

The Judging of Jorgen

By James Branch Cabell



F. G. J. J. J.

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CHICAGO
THE BOOKFELLOWS
1920

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This is the Bookly Joy for October, 1920

J. B. C.: IN GRATITUDE

HOW do I thank you, Cabell, in this wise:
For Horvendile and Jorgen, fifty laes
Of rupees and of pearls, and thirty
sacks

Of maidens' hearts and sudden widows' eyes.
And you shall have your pick of knightly steeds,
And banners, shrewdly sewn with golden thread;
There shall be steel and velvet for your head,
And for your soul, a string of amber beads.
This for the present: I shall add, in time,
Much that your prowess shall exult to see,
When you have trysted with Calliope,
And quilled the record of your joyous crime.
I can be grateful, as you shall be shown . . .
You shall have all Chicago for your own!

— VINCENT STARRETT

In this, as in every other fable
I have written about Jurgen, I have
endeavored to write that wherein
each man will find what his nature
enables him to see.

James Branch Cabell

29 May 1920

THE JUDGING OF JURGEN

THEY of Poictesme narrate that in the old days a court was held by the Philistines to decide whether or no King Jurgen should be relegated to limbo. And when the judges were prepared for judging, there came into the court a great tumblebug, rolling in front of him his loved and properly housed young ones.

This insect looked at Jurgen, and its pincers rose erect in horror. And the bug cried to the three judges, "Now, by St. Anthony! this Jurgen must forthwith be relegated to limbo, for he is offensive and lewd and lascivious and indecent."

"And how can that be?" says Jurgen.

"You are offensive," the bug replied, "because you carry a sword, which I choose to say is not a sword. You are lewd, because you carry a staff, which I prefer to think is not a staff. You are lascivious, because you carry a lance, which I elect to declare is not

a lance. And, finally, you are indecent for reasons of which a description would be objectionable to me, and which, therefore, I must decline to reveal to anybody."

"Well, that sounds logical," says Jurgen, "but, still, at the same time, it would be no worse for an admixture of common sense. For you, gentlemen, can see for yourselves that I have here a sword and a lance and a staff, and no mention of anything else; and that all the lewdness is in the insectival mind of him who itches to be calling these things by other names."

The judges said nothing as yet. But they that guarded Jurgen and all the other Philistines stood to this side and to that side with their eyes shut tight and saying in unison, "We decline to look, because to look might seem to imply a doubt of what the tumblebug has said. Besides, so long as the tumblebug has reasons which he declines to reveal, his reasons stay unanswerable, and you are plainly a prurient rascal, who are making trouble for yourself."

"To the contrary," says Jurgen, "I am a poet and I make literature."

"But in Philistia to make literature and to make trouble for yourself are synonyms,"

the tumblebug explained. "I know, for already we of Philistia have been pestered by three of these makers of literature. Yes, there was Edgar, whom I starved and hunted until I was tired of it; then I chased him up a back alley one night and knocked out those annoying brains of his. And there was Walt, whom I chivvied and battered from place to place and made a paralytic out of him; and him, too, I labelled offensive and lewd and lascivious and indecent. Then, later, there was Mark, whom I frightened into disguising himself in a clown's suit, so that nobody might suspect him of being one of those vile makers of literature; indeed, I frightened him so that he hid away the greater part of what he had made until he was dead and I could not get at him. That was a disgusting trick to play on me, I consider. Still, these are the only three detected makers of literature that have ever infested Philistia, thanks be to goodness and my vigilance, but for both of which we might have been no more free from makers of literature than are the other countries."

"Now, but these three," cried Jurgen, "are the glories of Philistia; and of all that Philistia has produced, it is these three

alone, whom living ye made least of, that to-day are honored wherever art is honored, and where nobody bothers one way or the other about Philistia!"

"What is art to me and my way of living?" replied the tumblebug, wearily. "I have no concern with art and letters and the other lewd idols of foreign nations. I have in charge the moral welfare of my young, whom I roll here before me, and trust, with St. Anthony's aid, to raise in time to be God-fearing tumblebugs like me. For the rest, I have never minded dead men being well spoken of; no, no, my lad, once whatever I may do means nothing to you, and once you are really rotten you will find the tumblebug friendly enough. Meanwhile, I am paid to protest that living persons are offensive and lewd and lascivious and indecent, and one must live."

Jurgen now looked more attentively at this queer creature; and he saw that the tumblebug was malodorous certainly, but at bottom honest and well meaning; and that seemed to Jurgen the saddest thing he had found among the Philistines. For the tumblebug was sincere in his insane doings and all Philistia honored him sincerely, so that

there was nowhere any hope for this people. Therefore, King Jurgen addressed himself to submit, as his need was, to the strange customs of the Philistines. "Now do you judge me fairly," cried Jurgen to his judges, "if there be any justice in this insane country. And if there be none, do you relegate me to limbo, or to any other place, so long as in that place this tumblebug is not omnipotent and sincere and insane."

And Jurgen waited. . .

NOW THE MORAL OF THE JUDGING OF JURGEN, WHICH
IS ALSO THE DEDICATION OF JURGEN, IS, AS IT WAS IN
THE BEGINNING :

BEFORE EACH TARRADIDDLE,
UNCOWED BY SCIOLISTS,
ROBUSTER PERSONS TWIDDLE
TREMENDOUSLY BIG FISTS.

“OUR GODS ARE GOOD,” THEY TELL US,
“NOR WILL OUR GODS DEFER
REMISSION OF RUDE FELLOWS’
ABILITY TO ERR.”

SO THIS YOUR JURGEN TRAVELS
CONTENT TO COMPROMISE
ORDAINMENTS NONE UNRAVELS
EXPLICITLY . . . AND SIGHS.

