

## The Ragman

**A**MONG all the curious characters with whom, I, in my short experience have ever met, none has appeared so ludicrous and amusing to me as the Jewish rag-picker. He is no stranger to the community where I spent my grammar school days. On the contrary he is a quite common character and his visits to the neighbourhood are of frequent occurrence. Rare was the week and despoiled of much delight to the "gang" when the ragman as he was called, failed to make his customary rounds through the back yards and more particularly of the ash cans where he hoped to get something for nothing as the saying is. But often he found that commodity where he least expected, or rather to speak more accurately when he least anticipated it. I speak of the reception accorded him by the members of the gang, that organization one of whose most pleasant duties it was to let no opportunity pass of demonstrating in a tangible manner the great pleasure given to them by the visit of the ragman to their district. As to how this was done I know or, at least, trust you will not be too inquisitive.

It is fitting that we should, at this point, attempt some description of the object of such solicitude and attention so that if you ever see him in your travels you may at least recognize him, not, however that you may extend to him the hearty and enthusiastic greeting that he has been wont to receive from the gang. Indeed I doubt if you could ever attain to such a point, for the boys, rest assured, had set a high ideal in that regard to which even they sometimes failed to attain owing to some sudden exigency upsetting the otherwise harmonious and tranquil order of things, such as the abrupt arrival of a——— but I must come back to my narrative, lest if I should take you with me in the hurried scamp through back yards, over fences and down alleys you might lose sight of the central figure of this history.

His appearance usually, one might say almost invariably was not exactly prepossessing but the "fellers" were willing to pardon any minor disrespect shown

them, such, for instance, as his appearing in their midst in undress, thereby showing ill-appreciation of the dignity of his hosts. He was generally of short stature which was poorly set off by faded trousers well fringed at the cuff as ornamentation, I suppose, and magnificently patched for varied coloring effect. In keeping with this part was the rest of his apparel. His coat, for example, was——well it would never be worn again by a devotee of the fashions. But it suited him, or at least, he persuaded himself that it did. His shoes which had long since fulfilled their allotted span of life, owing to their feeble condition induced by a long and active life, were ready and desirous to be rid of this hurry and bustle world of ours, but their time was protracted and lengthened and drawn out by their penurious master who feared lest he should dismiss them without having extracted their fund of service to the last pennyworth.

But what was, perhaps, the most striking feature of all was his superfluous beard which literally compelled admiration. As a necessary adjunct to this adornment, it seemed, were his eyebrows which probably served best in partly concealing his eyes, thus promoting in him doubtless the illusion that he could see without being seen. One would be led to think so, for many times it seemed wonderful to the boys that he should think he could work his "phony" tricks, as they designated them, without being caught. Upon such a hairy back-ground as we have attempted to describe was raised the aquiline nose, the great distinguishing facial feature of the Jewish people. As an indispensable part of his equipment was the rough burlap bag resembling greatly the ordinary potato bag and often one and identical with it. This, for greater convenience in carrying, was strung over his shoulder. Such a person, as I have tried to describe in the ragman in general. To fully appreciate his appearance you must needs see him yourself.

Some more fortunate individuals of his class had outgrown the primitive stage in the business and had advanced to the use of wagon and horse if so we may term the animal which did service between the shafts,

although to tell the truth, it would be reflecting upon the species to include the aforesaid animal in this category. However, as the members of the august body sitting in judgment upon the case had not as yet reached their zoological studies having overcome the substantial difficulties of true and false, or I mean bank discount, and having not yet accustomed their already overcharged minds to the additional burden caused by certain rules in grammar which conflicted with the general ideas and opinions of the gang, they were hardly qualified, as they readily confessed to decide with certainty the name of the beast and to save unnecessary worry they defined "aforesaid animal is or rather was a horse."

Now strange to say this latter class of visitors received a more hearty welcome, a more enthusiastic reception than their less fortunate brethren. Just what the reasons were for the preference must be left to the investigations of those with greater psychological erudition than we pretend to possess. Suffice here to say that the preference did exist.

The arrival of a member of this division was hailed with intense delight. He was accustomed to draw up at some regular station from which base, he would make his descent upon the ash cans of the neighborhood and other places where the prey for which he sought might be located and run to earth. This he did having previously armed himself with one or two bags into which he temporally consigned his prized captures. We will not follow him in his crusade but leaving him to carry on his work assisted? by delegates from the gang let us turn our attention to the real scene of action.

You are well aware of the laudable custom of stabling your visitor's horse thus relieving said animal of the burden of carrying the unpleasant load of harness and the uncomfortable restraint of shafts. The fellows, then, being conversant with the dictates of hospitality or what you might wish to call it, did their very best in this regard. True there was no stable or other shelter within convenient reach but they overcame this difficulty as best they could. At least they

could "sorter" rearrange the stiff dress of the horse in an endeavor to relieve him, believing that "a change is as good as a rest" when the rest is unobtainable. Unfortunately it frequently happened that the one delegated for the performance of this benevolent office lacked sufficient knowledge of the purpose for which harness exists and consequently rather embarrassing and inconvenient arrangements were given said harness. One peculiar accident of not rare occurrence was the unaccountable crossing of reins under the horse's head. Another, too, was the loosening of part of the breeching which in some mysterious manner was almost sure to happen and which resulted——well, it is not necessary for us to recall any painful details. Now such minor disarrangements would inevitably have been discovered by the boys in due time had not the solicitous owner, in his customary kindness to his horse, been in the habit of returning frequently to administer to his needs (the depositing of forage in the wagon being only incidental you may be sure.)

That these returns of the solicitous one were a cause for the mistakes remaining uncorrected will appear more evident to the reader when he reflects that the boys neither sought nor desired any reward for their charity beyond the soothing knowledge of work well done, and therefore refused absolutely to await the return of the ragman who undoubtedly (and as they well knew) would not be able to refrain from expressing in an unmistakable manner his appreciation of the attention of his hosts. His regret at the absence of these latter on his return, was generally of such intensity that it would find vent in animated expressions which we have neither space nor inclination to here record, but which nevertheless were gratefully recorded in the memories of the boys, who were hidden at no great distance, lest such rare gems of animated discourse should perish.

Much more could be written concerning the amiable and friendly relations existing between these two parties but time does not now remain and we must redirect our attention to other more pressing matters.

C. T. '19.