

**A DISILLUSIONED
OCCULTIST: A
DRAMA-NOVEL**

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A Disillusioned Occultist: A Drama-Novel by Charles Edward Barns

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CHARLES EDWARD BARNS

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A DISILLUSIONED OCCULTIST

1046 ~

“ And I saw Friendship, with two hands
Outstretched so pleadingly;
And while the right cried, ‘ Hail, sweet friend! ’
The left hand said, ‘ Good bye! ’ ”.....

A Disillusioned Occultist.

Steamship 'Deccan.' Two days westward from Bombay. Sunrise. Decks lively with bare-footed men in fluttering pajamas. An eager knot here and there wondering what the Captain will really do about it.

Briggs encounters his troubled friend Lon at the gang-way; he endeavors to pacify him while prying a secret at the same time.

"You see, Briggs, the Captain is in one of his sullen, egotistical moods when no prayers will pierce him, no threats avail to swerve him from that disgraceful resolve to lock up our 'mystery,' as the cynics misname him; and if he does, Briggs, if he does—"

"Nonsense! my boy—"

"But there is danger of it—great danger; and we can't afford to risk such a calamity. It might be disciplined out of a less formidable nature by... eh? five-thirty by my watch, poor thing; it has been running wry of late with all these severities of the Fates... yes, by a little

kindly endurance here, perhaps, and a little smart antagonism there, and so drive him out of this ungracious Scotch humor which threatens disaster in our very faces. Now see here—"

"No, no; Lon, you are going at it in the wrong way. He means right. This manner of his, from which you shrink so, is only—well, only a sort of ripeness of opinion, do n't you see."

"Excellent! The genial refinement of criticism, Briggs. When one must suffer a crabbed, incorrigible, unyielding old despot to tyrant thus over one's liberties, how generously humane and apt to call these pompous tyrannies merely a ripeness of opinion! To the gods! may my opinions remain perennially green, verdant as they are, if such is the maturing of them. Now look you; I know very well...no, thank you; never smoke before breakfast, even to please the best of friends. I just got out of my bunk, after a most consumptive endeavor to sleep, Briggs, with that mumbling young mystery lying there opposite me, with the moonlight pouring through the port-hole full into his strange, pallid face....look

out! your pajama's a-fire. Do you wonder that I prefer a breakfast to a stimulant?"

"Not at all, Lon; but you must admit that the captain is at least politic in this matter."

"I concede that, Briggs, most humbly; but policy is not the quality that should be brought to bear upon this tender affair. He is the most concrete of thinkers, to be sure, always proving his point with an exact word the complement of his opinions; but, dear fellow, tell me now. Is this not a complacent pass to bring the little wit of man that when he speaks it is as if the eternal had stolen in and superdominated his theories? With the captain's summing declarations one would think that the last word of science or art on the subject was spoken, and that all appeal to a higher tribunal that this Scotch commander's dicta would be a presumption. Yes; a sort of three-cornered crucible is the Captain's savage mind, wherein the ultimatum of human authority is melted up and minted into some fit coinage for a new intellectual Atlantis. But 'let us be thankful that things are

not worse,' as the old ballad goes—"

"Lon, you talk classics in a mud-hut. You seemed to despise, and yet shrink in awe of, this angular old autocrat as if he were some pouched and whiskered Apollo who had no business to step out of the dust of centuries and lord it over us with such supreme title. I half feel so myself at times, Lon, but after all is not this iron quality relieved by many evidences of sympathy and culture? These negative sort of aphorisms of his, you see, my boy—"

"Hush, Briggs, there goes the Captain now— Ah, what an imperious swagger! He's like a fox-hound of mine when he is following some important trail. He need not make mysteries out of mole-hills to prove himself an able officer and a gentleman— I must go to him—"

"No; you better stay where you are. He don't look particularly penetrable this morning; and you are in no mood to win your point. You will be apt to bombard his resolves with invective instead of ensnaring them with a bit of skilful persuasion. Let him alone, I say."

"Briggs, I must carry out my former

will. You need not caution me; you cannot move me. This is no churlish caprice; it is an honest determination to vindicate an honest man's misinterpreted motive."

"Stop, I say!"

"I will not. Let go of me; don't do anything you will be sorry for. That's a good fellow; wait here and watch my conquest from a distance."

II.

First officer appears with sextant. Salutes Captain. Captain grunts, cuddles the sextant tenderly, and gazes contemplatively on the dead and listless horizon.

Lon boards the uncastled behemoth, and is sorry for it. "Good morning, Captain!"
"Well, young mon; dawnt y' know that it's rawther over-familiar to slap me on the shoulder in the ilk of that? An' is that the way you say 'Guid morning' in your country, sir?"