

HUMAN AFFAIRS

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Human affairs by Vincent O'Sullivan

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VINCENT O'SULLIVAN

**HUMAN
AFFAIRS**

To Charles Whitley,
With the writer's best wishes.

April: 1907.



HUMAN AFFAIRS.

By the same writer:

PROSE

THE GREEN WINDOW.

A DISSERTATION UPON SECOND FIDDLES.

BEN JONSON

(for the edition of "Volpone" with pictures
by Aubrey Beardsley).

EDGAR ALLAN POE

(for the edition of "The Raven" with pictures
by Horton).

VERSE

POEMS.

THE HOUSES OF SIN.

HUMAN AFFAIRS

BY

VINCENT O'SULLIVAN.

LONDON
DAVID NUTT
57-59 LONG ACRE
1907.

955

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1875

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THE GREAT MOMENT

THE GREAT MOMENT

I

WHEN Mr. Becker died, his widow found herself with her two daughters in a distressing situation. It was as if the Fortune which had carried Mr. Becker so far had been peculiar to himself, impossible to bequeath, however much he might desire it—departing, this Fortune or Demon of his, finally from the world in company with his soul. The big New York house in Thirty-fourth Street near Fifth Avenue had to go, with all its appurtenances of servants, and horses, and carriages, and, as her daughters more than poor Mrs. Becker herself ultimately noticed, most of what it stood for in the way of social ease and importance. The big house, in fact, ere many months had passed saw their faces no more, Mrs. Becker having made up her mind at length to the inevitable boarding-house in West 56th Street, where, secured from absolute want by some relics picked from the wreck, she tried to enliven her stunned wits, and to use herself to her new and narrow and immensely dreary and ugly existence.

It was the dreariness and ugliness, most of all, that stayed with Maud upon her frequent escapes from the

boarding-house for a tramp in the near Central Park. Nita, constitutionally fragile, with the melancholy and resignation to Fate expressed in the eyes and voices of so many Americans, was content to sit at home—or rather in the refuge—with her mother, where they intoned for hours together the lamentations of exile; but Maud rebelled against the boarding-house, she hated the attitude of having seen better days, she was not content to sit down in the boarding-house and feel all its subtle powers of depression working their will on her. She loathed the boarding-house to the point that an escape from it into the freedom of the streets had positively the effect of an escape from a gaol or asylum. As she strode through Upper-Broadway in the evening, she had floating before her under the electric-light images of her little bedroom with its jarring wall-paper and flaring jet of gas; of the general parlour, with its ornaments which set her teeth on edge, with its vivid suggestion of discomfort, with the assurance it managed to convey that no human beings had ever spent their evenings in that room save such as had resigned themselves to accept discomfort for their portion. After she had passed a few hours in that room, Maud understood why so many of her country-folk regarded the dubious boarding-houses of Bloomsbury, and the deplorable *pensions* and *meublés* at Passy and in the neighbourhood of the Étoile, where economical summer vacations bestowed them, as so many ante-rooms of Heaven. The very unattractiveness of the