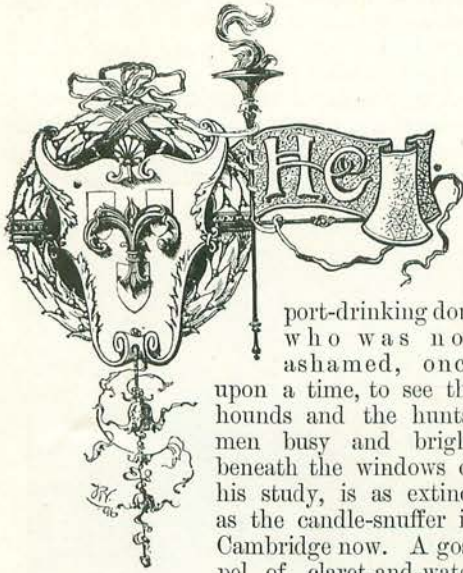


'VARSITY TALES.

BY MAX PEMBERTON.

II.—THE DON, WITH SOME SIDE-LIGHTS UPON DEANS.

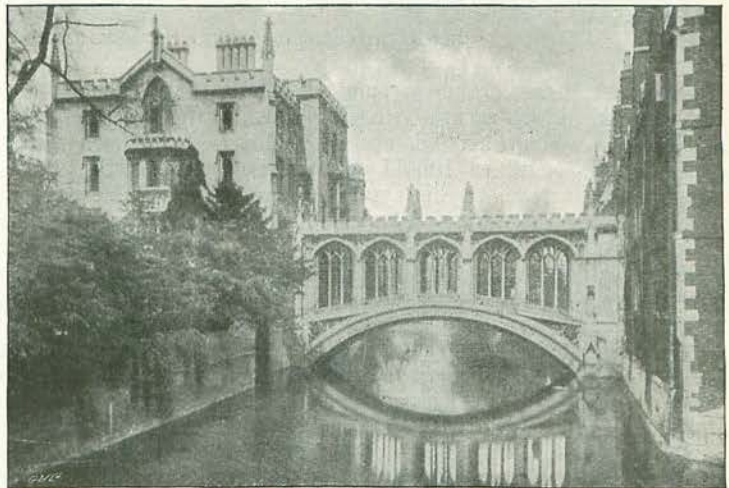


port-drinking don, who was not ashamed, once upon a time, to see the hounds and the huntsmen busy and bright beneath the windows of his study, is as extinct as the candle-snuffer in Cambridge now. A gospel of claret-and-water

and of an eight-hours day is preached diligently and to ready hearers; so that a fellow who is fat and scant of breath is a rare bird, while your sleek and full scholar skips merrily through hall and court, buoyed up, as it were, upon the wings of particles, and ever ready to peck at German specialists. Men like this, it has been urged, have made of Cambridge nothing but a gigantic boarding-school; but that is a purely frivolous judgment pronounced by youths aspiring to the honours of "town and gown," and to the fine schooling of a kid-gloved debauchery. The serious person hastens to welcome everything and anything which will promote the fame and maintain the dignity of his University. And there will be always the lighter side of Cambridge life—the effervescence of the mere boy, the occa-

sional aberration of the saner student, the woe of the don with an ideal, the wail of a dean with a creed. For these things are the early fruits of *la jeunesse* and will outlast the very stones upon which youth capers so merrily.

Not that one would say anything against ideals—as ideals—it is their application which is troublesome. I remember a famous tradition of a Dean of John's who announced, upon assumption of office, that he intended to stamp out many things—but particularly fireworks. There was no reason why the good man should not have gone through life with credit, doing as he would have been done by; but fireworks intervened. Though he was no papist himself, he yet made bold to add to the number of the thirty-nine articles; and his new anathema was for roman candles. At that time the fifth of November was the first of the feasts in John's. Regularly, when dark came down, great bonfires were lighted in the courts, and roman candles were fired from many windows. The new dean said that henceforth the feast must become a fast. No longer were the revolving splendours of catharine wheels, or the fiery balls from the papist's



From a photo by]

[Stearn, Cambridge.

BRIDGE OF SIGHS, ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

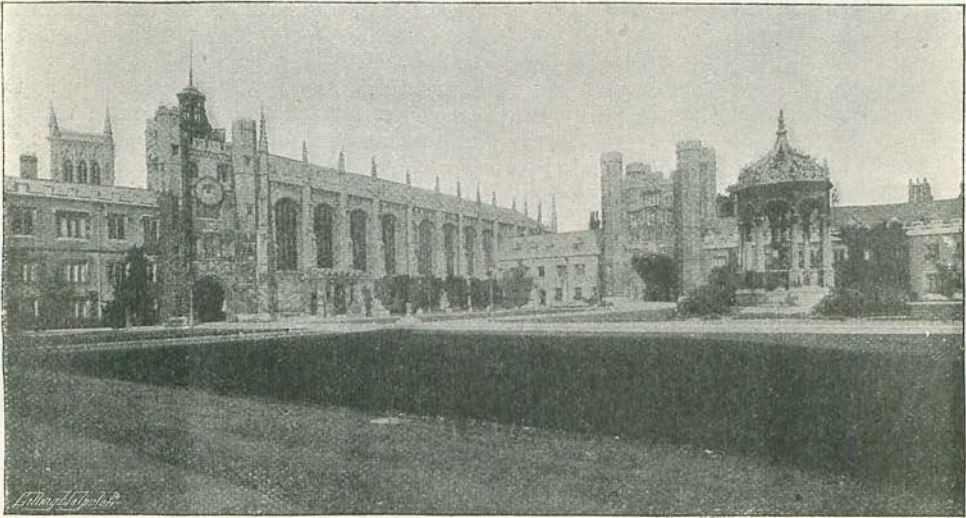
candles, to attract eyes which should be fixed upon the Phaedo or the gaseous laws of Boyle. He threatened to gate any man found to possess even the homely squib; while awful and mysterious penalties were prescribed against the introduction of the condemned candle and the soul-shaking maroon. When the great night at length arrived the dean sat down in the hall with the jaunty air of a man who has triumphed. Not a cracker had, until that time, offended ears so sensitive; not a squib had desecrated the hallowed silence of court or quad. It was midnight, in truth, before the first fire was lighted, and then the dean, still pluming himself, we may suppose, in his dreams, had to be fetched from his bed to see it.

the red cock crow so well on the holy roof of John's. Nor could the porter help him in his praiseworthy desire to secure, if it might be, even one of the impudent crew who had brought such ridicule upon his anathema.

"Williams," roared the dean, while his ears sang with the report of a candle newly lit in a window immediately above him, "whose window is that?"

"That, sir? Oh, if you please, that's a staircase window!"

A new report from another window upon the opposite side of the court conveniently drowned the dean's uneccelesiastical rejoinder. Like a tiger he turned toward the scene of the new outrage.



From a photo by]

[Stearn, Cambridge.

THE GREAT COURT OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

A porter called him, they say, and when he had wrapped himself up in his dressing-gown, and had put a shawl about his ears, he went out into the court to behold a spectacle which brought tears to his eyes. A great fire burned upon the grass-plot which should have been sacred to the feet of scholars; windows, through which the bewitching rays of the moon should have streamed upon innocent faces, were alight with fiery devices strange enough to satisfy the foul fiend himself. Roman candles were everywhere; the air was full of the blazing balls, which shot up in radiant showers and fell, hot and blistering, at the saintly, if naked, feet of the bewildered dean. Turn where he would, fix this window or that, he seemed unable so much as to name a "raider" who had made

"Williams, I insist! You hear me? Whose window is that?"

"If you please, sir, that's another staircase window!"

The dean ground his teeth and went on. His dressing-gown flapped cruelly to the night breeze, his shawl streamed behind him like a banner. He had run, it might have been a third of the way, round the great court when a terrible explosion made the very ground quake. At the same moment a large window on the south side became a blazing square of active roman candles vomiting balls of every hue down almost upon the head of the exasperated cleric.

"Williams," he hissed, "that man goes down to-morrow! You hear me? Then whose window is it? Are you dumb, Williams?"

"Not me, sir, I ain't dumb at all. *That's your window, sir!*"

* * *

The precise expressions of the Dean of John's at this particular moment are not recorded. They say that he compelled the porters to sit up every night for a week, fearing a repetition of the outrage. It was not until six nights had passed that these servile supporters of a new régime so far forgot themselves as to nod in their chairs. But scarce were they asleep when a terrific explosion fetched "old Rockets" from his bed to witness a new pyrotechnical display upon even a finer scale than the first. That broke his heart. He carried himself and his forty articles to a bishopric in remote Africa shortly afterwards; but upon the night of his departure his "dear pupils" sent him a testimonial. They had packed it in a huge hamper, covering it delicately with layers of straw. When the dean had read the framed address accompanying it and had half filled his room with the straw of the box, he came at last to the substance of the gift. It was a roman candle nicely done up in brown paper!

* * * *

But this is a story of the old time, and we are dealing with to-day. I have said that the port-wine drinking don is almost extinct; yet you will still find him lurking in nooks and corners of common-rooms, and you may be sure that he laughs in his sleeve when he sees the up-to-date fellow passing the "thirty-four" and proclaiming the superior stimulating qualities of a lemon squash. Nowadays, one must frankly admit, there is little port drank in the common-room at

all. It is even questioned whether some of the colleges have not ceased to lay down new wines; and the awful prospect of a portless age looms upon the horizon of the probabilities. The new don, to whom Kant is a dissipation and Hegel lighter fare than a comic paper, waxes anecdotal over coffee and hilarious upon the juice of the lemon. He has a contempt for his ruddy-cheeked brother



From a photo by

ST. JOHN'S TOWER FROM THE BACKS.

[Stearn, Cambridge.]

who sits in yon corner sipping his wicked glass, yet not daring to smack his lips or sigh upon its glory, as he would have done in the old time. For the matter of that, he preaches his apocalypse so diligently that the ruddy-faced brother in question begins to ask himself if the drinking of port wine is not, in fact, a crime as heinous as burglary and a little worse than blackmailing. I can

recollect one port-drinking fellow in Paul's who, they said, made and broke many a resolution never again to touch or to smell the heaven-sent "sixty-three." This good man was wont to sit long in the common-room seeing the decanter out. Often we met him at late hours furtively descending the great oak staircase, and we shook our heads when we observed how close was the friendship between him and the banister. One night, about eleven o'clock, we smuggled three cocks, all alive and crowing, into Paul's, and turned them upon this staircase at the moment when we observed our port-loving fellow in the act of leaving the common-room. He was half-way down and tottering in the balance before the first of the cocks greeted him with a rousing serenade, following it up by a great flapping of wings and antics peculiar to the lord of fowls. Then the other cocks answered with like demonstrations, while the victim of "sixty-three" stood beating the phantoms—as he thought them—from him with lusty arms.

"Begone!" he muttered, "begone!—leave me! It is the last time—the last time!"

* * * *

Here was a relic of the old school, a type of man still to be found in the rooms of master's houses and in decaying rectories. Yet that old school was not without its stricter men, as twenty anecdotes of Cambridge will tell you. Recall, for instance, a story of the senior wrangler who, when a dozen of his friends came rushing into his room to bring him the good news of his success, answered them by producing a pint of claret and declaring magnanimously, "Now you fellows shall not leave this room until that claret is finished!" Very similar is the anecdote told of a master, still honoured in Cambridge, of whom lying tradition saith that when he gave a supper to mark his "first" he put a jug of cider before the carousers. When that jug was empty the lord of the feast, stimulated to unbounded generosity, exclaimed—

"Let's have another quart of cider, and hang the expense!"

This master I remember well for he was grown old in his eccentricities when I was in residence. He had, I think, the finest head I have ever seen on man, and this, with his rugged flaxen hair and his little twinkling eyes, made him conspicuous in all the Varsity. His turn to be "vice" came round more than a decade ago, and he stood up in the senate, a splendid picture of a chancellor,

before whom the bachelors knelt in awe, that he might wipe his hands on their heads and pronounce them "very learned." Unhappily, this grand scene, to which fair women and brave men gave grace and ornament, was marred by an impertinent freshman who threw a full-blown cabbage from the gallery so unerringly that it struck the orator on the top of his head at the very moment of his finest period. The interjection ensuing was not, I fancy, originally recorded in the address, but the master was well aware, with Seneca, that the chief fault of youth is an inability to govern its own violence, and he made light of the outrage afterwards. It was his misfortune always to provoke the thoughtless undergraduate to laughter, and this he owed to his voice—a strange, ungovernable voice, which spanned the octaves with ease, and gave you a final note, high and piercing and discordant, like the wail of a departed piano. Regularly when October came round and sixty freshmen trooped into chapel for morning service, you knew that the old act was to be played; you awaited the unrestrainable ripple of laughter as a man may wait for the bell of a clock. The master had but to open his lips to set those sixty freshmen going. You could see their very surplices shaking. Nor will one who heard it ever forget the effect of that famous utterance, beginning high and nasally among the upper Cs and ending, heaven knows where, in notes of unscalable altitudes, "Let—us pray, for all founders—and ben-ee-factors—Ho Lord!"

* * * *

"Risu inepto res ineptior nulla est," says Martial. Much of the inept laughter of undergraduate life owes its being to the eccentricity of don or dean in the pulpit or the lecture-room. In every college, needless to state, there are traditions of a dean who at one time gave forth the text, "And there came a great army of grasspillars and catterhoppers innumerable." In my own place we loved to tell the story of a new-fledged cleric who ended the second lesson one Sabbath morning with the finely delivered but amazing statement, "Now Rababbas was a bobber." Yet withal we had a great affection for the Dean of Paul's, who knew how to be the friend of men and shared with the tutors the confidence and esteem of every man whose privilege it was to be guided of them. Many a time and oft have I seen our dean carry himself with amazing courage in the midst of turbulence and that

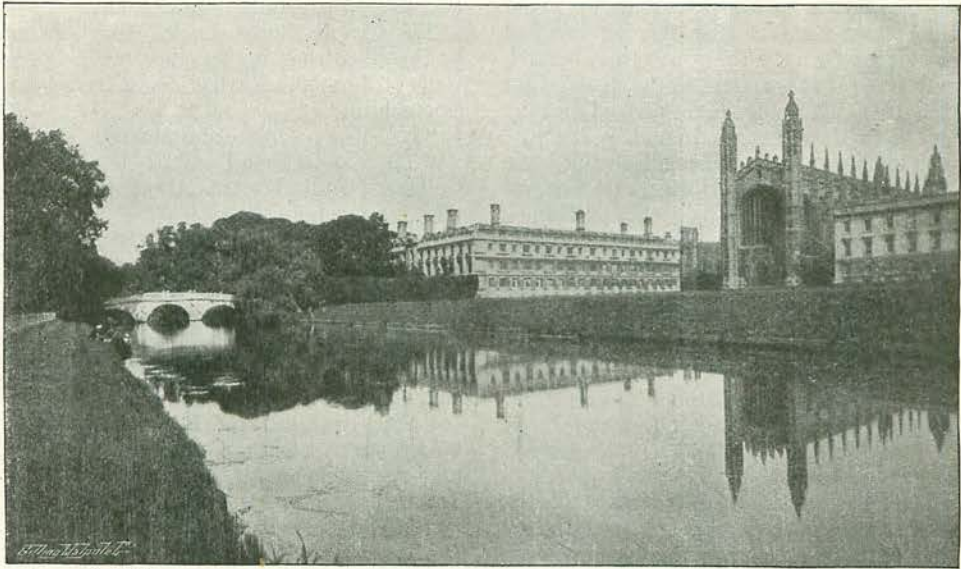
which bordered upon a petty riot. Once I remember—and it was shortly after the last attempt upon the Queen's life—a silly youth refused to stand up in chapel when "God Save the Queen" was sung by the choir. Next night a party of the constitutionally elect started off to make hay of that man's furniture. But "that man," guessing he would be the victim of a demonstration, had called in a locksmith with such good results that his door stood up impregnable as the walls of Troy. In vain were jemmies applied and bricks fetched, and all the burglarious implements of an outraged loyalty called to the assistance of the mob. It could not force the oak; it could but gather on the

was in the very midst of the fray. Splinters of glass hurtled about his ears; one bottle struck the banisters within two inches of his hand; a second broke at his very feet like a shell from a battery. But he never moved; and presently, when the others had fled in terror, he put on his glasses and surveyed the grinning idiot above with an amused and nonchalant interest.

"Mr. Smith," he said, "er—really, could you not be persuaded to *drink* a little of that soda-water?"

* * * *

I suppose of all recent dons in Cambridge, more stories, true and false, have been told



From a photo by]

[Stearn, Cambridge.

KING'S AND CLARE COLLEGES.

staircase and shout hysterically. Anon, the dean turned up and began to intercede.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" he said, "what does this mean? Be careful, I beg of you. Do you want to go down in the morning? What are you trying to do to that door? Mr. Lewis, you are gated for a week. Mr. Smith, go to bed, sir! You are in a disgraceful condition, sir!" and so on, and so on.

Mr. Smith however did not go to bed. He went up a flight of stairs to the next landing, and there, procuring twenty soda-water bottles from a gyp room, he began to drop them upon the throng below. Every time he let a bottle go crash he yelled with all his lungs, "God save the dean"; and for a truth the dean needed such a prayer. He

of the late Dean of Jesus than of any fellow of any university. And this surprises no one who knew the man. "Red Morgan" went near to being the most popular fellow in the 'Varsity. His huge figure; his voice, terrible as the anger of the sea; his immense dignity; his refusal to believe that any other dean lived in Cambridge, all contributed to magnify a glory which shone in later years like the orb of the setting sun. Yet no one had a larger heart or a quicker appreciation of a good jest than "Red Morgan." Even were the jest against that vast sense of self-importance which dominated him, he forgave it readily if the humour satisfied him. As an instance of this I may mention a little story told of the great "Tom Hockin," who,

with another "blue," was looking out of a window in Jesus Lane one day when "Red Morgan" chanced to come up the street. The dean was a little more pompous and self-complacent than usual on that occasion; he surveyed all things with his regal eye and threatened, as it were, to blast the very flags if the people did not kneel to him. His wrath is to be judged when he heard a voice bawling like thunder above him, "Halloa, Morgan, you old fool, go to bed!"

The dean stood thunderstruck, his veins began to swell, he rocked to and fro upon his great heels. There above him was a man leaning out of the window, and gesticulating so wildly that a hasty judgment might have deemed him guilty of an attempt to swim in the air. Closer observation would have revealed the fact that the window had been shut down upon the youth from behind, thus leaving him exposed to the ocular fury of the dean, while the frame pressed heavily upon that spot where, as Ingoldsby has told us, the tail joins on to the small of the back. It was one of "Tom Hockin's" jests, of course. He had bawled out, "Halloa, Morgan, you old fool!" etc., and then had made haste to shut the window down upon his innocent friend. "Red Morgan," with his usual astuteness, took in the situation at a glance.

"Man," he roared, surveying the struggling figure, "why do you seek to swim in the air when the Lord has created the water?"

* * * *

"Red Morgan" had a fine sense of the necessities of obedience. He exacted a ready humility from all the servants of the college, and was quick to punish the pride of those whom the catechism taught him were his inferiors. One day, as the tradition goes, he chanced to see the door of Jesus Chapel open at an unusual hour, and peeping in, he observed a workman high up on a scaffold and busy cleaning the roof. Being ignorant of the order for any such undertaking the outraged dean at once called the fellow to him.

"Working-man," he exclaimed solemnly, "come here!"

The "working-man," unconscious of the importance of deans, shockingly ignorant of the particular importance of this particular dean, went on with his work stolidly. "Red Morgan," who surveyed him gasping, stalked at last to the foot of the ladder and began to shout like the skipper of a ship.

"Common labourer," he bellowed, "descend!"

That a man such as this should have lived to meet a mortal bold enough to look him in the face is a fact for wonder. Yet "Red Morgan" remembered one day in his life when a decanal rebuff robbed him of breath—nay, almost of sense. It befell that he found himself in the quad of Christchurch at Oxford, and being an expert photographer, what should he do but produce his camera and pose it for a picture of a court so famous. Scarce was the tripod set, however, when a porter came running from the lodge and began to expostulate.

"Sir," said he, "I beg your pardon, but you are not allowed to take photographs here!"

"Man," cried the dean in a voice of thunder, "do you know who I am?"

The porter's knees shook. For a moment he imagined that he had become one of the walls of Jericho, and that a blast from heaven smote him.

"N-n-n-no, sir," he stammered.

"Then know that I am the Dean of Jesus College, Cambridge, and that I *shall* take photographs here!"

The porter ran for his life. "Red Morgan," glaring round the court like a bull which has tossed a matador, resumed his occupation. He was just inserting a plate in his camera when another little man, gowned, and dancing with anger, dashed across the court and faced him.

"Sir," squeaked the little man, with the voice of a hysterical piccolo, "you must not take photographs in this college!"

"Red Morgan" turned upon his heel.

"Man," he yelled, "do you know who I am? I am the Dean of Jesus College, Cambridge, and I say that I *shall* take pictures here!"

"Sir," retorted the little man, while he gave the camera a kick and sent it flying, "I am the Dean of Christchurch, Oxford, and I say that you *shall not* take pictures here!"

* * * *

Undergraduates, unripe though their judgment of men and things may be, are very quick in estimating the worth and the will of those set above them. The schoolmaster don is particularly abhorrent to them. They resent grandmotherly legislation but will repay confidence generously. In my own time at Paul's there was an occasion when the dean and the junior tutor were to be in London upon the same evening. The senior tutor—a worthy man, widely esteemed but over-zealous—did not like the idea of leaving

Paul's tutorless, and he came over from Trumpington, where he lived, to spend the night with us. It was not a wise proceeding, for had he remained in the bosom of his family, no soul in Paul's would have been conscious of his colleague's absence. As it was the rumour soon went round that he was our guest, and before the clock struck eleven he was so beautifully screwed up in his rooms that a local blacksmith scarce could have released him. When the work of screwing up his oak was done, the cry arose for "devils"

—those gluey combustible wheels of wood with which bed-makers light fires. Soon a great fire blazed under the senior's window. Masked figures danced in its weird light. The porters ran about with empty buckets comforting each other with the tidings that the chapel would be "afire presently." The local fire-engine turned out while the local firemen adjourned to the nearest public-house to be ready for emergencies. It was twelve o'clock next day before they extricated the over-zealous don, and then he made an ignominious exit by a ladder placed at the window of his keeping-room.

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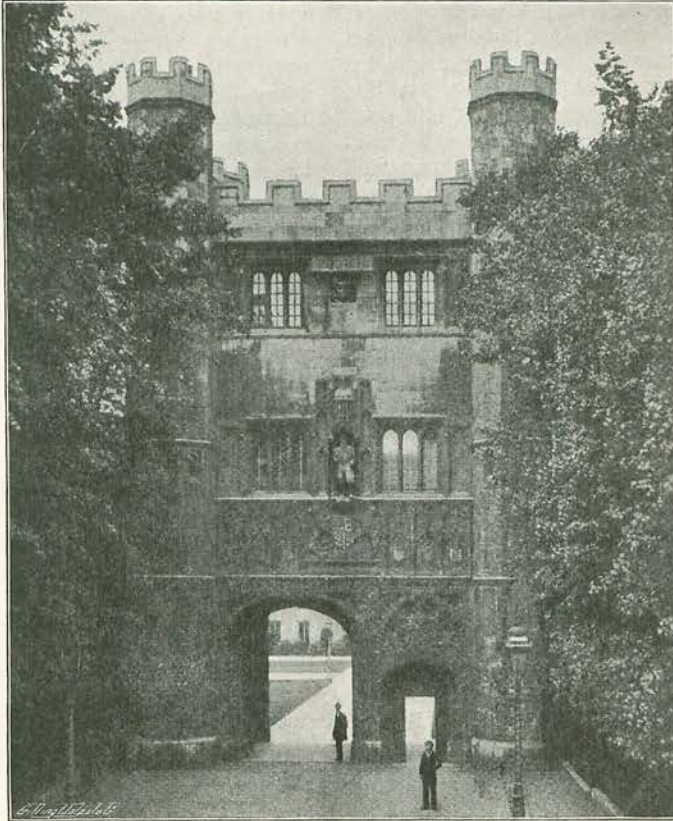
Contrast with zeal such as this the placid, yet withal effective suzerainty of a famous tutor of the Hall, ever ready to foster the proper aspirations of the young, but a very scourge for idlers and wastrels. "You do

nothing," this excellent fellow would say to a backslider; "you neither wead nor wow; you must go down." A splendid friend in adversity was this don.

* * * *

Despite the necessary and indispensable dignities of office, many Cambridge dons are unquestionably human. The undergraduate, accustomed to regard all dons as a compound of silk and spectacles and Greek irregular verbs, accepts this conclusion with

hesitation. You fellow, for instance, whom we meet coming out of the senate house when the rest of the Varsity is on its way to the footer field or to the "ditch" — is there anything possibly human about him. The strings of his master's gown flutter on the warm south wind; his eyes are small and twinkling; gold-rimmed glasses dangle upon his ample bosom; his clothes were black aforetime, but now moth and corruption have rusted



From a photo by]

TRINITY COLLEGE GATEWAY.

[Stearn, Cambridge.

them; his trousers make mountains of his knees; his boots fall heavy and largely upon the unoffending earth; his complexion is ruddy withal, and there is a dreamy, far-away look in his eyes as though he murmured while he walked such a melancholy lament as the κλύει τις ἢ στεναγμόν. You know that such a man has earned stars in two "second parts." Mundane passions and mundane weaknesses, you would think, have fled from a mind ever busy with the beauties of iambs; soaring to ecstasies in

the contemplation of Attic forms. But your assumption is wrong. The story of such a man is known to me. Let us follow him to his rooms and watch him awhile. He is no creature of fiction, be it remarked; he lives to-day in Cambridge, though he wears no longer that dreamy look

College is empty when he puts his key in his oak—even the laggards are now away in the playing field. He enters his rooms stealthily, and sighs when he tells himself that he is a very lonely man—as assuredly he is. By-and-bye, when he has taken off his gown and drawn his chair to the ebbing fire, he will take the poker in his hand and forget that there is sunshine in the court outside. But there is no sunshine in his heart, and the fitful flame in the chimney leaves him cold and spiritless. Anon, perhaps, he will break a lump of coal, and, as the fire quickens, will laugh nervously to himself. His thoughts have traversed many a landscape by this time and have come to rest in the fair gardens of Oxford. He beholds a woman, young and sweet and winning, the mistress of the garden of his dreams. He met her there last year in the Eights week. He hears her talk again of things strange to him—of theatres, and parks, and of men's love. The touch of her hand thrills him in fancy until his grip of the poker is tenacious and unyielding, and he batters the coal as though it stood between the vision and the dreamer. So the sparks fly up, and each of them becomes for him a nugget of the gold he lacks; of the gold he will garner should that happy day come when they will call him to a cure of souls, and he will preach to a flock of thirty upon the trifling stipend of fifteen hundred pounds a year. His quick mind casts upon the screen of his thought the picture of the rectory, ivy-

clad and red amidst the elms which guard it. He sees a lawn gay with flowers, and *one* who sits in a bower there, watching the hissing urn and the tea which steams in the porcelain cup. Another nervous clutch at the poker and our don is stealing across that lawn with gentle foot. Now he beholds the girlish figure; he detects the gold in the coil of the thick brown hair; he sees a pair of big blue eyes laughing up to his. "Dearest!" he says, and the *one* is in his arms. Her starched blouse crackles against his breast; her breath is warm upon his cheek; her curls blind his eyes, yet darkness is an ecstasy. Hand-in-hand they return to the ivy-clad rectory; his arm steals about her waist in the twilight of the ball; his lips hold hers in a kiss which is heaven to dream of. "Little wife," he says, "it is for ever—for ever!" So entirely does his dreaming absorb him that he has an arm about the back of a chair, while the poker is flourished to the immediate danger of his glass. Heavenward the imagination carries him, but to earth he comes at last, and without dignity. For, of a sudden, he hears a footstep behind him, and with a great cry of shame he springs from his chair to confront the apparition which dares to intrude at such a moment. But it is only his bed-maker come to lay his tea.

And so he awakes, and the vision passes, and the flannel-clad forms of men returning from the river fit through the courts, and the chapel bell rings dolefully, and only the twilight is real.

* * * *

That was ten years ago. To-day our don dreams no longer. For two are playing in the garden and two are in the perambulator—and that makes four as all the world goes.

