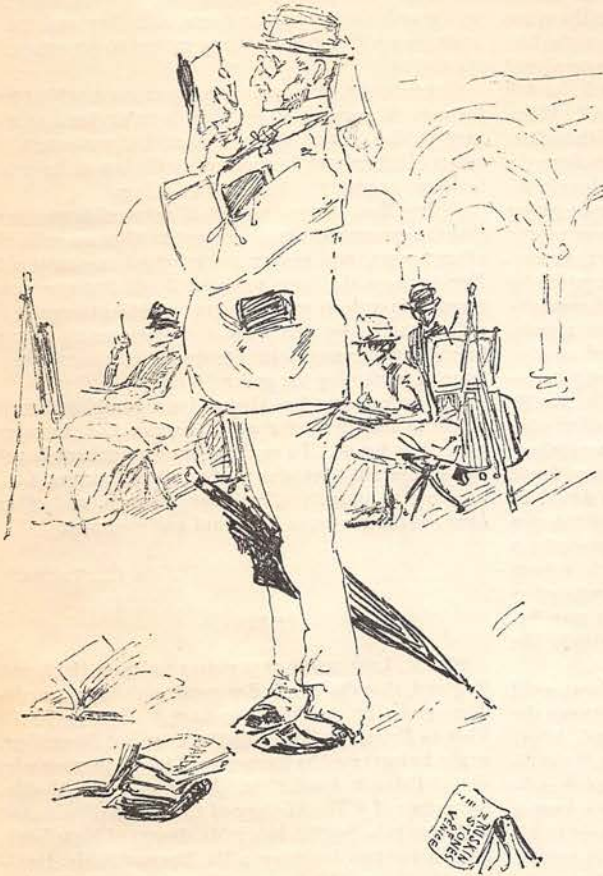


BRIC-À-BRAC.

In a Bob-tail Car.



IN A VENETIAN PICTURE-GALLERY.

On Some Buttercups.

A LITTLE way below her chin,
Caught in her bosom's snowy hem,
Some buttercups are fastened in,—
Ah, how I envy them!

They do not miss their meadow place,
Nor are they conscious that their skies
Are not the heavens, but her face,
Her hair, and mild blue eyes.

There, in the downy meshes pinned,
Such sweet illusions haunt their rest,
They think her breath the fragrant wind,
And tremble on her breast:

As if, close to her heart, they heard
A captive secret slip its cell,
And with desire were sudden stirred
To find a voice and tell!

Frank Dempster Sherman.

It was about noon of a dark day late in November, and a long-threatened drizzle of hail chilled the air, as Harry Brackett came out of the Apollo House and stood on the corner of Fourth Avenue, waiting for a cross-town car. He was going downtown to the office of the "Gotham Gazette" to write up an interview he had just had with the latest British invader of these United States, Lady Smith-Smith, the fair authoress of the very popular novel, "Smile and be a Villain Still," five rival editions of which were then for sale everywhere in New York. Harry Brackett intended to ride past Union Square to Sixth Avenue in the cross-town car, and then to go to the "Gotham Gazette" by the elevated railway, so he transferred ten cents for the fare of the latter and five cents for the fare of the former from his waistcoat pocket to a little pocket in his overcoat. Then he buttoned the overcoat tightly about him, as the raw wind blew harshly across the city from river to river. He looked down the street for the car; it was afar off, on the other side of Third Avenue, and he was standing on the corner of Fourth Avenue.

"A bob-tail car," said Harry Brackett to himself, "is like a policeman: it is never here just when it is wanted. And yet it is a necessary evil—like the policeman again. Perhaps there is here a philosophical thought that might be worked up as a comic editorial article for the fifth column. 'The Bob-tail Car'—why, the very name is humorous. And there are lots of things to be said about it. For instance, I can get something out of the suggestion that the heart of a coquette is like a bob-tail car, there is always room for one more; but I suppose I must not venture on any pun about 'ringing the belle.' Then I can say that the bob-tail car is a one-horse concern, and is therefore a victim of the healthy American hatred of one-horse concerns. It has no past; no gentleman of the road ever robbed its passengers; no road-agent nowadays would think of 'holding it up.' Perhaps that's why there is no poetry about a bob-tail car, as there is about a stage-coach. Even Rudolph Vernon, the most modern of professional poets, wouldn't dream of writing verses on 'Riding in a Bob-tail Car.' Wasn't it Heine who said that the monks of the Middle Ages thought that Greek was a personal invention of the devil, and that he agreed with them? That's what the bob-tail car is—a personal invention of the devil. The stove-pipe hat, the frying-pan, the tenement-house, and the bob-tail car,—these are the choicest and the chief of the devil's gifts to New York.

Why doesn't that car come? confound it! Although it cannot swear itself, it is the cause of much swearing!"

Just then the car came lumbering along and bumping with a repeated jar as its track crossed the tracks on Fourth Avenue. Harry Brackett jumped on it as it passed the corner where he stood. His example was followed by a stranger, who took the seat opposite to him.

As the car sped along toward Broadway, Harry Brackett mechanically read, as he had read a dozen times before, the printed request to place the exact fare in the box. "Suppose I don't put it in?" he mused; "what will happen? The driver will ask for it—if he has time and happens to think of it. This is very tempting to a man who wants to try the Virginia plan of readjusting his debts. Here is just the opportunity for any one addicted to petty larceny. I think I shall call that article 'The Bob-tail Car as a Demoralizer.' It is most demoralizing for a man to feel that he can probably evade the payment of his fare, since there is no conductor to ask for it. However, I suppose the main reliance of the company is on the honesty of the individual citizen who would rather pay his debts than not. I doubt if there is any need to dun the average American for five cents."

Harry Brackett lowered his eyes from the printed notice at which he had been staring unconsciously for a minute, and they fell on the man sitting opposite to him—the man who had entered the car as he did.

"I wonder if he is the average American?" thought Brackett. "He hasn't paid his fare yet. I wonder if he will? It isn't my business to dun him for it; and yet I'd like to know whether his intentions are honorable or not."

The car turned sharply into Broadway, and then came to a halt to allow two young ladies to enter. A third young lady escorted them to the car, and kissed them affectionately, and said:

"Good-bye! You will be *sure* to come again! I have enjoyed your visit so much."

Then the two young ladies kissed her, and they said, both speaking at once and very rapidly:

"Oh, yes. We've had *such* a good time! We'll write you! And you *must* come out to Orange and see us soon! Good-bye! Good-bye! Remember us to your mother! *Good-bye!*"

At last the sweet sorrow of this parting was over; the third young lady withdrew to the sidewalk; the two young ladies came inside the car; the other passengers breathed more freely; the man opposite to Harry Brackett winked at him slyly, and the car went on again.

There was a vacant seat on the side of the car opposite to Harry Brackett,—or, at least, there would have been one if the ladies on that side had not, with characteristic coolness, spread out their skirts so as to occupy the whole space. The two young ladies stood for a moment after they had entered the car; they looked for a seat, but no one of the other ladies made a sign of moving to make room for them. The man opposite to Harry Brackett rose and proffered his seat. They did not thank him, or even so much as look at him.

"You take it, Nelly," said one.

"I sha'n't do anything of the sort. I'm not a *bit*

tired!" returned the other. "I *insist* on your sitting down!"

"But I'm not tired *now*."

"Louise Valeria Munson," her friend declared, with humorous emphasis, "if you don't sit right down, I'll call a *policeman!*"

"Well, I guess there's room for us both," said Louise Valeria Munson; "I'm sure there ought to be."

By this time some of the other ladies on the seat had discovered that they were perhaps taking up a little more than their fair share of space, and there was a readjustment of frontier. The vacancy was slightly broadened, and both young ladies sat down.

The man who had got in just after Harry Brackett and who had given up his seat stood in the center of the car with his hand through a strap. But he made no effort to pay his fare. The driver rang his bell, the passengers looked at each other inquiringly, and one of the two young ladies who had just seated themselves produced a dime, which was passed along and dropped into the fare-box in accordance with the printed instructions of the company.

Three ladies left the car just before it turned into Fourteenth street; and after it had rounded the curve two elderly gentlemen entered and sat down by the side of Harry Brackett. The man who had not paid his fare kindly volunteered to drop their money into the box, but did not put in any of his own. Harry Brackett was certain of this, for he had watched him closely.

The two elderly gentlemen continued a conversation begun before they entered a car. "I'll tell you," said one of them, so loudly that Harry Brackett could not help overhearing, "the most remarkable thing that man Skinner ever did. One day he got caught in one of his amusing little swindles; by some slip-up of his ingenuity he did not allow himself quite rope enough, and so he was brought up with a round turn in the Tombs. He got two years in Sing Sing, but he never went up at all,—he served his time by substitute!"

"What?" cried his companion, in surprise.

"He did!" answered the first speaker. "That's just what he did! He had a substitute to go to State's Prison for him, while he went up to Albany to work for his own pardon!"

"How did he manage that?" asked the other, in involuntary admiration before so splendid an audacity.

"You've no idea how fertile Skinner was in devices of all kinds," replied the gentleman who was telling the story. "He got out on bail, and he arranged for a light sentence if he pleaded guilty. Then one day, suddenly, a man came into court, giving himself up as Skinner, pleading guilty, and asking for immediate sentence. Of course nobody inquired too curiously into the identity of a self-surrendered prisoner who wanted to go to Sing Sing. Well——"

The car stopped at the corner of Fifth Avenue; several passengers alighted and a party of three ladies came in. There were two vacant seats by the side of Harry Brackett, and as he thought these three ladies wished to sit together, he gave up his place and took another farther down the car. Here he found himself again opposite the man who had entered the car almost simultaneously with him, and who had not yet paid his fare. Harry Brackett wondered whether this attempt to steal a ride was intentional, or whether it was merely

inadvertent. His consideration of this metaphysical problem was interrupted by another conversation. His right-hand neighbor, who was apparently a physician, was telling the friend next to him of the strange desires of convalescents.

"I think," said he, "that the queerest request I ever heard was down in Connecticut. There was a man there, a day-laborer, but a fine young fellow, who had a crowbar driven clean through his head by a forgotten blast. Well, I happened to be the first doctor on the spot, and it was nip-and-tuck whether anything could be done for him; it was a most interesting case. But he was in glorious condition physically. I found out afterwards that he was the champion sprint-runner of the place. I got him into the nearest hotel, and in time I managed to patch him up as best I could. At last we pulled him through, and the day came when I was able to tell him that I thought he would recover, and that he was quite out of danger, and that all he had to do was to get his strength back again as fast as he could, and he would be all right again soon. He was lying in bed emaciated and speechless when I said this; and when I added that he could have anything to eat he might fancy, his eyes brightened, and his lips moved. 'Is there anything in particular you would prefer?' I asked him, and his lips moved again as though he had a wish to express. You see, he hadn't spoken once since the accident, but he seemed to be trying to find his tongue, so I bent over the bed and put my head over his mouth, and finally I heard a faint voice saying, 'Quail on toast!' and as I drew back in surprise, he gave me a wink. Feeble as his tones were, there was infinite gusto in the way he said the words. I suppose he had never had quail on toast in all his life; probably he had dreamed of it as an unattainable luxury."

"Did he get it?" asked the doctor's friend.

"He got it every day," answered the doctor, "until he said he didn't want any more. I remember another man who——"

But now, with many a jolt and jar, the car was rattling noisily across Sixth Avenue under the dripping shadow of the station of the elevated railway. Harry Brackett rose to his feet, and as he did so he glanced again at the man opposite to him, to see if, even then, at the eleventh hour, he did intend to pay his fare. But the man caught Harry Brackett's eye hardily, and looked him in the face, with a curiously knowing smile.

There was something very odd about the expression of the man's face, so Harry Brackett thought, as he left the car and began to mount the steps which led to the station of the elevated railroad. He could not help thinking that there was a queer suggestion in that smile—a suggestion of a certain complicity on his part: it was as though the owner of the smile had ventured to hint that they were birds of a feather.

"Confound his impudence!" said Harry Brackett to himself as he stood before the window of the ticket-agent.

Then he put his fingers into the little pocket in his overcoat and took from it a ten-cent piece and a five-cent piece. And he knew at once why the man opposite had smiled so impertinently;—it was the smile of the pot at the kettle.

Her Choice.

Two letters lay beside her plate
That dull December morning:
One, creamy-tinted, thick, and fine,
A silver crest adorning;
And one in plain and common white,
Untinted and uncrested.
Each brought a heart, and so untouched
Her dainty breakfast rested.

One spoke in cold and courtly phrase
Of wealth, ancestral honor,
And pride; but with the name and gold
She needs must take the donor.
And one, impassioned, breathed to her
Of flowery garden closes,
A quaint white cottage by the sea,
And Love among the roses.

Before her in a vision passed
The young earl's haughty features,
His scorn of all less great than he,
And all earth's toiling creatures;
Then Robert's sunny smile, and eyes
So dark and deep and tender,
His swinging step, and ringing voice,
And figure straight and slender.

The letter with the silver crest
Proud dreams, ambitions, brought her,
Of stately halls and swelling fields
And lakes of lily water.
Yet Cupid murmured in her ear:
"Thy maiden heart reposes
Where stands a cottage by the sea
O'ererrun with crimson roses."

She saw herself in silken robes,
In costly jewels blazing;
The queen of dinner, ball, and hunt,
All eyes upon her gazing.
She saw herself in quiet gowns
That ill displayed her beauty,
Her home a prison, and her life
A rigid round of duty.

And so she penned two pretty notes:
One read, such honor paid he
To her, she could not choose but say
That she would be his lady;
And one, some other maid than she
Must tend the garden closes,
And round the cottage by the sea
Entwine the running roses.

She is my lady now, and leads
In folly and in fashion,—
A lovely figure dressed by Worth,
A heart devoid of passion.
She is the belle of every ball,
The beauty of the races,
And everywhere her face is still
The fairest of all faces.

But still perhaps the silver cloud
May have a leaden lining;
And who can know a woman's heart,
Its hidden pain and pining?
For sometimes in my lady's dreams
The gate of Heaven uncloses
Upon a cottage by the sea
And Love among the roses!