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WAIFS OF WISDOM LEFT ON GREAT MEN'S DOORSTEPS

(By Dorothea Cahlen in New York Evening Post)

Where do the anonymous familiar quotations come from?

We all know some of them. They appear on Christmas gift cards and calendars, usually unsigned, or with Anon appended. We seldom question their origin; we assume that they were written by Emerson or Shakespeare or Elbert Hubbard or somebody, and let the matter drop. It is well that we do not worry about the authorship, for in most cases it is, to say the least, elusive.

Take Dulcy's remark about charitable judgments. She twisted the lines somewhat, but we easily recognize an old familiar:

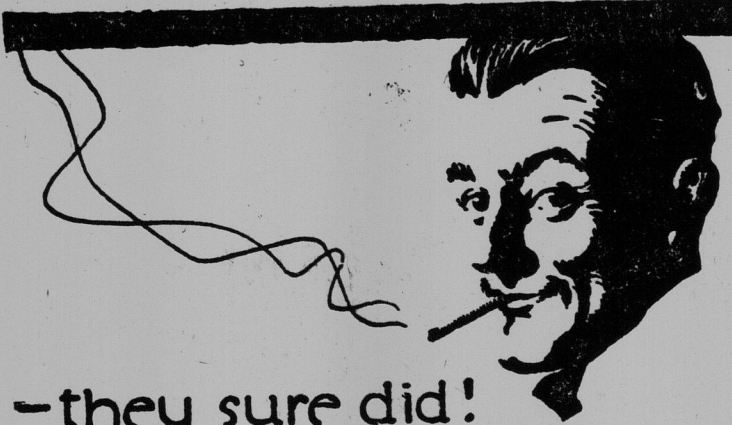
There's so much bad in the best of us And so much good in the worst of us That it ill behooves any of us To find fault with the rest of us.

Some say Stevenson wrote it. But it is not to be found in Stevenson's published works. Others say Gov. Hoch of Kansas was the author. But Gov. Hoch protests. In reply to a publisher who wrote to verify the authorship, he says:

I regret to say that I am not the author of the lines of which you refer, though I have been widely given credit for them.

(Signed) HOCH. So that clears Gov. Hoch, but sheds no light on the source. None of those public-spirited people who contribute to question-and-answer columns has yet been able to trace it, or to explain why this Kansas Governor should be credited with it.

The "Better Mouse Trap." The "Mouse Trap" quotation is another wait. In the last ten years its parentage has been debated with spirit by several claimants, and as yet no



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Solomon has arisen. The quotation in its commonest form runs thus: "If a man write a better book, preach a better sermon, or take a better mouse trap than his neighbor, though he build his house in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door."

It has been frequently credited to Emerson. Yet his publishers and his son testify that it does not occur in his works. His editors, however, put in a vigorous claim for his authorship, basing it on the fact that the idea is expressed in other words, in several essays. In writing of Thoreau, they point out, he said: "If the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts and there abide, the huge world will come 'round to him.' They quote, further, the paragraph which expresses the exact idea in different symbols: "If a man has good corn, or wood, or boards, or pigs to sell, or can make better chairs or knives, crucibles or church organs than anybody else, you will find a broad, hard-beaten road to his house, though it be in the woods."

A striking resemblance—but whence the mouse trap? The lethal implement evades also those who would prove that Dr. John R. Paxton of the West Presbyterian Church, New York City, was the man who gave the idea its present form. That he preached a sermon with the text "It could not be hid" is certain, and that the main idea of the sermon was identical with the "Mouse trap"

quotation is proved by printed extracts of his sermon published in a religious magazine of the time. But an proof exists that he mentioned mouse traps. Claimed for Fra Elbertus.

East Aurora, home of Roycrofters and their late chief Elbert Hubbard, came into the controversy, which flourished in the newspapers a few years ago. The East Auroran contribution is the simple statement:

"Elbert Hubbard is the author." Hubbard did write a brief essay proving the fallacy of the mouse trap doctrine. A friend of his has explained the apparent contradiction between his essay and the Roycrofters' statement thus:

"You see, he borrowed so much that he forgot which ideas he borrowed and which he originated. He no doubt forgot he had written this, just as he forgot that he had borrowed others. The facts are that he printed it, and no proof exists that it was ever printed before."

The Literary Digest's lexicographer invited the Roycrofters to state where

and where Elbert Hubbard printed it. Records show no response to the invitation. It seems unlikely that after years of anonymity this stray child will find its parent.

Another bit of unknown parentage is this: "I shall pass through this world but once. If there is any kindness or any good thing I can do for my fellow beings let me do it now, for I shall not come this way again."

This, too, has been credited to Emerson. Others credited with it are Carlyle, Addison, and Marcus Aurelius. Frequently it has been printed with the name of Stephen Grellet, an American Quaker. In none of the works of any of these men has the passage ever been found.

"Who Knows Not, Etc." Some of the fatherless aphorisms are recited when they appear in the new environment. Most high school monthlies publish, some time in the life of a school generation, the epigram about the relative knowledge of the four classes: The Freshman knows not and knows not that he knows not; The Sophomore knows not and knows not that he knows not; etc.

The attribution of authorship of this piece of wisdom scatters among the writers of antiquity. Livy, Hesiod, Cicero and the Arabs have all been given credit at different times for the original, which begins:

He who knows not and knows not that he knows not is the most foolish of men. The question of the origin of anonymous aphorisms can only be answered with questions. Are they "winger words," arrows shot from the bow of an eloquent speaker and straightway forgotten by the archer, but lodged in the retentive mind of some hearer, to be carried far away, repeated, and finally printed? Are they true quotations which have strayed so far away from their original text that they just got lost? Or are they, perhaps, the unsigned work of clever advertising copy writers and publishers of gift cards—or the prototypes of such?

Before we can answer any of these questions, the holiday crop of cards and calendars will be harvested. I wonder who will be the author of the mouse trap quotation this year.

YOUNG KOREA.

Any time after a Korean boy is seven he may be married, and he is seldom still unmarried at twelve or fourteen. At that time he winds his pigtail—if he still wears one in these crop-headed days—into a top-knot and swagsers a bit in the presence of the unbetrotted. Formerly, if a Korean boy had any schooling at all, he squatted all day on the school-room floor, learning to read and write, but not to speak Chinese, and he would have thought himself well educated if he acquired a vague knowledge of the maxims of Confucius. He often felt content to carry a "big" or to drive a pack-pony or even to act as nurse to the baby while his older brother wrestled with the Chinese classics. Under the new regime the school hours are long and strenuous, but the boys pursue a Japanese course of study in Japanese. They probably would vote their games more interesting than any "curriculum whatsoever." Their national sport is stone-fighting, which they carry on during the first fifteen days of the New

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