

with equal ease and fidelity. The drug store was the rendezvous of all types of Greensboro characters as it was the clearing house of all local news; and Will Porter, who as O. Henry was later to become the interpreter of New York through his stories, became first the historian of Greensboro through his cartoons.

At the age of twenty he went to Texas where he remained, with the exception of about six months, until 1898. He lived first on a ranch in La Salle County, then moved to Austin, then to Houston. In Austin he edited *The Rolling Stone* and was teller in the First National Bank; in Houston he was a reporter on *The Daily Post*. While in Houston he was summoned back to Austin to stand trial for the alleged misappropriation of \$1153.68.] Had he gone he would certainly have been acquitted. He protested his innocence to the last, and nobody in Austin, so far as I could learn, believed or believes him guilty. The indictment was contradictory in itself. One item of the charge was that on November 12, 1895, while acting as teller of the Austin bank, he had embezzled \$299.60. But O. Henry had resigned his position in the wretchedly managed institution early in December, 1894, and had been living in Houston ever since.

There is profound pathos in a note just received from Colonel Edward M. House. Colonel House was born in Houston but his home was then and still is in Austin: "I have always thought O. Henry was innocent and I have no doubt that if he had remained in Austin and had stood his trial he would have been proved so. Judge E. P. Hill, then owner of the Houston *Post* for which O. Henry was writing, enlisted my sympathies in his behalf and I looked into the matter closely enough to feel convinced that he had done no wrong. I had in mind the year he died to invite him that autumn to Austin as my guest. It was my purpose to give him a dinner and to have present the Governor, the members of the Supreme Court, and other State officials in order that an expression of regard and affection might be offered him. Unhappily, he died before I could extend the invitation to

him. I wished also to show some appreciation of the many delightful hours he had given me through his stories. I consider him the greatest short story writer the world has produced."

But after taking the train for Austin O. Henry was moved by a whim of the moment to turn back at Hempstead. He passed through New Orleans, took a fruiter for Honduras, and remained in Central and South America until he learned that his wife was desperately ill. He returned at once to Austin after an absence of a half year, surrendered himself to the authorities, and was sentenced to the federal prison in Columbus, Ohio. He entered the prison on April 25, 1898, and was released on July 24, 1901. It was here that he wrote his first stories and assumed the now famous pen-name O. Henry.

After a short stay in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where his daughter and her grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. P. G. Roach, were then living, he moved to New York City. His real flowering period began in December, 1903, when he signed a contract with *The New York World* for a story a week at the rate of \$100 a story. From March to November of this year he had dabbled in verse, publishing five second-rate poems in *Ainslee's Magazine* under the names of Howard Clark, T. B. Dowd, and S. H. Peters; the latter name together with that of James L. Bliss he also signed to several of the stories written in 1903. But from now on the short story was his central concern; his output being sometimes seven stories a month. Only once was he deflected—for six months during 1909 he collaborated with Mr. Franklin P. Adams on a musical comedy of Indian life to which O. Henry gave the title *Lo* from Pope's couplet,

Lo, the poor Indian! whose untutor'd mind  
Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind.

Ill health set in early in 1907, though there was never any decline in the quality of the stories. The end came on

June 5, 1910. He was buried in Asheville, North Carolina, near the home of his second wife, Miss Sara Coleman. Into his last story, *Let Me Feel Your Pulse*, he has woven the initial stages of his fatal illness and his brave but unavailing fight for life among the highlands of his native State. His grave is visited annually by throngs of tourists and a nation-wide movement is already under way to erect a monument that shall testify fittingly if not adequately to the admiration and affection of his readers.

The volumes of O. Henry's stories were issued in the following order: *Cabbages and Kings*, 1904; *The Four Million*, 1906; *The Trimmed Lamp*, 1907; *Heart of the West*, 1907; *The Voice of the City*, 1908; *The Gentle Grafters*, 1908; *Roads of Destiny*, 1909; *Options*, 1909; *Strictly Business*, 1910; *Whirligigs*, 1910; *Sixes and Sevens*, 1911; *Rolling Stones*, 1913; *Waifs and Strays*, 1919. These are all published by Doubleday, Page and Company except *Options* which is published by Harper and Brothers.

### III

The twenty-five stories that follow are arranged chronologically and represent O. Henry's chief regional interests, his favorite themes, his varying technique, his humor and pathos, and the four distinctive stages of his career. That they are the best twenty-five stories that he wrote no two readers would probably agree. With the exception of perhaps six of these stories substitutes equally good but hardly better could probably be found. When it is remembered that the ten lists of O. Henry's best ten stories (see page 133) resulted in a vote of sixty-two best, it can hardly be expected that my own choice of twenty-five will escape the dissent of the critic. If censure be mingled with dissent, no harm will be done; a closer study of O. Henry's work will be ample recompense for both censor and censured.

# SELECTED STORIES FROM O. HENRY

## THE DUPLICITY OF HARGRAVES

From *Sixes and Sevens*. First published in *Munsey's Magazine* February, 1902, but written in prison. The difference between the Northerner and the Southerner occupied much of O. Henry's thought. Regional differences, however, never became sectional differences with him, and characterization never passed into caricature. Six years later he writes *Thimble, Thimble* from this brief jotting in his notebook: "Old darkey—difference between Yankee and Southerner—N. Y." In the mediatorial character of Miss Lydia, as in the attitude of O. Henry himself, one sees a forecast of that larger and blended Americanism which combines the best in both Major Talbot and Hargraves but without the prejudice of the one or the blind spot of the other. For a characteristic statement of O. Henry's Southernism see the paragraph (page 228) in *A Municipal Report*, beginning, "I desire to interpolate here that I am a Southerner. But I am not one by profession or trade."

WHEN Major Pendleton Talbot, of Mobile, sir, and his daughter, Miss Lydia Talbot, came to Washington to reside, they selected for a boarding place a house that stood fifty yards back from one of the quietest avenues. It was an old-fashioned brick building, with a portico upheld by tall white pillars. The yard was shaded by stately locusts and elms, and a catalpa tree in season rained its pink and white blossoms upon the grass. Rows of high box bushes lined the fence and walks. It was the Southern style and aspect of the place that pleased the eyes of the Talbots.

In this pleasant, private boarding house they engaged

rooms, including a study for Major Talbot, who was adding the finishing chapters to his book, "Anecdotes and Reminiscences of the Alabama Army, Bench, and Bar."

Major Talbot was of the old, old South. The present day had little interest or excellence in his eyes. His mind lived in that period before the Civil War, when the Talbots owned thousands of acres of fine cotton land and the slaves to till them; when the family mansion was the scene of princely hospitality, and drew its guests from the aristocracy of the South. Out of that period he had brought all its old pride and scruples of honor, an antiquated and punctilious politeness, and (you would think) its wardrobe.

Such clothes were surely never made within fifty years. The major was tall, but whenever he made that wonderful, archaic genuflexion he called a bow, the corners of his frock coat swept the floor. That garment was a surprise even to Washington, which has long ago ceased to shy at the frocks and broad-brimmed hats of Southern congressmen. One of the boarders christened it a "Father Hubbard," and it certainly was high in the waist and full in the skirt.

But the major, with all his queer clothes, his immense area of plaited, raveling shirt bosom, and the little black string tie with the bow always slipping on one side, both was smiled at and liked in Mrs. Vardeman's select boarding house. Some of the young department clerks would often "string him," as they called it, getting him started upon the subject dearest to him—the traditions and history of his beloved Southland. During his talks he would quote freely from the "Anecdotes and Reminiscences." But they were very careful not to let him see their designs, for in spite of his sixty-eight years, he could make the boldest of them uncomfortable under the steady regard of his piercing gray eyes.

Miss Lydia was a plump, little old maid of thirty-five, with smoothly drawn, tightly twisted hair that made her look still older. Old fashioned, too, she was; but ante-bellum glory did not radiate from her as it did from the major. She possessed a thrifty common sense; and it was she who handled

the finances of the family, and met all comers when there were bills to pay. The major regarded board bills and wash bills as contemptible nuisances. They kept coming in so persistently and so often. Why, the major wanted to know, could they not be filed and paid in a lump sum at some convenient period—say when the “Anecdotes and Reminiscences” had been published and paid for? Miss Lydia would calmly go on with her sewing and say, “We’ll pay as we go as long as the money lasts, and then perhaps they’ll have to lump it.”

Most of Mrs. Vardeman’s boarders were away during the day, being nearly all department clerks and business men; but there was one of them who was about the house a great deal from morning to night. This was a young man named Henry Hopkins Hargraves—every one in the house addressed him by his full name—who was engaged at one of the popular vaudeville theatres. Vaudeville has risen to such a respectable plane in the last few years, and Mr. Hargraves was such a modest and well-mannered person, that Mrs. Vardeman could find no objection to enrolling him upon her list of boarders.

At the theatre Hargraves was known as an all-round dialect comedian, having a large repertoire of German, Irish, Swede, and black-face specialties. But Mr. Hargraves was ambitious, and often spoke of his great desire to succeed in legitimate comedy.

This young man appeared to conceive a strong fancy for Major Talbot. Whenever that gentleman would begin his Southern reminiscences, or repeat some of the liveliest of the anecdotes, Hargraves could always be found, the most attentive among his listeners.

For a time the major showed an inclination to discourage the advances of the “play actor,” as he privately termed him; but soon the young man’s agreeable manner and indubitable appreciation of the old gentleman’s stories completely won him over.

It was not long before the two were like old chums. The

major set apart each afternoon to read to him the manuscript of his book. During the anecdotes Hargraves never failed to laugh at exactly the right point. The major was moved to declare to Miss Lydia one day that young Hargraves possessed remarkable perception and a gratifying respect for the old régime. And when it came to talking of those old days—if Major Talbot liked to talk, Mr. Hargraves was entranced to listen.

Like almost all old people who talk of the past, the major loved to linger over details. In describing the splendid, almost royal, days of the old planters, he would hesitate until he had recalled the name of the Negro who held his horse, or the exact date of certain minor happenings, or the number of bales of cotton raised in such a year; but Hargraves never grew impatient or lost interest. On the contrary, he would advance questions on a variety of subjects connected with the life of that time, and he never failed to extract ready replies.

The fox hunts, the 'possum suppers, the hoe downs and jubilees in the Negro quarters, the banquets in the plantation-house hall, when invitations went for fifty miles around; the occasional feuds with the neighboring gentry; the major's duel with Rathbone Culbertson about Kitty Chalmers, who afterward married a Thwaite of South Carolina; and private yacht races for fabulous sums on Mobile Bay; the quaint beliefs, improvident habits, and loyal virtues of the old slaves—all these were subjects that held both the major and Hargraves absorbed for hours at a time.

Sometimes, at night, when the young man would be coming upstairs to his room after his turn at the theatre was over, the major would appear at the door of his study and beckon archly to him. Going in, Hargraves would find a little table set with a decanter, sugar bowl, fruit, and a big bunch of fresh green mint.

"It occurred to me," the major would begin—he was always ceremonious—"that perhaps you might have found your duties at the—at your place of occupation—sufficiently arduous to enable you, Mr. Hargraves, to appreciate what the

with which the book was dyed from end to end, he might consider its publication.

The major was in a white heat of anger, but regained his equanimity, according to his code of manners, as soon as he was in Miss Lydia's presence.

"We must have money," said Miss Lydia, with a little wrinkle above her nose. "Give me the two dollars, and I will telegraph to Uncle Ralph for some to-night."

The major drew a small envelope from his upper vest pocket and tossed it on the table.

"Perhaps it was injudicious," he said mildly, "but the sum was so merely nominal that I bought tickets to the theatre to-night. It's a new war drama, Lydia. I thought you would be pleased to witness its first production in Washington. I am told that the South has very fair treatment in the play. I confess I should like to see the performance myself."

Miss Lydia threw up her hands in silent despair.

Still, as the tickets were bought, they might as well be used. So that evening, as they sat in the theatre listening to the lively overture, even Miss Lydia was minded to relegate their troubles, for the hour, to second place. The major, in spotless linen, with his extraordinary coat showing only where it was closely buttoned, and his white hair smoothly roached, looked really fine and distinguished. The curtain went up on the first act of "A Magnolia Flower," revealing a typical Southern plantation scene. Major Talbot betrayed some interest.

"Oh, see!" exclaimed Miss Lydia, nudging his arm, and pointing to her programme.

The major put on his glasses and read the line in the cast of characters that her finger indicated.

Col. Webster Calhoun. . . . H. Hopkins Hargraves.

"It's our Mr. Hargraves," said Miss Lydia. "It must be his first appearance in what he calls 'the legitimate.' I'm so glad for him."

Not until the second act did Col. Webster Calhoun appear upon the stage. When he made his entry Major Talbot gave

an audible sniff, glared at him, and seemed to freeze solid. Miss Lydia uttered a little, ambiguous squeak and crumpled her programme in her hand. For Colonel Calhoun was made up as nearly resembling Major Talbot as one pea does another. The long, thin white hair, curly at the ends, the aristocratic beak of a nose, the crumpled, wide, raveling shirt front, the string tie, with the bow nearly under one ear, were almost exactly duplicated. And then, to clinch the imitation, he wore the twin to the major's supposed to be unparalleled coat. High-collared, baggy, empire-waisted, ample-skirted, hanging a foot lower in front than behind, the garment could have been designed from no other pattern. From then on, the major and Miss Lydia sat bewitched, and saw the counterfeit presentment of a haughty Talbot "dragged," as the major afterward expressed it, "through the slanderous mire of a corrupt stage."

Mr. Hargraves had used his opportunities well. He had caught the major's little idiosyncrasies of speech, accent, and intonation and his pompous courtliness to perfection—exaggerating all to the purpose of the stage. When he performed that marvellous bow that the major fondly imagined to be the pink of all salutations, the audience sent forth a sudden round of hearty applause.

Miss Lydia sat immovable, not daring to glance toward her father. Sometimes her hand next to him would be laid against her cheek, as if to conceal the smile which, in spite of her disapproval, she could not entirely suppress.

The culmination of Hargraves's audacious imitation took place in the third act. The scene is where Colonel Calhoun entertains a few of the neighboring planters in his "den."

Standing at a table in the centre of the stage, with his friends grouped about him, he delivers that inimitable, rambling, character monologue so famous in "*A Magnolia Flower*," at the same time that he deftly makes juleps for the party.

Major Talbot, sitting quietly, but white with indignation, heard his best stories retold, his pet theories and hobbies ad-

vanced and expanded, and the dream of the “Anecdotes and Reminiscences” served, exaggerated and garbled. His favorite narrative—that of his duel with Rathbone Culbertson—was not omitted, and it was delivered with more fire, egotism, and gusto than the major himself put into it.

The monologue concluded with a quaint, delicious, witty little lecture on the art of concocting a julep, illustrated by the act. Here Major Talbot’s delicate but showy science was reproduced to a hair’s breadth—from his dainty handling of the fragrant weed—“the one-thousanth part of a grain too much pressure, gentlemen, and you extract the bitterness, instead of the aroma, of this heaven-bestowed plant”—to his solicitous selection of the oaten straws.

At the close of the scene the audience raised a tumultuous roar of appreciation. The portrayal of the type was so exact, so sure and thorough, that the leading characters in the play were forgotten. After repeated calls, Hargraves came before the curtain and bowed, his rather boyish face bright and flushed with the knowledge of success.

At last Miss Lydia turned and looked at the major. His thin nostrils were working like the gills of a fish. He laid both shaking hands upon the arms of his chair to rise.

“We will go, Lydia,” he said, chokingly. “This is an abominable—desecration.”

Before he could rise, she pulled him back into his seat.

“We will stay it out,” she declared. “Do you want to advertise the copy by exhibiting the original coat?” So they remained to the end.

Hargraves’s success must have kept him up late that night, for neither at the breakfast nor at the dinner table did he appear.

About three in the afternoon he tapped at the door of Major Talbot’s study. The major opened it, and Hargraves walked in with his hands full of the morning papers—too full of his triumph to notice anything unusual in the major’s demeanor.

“I put it all over ‘em last night, major,” he began ex-

ultantly. “I had my inning, and, I think, scored. Here’s what the *Post* says:

His conception and portrayal of the old-time Southern colonel, with his absurd grandiloquence, his eccentric garb, his quaint idioms and phrases, his moth-eaten pride of family, and his really kind heart, fastidious sense of honor, and lovable simplicity, is the best delineation of a character rôle on the boards to-day. The coat worn by Colonel Calhoun is itself nothing less than an evolution of genius. Mr. Hargraves has captured his public.

“How does that sound, major, for a first nighter?”

“I had the honor”—the major’s voice sounded ominously frigid—“of witnessing your very remarkable performance, sir, last night.”

Hargraves looked disconcerted.

“You were there? I didn’t know you ever—I didn’t know you cared for the theatre. Oh, I say, Major Talbot,” he exclaimed frankly, “don’t you be offended. I admit I did get a lot of pointers from you that helped me out wonderfully in the part. But it’s a type, you know—not individual. The way the audience caught on shows that. Half the patrons of that theatre are Southerners. They recognized it.”

“Mr. Hargraves,” said the major, who had remained standing, “you have put upon me an unpardonable insult. You have burlesqued my person, grossly betrayed my confidence, and misused my hospitality. If I thought you possessed the faintest conception of what is the sign manual of a gentleman, or what is due one, I would call you out, sir, old as I am. I will ask you to leave the room, sir.”

The actor appeared to be slightly bewildered, and seemed hardly to take in the full meaning of the old gentleman’s words.

“I am truly sorry you took offence,” he said regretfully. “Up here we don’t look at things just as you people do. I know men who would buy out half the house to have