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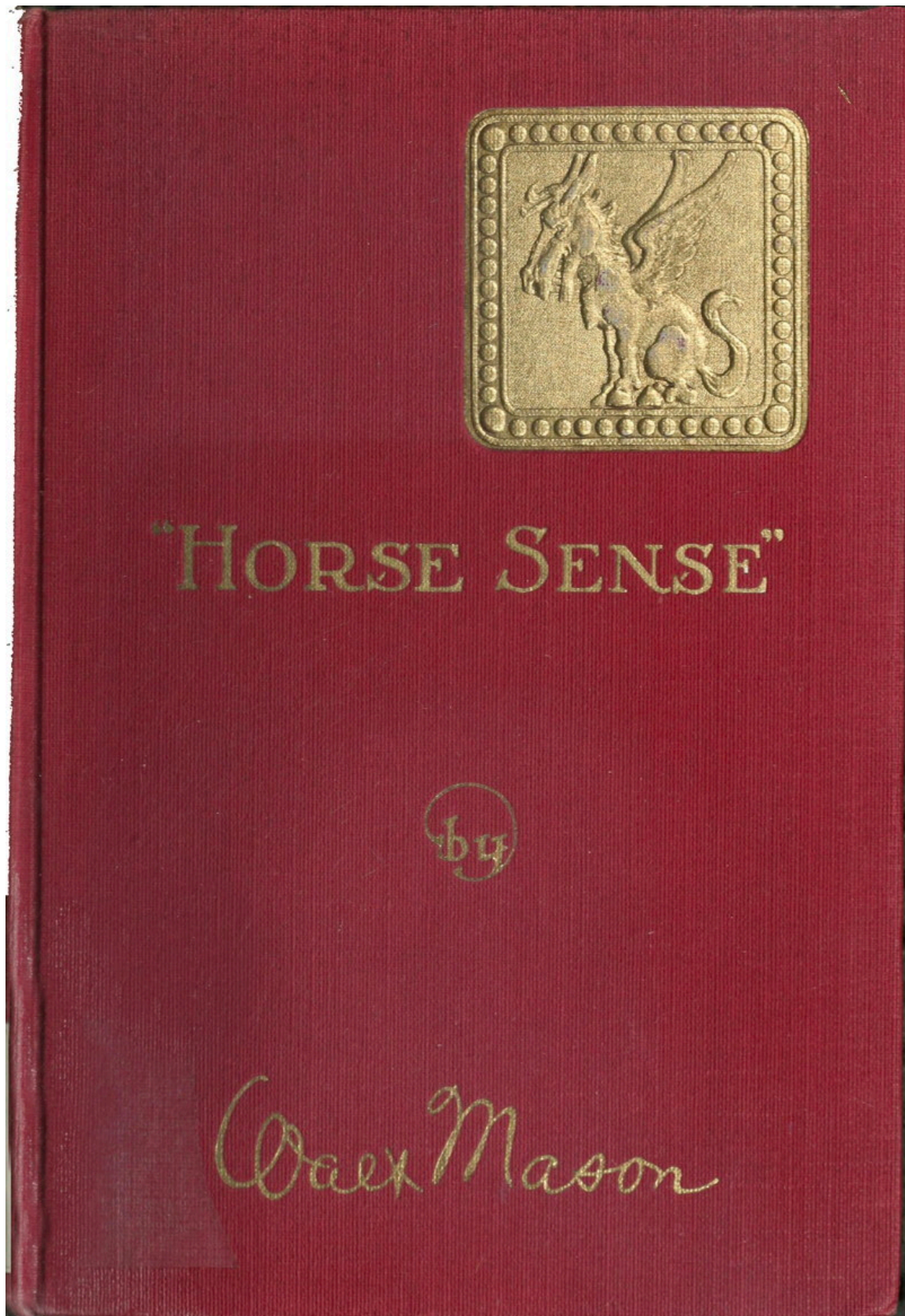
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK "HORSE SENSE" IN VERSES
TENSE ***



“HORSE SENSE” in Verses Tense



"HORSE SENSE"

IN VERSES TENSE

by *Walt Mason*

Walt Mason is the High Priest of Horse Sense.
— George Ade



Chicago
A·C·MCCLURG & CO·
1915

CONCERNING WALT

Walt Mason is the Aesop of our day, but his fables are of men, not animals.

—*Collier's Weekly*.

Much of Walt Mason's poetry is of universal interest.

—*London Citizen*.

Walt Mason's poetry is in a class by itself.

—*William Jennings Bryan*.

Walt's poems always have sound morals, and they are easy to take.

—*Rev. Charles W. Gordon*.
(*Ralph Connor*.)

His satires come with stinging force to the American people.

—*Sunday School Times*.

Why do people ever write any other kind of books, unless because no one else can write Walt Mason's kind?

—*William Dean Howells*.

His is an extraordinary faculty, surely God-given. Many a world-weary one, refreshed at the fount where his poetry plays, says deep down in his heart, “God bless Walt Mason!”

—*Seumas MacManus*.

Walt Mason's contributions to the *Chronicle* have attracted the attention of English readers by their originality and expressiveness, and have brought him letters from Mr. John Masefield and many others. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle regards him as one of the quaintest and most original humorists America has ever produced.

—*London Chronicle*.



The author as “Zim” sees him

“HORSE SENSE”

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by *Walt Mason*

Walt Mason is the High Priest of Horse Sense.
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1915

VI

Published September, 1915

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For permission to use copyright poems in this book thanks are extended to George Matthew Adams, and to the editors and publishers of *Judge*, *Collier's Weekly*, *System*, the *Magazine of Business*, *Domestic Engineering*, the *Butler Way*, and *Curtis Service*.

To
SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

VII

CHRISTMAS GIFT

VIII

The gift itself is not so much—
Perhaps you've had a dozen such;
Its value, when reduced to gold,
May seem too trifling to be told;
But someone, loving, kind, and true,
Selected it—and thought of You.
The gift may have a hollow ring—
The love behind it is the thing!

FROM SIR HUBERT

IX

I read Walt Mason with great delight. His poems have wonderful fun and kindliness, and I have enjoyed them the more for their having so strongly all the qualities I liked so much in my American friends when I was living in the United States.

I don't know any book which has struck me as so genuine a voice of the American nature.

I am glad that his work is gaining a wider and wider recognition.

John Masefield

*13 Well Walk, Hampstead,
London*

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THE CLUCKING HEN

1

THE old gray hen has thirteen chicks, and round the yard she claws and picks, and toils the whole day long; I lean upon the garden fence, and watch that hen of little sense, whose intellect is wrong. She is the most important hen that ever in the haunts of men a waste of effort made; she thinks if she should cease her toil the whole blamed universe would spoil, its institutions fade. Yet vain and trifling is her task; she might as profitably bask and loaf throughout the year; one incubator from the store would bring forth better chicks and more than fifty hens could rear. She ought to rest her scratching legs, get down to tacks and lay some eggs, which bring the valued bucks; but, in her vain perverted way, she says, “I’m derved if I will lay,” and hands out foolish clucks. And many men are just the same; they play some idle, trifling game, and think they’re sawing wood; they hate the work that’s in demand, the jobs that count they cannot stand, and all their toil’s no good.

THE MILKMAN

2

THE milkman goes his weary way before the rising of the sun; he earns a hundred bones a day, and often takes in less than one. While lucky people snore and drowse, and bask in dreams of rare delight, he takes a stool and milks his cows, about the middle of the night. If you have milked an old red cow, humped o'er a big six-gallon pail, and had her swat you on the brow with seven feet of burry tail, you'll know the milkman ought to get a plunk for every pint he sells; he earns his pay in blood and sweat, and sorrow in his bosom dwells. As through the city streets he goes, he has to sound his brazen gong, and people wake up from their doze, and curse him as he goes along. He has to stagger through the snow when others stay at home and snore; and through the rain he has to go, to take the cow-juice to your door. Through storm and flood and sun and rain, the milkman goes upon the jump, and all his customers complain, and make allusions to his pump. Because one milkman milks the creek, instead of milking spotted cows, against the whole brave tribe we kick, and stir up everlasting rows. Yet patiently they go their way, distributing their healthful juice, and what they do not get in pay, they have to take out in abuse.

3



FATIGUE

FROM day to day we sell our whey, our nutmegs, nails or cotton, and oft we sigh, as hours drag by, “This sort of life is rotten! The dreary game is e’er the same, no respite or diversion; oh, how we long to join the throng on some outdoor excursion! On eager feet, along the street, more lucky folks are hiking, while we must stay and sell our hay—it’s little to our liking!” Those going by perhaps will sigh, “This work we do is brutal; all day we hike along the pike, and all our work is futile. It would be sweet to leave the street and own a nice trade palace, and sell rolled oats to human goats, it would, so help me Alice!” All o’er this sphere the briny tear is shed by people weary, who’d like to quit their jobs and flit to other tasks more dreary. We envy folks who wear their yokes, and tote a bigger burden, we swear and sweat and fume and fret, and oft forget the guerdon. There is no lot entirely fraught with happiness and glory; if you are sore the man next door can tell as sad a story.

SPRING REMEDIES

5

“THIS is the time,” the doctors say, “when people need our bitters; the sunny, languid, vernal day is hard on human critters. They’re always feeling tired and stale, their blood is thick and sluggish, and so they ought to blow their kale for pills and potions druggish.” And, being told we’re in a plight, we swallow dope in rivers, to get our kidneys acting right, and jack up rusty livers. We pour down tea of sassafras, as ordered by the sawbones, and chewing predigested grass, we exercise our jawbones. We swallow pints of purple pills, and fool with costly drenches, to drive away imagined ills and pipe-dream aches and wrenches. And if we’d only take the spade, and dig the fertile gumbo, the ghost of sickness would be laid, and we’d be strong as Jumbo. Of perfect health, that precious boon, we’d have refreshing glimpses, if we would toil each afternoon out where the jimpson jimpses. There’s medicine in azure skies, and sunshine is a wonder; more cures are wrought by exercise than by all bottled thunder. So let’s forsake the closed up room, and hoe weeds cockle-burrish, where elderberry bushes bloom, and juniorberries flourish.

6



THE RURAL MAIL

7

A FIERCE and bitter storm's abroad, it is a bleak midwinter day, and slowly o'er the frozen sod the postman's pony picks its way. The postman and his horse are cold, but fearlessly they face the gale; though storms increase a hundredfold, the farmer folk must have their mail. The hours drag on, the lonely road grows rougher with each mile that's past, the weary pony feels its load, and staggers in the shrieking blast. But man and horse strive on the more; they never learned such word as fail; though tempests beat and torrents pour, the farmer folk must have their mail. At night the pony, to its shed, drags on its cold, exhausted frame; and after supper, to his bed, the wearied postman does the same. Tomorrow brings the same old round, the same exhausting, thankless grind—the journey over frozen ground, the facing of the bitter wind. The postman does a hero's stunt to earn his scanty roll of kale; of all the storms he bears the brunt—the farmer folk must have their mail!

HOME, SWEET HOME

OH, Home! It is a sacred place—or was, in olden days, before the people learned to chase to moving picture plays; to tango dances and such things, to skating on a floor; and now the youthful laughter rings within the Home no more. You will recall, old men and dames, the homes of long ago, and you'll recall the fireside games the children used to know. The neighbors' kids would come along with your own kids to play, and merry as a bridal song the evening passed away. An evening spent away from home in olden days was rare; the children hadn't learned to roam for pleasure everywhere. But now your house is but a shell where children sleep and eat; it serves that purpose very well—their home is on the street. Their home is where the lights are bright, where ragtime music flows; their noon's the middle of the night, their friends are—Lord, who knows? The windows of your home are dark, and silence broods o'er all; you call it Home—God save the mark! 'Tis but a sty or stall!

POOR WORK

9

YOU can't afford to do poor work, so, therefore, always shun it; for no excuse or quip or quirk will square you when you've done it. I hired a man to paint my cow from horntips to the udder, and she's all blotched and spotted now, and people view and shudder. "Who did the job?" they always ask; and when I say, "Jim Yellow," they cry, "When we have such a task we'll hire some other fellow." And so Jim idly stands and swows bad luck has made him nervous, for when the people paint their cows they do not ask his service. And thus one's reputation flows, a-skiting, here and yonder; and wheresoe'er the workman goes, his bum renown will wander. 'Twill face him like an evil ghost when he his best is doing, and jolt him where it hurts the most, and still keep on pursuing. A good renown will travel, too, from Gotham to Empory, and make you friends in places new, and bring you cash and glory. So always do your best, old hunks; let nothing be neglected, and you will gather in the plunks, and live and die respected.

OLD MAIDS

ALL girls should marry when they can. There's naught more useful than a man. A husband has some faults, no doubt, and yet he's good to have about; and she who doesn't get a mate will wish she had one, soon or late. That girl is off her base, I fear, who plans to have a high career, who sidesteps vows and wedding rings to follow after abstract things. I know so many ancient maids who in professions, arts or trades have tried to cut a manlike swath, and old age finds them in the broth. A loneliness, as of the tomb, enshrouds the spinsters in its gloom; the jim crow honors they have won they'd sell at seven cents a ton. Their sun is sinking in the West, and they, unloved and uncaressed, must envy, as they bleakly roam, the girl with husband, hearth, and home. Get married, then, Jemima dear; don't fiddle with a cheap career. Select a man who's true and good, whose head is not composed of wood, a man who's sound in wind and limb, then round him up and marry him. Oh, rush him to the altar rail, nor heed his protest or his wail. "This is," you'll say, when he's been won, "the best day's work I've ever done."

CHRISTMAS RECIPE

MAKE somebody happy today! Each morning that motto repeat, and life, that was gloomy and gray, at once becomes pleasant and sweet. No odds what direction you go, whatever the pathway you wend, there's somebody weary of woe, there's somebody sick for a friend; there's somebody needing a guide, some pilgrim who's wandered astray; oh, don't let your help be denied—make somebody happy today! There's somebody tired of the strife, the wearisome struggle for bread, borne down by the burden of life, and envying those who are dead; a little encouragement now may drive his dark visions away, and smooth out a seam from his brow—make somebody happy today! There's somebody sick over there, where sunlight is shut from the room; there's somebody deep in despair, beholding no light in the gloom; there's somebody needing your aid, your solace, wherever you stray; then let not your help be delayed—make somebody happy today. Make somebody happy today, some comfort and sympathy give, and Christmas shall ne'er go away, but always and ever shall live.

THE OLD MAN

BE kind to your daddy, O gamboling youth; his feet are now sluggish and cold; intent on your pleasures, you don't see the truth, which is that your dad's growing old. Ah, once he could whip forty bushels of snakes, but now he is spavined and lame; his joints are all rusty and tortured with aches, and weary and worn is his frame. He toiled and he slaved like a government mule to see that his kids had a chance; he fed them and clothed them and sent them to school, rejoiced when he marked their advance. The landscape is moist with the billows of sweat he cheerfully shed as he toiled, to bring up his children and keep out of debt, and see that the home kettle boiled. He dressed in old duds that his Mary and Jake might bloom like the roses in June, and oft when you swallowed your porterhouse steak, your daddy was chewing a prune. And now that he's worn by his burden of care, just show you are worth all he did; look out for his comfort, and hand him his chair, and hang up his slicker and lid.

WINTER NIGHT

HAIL, Winter and wild weather, when we are all together, about the glowing fire! Let frost be e'er so stinging, it can't disturb our singing, nor can the Storm King's ire. The winds may madly mosey, they only make more cozy the home where we abide; the snow may drift in billows, but we have downy pillows, and good warm beds inside. The night indeed has terrors for lonely, lost wayfarers who for assistance call; who pray for lights to guide them—the lights that are denied them—may God protect them all! And to the poor who grovel in wretched hut and hovel, and feel its icy breath, who mark the long hours dragging their footsteps slow and lagging, the night seems kin to Death. For cheery homes be grateful, when Winter, fierce and fateful, comes shrieking in the night; for books and easy rockers, for larders filled and lockers, and all the warmth and light.

GRANDMOTHER

14

OLD granny sits serene and knits and talks of bygone ages, when she was young; and from her tongue there comes the truth of sages. “In vanished years,” she says, “my dears, the girls were nice and modest, and they were shy, and didn’t try to see whose wit was broadest. In cushioned nooks they read their books, and loved the poets’ lilting; with eager paws they helped their mas at cooking and at quilting. The maidens then would shy at men and keep them at a distance, and each new sport who came to court was sure to meet resistance. The girls were flowers that bloomed in bowers remote from worldly clamor, and when I view the modern crew they give me katzenjammer. The girls were sweet and trim and neat, as fair as hothouse lilies, and when I scan the modern clan I surely have the willies. Refinement fades when modern maids come forth in all their glory; their hats are freaks, their costume shrieks, their nerve is hunkydory. They waste the night and in daylight they’re doctoring and drugging; when they don’t go to picture show, they’re busy bunny-hugging.” Then granny takes her pipe and breaks some plug tobacco in it, and smokes and smokes till mother chokes and runs out doors a minute.

15



THE TORNADO

WE people infesting this excellent planet emotions of pride in our victories feel; we put up our buildings of brick and of granite, equip them with trusses and bastions of steel. Regarding the fruit of our earnest endeavor, we cheerily boast as we weave through the town: “A building like that one will stand there forever, for fire can’t destroy it nor wind blow it down.” Behold, as we’re boasting there falls a dun shadow; the harvester Death is abroad for his sheaves, and, tumbled and tossed by the roaring tornado, the man and his building are crumpled like leaves. And then there are dead men in windrows to shock us, and scattered and gone are the homes where they died; a pathway of ruin and wreckage to mock us, and show us how futile and vain is our pride. We’re apt to, when planning and building and striving, forget we are mortals and think we are gods; and then when the lord of the tempest is driving, his wheels break us up with the rest of the clods. Like ants we are busy, all proud and defiant, constructing a home on the face of the lawn; and now comes the step of a wandering giant; it crushes our anthill, and then it is gone.

THE GREAT GAME

17

THE pitcher is pitching, the batsman is itching to punish the ball in the old-fashioned way; the umpire is umping, the fielders are humping—we're playing baseball in our village today! Two thousand mad creatures are perched on the bleachers, the grand stand is full and the fences the same, the old and the youthful, the false and the truthful, the plain and the lovely are watching the game. The groaning taxpayers are watching the players, forgetting a while all their burdens and wrongs, and landlord and tenant are saying the pennant will come to this town where it surely belongs. The loungeer and toiler, the spoiled and the spoiler, are whooping together like boys at the fair; and foes of long standing as one are demanding the blood of the umpire, his hide and his hair. The game is progressing, now punk and distressing—our boys are all rattled, the audience groans! But see how they rally—O, scorer, keep tally! We'll win at the finish, I'll bet seven bones! The long game is ended, we fans have all wended back, back to our labors, our cares and our joys, once more grave and steady—and yet ever ready to stake a few plunks on our own bunch of boys!

18



AT THE FINISH

O H say, what is this thing called Fame, and is it worth our while? We seek it till we're old and lame, for weary mile on mile; we seek a gem among the hay, for wheat among the chaff; and in the end some heartless jay will write our epitaph. The naked facts it will relate, and little else beside: "This man was born on such a date, on such a date he died." The gravestones in the boneyard tell all we shall ever know of men who struggled passing well for glory, long ago. They had their iridescent schemes and lived to see them fail; they had their dreams, as you have dreams, and all of no avail. The gravestones calmly tell their fate, the upshot of their pride: "This man was born on such a date, on such a date he died." The great men of your fathers' time, with laurel on each brow, the theme of every poet's rhyme—where are those giants now? Their names are written in the books which no one ever reads; and on the scroll—where no one looks—the record of their deeds. The idler by the churchyard gate this legend hath espied: "This man was born on such a date, on such a date he died."

THE VAGABOND

HE'S idle, unsteady, and everyone's ready to throw him a dornick or give him a biff; he's always in tatters, but little it matters; he's evermore happy, so what is the diff?

He carries no sorrow, no care for tomorrow, his roof is the heavens, his couch is the soil; no sighing or weeping breaks in on his sleeping, no bell in the morning shall call him to toil. As free as the breezes he goes where he pleases, no rude overseer to boss him around; his joys do not wither, he goes yon and hither, till dead in a haystack or ditch he is found. The joys of such freedom—no sane man can need 'em! Far better to toil for the kids and the wife, till muscles are aching and collarbone breaking, than selfishly follow the vagabond life. One laborer toiling is worth the whole boiling of idlers and tramps of whatever degree; and though we all know it we don't find a poet embalming the fact as embalmed it should be. The poets will chortle about the blithe mortal who wanders the highways and sleeps in the hay, but who sings the toiler, the sweat-spangled moiler, who raises ten kids on a dollar a day?

THE COMING DAY

THERE'LL come a day when we must make full payment for all the foolish things we do today; and sackcloth then perchance will be our raiment, and we'll regret the hours we threw away. We loaf today, and we shall loaf tomorrow, hard by the pump or in the corner store; there'll come a day when we'll look back with sorrow on wasted hours, the hours that come no more. We say harsh things to friends who look for kindness, and bring the tears to loving, patient eyes; we scold and quarrel in our fretful blindness, instead of smiles, we call up mournful sighs. Our friends will tread the path that leads us only to rest and silence in the grass-grown grave; there'll come a day when weary, sad and lonely, we'll think of them and of the wounds we gave. In marts of trade we're prone to overreaching, to swell our roll we cheat and deal in lies, forgetful oft of early moral teaching, and all the counsel of the good and wise. It is, alas, an evil road we travel, that leads at last to bitterness and woe; there'll come a day when gold will seem as gravel, and we shall mourn the sins of long ago.

SALTING THEM DOWN

22

THERE'S trouble in store for the gent who never salts down a red cent, who looks upon cash as the veriest trash, for foolish extravagance meant. Since money comes easy today, he thinks 'twill be always that way, and he burns up the scads with the rollicking lads and warbles a madrigal gay. His dollars are drawn when they're due; and rather than salt down a few, he throws them, with jests, at the robin red breasts, with riotous hullabaloo. I look down the scurrying years—for I'm the descendant of seers—and the spendthrift descry when his youth is gone by, an object of pity and tears. I see him parading the street, on weary and ring-boney feet, a-begging for dimes, for the sake of old times, to buy him some sauerkraut to eat. I see him abandoned and sick, his pillow a dornick or brick; and the peeler comes by with a vulcanized eye and swats him for luck with a stick. I see him when dying; he groans, but his anguish for nothing atones! And they cart him away in the dawn cold and gray, to the place where they bury cheap bones. Don't burn up your money, my friend; don't squander or foolishly lend; though you say it is dross and regret not its loss, it's a comfort and staff in the end.

23



SUCCESS IN LIFE

24

IT'S easy to be a success, as thousands of winners confess; no man's so obscure or unlucky or poor that he can't be a winner, I guess. And success, Mr. Man, doesn't mean a roll that would stagger a queen, or some gems of your own, or a palace of stone, or a wagon that burns gasoline. A man's a success, though renown doesn't place on his forehead a crown, if he pays as he goes, if it's true that he owes not a red in the dodgasted town. A man's a success if his wife finds comfort and pleasure in life; if she's glad and content that she married a gent reluctant to organize strife. A man's a success if his kids are joyous as Katy H. Dids; if they're handsome and neat, with good shoes on their feet, and roses and things on their lids. A man's a success if he tries to be honest and kindly and wise; if he's slow to repeat all the lies he may meet, if he swats both the scandals and flies. I know when old Gaffer Pete Gray one morning was taken away, by Death, lantern-jowled, the whole village howled, and mourned him for many a day. Yet he was so poor that he had but seldom the half of a scad; he tried to do good in such ways as he could—he was a successful old lad!

25



TRUE HAPPINESS

WHEN torrents are pouring or tempests are roaring how pleasant and cheerful is home! To sit by the winder all drier than tinder and watch the unfortunates roam! With glad eyes to follow the fellows who wallow around in the rain or the sleet, to watch them a-slipping and sliding and tripping, and falling all over the street! There's nothing so soothing, so apt to be smoothing the furrows of grief from your brow, as sitting and gazing at folks who are raising out there in the mud such a row! To watch a mad neighbor through hurricane labor, while you are all snug by the fire, to see him cavorting and pawing and snorting—what more could a mortal desire? I love storm and blizzard from A clear to Izzard, I'm fond of the sleet and the rain; let winter get busy and whoop till he's dizzy, and I'll be the last to complain. For there is a casement just over the basement where I in all comfort may sit, and watch people wading through mud or parading through snow till they fall in a fit.

GENEROSITY

OLD Kink's always willing to preach, and hand out wise counsel and teach; but ask him for aid when you're hungry and frayed, and he'll stick to his wad like a leech. He's handy with proverb and text to comfort the needy and vexed; but when there's a plan to feed indigent man, old Kink never seems to get next. He'll help out the widow with psalms, and pray for her fatherless lambs; but he never would try to bring joy to her eye with codfish and sauerkraut and hams. On Sunday he joins in the hymn, and makes the responses with vim; when they pass round the box for the worshipers' rocks, his gift is exceedingly slim. He thinks he is fooling the Lord and is sure of a princely reward when to heaven he goes at this life's journey's close—with which view I am not in accord. For the Lord, he is wise to gold bricks, and the humbug who crosses the Styx will have to be sharp if he captures a harp; St. Peter will say to him, "Nix!" They size up a man nearly right when he comes to the portals of light; and no stingy old fraud ever hornswoggled God or put on a robe snowy white.

BACKBONE

28

FROM Yuba Dam to Yonkers the man of backbone conquers, where spineless critters fail; all obstacles o’ercoming, he goes along a-humming, and gathers fame and kale.

No ghosts of failure haunt him, no grisly bogies daunt him or make his spirits low; you’ll find him scratching gravel wherever you may travel, from Butte to Broken Bow. From Winnipeg to Wooster you’ll see this cheerful rooster, this model to all men; undaunted by reverses he wastes no time in curses, but digs right in again. His face is always shining though others be repining; you cannot keep him down; his trail is always smoking while cheaper men are croaking about the old dead town. From Humboldt to Hoboken he leaves his sign and token in buildings high and grand; in factories that flourish, in industries that nourish a tired, anaemic land. He brings the work to toilers and fills with bread and broilers their trusty dinner pails; he keeps the rip-saw ripping, the big triphammer tripping, the workman driving nails. All honor to his noblets! We drink to him in goblets of grapejuice rich and red—the man of spine and gizzard who hustles like a blizzard and simply won’t be dead!

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THE POORHOUSE

THE poorhouse, naked, grim, and bare, stands in a valley low; and most of us are headed there as fast as we can go. The paupers sit behind the gate, a solemn thing to see, and there all patiently they wait, they wait for you and me. We come, we come, O sad-eyed wrecks, we're coming with a will! We're all in debt up to our necks, and going deeper still! We're buying things we can't afford, and mock the old-time way of salting down a little hoard against the rainy day! No more afoot the poor man roams; in gorgeous car he scoots; we've mortgages upon our homes, our furniture, our boots. We've banished all the ancient cares, we paint the country red, we live like drunken millionaires, and never look ahead. The paupers, on the poorhouse lawn, are waiting in a group; they know we'll all be there anon, to share their cabbage soup; they see us in our costly garb, and say: "Their course is brief; we see the harbingers that harb of bankruptcy and grief." Be patient, paupers, for a span, ye friendless men and dames! We're coming, blithely as we can, to join you in your games!

NIGHT IS COMING

WHILE the blessed daylight lingers, let us work with might and main, with our busy feet and fingers, also with the busy brain; let the setting sun behold us tired, but filled with honest pride; for the night will soon enfold us, when we lay our tools aside. When we're in the churchyard lonely, where the weeping willows lean, there's one thing and one thing only that will keep our memory green. If we did the tasks appointed as we lived our speeding years, then our graves will be anointed with a mourning legion's tears. All our good intentions perish when is closed the coffin lid, and the world will only cherish and remember what we did. Nothing granite, monumental, can preserve your little fame; epitaphs are incidental, and will not embalm your name. Nothing counts when you are sleeping, but the goodly work you've done; that will last till gods are weeping round the ruins of the sun. Let no obstacles confound us, let us work till day is o'er; soon the night will gather round us, when we'll sleep to work no more.

DOING THINGS RIGHT

TO do things right, with all your might—that is a goodly motto; I’ve pasted that inside my hat, and if you don’t you’d ought to. To do things right, as leads your light, with faith and hope abiding; to do your best and let the rest to Jericho go sliding! With such an aim you’ll win the game and see your fortune founded; and goodly deed beats any creed that ever man expounded. To do things right, to bravely fight, when fate cuts up unfairly, to pay your way from day to day, and treat your neighbor squarely! That doctrine fills all wants and stills the doubter’s qualms and terrors, and guides him straight at goodly gait through all the field of errors. To do your best, within your breast a cheerful heart undaunted—that is the plan that brings a man all things he ever wanted. At finding snares and nests of mares I am not very handy; but when it comes to finding plums folks say I am a dandy; and my receipt is short and sweet, an easy one to follow; just do things right, with all your might—it beats all others hollow!

RIGHT SIDE UP

THOUGH now and then our feet descend to byways of despair, we nearly always in the end land right side up with care. I've seen a thousand frenzied guys declare that all was lost, there was no hope beneath the skies, this life was but a frost. And then next year I'd see them scoot around in motor cars, each one a-holding in his snoot the richest of cigars. I've seen men at the wailing place declare they were undone; no more the cold world could they face, their course, they said, was run. Again I'd see them prance along, all burbling with delight; whatever in their lives was wrong, became at last all right. And so it's foolishness, my friend, to weep or tear your hair; we nearly always, in the end, land right side up with care. Some call it luck, some providence, and some declare it fate; but there's a kind, o'erruling sense that makes our tangles straight; and there are watchful eyes that mark our movements as we roam; a hand extended in the dark to guide us safely home. In what direction do you wend? You'll find the helper there; we nearly always, in the end, land right side up with care.

THE IRON MEN

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WHEN the north wind roars at your cottage doors and batters the window panes, and the cold's so fierce that it seems to pierce right into your bones and veins, then it's sweet to sit by the fire and knit, and think, while the needles clank, of the iron men, of the shining yen, you have in the village bank! When you've lost your job and misfortunes rob your face of its wonted grin, when the money goes for your grub and clothes, though there's nothing coming in; when the fates are rough and they kick and cuff and give you a frequent spank, how sweet to think of the bunch of chink you have in the village bank! When you're gray and old and your feet are cold, and the night is drawing on; when you're tired and weak and your joints all creak, and the strength of youth is gone; when you watch and wait at the sunset gate for the boatman grim and lank, oh, it's nice to know there's a roll of dough all safe in the village bank! The worst, my friend, that the fates can send, is softened for you and yours if you have the price, have the coin on ice—the best of all earthly cures; oh, a healthy wad is your staff and rod when the luck seems tough and rank; your consolers then are the iron men you have in the village bank!

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PROCRASTINATION

YOU are merely storing sorrow for the future, sages say, if you put off till tomorrow things which should be done today. When there is a job unpleasant that it's up to me to do, I attack it in the present, give a whoop and push it through; then my mind is free from troubles, and I sit before the fire popping corn or blowing bubbles, or a-whanging at my lyre. If I said: "There is no hurry—that old job will do next week," there would be a constant worry making my old brain-pan creak. For a man knows no enjoyment resting at the close of day, if he knows that some employment is neglected in that way. There is nothing more consoling at the setting of the sun, when the evening bells are tolling, than the sense of duty done. And that solace cometh never to the man of backbone weak who postpones all sane endeavor till the middle of next week. Let us then be up and doing, with a heart for any fate, as the poet said, when shooin' agents from his garden gate. Let us shake ourselves and borrow wisdom from the poet's lay; leaving nothing for tomorrow, doing all our chores today!

TIMBERTOES

OLD GOMER, of a Kansas town, was never known to wear a frown, or for man's pity beg, although he stumps along his way, and does his work from day to day, upon a wooden leg. And every time he goes out doors he meets some peevish guy who roars about his evil luck; some fretful gent with leg of flesh who, when vicissitudes enmesh, proceeds to run amuck. Strong men with legs of flesh and bone just stand around the streets and groan, while Gomer pegs along and puts up hay the long hours through, and sounds his joyous whoopsydo, and makes his life a song. Old Gomer never sits and broods or seeks the hermit's solitudes to fill the air with sighs; there's no despondency in him! He brags about that basswood limb as though it were a prize. Sometimes I'm full of woe and grief, convinced the world brings no relief until a man is dead; and as I wail that things are wrong I see old Gomer hop along and then I soak my head. I've noticed that the men who growl, the ones who storm around and howl o'er fate's unwise decrees, are mostly Fortune's special pets; and then the man who never frets is one with red elm knees.

THE THANKLESS JOB

THERE'S nothing but tears for the man who steers our ship o'er the troubled sea; there's nothing but grief for the nation's chief, whoever that chief may be. Whatever he does, he can hear the buzz of critics as thick as flies; and all of his aims are sins and shames, and nothing he does is wise. There's nothing but kicks for the man who sticks four years to the White House chair; and his stout heart aches and his wishbone breaks and he loses most of his hair. There's nothing but growls and the knockers' howls, and the spiteful slings and slams; and the vile cartoons and the dish of prunes and a chorus of tinkers' dams. Oh, we humble skates in our low estates, who fuss with our garden sass, should view the woes of the men who rose above and beyond the mass, and be glad today that we go our way mid quiet and peaceful scenes; should thankfully take the hoe and rake, and wrestle with spuds and greens!

THE UNDERTAKER

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WHEN life is done—this life that galls and frets us, this life so full of tears and doubts and dreads—the undertaker comes along and gets us, and tucks us neatly in our little beds. When we are done with toiling, hoarding, giving, when we are done with drawing checks and breath, he comes to show us that the cost of living cuts little ice beside the cost of death. I meet him daily in the street or alley, a cheerful man, he dances and he sings; and we exchange the buoyant jest and sally, and ne’er discourse of grim, unpleasant things. We talk of crops, the campaign and the weather, the I. and R., the trusts—this nation’s curse; no graveyard hints while we converse together, no reference to joyrides in a hearse. And yet I feel—perchance it is a blunder—that as I stand there, rugged, hale and strong, he’d like to ask me: “Comrade, why in thunder and other things, do you hang on so long?” When I complain of how the asthma tightens upon my lungs, and makes me feel a wreck, it seems to me his face with rapture lightens, smiles stretch his lips and wind around his neck. And when I say I’m feeling like a heifer turned out to grass, or like a hummingbird, he heaves a sigh as gentle as a zephyr, yet fraught with pain and grief and hope deferred.

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GARDEN OF DREAMS

IN the garden of dreams let me rest, far, far from the laboring throng, from the moans of the tired and distressed, from the strains of the conqueror's song. As a native of Bagdad, or Turk, I'd live in Arabian nights, away from the regions of work, from troubles and hollow delights. In the garden of dreams I would stray, and bother my fat head no more, a-wondering how I shall pay for groceries bought at the store. Ah, there in that garden I'd sit, communing in peace with my soul, and never again have a fit when handed the bill for the coal. In the garden of dreams I'd recline and soar on the wings of romance, forgetting this old hat of mine, the patches all over my pants, the clamor of children for shoes, the hausfrau's demands for a gown, the lodge's exorbitant dues, the polltax to work in the town. Alas! It is as I supposed—there is no escaping my fate, for the garden of dreams has been closed, a padlock is fixed on the gate. The young, who are buoyant and glad, may enter that garden, it seems; but the old, who are weary and sad, are warned from the garden of dreams!

CLOUDS

IF every day was sunny, with ne'er a cloud in view, we'd soon be spending money to buy a cloud or two. It always makes me weary when people say: "Old boy, may all your days be cheery and bright and full of joy!" If all my days were sunny, existence would seem flat; if I were fed on honey I'd soon get sick of that. I like a slice of sorrow to hold me down today, for that will make tomorrow seem fifty times as gay. A little dose of sickness won't make me whine or yell; 'twill emphasize the slickness of life when I am well. A little siege of trouble won't put my hopes in pawn, for I'll be trotting double with joy when it is gone. Down there in tropic regions where sunshine gleams all day, the fat and lazy legions just sleep their lives away; there every idle bumpkin who in the sunshine lies, lives like a yellow pumpkin, and like a squash he dies. I want my share of changes, my share of ups and downs; I want a life that ranges from crosses up to crowns.

BEAUTIFUL THINGS

THE beautiful things are the things we do; they are not the things we wear, as we shall find when the journey's through, and the roll call's read up there. We're illustrating the latest styles, with raiment that beats the band; but the beautiful things are the kindly smiles that go with the helping hand. We burden ourselves with gleaming gems, that neighbors may stop and stare; but the beautiful things are the diadems of stars that the righteous wear. There are beautiful things in the poor man's cot, though empty the hearth and cold, if love and service are in each thought that husband and wife may hold. There are beautiful things in the lowest slum where wandering outcasts grope, when down to its depths they see you come with message of help and hope. The beautiful things that we mortals buy and flash in the crowded street, will all be junk when we come to die, and march to the judgment seat. When everything's weighed on that fateful day, the lightest thing will be gold. There are beautiful things within reach today, but they are not bought or sold.

TRAVELERS

DOWN this little world we travel, headed for the land of Dawn, sawing wood and scratching gravel, here today, tomorrow gone! Down our path of doubts and dangers, we are toddling, mile on mile, transient and inquiring strangers, dumped into this world a while. Let us make the journey pleasant for the little time we stay; all we have is just the Present—all we need is just Today. Let's encourage one another as we push along the road, saying to a jaded brother: "Here, I'll help you with your load!" Banish scorn and vain reviling, banish useless tears and woe; let us do the journey smiling, all our hearts with love aglow. Let us never search for sorrow, since the journey is so brief; here today and gone tomorrow, what have we to do with grief? Down this little world we wander, strangers from some unknown spheres, headed for the country yonder where they have no sighs or tears; let us therefore cease complaining, let us be no longer glum; let us all go into training for the joyful life to come!

THE SHUT-IN

I KNOW a crippled woman who lives through years of pain with patience superhuman —for ne’er does she complain. An endless torture rages throughout her stricken frame; an hour would seem like ages if I endured the same. Sometimes I call upon her to ask her how she stacks; it is her point of honor to utter no alacks; she hands out no alases, but says she’s feeling gay, and every hour that passes brings some new joy her way. “I’m all serene, old chappie,” she says, “as you can see; my heart is always happy, the Lord’s so good to me!” Thus chortles pain-racked Auntie, and says it with a smile; and when I leave her shanty I kick myself a while. For I am strong and scrappy; I’m sound in wind and limb; and yet I’m seldom happy; I wail a graveyard hymn; whene’er I meet reverses my howls are agonized; I say, with bitter curses, the gods are subsidized. When life seems like December, a thing of gloom and care, I wish I could remember old Auntie in her chair, forget my whinings hateful, and that wan shut-in see, who says that she is grateful, “the Lord’s so good to me!”

IN OLD AGE

WHEN I have reached three score and ten I hope I will not be like sundry sad and ancient men that every day I see. I hope I'll never be so old, so broken down and gray, that I will lift my voice and scold when children round me play. I hope I'll never be so sere, so close to muffled drums, that I can't waltz around and cheer whene'er the circus comes. I hope I'll never wither up or yet so foundered be, that I won't gambol with a pup when it would play with me. I hope I'll not, while yet alive, be so much like a corse, that I won't seize a chance to drive a good high-stepping horse. Though I must hobble on a crutch to help my feeble shins, I'll always yell to beat the Dutch whene'er the home team wins. Perhaps I'll live a thousand years—I sometimes fear I will, for something whispers in my ears I am too tough to kill—I may outlast the modern thrones and all the kings thereon, but while I navigate my bones I'll try, so help me John, to be as young in mind and heart as any springald near, and when for Jordan I depart, go like a gay roan steer.

HOMELESS

WHEN the wind blows shrill, with a deadly chill, and we sit by the cheerful blaze, do we ever think of the homeless gink, a-going his weary ways? The daylight's gone and we sit and yawn, and comfort is all around; do we care a whoop for the dismal troop adrift on the frozen ground? You eat and drink and count your chink as you sit in your easy chair; and you've grown hog-fat, and beneath your hat there's hardly a sign of care. Do you never pause, as you ply your jaws, devouring the oyster stew, to heave a sigh for the waifs who lie outdoors, all the long night through? It was good of Fate that she paid the freight, and planted you here at ease, while the other lads, who are shy of scads, must sit in the park and freeze. But she may repent ere your days are spent, and juggle things all around, and the bo may sleep on your mattress deep, and you on the frozen ground!

THE HAPPY HOME

“OH these pancakes are sublime,” brightly cries Josiah Jakes; “mother, in the olden time, thought that she could fashion cakes; she was always getting praise, and deserved it, I maintain; but she, in her palmy days, couldn’t touch you, Sarah Jane. Oh, the king upon his throne for such fodder surely aches; you are in a class alone, when it comes to griddle cakes.” Then upon his shining dome he adjusts his lid and goes, and his wife remains at home, making pies and things like those. She is stewing luscious prunes, in her eye a happy tear, and her heart is singing tunes such as angels like to hear. O’er and o’er she still repeats all the kindly words he said, as she fixes further treats, pumpkin pie and gingerbread. When the evening’s growing gray, following the set of sun, “This has been a perfect day,” murmurs she, her labors done. Perfect nearly all the days of our loved ones well might be, if with words of honest praise we were generous and free.

THE UNHAPPY HOME

T IRED father to his home returns, all jaded by the stress and fray, to have the rest for which he yearns throughout the long and toilsome day. His supper's ready on the board, as good a meal as e'er was sprung, a meal no worker could afford in olden times, when we were young. He looks around with frowning brow, and sighs, "Ah, what a lot of junk! This butter never knew a cow, the coffee is extremely punk. You know I like potatoes boiled, and so, of course, you dish them fried; this poor old beefsteak has been broiled until it's tough as walrus hide. It beats me, Susan, where you find such doughnuts, which resemble rock; these biscuits you no doubt designed to act as weights for yonder clock. You couldn't fracture with a club the kind of sponge cake that you dish; alas, for dear old mother's grub throughout my days I vainly wish." Then Susan, burdened with her cares, worn out, discouraged, sad and weak, sits down beneath the cellar stairs, and weeps in German, French, and Greek. Alas, the poor, unhappy soul, whose maiden dreams are all a wreck! She ought to take a ten-foot pole and prod her husband in the neck.

COTTER’S SATURDAY NIGHT

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NEW VERSION

THE labor of the week is o’er, the stress and toil titanic, and to his humble cottage door returns the tired mechanic. He hangs his weather-beaten tile and coat upon a rafter; the housewife greets him with a smile, the bairns with joyous laughter. The supper is a merry meal, and when they’ve had their vittles, the mother plies her spinning wheel, while father smokes and whittles. But now the kids, a joyous crowd, must cease to romp and caper, for father starts to read aloud the helpful daily paper:

“A cancer on the neck or knees once meant complete disaster; but Dr. Chowder guarantees to cure it with a plaster. He doesn’t use an ax or spade, or blast it out with powder; don’t let your coming be delayed—rely on Dr. Chowder!”

Outdoors there is a rising gale, a fitful rain is falling; they hear the east winds sadly wail like lonely phantoms calling. But all is peace and joy within, and eyes with gladness glisten, and father, with a happy grin, reads on, and bids them listen:

“If you have pimples on your nose or bunions on your shoulder, if you have ringbones on your toes—ere you’re a minute older call up the druggist on the phone and have him send a basket of Faker’s pills, for they alone will save you from a casket.”

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The clock ticks on the cottage wall, and marks the minutes’ speeding; the firelight dances in the hall, on dad, where he sits reading. Oh, quiet, homely scene of bliss, the nation’s pride and glory! And in a million homes like this, dad reads the precious story:

“Oh, countless are the grievous ills, afflicting human critters, but we have always Bunkum’s Pills, and Skookum’s Hogwash Bitters. Have you the symptoms of the gout along your muscles playing? And are your whiskers falling out, and are your teeth decaying? Have you no appetite for greens, and do you balk at fritters? We’ll tell you, reader, what it means—you need some Hogwash Bitters!”

The children nod their drowsy heads, their toys around them lying. “I’ll take them to their little beds,” says mother, softly sighing. “It’s time they were away from here—the evening is advancing; but ere they go, O husband dear, read one more tale entrancing.” And father seeks that inside page where “Household Hints” are printed, where, for the good of youth and age, this “Household Hint” is hinted:

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“If you have maladies so rank they are too fierce to mention, just call on good old Dr. Crank; you’ll find it his intention to cure you up where others fail, though t’others number twenty; but don’t forget to bring the kale, and see that you have plenty.”

AT THE END

WE do our little stunt on earth, and when it's time to die, "The ice we cut has little worth—we wasted time," we sigh. When one has snow above his ears, and age has chilled his veins, he looks back on the vanished years, his spirit racked with pains. However well he may have done, it all seems trifling then; alas, if he could only run his little course again! He would not then so greatly prize the sordid silver plunk; for when a man grows old and wise, he knows that coin is junk. One kindly action of the past, if such you can recall, will soothe you greatly at the last when memory is All. If you have helped some pilgrim climb from darkness and despair, that action, in your twilight time, will ease your weight of care. The triumphs of your business day, by stealth or sharpness gained, will seem, when you are tired and gray, to leave your record stained. Ah, comrade, in the dusk of life, when you have ceased your grind, when all your strategy and strife are left for aye behind, when you await the curtain's fall, the setting of the sun, how you will struggle to recall the good that you have done!

WHAT’S THE USE?

MAN toils at his appointed task till hair is gray and teeth are loose, and pauses now and then to ask, in tones despondent, “What’s the use?” We have distempers of the mind when we are tired and sorely tried; we’d like to quit the beastly grind, and let the tail go with the hide. The money goes for shoes and pie, for hats and pork and dairy juice; to get ahead we strive and try, and still are broke, so what’s the use? Then, gazing round us, we behold the down-and-outers in the street; they shiver in the biting cold, they trudge along on weary feet. They have no home, they have no bed, no shelter neath the wintry sky; they’ll have no peace till they are dead, and planted where the paupers lie. No comfort theirs till in the cell that has a clammy earthen lid; yet some of them deserve as well of Fortune as we ever did. And, having seen the hungry throng, if we’re good sports we cease to sigh; we go to work with cheery song, and make the fur and feathers fly.

THE MAN WANTED

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NEVER was there such a clamor for the man who knows his trade! Whether with a pen or hammer, whether with a brush or spade he's equipped, the world demands him, calls upon him for his skill, and on pay day gladly hands him rolls of roubles from its till. Little boots it what his trade is, building bridges, shoeing mules—men will come from Cork and Cadiz to engage him and his tools. All the world is busy hunting for the workman who's supreme, whether he is best at punting or at flavoring ice cream.

Up and down the land are treading men who find this world a frost, toiling on for board and bedding, in an age of hustling lost. “We have never had fair chances, Fortune ever used us sore,” they complain, as age advances, and the poorhouse lies before. “Handy men are we,” they mutter, “masters of a dozen trades, yet we can't earn bread and butter, much less jams and marmalades. When we ask a situation, stern employers cry again: ‘Chase yourselves! This weary nation crowded is with handy men! Learn one thing and learn it fully, learn in something to excel, then you'll find this old world bully—it will please you passing well!’ Thus reply the stern employers when for work we sadly plead, saying we are farmers, sawyers, tinkers, tailors gone to seed. So we sing our doleful chorus as adown the world we wind, for the poorhouse lies before us, and the free lunch lies behind.”

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While this tragedy's unfolding in each corner of the land, men of skill are still beholding chances rise on every hand; men who learned one thing and learned it up and down and to and fro, got reward because they earned it—men who study, men who Know. If you're raising sweet potatoes, see that they're the best on earth; if you're rearing alligators, see that they're of special worth; if you're shoeing dromedaries, shoe the brutes with all your might; if you're peddling trained canaries, let your birds be out of sight. Whatsoever you are doing, do it well and with a will, and you'll find the world pursuing, offering to buy your skill.

A MAD WORLD

WHILE seated in my warm abode I see John Doe pass up the road, that man of many woes; he wears one rubber and one shoe, the wintry blast is blowing through his whiskers and his clothes. He has no place to sleep or eat, his only refuge is the street, his shelter heaven's vault; I see him in the storm abroad, and say, "But for the grace of God, there goes your Uncle Walt." John Doe with gifts was richly blest; he might have distanced all the rest, had Fortune kindly been; but Fortune put the kibosh on the efforts of the luckless John, and never wore a grin. I wonder why an Edgar Poe found life a wilderness of woe, and starved in garrets bare, while bards who cannot sing for prunes eat costly grub from golden spoons, and purple raiment wear. I wonder why a Robert Burns must try all kinds of shifts and turns to gain his daily bread, the while a Southey basked at ease and stuffed himself with jam and cheese, a wreath upon his head. Such things have never been explained; I know not why it is ordained that I find life a snap; and gazing from my door I see John Doe, in speechless misery, a homeless, hungry chap.

PUNCTUALITY

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THE punctual man is a bird; he always is true to his word; he knows that the skate who is ten minutes late is trifling and vain and absurd. He says, “I’ll be with you at four”; though torrents may ruthlessly pour, you know when the clock strikes the hour he will knock with his punctual fist at your door. And you say, “He is surely a trump! I haven’t much use for the chump who is evermore late, making other men wait—the place for that gent is the dump.” The punctual man is a peach; he sticks to his dates like a leech; it’s a pity, alas, that he hasn’t a class of boneheaded sluggards to teach. He’s welcome wherever he wends; the country is full of his friends; he goes by the watch and he ne’er makes a botch of his time, so he never offends. If he says he’ll get married at nine, you can bet he’ll be standing in line, with his beautiful bride, and the knot will be tied ere the clock is done making the sign. If he says he’ll have cashed in at five, at that hour he will not be alive; you can order his shroud and assemble a crowd, clear out to the boneyard to drive. The punctual man is a jo! The biggest success that I know! He is grand and sublime, he is always on time, not late by ten minutes or so.

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DOWN AND OUT

MISFORTUNE punched you in the neck, and knocked you down and tramped you under; will you survey the gloomy wreck, and stand around and weep, I wonder?

Your hold upon success has slipped, and still you ought to bob up grinning; for when a man admits he's whipped, he throws away his chance of winning. I like to think of John Paul Jones, whose ship was split from truck to fender; the British asked, in blawsted tones, if he was ready to surrender. The Yankee mariner replied, "Our ship is sinking at this writing, but don't begin to put on side—for we have just begun our fighting!" There is a motto, luckless lad, that you should paste inside your bonnet; when this old world seems stern and sad, with nothing but some Jonahs on it, don't murmur in a futile way, about misfortune, bleak and biting, but gird your well known loins and say, "Great Scott! I've just begun my fighting!" The man who won't admit he's licked is bound to win a triumph shining, and all the lemons will be picked by weak-kneed fellows, fond of whining.

“CHARGE IT”

61

“JUST chalk it down,” the poor man said, when he had bought some boneless bread, and many costly things, his wife and brood of bairns to feed—the most of which they didn’t need as much as you need wings. He buys the richest things in town, and always says, “Just chalk it down, I’ll pay you soon, you bet;” and payday evening finds him broke, his hard earned plunks gone up in smoke, and still he is in debt. The man who doesn’t buy for cash lays in all kinds of costly trash, that he could do without; he spends his coin before it’s earned, and roars about it when it’s burned—is that your way, old scout? When comes the day of evil luck the war bag doesn’t hold a buck to keep the wolf away; the “charge it” plan will work no more at any market, shop, or store—no goods unless you pay. The poor man for his money sweats, and he should pay for what he gets, just when he gets the same; then, when he goes his prunes to buy, and sees how fast the nickels fly, he’ll dodge the spendthrift game. If you begin to save your stamps, some day, with teardrops in your lamps, this writer you will thank; when man in grief and sickness groans there’s naught like having fifteen bones in some good savings bank.

62



THE CROAKER

63

THERE is a man—you know him well; in every village doth he dwell—who all the time and every day can dig up something sad to say. The good, the beautiful, the fine, the things that others think divine, remind him that all flesh is grass, that all things must decay and pass. He shakes his head and wags his ears and sheds all kinds of briny tears and cries, “Alack and wella-day! All flesh is grass, and grass is hay!”

He gazes on the blooming bride, who, in her beauty and her pride, is fairer than the fairest flower that ever charmed a summer hour. Wise people watch her with delight, and hope her future may be bright; they whisper blessings and declare that she is radiant and rare, and better feel for having seen so charming and so sweet a queen.

But Croaker notes her brave array and sighs, “Her bloom will pass away! A few short years, and she’ll be bent and wrinkled up, I’ll bet a cent! The hair that looks like gold just now will soon be graying on her brow. She’ll shrivel in this world of sin, and there’ll be whiskers on her chin; and she will seem all hide and bone, a withered and obnoxious crone! I’ve seen so many brides before, with orange wreaths and veils galore, and I have seen their glories pass—all flesh is grass, all flesh is grass!”

64

The people hear his tale of woe and murmur, “What he says is so!” For that’s the way with evil words; they travel faster than the birds.

I go to see the football game, and note the athlete, strong of frame, his giant arms, his mighty chest, and glory in his youthful zest. It fires my ancient soul to see exultant youth, so strong and free.

But someone at my elbow sighs—and there sits Croaker—dern his eyes!

“These youths,” he says, “so brave and strong, will all be crippled up ere long. If they’re not slaughtered in this game, they’ll all be bunged up, just the same. A few short years, and they will groan, with rheumatism in each bone; they’ll all be lame in feet and knees, they’ll have the hoof and mouth disease, the mumps, the glanders and the gout. Go on, ye springalds, laugh and shout and play the game as best ye may, for youth and strength will pass away! Like snow wreaths in the thaw they’ll pass—all flesh is grass, all flesh is grass!”

65

I bust him once upon the nose, I tie his whiskers to his toes, and, with an ardent, eager hoof, I kick his person through the roof. But he has spoiled my happy day; the croaker drives all glee away.

CHOOSING A BRIDE

THE man who goes to choose a bride should cautious be, and falcon-eyed, or he will harvest woes; it is a most important chore—more so than going to the store to buy a suit of clothes. If you have dreams of pleasant nights around the fire, and home delights, sidestep the giddy maid whose thoughts are all of hats and gowns, and other female hand-me-downs, of show and dress parade. And always shun the festive skirt who'll never miss a chance to flirt with men, at any cost; she may seem sweet and charming now, but, as your own and only frau, she's sure to be a frost. And when you see a woman near, who hankers for a high career, and combs her hair back straight, who says she's wedded to her art, whose brow is high, whose tongue is tart—oh, Clarence, pull your freight! Select a damsel safe and sane, who has no folly in her brain, who wants to build a home; if you can win that sort of bride, peace shall with you and yours abide, and crown your old bald dome.

AFTER US

67

THE workman, in my new abode, now spreads the luscious plaster; he hums a blithe and cheerful ode, and labors fast and faster. I stand and watch him as he works, I stand and watch and ponder; I mark how skillfully he jerks the plaster here and yonder. “This plaster will be here,” he cries, “unbroken and unshredded, when you sing anthems in the skies—if that’s where you are headed.” How good to feel, as on we strive, in this bright world enchanted, that what we do will be alive when we are dead and planted! For this the poet racks his brain (and not for coin or rubies) until he finds he’s gone insane and has to join the boobies. For this the painter plies his brush and spreads his yellow ochre, to find, when comes life’s twilight hush, that Fame’s an artful joker. For this the singer sprains her throat, and burns the midnight candle, and tries to reach a higher note than Ellen Yaw could handle. For this the actor rants and barks, the poor old welkin stabbin’, and takes the part of Lawyer Marks in Uncle Tommy’s Cabin. Alas, my labors will not last! In vain my rhythmic rages! I cannot make my plaster plast so it will stick for ages!

68



SOME OF THE POOR

So many have no roofs or doors, no sheets to cuddle under! You hire some men to do your chores, and then you cease to wonder. Alas, he is so hard to find—he takes so much pursuing—the worker who will keep his mind on what he may be doing. I hire a man to saw some sticks, to keep the fire a-going, and he discusses politics, in language smooth and flowing; the saw grows rusty while he stands, the welkin shrinks and totters, as he, with swinging jaws and hands, denounces Wall Street plotters. When I go home, as dusk grows dense, I hear his windy rages, and kick him sadly through the fence, when I have paid his wages. I hire a man to paint the churn and hoe the morning glories, and when at evening I return he's busy telling stories. “That toiler is no good, I fear,” remarks the hausfrau, Sally; I take him gently by the ear and lead him to the alley. I hire a man the stove to black, and fix the kitchen table, and when at evening I come back, he's sleeping in the stable. And thus we suffer and endure the trifler's vain endeavor; we do not wonder that the poor are with us here forever.

THE HARVEST HAND

Triumphantly the toiler roared, “I get three bones a day and board! That’s going some, eh, what?” And on he labored, brave and strong; the work was hard, the hours were long, the day was passing hot. I sat at ease beneath a tree—that sort of thing appeals to me—and watched him as he toiled; the sweat rolled down him in a stream, and I could see his garments steam, his face and hands were broiled. He chuckled as he toiled away, “They’re paying me three bones a day, with board and washing, too!” That was his dream of easy mon—to stew and simmer in the sun, for that, the long day through! And I, who earn three iron men with sundry scratches of a pen, felt sorry for the jay; but, as I watched his stalwart form, the pity that was growing warm within me, blew away. For he was getting more than wealth—keen appetite and rugged health, and blessings such as those; and when the day of toil was through, no doubt the stalwart worker knew a weary child’s repose!

WHAT I'D DO

71

If I were Binks the baker, I'd tidy up my store; I would not have an acre of dust upon the floor. I'd be a skilled adjuster and make things please the eyes; I'd take a feather duster and clean the pumpkin pies. I'd keep the doorknob shining, and polish up the glass, and never sit repining, and never say, “Alas!”

If I were Binks the baker, I'd have a cheerful heart, as always should the maker of bread and pie and tart; for looking sad and grewsome will never bring the trade of folks who want to chew some doughnuts and marmalade. When I go blowing money I always seek the store whose boss is gay and sunny, with gladness bubbling o'er; and when I chance to enter a bakery whose chief is roaring like a stentor about his woe and grief, his bellowings confound me, I do not spend a yen; I merely glance around me, and hustle out again.

If I were Binks the baker, and had a grouch on hand, I'd surely try to shake her, and smile to beat the band. For no one wants to harken to tales of woe and strife, to hear of clouds that darken a merchant's weary life. For customers, have troubles, like you, through all their years; and when they spend their rubles they are not buying tears. They'll like you all the better, you and your cakes and jam, if you are not a fretter, a kicker and a clam.

72

If I were Bakes, the binker—my wires are crossed, I swow—I'd sell the pie and sinker with calm, unclouded brow. No grumblings wild and woolly would from my larynx slide; I'd swear that things were bully, and seven meters wide. Then folks would all admire me, and seek me in my den, and load me till they'd tire me, with kopecks, tael, and yen.

THE FORTUNE TELLER

A gypsy maiden, strangely wise, with dusky hair and midnight eyes, my future life unveiled; she said she'd read the lines of fate for many another trusting skate, and never yet had failed. She was a maid of savage charms; great brazen rings were on her arms, and she had strings of beads; with trinkets she was loaded down; the noisy colors of her gown recalled no widow's weeds. She told me I would live to be as rich as Andy or John D., my dreams would all come true; I'd have a palace on a hill, and vassals near to do my will, a yacht to sail the blue. And as she told what blessings fine, what great rewards and gifts were mine, in low and dulcet tones, her nimble fingers, ne'er at rest, got closer to my checkered vest, and lifted seven bones. She touched me for my meager roll, that poor misguided, heathen soul, but still her victim smiles; she gave me dreams for half a day and took me with her to Cathay and the enchanted isles. Her glamour caused me to forget a little while, the strife and sweat, the city's bricks and stones; she took my toilworn soul abroad, and she is welcome to my wad—I still have seven bones.

GOLD BRICKS

74

Y oung Jack goes forth to call on Rose, attired in gorgeous raiment (and for that gaudy suit of clothes the tailor seeks his payment); his teeth are scoured, his shoes are shined, the barber man's been active—in sooth, it's hard to call to mind a fellow more attractive.

And Rose is waiting at the gate, as blithely Jack advances; she has her angel smile on straight, and charming are her glances. She's spent at least a half a day (to temper's sore abrasion) to get herself in brave array, in shape for this occasion. All afternoon, with patient care, she tried on heaps of dresses; her gentle mother heard her swear while combing out her tresses. But now, as lovely as the day, with trouble unacquainted, she looks as though she grew that way and never puffed or painted.

And so they both, on dress parade, sit down within the arbor, she well upholstered by her maid, he scented by his barber. They talk of painters, Spanish, Dutch; they talk of Keats and Dante—for whom they do not care as much as does your maiden auntie. Now Jack is down upon his knees! By jings! he is proposing! His vows, a-floating on the breeze, his ardor are disclosing! And Rose! Her bliss is now begun—she's made her little capture. Oh, chee! two hearts that beat as one, and all that sort of rapture!

75

And there is none to say to Rose, “Don't rush into a marriage! You're getting but a suit of clothes, some gall, a princely carriage! This man upon whose breast you lean too often has a jag on; he couldn't buy the raw benzine to run your chug-chug wagon! Of tawdry thoughts he is the fount; his heart is cold and stony. He's ornery and no account; his stately front is phony! He owes for all the duds he wears, for all the grub he's swallowed, and at his heels, on streets and stairs, the bailiffs long have followed!”

And there is none to say to Jack, “Don't wed that dazzling maiden! You think that down a starry track she slid to you from Aidenn; but she is selfishness boiled down—as mother oft discovers—and in the house she wears a frown; she keeps her smiles for lovers. She never did a useful thing or had a thought uplifting, and ere she gets you on her string, look out where you are drifting!”

There's none who dares to tell the truth or point the proper courses, so foolish maid weds foolish youth, and then we have divorces!

76



AMBITIONS

77

Ah, once, in sooth, in days of youth, I longed to be a pirate; the corsair's fame for deeds of shame—all boys did once desire it. At night when gleamed the stars I dreamed of sacking Spanish vessels, of clanging swords and dripping boards, and bloody scraps and wrestles. Then “One-Eyed Lief” the pirate chief my hero was and model; in dreams I'd hold his stolen gold till I could scarcely waddle. But father took his shepherd's crook and lammed me like tarnation, till I forgot that sort of rot for milder aspiration.

And still I dreamed; and now I seemed to be a baseball pitcher, adored by all, both great and small, in wealth grown rich and richer. My dreaming eyes saw crowds arise and bless me from the bleachers, when I struck out some pinch hit lout and beat those Mudville creatures. I seemed to stand, sublime and grand, the idol of all fandom; men thought me swell, and treasured well the words I spoke at random. Ah, boyhood schemes, and empty dreams of glory, fame and riches! My mother came and tanned my frame with sundry birchen switches, and brought me back to duty's track, and made me hoe the onions, dig garden sass and mow the grass until my hands had bunions.

78

In later days I used to raise my eyes to summits splendid. “I'll hold,” I'd swear, “the White House chair, before my life is ended.” The years rolled on and dreams are gone, with all their gorgeous sallies, and in my town I'm holding down a job inspecting alleys.

Thus goes the world; a man is hurled from heights to depths abysmal; the dream of hope is golden dope, but waking up is dismal. So many dreams, so many schemes, upon the hard-rock shiver! We think we'll eat some sirloin meat, and have to dine on liver. We think we'll dine on duck and wine, with garlands hanging o'er us, but when some dub calls us to grub, stewed prunes are set before us. And yet, my friends, though dreaming ends in dark-blue taste tomorrow, build airy schemes! Without your dreams, this life would be all sorrow.

CHRISTMAS MUSINGS

79

One winter night—how long ago it seems!—I lay me down to bask in pleasant dreams. My sock was hung, hard by the quilting frame, where Santa Claus must see it when he came. I'd been assured by elders, good and wise, that he would come when I had closed my eyes; along the roofs he'd drive his team and sleigh, and down the chimney make his sooty way. And much I wondered, as I drowsy grew, how he would pass the elbows in the flue.

The morning came, the Christmas bells rang loud, I heard the singing of a joyous crowd, and in my sock that blessed day I found a gift that made my head whirl round and round. A pair of skates, whose runners shone like glass, whose upper parts were rich with steel and brass! A pair of skates that would the gods suffice, if ever gods go scooting o'er the ice! All through the day I held them in my arms and nursed them close, nor wearied of their charms. I did not envy then the king his crown, the knight his charger, or the mayor his town. I scaled the heights of rapture and delight—I had new skates, oh, rare and wondrous sight!

'Twas long ago, and they who loved me then are in their graves, the wise old dames and men. Since that far day when rang the morning chimes, the Christmas bells have rung full forty times; the winter snow is on my heart and hair, and old beliefs have vanished in thin air. No more I wait to hear old Santa's team, as drowsily I drift into a dream. Age has no myths, no legends, no beliefs, but only facts, and facts are mostly griefs.

I've prospered well, I've earned a goodly store, since that bright morning in the time of yore. My home is filled with rare and costly things, and every day some modern comfort brings; I've motor cars and also speedy steeds, and goods to meet all human wants or needs; and at the bank, when I step in the door, the money changers bow down to the floor.

The bells of Christmas clamor in the gale, but I am old, and life is flat and stale. I'd give my hoard for just one thrill of joy, such as I knew when, as a little boy, I proudly went and showed my youthful mates my Christmas gift—a pair of shining skates! For those cheap skates I'd give my motor cars, my works of art, my Cuba-made cigars, my stocks and bonds, my hunters and my hounds, my stately mansion and my terraced grounds, if, having them, I once again might know the joy I knew so long, so long ago!



THE WAY OF A MAN

BEFORE MARRIAGE

He carried flowers and diamond rings to please that dazzling belle, and caramels and other things that damsels love so well. He'd sit for hours upon a chair and hold her on his knees; he blew his money here and there, as though it grew on trees. "If I had half what you are worth," he used to say, "my sweet, I'd put a shawlstrap round the earth and lay it at your feet."

He had no other thought, it seemed, than just to cheer her heart; and everything of which she dreamed, he purchased in the mart.

"When we are spliced," he used to say, "you'll have all you desire—a gold mine or a load of hay, a dachshund or a lyre. My one great aim will be to make your life a thing of joy, so haste and to the altar take your little Clarence boy."

And so she thought she drew a peach when they were wed in June. Alas! how oft for plums we reach, and only get a prune!

AFTER MARRIAGE

83

“And so you want another hat?” he thundered to his frau. “Just tell me what is wrong with that—the one you’re wearing now! No wonder that I have the blues, the way the money goes; last week you blew yourself for shoes, next week you’ll want new clothes!”

“I wish you were like other wives and would like them behave; it is the object of their lives to help their husbands save. All day I’m in the business fight and strain my heart and soul, and when I journey home at night, you touch me for my roll. You want a twenty-dollar hat, to hold your topknot down, or else a new Angora cat, a lapdog, or a gown. You lie awake at night and think of things you’d like to buy, and when I draw a little chink, you surely make it fly.

“With such a wife as you, I say, a husband has no chance; you pull his starboard limb by day, by night you rob his pants.

“My sainted mother, when she dwelt in this sad vale of tears, had one old lid of cloth or felt, she wore for thirty years. She helped my father all the time, she pickled every bone, and if she had to blow a dime, it made her weep and moan.

84

“The hat you wear is good as new; ’twill do another year. So don’t stand round, the rag to chew—I’m busy now, my dear.”



THE TWO SALESMEN

85

Two salesmen went to work for Jones, who deals in basswood trunks; each drew per week eleven bones, eleven big round plunks. “It isn’t much,” said Jones, “but then, do well, and you’ll get more; I’d like to have some high-priced men around this blamed old store. You’ll find I’m always glad to pay as much as you are worth, so let your curves from day to day astonish all the earth.”

Then Salesman Number One got down and buckled to his work; and people soon, throughout the town, were talking of that clerk. He was so full of snap and vim, so cheerful and serene, that people liked to deal with him, and hand him good long green. In busy times he’d stay at night to straighten things around, and never show a sign of spite, or raise a doleful sound. He never feared that he would work a half an hour too long, but he those basswood trunks would jerk with cheerful smile and song.

And ever and anon Brer Jones would say: “You’re good as wheat! I raise your stipend seven bones, and soon I will repeat!” And now that Salesman Number One is manager they say; each week he draws a bunch of mon big as a load of hay.

86

But Salesman Number Two was sore because his pay was small; he sighed, “The owner of this store has seven kinds of gall. He ought to pay me eighteen bucks, and more as I advance. He ought to treat me white—but shucks! I see my name is Pance.”

Determined to do just enough to earn his meager pay, he watched the clock, and cut up rough if late he had to stay. He saw that other salesman climb, the man of smiles and songs; but still he fooled away his time, and brooded o’er his wrongs.

He’s still employed at Jones’ store, but not, alas! as clerk; he cleans the windows, sweeps the floor, and does the greasy work. He sees young fellows make their start and prosper and advance, and sadly sighs, with breaking heart, I never had a chance!

And thousands raise that same old wail throughout this busy land; you hear that gurgle, false and stale, wherever failures stand. The men who never had a chance are scarce as chickens’ teeth, and chaps who simply won’t advance must wear the goose-egg wreath.

THE PRODIGAL SON

“**A**t last I’m wise, I will arise, and seek my father’s shack;” thus muttered low the ancient bo, and then he hit the track. From dwellings rude he’d oft been shooed, been chased by farmers’ dogs; this poor old scout, all down and out, had herded with the hogs. His heart was wrong; it took him long to recognize the truth, that there’s a glad and smiling dad for each repentant youth. “I will arise, doggone my eyes,” the prodigal observed, “and try to strike the old straight pike from which I idly swerved.” The father saw, while baling straw, the truant, sore and lamed; he whooped with joy; “my swaybacked boy, you’re welcome!” he exclaimed. Midst glee and mirth two dollars’ worth of fireworks then were burned; “we’ll kill a cow,” cried father, “now that Reuben has returned!” His sisters sang, the farmhouse rang with glee till rafters split, his mother sighed with hope and pride, his granny had a fit. And it’s today the same old way, the lamp doth nightly burn, to guide you home, O, boys who roam, if you will but return.

HOSPITALITY

I HATE to eat at a friend's abode—he makes me carry too big a load. He keeps close tab, and he has a fit, if I show a sign that I'd like to quit. “You do not eat as a host could wish—pray, try some more of the deviled fish. Do put some vinegar on your greens, and take some more of the boneless beans, and have a slice of the rich, red beet, and here's a chunk of the potted meat. We'll think our cooking has failed to please, if you don't eat more of the Lima peas, of the stringless squash and the graham rolls, and the doughnuts crisp, with their large round holes. You are no good with the forks and spoons—do try a dish of our home grown prunes!” I eat and eat, at my friend's behest, till the buttons fly from my creaking vest. I stagger home when the meal is o'er, and nightmares come when I sleep and snore; and long thereafter my stomach wails, as though I'd swallowed a keg of nails. Be wise, be kind to the cherished guest, and let him quit when he wants to rest! Don't make him eat through the bill of fare, when you see he's full of a dumb despair!

HON. CROESUS EXPLAINS

89

Oh, yes, I own a mill or two where little children toil; but why this foolish how-de-do, this uproar and turmoil? You say these children are but slaves, who, through the age-long day, must work in dark and noisome caves to earn a pauper's pay? You hold me up to public scorn as one who's steeped in sin; and yet I feel that I adorn the world I'm living in.

But yesterday I wrote two checks for twenty-seven plunks to build a Home for Human Wrecks and buy them horsehair trunks.

In building up monopolies I've crushed a thousand men? I'm tired of that old chestnut; please don't spring that gag again. I cannot answer for the fate of those by Trade unmade; for men who cannot hit the gait must drop from the parade. If scores of people got the worst of deals I had in line, if by the losers I am cursed, that is no fault of mine. And you, who come with platitude, are but an also ran; I use my money doing good, as much as any man.

I'm doing good while Virtue rants and of my conduct moans; for a Retreat for Maiden Aunts I just gave twenty bones.

I hold too cheap employees' lives, you cry in tones intense; I'm making widows of their wives, to keep down my expense. I will not buy a fire escape, or lifeguards now in style, and so the orphan's wearing crape upon his Sunday tile. I know just what my trade will stand before it bankrupt falls, and so I can't equip each hand with costly folderols. There is no sentiment in trade, let that be understood; but when my work aside is laid, my joy's in doing good.

90

Today I coughed up seven bucks to Ladies of the Grail, who wish to furnish roasted ducks to suffragists in jail.

You say I violate all laws and laugh the courts to scorn, and war on every worthy cause as soon as it is born? You can't admit my moral health—you wouldn't if you could; I spend my days in gaining wealth, my nights in doing good.

And while the hostile critic roars, I'm giving every day; I'm sending nice pink pinafores to heathen in Cathay.

MAÑANA

91

THE weeds in the garden are growing, while I'm sitting here in the shade; I know that I ought to be hoeing and doing some things with a spade. I know that I shouldn't be shirking in pleasant, arboreal nooks; I know that I ought to be working like good little boys in the books. They tell me that idling brings sorrow, and doubtless they tell me the truth; I'll tackle that garden tomorrow—today I've a yarn by Old Sleuth!

The fence, so my mother reminds me, needs fixing the worst kind of way! So it does; but, alas! how it grinds me to wrestle with fence boards today! I ought to do stunts with a hammer, and cut a wide swath with a saw, and raise an industrial clamor out there at the fence by the draw. The punishing fires of Gomorrah on idlers, ma says, will rain down; I'll fix up that blamed fence tomorrow—today there's a circus in town!

I ought to be whacking up kindling, says ma, as she fools with the churn; the pile in the woodshed is dwindling, and soon there'll be nothing to burn. There's Laura, my sister, as busy as any old bee that you know, while all my employments are dizzy, productive of nothing but woe. I'll show I'm as eager as Laura to make in the sunshine my hay! I'll split up some kindling tomorrow—I planned to go fishing today!

92

I've made up my mind to quit fooling and do all the chores round the shack. Just wait till you see me a-tooling the cow to the pasture and back! I'll show that I'm willing and able! I'll weed out the cucumber vines, I'll gather the eggs 'neath the stable, and curry the horse till he shines! A leaf from ma's book I shall borrow and labor away till I fall! I'll surely get busy tomorrow—today there's a game of baseball!

SHOVELING COAL

SHOVELING coal, shoveling coal, into the furnace's crater-like hole! Thus goes the coin we so wearily earn, into the furnace to sizzle and burn; thus it's converted to ashes and smoke, and we keep shoveling, weeping, and broke. Oh, it's a labor that tortures the soul, shoveling coal, shoveling coal! "The house," says the wife, "is as cold as a barn," so I must emigrate, muttering "darn," down to the furnace, the which I must feed; it is a glutton, a demon of greed! Into its cavern I throw a large load—there goes the money I got for an ode! There goes the check that I got for a pome, boosting the joys of an evening at home! There goes the price of full many a scroll, shoveling coal, shoveling coal! Things that I need I'm not able to buy, I have shut down on the cake and the pie; most of my jewels are lying in soak, gone is the money for ashes and smoke; all I can earn, all the long winter through, goes in the furnace and then up the flue. Still says the frau, "It's as cold as a floe, up in the Arctic where polar bears grow." So all my song is of sorrow and dole, shoveling coal, shoveling coal!

THE DIFFERENCE

94

WHEN I was as poor as Job, and monkeyed around the globe in indolent vagrant style, my life was a joyous thing, devoid of a smart or sting, and everything seemed to smile. I hadn't a bundle then; I herded with homeless men, and padded the highway dust; and care was a thing unknown, as scarce as the silver bone, in days of the wanderlust. But now I am settled down, a prop to this growing town, respectable till it hurts; and I have a bundle fat, and I have a stovepipe hat, and all kinds of scrambled shirts. I puff at a rich cigar, and ride in a motor car, and I have a spacious lawn; and diamonds upon me shine; my credit is simply fine, the newspapers call me Hon. But Worry is always near, a-whispering in my ear—I'm tired of her morbid talks: "Suppose that the bank should bust in which you have placed your dust, how then would you feel, Old Sox? Suppose that the cyclones swat the farms you have lately bought and blow them clear off the map? Suppose that your mills should fail, and you were locked up in jail, how then would you feel, old chap?" Dame Worry is always there; she's whitened my scanty hair, she's cankered my weary breast; she never goes far away; she tortures me all the day and ruins my nightly rest. And often at night I sigh for a couch 'neath the open sky and the long white road again; for the march through the sifting dust, and the lure of the wanderlust and the camp of the homeless men.

95

IMMORTAL SANTA

96

I MET a little maid who cried, as though her heart would break; I asked her why, and she replied, “Oh, Santa is a fake! My teacher says there never was a being by that name, and here I mourn for Santa Claus, and all the Christmas game.”

“Cheer up, my little girl,” I said, “for weeping is a crime; I’ll go and punch that teacher’s head as soon as I have time. Old Santa lives, the good old boy, his race is not yet run; and he will bring the children joy, as he has always done. The pedagogues have grown too smart, and must take in their sails, if they would break a maiden’s heart by telling phony tales.”

The young one, anxious to believe that Santa’s still on earth, looked up and smiled and ceased to grieve, and chortled in her mirth. I have no use for folks so wise that legend makes them sad, who say those stories are but lies which make the children glad. For Santa lives, and that’s the truth; and he will always live, while there is such a thing as Youth to bless the hands that give.

You may not hear his reindeer’s hoofs go tinkling o’er the snow; you may not see him climbing roofs to reach the socks below; and down the sooty chimney-hole you may not see him slide—for that would grieve the kindest soul, and scar the toughest hide—but still he goes his rounds and tries to make the children gay, and there is laughter in his eyes, on every Christmas Day.

97

You’re Santa Claus, and so am I, and so is every dad, who says at Christmas time, “I’ll try to make the young hearts glad!” All other men may lay them down and go to rest some day; the homes they builded, and their town may crumble in decay; and governments may rise and fall, and dynasties may lapse, and still, triumphant over all, that jolliest of chaps will journey through the snow and storm, beneath the midnight sky; while souls are true and hearts are warm, old Santa shall not die.

THE MEN BEHIND

98

THE firm of Jingleston & Jams, which manufactured wooden hams, has closed its doors, and in the mill, the wheels and shafting all stand still.

This mighty business was upbuilt by Humper, Hooperman & Hilt, who kept the factory on the go and made all kinds of fancy dough. Their products went to every mart, and cheered the retail merchant's heart, and made consumers warble psalms, and ask for more of those elm hams. These owners hired the ablest men that could be got for love or yen; throughout the mill fine workmen wrought; their every motion hit the spot; and expert foremen snooped around, and if some shabby work they found, the riot act they'd promptly speak, in Latin, Choctaw, Dutch and Greek.

The finest salesmen in the land were selling hams to beat the band. Old Humper said, “No ten-cent skate can earn enough to pay the freight; cheap men are evermore a frost—they're dear, no matter what they cost. We want the ablest men that grow—no other kind will have a show.” And so these owners gathered kale until the game seemed old and stale, then sold their mill and stock of hams to Messrs. Jingleston & Jams.

99

These were a pair of cautious gents, who had a reverence for cents. They looked around, with eager eyes, for chances to economize. They had the willies when they gazed upon the payroll—they were dazed! “Great whiskers!” Jingleston exclaimed, “this wilful waste makes me ashamed! This salesman, Jasper Jimpson Jones, draws, every month, two hundred bones! Why I can hire F. Flimson Flatt, who'll work I know, for half of that!”

“And by old Pharaoh's sacred rams,” remarked his partner, Peter Jams, “it's that way all along the list; old Humper must be crazed, I wist! We'll cut these salaries in two—that is the first thing we must do!”

And so the high-priced expert men were told to go, nor come again; and soon the shop began to fill with chaps who'd neither brains nor skill. The payroll slumped—which made Jams glad; but so did trade—which made him mad. The product lost its high renown, and merchants turned the salesmen down, and they sent frantic telegrams to weary Jingleston & Jams.

When things begin down hill to slide, they rush, and will not be denied, and so there came slump after slump until the business reached the dump, and poor old Jingleston & Jams are mournful as a pair of clams.

100

Economy's the one best bet—but some kinds cost like blitzen, yet!

THE BARD IN THE WOODS

101

A LONG the forest's virgin aisles I walk in rapture, miles on miles; at every turn delights unfold, and wondrous vistas I behold. What noble scenes on every hand! I feel my ardent soul expand; I turn my face toward the sky, and to the firmament I cry:

“The derved mosquitoes—how they bite! The woods would be a pure delight, would lure all men back to the soil, if these blamed brutes were boiled in oil! They come forth buzzing from their dens, and they're as big as Leghorn hens, and when they bite they raise a lump that makes the victim yell and jump.”

What wondrous voices have the trees when they are rocked by morning breeze! The voices of a thousand lyres, the music of a thousand choirs, the chorus of a thousand spheres are in the noble song one hears! The same sad music Adam heard when through the Eden groves he stirred; and ever since the primal birth, through all the ages of the earth, the trees have whispered, chanted, sung, in their soft, untranslated tongue. And, moved to tears, I cry aloud, far from the sordid madding crowd:

“Doggone these measly, red-backed ants! They will keep climbing up my pants! The woods will soon be shy of guests unless the ants and kindred pests abolished are by force of law; they've chewed me up till I am raw.”

102

Here in these sylvan solitudes, unfettered Nature sweetly broods; she'd clasp her offspring to her breast, and give her weary children rest, and say to them, “No longer weep, but on your mother's bosom sleep.” Here mighty thoughts disturb my brain—I try to set them down in vain; with noble songs my soul's afire—I cannot fit them to my lyre, Elysian views awhile I've seen—I cannot tell you what they mean; adown the forest aisles I stray, and face the glowing East, and say:

“It must have been a bee, by heck! that stung me that time on the neck! It's time I trotted back to town, and got those swellings doctored down! With bees and ants and wasps and snakes these bosky groves and tangled brakes are most too fierce for urban bard—I rather long for my back yard!”

VALUES

103

OLD Hiram Hucksmith makes and sells green wagons with red wheels; and merry as a string of bells in his old age he feels. For over all the countryside his wagons have their fame, and Hiram sees with wholesome pride, the prestige of his name.

He always tells his men: “By jings, my output must be good! Don’t ever use dishonest things—no wormy steel or wood; use nothing but the choicest oak, use silver mounted tacks, and every hub and every spoke must be as sound as wax. I want the men who buy my carts to advertise them well; I do not wish to break the hearts of folks to whom I sell.”

The farmers bought those wagons green, with wheels of sparkling red, and worked them up and down, I ween, and of them often said: “You cannot bust or wear them out, and if you’d break their holt, you’d have to have a waterspout or full-sized thunderbolt. The way they hang together’s strange, they ought to break but won’t, most earthly things decay or change, but these blamed wagons don’t.”

Old Hiram’s heart with rapture thrilled, to hear that sort of stuff; he worked and worked but couldn’t build his wagons fast enough. And now he lives on Easy Street, most honored of all men who toddle down our village street, and then back up again.

104

Old Jabez Jenkins long has made blue wagons with pink spokes, and once he had a goodly trade among the farmer folks. With pride his bosom did not swell, he knew not to aspire, to get up wagons that would sell—that was his one desire. And so he made his wheels of pine, where rosewood should have been, and counted on the painting fine, to hide the faults within.

And often when this sad old top was toiling in his shed, a customer would seek his shop and deftly punch his head. Wherever Jenkins’ wagons went, disaster with them flew; the tires came off, the axles bent, the kingbolts broke in two. You’d see the farmers standing guard above their ruined loads, and springing language by the yard that fairly scorched the roads.

This Jenkins now is old and worn, his business is decayed; and he can only sit and mourn o’er dizzy breaks he made. Old Hiram’s plan should suit all men who climb Trade’s rugged hill: Give value for the shining yen you put into your till.

STICKING TO IT

105

I USED to run a beeswax store at Punktown-in-the-Hole, and people asked me o'er and o'er, "Why don't you deal in coal? The beeswax trade will never pay—you know that it's a sell; if you take in ten bones a day, you think you're doing well."

Thus spake these thoughtful friends of mine; I heard their rigmarole, and straightway quit the beeswax line, and started selling coal. I built up quite a trade in slate, delivered by the pound, and just when I could pay the freight, my friends again came round. "Great Scott!" they cried, "you ought to quit this dark and dirty trade! To clean your face of grime and grit we'd need a hoe and spade! Quit dealing in such dusty wares, and make yourself look slick; lay in a stock of Belgian hares, and you'll make money quick."

I bought a thousand Belgian brutes, and watched them beige around, and said: "I'll fatten these galoots and sell them by the pound, and then I'll have all kinds of kale, to pleasure to devote; around this blamed old world I'll sail in my own motor boat." But when the hares were getting fat, my friends began to hiss: "Great Caesar! Would you look at that! What foolishness is this? Why wear out leg and back and arm pursuing idle fads? You ought to have a ginseng farm, and then you'd nail the scads."

106

The scheme to me seemed good and grand; I sold the Belgian brutes, and then I bought a strip of land and planted ginseng roots. I hoped to see them come up strong, and tilled them years and years, until the sheriff came along and took me by the ears. And as he pushed me off to jail, I passed that beeswax store; the owner, loaded down with kale, was standing in the door. "If you had stayed right here," he said, "you'd now be doing well; you would not by the ears be led toward a loathsome cell. But always to disaster wends the man who has no spine, who always listens to his friends, and thinks their counsel fine."

“THANKS”

107

THE lumber man wrapped up some planks, for which I paid a yen, and as I left he murmured, “Thanks! I hope you’ll call again!”

Such little courtesies as this make business worth the while; they fill a customer with bliss and give his mug a smile. Politeness never fails to win, and bring the trade your way; when I have cash I blow it in with dealers blithe and gay.

Of course, in every merchant’s joint, there are a thousand cares, which file his temper to a point, and give his brow gray hairs. And he should have a goat, no doubt, on which to vent his spite; a sawdust dummy, good and stout, should do for that all right. And then, when burdened with his woe, he might a while withdraw, and to the basement gaily go, and smash that dummy’s jaw. And when he’d sprained the dummy’s back, and spoiled its starboard glim, he to his duties would retrack, refreshed and full of vim.

Some outlet for his flowing bile—on this each man depends; but he should always have a smile and “Thank you” for his friends.

108

When I am needing further planks, to make a chicken pen, I’ll seek the merchant who said, “Thanks! I hope you’ll come again!” I feel that I am welcome there, in that man’s scantling store, and I can use the office chair or sleep upon the floor. His cordial treatment makes me pant to patronize such gents; and I shall wed his maiden aunt and borrow fifty cents.

I’d sing his praises day and night, if singing were allowed; the man consistently polite will always charm the crowd.

THE OLD ALBUM

109

I LIKE to take the album old, with covers made of plush and gold—or maybe it is brass—and see the pictures of the jays who long have gone their divers ways and come no more, alas!

This picture is of Uncle James, who quit these futile worldly games full twenty years ago; up yonder by the village church, where in his pew he used to perch, he now is lying low. Unheard by him the church bell chimes; the grass has grown a score of times above his sleeping form. For him there is no wage or price, with him the weather cuts no ice, the sunshine or the storm.

Yet here he sits as big as life, as dolled up by his loving wife, “to have his picture took.” Though dead to all the world of men, yea, doubly dead, and dead again, he lives in this old book. His long side whiskers, north and south, stand forth, like mudguards for his mouth, his treasure and his pride. With joy he saw those whiskers sprout, with glee he saw them broaden out his face, already wide. In those sweet days of Auld Lang Syne the men considered whiskers fine and raised them by the peck; a man grew whiskers every place that they would grow upon his face, and more upon his neck. He made his face a garden spot, and he was sad that he could not grow whiskers on his brow; he prized his whiskers more than mon and raised his spinach by the ton—where are those whiskers now?

110

Oh, ask the ghost of Uncle James, whose whiskers grew on latticed frames—at least, they look that way, as in this picture they appear, this photograph of yesteryear, so faded, dim and gray.

My Uncle James looks sad and worn; he wears a smile, but it’s forlorn, a grin that seems to freeze. And one can hear the artist say—that artist dead and gone his way—“Now, then, look pleasant, please!” My uncle’s eyes seem full of tears. What wonder when, beneath his ears, two prongs are pressing sore? They’re there to hold his head in place, while he presents a smiling face for half an hour or more. The minutes drag—if they’d but rush! The artist stands and whispers, “Hush! Don’t breathe or wink your eyes! Don’t let your smile evaporate, but keep it rigid, firm and straight—in it all virtue lies!”

111

It is a scene of long ago, when art was long and time was slow, brought back by this old book; there were no anesthetics then, and horror filled the souls of men who “had their pictures took.” Strange thoughts all soulful people hold, when poring o’er an album old, the book of vanished years. The dead ones seem to come again, the queer, old-fashioned dames and men, with prongs beneath their ears!

WAR AND PEACE

112

THE bugles sound, the prancing chargers neigh, and dauntless men have journeyed forth to slay. Mild farmer lads will wade around in gore and shoot up gents they never saw before. Pale dry goods clerks, amid war's wild alarms, pursue the foe and hew off legs and arms. The long-haired bards forget their metred sins and walk through carnage clear up to their chins.

“My country calls!” the loyal grocer cries, then stops a bullet with his form and dies. “’Tis glory beckons!” cry the ardent clerks; a bursting shell then hits them in the works. And dark-winged vultures float along the air, and dead are piled like cordwood everywhere. A regiment goes forth with banners gay; a mine explodes, and it is blown away. There is a shower of patriotic blood; some bones are swimming in the crimson mud. Strong, brave young men, who might be shucking corn, thus uselessly are mangled, rent and torn. They call it glory when a fellow falls, his midriff split by whizzing cannon balls; but there's more glory in a field of hay, where brave men work for fifteen bits a day.

113

The bugles blow, the soldiers ride away, to gather glory in the mighty fray; their heads thrown back, their martial shoulders squared—what sight with this can ever be compared? And they have dreams of honors to be won, of wreaths of laurel when the war is done. The women watch the soldiers ride away, and to their homes repair to weep and pray.

No bugles sound when back the soldiers come; there is no marching to the beat of drum. There are no chargers, speckled with their foam; but one by one the soldiers straggle home. With empty sleeves, with wooden legs they drill, along the highway, up the village hill. Their heads are gray, but not with weight of years, and all the sorrow of all worlds and spheres is in their eyes; for they have walked with Doom, have seen their country changed into a tomb. And one comes back where twenty went away, and nineteen widows kneel alone and pray.

They call it glory—oh, let glory cease, and give the world once more the boon of peace! I'd rather watch the farmer go afield than see the soldier buckle on his shield! I'd rather hear the reaper's raucous roar than hear a colonel clamoring for gore! I'd rather watch a hired man milk a cow, and hear him cussing when she kicks his brow, than see a major grind his snickersnee to split a skull and make his country free! I'd rather watch the grocer sell his cheese, his boneless prunes and early winter peas, and feed the people at a modest price, than see a captain whack an ample slice, with sword or claymore, from a warlike foe—for peace is weal, and war is merely woe.

114

THE CROOKS

115

THE people who beat you, hornswoggle and cheat you, don't profit for long from the kale; for folks who are tricky find Nemesis sticky—it never abandons their trail. I've often been cheated; the trick's been repeated so often I cannot keep tab; but ne'er has the duffer who thus made me suffer been much better off for his grab. It pays not to swindle; dishonest rolls dwindle like snow when exposed to the sun; like feathers in Tophet is burned up the profit of cheating, the crooked man's mon. The people who sting me unknowingly bring me philosophy fresh, by the crate; I don't get excited—my wrongs will be righted, by Nemesis, Fortune, or Fate. I know that the stingers—they think they are dingers, and gloat o'er the coin they don't earn—I know they'll be busted and sick and disgusted, while I still have rubles to burn. I'd rather be hollow with hunger than follow the course that the tricksters pursue; I'd rather be “easy” than do as the breezy and conscienceless gentlemen do. Far better the shilling you've earned by the tilling of soil that is harder than bricks, than any old dollar you manage to collar by crooked and devious tricks.

116



THE TRAMP

117

HIS hair is long, his breath is strong, his hat is old and battered, his knees are sprung, his nerves unstrung, his clothes are badly tattered, his shoes are worn, his hide's been torn by bow-wows fierce and snarling; and yet, by heck! this tough old wreck was once some daddy's darling!

He still must hit the ties and grit. A dismal fate is his'n; for if he stops, the village cops will slam him into prison. Some hayseed judge would make him trudge out where the rock pile's lying, to labor there, in his despair, till next year's snows are flying. The women shy when he goes by; with righteous wrath they con him. Men give him kicks and hand him bricks and train their shotguns on him. His legs are sprained, his fetlocks strained, from climbing highways hilly; it's hard to think this seedy gink was someone's little Willie!

And yet 'tis so. Once, long ago, some dad of him was bragging, and matrons mild surveyed the child and set their tongues a-wagging. “What lovely eyes!” one woman cries. “They look like strips of heaven!” “And note his hairs!” a dame declares. “I’ve counted six or seven!” “His temper’s sweet,” they all repeat; “he makes no fuss or bother. He has a smile that’s free from guile—he looks just like his father!” Thus women talked as he was rocked to slumber in his cradle; they filled with praise his infant days, poured taffy with a ladle.

118

And ma and dad, with bosoms glad, planned futures for the creature. “I’ll have my way,” the wife would say; “the child must be a preacher! His tastes are pure, of that I’m sure,” she says, with optimism; “for when he strays around and plays, he grabs the catechism!”

“Ah, well,” says dad, “the lovely lad will reach great heights—I know it. I have the dope that he’ll beat Pope or Byron as a poet.”

To give him toys and bring him joys, the savings bank was burgled; folks cried, “Gee whiz! How cute he is!” whenever baby gurgled.

His feet are bare, his matted hair could not be combed with harrows; his garb is weird, and in his beard are bobolinks and sparrows. You’d never think, to see the gink, that ever he had parents! Can it be so that long ago he was somebody’s Clarence?

THE DOLOROUS WAY

119

AS a mortal man grows older he has pains in hoof or shoulder, by a thousand aches and wrenches all his weary frame is torn; he has headache and hay fever till he is a stout believer in the theory of the poet that the race was made to mourn. He has gout or rheumatism and he's prone to pessimism, and he takes a thousand balsams, and the bottles strew the yard; he has grip and influenzy till his soul is in a frenzy, and he longs to end the journey, for this life is beastly hard. And his system's revolution is Dame Nature's retribution for the folly of his conduct in the days of long ago; in his anguish nearly fainting he is paying for the painting, for the wassail and the ruffling that his evenings used to know. We may dance and have our inning in our manhood's bright beginning, but we all must pay the fiddler, pay him soon or pay him late, and a million men are paying for the dancing and the playing, who are charging up their troubles to misfortune or to fate.

LOOKING FORWARD

120

I OFTEN wonder how this globe will struggle on when I cash in, when I put on my long white robe and sleep with cold but peaceful grin. I find it hard to realize that sun and moon and stars will shine, that clouds will drift along the skies, when everlasting sleep is mine. What is the use of keeping up the long procession of the spheres, when I'm beneath the butter-cup, with gumbo in my eyes and ears? What is the use of dusk or dawn, of starless dark or glaring light, when I from all these scenes am gone, down to a million years of night? Young men will vow the same sweet vows, and maids with beating hearts will hear, beneath the churchyard maple's boughs, and reckon not that I'm resting near. And to the altar, up the aisle, the blooming brides of June will go, and bells will ring and damsels smile, and I'll be too blamed dead to know. Ah, well, I've had my share of fun, I've lived and loved and shut the door; and when this little journey's done, I'll go to rest without a roar.

SEEING THE WORLD

121

HE jogged around from town to town, “to see the world,” was his excuse; he’d get a job and hold it down a little while, then turn it loose. “Oh, stay,” employers use to say; “your moving is a foolish trick; you’ll soon be earning bigger pay, for we’ll promote you pretty quick.” “This town is punk,” he would reply, “and every street is surnamed Queer; I’d see the world before I die—I do not wish to stagnate here.” Then he was young and quick and strong, and jobs were thick, as he jogged by, till people passed the word along that on him no one could rely. Then, when he landed in a town, and wished to earn a humble scad, the stern employers turned him down—“we want you not, your record’s bad.” He’s homeless in these wintry days, he has no bed, no place to sup; he “saw the world” in every phase; the world saw him—and passed him up. It’s good to “see the world,” no doubt, but one should make his bundle first, or age will find him down and out, panhandling for the wienerwurst.

THE POLITE MAN

WHEN Wigglewax is on the street, a charming smile adorns his face; to every dame he haps to meet, he bows with courtly, old world grace. His seat, when riding in a car, to any girl he'll sweetly yield; and women praise him near and far, and say he is a Chesterfield. Throughout the town, from west to east, the man for chivalry is famed. "The Bayards are not all deceased," the women say, when he is named. At home this Bayard isn't thus; his eye is fierce, his face is sour; he looks around for things to cuss, and jaws the women by the hour. His daughters tremble at his frown, and wonder why he's such a bear; his wife would like to jump the town, and hide herself most anywhere. But if a visitor drops in, his manner changes with a jerk, he wears his false and shallow grin, and bows like some jimtwisted Turk. Then for his daughters and his wife he wears his smile serene and fat, and callers say, "No sordid strife can enter such a home as that!" A million frauds like Wigglewax are smirking on the streets today, and when at eve they seek their shacks, they'll beef and grouch, the old stale way.

UNCONQUERED

123

LET tribulation's waters roll, and drench me as I don't deserve! I am the captain of my soul, I am the colonel of my nerve. Don't say my boasting's out of place, don't greet me with a jeer or scoff; I've met misfortune face to face, and pulled its blooming whiskers off. For I have sounded all the deeps of poverty and ill and woe, and that old smile I wear for keeps still pushed my features to and fro. Oh, I have walked the wintry streets all night because I had no bed; and I have hungered for the eats, and no one handed me the bread. And I have herded with the swine like that old prodigal of yore, and this elastic smile of mine upon my countenance I wore. For I believed and still believe that nothing ill is here to stay; the woozy woe, that makes us grieve, tomorrow will be blown away. My old-time griefs went up in smoke, and I remain a giggling bard; I look on trouble as a joke, and chortle when it hits me hard. It's all your attitude of mind that makes you gay or sad, my boy, that makes your work a beastly grind, or makes it seem a round of joy. The mind within me governs all, and brings me gladness or disgust; I am the captain of my gall, I am the major of my crust.

124



REGULAR HOURS

I HIT the hay at ten o'clock, and then I sleep around the block, till half past five; I hear the early robin's voice, and see the sunrise, and rejoice that I'm alive. From pain and katzenjammer free, my breakfast tastes as good to me as any meal; I throw in luscious buckwheat cakes, and scrambled eggs and sirloin steaks, and breaded veal. And as downtown I gaily wend, I often overtake a friend who's gone to waste; "I stayed up late last night," he sighs, "and now I have two bloodshot eyes, and dark brown taste; I'd give a picayune to die, for I'm so full of grief that I can hardly walk; I'll have to brace the drugstore clerks and throw some bromo to my works, or they will balk." But yesterday I saw a man to whom had been attached the can by angry boss, he wassailed all the night away, and then showed up for work by day a total loss. Don't turn the night time into day, or loaf along the Great White Way—that habit grows; if to the front you hope to keep, you must devote your nights to sleep—I tell you those.

PLANTING A TREE

TO be in line with worthy folk, you soon must plant an elm or oak, a beech or maple fair to see, a single or a double tree. When winter's storms no longer roll, go, get a spade and dig a hole, and bring a sapling from the woods, and show your neighbors you're the goods. What though with years you're bowed and bent, and feel your life is nearly spent? The tree you plant will rear its limbs, and there the birds will sing their hymns, and in its cool and grateful shade the girls will sip their lemonade; and lovers there on moonlight nights will get Dan Cupid dead to rights; and fervid oaths and tender vows will go a-zipping through its boughs. And folks will say, with gentle sigh, "Long years ago an ancient guy, whose whiskers brushed against his knee, inserted in the ground this tree. 'Twas but a little sapling then; and he, the kindest of old men, was well aware that he'd be dead, long ere its branches grew and spread, but still he stuck it in the mould, and never did his feet grow cold. Oh, he was wise and kind and brave—let's place a nosegay on his grave!"

DREAMERS AND WORKERS

THE dreamers sit and ponder on distant things and dim, across the skyline yonder, where unknown planets swim; they roam the starry reaches—at least, they think they do—with patches on their breeches and holes in either shoe. The workers still are steaming around at useful chores; they always save their dreaming for night, to mix with snores. They’re toiling on their places, they’re raising roastin’ ears, they are not keeping cases on far, uncharted spheres. They’re growing beans and carrots, and hay that can’t be beat, while dreamers in their garrets have not enough to eat. Oh, now and then a dreamer is most unduly smart, and shows he is a screamer in letters or in art; but where one is a winner, ten thousand dreamers weep because they lack a dinner, and have no place to sleep. There is a streak of yellow in dreamers, as a class; the worker is the fellow who makes things come to pass; he keeps the forges burning, the dinner pail he fills, he keeps the pulleys turning in forty thousand mills. The man with dreams a-plenty, who lives on musty prunes, beside him looks like twenty or eighteen picayunes.

SPRING SICKNESS

128

THIS is the season when the blood, according to the learned physician, is thick and flows as slow as mud, which puts a man in bad condition. Spring sickness is a fell disease, according to our time-worn notions, and, having it, the victim flees, to blow himself for dopes and potions. “I have to thin the sluggish stream,” he says, “which through my system passes; it’s thicker now than cheap ice cream, and flows like New Orleans molasses.” From all spring ills he’d have release, if he would tramp his potions under, and get a jar of Elbow Grease, the medicine that’s cheap as thunder. To get out doors where breezes blow, and tinker ’round to beat the dickens, would make a lot of ailments go, and thin the blood that winter thickens. Instead of taking pale pink pills which are designed for purple parties, go, plant the spuds in shallow hills, and you’ll be feeling fine, my hearties! We are too fond of taking dope, while in our easy chairs reclining, when we should shed our coats and slope out yonder where the sun is shining.

ON THE BRIDGE

129

I STOOD on the bridge at midnight, and looked at the sizzling town, where the pleasure seeking people were holding the sidewalks down. The moon rose over the city and shone on the dames and gents, but the glare of the lights electric made it look like twenty cents. The windows of homes were darkened, for no one was staying there; the children, as well, as grownups, were all in the Great White Glare. Deserted were all the firesides, abandoned the old-time game; alas, that the old home circle is naught but an empty name! The father is out chug-chugging, the mother is at her club, the kids see the moving pictures, and go to hotels for grub. How often, oh, how often, in the days that seemed good to me, have I looked at the children playing at home, where they ought to be! How often, oh, how often, in those days of the proper stamp, have I gazed on the parents reading, at home, by the evening lamp! But the world has gone to thunder, forgotten that elder day; and I took up the bridge and broke it, and threw all the chunks away.

MR. CHUCKLEHEAD

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HE shuts the windows, and shuts the doors, and then he lies in his bed and snores, and breathes old air that is stale and flat—the kind of air that would kill a cat. He says next day: “I am feeling tough; I’ll have to visit old Dr. Guff, and buy a pint of his pale pink pills, or I shall harbor some fatal ills.”

He fills his system with steaks and pies, and never indulges in exercise. He eats and drinks of the market’s best, until the buttons fly off his vest; he’s grown so mighty of breadth and girth that when he gambols he shakes the earth. “I’ll see Doc Faker,” he says; “that’s flat; I’ll get his dope for reducing fat. Doc Faker says he can make me gaunt, and let me eat all the stuff I want.”

He sits and mopes in his study chair, while others toil in the open air. He quaffs iced drinks through the sultry day, electric fans on his person play. “I feel despondent,” he murmurs low; “I lack the vim that I used to know; my liver’s loose and my kidneys balk, and my knee joints creak when I try to walk. I’ll call Doc Clinker and have him bring his Compound Juice of the Flowers of Spring.”

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His head is bald where the tresses grew in the long gone days when his scalp was new. He won’t believe that the hair won’t grow where it lost its grip in the long ago. He tries all manner of dope and drug; he buys Hair Balm by the gallon jug; he reads the papers and almanacs for news concerning the Mystic Wax which surely maketh the wool appear on heads gone bare in the yesteryear.

The more he uses of patent dopes, the more he worries, the more he mopes. And all he needs to be blithe and gay is just to throw his old jugs away, to do some work, as his fathers toiled, to let in air that has not been spoiled, to rest his stomach and work his thews, quit pressing coat tails and shake his shoes. If Chucklehead and his tribe did this, they’d soon find health, which is short for bliss; and old Doc Faker and all his gang would close their offices and go hang.

IN THE SPRING

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IN the spring the joyous husband hangs the carpet on the line, and assaults it with a horsewhip till its colors fairly shine; and the dust that rises from it fills the alley and the court, and he murmurs, 'twixt his sneezes: “This is surely splendid sport!”

In the spring the well-trained husband wrestles with the heating stove, while the flippant-minded neighbors go a-fishing in a drove. With the pipes and wire he tinkers, and his laughter fills the place, when the wholesome soot and ashes gather on his hands and face; and he says: “I’d like to labor at this task from sun to sun; this is what I call diversion—this is pure and perfect fun!”

In the spring the model husband carries furniture outdoors, and he gaily helps the women when they want to paint the floors; and he blithely eats his supper sitting on the cellar stairs, for he knows his wife has varnished all the tables and the chairs. Oh, he carries pails of water, and he carries beds and ticks, and he props up the veranda with a wagonload of bricks, and he deftly spades the garden, and he paints the barn and fence, and he rakes and burns the rubbish with an energy intense, saying ever as he labors, in the house or out of doors: “How I wish my wife and daughters could suggest some other chores!”

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In the spring this sort of husband may be found—there’s one in Spain, there is one in South Dakota and another one in Maine.

BE JOYFUL

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YOU'D better be joking than kicking or croaking, you'd better be saying that life is a joy, then folks will caress you and praise you and bless you, and say you're a peach and a broth of a boy. You'd better be cheery, not drooling and dreary, from the time you get up till you go to your couch; or people will hate you and roast and berate you—they don't like the man with a hangover grouch. You'd better be leaving the groaning and grieving to men who have woes of the genuine kind; you know that your troubles are fragile as bubbles, they are but the growth of a colicky mind. You'd better be grinning while you have your inning, or when a real trouble is racking your soul, your friends will be growling, "He always is howling—he wouldn't touch joy with a twenty-foot pole." You'd better be pleasant; if sorrow is present, there's no use in chaining it fast to your door; far better to shoo it, and hoot and pursue it, and then it may go and come back never more.

GOOD AND EVIL

135

THE poet got his facts awry, concerning what lives after death; the good men do lives on for aye, the evil passes like a breath. A noble thought, by thinker thunk, will live and flourish through the years; a thought ignoble goes kerplunk, to perish in a pool of tears. Man dies, and folks around his bed behold his tranquil, outworn clay; “We’ll speak no evil of the dead, but recollect the good,” they say. Then one recalls some noble trait which figured in the ice-cold gent. “He fixed the Widow Johnsing’s gate, and wouldn’t charge a doggone cent.” “Oh, he was grand when folks were ill; he’d stay and nurse them night and day, hand them the bolus and the pill, and never hint around for pay.” “He ran three blocks to catch my wig when April weather was at large.” “He butchered Mrs. Jagway’s pig, and smoked the hams, and didn’t charge.” Thus men conspire, to place on file and make a record of the good, and they’d forget the mean or vile for which, perhaps, in life you stood. The shining heroes we admire had faults and vices just like you; when they concluded to expire, their failings kicked the bucket, too.

BROWN OCTOBER ALE

136

HOW many ringing songs there are that celebrate the wine, and other goods behind the bar, as being wondrous fine! How many choruses exalt the brown October ale, which puts a fellow's wits at fault, and lands him in the jail! A hundred poets wasted ink, and ruined good quill pens, describing all the joys of drink in gilded boozing kens. But all those joys are hollow fakes which wisdom can't indorse; they're soon converted into aches and sorrow and remorse. The man who drains the brimming glass in haunts of light and song, next morning knows that he's an ass, with ears twelve inches long. An aching head, a pile of debts, a taste that's green and stale, that's what the merry fellow gets from brown October ale. Untimely graves and weeping wives and orphans shedding brine; this sort of thing the world derives from bright and sparkling wine. The prison cell, the scaffold near; such features may be blamed on wholesome keg and bottled beer, which made one city famed. Oh, sing of mud or axle grease, but chant no fairy tale, of that disturber of the peace, the brown October ale!

DELIVER US

137

FROM all the woe and sorrow that bloody warfare brings, when monarchs start to borrow some grief from other kings, from dreadful scenes of slaughter, and dead men by the cord, from blood that flows like water, deliver us, O Lord! From fear and melancholy that every death list gives, from all the pompous folly in which an army lives, from all the strife stupendous, that brings no sane reward, but only loss tremendous, deliver us, O Lord! From seeing friend and neighbor in tools of death arrayed, deserting useful labor to wield the thirsty blade; from seeing plowshares lying all rusty on the sward, where men and boys are dying, deliver us, O Lord! From seeing foreign legions invade our peaceful shore, and turn these smiling regions to scenes of death and gore, from all the desolation the gods of war accord to every fighting nation, deliver us, O Lord!

DOING ONE’S BEST

ONE sweetly solemn thought comes to me every night; I at my task have wrought, and tried to do it right. No doubt my work is punk, my efforts are a jest; however poor my junk, it represents my best. If you, at close of day, when sounds the quitting bell, that truthfully can say, you’re doing pretty well. Some beat you galley west, and bear away the prize, but you have done your best—in that the honor lies. And, having done your best, your conscience doesn’t hurt; serene you go to rest, in your long muslin shirt. And at the close of life, when you have said good-bye to cousin, aunt and wife, and all the children nigh, you’ll face the river cold that flows to islands blest, with courage high and bold, if you have done your best. No craven fears you’ll know, no terrors fierce and sharp, but like a prince you’ll go, to draw your crown and harp. So, then, whate’er the field in which you do your stunt, whatever tool you wield to earn your share of blunt, toil on with eager zest, nor falter in that plan; the one who does his best is God’s blue-ribbon man.

A LITTLE WHILE

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A FEW more years, or a few more days, and we'll all be gone from the rugged ways wherein we are jogging now; a few more seasons of stress and toil, then we'll all turn in to enrich the soil, for some future farmer's plow. A few more years and the grass will grow where you and the push are lying low, your arduous labors o'er; and those surviving will toil and strain, their bosoms full of the same old pain you knew in the days of yore. Oh, what's the use of the carking care, or the load of grief that we always bear, in such a brief life as this? A few more years and we will not know a side of beef from a woozy woe, an ache from a bridal kiss. "I fear the future," you trembling say, and nurse your fear in a dotard way, and moisten it with a tear; the future day is a day unborn, and you'll be dead on its natal morn, so live while the present's here. A few more years and you cannot tell a quart of tears from a wedding bell, a wreath from a beggar's rags; you'll take a ride to the place of tombs in a jaunty hearse with its nodding plumes, and a pair of milk-black nags. So while you stay on the old gray earth, cut up and dance with exceeding mirth, have nothing to do with woe; a few more years and you cannot weep, you'll be so quiet and sound asleep, where the johnnie-jumpups grow.

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THE IDLERS

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MEN labor against the hames, and sweat till they're old and gray, supporting the stall-fed dames who idle their years away. We've bred up a futile race of women who have no care, except for enameled face, or a sea-green shade of hair, who always are richly gowned and wearing imported lids, who carry their poodles 'round, preferring the pups to kids. And husbands exhaust their frames, and strain till their journey's done, supporting the stall-fed dames, who never have toiled or spun. We're placed in this world to work, to harvest our crop of prunes; Jehovah abhors the shirk, in gown or in trouserloons. The loafers in gems and silk are bad as the fragrant vags, who pilfer and beg and bilk, and die in their rancid rags. The loafers at bridge-whist games, the loafers at purple teas, the hand-painted stall-fed dames, are chains on the workers' knees. The women who cook and sew, the women who manage homes, who have no desire to grow green hair on enameled domes, how noble and good they seem, how wholesome and sane their aim, compared with that human scream, the brass-mounted, stall-fed dame!

LITERATURE

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I LIKE a rattling story of whiskered buccaneers, whose ships are black and gory, who cut off people's ears. A yarn of Henry Morgan warms up my jaded heart, and makes that ancient organ feel young and brave and smart. I like detective fiction, it always hits the spot, however poor in diction, however punk in plot; I like the sleuth who follows a clue o'er hill and vale, until the victim swallows his medicine in jail. I like all stories ripping, in which some folks are killed, in which the guns go zipping, and everyone is thrilled. But when I have some callers, I hide those books away, those good old soul enthrallers which make my evenings gay. I blush for them, by jingo, and all their harmless games; I talk the highbrow lingo, and swear by Henry James. When sitting in my shanty, to “have my picture took,” I hold a work by Dante, or other heavy book. But when the artist's vanished, I drop those dippy pomes, old Dante's stuff is banished—I reach for Sherlock Holmes.

NURSING GRIEF

I KNOW not what may be your woe, how deep the grief you nurse, but if you bid the blamed thing go, it's likely to disperse. If you would say, "Cheap grief, depart!" you soon might dance and sing; instead, you fold it to your heart, or lead it with a string. Oh, every time I go outdoors, I meet some mournful men, who talk about their boils or sores, of felon or of wen. Why put your misery in words, and thus your woe prolong? 'Twere best to talk about the birds, which sing their ragtime song; or of the cheerful clucking hens, which guard their nests of eggs; that beats a tale of corns or wens, of mumps or spavined legs. We go a-groaning of our aches, of damaged feet or backs, and nearly all our pains are fakes, when we come down to tacks. We talk about financial ills when we have coin to burn—and if we wish for dollar bills, there's lots of them to earn. We cherish every little grief, when we should blithely smile; and if a woe's by nature brief, we string it out a mile. Oh, let us cease to magnify each trifling ill and pain, and wear a sunbeam in each eye, and show we're safe and sane.

THE IDLE RICH

I'M fond of coin, but I don't itch to be among the idle rich, who have long green to burn; their wealth I could not well employ, for I could never much enjoy the bone I did not earn. Oh, every coin of mine is wet with honest, rich, transparent sweat, until it has been dried; it represents no sire's bequest, no buried miser's treasure chest, no "multi's" pomp and pride. I grind my anthem mill at home, and every time I make a pome, I take in fifty cents; I get more pleasure blowing in this hard-earned, sweat-stained slice of tin, than do the wealthy gents. Their coin comes easy as the rain, it represents no stress or strain, no toil in shop or den; they use their wealth to buy and sell, like taking water from a well; the hole fills up again. We do not value much the thing, which, like an everlasting spring, wells up, year after year; if you'd appreciate a bone, you have to earn it with a groan, and soak it with a tear. I'd rather have the rusty dime for which I labored overtime, and sprained a wing or slat, than have the large and shining buck that Fortune handed me, or Luck; get wise, rich lad, to that.

PASSING THE HAT

PASSING the hat, passing the hat! Some one forever gets busy at that! Oh, it seems useless to struggle and strain, all our endeavor is hopeless and vain; when we have gathered a small, slender roll, hoping to lay in some cordwood or coal, hoping to purchase some flour and some spuds, hoping to pay for the ready made duds, hoping to purchase a bone for the cat, some one comes cheerfully passing the hat! Passing the hat that the bums may be warm, passing the hat for some noble reform, passing the hat for the fellows who fail, passing the hat to remodel the jail, passing the bonnet for this or for that, some one forever is passing the hat! Dig up your bundle and hand out your roll, if you don't do it you're lacking a soul! What if the feet of your children are bare? What if your wife has no corset to wear? What if your granny is weeping for shoes? What if the grocer's demanding his dues? Some one will laugh at such logic as that, some one who's merrily passing the hat! Passing the hat for the pink lemonade, passing the hat for a moral crusade, passing the hat to extinguish the rat—some one forever is passing the hat!

GOING TO SCHOOL

“I HATE to tool my feet to school,” we hear the boy confessin’; “I’d like to play the livelong day, and dodge the useful lesson. The rule of three gives pain to me, old Euclid makes me weary, the verbs of Greece disturb my peace, geography is dreary. I’ll go and fish; I do not wish to spend my lifetime schooling; I do not care to languish there, and hear the teacher drooling.” His books he hates, his maps and slates, and all the schoolhouse litter; he feels oppressed and longs for rest, his sorrows make him bitter. The years scoot on and soon are gone, for years are restless friskers; the schoolboy small is now grown tall, and has twelve kinds of whiskers. “Alas,” he sighs, “had I been wise, when I was young and sassy, I well might hold, now that I’m old, a situation classy. But all the day I thought of play, and fooled away my chances, and here I strain, with grief and pain, in rotten circumstances. I’m always strapped; I’m handicapped by lack of useful knowledge; through briny tears I view the years I loafed in school and college!”

NOT WORTH WHILE

THE night of death will soon descend; a few short years and then the end, and perfect rest is ours; forgotten by the busy throng, we'll sleep, while seasons roll along, beneath the grass and flowers. Our sojourn in this world is brief, so why go hunting care and grief, why have a troubled mind? And what's the use of getting mad, and making folks around us sad, by saying words unkind? Why not abjure the base and mean, why not be sunny and serene, from spite and envy free? Why not be happy while we may, and make our little earthly stay a joyous jamboree? We're here for such a little while! And then we go and leave the pile for which we strive and strain; worn out and broken by the grind, we go, and leave our wads behind—such effort's all in vain. We break our hearts and twist our souls acquiring large and useless rolls of coins and kindred things, and when we reach St. Peter's Town, they will not buy a sheet-iron crown, or cast-off pair of wings.

MISREPRESENTATION

I BOUGHT a pound of yellow cheese, the other day, from Grocer Wheeze. And as he wrapped it up he cried, “In this fine cheese I take much pride. It’s made from Jersey cream and milk, and you will find it fine as silk; it’s absolutely pure and clean, contains no dyes or gasoline, it’s rich and sweet, without a taint, doggone my buttons if it ain’t. Oh, it will chase away your woe, and make your hair and whiskers grow.” I took it home with eager feet, impatient to sit down and eat, for I am fond of high-class cheese, which with my inner works agrees. But that blamed stuff was rank and strong, for it had been on earth too long. My wife, a good and patient soul, remarked, “Bring me a ten-foot pole, before you do your other chores, and I will take that cheese out doors. Before it’s fit for human grub we’ll have to stun it with a club.” What does a sawed-off grocer gain by such a trick, unsafe, insane? And what does any merchant make by boosting some atrocious fake? Yet every day we’re buying junk which proves inferior and punk, although it’s praised to beat the band; such things are hard to understand.

MAN OF GRIEF

I NOW am bent and old and gray, and I have come a doleful way. A son of sorrow I have been, since first I reached this world of sin. Year after year, and then repeat, all kinds of troubles dogged my feet; they nagged me when I wished to sleep and made me walk the floor and weep. I had all troubles man can find—and most of them were in my mind. When I would number all the cares which gave me worry and gray hairs, I can't remember one so bad that it should bother any lad. And often, looking back, I say, "I wonder why I wasn't gay, when I had youth and strength and health, and all I lacked on earth was wealth? I wonder why I didn't yip with gladness ere I lost my grip? My whole life long I've wailed and whined of cares which lived but in my mind. The griefs that kept me going wrong were things that never came along. The cares that furrowed cheek and brow look much like hop-joint phantoms now. And now that it's too late, almost, I see that trouble is a ghost, a scarecrow on a crooked stick, to scare the gents whose hearts are sick."

MELANCHOLY DAYS

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THE melancholy days have come, the saddest of the year, when you, determined to be glum, produce the flowing tear, when you refuse to see the joys surrounding every gent, and thus discourage other boys, and stir up discontent. A grouch will travel far and long before its work is done; and it will queer the hopeful song, and spoil all kinds of fun. Men start downtown with buoyant tread, and things seem on the boom; then you come forth with blistered head, and fill them up with gloom. There'd be no melancholy days, our lives would all be fair, if it were not for sorehead jays who always preach despair. We'd shake off every kind of grief if Jonah didn't come, the pessimist who holds a brief for all things on the bum. So, if you really cannot rise above the sob and wail, and see the azure in the skies, and hear the nightingale, let some dark cave be your abode, where men can't hear your howl, and let your comrades be the toad, the raven, and the owl.

MIGHT BE WORSE

THE window sash came hurtling down on Kickshaw's shapely head and neck; it nearly spoiled his toilworn crown, and made his ears a hopeless wreck. Then Kickshaw sat and nursed his head, a man reduced to grievous pass; yet, with a cheerful smile, he said, "I'm glad it didn't break the glass." He might have ripped around and swore, till people heard him round a block, or kicked a panel from the door, or thrown the tomcat through the clock; he might have dealt in language weird, and made the housewife's blood run cold, he might have raved and torn his beard, and wept as Rachel wept of old. But Kickshaw's made of better stuff, no tears he sheds, no teeth he grinds; when dire misfortune makes a bluff, he looks for comfort, which he finds. And so he bears his throbbing ache, and puts a poultice on his brain, and says, "I'm glad it didn't break that rich, imported window pane." It never helps a man to beef, when trouble comes and knocks him lame; there's solace back of every grief, if he will recognize the same.

MODERATELY GOOD

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A LOAD of virtue will never hurt you, if modestly it's borne; the saintly relic who's too angelic for week days, makes us mourn. The gloomy mortal who by a chortle or joke is deeply vexed, the turgid person who's still disbursin' the precept and the text, is dull and dreary, he makes us weary, we hate to see him come; oh, gent so pious, please don't come nigh us—your creed is too blamed glum! The saint who mumbles, when some one stumbles, “That man's forever lost,” is but a fellow with streak of yellow, his words are all a frost. Not what we're saying, as we go straying adown this tinhorn globe, not words or phrases, though loud as blazes, will gain us harp and robe. It's what we're doing while we're pursuing our course with other skates, that will be counted when we have mounted the ladder to the Gates. A drink of water to tramps who totter with weakness in the sun will help us better than text and letter of sermons by the ton. So let each action give satisfaction, let words be few and wise, and, after dying, we'll all go flying and whooping through the skies.

THE GIRL GRADUATE

IN school, academy and college stands forth the modern cultured girl, her lovely head so stuffed with knowledge it fairly makes her tresses curl. We all lean back in admiration when she stands up to make her speech, the finest product of the nation, the one serene, unblemished peach. Behold her in her snowy garments, the pride, the honor of her class! A malediction on the varmints who say her learning cuts no grass! “She hasn’t learned to fry the mutton, she’s not equipped to be a wife; she couldn’t fasten on a button, to save her sweet angelic life! With all her mighty fund of learning, she’s ignorant of useful chores; she cannot keep an oil stove burning so it won’t smoke us out of doors. The man she weds will know disaster, his dreams of home and love will spoil; she cannot make a mustard plaster, or put a poultice on a boil.” Avaunt, ye croakers, skip and caper, or we’ll upset your apple-carts! The damsel rises with her paper on “Old Greek Gods and Modern Arts.” So pledge her in a grapejuice flagon! Who cares if she can sew or bake? She’s pretty as a new red wagon, and sweeter than an old plum cake.

THE BYSTANDER

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I STAND by my window alone, and look at the people go by, pursuing the shimmering bone, which is so elusive and shy. Pursuing the beckoning plunk, and no one can make them believe that rubles and kopecks are junk, vain baubles got up to deceive. Their faces are haggard and sad, from weariness often they reel, pursuing the succulent scad, pursuing the wandering wheel. And many are there in the throng who have all the money they need, and still they go racking along, inspired by the demon of greed. “To put some more bucks in the chest,” they sigh, as they toil, “would be grand;” the beauty and blessing of rest is something they don’t understand. We struggle and strain all our years, and wear out our bodies and brains, and when we are stretched on our biers, what profit we then by our pains? The lawyers come down with a whoop, and rake in our bundle of scrip, and plaster a lien on the coop before our poor orphans can yip. I stand at my window again, and see the poor folks as they trail, pursuing the yammering yen, pursuing the conquering kale; and sorrow is filling my breast, regret that the people won’t know the infinite blessing of rest, that solace for heartache and woe.

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MEDICINE HAT

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THE tempests that rattle and kill off the cattle and freeze up the combs of the roosters and hens, that worry the granger, whose stock is in danger—the mules in their stables, the pigs in their pens—the loud winds that frolic like sprites with the colic and carry despair to the workingman’s flat, the wild raging blizzard that chills a man’s gizzard, they all come a-whooping from Medicine Hat. When men get together and note that the weather is fixing for ructions, preparing a storm, they cry: “Julius Caesar! The square-headed geezer who’s running the climate should try to reform! The winter’s extensive and coal’s so expensive that none can keep warm but the blamed plutocrat! It’s time that the public should some weather dub lick! It’s time for a lynching at Medicine Hat!” And when the sun’s shining we still are repining. “This weather,” we murmur, “is too good to last; just when we’re haw-hawing because we are thawing there’ll come from the Arctic a stemwinding blast; just when we are dancing and singing and prancing, there’ll come down a wind that would freeze a stone cat; just when we are hoping that winter’s eloping, they’ll send us a package from Medicine Hat!”

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FLETCHERISM

I READ a screed by Brother Fletcher, on how we ought to chew our grub; I said, “It’s sensible, you betcher! I’ll emulate that thoughtful dub. No more like some old anaconda, I’ll swallow all my victuals whole; I’ll eat the sort of things I’m fond o’, but chew them up with heart and soul.” And now I’m always at the table, I have no time to do my chores; the horse is starving in the stable, the weeds are growing out o’ doors. My wife says, “Say, you should be doing some work around this slipshod place.” I answer her, “I’m busy chewing—canst see the motions of my face?” I have no time to hoe the taters, I have no time to mow the lawn; though chewing like ten alligators, I’m still behind, so help me, John! I chew the water I am drinking, I chew the biscuit and the bun; I’ll have to hire a boy, I’m thinking, to help me get my chewing done. Some day they’ll bear me on a stretcher out to the boneyard, where they plant, and send my teeth to Brother Fletcher, to make a necklace for his aunt.

FATHER TIME

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TIME drills along, and, never stopping, winds up our spool of thread; the time to do our early shopping is looming just ahead. It simply beats old James H. Thunder how time goes scooting on; and now and then we pause and wonder where all the days have gone. When we are old a month seems shorter than did a week in youth; the years are smaller by a quarter, and still they shrink, forsooth. This busy world we throw our fits in will soon be ours no more; time hurries us, and that like blitzen, toward another shore. So do not make me lose a minute, as it goes speeding by; I want to catch each hour and skin it and hang it up to dry. A thousand tasks are set before me, important, every one, and if you stand around and bore me, I'll die before they're done. Oh, you may go and herd together, and waste the transient day, and talk about the crops and weather until the roosters lay, but I have work that long has beckoned, and any Jim or Joe who causes me to lose a second, I look on as a foe.

FIELD PERILS

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THE farmer plants his field of corn—the kind that doesn’t pop—and hopes that on some autumn morn he’ll start to shuck his crop. And shuck his crop he often does, which is exceeding queer, for blights and perils fairly buzz around it through the year. I think it strange that farmers raise the goodly crops they do, for they are scrapping all their days against a deadly crew. To plant and till will not suffice; the men must strain their frames, to kill the bugs and worms and mice, and pests with Latin names. The cut worms cut, the chinchbugs chinch, the weevil weaves its ill, and other pests come up and pinch the corn and eat their fill. And then the rainworks go on strike, and gloom the world enshrouds, and up and down the burning pike the dust is blown in clouds. And if our prayers are of avail, and rain comes in the night, it often brings a grist of hail that riddles all in sight. And still the farmers raise their crops, and nail the shining plunk; none but the kicker stands and yawps, and what he says is bunk. If all men brooded o’er their woes, and looked ahead for grief, that gent would starve who gaily goes to thresh the golden sheaf.

JOY COMETH

I SAT and sighed, with downcast head, my heart consumed with sorrow, and then my Aunt Jemima said: “I’m going home tomorrow!” I’d feared that she would never leave, her stay would be eternal, and that’s what made me pine and grieve, and say, “The luck’s infernal!” I thought my dark and gloomy skies no sunshine e’er would borrow, then Aunt Jemima ups and cries, “I’m going home tomorrow!” Thus oft the kindly gods confound the kickist and the carkist, and joy comes cantering around just when things seem the darkest. We all have aunts who come and stay until their welcome’s shabby, who eat our vittles day by day, until the purse is flabby; and when we think they’ll never go, or let us know what peace is, they up and dissipate our woe by packing their valises. The darkest hour’s before the dawn, and when your grief’s intensest, it is a sign ’twill soon be gone, not only hence, but hencest.

LIVING TOO LONG

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I WOULD not care to live, my dears, much more than seven hundred years, if I should last that long; for I would tire of things in time, and life at last would seem a crime, and I a public wrong. Old Gaffer Goodworth, whom you know, was born a hundred years ago, and states the fact with mirth; he's rather proud that he has hung around so long while old and young were falling off the earth. But when his boastful fit is gone, a sadness comes his face upon, that speaks of utter woe; he sits and broods and dreams again of vanished days, of long dead men, his friends of long ago. There is no loneliness so dread as that of one who mourns his dead in white and wintry age, who, when the lights extinguished are, the other players scattered far, still lingers on the stage. There is no solitude so deep as that of him whose friends, asleep, shall visit him no more; shall never ask, "How do you stack," or slap him gaily on the back, as in the days of yore. I do not wish to draw my breath until the papers say that Death has passed me up for keeps; when I am tired I want to die and in my cosy casket lie as one who calmly sleeps. When I am tired of dross and gold, when I am tired of heat and cold, and happiness has waned, I want to show the neighbor folk how gracefully a man can croak when he's correctly trained.

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FRIEND BULLSNAKE

THESE sunny days bring forth the snakes from holes in quarries, cliffs and brakes. The gentle bullsnake, mild and meek, sets forth his proper prey to seek; of all good snakes he is the best, with high ambitions in his breast; he is the farmer's truest friend, because he daily puts an end to mice and other beasts which prey upon that farmer's crops and hay. He is most happy when he feasts on gophers and such measly beasts; and, being six or eight feet high, when stood on end, you can't deny that forty bullsnakes on a farm are bound to do the vermin harm. The bullsnake never hurts a thing; he doesn't bite, he doesn't sting, or wrap you in his slimy folds, and squeeze you till he busts all holds. As harmless as a bale of hay, he does his useful work all day, and when at night he goes to rest, he's killed off many a wretched pest. And yet the farmers always take a chance to kill this grand old snake. They'll chase three miles or more to end the labors of their truest friend. They'll hobble forth from beds of pain to hack a bullsnake's form in twain, and leave him mangled, torn and raw—which shows there ought to be a law.

DOUGHNUTS

I SEEK the high-class eating joint, when my old stomach gives a wrench, and there the waiters proudly point to bills of fare got up in French. I order this, and order that, in eagerness my face to feed, and oftentimes I break a slat pronouncing words I cannot read. And as I eat the costly greens, prepared by an imported cook, to other times and other scenes with reminiscent eyes I look. My mother never was in France, no foreign jargon did she speak, but how I used to sing and dance when she made doughnuts once a week! Oh, they were crisp and brown and sweet, and they were luscious and sublime, and I could stand around and eat a half a bushel at a time. The doughnuts that our mothers made! They were the goods, they were the stuff; we used to eat them with a spade and simply couldn't get enough. And when I face imported grub, all loaded down with Choctaw names, I sigh and wish I had a tub of doughnuts, made by old-time dames. I do not care for fancy frills, but when the doughnut dish appears, I kick my hind feet o'er the thills, and whoop for joy, and wag my ears.

THE ILL WIND

THE cold wet rain kept sloshing down, and flooded yard and street. My uncle cried: “Don’t sigh and frown! It’s splendid for the wheat!” I slipped and fell upon the ice, and made my forehead bleed. “Gee whiz!” cried uncle, “this is nice! Just what the icemen need!” A windstorm blew my whiskers off while I was writing odes. My uncle said: “Don’t scowl and scoff—’twill dry the muddy roads!” If fire my dwelling should destroy, or waters wash it hence, my uncle would exclaim, with joy: “You still have got your fence!” When I was lying, sick to death, expecting every day that I must draw my final breath, I heard my uncle say, “Our undertaker is a jo, and if away you fade, it ought to cheer you up to know that you will help his trade.” And if we study uncle’s graft, we find it good and fair; how often, when we might have laughed, we wept and tore our hair! Such logic from this blooming land should drive away all woe; the thing that’s hard for you to stand, is good for Richard Roe.

APPROACH OF SPRING

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THE spring will soon be here; the snow will disappear; the hens will cluck, the colts will buck, as will the joyous steer. How sweet an April morn! The whole world seems reborn; and ancient men waltz round again and laugh their years to scorn. And grave and sober dames forsake their quilting frames, and cut up rough, play blind man's buff, and kindred cheerful games. The pastors hate to preach; the teachers hate to teach; they'd like to play baseball all day, or on the bleachers bleach. The lawyer tires of law; the windsmith rests his jaw; they'd fain forget the toil and sweat, and play among the straw. The spring's the time for play; let's put our work away, with joyous spiels kick up our heels, e'en though we're old and gray. You see old Dobbin trot around the barnyard lot, with flashing eye and tail on high, his burdens all forgot. You see the muley cow that's old and feeble now, turn somersaults and prance and waltz, and stand upon her brow. The rooster, old is he, and crippled as can be, yet on his toes he stands and crows "My Country, 'Tis of Thee." Shall we inspired galoots have less style than the brutes? Oh, let us rise and fill the skies with echoing toot-toots.

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STUDYING BOOKS

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WITH deep and ancient tomes to toil, and burn the midnight Standard oil may seem a job forbidding; but it's the proper thing to do, whene'er you have the time, if you would have a mind non-skidding. If one in social spheres would shine, he ought to cut out pool and wine, and give some time to study; load up with wisdom to the guards and read the message of the bards from Homer down to Ruddy. How often conversation flags, how oft the weary evening drags, when people get together, when they have sprung their ancient yawps about the outlook of the crops, the groundhog and the weather. How blest the gent who entertains, who's loaded up his active brains with lore that's worth repeating, the man of knowledge, who can talk of other things than wheat and stock and politics and eating! Our lives are lustreless and gray because we sweat around all day and think of naught but lucre; and when we're at our inglenooks we never open helpful books, but fool with bridge or euchre. Exhausted by the beastly grind we do not try to store the mind with matters worth the knowing; our lives are spent in hunting cash, and when we die we make no splash, and none regrets our going.

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STRANGER THAN FICTION

IT'S strange that people live so long, remaining healthy, sound and strong, when all around us, everywhere, the germs and microbes fill the air. The more we read about the germs, in technical or easy terms, the stranger does it seem that we have so far dodged eternity. No wonder a poor mortal squirms; all things are full of deadly germs. The milk we drink, the pies we eat, the shoes we wear upon our feet, are haunts of vicious things which strive to make us cease to be alive. And yet we live on just the same, ignore the germs, and play our game. Well, that's just it; we do not stew or fret o'er things we cannot view. If germs were big as hens or hawks, and flew around our heads in flocks, we'd just throw up our hands and cry: "It is no use—it's time to die!" The evils that we cannot see don't cut much ice with you and me. A bulldog by the garden hedge, with seven kinds of teeth on edge, will hand to me a bigger scare than all the microbes in the air. So let us live and have our fun, and woo and wed and blow our mon, and not acknowledge coward fright of anything that's out of sight.

THE GOOD DIE YOUNG

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BESIDE the road that leads to town the thistle thrives apace, and if you cut the blamed thing down, two more will take its place. The sunflowers flourish in the heat that kills the growing oats; the weeds keep living when the wheat and corn have lost their goats. The roses wither in the glare that keeps the prune alive, the orchards fail of peach and pear while cheap persimmons thrive. The good and useful men depart too soon on death's dark trip; they just have fairly made a start when they must up and skip. A little cold, a little heat will quickly kill them off; a little wetting of their feet, a little hacking cough; they're tender as the blushing rose of evanescent bloom; too quickly they turn up their toes and slumber in the tomb. And yet the world is full of scrubs who don't know how to die, a lot of picayunish dubs, who couldn't, if they'd try. Year after year, with idle chums, they hang around the place, until at last their age becomes a scandal and disgrace. And thus the men of useful deeds die off, while no-goods thrive; you can't kill off the human weeds, nor keep the wheat alive.

DISCONTENT

THE man who's discontented, whose temper's always frayed, who keeps his shanty scented with words that are decayed, would do as much complaining if all the gods on high upon his head were raining ambrosia, gold, and pie. The man who busts his gallus because his house is cheap, would rant if in a palace he could high wassail keep. The vexed and vapid voter who throws a frequent fit because his neighbors motor while he must hit the grit, would have as many worries, his soul would wear its scars, if he had seven surreys and twenty motor cars. The man who earns his living by toiling in the ditch, whose heart is unforgiving toward the idle rich, who hates his lot so humble, his meal of bread and cheese, would go ahead and grumble on downy beds of ease. Contentment is a jewel that some wear in the breast, and life cannot be cruel so long as it's possessed! This gem makes all things proper, the owner smiles and sings; it may adorn a pauper, and be denied to kings.

SILVER THREADS

174

LIFE is fading fast away, silver threads are on my brow; will you love me when I'm gray, as you love me now, my frau? Will you love me when I'm old, and my temper's on the blink, and I sit around and scold till I drive the folks to drink? When I have the rheumatiz, and lumbago, and repeat, and the cusswords fairly sizz as I nurse my swollen feet; when a crutch I have to use, since my trilbys are so lame that they will not fit my shoes, will you love me just the same? When the gout infests my toes, and all vanished are my charms, will you kiss me on the nose, will you clasp me in your arms? Silver threads are in the gold, life will soon have run its lease; I'd be glad if I were told that your love will still increase when my high ambition fails, and my hopes are all unstrung, and I tell my tiresome tales of the days when I was young; when I sit around the shack making loud and dismal moan, of the stitches in my back, and my aching collar bone; when the asthma racks my chest so I cannot speak a word, will you fold me to your breast, saying I'm your honeybird? When I'm palsied, stiff and sere, when I'm weary of the game, tell me, O Jemima dear, will you love me just the same?

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MOVING ON

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WE foolish folk are discontented with things where'er we chance to dwell. "The air," we say, "is sweeter scented in some far distant dale or dell." And so we pull up stakes and travel to seek the fair and promised land, and find our Canaan is but gravel, a wilderness of rocks and sand. "Across the hills the fields are greener," we murmur, "and the view more fair; the water of the brooks is cleaner, and fish grow larger over there." And so we leave our pleasant valley, from all our loving friends we part, and o'er the stony hills we sally, to reach a land that breaks the heart. "There's gold in plenty over yonder," we say, "and we shall seek the mines." Then from our cheerful homes we wander, far from our fig trees and our vines; a little while our dreams we cherish, and think that we can never fail; but, tired at last, we drop and perish, and leave our bones upon the trail. How happy is the man whose nature permits him to enjoy his home, who, till compelled by legislature, declines in paths afar to roam! There is no region better, fairer, than that home region that you know; there are no zephyrs sweeter, rarer, than those which through your galways blow.

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THE OLD PRAYER

WHEN the evening shadows fall, oftentimes do I recall other evenings, far away, when, aweary of my play, I would climb on granny's knee (long since gone to sleep has she), clasp my hands and bow my head, while the simple lines I said, “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep.” Journeyed long have I since then, in this sad, gray world of men; I have seen with aching heart, comrades to their rest depart; friends have left me, one by one, for the shores beyond the sun. Still the Youth enraptured sings, and the world with gladness rings, but the faces I have known all are gone, and I'm alone. All alone, amid the throng, I, who've lived and journeyed long. Loneliness and sighs and tears are the wages of the years. Who would dread the journey's end, when he lives without a friend? Now the sun of life sinks low; in a little while I'll go where my friends and comrades wait for me by the jasper gate. Though the way be cold and stark, I shall murmur, in the dark, “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep.”

INTO THE SUNLIGHT

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OH cut out the vain repining, cease thinking of dole and doom! Come out where the sun is shining, come out of the cave of gloom! Come out of your hole and borrow a package of joy from me, and say to your secret sorrow, “I’ve no longer use for thee!” For troubles, which are deluding, are timorous beasts, I say; they stick to the gent who’s brooding, and flee from the gent who’s gay. The gateways of Eldorados are open, all o’er the earth; come out of the House of Shadows, and dwell in the House of Mirth. From Boston to far Bobcaygeon the banners of gladness float; oh, grief is a rank contagion, and mirth is the antidote. And most of our woes would perish, or leave us, on sable wings, if only we didn’t cherish and coddle the blame fool things. Long since would your woes have scampered away to their native fogs, but they have been fed and pampered like poodles or hairless dogs. And all of these facts should teach you it’s wise to be bright and gay; come out where the breeze can reach you, and blow all your grief away.

BLEAK DAYS

THE clouds are gray and grim today, the winds are sadly sighing; it seems like fall, and over all a sheet of gloom is lying. The dreary rain beats on the pane, and sounds a note of sorrow; but what's the odds? The genial gods will bring us joy tomorrow. We have the mumps, the doctor humps himself around to cure it; we're on the blink and often think we simply can't endure it; to all who list we groan, I wist, and tell a hard-luck story; but why be vexed? Week after next we'll all be hunkydory. The neighbor folks are tiresome blokes, they bore us and annoy us; with such folks near it's amply clear that no one can be joyous; things would improve if they would move—we really do not need them; but let's be gay! They'll move away, and worse ones will succeed them. The world seems sad, sometimes, my lad, and life is a disaster; but do not roar; for every sore tomorrow brings a plaster. The fool, he kicks against the pricks, all optimism scorning; the wise man goes his way—he knows joy cometh in the morning.

THE GIVERS

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THE great, fine men are oft obscure; they have no wide, resounding fame, that experts warrant to endure until the finish of the game. Old Clinkenbeard is such a man, and though he has no store of yen, he's always doing what he can to help along his fellowmen. He has no millions to disburse, but when he meets a hungry guy, he digs a quarter from his purse, which buys the sinkers and the pie. The gifts of bloated millionaires mean nothing of a sacrifice; they sit around in easy chairs and count the scads they have on ice; if Croesus gives ten thousand bucks to help some college off the rocks, he still can have his wine and ducks—he has ten million in his box. The widow's mite, I do not doubt, in heaven made a bigger splash than shekels Pharisees shelled out from their large wads of ill-gained cash. And so the poor man, when he breaks the only William in his pants, to buy some widow tea and cakes, is making angels sing and dance. In fertile soil he's sowing seeds, and he shall reap a rich reward; for he who gives the coin he needs, is surely lending to the Lord.

GOOD OLD DAYS

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HOW I regret the good old days, and all the pleasant, happy ways now perished from the earth! No more the worn breadwinner sings, no more the cottage roof-tree rings with sounds of hearty mirth. The good old days! The cheerful nights! We had then no electric lights, but oil lamps flared and smoked; and now and then they would explode and blow the shanty 'cross the road, and sometimes victims croaked. The windows had no window screens, there were no books or magazines to make our morals lame; we used to sit 'round in the dark while father talked of Noah's ark until our bedtime came. No furnace or steam heating plant would make the cold air gallivant; a fireplace kept us warm; the house was full of flying soot and burning brands, and smoke to boot, whenever there was a storm. No telephones then made men curse; if with a neighbor you'd converse, you hoofed it fourteen miles; the girl who wished to be a belle believed that she was doing well if she knew last year's styles. There'll never be such days as those, when people wore no underclothes, and beds were stuffed with hay, when paper collars were the rage—oh, dear, delightful bygone age, when we were young and gay!

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THE RAIN

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THE clouds are banked up overhead, the thunder rips and roars; the lightning hits old Jimpson's shed, and now the torrent pours. The crazy hens get wet and mad, the ducks rejoice and quack; the patient cow looks pretty sad, and humps her bony back; the hired man, driven from the field, for shelter swiftly hies; old Pluvius can surely wield the faucet when he tries. In half an hour the rain is done, the growling thunder stops, and once again the good old sun is warming up the crops. In half an hour more good is wrought to every human cause, than all our statesmen ever brought by passing helpful laws. Old Pluvius sends down the juice, when he's blown off the foam, and once again high hangs the goose in every happy home. Not all the armies of the earth, nor fleets that sail the main, can bring us prizes which are worth a half-hour's honest rain. No prophet with his tongue or pen, no poet with his lyre, can, like the rain, bring joy to men, or answer their desire. The sunflowers have new lease of life, the johnnie-jumpups jump. Now I must go and help my wife to prime the cistern pump.

SOMETHING TO DO

185

OH, ye who complain of the grind, remember these words (which are true!): The dreariest job one can find is looking for something to do! Sometimes, when my work seems a crime, and I'm sorely tempted to sob, I think of the long vanished time when I was out hunting a job. I walked eighty miles every day, and climbed forty thousand high stairs, and people would shoo me away, and pelt me with inkstands and chairs. And then, when the evening grew dark, I knew naught of comfort or ease; I made me a bed in the park, for supper chewed bark from the trees. I looked through the windows at men who tackled their oysters and squabs, and probably grumbled again because they were tired of their jobs. And I was out there in the rain, with nothing to eat but my shoe, and filled with a maddening pain because I had nothing to do. And now when I'm tempted to raise the grand hailing sign of distress, I think of those sorrowful days, and then I feel better, I guess. I go at my labors again with energy vital and new, and say, as I toil in my den, "Thank God, I have something to do!"

INDUSTRY

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HOW doth the busy little bee improve each shining hour! It honey takes from every tree, and keeps it till it's sour. Ah, nothing hinders, nothing queers its labors here below; it does not always cock its ears, to hear the whistle blow. Wherever honey is on tap, you see the bumbler climb; for shorter hours it doesn't scrap, nor charge for overtime. It's on the wing the livelong day, from rise to set of sun, and when at eve it hits the hay, no chore is left undone. And when the bumblebees are possessed of honey by the pound, bad boys come up and swat their nest, and knock it to the ground. The store they gathered day by day has vanished in a breath, and so the bees exclaim, "Foul play!" and sting themselves to death. There is no sense in making work a gospel and a creed, in thinking every hour will spoil that knows no useful deed. No use competing with the sun, and making life a strain; for bees—and boys—must have some fun if they'd be safe and sane.

WET WEATHER

ALL spring the rain came down amain, and rills grew into rivers; the bullfrogs croaked that they were soaked till mildewed were their livers. The fish were drowned, and in a swoon reclined the muskrat's daughter, and e'en the snakes, in swamps and brakes, hissed forth "There's too much water!" And all my greens, the peas and beans, that I with toil had planted, a sickly host, gave up the ghost, the while I raved and ranted. The dew of doom hit spuds in bloom, and slew the tender onion; I viewed the wreck, and said, "By heck!" and other things from Bunyan. All greens of worth drooped to the earth, and died and went to thunder; but useless weeds all went to seeds—no rain could keep them under. When weather's dry, and in the sky a red-hot sun is burning, it gets the goats of corn and oats, the wheat to wastage turning; the carrots shrink, and on the blink you see the parsnips lying, but weeds still thrive and keep alive, while useful things are dying. It's strange and sad that critters bad, both veg'table and human, hang on so tight, while critters bright must perish when they're bloomin'!

AFTER STORM

THE wind has blown the clouds away, and now we have a perfect day, the sun is sawing wood; we jog along 'neath smiling skies, the sounds of grief no more arise, and every gent feels good. Life seems a most delightful graft when nature once again has laughed, dismissing clouds and gloom; we find new charms in Mother Earth, our faces beam with seemly mirth, our whiskers are in bloom. That is the use of dreary days, on which we're all inclined to raise a yell of bitter grief; they fill us up with woe and dread, so when the gloomy clouds are sped, we'll feel a big relief. That is the use of every care that fills your system with despair, and rends your heart in twain; for when you see your sorrow waltz, you'll turn three hundred somersaults, and say life's safe and sane. If there was not a sign of woe in all this verdant vale below, life soon would lose its zest, and you would straightway roar and beef because you couldn't find a grief to cuddle to your breast. So sunshine follows after storm, and snow succeeds the weather warm, and we have fog and sleet; all sorts of days are sliding past, and when we size things up at last, we see life can't be beat.

- Transcriber’s Notes:
 - Missing or obscured punctuation was silently corrected.
 - Typographical errors were silently corrected.
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