

### ***CANTO III--Scarmoges***

"And did you really walk," said I, "On such a wretched night? I always fancied Ghosts could fly - If not exactly in the sky, Yet at a fairish height."

"It's very well," said he, "for Kings To soar above the earth: But Phantoms often find that wings - Like many other pleasant things - Cost more than they are worth.

"Spectres of course are rich, and so Can buy them from the Elves: But WE prefer to keep below - They're stupid company, you know, For any but themselves:

"For, though they claim to be exempt From pride, they treat a Phantom As something quite beneath contempt - Just as no Turkey ever dreamt Of noticing a Bantam."

"They seem too proud," said I, "to go To houses such as mine. Pray, how did they contrive to know So quickly that 'the place was low,' And that I 'kept bad wine'?"

"Inspector Kobold came to you--" The little Ghost began. Here I broke in-- "Inspector who? Inspecting Ghosts is something new! Explain yourself, my man!"

"His name is Kobold," said my guest: "One of the Spectre order: You'll very often see him dressed In a yellow gown, a crimson vest, And a night-cap with a border.

"He tried the Brocken business first, But caught a sort of chill ; So came to England to be nursed, And here it took the form of THIRST, Which he complains of still.

"Port-wine, he says, when rich and sound, Warms his old bones like nectar: And as the inns, where it is found, Are his especial hunting-ground, We call

him the INN-SPECTRE."

I bore it--bore it like a man - This agonizing witticism! And nothing could be sweeter than My temper, till the Ghost began Some most provoking criticism.

"Cooks need not be indulged in waste; Yet still you'd better teach them Dishes should have SOME SORT of taste. Pray, why are all the cruets placed Where nobody can reach them?"

"That man of yours will never earn His living as a waiter! Is that queer THING supposed to burn? (It's far too dismal a concern To call a Moderator).

"The duck was tender, but the peas Were very much too old: And just remember, if you please, The NEXT time you have toasted cheese, Don't let them send it cold.

"You'd find the bread improved, I think, By getting better flour: And have you anything to drink That looks a LITTLE less like ink, And isn't QUITE so sour?"

Then, peering round with curious eyes, He muttered "Goodness gracious!" And so went on to criticise - "Your room's an inconvenient size: It's neither snug nor spacious.

"That narrow window, I expect, Serves but to let the dusk in--" "But please," said I, "to recollect 'Twas fashioned by an architect Who pinned his faith on Ruskin!"

"I don't care who he was, Sir, or On whom he pinned his faith! Constructed by whatever law, So poor a job I never saw, As I'm a living Wraith!

"What a re-markable cigar! How much are they a dozen?" I growled "No matter what they are! You're getting as familiar As if you were my cousin!

"Now that's a thing I WILL NOT STAND, And so I tell you flat." "Aha," said he, "we're getting grand!" (Taking a bottle in his hand) "I'll soon arrange for THAT!"

And here he took a careful aim, And gaily cried "Here goes!" I tried to dodge  
it as it came, But somehow caught it, all the same, Exactly on my nose.

And I remember nothing more That I can clearly fix, Till I was sitting on the  
floor, Repeating "Two and five are four, But FIVE AND TWO are six."

What really passed I never learned, Nor guessed: I only know That, when at  
last my sense returned, The lamp, neglected, dimly burned - The fire was  
getting low -

Through driving mists I seemed to see A Thing that smirked and smiled: And  
found that he was giving me A lesson in Biography, As if I were a child.