

The Period of the Gruesome

Lafcadio Hearn's first 27 years



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Period of the Gruesome

This is a piece of crime reporting from an article in the Cincinnati Enquirer dated November 9, 1874:

An Enquirer reporter visited the establishment [Habig's undertaking on West Sixth] some hours later, accompanied by Dr. Maley, [the Coroner] and examined all so far discovered of Herman Schilling's charred corpse.

THE HIDEOUS MASS OF REEKING CINDERS,

Despite all the efforts of the brutal murderers to hide their ghastly crime, remain sufficiently intact to bear frightful witness against them.

On lifting the coffin-lid a powerful and penetrating odor, strongly resembling the smell of burnt beef, yet heavier and fouler, filled the air and almost sickened the spectators. But the site of the black remains was far more sickening. Laid upon the clean white lining of the coffin they rather resembled great shapeless lumps of half burnt bituminous coal than aught else at the first hurried glance; and only a closer investigation could enable a strong-stomached observer to detect their ghastly character — masses of crumbling human bones, strung together by half-burnt sinews, or glued one upon another by a hideous adhesion of half-molten flesh, boiled brains and jellied blood mingled with coal. The

SKULL HAD BURST LIKE A SHELL

In the fierce furnace heat; and the whole upper portion seemed as though it had been blown out by the steam from the boiling and bubbling brains. Only the posterior portion of the occipital and parietal bones, the inferior and the superior maxillary, and some of the face bones remained — the upper portions of the skull bones being jagged, burnt brown in some spots, and in others charred to black ashes. The brain had all boiled away, save a small wasted lump at the base of the skull about the size of a lemon. It was crisp and still warm to the touch. On pushing the finger through the crisp, the interior felt about the consistency of banana fruit, and the yellow fibers seemed to writhe like worms in the Coroner's hands. The eyes were cooked to bubbled crisps in the blackened sockets, and the bones of the nose were gone, leaving a hideous hole.

So covered were the jaws and lower facial bones with coal, crusted blood and gummy flesh, that the Coroner at first supposed the lower maxillary to have been burnt away. On tearing away the frightful skull-mask of mingled flesh and coal and charred gristle, however,

THE GRINNING TEETH SHONE GHASTLY WHITE,

And both jaws were found intact. They were set together so firmly that it was found impossible to separate them, without reducing the whole mass to ashes. For so great had been the heat, that the Coroner was able to crumble one of the upper teeth in his fingers.

Besides the fragments of the skull have been found six ribs of the right side and four of the left; the middle portion of the spinal column; the liver, spleen and kidneys; the pelvic bones; the right and left humerus; the femoral bones, and the tibia and fibula of both legs. The body had burst open at the chest, and the heart and lungs had been entirely consumed. The liver was simply roasted and the kidneys fried. There is a horrible probability that the wretched victim was

FORCED INTO THE FURNACE ALIVE,

And suffered all the agonies of the bitterest death which man can die, while wedged in the flaming fire.

The murder referred to in this excerpt became known as the Tanyard Murder because it was committed at Freiburg Tannery at Findlay and what is now Baumann Street, just north and west of Findlay Market. The Enquirer reporter who wrote the series of articles on the murder became known to newspapermen across the country when the story was syndicated. And, of course, the Enquirer sold papers all day long as the series ran.

The author of the Tanyard series had been born twenty-four years earlier and over 5,000 miles away on the Ionian Island of Leucadia, [now called Lefkada], just west of Greece. His mother, Rosa Cassimati, was Greek; his father, Charles Bush Hearn, was Irish. The two met while Charles Hearn, a surgeon in the British Army, was stationed on the Ionian Islands which the British had seized after the defeat of Napoleon. Rosa and Charles married in November, 1849, after their first son George Robert had been

born and when Rosa was two months along in her second pregnancy. Charles Hearn had just received a promotion, and he had to return to England for reassignment. He was not there in June, 1850, for the birth of his second son, christened Patrick Lefcadio Hearn; and he was not there that August when his first son George Robert died.

This was the beginning of the story for the second son, Patrick Lefcadio Hearn. From his birth the travails, the energy and the achievements of his life were epic. He would become an outstanding writer, and Cincinnati was where he apprenticed. This paper is limited to what would be the first half of his life — his first twenty-seven years — that is, his formative years and his time in Cincinnati.

Little Patrick Lefcadio Hearn was two years old when his father Charles notified the War Office in London that he was indeed married. Stationed in the West Indies at the time, he called for his wife and surviving son to travel to his family's home in Dublin. Rosa could not speak English so an interpreter was hired to accompany her.

Rosa did not fare well in the austere different environs of Ireland and in a household where everyone was a stranger. She was frequently “indolent” and complained of her surroundings. She spent days lying on the sofa. The only family member to show some empathy was Charles’ aunt Sarah Brenane. Sarah Brenane was, like Rosa, a Catholic, having converted when she married. Sarah was also widowed, childless and wealthy. She took the time to engage with Rosa, taking her to church and for carriage rides and on shopping trips.

Charles Hearn returned to Dublin from the West Indies in the fall of 1853, when Patrick was three years and four months old. Little Patrick's image of his father from that time was of an unyielding and unloving man. For Rosa it became clear that Charles no longer loved her, and she suffered a nervous collapse. In six months Charles Hearn was gone once more, this time to Crimea.

Patrick's mother, pregnant with a third child, left for Greece a few months later. Sarah Brenane sent a nurse with Rosa to help her deliver and care for the infant while little Patrick stayed with his great-aunt. Sarah expected Rosa to return for Patrick. She did not. Patrick never saw his new little brother, nor did he ever see his mother again.

In 1856, Charles Hearn returned from Crimea. He divorced the absent Rosa, and, in 1857, married a young widow he had known many years before. Charles and his bride and her children left for India. At seven, Patrick was left behind a second time. He would never see his father again.

Even though he was very young, these aberrant events and his proximity to the trauma his mother experienced were forever with him. And Greece was never erased. Years later he wrote:

I have a memory of a place and a magical time in which the Sun and Moon were larger and brighter than now. Whether it was of this life or of some life before I cannot tell. But I know the sky was very much more blue, and nearer to the world, – . . . The sea was alive, and used to

talk, – and the Wind made me cry out for joy when it touched me. . . . And all that country and time were softly ruled by One who thought only of ways to make me happy.

The next layer of Patrick Lescadio Hearn’s life would be the years he spent in the care of his great-aunt Sarah. Sarah Brenane never formally adopted Patrick, but she did intend for him to be her heir. A prerequisite for this was that he be versed in the Catholic faith; however, her plan for his Catholic education backfired. Sarah’s faith canted to the negative – the fear of damnation, the counting of sins, guilt, dread. It was emotion with no reasoning, no logic, and it repelled young Patrick. He remembered an incident involving a friend of his aunt’s – Jane was her name. Her beautiful face distorted as she pulled Patrick toward her, the better to make her point about who God was and what Hell would be if he rejected God:

. . . always burning, burning, burning! – screaming and burning! screaming and burning! – never to be saved from that pain of fire!

He had a daytime nightmare about Jane – seeing her, following her, and her turning toward him to reveal she had no face.

Patrick had nighttime nightmares, too. He was afraid of the dark and the remedy for this was to lock him in his bedroom at night. Initially, when he cried someone in the household came to comfort him, but when that stopped, “the others” came, “melting through the door” or haunting the unused fireplace in his gloomy room. The gothic church he and his aunt attended with “the wizened and pointed shapes of the windows” gave him even more material for his nightmares.

To be sure, there were bright, happy memories, too. Faceless Jane died, (shortly after Patrick wished she would), and left Patrick all her books and not one of them was religious. His aunt's library was available to him as well, including an illustrated volume of nearly naked Greek gods that he never forgot, even after his religion tutor drew in heavy Western clothing. Also, the Hearn family spent summers at an idyllic resort in Wales where Patrick was with cousins, swimming in the ocean and tearing through the woods.

As Patrick approached adolescence, his relationship with his great-aunt changed. She was in her seventies, and he was an exuberant and rebellious boy. She felt less able to help him and more estranged. Enter Mr. Henry Hearn Molyneux, a young man in his twenties who was the son of a friend and distantly related to Sarah Brenane. Over several years he insinuated himself into Sarah's affections and edged out Patrick. Then he borrowed money from Sarah for a business venture. When Molyneux married, he invited Sarah to spend more and more time with himself and his wife. It was not too long before he suggested that Patrick go away to school in France and that Sarah move in with him. By this time, Molyneux was the principal beneficiary of her investments, and she had set aside a very large land holding, originally intended for Patrick, in trust for the young couple.

The school Patrick was sent to was the Institution Ecclésiastique near Rouen in France. It was a Catholic institution where the students lived the religious life with daily meditation, Mass and prayers, and the reading of religious books at meals. Not

only was Patrick feeling abandoned once more, but he never felt accepted by the other boys. It was a relief then at the age of thirteen to be sent to St. Cuthbert's near Durham in England in the fall of 1863.

But, here again, the religious curriculum and the saturation of liturgical events drained him. His escape was in books and his favorite genre was the macabre – ghosts, monsters, haunts and terrors of all sorts. Elizabeth Stevenson in her book Lafcadio Hearn describes his years at St. Cuthbert's:

What he learned was privately learned; what he did not want to learn, he skipped. He had rebelled silently at home. He rebelled openly at St. Cuthbert's. . . . In displeasing the masters, he pleased the boys. The masters were tainted, as he thought, with the belief that had poisoned life at home.

Paddy, as he was called at St. Cuthbert's, earned the right in the eyes of his fellow students to be himself and he was much admired. At the same time, he was fully aware of the influence the Molyneuxs were having over his great-aunt Sarah and that he was losing his advantage.

At the age of sixteen, while on the playfield at St. Cuthbert's, Paddy suffered a severe injury. One version of the story is that a knotted rope used in a game called Giant's Stride slipped from a player's hand and struck Paddy in the left eye. The eye could not be saved, but it was not removed. White scar tissue formed over the cornea. Paddy returned to St Cuthbert's, but he was not the same. He would never be the same. Because of his self-consciousness over this deformity, he developed the habit of covering his left eye with his left hand when he spoke to people. Photos of him were

always taken in right profile or with him looking down. In his book Wandering Ghost: the Odyssey of Lafcadio Hearn, Jonathan Cott notes these additional effects:

This colorless, bulbous eye, along with his congenitally protuberant right eye, was a disfigurement that destroyed his already fragile sense of self-confidence and trust in other persons; it also exacerbated his existing obsessions with “the Odd, the Queer, the Strange, the Exotic, the Monstrous”; and forced him to wear glasses (something he had always disliked doing) or use a magnifying glass and small folding telescope in order to see things clearly close up and far away.

Finally, when Paddy was eighteen, the financial bottom fell out at home. Henry Molyneux was bankrupt and Great-Aunt Sarah’s property was in receivership. Paddy was withdrawn from St. Cuthbert’s and sent to live in London’s East End with a former maid of Aunt Sarah’s now married to a dockworker. For the first time, Paddy saw the underbelly of a city as he wandered the streets and docks at night. What he heard and saw and smelled there would stay with him.

Molyneux next sent Patrick money for passage to America and told him to travel to Cincinnati and look up his brother-in-law, Thomas Cullinan. Patrick arrived here at the age of nineteen. Mr. Cullinan did receive money for Patrick from Sarah Brenane for a time. He gave Patrick money, but he never allowed him to live with his family. Then, in the early days of 1871, Mr. Cullinan gave Patrick a letter from Molyneux that informed him of his great-aunt’s death. There was no mention of an annuity or any other inheritance. Patrick, too, like his great aunt, had been swindled. In the disgust of the moment, he dropped the name Patrick and began going by Lefcadio which he softened to Lafcadio.

While Lafcadio was homeless on the streets of Cincinnati, he found respite in the Public Library. He became one of our library's most famous habitués, using it to research and to read in both English and French. Rev. Thomas Vickers, who would become the head Librarian of the Public Library when the "Old Main" opened in 1874, met Lafcadio in his first years here and helped him by giving him work and encouragement.

Also, Mr. Cullinan may have been directly or indirectly or, perhaps, not at all responsible, but somehow Lafcadio Hearn met a British-American printer named Henry Watkin whose shop was on Walnut between Fifth and Sixth. This kind man let Lafcadio sleep in the back on paper shavings in exchange for tidying up and running errands. When he asked Lafcadio what he wanted to be, the answer was quick a writer.

Watkin and Lafcadio became very close. Even after Watkin found Lafcadio a job with the Cincinnati Trade List, and Lafcadio was living in a boarding house, the two would visit almost every evening. Lafcadio called Watkin "Old Man" and "Dad." Watkin, in turn, called Lafcadio "Raven" because of the boy's great admiration for the writing of Edgar Allen Poe. Lafcadio, who frequently illustrated his letters, would sign notes to Watkin with the drawing of a raven. After he left Cincinnati, he corresponded with Henry Watkin for the rest of his life.

Following an argument with the owner of Trade List, (and I like to imagine it was over usage or punctuation), Lafcadio was let go. His next position was as a proofreader at

the Robert Clarke Company, a publishing house, on Fourth between Vine and Walnut. While there, Lafcadio began submitting articles to the Cincinnati Enquirer. His very first submission was printed in November of 1872, when he was twenty-two and a half. He was hired by the Enquirer soon after and became known among his peers simply as Hearn, or, because of his fastidious devotion to the English system of punctuation, as Old Semi-Colon.

He was not physically attractive at only 5' 3", nearsighted, blind and scarred in his left eye, and wearing thick glasses. His right eye bulged more to compensate for the blindness in the left. His dark skin revealed that he was mixed. And he was reduced to being poor, unable to afford new, much less fine clothing. Besides these matters of his appearance, he dealt with emotional issues: his parents' rejection of him; his resentment of his bad fortune at the hands of Henry Molyneux; and the privation he experienced while living in London's East End and during his short stay in New York City and on the streets of Cincinnati during his first two years here. With this physical and psychological pile up, Hearn felt most at ease among the less judgmental, the outsiders, the people of the night. As Langston Hughes would put it:

*Maybe it ain't right
but the people
of the night
will give even
a snake
a break.*

Even as a young writer, Hearn was endowed with great energy and great gifts. He read widely and was well-schooled. He loved words, and, when he wrote, he used them lavishly, saturating his writing with sensory images and evoking emotional response. Steve Kemme who is the current president of the Lafcadio Hearn Society/USA, notes in a lecture he gave at the University of Toyama in 2018, that another reason Hearn's writing is "so enthralling" is Hearn's self-referencing style. Hearn injected himself into his stories by referring to himself as "this reporter" or "we" or "the Dismal Man" or "the Ghoul." The combined effect is a sensory and emotional experience with Hearn as your personal guide.

While at the Cincinnati Enquirer and later at the Cincinnati Commercial, Hearn became a writer known for the sensational. He exploded onto the scene with his articles about the Tanyard Murder, and there would be more to follow. He also chronicled the life of the lowly. He was sincere in his empathy for them, and he wanted to bear witness to the suburbanites. Still today, Hearn's stories give us the *news*.

It is because of Hearn that we know so much about the life of stevedores and roustabouts along the landing. We know some of their names and individual stories, and we have the lyrics to a few of their songs.

Here are two passages from one of his twelve sketches of Bucktown and the Levee:

Cincinnati Commercial, March 17, 1876

[On] a cool spring evening, when the levee is bathed in moonlight, and the torch-basket lights dance redly upon the water, and the clear air vibrates to the sonorous music of the deep-toned steam whistle, and the sound of wild banjo-thrumming floats out through the open doors of the levee dance-houses, then it is perhaps that one can best observe the peculiarities of this grotesquely-picturesque roustabout life.

Probably less than one-third of the stevedores and 'longshoremen employed in our river traffic are white; but the calling now really belongs by right to the Negroes, who are by far the best roustabouts and are unrivaled as firemen. The white stevedores are generally tramps, willing to work only through fear of the Work-house, or, sometimes laborers unable to obtain other employment, and glad to earn money for the time being at any employment. . . .

Roustabout life in the truest sense is, then, the life of the colored population of the Rows, and, partly, of Bucktown – blacks and mulattoes from all parts of the States, but chiefly from Kentucky and Eastern Virginia, where most of them appear to have toiled on the plantations before Freedom; and echoes of the old plantation life still live in their songs and their pastimes. You may hear old Kentucky slave songs chanted nightly on the steamboats, in that wild, half-melancholy key peculiar to the natural music of the African race; and you may see the old slave dances nightly performed to the air of some ancient Virginia-reel in the dance-houses of Sausage Row, or the "ball-rooms" of Bucktown.

Cincinnati Commercial, March 19, 1876

The dancers danced a double quadrille, at first, silently and rapidly; but warming with the wild spirit of the music, leaped and shouted, swinging each other off the floor, and keeping time with a precision which shook the building in time to the music. The women, we noticed, almost invariably embraced the men about the neck in swinging, the men clasping them about the waist. Sometimes the men advanced leaping and crossed legs with a double shuffle, and with almost sightless rapidity. Then the music changed to an old Virginia reel, and the dancing changed to the most grotesque spectacle imaginable. The dancing became wild, men patted juba and shouted, and negro women danced with the most fantastic grace, their bodies describing almost incredible curves forward and backward; limbs intertwined rapidly in a wrestle with each other and with the music; the room presented a tide of swaying bodies and tossing arms, and flying hair. The white female dancers seemed heavy; cumbersome, ungainly by contrast with their dark companions; the spirit of the music was not upon them; they were abnormal to the life about them. Once more the music changed – to some popular Negro air, with the chorus –

*"Don't get weary,
I'm goin' home."*

The musicians began to sing; the dancers joined in; and the dance terminated with a roar of song, stamping of feet, "patting juba," shouting, laughing, reeling. Even the curious spectators involuntarily kept time with their feet; it was the drunkenness of music, the intoxication of the dance. Amid such scenes does the roustabout find his heaven; and this heaven is certainly not to be despised.

Hearn was sincere in wanting to print the truth about life among the powerless and unseen. Here are two excerpts, one from an article entitled *Haceldama* from a *Slaughter House* series and the other from an article entitled *Some Pictures of the Poor*. In the second excerpt you see an example of how Hearn recorded the dialect of the people he interviewed which is still not common practice and certainly wasn't at the time.

Cincinnati Commercial, September 5, 1875

Wheedling and coaxing were in vain; and the butchers loudly cursed the poor cow. But at last the noose was flung about her neck, and they laid on the rope while she braced herself to resist. Then a great, yellow-haired brute of a man, with very large calves and very ugly feet, seized a pritch, and put out the poor cow's left eye.

While he accompanied the Overseer of the Poor through a tenement, they “heard a noise of crying and beating in a room below the one they were visiting:”

Cincinnati Commercial, January 7, 1877

*“Why she must be killing her children,” muttered the Overseer.
“To be sure she is,” whispered the Aged Woman, looking awfully at the hole in the floor as though fearing lest the “Divil” might suddenly rise up through it.
“But how often does this thing go on?”
“How often is it? Shure there's no ind to it at all, at all. Ah, she bates the childher whinever she takes a dhrap too much, bad cess to her! an' may God forgive me fur spakin' that word – an' she's dhrunk all the time, so she is, night and day: Thin, if I wor to spake a word to the Divil, she breaks up the flure undher us wid a pole; an' many's the night I've stud over the hole, thryin' to keep the flure down an' she a-breaking it up betune me feet.”*

It was reporting like this that secured Hearn's reputation as the Dismal Man.

But Hearn also wrote about the arts. That first article he wrote for the Enquirer was a critique of Lord Alfred Tennyson's "Gareth and Lynette" from his *Idylls of the King*. This article and others led to a job at the Enquirer where one of his early assignments was to interview local artists, among them Henry F. Farny. Farny and Hearn, both young and brilliant, became good friends. Together, they started their own weekly "Devoted to Art, Literature and Satire" calling it Ye Giglampz. They argued and struggled throughout its run. Hearn resigned twice in the first three weeks. Their biggest supporters were the breweries and taverns that were resisting the Cincinnati Temperance League and the religious leaders of the Y. M. C. A. This little piece by Hearn is from the third edition of Ye Giglampz and is often cited:

At the grand opening at the new Y. M. C. A. establishment on Sixth Street, several of the reverend Doctors of Divinity present condescended to instruct an ignorant public as to the aims and purposes of the Y. M. C. A.

One of its professed aims and purposes is to keep young men away from theaters, saloons, ball-rooms and other institutions of the devil – by inviting them to "play chequers" in the social rooms of the Y. M. C. A.

From which it must be inferred that the loftiest and purest idea of ordinary human social enjoyment entertained by the reverend orators aforesaid, is – chequers!

Verily; a gigantic effort in the way of moral reform! – this advocacy of chequers as a substitute for the attractions of the opera, the ballet, the beer garden, the wine-house!

Sublime philanthropy!

Chequers!

O fortunate adolescens!

Henceforth forswear wine and woman.

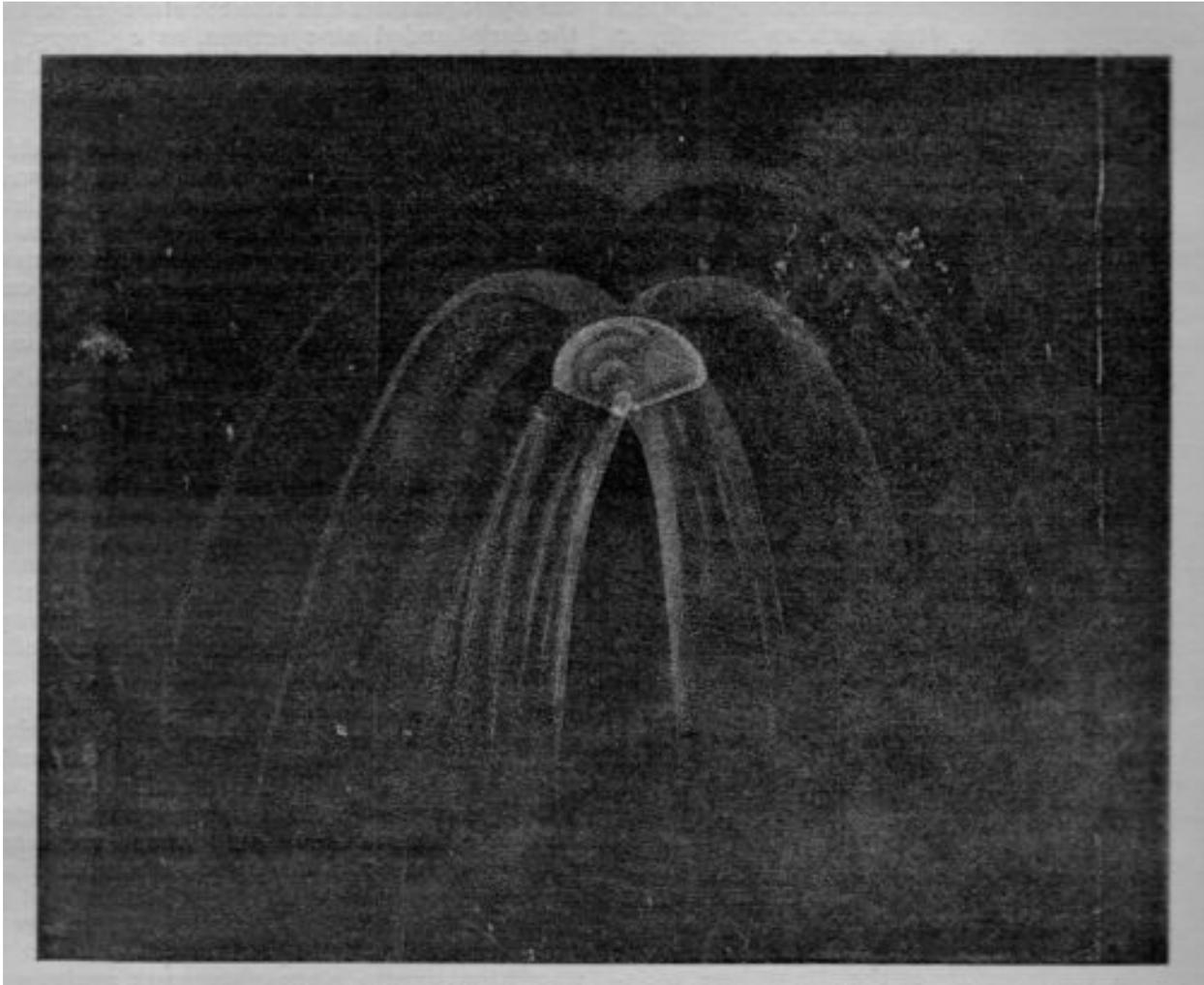
What is there like unto chequers?

Coggia's Comet which was not at all small, passed overhead that summer, and, as it tore across the sky, it collected all manner of significance. Ye Giglampz referenced it in several issues. The following remark is from the third edition and is another direct hit at the Cincinnati Temperance League:

The increasing virulence of the epidemic temperance-lunacy is probably attributable to the approach of the comet.

A Beautiful and Famous Comet, 1874

JF Ptak Science Books *Quick Post*



This lovely image of the head and envelopes of Coggia's Comet ([C/1874 H1](#)) as seen by Norman Lockyer on a summery night "under first-rate atmospheric conditions", July 12, 1874, and then drawn by him--and then published almost immediately in *Nature* on July 16, 1874, the magazine that Lockyer edited. This image is beautiful and significant for its "striking differences" from earlier cometary images "Without doubt, C/1874 H1 (Coggia) was a beauty; a true great comet. At its brightest, it probably exceeded the first magnitude and displayed a series of envelopes within its [coma](#) that astronomers compared with [Donati's Comet](#) 16 years earlier. Suitably placed observers also noted maximum naked-eye tail lengths reaching 70 degrees as the comet passed near Earth in July." Seargent, David A. J. (2008). "C/1874 H1 (Coggia)". *The greatest comets in history*. p. 126. --Wiki, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C/1874_H1#cite_ref-6

Unfortunately, Ye Giglampz did not survive past its ninth edition. Hearn had had high hopes for the weekly and had even quit his job at the Enquirer, but it was not to be. The Enquirer rehired Hearn at the end of summer, 1874.

It also fired him a year later, for behavior deemed scandalous and criminal he had married a bi-racial woman named Alethea Foley. Hearn called her Mattie. She was a beautiful girl of eighteen, a former slave from Kentucky who was now cooking meals at his boarding house. At the time miscegenation was against law in Ohio, [from 1861-1877], so he procured a marriage license through an African-American minister. The marriage was, unfortunately, a mistake. He had seen things in her that he needed and that he had wanted to see, and she told him stories, many of them ghost stories, in a voice and manner that enthralled him; but from the very start it did not work. After they separated he always inquired about her and wanted the best for her. She did eventually remarry, as did he. He was fired by the Enquirer without warning. He actually threatened to kill himself by throwing himself in the canal, but, alas, it was too shallow and he could swim too well. The managing editor of the Cincinnati Commercial took him on though. Scandal or no, he could sell papers.

Hearn worked for the Commercial for two years and submitted outstanding investigative articles. By 1877, at the age of twenty-seven, he was exhausted. He and his peers routinely put in twelve and sixteen hour days seven days a week. Besides, Hearn had other ambitions fueled by his reading of contemporary French writers. He had begun to translate the short stories of his favorite French author Théophile Gautier

and found that he enjoyed the work. He wanted to escape Cincinnati's winters and the social ills he saw everyday; plus, as he wrote to his friend Henry Watkin: "It is time for a fellow to get out of Cincinnati when they begin to call it the Paris of America." But where to go?

The answer came at two in the morning one night as he listened to his city editor extoll the natural beauty of the Gulf Coast. *New Orleans!* He left in October of 1877.

In his nearly ten years in New Orleans he accomplished literally volumes. He wrote a Creole cookbook, two novels, hundreds of newspaper articles, and he continued his work as a translator of contemporary French writers. Because he could capture the rhythm and the style of the original as well as the meaning, he is still recognized for his translations.

He left New Orleans in 1887, for the island of Martinique where he wrote articles for Harper's Magazine. His byline in the magazine caught the eye of his oldest half-sister in India and his younger brother who was by then farming in Michigan. He corresponded for years with both of them.

In 1889, Hearn went to Japan where he made an entirely other life for himself as Koizumi Yakumo, a married man; a father of four; a Buddhist; a much loved college professor; and a collector of Japanese folktales and customs. His collections of folktales are still available today in both the West and Japan.

Lafcadio Hearn is not known as a master of one or two or three writing genres, but of many: journalism for both newspapers and magazines, translations, novels, a cookbook, essays and lectures, beautiful and informative letters, folktales and critical reviews. He did all of this with one eye blinded and the other myopic. We all claim him for our own: both Ireland and Greece claim him, India lays a claim to him, New York and New Orleans claim him, Japan claims him, and we in Cincinnati claim him. We are proud that it's in our grotesque and raucous nineteenth century city that he built his journalistic reputation. He is our "Hearn", our "Old Semi-Colon".

An early biographer of Hearn, George M. Gould, called Hearn's time in Cincinnati his "period of the gruesome"; still in his twenties, he became our "Dismal Man". His style would change in New Orleans where the corrupt wanted him fired; and where, in an age of oppressive segregation, he was egalitarian.

Patrick Lafcadio Hearn was simply brilliant; a writer for the ages who understood that he was a creation of an explosive and dynamic universe, and who hoped that millions of ages hence, the very best of him would come together again. I hope so too.

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Addendum

1. The following is from a letter to his friend Henry Krehbiel who was music critic for the Cincinnati *Gazette* and later of the New York *Herald*:

My dear Krehbiel, Pray remember that your ancestors were the very Goths and Vandals who destroyed the marvels of Greek art which even Roman ignorance and ferocity had spared; and I perceive by your last letter that you possess still traces of that Gothic spirit which detests all beauty that is not beautiful with the fantastic and unearthly beauty that is Gothic.

You cannot make a Goth out of a Greek, nor can you change the blood in my veins by speaking to me of a something vague and gnostic and mystic which you deem superior to all that any Latin mind could conceive.

I grant the existence and the weird charm of the beauty that Gothic minds conceived; but I do not see less beauty in what was conceived by the passion and poetry of other races of mankind. This is a cosmopolitan art era; and you must not judge everything which claims art-merit by a Gothic standard.

Now I am with the Latin; I live in a Latin city; I seldom hear the English tongue except when I enter the office for a few brief hours. I eat and drink and sleep with members of the races you detest like the son of Odin that you are. I see beauty here all around me a strange, tropical, intoxicating beauty. I consider it my artistic duty to let myself be absorbed into this new life, and study its form and color and passion. And my impressions I occasionally put into the form of the little fantasies which disgust you so much, because they are not of the Æsir and Jötunheim. Were I able to live in Norway, I should try also to intoxicate myself with the Spirit of the Land, and I might write of the Saga singers

*From whose lips in music rolled
The Hamavel of Odin old,
With sounds mysterious as the roar
Of ocean on a storm-beat shore.*

The law of true art, even according to the Greek idea, is to seek beauty wherever it is to be found, and separate it from the dross of life as gold from ore. You do not see beauty in animal passion; yet passion was the inspiring breath of Greek art and the mother of language; and its gratification is the act of a creator, and the divinest rite of Nature's temple.

2. This is from a letter to his editor at Houghton-Mifflin who complained that Hearn used too many unfamiliar words:

For me, words have color, character,
They have faces, pouts, manners, gesticulations,
They have moods, humors, eccentricities,
They have tints, tones, personalities.

Because people cannot see the color of words, the tints of words, the secret ghostly motion of words;

Because they cannot hear the whispering of words, the rustling of the procession of letters, the dream-flutes and dream-drums, which are thinly and weirdly played by words;

Because they cannot perceive the pouting of words, the frowning and fuming of words, the weeping, the raging and racketing and rioting of words;

Because they are insensible to the phosphorescing of words, the fragrance of words, the noisomeness of words, the tenderness or hardness, the dryness or juiciness of words the interchange of value in the gold, the silver, the brass and the copper of words

Is that any reason why we should not try to make they hear, to make them see, to make them feel?

3. The following is an excerpt from his book *Two Years in the French West Indies*, 1890:

I thought Grande Anse the most sleepy place I ever visited. I suspect it is one of the sleepest in the whole world. The wind, which tans even a Creole of Saint Pierre to an unnatural brown within forty-eight hours of his sojourn in the village, has also a peculiarly somnolent effect. The moment one has nothing particular to do, and ventures to sit down idly with the breeze in one's face, slumber comes; and everybody who can spare the time takes a long nap in the afternoon, and little naps from hour to hour. For all that, the heat of the east coast is not enervating like that of Saint Pierre; one can take a great deal of exercise in the sun without feeling much the worse. Hunting excursions, river fishing parties, surf-bathing, and visits to neighboring plantations are the only amusements; but these are enough to make existence very pleasant at Grande Anse. The most interesting of my own experiences were those of a day passed by invitation at one of the old colonial estates on the hills near the village.

It is not easy to describe the charm of a Creole interior, whether in the city or the country. The cool shadowy court, with its wonderful plants and fountain of sparkling mountain water, or the lawn, with its ancestral trees the delicious welcome of the host, whose fraternal easy manner immediately makes you feel at home the coming of the children to greet you, each holding up a velvety brown cheek to be kissed, after the old-time custom the romance of the unconventional chat, over a cool drink, under the palms and the ceibas the visible earnestness of all to please the guest, to inwrap him in a very atmosphere of quiet happiness combine to make a memory which you will never forget. And maybe you enjoy all this upon some exquisite site, some volcanic summit, overlooking slopes of a hundred greens mountains far winding in blue and pearly shadowing rivers singing seaward behind curtains of arborescent reeds and bamboos and perhaps, Pelée, in the horizon, dreaming violet dreams under her foulard of vapors and, encircling all, the still sweep of the ocean's azure bending to the verge of day.

4. This is from his first book about Japan, *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*, 1894:

Here are Hokusai's own figures walking about in straw rain-coats, and immense mushroom-shaped hats of straw, and straw sandals, bare-limbed peasants, deeply tanned by wind and sun; and patient-faced mothers with smiling bald babies on their backs, toddling by upon their *geta* (high, noisy wooden clogs), and robed merchants squatting and smoking their little brass pipes among the countless riddles of their shops.

Then I notice how small and shapely the feet of the people are, whether bare brown feet of peasants, or beautiful feet of children wearing tiny, tiny *geta*, or feet of young girls in snowy *tabi*. The *tabi*, the white digitated stocking, gives to a small light foot a mythological aspect, the white cleft grace of the foot of a fauness. Clad or bare, the Japanese foot has the antique symmetry: it has not yet been distorted by the infamous foot-gear which has deformed the feet of Occidentals.

. . . Of every pair of Japanese wooden clogs, one makes in walking a slightly different sound from the other, as *kring* to *krang*; so that the echo of the walker's steps has an alternate rhythm of tones. On a pavement, such as that of a railway station, the sound obtains immense sonority and a crowd will sometimes intentionally fall into step, with the drollest conceivable result of drawling wooden noise.

5. Also from *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*:

The first of the noises of Matsue day comes to the sleeper like the throbbing of a slow, enormous pulse exactly under his ear. It is a great, soft, dull buffet of sound like a heartbeat in its regularity, in its muffled depth, in the way it quakes up through one's pillow so as to be felt rather than heard. It is simply the pounding of the ponderous pestle of the *kometsuki*, the cleaner of rice, a sort of colossal wooden mallet with a handle about fifteen feet long horizontally balanced on a pivot. By treading with all his force on the end of the handle, the naked *kometsuki* elevates the pestle, which is then allowed to fall back by its own weight into the rice-tub. The measured muffled echoing of its fall seems to me the most pathetic of all sounds of Japanese life; it is the beating, indeed, of the Pulse of the Land.

Then the boom of the great bell of Tokoji, the Zen-shu temple, shakes over the town; then come melancholy echoes of drumming from the tiny little temple of *Jizo* in the street *Zaimokucho*, near my house, signaling the Buddhist hour of morning prayer. And finally the cries of the earliest itinerant vendors begin, "*Daikoyai! kabuya-kabu!*"—the sellers of *daikon*, and other strange vegetables. "*Moyaya-moya*"—the plaintive call of the women who sell little thin slips of kindling-wood for the lighting of charcoal fires.

*

Roused thus by these earliest sounds of the city's awakening life, I slide open my little Japanese paper window to look out upon the morning over a soft green cloud of spring foliage rising from the river-bounded garden below. Before me, tremulously mirroring everything upon its farther side, glimmers the broad glassy mouth of the *Ohashigawa*, opening into the grand *Shinji Lake*, which spreads out broadly to the right in a dim gray frame of peaks. Just opposite to me, across the stream, the blue-pointed Japanese dwellings have their *to* [sliding wooden shutters] all closed; they are still shut up like boxes, for it is not yet sunrise, although it is day.

But oh, the charm of the vision, those first ghostly love-colors of a morning steeped in mist soft as sleep itself resolved into a visible exhalation! Long reaches of faintly-tinted vapor cloud the far lake verge, long nebulous bands, such as you may have seen in old Japanese picture-books, and must have deemed only artistic whimsicalities unless you had previously looked upon the real phenomena. All the bases of the mountains are veiled by them, and they stretch athwart the loftier peaks

at different heights like immeasurable lengths of gauze (this singular appearance the Japanese term “shelving”), so that the lake appears incomparably larger than it really is, and not an actual lake, but a beautiful spectral sea of the same tint as the dawn-sky and mixing with it, while peak-tips rise like islands from the brume, and visionary strips of hill-ranges figure as league-long causeways stretching out of sight, an exquisite chaos, ever changing aspect as the delicate fogs rise, slowly, very slowly. As the sun’s yellow rim comes into sight, fine thin lines of warmer tone spectral violets and opalines shoot across the flood, treetops take tender fire, and the unpainted facades of high edifices across the water change their wood-color to vapory gold through the delicious haze.

Looking sunward, up the Ohashigawa, beyond the many-pillared wood bridge, one high-pooped junk, just hoisting sail, seems to me the most fantastically beautiful craft I ever saw, a dream of Orient seas, so idealized by the vapor is it; the ghost of a junk, but a ghost that catches the light as clouds do; a shape of gold mist, seemingly semi-diaphanous and suspended in pale blue light.

6. The following autobiographical sketch entitled "Stars" was first published in *The Life and Letters of Lafcadio Hearn* by Elizabeth Bisland, published in 1906. Lafcadio spent two weeks in a stable here in Cincinnati when he was about nineteen and homeless. He wandered into the mews and the British coachmen hid him in the loft and made sure he was fed.

I take off my clothes few and thin and roll them up into a bundle, to serve me for a pillow: then I creep naked into the hay. . . . Oh, the delight of my hay-bed the first bed of any sort for many a long night! oh, the pleasure of the sense of rest! The sweet scent of the hay! . . . Overhead, through a skylight, I see stars sharply shining: there is frost in the air.

The horses, below, stir heavily at moments, and paw. I hear them breathe; and their breath comes up to me in steam. The warmth of their great bodies fills the building, penetrates the hay, quickens my blood; their life is my fire.

So contentedly they breathe! . . . They must be aware that I am here nestling in their hay. But they do not mind; and for that I am grateful. Grateful, too, for the warmth of their breath, the warmth of their pure bodies, the warmth of their good hay grateful even for those stirrings which they make in their rest, filling the dark with assurance of large dumb tolerant companionship. . . . I wish I could tell them how thankful I am how much I like them what pleasure I feel in the power that proceeds from them, in the sense of force and life that they spread through the silence, like a large warm Soul. . . .

It is better that they cannot understand. For they earn their good food and lodging; they earn the care that keeps them glossy and beautiful; they are of use in the world. And of what use in the world am I?

Those sharply shining stars are suns enormous suns. They must be giving light to multitudes unthinkable of other worlds. . . . In some of those other worlds there must be cities, and creatures, horses, and stables for them, and hay, and small things somewhat like rats or mice hiding in the hay. . . . I know that there are a hundred millions of suns. The horses do not know. But, nevertheless, they are worth, I have been told, fifteen hundred dollars each: they are superior beings! How much am I worth? . . .

Tomorrow, after they have been fed, I also shall be fed by kindly stealth; and I shall not have earned the feeding, in spite of the fact that I know there are hundreds of millions of suns!

7. This is from his essay "Dust" in the book *Gleaning in Buddha-Fields: Studies of Hand and Soul in the Far East*, 1897:

I an individual an individual soul! Nay, I am a population a population unthinkable for multitude, even by groups of a thousand millions! Generations of generations I am, æons of æons! Countless times the concourse now making me has been scattered, and mixed with other scattering. Of what concern, then, the next disintegration? Perhaps, after millions of ages of burning in different dynasties of suns, the very best of me may come together again.

8. The following are excerpts from newspaper articles that give a sense of some the social issues the city lived with in the 1870s.

from "OPIUM AND MORPHIA. Their Consumption On The Increase. Their Demand In Cincinnati and Vicinity The Quantities Consumed, And Their Terrible Consequences". *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 14, 1875.

. . . . The increase in the quantity of opium and its kindred poisons consumed in the United States alone is alarming, and should startle every well-meaning citizen should arouse the attention of law-observers and law-makers. Walk along the streets of this city any day, and you will meet opium slaves by the score. Whether with or without their subtle drug, you can scarcely fail to recognize them. If under its potent influence, you will notice their faded and shining skin, and a strange, basilisk glitter to their eye, and their languid and uncertain steps. They are slaves, abject slaves, suffering exquisite tortures, and not a street of Cincinnati is without them. They are not living they are simply existing, and their days are made up of spasmodic fits of desperation. . . . Once in the letters of opium or morphia, they are, with very rare exceptions, fettered for life. An incubus is upon them. They are held down with the strength of a Titan, and resurrection is foreign to all probability.

, , , the wholesale druggists of Cincinnati, were visited by a reporter during the past week and the aggregate amount of the opium which they annually dispose of was found to be 4,310 pounds, while the total amount of morphine annually sold by them was 11,250 ounces. . . . They sell because of their customers' demand. They would gladly banish the whole trade, and they would be the first to advocate a law preventing its use for other than medicinal purposes.

Its consumption is a disease, and it reveals among mechanical, business and professional men, and is especially prevalent among those of the weaker sex. In Cincinnati, victims to this terrible and poisonous appetite are known to daily grovel under its influences, victims occupying high and respected positions in society. Many of them have been slowly drawn into an opium-eating habit through the wiles of narcotic medicines.

. . . In the lower walks of life opium slaves are counted by the hundred. In the brothels opium reigns supreme. The writer was informed by a prominent retail druggist that he daily refused opium, morphia, or laudanum to scores of Cincinnati's demi-mondes.. They possibly seek forgetfulness, and what agent could better answer their purposes?

from "THE QUARTER OF SHAMBLES. Its Atmosphere, Aspects and Atrocious Stenches. Blood, Butchers and Divers Abominations. . . . *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, November 16, 1874.

Probably there is no city in America which contains a quarter so hideous as that noisome district of Cincinnati now cursed with the horror of the most frightful crime ever perpetrated in this country. [He refers to the Tanyard Murder.] It is a quarter where the senses of sight and hearing and smell are at once assailed with all the foulnesses of the charnel-house and the shambles. It is the center of all those trades which harden and brutalize the men who engage in them. Its gutters run with ordure and blood; its buildings reek with the smells of slaughter and stenches abominable beyond description. An atmosphere heavy with the odors of death and decay and animal filth and steaming nastiness of every description, hangs over it like the sickly smoke of an ancient holocaust. In fact, it has an atmosphere peculiar to itself rendering establishments, vast soap and candle factories, immense hog-pens and gigantic tanneries loom up through the miasmatic atmosphere for blocks and blocks in every direction. Narrow alleys, dark and filthy, bordered by sluggish black steams of stinking filth, traverse this quarter in every direction. The main streets here lose their width and straightness in tortuous curves and narrow twists and labyrinthine perplexity so that the stranger who loses his way in this region of nastiness must wander wildly and long ere he may cease to inhale the ghoulis aroma of stink-factories and the sickening smell of hog-pens fouler than the stable of Augeas. Night-carts*, which elsewhere leave far behind them a wake of stench suggestive of epidemics, here may pass through in broad daylight without betraying their presence. Rats propagate undisturbed and grow fat and gigantic among the dung-piles and offal-dumps.

Amid these scenes and smells lives and labors a large and strangely healthy population of brawny butchers, sinewy coopers, muscular tanners a foreign population, speaking a foreign tongue, and living the life of the Fatherland broad-shouldered men from Pomerania; tall, fair-haired emigrants from Bohemia;

* Night carts carried away the contents of privies all of which needed to be cleaned two or three times a year. This "night soil" was carried away and dumped by the night soil men.

dark, brawny people from Bavaria; rough-featured fellows from the region of the Hartz Mountains; men speaking the strange dialects of strange provinces. They are mostly rough of aspect, rude of manner and ruddy of feature. The greater part of them labor in tanneries, slaughter-houses and soap factories, receiving small salaries upon which an American workman could not support his family, and doing work which Americans instinctively shrink from making slaughter their daily labor, familiarizing themselves with death and agony, and diurnally drenching themselves in blood. . . .

The ghoulish grunting of hogs awaiting slaughter, the deep barking of ferocious tannery dogs, the snappish hissing of steam in rendering establishments, and the gurgling, like a continuous death-rattle, of the black and poisonously-foul gutter streams alone break the deathly silence. To right and left nought is visible but tall broad fences or long frame buildings, ghastly in the gleam of white-wash or gloomily black with the grime of smoky and greasy atmosphere. You can not cross the road without befouling your shoe-leather frightfully. Your own footsteps sound unpleasantly loud, and awake grim, hollow echoes in all directions. The narrow streets and alleys are unevenly checkered by weirdly grotesque shadows, and intersected by shadowy by-ways and deep doorways where murderers might well hide. The deep howling of the dogs in the tannery near by now excites frightful fancies.

from "SOME PICTURES OF POVERTY", *The Cincinnati Commercial*, January 7, 1877.

[This continues the story of the drunken mother on page 14. Hearn and the Overseer of the Poor call on the woman on the way out of the building.]

We visited her a strong, broad, flamboyant-haired woman, with hard, bloated features, and words haunted by the odor of spirits. Ignorant of what we had already heard, she brought the children forward for the visitor's admiration. They were not hungry-looking or thin, but there were written in their faces little tragedies of another character than hunger or cold can write. They watched with frightened eyes their mother's slightest actions. Their little features were molded in the strictest obedience to the varying expression of her own. She smiled in the effort to seem agreeable, and they smiled also, poor little souls; but such smiles! God help them!

from “BLACK VARIETIES. THE MINSTRELS OF THE ROW. Picturesque Scenes Without Scenery Physiognomical Studies at Pickett’s”. *The Cincinnati Commercial*, April 9, 1876.

. . . . This stage consists of a wooden platform elevated about a yard from the floor; and the little room under the staircase at the left side serves as the green-room. Tallow dips, placed about a foot apart, serve for footlights. Strips of white muslin sewed together form the curtains, which are attached by rings to a metal rod in the ceiling, and open and close much after the manner of the curtains of an old-fashioned, four-posted bedstead. These curtains were made by a mild-mannered brown girl called Annie, remarkable for deep, dark eyes, light, wavy hair, and wonderful curves of mouth, chin and neck; but poor Annie is no better than she ought to be, and loves to smoke a great, black, brier-root pipe.



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