

CIVILISATION OF LAWLEY ROAD

(As viewed in 5000 A. D.)

By

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The dispute was becoming proverbial. It even threatened to eclipse the famous Pickwickian Controversy.

It was all between Dr. Bluff and Dr. Muff: about the civilisation of Lawley Road: whether it was the civilisation of an educational institution or a lunatic asylum.

Now, it was not that Dr. Bluff had gone wrong or that Dr. Muff had tumbled into the correct. But the fact was that Dr. Bluff, after years of painstaking effort, both inside the laboratory and outside in the field, had come to a conclusion that Lawley Road should once have been the seat of an ancient, renowned, educational institution, ancient in its tradition and renowned for its achievements.

Great men were studying stones, mud, earth and all that: there were the beautiful collection of huge stones, tiny stones of various colors, lustre, streaks, specific gravity and so on. Again, the discovery of a certain inscription, perhaps the remnants of what once was a cemetery, had thrown much light on this angle. "Freeman Buildings"—Ah! What fine words! Buildings and that too belonging to Freeman! Dr. Bluff argued that these should have been the motto for the institution; Freedom for everybody, including Man. Even the buildings enjoyed a certain amount of freedom, in that they stood in a corner, detached from the main bustling town.

But, and a weighty "but" it was, Dr. Muff had stormed the entire world of historians by putting down Lawley Road, as a Lunatic Asylum now by gone. The very stones lying pell-mell, scattered here and strewn there, and exhibiting traces of torn-off skin, proved that stone-throwing had been a pastime with the lunatic members. It should have been the only pastime, perhaps, as other entertainments were definitely put down as harmful (said Dr. Muff).

And what about the collection of herbs with all its curious attractions? People had taken the trouble of squandering wealth on the collection, had given a name Herbarium, just as an eye-wash and had gone to the extent of preserving them. Well, said Dr. Muff, people in their normal senses would not have done that. Definitely, the lunatics were all perverts who had interested themselves in the art of healing with herbs

Again, one found arrays of bottles, containing liquids, powders and all appliances that obviously, should have been maintained in the hospital. The microscopes were used to examine sections of the brains of the dead members. "What we now use for chopping up our vegetables, said Dr. Muff, "they had used for taking sections with".

Thus, Dr. Muff began aiming his thunder-bolts in unearthing the excavations of Lawley Road that was an asylum. And one fine day, he called for a meeting of learned historians, antiquarians, contemporaries and others and began that oration, with a variety of ingenious and erudite speculations on various evidences.

"We have found out layers and layers of boxes, piled up, containing insects of various sizes, shapes and styles. Perhaps, next to stone-throwing, this was a favourite sport. Please note that to the best member in this sport, prizes were awarded each year by a Great Lunatic. Well, friends, does not the fact that the insects had been crucified with their wings stretched and bodies pierced with sharp-pointed pins, the fact that the insects had been put to deliberate death by the use of some lethal substance, and the abhorrent action in trying to preserve these; do not all these go to show the barbarism and unworldly instincts that breezed through these out-of-the-minds? You see that there was a method behind their madness in that the insects had all been arranged properly, with a sense of decorum.

"Any reasonable being, will suspect insanity on finding some excavations of what once should have been a graveyard, in the midst of trees, trees in flower and trees in fruit. Do you think that any one with common sense will take it into his head to lay out a graveyard amidst those beautiful evergreen spots on the surface of Nature? Cannot they find out some better place to bury one's remains, or to fume them away. And as you know, those who do not come under this classification are grouped under the family *Lunaceae*.

"I have got some interesting information about the life these people led. The people were all lunatic, lean-witted fools. They used to assemble quite frequently in definite places and these assemblages were presided over by elder lunatics. There were quite a good number of such G. F's in the Asylum: and this, Dr. Bluff had mistaken for class rooms, and all that. You see that the younger lunatics diverted themselves with sleeping, chatting, howling and all that, while such assemblies were in function.

"A word about the women of this civilisation. The one thing that strikes all historians is that these women were not in the habit of smoking, Oh! what a ridiculous thing it would have been! If such were in our midst, they would have become our laughing stocks.

"The attitude of the male lunatics towards their comrades of the opposite sex, (who, by the way were not necessarily fair) differed widely. Some adored them, worshipped them in their heart of hearts, dreamt about them and in short, went mad over them. Some others despised them. Some did not care about them: and yet others allowed themselves to be mocked by their contemporaries.

"These divergence and variations, about the same set of material, are easily explained by the character of the worthies, namely madness.

"Let me conclude that Lawley Road did once witness the life the lunatics led. I say it because, of all the colours, they had chosen the red colour, the ugly, dirty and above all dangerous red colour to demacate

their holdings; because instead of cultivating crops to cater to the needs the country, they raised weeds, tended them and harvested them; because, instead of building up for a stable future, they were content with the debris of their broken past: and because, they were madmen by birth, wedded to lunacy and begot in madness.

"But remember, that the most civilised people are as near to barbarism as the most polished steel is to rust; and therefore there is nothing base in being called a set of barbaric, insane, lunatics.

"Let me remind you that it was an asylum maintained by their Government, for the Government, from the coffers of the Government".

With this beautiful ebullition of historical knowledge concerning what once went to form the much-disputed civilisation of Lawley Road, Dr. Muff carved himself a niche in the temple of antiquarians. And what happened to Dr. Bluff after this discovery, little is known about that. Perhaps his name doomed to the oblivion of those who cultivate the mysterious and the sublime.

THE VEGETABLE TRAGEDY

By

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Darkness had fallen now. I could hear Velu's whistle somewhere behind the block. I didn't know why, but I was feeling lonely that day. I was thinking of the lecturer's remark "Even when you are asked while you are half asleep you must be able to tell"; Oh! forgotten. Boring subjects. Let me go to sleep. Avooowh!

Then suddenly, like a prearranged signal for the commencement of some festivity - Bang! Not a sharp, exciting bang, but a dull one, as of a door. Very slowly I turned my face to the right and blinked. Nothing further happened. Near at hand my clock ticked disinterestedly on. I had a feeling that someone was walking in. Suddenly it came to my mind. I had forgotten to lock the door when I last came in.

Now, I jumped from my bed and switched on the light. Oh! what shall I say! Seated on the table, surrounded by all my records, books, notes and all that I was associated with, was a young beautiful Oh! where can I get words, with a mass of blonde hair flowing down over her shoulders. Her attitude was nonchalant, but as she met my gaze with a sort of wistful appeal, I was enthralled. From the moment in which my eyes rested on her face other considerations did not count.