

## NOTHING THAT EVER CAME TO ANYTHING

It was at Quito, the mountain capital of Ecuador, that the following passage at correspondence took place. Having occasion to buy a pair of shoes in a shop six feet by eight in size and with walls three feet thick, I noticed a mangy leopard skin on the floor. I had no Spanish. The shop-keeper had no English. But I was an adept at sign language. I wanted to know where I should go to buy leopard skins. On my scribble-pad I drew the interesting streets of a city. Then I drew a small shop, which, after much effort, I persuaded the proprietor into recognising as his shop. Next, I indicated in my drawing that on the many streets there were many shops. And, finally, I made myself into a living interrogation mark, pointing all the while from the mangy leopard skin to the many shops I had sketched.

But the proprietor failed to follow me. So did his assistant. The street came in to help--that is, as many as could crowd into the six-by-eight shop; while those that could not force their way in held an overflow meeting on the sidewalk. The proprietor and the rest took turns at talking to me in rapid-fire Spanish, and, from the expressions on their faces, all concluded that I was remarkably stupid. Again I went through my programme, pointing on the sketch from the one shop to the many shops, pointing out that in this particular shop was one leopard skin, and then questing interrogatively with my pencil among all the shops. All regarded me in blank silence, until I saw comprehension

suddenly dawn on the face of a small boy.

"Tigres montanya!" he cried.

This appealed to me as mountain tigers, namely, leopards; and in token that he understood, the boy made signs for me to follow him, which I obeyed. He led me for a quarter of a mile, and paused before the doorway of a large building where soldiers slouched on sentry duty and in and out of which went other soldiers. Motioning for me to remain, he ran inside.

Fifteen minutes later he was out again, without leopard skins, but full of information. By means of my card, of my hotel card, of my watch, and of the boy's fingers, I learned the following: that at six o'clock that evening he would arrive at my hotel with ten leopard skins for my inspection. Further, I learned that the skins were the property of one Captain Ernesto Becucci. Also, I learned that the boy's name was Eliceo.

The boy was prompt. At six o'clock he was at my room. In his hand was a small roll addressed to me. On opening it I found it to be manuscript piano music, the Hora Tranquila Valse, or "Tranquil Hour Waltz," by Ernesto Becucci. I came for leopard skins, thought I, and the owner sends me sheet music instead. But the boy assured me that he would have the skins at the hotel at nine next morning, and I entrusted to him the following letter of acknowledgment:

"DEAR CAPTAIN BECUCCI:

"A thousand thanks for your kind presentation of Hora Tranquila Valse. Mrs. London will play it for me this evening.

"Sincerely yours,

"Jack London."

Next morning Eliceo was back, but without the skins. Instead, he gave me a letter, written in Spanish, of which the following is a free translation:

"To my dearest and always appreciated friend, I submit myself--

"DEAR SIR:

"I sent you last night an offering by the bearer of this note, and you returned me a letter which I translated.

"Be it known to you, sir, that I am giving this waltz away in the best society, and therefore to your honoured self. Therefore it is beholden to you to recognise the attention, I mean by a tangible return, as this composition was made by myself. You will therefore send by your humble servant, the bearer, any offering, however minute, that you may be prompted to make. Send it under cover of an envelope. The bearer may be trusted.

"I did not indulge in the pleasure of visiting your honourable self this morning, as I find my body not to be enjoying the normal exercise of its functions.

"As regards the skins from the mountain, you shall be waited on by a small boy at seven o'clock at night with ten skins from which you may select those which most satisfy your aspirations.

"In the hope that you will look upon this in the same light as myself, I beg to be allowed to remain,

"Your most faithful servant,

"CAPTAIN ERNESTO BECUCCI."

Well, thought I, this Captain Ernesto Becucci has shown himself to be such an undependable person, that, while I don't mind rewarding him for his composition, I fear me if I do I never shall lay eyes on those leopard skins. So to Eliceo I gave this letter for the Captain:

"MY DEAR CAPTAIN BECUCCI:

"Have the boy bring the skins at seven o'clock this evening, when I shall be glad to look at them. This evening when the boy brings the skins, I shall be pleased to give him, in an envelope, for you, a

tangible return for your musical composition.

"Please put the price on each skin, and also let me know for what sum all the skins will sell together.

"Sincerely yours,

"JACK LONDON."

Now, thought I, I have him. No skins, no tangible return; and evidently he is set on receiving that tangible return.

At seven o'clock Eliceo was back, but without leopard skins. He handed me this letter:

"SENOR LONDON:

"I wish to instil in you the belief that I lost to-day, at half past three in the afternoon, the key to my cubicle. While distributing rations to the soldiers I dropped it. I see in this loss the act of God.

"I received a letter from your honourable self, delivered by the one who bears you this poor response of mine. To-morrow I will burst open the door to permit me to keep my word with you. I feel myself eternally shamed not to be able to dominate the evils that afflict

colonial mankind. Please send me the trifle that you offered me. Send me this proof of your appreciation by the bearer, who is to be trusted. Also give to him a small sum of money for himself, and earn the undying gratitude of

"Your most faithful servant,

"CAPTAIN ERNESTO BECUCCI."

Also, inclosed in the foregoing letter was the following original poem, a propos neither of leopard skins nor tangible returns, so far as I can make out:

#### EFFUSION

Thou canst not weep;  
Nor ask I for a year  
To rid me of my woes  
Or make my life more dear.

The mystic chains that bound  
Thy all-fond heart to mine,  
Alas! asundered are  
For now and for all time.

In vain you strove to hide,

From vulgar gaze of man,  
The burning glance of love  
That none but Love can scan.

Go on thy starlit way  
And leave me to my fate;  
Our souls must needs unite--  
But, God! 'twill be too late.

To all and sundry of which I replied:

"MY DEAR CAPTAIN BECUCCI:

"I regret exceedingly to hear that by act of God, at half past three this afternoon, you lost the key to your cubicle. Please have the boy bring the skins at seven o'clock to-morrow morning, at which time, when he brings the skins, I shall be glad to make you that tangible return for your 'Tranquil Hour Waltz.'

"Sincerely yours,

"JACK LONDON."

At seven o'clock came no skins, but the following:

"SIR:

"After offering you my most sincere respects, I beg to continue by telling you that no one, up to the time of writing, has treated me with such lack of attention. It was a present to gentlemen who were to retain the piece of music, and who have all, without exception, made me a present of five dollars. It is beyond my humble capacity to believe that you, after having offered to send me money in an envelope, should fail to do so.

"Send me, I pray of you, the money to remunerate the small boy for his repeated visits to you. Please be discreet and send it in an envelope by the bearer.

"Last night I came to the hotel with the boy. You were dining. I waited more than an hour for you and then went to the theatre. Give the boy some small amount, and send me a like offering of larger proportions.

"Awaiting incessantly a slight attention on your part,

"CAPTAIN ERNESTO BECUCCI."

And here, like one of George Moore's realistic studies, ends this intercourse with Captain Ernesto Becucci. Nothing happened. Nothing ever came to anything. He got no tangible return, and I got no leopard skins. The tangible return he might have got, I presented to Eliceo, who



promptly invested it in a pair of trousers and a ticket to the  
bull-fight.

(NOTE TO EDITOR.--This is a faithful narration of what actually happened  
in Quito, Ecuador.)