THE QUEER THINGS OF THE SERVICE

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The Queer Things of the Service by James Dyehard & Mr. Joseph Meanwell & Sir John Shortbill

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JAMES DYEHARD & MR. JOSEPH MEANWELL & SIR JOHN SHORTBILL

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Frontispiece.

THE

QUEER THINGS OF THE SERVICE

ILLUSTRATED IN THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN

MR. JOSEPH MEANWELL,

AT THE ANTIPODES,

and

SIR JOHN SHORTBILL, KNT.

OF LONDON.

EDITED BY

JAMES DYEHARD,

CAPTAIN UNATTACHED.

EVERY MAN TO HIS PLACE, AND THE COOK TO THE FORE-SHEET

(OLD BENBOW'S *Speaking Trumpet, now silent and forgotten*).

LONDON:

SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, LOW, & SEARLE,

CROWN BUILDINGS, 188 FLEET STREET.

1872.

INTRODUCTION

BY

THE EDITOR.

Some short time ago, in one of the most distant of our Dependencies, I was suddenly called to the sick-bed of a Mr. Joseph Meanwell, a gentleman with whom my previous personal acquaintance was of the slightest nature. He was, however, well known by reputation to everyone in the Colony. I found him pale, feeble, and apparently in great mental suffering.

'Dyehard,' he said—extending a long, thin, bony hand—'Dyehard, I hope you'll excuse my sending for you. I hear you are going to England; is that true?'

'It is.'

'Dyehard, will you do me a little service? I know I have no right to expect it from you, but I think you will like to do it. You gave me good advice once. I wish I had followed it.'

'What can I do for you, sir? I am going to leave the service.'

'So am I, I fear; but by a longer road than yours. I cannot tell if I shall ever rise again, I feel so utterly prostrated. I have been a foolish man, carried on by vanity to do more than I or any other man could work out properly. I may have done injustice to some. I did not intend it.'

'Well?'

'All the amends I can offer now is to make clear my reasons for so acting. I have kept a Diary of my work for the past year. You will find it in that desk; take it, and do what you like with it. Do you remember the old proverb, *Nemo repente fuit turpissimus*—It will take many years to make a good Constrictor? Good bye.'

As I left the room, the doctor entered.

'What do you think of him, O'Rourke?' I whispered.

'Better; all right in time; been raving; swore the tea tasted of gunpowder, and that he had a compressor on his head, and all sorts of rubbish. Pressure of work too much. Send him home for half-pay by-and-by.'

'More than he deserves!'

'No! Thought so once—don't think so now. The

fact is, the good old days are really gone, and hard times come suddenly upon us; a little too suddenly, that is all. The service will entirely change; but the men who will come into it will think—what you and I were not accustomed to suppose was quite the correct thing. Good bye.'

Lying on the deck going home, while the good ship glided from tropic to tropic, I read the manuscripts which he called a Diary. I found among the papers certain letters which contained their own story so completely, that I thought others beside myself would like to read them. Ten years ago I might have hoped that to write, even thus in burlesque, upon such queer things would have been a step towards a remedy. Now, he who so hopes must be a man of greater confidence than I am. We may mourn and regret, as many an old soldier will; but I fear we have no longer strength to alter. The levelling process of the day has touched the old prestige at last, and tarnished all its glory!

J. D.

THE QUEER THINGS

OF

THE SERVICE.

Mr. Joseph Meanwell to Sir John Shortbill, Knight.

The Antipodes: April 1, 187–.

Dear Sir,—Although I have not the pleasure of a personal acquaintance with you, still as it is possible some particulars of the working of our new system, which cannot be conveyed in strictly official form, may not be unacceptable, I purpose from time to time sending you a few short items, which will better show you how things progress in this distant possession of Her Gracious Majesty, where I am happy to say we can put on the screw without much chance of a growl reaching home. Your instructions to use every possible means towards economy and retrenchment, without being too dilatory as to how it was to be effected, provided it was done on a sound understanding for the new system *ab ovo*, have been faithfully observed by me. I have been rummaging in every direction all over the place, in spite of the cold