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THE KING'S FAVORITE

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CAP AND BELLS.

BY H. WINTHROP PEIRCE.

IN the Middle Ages, when kings and great lords had almost no occupation beside fighting and hunting, they lived apart in large, gloomy castles, built for strength and defense, with little thought of cheerfulness. During the season of the year when they could not ride with hawks and hounds to hunt the wild animals which then abounded in all parts of Europe, nor enjoy themselves in their own pleasure-grounds, time must have hung heavily upon their hands. Books were few, and learning was thought fit only for "women and clerks."

Therefore, to beguile their time, almost every man of means kept a professional "fool" or "jester." And the jester often was a dwarf, more or less deformed, whose misfortune was considered a fit subject for mirth in those rough days.

The fool's dress was usually of rich materials, made in the most fantastic style, and of various hues, but yellow was the distinctive color for ornament and fringes. Cocks' feathers and foxes' tails were worn, while a number of little bells, attached to the clothes, tinkled gayly with every motion. Jesters always wore a wallet, and they carried a stick, on the end of which was either a funny head carved in wood, or else a bladder with a few rattling peas inside. The favored fool had access to his master, even if it should be a king, at any hour of the day or night. And, naturally, through this intimacy and the fact that his business was to amuse, he frequently obtained great influence over his master, who, with the entire household, would become much attached to him.

Shakespeare represents domestic fools as often bitter and sarcastic, but faithful and attached, ready to go into poverty and exile rather than leave their friends when overtaken by adversity.

King Lear, when driven out into the storm by his daughters, is followed by his fool. And when Rosalind is banished from her uncle's court, Touchstone leaves his comfortable home, and goes with her and her faithful cousin into the wild forest. Hamlet remembers, when he sees the skull of his father's jester Yorick, how "he had borne me on his back a thousand times," and that he, when a light-hearted, happy little prince, "had pressed his lips he knew not how oft." And speaking of Shakespeare, all who have read the great master's plays must have noticed how often he puts wonderful bits of wisdom into the lively, mocking raillery of the beloved fool.

An Italian jester named Gonello, born in Florence about 1400, A. D., entered the service of the Marquis of Ferrara, by whom his judgment was so highly prized that he was consulted on the most important state affairs. In course of time, the Marquis lost his health, and the doctors declared that nothing would restore it save the shock of an unexpected cold bath. But no one dared to give the Marquis a ducking.

At last, Gonello resolved, as his patron grew worse and worse, that he would try what no other friend or servant of the Marquis would venture to do. One day, walking beside the river with his lord, Gonello, without a word, pushed him in, waited just long enough to see that the Marquis was pulled out alive, and then fled to Padua.

The sudden plunge had the wished-for effect on the health of the Marquis; but he, far from being grateful, flew into a rage, and issued an edict that, if Gonello should ever set foot again on the soil of Ferrara, his life should be forfeited.

Poor Gonello was homesick enough in Padua.

He read the edict through and through, until he found that the poor fellow could joke with them no more. He had been frightened to death. The on the *soil* of Ferrara. Then he quickly got a donkey-cart, filled it with earth, and labeled it "Paduan ground." Perched on this, he passed in state into the streets of Ferrara. But he was soon seized, thrown into prison, tried, and convicted of having laid violent hands on the Marquis, and of having disobeyed his edict, for which offenses he must die.

On the day appointed for his execution, the whole city turned out to see him. The poor fellow was blindfolded; his head was placed on the block. But the executioner, instead of lifting the ax, dashed a pailful of water on Gonello's neck.

Then the people knew that all the dreadful preparations had been made in jest. How they waved their caps, and cheered, and shouted: "Long live the Marquis!" "Long live Gonello!"



WILL SOMERS PRESENTS HIS UNCLE TO KING HENRY VIII.

Marquis, full of remorse at having, by his cruel joke, destroyed his faithful friend, gave him a grand funeral, and did everything in his power to honor his memory.

Francis I., of France, had a jester of great beauty and refinement, who wrote verses which the King was glad to pass off as his own. This person was selected, when a boy of thirteen, on account of his remarkable brightness and beauty, to be the King's jester, notwithstanding the entreaties of his parents, who were of noble birth, and in spite of the tears and prayers of the boy himself, who had hoped to be a soldier and a great man. It is sad to think of the noble-hearted lad, secretly pining in the splendor of the court, yet bravely doing his best to enliven the dull hours, and perhaps trying his powers at a war of wits when he would have preferred to do battle in earnest.

But I can not give you his history here. You may be sure, however, that he was not so happy as Will Somers, of England. This famous wit, who was jester to Henry VIII., asked among many jokes, "What is it, that the less there is of it the more it is feared?" and then enjoyed the surprise of the court on his telling the answer—"A little bridge over a deep river." His reputation spread to his old home in Shropshire, and his aged uncle trudged up to Greenwich to visit him at



GONELLO'S TRICK.

But Gonello did not rise, and when his friends, with laughter and congratulations, lifted him, they

aged uncle trudged up to Greenwich to visit him at

the court. The countryman's old-fashioned dress and simple manner, as he passed through the streets asking the way to the King's palace, attracted attention. When he found the building, he asked the jeering pages at the gate, "If there was not a 'gentleman' at court named William Somers?" The pages laughed in disdain, and led the old man to a place where Will was sleeping in the park, with his head resting on a cushion that a poor woman had given him because he had interceded to save the life of her son, who had been condemned to be hanged as a pirate.

Will greeted his uncle with affection, and as he led him through the presence chamber, where crowds of richly dressed courtiers were assembled, he called aloud: "Room, knaves! Room for me and my uncle!"

Then, seeing that his relative's dress was not a fitting one in which to appear before the King, Will took him to his own room and dressed him in one of his queer motley suits. This done, Will brought his uncle in before "Bluff King Hal," who was much amused at the contrast between the venerable figure and its droll costume. Treating the uncle with respect due his years, the King encouraged him to talk.

The old man then told His Majesty about a common near his home, which had been unjustly shut up from the poorer people. And the King was so much interested in his account of the affair, that he ordered the ground to be thrown open to the public at once, and created the old uncle bailiff of the common, with a salary of twenty pounds a year, which in money of to-day would be a very comfortable income.

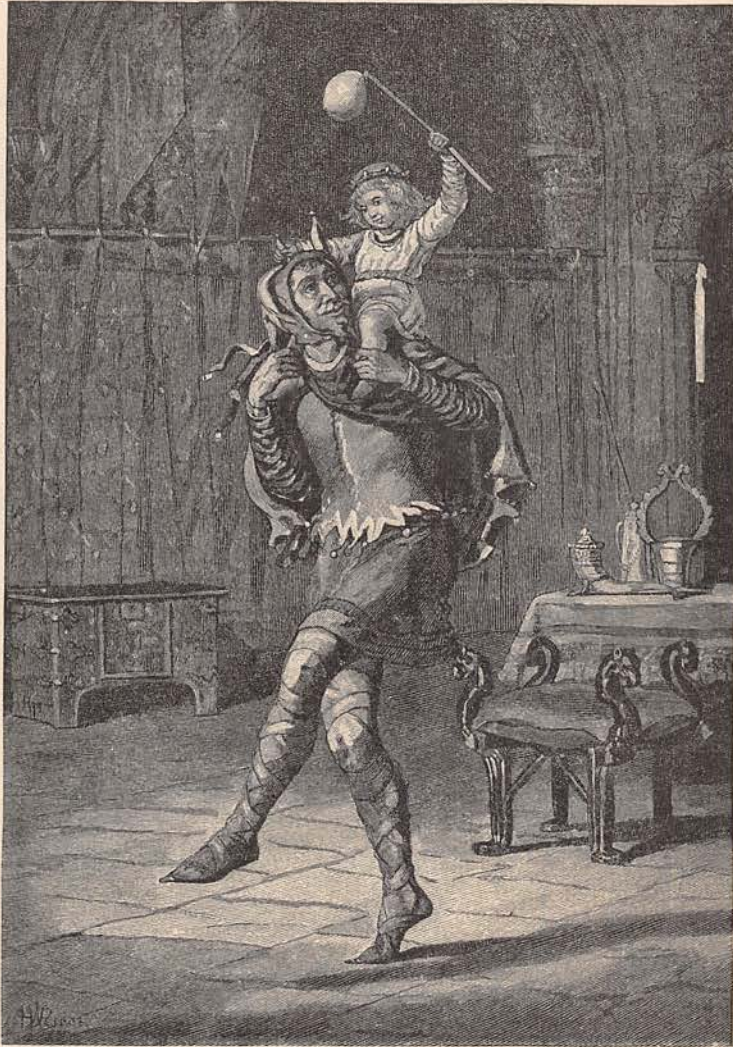
In those early times, jesters appeared on all occasions. They bustled about at the tournaments, and were busy with sharp remarks on the proceedings—now full of pity, now exulting, ready to help

the favorite knight to victory or to lead from the field his fallen foe.

A jester once complained to his king that an offended noble had threatened to kill him.

"If he does," said His Majesty, "I shall have him hanged a quarter of an hour afterward."

"Ah, but that would not save my life," said the Fool. "Could n't you have him hanged a quarter of an hour before?"



YORICK AND YOUNG HAMLET.

Jesters filled, in their time, a humble but important place, telling the truth to those who would not have heard it from any one else. And they sometimes acquired such great influence that many persons found it safest to treat them with consideration, or learned to their sorrow that to offend the

king's favorite was to place an obstacle in their own road to advancement.

But as intelligence became more general and reading more common, household jesters were no

longer needed, and the theater and the production of books and ballads gave a new field for the talents of those who in ruder times would have worn the cap and bells.



Little Dutch Karl
 and little French Jeanne
 They went out together
 ○○○○○○○○ to dine .
 But they couldn't agree
 For when she said "Oui"
 He always would answer her
 "Nein"

