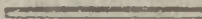


THE
MERRY TALES

OF THE

Wise Men of Gotham.



TO WHICH IS ADDED,
A COLLECTION OF JESTS.

*Of merry Books this is the chief,
It is a purging Pill,
To carry off all heavy Grief,
And make you laugh your fill.*



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THE
MERRY TALES

OF

The Wise Men of Gotham.

TALE I.

THERE were two men of Gotham, and one of them was going to Nottingham market to buy sheep, and they both met together on Nottingham bridge. Well met, said one to the other; whither are you going? said he that came from Nottingham. Marry, said he that was going thither, I am going to the market to buy sheep. Buy sheep! said the other, which way will you bring them home? Marry, said the other, I will bring them over this bridge. By Robin Hood, said he that came from Nottingham, but thou shalt not. By my maid Margery, said the other, but I will. You shall not, said the one: I will, said the other. Then they beat their staves one against the other, and then against the ground, as if a hundred sheep had been betwixt them. Hold there, said the one. Beware of my sheep leaping over the bridge, said the other. I care not, said the one.

They shall all come this way, said the other. But they shall not, said the one. Then said the other, if thou make much ado, I will put my finger in thy mouth. A turd thou wilt, said the other. And as they were in contention, another wise man that belonged to Gotham, came from the market with a sack of meal on his horse; and seeing his neighbours at strife about sheep, and none betwixt them, said he, Ah! fools, will you never learn wit! then help me, continued he, to lay this sack upon my shoulder. They did so, and he went to the side of the bridge, and shook out the meal into the river, saying, How much meal is there in my sack, neighbours? Marry, said one, none. Indeed, replied this wise man, even so much wit is there in your two heads, to strive for that you have not.—Now, which was the wisest of these three? I leave you to judge.

T A L E II.

THERE was a man of Gotham that rode to the market with two bushels of wheat, and because his horse should not be damaged by carrying too great a burden, he was determined to carry the corn himself upon his own neck, and

still kept riding upon his horse, till he arrived at the end of his journey. Now I will leave you to judge, which was the wisest, his horse or himself.

T A L E III.

ON a time the men of Gotham fain would have pinn'd in the cuckow, that she might sing all the year; and in the midst of the town, they had a hedge made round in compass, and got a cuckow and put her into it, and said, Sing here, and you shall lack neither meat nor drink all the year. The cuckow, when she perceiv'd herself encompassed within the hedge, flew away. A vengeance on her, said these wise men, we did not make our hedge high enough.

T A L E IV.

THERE was a man of Gotham who went to Nottingham market to sell cheese; and going down the hill to Nottingham bridge, one of his cheeses fell out of his wallet, and ran down the hill. Whoreson, said the fellow, what, can you run to the market alone? I'll now send one after another. Then laying his wallet down, taking out the cheeses, he tumbled them down the hill, one after another. Some ran into one

bush, and some into another. However, he charged them to meet him in the market-place. The man went to the market to meet with the cheeses, and stayed till the market was almost over; then went and enquired at his neighbours, if they saw his cheeses come to the market? Why, who should bring them? said one. Marry, themselves, said the fellow, they knew the way very well. A vengeance on them, they ran so fast, I was afraid they would run beyond the market; I am persuaded they are by this time almost as far as York. So he immediately rode to York, but was very much disappointed. And to add to it, he never found nor heard of one of his cheeses.

T A L E V.

A Man of Gotham bought at Nottingham market, a trevot, or barn-iron; and going home with it, his shoulders grew weary with the carriage. He set it down, and seeing it had three feet, said, Whoreson, thou hast three feet and I but two, thou shalt bear me home, if thou wilt; so set himself down upon it, and said to it, Bear me as long as I have done thee, for if thou dost not,

thou shalt stand still for me. The man of Gotham seeing that his trivot would not move, Stand still, said he, in the mayor's name; and follow me if thou wilt, and I can show you the right way. When he went home, his wife asked him where the trivot was? He said, it had three legs, and he had but two, and he had taught him the ready way to his house; therefore he might come himself if he would. Where did you leave the trivot, said the woman? At Gotham bridge, said he. So she immediately ran and fetched the trivot herself, or otherwise she must certainly have lost it, on account of her husband's want of wit.

T A L E VI.

A certain smith of Gotham had a large wasp's nest in the straw at the end of his forge; and there coming one of his neighbours to have his horse shod, and the wasps being exceeding busy, the man was stung by one of them. The man being grievously affronted, said, Are you worthy to keep a forge or not, to have men stung with these wasps? O! neighbour, said the smith, be content, and I shall put them from

their nest presently. Immediately he took a coultter, and heated it red hot, and thrust it into the straw at the end of his forge, and set it on fire, and burnt it up. Then said the smith, I told thee I'd fire them out of their nest.

T A L E VII.

ON Good-Friday, the men of Gotham consulted together what to do with their white-herrings, sprats, and salt-fish, and agreed that all such fish should be cast into the pond or pool, in the midst of the town, that the number of them might increase against the next year. Therefore every one, that had any fish left, did cast them immediately into the pond. Then said one, I have gotten so many red-herrings. Well, said another, and I have left so many whittings. Another immediately cried out, I have as yet gotten so many sprats left. And, said the last, I have gotten so many salt fishes, let them go together in the great pond without any distinction, and we may be sure to fare like lords the next year. At the beginning of the next Lent, they immediately went about drawing the pond, imagining they should have the fish;

but were much surprised to find nothing but a great eel. Ah! said they, a mischief on this eel, for he hath eaten up our fish. What must we do with him, said one to the other; kill him, said one; chop him in pieces, said another. Nay, not so, said the other, but let us drown him. Be it accordingly so, replied they all. So they immediately went to another pond, and cast the eel into the water. Lie there, said these wise men, and shift for thyself, since you may not expect any help from us. So they left the eel to be drowned.

T A L E VIII.

ON a time the men of Gotham had forgotten to pay their rents to their landlord. So one said to the other, To-morrow must be pay-day, by whom can we send our money to our landlord? Said one of them, I have this day taken a hare, and he may carry it, for he is very quick-footed; be it so, replied the rest; he shall have a letter, and a large purse to put our money in, and we can direct him the ready way. When the letter was written, and the money put into a purse, they immediately tied them about the hare's

neck, saying, You must first go to Loughborough, and then to Leicester, and at Newark is our landlord; then commend us unto him, and there is his due. The hare, as soon as he got out of their hands, ran a quite contrary way. Some said, thou must first go to Loughborough; others said, let the hare alone, for he can tell a nearer way than the best of us; let him go.

T A L E IX.

A man of Gotham that went mowing in the meadow found a large grasshopper. He immediately threw down his scythe, and ran home to his neighbours, and said, That the devil was there in the field, and was hopping amongst the grass. Then was every man ready, with their clubs and staves, halberts and other weapons, to kill the grasshopper. When they came almost to the place where the grasshopper was, said one to the other, let every one cross himself from the devil, for we will not meddle with him; so they returned again, and said, we were blest this day that we went no farther. O ye cowards, said he that left his scythe in the meadow, help me to fetch my

scythe. No, answered they, it is good to sleep in a whole skin: It is much better for thee to lose thy scythe, than to marr us all.

T A L E X.

ON a certain time there were twelve men of Gotham that went to fish; and some waded in the water, and some stood on dry land. And in going home one said to the other, we have ventured wonderfully in wading, I pray God, that none of us did come from home to be drowned. Nay, marry, said one to the other, let us see that, for there did twelve of us come out. Then they told themselves, and every one told eleven. Said the one to the other, there is one of us drowned. They went back to the brook where they had been fishing, and sought up and down for him that was drowned, making great lamentation. A courtier coming by, asked what it was they sought for, and why they were sorrowful? Oh! said they, this day we went to fish in the brook; twelve of us came out together, and one is drowned. Said the courtier, tell how many there be of you. One of them said eleven; but he did

not count himself. Well, said the courier, what will you give me, and I will find the twelfth man? Sir, said they, all the money we have got. Give me the money, said he; he then began with the first, and gave him a stroke over the shoulders with his whip, which made him groan, saying, Here is one, and so he served them all, and they groaned at the matter. When he came to the last, he paid him well, saying, Here is the twelfth man; God's blessing on thy heart, said they, for finding our brother.

T A L E XI.

A man of Gotham riding along the high-way, saw a cheese, so drew his sword and pricked it with the point, in order to pick it up. Another man came by and alighted, and picked it up, and rode away with it. The man of Gotham rides back to Nottingham to buy a long sword to pick up the cheese; and returning to the place where the cheese did lie, he pulled out his sword, pricking the ground, and said, If I had had but this sword, I should have had the cheese myself, but now another has got it.

T A L E XII.

A man in Gotham that did not love his wife, and she having fair hair, her husband said, divers times, he would cut it off, but durst not do it when she was awake, so he resolved to do it when she was asleep; therefore one night he took up a pair of sheers, and put them under his pillow; which his wife perceiving, said to one of her maids, go to bed to my husband, for he intends to cut off my hair to-night, let him cut off thy hair, and I will give thee as good a kirtle as ever thou didst see. The maid did so, and feigned herself asleep, which the man perceiving, cut off the maid's hair, and wrapped it about the sheers, and laid them under the pillow, and went to sleep: the maid arose, and the wife took the hair and sheers, and went to the hall, and there burned the hair. The man had a fine horse that he loved much, and the goodwife went into the stable, cut off the horse's tail, wrapped the sheers up in it, and then laid them under the pillow again. Her husband seeing her combing her head in the morning, marvelled very much thereat. The

girl seeing her master in a deep study, said, What the devil ails the horse in the stable? He bleeds prodigiously. The man ran into the stable, and found the horse's tail was cut off; then going to his bed, he found the sheers wrapped up in his horse's tail. He then went to his wife, saying, I crave thy mercy, for I intended to cut off thy hair, but have cut off my own horse's tail. Yea, said she, self-do, self-have. Many men think to do a bad turn, but it turneth oft-times to themselves.

F A L E XIII.

A man of Gotham laid his wife a wager, that she could not make him a cuckold. No! said she, but I can. Do not spare me, said he, but do what you can. On a time she had hid all the spiggots and fausets, and going into the buttery, set the barrel a broach, and cried to her spouse, Pray bring me a spiggot and fauset, or else the ale will all run out. He sought up and down, but could not find one. Come here then, said she, and put thy finger in the tap-hole. Then she called a taylor with whom she had made a bargain. Soon after, she came to her husband,

and brought a spiggot and fauset, saying, Pull thy finger out of the tap-hole, good cuckold. Beshrew your heart for your trouble, said he, make no such bargain with me again.

T A L E XIV.

A man of Gotham took a young buzzard, and invited four or five gentlemen's servants to the eating of it; but the old wife killed an old goose, and she and two of her gossips ate up the buzzard, and the old goose was laid to the fire for the gentlemen's servants. So when they came, the goose was set before them. What is this, said one of them? The goodman said, A curious buzzard. A buzzard! said they, why 'tis an old goose, and thou art a knave to mock us, and so in great anger departed home. The fellow was very sorry that he had affronted them, and took a bag and put the buzzard's feathers in it; but his wife desired him before he went, to fetch a block of wood, and in the interim she pulled out the buzzard's feathers, and put in the goose's. Then the man taking the bag, went to the gentleman's servants, and said, Pray be not angry with me, you shall see I

had a buzzard, for here be the feathers. Then he opened the bag and took out the goose's feathers. Upon which one of them took a cudgel, and gave him a dozen of stripes, saying, Why you knave, could you not be content to much us at home? but are ye come here to mock us?

T A L E XV.

A man's wife of Gotham was delivered of a male child, and the father invited the gossips, which were children of eight or ten years of age. The eldest child's name was Gilbert, the second's name was Humphrey, and the godmother's name was Christibel. Their relations admonished them divers times, that they must all say after the Parson. And when they were all come to the church, the Priest said, Be you all agreed of the name? Gilbert, Humphrey, and Christibel, said they all. The Priest then said, Wherefore came you hither? They immediately said the same. The Priest being amazed, could not tell what to say, but whistled and said, Whey, and so did they. The Priest being angry, said, Go home fools, go home. Then Gilbert, Humphrey, and

Christibel, did the same. The Priest then provided godfathers and god-mothers himself.

Here a man may see, that children can do nothing without good instructions, and that they are not wise who disregard them.

T A L E X V I.

A young man of Gotham went a wooing to a fair maiden; his mother warned him beforehand, saying, whenever you look at her, cast a sheep's eye at her, and say, How dost thou, my sweet Pigsnie? The fellow went to a butcher's, and bought seven or eight sheep's eyes. And when this lusty wooer was at dinner, he would look upon this fair wench, and cast in her face a sheep's eye, saying, How dost thou do, my sweet Pigsnie? How I do, said the wench, swine's-face, what do you mean, by casting a sheep's eye at me? Oh! sweet Pigsnie, have at thee with another. But I defy thee, swine's-face, said the wench. What my sweet old Pigsnie, be content, for if you live till next year, you will be a foul sow. Walk, knave, walk, said she, for if you live till the next year ye will be a fool.

T A L E XVII.

THERE was a man of Gotham who would be married, and when the day of marriage was come they went to church. The priest said, Do you say after me. The man said, Do you say after me. The priest said, Say not after me such words, but say what I tell you; thou dost play the fool to mock the holy Scripture concerning matrimony. Then the fellow said, Thou dost play the fool to mock the holy Scripture concerning matrimony. The priest could not tell what to say, but answered, What shall I do with this fool? And the man said, What shall I do with this fool? So the priest took his leave, and would not marry them. But he was instructed by others how to do, and was afterwards married. And thus the breed of the Gothamites has been perpetuated even unto this day.

T A L E XVIII.

THERE was a Scotsman who dwelt at Gotham, and he took a house a little distance from London, and turned it into an inn; and for his sign he would have a boar's head. Accordingly he went to a carver, and said, Can you

make me a bare-head? Yes, said the carver. Then, said he, make me a bare-head, and thou'se have 20d. for thy hire. I will do it, said the carver. So on St. Andrew's day, before Christmas, the which is called Yule in Scotland, the Scot came to London for his boar's head to set up at his door; I say to thee, speak, said the Scotsman, hast thou made me a bare-head? Yes, said the carver. He went and brought a man's head of wood that was bare, and said, Sir, here is your bare-head. Ay, said the Scot, The meikle de'il! is this a bare-head! Yes, said the carver. I say, said the Scotsman, I will have a bare-head like a head that follows the sow that has gryces. Sir, said the carver, I don't know a sow and gryces. What, whoreson, know you not a sow that will greet and groan, and cry, a week, a week. What, said the carver? do you mean a pig? Yes, said the Scotsman, let me have her head made in timber, and set on her scalp, and let her sing whip whire. The carver said, he could not. You whoreson, said he, gar her as she'd sing, whip whire. This shews that all men delight in their fancy.

T A L E XIX.

IN old times, during these tales, the wives of Gotham were got into an ale-house, and said, They were all profitable to their husbands. Which way, good gossips, said the ale-wife? The first said, I will tell you all, good gossips; I cannot brew nor bake, therefore I am every day alike; and go to the ale-house, because I cannot go to the church; and in the ale-house I pray to God, to speed my husband, and I am sure my prayers will do him more good than my labour. Then said the second, I am profitable to my husband, in saving of candle in winter, for I cause my husband and all my people to go to bed by day-light, and rise by day-light. The third said, I am profitable in sparing bread, for I drink a gallon of ale, I care not much for meat. The fourth said; I am loth to spend meat and drink at home, so I go to the tavern at Nottingham, and drink wine, and such other things as God sends me there. The fifth said, A man will ever have more company in another's house than his own, and most commonly in the ale-house. The sixth

said, My husband has flax and wool to spare, if I go to other folk's houses to do their work. The seventh said, I spare both my husband's wood and clothes, and sit talking all the day at other folk's fire. The eighth said, Beef, mutton, and pork are dear, I therefore take pigs, chickens, conies, and capons, being of a lesser price. The ninth said, I spare my husband's soap, for instead of washing once a-week, I wash but once a quarter. Then said the ale-wife, I keep all my husband's ale I brew from souring; for as I wont to drink it almost up, now I leave never a drop.

T A L E XX.

ON Ash Wednesday, the minister of Gotham would have a collection from his parishioners; and said unto them, My friends, the time is come that you must use prayer, fasting, and alms, but come ye to shrift, I will tell you more of my mind. But as for prayer, I don't think that two men in the parish can say their Pater-noster. As for fasting, ye fast still, for ye have not a good meal's meat in the year. As for alms-deeds, what should they give that have nothing? In Lent, you must refrain

from drunkenness, and abstain from drink. No, not so, said one fellow, for it is an old proverb, 'That fish should swim.' Yes, said the priest, it must swim in the water. I crave your mercy, quoth the fellow, I thought it should have swam in fine ale, for I have been told so. Soon after the men of Gotham came to shrift, and being seven in number, the priest knew not what penance to give them. He said, If I enjoin you to pray, you cannot say your Pater-noster. And it is but folly to make you fast, because you never eat a good meal's meat. Labour hard, and get a good dinner on Sunday, and I will partake of it, another man he enjoined to fare well on Monday, and another on Tuesday, and one after another, that one or other should fare well once in the week, that he might have part of their meat. And as for alms-deeds, the Priest said, Ye be but beggars, all except one or two, therefore bestow your alms on yourselves.

AN Irishman being asked, whether he or his brother werē oldest? I am

oldest, said he, but if my brother live three years longer, we shall be both of one age.

An Irish servant being struck by his master, cried out, Devil take me, if I am certain whether he has kill'd me or not; but if I am dead, it will afford me great satisfaction to hear the old rogue was hanged for killing me.

A deaf fellow coming to London to sell a turkey, at Hyde-park Corner, had occasion to untruss a point; a gentleman passing by, intended to put a joke upon him; Countryman, said he, there's a turd under you; the man thinking he asked the price of his turkey, said, Four shillings, master. I say, there's a turd under you, said the other. It is as good as ever you ate in your life, said the fellow, either baked or roasted. You rascal, said he, I could find in my heart to kick you soundly. Come chuse, says the fellow, for if you won't another will.

One being at his wife's funeral, and the bearers going pretty quick along, he cried out to them, Don't go so fast, what need we make a toil of a pleasure.

Two Irishmen, walking together in

the fields, were at length hemmed in by a great ditch, which when they perceived, quoth one of them, we must go back again, for the ditch is too big for us to jump over; nay, quoth the other, I protest I'll jump over, though I light in the middle.

A number of French gentlemen, dining at a tavern in Germany, the maid, as she took out the dishes, let a rousing fart; and her mistress scolding her severely for doing such a thing in hearing of the guests; Pshaw, madam, says she, you don't consider that they are all French people, and don't understand German.

In Admiral Hawke's last engagement with the French, a sailor on board one of the ships, had a leg shot off, whereupon one of his mess-mates took him down to the surgeon, and took his leg off the deck, and put under his arm; he was no sooner brought down, but another of his mess-mates began shaking his head, and telling him, he was very sorry he had lost a leg. That is a damn'd lie, you son of a b—h, replied he, for I've got it under my arm.

As Dean Swift was crossing the ferry at Dublin, turning himself from the passengers in the stern of the boat, asked a poor man near him, Well, friend, what profession are you off? I am a taylor, Sir, answered the other, not knowing the Dean. Are you married? said Swift. Yes, Sir, replied the taylor. And who wears the breeches? said the Dean. My a—se, answered the other.

A gentleman one day gave his servant a kick on the breech, upon which, the fellow let a rousing f—t, his master was horribly offended, but the servant said, Why, Sir, would you knock at a door and have no body answer you.

An Irishman at Chester, upon enquiring at his landlord how he could get to London, and being told he might go in the waggon, he replied, No, honey, that won't do, I am always seasick when I ride in a waggon.

A Schoolmaster asking one of his boys in a cold winter morning, what was Latin for cold; the boy hesitated a little——What, sirrah, said he, can't you tell? Yes, yes, cried the boy, I have it at my finger-ends.

FINIS.