

The Music-Box

BY ARTHUR RUHL

YOUNG Catherwood had for some time gone in rather heavily for slum life. His friends believed this to be certain proof of the transmuting powers of his imagination, and they regarded his experiments with admiration and approval. They were not aware that the people of the East Side have their emotions all on top, unprotected by clothes, manners, and conventions, and that in observing and making puppets of them such a man as Catherwood had a rather unfair advantage.

Some went so far as to say that he was really a poet. This title the young man acquired by abstaining from writing verse, and by saying things and making people see things which they, by themselves, could never have seen nor said. When the friends said "poet," they meant, of course, the right sort of poet—the sort who wears good clothes, and says rather nicer things about street lamps and hansom-cabs than about sheep and daffodils. And Catherwood really had the deftest knack of limelighting realities, so that a squalid alleyway might become a sort of drop-curtain Vale of Arcady, and the squealing of "L" brakes and the clang of cable-car gongs be made into roundelays and madrigals. This is a very pretty trick, and for those, for instance, who can't get into the country, where pastorals really should grow, it may oftentimes be useful. One should not forget, however, that it is merely a trick, and to be used sparingly and for a specific purpose—like rouge or absinthe. Catherwood did just the other thing. This shows what may happen when you do the other thing.

Just when everybody was getting out of town, the houses closing their shutter-eyelids for the summer's sleep, the cabs ceasing to clatter up and down the Avenue o' nights, and all Catherwood's friends were wondering why he didn't get his father's yacht in commission and

take them up into the Baltic, he put on a flannel shirt and some corduroys, loaded a push-cart with cherries, and started to tour the town. Hastings, on his way to the Exchange, ran into the cart at Wall and William streets in the morning; later somebody else saw Catherwood poking northward through Park Row, and by dinner-time most of Catherwood's crowd had heard of this, of all the young man's abnormal ventures the most extraordinary. Catherwood was, of course, as whimsically perverse as usual. He said gayly that he didn't expect them for an instant to understand; they were always so deucedly concerned about clients and patients and schemes and things.

"But, confound it, I don't see," said he, with extreme earnestness, "why push-carting doesn't solve your eternal problem of making a livelihood. You're free as a bird of air, and people come to you; so it has all the compensations of a profession. That removes the taint of commercialism. There's more fun doing it for the sake of doing it than there is in the money you make so—so it's really not a profession, but an art. And there you are; you make your living, you get just as much exercise and the out-of-doors as though you were a country gentleman; you see what is going on all day in town and are in the thick of it; and positively—positively the most sordid thing you have to do is to bring a gloss to a yellow pear or brush the bloom from a peach."

Any undergraduate or thoughtless dilettante might have been as whimsical. The dilettante would, however, have avoided actually pushing the cart. Herein lay the trouble with Catherwood. He became too interested.

Now there is a certain street running east and west across the island which should be avoided by impressionable young men in the spring-time of the

year. In the mornings, when the sun is just rising over the roof-line of the eastern tenements to pour its light through the cross-streets to the westward, there troop through this street, out of the heart of the Ghetto, on their way to the lofts of the big buildings near that part of lower Broadway, the girls who make pink roses and pompons and aigrettes and all sorts of wondrous feminine things. They have eyes—but this comes presently, and should only be told as Catherwood saw it.

It was the second day of his adventure, and a May morning—that particular morning when the spring seems to come all at once, and a strange new warmth everywhere breathes and palpitates, and no man is quite responsible for himself—that into this street young Catherwood came. The sun was just climbing above the forest of tenements that walled the eastern sky-line, and the girls were trooping by. In that one morning all the dreariness of their winter raiment had been sloughed aside, as the husks slip off the crocuses, and, like crocuses, alive, radiant, tremulous, they bloomed along the sidewalks in their shirt-waists of pink and blue. They had eyes like fawns—this is Catherwood now—like summer nights; eyes and all the rest. And as they passed, talking the odd speech that came from deep in their throats, and soft-moving with that exotic luxuriance which in their mothers so quickly and cruelly shrivels and fades, all of it, from their walk to the downward curve of the line of their waists, wove for Catherwood a shimmering drop-curtain, veiling the commonplace street, from behind which he could very prettily hear the clink of bracelets and tinkle of lightly picked strings curiously mingling with his pavement pastoral the mystery and glow of the Orient.

Thus softly playing with himself, Catherwood looked eastward over the rows of fruit-carts—each a great jewel-casket heaped with rubies—waiting for a Daphne to appear. Possibly it were better to call her a Zuleika, but the name is a detail. She came presently—a child with the richness of the woman and the freshness of the girl—while the hurdy-gurdy round the corner trilled like a meadow-lark, and over from the Bowery

came the trucks' and trolley-cars' madrigal. Quite as though this were indeed a sylvan grove, he the only satyr and she its only nymph, their eyes straightway met. She approached, laughing. Quickly he said many pretty things, which then he was not at all concerned she should understand; and scooping up a great bouquet of cherries, he pressed them into her hand.

"You will come back?" he asked, anxiously; and she just laughed and passed on. His eyes followed, catching details—the great coil of black hair done low on her neck, the curving waist, that soft and sinuous gait of hers. At the farther corner she paused, turning as though to hearken to the hurdy-gurdy that all the while had been clattering out upon the warm air its sweeping swinging tune. Then she turned farther to Catherwood, and laughing, shook her hand.

Catherwood spent the day in phrasing a ballade, with the usual yester-year refrain all left out of it.

It was dusk when she returned, loitering, smiling vaguely, lazy, as though she had but spent the day in wandering to the street's end and back again.

"You were long," said Catherwood, and he started the cart along the gutter beside her. "I'm going home with you," he said.

Into the very heart of her country they went, side by side, until the alphabet had changed to zigzags, and the solemn bearded men at the jewel-shop windows, and the withered women, in their brown, deep-parted wigs, on the tenement steps, stared inscrutably at the tall and comely youth who had no business there. Down through Chrystie Street, and then through Orchard, then another turn, and they came to the gingerbread brownstone archway and the brass railing that marked the entrance to the great barrack, somewhere toward the top of which the girl lived.

The little enclosure bounded by the brass rails and the arched doorway was Yetta Blume's reception-room, and there they stood, Catherwood and she, talking they knew and cared not what, until the dusk began to close in upon them. But all the while they were playing thus, a dark-skinned youth, with black,



SCOOPING UP A GREAT BOUQUET OF CHERRIES, HE PRESSED THEM INTO HER HAND

untamed eyes, passed along the sidewalk across the street; stopped, stared, walked on, and returned; stopped and stared again. Just as Catherwood was about to leave, the girl, turning, gave a quick little start and cringed backward.

"Who is it?" asked Catherwood, following her eyes.

"The Guiney!" said the girl, and just touching his coat sleeve with her fingers, she threw one quick glance of fear behind her and disappeared into the dark hall.

Catherwood got into white man's clothes and his own life in time for a late dinner that night; and later, beside an open

window in his tenth-floor uptown apartment, with the lights out, the night wind stirring the curtains, and the patter of hoofs on the asphalt coming up faintly from the street, he proved to his friend Mills, theoretically and unspecifically, yet with the most contagious thrill and earnestness, that there was more romance in the town than in all the seas and mountains beneath the sun—or moon. The part of his speech which young Mills quoted next day, and which, he said, made him question for a moment whether the law was really worth while, was made as Catherwood stood by the window, holding the curtain and staring

far off to the southeastward, beyond the Garden tower, beyond the glare of Madison Square, to where the blazing cross of St. Augustine's shone out high in the air above the dark forest of tenement roofs.

Catherwood made only one speech of this sort. The next day he disappeared. When some one did run across him, in his room days afterward, he did not talk. He seemed to fear that he wouldn't be appreciated. This meant merely—though, of course, Catherwood didn't see it at all—that he was losing his sense of perspective. He even felt more a poet than ever when, at the end of a fortnight, he stood on the roof of Yetta's tenement with the girl at his side and the lights of the town twinkling beneath them. As they leaned on the parapet, speaking a word now and then, he recalled, with a vaguely impish delight, a night on deck at sea. The slat-covered floor took the place of the holy-stoned deck, the white rail had become the parapet of a tenement roof, and the fetid air of the Ghetto took the place of the whiff from the open sea.

The night was hot and breathless. The brick of the wall was still warm to their hands from the baking of a summer day thrust into spring. So still was the air, and heavy, that it seemed almost as though they could feel the flame of the push-cart torches which flared in yellow stars down the length of the street. From below, indefinable, yet steadily audible, came the ceaseless and uneasy shuffle of many feet.

A quiverful of strident chords suddenly broke into this droning murmur, and somewhere beneath them a hurdy-gurdy rippled into a tune. At the first measure of it the girl's hand, which had lain passively on the brick beside Catherwood's, clasped his and held it tight. He turned quickly toward her, but she made no answer, and stared straight into the night.

"Do you know the song?" he said. And she only pressed her lips and his hand the tighter.

Now what the song was does not very much matter, for it would probably mean no more to you even if you heard its name. The tune was very silly and the

words even more so, but the little girls in twos, or with their baby brothers on their shoulders, followed the organ to dance to it in the sunny mornings; and at night, when the heat breathed out from the baked walls and gave the lie to the cool-looking darkness, the young men and maidens, with their arms about one another's waist, strolled through the fresh-air parks and round the recreation piers, humming its silly words. That was the sort of song it was, and Catherwood knew a little what it meant. So he asked again, somewhat gently,

"What is it?—the song?"

For yet another while the girl gazed out into the night—out beyond the roofs to where the lighted ferry-boats were gliding across the river, and then she turned to him. "It's his—it's the Guiney's song," she said. And presently she began, as though forgetfully, to hum:

*"Heart of my heart, I lo-o-ve you;
What would life be witho-o-out you?"*

She looked full at Catherwood and laughed—a short, cold little laugh.

"We danced to that," she said. And then, sentence by sentence, between snatches of the song, she told him everything that, in vanity at his play with the make-believe, he had prettily said to himself he didn't wish to know. She told how the Guiney had met her at one of the balls the winter before, and had first danced with her to that tune; how he had sent her letters with the words of it—clipped from nickel song folios—pasted at the bottom of the sheets; how, in his wild-eyed way, he had followed her and pleaded with and threatened her until she was afraid.

"He told me," said the girl, still holding Catherwood's hand—"he told me that the night you—you first came, and he saw us there, that he did not once close his eyes. He said that he stayed on the roof—his roof—just as we are now, and looked as near as he could to where he thought my roof was all night, and—and jabbed holes in the brick with a knife."

Laughing again the same quick little laugh, she followed the tune:

*"I will forget you ne-e-ver.
Swear you'll be mine fore-e-ver."*

"And he showed me the knife," said the girl, stopping short.

Catherwood had drawn away his hand. He felt that the detached mood should not be put to too great a strain. "And you?" he said, more gently than he meant to, "what did you say?"

"A Guiney!" cried the girl. "A crazy Guiney!" But the laugh died with the words. "He told me that I was killing him by inches, that his—his love was eating his heart out, and that—that I must marry him, and that if I didn't he would follow me—follow me always, and wherever I was he—" The girl's voice had grown fainter and fainter, and here she stopped, turning her face away, but reaching toward Catherwood's hand. "I was—I was afraid," she went on, almost in a whisper; "and I'm—sometimes I'm afraid now when you—but after—after you—" Swiftly she whirled to Catherwood. "I told him I didn't care!" she cried; and seizing his arm in both her hands, she pressed her cheek against it and broke into tears.

Thus Catherwood's Daphne vanished into the summer night, and he was standing on a tenement roof with a real woman mauling his coat sleeve, while her hot tears dripped on his hand. But he said nothing foolish. Somehow he got away.

Now the danger of playing with moonshiny thrills and mixing them up with bread-and-butter ones lies in the fact that just about the time the lime-light is turned off, a healthy bread-and-butter hunger begins. Catherwood had not learned well enough how to juggle for juggling's sake, and thus it was that, after about a week of a certain sort of pleasant remorse, he marched down into the East Side one night, not a Pipes o' Pan push-cart peddler, but Catherwood as Catherwood, in his own raiment, with eyes to the front and no haze over them.

The girl seemed to have expected him. She took possession of him with that unquestioning comprehension which, in certain of the more elemental situations, is a woman's birthright. On a Coney Island steamboat, away from the brick and the panting town, they were carried along with a cooing, spooning, shirt-waisted deck-load into the coolness of the

bay. Speaking but little in their newfound nearness, they were content to bask in the beauty of the night, while the couples about them whispered and tittered, the water splashed from the wheel, and the liquid harp notes rang along the deck.

The night was old when at last they left the boat and started for Yetta's home. The lights of the windows were out, and the sidewalks stretched on and on, deserted except for some lone patrolman starting out on the midnight tour. Splashes of white and bundles of blackness here and there on the fire-escape landings showed where the heat-tormented had made their beds, and now and again, as they idled on, came down to them the sigh of some fretful sleeper or the whimper of a child. But for this the jarring things of day were gone. Only the heat still hung in the streets, breathing upon them like a live thing, and from overhead the rich full moon shone down. There was something of playfulness and yet protection in her face—the face of one who would welcome her own.

At last they approached her doorway, its tawdriness glorified in the moonlight to the white dignity of a temple portal. Murmuring low and playfully, they paused, and presently passed within. As they turned at the first landing, the girl seized Catherwood's arm.

"What was that?" she whispered.

He turned just in time to see something flit across the doorway's white rectangle of light. He drew his arm through the girl's, and laughingly urged her up the stairs. "Nothing," he said.

Their footsteps echoed loudly in the stair-well as they slowly mounted the stone steps, until finally they passed the door and tiptoed through the shuttered box which did for dining-room and kitchen, into the tiny parlor.

A patch of light like that reflected from the walls met both their eyes, and there on the table beside the window, its lacquered face shining in the moonlight, was an ebony music-box. As a breath of surprise escaped Catherwood, the girl stopped in front of him with a quick gesture of dissent.

"But don't," laughed Catherwood. "I must see it. It never was there before."

The girl barred the way, her back to



Halftone plate engraved by W. H. Clark

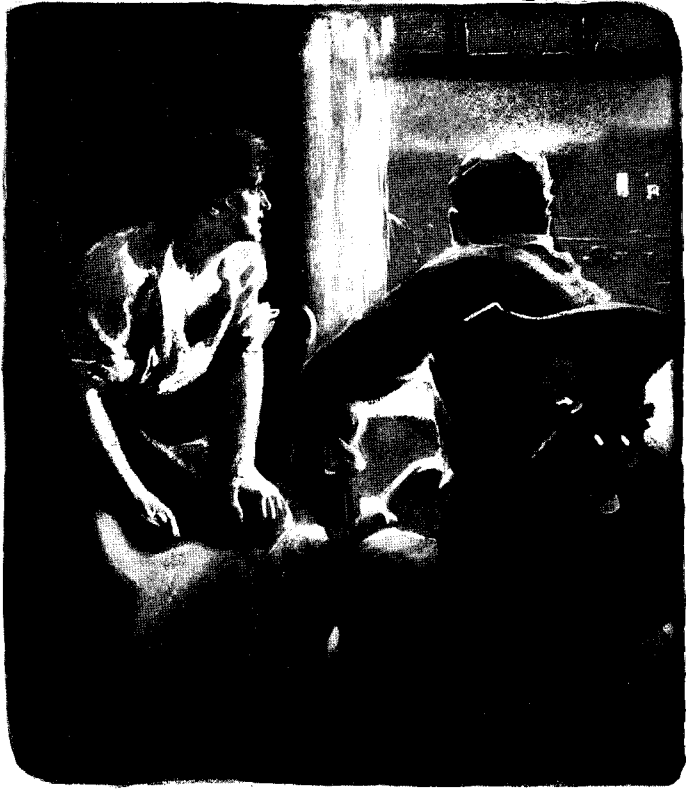
"PAWING THE DOOR WITH THE FLATS OF HIS HANDS"

the box. "Don't look; don't," she whispered. "Don't touch it. I'm afraid of it. It—it's the Guiney's."

She took the lapel of his coat, and then, in a strange medley of timorous laughter and mystery, she told him how the young Italian had come that afternoon — she had not seen him for many days — had pushed past her old aunt, who held the door, and set the black box on the table.

"I was there," said the girl, pointing to the cubby-hole bedroom which adjoined the parlor. "I was dressing; I was getting ready for to-

night. I heard somebody's step when he was going out, and I opened the door—just this much. Then he sees me, and he stops short—like this. And then, all at once, he comes running and falls on his knees—on his knees at the crack of the door. And I shut it tight. And then—then he talks: '*Comma—batta—walla—che—ke—cha*'—you know the Guiney talk. But that was at first. After a while he got better, and I could understand." The girl laughed nervously. "His mouth, you see, to the key-hole, and the flats of his hands pawing the door. And then he said—said that I must hear him, and that it was all for me, and that he had sworn away his pay for a year to get it, and that it would talk for him, because I would not listen to his talk, and that when it did speak I would understand. And then"—the girl paused, looking back and forth from the door to the cold-gleaming box on the table—"and then he wanted me to say that he could



BEFORE HIS MIND COULD GRASP THE PICTURE IT WAS GONE

come again—and that I would hear him—and—and all the while his hands were clawing, clawing the door. I was scared, and I thought—I turned the knob and—” She led Catherwood to the door, and going within the little room, she thrust her arm out of the crack of the door, the cuff of her shirt-waist pulled above the elbow. “Like that,” she said. “I—I couldn’t come farther; and he grabbed it and—and kissed it, and—and I jerked it away, and left him—jabbering.” She just bent her face close to Catherwood’s, feeling in the half-darkness for his eyes. “I—I wanted him to go,” she said, softly. “Don’t you see? I was afraid. I thought that—that it would make him go—”

“Yes,” said Catherwood, “I see.”

“Yes,” repeated the girl, in a whimpering little sigh, and she sank into a chair beside the table. Catherwood drew his chair close, facing her, while his eyes wandered from the dark shadow of her face to her hands, which lay still and



THERE LAY THE GIRL, STILL—

white in the moonlight. Presently he turned to the Guiney's box, which lay beside them like a dead thing, and in some vague way seemed to accuse them with the mute voice of the dead, and began to pick and to fumble with its cogs and stops.

"You mustn't," the girl cried once, lifting his hand away.

He laughed—the laugh of the man triumphing, and bent the closer to it. A lever gave, there was a whir, and all at once the dead box came to life, and into their sighing silence there tinkled forth that senseless song—their song—the Guiney's song—the song in which, in the instant's intuitive flash, Catherwood could feel and all but hear the maudlin lover making his last appeal. Even as he listened a quick grating like that of a foot slipping on iron, from the fire-escape below the window-ledge, snapped his gaze from the box, and as it lifted it met, framed in the casement, with the moonlight turning it to bronze, a swarthy face, whose eyes were staring at them there. Before his mind could grasp the picture it was gone.

"S-st!" he whispered.

"It is nothing," said the girl. "They are sleeping out there."

As he started to rise she seized both his hands, looking fearfully toward the back room, where the old aunt was sleeping.

"No," she said, in a curious, clinging

voice that made him feel like a fool. Holding her fingers, he leaned toward her until the loose roll of hair that hung over her forehead brushed his face. The girl made no sound—only bent her head the lower, while on and on tinkled that sickly, swooning tune:

*Heart of my hear-r-rt, I lo-o-ove you;
What would life be witho-o-out you?*

A drowsy mutter and the rasp of a door-hinge brought him back to his surroundings. His voice sounded a hollow "Good-night!" The girl spoke nothing, but as he turned on the stair he felt her hand, groping after him, brush across his sleeve.

The night was dying as Catherwood stepped into the street alone. The tenements loomed vague and shadowy in the darkness, and the sleepers on the fire-escapes had faded to ashen heaps of gray. Even the moon, the bold voluptuous beauty of the night, lay back in the sky, sick and faint with the lassitude of dawn. Into the wan valley of the lifeless streets he strode—solitary and giddily alive. As he repassed the way he had come that night, at his feet glimmered something white. He picked it up—a slimsy handkerchief—and caught the faint scent of perfume. The girl's very breath seemed to come with the smell and blow warm on his cheek, and he paused then, daft, pressing the rag to his face, when out of the

gray silence behind him came the quaver of a scream.

Catherwood whirled about and broke into a run. At every stride the cry lashed him—shrill, incoherent, quavering—until, just as he reached the arched doorway, a sharp report from overhead snapped it short. Through the walls the report came again—blunt, deliberate—again, and yet again, and following quick upon it was the sound of doors opening, of hurried noises and sputtering throaty cries. Blinking men and frowzy-headed women peered out as he leaped upward, and down through the well from the top story rang the terror-cry of—

"Oi, Oi! Oi, Oi! Gewalt! Gewalt!"

It was the cry that met him at the top of the stair, and there in the kitchen, her hair flying, her night-gown falling from her shoulders, the old woman was screaming and beating her bare fists against the bolted parlor door. Putting her aside, Catherwood heaved his weight against it

until he smashed the panels to the floor. And when he looked within, he and those who had swarmed up from below, half naked, dishevelled, jabbering—when they dared look within—there lay the girl, still; beside her, on his face, his head covered by her fallen hair, lay the Guiney; and over them the pinkpanking music-box was tittering the Guiney's song.

While Hastings was nibbling breakfast that morning, Catherwood dropped in just long enough to say that he was off for the country. It was going to be a piping hot day; even at that hour the breeze which fluttered through the window-curtains off the Avenue weighted the fragrance of iced cantaloupe most depressingly with the smell of sprinkling-carts and softening asphalt. It was high time even for pavement poets to run to cover, but Catherwood, with typical *insouciance*, merely remarked that he wanted to get out of town until the hurdy-gurdies got some new tunes.

Experiments in Low Temperature

BY HENRY SMITH WILLIAMS, M.D.

PRACTICALLY all the scientific discoveries of Thomas Young, Humphry Davy, Michael Faraday, and John Tyndall, not to mention living investigators, are to be credited to the Royal Institution, whose professorial chairs these great men have successively occupied.

These great men were all pioneers in the study of those manifestations of molecular activity which we now, following Young himself, term energy. Rumford, Davy, and Young stood almost alone among the prominent scientists of the world at the beginning of the century in upholding the idea that heat is not a material substance—a chemical element—but merely a manifestation of the activities of particles of matter. Rumford's papers on this thesis communicated to the Royal Society were almost the first widely heralded claims for this revolutionary idea. Some of Fara-

day's most important labors served to place on a firm footing the thesis for which Rumford battled; and Tyndall was the first, in his "beautiful book" called *Heat, a Mode of Motion*, to give wide popular announcement to the fact that the scientific world had finally accepted the proposition which Rumford had vainly demonstrated three-quarters of a century before.

The most important work which has been done at the Royal Institution in the present generation, and which is still being prosecuted there—the work, namely, of Professor James Dewar on the properties of matter at excessively low temperatures—is in the clearest sense a direct continuation of researches which Davy and Faraday inaugurated in 1823, and which Faraday continued in 1844. In the former year, Faraday, acting on a suggestion of Davy's, performed an experiment which resulted in the production