

**THE VALLEY OF
POPPIES. IN TWO
VOLUMES, VOL. II**

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The Valley of Poppies. In Two Volumes, Vol. II by Joseph Hatton

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JOSEPH HATTON

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BY

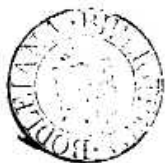
JOSEPH HATTON,

AUTHOR OF

'THE TALLANTS OF BARTON,' 'CHRISTOPHER KENRICK,' 'PIPPINS AND
CHESK,' 'WITH A SHOW IN THE NORTH,' ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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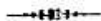
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CONTENTS OF VOL. II.



CHAP.	PAGE
I. 'UNTIL DEATH US DO PART' . . .	1
II. OUR COTTAGE BY THE THAMES . . .	33
III. THE FIRST BLARE OF THE TRUMPETS . . .	56
IV. 'AND OUR LITTLE LIFE IS ROUNDED WITH A SLEEP'	89
V. IN THE BATTLE	105
VI. IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY	122
VII. BECK'S MAN	151
VIII. WHY THEY CALLED HIM BECK'S MAN	169
IX. WHILE I JINGLED MY GLASS WITH THE LAW- YER'S IN THE CITY	187
X. 'AND THE STATELY SHIPS GO ON TO THEIR HAVEN UNDER THE HILL'	202
XI. 'BUT, O, FOR THE TOUCH OF A VANISHED HAND; AND THE SOUND OF A VOICE THAT IS STILL!'	218

THE VALLEY OF POPPIES.

CHAPTER I.

'UNTIL DEATH US DO PART.'

THERE are only three bells in the old tower of my church in the valley. They were made in the early days. There is an inscription upon them in Lombardic characters.

Their music is generally solemn. It wails. You can hear it wandering up and down the valley on Sundays.

The last time Masters came into the

valley we ascended the tower and interpreted the ancient inscription. It ran thus:

'Repent ye all,
While I do call.'

This is the message of each individual bell: a solemn warning. I hear the words very plainly now, and my parishioners hear them too. But they are time-serving, fickle bells. Though they are only three, with three notes, I have heard them say many things besides

'Repent ye all,
While I do call.'

The other morning there was a wedding in the parish, and the bells were quite merry over it.

They kept up the old story told by Rabelais. There is a spell upon them. They are to say whatever mortals wish them to say.

Wonderful music, this oracular and speech-like music of the bells!

With what terrible power Poe made them clash and clang! He was a bell-ringer in a thousand.

Scott's midnight bell startling the echoes of Northumbrian rocks is a solemn thing, but the submerged bells of Tintagel, they are haunting; their story is a soul-searching tale.

Cowper's bells 'in cadence sweet' have a sympathetic power over the memory; and the poet of these latter days who set a-ringing that thrilling peal at Christmas, hath he not learnt the secret of the bells? But for the sweetest and most tender heart-searching reflection about bell-music, I turn to the most melodious of singers:

'Those pleasant hours have pass'd away,
And many a heart that then was gay
Within the tomb now darkly dwells,
And hears no more those evening bells.'

I suppose these lines are known to nearly every man, woman, and child in the land.

There is a deep, fervent human pulsation in them which takes hold of me and buries my face in my hands. But in my agony the future comes to my aid. Moore left out of his poem the sweeter bells that ring above the world, the heavenly music of the better land. The old bell-founders never forget this. Their inscriptions always direct the thoughts of the earthly pilgrim to the better land.

I understand the bells. We understand each other. Sometimes I think there are spirits among them. It is an ancient thought, full of poetic fancy and mystery. The passing bell in old times was rung just as the soul was parting from the body, to scare away the fiends.

There is a story told in the valley that a hundred years ago, on the death of a wicked squire, who had oppressed the poor, a fiend took possession of the passing bell. When the ringer went to do his solemn

office, he found the demon sitting on the bell. A dozen strong men went to pull the rope, but ten thousand men could not have overpowered that terrible shape. Pensax may be said to have matriculated for similar honours. We shall see how far he progressed by and by. We have the authority of his wife for saying that Pensax had good impulses. None of us are all bad. Even those miserable Triggs, I dare say, have their generous moments, when the divine light glimmers through their darkened natures.

There must be a marvellous sensation of delight and glory in the jubilatory clashing and hammering and clanging and joyful turbulence of a grand marriage peal. To be a bridegroom bearing away from the altar the woman of your choice amidst flowers and cheering and the strains of the Wedding March; to see your horses prancing, and to hear the bells pealing out; to know that you will carry that sweet maiden