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LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. **733**  
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

# Brazilian Short Stories

Monteiro Lobato  
With an Introduction by  
Isaac Goldberg

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**Isaac Goldberg**

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# **BRAZILIAN SHORT STORIES**

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## INTRODUCTION

Monteiro Lobato represents the most recent phase of the Brazilian reaction against Gallic literary influence. Though not pretending primarily to be a writer, he yet has inaugurated what amounts to almost to a new period of the national letters. At the bottom of his nationalism, however, is the one valid foundation of art: sincerity. If occasionally he overdoes his protest against the French, he may well be forgiven because of its sound basis; it is part of his own personality to see things in the primary colors, to play the national zealot not in any chauvinistic sense; he is no blind follower of the administrative powers, no nationalist in the ugly sense of cheap partisan drum-beating, but in the sense that true nationalism is the logical development of the fatherland's potentialities. A personally independent fellow, then, who would achieve for his nation that same independence.

The beginning of the World War found Monteiro Lobato established upon a fazenda, far from the thoughts and centers of literature. It was by accident that he discovered his gifts as a writer. The story is told that one day, rendered indignant by the custom of clearing stubble fields by fire, and thus endangering the bordering inhabitants, he sent a letter of protest to a large daily in Sao Paulo. It seems that the letter was too important, too well-



written, too plainly indicative of natural literary talent, to be relegated to the corner where readers' jeremiads usually wail, and that, instead, it was "featured" upon the first page. From that day the die was cast. The episode, in my opinion, is far more important than it appears. For, whatever form in which the man's later writings are published, they are in a more important degree just what this initial venture was: a protest, a means of civic betterment, a national contribution:

It was with the collection named "Urupês" (Fungi) that Lobato definitely established himself. Upon the success of that book he has built a powerful publishing house, a splendid magazine ("Revista do Brasil"—The Brazilian Review), a veritable literary movement. He excels in stinging comment upon current affairs; he writes books for the primary schools; he is a practical nature bent upon visibly altering the national course. As a writer, he is "anti-literary," scorning the finer graces. Together with a similar group in Buenos Aires he underestimates the aesthetic element in art, confusing it, perhaps, with the snobbish, aloof, vapory spirits who have a habit of infesting all movements with their neurotic lucubrations. Yet such a view may do him, as it does Manuel Gálvez in Argentina, or Upton Sinclair in the United States, injustice. His style, his attitude, his product, are directly conditioned by the ambient in which he works and the problems he has set out to solve. Less unjust, surely is the criticism that may be made against him when—as is characteristic

of such natures—his earnestness degenerates into special pleading, when his intense feeling tapers off into sentimentality, and when what was meant to be humor falls away to caricature.

Labato's work in every phase is first of all an act of nationalism. To this caustic spirit, the real Brazil—the Brazil that must set to work stamping its impress upon the arts of the near future—lies in the interior of the country, away from the cosmopolitanism of the littoral. Yet his practise largely belies this implied regionalism.

That he is gifted with the rare faculty of self-criticism may be seen from a letter I received from him some time after I had introduced him to North American readers in a newspaper article.

"I was born," he wrote, "on the 18th of April, 1882, in Tabaute, State of Sao Paulo, the son of parents who owned a coffee plantation. I began my studies in the city, proceeding later to Sao Paulo, where I matriculated as a law student, being graduated, like everybody else, as a Bachelor of Laws. Fond of literature, I read a great deal in my youth: my favorite authors were Kipling, Maupassant, Tolstol, Dostolevsky, Balzac, Wells, Dickens, Camillo Castello Branco, Eca de Queiroz and Machado de Assis . . . but I never allowed myself to be dominated by any one." (Let me interrupt the letter long enough to quote Labato on literary influences. In his stimulating collection of critiques entitled "Idéas de Jéca Tatu" he has said: "Let us agree that imitation is, in fact, the greatest of creative forces. He imitates who assimilates

processes. Who copies, does not imitate; he steals. Who plagiarizes does not imitate; he apes." And let us recall that Lobato presents this book as "a war-cry in favor of personal-ity"). To continue with the letter:

"I like to see with my own eyes, smell with my own nose. All my work reveals this personal impression, almost always cruel, for, in my opinion, we are the remnant of a race approaching annihilation. Brazil will be something in the future, but the man of today, the Luso-Africano-Indian will pass out of existence, absorbed and assimilated by other, stronger races . . . just as the primitive aborigine passed. Even as the Portuguese caused the disappearance of the Indian, so will the new races cause the disappearance of the hybrid Portuguese, whose rôle in Brazilian civilization is already fulfilled, having consisted in the vast labor of clearing the land by the destruction of the forests. The language will remain, gradually more and modified by the influence of the new milieu, so different from the Lusitanian milieu.

"Brazil is an ailing country."

Let me interrupt once again, to say that in his pamphlet "Problema Vital," Lobato studies this problem, indicating that man will be victorious over the tropical zone through the new arms of hygiene. The pamphlet caused a turmoil throughout Brazil, and sides were at once formed, the one considering Lobato a defamer of the nation, the other seeing in the work an act of sanative patriotism. As a result, a national program of sanitation was inaugu-

ated. This realism of approach, so characteristic of Lobato, made of his figure Jéca Tatu a symbol that has in many minds replaced the idealized image of Pery, from Alencar's "Guarany." Jéca thus stands for the most recent critical reaction against national romanticism.

"I recognize now," continues Lobato in the letter, "that I was cruel, but it was the only way of stirring opinion in that huge whale of most rudimentary nervous system which is my poor Brazil. I am not properly a literary man. I take no pleasure in writing, nor do I attach the slightest importance to what is called literary glory and similar follies. I am a particle of extremely sensitive conscience that adopted the literary form,—fiction, the conte, satire,—as the only means of being heard and heeded. I achieved my aim and today I devote myself to the publishing business, where I find a solid means of sustaining the great idea that, in order to cure an ailing person he must first be convinced that he is, in fact, a sick man."

Here, as elsewhere, Lobato's theory is harsher than his practise. He is, of course, a literary man, and has achieved a distinctive style; but he knows, as his letter hints, that his social strength may prove his literary weakness. The truth would seem to be that Monteiro Lobato is not so much a teller of stories as he is a critic of men. The three tales by which he is represented in this booklet come from his "Urupês"; they exhibit him at his favorite pursuit of caricaturing his fellow men, of deriding their political foibles, their personal weakness, their social shortcomings. "Modern

Torture" would not have shamed Mark Twain. It is not so intimately Brazilian that it cannot apply, with little alteration, to wardheelers in the United States. "The Penitent Wag" is an experiment in the macabre that also serves as a piece of social criticism. "The Plantation Buyer" is just as comical in the United States of America as in the United States of Brazil.

As I write, Lobato's Sao Paulo is seething with revolt. Revolution, in ideas and in action have been the history of that region. It is not the least of Lobato's virtues that his intellectual revolt seeks practical outlet. He means his blue-prints to be, some day, inspiring temples. And he is one of the finest social architects of contemporary Brazil.\*

ISAAC GOLDBERG

Roxbury, Massachusetts, 1924.

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\*The translations are by a woman friend of Lobato's, resident in Brazil.

A more extended account of Senhor Lobato may be found in my *Brazilian Literature*, pages 277 to 291. (New York, 1922).

## BRAZILIAN SHORT STORIES

### MODERN TORTURE

All the barbarity practiced by the Holy Inquisition to subjugate heretics, the clever tortures of the medieval rack, Ottoman impalement, the torture of the thousand pieces, the red-hot molten lead, poured down the throat through a funnel—all the old science of martyrdom still exists to this day, cloaked under clever disguises. Humanity is ever the same cruel destroyer of itself, either in centuries before or after Christ. The form of things changes; but the substance remains the same.

As proof I here adduce the avatar of the ancient tortures: the postman's job.

This torture is equal to the wheel, the bonfire, strangulation, the strappado, the bronze bull, impalement, the cat-o'-nine-tails, the pillory, the hydraulic whipping-post; the difference being that these machines killed with relative rapidity, while the postman's job prolongs the agony of the victim for years.

A man goes into the service of postman in the following manner: the Government, at the hateful suggestion of some political "boss,"—the modern substitute of the "servant" of the inquisition,—appoints a citizen mail-carrier between two neighboring towns not served by a railroad.

The innocent man sees both honor and busi-

ness in the case: it is an honor to become one of the crowded phalanx of budget-devouring parasites who patiently digest the country; it is a good business to taste at the end of each month a fixed salary and to have, nicely prepared for the future, the soft bed of a pension.

Here we see the difference between the ominous medieval times and the super-excellency of the democracy of the present day.

Absolutism brutally seized the victims and without warning or "habeas-corpus," murdered them; democracy works with the cunning of a hypocrite, sets traps, sticks a slice of orange inside and treacherously waits for the famished bird to fall into the noose, of his own free will. It wants chance victims and does not choose. This is called art, artfully done. . . .

The man having been appointed, at first does not perceive his misfortune. Only at the end of a month or two he begins to have his doubts; doubts that gradually become a certainty, a horrible certainty that he has been impaled on the hard back of the worst plug in the neighborhood, with five, six, seven leagues of torture before him to consume per day, with the mail-bag behind him on the horse's back. These leagues are the pricks of the instrument of torture. For ordinary mortals a league is a league; the measure of a distance beginning here and ending there. The traveler, having covered the distance, arrives and is satisfied. The leagues of the postman, hardly are they over, return again "da capo" as in music. Having gone over six (suppose the route to be one of six leagues), he sees

them rise up again in front of him on his return. He must do them and undo them. Penelope's web, rock of Sisyphus, and between the going and coming, the bad digestion of a warmed-up dinner and a bad night; and thus it continues for a month, a year, two, three, five, as long as he still has buttocks and his horse has loins.

When he meets a traveler on his way he becomes green with envy: that one will soon "arrive," whereas, for the postman, this verb is an ironical derision. He dismounts with difficulty, worn out, his flesh on fire at the end of the thirty-six thousand metres of the weary way. He eats a plate of badly cooked beans, and takes a wretched little nap. The dawn of the next day stretches out before him and by way of good-morning, the same accursed thirty-six thousand meters of the evening before, now lengthened out the other way. . . .

Soon the sore animal weakens and gives out. Now the rider must climb the hills on foot. He has no means with which to buy another nag. His salary is spent for corn and a closely cropped pasture for the horse, and brine for the baths and other remedies for the bruises of both rider and ridden. There is nothing left for clothes.

The State awards—the same State that maintains fat bureaucratic caterpillars at a *conto* and Congressional parrots at a hundred *mil reis* per day,—awards him, this generous and wealthy State . . . . one hundred *mil reis* per month. That is, one *real* for every nine yards of torment. Twenty *reis* they pay him for



three hundred and thirty meters of torture. That is, one kilometer of martyrdom for sixty *reis*. Cheaper pain would be impossible. . . .

The post-made-man begins to shrink from fatigue and hunger. He gets thin, his cheeks sink in, his legs become brackets within which dwells the belly of the wretched horse.

Besides the physiological, economical and social calamities, he is also showered with meteorological woes. The inclement weather does not spare him. In summer the sun roasts him pitilessly, as nuts are roasted in an oven; if it rains, he misses not a drop; by the end of May, when the cold weather begins, benumbed like a subject of the Czar in Siberia, he devours the infernal leagues. On Saint Bartholomew's day,\* as he hangs like grim death to the mane of the lean mare, it is a miracle that the devilish wind does not tumble them both over a precipice.

His patrons, the Government, take it for granted that he is made of iron and his buttocks of chromate of steel; that the roads are asphalted streets lined with plush; that the weather is a permanent blue sky with balmy breezes bent upon blowing the sweet perfume of flowering balsam over the travelers.

It still takes it for granted that the hundred *mil réis*\*\* of salary is a regal remuneration, to make one smack one's lips. And, in these angelical suppositions, when financial crises come and economy must be considered, it cuts

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\*Supposed to be the windiest day of the year.

\*\*A *mil réis* is about 25 cents at par.

down five or ten *mil réis* from his meagre salary so that there may be some margin by which some brother-in-law, graduated in medicine, can go to Europe on a commission to study the "zygomatic influence of the solar perihelion on the Zarathustrian system of Latin democracies."

And thus the army of postmen, more and more emaciated every day, head over heels in debt, covered with bruises, at the mercy of the December sun or the benumbing June drizzles, trots, trots, unceasingly, up hill and down dale, through mud-holes and sand-banks, whirlpools and slippery slopes, shaken up by the miserable mount that from so much suffering, poor thing, has lost all semblance of a horse. Its loins are but an open wound; the ribs a lath-work. This sorry caricature of the noble *Equus*, finally one day falls exhausted and famished in the midst of the journey.

The postman throws the harness and the mail-bag over his shoulders and finishes the journey on foot. However, as on that day he arrives late, the post-office agent reports to headquarters regarding his "non-compliance with the rules." Headquarters get moving; a paper circulates about several rooms, where, comfortably sprawled out in expensive arm-chairs, the stout bureaucracy converses about German spies. After a long voyage the documents reach an office where a well-filled out-fellow, with good color, is seated at a mahogany desk smoking a confiscated cigar.

This one earns eight hundred *mil réis* per month. is son of someone, brother-in-law, father-

in-law or son-in-law of someone else, begins work at eleven in the morning and leaves at three with an interval in between to take a cup of chocolate at the café on the corner. The fatted pig glances over the paper with lazy, listless eyes and grunts:

"These postmen! What vagabonds they are!"

And signs the dismissal of the culprit for the good of the public service.

The poor tortured man, turned out, without health, without a horse, without flesh, full of debts, his insides dislocated by the shaking up on horseback, finds himself surrounded by creditors, hungry as vultures around a slaughterhouse. As he is completely cleaned out, he is unable to pay any of them and, therefore, becomes known as a swindler.

"He seemed an honest man and nevertheless robbed me of five measures of corn," says the grocer, a fat man from Calabria, who became rich circulating bogus money.

"He borrowed one hundred *mil réis* from me for a horse, at a small friendly interest (three per cent per month) five years ago, and all he could pay me was the little premium and the harness as part payment. What a thief!" said the money-lender, partner of the other in the circulation of bogus money.

The dry-goods shop lamented the loss of a pair of cotton trousers sold on credit to the postman some time ago. The drug-store bewailed two pounds of adulterated Epsom salts. And the martyr, steeped in insults, only sees one way out of it: to take to his feet and run

... run to any country where he is unknown and can die in peace.

Thus the modern torture of the post service, besides drying up the flesh of a human creature free from crime, gives him a beautiful moral death.

And all this so that no news will be lacking to the learned people of the little towns, unserved by railroads; for they must get the daily paper and learn about the knifings between Spread-foot and Black Shirt, the cheese stolen by Little Bahiano from Manoel of the grocery-store, the novel translated from Georges Ohnet, the country's rescue from national thieving, the spouting of Leagues for this and that, the discovery of spies where there is nothing to spy, polyculture, zebu oxen, illiteracy, the falsehoods of the International News Agency and all the nonsense that sprouts from the soil of this wonderful country.

\* \* \* \* \*

Colonel Evandro's policy in Itaóca fell through when, at a certain election, the rival candidate Fidencio, also Colonel, hoisted the quotation of votes of those who wore neck-ties, to five hundred *mil réis* and of those who went bare-foot to two suits of clothes and a hat besides. The first act of the winner was to turn out everyone turnoutable connected with public employment. Among those dismissed were the post-office employes, including the postman, who was replaced at the suggestion of the Government, by Izé Biriba.

Saíd Biriba was a human snail, slow in movement and obtuse in ideas, with two tremendous

preoccupations in life: politics and his forelock. The forelock was a stubborn tangled lock of hair always falling over his forehead, and so obstinate that he spent half the day raising his left hand to his forehead in an automatic movement to push back the rebellious lock. It is needless to say what the politics consisted of.

Forelock and politics, both combined, took up all of his time so that Biriba found no spare moment in which to work his farm, which finally, gnawed by the mortgage-bug, fell into the hands of a wily Italian.

Then he started a bar that failed. While he pushed back his forelock, the customers stole the tips from him; and during the political talks, the men of his party drank cooling drinks and ate fish-cakes in celebration of the future victory while they spouted sarcastic remarks against those in power.

Besides brushing back his forelock, Biriba had the habit of saying, "Yes, sir," used as a comma, semicolon, colon and period in reply to all the nonsensical remarks of his companions; and sometimes, through habit, when the customer ceased talking and began to eat, Biriba would utter a series of "Yes, Sirs." in accompaniment to the chewing of the stolen cake.

At the time of the other man's fall and the ascent of his own faction, he was reduced to the conspicuous position of an electoral pawn.

He worked like a nigger at the election. The bosses gave him the hardest jobs: to hunt out country voters hidden away in mountain fastnesses, to do commerce with their consciences, to bargain prices of votes, exchange

them for mangy mares and prove to the unbelieving, by arguments whispered in their ears, that "the Government is on your side."

After the victory Biriba felt for the first time in his life entire joy of heart, head and stomach.

To win! Oh, nectar! Oh incomparable ambrosia!

Our friend Biriba fully enjoyed the gifts of the gods. At last the darkness of his life of misery was dispelled by the happy dawn! To eat plentifully, to have the upper hand . . . . delights of victory!

What would the boss give him?

In anticipation of the prize in prospect he spent his time dreaming rosy dreams until his appointment as postman was announced. With no inclination for that work he tried to resist, to ask for more; however, in a conference with his chief, the objections which rose to his lips were transmuted into the habitual "Yes, Sir," so that the Colonel was convinced that his ideal had been realized.

"You see, Biriba, what loyalty is worth. You get a fine job! Regino is to be agent and you postman."

The most he could complain of was that he had no horse.

"That can be managed," said the Colonel promptly; "I have an Arab mare, single-footer, thoroughbred, worth two hundred *mil réis*; but since it is for you, you can have her at half price. The money? That's a minor matter. Borrow it from friend Lendaro. All can be arranged, man!"

The arrangement was that Biriba bought the trotting mare for double the price she was worth, with money raised at three per cent per month from said Leandro, who was merely the creature of Fidencio.

Thus, by a master stroke, the sly boss won interest on the worst nag on his farm, besides holding the poor idiot, made postman, the halter of gratitude.

Biriba began his work: six leagues to do today and undo tomorrow, without any rest except the thirty-first day of every other month.

If only he had simply to devour the leagues in company of the limp mail-bags. His work, however, did not turn out so easy. As Itaóca was only a little place perched on a ridge of the mountain range and lacking everything, his political friends were always looking him up to order something from the city. When it was already time to leave, the unscrupulous people would appear with lists of notions or messages sent by little darkies.

"Missus says will you buy three spools of number 50 thread, a paper of needles, a roll of white tape, five packages of fine hairpins and if there is a penny left over will you bring a candy for Master Juquinha?"

Very often all these articles could be found in Itaóca; a trifle dearer, however, and therefore the object in ordering them elsewhere was to save the penny for the candy.

"Yes, sir, yes, sir! . . ."

No other words left his lips, although the continued abuse exasperated him. Besides the small and less troublesome orders there were

other large ones, such as leading a harnessed horse to Mr. So-and-so who was to arrive on such and such a day, to accompany Mr. Etcetera's wife, and other missions of like nature. Whenever Tiburcia, the collector's black cook, went on a holiday rest to the city, Biriba was detailed to take her.

It was so I met him, protecting the Amazon. On the way to Itaóca, half way there, I met a man mounted on the most dilapidated mare that ever I saw; behind him he carried mail bags and several smaller bags, besides a new broom stuck into the harness with the straw part up. He had stopped in a stupid attitude, holding by the bridle a little horse carrying a side-saddle. I approached him asking for a light. Having lit the cigarette, I inquired who was riding the other horse.

"I am accompanying Dona Engracia who is mid-wife in Itaóca; she dismounted for a moment and . . . ."

I heard a rustle behind me: out of the woods came a large ruddy woman, her skirts stiffly starched and on her head a little cap of the time of His Most Faithful Majesty. . . . Not to embarrass her I went on my way, but not without looking out of the corners of my eyes to enjoy the postman's difficulty in placing on the little horse the mid-wife's generous avoirdupois.

And the scoldings. . . .

"Mr. Biriba, it wasn't number 40 thread I ordered. You are stupid!"

When the material was not right:



"Couldn't you see that the calico would fade, you ass?"

What hurt him above all was to carry for the execrable people of the opposition. The Colonel of the opposite party, neutral or secret opponent, did not hesitate to take advantage, through the influence of a third party, of the martyr's good faith.

Biriba recalled painfully a thoroughbred goat that gave him great trouble on the way, and several butts besides; finally upon his arrival he discovered that the animal was destined for the enemy. Everybody received news of the incident with laughter and jest.

"This Biriba is an idiot! To think of his bringing the opposite party's goat! Ha! ha! ha!"

This and other happenings embittered him. He became thin and yellow.

The poor mare lost all shape of a horse. Her loins became sway-back so that the rider's feet nearly touched the ground. Biriba sank when he mounted. His head nearly came on a level with the mare's haunches and ears. Horribly sore, the miserable animal's eyes were always filled with tears of pain. All this suffering, however, instead of moving the hard hearts of the people of Itaóca, amused them and was the cause of endless ridicule and idiotic jokes about the "postman of the Sorry Aspect and his Bucephalus," as they were nicknamed by a town wag. . . .

Scrofulous as they, only one other creature, Cunegundes. Cunegundes was a dog without owner, covered with mange, that strayed about

the town avoiding flies and kicks. What should they do but change Cunegundes' name to Biriba! The scoundrels!

And soon the Government contributed to the torture by deciding to cut down the salaries of the postmen in order to save itself on a certain occasion from financial difficulty. . . . And it did so.

Clothes threadbare. At the beginning of the rainy season a charitable soul presented Biriba with an old rain-coat; however, the first down-pour showed the recipient that the coat leaked like a sieve, thus increasing his difficulty with an overweight of cloth that absorbed several quarts of water.

Biriba lost his patience and grumbled.

Alas! The boss soon heard of it and called him to account.

"Is it true that you are complaining of the job we gave you? Perhaps you would rather be elected senator or Vice-President? A shabby thing that went about nearly dying of hunger, due to our generosity obtains a Federal post, with a right to a pension, a fairly good salary . . . (here Biriba coughed out a "Yes, Sir") finds everything easy, receives a good animal and still complains? What does Your Excellency desire, then?"

Biriba took his courage in his hands and declared that he only desired one thing: his dismissal. He was ill, worn out, threatened with the loss of the mare and his haunches at any moment. He wanted to change his mode of living.

"So one's mode of life can be changed off-

hand like that? You want to abandon your friends: And partisan discipline, what of that, my dear idiot?"

Biriba's dismissal would suit no one.

Who could be of greater service? They recalled the former postmen, rude fellows, unwilling even to bring a paper of needles to anyone. He must not leave. He must sacrifice himself for Itaóca.

However the daily torture of having his insides shaken up along seven leagues ended by loosening the cement of his political loyalty. The martyr's eyes were opened. He remembered with longing the ominous days of Colonel Evandro, the delights of the bar and even the degrading cat's paw service of electioneering days. Things had grown worse undoubtedly after the victory.

This free examination of conscience, believe me, was the beginning of the downfall of Colonel Fidencio. Biriba, the staunch support, was rotting at the base. He would fall and with him the roof of that political shanty. In his harassed soul the viper of treason made its nest.

.....  
As the new election was approaching, new victory only meant a new three years of martyrdom for the postman. Biriba confabulated with his mare and decided that the salvation of both lay in defeat. He would be dismissed and, veteran and martyr of Fidencio's party, he would continue to warrant the support of the party without suffering through his bruised haunches the hateful contact of the seven daily hours of shake-up.

He decided to betray.

On the eve of the election, Fidencio commissioned him to bring an important paper from the city for the counting up of votes. Don't know what it was. A paper. The word "paper," said in a mysterious tone, means "something."

• • • •  
I know nothing of elections. I couldn't say positively if a "paper" that isn't just paper has the power to decide these social ills. All I know is that everything depended on the "paper," so much so that Biriba's mission was a secret one. Fidencio emphasized the importance of the commission—the greatest proof of confidence ever given by him to any electoral pawn.

"Take care! Our fate is in your hands. There's confidence for you, hey?"

Biriba set out; he received the paper and started to return. Half way he took a side path which led to an old negro's hut. He loosened the mare and began to talk with the gorilla. Night fell and Biriba remained where he was. The next day dawned and Biriba still kept quiet. Ten days passed thus. At the end of the ten days he harnessed the mare, mounted and went off to Itaóca as though nothing had happened.

His appearance caused astonishment. All efforts to find him during the day of the election and those following had been in vain; they had given him up as lost, eaten by the panthers, he, mare, mail-bag and "paper." Now to see him appear alone and calm, made mouths open and the whole village gape. What had happened?

Biriba met all questions with an idiotic expression. He explained nothing. Knew nothing. Cataleptic sleep? Witchery? He did not understand what had happened. To him he seemed to have left the day before and to have come back today.

Everyone was astonished and looked foolish. Fidencio was in bed with brain-fever and delirious. He had lost the election completely. "Out and out defeat," said Evandro's followers, setting off whistling fire-works.

In consequence of the inexplicable eclipse of the postman, the exominous Evandro assumed leadership. The slaughter began. Everything savouring of Fidencio was turned out.

However the new broom of dismissals spared . . . Biriba! The new chief approached him and said:

"I threw out all the trash, Biriba, except you. You are the only saving grace of the Fidencio tribe. Rest easy, your little place will not be taken from you, even though the heavens fall!"

Biriba, for the last time in Itaóca murmured ais, "Yes, Sir." That night he kissed his mare's nozzle and went forth on his tip-toes. He reached the high-road, disappeared, and no one ever saw him again. . .

## THE PENITENT WAG

Francisco Teixeira de Souza Pontes, bastard scion of a Souza Pontes family, rich planters of Barreiros and owners of thirty thousand "arrobas"\* of coffee, at thirty-two years of age began to take life seriously.

A wag by nature, up to that time he had lived off his comic strain and thereby reaped board, lodging, clothing and all else. His currency consisted of grimaces, jokes, anecdotes about Englishmen and everything that tickles the facial muscles of the animal that laughs, commonly called man, provoking hilarity or raising hearty guffaws.

He knew So-and-So's "Encyclopedia of Laughter and Mirth" by heart—the most mirthless creature God ever made, but such was Pontes ability that he could turn the most feeble jokes into excellent witticisms, to the delight of his hearers.

He had a knack for imitating man and beast. The entire gamut of a dog's voice, from the baying of the hound chasing the wild pig, to howling at the moon and all other sounds, growling or barking, were imitated by him to such perfection as to deceive both dogs and moon.

He also grunted like a pig, cackled like a hen, croaked like a toad, scolded like an old woman, whimpered like a baby, enjoined silence like a Representative or speechified like a patriot at

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\*An arroba equals 32 pounds.

a street meeting. What two-legged or four-legged hum of voices did he not mimic to perfection, as long as he had before him an audience well equipped with those "muscles of mirth" invented by our talented authoress Albertina Bertha?

On other occasions he reverted to prehistoric times. When his hearers were not over ignorant, drawing upon his own modicum of learning, he would reconstruct for their intellectual delectation the paleontological roars of extant brutes, love-growls of mammoths to their mates or the yells of the *stegosaurus* upon seeing hairy *homos* perched upon tree-ferns, according to the laughable descriptive science of Barros Barreto.

If he ran across a group of friends talking on a street corner, he would come quietly up to them and slap the calf of the nearest leg. It was funny to see the frightened jump and hear the nervous "Get out!" of the unsuspecting victim, followed by the hilarious laughter of the others and also of Pontes who had his own mode of laughter, boisterous and musical—music after Offenbach. Pontes' laugh was an imitation of the natural and spontaneous laughter of the human species, the only one that laughs, with exception of the drunken fox,—and passed abruptly without transition into a seriousness irresistibly comic.

In all his gestures and manner, in his way of walking, reading, eating; in the most trivial details of life, this man possessed of the devil, differed from the others in that he made prodigious fun of everything.

This reached such a point that it was only

necessary for him to open his mouth or raise his hand, for humanity to writhe in laughter. The sight of him was enough. As soon as he appeared, all faces beamed; if he made a spontaneous gesture, laughter could be heard, if he opened his mouth some shrieked, others loosened their belts so as to laugh better. If he spoke, good Lord! one heard shrieks of laughter, yells, squeaks, chokes, sniffing and tremendous catching of breath.

"He beats the devil, this Pontes!"

"Hold on, man, you'll make me gag!"

And when the wit tried to look innocent and idiotic, remarking:

"But what did I do? I never opened my mouth. . . ."

"Ha, ha, ha!" everyone laughed, their jaws aching, weeping spasmodically with uncontrollable hilarity.

As time passed, the mere mention of his name was enough to provoke merriment. If anyone pronounced the word "Pontes," the gun-cotton of risibles by which man raises himself above animals who do not laugh, would instantly ignite.

Thus he lived until the age of Christ in a smiling parable, laughing and provoking laughter, without a serious thought,—a vagabond life that exchanges grimaces for dinners and pays small bills with ponderous jokes. A merchant whom he had cheated once said to him, amidst bursts of spluttering laughter:

"You amuse me, at least, and are not like Major Carapuça who cheats with a face like a wooden Indian.

That unstamped receipt troubled our wag



not a little; but as the bill amounted to two dollars, it was well worth the trick. However, the memory of it remained, like a pin-prick to his self-respect. Following this came other pin-pricks, some shoved in with less force, others straight through.

One wearies of everything. Sick of such a life, the tireless joker began to dream of the joy of being taken seriously, of speaking and being listened to without the play of facial muscles, of gesticulating without disturbing human dignity, of crossing a street without hearing a chorus of "Here comes Pontes!" in the tone of those who check laughter or prepare themselves for a hearty guffaw.

Attempting reaction, Pontes tried to be serious—a disaster! Pontes solemnly changed his tactics and adopted English humorism. Formerly he was amusing as a clown, now he took the part of Tony.

The enormous success which everyone supposed to be a new phase of his comic strain, threw the penitent wag into despair. Was it possible that he could never follow any other path in life than that one, now so hateful to him? A clown then, everlastingly a clown against his will?

But the life of a grown man requires seriousness, gravity and even soberness, unnecessary in youth.

Even the most humble government employment, an office of alderman, requires that immobility of countenance, characteristic of laughterless idiocy. One cannot conceive a smiling alderman. Rabelais' phrase is lacking

in one exception: laughter is the prerogative of the human species,—aldermen excepted.

As the years passed, reflection matured, self-respect grew and the free dinners tasted bitter to him. The coin of joke currency became very difficult, it no longer was cast with the former light-heartedness; now it was done as a livelihood, not in thoughtless merriment of the days past. He mentally compared himself to a circus clown, old and ailing, obliged through poverty to transform rheumatism into comical faces required by the paying public.

He began to flee from mankind and spent months in the study of the transition necessary to obtain an honest employment for his activities. He thought of going into business, commerce, the administration of a plantation, the setting up of a bar—anything was preferable to the comic idiocy adopted up to the present.

One day, his plans fully matured, he decided to change his way of living. He looked up a friendly tradesman and frankly told him of his intentions to reform, finally asking him for a place in his business-house, if only that of sweeper. He hardly finished telling his plans when the Portuguese and all the cashiers who looked on at a distance awaiting the outcome, writhed in a hearty guffaw, highly delighted.

"What a good joke! First class! Ha! ha! ha! Then you . . . ha! ha! ha! You'll give me a pain, man! If it's on account of that little bill for cigarettes, rest easy, I'm already paid for it! Ha! ha! ha! Pontes has . . . Do you hear that one, Jose? Ha! ha! ha!"

And the clerks, customers, the loafers and even the passers-by stopped on the sidewalk to hear the joke, and their laughter sounded like policemen's rattles as they shook until their sides ached.

The wretched creature, bewildered and perfectly serious, tried his best to dispel the misunderstanding:

"I am in earnest and you have no right to laugh. For God's sake, don't make fun of a poor unfortunate who asks for work and not laughter."

The merchant loosened his belt.

"You mean it? Pshaw! Ha! ha! ha! Look here, Pontes, you . . ."

Pontes left him in the middle of his sentence and went forth with his soul tortured by despair and rage. It was too much. Then everyone spurned him?

He applied at other houses in the town, explained as best he could, implored. The case was judged unanimously as one of the best jokes of the "incurable" wag and many persons commented upon it with the usual observation:

"He is still the same! he'll never behave, that devil of a fellow, and he is no longer young. . . ."

Barred from trade, he turned his attention towards the farms. He looked up an old planter who had dismissed his overseer and stated his case. The Colonel, after listening attentively to his reasons, ending up with the offer to take on the job as overseer on the farm, exploded in a fit of laughter.

"Pontes overseer! He! he! he!"

"But . . ."

"Let me laugh, man, you don't hear this sort of thing in the country very often. He! he! he! Splendid! I have always said there was no wit like Pontes! None!"

And shouting within doors:

"Maria, come and hear Pontes' latest. He! he! he!"

That day the unfortunate wag wept. He understood that one cannot destroy overnight what has taken years to form. His reputation as a funny man, as a joker, as inimitable, as monumental, was built of far too good mortar and cement to crumble so soon.

However, it was necessary to change his mode of life and Pontes began to reflect on government employment, the most convenient and only possible master in this abstract case, because it neither knows how to laugh, nor does it know from close observation the cells whence laughter arises. This master, and this one alone, would take him seriously—the road to salvation, therefore, lay in that direction.

He studied the possibility of a postoffice agency, notary office, collector's office and others. Weighing well the pros and cons, trumps and suits, he decided upon the choice of a federal collector's office, the occupant of which, a Major Bentes, being old and suffering from heart trouble, was not expected to last long. His aneurism was the talk of the town, the final break being expected at any moment.

Pontes' trump card was a relative in Rio, a rich man on the way to influence in politics, should a change of government occur. Pontes chased after him and worked so hard to interest him in his claim that the man finally dismissed him with a sure promise.

"Go in peace, for when the affair breaks out here and your collector breaks down there, no one will laugh at you any more. Go, and advise me of the man's death without waiting for the body to cool."

Pontes returned radiant with hope and patiently waited for subsequent events, with one eye on politics and the other on the provident aneurism.

Finally the crisis came; ministries fell, others rose to power and among these a negotiating politician, partner of the relative. Half the battle was over, the other half still to be fought.

Unfortunately the Major's health came to a standstill without any visible signs of a rapid decline. His aneurism was, according to the doctors who killed by allopathy, a serious thing, which could break with the slightest effort; but the cautious old man was in no hurry to leave a life of comfort, for a better world, so he fooled the illness with an ultra-methodical regime. If a violent effort would kill him then such an effort should not be made.

Pontes, already almost owner of the prize, became impatient with the swaying balance of his calculations. How could he clear the way of that obstacle? He consulted in Chern-

vitz's medical manual on aneurisms; learned it by heart. He inquired here and there about all that had been said and written on the matter and became more familiar with the subject than ever Dr. Ioduret, a local doctor, who, we may truthfully say, knew nothing at all.

The apple of science thus eaten, he was led to the temptation of killing the man, obliging him to burst the aneurism. An effort would kill him? All right, Souza Pontes would lead him to make that effort.

"A hearty guffaw is an effort," he satanically philosophized to himself," so a guffaw can kill. Well, I know how to provoke laughter."

Many days passed, lost to the world in a mental dialogue with Satan. Crime? No! in what code is to be found the provocation of laughter as a crime? If the man died of this the fault would be due to the bad condition of his great artery.

The rascal's head turned into a field of combat where his "plan" fought a duel against all objections raised by conscience. His bitter ambition served as judge of the contest and heaven knows how often said judge prevaricated, led by scandalous partiality for one of the combatants.

As was expected, Satan won and Pontes reappeared before the world a little thinner, with dark rings under his eyes but with a strange light of victorious decision in his expression. Anyone observing him closely would note his nervous manner; however, close observation was not a prevailing virtue

among his countrymen and furthermore, Pontes' various states of mind were of no importance because Pontes . . .

"Well, Pontes was just Pontes!"

The future employe proceeded to plan a careful campaign. In the first place it was necessary to approach the Major, a reserved man and not fond of jests; to ingratiate himself into his home life, study his whims and pet habits until he could discover in what part of his body lay the weak spot.

He began to frequent the receiver's office assiduously, under various pretexts, sometimes for stamps, sometimes for information regarding taxes; everything was an excuse for sly and clever prattle meant to undermine the old man's severity.

He would also go on other people's business for the paying of excise taxes, taking out permits and other little matters. He became of great use to the friends who had business with the exchequer.

The Major was surprised at such assiduity and said so, but Pontes evaded the question, turning it into a joke, and persevered in a well calculated conclusion to let time round off the sharp corners of the sick man.

Within two months Bentes had become used to that "chipmunk" as he called him, who on the whole seemed a good sort of fellow, sincere, eager to be of use and above all, harmless. From asking him a favor on a very busy day, then another and still a third, and finally considering him as a sort of adjunct to the department, was only a step.

For certain commissions there was no one like him. Such earnestness! Such subtleness! Such tact!

One day the Major, reprimanding the clerks, held up his diplomacy as an example.

"You great idiot! go learn with Pontes who has a knack for everything, and is amusing besides."

That day he invited Pontes to Dinner.

Pontes' soul was filled with joy: the fortress had opened its doors to him.

That dinner was the beginning of a series where the "chipmunk," now an indispensable factotum, found a first-class field of action for his tactics.

Major Bentes, however, possessed one invulnerable point: he never laughed, he limited his hilarity to ironical smiles. A joke that would make the other guests rise from the table smothering their mouths in their table-napkins, would barely elicit a smile from him. And if the joke were not of the very best, the bored collector pitilessly guyed the story-teller.

"That's old as the hills, Pontes, I remember reading it in Laemmert's Almanack for 1850."

Pontes would smile with a vanquished look; but would inwardly say,—if that one wasn't appreciated another would be.

All his sagacity was focussed on the discovery of the Major's weak point. Each man has a preference for a certain class of humor or wit. One delights in wanton jests of rotund friars. Another regales himself with the boisterous good-humoured German joke. Still another would give a year of his life for the Gaul's



spicy vulgarity. The Brazilian adores a joke which exposes the rank stupidity of the Portuguese—the most convenient way our people have found to demonstrate by contrast, their own intelligence.

But how about the Major? Why did he not laugh at the English, German, French or Brazilian jokes? Which did he prefer?

Systematic observation and methodical exclusion of the classes of humor already found inefficient, led Pontes to discover the weak point of his stern adversary. The Major delighted in tales of Englishmen and friars. But they must be stories of both together. Separate, they were a failure. Just an old man's crankiness. At the appearance of red-faced Britishers, with cork helmets, checked clothes, formidable boots and pipes, side by side with rotund friars dotting upon a hogshead of wine and revelling in feminine flesh, the Major would open his mouth and suspend his chewing like a child enticed by candy; and when the comic climax was reached, he would laugh, but without exaggeration enough to upset the equilibrium of his circulation.

Pontes with infinite patience bet on that class of fun and stuck to it. He increased the program, the spiciness, the dose of malice and systematically bombarded the Major's great artery with the fruits of his clever manipulation.

When the story was a long one, rendered so because the narrator added flourishes with a view to hiding the final climax and heightening the effect, the old man would become high-

ly interested and during the artful pauses would ask for explanations or continuation:

"And the rascally Englishman?....And what happened next?....Did Mr. John call for help?"

Although the fatal peal of laughter was long in coming, the future collector did not despair, pinning his faith on the fable of the pitcher that went so often to the well that it finally broke.

The calculation was well made. Psychology, as well as Lent, was on his side.

One day, Carnival having passed, the Major gathered his friends about an enormous stuffed fish, a present from the clerk.

Carnival sport had enlivened the hearts of the guests as well as of the host who on that day was pleased with himself and the whole world, as though he had seen the blue-bird.

When the fish was brought in, the Major's eyes sparkled; it was well worth all the bottled aperitives and reflected in all faces an epicurean tenderness. Fine fish was the Major's delight, especially when cooked by Gertrude. And for that dinner Gertrude had excelled in a seasoning that transcended all culinary art and soared to the height of the most exquisite poetry. What fish! Vatel could have signed it with the pen of impotence dipped in the ink of envy, said the clerk, well up as a reader of Brillat-Savarin and other authorities on good things to eat.

Between swallows of rich wine the fish was eaten with religious rites. No one dared break the silence of that bromotological beatitude.

Pontes foresaw the opportune moment to play

his game. He had brought full-cocked a case of an Englishman, his wife and two bearded friars, an anecdote built from the best grey cells of his brain, rendered ever more perfect through long nights of insomnia. It had been kept in ambush for days awaiting the moment in which everything would contribute towards the greatest possible effect.

It was the last hope of the villain, his last cartridge. If it failed to go off he would decidedly blow out his brains. He saw that it was impossible to manipulate a more ingenious torpedo. Should the aneurism resist the shock, then the aneurism was a bluff, the great artery a fiction, Chernovitz mere twaddle, medical science worthless and Dr. Ioduret an ass and he, Pontes, the dullest, most insipid creature under the sun, therefore unworthy to live.

Pontes meditated thus, alluring the poor victim with the eyes of psychology when the Major met him halfway and winked his left eye at him.

"The time has come," thought the scoundrel and in the most natural way he took up the little bottle of sauce as though casually and began to read the label:

"Perrins, Lea & Perrins. I wonder if this might be a relation of that Lord Perrins, who baffled the two bearded friars?"

Inebriated by the seductions of the fish the Major's eyes lit up coveteously, greedy for a spicy tale:

"Two bearded friars and a Lord! The story must be A-1! Fire away, Chipmunk."

And chewing mechanically he became absorbed in the fatal story.

The anecdote ran on insidiously in a natural strain, told with a master's art, firm and sure, with strategic progression, showing real genius, until it nearly reached the climax. Around about this point the entanglement so held the attention of the poor old man that he remained motionless, with lips parted and an olive, stuck on his fork in mid air. A half smile,—a detained smile, the spark of laughter which is the preparation for a peal of laughter, lit up his face.

Pontes hesitated. He foresaw the break of the artery. Conscience cramped his tongue, but only for an instant. Pontes let conscience quiet down again and pulled the trigger.

For the first time in his life Major Antonio Pereira da Silva Bentes broke into a hearty peal of laughter; frank, resounding,—which could be heard all down the street; a peal of laughter equal to that of Teufelsdröckh before John Paul Richter. The first and the last, because in the midst of it his astonished guests saw him fall face-downwards over his plate, while at the same time a gush of blood reddened the table-cloth.

The assassin rose hallucinated and making the most of the confusion, slipped out onto the street, a modern Cain. He hid himself at home, locked in his room, his teeth chattering the night through, in a cold sweat. The least noise filled him with terror: was it the Police?

Weeks later he began to get over that soul-fright which everyone attributed to sorrow over

the death of his friend. Notwithstanding, he had ever before his eyes the same sight: the old man fallen over his plate, spurting blood while the echo of his last peal of laughter still rang in the air.

While in this deplorable condition, Pontes received a letter from the relative in Rio. Among other things the holder of the trump card wrote: "Since you did not advise me in time, as per our agreement, I learned of Bentes' death only through the newspapers; I looked up the Minister but it was too late, the appointment of his successor had already been signed. Your frivolousness has lost you the best chance of your life. Remember this for your future guidance: *tarde venientibus ossa*, and be smarter in the future."

A month later they found him hanging from a beam in his room with his tongue lolling, his body rigid.

He had hung himself by a leg of his drawers.

When the news got about town everyone found it amusing. The Portuguese grocer commented thus to the cashiers:

"What a fellow! Even on his dying day he cracks a joke! Hung himself by a drawers leg! Only Pontes would remember to do that!"

And they repeated in chorus a series of "Ha! ha! ha!!" . . . the only epitaph given him by man.

## THE PLANTATION BUYER

No worse farm existed than that of Espigão. It had already ruined three owners, which made superstitious people say: "The thing's a white elephant!" The last holder, a certain David Moreira de Souza, acquired it at auction, convinced that it was a great bargain; but there he was, too, head over ears in debt, scratching his head disconsolately. . . .

The coffee plantations stripped every other year, lashed by hail or blackened by frost, never yielded enough of a crop to fill a deposit.

The overgrown pastures were full of white-ant heaps intertwined with choking weeds, teeming with ticks; any ox turned loose there soon became thin, with its ribs showing, full of parasites, pitifully sorry and sore.

The underbrush that had taken the place of the native forest, revealed by the indiscreet presence of the brambles, the poorest kind of dry soil. On such soil the manioc shyly put forth little knotted branches; the large species of sugar-cane took on the aspect of the most slender kind and these in turn became similar to little bamboos that passed through the grinding cylinders untouched.

The horses were full of lice. The pigs that escaped the plague never got beyond the Pharaonic thinness of Egyptian cows.

On every side the cutting-ant reigned su-

preme, day and night busily mowing down the grass of the pastures, so that in October the sky would be darkened by clouds of winged ants, male and female, frolicking about in their love-making.

Unopened roads, fallen fences, laborer's dwellings full of leaks, with shaky roofs, foretelling ugly ruins. Even in the manor-house, everything indicated approaching ruin; plastering falling, floors worm-eaten; paneless windows; rickety furniture; bulging walls . . . was there anything whole to be found there?

Within this tumble-down setting, the planter, grown old under the burden of long disillusionment, and besides, gnawed by the voracious interest, without hope and without remedy, a hundred times a day scratched the cowlick of hair on his grey head.

His wife, poor Dona Izaura, having lost her autumnal strength, gathered upon her face all the freckles and crows-feet invented by the years, hand in hand with a hard-working life.

Zico the eldest child had turned out a good-for-nothing, fond of rising at ten, plastering his hair until eleven and spending the rest of his time in unlucky flirtations.

Aside from this vagabond, there was Zilda, then about seventeen, a pretty girl, but more sentimental than was reasonable and good for her parents' peace of mind. The girl spent her time reading love stories and building castles in Spain. . . .

There was only one way out of such a situation: sell the darned *fazenda*, to be able to breathe free from mortgages. It was difficult, however, at a time when coffee sold at

five *mil reis* the *arroba*;\* it was hard to lay one's hands on a fool of the dimensions required. Attracted by clever advertisements, some buyers found their way to Espigão, but turned up their noses, swearing at the useless journey and making no offer.

"It would be dear as a gift!" they would murmur to themselves.

Moreira's cow-lick, after repeated scratching, yielded a mystifying plan: to place along the edge of the thickets and one or other openings accessible to visitors, plants of good standard woods, transplanted from the neighboring forests. The lunatic did so and even more: stuck into a hollow a tree of *Pau d'aiho*, imported from São Paulo's rich red soil and fertilized the coffee plants on the edge of the path just enough to conceal the poverty of the rest. Wherever the sun's rays disclosed more clearly the poorness of the soil, there the hallucinated old man covered it over with rich sifted earth. . . .

One day he received a letter from his business agent announcing a new buyer. "Handle your man carefully," he advised, "know how to work the game and you have him. His name is Pedro Trancoso, very wealthy, very young, very loquacious, and he wants a *fazenda* for pleasure. It all depends upon tricking him with the ability of a cunning dealer."

Moreira prepared himself for the task. In the first place he warned the laborers to be on their guard, careful in what they should

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\*I. e. About 25 cents per 32 pounds.



say. Instructed by their master, the men answered to the queries of the visitors with consummate cunning, so as to transform into marvels the evils of the place.

Buyers are accustomed to interrogate unexpectedly, being suspicious of the information given by the proprietors. Therefore, if this happened—and it always happened, because Moreira was the personification of the contriver of chance situations,—there occurred dialogues such as these:

"Is there much frost about here?"

"Very little, and that only in bad years."

"Do beans grow well here?"

"Holy Mother! This very year I planted five measures and harvested fifty *alqueires*. And what beans!"

"Do the cattle have ticks?"

"Why, no! only one or another here and there. For raising, none better. No weeds or wild beans. The trouble is, the master has no strength. If he had the means this would become a fine fazenda!"

Having warned the informants, that night the preparation for receiving their guest was discussed, all happy with the renewal of their lost hopes.

"I bet that this time the thing goes!" said the vagabond son and declared that for his part he needed three *contos* to set himself up in business.

"What kind of business?" asked the father astonished.

"A grocery store at Volta Redonda . . ."

"At Volta Redonda! I was already surprised at a sensible idea in this crazy head.

So as to sell on credit to Tudinha's people?"

The lad, though he didn't blush, kept silent; he had reason to do so.

The wife wanted a house in town; for a long while she had her eye on a small dwelling on a certain street, a cheap little house suitable for a family of moderate means.

Zilda a piano . . . and crates and crates of love stories . . .

They slept happily that night and on the following day they sent early to the village for dainties to offer to their guest—butter, cheese and biscuits. There was some hesitation over the butter.

"That's not worth while!" objected the wife. "That will cost three *mil réis*. Far better buy me with that money a piece of unbleached cotton that I am needing so much."

"It is necessary, my dear! Sometimes a trifle helps to get around a man and facilitates the closing up of business. Butter is grease and grease makes things slide!"

The butter won.

While she awaited the arrival of the ingredients, Dona Izaura fell to sweeping and cleaning the house and arranging the guest's room; killed the least thin of the cockerels and a young lame sucking pig; seasoned the dough for the pasties and was rolling it out when . . .

"There he comes!" shouted Moreira from the window where he had posted himself since early morning, nervously scanning the high road with an old field glass; without leaving his post of observation he transmitted

the details as he saw them to his more than busy wife.

"He is young . . . well dressed . . . Panama hat . . . looks like Chico Canhambora . . ."

At last the man arrived; dismounted; presented his card: Pedro Trancoso de Carvalhaes Fagundes. A finer young fellow and of pleasanter speech had never landed at Espigao.

He began relating all sorts of things with the ease of a man who is as much at home in the world as in his own house in pyjamas—the journey, incidents connected with it; a marmosette he had seen hanging from a branch.

As soon as they had entered the waiting room Zico glued his ear to the keyhole, from there whispering to the women busily setting the table all he could catch of the conversation. Suddenly he squeaked to his sister with a suggestive grimace:

"He's a bachelor, Zilda!"

The girl dropped the cutlery as though unintentionally and disappeared. Half an hour later she appeared, decked out in her best dress and with two little round red roses painted on her cheeks.

Anyone entering the oratory of the fazenda at that moment would note the absence of several petals of the red tissue paper roses that adorned the image of Saint Anthony and a little candle lighted at the feet of the image. In the country, rouge and marriages spring from the oratory . . .

Trancoso was delivering a dissertation upon various agricultural themes.

"The 'canastrao'? Piffle!! A backward breed and very rank. My favorite is the Poland China. The Large Black is also good. But the Poland! What precocity! What a breed!"

Moreira, terribly ignorant on the subject, knowing only the famished skinny ones without name or breed, that grunted in his own pastures, unconsciously opened his mouth in astonishment.

"As far as bovine cattle is concerned," continued Trancoso, I think that all of them from Barreto to Prado are entirely wrong. Completely wrong, I say. There should be no selection or inter-breeding. I advise the immediate adoption of the finer breeds; the Polled Angus and the Red Lincoln. We have no pastures? We'll make them. We'll plant alfalfa. Make hay, ensilage. Assis confessed to me once . . ."

Assis! the highest authorities on agriculture confessed to that man! He was intimate with them all—Prado, Barreto, Cotrim . . . and Ministers! "Now, I told Bezerra . . ."

Never was that house honored with a more distinguished gentleman, so well connected and so widely traveled.

He spoke of the Argentine and Chicago like someone who had just come from there. Marvelous!

Moreira's mouth opened and had almost reached the last degree of aperture allowed by the jaws, when a woman's voice announced breakfast.

Introductions. Zilda was the recipient of phrases never before dreamed of, which made

her heart leap for joy. So were the stewed chicken, the pork and beans, the pasties and even the drinking water.

"In town, Mr. Moreira, water like this, pure as crystal, absolutely drinkable is worth the best of wines. Happy are those who can drink it!"

The family looked at each other: they never imagined that they owned such a precious thing, and each one involuntarily took a little swallow of it as though acquainting themselves with it at that moment for the first time. Zico even smacked his lips.

Dona Izaura could not contain herself with delight. The compliments to her cooking captivated the good lady; she would have considered herself well paid for the hard work with half that praise.

"Learn, Zico," she whispered to her son, "that's what a gentleman should be!"

After coffee, hailed with the word "delicious!" Moreira invited the young man for a turn on horseback.

"Impossible, my friend, I do not ride after meals: it gives me cephalalgia."

Zilda blushed. Zilda always blushed when she did not understand a word.

"We will go this afternoon, I am in no hurry. Now I prefer a short walk through the orchard to aid the digestion."

While the two men went slowly in that direction, Zilda and Zico flew for the dictionary.

"It isn't among the S's," said the youth.

"Look for it with a C," suggested the girl.

After some trouble they found the word.

"Headache! Well, I never! Just that . . ."

In the afternoon on the ride, Trancoso admired and praised all that he saw, to the astonishment of the planter, who, for the first time, heard his belongings praised.

Usually buyers run down everything, looking only for faults; they begin to exclaim about the dangers of loose soil as soon as they come across a crumbling bank; they find the water scarce and bad; and if they see an ox they glue their eyes on the parasites.

Not Trancoso! He only praised! As Moreira, when they passed the counterfeited places, pointed to the standards with trembling finger, the young man exclaimed in astonishment:

"*Caquéra!* Why this is wonderful!"

At sight of the *Pau d'Alho*, his amazement reached its height:

"What I see is marvelous! I never expected to see even a vestige of such a tree in these parts," he said slipping a leaf into his pocketbook as a souvenir.

In the house he unbosomed himself to the old lady:

"Well, madam, the quality of the soil is far beyond my expectations. Even *Pau d'Alho!* It is really astonishing!"

Dona Izaura lowered her eyes.

The scene occurred on the veranda.

Night had fallen.

A night humming with the chirp of crickets, the croaks of frogs, numberless stars in the sky and endless peace on earth.

Trancoso, stretched out on a lounging-chair,

transformed the torpor of digestion into poetic lassitude.

"How charming is the chirp of the crickets! I adore starry nights, the rustic life of the country, so healthy and happy! . . ."

"But it is very lonely. . . ." ventured Zilda.

"Do you think so! Do you prefer the strident song of the cicada tuning up in the bright sunshine?" said he in a mellifluous voice. "Then it must be that some shadow darkens your little heart."

Moreira seeing that sentimentalism was coming into play and in this way liable to lead to matrimonial consequences, slapped his forehead and cried out: "The devil! If I wasn't forgetting all about. . ." He fled precipitately, leaving the two alone.

The dialogue continued, all honey and roses.

"You are a poet!" exclaimed Zilda at one of his sweetest warblings.

"Who would not be, beneath the stars of the heavens and beside a star of the earth?"

"Poor me!" sighed the girl, her heart beating fast.

From Trancoso's heart also rose a sigh. He lifted his eyes to a cloud that took the place of the Milky Way in the sky and he murmured a soliloquy strong enough to bring a girl to terms:

"Love! . . . the Milky Way of Life! The perfume of roses, the veil of dawn! To love, and listen to the stars. . . Love, for only he who loves can understand what they say!"

It was sour contraband wine; but to the girl's inexperienced palate it tasted like *Lachryma Christi*. Zilda felt the fumes go to

her head. She wanted to reciprocate. She searched the rhetorical nosegays of her mind so as to cull the most beautiful flower and found only a humble jasmine.

"What a beautiful thought for a postcard!" she said.

They did not go beyond the jasmine; coffee and fried cakes interrupted the budding idyl.

What a night! One would say the angel of happiness had spread his golden wings over that lonely house. Zilda saw all the love tales she had ever devoured come true. Dona Izaura enjoyed the hope of marrying her off wealthy. Moreira dreamed of settling debts with a big surplus tinkling in his pockets. And Zico, transformed in his imagination into a grocer, the whole night in dreams sold on credit to Tudinha's people, who, finally charmed by so much kindness, gave him the daughter's much desired hand.

Only Trancoso slept the sleep of the just; dreamless and undisturbed by nightmares. How good it is to be rich!

The next day he went over the remainder of the fazenda, coffee-plantations and pastures; examined the live-stock and out-buildings; and as the amiable young man continued to be charmed, Moreira, who the night before had decided to ask forty contos for Espigão, thought it wise to raise the price. After the scene of the *Pau d'Alho*, in his mind he raised it to forty-five; after the examination of the live-stock it had already risen to sixty. And thus when the great question was broached, the old man declared courageously in the firm voice of an *alca jacta*:



"Seventy-five!" and waited standing for the storm to burst.

Trancoso, however, found the price reasonable.

"Well, it is not expensive, the price is more moderate than I expected."

The old man bit his lips and tried to retract.

"Seventy-five, yes, but . . . not including the cattle! . . ."

"That's fair," answered Trancoso.

". . . also not including the pigs!"

"Exactly."

". . . and the furniture!"

"Naturally."

The planter choked; there was nothing more to exclude; he confessed to himself that he was an ass. Why had he not said eighty right off?

The wife informed of the case, called him a fool.

"But, woman, at forty it was already a good business!"

"For eighty it would have been doubly good. Don't excuse yourself. I never saw a Moreira who was not slow and stupid. It's in the blood. You are not to blame."

They sulked for a while but the eagerness to build air-castles with the unexpected pile of money swept the cloud far away.

Zico took advantage of the favorable occasion to insist upon the three contos for setting up the business and was promised them.

Dona Izaura no longer wanted the little cottage. Now she remembered a larger one on a street where processions passed — Eusebio Leite's house.

"But that one is worth twelve contos," warned the husband.

"But it is far better than that shanty. Very well arranged. Only I don't like the windowless room near the pantry; it's too dark."

"We could put in a sky-light."

"The yard, too, needs to be made over; instead of the chicken enclosure . . ."

Until far into the night, while sleep did not come, they remodeled the house, transforming it into the loveliest dwelling in town. The couple were giving the last touches, and beginning to get sleepy when Zico knocked at the door.

"Three contos are not enough, father, I need five. There are the arrangements that I had not thought of, the license and the rental and other little things . . ."

Between two yawns the father generously granted six.

And Zilda? She floated along on the high seas of a fairy tale.

Let her float on.

Finally the day arrived for the amiable buyer to leave. Trancoso bid goodbye. He was sorry that he could not extend the delightful stay, but important affairs called him back. A rich man's life is not as easy as it seems . . . As to the business, it was all but closed; he would give a definite answer within the week.

Trancoso left carrying a parcel of eggs,—he had highly appreciated a breed of chickens raised there; and a little bag of yams,—a dainty of which he was very fond.

He also took with him a fine present,

Moreira's sorrel, the best horse on the farm. He had praised the animal so much during his rides that the planter had been obliged to refuse an exchange proposed and make him a present of it.

"Just see!" said Moreira, voicing the general opinion. "Young, very rich, straight as can be, learned as a doctor and, nevertheless, amiable, polite, incapable of turning up his nose at things like the idiots who have come here. That's a gentleman for you!"

The old lady was specially pleased at the young man's lack of ceremony. To take away eggs and yams! How nice of him!

They all agreed with her, each one praising him in his or her way. And thus, even absent, the amiable and wealthy youth was the talk of the household during the entire week.

The week passed, however, without the arrival of the much desired answer. And still another, and yet another. Moreira wrote him, already apprehensive; no answer. He remembered a friend who lived in the same town and sent him a letter asking him to obtain a definite decision from the capitalist. Regarding the price, he would lower it somewhat. He would sell the fazenda for fifty-five, fifty, or even forty, including live-stock and furniture.

His friend answered without delay. Upon opening the envelope the four hearts of the Espigão fazenda beat violently: that paper held the destiny of all four.

The letter read as follows: "Dear Moreira: Either I am very much mistaken or you are laboring under an illusion. There is no wealthy

Trancoso Carvalhaes about here. There is little Trancoso, son of Nhá Béva, commonly called Rag-Picker. He is a swindler and lives off crooked deals and knows how to fool those who are not acquainted with him. Latterly he has travelled over the State of Minas, from fazenda to fazenda under divers pretexts. Sometimes he pretends to be a buyer and spends a week in the planter's house, boring him with rides through the plantations and inspections of boundaries; eats and drinks of the best that's to be had; flirts with the servant-girls or the daughter of the house or anyone he comes across, and at the best stage of the game, beats it. He has done this a hundred times, always choosing another neighbourhood. The rascal likes to change his diet! As the only Trancoso here is this one I shall not present your proposal to the rogue. Think of the Rag-Picker buying a farm! . . ."

Moreira dropped into a chair stupefied, with the letter on his knee. Then the blood rose to his face and his eyes flashed.

The hope of the household fell with a crash, accompanied by the girl's tears, the old lady's anger and the rage of the men. Zico proposed leaving immediately on the track of the bandit, so as to smash his face for him.

"Let it be, boy. The world rolls on. Some day I will run across him and square accounts with this thief."

Poor castles! There is nothing sadder than the sudden tumbling down of illusions. The beautiful castles in Spain erected during a month with the wonderful pile of money

turned into dingy ruins. Dona Izaura bewailed her cakes, her butter and chickens. As for Zilda, the disaster had the effect of an icy blast across a tender flower in bloom. She took to her bed in a fever. Her face became hollow. All the tragic episodes in the novels she had read fled through her memory; she saw in herself the victim of them all. And for days contemplated suicide. Finally she became used to the idea and continued to live. Thus she verified the fact that folks die of love only in fiction. . . .

The story ends here—for the audience; for the gallery it still goes on a bit. The audience is accustomed to simulate some fine habits of good taste and tone, which are very laughable; it enters the theatre after the play has begun, and leaves when the epilogue has hardly commenced. Now the galleries want the whole thing so as to have their full money's worth to the last penny. In the novels and stories they ask insistently for all the details of the plot and if the author, led by the teaching of his school, presents them with the half finished sentence which he calls the impressionable note, at the most exciting point, they turn up their noses. They want to know and they are perfectly right, if So-and-so died, if the girl married happily, if the man finally sold the fazenda. To whom and for how much.

Healthy, human and highly respectable curiosity!

"Did poor Moreira sell the fazenda?"  
I am sorry to say that he did not! And he did not sell it due to the most unconceivable

of all the misunderstandings invented in the world by the devil,—yes, because besides the devil, who would be capable of tangling up the threads of the skein with such loops and knots just when the piece of crochet is about to be finished?

Chance conferred upon Trancoso fifty contos in the lottery. Don't laugh. Why wouldn't Trancoso be the chosen one if chance is blind and he had the ticket in his pocket? He won the fifty contos which to a poor beggar of that sort signified great wealth.

Once in possession of the pile of money, after weeks of dizziness he decided to buy a fazenda. He wanted to stop up people's mouths doing something that had never entered his head: buy a plantation.

He passed in review all those that he had visited during the vagabond years, leaning finally towards the Espigão fazenda. Contributing to this were the memory of the girl, the old lady's cakes and the idea of giving over the administration of the fazenda to his father-in-law in such a way as to leave him free to loaf, gently basking in Zilda's love and the culinary perfections of his mother-in-law.

Therefore he wrote to Moreira announcing his return in order to close the deal.

Alas! when said letter reached the Espigão fazenda there were roars of anger mingled with howls of vengeance.

"Now's our chance!" said the old man. "The rascal liked the fun and wants to repeat the dose; but this time I'll fix you, see if I don't!"

he ended rubbing his hands together in anticipation of revenge.

In pale Zilda's sinking heart, however, there flashed a ray of hope. The sombre night of her soul was lighted up by the moon-beam of a "who knows?" However, she did not dare to face her father's and brother's anger, for both had agreed upon a tremendous settling of accounts. She pinned her faith on a miracle and lit another little candle to Saint Anthony. . . .

The great day arrived. Trancoso entered the fazenda dancing up on the sorrel. Moreira went down to meet him below with his hands behind his back. Even before reining up his horse, the amiable rogue had already begun to exclaim:

"How do you do, my dear Moreira! At last the great day has arrived. This time I've come to buy the fazenda."

Moreira shook. He waited until the scoundrel had dismounted and hardly had Trancoso thrown aside the reins and turned towards him with open arms, all smiles, when the old man drew a whip from under his coat and belaboured him with the fury of a wild boar.

"You want a plantation, you great scoundrel! Take that and that, you thief!" and slash, slash, the whip fell in strong and angry strokes.

The poor fellow, dazed by the unexpected attack, fled to the horse and mounted blindly, while Zico, the aggrieved all-but-brother-in-law, fell upon him with another shower of whaling across his back.

Dona Izaura set the dogs on him:

"Catch him, Brinquinho! Hold tight, Joll!"

The unfortunate plantation-buyer, pursued like a fox on a run, spurred his horse and flew, followed by a hail of insults and stones. As he passed out of the gate he still managed to hear in the midst of the yelling, the insults of the old woman:

"You cake eater! You butter swallower! Take that, and you'll never try it again, you robber of eggs and yams!"

And Zilda?

Back of the window-pane, her eyes swollen from crying, the sorrowful girl saw disappear forever, wrapped in a cloud of dust, the gentle knight of her golden dreams.

Unlucky Moreira thus lost on that day, the only chance Fortune had given him in his life to make a profitable deal: getting rid at a single stroke of his daughter and the Espigão fazenda. . . .



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- 5 Life of Samuel Johnson.  
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- 33 Brann: Smasher of Shams.  
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Know Her. 2 Vols. Dorian

## Drama

- (See "Literature (Ancient)"  
for Greek and Roman Drama  
See "Shakespeare" for Shake-  
spearean Plays and Criticism  
See "Oscar Wilde." See  
"French Literature" for Ma-  
liere, Victor Hugo and Maeter-  
linck. See "Ibsen, Henrik.")
- 90 The Mikado. Gilbert.
- 226 The Anti-Semites.  
Schnitzler.
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sire. Yeats.
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- 371 *Ampeocles on Etza.*  
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- 378 *The Maid of Orleans.*  
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Play*
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- 572 *The Beggar's Opera.* Gay.
- 589 *The Pot-Bellier.* Sinclair.

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 590-591-592 *The Millennium.* 3 Vols. Sinclair.  
 594 *The Overman.* Sinclair.  
 595 *The Happy Hypocrite.* Beerbohm.
- Fine Arts**
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 403 *History of Music.* Sheehan.  
 466 *A History of Sculpture.* Sheehan.
- 468 *A History of Architecture.* Sheehan.  
 413 *The Need for Art in Life.* Holborn.  
 507 *Richard Wagner: An Introduction.* Goldberg.
- (Note: In the operative titles listed below, Mr. Theo. M. R. van Keler gives short biographical sketches, the story of the opera and helpful criticism of the music, illustrated by excerpts from the score.)  
 410 *Die Walkuere.* Wagner.  
 440 *Cavalleria Rusticana.* Mascagni.  
 441 *I Pagliacci.* Leoncavallo.  
 455 *Richard Strauss's Salome.*  
 456 *Carmen.* Bizet.  
 457 *Lohengrin.* Wagner.  
 458 *Tannhauser.* Wagner.  
 459 *Das Rheingold.* Wagner.  
 494 *Siegfried.* Wagner.  
 495 *Rigoletto.* Verdi.  
 569 *Gotterdammerung.* Wagner.
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 150 *Lost Civilizations.* Finger.  
 169 *Voices From the Past.* Tichenor.  
 174 *Trial of William Penn.*  
 185 *History of Printing.* Disraeli.  
 201 *Satan and the Saints.* Tichenor.  
 214 *Speeches of Lincoln.*  
 276 *Speeches and Letters of George Washington.*  
 286 *When the Puritans Were in Power.* Tichenor.  
 469 *The Egypt of Yesterday: A History of Exploring and Excavation.* Moritzer.



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