

**THE SHADOW OF THE
MILLIONAIRE; OR, THE
NEW IDEAL: A NOVEL**

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The Shadow of the Millionaire; Or, the New Ideal: A Novel by P. Gerome

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OR

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BY

P. GEROME

"The mind of this country, taught to aim at low objects, acts upon itself. There is no work for any but the decorous and complaisant. Young men of the fairest promise, who begin life upon our shores, inflated by the northern winds, shined upon by all the stars of God, find the earth below not in unison with these,—but are hindered from action by the disgust which the principles on which business is managed inspire, and turn drudges, or die of disgust—some of them suicides."—EMERSON.

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THE
SHADOW OF THE MILLIONAIRE.

PART I
NEW ENGLAND.

CHAPTER I.

EXMOOR.

THERE are towns of New England that preserve the past; they lie like tranquil eddies in the rush of the flood of the continent's life; they are remainders-over, fast dissolving survivals of a by-gone time and a past civilization. New England, which conquered the South, is herself submitting to the spell of the new spirit whose wings she unloosened.

A stranger sauntering up the long main street of Exmoor, beneath the solid shade of the maples and the arch of the palm-like elms, is affected by the peace of the place and the severity of its aspect. He breathes an alien atmosphere, which clothes the town like a garment. A certain lofty modesty and grim Puritan beauty are manifest everywhere. Ambition and passionate sins have no place in this

sombre soil; ostentation has no part in these plain houses, whose fronts remind one of the faces of Church elders; the fury of living casts no lurid gleam into the pale flame of these provincial existences.

The unfrequented street, wide, grass-grown to the ribbon of dust in its middle; the heavy shadows of the northern trees; the houses' pillared façades which front the streets with classic masks, Corinthian screens set before prosaic comfort—in all these features which make up Exmoor's countenance is a mournful and moral import, a serious beauty, Miltonic and solemn, like the melancholy of a psalm. Behind a darkened window the profile line of a woman's face is caught—a dim cameo, whose tracery is all spiritual and has, I know not what, of exaltation, steeped as it were in reverie, suffused and permeated with religion. Perhaps a timid gaze steals through the narrow panes upon you, furtive, curious, startled, like an encloistered nun's. The straggling figure which meets you on the wooden sidewalks throws a suspicious regard out of misty eyes, as a lotus-eater might look upon some bustling citizen of the world.

Winter accentuates these effects, bringing out the tones rigidly. Then the trees writhe their limbs into stiff grotesques, as if frozen at an instant of agony; then the cold doubles distance to the exterior world of activity and commerce, and thus tightens more tensely the concentration of each household upon itself; then the snow pads the footfalls on the street; then the mind is constrained to inward study, the morbid probe pries the conscience; then Nature ceases her distractions and the soul sinks into its own deeps.

To the American of this fast generation what of interest is there in Exmoor?—a hill village, where flashes no glint of conflict or of fashion,—“where nothing goes on and the inhabitants are dead!”

Remain many weeks and there is no change.

An empty street, weather-worn façades, drooping elms, a sad tranquillity; the first impression abides. It is the whole. Verily, the town is a Puritan and Protestant monastery.

Yet a lump from the quarry of this homely village between the great breasts of the hills yields a richer return to the psychologist or the student of subtleties than a mass of common ambitions, and hatreds, and bargains, and lusts, wrested from a city's upheaval. The buried men of Exmoor, for whom the sense-world is drowned, theologians and littérateurs, are chameleons of mood. Their brains are tissues delicate as the photographer's plate; their souls are voltaic piles of aspiration; behind their quenched countenances lurk miracles and metamorphoses. These rapt and morbid women, who trail like ghosts along the street, seldom seen, see with the revealing eyes of St. John of Patmos. Beside them, the hauteur of a rich woman's portrait wanes into stolidity.

These select of Exmoor inherit the religious posture from five generations of Congregational divines, while isolation and study have developed in them the intellectual temperament. Chaste sybarites of the spirit, exquisites of the soul; such is the final phase of Pilgrim stock, leavened and fermented by the modern yeast.

These professors and dilettanti, these pure women, cradled from birth in innocence and bathed in the culture of eclecticism, have never wandered from the summits of the ideal; agnostics of evil, for them the slagged valleys of the world do not exist; objective despairs and the brutal struggle for bread have not steeled their fibres. And that, perchance, is the reason that no original strength of literature or philosophy has come out of Exmoor—theirs is not the Samson honey secreted in the lion's carcass. They cultivate letters, but they produce none. Jugglers of

subtleties, refinements and elaborate conceits consume originality. Yet so catholic is their critical culture that human thought is become to them as a Capua to be revelled in.

These minds are drunk on Burgundy, disdainng the heavy liquors, the gin of the sordid passions, the coarse ecstasies of the solid and muscular animal, the massive ambitions of the able or the blunt sensations of average humanity. They are not courageous and they shrink from the world; for they are Platonists and not Berserkers. The odor of the fight, the stench of the battle, the crunch of the chariot-wheels of success on the faces of the failed steam up to them faintly and but mantle their shoulders, leaving their heads in light, as the summer's mist strands on the foot-hills, while above, the heights soar into the blue. And if a reality, through mischance, intrude bodily, it is but for a moment; just space enough to introduce an articulate torture between the calm of Hellenic statues and the glory of the Transfiguration, and so make complete the Trinity of experience.

Such are the Brahmins of Exmoor. There remain the many.

Unless intellect single out a man, he sinks into the vegetable kingdom, in this town. Here is no stir of commerce or of gayety to blow upon his stagnant pool. An intenser apathy and a more entire emptiness of aim alone distinguish him from the common provincial. The presence of letters in his town has reinforced his natural lethargy; for they set up a standard as unattainable as absurd, so it seems to him; and effort is deprived of logic before this enthroned intellectual distinction.

About the stove of the grocery-store, squatted on barrels whose contents are products like themselves, the idlers drawl, gossip and turn their quids with lazy tongue. The weather is a theme, a constant wonder, an inspiration that invokes forecast. The trivialities of life in a country