

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers*, Dec 20, 1890 to May 30, 1891)

Phoebus, Daphne and the Mysterious Bull;  
A Tale of Adventure

I

The Start

Potter vs. Great Western Telegraph Co. had just gone to the jury in a whirlwind of dust, spangles, snapping of whips, tent-flapping and cheap brass orchestration; in short, it had been something of a circus. I was tired. I enjoy the hippodromic features of the modern jury practice, particularly in the country, so long as the thing is an active motion. The magic gallup, the leaping, tumbling, vaulting, and the swift downward flight through the air, not omitting the juggling splendor of the clowns, and the polyglot monotone from the animals' quarter, these things are exciting and agreeable enough while they last. But when it is all over, when that last inevitable sally of circus humor, the appeal to the intelligence of the jury, has been wafted into the fetid air, and you turn to go, you feel the pall of the sawdust Earth, a cotten-Duck sky and a hopeless, dead intermediate [ ].

I stood upon the door step of the little courthouse and measured with my eye the distance to a strip of wood land that lay beyond the village. It is 3 o'clock; there will be no train before night; I shall seek adventure. That was my thought. Tempered with speech it ran thus: "I think Mr. clerk that I shall stroll in the woods until the night train. You can wire me the verdict." Poor food for adventure, you think; well my experience has been otherwise; but we shall see

II

The Journey

Twenty minutes later the village lay at my back, another country road was creeping after it at a contemplative man's pace. Presently, the land mark, a tall elm stood at my elbow and I turned to crawl through an opening in the fence. A slip of a boy paused in the roadway –

Where you goin'?

I am going into the woods.

Goin' to have a swim? (Out of what experience of rural diffidence sprang that question, think you?)

No, I shall lie down under the trees and read out of a book.

Why don't you go swimmin'?

There was plainly no answer to that, so I said – “perhaps I shall” –

Guess you don't know where it's at, do you?

Well, no.

Well, all right. They's two places, swimmin' hole's nicest. You jest a keep right on till you get to the yella barn. Guess you'll find her all right.

The singular interview was at an end. A willow switch resumed its serpentine trail in the dust behind two bare legs, and the slip of a boy emerged slowly with the receding landscape. It all came to pass as it was spoken. There stood a yellow barn, a visible confirmation, and by every human test of prophecy, the swimmin' hole was a reality and not very far either. There it lay. It was what anyone familiar with these parts might have fore-known; a lure for malaria, green scum, mosquitoes and small boys. A wide grassy margin stretched away on all sides with even circumference to the forest. What an amphitheater for youthful exploit. If I properly understood boyhood, thought I as I crossed the velvet green, filled with these pleasing reflections, this little basin has been colored with a rich imagery since youthful eyes first glistened upon the glories of Swimmin' Hole.

I reached the shadow of two old apple trees that stood near the edge of the pond. They were the sole occupants of this charmed enclosure. “Heralds” quoth I, “to announce the order of the Combats! And at that moment my eye fell upon a strip of wood nailed to the trunk of the smaller harald. Upon it were these words “Look out for the bull.””

I seemed to fall instantly out of the ideal into a chapter of cold realism. It was not agreeable. It was not in harmony with the drift of my thought. To say the least, it was a coarse anachronism; and I really seemed to feel a sense of indignity that when my imagination had billed the regrettable gentlemen to announce the Hycean Tiger, they should have [ked] me a a common bull. However, as I have observed in the Courts, a right Conclusion is frequently reached, even upon incorrect grounds; and whether from an outraged artistic sense, or through fear, I sprang into the lower branches of the nearer tree, and herein I made no mistake.

### III

#### The Encounter

Did my eyes deceive me? Surely Appletree never rustled with that fresh, cool, crisp, gingham note! I looked about me and there in the next tree – I could have almost touched her with the tips of my fingers, there, oh! Cyprus, and green bay trees! O! Daphne. O! rosy youth! There sat rustic loveliness in green gingham. Her eyes were downcast and an open book lay in her lap, but she was not reading. Modesty was struggling to express a smile upon to cherry lips. I cast in my lot with the smile –

“Nay, Miss Daphne, if there be any humor in the situation, I pray you smile on. Indeed

though I were Phoebus himself, yet might we smile safely upon one another from our stalks, for behold! Am I not also immured in my tree by the discrete River God? An inextinguishable merriment stole into her lips to the undoing of all repression. "I thought it was the bull", she murmured unaware before modesty could rally her startled forces, and the smile won the day.

#### IV Captivity

We talked of many things. What music there is in a maiden's voice when it floats to you out of the tree top! Why it is, I know not, but it is no secret to the birds. Here they pour out their little songs. The very breezes seem to blow a sweeter melody when they kiss the murmuring leaves. Alas! I heard only the music and know not one word that was spoken!

#### V The Plot

"Tell me the story of Daphne", at last she said.

Well, down under the green fungus that floats on yonder pond, there dwells a great and powerful man God. Perseus is his name, and no one has ever looked upon him and lived. Ages ago his dear little daughter was sitting upon the bank, reading some lover's tale out of a book, when there came one Phoebus. Now, Phoebus, although a somewhat forward youth, was withal a most excellent and desirable god; and he loved her directly his eyes beheld her. So he ran toward her, no doubt to kiss her upon the lips. That is where, according to modern standards, he erred. It is claimed that he should first have spoken to her papa down in the pond, or at least to have sought some more formal presentation to her before taking such decisive action. But foolish notions of this kind did not prevail in those days, and I make no doubt that what presently befell would have taken place in any event, for Perseus was a very eccentric and irascible minor God, and would thwart anything that might happen to be going on, merely from a natural passion for thwarting things. At any rate, just as Phoebus was stretching out his arms, he ran right into a young apple tree, and there was no Daphne in sight, for that was her name. Well, now Phoebus was very much perplexed. He came back day after day to look upon the spot where she had sat. And he filled all this little glade with his lamentations.

Year after year he came. In course of time, Mount Olympus war away until it was level with the rest of the land, and in a little while [ ], people even forgot the place where it had been. Meanwhile all the poor gods were compelled to wonder about the world without any Olympus, and the effect of that was not only to make them very sad, but to rob them of all that strongly marked individuality with which they are credited in the books. They gradually took on the awkward and unnatural dress of the mortals until they were so changed that their own mothers would not know them.

The poets have always been a fickle race, in so when the gods lost all their high estate, the poets from that time forth refused to see any difference between them and common

men and would have nothing more to do with them. When they sang of Daphne, for instance, they would let the whole matter drop at the point where she was turned into a tree, so that people naturally supposed that that was the end of her. What became of poor Phoebus they never cared to inquire; but that was not all of the story by any means, as you shall hear. Through all these changes of time, Phoebus continued faithful to the spot; even when his mortal aspects; his [ ] longtailed coat and starched collars had so disfigured him that he scarcely knew himself, he came; until even the crabbed old River God was touched. And so one afternoon quite recently, when Phoebus lounged beside the little tree, old Perseus could stand it no longer, and he sputtered away to himself down in the pond until all the green scum on top was in commotion. Phoebus could not hear what was said, but he saw the commotion of the green scum on top with his own eyes.

In about a minute he began to have a curious sprouting sensation. It was like the feeling of having his toes drawn down into the cool damp earth; not unpleasant but very strange, and he could make nothing of it, until the first thing he knew he was a great big apple tree, just where he stood beside the little tree. Of course trees understand each other, and so directly he saw what he had been unable to see all these thousands of years when he was not a tree – for there was Daphne whom he had all this time given up for lost. And there was the book in her lap, just as it was when he had surprised her out of that ancient lover's tale.

Oh! How she must have sighed and smiled upon him from her tree all these years! And to think that he should have stood there so many hundreds of thousands of times, unconscious of her sweet presence and tender sympathy!

Well it was very cruel of old Perseus, very cruel indeed. And it was by no means a sufficient reparation to have granted them each other's companionship, fettered as it was by two separate and stationary trunks. They could only solace themselves for this by letting their little roots feel about for each other in the soft earth. And so in measurable happiness, they sit and smile upon one another from their stocks to this day, and being immortal will probably smile on that way forever.

Here I looked covertly at my watch.

## VI The Counter plot

“That was a very pretty story” she said, after a short silence.

Yes, it is a beautiful legend.

Daphne was nearby in the tree while the wicked River God was making a tree out of Phoebus was she not?

Yes.

Then she must have seen first how it happened?

Yes. I suppose so. Do you tell me now a nice little story of what Daphne saw.

Well, upon that afternoon she looked out of her tree and saw Phoebus coming toward her as usual. But this time his eyes seemed riveted upon a piece of wood which the River God had no doubt contrived for his own secret ends. It had certain words upon it – “Look out for the Dragon!” Or something like that, I believe. Now Daphne had often heard that gods who behaved as this had, were not nearly so brave as they looked; and sure enough, so great was the terror of the Dragon in the soul of poor Phoebus, that he was rooted to the spot where he stood —and became a tree! And there he will probably remain [helpless]! and poor little Daphne, also, forever and ever, unless some brave prince comes along and pulls down the terrible sign of the Dragon.

## VII Wounds

There are different kinds of wounds. There is the wound mortal, as when a cannonball carries away the head from the shoulders. Then there are myriad wounds grievous: rents – gaping, horrific; fractures – compound and communicated; concussions, with all kinds of vascular woe; ruptures – muscular, arterial, deleterious. These may be fatal, but are not uniformly so. There are injuries to the nerve matter of the body. There are innumerable shocks; the shock partial and the complete shock; shocks electric, splenetic, terrific; also mortifying shocks in which gangrenous complications sometimes manifest themselves. There is paralysis cerebral; cerebro-spinal and in the neck. Then there are certain dread compounds of a static stock, neuralgia, neurasthenia and the dilemma. I was satisfied in my case did not fall within any of these classifications, and yet I was conscious of a wound.

## VIII The Retreat

I will reflect upon my hurt, anon. Let me now take counsel of my valor, for it grows late and we must presently brave the perils that lurk in hidden places between us and [you] fence.

I framed this mental resolution, but so often as my thought turned upon that bellowing red-eyed Devastation, my heart failed me. They said that the ground trembles when these creatures [ ] it in their attack; and that just before the final cataclysm, they pause with lowered horns and paw the earth in a manner which is very terrible indeed. The cruelty of the death impressed me deeply. What! That sweet figure! No, it is too horrible! Here we shall remain; up here in our trees; aye! until the bull shall become an extinct race; until we may discover him between layers of petrified mineral, until we can append to him a fossil name and classify him with impunity and to our heart's content – in a book. There, there – let us compose ourselves to wait. I must have spoken this last sentence aloud in my excitement, for she said pleasantly – “no! Mr. Phoebus, for here comes the prince!”

I could have felt relief at the site of the great breadth of shoulders that pushed into the field and now bore down upon us under a straw hat of copious [ ], but for a certain fore-knowing quality which seemed to ring in Daphne's voice. A moment afterward her book was closed and she was lifted lightly to the ground in two huge arms. A small sign board was wrenched from the tree and carried away; and while a rippling farewell was yet playing merrily about the spot, the picture that had witched me from the world for a passing hour, faded from sight. The shadows gathered silently about me in my tree.

## IX Reflections

Life consists mainly of three parts! Rosy expectation; a present glamour; and perspiratory retrospect; that is to say part one is illusion; part two is illusion and part three is illusion.

I removed my hat as I sat in the railway coach that I might cool my brow from the beaded moisture of the third stage. Men of mind can seize upon a conclusion without ocular proof. I felt this and yet I reflected that I had not seen this bull, and was troubled and as I turned over many things in my mind, groping toward a right understanding of all that had transpired, a telegram was placed in my hand which read thus "Verdict for plaintiff -" "So, So." I sighed as I pushed back into the cushions. The world beckons me again. Come hither my soul. A truce to thy perplexities, and compose thyself wrest against the labors of the morrow. Besides, a motion for a new trial may set everything right.

Robert Ramsey

Hy Hooper Informal  
December 27, 1890