AS TO TRANSFER POETRY

By John Kendrick Bangs

"I MAINTAIN" SAID HE, "THAT LITERATURE SHOULD ALWAYS ADAPT ITSELF TO CONDITIONS"

A POOR MAN ONCE GAVE UP HIS SEAT TO A VERY HOMELY DAME.

JUST DOFF YOUR HAT AND SAY TO HER "OH, MISS—I PRAY—DON'T RISE."

"I CAN'T BACK THIS CAR DOWN TO FORTY-SEVENTH STREET JUST TO PLEASE YOU."

WHEN YOU ARE SPRAWLING ON THE FLOOR AVOID REMARKS UNPLEASANT.

"I SEE," said my old friend, Colonel Gabster, as the electric car started with a jerk so sudden and so sharp that it sent him into a sitting posture on the floor of the vehicle, with his feet up in the air, "that these trolley lines are printing poetry on the back of their transfer checks. Every day there is some new sentiment, some toast to the long continued prosperity of certain very excellent department stores. Read this, for instance:

If you should seek a new gas range,
  Or else a stovepipe hat;
Of colored shirts an extra change,
  Or brand new front doormat;
Or if, perchance, you need an ape
  To glorify your home;
Or something to improve your shape,
  Or possibly a comb,
Why, tell the cautious motorman or else the conductor
To let you out at Rinks & Jones' universal store.

At this point the Colonel rose from the floor, and seizing hold upon a convenient strap, assumed once more that dignified attitude toward society most affected by the patrons of our transportation companies during the rush hour. Then he began again.

"That, of course, isn't Homer or Milton. It isn't Shakespeare or Tennyson. In fact it isn't even Alfred Austin, but it is fair poetry none the less. It has rhyme. It has reason. It has rhythm, and in its allusions to certain homely things in life which are accounted among the necessities of existence I am not sure but that it possesses a certain amount of highly commendable sentiment. I have read worse things in my Herrick, less musical numbers in my Kipling, and inferior advice in my volume of the collected works of Dr. Watts.

"No woman can read it, or so I believe, without finding in or between the lines something to call off the discomfort of travel in the public conveyances of today. No man can read it without being reminded of the needs of his home, either directly or indirectly. His home may not stand in immediate need of an ape to cheer the family circle, but it may require something else—an egg-beater, or a baby grand piano, or a plumber, anything—the mere fact that a variety of things to be had of Rink & Jones from a gas range to a monkey is brought thus to his attention is commendable in that it reminds him of the things he actually does need.

Couldn't Understand.

"Nevertheless,' he added, as the quick stoppage of the car landed him in the lap of the Chinaman in the corner seat, "I cannot understand why this company, already rich beyond the wildest dreams of avarice, should seem to yield to the commercial spirit of the age by giving up this whole issue of transfer tickets to the exploitation of a simple department store. Sometimes I am almost inclined to suspect that they accept a moneyed consideration for so doing."

I started to say that it was quite likely that his inclination toward that suspicion was justified, but was unable to more than begin the assurance for the reason that a number seven lady with a Christmas turkey in a paper bag under her arm at that moment inserted herself into the seat next my own, just vacated by a number two shopgirl, who had uncomfortably crowded me in spite of her pathetic fragility. Intelligent conversation on any topic under such conditions is difficult. The organ of intelligence may be in good working order, but the physical instruments called into use by the exigencies of the moment for the suitable expression of one's ideas are not likely to prove fluent when crushed out of their normal conformation by 230 pounds of averdupois, aided and abetted by nine pounds of turkey in a paper bag. Nothing was lost, however, by my predicament, for Gabster is a man of quick apprehension.

"I see that you would agree with me if there was room," he observed, with a pleasant smile. "I judge men rather by their inclination than by what they say, anyhow. So let me talk on."

"Fares, please," cried the conductor, glaring at the Colonel.

"I have already paid you three times," said Gabster calmly.

"Me?" cried the conductor, with that show of abused righteousness so characteristic of the sex.

"Yes," said Gabster. "Once last Thursday. Once last Monday, and about five minutes ago today."

The conductor passed on and the Colonel resumed.

As to Transfers.

"If these trolley companies are going to encourage poetry," said he; "are, in fact, going in to publish it and to turn their transfer checks into flying leaves from magazines, why don't they do it in the right way? That's the thing that bothers me. I am told that I have old-fashioned ideas. Perhaps I have. Old-fashioned or no, they are honestly mine and I must stand or fall by them."

Here he fell, thanks to the system. Having, in the course of his remarks, loosened his hold upon the strap he could not do otherwise, considering the jolt the motorman gave us all. But he soon gathered himself up again, with the assistance of a Hungarian, a Russian Jew and two other Americans, one of whom was colored.

"I maintain," said he, "that literature should always adapt itself to conditions—not to circumstances, mind you—but to actual conditions. It should meet a distinctly aggressive need, and to do this it must be so phrased that those who may benefit by it can comprehend it; must be so intrinsically ordered that it shall reach the persons who most sorely stand in need of its teaching."

"Good!" I blurted out. I should have liked to commend his sentiment calmly and at further length, but at the moment of my speaking the 230 pounds of lady next me sighed, and I was so caught in the uplift of her emotion that even a monosyllable became an impossibility. Napoleon Bonaparte himself could not have issued one of these immortal asthmatic proclamations of his at such a moment.

Utility of Poetry.

"What is poetry for?" demanded the Colonel, disregarding the turkey leg that was not sticking in my eye, and unmindful of the fact that my neighbor's elbow was thrust deep into the lung I use for speaking purposes. Fortunately he himself had the answer ready:—"It is for the uplifting of mankind," said he. "Now the way to uplift mankind is to study men's specific needs and not their general requirements. Hence, if I were the editor of these transfer tickets, I should use the opportunity for something nobler than a mere advertising scheme. Take the habit of most travelers on these cars, for instance, of standing near the door so that getting out becomes almost as strenuous an operation as playing football. Why shouldn't these people's case be met by a stanza to this effect:

When there is lots of room in front—
  Enough for half a score—
Don't huddle like a flock of sheep
  Down by the entrance door.

"There'd be a real value in a small poem like that and I am sure it would prove distinctly reformative in its influence upon the traveling public."

"That's a good idea," said I, "but how about those jerky starts that send you sprawling on the floor? Do you think an experience of that kind lends itself to poetic treatment?"

"I was coming to that," observed the Colonel. "You can't very well do justice to such a theme in tuneful measures. Such incidents require to be handled in rather vigorous form, but you can give voice to a certain philosophical attitude in rhyme. For instance, I would suggest something like this:

You must not curse the motorman
  Because the car doth jerk;
It often haps a shaking down
  Is helpful in our work.

"I know in my own case I have derived much benefit from the joltings I have received on the crosstown cars. I need exercise, and I cannot spare the time to take it. This nightly ride of mine steps in and provides me with all that I could possibly get out of a punching-bag and at no extra expense."

Metrical Maxim.

"You're a broad-minded man, Gabster," said I. "I should have fallen back on etiquette rather than philosophy for my contribution. This, perchance:

When you are sprawling on the floor
  Avoid remarks unpleasant;
Profanity is natural, but
  There may be ladies present.

"I should accept such a contribution if I were the transfer editor," said he. "Politeness as well as a philosophical attitude toward life is one of the great needs of this hurly burly hour. The philosophical attitude, however, is of prime importance because is is fundamentally necessary. Politeness will follow in its train almost automatically. So I should instill cheerfulness in the mind of the traveling public with a series of quatrains to something like the following import:

When, in the overcrowded hour,
  Your thoughts grow dour and mean,
Do not despair; things might be worse—
  Consider the sardine.

If some one treads upon your toe,
  Of anger show no trace;
Think how much worse 'twould be if he
  Had stepped upon your face.

Whene'er a human avalanche
  Upon your lap is cat,
Give over wrath and bear in mind
  That lans are made for that.

Popularizing Poetic Pith.

"I think I should amend that last one—popularize it, perhaps," I suggested. "Put it this way:

If in your lap a sudden jerk
  Hurls one with soft blue eyes,
Just doff your hat and say to her
  Oh, Miss—I pray—don't rise.

Gabster smiled pleasantly. "You have a keen eye for the specific case," he said, "and I quite agree with you that now and then a little verse of that nature would be desirable. Take your own particular sufferings at this moment—a verse like this might convey a valuable hint:

Be careful of your turkey legs
  Lest they shall get too spry,
And, flaunting forth their piercing toes,
  Stab some one in the eye.

The intrinsic worth of this rhyme was shown instanter by the indignant glance which my neighbor with the bird in the paper bag hurled at the Colonel. The shaft had evidently struck home, for the lady transferred her package to her other side and my relief was immediate.

"Then, occasionally," Gabster continued, "I would vary the philosophical note with a bit of narrative poetry in which should lie the germ at least of a moral. Offhand let us suppose the following:

A poor man once gave up his seat
  To a very homely dame,
She thanked him as she took his place
  And asked him for his name.

In later years the woman died—
  'Tis said she caught a chill—
And lo! she left ten thousand plunks
  To that chap in her will!

The moral in this special case,
  Don't judge a lady by her face.

Inspiration in It.

"Such a poem as that would certainly prove an inspiration to hundreds of men who only fail to do the right thing because it never suggests itself to them. Then here is another that should prove instructive to children:

Small Tommy Jones got up one day
While riding uptown on Broadway
To let an aged man sit down.
The gentleman was Mr. Brown,
The billionaire of Boston town,
Who was so pleased with Tommy's act
That later when the lad was sacked,
He put him in a place where he
Was able in two years or three
To steal a hundred thousand clear
And get away with it, my dear.
The moral's very plain in sight:—
It sometimes pays to be polite.

"And so this policy might run on, and if consistently adhered to could not fail to prove beneficial in the end. As time passed the management might be induced to go in for prose and issue serial stories in transfer installments, a fresh chapter each day, which would prove profitable, for people would ride on the cars just to get the next installment."

The Colonel paused a moment, and, turning to the conductor, who was struggling by him, said:

"By the way, conductor, let us out at Forty-seventh street."

"Forty-seventh street!" retorted the conductor. "When do you mean—on the return trip."

"Sirrah, you are impertinent. Of course not. On the way up," said the Colonel severely.

The conductor laughed. "We have just passed 108th,' said he. "I can't back this car down to Forty-seventh street just to please you."

The Colonel started to speak, but fortunately restrained himself until we got off three miles beyond our destination and waited for the return car. Even then he did not break the silence until I spoke.

"What were you going to say, Colonel?" I asked.

"I shall not say it," he replied. "But if I ever get hold of the poetry department of the trolley company, look out for a poem on being carried by your street corner on a bitter cold night. It will be the hottest epic of the year."

GRIM DESTROYERS OF LIFE AND LIMB

DISEASE AND ACCIDENT THAT EFFECTS NINE MILLION AMERICANS EVERY YEAR

WASHINGTON, D. C., Jan. 25.—(Special correspondence of The Sunday Oregonian.)—"The Museum of Security," for the exhibition of every manner of thing ever invented for the protection of life or limb, is an interesting institution projected for the National Capital by the American Institute of Social Service. For this and kindred purposes its members are seeking endowments to the amount of $3,000,000.

We are still in the shadow of some of the gravest catastrophes in the annals of our history, and will doubtless look gratefully upon any public movement for the education of those responsible for the annual slaughter of our thousands; the annual maiming of our millions of precious lives; and this responsible class includes not only money-seekers, but lawmakers and law enforcers.

Grim Destroyers of Life and Limb.

The story of our grim destroyers will alone open many eyes to seeing; set many minds to thinking and contriving. It is a story which has not been told in detail, save in the maze of dry statistical tables.

The black monster death is devouring our citizens at the rate of over a million per year. True, his appetite is less voracious than it has ever been in our history, yet for every grave that is dug in our soil, nine homes are being saddened by accident.

Build a big city with the combined populations of Greater London and Paris, with their 8,000,000 and mangle, maim, cripple or in some manner injure every human being within the walls. An equal tribute do we pay annually to the demon negligence.

Descend upon the City of Hoboken with its 60,000 souls, and slaughter every man, woman and child, and such a massacre would not exceed the price in human life which this vampire exacts from us annually. Or, to otherwise illustrate this yearly penalty, fall upon our City of Memphis and cut a limb from each of its 100,000 citizens.

Assemble all of the workmen in this country in companies of 31, and wound every 31st man, or arrange them in battalions of 318 men and kill every 318th man, and you will repeat another feat of this demon negligence.

What is the worst to consider in this chapter of accidents is the fact that the average age when they are suffered is 33½ years, when man is in the very prime of usefulness, and while his children are still helpless and dependent.

It is not looking through spectacles too roseate to predict that before the world has spinned off many decades a large proportion of those 17-18th of our deaths now attributed to causes natural will be shifted to the table of causes accidental. We cannot but pause to consider for a moment the most fatal of these natural causes of wholesale death, for among them we find the very mammoths of the entire species of Great Destroyers.

Our Worst Enemy.

The parasite of pneumonia is just now our worst enemy, having in the past decade gained over the "great white plague" in the mad race of our pursuing phantoms. A museum of security must assign unto the manacles which may restrain this king of life destroyers the highest pedestal. Pneumonia and consumption are running in this hot pursuit for our lives almost neck and neck. The general tables of the last census give the "white plague" the lead, but Chief King, of the division of vital statistics, recently pointed to his statistics from those parts of the country in which all causes of death are systematically registered as the more accurate. These put pneumonia ahead, and if deaths from this disease are in the same proportion throughout the country generally as in these registration areas, 146,000 of us die annually from pneumonia; 145,000 from consumption.

The annual death rate from either pneumonia or consumption is greater than the annual mortality average of both armies during the Civil War, the bloodiest struggle in our history. Either of these diseases kills more Americans in a year than our Union troops did Confederates during the entire struggle between the states.

Heart disease is our third greatest enemy, diarrhoeal diseases, kidney diseases, apoplexy and cancer ranking next. Like pneumonia, all of these destroyers except diarrhoeal diseases are on the increase. In fact, the fatal diseases of adult life and advanced age are in the ascendant, while those which select infnts and youths as their victims are falling in power.

Suicide on Increase.

Suicide is claiming more of us than any specter of accidental death, according to the latest insurance statistics. The extermination of all of the inhabitants of Raleigh, N. C., would about represent the annual work of suicide in this country. In other words, 13,000 Americans are taking their own lives annually. More than three-quarters of our suicides are men, and more married than unmarried persons take their lives, a datum perhaps for the positive side of the controversy, "Is marriage a failure?" The period between the ages of 20 and 40 is the most usual for self-killing.

Shooting is the favorite method of self-destruction among men; poisoning among women. The order of frequency for other causes is, hanging, cutting, drowning, inhalation of gas, and jumping from high places. The method in greatest disfavor among the male suicides is jumping; among their still weaker sisters, cutting. Even here the superior esthetic temperament of woman shows itself. Rather the phial, which leaves no disfiguring wound, than aught else, and, least of all, the knife.

Despondency ranks as the chief cause of self-destruction, according to Professor W. B. Bailey, to whom the writer is indebted. Business loss is given as the second greatest excitation, insanity the third. Ill-health goads on the next greatest number. "Disappointment in love" is the cause fifth in frequency, if we can isolate it and leave it out of the column of insanity! Then follow, in the mad procession, domestic trouble, fear of disgrace, grief, alcoholism and chagrin. Monday is the favorite suicide day for our men, probably due to reaction from debauchery on Sunday, and our women are most in the mood for ending their lives on Sunday. In fact, more than a third of the suicides on account of domestic troubles are committed on this day of rest. "The family is then together for the day, giving greater opportunity for quarrel, or the husband may be intoxicated and the home seem dreary to the females," opines Professor Bailey. A sad commentary on the holy Sabbath! In the daily average there is a continual increase in suicides from midnight until 6 P. M., then a falling off until 9—while the supper digests?—but thence until midnight is the period of greatest frequency.

Eleven thousand suicides have occurred in the boroughs of Manhattan and the Bronx, N. Y., within the past century. The rate has been irregularly increasing during the past decade, but the highest per 100,000 of population was in the year 1895.

Americans are being killed by their fellows at the rate of 9200 a year. The massacre of all the men, women and children of Norfolk, Va., would equal our homicide record of five years. About nine out of every 100 prisoners in the country are charged with killing their fellows, and 95 per cent of these homicides were committed by men. The conversion of the whole City of Austin, Texas, into a charnel house would represent our combined annual death rates from suicide and homicide.

The Railway Juggernaut.

To the railway juggernaut over 2000 of our lives are being sacrificed annually. This is the Interstate Commerce Commission's reckoning, on the basis of the last four years. But in 1900 the census statisticians discovered over 6900 deaths from railroad accidents, whereas the commission discovered but 3000. The last yearly total compiled by the latter was far above the average. But railroad men are by no means selfish in their annual slaughter, for two of them go to accidental death with each passenger or non-employe killed on the rail. One out of every 11 railway workmen is being injured, one out of every 111 killed, in a year's time. But as a result of the safety appliance act which went into effect in 1900 the number of deaths from coupling accidents has fallen off more than half.

The wounding of more than two-thirds of all of our soldiers would be but a reproduction of the injuries due to railroad accidents in this country in a year. Last year was above the average, 46,000 people being hurt. The most appalling fact in records of the past year and a half is the appalling loss of life in collisions, and yet these fatalities are due to causes never seriously investigated by any department of the Government, state or Federal.

Fire and Shipwreck.

About 6800 of us are being burned or scalded to death annually, and flames are each year lapping up wealth sufficient to create 115 millionaires. Scarcely more than half of this loss is covered by insurance.

We are being drowned at the rate of more than 5000 per year, but a smaller percentage of our population are meeting death in this manner than a decade ago. Disasters to our ships have been costing us an average of 510 lives per annum since 1885, the total loss of life from this source having been close to 10,000 in this time. More than half of these victims have perished on the high seas or in foreign waters; over a fourth on our seacoasts; the remainder on our lakes and rivers. But while horrified by many other record-breaking catastrophes in the past year, we have been spared the harrowing news of very serious shipwrecks, whereas only 21 of the wrecks of the past century bore down to watery graves more than 5000 human beings. The most fatal shipwreck on record was that of the Atlantic, in 1873, when 481 lives were lost. In the past century more than 200 known vessels have sunk in the single region of Sable Island, carrying untold hundreds to the bottom. But of the millions of passengers transported on American steamboats during the past fiscal year there were less than 300 fatalities. The safeguards employed by the Federal steamboat inspection service, not only in the construction of boilers, but in their careful supervision while in use, seems to have reduced the chances of steamboat accidents—once so fatal—to a minimum.

"Travel by water has become the safest, the most assuring and luxurious of all means of transportation," says the general superintendent of the steamboat inspection service. Under the old inspection law of 1852 the average loss of life to our steamboat passengers was one in each quarter million, but under the new laws this has been reduced to one in several millions. One great benefit of the service has been its tireless crusade against intemperance among licensed steamship officers.

Gunshot, Lightning and Tempest.

More than 4000 of us are being eliminated annually by pistol and gun and we are more liable to be shot than drowned, more in danger of drowning than of being burned or scalded to death, and the chances of our death in railroad accidents are greater than those of a fatal ending of life from any of these accidental causes mentioned.

From 700 to 800 lives are lost each year from lightning stroke," says Professor A. J. Henry, of the National Weather Bureau. Most of the large numbers who annually meet such violent deaths under trees would, in his opinion, be spared, if they remained in the open. He also issues a warning note against "huddling together" in sheds and outbuildings, men, like animals, being killed by lightning, not singly, but in groups. He advises the public to keep out of the doorways of barns, away from cattle, chimneys, fireplaces and the ends of wire clothes lines.

Tornadoes rank among our powerful agencies of violent death, but their spasmotic nature precludes the compilation of any satisfactory death rate therefrom. Fifty-five days out of the year they visit some part of the United States and in a ten-year interval they have cost as much as $25,000,000. Over 150 lives were lost in three such catastrophes within the past year. Efforts are being made by the Weather Bureau to forecast their directions and to give timely warning of their approach. Warnings sent by this institution ahead of the great St. Louis tornado were sufficiently in advance for schools to be dismissed before it struck.

Most Unwholesome Occupation.

Among men the pursuit which entails the highest death rate has recently been found by Statistician King to be that followed by stockraisers, herders and drovers. Next in high order of fatality are those of the sailor and fisherman class, millers, coopers, non-agricultural laborers and ministers. Among women the highest death rates are those of servants and nurses. Commercial travelers enjoy the lowest mortality among men, despite their constant exposure to railroad accidents, and next to them in order of safety are engineers and surveyors, boot and shoemakers, textile mill and factory operators, plumbers, gas and steamfitters. The least fatal vocation for women is discovered to be that of artificial flower and paper boxmakers, and ranging next to these in enjoyment of life are stenographers and typewriters, hotel and boarding-house keepers.

The vocation of preacher is more fatal than that of policeman; that of policeman more dangerous to life that of soldier. In fact, the profession of the clergy is spared less than that of the lawyer, or even of the doctor, exposed as the latter is to disease. Indeed, the career of saloonkeeper is more fatal than that of soldier.

The Museum of Security will have a broad field of education open unto it. Similar institutions have been opened in Amsterdam, Berlin, Munich and Milan, while another is projected for Paris.

JOHN ELFRETH WATKINS, JR.

BEAUTY BEHIND THE BARS.

A New Trial for Mrs. Botkin Likely to Result in Her Acquittal.

Philadelphia Inquirer.

In a few weeks Mrs. Cordelia Botkin is to be tried once more in California for the alleged murder of the sisters, Mrs. Dunning and Mrs. Deane, of Dover, Del., by sending them poisoned candy through the mails. Five years ago she was tried and convicted, but obtained a new trial, since when she has been living in luxury in jail. In the meantime, the chief witness against her is dead, and there has been a mix-up in the candy box, which indicates that it can no longer be used in evidence with any potency. In fact, the chances are that Mrs. Botkin is going to get out of jail very soon.

This opinion is confirmed by the fact that the Delaware authorities, who furnished practically all the evidence that convicted the woman on the first trial, have not been communicated with, although the trial is only a month away. The cost to Delaware in the former trial was enormous, but there was no objection so long as the people thought that justice had been accomplished. In the new trial it is evident that Delaware is not to be called upon, and the newspapers of that state are sore over the apparent intention to whitewash the woman. It is said that the authorities are willing to go to the expense of sending witnesses, but this cannot be done without the request of the California authorities. The outlook is for a very pleasant year for Mrs. Botkin, the pretty woman who was so much more fascinating to Mr. Dunning than his lawful wife.

We call attention to this case simply because, in many respects, it is a parallel to that of Mrs. Maybrick, though in other respects so different. There has seldom been a stronger case of circumstantial evidence made up than that against Mrs. Botkin, or a weaker one than that against Mrs. Maybrick. The latter has been in jail for 15 years, and will be released in a few months as an act of grace. Mrs. Botkin soon got a new trial, and since then has been living in comfort in a jail from which she will part with less regret than most persons who have been incarcerated for five years. In this country it is impossible to hang a pretty woman, no matter how guilty she may be. This is, of course, a tribute to man's gallantry, but not to his sense of justice. Mrs. Botkin may be innocent, but it is certain that there are two dead bodies in the graves at Dover calling for revenge, and there is none in prospect.

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