

DEAR PROFESSOR LEACOCK:

There is a pretty story which probably comes to us in more languages than most of us read about a captain who is ordered by his superiors to select a number of his men for some extraordinary and hazardous duty. Whereupon, having summoned his company or troop before him, according to the manner which the various times and places where the incident occurs may dictate, the young leader repeats the special orders, and, since the service is not in the regular line of duty, asks for individual volunteers. Immediately, as the old story goes, the entire body steps forward, each man convinced of his own best fitness to represent the others in the special hazard of the moment—a pretty gesture, indeed, but one which leaves the perplexed subaltern in the predicament of making his own choice.

Well, something like that has been our experience in summoning to the desk your score of volumes and selecting therefrom some one thousand words or more, to make this book. We hoped for volunteers, but found the entire contents ready to be chosen. It was not what to include, but what to turn down, that bothered us—and since you cannot possibly telescope a dozen and a half volumes into one, no matter how extensive that one is, the casualties turned out to be numerous. I thought this explanation of the contents of the book should be made to you, the author, by me, the subaltern who had the job of editorial selection. But I should also like to make the point for the sake of those unfortunates who always find in a prize collection of this sort that the judges have left their particular loving-cup just outside the trophy-room door, rendering the whole exhibition for them both null and void.