

THE LION'S MOUTH

THREE PIGS

BY DON MARQUIS

I SAW three pigs under an oak-tree—a white pig, a black pig, and a black-and-white pig. They were talking as they ate acorns, and I hid on the other side of the tree to listen.

"I am not what I seem," said the white pig, curling his tail proudly and cocking his head to one side in a very conceited manner.

"Nor I," said the black pig. "I have seen better days."

And they both looked at the black-and-white pig as if expecting him to make some claim for himself. But he only grunted, his mouth full of acorns.

"I," said the white pig, "was a friend and companion of Ulysses. When we landed on Circe's island, after we burned Troy, the enchantress turned us into swine. But my spirit has never complied with my apparent condition.¹"

"I," said the black pig, "am perhaps the most splendidly wicked pig extant. I am a devil. I came from hell originally, and I was one of several devils that lived in the body of a man who dwelt beside the Gadarean lake, until a prophet came and drove us forth and made us inhabit a herd of hogs."

"Huh! huh!" said the black-and-white pig. "I'm a hog. A real hog. Just a common hog."

"I have seen things!" cried the white pig, looking with scorn upon the acorns, even as he continued to root for them. "I have been places!"

¹ We had assumed that Homer's account of this episode, concluding with the restoration of the entire company of Ulysses to human form, was the final word on the subject. Mr. Marquis evidently has reason to believe that one of the unfortunate crew did not answer the roll-call.—EDITOR.

"I was one of Satan's most trusted young fiends," said the Gadarean swine. "I was spoken of all over hell as a rising young devil . . . a devil of promise . . . a fiend with a future before him. And to come down to this!" And he, too, shuddered as if with distaste as he ate the acorns; nevertheless he continued to eat them.

"Come down to this? What's the matter with this?" asked the common hog. "Here is plenty of good food!"

Circe's hog and the Gadarean swine exchanged looks of intelligence. It was easy to see they had the most utter contempt for the ordinary pig.

"A low animal!" murmured Circe's pig.

"A hog, just a hog!" said the Gadarean swine.

"Hog, common hog," said Circe's pig, "you may well be contented. You have never heard the battle-cry of Achilles when the spears clashed and the shields were as a sea, nor have you seen the face of Helen shining above the dust of war."

"You have never been to hell, common hog," said the Gadarean swine, "and the person who has never been to hell has never been anywhere nor seen anything."

"Ugh!" said the ordinary pig, placidly. "Mighty fine, no doubt, all that. But I get along, I get along."

"Oh, for the rushing of the chariots!" said Circe's swine. "And, oh, the laughter of the ships along the sea!"

"When the powers and princes of evil came slanting in black flight to take their places in full conclave," said the Gadarean swine, "there was a fine sight against the red dome! And I have seen the brazen capitol of hell pulse and

tremble like a fiery lily in the wind when Satan spoke his will."

"Ugh!" said the common hog, not exactly understanding, but conscious that he was being outdone. He sought in his memory for some exploit of his own, or some knowledge, that would make him more important. Finally he said: "I know where there's a loose board at the side of a corn-crib. If the three of us together would poke and root around there for a while, we might nose it off and get into the corn."

"Vulgar beast!" said Circe's hog.

"No background!" muttered the Gadarean swine.

"Such a thing to suggest to me!" said Circe's hog. "I, who have hung sword to sword with Hector, and would have had his blood but that a goddess saved him!"

"Or to me," said the Gadarean swine. "I, who whispered Herodias to bid her daughter ask for John the Baptist's head on a charger! Yes, that was my idea!"

"To fall to such company!" said the Argive hog.

These pearls of reminiscence cast before the common hog finally began to anger him, and he said:

"Brag about what you used to be as much as you like! I do not care what you were. But do not be so contemptuous of me; or, if you feel so, keep it to yourself and cease to insult me. I am only a common hog; I claim to be nothing else; I have never been anything else—but, all the same, I do not choose to be insulted and blamed for being a common hog when I cannot help it. You, by your own testimony, were once my superiors; you wail about your declension in life. It seems to me that to have been something very important and to have fallen is nothing to boast about. If you were really proud and superior you would say nothing of your past glories, but would recognize the fact that you are now hogs and would devote your energies to being as successful hogs as possible. The one of you has ceased to be a hero, the other

can no longer be a devil; well, then, you can both be hogs! And if it hurts you to be hogs, let it hurt you secretly. At least do not try to make those discontented who have no hope beyond being hogs."

"Never," said the Argive hog, "will I comply! Fate has cast me down, but in my heart I am still unconquered. I will never consent to be a common hog!"

"Nor I!" said the Gadarean pig.

"Well, then," said the common hog, slyly, "it is no use showing you that corn-crib with the loose board."

The superior pigs looked at each other, and they thought of the corn, and the slaver began to drip from their jaws.

"After all," said the Gadarean pig, "we used to eat, even in hell."

"Yes," said the swine of Circe, "after all—"

"Lead us to it, hog," said the Gadarean.

"I will eat the corn," said the Argive hero, "but, nevertheless, in my spirit I will not comply."

"Exactly," said the common hog; "you will be a real pig while you are at the corn, as greedy as any of us; and then you will turn aristocrat again and insult the hog that led you to it. Nevertheless, come on."

And the ordinary hog led them off, chuckling, and thinking that he had proved his superiority over them. But, as I reflected on the matter, I was not so sure that the common hog was right. For the words of an old Oriental proverb came into my mind:

"It is better to be a crystal, and be broken, than to be merely a tile upon the housetop."

THE DESPISED INDIVIDUAL

BY C. A. BENNETT

I HATE Armitage. Whenever I think of him I say softly to myself, "Something with a little boiling oil in it." We have just parted in anger—I hope forever. If I tell you why our "meeting broke up in confusion," you