

(Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.)

IS IT POE'S?

Statement of Mr. Robert Alden Jarvis of New York, addressed to the Editor.

Having been appointed executor to the estate of my friend Mr. J. S.—— it of course became necessary that I should examine his private papers, and among them I found the manuscript of the following "strange story."

I believe I am carrying out the wishes of my deceased friend in sending you the story for publication, and I do so without expressing any opinion as to the authenticity of the tale, leaving it to yourself and others better qualified than I can be, to form an opinion on that point. I will merely remark that as I was on terms of the closest intimacy with my dear dead friend I can confidently state that although fond of the society of literary men, he was the last person in the world likely to attempt to write a tale of imagination.

W. B.

My poor friend Edgar called on me a few evenings ago, in his usual state of excitement, and walked about the room objurgating in no measured language the meanness and greed of publishers in general. He had a small roll of paper in his hand which he said was a story he had offered to old ——, but "the stingy old hunk would not even give me ten dollars for it."

After he had somewhat quieted down, I asked to see the story. He threw the roll of paper over to me and I opened and read the contents. It was one of his usual wild, weird tales, very short, and I read it to the end. "Good Heavens, Edgar," I exclaimed, when I had finished it, "what a horrible story." "Horrible or not," he replied, "there's more truth in it than you may imagine, but anyhow it would not bring me ten dollars, so here it goes," saying which, he threw the manuscript on the blazing fire, took his hat and left me. I never saw him again. In a few short weeks, his genius, his vices, and I hope I may also say his virtues, were lost to the world.

When he had gone, I retired to bed but not to sleep. My mind reverted with strange persistency to the story I had read. I regretted the destruction of the manuscript, as despite its *outré* and almost revolting character, I considered it displayed some of the genius of the writer and I thought that perhaps I myself might induce some publisher to purchase it. I knew the author would never be persuaded to rewrite it, and as it had made so vivid an impression on me that I believed I could recall nearly every word, I determined, as I could not sleep, that I would get up and endeavour to make a fair copy of it. I did so; and the following is I believe almost word for word, what I read in the original manuscript:

There is in Paris, in the Rue M—— an old bookseller's shop known to few besides biblioplists. I was in this shop on a rainy afternoon in the autumn of 18——, busily engaged in turning over some of old G——'s dusty treasures, when my attention was attracted by an enquiry for a somewhat rare German work on "Transmigration."

As this work had some bearing on the subject which I was then investigating I happened to possess a copy, and on G—— replying that he had not the book in stocks, I addressed myself to the enquirer proffering the loan of it.

From the first I had been singularly interested by the peculiar appearance of the man. He was above the ordinary height but thin almost to attenuation. Though carelessly, in fact shabbily dressed, he was unmistakably a gentleman and my opinion on this point was confirmed by the remarkable purity both of intonation and expression with which, though evidently a foreigner, he spoke the French language.

But it was the face of the man which exercised so remarkable a fascination on me; a fascination at the same time almost repulsive in its nature—it was fleshless as that of a mummy, with the skin of the colour and texture of new parchment drawn tightly over the prominent forehead and cheekbones, while his large black eyes stared out from their deep sunk orbits with a haggard, horror-stricken expression, only seen in persons suffering from some severe mental shock.

He responded courteously to my offer and accompanied me home to get the book.

From that time what I may almost call an intimacy sprang up between us; he frequently called in at my rooms and I took much pleasure in his conversation. He always avoided the question of his nationality, but I had come to the conclusion he was a German by birth, or at least by education, as he seemed to possess an exhaustible store of those weird, fantastic and supernatural tales which mark the romantic side of the German character. He never alluded to his own home nor invited me to visit him, and as I considered he might possibly be in straitened circumstances and unwilling to have his poverty observed, I never questioned him on the subject. On no occasion did he eat or drink with me, but I felt convinced from his emaciated appearance,

as well as from the strange and bizarre style of his conversation, that he was addicted to the use of stimulants, probably *absinthe* or some of those poisonous compounds which excite the brain to unnatural activity.

Our intimacy continued uninterrupted for several months, when one afternoon in November my friend entered my room and took his seat as usual on the sofa. He had scarcely done so when a little dog which had but the day before been given me by a lady with whom I was acquainted, ran into the room and jumped on to his knee. With a loud exclamation and a gesture of the intensest abhorrence, he dashed the poor animal violently on the floor and rushed out of the room.

I was annoyed and indignant at his strange behaviour, the more so when I found that the dog was seriously injured by the violence with which it had been thrown on the floor. I determined that when I next met H—— I would exact ample explanation and apology. My indignation, however, had plenty of time to cool as several weeks elapsed and I neither saw nor heard anything of my quondam friend.

One stormy night just before the close of the year, I was just about retiring for the night when a knock at the door of my ante-room arrested my attention. On opening it, I found a small boy very wet and ragged with a note in his hand addressed to myself, the writing was blurred and almost indistinguishable, but after considerable difficulty I made out that it was H—— begging me in urgent terms to come to him instantly. As I had almost forgotten my annoyance and had become really anxious about him, I did not hesitate long, but, despite the inclemency of the weather wrapped myself in any cloak and followed my youthful conductor. On the way I questioned the lad as to the state of health of my friend, but found that he knew nothing except that an old woman had sent him with the note with orders to show the person to whom it was addressed the way back to the house which was quite on the outskirts of the city.

The night was stormy and inclement, a piercing wind blew the showers of sleety rain in our faces as we pursued our way, battling with bent heads against the gusts. Not even a fiacre was to be seen and the streets were entirely deserted.

After walking, or rather struggling on for more than an hour, we reached a house of moderate size isolated in a garden of some extent. As we passed in at the iron gates and made our way up the avenue it was not difficult to perceive, even in the semi-darkness, that the garden was wild and neglected. The house was heavily built of stone and of considerable size, and I at first concluded that it was some cheap pension or lodging-house to which motives of economy had forced my friend to retire; but on questioning my guide I was surprised to find that it was only occupied by the old woman who had sent him with the letter, and a gentleman, whom I at once concluded to be H—— himself.

Not a light was to be seen at any of the windows as I pulled the rusty handle of the door bell which I heard sounding loudly and harshly in the distance; but notwithstanding the violence of the clangour, which was distinctly audible to me as I stood outside, I had rung again and again ere I heard the sound of approaching footsteps.

The door was opened by a very old woman whom I at once perceived, by her peculiar listening appearance, to be stone deaf. She did not hear or heed any enquiry as to her master's health, but pointing to a room at the extremity of a long stone corridor, said he was expecting me.

Hastily dismissing my guide with a gratuity which called forth voluble expressions of thanks, I walked quickly down the corridor and knocked at the door of the room indicated to me. A faint voice called to me to enter, and opening the door I found myself in the presence of my poor friend.

I had expected to find him ill, but I was not prepared for the ghastly change which had taken place in him.

Always thin and haggard looking he now resembled only a resuscitated corpse, while his eyes, wild and staring as ever, were glazed and dull as the eyes of a dead man. The atmosphere of the room was heavy and sickly with the rapid peculiar smell of opium, which almost overpowered me as I entered. Inexpressibly shocked I grasped his clammy nerveless hands, and for some moments was unable to utter a word.

"Good Heavens, my dear H——," I at length exclaimed, "how frightfully ill you look."

"Yes," he replied, with a haggard smile, "I shall soon lie at rest now, but I have sent for you to ask you to do me a service." Here his voice faltered, and his eyes assumed that peculiar horror-stricken expression I knew so well. "I—I have a dog here," he stammered; "it is mad, and I want you to kill it. I cannot do it myself; will you do this for me?"

Much amazed I replied: "Surely I will if you desire it," and added, "but could you not have got some one from the street to have done it?"

"No, no," he said; "no stranger, no one but yourself," and as he spoke the clammy

sweat rolled down his pallid face in streams, and his limbs shook as one in an ague.

"Fearing that he must be under some hallucination, and thinking that compliance with his request might calm him, I expressed my willingness to do as he wished, and asked when it should be done."

"Now, now," he replied eagerly, and, rising from his seat, he took a large double-barrelled pistol from a drawer, and pressing it into my hand led the way with trembling steps from the room.

With a strange feeling of apprehension I followed him along the corridor and down a flight of stone steps leading to the basement of the house. At the end of a long low vaulted passage was a door of great thickness heavily locked and barred; in the upper part was a sliding panel, also secured by a padlock. He handed me the key of this padlock, and whispered to me in low tremulous accents to unfasten it and kill the animal from the outside of the door.

I opened the panel, and with the pistol in my hand looked into the room or rather cell.

Couched upon the paved floor lay a creature resembling a dog, but of strange colour and shape; its head was hidden by its paws, but as I looked on it a strange indefinable thrill of dread passed over me. While I yet hesitated the creature lifted its head, and oh, horrors! showed me its sphinx-like face, and gazed upon me with its human eyes, and then I knew that there was a human soul imprisoned in that bestial carcass striving to burst from the vile tenement in which it was enshrined.

Throwing back its head the creature uttered a long mournful cry which chilled the very blood in my veins. I swear I could distinguish half-syllabled words such as we hear in the mournful ravings of insanity or idiocy. Thoroughly unmanned I drew back from the door, and turning to H—— exclaimed, "For God's sake tell me what is this?" He had sank down on the floor with his face buried in his hands.

"Kill it; kill it," he muttered.

"Kill it," I exclaimed; "I could as soon kill a human being."

With a low moan of unutterable agony he fell prone on the floor, and as I stooped to raise him, again that long thrilling cry went ringing up to Heaven. Scarce knowing what I did I closed and relocked the panel, and with a great effort raised my miserable friend and carried him back to his room. Giving him over to the charge of the old woman, who opportunely made her appearance, I rushed hastily from the ill-omened house.

* * * * *

Three days had passed since my memorable event, and I had scarcely recovered the shock I had sustained when, as I was rising from my almost untasted breakfast, I was startled by a loud peremptory knock at my door. Opening it I encountered a *gendarme* who presented me with a summons from the *Procureur*, demanding my instant attendance at an enquiry of justice then holding at a house, which I at once recognized to be my friend's residence. I hastily followed the *gendarme* into a fiacre he had in waiting. To my eager enquiries he opposed the usual reticence and imperturbability of a French official, merely replying that I should "learn all from the *Procureur*," and I had perforce to wait in a state of intense anxiety and agitation which made our rapid transit seem interminable. At length we arrived at the house, and I was ushered into the room in which I had at first seen my poor friend.

Seated at the table was the *Procureur* and his attendant official, and I was subject to a long interrogatory as to my acquaintance with and knowledge of the habits of H——. Making my replies as brief as possible, and merely stating that I had reason to believe he was in the habit of taking considerable quantities of opium, I waited with intense anxiety for my examination to come to an end.

At length the *Procureur* rose and, desiring me to follow him, led the way to the well-remembered cell on the basement. With a beating heart and trembling limbs I waited as he unlocked the door. I entered, and there in a corner of the room, resting against an angle of the wall was the lifeless corpse of my poor friend H——, while in the centre of the floor, with its head blown to atoms by the explosion of a pistol, lay the body of the Thing which had been the blight and curse of his wretched existence.

W. H. F.

An Illinois girl having 30,000 dollars of her own, recently refused to marry a clergyman because she thought herself not good enough to be a clergyman's wife. He gave up his sacred calling and proposed again, and then she refused him because she thought herself too good to marry a man who would abandon his high profession to gain a woman's hand.

Surely the genius who invented wooden nutmegs and oats made of deal chips cannot yet be "played out." A Maine man is about to apply for a patent for an artificial oyster made out of flour paste, tapioca, salt, and water. The inventor places these in second-hand oyster shells, which are carefully glued round the edges. There can be no dispute as to the success of this invention.

Fun.

The Quincy, Ill., *Herald* says: "The *Weekly Montanian* wants an editor. The last one was killed by shooting him full of shingle nails."

There were ninety-seven wrathful women in New Orleans the other day, ninety-eight mothers having taken their darlings to a baby show.

A Denver paper calls the atmosphere of Connecticut staid, stereotyped and bloodless; all three adjectives are particularly applicable to an atmosphere.

The *Argus* says that "Senator B. is always determined to go to the bottom of everything he discusses." Just now he is discussing the Mississippi river. When will he go to the bottom of it?

An Illinois editor, speaking of one of the writers for the *Journal*, claims to be "able to endure most kinds of people," but says "he can't bear a natural fool." Unfortunately his "maternal ancestor" could.

"Murder is a very serious thing, sir," said a Arkansas judge to a convicted prisoner. "It is next to stealing a horse or a mule, sir; and I shall send you to the State Prison for six years, sir."

A writer in the *Railroad Magazine* says that "no macadamized road is fit for use till firmly cemented by continued travel." "Och!" said a son of Erin, "I shall never be able to put these boots on till I have worn them a week."

At a party the other night, a pensive young man sang most pathetically, "Where are the friends of my childhood?" A bystander was heard to observe they were probably in a lunatic asylum, if they ever had any friendship for such a man as that singer apparently was.

There are some typographical errors that rather strengthen and improve a writer's diction. A Liverpool journal furnishes a neat example. Chronicling an accident, it says that, upon receiving in his chest the contents of a gun, the victim "felt dead," not fell dead.

A woman appeared at the shop where her husband is employed a short time ago, and apologetically said: "Jim is not well. You must excuse him from coming to work to-day. He and I had a little difficulty at the breakfast table this morning, and he won't be able to work this week."

A clergyman, who owed his situation to a titled patron rather than to his abilities, in visiting his parishioners for the purpose of catechising them, asked one old stern Presbyterian—"Who made Paul a preacher?" "It wasna the Marquis," replied the old man, with a grim smile and a shake of the head.

A Western man of a curious turn of mind recently examined the hind heel of a mule of moderate size, and found it extended quite across the barn floor to the haymow opposite. It also possessed sufficient area to shut out the light of heaven completely for several minutes. This refutes the popular idea of a mule's hoof being small.

A Vallejo (California) young lady, about to go off in the cars, stepped into the dark sitting-room of the depot to kiss her friend Sarah goodbye. Owing to the darkness she didn't hit Sarah, but caromed on a Chinaman, and didn't find out her mistake until John began yelling, "Whatee for you so chokee me? Hi yah! No squeeze so muchee!" A screech, a flopping of feminine garments, a slammed door, and that girl was gone.

A Bostonian who asked his boy one day what he had learned at school, was told that his lesson had been, "Johnny shut yer jaws and can't run." He went to the school the next day, and heard the teacher tell the boys to repeat, "A comma is just a pause to count one," and then heard the class all shout in unison, "Johnny shut yer jaws and can't run." Explanations followed, and that teacher is now striving to acquire more distinct enunciation.

Two drouthie cronies hearing that their conduct was likely to be made a matter for the Kirk Session, made up their minds to block that game by calling on the minister and promising to become teetotallers in future. After a long discussion the clergyman spoke thus to one of them:—"Peter, I think I know you to be a man of your word, and the greatest temptation only could induce you to break it, so I will recommend a postponement of your case for a while, so that your walk and conversation will give a guarantee that you are a changed man. But as for you, William, I don't know what to say. I know you to be a man of determination, and able to stand against adversity, stand against loss of friends and relations, stand even against prosperity, which is harder, you can stand also allurements of female charms, in fact, you are able to stand all things but one." "What's that, minister?" "You cannot stand a bottle of whiskey." William replied with a broad grin, "Ye auld sneek drawer, I can stand that, there's the siller. I aye thoct ye could tak' a taste yoursell."

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