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LIBERIA HERALD.

From the Southern Literary Messenger.

JACK-O'-LANTERN:

A NEW LIGHT STORY. BY EYES-IN-GLASS.

It is scarcely the best policy to begin the word of confession on one's first entry into the world, where, now-a-days, it men confess any sins at all, it is only such as are sufficiently equivocal to pass for virtues; but as my aim is a moral one and my hope the reformation of t is very infirmity among mankind, I know no better mode of beginning, than to put myself right in court, by a frank avowal of the matter which has brought me into it. Start not, therefore, ye devoutly pious—frown not, ye saints of the tabernacle,—and wring not your hands, ye godly dames, who form societies to help unto grace and gravity, the infinite number of wise young men, who are possessed of the spirit, and lack all other possessions,—when I boldly declare unto ye, that, like Saul of old, and the Witch of Endor, John Faustus, Michael Scott, and, possibly, the Reverend Edward Irving, I have a familiar—in plain language, a devil; one of those active and intelligent spirits, who from sympathy, animal magnetism, or some other equally unintelligible cause, attach themselves to the fortunes of that grub-worm, man, for his special comfort and edification; conveying him the news—canvassing morals, (and, *par parenthese*, the devil has a particular interest in his department of human economy,) and, altogether, affording him a mass of information not yet attainable even by the most adroit practitioner in *clair-voyancing*. How I became familiar, with this familiar, is, gentlest of all possible readers—without becoming too familiar—none of your business. He came to me, suffice it to know, not as visiters from the unsubstantial world usually come, reeking with smoke and stinking of antimony; there was not even a flourish of trumpets—not a breeze or breath of music—to intimate his approach. Never was coming more innocent and unimposing. I made use of no sort of incantations; none of your sculls and circles—grim, grinning jowls, skinned bats and withered frogs, encircled me; and, except the proverbial devil of the printing office, I do not remember to have ever had before the slightest communication, from or with, any of the hotly-quartered gentry. Nor did I solicit, the honor of a visit, (rhyme is a devilish propensity,) but uninvited, uncommanded—I will not say, undesired—he stood before me; nay, there I am wrong, he stood behind me, such was his unobtrusive modesty of his approach at first; and a stand was the first notice which I had of his near neighborhood. My devil first made my acquaintance in the shape of a sound. But that, gentle reader, was no vulgar sound, though not an unfrequent one since the discovery of Maccoboy. My snuff-box lay beside me, on the table, and from its capacious treasury. I had just withdrawn, betwixt my forefinger and thumb, a generous pinch of the titillating dust. Applied to my nostril, it had promptly done its office in provoking a most relieving and liberal sneeze. What was my consternation to behold, in the next moment, another sneeze behind me—a sneezo, as it were, the very *fac-simile* and echo of my own. Such, at first, I was almost persuaded to believe it, but a repetition of the explosion soon convinced me that it was not the sneeze of humanity, and I clearly comprehended the operation of my Maccoboy upon the sternutatory organs of an infernal. "Ha!—tshe—tshe—tshe—ha!—ha!"—was the melodious acknowledgement which my visiter gave to the potency and general excellence of my tobacconists; and the sympathy which his nostril thus seemed to exhibit with my own, half removed the feeling of disquiet and apprehension which his first annunciation had occasioned me. In an instant I to contront him, and a moment's glance sufficed to set my heart at ease and silence all my annoyances. On looking at him, I felt, of a sudden, all the freedom and familiarity of a long acquaintance; and this feeling, the moment I had discovered his quality, forced upon me the unpleasant conviction that I had been no better than I should be. His face was by no means remarkable. Such a face I have often seen. It was rather Gallician in its contour and general expression. A disposition to laugh at all things seemed its predominating feature, but there was a slight sinking at the corners of the mouth, which denoted a habitual sneer, and a fondness for sarcasm, which was strongly opposed to the general benevolence of his other features. The cheeks were full, fat and rosy, but the eyes were rather small, and the chin degenerated spishly. His figure was good enough—his person, though diminutive, was perfect. I cast my eyes with some curiosity towards his feet, but they were perfect also; and in a fashionable squaretoed boot seemed even handsomely formed. There was nothing like club or hoot to offend my sensibilities or alarm my fears, and I wondered at our grandams who could tell, and really believe, such discreditable stories. My devil, on the whole, was really a comely fellow. I have seen the editor of a ladies' gazettee, a far worse looking man, and infinitely less of a gentleman

With that divine instinct which we has never denied to the devil, while denying him all other virtues, he readily discerned my annoyances and saw that his coming had put me out; but with that felicity of manner which it would be equal folly in us to deny to a person so proverbially persuasive, he took special care in what he said, not to suffer me to see that he ascribed my discomposure to any other cause than the natural irritability of an author at being disturbed in his daily scribblings. I was at this time busily engaged upon a new work, calling for all my taste and research, no other than a collection of the most fashionable negro melodies, such as Jim Crow, Coal Black Rose, Clare De Kitchen, and other pieces of like national and moral interest, with a copious appendix of illustrative notes, such as might well become a work of so much magnitude and interest.

"I see that you are busy, Mr. Silex, and I would not willingly disturb you at this moment."

"Pray, proceed, sir—I have time enough to spare, and will wait upon you."

He drew a chair as he said these words, and with the air of a man resolved, under all circumstances, to be as good as his word, he prepared to take a quiet seat in a corner, and give himself up to meditation.

"Beg pardon, sir," said I, "but you will find it tedious—may I be honored at once with the purpose of your visit."

"That is soon told," said he in reply; "I see that you know me."

Here I expressed a little reluctance, and prayed for more direct information.

"I cannot deny," was my response, "that I have a shrewd guess, but——" There I paused.

"Which is perfectly correct, sir; your instinct is not less good than mine in matters of this sort, and there needs no formality between those already acquainted. Besides, there is something less than civil—certainly less than social—in calling folks continually by their titles of dignity. I freely confess to you a willingness to dispense with mine. It operates against me, and sits heavily upon me at certain seasons. I am, like many of the princes of old, and some of the officers of penal justice in modern times, infinitely more fond of a snug disguise, and a good humored *nom de guerre*, than of the solemn ceremonial which follows upon and announces the presence of superior attributes. At present, sir, as I see you still somewhat at a loss, you will do me the favor to recognize me under one of my many names—the most innocent and least imposing, pehaps, among them—and whenever you may deem it necessary to call me by a name at all, which I trust will not be often the case, to know me as Jack-O'-Lantern. I shall certainly be willing to give you all the light I carry, should you require it. Jack-O'-Lantern is a common acquaintance, and nobody should be seriously alarmed or annoyed at his presence. You, I know, who are a poet and philosopher, will readily show yourself above all idle superstitious fancies; and you will soon find, upon doing so, that if I have few virtues, I have many vices; and my more imposing names of sovereignity thrown out of the account, there can be no objection to the employment of my services."

"Your services, Mr. John O'-Lantern?" I exclaimed with some wonder, in the sudden commotion of my thoughts, not exactly knowing what to make of this sort of introduction—"Your services."

"Ay, my services," he replied: "I propose to serve you, because I see that you need my help, and because I have somehow taken a liking to you. You smile, but I am above jest in this. I am serious. In my friendship for you I have sought you out, and I am resolved to become your friend, companion, assistant, anything, whether you will or no! You want an amanuensis, and considering the color of the work on which I see you busy, perhaps I am the very person of all the world whom you should soonest choose. But I insist not on this. Take me in what capacity you please. I am an actor of all work, as the comedians call themselves. I can be a boon companion, a grave counsellor, a curious penman, and a dapper valet. Make me what you please, with a will, and rely on me to be the thing which you most desire. I will take no refusal you must employ me."

So liberal an offer, so graciously volunteered, was not to be rejected idly. He saw me hesitate, and threw in certain additional seggestions.

"My library is large and various; I see that you are busy, and sometimes at a loss, in your search after authorities. Your correspondence is extensive, let me give you a taste of my skill in assisting you to answer some of these letters."

He turned over a pile, seated himself at the table and with a pen that seemed rather to stream over the paper than to rest upon it, he wrote almost in a breath the most admirable and fitting replies to the greater number of them. To a politician wanting a vote, and giving a dinner accordingly, wrote a brief but comprehensive eulogium upon the arts of the cruisine, and concluded with an acceptance to his invitation, premising only that my wine for the current month was Lachrymæ Christi. To a lady of fashion whose billet for the next *skiree* was rather a summons than a solicitation, he pleaded a rule to reject all invitations for Friday, but complimented her at the same time upon the *recherche* fold of her missive. To the editor of a weekly magazine who begged for contributions, for which he promised to pay in praises, he wrote an essay on independent criticism. To a tailor soliciting custom and proffering extensive credits, he penned an order for a claret colored coat, such as the man wore who seized on the New York arsenal, and kept it for the whigs against General Arculârius and his man Friday. There was one letter which he was about to open, but as if he knew the contents already, or saw from the glance of my eye that he was now on forbidden ground, he paused in his progress, and I availed myself of the interval to acknowledge his powers, and relieve him for the present from their farther exercise.

"Enough, Mr. O'-Lantern I am quite obliged to you. You are indeed a valuable acquisition, and really I know not how I shall requite you."

"Requite me—I ask no requital, Mr. Silex—none. The pleasure of serving you is enough for me."

"Indeed! Truly you are becoming disinterested in your old age. You have not always toiled thus unprofitably, and with so little regard to self. If report speaks truly, you have usually been a severe expectant—a rigid exacter of your dues. You have done nothing for nothing."

"Report has done me wrong," he said coolly. "I have always been a much scandalized person among men, I assure you."

Never did injured mortal look more in need of sympathy. I felt myself getting lachrymose.

"What!" I proceeded, "and is your love in my case so great that you are willing to do for me those things for which you have exacted the eternal and unmitigated toils of other men, not to speak of their sufferings?"

"I do not understand you, really," was his reply, and he certainly looked at a loss when he spoke these words.

"'Pon my soul," I continued, "either you are exceedingly dull, Mr. O-Lantern, or I have been grievously imposed upon in the histories I have heard of you. Is it really possible that you intend to serve me for nothing? Do you really want no compensation! Do you ask nothing of me in return?"

"Nothing?"

"What! shall there be no bond between us?"

"Bond! for what? speak out my dear master that is to be, and tell me your real difficulty."

"Well, in plain terms then, Mr. O'-Lantern, do you not want to bind me, body and soul, in return for these services? Do you not want a mortgage of my soul?"

"Your soul, indeed what do I want with it? Bless your stars, my dear Mr. Silex, that thing is entirely out of fashion now. I have more souls than I know what to do with—they are positively rotting on my hands. I wouldn't be burdened or bothered with an increase on any terms; and next to the mistake which you have been led into by your grandmother on the subject of my character, is that monstrous error which you men seem to entertain as to the value of the article you think I trade in. Souls, indeed! The very idea is absurd. No, sir, If I wished for anything at your hands, it should be the breeches, you have worn. Now I think of it, sir, I will have pay for my services. You shall pay me in old breeches; you shall contract to give me all your breeches after a month's wearing them, and I will trust to your generosity, should you ever get married, to throw in occasionally a petticoat of your wife's. These shall be my terms. I ask for no other. Keep your soul, and do what you please with it; I would'nt have it as a gift. But your breeches, sir—your breeches; and in the event of your marriage an occasional petticoat of your wife's; these you shall give me, if anything, in return for my services. What say you to these terms?"

"A bargain," I exclaimed, delighted with the humor of the fellow. not less than his generosity. "Breeches and petticoats! you shall have them all! Why, Mr. O'Lantern, you are the very pink of liberality, and I rejoice at your coming. Pray resume your seat, and let us talk over this matter, that it may be the better understood between us. There may be something covert and equivocal in it, after all. You gentlemen of the lantern are apt to hang out false lights for the temptation of the unwary, and I am resolved to see that you have no occult signification in what you say, before I sign this agreement. It may be my soul, after all, that you're driving at, in aiming at my breeches. I know many men whose souls never go beyond their breeches, and though I trust that mine is not of this sort, yet I would take every precaution against involvements. I will have legal advice first in this business."

"You are right, my dear sir," he replied promplty, "take what precaution you please, and be satisfied before you proceed a single step in this matter. I have no disposition to deceive you—indeed, I am not a proficient in the arts of falsehood. I know many a lawyer who would put me to the blush for incompetence, and might, if lying were a prime requisite in my dominions usurp their sovereignty. Even if your soul were in your breeches, there would be little danger of its loss; all you have need to do is to shake them well before giving them to me, and unless it be a very sleepy or a very adhersive soul, it is physically impossible that it should stick there long after the shaking."

"But the instrument, itself! how would you have it drawn up? possibly you may desire that it should be written with my blood; if you do, I must tell you——"

His immoderate laughter silenced me.

"Another pinch of your Maccoboy," he said, helping himself. "I see you have been among the Germans. These are diabolical fancies I confess, and to my mind, rather dirty ones. I pray you, my dear master, look on me as one having a tolerable taste, and rather delicate stomach. These blood-pudding imaginings are my abomination. I deal differently with my friends. Leave the drawing up of the instrument to me, and keep your soul and blood to yourself. I would not rob you of a particle of either. The breeches will contont me,—the breeches; and, mark me! an occasional petticoat, whenever you may think it necessary to bring home Mrs Silex."

"You shall have them—that you shall," was my answer.

The deed was drawn out in the twinkling of an eye, and the contract signed and delivered. Nothing could exceed the delight of Jack upon his installation into office as my servant of all work. His joy broke out into tumultuous expressions the moment the papers were completed.

"I congratulate myself, my dear master, as well as you, on our mutual acquisitions. There is nothing so distressing as being out of place; I have been trying for sometime to employ a master after my own heart, and my rapture is now excessive at having found him."

"A double-edged compliment," I muttered to myself, with a slight shiver. He beheld and divined the sensation.

"Ay, I see," he cried playfully, "you are still unassured. You do not conjecture my value yet. But let me convince you. Say, what shall I do for you! It is proper that I commence my duties forthwith. Let me know them. I am ready now. I have no trunks to remove. My wardrobe is already here. As for my bedding, I want none. A chink in the chimney will yield me a sufficient sleeping place, and your saving in candles alone, will be no small item. You have only to set me above the chimney-peice when you want a light, and I will burn at both ends to please you. In food I am moderate. A fricasseed frog is the utmost that my stomach will bear, and in wine I am a single bottle man. In supplies I am a prime commissariat, and you would find me valuable for this quality, even if my consumption were greater than it is. To speak with due modesty, you will find me a wondrous acquisition; and will soon wonder how you ever did without me before."

"I nothing doubt it, Mr. John O'-Lantern."

"Plain Jack, if you please, Mr. Silex. John O'-Lantern will do for visiters and state occasions, when we go into company. Between us, and at our own fireside, a little more familiarity is best, and plain Jack more agreeable to my ear than any other epithet. And now, sir, shall I bring in coffee? Your usual supper hour is at hand."

"If you please, Jack," was my answer; and yet, I had some qualms of stomach, not to say conscience, as I thought of the proverb which denounced all liquor, however pleasant, of the devil's brewing. While I thought thus, the coffee urn was hissing on the table, and to do my new retainer lean justice, I assure you, I never drank a better cup of the purple beverage in my life. As a cook alone, he deserved new breeches daily; we shall see, as we get on that he displayed other qualities which entitled him to far higher rewards; but of these—anon.

THE ART OF COMPOSITION.

In almost every age, when a *people* have become *readers*, there are two schools of composition;—the one closely resembling the language commonly spoken; the other constructed upon the principle, that what is written should be something nobler or lovlier than what is spoken;—that fine writing ought not so much literally to resemble, as spiritually to idealize good talking;—that the art of composition, like every other art, when carried to its highest degree, is not the representation, but, as Browne expresses it, 'the perfection of Nature:—and that as music to sound, so is composition to language. A great writer of either school reaches the same shore, and must pass over the same stream; but the one is contented with the ferry, the other builds up a bridge,—one goes along the stream,—the other above it. Of these two schools of composition, the Eloquent and the Familiar, the last, often lightly esteemed in its time, and rather commanding a wide than a reverent audience pursues with little charge and little diminution of popularity, from generation to generation. But the first stands aloof,—the edifice of its age,—copied not for ordinary use, however well formed by scholars in exact and harmonious symmetry. Royal, but unprolific, it is a monarch without a dynasty. It commands, is obeyed, adored,—dies, and leaves no heir.—Gibbon and Junius are imitated but by school-boys, and correspondents to provincial newspapers; but the homely Locke, the natural Defoe, the familiar Swift, the robust, if boorish manliness of Cobbett, leave their successors; and find, (perhaps unconciously,) their imitators; as long as the langusge lasts. This is no detraction from the immortality, of greater and more imaginative minds. It is the characteristic of their immortality that though they inspire, they are not copied,—mediately or immediately: the spirit of Milton has had its influence on almost every great poet that has succeeded him,—but poetasters alone have mimicked the machinery of his verse. He who has really caught the mantle of the prophet, is the last man to imitate his walk. As with poets, so with those prose writers who have built up a

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