

F. ANSTEY



***VOCES
POPULI***

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Voces Populi

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VOCES POPULI

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An Evening with a Conjuror.

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SCENE—A Suburban Hall. The Performance has not yet begun. The Audience is limited and low-spirited, and may perhaps number—including the Attendants—eighteen. The only people in the front seats are a man in full evening dress, which he tries to conceal under a caped coat, and two Ladies in plush opera-cloaks. Fog is hanging about in the rafters, and the gas-stars sing a melancholy dirge. Each casual cough arouses dismal echoes. Enter an intending Spectator, who is conducted to a seat in the middle of an empty row. After removing his hat and coat, he suddenly thinks better—or worse—of it, puts them on again, and vanishes hurriedly.

FIRST SARDONIC ATTENDANT (*at doorway*). Reg'lar turnin' em away to-night, we are!

SECOND SARDONIC ATTENDANT. He come up to me afore he goes to the pay-box, and sez he—"Is there a seat left?" he sez. And I sez to 'im, "Well, I *think* we can manage to squeeze you in somewhere." Like that, I sez.

[*The Orchestra, consisting of two thin-armed little girls, with pigtails, enter, and perform a stumbling Overture upon a cracked piano. HERR VON KAMBERWOHL, the Conjuror, appears on platform, amidst loud clapping from two obvious Confederates in a back row.*

HERR V. K. (*in a mixed accent*). Lyties and Shentilmans, pefoor I co-mence viz my hillusions zis hevenin' I 'ave most hemphadically to repoodiate hall assistance from hany spirrids or soopernatural beins vatsohever. All I shall 'ave ze honour of showing you will be perform by simple Sloight of 'and or Ledger-dee-Mang! (*He invites any member of the Audience to step up and assist him, but the spectators remain coy.*) I see zat I 'ave not to night so larsh an orjence to select from as usual, still I 'ope—(*Here one of the obvious Confederates slouches up, and joins him on the platform.*) Ah, zat is goot! I am vair much oblige to you, Sare. (*The Confederate grins sheepishly.*) Led me see—I seem to remember your face some'ow. (*Broader grin from Confederate.*) Hah you vos 'ere last night?—zat exblains it! But you 'ave nevaire assist me befoor, eh? (*Reckless shake of the head from Confederate.*) I thought nod. Vair vell. You 'ave nevaire done any dricks mit carts—no? Bot you will dry? You never dell vat you gan do till you dry, as ze ole sow said ven she learn ze halphabet. (*He pauses for a laugh—which doesn't come.*) Now, Sare, you know a cart ven you

see 'im? Ah, zat is somtings alretty! Now I vill ask you to choose any cart or carts out of zis back. (*The Confederate fumbles.*) I don't vish to 'urry you—but I vant you to mike 'aste—&c., &c.

THE MAN IN EVENING DRESS. I remember giving Bimbo, the Wizard of the West, a guinea once to teach me that trick—there was nothing in it.

FIRST LADY IN PLUSH CLOAK. And can you *do* it?

THE M. IN E. D. (*guardedly*). Well, I don't know that I could exactly do it *now*—but I know how it's done.

[*He explains elaborately how it is done.*]

HERR V. K. (*stamping, as a signal that the Orchestra may leave off*). Next I shall show you my zelebrated hillusion of ze inexhaustible 'At, to gonclude viz the Invisible 'En. And I shall be moch oblige if any shentilmans vill kindly favour me viz 'is 'at for ze purpose of my exberiment.

THE M. IN E. D. Here's mine—it's quite at your service. [*To his companions.*] This is a stale old trick, he merely—(*explains as before*). But you wait and see how I'll score off him over it!



"LED ME

SEE—I SEEM TO REMEMBER YOUR FACE SOME'OW."

HERR V. K. (*to the M. in E. D.*). You are gvide sure, Sare, you leaf nossing insoide of your 'at?

THE M. IN E. D. (*with a wink to his neighbours*). On the contrary, there are several little things there belonging to me, which I'll thank you to give me back by-and-by.

HERR V. K. (*diving into the hat*). So? Vat 'ave we 'ere? A bonch of flowairs! Anozzer bonch of flowairs? Anozzer—and

anozzer! Ha, do you always garry flowairs insoide your 'at, Sare?

THE M. IN E. D. Invariably—to keep my head cool; so hand them over, please; I want them.

[His Companions titter, and declare "it really is too bad of him!"

HERR V. K. Bresently, Sare,—zere is somtings ailse, it feels loike—yes, it ees—a mahouse-drap. Your haid is drouble vid moice, Sare, yes? Bot zere is none 'ere in ze 'at!

THE M. IN E. D. (*with rather feeble indignation*). I never said there were.

HERR V. K. No, zere is no mahouse—bot—[*diving again*—ha! a leedle vide rad! Anozzer vide rad! And again a vide rad—and one, two, dree *more* vide rads! You vind zey keep your haid noice and cool, Sare? May I drouble you to com and dake zem away? I don't loike the vide rads myself, it is madder of daste. [*The Audience snigger.*] Oh, bot vait—zis is a *most* gonvenient 'at—[*extracting a large feeding-bottle and a complete set of baby-linen*—ze shentelman is vairy domestic I see. And zere is more yet, he is goot business man, he knows ow von must hadvertise in zese' ere toimes. 'E 'as 'elp me, so I vill 'elp 'im by distributing some of his cairculars for 'im.

[He showers cards, commending somebody's self-adjusting trousers amongst the Audience, each person receiving about two dozen—chiefly in the eye—until the air is dark, and the floor thick with them.

THE M. IN E. D. (*much annoyed*). Infernal liberty! Confounded impudence! Shouldn't have had *my* hat if I'd known he was going to play the fool with it like this!

FIRST LADY IN PLUSH CLOAK. But I thought you knew what was coming?

THE M. IN E. D. So I did—but this fellow does it differently.

[HERR VON K. *is preparing to fire a marked half-crown from a blunderbuss into a crystal casket.*

A LADY WITH NERVES (*to her husband*). John, I'm *sure* he's going to let that thing off!

JOHN (*a Brute*). Well, I shouldn't be surprised if he is. I can't help it.

THE L. WITH N. You could if you liked—you could tell him my nerves won't stand it—the trick will be every *bit* as good if he only *pretends* to fire, I'm sure.

JOHN. Oh, nonsense!—You can stand it very well if you *like*.

THE L. WITH N. I *can't*, John.... There, he's raising it to his shoulder. John, I *must* go out. I shall scream if I sit here, I *know* I shall!

JOHN. No, no—what's the use? He'll have fired long before you get to the door. Much better stay where you are, and do your screaming sitting down. (*The Conjuror fires.*) There, you see, you *didn't* scream, after all!

THE L. WITH N. I screamed to *myself*—which is ever so much worse for me; but you never *will* understand me till it's too late!

[HERR VON K. *performs another trick.*

FIRST LADY IN PLUSH CLOAK. That was very clever, wasn't it? I can't *imagine* how it was done!

THE M. IN E. D. (*in whom the memory of his desecrated hat is still rankling*). Oh, can't you? Simplest thing in the world—any child could do it!

SECOND LADY. What, find the rabbit inside those boxes, when they were all corded up, and sealed!

THE M. IN E. D. You don't mean to say you were taken in by *that*! Why, it was another rabbit, of course!

FIRST LADY. But even if it *was* another rabbit, it was wearing the borrowed watch round its neck.

THE M. IN E. D. Easy enough to slip the watch in, if all the boxes have false bottoms.

SECOND L. Yes, but he passed the boxes round for us to examine.

THE M. IN E. D. Boxes—but not *those* boxes.

FIRST L. But how could he slip the watch in when somebody was holding it all the time in a paper bag?

THE M. IN E. D. Ah, *I* saw how it was done—but it would take too long to explain it now. I *have* seen it so well performed that you *couldn't* spot it. But this chap's a regular duffer!

HERR V. K. (*who finds this sort of thing rather disturbing*). Lyties and Shentilmans, I see zere is von among us who is a brofessional like myself, and knows how all my leedle dricks is done. Now—[*suddenly abandoning his accent*—I am always griteful for hanythink that will distrack the attention of the orjence from what is going on upon the Stige; naterally so, because it prevents you from follerin' my actions too closely, and so I now call upon this gentleman in

the hevenin' dress jest to speak hup a very little louder than what he 'as been doin', so that you will be enabled to 'ear hevery word of 'is hexplanation more puffickly than what some of you in the back benches have done itherto. Now, Sir, if you'll kindly repeat your very hinteresting remarks in a more haudible tone, I can go on between like. [*Murmurs of "No no!" "Shut up!" "We don't want to hear him!" from various places;* THE MAN IN EVENING DRESS *subsides into a crimson taciturnity, which continues during the remainder of the performance.*

At the Tudor Exhibition.

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IN THE CENTRAL HALL.

The usual Jocese 'ARRY (who has come here with 'ARRIET, for no very obvious reason, as they neither of them know or care about any history but their own). Well, I s'pose as we are 'ere, we'd better go in a buster for a book o' the words, eh? (To COMMISSIONAIRE.) What are yer doin' them c'rect guides at, ole man? A shillin'? Not me! 'Ere, 'Arriet, we'll make it out for ourselves.

*A YOUNG MAN (who has dropped in for five minutes—"just to say he's been, don't you know"). 'Jove—my Aunt! Nip out before she spots me.... Stop, though, suppose she has spotted me? Never can tell with giglamps ... better not risk it. [*Is "spotted" while hesitating.**

HIS AUNT. I didn't recognise you till just this moment, John, my boy. I was just wishing I had some one to read out all the

extracts in the Catalogue for me; now we can go round together.

[JOHN *affects a dutiful delight at this suggestion, and wonders mentally if he can get away in time to go to afternoon tea with those pretty Chesterton Girls.*

AN UNCLE (*who has taken MASTER TOMMY out for the afternoon*). This is the way to make your English History *real* to you, my boy!

[TOMMY, *who had cherished hopes of Covent Garden Circus, privately thinks that English History is a sufficiently unpleasant reality as it is, and conceives a bitter prejudice against the entire Tudor Period on the spot.*

THE INTELLIGENT PERSON. Ha! armour of the period, you see!



"WHAT ARE YOU DOIN' THEM C'RECT GUIDES AT, OLE MAN?
A SHILLIN'? NOT me!"

(Feels bound to make an intelligent remark.) 'Stonishing how the whole art of war has been transformed since then, eh? Now—to me—*(as if he was conscious of being singular in this respect)*—to me, all this is most interesting. Coming as I do, fresh from Froude—

HIS COMPANION *(a Flippant Person)*. Don't speak so loud. If they know you've come in here fresh, you'll get turned out!

PATRONISING PERSONS (*inspecting magnificent suit of russet and gilt armour*). 'Pon my word, no idea they turned out such good work in those times—very creditable to them, really.

BEFORE THE PORTRAITS.

THE UNCLE. Now, Tommy, you remember what became of Katherine of Aragon, I'm sure? No, no—tut—tut—*she* wasn't executed! I'm afraid you're getting rather rusty with these long holidays. Remind me to speak to your mother about setting you a chapter or so of history to read every day when we get home, will you?

TOMMY (*to himself*). It *is* hard lines on a chap having a Sneak for an Uncle! Catch me swotting to please *him*!

'ARRY. There's old 'Enevry the Eighth, you see—that's 'im right enough; him as 'ad all those wives, and cut every one of their 'eds off!

'ARRIET (*admiringly*). Ah, I knew we shouldn't want a Catalogue.

THE INT. P. Wonderfully Holbein's caught the character of the man—the—er—curious compound of obstinacy, violence, good-humour, sensuality, and—and so on. No mistaking a Holbein—you can tell him at once by the extraordinary finish of all the accessories. Now look at that girdle—*isn't that Holbein all over?*

FLIPPANT P. Not quite all over, old fellow. Catalogue says it's painted by Paris Bordone.

THE INT. P. Possibly—but it's Holbein's *manner*, and, looking at these portraits, you see at once how right Froude's estimate was of the King.

F. P. Does Froude say how he got that nasty one on the side of his nose?

A VISITOR. Looks overfed, don't he?

SECOND V. (*sympathetically*). Oh, he fed himself very well; you can see that.

THE AUNT. Wait a bit, John—don't read so fast. I haven't made out the middle background yet. And where's the figure of St. Michael rising above the gilt tent, lined with *fleurs-de-lis* on a blue ground? Would this be Guisnes, or Ardres, now? Oh, Ardres on the right—so *that's* Ardres—yes, yes; and now tell me what it says about the two gold fountains, and that dragon up in the sky.

[JOHN *calculates that, at this rate, he has a very poor chance of getting away before the Gallery closes.*

THE PATRONISING PERSONS. 'Um! Holbein again, you see—very curious their ideas of painting in those days. Ah, well, Art has made great progress since then—like everything else!

MISS FISHER. So *that's* the beautiful Queen Mary! I wonder if it is really *true* that people have got better-looking since those days?

[*Glances appealingly at* PHLEGMATIC FIANCÉ.

HER PHLEGMATIC FIANCÉ. I wonder.

MISS F. You hardly ever see such small hands now, do you? With those lovely long fingers, too!

THE PHL. F. No, never.

MISS F. Perhaps people in some other century will wonder how anybody ever saw anything to admire in *us*?

THE PHL. F. Shouldn't be surprised.

[MISS F. *does wish secretly that CHARLES had more conversation.*

THE AUNT. John, just find out who No. 222 is.

JOHN (*sulkily*). Sir George Penruddocke, Knight.

HIS AUNT (*with enthusiasm*). Of course—*how* interesting this is, isn't it?—seeing all these celebrated persons exactly as they were in life! Now read who he *was*, John, please.

THE INT. PERSON. Froude tells a curious incident about—

FLIPPANT P. I tell you what it is, old chap, if you read so much history, you'll end by *believing* it!

THE INT. P. (*pausing before the Shakspeare portraits*). "He was not for an age, but for all time."

THE FL. P. I suppose that's why they've painted none of them alike.

A PERSON WITH A TALENT FOR COMPARISON. Mary, come here a moment. Do look at this—"Elizabeth, Lady Hoby"—did you *ever* see such a likeness?

MARY. Well, dear, I don't quite—

THE PERSON WITH, &c. It's her living image! Do you mean to say you really don't recognise it?—Why, *Cook*, of course!

MARY. Ah! (*apologetically*)—but I've never seen her dressed to go *out*, you know.

THE UNCLE. "No. 13, Sir Rowland Hill, Lord Mayor, died 1561"—

TOMMY (*anxious to escape the threatened chapters if possible*). I know about *him*, Uncle, he invented postage stamps!

OVER THE CASES.