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Ten Minutes at Han Ryner's

from *La Vie Littéraire et Artistique* no. 13

Jules Rivet

April 1, 1923

Han Ryner's barrel is set up on the banks of the Seine, not far from the Wine Market. Thus, the rustic habitation seems more justified than the dining habits of its occupant would suggest.

Our modern Diogenes is, in fact, if my information is correct, a naturist and water drinker.

"I admire him without envying him."

What I admire, however, is his beautiful philosopher's beard and the succulent honey of his words. When I troubled the sage in his solitary retreat, he did not ask me to stand out of his light..

He told me the story of Dion the Golden-mouthed [Dion Chrysostom], a marvelous story that has a share of both epic and symbolic legend:

Seeing that the army he was part of was about to go into a useless and bloody battle (as the stupid recklessness of armies do), Dion the Golden-mouthed rushed to the head of the soldiers, tore his clothes to rags and, half-naked, spoke so gracefully that he succeeded in stopping the combat.

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Han Ryner has not changed. But is he really of our time? By just saying yes, I would not want to feel sorry for him. No, Han Ryner is not of our time.

“I’m the only one in Paris,” he told me, “who hasn’t seen Phi-Phi and who hasn’t read the Garçonne.” There’s an originality like any other, perhaps more praiseworthy than others. However, even if Han Ryner has not seen Phi-Phi and has not read the Garçonne, at least he knows about them. And that is maybe a little urbane for a pre-decadent Stoic.

But let’s not squabble too much.

Instead, let’s praise him for remaining simple, useful and modest in an age when everything is geared toward pretentious and alluring uselessness.

Han Ryner told me another nice story. I imagine that it is his way of defending himself against tactless, inquisitive people. And of course, the stories he tells are so well chosen that you can see the thought of the Storyteller behind them.

Here’s the story of the Monkeys who dance:

One day in the court of a great king some monkeys took advantage of everyone sleeping to grab the clothes of the ministers and put them on... One of the monkeys looked like the chief of the Army, another the minister of Justice, a third the Treasurer and a fourth a famous writer. The others in the like... Then the monkeys started dancing upright like men and you would really have thought they were, until a commoner got the idea to throw a handful of nuts at them. Then the monkeys forget their clothes and started scrabbling around.

“Maybe it would only take,” Han Ryner finished, “a handful of nuts thrown in the midst of our ministers and into a full session of our Academy to witness the same scene.”

Well, that’s very likely. But it is not so certain because in our day the monkeys are not so attracted by nuts. They prefer gold francs.

Anyway, it is by telling such — and so subversive — stories that the author of *Paraboles Cyniques* and *Voyages de Psy-*

chodore has earned faithful admirers among the individualist anarchists who do not hide their preference for honest philosophers, their love of justice and their respect for the lives of men, poor and bearded.

Now, nobody is more bearded, honest and a philosopher than Han Ryner.