

## The Joker Club.

"The Pun is mightier than the Sword."

PHILISTIA DEFIANT.

(A Fragment of the Fiction of the Future.)

CHAPTER XLIX.

In which Aestheticism, assisted by a Teapot, is the Cause of a Division Between Friends.

Mrs. Vamp's High-Art boudoir in South Kensington was arranged and arrayed for the reception of a visitor. That visitor was Betsinda Grig—Mrs. Grig, of Clapham Park—"a dear creature," as Mrs. Vamp would often remark, "though quite too awfully utter Philistine."

Mrs. Vamp's boudoir was not a spacious one, but to the æsthetic soul the intense is the Un-conditioned. What Mrs. Vamp's boudoir wanted in compass she made up in crockery, of which she had a large collection, disposed in every unlikely and inappropriate position about the walls thereof. For the incongruous and the Utter are One! The pick and pride of this collection was for the moment a Teapot, an entirely too precious monstrosity in Blue, a Thing—say rather an Entity or Presence—to doat on by day and dream of by night.

Mrs. Vamp, who had long yearned to divert her friend Betsinda's errant feet from the pathways of Philistia into the pleasantries of Art's Elect, had to-day urgently summoned her to inspect this fætic Portent, together with a pair of Japanese idols, a couple of blue-moulded bronzes, an etching by Bristler, a drowsy crayon sketch of Simple Simeon, and a new *ballade* by Bowdewow. Mrs. Vamp adjusted her rust-tinted tresses against the verdigris-lined wall-paper, twined her scant skirts into right classic contortions, crooked her elbows, cranked her knees, threw the needful expression of hollow aghastness into her eyes, and had then finished her preparations for the reception and conversion of the pretty Philistine her friend even unto the setting forth of two spiritually edible lily-branches, intensely pulled.

Mrs. Vamp reached the Teapot from its dusk retirement, and placed it between the two lily-branches.

"Well, Sara," said Mrs. Grig, with some stoniness, "what is that?"

Mrs. Vamp's countenance expressing nothing more definite than a hungry agony of ecstatic absorption, Betsinda added—

"Is it one of the things they give away at cheap advertising tea warehouses to every purchaser of their superior Souchong at two and eight?"

"No, Betsinda, it is not!" was Mrs. Vamp's murmurous reproachful response.

"Well," said Mrs. Grig, with a short laugh, "it looks remarkably like it, only more cracked."

"Betsinda," Mrs. Vamp returned, with a glare of hollow yearning, "this is the finished fætic incarnation of the Utter. It is the symbol and quintessence, quite too consummately Too, of what that dear Matthew Arnold sweetly calls 'the eternal and unseizable Shadow, Beauty.' A Thing to love, to languish over, to clasp and covertly caress, to yearn intimately into, to classically attitudinise around, to gasp and rapturously groan at, to pat, to pet, to paint, to perorate about, to prostrate one's soul before, to hug in silence, to worship in company. In short, as the Supreme Symbol of the Supernal, the uttermost utterance of the unutterable Utter, it is a Thing to Live up to. Oh, my Betsinda, will you not essay to live up to it?"

During this touching address Mrs. Grig regarded the Teapot with coldly critical disfavor. "Well," said she, with drawlingly deliberate acerbity, "it's dreadfully cracked, and horribly

ugly, if that's what you mean by Unutterably Utter and all the rest of it. And, upon my word, Sara, I think you must indeed be living up—or down—to it, for you seem to get more decidedly cracked and more utterly ugly every day."

Mrs. Vamp went more deeply, darkly, un-beautifully sea-green, which is the Aesthetic's substitute for a flush. For a brief space she seemed to be agonisedly wandering in the spiritual Inane.

Then Mrs. Vamp resumed: "The Aesthetic, Betsinda—" "Bother the Aesthetic!" said Betsinda Grig.

Mrs. Vamp looked at her with amazement, incredulity, and indignation; when Mrs. Grig, folding her arms in a manner more suggestive of *Madame Angot* than of High Art, uttered these memorial and tremendous words,—"I don't believe there are any such people!"

*Mem. by Scholiast of the period.*—But there were! Unlike her celebrated antitype in circumstances somewhat similar, Mrs. Betsinda Grig had not hit upon the truth, the Aesthetic not unhappily, being, like the apocryphal Mrs. Harris, mere creatures of the imagination. It is to be supposed either that Mrs. Grig was driven into desperate denial by the iterated nr-gencies of Mrs. Vamp, or that she had been reading the *Daily Gasometer*, a sceptical and supertine journal of the time.—*Punch*.

DID YOU EVER?

Did you ever know a storekeeper asking for his account who had not a "bill to take up?"

Did you ever know a lodging-house landlady who would own to bugs?

Did you ever know a man who did not think he could poke the fire better than you could?

Did you ever know a tailor who was not prepared to sell you as good a suit for \$20 as the one you've got on at \$35?

Through all financial panics the puzzle fiend remains solvent.—*New York News*.

You can always tell a "duck" of a bonnet by the way it "sets."—*Yonkers Statesman*.

A servant girl in love presents a fair picture of domestic bliss.—*Quincy Modern Argo*.

Color-blind—the woman who can't tell when her husband has the "blues."—*McGregor News*.

Never put off till to-morrow going out to see the man you can see between the acts.—*Chic*.

A man's tongue often betrays him, but he can always count on his fingers.—*Yonkers Statesman*.

Is summer coming this year? No, not this year; another year. New Year.—*Louisville Journal*.

A little "tatty" is a dangerous thing. Therefore deal it out in large quantities.—*Old City Derrick*.

Singular that when we are feeling a little nervous we fly to a stimulant to nerve us.—*Boston Times*.

A western editor wrote an article on "Rh-barb," and the compositor made pi of it.—*McGregor News*.

The healthiest physician has to get sick once in a while to set the public a good example.—*Yonkers Statesman*.

A New York policeman has been promoted because he caught a miserable cold one day.—*Philadelphia News*.

A canal differs from most things in one respect—it is always filled before it is opened.—*Syracuse Evening Herald*.

An Illinois girl has bought an omnibus line. Bound to have a "bus" if she don't lay up a cent.—*Old City Derrick*.

Gate posts should be set out firmly. A great deal may hinge upon them, as your girls grow up.—*New Haven Register*.

"I'm just getting my hand in," said the irate feminine as she clutched her husband's hair.—*New York News*.

Cats give the sublimest evidence of faith. In the midnight serenades no doubting Thomas is ever found.—*Glasgow Times*.

Woman regards house-cleaning as a failure unless it gives her a worse back-ache than her neighbor has.—*Stillwater Lumberman*.

One of the greatest trials of a young lady's life is when she tries to get a half gallon foot into a quart shoe.—*Kit Adams, Modern Argo*.

"There's no place like home," repeated Mr. Henpeck, looking at a motto, and he heartily added, "I'm glad there isn't."—*Detroit Free Press*.

While a female fiddler was playing for a dance in Colorado her house took fire and burned to the ground. Like Nero, she fiddled while Rome was burning.—*Modern Argo*.

In Yonkers, N. Y., cucumbers are selling for 35 cents apiece. This exorbitant figure places cramp, colic, and kindred luxuries clear out of the reach of the poor.—*Quincy Modern Argo*.

We used to stand up in the school-room and declaim: "Ten mills make one cent." White-law Reid, of the New York *Tribune*, insists that "one Mill makes one fortune."—*Fulton Times*.

Letters are very devout. A great many of them go to Mass every day.—*Phila. News*. A large number of them go directly from Mass to Cin, and some straight to Rouen.—*Yavcoch Strauss*.

Jones has got an idea. He suspects that Newfoundland was so called because of the Newfoundland dogs that inhabit that country. Nobody but Jones would ever have made so startling a discovery.—*Boston Transcript*.

The last faint spark expires, and the tenacious individual who bravely kept his New Year resolutions has broken them with the same hammer that flattened out his thumb on the new parlor carpet.—*Rhinback Gazette*.

A minister preaches on the question "What is the Sabbath?" Around here Sabbath is the day when you lie in bed longer in the morning, and wrestle with your collar-button until it is too late to go to church.—*Lowell Citizen*.

Some one asked Bishop Peck at the recent Maine Methodist Episcopal conference, if a clergyman ought to run for Congress. The Bishop thoughtfully replied, "Yes, yes, when it is perfectly evident that he is fit for nothing else."

"Let us play we were married," said little Edith, "and I will bring dolly and say, 'See baby, papa.'" "Yes," replied Johnny, "and I will say, 'Don't bother me now, I want to look through the paper.'" Children have strange ideas of grown folks ways, now don't they?—*Boston Transcript*.

A Sunday-school teacher in Maine, who has grown eloquent in picturing to his pupils the beauties of Heaven, finally asked: "What kind of little boys go to Heaven?" A little four-year boy held up his hand. "Well, you may answer," said the teacher. "Dead ones!" the little fellow shouted.—*E.*

Some people can invent awful mean shams. When the Jenkins girl was whaling away at the piano and pestered the next door neighbor, the next door neighbor came out on the steps, listened to the noise a minute, looked up to the Jenkins girl's mother who was at the window, and said, "Got plumbers at work in your house, haven't you." No wonder those families don't speak now.—*Boston Post*.