

BANGS JOHN KENDRICK

OLYMPIAN NIGHTS

John Bangs
Olympian Nights

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=36365502

Olympian Nights:

Содержание

I	4
II	13
III	22
IV	34
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	36

John Kendrick Bangs

Olympian Nights

I

I Reach Mount Olympus

While travelling through the classic realms of Greece some years ago, sincerely desirous of discovering the lurking-place of a certain war which the newspapers of my own country were describing with some vividness, I chanced upon the base of the far-famed Mount Olympus. Night was coming on apace and I was tired, having been led during the day upon a wild-goose chase by my guide, who had assured me that he had definitely located the scene of hostilities between the Greeks and the Turks. He had promised that for a consideration I should witness a conflict between the contending armies which in its sanguinary aspects should surpass anything the world had yet known. Whether or not it so happened that the armies had been booked for a public exhibition elsewhere, unknown to the talented bandit who was acting as my courier, I am not aware, but, as the event transpired, the search was futile, and another day was wasted. Most annoying, too, was the fact that I dared not manifest the impatience which I naturally felt. I am not

remarkable as a specimen of the strong man; quite the reverse indeed, for, while I am by no means a weakling, I am no adept in the fistic art. Hence, when my guide, Hippopopolis by name, as the sun sank behind the western hills, informed me that I was again to be disappointed, the fact that he stands six feet two in his stockings, when he wears them, and has a pleasing way of bending crowbars as a pastime, led me to conceal the irritation which I felt.

"It's all right, Hippopopolis," I said, swallowing my wrath. "It's all right. We've had a good bit of exercise, anyhow, and that, after all, is the chief desideratum to a man of a sedentary occupation. How many miles have we walked?"

"Oh, about forty-three," he said, calmly. "A short distance, your Excellency."

"Very—very short," said I, rubbing my aching calves. "In my own country I make a practice of walking at least a hundred every day. It's quite a pleasing stroll from my home in New York over to Philadelphia and back. I hope I shall be able to show it you some day."

"It will be altogether charming, Excellency," said he. "Shall we—ah—walk back to Athens now, or would you prefer to rest here for the night?"

"I—I guess I'll stay here, Hippopopolis," I replied. "This seems to be a very comfortable sort of a mountain in front of us, and the air is soft. Suppose we rest in the soothing shade for the night? It would be quite an adventure."

"As your Excellency wishes," he replied, tossing a boulder into the air and catching it with ease as it came down. "It is not often done, but it is for you to say."

"What mountain is it, Hippopopolis?" I asked, turning and gazing at the eminence before us.

"It is Mount Olympus," he answered.

"What?" I cried. "Not the home of the gods?"

"The very same, your Excellency," he acquiesced. "At least, that is the report. It is commonly stated hereabouts that the god-trust has its headquarters here. As for myself, I have explored its every nook and cranny, but I never saw any gods on it. It's my private opinion that they've moved away; though there be those who claim that it is still occupied by the former rulers of destiny living incog. like other well-born rogues who desire to avoid notoriety."

Hippopopolis is a decided democrat in his views, and has less respect for the King than he has for the peasant.

"I shouldn't call them rogues exactly," I ventured. "Some of 'em were a pretty respectable lot. There was Apollo and old Jupiter himself, and—"

"Oh, you can't tell me anything about them," retorted Hippopopolis. "I haven't been born and bred in this country for nothing, your Excellency. They were a bad lot all through. Shall I prepare your supper?"

"If you please, Hippopopolis," said I, throwing myself down beneath a huge tree and giving myself up to the reveries of

the moment. I did not deem it well to interpose too strongly between Hippopopolis and his views of the immortals just then. He had always a glitter in his eye when any one ventured to controvert his assertions which made a debate with him a thing to be apprehended. Still, I did not exactly like to yield, for, to tell the truth, the Olympian folk have always interested me hugely, and, while I would not of course endorse any one of them for a high public trust in these days, I have admired them for their many remarkable qualities.

"Of course," said I, reverting to the question a few moments later, as Hippopopolis opened a box of sardines and set the bread a-toasting on the fire he had made. "Of course, I should not venture to say that I, a stranger, know as much about the private habits of the gods as do you, who have been their neighbor; but that they are rogues is news to me."

"That may be, too," said Hippopopolis. "People are often thought more of by strangers than by their own fellow-townsmen. Even you, sir, I might suspect, who are by these simple Greeks supposed to be a sort of reigning sovereign in your own country, are not at home, perhaps, so large a hill of potatoes. So with Jupiter and Apollo and Mercury, and the ladies of the court. I haven't a doubt that in the United States you think Jupiter a remarkably great man, and Apollo a musician, and Mercury a gentleman of some business capacity, but we Greeks know better. And as for the ladies—hum—well, your Excellency, they are not received. They are too bold and pushing. They lack the

refinements, and as for their beauty and accomplishments—"

Hippopopolis here indulged in a gesture which betokened excessive scorn of the beauty and accomplishments of the ladies of Olympus.

"You have never seen these people, Hippopopolis?" I asked.

"I have been spared that necessity," said he, "but I know all about them, and I assert to you upon my honor as a courier and the best guide in the Archipelago that Jupiter is the worst old *roué* a country ever had saddled upon it; Apollo's music would drive you mad and make you welcome a xylophone duet; and as for Mercury's business capacity, that is merely a capacity for getting away from his creditors. Why shouldn't a man wax rich if, after floating a thousand bogus corporations, selling the stock at par and putting the money into his own pocket, he could unfold his wings and fly off into the empyrean, leaving his stock and bond holders to mourn their loss?"

"Excuse me, Hippopopolis," I put in, interrupting him fearlessly for the moment, "pray don't try to deceive me by any such statement as that. I don't know very much, but I know something about Mercury, and when you say he puts other people's money into his pockets, I am in a position to prove otherwise. From five years of age up to the present time I have been brought up in a home where a bronze statue of Mercury, said to be the most perfect resemblance in all the statuary of the world, classic or otherwise, has been the most conspicuous ornament. At ten I could reproduce on paper with my pencil

every line, every shade, every curve, every movement of the effigy in so far as my artistic talent would permit, and I know that Mercury not only had no pocket, but wore no garments in which even so little as a change pocket could have been concealed. Wherefore there must be some mistake about your charge."

Hippopopolis laughed.

"Humph!" he said. "It is very evident that you people over the sea have very superficial notions of things here. When Mercury posed for that statue, like most of you people who have your photographs taken, he posed in full evening dress. That is why there is so little of it in evidence. But in his business suit, Mercury is a very different sort of a person. Even in Olympus he'd have been ruled off the stock exchange if he'd ventured to appear there as scantily attired as he is in most of his statuary appearances. You certainly are not so green as to suppose that that suit he wears in his statues is the whole extent of his wardrobe?"

"I had supposed so," I confessed. "It's a trifle unconventional; but, then, he's one of the gods, and, I presumed, could dress as he pleased. Your gods are independent, I should imagine, of the mere decrees of fashion."

"The more exalted one's position, the greater the sartorial obligation," retorted Hippopopolis, who, for a Greek and a guide, had, as will be seen, a vocabulary of most remarkable range. "Just as it happens that our King here, like H. R. H. the Prince of Wales, has to be provided with seven hundred and sixty-eight suits of clothes so as to be properly clad at the variety of functions

he is required to grace, so does a god have to be provided with a wardrobe of rare quality and extent. For drawing-room tables, mantel-pieces, and pedestals, otherwise for statuary, Mercury can go about clad in just about half as much stuff as it would require to cover a fairly sized sofa-cushion and not arouse drastic criticism; but when he goes to business he is as well provided with pockets as any other speculator."

"Another idol shattered!" I cried, in mock grief. "But Apollo, Hippopopolis—Apollo! Do not tell me he is not a virtuoso of rare technique on the lyre!"

"His technique is more than rare," sneered Hippopopolis. "It is excessively raw. It has been said by men who have heard both that Nero of Hades can do more to move an audience with his fiddle with two strings broken and his bow wrist sprained than Apollo can do with the aid of his lyre and a special dispensation of divine inspiration from Zeus himself."

"There are various ways of moving audiences, Hippopopolis," I ventured. "Now Nero, I should say, could move an audience—out of the hall—in a very few moments. In fact, I have always believed that that is why he fiddled when Rome was burning: so that people would run out of the city limits before they perished."

"It's a very droll view," laughed Hippopopolis, "and I dare say holds much of the truth; but Nero's faulty execution is not proof of Apollo's virtuosity. For a woodland musicale given by the Dryads, say, to their friends, the squirrels and moles and wild-cats, and other denizens of the forest, Apollo will suffice. The

musical taste of a kangaroo might find the strumming of his lyre by Apollo to its liking, but for cultivated people who know a crescendo andante-arpeggio from the staccato tones of a penny whistle, he is inadequate."

"You speak as if you had heard the god," said I.

"I have not," retorted Hippopopolis, "but I have heard playing by people, generally beginners, of whom the rural press has said that he—or more often she—has the touch of an Apollo, and, if that is true, as are all things we read in the newspapers, particularly the rural papers, which are not so sophisticated as to lie, then Apollo would better not attempt to play at one of our Athenian Courier Association Smokers. I venture to assert that if he did he would have to be carried home with a bandage about his brow instead of a laurel, and his cherished lyre would become but a memory."

I turned sadly to my supper. I had found the mundane things of Greece disappointing enough, but my sorrow over Hippopopolis's expert testimony as to the shortcoming of the gods was overwhelming. It was to be expected that the country would fall into a decadent state sooner or later, but that the Olympians themselves were not all that they were cracked up to be by the mythologies had never suggested itself to me. As a result of my courier's words, I lapsed into a moody silence, which by eight o'clock developed into an irresistible desire to sleep.

"I'll take a nap, Hippopopolis," said I, rolling my coat into a bundle and placing it under my head. "You will, I trust, be

good enough to stand guard lest some of these gods you have mentioned come and pick my pockets?" I added, satirically.

"I will see that the gods do not rob you," he returned, dryly, with a slight emphasis on the word "gods," the significance of which I did not at the moment take in, but which later developments made all too clear.

Three minutes later I slept soundly.

At ten o'clock, about, I awoke with a start. The fire was out and I was alone. Hippopopolis had disappeared and with him had gone my watch, the contents of my pocket-book, my letter of credit, and everything of value I had with me, with the exception of my shirt-studs, which, I presume, would have gone also had they not been fastened to me in such a way that, in getting them, Hippopopolis would have had to wake me up.

To add to my plight, the rain was pouring down in torrents.

II

I Seek Shelter and Find It

"This is a fine piece of business," I said to myself, springing to my feet. And then I called as loudly as my lungs would permit for Hippopopolis. It was really exhilarating to do so. The name lends itself so readily to a sonorous effect. The hills fairly echoed and re-echoed with the name, but no answer came, and finally I gave up in disgust, seeking meanwhile the very inadequate shelter of a tree, to keep the rain off. A more woe-begone picture never presented itself, I am convinced. I was chilled through, shivering in the dampness of the night, a steady stream of water pouring upon and drenching my clothing, void of property of an available nature, and lost in a strange land. To make matters worse, I was familiar only with classic Greek, which language is utterly unknown in those parts to-day, being spoken only by the professors of the American school at Athens and the war correspondents of the New York Sunday newspapers—a fact, by the way, which probably accounts for the latter's unfamiliarity with classic English. It is too much in these times to expect a man to speak or write more than one language at a time. Even if I survived the exposure of the night, a horrid death by starvation stared me in the face, since I had no means of conveying to any one who might appear the idea that I was hungry.

Still, if starvation was to be my lot, I preferred to starve dryly and warmly; so, deserting the tree which was now rather worse as a refuge than no refuge at all, since the limbs began to trickle forth steady streams of water, which, by some accursed miracle of choice, seemed to consider the back of my neck their inevitable destination, I started in to explore as best I could in the uncanny light of the night for some more sheltered nook. Feeling, too, that, having robbed me, Hippopopolis would become an extremely unpleasant person to encounter in my unarmed and exhausted state, I made my way up the mountainside, rather than down into the valley, where my inconsiderate guide was probably even then engaged in squandering my hard-earned wealth, in company with the peasants of that locality, who see real money so seldom that they ask no unpleasant questions as to whence it has come when they do see it.

"Under the circumstances," thought I, "I sincerely hope that the paths of Hippopopolis and myself may lie as wide as the poles apart. If so be we do again tread the same path, I trust I shall see him in time to be able to ignore his presence."

With this reflection I made my way with difficulty up the side of Olympus. Several times it seemed to me that I had found the spot wherein I might lie until the sun should rise, but quite as often an inconsiderate leak overhead through the leaves of the trees, or an undiscovered crack in the rocks above me, sent me travelling upon my way. Physical endurance has its limits, however, and at the end of a two hours' climb, wellnigh

exhausted, I staggered into an opening between two walls of rock, and fell almost fainting to the ground. The falling rain revived me, and on my hands and knees I crawled farther in, and, to my great delight, shortly found myself in a high-ceiled cavern, safe from the storm, a place in which one might starve comfortably, if so be one had to pass through that trying ordeal.

"He might have left me my flask," I groaned as I thought over the pint of warming liquid which Hippopolis had taken from me. It was of a particular sort, and I liked it whether I was thirsty or not. "If he'd only left me that, he might have had my letter of credit, and no questions asked. These Greeks are apparently not aware that there is consideration even among thieves."

Huddling myself together, I tried to get warm after the fashion of the small boy when he jumps into his cold-sheeted bed on a winter's night, a process which makes his legs warm the upper part of his body, and *vice versa*. It was moderately successful. If I could have wrung the water out of my clothes, it might have been wholly so. Still, matters began to look more cheerful, and I was about to drop off into a doze, when at the far end of the cavern, where all had hitherto been black as night, there suddenly burst forth a tremendous flood of light.

"Humph!" thought I, as the rays pierced through the blackness of the cavern even to where I lay shivering. "I'm in for it now. In all probability I have stumbled upon a bandits' cave."

Pleasing visions of the ways of bandits began to flit through my mind.

"In all likelihood," thought I, "there are seventeen of them. As I have read my fiction, there are invariably seventeen bandits to a band. It's like sixteen ounces to the pound, or three feet to the yard, or fifty-three cents to the dollar. It never varies. What hope have I to escape unharmed from seventeen bandits, even though five of them are discontented—as is always the case in books—and are ready to betray their chief to the enemy? I am the enemy, of course, but I'll be hanged if I wish the chief betrayed into my hands. He could probably thrash me single-handed. My hands are full anyhow, whether I get the chief or not."

My heart sank into my boots; but as these were very wet, it promptly returned to my throat, where it had rested ever since Hippopopolis had deserted me. My heart is a very sane sort of an organ. I gazed towards the light intently, expecting to see dark figures of murderous mould loom up before me, but in this I was agreeably disappointed. Nothing of the sort happened, and I grew easier in my mind, although my curiosity was by no means appeased.

"I know what I will do," I said to myself. "I'll make friends with the chief himself. That's the best plan. If he is responsive, my family will be spared the necessity of receiving one of my ears by mail with a delicate request for \$20,000 ransom, accompanied by a P. S. enclosing the other ear to emphasize the importance of the complication."

By way of diversion, let me say here that, while slicing off the victim's ear is a staple situation among novelists who write

of bandits, in all my experience with bandits—and I have known a thousand, most of 'em in Wall Street—I have never known it done, and I challenge those who write of South European highway-robbers to produce any evidence to prove that the habit is prevalent. The idea is, on the face of it, invalid. The ears of mankind, despite certain differences which are acknowledged, are, after all, very much alike. The point that differentiates one ear from another is the angle at which it is set from the head. The angle, according to the most scientific students of the organ of hearing, is the basis of the estimate of the individual. Therefore, to convince the wealthy persons at home that large sums of money are expected of them to preserve the life of the father of the family, the truly expert bandit must send something besides the ear itself, which, when cut off, has no angle whatsoever. If I, who am no bandit, and who have not studied the art of the banditti, may make a suggestion which may prove valuable to the highwaymen of Italy and Greece, the only sure method of identifying the individual lies in the cutting off of the head of the victim, by which means alone the identity of the person to be ransomed may be settled beyond all question. As one who has suffered, I will say that I would not send a check for \$20,000 to a bandit on the testimony of one ear any more than I would lend a man ten dollars on his own representation as to the meals he had not had, the drinks he wanted, or the date upon which he would pay it back.

All these ideas flashed across my mind as I lay there worn

in spirit and chilled to the bone. At last, however, after a considerable effort, I gathered myself together and resolved to investigate. I rose up, stood uncertainly on my feet, and was about to make my way towards the sources of the unexpected light, when a dark figure rushed past me. I tried to speak to it.

"Hello, there!" said I, hoping to gain its attention and ask its advice, since it came into the cavern in that breezy fashion which betokens familiarity with surroundings. The being, whatever it really was, and I was soon to find this out, turned a scornful and really majestic face upon me, as much as to say, "Who are you that should thus address a god?" The rushing thing wore a crown and flowing robes. Likewise it had a gray beard and an air of power which made me, a mere mortal, seem weak even in my own estimation. Furthermore, there was a divine atmosphere following in his wake. It suggested the most brilliant of brilliantine.

"Here," he cried as he passed. "I haven't time to listen to your story, but here is my card. I have no change about me. Call upon me to-morrow and I will attend to your needs."

The card fluttered to my side, and, not being a mendicant, I paid little attention to it, preferring to watch this fast-disappearing figure until I should see whither it was going. Arriving at the far end of the cavern, the hurrying figure stopped and apparently pushed a button at the side of the wall. Immediately an iron door, which I had not before perceived, was pushed aside. The dark figure disappeared into what seemed to

be a well-lighted elevator, and was promptly lifted out of sight. All became dark again, and I was frankly puzzled. This was a situation beyond my ken. What it could mean I could not surmise, and in the hope of finding a clue to the mystery I groped about in the darkness for the card which the hurried individual had cast at me with his words of encouragement. Ultimately I found it, but was unable to decipher its inscription, if perchance it had one. Nevertheless, I managed to keep my spirits up. This, I think, was a Herculean task, considering the darkness and my extreme lonesomeness. I can be happy under adverse circumstances, if only I have congenial company. But to lie alone, in a black cavern, prey only to the thoughts of my environment, thoughts suggesting all things apart from life, thoughts which send the mind over the past a thousand centuries removed—these are not comforting, and these were the only thoughts vouchsafed to me.

A half-hour was thus passed in the darkness, and then the light appeared again, and I resolved, though little strength was left to me, to seek out its source. I stood up and staggered towards it, and as I drew nearer observed that the illumination came from nothing more nor less than an elevator at the bottom of a shaft, the magnitude of which I could not, of course, at the moment determine.

The boy in charge was a pretty little chap, and, if I may so state it, was absolutely unclad, but about his shoulders was slung a strap which in turn held a leathern bag, which, to my eyes, suggested a golf-bag more than anything else, except that it was

filled with arrows instead of golf-clubs.

"How do you do?" said I, politely. "Whose caddy are you?"

"Very well," said the little lad. "Not much to brag of, however. Merely bobbish, pretty bobbish. In answer to your second question, I take pleasure in informing you," he added, "that I am everybody's caddy."

"You are—the elevator boy?" I queried, with some hesitation.

"That is my present position," said he.

"And, ah, whither do you elevate, my lad?"

"Up!" said he, after the manner of one who does not wish to commit himself, like most elevator boys. "But whom do you wish to see?" he demanded, trying hard to frown and succeeding only in making a ludicrous exhibition of himself.

Frankly, I did not know, but under the impulse of the moment I handed out the card which the stranger had thrown to me.

"I forget the gentleman's name," said I, "but here is his card. He asked me to call."

The elevator boy glanced at it, and his manner immediately changed.

"Oh, indeed. Very well, sir," he said. "I'll take you up right away. Step lively, please."

I stepped into the elevator, and the lad turned a wheel which set us upon our upward journey at once.

"I am sorry to have been so rude to you, sir," said the boy. "I didn't really know you were a friend of his."

"Of whom?" I demanded.

"The old man himself," he replied, with which he handed me back the card I had given him, upon reading which I ascertained the name of the individual who had rushed past me so unceremoniously.

The card was this:

MR. JUPITER JOVE ZEUS

Mount Olympus

Greece

"Top floor, sir," said the elevator boy, obsequiously.

III

The Elevator Boy

"Known the old man long, sir?" queried the boy as we ascended.

"By reputation," said I.

"Humph!" said the lad. "Can't have a very good opinion of him, then. It's a good thing you are going to have a little personal experience with him. He's not a bad lot, after all. Rotten things said of him, but then—you know, eh?"

"Oh, as for that," said I, "I don't think his reputation is so dreadful. To be sure, there have been one or two little indiscretions connected with his past, and at times he has seemed a bit vindictive in chucking thunder-bolts at his enemies, but, on the whole, I fancy he's behaved himself pretty well."

"True," said the boy. "And then you've got to take his bringing-up into consideration. Things which would be altogether wrong in the son of a Presbyterian clergyman would not be unbecoming in a descendant of old Father Time. Jupiter is, after all, a self-made immortal, and the fact that his parents, old Mr. and Mrs. Cronos, let him grow up sort of wild, naturally left its impress on his character."

"Of course," said I, somewhat amused to hear the Thunderer's character analyzed by a mere infant. "But how about yourself, my

laddie? Are you anybody in particular? You look like a cherub."

"Some folks call me Dan," said the boy, "and I *am* somebody in particular. Fact is, sir, if it hadn't been for me there wouldn't have been anybody in particular anywhere. I'm Cupid, sir, God of Love, favorite son of Venus, at your service."

"And husband of the delectable Psyche?" I cried, recalling certain facts I had learned. "You look awfully young to be married."

"Hum—well, I was, and I am, but we've separated," the boy replied, with a note of sadness in his voice. "She was a very nice little person, that Psyche—one of the best ever, I assure you—but she was too much of a butterfly to be the perpetual confidante of a person charged with such important matters as I am. Besides, she didn't get on with mother."

"Seems to me that I have heard that Madame Venus did not approve of the match," I vouchsafed.

"No. She didn't from the start," said Cupid. "Psyche was too pretty, and ma rather wanted to corner all the feminine beauty in our family; but I had my way in the end. I generally do," the little chap added, with a chuckle.

"But the separation, my dear boy?" I put in. "I am awfully sorry to hear of that. I, in common with most mortals, supposed that the marriage was idyllic."

"It was," said Cupid, "and therefore not practical enough to be a good investment. You see, sir, there was a time when the love affairs of the universe were intrusted to my care.

Lovers everywhere came to me to confide their woes, and I was doing a great business. Everybody was pleased with my way of conducting my department. I seemed to have a special genius for managing a love affair. Even persons who were opposed to the administration conceded that the Under Secretary of Home Affairs—myself—was assured of a cabinet office for life, whatever party was in power. If Pluto had been able to get elected, the force of public opinion would have kept me in office. Then I married, myself, and things changed. Like a dutiful husband, I had no secrets from my wife. I couldn't have had if I had wanted to. Psyche's curiosity was a close second to Pandora's, and, if she wanted to know anything, there was never any peace in the family until she found out all about it. Still, I didn't wish to have any secrets from her. As a scientific expert in Love, I knew that the surest basis of a lasting happiness lay in mutual confidence. Hence, I told Psyche all I knew, and it got her into trouble right away."

"She—ah—couldn't keep a secret?" I asked.

"At first she could," said Cupid. "That was the cause of the first row between her and Venus. Mother got mad as a hatter with her one morning after breakfast because Psyche *could* keep a secret. There was a little affair on between Jupiter and a certain person whose name I shall not mention, and I had charge of it. Of course, I told Psyche all about it, and in some way known only to woman she managed to convey to Venus the notion that she knew all about it, but couldn't tell, and, still further, wouldn't

tell. I'd gone down-town to business, leaving everything peaceful and happy, but when I got back to luncheon—Great Chaos, it was awful! The two ladies were not on speaking terms, and I had to put on a fur overcoat to keep from freezing to death in the atmosphere that had arisen between them. It was six inches below zero—and the way those two would sniff and sneer at each other was a caution."

"I quite understand the situation," I said, sympathetically.

"No doubt," said Cupid. "You can also possibly understand how a quarrel between the only two women you ever loved could incapacitate you for your duties. For ten days after that I was simply incapable of directing the love affairs of the universe properly. Persons I'd designed for each other were given to others, and a great deal of unhappiness resulted. There were nine thousand six hundred and seventy-six divorces as the result of that week's work. It's a terrible situation for a well-meaning chap to have to decide between his wife and his mother."

"Never had it," said I; "but I can imagine it."

"Don't think you can," sighed Cupid. "There are situations in real life, sir, which surpass the wildest flights of the imagination. That is why truth is stranger than fiction. However," he added, his face brightening, "it was a useful experience to me in my professional work. I learned for the first time that when a mother-in-law comes in at the door, intending to remain indefinitely, love flies out at the window. Or, as Solomon—I believe it was Solomon. He wrote Proverbs, did he not?"

"Yes," said I. "He and Josh Billings."

"Well," vouchsafed Cupid, "I can't swear as to the authorship of the proverb, but some proverbialist said 'Two is company and three is a crowd.' I'd never known that before, but I learned it then, and began to stay away from home a little myself, so that we should not be crowded."

I commended the young man for his philosophy.

"Nevertheless, my dear Dan," I added, "you ought to be more autocratic. Knowing that two is company and three otherwise, you have been guilty of allowing many a young couple who have trusted in you to begin house-keeping with an inevitable third person. We see it every day among the mortals."

"What has been good enough for me, sir," the boy returned, with a comical assumption of sternness—he looked so like a fat baby of three just ready for his bath—"is good enough for mortals. When I married Psyche, I brought her home to my mother's house, and for some nineteen thousand years we lived together. If Love can stand it, mortals must."

"Excuse me," said I, apologetically. "I have not suffered. However, in all my study of you mythologians, it has never occurred to me before this that Venus was the goddess of the mother-in-law."

"You mustn't blame me for that," said Cupid, dryly. "I'm the god of Love; wisdom is out of my province. For what you don't know and haven't learned you must blame Pallas, who is our Superintendent of Public Instruction. She knows it all—and she

got it darned easy, too. She sprang forth from the head of Jove with a Ph.D. already conferred upon her. She looks after the education of the world. I don't—but I'll wager you anything you please to put up that man gains more real experience under my management than he does from Athena's department, useful as her work is."

I could not but admit the truth of all that the boy said, and of course I told him so. To change the subject, which, if pursued, might lead to an exposure of my own ignorance, I said:

"But, Dan, what interests me most, and pains me most as well, is to hear that you are separated from Psyche. I do not wish to seem inquisitive on the subject of a—ah—of a man's family affairs"—I hesitated in my speech because he seemed such a baby and it was difficult to take him seriously, as is always the way with Love, unless we are directly involved—"but you have told me of the separation, and as a man, a newspaper-man, I am interested. Couldn't you reconcile your mother, Madame Venus, to Psyche—or, rather, Mrs. Dan?"

"Not for a moment," replied the boy. "Not for a millionth part of a tenth of a quarter of a second by a stop-watch. Their irreconcilability was copper-fastened, and I found myself compelled to choose between them. My mother developed a gray hair the day after the first trouble, and my wife began to go out to afternoon teas and sewing-circles and dances. The teas and dances were all right. You can't talk at either. But the sewing-circle was ruin. At this particular time the circle was engaged in

making winter garments for the children of the mother of the Gracchi. I presume that as a student and as a father you realize all that this meant. You also know that a sewing-circle needs four things: first, an object; second, a needle and thread; third, a garment; fourth, a subject for conversation. These things are constitutionally required, and Psyche joined what she called 'The Immortal Dorcas.' The result was that all Olympus and half of Hades were shortly acquainted with the confidential workings of my department—all told under the inviolate bond of secrecy, however, which requires that each member confided in shall not communicate what she has heard to more—or to less—than ten people."

"I know," said I. "The Dorcas habit has followers among my own people."

"But see where it placed me!" cried the little creature. "There was me, or I—I don't know whether Greek or English is preferable to you—charged with the love affairs of the universe. Confiding all I knew, like a dutiful husband, to my wife, and having her letting it all out to the public through the society. Why, my dear fellow, it wasn't long before the immortals began to accuse me of being in the pay of the Sunday newspapers, and you must know as well as anybody else that Love has nothing to do with them. Even the affairs of my sovereign began to creep out, and innuendoes connecting Jupiter with people prominent in society were printed in the opposition organs."

"Poor chap!" said I, sympathetically. "I did not realize that

you had to contend against the Sunday-newspaper nuisance as we mortals have."

"We have," he said, quickly, almost resignedly; "and they are ruining even Olympus itself. Still, I made a stand. Told Psyche she talked too much, and from that time on confided in her no more."

"And how did she take it?" I asked.

"She declined to take it at all," said Cupid, with a sigh. "She demanded that I should tell her everything on penalty of losing her—and I lost her. She left me a little over a thousand years ago, and my mother for the same reason sent me adrift fifteen hundred or more years ago. That is why I am eking out a living running an elevator," he added, sadly. "Still, I'm happy here. I go up when I feel sad, and go down when I feel glad. On the whole, I am as happy as any of the gods."

"However, Dan," I cried, sympathetically, slapping him on the back, "you have your official position, and that will keep you in—ah—well, you don't seem to need 'em, but it would keep you in clothes if you could be persuaded to wear them."

"No," said the little elevator boy, sadly. "I don't want 'em in this climate—nor are they necessary in any other. All over the world, my dear fellow, *true* love is ever warm."

There was a decided interval. I felt sorry for the little lad who had been a god and who had become an elevator boy, so I said to him:

"Never mind, Danny, you are sure of your office always."

"I wish it were so," said he, sadly. "But really, sir, it isn't. You may think that love rules all things nowadays, but that is a fallacy. Of late years a rival concern has sprung up. I have found my office subjected to a most annoying competition which has attracted away from me a large number of my closest followers. In the days when we acknowledged ourselves to be purely heathen, love was regarded with respect, but now all that is changed. Opposite my office in the government building there is a matrimonial corporation doing a very large business, by which the fees of my position are greatly reduced. Possibly after you have had your audience with Jove to-morrow you will take a turn about the city, in which event you will see this trust's big brazen sign. You can't miss it if you walk along Mercury Avenue. It reads:

MAMMON & CO.

Matchmakers

Fortunes Guaranteed:

Happiness Extra

Geo. W. Mammon

President

Horace Greed

Gen'l Manager

BRANCH OFFICE

67 Gehenna Ave., Hades

"Dear me!" I cried. "Poor Love!"

"I don't need your sympathy," said the boy, quickly, drawing himself up proudly. "It can't last, this competition. Man and god kind will soon see the difference in the permanence of our respective output. This is only a temporary success they are having, and it often happens that the spurious articles put forth by

Mammon & Company are brought over to me to be repaired. My sun will dawn again. You can't put out the fires in my furnaces as long as men and women are made from the old receipt."

Here the elevator stopped, and a rather attractive young woman appeared at the door.

"Here is where you get out, sir," said the elevator boy.

"You are Mr.—" began the girl.

"I am," I replied.

"I have orders to show you to number 609," she said. "The proprietor will see you to-morrow at eleven."

"Thank you very much," I replied, somewhat overcome by the cordiality of my reception. It is not often that mere beggars are so hospitably received.

"Good-night, Cupid," I added, turning to the little chap in the elevator. "I trust we shall meet again."

"Oh, I guess we will," he replied, with a wink at the maid. "I generally do meet most men two or three times in their lives. So *au revoir* to you. Treat the gentleman well, Hebe," he concluded, pulling the rope to send the elevator back. "He doesn't know much, but he is sympathetic."

"I will, Danny, for your sake," said the little maid, archly.

The boy laughed and the car faded from sight. Hebe, even more lovely than has been claimed, with a charmingly demure glance at my costume, which was wofully bedraggled and wet, said:

"This way, sir. I will have your luggage sent to your room at

once."

"But I haven't any luggage, my dear," said I. "I have only what is on my back."

"Ah, but you have," she replied, sweetly. "The proprietor has attended to that. There are five trunks, a hat-box, and a Gladstone bag already on their way up."

And with this she showed me into a magnificent apartment, and, even as she had said, within five minutes my luggage arrived, a valet appeared, unpacked the trunks and bag, brushed off the hat that had lain in the hat-box, and vanished, leaving me to my own reflections.

Surely Olympus was a great place, where one who appeared in the guise of a beggar was treated like a regiment of prodigal sons, furnished with a gorgeous apartment, and supplied with a wardrobe that would have aroused the envy of a reigning sovereign.

IV

I Summon a Valet

The room to which I was assigned was regal in its magnificence, and yet comfortable. Few modern hotels afforded anything like it, and, tired as I was, I could not venture to rest until I had investigated it and its contents thoroughly. It was, I should say, about twenty by thirty feet in its dimensions, and lighted by a soft, mellow glow that sprang forth from all parts without any visible source of supply. At the far end was a huge window, before which were drawn portières of rich material in most graceful folds. Pulling these to one side, so that I might see what the outlook from the window might be, I staggered back appalled at the infinite grandeur of what lay before my eyes. It seemed as if all space were there, and yet within the compass of my vision. Planets which to my eye had hitherto been but twinkling specks of light in the blackness of the heavens became peopled worlds, which I could see in detail and recognize. Mars with its canals, Saturn with its rings—all were there before me, seemingly within reach of my outstretched hand. The world in which I lived appeared to have been removed from the middle distance, and those things which had rested beyond the ken of the mortal mind brought to my very feet, to be seen and touched and comprehended.

Then I threw the window open, and all was changed. The distant objects faded, and a beautiful golden city greeted my eyes—the city of Olympus, in which I was to pass so many happy hours. For the instant I was puzzled. Why at one moment the treasures of the universe of space had greeted my vision, and how all that had faded and the immediate surroundings of a celestial city lay before me, were not easy to understand. I drew back and closed the window again, and at once all became clear; the window-glass held the magic properties of the magnifying-lens, developed to an intensity which annihilated all space, and I began to see that the development of mortals in scientific matters was puny beside that of the gods in whose hands lay all the secrets of the universe, although the principles involved were in our full possession.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.