

GASTER, THE FIRST M.A.

"The ruler of this place was one Master Gaster, the first Master of Art in the world."—RABELAIS.

THERE'S a comical fellow that all of us know,
 And who always is with us wherever we go ;
 But our constant companion and guide though he be,
 Yet our eyes never saw him, and never will see.
 Of science the source, and of arts the first master,—
 The name of this wonderful fellow is Gaster.

Search history through with attention and skill,
 And you'll find him still busy for good or for ill.
 With his mischievous doings you early may grapple
 In the old and unhappy affair of the Apple.
 Though the Serpent's designs mainly caused that disaster,
 The Serpent was greatly assisted by Gaster.

But when Man was then sentenced to trouble and toil,
 It was Gaster that taught him to labour the soil—
 To dig and to delve, and to plant for his diet ;
 And he never would let him a moment be quiet.

Despotic and stern, and a rigid taskmaster,
But an excellent friend and instructor, was Gaster.

After living some ages on water and greens,
Gaster found out that bacon ate nicely with beans ;
And he also found out that, to moisten such food,
Something better than water was needful and good.
The Nymph of the Well owned that Bacchus surpassed
her,
And gave way to the Grape as the liquor for Gaster.

Then baking, and brewing, and hunting, and fishing
Arose from what Gaster was wanting or wishing.
The grain in the furrow, the fruit on the tree,
The flocks on the mountains, the herds on the lee,
All acknowledged his sway ; never empire was vaster
Than the fertile dominions thus subject to Gaster.

Geometry sprang from the Nile's spreading flood,
Just that Gaster might know where his landmarks had
stood ;
And Commerce grew busy by land and by sea,
Just that Gaster at home well-provisioned might be.
See ! the camel, the car, the canoe, the three-master,
All speed with their loads on the missions of Gaster.

Then cities were built with their shops and their houses,
Where in plenty and peace Gaster feasts and carouses ;
And a half of the houses and shops in a town,
If great Gaster were gone, might as well be pulled down :
So splendid and spacious on pier and pilaster
Rise the halls we've erected in honour of Gaster.

But I ought to observe that the changes thus made
For the most part took place with Dame Poverty's aid :
For Gaster and She, you don't need me to mention,
Are the father and mother of every invention.
When the pockets contain not a single piaster,
The wits become sharp in the service of Gaster.

I own we've had bloodshed by Gaster's advice,
And proceedings besides that were not over-nice.
Neither Rob Roy nor Cacus had been such a thief,
Hadn't Gaster been always so partial to beef.
When the Mosstrooper's wife saw he'd soon be a faster,
She served up his spurs at the bidding of Gaster.

Yet if Gaster would stay in his natural state,
His exactions would seldom be grievous or great.
But Luxury comes with suggestions officious,
And Cookery tempts him with dishes delicious,

And the Doctor's called in, with his rhubarb and castor,
To remove the sad ills of poor surfeited Gaster.

O ! close upon frenzy the maladies border
That Gaster begets when he's long out of order.
Like madmen we hurry, in hopes of release,
To Malvern or Homburg, to Gully or Spiess ;
When perhaps the disease would be put to flight faster,
If we just stayed at home and did justice to Gaster.

Try always to suit Gaster's wants to a tittle,
Nor supply his demands with too much or too little.
You will ne'er put a sick man in hearty condition,
If Gaster won't join and assist the physician.
In vain to a wound you'll apply salve or plaster,
If you don't take the pains to conciliate Gaster.

When Beauty puts forth all its glory and grace,
And unites the full splendour of form and of face ;
When each gesture is joyous, each movement is light,
And the glance of the eye is serene and yet bright ;
When the rose-hue of health tints the pure alabaster,—
Let us own that 'tis partly the doing of Gaster.

Nay, even in your noblest possession, the Mind,
Your dependence on Gaster too often you find.

A redundant repast, a rich supper or *soirée*,
Will oppress the *divinæ particulam auræ* ;
While at times, you may see, no professor or pastor
Teaches kindness and charity better than Gaster.

Oft when petty annoyances ruffle the soul,
And the temper defies philosophic control,
The commotion is quelled, and a calm will succeed,
Through the simple device of inhaling the Weed :
Such magical power has the soothing Canaster
To bring balmy content and good-humour to Gaster.

As for me, who thus venture his praise to proclaim,
And adorn his high worth with his classical name,
Let me hope from my patron these verses may bring
Some appropriate boon to assist me to sing ;
For it must be confessed that the poor poetaster
Finds always his best inspiration in Gaster.

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NOTE.—If Gaster, as Rabelais says, was a Master of Arts, it seems a precedent for Female Graduation, as Gaster in Greek is feminine.