

# V. V.'s Eyes

BY

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

*The Riverside Press Cambridge*

1913

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*Published May 1913*

*To my first, second, and third reader*

NORVELL

*Who raises books by hand*



PLEASE DON'T TROUBLE, HUGO



*R. A. G.*

PAPA—I WANT TO INTRODUCE A GOOD FRIEND  
OF MINE—DR. VIVIAN

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*From drawings by Raymond M. Crosby*

# V. V.'s Eyes

## I

*Two Houses, with a great Gulf between; of V. Vivian, M.D., and what he thought of John the Baptist.*

V VIVIAN, M.D. by the paint upon his window, dwelt in the Dabney House; Mr. Heth — pronounced *Heath* if you value his wife's good opinion — dwelt in the House of his cognomen. Between the two lay a scant mile of city streets. But then this happened to be the particular mile which traversed, while of course it could not span, the Great Gulf fixed.

In one sense (though the wrong one) the Dabney House was the more impressive of the pair of domiciles: for it was seven stories tall and had two hundred rooms; while the House of Heth was only four stories and basement, and had but fourteen rooms, counting in the trunk-room. But physical size is size only: whereby hang few tales. Over and in the Heth House there prevailed the most charming air of ease with dignity, of taste plus means, that you could well imagine: while the circumambient atmosphere of the Dabney House, not to put too fine a point on it, was the abomination of desolation, or that abomination's little brother. Before the one stretched a brilliant street where imposing residences crowded each other just as close as they could crowd, and still be imposing, and residences. Behind the other stretched the likeliest the city could show in the way of slums, and, farther back, just over the brow of the sinister Hill, something less cheering than honest slums. One glittered upon the future; the other decayed into the past. And it would cost you — to clinch the comparison with the true and only — two thousand dollars a year, say, to secure Mr. Heth's house, nego-

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tiating with his executor at that; while in the great pile of the eponymous Dabney, you could have all of three rooms and (portable) bath for twelve dollars a month, though strictly cash in advance. . . .

Cartographers, with their miserable mathematics, called this a statute mile, which, as we say, a brisk man can walk in the smoking of a cigarette. But the authors of the Blue Book, grave fellows who have better struck the scales from their eyes, would have computed you this distance at  $N$ , which is infinity: and so closed up the book. For what bridge shall cross the uncrossable, what ferryman ply for silver pounds on the Great Gulf? An image-breaking age; no doubt; but there are limits, in decency. No thread of destiny or clue of circumstance shall connect two Houses set upon the poles of the world. . . .

So spoke the Blue Book: judging somewhat by the look of it, after all, pronouncing not without a touch of the weary wisdom which comes of knowing too much. But is it not written how the hussy Appearance wears a painted face, justly open to interrogation?—how there stands a summit from which a man shall see yet more sharply than his most admired authors, above referred to? Hence, look down. And behold, against the sunny day two clues now visible upon the bosom of the Gulf, to wit: the dark-eyed lad so oddly taking hired-carriage exercise up and down Washington Street, between eight-thirty and ten-thirty A.M.; and yon half-column of winged words in “The People’s Forum” column of this morning’s “Post,” under the caption (supplied by the editor): “Severe Arraignment of Local Factory Conditions.”

The Dabney House felt the pluckings first. They were Nobodies there; and by that token they were early risers.

She was fluttered to-day, was Mrs. Garland, by the nocturnal reappearance of her errant husband, Mister, as simply called: but she did not forget the iron rule. The “Post” was under the door by seven o’clock. Dr. Vivian perused by seven-fifteen. He perused with a peculiar and paternal gusto: for doctoring was not his meat and drink, and he had written these winged words himself. But of the vehicular lad he heard nothing till some hours

later, when Labor Commissioner O'Neill, skirting the old park from Centre Street, where he had been for cigars, dropped in on the way back to his office.

Even here, the words came first. O'Neill had a "Post" in his hand.

It was then nearing eleven o'clock. The doctor sat at a tall old "secretary" between his windows, swinging round with expectancy as his friend entered. There were still people of a sort, human beings in a manner of speaking, in the waiting-room; but he let them wait now, that being what the room was for.

"Well? . . . How 'd it strike you?"

The Labor Commissioner mopped his brow with a snowy handkerchief, which released into the office the scent of cologne. He was a stoutish man, and the morning, for autumn, was astonishingly warm.

"Well, it's ill-timed, V. V.," said he, without ill-humor. "And — kind of extreme. I told you the other day how I felt about it." The face of the medico fell.

"I thought you said you approved of a good, pertinent letter, to show that the laity were backing you up!"

"I said a mild, easy-tempered letter might be all right. But —"

"Why, Sam, don't you think that's an awfully mild letter? You ought to see what I edited out of it."

"Well, you left in enough to let the 'Post' in for a damage suit, all right. You, too. . . . Only you won't have much to lodge a judgment against, long's you have n't got a billhead printed and charge regular fees like I told you."

"I'm perfectly responsible — far as that goes. Don't you worry."

The doctor's look showed that he considered O'Neill's pleasantry in bad taste, to say the least of it. He had told Sam often enough, one would think, that he meant before long to put in a good businesslike system of fees, small fees . . .

The Commissioner was continuing: "Point is, V. V., there's nothing gained getting these people's backs way up. They're sore now. A little tact, a little bit of —"

"Tact!"

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"Sure thing. Look here, old boy, remember it's only a week since my report was in the papers, practically blacklisting those four plants, and I've already called personally on every one of 'em, putting it right up to 'em. You heard me at Heth's and the Pickle people's, yourself. I guess I put it up about as strong as could be done, hey? And that's all can be done till I get me some more law. Put it right square . . ."

But V. Vivian, gazing steadily over the chair-back, had obviously been stoking his inner fuel.

"Ah! Rousing public opinion's no use at all? . . . Why, don't you *know* that public opinion is the grandfather of your little statute-book laws? Don't you —"

"Yair. Know. See you say that in your letter."

"Well, it's a *great truth!* . . . How tactful will you feel some day, when one of those floors at the Heth Works collapses and kills a hundred people?"

Labor Commissioner O'Neill seemed unterrified by the grisly picture. He was strolling about the very large, bare, and strange-looking medical office, flicking cigar-ash where he would: a good-natured-looking Commissioner of thirty, wearing a glossy brown suit and strong yellow gloves. And his present pacific air was undoubtedly to his credit; certainly he had been annoyed when his eye first fell on the "Severe Arraignment," over his morning rasher. . . .

"And that is n't the worst of it," shot the doctor again, flinging out an arm. "It's only a detail, I say, this factory end of it; only a symptom, don't you see? What we're dealing with is the most dangerous element in the life of this city! Tact! . . . When fire could n't sweep through that new house of yours faster than the corrupting ideals of these people'll lick through this community!"

"Whe-ew!" said Sam O'Neill, this ground being not unfamiliar. . . . "Got to take 'em along slowly, Doctor, all the same. Rome was n't built in a day."

"But mark my words, the vandals kicked it down in about fifteen minutes."

O'Neill felt vaguely worsted by this riposte. He was the older

man, the practical man, with a proven ability to make money out of real estate; but old V. V., though talking like an anarchist of late, was admitted to have a verbal dexterity at debate. Argument was forced upon Sam, as it were. He demanded authority for calling these people corrupting; desired to know if V. V. knew any of 'em personally. And presently he was reading aloud from the letter in the "Post," reading retributively; one swingeing phrase after another.

"And here — here! Listen to this, will you? — 'Why should we stand by and permit these shameless egoists of industry to bleed the strength from the community's sinew and grow rich by homicide at the cost of the race?' . . ."

Severe, indeed, the Arraignment seemed when read aloud to you in that tone. Gusto ebbed a little, mayhap. But it was clear that the medical author did not propose to retract; quite the contrary, in short.

"Permit! Ought to have asked why we applaud them, court them, *envy* them —"

"'Shameless homicides'! — and he calls it mild! Now, here, honor bright —"

"It's what they are — and more! You ask me if I know these people personally? I reply that in the truest sense I do know 'em, very well, for I've made a study of the type, d' you see? . . ."

Then the office door from the hall opened about a foot, a fat head in a gaunt bonnet protruded through the crevice, having rather a decapitated look, and a deep inflectionless voice said:

"Excuse me introodin', Doctor, I'm sure, but your sick here raskin' me kin they see you soon."

"In five minutes precisely . . ."

Morning sunshine streamed through the unwashed windows. V. Vivian had risen in the ardor of his argument. Quite a different-looking man from the Commissioner he was observed to be, tall where the Commissioner was thick, eager where the Commissioner was easy-going. Rather a long face he had, sensitive about the mouth, lucid about the gaze, and hair of a tan shade which waved a little, no matter how crisply cut. The faded gray suit he wore contrasted unfavorably with his friend's new brown;



on the other hand, his movements were not devoid of a certain lank grace such as the gods have denied to rotundity.

Yet when he stepped out from his quaint desk, it was suddenly to be seen that the young man limped, on his left foot: that this limp was not accidental or temporary. . . . A lame doctor: so it was with him. And yet the fire with which he spoke was surely not born of the pharmacopœia. . . .

"Take it in the large — that's all I ask! Look at your job from a social standpoint. I tell you, it's just these Huns, these yellow-rich Heths and Magees and Old Dominion Pickle people who're rotting the heart out of this fine old town. And the root of the whole trouble's in their debased personal ideals, don't you see? 'Get on' at all costs, that's the motto: slapping their money in their neighbors' faces and shouting, 'Here's what counts!' — spreading their degraded standards by example through the community — yellow materialism gone mad. . . . Oh, I know! — I know it is n't your slave-driving captains only. It's mainly the women pushing from behind — fat horse-leeches' daughters always screaming 'more, more' — when there's —"

"Leeches! Peaches, you mean! You ought to see —"

"When there's no way to get any more but to bleed it out of — Corinne Garland here! — which is duly done. Brutal egoism, that's the philosophy —"

"Police!" cried O'Neill, puffing good-humoredly. "Why, V. V.! — They're personally some of the best people in town! If you knew 'em you'd be the first to say so. Take the Heths now, just to show you —"

"Huns all! I do know them, I say, through to their little prehensile souls! You don't seem to get me. . . . Why, I feel *sorry* for them, Sam! I would n't mind much what they did if they were only *happy with it*! But, good heavens! . . . D'you know what this age needs, my boy? *A voice crying in the wilderness*. . ."

"H'm! Don't know about that. You'll find, where it's a matter touching their pockets, people don't listen to voices much, either in —"

"They listened to John the Baptist!"