

# THE STRAND MAGAZINE.

Contents for June, 1922.

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Frontispiece: "Get across! Quick! Quick! All of you. I'll hold this devil off!" He had seized a stout stick and faced the madman, daring him to spring across.

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THE STRAND MAGAZINE is printed by the Newses and Pearson Printing Co., Ltd., N. Kensington, and published monthly by the Proprietors, George Newnes, Ltd., 8 to 11, Southampton Street, Strand, London, England. Subscription price to any part of the world, post free, for one year, 15s. (Canada, 14s.). Registered at the General Post Office for transmission by Canadian Magazine Post. Entered as Second-class Matter at the New York, N.Y., Post Office. Cases for binding volumes of THE STRAND MAGAZINE may be obtained to order from Booksellers for 3s., or post free for 3s. 4d. direct from the Office. Half-yearly Volumes, 7s. 6d. net.

Sole Agents for Australasia: Gordon & Gotch (Nash), Ltd., Sole Agents for South Africa: Central News Agency, Ltd. American Agents: The International News Company, 31 and 35, Duane Street, New York.

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The  
EVASIVE  
PAMPHLET

HE was disappointed again? He sat alone in his office thinking of the auction sale of the day before. A copy of the rare first edition of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," the immortal story of Edgar Allan Poe, was lost to him and his heirs for evermore.

He had gone to the auction with the virtuous intention of buying it; when the shabby little pamphlet with its brown paper wrappings—printed in Philadelphia in 1843—was offered, the bidding was remarkably spirited. It was finally sold to a distinguished collector for thirty-eight hundred dollars. He had been the underbidder, but what chance had a poor devil of a bibliophile against the wealthy captains of industry? At sales of this character the race is not to the swift, but to the—rich!

Robert Hooker had once owned a copy of this precious volume. This made his disappointment the keener. It was a more interesting example than the one that had just been offered under the hammer of the auctioneer, for it had been a presentation copy with a simple though beautiful inscription written in the delicate handwriting of the poet upon the title-page:—

*"To Virginia from E. A. P."*

This was the very copy the greatest of story-tellers had lovingly given to his wife. Years ago it had mysteriously disappeared from Hooker's office, where he had kept it in a fireproof safe, feeling it was more secure there than on the shelves of his library. He sought for it everywhere, offering large rewards for its return, but the evasive little volume never was heard of again.

Hooker was musing over his "defeat" of yesterday in the sales-room when his thoughts reverted to the fate of his own copy. Where was it? What was its history? Its possessor could not seek a purchaser, because the inscription on the title-page would instantly identify it. Had it

been destroyed? Was it—

"A gentleman to see you, sir, about an old book!"

He instantly awoke from his reverie. It was his secretary who had spoken.

"Tell him I have no money for such things!" said Hooker.

John Lawrence, his secretary, did not turn away, but waited with the flicker of a smile upon his face. He knew the foibles of his employer. He had been with him for many years. And a really good clerk always knows his master's weaknesses.

"Hold on a minute, John. Perhaps I can give him a few minutes. Tell him to come in."

"Hallo, Colonel! What can I do for you this morning?" said Hooker, cheerily, to a middle-aged man, erect of figure, who had just entered. He was one of those men who make their living picking up old books, old guns, old papers, old coins, old pictures, old everything. He also, at times, had a faculty of picking up old liquors, which was not good for him. He was known as the "Colonel" because of his military bearing and his interest in the Civil War. He had really been a soldier serving in the glorious and extensive regiment known as the home guard.

"Good morning, Mr. Hooker. I've a matter I'd like to speak to you about—but

in the strictest confidence. I'm on the track of a really fine book."

At this Hooker smiled. Although in his long and busy life and in his strange wanderings the Colonel had secured a few good things, his "finds" generally turned out to be of no value. Hooker had frequently advanced him money to purchase what the Colonel termed "nuggets," but when they were brought to him changed, in the twinkling of an eye, into fool's gold.

"Well, what is it?" said Hooker, rather impatiently, fearing another tug at his purse-strings.

"You've read this morning's papers? 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' brought at the sale yesterday thirty-eight hundred dollars—"

"Enough of that!" retorted Hooker, who was becoming angry. "I never want to hear of that confounded book again!"

"But I know where there's another copy," protested the Colonel, weakly.

"So do I. In the British Museum!"

"No, Mr. Hooker. Right here in New York."

"Where?"

"But you're not interested, you just said—"

"Of course I am, you old fool—go on!"

"Well, the book's in an old house down near Washington Square. It'll be difficult to get. Its owner's in jail."

"In jail?"

"Yes. He's serving a stretch—twenty years."

"What for?"

"Murder!"

"Now, Colonel, I hope you didn't come here to amuse me with fairy tales. I'm very busy this morning."

"No. That's straight. He's up for twenty years. He murdered his sweetheart. The court brought in a verdict of manslaughter, so he got a light sentence."

"Well, what's that got to do with the book?"

"Have patience, Mr. Hooker. You know of the Tomlinson case?"

"Never heard of it."

"Impossible, sir! The newspapers were filled with it at the time. Seven years ago everyone was talking about it, and surely you remember—"

"No, Colonel, seven years ago I was in Europe. Tell me about it."

The Colonel went into details.

**I**N June of 1907 a family by the name of Clarke moved into two rooms in a large, old-fashioned residence on Eighth Street, near Fifth Avenue. They were there for less than a month when they gave the landlord notice. They could not remain in the house

on account of ghosts! Now *everyone* believes in ghosts but landlords. It injures their business.

The Clarkes contended that every night in the front room the most mysterious noises were heard; they called in the janitor, but he knew nothing. The strange sounds continued; they were uncanny, inexplicable. The Clarkes moved out and they were succeeded by other nervous and hysterical persons. The landlord in desperation reduced the rent, but still the tenants would not remain.

At last even he, who was sceptical and would not believe in hobgoblins, or ghosts, or spirits, or any of those fantastic creatures that exist outside the material mind, resolved to investigate for himself. He literally camped in the rooms for months and heard not a sound! Every night he determined would be his last and that he would not waste any more of his valuable time over the mystical phantoms of his foolish tenants.

One evening, which he resolved was to be the final one, while he was playing solitaire to pass the tedium of the vigil, he heard a noise in the wall. He turned pale with fear. A cold chill ran up and down his back. A moment later the sound of a falling coin reached his ears, and there rolled toward him from the old Georgian fireplace a shining object.

It was a few minutes before he had the courage to pick it up. It was a small gold ring. He examined it carefully, and engraved therein were the initials "M. P. from J. L." He put the ring in his pocket, removed the fire-dogs, the tongs, the coal-scuttle, and the whole paraphernalia of fire-places, and looked up the flue. He could see nothing. Although it was a clear night he could not see the stars. Something was in the way.

The finding next day of the poor, bruised body of little Marie Perrin up the chimney of "No. 8" was the sensation of the hour. A horrible crime had been committed, and in an unknown and terrible way. It was Edgar Allan Poe in a new guise and his wonderful stories immediately became popular, and new editions of the "Tales" were called for by a new set of readers. Some critics of crime suggested that "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" had been repeated at No. 8, East Eighth Street. The hiding-place of the body was identical with that in the famous story, and it was said that the police were on the look-out for apes, gorillas, and other animals, which alone were capable of committing such hideous crimes.

The whole life of poor little Marie was laid bare. Her picture was in every newspaper and her history was given from the day of her birth with remarkable ingenuity. The

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reporters, with uncontrolled imaginations, turned out from the scanty material at their hands an excellent biographical sketch, that seemed and rang true, which is sufficient for the reading public.

Marie Perrin had disappeared without paying her rent from No. 8 over a year ago. When the agent came to collect the arrears, he found the tenant had departed with all her chattels. This was a libel, for she was in the room, but not visible. The detectives, when they investigated into the tragedy, and after asking ten thousand questions in a thousand and one places, found that Marie had a sweetheart and that his name was Richard Tomlinson. He refused to admit his guilt, but after being prodded with the iron fork of the law, technically known as the "third degree," he broke down and confessed. In a fit of anger he struck her over the head with the brass fire-tongs. He had no intention of killing her, or even harming her, but he had become insanely jealous of another who was paying her attentions. In fact, he said he must have been mad at the time, as he did not remember having struck her until she lay before him, quiet and cold upon the floor.

After a trial lasting over two weeks, and full of sensational incidents, Tomlinson was sentenced to spend twenty years of his life in prison.

"THAT'S an interesting tale," said Robert Hooker, when the Colonel had stopped speaking; 'but what has all this to do with the first edition of Poe's story?'"

"Well, you see, Tomlinson was a friend of mine. He told me that, after he had accidentally killed the girl, he was terribly frightened. He did not know what to do with the body. He had a mind to go to the police and confess all, but did not have the courage to do so. He remained in a trance, he thought, for hours, thinking of his fearful crime and the dreadful consequences. While he was in this deep, agonizing study, and not knowing what he was doing, he picked up a small book on her reading table. It was 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue.' It was the title that attracted him, and some compelling force, what it was he knew not, caused him to read it. He told me that never in his whole life had anything so interested him as that story on that frightful occasion; although pursued by terrible fears he read every word, every syllable of it. The rest you know."

"But, Colonel," said Hooker, with one thought uttermost in his mind, "it might be any edition, not necessarily the first. There have been hundreds of editions

published. How do you know what edition it was?"

"It was the first, Mr. Hooker. Tomlinson told me the girl had borrowed it to read, and that it belonged to someone who had a mania for old books and who had kept it always under lock and key."

"Do you know where it is?"

"Yes."

"Can you get it?"

"Perhaps."

"I shall make it worth your while. How much do you want?"

"All I can get. I'll have to steal it!"

"What!"

"Yes, I'll have to steal it. It cannot be had in any other way. Why do you start?"

"I didn't think you'd have to do that!"

"Yes. You see, Tomlinson, when he moved from those furnished rooms, took everything he could carry to his brother's lodgings near Washington Square. The book is in a sealed trunk on the third floor. Tomlinson made his brother promise that this trunk was not to be disturbed in any circumstances until he came out of jail a free man. I've tried in every way—by bribery and everything—but his brother will not touch it. He seems afraid of that old trunk. I'll get it, however, at all costs. Are you with me?"

Hooker was, above everything, a true bibliophile. He instantly answered:—

"Yes, Colonel! Go the limit. I'll back you."

The Colonel without another word picked up his hat and left the office.

FOR three tedious weeks Hooker heard no more of the book or of his curious friend, the Colonel. The whole thing seemed like a tale woven by Poe himself.

Would the book, if it ever was secured, turn out to be a second edition and worthless? Book-lovers, after the strange manner of their kind, only cherish the first, the earliest issue, in the same state as it came from the master's hand, unrevised and with all the errors uncorrected. They do not care for new and more elegant editions. Hooker grew restless as the weeks rolled by, and still no Colonel.

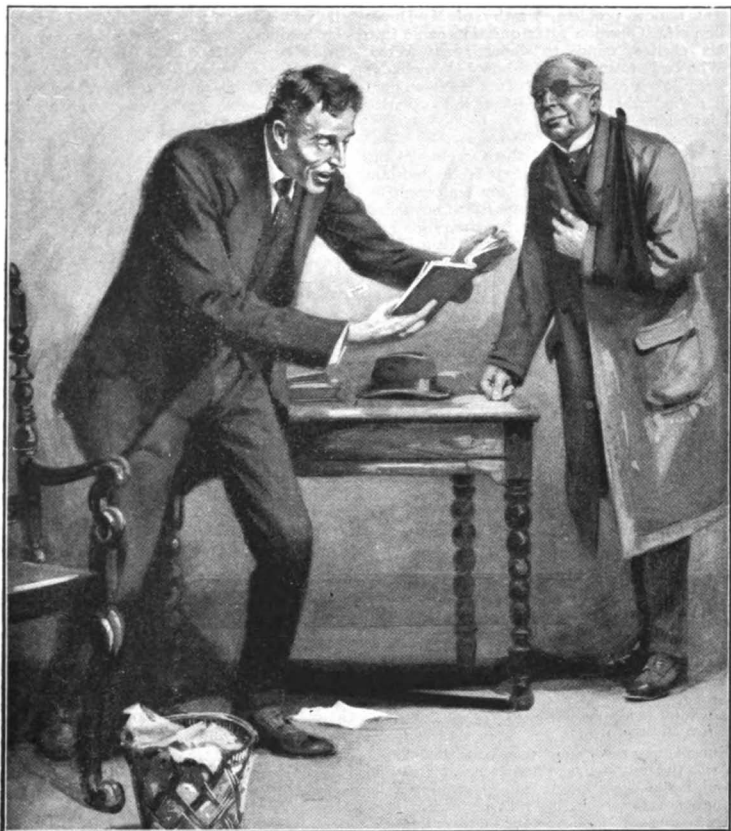
One morning, as he was looking over his letters, a gentleman was announced. Then, tottering into the office, with his arm in a sling and a patch over his left eye, came the gallant Colonel.

"Why, Colonel, what's the matter?"

"Nothing at all, sir."

"But your arm and your——"

"That's my affair, Mr. Hooker. I've come to secure the reward of my labours. I've got the book," he said, in triumph. "I told you I'd get it."



With trembling hands he grasped the book. A startled cry broke from his lips.

"Where is it?"

"Here in my pocket. Look at it. It's a superb copy!"

The Colonel laid before the astonished eyes of Richard Hooker the priceless first edition of Poe's marvellous story. It was in the original brown printed wrappers, just as it was published. With trembling hands he grasped the book; he turned the first page and gasped. A startled cry broke from his lips. The Colonel at once noticed his pallor. He did not dream that an old book would affect even the most ardent bibliophile in this manner. In all his

experience of forty years he had never seen anyone so overcome at the sight of a dingy pamphlet.

There, upon the title-page, Hooker read the tender inscription written many generations ago, with which the most imaginative of American poets had presented his greatest story to his loving wife. It was his own copy, returned like bread upon the waters. Hooker was speechless. He went over to his cheque-book and handed the Colonel the equivalent of three thousand dollars. The Colonel retired, murmuring his thanks.

The book lay upon Hooker's desk. Here

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was a new problem, worthy of M. Dupin himself. Question after question came into his excited mind, to depart unanswered. Who had stolen it? And how? Why had it been taken? How had Tomlinson secured it? And what, above all, had it to do with Marie Perrin?

**H**OOKER remained there, gazing at the pamphlet for hours. It fascinated him horribly. The luncheon hour went by and still he sat staring intently at its faded covers. Would he ever solve the riddle?

His mind was still at work on the problem when he was interrupted by his secretary.

"It's closing time, sir. Is there anything you want before I go?"

"Nothing, John, thank you."

The secretary turned to depart! He drew back suddenly.

"The book! Mr. Hooker, the book! Where did you get *that*?"

Robert Hooker looked at his confidential assistant. His face was the colour of the whitest parchment. His breath came in gasps, and cold drops of perspiration were visible upon his forehead.

"I bought it to-day," said Hooker, quietly.

"It once belonged to me—and Marie Perrin."

"She was my—"

John Lawrence did not finish the sentence; his face was twitching and he was evidently suffering from the keenest nervous excitement.

"Tell me about it, John," said Hooker, kindly. "You seem to know something of it."

"I do, Mr. Hooker. You'll forgive me, won't you? I didn't mean to do anything wrong."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Well, years ago, on your return from Europe, you questioned me about that book. I was the only one who had access to the safe and knew the combination. I told you I knew nothing about it—that perhaps it had been mislaid before your departure for London. I lied, for I had taken it. I'd no intention of stealing it; I did not even know

it was particularly valuable. I read the story one day when I was alone, with no work to do. It was the best tale I'd ever read. I was absorbed by it. I could not get the horrible plot out of my head."

"Yes, John, go on. Where does Marie come in?"

"I was engaged to her. I had known her for years. She came from Montpelier, Vermont, where we both were born. One day I told her of the story. She wanted to read it. Not thinking it any harm, I loaned it to her. She stopped for it one evening on her way home. I never saw her after that. I tried every way to find her, without avail. She had disappeared from her rooms on Eighth Street, and I never heard of her again until the frightful news came out. Detectives came to see me. My name was in the papers once or twice at the time, and the questions they asked me were terrible. I proved an alibi; they had fixed the crime on Tomlinson, who, unknown to me, was uppermost in her affections. It was a bitter awakening. I've never been the same since. I think of her every night of my life—I've now told you all and I shall resign and leave you at once. You can have no more need of me."

"Stay, John. I forgive you. You've suffered enough. Go home—and come down to-morrow, as usual."

**T**HE book still lay upon the desk. This time he would take it home to keep it in his library among his most valuable possessions. For surely it was the most interesting copy of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" in existence! Hooker turned the leaves to see whether, after its wanderings, all the pages were intact—"col-lating" it, as bibliophiles love to term this delightful occupation. Yes, it was perfect—just as when it had so mysteriously disappeared years ago. But, hold—what were the brown, reddish finger-marks on the back cover? Hooker did not require to be told that it was the life-blood of poor Marie Perrin.

