

BANGS JOHN KENDRICK

THE ENCHANTED
TYPEWRITER

John Bangs
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John Kendrick Bangs

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I. THE DISCOVERY

It is a strange fact, for which I do not expect ever satisfactorily to account, and which will receive little credence even among those who know that I am not given to romancing—it is a strange fact, I say, that the substance of the following pages has evolved itself during a period of six months, more or less, between the hours of midnight and four o'clock in the morning, proceeding directly from a type-writing machine standing in the corner of my library, manipulated by unseen hands. The machine is not of recent make. It is, in fact, a relic of the early seventies, which I discovered one morning when, suffering from a slight attack of the grip, I had remained at home and devoted my time to pottering about in the attic, unearthing old books, bringing to the light long-forgotten correspondences, my boyhood collections of “stuff,” and other memory-inducing things. Whence the machine came originally I do not recall. My impression is that it belonged to a stenographer once in the employ of my father, who used frequently to come to our house to take down dictations. However this may be, the machine had lain hidden by dust and the flotsam and jetsam of the house for twenty years, when, as I have said,

I came upon it unexpectedly. Old man as I am—I shall soon be thirty—the fascination of a machine has lost none of its potency. I am as pleased to-day watching the wheels of my watch “go round” as ever I was, and to “monkey” with a type-writing apparatus has always brought great joy into my heart—though for composing give me the pen. Perhaps I should apologize for the use here of the verb monkey, which savors of what a friend of mine calls the “English slanguage,” to differentiate it from what he also calls the “Andrew Language.” But I shall not do so, because, to whatever branch of our tongue the word may belong, it is exactly descriptive, and descriptive as no other word can be, of what a boy does with things that click and “go,” and is therefore not at all out of place in a tale which I trust will be regarded as a polite one.

The discovery of the machine put an end to my attic potterings. I cared little for finding old bill-files and collections of Atlantic cable-ends when, with a whole morning, a type-writing machine, and a screw-driver before me I could penetrate the mysteries of that useful mechanism. I shall not endeavor to describe the delightful sensations of that hour of screwing and unscrewing; they surpass the powers of my pen. Suffice it to say that I took the whole apparatus apart, cleaned it well, oiled every joint, and then put it together again. I do not suppose a seven-year-old boy could have derived more satisfaction from taking a piano to pieces. It was exhilarating, and I resolved that as a reward for the pleasure it had given me the machine should have

a brand-new ribbon and as much ink as it could consume. And that, in brief, is how it came to be that this machine of antiquated pattern was added to the library bric-a-brac. To say the truth, it was of no more practical use than Barye's dancing bear, a plaster cast of which adorns my mantel-shelf, so that when I classify it with the bric-a-brac I do so advisedly. I frequently tried to write a jest or two upon it, but the results were extraordinarily like Sir Arthur Sullivan's experience with the organ into whose depths the lost chord sank, never to return. I dashed off the jests well enough, but somewhere between the keys and the types they were lost, and the results, when I came to scan the paper, were depressing. And once I tried a sonnet on the keys. Exactly how to classify the jumble that came out of it I do not know, but it was curious enough to have appealed strongly to D'Israeli or any other collector of the literary oddity. More singular than the sonnet, though, was the fact that when I tried to write my name upon this strange machine, instead of finding it in all its glorious length written upon the paper, I did find "William Shakespeare" printed there in its stead. Of course you will say that in putting the machine together I mixed up the keys and the letters. I have no doubt that I did, but when I tell you that there have been times when, looking at myself in the glass, I have fancied that I saw in my mirrored face the lineaments of the great bard; that the contour of my head is precisely the same as was his; that when visiting Stratford for the first time every foot of it was pregnant with clearly defined recollections to me, you will perhaps more

easily picture to yourself my sensations at the moment.

However, enough of describing the machine in its relation to myself. I have said sufficient, I think, to convince you that whatever its make, its age, and its limitations, it was an extraordinary affair; and, once convinced of that, you may the more readily believe me when I tell you that it has gone into business apparently for itself—and incidentally for me.

It was on the morning of the 26th of March last that I discovered the curious condition of affairs concerning which I have essayed to write. My family do not agree with me as to the date. They say that it was on the evening of the 25th of March that the episode had its beginning; but they are not aware, for I have not told them, that it was not evening, but morning, when I reached home after the dinner at the Aldus Club. It was at a quarter of three A.M. precisely that I entered my house and proceeded to remove my hat and coat, in which operation I was interrupted, and in a startling manner, by a click from the dark recesses of the library. A man does not like to hear a click which he cannot comprehend, even before he has dined. After he has dined, however, and feels a satisfaction with life which cannot come to him before dinner, to hear a mysterious click, and from a dark corner, at an hour when the world is at rest, is not pleasing. To say that my heart jumped into my mouth is mild. I believe it jumped out of my mouth and rebounded against the wall opposite back through my system into my boots. All the sins of my past life, and they are many—I once stepped upon a

caterpillar, and I have coveted my neighbor both his man-servant and his maid-servant, though not his wife nor his ass, because I don't like his wife and he keeps no live-stock—all my sins, I say, rose up before me, for I expected every moment that a bullet would penetrate my brain, or my heart if perchance the burglar whom I suspected of levelling a clicking revolver at me aimed at my feet.

"Who is there?" I cried, making a vocal display of bravery I did not feel, hiding behind our hair sofa.

The only answer was another click.

"This is serious," I whispered softly to myself. "There are two of 'em; I am in the light, unarmed. They are concealed by the darkness and have revolvers. There is only one way out of this, and that is by strategy. I'll pretend I think I've made a mistake." So I addressed myself aloud.

"What an idiot you are," I said, so that my words could be heard by the burglars. "If this is the effect of Aldus Club dinners you'd better give them up. That click wasn't a click at all, but the ticking of our new eight-day clock."

I paused, and from the corner there came a dozen more clicks in quick succession, like the cocking of as many revolvers.

"Great Heavens!" I murmured, under my breath. "It must be Ali Baba with his forty thieves."

As I spoke, the mystery cleared itself, for following close upon a thirteenth click came the gentle ringing of a bell, and I knew then that the type-writing machine was in action; but this was

by no means a reassuring discovery. Who or what could it be that was engaged upon the type-writer at that unholy hour, 3 A.M.? If a mortal being, why was my coming no interruption? If a supernatural being, what infernal complication might not the immediate future have in store for me?

My first impulse was to flee the house, to go out into the night and pace the fields—possibly to rush out to the golf links and play a few holes in the dark in order to cool my brow, which was rapidly becoming fevered. Fortunately, however, I am not a man of impulse. I never yield to a mere nerve suggestion, and so, instead of going out into the storm and certainly contracting pneumonia, I walked boldly into the library to investigate the causes of the very extraordinary incident. You may rest well assured, however, that I took care to go armed, fortifying myself with a stout stick, with a long, ugly steel blade concealed within it—a cowardly weapon, by-the-way, which I permit to rest in my house merely because it forms a part of a collection of weapons acquired through the failure of a comic paper to which I had contributed several articles. The editor, when the crash came, sent me the collection as part payment of what was owed me, which I think was very good of him, because a great many people said that it was my stuff that killed the paper. But to return to the story. Fortifying myself with the sword-cane, I walked boldly into the library, and, touching the electric button, soon had every gas-jet in the room giving forth a brilliant flame; but these, brilliant as they were, disclosed nothing in the chair before

the machine.

The latter, apparently oblivious of my presence, went clicking merrily and as rapidly along as though some expert young woman were in charge. Imagine the situation if you can. A type-writing machine of ancient make, its letters clear, but out of accord with the keys, confronted by an empty chair, three hours after midnight, rattling off page after page of something which might or might not be readable, I could not at the moment determine. For two or three minutes I gazed in open-mouthed wonder. I was not frightened, but I did experience a sensation which comes from contact with the uncanny. As I gradually grasped the situation and became used, somewhat, to what was going on, I ventured a remark.

“This beats the deuce!” I observed.

The machine stopped for an instant. The sheet of paper upon which the impressions of letters were being made flew out from under the cylinder, a pure white sheet was as quickly substituted, and the keys clicked off the line:

“What does?”

I presumed the line was in response to my assertion, so I replied:

“You do. What uncanny freak has taken possession of you to-night that you start in to write on your own hook, having resolutely declined to do any writing for me ever since I rescued you from the dust and dirt and cobwebs of the attic?”

“You never rescued me from any attic,” the machine replied.

“You’d better go to bed; you’ve dined too well, I imagine. When did you rescue me from the dust and dirt and the cobwebs of any attic?”

“What an ungrateful machine you are!” I cried. “If you have sense enough to go into writing on your own account, you ought to have mind enough to remember the years you spent up-stairs under the roof neglected, and covered with hammocks, awnings, family portraits, and receipted bills.”

“Really, my dear fellow,” the machine tapped back, “I must repeat it. Bed is the place for you. You’re not coherent. I’m not a machine, and upon my honor, I’ve never seen your darned old attic.”

“Not a machine!” I cried. “Then what in Heaven’s name are you?—a sofa-cushion?”

“Don’t be sarcastic, my dear fellow,” replied the machine. “Of course I’m not a machine; I’m Jim—Jim Boswell.”

“What?” I roared. “You? A thing with keys and type and a bell—”

“I haven’t got any keys or any type or a bell. What on earth are you talking about?” replied the machine. “What have you been eating?”

“What’s that?” I asked, putting my hand on the keys.

“That’s keys,” was the answer.

“And these, and that?” I added, indicating the type and the bell.

“Type and bell,” replied the machine.

“And yet you say you haven’t got them,” I persisted.

“No, I haven’t. The machine has got them, not I,” was the response. “I’m not the machine. I’m the man that’s using it—Jim—Jim Boswell. What good would a bell do me? I’m not a cow or a bicycle. I’m the editor of the Stygian Gazette, and I’ve come here to copy off my notes of what I see and hear, and besides all this I do type-writing for various people in Hades, and as this machine of yours seemed to be of no use to you I thought I’d try it. But if you object, I’ll go.”

As I read these lines upon the paper I stood amazed and delighted.

“Go!” I cried, as the full value of his patronage of my machine dawned upon me, for I could sell his copy and he would be none the worse off, for, as I understand the copyright laws, they are not designed to benefit authors, but for the protection of type-setters. “Why, my dear fellow, it would break my heart if, having found my machine to your taste, you should ever think of using another. I’ll lend you my bicycle, too, if you’d like it—in fact, anything I have is at your command.”

“Thank you very much,” returned Boswell through the medium of the keys, as usual. “I shall not need your bicycle, but this machine is of great value to me. It has several very remarkable qualities which I have never found in any other machine. For instance, singular to relate, Mendelssohn and I were fooling about here the other night, and when he saw this machine he thought it was a spinet of some new pattern; so what does he

do but sit down and play me one of his songs without words on it, and, by jove! when he got through, there was the theme of the whole thing printed on a sheet of paper before him.”

“You don’t really mean to say—” I began.

“I’m telling you precisely what happened,” said Boswell. “Mendelssohn was tickled to death with it, and he played every song without words that he ever wrote, and every one of ‘em was fitted with words which he said absolutely conveyed the ideas he meant to bring out with the music. Then I tried the machine, and discovered another curious thing about it. It’s intensely American. I had a story of Alexander Dumas’ about his Musketeers that he wanted translated from French into American, which is the language we speak below, in preference to German, French, Volapuk, or English. I thought I’d copy off a few lines of the French original, and as true as I’m sitting here before your eyes, where you can’t see me, the copy I got was a good, though rather free, translation. Think of it! That’s an advanced machine for you!”

I looked at the machine wistfully. “I wish I could make it work,” I said; and I tried as before to tap off my name, and got instead only a confused jumble of letters. It wouldn’t even pay me the compliment of transforming my name into that of Shakespeare, as it had previously done.

It was thus that the magic qualities of the machine were made known to me, and out of it the following papers have grown. I have set them down without much editing or alteration, and now

submit them to your inspection, hoping that in perusing them you will derive as much satisfaction and delight as I have in being the possessor of so wonderful a machine, manipulated by so interesting a person as “Jim—Jim Boswell”—as he always calls himself—and others, who, as you will note, if perchance you have the patience to read further, have upon occasions honored my machine by using it.

I must add in behalf of my own reputation for honesty that Mr. Boswell has given me all right, title, and interest in these papers in this world as a return for my permission to him to use my machine.

“What if they make a hit and bring in barrels of gold in royalties,” he said. “I can’t take it back with me where I live, so keep it yourself.”

II. MR. BOSWELL IMPARTS SOME LATE NEWS OF HADES

Boswell was a little late in arriving the next night. He had agreed to be on hand exactly at midnight, but it was after one o'clock before the machine began to click and the bell to ring. I had fallen asleep in the soft upholstered depths of my armchair, feeling pretty thoroughly worn out by the experiences of the night before, which, in spite of their pleasant issue, were nevertheless somewhat disturbing to a nervous organization like mine. Suddenly I waked, and with the awakening there entered into my mind the notion that the whole thing was merely a dream, and that in the end it would be the better for me if I were to give up Aldus and other club dinners with nightmare inducing menus. But I was soon convinced that the real state of affairs was quite otherwise, and that everything really had happened as I have already related it to you, for I had hardly gotten my eyes free from what my poetic son calls "the seeds of sleep" when I heard the type-writer tap forth:

"Hello, old man!"

Incidentally let me say that this had become another interesting feature of the machine. Since my first interview with Boswell the taps seemed to speak, and if some one were sitting before it and writing a line the mere differentiation of sounds of

the various keys would convey to the mind the ideas conveyed to it by the printed words. So, as I say, my ears were greeted with a clicking "Hello, old man!" followed immediately by the bell.

"You are late," said I, looking at my watch.

"I know it," was the response. "But I can't help it. During the campaign I am kept so infernally busy I hardly know where I am."

"Campaign, eh?" I put in. "Do you have campaigns in Hades?"

"Yes," replied Boswell, "and we are having a—well, to be polite, a regular Gehenna of a time. Things have changed much in Hades latterly. There has been a great growth in the democratic spirit below, and his Majesty is having a deuce of a time running his kingdom. Washington and Cromwell and Caesar have had the nerve to demand a constitution from the venerable Nicholas—"

"From whom?" I queried, perplexed somewhat, for I was not yet fully awake.

"Old Nick," replied Boswell; "and I can tell you there's a pretty fight on between the supporters of the administration and the opposition. Secure in his power, the Grand Master of Hades has been somewhat arbitrary, and he has made the mistake of doing some of his subjects a little too brown. Take the case of Bonaparte, for instance: the government has ruled that he was personally responsible for all the wars of Europe from 1800 up to Waterloo, and it was proposed to hang him once for every man killed on either side throughout that period. Bonaparte naturally resisted. He said he had a good neck, which he did not object to have broken three or four times, because he admitted he deserved

it; but when it came to hanging him five or six million times, once a month, for, say, five million months, or twelve times a year for 415,000 years, he didn't like it, and wouldn't stand it, and wanted to submit the question to arbitration.

"Nicholas observed that the word arbitration was not in his especially expurgated dictionary, whereupon Bonaparte remarked that he wasn't responsible for that; that he thought it a good word and worthy of incorporation in any dictionary and in all vocabularies.

"'I don't care what you think,' retorted his Majesty. 'It's what I don't think that goes;' and he commanded his imps to prepare the gallows on the third Thursday of each month for Bonaparte's expiation; ordered his secretary to send Bonaparte a type-written notice that his presence on each occasion was expected, and gave orders to the police to see that he was there willy-nilly. Naturally Bonaparte resisted, and appealed to the courts. Blackstone sustained his appeal, and Nicholas overruled him. The first Thursday came, and the police went for the Emperor, but he was surrounded by a good half of the men who had fought under him, and the minions of the law could do nothing against them. In consequence, Bonaparte's brother, Joseph, a quiet, inoffensive citizen, was dragged from his home and hanged in his place, Nicholas contending that when a soldier could not, or would not, serve, the government had a right to expect a substitute. Well," said Boswell, at this point, "that set all Hades on fire. We were divided as to Bonaparte's deserts,

but the hanging of other people as substitutes was too much. We didn't know who'd be substituted next. The English backed up Blackstone, of course. The French army backed up Bonaparte. The inoffensive citizens were aroused in behalf of Joseph, for they saw at once whither they were drifting if the substitute idea was carried out to its logical conclusion; and in half an hour the administration was on the defensive, which, as you know, is a very, very, very bad thing for an administration."

"It is, if it desires to be returned to office," said I.

"It is anyhow," replied Boswell through the medium of the keys. "It's in exactly the same position as that of a humorist who has to print explanatory diagrams with all of his jokes. The administration papers were hot over the situation. The king can do no wrong idea was worked for all it was worth, but beyond this they drew pathetic pictures of the result of all these deplorable tendencies. What was Hades for, they asked, if a man, after leading a life of crime in the other world, was not to receive his punishment there? The attitude of the opposition was a radical and vicious blow at the vital principles of the sphere itself. The opposition papers coolly and calmly took the position that the vital principles of Hades were all right; that it was the extreme view as to the power of the Emperor taken by that person himself that wouldn't go in these democratic days. Punishment for Bonaparte was the correct thing, and Bonaparte expected some, but was not grasping enough to want it all. They added that recent fully settled ideas as to a humane application

of the laws required the bunching of the indictments or the selection of one and a fair trial based upon that, and that anyhow, under no circumstances, should a wholly innocent person be made to suffer for the crimes of another. These journals were suppressed, but the next day a set of new papers were started to promulgate the same theories as to individual rights. The province of Cimmeria declared itself independent of the throne, and set up in the business of government for itself. Gehenna declared for the Emperor, but insisted upon home rule for cities of its own class, and finally, as I informed you at the beginning, Washington, Cromwell, and Caesar went in person to Apollyon and demanded a constitution. That was the day before yesterday, and just what will come of it we don't as yet know, because Washington and Cromwell and Caesar have not been seen since, but we have great fears for them, because seventeen car-loads of vitriol and a thousand extra tons of coal were ordered by the Lord High Steward of the palace to be delivered to the Minister of Justice last night."

"Quite a complication," said I. "The Americanization of Hades has begun at last. How does society regard the affair?"

"Variously," observed Boswell. "Society hates the government as much as anybody, and really believes in curtailing the Emperor's powers, but, on the other hand, it desires to maintain all of its own aristocratic privileges. The main trouble in Hades at present is the gradual disintegration of society; that is to say, its former component parts are beginning to differentiate

themselves the one from the other.”

“Like capital and labor here?” I queried.

“In a sense, yes—possibly more like your Colonial Dames, and Daughters of the Revolution. For instance, great organizations are in process of formation—people are beginning to flock together for purposes of protection. Charles the First and Henry the Eighth and Louis the Fourteenth have established Ye Ancient and Honorable Order of Kings, to which only those who have actually worn crowns shall be eligible. The painters have gotten together with a Society of Fine Arts, the sculptors have formed a Society of Chisellers, and all the authors from Homer down to myself have got up an Authors’ Club where we have a lovely time talking about ourselves, no man to be eligible who hasn’t written something that has lasted a hundred years. Perhaps, if you are thinking of coming over soon, you’ll let me put you on our waiting-list?”

I smiled at his seeming inconsistency and let myself into his snare.

“I haven’t written anything that has lasted a hundred years yet,” said I.

“Oh, yes, I think you have,” replied Boswell, and the machine seemed to laugh as he wrote out his answer. “I saw a joke of yours the other day that’s two hundred centuries old. Diogenes showed it to me and said that it was a great favorite with his grandfather, who had inherited it from one of his remote ancestors.”

A hot retort was on my lips, but I had no wish to offend my

guest, so I smiled and observed that I had frequently indulged in unconscious plagiarism of that sort.

"I should imagine," I hastened to add, "that to men like Charles the First this uncertainty as to the safety of Cromwell would be great joy."

"I hardly know," returned Boswell. "That very question has been discussed among us. Charles made a great outward show of grief when he heard of the coal being delivered at the office of the Minister of Justice, and we all thought him quite magnanimous, but it leaked out, just before I left to come here, that he sent his private secretary to the palace with a Panama hat and a palm-leaf fan for Cromwell, with his congratulations.

"That seems to savor somewhat of sarcasm."

"Oh, ultimately Hades is bound to be a republic," replied Boswell. "There are too many clever and ambitious politicians among us for the place to go along as a despotism much longer. If the place were filled up with poets and society people, and things like that, it might go on as an autocracy forever, but you see it isn't. To men of the caliber of Alexander the Great and Bonaparte and Caesar, and a thousand other warriors who never were used to taking orders from anybody, but were themselves headquarters, the despotic sway of Apollyon is intolerable, and he hasn't made any effort to conciliate any of them. If he had appointed Bonaparte commander-in-chief of his army and made a friend of him, instead of ordering him to be hanged every month for 415,000 years, or put Caesar in as Secretary of State,

instead of having him roasted three times a month for seventy or eighty centuries, he would have strengthened his hold. As it is, he has ignored all these people officially, treats them like criminals personally; makes friends with Mazarin and Powhatan, awards the office of Tax Assessor to Dick Turpin, and makes old Falstaff commander of his Imperial Guard. And just because poor Ben Jonson scribbled off a rhyme for my paper, *The Gazette*—a rhyme running:

Mazarin And Powhatan,
Turpin and Falstaff,
Form, you bet, A cabinet
To make a donkey laugh.

Mazarin And Powhatan
Run Apollyon's state.
The Dick and Jacks Collect the tax—
The people pay the freight.

—just because Jonson wrote that and I published it, my paper was confiscated, Jonson was boiled in oil for ten weeks, and I was seized and thrown into a dungeon where a lot of savages from the South Sea Islands tattooed the darned old jingle between my shoulder blades in green letters, and not satisfied with this barbaric act, right under the jingle they added the line, in red letters, 'This edition strictly limited to one copy, for private circulation only,' and they every one of 'em, Apollyon,

Mazarin, and the rest, signed the guarantee personally with red-hot pens dipped in sulphuric acid. It makes a valuable collection of autographs, no doubt, but I prefer my back as nature made it. Talk about enlightened government under a man who'll permit things like that to be done!"

I ought not to have done it, but I couldn't help smiling.

"I must say," I observed, apologetically, "that the treatment was barbarous, but really I do think it showed a sense of humor on the part of the government."

"No doubt," replied Boswell, with a sigh; "but when the joke is on me I don't enjoy it very much. I'm only human, and should prefer to observe that the government had some sense of justice."

The apparently empty chair before the machine gave a slight hitch forward, and the type-writer began to tap again.

"You'll have to excuse me now," observed Boswell through the usual medium. "I have work to do, and if you'll go to bed like a good fellow, while I copy off the minutes of the last meeting of the Authors' Club, I'll see that you don't lose anything by it. After I get the minutes done I have an interesting story for my Sunday paper from the advance sheets of Munchausen's Further Recollections, which I shall take great pleasure in leaving for you when I depart. If you will take the bundle of manuscript I leave with you and boil it in alcohol for ten minutes, you will be able to read it, and, no doubt, if you copy it off, sell it for a goodly sum. It is guaranteed absolutely genuine."

"Very well," said I, rising, "I'll go; but I should think you would

put in most of your time whacking at the government editorially, instead of going in for minutes and abstract stories of adventure.”

“You do, eh?” said Boswell. “Well, if you were in my place you’d change your mind. After my unexpected endorsement by the Emperor and his cabinet, I’ve decided to keep out of politics for a little while. I can stand having a poem tattooed on my back, but if it came to having a three-column editorial expressing my emotions etched alongside of my spine, I’m afraid I’d disappear into thin air.”

So I left him at work and retired. The next morning I found the promised bundle of manuscripts, and, after boiling the pages as instructed, discovered the following tale.

III. FROM ADVANCE SHEETS OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN'S FURTHER RECOLLECTIONS

It is with some very considerable hesitation that I come to this portion of my personal recollections, and yet I feel that I owe it to my fellow-citizens in this delightful Stygian country, where we are all enjoying our well-earned rest, to lay before them the exact truth concerning certain incidents which have now passed into history, and for participation in which a number of familiar figures are improperly gaining all the credit, or discredit, as the case may be. It is not a pleasant task to expose an impostor; much less is it agreeable to expose four impostors; but to one who from the earliest times—and when I say earliest times I speak advisedly, as you will see as you read on—to one, I say, who from the earliest times has been actuated by no other motive than the promulgation of truth, the task of exposing fraud becomes a duty which cannot be ignored. Therefore, with regret I set down this chapter of my memoirs, regardless of its consequences to certain figures which have been of no inconsiderable importance in our community for many years—figures which in my own favorite club, the Associated Shades, have been most welcome, but which, as I and they alone know, have been nothing more than impostures.

In previous volumes I have confined my attention to my memoirs as Baron Munchausen—but, dear reader, there are others. I WAS NOT ALWAYS BARON MUNCHAUSEN; I HAVE BEEN OTHERS! I am not aware that it has fallen to the lot of any but myself in the whole span of universal existence to live more than one life upon that curious, compact little ball of land and water called the Earth, but, in any event, to me has fallen that privilege or distinction, or whatever it may be, and upon the record made by me in four separate existences, placed centuries apart, four residents of this sphere are basing their claims to notice, securing election to our clubs, and even venturing so far at times as to make themselves personally obnoxious to me, who with a word could expose their wicked deceit in all its naked villainy to an astounded community. And in taking this course they have gone too far. There is a limit beyond which no man shall dare go with me. Satisfied with the ultimate embodiment of my virtues in the Baron Munchausen, I have been disposed to allow the impostors to pursue their deception in peace so long as they otherwise behave themselves, but when Adam chooses to allude to my writings as frothy lies, when Jonah attacks my right as a literary person to tell tales of leviathans, when Noah states that my ignorance in yachting matters is colossal, and when William Shakespeare publicly brands me as a person unworthy of belief who should be expelled from the Associated Shades, then do I consider it time to speak out and expose four of the greatest frauds that have ever been inflicted upon a long-suffering public.

To begin at the beginning then, let me state that my first recollection dates back to a beautiful summer morning, when in a lovely garden I opened my eyes and became conscious of two very material facts: first, a charming woman arranging her hair in the mirror-like waters of a silver lake directly before me; and, second, a poignant pain in my side, as though I had been operated upon for appendicitis, but which in reality resulted from the loss of a rib which had in turn evolved into the charming and very human being I now saw before me. That woman was Eve; that mirror-like lake was set in the midst of the Garden of Eden; I was Adam, and not this watery-eyed antediluvian calling himself by my name, who is a familiar figure in the Anthropological Society, an authority on evolution, and a blot upon civilization.

I have little to say about this first existence of mine. It was full of delights. Speech not having been invented, Eve was an attractive companion to a man burdened as I was with responsibilities, and until our children were born we went our way in happiness and silence. It is not in the nature of things, however, that children should not wish to talk, and it was through the irrepressible efforts of Cain and Abel to be heard as well as seen that first called the attention of Eve and myself to the desirability of expressing our thoughts in words rather than by masonic signs.

I shall not burden my readers with further recollections of this period. It was excessively primitive, of necessity, but before leaving it I must ask the reader to put one or two questions to

himself in this matter.

1st. How is it that this bearded patriarch, who now poses as the only original Adam, has never been able, with any degree of positiveness, to answer the question as to whether or not he was provided with a caudal appendage—a question which I am prepared to answer definitely, at any moment, if called upon by the proper authorities, and, if need be, to produce not only the tail itself, but the fierce and untamed pterodactyl that bit it off upon that unfortunate autumn afternoon when he and I had our first and last conflict.

2d. Why is it that when describing a period concerning which he is supposed to know all, he seems to have given voice to sentiments in phrases which would have delighted Sheridan and shed added glory upon the eloquence of Webster, AT A TIME WHEN, AS I HAVE ALREADY SHOWN, THERE WAS NO SUCH THING AS SPEECH?

Upon these two points alone I rest my case against Adam: the first is the reticence of guilt—he doesn't know, and he knows he doesn't know; the second is a deliberate and offensive prevarication, which shows again that he doesn't know, and assumes that we are all equally ignorant.

So much for Adam. Now for the cheap and year-ridden person who has taken unto himself my second personality, Noah; and that other strange combination of woe and wickedness, Jonah, who has chosen to pre-empt my third. I shall deal with both at one and the same time, for, taken separately, they are not worthy

of notice.

Noah asserts that I know nothing of yachting. I will accept the charge with the qualification that I know a great sight more about Arking than he does; and as for Jonah, I can give Jonah points on whaling, and I hereby challenge them both to a Memoir Match for \$2000 a side, in gold, to see which can give to the world the most interesting reminiscences concerning the cruises of the two craft in question, the Ark and the Whale, upon neither of which did either of these two anachronisms ever set foot, and of both of which I, in my two respective existences, was commander-in-chief. The fact is that, as in the case of the fictitious Adam, these two impersonators are frauds. The man now masquerading as Noah was my hired man in the latter part of the antediluvian period; was discharged three years before the flood; was left on shore at the hour of departure, and when last seen by me was sitting on the top of an apple-tree, begging to do two men's work for nothing if we'd only let him out of the wet. If he will at any time submit to a cross-examination at my hands as to the principal events of that memorable voyage, I will show to any fair-minded judge how impossible is his claim that he was in command, or even afloat, after the first week. I have hitherto kept silent in this matter, in spite of many and repeated outrageous flings, for the sake of his—or rather my—family, who have been deceived, as have all the rest of us, barring, of course, myself. References to portraits of leading citizens of that period will easily show how this can be. We were all alike as two peas in the

olden days, and at a time when men reached to an advanced age which is not known now, it frequently became almost impossible to distinguish one old man from another. I will say, finally, in regard to this person Noah that if he can give to the public a statement telling the essential differences between a pterodactyl and a double spondee that will not prove utterly absurd to an educated person, I will withdraw my accusation and resign from the club. BUT I KNOW WELL HE CANNOT DO IT, and he does too, and that is about the extent of his knowledge.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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