

## THE GREEN DAMNATION

OR

The Apotheosis of the Epigram.

BY JOHN HARRISON.

**A** GOOD plot ruins a poor play," murmured Lord Weggie, inclining his fair head until his silky lemon-tinted hair was bathed in and empurpled by the passionate splendor of the metropolitan sunset, "It attracts attention and interferes with conversation. A novel with a purpose should be condemned uncut."

"On the contrary, Weggie," interrupted his friend Frappe Absinthe, "novels with a purpose should be cut and never condemned. You can damn a book into any number of editions."

"People such as Mrs. Humphrey Ward," said Weggie, "should be punished for masquerading as novelists. They reveal the cloven prayer book in the very preface. I am negatively inspired to write a novel. It should be devoid of plot or purpose, and shall not even be printed. This will disarm the critics. It will be an immense success."

"Immense successes are gross. The popular author or politician has no individual right. To be great is to be nobody. The man that has made success must tolerate bores. He cannot select his acquaintances. It is better to know everyone than to be known by anyone—even one's self. Ambition when realized becomes extinct like the Dodo."

"Frappe," said Lord Weggie, glancing at the glint of his patent-leather shoes admiringly, "I will put you in my novel and make you immortal—I will cull your most brilliant epigrams to gladden the hearts of the aborigines of the centuries to come."

"I believe," remarked Mr. Absinthe, with a sigh, "one has to give one's soul in exchange for immortality. You should have mine, Weggie, but since I was foolish enough to marry I have not been able to call it my own. That is the worst of marriage; nothing belongs to you when you are married—not even your children."

"Do you believe in morality?"

"One cannot believe in that which does not exist. Belief in morality requires faith in the unseen. Faith is a synonym for ignorance. Faith died with the introduction of the public schools. It will soon be bad form to be educated. The true aristocracy of the future will know nothing, disbelieve in clothing and eat missionaries."

"I wish I had said that, Frappe."

"You will—in your novel."

"Oh, Oscar! Frappe! What would Whistler say if he heard you?"

"Nothing until I was out of hearing. I never repeat my good things. He does that for me."

"Let us visit Mrs. Balmoral and Madame Vaulteasay."

"They assist conversation with their ears, but are apt to spoil it with their tongues. But they occasionally prompt, so we will go. Let us be brilliant fortified by the Green Damnation."

"Here come Lord Weggie Margarte and Mr. Absinthe," said Mrs. Windsor, looking from the window of her boudoir. "I suppose they have come to give us their best epigrams. What is there in life equal to an epigram? Oh, if one could only be an epigram."

"One can become one morally," said Madame Vaulteasay, "by grow-

ing down to it."

"They are more brilliant than ever, since they discarded the Green Carnation and adopted the Green Damnation."

"What is the 'Green Damnation?'" inquired Madame Vaulteasay; "as poor Lady Locke used to say, 'is it a badge?'"

"No, it is a drink. It is absinthe. The Green Carnation, you know, was dyed with arsenic, and so many of the dear wits lose their lives from the poison acting on their morals, or some other vital organ, that it had to be given up—by law. So they took to drink and of course they chose absinthe."

"I have just been hearing about the Green Damnation," said Madame Vaulteasay, as they entered the room where the gentlemen were seated. "Is it a badge?"

"It is the life of life," returned Mr. Absinthe, "for life is an epigram, and the Green Damnation is the vital spark of the epigram. It is Absinthe."

"Are you the High Priest of the cult?"

"If there is a cult, its object would be to lay High Priests low."

"Ah, you mean that for wit!"

"I never mean anything for wit but wit. It is the best imitation of itself I know."

"I do not understand you."

"If you did, I might understand myself, and that would be fatal."

"Frappe," exclaimed Lord Weggie, with passionate indolence, "you must be drunk, you are so dazzling, so transcendently brilliant to-night."

"Not intentionally. One cannot not get drunk intentionally. The intention to make me drunk was with the yellow sunlight, the morning air, and the quiver of the green grass pulsating with the heat of summer passion, which ripened the purple clusters of grapes foreordained by the Fates to grow that I should be made drunk. The intention lay with the picturesque picker, the sordid manufacturer and distiller, and with the avaricious and extortionate wine merchant, all of whom labored with the intention of making me drunk. I am merely fulfilling my destiny. I am what these people have made me."

"Frappe," murmured Lord Weggie, "you are godlike!"

"I only know the gods in marble," replied Mr. Absinthe. "They are cold, I am warm. If they were warm I might be able to judge better."

"We have," interposed Mrs. Balmoral, "an excellent chef, and," pointing to the velvet lawn, in the centre of which was a statue of an Adonis, "we have a god in marble. I will have him warmed over if you wish it."

"You smile," said Madame Vaulteasay to Mr. Absinthe, "but you do not laugh. Now I come to think of it, I never heard you laugh."

"A smile sweetens the countenance, but laughter distorts it. The canons of art forbid a laugh. Laughter is vulgar and ends in tears."

"Dear me," remarked Mrs. Balmoral, "how wise that is, Solomon might have said it."

"Solomon," replied Mr. Absinthe, except for his name, which sounds Jewish, was a great man. He refined sin and made it beautiful. He wrote down his passionate thoughts when they were sparkling with the dew of the bursting amber beads of the champagne of his time. I do not know the name of the brand, but am

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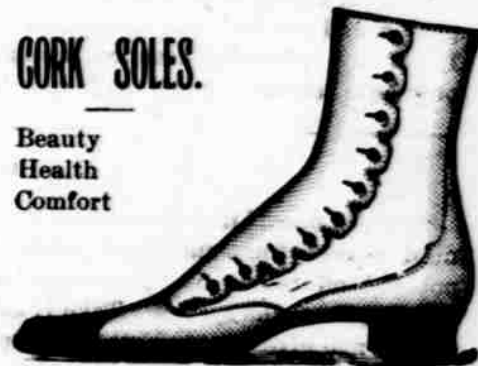
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