

**A FABLE FOR CRITICS; OR, BETTER. A GLANCE
AT A FEW OF OUR LITERARY PROGENIES
(MRS. MALAPROP'S WORD) FROM THE TUB
OF DIOGENES; A VOCAL AND MUSICAL
MEDLEY. THAT IS, A SERIES
OF JOKES BY A WONDERFUL QUIZ. SET 4TH
IN OCTOBER 21, 1948**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9781760574581

A fable for critics; or, better. A glance at a few of our literary progenies (Mrs. Malaprop's word) from the tub of Diogenes; a vocal and musical medley. That is, a series of jokes by a wonderful quiz. Set 4th in October 21, 1948 by Various .

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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It being the commonest mode of procedure, I premise a few candid remarks

TO THE READER :

This trifle, begun to please only myself and my own private fancy, was laid on the shelf. But some friends, who had seen it, induced me, by dint of saying they liked it, to put it in print. That is, having come to that very conclusion, I consulted them when it could make no confusion. For, (though in the gentlest of ways,) they had hinted it was scarce worth the while, I should doubtless have printed it.

I began it, intending a Fable, a frail, slender thing, rhyme-winged, with a sting in its tail. But, by addings and alterings not previously planned,—digressions chance-hatched, like birds' eggs in the sand,—and dawdlings to suit every whimsy's demand, (always freeing the bird which I held in my hand, for the two perched, perhaps out of reach, in the tree,)—it grew by degrees to the size which you see. I was like the old woman that carried the calf, and my neighbors, like hers,

no doubt, wonder and laugh, and when, my strained arms with their grown burthen full, I call it my Fable, they call it a bull.

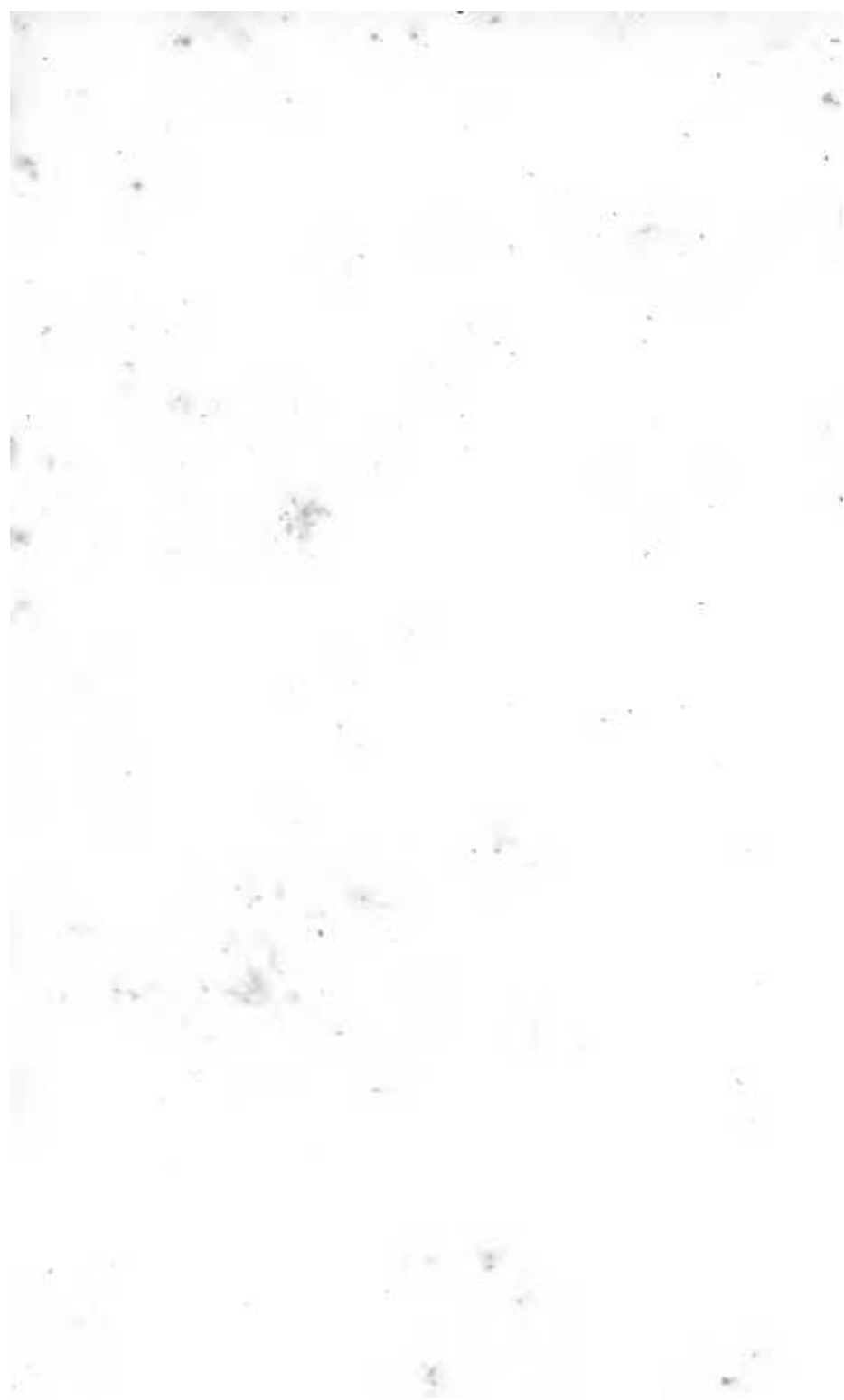
Having scrawled at full gallop (as far as that goes) in a style that is neither good verse nor bad prose, and being a person whom nobody knows, some people will say I am rather more free with my readers than it is becoming to be, that I seem to expect them to wait on my leisure in following wherever I wander at pleasure, that, in short, I take more than a young author's lawful ease, and laugh in a queer way so like Mephistophcles, that the public will doubt, as they grope through my rhythm, if in truth I am making fun *at* them or *with* them.

So the excellent Public is hereby assured that the sale of my book is already secured. For there is not a poet throughout the whole land, but will purchase a copy or two out of hand, in the fond expectation of being amused in it, by seeing his betters cut-up and abused in it. Now, I find, by a pretty exact calculation, there are something like ten thousand bards in the nation, of that special variety whom the Review and Magazine critics call *lofty* and *true*, and about thirty thousand (*this* tribe is increasing) of the kinds who are termed *full of promise* and *pleasing*. The Public will see by a glance at this schedule, that they cannot expect me to be over-sedulous about

courting *them*, since it seems I have got enough fuel made sure of for boiling my pot.

As for such of our poets as find not their names mentioned once in my pages, with praises or blames, let them SEND IN THEIR CARDS, without further DELAY, to my friend G. P. PUTNAM, Esquire, in Broadway, where a LIST will be kept with the strictest regard to the day and the hour of receiving the card. Then, taking them up as I chance to have time, (that is, if their names can be twisted in rhyme,) I will honestly give each his PROPER POSITION, at the rate of ONE AUTHOR to each NEW EDITION. Thus a PREMIUM is offered sufficiently HIGH (as the magazines say when they tell their best lie) to induce bards to CLUB their resources and buy the balance of every edition, until they have all of them fairly been run through the mill.

One word to such readers (judicious and wise) as read books with something behind the mere eyes, of whom in the country, perhaps, there are two, including myself, gentle reader, and you. All the characters sketched in this slight *jeu d'esprit*, though, it may be, they seem, here and there, rather free, and drawn from a Mephistophelian stand-point, are meant to be faithful, and that is the grand point, and none but an owl would feel sore at a rub from a jester who tells you, without any subterfuge, that he sits in Diogenes' tub.



A PRELIMINARY NOTE TO THE SECOND EDITION,

though it well may be reckoned, of all composition, the species at once most delightful and healthy, is a thing which an author, unless he be wealthy and willing to pay for that kind of delight, is not, in all instances, called on to write. Though there are, it is said, who, their spirits to cheer, slip in a new title-page three times a year, and in this way snuff up an imaginary savor of that sweetest of dishes, the popular favor,—much as if a starved painter should fall to and treat the Ugolino inside to a picture of meat.

You remember (if not, pray turn over and look) that, in writing the preface which ushered my book, I treated you, excellent Public, not merely with a cool disregard, but downright cavalierly. Now I would not take back the least thing I then said, though I thereby could butter both sides of my bread, for I never could see that an author owed aught to the people he solaced, diverted, or taught; and, as for mere fame, I have long ago learned that the persons by whom it is finally earned, are those with whom *your* verdict weighed not a pin, unsustained by the higher court sitting within.

But I wander from what I intended to say—that you have, namely, shown such a liberal way of thinking, and so much aesthetic perception of anonymous worth in the handsome reception you gave to my book, spite of some private piques, (having bought the first thousand in barely two weeks,) that I think, past a doubt, if you measured the phiz of your's most devotedly, Wonderful Quiz, you would find that its vertical section was shorter, by an inch and two tenths, or 'twixt that and a quarter.

You have watched a child playing—in those wondrous years when belief is not bound to the eyes and the ears, and the vision divine is so clear and unmarred, that each baker of pies in the dirt is a bard? Give a knife and a shingle, he fits out a fleet, and, on that little mudpuddle over the street, his invention, in purest good faith, will make sail round the globe with a puff of his breath for a gale, will visit, in barely ten minutes, all climes, and find Northwestern passages hundreds of times. Or, suppose the young Poet fresh stored with delights from that Bible of childhood the Arabian Nights, he will turn to a crony and cry, "Jack, let's play that I am a Genius!" Jacky straightway makes Aladdin's lamp out of a stone, and, for hours, they enjoy each his own supernatural powers. This is all very pretty and pleasant, but then suppose our two urchins have grown into men, and both have turned authors,—one says to his brother, "Let's play we're the American somethings or other, (only let them be big enough, no matter what.) Come

you shall be Goethe or Pope, which you choose ; I'll be Coleridge, and both shall write mutual reviews." So they both (as mere strangers) before many days, send each other a cord of anonymous bays. Each, in piling his epithets, smiles in his sleeve to see what his friend can be made to believe ; each, in reading the other's unbiassed review, thinks—Here's pretty high praise, but no more than is true. Well, we laugh at them both, and yet make no great fuss when the same farce is acted to benefit us. Even I, who, if asked, scarce a month since, what Fudge meant, should have answered, the dear Public's critical judgment, begin to think sharpwitted Horace spoke sooth when he said, that the Public *sometimes* hit the truth.

In reading these lines, you perhaps have a vision of a person in pretty good health and condition, and yet, since I put forth my primary edition, I have been crushed, scorched, withered, used up and put down, (by Smith with the cordial assistance of Brown,) in all, if you put any faith in my rhymes, to the number of ninety-five several times, and, while I am writing—I tremble to think of it, for I may at this moment be just on the brink of it—Molybdostoin, angry at being omitted, has begun a critique,—am I not to be pitied ?*

Now I shall not crush *them* since, indeed, for that

* The wise Scandinavians probably called their bards by the queer-looking title of Scald, in a delicate way, as it were, just to hint to the world the hot water they always get into.