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The Phoenix Nest

A City Mythology

RAMBLING through Bulfinch the other day and through the manual of Alexander S. Murray, we fell to thinking about the Greek and Roman gods, and pondering upon the Vedic Varuna and Indra, upon the Norse dignitaries whose thrones were in Gladshiem, and the eight great gods of Egypt, Neph, Amun, Pthah, Khem, Sati, Maut, and Bubastis, so familiar to you all. Might it not be possible, we wondered, to conceive a proper mythology for New York City? Godless Manhattan cried out, it seemed to us, for a proper hierarchy. Statues of apt deities might well supplant many of the frock-coated monstrosities in our public squares. So thinking, our pipe went out and we fell into a trance. And it seemed to us that the new gods came.

We stood in Madison Square, lately deleted of the historic Garden and its presiding Diana. And we beheld Flatire, the god of the Flatiron building. In his right hand he held a fistful of United Cigar Store coupons of brilliant colours, in his left he brandished a mug of coffee from a Hudson Lunch, and his face was as the face of a great clock. His hands were spread before his face.

Beneath his gigantic knees moved the swaying tops of green and brown busses, like crawling bugs. Like the brazen man of Crete he bestrode the traffic, from Broadway to Fifth Avenue. "Hail, Flatire! Great is Flatire!" acclaimed the people. A great shout rose from those who waved newspapers from the benches of the park.

A change came o'er the spirit of our dream. We were at Forty-second Street. Gostop, the god of the Great Crossing, loomed like a monolith before us. He was helmed with the crows' nest of a traffic tower, and the three eyes in his head burned red and yellow and green. His general effect was that of a tall scaffold or one of H. G. Wells's Martians. He was swathed in brilliant and expensive fabrics, and his dexter mitt waved a catalogue of the New York Public Library.

From Times Square hallooed to him Skysyno, the great god of the theatre district. His face was the face of David Belasco but his voice was the voice of Winthrop Ames. Both his hands dangled bright puppets upon a thousand strings. Heywood Broun clung to his left-hand lapel and Alec Woolcott to his right. Bob Benchley sat on the bridge of his nose. His feet were foyers and his mouth foamed with box-office receipts.

We turned from Skysyno with a shudder and dived into the subway. We caught a downtown express. Emerging at Brooklyn Bridge, we peered more closely at the Butter Boy fernist City Hall, decided that he was certainly not a god, and then raised our eyes to the real divinity of this district, the great god Nooze, lifting the Woolworth Tower like a spear. The words of his mouth were as the thunder of cannon, or of Hoe Presses. His stridence shook the

Old Post Office. His chest was plastered with pictures from an Illustrated Daily. He scooped handfuls of people from the street, cracked them between his nails, and deftly examined their insides. "I am The Inquiring Reporter," he roared.

Scuttling southward from his tumult we turned Eastward from Trinity Church down a steep place into the Street. Bonstocko stood where Stedman's Pan had piped. Great is Bonstocko, greatest of all the gods! His attire is ticker tape. The fingers of each enormous hand constantly gesticulate in strange gestures. Either breast is a Bank, with plate glass windows, and gunmen in automobiles adventure on his shoulders. He champs on gold. Wild speculation is in his eye. The pelts of bulls, bears, and lambs adorn his waist for a sash. Ever and anon he breatheh the mystic syllables mor-gan and the high buildings and deep canyons reverberate around him.

But by now we had almost had our fill of the new gods. We fled away to the yellow "L" and were off uptown. Fresh breezes cooled our fevered brow on the open platform. How long we journeyed on the flying dragon we cannot tell, but at length, after various mutations, we espied the Bronx.

Arlem is a great god. His colour is Ethiop. His tall bulk is constantly asway. His soul is music. His eyes roll and his stone feet shuffle. The Indies have woven him a gaudy robe of divers stuffs. Red bougainvilleas are a wreath for his head. He calleth on Big Dick and Little Phoebe, lesser divinities of his realm. He wieldeth a sax as big as the Mauretania.

And we have named but a few of the deities of this our city. Nor have we touched upon the many legends that surround them. There is no space here to relate how Philemonheimer and Baukistein, an aged couple of the poorer class, were living peacefully and full of piety towards the gods in their cottage-tenement in Eesidia, when Bunc, the greatest god of Manhattan, paid them a visit as a world-weary travelling salesman. Nor can we set forth the twelve labours of Harold Kleez, in the service of Moviestar,—how he quelled Produsa, the offspring of Typhon and Echidna, where this monster devastated the western district of Holy Wood, to the horror of the natives; how he encountered the Scenarian Bore, threw the Cretins the bull and fermented at last the apples of the Hesperides. Alas! Would we could relate how the Greeks sailed up the Hudson to Troy, armed with blacking-brushes, and engaged the immaculate Arrocollas; or how the Harpys licked the Gorgons in the eighteenth inning at the Polo Grounds. The second childhood of Dionysos among the sileni and vine-tenders of the night clubs must go unsung, and the newer Ovidian metamorphoses of the Village remain a dream. Oi-Oikles, the father of Amphi-

nandandius; Thyndhairius expelled from Jazziania by the Happicoontides; Terminus, the god of the Grand Central; Nyx, the presiding deity of the Central Park police; Ino, the flapper-nymph, and Errata, the Muse of Galley Proofs,—all these have their stories. But we must not linger in recounting them.

Meanwhile, we have but roughly traced the outlines of our trance. The true "Manual of Manhattan Mythology" is yet to be compiled, we hope by abler hands. We recommend the idea to the attention of the devout. What Petiscus, Prelles, and Welcker did in their researches into old-world myth may yet be rivalled by some creator of a new pantheon of heroes suitable to this neck of the woods. Yes, even Brooklyn might have its deities, and the maenads and bassarids of Long Island their proper celebration. Believe us, they might!
W. R. B.

The Salad³ Bowl

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—Arnold Bennett, by Mrs. Arnold Bennett.

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