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READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

O, Tempora! O, Moeres!

Edgar Allan Poe

O, Times! O, Manners! It is my opinion
That you are changing sadly your dominion —
I mean the reign of manners hath long ceased,
For men have none at all, or bad at least;
And as for times, altho' 'tis said by many
The "good old times" were far the worst of any,
Of which sound doctrine I believe each tittle,
Yet still I think these worse than them a little.

I've been a thinking — isn't that the phrase? —
I like your Yankee words and Yankee ways —
I've been a thinking, whether it were best
To take things seriously, or all in jest;
Whether, with grim Heraclitus of yore,
To weep, as he did, till his eyes were sore,
Or rather laugh with him, that queer philosopher,
Democritus of Thrace, who used to toss over
The page of life and grin at the dog-ears,
As though he'd say, "Why, who the devil cares?"

This is a question which, oh heaven, withdraw
The luckless query from a member's claw!
Instead of two sides, Job [Bob] has nearly eight,
Each fit to furnish forth four hours debate.
What shall be done? I'll lay it on the table,
And take the matter up when I'm more able,
And, in the meantime, to prevent all bother,
I'll neither laugh with one, nor cry with t'other,
Nor deal in flatt'ry or aspersions foul,
But, taking one by each hand, merely growl.

Ah, growl, say you, my friend, and pray at what?
Why, really, sir, I almost had forgot —
But, damn it, sir, I deem it a disgrace
That things should stare us boldly in the face,
And daily strut the street with bows and scrapes,

Who would be men by imitating apes.
I beg your pardon, reader, for the oath
The monkeys make me swear, though something loth;
I'm apt to be discursive in my style,
But pray be patient; yet a little while
Will change me, and as politicians do,
I'll mend my manners and my measures too.

Of all the cities — and I've seen no few;
For I have travelled, friend, as well as you —
I don't remember one, upon my soul,
But take it generally upon the whole,
(As members say they like their logick [logic] taken,
Because divided, it may chance be shaken)
So pat, agreeable and vastly proper
As this for a neat, frisky counter-hopper;
Here he may revel to his heart's content,
Flounce like a fish in his own element,
Toss back his fine curls from their forehead fair,
And hop o'er counters with a Vester's air,
Complete at night what he began A.M.,
And having cheated ladies, dance with them;
For, at a ball, what fair one can escape
The pretty little hand that sold her tape,
Or who so cold, so callous to refuse
The youth who cut the ribbon for her shoes!

One of these fish, par excellence the beau —
God help me! — it has been my lot to know,
At least by sight, for I'm a timid man,
And always keep from laughing, if I can;
But speak to him, he'll make you such grimace,
Lord! to be grave exceeds the power of face.
The hearts of all the ladies are with him,
Their bright eyes on his Tom and Jerry brim
And dove-tailed coat, obtained at cost; while then
Those eyes won't turn on anything like men.

His very voice is musical delight,
His form, once seen, becomes a part of sight;
In short, his shirt collar, his look, his tone is
The "beau ideal" fancied for Adonis.
Philosophers have often held dispute
As to the seat of thought in man and brute;

For that the power of thought attends the latter
My friend, the beau, hath made a settled matter,
And spite of all dogmas, current in all ages,
One settled fact is better than ten sages.



For he does think, though I am oft in doubt
If I can tell exactly what about.
Ah, yes! his little foot and ankle trim,
'Tis there the seat of reason lies in him,
A wise philosopher would shake his head,
He then, of course, must shake his foot instead.
At me, in vengeance, shall that foot be shaken —
Another proof of thought, I'm not mistaken —
Because to his cat's eyes I hold a glass,
And let him see himself, a proper ass!
I think he'll take this likeness to himself,
But if he won't, he shall, a stupid elf,
And, lest the guessing throw the fool in fits,
I close the portrait with the name of PITTS.

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