

**THE HERB-MOON: A
FANTASIA;
PP. 1-287**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649601493

The Herb-Moon: A Fantasia; pp. 1-287 by John Oliver Hobbes

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Cover @ 2017

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JOHN OLIVER HOBBS

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THE HERB-MOON

A FANTASIA

BY

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AUTHOR OF

SOME EMOTIONS AND A MORAL

A STUDY IN TEMPTATIONS

THE SINNER'S COMEDY

A BUNDLE OF LIFE



New York and London

FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY

PUBLISHERS

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THE HERB-MOON

A Fantasia.



CHAPTER I.

Which Explains a Situation.

MISS CRECY, the rich brewer's only daughter, threatened to walk if her ponies did not trot faster.

"Whip the little creatures," she told her coachman, "but do not hurt them!"

They ambled through long winding roads hedged with white-thorn and black-thorn; past wheat-fields, bean-fields, fields of barley; past wide stretches of meadow enameled with buttercups and clover; past farmyards and little houses facing lawns; past inns and churches and the cemetery where *sheep's-parsley*—with

its long green stems and white delicate flowers—waved over the graves, almost as high as the headstones. There were windmills and many small cottages to be seen either near or in the distance; and lanes, marked out by tall poplars or young elms, ash and maple. Overhead the sun shone out with a sleepy brilliance, and gray clouds, like a swarm of fantastic pigeons, roamed, driven by the breeze, across the sky.

As the phaeton turned a sudden corner, Miss Crecy saw, some few yards ahead, a young man, walking. He was tall, with fine square shoulders and a resolute face.

“Can I give you a lift, Mr. Robsart?” said the lady, when she reached him.

“Thanks,” he replied, and stepped in beside her.

Robsart was a clerk in a cotton factory, and hoped, in time, to occupy the post of overseer, formerly held by his father, now dead. The situation demanded good

sense, patience, honesty, and every long virtue; it belonged to that graceless order of responsibilities where the least mistake causes immense confusion, and the most scrupulous attention is accepted as a matter of course. Neither enthusiasm nor vanity had the smallest play in Robsart's life: it was all a question of duty and conscience and self-respect. Sometimes he resented its dullness and read about kings. His own history, however, had not been uneventful. At the time of his birth, his father was senior partner in the honorable firm—first established in 1700—of Robsart & Son, cotton spinners. The lad was educated in the belief that he would, if he lived, inherit the business and advance a step further than his ancestors by representing his native town in the House of Commons. He was sent to Eton, and proceeded to Cambridge, where, at the end of his first year, he was summoned to Ottley, to find his father a bankrupt,

their home under the hammer, and the factory sold to a Mr. Saxe, of Nottingham. It was a deadening blow. Old Robsart was an easy-tempered body, who, so long as he had a horse, good wine and the best tobacco, asked little of any one. He had married the daughter of a famous Methodist, and having killed her—not by cruelty but by his want of religion (she had endeavored to make him a Christian, and perished from the humiliation of her defeat)—he took for his second wife a widow with a pinched waist and easy morals, who, because she did not dye her hair, was called no harder name than injudicious for scattering money as if it were sawdust and drinking champagne by the pint. Robsart the son was always courteous to this lady—with Cromwell, "*he liked not war on women*"—but he chafed in secret to think that such a being could please the man his mother had loved and prayed for.

The disgrace of the bankruptcy tried his proud spirit so far that he could only live by reminding himself that he might in time and by working pay every creditor to the full and restore the family's injured integrity. The older Robsart, with that distressing meekness which fills up the loss of self-respect, accepted the position of a salaried servant in the factory established by his forefathers. All forced virtue is degrading in its effect. Robsart senior withered away in his attempt to act divine characteristics with a heart convulsed by every human instinct of jealousy and resentment. His native good-humor failed him after the novelty of a subordinate post became merged in mere routine. To be reprimanded for unpunctuality—(he liked to rise at noon), to make way for Mr. Saxe, to be forbidden his cigar during office hours—these were the restrictions which stopped his breath. He could meet his unpaid butcher, but