



MARK TWAIN IN A PARISIAN BARBER'S.

From earliest infancy it had been a cherished ambition of mine to be shaved some day in a palatial barber's shop in Paris. I wished to recline at full length in a cushioned invalid chair, with pictures about me, and sumptuous furniture: with frescoed walls and gilded arches above me, and vistas of Corinthian columns stretching far before me: with perfumes of Araby to intoxicate my senses, and the slumberous drone of distant noises to soothe me to sleep. At the end of an hour I would wake up regretfully and find my face as smooth and as soft as an infant's. Departing, I would lift my hands above that barber's head and say: "Heaven bless you, my son!"

So I searched high and low, for a matter of two hours, but never a barber's shop could I see. I saw only wig-making establishments, with shocks of dead and repulsive hair bound upon the heads of painted waxen brigands who stared out from glass boxes upon the passer-by, with their stony eyes, and scared him with the ghostly white of their countenances. I shunned these signs for a time, but finally I concluded that the wig-makers must of necessity be the barbers as well, since I could find no single legitimate representative of the fraternity. I entered and asked, and found that it was even so.

I said I wanted to be shaved. The barber inquired where my room was. I said, never mind where my room was, I wanted to be shaved—there, on the spot. There was a wild consultation, and afterwards a hurrying to and fro and a feverish gathering up of razors from obscure places and a ransacking for soap. Next they took me into a little mean, shabby back-room; they got an ordinary sitting-room chair and placed me in it, with my coat on. My old, old dream of bliss vanished into thin air!

I sat bolt upright, silent, sad, and solemn. One of the wig-making villains lathered my face for ten terrible minutes and finished by plastering a mass of suds into my mouth. I expelled the nasty stuff with a strong English expletive and said—"Foreigner, beware!" Then this outlaw strapped his razor on his boot, hovered over

me ominously for six fearful seconds, and then swooped down upon me like the genius of destruction. The first rake of his razor loosened the very hide from my face and lifted me out of the chair. I stormed and raved, and the other boys enjoyed it. Their beards are not strong and thick. Let us draw the curtain over this harrowing scene. Suffice it that I submitted, and went through with the cruel infliction of a shave by a French barber; tears of exquisite agony coursed down my cheeks, now and then, but I survived. Then the incipient assassin held a basin of water under my chin and slopped its contents over my face, and into my bosom, and down the back of my neck, with a mean pretence of washing away the soap and blood. He dried my features with a towel, and was going to comb my hair; but I asked to be excused. I said, with withering irony, that it was sufficient to be skinned—I declined to be scalped.

Humourist (boastfully)—"Why, sir, the patent medicine sellers put my jokes in their almanacs."

Cynicus—"I know it. They do that to make the people ill, so that they will buy their medicines."

"Madam, I understood your daughter had married a rich husband."

"My daughter, sir, married a rich man, I admit; but he is a very poor husband."

A well-known Glasgow milliner has a pet-parrot which hangs in the shop, and which she has trained to say, "Oh, how lovely!" every time a customer enters the shop, and "Oh, how pretty!" every time a customer tries a bonnet on. The astute modiste is reported to be doing a remarkably thriving business.

"Money," says a character in one of Byron's comedies, "won't purchase happiness."

"No," is the crushing reply, "but it will purchase an easy chair."

"Guard, I hope there won't be any collisions."

Railway Guard—"Oh, no fear, mum."

Old Lady—"I want you to be very careful. I've got two dozen eggs in this basket."