



# THE SPIRIT LAMP.

*An Oxford Magazine without News.*

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JAMES THORNTON, HIGH STREET, OXFORD.

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# The Spirit Lamp.

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No. III.

MAY 20, 1892.

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## THE GATES OF GAZA.

### II.

I WAS the guest of the Cénacle one evening about three weeks ago, and had the privilege of meeting half-a-dozen exquisites assembled for artistic conversation in the superb rooms which Sinbad Savage has taken near the Thames Embankment. My invitation (which was fantastically written on *papier de Hollande*) was the first communication I had received from Savage since we left college, where our acquaintance had never got beyond a commonplace bandying of nods and surnames when we met. He wrote—

“DEAR WALTER,—I am delighted to hear through Conrad that you are back in Town. You must join the Cénacle, of course: it is *the* thing in London worth living for. Do come (will you, please?) and meet some beautiful beings on S. Ninian's Eve (next Friday), at Midnight precisely. I simply long to see you again.—Ever, SINBAD SAVAGE.”

The members of the Cénacle take turns to lend their rooms for *réunions*, and the basis of the order in which they do so is not the letters of the alphabet, but the prevailing tint of their apartments; the object being that the atmosphere which surrounds them on these delightful occasions shall preserve a chromatic sequence in certain minor hues varying from mucous grey to poor blood-colour. Orange prevails at Sinbad

Savage's; the walls are hung in pale orange silk; the curtains, the cretonnes, the books on the table, all reflect the same spiritual colour. There is, of course, no gas; there are no pictures, nor ornaments of any kind except some fine Wedgwood plaques and an exiguous cast of Hermaphrodite. Some rare pale incense sends up a refinement of styrax and jonquil and the herb called smoke-raiser, and hides with its vapour the sordid machinery which controls the vehicle of light—a wonderful orange thing in the guise of Selene, attached I suppose to the invisible ceiling.

Savage, a large, almost plethoric man in evening dress, wearing an orange orchid, rose to greet me with acrobatic effusion.

"How good of you to come: let me introduce you to Ion and Bazy. (You would like to know Ion, wouldn't you?)"

I made my bow to two consumptives, the Honourable Ion Lamprady and my Lord Bayswater; refused absinthe, but lit a cigarette heavily opiated, and sat down uncomfortably in a corner.

The conversation, which my entry had interrupted, was speedily resumed; and I listened to it in silence, for I had the very rudiments of their euphuism to acquire. Everyone who knows Sinbad Savage justly regards him as a remarkably brilliant effective talker. His studied rhythm, his racy adverbs, his exotic constructions, his superabundance of epithet, his antitheses *quand même*, are the envy of those who listen, and the despair of those who read.

If his prepositions are ordinary and monotonous, his favourite nouns and phrases are changed regularly once a month. To-day you may marvel at the frequent recurrence of such words as *décadent*, *fin-de-siècliste*, *symbolism*—but be sure by July or so he will have a brand-new assortment of Paris fashions for evening wear. Some epigrammatists have been compared with Thought, stopping to admire herself, on the way to Truth; but for Sinbad Savage, thought is a bore and truth a blunder. Do you think his cleverness easy to catch? It is more complicated than you suppose. First, his epigrams are of two genera: the



raw material may be some well known aphorism which he turns to account as in "A nod is as impertinent as a wink to a blind lord," "All is not old that litters"; or it may be a singular abstract term, as in "the end of action is passivity," "generosity is the distraction of tyrants." There are likewise several methods: the purely verbal method, by a pun or a rhyme; simple negation; simple conversion; the method by definition; the method "*quia impossibile*"; and the *succès de scandale*, which usually accompanies some other, since it is essential to shock someone's convictions by the way.

When I was at the Cénacle, they talked first about morals; and Sinbad Savage showed an acquaintance with the lowest haunts of vice which would have been shocking, only that I know he is really too timid a fellow to risk his skin in "slumming"; and a scorn of religion which would have been terrifying, only that I know he is always in an abject fright about the hereafter. They talked of literature, and proved that nothing more than five years old is worth reading, and that of the last five years' literature, the first four are quite obsolete. Someone talked of Henrik Ibsen. "The man has no style," says Sinbad, "and is quite out of date into the bargain." (And I remember Sinbad was one of the first Englishmen to patronise young Norway! and I know several people who would have been sound Ibsenites by now, if they had not grown tired of hearing him eulogise "The Doll's House".)

It is almost a rule of the Cénacle, that at every meeting a perfectly new author and a perfectly new artist shall be introduced to the notice of the members, and the rivalry this custom gives rise to is inconceivable. There was quite a furious quarrel between Sinbad and Ethelbert Bellamy for the honour of first discovering a great genius whose name I don't feel called upon to disclose.

I went away just as the Cénacle began to discuss music, and the Hon. Ion Lamprady was explaining that "Bark" and "Shoe-bare" were as dead as door-nails.

Here we will leave you, Sinbad Savage. Your friends will be surprised to find you also among the Philistines; and I

can't explain why you are, for I can't define the term. I know what to think of the type of person who sneers at decadence and is afraid of being modern: but you who strive and struggle to be *décadent* because it is in the fashion are a far more despicable Philistine than he. You talk fluently of *névrose* and *migraine*, and you never had a headache; you never felt a genuine passion in your life, and you talk as if you had mastered the secret of the human heart in three lessons. You are not a man with a past, as you pretend; you are not a man with a future, as your friends suppose. You have made a desperate attempt to be epicene, and have ended by losing not only all virility but all humanity. Good-bye, Sinbad Savage: you are a creature of art and water. The art is false, and the water—flat Apollinaris.

Y.

---

#### NICOTTEAN ETHICS.

My life is bitter with thy love—thy throat  
Is girt about with golden, strange Egyptian words:  
Thy white robe binds thee fiercely, and I doat  
Upon thy russet eyes, more mild than eyes of birds.

But still they worship not, and as in scorn  
Desert thee for thy sister's nuder, nut-brown grace;  
Once and again the Idler thro' the Corn  
Turns to regard thine ivory wasted face.

Thy sister queens it with a royal zone  
That shames the rigour of thy modest gold tattoo;  
Her brown form seems begotten out of Stone,  
Recalling Jean Peyral's *liaison* with Fatou.

L.C.

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#### SHORT STORIES.—I.

##### “BOTH SIDES OF THE WALL.”—A Nocturne.

It was in the S.W. of London, towards Pimlico. One dark night in April I was walking late for my amusement through the slums. It was nearly one o'clock; the streets were generally empty; the ginshops had some time since vomited their victims. It was quiet: hardly a sound, except the

irregular sighing of a light wind; now and again some horrible cry, rising vaguely from one or other of the squalid hovels on one side the road: then again silence.

The slum I was in was narrow and long: one side a row of wretched houses with a drink shop every twenty yards. Their windows, some cracked, patched with paper, some broken—all dirty, returned a dull, unmeaning glimmer to the light of the wind-vest gas. On the other side a blind wall. It ran the whole length of the street—high, monotonous, interminable; built of that dead, sordid brown brick of thirty or forty years ago. Within were huge gas-works; but from the street one could see nothing of them—the wall was too high.

I was sauntering slowly, enjoying the night freshness, after a long day's work. I hardly knew how the time was going. Suddenly Big Ben struck one: a single, cold emphasis that made me start and shudder. I listened straining for the echo; hardly certain whether I had heard anything, with no repetition to make sure.

As I stood intent, a few heavy drops of rain fell—the foretaste of relief to the swollen masses of clouds, that drove slowly on from the South West.

At the same time when the vibrations of the stroke of the clock were hardly yet dead, another sound struck my ear. It was near the wall on my right. A rasping sound, as of one scratching the brick. It chilled me to the marrow. The street was as still as death: the windows looked blank and vacant; only the rain grew heavier and heavier. Still the same sound from the inside of the great wall.

I listened, without moving a muscle; every nerve tense and alert.

Still the same sound; steady, regular scraping.

\* \* \* \* \*

Suddenly a pause. Then the slight ring of metal against the brick. A sigh of relief—then the sound of a brick thrust back into its place. I had my ear to the wall and could hear every least vibration.

Again silence.

Then footsteps—irregular retreating footsteps.

After a minute or two even these died away, and nothing was to be heard but the quiet splashing of the rain.

A quarter past one chimed.

I walked slowly on down the street, nervous and excited.

I felt challenged and baffled by this mystery. What could the noise be? A man?

\* \* \* \* \*

Suddenly a cat shrieked on the roof of one of the houses on my left. It made me shudder: there is always something horrible, something human, in the cry of a cat at night; but now it struck me as peculiarly dreadful in the dead stillness, and the thrilled electric tension of my nerves.

I quickened my step, being dimly conscious I was exceedingly wet and cold, when I observed a door on my right in the blind gas-works wall. Curiosity was stronger than cold. I stopped; put my ear to the keyhole—there was no handle on the outside.

Not a sound: I strained my hearing till the very silence hummed dizzily in my ears. I pushed the door: it rattled, but it was evidently bolted. I tried to look through the keyhole, but it was as dark as hell. I stared long before I could descry the huge, dim swelling outlines of the meters; that was all.

“There *must* be someone there,” I thought, and again pushed hard against the door till it shook and rattled loudly. Again silence.

I was going away disappointed, when I fancied I caught sound of a footfall. It was certainly a footfall—measured, cautious, stealthy. It approached. Nothing was to be seen through the keyhole. I listened intently.

Suddenly a crash of glass behind me, and a torrent of curses addressed to me from a broken window: gradually the noise faded into a growl, and then ceased.

My heart was beating wildly. Again I put my eye to the keyhole—as I could hear no more footsteps. I could see nothing—not even the gas meters as before. Suddenly it struck me why.

There was a human eye at the other side of the keyhole, half-an-inch from mine. It seemed now to flash like a cat's in the dark: it mesmerized me. I could hear breathing.

\* \* \* \* \*

How long we stayed so I cannot tell: it seemed long. I felt glued, magnetized to the keyhole, till quite suddenly the ridiculous light of the thing flashed upon me.

I drew back and laughed.

I was answered by a fearful laugh from within the wall which chilled me all up the spine to the roots of my hair. Without thinking twice I turned and fled.

\* \* \* \* \*

I was pursued. Terrified, I ran for my life—down Horse-ferry Road, through deserted slums, under glaring floods of gaslight, through dim alleys—without knowing whither. I felt I was pursued. Now I could hear his steps gaining on me, coming nearer, nearer.

\* \* \* \* \*

A door opens—giving flight to a man: he is pursued by three—hounded on by a horrible woman's voice.

The last pursuer tripped me up: I fell prone on the wet pavement.

*(To be concluded in our next number.)*

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### ELYSIUM.

LIVING I lacked for much,  
Nor knew delight;  
Launched by Death's kindly touch  
Into the night,  
I know all joys of soul, and sense, and sight.

Living, unblest and mean  
I sighed a slave;  
Death a new life serene,  
Ethereal, gave;  
All joys of love and light within the grave.

Living, a slave ; but dead  
 Gathered to kings :  
 E'en life remembered  
 New rapture brings :  
 Soul, why so long didst fear to take thy wings ?

All hopeless loves which burned  
 In me alive,  
 Towards which one base and spurned  
 Hardly dared strive,  
 All the vain visions, fancies fugitive.—

All now I realise,  
 Unsated still ;  
 Ever new objects rise  
 My soul to fill ;  
 Ever I strive, and, striving, have my will.

All the great souls I see  
 Of long ago,  
 Sappho and Helené,  
 Homer I know,  
 Plato's sweet speech, and Orpheus' lyric flow.

Ah, foolish sons of men,  
 Frail leaves, light sand,  
 Why will ye tarry then ?  
 Why waiting stand ?  
 Life is not Life : Life lives in this dear land.

O.T.M.

## CAUSERIES DU VENDREDI.

### II.—Tennyson and Swinburne.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN has lately been formulating a Pension Scheme. In the absence of the more plethoric charms of three acres and a cow, the labourer and the artizan are being invited to the El Dorado of the Governmental Exchequer to relieve them from the haunting dream of the Union—and the Workhouse.

His critics have replied with considerable force that it is no cheering evangel for the hardy toiler to face superannua-



tion at the age of sixty—and much mental distress would be unquestionably caused by the constant brooding on such a final climacteric for the working man. There is much in all this. But the production of the "*Maid Marion*" and "*The Sisters*" by the above poets cannot but force a conviction on the mind of the more intelligent class of readers that it is indeed a matter for deep regret that there is no such extension of Mr. Chamberlain's main thesis to a Literary Pension Fund—formed by the deduction of some of the profits of their better works by their publishers in order to save the public the perplexed condition of mind that will ask whether the writers are engaged in a farce or a tragedy.

The sight of the veteran superfluous on the stage is never at best a pleasant one, and such a fund would be the welcome means of sparing the reader the sad spectacle of the laureate dropping to the Nadir of fatuity, and Mr. Swinburne engaged in a desperate fight with the bellman, or Mr. Martin Tupper, for the wooden-spoon of poetry—or verse.

Mr. Archer has recently been instructing the public *ex cathedra* on the question "How to write a good play." In these volumes he would find the answer to "how *not* to write it." We regret that the Laureate like the Home Secretary does not fall with the Cabinet, so that a much suffering public could have the opportunity of securing new blood. Mr. Berry, the public executioner, with a proper sense of his position, makes way for others! He feels the strain of office! With a tactful intuition that merits a frank recognition he sees the brilliant days of his executive power are over, and exacting demands for neatness of manipulation, finish, and despatch call for younger men. But the poets go on for ever. With nothing to say they go on saying it, and like women preaching and dogs standing on their hind legs they succeed neither, as Dr. Johnson declared, in doing it well, nor doing it with efficiency for long. They mistake words for ideas.

Were these books published anonymously they would meet with the castigation they merit, and be consigned to the limbo of the forgot. Because they come under the sanction of names, the public is mulcted of shekels, of its patience, and

its time more profitably engaged elsewhere. The Athenians fined their poet Phrynichus for his *Capture of Miletus*. Were some literary Radical in the House to move a reduction in a butt of Malmsey wine, and a fine on the Republican, he would deserve well of his country and of English literature.

It is about time the nation should protect itself and revise its tariff. The time surely has come when placid verbiage and eleuthero-maniac rant should no longer pass for poetry. Mr. Weller declined mild potations by his belief that by addiction to such the toper got no "for'arder":—after many years the public can only see constant decline of power in the writer of "*In Memoriam*"; and in the multitudinous ocean of verbiage and sound, of obscenity and imageless froth poured forth by the author of *Atalanta in Calydon*, the reader will detect no advance in taste, form, or power. Neither Settle, nor Shadwell nor any other of the laureates that ever inside the Dunciad or outside Bedlam "deviated into sense" would have viewed with equanimity these volumes three-fourths of which are below *Tit-Bits* or the *Quiver*. If Mr. Tennyson has desired to show the marvellous genius of Sir Walter Scott in bold relief against his own tinsel and twaddle, and Mr. Swinburne to atone for his former obscenity by a relapse into the bathos of dulness and absurdity, they have succeeded. Other aim they can hardly have had, or be said with any truth to have attained.

VIRTUTE CRESCO.

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#### BACCARESA STOPPER.

AH! I was but a stripling when  
     I came in love my earliest cropper;  
 My earliest, fondest flame was then  
     The lovely Baccaresa Stopper.

Her fathier was a bold bargee,  
     His arms like iron, his face like copper;  
 But oh! the pearl of maids was she,  
     The peerless Baccaresa Stopper!

A cruel tyrant was her sire,  
And grimly swore that he would whop her,  
And whop me too, should I aspire  
To flirt with Baccaresa Stopper.

Marriage, thought I, for all atones,  
And marriage shall make all things proper :  
She shall be Baccaresa Jones  
Instead of Baccaresa Stopper.

Yet dared I not that question pop,  
So all-important to the popper ;  
And still alone I keep the shop—  
She still is Baccaresa Stopper.

My father, learning of my flame,  
Sternly commanded me to drop her ;  
And oh ! I could not but obey 'm,  
And give up Baccaresa Stopper.

I waited, fearing to be told  
To go to Jericho or Joppa—  
Remorseless fate ! how I was sold :  
I lost my Baccaresa Stopper.

Whene'er I look upon the Thames,  
Or see a barge, I sigh and drop a  
Regretful tear, my gem of gems,  
For thee, my Baccaresa Stopper !

Yes, I was but a stripling when  
I came in love my earliest cropper,  
And 'neath the shadow of Big Ben  
Courtied Miss Baccaresa Stopper.

O.T.M.

---

**SAIONARA.**

CARVE me a kiss on stone,  
Paint me a sound on silk,  
Mould me a marble groan :  
Pour me a glass of milk.

Lap me in tears of oil,  
 Wring but my heart with jet,  
 Festoon me with a foil,  
 Solace me with a net.

String but thy heart on mine,  
 Bite but thy nail in love,  
 Sing to me but of swine,  
 Or dust me as a dove !

Cool but thine icy brow,  
 Curl but thy tender nose—  
 And I will churn a vow  
 That shall curtail the rose !

L.C.

#### A DEMI-SEMI-QUAVER ON THE UNIQUE.

EARLY this morning, while I was mechanically fluttering "Mon Frère Yves" over a hurried cutlet, it fell open at the chapter which runs as follows:—

XXXVII.

"Deux mois plus tard, quand cette Ariane fut prête à partir, le sort voulut que je fusse désigné, moi aussi, à la dernière heure, pour faire partie de son état major."

I now feel that at last, after many fretful struggles, after many fatuous efforts, the great object of my life is attained—my collection of curios is complete, my uniques really unique. The shortest chapter in any living or dead author !

\* \* \* \* \*

And now let me explain what I mean by the word.

The unique (the unique, be it understood, not the uniquely unique) is at once so common and so impossible that to discover it (for the third or fourth time) always gives rise to disappointment.

The tyro, going forth Quixote-like, with an idea of finding it, stands self-condemned. It is as one were to seek the Snark or—the moralities of Oxford on a Sunday.

But yet, just because he is a tyro, he will smile an angel smile to his papercutter. He will smile, I repeat, and fiercely whisper the magic formula, "The oldest clergyman in the Church of England."

Happy fatuity! graceful ignorance! *simplicitas sancta! sancta simplicitas!*

That ingenuous boy, that perfervid youth, that enthusiastic man, *has been reading the Church papers.*

I have dabbled in elementary psychology with some success, and *I know* that man has been reading the Church papers.

Yes! He or she has learnt from the *Churchman* or *Church-woman* of last week the happy news that the Rev. Thomas Thomas Spedewell Burne-Browne is the oldest clergyman extant in the Church of England.

But he (or she) has *not* read to-day's issue of this pair of journals.

In both of them they would have noticed, as I had the pleasure of noticing (for "The Zebra") that Mr. S. B. Browne had had the misfortune to be born exactly three hours after Mr. Percy Reginald à-Carte Dalia, and that consequently the oldest clergyman in the Church of England had, so to speak, ceased to exist. In a word, he *is* unique, but no longer uniquely so. But let us descend for a moment from the ridiculous to the sublime, let us leave the ages of Clergymen and proceed to the ages of Art.

The great masters, the great old masters, what I might perhaps felicitously call the *schoolmasters* of—of—of—the *best* period are notoriously not unique. The pictures of Van Dyck (it is difficult to stomach the ignorance of those ignorami who forsooth write his name with a yke) and of Rubens, for instance, seem painted with especial view to the deception of the dealer in uniques. All their masterpieces resemble each other exactly, and the difficulty is not only to distinguish their originals from their own copies of the originals, but also to distinguish their copies from their own originals of their copies.

And as with the painter in paint, so with the painter in prose.

Lord Beaconsfield, with his usual imaginative, tinsel idealization of the commonplace, happily described, or dined out and described, the hansom cab as the gondola of London.

We all know the quotation, and I with the tyro treasured it for a long time among my collection of uniques. Only a few days ago, however, I came across precisely the same idea somewhat differently expressed in Heine's Nordsee:—

Die Badekutschen, die Droschken der Nordsee.

I was horrified, and at once withdrew the gondola of London from my cabinet of quotations, one of the largest I possess, and the contents of which, I regret to say, have been stolen from time to time.

Very few undergraduates, I believe, collect chapters, although I am afraid a good many chapters collect undergraduates.

However that may be, and it seems to be pretty bad, I shall place the little chapter that heads this article in a silver vase on my mantelpiece after labelling it "uniquely unique in point of length." If my discovery only induces a thirst among my readers for the undiscoverable—the story without an end—I shall sleep in happiness to-night.

FINIS.

LATER.—On the point of bed my foot slipped on the Heine I had been reading.

It opened at the 12th chapter of his book of Ideas, which I here transcribe:—

"Die deutschen Censoren . . . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

\* \* \* \* \*

\* \* \* \* \*

. . . . . Dummköpfe . . . . .

. . . . ."

I had lost one unique to find another. It seems the very gem of chapters, the very marrow of literature, the UNIQUE



OF THE UNIQUE. Would it, would it, I wonder, have been more purely *true* if the *second* word had been but two syllables longer?

\* \* \* \* \*

I wonder, would oxfordisch——?

L. C.

### OF SCULLS AND NUMSKULLS.

SPECULATING upon the boredoms of the coming race, and whether I should go and see it or stay at home until the tyranny were overpast, I fell the other day to tracing the moral and natural history of the athlete in general and the rowing man in particular; when my reflexions begot some such conclusions as these.

First, that athletics are absolute, and athleticism at its zenith. I have heard of a time when to be able to run and leap with vigour and success was no rare accomplishment; when a man might translate Aristotle and yet ride to hounds once a fortnight; or row in the 'Varsity Eight and yet spell his name correctly; when the body rose voluntarily from the easy chair, and the soul, not unfrequently, above the *transtra*. Then came competition, and choked up all things; permanently severed the brain and the body, subjected either to continual coaching and cramming, and forced every man to choose between the two. It is some years since the great battle was fought which established the right of the individual to physical torpor, and since then the athlete has gathered unto his own thews the accumulated muscle of the nations; and the unused intellectual capital of the athlete has gone to supply the wasted brain-tissues of the bookworm. Lately a reaction has set in. The effete has fallen down and worshipped the full-blooded: strong men and strong women, acrobats, prize-fighters, have been the lions of the sapless herd; and while few can be athletic in their own persons, the whole world, it seems, is gone a-sighing after the lost instinct of primal brutality.

Second, that a wholesome chapter might well be written upon the involution of the rowing-man, in whom matter has finally triumphed over mind. Once he was pliant and of a natural height and modest biceps; he was affable, he was not turbulent; he could talk good lay talk on occasion: now is he become noisy and tyrannous; his brain is completely lignified, so that it cannot think; he talks only of weights, of whiffs, of torpids; if you say in his presence a thing that he does not agree with, it is ten to one he will not apprehend you; or if he do, he will have no patience to hear; or if he be converted, he will still outwardly say the same. Rightly, rightly is he called an Oar: now is he a thing of wood, long, straight, obdurate, tyrannous.

Musing whereon, I fell asleep and dreamt.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Now here,” said the gravedigger sadly, “here’s part of a scull hath lain you i’ th’ ground these three-and-twenty years.” We were on the banks of the Cherwell, where they have made a cemetery of late. It was a curious thing the fellow showed me—a long, thin piece of wood, apparently; but as he held it in his hand it crumbled to dust, and I found myself wondering whether it was the remains of some ancient magatherium I had looked on, of some monster of the pleiocene period, or of that latter-day great beast, the Thicksetoarus.

Σκύλαξ.

---

### NOTICES.

THE columns of the *Spirit Lamp* are open to all the talents. We shall be glad to receive contributions in Prose or in Verse. They should be written on *one* side of the paper only, and sent in not later than the *Wednesday before publication*, to

THE EDITOR,  
c/o MR. JAMES THORNTON,  
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