

## T W O W I S E M E N O F G O T H A M .

WITH THEIR REMARKABLE SAYINGS AND DOINGS.

— 'I do love  
 To note and to observe: though I live out,  
 Free from the active torrent, yet I'd mark  
 The currents and the passages of things,  
 For mine own private use.'

WHAT was the nature of the train of thought in which I was indulging last Sunday morning, I really cannot pretend to say, but my pen had been dawdling along by itself over the sheet of paper spread before me; probably it was a letter — possibly a love-letter — possibly not. The date was fairly written out; 'Dear,' and a portion of a flourishing capital, plain enough before my eyes whenever they chanced to turn in that direction; but so far as I am conscious of having done any thing at all, I was intently gazing into our own and the neighboring backyards, where a miniature deluge, worthy of a pigmy Pyrrha and Deucalion, was being visibly enacted. An antediluvian Shanghai, having curtailed himself of nearly one-half of that portion of his person above high-water mark, was gazing with the remainder in stupefied despair over the waste of waters about him. My pretty little bantam-rooster, his stockings all down at the heel, and his toilet in sad confusion, rolled himself all up in his tumbled white feathers, till there was neither form nor comeliness to him, and crowded close up to his shivering Biddy for comfort. Even glorious old chanticleer had forgotten to sound his clarion that morning. Poor fellow! — there he stood on one leg for a full half-hour, never once thinking of his fine flowing tail-feathers dragging in the muddy waters, nor of his golden-red plumage that used to glance so in the sun, now all ruffled, and be-draggled, and torn; nor yet could he muster up spirit to toss aloft his drooping, blood-red crest; but he drew in his humbled head as far as he could get it, into the bristling row of neck-feathers, and ruefully nestled up to his old enemy the Shanghai, and the coquettish little bantam-hen aforesaid. But Shanghai had been in terribly bad humor the whole morning; for his gouty toe was not materially benefited by the hydropathic treatment, and he had been swearing audibly in excellent Chinese at the villainous customs of the outside barbarian land; and now he drew up the afflicted member with extraordinary care, and lifting it high above the raging flood, strutted off with a degree of pomp and importance extremely at variance with his actual condition and appearance. But the soggy bricks and spongy sod could afford but little consolation in his comfortless plight, and little to soothe his injured pride; so after marching with stately tread, like an opera-hero under difficulties, up and down his narrow domain, he was fain to creep back, dispirited and woe-begone, to the sorry group he had left, and ill could his craven

spirit brook the mild, reproachful glance of his ancient noble foe, and mean and abject was his port, and crest-fallen truly his visage, as he stole, shivering and dejected, into the disconsolate group, and edged up to the insulted rooster. A boy's new sled hung like a brightly-blazoned scutcheon over the opposite basement-door, and a pair of rusty skates dangled forlorn by their straps from the hinder-most spoke. 'Delectable weather for the holidays, truly! Jupiter Pluvius! St. Swithin! Naiads! Water-gods and goddesses all!—have mercy!—pity our low estate!——'

Goodness gracious! what a slap that was! 'Frank Fantome!—is it possible!—are these your manners?—to enter thus a gentleman's room and peep over his shoulder while he writes? Really I——'

'Pooh, pooh! rub away, and when you begin to talk reasonably, I can listen; meantime don't disturb yourself about your secret correspondence; no very alarming revelations have yet been made, nor are likely to be, while you stare in that stupid way out of the window. Hem—blank! You'd save me a precious deal of trouble were all your letters after the same model, and many another unfortunate I know would be the gainer. But, Sam, poor Mrs. Pincher down-stairs is in a sad way about you. 'Oh! he is so changed, Mr. Fantome; so wild-like; he never eats any thing, poor young gentleman! and doesn't seem to take any notice of any thing; and stares so when people speak to him, and makes such strange replies; and he's taken to gin, Sir, in the most frightful way, and wears his shirt-collar turned down, and half the time no cravat; and then—oh! Mr. Fantome, it's awful!—such shocking things he says in his sleep!' Here—your ear, Sam; they say you've sold yourself to——'

'Whist!—yes!'

'The——'

'St!—softly!'

'OLD KNICK!'

'True!—it is, Frank!'

'Whe-e-e-ew! The dev——!'

'Hush!—it's his knock!—he's here!—the very same! Up—up on your chair, Frank!—it isn't the table this time. Now, presto! Nicodemus!—change!—appear!'

Slowly, silently swung open the door, and with a slouch and a grin, the imp stood in the room. Now, were it not for that ever unimpeachable character for veracity before whose sacred claims I and my fathers before me do reverently bow, I should summon to my aid at this crisis the whole armory of elemental war; blue forked lightnings should dart and quiver, and ghastly spectral shapes should glide athwart the darkness, and groaning sepulchral voices should come up, muttering, yet fearfully distinct, from the depths of the horrible pit. As it is, kind reader, bear with me for one paragraph more, while I go on to relate how devilishly grinned the sooty satellite, and snatched from my trembling hand a blotted roll, and vanished. Frank, holding his nose in both hands, dismounted from his pedestal.

'Villainous smell of matches in the room, though, Sam; where the dev——'

'Come, do 'nt speak of him again, Frank! That is the original

Lucifer, the patron-saint of all earthly match-makers, and worshipped in the very odor of brimstone sanctity by all old maids and dowagers, from the weddings of the fair daughters of men unto this present evil day.'

'Good heavens! look without, Sam! — how the clouds lower, and the fog sweeps darkling down, and the rain bursts in torrents on the white-washed walls! Black! black the murky vapors wrap us round! Felt you not the trembling timbers? — heard you not that roaring blast? Hark! hark! — the casements shake and rattle! — the shutters swing madly in the storm! — the sashes, they strain, they quiver! — furiously they clash together in the fearful gust! — they bend — they burst! Ho! heard you ever laugh like that? — it poured in upon the tempest — such demoniac glee! — such hellish merriment! Look! — look! — that blue, that ghastly flame! — it dances now! — it flashes! flickers! — it goes out! Why, Sam, you laughing now! All's still again; the room grows light; the fire burns clear and bright once more; that fearful, roaring blast has died away; the pall-like mist is lifting up; I see; I breathe again; the stifling sulphurous fumes no more infect the air! Come, help me to a chair! What is this all? What does it mean?'

'Simply, Frank, that you have upset my whole stock of spontaneous combustibles into the grate; that an unusually strong burst of wind has forced open my sashes, and has deluged my carpet, to its irretrievable ruin; that some unfortunate old gentleman in the street has made a forced offering of his Sunday beaver unto Æolus, to the extreme and boisterous satisfaction of half-a-score of news-boys; and last and greatest of all, you are yourself, Frank, not a little frightened, which accounts, *sine numine*, for all the phenomena in question.'

'Well, but — come closer; is it all nothing, then? Was not that black and blotted parchment signed with your best heart's-blood? Did you not therein contract, in consideration for sundry benefits derived, to belong, body and soul, for ever and aye, to the — the gentleman of whose amiable peculiarities so little is at present known, and who is popularly supposed to keep himself within very convenient calling-distance of those who need his services? Was not that same smutty-faced satellite one of the angels of his Satanic Mightiness? Did he not whirl away upon the violent speed of fire, bearing the fatal document down to the infernal court? Was it not the Prince of the power of the air sweeping by in hellish pomp and circumstance, rushing on with his stormy, noisy, boisterous train, that unrolled the black mantle of his majesty before us, and vanished amid demoniac shrieks and fiendish shouts of exultation? Was it not —'

'No, it was not! and the innocent youth you have so heartlessly maligned was my own private imp, sworn on this ponderous tome of Faustus, strictly commissioned to deposit one of my choicest manuscripts, penny-postage paid, in the outside slit of the city post-office, to be duly submitted to the tender mercies of the KNICKERBOCKER, on the Monday morning ensuing. But come — now talk sensibly — and here is a book concerning which I want your faithful, candid judgment.'

'"Soap-Fat: A Tale of City Life." Another of the romances of wretchedness, eh? Well, here's for the first chapter:

‘Under its blackened ceiling, decked with tawdry, drooping evergreens, lighted by a few dim burners, reeking with stale tobacco-smoke and the fumes of gin and beer; hot and close, pouring out its suffocating steam into the cold night-air; resounding with horrid blasphemy, and the loud, coarse, babbling clamors of drunken revellers; it cannot be mistaken; this is the dance-cellar of notorious Jim Poole! Enthroned on three large packing-boxes at the farther end, seen through the dim atmosphere of smoke and saw-dust, sit the orchestra — a quick-fingered negro, rolling his head unconcernedly around, sawing upon his instrument with a master-hand, drawing from it incongruous tones and strange jangling chords; an apoplectic mulatto flutist, and a plethoric bugler; these are the ruling spirits of the revels. Sailors, negroes, bandy-legged, flat-chested German tailors, in pantaloons that fit as awkwardly as German pantaloons alone can do; little pale-faced French cobblers; weary, languid women, bonneted and shawled, or with bare shoulders and arms, dragging through the tiresome dance.’ There, won’t that suffice for the whole, Sam? What is it all about?’

‘Why, Frank, this is one of the modern moral tales, read by good people of strong minds, with benevolent desires to be acquainted with all that is wretched, and wicked, and low, in all the myriad forms of ugly vice and poverty, throughout our great and wicked city. These are the tales that are brought into our parlors; that are perused and wept over by our wives and sisters and innocent daughters! — that teach the haunts of wickedness; that show the ways of vice to those that never dreamed of evil or impurity; that gloat over the miseries of Magdalens; that follow them down the slippery steps that lead them to perdition; that shed crocodile tears over the deep oblivious pits of infamy that hide their fearful end from view; that drag up the drunkard and the man of secret sin from their darksome dens; that flaunt out the ragged weeds of poverty, and the scanty tattered vesture of scarred and tainted vice, and ignominious crime; that do this, and then turn round in the face of high HEAVEN, under the glorious sun, and dare take the holy name of virtue upon their foul and loathsome lips, and declare before GOD, and in the sight of upright men, that they are doing battle in *her* cause, and in *her* name drag her pure banner through the polluted kennels where they themselves do most delight to dwell. This kind of reading, Frank, is much in vogue at present, at a time when charity has become fashionable, and when wealth is pouring in full streams into the channels which far-seeing and self-sacrificing benevolence has dug for it. When Five-Point missions flourish, and wild Maggies become famous, and lamp-lighters heroes, here spreads out at once an almost inexhaustible field of literature, and reapers enough are rushing into the harvest, and certainly sheaves enough are being gathered into the garner, and the fanning-mills of the critical press are having enough to do to winnow away the superabundant chaff. Now, on your conscience, tell me, Frank, is it not almost time that the sympathies of the reading-world should have some rest from the harrowing trials of juvenile news-venders with charitable impulses; of philosophical rag-pickers with economical propensities; of industrious soap-fat men of extended views and enlarged intellectual discrimina-

tions? Is it absolutely necessary that our ears should be perpetually open portals for the maudlin lamentations of drunken prostitutes? — that we should be ourselves familiarized in print with all the paths of those whose ways go down to death? — or that we should be continually straining microscopical perceptions to the discovery of virtues and excellencies in the lowest grades of life, to the exclusion and utter abnegation of all good in those above them? Now, because there have been good books written by competent hands, portraying vice in all its rags and filthiness, and rousing to efforts for its redemption, is that any reason why every petty penny-a-liner should pour forth his feeble soul in lamentations and insane ululations over the iniquities of the land? or should force his clumsy, disgusting daubs upon our heart-sick gaze?

‘Now our soap-fat boy, born of a street-prostitute, behind the tattered curtain of a dance-house, left a squalling, filthy orphan, upon the charities of this cold, blustering world, grows up, after a peculiar fashion that orphans have, till he reaches the mature age of seven; then he unites his destinies to those of an itinerant collector of grease, and thus his career begins. ‘Soap-fat! — soap-fat!’ — past windows, down areas, in lanes, in streets, in courts; still ‘Soap-fat! — soap-fat!’ The ugly soap-fat man stands scowling at the gate; the little soap-fat boy is higgling with Betty at the basement-door. Their deep, guttural tones break the morning quiet; their ragged shadows flaunt across the sunshine patches on the basement parlor-floor. Through all the city’s alleys, courts, and stately streets, the pair go slouching on. The surly soap-fat man can talk of soap-fat only; the little soap-fat boy trains his young lungs to the same hoarse, croaking tone; he drags his slip-shod feet along, and thrusts his cracked and grimy hands deep into his empty pockets, and echoes the dolorous song. Hard fare and kicks and blows are all of his reward; only one thing he knows, and that is, ‘Soap-fat! — soap-fat!’ — only one tongue he speaks, ‘Soap-fat! — soap-fat!’ His heroines are dirty house-maids; his divinities, greasy cooks; the paradise that never opens to his way-worn feet, the warm and cheerful basement dining-room; Bellevue-wards his chamber of death, and the Potter’s Field the end of his weary pilgrimage. So it seemed, at least; no ray of light to shoot across his gloomy path; no hope, to bless one moment with a smile; no love, no pride, no lofty thought, no cheerful dreams of future days; no bright portal, dazzling with glorious beams, and guarded round with serried ranks of radiant angels, at the end of steep, ascending paths that lead to heaven. No, no! — only a black, deep, muddy flood, stagnant, and dark, and cold, and a narrow, rugged, cheerless pathway that leads down to its brink! So it seemed then; and so the benighted soap-fat boy went stumbling on his obscure way, till the day when he met a little dirty rag-picking girl, harnessed up in the same cart with two laborious dogs, tugging on with might and main, and solacing herself meanwhile with a half-burnt bone. There had never been any thing very remarkable about young soap-fat’s mental exercises, nor any thing unusually favorable in his moral training. What it was, therefore, that should excite a chivalrous sympathy in his bosom at this particular moment, and should induce him to espouse the cause of this distressed damsel, we are left ourselves to conjecture; however, this becomes the turning-point in his career, and by exhibiting

all the virtues and heroism of all the Paladins for the rest of the volume, he attains a respectable position in life, supports, and is about to marry his tattered innamorata, when his course is arrested, and he sets off for heaven amid a shower of theatrical glories perfectly overwhelming. The loves of virtuous scavengers, and the plots of melo-dramatic hand-organ men, form a great part of the interest of the volume, and one thrilling chapter is made up of a minute description of a pitched combat between a flash-plaster image-peddler and a well-disposed but unfortunate bill-sticker, somewhat addicted to spirituous stimulants. All the characters are followed in their uprisings and in their lyings-down, through all the haunts of vice and infamy; not a wrinkle nor a plague-spot is spared to us in the loathsome picture; the fetid, noisome sores are bared to view; the writhing, distorted lineaments, the withered limbs are laid naked to our eyes; the foul exhalations, the sickening vapors, the atmosphere of death and disease wrap us round in their disgusting, clammy embrace; squalidness and rags, and drunkenness and ruin, and the cries of hopeless agony, and the muttered groans of uttermost despair — they form the back-ground and the hellish music of this black panorama, that moves on, ever, ever, ever, before our sickening gaze.

‘There are great flaring placards in the streets and in the shops, with startling queries, ‘Have you read Soap-fat?’ By-and-by, you will sit down with some agreeable lady in a pleasant parlor, and when the weather and other important questions are discussed, she will eagerly inquire of you, ‘Have you read Soap-fat?’ She will discourse learnedly on the mysteries and miseries of Soap-fat; she will be enthusiastic in her admiration of the lovely character of that dear Suet, and profoundly metaphysical in her appreciation of sweet little Cottonetta. Her eyes will glance vivid lightning as she recounts the villainies of Raga Muffin, and will gleam with the soft light of womanly compassion, through sparkling tears that flow in streams at the mention of poor little Margarina’s death. Great magazine reviews of Soap-fat will stare at you out of all sorts of covers for months to come; the cant of the tallow-chandlery will become the fashionable dialect; the refined images of soap-boilerdom will furnish pregnant classical allusions for all literary tea-tables; big painted banners will flaunt across wide thoroughfares, blazoning startling incidents in Soap-fat’s life; ‘The Hundredth Night of the Celebrated Moral Drama of Soap-fat, repeated to Crowded and Fashionable Houses, with Immense Applause,’ will be thrust into your face at every corner; you will climb into the cock-loft of a crammed theatre to witness an eternally-prolonged dramatic version of Soap-fat’s thrilling adventures; your heart will spring into your throat at the sight of his steadfast devotion to his erring mother’s Bible; you will ply your bandanna with unwonted activity when that circling cloud of white muslin floats before your eyes, and the still, hushed murmur of thousands’ sobs falls upon your ears, like the voice of summer rain, and the choked, gasping voice of poor Soap-fat goes up at last in a theatrical prayer, and theatrical angels bear aloft his theatrical soul to a theatrical heaven; and when the big green curtain rolls slowly down again, with a solemn roar, like the sound of mighty rushing winds in the tree-tops, you draw a long-



suspended breath and turn away, wondering you were so foolish, and buttoning your great-coat meantime over your throbbing heart. Managers will grow rich on Soap-fat ; publishers will amass fortunes by Soap-fat ; the author will hold up his head in the street and will buy a pretty little country-house with Soap-fat. There will be Soap-fat offerings ; societies for the amelioration of Soap-fat ; great Soap-fat meetings, and penny Soap-fat contributions ; there will be nothing but Soap-fat till the next new 'Moral Tale of the Appleman's Daughter' makes its appearance. And doubtless much good will be done, and many a poor orphan's tears will be wiped away, and many a dwarfed and starving mind will be hunted up, dwelling in a rough and dirty prison-cell, all shut up from the bright light of moral truth, and many such a one will go free and rejoicing on, in a new and blessed pathway, up to the pure, glorious day ; but the work will not be done by those who read Soap-fat, and are moved to tears by the story of Soap-fat's sufferings and his heroism ; nor by those who grow rich on Soap-fat ; nor by the one that wrote Soap-fat ; but by many a one that never heard of Soap-fat in a book, but found him and all his starving, benighted brethren away down in pits of pollution that they never told of to the world, nor boasted of in places of fashionable resort ; but blushing and shame-facedly they spoke of it in a corner, among a few like themselves, and rushed down to the rescue. What use is there of telling of all of Soap-fat's bruises, and his sores, and his filthy rags ? Why marshal Soap-fat into an army with banners, and parade him before plethoric stock-brokers and benevolent furred ladies ? Why make up pleasure-parties to pry into Soap-fat's haunts, and spy out all his nakedness ? Why use Soap-fat as a curiosity about to be metamorphosed into a human being ? Don't let Soap-fat alone ; give him money ; give him clothes ; teach him to read, and give him books ; teach him to work, and give him something to do ; make a man of him, and a good man ; but don't make him fashionable ; don't make him a phenomenon ; don't write novels about him.'

'Don't make long speeches about him either, Sam ! Really you must give me credit for some patience, considering that you have asked my opinion on some vital points, no less than half-a-dozen times, and have never once afforded me an opportunity of expressing it ; and here I have been sitting with my mouth half-open —'

'To its utmost stretch, Frank. If you have yawned once, it has been twenty times while I have been speaking ; but go on — go on ; I have done.'

'Well, that's a blessing, at all events ; but I came only to say that you must come with me to dinner. I have a fine auto-biographical scheme to talk over with you, and you have allowed me no time to do it justice here. But what say you, Sam, to a grand auto-biographical speculation — not that the world cares one straw about you or me in the abstract ; but an auto-biographical you or me, shut up in embossed and gilded muslin ! — your fine Vandyke oval staring at them from the frontispiece, or my Raffaelesque physiognomy looking over a Byronic collar, out from among the smooth-cut, pure white leaves ; or perchance let there be a half-apocryphal identity preserved. Let Samuel Seaton pillory the father that begat him, before the gaping, staring vulgar —'

masking himself, the executioner, meanwhile, under some well-sounding cognomen of vowels and smoothly-flowing consonants; let him blazon forth the unforgotten, rankling wrongs his brother has done him; let not a word be forgotten; let not a deed perish from that roll of infamy; let every hard, repulsive feature be engraven; let not remorse, let not one dying, lingering heart-throb of affection prevail in that hour, to erase one line or one wrinkle from that fiendish portrait, graved by the stern, the pitiless hand of a son's — a brother's hatred. Draw for the back-ground of this picture, worthy of a fury's pencil, a black and stormy field, whereon the bad, the evil-hearted, the cold and passionless doers of wrong are fighting for supremacy; cast over all a thin and flimsy veil of fiction; and then the world will care for you, and know you well; all your haunts, your trials, your wives, and the number of your children, and the back-attic where you earn your bread. Then you will have readers enough, and purchasers enough, and your publisher will rub his hands when he sees you, and ask after your next new book, with interest unfeigned. Or be a great financier, a false friend, a heartless lover, an opera-director, a quack. Betray the man that cherished you in his bosom in the winter of your adversity; lay bare all his little foibles, his tenderly-guarded prejudices, to the cold atmosphere of an unsympathizing, curious world. Reveal the weaknesses, the frailties of the woman you professed to love even unto death; coldly, cruelly unveil the little failings of her you swore to cherish and protect. Has she trifled with you? — has she mocked at your professions? — has she met your vows with heartless dissimulation, and treated the heart you offered her as a womanish toy? Show the world how nearly she was right, by publishing, with sound of trumpet, the history of that inglorious contest between woman's deep duplicity and art and man's diplomacy and desperate cunning. Or reveal to the crowd of admiring boobies the petty tricks of trade, the arts of charlatantry; or proclaim abroad the intrigues of ballet-girls and the *liaisons* of *prima donnas*; or write amusing libels upon eminence in all the four quarters of the globe, from the day you drew your earliest breath until the hour that you sit down, a worn-out, broken-down adventurer, to peddle out the stored-up scandal of fifty years of mis-spent life. Do this, and though you be in yourself more insignificant than 'the poor beetle that we tread upon,' yet shall you awake to find your name blown from fame's trumpet all throughout the land, and yourself shall be handed down to the admiring contempt of all posterity, coupled in ignominy with the great names that you have slandered.

From the revelations made to me by Frank Fantome that afternoon, in the development of his scheme, I am prepared to say that when that auto-biography of his *does* appear, there will not be a man, woman, or child in the country, possessed of any degree of intelligence, or any way considerably endowed with capillary covering, whose hair will not straightway assume an erect position, and maintain the same until such time as 'him list his magic-wand to wave,' and dispel those shadowy horrors with a burst of jocund merriment; and not a paltry, unlucky editor — and their name is legion — who ever returned one of Frank's brilliant essays, but the caitiff-knave shall quake and cringe beneath the knotted lash he wields in his unmerciful right hand.



## T H E W I N T E R W I N D .

HUSH! moaning wind, that murmurest past,  
With low, sad wailing filled;  
Peace! peace to the voice of the mournful blast!  
Wind, lonely wind, be stilled!

Some spirit of sadness thou must bear,  
O wind! on thy rushing wings;  
And this is the wailing sound I hear  
When that sorrowing spirit sings:

Thy voice is not that of the gentle breeze,  
That breath of the blushing spring,  
That sports 'mid the flowers and laughs 'mid the leaves  
Where the birds of the summer sing:

Nor the whirlwind's breath in its gathering might,  
By the wings of the tempest borne,  
When the lightnings gleam through the clouds at night,  
O'er the sky, where the storm rolls on.

But thine, O wind! is the chilling breath;  
And that voice, so full of sadness,  
It speaks to the heart of grief, of death,  
Of all—yes, all but gladness.

And it minds us too of the cold, dark tomb,  
Where sleep the silent dead;  
Of life when 'tis reft of its beauty and bloom,  
And its joy and its brightness have fled.

Thou art not heard when the spring is seen  
To come with her laughing showers,  
When she decks the earth in a robe of green,  
And wreathes her brow with flowers.

But thy voice is heard 'mid the naked trees,  
When the bright flowers all are gone,  
And thou comest to scatter the withered leaves,  
When the summer birds have flown.

Thou followest pale WINTER's icy feet,  
And thy voice its moaning keepeth,  
When the Earth, like the dead in their winding-sheet,  
In her cold, white mantle sleepeth!

Thou sigh'st o'er the grave where the lowly rest,  
Where no mourner comes but thee;  
Thy voice is heard on the ocean's breast,  
Far, far o'er the deep, dark sea:

And sad must sound that dreary wail  
Around some silent wreck,  
As howling through each tattered sail,  
It sweeps the lonely deck.