

## The Sorcerer

By Mme. Lucie Delarue-Mardrus

Translated by W. L. McPherson

IT WAS in Tunis, in the Maltese quarter, near the sea gate. A family from Malta, like so many others, lived there in a dingy lodging, amid poverty, dirt and squawking. Through the door, always open on the narrow, crowded street, one could see the comings and goings of the peddlers of fruits and vegetables, the stalls in which so many things are cooked in oil, the gayly-painted Arab carriages, the jumble of Mussulmans in soft-colored gandourahs, and of the Maltese residents, men with fur caps on at 90 degrees in the shade and women dressed in heavy black, as foul and unsightly as beggars.

No people could be more superstitious or fanatical than the Maltese—even the Sicilians. In the processions in which they take out the statue of the Virgin one sees them running to throw on the platform on which the Madonna is carried all that they have at home in the way of valuables, and especially of jewelry—the mother's little gold chain, the father's watch and so forth. But when the procession is over each one takes back his property, for it was a question of loans, not of gifts.

This form of collective neurasthenia is met with everywhere in the colony. It explains how there can happen an adventure, like the one, absolutely authentic, of which the above mentioned family was the victim.

One morning they saw entering through the open door, murmuring ceremonious salutations, a Maugrabin—that is to say, an Arab from Morocco—wearing a white robe under a black cloak with a cowl, with features straight and strongly marked, eyes close together and a look which held and dominated you.

Morocco is pre-eminently a land of sorcery. The Maltese know this, as everybody else does. "Close the door!" the sorcerer ordered.

The father ran and closed it.

"The children must go outside."

When only the father and mother were left he said:

"I came to hunt you up because my art has revealed to me that there is a treasure concealed in your house. I had the revelation last night and I hurried here to tell you. For Allah sends me to the poor to lift the burdens from their shoulders. This treasure is hidden under your bed, and I am going to show it to you, if such is your wish."

With hands clasped, the miserable couple listened.

"May God preserve you," said the husband. "We have no other wish."

"Good!" said the sorcerer.

He approached the dirty couch, made mysterious signs about it, and uttered incantations.

"Now," he ordered the husband, "pull the bed out and come close to me, both of you."

The bed pulled out, a double cry of amazement filled the humble room. For a flagstone, never before seen, was found in the corner. A heavy iron ring was attached to it.

"Lift the ring."

The man bent down and lifted it. A stairway, leading underground, appeared.

"Let us go down!"

Pale and trembling, the two Maltese followed the Moroccan. At the foot of the stairway a sudden illumination came to them from something which shone in the recesses of the cellar which they entered. It was a heap of gold pieces, nine feet high and at least fifteen feet in circumference. The treasure was guarded by two naked negroes, motionless and threatening, each with a bare sword in his hand. When the husband and wife, dumb with surprise, fear and joy, had looked at it for a time, a voice cried:

"Now, we must go up stairs again."

After the flagstone was put in place and the bed pushed back the Maugrabin explained:

"I must prepare an enchantment to get rid of the negroes, who guard the treasure. The pile of gold is yours four days from now at this hour, if you give me what I need to work with for the four nights."

The wife, her teeth chattering, asked:

"What do you need?"

"I need incenses, balms and many other things which I can't tell you about. Let us say sixty duros. Give me them at once and in four days the negroes will have disappeared. But don't speak to any one of this affair, not even to your children. In that case all would be lost. Don't touch the bed before I come back, and don't look under it."

The husband stared at his wife. Three hundred francs!—it was almost their entire capital. They had in all 350 francs, the savings of fifteen years.

"Give him the sixty duros," she said, still in a dream.

The Moroccan took the money without a look, apparently absorbed in his magic calculations. He didn't even count it, and murmured:

"I will give you a list of the purchases. There is no time to lose now."

At the door he made some more ceremonious salutations, while the other two kissed his hands, which he modestly drew back.

"Do not thank me, O my son and my daughter! I do it in the sight of Allah! If I give you happiness I shall be rewarded beyond my deserts."

When he was gone the poor couple fell into each other's arms and wept.

They didn't sleep for four nights. Their magnificent hopes wouldn't let them. Moreover, they were dreadfully afraid of lying in the bed under which lived the two negroes they had seen.

The morning of the fourth day they sent the children away. Fervently, with eyes dilated and twitching hands, they waited.

Alas! They are still waiting. Victims of the hypnotic power of the impostor, they searched for two months under the bed for the flagstone and the ring. But they found only dusty and broken flooring, just as it had always been. And the worst of the affair is that they are not alone in this predicament, and that more than one case in the courts of Tunis deals and will deal with equally incredible phantasmagoria.

## OLD-AGE PENSIONS IN FICTION

By JAMES L. FORD

Illustration by J. NORMAN LYND



The Cowboy Earl, the War Correspondent, the Criminal Investigator and the Settlement Worker

THE decision of the administration to award an old-age pension to those characters in American fiction who have long outlived whatever charm of novelty they may have possessed has met with the unqualified approval of the great reading public and also of those innumerable personages of modern life whose entrance into the pages of novels has been impeded because the veterans took up so much room.

The task of selecting those worthy of the pension was intrusted to a Censor who had already enjoyed long experience in the various busybodying activities of the age. He had tasted near beer in New Jersey saloons, measured bathing suits at Asbury Park, exposed the "inner workings" of the United States Steel Corporation and written articles to prove that convicts could be reformed through beneficent moving picture shows. The first problem that confronted him on assuming the robes of his new office was that of the proper age limit, for which no precedent was to be found in real life, for there is great variety in age among those who tread the city's pave and still are able to perform their duties.

## Characters Age Rapidly in Modern Fiction

It has been said that a prizefighter reaches the maturity of his powers at twenty-six and a baseball player at thirty. No one knows at what age a Wall Street broker ceases his activities on the exchange, but as a general thing he lives five times longer than any of his customers. The ballet dancer enters upon her decline at about forty, but the joke about her longevity has endured since the days of Garrick.

Exhaustive studies of latter day fiction convinced the Censor that its characters reach the age of senility at an age that seems absurdly young when compared with the years allotted to their prototypes of the earlier centuries. The new woman, for example, who but yesterday entered upon her career of reforming, lecturing, smoking cigarettes, calling a spade a spade and "living her own life" is now gray and wrinkled, and her appearance in a novel causes us to yawn. Compare her with the Three Musketeers of Dumas, who bob up now and again in costume romances and have entered upon a new life in the movies.

It was in the Hall of Fame that the newly appointed Censor entered upon the performance of his duties in the presence of an assemblage that filled the chamber to the utmost capacity and included not only many applicants for the award, but also a number of representatives of the lift of to-day whose existence, although well known to the reading public, has been ignored by novelists engaged in reproducing with simian aptitude personages who long have done duty on the printed page.

In his opening address the Censor declared himself unable to fix upon the precise age at which a character should relieve the reading public of its presence, but considered that a quarter of a century of constant service might be regarded as a just qualification for the pension list. "But," he continued, "I have found the task of selection so difficult and puzzling that thus far I can name only four who meet all the requirements. I shall deal with each of these in turn. Is Lord Hazelmere present?"

## The Earl of Hazelmere Gets What Is Coming to Him

A tall young man whose blue eyes, drooping mustaches and aristocratic bearing—whatever that may be—contrasted strangely with his cowboy garb stepped forth from the pages of a red-blooded novel dealing with life in the raw, swinging his riata for all the world as if he were taking part in a rodeo at the rancho. Every character in the room recognized him on sight as the backbone of Far Western fiction, the Cowboy Earl, whose disguise deceives no one who beholds him riding over the range toward the adobe house where Pepita Muggins, proud daughter of the ranchman, is preparing supper. Small wonder that Comanche Bill and Apache Jack, his rivals for the young girl's hand, aid the identification by casting eyes of sinister malice upon him as he rides his broncho with the seat of the Guards.

The Censor addressed him as the Earl of

Hazelmere, though he has been known under many aliases, and in offering him the old age pension to which he was rightfully entitled declared that his manner of life in America set an example in frugality, industry and wise matrimonial choice that other British peers might do well to follow.

"Moreover," continued the Censor, "you have shown yourself amenable to the laws of our native fiction by inheriting your title before your father's death, something unknown in your own country. This has enabled him to cut you off without a shilling because you refused to marry your cousin, the Lady Alicia Drelineourt, for no other reason save that her income of 50,000 pounds a year made her abhorrent to you. The attachment between you and Pepita began from the moment when you rode up to her adobe home, removed your sombrero from your head and asked for employment. Her love for you grew when she saw you ride the bucking broncho and best the envious Comanche Bill and Apache Jack in the primitive diversions with which they essayed to try your strength and courage. Your career on the plains, both as ranchman and lover, has been a continuous series of triumphs, culminating in the arrival of the letter from the family solicitor announcing the death of your father and your inheritance of the vast landed estate in Ireland, where eleven agents have been shot for trying to collect the rent. You have served the simple-minded reading public well, Lord Hazelmere, and the old age pension which I now award you has been fairly won."

The next applicant for the award was a young gentleman whose fashionable raiment, supplemented with a revolver and field glasses, proclaimed him as that favorite of novel readers, the War Correspondent. The Censor in placing him on the retired list with an ample pension thus addressed him:

"You have rendered noble service, young man, since the Spanish War, when you burst upon the delighted vision of the American public with your fancy clothes, your keen eyes and your alert mind. You have loitered in the cafes of Bucharest, Paris and Vienna wait-

ing for somebody to declare war and drawing a liberal salary. Prime Ministers have consulted you and you have given advice to kings. You have had yourself photographed when the shells were bursting around you in such numbers that one wonders at the daring of the photographer who braved those dangers in order to secure your likeness. You have pursued your work with an indifference to expense that is still a source of amazement to every reporter who ever tried to get a two dollar cab fare across the city editor's desk."

"I have enjoyed reading about the manner in which you dashed across Europe in special trains, chartered a steamer to take you through the Red Sea and a ferry boat for the passage to Jersey City. You were a decided improvement on your prototypes in real life, 'Bull Run' Russell and Archibald Forbes. All they did was to get the news."

"You forget," interposed the other, "that I sometimes rescued princesses."

"Merely a side line," said the Censor. "And now you have reached the age limit imposed on amatory enterprises. Henceforth you will live under your own vine and fig tree in the enjoyment of a pension. The Criminal Investigator will please step forward."

To this detector of crime, known under countless aliases to the readers of the best-loved brand of fiction in the American market, the Censor thus spoke:

"Oh, child of the great Sherlock Holmes! Your work has been of such compelling interest and variety and accomplished in the face of such apparently unsurmountable difficulties that you well deserve the liberal allowance that will gladden the years of your retirement. I know you so well that I can recognize you at sight, no matter what your assumed name or the disguise under which you conceal your activities. And I have admired you not only because of your skill in unraveling mysteries, but because of those cultivated tastes and pursuits so seldom found in the Central Office that round out your character. But despite your fondness for collecting rare books and browsing among art galleries and studios and that knowledge of horticulture which you in-

herit from your forebear of 'The Moonstone' the call of duty is never unheeded. When news reaches you that a millionaire has been murdered or that the priceless jewels of his daughter have been removed from the steel safe concealed behind the panelings of the family dining room you leave your flower beds or your rare books and go forth from your luxurious apartment like a hound on the scent. The interest in your exploits begins with your careful scrutiny of the premises on which the crime was committed. Your search for footprints among the flower beds, slightly delayed by interested discussion with the head gardener regarding his manner of growing roses; your examination of the servants, designed to fix suspicion on the aged butler, your casual inquiries concerning the wealthy and fashionable guests who were in the house at the time and your marvelous ability in deduction have made your career one of absorbing delight to millions."

"Deduction is my long suit," said the Criminal Investigator modestly.

## Farewell, Faithful Child Of Sherlock Holmes!

"It certainly is," said the other approvingly. "The thief or murderer might just as well commit his crime in the presence of the entire company as leave on his left boot the speck of mud that means so much to your trainee senses. I was positively thrilled when, led by unerring judgment, you clapped the handcuffs on the one character in the book who had previously eluded suspicion and proved by the dust on his coat sleeve that he was the guilty man. You have indeed done your work well. Now, let the Settlement Worker come forward."

A sweet-faced young woman in a costume designed by a Fifth Avenue tailor for visiting among the poor stepped forward and bestowed upon the Censor a smile of beatific bestowment.

"You have always attracted me so strongly," said the Censor, "that it really pains me to be obliged to retire you to private life. That you, the daughter of the millionaire banker whose money is invested in tenement house property, should find society an empty mockery and give up luxury for a life of well-doing instead of going into the movies, is very much to your credit. Moreover, your self-sacrifice has brought its own reward in the person of a gallant young District Attorney, who became a power in his downtown district where he lived among the poor, and as your husband will acquire permanent residence further uptown among the rich. Like the War Correspondent on whom I have just bestowed a pension, you are an improvement on the class from which you have sprung. I knew some of the earliest Settlement Workers, and all they did was to teach mothers how to take care of their children and inform them in regard to sanitary matters. You and your kind have shown that settlement work, properly conducted, may lead to advantageous results. But you have always been a picturesque figure as you walked through the dangerous parts of the town in your beautiful clothes and with a sweet smile on your face that commanded universal reverence. I loved to see the manner in which the most brutal ruffians stepped aside to allow you to pass, tipped their hats respectfully and resolved to 'croak' any one who dared molest you—which nobody ever did. Your work has not been in vain, for you have made the slums a gateway into society."

Free Verse Readings Keep The Chattertons Alive

As the meeting adjourned the Censor found himself surrounded by many page-worn characters who clamored for the pension on the ground of long and faithful service. These were outclassed in vehemence and numbers by more modern ones, who claimed to have been kept out of the great world of fancy by which the novelist held the key.

"They continue to starve me in my garret like a Chatterton," cried the poet indignantly, "but since the discovery of free verse as an easy means of livelihood I have been reading from my own works in drawing rooms and never lack a meal."

"They have not even heard of my existence!" cried a downy checked dramatic critic, "and yet I head every important movement for the betterment of the stage."

"Neither one of you has any just cause for complaint," said the Censor. "You both figure in every interesting group of the Younger Writers printed in the magazines, and that is quite enough."

## Taxing the Fat

Translated by Leon Lansberg

HOW shall a deficit be made good? Obviously by drawing upon a surplus. Such is the classic simplicity of the political economy of the day. News from Germany tells that the state financiers are seriously contemplating a literal application of the principle, after the fashion of an *argumentum ad hominem*.

Truly, some modern Caesar rules at the German exchequer. But he prefers men of ample girth and avoidupois, for the very practical purpose of making them sources of revenue. The plan is to replenish the national treasury by levying a graded tax on all men whose circumference or whose specific gravity exceeds a certain maximum.

So does a serious matter—mighty serious to Fritz of the Ample Waistband—spring hitherly forth from a merry bit of Gallic persiflage perpetrated by a shrewd advertising genius. The origin of the scheme upon which Germany relies for fiscal salvation was straggled one day the Parisian journal "Le Falloit" listed ostensibly as news the following item:

"The ninth sub-commission of the fiscal legislation met yesterday under the presidency of M. Courbomolle in order to discuss a new project of taxation to consist in raising a proportional tax on stoutness. Every taxpayer shall be assessed in future according to his net weight and shall have to report to be weighed on the municipal scales of the salt market. A sheet especially prepared for this tax will be filled out, according to the weight shown by the taxpayer, who shall be exempted from assessment up to sixty kilos. The scale of taxes to be paid will be established on the following basis: from sixty-one to eighty kilos, 20 francs; from eighty-one to ninety kilos, 30 francs; from ninety-one to one hundred kilos, 40 francs. Above one hundred kilos the tax will be 10 francs a pound overweight. It will be rather burdensome to the plump taxpayers, and if they do not want to carry this heavy supplementary burden they must hasten to rid themselves of their superfluous fat, according to the latest news, the vote on this will be urgently demanded, so that it may be into force from the first days in October."

The reading of this item (which no one suspected of being a hoax) did not fail to thrill all stout people into the abyss of perplexity. To find a means to weigh less than sixty-six kilos was the problem to be solved. Brothers, we must grow thin.

Yes, but how proceed to grow thin quickly? Oh! very simple! The remedy was then placed at the side of the disease. Under no item in question, as by chance, was this found in a box:

"Gentlemen: You begin to grow corpulent. As to grow corpulent means to pay the tax. In a few days the Decussol Sahut melts rapidly away the most consistent and most persistent fat. Baled in 50 per cent. guaranteed by following the simple treatment. Three bottles for 48 francs."

During six months it was a formidable defatation. All weighty persons bought Decussol Sahut. Most people did not hesitate to purchase it for 96 and even 144 francs, in order to avoid the formidable tax that threatened them and not to have to pay 30 or 30 francs to the tax collector. And M. Peguillieu, the well known druggist of the Place de la Concorde, who sold this marvelous preparation, saw the wealth of Pictorius sweating his face. The bottle of Decussol cost him six sous, including all expenses. It was a triumph.

Incidentally, the worry which they made themselves, much more than the drugs they took, succeeded in making M. Peguillieu's customers as lean as they desired. But, while each had freed himself of several kilos, the terrible tax on fat was never discussed in the Chambers. The sale of Decussol at also the profits of M. Peguillieu slackened. Then there appeared one morning in "Le Falloit" the following information:

"Frenchmen have always been accused of being a light people. With a praiseworthy object of correcting this fault, the fourth group of the budget commission will without delay propose to the Chamber a bill for assessing a degressive tax on all persons who do not have the weight prescribed by law. This weight, rigorously obligatory from April 1, will be fixed at seventy-five kilos for men and sixty-five kilos for women. If this minimum weight is not reached by the taxpayer each kilo less will be heavily taxed at 25 francs per pound, so that the good renown of the race and, above all, the equilibrium of the budget, may be maintained."

This grievous news threw consternation among the former "heavyweights." Now, after having done everything to grow thin, they had to do everything to fatten if they did not want to be crushed by taxes! But how were they to recover with the least possible delay good fat so imprudently dissolved? To use over-nutrition? Alas! everything was restricted, rationed out, measured in drops and letterweight! Potatoes cost 30 sous a kilo, and the fat of ham was requisitioned by the government to serve for the manufacture of a new explosive.

But a reassuring advertisement opportunely in the columns of "Le Falloit," close to the announcement, contained the following:

"Do you want to become big and fat? Do you want to gain six kilos a week? Take Balourdine Curative. It is bottled large. Price per bottle 10 francs."

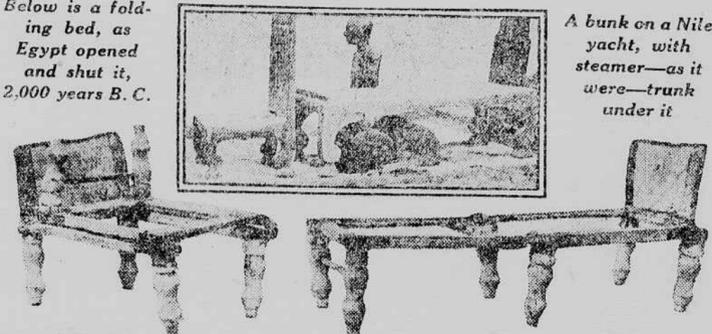
The public favor, for an instant not occupied, flew back toward this saving plank. And the same customers who to grow thin had bought Decussol Sahut now, in order to fatten, drank hard the Balourdine Curative, another of M. Peguillieu's inventions! At this price they avoided being skinned by the taxes that existed only in the imagination of the inventive drug mixer.

But the fiscals nevertheless got them. For they paid without noticing it and with double the tax on the payments, the tax on the bottles, the tax on pharmaceutical specialties, the tax on the corks and some other well balanced taxes.

Thus Gribouille, says the legend, one day jumped into the water in order not to get wet!

## Egypt Slept in a Folding Bed

Below is a folding bed, as Egypt opened and shut it, 2,000 years B. C.



A bunk on a Nile yacht, with steamer—as it were—tuck under it

NEW YORK is generally supposed to be the original habitat of the folding bed. It is difficult to think of it flourishing anywhere but in the narrow modern flat or the hall bedroom. There has recently been placed on exhibition in the Metropolitan Museum of Art a remarkably lifelike working model of a folding bed which dates from a period about 2,000 years B. C. The original contrivance was an Egyptian invention.

The ancient implement of torture looks surprisingly modern. It rests on wooden legs carefully turned in the modern fashion. When folded it occupies less than half the space required for sleeping. The hinges are still in working order after all these centuries, and although somewhat brittle the bed can be opened and folded with ease.

There is a rest for the pillow and a cross slat which held the bed clothing. The most amazing thing about the bed, however, was the nature of the place in which it was discovered. It was found in a tomb. The Egyptians on burial had placed about them the objects they imagined they would need for their comfort in a future life, or, as they expressed it, in their journey with the sun. The folding bed in modern times is only tolerated. It is at

best only a makeshift. The ancient Egyptian must have regarded it with affection. This particular folding bed, besides, did not belong to some person in moderate circumstances who occupied what corresponded to a hall bedroom in an Egyptian house. It was the property of one of the wealthiest citizens of the land, who could afford to build a very elaborate tomb.

In the same collection may be seen the model of another Egyptian bed, or rather bunk, such as was used on the boats on the Nile forty centuries ago. The bunk is made of wood, and is long and narrow, like steamer beds of our own day. The legs are carved with considerable taste. At the foot of the bunk stands a chair, evidently intended for the traveler to sit upon in dressing or undressing. Beside the bed stands the figure of a steward or servant, which shows that the ancient travelers had their own ideas about comfort.

A peculiarly modern touch in the furnishing of this ancient ship's cabin are the travelers' "steamer trunks," which fit conveniently under the low berth. They were obviously made for this purpose, since they fit very neatly in position. It would perhaps be inaccurate to call these "steamer trunks," as steam was not discovered until some forty centuries later, but no other description seems to fit.