

The Herald

RICHARD B. SWENSON
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Monmouth Meditations

In these parlous times when all that is left for a conscientious mediator, if he would avoid the opprobrium of those who, in their own estimation, monopolize the word "patriot," is to become a little cuckoo to his big daily brethren in the efforts of the latter to inflame our passions to a war heat, it is a pleasure to turn to the works of the late Ali Hackaback. Mr. Hackaback is a distinguished oriental author who is not so widely known as he would have been had his writings been given a wider circulation. He appears to have written, however, for the entertainment of himself and a few friends and it was only by the merest chance that we obtained possession of the cherished volumes. As to the manner and method of this acquisition, it is a story in itself, the telling of which will have to wait for some future convenience. The pleasure of bringing the works of Mr. Hackaback to the attention of the reading public is the more acute through its opportuneness, it being a truth that he was born in Bagdad, a venerable city recently taken by the armies of our allies, the British. Mr. Hackaback's works are semi-historical in character and for the most part deal with a country which he calls "Sandova." We have spent some time investigating Sandova but in atlas, encyclopedia and history, have failed to find as much as a single suggestion of it. We have therefore concluded that, some of the relations being too personal to meet with the approval of the originals, Mr. Hackaback has resorted to disguised names in order to carry out his original purpose.

One of these stories, that of "The Artistic Henhouse," has already been published in the Herald. This week we give a second selection:

AWAKENING SANDOVA

Or the Adventure of the Jersey Hummer and the Caliph

"Blessed is Sandova. The balm of Springtime is in its gentle zephyrs. The shepherds of a thousand hills keep watch over their flocks as they did in the year 1. The springtime of life is still with its people and the nervous haste of the occident is not theirs. Their telegraph and telephone systems are the men who call the hours of the day from the minarets of

their mosques and their lightning express is the camel which traverses its sober way across the desert. The most popular historian of the country was a blind man who could not write a stroke, but kept his knowledge in his head, and for many years their only printing press was a goosequill with which, upon sheepskin, the grand scribe of the caliph sent down to the people the edicts of the Sublime Son of the Morning.

"Not long ago a change threatened to undermine old Sandova. An agent of the International Liquid Fuel Dispensary arrived in the metropolis of the country and proceeded to develop the local market. He speedily convinced the housewives of the city into an appreciation of his wares and worked the old time trick of the magician in trading new lamps for old ones. The old ones were of solid copper and sold in New York City for \$14.99 as souvenirs. The new ones were of sheet iron, nicked over, and cost 97 cents in the Chicago department stores, but they shone with a light which eclipsed the Lone Star of India for brilliance.

In a very short time the path blazed by the Liquid Fuel man was widened into a thoroughfare by the trampling feet of a throng of others. All sorts of new industries flocked into Sandova and began to tap the pocket of the fierce son of the desert. The game, while it lasted, was a good one, but the finish came with alarming suddenness. The green goods man, the gold brick man and the man who was looking for the heir to an estate in Dorsetshire, England, were just getting ready to secure the confidence of the opulent and guileless Sandovan agriculturist, when of a sudden the bubble collapsed. A young man appeared and announced himself ready to start a modern newspaper.

"The young man, whose name was Stanton Merivale, was from credentials and outward appearances amply competent to the task of arousing and astonishing Sandova. Stress is laid on the fact that he was a graduate from the staff of the New Jersey Buzzer of Hoboken. He knew his profession from the top to the bottom thereof.

"In the initial issue of his paper he devoted a few lines to the death of Ali about Antiseptic, the distinguished sage of Damascus, and of the achievement of Omar ibn Flatcar, who after years of studious toil had succeeded in squaring the circle brief mention was made in an obscure corner.

"Conspicuous headlines however illuminated the front page, telling of the twelfth wife of the Emir of Cordwood who had eloped with her coachman; how the two had been pursued and captured by the irate emir who had taken his captives, sewed them up in bags and dumped them into the Persian Gulf. Investigation afterward showed this story to have no firmer foundation than that the Emir of Cordwood had twelve wives.

"The next issue of the 'Baritone,' for so Mr. Merivale styled his paper, had a long account of an alleged embezzlement on the part of the official cheese

tester of the empire who, so the Baritone said, was by various means filching large quantities of public coin. When the official whitewashers had got done with this statement it was found to have as its basis the fact that Sandova had an official cheese tester.

"In rapid succession the Baritone exploited a divorce case, a murder, two attempts at suicide as well as the exposure of a Don Juan in high society.

"But these things soon ceased to attract attention and Editor Merivale resolved on a heroic stroke of genius. He heard one day that a gatekeeper had been discharged from the force of employees at the palace and this rumor served as a hook on which to hang a grand fairy tale.

"The son of the Akound of Akechew, so the Baritone stated in substance next day, had acquired a liking for the daughter of the caliph and was wont to call clandestinely at the imperial palace. As the custom of Sandova, like all oriental countries, is severe in its treatment of young men and young women, socially, the young man had to cloak his calls with the utmost secrecy. To succeed, he bribed one of the gatekeepers. The caliph, however, became cognizant of the state of affairs, winked at the proceedings, and even went so far as to engage the young man for an hour each evening in the game of 'gash-hesh,' the Sandovan game of euchre, at which the caliph was an expert.

"In the course of a few games the young prince lost all his money and in anger one night he turned on the caliph, accusing that dignitary of cheating. The caliph met the situation promptly, summoned his guard, and the young man was dispatched to the sixth Mohammedan heaven with neatness and precision.

"Then the story was concocted and passed out with the remains of the young man to his relatives that the caliph had discovered the clandestine visits of the prince and he had been slain to preserve the good name of the household. The offending gate keeper had been discharged with a warning, and altogether great pains were taken to keep the affair a secret, etc.

"Those who took the trouble to investigate afterward found that while the Akound of Akechew had seven daughters, it was the bane of his existence that he had never had a son. Also that the gatekeeper had been discharged for stupidity.

"The caliph, however, did not wait to investigate. He stroked his beard meditatively with his left hand and then ordered a general cleaning out of foreigners.

"It will be some time before Sandova regains the same standard of civilization she had acquired at the time of the first issue of the Baritone.

"Allah! comments Ali Hackaback, 'Peace is monotonous, but it is restful.'"

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