

The Kiss of Fire

[Written for the Morning Astorian.]

James Hessler was in hard lines. For ten days he had patiently waited for John Melcher's criticism of his MMS. "There's your novel 'I've read it.' 'Well?'"

"There's no use of my trying to let you down easy, Jimmy. I may as well tell the truth. It's only fitted to be read by the occupants of a lunatic asylum."

Jimmy looked as if his friend had thrust a knife into his bosom. He was one of a lot of artists who inhabited the same rookery and every man of them on the verge of starvation.

"I tell you what, Jim," continued the speaker, "I'm a practical fellow at bottom and have no business with either art or literature. I have a scheme for working off this stuff you've written on a friend who is a publisher. He's practical too. I'm going to see him."

"Do you want the manuscript?"

"No."

John Melcher, the merciless friend-critic, went to the publisher and made a proposition which induced him to publish "The Kiss of Fire." Melcher was to take charge of the introduction of the book to the public in his own way. He relied implicitly on the members of his gang, who were to act as a clique under his direction. Hardly had the book been issued when all of them, having been coached by Melcher, went in different directions.

Each stopped upon passing a stand or store where books are sold and asked for "The Kiss of Fire." When told that they had no copy of the book the inquirer would be struck dumb with amazement and hurry away. Before nightfall of the first day there had been from half a dozen to a dozen inquiries for the novel in every book-shop in the city. Melcher had instructed his band to work the trumpeting and the inquiries among the book-sellers with equal zeal, well knowing that to "make a market" without providing a supply would be useless.

The booksellers gave small orders for the book, and occasionally some one to whom the gang sounded its praises bought one. Meanwhile Melcher was not idle. He persuaded a friend, Olcott, who was the leader of a literary club, to read the story. The reader's report upon it was, "For idiots, fools and lunatics, the most remarkable work of the century." Melcher went about telling all book lovers that Olcott had pronounced "The Kiss of Fire" the most remarkable work of the century, failing to mention for what class of readers. Before Olcott heard of his criticism and had corrected it a number of people who were ambitious of being up in the literature of the day had read the novel. None of them could understand why it was remarkable, but since Olcott said so none of them dared say it was not. One independent fellow pronounced it "rot," but the best "rot" he had ever read. All young girls entering society, hearing of the commotion it was creat-

ing and assuming for that reason the book must be a model of literary excellence, pronounced it "perfectly lovely." Then it was announced as "the best seller of the week."

Checks began to come in from the publisher. They were sent to Melcher, who apportioned them between the author and his gang. Thus encouraged, the clique worked on. But further effort was not necessary. The fame had been kindled, and if Melcher had led them in an attempt to put it out they could not have done so. It must burn till the fuel was exhausted. The critics abused the book, inveighing against the decline of literary taste, but they were not heeded. Every one read and talked about "The Kiss of Fire." Then suddenly, at the end of three months, the babel ceased. Every body had read the book and was ready for the next wonder.

About this time the literary editor of a prominent magazine fell ill, and Ben Hathaway, an understrapper, who took care of the books to be reviewed, happened on "The Kiss of Fire." He read it and was delighted with it. It entered his head to try his hand at writing a criticism on it. He did so, and the criticism got into the magazine before the editor resumed his post.

The late Robert Louis Stevenson has said in the preface to one of his books, "We write to our friends, and the public pays the postage." Now, it happened that Jimmy Hessler, away back of a pair of strange eyes far down in that peculiar brain of his, had some very singular fancies—fancies with which only a brain in rapport with his own would sympathize. In other words, when Hessler wrote "The Kiss of Fire" he was writing it to Hathaway. Hathaway in his criticism spoke very highly of the novel. He could not explain it. Indeed, he did not fully understand it, for no two brains are alike in all their parts. He contented himself with praising it. Nevertheless of all the criticisms written on Hessler's work Hathaway's was the only one emanating from a reader who had been in touch with the author's fancies. How many readers had been similarly sympathetic cannot be determined.

When Hathaway's chief saw that the magazine had during his absence been committed to an approval of "The Kiss of Fire" he took to his bed again, but not before he had discharged Hathaway. The periodical was looked up to by a certain class of literary people as a bulwark against any work that would not stand the test of criticism and suffered a severe blow in the estimation of those persons on account of what they called "The Kiss of Fire" blunder.

Hessler is writing another novel, which the publishers are "climbing over one another" to secure for publication, but what will be the fate of his next work is a problem of the future.

NORMAN D. WHITE.

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Every day a man submits to some injustice he vowed yesterday he would never stand.

About the toughest thing that can happen to a man is to go contrary to his wife's judgment and then make a failure.

—Atchison Globe.

Nervous New Yorkers.

"If anybody needs to be convinced that New Yorkers are a nervous lot, just let him peep under dining room tables at mealtime and see the position of the feet and he will have all the proof he wants," remarked the proprietor of a popular restaurant. "Not one person in a hundred sits with his feet planted squarely on the floor while eating. Some twist their feet around the legs of tables and chairs, some sit with them crossed, others rest the feet on the tips of the toes, while still others bear their whole weight down on the heel. Since it is only the flatly planted foot that indicates an equable temperament, it is easy to see what a nervous, irresponsible crowd the army of diners out really is." —New York Post.

Discolored Necks.

One of the common physical defects to which women are prone is a discolored neck, due, it may be, to dyes from the clothing or to hair lotions, pomades, etc., which work down from the head. Of course, barring the possibility of sunburn, the skin on the neck should have the same hue as that on the shoulders. It is well, however, before resorting to artificial means, to see what hot water, a coarse wash cloth and plenty of good soap will do in removing the discoloration. If a mouth of this natural treatment does not bleach the neck anoint it daily with peroxide of hydrogen. In case this irritates the skin a little vaseline or sweet almond oil may be rubbed in after the chemical has dried.

Baked Beans and Olive Oil.

To bake beans with olive oil is the fashion among those who are vegetarians and those who detest pork. The Housekeeper says: "To some natures pork in any shape is repugnant. For those who do not relish it in baked beans the following way of preparing this popular dish is recommended as being especially delicious: Soak one pint of beans overnight. Parboil next morning, using a little soda. When the skin can be blown off easily, drain and cover with boiling water. Add two tablespoonfuls of olive oil and one-fourth of a cupful of molasses. Sprinkle with salt, pepper and mustard. If liked very sweet, add a half instead of a fourth of a cupful of molasses."

INTERESTING PAIR.

New York Labor Leader and Daughter Members of a Law Class.

NEW YORK, Nov. 22.—Joseph Barondess, the East Side labor leader, and Marbel Barondess, his daughter, are an interesting pair of members of the junior class of the New York University Law School. The fact was brought out upon the announcement of the annual dinner of the class, where Mr. Barondess has been elected president.

By day the father conducts an insurance business. Until recently he was a leader in the Socialist movement on the lower East Side, and ran for Congress on the Socialist ticket. Barondess left the party after charging it with narrow-mindedness.

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