

Graham Harry

Familiar Faces



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«Public Domain»

Graham H.

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THE CRY OF THE PUBLISHER

O my Author, do you hear the Autumn calling?
Does its message fail to reach you in your den,
Where the ink that once so sluggishly was crawling
Courses swiftly through your stylographic pen?
'Tis the season when the editor grows active,
When the office-boy looks longingly to you.
Won't you give him something novel and attractive
To review?

Never mind if you are frivolous or solemn,
If you only can be striking and unique,
The reviewers will concede you half a column
In their literary journals, any week.
And 'twill always be your publisher's ambition
To provide for the demand that you create,
And dispose of a gigantic first edition,
While you wait.

O my Author, can't you pull yourself together,
Try to expiate the failures of the past,
And just ask yourself dispassionately whether
You can't give us something better than your last?
If you really – if you truly – are a poet,
As you fancy – pray forgive my being terse —
Don't you think you might occasionally show it
In your verse?

THE CRY OF THE AUTHOR

O my Publisher, how dreadfully you bore me!
Of your censure I am frankly growing tired.
With your diatribes eternally before me,
How on earth can I expect to feel inspired?
You are orderly, no doubt, and systematic,
In that office where recumbent you recline;
You would modify your methods in an attic
Such as mine.

If you lived a sort of hand-to-mouth existence
(Where the mouth found less employment than the hand);
If your rhymes would lend your humour no assistance,
And your wit assumed a form that never scann'd;
If you sat and waited vainly at your table
While Calliope declined to give her cues,
You would realise how very far from *stable*
Was the *Mews*!

You would find it quite impossible to labour
With the patient perseverance of a drone,
While some tactless but enthusiastic neighbour
Played a cake walk on a wheezy gramophone,
While your peace was so disturbed by constant clatter,
That at length you grew accustomed – nay, resigned,
To the never-ending victory of Matter
Over Mind.

While *you* batten upon plovers' eggs and claret,
In the shelter of some fashionable club,
I am starving, very likely, in a garret,
Off the street so incorrectly labelled Grub,
Where the vintage smacks distinctly of the ink-butt,
And the atmosphere is redolent of toil,
And there's nothing for the journalist to drink but
Midnight oil!

It is useless to solicit inspiration
When one isn't in the true poetic mood,
When one contemplates the prospect of starvation,
And one's little ones are clamouring for food.
When one's tongue remains ingloriously tacit,
One is forced with some reluctance to admit
That, alas! (as Virgil said) *Poeta nascit-*
-Ur, non fit!

Then, my Publisher, be gentle with your poet;
Do not treat him with the harshness he deserves,
For, in fact, altho' you little seem to know it,
You are gradually getting on his nerves.
Kindly dam the foaming torrent of your curses,
While I ask you, – yes, and pause for a reply, —
Are *you* writing this immortal book of verses,
Or am *I*?

I THE FUMBLER

Gentle Reader, charge your tumbler
With anæmic lemonade!
Let us toast our fellow-fumbler,
Who was surely born, not made.
None of all our friends is "dearer"
(Costs us more – to be jocose –);
No relation could be nearer,
More intensely "close"!

Hear him indistinctly mumbling
"Oh, I say, do let me pay!"
Watch him in his pocket fumbling,
In a dilatory way;
Plumbing the unmeasured deeps there,
With some muttered vague excuse,
For the coinage that he keeps there,
But will not produce.

If he joins you in a hansom,
You alone provide the fare;
Not for all a monarch's ransom
Would he pay his modest share.
He may fumble with his collar,
He may turn his pockets out,
He can never find that dollar
Which he spoke about!

Cigarettes he sometimes offers,
With a sort of old-world grace,
But, when you accept them, proffers
With surprise, an empty case.
Your cigars, instead, he'll snatch, and,
With the cunning of the fox,
Ask you firmly for a match, and
Pocket half your box!

If with him a meal you share, too,
You'll discover, when you've dined,
That your friend has taken care to
Leave his frugal purse behind.
"We must sup together later,"
He remarks, with right good-will,
"Pass the Heidsieck, please; and, waiter,

Bring my friend the bill!"

At some crowded railway station
He comes running up to you,
And exclaims with agitation,
"Take my ticket, will you, too?"
Though his pow'rs of conversation
In the train require no spur,
To this trifling obligation
He will *not* refer!

When at Bridge you win his money,
Do not think it odd or strange
If he says, "It's very funny,
But I find I've got no change!
Do remind me what I owe you,
When you see me in the street."
Mr. Fumbler, if I know you,
We shall never meet!

Fumbler, so serenely fumbling
In a pocket with thy thumb,
Never by good fortune stumbling
On the necessary sum,
Cease to make polite pretences,
Suited to thy niggard ends,
Of dividing the expenses
With confiding friends!

Here, we crown thee, fumbling brother,
With the fumbler's well-earned wreath,
Who would'st rob thine aged mother
Of her artificial teeth!
We at length are slowly learning
That some friendships cost too dear.
"Longest worms must have a turning,"
And our turn is near!

Henceforth, when a cab thou takest,
Thou a lonely way must wend;
Henceforth, when for food thou achest,
Thou must dine without a friend.
Thine excuses thou shalt mumble
Down some public telephone,
And if thou perforce *must* fumble,
Fumble all alone!

II THE BARITONE

In many a boudoir nowadays
The baritone's *decolleté* throat
Produces weird unearthly lays,
Like some dyspeptic goat
Deprived but lately of her young
(But not, alas! of either lung).

His low-necked collar fails to show
The contours of his manly chest,
Since that has fallen far below
His "fancy evening vest."
Here, too, in picturesque relief,
Nestles his crimson handkerchief.

Will no one tell me why he sings
Such doleful melancholy lays,
Of withered summers, ruined springs,
Of happier bygone days,
And kindred topics, more or less
Designed to harass or depress?

That ballad in his bloated hand
Is of the old familiar blend: —
A faded flow'r, a maiden, and
A "brave kiss" at the end!
(The kind of kiss that, for a bet,
A man might give a Suffragette.)

(THE BARITONE'S BOUDOIR BALLAD)

*Eyes that looked down into mine,
With a longing that seemed to say
Is it too late, dear heart, to wait
For the dawn of a brighter day?
Is it too late to laugh at fate?
See how the teardrops start!
Can we not weather the tempest together,
Dear Heart, Dear Heart?*

*Lips that I pressed to my own,
As I gazed at her yielding form, —*

*Turned with a groan, and then hastened alone
Into the teeth of the Storm!
Long, long ago! Still the winds blow!
Far have we drifted apart!
You live with Mother, and I love – another!
Dear Heart, Dear Heart!*

At times some drinking-song inspires
Our hero to a vocal burst,
Until his audience, too, acquires
The most prodigious thirst.
And nobody would ever think
That milk was *his* peculiar drink!

What spacious days his song recalls,
When each monastic brotherhood
Could brew, within its private walls,
A vintage just as good
As that which restaurants purvey
As "rare old Tawny Port" to-day!

(THE BARITONE'S DRINKING SONG)

*The Abbot he sits, as his rank befits,
With a bottle at either knee,
And he smacks his lips as he slowly sips
At his beaker of Malvoisie.
Sing Ho! Ho! Ho!
Let the red wine flow!
Let the sack flow fast and free!
His heart it grows merry on negus and sherry,
And never a care has he!
Ho! Ho!
(Ora pro nobis!)
Sing Ho! for the Malvoisie!*

*In cellar cool, on a highbacked stool,
The Friar he sits him down,
With the door tight shut, and an unbroached butt
Where the ale flows clear and brown.
Sing Ha! Sing Hi!
Till the cask runs dry,
His spirits shall never fail!
For no one is dryer than Francis the Friar,
When getting "outside the pail!"
Ho! Ho!
(Benedicimus!)*

Sing Ho! for the nutbrown ale!

*The Monk sits there, in his cell so bare,
And he lowers his tonsured head,
As he lifts the lid of the tankard hid
'Neath the straw of his trestle bed.
Sing Ho! Sink Hey!
From the break of day
Till the vesper-bell rings clear,
Of grave he makes merry and hastens to bury
His cares in the butt'rybier!
Ho! Ho!
(Pax Omnibuscum!)
Sing Ho! for the buttery beer!*

Oh, find me some secure retreat,
Some Paradise for stricken souls,
Where amateurs no longer bleat
Their feeble baracoles,
From lungs that are so oddly placed
Where other people keep their waist;

Where public taste has quite outgrown
The faculty for being bored
By each anæmic baritone
Who murders "The Lost Chord,"
And singers, as a body, are
Cursed with a permanent catarrh!

III

THE ACTOR MANAGER

Long ago, our English actors
Ranked with rogues and vagabonds;
They were jailed as malefactors,
They were ducked in village ponds.
In the stocks the beadle shut them,
While the friends they chanced to meet
Would invariably cut them
In the street.

With suspicion people eyed them,
Ev'ry country-squire would feel
That his fallow-deer supplied them
With the makings of a meal.
They annexed the parson's rabbits,
Poached the pheasants of the peer,
And had other little habits
Just as queer!

Even Will, the Bard of Avon,
As a poacher stands confest,
And altho', of course, cleanshaven,
Was as barefaced as the rest.
He, a player by vocation,
Practised, like his buckskin'd pals,
Indiscriminate flirtation
With the gals!

Now, the am'rous actor's cravings
For romance are orthodox;
Nowadays he puts his savings,
Not his ankles, into "stocks."
Nobody to-day is doubting
That a halo round him clings;
One can see his shoulders sprouting
Into wings.

Watch the mummer managerial,
Centre of a rev'rent group;
Note with what an air imperial
He controls his timid troupe.
Deadheads scrape and bow before him,
To his doors the public flocks;
Even duchesses implore him

For a box.

Enemies, no doubt, will tell us
(What we should not ever guess)
That he is absurdly jealous
Of subordinates' success.
Minor mimes who score a hit or
Threaten to advance too fast,
Are advised to curb their wit or
Leave the cast!

Foes declare that, at rehearsal,
Managers are free of speech,
And unduly prone to curse all
Those who come within their reach.
With some tiny dams (or damlets)
They exhort each "walking gent – "
Language that potential Hamlets
Much resent.

Do not autocrats, dictators,
All who lead successful lives,
Swear repeatedly at waiters,
Curse consistently at wives?
Shall the heads of *the* Profession,
Histrionic argonauts,
Be denied the frank expression
Of their thoughts?

Will not we who so applaud them
Execrate with righteous rage
Player knaves who would defraud them
Of their centre of the stage?
Do we grudge these godlike creatures
Picture-cards that advertise —
Calcium lights that flood their features
From the flies?

No, for ev'ry leading actor
Who produces problem plays,
Is a most important factor
In the world of modern days.
Kings occasionally knight him,
Titled ladies take him up;
Even millionaires invite him
Out to sup.

Proudly he advances, trailing
Clouds of limelight from afar,

(Diffidence is *not* the failing
Of the true dramatic "star").
What cares he for rank or fashion,
Politics or place or pelf?
He whose one prevailing passion
Is himself?

All the world's a stage, we know it;
Managers, whose heads are twirled,
Think (to paraphrase the poet)
That the stage is all the world.
Other men discuss the summer,
Or the poor potato crop,
Nothing can prevent the mummer
Talking "shop."

With his Art as the objective
Of his intellectual pow'rs,
He (as usual, introspective)
Talks about himself for hours.
While his friends, who never dream of
Interrupting, stand agog,
He decants a ceaseless stream of
Monologue.

He is great. He has become it
By a long and arduous climb
To the crest, the crown, the summit
Of the Thespian tree – a *lime*!
There he chatters like a starling,
There, like Jove, he sometimes nods;
But he still remains the "darling
Of *the gods*!"

IV THE GILDED YOUTH

A monocle he always wears,
Safe screwed within his dexter eye;
His mouth stands open wide, and snares
The too intrusive fly.
Were he to close his jaws, no doubt,
The eyeglass would at once fall out.

His choice of clothes is truly weird;
His jacket, short, and *negligée*,
Is slit behind, as tho' he feared
A tail might sprout some day.
One's eye must be inured to shocks
To stand the tartan of his socks.

The chessboard pattern of his check
Betrays its owner's florid taste;

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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