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1925

QUIZ And QUILL

Donald McCall

Christmas Number

THE QUIZ AND QUILL

Published by
THE QUIZ AND QUILL CLUB
of Otterbein College

THE QUIZ AND QUILL CLUB

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THE VENTURE

"There is no frigate like a book
To bear us lands away"

This little frigate book of story, verse and song
Has been compiled with careful care and long.
We've christened it THE VENTURE,—for it's really so,—
And decked it out with holly, trimmed with Christmas snow.

The sails are spun of fancy's web
But yet the keel ploughs true,
And the unknown seas that it sets sail
Are only the hands of you.

Our ship from out the port we send
Full-brimmed with precious store,
Like jewels, silks and spices rare
The merchants bore of yore.

Perchance you'll find at first, some things both old and new,
Some things at last, which have appeal for you;
As joy is in its sending, so may it bring you cheer
With all our warmest wishes for the coming year.

—THE EDITORS.

SIGNS

NOLAN R. BEST, '92

THE modern answer to the old question, "Do you believe in signs?", is, "One wouldn't dare believe all of them, but most of them are mighty interesting." It is a pungent lesson in human nature and human psychology to study the store window and billboard signs that appeal along a city street to the eye of the passer-by. Some have deeper implications than the first glance might suggest. For instance, the common announcement often seen stretched on a flaring strip of muslin across a store-front—"This Place has Changed Hands"—says much more than these five words signify in their own sense. It is pretty near to being a condensed history of the former owner.

If a place of business has been managed wisely, a new purchaser takes all pains to prevent the public from realizing that the former owner is gone. One of the most valuable assets which he has paid for he calculates to be the good business reputation which has heretofore attached to the establishment. It is only when the former owner has wrecked public confidence that his successor wants the neighbors to know that a different management has taken hold. The most searching test of what a man has done in any commercial undertaking is the decision of those who follow him as to whether they will run it as an old established business or whether they will advertise it as "under new management."

The biggest and longest established business in the universe changes hands oftener and more regularly than any other. It is the business of running this old world of ours. Any day you look out on the arena of human affairs you Can see a generation coming up and taking

matters out of the hands of the old folks. The young men and women in college today will in just a few years ahead be doing business at the old stand from which the generation now in control will by that time have retired or been ousted. And nobody who knows the alert and self-reliant and vigorous students of this present epoch of the world can help wondering whether they are going to accept the world as a going concern and keep the old firm name over the door, or whether they are going to tear down all the marks of identification with the former owners and hang out the sign: "This Place has Changed Hands."

I am not writing this to advise them either way. Certainly I know a lot of things which this new generation now in college ought to manage a lot better than any former generation has yet made out to do. Assuredly the next inheritors of the world enterprise ought to shape up the business so as to secure to all the partners a more equitable share in the profits (according to the individual investment of each in respect to life and labor) than has been accomplished by all the wisdom of the past. Yet I venture to think that in many and perhaps most other respects the customs of mankind, as built up into civilization by the experiments of the centuries, will prove too well fitted to human necessity for any wholesale scrapping of the old structure.

However, such speculations are aside from the mark here. What's more important just now, and what I should like to suggest to the young college folks of our day, is the trite but pertinent counsel to remember that years fly rapidly and long before they can believe it true, they will find themselves the old folks after whom a later generation will be eagerly pressing, anxious to take over from them the responsibility of managing the world. And I should indeed be happy if I might now plant in their minds the seed of this serious consideration: What kind of a world do they plan to turn over to their

successors when perforce they must relinquish the management which they are now impatiently waiting to undertake. Our generation has already made its mistakes and neither lamentation nor denunciation can now greatly change the world which today's college men and women are about to inherit. The mischief like the good in this bequest has already been done. But the generation next succeeding has all its possibilities ahead of it. Let it enter upon its heritage today and tomorrow with the high resolve that it will make a world so fine and noble that the owners into whose keeping it comes following their time will have no need to hang out on it the sign: "This Place has Changed Hands".

CROSS ROADS

ERNESTINE NICHOLS, '27

The still cold of a December night. Snow spread like fairy jewels over road and field and trees, and drifting with lazy indefiniteness in the crisp air. Snow deep-packed in parallel tracks along a road scarcely distinguishable under its muffling softness. Snow crunching and creaking in steady rhythm under trudging feet. A broad band of light, streaming in golden glory from the window of a tiny church, across unbroken drifts. Choir voices pouring forth glad carols into the silent night. Myriads of stars twinkling and flickering high above, the candles of the angels' Christmas tree.

KISMET!

CHARLOTTE OWEN, '27

CHRISTMAS EVE in Moscow! A man in the dark, great coat of a Russian Cossack stood in the doorway of an alehouse on a dimly lighted thoroughfare. The room was filled with peasants: frowzy-haired, shrill-voiced women; half-drunken soldiers. The air was heavy with smoke, and foul with the odor of spilled vodka. From every side came laughter—harsh—coarse. It was Christmas Eve and spirits ran high.

The man in the doorway seemed somehow out of tune with his surroundings. His bearing was that of a soldier, but there was something about him—something easily recognized by the other merry-makers in the room—that marked him as a man recently released from the prison camp. His cheeks were sunken, his hair unkempt, his manner sullen, He stood looking out into the night with listless eyes.

The street was narrow and dimly lighted. Snow fell silently—melting as it touched the warm asphalt. The paving gleamed in the light of passing cabs and motor cars. From a distant part of the city came the sound of temple bells chiming the hour—their tones hollow and strangely muffled by the snow.

Suddenly, a huge limousine rounded the corner. Its wheels slithered as they crossed the wet street. There was the rasping grind of brakes and the shatter of glass, as the car rammed into the curb. A woman screamed.

The man in the doorway of the alehouse plunged across the sidewalk. The driver was badly cut—blood ran from a gash on his forehead. The woman who had screamed lay fainting in the tonneau of the motor.

The revelers quickly overflowed into the street and formed a curious, sneering group about the stricken car. The crest emblazoned on its door angered rather than awed them,—it belonged to the Countess Yolenski. How they hated the rich! Even the sight of the blood-stained face of the driver brought forth jeers and rude snickers.

The man in the long, great coat of a Cossack abruptly took command. He gave orders like an officer—and strangely enough—they were obeyed. A heavy-bearded soldier was dispatched for a physician. As he stooped to lift the woman from the floor, the street light fell upon her face, and he drew back startled.

"Kismet!" he murmured—then "Lena?"

The dark eyes opened and looked at him blankly for a moment—then incredulously.

"Nicholas! O, Nick, is it you?" she gasped.

His eyes hardened before the glad light in hers. He straightened and would have stepped back from the car, but her hand clutched his sleeve.

"Fate is kind to bring you back. O, Nick, it was all my fault."

The glint in his eyes frightened her. Her poise —her pride—left her and she pled like a child. Her words came as if they had been memorized—as if she had repeated them over and over to herself many times.

"It was my fault, Nicholas. I told the Czar about the pamphlets. He said you were a government spy. He sent you to prison. But, I know now why you did it. The Czar is wicked! I hate him."

Her voice broke, but the eyes above her never wavered.

"O, Nicholas, if you will come back—if you will forgive me—all the wealth I have shall be yours. You shall print more pamphlets—many more. I will help."

The man stood rigid before her. There was a hint of nobility in his bearing. His eyes were

cold—hard—his lips twitched cruelly. O, a year in a prison camp can do much for a man!

"I don't need your money, Lena," his words came fiercely—bristling. "I don't need—you!"

He wheeled quickly and vanished in the doorway. The physician had bandaged the forehead of the driver. A broken windshield seemed to be the only damage done to the car. Its motor was purring softly, and at a faint nod from the Countess it slipped away from the curb and moved slowly down the street. The jeering, half-drunken mob from the alehouse shouted boisterously after it. They had paid little attention to the bit of drama acted out before them.

A Christmas Eve in Moscow! Laughter—harsh—coarse—filled the air. Temple bells chimed faintly, and a man standing in the doorway of an alehouse looked out into the night with listless eyes.

DEAD LEAF

VIRGINIA SNAVELY, '23

The dead leaves fall in the rain;
Underfoot, sodden and slithery they lie.
The wind moans through the streets
And in my soul there in an answering moan.
The world is dark
My soul is weary of the gloom;
I fall like the leaf
To be trodden underfoot, and then,
Forgot.

The fires are warm,
The lamps burn bright,
The beams catch in the silver and the glass
Upon the table.
I peer into the windows
Where the shades have not been drawn,
And my heart cries out for warmth;
But the wind moans,
The dead leaves fall
Sodden to be trampled underfoot
And I am one of them.

LET'S APOLOGIZE TO SHAKESPERE

HELEN BOVEE SCHEAR, '19

A few years ago it was the custom for the school authorities to send invitations to the homes in the district asking parents and friends to spend an "Evening with Emerson" or an "Hour with Longfellow" on the following Tuesday or Friday. Who was responsible for the consequent suffering I have never been able to determine. Certainly not the mothers, aunts and the few fathers who gathered in the school-room on these occasions and who, after exchanging blank smiles upon arriving, squirmed distressingly in their places the rest of the evening, fearing, feeling sure, that Bobby would forget his lines; not the "friends and neighbors," who sat stolidly, perspiringly, in their slat-backed chairs; and not the teachers and school board members present who had on display a sort of mercenary graciousness. Furthermore I can state dogmatically that the children themselves did not instigate these pseudo-entertainments.

It is pleasant to note, however, that civilization in its upward climb, has done away with the affairs entirely. Lest the old custom pass from our memories completely, though, I have been bold enough to add to one of Shakespere's gems some parenthetic phrases inspired by a fat, red-faced little boy who performed during an "Evening with Shakespere" long ago.

"The quality of mercy is not strained,"
(The strain is on the face of him who speaks.)
"It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: (ah, that he too,
This stam'ring lad, might gently drop from sight
Through friendly aperture!) "it is twice blessed;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:"
(And did he drop a blessing would fall twice,
Upon the lad and those constrained to hear.)
"'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes

The throned monarch better than his crown;
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,"
(And thus he quavers on, and knows but this,
That "attribute to awe and majesty,"
Whate'er it be, is half-way through the piece.)

A MOONLIGHT SONATA

BESSIE LINCOLN

The sun still lingered on the brink of night glowing richly in its flame-shot billows of chiffon clouds. Relunctantly it gazed across at the pale lemon moon which already was rising above the eastern hill, then gradually, majestically, it sank from view and the long shadows deepened on the grass.

As we sat on the terrace beneath the sheltering pines, we watched the moon rise higher, seeming to grow larger, to glow more clearly as it rose. It outlined as a marble trail the road leading up the eastern hill—made it a magic pathway leading into the mystic realms which lay just around the bend. It gleamed in a million tiny mirrors in the creek below us. The trees overhanging the waters were feathery shadows. Rippling a harp-like accompaniment the waters bubbled on.

Softly a new theme entered the sonata—the splash of a paddle, the deep richness of a baritone voice mingled with the pleading slide of a guitar. Just the gleam of a white dress in the bow, a rising crescendo of the song, and the canoe glided down among the shadows. Rippling a harp-like accomiment the waters bubbled on. And twilight was quite gone, merged into moonlight—June moonlight.

"——— AND THEN!"

EDNA DELLINGER CARLSON, '22

THE argument was ended. The Head of the House had ended the argument. In fact there was nothing left about which to argue.

The Head of the House walked slowly toward the table and upon it laid a cold, hard, glittering object. The Wifelette barely restrained a very unladylike scream for there before her eyes lay—a revolver. The Head of the House smiled triumphantly.

As we have hinted there had been an argument in this family of two. You see The Head of the House drove a car. Business took him to neighboring towns six days of each week. More than that he was blessed with a trusting disposition and any thumb-nail tourist could, by the mere twist of his wrist or beck of his finger, bring that car to a stop and The Head of the Family would innocently inquire, "Care to ride?"

You may know that the Wifelette lived in constant fear that her husband would be the victim of foul play. She had often read of bandits who held up men who were kind enough to give them a lift. In fact she could picture to herself her hero, robbed, gagged and thrown into a ditch to die. She begged The Head of the House to desist—but he would not. Thereby hung the argument, and we have seen how The Head of the House retained his title and at the same time kept the connubial bliss intact. He followed the dictate of his conscience and his wife's fears were quieted, for in his coat pocket he carried a revolver. Many a weary pedestrian was transported along the way and nothing happened. For two weeks that revolver was of no earthly use.

But there came a day———!

Now neither you nor I—no not even the ever apprehensive Wifelette, should have considered that particular traveler at all dangerous, but thrills and

chills chased each other up and down the manly spine of The Head of the House.

His watch and chain were gone!

The dust-covered traveler leaned idly against the cushions and lazily watched the shifting landscape. The only evidence of any nervousness was the fact that at intervals he tapped with long slender fingers upon the dusty knapsack which rested upon his knees. The Head of the House, besides being a good business man was a good judge of human nature, and as his alert eye noted the gentle tapping of those slender fingers he quickly outlined a plan. He knew of course that he would have to deal with one much more skilled than he in the game, but he did not hesitate. At the next "Slow" sign he jammed on the brakes, brought the car to a full stop and no one present had cause to doubt his sincerity and singleness of purpose as he thrust that shining revolver up against the ribs of his companion and said in firm tones, "Now give me that watch and chain!" Let us hasten to add that the tall dreamy youth did exactly as requested, and when the next command, "Beat it!" was given he lost no time in complying.

The Head of the House replaced the timepiece in his pocket, watched the tall thin one disappear in a gray cloud of dust, chuckled and drove home.

The Wifelette met her hero at the door, but she was too engrossed in her own troubles to note his triumphant smile and the proud way in which he puffed out his chest.

"You're a whole half hour late," she mourned, "and dinner is nearly ruined! If you only hadn't left your watch at home this morning, you'd have known how late it is!"

————and then!

A NIGHT

ALICE SANDERS, '26

A large-starred night in December, the dazzling brilliance of night in New York, the surging sweep of humanity jostling and thronging the walks, the twisting threads of traffic weaving ever-changing patterns,—but the great glass doors swing slowly to behind us, and the song of the street is hushed for the spell of another world holds us. Cool and aloof, —a marble corridor bordered in clipped box-wood and centered with wine-red tapestry, deep-napped and soft to the foot-fall, tapers to disclose a vista of allurement. We descend the three steps which outcurve gracefully into the grill-room. The great room is deep, rose-dim, with sprays of pendant cluster crystals tinkling light and waves of soft music pulsating from somewhere. Like a drift of petals edging a pool the white-linened tables are scattered around the glistening dance floor. Low-hung from the ceiling, a revolving chandelier casts chameleon colors upon the dancers, splashing bare arms with orange and paiting wierd diamonds of green and yellow on dark coat sleeves. Slender heels flash and draperies float in the rythm of motion. The music stops but it will begin again. It is midnight, but I reflect quite happily that I am not Cinderella nor are my slippers glass.

WHEN SNOW IS FALLING

J. RUSKIN HOWE, '21

When driving snow beats in your face,
  Grows deep upon the ground,
And blots out each familiar place
  With many a fluffy mound,—
'Tis Mother Nature's powder puff
  A-putting on a coat
To save the freshness of her face
  'Til birds and perfumes float.

MYSELF AND I

BY ME

LOIS ADAMS, '19

'Tis four o'clock, and school is out.
The lilt of mirth and merry shout
Grows distant down the street.
A vacant hush hange over all;
Unwatched, bronze Lincoln, in the hall,
Leans quietly against the wall
To rest his weary feet.

I close and lock my schoolroom door
—As I so oft have done before—
And go home to my dinner.
But, at the first turn of my mind,
—Or just ahead, or just behind—
Somewhere along the way, I find
Myself, the truant sinner.

I take her with me down the street,
I smile and nod to those I meet.
Her fancy roams afar.
She sees the trains and yearns to go,
To her, the houses, squat and low,
Look like old ladies in a row.
How wise their faces are!

We go into the cobbler's shop.
Swift speech and busy hammers stop.
The old man wraps our shoes.
I give him silver. She, the while,
Observes the quaintness of his style,
His wrinkled, grimy, foreign smile—
His clothes, of many hues.

We pass the church, I see the sign
Of Sunday School at half past nine.
She looks beyond the spire.
No matter if my thoughts are sped
From mountain top to ocean bed,
Myself will venture on ahead,
To greater depths—or higher.

SUNLIGHT AND SHADOW IN THE PHILIPPINES

MARJORIE MILLER ROBERTS, '21

The road from Baguio to San Fernando is curving, winding in and out, ever down and down, from the cool mountain to the hot plain along the shore of the China Sea, for in the Philippines the mountains and sea are neighbors.

We left Baguio in the afternoon, in the midst of a light rainstorm, and although it soon stopped raining, the clouds were threatening. We had not gone far when we were completely surrounded by a cloud mist. Were you ever in a cloud? It is a queer feeling to be in an isolated space of normal atmosphere and then, just a few feet away to confront an impenetrable wall of white mist.

As we curved around the shoulder of one of the mountains we saw spread out before us, miles and miles of country; in the foreground lower levels of mountains and hills—in the distance the plain leading to the sea. Immediately above us was a dark, threatening cloud whose shadow darkened the nearer mountains and valleys. Dark greens predominated. But beyond and low in the distance, the valleys and plains were lighter greens and yellow under the visible rays of an invisible sun. Away at the horizon lay the China Sea, glistening and shimmering in the sunlight. Later, at a much lower level we passed beneath another dark cloud and were in the midst of a downpour, but soon came again into the sunlight and the drops vanished in the tropical heat of its rays.

MY LAD OF THE SEA-GREEN EYES

JEAN TURNER, '27

His eyes were green in the early dawn,
Sea-green at the break of day,
And I thought as we met upon the hill
Of what old wives of sailors say:—

Trust not your love to a dreamer
If in choosing your love you'd be wise;
Be warned, 'tis a restless spirit
That is mirrored in green in the eyes.
  Give not your love to a rover,
  He will roam the whole world over,
  Be warned that your love is a rover
    If there's a bit of the sea in his eyes."

But, ah, I know the longing,
The urge of the wanderlust
That leaves no calm to restless souls
Who wander because they must.

'Tis sweet to think of a sheltered home,
Tall hedge-rows and garden nooks,
A fireside with children gathered round,
Evening peace, a few choice books.

But these can be only a dim, far dream,
For the lure of the road commands,
And on I must go and forever find
New homes in alien lands.

So, patient, I wait the awakening
To the call that comes to his kind,
For the end of the bitter struggle
'Gainst fetters that chafe and bind.

And at length, when he voices his yearnings,
I shall know but faint, wistful surprise,
And forth we'll adventure together
'Neath constant changing skies.
  Oh, I know that my love is a rover,
  He must roam the whole world over,
  I have learned that my love is a rover,
    By that bit of the sea in his eyes.

OUTBURST OF AN OUTRAGED ORGANIC STUDENT

ROBERT CAVINS, ' 26

Napoleon was going strong until he week-ended at Waterloo. Willard had the fistic universe by its spinal elongation until he was introduced to Mr. Dempsey. Big Bad Bill is sweet William now. And the college student takes organic chemistry. If the necessity for an eleventh plague had arisen in ancient Egypt, doubtless organic chemistry would have supplied the need.

It has to do with the behavior of the C's and H's, if such a series of convolutions and contortions may be dubbed behavior. A, E, I, O, and U enjoy the reputation of being the wildest and most untamed members of the alphabet, but that was before the C's and H's hit their stride. A good organic chemistry professor can coax more gyrations out of a flock of C's and H's than there are in the Charleston and after he has strung them out until they resemble a cross-word puzzle which has been out late the night before, he is likely to say "But that is self-explanatory." One feels for the fellow who fell overboard three times and was only saved twice.

ONE THING

JEAN TURNER, '27

One thing the winds from the Northland
Tell as they wildly blow—
How leal is the love of my laddie—
But that I know.
There is truth in the polar spaces,
Only truth lives at the earth's ice rim—
Then tell me, Voice of the Northland,
Do I love him?

BELOVED THINGS

RUTH ROBERTS, '25

The whirr of wings that flicker
On rainbow humming birds,
The purring summer stream;
Bird laughter,
And the gay youth's morning whistle in the field;
I love these sounds
But oh—
How lovely is the silence
When the sun goes down!

I HAD FORGOT

RUTH ROBERTS, '25

Dear heart—
Love's morn
Was golden in its dawning
As the sun;

And so I cried
When clouds began to come;

But dear—
I had forgot
How lovely is the rainbow
When the storm is gone.

RESPONSE

ESTHER HARLEY PHILLIPPI, '21

She bade me write.

So I write forthwith. How much easier to have written a long solemn treatise than a short clever squib. How much simpler to have written on a subject, even on the Idiosyncracies of Bedbugs in Beluchistan—for then I could have blamed it on the library if it had been too punk. But no!

So I shall wander around in these vast untentanted regions of my mind for a few moments and dredge up a feeble idea or so . . . . . I feel strongly that in a moment I'm likely to come across a bird of an idea; but on the other hand it might be a month or two before I would be able to clutch it by the dewy wing, and by that time this magazine would be in the hands of the receivers, and this priceless contribution still uncontributed.

She bade me write.

I have written.

Farewell.

A MEMORY

THELMA SNYDER, '27

Darkness, wind-swept spaces,
A restless pool,
Far off, the eerie cry
Of a lone sandpiper,
Grief in the heart o' me
    You away!

An old-blue night, star-studded;
Fairy revelry,
Silvery moonbeams dancing
On the lotus-bordered pool;
Poppies aglow by the gate,
Joy in the heart o' me
    You at my side!

AUTUMN

J. B. HENRY, '26

This is the twilight of the year.

The Same Hand that hangs out the harvest moon and guides the star world is sending down to those arms lifted to him the season's gift of little brown prayers and golden wishes enamelled with green and red and russet.

You have noticed, 'tis certain, in the campus trees the squirrels' gay antics, the curl of smoke in the south-east breeze, the vigor of the frosty morn, the flowing of the children's hair as they scamper, and the waving pennants of the yellow golden-rod and the pink ribbons in the sky.

Autumn time is here!

STARDAWN

ALICE G. SANDERS, '26

When the star-dawn has drilled the zenith
With edged pearls of light,
And the milky dust descending
Has spattered the dream-mad night . . . .

In the silent spaces of heaven
When angels' lips are mute,
And moments are singly given
Like chords struck from a lute . . . .

The limpid flow of thy language
Is a silver mesh for my heart ;
I am caught! I am caught, and I tarry,—
'Til the stars from the heavens depart.

VANITY

THELMA SNYDER, '27

April washed her hair today
  In the sky's big bowl of blue.
For soap she used a floating cloud,
  For water—the garden dew.

From the south came fairy winds
  To dry each dripping strand,
They blew on her their warm sweet breath
  Then scampered back to zephyrland.

Then toward her tiptoed a tiny scent
  From the heart of that red rose there;
So now I know without a doubt,
  Vain April too perfumes her hair!

A PLEA

JEAN TURNER, '27

These, yet, if you will, remember,
But, oh, if you can, forget . . . . . .

A silver, ghostly star mist,
Lilacs, fragrant and dewy wet;

Wild unreasoning yearning,
And trenchant, vain regret;

Vows, kisses, dreams, tears,
Hopes, haunting even yet . . . . . .

These, still, if you must, remember,
But, lad, if you can, forget.

APRIL

THELMA SNYDER, '27

April climbed upon a hill
Holding high her trailing skirts
Of clinging, misty moonlight;
Arms outstretched in passionate appealing
Sang a love-song of deepest feeling
To a low-hung, yellow moon,
        To the moon!
Dawn, hurrying up the hill,
A flaming feather in his cap,
Tripped on April's fleeing skirts and fell,—
And lo! where April once had stood
A daisy swayed, unheeded and apart,
Holding tight within its cupped and slender fingers
    white
A tiny golden heart,
Toward the place where once had swung
A yellow moon, low-hung,
        A yellow moon!

CLOUDS

J. GORDON HOWARD, '22

The sun, a burning globule in the sky,
Is loved but little when not draped with clouds.
Its glaring features, unmasked by gentle vapors,
Find little claim to beauty in the eyes of man.

But when at dawn, the sun its upward pathway
climbs
And its approach is ushered in by mists
Of varied hues on fleecy banks of clouds,
Then we can feel the beauty of the scene.

Just so, within the hearts of all mankind,
The sterner virtues, though in themselves esteemed,
Without the softening clouds of gentler traits
Are often harsh, unlovely sights to look upon.

And so it happens when we think a man
Has wit, our keener insight shows
That wit alone is oft the messenger of hate,
And witty shafts are breeders of distress and sorrow.

Yet wit, when shining through refractive clouds
Of true affection and desire for healthy fun,
Produces not a single bruise or hurt,
But helpful, unmitigated humor.

A TRENTON CHRISTMAS

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

LAURA E. WHETSTONE, '27

Time—Revolutionary Days.
Place—Cottage of the Dare's.
Characters—Constance Dare, twelve years old.
John Dare, six years old.
The General.
Colonel Minnich.
Aides to the General—Fritz, Erich.
A Tory.
Mr. Dare.

ACT I—SCENE I

The room is big and dark, and full of smoky shadows. The only illumination comes from a fire which crackles upon a wide, deep hearth. Its blaze is reflected dully from the pewter plates upon the mantel, and from the barrel of an old musket which hangs on the wall. A spinning wheel stands to left of the hearth. The room is furnished with hand-made furniture, the chairs cane-bottomed, and a great cherry high-boy with shiny brass knobs looms in a far corner. At center of back is seen a large trap-door with an iron ring. Before the fire sit Constance and John Dare, roasting chestnuts. Constance rises and goes over to the heavy, roughhewn door at left of back. She opens it just enough to thrust her head out, and a fierce blast of icy wind sweeps into the room fanning the flames on the hearth, and carrying sparkling flakes of snow. She stands looking out into the cloudy darkness.

JOHN: (Shivering) Come in, Constance, and shut the door. How cold it is tonight!

CONSTANCE: (Slowly closing and barring the door): I was just wondering what sort of a night it is this Christmas Eve. And how Aunt Bess is feeling since Mother is with her, and where—(her voice breaks, but she smiles brightly, lifting the droop in her lips). Have you roasted me a big, fat chestnut, brother?

JOHN: Yes, here it is, hot as fire and ready to burst. (Constance eats it, gazing thoughtfully at the fire.) Sister are you too sleepy to tell me a story?

CONSTANCE: Of course not! Would you like me to tell you the story of the first Christmas?

JOHN: Yes, that's it! All about the first Christmas.

CONSTANCE: Well, once a long, long time ago in a country far away there was a little town called Bethlehem. And on a certain night there were very, very many people in this town. They had come to pay their taxes.

JOHN: Did all these people have enough money?

CONSTANCE: Most of them did, I guess. Maybe some didn't.

JOHN: And if they didn't did King George send Hessian soldiers to make them?

CONSTANCE: No, no, brother. This was long, long ago before King George or anybody we know, and very far away. And two of these people who came were a carpenter named Joseph, and his wife Mary, who was sweet, and beautiful and good. And they each rode a little white donkey, like all the people in that country need to do, and they came on their donkeys trot-trotting, trot-trotting . . . . . What's that?

(They listen attentively, and the sound of loud voices and horses approaching at a lively pace, gradually grows more plain.)

JOHN: Oh, Constance—it's some one coming! Maybe it's some of those Hessians that neigrbor Goodleigh told us were headed down the Delaware. Oh, suppose they stop here!

(By this time the voices are quite loud. They are rough and gutteral and words are indistinguishable until there are cries of "Whao," and "Er ist ein hause." The two children, their eyes wide

with terror, creep close to each other before the fire, and Constance puts her arms around John.)

VOICE: (At the door)—Open, you inside!

(The two children look at each other, and Constance shakes her head.)

VOICE (louder)—Open der door, in der name of der King, or we'll break it in!

(The children do not move. There is a low conversation outside and then a terrific blow upon the middle panel of the dooor.)

CONSTANCE: We'll have to let them in. Perhaps if we're polite they won't hurt us. (She rises.)

JOHN: No, I'll let them in. You hide in the corner.

(He runs to the door and, standing on tiptoe, unbars it, while the pounding continues. When the catch is open the door flies violently inward driven by a blow from a musket butt, and John is hidden behind it. On the threshold stands a pudgy, red-faced man in a brightly-colored uniform, with much gold braid and many medals. Behind him are three others, evidently Hessians, tho' of lessser rank. All are plainly tipsy.)

GENERAL: Ach! No vun at home? But der door was locked—and locks do not themselves open.

(John steps from behind the door. He is trembling, but he stands up straight before the red-faced man.)

GENERAL: (turning to his men)—So? A young Repel? (Frowning at John) Vy you did not the door open at vunce? Hey?

JOHN: What do you want? Don't you dare come in! My father would kill any Hessian that came into our house!

GENERAL: (to his men)—Imbertinent liddle svine! (Scowling at John) Steb offer, oudt of der vay! Come in comrades. (John braces himself in the General's path and pushes him backward with

all his strength. The General turns quite scarlet.) Himmel! Such disrespectfulness from der liddle dog. Here, take dot, you liddle meddler! (He strikes John with the back of his hand, and strides into the room. John lies on the floor where he has fallen sobbing, with his face hidden in his arms, and Constance runs out of her corner to him. The soldiers inspect the room critically, paying no further attention to the children.)

FRITZ: Will this do, sir?

GENERAL: Ja, I guess this vill make goot headquarters for me. It iss large enough, undt varm, undt cozy, undt glose to der gamp of der men. Vot think you, Minnich?

COLONEL MINNICH: Nein, idt iss too far from der gamp.

GENERAL: But fool, it iss der house most near. Ach, my poy (wagging his forefinger and lifting his shaggy eyebrows at Minnich). I know vot is drubbling you. You ver always der goot old carouser, undt you vould like to be in der soldiers' gamp to help drink some more of dot ale undt vine we got at dot Sign of der Gray Goose three miles back. Vat? (To the aides)—It vill do; Erich, blace the light outside for a sign to der men.

(Exit Erich. He reenters a moment later.)

COLONEL: Vell, berhaps, I vould like to be in der gamp mit der men. But is it not der effening of Kriss Kringle? Undt derefore a dime to be happy undt drunk? Undt are not the soldiers, effen der lowest private effen now singing undt eating undt drinking in der gamp?

FRITZ—(Noticing the trap-door) Look, General! A cellar! Undt these Colonial cellars 'haff neffer failed us yedt! Der effening iss not to be a vailure perhaps after all! Dere vill be food undt drink too, if I guess not wrong.

GENERAL: Cleffer lad! You are right. Take your musket undt get down into der cellar. You

too, Erich. But look oudt for drubble for these low Repels neffer fight fair undt if I didn't know Vashington undt his stravelings were on der udder sidt of der Delaware undt der riffer full of floating ice, I vould expect to find dem in dot cellar as much as in any udder blace. But Chesus Christ himself couldn't walk der water dot's in der riffer now. (He laughs. Fritz lights a candle which he takes from the mantel, and muskets carefully primed, he and Erich gingerly raise the trap-door. They descend the steps cautionly.)

FRITZ: (below) Oh-h-h-h! Cheese! Abble juice ripe in a barrel! Hams! Undt vine!!

GENERAL: Ach, Colonel, vot luck! Down mitt us!

(They hurriedly descend the steps, and there is heavy trampling, laughter and cries of "Giff it now to me!" Finally they break into a loud drinking song, amid thir shouts and laughter, and these sounds gradually grow more drawling and drowsy during the succeeding scene. The two children have not stirred, but now Constance stands up and helps John to his feet.)

CONSTANCE: Oh, little brother! Did he hurt you a lot?

JOHN: No, but if I were a man—(he runs to the wall and looks longingly at the musket, far above his head.)

CONSTANCE: Oh, they'll eat the hams, and all the things we've stored for General Washington's men when they come this way!

JOHN: Will they kill us?

CONSTANCE: Perhaps, if they get quite drunk. Let us take our coats and run to neighbor Goodleighs.

(They are collecting their wraps, when the stacatto sound of a horse galloping madly over the frozen road is heard with rapidly increasing clearness. The children, their flight arrested, listen intently)

JOHN: Someone else is coming. Perhaps it's General Washington on his big white horse. He would not let anyone hurt us on account of father.

CONSTANCE: (in a hushed voice) No, little brother. General Washington is far away—and so is father, with him, across the Delaware somewhere.

(The galloping ceases abruptly and a horse snorts and pants heavily. Running steps hastily approach the door, it bursts open, and a small thin-faced man with close-set shifty eyes stands in the doorway. He is dirty, nondescriptly dressed, and evidently quite terrified. He sees the children.)

MAN: (gasping hoarsely) Is the big Hessian General here? I seen the light outside that they said would mark his headquarters. I got to tell him. Tell me quick—or I'll—

JOHN: (pointing) There in the cellar.

(The man leaps down the steps.)

MAN: (shouting below stairs) Hey, you'd better wake up, sirs! Washington has crossed back over the Delaware. God knows how! He's passed my place already—him and all his men. They're headed this way. I run my horse to death to tell you.

GENERAL: (stupidly) Ha! Ha! You're grazy! Wasing iss—iss—Here, my goot man! Haff a drink!

MAN: (shouting in desperation) They ain't two miles away—the whole ragged mob of them, and they're marching double quick in good order with their bayonets fixed! And they're headed this way! Hurry, wake up!

GENERAL: Vot? Man, you mean idt? (to the others) Come, slow loudts. To the gamp. Ve'll show him yedt! The traitor-repel! Come! Hurry!!

MAN: (ingratiatingly) Sir, how about the ten crowns they promised me for information. I'm a poor man and loyal to the King and I've run my horse to death—

GENERAL: Silence, spy. You'll be paitt. Hurry, up der stairs, now!

(Constance and John have listened wide-eyed to this. Now Constance, her face very white, springs over to the trap-door and lets it fall with a crash, shooting the catch into place.)

JOHN: Constance, what——

CONSTANCE: (panting)—Don't you see? If we cam keep them until Washington comes, and if the Hessians aren't warned—don't talk! Pile furniture on the trap-door, the chairs first. Everything.

VOICE: Gott! Dos leedle vermin haff shut der trap-door! Open dot door, if you want to liff!

CONSTANCE: (bringing a chair) Pile the firewood on, John.

VOICE: Neffer mind! Use der bayonets,—ve'll break them!

JOHN: Oh, they're going to break the trap-door! Shall we open it?

CONSTANCE: Here, help me carry the drawers from the high boy—and then put the iron kettle on the door.

VOICE: All togedder now! Bayonets to cut der wood, undt musget butts to batter it!

(All the men hammer and slash at the door amid a steady stream of oaths and imprecations.

CONSTANCE: Here, brother, push on the highboy and I'll pull. It's awfully heavy!

JOHN: Oh, do you think they'll—

(The first bayonet comes thru and sticks out, a long, shiny knife. John cries out and leaps back.)

JOHN: Oh come, let's run. They'll kill us!

CONSTANCE: We'll put the cedar chest over that hole.

(A hand comes thru moving the furniture aside and Constance aims a blow at it with a stick of firewood. Another hairy wrist follows the first groping for things to lay hold on. And then is heard very faintly, but with rapid increase in volume, the swinging, rhythmic stamp of many feet,

crunching at double-quick time thru the snow. The men in their noisy efforts take no notice, but the children lift their heads in close attention. Constance sobs and laughs.)

CONSTANCE: They're coming! General Washington and our soldiers! Oh John, can we hold out—run, help me pry the stones from the hearth!

(They struggle with a heavy stone, while a burly shoulder pushes at the hole. Fritz's head comes thru and he hears the steady beat of steps. His head disappears quickly. Now the steps are loud and plain, directly outside. A voice cries "Headquarters" and another voice, "My God, my home." Hurried steps approach the door and it opens disclosing a man in a ragged blue and buff uniform.)

CONSTANCE: Oh, sir, I'm so glad you've come. They're in the cellar, and we were so afraid they'd get out, the fat red-faced man, the others, and—

MR. DARE: Constance, Constance, don't you know your father? (Turning he calls) Straight ahead—They haven't retreated. Oh, my brave little girl! (He holds the children close.) Thru the open door is seen in silhouette against a dark blur of marching men, a figure on a tall white horse. The figure raises his hand and points ahead as it crosses the block of light.)

(CURTAIN)

INDEX

	Page
Cover Design by Donald L. Magill, '29	
Roster	4
Foreword—"The Venture"	5
Signs—Nolan R. Best	6
Cross-Roads—Ernestine Nichols	8
Kismet!—Charlotte Owen	9
Dead Leaf—Virginia Snavely	11
Let's Apologize to Shakespere—Helen Bovee Schaer	12
A Moonlight Sonata—Bessie Lincoln	13
—— And Then!—Edna Dellinger Carlson	14
A Night—Alice Sanders	16
When Snow Is Falling—J. Ruskin Howe	16
Myself and I, By Me—Lois Adams	17
Sunlight and Shadow—Marjorie Miller Boberts	18
My Lad of the Sea—Green Eyes—Jean Turner	19
'Till Home Coming—D. L. Adams	20
Pent Tears—Thelma Snyder	20
Smoke—W. H. Camp	21
Outburst—Robert Cavins	22
One Thing—Jean Turner	22
Beloved Things—Ruth Roberts	23
I Had Forgot—Ruth Roberts	23
Response—Esther Harley Phillippi	24
A Memory—Thelma Snyder	26
Autumn—J. B. Henry	25
Star Dawn—Alice Sanders	25
Vanity—Thelma Snyder	26
A Plea—Jean Turner	26
April—Thelma Snyder	27
Clouds—J. Gordon Howard	28
A Trenton Christmas—Laura Whetstone	29