

Dr Duthoit's Vision

ARTHUR MACHEN

Table of Contents

<u>Dr Duthoit's Vision</u>	1
<u>ARTHUR MACHEN</u>	1

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I KNEW a fine specimen of an English abbe when I was at school at Hereford. This was Dr Duthoit, Prebendary of Consumpta per Sabulum in Hereford Cathedral, Rector of St Owen's, bookworm and, chiefly, rose-grower. He was a middle-aged man when I was a little boy; but he suffered me to walk with him in his garden sloping down to the Wye, near a pleasaunce of the Vicars Choral, reciting sometimes the poems of Traherne, which he had in manuscript, but, for the most part, demonstrating his progress in the art of growing a coal-black rose. This was the true work of his life, and nearly forty years ago he could show blooms whose copper and crimson tints were very near to utter darkness. I believe that his ideal was never attained in absolute perfection; and perhaps the perfect end and attainment of desire do not prove happiness down here below.

After 1880 Prebendary Duthoit and I rarely saw each other, and rarely wrote. He was at rest among his roses by the quiet Wye, and I dashed to and fro in wilder waters, but each contrived to let the other know that he was still alive, and so I was not altogether surprised to see the Prebendary's queer, niggly writing on an envelope a week or two ago. He said he had heard of a good deal to talk about. Well, with a popular legend with which I am understood to be in some way concerned, and he thought that an odd experience of his might possibly interest me. I do not give the text of his letter, chiefly because it is full of Latin phrases, which I might be called upon to translate.

But the matter is as follows: On the 4th August, the day of the service at St Paul's, Dr Duthoit was walking up and down and about that pleasant garden on slopes of the Wye. Just above the water his gardener had prepared under direction and instruction a plot of ground in a very special manner. I do not gather the precise purpose of the operation, but it seems that the soil had been very fine and level for a superficies of about ten yards. To this place the Prebendary walked, slowly and reflectively, wishing to assure himself that his orders had been accurately carried out. The plot had been perfectly level the night before, but Dr Duthoit wanted to be more than sure about it. But to his extreme annoyance, when he turned by the fig-tree, he saw that the plot was very far from even. He is an old man, but his sight is good, and at a d