San Francisco Examiner
August 6, 1899

The Passing Show

Our unfortunate townsman, Lucky Baldwin, being "in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes," may well beweep his outcast state, and trouble deaf heaven with his bootless cries, and look upon himself and curse his fate –which is a good deal for a lucky man to do. A few months ago he experienced the mischance of losing a costly hotel by fire and his fellow citizens find it hard to forgive him. It had been the ugliest edifice in seven cities, but big and grandiose; and its remnant is at war with the human eye. Its incineration was a public benefaction, but we have been accustomed to seeing something there and the void offends like a missing phrase in music. Hence our bitterness toward poor Mr. Baldwin, whom, truth to tell, we loved none too well before. The embers of his hotel had not done glowing when the voice of public opinion was lifted up in a raucous demand for their instant removal. And now, when for lack of money to comply with our austere command to rebuild he timidly proposes to roof his ruin one storey above the mortgage he finds himself the focal point of so copious a dead-catting that he is like to be suffocated with fur!

Let us make a mighty effort to achieve the virtue of patience. A one-storey structure standing on that mortgage will not pay interest in rents. Eventually Mr. Baldwin must obtain money to build it higher or surrender it to the Hibernia Bank. Whoever remains in possession of a costly site must put up a costly structure on it—that is a law. Human laws are evitable, but that is not: the fine for infraction is too heavy. We may confidently count upon a building as high and hideous as its predecessor. In the meantime let us bear Mr. Baldwin's adversity with as charitable a fortitude as we can summon, remembering for our comfort that he feels it a good deal more keenly than we, and that in his efforts to evade "the bludgeoning of chance" God sees him and will not let him altogether escape.

The pugnant gentlemen down there in Clay County, Kentucky, appear to have grown weary of fighting: two of them have enlisted to serve under Otis in Luzon.

Having amused ourselves by lynching some Italian subjects on suspicion, we find ourselves confronted by their government with a demand for explanation. We have no explanation to give, further than that it is our national custom to lynch. If that is not satisfactory, coupled with an humiliating apology by the president, we shall pay out of the national treasury, and the treasury of the State of Louisiana, where the lynching was done, will be none the leaner. As to punishing the lynchers (if Italy should demand that) the general government is without power to comply: but if an Italian man-of-war should bombard New Orleans the general government would have to mix matters with that thunder-boat—that is, it would have to side with the lynchers. It is a beautiful scheme, this government of ours: It seems to have been

invented for the purpose of shirking responsibility to foreign powers. They have been pretty patient, as a rule—have been content with dollars and apologies; but some day one will demand life for life, and in the blood of our sailors and soldiers we shall pay for the privilege of living under a government that does not govern.

Two men-of-war were lying peacefully at anchor, side by side, when one fired into the other, killing some of her crew. The captain of the aggrieved vessel immediately boarded the other.

"Sir," he said to the captain of the offender, "you have wantonly killed some of my men."

"Let us be accurate," was the reply; "some of my gunners have done so. I assure you they acted without orders."

"Very well, sir: I demand that they be hanged at the yard-arm forthwith."

"You will have to be content with a sum of money and an apology. By the terms of my agreement with my crew they are independent of my orders, and I have no authority to punish them."

"The devil! What ship is this anyhow?"

"The United States."

"And who is your owner?"

"The crew."

"You are a queer outfit. If it is a fair question have you, for example, a compass?"

"My friend, the suspicion wrongs us—we steer by the will of God."

So Sampson wants prize money! Well. I declare
I know not what Sampson e'er captured, nor where.
Cervera surrendered to Schley, so they tell.
And the Mule of Matanzas still lies where he fell.

A Los Angeles man who had been living dishonestly on the money for his funeral expenses committed suicide the other day when it was all gone. He left a diary, in which he explained that he had bought a book by Harold Frederic, adding that the purchase cut short his life by one day. I don't see why he bought that book; he could have paid the same price for one by Beatrice Harraden. That would have brought him just much nearer, my God, to thee, and if he read it made him twice as willing to go.

Mrs. Adams, who had the misfortune to poison her child, has been convicted of murder and will serve what is humorously called a "life sentence," which in this state averages about seven years. Light as her punishment will be it ought to teach her the expedience of killing adult males, henceforth. It is hoped, though, that she may be persuaded to eschew both the potion and the poniard, and with malice toward none and charity for all go down South and lynch niggers. That is almost as restful as taking human life.

William Waldorf Astor is destined to excite the mirth of the nation for a brief space; he will be a passing fad in the comic weeklies and a temporary subject for the jibe of the newspaper paragrapher; thereafter, Oblivion will swallow William Waldorf Astor, name and all, at one fell gulp.—*Evening Post.*

In order that the gentleman from Mars may understand the real enormity of this malefactor's crime it may be explained that he is very wealthy. In this country that is regarded as an offence against the people. Finding himself exceedingly unpopular because of his wealth, and subject to all manner of insult and misrepresentation, he removed to London, where he has been intelligently and industriously pursuing an honourable vocation and living a blameless life, still followed by the ribald jests of the American press and by the falsehood that he went away in resentment of the taxman's just assessment of his property. If the gentleman from Mars is still insufficiently enlightened as to how (and why) things are done on this planet he will please be good enough to know that Mr. Astor is on friendly terms in England with persons of rank and consequence; and this is not easily forgiven by those to whose wish that distinction is denied. In short, by renouncing his allegiance to the United States and becoming a subject of Great Britain the Astor person has shown wicked disregard of some of the most tender sensibilities of the human soul.

In defense of Mr. Astor's change of residence and allegiance it might be urged (if one had the hardihood) that in his native country there is no adequate protection of human life—the primary purpose of government. More human beings are criminally killed in every year in the United States than have died in any modern battle. In England murder is punished, and is therefore seldom committed. In the United States suspected persons, frequently innocent, are put to death by their neighbors with impunity, and in one large section of the country it is customary to mutilate the victim before killing him, to burn him with red-hot irons, to tear his flesh from him in strips and afterward to carry away parts of his body as souvenirs. In England lynching is unknown. In the United States mobs of laborers on strike are permitted to murder other laborers in the streets and in their homes, to destroy their employers' property and that of others without effective opposition. In England nothing of this kind is allowed. In the United States no person's good name is secure from the oral or the printed lie. In England the slanderer and the libeller are silent under the menace of law. In the United States the courts and legislative bodies are, as a rule, corrupt. In England the judges are just and legislators honest. In the United States ignorant vulgarians and bawling demagogues are found everywhere enjoying the distinction of high political preferment. In England the holding of an important office is presumptive evidence of education and good breeding. In an American city the public service is controlled and the public revenues looted by coarse unlettered thieves known as "bosses." In English cities the "boss" is unknown. When charting so confidently and with such precision the motives impelling Mr. Astor to a change of allegiance his star-spangled critics might profitably consider whether some of these facts may not unconsciously have affected his decision. Not theirs, of course, nor mine, would be affected by considerations so trivial, but to an understanding enfeebled by possession of "the Astor millions" they might seem relevant and important. The United States were good enough, as doubtless Hades is good enough, for the old original John Jacob, but the degenerate William Waldorf may have an unmanly weakness for security, peace and self-respect.

In draughting the Scheme of Things the Creator made no provision for good government. It is a hope, a dream, "a radiant and adored deceit," a "light that never was on sea nor land." They have it in Heaven, doubtless, and by the way Heaven is a pure autocracy, neither saints nor angels sharing the cares of state; but here on earth we shall have it only when so good and wise as to require no government at all. Good government is too precious to be bestowed upon a people so unworthy as to need it. But there are degrees of bad government, and as an American who has lived and observed in both countries I am of the solemn conviction that of all

the governments of great nations that of the United States is the most senseless, corrupt and inefficient, and that of England the least. That there is anything discreditable in a change of allegiance from the one country to the other, according to interest or taste—or for that matter from any country to any other—is a proposition of so monstrous unreason that it could win assent from nobody but a malicious idiot or a patriot. I fear that the gentleman whom I have quoted is the latter.

When a person who gets his living by pretending to be somebody else gives judgment on a person who gets his by telling stories that arer not true one naturally expects "something out of the common." That is the situation when an actor reviews a book of fiction, as did Mr. Edwin Stevens in last Sunday's Call: he reviewed a volume of tales by Dr. Doyle. And something "out of the common" occurred. Observe this:

When Dr. Doyle fled to India to escape the ghost of Sherlock Holmes he did well. In introducing us to his delightful Ram Deen in "The Taming of the Jungle" he places us under such deep obligations that we feel the amende honourable has been made and find it in our hearts to forgive him for Holmes' untimely demise.

"Under such deep obligations" is good! A metaphor wherein one is considered as placed "under" something "deep" is imperfectly thinkable, but it makes one feel cool and dim and nice, like a fish at the bottom of the sea. It is cheering, too, to observe the word "demise" used for "death," reminding, as it does, that the King of Shadows has a vulgar name, unfit for ears polite, and is a low person whom one does not care to meet. How is this for an amendment?

There is a reaper whose name is "Demise." –Or this?

Hell shuddered at the hideous name and sighed
From all her caves and back resounded: "Demise!"

Mr. Stevens is a brilliant writer: he burns with a peculiar splendour—"a still and awful red"—from the sentence quoted, clean through his review to the concluding line: " 'Taming of the Jungle,' by R. Conan Doyle."

That reminds me of what I had to say. The book is by Dr. C. W. Doyle of Santa Cruz, California. Surely it is somewhat "out of common" for even a man that gets his living by pretending to be somebody else to read and review a book without looking at cover or title-page. Let me ask Mr. Stevens how he would think he felt if after one of his admirable impersonations of "Juliet" Professor Syle should solemnly congratulate him on his success as "The Nurse."

Mr. Markham—he of the Hoe—concludes a gorgeous article on strikes, trusts and all that he knows least about as follows:

Meanwhile every patriot should find his work in whatever tends to put down class hatred—in whatever tends to spread the sentiment of justice and brotherhood among the people.

This from the author of "Armageddon"?—this from the author of "The Man with the Hoe"! Now, Lord, let thy servant depart in peace, for he has heard enough. If any two words stand for "class hatred"—for blind, brutal, reasonless animosity, all the more mischievous because lodged in the heart and brain of a great poet, those words are "Edwin Markham." I do not at all doubt the sincerity of his conviction that he preaches a gospel of fraternity, any more that I doubt that the Spanish Inquisitors, the red-handed citizens of Nauvoo and all other pious

persecutors honestly believed themselves promoters of the law of love and faithful followers of the Prince of Peace. It is very easy to persuade oneself of the nobility of one's motive in doing evil, and I don't doubt that Judas Iscariot (a well-meaning chap who owed thirty pieces of silver to his tailor) was firmly persuaded of his own exceeding worth. It is easy, too, to repudiate a threat by calling it at need a warning or a prophecy, but Markham the Fraternalist follows rather tardily after Markham the Incendiary.

It is ingenious of Mr. Markham to justify his wrath against the "masters, lords and rulers of all lands" by showing how some of them, ages ago, slanted back the brow of the French peasant and let down the jaw of him; but the apologia is lacking in breadth. Moreover, it hardly squares with his confession that "it is no man's fault" that "the world is locked in a system of social injustice." On the whole, I prefer the candid voice of Mr. Markham's muse—*petroleuse* that she is—to the afterthought prose in which he clothes her dirty nakedness.