

**VAGARIES.
[LONDON-1898]**

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Vagaries. [London-1898] by Axel Munthe

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AXEL MUNTHE

**VAGARIES.
[LONDON-1898]**

VAGARIES

By AXEL MUNTHE

AUTHOR OF 'LITTIQ' FROM A MOURNING CITY'

LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET

1898

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1898

INSTEAD OF A PREFACE

HE who has written these pages is no author; his life belongs to reality, and does not leave him any peace for indulging in fiction, and, besides, he has for nearly twenty years limited his best thoughts and efforts to that special authorship which has for its only public apothecaries. He thought it very easy and refreshing to write this little book. The only difficulty about it has been to find a title, for it turned out that, when confronted with this problem, neither the writer nor any of the friends he consulted could say what stuff it was that the book was made of—was it essays, stories, or

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what? Essays is much too important a word for me to use, and stories it certainly is not, for I cannot remember having ever tried to invent anything.

Besides, isn't it so that in a story something always happens---and here, as a rule, very little seems to me to happen. I do not know, but can it be that it is life itself which "happens" in these pages, life as seen by an individual who can but try to be as the Immortal Gods created him, since conventionality long ago has given up in despair all hope of licking him into shape?

Now I want to tell you what made me publish this book---what made me write it cannot interest you. One day I found sitting in my consulting-room a young lady with a huge parcel on her knee. I asked her what I could do for her, and she began by telling me a long tale of woe

about herself. She said that nothing interested her, nothing amused her, she was bored to death by everything and everybody. She could get anything she wished to have, she could go anywhere she liked, but she did not wish for anything, she did not want to go anywhere.

Her life was passed in idle luxury, useless to herself and to everybody else, said she. Her parents had ended by dragging her from one physician to another: one had prescribed Egypt, where they had spent the whole winter; another Cannes, where they had bought a big villa; a third India and Japan, which they had visited in their fine yacht. "But you are the only doctor who has done me any good," she said. "I have felt more happiness during this past week than I have done for years. I owe it to you, and I have come to thank you for it." She

began rapidly to unfasten her parcel, and I stared at her in amazement while she produced from it one big doll after another, and quite unceremoniously placed them in a row on my writing-table amongst all my books and papers. There were twelve dolls in all, and you never saw such dolls. Some of them were dressed in well-fitting tailor-made jackets and skirts; some were evidently off for a yachting trip in blue serge suits and sailor hats; some wore smart silk dresses covered with lace and frills, and hats trimmed with huge ostrich feathers; and some looked as if they had only just returned from the Queen's Drawing-room.

I am accustomed to have queer people in my consulting-room, and I thought I noticed something glistening in her eyes. "You see, Doctor," said she with uncertain voice, "I never thought I could be of any

good to anybody. I used to send money to charities at home, but all I did was to write out a cheque, and I cannot say I ever felt the slightest satisfaction in doing it. The other day I happened to come across that article about Toys in an old *Blackwood's Magazine*,¹ and since then I have been working from morning till evening to dress up all these dolls for the poor children you spoke about. I have done it all by myself, and I have felt so strangely happy the whole time."

And I, who had forgotten all about this little escapade from the toil of my everyday life, I looked at the sweet face smiling through the tears, I looked at the long row of dolls who stared approvingly at me from among all my medical paraphernalia on the writing-table. And for the

¹ "Toys, from the Paris Horizon" was published in *Blackwood* several years ago.

first and last time in my life did I feel the ineffable joy of literary triumph, for the first and last time in my life did I feel that mystic power of being able to move others.

A smart carriage was waiting for her at the door, but we sent it away, and I put the kind donor and some of her dolls in a cab, and I remember we went to see Petruccio. I could see by her shyness that it was the first time she had entered the home of the poor. She gave each child a magnificent doll, and she blushed with delight when she saw the little sisters' beaming faces and heard the poor mother's "God bless you!" Hardly had a week passed before she brought me another dozen of dolls, and twelve more sick and destitute children forgot all about their misery. At Christmas I got up a big festa at the Jardin-des-Plantes quarter,