

IX.—BERNARD QUARITCH AND OTHERS.

NO survey of books and their makers can very well neglect the second-hand contingent. They resemble their wares, for the most part, in all outward disadvantage of comparison alongside the dealers who sell us "the last thing out." Their linen is less spruce, their binding less presentable, their edges want trimming, and their backs are bent. They are the train-band, the baggage-corps, in the great army of literature. They are a corrective against the fever of circulations, the clamour of advertisement, and the exaggeration of reviewers. Even in a material sense they are "makers of books" in so far as they doctor the imperfect copy and make it sound, by tracking down the truant volume, and restoring the departed plate, binding where necessary, and bringing a tattered work back to rehabilitation and its right mind. For one library they scatter, they help to start a dozen more, and if in the process some of the gold comes off the books and finds its way into their pockets, who cares?

Quite beyond the limit of the demonstrable information they contain, there is a psychology in books; they have emotions, you may say, as well as faculties, and the way to reach the soul of an author, humanly speaking, is to study his work in the guise in which it left his hands. Here again we depend upon the second-hand dealers, the men who shake their heads at temporary fame, and have parcelled so many Mudie-made celebrities away into the limbo of reductions and "remainders." Yet they are not merely a break-down gang to clear away the litter: they are the staff of the permanent way; and the greatest man who ever drove along it to renown and fortune

was a man already mentioned in these gossiping chapters—I allude to Bernard Quaritch.

The details of his life are easily reducible to a paragraph, while the oddities of his character would fill out a novel. He was born in a village of Prussian Saxony, four years after Waterloo had come and gone, leaving Germany to work out her own unity and salvation. He served his time to a bookseller in Nordhausen until the age of twenty, and then he spent three years with a publishing firm in Berlin. In 1842 he came to London and served, as we have seen, in the shop of Henry George Bohn, off Covent Garden. The salary was phenomenal—twenty-four shillings a week—and there is no record to show whether master and man perceived the other's real capacity. It is the silent man who wins. There is a legend that he and Bohn once came to a tussle of words, and if it be true, then the one must have broken his rule of bridling his tongue, and the other may have got some inkling of his subordinate's merit and resolution. The story goes that when Quaritch announced an intention of leaving, Bohn took offence, and remarked, "But why? where are you going?" "I am going," was the answer, "to set up in opposition to you." "It's like your impudence," said Bohn: "I'd have you know that I'm the first bookseller in England." This was matter of doubt, but Quaritch waived the argument. He retorted: "Yes, but I am going to be the first bookseller in Europe." He carried out his threat, and if he had thrown the other continents into the boast as well, he would have done no one any harm, for he lived and worked to make his prediction true.

At Bohn's he came to know Lowndes,

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of "The Bibliographer's Manual," and in the process of assisting in his works, he acquired something of the old compiler's method. But as the Frenchmen still had much to teach us in the finesse of old book-lore, he spent a year in the book-shops of Paris, and came back to help his former master, Bohn, in the preparation of his great catalogue of 1847. In that year he took out naturalisation papers as a British subject, and started for himself at a tiny corner-shop in what is now Charing Cross Road. He had a handful of savings as his capital. His first catalogue was a single sheet called "Quaritch's Book Circular," and this was the beginning of a series of publications which are contested in the open market of the sale-rooms almost as fiercely as the rareties they specify. The last catalogue of the firm came out in seven folio volumes with many supplements, and the care is inconceivable that goes into the making of a monumental list like that. Quaritch's catalogues have open shelves of their own in the Round Room of the British Museum, alongside the State Papers and all the thumb-worn drudges of ready reference. But the great Bernard was something more than a seller and a list-compiler, for he specialised and published on his own account. The Crimea established his vogue as a source for the literatures of Eastern Europe, and he published in rapid succession grammars and glossaries in Russian, Turkish, Persian, and Arabic. Meanwhile he went on buying and sweeping all before him. The Bishop of Cashel's famous library came into the market, and the modest corner-shopman who bagged his Mazarine Bible for £595 came to be known as a dealer in this costly rarity, for in the space of forty years he had half a dozen copies of it through his hands, and one of them he priced at £4,000.

Those things are not captured in the teeth of the traders and turned to profit without knowledge, courage, capital, and patience. When, after thirteen years, he moved into 15, Piccadilly, he had spread his reputation everywhere as the boldest wolf in the pack, and wherever books proved inaccessible the connoisseurs had learned to come to Quaritch. He never did justice to the contents of the books he bought and sold; no man could—not even a

Magliabecchi; but no one had such a Jew's eye for a Caxton or a Gutenberg, a rare old Codex or a Shakespeare quarto. If ever you pushed your way in through the Piccadilly crowd and the narrow door which served for every purpose, you were safe to see before you left some well-nigh priceless treasure of an older world—a crumbling Koran or a Talmudic manuscript swathed in a ragged talith or a camel-skin. You might see a row of Elzevirs propped up against a Pandect from some old notary's library in Padua, or a gem-encrusted Book of Hours some broken Spanish monastery had relinquished with sighs and groans, as it took a last leave of the illuminated wonders traced within.

In Quaritch's shop, somehow, you got a peculiar smell of learning and antiquity that was unattainable elsewhere, except perhaps in that fine relic of the Middle Ages, the Plantin Museum at Antwerp. And he was as taciturn as any mediæval scholar. Conversation he despised except among his cronies and the quaint club he formed called the "Sette of Odde Volumes." He detested the inutilities and small-talk of the passing day, and casual twaddle about trifles like the weather or the government was pretty safe to land you in a snub. He rarely looked up from his desk, and when he did he showed an impatient, stern, and energetic face, lit by an implied but eloquent reminder of the value of time. Dust seemed thoroughly congenial to him, and he showed to much more advantage in his workaday attire than he does in the spick-and-span portrait I am allowed to reproduce. The commonalty, hearing so much about his fabulous wealth, were inclined to doubt it when they bearded him in his den and found him such a bent, unceremonious, unassuming figure. One day, when the entrance was unguarded, an itinerant pedlar bundled his wares into the shop, and, as he strode through avenues of books, his basket knocked hundreds of pounds' worth of learning to the ground. When he arrived at the great man's desk, Quaritch, without looking up, inquired his business, and got the abrupt, alarming challenge: "Ten a penny, walnuts!" It was the only moment, so far as I have ever heard, when the bookseller fell into volubility.

Quaritch's great moments were at the

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book-sales. When he entered, he said little or nothing: his bids were nods; and when he left, it was his rivals' turn to talk, generally of their discomfiture and wonderment. His purchases were Homeric in their grandeur. He beat the best Frenchmen at the Didot sales in 1878 and 1879; and at the Perkins sale he spent £11,000, buying half the whole and all the best. He was the chief buyer at Sotheby's when the Hamilton and Beckford libraries came under the hammer; and at the end of the Sunderland sale at Puttick and Simpson's, he made such triumphant inroads in that mighty stock, that he was moved to rise and make a little speech congratulating all concerned on "the greatest book-sale that the world had ever known." When it was over, he was heard to blame himself for his

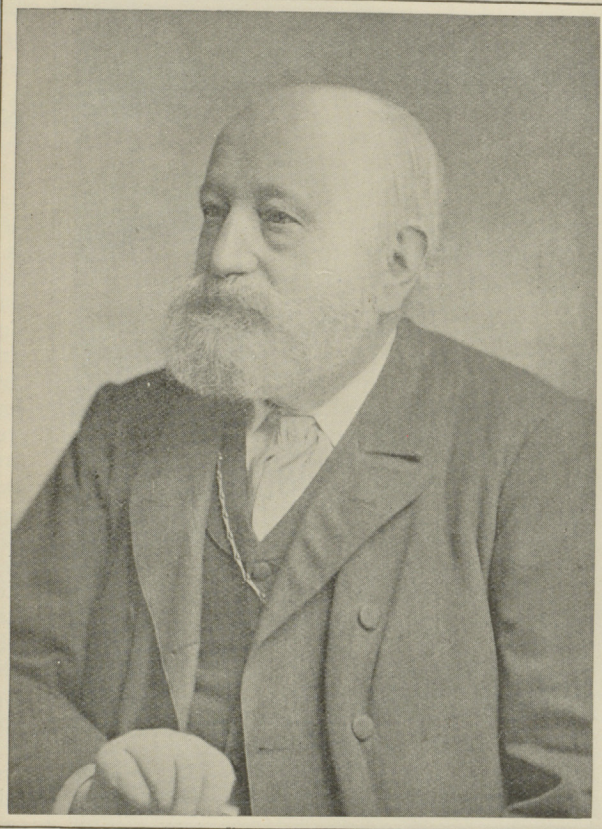


Photo by Martin and Sallnow.

The late Bernard Quaritch.

extravagance; but presently the Osterley sale came along, and he bought as vigorously as ever. He acted as agent and publisher for the proceedings of many of the learned corporations—the British Museum, the Government of India, the Hakluyt Society, the Society of Antiquaries, and a dozen others; and in the firm's present premises in Grafton Street there are rooms set apart for each of these departments of its activity. Even his smaller deals had something of the heroic in their mould. It was Quaritch who

published for Edward FitzGerald the first version of his "Omar," and when the tiny brown-paper book fell on an unappreciative world the surplus was dumped into the outside box to take its chance at a penny a copy. It is said that Rossetti found it first, read it to a select company of Swinburne and their friends, and in this way a day or two served to disperse a couple of hundred unconsidered trifles that are now worth their weight in gold. The

incident is famous in the annals of bibliography, but in comparison with the magnitude of Quaritch's transactions it was what the Irishman called "a flay-bite in the thrackless furmint." Meanwhile his catalogues went on, and one of the first of his more important ones, the "Bibliotheca Xylographica, Typographica, et Palæographica" of 1873,

was a masterpiece. The index alone of one of its successors in the eighties cost £1,000 in the production, apart from the bulk of the work, and the whole was styled by an authority "a suitable monument which will be regarded with wonder and veneration as long as the love of books and the use of books exist."

Before he died Quaritch warned his son and successor that the shop in Piccadilly would soon be unserviceable, and for years they were engaged in a

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quest for other premises. Albemarle Street seemed a likely quarter, partly for its quietude, associations, and accessibility, and a street which contains the headquarters of John Murray, the houses of Nell Gwynn and more reputable folk, and the Royal Institution into the bargain, is not without inducements for the owner of the greatest book-shop in the world. In

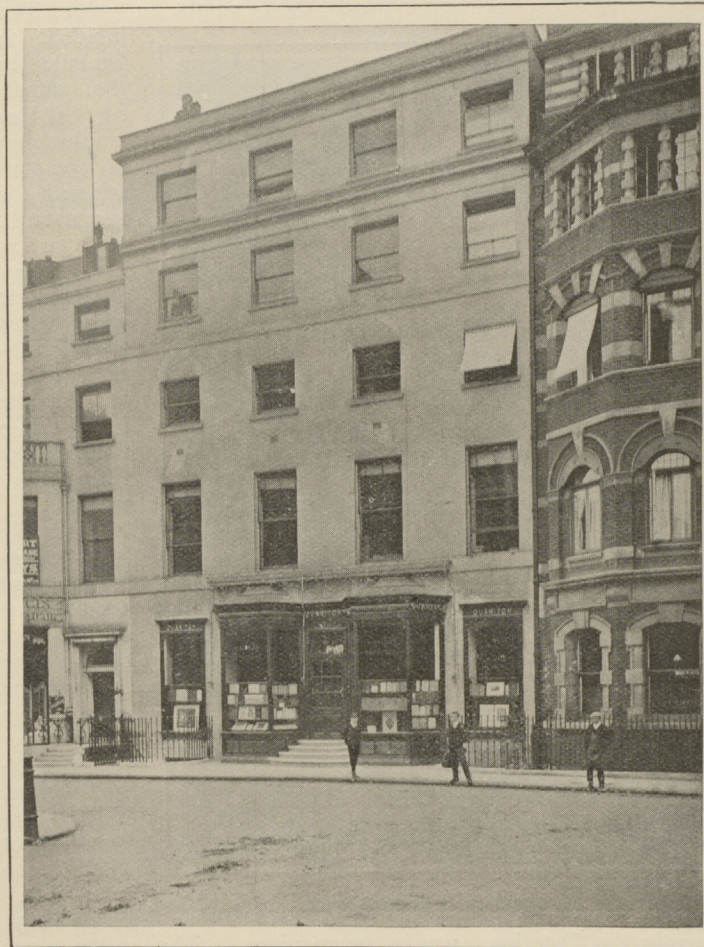
the chief store-room, where the rare bindings and incunabula are installed. Here you may see the *editio princeps* of Homer that the Nerlis of Florence had printed at their own expense in 1488; and side by side with it, and all around, a collection of collections, of everything in the way of script or print that has ever been enriched by the brain or the

hand of man. This blazon of old gold and colour looks as if the treasure and splendour of the "Arabian Nights" had been melted in a giant crucible, and poured into a library instead of a mould.

Quaritch had an invincible belief in books as an investment, and held that whatever price was paid for the rare and perfect book would be reached as the passion for bibliography developed. The demand grows, the supply is dwindling. The New World has caught on, and redoubled the emulation of the connoisseurs, so that the departure westward of much of our best has made the rest dearer in more senses than one.

This is the one business in the world, as Mr. Quaritch told me once, which is personal in its essence, and imaginative in its outlook.

Charing Cross Road was non-existent when Quaritch set up shop; it has come into being since, and now that Holywell Street has disappeared it must stand as our London substitute for the bookstalls and the boxes along the terrace of the Seine. The comparison is not inapt, for



Quaritch's new headquarters in Grafton Street.

the nick of time there came into the market the old house in Grafton Street which was once famous as the town house of Admiral Howe, and this gave the necessary light, space, and solidity, with the calm environment required. The result is a spacious shop that opens into Mr. Quaritch's study at the back, and a wide old Adams staircase that leads past landings and well-stored cases into

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our English climate is as moist as the air of any river-edge, and instead of the Seine we have the human tide that ebbs and flows at Charing Cross. Certainly one fails to find in the pages of Uzanne bibliophiles more devoted than those who haunt the boxes between St. Martin's and St. Giles'. Nothing seems to daunt them; they face alike, as Mr. Dobson says,

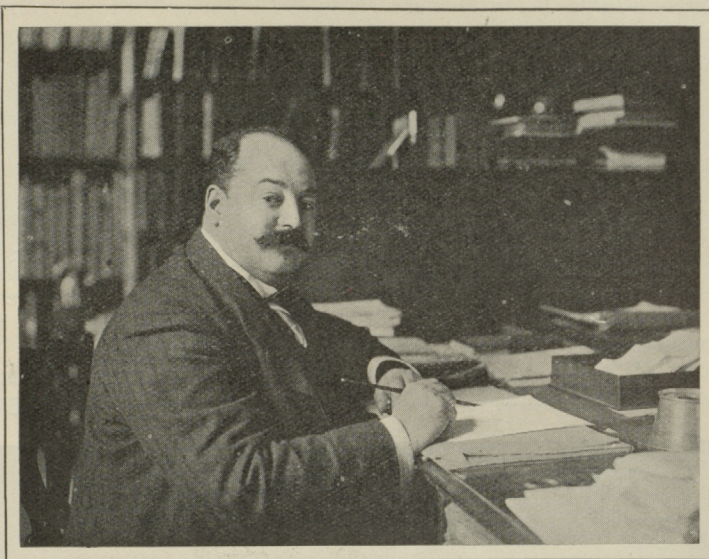
the common thoroughfare,
The dust, the beating rain, and all
The shame and squalor of the stall.

In the rain their only concern seems to be to unmask their quarry from its shelter of tarpaulin; in the dog days they endure the same heroic overcoats and mufflers that they sport in winter. As for their prey, nothing seems to come amiss; and in a single day you find the strangest disparities between the books and their buyers. Clerics buy yellow-backs; gentlemen from the "halls" and the Hippodrome come and hunt for ideas in antic and costume; postmen buy anything from music to sociology; lads buy anything from "cribs" to

"shockers." I once met a copy of Guicciardini in the original coming away in the hands of an ardent student of languages who is a porter at Victoria Station. The other day the President of the Local Government Board was emerging from one of these haunts, and I had the temerity to ask what he had captured. The answer disposed of any hope that the sweets of office had tempted him to higher flights than usual, for, "true to the kindred points of heaven and home," he had bought an old pamphlet relating to Battersea. Were one to take Charing Cross Road and tell its story from end to end, the book-shops would make the cream of the story; and one of the romances of

it all relates not to a book-shop but the memory of one. It is the site of the shop just referred to as Quaritch's first venture, and it remains as an instance of the sentiment of a man who was rarely suspected of heartstrings or any luxury of that kind. Years after he removed to Piccadilly he retained the old premises as a warehouse, and when the march of improvement swept this way, he still retained the site, and now it adjoins Wyndham's Theatre—a derelict plot walled in with hoardings, like a Lazarus, hectic and unsightly, among its loftier neighbours.

Shall we take another type of book-seller and subject him to a kindly scrutiny?



Bernard Quaritch the Second.

Saving your patience, there could hardly be a better instance than a man who, in dealing with second-hand wares, has struck an original line of his own. In this Latin Quarter of ours—the one spot where Mürger's Colin with his book-burst pockets would have been thoroughly at home—Mr. Bertram Dobell has more claims than seniority to be considered representative. He has done more to widen our acquaintance of poets and playwrights in the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras than perhaps any other living man. To him we owe Traherne and Strode, fine singers both, who had survived in manuscript only, and might have gone unlaurelled down to dusty death but for his discernment. Out of the files of the old *London Magazine* he

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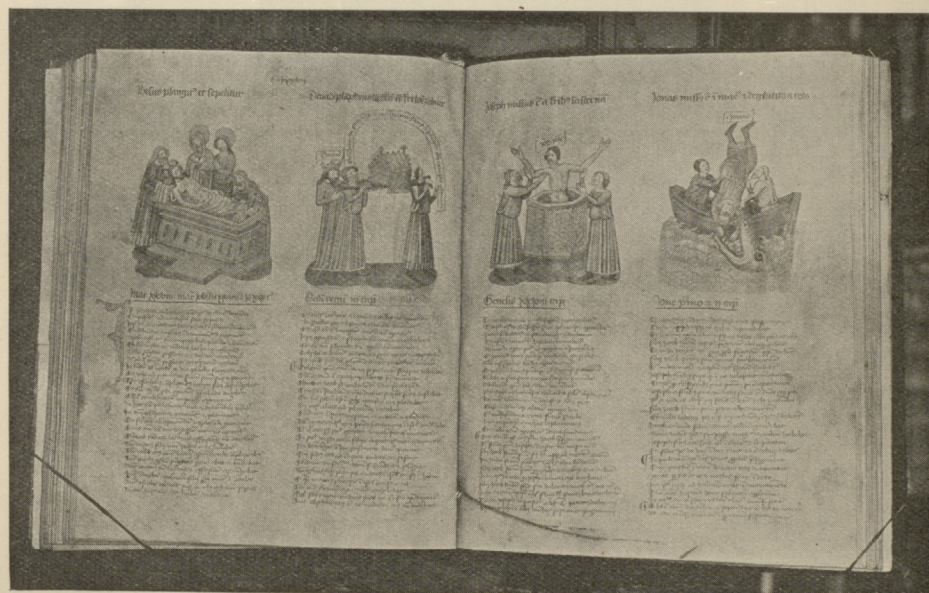
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has rescued and identified many unknown pieces from the pen of Lamb; and he has recovered more than one old English play which looks like giving its author a place alongside Webster and Dekker. Of late, scouring through fresh piles of unprinted manuscripts, he came across two manuscript versions of Sidney's "Arcadia"—each differing from each, and both from the final version we so freely discuss and rarely read. One or two things of moment relating to the origin of that fine romance have come to light through his happy agency; and we may say the same with regard to the difficult and narrow field of Shakspearean biography. As for minor gleanings in this and similar fields, they are many and valuable, and are to find their way soon into another published volume. All this is a signal achievement for a man who spent a youth of grinding poverty and scanty education. He was thirty when he broke away from a soulless occupation, and set out with a ten-pound note to learn the arduous and difficult trade of a dealer in books. In the conversations I have had with him at sundry times, he confesses to something over sixty years of age, and an unbroken habit of reading from five to six hours a day. This is the secret of it all—complete absorption in the one pursuit, the love of books, first

for their own sake, and secondly as a medium for honest dealing with one's fellow-men. On their own merits, as George Colman said, modest men are dumb. The one thing on which Mr. Dobell prides himself is that he was of some service during life to that melancholy and distracted soul, "B. V." Thomson; and if only for the part he played in sustaining and encouraging him, long before his means enabled him to publish Thomson's poems, all who know "The City of Dreadful Night," and the circumstances of the author's life, will hold Mr. Dobell in grateful remembrance. As he says himself, "The thing that galled me when I was young was to be chained to a thankless and sordid trade where I could never call my brain my own; and if I have had an ambition gratified in life, it was to feel that I had justified my life by doing some good to other men, and, above all else, to that fine, sad singer." It is an eloquent vindication of a life of hard work, and those who know Mr. Dobell are well aware that his sympathy for poetry proceeds from a refined and genuine poetic gift of his own.

London at first, to a provincial, seems strangely devoid of the kindly old-style booksellers he has left behind. One or two such still remain, but they are survivals of a past generation, and these



One of Quaritch's treasures,—a manuscript copy of the "*Speculum Humanæ Salvationis*," and a magnificent example of fifteenth-century illumination.

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The chief show-room at Quaritch's.

"Here you may see a collection of collections of everything in the way of script or print that has ever been enriched by the brain or hand of man."

few admit, on close inquiry, that they are not London-born. One of the best of them is a Northumbrian and an octogenarian, who has been a bookseller for sixty-nine years, without a holiday, and, until lately, without an illness. He has been dubbed "worthy and intelligent" in the pages of the *Nineteenth Century*, and still survived. Talk with him when he is in the vein, and you will find John Salkeld at eighty-one still unimpaired in faculty and full of lively recollections of Macaulay and Carlyle and others who have dealt with him. As a youngster he was "put" to a Hexham bookseller, and bound apprentice as the only cure for truancy. After serving his indentures, he did what Johnson's father used to do, he tramped from fair to fair with seven or eight stone of books and a £4 pedlar's licence; and after a twenty-five or thirty miles journey, thought nothing of standing in a market-place all the afternoon and evening disposing of his wares. But they were rough-and-tumble times. He tried a spell as assistant to a public conjurer, and then again as sponge-holder to a

pugilist; and when he had tired of these more devious occupations, and gone back to book peddling, he walked one day into Bristol with his stock of books and a hundred sovereigns in his pocket, and set out again at night, afoot and all but penniless, for Birmingham. Gold and books had gone at a gaming table, leaving him with fourpence, and the crude experience. That is sixty years since, and the chief recollections of the prosperous interval are his memories of Macaulay and Carlyle.

"The first shop I opened in London," he says, "was in Featherstone Buildings, a little thoroughfare off Holborn that rejoiced in a double bottle-neck, and a row of railways across it half-way up. I was unpacking some cases of books one morning that I had bought at Beverley, and, because there was no better place available, I was unpacking them in the roadway. Up came a grave and pleasant gentleman, very well set up and neatly dressed, who stopped and looked on as if he were fully at home in that kind of neighbourhood and also with

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the kind of job I was engaged on. It was a long time afterwards that I heard he was Lord Macaulay, and the customer who told me became Lord Justice Fry. 'May I look at these books?' the stranger asked. I said, 'Certainly,' and went and got a chair for him; but I was in so small a way then that I had to borrow it. He sat down and went through the lot, quickly but thoroughly, and made a big selection of historical tracts of the period just after the Civil War. He asked what he was to pay, and I said a shilling apiece. He seemed astonished, and I was prepared to hear him grumble, when he said, 'I am very pleased to have come across them, and to find you are so reasonable in your terms.' He came again and again, and each time took several pounds' worth away with him, carrying them himself and never allowing me to make a parcel except so far as to string them up. He was always eager to learn when I had new consignments coming, and once when I told him I had bought a fresh lot of Civil War tracts and stuff relating to the time of William and Mary, he showed some mild impatience at learning it was too late to unpack them that day. He begged me to go through them soon, and I said I would sit up that night and sort them out by the morning. He asked what time I opened shop, and I said eight o'clock. He was there on the step next morning to the minute, and commenced on his task, one pile after another. I soon found he had had no breakfast, but all I could persuade him to take was a cup of coffee. After a couple of hours' hard sorting, he chose two or three hundred pieces, paid for them, and engaged for me to deliver them at the Albany that night. I took them myself, and I should say the year was 1855 or '56. I remember his repeating his pleasure, the last time I saw him, that I had dealt with him so fairly. 'You have saved me a considerable amount of money,' he said, 'for what you charge me a shilling for, I have been in the habit of paying other people ten.' Which I thought was very fair of him, considering how slow buyers are as a rule to see any side to a bargain but their own."

Another recollection relates to Carlyle, and as Carlyle reminiscences are fast running to the ebb, it is worth a little more invasion on the reader's patience.

"When I moved my shop to Orange Street, one of my best customers was a Chelsea gentleman of the name of Swift—he was an eager collector in everything relating to Irish history. But he was getting much older then than I am now, and very early in 1864, I think, he decided to sell his library and save it from the hammer. I was to wait on him early one morning, not in a cart but a hansom, and the time we agreed on was six o'clock. I was there on the Embankment at half-past five and standing at the foot of Cheyne Walk, smoking and watching the dawn, when a curious figure came down one of the streets, who was engaged in the same occupations. Whether it was my relish for tobacco, or the unusual sight of a stranger with a vehicle there at that time of morning, I can't say, but the old gentleman came across the road to me, and I saw it was not my client. He wore a round black velvet skull-cap, and a loosish dressing-gown, and so far as I recollect, the pipe he was smoking was a clay. He passed the time of day, and when he caught my Northumbrian accent it seemed somehow to take the edge off things. He asked me what my business was, and when I told him all about Swift and his books, he arranged to call and see them. We parted, and I made my deal; but instead of waiting till I'd got the books in order, he came that very afternoon and spent three or four pounds with me. Like Macaulay, he wouldn't let me trouble to tie the parcel up, but had the books tied up with string and carried them off there and then. He came several times after that, and months passed before I knew it was Thomas Carlyle. Portraits of notable authors, you see, were not so thick upon the ground in those days, and a man had more chance of walking about without annoyance. History was what he seemed to buy, and not so much English or Scotch, but Irish history; and I remember that for every parcel he bought (and he was a pretty shrewd judge of prices), he insisted on something being knocked off. It is a pretty common weakness with all our clients, and Carlyle was not a Scotchman for nothing."

This weakness for the fractional reduction, though, is a dangerous thing in a pursuit like book-buying, and another of this dealer's recollections points the moral better than any homily. In the

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early seventies he bought as part of the contents of a private library a valuable heap of Burns material—presentation copies of songs signed by the poet, portraits, autographs, letters, and a book of unexampled importance to the poet's critics and biographers. Cromek describes it as such in his "Reliques of Robert Burns." It consists of a copy of the "Scots Musical Museum," which the poet

honour this) in the Bodleian Library. The custom of the trade is to post catalogues to the provinces a day before those that go to subscribers in town, and the sequel came like a whirlwind next morning. "A man drove up to the door," says Mr. Salkeld, "and announced himself as Mac So-and-so of Kilmarnock—just like a chieftain in Waverley—and by George he looked it, for he was



A type of book-shop that is fast disappearing.

From a drawing by J. H. Bacon, A.R.A.

annotated for his friend, Captain Riddell of Glenriddell, to the extent of a hundred and forty critical entries, many of them of tolerable length. It was the stingy bid of a rival that set Mr. Salkeld examining his find more closely, and when he entered the parcel up in his next catalogue at a price of 110 guineas, the description occupied two pages. You may see it in the complete file of his catalogues which is preserved (no common

a fair big figure of a man. He asked to see the Burns stuff, and after looking it over, never asked how I came by it, but wanted to know what discount I'd give. I told him the usual 10 per cent. allowed to the trade, and he offered a stingy £80. Now I knew he was rich, and I was not, and I refused, although if he had told me of the clients who had commissioned him I might have thought it over. He said no more, but walked out of the

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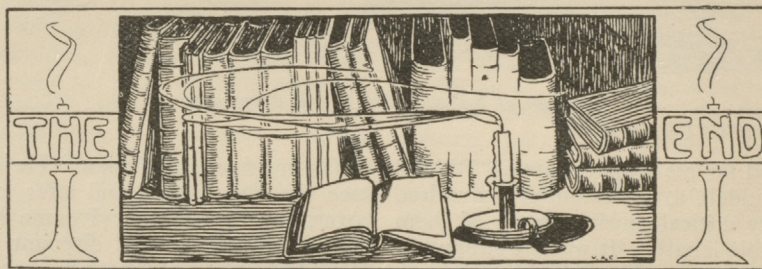
shop, and a quiet gentleman who was standing by asked for the chance instead. In less than five minutes he was off in a cab with the parcels tied up, when back came the Scotchman. 'I'll tak' 'em,' he said, and I told him they'd gone. Big as he was, he fainted, and if I hadn't held him up he'd have dropped there and then in the shop. We gave him a cordial, and when he came to he told me his principals, the Burns Club of Dumfries, had sent him to buy the lot at any price. He asked me to beg him the chance again from the collector who had bought them, but he was an old customer, and I knew it was hopeless; and when the poor man got back north, I believe he got an awful jacketing from his patrons of the Club. He never looked up afterwards, I believe, and it was certainly a loss to Scotland. Lord Rosebery, when he'd heard the things were sold, wrote me a very nice letter desiring to have the reversion if ever my customer wanted to sell; but all I could do was to send the letter on. For thirty-three years they remained with the same collector—he was Mr. Nichols, of Barnsbury,—and when he died four years ago, and his books were sold at Sotheby's, that Burns lot fetched close on a thousand pounds."

There is a moral in all this worth commending to any who are seized with the *chasse au bouquin*. One often hears of

inordinate profits made in the second-hand trade, but one may say of them what Bacon says of prophecies, that the successes are remembered and the failures go unnoticed. To those who are born with a love of it, it is, as the last narrator says, "a delightful trade," but it entails unwearying application, a passion for the dry routine of catalogues, unfailing memory and patience, indifference to personal discomfort and appearances, and "a murderous tenacity about trifles." The practitioner is lucky if the prime of life finds him with health and eyesight unimpaired. These are risks and burdens that no considerations of profit can outweigh, and we are few of us philosophers enough to be consoled, after our best years and faculties are spent, with the memory of past achievements and the hope of better things to come. For the era is gone and the fashion faded when a pious scholar could make a parable and a rule of life out of an old book, as Henry Vaughan did. To the gentle Silurist, the paper, the leather cover, and the thoughts within were eloquent respectively of trees and beasts and men, and he concluded the quaint fancy with this fine apostrophe:

O knowing, glorious Spirit! when
Thou shalt restore trees, beasts, and men,
When Thou shalt make all new again,
Destroying only death and pain,
Give him amongst thy works a place
Who in them lov'd and sought Thy face.

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A SQUARE DEAL.

BY FRANCES CLIFDEN AND LIEUT. B. E. PRITCHARD, R.N.

ILLUSTRATED BY RALPH CLEAVER.

I.

SEATED in an armchair in the smoking-room of a certain Service Club in Piccadilly, surrounded by a pile of papers, Lieut. John Carrol, R.N., looked the personification of misery.

Wealthy, handsome, and with that indefinable charm which, although so often

no one was better at his work, but his manner on the bridge was unduly lofty, and from time to time—generally at the most inopportune moments—he would commit the maddest follies.

The middies of the Mediterranean flagship still tell the tale of that official function at Venice when Carrol dressed up as a pretty girl, and hoodwinked the



"Get yourself talked about . . . be advertised in the papers."

a source of inconvenience to its owner, is invariably envied by the majority of men, Carrol was spoken of amongst his mess-mates as having been "born with a silver spoon in his mouth."

But he had one great drawback. He rarely, if ever, "hit things off" with his commanding officer. As an officer,

Admiral commanding the Squadron into the most compromising flirtation in which that eminently respectable gentleman had ever indulged. The joke was carried through brilliantly, and Carrol kept his counsel; but the story leaked out, and, strange to say, the Admiral entirely failed to see its humour. It was, in fact, this

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lamentable lack of humour on the part of many of his superior officers that Carrol so frequently deplored.

His efficiency had alone carried him through this and many other of his escapades. But the patience of even the high officials at Whitehall was at last exhausted. During the last twelve months Carrol had thrown up three excellent appointments merely on account of "not liking" his commanding officers! Things looked exceptionally dark for him, from a Service point of view, at that moment.

So thought his messmate Herrick, who strolled up just then. Herrick was a man with much of Carrol's own dare-devil spirit in his composition, but lack of means had dogged him from the outset of his naval career. Time after time he had been compelled to refuse the offer of good appointments on account of the expenses involved, and his gambling propensities had run him very deeply into debt.

"Hullo, Carrol!" he exclaimed, in some amazement: "what on earth has brought you home so soon?"

Carrol's gloom increased visibly. "Bor-ringer and I couldn't hit it off. I applied to be relieved."

The other man whistled. "What's going to happen now?"

"Half pay for the next six months, I suppose—and a metaphorical black mark against me: not the first, at that. You look a bit down on your luck too, old man. What's wrong with you?"

Herrick drank his cocktail drearily. "Same old yarn. Paid off from the destroyer I had in the manœuvres, and can't get another. I hang round the Admiralty daily, but don't get a ship."

"Well, if you can't raise one, all hope for me is at an end," groaned Carrol despairingly.

But Herrick grinned. "Oh! it's all right for you. Men with money to back them up can do no wrong. Besides, you're so devilish popular."

"Oh, am I?" asked Carrol, more despondently than ever. "I might as well make a clean breast of things. Every one will know sooner or later. The truth is, I've just had a very insulting letter from the Admiralty, informing me that I have 'incurred their lordships' severe displeasure.'"

"But, my dear chap——"

"Oh! of course, I went straight on to Whitehall; but—only to find that my old friend Barttelot—the Second Lord—was 'too busy to see' me, and 'could make no appointment,' and 'requested that all my future communications to him should be made through his secretary.'"

"And the secretary——?"

"He made things very clear," said Carrol drily, after a slight pause. "Explained that the Admiralty was more or less fed up with me. I'd played the fool, and must take the consequences. I should be kept on half pay for some time, and even then I could expect no other good appointment until—until I'd proved my right to it, I suppose. . . . Finally, he said 'Good morning,' and rang the bell very affably for a commissioner to show me out."

Carrol drained off another cocktail. "The truth is," said he, a faint glimmer of hope lighting up his face for the first time, "there's only one thing that will get a man a job at sea when once he's on the black list."

"What's that?" sarcastically inquired Herrick, aware that nothing would reinstate him in their lordships' opinion until he had got out of the debt of the naval agents.

"Get yourself talked about, do something brave to attract the public eye, be advertised in the papers, prove yourself a 'blooming hero' in one line or another—and you'll get almost anything you want, provided you aren't an utter rotter at your job."

Herrick laughed. "Unfortunately, those jobs aren't to be picked up at street corners."

Carrol's eyes twinkled. "One might take a hint from the Army. You know how Mayes got his V.C. in South Africa? Most of his brother officers and a trooper were in it. The Boers fired, the trooper dropped, the rest rode off grinning. . . . Mayes rode back, picked up the man, and brought him under cover. But *why* the trooper had fainted dead off with so slight a flesh wound that it could hardly be discovered, the doctor asks himself at this very day!"

Herrick looked up curiously. "Well then, if——"

But here Carrol sprang to his feet, with an expression of relief. "At last!"

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Herrick turned, astonished, expecting to see the Second Lord of the Admiralty at least. But the stranger was staid and elderly, with grey whiskers and a clean-shaven chin; dressed with the scrupulous neatness of an old family retainer. Ah, that was it! Herrick remembered his face now. He had seen him at Brendon Hall, Carrol's home, on his last visit. He was a former butler, Johnstone by name, pensioned by the family on account of some chronic illness, and he lived close to the estate.

But why was Carrol so extraordinarily rejoiced to see him? He left the room with the man without a glance in Herrick's direction. It was evident that for the moment he had entirely forgotten his friend's existence.

The club clock struck 1 p.m.

Herrick rose. He was lunching with friends who lived on the other side of the Park, and might as well walk across.

When he returned later in the afternoon, his thoughts were still occupied with his conversation of the morning. How true Carrol's words were! The only way to get on, under such circumstances as had befallen himself and his friend, was to do something heroic. For instance, if some one fell into the lake which he was just then passing, how easy it would be for a good swimmer like himself or Carrol to jump in and effect an heroic rescue that the papers would be full of! Why, properly advertised . . .

But luck like that would never come his way. It was much more likely to happen to Carrol—to Carrol, whose proverbial good luck was sure to carry him unscathed through even his present difficulties.

Herrick started. Two figures were approaching, in earnest conversation. Both were familiar. Carrol was gesticulating, talking excitedly, as was his wont when formulating one of his schemes. His face was aglow with interest and amusement. It needed no astute Lecoq to read its expression. He was suggesting, insinuating, pressing some course of action which, from the look upon his companion's face, was not entirely pleasing to that gentleman.

From time to time Johnstone shook his head—but ever in less and less vehement denial.

Herrick withdrew into the shadows of some trees. The two men approached.

Carrol, intent upon his explanation, was looking away from Herrick, towards the water.

"I'd make it so well worth—" Herrick heard him say, catching at the butler's arm as he passed.

Herrick leant forward, and watched till the two figures were out of sight.

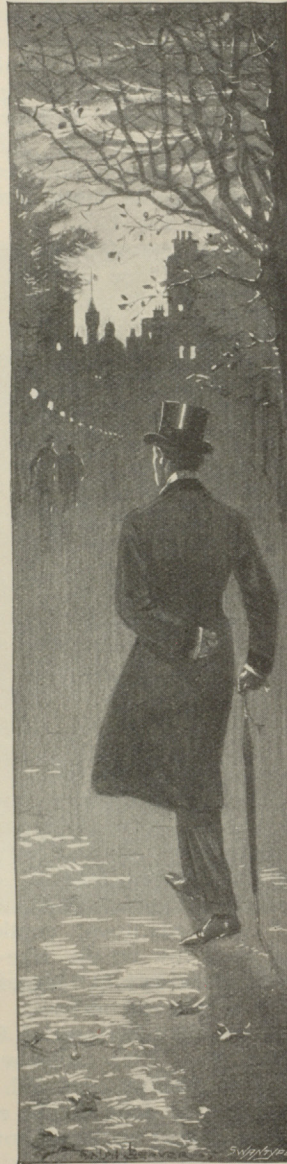
"Will you make it worth his while?" he said aloud, with a sardonic grin.

"Then I think you'll have to reckon with me too, Mr. Jack Carrol. I see it all. It only remains for me to discover exactly when and where this little game of yours takes place, to be able to play my own hand in it!"

II.

Big Ben struck the hour sonorously. Carrol started and consulted his watch. "Surely he can't have funk'd things at the last?" he asked himself anxiously.

It was a cold raw day in November. The sun, setting slowly in the western horizon, looked exactly like its reflected image in the coloured glass of a sextant. A heavy mist hung low: through it, one



"Two figures were approaching in earnest conversation."

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could only vaguely discern the outline of the houses surrounding St. James's Park.

The bridge across the small lake in the park was almost deserted. Upon the banks a few nurses with their charges in perambulators might be seen. The boatman—who earned a precarious living—sauntered to and fro, smoking a pipe of peace after his midday meal. His duties were not arduous during the winter. Few people cared to brave the fear of cold after a winter row. But occasionally a pair of lovers ventured—when the weather became more promising. To-day custom was slack.

Five minutes after the bell had tolled, there was no one in sight except Jack Carrol, early for his appointment, standing close to the suspension bridge. The young officer paced restlessly up and down. Again and again he weighed the pros and cons of the maddest enterprise in which he, with his reputation for recklessness, had ever indulged. Had he or had he not omitted any necessary precaution?

"Good afternoon, sir. Is everything arranged?"

Carrol looked up, and beheld the melancholy face of his old butler. "Yes. I think we're bound to succeed. It's awfully good of you to take a ducking for me at your age. . . . Well, you know I won't forget. The rest of the money shall be paid into your bank the day I get my medal."

"I'm sure you've been generous enough, sir," the gloomy butler responded, but his despondency increased as they drew near the water, which certainly did not look inviting.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen. Nice day for a row on the lake—it 'ud keep your circulation hup," suggested the boatman, as they approached.

Somewhat to his surprise, Carrol jumped at the idea. "It's rather a mad freak—quite in my line," he said. "What do you say, Johnstone? The exercise might do me good: as you know, the doctor ordered me to take some exercise only this morning."

But his companion at first declined. The time of year was too cold, he said, and he was afraid of accidents.

Carrol laughed. "An accident!—with me! Oh, I'll guarantee you're all right. Come on, Johnstone—it'll be such a lark to tell the governor how you spent your

afternoon. We'll bet him a fiver he fails to spot it in three guesses, and share the proceeds. Come along!"

Delighted at his chance of making money, the boatman got out his best boat, *The Fairy Queen*, from the shed. It shot at such lightning speed through the water, that the boatman paid him the compliment of watching him for several minutes from the bank.

"It isn't often I hire boats to rowers of the likes o' 'im," he remarked, as the boat shot out of sight round the farther side of the bridge.

And the hidden spectator by the bushes murmured: "How long! Good Lord, how long!" For half an hour wore away, and nothing happened. Then a boy approached the boatman, and they spoke together. A few minutes later, and the man had disappeared.

Just at that time the boat came slowly into sight. Another instant, and it had capsized. Yet another, and three persons might be seen struggling in the water. For the man amongst the bushes—who, having previously divested himself of coat and waistcoat, was at some advantage, had swum swiftly to the spot, and seized Johnstone's damp form long before Carrol had finished simulating his own struggle in the water.

"You blackguard, Herrick!" shouted Carrol, as he felt his right hand violently seized by his messmate, and saw Johnstone's body being borne away from him.

"What do you mean?" asked Herrick, as courteously as was possible under the circumstances. "I've come to your rescue. It's extremely kind and"—there was a twinkle in his eye—"heroic of me."

"This is my show," said Carrol, white with anger. "Here, give me the man at once."

"No, thank you: I've got him myself."

Between his two ardent rescuers the unfortunate Johnstone had fared badly. The two men were too interested in their own dispute to notice what was happening to their unlucky victim.

"Here," said Carrol, "this is a put-up job. Can't you see? Let go, I tell you."

"Never," said Herrick quietly. "Do you think I'm going to let a chance like this slip through my fingers?"

Carrol was desperate. "Look here," said he, "this is no time to haggle. What's your price?"

The butler feebly remonstrated. "If

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you two young gentlemen don't cease wrangling I shall be——"

Carrol looked at him. "Name the price," he said.

Herrick named it.

Carrol whistled, but a glance at Johnstone decided him. The man looked at death's door.

"Right," said he.

Herrick released his hold, as though exhausted or seized with cramp, and himself went under. By this time the crowd upon the bank had assumed large proportions. Several women fainted.

of interest to our readers appeared in the leading London and provincial papers :

The Royal Humane Society have presented Lieutenant John Carrol, R.N., with their silver medal, in recognition of a signal act of bravery performed by him on the afternoon of November 15 last. A full account of the gallant act by which this young officer not only saved the life of his father's butler, but of another officer who had sought to come to his assistance, but was unfortunately seized by cramp, was recorded in our issue of the 16th inst.

Under the heading of the Naval and



"Here, give me the man at once."

A wild cheer arose as Carrol, supporting Butler on one arm and Herrick on the other, swam very slowly to the shore.

The ovation that met him was tremendous. In the distance he saw pallid young men with notebooks eagerly taking down details. One pursued him, but he modestly disclaimed recognition. Having assured himself that Johnstone was really no worse for his sousing, he slipped away. The game had been taken out of his hands. He would leave the final moves to Herrick.

A few weeks after the above events had occurred an announcement which may be

Military Intelligence of the same date appeared the appointment of "Lieut. John Carrol, R.N., to H.M.S. *Kingfisher* as First Lieutenant."

That same afternoon Frank Herrick, sitting at ease in his club, received a letter of some importance. It was from the naval agents :

Messrs. Stilwell & Farrer have pleasure in informing Lieut. Herrick that they have received a cheque from Messrs. Richard Collings & Tate in full payment of their claims against Lieut. Herrick.

"It was a square deal," said Herrick, as he went into the hall to telephone for a couple of stalls at the Gaiety Theatre.

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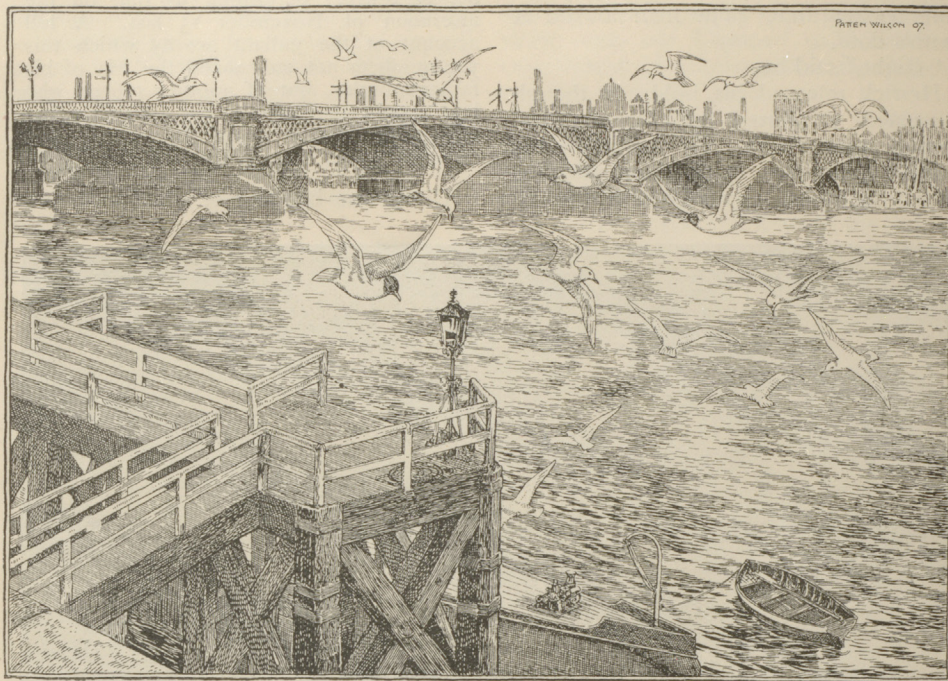
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THE ROUND TABLE.



SEA-BIRDS IN LONDON.

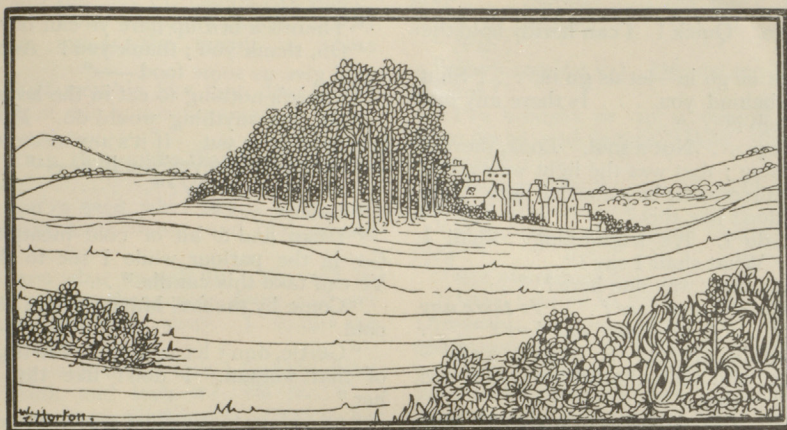
ILLUSTRATED BY PATTEN WILSON.

IN many-circling mazy wreath
Round Blackfriars Bridge the sea-
birds fly,
Grey wing and backs—white underneath
Where coral claws close-folded lie—
They soar and sail and wheel and dip,
Then poise, each wing with black on tip,
And float upon the wintry wind
Like small grey cloudlets silver-lined.

The peasant leaves his native field
To seek his bread in London town—
Do seas a smaller harvest yield
Than river-bed that fogs embrown?
Are there no fish off Beachy Head,
That all these bright wings thus are
spread
For chance-thrown crumbs of Babylon
Where Thames's turbid currents run?

The passing workman shares his meal,
The work-girls pause to watch the sight;
The waggoner forgets his wheel
A moment while he eyes the flight
Of bread the quick birds catch a-wing:
And in some toilers' minds up-spring
Faint thoughts of glories that illumine
The world beyond the city's gloom.

JOHN ANDERSON STEWART.



THE HOUSE ON THE MOOR.

BY A. S. M. HUTCHINSON.

"I'M frightened, Gertie—I'm terrified!
Oh! That flash—quite close to us!
Gertie, I simply can't go on!"

"Dearest, it's no good staying here. This
rock doesn't shelter us a bit, and we are
safer in the open."

"We may be going farther and farther
away."

"No, I'm sure we're not doing that at least.
You can feel the difference in the ground.
Don't you remember coming over these
stones on our way out? You—"

"That's the loudest clap there's been!
Put your arms around me, Gertie. I believe
this flash will—"

"There; it's gone, silly! Dearest, dearest
Mary, try to be brave. I'm frightened,
too, but it's no good giving way. We shall
die of cold if we don't keep moving."

"I'll try. Give me your hand again. I
can't see your face now. It's getting even
darker."

"No, it only seems worse after each flash.
Are you very wet, dear?"

"I can feel it on my skin."

"So can I."

"Do you think they are searching for us,
Gertie?"

"Oh, sure to be—sure to be!"

"But they must have started long ago."

"Well, I daresay we shall find them quite
close all of a sudden. Think of that! Think
of warm blankets, and hot tea, and—
and—"

"You're crying, aren't you?"

"I'm—I'm awfully frightened, too, Mary."

"You've only been keeping up for my
sake?"

"Yes—yes. Mary, I think they must be
looking for us in the wrong direction—the
way we always go—down by the river."

"Do you think we shall die, Gertie?"

"Not if we keep on walking."

"I can't—I can't, Gertie! I can't move
another step! The storm is getting worse.
Let us find that rock again and lie down."

"I think that's best, perhaps. It's only
a few paces back. . . . Here. . . . If we
crouch right down—are you comfortable?"

"Put your arms around me, dear, like
mine are."

"Let us pray again, Mary." . . .

"Now kiss me, Gertie. I don't
believe—"

"Here is the thunder again. Turn your
face towards mine—*Mary!*"

"What? what?"

"In that flash I saw a house."

"A house?"

"Yes, yes; get up. We were walking in
the opposite direction before, or we must
have seen it in every flash. Wait while the
next comes, and then look out this way—past
my face. Now! Don't be frightened—
there!"

"Yes; oh, yes. I saw it plainly."

"Quick, give me your hand. Come!
come! . . .

"Now I see a light, Mary—don't you?"

"N-no—yes, I do. Very dim. Oh, we
are saved!—we are saved!"

"Knock, Gertie. . . . Knock again. . . .
Louder! . . . Louder!" . . .

"Mary! It must be empty."

"But the light! It can't be. I'll knock
on the window." . . .

"Oh, Mary, why don't they come?"

"Perhaps they are asleep. Let us bang
together. . . . Again. . . . Oh, what shall we
do, Gertie?"

"We must get in—we must. Shall I try
the handle?"

"Yes—oh, anything." . . .

"Gertie, the door opens."

"Can you see anything?"

"Only the light from that room. What

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shall we do. Quick! I can hardly hold the door."

"Oh, let us go in—let us go in. . . . Shut the door behind you. . . . Is there any one in that room?"

"I'll peep. . . . Not a soul. Look, there is a fire burning; that was the light we saw."

"Then there *must* be some one here. Oh, Gertie, I don't like this."

"More do I. It's frightening. Shall I call out? What shall I say?"

"Say 'Is there any one here?'"

"*Is there any one here? . . . Is there any one here? . . . Is there any one here?*" . . .

"Not again, Gertie. It sounds awful—your voice, and then the silence. Oh, I'm frightened of this!"

"We're out of the storm, anyhow. Perhaps whoever is here is deaf, like that old herdsman we met yesterday. I think we ought to look in the other rooms. There's a door on the right here, and I think there must be a door there behind the stairs. I'll try this one. . . . No, pitch dark in there. . . . Yes, there is a door here. . . . Mary, there's a fire in here, too, and a door beyond."

"Oh, let us go away. I'd rather be in the storm."

"No, no. Come in with me to this further door—I daren't go alone." . . .

"*Gertie! What was that! Listen!*"

"*It sounded like a door shutting.*"

"Oh, let us get out of this hateful place. Come—quick, quick!"

"Yes—yes—Back through the front door. . . . *Mary!*"

"What! Oh, open it, quick!"

"*Mary, the door is locked! Some one has locked the door while we were in there!*"

"From outside?"

"No; the key is here. From inside."

"Turn it! turn it! Oh, Gertie, what does it mean?"

"I can't. It's so stiff—*hush! listen! upstairs! Some one is coming down!*" . . .

"It's a woman! Speak, Gertie."

"Oh—please. Oh, please forgive us for coming in like this. We got lost on the moor. We were in this storm for hours. Then we saw your cottage. We knocked a long time. Didn't you hear us?"

"Yes, I heard ye."

"Then why—? We thought—"

"Because I didn't want ye. However, *ye've come.*"

"I'm so sorry—so very sorry, if we are inconveniencing you. But—but on a night like this—and lost! And we have eaten nothing since midday—and my friend is not strong. And we are drenched. And so we stepped in and called out. And we were looking for some one when we heard the door lock—and—"

"I thought I heard ye go. I thought I'd locked ye out. Seemingly I locked ye in."

"But you will let us stay now."

"There's a bed up here ye can have."

"Oh, thank you; thank you! And if you could give us some food—"

"There's nothing to eat in the house."

"Oh, but anything would do. My friend is nearly worn out. If it's any inconvenience we will pay whatever you like—"

"Have ye money?"

"Indeed, yes."

"I can find a bit of cold meat, maybe. Go in the parlour while I see to the bed. Ye can take this candle." . . .

"Come by the fire, Mary; you're blue with cold."

"Gertie, don't let us stay! I'm frightened of that woman. I don't like the look of her."

"Oh, Mary! We must stay. We can't go out in the storm again. Anything is better than that!"

"But why did she behave so strangely—not letting us in, and then trying to lock us out, as she said? I believe she knew we were in when she slipped down and locked the door. And then the way she said '*However, you've come,*' and '*Have you money?*'—Gertie, we are at her mercy now!"

"I expect it's only her manner, dear. People become strange, living alone in desolate places like this. H'sh! She's coming" . . .

"There's a bit of cold mutton and some cold potatoes—your room is ready."

"Thank you so much! Could you—would it be too much trouble to get us some tea? You see the state my friend is in—"

"No, you can't have tea."

"Any hot drink would do her so much good—"

"There's no tea"

"Thank you. Do you think we might leave our wet clothes here by the fire? Perhaps you could let us have a rug or something, and we could undress here and leave them?"

"As you please. I'll fetch a blanket." . . .

"Now eat something, Mary."

"I can't. I don't feel hungry now—not a bit."

"Nor do I. But I think we ought to."

"Really, Mary, I couldn't *touch* that meat and those awful potatoes. I don't believe I could eat anything."

"Well, let us get off our clothes." . . .

"Here's a rug for one of ye—and a dressing-gown. If ye're ready, I'll take ye to your room. Ye've not eaten much?"

"No—no—I think we're too tired."

"Come to bed then. . . . This is the room. It's bare, but I reckon ye'll want no more than the bed. Ye'll not want the candle, since ye've undressed. Good-night."

"Oh, Gertie, she means to do something, I am sure. How I wish we had never seen the house! We mustn't go to sleep, whatever we do."

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"Why did she take the candle like that?"
 "I don't know—I don't know. Why should she, unless she meant us some harm?"

"Oh, don't tremble like that, dear! We shall laugh at this in the morning."

"If we ever see——"

"Oh, Mary, things like that don't happen nowadays."

"But you've seen what she is like; and she knows we have money, and that no one knows we are here."

"I tell you what we will do. We will lie awake for a little, then creep down and get our clothes and run away. I think the storm is stopping."

"Yes, let us do that. Can I find the door, do you think, and lock it? I'll try. . . . There's no key, Gertie—no, there's no lock."

"Never mind. I'm—I'm sure there's nothing to fear. Come and lie down. . . . Cover ourselves with these blankets." . . .

"You won't go to sleep?"

"No; hold my hand." . . .

"Mary! Mary! Wake up!"

"Oh, what——?"

"H'sh! Listen!"

"Some one creeping upstairs . . . stop—

ping . . . tapping . . . Oh God! What is going to happen?"

"H'sh!"

"She's coming in! Do you see the light? Ah-h-h!" . . .

"I've brought ye up a cup of tea and some bread and butter. Why, whatever is the matter?"

"Oh, we thought—we thought you were going to m-m-murder us."

"Why, bless your pretty hearts, what an idea!"

"But you seemed so—so——"

"Don't take on so, missy—don't take on so. Drink this nice tea, and I'll tell ye. I did not answer your knocking, and I looked after ye when I thought ye'd gone; yes, and I was surly and forbidding when I found ye must stay, because I never will have no visitors. Missy, my little son is dafty—idiot, ye understand. Dearer to me than the handsomest boy, he is; but when folk see him they laugh at him, so I will have none near the house. But, missy, after I had left ye, and kissed my boy, my heart chid me for my sourness to ye—so drenched and all! So I went to make ye a cup of tea, and came softly lest ye might be asleep. There, drink it! drink it! Missy, when ye see my little boy in the morning, ye'll not laugh?" . . .



AN EPISODE OF TWO VASES.

BY GODFREY J. FRANKS.

WE were smoking and idling time away in my friend's "show-room," as he called it. As a matter of fact, the said show-room was the entire house, for its occupant was delighted to decorate it with such rare and beautiful specimens of antique and modern art as he was able to hunt out of their hiding-places. Frank Errington was one of this world's lucky ones.

On the shelves and in the cabinets, which formed a large part of the wall furniture of his house, were arranged curious bronzes, French Empire figures, Dresden china decorated with fragile flowers, Sèvres vases

resplendent in rich blue-and-gold, uncouth Oriental monstrosities in human or animal form, snuff-boxes of Battersea ware, and elegant specimens of old English china from Worcester or Chelsea. The walls displayed specimens of old-time colour-printing and mezzotint-engraving, interspersed with choice paintings. His tastes were varied and cosmopolitan.

The collection of these was his principal occupation. He visited country sales and ransacked the premises of dealers in antiquities. In the quest, he travelled the kingdom from end to end. By the process

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of being repeatedly bitten he had learned in the best of all schools how to recognise genuine specimens and detect frauds, and had come to flatter himself that he could hold his own with any "dealer" or combination of dealers he might meet. In a little country town, the presence or absence of even one resident is soon noticed; consequently if my friend happened to be away on a "hunt" I soon became aware of the fact, and it had become my practice to look in upon him on his return to see what fresh specimens of art had been acquired, or antiquities unearthed.

One day I had managed to snatch half an hour from my own toil to look in upon Errington, who had but a day or two before returned from a trip to the North.

I found him re-arranging one of his china cabinets, endeavouring to find a suitable place for a pair of large vases, evidently new arrivals. They were a handsome pair, perfect, with their covers, standing about two feet six inches in height.

"Where did you get them?" I asked.

"At a private-house sale near Lutterborough."

"Begged them, I expect, with your usual luck—eh?"

"Well, I did, and I did not," said he. "The dealers had seen them, and ran them for all they were worth, finally dropping me in for them, as they thought, at such a warm price as would well punish me for my temerity in attempting to buy against them, and teach me better manners. However, I had seen something they had not, and while they went home with a few pictures and the satisfaction of thinking they had discomfited a presumptive amateur, I returned with a bargain and the added joy of knowing I had outwitted half a dozen of the 'cutest dealers in the North.'"

I smiled. "Done them again, have you? I hope the 'do' is not like the last, when you bought that Birmingham-made Burmese god!"

"No fear of that; the evidence is before you this time."

My playful allusion was to a rather unfortunate purchase which had provided him with a week's supply of well-seasoned but unchopped firewood at the moderate price of six guineas.

"Anyway, perhaps you will condescend to tell me all about it."

"With pleasure."

Having comfortably settled ourselves with a "weed" apiece, he proceeded: "Among my morning letters, a little while ago, there was a catalogue from Short & Peddlis of a sale they had at a country rectory. It seems the old rector had died, and his entire belongings were to be sold. Running my eye rapidly down the lots as set forth, passing in succession the contents of the

kitchen, the entrance, the servants' bedrooms, and the library, a line or two under the head of 'dining-room' arrested my attention. 'Pair of oil-paintings in gilt frames, Watteau-esque,' 'Oil-painting on oak panel,' 'Pair of handsome vases, richly decorated,' and a few more. My eye, accustomed to rapidly sifting the wheat from the chaff as far as catalogues are concerned, instantly saw here the possibility of a good day, and accordingly the morning of sale found me, catalogue in hand, wandering over the old house.

"Of course, you know, these country sales are all as like as peas, and this was no exception. In the garden were arranged a lawn-mower, gardeners' tools, a governess car, set of pony harness, and various other outdoor effects. On the lawn was a marquee in which the sale was to be held. Inside, the house was turned topsy-turvy in a way almost calculated to make the poor old rector turn in his grave. His library was lying in piles on the tables done up in lots of a dozen or more volumes, with miles of good sermons in bundles, destined to go for sixpence or so. Pictures and ornaments stood or hung about, covered with dust and disfigured with sale labels. His most cherished belongings had become merely 'lot 126,' or 'lot 127.' Lot by lot I went through those that had looked most likely in print. The 'Watteau-esque' oil-paintings were unsigned, the oak panel was worm-eaten, the handsome and richly decorated vases were an ugly pair of handleless vases, made of some kind of earthenware, decorated with large, raised, brick-dust coloured flowers, coarsely modelled upon a rough, blackish background, the lids being surmounted by red acorns or cones.

"Somewhat disappointed at having apparently drawn a blank, I listlessly looked round the remainder of the house. The company began to arrive. Some were only curious sightseers. There were the usual old women, who take front seats and 'sit it out,' occasionally offering a sporting bid of a few pence for an odd lot of crockery. Here and there was to be seen the inevitable dealer, nodding familiarly as he passed a fellow craftsman. Constantly 'standing in' at sales, 'knocking out' afterwards and pooling the proceeds, keeps them almost on family terms.

"There was the 'lady dealer' from Birmingham, the book man from Coventry, a silver man from Newark, and others, all addressing each other by their Christian names, which peculiarity seems to be a kind of dealers' hall-mark by which I have noticed they can be unfailingly spotted. In turn they looked at the pictures, sniffed at the ornaments, picked up the vases and set them down again in a dubious way. As a matter of fact, though all admitted they were ugly and no good, none could exactly

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determine in his or her mind what they were made of.

"I was no exception. Again I turned towards them and scrutinised them from top to bottom. I picked one up and removed the lid. Inside it was a dirty yellow. Whatever the material might be, it was decidedly heavy. Turning it upside down, I examined the bottom: and one knowing dealer nudged another: 'Looking for the mark!' I could imagine him saying. They had 'done' me over the Burmese idol only quite recently, and hoping to do me again, no doubt, thought they saw an opportunity. The knowing one approached. 'Fine pair of vases,' he ventured, by way of a beginning.

"'Yes,' said I—'very.'

"Just at that moment my eye caught a small crack or chip on the bottom, and I saw what set me thinking. In a careless way I slowly placed the vase upright again upon the shelf, put its cover on, and passing along, aimlessly looked at the succeeding lots, leaving the dealer to think he had made a decided impression.

"What could that chip mean? What could the mark mean it had revealed? This question I turned over and over in my mind until, all at once, its significance was borne in upon me. 'Now, my dealer friends,' thought I, 'it is my turn.'

The auctioneer and his assistants arrived. The company crowded into the marquee, the old women, as is their wont, occupied the front row of seats, and the dealers brought up the rear, from which point of vantage they could see all and not be seen, except by those who deliberately turned round to find out where bids were coming from.

"The bidding proceeded. The little men bought their 'pies,' the local dealers secured their tables and chairs, a few private buyers occasionally purchased odd lots, the old women in the front row whispered together when lots went for a few shillings and raised their eyebrows when they fetched pounds, and the dealers by my side at the back watched all with amused smiles until their particular lots came on. These lots could be numbered on the fingers of one hand.

"A little white china figure a few inches high, so insignificant that the local men saw nothing but a little piece of 'pot,' was quietly secured by one of them. Another bid for and got a small silver cream jug that the locals only valued at a few shillings per ounce. And so it went on until the ugly vases were put up. The auctioneer, of course, described them in glowing language, trying to make up by fine words for what they lacked in beauty.

"The company in general seemed little interested in them, and as the bidding flagged at about a sovereign, I put one in with a nod to the auctioneer. But quietly as this was done, my dealer friends observed it and commenced to run them. The bidding mounted to two pounds, then three, and four. At this point, their spokesman who was doing the bidding evidently began to doubt the wisdom of going further. He did not want them at any price, and his bids had for their sole object the drawing of a higher bid from me. I had appeared to hesitate for some time before my last bid, and my opponent, seeming to fear that a further advance on his part might drop them down to himself, let me have them at four pounds five shillings, and the whole group were evidently well pleased with the result.

"If they were pleased, I was more so, and going out into the village procured at the local grocer's a good spacious box, plenty of straw, and the services of a boy. With these, and the aid of the grocer's cart, my purchases were safely conveyed to the station, and in due course they and myself reached home.

"Quickly I unpacked them, and in privacy, and at my leisure, examined them again. The chip at the bottom of one of them was subjected to a close scrutiny with the aid of a hand magnifier. Its peculiarity was this: while the whole vase was black or red, the bottom of the chip was white and across it I thought I saw a faint blue line. I soon made up my mind what to do. If they were not what I thought, they were merely an ugly and worthless pair of vases fit for a jumble sale. If they were what I hoped, they would be priceless.

"Applying my pocket-knife I carefully enlarged the chip, and to my delight, was rewarded by seeing a further enlargement of the white area and a prolongation and development of the blue line. No longer in doubt as to what I had purchased, I set to, took off my coat, conveyed them to the kitchen and proceeded to chip, scrape, and wash off all the black and red exterior. With a powerful solvent I got off the paint from the interior and after some hours of hard and dirty work, triumphantly carried into my drawing-room the finest pair of blue-and-white Nankin china vases that I have ever seen.

"How did the messy stuff get on? And who could have so spoiled Oriental blue-and-white china? I can only suppose that the rector's daughter or niece thought they looked too much like willow-pattern earthenware kitchen jugs, and having attended local technical classes on 'art decoration,' had improved them!"



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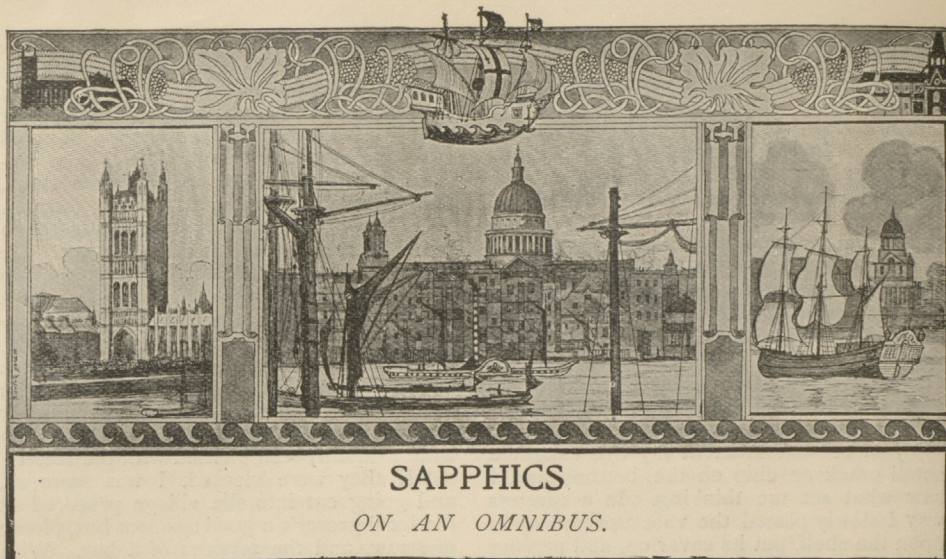
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SAPPHICS

ON AN OMNIBUS.

SWEET is the scent of flower-strewn fields in summer ;
 Sweet is the sound of waves as they kiss the pebbles ;
 Yes, but there's something sweeter by far to one poor
 Exile from London.

And he has found it : holiday time has brought him
 Back to his love—the mystical streets of London ;
 Back to the bus which plies from the Bank to Somewhere—
 Somewhere in London.

Once more he sees the wonderful City bobbies—
 Bobbies who have strange bulges upon their helmets—
 Placidly standing, just where the throng is thickest,
 Guiding the traffic.

Once more he smells the smell of the good wood-pavement ;
 Smiles as he sees an elderly lady waving
 Bag and umbrella—signals which tell that she is
 Stuck on an island.

Once more he hears the cry of the London news-boy,
 "Speshul-edition-winners-and-startin'-prices" ;
 Listens with joy to, "Liverpool Street, Benk, Putney,
 "Waterloo Station!"

There in a row stand vendors of wondrous oddments—
 Matche's and studs, mechanical toys and laces—
 Pitiful outcasts ; what do they hope for, standing
 There in the gutter?

Here is the Bridge, and there is the broad brown River
 And—can it be?—the very same blind man, reading
 Not with his eyes, but reading with cunning fingers,
 Hoping for coppers.

Somewhere in London ! Anywhere ; 'tis no matter ;
 Get on a bus, and cheerfully pay your pennies ;
 Open your eyes, your ears, and your heart, and then be
 Grateful for London.

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OTHER PEOPLE'S GODS.

BY VIOLET JACOB.

ILLUSTRATED BY A. H. BUCKLAND.

WILFRED SANDS rode through the hot February afternoon towards the little city of Central India to which his fortunes had led him. The long, low ridge of its cantonment stretched before him a few miles away; and unseen on the lower ground behind it, lay the native town on the outskirts of which his own bungalow stood. He rode along in the happy condition of one whose sympathies are in tune with his surroundings, for he loved India, and his work brought him frequently into contact with the things that interested him most.

It was five years since he had first landed, and three since he had come to Sivapura to manage the local branch of the Bank of Bombay. His post was a small one, for Sivapura was the capital of an inconsiderable native state, but Wilfred was young in his profession and well content with destiny; for he had a little money of his own, good health, a couple of decent ponies, and a feeling for the East which made him indifferent to banishment.

His scheme of life, outside his business, was one of contemplation varied by violent exercise. He was an energetic if moderate polo player, and a very much more than moderate cricketer; and these qualities brought him into touch with the soldier part of the community which had its dwelling in the cantonment on the hill. But, in spite of these things, in a country in which members of the dominant race depend so much upon one another, he was a man of few friends and no intimacies. Soldier and civilian alike spoke well of him, but no one, except where games were concerned, saw much of him. He was fond of shooting, but he did his shooting alone; cards wearied him, and for women's society he had little taste. There were some inclined to pity a man who stood so much apart from his fellows; but Sir Thomas Marney, the white-headed Indian general in command of the district, who knew him better than did any one else, was amused at what he considered a

waste of good feeling, for he suspected Sands of being perfectly contented.

Wilfred's father had been in business in Bombay and Sir Thomas was one of the friends of his youth, but it was not only that fact which stirred the soldier's interest in the young man. There was a sympathy of temper which ran deeper than association. Sir Thomas Marney also loved India, with a ripe affection that had survived many disillusionments and many blows, and, as the years of his service drew to an end, he looked forward to his freedom with none of the eagerness of the traditional exile. The "white cliffs" that are supposed to inspire the returned wanderer were, to him, only the illustration of an idea to which he had been faithful all his life, and of which he needed no reminder beyond the one lying permanently at his heart. Though his undeviating wish had ever been to serve his country, he preferred to serve her at a distance. When men who have held good positions in remote places return to end their days in England it is much the fashion to pity them for the loss of consequence which is their lot. To the slow imagination of the average stay-at-home Briton, the East, with its ceaseless undertone of tragedy and heroism, its large issues and sudden fatalities, is merely a place of perquisites, precedence, and numerous carriages and servants, and his pity for those who must exchange such value for the obscurity of a straitened provincial establishment is unfeigned. Discomfort is what he can readily understand—what may be brought home to his own cherished body any day. But he has no sympathy for that loss of spiritual elbow-room from which many of the objects of his half-contemptuous pity are suffering, because he has no experience of it. He does not know how difficult one whose personal energies have been chiefly concerned with desperate matters—with rebellion, pestilence, or the responsibility for many lives—may find it to adjust them to the questions that convulse his new sur-

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roundings; he does not realise that eyes which have frequently seen death at closer quarters than he has seen a street-row may wander as they confront those of Jones, who is passionately describing antique furniture, or the iniquities of paperhangers. There are some men who find rest, after the strenuous past years, in the trivialities that flock round modern English life, and there are some who find suffocation. General Marney knew that he was condemned to be of the latter.

But, apart from all effects of experience, he hated to think of leaving a country to whose outward face he was truly attached. He had always been a sportsman and had lived much in the open; and the shrines and gods of the common people, the groves and temples round their villages, were filled with interest for him. Without laying claim to any great learning, he understood the rustic dwellers in the Central Indian plains, their cupidity, their poverty, their superstition and their strange inverted simplicity, as well as a European may understand them. It was because he saw in Sands a reflection of his own mind that he was attracted towards him.

Wilfred was riding home from a solitary day's shooting to dine with his friend, and he looked forward to his evening, for the General had told him that they would be alone. His sturdy, country-bred pony was ascending the easy slope at a slow, tireless canter, leaving a puff of dust hanging above his tracks, and as he reached the flat stretch that crowned the rise he pulled into a walk. He had plenty of time before him, for the sun was still above the horizon. The plain on his right hand was a sea of burnt grass and *karunda* bushes; and, as the hot weather was not yet come, the pervading scent of *karunda* flowers mixed with the odour of cowdung and goats that was the breath of the roadside village of Devigaon.

For him, there was a charm about this particular spot, though it would have been hard for a stranger to see its justification. There was nothing alluring about the filthy huts and yapping pariah-dogs, and the hamlet was not even graced by the usual *peepul* tree, whose encircling mud platform is the haunt of the village elders and the resting-place of that piece of walking scoundrelism, the travelling *sadhu*.

Beyond Devigaon the ground was a

mass of scrub and half-buried stones, almost unrideable, and avoided even by the tracks which ran to the nearest village; but in the centre of this unpropitious place was the point of attraction for Sands. He had discovered it while threading his way among the boulders and dodging between bushes in search of a short cut to the tank lying farther in from the road. From the highway nothing could be seen of the object round which his thoughts were circling as he rode along but a fragment of roof, cutting the sky line above the scrub.

On a patch of ground beyond the boulders stood one of those squalid, isolated shrines, mostly commemorative of deceased persons, which are found in the neighbourhood of the poorer villages. A rude square of thatching, supported by four poles and backed by the inevitable piece of corrugated tin, sheltered the mound of stones which formed the shrine, creating, by the shadow of its closure, a gloom through which it was difficult to see clearly. The few broken cocoanut-shells lying round it and the faint traces left by the red *chendur* showed it to have been untended for some time. In the most prominent place under the roof was an upright stone slab, roughly carved with the figure of a man on horseback, and bearing, on either of its top corners, a circle and a half-circle, which stood, respectively, for the sun and moon. The whole device had about as much relation to nature as has the drawing made by a child on a slate. What fascinated Sands was a little stone serpent placed alone beside the sculptured horseman.

It was about six inches high and formed with real skill from a solid block. The coil of its tail made a flat base on the ground, and from it rose the delicate balance of the poised body supporting the outspread hood of the cobra. It had looked so strangely real to him on the day, some weeks ago, when he first stopped by the shrine and peeped in; for the sun was bright outside and a chink of light was lying on the little grey object that reared itself up in the shadow. He had ventured inside, bent double under the roof, and examined it curiously. Wandering alone in the late afternoon for the partridges which would call to one another from the stony tract and the bits of cultivation about Devigaon,



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he had more than once, since that occasion, laid his gun upon a boulder and turned aside to look at the cobra. He had never met a native about the spot of whom he might ask the shrine's history; and, had he done so, it is likely that, for one reason or another, he would have heard nothing to enlighten him. He never passed on the road without thinking of the little inanimate creature which sat, with the grotesque horseman for company, over there among the baked stones and the *karunda* bushes. Sometimes he almost wished he could carry it away and set it in some corner of his bungalow, a reminder of the mysterious world encompassing the European influences of his life.

He sat with Sir Thomas a few hours later at the shaded dinner-table; the Madrassi butler had left his post behind the General's chair and the cigarette box was open between the two men. The talk had dropped for a moment.

"I wish *I* were twenty-nine," said the soldier.

He sighed rather enviously as he looked at his old friend's son.

Until he had taken up his command at Sivapura, eighteen months ago, his recollection of Wilfred had been of an urchin in a pinafore.

"At twenty-nine there was such a lot before me," he went on, "the best years of my life. And now, in a few more, it will be all done and my time up, and nothing to look for in front."

He met his guest's glance, respectful, with a touch of embarrassment, and smiled.

"I suppose I appear very old?" he said.

"Indeed, sir, you don't seem so to me," answered Wilfred.

Though sympathy alone might have dictated his reply, he spoke truth. Marney's hair was white and his skin weather-beaten, but there was little else about him to suggest age. He had lived healthily, and his spare figure was now rewarding him for his trouble; also, certain lines which, in middle life, the meaner emotions begin to draw in many human faces were absent.

"And I don't seem so to myself," continued he; "that is the tragedy. I can't feel that in two and a half years I shall be old enough to go home and serve other people's gods—I like my own so much better."

There was a long pause as they sat smoking.

"Come, we'll go into the verandah," said Marney.

The General's bungalow stood high at the outer edge of the cantonment, and from where he sat with his guest the ground sloped away to the open country. As Wilfred lay back in his long chair his eyes were turned through the hot starlit darkness towards Devigaon. Sir Thomas's allusion to gods made him think of the little serpent in the jungle-patch, and he wondered whether his companion had ever seen the tumble-down shrine—he who had wandered so much among such places, and was so unusually familiar with village life and customs.

After a moment he began upon the subject. He had some powers of description, and, as he sat bolt upright, throwing out his hand towards the blue-black space of sky at the end of the verandah, as though he could see through it to Devigaon, the General listened in silence.

"And why don't you take the serpent?" he said, when Sands had finished.

The other looked at him in astonishment.

"Take it?" he said, as though he had misunderstood.

"Yes, take it," repeated the General. "I should, if I had the fancy for it that you have. No one would care."

"You surprise me," said Wilfred blankly.

"If you had seen as much as I have of the people—the low-caste village people of this part of India—you would not be surprised. Outside the bounds of a certain circle of superstition these things mean so little to them. Hanuman and Bhiru don't enter into their lives as Englishmen imagine they do. Heaven knows an Englishman's religion often doesn't go for much in his feelings; but it is supposed to, for all that. But here, with the low-caste man, it isn't even supposed to. He propitiates what he is told to propitiate and that's all. It is the lowest man who tills the soil, and religion is mainly a matter of caste. Very probably the Devigaon villagers don't remember that the shrine exists."

"No one ever seems to go there, certainly. The red marks on the stones are almost worn out and the thatch of the roof is falling to bits. I shoot round

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there very often and I have never seen a native near the place."

"Some other spot has developed importance," said Sir Thomas; "some *banyan*-root or even a *babul*-tree. Some tomb, Hindu or Mohamedan, it matters little which to these ignorant folk, has burst into sudden sanctity, and nobody thinks any more of your place. A re-crudescence may come some day when we are all dead, or it may not. Probably not."

"I could take it easily enough," said Wilfred slowly. "The snake is not too big to go into a coat pocket. But I don't exactly feel as if I should do it."

"If you want to be strictly honest you can leave a rupee in its place," said Marney, smiling again; "that would be a miracle the whole village would appreciate. But it's ten to one you would find it where you left it in a year's time, for probably not a soul goes there but yourself."

"You spoke of not liking other people's gods just now," said Sands reflectively—"perhaps I like them too much."

They sat on under the white verandah arches. Now and then an isolated tom-tom beat from a native hut, and a pariah dog barked, or the sentry on the path outside passed in his round. When eleven struck on the gong of the native cavalry lines the young man rose, remembering that there was a field day on the morrow and that his host would be astir early. While he mounted his pony at the porch steps and the syce disappeared like a moth into the darkness Sir Thomas stood at the top watching him:

"Perhaps next time I see you, you'll tell me that the snake is in your bungalow," said he.

Sands glanced up at him and laughed. One of the things Marney remembered all the rest of his life was his upturned face in the light of the lantern swinging from the rafters of the porch.

"No, no," he said. "I'm afraid of meddling with other people's gods. Good night, sir."

The two men did not meet at all during the next couple of weeks, for a press of business at the bank kept Wilfred unusually busy, and he had barely time for a canter round the race-course when evening set him free. Often, while he sat at his desk listening to the click of the native clerks' typewriters, his thoughts

went back to Marney's words. Once he had shot round Devigaon, and again looked into the shrine. One of those sudden squalls of wind that herald the hot weather had further damaged the roof, making it sag down from the pole at one corner. The grass was turning browner, and the fiery flood of light seemed like a molten sea which had left the bare bones of the shrine high and dry.

The idea of possessing the stone snake grew in his mind. He had a few brass images of gods and godlings that he had bought from time to time in the bazaar; but though he valued them mildly, not one could inspire him with the interest he felt in the cobra. They had either been hawked at his door or haggled for amid the incongruous mercantile surroundings of shops. As likely as not they had been made in Birmingham for the Indian market. But the snake was a true member and symbol of the stealthy jungle hierarchy; of the company of Hanuman and the Bhirus lurking among the *banyan*-roots in the dark byways of the country.

That Sir Thomas Marney knew what he was talking about was indisputable, and his own insignificant wanderings among the surrounding hamlets had shown him something of the villagers' apathy towards all that had no bearing on gain. He turned the matter over and over. He had only realised how much he would like to have the cobra since his talk with Sir Thomas.

One stifling evening he turned his pony into the Devigaon road, his mind made up at last. He had timed himself to arrive by dusk at the place where he would leave it and take to the stony scrub. Night falls so swiftly in India that a man going across country does well to be within sight of a beaten track as the sun disappears. If he left the road with sunset, he would just have time to pick his way to the shrine, take his spoil and return, leading his horse through the maze of thorns and boulders, before darkness should swoop down. Though, as he had told Marney, he had never met a soul near the spot, he was apprehensive of being seen.

At the side of the highway the goat-herds were driving their flocks through the reddish-golden dust, and the crickets had struck up their vibrant chorus from the wayside *babul* trees. Little spots of fire had burst out all over the country, from fields and hillocks, from waste and

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tillage, from everywhere where unseen men were cooking their solitary evening messes, or gathering in groups squatted on their heels to pass round the common pipe. These scattered eyes of the Indian dusk did not mark him as he left the road. There was enough light to enable him to get forward briskly, and it still held as he dismounted by a thicket of *karunda* and made the pony's rein fast to a projecting branch. Not fifty yards beyond him the broken roof cut into the twilight.

He went up the stony slope, his riding-boots slipping on the grass that was like tinder beneath his feet, and paused in front of the shrine. There was not a stir nor a sound; not a breath of air moved so much as a dried blade. He could not even hear the cropping of the pony's teeth on the other side of the stunted shrubs.

He went in under the thatch, bending his head; his eyes were still full of the twilight and he could barely see the upright slab with the horseman, but he knew exactly where the snake stood and put out his hand to the grey shape.

A shock of vivid pain ran up his arm like a tongue of fire; it was as though a bow had been drawn to the uttermost and an arrow shot into his wrist. He sprang backward and his fingers brushed the image, overturning it upon the ground. As he stood, dazed and dumb, the horror of a ghastly thought struck his brain, even as the blow had struck his flesh; and there passed behind the carved horseman a slim shadow that flowed along the earth like a thread of sluggish water in a dry place.

He rushed out, holding his wrist. The pulsing blood was singing one loud word in his brain—"Death! death! death!" Death, not at that vague trysting-place ahead where we all expect to meet him, not with the touch of human-kind to stay him up till the veil should fall between humanity and his senses, but here—now—alone! The presence ran beside him, even as he ran, and the passionate desire to reach his pony, the last warm, living creature he could cling to till the pursuer's grip should fall on him, drove him on.

The darkness was gaining on him too, and every stock and stone growing more alike to his stricken eyes. He went stumbling forward, unable to concentrate his wits on his direction; already his arm was numb, and his feet became heavier at every step.

He did not know how long he struggled on, dizzy and half blind with the strange sensations creeping on him, missing his way, and crossing his own tracks only to cross them again. He had lost all count of time. The darkness gathering round him was darker than that of evening.

At last, through his bewilderment, and above his own choking breaths, he heard the pony snort among the scrub close to him, and staggered towards the sound. Then he fell down, face foremost, almost at the startled beast's feet.

Sir Thomas Marney had finished his dinner and was writing letters, when he was told that two of Sands-sahib's servants were outside, anxious to speak to him. There was an undercurrent in his butler's manner, as he made the request, that struck him; and, telling the man to bring them to the verandah, he went out. Wilfred's butler and a syce were salaaming on the path. The former, as spokesman, said that he had come, well knowing the General-sahib to be his master's friend. No one knew where the sahib was. The Arab pony had returned alone to his stable; he had been galloping and the bridle was broken. They did not know what to do, and they had waited, hoping that the sahib would return. Perhaps he had got off and let the pony go, perhaps he might return on foot. Who knew?

Marney turned to the syce.

"Was the pony hurt?" he asked; "had he been down?"

The pony was well. There was nothing wrong—only a scratch on his shoulder. The syce had picked the end of a *karunda* thorn out of it.

It struck the general that the syce was more observant than most of his kind.

"And did no one know where Sands-sahib had gone?" he asked.

He had ridden out later than usual, the man said. He had seen a goat-herd, too, as they came along, who told him that he had passed his sahib on the road to Devigaon.

Marney was silent. He knew now where to look for Wilfred. He could not guess what had happened, but if any accident had befallen the young man in that unfrequented place, he might lie till morning, for all the chance there was of being seen. He might, at this very moment, be there, stunned or helpless,

with a broken limb. His mind was made up at once.

He dismissed the two men. The butler was to go home to Wilfred's bungalow and the syce was to get out his master's dun country-bred pony and wait, with a lantern, till he should join him at the beginning of the Devigaon road. Marney ordered his horse and sent word to his mounted orderly to be ready to come with him.

The three men left the cantonment and went at a steady canter along the road, one behind the other, the general leading and the syce last. As they came parallel with the tract that he knew well from Wilfred's description, Marney stopped, and, leaving the syce on the road with the horses, dismounted and bade his orderly follow him in among the bushes with the light.

When they had almost reached the heart of the scrub he stepped suddenly back and the orderly set it down. There lay Sands on his face, dead and cold.

They examined him all over in search of some hurt, but they could find nothing, till the orderly, taking up the heavy hand, gave a loud exclamation. The ray of the lantern fell upon two little livid marks inside the dead man's wrist.

"It is Nag," he said, "the cobra. Here among these rocks he has many brothers."

When the galloping hoof-beats of the orderly's horse were dying out on the

road, Marney, who had sent him to the hospital at Sivapura for a *dhooly*, stood by Sands' body. In the lonely stillness he took up the lantern and made his way in the direction which he knew led to the shrine. He came upon it sooner than he expected.

The snake lay on its side by the horseman, but it was not at these things that the General looked. What he was searching for he found. There, on the earth beside the fallen image, lay a rupee.

Early on the second morning after he had ridden into Sivapura beside Wilfred's body he came out of the gates of the European cemetery to mount his horse. He did not speak to any one among the little crowd of Englishmen who had stood, just now, round the grave. He was too sane a man to imagine himself to have had any share in the tragedy of Sands' death, or to torment himself with the futile idea; but his heart was heavy. The chaplain passed him in his *tonga*; he was going back to his breakfast; his church service was in his hand and the bag containing his surplice at his feet. They saluted each other gravely. As Marney turned up towards the ridge on which his own house stood, his lips moved.

"Other people's gods," he murmured. "He said he was afraid of meddling with other people's gods."

RENASCENCE.

NEAR the frowning castle grows
Fragrantly the crimson rose;
Round the temple's granite plinths
Violets and hyacinths
Scatter perfume; on the wall
Of some immemorial hall
Creeps the jasmine, and would hide
Wounds that mar the shatter'd side.
So things soft and delicate
Cluster round the rough and great,
And where ruin seems to reign
Beauty claims her own again.

R. ELLIS ROBERTS.

Haematologist.
Callum, M.D.

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THE MISSING WORD.

BY AUSTIN PHILIPS.

AT the great house beyond the town the Prime Minister lay at death's door; in the Murcester telegraph gallery we sat, we dozen telegraphists, waiting for the news that should bid us tell the world how a stormy soul had passed where courts and kings and cabinets are not. And as, between midnight and slow dawn, we waited, weary-eyed and idle, the heavy tempest drops hammered hard upon the glass roof of the gallery, frequent lightning forked, and clouds clashed together, thunderously at war.

A blue flame sparkled in the periscope of a double-current sounder; the needles of the instruments on the Sub-office Circuit swung in sudden unison, so that they stood a-row like compasses and pointed, each one of them, at the selfsame angle, no longer northwards, but north-west by north. And then the electric current sparkled on the sounders themselves, and the lights died swiftly out, leaving us in darkness and dismay.

Old Shayler, grey-bearded and grey-moustached, the doyen of us all, jumped away from the instruments and pulled his chair into the open space in the middle of the gallery.

"Come away, boys!" he shouted—"come away from the sounders! I'm not taking any risks!"

There came a rush and scrape of chairs across the wood-block floor; the old man had done what we were too cowardly to do. In a second or two we sat, ringed round him, huddling close and fearful. The storm had raged since eight o'clock; for four hours we had terrified ourselves with tales of crime and horror.

"What a night!" gasped Wollen of the race-staff. "I've never known such a night before. Not in twenty years' service!"

Then once more the lightning forked across the hall, reflected in the glass roof above, footing, as it seemed, some *Danse Macabre* upon the gallery floor. The needles of the instruments on the Sub-office Circuit almost seemed to pirouette before they swung back again to their fixed position. Long after the flash had passed, the periscopes belatedly gleamed; the

heavy sounders moved, as if driven by some strange force to babble in a code unknown to man of the mysterious power which set the elements at strife.

I drew my chair an inch closer to the man on my right; on my left hand I felt Beechcroft shudder and do the like. He was a poor creature at the best of times—to-night he was almost beside himself with fear.

"I knew just such another night," said old Shayler presently—"the night that Jacky Soames was killed at Bromyard and the office ransacked. But it wasn't lightning that killed him. Lightning seldom hurts people indoors, they say. It was a man that killed Jacky Soames!"

The chairs moved again, a full dozen of them, till we sat, huddled closer than ever, cold and fearful, for all the night's midsummer heat.

"Tell us about it, Shayler!" I cried. "Tell us what happened. Did they ever catch the murderer?"

And three or four voices echoed what I asked; for indeed it seemed better to hear of man's work than God's that night. One or two, indeed, cried "No!" but they were in the minority, and, sitting there in the middle of us, old Shayler began. And as the thunder, clamorous and insistent, growled above us, louder and more near, I felt Beechcroft shudder beside me, and his fingers, unconsciously, met on my wrist and stayed there. But I let the poor devil keep his grip, for I could hear his teeth chatter and his breath come and go in the darkness.

Then old Shayler cleared his throat and began.

"It was fifteen years ago, to this very night, and Jacky was sent in charge of the Bromyard office. It was a small enough place in those days, and a one-man show. But Jacky was nearly off his head with joy. He had just got a girl, and it seemed like promotion coming, and he went about the place singing and whistling till it wasn't big enough to hold him. I remember seeing him off from Murcester station after having a drink with him at the Old Dun Cow. It was the post-office house then, just as it is to-day!"

"Was that the last you saw of him?" interrupted little Teddy Saunders—he was only a boy, and couldn't let the old man tell the tale in his own way. "I mean, did he die?—was he murdered the same night?"

Old Shayler frowned and sat silent, and seemed to dry up.

"Go on!" said some one sharply—"go on; and, Teddy, if you interrupt again, I'll put you in contact with the wires!"

The old man, somewhat appeased, cleared his throat again. "It was the last I saw of him," he said slowly. "But it wasn't the last I *heard* of him. I was on night duty, and at about half-past eleven we had a chat over the wires. He told me how lonely he was in that house all by himself, and how he couldn't sleep for the sense of responsibility, and I joked a bit to cheer him up, and told him to go to bed. But he said he couldn't sleep, and that he would sit up in the office all night. And then, as there was nothing doing here, I began to sleep."

Then old Shayler paused.

"Has anybody got a cigarette?" he asked. "Telling it makes it all come back again, and I shall talk easier if I smoke!"

Some one leaned across and fumbled for the old man's hand, and thrust a cigarette into his groping fingers. He lighted it, and at every puff I could see the white faces round me, and I felt that my own was whiter than them all. But no one spoke.

"About midnight," went on the old man, "I woke up with a start, in a cold shiver. Something was happening to Jacky. I didn't know what—I only knew that he was in danger; and it seemed as if I had been dreaming, and, though I couldn't remember my dream, I had waked up to find it was true.

"Then the Bromyard needle began to click, and, though the sending was jumpy and uneven, I knew it for Jacky Soames—I should have known his touch on the keys anywhere."

"What did it say?" cried Teddy Saunders, almost beside himself—"what did it say?"

And this time no one chided him for an interruption which seemed to come from us all, even though it was only Teddy that spoke. Even old Shayler

showed no annoyance, for he knew that Teddy couldn't help but speak.

"It said," he answered slowly—"it said, 'I am being murdered by——'"

He stopped short, and puffed at his cigarette.

"Yes!—yes! What more did it say?" we clamoured.

Old Shayler puffed hugely, so that the glowing tobacco, before it sank into hidden greyness, shed a bright light on the faces round him.

"It said nothing more!" he answered, in slow tones. "But I rushed out to the police station (there were no telephones in those days), and when the storm was finished I got the sergeant to drive out to Bromyard; for I couldn't leave the office myself for any length of time. And when he got there he found poor Jacky's body on the floor by a parcel hamper, and his head hammered in with a poker, and the safe open and all the cash and registered letters gone."

"But was there no clue to the murderer?"

"None at all. There were all sorts of theories, though. And I had mine!"

"What was it?" asked Beechcroft, shudderingly, at my side. It was the first time that he had spoken, and his fingers on my wrist were wringing wet.

"Yes; what was it?" I echoed.

"Have any of you young fellows another cigarette?" came the question, with aggravating lack of haste.

I thrust a packet into his hand. He took one, lit it, and then went on between great puffs.

"The police thought it was a skilled burglar, because the safe was opened with skeleton keys. But I think it was one of Jacky's own colleagues!"

"Good God!" cried some one. "You don't mean——!"

"I mean," went on old Shayler, "that it was some one who knew Jacky, and whom Jacky was glad to see. At first, when the fight began, he was able to hold the brute off with one hand while he sent the message with the other. And then the burglar must have hit him on the head and stunned him, which would have been easy, for Jacky was a small man, and no bigger than little Teddy here."

"But why did he have to kill Jacky, if he was stunned?"

"That's what makes me think it was some

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one that Jacky knew. And dead men tell no tales!"

The lightning lit up our faces again, the rain had grown to hail, and the thunder still rumbled across the glass roof. Beechcroft at my side looked almost moribund with fear. I tried to loose his fingers from my wrist, but it was useless. And before I could remonstrate Teddy broke in. "So Jacky Soames was killed before he could signal the murderer's name? But it was a pretty near thing!"

For the first time that night old Shayler answered a question swift and direct. "I believe he *did* signal the name!" he said.

But how, if he was overpowered?—and if before, why didn't you hear it?"

"Because the wires were broken," said the old man triumphantly. "Because the lightning struck a tree on the high road, and a branch fell and broke the wires. That's why I never got the name!"

"Nor never will!" put in Beechcroft, in his high-pitched voice.

"I'm not so sure!" cried Shayler. "The word was sent, and the word is floating about yet, and some day or other it will find the wires again and tell the murderer's name!"

He fell silent.

"I've had enough of this!" said Teddy Saunders. "It's giving me the horrors. I can see the whole thing quite plain!"

"Strikes me we shall be here this time to-morrow," put in somebody gloomily. "The Prime Minister's a long time pegging out!"

As he spoke, an instrument in the far corner of the gallery began to vibrate. M.R., M.R., M.R. it clicked, in Morse code. M.R. was the call for Murcester.

"He's dead!" cried Teddy Saunders. "They're calling us from the Towers. And how are we going to manage without the light?"

I leaned forward and listened hard.

"It isn't from the Towers at all!" I shouted. "The Towers wire is on the other side. It sounds like Bromyard. But it can't be!"

Old Shayler leapt to his feet.

"It's Jacky Soames!" he cried. "I should know his touch among a million!"

None of us spoke; none of us dared to move. If we doubted, it was only because we dared not believe. And the nails of the fingers that held my wrist dug and twisted and tore into the flesh.

M.R., M.R., M.R. clicked the key, and then spelled out a word.

"By God!" cried Shayler, "Beechcroft!"

The fingers on my wrist relaxed; the man at my side fell to the floor in a heap; old Shayler had been right. The word that for fifteen years had floated in the void had found the wires again.

AFTERWARDS.

DEAREST, when I lie asleep,
Will you come?
Not, perchance, to sigh or weep
Over dust that lieth dumb;
But remembering how we met
In the sun-tides that have set,
Though you think that I forget,
Dearest, come!

Where the tangled grasses blow
In the wind,
Come as in the long ago,
Sometimes vexed and sometimes kind.
Come for just a little space
To that solitary place,
With the sunshine of your face,
Dearest, come!

Leaves shall rustle a reply
At your feet;
Love shall answer though not I,
When the past and present meet.
Recollecting words once spoken
Ere companionship was broken—
Just to bring and take a token,
Dearest, come!

ARTHUR L. SALMON.

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