

**MARSHALL
PINCKNEY
WILDER**

THE WIT AND HUMOR OF
AMERICA, VOLUME IX

Marshall Pinckney Wilder
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America, Volume IX

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The Wit and Humor of America, Volume IX (of X):*

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The Wit and Humor of America, Volume IX (of X)

THE NINE LITTLE GOBLINS

BY JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY

They all climbed up on a high board-fence—
Nine little Goblins, with green-glass eyes—
Nine little Goblins that had no sense,
And couldn't tell coppers from cold mince pies;
And they all climbed up on the fence, and sat—
And I asked them what they were staring at.

And the first one said, as he scratched his head
With a queer little arm that reached out of his ear
And rasped its claws in his hair so red—
"This is what this little arm is fer!"
And he scratched and stared, and the next one said
"How on earth do *you* scratch your head?"

And he laughed like the screech of a rusty hinge—
Laughed and laughed till his face grew black;
And when he choked, with a final twinge
Of his stifling laughter, he thumped his back
With a fist that grew on the end of his tail
Till the breath came back to his lips so pale.

And the third little Goblin leered round at me—
And there were no lids on his eyes at all—
And he clucked one eye, and he says, says he,
"What is the style of your socks this fall?"
And he clapped his heels—and I sighed to see
That he had hands where his feet should be.

Then a bald-faced Goblin, gray and grim,
Bowed his head, and I saw him slip
His eyebrows off, as I looked at him,
And paste them over his upper lip;
And then he moaned in remorseful pain—
"Would—Ah, would I'd me brows again!"

And then the whole of the Goblin band
Rocked on the fence-top to and fro,
And clung, in a long row, hand in hand,
Singing the songs that they used to know—
Singing the songs that their grandsires sung
In the goo-goo days of the Goblin-tongue.

And ever they kept their green-glass eyes

Fixed on me with a stony stare—
Till my own grew glazed with a dread surmise,
And my hat whooped up on my lifted hair,
And I felt the heart in my breast snap to
As you've heard the lid of a snuff-box do.

And they sang, "You're asleep! There is no board-fence,
And never a Goblin with green-glass eyes!—
'Tis only a vision the mind invents
After a supper of cold mince-pies,—
And you're doomed to dream this way," they said,—
"And you sha'n't wake up till you're clean plum dead!"

OUR VERY WISHES

BY HARRIET PRESCOTT SPOFFORD

It was natural that it should be quiet for Mrs. Cairnes in her empty house. Once there had been such a family of brothers and sisters there! But one by one they had married, or died, and at any rate had drifted out of the house, so that she was quite alone with her work, and her memories, and the echoes in her vacant rooms. She hadn't a great deal of work; her memories were not pleasant; and the echoes were no pleasanter. Her house was as comfortable otherwise as one could wish; in the very centre of the village it was, too, so that no one could go to church, or to shop, or to call, unless Mrs. Cairnes was aware of the fact, if she chose; and the only thing that protected the neighbors from this supervision was Mrs. Cairnes's mortal dread of the sun on her carpet; for the sun lay in that bay-windowed corner nearly all the day, and even though she filled the window full of geraniums and vines and calla-lilies she could not quite shut it out, till she resorted to sweeping inner curtains.

Mrs. Cairnes did her own work, because, as she said, then she knew it was done. She had refused the company of various individuals, because, as she said again, she wouldn't give them

house-room. Perhaps it was for the same reason that she had refused several offers of marriage; although the only reason that she gave was that one was quite enough, and she didn't want any boots bringing in mud for her to wipe up. But the fact was that Captain Cairnes had been a mistake; and his relict never allowed herself to dwell upon the fact of her loss, but she felt herself obliged to say with too much feeling that all was for the best; and she dared not risk the experiment again.

Mrs. Cairnes, however, might have been lonelier if she had been very much at home; but she was President of the First Charitable, and Secretary of the Second, and belonged to a reading-club, and a sewing-circle, and a bible-class, and had every case of illness in town more or less to oversee, and the circulation of the news to attend to, and so she was away from home a good deal, and took many teas out. Some people thought that if she hadn't to feed her cat she never would go home. But the cat was all she had, she used to say, and nobody knew the comfort it was to her. Yet, for all this, there were hours and seasons when, obliged to stay in the house, it was intolerably dreary there, and she longed for companionship. "Some one with an interest," she said. "Some one who loves the same things that I do, who cares for me, and for my pursuits. Some one like Sophia Maybury. Oh! how I should have liked to spend my last days with Sophia! What keeps Dr. Maybury alive so, I can't imagine. If he had only—gone to his rest"—said the good woman, "Sophia and I could join our forces and live together in clover. And how we should enjoy

it! We could talk together, read together, sew together. No more long, dull evenings and lonely nights listening to the mice. But a friend, a dear sister, constantly at hand! Sophia was the gentlest young woman, the prettiest,—oh, how I loved her in those days! She was a part of my youth. I love her just as much now. I wish she could come and live here. She might, if there weren't any Dr. Maybury. I can't stand this solitude. Why did fate make me such a social old body, and then set me here all alone?"

If Sophia was the prettiest young woman in those days, she was an exceedingly pretty old woman in these, with her fresh face and her bright eyes, and if her hair was not all her own, she had companions in bangs. Dr. Maybury made a darling of her all his lifetime, and when he died he left her what he had; not much,—the rent of the Webster House,—but enough.

But there had always been a pea-hen in Mrs. Maybury's lot. It was all very well to have an adoring husband,—but to have no home! The Doctor had insisted for years upon living in the tavern, which he owned, and if there was one thing that his wife detested more than another, it was life in a tavern. The strange faces, the strange voices, the going and coming, the dreary halls, the soiled table-cloths, the thick crockery, the damp napkins, the flies, the tiresome *menu*—every roast tasting of every other, no gravy to any,—the all out-doors feeling of the whole business, your affairs in everybody's mouth, the banging doors, the restless feet, the stamping of horses in the not distant stable, the pandemonium of it all! She tried to make a little home

in the corner of it; but it was useless. And when one day Dr. Maybury suddenly died, missing him and mourning him, and half distracted as she was, a thrill shot across the darkness for half a thought,—now at any rate she could have a home of her own! But presently she saw the folly of the thought,—a home without a husband! She staid on at the tavern, and took no pleasure in life.

But with Dr. Maybury's departure, the thought recurred again and again to Mrs. Cairnes of her and Sophia's old dream of living together. "We used to say, when we were girls, that we should keep house together, for neither of us would ever marry. And it's a great, great pity we did! I dare say, though, she's been very happy. I know she has, in fact. But then if she hadn't been so happy with him, she wouldn't be so unhappy without him. So it evens up. Well, it's half a century gone; but perhaps she'll remember it. I should like to have her come here. I never could bear Dr. Maybury, it's true; but then I could avoid the subject with her. I mean to try. What a sweet, comfortable, peaceful time we should have of it!"

A sweet, comfortable, peaceful time! Well; you shall see. For Mrs. Maybury came; of course she came. Her dear, old friend Julia! Oh, if anything could make up for Dr. Maybury's loss, it would be living with Julia! What castles they used to build about living together and working with the heathen around home. And Julia always went to the old East Church, too; and they had believed just the same things, the same election, and predestination and damnation and all; at one time they had

thought of going out missionaries together to the Polynesian Island, but that had been before Julia took Captain Cairnes for better or worse, principally worse, and before she herself undertook all she could in converting Dr. Maybury,—a perfect Penelope's web of a work; for Dr. Maybury died as he had lived, holding her fondest beliefs to be old wives' fables, but not quarreling with her fidelity to them, any more than with her finger-rings or her false bangs, her ribbons, and what she considered her folderols in general. And how kind, she went on in her thoughts, it was of Julia to want her now! what comfort they would be to each other! Go,—of course she would!

She took Allida with her; Allida who had been her maid so long that she was a part of herself; and who, for the sake of still being with her mistress, agreed to do the cooking at Mrs. Cairnes's and help in the house-work. The house was warm and light on the night she arrived; other friends had dropped in to receive her, too; there were flowers on the table in the cosy red dining-room, delicate slices of ham that had been stuffed with olives and sweet herbs, a cold queen's pudding rich with frosting, a mold of coffee jelly in a basin of whipped cream, and little thin bread-and-butter sandwiches.

"Oh, how delightful, how homelike!" cried Mrs. Maybury. How unlike the great barn of a dining-room at the Webster House! What delicious bread and butter! Julia had always been such a famous cook! "Oh, this is home indeed, Julia!" she cried.

Alas! The queen's pudding appeared in one shape or another

till it lost all resemblance to itself, and that ham after a fortnight became too familiar for respect.

Mrs. Cairnes, when all was reëstablished and at rights, Sophia in the best bedroom, Allida in the kitchen, Sophia's board paying Allida's wages and all extra expense, Sophia's bird singing like a little fountain of melody in the distance, Mrs. Cairnes then felt that after a long life of nothingness, fate was smiling on her; here was friendship, interest, comfort, company, content. No more lonesomeness now. Here was a motive for coming home; here was somebody to come home to! And she straightway put the thing to touch, by coming home from her prayer-meeting, her bible-class, her Ladies' Circle, her First Charitable, and taking in a whole world of pleasure in Sophia's waiting presence, her welcoming smile, her voice asking for the news. And if Sophia were asking for the news, news there must be to give Sophia! And she went about with fresh eagerness, and dropped in here, there, and everywhere, and picked up items at every corner to retail to Sophia. She found it a little difficult to please Sophia about the table. Used to all the variety of a public-house, Mrs. Maybury did not take very kindly to the simple fare, did not quite understand why three people must be a whole week getting through with a roast,—a roast that, served underdone, served overdone, served cold, served warmed up with herbs, served in a pie, made five dinners; she didn't quite see why one must have salt fish on every Saturday, and baked beans on Sunday; she hankered after the flesh-pots that, when she had them, she had found tiresome, and

than which she had frequently remarked she would rather have the simplest home-made bread and butter. Apples, too. Mrs. Cairnes's three apple-trees had been turned to great account in her larder always; but now,—Mrs. Maybury never touched apple-sauce, disliked apple-jelly, thought apple-pie unfit for human digestion, apple-pudding worse; would have nothing with apples in it, except the very little in mince-pie which she liked as rich as brandy and sherry and costly spices could make it.

"No profit in this sort of boarder," thought the thrifty Mrs. Cairnes. But then she didn't have Sophia for profit, only for friendliness and companionship; and of course there must be some little drawbacks. Sophia was not at all slow in expressing her likes and dislikes. Well, Mrs. Cairnes meant she should have no more dislikes to express than need be. Nevertheless, it made Mrs. Cairnes quite nervous with apprehension concerning Mrs. Maybury's face on coming to the dinner-table; she left off having roasts, and had a slice of steak; chops and tomato-sauce; a young chicken. But even that chicken had to make its reappearance till it might have been an old hen. "I declare," said Mrs. Cairnes, in the privacy of her own emotions, "when I lived by myself I had only one person to please! If Sophia had ever been any sort of a housekeeper herself—it's easy to see why Dr. Maybury chose to live at a hotel!" Still the gentle face opposite her at the table, the lively warmth of a greeting when she opened the door, the delight of some one with whom to talk things over, the source of life and movement in the house; all this far outweighed the

necessity of having to plan for variety in the little dinners.

"I really shall starve to death if this thing does on," Mrs. Maybury had meanwhile said to herself. "It isn't that I care so much for what I have to eat; but I really can't eat enough here to keep me alive. If I went out as Julia does, walking and talking all over town, I daresay I could get up the same sort of appetite for sole-leather. But I haven't the heart for it. I can't do it. I have to sit at home and haven't any relish for anything. I really will see if Allida can't start something different." But Allida could not make bricks without straw; she could only prepare what Mrs. Cairnes provided, and as Mrs. Cairnes had never had a servant before, she looked on the whole tribe of them as marauders and natural enemies, and doled out everything from a locked store-room at so much a head. "Well," sighed Mrs. Maybury, "perhaps I shall get used to it." From which it will be seen that Julia's efforts after all were not particularly successful. But if Mrs. Cairnes had been lonely before Mrs. Maybury came, Mrs. Maybury was intolerably lonely, having come; the greater part of the time, Allida being in the kitchen, or out herself, and no one in the house but the sunshine, the cat, and the bird; and she detested cats, and had a shudder if one touched her. However, this was Julia's cat, this great black and white evil spirit, looking like an imp of darkness; she would be kind to it if it didn't touch her. But if it touched her—she shivered at the thought—she couldn't answer for the consequences. Julia was so good in taking her into her house, and listening to her woes, and trying to make her comfortable,—only

if this monster tried to kill her bird,—Mrs. Maybury, sitting by herself, wept at the thought. How early it was dark now, too! She didn't see what kept Julia so,—really she was doing too much at her age. She hinted that gently to Julia when Mrs. Cairnes did return. And Mrs. Cairnes could not quite have told what it was that was so unpleasant in the remark. "My age," she said, laughing. "Why, I am as young as ever I was, and as full of life. I could start on an exploring expedition to Africa, to-morrow!" But she began to experience a novel sense of bondage,—she who had all her life been responsible to no one. And presently, whenever she went out, she had a dim consciousness in her mental background of Sophia's eyes following her, of Sophia's thoughts upon her trail, of Sophia's face peering from the bay-window as she went from one door to another. She begged some slips, and put a half dozen new flower-pots on a bracket-shelf in the window, in order to obscure the casual view, and left the inner curtain drawn.

She came in one day, and there was that inner curtain strung wide open, and the sun pouring through the plants in a broad radiance. Before she took off her bonnet she stepped to the window and drew the curtain.

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Maybury, "what made you do that? The sunshine is so pleasant."

"I can't have the sun streaming in here and taking all the color out of my carpet, Sophia!" said Julia, with some asperity.

"But the sun is so very healthy," urged Mrs. Maybury.

"Oh, well! I can't be getting a new carpet every day."

"You feel," said Mrs. Maybury, turning away wrath, "as you did when you were a little girl, and the teacher told you to lay your wet slate in your lap: 'It'll take the fade out of my gown,' said you. How long ago is it! Does it seem as if it were you and I?"

"I don't know," said Julia tartly. "I don't bother myself much with abstractions. I know it is you and I." And she put her things on the hall-rack, as she was going out again in the afternoon to bible-class.

She had no sooner gone out than Mrs. Maybury went and strung up every curtain in the house where the sun was shining, and sat down triumphantly and rocked contentedly for five minutes in the glow, when her conscience overcame her, and she put them all down again, and went out into the kitchen for a little comfort from Allida. But Allida had gone out, too; so she came back to the sitting-room, and longed for the stir and bustle and frequent faces of the tavern, and welcomed a book-canvasser presently as if she had been a dear friend.

Perhaps Julia's conscience stirred a little, too; for she came home earlier than usual, put away her wraps, lighted an extra lamp, and said, "Now we'll have a long, cosy evening to ourselves."

"We might have a little game of cards," said Sophia, timidly. "I know a capital double solitaire—"

"Cards!" cried Julia.

"Why—why not?"

"Cards! And I just came from bible-class!"

"What in the world has that got to do with it?"

"Everything!"

"Why, the Doctor and I used—"

"That doesn't make it any better."

"Why, Julia, you can't possibly mean that there's any harm,—that,—that it's wicked—"

"I think we'd better drop the subject, Sophia," said Julia loftily.

"But I don't want to drop the subject!" exclaimed Mrs. Maybury. "I don't want you to think that the Doctor would—"

"I can't help what the Doctor did. I think cards are wicked! And that's enough for me!"

"Well!" cried Mrs. Maybury, then in great dudgeon. "I'm not a member of the old East Church in good and regular standing for forty years to be told what's right and what's wrong by any one now!"

"If you're in good and regular standing, then the church is very lax in its discipline, Sophia; that's all I've got to say."

"But, Julia, things have been very much liberalized of late years. The minister's own daughter has been to dancing-school." The toss of Julia's head, and her snort of contempt only said, "So much the worse for the minister's daughter!"

"Nobody believes in infant damnation now," continued Mrs. Maybury.

"I do."

"O Julia!" cried Mrs. Maybury, for the moment quite faint,

"that is because," she said, as soon as she had rallied, and breaking the dreadful silence, "you never had any little babies of your own, Julia." This was adding insult to injury, and still there was silence. "I don't believe it of you, Julia," she continued, "your kind heart—"

"I don't know what a kind heart has to do with the immutable decrees of an offended deity!" cried the exasperated Julia. "And this only goes to show what forty years' association with a free-thinking—"

"You were right in the beginning, Julia; we had better drop the subject," said Mrs. Maybury; and she gathered up her Afghan wools gently, and went to her room.

Mrs. Maybury came down, however, when tea was ready, and all was serene again, especially as Susan Peyster came in to tell the news about Dean Hampton's defalcation at the village bank, and had a seat at the table.

"But I don't understand what on earth he has done with the money," said Mrs. Maybury.

"Gambled," said Susan.

"Cards," said Mrs. Cairnes. "You see!"

"Not that sort of gambling!" cried Susan. "But stocks and that."

"It's the same thing," said Mrs. Cairnes.

"And that's the least part of it! They do say"—said Susan, balancing her teaspoon as if in doubt about speaking.

"They say what?" cried Mrs. Cairnes.

But for our part, as we don't know Mr. Dean Hampton, and, therefore, can not relish his misdoings with the same zest as if we did, we will not waste time on what was said. Only when Susan had gone, Mrs. Maybury rose, too, and said, "I must say, Julia, that I think this dreadful conversation is infinitely worse and more wicked than any game of cards could be!"

"What are you talking about?" said Julia, jocosely, and quite good-humored again.

"And the amount of shocking gossip of this description that I've heard since I've been in your house is already more than I've heard in the whole course of my life! Dr. Maybury would never allow a word of gossip in our rooms." And she went to bed.

"You shall never have another word in mine!" said the thunderstricken Julia to herself. And if she had heard that the North Pole had tipped all its ice off into space, she wouldn't have told her a syllable about it all that week.

But in the course of a fortnight, a particularly choice bit of news having turned up, and the edge of her resentment having worn away, Mrs. Cairnes could not keep it to herself. And poor Mrs. Maybury, famishing now for some object of interest, received it so kindly that things returned to their former footing. Perhaps not quite to their former footing, for Julia had now a feeling of restraint about her news, and didn't tell the most piquant, and winked to her visitors if the details trenched too much on what had better be unspoken. "Not that it was really so very—so very—but then Mrs. Maybury, you know," she said

afterward. But she had never been accustomed to this restraint, and she didn't like it.

In fact Mrs. Cairnes found herself under restraints that were amounting to a mild bondage. She must be at home for meals, of course; she had been in the habit of being at home or not as she chose, and often of taking the bite and sup at other houses, which precluded the necessity of preparing anything at home. She must have the meals to suit another and very different palate, which was irksome and troublesome. She must exercise a carefulness concerning her conversation, and that of her gossips, too, which destroyed both zest and freedom. She strongly suspected that in her absence the curtains were up and the sun was allowed to play havoc with her carpets. She was remonstrated with on her goings and comings, she who had had the largest liberty for two score years. And then, when the minister came to see her, she never had the least good of the call, so much of it was absorbed by Mrs. Maybury. And Mrs. Maybury's health was delicate, she fussed and complained and whined; she cared for the things that Mrs. Cairnes didn't care for, and didn't care for the things that Mrs. Cairnes did care for; Mrs. Cairnes was conscious of her unspoken surprise at much that she said and did, and resented the somewhat superior gentleness and refinement of her old friend as much as the old friend resented her superior strength and liveliness.

"What has changed Sophia so? It isn't Sophia at all! And I thought so much of her, and I looked forward to spending my old age with her so happily!" murmured Julia. "But perhaps it

will come right," she reasoned cheerily. "I may get used to it. I didn't suppose there'd be any rubbing of corners. But as there is, the sooner they're rubbed off the better, and we shall settle down into comfort again, at last instead of at first, as I had hoped in the beginning."

Alas! "I really can't stand these plants of yours, Julia, dear," said Mrs. Maybury, soon afterward. "I've tried to. I've said nothing. I've waited, to be very sure. But I never have been able to have plants about me. They act like poison to me. They always make me sneeze so. And you see I'm all stuffed up—"

Her plants! Almost as dear to her as children might have been! The chief ornament of her parlors! And just ready to bloom! This was really asking too much. "I don't believe it's the plants at all," said Julia. "That's sheer nonsense. Anybody living on this green and vegetating earth to be poisoned by plants in a window! I don't suppose they trouble you any more than your lamp all night does me; but I've never said anything about that. I can't bear lamplight at night; I want it perfectly dark, and the light streams out of your room—"

"Why don't you shut the door, then?"

"Because I never shut my door. I want to hear if anything disturbs the house. Why don't you shut yours?"

"I never do, either. I've always had several rooms, and kept the doors open between. It isn't healthy to sleep with closed doors."

"Healthy! Healthy! I don't hear anything else from morning till night when I'm in the house."

"You can't hear very much of it, then."

"I should think, Sophia Maybury, you wanted to live forever!"

"Goodness knows I don't!" cried Mrs. Maybury, bursting into tears. And that night she shut her bedroom door and opened the window, and sneezed worse than ever all day afterward, in spite of the fact that Mrs. Cairnes had put all her cherished plants into the dining-room alcove.

"I can't imagine what has changed Julia so," sighed Mrs. Maybury. "She used to be so bright and sweet and good-tempered. And now I really don't know what sort of an answer I'm to have to anything I say. It keeps my nerves stretched on the *qui vive* all day. I am so disappointed. I am sure the Doctor would be very unhappy if he knew how I felt."

But Mrs. Maybury had need to pity herself; Julia didn't pity her. "She's been made a baby of so long," said Julia, "that now she really can't go alone." And perhaps she was a little bitterer about it than she would have been had Captain Cairnes ever made a baby of her in the least, at any time.

They were sitting together one afternoon, a thunderstorm of unusual severity having detained Mrs. Cairnes at home, and the conversation had been more or less acrimonious, as often of late. Just before dusk there came a great burst of sun, and the whole heavens were suffused with splendor.

"O Julia! Come here, come quick, and see this sunset!" cried Mrs. Maybury. But Julia did not come. "Oh! I can't bear to have you lose it," urged the philanthropic lover of nature again.

"There! It's streaming up the very zenith. I never saw such color—do come."

"Mercy, Sophia! You're always wanting people to leave what they're about and see something! My lap's full of worsteds."

"Well," said Sophia. "It's for your own sake. I don't know that it will do me any good. Only if one enjoys beautiful sights."

"Dear me! Well, there! Is that all? I don't see anything remarkable. The idea of making one get up to see that!" And as she took her seat, up jumped the great black and white cat to look out in his turn. Mrs. Maybury would have been more than human if she had not said "Scat! scat! scat!" and she did say it, shaking herself in horror.

It was the last straw. Mrs. Cairnes took her cat in her arms and moved majestically out of the room, put on her rubbers, and went out to tea, and did not come home till the light up stairs told her that Mrs. Maybury had gone to her room.

Where was it all going to end? Mrs. Cairnes could not send Sophia away after all the protestations she had made. Mrs. Maybury could never put such a slight on Julia as to go away without more overt cause for displeasure. It seemed as though they would have to fight it out in the union.

But that night a glare lit the sky which quite outdid the sunset; the fire-bells and clattering engines called attention to it much more loudly than Sophia had announced the larger conflagration. And in the morning it was found that the Webster House was in ashes. All of Mrs. Maybury's property was in the building. The

insurance had run out the week before, and meaning to attend to it every day she had let it go, and here she was penniless.

But no one need commiserate with her. Instead of any terror at her situation a wild joy sprang up within her. Relief and freedom clapped their wings above her.

It was Mrs. Cairnes who felt that she herself needed pity. A lamp at nights, oceans of fresh air careering round the house, the everlasting canary-bird's singing to bear, her plants exiled, her table revolutionized, her movements watched, her conversation restrained, her cat abused, the board of two people and the wages of one to come out of her narrow hoard. But she rose to the emergency. Sophia was penniless. Sophia was homeless. The things which it was the ashes of bitterness to allow her as a right, she could well give her as a benefactress. Sophia was welcome to all she had. She went into the room, meaning to overwhelm the weeping, helpless Sophia with her benevolence. Sophia was not there.

Mrs. Maybury came in some hours later, a carriage and a job-wagon presently following her to the door. "You are very good, Julia," said she, when Julia received her with the rapid sentences of welcome and assurance that she had been accumulating. "And you mustn't think I'm not sensible of all your kindness. I am. But my husband gave the institution advice for nothing for forty years, and I think I have rights there now without feeling under obligations to any. I've visited the directors, and I've had a meeting called and attended,—I've had all your energy, Julia, and

have hurried things along in quite your own fashion. And as I had just one hundred dollars in my purse after I sold my watch this morning, I've paid it over for the entrance-fee, and I've been admitted and am going to spend the rest of my days in the Old Ladies' Home. I've the upper corner front room, and I hope you will come and see me there."

"Sophia!"

"Don't speak! Don't say one word! My mind was made up irrevocably when I went out. Nothing you, nothing any one, can say, will change it. I'm one of the old ladies now."

Mrs. Cairnes brought all her plants back into the parlor, pulled down the shades, drew the inside curtain, had the cat's cushion again in its familiar corner, and gave Allida warning, within half an hour. She looked about a little while and luxuriated in her freedom,—no one to supervise her conversation, her movements, her opinions, her food. Never mind the empty rooms, or the echoes there! She read an angry psalm or two, looked over some texts denouncing pharisees and hypocrites, thought indignantly of the ingratitude there was in the world, felt that any way, and on the whole, she was where she was before Sophia came, and went out to spend the evening, and came in at the nine-o'clock bell-ringing with such a sense of freedom, that she sat up till midnight to enjoy it.

And Sophia spent the day putting her multitudinous belongings into place, hanging up her bird-cage, arranging her books and her bureau-drawers, setting up a stocking, and making

the acquaintance of the old ladies next her. She taught one of them to play double solitaire that very evening. And then she talked a little while concerning Dr. Maybury, about whom Julia had never seemed willing to hear a word; and then she read, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," and went to bed perfectly happy.

Julia came to see her the next day, and Sophia received her with open arms. Every one knew that Julia had begged her to stay and live with her always, and share what she had. Julia goes now to see her every day of her life, rain or snow, storm or shine; and the whole village says that the friendship between those two old women is something ideal.

THE MYSTERY OF GILGAL

BY JOHN HAY

The darkest, strangest mystery
I ever read, or heern, or see
Is 'long of a drink at Taggart's Hall—
Tom Taggart's of Gilgal.

I've heern the tale a thousand ways,
But never could git through the maze
That hangs around that queer day's doin's;
But I'll tell the yarn to youans.

Tom Taggart stood behind his bar,
The time was fall, the skies was fa'r,
The neighbors round the counter drawed,
And ca'mly drinked and jawed.

At last come Colonel Blood of Pike,
And old Jedge Phinn, permiscus-like,
And each, as he meandered in,
Remarked, "A whisky-skin."

Tom mixed the beverage full and fa'r,

And slammed it, smoking, on the bar.
Some says three fingers, some says two,—
I'll leave the choice to you.

Phinn to the drink put forth his hand;
Blood drewed his knife, with accent bland,
"I ax yer parding, Mister Phinn—
Jest drap that whisky-skin."

No man high-toneder could be found
Than old Jedge Phinn the country round.
Says he, "Young man, the tribe of Phinns
Knows their own whisky-skins!"

He went for his 'leven-inch bowie-knife:—
"I tries to foller a Christian life;
But I'll drap a slice of liver or two,
My bloomin' shrub, with you."

They carved in a way that all admired,
Tell Blood drewed iron at last, and fired.
It took Seth Bludso 'twixt the eyes,
Which caused him great surprise.

Then coats went off, and all went in;
Shots and bad language swelled the din;
The short, sharp bark of Derringers,
Like bull-pups, cheered the furse.

They piled the stiffs outside the door;
They made, I reckon, a cord or more.
Girls went that winter, as a rule,
Alone to spellin'-school.

I've sarched in vain, from Dan to Beer-
Sheba, to make this mystery clear;
But I end with hit as I did begin,—
Who got the whisky-skin?

THE GUSHER

BY CHARLES BATTELL LOOMIS

Of course an afternoon tea is not to be taken seriously, and I hold that any kind of conversation goes, as long as it is properly vacuous and irrelevant.

One meets many kinds of afternoon teas—the bored, the bashful, the intense, and once in a while the interesting, but for pure delight there is nothing quite equals the gusher. She is generally very pretty. Nature insists upon compensations.

When you meet a real gusher—one born to gush—you can just throw all bounds of probability aside and say the first thing that comes into your head, sure that it will meet with an appreciative burst of enthusiasm, for your true gusher is nothing if she is not enthusiastic. There are those who listen to everything you say and punctuate it with "Yes-s-s, yes-s-s, yes-s-s," until the sibilance gets on your nerves; but the attention of the Simon-pure gusher is purely subconscious. She could not repeat a thing of what you have told her a half minute after hearing it. Her real attention is on something else all the while—perhaps on the gowns of her neighbors, perhaps on the reflection of her pretty face—but never on the conversation. And why should it be? Is a

tea a place for the exercise of concentration? Perish the thought.

You are presented to her as "Mr. Mmmm," and she is "delighted," and smiles so ravishingly that you wish you were twenty years younger. You do not yet know that she is a gusher. But her first remark labels her. Just to test her, for there is something in the animation of her face and the farawayness of the eye that makes you suspect her sincerity, you say:

"I happen to have six children—"

"Oh, how perfectly dee-ar! How old are they?"

She scans the gown of a woman who has just entered the room and, being quite sure that she is engaged in a mental valuation of it, you say:

"They're all of them six."

"Oh, how lovely!" Her unseeing eyes look you in the face. "Just the right age to be companions."

"Yes, all but one."

The eye has wandered to another gown, but the sympathetic voice says:

"Oh, what a pi-i-ty!"

"Yes, isn't it? But he's quite healthy."

It's a game now—fair game—and you're glad you came to the tea!

"Healthy, you say? How nice. It's perfectly lovely to be healthy. Do you live in the country?"

"Not exactly the country. We live in Madison Square, under the trees."

"Oh, how perfectly idyllic!"

"Yes; we have all the advantages of the city and the delights of the country. I got a permit from the Board of Education to put up a little bungalow alongside the Worth monument, and the children bathe in the fountain every morning when the weather is cold enough."

"Oh, how charming! How many children have you?"

"Only seven. The oldest is five and the youngest is six."

"Just the interesting age. Don't you think children fascinating?"

Again the roaming eye and the vivacious smile.

"Yes, indeed. My oldest—he's fourteen and quite original. He says that when he grows up he doesn't know what he'll be."

"Really? How cute!"

"Yes, he says it every morning, a half-hour before breakfast."

"Fancy! How old did you say he was?"

"Just seventeen, but perfectly girl-like and masculine."

She nods her head, bows to an acquaintance in a distant part of the room, and murmurs in musical, sympathetic tones:

"That's an adorable age."

"What, thirteen?"

"Yes. Did you say it was a girl?"

"Yes, his name's Ethel. He's a great help to her mother."

"Little darling."

"Yes; I tell them there may be city advantages, but I think they're much better off where they are."

"Where did you say you were?"

"On the Connecticut shore. You see, having only the one child, Mrs. Smith is very anxious that it should grow up healthy" (absent-minded nods indicative of full attention), "and so little Ronald never comes to the city at all. He plays with the fisherman's child and gets great drafts of fresh air."

"Oh, how perfectly entrancing! You're quite a poet."

"No; I'm a painter."

Now she is really attentive. She thought you were just an ordinary beast, and she finds that you may be a lion. Smith? Perhaps you're Hopkinson Smith.

"Oh, do you paint? How perfectly adorable! What do you paint—landscapes or portraits?"

Again the eye wanders and she inventories a dress, and you say:—

"Oils."

"Do you ever allow visitors come to your studio?"

"Why, I never prevent them, but I'm so afraid it will bore them that I never ask them."

"Oh, how could anybody be bored at anything?"

"But every one hasn't your enthusiasm. My studio is in the top of the Madison Square tower, and I never see a soul from week's end to week's end."

"Oh, then you're not married."

"Dear, no; a man who is wedded to his art mustn't commit bigamy."

"Oh, how clever. So you're a bachelor?"

"Yes, but I have my wife for a chaperon and I'd be delighted to have you come and take tea with us some Saturday from six until three."

"Perfectly delighted!" Her eye now catches sight of an acquaintance just coming in, and as you prepare to leave her you say:—

"Hope you don't mind a little artistic unconventionality. We always have beer at our teas served with sugar and lemons, the Russian fashion."

"Oh, I think it's much better than cream. I adore unconventionality."

"You're very glad you met me, I'm sure."

"Awfully good of you to say so."

Anything goes at an afternoon tea. But it's better not to go.

THE WIDOW BEDOTT'S VISITOR

BY FRANCES M. WHICHER

Jest in time, Mr. Crane: we've jist this minit sot down to tea. Draw up a cheer and set by. Now, don't say a word: I shan't take *no* for an answer. Should a had things ruther different, to be sure, if I'd suspected *you*, Mr. Crane; but I won't appolligize,—appolligies don't never make nothin' no better, you know. Why, Melissy, you hain't half sot the table: where's the plum-sass? thought you was a-gwine to git some on't for tea? I don't see no cake, nother. What a keerless gal you be! Dew bring 'em on quick; and, Melissy, dear, fetch out one o' them are punkin pies and put it warmin'. How do you take your tea, Mr. Crane? clear, hey? How much that makes me think o' husband! he always drunk hisen clear. Now, dew make yerself to hum, Mr. Crane: help yerself to things. Do you eat johnny-cake? 'cause if you don't I'll cut some white bread. Dew, hey? We're all great hands for injin bread here, 'specially Kier. If I don't make a johnny-cake every few days he says to me, says he, "Mar, why don't you make some injin bread? it seems as if we hadn't never had none." Melissy, pass the cheese. Kier, see't Mr. Crane has butter. This 'ere butter's a leetle grain frouzy. I don't want you to think it's my

make, for't ain't. Sam Pendergrass's wife (she 'twas Sally Smith) she borrowed butter o' me t'other day, and this 'ere's what she sent back. I wouldn't 'a had it on if I'd suspected company. How do you feel to-day, Mr. Crane? Didn't take no cold last night! Well, I'm glad on't. I was raly afeard you would, the lectur'-room was so turrible hot. I was eny-most roasted, and I wa'n't dressed wonderful warm nother,—had on my green silk mankiller, and that ain't very thick. Take a pickle, Mr. Crane. I'm glad you're a favorite o' pickles. I think pickels a delightful beveridge,—don't feel as if I could make out a meal without 'em. Once in a while I go visitin' where they don't have none on the table, and when I git home the fust thing I dew's to dive for the butt'ry and git a pickle. But husband couldn't eat 'em: they was like pizen tew him. Melissy never eats 'em nother: she ain't no pickle hand. Some gals eat pickles to make 'em grow poor, but Melissy hain't no such foolish notions. I've brung her up so she shouldn't have. Why, I've heered of gals drinkin' vinegar to thin 'em off and make their skin delekit. They say Kesier Winkle—Why, Kier, what be you pokin' the sass at Mr. Crane for? Melissy jest helped him. I heered Carline Gallup say how't Kesier Winkle—Why, Kier, what do you mean by offerin' the cold pork to Mr. Crane? jest as if he wanted pork for his tea! You see, Kier's been over to the Holler to-day on bizness with old Uncle Dawson, and he come hum with quite an appertite: says to me, says he, "Mar, dew set on some cold pork and 'taters, for I'm as hungry as a bear." Lemme fill up your cup, Mr. Crane. Melissy, bring on

that are pie: I guess it's warm by this time. There, I don't think anybody'd say that punkin was burnt a-stewin! Take another pickle, Mr. Crane. Oh, I was a-gwine to tell what Carline Gallup said about Kesier Winkle. Carline Gallup was a manty-maker—What, Kier? ruther apt to talk? well, I know she was; but then she used to be sewin' 't old Winkle's about half the time, and she know'd purty well what went on there: yes, I know sewin'-gals is generally tattlers.... But I was gwine to tell what Carline Gallup said. Carline was a very stiddy gal: she was married about a year ago,—married Joe Bennet,—Philander Bennet's son: you remember Phil Bennet, don't you, Mr. Crane?—he 'twas killed so sudding over to Ganderfield? Though, come to think, it must 'a' ben arter you went away from here. He'd moved over to Ganderfield the spring afore he was killed. Well, one day in hayin'-time he was to work in the hay-field—take another piece o' pie, Mr. Crane: oh, dew! I insist on't—well, he was to work in the hay-field, and he fell off the hay-stack. I s'pose 'twouldn't 'a' killed him if it hadn't 'a' ben for his comin' kermash onto a jug that was a-settin' on the ground aside o' the stack. The spine of his back went right onto the jug and broke it,—broke his back, I mean,—not the jug: that wa'n't even cracked. Cur'us, wa'n't it? 'Twas quite a comfort to Miss Bennet in her affliction: 'twas a jug she valleyed,—one 'twas her mother's....

Take another cup o' tea, Mr. Crane. Why, you don't mean to say you've got done supper! ain't you gwine to take nothin' more? no more o' the pie? nor the sass? Well, won't you have

another pickle? Oh, that reminds me: I was a-gwine to tell what Carline Gallup said about Kesier Winkle. Why, Kier, seems to me you ain't very perlite to leave the table afore anybody else does. Oh, yes, I remember now; it's singin'-school night: I s'pose it's time you was off. Melissy, you want to go tew, don't you? Well, I guess Mr. Crane'll excuse you. We'll jest set back the table ag'in' the wall. I won't dew the dishes jest now. Me and Melissy does the work ourselves, Mr. Crane. I hain't kept no gal sense Melissy was big enough t' aid and assist me. I think help's more plague than profit. No woman that has growed-up darters needn't keep help if she's brung up her gals as she'd ought tew. Melissy, dear, put on your cloak: it's a purty tejus evenin'. Kier, you tie up your throat: you know you was complainin' of a soreness in't to-day; and you must be keerful to tie it up when you cum hum: it's dangerous t' egspose yerself arter singin'—apt to give a body the brown-critters,—and that's turrible. You couldn't sing any more if you should git that, you know. You'd better call for Mirandy and Seliny, hadn't you? Don't be out late.

Now, Mr. Crane, draw up to the stove: you must be chilly off there. You gwine to the party to Major Coon's day arter to-morrow? S'pose they'll give out ther invatations to-morrow. Do go, Mr. Crane: it'll chirk you up and dew you good to go out into society ag'in. They say it's to be quite numerous. But I guess ther won't be no dancin' nor highy-tighty dewin's. If I thought ther would be I shouldn't go myself; for I don't approve on 'em, and couldn't countenance 'em. What do you think Sam

Pendergrass's wife told me? She said how't the widder Jinkins (she 'twas Poll Bingham) is a-havin' a new gownd made a purpose to wear to the party,—one of these 'ere flambergasted, blazin' plaid consarns, with tew awful wide kaiterin' flounces around the skirt. Did you ever! How reedickilous for a woman o' her age, ain't it? I s'pose she expects t' astonish the natyves, and make her market tew, like enough. Well, she's to be pitied. Oh, Mr. Crane, I thought I *should go off* last night when I see that old critter squeeze up and hook onto you. How turrible imperdent, wa'n't it! But seems to me I shouldn't 'a' felt as if I was obleeged to went hum with her if I'd 'a' ben in your place, Mr. Crane. She made a purty speech about me to the lectur': I'm 'most ashamed to tell you on't, Mr. Crane, but it shows what the critter is. Kier says he heered her stretch her neck acrost and whisper to old Green, "Mr. Green, don't you think the widder Bedott seems to be wonderfully took up with *crainiology*?" She's the brazin'-facedest critter 't ever lived; it does beat all; I never *did* see her equill. But it takes all sorts o' folks to make up the world, you know. What did I understand you to say, Mr. Crane?—a few minnits' conversation with me? Deary me! Is it anything pertickler, Mr. Crane? Oh, dear suz! how you *dew* frustrate me! Not that it's anything oncommon fer the gentlemen to ax to have private conversations with me, you know; but then—but then—bein' you, it's different: circumstances alter cases, you know. What was you a-gwine to say, Mr. Crane?

Oh, no, Mr. Crane, by no manner o' means; 'tain't a minute

tew soon for you to begin to talk about gittin' married ag'in. I am amazed you should be afeerd I'd think so. See—how long's Miss Crane been dead? Six months!—land o' Goshen!—why, I've know'd a number of individdiwals get married in less time than that. There's Phil Bennet's widdler 't I was a-talkin' about jest now,—she 'twas Louisy Perce: her husband hadn't been dead but *three* months, you know. I don't think it looks well for a *woman* to be in such a hurry; but for a *man* it's a different thing: circumstances alter cases, you know. And then, sittiwated as you be, Mr. Crane, it's a turrible thing for your family to be without a head to superintend the domestic consarns and 'tend to the children,—to say nothin' o' yerself, Mr. Crane. You dew need a companion, and no mistake. Six months! Good greivous! Why, Squire Titus didn't wait but six *weeks* after he buried his fust wife afore he married his second. I thought ther' wa'n't no partickler need o' his hurryin' so, seein' his family was all growed up. Such a critter as he pickt out, tew! 'Twas very onsuitable; but every man to his taste,—I hain't no dispersion to meddle with nobody's consarns. There's old farmer Dawson, tew,—his pardner hain't ben dead but ten months. To be sure, he ain't married yet; but he would 'a' ben long enough ago, if somebody I know on 'd gin him any incurridgement. But 'tain't for me to speak o' that matter. He's a clever old critter, and as rich as a Jew; but—lawful sakes!—he's old enough to be my father. And there's Mr. Smith,—Jubiter Smith: you know him, Mr. Crane,—his wife, (she 't was Aurory Pike) she died last summer, and he's ben squintin' round

among the wimmin ever since, and he *may* squint for all the good it'll dew him so far as I'm consarned,—though Mr. Smith's a respectable man,—quite young and hain't no family,—very well off, tew, and quite intellectible,—but I'm purty partickler. Oh, Mr. Crane, it's ten years come Jinniwary sense I witnessed the expiration o' my beloved companion!—an uncommon long time to wait, to be sure; but 'tain't easy to find anybody to fill the place o' Hezekier Bedott. I think *you're* the most like husband of any individdiwal I ever see, Mr. Crane. Six months! murderation! cur'us you should be afeard I'd think 'twas too soon. Why, I've knowed—

Mr. Crane—Well, widder, I've been thinking about taking another companion, and I thought I'd ask you—

Widow—Oh, Mr. Crane, egscuse my commotion; it's so onexpected. Jest hand me that are bottle of camfire off the mantletry shelf: I'm ruther faint. Dew put a little mite on my handkercher and hold it to my nuz. There, that'll dew: I'm obleeged tew ye. Now I'm ruther more composed: you may perceed, Mr. Crane.

Mr. C.—Well, widder, I was a-going to ask you whether—whether—

Widow—Continner, Mr. Crane,—dew. I know it's turrible embarrassin'. I remember when my dezeased husband made his suppositions to me he stammered and stuttered, and was so awfully flustered it did seem as if he'd never git it out in the world; and I suppose it's ginerally the case,—at least it has been with all

them that's made suppositions to me: you see they're generally oncerting about what kind of an answer they're a-gwine to git, and it kind o' makes 'em narvous. But when an individdiwal has reason to s'pose his attachment's reciperated, I don't see what need there is o' his bein' flustrated,—though I must say it's quite embarrassin' to me. Pray continner.

Mr. C.—Well, then, I want to know if you're willing I should have Melissy.

Widow—The dragon!

Mr. C.—I hain't said anything to her about it yet,—thought the proper way was to get your consent first. I remember when I courted Trypheny we were engaged some time before mother Kenipe knew anything about it, and when she found it out she was quite put out because I didn't go to her first. So when I made up my mind about Melissy, thinks me, I'll do it right this time, and speak to the old woman first—

Widow—*Old woman*, hey! That's a purty name to call me!—amazin' perlite, tew! Want Melissy, hey! Tribble-ation! gracious sakes alive! Well, I'll give it up now! I always knowed you was a simpleton, Tim Crane, but, I *must* confess, I didn't think you was *quite* so big a fool. Want Melissy, dew ye? If that don't beat all! What an everlastin' old calf you must be, to s'pose she'd *look* at *you*! Why, you're old enough to be her father, and more, tew; Melissy ain't only in her twenty-oneth year. What a reedickilous idee for a man o' your age! As gray as a rat, tew! I wonder what this world *is* a-comin' tew: 'tis astonishin' what fools old

widdiwers will make o' themselves! Have Melissy! Melissy!

Mr. C.—Why, widder, you surprise me. I'd no idee of being treated in this way, after you'd ben so polite to me, and made such a fuss over me and the girls.

Widow—Shet yer head, Tim Crane; nun o' yer sass to me. *There's* your hat on that are table, and *here's* the door; and the sooner you put on *one* and march out o' t'other the better it will be for you. And I advise you, afore you try to git married ag'in, to go out West and see 'f yer wife's cold; and arter yer satisfied on that p'int, jest put a little lampblack on yer hair,—'twould add to yer appearance, undoubtedly, and be of sarvice tew you when you want to flourish round among the gals; and when ye've got yer hair fixt, jest splinter the spine o' your back,—'twouldn't hurt your looks a mite: you'd be intirely unresistible if you was a *leetle* grain straiter.

Mr. C.—Well, I never!

Widow—Hold your tongue, you consarned old coot you! I tell you *there's* your hat, and *there's* the door: be off with yerself, quick metre, or I'll give ye a h'ist with the broomstick.

Mr. C.—Gimmeni!

Widow (rising)—Git out, I say! I ain't a-gwine to stan' here and be insulted under my own ruff; and so git along; and if ever you darken my door ag'in, or say a word to Melissy, it'll be the wuss for you,—that's all.

Mr. C.—Treemenjous! What a buster!

Widow—Go 'long,—go 'long,—go long, you everlastin' old

gum! I won't hear another word (stops her ears). I won't. I won't. I won't. (Exit Mr. Crane.)

(Enter Melissy, accompanied by Captain Canoot.)

Good-evenin', cappen! Well, Melissy, hum at last, hey? Why didn't you stay till mornin'? Purty business keepin' me up here so late waitin' for you, when I'm eny-most tired to death iornin' and workin' like a slave all day,—ought to ben abed an hour ago. Thought ye left me with agreeable company, hey? I should like to know what arthly reason you had to s'pose old Crane's was agreeable to me? I always despised the critter; always thought he was a turrible fool, and now I'm convinced on't. I'm completely dizgusted with him; and I let him know it to-night. I gin him a piece o' my mind't I guess he'll be apt to remember for a spell. I ruther think he went off with a flea in his ear. Why, cappen, did ye ever hear of such a piece of audacity in all yer born days? for him—*Tim Crane*

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