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A FLASH IN THE PAN.

It is not everybody who knows what a minor canon is, or what his duties are, or for the sake of the uninitiated, let me say at once that his chief duty is to take his turn in reading, that is, in mumbling and singing the daily services in a sufficient fashion. Such is my duty. I am a minor canon of the cathedral church of Marchbury. I occupy a house within the cathedral close, and thus enjoy the privilege of passing my days "far from the madding crowd." The life is uneventful enough. Little happens from year's end to year's end to vary the monotony of existence. In fact nothing more exciting than a garden party at the bishop's or a dinner at the deanery or tea at the archdeacon's. Even these superior "functions" cause but a slight and transient ruffle upon the even flow of life's stream.

For many years, as a minor canon, I have breathed this serene and placid atmosphere of the close. Often have I wondered if I should live all my life there, or whether some day or other, something would startle me, like a bolt from the blue, and I should find myself plunged, on a sudden, into the midst of the most exciting events. For many years, year after year and month after month, I have regularly taken my "turn" in singing the services, and nothing particularly remarkable has ever happened to me—until yesterday; and yesterday something did happen.

It was Monday, and in the afternoon, as I was walking along the High street of Marchbury, I was met by a Gladstonian looking person whom I had observed at the services in the cathedral on the previous day. Now it chanced on that fine day that I was singing the service. Properly speaking, it was not my turn, but as my brother minor canons were either away from Marchbury or ill in bed, I was the only one left to perform the necessary duty. The distinguished looking person was a tall, big man, with a round, fat face and small features. His eyes, his hair and moustache (his face was bare but for a small moustache) were quite black, and he had a very pleasant and genial expression. He wore a tall hat, set rather jauntily on his head, and he was dressed in black, with a long frock coat buttoned across the chest and fitting him close to the body.

As he came, with a half saunter, half swagger, along the street I knew him again at once by his appearance, and as he came nearer I saw from his manner that he was listening, to stop and speak to me? for he slightly raised his hat, and in a soft, melodious voice, with a colonial "twang," which was far from being disagreeable and which indeed to my ear gave a certain additional interest to his remarks, he addressed me with "Good day, sir!"

"Good day," I answered, with just a little reserve in my tone.

"I hope, sir," he began, "you will excuse my stopping you in the street, but I wish to tell you how very much I enjoyed the music at your cathedral yesterday. I am an Australian, sir, and we have no such music in my country."

"I suppose not," I said.

"No, sir," he went on, "nothing nearly so fine. I am very fond of music, and as my business brought me in this direction I thought I would stop at your city and take the opportunity of paying a visit to your grand cathedral. And I am delighted I came, so pleased, indeed, that I should like to leave some memorial of my visit behind me. I should like, sir, to do something for your choir."

"I am sure it is very kind of you," I replied.

"Yes, I should certainly be glad if you could suggest to me something I might do in this way. As regards money, I may say that I have plenty of it. I am the owner of a most valuable property. My business relations extend throughout the world, and if I am so fortunate in the projects of the future as I have been in the past I shall probably one day achieve the proud position of being the richest man in the world."

I did not like to undertake myself the responsibility of advising or suggesting, so I simply said:

"I cannot venture in any offhand what would be the most acceptable way of showing your great kindness and generosity, but I should certainly recommend you to put yourself in communication with the dean."

"Thank you, sir," said my Australian friend, "I will do so. And, now, sir," he continued, "let me say how much I admire your rules. It is, without exception, the very finest and clearest rules I have ever heard."

"Really," I answered, quite overcome with such unqualified praise, "really it is very good of you to say so."

"Ah! but I feel it, my dear sir. I have been round the world, from Sydney to Frisco, across the continent of America (the relict it American) to New York city, then on to England, and tomorrow I shall leave your city to continue my travels. But in all my experience I have never heard so grand a voice as your own." This and a great deal more he said in the same strain, which modesty forbids me to reproduce here.

Now, I am not without some knowledge of the world outside the Close of Marchbury cathedral, and I would not listen to such a "flattering tale" without having my suspicions aroused. Who and what is this man? thought I. I looked at him narrowly. At first the thought flashed across me that he might be a "swell mobsman."

But no, his face was too good for that, besides, we are with the Australians, their personality so marked and so easily recognizable, could be a swindler; he could not escape detection a single hour. I dismissed the suspicious thought. Perhaps he is rich, as he says. We do hear of munificent donations by benevolent millionaires now and then. What if this Australian, attracted by the glories of the old cathedral, should appear, as a deus ex machina, to endow the choir, or to found a musical professorship in connection with the choir, appointing me the first occupant of the professorial chair.

These thoughts flashed across my mind in the momentary pause of his fluent tongue.

"As for yourself, sir," he began again, "I have something to propose which I trust may not prove unwelcome. But the public street is hardly a suitable place to discuss my proposal. May I call upon you this evening at your house in the Close? I know where it is, for I happened to see you so like a gentleman yesterday after the morning service."

"I shall be very pleased to see you," I replied, "We are going out to dinner this evening, but I shall be at home and disengaged till about 7."

"Thank you very much indeed. Then I shall do myself the pleasure of calling upon you about 8 o'clock. Till then, farewell." A graceful wave of the hand and my newfound friend had disappeared round the corner of the street.

Now, as soon, I thought, something is going to happen to my uneventful life—something to break the monotony of its existence. Coming events cast their shadows before. The shadow had been cast, and a very solid and substantial shadow, too—over six feet high, and proportionately broad and thick.

I had succeeded. It was evident, in attracting the notice of some great American millionaire. Of course he must have inquired my name—he could get that from any of the cathedral vergers, and, as he said, he had observed whereabouts I sat in Close I lived. But I was not to see him again till 8 o'clock, and these seven times good hours to wait. I recalled all that happened on the Sunday. It seemed as if some special providence was acting in my favor. It was due to the illness and absence of my colleagues that I had had the good fortune to officiate. Every turn was providential, and I am inclined to say that I was, in one way, making the train of the fortunate maidens of Lucknow, inasmuch as deriving a great satisfaction from the misfortunes of my friends. Still it was remarkable that it should happen thus. And it was undoubtedly true that on I had performed in my humble way, I was in excellent voice and then the vanity, which is natural to all men, asserted itself in me, and I found myself only too ready to believe that my voice was the "finest and clearest" ever heard. Somebody's must be the finest, and why not mine?

My mysterious friend, whatever else he might be, was most certainly a man of good taste and judgment. That could not be denied. And then, as he had said, he was rich. "Plenty of money" he said he had. What he meant by it was not for, I wondered. I spent the rest of the afternoon in making the wildest surmises. I was castle building in Spain at a furious rate. At one time I imagined that this faithful son of the church was to appoint me to—was going to build and endow a grand cathedral in Australia, on condition that I should be appointed dean at a yearly stipend of—say £10,000. At another time I imagined this making me to become his private chaplain at about the same remuneration.

Again I thought that he might offer to educate my three boys at his own expense, provided that special attention should be given to the development of their natural musical genius. Or, perhaps, I said to myself, he will beg me to accept a sum of money—I never thought of it as less than a thousand pounds—as a slight recognition of, and tribute to, my remarkable sensibility. I confess I always came back to this last conjecture as the most probable, the others seemed rather wild in their fantasticness. I felt there were many practical objections in the way of realizing them, but it seemed so easy and natural that he should make me a present from his boundless wealth that my imagination dwelt upon it with increasing satisfaction.

I took a long, lonely walk into the country to correct these ridiculous fancies and to steady my mind, and when I reached home and had refreshed myself with a quiet cup of afternoon tea, I felt I was mentally and physically prepared for my interview with the opulent stranger.

Punctually as the cathedral clock struck six there was a ring at the visitor's bell in a moment or two my unknown friend was shown into the drawing room, which he entered with the easy air of a man of the world. I noticed he was carrying a small black bag.

"How do you do again, Mr. Dale?" he said as though we were old acquaintances. "You see I have come sharp to my time."

"Yes," I answered, "and I am pleased to see you; do sit down." He sank into my best armchair, and placed his bag on the floor beside him.

"Since we met in the afternoon," he said, "I have written a letter to your dean expressing the great pleasure I felt in listening to your choir, and at the same time I enclosed a five-pound note, which I begged him to divide among the choir boys and men, from Alexander Poulter, Esq., of Poulter's Pills. You have of course heard of the world renowned Poulter's Pills. I am Poulter."

Poulter of Poulter's Pills! My heart sank within me! A five-pound note! My airy castles were tottering!

"I also sent him a couple of hundred of my pamphlets, which I said I trusted he would be so kind as to distribute in the Close."

"I was aghast!

"And now, with regard to the special object of my call, Mr. Dale. If you will allow me to say so, you are not making the most of that grand voice of yours; you are hidden under an ecclesiastical bushel here—lost to the world. You are wasting your vocal strength and sweetness on the desert air, so to speak. Why—if I may hazard a guess—I don't suppose you make five hundred a year here, at the outside?"

I could say nothing.

"Well now, I can put you into the way of making at least three or four times as much as that. Listen! I am a patent man.

Poulter of Poulter's Pills. I have a proposal to make to you, the scheme is bound to succeed, but I want your help. Accept my proposal and your fortune's made. Did you ever hear of Moody and Sankey?" he asked abruptly.

It seemed an eccentric query, and in the very disjointedness we reached one of Alice in Wonderland. I murmured that I had had that advantage.

"So much the better," he said with evident satisfaction, and he lifted his bag on to his knees.

I was beginning to get rather nervous. What if this man believe me were an escaped lunatic! What if he carried some deadly weapon in this bag! At any rate I would be careful not to contradict him, lest he agree with him in everything. I had always understood that this was the safest thing for any one to do who might find himself face to face with a raving lunatic.

"So much the better," he repeated, "it will save me some risk of not making myself understood. You are now in a position to grasp my scheme. Moody and Sankey were, I believe, eminently successful in their line; and it seems to me not unreasonable to expect that a similar success will result from applying the same method to my business. We must advertise. Famous as Poulter's Pills are, their fame depends upon keeping up a system of enterprising advertisement. We have tried, for a time, as an experiment, the effect of not advertising, relying upon a well established reputation, and we found out the mistake. Advertise we must."

The man is an idiot, thought I. He is now fairly carried away with his particular mania. Well it isn't long! Stick to him.

"Shortly, my dear sir," he went on, "is the rule of the day, and there must be novelty in advertising as in everything else to catch the public interest. So I intend to go on a tour lecturing on the merits of Poulter's pills in all the principal halls of all the principal towns all over the world. But I have been delayed in carrying out my idea till I could associate myself with a gentleman such as yourself. Will you join me? I should be the Moody of the tour, you would be its Sankey. I would speak my patter, and you would intersperse my oratory with melodious ballads bearing upon the virtues of Poulter's pills. The ballads are all ready!"

So saying he opened that bag and drew forth from its recesses nothing more alarming than a thick roll of manuscript music.

"The words are my own," he said, with a little touch of pride, "and as for the music, I thought it better to make use of popular melodies, so as to enable an audience to join in the chorus. See, here is one of the ballads: 'Darling, I am better now.' It describes the woes of a fond lover, or rather his physical miseries, until he went through a course of Poulter. Here's another: 'I'm ninety-five! I'm ninety-five!' You catch the drift of that, of course—a healthy old age secured by taking Poulter's pills. Ah! what's this? 'Little sister's got measles.' I fancy that idea of that is to beg the family never to be without Poulter's pills. Here again: 'Turn you'll remember me?' I'm afraid that title is not original, my mind, the song is, I know, an old one—but there are many more, and I won't detain you with them now."

He sat, perhaps, I was getting hopeless. Thank heaven, however, he was not second lunatic! I was safe!

"Well, now, my dear Mr. Dale, you see what my plan is. What do you say? Don't reject in haste a proposal so generous, so extraordinary, so at first sight ridiculous and extravagant which succeeds so admirably. Don't say no, my friend, for if there's money in it, eh? I don't ask you to accept an immediate answer, I don't ask you to give security for any sum of money, if you prefer not, what I want you to do is simply to help me with your relations rates in the way I have explained. I can offer you thirty pounds a week to begin with, and then, if my project succeeds, as I am sure it will, you shall have forty pounds. We shall travel all over the country with a tent in our rear, with a brass band playing on the top, while you and I will be in front on the box. Imagine what a stir we shall make everywhere! Picture the huge crowds who will flock to our lectures! Come, what do you say?"

I could say nothing. Disappointment and disgust, rage and resentment, distracted my mind. This was the end of all my brilliant hopes! I saw myself in imagination being driven about the streets of provincial towns in the day, and sitting behind a harmonium singing abominable ballads to its lugubrious accompaniment at night. The thought was too much for me. By a great effort I managed to stammer a few words.

"Mr. Poulter," said I, "I took you this afternoon for a disinterested and philanthropic millionaire; you take me for—for—something different from what I am. We have both made mistakes. In a word, it is impossible for me to accept your offer!"

"Is that final?" asked Poulter.

"Certainly," said I.

Poulter gathered his manuscripts together and replaced them in the bag, and got up to leave the room.

"Good evening, Mr. Dale," he said mournfully, as I opened the door of the room. "Good evening"—he kept on talking till he was fairly out of the house, "mark my words, 'you'll be sorry—very sorry—one day. And you did not fall in with my scheme. Offers like mine don't come every day, and you will one day regret having refused it."

With these words he left the house.

I had little appetite for my dinner that evening.

Firing at Long Range.

John L. Wilson, the youthful and enthusiastic member from Washington, let his arrow crossed swords with General Spinola. The New York man was speaking on some pension bill and took occasion to allude to a member of the Republican side as "the gentleman with the Shakespeare head who took no part in the war." He pointed to Wilson's direction, although he was not alluding to him. Wilson fired at once and objected to being singled out for an attack when there was no call for it.

"I object to the personal remarks of the gentleman from New York," he screamed.

"I was not referring to the gentleman from Washington," said General Spinola.

"You pointed at me," said Wilson.

"That may be true," was the reply, "but the gentleman from Washington might know I did not mean him, because he is not old enough to remember anything about the war. He wasn't born then, and besides, I never heard before that he claimed to have a Shakespeare head." Amid General Spinola, and Wilson reached the cloak room before the applause subsided.—New York Times.

A Sad View of It.

Gilloody—This world is full of misery. The happiest man is the one who is never born.

Hostetter McGinnis—Yes, but there isn't one in a million that has such a streak of luck.—Texas Siftings.

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