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A LITTLE BOOK  
IN C MAJOR

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# A LITTLE BOOK IN C MAJOR

BY  
H. L. MENCKEN

[Opus 22.]

For Mr. Sidney Phillips

H. L. Mencken

NEW YORK  
JOHN LANE COMPANY  
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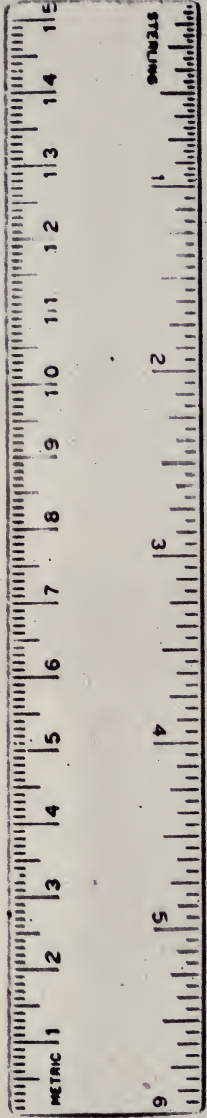
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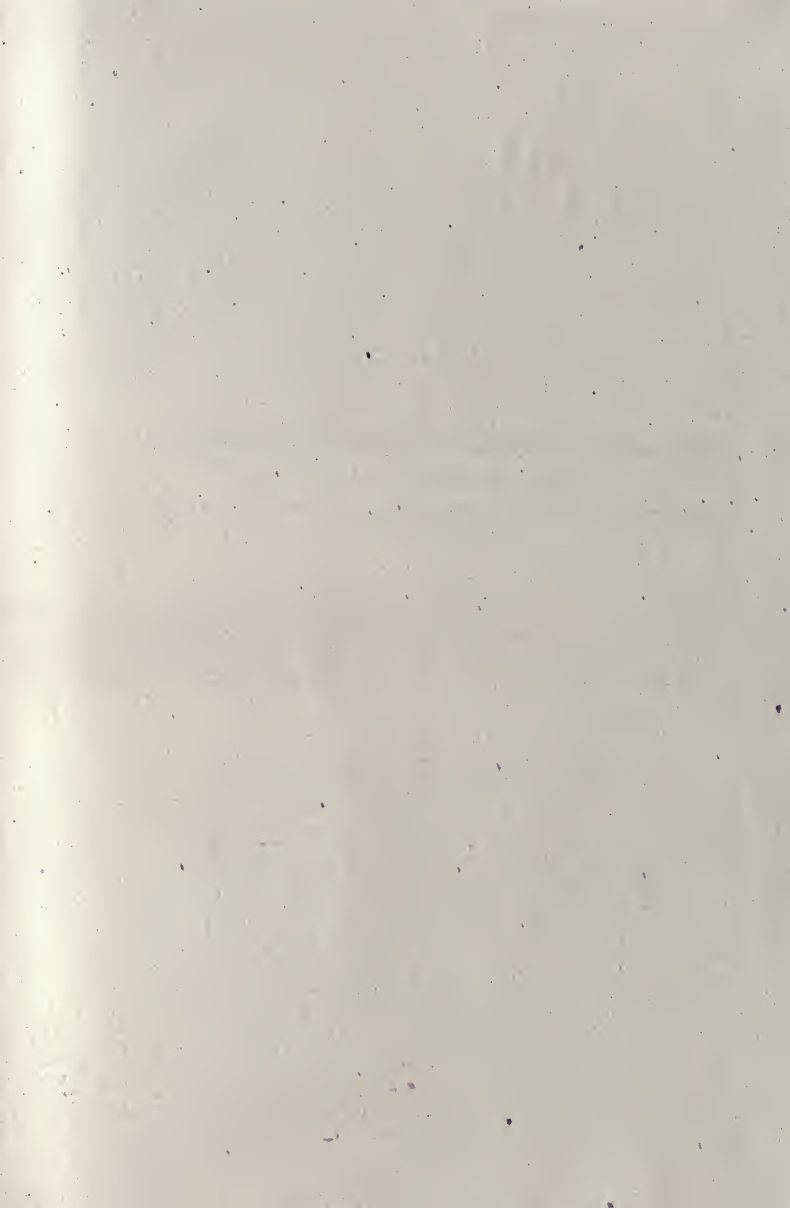
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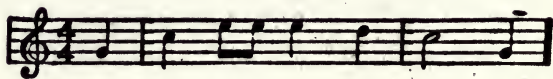
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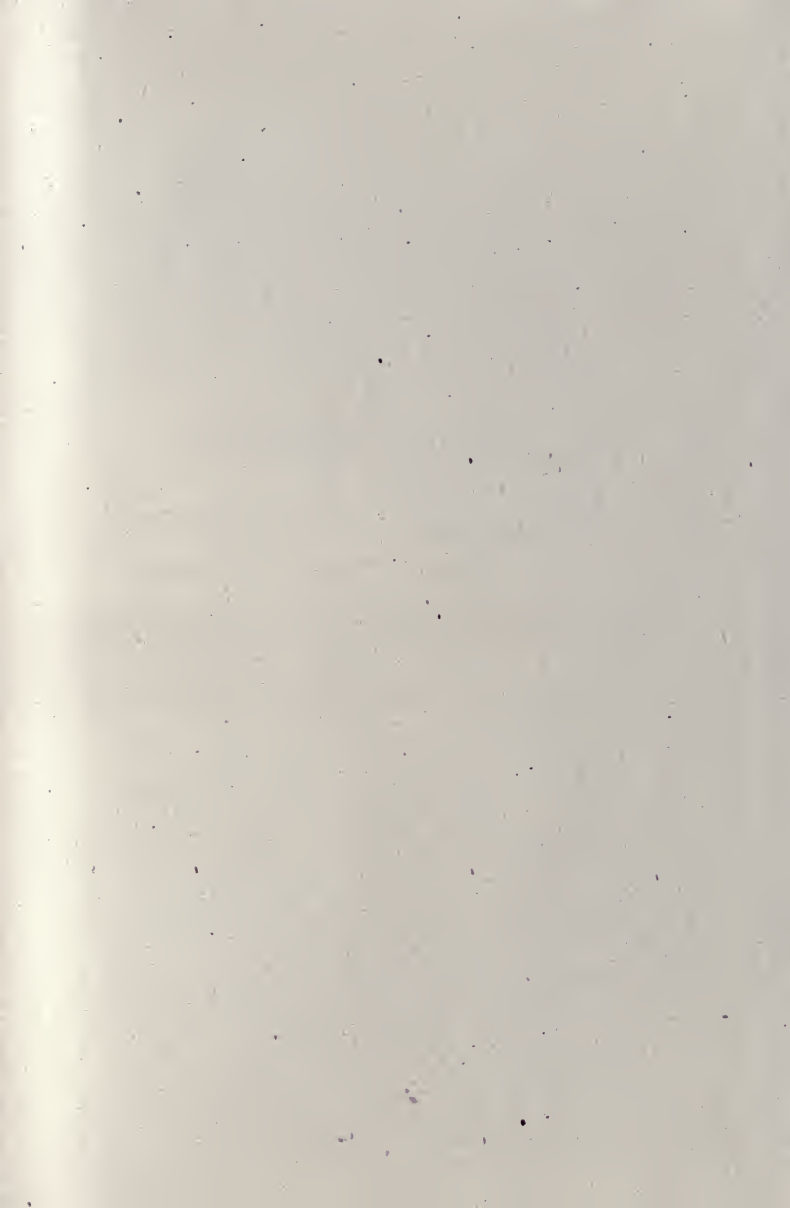
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Gist

Mencken.

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I

Commissaire, commissaire,  
Colin bat sa ménagère;  
C'est un beau jour pour l'amour!

—*Pierre Jean de Béranger*



**§1**

**Love is the delusion that one woman differs from another.**

**§2**

**Man weeps to think that he will die so soon. Woman, that she was born so long ago.**

**§3**

**Happiness is peace after effort, the overcoming of difficulties, the feeling of security and well-being. The only really happy folk are married women and single men.**

**§4**

**Wife: a former sweetheart.**

## §5

How little it takes to make life unbearable! . . . A pebble in the shoe, a cockroach in the spaghetti, a woman's laugh!

## §6

Love at first sight: a labor-saving device.

## §7

The honeymoon lasts as long as the bride believes the bridegroom's word of honor.

## §8

The bride at the altar: "At last! At last!" The bridegroom: "Too late! Too late!"

## §9

The lucky man is the one who is not even invited to the wedding.

## §10

After a hard night of it two old friends fell into a sleepy conversation in the steam-room of a Turkish bath.

"My wife loves me so much," said one, "that she'll believe me when I tell her I was kept downtown all night by business."

"My wife loves *me* so much," said the other, "that I won't be afraid to tell her the truth."

## §11

The best friend a woman can have is the man who has got over loving her. He would rather die than compromise her.

## §12

The one breathless passion of every woman is to get someone married. If she's single, it's herself. If she's married, it's the woman her husband would probably marry if she were to die tomorrow.



## §13

"I wooed and won her," said the Man of his Wife. "I made him run," said the Hare of the Hound.

## §14

The way to hold a husband is to keep him a little bit jealous. The way to lose him is to keep him a little bit more jealous.

## §15

Women may be divided into two classes: those who know how to rouge and those who know how to blush.

## §16

It used to be thought in America that a woman ceased to be a lady the moment her name appeared in a newspaper. It is no longer thought so, but it is still true.

### §17

**Women have very simple tastes. They can get pleasure out of the conversation of children in arms and men in love.**

### §18

**Whenever a husband and wife begin to discuss their marriage they are giving evidence at an inquest.**

### §19

**Do not be deceived by appearances. The virtue of a man is not to be measured by what he does while his wife is watching.**

### §20

**Women always excel men in that sort of wisdom which comes from experience. To be a woman is in itself a terrible experience.**

## §21

You will never convince the average farmer's mare that the late Maud S. was not dreadfully immoral.

## §22

The man a woman marries is usually her second choice. The woman a man marries is often not his choice at all.

## §23

No man is ever too old to look at a woman, and no woman is ever too fat to hope that he will look.

## §24

Men have a much better time of it than women. For one thing, they marry later. For another thing, they die earlier.

## §25

The one thing to be careful of is that you are on with the new love before you are off with the old.

## §26

Cold mutton-stew; a soiled collar; breakfast in dress clothes; a wet house-dog, over-affectionate; the other fellow's tooth-brush; an echo of "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay"; the damp, musty smell of an empty house; stale beer; a mangy fur coat; *katzenjammer*; false teeth; boiled cabbage; a cocktail *after* dinner; an old cigar stump . . . the kiss of Evelyn after the inauguration of Eleanor.

## §27

Whenever a woman begins to talk of anything, she is talking to, of, or at a man.

## §28

The worst man hesitates when choosing a mother for his children. And hesitating, he is lost.

## §29

The charm of a man is measured by the charm of the women who think that he is a scoundrel.

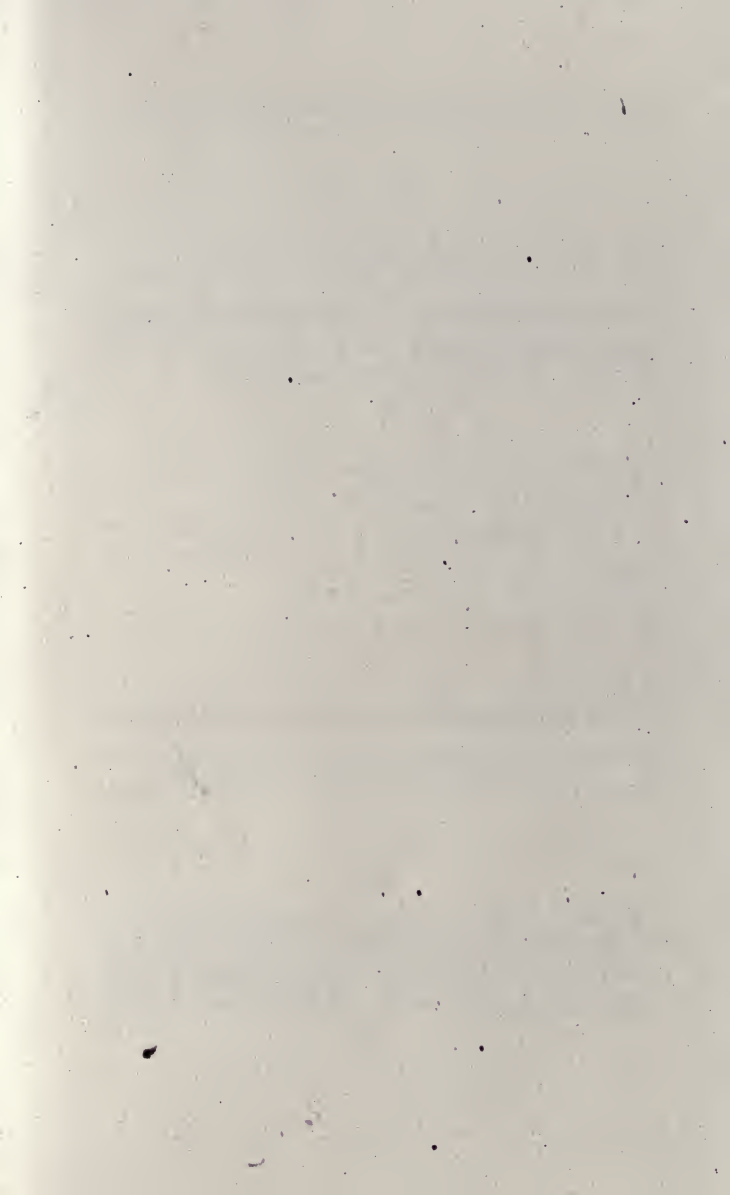
## §30

A bachelor's virtue depends upon his alertness. A married man's depends upon his wife's.

## II

**The snow-bird sings and soars amid the  
blast: he has no catarrh from wet feet.—**

***Mary Baker G. Eddy.***



## §1

**Democracy is the theory that the common people know what they want, and deserve to get it good and hard.**

## §2

**Civilization is a concerted effort to remedy the blunders and check the practical joking of the Creator.**

## §3

**'An idealist is one who, on noticing that a rose smells better than a cabbage, concludes that it is also more nourishing.**

## §4

**Morality is the theory that every human act must be either right or wrong, and that 99 per cent. of them are wrong.**



## §5

All men may be divided into two classes: those who like vaudeville and those who can stand it when they are drunk.

## §6

Say what you will against civilization, it has at least got rid of whiskers, the vermiform appendix and the Ten Commandments.

## §7

The surest way to get a reputation as a liar is to pretend to be very good. The next surest way is to pretend to be very wicked.

## §8

The Christian always mixes prudence with his devotion. He is willing to serve three gods, but he draws the line at one wife.

## §9

Exit the roller-towel. Enter the individual drinking-cup. Hygiene makes steady progress. The end, perhaps, will be a law penalizing the laborious Italian for spitting on his hands.

## §10

The ideal home is one in which the human inhabitants multiplied by 50 outnumber the cockroaches divided by 100.

## §11

The truth that survives is simply the lie that is pleasant to believe.

## §12

Say what you will against the morality of anonymous letters, at all events no one ever seriously doubts them.

§13

Democracy defines the truth as anything believed by at least 51 men in every 100. It is thus firmly committed to the doctrines that one bath a week is enough, that "I seen" is the past tense of "I see", and that Friday is an unlucky day.

§14

The final proof of human greatness is an embalmer trembling with stage-fright.

§15

It is hard to believe that a man is telling the truth when you know that you would lie if you were in his place.

§16

All men are frauds. The only difference between them is that some admit it. I myself deny it.

### §17

An anti-vivisectionist is one who gags at a guinea pig and swallows a baby.

### §18

The original efficiency expert: Simon Legree.

### §19

Said Oscar Wilde: "Each man kills the thing he loves." For example, the amateur musician.

### §20

A yacht club is an asylum for landmen who would rather die of drink than be seasick.

### §21

Thanksgiving Day: a day devoted by persons with inflammatory rheumatism to thanking God that it is not hydrophobia.

## §22

A Socialist, carrying a red flag, marched through the gates of Heaven. "To hell with rank!" he shouted. "All men are equal here." Just then the late Karl Marx turned a corner and came into view, meditatively stroking his whiskers. At once the Socialist fell upon his knees and touched his forehead to the dust. "O Master!" he cried. "O Master, Master, Master!"

## §23

Definition of the truth: something somehow discreditable to someone.

## §24

Every failure teaches a man something. For example, that he will probably fail again next time.

## §25

Pensioner: a kept patriot.

## §26

Conscience makes cowards of us all.  
Politeness is even worse. It makes actors  
of us.

## §27

The nocturnes of Chopin: two embalm-  
ers at work upon a minor poet . . . the  
scent of tuberose . . . autumn rains.

## §28

Let no man take his friends and ene-  
mies too seriously. One of the conclu-  
sions every man is bound to come to, re-  
viewing his life in his old age, is that  
his enemies have done him much less  
good than he expected and his friends  
much less harm.

## §29

A clergyman is a ticket speculator out-  
side the gates of Heaven.

## §30

Christian Science is the theory that, since the sky rockets following a wallop in the eye are optical delusions, the wallop itself is a delusion and the eye another.

### III

And to anyone who wishes to do so, we publicly and freely give permission to swear; and we will never prevent anyone from swearing.—*Magna Charta*, §61.





### §1

A man becomes a gentleman the moment the betting odds on his word of honor pass 3 to 2.

### §2

If George Washington could have foreseen the chautauqua it is likely that he would have let Cornwallis go.

### §3

A Sunday-school is a prison in which children do penance for the evil consciences of their parents.

### §4

Brevity: the quality that makes cigarettes, sermons and ocean voyages bearable.

## §5

A successful man is simply one who doesn't make a fool of himself in the same way more than two or three times running.

## §6

An osteopath is one who argues that all human ills are caused by the abnormal pressure of hard bone upon soft tissue. The proof of his theory is to be found in the heads of those who accept it.

## §7

During a lull in the uproar of Hell two voices were heard.

"My name," said one, "was Ludwig van Beethoven. I was no ordinary music-master. The Archduke Rudolph used to speak to me on the streets of Vienna."

"And mine," said the other, "was the Archduke Rudolph. I was no ordinary archduke. Ludwig van Beethoven dedicated a trio to me."

## §8

**Politician:** any citizen with influence enough to get his old mother a job as charwoman in the City Hall.

## §9

The master banalities of art: the Mona Lisa, La Dame aux Camélias and Celeste Aïda. The master banalities of nature: Niagara Falls, the Gulf Stream and the blood-sweating hippopotamus.

## §10

A prohibitionist is the sort of man one wouldn't care to drink with—even if he drank.

## §11

The majority always has its way in the end. So does the undertaker. But neither gains in pleasantness by the fact.

## §12

**Fugue: one damned fiddle after another.**

## §13

**The formula of George Bernard Shaw: to put the obvious in terms of the scandalous.**

## §14

**After all, why be good? How many will actually believe it of us?**

## §15

**Why doesn't some Christian Science healer try his magic as a Christian Science embalmer?**

## §16

**No form of liberty is worth a darn which doesn't give us the right to do wrong now and then.**

### §17

The unpleasant things of life are always the most durable. A wart outlasts ten thousand kisses.

### §18

A psychologist is one who sticks a pin into a baby and then makes a chart showing the ebb and flow of the yell.

### §19

If all public questions were settled by shooting dice, fifty percent of them would be settled correctly. This would be five times as good a score as we make now.

### §20

Say what you will about the Ten Commandments, you must always come back to the pleasant fact that there are only ten of them.

§21

**Sob:** a sound made by women, babies, tenors, actors and drunken men.

§22

**Truth** would quickly cease to be stranger than fiction, once we got as used to it.

§23

**Theatre:** a place in which bad ideas are filtered through worse actors.

§24

**A woman's club** is a place in which the validity of a philosophy is judged by the hat of its prophetess.

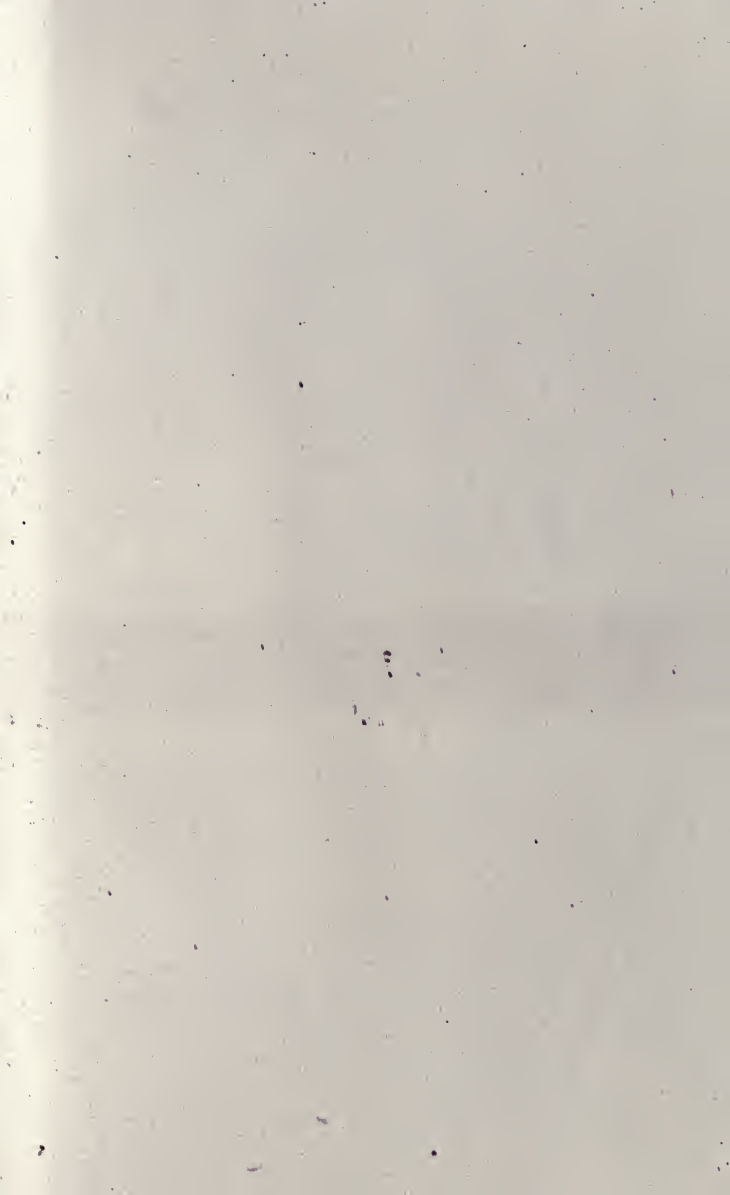
§25

**A man** is called a good fellow for doing things which, if done by a woman, would land her in a lunatic asylum.

## §26

**One may cherish, perhaps, a profound respect for the Beatitudes, but surely not for the man who believes in them.**



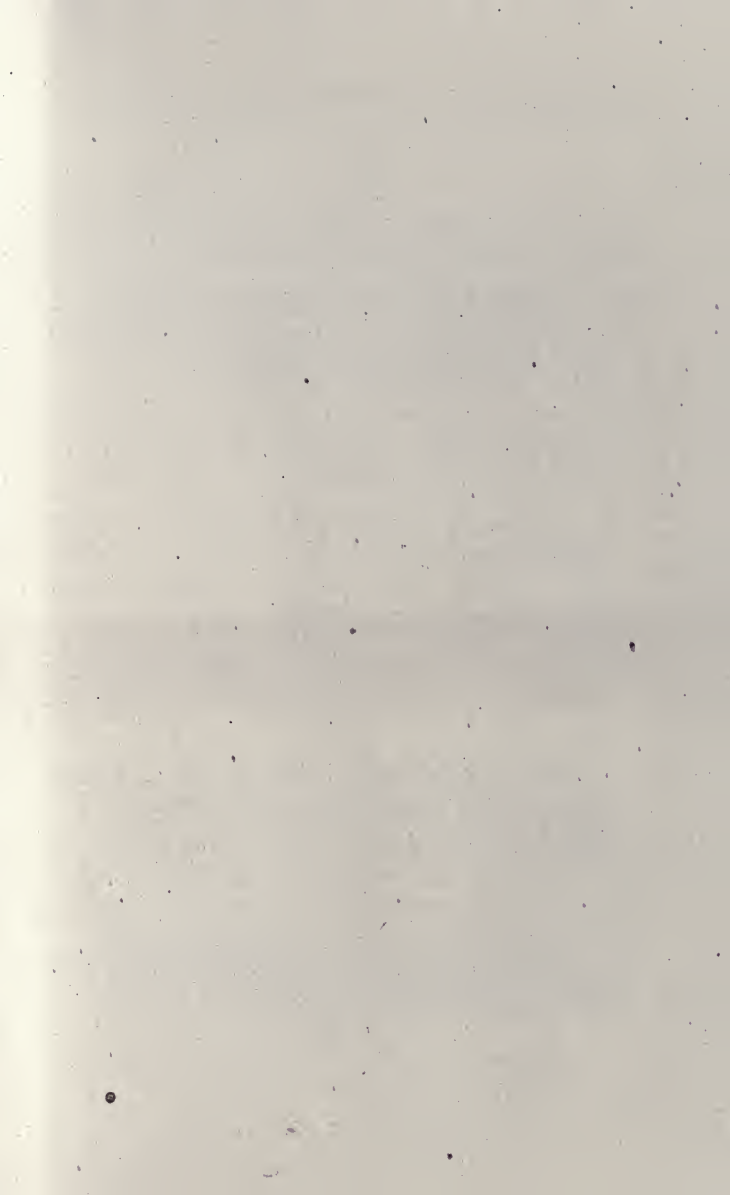


#### IV

Si el sabio no aprueba, malo!

Si el necio aplaude, peor!

—*Tomas de Yriarte.*



## §1

**Archbishop:** a Christian ecclesiastic of a rank superior to that attained by Christ; see also *bishop* and *archdeacon*.

## §2

A jury is a group of twelve men who, having lied to the judge about their hearing, health and business engagements, have failed to fool him.

## §3

The verdict of a jury is the *a priori* opinion of that juror who smokes the worst cigars.

## §4

A judge is a law student who marks his own examination papers.

## §5

A judge is an officer appointed to mislead, restrain, hypnotize, cajole, seduce, flabbergast and bamboozle a jury in such manner that it will forget all the facts and give its decision to the best lawyer. The objection to judges is that they are seldom capable of a sound professional judgment of lawyers. The objection to lawyers is that the best are the worst.

## §6

A lawyer is one who protects you against robbers by taking away the temptation.

## §7

A fine is a bribe paid by a rich man to escape the lawful penalty of his crime. In China such bribes are paid to the judge personally. In America they are paid to him as agent for the public. But it makes no difference to the men who pay them, nor to the men who can't pay them.

### §8

**Courtroom: a place where Jesus Christ and Judas Iscariot would be equals, with the odds in favor of Judas.**

### §9

**The penalty for laughing in a courtroom is six months in jail. If it were not for this penalty the jury would never hear the evidence.**

### §10

**Sunday is a day given over by Americans to wishing that they themselves were dead and in Heaven, and that their neighbors were dead and in Hell.**

### §11

**The chief argument against prohibition is that it doesn't prohibit. This is also the chief argument in favor of it.**

## §12

Conscience: the inner voice which warns us that someone may be looking.

## §13

As for the great masses of the plain people, whose rectitude and acumen are so much lauded, they may be divided into two classes: those to whom thinking is painful, and those to whom it is impossible.

## §14

Ideal picture of a reform movement in the United States: a hangman signing a petition against vivisection.

## §15

To an embalmer there are no good men and bad men. There are only dead men and live men.

### §16

**Democracy is also a form of religion. It is the worship of jackals by jackasses.**

### §17

**Immortality: the condition of a dead man who doesn't believe that he is dead.**

### §18

**Three proofs that the Creator is a humorist: democracy, hay fever, any fat woman.**

### §19

**University: a place for elevating sons above the social rank of their fathers. In the American universities men are ranked as follows: 1. Seducers; 2. Fullbacks; 3. Boozers; 4. Pitchers and catchers; 5. Mandolin players; 6. Poker players; 7. Scholars; 8. Christians.**



## §20

A man's belief in his soul is in direct ratio to his inability to digest proteids.

## §21

How little it takes to make life perfect! A good sauce, a cocktail after a hard day, a girl who kisses with her mouth half open!

## §22

Y. M. C. A.: a cheap boarding house for thrifty and agnostic Jews.

## §23

Literature, in America, is life in a flour barrel.

## §24

Christian Science and the coroner: the initiative and referendum.

## §25

A clergyman is one employed by the wicked to prove to them by his example that virtue doesn't pay.

## §26

The Puritan is one who uses the Cross as a hammer to knock in the heads of sinners.

## §27

The agents of argumentation under a free democracy, in the order of their potency: whiskey, beer, cigars, tears.

## §28

Vanity is at the bottom of a good deal of morality. A moral man is one who likes to be thought capable of doing things that no man could actually do.

§29

**Marriage: an unresolved dissonance.  
Divorce: the return to the tonic.**

§30

**'A' man of self-respect is one who still  
believes that nobody suspects him.**

V

We brought you the truth heretofore,  
but the greater part of you abhorred the  
truth.—*The Koran, XLIII.*



**§1.**

**What a world, alas, it is! So many drinking, and so little in a keg!**

**§2**

**A great nation is any mob of people which produces at least one honest man a century.**

**§3**

**Since Shakespeare's day more than a thousand different actors have played Hamlet. No wonder he is crazy!**

**§4**

**Hell: a place where the Ten Commandments have a police force behind them.**

## §5

A celebrity is one who is known to many persons he is glad he doesn't know.

## §6

It is not the drinker, but the man who has just stopped drinking, who thinks the world is going to the dogs.

## §7

Remorse: regret that one waited so long to do it.

## §8

A poet is usually a bad critic of his own work. And a critic is often even worse.

## §9

The father of liars took the first shower-bath.

### §10

The chief knowledge that a man gets from reading books is the knowledge that very few of them are worth reading.

### §11

Suicide: a belated acquiescence in the opinion of one's wife's relatives.

### §12

Socialism is the theory that the desire of one man to get something he hasn't got is more pleasing to a just God than the desire of some other man to keep what he *has* got.

### §13

A moralist is one who is a good deal less moral than he would have you believe. And an immoralist is one who is a good deal more moral.



## §14

A cynic is one who has learned to read the secret cost marks on the world's price tags.

## §15

To have a wooden head is much less a misfortune to an actor than to have a wooden leg.

## §16

To be found out: to escape from suspicion.

## §17

Biographer: an unjust god.

## §18

Psychotherapy is the theory that the patient will probably get well anyhow, and is certainly a damned fool.

### §19

What alcohol is to men, tears are to women. In each there is sanctuary from the duel of sex.

### §20

There is only one justification for having sinned, and that is to be glad of it.

### §21

Sunday-school: the first refuge of scoundrels.

### §22

The objection to Puritans is not that they try to make us think as they do, but that they try to make us do as they think.

### §23

It is a sin to believe evil of others, but it is seldom a mistake.

## §24

The doctrine of reincarnation runs aground on the puzzle as to what most men did in the last life to deserve being what they are in this one.

## §25

Democracy is the theory that two thieves will steal less than one, and three less than two, and four less than three, and so on *ad infinitum*.

## §26

'Tis more blessed to give than receive.  
For example, wedding presents.

## §27

How the whole course of history would have been changed if Mrs. Mary G. Eddy had been baptized Birdie!

## §28

The one unanswerable objection to Christianity is that the God it asks us to worship, if the descriptions of its official spokesman are to be believed, is a vastly less venerable personage than Ludwig van Beethoven.

## §29

The objection to a scandal-monger is not that she tells of racy doings, but that she pretends to be indignant about them.

## §30

Firmness in decision is often merely a form of stupidity. It indicates an inability to think the same thing out twice.

## §31

Faith: a mellow and caressing ecstasy, a benign and uplifting booziness.

## §32

The trouble with the hymeneal knot is that it is often tied too tightly. Many a husband reminds one of a 16 neck in a  $15\frac{3}{4}$  collar.

## §33

'A tombstone' is an ugly reminder of one who has been forgotten.

## §34

An altruist is one who would be sincerely sorry to see his neighbor's children devoured by wolves.

## §35

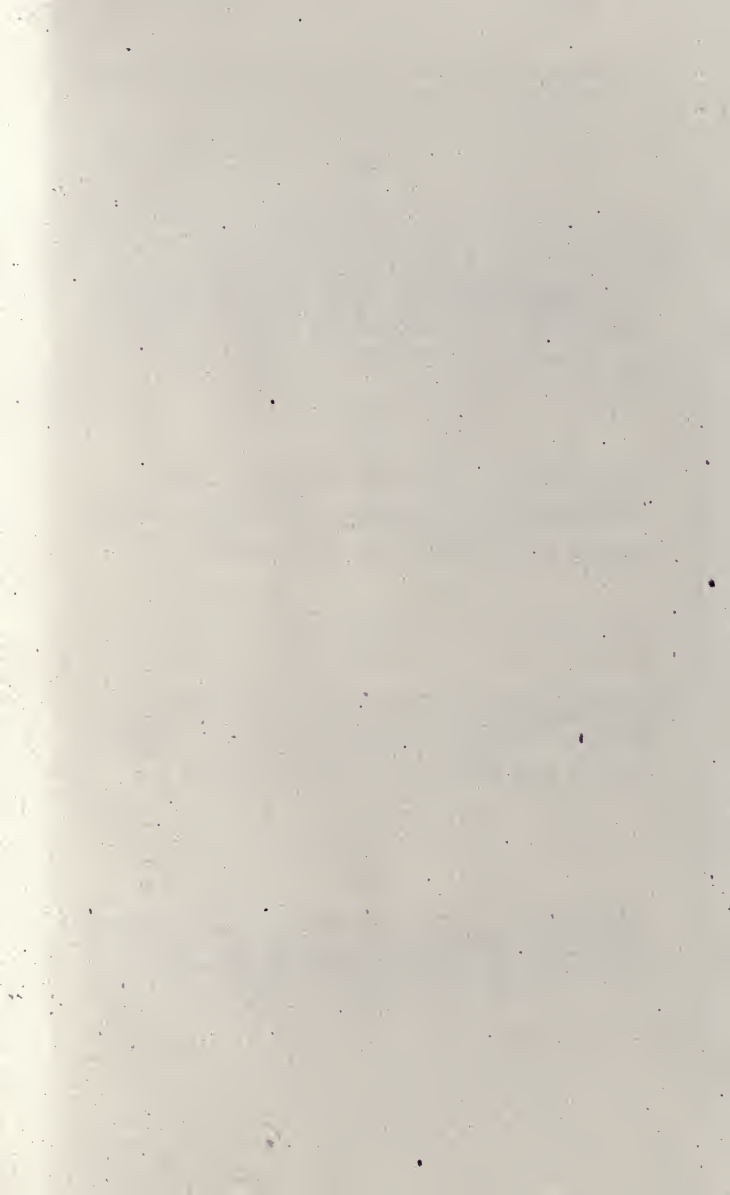
In the year 1830 the average American had six children and one wife. How time changes all things!

## §36

If the plain people had heads of ivory it wouldn't be so bad. But celluloid!

## VI

The women, woven, built and kneaded up  
Of hydrogen, of azote, oxygen,  
Of carbon, phosphorus, chlorine, sulphur,  
iron,  
Of calcium, kalium, natrum, maganese.  
—*John Davidson.*



## §1

A man always blames the woman who fools him. In the same way he blames the door he walks into in the dark.

## §2

On one issue, at least, men and women agree: they both distrust women.

## §3

A really good husband is almost unknown. What women mistake for a good one is usually only a careful one.

## §4

When women kiss it always reminds one of prize-fighters shaking hands.



## §5

There are two times in every man's life when he is thoroughly happy; just after he has met his first love and just after he has parted from his last one.

## §6

Man's objection to love is that it dies hard; woman's is that when it is once dead it stays dead.

## §7

The sort of man a woman remembers longest is the sort that it would be better not to remember at all.

## §8

Without a doubt there are women who would vote intelligently. There are also men who knit socks beautifully.

## §9

Definition of a good mother: one who loves her child as much as a little girl loves her doll.

## §10

Love begins like a triolet and ends like a college yell.

## §11

Bachelors know more about women than married men. If they didn't they'd be married too.

## §12

No matter how long he lives, no man ever becomes as wise as the average woman of forty-eight.

## §13

A gentleman is one who never strikes a woman without provocation.

## §14

Man is a natural polygamist. He always has one woman leading him by the nose and another hanging on to his coat-tails.

## §15

All women, soon or late, are jealous of their daughters; all men, soon or late, are envious of their sons.

## §16

A transvaluation of all values is now in progress. No doubt the future will see men of questionable repute and women who neither drink nor smoke.

## §17

Women's tears are the most precious things in the world. They always cost some man or other at least \$2 apiece.

§18

Jealousy is the theory that some other fellow has just as little taste.

§19

The man who marries for love alone is at least honest. But so was Czolgosz.

§20

Bachelors have consciences. Married men have wives.

§21

Marriage: the end of hope.

§22

Fashions may come and fashions may go, but the best bait, after all, is still a bit of lace about the neck.

## §23

A woman always knows that a man is in love with her long before he knows it himself. And even when she doesn't know it, she often assumes it.

## §24

There was a woman once who was satisfied with her husband, her dress allowance and her complexion. Her name has not been preserved. She died before writing was invented.

## §25

When a husband's story is believed, he begins to suspect his wife.

## §26

Woman is at once the serpent, the apple—and the stomach-ache.

## §27

**Optimist:** the sort of man who marries his sister's best friend.

## §28

If there were only three women left in the world, two of them would immediately convene a court-martial to try the other one.

## §29

**Alimony** is the ransom that the happy pay to the devil.

## §30

History seems to bear very harshly upon women. One cannot recall more than three famous women who were virtuous. But on turning to famous men the seeming injustice disappears. One would have difficulty finding even two of them who were virtuous.

## §31

Husbands never become good; they merely become proficient.

## §32

The devil: a man with a woman's soul.

## §33

Sign to hang outside the parlor door after the engagement has been announced: Don't stop! Don't look! Don't listen!

## §34

Widower: one released on parole.

## §35

A wedding is a device for exciting jealousy in women and terror in men.

### §36

Strike an average between what a woman thinks of her husband a month before she marries him and what she thinks of him a year afterward, and you will have the truth about him in a very handy form.

### §37

The worst of marriage is that it makes a woman believe that all men are just as easy to fool.

### §38

Possession is nine points of the law. This is the only reason why so many men keep their wives.

### §39

Cleverness in a woman means any mental state superior to downright imbecility. A clever woman is simply one who seems almost like a man.



## §40

The great secret of happiness in love is to be glad the other fellow married her.

## §41

A misogynist is a man who hates women as much as women hate one another.

## §42

If hammocks could talk no one would care to listen to church pews.

## §43

Suicide and marriage: the supreme acts of cynicism.

## §44

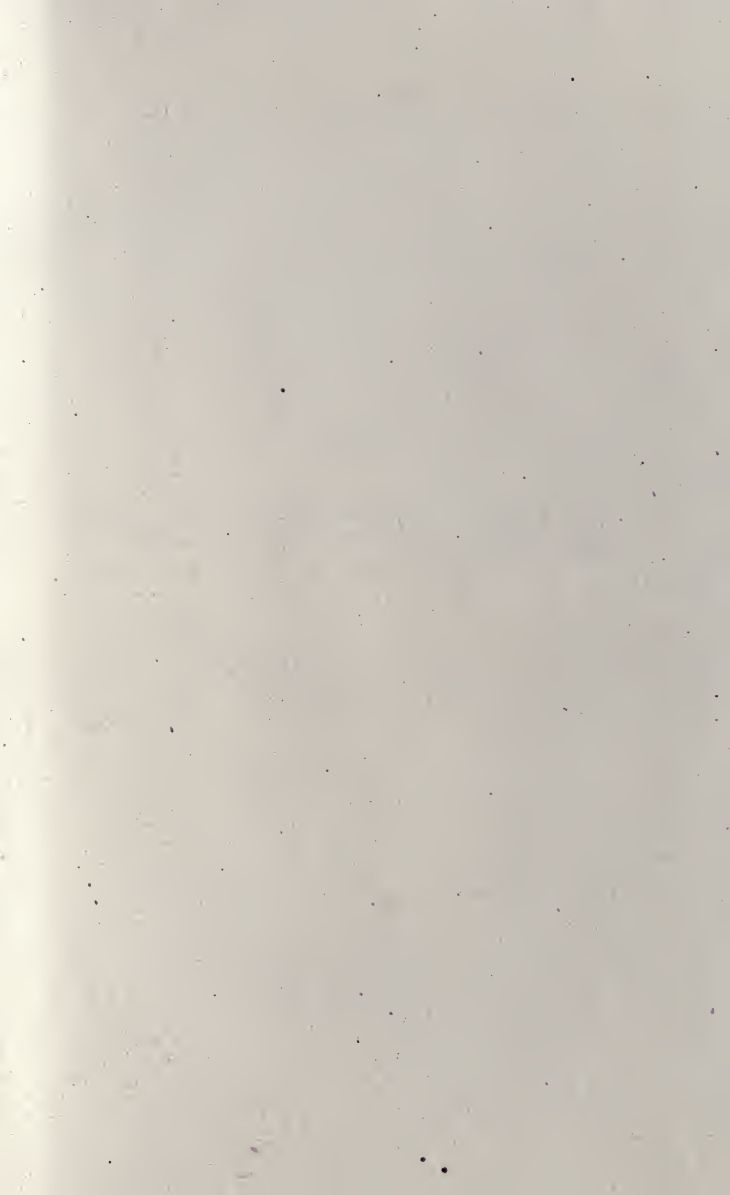
A man may be a fool and not know it—but not if he is married.

**§45**

All men are proud of their own children. Some men carry egoism so far that they are even proud of their own wives.

**§46**

Intelligence lasts a woman much longer than beauty. But it is a good deal less useful while it lasts.



## VII

. . . weil Verschiedenheit des Nichts  
mehr ergötzt als Einerleiheit des Etwas.  
—*Johann Paul Friedrich Richter.*



## §1

The great difficulty about keeping the Ten Commandments is that no man can keep them and be a gentleman.

## §2

When a man is old enough to be sinful discreetly he is usually too old to be sinful at all.

## §3

Puritanism: an attempt to bleach the red corpuscles.

## §4

The moment everyone begins to believe a thing, it ceases to be true. For example, the notion that the homeliest girl in the party is the safest.

## §5

In the main, there are two sorts of books: those that no one reads and those that no one ought to read.

## §6

A bachelor is one who has learned the lesson of his brother's punishment.

## §7

The object of all religion is to teach man what he ought to do. The object of all knowledge is to show him how to do it. The object of all art is to make him glad he is not doing it.

## §8

There are always two sound objections to a fat woman. One is that she is fat and the other is that she is sentimental.

### §9

Women have a good deal more sober sense than men. But men would be just as sensible if there were no women.

### §10

The agents of human happiness in the order of their potency: a good bank account, a negative Wassermann, a clear conscience.

### §11

Theology is an effort to explain the unknowable by putting it into terms of the not worth knowing.

### §12

A church is a place in which gentlemen who have never been to Heaven brag about it to persons who will never get there.



## §13

No matter how happily a woman is married, she always hopes that her daughter will grab a better one.

## §14

At the bottom of Puritanism one finds envy of the fellow who is having a better time in the world, and hence hatred of him. At the bottom of democracy one finds the same thing. This is why all Puritans are democrats and all democrats are Puritans.

## §15

It is better to have a conscience than to be run over by a locomotive.

## §16

Happiness is the china shop; love is the bull.

## §17

Pediculocracy, or government by vermin. . . . Lohengrinophobia, or the fear of marriage. . . .

## §18

'Ah, the divine persistence of beauty! . . . Once I enjoyed the great Christian diversion of seeing a man hanged. As he plunged through the trap and came up with that last, abominable jerk, the taut hemp sounded a soft, sonorous CCC.

## §19

Wife: one who is sorry she did it, but would undoubtedly do it again.

## §20

When you sympathize with a married woman you make two enemies—or gain one wife and one friend.

## §21

An historian is an unsuccessful novelist.

## §22

The vice crusade: an effort to fill up the ocean by throwing sailors overboard.

## §23

Surgeon: one who takes the blame for the family doctor's error in diagnosis.

## §24

Women do not like timid men. Cats do not like prudent rats.

## §25

He marries best who puts it off until it is too late.

§26

A bachelor is one who wants a wife but is glad that he hasn't got her.

§27

Eugenics: the theory that marriages should be made in the laboratory; the Wassermann test for love.

§28

Women usually enjoy annoying their husbands, but not when they annoy them by growing fat.

THE END

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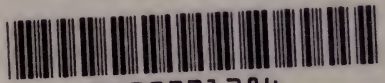
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