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My Tussle with the Devil

and Other Stories

O. HENRY'S GHOST

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The New York Public Library
* *
The Merle Johnson
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The Barrage Fire

I FEEL I cannot give O. Henry's Ghost better ammunition with which to meet his critics than a bit of truth voiced by Joan in one of Algernon Blackwood's wonderful books.

"The beloved dead step nearer when their bodies drop aside. They know where they are and what they are doing. It's not for us to worry —in that way. And they are *out of hours and minutes.*"

To meet the onslaught of you, Mr. Scoffer and Mr. Skeptic, who will say, "Impossible! They are not a bit like O. Henry's stories! They lack all his virility, etc., etc." I say at once, of course they are different! Where before his stories were written in the bold black and red of human passions, which belong to materiality,

Johnson 28 Nov. 1925

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Comments

THE COMING OF THE STORIES

FROM the first we used the Ouija Board not as a toy, but as a serious medium through which we received guidance in our affairs and teachings of the Great Law of Life, for which we were searching. We were determined to have only the truth, and so we eliminated the frivolous and deceiving, who are ever on the watch for the ignorant user of the "Board" —to amuse themselves with his credulity, or through sheer devilishness to lead him to disaster—material and spiritual.

Those with whom we talked were Great Invisible Teachers—who were on the Earth plane to help humanity —and a close relative whose develop-

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"Over There"

O. Henry's Ghost Answers the Questions of a Newspaper Man Regarding "Over There"

SO he desires to know how we folks live?

Queer! the idea humanity hugs to its breast of how different life must of necessity be over here.

Tell him that at present it is New York at its worst, on a day of celebration,—with streets crowded, people pushing in all directions, friends meeting, exchanging greetings and passing on. To us life is the same, with the exception that now time is no longer a factor.

Our emotions are the same—until we learn the wisdom of eliminating all unworthy ones.

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My Tussle with the Devil

IT was the hour when souls simply cling to their bodies by the merest thread—when I met His Satanic Majesty.

He is well named, for he is majestic in every sense of the word—majestic of mien—majestic of gesture, of expression, and a god to look upon.

He is a deceptive person, for one meeting him casually would think he was one of the great and good men of the day—abroad on errands of mercy and with kindness in his heart for all humanity. So carefully does he conceal his identity that he resembles most of mankind—who are one person to themselves and quite another to the world of men.

We met. He knew me, but I had not yet had the pleasure of knowing

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The Contest

Yucatan—Time: Midnight

LIFE met Death in the room of Joe, who lay on a bed in the corner, with a pain-racked body.

Suspense as to the visitant made him almost unconscious, yet thoroughly cognizant. It was as if some part of his brain stopped, while the rest leaped away from the body—then, with a whirl which made him reel, leaped back again.

Gazing at him from a chair which stood in front of the fire was a softly clad woman. In her hands was myrtle and thyme, which made mysterious shadows upon the wall.

His humble room seemed decorated by a master hand. Each individual article took on a luster hitherto unknown.

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Yearning

THE lamps on the street throw fitful shadows upon the pavements, which glisten with many raindrops.

Walking slowly, with bent shoulders and bowed head, is a man with slightly graying hair. Round and round the square he walks, glancing neither to the right nor left, until finally, wearying, he crosses the street and enters a house where the curtains are closely drawn.

Bits of smilax, rose leaves and trodden violets can be seen about the steps, and as he opens the door, the air is charged with escaping perfume.

With a hasty glance at the heavy draperies which conceal the opening to *the* room, he mounts hurriedly the stairs, and with trembling hands turns the knob of a door.

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Weariness

I.—THE KING

PACING forward — backward — backward — forward, to and fro—a King. With world weary eyes he gazes out of his window in search of his soul's desire.

Before him a seething mass of heads, with eyes riveted upon him. Immovable, he stands and contemplates them.

Of what do they think?

Have they souls which long and cry out, day and night, for liberty?

Or are they satisfied with the narrow ring in which they move?

Do they know the joy of freedom: of vast expanses?

A surge of hatred passes through him and he has a longing to slay that

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Missionaries

I.

JUST outside of a walled city there is a field of white—little, delicate, slim emissaries of peace, wafting their messages of healing broadcast. With a ringing of delicate musical bells, they say:

"Come with me! Here is joy and peace."

Within the walls a lonely watcher in a tower looks and listens.

Hidden from view are the tools of trade.

Gazing on the field, he muses on the infallibility of the law, which with undeviating regularity brings forth the thousands of tiny Heralds. Surely they are a symbol of some part of that Great Whole—some plan is back of their being!

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Multitudes

WITHIN the darkest recesses there is a vast multitude seeking expression — rising with each multitude a little higher.

Rubies, who gather to themselves the fading glory of the sun, secretly desire the millions of rays which the diamond has secured,—while Sapphires, holding the blue winged lights of the moon,—seek in vain to acquire the rustling of trees and grasses, the running of water,—within their form.

Insensate?

Round and round the spiral they travel,—ever spurred, by the force lying within each and every one, to be more than they are and to express All!

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Going Home

THE sky was heavy with menacing clouds, and wind —howling dismally as it blew through the trees— when I met a wayfarer who was walking, with downcast eyes, along the highway which skirted the town.

Gazing at him sharply, I met a furtive glance, which held within it pleading, and yet had an assurance which was compelling. He hesitated when we came abreast, and as I felt in the mood for converse, I bade him "Good-evening."

"It is a *good* evening, is it not," he replied. "Good, in its freedom of elements. They make merry to-night."

This was a strange answer, and my curiosity was piqued, and I felt constrained to lead him on further.

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My Hearth

GRANDFATHER sits in an old armchair. The back of it boasts an anti-macassar in many colors, while the seat has a patchwork cushion.

Grandmother occupies a low rocker, which moves slowly to and fro, as she softly hums the hymn of the Sunday service.

Keeping silence is grandfather's "long suit"—while making, in reality, *my* life.

He is a sturdy old chap, with a will and determination which has carried him beyond anti-macassars and patchwork cushions, and centered itself upon me. No fly was ever more helpless!

I make the announcement:

"Life is going to give me something more than this country town."

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The Three H's

PART I.

IN a tavern, which was on the waterfront and visited mostly by sailors on shore leave, lay a semblance of a man. He was tattered and in rags. Crouching at his feet was a dog as forlorn as he was and in a starved condition.

Standing around the pair was a circle of men—the regular habitués of the place.

"Where'd you find him, Pete?" inquired a sour-visaged standee.

"On the wharf. I heard the dog, and as my boy wants a cur, I followed the sound. But love ye! I couldn't touch the dog, for he was that crazy at seeing me. Seemed like he would never stop running around

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The Senses

SEEING:—

From my nest on shore I gaze across the sea to a tiny speck of white which appears on the horizon—a fluttering sail.

Suddenly, a swiftly darting thing of gray—a puff of smoke—

I strain my eyes in vain, but nowhere can be seen a fluttering sail of white or the darting thing of gray.

Only the ever-moving sea, gleaming with light!

FEELING:—

What tragedy has been enacted?

How many souls have silently bid adieu to the sunshine and the sea?

To what home is the news carried?

How many hearts are made to suffer?

How many homes bereft?

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Yesterday—To-day

A Fantasy in Three Parts

PART I.—YESTERDAY

LITTLE wisps of clouds I meet as I wander by the sea,—fragile as lacy petticoats that imprison the form. Useless they seem to be, but as I watch I think I see a form. Multiplying, I mistake seeming for fact, and revel in the vision they recall.

Cloudless skies—dazzling sunshine—heavy scent of flowers, and floating upon the breast of the jeweled sea, a barge—gay with silken draperies, flowers and the music of many blades cleaving the waves.

Upon a golden couch lies a softly clad nymph. Sapphire are her eyes, alabaster her arms, coral tinges her mouth and pearls gleam, as the sun warms and bathes her in its rays.

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Action—Reaction

ACTION

A VILLAGE nestling among the pines. Only the buzz of insects and hum of bees, together with the accompaniment of rustling branches, breaks the silence.

All is peace and harmony.

Hark!

From afar sounds a discordant blatant note. Nearer it comes, ever growing harsher, until at last, at the end of the street is seen a mounted horseman, with a bugle at his lips. With one final blast he summons all the peaceful souls, who crowd about him. He watches them, as they gather, with an appraising eye, and then with uplifted hand commands silence.

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A Vision

N the far distant East gleams a light—faint but effulgent, and as I watch it moves slowly, majestically, westward.

Still I gaze, and watch it ever going higher, moving more swiftly, and growing ever brighter and larger.

Still I gaze:

Swifter becomes its movement, more dazzling its light, and lo! from what seemed a speck when I first gazed upon that light, has grown a golden bird with outstretched wings gleaming and sending showers of golden radiance with each movement.

Westward it moves, ever expanding, ever more dazzling, until at last all the face of the world has been showered with the glimmering gold from its wings.

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