THE JESTS OF HIEROCLES AND PHILAGRIUS

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The Jests of Hierocles and Philagrius by Charles Clinch Bubb

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CHARLES CLINCH BUBB

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THE JESTS OF HIEROCLES AND PHILAGRIUS

NEWLY TRANSLATED FROM THE GREEK

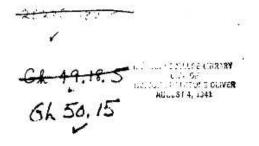
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Foreword

WHEN Homer sings of the unquenchable laughter in which the gods indulged at their banquet upon Mount Olympus, one is naturally curious to learn the cause of their merriment. It comes with a sense of disappointment to find that it was the uncouth antics of the lamed and deformed Hephaestus that pleased the deities at their meal. It is said that Homer's gods and goddesses reflect the ideas and customs of his time, and if so, this is, then, an early instance of the employment of what was destined later to be the court fool.

It would be interesting to trace the development of the idea which finds the sight of physical deformity humorous; it evidently belongs to the childhood of the race, judging from those who see in children the

JESTS OF HIEROCLES

expression of the various stages through which mankind has passed in its growth in civilization. The child, before it begins to reflect, can see something amusing in a hunch-back or cross-eved person, whereas in later years pity and compassion take the place of the unconscious cruelty caused by laughter at physical defects. A nation's state of civilization and morals may be inferred to a certain extent by what it considers humorous. It is no wonder, therefore, that a people who revelled in the bloody exhibitions of the amphithestre could find the sight of physical mutilation or painful suffering sufficiently amusing to preserve such anecdotes in their collections of facetize. To the modern mind there is nothing to laugh at in the section of this work dealing with the unfortunate people of Abdera or the eunuchs, or the ruptured.

Next to the deformed person as a means of exciting laughter, may be placed the wittol, the natural fool who blunders