

**THROUGH THE
MAGIC DOOR**

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Through the magic door by Arthur Conan Doyle

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ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

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BY

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE



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I

I CARE not how humble your bookshelf may be, nor how lowly the room which it adorns. Close the door of that room behind you, shut off with it all the cares of the outer world, plunge back into the soothing company of the great dead, and then you are through the magic portal into that fair land whither worry and vexation can follow you no more. You have left all that is vulgar and all that is sordid behind you. There stand your noble, silent comrades, waiting in their ranks. Pass your eye down their files. Choose your man. And then you have but to hold up your hand to him and away you go together into dream-land. Surely there would be something eerie

about a line of books were it not that familiarity has deadened our sense of it. Each is a mummified soul embalmed in cere-cloth and natron of leather and printer's ink. Each cover of a true book enfolds the concentrated essence of a man. The personalities of the writers have faded into the thinnest shadows, as their bodies into impalpable dust, yet here are their very spirits at your command.

It is our familiarity also which has lessened our perception of the miraculous good fortune which we enjoy. Let us suppose that we were suddenly to learn that Shakespeare had returned to earth, and that he would favor any of us with an hour of his wit and his fancy. How eagerly we would seek him out! And yet we have him—the very best of him—at our elbows from week to week, and hardly trouble ourselves to put out our hands to beckon him down. No matter what mood a man may be in, when once he has passed through the magic door he can summon the world's greatest to sympathize with him in it.

If he be thoughtful, here are the kings of thought. If he be dreamy, here are the masters of fancy. Or is it amusement that he lacks? He can signal to any one of the world's great story-tellers, and out comes the dead man and holds him enthralled by the hour. The dead are such good company that one may come to think too little of the living. It is a real and a pressing danger with many of us, that we should never find our own thoughts and our own souls, but be ever obsessed by the dead. Yet second-hand romance and second-hand emotion are surely better than the dull soul-killing monotony which life brings to most of the human race. But best of all when the dead man's wisdom and the dead man's example give us guidance and strength in the living of our own strenuous days.

Come through the magic door with me, and sit here on the green settee, where you can see the old oak case with its untidy lines of volumes. Smoking is not forbidden.