

**BROUN
HEYWOOD**

SEEING THINGS
AT NIGHT

Heywood Broun

Seeing Things at Night

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=24171860

Seeing Things at Night:

ISBN <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/35793>

Содержание

Introduction	4
The Fifty-first Dragon	6
How To Be a Lion Tamer	18
H. G. Wells of England	25
Promises and Contracts and Clocks	30
Alcoholic Liquors	34
Some of My Best Friends Are Yale Men	39
Bacillus and Circumstance	44
Death Says It Isn't So	56
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	65

Seeing Things at Night

Introduction

THE first difficulty was the title. It was felt that *Seeing Things at Night* might suggest theatrical essays to the exclusion of anything else. That was not the author's intention. He meant to suggest rather newspaper articles of any sort done more or less on the spur of the moment for next day's consumption. There was also some question as to the order in which the various "pieces" should be arranged. The author was tempted to follow the example of Adolf Wolff, a free verse poet who published a volume some years ago called *Songs, Sighs and Curses*, and explained in a foreword, "When asked in what sequence he would arrange his poems, Wolff threw the manuscripts in the air, saying 'Let Fate decide.' They now appear in the order in which they were picked up from the floor."

Broun, however, feared that some of his essays might crash through the floor like the mistakes of a cannonball juggler and that others would prove so lacking in weight when put to the test that it would be necessary to pluck them from the ceiling rather than the floor. The arrangement, therefore, is premeditated though haphazard. In respect to his age the author also wishes to

explain that the character, H. 3rd, who appears from time to time is his son and not his grandson. He also wishes to acknowledge the courtesy of *The New York Tribune*, *Vanity Fair*, *McCall's*, *Collier's Weekly* and *The Nation* in permitting him to reprint various articles which first appeared in their pages.

The Fifty-first Dragon

Of all the pupils at the knight school Gawaine le Cœur-Hardy was among the least promising. He was tall and sturdy, but his instructors soon discovered that he lacked spirit. He would hide in the woods when the jousting class was called, although his companions and members of the faculty sought to appeal to his better nature by shouting to him to come out and break his neck like a man. Even when they told him that the lances were padded, the horses no more than ponies and the field unusually soft for late autumn, Gawaine refused to grow enthusiastic. The Headmaster and the Assistant Professor of Pleasaunce were discussing the case one spring afternoon and the Assistant Professor could see no remedy but expulsion.

"No," said the Headmaster, as he looked out at the purple hills which ringed the school, "I think I'll train him to slay dragons."

"He might be killed," objected the Assistant Professor.

"So he might," replied the Headmaster brightly, but he added, more soberly, "We must consider the greater good. We are responsible for the formation of this lad's character."

"Are the dragons particularly bad this year?" interrupted the Assistant Professor. This was characteristic. He always seemed restive when the head of the school began to talk ethics and the ideals of the institution.

"I've never known them worse," replied the Headmaster. "Up

in the hills to the south last week they killed a number of peasants, two cows and a prize pig. And if this dry spell holds there's no telling when they may start a forest fire simply by breathing around indiscriminately."

"Would any refund on the tuition fee be necessary in case of an accident to young Cœur-Hardy?"

"No," the principal answered, judicially, "that's all covered in the contract. But as a matter of fact he won't be killed. Before I send him up in the hills I'm going to give him a magic word."

"That's a good idea," said the Professor. "Sometimes they work wonders."

From that day on Gawaine specialized in dragons. His course included both theory and practice. In the morning there were long lectures on the history, anatomy, manners and customs of dragons. Gawaine did not distinguish himself in these studies. He had a marvelously versatile gift for forgetting things. In the afternoon he showed to better advantage, for then he would go down to the South Meadow and practise with a battle-ax. In this exercise he was truly impressive, for he had enormous strength as well as speed and grace. He even developed a deceptive display of ferocity. Old alumni say that it was a thrilling sight to see Gawaine charging across the field toward the dummy paper dragon which had been set up for his practice. As he ran he would brandish his ax and shout "A murrain on thee!" or some other vivid bit of campus slang. It never took him more than one stroke to behead the dummy dragon.

Gradually his task was made more difficult. Paper gave way to papier-mâché and finally to wood, but even the toughest of these dummy dragons had no terrors for Gawaine. One sweep of the ax always did the business. There were those who said that when the practice was protracted until dusk and the dragons threw long, fantastic shadows across the meadow Gawaine did not charge so impetuously nor shout so loudly. It is possible there was malice in this charge. At any rate, the Headmaster decided by the end of June that it was time for the test. Only the night before a dragon had come close to the school grounds and had eaten some of the lettuce from the garden. The faculty decided that Gawaine was ready. They gave him a diploma and a new battle-ax and the Headmaster summoned him to a private conference.

"Sit down," said the Headmaster. "Have a cigarette."

Gawaine hesitated.

"Oh, I know it's against the rules," said the Headmaster. "But after all, you have received your preliminary degree. You are no longer a boy. You are a man. To-morrow you will go out into the world, the great world of achievement."

Gawaine took a cigarette. The Headmaster offered him a match, but he produced one of his own and began to puff away with a dexterity which quite amazed the principal.

"Here you have learned the theories of life," continued the Headmaster, resuming the thread of his discourse, "but after all, life is not a matter of theories. Life is a matter of facts. It calls on the young and the old alike to face these facts, even though they

are hard and sometimes unpleasant. Your problem, for example, is to slay dragons."

"They say that those dragons down in the south wood are five hundred feet long," ventured Gawaine, timorously.

"Stuff and nonsense!" said the Headmaster. "The curate saw one last week from the top of Arthur's Hill. The dragon was sunning himself down in the valley. The curate didn't have an opportunity to look at him very long because he felt it was his duty to hurry back to make a report to me. He said the monster, or shall I say, the big lizard? – wasn't an inch over two hundred feet. But the size has nothing at all to do with it. You'll find the big ones even easier than the little ones. They're far slower on their feet and less aggressive, I'm told. Besides, before you go I'm going to equip you in such fashion that you need have no fear of all the dragons in the world."

"I'd like an enchanted cap," said Gawaine.

"What's that?" answered the Headmaster, testily.

"A cap to make me disappear," explained Gawaine.

The Headmaster laughed indulgently. "You mustn't believe all those old wives' stories," he said. "There isn't any such thing. A cap to make you disappear, indeed! What would you do with it? You haven't even appeared yet. Why, my boy, you could walk from here to London, and nobody would so much as look at you. You're nobody. You couldn't be more invisible than that."

Gawaine seemed dangerously close to a relapse into his old habit of whimpering. The Headmaster reassured him: "Don't

worry; I'll give you something much better than an enchanted cap. I'm going to give you a magic word. All you have to do is to repeat this magic charm once and no dragon can possibly harm a hair of your head. You can cut off his head at your leisure."

He took a heavy book from the shelf behind his desk and began to run through it. "Sometimes," he said, "the charm is a whole phrase or even a sentence. I might, for instance, give you 'To make the' – No, that might not do. I think a single word would be best for dragons."

"A short word," suggested Gawaine.

"It can't be too short or it wouldn't be potent. There isn't so much hurry as all that. Here's a splendid magic word: 'Rumplesnitz.' Do you think you can learn that?"

Gawaine tried and in an hour or so he seemed to have the word well in hand. Again and again he interrupted the lesson to inquire, "And if I say 'Rumplesnitz' the dragon can't possibly hurt me?" And always the Headmaster replied, "If you only say 'Rumplesnitz,' you are perfectly safe."

Toward morning Gawaine seemed resigned to his career. At daybreak the Headmaster saw him to the edge of the forest and pointed him to the direction in which he should proceed. About a mile away to the southwest a cloud of steam hovered over an open meadow in the woods and the Headmaster assured Gawaine that under the steam he would find a dragon. Gawaine went forward slowly. He wondered whether it would be best to approach the dragon on the run as he did in his practice in the South Meadow

or to walk slowly toward him, shouting "Rumplesnitz" all the way.

The problem was decided for him. No sooner had he come to the fringe of the meadow than the dragon spied him and began to charge. It was a large dragon and yet it seemed decidedly aggressive in spite of the Headmaster's statement to the contrary. As the dragon charged it released huge clouds of hissing steam through its nostrils. It was almost as if a gigantic teapot had gone mad. The dragon came forward so fast and Gawaine was so frightened that he had time to say "Rumplesnitz" only once. As he said it, he swung his battle-ax and off popped the head of the dragon. Gawaine had to admit that it was even easier to kill a real dragon than a wooden one if only you said "Rumplesnitz."

Gawaine brought the ears home and a small section of the tail. His school mates and the faculty made much of him, but the Headmaster wisely kept him from being spoiled by insisting that he go on with his work. Every clear day Gawaine rose at dawn and went out to kill dragons. The Headmaster kept him at home when it rained, because he said the woods were damp and unhealthy at such times and that he didn't want the boy to run needless risks. Few good days passed in which Gawaine failed to get a dragon. On one particularly fortunate day he killed three, a husband and wife and a visiting relative. Gradually he developed a technique. Pupils who sometimes watched him from the hill-tops a long way off said that he often allowed the dragon to come within a few feet before he said "Rumplesnitz." He came to say

it with a mocking sneer. Occasionally he did stunts. Once when an excursion party from London was watching him he went into action with his right hand tied behind his back. The dragon's head came off just as easily.

As Gawaine's record of killings mounted higher the Headmaster found it impossible to keep him completely in hand. He fell into the habit of stealing out at night and engaging in long drinking bouts at the village tavern. It was after such a debauch that he rose a little before dawn one fine August morning and started out after his fiftieth dragon. His head was heavy and his mind sluggish. He was heavy in other respects as well, for he had adopted the somewhat vulgar practice of wearing his medals, ribbons and all, when he went out dragon hunting. The decorations began on his chest and ran all the way down to his abdomen. They must have weighed at least eight pounds.

Gawaine found a dragon in the same meadow where he had killed the first one. It was a fair-sized dragon, but evidently an old one. Its face was wrinkled and Gawaine thought he had never seen so hideous a countenance. Much to the lad's disgust, the monster refused to charge and Gawaine was obliged to walk toward him. He whistled as he went. The dragon regarded him hopelessly, but craftily. Of course it had heard of Gawaine. Even when the lad raised his battle-ax the dragon made no move. It knew that there was no salvation in the quickest thrust of the head, for it had been informed that this hunter was protected by an enchantment. It merely waited, hoping something would

turn up. Gawaine raised the battle-ax and suddenly lowered it again. He had grown very pale and he trembled violently. The dragon suspected a trick. "What's the matter?" it asked, with false solicitude.

"I've forgotten the magic word," stammered Gawaine.

"What a pity," said the dragon. "So that was the secret. It doesn't seem quite sporting to me, all this magic stuff, you know. Not cricket, as we used to say when I was a little dragon; but after all, that's a matter of opinion."

Gawaine was so helpless with terror that the dragon's confidence rose immeasurably and it could not resist the temptation to show off a bit.

"Could I possibly be of any assistance?" it asked. "What's the first letter of the magic word?"

"It begins with an 'r,'" said Gawaine weakly.

"Let's see," mused the dragon, "that doesn't tell us much, does it? What sort of a word is this? Is it an epithet, do you think?"

Gawaine could do no more than nod.

"Why, of course," exclaimed the dragon, "reactionary Republican."

Gawaine shook his head.

"Well, then," said the dragon, "we'd better get down to business. Will you surrender?"

With the suggestion of a compromise Gawaine mustered up enough courage to speak.

"What will you do if I surrender?" he asked.

"Why, I'll eat you," said the dragon.

"And if I don't surrender?"

"I'll eat you just the same."

"Then it doesn't make any difference, does it?" moaned Gawaine.

"It does to me," said the dragon with a smile. "I'd rather you didn't surrender. You'd taste much better if you didn't."

The dragon waited for a long time for Gawaine to ask "Why?" but the boy was too frightened to speak. At last the dragon had to give the explanation without his cue line. "You see," he said, "if you don't surrender you'll taste better because you'll die game."

This was an old and ancient trick of the dragon's. By means of some such quip he was accustomed to paralyze his victims with laughter and then to destroy them. Gawaine was sufficiently paralyzed as it was, but laughter had no part in his helplessness. With the last word of the joke the dragon drew back his head and struck. In that second there flashed into the mind of Gawaine the magic word "Rumplesnitz," but there was no time to say it. There was time only to strike and, without a word, Gawaine met the onrush of the dragon with a full swing. He put all his back and shoulders into it. The impact was terrific and the head of the dragon flew away almost a hundred yards and landed in a thicket.

Gawaine did not remain frightened very long after the death of the dragon. His mood was one of wonder. He was enormously puzzled. He cut off the ears of the monster almost in a trance. Again and again he thought to himself, "I didn't say

'Rumplesnitz!'" He was sure of that and yet there was no question that he had killed the dragon. In fact, he had never killed one so utterly. Never before had he driven a head for anything like the same distance. Twenty-five yards was perhaps his best previous record. All the way back to the knight school he kept rumbling about in his mind seeking an explanation for what had occurred. He went to the Headmaster immediately and after closing the door told him what had happened. "I didn't say 'Rumplesnitz,'" he explained with great earnestness.

The Headmaster laughed. "I'm glad you've found out," he said. "It makes you ever so much more of a hero. Don't you see that? Now you know that it was you who killed all these dragons and not that foolish little word 'Rumplesnitz.'"

Gawaine frowned. "Then it wasn't a magic word after all?" he asked.

"Of course not," said the Headmaster, "you ought to be too old for such foolishness. There isn't any such thing as a magic word."

"But you told me it was magic," protested Gawaine. "You said it was magic and now you say it isn't."

"It wasn't magic in a literal sense," answered the Headmaster, "but it was much more wonderful than that. The word gave you confidence. It took away your fears. If I hadn't told you that you might have been killed the very first time. It was your battle-ax did the trick."

Gawaine surprised the Headmaster by his attitude. He was obviously distressed by the explanation. He interrupted a long

philosophic and ethical discourse by the Headmaster with, "If I hadn't of hit 'em all mighty hard and fast any one of 'em might have crushed me like a, like a – " He fumbled for a word.

"Egg shell," suggested the Headmaster.

"Like a egg shell," assented Gawaine, and he said it many times. All through the evening meal people who sat near him heard him muttering, "Like a egg shell, like a egg shell."

The next day was clear, but Gawaine did not get up at dawn. Indeed, it was almost noon when the Headmaster found him cowering in bed, with the clothes pulled over his head. The principal called the Assistant Professor of Pleasaunce, and together they dragged the boy toward the forest.

"He'll be all right as soon as he gets a couple more dragons under his belt," explained the Headmaster.

The Assistant Professor of Pleasaunce agreed. "It would be a shame to stop such a fine run," he said. "Why, counting that one yesterday, he's killed fifty dragons."

They pushed the boy into a thicket above which hung a meager cloud of steam. It was obviously quite a small dragon. But Gawaine did not come back that night or the next. In fact, he never came back. Some weeks afterward brave spirits from the school explored the thicket, but they could find nothing to remind them of Gawaine except the metal parts of his medals. Even the ribbons had been devoured.

The Headmaster and the Assistant Professor of Pleasaunce agreed that it would be just as well not to tell the school how

Gawaine had achieved his record and still less how he came to die. They held that it might have a bad effect on school spirit. Accordingly, Gawaine has lived in the memory of the school as its greatest hero. No visitor succeeds in leaving the building to-day without seeing a great shield which hangs on the wall of the dining hall. Fifty pairs of dragons' ears are mounted upon the shield and underneath in gilt letters is "Gawaine le Cœur-Hardy," followed by the simple inscription, "He killed fifty dragons." The record has never been equaled.

How To Be a Lion Tamer

The Ways of the Circus is a decidedly readable book, rich in anecdotes of the life of circus folk and circus animals. The narrator is an old lion tamer and Harvey W. Root, who has done the actual writing, has managed to keep a decidedly naïve quality in the talk as he sets it down. There is a delightful chapter, for instance, in which Conklin tells how he first became a lion tamer. By gradual process of promotion he had gone as far as an elephant, but his salary was still much lower than that of Charlie Forepaugh, the lion man. There were three lions with the circus, but Charlie never worked with more than one in the cage at the time. Conklin got the notion that an act with all the lions in action at once would be a sensational success. He was not sure that it could be done, as he had had no experience with lions. The only way to find out was to try. Accordingly Conklin sneaked into the menagerie alone, late at night, to ascertain whether or not lions lay along his natural bent.

"The animals seemed somewhat surprised at being disturbed in the middle of the night," he says, "and began to pace rapidly up and down their cages. I paid no attention to this, but opened the door of each cage in succession and drove them out. Then I began as sternly as I could to order them round and give them their cues.

"Except, perhaps, for an unusual amount of snarling, they did

as well for me as for Charlie. I put them through their regular work, which took fifteen or twenty minutes, drove them back, and fastened them into their own cages and climbed down on to the floor from the performing cage, much elated with my success. I had proved to myself that I could handle lions."

Conklin then goes on to tell how he gave a secret exhibition for the proprietor of the circus and convinced him of his skill. In fact, the proprietor promised that he should become the lion tamer of the show as soon as Charlie Forepaugh's contract ran out. Conklin goes on to say that he himself was very particular for the sake of safety not to let Charlie know of this arrangement. And in explaining his timidity, he writes, "He was a big fellow with a quick temper."

This almost emboldens us to believe the old story of the lion tamer and his shrewish wife. Coming home late from a party, he feared to enter the house and so he went to the backyard and crept into the cage with the lions. There it was that his wife discovered him the next morning, sleeping with the lions, and she shook her fist and shouted through the bars, "you coward!"

To be sure as Mr. Conklin tells it there seems to be no great trick in being a lion tamer. Take, for instance, the familiar stunt in which a trainer puts his head into a lion's mouth and you will find upon close survey that it is nothing to worry about. "This never failed to make the crowd hold its breath, but it was not as risky as it seemed," says Conklin, "for with my hold on the lion's nose and jowl I could detect the slightest movement of his

muscles and govern my actions accordingly." Mr. Conklin does not develop the point, but we suppose that if he detected any intention on the lion's part of closing his mouth he would take his head out in order to make it easier for the animal.

Mr. Conklin also corrects a number of misapprehensions about lions which may be of use to some readers. Contrary to popular belief, you have nothing to worry about if any of your lions insist on walking up and down. "A lion that will walk round when you get in the cage with him is all right, as a general thing," explains Conklin, "but look out for the one that goes and lies down in a corner."

To be sure, there is something just a little disturbing in the afterthought indicated in "as a general thing." Our luck is so bad that we wouldn't feel safe in a cage with a lion even if he ran up and down. In fact, we would be almost willing to wager that ours would be one of the unfortunate exceptions which didn't know the rule and so would do his bit toward providing it.

In another respect the lion tamer is a little more specific about lions and therefore more helpful. "It is true, though," he adds, "that you should never let one get behind you if you can help it, though in many of the acts it is not possible to keep all of them in front of you all the time." We can understand this advice, though it is not altogether clear to us just what we would do if a lion tried to get behind us. Of course, we would tell him not to, but after that we should be somewhat at a loss. We have never believed in being rough with lions. Probably we would let him have his way

just to avoid argument. As a matter of fact we would have no great objection to having all our lions behind us if only we could keep far enough in front.

"A lion that growls frightfully and acts very ferocious when you are outside the cage may be one of the easiest to handle and get work out of when once you are actually in the cage; and on the other hand, a lion that is mean and dangerous to do anything with in the cage may be exceptionally docile from the outside and allow you to pet him freely."

This should go a long way toward solving the problems of lion tamers. All you have to do before a performance is to make a test from outside the cage. Try to pat your lion and pull his ears. If he growls and bites your hand you will know at once that you may come in and go about your business with perfect safety. On the other hand, if he meets your caresses by rolling over on his back and purring it is up to you to call off the show or send for your understudy.

The unfortunate fate of such a substitute is described by Conklin with much detail and, we fear, a little relish. The man in question took Conklin's job when he struck for a raise in salary. Things went well enough during the first performance until the very end, and then it was the fault not of the lion but of the substitute, for the trainer was ignorant of one of the cues which had become a part of the act.

"I had taught George to jump for me as I went out the door," writes Conklin. "It had been done by blowing on his nose and

then jumping back as you would play with a dog. It always made a great hit with the crowd, who supposed it had seen a lion try to eat a man and that I had had a very narrow escape. I worked it this way: After I had finished the rest of my act I would get George all stirred up and growling. Then I would fire my pistol two or three times and jump out of the cage as quickly as I could. At the same time George would give a big lunge and come up against the door which I had just shut behind me. George had learned the trick so well that I frequently had to turn on him once or twice and work him farther back from the door before I dared attempt getting out."

Unfortunately the substitute had missed all this part of the act. He started out of the cage and George jumped at him and the man was not prepared to dodge. The moral seems to be that nobody should covet another man's job, not even that of lion taming.

Some readers we suppose will find Mr. Conklin's lion stories unwelcome because they may tend to take away their illusions. It is not to be denied that he has to some extent rubbed the gilt off the gingerbread by writing that the record for all the lions he has known consists of one substitute trainer and a cow. His whole attitude toward lions is contemptuous in its calm and so is the attitude of practically everybody else in the book with the exception of the cow and the substitute trainer. Even they suffered a little, at first, from overconfidence.

On the night down in Philadelphia when Wallace, the big lion,

escaped from his cage in winter quarters nobody grew excited. O'Brien, the owner of the show, did not even get up, but called through the door "Go git Conklin!" The preparations of the trainer were simple. First he got an iron bar and then he found the lion and hit him on the end of the nose. "After a few minutes," he adds, "I had him safely locked in again."

Lions, for all their air of authority, seem to be easily dominated. They're not so much wicked as weak. Anybody with a little firmness can twist them around a finger, possibly not the little finger, but any of the others. It is a great pity that lions should be like that. To be sure, the information ought not to come as a surprise to anybody who is familiar with the Bible. The condition we have mentioned has existed for a long time. As far as we know, Daniel had not so much as an iron bar when he went into the den. He overawed the lions with nothing more than faith.

Perhaps it is not quite fair to go on as if lions were the only living creatures in all the world who are swayed and cowed by firmness and authority. The same weakness may be found now and then among men. All too many of us if hit on the nose with iron bars, either real ones or symbols, do little more than lions in similar circumstances. We may growl and roar a little, but we do not show resentment in any efficient way. And like the lions, we are singularly stupid in not making working alliances with our fellows against the man with the iron bar. By and by we begin to go through the hoops as if the procedure were inevitable. Having made a protest we feel that our duty is done.

It is a great pity. Lions ought to know better. The man who stares you in the eye and squeezes hard in a handshake may come to the bad end which you wish him, but it is unlikely that he will ever be eaten by lions. Something else must be devised for him. Even outside the circus he is likely to go far. Anybody who can shake a little personality can be ringmaster in this world. And we, all of us who have none, do nothing about it except to obey him. Camels we can swallow easily enough, but we strain at the natty dresser.

Still we did manage to find a few bits of information in *The Ways of the Circus* which were brand new to us. If, for instance, a rhinoceros escaped from his cage just what would you do to get him back again? That is, if he were the sort of rhinoceros you wanted back. At first glance it seems rather a problem, but any reader of Mr. Conklin's book could arrange it for you without difficulty. Nothing is needed but carrots and a stout heart. The carrots you scatter profusely about the floor of the cage, and when the rhinoceros returns to get them you slam down the door, and there he is.

H. G. Wells of England

H. G. Wells in his *Outline of History* seldom seems just an Englishman. He fights his battles and makes most of his judgments alone and generally in defiance of the traditions of his countrymen, but he is not bold enough to face Napoleon Bonaparte all by himself. The sight of the terrible little Corsican peeping over the edge of the thirty-eighth chapter sends Wells scurrying from his solitude into the center of a British square. It must be that when Wells was little and bad his nurse told him that if he did not eat his mush or go to bed, or perform some other necessary function in the daily life of a child, Old Bony would get him. And Wells is still scared. He takes it out, of course, by pretending that Napoleon has been vastly overrated and remarks that it was pretty lucky for him that he lost Trafalgar and never got to England, where troops would have made short work of him.

Nelson, Wells holds, was just as great a figure in his own specialty as Napoleon in his, but if so it seems a pity that he did not rise to Wellsian heights of strategy and lose Trafalgar so that Napoleon might land and be defeated by British pluck and skill. Then, indeed, might Waterloo have been won upon the cricket fields of Eton.

Not only does Wells insist on regarding Napoleon through national lenses but through moral ones also. Speaking of his

accession as First Consul, Wells writes: "Now surely here was opportunity such as never came to man before. Here was a position in which a man might well bow himself in fear of himself, and search his heart and serve God and man to the utmost."

That, of course, was not Napoleon's intent. His performance must be judged by his purpose, and it seems to us that Wells doesn't half appreciate how brilliant was the stunt which Napoleon achieved. "He tried to do the impossible and did it." Man was no better for him and neither was God, but he remains still the great boggy man of Europe, a boggy great enough to have frightened Mr. Wells and marked him. Here was a man who took life and made it theatrical. It was an achievement in popular æsthetics, if nothing else, but Wells doesn't care about æsthetics. Perhaps even a moral might be extracted from the life of Napoleon. He proved the magic quality of personality and the inspiration of gesture. Some day the same methods may be used to better advantage.

The institution of the Legion of Honor Wells calls "A scheme for decorating Frenchmen with bits of ribbon which was admirably calculated to divert ambitious men from subversive proceedings." But these same bits of ribbon and the red and green ones of the Croix de Guerre and the yellow and green of the Médaille Militaire were later to save France from the onrush of the Germans. Without decorations, without phrases and without the brilliant and effective theatrical oratory of French officers,

from marshals to sub-lieutenants, France would have lost the great war. Everybody who saw the French army in action realized that its morale was maintained during the worst days by colored ribbons and florid speeches. Even the stern and taciturn Pershing learned the lesson, and before he had been in France three months he was about making speeches to wounded men in which he told them that he wished that he, too, were lying in hospital with all their glory. Personally, it never seemed to me that Pershing actually convinced any wounded doughboy of his enthusiasm for such a change, but he did not use the gesture with much skill. He lacked the Napoleonic tradition.

Another American officer, a younger one, said, "If I ever have anything to do with West Point I'm going to copy these Frenchmen. They do it naturally, but we've got to learn. I'm going to introduce a course in practical theatricalism. Now, if I were a general, as soon as I heard of some little trench raid in which Private Smith distinguished himself I'd send a staff officer down on the sly to find out what Smith looked like. Then I'd inspect that particular organization and when I got to Smith my aide would nudge me and I'd turn, as if instinctively, and say, 'Isn't that Private Smith who distinguished himself on the evening of January 18 at 8 o'clock? I want to shake your hand, Smith.' Why, man, the French army has been living and breathing on stuff like that for the last two years."

It is an easy matter to satirize the heroic and theatrical gesture. The French themselves did it. Once in the Chamber of Deputies,

late in the war, a Radical member, who didn't care much for the war, anyway, and still less for the Cabinet, arose and said: "This morning as I was walking in the streets of Paris a little before dawn I saw three camions headed for the front, and I stopped the first driver and said, 'Ah, I am overjoyed to see that at last the ministry is awake to the needs of our brave poilus and is sending supplies to the front. What is it that you carry – ammunition, clothing, food?' But the driver shook his head and said, 'No; Croix de Guerre.'"

But the satire does not cut too deeply, for Croix de Guerre played just as important a part in winning the war as food or ammunition or clothing. I heard a French colonel once cry to a crowd of prisoners returned from Germany, broken and ill: "Now, let us hear you shout that which it has been so long forbidden to you to say, 'Vive la France!'" And as he spoke his arm shot up into the air and his voice rang like a trumpet call, and everybody within sound of the man straightened up and thrilled as if he had just heard of a great victory. It was fine art for all the fact that it was probably also sincere.

No, when Napoleon had himself crowned in Nôtre Dame it was not, as Wells says, "Just a ridiculous scene." Napoleon realized that a play can be staged in a cathedral or upon a battlefield just as well as in a theater, and that man, who may come in time to be the superman of whom Wells dreams is still a little boy sitting in the gallery, ready to applaud and to shout for any dressed-up person who knows how to walk to the center

of the stage and hold it.

Promises and Contracts and Clocks

"I am one of those people," says the flapper in *Beauty and Mary Blair*, "to whom life is a very great puzzle. So many people seem to get used to living, but I don't. I can't seem to get up any really satisfactory philosophy or find anybody or anything to help me about it. I want everything, little or big, fixed up in mind before I can proceed.

"Even as a very small child I always wanted my plans made in advance. Once, when mother had a bad sick headache, I sat on the edge of her bed and begged her to tell me if she thought she was going to die, so if she was I could plan to go and live with my Aunt Margaret. I was an odious infant, but all the same, I really wanted to know, and that's the way I am to this day! I want to know what the probabilities are, in order to act accordingly."

And without doubt she was odious, but only in the same way that practically everybody else is odious, for we live in a world which is governed by promises and contracts and clocks. If there actually is any such thing as free will, aren't we the idiots to fetter it! The chances of doing things on impulse are being continually diminished. There are points in the city now where it is not possible to cross the street without the permission of the policeman.

"Stop," "Go," "Keep Off the Grass," "No Trespassing," "Beware of the Dog," "Watch Your Hat and Overcoat,"

"Positively No Checks Cashed," "Do Not Feed or Annoy the Animals" – how can a free and adventurous soul survive in such a world? Don Marquis has celebrated the exploit of one brave rebel, we think it was Fothergil Finch, who strode into the monkey house and crying "Down with the tyranny of the capitalist system," or words to that effect, threw a peanut into the baboon's cage. We know an even bolder soul who makes a point of never watching his hat and overcoat in direct defiance of the edict, but he says that the world has become so cowed by rules that nothing ever happens.

Even the usual avenues of escape have been beset with barbed wire. There was liquor, for instance. There still is, but the prohibitionists have been devilishly wise. By arranging that it shall be ladled out by prescriptions, no matter how lavish, they have reduced drinking to the prosaic level of premeditation along with all the other activities of the world. Things have come to such a pass that drinking has now been restricted to men with real executive ability. It is no longer the solace of the irresponsible, but the reward of foresight.

Once the easy escape from dull and set routine lay in stepping on board a steamer and sailing for distant and purple shores. They are not so purple any more. No traveler can feel much like a free and footloose adventurer after he has spent two weeks in conference with the State Department, presented a certificate confirming the fact of his birth, gathered together the receipts of his income tax payments and obtained a letter from his pastor.

Even though he go to the ends of the earth the adventurer travels only by the express and engraved permission of the United States government. Oceans and mountain ranges cannot alter the fact that he is on a leash. Of course, to free souls the whole system is monstrous. The fact that a man suddenly feels a desire to go to Greece on some rainy Tuesday afternoon is no sign at all that he will still want to go two weeks come Wednesday. The only proper procedure for the rebel is to obtain passports for a number of places for which he has not the slightest inclination on the hope that some day or other through a sudden change of wind he may be struck with yearning.

Train journeys are almost as bad as sea voyages. Go into any railroad station in town and ask the man at the window for a ticket and he will invariably inquire "Where do you want to go?" No provision is made for the casual traveler without a destination. The query "What trains have you got?" meets with scant courtesy. Our own system is to shop for trains. It is possible to walk up and down in front of the gates and look over the samples before making a selection, but our practice is to take the first one. To be sure this has let us into going to a good many places to which we didn't want to go, but it has also saved us from visiting any number of others to which we ought to go. Moreover, confidentially, we have one trick by which we slash through the red tape of railroad precision. Only last Thursday we told the man with a great show of determination that we wanted to go to Poughkeepsie and bought a ticket for that place. Then, when the

conductor wasn't looking we slipped off at Tarrytown.

Going to the theater, getting married or divorced are all carried on under the same objectionable conditions. "Seats eight weeks in advance" say the advertisements of some of the popular shows and others. How can anybody possibly want to do something eight weeks in advance? It makes taking in a matinée a matter as dignified to all intents and purposes as writing a will or doing some other service for posterity.

There are in this country statesmen who worry from time to time that people do not marry as young as they used to, if at all. How can it be expected that they will? The life force is powerful and may prevail, but nature never had within its intent a license, witnesses, bridesmaids, a plain gold ring, a contract with the caterer, a bargain with the printer and an engagement with the minister.

Alcoholic Liquors

"The moment, now, had arrived for a Daiquiri," writes Joseph Hergesheimer in his *San Cristobal de la Habana*. "Seated near the cool drip of the fountain, where a slight stir of air seemed to ruffle the fringed mantone of a bronze dancing Andalusian girl, I lingered over the frigid mixture of Don Bacardi, sugar and a fresh, vivid green lime.

"It was a delicate compound, not so good as I was to discover later at the Telegrafo, but still a revelation, and I was devoutly thankful to be sitting at that hour in the Inglaterra with such a drink. It elevated my contentment to an even higher pitch, and, with a detached amusement, I recalled the fact that farther north prohibition was now in effect. Unquestionably the cocktail on my table was a dangerous agent, for it held in its shallow glass bowl slightly incrustated with undissolved sugar the power of a contemptuous indifference to fate; it set the mind free of responsibility; obliterating both memory and to-morrow, it gave the heart an adventitious feeling of superiority and momentarily vanquished all the celebrated, the eternal fears."

We wonder what they put into Mr. Hergesheimer's Daiquiri. It seems to us a rather optimistic and romantic account of the effect of a single cocktail. One of the reasons why we were reconciled to prohibition was the fact that we invariably felt cheated whenever we read any loving essay about rum. In the

theater, too, again and again we saw some character raise a glass to his lips and immediately begin to sing about young love in May if he happened to be the hero, or fall down a flight of steps if he were cast as the low comedian. We tried earnestly enough, but these experiences were never duplicated for us. No songs came to our lips, nor comic tumbles to our feet. Nor did we ever participate in Mr. Hergesheimer's "contemptuous indifference to fate." It was not for us in one cocktail; no, not in many.

Occasionally, it was possible to reach a stage where we became acutely conscious of the fact that Armenians were being massacred and that Ireland was not yet free. And later we have known a very persuasive drowsiness. But as for contempt and a feeling of superiority and a freedom from the eternal fears, we never found the right bottle. There was none which opened for us any door of adventure. Once, we remember, while on our way from the office to Seventy-second Street, we rode in the subway to Van Cortlandt Park and, upon being told about it, traveled back to Atlantic Avenue. It was a long ride for a nickel, but it hardly satisfied us as authentic adventure.

Even the romantic stories of our friends generally seem to us inadequate. Only to-day A. W. said, "You should have come to the party. We played a new game called 'adverbs.' You send somebody out of the room and choose an adverb, and when she comes back you've got to answer all the questions in the spirit of that adverb. You know rudely, quickly, cryptically, or anything like that. And then Art did a burlesque of the second act of

Samson and Delilah and Elaine passed out completely, and every time anybody woke her up she'd say, 'Call me a black and white ambulance.' You had ought to have come."

We couldn't have added anything to that party. When it came our turn to answer the questions in the adverb game it would be just our luck to have the chosen word "gracefully" or "seductively" or something like that, and probably the burlesque was no good anyhow unless one could get into the spirit of the thing. That is our traditional failure. Right at the beginning of a party we realize that it is our duty to get gay and put ice down people's backs and all that, and it terrifies us. Whenever a host says "Here, drink some more Scotch and liven up" we have the same sinking feeling that we used to get when one of our former city editors wrote in the assignment book opposite our name: "Go up to the zoo and write me a funny story."

The whole trouble with life so far is that too much of it falls into assignments. We're not even content to let our holidays just happen. Instead we mark them down on a calendar, and there they stay as fixed and set as an execution day. There are times, for instance, when we feel like turning over a new leaf and leading a better life and giving up cigarettes, but when we look at the calendar it isn't New Year's at all, but Fourth of July, and so nothing can be done about it. Columbus Day or Washington's Birthday generally comes just about the time we've worked up an enthusiasm for Lincoln, which has to go to waste, and the only strong impulse we ever had to go out and cut loose was spoiled

because we noticed that everybody we met was wearing a white flower in his buttonhole and we remembered that it was Mother's Day. There are even times when we don't want to play cards or travel on railroad trains or read the newspapers or go to the movies, but these times never synchronize with Sunday.

When we first took up drinking we hoped that this would be one of the avenues of escape from schedule and assignment, but it didn't work out. Even here there were preliminaries and premeditation. First of all, it was necessary to cultivate a taste for the stuff, but that was only a beginning. There were still ceremonies to be complied with. Drunkenness never just descended on anybody like thunderstorm, rain or inspiration. It was not possible to go to sleep sober and wake up and find that somehow or other you had become intoxicated during the night. Always an act of will was required. A fixed determination, "I'm going to get drunk," must first be set, and then the rum has to be ordered and poured out and consumed pretty regularly. In fact, we never could look at a bottle without feeling that the label probably bore the express direction, "Take ten times every hour until relief is obtained." Even before the Volstead act liquor was spiritually a prescription rather than a beverage.

We never had the strength of character to get any good out of it. It's a fallacy, of course, to think of a chronic drunkard or a chronic anything as a person of weak will. Indeed, as a matter of fact, his will is so strong that he has been able to marshal all his energies into one channel and to make himself thereby a

specialist. In all our life we have never met but two determined men. One took a cold bath every morning and the other got drunk every night.

Some of My Best Friends Are Yale Men

"Oh, Harvard was old Harvard when Yale was but a pup,
"And Harvard will be Harvard still when Yale has all gone up,
"And if any Eli – "

THIS is about as far as the old song should be carried. Perhaps it is too far. Our plea to-day is for something of abatement in the intensity of the rivalry between Harvard and Yale. To be sure we realize that the plea has been made before unsuccessfully by mightier men. Indeed it was Charles W. Eliot himself, president of Harvard, who rebuked the students when first they began to sing, "Three cheers for Harvard and down with Yale." This, he said, seemed to him hardly a proper spirit. He suggested an amendment so that the song might go, "Three cheers for Harvard and one for Yale." Such seventy-five percent loyalty was rejected. Yale must continue to do its own cheering.

Naturally, it is not to be expected that Yale and Harvard men should meet on terms of perfect amity immediately and that the old bitterness should disappear within the time of our own generation. Such a miracle is beyond the scope of our intention. Too much has happened. Just what it was that Yale originally did to Harvard we don't profess to know. It was enough we

suppose to justify the trial of the issue by combat four times a year in the major sports. Curiously enough, for a good many years Yale seemed to grow more and more right if judged in the light of these tests. But the truth is mighty and shall prevail and the righteousness of Harvard's cause began to be apparent with the coming of Percy Haughton. God, as some cynic has said, is always on the side which has the best football coach.

Our suggestion is that whatever deep wrong Yale once committed against Harvard, a process of diminution of feeling should be allowed to set in. After all, can't the men of Cambridge be broadminded about these things and remember that nothing within the power of Yale could possibly hurt Harvard very much? Even in the days when the blue elevens were winning with great regularity there should have been consolation enough in the thought that Harvard's Greek department still held the edge. Seemingly nobody ever thought of that. In the 1906 game a Harvard half-back named Nichols was sent in late in the game while the score was still a tie. On practically the first play he dropped a punt which led directly to a Yale touchdown and victory.

Throughout the rest of his university career he was known in college as "the man who dropped the punt." When his brother entered Harvard two years later he was promptly christened, and known for his next four years, as "the brother of the man who dropped the punt."

Isn't this a little excessive? It seems so to us, but the emphasis

has not yet shifted. Only a month or so ago we were talking in New Haven before an organization of Yale graduates upon a subject so unpartisan as the American drama – though to be sure Harvard has turned out ten playwrights of note to every one from Yale – and somehow or other the talk drifted around to football. In pleading for less intensity of football feeling we mentioned the man who dropped the punt and his brother and told how Yale had recovered the fatal fumble on Harvard's nineteen-yard line. Then, with the intention of being jocose, we remarked, "The Yale eleven with characteristic bulldog grit and courage carried the ball over the line." To our horror and amazement the audience immediately broke into applause and long cheers.

Some of my best friends are Yale men and there is no basis for the common Harvard assumption that graduates of New Haven's leading university are of necessity inferior to the breed of Cambridge. Still, there is, perhaps, just a shade of difference in the keenness of perception for wit. Practically all the Harvard anecdotes about Yale which we know are pointed and sprightly, while Yale is content with such inferior and tasteless jibes as the falsetto imitation which begins "Fiercely fellows, sift through." Even the audience of graduates to which we referred was singularly cold to the anecdote about the difference in traditions which prevails at New Haven and at Cambridge. "When a Yale man is sick, the authorities immediately assume that he is drunk. When a Harvard man is drunk, the authorities assume that he is sick."

Nor were we successful in retelling the stirring appeal of a well-known organizer who was seeking to consolidate various alumni bodies into a vast unified employment agency for college men. "There should be," he cried, "one great clearing house. Then when somebody came for a man to tutor his children we could send him a Harvard man and if he needed somebody to help with the furnace, we'd have a Yale graduate for him."

Joking with undergraduates we found still more disastrous. After the last Harvard-Yale football game – score Harvard 9, Yale 0, which doesn't begin to indicate the margin of superiority of the winning team – we wrote an article of humorous intent for a New York newspaper. Naturally our job as a reporter prevented us from being partisan in our account of the game. Accordingly, in a temperate and fairminded spirit, we set down the fact that, through the connivance of the New York press, Yale has become a professional underdog and that any Harvard victory in which the score is less than forty-two to nothing is promptly hailed as a moral victory for Yale.

Developing this news angle for a few paragraphs, we eventually came to the unfortunate fist fight between Kempton of Yale and Gaston of Harvard which led to both men being put out of the game. It was our bad luck to see nothing but the last half second of the encounter. As a truthful reporter we made this admission but naturally went on to add, "Of course, we assume that Kempton started it." For weeks we continued to receive letters from Yale undergraduates beginning, "My attention has

been called to your article" and continuing to ask with great violence how a reporter could possibly tell who started a fight without seeing the beginning of it. Some letters of like import were from Princeton men.

Princeton is always quick to rally to the defense of Yale against Harvard. This suggests a possibly common meeting ground for Harvard and Yale. Of course, they can hardly meet on the basis of a common language for the speech of Yale is quite alien. For instance, they call their "yard" a "campus." Also, there are obvious reasons why they cannot meet as equal members in the fellowship of educated men. Since this is a nonpartisan article designed to promote good feeling it will probably be just as well not to go into this. Though football is the chief interest at New Haven, Yale men often display a surprising sensitiveness to attacks on the scholarship of their local archaeologists. Nor will religion do as a unifier. Yale is evangelical and prays between the halves, while Harvard is mostly agnostic, if it isn't Unitarian. No, just one great cause can be discovered in which Harvard men and Yale men can stand shoulder to shoulder and lift their voices in a common cause. Each year some public spirited citizen ought to hire Madison Square Garden and turn it over to all graduates and undergraduates of Harvard and of Yale for a great get-together meeting in which past differences should be forgotten in one deep and full throated shout of "To Hell with Princeton!"

Bacillus and Circumstance

IT is evening in the home of Peter J. Cottontail. The scene is a conventional parlor of a rabbit family of the upper middle class. About the room there is the sort of furniture a well-to-do rabbit would have, and on the shelves the books you would naturally expect. *Leaves of Grass* is there, of course; possibly *Cabbages and Kings*, and perhaps a volume or two of *The Winning of the West*, with a congratulatory inscription from the author. The walls have one or two good prints of hunting scenes and an excellent lithographic likeness of Thomas Malthus, but most of the space is given over to photographs of the family.

In the center of the room is a small square table, the surface of which is covered with figures ranged in curious patterns such as $2 \times 5 = 10$, and even so radical an arrangement as $7 \times 8 = 56$. At the rise of the curtain Peter J. Cottontail is discovered seated in an easy chair reading the current edition of *The New York Evening Post*. He is middle-aged and wears somewhat ill fitting brown fur, tinged with gray, and horn-rimmed spectacles. He looks a little like Lloyd George. As a matter of fact, his grandfather was Welsh. The actor should convey to the audience by means of pantomime that he has made more than a thousand dollars that afternoon by selling Amalgamated Cabbage short, and that there will be a tidy surplus for himself even after he has fulfilled his promise to make up the deficit incurred by the

charity hop of the Bone Dry Prohibition Union. Now and again he smiles and pats his stomach complacently. It is essential that the actor should indicate beyond the peradventure of a doubt that Peter J. Cottontail has never touched spirituous or malt liquors or anything containing more than two per cent of alcohol per fluid ounce.

As P. J. Cottontail peruses his paper the ceiling of the room is suddenly plucked aside and two hands are thrust into the parlor. One of the hands seizes Mr. Cottontail, and the other hand, which holds a hypodermic needle, stabs the helpless householder and injects into his veins the contents of the needle. It is a fluid gray and forbidding. There is no sound unless the actor who plays Cottontail chooses to squeak just once.

Here the curtain descends. It rises again almost immediately, but five days are supposed to have elapsed. Mr. Cottontail is again seated in the center of the room, and he is again reading *The Evening Post*. The property man should take pains to see that the paper shall be dated five days later than the one used in the prologue. It might also be well to change the headline from "Submarine Crisis Acute" to "Submarine Crisis Still Acute." It is also to be noted that on this occasion Mr. Cottontail has removed his right shoe in favor of a large, roomy slipper. On the opposite side of the table sits Mrs. Cottontail. She is middle-aged but comely. A strong-minded female, one would say, with a will of her own, but rather in awe of the ability and more particularly the virtue of Mr. Cottontail. Yet Mr. Cottontail is evidently in ill

humor this evening. He takes no pleasure in his paper, but fidgets uneasily. At last he speaks with great irritation.

MR. COTTONTAIL – Is that doctor ever coming?

MRS. COTTONTAIL – I left word at Doctor Cony's house that you were in a good deal of pain, and that he should come around the minute he got home. (*The door bell rings.*) Here he is now. I'll send him up. (*She goes out the door, and a few moments later there enters Dr. Charles Cony. He is a distinguished and forceful physician, but a meager little body for all that. He carries a black bag.*)

DR. CONY (*removing his gloves and opening the bag*) – Sorry I couldn't get here any sooner, but I've been on the go all day. An obstetrician gets mighty little rest hereabouts, I can tell you. Well, now, Mr. Cottontail, what can I do for you? What seems to be the trouble?

COTTONTAIL (*pointing to the open door, and lifting one finger to his mouth*) – Shush!

DR. CONY – Really! (*The physician crosses the room in one hop and closes the door.*)

COTTONTAIL – The pain's in my foot. My big toe, I think, but that's not what worries me —

DR. CONY (*breaking in*) – Pains worse at night than it does during the daytime, doesn't it? Throbs a bit right now, hey?

COTTONTAIL – Yes, it does, but that isn't the trouble.

DR. CONY – That's trouble enough. I'll try to have you loping around again in a month or so.

COTTONTAIL – But there's more than the pain. It's the worry. I haven't told a soul. I thought at first it might be a nightmare.

DR. CONY – Dreams, eh? Very significant, sometimes, but we'll get to them later.

COTTONTAIL – But I'm afraid it wasn't a dream.

DOCTOR – What wasn't a dream?

COTTONTAIL – Last Tuesday evening I was sitting in this room, quietly reading *The Evening Post*, when suddenly something tore the ceiling away, and down from above there came ten horrible pink tentacles and seized me in an iron grasp. Then something stabbed me with some sharp instrument. I was too frightened to move for several minutes, but when I looked up the ceiling was back in place as if nothing had touched it. I felt around for the wound, but the only thing I could find, was a tiny scratch that seemed so small I might have had it some time without noticing it. I couldn't be sure it was a wound. In fact, I tried to make myself believe that the whole thing was all a dream, until I was taken sick to-night. Now I'm afraid that the sword, or whatever it was that stabbed me, must have been poisoned.

DR. CONY (*sharply*) – Let me look at your tongue. (Cottontail complies.) Seems all right. Hold out your hands. Spread your fingers. (*He studies the patient for a moment.*) Nothing much the matter there. (*Producing pen and paper.*) If it was only March now I'd know what to say. Let's see what we can find out about hereditary influence. Father and mother living?

COTTONTAIL – I had no father or mother. I came out of a trick hat in a vaudeville act.

DR. CONY – That makes it a little more difficult, doesn't it? Do you happen to remember what sort of a hat?

COTTONTAIL (*a little proudly*) – It was quite a high hat.

DR. CONY – Yes, it would be. What color?

COTTONTAIL – Black and shiny.

DR. CONY – That seems normal enough. I'm afraid there's nothing significant there. (*Anxiously.*) No fixed delusions? You don't think you're Napoleon or the White Rabbit or anything like that, do you? Do you feel like growling or biting anybody?

COTTONTAIL – Of course not. There's nothing the matter with my brain.

DR. CONY – Perhaps you went to sleep and dreamed it all.

COTTONTAIL – No, I distinctly saw the ceiling open and I felt the stab very sharply. I couldn't possibly have been asleep. I was reading a most interesting dramatic review in *The Evening Post*.

DR. CONY – But you weren't stabbed in the big toe, now, were you?

COTTONTAIL – Well, no.

DR. CONY – And you will admit that the ceiling's just the same as it ever was?

COTTONTAIL – It looks the same from here. I haven't called any workmen in yet to examine it.

DR. CONY – Take my advice and don't. Just let's keep the

matter between ourselves and forget it. I'm afraid you've been working too hard. Drop your business. Do a little light reading, and after a bit maybe I'd like to have you go to a show. Something with songs and bunny-hugging and jokes and chorus girls. None of this birth control stuff. I don't see how any self-respecting rabbit could go to a play like the one I saw last night. (*He goes to his instrument case and produces a stethoscope.*)

DR. CONY – Have you had your heart examined lately?

COTTONTAIL (*visibly nervous*) – No.

DR. CONY – Any shortness of breath or palpitation?

COTTONTAIL – I don't think so.

DR. CONY – If that's a vest you have on, take it off. There, now. (*He stands in front of Cottontail with his stethoscope poised in the air. Cottontail is trembling. Dr. Cony allows the hand holding the stethoscope to drop to his side and remarks provocatively*), I'll bet you Maranville doesn't hit .250 this season.

COTTONTAIL (*amazed*) – Really, sir, I never bet. No, never. I don't know what you are talking about, anyway.

DR. CONY – That's all right, that's all right. Don't agitate yourself. Just a little professional trick. I wanted to calm you down. Now (*he makes a hurried examination*), Mr. Cottontail, I don't want you to run. I don't want you to climb stairs. Avoid excitement and don't butter your parsnips. Fine words are just as good, no matter what anybody may tell you, and they don't create fatty tissue. Of course, you've got to have some exercise. You might play a little golf. Say, about three holes a day.

COTTONTAIL (*sadly*) – Three holes?

DR. CONY – Yes, that will be enough.

COTTONTAIL (*musng*) – It's a little tough, doctor. I can still remember the day I won my "H" at dear old Hassenpfeffer in the 'cross-country run. I had the lungs and the legs then. Even now I can feel the wind on my face as I came across the meadow and up that last, long hill. They were cheering for me to come on. I can tell you I just leaped along. It was nothing at all for me. If I'd sprinted just a bit sooner I could have been first in a hop. Anyhow, I was second. There was nobody ahead of me but the Tortoise. (*Cheerlessly*) Three holes of golf a day!

DR. CONY – Come, come, sir, be a rabbit. There's no cheating nature, you know. You had your fun, and now you must pay.

COTTONTAIL – What's the matter with me?

DR. CONY – Plain, old-fashioned gout.

COTTONTAIL – What does that come from?

DR. CONY (*with evident relish*) – From too much ale or porter or claret or burgundy or champagne or sherry or Rhine Wine or Clover Clubs or Piper Heidsieck or brandy or Bronxes or absinthe or stingers, but the worst of all and the best of all is port wine.

COTTONTAIL (*horrified*) – You mean it comes from drinking?

Dr. Cony – In all my twenty-five years of professional practice I have never known a case of gout without antecedent alcoholism.

COTTONTAIL (*much relieved*) – Well, then, it can't be gout. I've never taken a drink in my life.

Dr. Cony – In all my twenty-five years of professional experience I've never made an incorrect diagnosis. It is gout.

COTTONTAIL – But I'm president of the Bone Dry Prohibition Union.

Dr. Cony – The more shame to you, sir.

COTTONTAIL – What shall I do?

DR. CONY – Obey my instructions implicitly. A good many doctors will tell you that they can't cure gout. Undoubtedly they are right. They can't. But I can. Only you simply must stop drinking. Cutting down and tapering off to ten or twelve drinks a day won't do. You must stop absolutely. No liquor at all. Do you understand? Not a drop, sir.

COTTONTAIL (*his nose violently palpitating with emotion*) – I never took a drink in my life. I'm president of the Bone Dry Prohibition Union. I was just sitting quietly reading *The Evening Post*—

DR. CONY – Save that story for your bone-dry friends. I have nothing to do with your past life. I'm not judging you. It's nature that says the alcoholic must pay and pay and pay. I'm only concerned now with the present and the future, and the present is that you're suffering from alcoholism manifested in gout, and the future is that you'll die if you don't stop drinking.

COTTONTAIL – I tell you I promised my Sunday school teacher when I was a boy that I would always be a Little Light

Bearer, and that I would never take a drink if I lived to be a hundred.

DR. CONY – Don't worry, you won't live that long, and don't take on so. You're not the first one that's had his fun and then been dragged up by the heels for it. Cheer up. Remember the good times that are gone. Life can't be all carrots, you know.

COTTONTAIL – But I never had any good times.

DR. CONY – Oh, yes, you did, I'll warrant you. There must have been many merry nights as the bottle passed around the table. (*With evident gusto*) Maybe there was a rousing song – "When Leeks Are Young in Springtime" – or something like that, and I wouldn't be surprised if now and again there was some fluffy little miss to sing soprano to your bass. Youth! Youth! To be young, a rabbit and stewed. (*Quoting reminiscently*) "A leaf of lettuce underneath the bough." After all, salad days are the best days. I never meet an old rabbit with gout but I take off my hat and say, "Sir, you have lived."

COTTONTAIL (*wildly*) – It's not true. I never lived like that. I never took a drink in my life. You can ask anybody. Nobody ever saw me take a drink.

DR. CONY – That's bad. You solitary drunkards are always the hardest to handle. But you've simply got to stop. You must quit drinking or die, that's all there is to it.

COTTONTAIL – This is terrible. It must have been that poisoned sword. I tell you, I was just sitting here quietly, reading *The Evening Post*—

DR. CONY – My dear sir, please rid yourself right away of the alcoholic's habit of confusing cause and effect. He thinks he's sick because green elephants are walking on him, while, as a matter of fact, green elephants are walking on him because he's sick. It's terribly simple, when you stop to figure it out.

COTTONTAIL – You don't think I saw any pink monster come through the ceiling?

DR. CONY – On the contrary, I'm sure you did. But the point is, you mustn't see him again, and the only way to avoid seeing him is to quit drinking. Your fun's done. Now, be a good patient and tell me you'll stop drinking —

COTTONTAIL – I tell you I never had any fun. I never had any fun —

DR. CONY – Well, strictly speaking, it isn't the fun that hurts you, it's the rum. You must stop, even if you hate the stuff. Do you understand?

COTTONTAIL (*hysterical*) – I can't stop, I can't stop; I never started, I can't stop —

DR. CONY – Very well, sir, I must insist on taking the only measure that will save your life. (*He steps to the door and calls*) Mrs. Cottontail, will you come here immediately?

(*Enter Mrs. Cottontail.*)

COTTONTAIL – My dear —

DR. CONY – If you please, madame. Let me explain first. You can have it out with your husband later. I'm sorry to tell you, Mrs. Cottontail, that your husband has gout. He has contracted

it from excessive drinking. You knew, of course, that he was a heavy drinker?

MRS. COTTONTAIL (*surprised, but not in the least incredulous*) – I couldn't go so far as to say I knew it.

DR. CONY – He must stop or he'll die.

COTTONTAIL (*rapidly and wildly*) – I can explain everything, my dear. The doctor's all wrong. The whole trouble is somebody pulled the roof off the other day and stabbed me with a poisoned sword. I was right here in this room. I was just quietly reading *The Evening Post*. I knew no good would come of our moving into this new apartment house, with its fancy wire and green paint and free food, and all the rest of it.

DR. CONY (*to Mrs. Cottontail, who aids him in ignoring the patient*) – You can see for yourself, madame, just how rational he is. I leave him in your care, Mrs. Cottontail. Don't let him out of your sight. Try and find out where he gets his liquor. If he pleads with you for a drink, be firm with him. Follow him everywhere. Make him obey. It won't be hard in his enfeebled condition. I'll be around to-morrow. (*To Cottontail*) Remember, one drink may be fatal.

(*Exit Dr. Cony.*)

COTTONTAIL – My dear, it was a pink monster, with an enormous dagger. It lifted off the ceiling —

MRS. COTTONTAIL – Peter, can't you even be temperate in your lies?

COTTONTAIL (*sinking helplessly in his chair*) – My dear, I

was just sitting quietly, reading *The Evening Post*—

MRS. COTTONTAIL – You brute! I always had a feeling you were too good to be true.

COTTONTAIL (*feebly and hopelessly*) – I was just sitting, reading *The Evening Post* (*his voice trails off into nothingness. He sits motionless, huddled up in the chair. Suddenly he speaks again, but it is a new voice, strangely altered.*) Mopsy, give me *The Sun*.

MRS. COTTONTAIL (*looking at him in amazement*) – What do you say?

COTTONTAIL (*His muscles relax. His eyes stare stupidly. He speaks without sense or expression*) —*The Sun! The Sun! The Evening Sun!*

(*He is quite mad.*)

(Curtain.)

Death Says It Isn't So

THE scene is a sickroom. It is probably in a hospital, for the walls are plain and all the corners are eliminated in that peculiar circular construction which is supposed to annoy germs. The shades are down and the room is almost dark. A doctor who has been examining the sick man turns to go. The nurse at his side looks at him questioningly.

THE DOCTOR (*briskly*) – I don't believe he'll last out the day. If he wakes or seems unusually restless, let me know. There's nothing to do.

He goes out quietly, but quickly, for there is another man down at the end of the corridor who is almost as sick. The nurse potters about the room for a moment or two, arranging whatever things it is that nurses arrange. She exits l. c., or, in other words, goes out the door. There is just a short pause in the dark, quiet room shut out from all outside noises and most outside light. When the steam pipes are not clanking only the slow breathing of the man on the bed can be heard. Suddenly a strange thing happens.

The door does not open or the windows, but there is unquestionably another man in the room. It couldn't have been the chimney, because there isn't any. Possibly it is an optical illusion, but the newcomer seems just a bit indistinct for a moment or so in the darkened room. Quickly he raises both the window shades, and in the rush of bright sunlight he is

definite enough in appearance. Upon better acquaintance it becomes evident that it couldn't have been the chimney, even if there had been one. The visitor is undeniably bulky, although extraordinarily brisk in his movements. He has a trick which will develop later in the scene of blushing on the slightest provocation. At that his color is habitually high. But this round, red, little man, peculiarly enough, has thin white hands and long tapering fingers, like an artist or a newspaper cartoonist. Very possibly his touch would be lighter than that of the nurse herself. At any rate, it is evident that he walks much more quietly. This is strange, for he does not rise on his toes, but puts his feet squarely on the ground. They are large feet, shod in heavy hobnail boots. No one but a golfer or a day laborer would wear such shoes.

The hands of the little, round, red man preclude the idea that he is a laborer. The impression that he is a golfer is heightened by the fact that he is dressed loudly in very bad taste. In fact, he wears a plaid vest of the sort which was brought over from Scotland in the days when clubs were called sticks. The man in the gaudy vest surveys the sunshine with great satisfaction. It reaches every corner of the room, or rather it would but for the fact that the corners have been turned into curves. A stray beam falls across the eyes of the sick man on the bed. He wakes, and, rubbing his eyes an instant, slowly sits up in bed and looks severely at the fat little man.

THE SICK MAN (*feebly, but vehemently*) – No, you don't. I won't stand for any male nurse. I want Miss Bluchblauer.

THE FAT MAN – I'm not a nurse, exactly.

THE SICK MAN – Who are you?

THE FAT MAN (*cheerfully and in a matter of fact tone*) – I'm Death.

THE SICK MAN (*sinking back on the bed*) – That rotten fever's up again. I'm seeing things.

THE FAT MAN (*almost plaintively*) – Don't you believe I'm Death? Honest, I am. I wouldn't fool you. (*He fumbles in his pockets and produces in rapid succession a golf ball, a baseball pass, a G string, a large lump of gold, a receipted bill, two theater tickets and a white mass of sticky confection which looks as though it might be a combination of honey and something – milk, perhaps*) – I've gone and left that card case again, but I'm Death, all right.

THE SICK MAN – What nonsense! If you really were I'd be frightened. I'd have cold shivers up and down my spine. My hair would stand on end like the fretful porcupine. I'm not afraid of you. Why, when Sadie Bluchblauer starts to argue about the war she scares me more than you do.

THE FAT MAN (*very much relieved and visibly brighter*) – That's fine. I'm glad you're not scared. Now we can sit down and talk things over like friends.

THE SICK MAN – I don't mind talking, but remember I know you're not Death. You're just some trick my hot head's playing on me. Don't get the idea you're putting anything over.

THE FAT MAN – But what makes you so sure I'm not Death?

THE SICK MAN – Go on! Where's your black cloak?

Where's your sickle? Where's your skeleton? Why don't you rattle when you walk?

THE FAT MAN (*horrified and distressed*) – Why should I rattle? What do I want with a black overcoat or a skeleton? I'm not fooling you. I'm Death, all right.

THE SICK MAN – Don't tell me that. I've seen Death a thousand times in the war cartoons. And I've seen him on the stage – Maeterlinck, you know, with green lights and moaning, and that Russian fellow, Andreyeff, with no light at all, and hollering. And I've seen other plays with Death – lots of them. I'm one of the scene shifters with the Washington Square Players. This isn't regular, at all. There's more light in here right now than any day since I've been sick.

THE FAT MAN – I always come in the light. Be a good fellow and believe me. You'll see I'm right later on. I wouldn't fool anybody. It's mean.

THE SICK MAN (*laughing out loud*) – Mean! What's meaner than Death? You're not Death. You're as soft and smooth-talking as a press agent. Why, you could go on a picnic in that make-up.

THE FAT MAN (*almost soberly*) – I've been on picnics.

THE SICK MAN – You're open and above board. Death's a sneak. You've got a nice face. Yes; you've got a mighty nice face. You'd stop to help a bum in the street or a kid that was crying.

THE FAT MAN – I have stopped for beggars and children.

THE SICK MAN – There, you see; I told you. You're kind and considerate. Death's the cruellest thing in the world.

THE FAT MAN (*very much agitated*) – Oh, please don't say that! It isn't true. I'm kind; that's my business. When things get too rotten I'm the only one that can help. They've got to have me. You should hear them sometimes before I come. I'm the one that takes them off battlefields and out of slums and all terribly tired people. I whisper a joke in their ears, and we go away, laughing. We always go away laughing. Everybody sees my joke, it's so good.

THE SICK MAN – What's the joke?

THE FAT MAN – I'll tell it to you later.

Enter the Nurse. She almost runs into the Fat Man, but goes right past without paying any attention. It almost seems as if she cannot see him. She goes to the bedside of the patient.

THE NURSE – So, you're awake. You feel any more comfortable?

The Sick Man continues to stare at the Fat Man, but that worthy animated pantomime indicates that he shall say nothing of his being there. While this is on, the Nurse takes the patient's temperature. She looks at it, seems surprised, and then shakes the thermometer.

THE SICK MAN (*eagerly*) – I suppose my temperature's way up again, hey? I've been seeing things this afternoon and talking to myself.

THE NURSE – No; your temperature is almost normal.

THE SICK MAN (*incredulously*) – Almost normal?

THE NURSE – Yes; under a hundred.

She goes out quickly and quietly. The Sick Man turns to his fat friend.

THE SICK MAN – What do you make of that? Less than a hundred. That oughtn't to make me see things; do you think so?

THE FAT MAN – Well, I'd just as soon not be called a thing. Up there I'm called good old Death. Some of the fellows call me Bill. Maybe that's because I'm always due.

THE SICK MAN – Rats! Is that the joke you promised me?

THE FAT MAN (*pained beyond measure*) – Oh, that was just a little unofficial joke. The joke's not like that. I didn't make up the real one. It wasn't made up at all. It's been growing for years and years. A whole lot of people have had a hand in fixing it up – Aristophanes and Chaucer and Shakespeare, and Mark Twain and Rabelais —

THE SICK MAN – Did that fellow Rabelais get in – up there?

THE FAT MAN – Well, not exactly, but he lives in one of the most accessible parts of the suburb, and we have him up quite often. He's popular on account of his after-dinner stories. What I might call his physical humor is delightfully reminiscent and archaic.

THE SICK MAN – There won't be any bodies, then?

THE FAT MAN – Oh, yes, brand new ones. No tonsils or appendixes, of course. That is, not as a rule. We have to bring in a few tonsils every year to amuse our doctors.

THE SICK MAN – Any shows?

THE FAT MAN – I should say so. Lots of 'em, and all hits.

In fact, we've never had a failure (*provocatively*). Now, what do you think is the best show you ever saw?

THE SICK MAN (*reminiscently*) – Well, just about the best show I ever saw was a piece called "Fair and Warmer," but, of course, you wouldn't have that.

THE FAT MAN – Of course, we have. The fellow before last wanted that.

THE SICK MAN (*truculently*) – I'll bet you haven't got the original company.

THE FAT MAN (*apologetically*) – No, but we expect to get most of them by and by. Nell Gwyn does pretty well in the lead just now.

THE SICK MAN (*shocked*) – Did she get in?

THE FAT MAN – No, but Rabelais sees her home after the show. We don't think so much of "Fair and Warmer." That might be a good show for New York, but it doesn't class with us. It isn't funny enough.

THE SICK MAN (*with rising interest*) – Do you mean to say you've got funnier shows than "Fair and Warmer"?

THE FAT MAN – We certainly have. Why, it can't begin to touch that thing of Shaw's called "Ah, There, Annie!"

THE SICK MAN – What Shaw's that?

THE FAT MAN – Regular Shaw.

THE SICK MAN – A lot of things must have been happening since I got sick. I hadn't heard he was dead. At that I always thought that vegetable truck was unhealthy.

THE FAT MAN – He isn't dead.

THE SICK MAN – Well, how about this "Ah, There, Annie!"? He never wrote that show down here.

THE FAT MAN – But he will.

THE SICK MAN (*enormously impressed*) – Do you get shows there before we have them in New York?

THE FAT MAN – I tell you we get them before they're written.

THE SICK MAN (*indignantly*) – How can you do that?

THE FAT MAN – I wish you wouldn't ask me. The answer's awfully complicated. You've got to know a lot of higher math. Wait and ask Euclid about it. We don't have any past and future, you know. None of that nuisance about keeping shall and will straight.

THE SICK MAN – Well, I must say that's quite a stunt. You get shows before they're written.

THE FAT MAN – More than that. We get some that never do get written. Take that one of Ibsen's now, "Merry Christmas" —

THE SICK MAN (*fretfully*) – Ibsen?

THE FAT MAN – Yes, it's a beautiful, sentimental little fairy story with a ghost for the hero. Ibsen just thought about it and never had the nerve to go through with it. He was scared people would kid him, but thinking things makes them so with us.

THE SICK MAN – Then I'd think a sixty-six round Van Cortlandt for myself.

THE FAT MAN – You could do that. But why Van Cortlandt?

We've got much better greens on our course. It's a beauty. Seven thousand yards long and I've made it in fifty-four.

THE SICK MAN (*suspiciously*) – Did you hole out on every green or just estimate?

THE FAT MAN (*stiffly*) – The score is duly attested. I might add that it was possible because I drove more than four hundred yards on nine of the eighteen holes.

THE SICK MAN – More than four hundred yards? How did you do that?

THE FAT MAN – It must have been the climate, or (*thoughtfully*) it may be because I wanted so much to drive over four hundred yards on those holes.

THE SICK MAN (*with just a shade of scorn*) – So that's the trick. I guess nobody'd ever beat me on that course; I'd just want the ball in the hole in one every time.

THE FAT MAN (in gentle reproof) – No, you wouldn't. Where you and I are going pretty soon we're all true sportsmen and nobody there would take an unfair advantage of an opponent.

THE SICK MAN – Before I go I want to know something. There's a fellow in 125th Street's been awful decent to me. Is there any coming back to see people here? (*A pause*)

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.