The Mystery of the Horses of St. Mark's

Their Origin in Doubt—Their Present Whereabouts a State Secret.

IN a recent issue of THE SUN it was stated that the famous gilded bronze horses which for centuries have adorned the principal portal of St. Mark's Church in Venice have been removed to a place of safety because of the fear that they might be damaged by hostile aviators or warships. Apparently the Italian authorities have decided that the four horses have suffered enough hardships since they were first placed on the parapet of St. Mark's and by hiding them they will not be exposed to danger in the event of an invasion of Venice by the enemy. The shelling of the Rheims Cathedral has been an object lesson to the Italian Government.

Before the European war the horses of St. Mark's were one of the sights of Venice. The glowing mosaics of the glorious Byzantine structure, the lofty campanile, the Grand Canal, the Doge's palace, the marbles, the bronze doors and the inscriptions in the basilica have no greater attractions for visitors than the four horses, beautiful specimens of sculpture, standing to the right of the famous clock tower, with their left fore feet lifted, heads erect, unbridled, and beautiful flowing tails.

John Ruskin, who lived much in Venice and wrote much about the island city, in his book "St. Mark's Rest: A History of Venice" says, "I begin with the horses—those I saw in my dream in 1871 putting on their harness. These are the sign to Europe of the destruction of the Greek Empire by the Latin. They are chariot horses, the horses of the Greek quadriga, and they are the trophies of Henry Dandolo."

Another writer on Venice, L. M. Rogg, in his book "Things Seen in Venice," expresses his sentiments toward the horses in this manner:

Four steeds divine that strike the ground
resounding with their feet,
And from their nostrils snort ethereal
flame.

Where the four horses originally came from has been a much mooted question. According to a popular guide of Venice much used at present "the four horses of St. Mark's, five feet high, are among the finest of ancient bronzes. They probably once adorned the triumphal arch of Nero (A. D. 37-68) and afterward that of Trajan (A. D. 52-177). Constantine (A. D. 270-337) sent them to adorn the imperial hippodrome at Constantinople, whence the Doge Enrico Dandolo took them to Venice in 1204 as the spoils of war. In 1797 they were carried to Paris by Napoleon, where they were set up on the triumphal arch in the Place du Carrousel, but in 1815 they were restored to their former position by Emperor Francis."

Another authority says that "they were taken from the triumphal arch of Titus (A. D. 40-81) to the Greek 'New Rome.'"

Thus there seems to be a great difference of opinion among historians as to where the horses came from. Some assert that the four horses originally came from Greece, being modelled after the winners of the four horse chariot race in the Olympic games. Other authorities maintain that quadrigas were unknown to the Greeks and consequently the horses were fashioned after the quadrigas appearing on Roman triumphal arches, coins and gems, particularly in the time of Nero.

During the '80s a history of Venetian antiquities, prepared under the direction of Prof. Camillo Bioto and translated by William Scott, was published in Venice. The book was called "The Basilica of St. Mark's." Each subject was assigned to a man best qualified to deal with it. The history of the four horses was entrusted to A. Dall' Acqua Giusti, and there is no doubt he did his work well.

Giusti found that Niketas of Iconium lamented the irreparable devastation caused in Constantinople by the Latins when they besieged and took the city in 1204. Niketas deplored the destruction of the ancient statues. However, the four horses of gilt copper were jealously preserved. Those horses had been placed in the hippodrome above the grand stand when the chariots stood ranged before the race.

Niketas repeats the words of an Arab who had fled to the hippodrome and ascended to the tower. The Arab said: "They were four horses of gilt copper (or bronze) with their necks somewhat curved, turned toward one another and eager for the race."

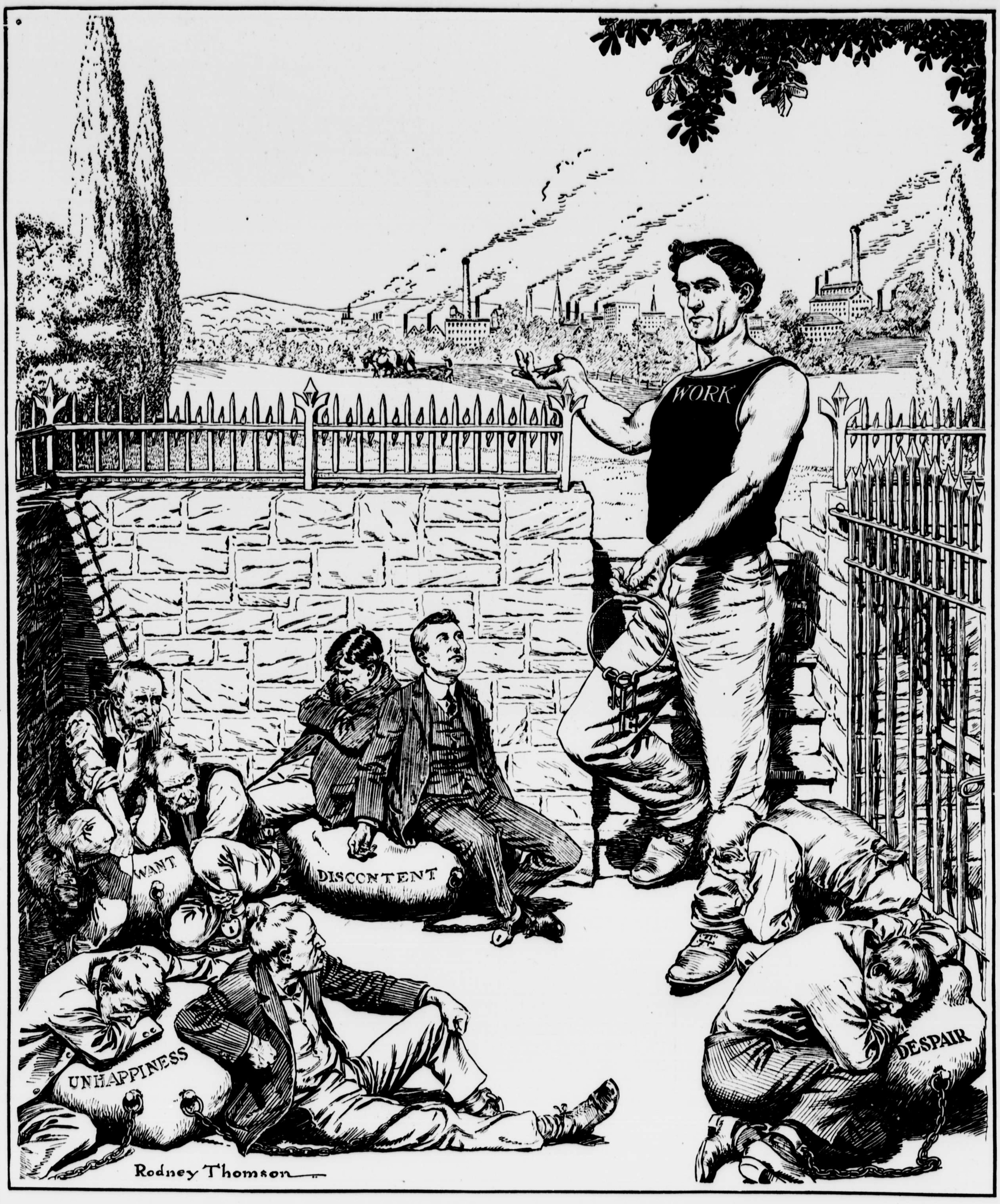
Other Byzantine writers besides Niketas speak of the horses. Papias, an old writer, relates that the four gilded horses placed on the upper part of the hippodrome were brought during the reign of the younger Theodosius from the island of Chios, a large island close to the Asian shore and widely known as the home of the alleged descendants of Homer. George Kodinos, another writer, takes the same view of their origin.

Therefore the first undisputed movement of the horses was as a part of the share of the loot of Constantinople falling to the Venetians in their union with the crusaders.

When the four horses reached Venice they were immediately placed on the front of the basilica of St. Mark's, where the passing throngs could see and admire them. But even if the masses did accord to the beautiful horses their admiration the Venetian writers did not enthuse, and most of them failed to note the event. Even such an ardent writer as Andre Dandolo, who devoted much time and trouble to enumerating the relics and bodies of saints brought from Constantinople, failed to say one word about the horses.

Petrarch seems to be the first writer to mention them. It was in 1364. At the time there was great joy and celebrating in Venice because a rebellion on the island of Crete had been put down. On June 4 a festival was held in St. Mark's Square to celebrate the great victory. With the Doge and a large number of nobles at his side Petrarch stood above the atrium of the church on a marble platform. Petrarch wrote of the incident: "This is the place where are four gilt bronze horses of ancient workmanship and by an illustrious artist, whoever he may have been, which almost neigh and stamp with their feet."

THE LIBERATOR - - Drawn by Rodney Thomson



Those who disdain his beckoning hand must wear their shackles still

The four horses of St. Mark's seem to have personified the power of the Venetians. In 1370 Venice was in dire distress. The Venetian terra firma up to the Bebbe tower and the Moranzano had been occupied by Francesco da Carrara. As an added menace, the Genoese after many sanguinary conflicts were in possession of Chioggia. The people were in deadly fear of the final onslaught. The Senate met to consider what should be done. It was decided to send messengers to the invaders and pray for peace at any cost.

The invaders refused to listen to peace proposals. They sneered at the peace ambassadors, and their leader, Pietro Dorio, sent back this word: "Upon my honor you shall never have peace either from the Lord of Padua or from Genoa until we have bridled those unbridled horses of yours that stand on the palace of your Evangelist St. Mark."

The arrogant assertion of Dorio did not daunt the Venetians. The populace was indignant at their chiefs for their lack of aggressiveness in opposing the invaders. They cried for the release of Admiral Vittor Pisani, who was very popular, although he was in prison for his defeat in Dalmatian waters. The public clamor became so great that the Doge issued orders for the immediate release of Admiral Pisani. He rallied about him a force of faithful soldiers, forced the Paduans to retreat, and then shut the Genoese up in Chioggia, where, after a short siege, he forced them to surrender. There was great joy among the Venetians, Admiral Pisani was proclaimed a hero and the four horses remained unbridled.

Martin Sanudo was the first writer to confirm the tradition that the four horses were brought from Constantinople. He speaks with authority in a certain measure, basing his contention on particulars supplied by eyewitnesses. Sanudo has yet another version of the origin of the horses. He asserts that they were made in Persia and brought first to Rome. Sanudo is believed to have been misled into this statement by seeing the horses represented on the reverse side of a Roman coin.

Sanduso relates that one of the horses was damaged while being brought to Venice on board Ser Damenico Morosini's galley. The hind foot was broken off and Morosini kept the foot as a memento. The foot was brought to a house in St. Augustine's which had belonged to Ser Alessandio Contarini, son of Ser Carla, who married his only daughter to Ser Marco Tiepolo of Sant' Apostolo. When the latter had completed the building of a home at Sant' Apostolo he transferred the foot from St. Augustine's and placed it on the house near the corner. It was later removed, but nothing is said of what finally became of it.

Another writer, Francesco Sansovino, gives this hypothesis: Marino Zeno, the first Latin Governor of Constantinople after its fall in 1204, sent the horses to Venice along with various slabs and marbles. For some reason not explained the horses were placed in the arsenal when they arrived in Venice. In such a place they were in danger of being broken up, and as their singular beauty finally attracted attention they were brought forth from their hiding place and placed on the Basilica of St. Mark's.

There is no authenticity for this supposition, however, for it is considered a very singular thing that while the horses were sent to Constantinople with valuable slabs and marbles they were cast into an arsenal and not considered valuable for some time. The chances are that Sansovino also saw the horses depicted on Roman coins and concluded that they were taken to Constantinople and later to Venice. The writer, however, admits his own doubts on this subject.

Chemistry has joined with historical research in an attempt to solve the mystery of the origin of the horses. Three assayers, Darcet of Paris, Klaproth of Berlin and Bussolin, chief assayer of the Venice mint, made an analysis of the metal and found that the copper contained a hundredth part of tin, besides traces of silver and lead. Tin had been added to the copper to give it the proper fluidity for casting. Small quantities of other metals were also discovered, but the assumption was that these were impurities remaining in the metals used or were from a small quantity of old copper which had been used before.

The assayers agreed that the founder of the famous horses possessed extraordinary skill in casting and must have used a method unknown to us. The castings are but shells of metal only about 1-6 of an inch in thickness. Each is made in two parts, one part being the entire body as far as the base of the neck, while the other consists of the neck and head. The juncture is neatly hidden under the collar.

Although the lower parts of the legs and other parts of the bodies show the injuries received in moving, gilding has concealed the defects. The extreme beauty of the horses lends color to the belief that they are of Grecian origin. Their muscular necks, their round bodies and their superb heads must be characteristic of their breed. They were probably the four most prized chariot horses of their time.

Another reason for the belief that the four horses are Greek is that they were harnessed for triumph and were adorned with trappings such as crescents, lion's claws of gilt or gold, hanging from their collars. Similar trappings adorn the horses of the Roman triumphal arches, but the custom was derived by the Romans from the Greeks.

The clue to the mystery has also been sought in the close clipped manes of the horses. A German writer, J. Seitz, who saw the horses in Paris, concluded that the representation of the manes as close clipped was due to the artist's inability to represent them otherwise. Seitz therefore decided that Lysippus, a native of Sicyon, renowned for his works in bronze in the last half of the fourth century, B. C., did not model the horses. He thought they might have been modelled by Polydetus or Myro.

Seitz's theory was exploded, however, when it was shown that the horses of the Parthenon, sacred to the virgin goddess Athena, all had their manes clipped close to the neck. Therefore, there is no doubt that the custom prevailed in Greece during the best period. It was a custom seldom followed by the Romans.

Count Leopold Cicognara, president of the Academy of Fine Arts of Venice and known for his "History of Sculpture," was the first to write a complete historical account of the four horses. He valiantly endeavored to show that the horses were cast in Nero's time, but it is believed that he, like other writers, was influenced by the fact that quadrigas appeared on Roman coins.

When, after standing for six centuries on the Basilica of St. Mark's, the horses were hauled down by the Gallic invader and removed on the order of Napoleon to Paris, they were placed on four pilasters before the palace of the Tuileries. Napoleon, in his dream of assuming the dignities as well as the powers of a Roman Emperor, conceived the idea of having an image of himself driving a chariot to which the four horses should be hitched. He even gave the order for the work, and the horses were raised on the arch of the Tuileries. But before the group could be completed with his own statue the fabric of his glories crumpled. The horses were immediately started on their journey back to Venice, where they arrived on June 13, 1815, the eighteenth anniversary of the day on which they had been carried off by the French. The horses were drawn to the Basilica and hoisted to their old places amid the booming of guns.

Familiar Incidents

By Stephen Leacock.

Continued from Ninth Page.

page? Answer carefully, Jones, because if it hasn't I won't buy it."

"I think it has," he said.

"Very well," I answered; "now bring the author to me."

In the interval of waiting I hastily ran my eye through the pages of the manuscript.

Presently they brought the author back again. He had assumed a look of depression.

"I have decided," I said, "to take your manuscript."

Joy broke upon his face. He came nearer to me as if to lick my hand.

"Stop a minute," I said. "I am willing to take your story, but there are certain things, certain small details, which I want to change."

"Yes?" he said timidly.

"In the first place, I don't like your title. 'Dorothy Dacres, or, Only a Clergyman's Daughter' is too quiet. I shall change it to read 'Dorothea Dashaway, or, The Quicksands of Society.'"

"But surely," began the contributor, beginning to wring his hands——

"Don't interrupt me," I said. "In the next place, the story is much too long." Here I reached for a large pair of tailor's scissors that lay on the table. "This story contains 9,000 words. We never care to use more than 6,000. I must therefore cut some of it off."

I measured the story carefully with a pocket tape that lay in front of me, cut off 3,000 words and handed them back to the author.

"These words," I said, "you may keep. We make no claim on them at all. You are at liberty to make any use of them that you like."

"But please," he said, "you have cut off all the end of the story; the whole conclusion is gone. The readers can't possibly tell——"

I smiled at him with something approaching kindness

"My dear sir," I said, "they never get beyond 3,000 words of the end of a magazine story. The end is of no consequence whatever. The beginning, I admit, may be, but the end! Come! Come! And in any case in our magazine we print the end of each story separately, distributed among the advertisements to break the type. But just at present we have plenty of these on hand.

"You see," I continued, for there was something in the man's manner that almost touched me, "all that is needed is that the last words printed must have a look of finality. That's all. Now, let me see," and I turned to the place where the story was cut. "What are the last words here: 'Dorothea sank into a chair. There we must leave her!' Excellent! What better end could you want? She sank into a chair and you leave her. Nothing more natural."

The contributor seemed about to protest. But I stopped him.

"There is one other small thing," I said. "Our coming number is to be a Plumbers' and Motor Number. I must ask you to introduce a certain amount of plumbing into your story."

I rapidly turned over the pages.

"I see," I said, "that your story as written is laid largely in Spain in the summer. I shall ask you to alter this to Switzerland and make it winter time to allow for the breaking of steam pipes. Such things as these, however, are mere details; we can easily arrange them."

I reached out my hand.

"And now," I said, "I must wish you a good afternoon."

The contributor seemed to pluck up courage.

"What about remuneration——" he faltered.

I waived the question gravely aside. "You will of course be duly paid at our usual rate. You receive a cheque two years after publication. It will cover all your necessary expenses, including ink, paper, string, sealing wax and other incidentals, in addition to which we hope to be able to make you a compensation for your time on a reasonable basis per hour. Goodbye."

He left and I could hear them throwing him downstairs.

Then I sat down, while my mind was on it, and wrote the advance notice of the story. It ran like this:

"Next month's number of the *Monday Mania Magazine* will contain a thrilling story, entitled 'Dorothea Dashaway, or, The Quicksands of Society.'

"The author has lately leaped into immediate recognition as the greatest master of the short story in the American world. His style has a brio, a poise, a savoir faire, a je ne sais quoi, which stamps all his work with the cachet of literary superiority. The sum paid for the story of 'Dorothea Dashaway' is said to be the largest ever paid for a single MS. Every page palpitates with interest, and at the conclusion of this remarkable narrative the reader lays down the page in utter bewilderment, to turn perhaps to the almost equally marvellous illustration of Messrs. Spiggott and Fawcett's Home Plumbing Device Exposition which adorns the same number of the great review."

I wrote this out, rang the bell, and was just beginning to say to the secretary:

"My dear child—pray pardon my forgetfulness. You must be famished for lunch. Will you permit me——"

And then I woke up—at the wrong minute, as one always does.

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THE DUCHESS'S CHARITY.

LAST week the Duchess of Marlborough gave an afternoon musicale at Sunderland House for the benefit of the fund of the Aged Candidates Guild of the Royal United Kingdom Beneficent Association. The association gives annuities to impoverished gentlefolk who because of age or ill health are not able to earn their own living.

The guild exists to care for old men and women who are candidates for annuities and help them to secure the data necessary to push their claims. During the last ten years the guild has been the means of securing these pensions for upward of two hundred and sixty aged men and women. Many of these gentlefolk are only one generation or two from distinguished families and represent some of the most widely distinguished men and women in English history.

The Duchess of Marlborough is said to take a special interest in the work of the guild and on more than one occasion to have contributed generously to its fund.