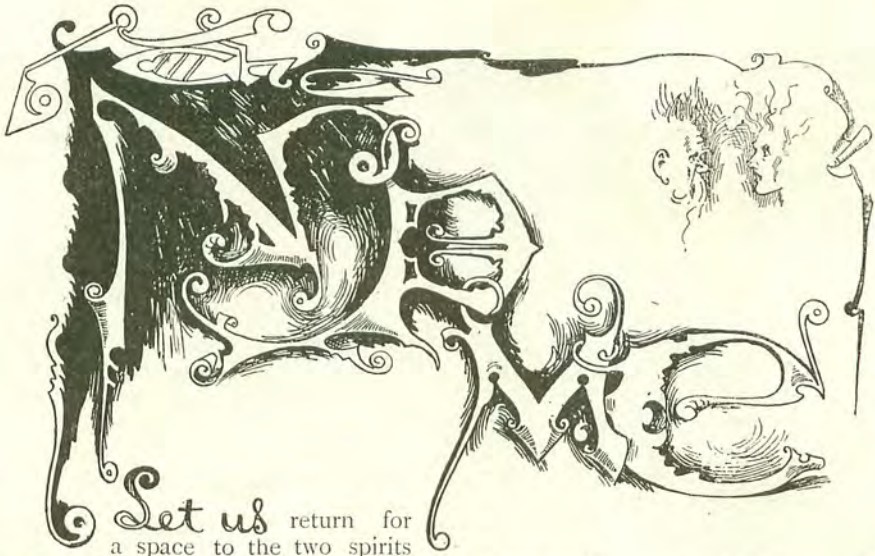


The Queer Side of Things.



Set us return for a space to the two spirits William and James, whose conversations we described in past numbers. Some readers may possibly recall how the spirit James, while wandering through the darkness of unoccupied Space (about five-and-twenty billions of eons before the commencement of Eternity), conceived a wild idea of the possibility of the existence of worlds—worlds occupied by an impracticability called “man.” It will be recollected how the wiser spirit William cast well-merited ridicule upon this insanely impossible phantasy of a disordered mind; nay, even condescended to crush, by perspicuous and irrefutable logic, the grotesque and preposterous idea.

Very well; it is now William’s turn.

“James,” he said one day as they chanced to sight each other in the awful solitude of Space, “I have been thinking over that world of yours, and your crowning absurdity, ‘man.’ Pray do not become too inflated with weak conceit at my condescending to think about such trivialities; for the fact is, any subject of thought—however hopelessly foolish—is a relief amid the tediousness of Space. Well, I have been reflecting upon that characteristic which you conceive as distinguishing your puppet ‘man’—I allude to *intelligence*. I think you suggested that he would possess intelligence?”

James only fidgeted uneasily, and made a feeble sign of affirmation.

“Very well,” continued William. “Now, I have been putting two and two together, and have found out the nature of that quality which you mistake for intelligence; its true name is ‘low cunning.’ Every fresh piece of absurdity which you have told me touching the tricks of your queer creatures has supplied new evidence of this. Your creatures were to feed upon the substance of the ‘world’ on which they lived, and, ever increasing in numbers, would logically in course of time find there was not a mouthful apiece. I think we agreed about that? Well, let us consider that period, some time before the creatures should actually become exterminated by the natural evolution of events—the time when all the eatable products of their world would be growing scarce. You went so far as to imagine a great many products——”

“Yes!” said James, gazing afar off in the absorption of his imagination. “Yes—there were eggs, and oysters, and poultry, and mushrooms, and——”

“Ah!—the very things I’ve been reflecting about. Well, I’ve been dreaming that, at the period of which I speak, when all the commodities were becoming scarce, your human beings would agree to make poisonous artificial articles of consumption with which to poison themselves by degrees, and thus reduce the population to convenient limits.”

"No!" cried James, pondering deeply. "Their idea would be to poison not *themselves*, but *each other!*"



"Ah! I see. Then they would make some sort of effort to prevent themselves being poisoned?"

"Oh, yes; they would pass Adulteration Acts for the purpose."

"I see; and any creature who did not wish to be poisoned could take advantage of these Acts to protect himself?"

"Certainly. The Acts would be very stringent. Let us suppose, for example, that a certain man suspected that the butter supplied to him was not butter at all, but a deleterious compound—well, all he would have to do would be to go to the shop, accompanied by a guardian of the peace, and, standing on one leg, with both hands on the counter and one eye shut, order a pound of the butter in certain words prescribed by the Act. He would then say to the tradesman, 'I am about to divide this pound of butter into three equal portions for the purposes of analysis'; and, taking the butterman's knife in his left hand, and passing it to his right, would cut the butter into three portions exactly equal.

"After this, hermetically sealing the three portions in three jars provided for the purpose, he would hand one jar

to the tradesman, the second to the guardian of the peace, and retain the third. Then he would bring an action; and (provided that all the conditions had been accurately fulfilled, without the slightest flaw) the erring tradesman would be told by the Court not to do it again; while the complainant would have to pay all costs, and possibly a fine; and would be sneered at by the magistrate as a fussy idiot and a common informer.

"If, on the other hand, the complainant should omit to secure the company of a custodian of the peace, or fail to stand on one leg with both hands on the counter, or take the knife in his right hand first, or should leave out the prescribed words, or blink his eye, or stammer, or sneeze, or in any other way fail to observe the regulations of the Act; he would, of course, have no case or remedy. The Adulteration Acts would be extremely stringent——"

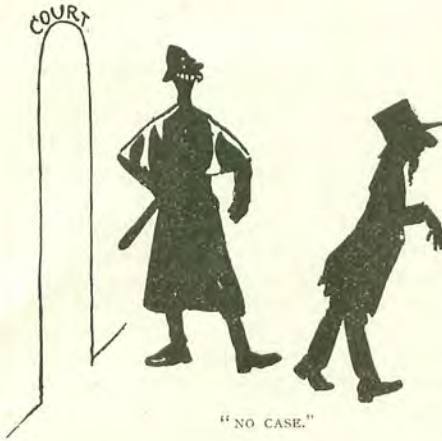
"Against the victim of adulteration?"

"Ye—es," murmured James, a little nonplussed.

"Ah—well, then, I think we can afford to ignore these Adulteration Acts—like the adulterators and the public authorities would—and proceed with the question of the adulteration. I had a most vivid vision or dream of the details of this adulteration as they would be carried out on your world at the period we are now considering. I imagined that I was actually in a part of your world called 'America,' and that one of your



"THE SHOP."



human beings politely invited me to walk through his factory and see how things were made. I think you mentioned 'oysters'—"

"Yes," said James, "that's one name the article of food would possess; newspaper writers, however, would not recognise them by that name—they would only know them as 'the succulent bivalve.'"

"The very idea!" exclaimed William. "That's exactly what I seemed to have become—a newspaper writer. I fancied I went to see the factory, and then sent in the following account:—

"One of the most interesting factories in America is the stately building of the Ephraim Q. Knickerbocker Natural Products Manufacturing Corporation, of Spread Eagle Springs, N.J. That the structure is itself an imposing one may well be imagined in view of the vast productive energy expended within its walls; and the febleness and inefficiency of the productive operations of Nature are never so fully realized as after a visit to this marvellous factory, and a comparison of the two systems.

"It was, therefore, with no little satisfaction that we lately received a courteous invitation from the able and energetic managing director General Sardanapalus J. Van Biene to inspect the operations of the Corporation at its factory. Accordingly, we

proceeded to the New York terminus of the Natural Products Manufacturing Corporation's New York, Sumner Ferry, Thanksgiving Flats, and Spread Eagle Springs Railroad, along which a special train speedily whirled us to the front door of the works. On the steps stood the genial managing director, supported by the principal manager Colonel Exodus V. Rooster, the head chemist Major Madison B. Jefferson, and the assistant chemists Judge Vansittart J. Sumner and Admiral Hudson W. Killigrew.

"They received us with open arms, and, after entertaining us at a *recherché* lunch, conducted us to the chemistry and analysis section occupying a little over seventeen acres and employing a permanent staff of thirteen thousand four hundred and thirty-two assistants, among whom are chemists, microscopists, sub-inventors, etc., etc. There it is that the productive operations of Nature are studied and improved upon.

"You must not imagine that we have any kind of sympathy or admiration for Nature's system,' explained General S. J. Van Biene, hastening to sweep away any false impression which we might have formed.

"On the contrary, we just entirely despise her and her ways, and should have discarded her way back but for the prejudices



"THEY RECEIVED US WITH OPEN ARMS."

of the consuming public. It's just like this—the consumers still believe in natural products, and so we have to go on reproducing them instead of starting right away on our own lines and bringing out new and original commodities far in advance of anything Nature can do. How we're stultified you'll see as we work through. We just have to copy, anyway, in place of originating. We make oysters, for example. Now quite a while ago, our head chemist Major Madison B. Jefferson invented a new edible way, finer in every essential than the oyster; but the consumers wouldn't have it: they shied at it, and declared it wasn't wholesome; and we had the whole stock on our hands, and had to vat it down again, and recolour it, and make tomatoes of it. Then they took it down and just chaired it round. Of course, we have to say we *grow* the products—that's another effect of popular prejudice; if we had said we made those tomatoes, the public would have started right off again, and talked of "adulteration," although our tomatoes whip Nature's by 50 per cent. in all the elements of nutrition and flavour. Just taste this one.'

"We hesitated, and the director, perceiving it, promptly consumed another from the same case. Thus reassured, we ventured to nibble at the artificial vegetable, and found it excellent in every respect—decidedly superior to the natural product, as he had stated.

"'But,' we asked, 'do you not suffer considerable losses when these products—necessarily perishable in the natural course of things—begin to decay?'

"'That's just another point where we show our superiority to Nature. *Our* products *don't* decay; on the contrary, they improve by keeping. Here is a tomato seven years old,' he continued, taking down another case. 'Try it.'

"We did. The other was not to be compared with it. The older tomato had matured and mellowed, the skin having a finer colour

and lovelier gloss, the flesh possessing a firmer body and more delicate flavour; it was far in advance of any tomato we had ever conceived.

"'Wonderful!' we exclaimed.

"'A very simple matter,' said the director. 'All that is required is a thorough mastery of chemistry. In all our goods we employ a special patent preservative of our own, which is naturally a secret. We calculate it to be worth one hundred and fifty quadrillions of dollars.

"'But let us show you how we make oysters! See, these are the tanks which contain the mixture—the compound which forms the body of the bivalve. This tank contains the beard-mixture; and this one the gristle.'

"'And what are the principal ingredients?'

"'Glue, made from horses' heels. This is a very important factor in our products. This glue, after undergoing a peculiar treatment which prevents its hardening and losing its elasticity in the course of years, is flavoured

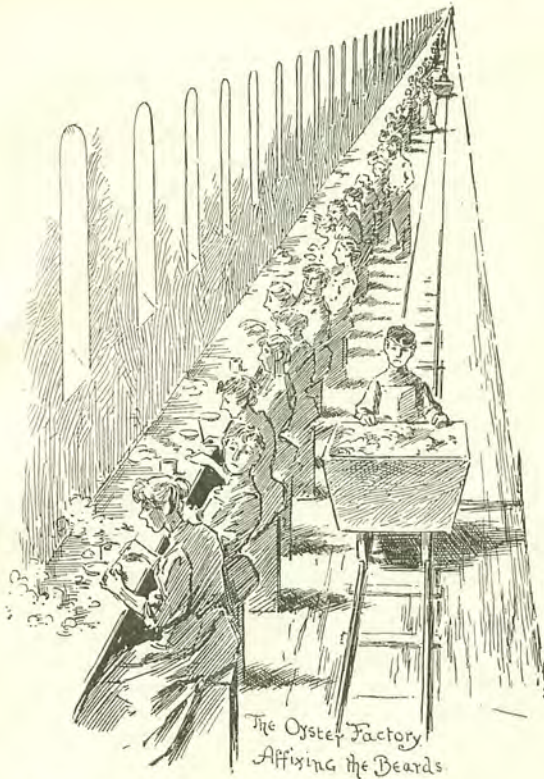
and coloured in various ways. This great tank contains the composition for the internal parts of the oyster—nearly black, you perceive; that tank over there contains the compound for the flesh that covers the internal parts; that tank farther along holds the beard-mixture; and the one beyond that the gristle which attaches the oyster to the shell. First, the flesh of the oyster is run into moulds, each oyster being in two parts; then the inside of the animal is run into another



"JUST TASTE THIS ONE."

mould, and the two halves of the body are automatically placed around it and cemented together.

"'Meanwhile the beards have been rolled, stamped, frilled, and coloured along the edge by special automatic machinery. The body of the oyster then passes to the fixing-up room, where the beard is cemented to it by hand, and finishing touches of colour added; and then it passes along and has the gristle attached: and the oyster itself is complete.'



“ ‘But it wants a shell!’

“ ‘Just so. As far as the supply will go, we buy up old shells from dustyards and use them; but most of them are damaged by previous opening, so we make the bulk of our shells, and they’re a good deal more natural than the real ones. They’re made of lime.’

“ ‘All alike?’

“ ‘Not in the least. You see, we have some thousands of moulds, every one differing slightly from the rest. There’s a special department for hingeing the two shells together. We had some trouble to find a substance for the hinge; but at last one of our chemists hit on a way of subjecting old hide-scrap to a peculiar process, and that did the thing. The mother-of-pearl is made of a sort of soft glass, somewhat after the appearance of Venetian glass, and put on the shell hot. Lastly, the oyster is attached to the shells by its cartilage; a little liquor is put in, and the shells are closed up.’

“ ‘But surely people must observe that they are not alive?’ we said. ‘For instance, they can’t open their shells!’

“ ‘That’s just where you’re astray,’ replied the General. ‘Owing to the mechanical action of salt upon the composition of the cartilage, the oyster opens when placed in

salt water. Iron, however, exercises an electro-magnetic influence upon the composition forming the body of the bivalve, causing a sudden contraction — so that, on a knife being introduced into the shell, the latter closes in the most natural way. We manufacture pearls on the premises, and advertise that one oyster in every gross taken from our beds contains a pearl of more or less value; and there’s a greater demand for our oysters than for any others in the world. Our oyster beds are way down along the coast, about ten miles off; and are inspected by thousands yearly. Taste this egg.’

“ ‘He took up a fine specimen of a new-laid egg, and proceeded to break it into a glass. It was a delightful egg. ‘That’s our latest pattern of egg,’ explained the General. ‘You perceive that it has three lines around it, where the substance of the shell is weaker than elsewhere; the lines near each end enable a person about to consume the egg in a boiled state to easily cut off the top or bottom with a knife, or run his nail around it;



while the line about the middle greatly assists cooks in breaking it into a basin. There is also a thin spot at either end, to facilitate sucking. These eggs are always new-laid; we send tons to Europe, particularly to Great Britain, where ours are the only fresh eggs they ever get.’



The London
Egg

"But you must find some difficulty in making an egg?"

"Just as easy as smiling. The white is simply jelly-fish subjected to a chemical process—jelly-fish aren't costly. This tank is full of the liquor. The main ingredient of the yolk is the horse-heel glue mentioned before; we also boil down vast quantities of rats—they come cheap, too; it's only the cost of catching them; and then there's a vegetable colouring, and the preservative, and a few other trifles. First, the two halves of the white are made in two moulds, and frozen; then the two frozen halves are frozen together, and the yolk-mixture poured in through a small hole, which is then closed. Then comes the skin; and that is the most expensive part, for it contains a certain quantity of rubber. We have tried in vain to find a substitute for rubber, but failed hitherto. The rubber is mixed with a gum from a South American tree, and the mixture is applied with a brush over

the frozen egg; and then the egg, still frozen, is dipped in a lime composition very nearly identical with the oyster-shell mixture; and, lastly, the whole thing is passed through the finishing machine, which turns the three thin lines and the two thin spots, imitates the pores of the shell, and delivers the finished egg to the warehouse."

"Marvellous!" we involuntarily exclaimed.

"Oh, that's nothing at all," said the director. "We're meditating turning out eggs that will hatch and become fowls. At present we have to manufacture fowls; but we calculate to make a great saving by producing them from the eggs we make. That building over yonder is the terrapin factory; we turn out eleven tons of terrapin weekly. We make clams, of course—in the oyster department. In this next house we make kidneys and sweetbreads. Fruit? Oh, yes, we turn out masses of fruit; peaches pay best, but we do very well with nuts."

"We were then conducted to the show-room, where we tasted a number of other products of the wonderful factory; and we had just said a grateful farewell to our courteous guide, when we were seized with pains of the most acute description.

"The arrangements of the hospital were admirable. The kindness and attention we received made our five years' sojourn there a time to look back upon with feelings of gratitude. We are assured that, with strict diet and unremitting care, we may last some time yet—possibly even three months."

"It was a marvellous vision," said James, fervently, as the voice of William ceased. "Surely after that you must think better of those beings of mine?"

But William merely sniffed.

J. F. SULLIVAN.



The
Pain

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