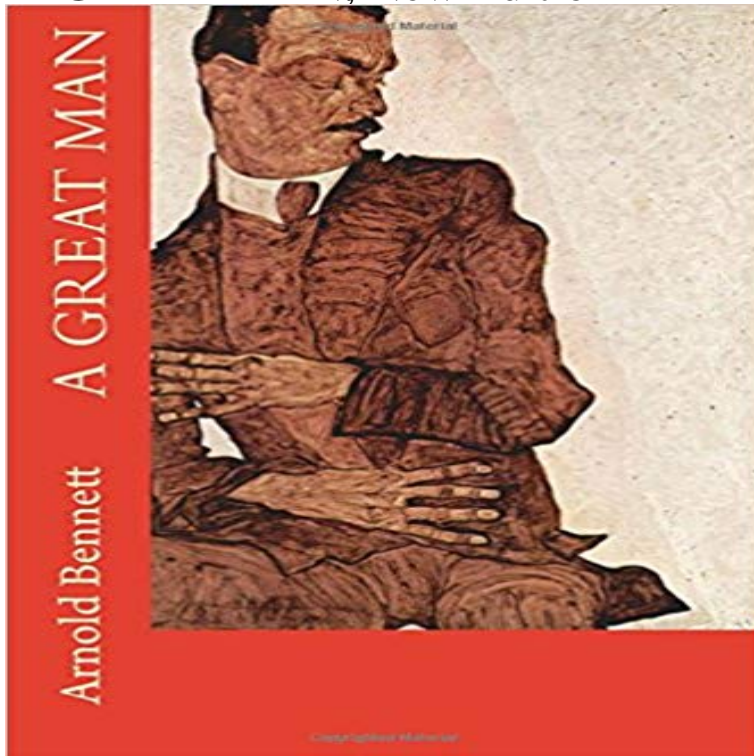


A GREAT MAN, New Edition



On an evening in 1866 (exactly eight hundred years after the Battle of Hastings) Mr. Henry Knight, a drapers manager, aged forty, dark, clean-shaven, short, but not stout, sat in his sitting-room on the second-floor over the shop which he managed in Oxford Street, London. He was proud of that sitting-room, which represented the achievement of an ideal, and he had a right to be proud of it. The rich green wall-paper covered with peonies in full bloom (poisoning by arsenical wall-paper had not yet been invented, or Mr. Knight's peonies would certainly have had to flourish over a different hue) matched the magenta table-cloth of the table at which Mr. Knight was writing, and the magenta table-cloth matched the yellow roses which grew to more than exhibition size on the Axminster carpet; and the fine elaborate effect thus produced was in no way impaired, but rather enhanced and invigorated, by the mahogany bookcase full of imperishable printed matter, the horsehair sofa netted in a system of antimacassars, the waxen flowers in their glassy domes on the marble mantelpiece, the Canterbury with its spiral columns, the rosewood harmonium, and the posse of chintz-protected chairs. Mr. Knight, who was a sincere and upright man, saw beauty in this apartment. It uplifted his soul, like soft music in the gloaming, or a woman's face. Mr. Knight was writing in a large book. He paused in the act of composition, and, putting the pen between his teeth, glanced through the pages of the volume. They were filled with the drafts of letters which he had addressed during the previous seven years to the editors of various newspapers, including the Times, and several other organs great then but now extinct. In a space underneath each letter had been neatly gummed the printed copy, but here and there a letter lacked this certificate of success, for Mr. Knight did not always contrive to reach his public. The

letters were signed with pseudonyms, such as A British Citizen, Fiat Justitia, Audi Alteram Partem, Indignant, Disgusted, One Who Knows, One Who Would Like to Know, Ratepayer, Taxpayer, Puzzled, and Pro Bono Publicoespecially Pro Bono Publico. Two letters, to a trade periodical, were signed A Drapers Manager of Ten Years Standing, and one, to the Clerkenwell News, bore his own real name. The letter upon which he was now engaged was numbered seventy-five in the series, and made its appeal to the editor of the Standard. Having found inspiration, Mr. Knight proceeded, in a hand distinguished by many fine flourishes: ... It is true that last year we only paid off some four millions, but the year before we paid, I am thankful to say, more than nine millions. Why, then, this outcry against the allocation of somewhat less than nine millions out of our vast national revenue towards the further extinction of the National Debt? It is not the duty of the State, as well as of the individual, to pay its debts? In order to support the argument with which I began this communication, perhaps you will permit me, sir, to briefly outline the history of the National Debt, our national shame. In 1688 the National Debt was little more than six hundred thousand pounds.... After briefly outlining the history of the National Debt, Mr. Knight began a new paragraph thus: In the immortal words of Shakspeare, wh But at this point he was interrupted. A young and pleasant woman in a white apron pushed open the door. Henry, she called from the doorway. Well? Youd better go now. Very well, Annie; Ill go instantly. He dropped the pen, reduced the gas to a speck of blue, and in half a minute was hurrying along Oxford Street. The hour was ten oclock, and the month was July; the evening favoured romance. He turned into Bury Street, and knocked like fate at a front-door with a brass tablet on it, No. 8 of the street. No, sir. He isnt in at the moment, sir, said the maid who answered Mr. Knights imperious summons. Not in! exclaimed Mr. Knight.

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