

The Unknown

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Illustrations by T. Victor Hall

a simple story but it lends itself to effective acting; it is capable of being interpreted adequately by means of gesture alone; and it is just the sort of play which would appeal to an Alentian audience, being wholly within their experience and their apprehension.

Pantomime flourished in Rome and in Constantinople in the sorry years of the decline and fall of the Empire; and it was then low and lascivious. A great part of the fierce hostility of the Fathers of the Christian Church to the theater was due to the fact that the only drama of which they had any knowledge was pantomime of a most objectionable character, offensive in theme and even more offensive in presentation. With the conversion of the Empire to Christianity, pantomimes of this type, appealing only to lewd fellows of the baser sort, were very properly prohibited. But pantomime of another type sprang up in the Middle Ages in the Christian churches, to exemplify and to make visible to the ignorant congregations, certain episodes of sacred history. In the Renaissance dumb-shows were represented before monarchs, at their weddings and at their stately entrances into loyal cities. And dumb-shows were often employed in the Elizabethan stage, sometimes as prologues to the several acts, as in *Gorboduc*, for example, and sometimes within the play itself, as in *Hamlet*.

In the eighteenth century, pantomime had a double revival in France and in England. In France, Noverre elevated the *ballet d'action*, that is to say, the story told in pantomime and adorned with dances. Sometimes these *ballets d'action* were in several acts, relying for interest on the simple yet ingenious plot, and only decorated, so to speak, with occasional dances. Coppée's *La Korrigane*, for example, is in two acts, and Gille and Mortier's *Yedda* is in three acts. One of these *ballets d'action*, the book of which was devised by the fertile Scribe, was so solidly constructed and so interesting in story that Bellini took it as the libretto for his opera *La Sonnambula*. From Noverre and from France the tradition of the pantomime with interludes of dancing, spread at first to Italy and later to Russia. In Italy this tradition developed into the huge spectacular pantomime of the type of *Exceelsior* which was brought to this country about thirty years ago.

IN ENGLAND the development of pantomime was upon different lines, due to the influence of the Italian comedy-of-masks with its unchanging figures of *Pantaleone*, *Columbina* and *Arlecchino*. These figures were still further simplified; and to *Pantaloon*, *Columbine*, and *Harlequin* there was added the characteristically British figure of the Clown. The most famous impersonator of the clown was Grimaldi, whose memoirs were edited by Dickens. The mantle of Grimaldi fell upon an American, G. L. Fox, whose greatest triumph was in the late sixties in a pantomime called *Humpty Dumpty*—the rhyming prologue of which was written by A. Oakley Hall, who was then Tweed's mayor of New York. G. L. Fox and his brother C. K. Fox (who was the inventor of the comic scenes) had been preceded in America by a family of French pantomimists known as the *Ravels*. And they were followed by the family known as the *Hanlon-Lees*, who had originally been acrobats, and who appeared in a French play, in which the other characters spoke while they expressed themselves only in gesture. Here again Scribe had been before them, with his libretto for the opera of *Masaniello* in which there was a principal part, *Fenella*, for a pantomime actress. And when the great French actor, Frederick Lemaître, had lost his voice by overstrain, Dennery wrote a play for him, the *Old Corporal*, in which he appeared as a soldier of Napoleon's Old Guard who had been stricken dumb during the retreat from Russia.

This exploit of Frederick Lemaître's is not as extraordinary as it seems. A truly accomplished actor ought to be able to forego the aid of speech. Even in our modern plays gesture is more significant than speech. To place the finger on the lips is more effective than to say "Hush!" The tendency of the modern drama in our amply lighted picture-frame stage is to subordinate the mere words to the expressive action. In all good acting the gesture precedes the word; and often the gesture makes the word itself unnecessary, because it has succeeded in conveying the impression and in making the full effect by itself, so that the spoken word lags superfluous.

About twenty years ago there was a wide-spread revival of interest in pantomime in France, where it had been dormant since the days of Deburau. A society was formed for the encouragement of the art and a host of little wordless plays was the result.

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ROFESSOR RIDGLEY dropped the chalk and mopped his perspiring brow with his handkerchief. Stealing a surreptitious glance at the clock, he almost gasped with relief.

Five minutes more, and he would be at liberty to leave the stifling lecture room and to seek the comparative cool of his study.

The heat was almost intolerable. In the morning, a slight breeze had ruffled the leaves of the tall elms on the campus and crept in at the windows; but shortly after the sun passed the meridian, the wind died away.

The Storm King was marshalling his forces, and now threw his threatening phalanxes forward from the darkening west. Rank upon rank, squadron upon squadron, the murky foe advanced. The air was close, heavy, lifeless.

With the fervent hope that the coming storm would cool the superheated atmosphere, the Professor picked up the crayon again and proceeded:

"The 'cuboid,' as this abstract body has been called, has four dimensions—length, of the line, breadth, of the square, thickness, of the cube, and one other dimension, extending somewhere. But where? We do not know; we can not conceive.

"Yet, we have no right to say that there can be no body of four dimensions, simply because we have never seen and are unable to imagine such a body. The Fourth Dimension may be a fact. It should not be classed with such absurdities as squaring the circle, the duplication of the cube, the trisection of the angle.

"Mr. Ames, are you listening?" the Professor broke off.

A young man, sitting at the end of the semicircle of seats, looked up. He was loosely built, with legs and arms that seemed too long for his body. His features were not bad; but his light hair straggled in an unruly fashion about his head, and the wide blue eyes he turned upon the professor were filled with a dreamy, abstracted expression.

"I asked if you were listening, Mr. Ames?" the instructor repeated impatiently. With an evident effort, the blue eyes met his.

"No, sir," came the low answer. The heat of the day, the difficulties of his subject and a severe headache combined to set Ridgley's nerves on edge.

He glared at the culprit a moment before he observed with fine sarcasm:

"It may be that the information I am endeavoring to impart is superfluous to you? That you are so well acquainted with the theory of the Fourth Dimension that you find my groping irksome?"

"I'm very sorry, Professor."

"You have not answered my question, Mr. Ames. You know all about this subject?"

"Why, no, sir, not all"—in somewhat shamefaced apology.

For an instant there was silence, broken by a smothered chuckle from the class. Ridgley felt the blood mount to his forehead.

"If you will be good enough to remain after dismissal, Mr. Ames," he said in a strangled tone, "I should like to inquire more closely into the extent of your knowledge."

"Certainly, sir." Ames' tone was perfectly respectful. Ridgley's hands clenched; but there was nothing to be gained by losing his temper. With an effort, he mastered his rage and turned away.



"That rather strikes a blow at the law of the impenetrability of matter, doesn't it, Ames?"

"We, creatures of three dimensions," he went on, as if no interruption had occurred, "know no other space than the one in which we live. But we can imagine a space having two dimensions only. Let us suppose that there is such a world—a perfectly flat plane, inhabited by perfectly flat creatures, who live, move and have their being in a world of two geometrical dimensions.

"Had these people of Shadowland brains, reasoning powers, their minds would be no more capable of grasping the idea of a three dimensional space—the world in which we live—than we are able to conceive of a world of four dimensions.

"The shadow of a body of three dimensions possesses but two dimensions. A three-dimensional body, passing through Shadowland, would convey to the inhabitants of that land the impression of only two dimensions. Similarly, were a four dimensional body to pass through our space, we should be conscious of only three of its dimensions.

"May it not be within the bounds of possibility that there is another world, of which we know nothing, to the inhabitants of which we creatures of three dimensions appear as shadows appear to us?"

A BELL rang sharply; there was a little bustle among the students. Ridgley removed his glasses and swung them from his forefinger.

"So much for the Fourth Dimension," he concluded. "The possibility of its existence may not be disputed, but it can not be proven. Algebraically we can indicate it; geometrically, practically, no. We can not even project its outlines in limitless space;

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The heavens were split by a sheet of flame