

VARIOUS

CHAMBERS'S JOURNAL
OF POPULAR
LITERATURE, SCIENCE,
AND ART, NO. 729,
DECEMBER 15, 1877

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Содержание

A BUNCH OF KEYS	4
THE LAND OF THE INCAS	13
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	22

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A BUNCH OF KEYS

I am a professional man, and reside in the West End of London. One morning some few months back, my assistant on coming to attend to his duties produced a bunch of keys, which he informed me he had just picked up at the corner of a street leading from Oxford Street.

'Hadn't they best be handed over to the police?' suggested my assistant. I wish to goodness I had at once closed with his suggestion; but I didn't, much to my own cost, as will be presently seen.

'Well, I don't know,' was my answer. 'I rather think it will be a wiser plan to advertise them, if the owner is really to have a chance of recovering them; for to my mind, articles found in that way and handed over to the police are rarely heard of again.'

An advertisement for the *Times* was duly drawn up and sent off for insertion. It merely stated where the keys had been picked up, and where the owner of the bunch could have it returned to him on giving a proper description. The next morning the advertisement appeared; and though I half expected that some applications might be made later on in the same day, it passed over quite quietly. But the following morning I had a foretaste of the trouble that awaited me so soon as the postman had deposited my letters in the box and given his accustomed knock. A glance at my table shewed me that my correspondence was very considerably beyond its average that morning. The very first letter I opened was in reference to the advertisement; and before I had gone through the collection I found there were over twenty applications for the bunch of keys in my possession. Some of the writers took the trouble to describe the keys they had lost; but none of them were in the least like those that had been picked up by my assistant. Some did not take the trouble to give any description at all, or to state if they had been in the part of the town where the keys were found; and a few boldly claimed them on the strength of having dropped a bunch miles from the spot indicated in the advertisement!

By the time I had got through my letters and my breakfast, my servant came to tell me that my waiting-room was already full of people – 'mostly ladies,' he said – though it was nearly two hours before the time I was accustomed to see any one professionally. With a foreboding that a good deal of worry and a loss of much

valuable time was in store for me, I entered my consulting-room, and gave orders that the ladies should be admitted in the order of their arrival. They were all applicants for the keys; and out of the sixteen persons that were waiting, fourteen were ladies. The two gentlemen were soon despatched. They *had* lost keys, near the spot for anything they could tell; but on being satisfied that what had been found did in no way agree with the description of what they had lost, they apologised for the trouble and went at once.

But it was no such easy matter to get rid of my fourteen lady-applicants. Some of them were for inflicting upon me a narration of family affairs that had not the most remote connection with the business in hand. A few kept closely enough to the subject on which they had come; but would not take a denial that the keys in my possession were not the least like those they said they had lost; and it was only at the sacrifice of some of my usual politeness that I was able to get rid of them. Not one of the morning's arrival could make out anything like a fair claim, and one or two owned that they had not even been in the quarter where the keys were found on the day specified.

More letters, more applicants, came as the day wore on; and I began heartily to repent of my well-meant desire to benefit my fellow-mortals by taking the trouble to find out the rightful owner of a lost article. I was just on the point of giving orders to my servant to put off all further applicants until the following morning, when he ushered in a comfortable-looking lady of middle age, who proceeded straight to business by at once

describing with the greatest accuracy the bunch of keys that had given me so much anxiety that day; and assuring me that she had passed the spot indicated in the advertisement on the morning they were found.

'Nine keys on the bunch, all Chubb's patent; three very small ones, five of various sizes, and one latch-key longer than any of the others.'

The description was perfect. Some of the other applicants had curiously enough been right as to the number, but wrong as to description.

I at once told my lady visitor that I had no doubt the keys were hers; and that I was ready to hand them over to her. But I ventured to add that it would give me greater security were she to permit my assistant to accompany her to her residence, and there, in his presence, to open the different locks to which the keys belonged. To this proposal not the smallest objection was raised. She begged I would call my assistant, as she had a cab waiting at the door. The direction was given to some place in Bloomsbury, and they drove off. In less than an hour my assistant returned. He stated that the lady opened the street door with the latch-key, and that the other eight keys opened desks, writing-tables, cash-boxes, &c. – all quite correct and satisfactorily. The expense of the advertisement was of course paid.

Congratulating myself that this troublesome business was well over, and mentally resolving that another time, under similar circumstances, I should act on my assistant's suggestion, and hand

such matters over to the police, I gave orders that all applicants that might come were to be told that the rightful owner had been found and that the keys were disposed of.

Two days passed, and I had almost dismissed the whole affair from my mind. On the morning of the third day my attention was attracted by an altercation going on between my servant and an irate lady – well advanced in years – to whom he refused admittance. Anxious to escape disturbance, I gave orders that she should be shewn into my consulting-room, where I presently went to see what she wanted.

'I want to know why you never answered my letter about the bunch of keys you advertised as having found, and which I lost? I have come for them now.'

'But, madam, none of the letters described the keys accurately, and I was therefore not bound to notice any of the written applications that reached me.'

'Not describe them properly! But I *can* describe them; they were nine in number on the bunch.'

'So far, that is right, madam. Proceed with your description.'

The description was entirely wrong; and I told her so. I told her, moreover, that the rightful owner had been found, who had not only described the keys properly, but who had taken my assistant to her house and had used each individual key in his presence. I added that if she were not satisfied, I could furnish her with the address of the lady to whom the keys had been given up, and that she might call and try to establish her claim if she

fancied she had one.

She was very far from being satisfied. She wanted to argue the matter further and, as I feared, to an unreasonable length. I told her firmly I could waste no further time on her; whereupon she left vowing vengeance.

The threats of the old lady did not much disturb me; but they were not altogether so unmeaning as I supposed, for in two days thereafter a summons was handed into me, demanding my presence at the police court of the district, to answer for my refusal to deliver up to the rightful owner property belonging to her, which I owned to having found, but refused to account for.

That I was very much annoyed may be easily supposed; but at the same time I could not help being somewhat amused, bearing in recollection how I had tried to satisfy the unreasonable dame, who had evidently more money than wit, seeing she was ready to waste it on so hopeless a case.

I duly made my appearance before the worthy magistrate, whom I happened to know slightly, and who could not restrain an amused grin when I was called forward. My assistant accompanied me as a matter of course.

The old lady had engaged a smart lawyer, who did his best in trying to make out a case; but his client rather weakened his statement by her inconsequential answers to both her counsel and the magistrate. My answer was easy. I shewed how the prosecutrix had utterly failed in describing the keys. I told that the rightful owner had rightly described them; and I put my assistant

into the box to prove his having seen every key in the bunch fitted into its proper lock.

'Were you passing along Oxford Street on the morning that this bunch of keys was found?' asked the magistrate of the old lady.

'I was that way in an omnibus in the afternoon,' was the answer.

'But the keys in question were found in the morning, and were lying on the pavement,' remarked His Worship.

'Ah, I don't know how that might be,' said my persecutor; 'but I know I lost a bunch of keys.'

'Well, the case is dismissed; and you must pay expenses.' And so ended the case.

Now I have no doubt the old lady, though so wrong-headed in the claim she set up against me, had really lost a bunch of keys on the day my assistant made his – for me – unlucky find. Nor do I for a moment doubt the fact of some of the other applicants having also lost keys on the same day and perhaps near the same spot. But the applications by letter and personally numbered altogether not far short of fifty; and it may be set down as a moral certainty that they did not all lose, each of them, a bunch of keys on that particular day, and in Oxford Street – without being particular as to the spot. My theory is, that some of them had probably got their pockets picked of their keys while travelling by omnibus, and could not of course tell exactly where they lost them. Others may have simply mislaid their keys, and

jumped to the conclusion that they were lost. Some others, I fear, had not lost keys at all, but merely came to my place out of idle curiosity. All of them, I know, gave me more trouble than I ever hope to have again in an affair of the kind.

[We can hardly say that the foregoing narrative, to call it so, is overstrained. It points to a marvellous want of logical precision in reasoning which is far from uncommon. Some years ago, in these pages, we mentioned a droll case within our own experience. One day we chanced to find a brooch, and advertised the fact in the newspapers. Next day a lady called on us to say that she had lost a ring, and asked if we knew anything about it. 'Madam,' was our reply, 'you must understand that it was a brooch we found, and not a ring.' 'O yes, that maybe so; but I thought as you were in the way of finding things, you might perhaps have seen something of my ring.' A very pretty example this of want of common-sense. Our advice to all who happen to find any article of value on the street is, to take it at once to the police office, where it may be reclaimed by the owner. Those who will not take this trouble, should let the article alone. Finding does not constitute ownership. We knew a gentleman, now deceased, who in the course of his life punctiliously refrained from picking up any article of value on the street, as the article was not his, and he might have been brought into trouble. This was being too fastidious, for it was allowing the article to be appropriated by possibly some dishonest person. True kindness and true honesty consist in lodging the article found, at the police office, whence,

if no owner casts up within twelve months, it will be sent to the finder, whose lawful property it becomes. – Ed.]

THE LAND OF THE INCAS

Peru recalls to every thoughtful student of history not only the half-barbaric splendour of the empire of the Incas, but the vanished prestige and glory of their Spanish conquerors. The gorgeous figure of Pizarro, the stately hidalgo, the successful captain, the ruthless soldier of fortune, meets us still at every step in the once rich Indian empire he won for Spain. On that low swampy mangrove-fringed stretch of coast, a tangled maze of vines and flowering creepers, the half-famished Castilian adventurer landed in 1524. And here, where the full tide of the Pacific rolls in upon the beach in columns of snowy foam, he, in 1535, founded Lima, the 'city of the kings.'

To examine the cities of the Incas, their ruined palaces, and other objects of note in this interesting region, was a task undertaken and carried out by Mr Squier, whose researches have been embodied in a volume entitled the *Land of the Incas*, the perusal of which enables us to offer the following items to our readers.

The coast of Peru is arid and barren, lined with guano islands, which although adding little to the charm of the scenery, are found as lucrative to-day as the mines of Potosi and Pasco were in the heyday of Spanish greatness. Thanks to this useful but unfragrant compost, Pizarro's city of the kings is still rich and flourishing, though the veins of silver are exhausted, and

the golden sands no longer glitter with the precious ore, which fired the Spanish breasts of old with such fierce cupidity. It is very unhealthy, and although in the tropics, the climate for six months in the year is extremely damp and almost cold. Lima, which stands in an earthquake region, is built so as to sustain the least possible damage from the ever recurring shocks of those alarming phenomena. The private houses are never more than two stories in height. They have flat roofs and projecting balconies, and are constructed (one can hardly say built) of cane, plastered with mud, and painted in imitation of stone. Most of them have courts with open galleries in the Moorish style, extending along the four sides; and many of them have towers, from which, in addition to the surrounding scenery, an extended view of acres of flat roofs may be obtained – the said flat roofs being piled with heaps of refuse, filth, and all manner of abominations; very often they are used as poultry-yards, and here the buzzards, which act as scavengers in all the South American cities, roost at night.

The furniture in the better class of these wicker and mud-built dwellings is often very fine: antique plate, velvet hangings, costly mirrors, and family portraits, that smile or frown upon you with all the charm or vigour the brush of Vandyke or Velasquez was able to impart. The *pasios* or public walks are planted with trees, and the arcades, which are lined with fine shops, are a very favourite promenade. The inhabitants of Lima of all grades are remarkably fond of flowers, particularly of roses, which they

contrive to keep in bloom all the year round. 'Roses,' Mr Squier says, 'bloom in every court and blush on every balcony, and decorate alike the heavy tresses of the belle and the curly shock of the zamba.'

Bull-fights are a favourite amusement, and so is cock-fighting, although it is no longer, as formerly, practised in the public streets.

The markets are well supplied, especially with fruit and vegetables. Fish is good and the butcher-meat of fair quality. The luckless traveller in Central America who could get nothing but chickens and turkeys to eat, and was afraid at last that his whiskers would transform themselves into feathers, may go to Lima with all safety, as a medium-sized turkey there costs twenty dollars in gold. The cookery is Spanish in its character, and consists much of stews savoury with oil and garlic and pungent with red pepper.

Twenty miles from Lima is Pachacamac, a sacred city of the Incas, where once stood a gigantic temple, dedicated to a deity of the same name, the supreme creator and preserver of the universe. The ruins of two large wings of this temple still remain, one of which contains a perfect well-turned arch, which is so rare a feature in American ruins that Mr Squier says 'it is the only proper arch I ever found in all my explorations in Central and South America.' Pachacamac was the Mecca of South America; and its barren hills and dry nitrous sand-heaps are filled with the dead bodies of ancient pilgrims, who travelled from all parts of

the country to lay their bones, not their dust, in this hallowed spot. 'Ashes to ashes, dust to dust,' has no meaning here; the dead body does not decay, but is dried and shrivelled into a mummy. Mr Squier had the curiosity to open the shroud of what may once have been perchance an Aztec belle. The body, which was that of a young girl, was in a sitting posture, supported on a workbox of braided reeds, in which were rude specimens of knitting, spindles for weaving, spools of thread, needles of bone and bronze, a small bronze knife, a fan, and a set of curious cosmetic-boxes formed of the hollow bones of a bird. These were filled with pigments of various colours, and were carefully stopped with cotton. Beside them was a small powder-puff of cotton for applying them to the face, and a rude mirror formed of a piece of iron pyrites highly polished. There was also a netting instrument and a little crushed ornament of gold intended to represent a butterfly. The long black hair, still glossy as in life, was braided and plaited round the forehead, which was bound with a fillet of white cloth adorned with silver spangles. A silver bracelet hung on the shrunken arm; and between the feet was the dried body of a dead parrot, a pet no doubt in life, and sacrificed to bear its mistress company into the dread unknown land of spirits.

In the fertile valley of Canete, amid rich sugar-plantations, Mr Squier found vast pyramidal buildings, rising stage upon stage, with broad flights of steps winding round them to the summits. While sketching amid a maze of these massive shattered adobe

walls, our author was startled by seeing three men suddenly leap over a low wall into the vivid sunshine before him. 'God and peace be with you!' he said as calmly as he could, instinctively divining that his best cue was to appear as cool as possible. 'God and peace be with you!' responded the bandits, for such they were; and after a little bullying, an amicable parley ensued, which had for its object the acquisition of Mr Squier's breech-loading rifle, a weapon which kindled in the bosom of Rossi Arci, the robber chief, an ardent, but with all due deference to Mr Longfellow, a wasted affection, for he did not obtain it. Four weeks afterwards, Mr Squier saw the swollen disfigured corpse of this bandit captain exposed to public view in one of the principal streets of Lima.

At Truxillo our author came across a treasure-hunter, one Colonel La Rosa. This man spent his whole life in burrowing like a mole among the old ruins in search of buried gold, gems, silver goblets, or any other relic of antiquity which he could turn into money. Under his guidance, Mr Squier visited a great pyramid called the Temple of the Sun, and the extensive, interesting, and well preserved ruins of Grand Chimu. Here he found vast halls, the walls of which were covered with arabesques, and wide corridors from which spacious rooms diverged. The walls of these apartments were bright with vivid and delicate colours; and Colonel La Rosa shewed him where in the midst of them he had found a walled-up closet filled with vessels of gold and silver placed in regular layers one above the other, as if they had

been hidden there in some dire emergency. Two vaults were also discovered filled with silver cups and goblets. The silver of which these vessels were composed was much alloyed with copper, and was so much oxidised that it had become exceedingly brittle. Mr Squier obtained possession of two of the cups. They have the appearance of being hammered out of a single piece of metal, are as thick as ordinary tin-plate, and are both adorned by the representation of a human face, with clearly cut features and a large aquiline nose.

About a hundred yards to the westward of the excavations which have revealed the half-buried palace of the ancient princes of Chimu, is a low broad mound, which has been found to be a necropolis, filled with bodies richly clad and covered with gold and silver ornaments. Many of the heads of the dead bodies found by Colonel La Rosa were gilt and encircled by bands of gold; and one body, that of a woman, was covered with thin sheets of gold, and wrapped in a robe spangled with silver fishes. Warlike weapons and agricultural implements, knives, war-clubs, lance-heads, and spear-points, with spades and mattocks of different shapes, all of bronze, are found abundantly in the vicinity of these ruins; as are also specimens of excellent pottery, on which are modelled with spirit and fidelity representations of birds, animals, fishes, shells, fruit, vegetables, and the human face and form.

Leaving Chimu reluctantly, Mr Squier travelled down to the coast, along which he sailed, examining the coast ruins at

Calaveras and other places, till he reached Arica, the port of Tacna.

This is peculiarly an earthquake region; and some of these subterranean convulsions are terrible to a degree which we dwellers in a temperate clime can scarcely even imagine. A notably dreadful and destructive earthquake was that of 1868, which shook to its base all the adjacent country. It was first noted in Arica about five o'clock in the morning, its premonitory symptoms being immense clouds of dust, which were seen slowly advancing across the plain in dusky columns at a distance of about ten miles.

Nearer and nearer they came; and in the awful pause of dread expectancy that ensued, the distant snowy peaks of the Cordilleras were observed to nod and reel, as if executing some horribly suggestive cyclopean dance. Gradually this impulse extended itself to the mountains nearer to the town, till the huge *morro* or headland, a little to the left of it, began to rock violently to and fro, heaving with sickening lurches, as if about to cast itself loose into space, and always bringing to again, like a hard bestead ship in a driving tempest. As it worked back and forward, huge fragments of stone detached themselves from its cave-worn surface, and fell with deafening crash into the surf below; while under and above all, like a subdued monotone of horror, was a prolonged incessant rumble, now like the roll of distant thunder, but ever and anon at irregular intervals swelling into a deafening crash, like the discharge of a whole park of artillery.

As far as could be seen, the usually solid earth was agitated by a slow wave-like motion, which became first tremulous, and then unspeakably violent, throwing half of the houses into heaps of ruins, and yawning into wide chasm-like fissures, from which mephitic sulphurous vapours issued. Shrieks and groans of anguish filled the air, a mournful interlude shrilly resounding at intervals above the subterranean thunder, as the terrified crowd rushed to the mole, to seek refuge on board the vessels in the harbour. Scarcely had they reached this hoped-for haven of safety, when the sea, treacherous as the heaving land, glided softly back, and then rushing forward with a terrific roar, submerged the mole with its panting terror-stricken occupants, and poured on in a foaming flood over the prostrate town, where it completed the havoc the earthquake had begun. It then rushed back almost more suddenly than it had advanced, the whole fearful deluge occupying only about five minutes. Again and again the earth quivered and shook, as if about to rend asunder and drop into some unfathomable abyss below, and again the sea dashed forward as if in frantic fury, and then as suddenly recoiled, the last time shewing a perpendicular wall of water forty-five feet high, capped by an angry crest of foam. This tremendous wave swept miles inshore, where it stranded the largest ships then lying in the harbour, one of them a United States frigate.

In Arica Mr Squier equipped himself for a journey over the Cordilleras. Nothing can exceed the savage wildness of these

mountains, or the difficulties and dangers of the long narrow passes that intersect them. Mr Squier says: 'I have crossed the Alps by the routes of the Simplon, the Grand St Bernard, and St Gothard; but at no point on any of them have I witnessed a scene so wild and utterly desolate as that which spreads out around La Portada.' It is the very acmé of desolation – treeless, shrubless, bare of grass, with scarcely a lichen clinging to the rugged sides of the huge cliffs. Pile upon pile towering to the sullen skies, rise ridges of dark-brown hills bristling with snowy peaks, from several of which long trails of smoke stream lazily out upon the air, shewing where the pent volcano surges in ominous life beneath the wintry wastes of snow.

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