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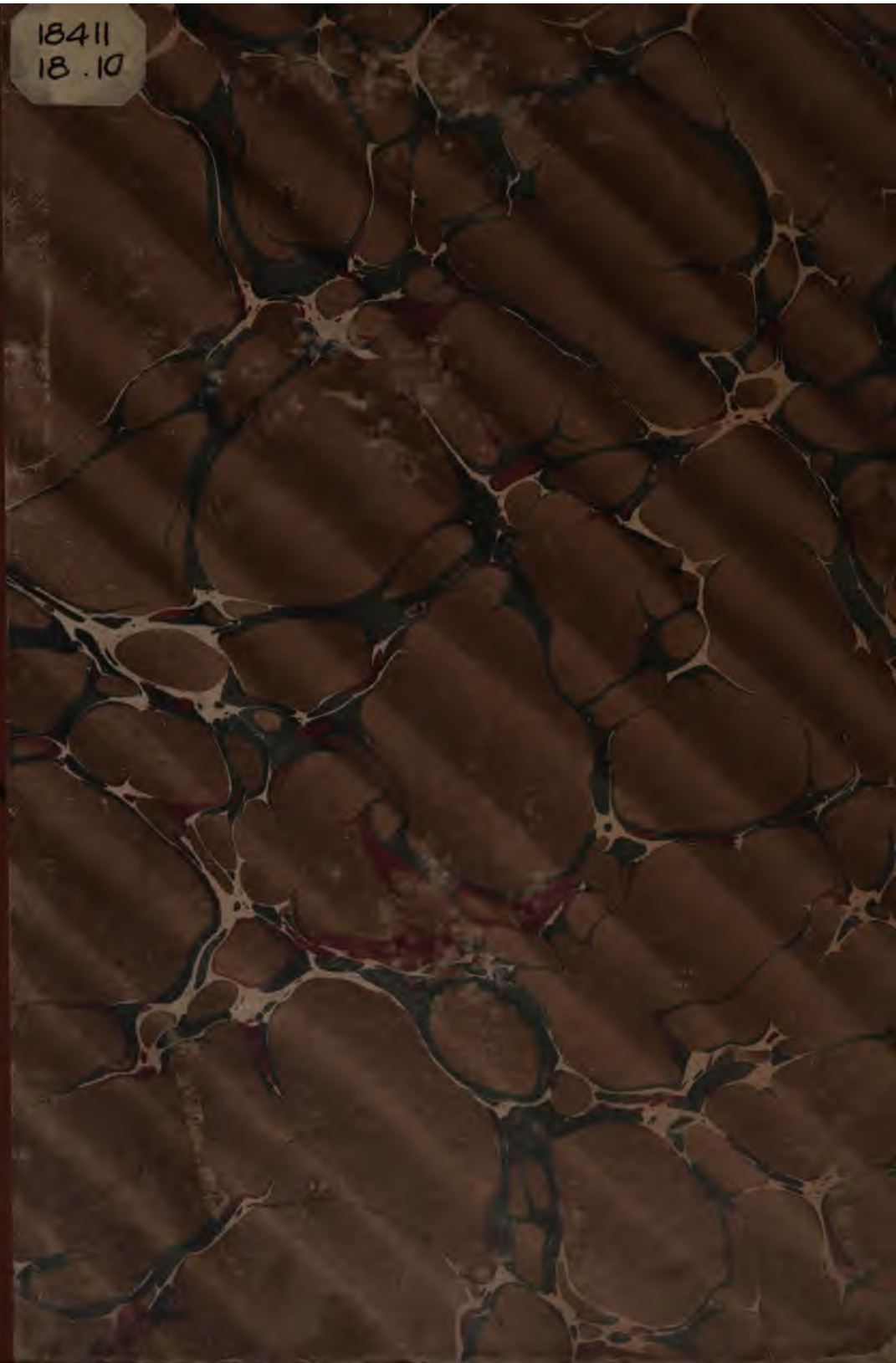
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Coiler - The Happy Man's Shirt and
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FROM

Prof. Hyder E. Rollins





THE
HAPPY MAN'S SHIRT,

AND

THE MAGIC CAP.

IMITATED FROM THE ITALIAN.

[PRIVATELY PRINTED.]

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Prof. Hiden E. Rollins,
Cambridge

For James Bruce Collier
Lent to Prof. H. B. Conner

THE HAPPY MAN'S SHIRT,

AND

THE MAGIC CAP.

I have no wish, grave matrons, to divert you,
Nor do I write to virgins stale and prudish :
Austere impostors, what I say can't hurt you,
When I address gay youths, whom you call rudish,
And maids, who couple reason with their virtue ;
Who think there's nothing worse in language nudish,
Than in nude Grecian statues, without drapery,
Which show God's image in pure nature's napery.

If you should meet a word that seems too warm,
A shade of fancied ill, where none's intended,
From which your conscience takes a false alarm,
Don't read the tale, and you are not offended :
To turn the leaf is certainly no harm ;
But, if you will read on, when my tale's ended
Don't make sour faces.—After this preparative,
And friendly warning, I commence my narrative.

'Tis of Arsaces, who once reign'd in Ormuz,
 Descended of an ancient, warlike race ;
 But he lov'd pleasure, and spent sums enormous
 On jousts, and games, and tournaments, to grace
 Damsels, whose beauty, were we ice, would warm us
 With but a beam of each sunshiny face :
 In banquets, plays, and dances, pass'd the night.
 Was not the Sultan, think you, in the right ?

One reason, why to such excess he carried
 These entertainments, was to please his wife :
 Irene, boast of all the East, he married,
 And from his rivals bore her without strife.
 However humbler faces may be varied,
 Princes are always handsome: proofs are rife,
 Since the first monarchs of the world began.—
 The Sultan was the model of a man.

They liv'd in perfect harmony some time,
 As man and wife should do, but oft do not :
 Suspicion never hinted at a crime
 That could the fame of either of them blot.—
 Arsaces had a soul that soar'd sublime
 Above the wisdom of this earthly spot,
 And to augment his stock of wondrous knowledge, he
 Delighted both in magic and astrology.

His court was throng'd with many a sage professor
 Of these rare sciences.—But most of all
 He was desirous to be made possessor
 Of all events in future to befall ;
 And to be render'd better than a guesser
 At others' secret thoughts.—One day in Hall,
 A great magician brought a Cap: my history
 Says 'twould reveal the mind's most hidden mystery.

In fact, so wondrous were its properties,
 The wearer could not choose but make exposure
 Of all he thought and knew, "withouten lies."
 But if the Sultan heard some sad disclosure,
 He promis'd never to betray surprise,
 Sorrow, or wrath, but bear it with composure:
 Indeed, he swore it; yet the sage was loth
 To trust him even then, upon his oath.

Yet was Arsaces, I should say, most strict
 In his adherence to whate'er he swore;
 And him no mortal ever could convict
 Of any breach of faith pledg'd heretofore.
 He had a conscience that was quickly prick'd;
 Which is to say of him a great deal more
 Than can be said of many another Prince
 Reigning on earth before him—aye, or since.

He deem'd himself supremely blest with this
 Truth-telling Cap, by which he could avoid
 Fraud, treachery, flattery, anything amiss,
 And lead a life of pleasure unalloy'd.
 How ignorant is man of what is bliss,
 And how it may be kept, or how destroy'd!
 Each coming ill, that on our joy encroaches,
 Seems smaller, if we see not its approaches.

Arsaces first resolv'd that he would try
 The virtue of the Cap on an attendant,
 A slave much valued for fidelity,
 His Chamberlain, and favourite dependant;
 Who, sleeping in a room that was close by
 The Sultan's chamber, (namely, at the end on't)
 Us'd to be ready, at a moment's warning,
 To give his service every night and morning.

Marzucco was his name, a vigorous youth,
 Well built, and with a handsome face, though sooty,
 Such as might please an Eastern lady's tooth ;
 And often, as a portion of his duty,
 He came to the bed-side : to tell the truth,
 Irene then admir'd his manly beauty
 More than was proper.—For a monarch's ransom,
 Husbands, ne'er keep a Chamberlain that's handsome.

Meeting Marzucco one day at a distance,
 In a lone chamber of the royal palace,
 Arsaces clapt the Cap on, sans resistance :
 He never dream'd of treachery and malice
 In one who seem'd a pattern of existence,
 Though really richly meriting the galleys ;
 As will be seen from what Marzucco said,
 The instant that the Cap was on his head.

But let me pause.—I had forgot to mention
 That 'twas a property of this same Cap
 (Not the least wonder of the rare invention)
 That he who wore it had a sort of nap
 While it was on, all senses in suspension ;
 And when he woke again, the magic trap
 Was so complete, he knew not what he'd uttered,
 Although his tongue had run as it were buttered.

Said he—" Irene loves me, and I know it ;
 But, ah ! how rarely mc she can caress !
 I love her, too ; why should I not bestow it
 On one as beauteous as the Sultanness ?
 Like her, alas ! I can but seldom show it,
 Her husband keeps so close to her ; unless
 I run all risks, and hazard our impunity.
 How vain to love, and want an opportunity !"

The Sultan grasp'd his dagger, as he heard,
But instantly remember'd he was bound
By oath to take no vengeance. Thus deterr'd,
He snatch'd the Cap, and hurl'd it to the ground,
Which the slave brought again without a word :
Marzucco only saw Arsaces frown'd,
But knew not why ; nor could he ever guess
The truth the Cap compell'd him to confess.

For hours Arsaces all his Court forbore ;
Strive as he might, 'twas idle to conceal
That anguish prey'd upon his inmost core.
Revenge he sought not, but he still must feel.
He rued the time he bought the Cap, or swore
To bear unmov'd whate'er it might reveal.
How oft we wish a thing, and, having gain'd it,
Curse our unlucky stars that we obtain'd it.

All marvell'd hugely what could be the matter,
But none could tell. At last, while he reflected
On what had past, he 'gan himself to flatter
With hopes his Queen ought not to be suspected.
As drowning men still catch at straws in water,
Thinking to save themselves, he recollected
The words the Cap extorted might express
Love for some lady not the Sultanness ;

But an Irene the slave thought as fair.
And while Arsaces fed this hope, though faint,
The Queen came in, adorn'd with careless care,
In purest white, and looking like a saint.
He never saw her look more lovely, ne'er
Had known a face more free from vice's taint :
Beauty and innocence seem'd blended in her :
Angels might fall ; she could not be a sinner.

A kiss she gave the Sultan, so luxurious,
 He could not help returning it, though coldly :
 She smil'd to find him frigid and penurious,
 And kiss'd again, to make him kiss more boldly ;
 Till, as before, his love grew almost furious,
 And she regain'd her empire uncontroll'dly.
 Man is at best a duped, deluded dotard,
 A governor no less so than a goatherd.

Just then, Irene saw the fatal Cap,
 Where he had flung it on a marble stand,
 As she was sitting on the Sultan's lap.
 'Twas vastly pretty—took it in her hand—
 And, just as if predestin'd to the trap,
 She put it on, by her own act trepann'd.
 'Twas done in such a moment, he'd no time
 To stay her hand, ere she confess'd her crime.

Her inmost secrets she betray'd most speedily,
 While poor Arsaces listen'd to the whole.
 "Where's my Marzucco, whom I love so greedily,"
 (She cried) "that I adore him with my soul ?
 Convenient husbands may be welcome needily,
 But love's a tyrant queens cannot control :
 Arsaces may just do for now and then,
 But my Marzucco is the man of men !"

Arsaces, when he heard her thus confess
 With her own lips, without a tinge of shame,
 But most unconsciously, her wantonness
 With him from whom before he heard the same,
 He could not doubt her guilt, and his no less.
 His bosom in an instant was all flame ;
 This fatal confirmation of her treason
 Depriv'd the Sultan of his sense and reason.

He seiz'd the Cap, and, frantic with emotion,
He hurl'd it from the window in the sea.
Absorbing water, some maintain the notion
It reach'd the bottom, where it still may be;
But others say 'twas rescued from the ocean
By a pearl-diver. 'Tis the same to me:
In fact, in neither party I've confided,
But leave the curious point quite undecided.

The Sultan's face was deathly pale, then red,
All in a moment: next, upon the floor
He senseless fell, and lay there as one dead.
Irene what had caus'd it knew no more
Than if the Cap had never touch'd her head.
She scream'd aloud, and, running to the door,
Call'd the attendants, who, with speed arriving,
Found the young monarch only just reviving.

The object that first met his languid eyes
Was his Irene; and he turn'd away
With loathing and disgust, to the surprise
Of all who mark'd it: but, although to-day
He was recover'd by their remedies
Out of his swoon, a deadly weight still lay
Upon his heart, and all attempts to lighten it
Were merely vain, or his dull eye to brighten it.

He wasted fast.—The Sultanness attended
Upon him day and night, with seeming care,
With which such lovely blandishments she blended,
She look'd to all as innocent as fair;
Save to her husband, whom she but offended
By new hypocrisy: as if for air,
He often put her back, while leaning over him.
Each day the chance seem'd less they could recover him.

PART II.

When every means had been essay'd, but vainly,
 Physic and pleasure, both in great variety,
 And the whole Court discover'd very plainly
 Nothing avail'd; so great was their anxiety,
 The Magi were conven'd, because all mainly
 Trusted the wisdom of that fam'd society:
 'Twas hoped they might discover, by their science,
 Some wondrous remedy, and its appliance.

This great assembly, I perhaps should note,
 Met but in cases of the last resort,
 To settle matters worthy of its vote.
 The oldest Magus only could report
 Of three such meetings; but an antidote
 To the King's illness was requir'd, and for't
 The summons issued. 'Twas a great emergency,
 Demanding such a measure by its urgency.

The Magi's Hall was in the royal palace,
 And for the purpose had been us'd before.
 Arm'd soldiers lined the passages and alleys
 Leading thereto, and guarded the great door.
 They show'd their wonted insolence and malice
 To the unprivileg'd, upon the score
 They were not Shieks, Bashaws, nor Magi's cousins,
 Whom they, of course, allow'd to pass by dozens.

These oracles of vast and various learning
 Open'd their mouths, and divers plans propounded,
 Which, by the Sultan's health and strength returning,
 No little to their fame would have redounded.
 One argued to persuade the most discerning
 A splendid mosque should by his hand be founded;
 Another urg'd a pilgrimage to Mecca,
 All charges to be borne by the Exchequer.

At length the sage Abumelek arose,
 His mystic wisdom to expectorate:
 He strok'd his beard; and, as you may suppose,
 With mute respect the other Magi wait
 To list the mode of cure he should disclose.
 Euphrates, Tigris, owned his sapience great,
 And of his learning they had different versions
 Among the Tartars, Arabs, Medes, and Persians.

Raising his awful eyes, he thus began:
 "Such is between men the extreme disparity,
 I must point out the means—I only can.
 The Sultan shall recover his hilarity
 When he puts on the shirt of any man
 Who's truly happy: though he be a rarity,
 All other remedies are merely quackery."
 A sudden burst of most vociferous claquery

Follow'd this solemn speech, and there was no man—
 No Magus rather—ventur'd a reply.
 The more, indeed, the scheme appear'd uncommon,
 The greater its infallibility.
 They all admir'd the prescience superhuman
 The virtues of this shirt that could descry.
 Without more talk, for every one declin'd it,
 The only question now was—where to find it?

They sought in Ormuz first, and its vicinity,
 For happy men: not one, alas! was found.
 Satraps and Bashaws of high consanguinity
 Were sent to travel Asia's confines round,
 And met with few that had a slight affinity
 To happiness within their utmost bound.
 They searched Armenia, Araby the blest,
 But found none really happy, east or west.

In monarchs they saw pride of high estate,
 But in the heart a constant dread of treason ;
 Loaded full often with the public hate,
 Fearing assassins, not without good reason,
 With minor evils that on thrones await :
 False splendour, falser joy prevail'd a season,
 While far above the mob, or what some call so,
 Wretched themselves, they made their subjects also.

In nobles they beheld an empty boast
 Of doubtful ancestors—bad kings' abettors :
 Those who obtain'd their Prince's favour most,
 Were earliest victims to the axe or fetters.
 Against some envy rais'd a grudging host
 At their great wealth, though but insolvent debtors.
 It was quite clear, with all these ills begirt,
 That such an order could not own the shirt.

'Mong meaner subjects they observ'd distress
 In every shape that it could be presented.
 Lean poverty aspirants would repress,
 And competence made thousands discontented.
 Blank disappointment marr'd the happiness
 Of a pale few, who noblest works invented ;
 While oft a tyrant's cruelty or whims
 Depriv'd the virtuous of their lives and limbs.

One man they saw, by too severe a fate,
 Once bless'd indeed in single-hearted blindness ;
 But having stiff opinions, with a hate
 Of mean subservience, risk'd a patron's kindness,
 Who, though he knew great truth to estimate,
 Yet could not quite forgive him. With resign'dness
 This fool preferr'd to starve himself and family,
 Than down the throats of men in power to cram a lie.

From the Egæan to the Indian main,
 Through cities, towns, and hamlets, they proceeded,
 To find one happy man, but sought in vain,
 To furnish them with what so much they needed.
 Most of the Satraps and Bashaws again
 Return'd, and told that they had not succeeded ;
 That for the shirt they'd rummag'd every quarter,
 But could not find it on the land or water.

Thus we oft-times an eager dog have known
 Rush for a stone into a lake or river,
 Which by his master purposely was thrown,
 And 'neath the waves may lie conceal'd for ever :
 The dog looks on the surface for the stone,
 Swimming about ; and, after vain endeavour,
 Returns to shore, leaving the stone behind it,
 And all but says, " Master, I cannot find it."

It chanc'd, however, that two Satraps came
 Into that land, of which there's a description
 In the first book of Genesis ; the same
 Which some have said was Persian, some Egyptian :
 It is quite needless I should give it name.
 All perfect joy inhabits by prescription
 Where our first parents liv'd among the flowers,
 In bliss, perhaps, for four and twenty hours.

Proceeding onward, in a lovely valley,
 Still fragrant with perfumes of Paradise,
 As if they lov'd on this sweet spot to dally,
 The Satraps saw a shepherd, simply wise,
 Who tuned his pipe within a shady alley
 To two young maidens with bliss-beaming eyes,
 Who, while their hands or slowly mov'd, or quicker,
 As the time chang'd, made baskets of white wicker.

A faithful dog was at the shepherd's side :
 Another peasant, vigorous, light, and lusty,
 To sprightly dance his bounding feet applied
 Upon the greensward, anything but dusty.
 The burden of the song they all divide
 In a melodious chorus, full and gusty,
 While woods and hills repeat their careless jollity :
 If not the most refin'd, 'twas pure in quality.

Apart the Satraps stood awhile, to mark
 A sight so full of honest mirth and pleasure.
 The shepherds seem'd content ; like morning lark
 They sang, and such content is heaven's treasure.
 Conceal'd behind a myrtle's foliage dark,
 One of the Satraps said—"Beyond all measure,
 Above all others, these appear most joyous,
 Free from those cares that constantly annoy us.

"How can it happen that among the poor
 We see such bliss? for we are certain it is
 What rank and fortune never can insure
 In wealthy provinces and stately cities.
 Who knows we may the shirt at last procure
 From these ; if not, it is a thousand pities.
 Here we've a better chance than in high palaces,
 Where men drink sorrow out of golden chalices."

The other, pausing, answer'd: "I confess
 I first was struck, as you appear to be:
 But what you note is not true happiness,
 Only a little temporary glee—
 An interval from toil and hard distress,
 To which the poor are doom'd by just decree.
 Though now they dance to merry pipe and tabor,
 To-morrow they return to grief and labour.

"As we have sometimes seen a frisky ass
 Break from hard bondage, when too frail his bridle :
 With ears erect, he gallops o'er the grass,
 Free from his load ; but all his hopes are idle :
 He brays and snorts for joy ; too soon, alas !
 His freedom fails ; his rapture is but tidal :
 His master comes with whip he oft had tasted,
 And he's re-brought, re-burden'd, and re-basted."

To settle this wide difference between them,
 The Satraps both resolv'd to make experiment,
 Though one had held, at first, it would demean them
 Even to ask their real cause of merriment.
 The peasants ceas'd the moment they had seen them
 Come from behind the myrtle.—"Friends, in veriment,"
 One Satrap said, bending in his advances,
 "Don't let us interrupt you in your dances.

"We only have approach'd you with design
 To ask you why you are to-day so merry ?
 You seem quite happy, and I should incline
 To think you so."—The shepherd answered, "Very :
 We dance and sing in either shade or shine ;
 But what you see is not extraordinary :
 We have no toils ; and even cares borne lightly
 Lose half their weight : grief is to God unsightly."

The Satrap stood a moment in deep thought,
 And then demanded—"Wish you nothing more?"—
 "I am content and thankful, as I ought,"
 The shepherd said ; "Content is never poor ;"
 The Satraps hoped they now had what they sought,
 A happy man, with shirt that would restore
 The Sultan's health—"You're happy, then? Pray answer."
 "Indeed I am," replied the jocund dancer.

No sooner had he given this assurance,
 Than they both seiz'd him. He, much fearing hurt,
 Call'd lustily for help; but they in durance
 Still kept their man, and both of them assert
 They meant no harm to him, but for the curance
 Of their sick king they must obtain his shirt:
 "Give us your shirt," they said, "without resistance."—
 "My shirt! I ne'er had one in my existence."

The fact was so.—They started back in wonder:
 He wore no shirt, nor had one to his back!—
 The Satraps, disappointed of their plunder,
 To Ormuz recommenc'd their weary track,
 Vex'd to the heart they had made such a blunder,
 To think a man, who ne'er had cried alack,
 Should be as shirtless as your present Poet,
 Nor knew the want, until they made him know it.

And reaching Ormuz, where their journey ended,
 The Satraps to the Magi soon reported
 The stars had not their anxious search befriended;
 That they who shirts and such like luxuries sported
 Were not as blest as flatterers pretended,
 Who to the dwellings of the rich resorted.—
 This is my moral—true as it is hurtless—
 The really happy are the really shirtless.

And ye, who live in palace or in mansion,
 Take comfort from it, 'mid your irksome riches:
 If ye a Poet leave 'neath heaven's expansion,
 Without a roof, a shirt, or even breeches,
 Ye do him but a favour; for he can shun,
 By being poor, (though hunger have its twitches)
 The thousand ills that with the rich have prevalence.
 Keep the poor poor; for that is true benevolence.

THE END.





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