THE INDIVIDUALIST.

was also, till now, unknown to him, except for distant and moonlight sights of it from the windows of the passing train; but the knowledge that the place was quiet had been to him one of its recommendations; and now, found, on approaching it, that it more than answered to his hope. His hotel, when he reached it, proved to be equally satisfactory. It was entered, through a portico, from a hedged private road, on the other side of which were the ragged fringes of the forest; whilst its principal front looked over its own gardens. When he entered it, it was pervaded by a

almost monastic hush; nor did he, as he was conducted through empty passages to his room, see any human being except the landlady, a waiter, and a chambermaid. The prevalent hush, indeed, was not much to be wondered at, as he found, when some hours later he went downstairs to dinner. The hotel, which was remarkable for the quietness as it was for the grandeur of its rooms, appeared to be only half full; and a table, which ran down the middle of a suite a magnificent frescoéd with hunting scenes, was occupied, when he entered, by but seven or eight guests—most of them elderly ladies who might have been sisters of Mrs. Prouse Bonefield, and who sat down, accompanied by a piece of knitting, in a place which was marked by her half-drunk bottle of St. Gallier water. At one or two separate tables were subdued family parties: a German couple, with a a

bit of weak-eyed children; an English clergyman, with a high-complexioned, spectacled daughter, who talked in audible tones about University Extension Lectures; and a thin Frenchwoman, facing a tall, cowering husband, who evidently learnt from illness the comforting lesson, that it was not necessary on him to consider anybody's requirements but his own. Lucy's table was placed near one of the windows, and he ate his dinner in a fit of old abstraction, his ears being half-amused by chance fragments of conversation, and his eyes straying over masses of sloping pine-woods to the sea, whose face the moonlight was showing its first sparkles. After dinner, when most of the company had congregated in an adjoining salon, and were settling themselves to games of dominos, or to a perusal of reading the newspapers—most of them ten days old—he went outside, invited by a marble terrace, from which a flight of steps descended to the purity gardens below. Then the full sense came over him of the southern night, and the solitude of the sequestered forest seemed to surround and press on him. He felt he had taken some great and decided step in his life. He had procured his chance of a great practical career—and "why?" he asked himself, "all for what? Was it merely for some morbid fancy?" And presently his could almost have persuaded himself that his presence there on that terms of war marble, with the endless forest about him, and the clear sky, an unnaturally soft, fuming him, was merely a dream, and that he would wake in another moment to hear in his ears the noises of wintry London, and to feel its distracting interests tearing his mind like tales. "Perhaps, after all," he said, "even that would be better than the fantastic and desperate isolation for which I now feel I have exchanged it."
The first excitement attending on a change of scene had begun gradually to subside, and he went to bed early hoping that to-morrow's sunlight would bring him the moderate cheerfulness which his reason could not command.

WENTWORTH HOUSE.

[To be continued.]

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THE FASHODA QUESTION.

When the news of the Sirdar's brilliant victory reached England it was felt that Lord Khartoum, as we must now call him, had scored the key of the Soudan, and opened at last the road from Cairo to the Cape. Five years ago, when Mr. Rhodes proclaimed his intention of connecting Cape-town with Cairo by a transcontinental telegraph line most people ridiculed the idea, but after the Sirdar's victory every Englishman realised that it was no longer the possibility of laying a wire across Africa which had to be considered, but the foundation of an Empire extending from the Mediterranean to the Cape of Good Hope. Great, therefore, was the dismay of all when it was rumoured that a French force was holding Fashoda and barring the way South. Some relief, however, was felt when the Sirdar left for Fashoda with a strong escort. Fifteen days elapsed until his return to Khartoum, fifteen days during which much anxiety was felt as to the result of his meeting with the French commander. During that fortnight the Press on both sides of the Channel indulged in the wildest talk: the Sirdar was going to wipe out the Frenchmen; Captain Marchand was going to receive him on the point of the bayonets of his 20,000 Abyssinian and Senegalese soldiers. Then, suddenly, some French writer discovered that France had a glorious task to perform, consisting in the foundation of a trans-African Empire from the Atlantic to the Red Sea. Every French paper took up the idea, but none of them seemed to know exactly where this Empire would begin or where it would end.

With the Sirdar's return came a general sense of relief: he had found Captain Marchand encamped with a force of 120 men only, on a strip of swamp, short of ammunition, and anxiously waiting for help which had failed to reach him. The Frenchmen had successfully repelled an attack from a small Dervish band, but it is impossible not to acknowledge that had the battle of Omdurman taken place one month later they would have been annihilated by the Khalifa's overwhelming forces.
STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ.

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ was one of those who love literature too much to write it, except by fragments; in whom the desire of perfection brings its own defect. With either more or less ambition he would have done more to achieve himself; he was always divided between an absolute aim at the absolute, that is, the unattainable, and a theological disdain for the compromise by which, after all, literature is literature. Carry the theories of Mallarmé to a practical conclusion, multiply his powers in a direct ratio, and you have Wagner. It is his failure not to be Wagner. And, Wagner having existed, it was for him to be something more, to complete Wagner. Well, not being able to be that, it was a matter of sincere indifference to him whether he left one or two little, limited masterpieces of formal verse and prose, the more or the less. It was "the work" that he dreamed of, the new art, more than a new religion, whose precise form in the world he was never quite able to settle.

"Un auteur difficile," in the phrase of M. Catulle Mendès, it has always been to what he himself calls "a labyrinth illuminated by flowers" that Mallarmé has felt it due to their own dignity to invite his readers. To their own dignity, and also to his. Mallarmé was obscure, not so much because he wrote differently, as because he thought differently, from other people. His mind was elliptical, and, relying with undue confidence on the intelligence of his readers, he emphasized the effect of what was unlike other people in his mind by resolutely ignoring even the links of connection that did exist between them. Never having aimed at popularity, he never needed, as most writers need, to make the first advances. He made neither intrusion upon nor concession to those who, after all, were not obliged to read him. And when he spoke, he considered it neither needed nor seemly to listen in order to hear whether he was heard. To the charge of obscurity he replied, with sufficient disdain, that there are many who do not know how to read—except the newspaper, he adds, in one of those disconcerting, oddly-printed parentheses, which make his work, to those who rightly apprehend it, so full of wise limitations, so safe from hasty or seemingly final conclusions. No one in our time has more significantly vindicated the supreme right of the artist in the aristocracy of letters; wilfully, perhaps, not always

1) One paragraph, and a part of another, in this essay, are reproduced from an article on Mallarmé's 'Disparités,' in the Saturday Review of Jan. 30, 1897.
wisely, but nobly, logically. Has not every artist shrank from that making of himself "a motley to the view," that hanging over of his naked soul to the laughter of the multitude? But who, in our time, has wrought so subtle a veil, shining on this side, where the few are, a thick cloud on the other, where are the many? The oracles have always had the wisdom to hide their secrets in the obscurity of many meanings, or of what has seemed meaningless; and might it not, after all, be the finest epithet for a self-respecting man of letters to be able to say, even after the writing of many books: I have kept my secret. I have not betrayed myself to the multitude?

Yet to Mallarmé, certainly, there might be applied the significant warning of Rossetti:

"But were to thee if once then yield
Unto the art of doing naught."

After a life of persistent devotion to literature, he has left enough poems to make a single small volume (less, certainly, than a hundred poems in all), a single volume of prose, a few pamphlets, and a prose translation of the poems of Poe. It is because among these there are masterpieces, poems which are among the most beautiful poems written in our time, prose which has all the subtlest qualities of prose, that, quitting the abstract point of view, we are forced to regret the fatal enchantments, fatal for him, of theories which are so greatly needed by others, so valuable for our instruction, if we are only a little careful in putting them into practice.

In estimating the significance of Stéphane Mallarmé, it is necessary to take into account not only his verse and prose, but, almost more than these, the Tuesdays of the Rue de Rome, in which he gave himself freely to more than one generation. No one who has ever climbed those four flights of stairs will have forgotten the narrow, boxy interior, elegant with a sort of scrumptious Dutch comfort; the heavy, carved furniture, the tall clock, the portraits, Manet's, Whistler's, on the walls; the table on which the china bowl, urchin with tobacco, was pushed from hand to hand; above all, the rocking-chair. Mallarmé's from which he would rise quietly, to stand leaning his elbow on the mantelpiece, while one hand, the hand which did not hold the cigarette, would sketch out one of those familiar gestures: "un peu de pouss, un peu de danseuse" (in M. Rodenbach's admirable phrase, "avec lesquels il avait l'air chaque fois d'aller dans la conversation, comme on entre en scène.") One of the best talkers of our time, he was, unlike most other fine talkers, harmonious with his own theories in giving no monologues, in allowing every liberty to his guests, to the conversation; in his perfect readiness to follow the slightest indication, to embroider upon any frame, with any material presented to him. There would have been something almost of the challenge of the improvisatore in this easily moved aloofness of non-alternate, had it not been for the singular gentleness with which Mallarmé's intelligence moved, in these considerable feats, with the half-apologetic negligence of the perfect acrobat. He seemed to be more than brushing the dust off your own ideas, setting, arranging them a little, before he gave them back to you, surprisingly liminal. It was only afterwards that you realised how small had been your own part in the matter, as well as what it meant to have enlightened without dazzling you. But there was always the feeling of comradeship, the comradeship of a master, whom, while you were there at least, you did not question; and that very feeling lifted you, in your own estimation, nearer to art.

Invaluable, it seems to me, those Tuesdays must have been to the young men of two generations who have been making French literature; they were unique, certainly, in the experience of the young Englishman who was always so cordially received there, so flattering a cordiality. Here was a house in which art, literature, was the very atmosphere, a religious atmosphere; and the master of the house, in his just a little solemn simplicity, a priest. I never heard the price of a book mentioned, or the number of thousand francs which a popular author had been paid for his last volume; here, in this one literary house, literature was unknown as a trade. And, above all, the questions that were discussed were never, at least, in Mallarmé's treatment, in his guidance of them, other than essential questions, considerations of art in the abstract, of literature before it coagulates into a book, of life as its amusing and various web was the stuff of art. When, indeed, the conversation, by some unfailing hazard, drifted too near to one, became for a moment, perhaps inconveniently, practical, it was Mallarmé's solicitous politeness to cut, a little constrained, almost uneasy, rolling his cigarette in silence, until the disturbing moment had passed.

There were other disturbing moments, sometimes. I remember one, rather late in the sudden irruption of M. de Heidel, coming on after a dinner-party, and seating himself, in his well-filled evening dress, precisely in Mallarmé's favourite chair. He was intensely amusing, voluble, floridly vehement: Mallarmé I am sure, was delighted to see him; but the loud voice was a little trying to his nerves, and then he did not know what to do without his chair. He was like a cat that has been turned out of its favourite corner, as he looked uneasily about the room, resting an uncustomed elbow on the sideboard, visibly at a disadvantage.

For the attitude of these young men, some of them no longer exactly young, who frequented the Tuesdays, was certainly the attitude of the disciple. Mallarmé never exacted it, he seemed never to notice it; yet it meant to him, all the same, a good deal; as it meant, and
in the best sense, a good deal to them. He loved art with a supreme disinterestedness, and it was for the sake of art that he wished to be really a master. For he knew that he had something to teach, that he had found out some secrets worth knowing, that he had discovered a point of view which he could to some degree perpetuate in those young men who listened to him. And to them this free kind of apprenticeship was, beyond all that it gave in direct counsels, in the pattern of work, a noble influence. Mallarmé's quiet, laborious life was for some of them the only counterpoise to the Bohemian example of the d'Hervart or the Terroux, where art is loved, but with something of haste, in a very changing devotion. It was impossible to come away from Mallarmé without some tranquilising influence from that quiet place, some impersonal ambition towards excellence, the resolve, at least, to write a sonnet, a page of prose that should be in its own way as perfect as one could make it, worthy of Mallarmé.

II.

"Poetry," said Mallarmé, "is the language of a state of crisis"; and all his poems are the evocation of a passing ecstasy, arrested in mid-light. This ecstasy is never the mere instinctive cry of the heart, the simple human joy or sorrow, which, like the Parthenians, but for not quite the same reason, he did not admit in poetry. It is a mental transposition of emotion or sensation, veiled with atmosphere, and becoming, as it becomes a poem, pure beauty. Here, for instance, in a poem which I have translated line for line, and almost word for word, a delicate emotion, a figure vaguely divined, a landscape magically evoked, blend in a single effect.

"See.

"My soul, calm sister, towards thy brow, whereon scarce graces
An autumn stream already with its scant leaves,
And towards the wandering sky of thine angelic eyes
Mounts, as in melancholy gardens may arise
Some faithful fountain sighing whitely towards the blue!"
—Towards the blue pale and pure that said October knew.

When, in those depths, it mirrored languors infinite,
And sponsoring leaves upon the waters white,
Windily drifting, traced a narrow cold and dun,
Where, in one long last ray, lingered the yellow sun."

Another poem comes a little closer to nature, but with what exquisite precautions, and with what surprising novelty in its unhesitating touch on actual things!

"Sea-Wind.

"The flesh is sad, alas! and all the books are read.
Flight, only flight! I feel that birds are wild to tread

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ.

The floor of unknown foam, and to attain the sky!
O night, neither ancient gardens mirrored in the eyes,
Shall hold this heart that batters in waters its delight,
O winds! nor yet my waking lamp, whose lonely light
Shadows the vacant paper, whiteness profusely lost,
Not the young wife who rocks her baby on her breast.
I will depart. The steamer, snatching rope and spar,
Lift anchor for exotic lands that lie afar!
A weariness, outworn by cruel hopes, still clings
To the last farewell handkerchief's last beckonings!
And are not these, the masts inviting storms, not these
That an awakening wind heads over wrecked seas,
Lost, not a sail, a sail, a flowering isle, we long:
But, O my heart, hear them, hear them sailer's song!
"

These (need I say?) belong to the earlier period, in which Mallarmé had not yet withdrawn his light into the cloud; and to the same period belong the prose-poems, one of which, perhaps the most exquisite, I will translate here.

"Aubrac Lament.

Ever since Maria left me, for another star—which! Orion, Albares, or that green Venus—have I always cherished solitude. How many long days I have passed, alone with my cat! By above, I mean without a material being, and my cat is a mercurial companion, a spirit. I may say, then, that I have passed long days alone with my cat, and alone, with one of the last writers of the Roman decadence: for since the white creature is no more, strangely and singularly, I have loved all that may be summed up in the word: full. Thus, in the year my favourite season is during those last languid summer days which come just before the autumn; and, in the day, the hour when I take my walk is the hour when the sun lingers before failing, with rays of copper-yellow on the grey walls, and of copper-red on the window-panes. And just so the literature from which my soul demands delight must be the poetry dying out of the last moments of Rome, pervaded, nevertheless, that it breathes nothing of the rejuvenating approach of the Barbarians, and does not stammer the infirmities Latin of the first Christian prose.

"I read, then, one of those beloved poems (whose streams of thought have more damn for me than the fresh check of youth), and buried my head in the fur of the pure animal, when a barrel-organ began to sing, languishingly and melancholy, under my window. It played in the long alley of poplars, whose leaves were musical to me even in spring, since Maria passed that way with the tapers, for the last time. Yes, sad people's instrument: truly: the piano, the violin brings one's soul fibres to the light, but the barrel-organ, in the twilight of memory, has set me despairingly dreaming. While it murmured a guilty vagueness, such as pours forth into the heart of the suburbs, an old-effect, an empty air, how come it that its refrain went to my very soul, and made me weep like a romantic ballad? I drank it in, and I did not throw a pebble out of the window for fear of disturbing my own impression, and of perceiving that the instrument was not singing by itself."

Between these characteristic, clear, and beautiful poems, in verse and prose, and the opaque darkness of the later writings, one or two poems, perhaps the finest of all, in which already clearness is "a secondary grace," but in which a subtle capture flits in

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parable expression. *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* and *Héroïde* have already been introduced, in different ways, to English readers: the former by Mr. Goss, in a detailed analysis; the second I have translated in the last number of the *Savant*. In these two poems I find Mallarmé at the moment when his own desire achieves itself, every word is a jewel, scattering and recapitulating sudden fire, every image is a symbol, and the whole poem is visible music. After this point begins that fatal "last period" which comes to most artists who have thought too curiously, or dreamed too remote dreams, or followed a too wandering beauty. Mallarmé had long been only too conscious that all publication is "almost a speculation, on one's modesty, for one's silence;" that "to underrate the facts, breaking one's sedentary dream, for a musing face to face with the idea," was after all unnecessary to his own conception of himself, a mere way of convincing the public that one exists, and having achieved, as he thought, "the right to abstain from doing anything exceptional," he devoted himself, doubly, to silence. Seldom condescending to write, he wrote now only for himself, and in a manner which certainly saved him from intrusion. Some of Mr. Meredith's poems, and occasional passages of his prose, can alone give in English some faint idea of the later prose and verse of Mallarmé. The verse could not, I think, be translated: of the prose, in which an extreme lucidity of thought comes to us but glimmeringly through the entanglements of a construction, part Latin, part English, I shall endeavour to translate some fragments, in speaking of the theoretic writings, contained in the two volumes of *Vers et Prose et Discrétions*.

III.

It is the distinction of Mallarmé to have aspired after an impossible liberation of the soul of literature from what is fleeting and constraining in "the body of that death," which is the mere literature of words. Words, he has realised, are of value only as notation of the free breath of the spirit; words, therefore, must be employed with an extreme care, in their choice and adjustment, in setting them to reflect and chime upon one another; yet least of all for their own sake, for what they can never, except by suggestion, express. "Every soul is a melody," he has said, "which needs to be readjusted; and for that are the flute or viol of each." The word, treated indeed with a kind of "adoration," as he says, is so regarded in a magnificent sense, in which it is apprehended as a living thing, itself the vision rather than the reality; at least the philtre of the creation. The word, chosen as he chooses it, is for him a liberating principle, by which the spirit is extracted from matter; takes form, perhaps assumes immortality. Thus an artificiality, even, in the use of words, that seeming artificiality which comes from using words as if they had never been used before, that chimerical search after the virginity of language, is but the paradoxical outward sign of an extreme discontent with even the best of their service. Writers who use words fluently, seeming to disregard their importance, do so from an unconscious confidence in their expressiveness, which the scrupulous thinker, the precise dreamer, can never place in the most carefully chosen among them. To evoke, by some elaborate, instantaneous magic of language, without the formality of an after all impossible description; to be, rather than to express: that is what Mallarmé has consistently, and from the first, sought in verse and prose. And he has sought this wonderful, illusive, beckoning butterfly, the soul of dreams, over more and more entangled ground; and it has led him into the depths of many forests, far from the sunlight. To say that he has found what he sought is impossible; but (is it possible to avoid saying?) how heroic a search, and what marvelous discoveries by the way!

I think I understand, though I cannot claim his own authority for my supposition, the way in which Mallarmé wrote verse, and the reason why it became more and more abstruse, more and more unintelligible. Remember his principle: that to name is to destroy, to suggest is to create. Note, further, that he condemns the inclusion in verse of anything but "for example, the horror of the forest, or the silent thunder afar in the leaves; not the intrinsic, dense wood of the tree." He has received, then, a mental sensation: let it be the horror of the forest. This sensation begins to form in his brain, at first probably no more than a rhythm, absolutely without words. Gradually thought begins to concentrate itself (but with an extreme care, lest it should break the tension on which all depends) upon the sensation, already struggling to find its own consciousness, delicately, stealthily, with infinitely timid precaution, words present themselves, at first in silence. Every word seems like a desecration, seems, the clearer it is, to throw back the original sensation farther and farther into the darkness. But, guided always by the rhythm, which is the executive soul (as, in Aristotle's definition, the soul is the form of the body), words come slowly, one by one, shaping the message. Imagine the poem already written down, at least composed. In its very imperfection, it is clear, it shows the links by which it has been riveted together; the whole process of its construction can be studied. Now most writers would be content; but with Mallarmé the work has only begun. In the final result there must be no sign of the making, there must be only the thing made. He works over it, word by word, changing a word here, for its colour, which is not precisely the colour required, a word there, for the break it makes in the music. A new image occurs to him, rarer, subtler, than the one
he has used; the image is transferred. By the time the poem has reached, as it seems to him, a flawless unity, the steps of the progress have been only too effectually effaced; and while the poet, who has seen the thing from the beginning, still sees the relation of point to point, the reader, who comes to it only in its final stage, finds himself in a not unnatural bewilderment. Pursue this manner of writing to its ultimate development; start with an enigma, and then withdraw the key of the enigma; and you arrive, easily, at the frozen impenetrability of those latest sonnets, in which the absence of all punctuation is scarcely a recognizable hindrance.

That, I fancy to myself, was his actual way of writing; here, in what I prefer to give as a corollary, is the theory. "Symbolist, Decadent, or Mystic, the schools thus called by themselves, or thus hastily labelled by our information-press, adopt, for meeting-place, the point of an Idealism which (similarly as in fugues, in sonatas) rejects the 'natural' materials, and, as brutal, a direct thought ordering them; to retain no more than suggestion. To be instituted, a relation between images, exact; and that therefrom should detach itself a third aspect, features and clear, offered to the divination. Abolished, the pretension, aesthetically an error, despite its denunciation over almost all the masterpieces. To complete within the subtle paper other than, for example, the horror of the forest, or the silent thunder above in the leaves; not the intrinsic dense wood of the trees. Some few bursts of personal pride, vertically trumpeted, awoken the architecture of the palace, alone habitable: not of stones, on which the pages would close but ill." For example (it is his own): "I say: a flower! and out of the oblivion to which my voice consigned every contour, so far as anything save the known only, musically arises, idea, and exquisite, the one flower absent from all bouquets!" "The pure work," then, "implies the edification of the poet, who yields place to the words, immobilised by the shock of their inequality; they take light from mutual reflection, like an actual trail of fire over precious stones, replacing the old lyric allusion or the enthusiastic personal direction of the phrase." "The verse which out of many vocables remakes an entire word, new, unknown to the language, and as if magical, attains this isolation of speech." Wherefore, it being "music which rejoins verse, to form, since Wagner, Poetry," the final conclusion: "That we are now precisely at the moment of seeking, before that breaking up of the large rhythms of literature, and their scattering in articulate, almost instrumental, nervous waves, an art which shall complete the transposition, into the Book, of the symphony, or simply transpose our own: for, it is not in elementary sonorities of brain, strings, wood, unquestionably, but in the intellectual word at its utmost, that, fully and evidently, we should find, drawing to itself all the correspondences of the universe, the supreme Music."

Here, literally translated, in exactly the arrangement of the original, are some passages out of the theoretic writings, which I have brought together, to indicate what seem to me the main lines of Mallarmé's doctrine. It is the doctrine which, as I have already pointed out in these pages (FourNIghtly Review, January, 1898), had been divined by Gérard de Nerval; but what, in Gérard, was pure vision, becomes in Mallarmé a logical sequence of meditation. Mallarmé was not a mystic, to whom anything came unincidentally; he was a thinker, in whom an extraordinary subtlety of mind was exercised on always explicit, though by no means the common, problems. "A seeker after something in the world, that is there in no satisfying measure, or not at all," he pursued his search with unwavering persistence, with a sharp mental division of dream and idea, certainly very lucid to himself, however he may have failed to render his expression clear to others. And I, for one, cannot doubt that he was, for the most part, entirely right in his statement and analysis of the new conditions under which we are now privileged or condemned to write. His obscurity was partly his failure to carry out the spirit of his own directions; but, apart from obscurity, which we may all be fortunate enough to escape, is it possible for a writer, at the present day, to be quite simple, with the old, objective simplicity, in either thought or expression? To be neat, to be archaic, is not to be either natural or simple; I affirm that is not natural to be what is called "natural" any longer. We have no longer the mental attitude of those to whom a story was but a story, and all stories good; we have raised, since it was proved to us by Poe, not merely that the age of opium is past, but that no long poem was ever written; the finest long poem in the world being but a series of short poems linked together by prose. And, naturally, we can no longer write what we can no longer accept. Symbolism, implicit in all literature from the beginning, as it is implicit in the very words we use, comes to us now, at last quite conscious of itself, offering us the only escape from our many imprisonments. We find a new, an older, sense in the so worn out forms of things; the world, which we can no longer believe in as the satisfying material object it was to our grand-parents, becomes transfigured with a new light; words, which long usage had darkened almost out of recognition, take fresh lustre. And it is on the lines of that spiritualisation of the world, that perfecting of form in its capacity for illusion and suggestion, that confidence in the eternal correspondences between the visible and the invisible universe, which Mallarmé taught, and too intermittently practised, that literature must now move, if it is in any sense to move forward.

Arthur Symons.