The Gift of Quirn

BY JOHN T. TROTH.

PART I.

Shom sat motionless upon the ground with something clutched tightly in one hand. His brown forehead was puckered, his eyes narrowed, and his tongue hard thrust into one smooth cheek, by which signs one well versed in such matters would instantly have deduced that Shom was at that moment engaged in a prodigious effort to think. Yet deliberate thought was distinctly a new turn for Shom, who led, day in and day out, the lazy, dreaming life of a goatherd on the sunny and grassy slopes of Dunmeen—slopes that quite innocently aspire to become little hills, with summits of their very own, but which end by being incontinently swallowed by the jealous foothills of the terrible mountains of Knorr, whose quite impossible peaks make threatening gestures from the north and west. But Shom's was a most happy existence, for those velvety pastures over which his flocks grazed were among the rare parts of the known world still peopled by the elves and fairies, and presided over by unassuming and easily placated lesser deities, who, in their simple way, were well pleased to see his sturdy, sun-bronzed legs chasing too adventurous kids along the steeper slopes, and to listen to the cheery tunes that come so miraculously out of his reed pipes.

But, as we have said, Shom was deeply concerned with thought. He had just had quite a remarkable adventure, and was the richer by he was not yet certain how much. But the possibilities were surely well worth considering. The way of it was this. That very morning while driving his goats up toward a new and better pasturage, he had heard a voice piteously calling "Shom! O Shom! Come and help me!" Looking keenly about he finally perceived Quirn, one of the innumerable little gods of vagrant impulse, who was caught in a most facetious but uncomfortable dilemma of which it is quite unnecessary to speak. Shom, politely hiding his amusement, for it is not well to laugh at any god or some men, ran to Quirn's aid, and the latter was so grateful for the timely assistance that he went to a hollow tree, dug about in the mouldy leaves for a moment, and returned with a gift. Which was the very thing that Shom held so closely in his hand as he sat thinking.

Now this gift was no less than a smooth, downy purse slyly and artfully fashioned from something it would hardly interest you to know about. Quirn said that the purse was a distinctly magical affair, to possess which many a king would gladly give much, since it contained a considerable store of gold. At this statement Shom was plainly puzzled, for the purse was small and he could feel but one coin within it. But Quirn explained, whispering, and peering warily about to be sure no avaricious little god was eavesdropping, that between the purse and its single gold-piece there existed so powerful an affinity that no sooner was the latter spent than it returned silently and mysteriously to the former, and could thus be spent over and over again, an arrangement which Shom immediately saw was unusually convenient. Whereupon Quirn left him, vanishing in search of other predicaments into which he might pleasantly fall, and Shom sat down to think.

This was the manner of his thought. Surely Quirn had said that many a king would give much to possess the magical purse—that he remembered clearly, for to a goatherd the affairs of a king are matters for absorbing speculation, and the mere mention of one could not easily be forgotten. But Shom was greatly puzzled to imagine what thing a king might own that would be of any use to him. In his mind he went over the simple but complete contents of his little thatched hut down in the valley, checking them off easily on the fingers of his disengaged hand, but to no purpose whatever—he really had everything that was necessary to his pleasant existence. Or so, at least, it at first appeared.

But the urgeful, insinuating little voices of spring were all about, and at such a time it has been known to happen, quite frequently in fact, that a man, whether goatherd or king, will find himself thinking of some perilous and intriguing luxury as though it were suddenly become a necessity, and, in consequence, will do many foolish and illogical things. And so it all happened, even to Shom. For, before long, it came into his mind that he had once seen the Princess Zeni, daughter of King Zoto, returning from the chase along the highway with all her brave retinue. And he had no trouble in recalling that she was of exceeding disturbing beauty—such beauty as the dawn holds while it is yet unseen in the anticipations of one who has tossed throughout an endless and fearsome night. Her incomparable loveliness had choked his heart with an aching, dumb sense of futility, and had sent a gnawing, vague hunger prowling through his benumbed veins, for such are the emotions immemorially inspired in men at the sight of great beauty, and particularly of that beauty which guilefully promises so much and grudgingly fulfills so little of the seeming promise. But Shom's mind, being enthralled with the memory of the vision, climbed painfully from thought to thought until it occurred to him that a king, some certain king, say, might have something for which Shom would gladly barter the gift of Quirn.

Long before sunset he herded the mildly reproachful goats back to the valley, made all safe for the night, and set off toward the city of Gam, whose turrets and pinnacles gleamed above the green of the furthest treetops at the southern extremity of the far-reaching vale, which was threaded by the sinuous course of the River Gurg. He strode along beside it, and the purse, in all this time, had never once left the strong brown fingers that had received it from the hand of Quirn.

Arriving at the gates of the city just at dusk, he spoke politely to the watchers above on the towers, who were preparing for the first vigil of the night, and was about to enter, when a pikeman asked him the manner of his business in Gam at such an hour.

"I come bearing that for which many kings would gladly give much," replied Shom, significantly, at which the pikeman stood respectfully to one side yet gazed after him as if wondering whether, in fact, the explanation was sufficiently conclusive. But Shom went calmly up the narrow streets until he came to where a seller of sweetmeats was slinging together his baskets in order to go home.

"Now is the time!" thought Shom. With quite a casual air, though trembling with excitement, he selected six little oaten cakes, handing the astonished merchant the gold piece in payment. The latter stammered that it was, no doubt, a jest, for how should a poor peddler of sweets have change for a veritable king's ransom! To which Shom replied grandly, for he had listened to the conversation of nobles on the highway, "Keep the change, my good fellow," and proceeded up the street munching on his cakes. Just as soon as he felt himself out of sight of the gaping sweetmeat seller, however, he darted behind a stone fountain and hurriedly opened the purse. There lay the gold piece, for all the world as if it had never budged, and Shom heaved a deep breath, saying, "Quirn indeed spake truth!"

He slept that night deep-burrowed into a great wain of fragrant new hay which stood in a tavern yard, and dreamed only such dreams as were eminently suitable to his new estate. Very early the next morning he went down into the bazaars and among the merchants and bought with his homing gold piece a magnificent red tunic all embroidered with the names of the gods, being careful to see that Quirn's name was not omitted; shoes of red muscovite leather and a very jaunty cap with a long blue feather brought from the jungles of Umb, together with other minor accountrements proper to the person of one who proposed to excite the covetous envy of a king.

At last he set off for the palace, set in the very centre of Gam, differing in this respect, as you will recall, from that in the rival city of Gaw, which is built over and around the main gate. And Shom left behind him a trail of various merchants searching feverishly among their wares and in their pockets, for assuredly the handsome and impudent stranger had put a gold piece even into their very hands, and behold, it was gone! But the coin and its owner went confidently on toward the palace, and Shom kept repeating over and over, under his breath, the thing that Quirn had said concerning kings.

Having come to the palace he shrewdly varied his tactics, remembering having once heard that King Zoto owed his being to that very god of vagrant impulse who had given the purse, so that the image of Quirn was well seen in the royal halls. So to the questions of the doorkeepers he made answer: "I am Shom of Dumeen, and I come from Quirn to prophesy before the King." This astounding news was passed from mouth to mouth along the corridors of the palace until it reached the ear of Zoto himself.

"What's that you are all mumbling?" he demanded peevishly, for the money-lenders had become uncommonly insistent and had refused further advances, thus putting him in a wonderfully bad humor.

"Sire, Shom, of Dumeen, has come direct from Quirn to prophesy unparalleled good fortunes for your royal and illustrious house!" squeaked one timorous courtier, hopefully, for Zoto had just broken a great bowl over his head, and he seized greedily upon any straw that might save him from further disfavor.

"Shom? Shom? Who the devil is Shom?" spluttered the King, adding hurriedly as he rather grudgingly remembered his indebtedness—"But no matter! If indeed he comes from Quirn we will hear what he has to say!"

Accordingly, Shom was brought into the King's presence with great respect, for the entire court had come to its wit's end, and were hoping that he might, in some way, relieve the tensity of the situation. Out of the corner of his eye Shom saw the beautiful Zeni sitting by her father, industriously engaged in teasing a young peacock. She looked up in languid interest, but he wisely refused to meet her eyes, desiring to remain in full possession of his senses just then, but secretly promising himself the pleasure of taking leave of them at a more auspicious time. So he looked catlike at the King and awaited his command.

(To be concluded.)

WOMEN JOCKEYS IN ENGLAND

Horse racing for women is becoming an interesting feature of English racing events. The picture shows a winner being led in after a race in which she rode "Bo-Beep."

Woman's Sphere

Educational Value of Music to Little Children.

With a profound belief in the educational value of music to little children, Mrs. Statis. N. Coleman of New York thought that children should first be taught music without note reading. "Why not," she said, deliberately, "employ the child's natural way of learning until the physical process becomes easy?"

Mrs. Coleman says initiative singing may begin as soon as a child begins to talk, or even before. Simple dancing at three or four results in the cultivation of rhythm. Mrs. Coleman then had the idea of treating her children as little savages. They could understand savage music, and if they made their own instruments like the primitive peoples, they would love playing them. From the child's own savage level she would gradually lift him to higher forms. He would understand each stage as he reached for it, and his work always be at his own level.

Mrs. Coleman believes that it is possible for a child to receive from his mother and father in the home in the first seven years of his life musical training without set lessons or practice hours that will be of greater value to him than twice seven years' study in any conservatory after he is grown.

Mrs. Coleman's tiny pupils began at the drum and rattle stage, played Pan pipes until they found out the principle of the flute, made the shoulder harp of the Egyptians until they discovered how resonance could be found for strings, strummed the lyre and primitive harp, and learned how one string could be made to play more than one note and so made and played upon primitive fiddles and lutes and banjos.

Training Ears To Behave.

How greatly your child will regret it in later years if you allow his ears to grow out of his head, instead of training them to their natural place—close to the head! Remember that boys cannot modify any such defect by a coiffure.

It is a simple matter to have your baby wear a lacy cap to bed, being sure that his ears are in their correct position before it is tied. I suggest a lacy cap because there should be an opportunity for ventilation. The holes should not be large enough to allow portions of the ear to poke through, but there should be plenty of them.

My small boy of five evinces a great desire to jam his hat down on his ears, so that I have to be constantly on the alert. If his hat is a bit large, I put some tissue-paper inside of the hat-band, and take it out when he "grows into it."

In cold weather, when the little lad wears a close-fitting knitted cap, I am careful to see that his ears are pressed back before pulling the hat down securely.

When a child's ears are inclined to stand out, all of these things should be patiently attended to. Large ears which are unduly prominent are especially disfiguring, but they need not be so if properly "trained."

Wholesome Cold Weather Breads.

Good graham bread is wholesome and delicious at any time of the year, but if there is a time when it seems to just fit the appetite a little better than any other, it is when the crisp cold days of autumn and winter are with us.

In many modern homes the value of graham flour is underestimated. The graham that makes the most delicious and nut-like bread is ground at the mill directly from the farmer's wheat. It will be slightly coarser than the sacked graham procured at the grocery and much sweeter and better flavored. By asking the miller to give your wheat what is called "the first crack" you will have a nutritious and highly delightful breakfast food. Cook this the same as cream of wheat and you will ask for nothing better.

Hot graham gems are a welcome addition to the breakfast table on a cold morning. In one family where the mother was a splendid cook the writer recalls that when winter approached the main part of the Sunday morning breakfast was always baked potatoes, and graham gems. When you have baked beans for supper try serving hot graham gems or Boston brown bread with them.

Sandwiches from graham loaf and filled with cold roast pork, cheese or jelly, are ideal for the school lunch box.

For those troubled with poor digestion the best bread is made with yeast sponge and part or all graham flour.

The following are a few recipes for various forms of graham bread for a family of six:

Plain graham loaf—1 qt. good buttermilk, ¼ cup melted shortening, 2 tsps. soda and one tsp. baking powder, ½ cup molasses or sugar, 1 cup white flour or one egg.

Add one tsp. salt and enough graham flour to make a batter that will drop clean from the spoon. This will make two loaves baked in individual loaf tins.

For breakfast gems we use a plain loaf recipe and bake in well-greased gem pans in a hot oven.

Nut loaf—2 large cups buttermilk, ¼ cup melted shortening, 1 tspn. soda and one tspn. baking powder, 1 tspn. salt, 1 tbspn. white sugar or light syrup, 1 cup white flour, 1 egg, 1 cup chopped nut meats, 1 cup chopped raisins.

Add graham flour to make stiff batter, beat well, put in loaf tin, let rise fifteen minutes and bake in medium oven.

Raisin loaf is combined the same as plain loaf with one cup of chopped raisins added.

Boston brown bread—1 qt. good buttermilk, ½ cup melted shortening, 1 tspn. salt, 2 tspns. soda and 1 tspn. baking powder, 1 cup molasses or sorghum, 1 cup white flour, 1 cup corn meal, 1 cup rye meal.

One egg and enough graham flour to make stiff batter. Steam three hours in pudding basin or baking powder cans and bake twenty minutes in medium oven.

Yeast graham bread—Take the light sponge as for regular white bread, mix in two and one-half quarts of graham and enough white flour to make the hard loaf. Let rise, mold into loaves, let rise again and bake in steady oven.

To vary this bread if you like it slightly sweet, add to the sponge one cup of molasses and quarter teaspoon of soda.

If there were no clouds, we should not enjoy the sun.

Hounds of the same breed which were pets of the Pharaohs, Egypt's ancient rulers, were exhibited at a recent dog show in London.

Minard's Liniment for Coughs & Colds.

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Victim—"What! Are you coming back?"

Minard's Liniment for Burns & Scalds.

Long Meals.

Thomas A. Edison is not much given to humor—he is far too busy for that—but he has one pet yarn that he is never tired of repeating:

A man from the country one day came to town and put up at a first-class hotel. He went to the office and asked the clerk what were the times of the meals.

"Breakfast, 7 to 11," answered the clerk; "lunch 11 to 3; tea, 3 to 6; dinner, 6 to 8; and supper, 8 to 12.

"What!" shouted the astonished visitor, "then am I going to get time to see the town?"

Warships in the times of the old Greeks and Romans were built with as many as four and five banks, or rows, of oars.

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