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"REALITIES."

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE *PEN AND PENCIL* SOCIETY.

BY

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“REALITIES.”

AUBREY HOUSE, NOTTING HILL, W.
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DEAR MR SCOTT,—You are quite welcome to reprint my little *jeu*, if you really think it worth *la chandelle*. It was of course never intended to leave the MS. form in which it was placed in the basket of our *Pen and Pencil* Society; but an American lady who happened to be present, liked it well enough to send the MS. to a New York Paper, in which you saw it.

The texture is too flimsy to stand cutting about in the endeavour to make it more presentable, so that if you do anything with it, it will have to be just as it stands.—Yours truly,
P. A. TAYLOR.

I AM informed by *Pen and Pencil*, with a certain harsh inexorableness of tone that *something* I must produce this evening, or—incur a sentence too dreadful to be contemplated, no less than that of ostracism (perhaps ostracism for incapacity should be spelt *ass-tracism*).

Well, what are the words? *Realities* and *drifting*. Very good; then I'll take both, for the most characteristic element that I have noted of *realities* is that they are constantly *drifting*.

Wishing to start from an undoubted basis, I asked a friend, before sitting down to write, what exactly he understood by *realities*, and he replied, with the air of a philosopher, “whatever man, through the medium of

his senses, can surely realize." The conclusion I draw is, that there is some inextricable connection between *realities* and *real lies*. In which I am confirmed by Johnson, who traces the derivation of the word *reality* as *from* real.

Sir John Lubbock, in his "Origin of Civilization," under the heading of "Savage Tendency to Deification," states as a fact that "The king of the Koussa Kaffirs, having broken off a piece of a stranded anchor, died soon afterwards, upon which all the Kaffirs looked upon the anchor as alive, and saluted it respectfully whenever they passed near it." At a glance it occurred to me, this is a *reality* well worthy of being brought under the notice of *Pen and Pencil*. Will it not furnish, thought I, material for their philosophers, and mirth for their humorists, and surely an excellent subject for their artists. *But is it true?* Ay, that must be my first discovery. Who shall hope to palm off doubtful *realities* upon *Pen and Pencil*, without deservedly *drifting* to disgrace?

Without indecent boasting, I believe I may assure this august assembly that I have probed this matter to its very root; the whole truth is in my hands, and shall be faithfully presented to this critical company. I shall be excused from detailing my method of examination; time would fail us were I to make the attempt; suffice it to say that I have brought all possible modes under contribution, and many more, and that not a single fact has been set down unless previously tested by a wild flight of imagination. Upon principle, too, I decline to say how I have arrived at the realities of the case, lest truth should suffer through disapproval of my process.

If I say that I have telegraphed direct, some wretched caviller may observe that he never heard of Kaffir wires. I may have conversed with the ghost of the wicked king of Koussa Kaffir through the medium of Mrs Marshall, but some joker—how I do detest the race—might object to my plan of *marshalling* my facts. I may have "asked that solemn question" of the leg

of my loo-table, which does *not* by any means “seem eternal,” something after the fashion of Ion. I may have caught the little toe of Mr Home, as he was floating in mid-air, and so found my information, as honest debts should be paid, *on the nail*. I may have—but no more—I respectfully decline to communicate, to-night at least, aught but the ascertained *realities*.

It is true, then, that a stranded anchor was thrown on the shore of Koussa Kaffir; that it created wide-spread wonder and enquiry as to its whence, its wherefore, and its whither; that the king, being of an enquiring mind, often examined the anchor, pondered over its shape and its materials; that one day, testing this last with too much energy, one fluke was quite lopped off. His majesty was pleased with the result, although it did not seem to do much towards solving the difficult questions connected with the strange visitor; but it was afterwards generally reported that some of the wisest of the Kaffirs had shaken their heads three times, and had remarked that if anything should happen they should doubt whether it was not for something.

Something did happen. The king that night ate for his supper forty-four ostrich eggs, besides two kangaroos and a missionary. It was too much for even a Kaffir king; he was seized with night-mare, raved of the weight of the anchor on his chest, and died.

The effect produced upon Kaffir public opinion, and the Kaffir press, was startling and instantaneous. The king had broken the anchor; the king had died—had died *because* he broke the anchor; that was evident, nay was proved—proved by unerring figures, as thus: the king was fifty-five years old; had lived, that is to say, 20,075 days; to say, therefore, that he had not died this day *because* of his daring impiety was more than 20,000 to one against the doctrine of probabilities.

The anchor, therefore was a power—was a devil to be feared—that is, a god to be worshipped; for in savage countries there is a wonderful likeness between the two. Thus was born a religion in Koussa Kaffir.

Divine honours or dastard fears were lavished on the anchor ; a priesthood sprang up who made their account in the Kaffir superstition. They were called anchorites. They were partly cheats, and partly dupes ; but they made a livelihood between the two characters. They fixed the nature and the amount of the sacrifices to be offered, and the requirements of the anchor were in remarkable harmony with the wants of its priests. Natural causes, too, were happily blended with supernatural. The anchor was declared to be the great healer of diseases. For immense sums the ministering priests would give small filings to the diseased, and marvellous were the cures produced by oxides and by iron ; never, in short, was there a more prosperous faith. The morals of the people, I grieve to say, did not improve in proportion to their faith. An anchor that is supposed to remit sins on sacerdotal intercession is probably not favourable to the higher morals in Koussa Kaffir.

But a trial had to come upon the anchor-devil and its worshippers. Under it it must collapse, or passing through it as through the flame of persecution, come forth stronger and brighter than ever. Which should it be ? It was an interesting spectacle. Let me finish my story.

There returned to Koussa Kaffir a native who had voyaged round the world since he had left his native land ; he had seen and had observed much ; he was well acquainted with anchors ; had seen them in all stages and under all conditions ; he knew their use by long experience ; he had handled them. One time his vessel had been saved by its stout anchor, another time he had had to save the ship by slipping his cable and leaving the anchor at the bottom ; he had never known an anchor resent the worst usage ; he would not worship this old broken one. Some thought him mad, some wicked ; he was called infidel by those who knew his mind, but for a long time he followed his friends' advice, and said nothing of his awful heresy.

But this condition of mind would hardly last for

ever. Travel had improved his intellectual force, as well as given special knowledge about anchors and other things ; he began to lament over and even to despise the folly of his race ; he burned to cast off some at least of their shackles of ignorance and superstition. "How shall I begin," cried he one day, "to raise their souls to something higher, while they worship that stupid old rusty anchor in the sand?"

His soul began to burn with the spirit of martyrs and reformers. "I will expose this folly ; I will break to pieces their anchor-devil, and when they see that all is well as it was before, they will begin to laugh at their own devil, and will have their minds open to a higher faith."

But first he would consult his friends ; if possible obtain their sanction, and act in unison with others. He met with no encouragement. One gravely rebuked him for his presumption and conceit, and produced a long list of eminent Kaffirs who had bowed before the anchor. Another found in the absurdity of the anchor faith its best evidence of solidity. It was, he said, a faith too improbable for a Kaffir to have invented ; any fool, he added, could believe a probable religion, but it needed a superior Kaffir to swallow this. Some put their tongues in their cheeks (a vulgar habit amongst the Koussa Kaffirs), and said : "Silly fellow, we know all that as well as you do, but the anchor is a profitable anchor, and as needs must, you shall be one amongst the priests."

Again, others said : "We, too, have our doubts, but as a political engine we must retain our anchor. How should we keep down the lower orders ? How restrain our servants from pilfering without its influence and sanctifying power. The fact is, that in our complicated social system all society depends upon the anchor." "Between ourselves," one added, "if heaven had not sent that particular anchor some of us think we must have sent to Woolwich for another."

But the only arguments that caused him any hesitation, and which did give him some pain, were from

certain women who implored him not to destroy their anchor idol. "We cannot judge," said one of these, "between your arguments and the conclusions we have been brought up to reverence. The anchor may not be a god but only a symbol, but how beautiful a one! Does not the anchor save the ship? And are not our own lives, too, like the storm-tossed vessel? That anchor is associated with all we have felt, suffered, prayed for. Destroy that symbol, and you wound and endanger the deepest element of religion in our hearts."

Finally, one very intelligent friend said to him with much solemnity: "Rash man, forbear! Stop while there is time in a course that may bring down ruin on the state and on yourself, and for the doing of which you can have, as a rational being, no temptation whatever. I grant you, you may be right, and the rest all wrong; but what then? We can know nothing of the matter, and *you may be wrong*. Now, anyhow, *we are on the safe side of the hedge*. If the anchor be a devil he may do you harm, and if he be only a bit of rusty iron, you will be none the worse for a bow and a grimace."

The rash man was immovable. Doomed by the infernal gods to pay the penalty of having lit his Promethean torch at Woolwich dockyard, armed with a mighty hammer, and followed by an awe-struck crowd, he fell upon the anchor, and with one mighty blow, struck off the other fluke. It was his last! Inspired by religious zeal, the Koussa Kaffirs rushed upon him, and in the sight of the outraged anchor beat his brains out on the beach. It was observed that his friend who liked to be "on the safe side" threw the first stone, and the advocate of public morals was the next; after that they rained too thick to tell who did the most.

Meantime the anchor of Koussa Kaffir will be worshipped for a thousand years, for has it not slain the only two men who dared to question its authority!

