"I was delighted when Wilkins smothered an amazed oath, while his rugged face was a study of novel emotions."

TALES OF A COLLECTOR OF WHISKERS

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The remarkable researches and discoveries of Mr. J. Archibald McKackney have hitherto been buried in the monographs of the American Society for the Promotion of Curious Science. Mr. McKackney, it may be remarked, is an elderly gentleman of great wealth and an eager mental activity whose estate is one of the showplaces of the New England coast. For several years he had been engaged in assembling his unique collection of Human Whiskers before his discovery and employment of their musical vibrations made a world-wide stir among the students of Acoustics and Harmony. *

For the information of the layman it is perhaps well to refer to the circumstances which preceded the organization of the now famous Hirsute Orchestra. Having wearied of the more commonplace objects of the collector's ardor, including Japanese pottery, unset gems and Roman coins, Mr. McKackney turned with the utmost enthusiasm to the task of obtaining the photographs, paintings and drawings of all the styles, patterns, designs and front elevations of the beards, whiskers and mustachios that have ornamented the human face from the days of the ancient Egyptians.*

He visited almost all the inhabited corners of the globe in the hope of adding new trophies to his classified list of one hundred and eighty-seven distinct or catalogued varieties of whiskers, and the walls of his immense library are covered with bewildering sequences of facial landscapes.

For the first time some account of the adventures and achievements of Mr. McKackney has been prepared in popular form, and the following is the first of a series of these narratives that will appear in this magazine, as told by the distinguished collector and virtuoso.

I
THE HIRSUTE ORCHESTRA

I had hastened to my "workshop," or laboratory, early in the morning of that memorable day. For months I had been groping my way toward a discovery which should set the world of science by the ears and crown the brow of J. Archibald McKackney with a unique kind of fame. My Whisker Collection, notable as it was, had almost ceased to focus my interests. My life was bound up in the array of electrical machinery, burnished spheres, rows of tuning forks and other complex apparatus which filled the long room up under the roof of my mansion. Even my loyal assistant, Hank Wilkins, had not been taken into my confidences. The former sailor-man, who had won his position with me because of his peerless beard of the rare Titian red, was left to pore over the illustrated catalogue of the McKackney Whisker Collection while I toiled behind locked doors.

Never can I forget the moment when I rushed into the upper hall and shouted down the stairway to Wilkins:

"Come up here. I've done it, by the Lord Harry! Hurry up! The grandest discovery of modern times! You can hear it! Beautiful! Wonderful! Amazing!"

I was dancing with impatience as the sailor fairly flew upstairs, his immense crimson beard streaming over his shoulders as if he had set studding-sails for a swift passage. Our strange adventures in search of rare types of whiskers had prepared him for the unexpected, but for once he was almost dismayed.

I grasped his arm and led him into the workshop and pointed toward a row of rounded wooden blocks to which were attached artificial whiskers of various lengths and patterns. The faithful fellow rubbed his eyes and his jaw dropped. If the display of false whiskers puzzled him, the maze of elaborate mechanisms to right and left fairly bewildered him. The series of bellows geared to a small engine and dynamo next drew his attention and his expression was so extraordinary that I managed to explain:

"I didn't mean to frighten you, Wilkins, and it will take time to batter this achievement into that thick skull of yours. Sit down and I will try to make it clear."

I could not restrain a nervous laugh and my voice was not easily controlled as I mopped my face and went on:

"I am excited, Wilkins, and small wonder. After many heart-breaking failures and incredible effort I have—I have—been

*"My first impulse toward this field of investigation was inspired as the result of an idle hour in a crowded railway station. I began to note the whiskers of the hurrying pedestrians and was surprised to discover that their patterns were as severely distinct and individual as the faces of their wearers. I counted no less than seventeen successive types, no two of which were identical in any respect." It occurred to me at that time that if such a wide variety could be found in this casual observation, there must be an opportunity for a scientific study of these highly entertaining and important human phenomena. (Extract from the owner's Introduction to the Illustrated Catalogue of the McKackney Collection.)
able to apply the theories of musical vibration to the human whisker. For ages the winds of Heaven have been sweeping through the whiskers of mankind, which has been deaf to the magic of their harmonies."

Wilkins made a brave rally and tried to meet my astounding statement half way as he fairly shouted:

"The devil you say, sir! Then my peerless Titian beard must be a whole brass band. Do you mean to say you can play tunes on 'em?"

He had blindly stumbled on the very climax of my discovery, and as I waved my arm around the room I told him:

"That is what I hope to do, and before very long, if you will help me. Did you ever see an Æolian harp?"

"One of those boxes full of strings that make soft and soothing sounds when tickled by the wind?" he replied. "Why, I sailed with a skipper that had one in his cabin skylight. But you could hear that music, and my whiskers have been dumb for thirty years."

Then I told him, as simply as possible, how, after an exhaustive study of the laws of vibration and sound waves, I had evolved the theory that there must be a similitude between the Æolian harp and the Human Whisker. The instrument was but waiting for the player. But further progress had seemed hopeless after I discovered by experiment that the average vibrations of the Human Whisker when stirred by the wind range from ten thousand to forty thousand per second. Now it is well known, as I explained, that the practical range of the musical scale is hardly more than four thousand vibrations per second for the highest note of the piccolo flute. It was therefore evident that the sound of the vibrating whisker is beyond the reach of the human ear. This accounted for the failure of the human race to detect its own hirsute music, as Wilkins was quick to comprehend. And because these tones were inaudible without some means of greatly magnifying and recording sound, my most arduous efforts had been bent toward developing the powers of the microphone.

When under unusual mental pressure Mr. Hank Wilkins sometimes burst into snatches of impromptu doggerel, and be-
to his ears a succession of musical sounds unlike anything he had ever heard. He informed me that one reminded him of a violin; another sounded like the lingering sweetness of a twanged harp-string, while a third suggested a cello. Mingled with these were incredibly high-pitched and piping notes that soared far above any octaves known to human instruments. There were discords, of course, because I had not progressed as far as trying to tune these experimental whiskers.

I asked Wilkins to move one of the dummies aside and step in its place. I was wild with eagerness to try a living subject. Leaving one set of bellows pumping at full blast I rushed to snatch up the receivers. The stiff breeze fanned the noble beard of whiskers without my supervision! 

I dropped the instruments and could not help shouting:

"Hurrah, I was right! No more false whiskers! Oh, the mellow richness of your tone, Wilkins! Never, never trim your whiskers without my supervision! After lunch we must discuss the plans for assembling an orchestra with a human keyboard. I will spare no expense to find the needed assortment of whiskers."

As we went downstairs I was pleased to hear Wilkins humming behind me:

"As long as there's harvests of whiskers to grow, we shall have music wherever we go."

It was late that night before I was able to outline the final instructions which should send my assistant forth on the most difficult mission of our checkered career together. He was not appalled in the least, however, and I had reason for renewed gratitude that so resourceful and dauntless a companion as Wilkins had been granted me in the pursuit of my hobby. It was Wilkins who had obtained the portrait of the Insane Cossack with the Pink Whiskers after a perilous journey across Siberia, and that splendid trophy in its massive gilt frame hung facing him as we chatted in my library. It was in itself an inspiration and a reminder.

On the table were strewn my sketches and diagrams that indicated the various styles of whiskers needed to perfect the musical scale which I had resolved to assemble as soon as possible. They were grouped according to the pitch required, and carefully numbered and described. He could not go far wrong with these charts. He was to go out into the highways and hedges and find twenty-four men—no more, no less—to equip me with a range of three octaves for my Hirsute Orchestra. They would be offered handsome salaries to visit me for an indefinite period, and already I had given orders to have the billiard room and annex made into comfortable dormitories with a private dining-room. These guests were to be carefully selected as per the diagrams furnished Wilkins, and I explained to him:

"Each of these species of whiskers will give forth a different note when properly tuned, and all you will have to do is to consult your directions. For example, here is Face Number Six—Close Cropped Sideboards (see page 118 of the illustrated catalogue of my collection); or Face Number Nine—Crisp, Pointed Vandyke, such as young doctors affect. If my recent experiments with the tuning forks have not misled me this latter type of whisker should develop a clear and bell-like Middle C."

Wilkins ventured to object:

"But I can't tell whether they'll be meloious. Supposing I happen to ship you a shockin' consignment of discords."

He also inquired why he should not be allowed to pick up "a bunch of the hairiest, whiskerest Johnnies he could find and let Mr. McKackney trim, clip and tune them to suit." I explained with some slight impatience that I could not think of waiting for such whiskers as these to season and gain timbre; that a beard is like a violin, and needs age to give it tone. Rather sharply I ordered Wilkins to be sure to send me no whiskers that had been worn for less than three years.

I left him sitting by the library fire with his head in his hands studying his charts. The prospect of asking perfect strangers for the use of their whiskers seemed to disturb him now that he was on the eve of setting out in chase. But I knew that no difficulties could make him flinch once he was fairly on the trail of a coveted whisker.

My estate is remote from populous towns, and Wilkins had decided to head for Boston as the most promising field for his
quarry. From his detailed reports I later learned that upon reaching that city he laid his course for the wharves and sailors' boarding-houses where he was most likely to run across old friends. This was a wise choice also for technical reasons, because I afterward discovered that the whiskers of the sea-faring members of the orchestra surpassed the others in musical qualities. I explained this on the ground that they had been exposed to strong winds and rain and sun until they were toned and seasoned to an uncommon degree—but I am wandering from my story.

Wilkins' first capture, it seems, was made as he was nearing a saloon where in other days he had consorted with the sailormen of Boston. Sighting an old shipmate, Peter O'Dwyer by name, my assistant was delighted to note that he had grown a set of whiskers "that would calk a ship's yawl." Consulting his chart, Wilkins saw at once that the whiskers looked very much like "Number Eighteen (Middle Octave), medium length, square cut, bushy growth."

He overhauled O'Dwyer and over a table in the back room of the tavern renewed a briny friendship. Wilkins began to glimpse the troubles that threatened to beset him when O'Dwyer was moved to ask:

"You're lookin' at me kind of cock-eyed and queer, Hank. Don't my face fit me?"

Wilkins unfolded his bulky bundle of documents and jabbing one sheet with his stubby forefinger exclaimed:

"No offense meant, Pete, but I want your whiskers. There's a reward out for a man that can match these specifications. Tell me first, how long have you worn them?"

He was assured that the O'Dwyer whiskers had sprouted four years back, or just after these two had parted in Shanghai. Wilkins came at once to the point and told him:

"Forty dollars a month and keep you like a prince. A job right out of a fairy story—that's what I offer you. And I'll give you a juicy advance the minute you sign articles."

Mr. O'Dwyer narrowly eyed his friend, and was unfeeling enough to reply:

"I'm plannin' to ship aboard a bark to-morrow, and you'd better come along with me. Booze always did give you singular visions. Did you dream you'd started a mattress factory and wanted my whiskers for stuffing?"

Wilkins saw that it would only alarm his shipmate to enlarge upon the musical values of whiskers, and tactfully based his persuasions upon a show of cash. Still mystified, but confiding in the oft-proven friendship of Wilkins, able seaman, O'Dwyer at length declared that he was ready to follow him until the surface of Hades became solidly congealed, or words to that effect. As they walked toward the water-front a salty breeze swept up from the harbor and fairly whistled through the notable beards of these two sea-farers. Wilkins halted in his tracks and cocked his head as if eagerly listening. O'Dwyer stared at him with gloomy misgivings, as if his suspicions were trooping back, and muttered something about "having known 'em to hear voices in the early stages."

As Wilkins tells it, he felt himself blush
up to the eyes as he came to himself with a start and thought aloud:

"I just couldn't help listening. But of course my tones was invisible to the naked ear."

After putting O'Dwyer aboard a train to be shipped to me as the first "note" harvested, Wilkins set out after additional fragments of stray harmony. Among the several prizes captured later in the day was the cook of a coasting schooner who proved to be a treasure indeed. When sighted he was leaning against his galley airily twisting the needle-like ends of a rat-tailed mustache, while a slim goatee jutted from his chin like the point of a marline spike. Wilkins' observations showed his quick grasp of the technique of his arduous mission.

"I could see that he belonged with the rest of my sweet singers," he explained to me, "for them little wind-cutters was keyed way up for the piccolo flute. And that goatee added to them cunning mustachios had ought to make a noise like pickin' three strings of a guitar at once."

The cook was a Portuguese madly in love with a girl in New Bedford, and the offer of a situation ashore made him desert his pots and pans with cries of joy. Gaining assurance from these early successes Wilkins left the water-front for more conventional regions and was routed in confusion for the first time in his dashing career. While crossing the Common there approached him a slim and very erect gentleman with a pompous dignity of bearing. He carried a bundle of books under one arm, and seemed absorbed in weighty reflections. Wilkins appraised him as a person of intellectual distinction, and thrilled with pleasure as he stared at the trim, brown "Vandyke" which appeared to have been tended with scrupulous care. In a letter to me Wilkins wrote:

"I wish you had given me a tuning fork to try them out, Commodore, but this high-browed party struck me as a perfect specimen of Number Five, and properly sound and seasoned. I thought I'd just put it to him as man to man. So I braced up to him with a most respectful apology and tried to tell him that as I felt sure that he would be willing to help along the cause of Acoustics and Harmony, I'd like to borrow his whiskers, he go along with them, of course. I asked him to spare me only a few minutes, and promised to return him and his whiskers in good order."

Condensing Mr. Wilkins' narrative, it appears that the stranger fled with panicky strides, and cried out and wildly beckoned to the first policeman he saw. Wilkins stood his ground until the policeman made for him and then he dove like a frightened rabbit into the nearest subway entrance. He was followed aboard a train by a smartly dressed young man with a twinkling eye who sat down by his side and remarked:

"I beg your pardon, but I simply can't help asking what you said to Professor R. Xerxes Peabody. He is my uncle, you know, and I never saw him rattle before. Upon my word, it was like watching a glacier blow up."

Wilkins was worried and upset, but the young man's friendly air soon won his confidence and at length he explained the purpose of his mission. The stranger laughed so long and loud that Wilkins began to resent the ill-timed levity. Then the young man explained that Boston was immensely proud of Professor R. Xerxes Peabody as its most cultured citizen, and that never in his life had he spoken to a human being without an introduction. The idea of asking him for "the loan of his whiskers" struck the cheerful nephew as such an absolutely incredible event that he fairly begged Wilkins to "fall off at the next station and have a drink" in celebration. Wilkins was persuaded to follow his acquaintance, and a little later he related the morning's adventures along the waterfront. I am sure that as the listener studied the candid features and keen eyes of Wilkins he must have viewed him with growing seriousness, for he finally exclaimed with much emphasis:

"You aren't in the least bit dippy, Mr. Wilkins. It is gorgeous, every bit of it. And you simply must let me in on this. I am a musician myself in an amateurish way. And I am dying to meet Mr. J. Archibald McKackney, whom I know, by reputation of course, for his famous Whisker Collections."

The conscientious Wilkins protested that his young acquaintance was ineligible, because his face was as smooth as a hard-
boiled egg, and pronounced him to be a "fiddle without any strings." But this Mr. Arthur Harrison Colby was a persistent youth and he argued with much spirit, that while Mr. Wilkins was able to handle seafaring folks, he had already run out of this web-footed material and was invading new territory in which he was apt to "find seventeen kinds of trouble." He quoted Professor Peabody as an example of the perils that confronted the musical pilgrim, and wound up with this proposition:

"Now, I can guarantee to take care of a dozen numbers on your chart among my own acquaintances, if you will ring me in as assistant on the harmonious round-up."

Wilkins thought it over and finally wired me the circumstances with a request for my O. K. I was glad to send my approval, and next day received a note from Mr. Colby in which he said:

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your confidence in me. I have had a very expensive musical education and I realize the importance of your undertaking. I promise on my honor to spare no pains to help Mr. Wilkins assemble the most harmonious collection of whiskers that ever sung together like the morning stars."

Mr. Colby was as good as his word. Three days later Wilkins found him waiting in the hotel lobby. With him were no less than fifteen mustached and bearded strangers. Most of them were fashionably dressed, although four or five of these recruits looked badly battered and seedy. Before Wilkins could shout a greeting, this admirable young Colby waved his bamboo cane as if it had been a baton, and his fifteen followers rose as one man and bowed with great dignity. They were presented by their leader as "two full Octaves, shy one note which got lost in the shuffle. He was a merry wag whom we plucked from the Salvation Army bread line. On the way hither he sprinted for a weighing machine, explaining that before taking a musical engagement he wanted to try his scales."

Wilkins, of course, carefully inspected the company, compared their individual whisker growths with his charts and checked them off one by one. The results were so gratifying that he asked Mr. Colby to "steer the whole symphony into the bar and wet its pipes." Presently the Salvation Army jester drifted in, and Wilkins was able to tell Mr. Colby that twenty-one of the twenty-four musical notes had been secured. The remaining three, however, were the "rarest whiskers that grew in these latitudes," according to the experienced Wilkins, and he decided to send Mr. Colby ahead with his two Octaves for speedy delivery. He himself would stay behind and endeavor to run down the three missing notes. Mr. Gilby explained that ten of his followers were personal friends and relatives of his who had been selected from the club windows of Boston. "They will be missed, because they were distinctly decorative," he added.

From the end of the bar there came the subdued harmony of an impromptu quartette singing:

"There's music in the Hair-r-r."

Wilkins opined that it was time to move, and Mr. Colby promised to deliver two
Octaves at their destination in ship-shape order. I will say for Mr. Colby that he did deliver his consignment intact, but their arrival at my place was unpleasingly spectacular. From the railroad station they marched into my ground in column of twos with half the village at their heels. Mr. Colby's elderly Harvard friends and uncles had festooned their whiskers with bows of crimson ribbon and at frequent intervals they shouted a stentorian cheer which wound up with:

"Whiz-z-z, Whee-e, Bing Boom Ah-h.
We're the Æol-i-an Orchestra-a."

I succeeded in quieting this disturbance and showed these two fortissimo Octaves to their quarters in the annex. No sooner were they off my hands than Captain Jonathan Rust was setting the dormitory by the ears. He was an old sea-dog and a confounded nuisance, and I had reason to wish that I might strangle him in his baritone whiskers. First he took offense at the harmless Portuguese sea-cook and demanded that he be removed to other quarters. The old curmudgeon made a social issue of eating at the same table with a man whom he would feel at liberty to kick the length of a deck, and whittled out several wooden belaying-pins which he hurled at the head of the panicky Portuguese. Then he insisted that the company should be divided into two watches for the sake of discipline. A musical crank argued that the natural division was into the three Octaves, and these two quarreled night and day. Some of the others took sides, and I was in mortal fear that they would fall to pulling each other's whiskers and wreck their tonal values.

On top of these trials, the able seaman Peter O'Dwyer persisted in making fish-nets for diversion. Of course he had to upset a bucket of tar in his whiskers and Heaven only knew whether I could get him cleaned up in time for the first rehearsal. When Mr. Colby and his friends were not playing golf they started fresh rows between old Rust, the musical crank, and the Portuguese cook and egged them on with Harvard cheers. I breathed a prayer of fervent thanksgiving when Wilkins wired that he was en route with the twenty-fourth prize in tow. This musical fragment was an Irish stevedore with a coy and peerless fringe sprouting from beneath his smooth-shaven chin. I was so glad to see Wilkins that I included this Mr. O'Hara in my effusive greeting at the station. The old gentleman was ill at ease and backed away from me as he croaked:

"Your fifty dollars is in me pants, and I'd go half way to Hell for twice as much as that. But I'll be ready to lep through a windy if you do begin talkin' to yourself and makin' faces at me. Mister Wilkins here says he will give me a job on the high C's. I sailed thim when a lad, but they was never like this."

Mr. O'Hara was cheered to find several salt-water comrades in the dormitory and the forceful presence of Wilkins soon removed the discords from what he called my "human anthems." In the evening I summoned my able assistant to the library and congratulated him upon his brilliantly successful pilgrimage. My hasty survey of the tout ensemble led me to believe that the material for my unique Hirsute Orchestra was ready to be classified and tuned. Wilkins reported that Captain Rust had suddenly become nervous about the danger of fire among the luxuriant growths of whiskers gathered in the dormitory and had tried to place an embargo on smoking. I ordered Wilkins to equip the old man with a dozen hand grenades and a chemical extinguisher and to appoint him chief of the fire department, and then I took up the more important subject of assembling the orchestra in my laboratory for preliminary practice.

"Have the full three Octaves here at ten o'clock to-morrow morning, Wilkins," I said in parting. "You and I are on the eve of a marvelous revelation."

"All we need is a fair wind, sir," solemnly spoke the faithful fellow from the doorway.

(The second tale of a Collector of Whiskers will describe further adventures of the Hirsute Orchestra under the title of The Bearded Peasant's Revenge.)