

of the wine and water as the act of a barbarian, if it had been his intention to drink the wine neat, for, in their moderation, they went as far as three and even four-water grog. They were too early in the world to be acquainted with the awful fate of Ben Backstay, the ghost of whose body, that a shark had bereft of its head, appeared to his comrades to give them the solemn warning:

"So, lest my fate you meet,  
Why, never mix your liquor, boys,  
But always take it neat."

Nothing but apt alliterations artful aid can justify the quoting of the Bible immediately after Ben Backstay. That sacred volume contains the command "Neither shall a garment mingled of linen and woollen come upon thee." Moses Maimonides states that the prohibition arose out of the fact that heathen priests wore such hybrid clothes, as, replacing the flax with cotton, are now-a-days common. He further adds that if a man saw an Israelite wear such a garment, it was lawful for him to fall upon the offender in public, even were he his spiritual master, and rend the profane attire from his person. The prohibition of such an apparently innocent mixture is a peculiar one. If it be true that the bagpipes flourished in ancient Babylonia, showing that the Gaul was not far off, its object may have been to draw a well-marked line between two peculiar peoples: for the old Description of the Realm of Scotland relates that the Highlanders and Islesmen "delight to wear marled cloths, especially such as have long stripes of sundry colours; they love chiefly purple and blew." Now "marled," according to Jamieson, means variagated, made of mixed colours, not necessarily of mixed materials, although the one might lead to the other. To what extent the modern Hebrew complies with the ancient law, one who is altogether unconnected with the clothing trade has little opportunity of judging.

In the process of preparing cloth for the market, it is supposed to undergo sponging in order to prevent subsequent shrinkage. A popular idea conveyed by the comic papers is that the garments sold by Hebrew clothing dealers receive their first shrinkage from a shower of rain when on the unhappy buyers' persons. What would be the effect of sponging a composite suit of linen and woollen can only be guessed by analogy. The superior shrinking power of the wool would pucker up the linen threads, till they stood out like quills on the fretful porcupine. Ancient Roman writers are of no use on this subject, because the ancient Roman did not wear linen at all. That excellent material only came into use when Egypt became better known, and infected the Romans with the spirit of luxury. A wicked sophist of the fourth century, after the seat of Empire had been transferred to Constantinople, characterized the Christian clergy as men not ashamed to go about in black coats and dirty linen. So great is the malice of the pagan! Had the brethren he slandered lived a thousand years or more later a celluloid stock and cuffs might have replaced the linen, and a sponge, with some cheap water, would have rendered the white part of their attire immaculate. Aulus Gellius, Valerius Maximus, and other ancients, refused to help the writer out of his dilemma between sponges and mixed clothes, but somehow he has got back to the sponge. The sponge takes away the injurious element in the mixture of collar and cuffs, on the one hand, and dirt on the other, as Philo's oiled sponge removed the objectionable water from the wine.

In ancient days the debit accounts of regular customers in taverns and general stores were kept on slates, as may still be the case in remote rural districts. When pay-day arrived these establishments became sponging houses without the aid of a bailiff, for the wetted sponge wiped out old scores to the mutual comfort of debtor and creditor. The artless school boy often has cause to rejoice in the lucky accident of a sponge fastened to his slate by a long string, when the school-marm, making a tour of inspection, approaches a desk over which three heads are grouped, their grinning faces jubilant over a frightful feminine caricature above the words: "portrate of ugli mis biles." In a moment the sponge is applied to the artist's mouth and the cartoon is among the things that are past equally with the three grins. It is very dangerous sport to mix up an innocent arithmetical vehicle with educational libels. Even in the process of more serious warfare the sponge has its uses. The sportsman whose war is waged against portions of the

animal kingdom, and the artillerist who trains his gun for higher game, must make more or less frequent applications of the sponge-rod to remove caking accretions and ensure the efficiency of their weapons. Serious accidents have resulted from negligence in its employment.

While sticking to Philo's text, we can only regard the sponge as a beneficent agent. The gratuitous absorber of the good things of another has the same name, but constitutes a totally different theme. The sage of Alexandria lets us know that mixture is a very common thing in this life and often leads to confusion. This is true. Unmingled happiness, invariable success, an unbroken high level of achievement, perfection of character, unwavering popularity, are human impossibilities. The wine of life is generally mixed with water, and that not of the most palatable, even bilge of many voyages. In commerce with our fellows, their memories become large slates on which heavy scores are chalked up against us. Even those from whom we naturally expect to receive some measure of justice, if not of respect, use their tongues, as the school-boy his slate-pencil, to draw caricatures of us on the tablets of their neighbours' minds. Often we ourselves, and the nature of the work we have to do, carry fouling as a necessary result. The shots we fire in earnest or in sport, though the latter be but blank-cartridge, sooner or later will blacken and choke the weapon. Cynics have been made in this way and misanthropes, to say nothing of people of cutting speech and a bad tongue. Such acquire an evil reputation, and their language, spoken or written, happily loses all weight.

Blessed is the beneficent human sponge! He sees that the world has dashed cold water on his friend's wine-cup, and, like Philo, he sets himself to work to drain it off. An experienced, kindly sponge can take off the dashings of a year in a few minutes, and enable the cup-bearer to enjoy the full, rich flavour of life's vintage. A mischievous fellow's tongue tries to draw a caricature of youth on his mind, but he wipes the thing off with a single rub, and advises Mr. Mischief to do the same. Others present their heart slates full of old scores to him. He refuses to copy them, and does his best to erase their false and ugly figures. Should the figures even be true, they are yet none of his affair; and, if they have been in any way part of his life account with you, he is willing still to let by-gones be by-gones. Is he a public man whose business it is to fight at times! He still retains the beneficent sponginess of his nature. After every encounter he scours his barrel clean and bright, in readiness for a friendly, peaceful parade and an inspection by the highest and most exacting authority. The quality of the human eraser is divine, of the very essence of divinity, and that is probably why he is so rare a product among humanity, that will have every nice offence to bear its comment. His presence is refreshing to the soul as tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep. When such as he are multiplied, the great motive of mankind for fighting will have been taken away, and a universal *tabula rasa* prepared for the writing of the mysterious and glorious Third Heaven.

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"The Poets of the Bodley Head:" Norman Gale.

"MUCH depends," writes Lamb, "on *when* and *where* you read a book," and those who love books say "Amen" to the statement. We read a comic author, while we wait in the doctor's ante-room, and afterwards the jester's name only means to us the sick thrill we felt as the door into the consulting room opened and shut, from time to time, and our turn came always nearer. We take up a favourite poet the day before the lists are published, and till old age, his lines will tell back to us again the ambitions, the hopes, and the deadly fears that pulsed through us that day.

The right circumstances and the perfect book very seldom meet.

"Never the day and the hour  
And the loved one altogether!"

But most of us carry in our minds visions of ideal books for certain ideal days, and that is why, while the tender green is showing against the blue sky, and the flowers are wandering back to earth, we write of Norman Gale and beg all who do not know his "Country Muse" to get the book now and learn to love it in the season that suits it best.