

**AT RANDOM;
ESSAYS
AND STORIES**

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At random; essays and stories by L. F. Austin

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L. F. AUSTIN

**AT RANDOM;
ESSAYS
AND STORIES**



David F. Austin

1877

Gracely Mine

L. F. Austin



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1896

To
SIR WEMYSS REID,
WITH MUCH REGARD.

PREFACE.

A friend, in whose judgment I have great faith, has enjoined me to write a preface. "It will have the advantage," he says, "of putting the character of your work well in the forefront. The reader will catch the quality of it at the outset; the reviewer who, believe me, does not, as most people imagine, enjoy the stern and relentless quest of the author's meaning, will seize it at once without the fatigue of research. Rest assured that a preface is the hall-mark of your adventure."

I have deferred to this counsel with some misgiving. Putting one's significance in the forefront of the battle seems to invite the fate of Uriah. He left a beautiful widow to receive royal consolation; but if I am cut off in the preface, who is to console this little book in its bereavement? Besides, the very title excludes the idea of such a piece of synthetic philosophy as a preface ought to be. What message can be culled from these random humours? The only pretence to philosophic gravity is in the marginal headings—finger-posts which the reviewer may find sufficiently luminous without exploring the adjacent country. I hope he will be propitiated by this delicate solicitude for his comfort.

A journalist who has given much of his time to the solemn recitation of facts in unwilling ears, who rattle the bones of statistics over the stones of public opinion, may take his fill now and then of whimsical fantasy by way of recreation. Like the urchin who, one day in the year, is whirled away from the sordid prose of court and alley into the reckless profusion of flowers and butterflies with which Nature, when she can, spoils the children of the rates, that journalist may overdo his holiday from Blue-books and leading articles in a bewildering spread of metaphor. This, perhaps, is the inner meaning of "At Random"; at any rate, the suggestion is meekly submitted to the critical colossus who may be tempted to bestride the poppies.

To Sir Wemyss Reid, one of the editors who have encouraged these fantastic excursions, I dedicate this volume, which owes much to "The Speaker"; to the other, Mr. Clement Shorter, I desire to make a grateful acknowledgment of the kindness and patience (not unmixed with wonder and alarm) with which he has watched a certain page of "The Sketch" for the greater part of two years.

L. F. A.

September, 1896.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
A MARCH MEDITATION	1
THE LONDON GONDOLIER	6
SINGULAR BEHAVIOUR OF QUOTATIONS	13
A PATRON OF BARBERS	19
TO HEAVEN IN MY BOOTS!	27
ON A CERTAIN NOTABLE FIRE	36
THE NEW ZEALANDER COMES	42
THE NEW MAN	50
ON THE ART OF NOT GROWING OLD	57
A DISINTERESTED REVIEWER	64
THE OLD YEAR AND THE NEW	71
A MARKED MAN	77
IN PRAISE OF CIDER	84
AN OLD SCHOOLMASTER	90
A WATER BABY	97
A COMEDY OF SIGNPOSTS	105
THE GHOST OF AN APOLOGY	112

	PAGE
ON BOHEMIANS	127
A DOVE-LIKE INTERVIEWER	134
THE SILENT ONLOOKER	140
ON A CERTAIN QUAINTESS OF THE FOREIGN DRAMA	150
SOME EXPERIENCES OF PHOTOGRAPHY	161
ON CHRISTMAS NUMBERS	170
ON THE PERILS OF AN AMATEUR ACTOR	179
THE ONLY MAN IN TOWN	185
AN OLD PLAYGOER	194
MY FRIEND JUDSON	200
JUDSON ON DRAMATIC CRITICISM	209
CURIOUS ADVENTURE OF JUDSON	214
JUDSON AS A DOG FANCIER	222
TO WINIFRED EVANS	231
ON MURAL TABLETS	239
THE AFTER-DINNER ORATOR	247
AT OLIVIA'S CLUB	254