

THE
GRECIAN BEND

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WHAT IT IS.

Robert Carr Dunham



Profusely Illustrated.

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THE GRECIAN BEND.

THE following pages were written from pure philanthropic motives, the object being to guard the public against a distemper which has raged in fashionable circles during the summer, causing pain and anguish to thousands. Cold weather may relieve the victims, but if the patients should venture out on severe mornings, and freeze in position, the effects would be alarming. To show how the Grecian Bend has been viewed from some lookouts, we copy the following from the "Boston Sunday Times." The narrative was written by a simple child of nature, who never drank the limpid waters of Saratoga from the Springs, and didn't comprehend the cool cunning of the "crook-backed tyrant" of his household.



A SEVERE FAMILY AFFLICTION.

BY BELLAMY BROWNJOHN.

One of those calamities which makes whole communities feel particularly uncomfortable is the prevalence of a contagious disease, especially one which will not yield readily to medical treatment.

The first I heard of the distemper called the Grecian Bend was from a minister, who told me of one of his parishioners that had hitherto borne an irreproachable character; "but," he added, solemnly, with the light of other days gleaming from his eyes, "she has become a Grecian Bendist."

"Have her family deserted her?"

"No, but I have warned my wife and girls against her." He clutched my arm convulsively and took me aside; he then whispered mysteriously in my ear: "There is already a general caving-in of the parts, and she looks like a lame kangaroo!"

"Hapless communicant!" I mused.

"It is," he continued, "different from the mumps, and is not, like the disease which recently broke up our school, transferred from one to the other by the touch. Why, oh, why,"

he mourned, "should my flock be thus smitten?"

"Brace up against it!" I replied, firmly. "Have faith and patience, and your troubles as well as your lambs will get straightened out!"

"Others of our dear sisters," he continued, "I just hear, are afflicted. Mrs. Lupkins caught it at a summer hotel; she gave it to her neighbor, Mrs. Jupkins, who had it doubly as severe as she. A rivalry always existed between these dear sisters, and the height of Mrs. Jupkins' ambition is to outdo the Lupkines. Her toothaches are always much severer than Mrs. L.'s."

We then parted,—he bending over with sorrow.

Said I to my friend Jowler, the other day, "How's your family?"

"Pretty well," said he, "with one exception; my wife's got the Grecian Bend."

Soon we met Fowler, and the three of us strolled down the street.

"Fowler," said I, "how's your wife since her return?"

"She's very ill, — very ill, — she's got the Grecian Bend."

"Has she got it bad?" I asked.

"Yes; — she sits half the time on the door-stoop. It pervades her whole system."

Mr. Growler soon came along; and in answer to our inquiries informed us that his wife had got the Grecian Bend.

I expressed the hope that the old folks and children were not afflicted with it also. The three exchanged significant glances, but said nothing. I began to feel uneasy, and ventured the fear that I had said something to wound Growler's feelings.

They all smiled grimly, but silence reigned in their midst.

"It prevails," I continued, with assumed familiarity with the subject, "to an alarming extent. In some neighborhoods, I have heard, the children are very severely lacerated with it!"

"The children!" exclaimed Growler. "Great heavens!"

These ejaculations were interrupted by a sudden exclamation from Fowler: "There goes one now!"

"One what?" I asked.

"A Grecian Bend."

"Does it travel?"

"Brownjohn, it's plain you are not posted," said Growler. "Don't try and cheat us. Look there!"



I looked, and instantly doubled up like a jack-knife.

After a few spasmodic efforts, I recovered my equilibrium, but my friends continued shaking their sides.

"I declare, now, fellows, it's too bad to laugh. She can't help it!"

"*Can't help it!*" they all shouted, and laughed heartier than before.

"Gentlemen," said I, "you know this is just the season for such complaints; and although the 'Bend' makes its victims appear somewhat to a disadvantage, it is not right that we should laugh at the poor creatures. The disease is a malignant type of the same excruciating malady to which all of us have been accustomed from boyhood."

"*There's another!*" screamed Jowler, whom my words seemed to convulse rather than quiet.

We gazed, and our bodies again contorted into the abyss of uncontrollability. Having nearly recovered, Fowler shouted:—

"*There's one worse than ever!*"

A violent spasm simultaneously seized our quartette. The shaking of the risibilities was so irrepressible that we were obliged to withdraw to a quiet corner where we could oscillate and flounder about unobstructedly.

Fowler gave out first and then dropped;

then Jowler; then myself; and Growler was finally obliged to succumb.

A policeman came round and found us on



the pavement with a hinge in our backs, and each one folded together like a sheet of paper.

He asked us if it was poison. No answer was vouchsafed. "What kind of poison was it?" he continued.

Growler gasped out "Grecian Bend, — Hack!" and we were packed in a carriage like merchandise and driven home.

Electra was, of course, surprised and alarmed to see the driver bring me into the house with my classic head between my heels; but the knight of the whip told her it was only an "aggrawated case o' the Greeshum Bend," and she was becalmed.

With the assistance of neighbors, I was pried apart, and regained a perpendicular position. I did not, however, trust myself out of doors among the Bendists again that day.

In the afternoon, Mrs. B. called on Mrs. Jowler, and when she returned I noticed a change in her personal appearance. She had begun to bend!

"Electra!" said I, in alarm, "you are descending from dignity! You've got it!"

"Got what?"

"It's an infectious disease, and you caught it at the Jowlers!"

She blushed crimson.

"Don't now, I pry'thee, — don't curve! If

you value my backbone, and your own appearance, take immediate and stringent measures for relief! If the trouble is external, put yourself in a strait-jacket. If it's internal, take chain-lightning and vitriol, or some other equally powerful antidote, — hoist it from your system! If it's contagious, don't go near the baby! It would break his little back! Don't let the lap-dog see you, for it would give him the jim-jams! Keep away from the cat, for she would be a raving maniac! And, by all means, avoid your aged parents, for their frames could never stand the wrenching!"

I stopped to take breath, and contemplate her position.

My sides began to shake, but I could not smile; a ghastly grin overspread my face; my body went through the doubling process, and various other contortions; but, although my feelings were tickled, my countenance could not indicate laughter. She bent, and I doubled and thrashed, until the furniture was miscellaneously scattered about and damaged by contact with my limbs.

The "Grecian Bend" is a terrible malady; but it affects the sexes differently. During infliction females assume the tortuous form of



MR. AND MRS. BROWNJOHN ON THE STREET.

the Red Man's bow, and their countenances are serene as the facial expression of the placid cockroach. They catch the distemper from each other. Men, on the other hand, are thrown into convulsions and cramps, their faces are horribly distorted, and they can catch the disease only from seeing a woman who is afflicted with it.

What will cure it, is another thing. If it gets into the blood, Turkish baths and periodical suspensions by the neck, with a few pounds of iron taken internally, may eradicate it. But if there is anything in a name, "Cherokee Medicines for the Unfortunate" are the only compounds which will prevail against the monster. I think Hamlet had it bad. He was evidently suffering its excruciating tortures when he said: "They fool me at the top of my bent," or bend, — which meant his cranium.

My wife is doing all she can to get well. She locks herself up three hours each day and practises, — endeavoring, as she says, to straighten herself out. I have tried several times to enter the apartment while she was training; but she persistently refused to open the door. She has purchased some stout

leather straps, that look like a harness for a Shetland pony, and which, she assures me, will, in a short time, make her "all right." But she bends with the weight of the disease more and more each day.

I am trying to find out what she does with the harness, and wish to try it on, to see how it works; but she assures me the straps are "for ladies only." It is a painful thing, for one who loves as fondly as I, to think that the wife of his bosom must wear habiliments like the beasts of the field, notwithstanding which I double up every time I catch a glimpse of her.

I met Fowler this morning, and asked how his wife was.

"Worse."

Jowler came along soon after, and the verdict was, "Worse."

And Growler, after shaking hands, growled out, "Worse."

"I hope, my friends," said I, "we shall soon be enjoying our usual health. I see we have all grown round-shouldered within a week."

They looked sadly at each other, but tried to be pleasant.

"I'll tell you one thing," at last, I said, with unwonted energy; "my wife has got to try some different treatment. I believe these straps are d—— humbugs!"

"And so do I," they enthusiastically chimed in.

We then turned into an humble quarter of the town, where there were ten thousand children, and as many cartloads of dirt, to each block; the boys hooted at and stoned us, and the hot breath of smutty-nosed babies, dandled in maternal arms, smote our cheeks at each window as we passed along.

But we walked erect and happy.

We were out of the region of the "Grecian Bend."

As we passed a large group of small hopefuls, who did not abuse us, I said: "My dear friends, I am going to make those children a speech. Though not wealthy, they are evidently well-disposed and susceptible."

Then, waiting until an expression of sadness came over my features, I said, with a trembling voice: "Children, beware of green apples and castor beans! Eschew them! They will give you the 'Grecian Bend!'"

The effect of the warning would have been

splendid, had not one obtuse and irreverent little kuss, ignorant of what I had already suffered, shouted, "Go to grass and shake yourself, old toddy-blossom!"

His speech was received with enthusiasm by both his friends and mine.

Disgusted, I shook both crowds.

But when out of sight the old feeling came over me, and I could but go and smile.

Now, reader, pause awhile,
And your attention lend,
While Brownjohn takes his "smile,"
I'll "do" the Grecian Bend.

SONG OF THE GRECIAN BEND.

Should you ask me whence these stories,
Whence these curvings and these bendings,
With the mincing and the wincing,
With the curling of the tresses,
And the looping of the dresses; —

Why the dainty female footses,
That inspire the classic muses,

Are pinched and cramped in high-heeled shoeses,
 I should answer, I should tell you,
 "From the spring of Saratoga,
 Where they go to quaff the water,
 Where the matron 'shows' her daughter
 To the bobbing popinjays,
 There the monster first bulged out."

Hold your horses and I'll tell you,
 Tell you simply, tell you truly,
 How they did it, how they do it;
 And should you ask me how I know it,
 I will tell you, I have done it:

First make up a toilet hideous,
 Put on a hoop of small dimension,

Put on a dress of closest tension,
 Eat a peck of sour green apples,
 Apples plucked in early summer,
 Put a strap around your waist,
 Then two others down your haunches;
 When the apples bend you over,
 Draw them tightly, draw them closely.

Underneath the rear of said hoop,
 Just below the tapering waist,
 Bind a coil of three-inch wire,
 And let it stick out, boldly stick out;
 Over this the panier hang,
 And when it wobbles to and fro,
 Glance behind you and observe
 What a splendid thing for fly-time,



You have got behind your curve;
 Let your hands then dangle idly,
 And flop about loose as may be;
 In your walk step just three inches;
 Never mind your shoe that pinches.

See that cat upon the wall,
 She has got it! — she has got it!
 Got the bend without the leather, —
 And when the two are placed together,

With their backs so nearly curving,
 With their panniers gayly streaming,
 To our mind this thought they bring,
 THE GRECIAN BEND IS NO NEW THING.
 When we look at these fair pictures,
 Pictures of the varied bends,
 We see at once who long has had it,
 And also where our daughters got it;
 Where first the sad catastrophe,



Fastened to the human frame,
 Brought out bunches, mammoth bunches,

And upset our calculations,
 About the female form divine,
 Now made to wear a bushel basket;
 An ugly, clumsy bushel basket,
 Below the shoulders, on behind.

A MORAL TALE, WITH A CLIMAX.

Mary had a little goat,
 Its hair was black as jet;
 And everywhere that Mary got,
 The goat was sure to get.

He followed her to a watering-place, —
 Which goats will sometimes do;
 She harnessed it to a little cart, —
 The cart the black goat drew.

It capered gayly round about,
 Except when on the road;
 And everybody liked the goat,
 Because the goat was good.

Mary bought a new black dress,
 Which fitted, every inch;
 She put her feet in high-heeled shoes,
 Which gave her toes a pinch.

But Mary bore it gallantly,
And no fault did she find;
The goat grew sad and sorrowful,
And, harnessed, would not mind.

He gazed at her in silent grief,
And pined away with trouble;
His bleat grew weak, his eye grew dim,
To see her bent up double.

No more he capered round about,
No more he drew his cart;
And so she took him out to walk
To cheer his drooping heart.

But when he saw her panier,
Far from the busy crowd;
He got his Ebenezer up,
And bleated long and loud.

Then he bent his body up
And gave a sudden jump;
His horn went through the panier,
And struck her hip ker-thump.

Mary dropped her parasol,
And gave a healthy shout, —
The straps gave out with sudden snap,
And she was straightened out.



The goat at once appeared much pleased,
And walked home by her side;
And that same day was strong enough
To haul her out to ride.

After that, the other girls
Who heard of Mary's shock,
All left their paniers at home
When they took a walk.

MORAL.

This story teaches all who have
The sad complaint endured,
To buy a goat and take a walk, —
The "Bend" may thus be cured.



THE LAST OF THE "GRECIAN BEND."