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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK IMPERTINENT POEMS ***



There's one you
must get next to

Page 57.

Impertinent Poems

By

Edmund Vance Cooke

Author of

"Chronicles of the Little Tot"
"Told to the Little Tot"

"Rimes to Be Read"
Etc.

With Illustrations by

Gordon Ross

*Death comes with a crawl, or comes with a pounce,
And whether he's slow, or spry,
It isn't the fact that you're dead that counts
But only—how did you die?*

New York
Dodge Publishing Company
220 East 23rd Street

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A PRE-IMPERTINENCE.

Anticipating the intelligent critic of "Impertinent Poems," it may well be remarked that the chief impertinence is in calling them poems. Be that as it may, the editors and publishers of "The Saturday Evening Post," "Success" and "Ainslee's," and, in a lesser degree, "Metropolitan," "Independent," "Booklovers" and "New York Herald" share with the author the reproach of first promoting their publicity. That they are now willing to further reduce their share of the burden by dividing it with the present publishers entitles them to the thanks of the author and the gratitude of the book-buying public.

E. V. C.



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IMPERTINENT POEMS



[Pg 11]

DEAD MEN'S DUST.

You don't buy poetry. (Neither do I.)
 Why?
 You cannot afford it? Bosh! you spend
Editions de luxe on a thirsty friend.
 You can buy any one of the poetry bunch
 For the price you pay for a business lunch.
 Don't you suppose that a hungry head,
 Like an empty stomach, ought to be fed?
 Looking into myself, I find this true,
 So I hardly can figure it false in you.

And you don't *read* poetry very much.
 (Such
 Is my own case also.) "But," you cry,
 "I haven't the time." Beloved, you lie.
 When a scandal happens in Buffalo,
 You ponder the details, con and pro;
 If poets were pugilists, couldn't you tell
 Which of the poets licked John L.?
 If poets were counts, could your wife be fooled
 As to which of the poets married a Gould?
 And even *my* books might have some hope
 If poetry books were books of dope.

"You're a little bit swift," you say to me,
 "See!"

You open your library. There you show
 Your "favorite poets," row on row,
 Chaucer, Shakespeare, Tennyson, Poe,
 A Homer unread, an uncut Horace,
 A wholly forgotten William Morris.
 My friend, my friend, can it be you thought
 That these were poets whom you had bought?
 These are dead men's bones. You bought their mummies

[Pg 12]

To display your style, like clothing dummies.
But when do they talk to you? Some one said
That these were poets which should be read,
So here they stand. But tell me, pray,
How many poets who live to-day
Have you, of your own volition, sought,
Discovered and tested, proved and *bought*,
With a grateful glow that the dollar you spent
Netted the poet his ten per cent.?

[Pg 13]

"But hold on," you say, "I am reading *you*."

True,
And pitying, too, the sorry end
Of the dog I tried this on. My friend,
I *can* write poetry—good enough
So you wouldn't look at the worthy stuff.
But knowing what you prefer to read
I'm setting the pace at about your speed,
Being rather convinced these truths will hold you
A little bit better than if I'd told you
A genuine poem and forgotten to scold you.
Besides, when I open my little room
And see *my* poets, each in his tomb,
With his mouth dust-stopped, I turn from the shelf
And I must scold you, or scold myself.

IN NINETEEN HUNDRED AND NOW.

[Pg 14]

Thomas Moore, at the present date,
Is chiefly known as "a ten-cent straight."
Walter, the Scot, is forgiven his rimes
Because of his tales of stirring times.
William Morris's fame will wear
As a practical man who made a chair.
And even Shakespere's memory's green
Less because he's read than because he's seen.
Then why should a poet make his bow
In the year of nineteen hundred and now?

Homer himself, if he could but speak,
Would admit that most of his stuff is Greek.
Chaucer would no doubt own his tongue
Was the broken speech of the land when young.
Shelley's a sealed-up book, and Byron
Is chiefly recalled as a masculine siren.
Poe has a perch on the chamber door,
But the populace read him "Nevermore."
Spenser fitted his day, as all allow,
But this is nineteen hundred and now.

Tennyson's chiefly given away
To callow girls on commencement day.
Alfred Austin, entirely solemn,
Is quoted most in the funny column.
Riley's Hoosiers have made their pile
And moved to the city to live in style.
Kipling's compared to "The Man Who Was,"
And the rest of us write with little cause,
Till publishers shy at talk of per cents.,
But offer to print "at author's expense."

[Pg 15]

O, once the "celestial fire" burned bright,
But the world now calls for electric light!
And Pegasus, too, is run by meter,
Being trolleyized to make him fleeter.
So I throw the stylus away and set
Myself at the typewriter alphabet
To spell some message I find within
Which shall also scratch your rawhide skin,
For you must read it, if I learn how
To write for nineteen hundred and now.



When the plan which I have, to grow suddenly rich
Grows weary of leg and drops into the ditch,
And scheme follows scheme
Like the web of a dream
To glamor and glimmer and shimmer and seem,...
 Only seem;
And then, when the world looks unfadably blue,
 If my rival sails by
 With his head in the sky,
And sings "How is business?" why, what do I do?
Well, I claim that I aim to be honest and true,
But I sometimes lie. Don't you?

[Pg 17]

When something at home is decidedly wrong,
When somebody sings a false note in the song,
Too low or too high,
And, you hardly know why,
But it wrangles and jangles and runs all awry,...
 Aye, awry!
And then, at the moment when things are askew,
 Some cousin sails in
 With a face all a-grin,
And a "Do I intrude? Oh, I see that I do!"
Well, then, though I aim to be honest and true,
Still I sometimes lie. Don't you?

When a man whom I need has some foible or fad,
Not very commendable, not very bad;
Perhaps it's his daughter,
And some one has taught her
To daub up an "oil" or to streak up a "water";
 What a "water"!
And her grass is green green and her sky is blue blue,
 But her father, with pride,
 In a stagey aside
Asks my "candid opinion." Then what do I do?
Well, I claim that I aim to be honest and true,
But I sometimes lie. Don't you?

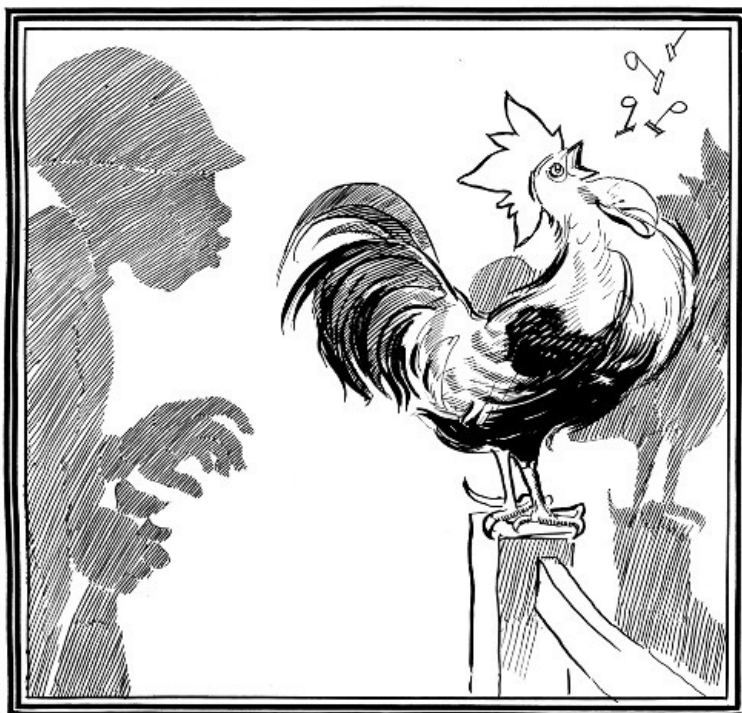
YOU TOO.

[Pg 18]

Did you ever make some small success
 And brag your little brag,
As if your breathing would impress
 The world and fix your tag
Upon it, so that all might see
The label loudly reading, "ME!"
And when you thought you'd gained the height

And, sunning in your own delight,
You preened your plumes and crowed "All right!"
Did something wipe you out of sight?
Unless you did this many a time
You needn't stop to read this rime.

When I was mamma's little joy
And not the least bit tough,
I'd sometimes whop some other boy
(If he were small enough),
And for a week I'd wear a chip,
And at the uplift of a lip
I'd lord it like a pigmy pope,
Until, when I had run my rope,
Some bullet-headed little Swope
Would clean me out as slick as soap.
No doubt you were as bad, or worse,
Or else you had not read this verse.



“Ate!”

Page 18.

All women were like pica print
When I was young and wise;
I'd read their very souls by dint
Of looking in their eyes.
And in those limpid souls I'd see
A very fierce regard for me.
And then—my, my, it makes me faint!—
Peroxide and a pinkish paint
Gave me the hard, hard heart complaint,
I saw the sham, I felt the taint,
Yet if she'd pat me once or twice,
I'd follow like a little fyce.

I never played a little game
And won a five or ten,
But, presto! I was not the same
As common makes of men.
Not Solomon and all his kind
Held half the wisdom of my mind.
And so I'd swell to twice my size,

[Pg 19]

And throw my hat across my eyes,
And chew a quill, and wear red ties,
And tip you off the stock to rise—
Until, at last, I'd have to steal
The baby's bank to buy a meal.

I speak as if these things remained
All in the perfect tense,
And yet I don't suppose I've gained
A single ounce of sense.

I scoff these tales of yesterday
In quite a supercilious way,
But by to-morrow I may bump
Into some newer game and jump!
You'll think I am the only trump
In all the deck until—kerslump!
Unless you'll do the same some time,
Of course you haven't read this rime.

[Pg 20]



The Eternal Everyday

Page 21.

[Pg 21]

THE ETERNAL EVERYDAY.

O, one might be like Socrates
And lift the hemlock up,
Pledge death with philosophic ease,
And drain the untrembling cup;—
But to be barefoot and be great,
Most in desert and least in state,
Servant of truth and lord of fate!
I own I falter at the peak
Trodden daily by the steadfast Greek.

O, one might nerve himself to climb
His cross and cruelly die,
Forgiving his betrayer's crime,
With pity in his eye;—
But day by day and week by week

To feel his power and yet be meek,
Endure the curse and turn the cheek,
I scarce dare trust even you to be
As was the Jew of Galilee.

O, one might reach heroic heights
By one strong burst of power.
He might endure the whitest lights
Of heaven for an hour;—
But harder is the daily drag,
To smile at trials which fret and fag,
And not to murmur—nor to lag.
The test of greatness is the way
One meets the eternal Everyday.

DON'T TAKE YOUR TROUBLES TO BED.

[Pg 22]

You may labor your fill, friend of mine, if you will;
You may worry a bit, if you must;
You may treat your affairs as a series of cares,
You may live on a scrap and a crust;
But when the day's done, put it out of your head;
Don't take your troubles to bed.

You may batter your way through the thick of the fray,
You may sweat, you may swear, you may grunt;
You may be a jack-fool if you must, but this rule
Should ever be kept at the front:—
Don't fight with your pillow, but lay down your head
And kick every worriment out of the bed.

That friend or that foe (which he is, I don't know),
Whose name we have spoken as Death,
Hovers close to your side, while you run or you ride,
And he envies the warmth of your breath;
But he turns him away, with a shake of his head,
When he finds that you don't take your troubles to bed.

FAILURE.

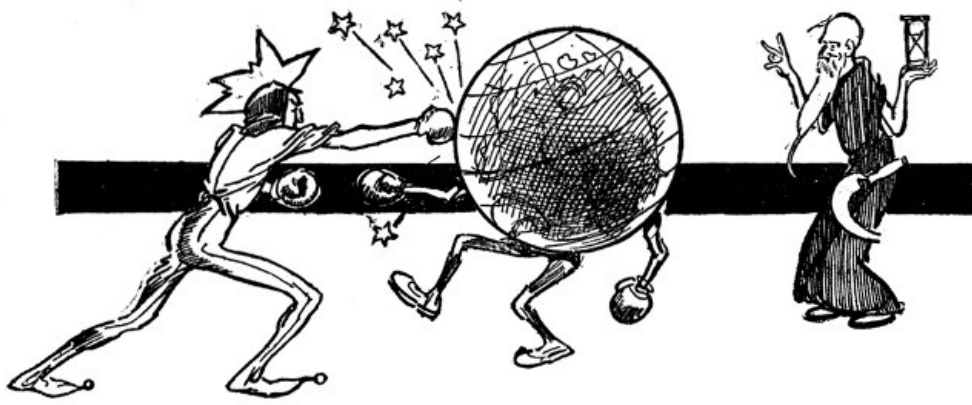
[Pg 23]

What is a failure? It's only a spur
To a man who receives it right,
And it makes the spirit within him stir
To go in once more and fight.
If you never have failed, it's an even guess
You never have won a high success.

What is a miss? It's a practice shot
Which a man must make to enter
The list of those who can hit the spot
Of the bull's-eye in the centre.
If you never have sent your bullet wide,
You never have put a mark inside.

What is a knock-down? A count of ten
Which a man may take for a rest.
It will give him a chance to come up again
And do his particular best.
If you never have more than met your match,
I guess you never have toed the scratch.

GOOD.



You look at yourself in the glass and say:
"Really, I'm rather *distingué*.
To be sure my eyes
Are assorted in size,
And my mouth is a crack
Running too far back,
And I hardly suppose
An unclassified nose
Is a mark of beauty, as beauty goes;
But still there's something about the whole
Suggesting a beauty of—well, say soul."
And this is the reason that photograph-galleries
Are able to pay employees' salaries.
Now, this little mark of our brotherhood,
By which each thinks that his looks are good,
Is laudable quite in you and me,
Provided we not only look, but be.

I look at my poem and you hear me say:
"Really, it's clever in its way.
The theme is old
And the style is cold.
These words run rude;
That line is crude;
And here is a rhyme
Which fails to chime,
And the metre dances out of time.



Look at Yourself

Page 24.

Oh, it isn't so bright it'll blind the sun,
 But it's better than that by Such-a-one."
 And this is the reason I and my creditors
 Curse the "unreasoning whims" of editors,
 And yet, if one writes for a livelihood,
 He ought to believe that his work is good,
 Provided the form that his vanity takes
 Not only believes, but also makes.

And there is our neighbor. We've heard him say:
 "Really, I'm not the commonest clay.
 Brown got his dust
 By betraying a trust;
 And Jones's wife
 Leads a terrible life;
 While I *have* heard
 That Robinson's word
 Isn't quite so good as Gas preferred.
 And Smith has a soul with seamy cracks,
 For he talks of people behind their backs!"
 And these are the reasons the penitentiary
 Holds open house for another century.
 True, we want no man in our neighborhood
 Who doesn't consider his character good,
 But then it ought to be also true
 He not only knows to consider, but do.

[Pg 25]

LET'S BE GLAD WE'RE LIVING.

I.

Oh, let's be glad that we're living yet; you bet!
 The sun runs round and the rain is wet
 And the bird flip-flops its wing;
 Tennis and toil bring an equal sweat;
 It's so much trouble to frown and fret,

[Pg 26]

So easy to laugh and sing,
 Ting ling!
So easy to laugh and sing!
 (And yet, sometimes, when I sing my song,
 I'm almost afraid my method is wrong.)

II.

Many have money which I have not, God wot!
But victual and keep are all they've got,
 And the stars still dot the sky.
Heaven be praised that they shine so bright,
Heaven be praised for an appetite,
 So who is richer than I?
 Hi yi!
Say, who is richer than I?
 (And yet I'm hoping to sell this screed
 For several dollars I hardly need.)

III.

Ducats and dividends, stocks and shares, who cares?
Worry and property travel in pairs,
 While the green grows on the tree.
A banquet's nothing more than a meal;
A trolley's much like an automobile,
 With a transfer sometimes free,
 Tra lee!
With a transfer sometimes free!
 (And yet you're unwilling, I plainly see,
 To leave the automobile to me.)

[Pg 27]

IV.

A note you give and a note you get; don't fret,
For they both may go to protest yet,
 And the roses blow perfume.
Fortune is only a Dun report;
The Homestead Law and the Bankrupt Court
 Have fostered many a boom,
 Boom, boom!
Have fostered many a boom.
 (But I see you smile in a rapturous way
 On the man who is rated double A.)

V.

Life is a show for you and me; it's free!
And what you look for is what you see;
 A hill is a humped-up hollow.
Riches are yours with a dollar bill;
A million's the same little digit still,
 With nothing but naughts to follow,
 So hollo!
There's nothing but naughts to follow.
 (But you and I, as I've said before,
 Could get along with a trifle more.)

SUCCESS.

[Pg 28]

It's little the difference where you arrive;
The serious question is how you strive.
Are you up to your eyes in a wild romance?
Does your lady lead you a dallying dance?
Do you question if love be fate, or chance?
Oh, the world will ask: "Did he get the girl?"
Though gentleman, coxcomb, clown or churl,
Master or menial of passion's whirl.
But it *isn't* that. The world will run
Though you never bequeath it daughter or son,
But what, O lover, will come to you
If you be not chivalrous, honest, true?
As far ahead as a man may think,

You can see your little soul shrivel and shrink.

It's not, "Do you win?"

It is, "What have you been?"

Are you stripped for the world-old, world-wide race

For the metal which shines like the sun's own face

Till it dazzles us blind to the mean and base?

Do you say to yourself, "When I have my hoard,

I will give of the plenty which I have stored,

If the Lord bless me, I will bless the Lord"?

And do you forget, as you pile your pelf,

What is the gift you are giving yourself?

Though your mountain of gold may dazzle the day,

Can you climb its height with your feet of clay?

Oh, it isn't the stamp on the metal you win;

It's the stamp on the metal you coin within.

It's not what you give;

It is "What do you live?"

[Pg 29]

Are you going to sail the polar seas

To the point of ninety-and-north degrees,

Where the very words in your larynx freeze?

Well, the mob may ask "Did he reach the pole?"

Though fair, or foul, did he touch the goal?"

But if that be the spirit which stirs your soul,

Off, off from the land below the zeroes;

For you are not of the stuff of heroes.

Ho! many a man can lead men forth

To the fearsome end of the Farthest North,

But can you be faithful for woe or weal

In a land where nothing but self is leal?

Oh, it isn't "How far?"

It is what you are.

And it isn't your lookout where you arrive,

But it's up to you as to how you strive.

THE GRILL.

[Pg 30]

Why do you?

What's it to you?

I know you do, for I've seen the gruesome feeling simmer through you.

I've seen it rise behind your eyes

And take your features by surprise.

I've seen it in your half-hid grin

And the tilting-upness of your chin.

Good-natured though you are and fair, as you have often boasted,

Still you like to hear the other man artistically roasted.

Whenever the star secures the stage with the spotlight in the centre,

Why should the anvil chorus think it has the cue to enter?

Whenever the prima donna trills the E above the clef,

Why should the brasses orchestrate the bass in double f?

It's funny,

But it's even money,

You like to spy the buzzing fly in the other fellow's honey.

Though you have said that honest bread

Demands no honey on it spread,



Why do You?

Page 30.

And if we eat the crusty wheat
 With appetite, it needs no sweet,
 Still I have noticed you were not at all inclined to cry
 Because the man the bees had blest was bothered with the fly.

[Pg 31]

Whenever the chef concocts a dish which sets the world to tasting,
 Why does the cooking-school get out its recipes for basting?
 Whenever a sprinter beats the bunch from the pistol-shot, why is it
 The heavy hammer throwers get together for a visit?

Excuse me!
 Did you accuse me
 Of turning the spit a little bit myself? Why, you amuse me!
 Didn't I scratch the sulphurous match
 And blow the flame to make it catch?
 Didn't you trot to get the pot
 To heat the water good and hot?
 Then, seizing on our victim, if we found no greater sin,
 Didn't we call him "a lobster," and cheerfully chuck him in?

THE VISION.

[Pg 32]

At the door of Success, I've been tempted to knock
 Both the door and the man who went through it,
 But I find that the fellow was greasing the lock
 All the time that he strove to undo it,
 So I either stay out, or must look for the key
 Which slipped back the bolt which impeded,
 And I'm certain to find it, as soon as I see
 The reason my rival succeeded.

Yes, I own when the man is a rank also-ran
 That I feel quite pish-tushy and pooh-y,
 And exclaim if he ever knew saw-dust from bran,
 Well—I come from just west of St. Louis!
 But then, in the winning he's made, there's a hope

That I may do even as he did,
So I swallow my sneer and I study his dope
To discover just why he succeeded.

I've been up in the air, I've been down in the hole,
(But always, let's hope, on the level,)
And I've been on my uppers—so meagre my sole
'Twould scarcely have tempted the devil!
But it's nothing to you what I am, or I was,
And no whit of your sympathy's needed,
For I'm certain to win in the long run, because
I shall see how my rival succeeded.

BLOOD IS RED.

[Pg 33]

Some of us don't drink, some of us do;
Some of us use a word or two.
Most of us, maybe, are half-way ripe
For deeds that wouldn't look well in type.
All of us have done things, no doubt,
We don't very often brag about.
We are timidly good, we are badly bold,
But there's hope for the worst of us, I hold,
If there be a few things we didn't do,
For the reason that we so wanted to.

Some of us sin on a smaller scale.
(We don't mind minnows, we shy at a whale.)
We speak of a woman with half a sneer,
We sit on our hands when we ought to cheer.
The salad we mix in the bowl of the heart
We sometimes make a little too tart
For home consumption. We growl, we nag,
But we're not quite lost if we sometimes drag
The hot words back and make them mild
At the moment they fret to be running wild.

Don't pin your faith on the man or woman
Who never is tempted. We're mostly human.
And whoever he be who never has felt
The red blood sing in the veins and melt
The ice of convention, caste and creed,
To the very last barrier, has no need
To raise his brows at the rest of us.
It bides its time in the best of us,
And well for him if he do not do
That which the strength of him wants him to.

[Pg 34]

DIAGNOSIS.

[Pg 35]

You have a grudge against the man
Who did the thing you couldn't do.
You hatched the scheme, you laid the plan,
And yet you couldn't push it through.
You strained your soul and couldn't win;
He gave a breath and it was easy.
You smile and swallow your chagrin,
But, oh, the swallow makes you queasy.

I know your illness, for, you see,
The diet never pleases me.

Your dearest friend has made a strike,
Has placed his mark above the crowd,
Has won the thing which *you* would like
And you are glad for him, and proud.
Your tongue is swift, your cheek is red,
If some one speak to his detraction,
And yet, the fact the thing is said

Affords you half a satisfaction.

I see the workings of your mind
Because my own is so inclined.

You tell me fame is hollow squeak,
You say that wealth is carking care;
And to live care-free a single week
Is more than years of work and wear.
Alexander weeps his highest place,
Diogenes is happy sunning!
What matters it who wins the race
So you have had the joy of running?

[Pg 36]

And yet, you covet prize and pelf.
I know it, for I do, myself.

SPREAD OUT.

[Pg 37]

In politics I'm a—never mind,
And you are a—I don't care,
But, anyway, I am rather inclined
To suspect we are both unfair;
For I have called you a coward and slave
And you have dubbed me a fool and knave.

(Yet, perhaps I was right, for you surely abused
The right of free speech in the names you used!)

In business you figure—a profit, I guess,
And I charge you—as much as I dare,
And I grumble that you ought to do it for less,
And you ask if my price is fair.
But if *I* sold your goods and *you* sold mine,
I doubt if the prices would much decline.

(Though I must insist that I think I see
Where you'd still have a little advantage of me!)

In religion you are a—who cares what?
And I am a—what's the odds?
So why have I sneered at your holiest thought,
And why have you jeered at my gods?
For, thinking it over, I'm sure we two
Were doing the best that we honestly knew.

(Though, of course, I cannot escape a touch
Of suspicion that *you* never knew too much!)

THE DILETTANT.

[Pg 38]

To lie outright in the light of day
I'm not sufficiently skilful,
But I practice a bit, in an amateur way,
The lie which is hardly wilful;
The society lie and the business lie
And the lie I have had to double,
And the lie that I lie when I don't know why
And the truth is too much trouble.

For this I am willing to take your blame
Unless you have sometimes done the same.

To be a fool of an A1 brand
I'm not sufficiently clever,
But I often have tried my 'prentice hand
In a callow and crude endeavor;
A fool with the money for which I've toiled,
A fool with the word I've spoken,
And the foolish fool who is fooled and foiled

On a maiden's finger broken.

If you never yourself have made a slip,
I'm willing to watch you curl your lip.

And yet my blood and my bone resist
If you dub me fool and liar.
I set my teeth and double my fist
And my brow is flushed with fire.

You I deny and you I defy
And I vow I will make you rue it;
And I lie when I say that I never lie,
Which proves me a fool to do it!

You may jerk your thumb at me and grin
If liar and fool you never have been.

[Pg 39]

THE CONSERVATIVE.

[Pg 40]

At twenty, as you proudly stood
And read your thesis, "Brotherhood,"
If I remember right, you saw
The fatuous faults of social law.

At twenty-five you braved the storm
And dug the trenches of Reform,
Stung by some gadfly in your breast
Which would not let your spirit rest.

At thirty-five you made a pause
To sum the columns of The Cause;
You noted, with unwilling eye,
The heedless world had passed you by.

At forty you had always known
Man owes a duty to His Own.
Man's life is as man's life is made;
The game is fair, if fairly played.

At fifty, after years of stress
You bore the banner of Success.
All men have virtues, all have sins,
And God is with the man who wins.

At sixty, from your captured heights
You fly the flag of Vested Rights,
Bounded by bonds collectable,
And hopelessly respectable!

HUSH.

[Pg 41]

What's the best thing that you ever have done?
The whitest day,
The cleverest play
That ever you set in the shine of the sun?
The time that you felt just a wee bit proud
Of defying the cry of the cowardly crowd
And stood back to back with God?
Aye, I notice you nod,
But silence yourself, lest you bring me shame
That I have no answering deed to name.

What's the worst thing that ever you did?
The darkest spot,
The blackest blot
On the page you have pasted together and hid?
Ah, sometimes you think you've forgotten it quite,
Till it crawls in your bed in the dead of the night
And brands you its own with a blush.

What was it? Nay, hush!
Don't tell it to me, for fear it be known
That I have an answering blush of my own.

But whenever you notice a clean hit made,
Sing high and clear
The sounding cheer
You would gladly have heard for the play you played,
And when a man walks in the way forbidden,
Think you of the thing you have happily hidden
And spare him the sting of your tongue.
Do I do that which I've sung?
Well, it may be I don't and it may be I do,
But I'm telling the thing which is good for *you!*

[Pg 42]

THE ISLAND.

[Pg 43]

You, my friend, in your long-tailed coat,
With your white cravat at your withered throat,
Praying by proxy of him you hire,
Worshiping God with a quartet choir,
Bumping your head on the pew in front,
Assenting "Amen!" with an unctuous grunt,
Are you sure it is you
In the pew?

Look!

You're away on a lonely isle,
Where the scant breech-clout is the only style,
Where the day of the week forgets its name,
Where god and devil are all the same.
Look at yourself in your careless clout,
And tell me, then, would you be devout?

One on the island, one in the pew—
How do you know which is you?

You, dear maiden, with eyes askance
At the little soubrette and her daring dance,
Thanking God that His ways are wide
To allow you to pass on the other side,
You, as you ask, "Will the world approve?"
At the hint of a wobble out of the groove,

[Pg 44]

Look!

On that isle of the lonely sea
Are you, the saucy soubrette and *he*.
And the little grooves that you circle in
Are forever as though they never had been.
Now you are naked of soul and limb:
Will you say what you will not dare—for him?

Which of the women is real?
The one you appear, or the one you feel?

You, good sir, with your neck a-stretch,
As the van goes by with the prison wretch,
Asking naught of his ills or hurts,
Judging "he's getting his just deserts,"
Pluming yourself that the moral laws
Are centred in you as effect and cause.

Look!

At the island, and there you are
With the long, strong arm which reaches far,
And there are the natives who kneel and bow,
And where are your *meum et tuum* now?
Are you sure that the balance swings quite true?
Or does it a little incline to you?

Answer or not as you will, but oh,
I have an island, too, and so
I know, I know.

HUMBLER HEROES.

[Pg 45]

It might not be so difficult to lead the light brigade,
While the army cheered behind you, and the fifes and bugles played;
It might be rather easy, with the war-shriek in your ears,
To forget the bite of bullets and the taste of blood and tears.

But to be a scrubwoman, with four
Babies, or more,
Every day, every day setting your back
On the rack,
And all your reward forever not quite
A full bite
Of bread for your babies. Say!
In the heat of the day
You might be a hero to head a brigade,
But a hero like her? I'm afraid! I'm afraid!

It might be very feasible to force a great reform,
To saddle public passion and to ride upon the storm;
It might be somewhat simple to ignore the roar of wrath,
Because a second shout broke out to cheer you on your path.

But he who, alone and unknown, is true
To his view,
Unswerved by the crush of the mutton-browed,
Blatting crowd,
Unwon by the flabby-brained, blinking ease
Which he sees
Throned and anointed. Say!
At the height of the fray,
You might be the chosen to captain the throng:
But to stand all alone? How long? How long?

[Pg 46]

CONSCIENCE PIANISSIMO.

[Pg 47]

You are honest as daylight. You're often assured
That your word is as good as your note—unsecured.
We could trust you with millions unaudited, but——

(Tut, tut!
There is always a "but,"
So don't get excited,) I'm pained to perceive
It is seldom I notice you grumble or grieve
When the custom-house officer pockets your tip
And passes the contraband goods in your grip.
You would scorn to be shy on your ante, I'm certain,
But skinning your Uncle you're rather expert in.

Well, I'm proud that no taint of the sort touches me.
(For I've never been over the water, you see.)

Your yardstick's a yard and your goods are all wool;
Your bushel's four pecks and you measure it full.
You are proud of your business integrity, yet—

(Don't fret!
There is always a "yet,")
I never have noticed a sign of distress, or
Disturbance in you, when the upright assessor
Has listed your property somewhere about
Half what you would take were you selling it out.
You're as true to the world as the world to its axis,
But you chuckle to swear off your personal taxes.
As for me, I would scorn to do any such thing,
(Though I may have considered the question last spring.)

[Pg 48]

You have notions of right. You would count it a sin
To cheat a blind billionaire out of a pin.
You have a contempt for a pettiness, still—

(Don't chill!
There is always a "still,")
I never have noticed you storm with neglect
Because the conductor had failed to collect,

Or growl that the game wasn't run on the square
When your boy in the high school paid only half fare.
The voice of your conscience is lusty and audible,
But a railroad—good heavens! why, that's only laudable.

Of course, *I* am quite in a different class;
For me, it is painful to ride on a pass!

THE WORLD RUNS ON.

[Pg 49]

So many good people find fault with God,
Tho' admitting He's doing the best He can,
But still they consider it somewhat odd
That He doesn't consult them concerning his plan,
But the sun sinks down and the sun climbs back,
And the world runs round and round its track.

Or they say God doesn't precisely steer
This world in the way they think is best,
And if He would listen to them, He'd veer
A hair to the sou', sou'west by west.
But the world sails on and it never turns back
And the Mariner never makes a tack.

Or the same folk pray "O, if Thou please,
Dear God, be a little more circumspect;
Thou knowest Thy worm who is on his knees
Would not willingly charge thee with neglect,
But O, if indeed Thou knowest all things,
Why fittest Thou not Thy worm with wings?"

So many good people are quite inclined
To favor God with their best advices,
And consider they're something more than kind
In helping Him out of critical crises.
But the world runs on, as it ran before,
And eternally shall run evermore.

[Pg 50]

So many good people, like you and me,
Are deeply concerned for the sins of others
And conceive it their duty that God should be
Apprised of the lack in erring brothers.
And the myriad sun-stars seed the skies
And look at us out of their calm, clear eyes.

PASS.

[Pg 51]

Did somebody give you a pat on the back?
Pass it on!
Let somebody else have a taste of the snack,
Pass it on!
If it heightens your courage, or lightens your pack,
If it kisses your soul, with a song in the smack,
Maybe somebody else has been dressing in black;
Pass it on!
God gives you a smile, not to make it a yawn;
Pass it on!

Did somebody show you a slanderous mess?
Pass it by!
When a brook's flowing by, will you drink at the cess?
Pass it by!
Dame Gossip's a wanton, whatever her dress;
Her sire was a lie and her dam was a guess,
And a poison is in her polluting caress;
Pass it by!
Unless you're a porker, keep out of the sty.
Pass it by!

Did somebody give you an insolent word?

Pass it up!
'T is the creak of a cricket, the pwit of a bird;
Pass it up!
Shake your fist at the sea! Is its majesty blurred?
Blow your breath at the sky! Is its purity slurred?
But the shallowest puddle, how easily stirred!
Pass it up!
Does the puddle invite you to dip in your cup?
Pass it up!

[Pg 52]

PUBLICITY.

[Pg 53]

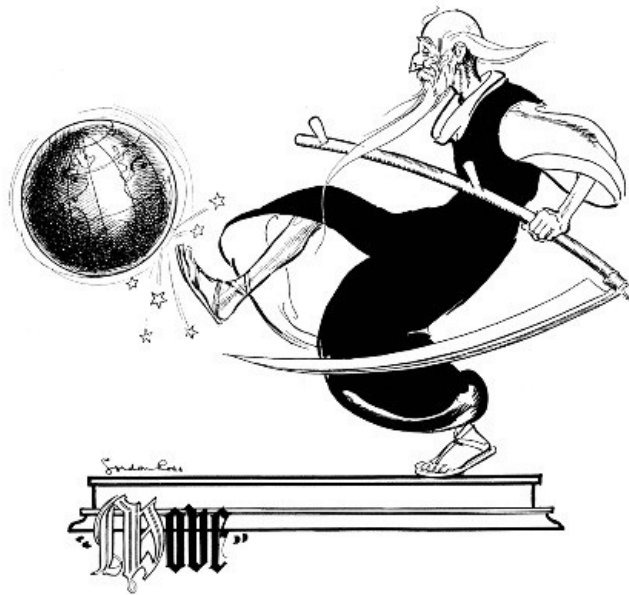
There's nothing like publicity
To further that lubricity
Which minted cartwheels need
To maximize their speed
In your direction.
True, some hydropathist of stocks,
Or one whose trade is picking locks,
May make objection:
Yet even those gentry always lurk
Where booming first has done its work.

Observe how oft some foreigner,
About the size of coroner,
Can sell L O R D
(Four letters, as you see,)
For seven numbers,
Because his trade-mark, thus devised,
Is advertised and advertised
Till it encumbers
The mental view, as though 't were some
Bald-headed brand of chewing-gum.

Study your own psychology!
See how some mere tautology
Of picture, or of print,
Has realized the glint
Of your good money.
How often have persistent views
Of one bare head sold you your shoes!
Which does seem funny;
And yet 'twas head-work, after all,
Which helped the shoe-man make his haul.

[Pg 54]

There's some obscure locality
In every man's mentality
Which, I am free to state,
I'd like to penetrate
For my felicity.
For now who gives a second look
When he perceives a POEM by Cooke?
But come publicity!
And then a poem by COOKE were seen
The first thing in the magazine!



“Doesn't somebody bump us, and bump us hard”

Page 55.

[Pg 55]

MOVE!

We are on the main line of a crowded track;
We've got to go forward; we can't go back
And run the risk of colliding:
We must make schedule, not now and again,
But always, forever and ever, amen!
Or else switch off on a siding.
If ever we loaf, like a car in the yard,
Doesn't somebody bump us, and bump us hard,
I wonder?

You've succeeded in building a pretty fair trade,
But can you sit down in the grateful shade
And kill time cutting up capers?
Or must you hustle and scheme and sweat,
Though the shine be fine or the weather be wet,
And keep your page in the papers?
If ever you fail to be pulling the strings,
Aren't some of your rivals around doing things,
I wonder?

You're a first-class salesman. You know your line;
Your house is good and your goods are fine,
So you fill your book with orders,
But can you get quit of the ball and chain,
Or are you in jail on a railroad train,
With blue-coated men for warders?
If you sent your samples and cut out the trip,
Wouldn't somebody else soon be lugging your grip,
I wonder?

[Pg 56]

You are starred on the bills and are chummy with fame;
The man on the corner could tell you your name
At three o'clock in the morning,
But can you depend on the mind of the mob?

Can you tell your press-agent to look for a job,
Or give your manager warning?
Should you lie down to sleep, with your laurels beneath,
Wouldn't somebody else soon be wearing your wreath,
I wonder?

Oh, I'm willing to work, but I wish I could lag,
Not feeling as if I were "it" for tag,
Or last in follow-my-leader;
There is only one spot where, I haven't a doubt,
Nobody will try to be crowding me out,
And that is under the cedar.
And even in that place, will Gabriel's trump
Come nagging along and be making me jump?
I wonder.

GET NEXT.

[Pg 57]

Chap. I., verse 1, is where you'll find
The text of what is in my mind
If, haply, you are so inclined.
Chap. I., verse 1—the primal rule
For saint or sinner, sage or fool,
No matter what his church or school.
Though you may call it slangy solely,
Though you may term it flippant wholly,
Truth still is truth and is not vexed;
I write this rhyme to prove the text—
Get Next.

Suppose I sought some lonely height
And dipped a stylus in the light
Of welding worlds and sought to write
Upon the highest, deepest blue
My message to Sam Smith and you.
The chances are it would not do.
You would not risk your neck to read
My much too altitudinous screed,
And I, chagrined and half-perplexed,
Had missed you when I missed my text—
Get Next.

Suppose you have a breakfast food
Which you conceive I should include
Within my lat-and-longitude.
'T is not enough to have the stuff,
But you must post, and praise, and puff,
Until I memo. on my cuff,
Among my most important notes—
Be sure to bring home Oatless Oats.
And then you know that I'm annexed,
Because you followed out the text—
Get Next.

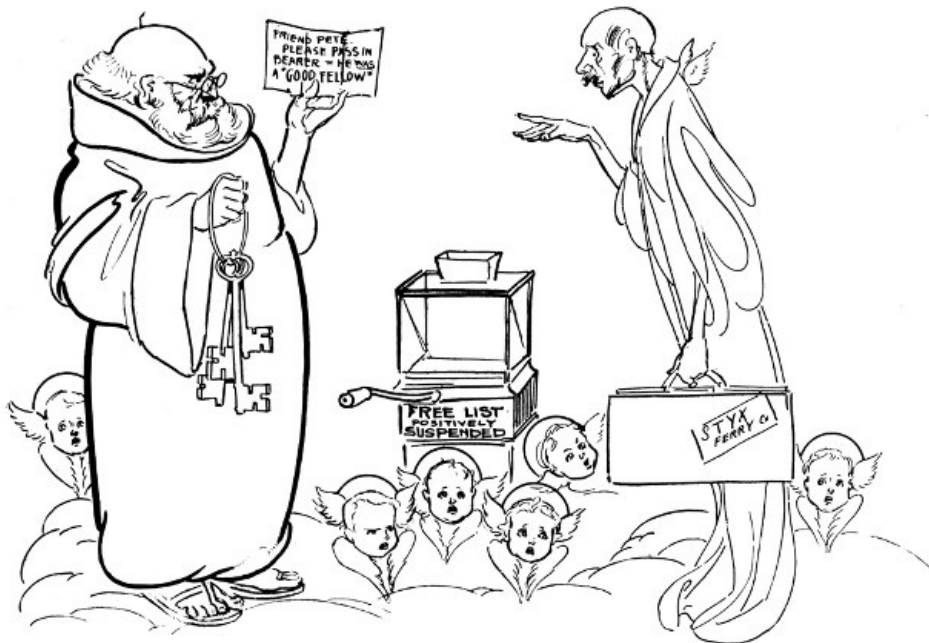
[Pg 58]

Get next! get next! and hold it true
There's one you must get nextest to,
And that important one is you.
Be not of those who, uncommuned
With their own skins, have all but swooned
From some imaginary wound,
But strip the rags from off your soul
And find you are not maimed, but whole!
'T is but a flea-bite which has vexed
As soon as you've applied the text—
Get Next.



“Post, and praise, and puff”

Page 58.



Are You You?

Page 59.

Are you a trailer, or are you a trolley?
Are you tagged to a leader through wisdom and folly?
Are you Somebody Else, or You?
Do you vote by the symbol and swallow it "straight"?
Do you pray by the book, do you pay by the rate?
Do you tie your cravat by the calendar's date?
Do you follow a cue?

Are you a writer, or that which is worded?
Are you a shepherd, or one of the herded?
Which are you—a What or a Who?
It sounds well to call yourself "one of the flock,"
But a sheep is a sheep after all. At the block
You're nothing but mutton, or possibly stock.
Would you flavor a stew?

Are you a being and boss of your soul?
Or are you a mummy to carry a scroll?
Are you Somebody Else, or You?
When you finally pass to the heavenly wicket
Where Peter the Scrutinous stands on his picket,
Are you going to give him a *blank* for a ticket?
Do you think it will do?

THE PRICE.

In, or under, or over the earth,
What will fill you, and what suffice?
No matter how mean, or much its worth,
It is yours if you pay the price.
Never a thing may a man attain,
But gain pays loss, or loss pays gain.

Lady of riches, riot and rout,
Fair of flesh and sated of sense,
Nothing in life you need do without
Except the trifle of innocence.
Counterfeit kisses you paid, and got
Just what you paid for—which is what?

Man of adroitness, place and power,
Trampled above and torn below;
Set in the light of your noonday hour,
Playing a part in the public show;
Fooling the mob that the mob be ruled:
You know which is the greater fooled.

Artist of pencil, or paint, or pen,
Reed, or string, or the vocal note,
Making the soul to suffer again
And the wild heart clutch the throat;
Ever your fancy has paid in fact;
You rack my soul, as yours was racked.



“The Trifle of Innocence”

Page 60.

THE BUBBLE-FLIES.

[Pg 61]

Let me read a homily
Concerning an anomaly
I view
In you.
Whatever you are striving for,
Whatever you are driving for,
'T is not alone because you crave
To be successful that you slave
To swim upon the topmost wave.
You care less what your station is,
But more what your relation is.
To be a bit above the rest!
To be upon, or of, the crest!
Ah! that is where the trouble lies
Which stirs you little bubble-flies.

(I sneer these sneers, but just the same
I keep my fingers in the game.)
See! you have eat-and-drinkables
And portables and thinkables
And yet
You fret.
For what? Let's reach the heart of you
And see the funny part of you.
For what? I find the soul and seed
Of it is not your lack or need,
Or even merely vulgar greed.
Gold? You may have a store of it,
But someone else has more of it.
Fame? Pretty things are said of you,
But—some one is ahead of you.
Place? You disprize your easy one
For some one's high and breezy one.

[Pg 62]

(I smile these smiles to soothe my soul,
But squint one eye upon the goal.)

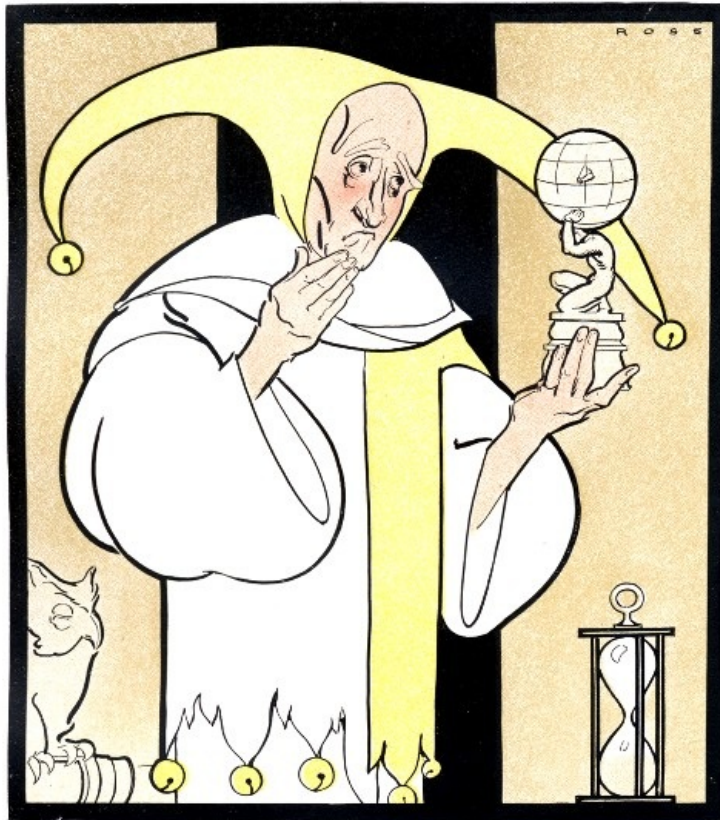
Tell me! what's your capacity
Compared to your voracity?

I guess

"T is less.

And so I strike these attitudes
And tender you these platitudes;—
Not wishing wealth, or spurning it,
Not hoarding it, or burning it
Is equal to the earning it.
Life's race is in the riding it,
Not in the word deciding it.
And after all is said and uttered
The keenest taste is bread-and-buttered.

(And yet—and yet—my palate aches
For pallid pie and pasty cakes!)



The Bubble=Flies

Page 61.

QUALIFIED.

[Pg 63]

I love to see my friend succeed;
I love to praise him; yes, indeed!

And so, no doubt, do you.

But will you tell me why it is
The praise we parcel out as his
So often goes askew,

And ends by running in the rut
Of "if," "except" or "but"?

"Boggs is a clever chap. His trade
Is doubling yearly, and he's made

A fortune all right, but——"

"Sharp is elected. Well, I say!
He'll hit a high mark yet, some day,

If—" (here one eye is shut).
"Such acting! Why, I laughed and wept!
Fobb's art is great—except."

"Miss Hautton has such queenly grace.
And then her figure and her face!
She'd be a beauty if—" "
"And Mrs. Follol entertains
With so much taste and so much pains;
But—" (here a little sniff).
"And Mrs. Caste has ever kept
The narrow path—except."

I wish some man were great and good
That I might praise him all I could
And never add a "but."
I would that some would value me
And never hint what I would be
"If"—but why cavil? Tut!
Eternal justice still is kept
And Heaven is good—except!

[Pg 64]



Yesterday's laurels are dry and dead

Page 65.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

[Pg 65]

Do you lazily nurse your knee and muse?
Do you contemplate your conquering thews
With a critical satisfaction?
But yesterday's laurels are dry and dead
And to-morrow's triumph is still ahead;
To-day is the day for action.

Yesterday's sun: is it shining still?
To-morrow's dawn: will its coming fill
To-day, if to-day's light fail us?
Not so. The past is forever past;
To-day's is the hand which holds us fast,

And to-morrow may never hail us.

The present and only the present endures,
So it's hey for to-day! for to-day is yours
For the goal you are still pursuing.
What you have done is a little amount;
What you will do is of lesser account,
But the test is, what are you doing?

THE FIRST PERSON SINGULAR.

[Pg 66]

McUmpfrey's a fellow who's lengthy on lungs.
Backed up by the smoothest of ball-bearing tongues,
And his topic—himself—is worth talking about,
But he works it so much he has frazzled it out.
He never will give me my half of a chance
To chip in my own little, clever romance
In the first person singular. Yes, and they say,
He offended you, too, in a similar way.

Cousin Maud tells her illnesses, ancient and recent,
In a most minute way which is almost indecent!
Vivisecting herself, with some medical chatter,
She serves us her portions—as if on a platter,
Never noting how I am but waiting to stir
My dregs of diseases to offer to her.
And I hear (such a joke!) that your chronic gastritis
Stands silent forever before her nephritis.

Mrs. Henderson's Annie goes out every night,
And Bertha, before her, was simply a fright,
While Agnes broke more than the worth of her head,
And Maggie—well, some things are better unsaid.
Such manners to talk of her help—when she knows
My wife's simply aching to tell of *our* woes!
And I hear that she never lets you get a start
On your story of Rosy we all know by heart.

[Pg 67]

You'd hardly believe that I've heard Bunson tell
The Flea-Powder Frenchman and Razors to Sell,
The One-Legged Goose and that old What You Please—
And even, I swear it, The Crow and the Cheese.
And he sprang that old yarn of He Said 't was His Leg,
When you wanted to tell him Columbus's Egg,
While I wanted to tell my own whimsical tale
(Which I recently wrote) of The Man in the Whale!

THE CHOICE.

[Pg 68]

The little it takes to make life bright,
If we open our eyes to get it!
And the trifle which makes it black as night,
If we close our lids and let it!
Behold, as the world goes whirling by,
It is gloomy, or glad, as it fits your eye.

As it fits your eye, and I mean by that
You find what you look for mostly;
You can feed your happiness full and fat,
You can make your miseries ghostly,
Or you can forget every joy you own
By coveting something beyond your zone.

In the storms of life we can fret the eye
Where the guttering mud is drifted,
Or we can look to the world-wide sky
Where the Artist's scenes are shifted.
Puddles are oceans in miniatures,
Or merely puddles; the choice is yours.

We can strip our niggardly souls so bare
That we haggle a penny between us;
Or we can be rich in a common share
Of the Pleiades and Venus.
You can lift your soul to its outermost look,
Or can keep it packed in a pocketbook.

[Pg 69]

We may follow a phantom the arid miles
To a mountain of cankered treasure,
Or we can find, in a baby's smiles,
The pulse of a living pleasure.
We may drink of the sea until we burst,
While the trickling spring would have quenched our thirst.

THE SAVING CLAUSE.

[Pg 70]

Kerr wrote a book, and a good book, too;
At least I^[A] managed to read it through
Without finding very much room for blame,
And a good many other folks did the same.
But when any one asked me^[A]: "Have you read?"
Or: "How do you like?" I^[A] only said:
"Very good, very good! and I'm glad enough;
For his other writings are horrible stuff."

Banks wrote a play, and it had a run.
(That's a good deal more than ever I've^[A] done.)
The interest held with hardly a lag
From the overture to the final tag.
But when any one asked me^[A]: "Have you seen?"
Or: "What do you think?" I^[A] looked serene
And remarked: "Oh, a pretty good thing of its kind,
But I guess Mr. Shakespeare needn't mind!"

Phelps made a machine; 't was smooth as grease.
(I^[A] couldn't invent its smallest piece
In a thousand years.) It was tried and tried,
Until everybody was satisfied.
But when any one asked me^[A]: "Will it pay?"—
"Is it really good?"—I^[A] could only say:
"It's a marvelous thing! Why, it almost thinks!
And Phelps is a wonder—too bad he drinks!"

[A] (Errata: On scanning the verses through I find these pronouns should all read "You.")



Mr. Shakespeare needn't mind

Page 70.

BETWEEN TWO THIEVES.

[Pg 71]

Sure! I am one who disbelieves
 In thieves;
 At which you interrupt to cry
 "Aye, aye, and I."
 Hmf! you're so sudden to agree.
 Suppose we see.

I know a thief. No matter whether
 I ought to know a thief, or not.
 Perhaps "we went to school together;"
 That old excuse is worked a lot.
 One day he "copped a rummy's leather,"
 Which means—I hate to tell you what.
 It's such a vulgar thing to steal
 A drunkard's purse to buy a meal.
 "Hey, pal," said he, "come help me dine;
 I've hit a pit and got the swag;
 To-day, Delmonico's is mine;
 To-morrow once again a vag.
 Come on and tell me all the stunts
 Of all the boys who knew me—once."

"Did I go with him?" I did not.
 Would you have gone? Could you be bought
 By dinners—when the trail was hot
 And any hour he might be caught?
 I know a thief, whose operations
 Are colored by a kindly law.
 Your income and a beggar's rations
 Contribute to his cunning claw;
 Cities and counties, courts and nations
 Pay portion to his monstrous maw.

[Pg 72]

He gave a dinner not long since

In honor of some played-out Prince.
The decorations, ah, how chaste!
And how delicious was the wine!
For Mrs. Thief has perfect taste
And Mr. Thief knows how to dine.
And so the world has long agreed
Quite to forgive, forget—and feed.
But really I was shocked to see
How many decent folks could be
Induced to come and bow the knee;
I think you were my *vis-a-vis*.

Yes, yes, I quite despise him, too,
Like you;
And (though it's not a thing to brag)
I somehow like the vag.
But, oh, the difference one perceives
Between two thieves!

THE SPECTATOR.

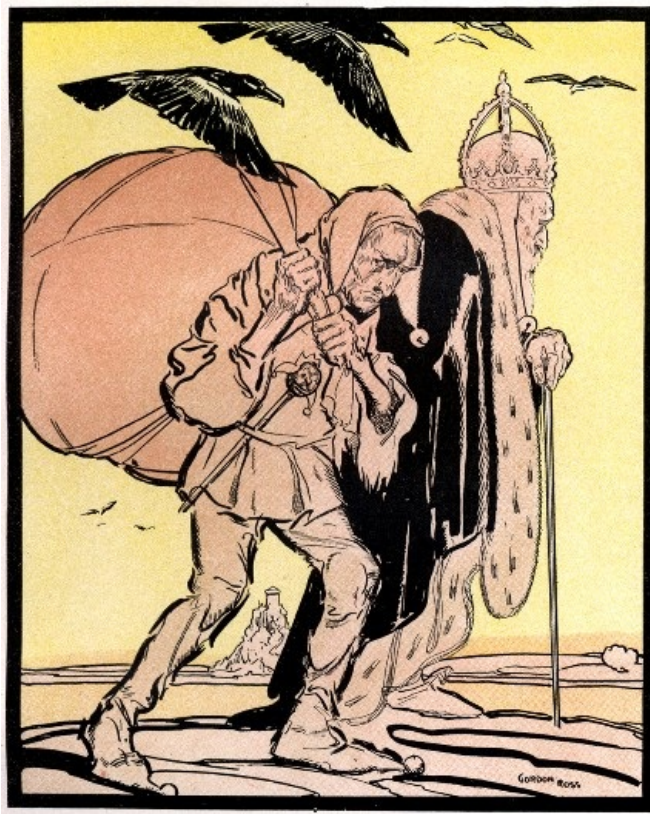
[Pg 73]

Look at the man with the crown
Weighing him down.
Plumed and petted,
Galled and fretted!
Why do you eye him askance
With a quiver of hate in your glance?
Why not conceive him as human,
Nursed at the breast of a woman,
Growing, mayhap, as he could,
Not as he would?
How are you sure you would be
Better and wiser than he?

Look at the woman whose eye
Follows you by.
Silked and satined,
Scented, fattened!
Why does the half smile slip
Into a sneer on your lip?
You pity her? Ah, but the fashion
Of your complacent compassion.
Pity her! yet you have said,
"Better the creature were dead.
What is there left here for her
But to err?"
Thus would you make the world right,
Hiding its ills from your sight.

[Pg 74]

Look at the man with the pack
Breaking his back.
Ragged, squalid,
Wretched, stolid.
And you are sorry, you say,
(Much as you are at a play.)
But do you say to him, "Brother,
Twin-born son of our mother
What were the word, or the deed
Fitting your need?"
Or, as he slouches by,
Do you breathe "God be praised, I am I?"



“God be praised,
I am I!”

Page 74.

THE SQUEALER.

[Pg 75]

Of course some people are born so bright
That no matter what one may say, or write,
The theme is old and the lesson is trite,
Which is what you may say, as these lines unreel
And I mildly suggest it is better to feel
 Than to squeal.

Everybody knows that? Yes, it's certain they do,
Everybody, that is, with exception of two,
Of whom I am one and the other is you.
But for us the lesson is still remote,
Although we commit it and cite it and quote
 It by rote.

But still when you thrill with the thudding thump
From the fist of the fellow you tried to bump
And the world looks hard at the swelling lump,
There's a strong temptation to open your door
And invite the public to hear you roar
 That you're sore.

And again, tho' 'tis plain as the printed page:—
"Keep your hand on the lever and watch the gauge
When the fire-pot's full and the boilers rage,"
How often the steam-pressure grows and grows
And before the engineer cares or knows,
 Up she goes.

So why should you fret if I send you to school
Again to consider the sapient rule
That Wisdom is Silence and Speech is a Fool.
Close up! and a year from to-day you will kneel
And thank the good Lord that you knew how to feel
 And not squeal.

[Pg 76]

DISTANCE AND DISENCHANTMENT.

[Pg 77]

He was playing New York, and on Broadway at that;
I was playing in stock, in Chicago.
I heard that his Hamlet fell fearfully flat;
He heard I was fierce, as Iago.
Each looked to the other exceedingly small;
We were too far apart, that is all.
You, too, if your vision is ever reflective,
Have noticed your rival is small in perspective.

I heard him in Memphis (a chance matinée);
He heard me (one Sunday) in Dallas.
His critics, I swore, never witnessed the play;
He vowed mine were prompted by malice.
A pleasanter fellow I cannot recall.
We were closer together; that's all.
And your rival, too, if you once see him clearly,
Is clever, or how could he rival you, nearly?

In Seattle they said he was greater than Booth,
(Or in Portland, perhaps; I've forgotten);
I said 'twas ungracious to speak the plain truth,
But his work in the first act was rotten.
I had only intended to speak of the thrall
Of his wonderful fifth act; that's all.
But when a man's praised far ahead of his talents,
I guess you say something to even the balance.

[Pg 78]

In Atlanta I heard a remark that he made
And again in Mobile, Alabama;—
That he hardly thought Shakespeare was meant to be played
Like a ten-twenty-thirt' melodrama.
Oh, well, there was one honey-drop in the gill;
The fellow was jealous; that's all.
And you, too, have found, when a friendship is broken,
That his words are worse than the ones you have spoken.



To even the balance

FAMILY RESEMBLANCE.

[Pg 79]

I used to boost the P. and P.,
Designed to run from sea to sea,
From Portland, Ore., to Portland, Me.,
But which, as all the maps agree,
Begins somewhere in Minnesota
And peters out in North Dakota.
You gibed because I used to mock
Its streaks of rust and rolling-stock,
Its schedule and its G. P. A.
(Who took your Annual away,)
But lately you seem much inclined
To own a sudden change of mind.

Ah, me,
You're much like other folks, I see.

I much admired the book reviews
Of Quillip of the Daily News.
I laughed to see him put the screws
On some sprig of the late Who's-Whos,
Tear off his verbiage and skin him
To show the little there was in him.
You said the book he wrote himself
Lay stranded on the dealer's shelf
And wasn't worthy a critique;
(Just what he said of mine last week).
Perhaps your reasoning was strong
And you were right and I was wrong.

Heigho!
I'm very much like you, I know.

O'Brien's zeal ran almost daft
In its antipathy to graft.
He raked the practice fore and aft;
Lord! how his sulphurous breath would waft
"Eternal and infernal tarmint
To ivery grasping, grafting, varmint."
The worst of these upon the planet,
He said, were those who wanted granite
In public buildings,—"yis, begorry!"
(O'Brien owns a sandstone quarry.)
Of course I'd hate to see it tested,
But would he be less interested
In civic virtue—uninvested?

Oh, dear!
O'Brien's much like us, I fear.

[Pg 80]

NEED.

[Pg 81]

Don't you remember how you and I
Held a property nobody wanted to buy
In San José,
Until one day
A man came along from Franklin, Pa.?
And didn't we jump till we happened to find
The chap wasn't going it wholly blind,
But all the rest of the block was bought
And he simply had to have our lot.
Well, didn't our land go up in price
Till double the figures would scarce suffice?

And don't we sometimes figure and fret
How he got the best of us, even yet?

Don't you remember the perfect plan
You had, which needed another man

To make it win,
To jump right in
And everlasting make things spin?
And you said I had the requisite dash
And also the trifle of hoarded cash.
Was I glad to get in? Well, yes, indeed!
Until I saw the compelling need
Which had brought you to me, and then, "Ho! ho!
None of that for me, nay, not for Joe."

And I'm always provoked when I think you made
The plan get along without my aid.

Don't you remember the time we met
At Des Moines, or was it at Winterset?
But anyway, you
Were feeling blue
And tickled to see me through and through.
And "Come, let's open a bottle of—ink,"
Said you, "and see if it's good to drink."
But weren't you sorry because you spoke
When I had to tell you I was "broke"?
Oh, you lent me the saw-buck, I know, but still
I fancied your ardor had taken a chill.

And you've never been able to quite forget
That once I was "broke," and in your debt.

[Pg 82]

BETTER.

[Pg 83]

There's only one motto you need
To succeed:
"Better."
To other man's winning? Then you
Must do
Better.
From the baking of bread
To the breaking a head,
From rhyming a ballad
To sliming a salad,
From mending of ditches
To spending of riches,
Follow the rule to the uttermost letter:
"Better!"

Of course you may say but a few
Can do
Better;
And you're going to strive
So that all may thrive
Better.
And it's right you are
To follow the star,
Set in the heavens, afar, afar;
But still with your eyes
On the skies
It is wise
To be riding a mule,
Or guiding a school,
Thatching a hovel
Or hatching a novel,
Foretelling weather,
Or selling shoe-leather;
And remember you must
Be doing it just
A wee dust
Better.

And 'tis quite
As right
For you to cite
That the author might,

[Pg 84]

Or ought, to write
A heavenly sight
Better!
For which sharp word I am much your debtor,
Knowing none other could file my fetter
Better.



“Saving repairs and wrath”

Page 85.

FORGET WHAT THE OTHER MAN HATH.

[Pg 85]

What do I care for your four-track line?
I have a country path;
And this is the message I've taken for mine:—
"Forget what the other man hath."

What do I care for your giant trees?
I'd rather whittle a lath,
And my motto helps me to take my ease;—
"Forget what the other man hath."

What do I care for your Newport beach?
A tub's as good for a bath.
And I keep my solace in constant reach:—
"Forget what the other man hath."

What do I care for your automobile?
I'm saving repairs and wrath,
My proverb goes well with an old style wheel;—
"Forget what the other man hath."

What do I care if you scorn my rime?
For this is its aftermath;—
It sounds so well I shall try, (sometime,)
To "forget what the other man hath!"

The day that I loaf when I ought to employ it
 Has, somehow, the flavor which makes me enjoy it.
 So the man with no work
 He may joyously shirk
 I envy no more than I do the Grand Turk.
 He most is in need of a holiday, who,
 In this workaday world, has no duty to do.

The dollar you waste when you ought not to spend it
 Buys something no plutocrat's millions could lend it,
 For if once you exhaust
 All your care of the cost,
 Full half of the pleasure of purchase is lost,
 So I trust you are one who is wise in discerning
 The value of spending is most in the earning.

My little success which was nearest complete
 Was that which I tore from the teeth of defeat,
 And the man who can hit
 With his wisdom and wit
 Without any effort, I envy no whit.
 The genius whose laurels grow always the greenest
 Finds pleasure in plenty, but misses the keenest.

WHAT SORT ARE YOU?

"How much do you want for your A. Street lot?"
 Said a real estate man to me.
 I looked as if I were lost in thought
 And then I replied: "Let's see;—
 Black's sold last year at fifty the foot
 And without using algebra that should put
 My figure at sixty now, I guess,
 Or a trifle more, or a trifle less."
 I was anxious to sell at fifty straight,
 Or I might have been glad of forty-eight.
 Oh, yes, I'm a bit of a bluff, it's true;
 What sort of a bluff are you?

"And what do you think of these railroad rates?"
 The man with a bald brow said,
 "For you have travelled through all the states
 And have heard a good deal and read."
 "The railroad lines," I wisely replied
 "Are the lines with which our trade is tied,
 And the wretches who take their rebates set
 New knots in the bonds under which we fret."
 But, now I remember, I once rode free
 And forgot that the road rebated me!
 Oh, yes, I'm a bit of a bluff, its true;
 How much of a bluff are you?

"You've been to hear 'Siegfried' and found it fine?"
 Cried a classical friend one day.
 "I'm sure your impressions accord with mine,
 But I want your own words and way.
 And, oh, "the tone-color beats belief,"
 And, oh, "dynamics," and oh, "motif,"
 And "chiar-oscuro, how finely abstruse,"
 And oh, la-la-la, and oh, well, what's the use?
 For the only thing I understood in the play
 Was that dippy, old dragon of *papier-maché*.
 Oh, yes, I'm a bit of a bluff, it's true;
 What style of a bluff are you?

"And the senator should, you believe, be returned?"
 Said a newspaper-man to me.
 "He's as rotten a rascal as ever burned,"
 I said. "May I quote?" asked he.
 "Oh, no," I replied, "if you're going to quote,

Just remark that his friends are regretting to note
That the exigencies of the party case
Indicate that he shouldn't re-enter the race."
For the senator sometime may possibly be
Interviewed by a newspaper-man about me.
No, none of these cases may quite fit you,
But what sort of a bluff *are* you?



“And, oh, the tone
color beats belief”

Page 88.

THE CRITICS.

[Pg 89]

As a matter of fact,
I am sure I can act,
And so,
 When I go,
 To the show,
Not the art of an Irving
Seems wholly deserving,
And though Booth were the star
He'd have many a jar,
If he heard the critique
Which I frequently speak,
 As you
 Do,
 Too.

Written deep in my heart
Is a knowledge of art,
For why?
 I've an eye
 Like a die.
And where Raphael's paint
Has bedizened some saint,
I note his perspective
Is sadly defective,
And you? O, I know

When you've looked on Corot

The same

Blame

Came.

And the world would have gained

If my voice had been trained,

For my ear

Is severe,

As I hear

De Reszke and Patti.

(I've heard 'em sing "ratty!")

And the crowd has yelled "Bis!"

When a call for police

Should have shortened the score.

Was there ever a more

Absurd

Word

Heard?

And I feel, now and then,

I could handle a pen,

For indeed,

As I heed

What I read,

I observe many faults;

Homer nods, Shakespere halts,

Dante's sad, Pope is trite,

Poe's mechanic, Holmes light,

Yet so easy to do

Is the thing, even you

Might

Write

Quite

Bright!

[Pg 90]

[Pg 91]

PLUG.

[Pg 92]

As you haven't asked me for advice, I'll give it to you now:

Plug!

No matter who or what you are, or where you are, the how

Is plug.

You may take your dictionary, unabridged, and con it through,

You may swallow the Britannica and all its retinue,

But here I lay it f. o. b.—the only word for you

Is plug.

Are you in the big procession, but away behind the band?

Plug!

On the cobble, or asphaltum, in the mud or in the sand,

Plug!

Oh, you'll hear the story frequently of how some clever man

Cut clean across the country, so that now he's in the van;

You may think that you will do it, but I don't believe you can,

So plug!



Do you want to reach the heights?

Page 92.

Are you singing in the chorus? Do you want to be a star?

Plug!

You may think that you're a genius, but I don't believe you are,
So plug!

Oh, you'll hear of this or that one who was born without a name,
Who slept eleven hours a day and dreamed the way to fame,
Who simply couldn't push it off, so rapidly it came!

But plug.

Are you living in the valley? Do you want to reach the height?

Plug!

Where the hottest sun of day is and the coldest stars of night?

Plug!

Oh, it may be you're a fool, but if a fool you want to be,
If you want to climb above the crowd so every one can see
Just how a fool may look when he is at his apogee,

Why, plug!

Can you make a mile a minute? Do you want to make it two?

Plug!

Are you good and up against it? Well, the only thing to do
Is plug.

Oh, you'll find some marshy places, where the crust is pretty thin,
And when you think you're gliding out, you're only sliding in,
But the only thing for you to do is think of this and grin,

And plug.

There's many a word that's prettier that hasn't half the cheer
Of plug.

It may not save you in a day, but try it for a year.

Plug!

And to show you I am competent to tell you what is what,
I assure you that I never yet have made a centre shot,
Which surely is an ample demonstration that I ought

To plug.

[Pg 93]

[Pg 94]

I.

You sometimes think you'd like to be
 John D.?
 And not a man you know would dare
 To josh you on your handsome hair,
 Or say, "Hey, John, it's rather rude
 To boost refined and jump on crude,
 To help Chicago University,
 Or bull the doctrine of—immersity."

II.

You wouldn't care to be the Pope,
 I hope?
 With not a chum to call your own,
 To hale you up by telephone,
 With, "Say, old man, I hope you're free
 To-night. Bring Mrs. Pope to tea.
 Let some one else lock up the pearly
 Gateway to-night and get here early!"

III.

Perhaps you sometimes deem the Czar
 A star?
 With not a palm in all the land
 To strike his fairly, hand to hand,
 With not a man in all the pack
 To fetch a hand against his back
 And cry, "Well met, Old Nick, come out
 And let us trot the kids about.
 Tut, man! you needn't look so pale,
 A red flag means an auction sale."

[Pg 96]

IV.

I'll bet even Shakespeare's name was "Will,"
 Until
 He was so dead that he was great,
 For fame can only isolate.
 And better than "The Immortal Bard"
 Were "Hello, Bill," and "Howdy, pard!"
 Would he have swapped his comrades' laughter
 For all the praise of ages after?

A SONG OF REST.

[Pg 97]

I have sung the song of striving,
 Of the struggling, of arriving,
 Of making of one's self a horse and mounting him and driving!
 But now, let's cease;
 Let's look for peace.
 Let's forget the mark of money,
 Let's forget the love of fame.
 Life is ours and skies are sunny;
 What is worry but a name?
 Let's sit down and whiff and whittle,
 Let us loaf and laugh a little.

(Here the youngest spoiled the rime
 By running to me for a dime.)

I have sung the joy of doing,
 Of the pleasure of pursuing,
 And how life is like a woman and our role and rule is wooing,
 But now, O let
 Us cease to fret!
 Let us cease our vain desiring;
 Water's better than Cliquot;

What is honor but perspiring?
Wealth's another name for woe.
Let us spread out in the clover,
Just too lazy to turn over,—

[Pg 98]

(Here my wife brought in the news:
All the children need new shoes.)

I have sung the song of action,
Of the sweet of satisfaction
Of pounding, pounding, pounding opposition to a fraction,
But now, let's quit;
Let's rest a bit.

Money only makes us greedy,
Life's success is but a taunt.
He alone is never needy
Who has learned to laugh at want.
Let us loaf and laugh and wallow;
Too much work to even swallow—

(Here's the mail and bills are curses;
I must try to sell these verses.)

DESIRE.

[Pg 99]

Oh, the ripe, red apple which handily hung
And flaunted and taunted and swayed and swung,
Till it itched your fingers and tickled your tongue,
For it was juicy and you were young!
But you held your hands and you turned your head,
And you thought of the switch which hung in the shed,
And you didn't take it (or so you said),
But tell me—didn't you want to?

Oh, the rounded maiden who passed you by,
Whose cheek was dimpled, whose glance was shy,
But who looked at you out of the tail of her eye,
And flirted her skirt just a trifle high!
Oh, you were human and not sedate,
But you thought of the narrow way and straight,
And you didn't follow (or so you state),
But tell me—didn't you want to?

Oh, the golden chink and the sibilant sign
Which sang of honey and love and wine,
Of pleasure and power when the sun's a-shine
And plenty and peace in the day's decline!
Oh, the dream was schemed and the play was planned;
You had nothing to do but to reach your hand,
But you didn't (or so I understand),
But tell me—didn't you want to?

[Pg 100]

Oh, you wanted to, yes; and hence you crow
That the Want To within you found its foe
Which wanted you not to want to, and so
You were able to answer always "No."
So you tell yourself you are pretty fine clay
To have tricked temptation and turned it away;
But wait, my friend, for a different day!
Wait till you want to want to!



“Desire”

Page 99.

THERE IS, OH, SO MUCH.

[Pg 101]

There is oh, so much for a man to be
In nineteen hundred and now.
He may cover the world like the searching sea
In nineteen hundred and now.
He may be of the rush of the city's roar
And his song may sing where the condors soar,
Or may dip to the dark of Labrador,
In nineteen hundred and now.

There is oh, so much for a man to do
In nineteen hundred and now.
He may sort the suns of Andromeda through
In nineteen hundred and now.
Or he may strive, as a good man must,
For the wretch at his feet who licks the dust,
And never learn how to be even just
In nineteen hundred and now.

There is oh, so much for a man to learn
In nineteen hundred and now:
The least and the most he should trouble to earn
In nineteen hundred and now,
The message burned bright on the heavenly scroll,
The little he needs that his stomach be whole,
The vastness of vision to sate his soul,
In nineteen hundred and now.

There is oh, so much for a man to get
In nineteen hundred and now.
He may drench the earth in vicarious sweat
In nineteen hundred and now.
And his wealth may be but a lifelong itch,
While the lowliest digger within his ditch
May have gained the little to make him rich

[Pg 102]

In nineteen hundred and now.

There is oh, so much for a man to try
In nineteen hundred and now.
The sea is so deep and the hill so high
In nineteen hundred and now.
But sometimes we look at our little ball
Where the smallest is great and the greatest small
And wonder the why and the what of it all
In nineteen hundred and now.

There is oh, so much, so we work as we may
In nineteen hundred and now,
And loiter a little along the way
In nineteen hundred and now.
O, the honeybee works, but the honeybee clings
To the flowers of life and the honeybee sings!
Let us eat the sweet and forget the stings
In nineteen hundred and now!

HOW DID YOU DIE?

[Pg 103]

Did you tackle that trouble that came your way
With a resolute heart and cheerful?
Or hide your face from the light of day
With a craven soul and fearful?
Oh, a trouble's a ton, or a trouble's an ounce,
Or a trouble is what you make it,
And it isn't the fact that you're hurt that counts,
But only how did you take it?

You are beaten to earth? Well, well, what's that?
Come up with a smiling face.
It's nothing against you to fall down flat,
But to lie there—that's disgrace.
The harder you're thrown, why the higher you bounce;
Be proud of your blackened eye!
It isn't the fact that you're licked that counts,
It's how did you fight—and why?

And though you be done to the death, what then?
If you battled the best you could,
If you played your part in the world of men,
Why, the Critic will call it good.
Death comes with a crawl, or comes with a pounce,
And whether he's slow or spry,
It isn't the fact that you're dead that counts,
But only how did you die?



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