UNDER THE TOWER OF SILENCE

By JOHN D. REID,

Author of "A ROSE O'DOON," "AILIE'S BAIRN," "THE BULLERS O'BUCHAN," etc.

At a distance of perhaps a mile from the Wanowrie lines at Poonah, in the presidency of Bombay, the ground rises some little way above the elsewhere dead level of the surrounding country. The elevation referred to is scarcely sufficiently imposing to entitle it to the name of a hill, but as it is the only exception to the everlasting wooded flat, it bulks in the relieved eye with a kind of fictitious importance. In character it is rocky and bare; what slight vegetation it boasts of being, even in the rainy season, of little account and less value. Trees will not grow on it, and, although the brushwood on the plain below is thick enough, not a bush climbs its sun-baked, blistered slopes. There would, indeed, be nothing about it worth a second glance were it not that on its summit stands a huge circular pillar or tower, built of red brick, and having a name that epitomises humanity. It is one of the Parsee places of the dead; one of the Towers of Silence.

Grim enough it looks even in daylight, with the heated air eddying and quivering around it, and the fierce flare of the tropic sun turning its dingy red to the hue of flame; splashing it with streaks and blotches that look like blood. Grimmer yet is its aspect in the ghostly moonlight, for then it is black against the stars, and the shadows creep about it like bodiless presences of outer and evil things. Grimmest of all, perhaps, it is in that weird time that lies between the first brightening of the east and the rising of the sun; when the haze lifts from the grey levels and the inky woods sharpen their outlines against the whiteness of the dawn. At such a time there is something unearthly about it, coming almost into open sight and surrounding it with an atmosphere of fascination that at once draws and repels the imagination, not yet wholly freed from the influences of the night and the dark. Such a time, too, seems of all the fittest for those who would follow the dead into the inner pit of their aerial grave. Were we now to open yonder low, frowning door, and climb in the darkness of the inner stairway up and up to the eeric tower top, we should find—what?

What is best left alone, possibly, if only out of pity for death's shame; for the hollow core of the tower is lidded, within a few feet of the top, by an iron grating, and upon that ghastly platform we might find that that would appal us with the revealed horrors and hideous realities of the graves that are yet to be our own. Better to stay here on the hill-side, and, looking up at the dizzy crown of the tower, picture in fancy all we dare to think of it—the hour after the mourners have gone, and over the still, naked one stretched on the grating the obscene air-scavengers gather in clouds.

Ugh! The very atmosphere of the place is charnel, and had there been no more of mystery attaching to it than the sad and solemn secrets of the grave we might have passed it by. But it so happens that connected with that ghastly air pit is an experience as weird and awful as ever was undergone by man, beginning and ending, that is, short of the shut lid of a coffin.

For it chanced, once upon a time, that a draft of fifty soldiers from England arrived at Poonah, en route for a certain regiment then stationed at Benares. And as there was no room for them all at Corporee, the station depot, the surplus, about a dozen in number, were sent on to Wanowrie. The distance between the two places is less than a mile, but even that was enough to insure the Wanowrie party being left very much to themselves; the officer commanding the depot having two pronounced characteristics—a superabundance of fat and rooted dislike to exertion.

Among the new-comers who found themselves located at Wanowrie was one Hector McLeod. As his name implies, he was of Highland descent, was about twenty-seven years of age, and was exceptionally handsome. He was possessed of much more than the average intelligence and education of his class, but in addition to being imaginative and reserved to an extreme degree, professed to hold views that stopped but little short of downright atheism. What was more, he seemed to have lost or destroyed any moral sense he had ever possessed, and summed up his creed in one word — selfishness — not selfishness in the ordinary greedy, grasping sense, be it understood, for, when the whim seized him, he could be even generous; and his conduct as a soldier was unexceptionable. But he acknowledged no dividing line between right and wrong, and, enforcement of law apart, held no right or honor sacred in others that opposed or impeded the gratification of his wishes and desires. In addition to all this he he was credited by his comrades, most of whom were of Scots nationality, with the gift of second sight; a belief his recurrent fits of savage gloom did much to strengthen, and which increased to no small extent the feelings of uneasiness and aversion with which they regarded him.

When the draft had been about a week at Wanowrie, McLeod found himself one evening at the foot of the rise upon the crest of which stands the Tower of Silence. As usual, he was alone, and to judge from the expression on his face, was in even more than his wonted state of gloom. Standing there on the edge of the bare, blistered activity, and staring up at the tower through the swiftly falling twilight of the east, he had a touch of the satanic about him in his sneering lips and sombre eyes.

A hideous-looking vulture, that had been perched on the coping of the tower, suddenly lost its footing and came tumbling down as if it had been shot. So unexpected by the great bird itself had been the movement that it was half way to the bottom before it succeeded in arresting its descent. Then, as its vast wings again recovered their mastery of the air, it wheeled sharply and swept away over the tree tops like a tempest-driven cloud. And as it did so, McLeod, to whom the quick transition from dignified repose to scared activity appeared in the last degree ludicrous, broke into a laugh of saturnine amusement.

The laugh was echoed behind him, but in a voice melodious and soft as a woman's. Instantly wheeling round, he found himself face to face with a tall figure, wearing the flowing dress and grotesque headgear of a Parsee. Too much surprised for the moment by the other's unheard and unsuspected approach to speak, McLeod stood staring, his face revealing an odd mixture of curiosity and irritation.

Although appareled like a man, and of a stature rarely attained by the opposite sex, there was that in the face and general bearing of the stranger that suggested to McLeod an instant suspicion that he was in the presence of a woman. Yet when he sought justification for the thought he was puzzled. The tall form, what could be seen of its outlines under its loose robes, was slender, the limbs shapely, the hands and feet small; but in no one of the points noted was there anything incompatible with strength and virility. As for the face, it simply strengthened the suspicion while affording even less ground upon which to rest it. The complexion was clear olive, the features delicately cut, the eyes large, glowing, and intensely black. Beautiful it undoubtedly was, but the beauty was not of that order that one could readily associate with a woman's face. The stamp of power was too strongly impressed upon it, and there was a subtle suggestion of mocking cruelty about the mouth and in the deep, lustrous eyes.

While rapidly noting the above the soldier had been recovering from his first surprise, and now contrived to ask—

"Where did you come from?"

The stranger laughed; the same musical laugh that had so startled McLeod already.

"From the road, yonder, he said. "I was passing near you, but you were watching the vulture so intently that you did not hear me."

Whatever the face and form might assert to the contrary that the voice was a woman's McLeod decided as soon as he heard it. Those low, liquid tones never came from a man's lips. The accent, too, added not a little to his sense of wonder, it was so wholly unlike anything he had ever heard before, yet the speaker's knowledge of English appeared to be perfect.

"And what do you want?" was McLeod's next question.

It was now nearly dark, and in the gloom the stranger's eyes seemed to gleam with sudden light as he replied:

"I want many things; all who live do."

"From me?" asked McLeod, derisively.

"I did not say so; besides, you have nothing to give that I would accept—now."

"D'ye mean that I may yet have an opportunity of showing how generous I can be?" continued McLeod, in the same tone of mockery.

"You may; should we meet on the day of your nativity."

"Then, should that happen, I hope you'll wear your proper dress."

"And that?"

"Is a woman's," said the soldier, bluntly.

Again that low, entrancing laugh rippled out on the night.

"It might be done if I were a woman," said the unknown. "Or I might even be a woman for the time."

"Don't talk stuff. You can't be any other than one of two—either a man or a woman."

"And what if I tell you I am neither."

"I'd say you're a ——. What are you, then?"

"One whom time has forgotten."

The utterance of the words seemed to send a cold chill to McLeod's very heart; they were so full of hopeless sadness, of unutterable despair. Then, too, he noticed for the first time a strange thing, though the unknown was himself perfectly motionless, his robe kept swaying to and fro, as if waved by a gentle wind; and yet there was not a breath of air stirring. The discovery startled McLeod a good deal, and for a moment he felt almost afraid. Then he shook off the feeling and laughed.

"Then there's all the more reason that I should not forget you," he said. "And as my birthday falls no farther away than next Saturday, I'll meet you—the woman, remember—where you will."

"Agreed. Then let it be at moonrise, and here; or rather yonder by the tower. But there is a condition."

"What is it?"

"Who meets me at such a time must leave his God behind him."

"That's easily done. I have none."

"Say it again."

"I have none."

"That is well. Good-night."

And before the surprised soldier could arrest the movement the speaker had gone, seeming rather to glide than walk over the rough ground. In another moment he had vanished in the darkness, and McLeod, more convinced than ever that he had to do with a woman more or less insane, lit his pipe and slowly returned to Wanowrie.

The appointed day came and found McLeod in one of his darkest moods, but, nevertheless, quite resolved to keep faith with the mysterious stranger. It is probable that he would have done so without a soul in the lines being aware of his absence had not the fat captain taken it into his head to come up to Wanowrie about midday on a surprise visit. McLeod was mess orderly for the day, and as, among other discoveries evincing laxity of discipline, the captain found the lamps unfilled, he instantly gave orders for the culprit's incarceration in the guard-room. McLeod heard the command given, and setting discipline at defiance, made for the woods, pursued by a corporal and two men. The latter kept up the search during the whole afternoon; until, indeed, the approach of sunset suggested that it was time to sit down under a tree and curse both the captain and the runaway, a suggestion on which they acted with positive pleasure.

"Tell ye what, boys," said the corporal, as he sat throwing pebbles into the nullah, upon the bank of which the tree grew; "this wark's like nothin' for canaries in a coal-hole. We'd better gang awa back to the lines, and let McLeod come in himsel'. We're no like to catch him this gate, an' even if we did, I question whether the three o's wad be able to tak' him in."

"Whey?" asked one of the men, sharply. He was six feet high, had the strength and sinews of a bull, and rather resented the notion of inability.

"Because," replied the corporal, gravely, "the dark hour's on him. I saw that afore he gaed oot, and ye ken what he is at sic times. If we cam' on him the noo, he'd either hurt us or we'd hurt him; sae we'll awa' hame and let the captain whussle."

As all appeared to think that a "whussle" would do the captain good, an immediate move was made, and the last of the white helmets was speedily out of sight.

Then there came a scraping, rattling sound among the pebbles at the bottom of the nullah, and an instant later McLeod ascended the steep bank and seated himself under the tree that had so recently sheltered his pursuers. His face was pale as ashes, his brows were heavily knitted, and in his eyes shone a strange light, like the reflected flicker of inner and hidden fire.

He leaned back against the tree and looked in the direction taken by the search party, a derisive smile curving his lips the while. He had heard the conversation of a few minutes before, and had not the slightest intention of gratifying the captain by presenting himself with undue haste at the guard-room door. In his then state of mind the very thought of restraint, or even human companionship was hateful, and he determined to wait until morning before going in. But where was he to go meanwhile? If he remained where he was there was always the probability that he might be seen and—

His eyes had suddenly fallen upon the Tower of Silence, burning blood-red against the sky in the flame of the sinking sun, and with the sight the recollection of his appointment with the stranger, which he had for the time forgotten, returned to him. But that was hours away, for the moon would not rise until near midnight. Yet, if he were to go up to the tower now he would, in its vicinity, be safe from contact with undesired companions, seeing that the soldiery were expressly forbidden to approach it, and that the superstitious fears of the natives barred its environs against feet of theirs.

Rising, he made his way cautiously along the nullah until he reached its termination at the slope whereon the tower stood. Then, after a careful scrutiny of the ground lying towards Wanowrie, he felt himself safe and began to ascend the hill.

By this time the sun had set and the night was rushing down like rain. Already the eastern landscape was lost in the dark, above which the stars seemed to whirl up the sky like showers of fire, and as the ebbing tide of day swept westward the burning bars of the sunset began to grow dull and dim. A little longer and they shut down wholly, the last glimmer of light went out and night was everywhere. So swift was the transition from day to night that McLeod, fresh from witnessing the long, magical gloamings of his far Norlan' home, was startled, and looked around him wonderingly.

He had nearly reached the crest of the hill. Right before him, black as ink in the night, and seeming to rest its grim head among the stars, rose the tower. Familiar though he had become with the sight of it, this was the first time he had approached it closely, and in some way its aspect filled him with a feeling of deepening awe. Perhaps it was due to the working of fancy—an outcome of the darkness and his own gloomy frame of mind—but whatever the cause, he felt a sudden shuddering chill pass over him, making his heart throb heavily, and awaking an indefinable sense of near and deadly peril. Almost as soon as it came, however, it passed away, and he laughed aloud at his own folly.

A moment's pause, and he was nearly shaken back into his former dread. The laugh seemed to run up the side of the black column and die away—to be answered by another from within the tower—a woman's.

Faint and muffled, as if by the barrier of masonry through which it came, he yet heard distinctly those low, rippling notes; the sweetest in their flute-like music that had ever reached his ears. In his alarm and utter surprise he call aloud—

"Who comes there?"

The question was echoed back harshly from the tower, and was followed by a stillness as of death. For a space of perhaps a minute's duration he stood as though expecting a reply—then, recollecting himself, uttered an oath.

"What an ass I am!" he muttered; "to imagine that a living woman could be in that—Hector McLeod, my boy, you're going off your head!"

With the words he again moved forward and continued his advance till he gained the wall, when he immediately began to cast about for a suitable place whereon to rest until moonrise, or, as might chance, daylight.

Prowling around the wall in the dark, he at last found a patch of soft sand, dry, and yet warm with the blistering heat of the past day's sun. Sinking down on this, he lay resting on his elbow, with his shoulder against the tower, his eyes roving absently over the dim and shadowy landscape beneath.

The night was warm and still. Low and indistinct through the haze the wood-blotched plain rolled away under the flashing of the stars till the last lines of earth and sky ran together and melted in the mist. In spite of the starlight the shadows were very heavy, yet the darkness was nowhere such as to destroy vision wholly, and it was possible, with some exercise of effort, to make out surrounding objects with a fair degree of certainty.

Thus it was that, shifting his position to watch the flight of a bat round the tower, his eyes fell upon the door giving entrance to the dread stairway within. It was distant from him about ten or twelve feet, and after the first careless look his eyes returned to it again and again with an oddly puzzled expression. This wonderment, if the feeling could be so described, was due to an idea that there was a light shining behind the door and shimmering faintly through it. It was dim and phosphorescent, very much like that made by rubbing matches on one's hands in the dark, and had a waving, smoke-like motion that, added to the gruesome associations of its situation, rendered it absolutely ghastly. Another thing was that, while looking straight at the door the watcher could see nothing, no sooner did he turn his eyes a little away than the whole array of shadowy spots and lines came back, burning, waving, vanishing and burning again, as if tossed and swayed by a strong wind.

After staring at it for some time, McLeod was on the point of going over to examine the door more closely, when his gaze lighted on the first stars of the Southern Cross, just then rising above the horizon. Watching the famous constellation climbing up out of the mists, he forgot all about the door and its uncanny light. After a little he grew drowsy in the hot hush of the night, and before the last star of the Cross rode full over the tops of the trees, he had fallen asleep.

How long that sleep lasted he could never afterward tell, but when at last his eyes unclosed his first feeling was one of chill—a cold so intense that the blood seemed to be thickening in his veins under it. More, and worse, he seemed to have been deprived of, not the power to move only, but also of the will to attempt movement. A confusion of mind so utter as to destroy for the time even the sense of his own identity fell upon him like a cloud, covering him with space on space of darkness. In a horror and fear so great that he felt as though he could have let his life out in one frenzied shriek, he lay there in the first agony of that awful awakening.

Slowly the first bewilderment lessened, although the sense of terror and danger did not for an instant loose their strangling hold. The broken and scattered forces of thought and memory began to rally, but in a fashion so halting that he could not tell where he was or ask himself why he should be afraid. All he knew was that he was awake, and that if ever the hope and soul of a man were all but lost to the fiends of the pit, his were then. And as with every second's flight the weight, the mountain of fear crushing his life out grew, and grew, there rose within him a horrible love, an overmastering desire to look on the face of the woman—if, indeed, she was not more than woman—whose beauty had led him there, under whose spell he had become accursed.

Death crawled nearer and nearer in the dark. His heart fluttered and leaped like that of one dying in torment. His breath came in gasps, rattling in his throat as it came, and his brain was swollen to bursting with torturing fire.

Suddenly, as he sank lower and lower toward the ending of what was literally his death agony, upon his inner sight one word uprose in mighty characters, blood-red against a sea of livid flame. In his extremity his soul seemed to reach out of him and snatch at it, while from his throat broke a hoarse cry.

"GOD!"

Was it fancy? or did he hear a rushing as of wings around him? He could not tell; of only one thing was he assured, that frightful fear had gone. Gone, too, where the hellish longings for the fearful being whose woman'shape he had so desired, and with their going went the dull numbness that had held his limbs in chains. Rising heavily to his feet, he staggered back till his outstretched hand felt the wall of the tower. Leaning against it, with laboring breath and wild eyes, he beheld a thick darkness melt and dissolve under his sight, leaving him staring out over the lower plain, all asleep and dreaming beneath the white sheen of the risen moon.

The sight calmed him at once, and then, out of the very sense of relief which it brought, he drew strength to mock his recent terror. With a savage oath he caught his arms above the elbows and shook himself.

"Hector McLeod, you are either going mad or there are devils here. Well, no matter, if only she comes," and as he ended he laughed.

The last of that laugh was yet on his lips when his heart was sprung sheer into his throat by hearing—almost at his ear it sounded—the answer he had heard before—that laugh in a woman's voice.

With eyes almost starting from their sockets under the shock of unreasoning surprise, he wheeled in the direction of the sound—to find himself still alone. Then, falling upon him like a tangible thing, the old fear and horror returned; but now, with a strength that left his mind absolutely blank to every impulse of reason or of will. Even the former touch of his surroundings, slight as it had been, was lost. He could only stare fixedly before him; hearing and feeling—see he could not—in a mechanical way, but intelligently knowing nothing. The old fluttering did not return to his heart, his breathing was calm as that of a sleeping child, the fire had not rekindled in his brain. But in their place had come a renewal of that sick love and longing, the burning fever of which was at once joy and torture indescribable—that and a dull certainty of absolute and unutterable despair. Then out of the pent hell within him he felt his soul rising, heavy with stirrings and suggestions of evil unspeakable, to defy and blaspheme the Eternal, and to his face.

Yet even in that thrilling moment of weighted and balanced fate, all but lost in the shadow of impending doom, some power of which his consciousness knew no name and to which it could give no place, held him back from utterance and moved in him the well-nigh forgotten thought of safety. One thing to do—one word to say—that—to end it. But what was the thing?—what the word? He had forgotten, forgotten, forgotten—and the sands were running out. A little longer—a very little longer was left—and he could not remember—and the issue was for eternity. And still in that stony agony, and still with that flood of evil surging higher and higher in his soul, and still with that fearful passion storming into nearer and nearer victory, he stood there in the night, knowing, as far as man may know and live, something of the secret of the damned.

Gradually, and after what lapse of time he knew not, all existence seemed to merge in this one thing—the scorching strength of desire for the presence of the woman, be she what she might, into whose hands he had, as he now knew, given his soul. And even as he thrilled beneath the certainty of her coming, he felt that the door behind him was opening.

Again, but fiercer and more vividly intense, the white fire flooded his brain, burning his very eyeballs. Again, but fainter and dimmer than before, the name stood out in blood against the blaze.

What was the name?—what? He stared at it stupidly. It had no significance, no meaning; and yet it seemed familiar. What was it? Where had he seen it before?

"God!"

There was no sound, yet the word was spoken to him. He heard it in his soul, not in his ears. But it flashed athwart his tortured spirit like the lance of the lightning across the sky at midnight, and recollection stirred anew to its touch as from his white and writhen lips came the choked and whispering accents:

"God!—Thy Christ!"

Again the enveloping gloom faded into thin air, shot through with the moonbeams and the falling arrow flight of the stars. But this time it did not disperse so soon, and hung in the silver atmosphere like a blue and quivering mist. Long before the last faint trace had vanished, McLeod had fallen on his knees and was thinking the gratitude he could not utter—for what immensity of deliverance he did not dare to estimate before the awful certainty of the unseen. He did not reason about it—would not have done so had he been able—he knew. Right or wrong, mad or sane, be the explanation of others what it might, he knew this one thing:—that he had so nearly passed behind the veil as to learn something of what lay beyond. As one who has trodden in the dark a death-strewn path, and in the dawn looks back to measure the miracle of his safety, so he looked on the hour—or was it hours?—just ended. Then the revulsion came, and falling on his face, he lay quivering.

An hour dragged away before he moved, then he staggered to his feet, and with a slow, shuddering glance around that dread place, went stumbling down the moonlit hill. Passing a clump of bushes at the bottom of the declivity, a low voice, whose remembered music fell on his ear like a sigh, uttered the one word—

"Soldier."

He stopped. He had no further capacity left for fear or even surprise. In the shadow of the clustered branches stood a tall, still figure. It was the stranger.

"I am listening. Speak."

"It is not yet dawn; go back."

"I will not."

"You must. She waits for you."

Who—what is she?—what you?—in the name of—"

"Hush! You need not know. Go back; the Morning Star is yet hid, and they wait for you."

"Who wait?"

"Those whom time has forgotten. It is their hour and yours—the hour of your nativity. Go back."

"I will not."

"For her beauty's sake?"

"I will not."

"Death lies await in your path if you leave her before dawn. Go back."

"Better death than hell. I will not, will not, will not."

The unknown moved slightly, and it seemed to the soldier that the motion brought out in the deeper folds of his robe a faint phosphorescent glimmer. It vanished as the stirring ceased, and then the answer came:

"He whom you twice denied has twice saved you. Go."

Without further word or sign McLeod went on his way. He looked back once; the stranger had disappeared. An hour afterwards he reeled into the guard-room, and before sunrise was delirious with fever.

He was ill for months, and when he at last struggled back to life, was so weakened and broken that he was discharged on being unfit for further service. Afterward he was heard of as a preacher in the London slums; as one who was killing himself through excess of zeal in the cause he served. That he is alive now is uncertain, but at least one thing is sure—death's very self, come or coming, was or will be as nothing compared to that moonlit vigil under the Tower of Silence.

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OUT OF THE ORDINARY.

Wyoming is the only State that pays its teachers equally without regard to sex.

In England, at the present time, the ratio of public houses is one to every two hundred of the population.

In almost every school of Japan it is the custom one day in the autumn to take the pupils out rabbit-hunting.

The Berlin University is the third largest in the world. Paris, with 9,215 students, and Vienna, with 6,220, are larger.

Auctioneers' fees in England and in the United States are paid by the seller. In France and Holland the purchaser pays them.

A writer in the Boston Transcript has figured up that heaven contains 1,800,000,000 souls against a population in hell of 175,000,000,000.

It is interesting to note that of the 328,000 divorces granted in the United States during the last twenty years 316,000 were granted at the request of wives.

The costliest pocket-knife made is sold for $25. Its handle is of solid gold, and it contains two small blades only, a nail file and a miniature pair of scissors.

There is a whirlpool in the Santa Fe river, three miles northwest of High Springs, Fla., into which 1,000 feet of line has been lowered without finding bottom.

Cameron, Mo., has a $125 damage suit, brought by Knox Brothers, to recover the value of a mule killed on the Fourth of July by being hit by a skyrocket.

The cocoanut trees of Florida are due to nuts washed ashore from a wrecked vessel sixteen years ago. Now the State furnishes nearly all the cocoanuts used in the United States.

Surgical operations are very successful in Japan, and the healing process is rapid, owing probably to the abstinence of the people from alcohol and their not being flesh-eaters.

Among the instrumental resources of the Johns Hopkins University is a thermometer valued at $10,000. The graduations on the scale are so fine that a magnifying glass is required to read them.

If you wish to take the conceit out of a peacock pull out his tail feathers, and as soon as he finds the glory of his plumage gone he becomes the humblest, most subdued and ashamed looking bird that ever walked the earth.

An acid is now mixed with sawdust, and the whole mass molded into blocks or any other form, resulting in a fine material for building purposes. The blocks assume extreme hardness of surface, and are practically non-combustible.

It has been over 1,500 years since the rule was adopted which makes Easter the first Sunday after the first full moon after the sun crosses the line. By this arrangement of things Easter may come as early as March 22 or as late as April 25.

In Peru the cotton plant rises to the distinction of a tree, instead of the comparatively diminutive shrub which grows in this country. The tree commences bearing when it is two years old, and it continues to bear for forty or fifty years.

The Japanese are unsusceptible to scarlet fever, and small-pox, which was at one time rife among them, has been checked and almost exterminated by voluntary vaccination. The mortality of Tokio, a vast city which covers one hundred square miles of ground, is only twenty per thousand.

The oldest striking clock in England is one made at Glastonbury Abbey by Peter Lightfoot, one of the resident monks, in 1325, and removed in Elizabeth's reign from Canterbury to Wells Cathedral. It was exhibited at the South Kensington Museum, having been lent by the Dean and Chapter of Wells.

"If every human being on the American continent were to be taken out of existence," said the late Prof. Asa Gray, "and the whole work of his hands were cleared away, so that no trace remained, subsequent historians could prove that the Caucasian race existed upon it by the flowers that would be found growing there."

Nearly all of the Parisian funerals are managed by a syndicate of undertakers. There are ten classes of funerals, six of which are remunerative. The first six range in cost from £4,000 to £320. An eighth-class funeral costs about £1; the ninth, 6s, and the tenth is free. The funerals directed by this company average 673 a week.

It is noted by a London financial journal as one of the causes of the failure of so many Australian banks that many of them hold such vast quantities of land that when a pinch comes they are unable to realize, and are compelled to stop payment. In New South Wales twelve banks and financial syndicates own about 45,000,000 acres of land, one institution alone owning 8,500,000 acres.

The imperial eagle, largest of the species known, flies to a height from ten to fifteen thousand feet. It is a native of South America, and its habitat is among the lofty mountains of that country. Its power of flying to high altitudes is only exceeded by the condor of the Andes, which is said to have attained the height of six miles, or within one mile of the greatest height ever attained by a balloon.

An Evening's Amusement.

Chicago Journal.

As every one sketches a little nowadays, an art party is one of the jolliest of all lenten entertainments. The guests are provided each with a card and pencil, and seated so as to be in view of a large blackboard. Each guest writes his name on the back of the card, and places the number of guests in a vertical line down the left side of the card. A basket containing slips of paper is passed, each slip having a number and the name of a different animal. When a number is called by the leader of the game, the person whose slip bears this number must draw upon the board the animal designated by the slip. All the other guests write opposite the drawer's name their idea of what the animal is that he is trying to draw. The person who makes the greatest number of correct guesses wins the prize, and the ludicrous mistakes made occasion much fun.

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New spring shades of Lansdowns now open.

READING FOR SUNDAY.

Three Words.

There are three lessons I would write—
Three words as with a burning pen
In tracings of eternal light,
Upon the hearts of men:

Have Hope. Though clouds environ now,
And gladness hides her face in scorn,
Put thou the shadow from thy brow—
No night but hath its morn.

Have Faith. Where'er thy bark is driven—
The calm's disport, the tempest's wrath—
Know thou: God rules the hosts of heaven,
The inhabitants of earth.

Have Love. Not love alone for one,
But man, as man, thy brother call,
And scatter, like the circling sun,
Thy charities on all.

Thus grave these lessons on thy soul—
Hope, Faith and Love—and thou shalt find
Strength, when life's surges rudest roll,
Light, when thou else wert blind.

—Schiller.

International Sunday-School Lesson for April 10, 1892.

PSALM II, 1-12.

Golden Text—Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him. (Psa. ii, 12.)

HOME READINGS.

M.....Psa. ii.
Tu.....Zech. ii, 6-13.
W.....Mal. iii, 1-6.
Th.....I Tim. vi, 11-16.
F.....Heb. i, 1-12.
Sa.....Rev. xix, 6-16.
Su.....Rev. xxii, 1-7.

COMMENTS ON THE LESSON.

Lyman Abbott, in Christian Union.

Whatever the original circumstance of this ode, its spiritual significance is not difficult to perceive. Its horizon is wider than that of Palestine. As the singer sings, his prophetic vision takes in the world-conflict. He sees all the powers of evil leagued against God and God's anointed, forecasts the inevitable issue, and, with a foreshadowing of the gospel, points out to those who disregard God's authority that their only way to peace and safety is by repentance and submission. Thus in all ages this psalm has given expression to the courage of piety in time of apparent calamity. Thus was it used by the apostles in the early church, when threatened with punishment if they continued to preach the gospel of Christ. It is the warrior psalm of the church militant for all ages.

The hosts of sin afford to the true Christian no reason for fear. Pessimism has some ground, at least some excuse, in the short sight, but none in the long look. Faith and pessimism cannot go together. We believe in the victory of the right, because we believe in God.

For right is right, since God is God,
And right the day must win;
To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin.

In interpreting this poem one may easily stumble at its imputation to Jehovah of human expression of feeling. "He who is seated in the heavens laughs; the Lord mocks at them." To stumble at such an expression is to treat the poet as though he were a philosopher, and the truth of poetry as though it were the truth of philosophy. The philosopher sees truth in abstract forms; he therefore says, the Almighty is not disturbed by the apparent power of evil. The poet sees truth in concrete forms; he therefore says, "He that sitteth in the heavens laughs; the Lord mocks at them." Beneath this dramatic picture, and interpreted by it, is the profound truth of the eternal serenity, from which in all times of trouble we may borrow peace.

In this psalm is a double gospel message—message to the assailed, message to the assailant. To the assailed the Psalm comes with the word of Jehovah to Moses and Joshua; with the word of the angel, after Christ's death, to the disciples; and of the angel, in the hour of shipwreck, to Paul—"Fear not." To the assailant it comes with both warning and promise. God is a God of righteousness, and righteousness will be victorious, for God will maintain righteousness at any and every cost. But He will maintain righteousness rather by your submission than your destruction, by crowning you also with loving kindness and tender mercies if you will recognize the coronation. He is king of kings and lord of lords. He is going forth conquering and to conquer. Do homage, therefore; accept his reign, find in Him a refuge; for all they that find refuge in Him are blessed.

Of General Interest.

The Methodist Episcopal Church has over 15,000 ministers, 14,000 local preachers, 100,000 official members, and 300,000 Sunday-school officers and teachers.

The Sunday-school and Publishing Society of the Congregational Church expended during the year just closed, in the missionary department of its work, $61,690; just $365 less than its total receipts.

The Temperance Society of the Free Church of Scotland made rapid progress during the past year. The membership rose by ten thousand, and now stands at over ninety thousand. Of thirty-six ministers ordained during the twelve months thirty-five were abstainers, and nearly all the students in the colleges are teetotalers.

The sixty-first annual report of the Calcutta (India) Tract and Book Society brings the transactions of the society down to 1891. The number of books and tracts issued during the year ending March 31, 1891, were in English, 230,000; in Bengali, 750,000; in Mussulman-Bengali, 36,000, and in other Indian vernaculars, principally Hindi and Urdu, over 40,000, making a total of over one million books and tracts sold and given away.

The will probated of Rev. F. J. Peree, of Monmouth, N. J., leaves an estate of $200,000 to Lincoln University, of Oxford, Chester county, Pennsylvania, for the purpose of educating colored young men to the ministry, and in case no sufficient number of colored young men shall offer for such ministry, then the institution shall apply the funds for the payment of the expense of educating and maintaining white young men who may wish to become missionaries to Africa, under the direction of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Affairs.

The offer by the Mormons to the commissioners of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the use of their large tabernacle at Salt Lake City, with a choir of five hundred voices, has been respectfully declined on the ground that the Presbyterians intend to hold meetings in the city explaining the work of the Presbyterian Church among the Mormons; and they do not feel that it would be right to hold such meetings in the tabernacle. They have secured the opera-house, and in addition expect to have sessions in the evangelical churches of the city.

Thoughts for the Day.

The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.

—Longfellow.

The world is all up hill when we would do,
All down hill when we suffer.

—Bailey's Festus.

Mine honor is my life; both grow in one;
Take honor from me and my life is none.

—Shakspeare.

Better a day of strife
Than a century of sleep;
Give me, instead of a long stream of life,
The tempest and tears of the deep.

—Father Ryan.

Particular About Butter.

Good News.

Little Boy—Mom wants two pounds o' butter exactly like wot you sent us last. If 'tain't exactly like she won't take it.

Grocer (to numerous customers)—Some people in my business don't like very particular customers, but I do. It's my delight to serve them, and get them exactly what they want. I will attend to you in a moment, little boy.

Little Boy—Be sure to get the same kind, A lot o' pap's relations is visitin' at our house, an' mom wants to drive 'em away.

Too Much for Him.

Puck.

Minister—Now, my dear hearers, look with me for a moment at the character of David. In him we see a man of brains, and courage, and resources! A powerful politician! A skillful leader and organizer of men!

Mr. Nosun (edging toward door)—Here, let me out! I can't stand that man's praise of Hill!

Temporary Shortage.

New York Weekly.

Wife—That new bonnet——

Husband—My dear, you can't have that new bonnet. I've been nominated for a high position of public trust, and it will take all I can rake and scrape to buy votes.