

LEITH HOUSE.

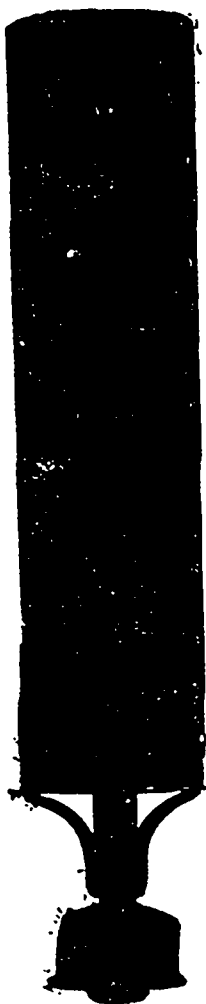
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MY EXAMINATION.

"Study hard! study hard, Philip! and you'll succeed. All things come to him who waits," so said my uncle, putting his head out of a first-class carriage window as the train moved away from the platform.

"Study hard!" Yes, I would, but as to succeeding—that was more doubtful.

For several long weary months I had been "cramming" for a horrid examination, which when once passed was to secure a place for me in an office truly after my own heart.

But, try as I might, every time I went up I failed. Only a few short weeks ago I had tried again and had been—"plowed again."

My good uncle did all he could to assist and encourage me except one thing, and that was he wouldn't let me have a "coach."

He said if I liked I could pass well enough without other aid than that which could be got by books, and so, to his mind, it would be useless expense to employ a "coach."

When he was a young man he had done the same with ease, and so there was no reason why I shouldn't.

One of his favorite wise precepts—and he had many of them—was that what one man has done another can do. In fact, until the day on which I tried to row my uncle and cousins upon the Thames and upset them, that was also one of my dearest maxims.

After seeing my uncle off to his little country home, I walked leisurely out of the station towards my lodgings.

I had scarcely turned the corner of the street when who should I meet but Dr. Grandenore, my old schoolmaster.

Now, though in days gone by I had not venerated him any more than boys as a rule do their preceptors, yet now that I had not seen him for several months I felt that such a meeting might perhaps help to raise my drooping spirits afresh for the coming labor of cramming.

In response to his inquiries I told him all about myself, and he in return communicated to me all the news about the latest readings and editions of the Latin and Greek classics.

Also what he considered to be far more important than these—that it was reported that the missing books of Euclid had been unearthed in an Alexandrian dust-heap!

When I told him I had come up to London again to study for that wretched exam.—I didn't say I had done the same thrice before—he said he could give me some good advice, and taking out his pocket-book (the very book in which my name had more than once figured for an imposition!) he wrote out six short rules.

"Follow these, Philip," he said, "and you'll pass at once! Good-bye." So saying, he was gone. I watched the good old man as he walked up the street, and inwardly wondered whether or no his tall form, healthy appearance, and success in life were due to the following out of these rules.

Then I turned towards my solitary rooms in Grinden street, and mentally determined to put the doctor's advice into practice.

Arriving at number 29 I rang the bell, and after waiting five minutes—a time long enough in my consideration to justify lighting another cigarette—Mrs. Skigen, my landlady, appeared.

"Oh! Mr. Balliman," she began, "there's a letter for you upstairs. Black-edged—no bad news I hope, though we can't none of us be sure what mayn't happen some day."

Without waiting for any further discourse upon the frailty of the flesh, I mounted to my own sitting room.

The window of the room looked out on a busy thoroughfare, which did not improve the place for study.

On the table lay a letter with a deep black edge. I knew the writing; it was Mr. Balliman's.

Before I go any further I must briefly explain a little of our family affairs.

Some years previous to my coming to London, when I was a boy, my father—Mr. John Westford—had died, and soon after my mother had married again; this time to a Mr. Louis Balliman, a small country wine-merchant.

Whether I was prejudiced or not, I do not know, but I took a dislike to him the first time we met, and that dislike never left me. Very possibly it was not lessened by the fact that he would always have me called by his surname instead of my own.

Now I was away from home I took care to be known only as "Philip Westford," and not as "Philip Balliman," except of course to Mrs. Skigen.

There is one other point to which I must refer without further delay.

For some months I had been engaged to a young lady of the name of Mary Layman. She, poor girl, was worse off than I was from a pecuniary point of view—and I ask what other point of view have we in this world?

Mary Layman was then working as a governess in an aristocratic family, and practically she was—as what governess is not?—a slave to her employers, who were both cold and proud people of the world.

But to return to the black-edged envelope addressed to "Mr. Philip Balliman, 29 Grinden street, Bayswater, London, W."

My step father was a dull man and did not often write, so I thought there must be something of importance in the bulky letter.

It ran thus:—

"MY DEAR PHILIP,—You will I suppose be sorry to hear of the death of your uncle, my brother, on Monday last at Faldstenden Manor. I had hoped that he—being without children, would not forget us in his will. However, I was wrong for once in my expectations, and he leaves us nothing.

He might have helped me to give you a good start in life, but, as you see,