

**KITTY ALONE. A STORY
OF THREE FIRES. IN
THREE VOLUMES. VOL. I**

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Kitty alone. A story of three fires. In three volumes. Vol. I by S. Baring Gould

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S. BARING GOULD

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KITTY ALONE

A STORY OF THREE FIRES

BY

S. BARING GOULD

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"IN THE ROAR OF THE SEA" "THE QUEEN OF LOVE"
"MEHALAR" "CHEAP JACK ZETA" ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I

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KITTY ALONE



CHAPTER I

THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

WITH a voice like that of a crow, and singing with full lungs also like a crow, came Jason Quarm riding in his donkey-cart to Coombe Cellars.

Jason Quarm was a short, stoutly-built man, with a restless grey eye, with shaggy, long, sandy hair that burst out from beneath a battered beaver hat. He was somewhat lame, wherefore he maintained a donkey, and drove about the country seated cross-legged in the bottom of his cart, only removed from the bottom boards by a wisp of straw, which became dissipated from under him with the joltings of the conveyance. Then Jason would struggle to his knees, take the reins in his teeth, scramble backwards in his cart, rake the straw together again into a heap, reseat himself, and drive on till the exigencies of the case necessitated his going through the same operations once more.

Coombe Cellars, which Jason Quarm approached, was a

cluster of roofs perched on low walls, occupying a promontory in the estuary of the Teign, in the south of Devon. A road, or rather a series of ruts, led direct to Coombe Cellars, cut deep in the warm red soil; but they led no farther.

Coombe Cellars was a farmhouse, a depôt of merchandise, an eating-house, a ferry-house, a discharging wharf for barges laden with coal, a lading-place for straw, and hay, and corn that had to be carried away on barges to the stables of Teignmouth and Dawlish. Facing the water was a little terrace or platform, gravelled, on which stood green benches and a green table.

The sun of summer had blistered the green paint on the table, and persons having leisure had amused themselves with picking the skin off these blisters and exposing the white paint underneath, and then, with pen or pencil, exercising their ingenuity in converting these bald patches into human faces, or in scribbling over them their own names and those of the ladies of their heart. Below the platform at low water the ooze was almost solidified with the vast accumulation of cockle and winkle shells thrown over the edge, together with bits of broken plates, fragments of glass, tobacco-pipes, old handleless knives, and sundry other refuse of a tavern.

Above the platform, against the wall, was painted in large letters, to be read across the estuary—

PASCO PEPPERILL,
HOT COCKLES AND WINKLES,
TEA AND COFFEE ALWAYS READY.

Some wag with his penknife had erased the capital H from "Hot," and had converted the W in "Winkles" into a V, with the object of accommodating the written language to the vernacular. One of the most marvellous of passions seated in the human heart is that hunger after immortality which, indeed, distinguishes man from beast. This deep-seated and awful aspiration had evidently consumed the breasts of all the "'ot cockle and vinkle" eaters on the platform, for there was literally not a spare space of plaster anywhere within reach which was not scrawled over with names by these aspirants after immortality.

Jason Quarm was merciful to his beast. Seeing a last year's teasel by the wall ten yards from Coombe Cellars' door, he drew rein, folded his legs and arms, smiled, and said to his ass—

"There, governor, enjoy yourself."

The teasel was hard as wood, besides being absolutely devoid of nutritious juices, which had been withdrawn six months previously. Neddy would have nothing to say to the teasel.

"You dratted monkey!" shouted Quarm, irritated at the daintiness of the ass. "If you won't eat, then go on." He knelt up in his cart and whacked him with a stick in one hand and the reins in the other. "I'll teach you to be choice. I'll make you swaller a holly-bush. And if there ain't relish enough in that to suit your palate, I'll buy a job lot of old Perninsula bayonets and make you munch them. That'll be chutney, I reckon, to the likes of you."

Then, as he threw his lame leg over the side of the cart,