

AT THE MESS TABLE.

At the mess table brooded silence,
And the fire flickered low,
And the guests seemed thinking sadly
Of home and long ago;
And the General bade the Captain,
Bearded and bronzed and hale,
"Come, give us one of your stories,"
And the Captain told this tale:

"THE PHANTOM OF THE PECOS."

"It was a sultry summer, some twenty years ago,
When the emigrant train left Texas, bound for New Mexico.

Strong men and gentle women threescore were in the band,
And high as many children left wee foot-prints in the sand.

"Northward they travelled slowly, and bitter was the road.

The sun, a ball of fire, in the brazen heaven glowed;
The sands were like red ploughshares beneath a martyr's feet;

And the thorny spikes of cactus drooped, shrivelled in the heat.

"There was no wind till evening, and then its feverish breath

Like that was of the angel that bears the brand of death;

And the moon, a fiery crescent, swooned in the sky afar.

As it had been the reddened blade of his baleful scimitar.

"And as they travelled northward, within its sandy bed

The river shrank away from them, as if with guilty dread.

And narrower grew the water, and shallower, until

The river had dwindled to a creek, the creek to a muddy rill.

"Then here and there a languid pool in those accursed lands,

And then the river-bed was naught but rocks and arid sands.

And the little water that they found by digging long and deep

Was bitter as that on sea-side rocks when the tide is at the neap.

"And as into the flinty earth the treacherous river sank

Fewer the following footprints were upon its burning bank;

Twenty beheld the red sun rise, fifteen flagged faint at noon,

And only ten went into camp under the lurid moon.

"And twice again the red moon sank, twice rose the copper sun.

And the ten that staggered on were eight, were five, were three, were one.

One man was left of the emigrant train that two short weeks ago

Had left the Texan valley bound for New Mexico.

"And as he tottered northward across the endless sands,

His blood-shot eyes still shading with thin and blistered hands,

Sudden from out the desert, up to the cloudless skies,

A vast and awful figure the traveller saw arise.

"It was the watery mirage. There shimmer to his view

Fleecy cascades down-falling and lakes of deepest blue;

But though he strains to reach them, and desperate staggers on,

Ever a step beyond him the vision is withdrawn.

"Ever before him hovers, and seems to bar the way,

The Phantom of the Pecos, a cloud of dusty gray;

Its mocking eyes glare on him, and through the fervid air

Its voice of doom makes answer to his question of despair.

"The dying wanderer listens the Phantom speak his name,

And moves his cracking lips in vain one piteous prayer to frame;

And the awful vision mutters on the salt sand as he sinks,

"Don't you think that it's a long time—a long time between drinks?"

The General started from his chair

As he had felt a wound.

"Captain," he said, "you're right, I swear—

Send the decanter round."

—G. T. LANIGAN, in *Harper's*, for February.

ETHELRED THE UNREADY.

BY NED P. MAH.

I love the night. I seem just to begin to live when the lamps are lighted. I hate early rising. I never felt the benefit of it, I never saw the good of it. To get up before the world was ready to receive me, before that useful servant of all work, the sun, had quenched the stars that shone with pallid flame, like the wax ends in a chandelier at dawn, before he had swept the cobwebs of night mist from the walls of hills and ceiling of the sky, or dried the dew with which the floor of the world had been liberally sprinkled as an antidote against dust, to me is misery.

What an unsociable meal breakfast is! People come straggling to table one by one. Isn't there something melancholy in the broken egg-shells, and rims of toast, and empty cups, and pushed-aside plates? The man who shall tell me that he thoroughly enjoys breakfast, that he feels genial, or merry, or witty at that repast is to me an arrant humbug.

We can all of us, no doubt, remember happy days, probably more, miserable ones, but are not our most cherished memories connected with the evening and the night? When dinner has imparted a sense of comfort and satisfaction to our being, when wine has brightened our intellect, then first we enter on the true fruition of our existence, then we cast away till the morrow the care and worry and turmoil of the day, and surrender ourselves to society, to pleasure, or to romance.

Who does not love to wander at night through the moon-lit streets of some quaint old city, or to revisit in that soft pale light the scenes of his

earlier life. Are they not invested with tenderest memories, with sweeter melancholies, with purer joys, with loftier lessons, than when viewed in the broad glare of day?

So thought Paul Chester as he sauntered, cigar in mouth, down the steps of the Hotel Cimbria, and through the crooked, gable-shadowed streets of the queer old town of Z—. He had just arrived by the night-mail, which was itself an innovation; there had been no railway here when he had known the place, no other public conveyance than the unwieldy, sluggish diligence that clattered nightly up to the hotel door at a town pace of five miles an hour, but with more fuss, and cracking of whips, and oburgations, and hurrying of hotel waiters, and universal scurrying and pushing, and anxious faces and general excitement, than the arrival of a tidal train makes now-a-days at Dover or London.

Paul wondered whether, if it were day, he should see the old familiar faces at the old familiar windows. The twenty years that had passed since he last had paced the uneven paving stones of the old town seemed but as yesterday, yet in those twenty years people must have died, and been born, and married and been given in marriage. The fair-haired Frauleins with whom he had danced and flirted twenty years syne, were doubtless portly matrons now, and the laughing children whose heads he had patted, had taken their sisters' places as belles and reigning beauties. Only he did not realize all this, and as he passed the corner window from which lovely Flora Guldenberg had been wont to beam upon him in the olden time, he mechanically took off his hat in rehearsal of the morrow's low salute. As he strolled on along the Nordenstrasse the old memories came thick upon him. Here was the Dier Konigen whence the echoes of the sweet German songs seemed once again to steal on his ear. The club, where he had tasted to the full the simple pleasures of the kindly German folk, where he had played billiards, and sixty-six, and imbibed beer, and grog and Burgundy and champagne; where he had danced with Flora, and Franziska, and Laura, and last, and least, and charmingest of all, with little Sottchen Rosenkranz—where he had played Kegel with a count, a doctor, a horse-dealer, a tailor, and a riding-master at one and the same time. He passed the Wilhelm's Platz, and saw with loving eyes the spot where the happiest days of his life-time had been passed. The well-known windows seemed to glimmer at him with subdued flashes of recognition. He passed the harbour, where bluff bowed galliots, apple-laden, lay peacefully moored, as of yore, the garments of the crews fluttering, from lines stretched across the rigging, lazily in the soft night wind. He strolled on through the arsenal gardens, where the subtle incense of the sleeping flowers stole upon his senses; under huge trees, that made dark caverns with their clustering foliage, through the interstices of which the struggling moonbeams threw weird streaks and gushes of light upon the sandy path. On till he reached the little rustic bridge across the creek that led down to the baths. Here he paused and leant upon the rail and gazed down upon his own reflection in the water. Presently he became sensible that he was not alone. Some other lover of the lonely night shared with him the solitude, like him puffed the fragrant weed, like him was lost in midnight meditation.

"A beautiful night," was Paul's original remark to this mysterious being. The mysterious being turned its face toward Paul with a gesture of assent.

The moon, emerging from a cloud, shone out in all the fullness of its pallid glare. The eyes of both became rivetted.

"What! Red!"

"Why, Paul!"

And a hearty hand grasp followed. The only reason they did not embrace was that they were both Englishmen, and continued travel had not eradicated their native phlegm.

"Who'd have thought of seeing you!"

"What the deuce are you doing here, and what brought you to this out-of-the-way hole?"

"What brought me here is a long story.

What I am doing here is a short one," rejoined Tom Hinton, better known to his familiars as Red.

"If you will come to the hotel I will tell you both; or do you prefer to have the relation *al fresco*?"

"It's too hot to go in-doors. Let us have a jaw here."

"All right; but first I will rout out the barmaid and get something cool to moisten what may prove a dry narrative."

Advancing to a small rustic building he tapped at the window. Presently it opened, and a damsel with black hair, with a crink in it, with black eyes—with a devil in them, with brawny arms—with dimples in them, appeared at the orifice.

"Hand us out a cooler and a couple of bottles of La Rose," he entreated; and appropriating two chairs from the pile of those articles beneath the pent house, the two friends sat down upon the planking of the little wharf, and while the lap, lap, lapping of the stream against the bows of the pleasure boats moored at their feet beat its constant refrain, Tom began:

"What I am doing here is trying to decide whether I shall accept the traffic management of the Holtzenburg line which has been offered me. I have been shilly shallying about it because it will tie me down to a residence in this dull hole, and doubtless, I have already lost my chance by the delay. It is but one more instance in which I have played the rôle of Ethelred the Unready. You have heard, of course, how I

gained that soubriquet! No! Well, it dates back to my childhood almost, to my school boy days at least. Once during the holidays a crowd of us juveniles were having a jollification and shindig at home when forfeits were introduced and I and a certain Polly something or other were turned out of the room to perform some penance or other which, divested of all metaphor, in plain English meant kissing. I shilly shalled as usual and had just mustered up sufficient resolution when the impatient Polly broke from me and rushed back *coram populo* exclaiming, with a gesture of supreme contempt, that brought a hot flush to my cheeks, 'He didn't do it!' 'Ethelred the Unready,' quavered a youngster proud to show his wit and knowledge of English history at the same time.

There was a universal titter, and the nickname, thus bestowed, was of such obvious applicability that it was universally adopted, and abbreviated into Red has stuck to me ever since. I could multiply, till I wearied you, the chances in life I have thrown away through sheer want of decision. The cause of my being here at this moment was one of these. You remember pretty, gentle, winning Patty Riverton? Well, I believe that girl really liked me though I could never believe it, and never understood why, though I got awfully spooney on her. You see I was so different from her, so fond of hunting and shooting, and didn't go in for poetry and music and dancing like some of the fellows she had round her did. Anyway she gave me plenty of chances, and seemed to try to make me understand I might win her if I choose. At last things came to a crisis. One day she had been more than usually amiable all day, and after dinner she followed me into the library where I had gone with a new number of the *Field* in my hand, just come down from town. It was an off night and there was nobody at the house.

"Will you give me the paper knife, please?" I asked; it was near her hand on the table. She looked round beaming, radiant, blushing, 'I will give you anything you ask, Tom,' she said.

Then she bent over some engravings at the table but I could see that her neck and the little piece of cheek not hidden by her curls, were scarlet.

I slowly cut my paper, with a whirl of thoughts rushing through my brain, with a host of pretty speeches sticking in my throat. Presently she shut the book with a bang. 'Are you going? Isn't your book interesting?' I asked. 'No, it's stupid. As stupid as—you,' and with a sweeping mock curtsy she vanished through the French windows. I didn't see her any more that night. Next day a crowd of guests arrived, among them Harry Dangerfield, with those odious Dundreary whiskers. She danced with him all that night and was as frigid as you please to me. My chance was gone. She has married Dangerfield since. I wondered about the Continent till funds got low and—here I am. I am awfully miserable here. I scarcely know a soul and have not your facility for making friends. Tell me, what is the secret of your popularity?"

"I was not always popular," said Paul. "At one time I had hardly one of my acquaintances intimate enough to be called a friend. But one day I got the blues, and I said we must change all this. I did violence to my nature. I expunged the words 'No, thank you' from my vocabulary. I went in for everything that offered, accepted every invitation, joined every club, attended every tea fight, ball and party. What was the result? After three years of remorseless dissipation, my feet became so weary of the social treadmill, that I longed for a release. I had no zest, no pleasure, and I tell you honestly that if I could have known at an time when I laid my weary head upon its pillow that my sleep that night would be the sleep that knows no waking, I would have closed my eyes with a real sense of relief. At last this state of things became unbearable and I rushed away to seek for peace and solitude and rest. That is why I am here."

The two friends, who had met so strangely, parted presently as the first streak of dawn warned them of the coming day. Tom went up to his pleasant little room in the Bellevue which looked out towards the sea. Paul retraced his steps through the quiet gardens to the quaint old town.

Paul's influence secured his friend the position for which he was in treaty, and prevented his indecision of character from hesitating to accept it.

"Constant occupation is the best thing to reconcile you to existence," said he, "and here, though your duties will be by no means arduous they will increase your happiness, and put you in funds till your finances recover themselves, when you can sell out."

Paul stopped a week in Z— when a restless fit came on again and he wandered away southwards.

"Don't be unready any more, Tom," was his parting advice to his friend. "Don't repress your emotions. Repressed emotion is the cause of nearly all the misery in the world. Act upon impulse, and you will be a great deal happier."

"Rot!" muttered Tom to himself. "How am I to act upon impulse when I never have any? That would be equivalent to Paul's plan—doing violence to my nature." But he treasured his friend's words nevertheless.

There were races—heaven save the mark! at Z— every spring. Let us rather translate the native word and call it modestly a "horse running." Next year Tom was there on the grand stand. Immediately before him was a little party of English people. Under the brown straw hat of one of them he discovered

the gentle winning face of the erstwhile Patty Riverton. Dangerfield was dead and the doctors had prescribed change and constant amusement of not too exciting a nature for the young widow. That accounted for her being here, in the charge of friends, out of the beaten track of tourists.

There is no privacy like that of a crowd—so it proved now. Little did the excited spectators wot, while they gazed intently upon the equine contest, of the two lovers in the quiet corner.

"Well done, White Jacket," they shouted.

"Go it, Green—Blue's ahead. Well done, Red—Red and Blue—Blue's ahead! Well done, Blue! Blue has it! Red and Blue neck and neck. Blue, Red,—Red, Blue. Red's won!"

Red had won. Not unready this time, he had poured out the words he had meant to say years ago, to Patty's not unwilling ear, and they had sealed the bargain with a kiss.

Tom had done violence to his nature. He had permitted himself no hesitation. For once in his life he was up to time.

They were married, he and Patty, in the quaint old red church, with the quaint old square tower, and the queer pagoda-like steeple.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF IRVING.

Irving's is a singularly impressive face. He is one of those men who would arrest your attention and excite inquiry wherever you might meet him. The other day, at the house of Mr. William Winter, on Staten Island, New York, I saw a portrait of Edwin Booth which reminded me much of Irving. Great actors have a physiognomy of their own, to be sure, but the face of Booth in the picture had something in the eyes and expression of the mouth so much like Irving, that at first sight it might have been taken for the English actor's portrait. I heard some gossip in New York about the two artists, which was unjust to Irving. It suggested rivalry and jealousy of Booth on his part. "Here is a programme showing *Hamlet* underlined for the Lyceum during October and November! That is the first note of the Englishman's opposition." The truth is, *Hamlet* was underlined for the usual Lyceum morning performances before Mr. Booth's opening part was announced. When the Princess's manifesto came out Irving at once withdrew the announcement of *Hamlet*, leaving the field clear and open to the stranger, in whose success Irving has shown real and practical pleasure. He was one of the first leading artists of London to call upon and congratulate him. He made Mr. Booth a characteristic present of an interesting picture illustrating the play of *Richelieu*, and shortly afterward arranged for his appearance at the Lyceum to alternate with himself the two leading parts in *Othello*.

Genius is rarely without a sense of humor. Mr. Irving has a broad appreciation of fun, though his own humour is subtle and deep down. This is never better shown than in his Richard III. and Louis XI. It now and then appears in his conversation; and when he has an anecdote to tell, he seems to develop the finer and more delicate motives of the action of the narrative, as if he were dramatising it, as he went along.

A notable person in appearance, I said just now. Let me sketch the famous actor as we leave his rooms together. A tall, spare figure, in a dark overcoat and grayish trousers, black neckerchief carelessly tied, a tall hat, rather broad at the brim. His hair is black and bushy, with a wave in it on the verge of curl, and suggestions of gray at the temples and over the ears. It is a pale, somewhat ascetic face, with bushy eyebrows, dark, dreamy eyes, a nose that indicates gentleness rather than strength, a thin upper lip, a mouth opposed to all ideas of sensuousness, but nervous and sensitive, a strong jaw and chin, and a head inclined to droop a little, as is often the case with men of a studious habit. There is great individuality in the whole figure, and in the face a rare mobility which photography fails to catch in all the efforts I have yet seen of English artists. Though the popular idea is rather to associate tragedy with the face and manner of Irving, there is nothing sadder than his smile. It lights up all his countenance, and reveals his soul in his eyes; but it is like the sunshine that bursts for a moment from a cloud, and disappears to leave the landscape again in shadows, flecked here and there with fleet reminiscences of the sun.—JOSEPH HATTON, in *Harper's*.

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