

CANTO V--Byckerment

"Don't they consult the 'Victims,' though?" I said. "They should, by rights, Give them a chance--because, you know, The tastes of people differ so, Especially in Sprites."

The Phantom shook his head and smiled. "Consult them? Not a bit! 'Twould be a job to drive one wild, To satisfy one single child - There'd be no end to it!"

"Of course you can't leave CHILDREN free," Said I, "to pick and choose: But, in the case of men like me, I think 'Mine Host' might fairly be Allowed to state his views."

He said "It really wouldn't pay - Folk are so full of fancies. We visit for a single day, And whether then we go, or stay, Depends on circumstances."

"And, though we don't consult 'Mine Host' Before the thing's arranged, Still, if he often quits his post, Or is not a well-mannered Ghost, Then you can have him changed."

"But if the host's a man like you - I mean a man of sense; And if the house is not too new--" "Why, what has THAT," said I, "to do With Ghost's convenience?"

"A new house does not suit, you know - It's such a job to trim it: But, after twenty years or so, The wainscotings begin to go, So twenty is the limit."

"To trim" was not a phrase I could Remember having heard: "Perhaps," I said, "you'll be so good As tell me what is understood Exactly by that word?"

"It means the loosening all the doors," The Ghost replied, and laughed: "It means the drilling holes by scores In all the skirting-boards and floors, To make a thorough draught."

"You'll sometimes find that one or two Are all you really need To let the wind come whistling through - But HERE there'll be a lot to do!" I faintly gasped "Indeed!

"If I'd been rather later, I'll Be bound," I added, trying (Most unsuccessfully) to smile, "You'd have been busy all this while, Trimming and beautifying?"

"Why, no," said he; "perhaps I should Have stayed another minute - But still no Ghost, that's any good, Without an introduction would Have ventured to begin it.

"The proper thing, as you were late, Was certainly to go: But, with the roads in such a state, I got the Knight-Mayor's leave to wait For half an hour or so."

"Who's the Knight-Mayor?" I cried. Instead Of answering my question, "Well, if you don't know THAT," he said, "Either you never go to bed, Or you've a grand digestion!

"He goes about and sits on folk That eat too much at night: His duties are to pinch, and poke, And squeeze them till they nearly choke." (I said "It serves them right!")

"And folk who sup on things like these--" He muttered, "eggs and bacon - Lobster--and duck--and toasted cheese - If they don't get an awful squeeze, I'm very much mistaken!

"He is immensely fat, and so Well suits the occupation: In point of fact, if you must know, We used to call him years ago, THE MAYOR AND CORPORATION!

"The day he was elected Mayor I KNOW that every Sprite meant To vote for ME, but did not dare - He was so frantic with despair And furious with excitement.

"When it was over, for a whim, He ran to tell the King; And being the reverse of slim, A two-mile trot was not for him A very easy thing.

"So, to reward him for his run (As it was baking hot, And he was over twenty

stone), The King proceeded, half in fun, To knight him on the spot."

"'Twas a great liberty to take!" (I fired up like a rocket). "He did it just for punning's sake: 'The man,' says Johnson, 'that would make A pun, would pick a pocket!'"

"A man," said he, "is not a King." I argued for a while, And did my best to prove the thing - The Phantom merely listening With a contemptuous smile.

At last, when, breath and patience spent, I had recourse to smoking - "Your AIM," he said, "is excellent: But--when you call it ARGUMENT - Of course you're onlyjoking?"

Stung by his cold and snaky eye, I roused myself at length To say "At least I do defy The veriest sceptic to deny That union is strength!"

"That's true enough," said he, "yet stay--" I listened in all meekness - "UNION is strength, I'm bound to say; In fact, the thing's as clear as day; But ONIONS are a weakness."