

Municipal Report The cities are full of pride

Challenging each to each - This from her mountainside,
That from her burthened beach. R. KIPLING. Fancy a
novel about Chicago or Buffalo, let us say, or Nashville,
Tennessee! There are just three big cities in the United
States that are 'story cities' - New York, of course, New
Orleans, and, best of the lot, San Francisco. - FRANK
NORRIS. EAST IS EAST, and West is San Francisco,
according to Californians. Californians are a race of
people; they are not merely inhabitants of a State. They
are the Southerners of the West. Now, Chicagoans are no
less loyal to their city; but when you ask them why, they
stammer and speak of lake fish and the new Odd Fellows
Building. But Californians go into detail. 308 O HENRY -
100 SELECTED STORIES Of course they have, in the
climate, an argument that is good for half an hour while
you are thinking of your coal bills and heavy underwear.
But as soon as they come to mistake your silence for
conviction, madness comes upon them, and they picture
the city of the Golden Gate as the Bagdad of the New
World. So far, as a matter of opinion, no refutation is
necessary. But, dear cousins all (from Adam and Eve
descended), it is a rash one who will lay his finger on the

map and say: 'In this town there can be no romance - what could happen here?' Yes, it is a bold and a rash deed to challenge in one sentence history, romance, and Rand and McNally. NASHVILLE. - A city, port of delivery, and the capital of the State of Tennessee, is on the Cumberland River and on the N.C. & St. L. and the L. & N. railroads. This city is regarded as the most important educational centre in the South. I stepped off the train at 8 p.m. Having searched the thesaurus in vain for adjectives, I must, as a substitution, hie me to comparison in the form of a recipe. Take of London fog 30 parts; malaria 10 parts; gas leaks 20 parts; dewdrops, gathered in a brickyard at sunrise, 25 parts; odour of honeysuckle 15 parts. Mix. The mixture will give you an approximate conception of a Nashville drizzle. It is not so fragrant as a moth-ball nor as thick as pea-soup; but 'tis enough - 'twill serve. I went to an hotel in a tumbril. It required strong self-suppression for me to keep from climbing to the top of it and giving an imitation of Sidney Carton. The vehicle was drawn by beasts of a bygone era and driven by something dark and emancipated. I was sleepy and tired, so when I got to the hotel I hurriedly paid it the fifty cents it demanded (with approximate lagniappe, I assure you). I knew its habits; and I did not

want to hear it prate about its old 'marster' or anything that happened 'befo' de wah.' The hotel was one of the kind described as 'renovated.' That means \$20,000 worth of new marble pillars, tiling, electric lights and brass cuspidors in the lobby, and a new L. & N. time table and a lithograph of Lookout Mountain in each one of the great rooms above. The management was without reproach, the attention full of exquisite Southern courtesy, the service as slow as the progress of a snail and as good-humoured as Rip Van Winkle. The food was worth travelling a thousand miles for. There is no O HENRY - 100 SELECTED STORIES 309 other hotel in the world where you can get such chicken livers en brochette. At dinner I asked a negro waiter if there was anything doing in town. He pondered gravely for a minute, and then replied: 'Well, boss, I don't really reckon there's anything at all doin' after sundown.' Sundown had been accomplished; it had been drowned in the drizzle long before. So that spectacle was denied me. But I went forth upon the streets in the drizzle to see what might be there. It is built on undulating grounds; and the streets are lighted by electricity at a cost of \$32,470 per annum. As I left the hotel there was a race riot. Down upon me charged a company of freedmen, or Arabs, or Zulus,

armed with - no, I saw with relief that they were not rifles, but whips. And I saw dimly a caravan of black, clumsy vehicles; and at the reassuring shouts, 'Kyar you anywhere in the town, boss, fuh fifty cents,' I reasoned that I was merely a 'fare' instead of a victim. I walked through long streets, all leading uphill. I wondered how those streets ever came down again. Perhaps they didn't until they were 'graded.' On a few of the 'main streets' I saw lights in stores here and there; saw street-cars go by conveying worthy burghers hither and yon; saw people pass engaged in the art of conversation, and heard a burst of semi-lively laughter issuing from a soda-water and ice-cream parlour. The streets other than 'main' seemed to have enticed upon their borders houses consecrated to peace and domesticity. In many of them lights shone behind discreetly drawn window shades; in a few pianos tinkled orderly and irreproachable music. There was, indeed, little 'doing.' I wished I had come before sundown. So I returned to my hotel. In November, 1864, the Confederate General Hood advanced against Nashville, where he shut up a National force under General Thomas. The latter then sallied forth and defeated the confederates in a terrible conflict. All my life I have heard of, admired, and witnessed the fine

markmanship of the South in its peaceful conflicts in the tobaccochewing regions. But in my hotel a surprise awaited me. There were twelve bright, new, imposing, capacious brass cuspidors in the great lobby, tall enough to be called urns and so widemouthed that the crack pitcher of a lady baseball team should 3 1 0 O HENRY - 100 SELECTED STORIES have been able to throw a ball into one of them at five paces distant. But, although a terrible battle had raged and was still raging, the enemy had not suffered. Bright, new, imposing, capacious, untouched, they stood. But shades of Jefferson Brick! the tile floor - the beautiful tile floor! I could not avoid thinking of the battle of Nashville, and trying to draw, as is my foolish habit, some deductions about hereditary markmanship. Here I first saw Major (by misplaced courtesy) Wentworth Caswell. I knew him for a type the moment my eyes suffered from the sight of him. A rat has no geographical habitat. My old friend, A. Tennyson, said, as he so well said almost everything: 'Prophet, curse me the blabbing lip, And curse me the British vermin, the rat.' Let us regard the word 'British' as interchangeable ad lib. A rat is a rat. This man was hunting about the hotel lobby like a starved dog that had forgotten where he had buried a bone. He had a face of great acreage,

red, pulpy, and with a kind of sleepy massiveness like that of Buddha. He possessed one single virtue - he was very smoothly shaven. The mark of the beast is not indelible upon a man until he goes about with a stubble. I think that if he had not used his razor that day I would have repulsed his advances, and the criminal calendar of the world would have been spared the addition of one murder. I happened to be standing within five feet of a cuspidor when Major Caswell opened fire upon it. I had been observant enough to perceive that the attacking force was using Gatlings instead of squirrel rifles; so I side-stepped so promptly that the major seized the opportunity to apologize to a non-combatant. He had the blabbing lip. In four minutes he had become my friend and had dragged me to the bar. I desire to interpolate here that I am a Southerner. But I am not one by profession or trade. I eschew the string tie, the slouch hat, the Prince Albert, the number of bales of cotton destroyed by Sherman, and plug chewing. When the orchestra plays Dixie I do not cheer. I slide a little lower on the leather-cornered seat and, well, order another Würzburger and wish that Longstreet had - but what's the use? Major Caswell banged the bar with his fist, and the first gun at Fort Sumter re-echoed. When he fired the

last one at Appomattox O HENRY - 100 SELECTED
STORIES 311 I began to hope. But then he began on
family trees, and demonstrated that Adam was only a
third cousin of a collateral branch of the Caswell family.
Genealogy disposed of, he took up, to my distaste, his
private family matters. He spoke of his wife, traced her
descent back to Eve, and profanely denied any possible
rumour that she may have had relations in the land of
Nod. By this time I began to suspect that he was trying to
obscure by noise the fact that he had ordered the drinks,
on the chance that I would be bewildered into paying for
them. But when they were down he crashed a silver
dollar loudly upon the bar. Then, of course, another
serving was obligatory. And when I had paid for that I
took leave of him brusquely; for I wanted no more of
him. But before I had obtained my release he had prated
loudly of an income that his wife received, and showed a
handful of silver money. When I got my key at the desk
the clerk said to me courteously: 'If that man Caswell has
annoyed you, and if you would like to make a complaint,
we will have him ejected. He is a nuisance, a loafer, and
without any known means of support, although he seems
to have some money most the time. But we don't seem
to be able to hit upon any means of throwing him out

legally.' 'Why, no,' said I, after some reflection; 'I don't see my way clear to making a complaint. But I would like to place myself on record as asserting that I do not care for his company. Your town,' I continued, 'seems to be a quiet one. What manner of entertainment, adventure, or excitement have you to offer to the stranger within your gates?' 'Well, sir,' said the clerk, 'there will be a show here next Thursday. It is - I'll look it up and have the announcement sent up to your room with the ice water. Good night.' After I went up to my room I looked out of the window. It was only about ten o'clock, but I looked upon a silent town. The drizzle continued, spangled with dim lights, as far apart as currants in a cake sold at the Ladies' Exchange. 'A quiet place,' I said to myself, as my first shoe struck the ceiling of the occupant of the room beneath mine. 'Nothing of the life here that gives colour and variety to the cities in the East and West. Just a good, ordinary, humdrum business town.' Nashville occupies a foremost place among the manufacturing centres of the country. It is the fifth boot and shoe market in the United States, the largest candy and cracker manufacturing city in the South, and does an enormous wholesale dry goods, grocery and drug business. 312 O HENRY - 100 SELECTED STORIES I must

tell you how I came to be in Nashville, and assure you the digression brings as much tedium to me as it does to you. I was travelling elsewhere on my own business, but I had a commission from a Northern literary magazine to stop over there and establish a personal connection between the publication and one of its contributors, Azalea Adair. Adair (there was no clue to the personality except the handwriting) had sent in some essays (lost art!) and poems that had made the editors swear approvingly over their one o'clock luncheon. So they had commissioned me to round up said Adair and corner by contract his or her output at two cents a word before some other publisher offered her ten or twenty. At nine o'clock the next morning, after my chicken livers en brochette (try them if you can find that hotel), I strayed out into the drizzle, which was still on for an unlimited run. At the first corner I came upon Uncle Cæsar. He was a stalwart negro, older than the pyramids, with grey wool and a face that reminded me of Brutus, and a second afterwards of the late King Cetewayo. He wore the most remarkable coat that I ever had seen or expect to see. It reached to his ankles and had once been a Confederate grey in colours. But rain and sun and age had so variegated it that Joseph's coat, beside it, would have

faded to a pale monochrome. I must linger with that coat for it has to do with the story - the story that is so long in coming, because you can hardly expect anything to happen in Nashville. Once it must have been the military coat of an officer. The cape of it had vanished, but all adown its front it had been frogged and tasselled magnificently. But now the frogs and tassels were gone. In their stead had been patiently stitched (I surmised by some surviving 'black mammy') new frogs made of cunningly twisted common hempen twine. This twine was frayed and dishevelled. It must have been added to the coat as a substitute for vanished splendours, with tasteless but painstaking devotion, for it followed faithfully the curves of the long-missing frogs. And, to complete the comedy and pathos of the garment, all its buttons were gone save one. The second button from the top alone remained. The coat was fastened by other twine strings tied through the buttonholes and other holes rudely pierced in the opposite side. There was never such a weird garment so fantastically bedecked and of so many mottled hues. The lone button was the size of a half-dollar, made of yellow horn and sewed on with coarse twine. This negro stood by a carriage so old that Ham himself might O HENRY - 100 SELECTED

STORIES 313 have started a hack line with it after he left the ark with the two animals hitched to it. As I approached he threw open the door, drew out a leather duster, waved it, without using it, and said in deep, rumbling tones: 'Step right in, suh; ain't a speck of dust in it - jus' back from a funeral, suh.' I inferred that on such gala occasions carriages were given an extra cleaning. I looked up and down the street and perceived that there was little choice among the vehicles for hire that lined the kerb. I looked in my memorandum book for the address of Azalea Adair. 'I want to go to 861 Jessamine Street,' I said, and was about to step into the hack. But for an instant the thick, long, gorilla-like arm of the old negro barred me. On his massive and saturnine face a look of sudden suspicion and enmity flashed for a moment. Then, with quickly returning conviction, he asked blandishingly: 'What are you gwine there for, boss?' 'What is that to you?' I asked a little sharply. 'Nothin', suh, jus' nothin'. Only it's a lonesome kind of part of town and few folks ever has business out there. Step right in. The seats is clean - jes' got back from a funeral, suh.' A mile and a half it must have been to our journey's end. I could hear nothing but the fearful rattle of the ancient hack over the uneven brick paving; I could

smell nothing but the drizzle, now further flavoured with coal smoke and something like a mixture of tar and oleander blossoms. All I could see through the streaming windows were two rows of dim houses. The city has an area of 10 square miles; 181 miles of streets, of which 137 miles are paved; a system of waterworks that cost \$2,000,000, with 77 miles of mains. Eight-sixty-one Jessamine Street was a decayed mansion. Thirty yards back from the street it stood, outmerged in a splendid grove of trees and untrimmed shrubbery. A row of box bushes overflowed and almost hid the paling fence from sight; the gate was kept closed by a rope noose that encircled the gate-post and the first paling of the gate. But when you got inside you saw that 861 was a shell, a shadow, a ghost of former grandeur and excellence. But in the story, I have not yet got inside. When the hack had ceased from rattling and the weary quadrupeds came to a rest I handed my jehu his fifty cents with an 3 1 4 O HENRY - 100 SELECTED STORIES additional quarter, feeling a glow of conscious generosity as I did so. He refused it. 'It's two dollars, suh,' he said. 'How's that?' I asked. 'I plainly heard you call out at the hotel: "Fifty cents to any part of the town." ' 'It's two dollars