J. STORER CLOUSTON

THE ADVENTURES OF M. D'HARICOT

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Chapter I

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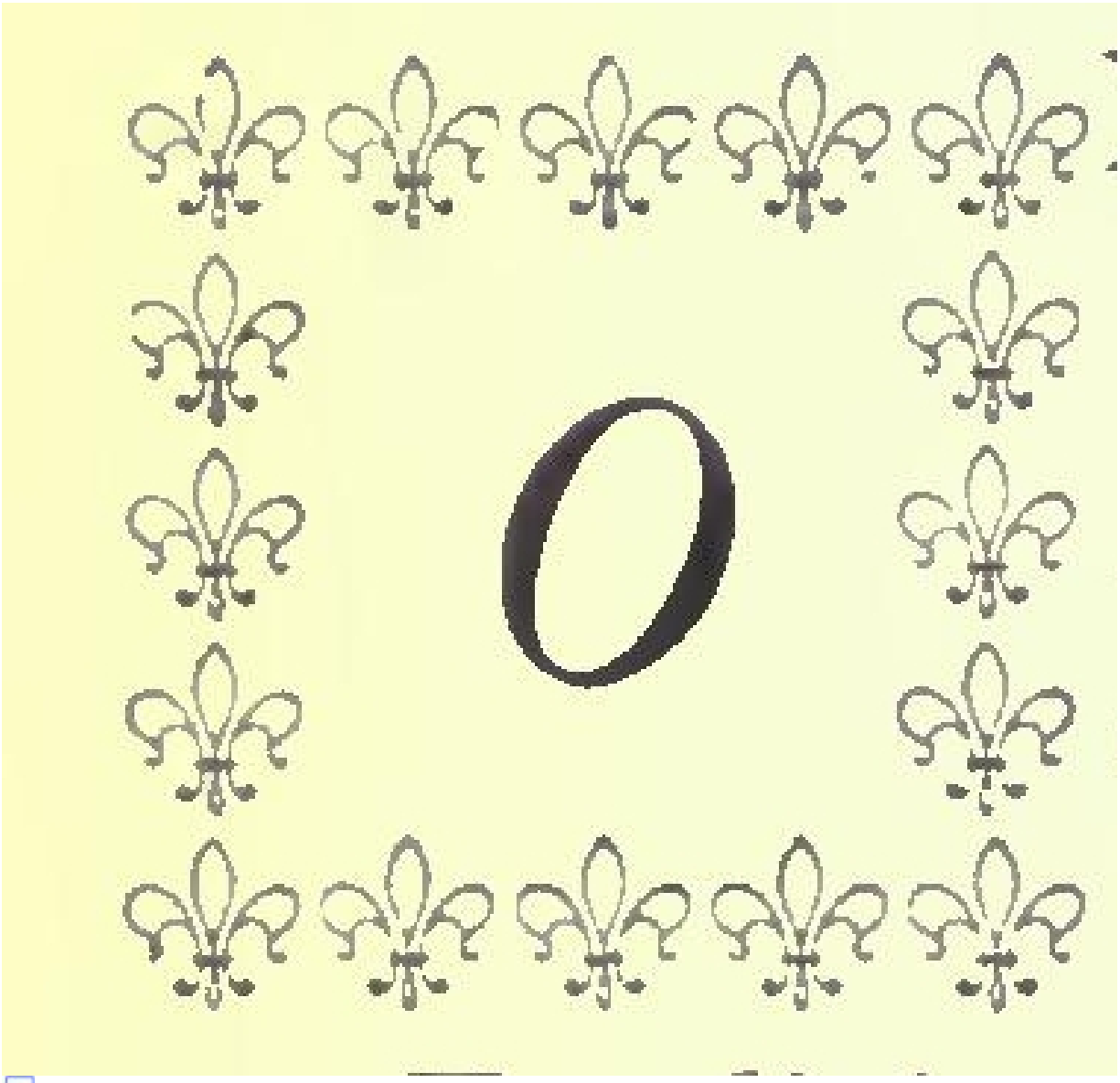
“Adieu, the land of my birth!
Henceforth strange faces!”
—Boulevarde



N my window-sill lies a faded rose, a rose plucked from an English lane. As I write, my eyes fall upon the gardens, the forests, around my ancestral chateau, but the faint scent is an English perfume. To the land of that rose, the land that sheltered, befriended, amused me, I dedicate these memoirs of my sojourn there.

They are a record of incidents and impressions that sometimes have little connection one with another beyond the possession of one character in common-myself. I am that individual who with unsteady feet will tread the tight-rope, dance among the eggs, leap through the paper tambourine—in a word, play clown and hero to the melody of the castanets. I hold out my hat that you may drop in a sou should you chance to be amused. To the serious I herewith bid adieu, for instruction, I fear, will be conspicuously absent, unless, indeed, my follies serve as a warning.

And now without further prologue I raise the curtain.

The first scene is a railway carriage swiftly travelling farther and farther from the sea that washes the dear shores of France. Look out of the window and behold the green fields, the heavy hedge-rows enclosing them so tightly, the trees, not in woods, but scattered everywhere as by a restless forester, the brick farms, the hop-fields, the moist, vaporous atmosphere of England.

Cast your eyes within and you will see, wrapped in an ulster of a British pattern concealing all that is not British in his appearance, an exile from his native land. Not to make a mystery of this individual, you will see, indeed, myself. And I —why did I travel thus enshrouded, why did my eye look

with melancholy upon this fertile landscape, why did I sit sad and sombre as I travelled through this strange land? There were many things fresh and novel to stir the mind of an adventurer. The name, the platform, the look of every station we sped past, was a little piece of England, curious in its way. Many memories of the people and the places I had known in fiction should surely have been aroused and lit my heart with some enthusiasm. What reason, then, for sadness?

I shall tell you, since the affair is now no secret, and as it hereafter touches my narrative. I was a Royalist, an adherent of the rightful king of France.


ALBERT
HEVERING
why did I
travel thus
enshrouded

I am still; I boast it openly. But at that time a demonstration had been premature, a government was alarmed, and I had fled.

Hereafter I shall tell you more of the secret and formidable society of which I was then a young, enthusiastic member—the Une, Deux, Trois League, or U. D. T's, as we styled ourselves in brief, the forlorn hope of royalty in France. At present it is sufficient to say that we had failed.

Baffled hopes, doubt as to the future, fear for the present, were my companions; and they are not gay, these friends.

I felt—I confess it now mirthfully enough—suspicious of the porter of the train, of the guard, of the people who eyed me.

I was young, and “political offender” had a terrible sound. The Bastile, Siberia, St. Helena; were not these places built, created, discovered, for the sole purpose of returning white-haired, enfeebled unfortunates to their native land, only to find their homes dissolved, their families deceased, themselves forgotten? The truth is that I was already in mourning for myself. The prospect of entering history by the martyr's postern had seemed noble in the heat of action and the excitement of intrigue. Now I only desired my liberty and as little public attention as possible. I commend this personal experience to all conspirators.

Such a frame of mind begets suspicions fast, and when I found myself in the same compartment with a young man who had already glanced at me in the Gare du Nord, and taken a longer look on board the steamboat, I felt, I admit, decidedly uncomfortable. From beneath the shade of my

travelling-cap I eyed him for the first half-hour with a deep distrust. Yet since he regarded me with that total lack of interest an Englishman bestows upon the unintroduced, and had, besides, an appearance of honesty written on his countenance, I began to feel somewhat ashamed of my suspicions, until at last I even came to consider him with interest as one type of that strange people among whom for a longer or a shorter time I was doomed to dwell, He differed, it is true, both from the busts of Shakespeare and the statues of Wellington, yet he was far from unpleasing. An athletic form, good features, a steady, blue eye, a complexion rosy as a girl's, fair hair brushed flat across his forehead, thirty years of truth-telling, cricket-playing, and the practice of three or four elementary ethical principles, not to mention an excellent tailor, all went to make this young man a refreshing and an encouraging spectacle.

“Bah!” I said to myself. “My friend may not be the poet-laureate or the philanthropic M. Carnegie, but at least he is no spy.”

By nature I am neither bashful nor immoderately timid, and it struck me that some talk with a native might be of service. My spirits, too, were rising fast. The train had not yet been stopped and searched; we were nearing the great London, where he who seeks concealment is as one pin in a trayful; the hour was early in the day, and the sun breaking out made the wet grass glisten.

Yes, it was hard to remain silent on that glorious September morning, even though dark thoughts sat upon the same cushion.

“Monsieur,” I said, “the sun is bright.”

With this remark he seemed to show his agreement by a slight smile and a murmured phrase. The smile was pleasant, and I felt encouraged to continue.

“Yet it does not always follow that the heart is gay. Indeed, monsieur, how often we see tears on a June morning, and hear laughter in March! It must have struck you often, this want of harmony in the world. Has it not?”

I had been so carried away my thoughts that I had failed to observe the lack of sympathy in my fellow-traveller's countenance.

“Possibly,” he remarked, dryly.

“Ah,” I said, with a smile, “you do not appreciate. You are English.”

“I am,” he replied. “And you are French, I suppose?”

At his words, suspicion woke in my heart. It was only as a Frenchman that I ran the risk of arrest.

“No; I am an American.”

This was my first attempt to disclaim my nationality, and each time I denied my country I, like St. Peter, suffered for it. Fair France, your lovers should be true! That is the lesson.

“Indeed,” was all he said; but I now began to enjoy my first experience of that disconcerting phenomenon, the English stare. Later on I discovered that this generally means nothing, and is, in fact, merely an inherited relic of

the days when each Englishman carried his “knuckle-duster” (a weapon used in boxing), and struck the instant his neighbor's attention was diverted. It is thanks to this peculiarity that they now find themselves in possession of so large a portion of the globe, but the surviving stare is not a reassuring spectacle.

Yet I must not let him see that I was in the slightest inconvenienced by his attitude. The antidote to suspicion is candor. I was candid.

“Yes,” I said. “I am told that I do not resemble an American, but my name, at least, is good Anglo-Saxon.”

And I handed him a card prepared for such an emergency. On it I had written, “Nelson Bunyan, Esq.” If that sounded French, then I had studied philology in vain.

“I am a traveller in search of curios,” I added. “And you?”

“I am not,” he replied, with a trace of a smile and a humorous look in his blue eyes.

He was quite friendly, perfectly polite, but that was all the information about himself I could extract—“I am not,” followed by a commonplace concerning the weather. A singular type! Repressed, self-restrained, reticent, good-humoredly condescending—in a word, British.

We talked of various matters, and I did my best to pick him, like his native winkle, from the shell. Of my success here is a sample. We had (or I had) been talking of the things that were best worth a young man's study.

“And there is love,” I said. “What a field for inquiry, what variety of aspects, what practical lessons to be learned!”

He smiled at my ardor.

“Have you ever been in love?” I asked.

“Possibly,” he replied, carelessly.

“But devotedly, hopelessly, as a man who would sacrifice heaven for his mistress?”

“Haven't blown my brains out yet,” he answered.

“Ah, you have been successful; you have invariably brought your little affairs to a fortunate issue?”

“I don't know that I should call myself a great ladies' man.”

“Possibly you are engaged?” I suggested, remembering that I had heard that this operation has a singularly sedative effect upon the English.

“No,” he said, with an air of ending the discussion, “I am not.”

Again this “I am not,” followed by a compression of the lips and a cold glance into vacancy.

“Ah, he is a dolt; a lump of lead!” I said to myself, and I sighed to think of the people I was leaving, the people of spirit, the people of wit. Little did I think how my opinion of my fellow-traveller would one day alter, how my heart would expand.

But now I had something else to catch my attention. I looked out of the window, and, behold, there was nothing to be seen but houses. Below the level of the railway line was spread a sea of dingy brick dwellings, all, save here and there a church-tower, of one uniform height and of one uniform ugliness. Against the houses nearest to the railway were plastered or propped, by way of decoration, vast colored testimonials to the soaps and meat extracts of the country. In lines through this prosaic landscape rose

telegraph posts and signals, and trains bustled in every direction.

“Pardon me,” I said to my companion, “but I am new to this country. What city is this?”

“London,” said he.

London, the far-famed! So this was London. Much need to “paint it red,” as the English say of a frolic.

“Is it all like this?” I asked.

“Not quite,” he replied, in his good-humored tone.

“Thank God!” I exclaimed, devoutly. “I do not like to speak disrespectfully of any British institution, but this—my faith!”

We crossed the Thames, gray and gleaming in the sunshine, and now I am at Charing Cross. Just as the train was slowing down I turned to my fellow-traveller.

“Have you been vaccinated?” I asked.

“I have,” said he, in surprise.

You see even reticence has its limits.

“I thank you for the confidence,” I replied, gravely.

As he stood up to take his umbrella from the rack he handed me back my card.

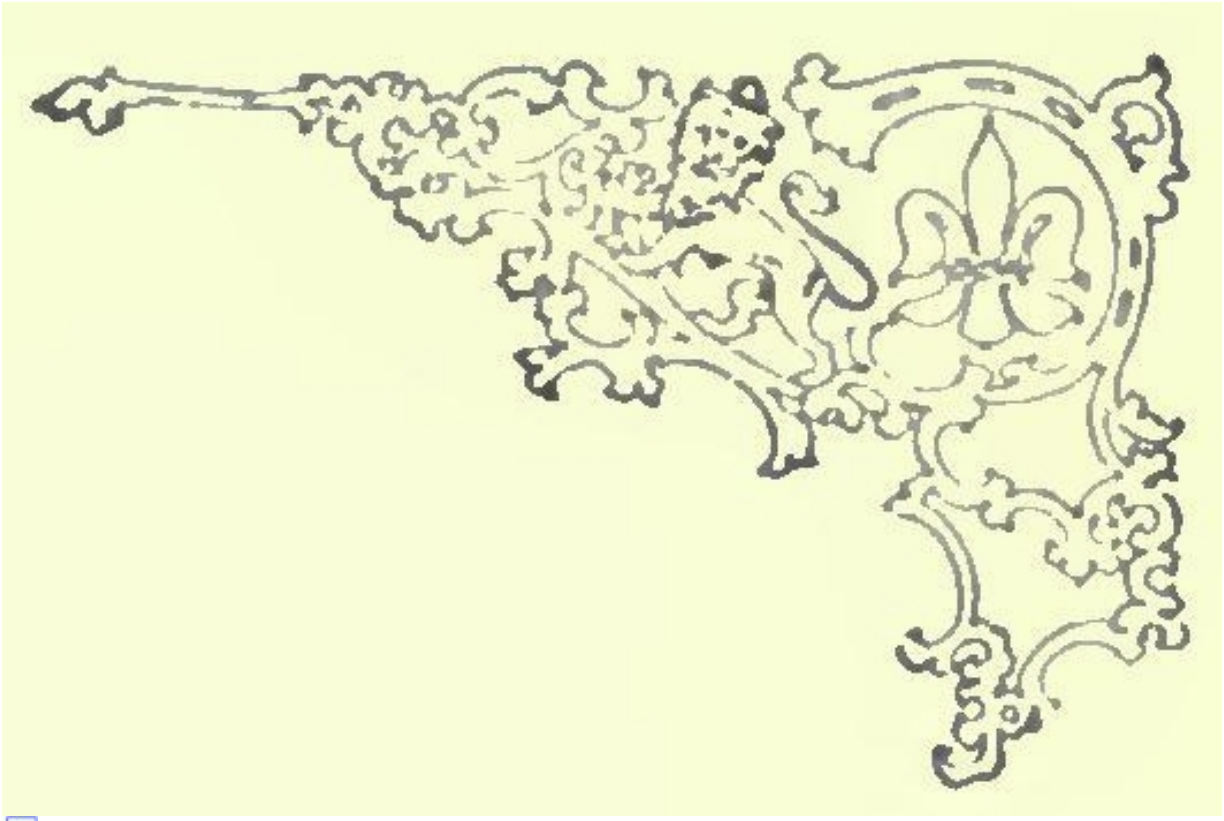
“I say,” he abruptly remarked, in a tone, I thought, of mingled severity and innuendo, “I should have this legend altered, if I were you. Good-morning.”

And with that he was gone, and my doubts had returned. He suspected something! Well, there was nothing to be done but maintain a stout heart and trust to fortune. And it takes much to drive gayety from my spirits for long. I was a fugitive, a stranger, a foreigner, but I hummed a tune cheerfully as I waited my turn for the ordeal of the custom-

house. And here came one good omen. My appearance was so deceptively respectable, and my air so easy, that not a question was asked me. One brief glance at my dress-shirts and I was free to drive into the streets and lose myself in the life of London.

Lose myself, do I say? Yes, indeed, and more than myself, too. My friends, my interests, my language, my home; all these were lost as utterly as though I had dropped them overboard In the Channel. I had not time to obtain even one single introduction before I left, or further counsel than I remembered from reading English books. And I assure you it is not so easy to benefit by the experiences of Mr. Pickwick and Miss Sharp as it may seem. Stories may be true to life, but, alas! life is not so true to stories.

Fortunately, I could talk and read English well—even, I may say, fluently; also I had the spirit of my race; and finally —and, perhaps, most fortunately—I was not too old to learn.



Chapter II

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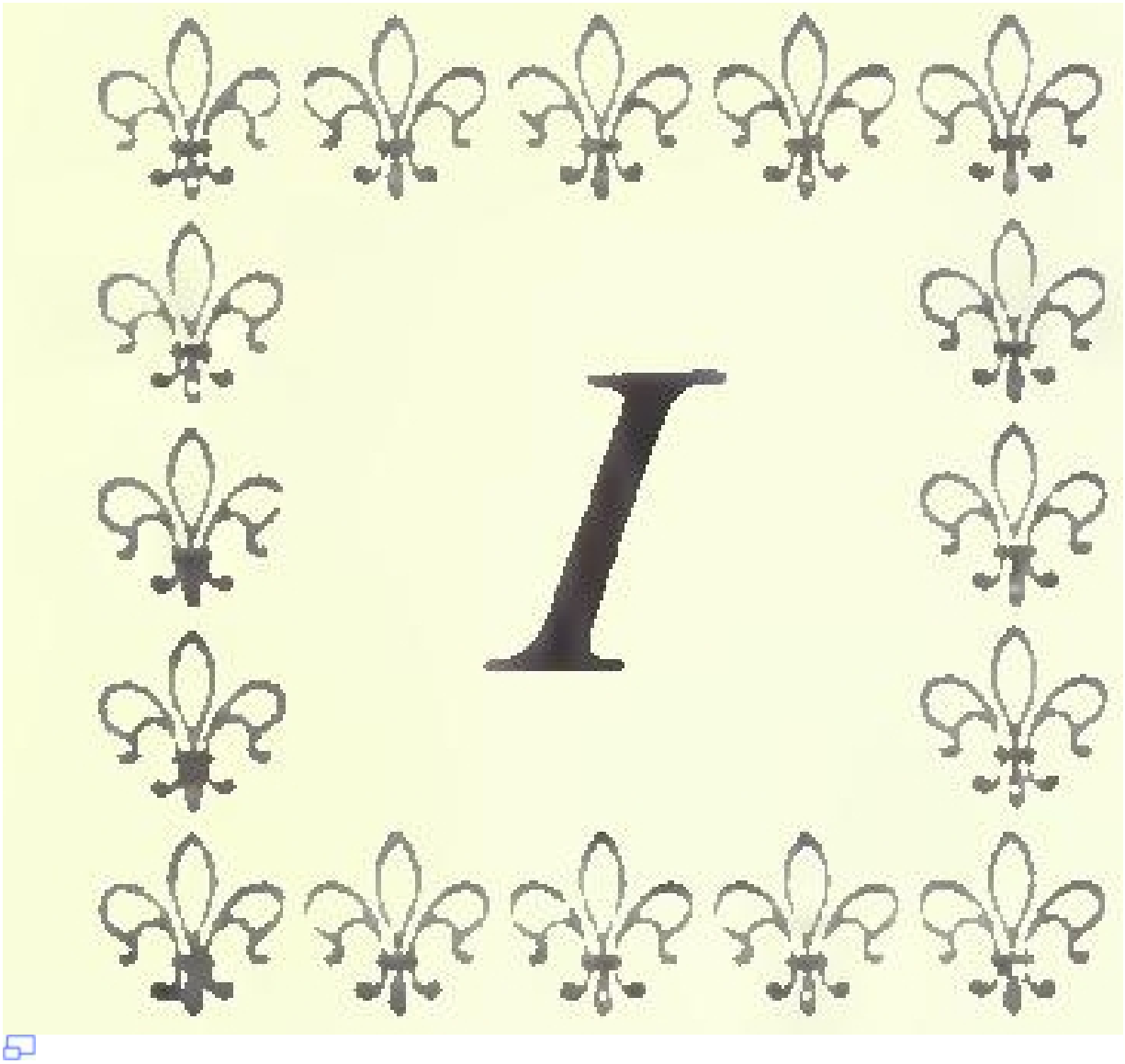
"*In that city, sire, even the manner of breathing was different.*"

—PIZARRO.



WAS in London, the vastest collection of people and of houses this world has ever seen; the ganglion, the museum, the axle of the English race; the cradle of much of their genius and most of their fogs; the home of Dr. Johnson, the bishops of Canterbury, the immortal Falstaff, the effigied Fawkes; also the headquarters of all the profitable virtues, all the principles of business. With an abandon and receptivity which I am pleased to think the Creator has reserved as a consolation for the non-English, I had hardly been half an hour in the city before I had become infected with something of its spirit.

“Goddam! What ho!” I said to myself, in the English idiom. “For months, for years, forever, perhaps, I am to live among this incomprehensible people. Well, I shall strive to learn something, and, by Great Scotland! to enjoy something.” So I turned up my trousers and sallied out of my hotel.

Ah, this was life, indeed, I had come into; not more so than Paris, but differently so. Stolidly, good-naturedly, and rapidly the citizens struggle along through the crowds on the pavement. They seem like helpless straws revolving in a whirlpool. Yet does one of them wish to cross the street? Instantly a constable raises a finger, the traffic of London is stopped, and Mr. Benjamin Bull, youngest and least important son of John, passes uninjured to the farther side.

“What is this street?” I ask one of these officers, as he stands in the midst of a crossing, signalling which cab or dray shall pass him.

“Strand,” says he, stopping five omnibuses to give me this information.

“Where does it lead me?”

“Which way do you wish to proceed?” he inquires, politely, still detaining the omnibuses.

“East,” I reply, at a venture.

“First to the right, second to the left, third to the right again, and take the blue bus as far as the Elephant and Angel,” he answers, without any hesitation.

“A thousand thanks,” I gasp. “I think, on the whole, I should be safer to go westward.”

He waves his hand, the omnibuses (which by this time have accumulated to the number of fourteen) proceed upon their journey, and I, had I the key to the cipher, should doubtless be in possession of valuable information. Such is one instance of the way in which the Londoner's substitute for Providence does its business.

I shall not attempt to give at this point an exhaustive description of London. The mandates of fortune sent me at different times to enjoy amusing and embarrassing experiences in various quarters of the city, and these I shall touch upon in their places. It is sufficient to observe at present that London is a name for many cities.

A great town, like a great man, is made up of various characters strung together. Just as the soldier becomes at night the lover and next morning the philosopher, so a city is on the east a factory, on the west a palace, on the north a lodging-house. So it is with Paris, with Berlin, with all. But London is so large, so devoid of system in its creation and in its improvements, so variously populated, that it probably exceeds any in its variety.

No emperor or council of city fathers mapped the streets or regulated the houses. What edifice each man wanted that he built, guided only by the length of his purse and the depth of his barbarism; while the streets on which this arose is either the same roadway as once served the Romans, or else the speculative builder's idea of best advancing the interests of his property. Then some day comes a great company who wish to occupy a hundred metres of frontage and direct attention to their business. So many houses are pulled down and replaced by an erection twice the height of anything else, and designed, as far as possible, to imitate the cries and costume of a bookmaker. And all this time there are surviving, in nooks and corners, picturesque and venerable buildings of a by-gone age, and also, of late, are arising on all sides worthy and dignified new piles.

So that the history of each house and each street, the mental condition of their architects and the financial condition of their occupants, are written upon them plainly with a smoky finger. For you see all this through an atmosphere whose millions of molecules of carbon and of aqueous vapor darken the bricks and the stones, and hang like a veil of fine gauze before them. London is huge, but the eternal mistiness makes it seem huger still, for however high a building you climb, you can see nothing but houses and yet more houses, melting at what looks a vast distance into the blue-and-yellow haze. Really, there may be green woods and the fair slopes of a country-side within a few miles, but since you cannot see them your heart sinks, and you believe that such good things must be many leagues below the brick horizon. More than once upon a Sunday

morning, when the air was clear, I have been startled to see from the Strand itself a glimpse of the Surrey hills quite near and very beautiful, and I have said, “Thank God for this!”

It was in the morning that I arrived in London, and my first day I spent in losing my way through the labyrinth of streets, which are set never at a right angle to one another, and are of such different lengths that I could scarcely persuade myself it had not all been specially arranged to mislead me.

About one o'clock I entered a restaurant and ordered a genuine English steak—the porter-house, it was called. In

quality, I admit this segment of an ox was admirable; but as for its quantity—my faith! I ate it till half-past two and scarcely had made an impression then. Half stupefied with this orgy, and the British beer I had taken to assist me in the protracted effort, I returned to my hotel, and there began the journal on which these memoirs are founded. As showing my sensations at the time, they are now of curious interest to me. I shall give the extract I wrote then:

"*Amusing, absorbing, entertaining as a Chinese puzzle where all the pieces are alive; all these things is the city of London. Why, then, has it already begun to pall upon me? Ah, it is the loneliness of a crowd! In Paris I can walk by the hour and never see a face I know, and yet not feel this sense of desolation. Friends need not be before the eye, but they must be at hand when you wish to call them. For myself, I call them pretty frequently, yet often can remain for a time content to merely know that they are somewhere not too far away. But here—I may turn north, south, east, or west, and walk as far as I like in any direction, and not one should I find!*

"*Shall I ever make a friend among this old, phlegmatic, business-like people? Some day perhaps, an acquaintance may be struck with some such reticent and frigid monster as my fair-haired companion of the journey. Would such a one console or cheer or share a single sentiment? Impossible! Mon Dieu! I shall leave this town in three days; I swear it. And where then? The devil knows!*"

At this point the writing of these notes was unexpectedly interrupted, only to be resumed, as it chanced, after some adventurous days.

A waiter entered, bearing a letter for me. I sprang up and seized it eagerly. It was addressed to Mr. Nelson Bunyan, Esq., and marked “Immediate and confidential.” These words were written in English and execrably misspelled.

It could come from but one source, for who else knew my *nom de plume*, who else would write “Immediate and confidential,” and, I grieve to say it, who else would take their precautions in such a way as instantly to raise suspicions? Had the secretary of the “Une, Deux, Trois” no English dictionary, that he need make the very waiter stare at this very extraordinary address? I did my best to pass it off lightly.

“From a lady,” I said to the man. “One not very well educated, perhaps; but is education all we seek in women?”

“No, sir,” said he, replying to my glance with insufferable familiarity, “not all by no means.”

Alas that the fugitive cannot afford to take offence!

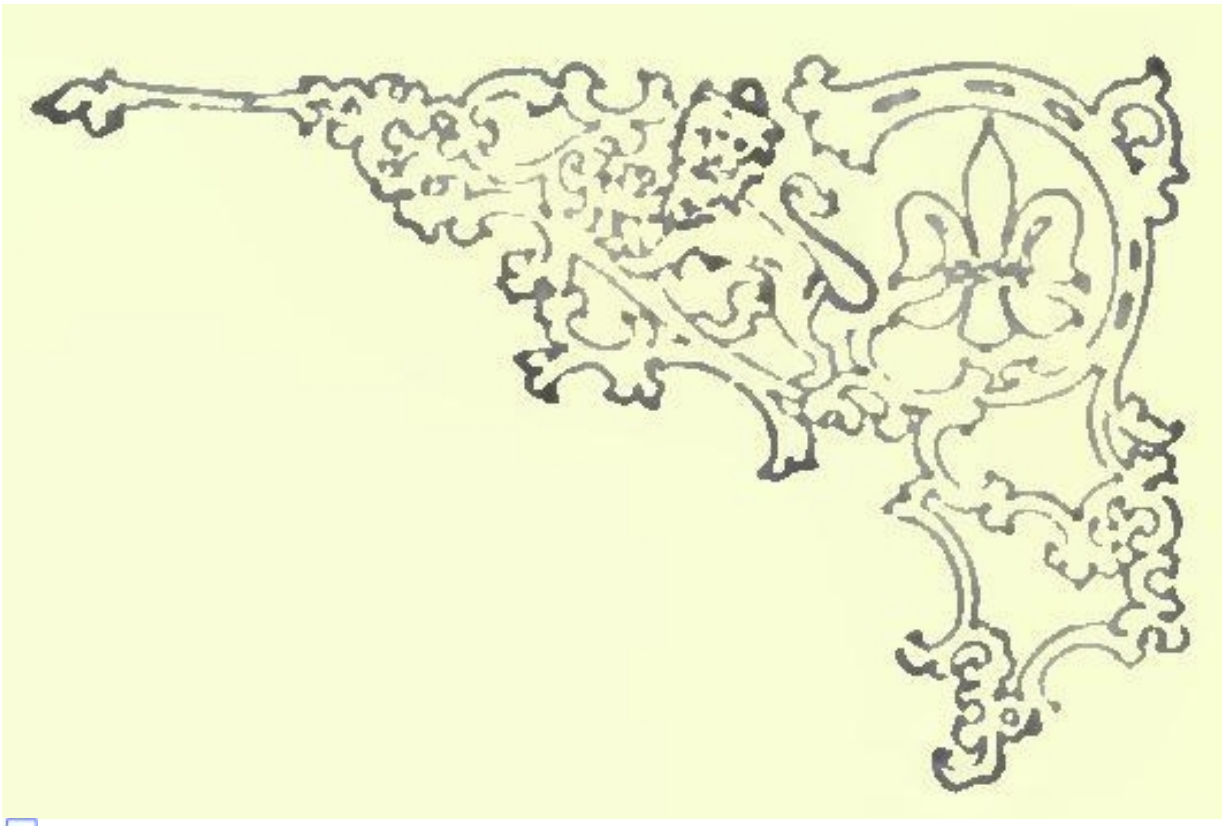
I opened the letter, and, as I expected, it was headed by the letters U. D. T:

“*Go at once to the house of Mr. Frederick Hankey, No. 114 or 115 George Road, Streatham. Knock thrice on the third window, and when he comes say distinctly 'For the King.' He will give directions for your safety.*”

This missive was only signed F. II, but, of course, I knew the writer—our most indefatigable, our most enthusiastic, the secretary himself.

Well, here was something to be done; a friend, perhaps, to be made; a spice of interest suddenly thrown into this city of strangers. After my fashion, my spirits rose as quickly as they had fallen. I whistled an air, and began to think this

somewhat dreary hotel not a bad place, after all. I should only wait till darkness fell and then set out to interview Mr. Frederick Hankey.



Chapter III

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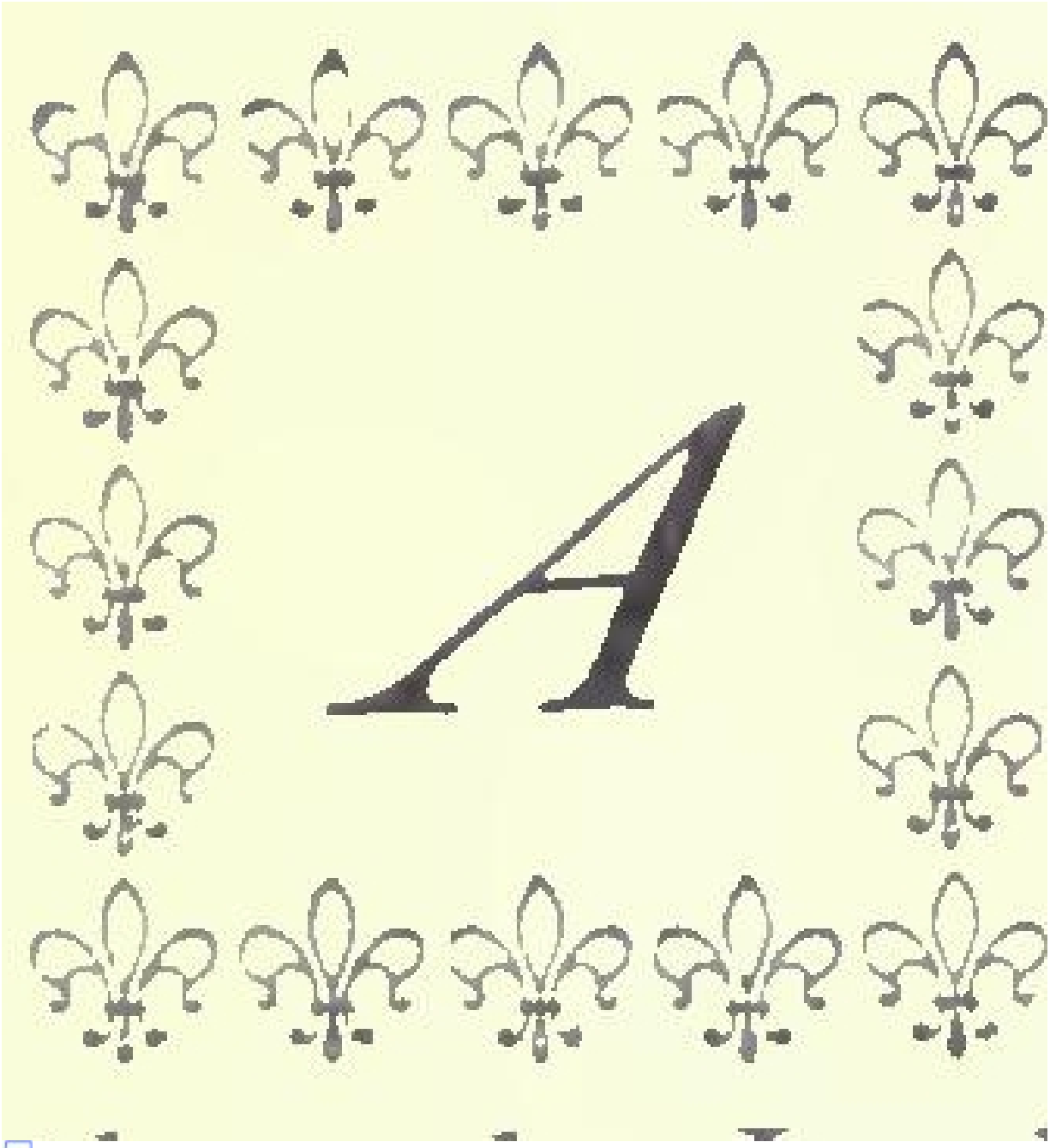
“*What door will fit this key?*”
—Castillo Soprani.



S I ate my solitary dinner before starting upon my expedition to Mr. Hankey's house, I began to think less enthusiastically of the adventure. Here was I; comfortable in my hotel, though, I admit, rather lonely; safe, so far, and apparently suspected by none to be other than the blameless Bunyan. Besides, now that I could find a friend for

the seeking, my loneliness suddenly diminished. Also I was buoyed by the thought that I was a real adventurer, a romantic exile, as much so, in fact, as Prince Charles of Scotland or my own beloved king. Now I was to knock upon the window of a house that might be either number 114 or 115, and give myself blindfold to strangers.

Yet on second thoughts I reflected that I knew nothing of English laws or English ways. Was I not in “perfidious Albion,” and might I not be handed over to the French government in defiance of all treaties, in order to promote the insidious policy of Chamberlain? Yes, I should go, after all, and I drank to the success of my adventure in a bottle of wine that sent me forth to the station in as gay a spirit as any gallant could wish.

I had made cautious inquiries, asking of different servants at the hotel, and I had little difficulty in making my way by train as far as the suburb in which Mr. Hankey lived. There I encountered the first disquieting circumstance. Inquiring of a policeman, I found there was no such place as George Road, but a St. George's Road was well known to him. If F. II had been so inaccurate in one statement, might he not be equally so in another?

I may mention here that the name of this road is my own invention. The mistake was a similar one to that I have narrated. In all cases I have altered the names of my friends

and their houses, as these events happened so recently that annoyance might be caused, for the English are a reticent nation, and shrink from publicity as M. Zola did from oblivion.

Up an immensely long and very dark road I went, studying the numbers of the houses on either side, and here at once a fresh difficulty presented itself. In an English suburb it is the custom to conceal the number provided by the municipal authorities, and decorate the gates instead with a fanciful or high-sounding title. Thus I passed “Blenheim Lodge,” “Strathcory,” “Rhododendron Grove,” and many other such residences, but only here and there could I find a number to guide me. By counting from 84, I came at last upon two houses standing with their gates close together that must either be 114 and 115, or 115 and 116. I could not be sure which, nor in either case did I know whether the one or the other sheltered the conspiring Hankey. The gate on the left was labelled “Chickawungaree Villa,” that on the right “Mount Olympus House.” In the house I could see through the trees that all was darkness, and the gate was so shabby as to suggest that no one lived there. In the villa, on the contrary, I saw two or three lighted windows. I determined to try the villa.

The drive wound so as to encircle what appeared in the darkness to be a tennis-court and an arbor, and finally emerged through a clump of trees before a considerable mansion. And here I was confronted by another difficulty. My directions said, knock upon the third window. But there were three on either side of the front door, and then how did I know that Hankey might not prefer me to knock upon his