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A Surprise

By MARTIN BRADFORD

I am a college professor and add to my income by lectures on astronomy. One November day I started to walk from the town of A. where I had just given a lecture, to the town of B. where I was to give one that night. The weather was Indian summer and delightful. Some of the trees were late in shedding their leaves, and the woods were here and there still decorated with patches of scarlet, brown and deep green.

On emerging from a cut through which the wood ran I saw a man walking ahead of me. I don't mind a companion now and then in my walks, so I hastened my pace and caught up with him. I found him to be about thirty years old, dressed in shabby genteel clothes and of an intellectual cast of countenance. I addressed him, speaking of the beauty of the scenery, the autumnal glow and the invigorating atmosphere. He responded appreciatively.

After chatting awhile on general topics he asked me where I was going, and my purpose to give a lecture that night at B. on astronomy came out. He said that he had always had a desire to know something on that subject and regretted that his education had been neglected, for if it had not been he would certainly have devoted some time to the study of the stars. Would I tell him something about them?

It occurred to me that this would be a good opportunity to rehearse my lecture. My subject was to be "The Solar System," and, beginning with the central orb, I gave its dimensions and weight and then passed to the planets in their order of distance from it, ending with an account of the discovery of the farthest, Neptune, by means of the perturbations of Uranus, then supposed to be the most distant satellite of the sun. My companion seemed greatly interested in this marvelous power of a man to reach out into space and take cognizance of a world invisible to the unaided eye and greedily absorbed all I told him, though, being expected to lecture to a popular audience, I did not enter upon the marvelous development of knowledge of the constitutional ingredients of our system with the interpretation of the lines on the spectrum. In other words, I contented myself with stating the simplest truths known half a century ago and within the grasp of ordinary intellects.

Now and again in his comments on the information I gave him my companion astonished me by an observation indicating a natural aptitude for a subject of which he was ignorant. He wondered how the heat of the sun could pass through realms of space infinitely cold without being lost. He asked if we were sure that Neptune was the most distant planet of our system. These and other points he suggested convinced me that if he were uneducated he at least possessed an original or at least an inquiring mind.

While we were conversing I felt a giddiness to which I am subject and which is always followed by a disability for either hours or days. My companion kindly guided me to a farmhouse beside the road and ministered to my wants. I told him that I was very much troubled at the prospect of not being able to keep my engagement to lecture, and in order to help me out of the difficulty, since he was going to B., he offered to call on the manager of the course and explain my unfortunate position. I told him to say that past experience had taught me that I would not be able to lecture the same night even if I were able to get to B., but the lecture might be put off till the next evening or such time as I had recovered. He promised to bear my message, but put a damper on my anticipations by asking for a small loan. I gave him what he asked.

In the course of a few hours I felt so much better that I made a bargain with the farmer with whom I was lodged to hitch up a team and drive me into B. I would reach the town too late for the lecture, but that would have been postponed anyway.

On driving into B., which I reached about half an hour after the hour set for the lecture, I was surprised to see the hall in which it was to be given illuminated. I asked the farmer to pull up. I got out and entered the hall.

To say I was astonished conveys little idea of my condition. There on the rostrum was the man who had taken my message, speaking easily and gracefully on the solar system. In short, he was delivering my lecture, but so much more easily and gracefully than I could have done it, so enriched with entertaining facts and with so much poetic inspiration, that I sank into a back seat and listened spellbound.

No one present had ever seen me. The man had palmed himself off for me and was speaking for me far better than I could have spoken for myself.

When he came out I joined him. He felt very uneasy and drew me aside as quickly as possible to tell me that he had not been paid for the lecture and had no idea of perpetrating a swindle.

He turned out to be an Oxford graduate who had come to America and got run down. I took him with me to my college and succeeded in getting him a chair which for awhile he filled nobly. But there was a screw loose in him. One day he disappeared, and I never heard from him again.

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Gems In Verse

TWO VALENTINES.

LOVE, at your door young Cupid stands
And knocks for you to come.
The frost is in his feet and hands;
His lips with cold are numb.
Grant him admittance, sweetheart mine,
And by your cheering fire
His lips shall loosen as with wine
And speak forth my desire.

HE left me not an hour ago,
And when the rascal went
Barefooted out into the snow
I asked him whither bent.
Quoth he: "To her whose face is like
A garden full of flowers.
To her whose smiles like sunlight strike
Across the winter hours."

NO more he said, nor need of more
Had I to know. I knew
His path lay straight unto your door—
That face belongs to you.
"Godspeed," I cried, "and give her this
When you her face shall see!"
And on his lips I set a kiss,
A valentine from me.
—Frank Dempster Sherman.

LIFE MASK OF LINCOLN.

This bronze doth keep the very form and mold
Of our great martyr's face. Yes, this is he:
That brow all wisdom, all benignity;
That human, humorous mouth; those cheeks that hold
Like some harsh landscape all the summer's gold;
That spirit fit for sorrow as the sea
For storms to beat on; the lone agony
Those silent, patient lips too well foretold.
Yes, this is he who ruled a world of men.
As might some prophet of the elder day—
Brooding above the tempest and the fray
With deep eyed thought and more than mortal ken.
A power was his beyond the touch of art
Or armed strength—his pure and mighty gleam
Richard Watson Gilder.

THE ETERNAL VALENTINE.

SHALL woman vote? Shall woman do
The strenuous deeds of men
In commerce, art and politics,
In science and the pen?
These are the questions that arise,
And these, the woman claims.
Are those, if answered as she can,
Best represent her aims?
And so she seeks to answer them
In every walk of life,
Ignoring in superior style
The mission of the wife.
Then cometh Cupid, little god
Or little devil—whichever?
The woman wonders as she feels
What comes to poor and rich.
She struggles helplessly until
She finds that for a head,
As man has for the work he does,
She has a heart instead.
—William J. Lampton.

THE WIFE SPEAKS.

NOT all those women you have loved
and left,
O my beloved, can stir my jealousy;
Not the light loves which you forgot for me,
For my heart's fingers, made by life most deft,
Have mended all the rents their arrows cleft.
And from their old enchantment set you free.
But one is my despair, and only she—
The one who loved you, hopeless and bereft.
How can I give as much who hold your heart
As she, unloved, who gave with scorn of gain?
So do the angels. At her name I smart
And feel a sordid bargainer who gives
For fair exchange, I cannot heal the pain.
I am defeated by her while she lives.
—Helen Hay Whitney.

CANDOR.

"I KNOW what you are going to say," she said,
And she stood up, looking uncommonly tall.
"You are going to speak of the hectic fall
And say you're sorry the summer's dead,
And no other summer was like it, you know."
And can I imagine what made it so?
Now, aren't you honestly?" "Yes," I said.
"I know what you're going to say," she said,
You are going to ask if I forget
That day in June when the woods were wet
And you carried me—here she dropped her head—
"Over the creek. You are going to say
Do I remember that horrid day?
Now, aren't you honestly?" "Yes," I said.
"I know what you're going to say," she said,
"You are going to say that since that time
You have rather tended to run to rime,
And—her clear glance fell, and her cheek grew red—
"And have I noticed your tone was queer?
Why, everybody has seen it here!
Now, aren't you honestly?" "Yes," I said.
"I know what you're going to say," I said,
"You're going to say you've been much annoyed
And I'm short of tact—you will say 'de-void'—
And I'm clumsy and awkward and call me Ted,
And I bear abuse like a dear old lamb,
And you'll have me anyway just as I am.
Now, aren't you honestly?" "Ye-es," she said.
—Henry Cuyler Bunner.

THE ULTIMATE PEACE.

THERE is a peace which no man know
Save those whom suffering hath laid low—
The peace of pain.
A STRENGTH which only comes to those
Who've borne defeat—greater, God knows,
Than victory.
A HAPPINESS which comes at last.
After all happiness seems past—
The joy of peace.
—Author Unknown.

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