

AUCTIONS

BY KATHARINE TYNAN

IN the country in which I have the honor to live the whole world goes to auctions. It is a form of gambling which may be practised by those who have conscientious objections to cards and horse-racing. It has the advantage over bridge that one dares to laugh, and may be interested in another's success where it has not interfered with one's own. Altogether it is a most agreeable form of lottery.

As demand produces supply, it follows that all the world is auctioning its goods and acquiring other people's. The number of auctions every day is quite remarkable; and as the most confirmed auction-goer cannot be in half a dozen places at once, it follows that there are chances such as there would not be in a place where a rare auction draws all the world.

Then the elements may be on your side. If it is a hard frost or a wet day the number of pleasure and profit-seekers may be sensibly diminished. If the house should be far enough from other houses and a railway station to prevent easy access, and the day is a bad one, the fates are on your side. Dealers are the persons most to be dreaded, but the mug with plenty of money is almost, if not quite, as bad. Sometimes he will drive out the dealers in disgust. If he should then get tired himself of paying impossible prices, your opportunity, if you are a bargain-hunter, is at hand. Once at a sale in Dublin, in Horse Show Week, from which the dealers had departed, cursing the squires and squireens who were playing with their money, in the heel

of the evening, when the buyers were sated, I acquired some thirty-six Chinese plates — not of the best period, reported an expert later; only worth about a guinea apiece — for as many shillings.

The best chance of all is at the sale of a 'residue' of furniture which does not attract the dealers. In this country auctions are really honest auctions and without reserve. I had almost forgotten their delights, having been put off by London auctions, in which the house had been taken for a fortnight and furnished with whited sepulchres of furniture, very smart, with plate glass and gilding in front and unseasoned wood behind — and I am only regaining the delights of the honest auction.

I went to one the other day — a residue. We went to buy useful things, of which we required a good many, as we were setting up house, and had shed our useful things in another land. So we were interested in garden and kitchen requisites, and only looked longingly at dining-room and drawing-room. There was a good deal of Sheffield plate, a sarcophagus, Georgian, on claw feet, with very fine lion handles, and a Sheraton spinet, delicate and demure, with the green shell inlaying in perfect condition, and the keyboard, which some barbarous owners of spinets are having removed in order to make the spinet into something it is not. Maker's name, James Clementi. The spinet drew our longing eyes most of all. Every motor-car that drove up contained, we were sure, people who had come to buy the spinet, and we en-

vied them. The useful things being acquired, we lingered on just to see what the spinet would fetch.

Our purchases at that auction were many; in fact, we were the principal buyers. Let me, at the risk of being written down a Sapphira, record the items of the bag while I remember them. There was a large linen cupboard, white painted, in two parts, two small wardrobes, hanging and shelved, a kitchen table (very excellent, my cook assures me), a towel rail, a mahogany double washstand with a marble top, four wash tubs, two lawn mowers, one a Pennsylvania, a hose reel, three stone hot-water bottles, five copper moulds and a copper saucepan, a clothes-horse, a clock, a terrestrial globe, a golf bag, with sticks, two umbrellas, three antlers, and — we were ashamed to look honest people in the face — an eighteenth century Sheraton spinet. Our bill amounted to, well — not quite three parts of a ten-pound note.

I sit respectfully at the feet of the wise, who tell me — I read it in a *Times* leader the other day — that there is no such thing nowadays as a genuine bargain; that all the bargains and collections have been picked over long ago; that it is the age of fake, and so on. Well, I missed the other day at an auction the original Dr. Syntax's *Tours*, with the illustrations by Rowlandson, which was sold at eleven shillings. It was the one jewel in a rubbish heap, and the books were too unimportant to be catalogued. No one knew anything about it except the one who bought it and ourselves, and we, unable to see the book, put it down as a reprint.

The excitement is quite as great as in any other form of gambling, but, for some reason, much less baneful. We may wear the auction face while we are bidding with passionate anxiety for

odd lots of crockery and lucky bags in which half the articles may be cracked or broken for what we can see. But we are always ready to laugh; even at the frequent repetition of the name of a buyer. Mrs. — shall we say, Smith No. 2? — was a reckless buyer at a sale the other day. The time came when we laughed hilariously while she took the drawing-room fender out of our mouth and dashed the Chippendale card-table from our lips. 'Bedad, ma'am, ye're a divill!' shouted a voice of unwilling, or only half-willing, admiration. But when we go to remove our purchases we fraternize. We compare our bargains and congratulate each other on our good buying; we console each other for the bad. We discuss the points of the bargains and recommend French polishers and such things to each other. We may even discover that the same university mothered us both, or that we followed the same political leader in a stirring past, and strike up friendships for life.

A country auction, within easy reach of town, is best for fun as well as for bargain hunting. There is an electric quality in the crowd absent from more hardened auction-goers, and the spectacle of a pair of excited men bidding for an article of household furniture to far beyond its original cost in the dark ages, moves us to visibility. 'Bedad, I would n't like to be you goin' home to the mistress this evenin',' says someone to the winner; and he acknowledges, with rueful good humor, now the fight is out of him, that 'Herself 'll make it warm for him, sure enough.' Which reminds me of a friend of mine who, dropping into an auction by the merest chance, found herself the possessor of a wagonette in excellent order, admirably adapted to the needs of a large and growing family, for two pounds. Going home, full of pride, and imparting the fact to the male critic on

the hearth she was received with the question: 'Has it rubber tires?' This was in the days too before motors had sent horsed vehicles on to the market at 'desperate reductions.'

One of the best auctions I remember was where all the possessions of two bachelor brothers and a spinster sister went to the hammer. It was in a somewhat inaccessible country place, within five miles of the city; there was a hard frost, and none but horsed vehicles, so there were only the buyers from the immediate neighborhood. My purchases on that occasion consisted chiefly of china, but a portion of the

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bag were two old Indian shawls, which became mine for a pound. If I had willed it I might have also purchased for a song beaver hats of the Regency, and beautifully embroidered waistcoats, or delicate flowered muslins of the early Victorian days, with short waists, frills at the feet and babyfied sleeves in which some girl must have looked adorable. These things are the sadnesses of auctions. Indeed, there is always a sadness, for the auction means the breaking-up of a home and the violation of sacred privacies. But let me not drop a tear lest it should be called a crocodile one.

THE LAST BOHEMIAN

BY S. HUDDLESTON

It is possible that in a strictly accurate sense there are still Bohemians, by nature not by nationality, in Paris; but with the apostasy of Hégésippe Joucla the war has at last, on the very edge of peace, converted into the most conventional of citizens the man who for me represented in its quintessence the spirit of Bohemia. With his transformation, a transformation that appeared incredible, a phenomenon which has the air of finality has emerged. If Hégésippe Joucla can wear cuffs and a clean starched collar and work daily from morn till eve in a Government office for a fixed salary each month, the ultimate possibility has been reached. The miracle of the war did not happen at the first or the second Marne. It happened on the Boulevard St. Michel.

Revisiting that leafy thoroughfare of the Latin Quarter the other evening, I encountered on the sheltered terrace of a café (not a cheap, dismal little café but a large and *chic* establishment) my old acquaintance. He was scarcely recognizable, and I betrayed in my fumbling greeting the astonishment that seized me at the sight of the old, fierce beard no longer uncombed, but smooth and glossy. Hégésippe had on a respectable blue jacket, with a white handkerchief sticking out of the pocket a thought too far; he had a bowler hat, very slightly exotic; and his trousers, if a trifle conspicuous in pattern, were of the ordinary cut, and were creased even to excess.

Think of him in the old days of peace and poetry! Ragged and unkempt, he spent his days in talking