

THE PROFESSOR

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The Professor by Arthur Christopher Benson

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ARTHUR CHRISTOPHER BENSON

THE PROFESSOR

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οὔτε φυγεῖν εὐμαρὸς, οὔτε φέρειν

BY

ARTHUR CHRISTOPHER BENSON

(of Elton College).

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GEORGE NEW.

1895.

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To J. D. G. LITTLE.

Elon College, Windsor.

My dear Little,

You are only too well acquainted with the little series of poems that I here venture to dedicate to you. The Professor, poor soul, has long been shivering on the brink of publicity; and like other timid natures, when he has once made up his mind to a step, he plunges in with a reckless haste, an indiscreet abandonment, for which a word of excuse is needed.

Remember that he is what they call a Scientist; a man whose work is to pry into the deepest and holiest secrets of existence, and tabulate them; a man who, wherever he goes, carries a savour of the dissecting-room

and theatre about with him; a man for whom life has parted with its reticence, and death with its mystery.

Well, well! Perhaps his experiences have taught him something: perhaps he now suspects that the sensations of the human heart are not precisely proportioned to the flexibility of the aorta: whether he is prosecuting his studies in this direction at the University of Göttingen, (where he now resides,) I know not: he had some semblance of a heart, the Professor; he lighted upon a guarded treasure, but he fumbled strangely with the lock: God help him to turn the key!

Ever yours,

ARTHUR C. BENSON.

June 30th, 1895.

A T T W I L I G H T.

Dear fellow-labourers, whom unseen I own,
My heart goes out towards you, in this grey
Soft hour; I wonder if you too have known,
As day succeeds to day,
The early sadness, slowly gathering strength,
The stillness of the long laborious noon,
The strong o'er-mastering ardour, till at length
The darkness falls too soon?
The large sun drops; the vapours in his track
Roll westward, and the distant stars draw nigh;

The silent wood grows sinister and black

 Against an emerald sky.

Now, ere the lamp's warm circle on the floor

 And on these patient hands be calmly thrown,

The soul may slip unchallenged from her door,

 And wander forth alone.

I quit the land ; I hoist the throbbing gear ;

 The shallop rocks, the seaward wind blows free,

The huge sail flaps and bellics, as I steer

 Into the plunging sea ;

That lonely sea, where should some sudden sail

 Gleam o'er the hissing breaker, gleam and fly,

Yet no bewildered mariner may hail,

 No pilot make reply.

S E L F.

This is my chiefest torment, that behind
The brave and subtle spirit, the swift brain,
There sits and shivers, in a cell of pain,
A groping atom, melancholy, blind,
Which is myself ;—though, when spring suns are kind,
And rich leaves riot in the genial rain,
I cheat him, dreaming : slip my rigorous chain,
Free as a skiff before the dancing wind.

Then he awakes : and vexed that I am glad,
In dreary malice strains some nimble cord,
Pricks his thin claw within some delicate nerve,
And all at once I falter, start, and swerve
From my true course, to fall, unmanned and sad,
Into gross darkness, tangible, abhorred.