

The illustration is a full-page background image. It depicts a scene from a medieval manuscript. The Virgin Mary, with long blonde hair and a halo, is shown in a white robe with a blue mantle. She holds a white lily in her right hand and her left hand is extended towards a man kneeling before her. The man is wearing a dark tunic with a red and black diamond pattern and is looking up at her with a reverent expression. In the background, several men in white robes are watching the scene. The setting appears to be a church or a similar religious building, with stone walls and a large window or altar area visible on the left.

JAN M. ZIOLKOWSKI

READING THE JUGGLER OF NOTRE DAME

Medieval Miracles and Modern Remakings



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Cover image: Leon Guipon, 'Lightly down from the dark descends the Lady of Beauty' (1907), published in Edwin Markham, 'The Juggler of Touraine', *Century Magazine* (December 1907), p. 231.

Cover design by Anna Gatti.

8. The Poet Edwin Markham

Nowadays the American man of letters [Edwin Markham](#), who was born in 1852 and died in 1940, languishes forgotten.

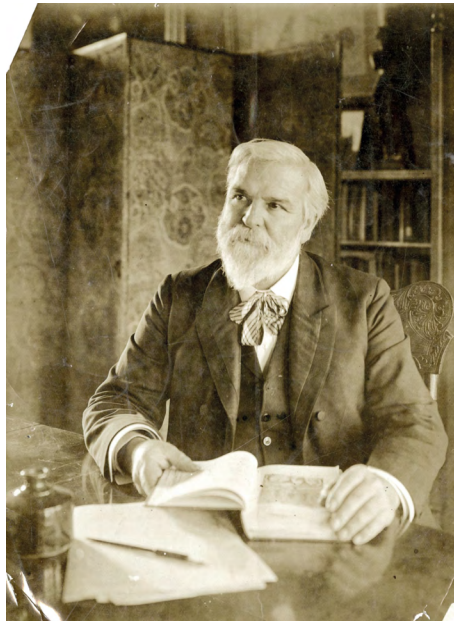


Fig. 38: Edwin Markham at his desk. Photograph, date, and photographer unknown. New York, Wagner College, Horrmann Library. Image courtesy of Wagner College, New York. All rights reserved.

He rests in a dead zone between such greats as Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman, who preceded him, and T.S. Eliot, Langston Hughes, and Ezra Pound, who succeeded him. A century ago, the oblivion would have surprised many in the United States. In his prime, Markham enjoyed a far higher reputation than he does in literary history today. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, he achieved flashes of renown for the socialist themes he sounded as “the poet for preachers.” His first and perhaps foremost claim to fame was a poem entitled “[The Man with the Hoe](#),” composed in the last week of 1898 and published in a newspaper two weeks later. This paean to the proletariat was inspired by a canvas from 1862 by the painter Jean-François Millet, a founder of the Barbizon school in France. But Markham was not just a flash in the pan.

In 1900 he wrote "Lincoln, Man of the People," on the US president. A great success, it became the title piece in his second book of poetry, from 1901.

Markham's receptivity to Gallic culture did not end with "The Man with the Hoe." Quite to the contrary, he found himself moved a decade later by [Isabel Butler's prose translation](#) of the medieval French original as well as by Anatole France's short story.

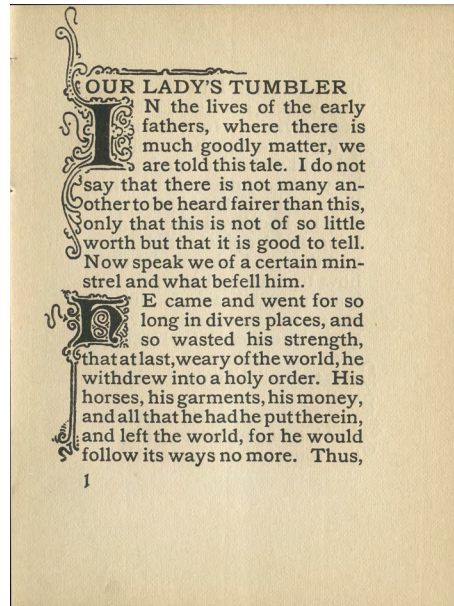


Fig. 39: Isabel Butler, trans., *Our Lady's Tumbler: A Tale of Medieval France*, Translated into English from the Old French (Boston: Copeland & Day, 1898), p. 1.

In response, he wrote a narrative to which he attached the title "The Juggler of Touraine." With four lovely full-page illustrations in color by the French-born artist Leon Guipon, his poem was printed first in [December 1907](#), in a weekly with wide circulation.

In his free versification Markham employs iambic pentameter, mostly but not thoroughly rhymed aabbccdd, but his goal was not to achieve a metrical tour de force. True to form, he seized upon the capacity of the tale to be coordinated with the social issues that he deemed most pressing in his day and in his nation. He took the opportunity to commend the humility of the performer. He implied that the proto-populist anticipated the struggles of the working poor in the United States. Yet he refrained from outright editorializing. Instead, he emanated a spirit, often mystical,

that has earned him recognition as “a poet of brotherhood and love.” The brotherliness accorded well with the monastic setting. In this fraternalism, the poet sounded what was at the time a distinctively American note of religious tolerance, by cautioning readers not to be judgmental of those who worshipped differently. This last message dovetailed nicely with the timing of the initial publication, which led one reviewer to judge the piece “an unusually meritorious Christmas poem.” An aura of “on earth peace, good will toward men” permeates the poem.

A small black-and-white embellishment in the magazine brought home the connection with the birth of Jesus, not that many readers could have missed it. More to the point is a decoration on the first page of the text that pictures a taper, surrounded by a juggler’s equipment, burning before a niche with a Madonna, against a backcloth with the fleurs-de-lis conventionally associated with her. In the early twentieth-century US, such symbolism was rare, because of its association with Catholicism. The Yuletide season allowed attention to the Virgin that at other seasons of year would have been out of keeping with the then-dominant Protestantism. In America, the two main branches of Christianity drew closer at Christmas than in other months, perhaps even than at Easter.

“The Juggler of Touraine”

I

- Once in the time of Louis the King
 Happened a smiling and holy thing.
 'Twas all in the outdoor days of old,
 Days that fancy has warmed with gold,
 5 Days that are gone with the leaves, alas!
 When the light-legged juggler Barnabas
 From city to wondering city went,
 Sprinkling the world with his merriment.
 He would startle the Square on festival-days,
 10 When all the town was a sudden blaze,
 A clamor of tongues, and a clack of feet,
 A flurry of thousands filling the street—
 Princes with plumes and gartered knees;
 Sailors back from the Indian seas;
 15 Mayors and marshals viewing the town,
 Horsed, and robed in the violet gown;

Thieves alert for the thoughtless purse,
 And ever free with the easy curse;
 Shepherds leading their April flocks;

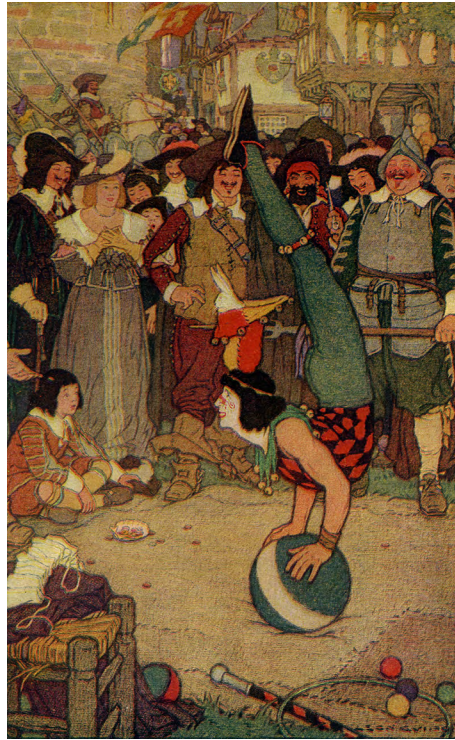


Fig. 40: "Sprinkling the world with his merriment." Illustration by Leon Guipon, 1907. Published in Edwin Markham, "The Juggler of Touraine," in *Century Magazine* (December 1907): 223.

- 20 Damsels driving their [turkey-cocks](#);
 Beggars droning their practised whine;
 Troopers red from the tavern wine;
 Ladies in feathers and flaring hoops;
 Monks with relics and pious stoops;
 25 [Bullies](#) with long mustachio twirls
 Teasing the fops with the scented curls;
 Quacks with doses for all the ills—
 Coughs and colics, and gripes and chills;
 Brigands home from their sorry trade,
 30 And marked to [dance with the hempen maid](#);
 Hucksters bragging across the din;
 [Gaffers](#) agaze with shaking chin;
 Gamesters, too, with the shifty eye
 And the conical hat an arm's-length high,
 35 [Clackering](#) loud their lottery dice,
 Shouting the winning numbers thrice,
 Giving to all their wild advice.

In through it all, like a [straddling](#) ape,
 The juggler strode, with the town agape,

- 40 A [punchinello](#) on tipsy stilts,
 Wading his way with leaps and [lilts](#).
 A peaked hat on his bobbing head
 Was half of yellow and half of red.
 On his powdered face was the unicorn,
 45 One cheek for the tail and one for the horn.
 His gown, puffed out over belly and back,
 Was sprinkled with signs of the Zodiac.
 His sleeves, blown up like young balloons,
 Were floating skies stuck full of moons.
 50 And his [quips and cranks](#) seemed never to fail
 To draw the crowd like a comet's tail!

- Why, even duennas on way to Mass
 Would follow the train with their maids, alas!
 And the [First Epistle](#) be reached and read,
 55 While they were held by a [feather-head](#)!
 For he stretched a carpet along the grass,
 Where the murmurs mix and the laughters pass;
 And ripping the skies from arms and back,
 He stood [trim-trig](#) as a tumbling [jack](#).
 60 Like a blowing bough was his [whimsy](#) grace;
 Like a rising moon was his fresh young face.

- Now he poised on hands on a rolling sphere,
 And cracked his heels at the Marshal's ear.
 Now he scattered nine balls to the morning air,
 65 And kept them [a-shine and a-weaving](#) there;
 For they flew to their places, one by one,
 As planets tethered about the sun.
 With toes to head, in a [spangling](#) round,
 He ran as a light wheel over the ground.
 70 He swallowed the Notary's signet-ring,
 And down in your pocket you found the thing!
 On, on he went till the crowd was full
 Of [tarradiddle](#) and cock-and-bull;
 And a shower of coins on the carpet fell,
 75 Like a rain of leaves on an autumn well.

II

Oh, blithe is the trade of [Pantaloön](#),
 Light as the flight of an April moon.
 Blithe are the travels of [Harlequin](#),

- Till the leaves turn red and the frosts begin.
 80 And light went the days of Barnabas—
 Light as the dews on a blade of grass,
 Till the first faint frost at Michaelmas.
 He and the cricket went chirruping by
 Till the delicate snows began to fly.
 85 Then all things crept to a snug abode—
 Squirrel and lizard and lumbering toad—
 And he and the wind were alone on the road.



Fig. 41: "He and the wind were alone on the road." Illustration by Leon Guipon, 1907. Published in Edwin Markham, "The Juggler of Touraine," in *Century Magazine* (December 1907): 220.

- For his purse was lean, his friends were few,
 And the lodge for the night he never knew.
 90 But however the hours ran dark with ill,
 He only smiled on the old world still:
 Wide was his love as the sun's good will.

- And he kept him clear of the deadly sins,
 Nor bragged and brawled in the noisy inns,
 95 Where unfrocked abbès and tipsy churls

Made **light-hour** love to the loveless girls.
 Through all the ways that went so wild,
 He kept the heart of a little child.
 And he never failed at a **wayside shrine**
 100 With the bended knee and the holy sign,
 And a candle, **tipt** with a tender flame,
 Lighted in praise of Our Lady's name.
 And he never failed of his parting prayer:
 "Mother of Jesus, **Queen of the skies**,
 105 Shine on the ways my feet may fare;
 And when God pleases to shut my eyes,
 Take me home to your paradise!"

One eve, on the edge of a lonely town,
 As the clouds drove by and the rain shot down,
 110 Poor Barnabas, hugging his knives and balls,
 And seeking a **bed in the cattle stalls**,
 Fell in with a friar from the **cloistral** halls—
 A cheery friar, with a wind of words
 And a head crooked out like a long-necked bird's.

115 "How is it, son," said the beaming friar,
 "That a **grasshopper green** is your winter **tire**?
 Are you **trigged** for the clown in a **mystery play**?
 Are you out as a **droll** till the break o' day?"
 "Father," said Barnabas, "this that you see,
 120 This is the **kill-care** Barnabas, he
 Who has lighted with laughter a hundred towns,
 Driving before him the **phlegms** and frowns—
 Lord of the revels; but now, ah, now,
 Blown in the wind as a leafless bough.
 125 Oh, the juggler's trade would the sweetest be
 Of all in the world if bread were free!"

"Beware," said the friar, "beware, my son:
 The cloistral trade is the sweetest one.
 For the friars keep **orison** day and night,
 130 And join the song of the souls in light,
 And the **Seven Throne Angels** burning white."—
 "Father, my tongue ran loose and long:
 Your trade is the sweetest: I did God wrong.
 It is much to dance with a feather thin
 135 Or a crookèd sword on the upturned chin,
 And to get the laugh and the **rat-tat-tat**,
 When I pull the hen out of **Gaston's** hat.
 But little are these to the cloistral ways,

Where long hours go to Our Lady's praise,
 140 Where the pale friars pass with feet unshod,
 And the bread is changed to the body of God.
 Oh, would that I might the great hours know,
 Where the Sanctus sounds and the gray monks go,
 And the candles burn in a saintly row!"

145 So simply told was the wistful tale
 That the word of the juggler had avail.
 "Come," said the friar, "to the cloistral rest;
 For the God who gives to the bird a nest,
 And guides the worm on its lampless quest,
 150 Has sent me out on the edge of night
 To lead your soul to the place of light."
 Sweet as the sound of a sudden stream
 That cools the heat of a traveller's dream,
 So sweet was the sound of the friendly word
 155 The weary heart of the juggler heard.
 That night he entered the convent door,
 That night he slept on the frater's floor.
 He had found a home for his heart at last,
 And the piteous chance of the road was past.

III

160 Lightly and still went the busy days
 Where each one toiled in Our Lady's praise.
 The Almoner lauded in lovely words
 That went to the heart like a flight of birds:
 She was the Lily, the Tower of Gold,
 165 Gate of Ivory, Roof of the Fold,
 The Rock of Vision, the Well that Flows,
 The Star of the Sea, the Mystic Rose.
 And ever the good Friar Estevan,
 A little mysterious thread of a man,
 170 Lauded her grace in Virgilian verse,
 In numbers majestic, tender, and terse.
 Friar Glorian copied the stately chants
 With all of his scholarly curves and slants,
 Prinking the pages in rainbow dyes,
 175 Strewing them over with butterflies,
 Winding the border with loop and lock
 Of the fleur-de-lis and the hollyhock—
 Bonaccord, Basil, and Théophile
 Praised her in music, as others kneel,

180 Blowing silver and touching string,
 Till hearts were struck by the mystic wing.
 Bonaccord's love in the 'cello sang.
 Théophile's praise in the *hautboy* rang
 Or tenderly cried in the violin.
 185 Basil, puffing his horn, came in,
Bladdering wide his jovial cheeks,
 Till his eyes went out into little streaks.
 Friar *Julian* painted Madonnas on
 The *throne of the great King Solomon*,
 190 With lions at corners, awake, aware,
 And Our Lady bowed in her beauty there.
 Two souls at her feet cried not in vain
 For the grace that whitens the mortal stain.

Around her head, in a haloed light,
 195 Were seven doves whirled in a silver flight,
 The *seven great gifts* of the *Holy Breath*—
 Devotion that saveth the soul from death,
 Strength that steadies us, Awe that stills,
 Science that measures the seas and hills,
 200 Wisdom, Intelligence, Good Advice
 That *balks* the *throw of the devil's dice*. —
 And ever the stout Friar *Palemone*
 Chiseled and hammered the patient stone,
 Carving her beauty the whole day long,
 205 *Edging* the time with a quiet song.
 Like *bearded rye* were his bristling brows,
 And white with the dust, as bended boughs
 Are white with the sift of the early snow
 When dead leaves stir and begin to go.

210 But to laud in marble, to praise in brass,
 To honor in color, poor Barnabas,
 Nothing of these could he do, alas!
 As leaves on a desert his learning was scant:
 He knew neither litany, *credo*, nor chant,
 215 Nor *Pater*, nor *Ave*—not even a prayer,
 Like a sheep of the field, like a hawk of the air.

One day, when his heart was nigh to fail,
 The Prior to comfort him *told a tale*
 Told of a friar from a southern isle,
 220 His face all lit with a heavenly smile,
 So lean in learning he could recite
 Only an Ave and that half right!



Fig. 42: "Nothing of these he could do, alas." Illustration by Leon Guipon, 1907. Published in Edwin Markham, "The Juggler of Touraine," in *Century Magazine* (December 1907): 227.

Yet beautiful tremblings went over his soul,
 As stars go over a hidden shoal.
 225 He died, and out of his bosom sprang
 Four doves that flew to a wood and sang.
 The four white doves that so lightly came
 Were the four white letters of Mary's name!

But the Prior's story was little relief
 230 To Barnabas, bearing his daily grief.
 So morning by morning the young friar slipped
 Through doors and halls to a secret crypt,
 And kneeling low at the altar cried:
 "O Madam and Mother, Virgin Bride,
 235 Here am I only a tethered ox,
 Eating the grass of the useful flocks!
 The choir can sing, and the deacons read
 The Gospel to scatter the living seed.
 Others can praise where the censers swing,
 240 And the white smoke circles, ring on ring.
 And the learned can laud you with art and craft,
 In the Latin chant and the marble shaft.

But I, poor Barnabas, nothing can I,
But drone in the sun as a drowsy fly."

IV

245 So the days crept on till a white dawn came
When a thought flashed over his soul like flame,
And he leaped from his cell all legs and arms,
Filling the cloister with looks and alarms,
As he shot his way to the chapel dim,
250 Running for joy in the heart of him.
And when he came out of the hidden place,
A light as of stars was over his face.
Now day after day to the secret crypt,
He sped light-foot as the old earth dipped
255 Softly and still in the fire of dawn,
For the restless pain of his heart was gone.
The friars were a-flutter that this should be,
Till at last the Prior with two or three—
Elders and *fraters* of high degree—
260 Followed the juggler on *tipping toe*,
Their breath held mightily, hoping to know.
And they heard him cry at Our Lady's shrine:
"All that I am, Madam, all is thine!
Again I am come with spangle and ball
265 To lay at your altar my little, my all.
The friars know all of the saints, what they do,
But of all up in Heaven, I know only you!
Of holy St. Francis a little I've heard,
But not of *St. Plato* or Peter a word.
270 I know not *Quintilian*—nothing he said
Of *the Three and the One*, and *the Wine and the Bread*.
Ah, nothing know I of the holy books,
And nothing of paints to put beautiful looks
Of your eyes on the wall, nor the blowing of brass
275 To make sound of my love—ah, nothing, alas!
But the trade of the wandering Barnabas.
Yet, Lady and Queen, if my heart would live,
I must give the gift that I have to give."

280 **A**nd then the eyes of the elders shone,
As they peered from the shade of a pillared stone.
For laying his friar's robe tenderly by,
He flickers as light as a dragonfly,
Then whirls into many a whimsical shape,

As once he had whirled with the crowd agape.
 285 And softly he cries as his breath comes quick:
 "Look down, for, Madam, this is the trick
 I did at *Toulon*, when I took the eye
 Of the King himself as he galloped by...
 This trick drew a duchess at *Chateauroux*. ...
 290 But this is the one I have made for you!"
 So flinging his feet in the air, he stands,
 Or goes and comes on his nimble hands,
 Or tosses the balls up to twinkle and run
 Like planets that circle about a sun.
 295 "Lady," he cries again, "look, I entreat:
 I worship with fingers and body and feet!"

At this all the elders mutter and chide:
 "Nothing like this do the rules provide!
 This is a scandal, this is a shame,
 300 This madcap prank in Our Lady's name.
 Out of the doors with him; back to the street:
 He has no place at Our Lady's feet!"

But why do the elders suddenly quake,
 Their eyes a-stare and their knees a-shake?
 305 Down from the rafters arching high,
 Her blowing *mantle blue* with the sky—
 Lightly down from the dark descends
 The *Lady of Beauty*, and lightly bends
 Over Barnabas stretched in the altar place,
 310 And wipes the dew from his shining face.
 Then touching his hair with a look of light,
 Passes again from the mortal sight.
 An odor of *lilies* hallows the air,
 And sounds as of harpings are everywhere.

315 "Ah," cry the elders, beating the breast,
 "So the lowly deed is a lofty test!
 And whatever is done from the heart to Him
 Is done from the height of the *Seraphim*!"