

Muscatine, Iowa,

190

A Literary Nightmare.

Will the reader please to cast his eye
over the following verses, & see if he can
discover anything harmful in them?

Conductor, when you receive a fare
Punch in the presence of the passengars!

A blue trip slip for an 8-cent fare,

A buff trip slip for a six cent fare,

A pink trip slip for a three cent fare,

Punch in the presence of the passengars!

Chorus

Punch, brothers! punch with care!

Punch in presence of the passengars!

I came across these jingling rhymes
in a newspaper, a little while ago, &
read them a couple of times. They
took instant & entire possession of me. All
through breakfast they went waltzing
in my brain, & when at last I folded
up my napkin, I could not tell
whether I had eaten anything or not.
I had carefully laid out my days work
the day before - a thrilling tragedy

in the novel I am writing. I went to my
den to begin my deed of blood. I took up
my pen, but all I could get it to say
was, "Punch in the presence of the
passengers," I fought hard for an hour
but it was useless. My head kept
humming, "A blue trip slip for a
cent fare, a buff trip slip for a cent fare,
& soon & soon, without peace or respite.
The day's work was ruined - I could see
that plainly enough. I gave up and
drifted downtown, & presently discovered
that my feet were keeping time to that
relentless jingle. When I could stand
it was no longer, I altered my step.
But it did no good; those rhymes
accommodated themselves to the new
step, & and went on harassing me just
as before. I returned home, & suffered
all the afternoon; suffered all through
an unconscious dinner and
unrefreshing dinner; suffered &
cried & jingled all through the evening
went to bed, & rolled, tossed & jingled right
along, the same as ever; got up at
midnight frantic, & tried to read; but
there was nothing visible upon
the whirling page except "Punch,
punch with will care, punch in the
presence of the passengers!" By sunrise
I was out of my mind & every body
marveled & was distressed at the
idiotic burden of my ravings:
"Punch! oh, ^{with care} punch! punch in presence
of the passengers!"

Hotel Grand,

J. G. DERMEDY, Prop'r.



Muscatine, Iowa,

190

Two days later, on Sat. morning, I arose a tottering wreck, + went forth to fulfill an engagement with a valued friend the Rev. Mr. —, to walk to the Pilcote tower, 10 miles distant. He stared at me but asked no question. We started Mr. — talked, talked, talked — as is his wont. I said nothing; I heard nothing at the end of a mile Mr. — said: "Mark, are you sick? I never saw a man look so haggard + worn + absent minded. Say something, do!" Dearily without enthusiasm, I said: "Punch, brothers!" My friend eyed me blankly, looked perplexed then said: "I do not think I get your drift Mark. There does not seem to be any relevancy in what you have said, certainly. nothing sad: and yet — maybe it was the way you said the words —"

I never heard anything that sounded so
pathetic. What is—

But I heard no more. I was already far
away with my pitiless, heart-breaking
"blue trip slip for an eight cent fare,
buff trip slip for a ^{six} cent fare; punch
in the presence of the passengers"
I do not know what occurred during
the other nine miles. However, all of a
sudden Mr. Gray laid his hand on my
shoulder and shouted:
"Wake up! wake up! wake up. Don't
sleep all day! Here we are at the tower
man! I have talked myself deaf
and dumb and blind, and never get a
response. Just look at this magnificent
autumn landscape! Look at it! look
at it! Feast your eyes on it! You have
traveled: you have seen boastful landscapes
elsewhere. Come, now, deliver an honest
opinion. What do you say to this?"
I sighed wearily, and murmured:
"A buff trip slip for a ~~eight~~ cent fare, a pink
trip slip for a ^{six} cent fare. Punch
in the presence of the passengers"
Rev Mr. Gray stood there, every grave
full of concern, apparently, and looked
long at me: then he said:
"Mark there is something about this
that I can not understand. Those are
about the same words you said before."

Hotel Grand,

J. G. DERMEDY, Prop'r.

Muscatine, Iowa,

190

There does not seem to be any thing in them, and yet they nearly break my heart when you say them. Pray in the - how is it they go?"

I began at the beginning and repeated all the lines. My friend's face lighted with interest. He said:

"Why what a captivating jingle it is! It is all most music. It flows along so nicely I have nearly caught the rhythm myself. Say them over just one more, and then I'll have them sure."

I said them over. Then Mr Gray said them. He made one little mistake, which I corrected. The next time and the next he got them right. Now a great burden seemed to tumble from my shoulders. That torturing jingle departed out of my brain, and a grateful sense of rest and peace

descended upon me. I was light-
hearted enough to sing: and I did
sing for half an hour, straight along,
as she went jogging home ward.
Then my feet tongue found blessed
speech again, and the pent talk of
many a weary hour began to gush
and flow. It flowed on and on joyously
jubilantly, until until the fountain
was empty and dry: as I was saying

"Havent we had a royal good time!
But now I remember, you havent
said a word for two hours. Come,
come out with something?"

Mr. Mr. Gray turned a lack-
lustre eye upon me, drew a deep
sigh, and said, without animation,
without of parent consciousness;

"Punch, brother! punch with ears!
Punch in the presents of the passengers!
A punk shot through me as I did
to my self 'Poor fellow, poor
fellow! he has got it now.'"

I did not see Mr. Gray for two or three
days after that. Then, on Tuesday
evening, he staggered into my
presents and sank dejectedly
into a chair seat.

He was pale & worn: he was a wreck.
He lifted his faded eyes to my face
and said:

Hotel Grand,

J. G. DERMEDY, Prop'r.

~~VI~~

Muscatine, Iowa,

190

"Oh, Mark, it was a ruinous investment that I made in those heartless rhymes. They have ridden me like a nightmare, day and night, hour after hour, to this very moment. Since I saw you I have suffered the torments of the lost. Last evening I had a sudden call by telegraph, & took the night train for Boston. The occasion was a death of a valued old friend who had requested that I should preach his funeral sermon. I took my seat in the cars & set myself to framing the discourse. But I never got beyond the opening paragraph; for then the train started & the car-wheels began their clack-clack-clack-clack-clack-clack-clack-clack & right away those odious rhymes fitted themselves to that

accompaniment. For an hour
I sat there a syllable of those
rhymes to every separate & distinct
clack the car wheels made. My I was
as fagged out then as if I had ~~been~~ been
chopping wood all day. My skull
was splitting with headache. If
I sat there any longer, so I addressed
& went to bed. I stretched out in my
berth, & - well you know what
the result was. The thing went
right along just the same. Clack-
clack-clack clack clack, a blue trip
and a cent for cl - cl - for
a buff trip, a trip cl - cl - clack clack
for a cent for and soon a soon
soon punch in the present of
the passenger! Help? At a single
wink! I was almost a lunatic when
I got to Boston. No do don't ask
me about the funeral. I did the
best I could! but very solemn
individual sentences meshed &
tangled & woven in & out with
punch brothers punch with
care! punch in the present
of the passenger. And the
most distressing thing was
that my delivery dropped into
the unalating rhythm of
those pulsing rhymes, and I
could actually catch about minded

Hotel Grand,

J. G. DERMEDY, Prop'r.

V:

Muscatine, Iowa,

190

people nodding time to the
swinging of it with their stupid
heads. And Mark. you may
believe it or not, but before I
was through, the entire
assemblage, except the corpse,
were placidly bobbing their
heads in solemn submission,
mourners, undertakers, and
all. The moment I had finished
I fled to the anteroom in a
state bordering on frenzy. Of
course it was my luck to
find a sorrowing & maiden
Aunt of the deceased there,
who had arrived from Springfield
too late to get into the church.
She began to sob, and said
"Oh he is gone! he is gone, & I didn't
see him before he died!"
"Yes! I said! - he is gone, he is gone,
he is gone, he is gone - oh this

suffering will kill me will
this suffering never cease?
"You love him, then! You too love
him!"

"Love him! Loved who?"

"Why, my poor George! my poor
nephew!"

"Oh him! Yes oh yes, yes ~~yes~~ certainly
certainly. Punch - punch - Oh this
misery will kill me.

"Bless you sir, for those sweet
words! I too - suffer in this dear
last moments?"

"Yes! I - whose last moments?"

"His, the dear departed's."

"Yes! Oh, yes yes yes! I suppose
so, I think so, I don't know! Oh,
certainly - I was there I was there"

"Oh, what a privilege! what a
precious privilege. And his last
words tell me - tell me his
last words! What did he say?"

"He said - he said - Oh, my head,
my head, my head. He said - he
said - he never said anything
but Punch, punch punch, in
the presents of the passenger!
Oh, leave me, madam! In the
name that of all that is
generous, leave me, leave me to
my madness; my misery, my despair

Hotel Grand,

J. G. DERMEDY, Prop'r.

VI

Muscatine, Iowa,

190

a buff trip slip for a six cent fare
a pink trip slip for a 3 cent fare
endurance can no further go!
Punch in the presents of the
passenger! My friends hopeless
eyes rested on mine a pregnant
minute, & then he said impressed
"Mark, you do not say anything
You do not give me any hope. But
ah-me, it is just as well it is just
as well. You could not do me
any good. The time has long
gone by when words could do
me any good. Something tell
me that my tongue is doomed
to wag forever to the jiggers
of ~~that~~ ^{that} remorseless jingle.
Thus it is coming on again.
A blue trip slip for a 8 cent
fare a buff trip slip for a
Thus murmuring faintly
brought my friend back into

a peaceful trance, + forgot his
sufferings in a blessed respite.
How did I finally save him
from the asylum? - I took him
to a neighboring university
+ made him discharge the
burden of his persecuting rhymes
into the eager ears of the unthink-
ing students. How is it ~~now~~ with
them, now? The result is too
sad to tell. Why did I write this
article? It was for a worthy, even
a noble purpose. It was to warn
you, reader, if you should
come across these merciless
rhymes, to avoid them -
Avoid them as you would a
~~pestilence~~ pestilence!

Mark Twain