastical monkling."

But the true note of Rabelais is sheer glorious and outrageous fooling, uproarious mirth, genial, kindly, humane. Take, for instance, this speech of the scholar from Paris, whom Gargantua's son, Pantagruel, meets on the way, and asks him, "How do you spend your time there, you my masters the students of Paris?"

X The scholar answered, "We transfretate the Sequane at the dilucul and crepuscul: we deambulate by the compites and quadrivies of the urb; we despumate the Latial verbocination; and, like verisimilary amorabunds, we captate the benevo-



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lence of the omnijugal, omniform, omnigenal feminine sex. And if by fortune there be rarity or penury of pecune in our marsupies, and that they be exhausted of ferruginean metal, for the shot we demit our codices, and oppigenerate our vestments, whilst we prestolate the coming of the Tabellaries from the penates and patriotic lares."

Needless to say, Pantagruel got very angry, and thrashed the scholar till he shrieked for mercy in vernacular Gallic.

That is your genuine Rabelais, one of the great mirth-makers of the world and of all time.

## XXII<sup>v</sup>

### FROM MOLIÈRE TO DAUDET

THE funniest thing that I have been able to find in Molière, and one of the slyest in all literature, is a little scene in "Love, the Physician," which was written to the order of King Louis XIV. in the autumn of 1665 and acted at Versailles while the first streaks of gold and red were touching the beeches in the park.

"Love, the Physician" introduces us to a wealthy merchant, with one fair daughter and no more, who says, most reasonably, that he does not want her to marry, because, for the life of him, he cannot see why he should give up his child and his money to some young sprig with a plume in his cap who comes along and cries, "Stand and deliver!"

So, when the fair maiden has most perversely, as maidens are wont, set her tender heart upon just such a sprig, he turns a deaf ear to her pleading and grunts and growls in unresponsive indignation. The maiden, as maidens are wont, determines to have her own way; so, with her maid, she concocts a plot as old as time itself: she will fall sick, feign imminent and oncoming death,

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and so wring the heart of papa that he will agree to anything to bring her back to life again.

So said, so done. The maiden fair is presently disclosed in a darkened room, pale, attenuated, palpitating; while fond papa, who was evidently no novel-reader, is seen tearing his hair and moaning in anguished dread. In his haste he says, not, like the psalmist, "All men are liars," but, "Go quick; fetch a doctor!" with such vehement fear that his servant straightway rings up four. They assemble, one after another examining the love-lorn maiden, scrutinizing her tongue, touching her feeble pulse, and pressing with anxious palm her fevered brow. Then, in another room, shut in by themselves, they enter into consultation upon their patient, and the following discourse ensues after the learned physicians have seated themselves and coughed judicially.

Doctor des Fonandrès begins the consultation by remarking that Paris is a very large place, and that it is necessary to make long journeys when practice is brisk. To this, Doctor Tomès replies that he is glad to say he has an admirable mule, which covers an astonishing stretch of ground every day. Doctor des Fonandrès rejoins that his own horse is a wonder, an indefatigable beast. Doctor Tomès, taking up the gauntlet for his mule, declares that, on that very day, he went first close to the arsenal; from the arsenal to the end of the Faubourg Saint-Germain; from the Faubourg Saint-Germain to the end of the Marais; from the end of the Marais to the Porte Saint-Honoré;

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from the Porte Saint-Honoré to the Faubourg Saint-Jacques; from the Faubourg Saint-Jacques to the Porte de Richelieu; from the Porte de Richelieu to the house in which they then were, and that he had still to go to the Place Royale.

Doctor des Fonandrès affirms that his horse has done all that and more, as he has also been to see a patient at Ruel.

Then Doctor Tomès turns the talk to the famous dispute between the two physicians Theophrastus and Artemius, and asks his colleague which side he takes in the dispute. The other says he is for Artemius.

“So am I,” replies Tomès, although his advice, as we have seen, killed the patient, and that of Theophrastus was certainly much better; yet the latter was decidedly wrong, under the circumstances, and he ought not to have held an opinion different from that of his senior.

“What say you?” he asks his colleague, who replies that, unquestionably, etiquette should always be preserved, no matter what happens.

“For my part,” continues Doctor Tomès, “I am excessively strict in these matters, except between friends. The other day three of us were called in to a consultation with a provincial doctor, whereupon I stopped the whole affair; I would not allow the consultation to take place if things were not to be done in order. The people of the house did what they could and the sickness grew worse, but I would not give way and the patient died heroically during the dispute.”

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His worthy colleague replies that it is quite right to teach people how to behave, and to show them their ignorance; and Doctor Tomès continues:

“A dead man is but a dead man and of no consequence whatever; but the whole medical profession suffers if one formality is neglected.”

Well, gentle reader, has it dawned on you where the joke comes in? This eloquent and animated talk is supposed to be a consultation of physicians over a girl at the point of death; and the good doctors have evidently forgotten all about her, as you, perhaps, have also done, while reading their lucubrations. But her fond papa now pops in, and a further scene of comedy begins, which ends by Doctor Tomès saying, “If you do not bleed your daughter immediately she is a dead woman”; to which Doctor des Fonandrès indignantly retorts, “If you do bleed her, she will not live a quarter of an hour.” Let me relieve your apprehensions, good reader, by telling you that the maiden made a sudden and astonishing recovery, after this manner: A fifth doctor presented himself, who was no other than the desired lover in disguise. He prescribed sundry weird things, among others an imaginary marriage, which was so realistically carried out that the fond papa presently discovered that he had signed a marriage contract consenting to the espousal of his daughter and fixing on her a dowry of twenty thousand crowns. Thereafter, marriage bells and general rejoicings.

So far Molière. In La Fontaine's fables there

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are some mildly amusing things. I remember, for instance, an eloquent poem on a hen-pecked husband, and another on a covetous priest who, as he conducts the mortal remains of one of his parishioners to the vault, speculates on the rich legacy which he expects to receive. But his parishioner, though dead, takes the trick, for the coffin falls on the priest and turns him also into funereal matter.

Coming nearer our own days, I recall a charmingly irreverent poem by Beranger, one of the greatest and most genial of Frenchmen; a poem which describes how Monsieur the Deity woke one morning, opened His window, and looked out for our little earth, vaguely speculating with Himself as to whether it had perished during the night. But He sees it whirling away in a distant corner, and thereupon ruminates thus:

“If I understand how they get along there, may the devil fly away with Me, My children! Black or white, roasted or frozen, these little mortals pretend that I direct them! But, thank Heaven, I also have ministers! If I don't fire two or three of them, I hope, My children, that the devil will fly away with Me! Was it in vain that, to make them live in peace, I gave them lovely woman and wine? But to My very beard these pygmies call Me the God of Armies, and fire cannon at each other in My name. If I have ever led a regiment, I hope, My children, that the devil will fly away with Me! What are those dwarfs doing, prinked out on thrones with golden

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nails? With anointed brows and haughty mien, these chiefs of your ant-hill say that I have blessed their crowns, that through My grace they reign as kings. If it is through Me they reign like that, I hope, My children, that the devil will fly away with Me! I feed yet other dwarfs in black, whose incense My nose dreads; they turn life into Lent, and launch anathemas in My name, in sermons beautiful indeed, but which are all Hebrew to Me. If I believe a word they say in them, I hope, My children, that the devil will fly away with Me!"

Come we now to Alphonse Daudet, and his greatest creation, "Tartarin de Tarascon." Daudet, an ardent lover of Cervantes and his gaunt, chivalric hero, bethought him to create a modern Don Quixote of the nineteenth century in the full sunlight of southern France. So he made Tartarin redoubtable, sturdy, magnetic, imaginative, and set him down amid the mirages of Tarascon, on the bank of the Rhone. Tartarin is the center of a mock heroic company made up of "the brave commandant Bravida," really a retired army tailor, the armorer Costecalde, the pharmacist Bézuquet, and the rest, who are banded together into a hunters' club. But alas! there is no game, not even a partridge or a rabbit; so the Nimrods are reduced to throwing their caps in the air, and shooting at them. Then they return home, well content, and, soaked in Tarascon sunshine, dine heartily, and fight their battles o'er.

Circus comes to town, bringing a magnificent

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Atlas lion. Tartarin is stirred to the depths of his heart. He stands on guard before the cage and says, in his reverberant bass, "Ah, that were a hunt worth trying!" and immediately word goes abroad that Tartarin is going forth, voyaging to Mount Atlas to hunt lions. The good man had no such thought, but he is nagged into living up to the popular hope, and sets forth, a portentous figure, with two cases of rifles, a patent collapsible tent, a traveling drug-case, knives, revolvers, boxes; himself garbed as an Algerian, and so, after a humiliating sea-trip, he arrives at the French colony of Algiers, the one exotic figure in that little Parisian outpost.

The lions of Atlas sleep in peace, however, for Tartarin, less devoted than Don Quixote to an ideal flame, falls head and ears in love with a Moorish beauty, whom he immediately loses in the crowd. By the help of his good friend the Prince of Montenegro he recovers her, as the prince assures him, though he himself has doubts; but he is presently lapped in Oriental luxury, in a charming Villa Amanda of Moorish design, and wholly enthralled by the fair Baya's charms.

At last his better man awakes, and he goes forth to hunt lions and returns shorn. He shoots first a poor little donkey, which earns him a good drubbing, and then an aged lion, lame and blind, which has been employed, like a blind man's dog, to gather coppers for a Moorish monastery. As the culmination of his woes, the Prince of Montenegro goes off with his pocketbook. Tar-



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tarin returns to Algiers with but one friend, a faithful camel who has shared with him the dangers of the desert, and has conceived a deep-rooted attachment for the bold Tarascon hero, and very embarrassingly insists on accompanying him everywhere. Tartarin, yearning for the tender consolations of his faithful Baya, finds that she, too, is fickle and has transferred her heart to a more recent wooer. Tartarin, utterly disillusioned, is returning through a back street of Algiers just before dawn. He terrorizes the muezzin, takes his turban and cloak, and gravely ascends to the terrace of the minaret. Let Daudet continue:

“The sea was gleaming in the distance. The white roofs were sparkling in the moonlight. The night breeze wafted the notes of late guitars. The Tarascon muezzin hesitated a moment, then, raising his arms, he began a shrill psalmody:

“‘La Allah il Allah. . . Mohammed is an old humbug. . . . The Orient, the Koran, the lions, and the Moorish beauties are not worth a copper! . . . There are no more pirates . . . there are only sharpers. . . . Long live Tarascon! . . .’”

And while, in a bizarre jargon of blended Arabic and Provençal, the illustrious Tartarin scattered to the four corners of the horizon, over the sea, over the city, over the plain, over the mountain, his joyous Tarascon malediction, the clear, grave voices of the other muezzins replied to him, spreading from minaret to minaret, and the last believers of the upper town devoutly beat their breasts. . . .

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But one desire remained to Tartarin: to slink back unobserved to Tarascon, and there to hide his diminished head. But he counted without one devoted friend; let Daudet again tell the tale:

“After this disastrous expedition, he had hoped to return home incognito. But the encumbering presence of the love-sick camel rendered it impossible. What an entry he would have to make, O merciful Heaven! Not a copper, not a lion, nothing! . . . A camel! . . .

“‘Tarascon! Tarascon!’

“There was nothing for it but to leave the train.

“O stupefying fact! Hardly had the hero’s Algerian cap appeared at the opening of the gate when a great cry, ‘Long live Tartarin!’ made the glass roof of the station tremble. ‘Long live Tartarin! Long live the lion-killer!’ And then a flourish of trumpets, a burst of music, followed. . . . Tartarin was almost dead with shame. He thought some trick was being played on him. But no! All Tarascon was there, waving hats and full of cordiality. There was the brave commandant Bravida, the armorer Costecalde, the president, the pharmacist, and the whole noble band of cap-hunters, crowding round their leader and carrying him in triumph all along the stairways. . . .”

Singular effects of the mirage! The skin of the blind lion, sent to Bravida, was the cause of all this uproar. With that modest pelt, exhibited at the club, the men of Tarascon, and the whole

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south at their backs, had turned their heads. The "Semaphore" had spoken. A whole drama had been invented. It was no longer a single lion that Tartarin had slain, but ten lions, twenty lions, a cargo of lions! So Tartarin, when he landed at Marseilles, was already famous there without knowing it; and an enthusiastic telegram had outstripped him, reaching his native city two hours before him.

But what set the crown on the people's joy was the vision of a fantastic animal, covered with dust and sweat, appearing in the hero's wake and clattering down the station stairway. For a moment Tarascon thought the mythical Tarasque had returned.

Tartarin reassured his compatriots.

"That is my camel," said he.

And already under the influence of the sun of Tarascon, that lovely sun which brings forth innocent fictions, he added, caressing the dromedary's hump:

"A noble beast! . . . It saw me kill all my lions."

Thereupon, his face rosy with joy, he took the commandant's arm with a familiar gesture; and, followed by his camel, surrounded by the cap-hunters, acclaimed by the whole populace, he set forth peacefully toward the house of the baobab, and as he walked he began the story of his mighty hunts.

"Picture to yourself," he said, "that, on a certain evening, in the heart of the Sahara . . ."

## XXIII

### OLD HIGH GERMAN JOKES

TO comply with the promise of my title, the jokes must, I suppose, be old and high and German. As for their antiquity, some of the best of them go back to the thirteenth century, and have, therefore, the novelty of the well-forgotten. Where they are too high I shall endeavor to temper their altitude; and, as for their being German, why, that is my very reason for recording them.

In these Old High German jokes there seems to be a general type. An energetic person of humorous bent and cheerful rascality goes forth through the world, seeking and finding disreputable adventures, playing rowdy practical jokes, and laughing uproariously at his own escapades; whereat the audience is supposed to laugh in sympathetic chorus. The course of this roistering Goth is liberally irrigated with beer, which is joyously swilled by red-faced persons with carbuncle noses, fat paunches, and a general air of disreputable conviviality. In a word, Falstaff is the very model. Such is the worthy Parson Ameis of the thirteenth century. Such is the

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sixteenth-century Till Eulenspiegel. Such is his successor, Hans Clauert. Such, in the eighteenth century, though with the difference that he was a real person and a most outrageous liar, was Baron Münchhausen. And such, in the late nineteenth century, was the famed Tobias Knopf. The laughter is hilarious and breezy, the humor never so fine-drawn as to be in any danger of passing uncomprehended, the repertory demonstrates that smoking-room stories antedate the introduction of the weed by Sir Walter Raleigh.

With a truly prophetic refinement of insight, the Old High Germans made their first great humorous rascal an Englishman and a parson. As the result of a wordy dispute with his bishop, Parson Ameis undertakes to teach the bishop's donkey to read, so that that dignitary may not pride himself too much on his erudition. He hides the long-eared student in a cave, half starves him, and then puts before him a book, with oats sprinkled thinly between the leaves. The ass eagerly turns them over with his soft nose and licks up the oats. After a while the bishop, anxious to know how his rival in learning is getting on, asks Parson Ameis for a demonstration. By that time the ass can turn the pages over charmingly, and the bishop goes off open-mouthed, persuaded that it is only a matter of time before the other one learns Latin. But the bishop fortunately dies before the time is up, and the education of the ass is cut short.

Poverty drives Parson Ameis to the Continent

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in search of a fortune. He presently finds himself in Paris, and determines to victimize the King of France. He assures that monarch that he, the adventurer, is such a painter as the world never saw, and gets a contract to adorn a great hall in the palace. And, with solemn knavery, he further persuades the king that such is the occult virtue of his painting that, should the beholder have a pedigree at any point suspect or tinged with left-hand incidents, the picture will remain for him wholly invisible. So the king, with big, round eyes of credulity, fills the knave's pockets with gold and bids him paint away. The knave closes the hall, lies cheerfully on his back, and never paints a line. When the king comes, after a month, to see the painting, the parson reminds him of the occult virtue of the work and its relation to damaged paternity; and the king, who, very naturally, sees nothing at all, blinks like a solemn owl and avers that the work is excellently good. Ameis points out this detail and that of mountain or tree or human form, of the bare, white wall, and the king assents and praises, fearful of the possible slur on his paternity should he declare that he sees nothing. He, in his turn, describes the pictures to his gaping, naught-seeing courtiers, who, for a like reason, eagerly behold what is not there, till at last a blunt, stupid person avers that he sees nothing, because there is nothing to see, and ruthlessly adds that in his belief neither king nor princes see anything more than he does. Whereat the whole court laughs uproariously, and

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Parson Ameis is praised for a witty knave. All of which is unmarred by over-delicacy, but is rather the true material of primitive mirth.

In Lotharingia, Parson Ameis had another adventure. He declared to the duke that he was a marvelous healer, so that all diseases yielded to his skill. The duke offered him much gold if he could prove his skill, and turned over the inmates of the hospital to his care. Thereupon Parson Ameis assembles the sick and wounded, and makes them a little speech. He announces that their duke has intrusted them to his care, and that he will heal them all; but that, to do this, he must take that one among them who is irremediably ill, put him out of his misery, bray his bones in a mortar, and therewith make a sovereign ointment for the healing of the others. Thereupon, the unfortunate folk looked at one another and pondered. Each bethought him that, even if he admitted having only a little ailment, his neighbor might own to none at all, and so he, as the most gravely sick, would have to yield material for the ointment. Therefore, with one accord they began to assert that they felt better already, were, indeed, so decidedly on the mend that they might be said to be altogether well. So Parson Ameis stood there smiling, listening to their testimony; and presently he sent for the duke, reported a clean bill of health, pocketed his money, and went serenely forth. Such is the good Briton who is the first great figure in German humor. Many more adventures he had, as he

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swindled and tricked his way throughout all Europe, until finally he amassed such a fortune as enabled him to settle luxuriously at home and to end his days in an odor of sanctity.

Till Eulenspiegel is just such another knave, but that we are introduced to him in his early childhood, while he is still playing the pranks that make him the prototype of all bad boys. Seventy adventures and more are accredited to him, wild, boisterous, hilarious, as he wanders throughout the wide German world. Of these, I think the wittiest is this. Till had indulged in so many stupid pranks that folk began to call him a manifest fool. He took a keen revenge. Sedulously he spread the rumor that he, Till Eulenspiegel, the fool, would, on a certain morning, appear at the tower window and fly through the air to the ground. The good townsfolk came gaping thither, and, sure enough, at the appointed time Till made his appearance at the tower window. He looked down at the burghers, and they gazed up at him. Finally Till said, "You have all come here, to see me fly! Yet you know as well as I do that I can no more fly than you can. Judge, then, who is the biggest fool!"

Here is another tale, from a book of the same period. Some German boors were traveling along the muddy road from one Old High German city to another. At nightfall they came to a wayside inn, and asked for bed and board, including ample supplies of beer. When they were properly mellow, they decided to go to bed, mine



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host declaring that he could only provide one bed for every two of them. Then one fellow, thinking to be funny, declared to his companion that he was by predilection a ball-player, and, further, that he was given to nightmares, during which, believing himself to be playing ball, he had the bad habit of striking out in bed; should this happen, and should he accidentally break his bed-fellow's nose, he craved his forgiveness beforehand.

The other nodded and hummed and promised. But when the sleep-walking ball-player had drowsed off, his companion rose quietly and put on a pair of spurs, and then went back to bed again. Presently the ball-player began to jerk and mutter in his sleep, and began to wave his arms, finally landing a stiff blow on his companion's face. The latter immediately started up, jumped on the ball-player's back, dug the spurs into him, and bade him canter. When the ball-player yelled his expostulations, the other begged his pardon and explained that he too was given to nightmare and had just dreamed that his companion was a horse. So everybody laughed uproariously and ordered more beer.

Here is another yarn, of the same fiber. Two boors were good neighbors, their houses side by side, and on a certain morning, not so very early, came the one to the other's window and rapped thereon with his finger. But the other was still lying in the chimney-corner behind the stove, and did not want to get up. So, when his neighbor

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rapped on the window, he cried out, saying with a loud voice:

“Who is there?”

The one who was outside said, “It is I, neighbor Conrad; what are you doing?”

The first said, “I am in bed, still sound asleep. What do you want, neighbor?”

The one at the window said, “If you had not been asleep, I wanted to borrow your wagon; but I will come back again after you wake.”

Such simple-minded boors, says the narrator, are hard to find. And he goes on to tell a tale of another boor, simple enough in his way, but very far from being a fool. In a certain village, he says, there were bad, rascally, wicked boors, who often in the beer-house with each other quarreled, and with base words to each other the lie gave, and too often beat and stabbed each other, which their parson had many times warned them against. But, unfortunately, it helped nothing.

Once on a Sunday, when the good parson not much had studied, and to his boors had to preach, he began again their base words to narrate, and said, “Oh, ye are unholy boors! I have you already a long time forbidden to curse and to swear, to call one another liars, to quarrel and to brawl, yet the longer it goes the wickeder it gets. You call one another with blasphemous words liars, and thereof all sorts of contention and bickering ariseth! Now be it so: if one hears the other lie, and knows manifestly that he is lying, let him not him a liar straightway call, but much

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rather let him gently to whistle begin. He who has lied will briefly remark this whistling, and from a sense of remorse and confusion will hold up to lie. Pfui! What you do, most unseemly appears!"

The which a certain profane and knavish boor, who was in the church, remarked. But then the parson let go his preaching and began of the creation of the first men to speak.

"Dearly beloved brethren, the Almighty, as He created the heaven and the earth and found that it all very good was, determined He also to make men. So he took a lump of clay and squeezed it together, and formed, as it were, a man thereof, and, having formed him, set him up against the fence to dry."

Which, when the rascally boor aforesaid heard, began he to whistle overloud, which the parson, remarking, said:

"What, boor, you mean that I lie?"

Whereupon that wicked boor answered, "Oh no, your Reverence! But all the same, who made the fence before the first man was created?"

I have translated this as literally as may be, in order to preserve the fine Old High German flavor. I will now relapse into the vernacular, and tell another tale.

In a certain village near Leipzig lived a widow, well blessed with this world's goods and possessed of riches in plenty. To her many good widowers came as suppliants, asking for her hand and offering to take care of her goods. But she would

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not. No saddle suited her, and she chose rather to remain master in her own house, unwilling to submit her will to any man. To the which village came a certain young man, very fine and clever and beautiful, who, hearing much of the good widow and her possessions, determined to set his cap at her, and if so it might be, wed her and make her his. So he wooed her with right good will and gentle art, and at last began to be pleasing in her sight, so that she smiled when she met him in the market-place or at church, or wherever it might be. Well, the thing went so that he offered himself to her; and they were wedded, although all her gossips dissuaded her and said it would surely turn out ill.

After the wedding, for the first while he was good, obedient, quiet, keeping good care of his own house and following the old wife from chamber to chamber, until he had learned where all her treasures were kept. But then he began to go astray, lingering long at the beer-house, drinking much, and often bringing boon companions home with him to drink and roister and make merry till the clock struck midnight.

The which the good wife remarking, she determined on guile, and, binding a towel about her head, laid her on the sofa and began mournfully to groan. Whereupon, her man, entering with his boon companions, asked her what was ill with her; and she said that her head gave her much woe and was full of sore pains. At that, in well-feigned anger tearing the towel from her head,

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he began to thump her on the brow, crying, "O wicked and shameless head, thus to torment my dear, tender wife! But I shall beat thee until thou ceasest, therefore take that, and that, and that!"

So vigorously did he beat her that she was fain to cry peace, saying that the head no longer hurt her, but that she was well.

"Then, up, good wife, sit with us, make merry, and drink wine!" cried he, unashamed. "And if that evil head bethink again to hurt thee, I will of a truth beat it even more!"

## XXIV

### BARON MUNCHAUSEN AND AFTER

THE funniest thing about Baron Munchausen's preposterous yarns is that the good baron was an entirely real person, and really told those yarns or others like them. Born on May 11, 1720, on his father's estate of Bodenwerder, near Hanover, the mendacious baby was christened Karl Friedrich Hieronymus, with the style and title of Freiherr von Münchhausen. In his boyhood he served as a page of Prince Anton Ulrich of Brunswick, thereafter obtaining a coronetcy in the "Brunswick Regiment" in the Russian service, and, on November 27, 1740, the Russian Empress Anna gave him a lieutenant's commission and sent him south to fight against the Turks. Ten years later he had risen to be a captain of cuirassiers under the Empress Elizabeth, and in 1760 he retired from the Russian service and settled down on his paternal estate of Bodenwerder. There, in part to entertain his friends, in part to defend himself against the shooting stories of his gamekeeper, he spun his yarns. He spoke as a man of the world, naturally, simply, taking it for granted that he was relating mere matters

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of fact, never laughing or even smiling at his own jokes. Among the guests at his table who heard them was a certain Rudolph Erich Raspe, also a Hanoverian, and a man of much curious learning. Raspe pilfered medals from a museum, fled to England, was very hard up, and bethought him to earn an honest guinea or two by writing down some of his host's tales, no doubt with embellishments of his own. But at first the book was no more than an exaggerated account of the baron's yarns concerning his stay in Russia, as its title showed. It only ran to about forty pages, including chapters two to six of the present editions; all the rest is apocryphal.

The kernel of the narrative sticks close to the real events of the baron's life—for example, this beautiful tale:

“After my arrival at St. Petersburg, it was some time before I could obtain a commission in the army, and for several months I was perfectly at liberty to sport away my time and money in the most gentlemanlike manner. You may easily imagine that I spent much of both out of town with such gallant fellows as knew how to make the most of an open forest country. The very recollection of those amusements gives me fresh spirits and creates a warm wish for a repetition of them. One morning I saw, through the windows of my bedroom, that a large pond not far off was crowded with wild ducks. In an instant I took my gun from the corner, ran down-stairs and out of the house in such a hurry that I imprudently struck

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my face against the door-post. Fire flew out of my eyes, but it did not prevent my intention; I soon came within shot, when, leveling my piece, I observed, to my sorrow, that even the flint had sprung from the cock by the violence of the shock I had just received. There was no time to be lost. I presently remembered the effect it had on my eyes, therefore opened the pan, leveled my piece against the wild fowls and my fist against one of my eyes. [The baron's eyes have retained fire ever since, and appear particularly illuminated when he narrates this anecdote.] A hearty blow drew sparks again; the shot went off, and I killed fifty brace of ducks, twenty widgeons, and three couple of teals.

“Presence of mind,” went on the baron, “is the soul of manly exercises. If soldiers and sailors owe to it many of their lucky escapes, hunters and sportsmen are not less beholden to it for many of their successes. In a noble forest in Russia I met a fine black fox, whose valuable skin it would be a pity to tear by ball or shot. Reynard stood close to a tree. In a twinkling I took out my ball, and placed a good spike-nail in its room, and hit him so cleverly that I nailed his brush fast to the tree. I now went up to him, took out my hanger, gave him a cross-cut over the face; I laid hold of my whip, and fairly flogged him out of his fine skin.

“Chance and good luck often correct our mistakes; of this I had a singular instance soon after, when, in the depth of a forest, I saw a wild pig and



## BARON MUNCHAUSEN AND AFTER

sow running close behind each other. My ball had missed them, yet the foremost pig only ran away, and the sow stood motionless, as if fixed to the ground. On examining into the matter, I found the latter one to be an old sow, blind with age, which had taken hold of her pig's tail in order to be led along by filial duty. My ball, having passed between the two, had cut his leading-string, which the old sow continued to hold in her mouth; and, as her former guide did not draw her on any longer, she had stopped, of course; I, therefore, laid hold of the remaining end of the pig's tail, and led the old beast home without any further trouble on my part, and without any reluctance or apprehension on the part of the helpless old animal.

“Terrible as these wild sows are, yet more fierce and dangerous are the boars, one of which I had once the misfortune to meet in a forest, unprepared for attack or defense. I retired behind an oak-tree just when the furious animal leveled a side blow at me with such force that his tusks pierced through the tree, by which means he could neither repeat the blow nor retire. ‘Ho, ho!’ thought I. ‘I shall soon have you now!’ And immediately I laid hold of a stone and bent his tusks in such a manner that he could not retreat by any means, and must wait my return from the next village, whither I went for ropes and a cart to secure him properly and to carry him off safe and alive, in which I perfectly succeeded.”

“We took the field,” said the good baron on

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another occasion, "among other reasons, it seems, with an intention to retrieve the character of the Russian arms, which had been blemished a little by Tsar Peter's last campaign on the Pruth; and this we fully accomplished by several very fatiguing and glorious campaigns under the command of Count Munich. We had very hot work once in the van of the army, when we drove the Turks into Oczakow. The swiftness of my Lithuanian steed enabled me to be foremost in the pursuit; and seeing the enemy fairly flying through the opposite gate, I thought it would be prudent to stop in the market-place to order the men to rendezvous. I had stopped, gentlemen; but judge of my astonishment when in this market-place I saw not one of my hussars about me! Are they scouring the other streets, or what has become of them? They could not be far off, and must, at all events, soon join me. In that expectation I walked my panting Lithuanian to a spring in this market-place, and let him drink. He drank uncommonly, with an eagerness not to be satisfied, but natural enough; for when I looked round for my men, what should I see, gentlemen! The hind part of the poor creature—croup and legs were missing, as if he had been cut in two, and the water ran out as it came in, without refreshing or doing him any good! How it could have happened was quite a mystery to me, till I returned with him to the town gate. There I saw that when I rushed in pell-mell with the flying enemy, they had dropped the portcullis (a heavy falling door, with sharp

## BARON MUNCHAUSEN AND AFTER

spikes at the bottom, let down suddenly to prevent the entrance of an enemy into a fortified town) unperceived by me, which had totally cut off his hind part, that still lay quivering on the outside of the gate. It would have been an irreparable loss, had not our farrier contrived to bring both parts together while hot. He sewed them up with sprigs and young shoots of laurels that were at hand; the wound healed, and, what could not have happened but to so glorious a horse, the sprigs took root in his body, grew up, and formed a bower over me; so that afterward I could go upon many other expeditions in the shade of my own and my horse's laurels."

Such is the genuine Baron Munchausen, mere decorative embroidery on the real campaigns and exploits of an authentic warrior and campaigner in Russia. All but some forty pages in our latter-day editions is apocryphal; or, let us say, the green shoots of mendacity twined by the first baron have sprouted and grown into a portentous bower above his head.

Here is a pretty piece of nineteenth-century humor from Germany, entitled, "The Sad Tale of Seven Kisses":

"It is quite a while ago, I think," says the narrator, "since one day the dear God called the angel Gabriel to Him, as He often does, and said, 'Thou, Gabriel, go and open the slide and look down! Methinks I hear crying!'

"Gabriel went and did as the dear God said, put his hand up to his eyes because the sunlight

## WHY THE WORLD LAUGHS

dazzled him, looked all around, and finally said, 'Down there is a long green meadow; at one end sits Barbelie pasturing her geese, at the other sits Christoph pasturing his pigs, and both are weeping to melt a heart of stone.'

"'Indeed,' said the dear God; 'get out of the way, you big fellow, and let Me look!'

"When He had looked, He saw that it was just as Gabriel had said.

"And this is how it was that Christoph and Barbelie were weeping so pitifully: Christoph and Barbelie loved each other dearly; one of them took care of the geese and the other took care of the pigs, and so it was a very suitable match, there being no disparity of rank. They made up their minds to be married, and they thought that being fond of each other was a good enough reason. But here their employers disagreed, and so they had to be content with being betrothed. Now, as it is well to be methodical in all things, and as kissing plays an important part in betrothals, they had made an agreement that seven kisses in the morning and seven kisses more in the evening would be quite the proper thing. For a while all went well, the seven kisses being given and received at the appointed time. But on the morning of the day when this story happened, it came about that, just as the seventh kiss was coming around, Barbelie's pet goose and Christoph's pet pig had a falling-out over their breakfast, threatening to end in a riot. To settle the difficulty it was necessary for the lovers to stop

## BARON MUNCHAUSEN AND AFTER

short of the proper number of kisses. Later, when they were sitting far apart at opposite ends of the meadow, it occurred to them how very sad a thing this was; and they both began to weep, and were still weeping when the dear God looked down.

“The dear God thought at first that their sorrow would subside of itself; but when the sound of weeping waxed louder and louder and Christoph’s pet pig and Barbelie’s pet goose began to grow sad from sympathy and to make woebegone faces, He said: ‘I will help them! Whatever they wish for to-day shall come true.’

“But as it was the two had but one thought, to complete the tale of kisses; and as each gazed in the direction where the other sat and neither could see the other, for the meadow was long and there were bushes in the middle, Christoph kept thinking, ‘If I were but over where the geese are!’ and Barbelie kept sighing, ‘Oh, could I but be near the pigs!’

“All at once Christoph found himself sitting by the geese, and Barbelie found herself beside the pigs; but they were no nearer to each other than before, and there was no possibility of making up the missing number.

“Then Christoph thought, ‘Very likely, Barbelie wished to pay me a little visit’; and Barbelie thought, ‘No doubt, Christoph has gone to look for me!’ and then again they began to wish, ‘Oh, if I could but be with my geese!’ and ‘Oh, if I could but be with my pigs!’

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“In a moment Barbelie was once more sitting beside her geese and Christoph was back with his pigs; and so it went on all day, turn and turn about, because they always wished themselves past each other. And so to this day they are short of that seventh kiss. Christoph, to be sure, was all for making it up in the evening, when they both came home tired to death by all their wishing; but Barbelie assured him that it would not do a bit of good, and that there was no possibility of putting the number right again.

“And when the dear God saw how the two had been wishing themselves away from each other, He said, ‘Well, this is a nice muddle! But what I have once said, I have said! There is no help for it.’

“So He made up His mind then and there that He would never grant lovers’ wishes rashly in future, before finding out exactly what they wanted.”

We have all seen pictures of the snuffy, stuffy German professor, famous for his absent-mindedness. A cheerful person has collected a number of involuntary jokes, which he lays to the charge of the said “Herr Professor.” I cull a few, giving them on his authority rather than my own:

“Alexander the Great,” said the Herr Professor, “was poisoned twenty-one years before his death. The death of Alexander was felt by all Asia, but not until after his death.”

“Brutus and Cassius murdered Julius Cæsar in a manner very detrimental to his health.

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Gallus was murdered in the presence of the populace, and he met the same fate once more at the hands of an assassin."

"Tacitus says that the ancient Germans were as tall as the Kaiser's body-guard. The Cimbrians and the Teutons were descended from each other."

Turning from classical times to English history, the Herr Professor announced that King Richard III. murdered all his successors. And he added that, after the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, Queen Elizabeth appeared in Parliament with a handkerchief in one hand and a tear in the other. In the field of general European history, the Herr Professor declared that Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden, lived until shortly before his death, and that Stanislaus was not yet in existence when his father was born. He further said that the Russian general Suvoroff marched at so rapid a pace with his army that neither the infantry nor the cavalry nor the artillery could keep up with him; and that the Polish army was beaten by Suvoroff because it ran away and fled.

Then, turning to geography, the Herr Professor thus relieved his mind of its encumbering wisdom. "The sources of the Nile," he said, "are much farther south than where the explorer Bruce discovered them." And he added that, in South Africa, the eyesight of the Hottentots is so well developed that they can hear the tramp of a horse at an incredible distance. North America, he went on to say, consists of a great number of large

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and small islands, very few of which are surrounded by water; and he affirmed that, when Humboldt ascended Mount Chimborazo, he found the air so thin that he could not read without glasses. Finally, inspired, perhaps, by unconscious political feeling, the Herr Professor announced that there would be much less leather produced by the English if they tanned only their own hides.



## XXV

### SCANDINAVIAN FUNNY STORIES

ONE of the funniest stories from the land of the fiords is an ancient tale whose purpose is to illustrate the mental levity of women. I imagine that, in these days of feminism and enlightenment, it has been suppressed by the Storthing; but I have captured a copy, and, at some personal risk, I now make it public. This tale relates that there was a certain man named Jacob, whose wife, Alida, was blessed with a plentiful lack of wits. They had some marketing to do, and, as Jacob was busy, Alida said she would go. So Jacob told her, "Mind well, goodwife, you are to sell the cow and the hen; the cow for fifty crowns and the hen for fifty pence, and, mind you, not a penny less!"

So Alida went along the road to market, carrying the hen and driving the cow; and as she went she kept saying to herself, "The cow and the hen, the cow and the hen; fifty crowns and fifty pence; the cow and the hen." And presently, from saying it too often, she got confused, and said, "Fifty pence and fifty crowns for the cow and the hen." And then she began to say, "Fifty pence for the cow, and fifty crowns for the hen."

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The butcher was going along the road, and he heard her and said he would take the cow at her price, and so he gave her the fifty pence and took the cow, and the goodwife went on to market with the hen. But when she came to the market nobody would give her fifty crowns for the hen, so she was sorrowful. And at last she went to the butcher and told him, as he had taken the cow, he should take the hen, too. So he said he would see about it, and asked her to come in, and put food of the best before her and gave her strong waters to drink, so that presently the goodwife was snoring. Then he daubed her with tar and rolled her in feathers and set her out on the roadside. When she awoke, it was the chill of the morning, and she rubbed her eyes and looked for the fifty crowns she was to get for the cow and the fifty pence she was to get for the hen; but she could find none of it, but only the feathers, all over her, where the butcher had daubed her.

Well, the goodwife was perplexed. "Am I me," she said, "or am I not me? And if I'm not me, then who can I be?" So she thought perhaps she was a big bird, and not herself at all. "Well," she said, "I'll go home, and if the dog licks my hand, then I am me; but if he barks at me, then I am a bird, and not me at all."

So she went home, and indeed the dog began to bark and to howl; so she knew she was a bird, and not herself at all; so she must go up on the roof and try to fly. The goodman saw her, and, indeed, he too thought she was a bird, and got his

## SCANDINAVIAN FUNNY STORIES

gun, and would have shot at her; but she cried out, "Oh, goodman, don't shoot me, even if I'm somebody else!" So he came up on the roof, and she told him all that had happened. Then the goodman spat and swore, so disheartened was he, and he said he would take all, whatever money he had in the house, and go forth, and never return until he had found three women who were as big fools as his wife. Then he would return.

So he took what he could take and went. And as he went along the road, lo and behold, there was a new house built by the roadside and a woman running in and out of it. She had a sieve in her hand, and she would come out, and then whip her apron over the sieve, and then run back again into the house. So Jacob watched her, and then he asked her what she was doing.

"I am trying," she said, "to catch some sunshine to take it into my house; for my house is dark for lack of sunshine. In my old hut there was plenty, but in my new house, for all it is fine and beautiful, there is no sunshine. And, indeed, I would give a hundred crowns to the man that would bring me in some sunshine!"

Then Jacob looked at her and raised his eyebrows. Then he thought, and said to the woman:

"Goodwife, if you give me an ax, I'll bring you some sunshine."

So she got him an ax, and he cut windows in her house, till the sun streamed in, for the builder had forgotten them. And the good woman was joyful, and clapped her hands, and gave him a

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kiss, which he liked, and the hundred crowns, which he liked still more.

"There's one!" he cried, and went on along the road. And it was not long till he came to a place where there was a terrible yelling and howling; and he saw a woman with a club, such as washer-women use to beat the linen at the stream, and there was a man there, with his head covered, and she was beating him over the head and he was yelling and crying out that she was murdering him.

So Jacob went up and stopped her. "What are you doing?" said he.

"Trying to get my goodman's shirt on," said she. "I've sewn him a new shirt, but he can't get his head through it, and so I'm trying to drive it through with a club."

And Jacob looked, and, sure enough, the goodwife had forgotten to put any neck in the shirt, so her goodman could not get his head through. And both of them were crying, she for despite and he for the beating she had given him trying to put on the shirt.

"I would give a hundred crowns," cried the goodwife, "if any one would show me how to put on the shirt."

So Jacob said he would do it, and he took the shears and cut a slit in the shirt for the neck, and so it went on easily enough. And the goodwife laughed and rejoiced and gave him the hundred crowns. But the goodman only rubbed his head and blinked his eyes.

## SCANDINAVIAN FUNNY STORIES

“That makes two!” said Jacob, and went on his way. And presently he came to a house and went in; and the old woman was deaf, so that she could not well hear what he said.

“Where are you from?” asked she.

“I am from Elverum,” said he.

“From heaven?” said she, not rightly hearing him. “Then you may have met my husband Peter—the second, I mean, for I have been married three times, and each of my men has been called Peter to his name. The first beat me, so he doesn’t count; the third is still alive, so he doesn’t count; so I am asking about the second, who was a good man and surely went up.”

Jacob thought awhile and laughed in his sleeve, for all that he was disheartened to find a woman so foolish. Yes, he said, he came from heaven, but he could not rightly say whether the Peter he knew there was her husband or not. But he was soon going back again, and would find out. The man he knew in heaven was a good man, but poor, with never a stitch to his back nor a silver crown in his pouch, but a good man and kindly, withal. Then the old woman began a-weeping and a-wailing, and said that was the living description of her own lost Peter, not counting the first one, who was bad and had gone elsewhere; and would he kindly take her Peter something when he went back?

Yes, he would. And so the old woman went up to the garret and gathered good clothes that her Peter had left, and a box of silver for him, and gave

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them to Jacob, with a cart to carry them and a horse to draw the cart. So he went away again, toward his home. "That makes three!" he said, as he laughed in his sleeve, even though he was disheartened at the foolishness of women.

Then the third husband, he that was still living and was also Peter, saw a man driving his cart away, and ran into the house and asked the old wife what it was. So she told him that he was taking the things back to heaven for her second man. Then the third Peter was wroth, and took his horse and pursued. But Jacob, hearing him, turned into the wood, and hid the horse and cart. And he plucked a wisp of hair from the horse's tail and stuck it in a birch-tree on a hillock in the wood.

No sooner was this done than the third Peter was after him; and he found Jacob lying flat on his back and gazing up into the sky. "There it goes," says Jacob, "the horse and the cart, up through the clouds to the door of heaven." And with that he showed the horse-hair on the birch, where the cart and horse had passed on their way upward. And Peter the third was much astounded, and he, too, would see. So Jacob bade him also lie on his back and look up steadily till his eyes got used to it and he saw the horse and cart in the clouds.

So there he lay, and Jacob was off with the cart and the horse, and he took, too, the horse that Peter had come on galloping after him. And when he came home he was well content, for had he not the

## SCANDINAVIAN FUNNY STORIES

two horses and the cart and two hundred crowns and the clothes for Peter that was in heaven? And as he came to the house he saw the field was plowed; so he asked his wife, Alida, what that meant.

"I have always heard," said she, "that what you sow you reap, with good measure added. So I have had the field plowed, and have sown salt in it, and if only we have rain enough I expect to reap many a bushel."

Then Jacob was angry and disheartened at her foolishness. "But," said he, "there is no help for it, since all womankind are even such as you."

Here is another tale, about an animal with no tail, to wit, Brother Rabbit; a tale which might well have come from Georgia and Uncle Remus, but which has come, in fact, from the land of the Vikings.

Once on a time, says the tale, there was a rabbit who was frisking up and down under the greenwood tree. "Hooray! Hooray!" he cried, "Hip, hip, hooray!" and he leaped and sprang, and then threw a somersault and stood on his hind legs.

Just then Brother Fox came slipping by.

"Good day, good day, Brother Fox!" cried the rabbit. "I am so merry, for you must know I was married this morning!"

"Lucky fellow, you!" said Brother Fox.

"Not so lucky, after all," said the rabbit, "for she is too ready with her fists; a regular old witch I got to wife!"

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“Unlucky you are,” said the fox.

“Oh, not so unlucky either,” said the rabbit, and he danced again; “for she was an heiress; she had a house of her own.”

“Why, then, you are lucky, after all,” said the fox.

“Well, no, not so very lucky,” said the rabbit, “for the house caught fire and was burned up, and with it everything we possessed.”

“Why, then, you are unlucky!” said the fox.

“Oh, not so unlucky,” said the rabbit, “for my witch of a wife was burned up, too!”

In the Scandinavian tongues there are many good tales of the youngest son, who, against all handicaps of age and ill-favor, rubs it all over his elder brothers. He is a kind of masculine Cinderella, and has Cinderella’s astonishing luck, too. Generally, his good-fortune turns on an act of kindness done to an old witch in distress, who turns out to be a fairy godmother and gives him a wish or some magical gear, with which he proceeds to make his fortune. One of the best of these yarns of the youngest son relates that the two elder brothers had gone, as always, to the king’s court to make their fortunes. The king set them, each in turn, to herd his hares, with the condition that, if none of the hares were lost, the princess would bestow her hand on the lucky herdsman; but if even one were missing in the evening, the culprit should have a slice cut from his back, and salt rubbed in till he howled.

As was to be expected, the two elder brothers



## SCANDINAVIAN FUNNY STORIES

came to grief; and the king, with many expressions of regret, carved them according to agreement. Then came the youngest son, who, as we expected, had met the fairy godmother well disguised as a witch, and had received from her, in return for kindness, a fairy pipe which had the virtue that, if you blew into one end, things would scatter and fly, but if you blew into the other, they would run together again as quickly as quicksilver. So the hares were magically herded, and the king, lugubriously whetting his knife each day, was doomed each evening to disappointment. Then the whole court was intrigued, and the king sent the princess to spy on him; and when she had discovered the secret of the magic pipe, the king bade her purchase it at any cost. So she gave many dollars and more kisses for the pipe, and set off home with it; but it had this virtue, that, if the lawful owner lost it, he had only to wish it back again, and it would come. So the princess discovered that the pipe was gone; and the hares were well herded once more. First the queen tried, giving many kisses and dollars; and then the king, giving his own white steed, but all to no purpose. The pipe went back to the youngest son.

At this the king was spiteful and wroth, and said the youngest son was a wizard and must lose his life unless he could lie the great brewing-vat full of lies so that it ran over. Then he might keep his life.

That was neither a long nor a perilous piece of work. The youngest son could do that. So he

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began to tell the whole tale just as it had happened, and how the old witch gave him the pipe. And then he went on to say, "Well, but I must lie faster if the vat is to be full." So he went on and told how the princess came and gave him many dollars for the pipe, and many kisses, away there in the wood. Then he stopped and said, "I must lie faster if ever the vat is to be full." So he told of the queen, and how she had tried to get the pipe and of the money she had given him, and the kisses, too. And the queen got white, and the king got red when he heard it; but the youngest son said, "I must lie hard to get the vat full."

But the queen said, "For my part, I think it's pretty full already."

"No, no; it isn't," cried the king.

So the youngest son went on, and told how the king had come after the pipe in his turn, and was going to tell about all the tricks the king had tried on him to get the pipe. "If the vat is to be full I must lie hard!" he said.

But the king got redder and redder, because he was ashamed of the tricks he had tried and afraid that the court would mock him; so the king cried out, "Hold, hold! The vat is full to the brim! Don't you see how the lies are pouring over?"

So the youngest son got the princess for his wife, and half the kingdom. There was no help for it.

"That was something of a pipe!" said the youngest son.

## XXVI

### THE RUSSIAN AND THE TARTAR

IN our garland of the laughter of the world we have already had flowers of humorous epic; first, from the father of all epic poets we cited that famed passage on the snaring of lovely Aphrodite and Ares, the war-god, in a net, as a warning to all flirts in days to come, whereat the assembled gods broke forth in Homeric laughter that echoed through the high halls of Olympus; then, from the Mahabharata, we had the story of how yet other gods, dusky and exotic this time, paid court to King Nala's sweetheart, Damayanti, to the dire perplexity of that love-lorn and loyal maiden. We shall now add to these a very pretty tale, conceived in a spirit of genuine humor, and having to do with Vladimir Sunbright, prince of Kieff in by-gone days, that same Vladimir who first made Christians of the heathen Slavs, for which he is revered as a saint.

But it is a very human monarch, rather than a saint, who meets us in this story, a magnificent and barbaric prince, who had made a festival, a day of honor for princes and warriors, for strangers in Kieff and for merchants, and for all who might

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come to his hospitable halls. When the guests had eaten at the long tables and had drunk well of the green wine and mead, filled with the joy of their feasting, they began to boast.

One of them boasted of his might in war, one boasted of his noble birth, another, of his swift horses, another of his silken cloak. But among all the guests assembled in Prince Vladimir's hall a young merchant guest from Chernigoff, by name Stavyor Godinovich, ate not and drank not; he broke not the flesh of white swans nor tasted the green wine, nor did he boast him of anything: Prince Vladimir Sunbright of Kieff noted it, and came through the hall to young Stavyor, speaking to him words like these:

“Go to, then, young Stavyor Godinovich; why sittest thou, eating not, nor drinking nor feasting, neither breaking the white swan's flesh nor drinking the green wine, nor yet boasting thee of anything at the feast?”

Then Stavyor Godinovich made this high-hearted answer: “What need have I to boast among the feasters? Shall I boast of my father and mother? But my father and mother are dead and gone. Shall I boast of my wealth? But my wealth is safe enough. Little gains and little coins I keep not. Shall I boast of my flowered robes? But my flowered robes are hardly worn. I have ever thirty master tailors in my house, who sew me new caftans and cloaks. A day I wear them, two days I wear them, then send them to the booths in the market-place; to

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your princes and warriors I sell them, and take the full price unabated. Or shall I boast of my swift horses? But my swift horses I hardly ride. I have thirty mares of golden sides that bear me unblemished foals. The best of them I ride myself; the worst I send to the market-place; to your princes and warriors I sell them, and take the full price unabated. Small need have I to boast among you. Or should I boast of my new-wed wife, Vassilissa, Mikula's child—of her forehead whiter than the moon, her eyes that glimmer like the stars, her brows darker than sable fur, her hair brighter than the swift falcon's wing? She would buy you, princes and warriors; and for thee, Vladimir, she would make thee mad."

The guests' faces darkened, and the boasting of young Stavvor pleased not Prince Vladimir; therefore, full of anger, he spoke words like these:

"My faithful servants all! Seize young Stavvor Godinovich! By his white hands seize him, by his fingers with their rings of gold; hail him away to the chill prison, for this boasting of his and his words of little courtesy. Feed him there on bread and water, not for less nor for more, but for six full years. Let him there win back his wits again! For we would see how Stavvor's new-wed wife will draw her boaster from the dungeon, how she buys you and sells you, warriors and princes, and for me, Vladimir, how she makes me mad!"

So the boastful young Stavvor was consigned to durance vile, and Vladimir Sunbright sent messengers to seize his new-wed wife and bring her

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a prisoner to Kieff. But word of Stavvor's mishap outran the messengers, and the fair Vassilissa thus bethought her, "I cannot ransom Stavvor with money; I cannot save him by force; I must win him forth from the dungeon by woman's wile and artfulness. So she had her golden locks shorn off relentlessly, and, taking valiant companions, set forth for Kieff disguised as an envoy of the Tartar Horde—a wild anachronism, by the way, for the Horde did not reach Russia until centuries later. But so runs the tale.

The seeming envoy, assuming the name of Vassili, Mikula's child, came right haughtily to Kieff, strode into Vladimir's hall, and demanded the arrears of tribute due to the Tartars and to their chief, the hound Kalin. The envoy, waxing bolder as Prince Vladimir quailed, went on to demand in marriage the hand of Vladimir's fair niece, Zabava Putyatishna, who was seated with him at the banquet.

Vladimir answered: "It is well, thou envoy Vassili, Mikula's child. But I would weigh the matter with my niece." So he led her forth from the chamber, to take counsel with her, addressing to her words like these: "Answer me, well-loved niece; wilt thou wed the stern envoy? Wilt thou wed Vassili, Mikula's child?"

But Zabava answered him, smiling secretly: "Nay, well-loved uncle, what perverse purpose is thine? What is this that thou hast dreamed of? Wed not a maiden to a woman, nor make me laughing-stock for holy Russia!"

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Vladimir answered, much perplexed, "Nay, well-loved niece, but why should I not wed thee to the envoy—the stern envoy of the fierce hound Kalin, the Tartar king?"

But Zabava answered him: "Nay, no envoy is this, but a woman! For the signs of womanhood, I know them well. As a swan swims, she walks the highway and mounts the stair with little steps, seats her on the bench with knees together, glancing hither and yon beneath her eyelids. Her voice is somewhat piping, like a woman's; and her waist is slender, like a woman's; her hands are pliant, like a woman's; and her fingers taper, like a woman's, with the mark of the wedding-rings still upon them! Nay, such a pair, if we were wed, would die of weariness!"

So Vladimir Sunbright of Kieff determined to make trial of the envoy, challenging him first to try his strength against the wrestlers; and thereupon, in a style to make even the most determined modern Amazon envious, the self-styled envoy Vassili with the right hand seized three wrestlers, and with the left hand seized another three, hurling them together and casting them away, so that the seventh was overwhelmed beneath them. Then, in the words of the epic, Vladimir spat, and so returned.

A trial of archery had a like result, and at last the false, fair envoy beat Vladimir at chess, winning from him his city of Kieff, instead of which, after guileful bargaining, the envoy agreed to accept the boastful husband, Stavyor Godinovich.

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The story ends in the triumphant mockery of Vladimir Sunbright of Kieff by the fair Vasilissa, Mikula's child, who has made good the boast, buying and selling the princes and warriors and making Prince Vladimir mad.

So much for the folk-humor of the old Russian bards. It was late in the day when Russian began to grow into a literary tongue. Among the earlier writers who brought that consummation about is one who rejoices in the delightfully piebald name of Denis Ivanovich von Wiesen, a contemporary of George Washington. He has written satirical comedies; but the funniest thing of his that I know of is the account of his school-days in his *Confession*. He tells us that the professors sometimes came to their classes, but not often. The mathematical teacher drank himself to death. The Latin teacher came only at examination times, appearing then in a caftan that had five buttons, while his waistcoat had only four.

"My buttons seem to amuse you," said the professor, when the students laughed at him, "but they are the guardians of your honor and of mine: those on the caftan stand for the five declensions, those on the vest for the four conjugations. And now," he proceeded, as he beat the table with his hand, "be all attention to what I have to say! When they shall ask you for the declension of some noun, watch what button I am touching: if you see me holding the second button, answer boldly, 'The second declension.' Do similarly in regard to the conjugations, being guided by



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the buttons on my vest, and you will never make a mistake."

In the geography class, the first student was asked into what sea the Volga flowed.

"Into the Black Sea," was his answer.

The second student answered, "Into the White Sea."

When Von Wiesen was asked, he answered, "I don't know," with such an expression of simplicity that the examiners at once awarded him the gold medal.

Ivan Kriloff belonged to the next generation. Here is a free rendering of one of the best of his fables, entitled, shall we say, "The Unqualified Prevaricator."

A certain nobleman, perhaps even a prince, returning from distant lands, fell into the habit of boasting of the strange and wonderful things he had seen.

"Alas," he sighed, "I shall never see the like of it again! What a land is this Russia of ours. Too hot half the year, too cold the other half; now you are baked, now you are deluged; but abroad it is a real paradise; you never need a fur coat or a fire; it is merry May the whole year long. Abroad you need neither plant nor sow, all things grow so wonderfully! Why, in Rome once I saw a cucumber—oh, heavens! even to think of it fills me anew with wonder. Why, friend, that cucumber was as big as a hill!"

"Ah," said his friend, "how marvelous! Yet the world has many marvels; why, in this very

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neighborhood there is one, the bridge across that stream we are coming to. It looks plain enough, but is a true miracle. Not a liar in the country will venture near it, for as soon as he gets half-way across, the bridge will gape in the middle and let him through into the stream. But your truthful man may go over boldly, even in his carriage."

"Mm!" said the traveler. "Is the water deep?"

"Oh, not so deep," said the friend, "but there is water enough to drown a liar or two. So, you see, there is more than one kind of marvel in the world. But Roman cucumbers are huge, no doubt of it—you said, I think, as big as a hill?"

"Well," said the traveler, hesitating, "not so big as a hill, perhaps, but as big as a house!"

"You don't tell me!" replied the friend. "Still there are wonders in the world, and real ones. Like this bridge, for instance, that won't let a liar go across it. Why, just this spring, as every one in town well knows, a tailor and two journalists fell through. Still, a cucumber as big as a house is astonishing enough, deny it who can."

"Not quite so wonderful, when you understand. Houses are not everywhere as big as they are here. The houses there, as I should have explained, will just hold two, who neither stand up nor sit down."

"Well, well," said the friend, "a cucumber with room for two inside is worth seeing; but our bridge here is a pretty wonderful bridge, too; not a liar can go across it . . ."

"Say no more, friend," begged the traveler;

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“and after all, why cross the bridge? There must be a ford about here, somewhere!”

Yet a generation later comes Gogol, one of the strangest of many strange Russian geniuses. Were it possible, I would fain give some account of his ludicrous comedy, “The Reviser,” in which a pack of grafting Russian officials are warned that a secret agent has been sent to their town from St. Petersburg to pry into their misdeeds. Just at the same time it happens that a needy youth has drifted into town, put up at the inn, and remained there for the sternly simple reason that he could not pay his bill and leave. The fact that he does not pay, and orders every one about, at once suggests to the guileless grafters that he must be the expected high official; so they wait on him, treat him royally, make him a guest of honor, and load him with gifts. At first he thinks they have come to arrest him for his hotel bill, and blusters manfully; then he rises to the situation, and decides to fool them to the top of their bent. He in due time departs, and an incautious letter of his to a friend betrays the secret. But the humor of the piece lies in the immortal doublets, Peter Ivanovich Bobchinski and Peter Ivanovich Dobchinski, who are forever interrupting each other and tripping over each other’s heels. For example, they discover the mysterious stranger at the hotel, and rush to bear the news to the assembled officials.

Breathless, Bobchinski cries out, “A most extraordinary occurrence . . .”

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Dobchinski interrupts, "A most unexpected occurrence . . ."

"What is it?" cry the alarmed officials.

Dobchinski starts again: "A quite unforeseen affair; we went to the hotel . . ."

Bobchinski interrupts, "Peter Ivanovich and I came to the hotel . . ."

Dobchinski breaks in, "Eh, allow me, Peter Ivanovich, let me tell it . . ."

Bobchinski pleads, "Oh no, let me, let me; you aren't a good talker . . ."

"Dobchinski interrupts, "But you'll get confused, and forget something . . ."

Bobchinski protests, "Oh no! I won't, upon my word! Don't plague me; let me tell it! Please, gentlemen, do not let Peter Ivanovich plague me . . ."

The exasperated officials protest: "For the Lord's sake, do tell it. What happened? My heart is in my mouth. Sit down, gentlemen! Take seats! Peter Ivanovich, here is a chair for you. Well, what has happened?" and all gather about the two Peter Ivanoviches.

So goes the tale, but it is rather a matter of comic acting than narrative humor.

## XXVII

### THE CENTRAL FIGURE OF ENGLISH HUMOR

WE are all familiar with the central figure of English humor: the rotund, jolly man with the red face, who carried with him the atmosphere of the great out-of-doors, who is mightily addicted to the swigging of beer, and who, when half-seas over, plunges with wild recklessness into all sorts of questionable adventures; a good sort, withal, though much too boisterous for weak nerves, carrying about with him a flavor of the stables, and devoted to sanguinary adjectives. In a word, the comic John Bull, without whom no English book is thoroughly national.

Whether the Anglo-Saxons recognized him is a question into which I am not drawn to investigate; perhaps Norman Rufus was the first adumbration of him, though I never heard Rufus spoken of as a comic person; on the contrary, he was rather grim and downright. But when we come to Geoffrey Chaucer, the verse-writing member of Parliament, we find the type complete, as, indeed, is true of nearly every type distinctly English. Chaucer paints the more amiable side of the comic John Bull in the Franklin of the

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famed Canterbury pilgrimage, while the disreputable side, a hardly less essential part of the picture, is embodied in the Summoner of the same immortal company.

Chaucer touches off the Franklin with the loving skill of a Rembrandt or a Jan Steen, beginning artfully with his beard, white as a daisy, above which flares into rubicund jollity his sanguine visage. The good gentleman loved to begin the morning with a hunch of white bread soaked in red wine; his wont was ever to live in pleasure, for he was own son to Epicurus, and held firmly to the view that pleasure was the highest good. He was the Saint Julian of the country-side for cheerful hospitality; his bread and ale were uniformly good, his cellars always stocked with good red wine. His house was never without baked meats, and fish and fowl were as plentiful as snow in winter. All the dainties of the year graced his table, month by month, partridge and bream and pike, with poignant sauce. Like a good English country gentleman he attended the sessions as a justice of the peace, and his county had often sent him to Westminster.

Is there anything in that portrait of the late thirteen hundreds that would seem out of place in *Tom Jones* or one of Hardy's books? Is it not the type perennial, everlasting? But to paint in the disreputable traits, from the Summoner, the hanger-on of the ecclesiastical court. The Summoner also was a florid Englishman, having, indeed, a fire-red cherub's face plentifully adorned

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with knobs and carbuncles. He also loved strong red wine, and had a plebeian fondness for garlic, onions, and leeks. And, when he was in liquor, he would speak nothing but Latin, stringing together the tags he had picked up, as apparitor at the courts. Chaucer insists that this knobbed, red-faced knave is a jolly good fellow, a point of view also distinctly English; and, as an example of his goodness to other jolly good fellows, relates that he was ever ready to screen them against the archdeacon's curse; he kept under his thumb all the young folk of the diocese, not, I fear, to their edification. The Summoner wore a garland on his head big enough for the sign of an ale-house, and had a huge round cake for a shield.

So much for the picture of the comic John Bull, feelingly limned by Dan Chaucer, who is a perfect Dutch portraitist. Then two centuries later comes the Bard of Avon, and sets the comic John Bull in action, dragging him through a thousand screamingly funny, disreputable adventures, such as the escapades with Prince Hal, and that famed adventure with the "Merry Wives of Windsor."

For, I make no doubt, gentle reader, you have already recognized the John Bull of comedy in that fat rascal, Sir John Falstaff, the creation of whom places Shakespeare among the greatest humorists of the world, peer, in that kind, of Aristophanes, Cervantes, Rabelais; and one may doubt whether Falstaff be not the most compact organic figure of them all; and English through and through, contrasted, let us say, with the lean

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knight of La Mancha or the gluttonous guzzler, Gargantua.

But instead of trying to portray Sir John, let me borrow a character sketch of him from Prince Hal, who, when Falstaff asks him the time of day, thus heartily responds:

“Thou art so fat-witted, with drinking of old sack, and unbuttoning thee after supper, and sleeping upon benches after noon, that thou hast forgotten to demand that truly which thou wouldst truly know. What a devil hast thou to do with the time of the day? unless hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons,” and more of like essence.

To which Falstaff replies: “Indeed, you come near to me now, Hal: for we that take purses go by the moon and seven stars; and not by Phœbus—he, ‘that wandering knight so fair.’ And, I pray thee, sweet wag, when thou art king—as, God save thy grace (majesty, I should say; for grace thou wilt have none); marry, then, sweet wag, when thou art king let not us, that are squires of the night’s body, be called thieves of the day’s beauty; let us be—Diana’s foresters, gentlemen of the shade, minions of the moon. And let men say: we be men of good government, being governed as the sea is, by our noble and chaste mistress the moon, under whose countenance we steal. . . . Thou hast done much harm upon me, Hal, God forgive thee for it! Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing; and now am I, if a man should speak truly, little better than one



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of the wicked. I must give over this life, and I will give it over; by the Lord, an I do not, I am a villain; I'll be damned for never a king's son in Christendom."

Falstaff, in his young days, was a contemporary of Chaucer, so it is fitting enough that the boon companions should agree to lie in wait that night for a band of pilgrims going to Canterbury with rich offerings. How the adventure befell, let Falstaff bear testimony:

"There be four of us here," he boasts over his cup of sack in the Boar's Head tavern at Eastcheap, "have ta'en a thousand pound this morning. Where is it? Taken from us it is; a hundred upon poor four us. I am a rogue, if I were not at half-sword with a dozen of them two hours together. I have 'scap'd by miracle. I am eight times thrust through the doublet; four through the hose; my buckler cut through and through; my sword hacked like a hand-saw, *ecce signum*. I never dealt better since I was a man—all would not do. A plague of all cowards! Let them speak. If they speak more or less than truth, they are villains."

Prince Hal calls on the others to speak.

Gadshill responds, "We four set upon some dozen—"

Whereupon Falstaff interrupts: "Sixteen, at least, my lord."

"And bound them," says Gadshill.

But Peto declares they were not bound.

"You rogue," cries Falstaff, "they were bound,

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every man of them; or I am a Jew else, an Ebrew Jew."

Gadshill again interjects, "As we were sharing, some six or seven fresh men set upon us—"

"And unbound the rest, and then come in the other," Falstaff takes up the tale.

Prince Hal incredulously asks, "What, fought ye with them all?"

"All?" cries Falstaff. "I know not what you call all; but if I fought not with fifty of them, I am a bunch of radish; if there were not two or three and fifty upon poor old Jack, then am I no two-legged creature."

"Pray God," says Poins, "you have not murdered some of them."

"Nay," answers Falstaff, "that's past praying for; for I have peppered two of them; two, I am sure, I have paid; two rogues in buckram suits. I tell thee what, Hal, if I tell thee a lie, spit in my face, call me horse. Thou knowest my old ward—here I lay, and thus I bore my point. Four rogues in buckram let drive at me, these four came all a-front, and mainly thrust at me. I made me no more ado, but took all their seven points in my target, thus: These nine, in buckram, that I told thee of, began to give me ground; but I followed me close, came in foot and hand; and, with a thought, seven of the eleven I paid. But, as the devil would have it, three misbegotten knaves, in Kendal green, came at my back and let drive at me—for it was so dark, Hal, that thou couldst not see thy hand."

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Then, after some eloquent banter, Prince Hal tells what really befell:

“We two saw you four set on four; you bound them, and were masters of their wealth. Mark now, how plain a tale shall put you down. Then did we two set on you four; and, with a word, out-faced you from your prize, and have it; yea, and can show it you here in the house; and, Falstaff, you carried your guts away as nimbly, with as quick dexterity, and roared for mercy, and still ran and roared, as ever I heard bull-calf. What a slave art thou, to hack thy sword as thou hast done; and then say, it was in fight! What trick, what device, what starting-hole, canst thou now find out, to hide thee from this open and apparent shame?”

“By the Lord,” answers jolly Sir John, no whit abashed, “I knew ye, as well as he that made ye. Why, hear ye, my masters: Was it for me to kill the heir apparent? Should I turn upon the true prince? Why, thou knowest, I am as valiant as Hercules; but beware instinct; the lion will not touch the true prince. Instinct is a great matter; I was a coward in instinct. I shall think the better of myself and thee, during my life; I, for a valiant lion, and thou for a true prince. But, by the Lord, lads, I am glad you have the money—Hostess, clap to the doors; watch to-night, pray to-morrow. Gallants, lads, boys, hearts of gold, all the titles of good-fellowship come to you! What, shall we be merry? Shall we have a play extempore?”

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Which sufficiently reveals Sir John Falstaff as the comic John Bull. Some two and a quarter centuries after Shakespeare wrote that comedy, Sir John Falstaff was reborn, still choosing England for his native land, in the person of Samuel Pickwick, Esquire, author of a learned paper entitled, "Speculations on the Source of the Hampstead Ponds, with Some Observations on the Theory of Tittlebats." The reincarnated Sir John, who now bore the prenomen of Samuel, had, it is true, a sobered and a chastened spirit, yet something of the destiny of him whom the Merry Wives carried out in a clothes-basket still clung to him. As witness the following adventure:

Mr. Pickwick paced his room in Goswell Street to and fro with hurried steps, popped his head out of the window at intervals of about three minutes each, constantly referred to his watch, and exhibited many other manifestations of impatience, very unusual with him. It was evident that something of great importance was in contemplation, but what that something was not even Mrs. Bardell herself had been enabled to discover.

"Mrs. Bardell," said Mr. Pickwick, at last, as that amiable female approached the termination of a prolonged dusting of the apartment.

"Sir," said Mrs. Bardell.

"Your little boy is a very long time gone."

"Why, it's a good long way to the Borough, sir," remonstrated Mrs. Bardell.

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"Ah," said Mr. Pickwick, "very true; so it is."

Mr. Pickwick relapsed into silence, and Mrs. Bardell resumed her dusting.

"Mrs. Bardell," said Mr. Pickwick, at the expiration of a few minutes.

"Sir," said Mrs. Bardell again.

"Do you think it's a much greater expense to keep two people than to keep one?"

"La, Mr. Pickwick," said Mrs. Bardell, coloring up to the very border of her cap, as she fancied she observed a species of matrimonial twinkle in the eyes of her lodger. "La, Mr. Pickwick, what a question!"

"Well, but *do* you?" inquired Mr. Pickwick.

"That depends," said Mrs. Bardell, approaching the duster very near to Mr. Pickwick's elbow, which was planted on the table—"that depends a good deal upon the person, you know, Mr. Pickwick; and whether it's a saving and careful person, sir."

"That's very true," said Mr. Pickwick; "but the person I have in my eye [here he looked very hard at Mrs. Bardell] I think possesses these qualities; and has, moreover, a considerable knowledge of the world, and a great deal of sharpness, Mrs. Bardell; which may be of material use to me."

"La, Mr. Pickwick," said Mrs. Bardell, the crimson rising to her cap-border again.

"I do," said Mr. Pickwick, growing energetic, as was his wont in speaking of a subject which interested him—"I do, indeed; and to tell you

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the truth, Mrs. Bardell, I have made up my mind."

"Dear me, sir," exclaimed Mrs. Bardell.

"You'll think it very strange now," said the amiable Mr. Pickwick, with a good-humored glance at his companion, "that I never consulted you about this matter, and never mentioned it till I sent your little boy out this morning—eh?"

Mrs. Bardell could only reply by a look. She had long worshiped Mr. Pickwick at a distance, but here she was, all at once, raised to a pinnacle to which her wildest and most extravagant hopes had never dared to aspire. Mr. Pickwick was going to propose—a deliberate plan, too—sent her little boy to the Borough, to get him out of the way—how thoughtful—how considerate!

"Well," said Mr. Pickwick, "what do you think?"

"Oh, Mr. Pickwick," said Mrs. Bardell, trembling with agitation, "you're very kind, sir."

"It 'll save you a good deal of trouble, won't it?" said Mr. Pickwick.

"Oh, I never thought anything of trouble, sir," replied Mrs. Bardell; "and, of course, I should take more trouble to please you than than ever; but it is so kind of you, Mr. Pickwick, to have so much consideration for my loneliness."

"Ah, to be sure," said Mr. Pickwick; "I never thought of that. When I am in town, you'll always have somebody to sit with you. To be sure, so you will."

"I'm sure I ought to be a very happy woman," said Mrs. Bardell.

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“And your little boy—” said Mr. Pickwick.

“Bless his little heart,” interposed Mrs. Bardell, with a maternal sob.

“He, too, will have a companion,” resumed Mr. Pickwick, “a lively one who’ll teach him, I’ll be bound, more tricks in a week than he would ever learn in a year.” And Mr. Pickwick smiled placidly.

“Oh, you dear—” said Mrs. Bardell.

Mr. Pickwick started.

“Oh, you kind, good, playful dear,” said Mrs. Bardell; and, without more ado, she rose from her chair and flung her arms round Mr. Pickwick’s neck, with a cataract of tears and a chorus of sobs.

“Bless my soul,” cried the astonished Mr. Pickwick. “Mrs. Bardell, my good woman—dear me, what a situation—pray consider. Mrs. Bardell, don’t—if anybody should come—”

“Oh, let them come,” exclaimed Mrs. Bardell, frantically; “I’ll never leave you—dear, kind, good soul.” And with these words, Mrs. Bardell clung the tighter.

“Mercy upon me,” said Mr. Pickwick, struggling violently; “I hear somebody coming up the stairs. Don’t, don’t, there’s a good woman, don’t!” But the entreaty and remonstrance were alike unavailing; for Mrs. Bardell had fainted in Mr. Pickwick’s arms; and before he could gain time to deposit her on a chair Master Bardell entered the room, ushering in Mr. Tupman, Mr. Winkle, and Mr. Snodgrass. . . .

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“I cannot conceive,” said Mr. Pickwick, when his friends returned—“I cannot conceive what has been the matter with that woman. I had merely announced to her my intention of keeping a man-servant, when she fell into the extraordinary paroxysm in which you found her. Very extraordinary thing.”

“Very,” said his three friends.



## XXVIII

### THE PAWKY HUMOR OF SCOTLAND

A FRIEND of mine, a "puir English body," be it understood, declares that he suspects the authenticity of any Scotch joke, unless there be a corpse concealed in it somewhere. That, I think, is distinctly libelous; and, besides, he ought to have said "corp." Anent the use of this word, Sir Archibald Geikie, himself a "brither Scot," tells two or three excellent stories. Strictly speaking, he says, the word "corp" is held to be the singular of "corpse," and is used to refer to the late lamented from the moment of death until the time of interment; whereafter he ceases to be a subject of anatomy, and becomes a subject of theology. But, pending the disposal of his earthly part, one may hear such a discussion as this, concerning a departed Scotchman: "Ah'm sayin', Sandy, what was the corp to trade?"

And there is an admirable yarn of an old couple, deeply offended at not being invited to partake of the funeral baked meats of a neighbor, who consoled themselves thus: "Aweel, never ye mind; maybe we'll be havin' a corp o' our ain before lang, and we'll no ask them!"

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Quite inimitable, too, is the story of the melancholy cortège which was proceeding, with an empty hearse, through one of the streets of Forfar. To a curious inquirer, one of its members made this reply: "Weel, ye canna exactly call it a funeral, for the corp has missed the railway connections!"

If any of my readers are still in doubt as to the exact connotation of the adjective "pawky," or question its entire applicability to the humor of Scotland, I think the following little tale will clear the matter up. Once more, it is the world-famous geologist who tells the story. At a funeral in Glasgow, he says, a stranger had taken his seat in one of the mourning carriages, clad in decent black. His presence excited the curiosity of the other three occupants, one of whom could stand it no longer, and thus addressed him:

"Ye'll be a brither o' the corp?"

"No," replied the gloomy stranger; "I'm no a brither o' the corp!"

"Weel, then," pursued the curious mourner, "ye'll be his cousin?"

"No, I'm no that!" was the still tantalizing reply.

"No!" went on the insatiate querent; "then ye'll be at least a frien' o' the corp?"

"No that either," admitted the stranger. "To tell the truth, I've no been that weel, mysel', and as my doctor has ordered me some carriage exercise, I thocht this wad be the cheapest way to tak' it!"

Robert Louis Stevenson's father is, I believe,

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responsible for the story of an ancient grave-digger of Monkton who lay a-dying. The minister, having prepared him for his future destiny, began to talk to him of his long and industrious life, and at last asked him whether he felt that he had anything to regret.

“Weel, to tell you the truth, Minister, I’ve put two hunner and eighty-five corps in that kirk-yaird, and I wuss it had been the Lord’s wull to let me mak’ up the three hunner!”

It is rapidly becoming evident, I think, that if Shakespeare had seen more deeply into the matter, he would have transferred the grave-digger scene from “Hamlet” to “Macbeth,” and given the funeral moralizings of the melancholy Dane to the Thane of Fife. There is one of these lugubrious tales which, I must own, caused some misgiving in my own mind, when my English friend made the derogatory remark above quoted concerning Scots humor. It is the tale of a banquet at Glasgow, in bygone days, one of the guests of which was Laird of Kerscadden.

At a late hour, when the guests had absorbed largely of Glenlivet and other Highland brews, and, as is customary in Scotland at that stage, the conversation was turning to metaphysics and other high matters, one of those present noted that the Laird of Kerscadden was looking deathly pale, ghastly, indeed, or as the good Scot would call it, “gash.” Thereupon he queried thus:

“Fat gars Kerscadden luik sae gash?” Which,

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being translated, means, "What makes Kerscadden look so pale?"

To this another guest replied:

"Kerscadden's soul departed to its Maker twa hours agone. I obsairved it at the time, but said naething, no wishin' to disturb the hilarity of the proceedin's."

But Scots humor by no means confines itself to the gloomy cerements of the tomb. On the contrary, it plunges boldly into the Beyond. Classical, of course, is the famous theological exposition of Calvinism, in "Holy Willie's Prayer," which fine and genial poem looks, in popular editions, somewhat like a star map. That profane and vain babbler, Rabbie Burns, there sets forth the Calvinistic view of the Creator thus:

O Thou, wha in the heavens dost dwell,  
Wha, as it pleases best Thyself,  
Sends ane to heaven, and ten to hell,  
A' for Thy glory;  
And no for ony gude or ill  
They've done afore Thee. . . .

I have heard a modern tale, which put the Maker of all the earth in somewhat the same light. It concerns a sermon delivered, I believe, in a Free Kirk place of worship, to an assembly of parishioners who had more than the usual proportion of original sin. The meenister perorated thus:

"Ma friens! Ah ken ye weel, an' a' the hardness o' yer hearts! Ye come here the Sawbath

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morn, wi' yer gude claes and yer sad faces, but ye're no gude, ma friens, yer bad at heart! Bad ye are, and bad ye'll live, till your hour comes, and the Lord stretches forth His hand against ye, an' ye dee! An' when ye're deid, yer bodies 'll gang to the kirkyaird, but yer souls 'll gang to the hottest pairt o' perdeetion!

"And oh, ma friens, yer souls 'll wake up in the hottest pairt o' perdeetion, an' ye'll cry unto the Maker of a' the airth, an' ye'll say unto Him: 'O Lord, Maker of a' the airth, what for did Ye send us to the hottest pairt of perdeetion?' An' the Maker of a' the airth 'll make answer an' say unto ye: 'Because ye were bad bairnies!' An' ye will reply unto the Lord, 'O Lord! we didna ken we were bad bairnies!' And the Maker of a' the airth 'll answer an' say unto ye, 'Awell, ye ken it noo!'"

So it cannot be said that Scottish humor is limited to the "corp." But it does tend to play about great issues, and "the last things," as the theologians call them. Yet this impulse may not spring altogether from piety; as is suggested by a story, which was once told me, concerning a little town in Fifeshire, where there are a thousand inhabitants and ten churches, of as many different denominations. It is said that a Southron, a "puir English body," who did not know any better, coming thither, remarked to one of the natives: "This must be a very religious town; so many churches with so few people!" To which the native, with a sniff of infinite scorn, in part

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for English ignorance, in part for his fellow-townsmen whom he knew so well, replied:

“Releegious! It’s no releegion ava’; it’s juist currrsedness o’ temperrr!”

One cannot do justice to the richness of this in cold type; for in Fifeshire, more, perhaps, than in any other part of Scotland, the spoken sentence does not move stupidly forward on a dead level, as in mere English, but curves up and down through the scale, like a switchback railway; a deliberate and serious-minded switchback, of course, but an undeniable switchback.

There is another theme about which Scots humor coruscates incessantly; a theme not concerned with death or “perdeetion,” though, perhaps, on the main road thither. That subject is “whusky.” On this theme one of the best tales is contributed by the great geologist already laid under contribution. He tells of two Highlanders discussing the merits of a certain gentleman, who had fallen under the displeasure of one of them, against which the other was vigorously defending him. The complainant said:

“Weel, Sandy, ye may say what ye like, but I think he canna be a nice man, whatefer!”

“But what ails ye at him, Donald?”

“Weel, then, I’ll juist tell ye!” said Donald, with a sniff of reminiscent indignation. “I wass in his house last week, and he wad be pourin’ me out a glass o’ whusky; and, of course, I cried out, ‘Stop, stop!’ and wad ye believe it, he stoppit!”

That reminds me of a classic story concerning

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two other Highlanders, one of whom observed the other to be wrapped in impenetrable gloom. He asked the cause, and the interlocutor at last reluctantly replied:

“It’s that man MacTavish! He ca’ed me a leer!”

His friend tried to console him, explaining that many a man had been called a liar and had been none the worse for it. But the gloomy one with some heat replied:

“Dammut mon! But he pruvud it!” Which showed where the shoe really pinched.

But we were talking of barley brew. Here is a slender tale, yet with a spice to it. Be it understood that a “bawbee” is, in the Scots tongue, a halfpenny, and you will understand the full significance of this sign upon a country inn in Forfar: “Drunk for three bawbees, and mortal for threepence!” It must have been a native of those parts who was so scandalized by the conditions of things in a distant parish in Perth. “This is no’ a godly place at all, at all,” he said; “they dinna preach the gospel here—and they water the whusky!” The “gospel” in his mind probably meaning the kind of doctrine that was dished out to the “bad bairnies.”

Concerning the said preaching of the gospel, the late lamented Dean Ramsay used to tell the following tale. A certain old “betheral,” which is to say, bealle, had received a brother “betheral” from a neighboring parish, coming with the minister thereof to preach, instead of the regular in-

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cumbent, for some special occasion. After service, the strange clergyman's "betheral" feeling proud of the way in which his "meenister" had acquitted himself of his task, remarked in a triumphant tone to his friend:

"I think our meenister did weel; ay, he gars the stour flee out o' the cushion!" That is, he banged the cushion on the pulpit desk so hard that he made the dust fly.

To which the home "betheral," not so easily to be outdone, made answer: "He garred the stour flee out o' the cushion! hout! our meenister, sin' he cam' wi' us, has dinged the guts out o' twa Bibles!" Which hardly needs to be rendered into the vernacular.

There are many Scots jests which judiciously mingle the two great comic elements—namely, theology and "whusky." For example, the tale of a certain minister who reproached his "betheral" somewhat severely for always coming home "fou'," which is to say, full, which is to say, very drunk.

"Now, John," said the minister, "I go through the parish, and you don't see me return fou', as you have done!"

To which John the incorrigible replied: "Ay, meenister; but then aiblins ye're no sae popular in the parish as me!"

Yet another anecdote is linked to this by the beautiful word "aiblins," meaning "perhaps." It is concerned with a rather backward student of the catechism, who was asked by his easy-



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going and kind-hearted minister what the latter thought would be a particularly simple question: "How many Commandments are there?" The boy scratched his head, shifted from one foot to the other, peered up at the minister, and hazarded the reply:

"Aiblins a hunner!"

Departing somewhat abashed from the minister's house, he met another candidate for catechetical honors, whom he cautiously sounded thus:

"Weel, what will ye say noo if the meenister asks ye how mony Commandments there are?"

"Say?" cried the other, full of self-conscious science. "Why, I shall say ten, to be sure!"

"Ten?" snorted the other, with infinite contempt. "Try ye him wi' ten! I tried him wi' a hunner, and he wasna satisfeed!"

Of a certain old-fashioned minister, the Reverend Alexander Shirra by name, it is recorded that, as he got well on in years, he acquired the habit of thinking aloud, as he read from the Gude Buik in the kirk. He was once reading from the hundred and sixteenth Psalm, when he came to the verse: "I said in my haste all men are liars!" His mind began to work, and he went on, quite unconsciously, but also quite audibly: "Indeed, Dauvid, an ye had been i' this parish, ye might hae said it at your leesure!"

It is recorded that one of his parishioners once purchased a pair of nether garments which pleased him inordinately; a pleasure which he sought to

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share with the rest of the congregation by walking slowly and conspicuously up and down the aisle. The minister stood it for a while, and then broke out:

“Oh, mon, will ye sit down, an’ we’ll see yer new breeks when the kirk’s done!”

Two of the best Scots tales illustrate the figure which, in the kindred art of music, is called *crescendo*. The first is of the plain people; the second deals with their “betters,” as the catechism puts it. For the first, Dean Ramsay’s father is responsible. Riding home one evening, he passed a small farm-house, where there was a considerable assemblage of people and incipient merry-making for some festive occasion. When the good gentleman asked one of the lassies standing by what it was all about, she answered:

“Ou, it’s juist a wedding of Jock Thompson and Janet Fraser!”

Mr. Ramsay then asked three questions:

“Is the bride rich?”

To which the lassie replied, “Na.”

“Is she young?”

“Naa!”

“Is she bonny?”

“Naaa!”

Here is the same figure in a more aristocratic key: The Marquis of Lothian, a peppery nobleman with fine manners of the olden time, had as his guest a certain countess, very charming but very deaf, a fact which was unknown to her distinguished host. Early in the repast, the mar-

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quis, turning to the countess with a lordly bow, asked her:

“Madam, may I have the honor and happiness of helping your ladyship to some fish?”

The countess failed to hear or respond. The marquis repeated his inquiry, but with a slight rise in temperature:

“Madam, may I have your ladyship’s permission to send you some fish?” The same—that is to say, no reply—from the countess.

For the third time the marquis asked:

“Is your ladyship inclined to take fish?”

Still silence.

“Madam, do you choice fish?”

Then finally:

“Confound ye, will ye have any fish?”

We are now in a position to meet and refute certain calumnies evidently born of an invidious spirit, which came from the flat country south of the Tweed. For example, that tale of Charles Lamb, who was invited to a party to meet a Colonel Burns, the son of the author of “Holy Willie’s Prayer.” Charles Lamb happened to say that he wished it had been the father he was to meet, and, he says, several Scotchmen present at once explained that that would be impossible, because Robert Burns was dead! We are now in a position to declare authoritatively that this remark sprang not from a lack of the sense of humor, but from an excess of it, mingled with a sly desire to impose on the “English body’s” credulity. In which the Caledonians were so

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successful, that Charles Lamb brought the story back to London and told it to the end of his days. So, of that peevish remark of Sydney Smith: "It requires a surgical operation to get a joke well into a Scotch understanding. Their only idea of wit, which prevails occasionally in the north, and which, under the name of wut, is so infinitely distressing to people of good taste, is laughing immoderately at stated intervals."

We all know the Scots answer to that aspersion about the surgical operation and the joke: "Ouy! an English joke!" The point is well taken, and one suspects that some of Sydney Smith's rancor may be due to the fact that his own joke thus suffered. They were evidently not pawky enough.

Lastly, brethren, to close this discourse, and once more to illustrate the adjective I have chosen to characterize the humor of Caledonia, let me record this observation of a Scottish host to one of his countrymen, who was visiting him, as they stood, at evening, on the threshold of the house-door:

"It's wat; but it's no weetin'! It's darrk; but, losh, mon, ye can see! Ye may bide if ye like; but if Ah was you, Ah wad gang!"

In telling this story, pray, gentle reader, do not forget the word "losh," which adds local color and infinite pawkiness.

## XXIX

### HUMOR OF THE ANCIENT HIBERNIANS

NOT very long ago I had a brilliant intuition concerning Irish humor. It came upon me in a flash of inspiration that the essence of Irish humor is, that it is not humorous at all. It is simply the Irishman's way of saying the thing in the best and most direct manner possible. The scintillant effect comes from the quality of his mind and his power of thinking, feeling, and saying two wholly incompatible things at the same time.

Yet I flatter myself when I say that it was I who had this inspiration. Rather it was forced on me by a lively and pathetic little old Irishman, who was wholly unconscious that he was saying anything out of the common. And I think that, for him, it was in all likelihood not out of the common. He looked as if he could do it all the time and never even know it.

The time was the festal day of the Hudson-Fulton celebration. The place was Grant's Tomb, where was gathered a motley throng eager to see the goodly showing of war-ships of all flags, the little high-pooped *Half-Moon*, the *Clermont*, and

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the rest. My little old Irishman was full of earnest enthusiasm. He was also short of stature. So he climbed on a bench and craned his little, scrawny neck over the crowd, only to be yanked down by a relentless big man in gray. He looked hurt, but said nothing; and, climbing up the stairs, tried to get on one of the stone ridges of the tomb; but another big man in gray again abstracted him. Then, sad but undaunted, he tried to mount the railings of Li Hung Chang's ginkgo-tree; again a big man in gray grabbed him. Then he gave up in despair, and, rather in sorrow than in anger, said: "Ye can't look at annything frum where ye can see it frum!" and faded into the crowd.

That was some years ago. I have spent much time, during those years, trying to say the same thing in fewer or as few words; with the result that I have come to the matured conclusion that this funny, pathetic Irishman had intuitively hit on the very best way possible of expressing a complex and difficult thought, and had done it without any consciousness of the feat he was accomplishing.

Another instance. This was at Newcastle, in County Down, under the lovely purple shadows of the Mourne Mountains. It was a holiday, and there was to be a consequent rearrangement of the evening trains, carrying excursions back to their homes. The railway porter at Newcastle station studied the facts and hours, got the whole thing clear in his head, and, coming forth to the crowd on the platform, thus announced: "The

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ten o'clock train 'll go at eleven o'clock to-night, and there'll be no last train!" That is what is usually called an Irish bull. It is really the result of an unconscious genius expressing a fact in the shortest possible way. Try it yourself, and see if you come anywhere near it.

Yet another instance: this time the expression of a social situation which we have all faced at one time or another, but, I apprehend, without the advantage of Hibernian genius. Mr. Murphy and Mr.—well, let us say Mr. O'Flaherty, as this takes the story out of politics, and, besides, I mean a different Murphy. Well, the said gentleman had had a falling-out, and the feud was taken up by their loyal spouses. It befell, however, that there was a ball at the County Assembly Rooms, and, by a curious accident, it likewise befell that the two ladies indicated came a half-hour early to the hall, to find a wide untenanted space smiled down on by green flags and Gaelic mottos. These they surveyed for a time with absorbed attention, and studied oblivion of each other's presence in a silence that could be felt. Finally Mrs. O'Flaherty could stand it no longer. So, coming up to the other one, she spoke thus, with a warm voice and an engaging smile:

"And is that you, Mrs. Murphy? And how is Murphy? Not that I give a damn, but just for conversation!"

Without question, that complies with Pope's definition:

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True wit is nature to advantage dressed,  
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed.

Here, then, in these three cases, the essence of Irish humor consists in the fact that it is not humorous at all, but simply the shortest and best possible way of saying something, attained by an inherent genius for feeling and thinking two things at once. There is always a thought, generally a double thought, in an Irish bull, so-called; which is, perhaps, why Professor Mahaffy used to say: "The Irish bull is pregnant." Always a double measure of thought. At least so I believed, until the other day, when, on the upper West Side, I chanced to overhear a conversation between two nurse-maids, who had about them an atmosphere of the County Kerry.

They were wheeling perambulators, and one of them was one of those double-enders, which represent a terrible shock to a father's feelings when the doctor holds up two fingers and announces "Twins!" The maid who was wheeling only one babe was, nevertheless, courteously appreciative of the double charms of the other's charges. She looked at them, admired them, chucked them under the chins, goo-gooed at them, and finally said:

"Oh, the lovely little craytures! And do they both look alike?"

To this moment I have a haunting suspicion that she may have meant something uncommonly wise and deep, and that the failure to discern it



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is a shortcoming of my own. Should any kind reader catch her thought, I should be glad to know of it.

Yet these are modern frivolities, while my expressed intention is to write of Hibernian humor of ancient days; humor contemporary, in all likelihood, with satirical Horace and witty Lucian, and the fantastical-comical author of "The Golden Ass."

The best of these ancient stories, and in some ways the finest Irish story ever told, is found in the great Celtic manuscript entitled "The Book of Leinster," and records the adventure of King MacDatho's Pig.

MacDatho was a famous king of Leinster, and his fortress rath was in sight of the Wicklow Hills. He had a hound named Ailbe, the like of which was not known in all of the kingdoms of Erin; so that the princes and warriors of Erin coveted it. Whether for hunting or keeping guard, never was there such a hound as Ailbe.

So fierce was the longing of the princes and warriors for the hound that they sent embassies to Leinster to try to barter for it with the king: embassies from the royal rath of Cruachan in Connaught, and from the great kingly rath of Emain 'neath the beech-trees, in the heart of Ulad, in the north. And it befell that these two embassies arrived in the same day at the royal fort rath of MacDatho, King of Leinster.

MacDatho's heart was disturbed within him when he saw the two famous great embassies of

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the warriors of the west and north, so that his queen, perturbed, asked him the cause of his gloom.

“But,” said he, “what will it profit me to tell it to you, for when was there ever wisdom or prudence in the heart of a woman?”

Nevertheless he told her, and she found in her heart, if not wisdom, yet guile and craft and strategy to bring him out of his perplexity. For she counseled him to promise the great hound to both, to the men of Connaught and to the men of Ulster, leaving them to settle it between them, for thus would Leinster be rid of many a foe.

So MacDatho received the embassy of Connaught, the embassy of King Ailill and Queen Maeve, she that was bride to Conchobar, and then fled away from him to Ailill; and the men of Connaught offered MacDatho a thousand kine and a yoke of steeds and a chariot for the great dog; and he told them he would give the hound to them for that. And then, in his seven-gated great rath, and in his hall, MacDatho heard of the ambassadors of Ulster, and they offered him flocks and herds for the hound; and he promised Ailbe to them for that. So MacDatho made a banquet for the ambassadors, the men of Connaught and the men of Ulster, and they sat down together. And at the long, heavily burdened tables of the banquet were many bodies of sheep and oxen; but chiefest was the pig of MacDatho, for three hundred cows had fed it with the best of their milk for seven years, so that the like of it had never been seen in Erin.

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“That pig looks good!” said Conchobar, King of Emain.

“Of a truth it does,” answered Ailill, of Cruachan; “but how shall it be carved, O Conchobar?”

“What more simple than that in this hall where sit the glorious heroes of Erin?” cried Bricriu, of the sharp tongue, the most quarrelsome man in Erin; “to each man his share, according to his fights and deeds; but before the shares are distributed more than one rap on the nose will have been given and taken.”

“So be it!” said Ailill, of Connaught.

“It is fair,” said Conchobar, “for we have with us our best warriors, the defense of our frontiers against the men of Erin!”

Then Cet, son of Maga, great among the warriors of Connaught, arose in his place at the table and proclaimed that he should have the right to carve the milk-fed pig. But Angus, son of Danger Arm, of the men of Ulster, rose to dispute it, saying that he himself should carve.

“Who is this?” said Cet, “and how comes he by his name? Do you not know that it was I that beat your father, casting a javelin at him and piercing his arm, so that they call him Danger Arm to this day? How, then, are you the better man?”

So Angus sat down abashed. But Eogan rose, from among the warriors of Ulster, and said that he should carve at the banquet.

“Who is this?” said Cet—“this man with the

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one eye? Is not this Eogan, that I fought against and sent a strong, great javelin against him, piercing his eye so that he is half blind to this day? How can he claim to be the better man?"

Then Munremur of Ulster arose, and said that he should carve the pig.

"Who is this?" said Cet. "Is not this Munremur, whose eldest son I slew, and he could not defend him against me?"

So Munremur sat down abashed in his place at the table.

Then Mend, son of Crutches, rose and said that he should carve at the king's banquet.

"Who is this?" said Cet. "Is it not Mend, whose father I fought and pierced his legs with a javelin, so that he limps to this day? How is he the better man?"

Then Celtecar, son of Utecar, rose, he who came from the mouth of the Quoile and the fort by the rushy reaches of the river.

"Who is this?" said Cet—"this brave warrior of Ulster? Is it not he that I fought and wounded in the thigh, so that he limps in his walk, and goes halting?"

Then up rose Cuscraid, speaking huskily, and said that he as bravest of the warriors of Ulster should carve at MacDatho's banquet.

"Who is this?" asked Cet; "and why does he speak huskily, so that the warriors cannot hear him? Is not this Cuscraid? And did I not fight him, sending an arrow against him and piercing

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him through the throat, so that he speaks huskily even now? How is he the better man?"

There was a stir about the doorway, and in strode Conall Cearnach, of the warriors of Ulster, his arm covered with his red cloak. And, as he entered, Cet, of Connaught, was boasting, saying that he should carve, for not one of the warriors of Ulster was fit to stand against him.

Then Conall Cearnach stood and looked at him, and the two eyes of Cet fell before the eyes of Conall.

"Who is this," asked Conall, "that boasts himself to be the better man, and how can he claim it while I am here? Have I not fought in the armies of Ulster, so that never a day or a night passed that I did not slay an enemy? Ever since I first bore a weapon and learned to fight and to combat, not often have I lacked the head of a Connaught man for my pillow in the evening!"

"I confess it," said Cet. "Conall, thou art a greater warrior than I. Nevertheless, if Anluan, of Connaught, were here you would not dare to carve at this table."

Then Conall Cearnach rose in his seat and took a head from under his cloak, where he had it grasped by the long hair in his hand. "Anluan is here!" he answered. "Nevertheless, I shall carve at the banquet!"

Fain would I stay to recount the great and bloody and monster combat between the strong, valiant warriors of Erin, and to relate how the Ulster men triumphed and the Connaught men

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fled; likewise, how the great hound Ailbe pursued after the chariot of Ailill, King of Connaught, and caught the axle in his teeth, holding on until Ailill hacked the head of the hound from its body; and how, even then, the hound's jaws kept fast hold of the axle; but space forbids; therefore I must terminate the true tragedy of MacDatho's Pig.

Ossian, the tuneful son of Finn McCoul, the perfect poet whose name has echoed down through seventeen centuries, besides being a poet was something of a humorist, too. There still remains a poem attributed to golden-tongued Ossian, which is worthy of a place among the great humoresques of the world.

Very amusingly, Ossian takes as the target of his humor his own mighty father, Finn McCoul, and his own tuneful self. He relates the adventures of Finn at a great race-meet in the plain of Munster, and tells, with infinite zest, how Finn won the great race of the day and how the King of Munster presented him with a coal-black steed as a reward of his horsemanship. Finn, like the genuine Irishman he was, must needs try the big black horse, and so he set forth westward toward the ocean and galloped his new horse along the great white strand at Tralee, on the Kerry headland. Then he turned south, toward Killarney's lakes, stopping at every inn to boast of his steed and to sample the local brew.

So it befell that Finn, and Ossian, who accompanied him, being at sundown among the purple

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hills about Killarney, entered a certain carpeted vale, wherein they saw a strange habitation that, for all their hunting of the red deer on those hills, they had never seen or heard of before. They came to the door and halted in sudden horror; for there, at the right side of the entrance, sat twelve headless men, while at the left side were ranged in a gruesome row their missing heads.

Nor was this all; for Finn and Ossian, compelled by magical force to enter the hall of doom, were presently witnesses of a dire and dreadful match of bowls, wherein the headless men played against one another, rolling the loose heads along the floor. Such was their horror that Finn and Ossian presently swooned away.

When morning dawned, the warrior poet and his wise old father, to their infinite wonder, found themselves lying on the purple heather of the hillside, their horses browsing tranquilly near by, while of the weird house and its inhabitants there was not a trace. Only in their heads there was a strange feeling, compounded of numbness and of pain.

Thus with charm and fancy does famed Ossian describe "the morning after the night before," leaving it to us to divine whether he and his father went back to those inns to seek medicine for their strange malady.

Have you ever heard of the modern Irishman who, when reproached with his childless state, boldly affirmed that "it was hereditary in his family to have no children"? He did not know

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it; but he was only parodying a far finer saying of a far greater Hibernian—namely, King Brian of Munster, he of the Boruma tribute.

Brian, like earlier Alfred of England, fought for long years against the Danes. Once he had lost almost everything, and was pent up in the forests of Clare, when his brother Mahon came to him, begging him to surrender to the black Norsemen, lest the land should be altogether destroyed.

Brian magnificently replied that this was no good counsel; it was not natural for him or his clan to submit to insult and contempt; for neither his father nor his grandfather had ever surrendered or submitted to insult; therefore he concluded that it was not hereditary in his family to surrender. But if he fought the black Norsemen, he would either conquer them or die; and he did not fear death, for his father had died, and his grandfather before them, and their fathers' fathers. Therefore he concluded that it was hereditary in his family to die.



## XXX

### AMERICAN HUMOR BEFORE COLUMBUS

YES; and not only before Columbus, but older than our era; nay, even earlier than the year of the first Olympiad or the founding of the mighty city Rome. American humor not less ancient than three millenniums, and vouched for, not only by ancient and veridical chronicles, but also by the very matter of the jests.

One characteristic of modern American humor is a profane tendency to get gay with the sanctities, as where the Yankee interviews King Arthur, or the other Yankee, at least by adoption, interviews the Emperor of Russia or the mortal vestiges of an Egyptian mummy or the memorials of the great Christopher Columbus himself. I suppose this characteristic of humor stands out here, in America, because this country, having laid its foundation by bidding defiance to kings, thought itself well within its right in cracking jokes at them. Yet this is not the final essence of American humor; but of that later.

Well, it happens that the most ancient humor of America, which has to its credit, as I have said, not less than three thousand years, and probably

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many more, has as a characteristic quality a certain levity and mockery of no less a subject than the creation itself; as though, perhaps, the matter was recent enough in those days to be still regarded as funny; or, perhaps, because the Americans of that day had not lived long enough to realize how far certain aspects of the creation of mankind are from being a joke. But certain it is that nothing less than the august creation of that most august of creatures, man, is the theme of pre-Olympian American wit. And it is not only that the philosophers of the ancient American races have given an account of the origin of things, which, while solemn earnest for them, may seem very funny to us; on the contrary, they intended to be funny, especially in the second of the two stories which I shall relate; they were laying themselves out to catch a laugh; so they fully merit the title of humorists, not only by grace, but also of malice prepense.

Viewing, perhaps, the manifold contradictions of man, to say nothing of the helpmeet, seeing him at one time in action like an angel, at another time but a quintessence of dust, these prehistoric reasoners and seers, whose descendants long after built Palenqué and Copan, decided, it would seem, that the creators, or whoever might be responsible, had not made of mankind a very creditable job; they had in view the same sort of facts which led later theologians to develop the dogma of the fall of Adam, and of original sin. But they managed not to lay all the blame on Adam, nor on the help-

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meet, who has borne the greater part of it ever since, nor even on the suggestive ophidian who ministered to the general result; the ancient Americans have, very deftly, and without unseemly irreverence, shifted a great part of the blame to the formative powers themselves; affirming that these not only did not succeed very well with the matter in hand, but, further, and in this they anticipated Darwin, that the said powers only reached such qualified success as stands to their credit, after a good many bungling failures.

In the *Popul Vuh*, the sacred book of Guatemala, which was dim with age before the Spaniards came, these things are written. There is majesty, there is pathos in the creative record, and, what makes for our purpose, there is rich humor, too. The powers, who have very lovely designations that we must skip over, saw the earth without form and void; it could not pray to them; it could not adore them. So they commanded the earth to come forth from the waters, and the mountains appeared rising above the expanse like the backs of lobsters. But the mountains could not pray nor adore, so the powers made forests come forth; these, to break their silence, they decked with stags and jaguars, cougars, and birds and serpents. But all these, though they tried, could neither pray nor adore. So the powers took counsel together, and of the earth they formed men, of clay skilfully molded and shaped. But these men of clay lived after their kind; they were of the earth, and they acted as

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earth; dull, vague, forgetful, though they had speech, they neither adored nor prayed. And, worst of all, when the rain came, they got wet and melted away.

So the formative powers tried again. This time they took a material which would, at least, be water-tight. They shaped new men, this time carving them out of wood; wooden they were in source, wooden they were in nature. And here I am assailed by misgivings whether these antique sages had not in view, in their wooden dolls of men, some such creatures as ourselves, who lord it so sovereignly over things, knocking the lesser creatures about as though they owned them, and, just like the men of mud, forgetting to adore and to pray; forgetting the great well-spring of Life, their source and home. Be that as it may, the powers decided that these wooden-doll men would not do at all; so they prepared a cataclysm for them, and, somewhat illogically, as it seems to me, decided that they should be destroyed by a flood, whereas for wooden-doll men and women one would have thought destruction by fire much more appropriate. And it seems that the antique sages had something of this qualification in their own minds; for the deluge did little more than soak the spirit out of the wooden-doll men and women, and left at least enough of them animate to be punished some more.

And here comes genuine humor, somewhat grim, and, so far as I know, quite unprecedented in this august field. These wooden-doll men and

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women, we are informed, saw their late possessions come up before them, now richly endowed with speech, if not to adore and pray, at least to berate and objurgate their late masters and mistresses, for the helpmeet comes in for equal measure. To say nothing of the wild things of the forest, which they had unwarrantably pursued and slain, the very domestic dogs and fowl rounded on them, and gave it to them. "You cut our throats and ate us," said the fowl. "You did the like to us," said the dogs—and such is still the usage in those countries; "but, further, the moment we came in to the fireside you picked up things to throw at us," and then, as now, and as these dogs expressly say, "anything was good enough to beat a dog with." "So," said the chickens and the dogs, "as you have done unto us, we shall do to you."

Then the pots and pans took voice, and addressed themselves primarily to the helpmeet. "You never thought twice," they reproached, "before putting us in the fire; it mattered little to you that our cheeks were smutted and black. But our time has come, and we shall do likewise to you." So they thrust them in the fire and blackened their faces in the smoke. And the millstones likewise reproached them and said it was their turn to grind their masters. Nor was this all, for meanwhile the flood was steadily rising, and, when the wooden-doll people tried to climb on their houses to escape, the houses crumbled and fell, so that they had no resource or way of escape from the flood but to flee to the moun-

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tains and climb the loftiest trees of the forests; and there a terrible thing overtook the wooden-doll people, for they turned into the little monkeys that you find only in the highest hills; and that is why these little monkeys have faces like men, because they are the wooden-doll people changed.

This, indeed, is turning the tables on Darwin; and there is another story, of like purport, which seems to me the climax of pre-Columbian American humor. It relates to a period somewhat later, when the races of men had become more human; and the persons in the story are a venerable old grandmother, and two wonderful pairs of twins, her dual grandsons. Wonderful things surrounded the birth of both the elder and the younger twins, and portents accompanied them. For the elder twins were marvelously skilled in all the arts; they could discourse exquisite melody on the flute; they could dance and sing marvelously, and to these already wonderful acquirements they added a knowledge of sculpture and painting; perhaps they made the models for some of those portentous sculptured figures that are brought from Copan and Palenqué to our museums, sculptures with a kind of hideous grandeur about them. Perhaps, also, they painted such books as were found by the early invaders, books of flaring hieroglyphics, or rather symbolical figures, who made the written letters of those ancient days.

But, skilled as they were in the arts, the elder twins had mean and discreditable natures; they hated the younger twins with a deadly and pro-

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phetic hatred, hated them, indeed, before they came to birth and saw the light. For the elder twins were grown men and famed artists before the younger twins came into the world; and, had they had their wicked will, the younger twins would have perished at their birth. For the wicked elder brothers took the twin infants from their mother's arms and threw them out on an anthill, hoping that they would be stung to death; but, because they were miraculous twins and children of destiny, they took no harm, but slept there, peacefully smiling. So once more the elder twins, full of envious wrath, took the babes and threw them among thorns; but here also they prospered, and were none the worse. So at last perforce the elder twins had to accept their fate, and allowed the younger twins to grow up in the dwelling of their old grandmother.

But, just because of the many virtues of the younger twins, the elder twins hated them yet the more. And they so arranged matters, that they, the elder twins, should have all the pleasures and delights, while the younger twins should have the toils and pains. But the younger twins were skilled magicians and at last they worked a dire vengeance upon their cruel brothers. For matters were so divided between them that it was the duty of the younger twins to go out and shoot game with their blow-guns, birds and small animals of the forest; but it was the part of the elder brothers to eat the game when it was brought home and cooked. Thus nourished, they lived

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at their ease, fluting and dancing all the day, save at such times as they were giving to painting and sculpture.

So one day the vengeance fell. The younger twins, of deliberate intent, returned homeward from their blow-gun hunting without trace of fur or feather, and sate them down, again of deliberate intent, before their old grandmother, who was busy at the fire making ready for the cooking. When she saw that there was nothing to cook, she was astonished and asked the twin hunters what had befallen and what had failed to befall. Had there been no game in the forests, or had their aim been bad? But the younger twins made answer that they had seen abundant game and had indeed shot much with their blow-guns; but, as ill-luck would have it, everything they shot fell among the thick branches of the trees, and they, being yet young and not fully grown, could not climb after it and bring it to earth. So they begged the old grandmother to bid the elder twins go forth with them to climb the great tree and bring down the birds which they had shot.

The elder twins, little suspecting, laid their flutes aside, ceased from their dancing and their arts, and, propelled by the need of dinner, went forth. They came to a certain great tree, which, all unknown to the elder brothers, the younger brothers had circled with potent magical spells. About the crown of the tree were many birds of gorgeous plumage and plump flesh, and at these the younger twins began to shoot, with industrious skill, with



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their blow-guns. And the birds fell before their darts, yet fell never to the ground, but stuck always in the upper branches of the mighty tree. So, when they had shot many, but gotten none, they at last overpersuaded the elder twins to mount the great tree, and, behold a wonder, as they climbed, so did the tree grow, till the elder twins realized that they could never get down again. Then did the younger twins resort to a graceless strategy. For, seeing the elder twins perplexed and frightened among the branches, they called to them: "Tie your belts round your waists, and let the ends hang down; then each can aid the other to descend, and you will be saved." And no sooner were the belts tied and pendant than the junior twins worked a magical spell, which had the dire effect of turning the belts into tails and their wearers into monkeys.

Now indeed did those elder brothers grimace and chatter in the trees, no longer eager to get down, but rather desirous of escaping further sight and fleeing along the upper branches to the mountain heights. And when they were fled, chattering and grimacing, with long tails pendant, the younger brothers went back slowly, and, as it were, pensive and perplexed, to the old grandmother's abode. She, in truth, was not long in asking what had befallen the elder twins, whom she always perversely favored, spite of their bad and evil natures; and the younger twins told her, with many expressions of wonder, that their big brothers had, by some dire mischance, been

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turned into beasts of the forest, great monkeys among the boughs, with nothing now left of their manifold arts but gibbering and chattering to take the place of song. But, they said, they could secure to the old grandmother a sight of her ill-starred favorites on one condition, and that not too easy a one. They could pipe to the elder brothers on their flutes, and these would come forth from the forest; but if by chance the old grandmother should laugh at them, then they would fly back again to the woods and disappear. She consented, made her wryest and most resolute face, and waited the coming of the grandsons, while the younger twins piped to them sweetly on the flute, and the melody they piped was the Monkey Dance, far famed of old.

Such was the charm of the Monkey Dance, such their charm in fluting it, that presently the elder twins, irresistibly moved by concord of sweet sounds, spite of their stratagems, came hopping and prancing forth from the forest in time to the music, gibbering and chattering and grimacing, with their tails balancing rhythmically in the air. The old grandmother was shocked at the permutations of her descendants, and grieved for the fate that had come over them; but, even though she had been warned that laughter would be fatal, she could not refrain. She hid her face in her hands, but presently she was sizzling and sputtering with laughter, and her monkey sons straightway disappeared in the forest. Twice and thrice did the poor old crone most heartily try

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to restrain her grins; twice and thrice did the crafty younger twins pipe most melodiously to their whilom tyrannous elders; and twice and thrice did these come forth from the forest, most grotesquely balancing and mowing, gibbering and chattering, and brandishing their new-grown tails. Twice and thrice, too, did the old lady burst out into uncontrollable laughter, to see her offspring thus translated; and, as her last laughter rang through the house, and echoed over the open space about it, the ill-fated elder twins, incredibly shocked at her mirth, disappeared in the forest for ever.

## XXXI

### THE ESSENCE OF AMERICAN HUMOR

WRITING once of "The American Spirit in Literature," I tried to solve a problem which had been haunting me for years: to give myself an account of the peculiar and wonderful quality which distinguishes the best that has been written on this continent from all other writing whatsoever, from the days of gray-headed Chaldea and Mother India down to the latest fantasies of Maurice Maeterlinck and Gabriel d'Annunzio.

To lay a ghost, the magicians of the East always have to evoke a demon. I find myself in much the same case. In settling to my own satisfaction that first haunting problem, I find I have called up half a dozen more, just as difficult and just as clamorous for solution. It happened in this way: To show the visible presence and sunlit transparency of the best American writing, I instanced chiefly four story-tellers — Bret Harte, Mark Twain, G. W. Cable, and Mary Wilkins. But all four of them, and especially the first two, irresistibly suggest another quality besides the American spirit—namely, the quality of humor. And so up springs the new demon, the infinitely

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tantalizing problem. What is American humor? And if it differs from the humor of other lands, from Aristophanes to Rabelais, from Chaucer to Dickens, from the *Ecclesiast* to *Hitopadesha*, wherein does the difference lie? Here, again, to lay one ghost, we must raise another. Supposing we have settled the question of humor; just as we are folding our hands in placid satisfaction, we suddenly remember that there is such a thing as wit, and we are called on either to try a fall with this new adversary or to admit ourselves disgracefully vanquished.

I hope I have some humanity in my breast, for I have already raised a whole army of sprites, and in imagination see myself confronted with a host of visionary readers, with haggard eyes and drawn countenances, desperately asking: "What is a joke? And how are you to know one if you see it?" My justification for this wanton malice is that I think I have discovered the charm to lay these haunting presences to rest; that I have in some sort discovered the true inwardness of humor, and even been able to draw the shadowy line dividing it from wit.

Here is a story which seems to me to come close to the heart of the secret. The scene is laid in the wild and woolly West. A mustang has been stolen, a claim jumped, or a euchre pack found to contain more right and left bowers than an Arctic brig; and swift Nemesis has descended in the form of Manila hemp. The time has come to break the news to the family of the deceased. A

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deputation goes ahead, and the leader knocks at the door of the bereaved homestead, asking, "Does Widow Smith live here?"

A stout and cheerful person replies, "I'm Mrs. Smith, but I ain't no widow!"

The deputation answers: "Bet you a dollar you are! But *you've* got the laugh on *us*, just the same, for we've lynched the wrong man."

That story is irresistible. It is as full of sardonic fire as anything in all literature, but you would hardly call it humor. It seems to me to lie so directly on the border-line that we may use it as a landmark.

X  
The moral is this: humor consists in laughing *with* the other man; wit, in laughing *at* him. There is all the difference in the world. But in both there must be laughter. And laughter is always the fruit of a certain excess of power, of animal or vital magnetism, drawn forth by a sense of contrast or discrepancy. This story illustrates each of these points. The discrepancy or contrast lies in the chasm between the terrible bereavement of widowhood and the jest that announces it. Even the Widow Smith must have smiled. But after the first spasms of laughter have passed, there remains the yawning gulf before her, in all its blackness. The story is really infinitely bitter, and the laughter it calls up something of a snarl.

To laugh at the other man is invariably a tribute to one's own egotism, a burning of incense to oneself. It widens the chasm between the

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two personalities, and sharpens the natural opposition between man and man. In this way wit is essentially demoralizing. It is also essentially self-conscious. Watch the efforts of the conscientiously funny man, and you will see both elements manifest themselves—the self-consciousness and the demoralization. The final result of his efforts is contempt instead of admiration, and a universal sadness overcasting the company he has tried to move to mirth. Wit, therefore, differs from humor in this: that while both are expressed in laughter, arising from excess of animal magnetism and called forth by a feeling of discrepancy or contrast, wit is self-conscious and egotistical, while humor is natural and humane.

One may call humane whatever recognizes our common humanity, or, still more broadly, whatever recognizes our common life. For there is a humanity toward animals. But if we look deep enough, we shall find that behind our conscious intention we do perpetually recognize a common life, a common soul; that we do this by hating no less than by loving, by hostility as well as by acts of gentlest charity. Behind all our dramas of emotion—grave or gay, passionate, tragic, or mirthful—behind avarice, ambition, vanity, lies the deep intuition of our common soul, and to this we in all things ultimately appeal. We seek the envy of human beings, not of stones or trees; we covet and lust for human ends; and in even the blackest elements of our human lives we are still paying tribute to our humanity, to

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the common soul. Even murderers would not conspire together but for the sense of the common soul in both.

But pity and compassion recognize the common life, the common human soul; the very name of sympathy means a suffering with some other. The classic story of sympathy, the Good Samaritan, owes its immortal power to this sense. First there is the sympathy of the narrator with the afflicted man and with his rescuer; and then the second and communicated sympathy which all hearers are compelled to feel with both, thus being brought into the humane mood of the narrator, and recognizing the common soul in themselves, in him, in the sufferer, and in the Samaritan who relieved his pain. This irresistible quality of sympathy, this potent assertion of the common soul, has made the story immortal, erecting the name of an obscure Semitic clan into a synonym for humanity and kindness.

Sympathy, compassion, the suffering with another, are recognitions of the common soul in the face of sorrow, in the face of suffering, in the face of fate. The whole cycle of Greek tragedy is full of this sense of universal man bearing in common the mountainous burden of adverse and invincible law. That line of Homer might characterize it all: "Purple Death took him, and mighty Fate." The bereavements of Hecuba, the madness and death of Ajax, owe their undying power, not to any quality of art or beauty, though they are saturated and sultry with beauty, but to something



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greater still: to the sense of the common soul, called up in us by sorrow, by danger, by affliction, by death.

Consider the message of Galilee as an orderly sequence to this. We have the same recognition of the common soul, not so much in resignation and submission to fate as in a certain warm and subtle quality which outruns fate and makes it powerless—a quality of sympathy, of compassion, of suffering with another, in virtue of which the very shadows of Greek tragedy, sickness, sorrow, affliction, become the lights of the picture, for they testify to and evoke the common soul. Rightly understood, this is the message of the Evangel of Sorrow. When our complacence and self-satisfied egotism are beaten down, this other side of our nature arises; when we are less full of ourselves, we have more room for others, or, deeper still, more room for that which we recognize in others, the one soul common to all humanity. All emotion, not compassion only, is contagious. All emotion testifies to the common soul. We come to this result: that humor is emotion expressing itself in laughter, and called forth by a contrast or discrepancy. But laughter is always the fruit of an excess of vital magnetism, of power. Therefore, rightly understood, humor is a contagion or sharing of the sense of excess power, of abundant vitality, of animal magnetism.

You can see now why we laid such stress upon the Greek tragedy and its message. Sophocles

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unites us through the sense of our common danger and common pain. That is the darker side of sympathy, the deep shadow of the picture. The Galilean unites us through sympathy, the feeling of kindness drawn forth by pain. But, if my definition comes near the truth, real humor unites us in a sense of our excess vitality, a sense of mastery over fate; an intuition that the common soul in us can easily conquer and outlast the longest night of sorrow, the deepest shadow of pain. Humor thus becomes a very serious matter. It becomes nothing less than the herald of our final victory, the dawn of the golden age.

To go back a little to a point we raised before. Wit is a sense of scoring off the other man, a triumph over him, a sense of our excess vitality as contrasted with his weakness, a mentally pushing him into the mud and gloating over him. Now it is essentially unpleasant to be pushed into the mud and laughed at, whether mentally or bodily; and the successful wit's tribute to his own egotism, so far from cementing the bonds of man, really widens the chasm and sets up that hostility between one personality and another which is always the demoniac element in human life. It follows that whatever separates persons in feeling, though it may be the fodder of wit, is fatal to humor, just as it is fatal to sympathy or to gentle charity. Therefore, to have true humor, we must first hold in abeyance the elements of hostility, difference of race or rank, difference of faith or hope. If the common soul be, as we have seen

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it is, the last and highest reality behind all our dramas of feeling and ambition, behind hate as well as love, behind envy as well as kindness, then all these things which separate persons and set them at variance, the dreams of different race and rank, of different faiths and ideals, are but shadows cast by our fancies in the light of the common soul: that is the reality, while these are dreams.

Humor, then, can know no difference of race. For it, we are all human beings, all children of the common soul. But humor will not apprehend this doctrine here; it will go far deeper, and apprehend it as a visible presence, a reality touched and felt, a direct intuition. For this reason, along with many others, the best American humor stands pre-eminent throughout the world and through all time. It recognizes no difference of race. It is free from that miserable tribal vanity which is the root of half our human ills. The Jewish spirit is perhaps the supreme instance which human history affords of this tribal self-love, with its reward of intensity and its punishment of isolation. And as certainly as night follows day, or day night, we find in Jewish wit the last essence of bitterness, the culmination of that unhumane quality which eternally divides it from humor. Read sentence after sentence of "Koheleth, the Preacher"—the living dog better than the dead lion, the gibes at women, the perpetual mockery at fools, the deep pessimism under it all—and you will realize how closely tribal zeal and

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bitterness are bound together; how certainly the keen sense of race difference closes the door of that warm human heart from which alone humor can come.

All Jewish writing, ancient or modern, has the same defect. There is always the presence of two qualities, seemingly unconnected, but in reality bound very closely together—a certain bitter sensuality and a sardonic and mordant wit. Both spring from the same thing: an overkeen sense of bodily difference, whether of sex or of race. The first sense of difference causes a subjection to sex tyranny, which revenges itself in gibes and epigrams, as with that uxorious king to whom tradition accredits the Proverbs. The second, the keen sense of race difference, breeds a hostile and jealous spirit, a perpetual desire to exhibit one's own superiority, to show off, to "get the laugh on" the supposed inferior races and outer barbarians, which, going with excess of vital power—a marvelous characteristic of the Jews—will inevitably give birth to keen and biting wit, but to humor never. The gibes of the Preacher, the courtly insincerities of Disraeli, the morbid sensuousness of Zola, all flow from the same race character, and are moods of the same mind.

It is curious to see the same thing cropping up in Alphonse Daudet, who was of mixed race, half Jew, half Provençal. One may follow that famous image of his own, which describes the two Tartarins—Tartarin-Quixote and Tartarin-Sancho-Panza, or, more familiarly, Tartarin Lapin-de-

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garenne and Tartarin Lapin-de-choux—and say that there are two Daudets, Daudet-Koheleth and Daudet-Tartarin: the one, the Semitic author of *Sappho*, of *Rose et Ninette*, of *Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné*; the other, the creator of the many-sided, meridional Tartarin-Numa-Nabab. There lies the difference between wit and humor, as it is influenced by exclusiveness of race, or, to give a foolish thing a commoner name, by tribal vanity.

To precisely the same category of wit springing from tribal vanity belong the endless stories in which the Germans score off the Russians, the Russians score off the Germans; in which Magyars and Austrians whet their satire on each other; in which Bengalis try to get the laugh on Punjabis; in which Frenchmen are witty about Miss Bull's protruding front teeth, while Englishmen revenge themselves by tales of the frog-eating Mounseer. So that we have here a perfectly definite line: if there is a play of the mind about difference of race, using this as the laughter-rousing contrast which is common to both wit and humor, and if this play of thought and feeling accentuates and heightens the race difference, and tries to show, or assumes, as is oftener the case, that the race of the joker is endlessly superior to the other, then we are dealing with wit—an amusing thing enough in its way, but a false thing, one which leads us away from the true end of man. If, on the other hand, we have an accentuation of the common life, bridging the chasm of race, and the overplus of power is felt to be shared in

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by the two races and to unite them, then we have genuine humor—something as vital to our true humanity as is the Tragedy of Greece, as is the Evangel of Galilee, yet something more joyful and buoyant than either; uniting us, not through compassion or the sense of common danger, but through the sense of common power—a prophecy of the golden age, of the ultimate triumph of the soul.

In this binding quality of humor Mark Twain's best work stands easily supreme. Take the scenes on the Mississippi in which the immortal trio, Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn, and Jim the Nigger, play their parts: they are as saturated with the sense of our common life as is the story of the sorrow of Ajax or the tale of the Samaritan. The author has felt the humanity in his triad of heroes as deeply and humanely as it can be felt; his work is sincere and true throughout; it is full of that inimitable quality of contagion, the touchstone of all true art, in virtue of which we vividly feel and realize what the artist has vividly felt and realized. Through every page we feel the difference of race, used as an artistic contrast; but we are conscious of something more—of overstepping the chasm, of bridging the abyss between black and white, American and Ethiopian, bond and free. We have come to the conclusion, long before Huck Finn puts it in words, that Jim is a white man inside—as white as we are.

This binding of the two races has been accomplished before, in a famous American book; the

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most successful, probably, that the New World has yet produced. But in *Uncle Tom* the cement is sentimentality rather than humor; the Galilean sense of sympathy through common suffering rather than through excess of power; it plays round feelings and emotions which, however keen and poignant, are not part of our everlasting inheritance; moreover, it is colored with a religious pathos which, while it still saturates the minds of the race mates of Uncle Tom, is quickly vanishing from the hearts of his white masters, to give place to something higher and better—an assured sense of the power of the soul. So marked has been the growth of our spiritual consciousness in the last generation, hitherto unconscious and unrecorded, that we can confidently look forward to a time when the fear of death will no longer be valid as a motive of tragedy, any more than the fear of hell is now a motor of morals. Therefore, the mood of religion which colors *Uncle Tom* is a far less enduring and vital thing than the robust out-of-doors vitality of Tom Sawyer's Mississippi days: and it is this quality, this buoyancy and excess of power, which forms the necessary atmosphere of humor.

In another story, of a much earlier period, Mark Twain has again used his genius to bridge the same race chasm. It is that fine and epic tale of Captain Ned Blakely and his colored mate. Here humor is reinforced by indignation, and both are illuminated by fancy; but humor, the sense of excess of power and of our common soul, is still

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the dominant note. Yet the Tom Sawyer trio, in those sunlit days on the great river, with the raft floating along and the boys telling tales or puffing at their corncob pipes or going in swimming, is, and will probably long remain, the high-water mark of humor and imaginative creation for the New World—the most genuinely American thing ever written.

Bret Harte is of nearly equal value in his early tales, but with this difference: that it is the chasm of caste, not of race, which his great power bridges over. Mark Twain does this abundantly, too. Huck Finn, the outcast, the vagabond, the homeless wanderer, with his patched breeches, his one suspender, his perforated hat, is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh beyond the common measure of our kind; more, he is the superior of most of us in humane simplicity, in ease of manner and unconsciousness, in genuine kindness of heart. But with Bret Harte, this bridging of chasms, this humanizing of outcasts, of vagabonds, gamblers, and waifs of either sex, is a passion, the dominant quality of his rich and natural humor. That nameless baby, the Luck of Roaring Camp, enlists our heartiest sympathy from the first; so, indeed, does his disreputable mother. We remember, and we are conscious of a profound satisfaction in remembering, that motherhood is always the same, without regard to race, caste, color, or creed. And with the excess of power in his robust miners, and their fine animal magnetism, as of the primeval out-of-doors, comes the quality of



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humor, like the touch of morning sunshine on the red pine stems and granite boulders of the Rockies, where is their home.

“The Outcasts of Poker Flat” is full of the same leveling quality; a leveling up, not a leveling down. The two real outcasts, the gambler and the Rahab, are raised to a sense of their human life, to a human dignity and self-sacrifice, by the simplicity of their half-childish chance companions; all barriers are broken down, and there remains nothing but the common soul. There is a touch of pathos in this tale, too, but rather as a contrast than as a primary element; yet the fine feeling is humor—victory, not defeat; not weakness, but power. “M’liss,” one of the finest things Bret Harte ever wrote, is full of the same quality—the quality of charity, of sympathy with outcasts; or, to come to the true name, it is full of the sense of the common soul under all differences. More than that, we are all through conscious of a feeling that the essential truth is with M’liss in her wildness; that she is more at home in the universe than we are, feels more kindred with the enduring things—the green forests, the sunshine, the wind, the stars in the purple sky, the primal passions of the human heart.

If genius thus bridges over the greater chasms of our life, we need hardly say that it still more easily and certainly passes over the less; but there is one chasm which it is worth while to speak of more fully—the chasm between childhood and age. American humor has discovered the child

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for the purposes of literature. The reason is, without doubt, that Americans are the only people who treat their children as autonomous citizens; who make it stuff of the conscience to give their children the utmost possible freedom, and rouse them to a sense of responsibility. Think of how children were kept down and suppressed, even oppressed, in the Old World, only a generation or two ago, and you have the reason why the child of European literature is such a failure. I know not whether it has ever been said before, but the children of the greatest writer of them all are stiff and unnatural to a marvelous degree, so that we hardly regret Macbeth's bringing to an end that precocious and sententious youngster who moralizes to his mamma. It is with a feeling of relief that we read the stage direction, "*Dies.*" Let him rest in peace.

Contrast with the deceased child those two inimitable creations of American humor, Budge and Toddy, in *Helen's Babies*, one of the best books this continent has yet seen. In every point of reality, as far as child life is concerned, Habberton is the superior of Shakespeare, who in so much else is the superior of all other men. Tom Sawyer is also a most notable child in literature; but of course he is ever so much older than Budge and Toddy, and therefore the chasm is not so wide, and the honor of bridging it less. Yet there is something inimitable in the way he "shows off" when the new girl comes to the village, and, let me add, something irresistibly American. Up

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to the present, I have not been able to determine at what age Tom Sawyer's fellow-countrymen drop the habit, or at any rate the desire, of showing off; I am, indeed, strongly convinced that nothing more serious than that selfsame human weakness is the root of all the millionairism which seems to fill so large a space in our horizons. It is the desire to possess the stage properties essential to successful showing off which keeps the millionaires so busy; and it is to be surmised that, as in Tom Sawyer's case, the "new girl" is the audience of the play.

Speaking of the new girl calls attention to the fact that, so far, Budge, Toddy, and Tom Sawyer, the hierarchy of American boys, have no sisters. There are no little girls of the first magnitude in American literature. Perhaps the English Alice in Wonderland is the high-water mark among little girls; but, wonderful achievement as she is, and absorbing as are her adventures, the atmosphere of cards and chessmen which surrounds her is very different from the broad river bosom, the sweet-smelling woods, the echoing hills of night under the stars, where Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn play their parts. So infinitely does nature outweigh fancy.

Having established our canon, we can now apply it. We do, in fact, find that the masterpieces of American humor were conceived in an atmosphere possessing exactly the qualities we have outlined. There was the broad and humane sense of this our life, of our common nature, our com-

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mon soul, overleaping all barriers whatsoever; the distinctions of race and caste, of rich and poor, dwindling to their real insignificance or forgotten altogether; this binding of hearts taking place, not through the sense of our common tragedy, our common servitude to fate, as in Æschylus and Sophocles, nor in pity and compassion, as in the Evangel of Galilee, but with a certain surcharge and overplus of power, a buoyancy, a sense of conquest, which could best come with the first youth of a strong young nation, and which did, in fact, come in the harvest of success following that fine outburst of manliness and adventure, the mining campaign of '49.

One characteristic of the finest humor, touched on already, we must come back to—the quality of unconsciousness. Neither Bret Harte nor Mark Twain, when they wrote of the Luck, of M'liss, of Captain Ned Blakely, of Buck Fanshaw and Scotty Briggs, had any idea how great they were, or even that they were great at all; they never dreamed that these sketches for the local journal would outlive the week that saw their birth, and at last make the circuit of the world, becoming a part of the permanent wealth of man. This unconsciousness gives these stories their inimitable charm. There is none of the striving of the funny man in what belongs to that first period, no setting of traps for our admiration. This is the same as saying that there is none of that instinct of egotism which prompts a man to laugh at his fellow, to show how

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much wiser and cleverer he himself is. It is all free, generous, and bountiful as the sunshine of the land where it was conceived, full of the spontaneous life of Nature herself. As there is in the simplest heart a wisdom that outweighs all philosophy, in the most untutored soul a faith that the schools and doctors know nothing of, so there is in these first fruits of genius a fresh charm that no art can emulate; we recognize the wisdom and handiwork, not of the immediate artificer, but of the great master builder, the one enduring soul, common to all men through all time. There is the sense of the unprecedented, of creative power, in all works of genius; it shines forth brightly in the best work of American literature, and most brightly in the first fruits of American humor.

It is not so agreeable to complete our inventory; for we are forced to see that much of what passes for humor nowadays is not humor at all, but its imitation and baser counterfeit—that wit which is marred by egotism and vanity, which springs from the desire to shine, to show off, to prove oneself smarter than one's fellows, to air the superior qualities of one's mind. Let us devoutly hope that this mood of self-consciousness, like its cousin, the shyness of the half man, half boy, is transient only; that it will presently give place to something more mellow and humane. How often we feel, when we read the productions of this class, that the writer, as he made each point, was lit up with a little explosion of vanity; that he was terribly self-conscious; that he bridled and

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pranced within him, to think he was not as other men! Instead of that fine and humorous tale of Pharisee and Publican, we might write one of the humorist and the wit, the child of genius and the funny man; and the moral would be just the same. In the one case, a sense of peace, of hitting the mark, of adding to our human wealth, of reaching the true end of man; in the other, a certain tickling of the sensations, it is true, but, with it, dissatisfaction, unrest, a sense of vanity, with final bankruptcy staring us in the face. Self-consciousness is fatal to humor. It is as disappointing as that habit certain people have, whose sex and age we shall not specify, of always thinking of their clothes, or of your clothes, or of some one else's clothes; their society is not joy and gladness, nor does it bring us nearer to the golden age.

It would be with genuine joy of heart that I should record, if conscience allowed me, that American life seems, on the whole, to be flowing in the direction which leads to humor rather than to wit—the direction which leads away from tribal and personal vanity, from the lamentable longing to show off, from self-consciousness and egotism, toward the common heart of man. But this, at least, can with certainty be said: that only as the great tide thus sets toward the better goal; only when the desire of wealth gives way to humane sympathy and inherent power; when the barriers of caste, so untimely and anomalous here, are broken down; when the tribal vanity of

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fancied race superiority is forgotten; when self-consciousness and the longing for stage properties are left behind, merged in that large urbanity which is the essence at once of real culture and of true breeding—only then will a real development of humor be possible. But this humanizing of our hearts is in itself not enough, though it is essential and not to be replaced: there must also be a sense of power, of lightness, of success; a surplus of magnetism and vital energy, like that surcharge of life which, having molded root and stem and leaves, bursts forth in beauty in the flower. All this is needful, and by no means to be dispensed with; yet to all this must be added something more, something which, by all our taking thought, we can never gain—that superb fire of genius which comes not with observation, but is the best gift and creative handiwork of our everlasting human soul.

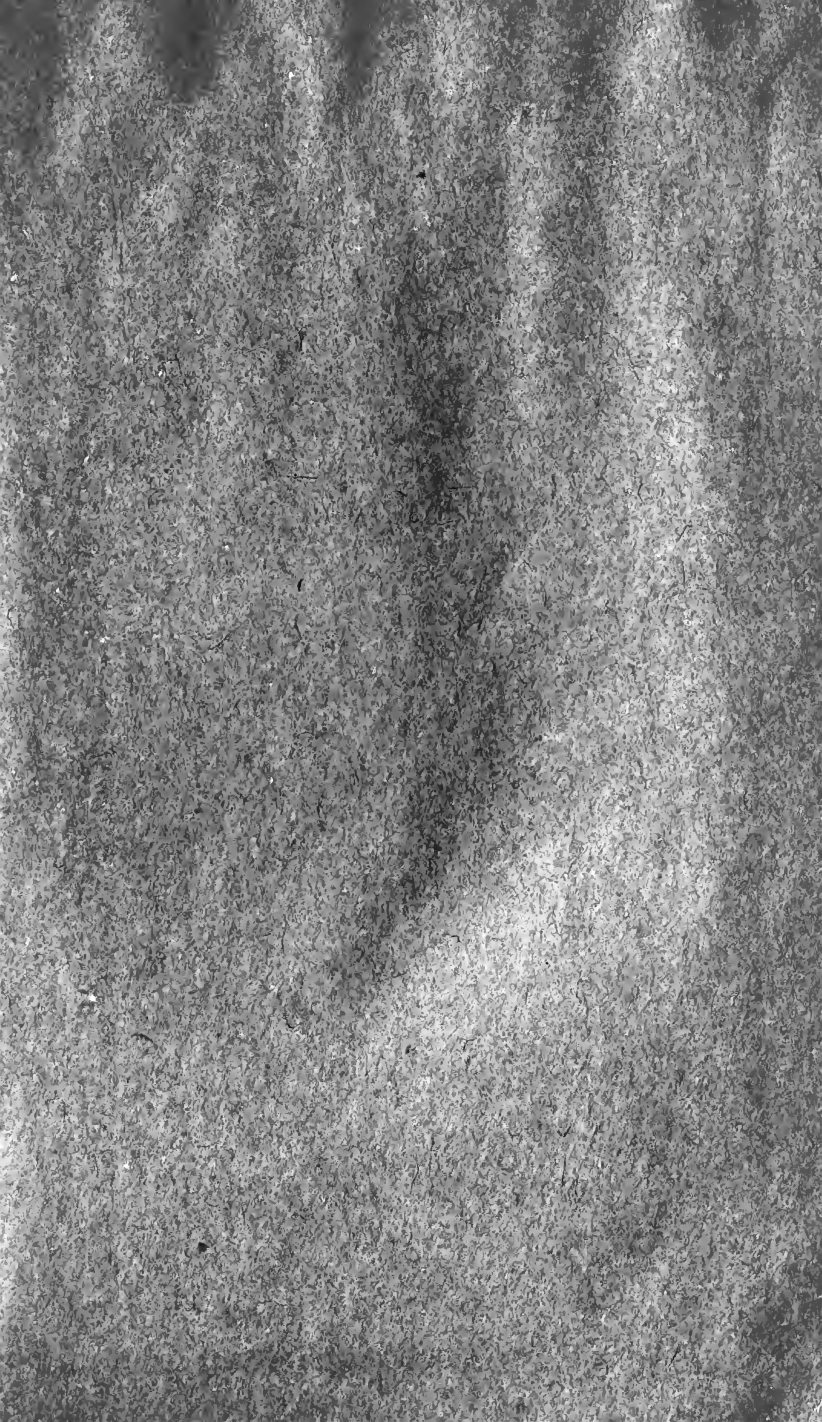
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