



THE SINGINGFEST AT SHIRAZ

By MICHAEL WHITE

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"WHAT has become of Ridgeley?" The question was put by one of two men, who had risen from a luncheon table and strolled out into the spacious hall of a private mansion. "I guess he's detained by the real estate agent who sent in about some property he contemplates purchasing. By the way, have you ever seen Ridgeley's collection?"

"No," replied Burns. "No! Well, you certainly ought to. Let's look at it now."

Anson led the way to a long gallery opening off a balcony on the first landing. When across the threshold both men paused to view the superb spectacle. From floor to ceiling the walls displayed a unique and priceless gathering of objects picked up in the still remote corners of the earth. From the depths of the Dark Continent skins of rare beasts, from the Never Never Land of Australia relics of a prehistoric race, from the top of the world in the fastnesses of the Himalayas banners and trophies secreted there by conquering tribes. In glass cabinets reposed amulets, rings, and necklaces of gold set with precious stones recovered from Etruscan tombs; vases and drinking cups of crystal, amethyst, and topaz from the imperial palaces of the Orient. Burns gazed around upon the collection in admiring wonder.

"Isn't it a bit strange," he remarked at last, "that with all these treasures Ridgeley never set over them the one they would most fittingly adorn—a wife?"

"Ah!" ejaculated the other. "I guess that question can be answered by asking another. Now, what would you consider Ridgeley values chiefly in this place?"

"It would be hard to make a choice," Anson moved to a small table which was a masterpiece of burl and ornolu work. On its surface of intricate inlay stood a glass globe, and in the globe was a little stuffed bird on a perch.

"There is the gem of Ridgeley's collection."

Burns glanced from his companion's face to the modest object and back again, with a puzzled expression.

"What! That? Nonsense!"

"Still, it is an absolute fact so far as Ridgeley's opinion goes."

"But why in the name of all that's commonplace?"

"It's a nightingale!"

"What of it?"

"Why did it die of a broken heart?"

"A broken heart?"

A laugh and a shake of the head proclaimed Burns' disbelief in the explanation.

"You doubt such a thing is possible?"

"Oh, well, if you mean heart failure I may yield the point. But an actual heartbreak—"

"I mean an actual broken heart," retorted Anson. "There are cases on record—Porter and the leaping tuna fish, for example. You knew Porter?"

"No; well, he was a wonderfully keen fisherman. He would go anywhere for sport of that kind, down to the West Indies or out to the Pacific coast. It was on one of his expeditions to the last ground he hooked a monster leaping tuna that tugged on the line for seven hours. The strength and endurance of that fish was marvelous. It pretty well exhausted Porter and his companions. Finally just as they were about to gaff the tuna, it made a supreme effort and broke the swivel. Porter felt sure the fish had escaped, but presently it rose to the surface, fins up, stone dead. When cut open its heart was found to have been actually broken by that last supreme struggle."

Burns smiled indulgently.

"Well," he said, "granted that an actual broken heart is possible in a fish, it would hardly add to a little bird's value in a collection of this kind, and besides what has it got to do with Ridgeley remaining a bachelor?"

"Everything," replied Anson. "I'll tell you. A casual acquaintance would probably not regard Ridgeley as a man of much sentiment. But he had his romance, and a mighty fine girl she was upon whom he fastened his affection. I don't know exactly what interposed to halt the marriage, but for some reason it was at any rate temporarily suspended."

"Then Ridgeley went off on his wanderings to out-of-the-way places, collecting all these things, and for a year disappeared entirely in Central Asia. A vague report came to hand that he had been murdered by caravan robbers, though according to Ridgeley's account his plight was no more desperate than being out of touch with telegraph wires."

"Finally he made for Persia, and turned up in Shiraz at a time when a rather curious contest was in progress. It appeared that the indolent inhabitants of that decadent city of poetic fame had scrambled from the dust and were beating each other over the head in angry recrimination regarding the rival merits of three singing nightingales. The three nightingales were respectively the property of three cafes, each cafe endeavoring to win exclusive patronage by the voice of its feathered songster, in Persia the nightingale taking the

place of high-priced prima donnas with us.

"At the caravanserai where Ridgeley lodged, he fell into the company of an Englishman and an Australian. Very shortly the spirit of the contest took hold of them, and after visits to the three cafes, they became strong partisans. Ridgeley stoutly maintained that the bird he named Madame Nebraska, after his state, could give the other two long odds as a prima donna. With equal insistence the Englishman and the Australian stood by their favorites, calling them Madame London and Madame Sydney respectively.

"Heretofore the three birds had not tested their vocal powers in each other's presence, and by this plan Ridgeley proposed to settle the question of superiority for all time. Hence it was to the Cafe of the Rose that the birds were brought in covered cages, each cage being suspended from the roof above a pool of clear water occupying the center of the paved floor.

"As public interest in the nightingale contest had run to the touch of dagger hilts when two men passed in the street, the stone bench around the walls was packed with cut-throat-looking figures, while the narrow bazaar outside and the little garden of blooming rose bushes from which the cafe took its sign were thronged with those unable to gain admittance. Kalyan mouthpieces went from hand to hand with wagers offered and taken, and tiny cups of black coffee were drained to the success of the backer's favorite.

"By arrangement with the proprietor lots were drawn for the order of the contest, the selection falling first to London, then to Sydney, with the final effort reserved for Madame Nebraska.

"A silence of absorbed expectancy fazed upon the throng when the cover was removed from London's cage. That little bird ruffled her plumage, hopped around once or twice, took a firm grip on her perch, and puffing out her throat, gave expression to a few melodious notes. As it were, having gained her pitch, she set off with a series of trills which rose like a fountain tossing sprays of liquid gems into the air. Higher and higher she sent her voice, until somewhere in the zenith of the ethereal blue she touched her top note, fell and rose to it again, and then burst into a rhapsody of song. When she ceased tapping her beak on the perch as if to challenge a better performance, grunts and ejaculations of approval brought down the house after the Persian fashion.

"Sydney followed much the same method as the first bird—the nightingale singing schools in Persia being very similar in their courses of tone production, etc.—but as she reached higher notes than her rival, the Australian grinned triumphantly upon the Englishman.

"Then Nebraska was uncovered. But instead of the little bird being found fluttering with restrained eagerness on her perch, the audience beheld her sitting motionless on the wicker shelf in the bottom of the cage. A murmur of adverse comment which ran around the stone bench prompted one of the attendants to recall the public songster to a sense of her duty with the tip of a wooden coffee-stirrer. She gazed around with her bead-like eyes almost in a dazed manner, presently shook her feathers in response to the encouraging words of her trainer, and hopped bravely onto her perch. A moment of suspense followed. Nebraska was evidently nerving herself to a supreme effort. Presently she spread her wings, threw back her head, opened her beak, wide, and—and from it came forth a crescendo plaintive squawk."

"A what?" ejaculated Burns with astonishment.

"Just a squawk," repeated Anson. "Then she toppled off her perch, backward, dead into the bottom of the cage."

"Dead into the bottom of the cage! But how did that happen?" questioned Burns.

"She died of a broken heart. She simply couldn't rise to the occasion and beat those other birds. She knew it, and that was the end of the great singingfest at Shiraz. When the excitement subsided, Ridgeley bought the dead bird and sent it to a local taxidermist to be stuffed. He showed Ridgeley the actual broken heart."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Burns. "But—but after all what has it got to do with Ridgeley's love affair?"

"Just this," explained Anson in a lower tone. "It was a curious coincidence, but Ridgeley subsequently discovered that little bird died about the same time as his sweetheart in the United States. It was said she also came to her end from a broken heart, owing to Ridgeley's long absence and the report that he had been killed by caravan robbers."

"Hush!" he added, laying a warning finger on his lips and drawing Burns away from the burl and ornolu table. "I hear Ridgeley's footsteps. Don't refer to the subject. He is sensitive about it. But now you know why he remains a bachelor, and regards the little stuffed bird as his chief treasure. You may argue that coincidences such as this prove nothing, but for all that they make on the majority of us a lasting impression. Hence in Ridgeley's mind the connection between the dead nightingale and the romance of his life."

"Hello, Ridgeley," he turned to greet their host. "Burns, here, is interested in those Afghan words."

Babbitt Again
"He's the kind of fellow," remarked the Man on the Car, "who lives a year in happy anticipation of marching in a parade."—Toledo Blade.

GOOD ROADS

UNIFORM SYSTEM OF SIGNS IS ADOPTED

(Prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture.)

The joint board on interstate highways meeting at the United States bureau of public roads in Washington, D. C., adopted a system of interstate roads and a series of standard danger, caution, direction and informational signs which it will recommend for use in marking and signing the systems selected.

The system adopted will now be mapped and as promptly as possible a full report will be made to the secretary of agriculture by whom the board was appointed last February.

The selected routes will be numbered in accordance with a system to be evolved by a subcommittee of the board.

The standard route marker will be a typical United States shield painted white on which will appear, in black, the name of the appropriate state, the initials "U. S." and the route number. If possible the route numbers will be limited to two digits for easy reading, and steps will be taken to prevent the use of the standard marker for any purpose other than for the marking of the selected system of interstate roads.

Other standard signs adopted by the board were as follows:

A white shield in a smaller size than the route marker on which will be printed the letters R or L as a precautionary warning on the approach of curves or turns in the routes. A similar sign with the addition of an arrow pointing in the proper direction will be posted immediately at the turn.

A circular sign 24 inches in diameter with a yellow background and bearing the familiar railroad cross in black with the letters "R R" also in black in the upper quadrants has been adopted for use at railroad grade crossings in all states in which existing laws permit the use of such a sign; and the board recommends that the use of the sign be authorized by suitable legislation in all states.

The standard stop sign adopted is a regular octagon with the word "Stop" in black letters on a yellow background.

The caution signs are diamond shaped with a yellow background on which are superimposed the warning words and symbols giving notice of curves, hills, loose gravel, etc., ahead. In addition to these cautionary signs provision has been made for the use of "look" or "attention" signs to be used sparingly on approaching schools and other points at which caution may be necessary. These signs will be square with a yellow background and black letters.

In the selection of colors and shapes the board has been guided by the principle that all signs indicating the necessity for any degree of caution will be yellow. The degree of caution required will be indicated by the shape of the signs as well as by the words and symbols on them. Thus a round sign will always indicate a railroad crossing; an octagonal sign will indicate positive danger and will call for a complete stop; a diamond-shaped sign will be equivalent to a command to proceed with caution; and a square, yellow sign will call attention to the need for a lesser degree of caution.

In addition to the warning and cautionary signs, standards were also adopted for various forms of informational and directional signs, all of which are to be rectangular in form and to have a white background with black letters.

With respect to luminous signs the action of the board at its April meeting remains unchanged. The colors approved are red for danger or stop, yellow for caution, and green to indicate "Go."

Good Roads Notes

Washington is to spend \$17,000,000 on roads, not to mention the upkeep of fences.

Pennsylvania plans to build a special commercial highway between Chester and Philadelphia to accommodate heavy trucking. It will almost parallel the existing road between these cities.

Motor vehicles produced during June in the United States and Canada totaled 402,696, according to the Department of Commerce. Of these, 350,557 passenger cars and 36,096 trucks were made in the United States and 14,249 passenger cars and 1,794 trucks in Canada. In June, 1924, this country produced 214,322 passenger cars and 28,117 trucks.

Pennsylvania's system of whitewashing poles along highway routes has been adopted by several other states, as it is a safeguard in night driving. During 1924 the highway department whitewashed 310,200 poles.

The first paved road in the United States is in Alexandria, Va. The stones used were brought as ballast in ships from Europe and were laid by Hessian prisoners during the years of the American Revolution. The old pavement is bordered by shade trees.

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A New Fad—Perhaps.

We sometimes have to go outside of our own door to learn what is going on inside. Thus from Canada we get the information that the latest American fad is the sending of engraved cards announcing the sender's divorce. An example given runs thus: "Mrs. John Henry Howard is pleased to announce Her husband, John Henry, is given the bounce."

—Boston Transcript.

Record Hailstones.

The maximum possible size of hailstones cannot be positively stated, but stones larger than a man's fist and weighing more than a pound have several times been reported. During a hailstorm in Natal, on April 17, 1874, stones fell that weighed one and one-half pounds. Hailstones 14 inches in circumference fell in New South Wales in February, 1847.

Needed Compass Change.

The United States Geological survey says that a compass should be changed about one degree every 20 years. This change is necessary, as the magnetic pole toward which the needle of a compass points and the North pole, are not the same. The magnetic pole shifts, and therefore the change must be made in the compass to make up for the shift of the magnetic pole.

Also a Counter Irritant.

A feminine newspaper writer says no two people can live together in matrimony without friction and without getting on each other's nerves. But people must marry, and some of them must live together, friction or no friction, nerves or no nerves. It seems to us that under such circumstances children are not only a great help, but necessary.—Houston Post-Dispatch.

Growth of Post Office.

Benjamin Franklin was the first head of the postal system of the United States. When he took over the affairs of his office, there were 75 post offices, with an aggregate postal revenue of \$30,000 a year. Today we have more than 53,000 post offices and about 300,000 employees. The aggregate revenue collected and expended amounts to about \$800,000,000 annually.

Self-help.

Self-help is a great virtue, provided one only helps oneself to a fair share. The ideal of independence is to acquire as little service as possible from others, while being ready to give to others as much service as lies within one's capacity.

Drive Away Mice.

If a trap, or the best remedy, a cat, is objected to in ridding a house of mice, try plugging the mouseholes with bits of sponge or cotton wool saturated with oil of peppermint, and sprinkle the oil in places frequented by the pests.

Facts About Ant.

The brain of an ant is about the size of the head of a darning needle. These insects live from eight to ten years as a general rule, although specimens in captivity have been known to reach the age of fifteen.

Chinese vs. English.

Throughout the world more than twice as many people speak Chinese as English.

Defy Approach of Age.

Robert Louis Stevenson gives good advice when he says: "Cling to your youth; it is an artist's stock in trade; do not give up that you are aging and you won't age."

The Greater Deed.

He who sows the ground with care and diligence acquires a greater store of religious merit than he could gain by the repetition of ten thousand prayers.—Zoroaster.

Qualities That Live.

The best portion of a good man's life—his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love.—Wordsworth.

Wisdom of Maturity.

As we grow older we doubt the wisdom of working hard to let the children have an easier time.—Birmingham News.

Devil's Food.

If you throw crumbs on the fire you are feeding the devil.—Old Proverb.

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Simultaneous Ideas.

Darwin originated the natural selection theory of evolution, so far as he himself was concerned, but it is a curious fact that by an extraordinary coincidence Alfred Russel Wallace formulated the same theory at the very same time of its utterance by Darwin. Both men published articles presenting this theory in the same number of the Journal of the Linnaean society in 1858.

High Engine Speed.

The highest engine revolution known is alleged to have been reached by a new design of internal spindle grindstone used to grind cylinders. The shaft revolves 80,000 times a minute.

Hermit Crab's Protection.

The hermit crab, says Nature Magazine, protects itself by inserting its abdomen into some empty shell which it carries about in all of its wanderings.

Much Mercury from Spain.

More than one-fourth the world's total output of mercury comes from the Monte Amiata mercury mines of Spain.



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From School Teacher To Great Eminence

A young man who was brought up on a farm in Western Pennsylvania studied diligently and qualified for district school teacher. Further pursuing his studies and teaching, he managed to save up enough money to put him thru medical college. After the Civil War, he began the practice of medicine in the new oil section of Pa., and often rode horse-back thru the woods to reach and relieve those who were seriously ill. He was a student of nature; knew and could easily recognize most of the medicinal plants growing in the woods. Later, he moved to Buffalo, N. Y., where he laughed his favorite remedies, and, in a short time, they were sold by every druggist in the land. Today, the name of this man, Dr. R. V. Pierce, is known throughout the world. His Golden Medical Discovery is the best known blood medicine and tonic. More than fifty million bottles have been sold in the U. S. If your druggist does not sell the Golden Medical Discovery, in liquid or tablets, you can obtain a trial pkg. of the tablets by sending 10c to the Dr. Pierce Clinic, in Buffalo, N. Y.

For, after all, the love, the patience, the kindly wisdom of a grown man who can enter into the perplexities and turbulent impulses of a boy's heart, and give him cheerful companionship, and lead him on by free and joyful ways to know and choose the things that are pure and lovely and of good report, make as fair an image as we can find of that loving, patient wisdom which must be above us all if any good is to come out of our childish race.—Henry Van Dyke.

Deception Justified.

"What in the world did you mean by introducing me to Mr. Brown as your aunt?" inquired the mother with some warmth. "Forgive me, mother," said Dorothy, "but Mr. Brown seemed to be on the point of proposing and I felt that it would not do to take any risks. He has a strong prejudice against mothers-in-law."

Least He Could Do

"Do you stand back of every statement you make in your newspaper?" asked the timid little man. "Why—er—yes," answered the country editor. "Then," said the little man, holding up a notice of his death. "I wish you would help me collect my life insurance."—Capper's Weekly.

No Scotch Trespass Law.

Although Scotland is known for its many regulations and laws that regulate human conduct, it has one distinction in the way of human liberty not shared by any other countries. In Scotland there is no law of trespass and indications are that there will be none for many years.

Dog Finds Gold.

A boy was playing with a dog near the old Hill End field at Sydney, when the dog scratched up a sample of gold. Investigation showed a reef carrying three ounces of gold to the ton, and a battery was promptly installed.

Not a Busy Street.

The straight and narrow path is wide enough for its traffic.—Frankfort Times.

Perpetual Motion.

Making hay while the sun shines and raising mushrooms in the dark.—Kansas City Star.

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