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CELEBRITY: AN EPISODE**

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Special Limited Edition. The Celebrity: An Episode by Winston Churchill

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WINSTON CHURCHILL

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THE CELEBRITY

AN EPISODE

BY

WINSTON CHURCHILL

AUTHOR OF "RICHARD CARVEL"

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TO

Albert Shaw, Ph.D.

WITH THE AFFECTIONATE REGARDS OF
THE AUTHOR

THE CELEBRITY

CHAPTER I

I WAS about to say that I had known the Celebrity from the time he wore kilts. But I see I shall have to amend that, because he was not a celebrity then, nor, indeed, did he achieve fame until some time after I had left New York for the West. In the old days, to my commonplace and unobserving mind, he gave no evidences of genius whatsoever. He never read me any of his manuscripts, which I can safely say he would have done had he written any at that time, and therefore my lack of detection of his promise may in some degree be pardoned. But he had then none of the oddities and mannerisms which I hold to be inseparable from genius, and which struck my attention in after days when I came in contact with the Celebrity. Hence I am constrained to the belief that his eccentricity must have arrived with his genius,

and both after the age of twenty-five. Far be it from me to question the talents of one upon whose head has been set the laurel of fame!

When I knew him he was a young man without frills or foibles, with an excellent head for business. He was starting in to practise law in a downtown office with the intention of becoming a great corporation lawyer. He used to drop into my chambers once in a while to smoke, and was first-rate company. When I gave a dinner there was generally a cover laid for him. I liked the man for his own sake, and even had he promised to turn out a celebrity it would have had no weight with me. I look upon notoriety with the same indifference as on the buttons on a man's shirt-front, or the crest on his note-paper.

When I went West, he fell out of my life. I probably should not have given him another thought had I not caught sight of his name, in old capitals, on a daintily covered volume in a book-stand. I had little time or inclination for reading fiction; my days were busy ones, and my nights were spent with law books. But I bought the volume out of curiosity, wondering the while whether he could have written it. I

was soon set at rest, for the dedication was to a young woman of whom I had often heard him speak. The volume was a collection of short stories. On these I did not feel myself competent to sit in judgment, for my personal taste in fiction, if I could be said to have had any, took another turn. The stories dealt mainly with the affairs of aristocratic young men and aristocratic young women, and were differentiated to fit situations only met with in that society which does not have to send descriptions of its functions to the newspapers. The stories did not seem to me to touch life. They were plainly intended to have a bracing moral effect, and perhaps had this result for the people at whom they were aimed. They left with me the impression of a well-delivered stereopticon lecture, with characters about as life-like as the shadows on the screen, and whisking on and off, at the mercy of the operator. Their charm to me lay in the manner of the telling, the style, which I am forced to admit was delightful.

But the book I had bought was a success, — a great success, if the newspapers and the reports of the sales were to be trusted. I read the criticisms out of curiosity more than any

other prompting, and no two of them were alike: they veered from extreme negative to extreme positive. I have to confess that it gratified me not a little to find the negatives for the most part of my poor way of thinking. The positives, on the other hand, declared the gifted young author to have found a manner of treatment of social life entirely new. Other critics still insisted it was social ridicule: but if this were so, the satire was too delicate for ordinary detection.

However, with the dainty volume my quondam friend sprang into fame. At the same time he cast off the chrysalis of a commonplace existence. He at once became the hero of the young women of the country from Portland, Maine, to Portland, Oregon, many of whom wrote him letters and asked him for his photograph. He was asked to tell what he really meant by the vague endings of this or that story. And then I began to hear rumors that his head was turning. These I discredited, of course. If true, I thought it but another proof of the undermining influence of feminine flattery, which few men, and fewer young men, can stand. But I watched his career with interest.