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Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane
Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Homer Tolstoy Whittman
Darwin Thoreau Twain
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott
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Doctor Claudius, A True Story

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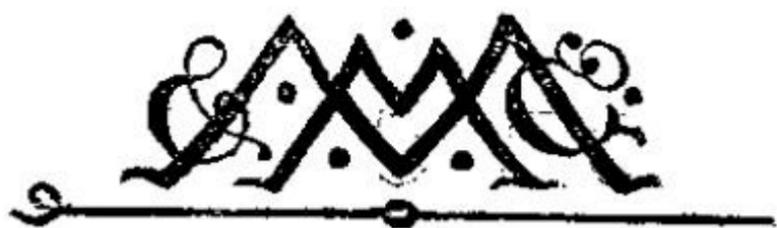
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Dedicated

TO

MY DEAR FRIENDS

THE COUNTESS MARGARET AND
CLAUDIUS, PH.D.

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DOCTOR CLAUDIUS.

CHAPTER I.

"I believe I am old," said the Doctor, pushing his straight-backed wooden chair from the table, and turning from his books to look out of his small window. "Yes, I am certainly very old," he said again, rapping absently on the arm of the chair with the pen he held. But the fingers that held the instrument were neither thin nor withered, and there was no trembling in the careless motion of the hand. The flaxen hair, long and tangled, was thick on the massive head, and the broad shoulders were flat and square across. Whatever Dr. Claudius might say of himself, he certainly did not look old.

And yet he said to himself that he was, and he probably knew. He said to himself, as he had said every day for many long months, that this was the secret of the difference he felt between his life and the life of his companions—such companions as he had, between his thoughts and their thoughts, between his ways and their ways. Of late the fancy had gained a stronger hold on his imagination, excited by solitude and an undue consumption of the midnight oil, and as he turned his face to the evening light, an observer, had there been one, might have felt half inclined to agree with him. His face was pale, and the high aquiline nose looked drawn. Moreover, the tangled hair and beard contrasted strangely with his broad, spotless collar, and his dressing-gown of sober black. The long habit of neatness in dress survived any small vanity of personal looks.

He rose, and throwing the pen impatiently on the table, went to the little window and looked out. His shoulders overlapped the opening on both sides as he thrust his yellow head out into the evening sunshine, and Master Simpelmayer, the shoemaker down in the street, glanced up, and seeing that the Herr Doctor was taking his evening sniff of the Neckar breeze, laid down his awl and went to "vespers,"—a "maas" of cool beer and a "pretzel." For the Herr Doctor was a regular man, and always appeared at his window at the same hour, rain or shine. And when Simpelmayer mended the well-worn shoes that came to him periodically from across the way,

he was sure that the flaxen-haired student would not call over to know if they were finished until the sun was well down and the day far spent. On this particular evening, however, there was no mending in hand for the Herr Doctor, and so the crooked little shoemaker filled himself a pipe, and twisted his apron round his waist, and stumped leisurely down the street to the beer-shop at the corner, where he and his fellows took their pots and their pipes, undisturbed by the playful pranks of the students.

But the Doctor remained at his window, and neither vouchsafed look nor greeting to Master Simpelmayer. He was not thinking of shoes or shoemakers just then, though, to judge by his face, he was thinking very intently of something. And well he might, for he had been reading very serious stuff. The walls of his little chamber were lined with books, and there was a small sliding-rack on the table, presumably for those volumes he immediately required for his work. A rare copy of *Sextus Empiricus*, with the Greek and Latin side by side, lay open on an inclined desk at one end, and the table was strewn with papers, on which were roughly drawn a variety of mathematical figures, margined all around with odd-looking equations and algebraically-expressed formulæ. Well-thumbed volumes of mathematical works in English, German, and French, lay about, opened in various places, and there was a cracked old plate, half full of tobacco ashes and the ends of cigarettes. The remaining furniture of the room was simple and poor: a neat camp bedstead, a boot-jack, and a round mirror, not more than four inches in diameter; a tin tub and an iron washing-stand; a much battered old "schläger," with the colours at the hilt all in rags, hung over the iron stove; and that was all the room contained besides books and the working-table and chair. It would be impossible to live more simply, and yet everything was neat and clean, and stamped, too, with a certain *cachet* of individuality. There were probably hundreds of student-rooms in the town of Heidelberg which boasted no more adornment or luxury than this, and yet there was not one that looked like it. A student's room, as he grows up, is a reflection of himself; it is a kind of dissolving view, in which the one set of objects and books fades gradually away as his opinions form themselves, and as he collects about him the works that are really of interest to him, as distinguished from those with which he has been obliged to occupy him-

self prior to taking his academic steps. Then, as in the human frame every particle of bone and sinew is said to change in seven years, the student one day looks about him and recognises that hardly a book or a paper is there of all the store over which he was busied in those months before he took his degree, or sustained his disputation. When a man has entered on his career, if he enters on it with a will, he soon finds that all books and objects not essential as tools for his work creep stealthily into the dusty corner, or to the inaccessible top shelf of the bookcase,—or if he is very poor, to the second-hand bookshop. He cannot afford to be hampered by any dead weight.

Now Dr. Claudius had gone through many changes of thought and habit since he came to Heidelberg ten years ago. But he had never changed his quarters; for he loved the garret window and the isolation from visits and companions that he gained by his three flights of stairs. The camp-bed in the corner was the same whereon he had lain after his first duel, with a bag of ice on his head and his bosom friend by his side, with a long pipe. At that very table he had drawn his first caricature of Herr Professor Winkelnase, which had been framed and hung up in the "Kneipe"—the drinking-hall of his corps; at the same board he had written his thesis for his doctorate, and here again he had penned the notes for his first lecture. Professor Winkelnase was dead; not one of his old corps-brothers remained in Heidelberg, but still he clung to the old room. The learned doctors with whom he drank his wine or his beer of an evening, when he sallied forth from his solitude, wondered at his way of living; for Dr. Claudius was not poor, as incomes go in South Germany. He had a modest competence of his own to begin with, and his lectures brought him in something, so that he might have had a couple of rooms "*parterre*"—as the Germans call the *rez-de-chaussée*—and could have been as comfortable as he pleased. But no one ever attempted to account for Dr. Claudius at all. He was a credit to the University, where first-rate men are scarce,—for Heidelberg is not a seat of very great learning; and no one troubled to inquire why he did not return to his native country when he had obtained his "Phil.D." Only, if he meant to spend the rest of his life in Heidelberg, it was high time he married and settled down to

genuine "Philisterleben"—at least so Dr. Wiener had said to Dr. Wurst over the second "schoppen" every night for a year past.

But Claudius did not marry, nor did he even allow his blue eyes to rest contemplatively on black-eyed Fräulein Wiener, or red-cheeked Fräulein Wurst. He would indeed occasionally accept an invitation to drink coffee at his colleagues' houses, but his talk was little and his manner a placid blank. He had been wild enough ten years before, when his yellow hair and tall straight presence were the admiration of every burgher's daughter in the Hirschgasse or the Langestrasse; but years and study had brought out the broad traits of his character, his uniformly quiet manner, his habits of regularity, and a certain deliberateness of gait and gesture which well became his towering figure and massive strength. He was utterly independent in all his ways, without the least trace of the arrogance that hangs about people whose independence is put on, and constantly asserted, in order to be beforehand with the expected opposition of their fellow-men.

Dr. Claudius was a Swede by birth and early education, and finding himself at twenty free to go where he would, he had wandered to Heidelberg in pursuit of the ideal student-life he had read so much of in his Northern home. Full of talent, independent and young, he cared little for the national enmities of Scandinavians and Germans, and, like all foreigners who behave sensibly, he was received with open arms by the enthusiastic students, who looked upon him as a sort of typical Goth, the prototype of the Teutonic races. And when they found how readily he learned to handle schläger and sabre, and that, like a true son of Odin, he could drain the great horn of brown ale at a draught, and laugh through the foam on his yellow beard, he became to them the embodiment of the student as he should be. But there was little of all that left now, and though the stalwart frame was stronger and tougher in its manly proportions, and the yellow beard grown long and curly, and the hair as thick as ever, the flush of youth was gone; and Dr. Claudius leaned out of his high window and smelled the river breeze, and said to himself it was not so sweet as it used to be, and that, for all he only had thirty summers behind him, he was growing old—very old; and that was why he did not care to spend more than half-an-hour of an evening with Dr. Wiener and Dr. Wurst.

In truth it was an unnatural life for a man just reaching his prime, and full of imagination and talent and love for the beautiful. But he had fallen into the philosophical groove of study which sooner or later seems to absorb so many gifted minds, only to lay them waste in nine cases out of ten. A brilliant mathematician, he had taken his doctorate without difficulty, and his thesis had even attracted some attention. From the higher speculations of modern mathematics to the study of philosophy is but a step, and Claudius had plunged into the vast sea of Kant, Spinoza, and Hegel, without, perhaps, having any very definite idea of what he was doing, until he found himself forced to go forward or to acknowledge himself baffled and beaten. This he was not willing to do, and so he had gone on and on, until one day, some six months ago, he had asked himself what it all led to? why he had laboured so hard for years over such things? whether the old free life and ready enjoyment were not better than this midnight prowling among other people's thoughts, which, whatever they might have been when spoken, never seemed quite clear on paper? Or would it not be better to leave the whole thing and go back to his Northern home? He might find plenty of adventure there, and breathe in fresh youth and vitality in the cold bright life of the Norwegian fisheries or of some outlying Swedish farm. And yet he could not make up his mind to move, or to acknowledge that he had laboured in vain. It was in vain, though, he said, as he looked out at the flowing river. Had he gained a single advantage either for his thoughts or his deeds by all his study of philosophy? In his weariness he said to himself that he had not; that he had been far better able to deal with questions of life, so long as he had only handled the exact sciences, than he was now, through all this uncertain saturation of foggy visions and contradictory speculations. Questions of life—but did questions of life ever arise for him? He had reduced it all to its simplest expression. His little store of money was safely invested, and he drew the income four times a year. He possessed no goods or chattels not stowed away in his garret chamber. He owed no man anything; he was not even a regular professor, tied to his University by a fixed engagement. In a word, he was perfectly free and untrammelled. To what end? He worked on from force of habit; but work had long ceased to amuse him. When had he laughed last? Probably not since his trip on foot

to the Bavarian Highlands, where he had met a witty journalist from Berlin, with whom he had walked for a couple of days.

This evening he was more weary than usual. He almost thought he would go away if he could think of any place to go to where life might be more interesting. He had no relations excepting an uncle, who had emigrated to America when Claudius was a baby, and who wrote twice a year, with that regular determination to keep up his family ties which characterises the true Northman. To this uncle he also wrote regularly at stated intervals, telling of his quiet student-life. He knew that this solitary relation was in business in New York, and he inferred from the regular offers of assistance which came in every letter that he was in good circumstances,—but that was all. This evening he fell to thinking about him. The firm was "Barker and Lindstrand," he remembered. He wondered what Mr. Barker was like. By the by it would soon be midsummer, and he might expect the half-yearly letter at any time. Not that it would interest him in the least when it came, but yet he liked to feel that he was not utterly alone in the world. There was the postman coming down the street in his leisurely, old-fashioned way, chatting with the host at the corner and with the tinman two doors off, and then—yes, he was stopping at Dr. Claudius's door.

The messenger looked up, and, seeing the Doctor at his window, held out a large envelope.

"A letter for you, Herr Doctor," he cried, and his red nose gleamed in the evening glow, strongly foreshortened to the Doctor's eye.

"Gleich," replied Claudius, and the yellow head disappeared from the window, its owner descending to open the door.

As he mounted the dingy staircase Claudius turned the great sealed envelope over and over in his hand, wondering what could be the contents. It was postmarked "New York," but the hand was large and round and flourished, not in the least like his uncle's sexagenarian crabbedness of hieroglyphic. In the corner was the name of a firm he did not know, and the top of the letter was covered with a long row of stamps, for it was very thick and heavy. So he went into his room, and sat down on the window-sill to see what

Messrs. Screw and Scratch of Pine Street, New York, could possibly want of Claudius, Phil.D. of Heidelberg.

His curiosity soon gave way to very considerable surprise. The first part of the letter contained the formal announcement of the sudden decease of Gustavus Lindstrand, of the firm of Barker and Lindstrand of New York. Claudius laid down the letter and sighed. His one relation had not been much to him. He had no recollection even of the old gentleman's appearance, but the regular correspondence had given him a feeling of reliance, a sensation of not being absolutely alone. He was alone now. Not a relation of any description in the world. Well, he would read the remainder of the letter. He turned over the page.

"We enclose a copy of the will," the lawyer continued, "for your inspection. You will see that Mr. Screw of our firm is appointed joint executor with Mr. Silas B. Barker, and we await your further instructions. In view of the large fortune you inherit," . . .

Claudius looked up suddenly and gazed blankly out of the window; then he went on—

. . . "by the aforesaid will of your uncle, the late Mr. Gustavus Lindstrand, it might be well if, at your convenience, you could pay a visit to this country."

Here Claudius thought it was time to look at the will itself. Unfolding the document, which was very short, he acquainted himself with the contents. There were a few legacies to old servants, and one or two to persons who were probably friends. Everything else was devised and bequeathed "to my nephew, the son of my sister, Claudius, *privat-docent* in the University of Heidelberg, Grand Duchy of Baden, Germany." And it appeared that the surplus, after deducting all legacies and debts, amounted to about one million and a half of dollars.

Claudius carefully reread the papers without betraying the smallest emotion. He then put them back in the envelope, and opening a small iron cash-box, which stood on a shelf of the book-case, locked up will, letter, power of attorney, and all. Then he shook his long limbs, with a sigh, and having rolled a thick cigarette, lighted it, and sat down in his chair to think. The shadows were deepening, and

the smoke of his tobacco showed white against the gloom in the room. The news he had just received would have driven some men crazy, and certainly most people would experience some kind of vivid sensation at finding themselves suddenly endowed with immense wealth from a quarter where they did not even suspect it existed. Moreover, old Lindstrand's will was perfectly unequivocal, and contained none of those ill-natured restrictions about marrying or not marrying, or assuming the testator's name, or anything which could put the legatee to the slightest inconvenience. But Claudius experienced no sensation of pleasure at finding himself sole master of a million and a half.

It was not that he was foolish enough to despise money, or even to pretend to, as some people do. He would have felt keenly the loss of his own little store, and would have hated to work for money instead of working for work's sake. But he had enough, and had always had enough, for his small wants. He loved beautiful things intensely, but he had no desire to possess them; it was enough that he might see them, and carry away the remembrance. He loved books, but he cared not a jot for rare editions, so long as there were cheap ones published in Leipzig. That old copy of *Sextus Empiricus*, on the desk there, he had bought because he could not get an ordinary edition; and now that he had read it he did not care to keep it. Of course it contained a great deal that was good, but he had extracted the best of it, and meant to sell the volume to the first bidder—not that he wanted the money, but because it was in the way; if he allowed things to accumulate, there would be no turning round in his little den. So he leaned back in his straight-backed chair and wondered what in the world he should do with "all that money." He might travel. Yes, but he preferred to travel with a view of seeing things, rather than of reaching places. He would rather walk most of the way. The only way in which he could possibly live up to such an income must be by changing his entire mode of life—a house, somewhere in a great city, horses, servants, and even a wife—Claudius laughed for the first time in many months, a deep Homeric laugh—they would all help him to get rid of his money. But then, a life like that—pshaw! impossible. He was sick of it before beginning, then what would he feel after a month of it?

The problem faced him in the dark, like an unsolved equation, staring out black and white before his eyes, or like an unfinished game of chess when one goes to bed after five or six hours' play. Something he must decide, because it was his nature to decide always, before he left a subject, on some course of thought. Meanwhile he had been so little disturbed by the whole business that, in spite of his uncle's death, and a million and a half of money, he was hungry and thirsty. So he struck a match and lit his study-lamp, and found his coat and hat and stick. Then he paused. He did not want to meet Dr. Wiener and Dr. Wurst that evening; he would fetch himself something to eat and drink, and be quiet. So he slung a heavy stone jug on his arm, and, turning his lamp down to save the oil, trudged down the stairs and out into the street. He made for the little inn at the corner, and while the fat old landlord filled his jug with the best Markgräfler, he himself picked out a couple of smoked sausages from the great pile on the counter, and wrapping them up with half a dozen pretzels, transferred the package to his capacious pocket. Then he took the jug from the innkeeper, and having paid half a gulden for the whole supply of eatables and wine, he departed to consume them in solitude. It was his usual supper. He had done the same thing for ten years, off and on, whenever he was not inclined for company.

"But I suppose it is incongruous," he soliloquised, "that, being a millionaire, I should fetch my own supper." Once more he laughed aloud in the crowded street, for it was warm and the people were sitting in front of their houses, Simpelmayer the shoemaker, and Blech the tinman, and all the rest, each with his children and his pot of beer. As the Doctor laughed, the little boys laughed too, and Blech remarked to Simpelmayer that the Herr Doctor must have won the great prize in the Hamburg lottery, for he had not heard him laugh like that in three years.

"Freilich," returned the crooked shoemaker, "but he was used to laugh loud enough ten years ago. I can remember when he first moved in there, and his corps-fellows locked him in his room for a jest, and stood mocking in the street. And he climbed right down the woodwork and stepped on the signboard of the baker and jumped into the street, laughing all the while, though they were holding in their breath for fear he should break his neck. Ja, he was

a right student; but he is changed now—the much reading, lieber Blech, the much reading." And the old fellow looked after Claudius as he disappeared into the dark doorway.

The Doctor mounted his three flights with even tread, and, turning up his light, proceeded leisurely to eat his twisted rolls and sausages. When he had done that, he took the great stone jug in his hand, as if it had been a wine-glass, and set it to his lips and drank a long draught.

The result of his cogitations, assisted by the soothing influence of supper, was to be foreseen. In the first place, he reflected that the problem was itself a myth. No one could require of him that he should use his money unless he liked. He might let it accumulate without any trouble to himself; and then, why should he tell any one of his inheritance? Surely he might go on living as he was living now for an indefinite period, and nobody would be the wiser. Besides, it would be a novel sensation to feel that while living like a simple student he possessed a great power, put away, as it were, on the shelf, whereby he could, if he liked, at any moment astonish the whole country. Very novel, indeed, and considering the importance of the question of the disposal of his income, he could well afford to give it six months' consideration. And he might move undisturbed about the University and eat his supper with Dr. Wiener and Dr. Wurst without being the object of general interest, which he would at once become if it were known that he, a simple *privat-docent*, with his decent black coat and his twice-mended shoes, was the richest man in the Grand Duchy of Baden.

These reflections of Dr. Claudius, strange as they must seem in the eyes of men of the world, were only what were to be expected from a man of his education and character. He had travelled after a fashion, it is true, and had frequented society when he was younger; for the Heidelberg student is a lover of the dance, and many of the wild young *burschen* become the brilliant officers of the crack regiments of the first army in the world. He had been in Paris and Vienna and Rome for a few weeks, and, being of a good family in the North, had received introductions through the diplomatic representatives of his country. His striking personality had always attracted attention, and he might have gone everywhere had he cho-

sen. But he had only cared enough for society and its life to wish to see it now and then, and he fancied that he understood it at a glance—that it was all a sham and a glamour and vanity of vanities. There was, of course, a potent reason for all this. In his short peregrinations into the world of decorations and blue ribbons and cosmopolitan uniforms he had never come across a woman that interested him. He had a holy reverence for woman in the abstract, but he had not met one to whom he could do homage as the type of the ideal womanhood he worshipped. Perhaps he expected too much, or perhaps he judged too much by small and really insignificant signs. As no man living or dead has ever understood any woman for five minutes at a time, he was not to be blamed. Women are very like religion—we must take them on faith, or go without.

Moreover, Dr. Claudius had but an indifferent appreciation of the value of money; partly because he had never cared for what it would buy, and had therefore never examined its purchasing power, and partly because he had never lived intimately with people who spent a great deal. He knew nothing of business, and had never gambled, and he did not conceive that the combination of the two could be of any interest. Compared with the questions that had occupied his mind of late, it seemed to make no more difference whether a man were rich or poor than whether he had light hair or dark. And if he had seriously asked himself whether even those great problems which had occupied the minds of the mightiest thinkers led to any result of importance, it was not likely that he would bestow a thought on such a trivial matter as the question of pounds, shillings, and pence.

So, before he went to bed, he took out a sheet of paper and an envelope—he never bought but one package of envelopes a year, when he sent his New Year's card to the other doctors of the University—and wrote a short letter to Messrs. Screw and Scratch of Pine Street, New York. He acknowledged the receipt of their communication, deplored the death of his only relation, and requested that they would look after his money for him, as he had no use whatever for it at present. He objected, he said, to signing a power of attorney as yet, for as there was no hurry they might consult him by letter or telegraph as often as they liked. When Messrs. Screw and Scratch read this epistle they opened their eyes wide, wonder-

ing what manner of man Claudius, Phil.D., might be. And it took them some time to find out. But Claudius put out his light when he had signed and sealed the missive, and slept the sleep of the strong and the just, undisturbed by the possession of a fortune or by any more doubts as to the future.

Before receiving this letter he had thought seriously of going away. Now that a move was almost thrust upon him, he found that he did not want to make it. A professor he would live and die. What could be more contemptible, he reflected, than to give up the march of thought and the struggle for knowledge, in order to sit at ease, devising means of getting rid of so much cash? And he straightened his great limbs along the narrow camp-bed and was asleep in five minutes.