

JEROME

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CLOCKS

Джером Джером

Clocks

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Jerome K. Jerome

Clocks

CLOCKS

There are two kinds of clocks. There is the clock that is always wrong, and that knows it is wrong, and glories in it; and there is the clock that is always right – except when you rely upon it, and then it is more wrong than you would think a clock *could* be in a civilized country.

I remember a clock of this latter type, that we had in the house when I was a boy, routing us all up at three o'clock one winter's morning. We had finished breakfast at ten minutes to four, and I got to school a little after five, and sat down on the step outside and cried, because I thought the world had come to an end; everything was so death-like!

The man who can live in the same house with one of these clocks, and not endanger his chance of heaven about once a month by standing up and telling it what he thinks of it, is either a dangerous rival to that old established firm, Job, or else he does not know enough bad language to make it worth his while to start saying anything at all.

The great dream of its life is to lure you on into trying to catch a train by it. For weeks and weeks it will keep the most perfect time. If there were any difference in time between that clock and the sun, you would be convinced it was the sun, not the clock, that wanted seeing to. You feel that if that clock happened to get a quarter of a second fast, or the eighth of an instant slow, it would break its heart and die.

It is in this spirit of child-like faith in its integrity that, one morning, you gather your family around you in the passage, kiss your children, and afterward wipe your jammy mouth, poke your finger in the baby's eye, promise not to forget to order the coals, wave at last fond adieu with the umbrella, and depart for the railway-station.

I never have been quite able to decide, myself, which is the more irritating to run two miles at the top of your speed, and then to find, when you reach the station, that you are three-quarters of an hour too early; or to stroll along leisurely the whole way, and dawdle about outside the booking-office, talking to some local idiot, and then to swagger carelessly on to the platform, just in time to see the train go out!

As for the other class of clocks – the common or always-wrong clocks – they are harmless enough. You wind them up at the proper intervals, and once or twice a week you put them right and "regulate" them, as you call it (and you might just as well try to "regulate" a London tom-cat). But you do all this, not from any selfish motives, but from a sense of duty to the clock itself. You want to feel that, whatever may happen, you have done the right thing by it, and that no blame can attach to you.

So far as looking to it for any return is concerned, that you never dream of doing, and consequently you are not disappointed. You ask what the time is, and the girl replies:

"Well, the clock in the dining-room says a quarter past two."

But you are not deceived by this. You know that, as a matter of fact, it must be somewhere between nine and ten in the evening; and, remembering that you noticed, as a curious circumstance, that the clock was only forty minutes past four, hours ago, you mildly admire its energies and resources, and wonder how it does it.

I myself possess a clock that for complicated unconventionality and light-hearted independence, could, I should think, give points to anything yet discovered in the chronometrical line. As a mere time-piece, it leaves much to be desired; but, considered as a self-acting conundrum, it is full of interest and variety.

I heard of a man once who had a clock that he used to say was of no good to any one except himself, because he was the only man who understood it. He said it was an excellent clock, and one that you could thoroughly depend upon; but you wanted to know it – to have studied its system. An outsider might be easily misled by it.

"For instance," he would say, "when it strikes fifteen, and the hands point to twenty minutes past eleven, I know it is a quarter to eight."

His acquaintanceship with that clock must certainly have given him an advantage over the cursory observer!

But the great charm about my clock is its reliable uncertainty. It works on no method whatever; it is a pure emotionalist. One day it will be quite frolicsome, and gain three hours in the course of the morning, and think nothing of it; and the next day it will wish it were dead, and be hardly able to drag itself along, and lose two hours out of every four, and stop altogether in the afternoon, too miserable to do anything; and then, getting cheerful once more toward evening, will start off again of its own accord.

I do not care to talk much about this clock; because when I tell the simple truth concerning it, people think I am exaggerating.

It is very discouraging to find, when you are straining every nerve to tell the truth, that people do not believe you, and fancy that you are exaggerating. It makes you feel inclined to go and exaggerate on purpose, just to show them the difference. I know I often feel tempted to do so myself – it is my early training that saves me.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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