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## TERROR

By R. B. Cunninghame Graham.

THE scent of horse-dung filled the summer air; the whispering trees stood out black menacing masses in the moonlight; the stuccoed houses frowned respectfully upon the streets, looking like artificial cliffs bounding some silent and exclusive sea. Belgravia lay asleep, steeped in the pseudo-moonbeams of the electric light; the roar of traffic, which by day-time deafens and renders by degrees the ear incapable of hearing anything but noise, was dulled, or only rumbled fitfully in the far-off streets, whilst in the silent squares a breeze shook the dust-powdered trees, and rained the first dry summer leaves upon the ground. At corners, a stray prostitute or two still lingered, lying in wait for the belated diner-out.

At the opening of a mews, a knot of stablemen, in shirt-sleeves, with their braces hanging down their backs, girt with broad webbing belts, stood talking about horses, but seriously and without emotion, as befits the solemn nature of their theme. The strange and ragged loiterers who at night parade the streets, coming out silently from the nothingness of misery, "dossing" in the park, and at the first approach of dawn sinking again into the misery of nothingness which is their life, were all abroad. Women, who seemed mere bundles of black rags in motion, and men in greasy, old frockcoats and trousers with a fringe behind the heels, passed one another silently, ships on a sea of failure, without a salutation or a sign.

Mechanically they scratched themselves, their hands like claws of many vultures, raking amongst their rags. Munching a hunch of dirty bread, they passed into the night, a silent menace to their well-fed brothers in the Lord. All that by day is hidden from our sight, was out, giving the lie to optimists, to statisticians, and to all those who make pretense to think that progress makes for happiness, and that the increase of wealth acts as a sort of blotting-pad on poverty, and sucks up grief.

Dressed in their blue-serge jumpers, and sweaters in the thick blue trousers and the ammunition boots which a paternal government deals out to them, so that their lightest step shall thunder on the pavement and give ill-doers a fair chance of stealing themselves away to safety, the police stood at the crossings and conversed in pairs, or, leaning against some iron railings, courted the servant girls, as they watched for the welfare of the sleeping town. A homing cab or two lurched wearily along, the horse and driver nodding in their respective situations, each of them conscious of having earned his meed of beer or corn. The bicyclist's sharp bell startled the swinkt pedestrian at the crossing, as the machine, vanguard of those which will soon sweep pedestrians from all streets, slipped noiselessly along and vanished in the distance, its rider seeming to be suspended in the air as his legs worked like wings.

From the windows of a distant house, the music of a valse floated out fitfully; the shadows of the dancers turned as in a mist behind the glass; outside, the group of waiting footmen lounged,

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and waifs and strays, leaning against the railings of the square, completed the gradations of society, thus seeming, by their presence, at the same time to act as foil to those inside, and yet unite them in the bonds of brotherhood and faith.

The happy, rich, successful, vulgar-looking city, after the toils of business and of fashion, seemed to be taking its well-earned repose. A light nightbreeze just stirred the dust upon the leaves of the black walnuts in the oblong square, shut at one end by the bulk of the long, cake-like church, with bell-tower pepper-box and portico, upon the steps of which the high-heeled boots of fashionable worshippers had left the imprints of the first stage upon their journey towards their self-appointed place.

Nothing on all the face of the quiet, well-regulated town seemed to be out of joint, for tramps and prostitutes have each their proper place in the Chinese puzzle of society, and it is possible, were they but removed, that institutions men deem honorable might find themselves without a place. But nature, pitiless and ever on the watch, and seemingly intent to lower our pride whenever we look round complacently upon our puny so-called scientific triumphs, by linking us inexorably to the other animals in all our passions and our feelings, was not asleep.

Between some iron railings and a stretch of bare and stuccoed wall, some smoke-stained lilacs grew, their roots a lurking-place for cats and a receptacle for bones and empty tins, straws, and the scraps of newspapers which act as banners to our progress, driven by the wind. Right opposite this urban jungle, close to the curbstone, its head upon some horse-dung and its legs stretched out upon the little waves and inequalities of hardened mud left by the rain, lay the dead body of a white-and-yellow cat. Upon its staring coat, each individual hair, stiff with dry sweat and mud, stood out like frozen grass protruding from the snow. Its eyes stared glassy and distended, its legs and tail had taken the rigid forms of feline death, rendered more horrible by contrast with the subtle grace of life. Its body, swollen to twice its proper size, seemed just about to burst.

Killed by a passing cab, or worried by a dog, or perhaps slain out of pure joy in death and love of field-sports by some sportsman to whom the

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