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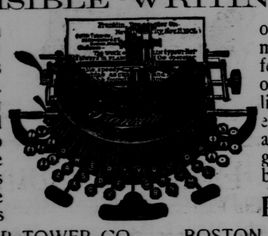

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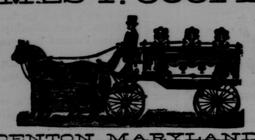

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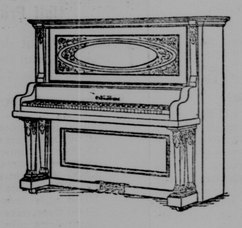

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THE TREE GHOST

Jacques had just committed an awful deed, a fearful crime—in short, a murder—yet so far he felt no remorse. It happened in this way:

He was not naturally cruel or wicked—only quick tempered and impulsive. A law student, diligent and thorough, a philosopher imbued with Schopenhauer, he led a dreary life, lacked money, gave lessons and scarcely kept soul and body together. The burden began to weigh heavily on him, and at times he felt an angry revolt against his circumstances, a dissatisfaction that might and did, as we shall see, lead him to the lowest depths of infamy.

One summer evening, hungry and penniless, raging at the thought of a pleasure party planned for the morrow, which he must give up for want of a little money, he walked beyond the city gates, and at about 8 o'clock he found himself on a long and lonely road which stretched straight on till it was lost in the dusky gloom.

Then, like an evil omen, there came a heavy crash of thunder, and great drops of rain began to fall. Jacques did not fear the storm except as concerned his clothing and his health. He did not wish to spoil his garments or catch an expensive attack of pneumonia. No shelter; to the right, as to the left, a barren plain. At last by good fortune he spied a tree standing alone, a crooked, twisted apple tree. The tired man crouched under its branches. The fury of the storm redoubled. Everything, even nature, seemed against poor Jacques. Chilly, soaked, exasperated, he shook his fist in the air as the rain fell down like threads of steel.

"Such weather, such weather!" After a little a second person came grumbling up to lean against the tree, with his back to Jacques, whom he had not perceived. The newcomer seemed to be a little tipsy, for he rambled on aloud in a husky voice:

"This is fine! Those fellows played me a pretty trick in driving off with my carriage and leaving me to walk home alone with all this money in my pocket."

Jacques, hearing these fatal words and yielding to the temptation of his evil passion, fell upon the stranger, strangled him and emptied his purse. This accomplished, he turned toward home.

The apple tree, which had not budged during this incident, began to follow him.

It is not a customary occurrence for an apple tree to follow a man, and therefore Jacques cannot be accused of weakness if we admit that he felt a little surprise. Hearing the roots sliding behind him, he turned and beheld the tree, a dark shadow on the darkness.

"I am nervous," he thought. "It is a fancy!"

He continued to walk, and the tree continued to follow him.

"Either I have gone mad," said Jacques, "or this manifestation is an inexplicable freak of nature. But I shall soon know, for when I get into the city the people will not let an apple tree go by without making some remark."

But the people passed and made no remarks, and the tree did not appear to mind them.

Jacques meditated.

"Well, then," he continued, "it is certain that this apple tree is a visible form of remorse, such as Banquo's ghost was to Macbeth and the commander to Don Juan, but this hallucination is the more singular because I feel no remorse at all. The tree seems to disregard received tradition. Never mind. I have got some money. After a night's rest my tree will have disappeared."

He quickened his step not to escape from his apple tree, but because he was weary and longed for repose. Before the door he wondered if the apple tree would enter. He even felt a kind of interest about it on account of the narrowness of the hall, fearing the branches might be broken. He rang, went in, and the door closed. The tree remained outside. Jacques smiled, not that the tree annoyed him, only he thought the janitor might have objected to such a companion.

In his own room he counted his ill gotten gain, a considerable sum; then he suddenly thought of the tree and looked out. It was on the sidewalk, gliding to and fro. It even moved politely aside to allow two policemen to pass. Jacques went to bed and slept soundly till morning.

Heavy knocks on his door awoke him. "Oh! Ah! Yes, to be sure!" It was his friends, who came to seek him for the pleasure party. He threw on his garments and opened the door, greeting them gayly. Then he finished his dressing while proposing lively plans for the day. He slipped several gold pieces into his pocket, and they started off together to meet the rest of the company at the place agreed on.

The apple tree, which waited respectfully for him on the sidewalk, began immediately to follow him like a well bred lackey. Jacques, who felt no grudge, gave it a little smile of acknowledgment, as though it were an old acquaintance.

When the party of ladies and gentlemen was complete, Jacques insisted on regaling them all with vermuth and ordered the waiter to give one to his apple tree, though it seemed to sketch a gesture of refusal with its boughs. The waiter, who did not understand, looked angry.

As they entered the carriage to drive to the railway station Jacques gave his tree an amiable nudge with his elbow, making some joke about leaving it behind. Impassively the tree waited on the sidewalk till they started, when it followed the conveyance at a quick trot. Leaning over the window, Jacques watched it. Once he gave a little cry of terror as a heavy vehicle crossed its path and he thought it might be run over, but it escaped.

"What in the world is the matter with you?" exclaimed his companion in surprise.

"Don't trouble about me. It is only my apple tree"—

"Your apple tree? Why, what can you mean?"

But Jacques did not explain.

At the station the tree did not get lost. Jacques began to feel himself cruel in trotting the poor thing so far. He was growing attached to it really. He was soon reassured, for it galloped beside the train like an outrider attending the carriage of a sovereign.

Only Jacques was so absorbed in watching it that he neglected his friends, and one of them, a lady who liked him, reproached him gently for his preoccupation.

"You are jealous of my apple tree," he said laughingly.

"Apple tree! Apple tree!" They began to chant it to the tune of a popular song, improvising words which they thought appropriate. Jacques really feared they might hurt its feelings, but it did not seem to mind.

The chosen spot was reached. The day sped on in mirth. Jacques was wild with merriment, never losing sight of his attendant tree.

Some one proposed a row on the river.

"No, no!" cried Jacques. "Perhaps he may not know how to swim."

"Who?"

"My ap"—

"Apple tree! Apple tree! What is the joke? Do explain."

Jacques reddened a little. These people could not possibly understand. He looked at his tree as if to consult it, and it seemed to him that the tree had no objection to the water.

The boats set off, and the apple tree followed. Jacques kept on the alert, ready to hold out a helping hand, he was so fond of his tree.

In the evening at dinner Jacques imbibed recklessly, and he did not forget to fling a glass of champagne over his apple tree. He grew very tipsy and quarrelsome.

"I am tired of you all!" he cried to his friends. "You bore me inexpressibly! I shall leave you and go off by myself—with my apple tree!"

They laughed good naturedly and tried to keep him. The ladies looked annoyed, but off he went.

It was night now and very dark. He went along the steep bank, still accompanied by his tree. He felt horribly humiliated and ashamed, for he was staggering and stumbling, while the sober tree slid on erect and firm.

Jacques zigzagged along in a deplorable fashion nearer and nearer to the water's edge. Feeling the necessity of support, he sidled up to the apple tree.

"You are my friend," he said. "Let me lean on you."

He threw his weight against the tree, but his body encountered the empty air. He lost his balance, rolled down the steep declivity into the river and was drowned.

The tree, left to itself, returned to the field whence it came.—From the French.

Curious Eyes of Animals.

Many animals possess more than two eyes which do not act together. A leech, for example, has ten eyes on the top of its head which do not work in concert, and a kind of marine worm has two eyes on the head and a row down each side of the body. Some lizards have an extra eye on the top of the head which does not act with the other two. A bee or wasp has two large compound eyes which possibly help each other and are used for mere vision and also three little simple eyes on the top of the head which are employed for seeing things a long way off.

His Exasperating Calmness.

"Laura," said Mr. Ferguson, the dinner having progressed thus far without any comment on his part, "where did you get this steak?"

"At the usual place," his wife replied. "What's wrong with it?"

"Nothing. It's the best we have had for a long time. That's why I inquired. Did you think I was finding fault with it?"

"How was I to know?" said Mrs. Ferguson, slightly irritated. "You always do your grumbling and your praising in exactly the same tone of voice."—Chicago Tribune.

Wit Under Difficulties.

At the recent battle of flowers at Nice violets and white stocks seemed to be the flowers chiefly thrown, and Mr. Zangwill called to us as we passed him to be sure to throw him "some stocks which were going up!" Imagine any one being witty in the midst of a battle of flowers! —London Ladies' Field.

SPAIN'S PUBLIC RECORDS.

An Institution Not Paralleled in Any Other Country.

There are many interesting places in the neighborhood of Salamanca. On the carriage road from Valladolid is the old Roman city of Simancas, now reduced to a sleepy village of a few hundred inhabitants, inclosed in massive walls, which has been preserved from extinction by the little business attracted here by the archives of Spain. In the early part of the sixteenth century Cardinal Ximines established at Simancas a house of public records. It was a statesmanlike thing to do, and it is a pity his example was not imitated by other countries. Here in an enormous building erected for the purpose are 33,000,000 documents, divided into 80,000 classes, indexed and arranged in chronological order, reaching back as far as the introduction of the art of writing into the kingdom and coming down to the middle of the last century. They were arranged under the direction of Manuel Ayala, secretary of Charles V., and beside the records of state, the correspondence of ambassadors, the reports of military commanders, governors of provinces and other agents of the government, are tons upon tons of private correspondence of immense historical value.

There is no similar collection anywhere in the world, and upon the shelves are records not only concerning Spain, but England, France, the Netherlands, Germany and Austria, of which many writers have already availed themselves. Washington Irving and Prescott both spent months here and here obtained much of the material found in their histories. There is a large staff of clerks under the direction of the chief of the archives, who are always very obliging. They lead lonely lives and are glad to welcome strangers. Nearly always there is some one there, and often several people making investigations and copies of documents to be used in suits of law or historical writings. All documents dated earlier than the middle of the eighteenth century are shown at the discretion of the custodian, but later archives cannot be examined without a permit from the minister of the government at Madrid.

Ordinary visitors will be interested in inspecting the original deed of capitulation by which the Alhambra was surrendered to Ferdinand and Isabella by Boabdil, the last of the Moorish kings; original dispatches of Gonzalo de Cordova, the "gran capitan," the greatest soldier of his age; the inventory of Queen Isabella's jewels which she offered to pawn to raise money for Columbus, but they were not needed; her marriage contract with Ferdinand, which united four kingdoms; her last will and testament, and also those of Charles V. and Philip II. None of the documents, however, relates to America. Those are all preserved in a similar manner in the Longa, the old chamber of commerce building at Seville.—W. E. Curtis in Chicago Record-Herald.

The Heroic Butler.

During a church congress at Bristol the lord mayor of the city gave a reception to the members of the congress. The place was crowded almost to suffocation, and one prominent clergyman from the north of England after having been duly presented to the lord mayor and lady mayoress found himself carried on by the crush through various rooms until he was taken again into the entrance hall, where a stream of comers was still being presented. He could not escape one way or another. The butler asked his name, when he at once replied, "I've been in before."

Immediately the butler called out in a loud voice, "The Rev. Mr. Been-in-before!"—London News.

Natural Enough.

"I don't understand your method at all," said Miss Obesity somewhat irately to the professor of physical culture. "I have just been talking to Miss Skinny Bones, and she says that your advice to her is exercise and diet. Now, you have told me that diet and exercise are what I need. How can you possibly hope to accomplish such different ends with the same means?"

"Simplest thing in the world, madam," answered the professor. "Your cases are exactly reversed. A mere reversion of the medicines is all that is necessary."—Detroit Free Press.

What He Needed.

The physician pondered the case for a few minutes before he ventured an opinion.

"I think your husband needs a rest more than anything else," he said at last. "If he could be convinced of that"—

"But he refuses absolutely to listen to me, doctor."

"Well," returned the physician thoughtfully, "that's a move in the right direction."—New York Times.

Her Friendly Service.

Nell—You and Jack Sterling seem to be quite chummy these days.

Belle—Yes; Jack's a good fellow. He's going to marry May Simpson in a month or so.

Nell—I knew they were engaged, but I thought she was growing cold.

Belle—Oh, she's warming up now. I've been giving her the impression lately that I wanted him.—Philadelphia Ledger.

The Story of a Trial and Acquittal and Its Sequel.

In the year 1803 there arrived in Florence a traveler, accompanied by a servant. They took quarters in the best hotel. The stranger asked the proprietor how he could amuse himself during several days' stay in town. The proprietor regretted exceedingly that there was but little choice in amusements, the season being nearly over. But a trial for murder and arson, he said, was going on, and if the honorable visitor would but attend the court doubtless he would be interested to the same extent as was the populace for miles around.

The stranger took the advice and managed to get a seat in the front row of the spectators' benches in the courtroom. The defendant protested his innocence and asserted that at the time the crime was committed he was not in Florence, but in Rome.

Circumstantial evidence piled high against him, however, and his case seemed hopeless. Suddenly his eyes met those of the stranger.

"Your honor," cried the prisoner, "I have just found the man who can prove me innocent!" Then he asked permission to address the stranger openly and to put several questions to him.

The permission was granted, but the stranger said he had never seen the defendant before.

"But," asked the accused, "were you not in Rome in February a year ago?"

"What of it?" was the return.

"Do you remember a man in a blue suit who carried your trunk one stormy night to the Hotel Roma?"

"I do," the stranger answered.

"Do you recall that on the way from the post wagon to the hotel the man told you he had fought in the Spanish army, and he showed to you a saber cut on the forehead which he received while in that service?"

"That, too, is correct, and I dismissed you with a French coin, not having changed enough money to the currency of the country," said the traveler.

The prisoner brushed his hair back from his forehead and showed over the left temple a deep scar.

The crime for which he was on trial had been committed in Florence on the very day the two men were together in Rome. The judge accepted the alibi and acquitted the prisoner.

Three weeks later three highwaymen were captured following a robbery of the post wagon bound south from Florence. The three prisoners were the traveler, his servant and the man with the scar. The "traveler" and his servant had gone to Florence merely to get their confederate out of his scrape, and the trick would have succeeded had not the three continued their operations and been caught. All three were sentenced to death.

The Way to Make a Cannon.

Turaccioletti obtained leave to visit the manufactory of weapons at Terni. An engineer politely showed him round, but soon grew weary of the innumerable questions to which he was compelled to give courteous answers. At length Turaccioletti decided to take his departure, but on reaching the door he said to the guide:

"Before I go would you mind explaining to me how they manage to construct a 100 ton steel cannon?"

For a moment or two the engineer was speechless, but soon recovered his equanimity and replied: "Oh, it is not so difficult as you think. You take a hole and put the steel all round it!"—Corriere dei Bagni.

In the Eighteenth Century.

The old adage that there is nothing new under the sun has been verified anew by the reference recently in London Truth to La Coterie, a woman's club established in London in 1770. Men were also members. The following were among its rules:

That the women shall ballot for men and men for women.

That no man shall be balloted for but by at least eight women present.

That no woman shall be balloted for but by at least twelve men present.

That upon any woman becoming a member of this club her husband shall become a member, of course.

The Word "Creole."

A creole, strictly speaking, is any person born in this country of foreign parents. Because the word is from the Spanish criollo, a child, the use of it has been restricted, first, to children of foreign parents born in Louisiana and, second, to children of Spanish or French parents born in Louisiana, and then in the north the word has been perverted so that it is believed to imply some strain of negro blood in a person to whom it is applied. It does not imply anything of the sort.

Held on to the Handle.

"Did you hear about the game worked on Harker in the skyscraper this morning? Some sleek chap walked in and told Harker if he'd give him an umbrella he'd go up to the roof and come down holding on to the handle."

"Did he?"

"Yes. He came down in the elevator, and I guess he's holding on to the handle yet."—Philadelphia Record.