

A Bit of Attic Philosophy

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This was not so easy. And for the third part, each was to name and describe his favorite heroine, giving a brief account of the incidents connected with her. Finally, the slips were signed, and handed in for examination.

While they were being examined there was a vocal Dickens' duet—"What are the Wild Waves Saying?" adapted from "Dombey and Son." This was rendered by two of the Philosophers, Herman Smith taking the part of "Paul", and Helen Blair that of "Florence."

After some delay, the winner was announced—none other than the young minister aforementioned. The prize was a copy of a "Tale of Two Cities."

After this there were games in which all who wished joined, while others looked on. There were Dickens charades and Dickens tableaux, and other games with all of which in some curious way Dickens was connected. And presently a curtain was drawn back in one corner revealing a Dickens Booth.

"Come and buy a souvenir of Dickens." "Your choice for ten cents." "None allowed to leave without a souvenir." So said the placards above. There were some really artistic book-marks, with a quotation and a pen-and-ink sketch of Dickens himself: Dickens book covers made in silk or linen: Dickens calendars, and Dickens paper-weights, and many other Dickens things.

At half-past ten supper was announced. This was to be served downstairs in the Robinson dining-room. "The fee for supper is ten cents, and there are ten items on the menu," explained Harvey.

At the foot of the attic stairs stood a girl philosopher with a little money-basket and a pile of daintily printed cards. There was nothing to do but pay the price, evidently!

The menu cards were headed: "A Dickens supper—'Piping Hot.'"

The first dish was Baked Potatoes. ("There was a boy by the extraordinary name of Mealy Potatoes.") Under Pickles came the inscription: "Try the cucumbers, Betsey Prig." Under Coffee: "Half-a-pint of ready-made coffee." Every dish had a quotation to match.

When supper was over, and before anyone had risen to leave, Harvey Lewis once more rose in his place at the end of the table to give a final word. After having thanked everyone for being present, he said that it had first been thought best by the members of the club to keep the object of the evening's entertainment secret, but they had now decided differently. Then briefly he mentioned what already all knew. The story of Herb Willcox's accident, and stated that the club had taken this way of raising enough money to buy a wheelchair. If those present had really given the money, the Philosophers themselves had given the supper, their time, and their talents. "And I am sure you will admit that it was a fair exchange, and therefore, no robbery," he concluded.

After the applause had subsided, he added: "There is now nothing more this evening save the going home. As your invitations hinted, there will be a small exit fee. This will be collected in the vestibule. Kindly go out slowly—one at a time, please."

"Almost as bad as going in to have one's fortune told," said one. But it was really quite simple after all. For Harvey merely asked: "How many of Dickens' books have you read?" One hurriedly counted up—then paid one cent for each of those one hadn't! Some few escaped free. The most had ten or twelve cents to pay.

When the weary Philosophers counted up their gains shortly after midnight, they joyfully discovered that the evening had netted them twenty-five dollars and seventy-eight cents. "More than enough to buy a splendid chair," said Rosalind, "one of the kind that Herb can go about in by himself."

And so it did. But how the Philosophers presented it to him, and how Herb, though always a cripple, still managed to finish his college course and afterwards became a successful lawyer, these are other stories and would take long in the telling.

But Herb always insisted that all his after success was due to the loving help and encouragement given him at a trying time in his life, "by a bunch of Attic Philosophers, whose philosophy happened to be a little deeper and a little more practical than the philosophy in books."

La Tristesse

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"There is a kind priest at Terminaison," said Maxine, hot and fierce, his blue eyes on her grey ones that were no longer cold.

"Felice laughed still. It seemed as if she could not stop laughing for very happiness, but her beautiful creamy cheeks showed no blush. 'As you like,' she answered; 'we will go to the cure if it pleases you. But if you go, I go also. I am as faithful as La Tristesse.'"

"Come, then," said Maxime. And that was all. They forgot the people who were watching them, awed and silent before this strange divine thing shown forth in their midst. Maxime never even looked back at his little cabin, and Felice never looked from his face. They moved away down the road together, hand in hand, into the great golden sunset, and Sorrow following them, leaping and frisking. That was absolutely all, and it was over in five minutes. But think of the wonder of it—a flower of Greece in her golden days, a vision of Italy, a dream of ancient France, there suddenly showing forth for all men to see.

"They went unmolested down the lonely road. Once Felice shook her slim arms above her head as if in a very ecstasy of joy. Once Sorrow jumped up to lick her hand.

"Yes, they went, and were hidden in the golden mist of the sunset, and were gone. Nor did I ever hear of them or see them again,—Maxime, with his blue eyes, his gentle hands, his long lazy body, his rags and tatters; Sorrow, black and faithful as her namesake; Felice, beautiful as the ever-youthful Artemis. Nor can it be said that I saw them go. For I was down on my face, crying so that the tears made little grey runnels in the dust in the road,—crying for the loss of the most beautiful thing I had ever known."

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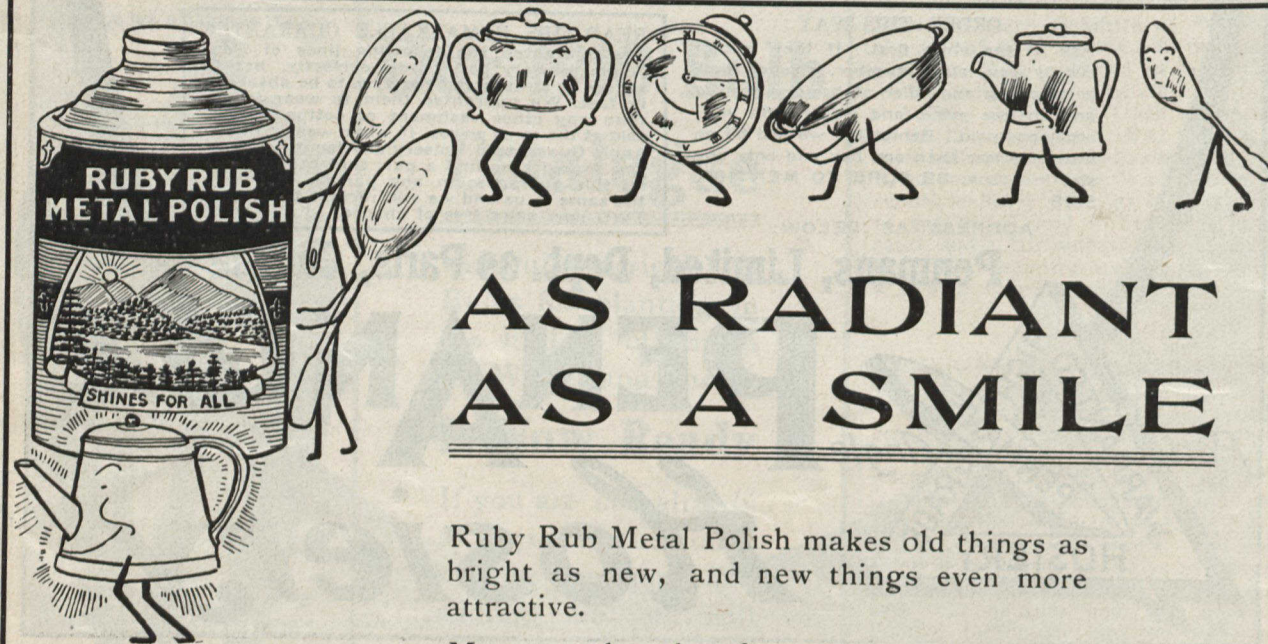
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