

MR. S. H. SIME AND HIS WORK.

By E. S. VALENTINE.

“It is easy to seek after what is at once grotesque and art,” once wrote a great critic; “it is much more difficult to find it.” Mr. Sidney Sime, one of the ablest draughtsmen of the day, has not sought after the grotesque; he has not, indeed, found it—the grotesque has found him.

“What I do,” he said to me, as we sat together in his studio in a remote corner of Surrey, surrounded by a truly marvellous collection of sketches in oil, ink, and water-colour—“what I do I don’t do consciously. I’m speaking now of my ideas. I have a natural inherent bent towards mystery, and things must appear to be touched with what I may call the ‘bogey wand’ or—well, I simply don’t see them! I do not remember a time when I did not make drawings—of sorts. Like Traddles I was much addicted to skeletons, likewise to ghosts and devils!”

Mr. Sime is, both in character and person, as far removed as possible from the dreamy, decadent, degenerate type of artist. He springs direct from the common people, just as William Blake did—and, strange as it may appear, there are many points of physical resemblance between himself and Blake. Weird and charged with occult significance as many of his designs are, Sime is a humorist—and, moreover, a man absolutely without pose.

“I’m afraid,” he says, “the general public want what is obvious and instantly understood. The age is a commercial one, and everyone is so busy making money that

few people have the time to acquire a taste for what is really good in art. But I am not going to rail at the public or call the man in the street a tyrant. I have acquired a competence and don’t now depend, thank Heaven, on his suffrage. He wants something he can fathom at once and throw aside. If an artist’s work can’t be understood at once people think he is posing. Well, perhaps he is posing. I’m not.

“No; I don’t draw from models. As I am not a draughtsman in a technical sense, I cannot say that any one of my drawings is worse than another from a South Kensington point of view. I like to draw things which tickle my own fancy—but let me be quite frank with you; I really think farming or sailing better occupations for a grown man.”

After this burst of candour we talked about Mr. Sime’s first Metropolitan appearance in the pages of *Pick-Me-Up*, when he succeeded Mr. Raven-Hill, and produced drawings which created an instant sensation. Yet they were as different from the drawings since associated with his genius as can well be imagined. He began by caricaturing popular actors and music-hall favourites. “It took me some time to study an actor’s mannerisms so as to give a characteristic picture of him. I usually visited a piece two or three times before making my finished sketch. At the first visit I would study his face from the stalls; at the second visit I might

consider him from a dark corner of the pit, noting his peculiarities of gesture and attitude.”

Once Mr. Sime gave his impressions of the



MR. S. H. SIME.

From a Photo. by Geo. Newman, Ltd.

house from the stage while the inimitable Dan Leno was delivering one of his monologues; in other words, how the audience must have appeared to the comedian.

But all this kind of work was before Mr. Sime became a daring adventurer in strange tracts of country--Dreamland, Fairyland, the

more than a suggestion of pain and disease. But, apart from his temperament, his technique was extraordinary. I think he has influenced almost every man who is drawing to-day. The same, of course, may be said of Japanese art." As a consequence, people charged Mr. Sime with being morbid.



"HOW THE AUDIENCE APPEARED TO DAN LENO."
(Reproduced by courtesy of *The Sketch*.)

Netherworld, and Utopia. At first, as he confesses, he did not know how to express himself in terms which the public would understand. He tried Aubrey Beardsley as a guide. He has even tried Forain.

"Beardsley's work was generally morbid, and he introduced often into his drawings

Then there is that series of drawings of the Netherworld and the serener atmosphere of Elysium which brought the artist fame. Who that has ever seen it can forget "The Gate of Heaven," through which the rich man has perforce to pass? How can so corpulent a soul pass through a portal so straitened?

Is there any draughtsman living who could design anything weirder or more grotesque than that which Mr. Sime has wrought specially for THE STRAND, and to which he gives the title of "The Squidg"?

The whole presentment reeks of humour,

across the chasm leading to the captive balloon, wherein the gardener goes and fetches and carries for his egregious master.

All this is pure Sime—Sime for the nursery as well as for our own lighter moments.

As a further example of Mr. Sime's peculiar



"THE GATE OF HEAVEN."
(Reproduced by courtesy of *The Sketch*.)

as well as of the ingenious fantasy of nightmare. Pass but a glance at the smirking monster that never was on sea or land, crouched on the summit of his rocky cliff, and then regard the serious absurdities of the rest of the picture -- the Squidg's gardener, raking up a crop of pebbles which grow upon the fertile adamant; the bridge

talents, take note of his drawing, "An Illustration to an Unknown Tale." (See page 398.) Obviously such a tale would be unknown. Who would undertake to fit a story to such pictorial licence as this? Is it a gorilla, is it some extraordinary type of baboon, or is it a new type of cannibal? The contents of the saucepan point to the latter solution; but we

are only certain of one thing, and that is the drawing is pure Sime again.

Mr. Sime himself suggests the following wording as descriptive of the picture, wording as truly explicit as the picture itself:—

heeded by me, absorbed as I was—for how long I know not—in a profound and fatal curiosity. . . .”

Obviously, nothing in prose or verse could be more clear.



“THE SQUIDG.”

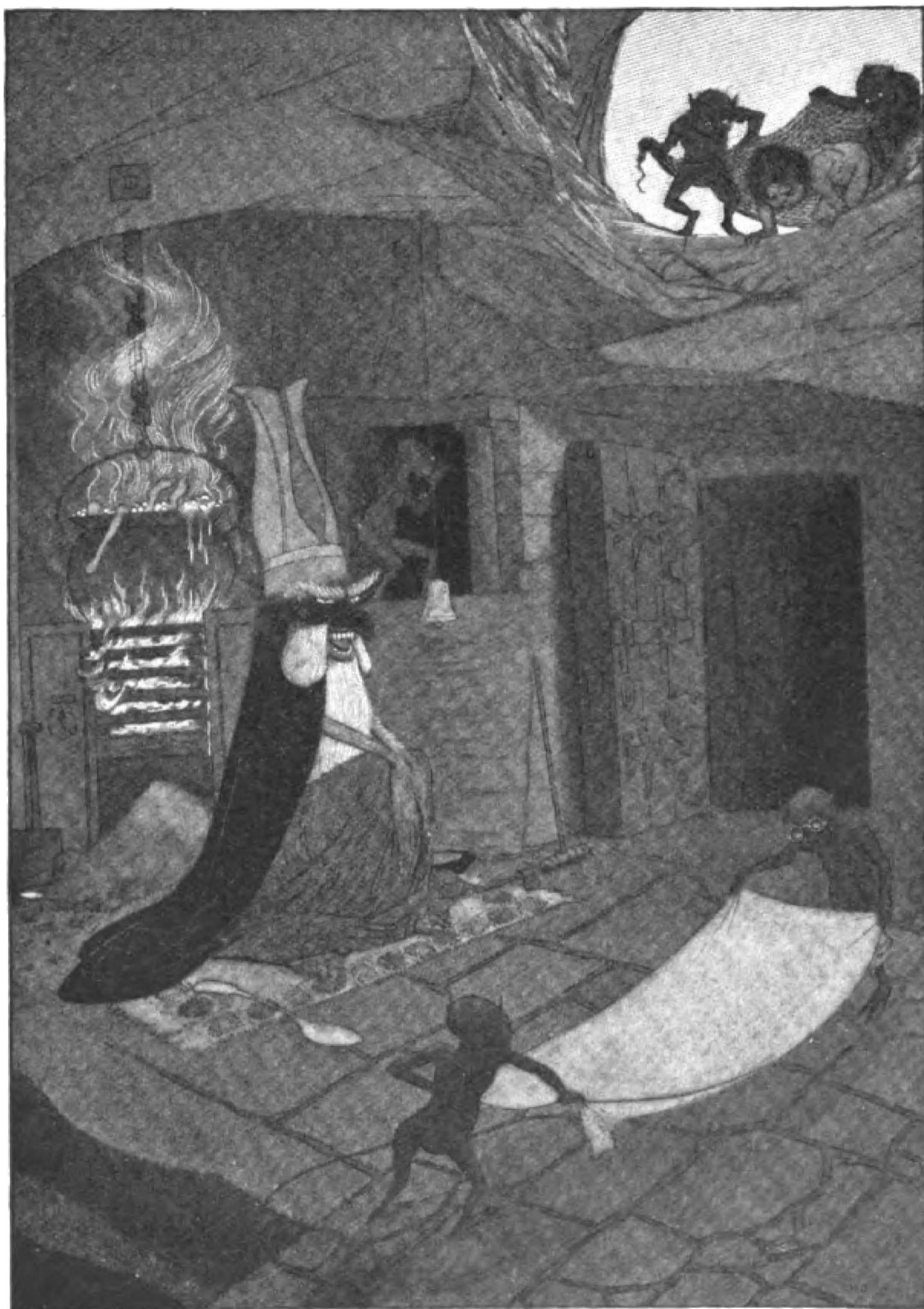
“ . . . The sudden discovery of that infamous den—that renowned and impregnable stronghold, the fear and envy of universal wizardry—not only drowned my memory of the quest, it involved me in perilous side issues. The malevolence underlying the Pophoff’s hospitable greeting passed un-

Again, what an amount of tragi-comedy there is in “The Dream of the Woman of Char.” (See page 400.) The true nightmare touch is evinced both in the weirdness of the charwoman’s surroundings and in the agony of her plaintive cry—“I dreamed I was the Woman of Char, and that it was my task to

scrub the endless and gigantic stairs which are neither here nor there. I had no water, but my tears fell in great abundance, and there was an occasional shower of rain; so I worked frantically, and the lather grew and grew. But despair overcame me when I

resorts both to Nature and to books. I asked him to whom he most owed inspiration.

"I owe everything to omnivorous and indiscriminate reading," he replied; "but perhaps if I mention Poe, Heine, De Quincey, it will give you some indication



"AN ILLUSTRATION TO AN UNKNOWN TALE."
(Reproduced by courtesy of *The Tatler*.)

realized the hideous mockery of the situation—*The stairs were made of soap!*"

The expression Mr. Sime gives to the charwoman—caught just as she makes her momentous discovery—is too delicious to need description.

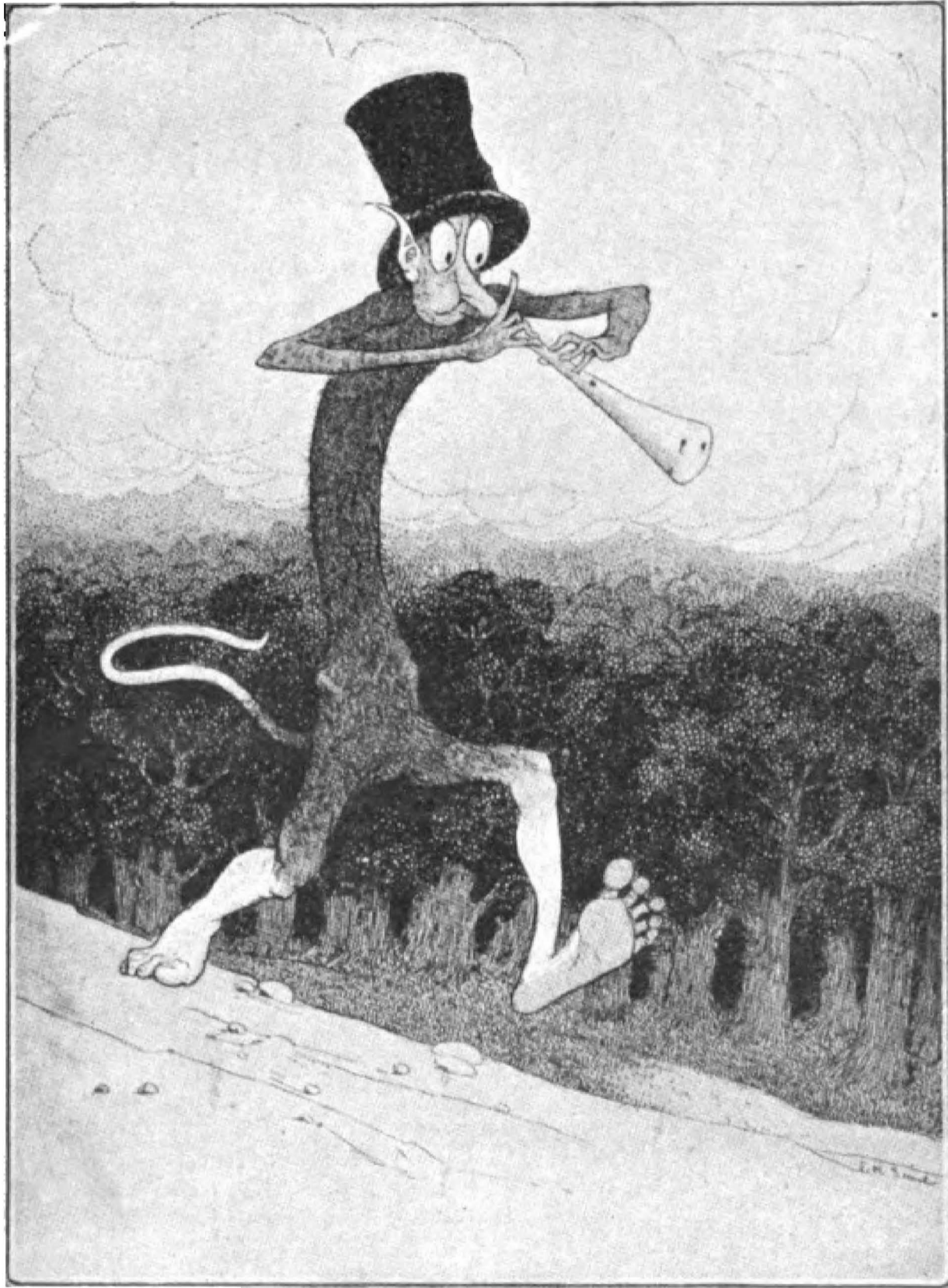
Although essentially imaginative, Mr. Sime

of my preferences in literature. And Meredith—above all, Meredith."

Periodically Mr. Sime emerges from the remote and picturesque seclusion of the little village of Worplesdon and plunges into the heart of London. There he frequents cafés, music-halls, and other prosaic places where

the man in the street loves to congregate, keeping his eyes, if not his note-book, open. It is curious, perhaps almost incredible, that the idea for a "Squidg" or a "Zoom" should be evolved by the artist through scanning the comparatively prosaic faces of his fellow-men. But Mr. Sime reads between the lines in the Book of Life.

found in the landscapes of Mr. MacWharter or Mr. Leader. One upon which he is now at work, entitled "Wild Beast Wood," depicts a moonlit, tree-dotted slope, taken from the height of some giant pine or the back of a mighty roc. The impression is one of eerie, wind-swept silence, and this despite the herd of gaunt black wolves who with blazing eyes



"THE ZOOM."

(Reproduced by courtesy of *The Sketch*.)

"I reproduce faces, when I want human faces, from memory. When I am travelling I often make a study of the people in the railway carriage, and I can draw them all from memory when I get home."

Little as his most ardent admirers suspect it, Mr. Sime is a painter in oils, much addicted to landscape. He is fondest of wild Scottish Highland or Welsh scenery, which, coming under the magic of his brush, takes on a weird and "wicked" quality not at all to be

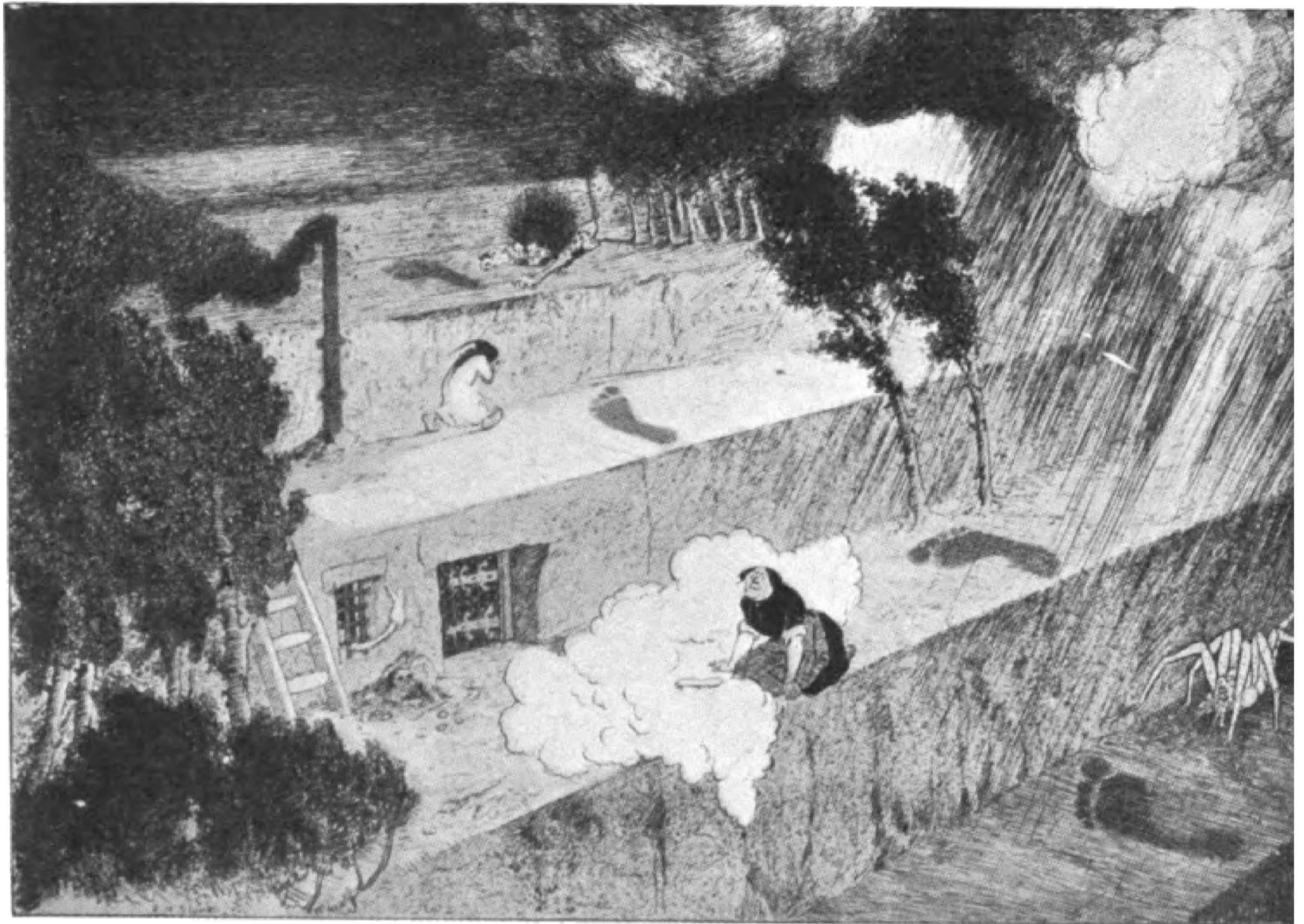
noiselessly steal across the open. (See next page.) Almost involuntarily I exclaimed:—

"Behold, there is your masterpiece!"

Sime—"the man Sime"—as he used invariably to be called in the pages of *Pick-Me-Up*—smiled an indulgent smile.

"Masterpiece? I haven't had time to attempt a masterpiece. But I'll show you something which is giving me more trouble than anything else I ever did attempt."

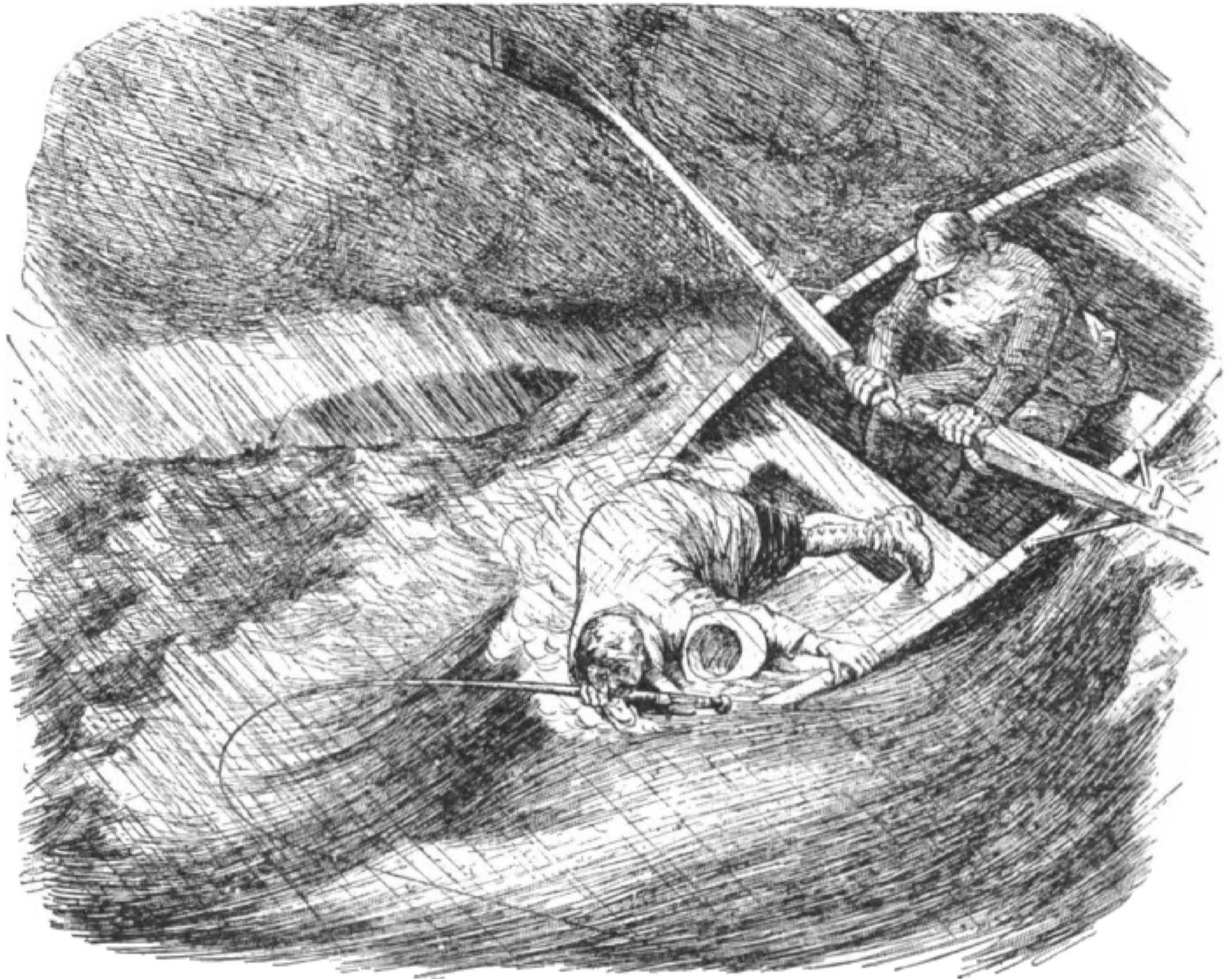
From an adjacent easel, the cloth was



"THE DREAM OF THE WOMAN OF CHAR."
(Reproduced by courtesy of *The Sketch*.)



"WILD BEAST WOOD."



IMPETURABLE BOATMAN: "Haud up yer rod, man! Ye have 'm!—ye have 'm!"
(Reproduced by the special permission of the Proprietors of *Punch*.)

removed, revealing a perfect riot of vivid colour and bizarre shapes. It is intended to represent a scene from Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death," and will be one of a triad of pictures. One may safely predicate of this achievement that when it comes to be exhibited, at the Royal Academy or elsewhere, it will make all the other paintings in its immediate entourage appear somewhat flat, pale, and uninspired.

Mr. Sime has also been a contributor to *Punch*. The specimen of his work in that paper reproduced above has the rare



CARICATURE SKETCH OF MR. S. H. SIME,
BY "MAX."

distinction of being a funny picture, apart from the merit of the joke.

Mr. Sime has, amongst other distinctions, enjoyed that of being caricatured by Mr. Max Beerbohm. It says much for the elder artist's magnanimity that, in spite of this performance, he can yet declare warmly, "Max is the only caricaturist we have!" This was not uttered in the spirit of one illustrious victim, whose comment was, "If there were another Max, or if Max had Sime's skill in draughtsmanship, England would be intolerable for some of us!"